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AWARDS

DECCAN HERALD, OCT 8, 2014

Low-carbon LED lamp wins Nobel for Japanese trio

Three Japanese-born researchers today won the Nobel Prize for Physics for inventing the LED lamp, a boon in the fight against global warming and aiding people in poverty.

The trio are Isamu Akasaki, Hiroshi Amano and Shuji Nakamura, a researcher who is currently based in the United States.

"This year's Nobel Laureates are rewarded for having invented a new energy-efficient and environment-friendly light source -- the blue light-emitting diode (LED)," the jury said.

"Their inventions were revolutionary," it said.

"Incandescent light bulbs lit the 20th century; the 21st century will be lit by LED lamps."

The three researchers produced bright blue light beams from semiconductors in the early 1990s, triggering a fundamental transformation of lighting technology, according to the jury.

Red and green diodes had been around for a long time but without blue light, white lamps could not be created.

Devising the blue LED was a challenge that endured for three decades. "They succeeded where everyone else had failed," the jury said.

It added: "With the advent of LED lamps we now have more long-lasting and more efficient alternatives to older light sources."

LED lamps emit a bright white light, are long-lasting and use far less energy compared with the incandescent lightbulb pioneered by Thomas Edison in the 19th century.

Because they have very low electricity needs, LED lights can be connected to cheap, local solar power -- a benefit for the more than 1.5 billion people around the world who lack access to the electricity grid.

The winners will share the prize sum of eight million Swedish kronor (USD 1.1 million, 883,000 euros).

Last year the award went to Peter Higgs of Britain and Francois Englert of Belgium for the discovery of the "God particle", the sub-atomic Higgs boson which gives mass to other elementary particles.

In line with tradition, the laureates will receive their prize at a formal ceremony in Stockholm on December 10, the anniversary of prize founder Alfred Nobel's death in 1896.

BUSINESS LINE, OCT 14, 2015

Behind the Prize, an agenda

RASHEEDA BHAGAT

Heal the world Make it a better place AM Faruqui

Both Satyarthi and Malala richly deserved the Nobel peace award. But there's always an underlying political motive

Question marks may be raised on the dramatics indulged in by the Nobel committee in its citation for this year's Nobel Peace Prize, bagged jointly by India's Kailash Satyarthi and Pakistan's Malala Yusafzai, already an international celebrity.

Before coming to Malala and Satyarthi's work, a look at this part of the citation, which said the Peace Prize committee "regards it as an important point for a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a Pakistani, to join in a common struggle for education and against extremism."

At a time when hostilities on the Indo-Pak border have intensified, and India has started responding to Pakistan's firings, this can be interpreted depending on your point of view and levels of scepticism regarding the good ol' West's lectures to the poor, undeveloped East!

But leaving aside the clear shades of geo-global politics that have crept into the Nobel — last year too Malala, then a bare 16, was nominated for this prize, but was beaten by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. This was seen by many quarters as a salute to the European Union.

And this year's choice is bound to be seen by some as a "rebuke" to the Islamist ultras who trample on the human rights of the girl child.

Anyway leaving the politics aside, as also the not-so-subtle nudge at India and Pakistan to co-exist more peacefully, both the Laureates deserve this honour. So let us give both Malala and Satyarthi their due... one the youngest person in the world to bag a Nobel, and the second, who has waged a relentless battle not only against smaller entities but also corporates who shamelessly use child labour in their production facilities.

More than anything else, by recognising these two activists, Nobel has raised the visibility level of children's rights; the Indian has fought against child labourers/slaves and campaigned and slogged for their right to education. The Pakistani girl's story is only too well known. Defying the Taliban, endorsing girls' right to education on a BBC blog, and getting bullets pumped right into her brain.

Evolution of Malala

Her courage, and fight to even come out of that murderous attempt as she battled for life in a Pakistani military hospital before being shifted to a hospital in Birmingham, where she is schooling now, is the stuff of legend.

Last year, at 16, when she was nominated, several eyebrows went up wondering how she could be in the reckoning as there were numerous worthies around the world who have slaved for long decades to safeguard human rights of all hues.

But then Malala went to the UN and addressed the UN Assembly on her 16th birthday which was named ‘Malala Day’, met the US President Barack Obama and expressed her “concern that drone attacks are fuelling terrorism”, killing the innocent and causing resent against the US in Pakistan.

Her UN and other speeches and interactions, however well rehearsed, built up her celebrity status and now she becomes the first Pakistani Nobel Laureate. She got the news while in a chemistry class in her school.

Before she was attacked on her school bus in the Swat Valley in Pakistan, she wanted to become a doctor. Now her dream -- undoubtedly shaped by her rubbing shoulders with State leaders, who listen to her respectfully and in rapt attention, as Obama did — is to become a politician, but of the good variety.

This teenager, not even old enough to get an ‘id’, touches your heart when she speaks. After getting the news, Malala thanked her parents, specially her father... “for not clipping my wings, for letting me fly and achieve my goals. For showing to the world that a girl is not supposed to be a slave, she should have an identity, she has equal rights and she should be recognised as a voice.”

Long struggle

Satyarthi, whose innocuous status is evident from his having a twitter following of barely 200 before the news broke, and which swelled to a few thousand within minutes of the announcement and has now jumped to 29,000, is at the other end of the spectrum. He too has been beaten up mercilessly several times, by the police and security guard in factories where he has led raids to free children held as bonded labour.

His NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan, has set up schools for children and its website (www.bba.org.in) says he has rescued 83,525 children from child labour and slavery since 1980. A good part of his work has been focused in the last three decades on stopping child trafficking, rescuing trafficked children, including teenage girls forced into prostitution.

Satyarthi has also been urging western consumers not to buy rugs and other articles made with child labour. He is also responsible for the labelling system GoodWeave which

educates western buyers that the handwoven carpet industry exploits 250,000 children. This label certifies carpets and rugs that are free of child labour.

A trained electrical engineer, Satyarthi left his vocation to fight for children's rights. Today, of course, there is a scramble to meet him and celebrate his work. He has been feted by VIPs from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Home Minister Rajnath Singh, and chased by the electronic and print media. While everybody is now vowing to protect children's rights to education, housing, water and sanitation and a safe environment, India's latest Noble Laureate stays focused and optimistic.

He does us proud when he says in an interview, "India is the country of hundreds of problems, but it is also the country of millions of solutions."

For millions of Indian still seething that Mahatma Gandhi never won the Nobel, despite being nominated several times, Satyarthi's triumph is a celebration. However great the halo around the Nobel prize — is there another more coveted prize? — we'd do well to remember it is still the West and Western ethos, prism or mindset which decides who'll get the crown. The committee set about to correct a wrong when the citation for the Dalai Lama, who bagged the Peace Prize in 1989, said that the award was "in part a tribute to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi"!

As for Malala, it'd be worth recalling the tweet of George Galloway, British politician, writer and broadcaster, posted exactly a year ago, on October 12, 2013. "If Malala had been murdered in a drone-strike the UK media would never even have told you her name."!

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated October 14, 2014)

BUSINESS LINE, OCT 14, 2014

Not so Nobel record

Why India hardly figures in the science awards

Kailash Satyarthi has done the country proud by bagging a Nobel Prize for his untiring crusade against child labour. But that still leaves a nagging question: Why does India, with its army of engineers and doctors, bag so few science Nobels? Unlike the Nobel awards for literature and peace, excellence in science (and economics, for that matter) is linked to a country's quality of education. Venkataraman Ramakrishnan, who bagged the Chemistry Nobel in 2009, was only the fourth scientist of Indian origin after CV Raman, Hargobind Khurana and S Chandrashekhra to be awarded the Prize in about 80 years. That tells a story. We have killed the basic sciences in our pursuit of applied science courses, only to be left with many mediocre engineers who would prefer being marketing managers. The only hope for science education lies in reversing this bias against basic science. The opening of five Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISER) since 2006 is welcome, but more are needed. Besides, the entrance exam for the IISERs is the

same as that for the IITs (the IIT-JEE), reinforcing the prevailing bias in favour of ‘technology’ courses. After the top few make it to the IITs, the rest qualify for the IISERs. These institutes, however, confront a major problem: the wall between science teaching and research, even as each needs the other to survive.

Unwilling to take on cussed university bureaucracies, the government created separate research institutes such as the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, National Physical Laboratory and National Chemical Laboratory while leaving teaching to the universities. Today, both university science departments and research establishments are in bad shape. It is worth considering whether some of these research bodies have outlived their utility. They have created a science bureaucracy that frustrates talent. Foreign and domestic private players should be permitted to set up IISER-like institutes. The same holds true for opening pure science colleges as part of universities. Science teaching should be thrown open to foreign faculty. This will challenge the lethargy and power of vested interests in academia, creating an enabling atmosphere for researchers and teachers, who may otherwise explore options in the US and Europe.

Institutions such as IISER should be located in a university ambience, which offers courses in social sciences and the humanities. That our universities are unable to offer a flexible combination of subjects, as in the US, suggests that they need to be exposed to competition. Creativity and insight flows from a holistic and dynamic approach to learning. But for these changes to occur, a change in social attitudes is called for. The government should popularise careers in science teaching and research, blunting the craze for engineering courses. We need better teachers to produce top scientists – like Ramakrishnan’s professors at Baroda University. Also, universities that offer both physical infrastructure and a creative ambience that can make for that ‘Eureka’ moment.

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated October 14, 2014)

[ASIAN AGE, OCT 11, 2014](#)

A peace Nobel for midnight’s children

An elated Nobel Peace Prize winner and children’s rights activist Kailash Satyarthi addresses the media at his office. AP

Nobel panel links religions, neighbours via Satyarthi, Malala Yousafzai

An India-Pakistan combination of Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzai on Friday shared the Nobel Peace Prize for 2014 for their work on promoting child rights in the sub-continent.

Mr Satyarthi, 60, who runs an NGO called Bachpan Bachao Andolan that is at the forefront of rescuing children from forced labour and trafficking, and 17-year-old Malala, who shot into limelight after Taliban militants shot her for advocating education for girls, were named by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee for the top global award this year. “The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided that the Nobel Peace Prize for 2014 is to be awarded to Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzai for their struggle against the

suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education,” the jury said.

Mr Satyarthi has maintained the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and headed various forms of peaceful protests “focusing on the grave exploitation of children for financial gain,” the Nobel Committee said. It added that it “regards it as an important point for a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a Pakistani, to join in a common struggle for education and against extremism.”

Mr Satyarthi dedicated the award to the people of India and vowed to work with renewed vigour against exploitation of children and to ensure their welfare. “For the first time issues related to child-trafficking and child labour have been recognised globally. For me the biggest achievement would be the message spreading further, loud and clear,” he told this newspaper.

Thanking the Nobel Committee for recognising the plight of millions of children who are suffering in the modern age, he said, “It is a huge honour for me.” Mr Satyarthi is the second Indian citizen to win the peace award, after Mother Teresa.

Congratulating Mr Satyarthi and Pakistani girls’ education rights activist Malala Yousafzai, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, “Congratulations to Kailash Satyarthi on being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The entire nation is proud of his momentous achievement.” “Kailash Satyarthi has devoted his life to a cause that is extremely relevant to entire humankind. I salute his determined efforts,” he said on Twitter. Applauding Malala, Mr Modi said added on Twitter, “Malala Yousafzai’s life is a journey of immense grit & courage. I congratulate her on being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.”

Congress president Sonia Gandhi also expressed happiness and said the awards have brought “glory to entire South Asia”. She extended her good wishes to both winners. Congratulating Mr Satyarthi, Mrs Gandhi said it is a “moment of immense pride” for the nation and that the Nobel for Satyarthi was a “rightfully deserved recognition of his tremendous contribution”.

Malala had displayed tremendous courage even after the Taliban attack when she resolutely expressed her determination to carry on with her campaign for child rights and girls’ education in Pakistan. She has become the youngest Nobel laureate for her outstanding work in furthering world peace and in other fields. Malala, who was airlifted to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham where she was treated for life-threatening injuries, after being shot by the Taliban, continues to campaign for girls’ education.

In the statement, the committee said: “Despite her youth, Malala Yousafzai has already fought for several years for the right of girls to education, and has shown by example that children and young people, too, can contribute to improving their own situations. This she has done under the most dangerous circumstances.

Through her heroic struggle she has become a leading spokesperson for girls' rights to education.”

This year's record number of 278 nominees included Pope Francis and Congolese gynaecologist Denis Mukwege, although the full list was kept a secret.

HINDU, OCT 14, 2014

Jean Tirole wins economics Nobel

French economist Jean Tirole on Monday won the Nobel prize for economics for research on market power and regulation that has helped policy-makers understand how to deal with industries dominated by a few dominant companies. — AP

HINDU, OCT 15, 201

17,000 candidates clear UPSC prelims

Nearly 17,000 candidates have qualified the Civil Services (preliminary) Examination, 2014, conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, the results of which were declared on Tuesday morning.

With over 4,50,000 candidates appearing for the examination on August 24, the results were declared in a record 50-day time period.

The successful candidates will now have to appear in the mains examination, which will be conducted from December 14 to December 20.

According to an UPSC official, there was an increase of 40 per cent in the number of students appearing in this year's examination compared to last year's 3,24,279 . The official said that in previous years, results were declared within an average of 68 days from the day of the examination. "Successful candidates will get more time this year to study because of early declaration of results," said the official.

This year was tumultuous for the UPSC with a controversy that erupted over the pattern of the Civil Services Examination in July demanding a change in the Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) or paper II. Students had taken to the streets claiming the examination put aspirants from rural areas or with Hindi background at a disadvantage. The Union government had decided then that marks of the English section questions, asked in paper-II, would not be included for gradation or merit in the exam.

, The UPSC has advised candidates not to file RTI applications seeking details of their marks which will be provided to them only after the entire selection process for the Civil Services Examination is over. "Candidates are also informed that marks, cut-off marks, and answer keys of the Civil Services (preliminary) Examination, 2014, will be provided only after the entire process of the Civil Services Examination, 2014, is over i.e. after the declaration of the final result. Therefore, no application under the RTI Act, 2005, or otherwise will be entertained ," the UPSC said in a statement.

The list of successful candidates, who have qualified for admission to the Indian Forest Service (main) examination, 2014, was also declared. "As many as 1,106 candidates have been declared successful to appear for the Indian Forest Services (main) examination which will be held on November 22. They were also selected through the Civil Services (preliminary) Examination," said an official.

The successful candidates have been asked to fill in the Detailed Application Form (DAF) for the Civil Services Main (CSM) examination scheduled to be held from December 14 this year. The DAF (CSM) will be available on the UPSC website from October 28 till November 11, 2014.

(With inputs from PTI)

ECONOMIC TIMES, OCT 11, 2014

Government asks employees to register for online course on RTI

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has been conducting an RTI online certificate course in English since 2009, and in Hindi and Telugu

NEW DELHI: The Centre has asked [employees](#) responsible for disposing applications received under the Right to Information (RTI) Act to get themselves enrolled for its online certificate course.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has been conducting an [RTI](#) online certificate course in English since 2009, and in Hindi and Telugu since 2012. The course is conducted through Centre for Good Governance (CGG), Hyderabad.

"The RTI online certificate course not only offers the benefit of away-from-classroom-learning, but also provides a platform for reinforcing one's learning through interacting with experts and candidates. This course is open for all the citizens and is available free of cost," the [DoPT](#) said in an order.

"It is requested that the Public Information Officers and First Appellate Authorities working in your ministry or department and public authorities under your administrative control may be encouraged to enroll for the online certificate courses on RTI," the DoPT said in the order sent to all secretaries of central government departments.

The [CGG](#) hosts two courses on RTI--a short duration course of seven days and a longer version of 15 days.

The seven days course is introductory in nature and does not have chat window or moderator facility and does not carry any certificate. However, this is treated as an eligible criterion for getting selection into the longer version 15-days course.

The 15-day course is more intensive with practical orientation of applying the RTI Act. This version of the course has the facility of discussion forum and moderation. On successful completion of the course, an e-Certificate will be issued.

ECONOMIC TIMES, OCT 11, 2014

Major bureaucratic reshuffle in Home Ministry

The Home Ministry today carried out a major reshuffle by shifting officials handling crucial internal security and Naxal divisions and appointed two new Joint Secretary-level officers

NEW DELHI: The [Home Ministry](#) today carried out a major reshuffle by shifting officials handling crucial internal security and Naxal divisions and appointed two new Joint Secretary-level officers.

[Rakesh Singh](#), a 1989 batch IAS officer of Karnataka cadre, who was handling internal security wing of the MHA, has been shifted to Union Territory division, official sources said.

M A Ganapathy, a 1986 batch IPS officer of [Uttarakhand](#) cadre, will now be in charge internal security division. Ganapathy is now [Joint Secretary](#) (Left Wing Extremism) in the Ministry.

[Dilip Kumar](#), a 1995 batch IAS officer of Punjab cadre, has been appointed Joint Secretary in charge of Left Wing Extremism Affairs, they said.

G K Dwivedi, a 1993 batch IAS officer of Andhra Pradesh cadre, was appointed Joint Secretary (Foreigner) in the Home Ministry, the sources said.

TIMES OF INDIA, OCT 14, 2014

UPPSC plans PCS (mains) on Civil Services pattern

Allahabad: Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC) is planning to make the pattern of main papers of Combined State Upper Subordinate Services Examination or PCS (mains) examination similar to that of Civil Services examination conducted by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

The Commission has already sent a proposal regarding this to the state government for approval in September.

Sources said that if UPPSC gets approval from the state government, then the pattern would be implemented from 2015 onwards.

It may be mentioned here that the pattern of prelims had already been changed with the introduction of Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) pattern in 2012.

As per the proposal, first paper of PCS mains would be of essay. There would be four question papers of general studies. The optional paper has been proposed to be decreased from two to one.

However there would be a difference between the GS question papers set for Civil Services and PCS. In the PCS (mains), all the four papers would be objective type while in the IAS and allied services exams, the question paper would be subjective.

Sources claimed that after increasing the age-limit for applying for PCS in the year 2012, the number of candidates has increased manifold after which the officials are left with no other choice but to plan a pattern which would ensure timely completion and flawless evaluation process.

"In the present pattern of main exams, candidates are required to write answers of questions related to the subject they opt for. The evaluation process takes time, given the number of candidates who apply for the exam. So from past several years, there has been growing demand to change the pattern," an official said.

Mahendra Prasad, examination controller, UPPSC declined to comment. "At present, I can't speak anything about the pattern."

ECONOMIC TIMES, OCT 11, 2014

Centre allocates IAS, IPS, IFoS officers for Telangana, Andhra Pradesh

The composition of the three all-India services is based upon a recommendation by a six-member committee headed by former CVC Pratyush Sinha.

NEW DELHI: The Centre has okayed allocation of IAS, [IPS](#) and [IFoS](#) officers for the newly-formed state of [Telangana](#) and residuary Andhra Pradesh.

As per the guidelines finalised by the Department of Personnel and Training, 163 posts of Indian Administrative Service (IAS), 112 of Indian Police Service (IPS) and 65 Indian [Forest Service](#) (IFoS) officers (including promotees) have been allotted to Telangana.

[Andhra Pradesh](#) will now have 211 posts for IAS, 144 for IPS and 82 for IFoS officers, it said. DoPT has issued officer-wise list for the IAS, IPS and IFoS officers, which is available in the public domain.

The composition of the three all-India services is based upon a recommendation by a six-member committee headed by former Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) Pratyush Sinha.

Earlier, Andhra Pradesh had a total authorised strength of 376 IAS, 258 IPS and 149 IFoS officers.

DoPT has also issued a notification defining the cadre strength for IAS, IPS and IFoS officers.

Telangana, the country's 29th state, came into existence on June 2 and started functioning from that day. Parliament had given its approval on February 20 for the creation of Telangana through the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh.

Of the total of 163 [IAS](#) posts for Telangana, one each is of the Chief Secretary and Additional Chief Secretary, 10 of Principal Secretaries and 27 for Secretaries, the notification said.

Among the 112 IPS posts, one is for the Director General of Police (DGP), five for Additional Directors General (ADGs), 13 Inspectors General (IGs), 11 Deputy Inspectors General (DIGs) and 31 Superintendents of Police (SPs).

Of the 65 IFoS posts, two are for the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), three for Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, five for Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) and 10 for conservator of forests, it said.

INDIAN EXPRESS, OCT 10, 2014

Govt employees' attendance surveillance system goes online

An electronic surveillance system to keep track of punctuality of government officials will become fully operational by the month end as part of Narendra Modi Government's efforts to discipline employees.

Online trial run of the live biometric attendance system (BAS) have begun and attendance of over 50,000 employees from 148 departments can be viewed online. The system uses fingerprints to ensure that employees physically turn up and do not use proxies.

"BAS for central employees will be fully functional by the end of this month," DeitY Secretary Ram Sevak Sharma informed.

The website, attendance.gov.in, is hooked up to computers in government offices that will identify employees through their fingerprint and unique identity number (Aadhaar).

It displays a dynamic, real-time chart of how many people are at work. It is also possible check when an individual checks in and logs out of the system.

The programme is currently being implemented in the central government offices located in the national capital and will eventually expand to all central Government employees across the country.

Wall mounted bio-metric attendance terminals have been installed in government buildings. Government employees can mark their attendance in any of the buildings where biometric terminals are installed.

So far, over 50,000 employees have registered on the site, he said, adding that around 10,000 more are expected to join this month.

The system will start with tracking attendance of central government employees stationed in the national capital, he said.

According to the information available on the attendance web portal, as many as 148 central government organisations have registered themselves for the same.

So far, about 50,027 employees have registered on the portal, of the total 66,353 employees. Out of the registered users, 47,644 employees are Aadhaar verified.

ECONOMIC TIMES, OCT 8, 2014

Centre planning to replicate Gujarat's online posting system

By [Aman Sharma](#)

The central team was so impressed that it decided to look at the possibility of implementing the HRMS, which was launched by Gujarat CM Anandiben Patel.

NEW DELHI: The Centre is planning to put in place an online system to post the most suitable officers to various positions and keep track of all upcoming vacancies in the bureaucracy, replicating an initiative conceived by [Narendra Modi](#) in [Gujarat](#) when he was chief minister of the state.

The Gujarat government on September 9 gave a presentation on Human Resources Management System (HRMS) at a meeting called by [Jitendra Singh](#), the MoS in Prime Minister's Office and ministry of personnel.

The central team was so impressed that it decided to look at the possibility of implementing the HRMS, which was launched by Gujarat CM [Anandiben Patel](#) on August 12.

"The possibility of replicating the best principles of [HRMS](#) for manpower planning and human resources development by the state governments and the Centre was deliberated so that suitability of officers for various posts could be adjudged," the minutes of the meeting (MoM) read.

The Centre could work further on a database of officials built by it lately for the purpose of an attendance monitoring system. The system also tracks all upcoming vacancies due to retirements to ensure a proper succession plan and its built-in performance appraisal system ensures the government is able to assess various candidates. The database is accessible to all departments, and applications being processed are leave, pay roll, performance management, promotion and training can be tracked by the system.

Meanwhile, at the September 9 meeting with officers from all states, the secretary (personnel) Sanjay Kothari stressed on the need for promoting a citizen-centric and transparent administration which provides maximum information for public.

"Accordingly, draft rules and policies should not only be put on the website but comments of the users should also be invited and suggestions incorporated, wherever possible," Kothari said, as per the (MoM).

BUSINESS LINE, OCT 8, 2014

Centre to use Aadhaar-based system to track staff attendance

As part of the Digital India campaign, the Centre has launched an Aadhaar-based system developed by the National Informatics Center (NIC) to track attendance of Government employees.

The new system, www.attendance.gov.in, aims to ensure that the attendance of all Government employees will be visible in real time on the common attendance portal,

ensuring transparency and accountability. An employee will have to register his/her attendance through a biometric (fingerprint or Iris) system, which will be authenticated online by doing a one-to-one match with the biometric stored in the UIDAI database against the employee's Aadhaar number. The new system will be implemented in two phases.

In the first phase, 148 Central Government organisations (Ministry, departments and autonomous bodies etc) are on board with registration of 49,272 employees. To enable these employees to register their attendance, 1,000 wall-mounted biometric attendance terminals, 5,000 fingerprint scanning devices and 200 Iris devices have been procured and are being installed in about 100 Government bhawans/buildings.

In the second phase, all the Central Government organisations would use the common biometric attendance portal, which is hosted at the NIC data centre. Various Government organisations are operating across different locations. The major challenge is to enable and manage the attendance of across various locations keeping the total cost of ownership (TCO) low.

At present, various Government organisations have deployed proprietary biometric attendance solutions, which lack uniformity in technical architecture due to which these solutions are difficult to scale up and integrate. All departments will have a nodal officer for the new system. Then, there will be online registration of all employees. There will be two steps of verification.

First, the Aadhaar details will be verified by the UIDAI, while the nodal officer will do the second verification. Only after that will an employee be able to mark his/her attendance on the biometric terminal.

DECCAN HERALD, OCT 15, 2014

Bureaucrats have their way; portal showing attendance record restricted

Bureaucrats appeared to have successfully blocked Narendra Modi government's attempt to make their attendance record public as part of bringing transparency to the governance system.

Though the public had an unrestricted access to attendance.gov.in for more than a week, the official site has now been password protected.

Bureaucrats have been unhappy about the portal, a governance initiative by Prime Minister Narendra Modi that was unveiled on September 30, and have lobbied against it.

Sources said intense pressure forced authorities to restrict access to the portal.

Officers said letting the public know the log-in and log-out timings of the bureaucrats did not actually serve any purpose, as they explained the logic behind restricting access to the

portal.

“How does it help in bringing transparency? Does it serve any purpose to know that an officer has gone on leave for two weeks or two months” a senior official said.

As of now, details of 51,166 employees in 149 departments/ministries in Delhi have been uploaded in the system. The plan is to cover Delhi and move to the rest of the country, the official said.

Record showed that 30,430 government staff attended office on Tuesday. While 3,004 employees were still working at 8.45 pm, that number had fallen to 2,975 ten minutes later. It also revealed that 61.6 per cent of the officers logged-in between 9 and 10 am and 25.3 per cent came to work before 9 am. However, 6.1 per cent came in after 11 am.

The portal remained accessible to public until Sunday morning, but barely 24 hours later on Monday, access to it was restricted.

TIMES OF INDIA, OCT 8, 2014

Is a babu at work? You can check in real time

[Kim Arora,](#)

NEW DELHI: Tracking the attendance of ministers and babus from central government departments and ministries in real-time is possible now. The recently-launched government website, attendance.gov.in, shows attendance details of nearly 50,000 employees across 148 organisations (figures as of Tuesday afternoon), and the figures are expected to grow.

The website and the system architecture have been developed by a team from the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) under the direction of the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY). The website is currently in its trial phase, and will soon see a formal launch.

The data indicates not only whether a particular officer is present or not, but also the time s/he signed in and signed out, the number of entries on each biometric machine installed in an office and whether it is active or inactive. The home page of the website is a dashboard which features a real-time "attendance activity" graph, number of employees authenticated and registered for the biometric attendance system, number of active devices and more.

More detailed data shows individual employee timings, along with their pictures, e-mail addresses, and attendance timings. On an individual employee page, one can also see a month-long graph indicating present days, holidays and days when an employee was absent. For example, for Gulshan Rai, director general of Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) had an "in time" of 09:26 am on Tuesday morning.

The employees' biometric details are linked to UID or Aadhaar. The web portal is meant to act as a centralized management information system for attendance, and is currently active for Delhi offices. "The details are forwarded from the local server to the UIDAI for verification. Then, the attendance is recorded. The average response time for this process is currently 1.5 seconds," says R S Sharma, secretary at the DeitY, adding that they are seeing a "huge amount of discipline in the trial phase itself." Sharma was the principal Secretary of the science and technology department of the Jharkhand state government, where a similar attendance portal is in place at the state level.

While several concerns regarding privacy have been raised in the past when it comes to the use and implementation of the UID or Aadhaar numbers, Sharma says the linking has helped bring down costs and has made the project scale-able. "It is a lightweight system that decouples authentication from recording," he says. Officials visiting other government offices for meetings can mark their attendance from there itself. "Later as we scale this up, employees will be able to do this from different cities too," says Sharma, adding that the department of personnel and training will now have to come up with policies to regulate this new system of recording attendance digitally.

The implementation of the biometric attendance system has had its share of detractors. In August this year in Asansol, trade unions had protested over the introduction of the biometric attendance system by Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL). The same month, Delhi University teachers had also protested a similar move.

CONSUMERS

TIMES OF INDIA, OCT 9, 2014

UGC-sponsored 2-day seminar on consumerism in India

[Bosco Dominique](#)

PUDUCHERRY: The department of commerce, Kanchimamunivar centre for postgraduate studies (KMCPGS) and the department of civil supplies and consumer affairs will hold a University Grant Commission (UGC)-sponsored two-day seminar on 'Consumerism in India: The changing paradigm of consumer protection' on October 9 and 10 at the centre's conference hall.

The seminar under the theme 'Education, awareness and protection of consumers' will dwell in detail on the human rights violation in consumerism, impact of advertisements in consumerism, ethics in advertisements and the government's role in regulating unethical advertisements. Director (higher and technical education) T Karikalan will inaugurate the seminar at 9.30am on October 9.

STATESMAN, OCT 11, 2014

Consumer affairs department to create awareness

The state consumer affairs department has decided to organise a four-day fair beginning from 24 November to create awareness about consumer rights and consumer protection act

The fair by organising seminars, symposia, quiz and various discussion will give legal advice and suggestions to consumers how they can get redressal from traders if they are deceived. The fair will be held at Netaji Indoor Stadium. A complaint cell will be opened at the fair where consumers can lodge complaint against the traders, multi national companies, insurance, chit funds and real estate developers if consumers are deceived by them. The fair will give ideas what precautionary measures consumers need to take before purchasing any product.

Consumers at the fair will be advised to lodge complaints immediately with the consumer affairs department against food adulteration and misleading advertisements.

Consumer affairs minister Mr Sadhan Pandey will inaugurate the fair along with other senior officials of the department.

If consumers are deceived by any chit fund companies, financial institutions and insurance companies, ideas will be given to consumers at the fair how they can get redressal. Consumers, who deposited money with different money marketing firms but

didn't get refunds since several of the firms had been closed, will also be redressed, said a senior official of the department.

“Last year thousands of people had attended the fair. Many consumers who were deceived by traders and big companies had sought ideas from the officials of the department and we resolved their problem free of cost,” said Mr Pandey.

Last year at the fare there were also complaints related to land frauds, where a single plot was sold to a number of people, the official said.

Various cultural events, including songs, drama, chhau dance and folk songs will be held at the fair.

DISASTERS

HINDUSTAN TIMES, OCT 13, 2014

Lessons from Hudhud: States must step up to tackle natural calamities

[KumKum Dasgupta](#)

Devendra Singh Tak, a New Delhi-based communication specialist with Save the Children, was in Vishakhapatnam when Cyclone Hudhud pounded the coastal city on Sunday. Throughout the day, Tak sent several text messages, updating me about the ground situation in city. At 7.40pm on Sunday, hours after the worst was over, he sent this message: “Just drove around a bit... my hotel inverter has packed up and kitchen destroyed. Huge damage ... I have been in three cyclones and this was not less than any other. Vishakhapatnam is like a war zone”. A few minutes later, Tak added: “I fear casualties since not enough people were evacuated; plus crops destroyed. Trees bus stops electric poles and many constructions destroyed”.

The real quantum of loss in the Hudhud-hit states of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa will be known only in the coming days. However, expecting the worst, Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu has already asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare Hudhud as a national calamity and requested an immediate relief of Rs. 2,000 crore.

If there is one big lesson that Hudhud has for India, it is this: coastal cities need to plan and implement climate risk management strategies as an integral part of their development plans to overcome the risks posed by climate change, natural disasters and other extreme events. And this has to be done on a war-footing.

And, here's the stats why protecting these regions is vital: India's coastal area is spread over 8% of the geographical area in 84 districts falling within 13 states and Union Territories, and accommodating an estimated population of about 320 million people (which roughly accounts to about 25% of the country's population). In the last 270 years, 21 of the 23 major cyclones with casualty figures of about 10,000 lives or more worldwide occurred mostly in India and Bangladesh, over the area surrounding the Indian subcontinent.

Despite the real threat of climate change, Indian cities are yet to rise up to the challenge of making their cities climate-resilient. To date, only seven Indian cities have climate resilience plans: Surat, Indore, Gorakhpur, Mysore, Bhubaneswar, Shimla and Guwahati. And other than Surat, no other city has implemented their climate change plan.

‘The main problem is that there are no state-level mandates to tackle climate change and tackling it does not even fall within the responsibilities of urban local bodies (ULBs) as framed by the 74th Constitutional Amendment,’ TERI's Divya Sharma told me last week. “We need to mainstream climate resilience and weave it into urban

planning. Unfortunately, many officials are not even aware about the economic and social disruption that climate-induced calamities can have on a city and its residents.”

Sharma, who has worked with several state governments, added that responses of states differ but more often than not, departments keep passing the files from one to another to avoid taking any decision on the issue. “Most states feel that tackling climate change is the Centre’s responsibility. Only Goa and Gujarat are proactive when it comes to planning for climate challenges. Interestingly, Vishakhapatnam has a cycle preparedness plan but no disaster management plan.”

A climate resilient city is one that has the ability to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self organisation and the capacity to adapt to stress and change. To be resilient, a city needs to work on its urban governance, infrastructure, finance, design and environmental and resource management.

It is time that cities realise that they are putting their very existence at risk by not focussing on building plans on how to ensure that they stay afloat in face to climate catastrophes.

Equally important, chief ministers should realise that presenting a demand note to the Centre after every calamity is not a long-term solution to the problem; instead, they must shoulder the responsibility to make their states climate-resilient and that they do not have the luxury of time any more.

EDUCATION

STATESMAN, OCT 14, 2014

Colleges & universities

AK GHOSH

It is generally agreed that higher education has reached the masses because of the rapid expansion of elementary and secondary education and the emergence of a knowledge-based society. College education is an important pathway to national progress.

Education contributes to nation-building by influencing the child's interaction with his milieu in order to make him a responsible citizen. Unfortunately, the system is presently in a mess, and it is getting worse every year due to political interference.

In focus is the collegiate system and no education planner can afford to ignore this contingency. The colleges feed and support the matrix of higher education which is enormous in its reach, scope and application. Yet it calls for evaluation so that remedies can be introduced, as and when necessary.

The broad issues that require immediate attention are the opening and management of colleges, recruitment, conduct and participation of teachers in the management, besides their professional enhancement and student interaction. The courses, the level of students, the environment in which the entire exercise is to be conducted, and the management under which it is to be done ~ all these and more need to be examined in the present context for the assured development of the colleges.

The colleges cannot churn out products ready for the market. Yet they become centres of discontent rather than any kind of educational enterprise and development. Over the years new modes have been introduced but the response in our colleges has remained almost unchanged. Alternately, a number of correspondence and distance courses have been introduced, and these have earned qualified credibility. However, they have not been able to replace the longing for degrees from regular colleges.

The issue has become still more critical with the phenomenal increase in the number of colleges in the country. The compulsions for the opening of colleges vary from sociological to political considerations. There are colleges where the management cannot afford the salary and earn social recognition and support with substantial financial inputs.

Every college is viewed as a seat of learning by the students who come out of schools with fanciful ideas, but the level of teaching is not uniform. The determinants include the participation and role of the state governments and the affiliating universities in the formulation of courses. The affiliating universities generally prescribe the courses and sit on the fence and, at times, oversee the colleges. They accept the credit for all that is good

in the collegiate system, while ignoring and relegating its weak points and lapses in terms of teaching and management.

Affiliation is a formal legacy of the British era and has over time lost its sanctity and relevance given the busy schedule of the universities. The latter grant the affiliation and evade their role, except in regard to conducting examinations and awarding degrees. Though the linkage between the universities and the colleges at the academic level cannot be denied, the equation is often rather peripheral. There is little by way of “vertical mobility” of college teachers. So the teachers are left to their own devices to fix the academic exercises. Once affiliation is granted, the colleges look up to the universities for academic leadership which is undefined, but may on occasion be political. This hardly helps matters in the prevailing circumstances.

So the networking that might exist between colleges and universities may not necessarily be a practical partnership. The interaction hardly contributes to the development and consolidation of the system.

In a college where books and equipment need to be replenished every year, the infrastructure also needs to be upgraded. This can also entail the introduction of new courses, student amenities, hostels and extra-curricular activities.

The grant-in-aid rules in respect of colleges vary from region to region. Where the grants are not sufficient and the managements are not able to provide funds, the result can be misutilisation of funds. In the net, this can harm teaching standards.

Expectations have increased with democratic liberalisation. It has been argued that as universities promote elitism in education, they also serve as a waiting lounge for students during the period between graduation and employment. In fact, the colleges also require greater attention so that their students can meaningfully terminate their studies and settle in life rather than go to the universities for yet another time-frame in the hope of employment opportunities. The mismatch between college and university education calls for a fresh debate to remove this asymmetry in the system so that vertical mobility can be ensured both among the students and the teachers.

Society has a lot more to expect from the colleges in terms of their product and delivery system. Students are not exposed to the hard realities of social compulsions and environmental demands. Neither the universities nor the UGC have advanced substantive schemes to address the disparity between colleges.

Our colleges have become centres where students can take the examination if they meet the required attendance, and teachers can hold on to their jobs if they can string a bunch of sentences together and stretch them over 45 minutes. And what if the teacher actually wants to perform well? Indifferent students, meager library facilities, restricted access to

books and journals, shortage of space and students' unrest are the deterrents. Have teachers ever come together to demand better funding for libraries, for offices, for more space, sufficient time for research, or even for a greater say in the administration of the universities where they work?

INDIAN EXPRESS, OCT 15, 2014

HRD ministry set to adopt Gujarat's Tithi Bhojan concept

by [Ruhi Tewari](#)

Taking inspiration from Gujarat and replicating its model, the HRD Ministry is planning to introduce greater public participation as well as involvement of religious and charitable institutions in its Mid-day Meal Scheme through the concept of "Tithi Bhojan" to ensure more effective community monitoring.

A meeting of the empowered committee for the scheme, chaired by the HRD Minister Smriti Irani, to be held on Wednesday is expected to approve the introduction of the concept of Tithi Bhojan — an initiative taken by the Gujarat government — at the national level. Under the concept in Gujarat, villagers sponsor the food, with sweets, for children on different occasions and also make contributions in kind by providing utensils etc.

In a meeting of state education secretaries in end August, the ministry had asked states to "explore possibilities" of involving institutions like "Tirupati Devsthanam Trust, gurudwaras, trusts, mosques, temples etc in serving MDM in the schools in their vicinity to ensure better community participation and to enhance awareness about the scheme".

In order to bring incidents and complaints about Mid-day Meal to the forefront, the ministry is planning to create an open forum on the scheme's website where views can be shared online — another key item on the agenda of Wednesday's meeting.

The meeting will also discuss the recommendations of the expert committee for assessing adequacy, quality and safety of the food served. The committee, set up last year, has noted the "crucial role" of the community in checking ingredients of the meal, preventing micro biological contamination and mandatory testing of meals at kitchen level.

INDIAN EXPRESS, OCT 15, 2014

Panjab University likely to introduce CGPA from next session

Panjab University is making preparations for introducing the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) system from the next session.

The University Institute of Engineering and Technology (UIET) is one of the departments to have adopted the CGPA system, and as per sources, their results are comparatively better than the other departments. The proposal of introducing CGPA in all other

departments was moved at a meeting of all chairpersons with Vice-Chancellor(V-C) Professor Arun Kumar Grover, last month.

Parvinder Singh, Controller of Examinations, PU, informed that a standing committee for undergraduate courses will work out the modalities of the CGPA system and then would take the proposal further to the Senate and the Syndicate meeting, where the final decision will be taken. “The examination branch has been asked to prepare a draft for the CGPA calculations. In the meantime, we will take random opinions from students and staff about whether this system be helpful or not,” said Parvinder. He added, “This system will reduce the pressure among students as these days they are running a rat race to outshine others. With this system, the revaluation and UMC cases will automatically come down.

As per the present system, 38 marks and 45 marks make a difference of 7 marks but in the grading system, 38 and 45 marks will be counted as one grade.” The examination branch has also been asked to take a feedback from students through the PU website. The CGPA is the average of grade points obtained in all the subjects during a period of study, and one could multiply the CGPA with 9.5 to get the overall indicative percentage.

HINDU, OCT 15, 2014

DU law faculty all set to get new building

Delhi University’s law faculty is likely to get a new campus to accommodate the three law centres currently operating from different buildings on the North Campus.

“A proposal for a building on the North Campus for the three centres of law faculty has been submitted before the High Court,” DU media coordinator and Joint Dean of Students’ Welfare Malay Neerav said.

“According to the proposal, the three law centres — Campus Law Centre, Law Centre-I and Law Centre-II — are proposed to be shifted to a new building adjacent to the faculty of law on the North Campus itself,” he said.

According to Dean (Law Faculty) Ashwani Kumar Bansal, “The building is still under construction, but 75 per cent of the building is ready and we have been assured that the three centres will be accommodated on the new premises from the next academic session.”

The law faculty was in the news recently when the Bar Council of India, the apex regulatory body for legal education and the legal profession in India, had decided to derecognise DU’s law course after it failed to seek timely extension of the affiliation of its three centres.

“We have applied for extension and the issue will be sorted out soon. We have already assured our students that their prospects of practising as advocates will not be hampered,” Mr. Bansal said.

Vice-Chancellor Dinesh Singh added: “The issue was blown out of proportion and I have been told that it will be sorted soon.”

Meanwhile, a seven-member team from the BCI visited the law faculty campus on Tuesday for inspection.

Members of the Delhi University Students’ Union presented a memorandum to the team demanding better infrastructure for the institution.

Among the DU law faculty alumnus are the likes of Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, former Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal, Supreme Court judge R. Nariman, former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati and former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Ajit Jogi. —PTI

DECCAN HERALD, OCT 9, 2014

Deal strongly with plagiarists

A committee appointed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) has made some welcome recommendations to discourage plagiarism in academic work and award punishment to those who resort to it. It is known that plagiarism is not uncommon in the work of researchers and academics in many Indian universities. Charges of lifting of material from others’ publications, fabrication of data and fraud have been levelled against even senior academics. A few years ago a highly regarded professor of geology in Panjab University was found to have planted fossils, stolen from a museum in European museum or bought in the Himalayas and claimed credit for discovering them. There have been many other cases from other universities and research institutes. They have not been limited to scientific research. In the field of humanities like history and literature also research scholars have been accused of using in their papers or theses material and ideas from others’ work without acknowledgement.

Such malpractices are not limited to India. Two recent separate cases of fraud by a senior South Korean stem cell researcher Hwang Woo-suk and a young Japanese researcher Haruko Obokata in the same field had attracted worldwide attention. Huang’s guilt was proved on investigation and action was taken against him. Obokata’s case is more recent and she is facing investigation and action. In cases of plagiarism and fraud even jail sentences have been awarded in the US when deliberate and intentional misconduct is proved. In India, investigation of charges and actions based on them have not always been the norm.

Considerations like the standing of the persons accused of plagiarism or their connections and the reputation of the institutions where they work have influenced investigations and actions. But there have also been exemplary cases of action in rare cases. Professors and researchers have been suspended or dismissed when complaints of plagiarism were found correct. Recently the Institute of Microbial Technology based in Chandigarh, attached to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, did well to retract papers published by

a research associate in an international journal when it was found that the data was fabricated.

Many institutions do not even investigate complaints of plagiarism and fraud for fear of inviting adverse attention and loss of reputation. But when unethical and unprofessional conduct is proved, it only invites more ignominy and disgrace. The UGC panel has prescribed a range of punishments from salary cuts to dismissals for various types of malpractices. Investigations should be mandatory and punishments should have strong deterrent value. Non-action will only bring disrepute to the country and to its scientific and intellectual establishments.

HINDU, OCT 9, 2014

DUTA seeks investigation into plagiarism charges against V-C

VIJETHA S.N

Urges MHRD to enlist this case for its special committee

After getting wind of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) initiating a probe into allegations of plagiarism by some Delhi University teachers, the university's teacher union has written to the Ministry to first investigate the allegations of plagiarism against their boss, the Vice-Chancellor.

"We have come to know that the MHRD has set up a committee to inquire into allegations of plagiarism regarding some professors at Delhi University. We wanted the MHRD to be aware that there is a pending case of plagiarism against Vice-Chancellor Dinesh Singh. The issue is part of the White Paper submitted by us, but since there is already a specific committee investigating charges of plagiarism, we have requested the Ministry to include this case too," said Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) president Nandita Narain.

She alleged that the "case of Prof. Dinesh Singh's suspected attempts to pass off five publications authored by someone else as his own," was reported by a leading national daily in December, 2012.

"The university had defended the V-C by claiming that his researcher profile on "ResearcherID", a website maintained by a news wire, had been hacked and that a complaint had been lodged with the Delhi Police. However, its replies to RTI queries following the incident reveal glaring inconsistencies in the university's claims," she said. The DUTA has also alleged that the university had remained silent on the details about the police complaint it had lodged.

"It has not provided any copy of this complaint in response to the RTI queries. It may be noted that the services of a DU teacher found guilty on the same charge had been terminated in the past. Such a case acquires far greater seriousness when the Vice-Chancellor, the person holding the highest office at the university, is allegedly involved," said DUTA secretary Harish Khanna.

“The university had defended the V-C by claiming that his researcher profile on “ResearcherID”, a website maintained by a news wire, had been hacked”

ELDERLY

INDIAN EXPRESS, OCT 10, 2014

Handle age with care

The latest Census data report that 15 per cent of the elderly live alone, mainly because of the nuclearisation of the family. (Source: PTI)

BY: Charan Singh and S.J.S. Swamidoss

While the new government has spoken about taking policy measures to address the needs of India's young population, nearly 10 crore of the elderly — citizens above 60 years of age — are generally neglected in policymaking. The latest Census data report that 15 per cent of the elderly live alone, mainly because of the nuclearisation of the family. As longevity is increasing and women tend to live longer than men, the proportion of women staying alone is significantly large: three-fourths of the elderly, or about one crore of elderly women, live alone. In Tamil Nadu, one in 11 of those above 60 lives alone. This trend has disturbing implications for the nutrition and health of the elderly and should be a cause for concern.

In India, on average, nearly 2 per cent of the elderly are confined to the bed and 5 per cent confined to the home. The ratio for elderly women is much higher. There is evidence to suggest that in old age, isolation and abandonment has been increasing, especially because of the nuclearisation of the family, urbanisation and migration of workers, and persistent poverty. The real problem is the inability of old people to derive benefits from various poverty alleviation programmes, including food security schemes in place. This problem exists in both rural and urban areas.

The elderly too require secure food, shelter and clothing to survive in a dignified way. The Central and state governments have made some effort to provide for old-age care. A number of schemes, like integrated programmes for an older person, have been implemented since 1992 and the national policy on older persons was announced in January 1999. These schemes aim to provide financial and food security, healthcare, shelter and other means to the elderly to improve their quality of life. Various government ministries, like the railways, rural development and finance, also offer special concessions to the elderly. But a 2011 survey by the United Nations Population Fund revealed that the utilisation of these schemes, especially those designed for BPL households, was abysmally low.

In view of the fact that many of the elderly live alone and some have been abandoned by their families and neglected by their children, they suffer near starvation. In many a household, feeding the elderly is never a priority and they often get only the residual food.

There are a number of old people who cannot cook their own meals because they are bedridden or weakened by age or don't possess the utensils to cook due to acute poverty.

These numbers are not small, as revealed in a private survey conducted in a few villages in Tamil Nadu around Chennai; the average numbers of such destitute elderly range between 10-20 per village. In a country of six lakh villages, one can assume that about 90 lakh elderly regularly suffer due to a lack of food.

The Narendra Modi government could consider a daily midday meal scheme for such people. To administer the scheme, various options are available — the government could do it on its own or seek a public-private partnership. This can be covered under the private sector's corporate social responsibility burden. In India, more than 5,000 companies are listed on the stock exchange and there are just about 350 districts. The scheme can be initially piloted in a few districts in every state and if successful, it can be scaled up. The scheme could ensure that one square meal per day is available to the elderly.

In Tamil Nadu, where the scheme is being privately run by an NGO, many elderly are benefitting, beaming with self-assurance, and some are recovering from withdrawal symptoms. The organisers of the voluntary scheme operating in 30 villages collect Rs 400 per month from donors to feed one old person with a noon-meal every day. With this taken as benchmark expenditure, annual expenditure for implementing a scheme to feed one good meal to 90 lakh elderly per year would amount to Rs 4,320 crore.

The objective of this scheme is to ensure that the elderly in the country are able to procure food in a dignified manner. Once the infrastructure has been established, the supply chain of this facility can be used for the distribution of select medicines and even clothes to the bedridden elderly. This could give a new meaning to “welfare state”. Singh is RBI Chair professor of economics, IIM Bangalore. Swamidoss is former director, research department, RBI and founder of the noon-meal scheme for the elderly destitute in Tamil Nadu. Views are personal

EMPLOYMENT

TIMES OF INDIA, OCT 9, 2014

Babu warns of 40% fall in MGNREGS jobs, but overruled

NEW DELHI: Overriding objections raised by senior officials, rural development minister Nitin Gadkari has ordered far-reaching changes in the job guarantee scheme (MGNREGS) which has provided seasonal work to one in three rural households in the last eight years.

Documents obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act by activists show file notings by a senior official in the ministry arguing that Gadkari's announcements run contrary to the "spirit of the Act" and that reducing the wage component of the total funds allocated for the scheme would lead to a 40% fall in jobs, affecting five crore rural households.

In response to this dire warning, Gadkari notes in the file that reducing the wage component "is reflective of the view of the legislature" and hence it should be "brought about immediately".

These and other documents revealing the intense churning in the government on the job guarantee programme's fate were released on Wednesday by People's Action for Employment Guarantee, led by RTI activists Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey. An open letter to the Prime Minister protesting against attempts to dilute MGNREGS and signed by more than 200 personalities, including economists, women's activists, lawyers, former bureaucrats and others was also released.

At a press conference in Delhi, Roy said the present government never sought votes on the platform of killing the job guarantee scheme, otherwise people would have rejected them.

The starving of the MGNREGS by cutting down on funds and the changes proposed by the minister were described as attempts to abrogate a right of the people, economists Prabhat Patnaik and Abhijit Sen said.

Sen, a former Planning Commission member said creation of assets under MGNREGS was nine times more than the earlier Jawahar Rozgar Yojana although spending in both as a proportion of GDP was about the same.

GADKARI'S CHANGES

- **Wage-material ratio in fund allocation tweaked from 60:40 to 51:49**
- **Scheme to be available only in 'needy' areas/states**
- **States to have the right to include any work of their choice**

Norati Devi, head of the Hamada panchayat in Ajmer district, Rajasthan, said that every month, their panchayat paid between Rs 80 lakh and Rs 1.25 crore for work under the job guarantee scheme. "It is a lifeline for poor people. For the first time, their children are going to school and getting medicines when sick. If the government stops this, people will face starvation," she said.

In the documents obtained under RTI, joint secretary R Subrahmanyam notes that increasing the material component of funds from 40% to 49% — and decreasing the wage component accordingly — would mean reliance on "benami contractors" with resultant corruption. He also points out that the more vulnerable unskilled workers would lose out to skilled workers in a contractor-based system.

(MGNREGS has provided seasonal work to one in three rural households in the last eight

years.)

Regarding the proposal of "targeting" the job guarantee scheme at areas where most needed, the notings by L C Goyal, secretary of rural development, are lauded by Gadkari who directs that these should be pursued "in a legally feasible manner on a separate file". Activists of PAEG, as well as the signatories of the open letter, have strongly condemned this proposal calling it a death knell for the job guarantee scheme.

Another concern highlighted by PAEG is that of liabilities of state governments. In a separate RTI reply, the ministry has revealed that state governments had to pay nearly Rs 6000 crore as on March 31, 2014, the bulk of which was delayed wages. The ministry is releasing funds in dribbles and most of it is getting used up in settling pending wages and other liabilities, the activists said. For example, the Bihar government had outstanding liabilities of Rs 624 crore but till August-end, the union ministry had released only Rs 256 crore.

ENVIRONMENT

STATESMAN, OCT 14, 2014

Saving the Ganga or endangering it further?

Bharat Dogra

The Union Government has clearly accorded top priority to protecting the Ganga river. This should be welcomed, but serious questions need to be raised about some of the more specific proposals of the government which appear to be more in line with endangering the river further instead of protecting it.

Before coming to these proposals, however, two limitations of the overall approach of the government need to be highlighted. Firstly, there does not appear to be any comprehensive planning for protection of all rivers in the country. Such a comprehensive plan has to ensure adequate flows in rivers, effective steps to curb pollution, many-sided efforts to save various forms of life in the river, check destructive mining in and around rivers, protect catchment and estuary areas as well as ensure longer-term survival of rivers. Such comprehensive planning for protection of rivers incorporating short-term efforts and longer-term concerns just doesn't exist in the country even though it is badly needed.

In the absence of such comprehensive planning for protection of our rivers and river-systems, what is happening is that some limited work on a single river (or may be only some stretch of that river) is taken up for its religious, emotional and political appeal. All emphasis is placed on this limited objective. This is very difficult from the real task of genuinely protecting all rivers.

Secondly, there is an overall trend towards weakening of environmental norms and clearances. This was visible even in the last days of the UPA government, and after the advent of the new (NDA) government this trend has been accentuated further. One aspect of this trend which concerns us here is that the numerous dams, tunnel-dams and barrages proposed on the Ganga river are now likely to get even less scrutiny from the point of view of safety and environment protection.

Within these limitations and overall adverse conditions of environment protection, let's examine what will be impact of the plans now being considered by the government for the Ganga river. Although a full and final blueprint of these plans has not emerged yet, what appears likely is that a series of barrages are being planned on the river from Allahabad to Haldia. Over a distance of about 1600 kms, about 16 barrages may be planned, one barrage for a stretch of 100 kms. or so.

If we consider the adverse impacts of Farakka barrage which has been in operation for several years, then it is evident that the construction of so many barrages can have much

bigger adverse impacts. In the upstream areas of a barrage, the problems of sedimentation can get worse while in the downstream areas the river's capacity to erode land can increase. Overall there is adverse impact on fish and other forms of life in the river. Some fish cannot migrate to their spawning place while others are deprived of essential nutrients. In lean season the water situation can aggravate for some areas while during rainy season the threat of floods can increase, as the free flow of water is disrupted. The livelihood of fisherfolk and the smaller boatmen can be adversely affected. Costly dredging may be required in some places of heavy sedimentation, and despite the heavy costs this solution may not prove effective.

Despite possibility of all these adverse impacts as evident from the experience of Farakka project, such barrages are being advanced without even the essential social and environmental impact studies. This is in keeping with the wider conditions of ignoring or giving less significance to environmental norms and pre-conditions. Such neglect can prove very costly if heavy investments are made in inherently faulty projects. Already we have a history of first costly mistakes leading to huge problems, then trying to treat these problems by making even more costly mistakes! The reference here is to Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) followed by Farakka barrage project.

In the context of DVC a warning of disruption in the entire drainage of the Bhagirathi, the Hooghly and their tributaries had been given by Mr. Kapil Bhattacharya and some other engineers. Briefly the argument put forward by Mr. Bhattacharya was that the natural floods in the Damodar and Rupnarayan because of their timing, flow and force are capable of flushing out the sand and silt that accumulates in the lower reaches of the Hooghly river. This natural system should not be disrupted, he explained. But this is precisely what was likely to happen once the DVC dams were constructed. The drainage capacity of the Hooghly, the Bhagirathi and several of their tributaries would be adversely affected. Silt and sand would accumulate. Floods would increase and what is more, last for longer period. The navigability of the Hooghly river would be adversely affected, endangering the future of Calcutta Port.

What is important about all these predictions is that they actually came true to a large extent in the post-DVC days. At this stage Mr. Kapil Bhattacharya recommended that the irrigation component of DVC should be given up and instead this water should be diverted to flush the lower Hooghly. However, this view was not accepted by the authorities. Their response to the emerging problems, specially to the threat to the Calcutta Port, was to build a barrage at Farakka to divert additional water to Bhagirathi (Bhagirathi is the upper reach of Hooghly-after the merger of the Jalangi river above Kolkata the Bhagirathi is known as the Hooghly).

However the view of Mr. Bhattacharya, backed by some other knowledgeable persons,

was that the construction of Farakka barrage will merely mean adding one more costly mistake to the existing one.

He said on the basis of close observation of river discharge that adequate water will not be available for the Bhagirathi at Farakka. Its concrete bed will decrease the water carrying capacity of the Ganga river and increase the threat of floods in the entire region. The lower release in the river Padma beyond Farakka will lead to heavy silt accumulation in this river, bringing changes in the river course and indirectly also contributing further to floods in West Bengal.

The actual experience in the post-Farakka phase is that erosion and floods have assumed very serious dimensions. A former West Bengal irrigation minister Debabrata Bandopadhyaya has been quoted in the press as saying that Farakka barrage was a mistake and unless costly dredging works are undertaken, the districts of Malda and Murshidabad in West Bengal are doomed. All this is in addition to the well-publicised adverse effects on Bangladesh side and the highly adverse effects on the livelihood of fisherfolks caused by the controversial barrage.

The question is whether we have learnt from costly mistakes made in the past? The past experience tells us that the government may be on the verge of repeating very costly mistakes in the Ganga river system.

The Writer is a free-lance journalist who has been involved with several social initiatives and movements.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

STATESMAN, OCT 15, 2014

Bank unions call for strike on 12 Nov

Vadodara, 14 October: Bank employees have given a nationwide strike call on 12 November to press for immediate resolution of wage hike issue, the talks on which remain stalled.

The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), an umbrella organisation comprising various employee bodies, has given the strike call.

All-India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) general secretary CH Venkatchalam said they were forced to give a strike call as Indian Banks Association (IBA) has rejected demand for higher wages and are sticking to their earlier 11 per cent hike citing poor financials of the lenders.

UFBU has also decided to take out rallies on 30 October in all the state capitals before observing the strike. pti

HINDUSTAN TIMES, OCT 15, 2014

Bank nationalisation move has outlived its utility

[Subir Roy](#)

The NDA government, after campaigning for change and receiving a clear mandate, has asserted that it will not let state holding in public sector banks go below 51%.

Thus, the torch of bank nationalisation, which Indira Gandhi lit more than four decades ago, continues to be carried by the BJP and its allies even though they have decimated the Congress in the recent general elections.

Indian business leaders have backed Narendra Modi in the hope that he will take forward reforms but the privatisation of State-owned banks is one reform which is nowhere in sight.

This policy of persisting with public sector banks (PSB) comes at a huge cost. PSBs have in the last few years seen a sharp rise in their non-performing assets (NPA) — their net NPA ratio going up from 0.94 in 2008-09 to 2.02 in 2012-13.

Some of this will have to be written off, eroding their capital base, which will need replenishing. Besides, more capital is needed simply to grow. Simplifying it a little, with a capital adequacy ratio (CAR) of, say, 9%, a bank will need Rs. 9 more of capital for every additional Rs. 100 it lends.

What is more, to meet the more stringent Basel III capital adequacy norms, which are round the corner, even more capital will be needed to do the same level of business.

According to one estimate, the country will need to recapitalise its banks in the next three years by a staggering Rs. 3.5-4 lakh crore. This is around 30% of the entire revenue receipts projected in the 2014-15 budget and 4% of GDP.

Well over half this bill has to be footed by the government because of its holding in PSBs, which is in the 55-82% range.

Putting this kind of money into banks will make a significant dent in the government's fiscal resources, setting back its agenda of achieving fiscal consolidation — a key element in making a long-term dent on inflation still running high. Is this worth it? What does the government gain from continuing to own around 70% of the banking sector?

Bank nationalisation served a purpose by taking banking to parts of the country (non-commercial centres) and sections of the economy (agriculture and small scale industry) that were earlier ignored by commercial banks. As a result, India's savings rate improved and the foundation for industrial development at the grassroots was laid.

But it came with a cost: Poor customer service, a privileged set of employees with low productivity, lack of professionalism in management, politically directed lending like loan melas and high NPAs once the true picture of banks' financial condition was revealed during the post-1991 banking reforms.

What does the government get out of owning 26 PSBs today? Having taken the spread of banking up to a point, India's commercial banks, of which PSBs are a part, have failed to deliver in the final leg — achieve financial inclusion.

Urban-centric commercial banks are simply unable to take banking to poor illiterate people, who are intimidated by paper work and have to sometimes forego a day's earnings to get done something at a bank branch, which can be several kilometres away.

Hence the banking regulator, Reserve Bank of India, has come up with the idea of limited banking (banks which are not full-fledged commercial banks) like payments banks, small banks and banking correspondents. This is where development activity today lies.

What is more, PSBs have in the past few years emerged as a key link in the chain of crony capitalism with corporate debt restructuring seen as a major tool through which senior bank managers play along with corporate clients even as NPAs of PSBs rise at a disturbing rate. Anecdotal evidence suggests how this works.

Agents of business houses lobby with senior officials and ministers for the appointment of particular individuals as executive directors and chiefs of PSBs.

On getting the position, such bankers pay back in the following ways. They sanction new loans to firms of the business houses, restructure earlier non-performing loans, which entails a loss for the bank, with some of the loans eventually having to be written off, by which time the bank officials in questions may have retired or moved on.

The recent arrest of a PSB chief who was sought to be bribed by a steel maker with high debt and its managing director highlights just one aspect of the reality.

If the time has come to disentangle PSBs from the web of corruption, they have to be professionally run and sink or swim on the basis of their performance. This is best done if the government does not own them.

If this is accepted then the next question is: Should all 26 PSBs be privatised or should we stop somewhere in between? A case can be made for a different status, somewhere in between public and private ownership, for a few large PSBs. Maybe three or four like State Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank and Punjab National Bank can be given the status of national banks so that they can discharge a public function during a national requirement.

SBI, for example, during times of external crisis has raised hard currency from around the world by issuing paper like India Development Bonds and Resurgent India Bonds.

How can this be done without the government being involved in the day-to-day running of the organisations? One route is for the banks to be privatised, with the government retaining a golden share. Britain adopted this device when under Margaret Thatcher it issued itself a golden share while privatising the British National Oil Corporation so that it did not fall into undesirable (read foreign) hands.

The government can say that it will exercise the right of holding the golden share only by publicly announcing a specific task when a particular exceptional situation arises.

For the rest these banks will follow their own agenda within the central bank's monetary policy framework. Most importantly, they will be run professionally and senior appointments made by their boards and shareholders like any other private bank.

Subir Roy is a financial journalist and has also worked in the SBI

The views expressed by the author are personal

HEALTH SERVICES

HINDU, OCT 13, 2014

For public health as political priority

SUJATHA RAO

How does Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus on population, health and subjects like public hygiene, the facilitation of toilets and ensuring preventive health through yoga fit in with his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party's manifesto; one which promises a National Health Assurance (NHA) mission, with its aim of providing cashless hospitalisation in order to reduce out-of-pocket expenses? Why do these concerns seem contradictory? Does pursuing one necessarily hurt the other? These are legitimate questions and concerns. This must be looked at in a global context where there is discussion on Universal Health Coverage (or National Health Assurance) widening inequity in the short and medium term.

In seeking the maximisation of the health and well-being of every individual, the NHA subsumes the essentiality of access to those elements that constitute the foundation of good health — tap water (where conveyance of contamination is reduced by 99 per cent), a toilet and sewerage system, environmental hygiene, nutrition and basic primary care — and in the process, reduce 90 per cent of all morbidities and a substantial proportion of mortality. Evidence of efforts in the United Kingdom to contain tuberculosis by ensuring better housing and nutrition, the successful eradication by India of guinea worm infestation using improved water systems, or eradicating polio through improved sanitation and universal immunisation are some useful reminders of the interconnectivity between disease and environment, and between public health and clinical science.

Addressing inter-State disparities

In India, public health has been severely neglected with about 44 per cent of the population having access to tap water and toilets, 42 per cent of children being malnourished and a majority of people being treated by quacks. Setting right these issues requires an expenditure of an estimated Rs.10.7 lakh crore (recurring and non-recurring) against which the 12th Plan has allocated Rs.3.8 lakh crore. The most challenging of these is in bridging inter-State disparities, with 70 per cent of this investment required by the northern States that have restricted fiscal space, three quarters of the disease burden (preventable with effective primary health care) and weak implementation capacity, making inadequate funding not the only constraint. For example, in Bihar, 2.5 per cent of its rural population has access to tap water, 23 per cent of its people to toilets and a battered primary care system. Should such a State then invest in providing these basic services or in buying expensive care from private hospitals through insurance? What are the moral and ethical imperatives that must guide State action?

The Andhra Pradesh experience

In this regard, a review of the impact of the Rajiv Aarogyasri Health Insurance Scheme (RAS) in former Andhra Pradesh is illustrative of how the State consciously chose to

abandon primary care for universal coverage of a select set of tertiary and secondary care conditions.

In 2007, RAS, a State sponsored health insurance scheme (covering 85 per cent of the population, with sum assured of Rs.1.5 per family for cashless treatment in 486 hospitals involving 938 procedures) was launched to provide risk protection against catastrophic illnesses that “have the potential to wipe out a lifetime savings of poor families.” The justification was that there was effective demand for treatment for non-communicable and chronic diseases, low investment in public hospitals and a burgeoning private sector, unaffordable to most.

RAS was perceived to be a popular programme. But there is a thin line between perception and reality. Several commentators have critiqued it as having boosted the revenue streams of private corporate hospitals without necessarily reducing health expenditures or improving health outcomes.

While there are no systematic evaluations to assess the impact of RAS, a recently conducted household survey in Andhra Pradesh by Access International covering 8,623 households offers interesting insights. While it showed an overall reduction in out-of-pocket expenditure and increased hospitalisation, it had limited impact in reducing impoverishment or indebtedness among the two lowest quintile groups. For example, while per capita expenditures for inpatient treatment nearly trebled from Rs.391 in 2004 to Rs.1,083 (2012) for the poorest quintile, it was down to Rs.1,174 from Rs.1,819 for the fourth quintile group. Likewise, while the proportion of those incurring catastrophic expenditures more than doubled from 1.1 per cent to 2.8 per cent and 1.2 per cent to 3.4 per cent for the two lowest quintiles, the richer quintiles faced reductions. Such wide disparities are attributed to the concentration of half the accredited hospitals in seven districts (towns) resulting in an inequitable distribution of and gross deficiencies in the supply side, making access difficult and unaffordable for those residing in backward districts.

Impact on poor

Second, 49 per cent of reimbursement was for cardiac, cancer and kidney failure (38 per cent of patients or 0.5 per cent of population), while the two bottom quintiles suffered impoverishment, premature mortality and disability due to lower respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, tuberculosis (TB), ischemic heart diseases and malaria — conditions eminently preventable and treatable with effective primary care.

Besides, partaking RAS benefits implies forced hospitalisation for outpatient care, increasing the risk of hospital acquired infections and higher indirect expenditures that the poor cannot bear.

Third, the primary health-care system that the earlier Telugu Desam Party government had accorded high priority to has all but collapsed. Among 19 major States, Andhra Pradesh incurred the lowest expenditure of Central grants (National Rural Health Mission

and disease control programmes) as proportional to its total health spending during 2011; 16 per cent against 31 and 28 percentages by Maharashtra and Karnataka respectively and the only State to slash its primary care budgets from 53 per cent to 46 per cent and allocate just 9 per cent for secondary care down from 12 per cent during 2007-12. In comparison, RAS was provided 23 per cent of the health budget for less than 1 per cent of the population (not necessarily poor) or 11.3 per cent of total hospitalisation. In the absence of cost containment measures and generous pricing, costs are likely to escalate further, impinging on the fiscal space of the two new States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. RAS reimbursement rates, say for hysterectomy, laparoscopy, appendectomy or coronary bypass are higher when compared to other schemes in the country. Prices set through negotiations with private hospitals by committees without professionals — like chartered accountants, health economists or systematic unit costing methodologies — can only be arbitrary. Further, package rates provide scope for gaming the system. In the absence of standards to measure quality and regulations to control provider behaviour and fraud, perverse incentives are created, as reflected in unnecessary diagnostics, procedures and surgeries.

RAS was a bold initiative to address the problem of impoverishment that has been partially addressed. Contrary to Tamil Nadu, which witnessed a 10 per cent shift in institutional deliveries from private to public sector, the increase in Andhra Pradesh is in the private sector, resulting in huge borrowings. Access to social determinants and the substantial load of preventable diseases like diarrhoea, TB, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, are bouncing back due to policy neglect and mismanagement and continue to be issues requiring attention.

Policy corrections

The Andhra Pradesh story shows that lessons need to be learnt in order to reboot health policy along a more sustainable path. Scaling-up the NRHM's efforts to revive the primary health-care system; incentivising lifestyle changes; universalising access to social determinants; revamping and embedding the primary care system within the community; increasing investments in public sector hospitals, along with improving incentive structures, employing requisite staff and upgrading infrastructure would be far cheaper and more sustainable than buying care from private hospitals for services that are available in the public hospitals at a third of the price. Private care must supplement, not substitute public care. Finally, in order to ensure patient well-being and value for money, standard treatment protocols and guidelines need to be developed; costing of procedures undertaken, monitoring systems for quality such as rates of survival, hospital acquired infections and readmissions developed and regulations enforced alongside establishment of grievance redress systems, with fair compensation and penalties against malpractice.

A systemic reform of the health sector in order to achieve the three principal objectives of equity, efficiency and quality is long overdue. This will require skilful political management and stakeholder negotiations. Governments at the national and State levels need to give up rhetoric and knee-jerk responses as substitutes for real action. Instead, they need to make interventions intelligently, decisively and strategically to ensure that

solving one problem does not give rise to another. They also need to stay focussed on doing the simple things right in the first instance so that disparities reduce and the poor reap the benefits in real terms.

(Sujatha Rao was Health Secretary in the Government of India.)

Scaling-up the National Rural Health Mission's efforts

to revive the primary health-care system would be far cheaper and more sustainable than buying care from private hospitals.

A systemic reform of the health sector in order

to meet the key objectives of equity, efficiency and quality is long overdue. In this, the Central and State governments need to make interventions intelligently, decisively and strategically so that the poor reap the benefits

IDENTITY

TIMES OF INDIA, OCT 8, 2014

Telangana govt to issue ID cards for residents

HYDERABAD: The Telangana government will soon initiate the process of issuing identity cards for all residents of the state. This was announced by chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao at a meeting with district collectors and senior government officials at the Secretariat here on Tuesday. The cards will be issued to all those who participated in the recently-held household survey in Telangana.

The government also decided to issue fresh credentials to the state's residents such as income proof, caste and nativity certificates, especially to students of Telangana. In place of existing ration cards, the government will introduce Telangana State Food Security Cards for the poor. KCR directed officials to expedite the process of implementing his government's ambitious schemes during the meeting.

As the government has already released Rs 4,250 crore towards the first instalment of farm loan waiver, KCR instructed officials to complete formalities of the scheme within 15 days and ensure disbursement of fresh loans to farmers.

"The CM directed district collectors to convene meetings with bank officials on a daily basis ensuring complete implementation of the farm loan waiver scheme within fifteen days and issuance of fresh loans to farmers," a press release issued by the CMO said.

With respect to Financial Assistance for Students of Telangana (FAST) that has replaced the fee reimbursement scheme, KCR directed officials to issue all required certificates to students at one go. Students have been asked to submit applications to the tehsildar or mandal revenue officer concerned on or before October 15 in order to avail certificates required for the FAST scheme.

The new pension scheme for senior citizens, widows and physically challenged will be launched in November. The government has already issued orders enhancing the monthly pension amount from Rs 250 to Rs 1,000 for the aged and widows, and to Rs 1,500 for the physically challenged. Pension seekers have been asked to submit their applications to the village revenue officer concerned on or before October 15. Beneficiaries will be issued individual sanction letters.

Doing away with existing ration cards as a substantial number of them were found to be fake, the government will issue Telangana State Food Security Cards for the poor. Except government employees, land owners holding more than five acres and traders, all people are eligible for the cards, and beneficiaries have been asked to apply with the VRO concerned on or before October 15. The chief minister, in principle, agreed that each

person in a family should get 5 kg of rice in accordance with the National Food Security Act. He also directed officials to appoint division-level flying squads to identify beneficiaries and overview effective implementation of the schemes.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TELEGRAPH, OCT 8, 2014

ROCK STARS AND STRIPES

Why Modi's US visit was a success **DIPLOMACY:** K.P. Nayar

When all the punditry over the visit to the United States of America of the prime minister, Narendra Modi, is exhausted, it will be instructive to step back and study how the Americans selectively use all their levers of power on a graduated scale when they want a foreign leader's visit to succeed and produce results. Contrast that to the Indian experience, and it is easy to see why Modi's visit to Washington and New York has been as much of a success as the trip to the US of his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, in 2005, when the nuclear deal was announced.

The prime minister may never admit it in public, but it was clear — from his body language throughout his stay in the two major American cities, and from his private comments conveyed selectively by those around him to the largest Indian media contingent to cover any prime ministerial visit abroad — that Modi considered his travel to the US as far more important than any other trip he has undertaken so far since assuming office.

For him, the reception he received at the White House was a vindication of all that he did since his transformation from a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh *pracharak* and an organization man of the Bharatiya Janata Party into an elected leader of the people, initially in Gujarat, and now for all of India. It has eliminated, internationally, an albatross that was around his neck for over a decade: no one will talk any more in America about the 'Godhra fallout' and about Modi's alleged acts of commission at that time.

As proof of the 'immunity' Modi has finally received in the US from his alleged role as a persecutor of minorities, even as an organizer of pogroms against Muslims in Gujarat, read a statement that was issued in Washington by the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America, commonly known by its acronym of FIACONA, on the eve of Modi's arrival in Washington from New York. FIACONA was in the vanguard of a successful campaign to deny a US visa to Modi in 2005, with muscle for its lobbying to ban Modi from travelling to America provided by Senators and members of the House of Representatives who are sympathetic to right-wing religious lobbies. It was natural that as Modi had acquired rock-star status in popular play during his visit, the FIACONA statement got little attention either in the US or in India. It is a pity that hardly anyone noticed that statement.

In a sweeping reversal of its crusading role against Modi ever since he became Gujarat's chief minister, FIACONA practically ended its long campaign against him. Incredibly, the statement began thus: "Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America welcomes the Prime Minister of India to Washington." The organization was merely reflecting the change of mood in the US on the prime minister and being

pragmatic. But for Modi, personally, this change of mind among Christian organizations in America was a bigger vindication than Barack Obama's own belated endorsement of the prime minister, with whom he clearly established good chemistry at the private dinner he hosted in the Blue Room of the White House residence within hours of Modi's arrival in the US capital.

"Modi, who was denied a visa to visit the US in 2005 because of his suspected culpability in the political massacre of religious minorities in the state of Gujarat, India, while he was the state's chief elected official, was granted a US visa... as India's elected prime minister," the statement continued, obviously for the benefit of those Americans who may be unfamiliar with the entire case. "But unfortunately, Modi's past has been proving to be an unnecessary distraction during this important visit where so much is at stake for India's economic development and trade.

"Such distractions involving the prime minister of India during his meetings with other world leaders is regrettable but unavoidable." Notice the use of the phrase, "suspected culpability". This is an umbrella organization of the Christian Right, which had tried Modi in its kangaroo court of influential opinion and sentenced him as chief minister without credible proof and well before India's legal system had delivered its final verdict on Modi's role in the post-Godhra events in Gujarat. That it has finally had a change of heart is the most important outcome of his visit for Modi personally, and for his prime ministership in hardcore US terms in the long run.

FIACONA acknowledged the importance of the prime minister's visit for India and committed itself to avoiding distractions in America's engagement of Modi, describing those distractions as "unfortunate". But the problem with American organizations like the FIACONA is that its leaders earn their livelihood by creating 'enemies' like Modi and targeting them. And for causes such as the protection of Christians, there is more than enough money going round in America to be distributed.

Such organizations are also adept at adapting themselves to changing situations so that their hold on financial and other benefits is not loosened by the changes. For them, Modi is no longer a target in the US capable of raising funds on behalf of those whom FIACONA and similar bodies claim to protect. Therefore, their target will henceforth be the *largersangh parivar*. "While we strongly support multi-faceted close cooperation and engagement with India, we caution US officials and policy makers to keep in mind the radical ideologies and political background of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its affiliates, which remains as a serious concern for FIACONA," the statement cautioned. "It becomes an important responsibility of the international community to prevent a progressive and liberal democratic country like the size of India, turning into a radical religious state with a naked majority rule, in a fashion similar to that of Egypt, Uganda or Tibet."

In the process, a bit of criticism of America pays off in terms of their credibility: "We advise those policy-makers who are either ambiguous or think otherwise, to please refresh themselves with the recent history of US policies supporting leaders belonging to radical nationalist groups, for one or other 'compelling' reason." Some praise of the US is

also inevitably due. “We hope the US, while welcoming the prime minister of India to Washington, would stand by its commitment to support plural liberal democracies.”

The other major vindication for Modi was an unstated, but clear, commitment by the US to advance the prime minister’s agenda at home. It was here that the US on its part used all their levers of power to make the visit productive. The US trade representative, Michael Froman, is known to froth at the mouth whenever India is mentioned because of New Delhi’s policies at the World Trade Organization. But even Froman was willing to give the Modi dispensation another chance, so to speak, with his presence at a reception for the prime minister hosted by the US-India Business Council. It is said here that he was persuaded to attend the reception by the commerce secretary, Penny Pritzker. The two officials arrived together at the reception.

For those who insist that unlike Modi’s Japan visit and the India visit of the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, the US was tight-fisted with investments, here is what happened. Neither the Obama administration nor the US Congress can persuade anyone to invest in a foreign country. Xi can do that in China. In Japan, there is an incestuous relationship between the government and business. But the fact is that at the USIBC reception, it was announced that the organization had identified over \$41 billion for investment in India from its members over the next two to three years. That figure is based on a survey of only 20 per cent of USIBC’s membership. It is clear that the best is yet to come in Indo-US relations from Modi’s visit.

ECONOMIC TIMES, OCT 8, 2014

The Asian quartet of India, Japan, Indonesia and China gain prominence on global stage

By Rajeev Deshpande

The lure of mutual prosperity and common perceptions on security and terrorism can provide a powerful rationale for ascendant Asian leaders

SINGAPORE: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's success in drawing wide attention to his US visit has sparked renewed interest in the rise of an Asian quartet of "nationalist" growth-oriented leaders capable of refashioning national and regional identities.

As leaders of the world's three most populous countries, Modi, China's Xi Jinping and Indonesian President-elect Joko Widodo (Jokowi) are a new cast of characters on the global stage along with Japan's Shinzo Abe.

Seen as clear-eyed leaders committed to agendas that mash unapologetic nationalism and economic growth that, despite the seeming contradiction, is free of protectionist dogma, the Asian quartet is generating a lively buzz.

Talk of an "Asian century" has waxed and waned despite a large consensus among historians and economists that the balance is clearly tilting towards Asia in tandem with a relative — and fairly gradual — decline in US power.

Despite handicaps at home and significant disputes between their nations, the emergence of a set of popular and charismatic Asian leaders long after the heydays of the non-aligned movement is seen as a tantalizing prospect.

In a recent article, Suvi Dogra of the International Institute of Strategic Studies and Jun Jie Woo of Singapore University of Technology and Design noted that despite regional tensions and confrontations, political and economic interdependencies are also increasing.

The lure of mutual prosperity and common perceptions on security and terrorism can provide a powerful rationale for ascendant Asian leaders to secure better deals on environment and trade at global fora.

Commentators like Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy dean Kishore Mahbubani have pointed to the unusual coincidence of the ascent of Modi, Xi and Jokowi at a time when western economies seem unable to snap out of a post-2008 stupor.

The possibility of more intra-Asian trade seems increasingly attractive and despite the political and diplomatic headaches over border intrusions, [India](#) and [China](#) have much at stake in a likely convergence on Afghanistan.

JUDICIARY

STATESMAN, OCT 9, 2014

SC declines to fix cooling-off period for retired judges

New Delhi, 8 October: The Supreme Court today declined to fix any cooling-off period for judges to take up government assignments after retirement, in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) which was filed after former Chief Justice of India P Sathasivam took governorship soon after his tenure ended.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice H L Dattu dismissed the PIL seeking its direction for stipulating cooling-off period for retired judges and restraining governments from appointing retired judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts to any post without the consultation and concurrence of the Chief Justice of India or the Chief Justices of the High Courts.

The Public Interest Litigation was filed by Mohammed Ali who pleaded that it is necessary to pass an order regarding this to protect the integrity of the judiciary.

The petitioner has submitted that there is no provision for the issue as such in the Constitution as the Constitution makers had not expected that a retired Chief Justice of India would accept any post offered by the government.

Justice Dattu's predecessor, Justice R M Lodha, however, on his last day in office had opined that there should be a cooling-off period of two years for judges and said he will not take up any government assignment during the period. Sns

LIBRARIES

HINDU, OCT 9, 2014

Building libraries, rack by rack, book by book

KAVITA KISHORE

The student volunteers are also building their own bookshelves

If you have books that your children have outgrown or don't need anymore and are wondering what to do with them, the students of IIT-Madras have a solution — donate them to the needy.

The Pledge a Book Project, which started a couple of months ago, is building libraries for the underprivileged.

The students have tied up with different NGOs to help them set up bookshelves and libraries. Their first library was established through Avanti Fellows, an NGO that trains students for IIT-JEE. Around 100 JEE-related books were donated to the organisation and the students also supplied bookshelves. The team is collecting books from anyone who is willing to donate.

“Most people have some books that they do not use anymore. Whether they are IIT-JEE reference books or novels, there are people who need them,” Shubham Jain, a student volunteer said.

Once they collect the books, they sort them and then determine where to set up libraries based on the category. To save costs, the students are also building their own bookshelves at the Center for Innovation workshop.

“Many of the children's reference books will go to the IDF's Bal Gurukuls. We are also willing to tie up with any NGO that requires books for adults or children,” Romil Shah, another volunteer said.

Pledge A Book was initially started as part of IIT-Madras' technical festival Shaastra 2015, but now, the project's volunteers are planning to take it further.

“In the days to come, we also plan to start a programme that promotes reading among communities. In the future, we hope to establish libraries in different neighbourhoods. We are also looking for corporate support,” he said.

The Pledge a Book project is also supported by UNESCO. For further details contact shubham@shaastra.org.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

FINANCIAL EXPRESS, OCT 9, 2014

Municipal bodies can raise funds from mkts

SUMMARYThe government on Wednesday said the municipal bodies can raise funds from the market..

The government on Wednesday said the municipal bodies can raise funds from the market to develop smart city projects sans private sector participation. The urban local bodies (ULBs) have been told to introduce reforms to generate additional revenue, putting revenue-generating public services online, for instance. This would improve their credit-worthiness.

Urban development secretary Shankar Aggarwal said cities had the option to raise funds for infrastructure on their own without private participation by issuing municipal bonds. Even in such cases, the Centre will provide viability gap funding (VGF) similar to that under the JNNURM — 40% VGF for cities in plains and 90% VGF for hills.

The actual quantum of the VGF to be provided is yet to be decided, he added. Aggarwal, however, said the cities must comply with the provisions required to issue municipal bonds, like a double-entry accounting system and the bonds need to be rated by credit rating agencies.

"We should be able to identify smart city project in a month or so," Aggarwal said.

The move is significant as the government has been banking heavily on private investment for smart city projects and is buoyed by the interest shown in the projects so far. "There is a tremendous interest generated over the project and now every city wants to become part of the project," Aggarwal said.

Apart from the state capitals and Union territories, satellite towns of megacities with a population in excess of 4 million will be considered for the project.

The government had announced in the annual Budget a mega-project to develop 100 smart cities with modern amenities. Smart City entails facilities like continuous water supply, modern sewage system, solid-waste management and infrastructure development and other advanced facilities. The total estimate of investment for providing these services is estimated to be around Rs 7.5 lakh crore over 20 years which means it requires Rs 35,000 crore in a year.

MINORITY GROUPS

ASIAN AGE, OCT 9, 2014

Skills institute for minorities

In a move to enhance the employability of young people belonging to the minorities, the Narendra Modi government has decided to set up a national-level skill development institute exclusively for them. Announcing this, minority affairs minister Najma Heptulla said the institute would train people in specialisations where the demand is likely to rise in evolving economic conditions to aid employment prospects.

The minister said the government will soon set up the Maulana Azad National Academy for Skills (MANAS), that will serve as a specialised vehicle to impart and upgrade skill development for the minorities.

Inaugurating the annual meet of the State Channelising Agencies of the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC), the minister said the academy will be based in New Delhi.

“This is an ambitious project focusing at providing skills, training and upgradation in those sectors of the economy in which there is shortage of these specialisations or demand is likely to emerge in future. It will help people find gainful employment or self-employment,” she added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has frequently stressed on the need for skill development of youth to deal with the challenge of unemployment. NMDFC will ensure concession on credit flows to those who have undergone training and want to either set up or expand their own businesses for self-employment, an official statement said. MANAS will act as a link between the demand for skills and the need for soft loans to boost employment.

POLICE

TIMES OF INDIA, OCT 15, 2014

Guwahati to host national meet of DGPs on Nov 21

[Prabin Kalita](#)

Guwahati: The annual national conference of director generals of police (DGP) of all states has been shifted, for the first time, outside New Delhi and will be held in Guwahati on November 21 and 22.

This is one of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's many decentralization measures and security experts are happy that the northeast has been finally given importance.

The conference, which will be attended by heads of all the intelligence agencies of the country, will be inaugurated by Modi, while home minister Rajnath Singh is likely to attend it on the concluding day.

"The national policy of the country's police force as a whole will be discussed at the conference," state home secretary GD Tripathi told TOI.

"We are very excited to host the national conference of the police chiefs here for the first time. This will give the region its much needed importance and give us an opportunity to test our system and preparedness for holding such high-level security meetings. This will also boost the morale of Assam Police," Tripathi added.

Formed in 1826, the Assam Police are perhaps the only state police force in the country which have been fighting multiple militancy along with frequent ethnic violence.

With the militancy checked, the state police are now facing newer threats in the form of naxalism and jehadi elements. According to its official web site, the state police have successfully busted the ISI-sponsored Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) module in the state and arrested 47 HuM cadres.

The website says the silent intrusion of CPI (Maoist) into the state in the early part of the last decade has posed a new challenge before the state police. "Though the outfit is in a nascent stage, the police have pursued an offensive policy against these entrants in the law and order scenario as a result of which the outfit could not extend its area of influence."

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

STATESMAN, OCT 9, 2014

Public, media and corruption

Rajinder Puri

Possibly there is a huge gap between the public and media analysts regarding their respective perceptions about corruption. Newspaper editorials and columnists waxed eloquent about the recent fates of Ms Jayalalithaa and Mr. Om Prakash Chautala who are both battling corruption cases. Media showered praise on governments and judges for their roles in dealing with both cases. Undoubtedly the Judge who delivered his sentence on the case of Ms Jayalalithaa acquitted himself with courage and integrity which invited media's well deserved praise. This led commentators to gush that the cause of justice had been served. Similar sentiments are expressed about the arrest of Mr. Om Prakash Chautala. However the public does not see things quite the same way.

The media is impressed by single events and concludes that justice is being served. The public views the overall context and concludes that politically motivated ends are being served. The public is aware that compared to Ms. Jayalalithaa there would be over fifty leaders with corruption and criminal charges as or more damaging against them who continue to bask in comfort. Nothing is being done against them. The Judge refused Ms. Jayalithaa bail although the prosecution did not oppose it. The Judge indicated that corruption was a serious issue and granting bail would send the wrong message. Mr. Amit Shah's murder charge is not serious while he continues to successfully extend his bail?

The public is aware that of all leaders in Haryana Mr. Om Prakash Chautala may be the least corrupt. The mega corrupt land deals in Haryana involve political leaders including a member of the Congress party's ruling dynasty. These are not being adequately probed. Instead a government official attempting to pursue the cases in the line of duty was harassed and victimized. During the poll campaign the PM lashed out at the Haryana government for finalizing Mr. Vadra's land deals before the poll. But why is the central government paralyzed to act against a land deal of Mr. Vadra's associates across the road from Rashtrapati Bhawan land which imperils national security? Mr. Modi's government has failed to act even though the Rashtrapati Bhawan authorities raised objections against the deal! The public is not blind to these events. The media therefore is bowled over by a micro view. The public is disgusted by its macro view. Whether this surmise is correct will be tested when the two leaders facing corruption cases next face voters. It may take time before Ms. Jayalalithaa's standing among voters is tested in elections. But whether Mr. Chautala will be decimated by his electoral protagonists, including Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi who is vigorously campaigning against him will be known within this month. The results need to be watched. Only after that should media analysts finally decide whether the cause of justice

has been served. If corruption of one or two politically inconvenient leaders is exposed while that of many others is deliberately overlooked has the cause of justice been served? The public may not think so.

STATESMAN, OCT 15, 2014

UK Parliament votes to recognise Palestine

PM David Cameron and other government leaders abstained from the vote

British lawmakers have voted in favor of recognizing Palestine as a state, a symbolic move intended to increase pressure for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Legislators in the House of Commons voted 274 to 12 to support a motion calling on the British government to “recognize the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.” Prime Minister David Cameron and other government leaders abstained, and more than half of the 650 Commons members did not participate in the vote. But the motion had support from both government and opposition lawmakers, who said it could help kick-start the peace process following a summer war in Gaza that claimed the lives of more than 2,100 Palestinians, the majority civilians, and more than 70 Israelis, most of them soldiers.

Labour Party legislator Grahame Morris said recognizing a Palestinian state could help break the impasse in peace negotiations before it was too late. Otherwise, he said, “any hope of a two-state solution, the only viable solution, will have disappeared altogether.”

Conservative lawmaker Nicholas Soames, grandson of World War II Prime Minister Winston Churchill, said that “to recognize Palestine is both morally right and is in our national interest.”

The government said the vote would not change Britain's official diplomatic stance. Middle East Minister Tobias Ellwood said the UK would recognize Palestinian statehood when it would help bring about peace.

In 2012 the United Nations General Assembly voted to recognize a state of Palestine on territories captured by Israel in 1967. But the United States and many European countries have not followed suit.

But Western politicians have expressed frustration with Israel's continued settlement-building on West Bank land the Palestinians want for a future state. Earlier this month Sweden's new Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said his government would recognize the state of Palestine, an announcement that drew praise from Palestinian officials and criticism from Israel.

Israel today rejected the vote by the British parliament to recognise Palestinian statehood, saying the move undermines prospects of peace between the two sides. Reacting to the development, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Tzachi Hanegbi said that the vote in the British parliament will not help the Palestinians have a state. "This won't work. No Israeli government will accept significant risks in Judea and Samaria without a treaty. The Palestinians are not holding real negotiations and they're losing time," Hanegbi told the Army Radio.

The deputy foreign minister called upon the Palestinian leadership to act like former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and former Jordanian king Hussein and analyse the needs and risks of each side in trying to reach a compromise. Israel's Foreign Ministry said that the vote undermines chances for peace because Palestinian statehood should result only from talks with Israel.

RAILWAYS

HINDUSTAN TIMES, OCT 8, 2014

Railway bending rules, standards for PM Modi's plan Srinand Jha

In its zeal to implement Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet scheme of increasing speeds of passenger trains, the railways is bending the railways design and standards organisation (RDSO)-established standards on passenger safety.

As per RDSO guidelines, rail tracks that weigh a minimum of 60 kg per metre must "mandatorily" be provided for running trains at speeds of 160 kmph.

RDSO also sets preconditions for installation of thick web switches at facing points and construction of boundary walls at critical locations on nine existing tracks identified for semi high speeds. The ministry's infrastructure directorate issued directions to the western railways on September 5 to conduct trials on upgrading speeds to 160 kmph on tracks that weigh only 52 kg per metre, documents available with HT show. The railway board letter makes no mention on the need to install thick web switches and says that "sturdy fencing" can be provided for - "depending on local conditions".

The letter also states that installation of train protection warning systems (TPWS) on tracks identified for running semi high speeds "shall not be considered mandatory".

The railway board missive was in connection with the proposed semi high speed plan for the Virar-Ahmedabad section of the western railways. In its letter of September 11, the western railways has sought several clarifications on the directive.

"Train speeds will have to be gradually raised to 110, 130 and 160 kmph. Alongside, the railways will either have to take measures to upgrade tracks, or will need to request the RDSO to take a re-look their safety norms. Administrative sanction (to semi high speeds) is one thing and ground realities are quite another", railway board chairman Arunendra Kumar told HT.

BUSINESS STANDARD, OCT 8, 2014

Railways to get income boost via premium tatkal pricing

The move may bring in an additional income of Rs 300 cr, if the experiment proves to be a success

With losses from passenger operations crossing Rs 26,000 crore in FY14, the Indian [Railways](#) is trying to generate some extra money by selling 50 per cent of the tatkal tickets under dynamic pricing model on select routes. The move would bring in an additional income of Rs 300 crore, if the experiment proves to be a success, senior Railway officials said.

Under this model, ticket prices vary according to demand. The Railways already run premium trains at 30 routes, whose base fare starts from the tatkal fare and at the peak of the demand, it competes with the air fares.

About 20 popular routes across the country are identified where half of the tatkal tickets would be sold through premium pricing. The routes include Delhi-Mumbai, Delhi-Patna, and Chennai Central-Ahmedabad.

The zonal divisions of the Railways have been asked to come up with a plan for phase-wise rolling out of the scheme. The move is expected to boost the revenue generation of cash-strapped Railways by up to 40 per cent on these routes. About 15 per cent of the reserved category tickets are tatkal tickets, which make up for five per cent of income from the passenger operations.

In FY14, the Railways yielded Rs 1,298 crore through tatkal tickets. About 170,000 seats, of the 1.1 million available, are up for booking under the tatkal scheme.

In December last year, the Railways had conducted a pilot between Delhi and Mumbai for premium trains during the Christmas-New Year rush. It is estimated that the Railways earns Rs 19 lakh from a one-way journey on the Delhi-Mumbai Rajdhani. The earnings were spiked by 43 per cent on a single journey, according to senior Railway Board officials.

In the last financial year, the Railways earned Rs 37,500 crore from passenger operations, while for the first time in many decades, the volume fell one per cent on a year-over-year basis. For FY15, the Railways has set a target of earning at Rs 44,645 crore from passenger operations and it expects a five per cent spike in volume.

In June, the Railways had announced an increase of 14.2 per cent in passenger fares and 6.5 per cent in freight rates. However, the hike in sub-urban passenger fares was withdrawn amidst political pressure, which cost the Railways Rs 670 crore.

TIMES OF INDIA, OCT 9, 2014

Railways invites private players to sell tickets

[Mahendra K Singh](#)

NEW DELHI: Railways has invited private players to sell tickets of both reserved and unreserved category, inviting ire of employee unions.

The unions are crying foul and opposing the move as it has come after the new

dispensation decided to outsource cleaning of 50 major stations and decided to deploy 'Gate Mitras' (counselors) hired by private agencies at unmanned level crossings instead of posting trackmen.

The unions have termed these moves as "back-door" privatization of railway operations.

The stiff resistance came after the Railway Board's directive to allow public-private partnership in the establishment and operation of computerized Passenger Reservation System (PRS)-cum-Unreserved Ticketing System terminals. As of now, all the PRS counters across the country are operated by railway employees while only authorized travel agents are allowed to sell e-tickets.

The new reservation centres would be called Yatri Ticket Suvidha Kendras (YTSK). Railways justify the plan saying the move would help expansion of the facilities for purchase of tickets that would help passengers.

To start with, railways would allow only authorized ticketing agents with five year experience and those who have an office outside the railway station equipped with adequate infrastructure to run the YTSK.

Private players would be given permission to operate up to four terminals on the pattern and standard at par with the computerized PRS centres of Railways.

However, the timings of operations of the terminals have been fixed one hour behind the opening timing of PRS counters with aim to prevent the operators from getting into any malpractice. At railways' run PRS centre the booking of normal tickets opens at 8 am and tatkal booking at 10 am, but privately-operated YTSKs would be allowed to open only at 9 am and 11 am.

The unions argue that in the past also, outsourcing of such activities to private parties has resulted in lots of discrepancies, frauds and public complaints. It said even authorized travel agents were banned for a pretty long time and opening the flood gate to private parties will definitely give a bad name to railways.

A railway official rejected the contention, saying private players would give better ticketing service to rail travelers.

FINANCIAL EXPRESS, OCT 8, 2014

Column: Reforming Railways

[Raghu Dayal](#)

SUMMARYThe need is to transform the Railways from being a departmental undertaking to a corporate entity.

Soon after assuming office in 2004, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh emphasised on restructuring the bureaucracy to improve the country's governance. He set up an administrative reforms commission and remained content ever after. The Modi government, too, has opted to get an MRI for the Railways, knowing well that no other public institution in the country has been studied and analysed as extensively.

Much has been said about Railway Board becoming “unwieldy” as it enunciates policy and implements it too. Doesn't it help policy-making derive the benefit of domain knowledge and realism of people at the helm who also assume responsibility for its implementation? The Railway Board has been an exemplary dual-function administrative model, the highest executive for technical direction and operation of the Railways and as a government department for planning and development of the system.

Following Sir Thomas Robertson's appointment as Special Commissioner for Railways in August 1901—after the post of Director General, Railways and the railway branch of PWD, was abolished—a three member-Railway Board assumed office in March 1905, including a President with “thorough practical knowledge of railway working”. A somewhat modified structure by the Ackworth Committee saw the Chief Commissioner as President of the Board and Secretary to Government along with a Financial Commissioner and three Members assisted by six Directors, in 1947. The post of Chief Commissioner was re-designated Chairman, Railway Board, in 1951.

With Members as ex officio secretaries to the government, the Railway Board has, of late, been far from a well-knit, cohesive corporate group. It doesn't function as a Board must, per force, do for a gigantic commercial entity as the Railways. The present departmental structure results in compartmentalisation and its concomitant ills, including competitive empire-building. Operational silos sap the energy and vitality of the system. The recruitment and training regime for its managerial cadres needs to be overhauled to rid it of the culture of disparate departments. There may be just two streams of officer cadres—one, technical and, the other, general. The departmental representation in the managerial cadres may not go beyond the mid-career level on completion of, say, 15 years of service. While the incumbents at the Board level may not be drawn from, or owe loyalty to, any specific disciplines, they must pass the test of corporate leadership and professional competence, and be given a minimum tenure of three years.

For the present, a possible composition could be a Member each for (i) freight services, (ii) passenger services, (iii) infrastructure (tracks, bridges, buildings, signalling, electrification, (iv) assets including rolling stock, equipment, and real estate, (v) HRD,

including industrial relations, vigilance, safety and security, (vi) finance, including accounts and material management, and (vii) chairman as the CEO for coordination and control, strategic planning, R&D, and external relations. The person at the top has to be a visionary leader with the ability to communicate with political leadership and coping with the challenge of change.

There are too many routine and mundane functions taken up by the Board/Ministry, with over a hundred joint-secretary-and-above level incumbents crowding the Rail Bhawan—the Railways has added layers when it needed to be far flatter. It invests in new technologies and persists with old staffing patterns.

The Railways will be better served if it first used the secateurs to begin shedding half of the gazetted cadres ensconced in Rail Bhawan itself. Large station complexes, major freight depots and centres, maintenance depots and installations may all be endowed with local area managers with delegated authority over all functions. This can be in the same manner that the Chinese Railways followed in March 2005—it streamlined the traditional 4-tiered organisation (analogous to IR's) into a 3-tiered system, thereby abolishing the equivalent of all divisions of IR.

There is little justification for the IR to continue to commit its scarce resources to in-house manufacture of rolling stock and other equipment, when these have failed to modernise and have fallen steadily behind commercially operated alternatives. To start with, let the IR's equipment manufacturing units be corporatised forthwith, preferably with the participation of the private sector. Its moribund R&D outfit is in need of immediate re-orientation and restructuring.

As strongly advocated by the Kakodkar Committee, the top general administration posts of the Railways must be manned only by those who are duly battle-inoculated, exposed to the rigours of operations and interactions with customers. There may be a rigorous selection process for officers from different disciplines to be in the general administration pool. For objectivity and transparency, a standing selection panel will need to be appointed, with an acknowledged HRD expert, another one from business/industry, one from academia, besides a senior railway officer.

The Railways needs to be freed from the whims and caprice of policy-makers. Most of the ministers in charge have viewed the Railways as a fiefdom. The rail budget has no rationale in today's public finance. The IR will be served well by an independent regulator for defining and safeguarding its commercial interests alongside those of its customers. An advisory council with representation from business leaders, reputed

academicians and professionals should be put in place for advice on investment and suggesting business plans.

The IR must shed the ambivalence inherent in its perceived role of a departmental undertaking with a public service obligation and, instead, have an unambiguous commitment to being a corporate entity. Today, the IR carries just 30% of country's freight and 10% of its passenger traffic. It carries these dwindling volumes even as the overall offering keeps growing. It should focus on clear goals—the creation of adequate capacity, generation of substantial investible surpluses, optimal pricing and substantial downsizing.

A rational and viable fare and freight structure is an imperative. Freight transport costs have been falling the world over; rail freight charges in the country also need to be brought down for the IR to assume the role of a leading logistics solutions-provider. All its high density arterial corridors remain clogged. Rail freight is the very life-blood of the economy. Most expert bodies have argued for IR to achieve an optimal 50% share in country's freight market by end of the 15th Plan. It needs to create a critical mass for retail freight, in partnership with others.

The IR must rationalise its passenger services as a line of business, separate from freight, and leave the management of the suburban/intra-city services, regional services and other short-distance segments to an autonomous corporate entity under its overall umbrella as well as the container-freight business. The IR needs to substantially expand and modernise its infrastructure, stations, pre-board and on-board services. It must upgrade well ahead of the completion of the exclusive freight corridors to ensure 10-12-hour journeys on the 1,500 km Delhi-Mumbai/Delhi-Kolkata Rajdhani, as envisaged fifty years ago.

The IR, the iconic Goliath, has steadily forfeited its pre-eminence in country's transport business. It needs to recover fast and learn to sprint again; just jogging, if at all, will keep it where it is. It generates just 1% of the country's GDP; its potential and the expectations of its stakeholders demand it should be aiming for at least double that—a huge task in an expanding economy. If duly nurtured and wisely led, it will bounce back, like China Rail which lagged IR; but in just 25 years, China has gone far ahead and emerged world's numero uno.

The author was the first MD of the Container Corporation of India Ltd

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ASIAN AGE, OCT 10, 2014

21,729 Indians submit names to be sent into space: Nasa

Over 2.8 lakh people from around the world, including 21,729 Indians, have so far submitted their names to be inscribed on a Nasa microchip that will eventually fly to Mars.

Nasa is giving people a chance to shoot their names up into space on the first Orion mission, scheduled to launch December 4, and then eventually to the Red Planet.

Currently, 2,80,429 people have submitted their names to fly into space.

The highest number of names submitted to Nasa so far from a single country, a total of 1,13,121, comes from the USA while the third-largest submission of names is from India, with 21,729 space enthusiasts from the nation giving their names.

Other countries with high participation include UK (22,491 names), Philippines (9,869 names) and Canada (7,760 names). Currently, only 1,828 names have been submitted from China and 1,620 from Pakistan.

The collected names will be included on a microchip the size of a dime. The first trip will be on board Nasa's initial test flight for the new Orion spacecraft.

It is set for a 4.5-hour mission in orbit around Earth. It will then take a flying leap back through the atmosphere and land in the Pacific Ocean, "cnet.com" reported.

Orion spacecraft is designed to one day carry astronauts on long missions to visit asteroids and Mars.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

STATESMAN, OCT 15, 2014

Bengal protests 'clean' circular

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee today accused the Narendra Modi government of “conspiring” to damage the federal character of the country's Constitution by its “unilateral” actions bypassing the state government, while state education minister Partha Chatterjee said the latest instance of the Centre's “undemocratic” action was its circular on the Swacch Bharat programme.

Miss Banerjee asserted the Centre's “arrogance” reminded the people of the days of Emergency clamped by Indira Gandhi.

Mr Chatterjee said the Centre was “deliberately bypassing the chief secretary and directly issuing notifications to the district magistrates.'It issued notification on the implementation of the “Swacch Bharat ” project to DMs .

“We are astonished to notice that the chief secretary didn't receive any such notification,' the minister said. “Earlier, too, we noticed the same thing as the ministry of human resource development issued notice on celebration of Guru Utsav on Teachers' Day to the state education department bypassing the chief secretary,' he said. The CM posted in Facebook account: “Surprisingly, now-a-days, it is noticed that the BJP through its different networks is continuously engaged in making irresponsible comments, unparliamentary utterances and persistent character assassinations, where even women are not spared.”

She stated in politics, “ethics, mannerisms and domain knowledge are key essentials.” Mr Chatterjee said, people of Bengal had stood up against mis-governance. “They drove out those who wanted to create disturbance through their mandate. Love for motherland should come first before allegiance to politics or political parties.”

German Aid for India

New Delhi, 14 October: Germany has agreed to provide 4 million Euros and services of international experts to help the Indian govt in effective implementation of sanitation programmes in urban areas of the country. India and Germany signed to this effect an ‘Implementation Agreement on Support to National Urban Sanitation Policy’ today. The technical cooperation agreement assumes significance in the context of the ‘Swachh Bharat Mission’.

ECONOMIC TIMES, OCT 11, 2014

Belgaum to be renamed as Belagavi

Maharashtra moved SC on boundary row with Karnataka maintaining its stand that Mahajan Commission report which says Belgaum is part of state is final.

BANGALORE: [Karnataka government](#) today decided to rename Belgaum as Belagavi and an official announcement in this regard will be made on November one, the state formation day, Chief Minister [Siddaramaiah](#) said today.

Belgaum is in Karnataka but Maharashtra claims that it should belong to it.

Siddaramaiah made the announcement after a meeting of leaders of political parties, Kannada litterateurs and various organisations in connection with the case on the boundary row between Maharashtra and Karnataka pending before the Supreme Court.

Maharashtra has moved the [Supreme Court](#) on the boundary row with Karnataka maintaining its consistent stand that the [Mahajan Commission](#) report which says Belgaum is part of the state is final.

Siddaramaiah said the meeting decided that a review petition should be filed in the apex court stating that preliminary issues should be decided first before the recording of evidence in the boundary row case.

He also stressed that according to Article 3 and 4 of the Constitution, parliament is supreme and it is the only forum to decide on issues of such nature (as boundary).

The government has also opposed the setting up of 44 Marathi schools in [Jat](#) taluk of Sangli district of Maharashtra where a majority of Kannada-speaking people reside, Siddaramaiah said.