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BONDED LABOUR

ASIAN AGE, NOV 18, 2014

‘Nearly 14.3 million people are enslaved in India’

Nearly 14.3 million people, including children, are “trapped” in modern-day slavery in India, which tops a global index of people under bondage across the world with an estimated 35.8 million people enslaved, a new research said on Monday.

The Global Slavery Index (GSI) 2014, published by the Walk Free Foundation in Perth in Australia, said India and Pakistan account for 45 per cent of the global total. The report estimates that over 23.5 million people in Asia are living in modern-day slavery. This is equivalent to almost two-thirds of the global total number of people enslaved.

“Of these, over 14.2 million are in India and over 2.05 million are in Pakistan which demonstrate the highest prevalence of modern slavery in Asia (1.141 per cent and 1.13 per cent of their populations respectively). Together these two alone represent 45 per cent of the global total,” it said.

In South Asia, these countries are followed in prevalence by Nepal (0.823 per cent of the population, 228,700 people), Bangladesh (0.435 per cent, 680,900 people), Afghanistan (0.435 per cent, 132,800 people) and Sri Lanka (0.359 per cent, 73,600 people). The report said that the people are trapped in slavery through human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, forced or servile marriage or commercial sexual exploitation.

“In terms of absolute numbers, India remains top of the list with an estimated 14.29 million enslaved people followed by China (3.24m), Pakistan (2.06m), Uzbekistan (1.2m, new to the top five), and Russia (1.05m).“Together these account for 61 per cent of the world’s modern slavery or nearly 22 million people,” it said.

The research report also said that “an estimated 35.8 million men, women and children around the world are today trapped in modern slavery, just over 20 per cent more than previously estimated,” the report said. The Index was created in consultation with an panel of experts from international organisations, think tanks and academic institutions.

CHILD WELFARE

STATESMAN, NOV 17, 2014

Child at work

ANUPRIYO MALLICK

Bestow blessings on those Little, innocent lives Bloomed on Earth/ Who have brought the message of joy from heavenly garden.

~ Rabindranath Tagore

India has the dubious distinction of being home to the world's largest child labour force. An estimated 30 per cent of the world's working kids live in this country. A recent report, compiled by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, states that there are as many as 60 million children working in India's agricultural, industrial and commercial sectors. The booming economy exploits the child workers to buttress its growth and to bring wealth to a minority.

The problem of child labour is distorting the parameters of a democracy and a welfare state. It is also hampering the country's productive efficiency. As a child is forced to work in inhuman conditions, his/her health is shattered and growth shunted. Legislation does exist to prohibit child labour. Attempts have been made to regulate their working environment, pay, hours of work etc.

The government has also appointed a 'Task Force on Child Labour' which has been set up on the recommendation of the Central Advisory Board on Child Labour. It is on the recommendations of this task force that the government has formulated the National Policy on Child Labour in 1987. The Supreme Court has passed orders on 10 December 1996, banning the employment of children in hazardous occupations. On the face of it, such initiatives seem to be directed towards the well-being and proper development of children.

The child has been the subject of special laws and legal provisions. Because of the tender age, fragile physique, and inadequately developed mind and understanding, every child needs protection against moral and physical harm and exploitation. In the formative years of his life, the child needs special care in order to realize his full potential for growth and development. There are about 250 Central and state statutes relating to children. These have been enacted to protect and help children. These laws are applicable to children in various spheres of life, which are regulatory, protective and correctional in nature. Under the law, children are entitled to special care, assistance and essential needs and they should be given the highest priority in the allocation of resources. Kailash Satyarthi has won the Nobel Prize for his work against child labour but in India, the jobs for children are well-defined and the laws protecting citizens aged below 18 years are often inadequate. Certain laws that are meant to curb child labour end up endorsing it.

The declining sex ratios in Haryana and Punjab have created a demand for child brides.

Girls are sold off by their parents for a paltry sum of Rs 15,000 in Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal to give birth to male heirs. All over India, the utility of child labour is high and so is its demand. These are excerpts from a documented field survey report on child labour, prepared by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), a government body to monitor the rights of children.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 is the key law governing and preventing child labour in India. The Act prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 in hazardous industries. Quite glaringly, it provides scope for employment of these children in non-hazardous industries. It also leaves the scope for employment of children between 14 and 16 years in hazardous industries. If child labour laws are fluid in nature, they are more easily violated than observed. Children are being employed in the name of vocational training. For example, in the carpet mills of Varanasi, there are instances where a large number of children have been employed in the name of training.

In 2012, the government introduced a draft Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill. It is still in a consultative stage, and it seeks to add a new category ~ adolescence ~ for persons aged between 15 and 18 years, who will be prohibited to work in hazardous industries. Employing a child below 14 years in any kind of occupation except where the child helps his family after school hours is set to become a cognizable offence punishable with a maximum of imprisonment of three years or fine up to Rs 50,000.

However, the initial draft of the Bill is no panacea for child labour. The slow pace of reforms in child labour laws can be assessed from the fact that it was as late as 2006, when the government included working in households and roadside eateries and motels under the prohibited list of hazardous occupations, and it was only in 2008 that employment involving exposure to excessive heat and cold, stone mining and stone quarries were added to the list of prohibited occupations. Other laws, too, allow persons aged below 18 years to be employed. For example, the Factories Act, 1948, prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14.

However, an adolescent aged between 15 and 18 years can be employed in a factory if he obtains a certificate of fitness from an authorized doctor, according to the list of National Legislation and Policies Against Child Labour in India cited in the website of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Again, the Mines Act, 1952 prohibits the employment of persons aged below 18 years in a mine. However, it states that apprentices above 16 may be allowed to work under proper supervision, according to the ILO source.

Hopefully, the amended Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Bill if passed, it will supersede other laws and help in the effective prevention of child labour.

In the M C Mehta case (1996), in which the Supreme Court directed the Union and the

state governments to identify all children working in hazardous processes and occupations, to withdraw them from work, and to provide them with quality education through a consolidated fund. Unfortunately not much is known about how this fund is being utilised for the rehabilitation of children. Despite several legislative measures, the exploitation of children by profit-makers continues unchecked and in utter disregard of constitutional injunction and statutory prohibition.

Clearly, the statutes vary according to the age-limit of a child employed or permitted to work in various occupations. There is no law fixing the minimum age for employment of children in agriculture. The Factories Act, 1948, fixes the minimum age of 14 whereas the ILO Convention prescribes the minimum age for any employment as 15. In the case of plantations, the age of employment has been fixed at 12 years. The highest number of child labour violations are to be found in the domestic and agricultural sectors, roadside eateries and coal mining, most particularly in Meghalaya's Jaintia Hills region.

The statutory provisions that exist need to be reviewed, supplemented and properly enforced. Child labour is a complex phenomenon. Children do not have any fundamental rights under the Constitution except a reference under Articles 24, 39 and 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy. Though there is legislation governing child labour, it does not seem consistent with the definition of a child. This is ridiculous and hypocritical.

The writer is with the Eastern Institute for Integrated Learning in Management, Kolkata

CIVIL SERVICE

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NOV 22, 2014

By R-Day, govt staff will start losing CL if they're late to office

Aloke Tikku

Over 30 lakh central government officials across the country will have to get used to the idea of reaching office on time.

The government on Friday set a January 26, 2015, deadline to install the Aadhaar-enabled biometric attendance system at its offices across the country and reminded employees they would lose half-a-day's casual leave every time they were late.

Heads of offices would have the powers to condone late-coming twice a month if employees come up with "justifiable reasons".

In all other cases, half a day's casual leave will be debited for each day of late attendance. In case employees exhaust their casual leave, the government will start debiting earned leave.

"Disciplinary action may also be taken against government servants who are habitually late. early leaving is also to be treated in the same manner as late coming," the Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) issued on Friday said.

The order comes after HT reported on Monday that only 25% central govt officials were landing up to work on time in Delhi offices where the biometric system had been installed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office had ordered installing biometric devices for central departments and ministries in Delhi soon after coming to power.

Nearly 62,000 employees serving in Delhi have already registered themselves. Of them, only 40,000, however, mark their attendance on the biometric devices.

Friday's circular by the DoPT — the government's human resource manager — is expected to prompt others to fall in line too.

"It has been decided to use an Aadhaar-enabled biometric attendance system in all offices of the central government including attached/subordinate offices in India," JA Vaidyanathan, director at DoPT said in the circular.

"The system will be installed in the offices located in Delhi/New Delhi by 31 December 2014. In other places, this may be installed by 26 January 2015," the order said.

TIMES OF INDIA, NOV 20, 2014

Sheila babus to return to Delhi ity with plum posts

Ambika Pandit,

NEW DELHI: A bureaucratic reshuffle in Delhi seems likely as three senior bureaucrats who had plum postings in Sheila Dikshit's government are being brought back. Among them is former NDMC chairperson Parimal Rai who was packed off to Goa sometime after the controversy over the alleged irregularities in the redevelopment of Shivaji Stadium for the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Rai is a 1985-batch IAS officer.

The Union home ministry has also ordered the transfer of former DIMTS chairman S N Sahai, who was on deputation to the Centre.

Sahai was at the helm of affairs when the Delhi government pushed its ambitious BRT corridor project. Sahai is awaiting a posting, but both he and Rai are expected to get prime departments to lead.

Senior IAS officer Reena Ray is the third officer being ordered back to Delhi. She was posted in Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In Delhi, she was the secretary of education, culture and tourism departments in the Sheila government and was also the chief electoral officer of Delhi. She had worked on the simplification of the CEO portal.

Three other officers being brought to Delhi are Rakesh Bali (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), Ashutosh Kumar and Akash Mahapatra (Mizoram). Labour commission Jitender Narain has been transferred to Puducherry.

DECCAN HERALD, NOV 19, 2014

Refusal of deputation to debar babus from foreign jobs: Govt

The refusal of IAS officers to come on central deputation will debar them from foreign postings, the Centre has said.

The move comes after it was noticed that many state governments and cadre controlling authorities were withdrawing the names of proposed IAS officers when their cases were being processed at the Centre.

"As you might be aware, a laborious exercise precedes the appointment of an officer to a post under the central government. However, very often, the state governments withdraw the names of officers from offer subsequently.

"This results in considerable delay in the placement of officers at the Centre, which is not in public interest. Consequently, the Government of India has been following a policy of debarring an officer for five years, if, once appointed by the government under the Central Staffing Scheme, he does not join the post either on account of personal

disinclination, or the refusal of the Cadre to relieve him," the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) said in a letter to state governments.

It is also to be highlighted that it is not only the failure to take up the appointment, but also withdrawal of the name of an officer after a panel has been recommended by the Civil Services Board, that results in debarment for five years, the letter said.

An officer who is debarred from being taken on deputation to a post under the Central Staffing Scheme is also to be debarred from being given cadre clearance for foreign assignments or consultancies abroad during the period of debarment, it said.

"Therefore, you are earnestly requested to ensure that an officer, once placed on the offer list, continues to be available for consideration throughout the year and his name is not withdrawn during this period, except under exceptional circumstances," the DoPT said in the letter to all Chief Secretaries of states and union territories.

In a separate letter, the DoPT has also asked all cadre controlling authorities, like Ministry of Environment and Forests for officers of Indian Forest Service, to ensure that they do not withdraw the names of the officers after their names have been proposed for the central deputation.

Citing shortage of over 300 IAS officers, the DoPT has asked all states to ensure that requisite number of the bureaucrats who could be considered for central deputation.

The total authorized strength of IAS officers is 6,217. Of these, 4,455 officers are working under the central and various state governments.

According to the letter, the central deputation reserve, on the basis of the total number of serving officers, is 952. There are 643 IAS officers presently working on central deputation, leaving a gap of 309 bureaucrats.

"An officer being nominated should he willing to serve anywhere in India; Preference of an officer for a particular station(s) on account of personal reasons, if any, may be explicitly indicated.

"The Officers have also been given an option to choose any three departments or ministries where they would like to work under the Central Staffing Scheme.

However, actual appointments will be subject to availability of posts and the suitability of officers for the posts," it said.

TELEGRAPH, NOV 18, 2014

Govt focus on 'internal happiness'

SOBHANA K. NAIR

New Delhi, Nov. 17: The capital's babus are feeling wanted. At last, a government seems to care about their "happiness", "satisfaction" and "contribution".

A recent government circular prods civil servants to do voluntary social service for "internal happiness". Another requests each soon-to-retire official to write a 1,000-word paper on his or her "outstanding" contribution — for their own "satisfaction" and to inspire junior colleagues.

They must, however, restrict themselves to personal innovations that led to an improved work culture or increased efficiency.

"Comments which are religious or political in nature or are against the national interest will not be permitted," says the November 4 circular from the department of pension and pensioners' welfare.

Swantah Sukhaya, the nudge for voluntary service outside their usual "structured work", had come on November 1, from the department of personnel and training.

"*Swantah sukhaya* is a Sanskrit term, meaning *swan tah* — oneself — and *sukhaya*, happiness," the circular explained, replicating a 2003 Gujarat government initiative. "This initiative is meant to provide internal happiness and a sense of achievement."

Any employee of whatever rank can pick his own voluntary work and do it with the department's backing — without having to seek his bosses' permission. The government will recognise the best initiatives. A similar scheme — titled Sankalp — has been started for retired employees.

Plus, the government has started monthly, half-a-day, pre-retirement counselling sessions to educate employees about their benefits, the required paperwork and post-retirement job avenues.

"Employees usually spend their last six months completing papers, sometimes utterly confused how to go about it. We'll try to settle their doubts," a senior official said.

Former bureaucrats welcomed the shift in the government's attitude. "The present government gives primacy to bureaucrats. The Prime Minister has been regularly talking to secretaries," former Delhi chief secretary Shailaja Chandra said.

"So, no one can sit in a watertight compartment and ignore a subject because it does not come under their jurisdiction. They are propelled to talk and find a solution."

Former cabinet secretary T.S.R. Subramanian agreed. "In Delhi, there's clearly a change in bureaucrats — there's a gleam in their eyes, a hop in their step. They are willing to take initiatives."

He, however, cautioned: “But remember, the Delhi bureaucracy is just five per cent of the bureaucratic network. I’m not sure if similar changes have come in the states or even the lower levels in Delhi.”

DECCAN HERALD, NOV 18, 2014

Contract government jobs to have SC/ST quota

The High Court of Karnataka on Monday disposed of a petition after the State government agreed to do away with Section 3(d) of the Karnataka Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes (Reservation of Appointment etc) Act, 1990. Section 3(d) restrained the applicability of the Act to posts filled up on the basis of contract.

The petitioner, Bajantri Madappa, had contended that suitable candidates belonging to Scheduled Castes/Tribes and Other Backward Classes were denied of jobs under contract under the existing Act.

The petitioner’s advocate M P Kunju had submitted that under the Central Act, there was no such clause.

However, it was only in Karnataka that reservation was not given for workers under contract.

The government advocate said that they have decided to do away with Section 3(d) in the Act and will give reservation for candidates applying for jobs under contract. A division bench comprising Chief Justice D H Waghela and Justice R B Budihal disposed of the petition.

Details of sex abuse cases

The High Court has directed the petitioner to collect details about cases of sexual abuse on women pending before the sessions courts, details about number of accused convicted, acquitted and also those witnesses of the victim who have turned hostile.

Hearing a petition filed by advocate G R Mohan, the party-in-person, a division bench headed by Chief Justice D H Waghela directed the petitioner to gather information for the next hearing.

The petitioner said that despite the High Court drafting guidelines for women’s safety, the police department was not showing concern towards women’s safety.

The petition sought directions to initiate strict disciplinary action against the police who are slack in their duties while investigating cases related to rape and gangrape.

The petitioner sought directions from the court to the police officers that they should not be influenced by politicians, while investigating sexual abuse cases.

DECCAN HERALD, NOV 18, 2014

Centre offers officers to Bengal, U'khand

Shemin Joy

Days after rebuking states for not sending enough IAS officers for deputation, the Centre has now offered middle-level officers for West Bengal and Uttarakhand where there is “acute shortage” of such bureaucrats.

In identical letters to the chief secretaries of both the states, the government has said they could avail the services of Group A officers, who “provide a strong and permanent” set up of middle level functionaries, on deputation.

Sanjay Kothari, Secretary of Department of Personnel and Training, said in the letter that these officers contribute ably in policy formulation, its execution and review. These officers perform the function of coordinating opinions and ideas to present a balanced picture.

There are about 2,200 Group A officers in the service in the designations of under secretary, deputy secretary, director and joint secretary.

“I understand that you have shortage of officers at the middle level due to low intake of officers in civil services from 1992 to 2006. The state governments may like to utilise the experience of the officers at appropriate levels on deputation basis,” Kothari wrote.

He felt that the arrangement will “enrich” officers with the required field experience at ground level in the execution of various schemes and policies and make them understand issues in a better way, which will in turn improve their capacities.

He has asked the states to identify vacancies and tenure of posting and inform the DoPT. After this, the DoPT will circulate vacancies among officers and nominate a panel of selected officers for deputation. “You (states) can choose the suitable officer from the panel,” the letter said.

Last week, the NDA government under Narendra Modi shot off identical letters to states, advising them against restraining officers from taking up assignments on central deputation.

The government needed 1,345 IAS officers out of a sanctioned strength of 6,217 but it has less than 50 per cent of its strength as states fail to relieve sufficient number of officers for central government work. With only 4,455 IAS officers in place across India at present, the states are supposed to send 952 IAS officers.

HINDU, NOV 18, 2014

Centre to lower age limit for civil service aspirants

S. VIJAY KUMAR

Limit will be 29 for SC/ST, 28 for OBC, 26 for open candidates

LOWERING THE AGE BAR
THE NEW PROVISIONS WILL TAKE EFFECT FROM 2015 AFTER DoPT ISSUES NOTIFICATION ON THE GOVERNMENT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Category	Upper age limit	Attempts permitted
Open Category	26	3
OBC	28	5
SC/ST	29	6

Physically challenged:
2 additional years in each category

- August 1 retained as cut-off date for eligibility
- Centre will not review the exam structure

In a move that could affect thousands of civil service aspirants across the country, the Centre intends to reduce the upper age limit and number of attempts of applicants with effect from 2015. Going by the new norm, the upper age limit will be 29 years for SC/ST candidates, 28 years for OBC and 26 for the unreserved category. There will be an additional two years for physically challenged candidates in each category.

At present, the upper age limit for SC/ST, OBC and unreserved candidates is 35, 33 and 30 years respectively.

According to information published on the website of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, the number of attempts allowed for candidates appearing for the Civil Services Examination would also be reduced to six for SC/ST candidates, five for OBC and three for unreserved candidates.

The measures, recommended by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) and almost entirely accepted by the government, were put up on the website a few months ago. The Centre has decided to retain August 1 in the examination year as the cut-off date for eligibility and not to review the structure of the examination (both preliminary and main) since this was only recently changed.

MDMK leader Vaiko urged the Centre to withdraw its plan to bring down the upper age limit.

HINDU, NOV 19, 2014
DoPT clarifies on Civil Services Examination
DEVESH K. PANDEY

The Centre's decision in February to allow two additional attempts to all categories of candidates for the Civil Services Examination (CSE) with effect from 2014 rendered infructuous the Group of Ministers' decision last December to lower the upper age limit for eligibility from CSE 2015.

While the age limit earlier was 30, 35, 33 and 40 years respectively for the unreserved, SC/ST, OBC and the physically challenged categories, consequential changes in the age limit due to provision of two additional attempts are 32 years for the unreserved, 37 for the SC/ST, 35 for the OBC and 12 additional years (30+12 for General, 35+12 for SC/ST and 33+12 for OBC) for the physically challenged candidates in each category.

In a statement, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) clarified that no change has been made in the age limit / attempts for CSE 2014. "The Group of Ministers [GoM] at its meeting held on December 16, 2013, while accepting the age of entry in the CSE to be 21, discussed the upper age limit and decided to go by the recommendations of the Core Group on Administrative Reforms, which is 26 years for the unreserved category, 28 for OBC and 29 years for SC/ST, and two years additional for physically challenged candidates in each category," said the DoPT statement.

The GoM, further decided to reiterate its earlier decision regarding number of attempts i.e. three for unreserved candidates, five for OBCs, six for SC/ST candidates with additional two attempts for physically challenged candidates in each category. "The above mentioned decisions were noted for record and further necessary action. However, before any action in this regard could be taken, the government further took a decision on February 7, 2014, to allow two additional attempts to all categories of candidates with effect from CSE 2014, with consequential relaxation of maximum age for all categories of candidates, if required," said the statement.

DECCAN HERALD, NOV 18, 2014

Don't transfer employees with autistic kids: Govt

Government employees who have children suffering from autism will be exempted from routine transfers and they will not be asked to take voluntary retirement on refusing such postings, the Centre said today.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has issued an order including autism in the category for disabled children whose parents (government employees) are exempted from transfer.

"Considering the fact that the autism spectrum disorder child requires constant caregiver support and it would be imperative for the government employees to take care of their autism spectrum disorder child on continuous basis, it has been decided to include 'Autism' in the term 'disabled'," it said in its directive issued to all central government ministries and departments for compliance.

Autism is a mental condition characterised by great difficulty in communicating. A government employee with a disabled child serves as the main caregiver and any displacement of such employee will have a bearing on the systemic rehabilitation of the child since the new environment or set up could prove to be a hindrance for rehabilitation process, it said.

"Therefore, a government servant who is also a caregiver of disabled child may be exempted from the routine exercise of transfer or rotational transfer subject to the administrative constraints," the DoPT said.

The word disabled includes blindness or low vision, hearing impairment, locomotor disability or cerebral palsy, leprosy, mental retardation, mental illness and multiple disabilities, it had said in an earlier order.

"Upbringing and rehabilitation of disabled child requires financial support. Making the government employee to choose voluntary retirement on the pretext of routine transfer or rotation transfer would have adverse impact on the rehabilitation process of the child," the DoPT said.

The move came following demands that a government employee who is a caregiver of the disabled child should not suffer due to displacement by means of routine transfer or rotational transfers.

"This demand has been made on the ground that a government employee raises a kind of support system for his or her disabled child over a period of time in the locality where he or she resides which helps them in the rehabilitation," it said.

The matter regarding the scope of disabled was further examined by the DoPT which found that rehabilitation is a process aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to reach and maintain their optimal physical, sensory, intellectual, and psychiatric or a social functional level.

"The support system comprises preferred linguistic zone, school or academic level, administration, neighbours, tutors or special educators, friends, medical care including hospitals, therapists and doctors, etc.

"Thus, rehabilitation is a continuous process and creation of such support system takes years together," the DoPT said.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NOV 17, 2014

Only 25% govt officials come to work on time

Aloke Tikku

Getting central government officials to report for work on time might be a bigger challenge than the government had previously anticipated.

Only 20-25% of such employees are at their work stations when the clock strikes nine, according to the biometric attendance system installed on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's directions. The average government official turns up 30 minutes late but is amazingly punctual when it comes to leaving the office.

Central government offices work from 9am to 5:30pm with a half-hour lunch break. According to the 8-hour working day, employees should put in 40 hours a week and 176 hours a month.

The attendance system — linked to a website, <http://attendance.gov.in/>, that displays average entry and exit timings — indicates government employees on average work not more than 165 hours.

“The focus on punctuality isn’t new and there have been directions dating back to the 1970s,” a senior government official told HT.

“The evidence, however, of employees being late was always anecdotal. With the new system, poor punctuality records are right in your face... Now, you have to deal with it,” he added.

Senior officials have access to the attendance data. Employees will just have to get used to the idea of being punctual, government sources said.

Under the rules, employees who turn up after 9:30am should be marked on half-day leave but department heads have the power to condone the delay.

The home ministry, among the first to install the biometric machines four years ago, requires late-comers to make up for lost time by putting in extra hours to clock at least 40 hours. This was done through the introduction of flexi-timings through the backdoor — something a panel of top civil servants, and later the cabinet, had rejected when the Sixth Pay Commission made the recommendation in 2008.

A senior government official, however, stressed it was important not to lose sight of the fact that babus in Delhi were working more hours than before and more than their counterparts in many states.

At the Centre, weekly working hours have steadily increased from 33.5 hours in the 1940s to 40 hours now. The government introduced a 9-to-5pm schedule when it switched to a five-day week in June 1985. The next year, it increased the work day by 30 minutes.

COMMUNICATIONS

PIONEER, NOV 21, 2014

SC OUSTS CBI CHIEF FROM 2G PROBE

CBI Director Ranjit Sinha was unceremoniously removed from the ongoing 2G spectrum investigation and trial on Thursday, just 12 days before his retirement, after the Supreme Court (SC) found that he interfered and his conduct was unbecoming in at least three cases, including the high-profile probe against former Telecom Minister Dayanidhi Maran in the Aircel-Maxis deal.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice HL Dattu brought an end to the marathon hearing in the case argued over the past several days. In its short order, the court did not cite reasons for Sinha's removal in order to protect the reputation of the post of CBI Director and the institution he heads. But it unequivocally held Sinha guilty of interfering in the 2G case probe.

"We direct Ranjit Sinha not to interfere in the 2G case investigation and prosecution and to recuse from the case," said the Bench, also comprising Justices Madan Lokur and AK Sikri. The court entrusted the probe to the senior-most officer in the CBI and added: "We are not purposely giving elaborate reasons. Suffice it to observe that the information given by applicant CPIL (NGO Centre for Public Interest Litigation) prima facie appears to be credible and requires to be accepted."

In August this year, petitioner CPIL had moved an application to remove Sinha from the 2G probe, pointing out instances where he bypassed the Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) appointed by the SC in matters concerning filing of crucial affidavits in the apex court. It further accused him of transferring a member of the 2G probe team in a court-monitored probe despite an order by the SC not to transfer any officer till completion of investigation.

Sinha was also accused of seeking the Attorney-General's opinion in the case against Maran at a time when all officers below him unanimously agreed to file a charge sheet against Maran and eight others.

To substantiate these charges, CPIL even produced the original visitor's diary of Sinha's residence to show that accused in the 2G case frequently visited the CBI chief around the time when these decisions were taken. Sinha's senior counsel Vikas Singh tried his best to falsify the charges, but newly-appointed SPP, Anand Grover filed a confidential report in the SC upholding the charges against the CBI chief as "credible".

Grover attacked Sinha for transferring DIG Santosh Rastogi, a crucial member of the 2G probe team, as an act of retribution as this officer refused to obey Sinha's command to file separate affidavits in SC supporting the case of the accused that the charges against them cannot be sustained. When Rastogi opposed, the Director transferred him from the case.

Referring to this instance, the Bench asked Sinha's counsel: "It appears to us that because he (Rastogi) was coming in your way, you decided to shift him to have a clear path so

that he may not oppose... Is it not correct to say then that you were trying to overreach the court.”

The SC clarified that its order restraining any addition or deletion from the 2G investigation team applied not just to investigation officers but the entire team including Rastogi, who is a supervisory officer. Even on bypassing SPP, the court was critical on Sinha. “We have appointed a SPP. We want the investigating agency to have total coordination with the SPP in matters of monitoring of investigation and prosecution.”

Yet another instance of interference by the Director came to light as Grover revealed that during the trial against Loop Telecom, the accused company moved an application to refer their case involving charge of cheating to Lok Adalat. The CBI Director noted in the file to refer the same for the Attorney-General’s opinion despite the fact that the trial court had dismissed a similar application in the past and no officer was in favour of entertaining the “frivolous” application. Even in Maran’s case, Sinha delayed trial for a year despite the unanimous opinion of the entire 2G team to prosecute Maran and eight others.

The Bench reminded Sinha: “People have great faith in this institution. Anything we say can damage the reputation (of CBI)... We are not giving certificate to anybody. But we prima facie feel things are not well in the institution.”

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NOV 22, 2014

Gap in law’ keeps govt from acting on CBI chief: Jaitley

Finance minister Arun Jaitley cited on Friday a "gap in law" vis-a-vis the government's power to remove the CBI director even as incumbent Ranjit Sinha seemed disinclined to step down after the Supreme Court's indictment against him in the 2G spectrum probe.

The minister said his "conscience is clear" on the issue because he, in his previous capacity as leader of the opposition in the Rajya Sabha, and his Lok Sabha counterpart Sushma Swaraj had registered their objection to then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh within hours of Sinha's appointment.

"You have to look at the legal regime. I was looking at the law that applies whether it's a gap in law or otherwise. We have to seriously examine who has the powers to do that because the collegium is the new appointing authority," said Jaitley at the 12th Hindustan Times Leadership Summit.

CONSUMERS

ECONOMIC TIMES, NOV 17, 2014

Government plans to amend law to empower consumers

According to sources, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs proposes to bring amendments to the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 to make it more effective.

ET SPECIAL:

NEW DELHI: With an aim to empower consumers, the [government](#) plans to amend a law to allow customers to file case against sellers from their place of residence.

As per current norms, the case has to be filed at the place of transaction.

Also, the requirement of engaging lawyers in the consumer forums is likely to be done away with, if the goods or services availed is of less than Rs 2 lakh value.

According to sources, the [Ministry of Consumer Affairs](#) proposes to bring amendments to the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 to make it more effective.

The proposed amendments would be sent to the Cabinet for approval after seeking views from other ministries, they added.

The objective for bringing in amendments is to protect consumer rights by simplifying the judicial process to ensure speedy and inexpensive justice.

"Currently, customers have to file case against sellers from the place where they have bought the goods. We propose to allow customers to file the case from the place where they reside," a source said, while giving details about changes proposed by the Ministry.

"No lawyers shall be permitted for both the parties (consumers and sellers) if the value of good or service is less than Rs 2 lakh," the source said, adding that mediation between both the parties would be allowed except in certain cases.

The amended Act is likely to have provisions to cover e-commerce companies and some other service providers like Railways and courier firms.

To make the complaint registration procedure simpler for consumers, the Ministry has not prescribed any fixed format and the complaints can also be made online. After 21 days, the complaints would be deemed to be accepted.

Concerned over the pending cases in consumer forums, sources said the department has proposed that there would be only one stage for appeal in higher forum.

Recently, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan had said that the government plans to make amendments in the [Consumer Protection Act](#) to "make it more

effective as protection of [consumers](#) in terms of quality, quantity and safety is of utmost importance."

The government has proposed an authority under this law to protect consumers against unfair trade practices and also to keep a close watch on various consumer services also, he had said.

Sources said the Central Consumer Protection Authority would be like an investigating agency, which will take up cases suo moto or complaints involving more than one person. It will promote, protect and enforce consumer rights and even recall hazardous products.

EDUCATION

DECCAN HERALD, NOV 20, 2014

KVs to relax norms in grading of third language students

Kendriya Vidyalayas have decided to provide certain relaxations to students from class VI to VIII such as postponing their formative assessments in the wake of the HRD Ministry's move to replace German with Sanskrit as the third language mid-session.

The ministry had earlier said that students could opt for any other modern Indian language for this session to help them reduce their burden.

In a communication, the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan has also made it clear that the third language will be taught for such students with the syllabus of the first-term of class VI and even for those children in class VII and VIII who had taken German as a third language.

"To further facilitate these children, the grades obtained by these students for the earlier term of learning German as a third language would be considered for finalising the compilation of results for their totals in the third language," it said.

The decision of the ministry to replace German with Sanskrit has affected close to 68,000 students between class VI to VIII.

German will, however, continue to be taught as an additional subject or as a hobby class.

The third and the fourth formative assessment scheduled to start shortly will now not be held for these students and their assessment and examination schedule will be intimated subsequently, the communication said.

Formative Assessment, introduced within the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation Framework, is a tool used by the teacher to continuously monitor student progress.

The ministry had last week decided to replace German with Sanskrit as the third language in the KVs, arguing that the existing arrangement was against the three-language formula and "violated" the national policy on education.

Union HRD Minister Smriti Irani had said that "an investigation" has already been launched into the signing of an MoU in 2011 enabling German being taught as the third language.

The KVs have also decided that survives of teachers recruited on contractual basis for teaching of German will be continued as per existing terms and conditions as it is being taught as an additional subject.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NOV 17, 2014

Don't rewrite the rules for education

The lifeline of the India growth story is education and by that we mean quality education. So, it is disheartening to learn that among the many who wish to leave their imprint on education, not all are necessarily qualified professionals.

In recent times, we have seen the disquieting phenomenon of those with strong links to the RSS and other right-wing cultural organisations taking an unhealthy interest in school curricula, the latest being Dinanath Batra, who has been roped in as an adviser on education reforms by the Haryana government. Mr Batra is the man who famously got Wendy Doniger's seminal work on Hinduism pulped on the grounds that it went against the grain of our culture. The first and foremost quality of an educationist is an openness to ideas and thoughts.

There is an excessive emphasis on moral values, ancient scriptures and philosophy most of which cannot be substantiated historically.

Of course, all curricula is subject to review. But those doing so must be mindful of the fact that our children will have to emerge armed with the knowledge that will enable them to fit into a competitive higher education system and then a competitive marketplace.

Mr Batra's books have been dismissed by most historians and prima facie he does not seem qualified to preside over curriculum changes. This is something that the HRD minister needs to look at very seriously.

Young minds are shaped in the classrooms and under no circumstance should they be imparted any knowledge which is ideologically weighted or just plain and simple wrong.

Mr Batra's advocacy of redrawing boundaries to reflect territories of a bygone time does not inspire much confidence in his ability to create child-friendly and relevant curricula. This is the first rung of academia, but the problem seems to have reached even the upper echelons.

In a recent lecture organised by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), a professor went so far as to say that one did not require history at all, much to the chagrin of the other luminaries present.

His argument that texts like the Mahabharata were enough to understand the past met with stiff resistance from other scholars. That the head of the ICHR concurred with these views is alarming, to say the least.

Earlier we saw Subramanian Swamy of the BJP saying that books by great historians like Romila Thapar and Bipan Chandra should be burned. This is not the inclusive

society that Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to foster. Education must be left to professionals and most certainly, facts cannot be doctored.

Our children deserve the best that schools and colleges can offer and that can only happen if this is built on a firm and objective foundation.

BUSINESS STANDARD, NOV 17, 2014

Govt project to convert school texts into e-books

The ministry of education is tasked with the work of identifying the curricula and the books which will be first available on the platform

Surabhi Agarwal

The central [government](#) is planning a project to convert all books covered under school curricula into e-books.

The project is being loosely termed [e-basta](#) and could put the government at par with some large e-book hosting platforms such as Amazon.

The Centre for Development of Advanced Computing is building the platform to host the e-books, Ram Sevak Sharma, secretary to the department of electronics and information technology, told *Business Standard*, "The platform should be ready in a month and will be like an intelligent online marketplace, where suggestions for related books, etc, will be given."

The platform will also provide to publishers the tools and technology for converting their books into e-books. There will be a payment gateway built in, to enable purchase of higher-end books, which will not be available for free download. "This project, along with others such as biometric attendance and e-greetings, are part of the priority projects under the Digital India initiative," added Sharma. Both have been rolled out within a few months of their announcement.

The Union Cabinet approved the blueprint for the Digital India project in August. It is expected to see investment upwards of Rs 1,00,000 crore over the next three to four years. The project envisages all government services be delivered electronically by 2018. It will also provide "high-speed internet as a core utility" down to the gram panchayat level and a "cradle-to-grave digital identity - unique, lifelong, online and authenticable".

The ministry of education is tasked with the work of identifying the curricula and the books which will be first available on the platform. The books will be shortlisted in

coordination with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Currently, several private organisations, as well as technology and education firms, offer e-books of the NCERT curriculum. However, these are scattered across platforms and are not comprehensive. The idea of a government platform is make sure all the material is available at one place, is current and easy to access.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a big proponent of digitising libraries. In early 2013, when he was the chief minister of Gujarat, he'd said efforts were underway to make books available in every household in the state through technology. "Libraries will now be just a click away for people. The importance of e-books is increasing," Modi had said. Every publisher releases a digital book, too, which had helped in increasing the reach, he added.

Students might be aided with digital devices such as notebooks to make the central project successful.

TIMES OF INDIA, NOV 17, 2014

Central government to launch a Rashriya Avishkar Abhiyan

The Central government plans to launch a Rashriya Avishkar Abhiyan, or national innovation mission, next year, Union human resource development minister Smriti Irani said at an event in the Capital last week.

"Next year, we hope to roll out the Rashriya Avishkar Abhiyan, which is a national innovation experience or initiative on behalf of the government of India so that in primary and secondary education, we can inculcate a desire for enquiry-based learning and a desire to possibly oscillate towards the fields of maths and science as a profession and not only something you pursue as part of your academics," Irani said at the Ficci higher education summit (HES) 2014. To pre-empt brain drain, she added, "The government of India seeks to find the money so that ideas don't leave our shores."

She spoke about other initiatives, such as the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan involving the IITS, IIMs and central universities to work for rural uplift.

At the summit, Greg Clark, minister of state for universities, science and cities, UK, announced the launch of the Generation UK-India programme under which more than 25,000 young UK aspirants are going to become teaching assistants in Indian schools and learn about the country through cultural immersion courses.

In a discussion on day two, Supriya Chaudhuri, professor emerita, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, said that under project E-Qual, the institution along with the University of

Hyderabad, Ambedkar University -Delhi, Shiv Nadar University, King's College, London and the University of Bologna, Italy, are designing courses in human ecology, critical thinking, design courses, and these courses to etc. "Working on these courses together is breaking the traditional system of rigid instructional practices. Technology has come in a big way and we would like to use it to go beyond traditional structures. These courses will cater to universities in India and Europe and will be taught through blended learning."

Before the HES, Ficci and the Central Square Foundation launched a report on the role corporate philanthropy could play in promoting quality school education.

INDIAN EXPRESS, NOV 21, 2014

Pranab Mukherjee asks central universities to adopt five villages each
[Samudra Gupta Kashyap](#)

President Pranab Mukherjee on Thursday asked every central university of the country to adopt five villages the way National Institutes of Technology (NIT) have been asked to, transform them into model villages by providing solutions to a wide range of issues concerning them in order to make India progressive and equal.

Addressing the 12th convocation of Tezpur University in Tezpur, 180 kms from here, President Mukherjee said higher educational institutions in general and central universities in particular must actively involve themselves to make an India which is progressive and equal.

"Central universities have a pioneering role to play in setting standards for higher education across the country. They have to be a catalyst for rejuvenating other institutions of higher learning in their region thereby reducing regional academic imbalance. More importantly, Central Universities have to become a vehicle of social rejuvenation by extending the reach of education through extension work in adjoining areas," he said.

Mukherjee said universities have to reach out to people in their region by disseminating knowledge, encouraging innovation, promoting environmental conservation and developing skills. "They have to elicit the participation of talented local youth, increase their employability and usher in upward mobility of the deprived sections of the society. Their work must resonate the needs and aspirations of the people," the President added.

Asking central universities to become breeding ground for creative quests and cutting-edge technological developments, President Mukherjee said India as a developing nation, have to search for solutions to issues like renewable energy, climate changes, drinking water, sanitation and urbanization.

"It is incumbent on our universities to align their research priorities with these challenges. Our universities have to be the breeding ground for creative quests and cutting-edge technological developments. They have to encourage their students to satiate their curiosity and chase their creativity," he added.

Over 1500 students were awarded degrees and PhDs in the convocation that was also attended by Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi and union minister of state for sports and youth affairs Sarbananda Sonowal.

INDIAN EXPRESS, NOV 21, 2014

With 42% vacant posts, MU gets UGC warning to hire or face stoppage of grant

[Mihika Basu](#) , [Dipti Singh](#)

With 42 per cent of its faculty posts lying vacant, Mumbai University will have to pull up its socks as the University Grants Commission (UGC) has written to all universities, asking them to fill teaching posts or face withholding of general development grant.

“We need to make an all-out effort to identify academically and professionally qualified people to fill vacant positions in universities. Advertisements will have to be published and notice be put up on the university websites. Even personal references to experts seeking names of candidates should be made. The UGC has never held back its commitment to provide resources for this purpose to universities, but it also expects that universities should play its own part in the same spirit in ensuring filling up of vacant positions in all subjects without further delay in the interest of maintaining the quality and standard,” stated the UGC notification sent to all vice-chancellors signed by UGC Chairperson Ved Prakash.

The notice further read that, “It should be ensured that the policy of reservation is duly followed while making recruitments. I hope that the spirit of the letter will be appreciated and that there will be no opportunity for the UGC to withhold the general development grant to universities.”

According to figures given by Mumbai University, 154 seats out of 365 sanctioned posts are vacant. “We had advertised for the vacant posts and received applications for some. Scrutiny of the applications is underway,” said an MU official.

The UGC letter also severely criticised the fact that owing to largescale vacancies, the instructional work was being handled by teachers appointed on temporary, contract and even part-time basis. “Their commitment largely ends with delivering the assigned lectures. The end result is that instructions are passed on to students in a ritualistic manner,” it said.

“Every senate meeting, we demand that the university must fill up posts on an urgent basis. Unfortunately, there is no proper human resource management and planning at the university. Proper internal promotion policy is also missing. Hiring contractual teachers on a lower pay will ultimately impact our students,” said Supriya Karande, a Mumbai University senate member.

MU repeats Bcom supplementary exam paper, rectifies in time

Third-year Bachelor of Commerce students, appearing for the supplementary exam in their sixth term, found themselves solving a familiar set of questions in Financial

Accounting exam paper on Wednesday. The Mumbai University had inadvertently repeated the previous year's exam paper — with the goof up corrected half an hour after the students began attempting the questions.

“The paper we received was the one we had appeared for in the final exam last year and failed. The same paper was given to us for the supplementary exam on Wednesday.

We did not realise this until the supervisor at the exam centre interrupted us and fresh question papers were distributed. Though they extended the time later but we had almost completed half the paper,” said one of the students.

When contacted, senior Faculty member of Mumbai University's commerce department said, “The exam was conducted for around 2, 000 students who had failed in the previous year exam. As soon as the goof up was found out, the examination department sent another question paper and students were given extra time.”

Every year, on an average, seven to eight goof ups take place in the Mumbai University during exam seasons, admissions and results. “How many times will the university make same goof ups? Every year there is at least one case of question paper goof up. I met the pro vice chancellor and have requested him to demand an explanation from the examination department for this goof up,” said Senate member Pradeep Sawant. Controller of examination Dinesh Bhonde was unavailable for comment.

ELECTIONS

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NOV 19, 2014

Compulsion won't work; voter education key to participation

An Act passed by the Gujarat legislature making voting compulsory in panchayat and municipal elections has raised a massive debate on the subject. In the din of the arguments for and against compulsory voting, a very momentous and laudable part of the Act reserving 50% seats for women has been completely lost.

The proposal for compulsory voting has been raised for years in response to chronic voter apathy, especially in urban areas. However, persuasion by education, rather than compulsion, is the answer. In fact, compulsion and democracy are the antithesis of each other.

And this principle is already well established in our laws. The 'electoral right' of a voter is defined in Section 171A(b) of the Indian Penal Code and in Section 79D of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 to 'mean the right of a person to vote or refrain from voting at election'. The decision to vote or not to vote is an individual's decision in exercise of this right.

In the recent NOTA judgment, the Supreme Court has held that abstention from voting and negative voting are protected as freedom of expression — a fundamental right (PUCL vs Union of India, 2013). In April 2009, the Supreme Court had taken the same view, dismissing a plea to make voting mandatory on the ground that Indian governments had ceased to represent the majority because of low turnouts.

In any election, there will always be some who do not vote out of conviction or ideological reasons. More importantly, there are millions of daily wage earners who cannot afford to forego their wages. They cannot be called anti-State or anti-democracy and punished. Some are forcibly driven out of their homes by riots or natural disasters. How can they vote in their forced homelessness?

The major element which distinguishes democracy from authoritarianism is that it ensures people's participation in election and the decision-making processes. A legitimate question arises: Can this participation be enforced? The enforcement can take people to the electoral booths, but it can't ensure their votes. It may add to the voter turnout, but it will not enhance voters 'participation' in the democratic processes.

Even practically it is very difficult to implement compulsory voting, which presupposes some punitive action against defaulters. Even if 10-15% voters do not vote (as in countries where voting is compulsory) it would have 8-12 crore voters to be punished. The punishment has to be stiff enough to be a deterrent. Suggestions from a cross section range from withholding PAN card and driving licence to withdrawing ration card, BPL card, MGNREGA card, etc. A PIL in 2009 suggested disconnection of

water and electricity that shocked the Supreme Court, which condemned these ‘inhuman methods’.

Even if a nominal punishment of, say, a fine of just Rs. 1 is imposed, the due process of law has to be followed. Issuing notices to non-voters, giving adequate opportunity to them to explain why they did not vote, with supportive documents, giving them a hearing, and then, finally, write speaking orders, is not administratively feasible. In other words, it will mean crores of new court cases after every election (and there are at least three every five years). The lawyers will be delighted. And so will petty bureaucrats, always on the lookout for extortion opportunities.

Nothing can be more retrograde than even to think of withdrawing these facilities, which despite decades of efforts have not fully reached the people. This will also shatter the laudable goal of ‘minimum government’ — by letting loose an extortion mafia. The law could become a coercive instrument in the hands of the State and make citizens vulnerable to harassment by government and its officials.

The noble objective of enhanced voter participation can be best achieved through systematic voter education, amply demonstrated by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in the elections in 29 states between 2010 and 2014. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, 66.4% voter turnout beat all previous records. Many states reached the threshold of 80% turnout. These included Nagaland (87.8%), Lakshwadeep (86.6%), Tripura (84.7%), West Bengal (82.2%) and Assam (79.8%). Our consistent assertion that motivation and facilitation, rather than compulsion, are the best ways to address the issue, has been clearly vindicated.

Compulsory voting started with Belgium in 1892, followed by Argentina (1914) and Australia (1924). Some countries like Venezuela and the Netherlands practised it at one time but have since abolished it. Currently, 19 countries have this provision but only nine enforce it. It is absurd to enact a law that you do not intend to enforce or know that you cannot.

It is amusing to see people citing examples of other countries selectively (eg Australia and Singapore). Why not mention the United States, the world’s greatest democracy (and the largest after India) and Britain, the mother of modern democracy? They have no compulsory voting despite low turnouts.

Anyway, let’s look at Australia, the most cited country. It is smaller in population (21.5 mn) than Haryana (25.5 m). Its literacy rate is 96%, poverty is negligible, and its voting period extends up to two months. And to collect a fine of A\$ 20, they end up spending A\$ 2,000. And after all that, the highest ever turnout is 92% (against Tripura’s 93%) of which 6% dropped a blank ballot. As for the other favourite example, Singapore, it is smaller than Karol Bagh (in Delhi). Well, India is a little bigger than that.

All these arguments notwithstanding, the issue should not be given a hasty burial. Buried it must be, but only after a healthy debate on the entire range of electoral reforms.

SY Quraishi, former CEC, is the author of *An Undocumented Wonder — the Making of the Great Indian Election*

The views expressed by the author are personal

EMINENT PERSONALITIES

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NOV 20, 2014

A view of India based on hatred

Vir Sanghvi

Now that the birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru is out of the way, it might be worth reflecting on the bitterness, rancour and downright abuse that characterised it during debates in TV studios, on social media and sometimes, even in print.

Even those of us who acknowledge Nehru's contribution to the making of modern India concede that he made numerous mistakes. When it came to economic policy, he was often too influenced by the Fabian-Socialist approach to the issue. His hatred for the colonial powers that had ruled India for two centuries led him to view the Soviet Union in much too favourable a light. He was wrong about China: First too trusting and then, with the Forward Policy, needlessly provocative. His handling of the Kashmir issue was flawed. And so on.

But the level of bitterness that characterised the Nehru anniversary went far beyond any logical listing of his mistakes. Instead, those opposed to Nehru demonstrated an almost visceral hatred of him and his legacy. If facts got in the way of the debate, then they were quickly brushed aside and replaced with invective and abuse.

Why should a generation that had no real experience of Nehru's style of governance feel such anger and bitterness towards a man whom most independent historians regard as one of the great figures of the 20th century?

I can think of three reasons, only one of which is vaguely honourable.

First of all, there is no doubt that, by the 1950s, a competing world view had emerged within India. Though this view is bogusly ascribed to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (who was a much more complex figure than his new-found admirers realise), it had many advocates. In this view, non-alignment was a mistake. The decision to build up a huge publicly-owned industrial infrastructure was an error. And the decision to declare Hindu-majority India as a secular country, defined not by religion but by an idea of India, was downright foolish and unfair to the Hindu majority.

But whenever parties that should have represented this view came to power, they could not counter the Nehru legacy. For instance India's first BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee simply did not subscribe to this position. He may have had his own opinion about Nehru's mistakes but as external affairs minister (1977-79), he stuck with non-alignment and then, as prime minister, rejected a religion-based approach to nationalism.

It is not clear where Narendra Modi stands on the issue (he has been uncharacteristically ambivalent) but there's no doubt that many of his supporters believe that Modi's victory is the triumph of an alternative view of India, one that

rejects the Nehruvian model and celebrates a religion-heavy approach to Indian citizenship.

This is fair enough. If a competing ideology has finally occupied the mainstream, then perhaps its supporters are entitled to gloat a little.

But that doesn't explain the rancour, the viciousness of the responses and the bitterness displayed by many of those attacking Nehru and especially by the angry army of abusive trolls on social media who spend their days posting abuse all the way from Vancouver to Versova.

That anger stems from two entirely separate factors.

The first is what many of the trolls call 'Sickularism.' Some Nehru-bashers are people who resent Islam, hate Muslims and blame most of the world's ills on Islamic fanaticism. You have only to go on Twitter to see the extent to which abuse of Muslims and their religion — completely unacceptable in normal discourse — is rampant on social media. The abusers are not necessarily people who are worried about ISIS or al Qaeda. They just loathe Muslims and have no hesitation in saying so.

For such people, Nehru was the Appeaser-in-Chief. He was the man, they say, who betrayed Hindus to pamper Muslims. Just as liberals regard Indian secularism as among Nehru's achievements, the trolls see it as his greatest crime against humanity. (Well, against Hindus at any rate). So, much of the abuse of Nehru stems not from any understanding of his successes and failures. It originates in hatred of Muslims. Nehru is blamed as the man who gave Muslims an equal stake in what should have been a Hindu country. Hence the names he is called on Twitter: Jawahar Khan, Jawahar Mohammed, etc.

There is another factor. The BJP has promised India a Congress-mukt Bharat. These days, the Congress has come to mean (especially to its opponents) the Gandhi family. If the Modi-bhakts are to attack the Gandhis (and there is no doubt that for some of them, hatred of the family is almost pathological), then they must start at the root. It does not matter to them whether Nehru intended to create a dynasty (the evidence is inconclusive). What matters is that he did. In their view, the family is a cancer at the heart of the Indian system and every element of that malignant growth must be pulled out, and that begins with Nehru.

So it doesn't matter whether Nehru was right or wrong. Rather, in the manner that ancient and medieval Indian history is being rewritten to suit the political demands of the present, so modern Indian history must also be twisted to portray Nehru as a Muslim-loving Soviet stooge who failed India; his only achievement was to establish a dynasty which held India back from occupying its place as one of the world's great post-Vedic superpowers.

The first reason for opposing Nehru is understandable. Triumphalism and gloating from an ideological faction that has finally come to power are common enough in politics.

More troubling are the other two reasons. So much of the hatred stems not from any fair examination of Nehru's achievements or failures, but from present-day hatreds: Hatred of Nehru's descendants and hatred of Muslims.

It is worrying when a society cannot disentangle its past from its present. And it is even more worrying when a whole generation of trolls bases its view of India on nothing more than hatred.

Nehru deserves better. And so does Indian political discourse.

The views expressed by the author are personal

ENVIRONMENT

DECCAN HERALD, NOV 19, 2014

Climate deal brings pressure on India

The deal between the US and China on reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions marks an important step forward in the efforts to reduce global warming and avert climate change.

The deal is notable for many reasons. It was negotiated bilaterally without the involvement of the multilateral United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process.

The US and China are the two biggest emitters of carbon gases and so their actions for reduction of emissions will have an impact on global GHG levels.

They have till now been adversaries in the climate change debate with China leading the developing countries' demands and the US leading the developed countries' refusal to make any sizeable reductions.

The US has not even endorsed the only international agreement on climate issues, the Kyoto Protocol, which needs to be replaced soon. The differences between the two sides made all the past attempts to arrive at a comprehensive agreement fruitless.

The commitments made by the two countries are different and show different approaches to curb gas emissions. While the US has promised to reduce emissions by 26 to 28 per cent of their 2005 levels by 2025, China has pledged to peak its emissions by 2030 and to increase the share of renewable energy sources like wind and solar power to 20 per cent of its energy basket.

While the US will have to reduce the share of coal, China will have to increase the contribution of other sources.

With the Republicans, who are against any cuts in emissions on the ground that they will affect economic growth, now dominating Congress, President Obama will find it difficult to get legislative sanction for his deal.

China will be aided by slowing growth but it will have to make huge investments in alternative sources of energy to make good its commitment.

The US-China deal comes in the wake of a commitment by the European Union countries to make a 40 per cent reduction in GHG emissions by 2030.

They set the stage for the coming UN-sponsored meeting in Lima and Paris where a final

agreement needs to be concluded. They also put pressure on other major emitters, including India, to make similar commitments.

India's case is different from all others because, even though it is a major emitter, its per capita emissions are very low. It has already stated that its average per capita emission would be capped below the world average.

But it has been disinclined to set targets for quantitative reductions as its level of economic growth is much below those of developed countries and even China.

India will have to formulate a strategy that suits its needs and ensures the success of the UNFCCC process.

FINANCE

ASIAN AGE, NOV 17, 2014

Finance Minister to unleash subsidy reforms in next Budget

Mukesh Ranjan

Pending the report of the Expenditure Management Commission headed by former RBI governor Bimal Jalan, the government is all set to unleash subsidy reforms in the coming 2015-16 Budget, which may allow finance minister Arun Jaitley to save upto Rs 50,000 crores in the next financial year, and also help him in managing the fiscal deficit target better. Under the FRBM Act, the government has to keep the fiscal deficit target to 3.6 per cent of GDP in 2015-16.

Government sources said the finance ministry, under the active supervision of the PMO, was working on a multi-pronged strategy to keep the subsidy burden under “a manageable level”, and this will be unveiled in next year’s Budget.

A senior official claimed the Centre has identified “a few of the low-hanging fruit”, adding: “Petroleum products and fertilisers are the focus area of subsidy reforms, that the government wants to bring in from next year. The total annual subsidy burden on three petroleum products LPG, kerosene and diesel is Rs 1,35,000 crores, and has been increasing every year. In case of fertilisers, the government has to shell out over `70,000 crores, and this also increases year after year.

“As part of subsidy reforms, the government got an opportunity on account of the dip in prices of crude oil in the international market, and thus decided to deregulate the price of diesel; now it is linked with market forces,” a source said, adding that the process was on to put a cap on the subsidy outgo on LPG, which currently burdens the government with around Rs 92,000 crores.

“The Cabinet has already agreed in principle to cap the LPG subsidy on the basis of per kg. The quantum Rs 20 per kg has been suggested to a committee headed by PMO principal secretary Nripendra Mishra, with an additional support of the same sum by oil companies like ONGC, that gets windfall gain due to import parity price given to them on crude oil, and this has been accepted,” a source said.

Thus the subsidy on domestic LPG of 14.2 kg is going to be fixed at Rs 568 per cylinder, thereby the stage is set for deregulating the pricing of domestic cooking gas from the next financial year, sources said, adding that under the new system, people will get the benefit of subsidy on smaller size cylinders, as it will be provided on a per kg basis.

In the case of kerosene, the Centre has chalked out a roadmap to phase out subsidies altogether, as the Narendra Modi government plans to provide 24x7 power supply across the entire country in the next five years in a phased manner. “As states get fully electrified and also assured power supply, the kerosene quota on subsidy to those states will be discontinued,” sources said.

In case of fertilisers, sources said, the LPG model is being worked out, as most of them are now “nutrient based”, barring urea. “We are working on a draft note to bring even urea under a nutrient-based formula so that subsidy could be capped on a per kg basis. However, the work on this is at a very initial stage, but we are sure to settle the issue soon,” a source noted.

HEALTH SERVICES

HINDU, NOV 21, 2014

Missing links in universal health care

NACHIKET MOR

ANUSKA KALITA

A number of announcements have been made by the Central and State governments on their intent to offer Universal Health Care (UHC). These welcome developments are timely as India is now rapidly becoming one of the few countries that do not seem to have a concrete plan for UHC in place. Even poorer countries such as Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, and Vietnam have now started to make significant progress in this area.

A fact often overlooked in these discussions, however, is that UHC is a complex idea and contains several prerequisites that need to be carefully incorporated into its conceptualisation, design and implementation. This article attempts to outline four of these essential elements.

Providing integrated care

The first, and perhaps the most important, element is the need to distinguish UHC from universally available health insurance. UHC seeks to ensure financial protection with the provision of appropriately priced, high quality, and integrated health care (combining primary, secondary, and tertiary care into a single, patient-centred health-care system). Ideally, financial protection and comprehensive health care are bundled together into an integrated ‘managed care’ proposition where the financial-protector (or the risk-manager) and the provider are a single entity. One of the key benefits of this model is the significant shift in incentives for the health provider — from the current focus on promoting hospitalisation and needless care-procedures, to incentives for promoting health and prevention of illness. Since the provider receives only a fixed amount per year, irrespective of the actual treatment provided, ‘managed care’ places rational treatment and cost-effectiveness at the centre of the model. Because of their very nature, health-care systems owned and financed by ministries of health are ideally suited for offering this type of ‘managed care’. And, if, but only if, there is very strong confidence in the ability of the system to regulate and monitor both patient and provider behaviours as well as population level outcomes, it is possible — as Thailand has done successfully — to invite large non-government players to also bid to provide such ‘managed care’ services. And, while the regulatory challenge in outsourcing ‘managed care’ to the private sector is quite considerable, it is very clear that fragmented health systems with different providers taking care of different parts of the health system, such as the private sector providing hospital-based care and the government focussing on primary care, with patients free to bypass it, is the worst of all possible choices. This fragmentation is the principal reason why a country like the United States finds itself in a situation where insurance premiums and costs of health care are both rising rapidly but population level health indicators are well below those of other comparable countries.

Primary care with gatekeeping

The second element is the need to shift the focus of attention from hospital-based care, to primary care — in terms of financing, development of infrastructure and usage. In order for India to achieve UHC, both in terms of financial feasibility as well as its well-being goals, it is clear that fewer than 2.50 per cent of patients in any given year should need hospital-based care. This implies that 97.5 per cent of all conditions would need to be dealt with at the primary-care level. UHC would therefore need substantial investments at the primary level combined with a strong gatekeeping framework that does not allow patients to seek hospital-based care unless they have been referred by a primary-care provider. It is believed that over 95 per cent of patients who visit tertiary care facilities such as JIPMER in Puducherry and AIIMS in Delhi are at the wrong place and have incurred all the hardship and costs that they did needlessly when they could easily have been cared for locally if good primary care was available. Evidence from Andhra Pradesh also shows that under 'Arogyasri', people are overwhelmingly seeking care at hospitals even for conditions which are patently treatable at primary-care facilities. While India undoubtedly needs additional hospital beds to provide adequate coverage even at the 2.50 per cent level mentioned earlier, it is imperative that the focus of immediate attention should not be hospitals or more AIIMS-like centres but well-designed and capable primary-care facilities so that patients can go there directly. Should they inadvertently end up at hospitals for seeking such care, they must be directed back. Only this combination of improved-availability and mandatory-gatekeeping will start to reduce the excess demand for hospital beds even as we gradually seek to address the unmet needs for hospital beds in deficient regions. Otherwise, we run the serious risk of this turning into a vicious cycle of ever increasing demand for hospital beds, further fuelled by an in-patient, insurance-led financial protection strategy, leading eventually to continual and rapid increases in health insurance premiums with no resultant improvements in health outcomes.

Covering everybody

The third key element relates to coverage — any universal health programme would need to include the entire population and not just be targeted at the poor. This is because India has a very steep poverty gradient and single health shocks have the potential to draw entire households back into poverty for all but the very top sliver of the population. For this very reason, globally, citizens of the most developed and several developing nations, who have significantly higher per capita incomes than do even the top percentiles of our population, have also been provided with full access to health care and financial protection. Engagement of the middle class also allows additional resources to be pooled along with tax resources since the amounts that they are currently expending on health care could be included as well. It is clear that development of integrated risk pools and their investment into an integrated UHC framework of the type discussed earlier (as would be implied by grouping the rich and poor together) would allow a significantly higher level of expenditure-volatility compression and the delivery of rational care. This would benefit both segments, with only the resultant net savings to the middle class being used to cross-subsidise the poor. Another benefit of including the middle class is in

ensuring accountability of the health system. Being more conscious of its rights and with more resources to participate in the political process, the middle class is better placed to hold the public system accountable to higher quality of care, and perhaps, place health care centrally on political agendas — a feat that the Below Poverty Line (BPL)-targeted Indian health system has not been able to accomplish.

Separating out social determinants

The fourth key element is the urgent need for separation of core health care from extended health care, in a focussed discussion on UHC. While broader social determinants of health (or extended health care) such as provision of clean drinking water, improved sanitation and improved education of girls, have the potential to produce a very big impact on health outcomes, UHC is much more narrowly focussed on what the health-care system itself can provide directly in terms of primary, secondary, and tertiary care (or core health care). The reasons for the desirability of this separation are many and have to do principally with the appropriate allocation of responsibilities and resources. First, these broader determinants, for the most part, fall outside the domain of the ministries of health. Second, in India, the resources currently allocated for health care by the government have to go up three times, from 1 per cent to 3 per cent of GDP even to provide the essential elements of core health care at a reasonable level of quality and availability. Provision of extended health care would need a much larger level of resource allocation and would perforce have to be included in the domain of other ministries. And, finally, the benefits that accrue from extended health care go well beyond health (for example, time savings account for over 70 per cent of the benefits of home-delivered, clean drinking water and are not necessarily the most cost-effective interventions if viewed only from the narrow lens of health care.

There are a number of very important challenges that we face as a country. It is important to ensure that we are focussed on solving those using strong evidence-based strategies and with a very sharp sense of focus. Offering UHC to all our citizens is one such challenge. Here we need to be careful that we use the limited resources we have at our disposal in the most effective way, even if it means that some very important ideas need to be revisited or deferred for the time being.

(Nachiket Mor and Anuska Kalita are with the IKP Trust. The views expressed are entirely personal.)

The middle class is better placed to hold the public system accountable to higher quality of care, and perhaps, place health care centrally on political agendas.

Over 95 per cent of patients coming to super-speciality medical care facilities are at the wrong place and have incurred hardships and costs when they could have easily been treated at their neighbourhood primary care centre. This among other factors badly affects health outcomes in India

TIMES OF INDIA, NOV 17, 2014

From January 2015, life-saving drugs to show govt-fixed rates in bold red

Sushmi Dey

NEW DELHI: All life saving drugs from January 2015 will come with a bold red strip on their packs highlighting price as fixed by the government and also specify if they are under price control. Signaling a New Year gift for consumers, the government is set to make it mandatory for regulated drugs to print on their packs 'DPCO Scheduled Drug' in black ink on a bold red strip along with their ceiling price per unit, an official source said.

The move will enable consumers, who are presently highly dependent on doctors and chemists, to make an informed choice while purchasing medicines. In case of overcharging, consumers can directly call National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority's (NPPA) helpline number 1800111255 or voice helpline 1800114424 to lodge a complaint.

"The proposal has been discussed with the ministry of consumer affairs, food and public distribution and health ministry. There is overall consensus that there is a need to protect consumer interest in the use of medicines," the official said. The NPPA, which regulates and monitors prices of medicines, is anchoring the move.

This is the second such populist move related to medicines proposed in the past one week. The government also proposed to bring at least 100 more drugs under price control by making corrections in the existing Drug Price Control Order, 2013.

Currently, price monitoring of medicines is one of the biggest challenges facing the drug regulator. "With over 600 scheduled formulations, which translate into more than 6,000 packs of different brands sold across the country, including in rural areas and distant villages, it is very challenging to ensure oversight on price compliance," the official said, adding consumer awareness regarding regulated products and their ceiling prices was a must to ensure there was no overcharging.

Presently, there are several overcharging cases pending with the regulator. The latest data by NPPA shows almost Rs 4,000 crore pending against several drug makers for overcharging consumers on different medicines.

However, the regulator feels this is just a fraction and in reality the amount is likely to be much higher. At present, the NPPA randomly picks up samples from the market to detect cases of overcharging. A mandatory tagging of the ceiling price on packs will allow monitoring of prices through consumers in every nook and corner of the country, the official said.

The plan, which is in its last stage seeking comments from stakeholders including

pharmaceutical companies, consumer organizations and state drug authorities, is expected to be notified by December-end. The NPPA has asked all stakeholders to submit their comments by November 30.

BUSINESS LINE, NOV 20, 2014

No man is an island

JINOY JOSE P

The Ebola epidemic hurts everybody, equally

India has reported its first case of Ebola. Health authorities say a young man who returned from Liberia tested positive despite having been treated for the disease, and cured. This, along with similar instances in other geographies, illustrates the key takeaway from the virus outbreak: in a deeply integrated and interconnected world, epidemics anywhere can mean epidemics everywhere. And that means the response to deadly diseases should be collective, immediate and globalised. No country can turn away from supporting efforts to tackle emergencies saying it hasn't hit its gates yet. No country or business is insulated from the rest of the world.

Courtesy Ebola, several multinational mining companies in West Africa have been forced expansion plans on hold, costing thousands of jobs. Arcelor Mittal has reportedly delayed a \$1.7 billion expansion at its iron ore mine in Liberia. So has Rio Tinto which stopped work at its \$20 billion iron ore mine in Guinea, which has reported nearly 2,000 Ebola patients. London Mining, with business in Sierra Leone, applied for bankruptcy last month after iron ore prices crashed owing to Ebola concerns, among others.

Several Chinese and Indian companies are present in many African nations. But we are yet to see a concrete and comprehensive action plan from these countries to tackle the virus spread in West Africa. That the recent outbreak started in 2013, says a lot about the collective responsibility — or lack of it — of nations and trade blocs.

The private sector should also bear some share of the blame. It was widely alleged that companies doing business in Africa do zip when it comes to helping these countries maintain clean environs and healthy lifestyle. It's high time industry bodies with interests in Africa started initiatives to make and keep Africa clean.

Jinoy Jose P Assistant Editor

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INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS, NOV 17, 2014

G20 summit: PM Narendra Modi gives a strong push to govt agenda on black money, tax avoidance

[P Vaidyanathan Iyer](#)

Driven by a strong domestic political agenda of getting [black money](#) back home, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday managed to get the Group of 20 include a certain clause in the final Leaders' Communiqué that will make it difficult for tax havens to give complete tax exemption to companies.

This, along with the G20's endorsement of a global Common Reporting Standard for automatic exchange of tax information on a reciprocal basis, are the twin pillars in India's fight against tax evasion and repatriating unaccounted money, said [Suresh Prabhu](#), sherpa to Prime Minister Modi for the G20 Summit.

Prabhu said that the Prime Minister made a strong pitch against black money. "At present, there are many rigidities in [international tax laws](#), and past tax treaties also do not facilitate easy exchange of information," he said. India has to make specific requests with tax jurisdictions for information, and more often such information is shared with caveats.

The Prime Minister's Office said that India's concerns on black money and tax avoidance have been taken on board in G20. This, government officials said, would give an impetus to India's move to renegotiate treaties with some countries.

On the implication of the clause that now commits the G20 to ensure 'transparency of taxpayer-specific rulings found to construe harmful tax practices', Usha Titus, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Finance, pointed out that Luxembourg, for instance, had given a series of rulings which effectively did not require certain corporates to pay any tax. "The inclusion of this clause will make it difficult for tax havens to do so for specific corporates," she said.

This is part of the base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) action plan of the G20/ OECD to modernise international tax rules. The G20 final draft said that this plan has made significant progress. "We are committed to finalising this work in 2015," it said. The G20 countries are expected to exchange information with each other and other countries by 2017 or end-2018 after completing legislative procedures.

Modi has been pushing the issue of black money in his meetings with global leaders including Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the BRICS leaders. At an informal meeting with BRICS leaders Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, Xi Jinping of China, Vladimir Putin of Russia and Jacob Zuma of South Africa, Modi called for close coordination on unaccounted money stashed abroad. He said unaccounted money was also linked to security challenges.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NOV 19, 2014

PM Modi announces \$75 million credit line to Fiji

Seeking stronger engagement with the Pacific Islands, India on Wednesday announced a \$75-million line of credit for Fiji for a co-generation power plant and upgrading the sugar industry and also a \$5 million fund to develop its villages even as the two countries agreed to expand their Defence and Security cooperation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who made these announcements after talks with his Fijian counterpart Frank Bainimarama shortly after his arrival, also announced a visa on arrival for Fijians and assistance projects that included a parliament library and doubling the scholarships and training slots in India for people from this country.

The lines of credit were part of three agreements signed between the two countries in the presence of the two leaders. Modi arrived in Suva at the crack of dawn on the third and final leg of his 10-day three-nation tour, for a day-long visit, the first by an Indian premier to the country in 33 years after Indira Gandhi in 1981.

The tiny remote pacific Island nation rolled out the red carpet for Modi, who was received by Frank Bainimarama, a former military ruler, at the Suva International airport. Bainimarama was sworn in as prime minister on September 22 after the first parliamentary elections in the pacific nation since he seized power in a coup in 2006.

Modi was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour at the airport after which he attended the traditional ceremony of Welcome at Albert park, close to the Prime Minister's office and Parliament. He shook hands with people from the Indian diaspora assembled at the ground as he walked past the enclosures. "It is a new day and a new beginning in our relations with Fiji," Modi said in remarks to the media at a joint appearance with Bainimarama at the prime Minister's office.

"Fiji could serve as a hub for stronger Indian engagement with Pacific islands. I see this visit as an opportunity to renew an old relationship and lay the foundation for a strong partnership in the future," he added. Modi also addressed Fijian parliament, the first by a foreign leader, after parliamentary elections, during which he said that India was prepared to work with Fiji to build a "Digital Fiji". The Line of Credit included \$70 million for a co-generation power plant at Rarav sugar mill and \$5 million to strengthen and modernise Fiji's village, small and medium scale industries. "I regard Fiji as an important partner for India. We have deep and enduring ties of history and culture.

Fiji is an influential voice in the Pacific Region and the developing world, and our partner in multilateral institutions," Modi said at his joint press interaction.

Reciprocating Modi's sentiments, Bainimarama said the Indian Prime minister's visit has laid the groundwork for "productive relationship" between the two countries.

"We are proud to have India as a partner in Fiji's future," he said, adding that 15 more bilateral agreements are in the works. Modi touched a chord at all his events starting his

speeches with a Fijian greeting "Nissan Vola" and ending them with "Vinaka" (Thank You). "We will also expand our defence and security cooperation, including assistance in defence training and capacity building. We agreed to identify opportunities to expand our trade and investments and work out a concrete roadmap," Modi said. He said that India looks forward to closer engagement in areas like information technology and Space applications. "I want to offer to convey a special word of gratitude from the people of India for hosting Indian scientists for tracking India's Mars Mission earlier this year. Together we made history," the prime minister said.

"We are also prepared to increase cooperation in renewable energy, especially solar and wind energy, and in building capacity to adapt to climate change," he added. He also suggested Fijian leaders to invite Bollywood to shoot their films in Fiji to attract more Indian tourists.

"Fiji is a leader in the region and a strong voice in the developing world. Together, we can also work for a future in the region, in which there is an equal place for all nations big and small, developed and developing and a climate of peace and tranquility," he added.

INTERNET

HINDU, NOV 17, 2014

Connaught Place is now a Wi-Fi hotspot

JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ

NDMC to extend services to markets under their jurisdiction

Visitors to Connaught Place can now stay connected to the Internet while they eat, work, shop or just lounge around Central Park as the entire market is now a Wi-Fi zone. Member of Parliament from New Delhi constituency Meenakshi Lekhi launched the service on Sunday evening at an event organised at central park.

The project has been taken up by Tata Teleservices Limited as part of their corporate social responsibility in association with New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC). The service was initially supposed to be launched by Lieutenant-Governor Najeeb Jung but the BJP MP took his place instead.

After launching the service, Ms. Lekhi tested the quality of the connection provided by streaming the song 'Happy' by Pharrell Williams on the loudspeaker for the audience to enjoy. The stream was seamless and the representatives of Tata Teleservices cheered along with the hundreds of people that had gathered at the event. The foot-tapping music encouraged others to log on the Wi-Fi and try it out for themselves as well.

The NDMC had launched a pilot project at Khan Market a few months back but the project at Connaught Place had been plagued by delays.

Speaking at the event Jalaj Srivastava, Chairman, NDMC said the Connaught Place project faced challenges as the buildings in the market had very thick walls. Also the sheer size of the market with its various lanes was difficult to cover. The NDMC plans to extend the services to all markets under their jurisdiction soon. Mr. Srivastava hoped that the connection would encourage transparency and help the NDMC be more efficient in delivery of their services.

Shankar Aggarwal, Secretary (Urban Development), Govt. of India who was present at the event explained the 'Smart City Project' undertaken up by the Ministry of Urban Development for making 100 Smart Cities across the country. He said that the initiative had been taken by the NDMC under the 'Smart City Vision' of the Prime Minister of India.

The Wi-Fi service in Connaught Place is the largest in India. At a time, the service can be availed by 5,000 people with a speed of 512 Kbps. The first 20 minutes (within a 24 hour period) would be entirely free after which scratch cards can be purchased in various denominations in the market. The password for the Wi-Fi will be sent to users via SMS once they login to the hotspot from the Wi-Fi settings.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

TIMES OF INDIA, NOV 19, 2014

No government role on 2002 riots: Godhra panel

AHMEDABAD: More than 12 years and 25 extensions later, the Nanavati commission on Tuesday submitted its final report on post-Godhra riots, including 4,160 cases of violence between February 27 and May 31, 2002.

"The commission has concluded that there was no direct involvement of the state government in cases of rioting, but it felt that there was a scope for improvement in police department to control the violence," top sources said.

The commission comprises retired Supreme Court Justice G T Nanavati and retired high court Justice Akshay Mehta. They handed over the report, running into more than 2,000 pages, to CM Anandiben Patel. "It is up to the state government to make it public," said Justice Nanavati, who refused to comment on content of the report.

On delay in completing the inquiry, he said, "We would have submitted the report earlier. There was a delay of more than two years because SIT refused to share investigation papers with us. Also, because of (IPS) Sanjiv Bhatt who frequently moved HC."

READ ALSO : [Gujarat HC adjourns hearing on Godhra carnage appeals](#)

The commission had submitted its first report on the burning of S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express in Godhra in September 2008, where it said that the attack was a planned conspiracy.

For inquiry into post-Godhra riots, the commission perused more than 50,000 affidavits submitted by riot victims. It also examined hundreds of witnesses including IPS officers P C Pande, R B Sreekumar, Rahul Sharma, Sanjiv Bhatt, former home minister Gordhan Zadafia and others.

Despite the elaborated scope for examining ministers and the chief minister, the probe panel did not question then CM Narendra Modi, who faced severe criticism for not being able to control the riots that witnessed 1,169 deaths in three months. The commission had said there was not enough evidence showing Modi's involvement and hence his presence and questioning was not required.

Not questioning Modi indicates that there is no indictment of him in this inquiry. When asked, the judges said, "No comments, please." The investigation by Supreme Court-appointed SIT has also given Modi a clean chit. The SIT went on to praise riots control measures taken by the Modi government.

On March 3, 2002, Justice K G Shah was appointed as a one-member inquiry commission to probe the Godhra carnage case. But later, Justice Nanavati was appointed as chairman and the probe was expanded to post-Godhra violence also. In 2004, the commission's scope of inquiry was further expanded to question the CM also. In 2009, Justice Shah died and Justice Mehta was appointed as member in his place.

LIBRARIES

HINDU, NOV 19, 2014

NRIs to set up knowledge centre

United Kingdom-based Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) will shortly start a knowledge centre here under the auspices of Arullananda Trust. The centre will be equipped with computers and a library to enable economically-backward students use them for competitive examinations, according to Sri Arulananda Swami who was speaking at the birth anniversary celebrations of his guru Swami Lalitananda Sarasvati at Voderavu, near here, on Tuesday.

TIMES OF INDIA, NOV 19, 2014

AMU VC seeks Rs 20 crore to expand library, admit girls

Eram Agha,

NEW DELHI: It appears that every dark cloud indeed has a silver lining. The silver lining in the AMU affair is that Aligarh Muslim University vice-chancellor Zameeruddin Shah has sought a Rs 20 crore grant from the HRD ministry to expand the main university library so that it can accommodate girls from the Women's College.

He will also use the funds to start a bus service for the girls of the college, which is 3km from the university campus.

Speaking to TOI here, Shah clarified that his sexist remark was made in jest. "It was a simile," he said, referring to his statement that girls in the library would attract boys. He stressed he was in favour of girls coming to the library and in June last year wrote to parents asking if they would be fine with their wards travelling unescorted from college to the AMU campus. "Barring one, no parent said 'yes'," he said.

In a letter addressed to the HRD ministry, Shah has said, "Despite being open for 18 hours from 8am to 2am for seven days a week it (the library) is always overcrowded. It was constructed to cater to 7,000 students but now the strength is 28,000. It is not at all feasible to take more, we are also examining if it is feasible to get Women's College girls, the problem is of space and we need funds for expansion of the library. I will be projecting a requirement for special allocation of funds to MHRD."

Shah has clarified to HRD minister Smriti Irani that AMU has not violated the fundamental rights of women. He said, "The safety of girls moving from their college to the main library after dark is a major security hazard because of the lumpen elements of Aligarh city. There have been several cases of chain snatching and 'eve teasing'. This aspect can be taken care of if the College has bus service. Unfortunately, there was a total ban on purchase of new vehicles by universities, till it was clarified that replacements for condemned vehicles could be restored to."

DECCAN HERALD, NOV 20, 2014

Government working towards building national e-library

The government is working towards building a massive national e-library and providing wi-fi connectivity to classrooms, Amita Sharma, advisor, ministry of human resource development, said here Wednesday.

"The government is working on creating a MOOC (massive open online course) platform called Swayam. Work is in progress and students will soon be able to log into the web and access free content created by our own premier institutes," Sharma said.

"Activities relating to building a massive, national e-library and providing wi-fi connectivity to classrooms has already been initiated," Sharma added.

She said that IIT Bombay had signed an agreement with Edex to carry this venture forward.

Sharma was speaking at the Indo-US Technology Summit 2014, which was organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry, the Department of Science and Technology, the government of India and the US Department of State.

"While the government is taking aggressive initiatives to improve the scenario of higher education in the country, close collaboration with the industry should also be encouraged to build world class academic institutions to nurture Indian students and attract global talent," R. Chidambaram, principal scientific advisor, government of India, said.

While talking about emerging technology, which holds the potential of revolutionising the higher education system, he listed some key classroom breakthroughs like cloud computing, mobile learning, tablet computing, MOOC, open content, learning analytics, gamification, 3-D printing, virtual and remote labs and wearable technology.

"Technology-driven higher education is a must to help drive the vision of creating a 'knowledge economy'," Chidambaram added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Aug 15 Independence Day address to the nation announced a Rs.1 lakh crore project to transform the country into a digitally empowered and connected knowledge economy.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

HINDU, NOV 18, 2014

MCG sanitation staff working without salary, equipment

ASHOK KUMAR

With a host of their demands not fulfilled for months and forced to work without salary and proper equipment, *safai karamcharis* in the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon are an unhappy lot.

Fighting for their rights under the aegis of the Nagar Palika Karamchari Sangh (NPKS), Gurgaon, over 2,000 *safai karamcharis* on the rolls of the MCG, including 400-odd regular ones, have approached senior officials on several occasions, but their voice has remained unheard.

“We made the Municipal Commissioner aware of our demands, both in writing and oral, on several occasions. But the administration made false promises and our demands were not met. On September 24, we handed over a 15-point demand letter to the Commissioner and he sought a week’s time to consider it. But it has been almost two months now and nothing has happened,” said NPKS vice-president Rajesh Pradhan.

The union members again submitted a memorandum to the Municipal Commissioner a week ago reiterating their demands and are gearing up to start an indefinite strike from Wednesday if their demands are not met.

Though the Haryana Government had ended contract system in all municipal corporations and councils in July this year, more than 1,400 contractual *safai karamacharis* in the MCG are yet to get their appointment letters. Seeking appointment letters for these *karamcharis* is one of the major demands of the union.

“The *safai karamcharis* are the backbone of the Swachhta Abhiyan. Their genuine demands must be immediately met to make the campaign a success and ensure clean city,” said Rajbir, a *safai karamchariat* the MCG recently taken on the rolls.

The other demands of the union include payment of salary latest by the seventh of every month, taking 685 sewer men on rolls and construction of permanent sheds. “We are forced to work without proper equipment such as gloves, shovels, shoes, uniform and hand carts. It is difficult to work without these essential items. These should be provided at the earliest. The tractor drivers on contract have not been paid for almost three months now. They should be paid immediately. The fire station employees on contract should be given Rs.5 lakh as accident insurance,” said Mr. Pradhan.

The union members said they are gearing up to start an indefinite strike from Wednesday if their demands are not met

MASS MEDIA

HINDU, NOV 17, 2014

A new template for media regulation — 2

Between 2002 and 2006, Jean Tirole and Jean-Charles Rochet explored the platform markets in depth. Their work covered a range of industries that have platform markets — portals and media, credit card and debit card payment systems, and the Internet. This column will restrict itself to their contributions to the media market alone.

Mr. Tirole and Mr. Rochet were quick to point out that the demands from advertisers on the one hand and viewers or readers on the other can be very different. For instance, they point out, advertisers might desire that there be more viewers or readers while viewers and readers prefer less advertisements. This, they argue, could transform certain pricing policies that are clearly anti-competitive in a one-sided market into a highly competitive one in a two-sided market. For instance, they established that offering newspapers for very low prices might be a sign of predatory pricing if the newspapers' source of revenue came from the readers alone. But it may be consistent with competitive pricing if advertising revenues play a major role.

The theory spelt out by Mr. Tirole and his colleagues makes immense sense in the media markets of the developed countries. In the U.S., cross-media ownership restrictions are imposed on the basis of the number of independently owned media voices in the market. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) acts as a regulator. The U.K. model works on a different principle — restrictions there are based on influence, which prevent one person from owning different types of media over specified market share levels. Countries like Australia and Canada have a blanket restriction on entry into more than one or two media segments.

No restrictions in India

But price wars in India can turn predatory quickly, as there are no restrictions in terms of cross-media ownership. In 2008, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting asked the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) to study cross-media ownership. ASCI submitted the draft report in March 2009 and the final report in July 2009. The report found a pattern in the accumulation of interests and growing instances of cross-media ownership that included print, television, radio and even carriers like multi-system operators (MSOs) and DTH platforms. It used the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index to measure market concentration and the effect of competition in a market. It called for the formulation of cross-media restriction norms across print, television, radio, cable and new media after a detailed study of the relevant markets of each of the mediums. Not much happened in the form of follow-up action to the ASCI report while the Indian media scene underwent a profound change. Apart from cross-media ownership, India also witnessed both horizontal and vertical integration.

This in reality means that some of the dominant players can no longer invoke the logic of the platform market.

Paid news scandal

The issue of media ownership became a topic among policymakers when the ethical foundation of the news industry was rocked by the paid news scandal. This newspaper played a key role in exposing the paid news phenomenon. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology's 47th report tabled in the Lok Sabha on May 6, 2013 was an indictment of sorts for the media industry. It identified corporatisation of media, disaggregation of ownership and editorial roles, decline in autonomy of editors/journalists due to the emergence of contract system, and poor wage levels of journalists as key reasons for the rise in the incidence of paid news. It expressed concern that the lack of restriction on ownership across media segments (print, radio, TV or Internet), or between content and distribution, could give rise to monopolistic practices. It asked the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to look into the matter and come up with a set of recommendations. The committee also urged the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to take conclusive actions based on TRAI's recommendations on a priority basis.

However, the Ministry had asked TRAI in May 2012, a year before the Parliament Standing Committee's report, to evolve a comprehensive approach to balance the technological and business logic of vertical integration and cross media holdings with the need for pluralism and diversity and the need to protect the citizen's right to credible choice and competitive pricing of the media he/she consumes. In August 2014, TRAI released its recommendations after many rounds of consultations with various stakeholders. It sought a regulatory framework that has two distinct segments: to preserve external plurality (diversity of ownership) and to ensure internal plurality (diversity of content) in the media ecology of India.

The defining element in TRAI's recommendation is that it managed to look not only into the ownership issues, but also the "control" over media outlets. It reads: "There may be thousands of newspapers and hundreds of news channels in the news media market, but if they are all "controlled" by only a handful of entities, then there is insufficient plurality of news and views presented to the people. Thus, it is essential to know the actual number of independent voices in the market to determine the extent of plurality. Also, there are numerous ways by which "control" can be exercised over a media outlet. Therefore, it is imperative to clearly define what constitutes or can amount to ownership and/or control of a media owning entity."

TRAI's recommendation is rich in its analysis of what is wrong in the media. It documents the failures of the existing legal and regulatory arrangements. It looks at vertical integration in the media but fails to take note of horizontal integration. At the policy level, the recommendations have certain limitations and shortcomings.

(To be continued)

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

POSTAL SERVICES

BUSINESS LINE, NOV 20, 2014

Kisan Vikas Patra 2.0

While the revamped scheme is attractive for small savers, checks are needed to prevent its misuse for money laundering

Desperate times call for desperate measures and the Centre's decision to relaunch Kisan Vikas Patra, a popular small savings instrument that was discontinued three years ago, may be seen in this light. Lakhs of investors have fallen victim to illegal money-pooling and Ponzi schemes, including the Sahara and Saradha scams, in the last three years. These instances show that the current suite of financial products offered by the Government and private players have become too complex to attract small savers. The recent dip in household financial savings to a decadal low is mainly a result of the difficulty in understanding financial instruments and in keeping up with their ever-changing Know-Your-Customer (KYC) rules, apart from the uneasiness that most savers have with market-linked returns. The Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP), in its new avatar, directly addresses these pain points. It offers a fixed return (the investor's money will double in 100 months), ease of transaction (it is a bearer instrument with no PAN requirement) and good liquidity to boot (exit is available freely after a 2.5 year lock-in). Therefore, it may well succeed in its objective of wooing the un-banked population into financial savings.

Having said this, the new KVP raises some concerns from a policymaking perspective. For one, its offer of a fixed return is a step back in the process of restructuring all small savings schemes and aligning their returns to market rates. This overhaul, initiated three years ago at the behest of the Shyamala Gopinath Committee, was undertaken to improve the performance of the national small savings fund, which generated sub-par returns. If the Centre is keen on resurrecting the concept of a fixed return, it must address the funding issue on a war footing. Two, given that the KVP is likely to entail high costs for the Centre, it is essential that the money be put to productive use. Presently, collections from small savings schemes (whatever their nomenclature) are mainly lent out to fund unproductive revenue expenditure of the States and the Centre; they don't fulfil a specific developmental objective.

Most important of all, the Centre must take note of warnings that the reworked KVP may turn out to be a backdoor amnesty scheme for those who evade taxes. With its PAN waiver, facility for unlimited investments and bearer status, the instrument can be easily used to launder and park black money. It was precisely this concern, in fact, which had prompted the Gopinath committee to suggest its closure in 2011. To prevent rampant misuse of the KVP in its new avatar, the Centre must expedite the computerisation of India Post and use technology to track down large investments and redemptions from this scheme. It should also put in place an annual investment ceiling on individual purchases of KVP, similar to those for the public provident fund and other post office schemes. Given its other attractions, this will not materially dent the instrument's appeal to small savers.

PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

TIMES OF INDIA, NOV 20, 2014

Inspector raj' abolished in ration supply

NEW DELHI: In a bid to expedite the distribution process, the Delhi government on Wednesday abolished the four-decade-old system of 'inspector raj' in which an inspector had to first open the sale of rations before it being distributed.

In the inspector raj system, the fair price shop (FPS) licensee was required to inform the office of food supplies officer about the arrival of ration, who would then depute an inspector to visit the FPS to verify the commodity received and then order for opening of sale.

"Government has abolished the system of opening of the sale in each ration shop by the inspectors of the department before the ration could be sold to the beneficiaries," said Sajjan Singh Yadav, secretary-cum-commissioner, food supplies & consumer affairs. Yadav said in the old system, the ration card holders had to wait for their ration till the sale was opened by the inspector.

RAILWAYS

BUSINESS STANDARD, NOV 17, 2014

A K Bhattacharya: Track changes for the Indian Railways

Suresh Prabhu, the new railways minister, not only needs to save the railways from the clutches of bureaucracy and politics but also attract foreign investment to revive the once potent force

A K Bhattacharya

The appointment of a new [railways minister](#) has quite understandably generated a lot of hope and some excitement. There is hope because of the commendable track record of Suresh Prabhu, the new railways minister, who had impressed everybody by his ideas and performance as the power minister in the [Atal Bihari Vajpayee](#) government. The excitement is even more because of the opportunities that the [Indian Railways](#) offers by way of reforms and restructuring to become a potent force to revive India's economic growth.

The current state of the Indian Railways is nobody's envy. It has been consistently losing market share in goods transportation to the roads sector and now even passenger volumes growth has become a challenge. Its finances are under strain with the share of its gross operating costs in total revenues rising at an unhealthy rate and the burden of pension liability becoming even more unmanageable. Its safety record is a cause for concern and project delays are getting longer. It is failing even in performing the basic tasks of maintaining punctuality of its services and providing clean trains and railway stations.

What should Prabhu focus on to revive the Indian Railways? One, the opening up of the railways to foreign investment will obviously be a big opportunity, but it will be a bigger challenge. Past efforts at getting even the Indian private sector to set up facilities for the Indian Railways have failed to make much headway. The existing mindset of those who manage the Indian Railways is such that new initiatives coming from outside the railway system are not welcome. Even attempts at setting up the dedicated [freight corridor](#) project outside the railway system were successfully thwarted, consequences of which are evident in its delayed execution.

But more investments in the Indian Railways are a dire necessity. Given the pressure on the Union government's finances, with its fiscal deficit remaining a worry point, there is little hope of the railways getting more resources from the central exchequer. So, foreign

investment will be a critical component in augmenting facilities and setting up new projects for the railways. For Prabhu, getting foreign investment for the Indian Railways and making it work will, therefore, be a necessity and a big challenge.

Two, the Indian Railways continues to cross-subsidise passenger services by charging goods transportation at much higher tariffs, rendering its freight services uncompetitive. Not surprisingly, it continues to lose goods traffic to the roads sector. The net result is that neither can the Indian Railways generate surpluses from its freight business nor can it improve its passenger services, where the lack of modernisation and better facilities have seen an erosion of its passenger earnings as well. It is a vicious cycle in which the Indian Railways has been trapped.

Some bold initiatives to reform the tariff structure have been taken in the last year or so. The Manmohan Singh government had cleared the setting up of a tariff authority for the Indian Railways. But that proposal suffered from a vital weakness. The authority did not have the autonomy for recommending fares and freight rates that would be implemented without any intervention or interference from either the railway [bureaucracy](#) or the political leadership. As a consequence, the tariff authority could not have become effective in addressing the basic weaknesses arising out of a lack of a commercial focus in fixing fares and freight rates.

For Suresh Prabhu, therefore, the challenge is clear. He has to save the Indian Railways from the clutches of the railway bureaucracy and politics. To make foreign investment succeed in the Indian Railways, he has to overcome the resistance of the railway bureaucracy to new projects with the help of foreign partners along with their funds. Similarly, the powers for fixing fares and freight rates have to be depoliticised. The new rail tariff authority must be given the necessary independence to fix fares and freight rates. Once the broad policy parameters for both investment and tariffs are fixed by the bureaucracy and the railway ministry, the tasks of implementing them should be left to the tariff authority without any political or bureaucratic interference. This will be Prabhu's toughest challenge and also an opportunity to revive the Indian Railways.

STATESMAN, NOV 19, 2014

The right track-I

By AARTI KHOSLA

There is a change of guard at Rail Bhawan after just six months. Exit Sadanand Gowda, enter Suresh Prabhu. It is said that the steam-engine speed of the Railway ministry on so many fronts like FDI, high-speed trains was not to the liking of our energetic and hardworking Prime Minister. The new minister has started with the right note of focusing

on basics like safety, passenger comforts and timely completion of projects. Basics have to be taken care of before we move to luxuries like the bullet train. Day-to-day operations of Railways are so overwhelming that it requires constant attention of leaders at the top. To move over 2 crore people and more than 3 million tons of freight daily across the length and breadth of this vast country is not an easy task. That 14 lakh Railway employees are able to manage this gargantuan organization running 11,000 trains through more than 7,000 railway stations day and night, in rain or snow, is a marvel indeed. It is this marvel which even that India-baiter author VS Naipaul found as the “bright sunshine” in the Area Of Darkness. It is no less than fighting a war and is made possible because the railwaymen and women display the same kind of discipline as the armed forces.

While throwing brickbats at the organization for many shortcomings, let us also not forget this and also how a system first battered by World War II and then by the country’s Partition was brought on track by sheer commitment and dedication of Railway engineers and traffic personnel. The Assam link was destroyed after Partition. That this 200-plus mile link which included several culverts, small bridges and one big bridge was restored in one working season to the great delight of India’s first Prime minister was no small achievement. The Prime Minister lauded handsomely the railway employees at the inaugural ceremony of this restored link. Legends like Karnail Singh, the man behind this feat, are celebrated even today. It does help in looking back at history to get inspiration.

That, however does not mean that there is no scope of reforming the railway system or structure. As a matter of fact, reforms are overdue. The last reorganization of the Railway Board took place 50 years ago soon after the Indian Republic was born, when Lal Bahadur Shastri was the Railway minister. He rejected an expert’s advice to include a non-technical civilian Secretary in the Board saying that “a clear-cut demarcation between the technical and administrative wings of the Railways would not lead to better efficiency”. He reorganized the Railway Board by replacing the Chief Commissioner system introduced in 1924 with that of Chairman, Railway Board, one Financial Commissioner and three other members. The Chairman was given the status of the Secretary to the Government of India. All policy and other important matters were to be put up to the minister through him. Thus emerged the policy-making functions of the Railway Board. This was in replacement of the Commissioner style Railway Board put in place on the basis of the Acworth Committee Report of 1922 which is considered a milestone in the history of the Railways.

To look at restructuring after 50 years in the context of changed requirements and unprecedented advance in technology is no doubt relevant but we have to be cautious lest we may not throw the baby away with the bath water and come up with alternatives that cause more problems than they solve. So the Committee as appointed by the Government on restructuring of the Railway Board need not be in a hurry especially when a majority of its members have to first get familiar with the functioning of the Railway system. The

very composition of the committee does not instill confidence that they would be able to come up with an efficient model to replace the existing Railway Board system without spending much time on this exercise. There is a lone ex-railwayman, a retired Financial Commissioner, on the committee. The rest of the six members, an economist, a manager and an author, two IAS officers (one retired cabinet secretary and the other serving), one policy research Fellow and one connected with National Stock Exchange have all to first understand the actual working of the railway operations, identify the problem areas and then come up with recommendations. It is a difficult assignment.

Way back in 2001 when an expert group (the Rakesh Mohan committee) was entrusted with similar work, their honest confession while submitting their report was “Indian Railways is a large and complex organization..... and it is not easy for outside experts to grasp the many complexities that govern the operations of this massive enterprise”. That is why though they recommended corporatization/privatization of the system, they themselves were not sure of their conclusions when they said “there could be other approaches”. Then why recommend something you are not sure of? Corporatisation of Railways, in any case, is not possible as the Railways are not purely a commercial enterprise. There is a public utility face of the organization and they have to carry a significant number of ‘social burdens’ which no corporate entity is made to carry. Yes, some of the manufacturing units for coaches and locomotives can be privatized. Therefore, the current Restructuring Committee has to be fully convinced of the changes they come to suggest to restructure the Railway Board.

The first and the most important term of their reference is to suggest separation of policy-making from operations. As it is the Railway Board, which also functions as a ministry, does play a policy-making role. Of course, individual Members of the Board also have the full-time responsibility of monitoring the working of the department under their professional charge.

For example, Member Mechanical is responsible for Rolling Stock, the manufacturing hubs and maintenance workshops of wagons, coaches and locomotives; Member (Engineering) is concerned with new constructions as also the maintenance of Permanent Way i.e track; Member (Electrical) is responsible for the electrical as well as the signaling installations of the Railways; the Financial Commissioner has control over Railway finances; and the Member (Staff) looks after the personnel policies and training needs of staff.

(To be concluded)

The writer is former Executive Director (Finance), Railway Board

STATESMAN, NOV 20, 2014

The right track-II

AARTI KHOSLA

Day-to-day supervision is necessary even though much can be left to the ground level bosses in charge of these activities. Doing away with Board-level supervision altogether may neither be feasible nor desirable but the delegation of powers to the General Managers who are involved with day-to-day operations may have a salubrious effect leaving more time with the Board members to plan, think and innovate. While an outsider CEO, an IAS officer or a business man may not be a good idea, there is definitely some scope to bring in non-railway persons in certain areas like marketing, human resource management, planning and some other areas of Railway working.

Exchange of officers is also commendable. As on date, many railway officers do go out on deputation to other ministries under the Central Staffing Scheme or otherwise and many of them have done remarkably well in whatever assignment they are placed in, but the doors of Rail Bhawan have not been opened to officers from other services. The Railways can certainly benefit from the experience and expertise of outsiders in the fields mentioned. Similarly experts in the committee can suggest the “appropriate measures to raise resources internally and from outside”, the third term of reference. Barring restructuring the rest are not complex terms of reference.

As for the Rail Tariff Authority, the need for this came up because of the inability of the Railways to raise passenger fares in line with costs of haulage due to vote-bank politics of successive Railway ministers. If a formula can be devised and the Railways are freed from this political approach there is no need for a Rail Tariff Regulatory Authority.

While the restructuring of the Railway Board may take its own time, there are certain problem areas that need immediate attention and if rectified can vastly improve the Railway administration. Postings, promotions and transfers in the Railways are highly personalized. Whims, prejudices, and at times corrupt practices play a role. Seniority of officers is manipulated to weed out inconvenient (read honest) officers and promote those who are helpful. That is one reason why posts at senior levels remain unfilled because of the controversy generated. Even today a number of posts of General Managers and Divisional Railway Managers remain unfilled due to complaints of unfairness. Each member is responsible for the cadre of officers of his department and he has such a hold on the career growth of his officers that often he resorts to favouritism or antagonism to reward or harass the officers.

Strange is the functioning of the Railway Board in these matters. When an officer returns from a deputation post or training he has to cool his heels and run around his bosses for a posting. In fact, it should be the concern of the administration to find a post for him. The Railways should devise a system whereby the postings and transfers for all services are done by a centralized authority. Maybe Member (Staff) rechristened as Member (HRD) to be brought from outside should be given this responsibility. If good governance needs

good men Railway bosses have yet to learn the first motivational lesson that “employees excel when they feel cared for, trusted and valued.”

The railway bosses should also know what our ex-President APJ Abdul Kalam told some businessmen in Coimbatore in July 2005, that “creative leadership is exercising the task to change the traditional role from commander to coach, from manager to mentor, director to delegator and from one who demands respect to one who facilitates self-respect.” The saloon mentality of Railway bosses is a big handicap in the way of good administration. A system has to be put in place where promotions and postings follow some rules.

Another bane of Railway functioning is the Railway Board Secretariat Service whose members join and retire from Rail Bhawan itself. Some of them continue to hold on to the same seat for years. Like frogs in the well some of them come to develop closed minds and since they naturally aspire for promotions a plethora of higher-level posts have been created in the Railway Board to accommodate them. Lack of exposure makes them negative in their approach. In the present-day context there is no relevance of a separate secretariat service solely for the Railway Board. The service should be merged with the Central Secretariat Service and there should be free flow of its officers from one ministry to others.

One more factor which has adversely affected the working of the Railway Board especially from the financial angle is the dilution of the autonomy of the Financial Commissioner. This post was introduced in 1924 on the basis of the Acworth Committee report and the incumbents had not necessarily been Railway persons. Post-1951, while the Chairman was given powers to overrule the other members of the Board he could not overrule the Financial Commissioner. If the Financial Commissioner did not agree with the Chairman on any matter relating to finance, he could ask for it to be referred to the Railway minister and Finance Minister. This arrangement ensured proper financial advice and management of Railway finances. Being an ex-cadre post a suitable person from any non-Railway service including the IAS could be posted as Financial Commissioner. After the fifth pay commission the post became a cadre post of the Indian Railway Accounts Service. For becoming Financial Commissioner an officer should have held the post of a General Manager and Divisional Railway Manager for which he/she works under the control of the executive and is appraised by those whose proposals he may have to vet as Financial Commissioner. This has given a death-blow to the independence of the post and weakened his position. For the robust financial health of the Railways it is necessary to restore the original position of this post by making it once again an ex-cadre post as also bringing the Accounts and Finance officers of IRAS under his control and independent of the executive.

These reforms will go a long way in improving the functioning of the Railway Board. The restructuring exercise should take care of the other ills of departmentalization or

what is known as silo mentality of the current form of functional Members. Incidentally, the Railways are one institution studied and reported upon many times over. Maybe it is time to dust many of these reports and cull the substance from there. (Concluded)

INDIAN EXPRESS, NOV 21, 2014

Govt plans subsidised train tours to popularise Northeast

[Avishek G Dastidar](#)

To popularise the Northeast among the country's students, the government has a mega-tourism plan on the anvil, using the rail network as the primary mode of travel. Starting December, a number of trains that ply to the region will have coaches dedicated for taking school students from across India on tours at highly subsidised rates.

With the implementation of the programme pursued by the Prime Minister's Office regularly, the Railway Ministry has already had talks with the Tourism Ministry and states concerned to try set the ball rolling. It has given the job of organising the tours to its Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC).

The IRCTC has already had a similar experience a year ago when it collaborated with the Assam chapter of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhijan to take 2900 students to visit Delhi and Agra.

As per the programme, students will get to explore the Northeastern states during both winter and summer holidays. Each itinerary package could be of around 10 days. The packages will include bus travel, accommodation and sightseeing through conducted tours. The pilot programme is likely to be a tour of Sikkim.

To facilitate the programme, the Railways is exploring the option of extending 50 per cent student concessions to its Darjeeling Himalayan Railway or "toy train", which will be part of the tour. The concession may also be allowed on the special coaches carrying the children. Usually these special coaches are attached to trains at commercial rates.

An estimated 10-12 trains will eventually be made a part of this programme, that will be rolled out in a phased manner. The primary education departments of states concerned are also being engaged to popularise the tours.

The mandate from the PMO for this programme was to make affordable tourism packages for students to travel to the Northeast. To make the package attractive, one teacher will get to travel for free with a party of 70 students. The overall train-travel cost, which is still being finalised, could work out to be cheaper than the existing concessions. Railways has had a separate discussion with states regarding security of the travelling students in the programme.

"We want to attract school students to these parts of the country. We have had dialogues with the Tourism Ministry and also the states. It will be launched soon," said D P Pande, Member Traffic, Railway Board.

INDIAN EXPRESS, NOV 20, 2014

Prabhu for replacing sleepers with chair cars in short-distance trains

[Avishek G Dastidar](#)

The Railways is working on an idea that, if implemented, would significantly increase the passenger carrying capacity of a few short-distance trains, but at the same time make the overnight travel more like a bus journey.

Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu has suggested the Railway Board to replace non-AC sleeper coaches of busy trains with reserved chair cars, so that more people could be adjusted in overnight journeys of up to 10 hours. Prabhu has also pressed for more double-decker trains in shorter routes.

The Railway Board is currently determining feasibility of the idea. The zonal units have been asked to get back with relevant data so that the Board and the minister could take a formal call.

“In summer and during festive seasons, the Railways faces a lot of flak for the crowd and its inability to carry them,” a note from Prabhu said. “For overnight journeys or journeys for less than 10 hours, the Railways may put chair cars instead of sleeper cars,” it said.

There is justification for the idea too. “As the energy consumption to produce a rail passenger-km is about twice that needed for freight, because passenger trains travel at higher speeds (energy increases exponentially with increasing speed) and because passenger trains tend to be less heavily loaded...Passenger traffic represents only 28.5 per cent of rail output, but somewhat over 44 per cent of rail energy use. So, we may use chair cars in passenger trains and double-deckers in short distance trains,” said the note.

Sources said routes like Delhi-Jammu, Delhi-Lucknow, Delhi-Varanasi or even Delhi-Patna during summer or festive rush would be serviced better if the idea fructifies.

Officials, however, said there are multiple glitches in the idea. A reserved chair car (non-AC) has 108 seats as against 80 seats in modern non-AC sleeper coaches. So, a seating-only coach might carry 28 more passengers, but the ticket cost would also come down. For instance, a sleeper class ticket from Delhi to Lucknow fetches the Railways around Rs 285. For the same journey, a reserved seating ticket, known as “2S”, costs Rs 185. Even after carrying more people, the difference in earning from each coach would over Rs 2000.

Another problem is the availability of coaches. At present, Railways has around 2,676 non-AC reserved-seating-only coaches. Usually, long distance trains do not have these coaches and to service short distances, almost all these coaches are already in service.

RELIGION

STATESMAN, NOV 21, 2014

In a godman's name

It can only happen in India; a pitched battle between the police and a self-styled godman in which the police retreats!

Rampal's story is a saga of all that is wrong with the Indian system. And how a conman calling himself a godman can hold the government to ransom for not just days but decades even as he adds to his assets and evades the law.

Rampal was a junior engineer in Haryana's irrigation and public works department. He was born in a farmer's family and being obviously a man with his wits around him moved out of the desultory job for shinier pastures. His contact with another not-so-well-known godman of the time helped and soon Rampal had opened an ashram in his home state, and declared himself a 'saint'. He did not look back and clearly attracted sufficient devotees to expand his business, and open a number of ashrams across Haryana. There is no information but one is sure that if it is looked into, the process of establishing himself as a godman of substantial assets would be replete with political favours, political protection and subsidies of all kinds.

To cut a long story short, Rampal's 'devotees', clearly armed, had a row with villagers in 2006 and opened fire on the locals in Rohtak. One died, and in the uproar a murder case was registered against Rampal. Then began the long story of evading the law, with the police refusing to arrest him and the courts too not particularly harsh in ensuring that justice was done. Four years ago the case took a new turn with the Punjab and Haryana High Court insisting on making the elusive man accountable. He started avoiding the courts and skipped 43 hearings in these years on the grounds of ill health and other such pleas.

The High Court finally lost its patience and issued non-bailable warrants against him. He was not arrested, however, with extensions becoming more extensions until the judges raised the gavel and banged it down hard. The state police, left with no option, went to his ashram in Hisar district to arrest him. And were instead attacked by thousands who had surrounded the ashram with petrol bombs, brickbats and according to many accounts, guns and bullets. The police fought back to some extent and retreated, with at least 60 policemen injured and 70 journalists hit in the fracas. A day later six dead bodies, five of women and one of a youth, lay in the morgue as testimony to the grim battle being waged by Rampal's men against the law and order forces of India. Clearly, the will was lacking as the police retreated. However, there was a perceptible shift after Tuesday when the pitched battles took place. By Wednesday morning it did seem as if Rampal's days as a free agent were now numbered. And that his political

protectors had backed off in the wake of the court's insistence that he be produced on Friday, 21 November. And the hint that if this was not done there could be a move to file a contempt of court case against the BJP Haryana chief minister. And sure enough in a late night swoop the police finally, two weeks and six dead bodies later, arrested the man from his ashram at Barwala in Hisar. Reports suggest that many villagers started dancing to drum beats as soon as reports of his arrest were made public. The Indian politician has this fascination with godmen, and there have been any number of cases of fraud and deceit by these self-styled men of religion over decades. Many have come close to the Prime Ministers and Presidents of India, exercising questionable influence. An immediate name that comes to mind is of the yoga man Dharendra Brahmachari who was close to late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and during the period added to his real estate assets considerably. He was often compared to Rasputin, with his influence on the PM assuming a larger-than-life dimension.

Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers, after the initial post-Independence years, liked to surround themselves with religious leaders of all hues in what is clearly a mistaken notion of secularism. Instead of distancing their public person from the pandits and the maulvis and the priests, senior political leaders seek out the company of these men in the hope that it will add to their vote bank. In the process, close relationships evolve, and the godmen use the political patronage to build their assets and on occasion, even influence official business and policy; some at the state level, many at the national level by attaching themselves to individual leaders whom they then almost control.

Indians like their religion, but it should be emphasised that religion should be kept away from government. And should not be a reason for shrines and temples and mosques and churches not to disclose their assets and pay tax for the money and jewellery they collect. Godmen thrive on political and government patronage, and as the Rampal case amply demonstrates, religion is, more often than not, used to harbour lumpens, create private armies, and acquire and manage assets by breaching the law. And these godmen really live outside the law, and do not hesitate to kill and attack if confronted by the law.

This needs to be checked immediately. If it was not for the firmness of the bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, Rampal would have gotten away. As there was no effort from the government, present or past, to arrest him, with the police clearly under directions not to hassle the godman unduly.

The writer is Editor-in-Chief of The Citizen, a daily online newspaper.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

TELEGRAPH, NOV 18, 2014

Against democracy

**- The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan turns citizens into mendicants Prabhat Patnaik

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The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan - at least, the image through which it is expressed, of celebrities descending from limousines in sundry locations to sweep away the "clean garbage" ∥mainly leaves and such like) which have been carefully deposited there by official workers prior to their arrival - is not just kitsch. It betrays an obnoxious social outlook. The celebrities who wield the broom for a few minutes, far from obliterating the difference in social status between themselves and the class of regular broom-wielders, are actually asserting and underscoring that difference by this very act. It is "slumming" on their part, a brief, sanitized, but patronizing foray into a world inhabited by Dalits, which simultaneously constitutes an assertion of their superior social status. One should not, however, be too harsh on the celebrities. Their life is such that they must have photo-ops; they can hardly be expected to let such a golden opportunity, of being photographed while engaged in an apparently 'patriotic cause', slip by. What is really disturbing is that this obnoxious social outlook now appears to be permeating the State itself.

It is estimated that Swachh Bharat would require the construction of 12 crore toilets at a cost of Rs 1.96 lakh crores; but this sum apparently is supposed to come not so much from the government's budget as from philanthropy, through the invoking of corporate social responsibility. Even the manpower required for Swachh Bharat is to be provided not through an increase in the number of government employees engaged for the purpose, but through voluntary work. The State in short is now planning to abdicate its responsibility for providing sanitation infrastructure to its citizens and is leaving the task to the corporate sector ∥together with voluntary labour).

This amounts to a massive social retrogression. It is the Constitutional obligation of a modern State to meet the elementary requirements of its citizens. In India, the Directive Principles of State Policy lay down these obligations of the State. Correspondingly, every citizen has a right to demand the fulfilment of these requirements from the State, which is what confers dignity upon the citizen, makes the citizen a member of a "fraternity of equals" upon which the State rests. By contrast, a citizen, *qua* citizen, cannot *demand* that some corporate house should build a toilet in his or

her neighbourhood. Corporate social responsibility is thus merely a high-falutin way of asking the corporate sector to be charitable. When people have to rely on corporate charity for getting their sanitation infrastructure, they can only do so as mendicants. They have to persuade some corporate house, as a beggar has to persuade some potential alms-giver, to part with some money for their benefit.

The shifting of the responsibility for building the sanitation infrastructure from the State to the so-called social conscience of the corporate sector is tantamount, therefore, to pushing people from the status of being dignified citizens, members of a fraternity of equals, to the status of being mendicants dependent upon the charity of a specially privileged class of their fellow countrymen. Underlying the grandiose plan of Swachh Bharat is really an assault, at an epistemic level, on the democratic nature of modern India and its conceptual underpinning.

Exactly the same can be said *apropos* the suggestion that corporate houses and rich celebrities should "adopt" particular villages to bring about "uplift" there (and the prime minister reportedly has already adopted one village). For the people of those villages, being adopted by a section of their fellow countrymen is an act of condescension towards them, which they may put up with, in their desperation, but which scarcely respects their dignity. And when a democratic State elevates such adoption into an officially-sponsored means of improving the villagers' lot, it is violating its Constitutional responsibility, and going against the democratic ethos by pushing citizens into the status of mendicants.

This argument, some may feel, is going too far. But this feeling itself, I submit, is based on an implicit epistemic rejection of democracy. The obnoxiousness of this devaluation of citizens to the status of mendicants does not strike us because many of us, belonging to the upper echelons of this caste-ridden society, never took the idea of universal citizenship - the idea of every citizen being a member of a fraternity of equals - seriously anyway. True, *hoi polloi* have got the vote; they can no longer be treated in daily interactions the way they used to be. But the idea of an India of equals - even of juridical, let alone social and economic, equals - has always appeared far-fetched to much of the Indian elite.

Notwithstanding our Constitutional provisions, there has hardly ever been an epistemic acceptance of equality in this country and of the concept of a fraternity of equal citizens. This *de facto* episteme is now being made *de jure*, which is a serious shift. This shift, though in sync with the inequality built into our psyche by the caste-system, has been effected by the pursuit of neo-liberalism. The argument that the State lacks the resources to undertake adequate investment in sanitation infrastructure, apart from being rooted in this very anti-democratic episteme, is palpably absurd. The resources that the corporate houses are supposed to spend on sanitation infrastructure, for discharging their so-called social responsibility, could be taken by the State through taxation to provide the very same infrastructure and, in the process, accord to the beneficiaries of such spending the dignity of being citizens of a democratic country. The fact that the State does not do so is because taxing corporate houses, even for State spending for such a vital social need, gets eliminated from the agenda in a neo-liberal economy. The State has to devote or forego resources to the benefit of corporate houses, to incentivize them for effecting larger growth, but it cannot take resources away from corporate houses for the benefit of the people.

As a result, under the neo-liberal dispensation, just as countries have to vie with one another for attracting direct foreign investment on to their soils for promoting economic growth, villages and localities have to vie with one another for attracting corporate social responsibility spending or for being adopted, for getting their sanitation infrastructure. The logic that was hitherto visible at the level of countries is simply being extended now to the level of villages. Mendicant countries are now being supplemented by mendicant villages within countries, as the inexorable logic of neo-liberalism plays itself out.

In the process, we are now imparting a new intellectual twist to the theory of "trickle down". The original argument was that the State must promote the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy because the benefits of the growth that would ensue would "trickle down" to everyone in society. When this turned out to be vacuous, the argument was changed; the State, it was now claimed, should promote the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy because the growth that would ensue, even when its benefits do not automatically "trickle down", would enable the State to garner larger tax revenue, and spend larger amounts, to benefit everyone in society. But when this too has been shown to be vacuous, with even programmes like MGNREGA being wound up, we now have a new argument: the State must promote the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy because the growth that would ensue would leave larger resources in this oligarchy's hands for spending for the people as part of its corporate social

responsibility! The crux of the argument has always remained the same: the State must promote the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy!

What we are witnessing in India today (and in the world in general) is a brazen attempt to roll back popular sovereignty and to re-define the role of the State. Popular sovereignty can be exercised through a democratic State, and this exercise has meaning only if the State can intervene directly to improve the lives of the people. The people, in other words, are sovereign only in so far as they have the capacity to intervene through the instrumentality of a democratic State to change their own material lives, which presupposes, in turn, that improving their material lives is the responsibility of, and within the province of, the State. This presumption had been so widely accepted till recently that all socialist, social democratic and even liberal bourgeois political formations could be counted, broadly speaking, among its adherents.

What we are now witnessing is an undermining of this consensus position. This, however, also undermines the basis of democracy, for why should anyone bother to vote at all, if all elected governments pursue the same policy of promoting the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy, and leave people's welfare to this oligarchy's so-called social responsibility?

The author is Professor Emeritus, Centre for Economic Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

