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CIVIL SERVICE

INDIAN EXPRESS, SEP 9, 2014

Secys told to ensure Cabinet notes are free of ‘defects’

[Raghvendra Rao](#)

Pointing out that some of the Cabinet notes being received by the Cabinet Secretariat were “procedurally deficient” and lacked the “desired standard and quality” in their content, Cabinet Secretary Ajit Seth has shot off a missive to all secretaries asking them to ensure that “personal attention is given to preparation and finalisation” of Cabinet notes “so as to ensure that defect-free notes only are forwarded” to the Cabinet Secretariat and the Prime Minister’s Office.

Seth has asked the secretaries to ensure that the “defect-free notes” also have the necessary approvals in accordance with the laid down procedures.

“The approval paragraph in some cases is not self-contained, and in some cases includes a reference to preceding paragraphs, the contents of which are not meant for approval,” Seth’s sharply-worded missive states.

“Similarly, inter-ministerial consultations are sometimes not undertaken with all concerned, and in some cases, the gist of such consultation is not brought out in the main note. Especially on the points of difference, the sponsoring Ministry/Department should bring out their view with sound justification/reasoning,” the letter adds.

Underlining that “deficient notes cause considerable inconvenience to the Council of Ministers and in some cases lead to delay in decision-making,” Seth asked the secretaries to “advise” the officers’ association with preparing Cabinet notes to “closely go through the instructions and handbook on writing Cabinet notes”.

“They may also be nominated to attend one-day workshops organised by the Institute of Secretariat Training and Management on the subject,” the communication states.

Seth’s letter also states that a set of instructions have been compiled and is available to ensure “the notes are conceptually clear, lucid and well-organised and facilitate smooth decision making during Cabinet deliberations”.

“However, it is matter of concern that some of the notes that are being received in this secretariat are not only procedurally deficient but content-wise too, lack the desired standard and quality,” the Cabinet Secretary has written.

PIONEER, SEP 15, 2014

TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

19 IAS OFFICERS MISSING IN ACTION

Elite babus abscond; Centre, States clueless about missing cadre

This Indian mystery can easily make part of an episode on Ripley's Believe It or Not! Almost 19 officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and two of the Indian Police Service (IPS) belonging to various State cadres have been missing for ages and shockingly, neither the Centre nor the States have any clue about their whereabouts.

Most of these civil servants went abroad on study leave or some official assignments and never returned. Although it requires painstaking efforts to get into the hallowed cadre, but once there, it seems that a recruit can choose not to attend office for several years! Apparently, he or she can calmly go on a foreign jaunt, join a private sector bank, or simply go incommunicado! What is even more baffling is the fact that the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and State Government are just clueless about the whereabouts of the officers who have been untraceable for years.

The officers who are missing include Namita Dutta (AGMUT, 1991), Amit Kumar Jain (Sikkim, 1991), Sanjay Agarwal (Maharashtra, 1996), Jyotsna Verma (Jharkhand, 1992), KC Mishra (Bihar, 1977), Prashant (West Bengal, 1988), LV Nilesh (Maharashtra, 1991), LV Prasad (AGMUT cadre IPS 1997) Puneet Arora (AGMUT cadre IPS 1997), Shishir Priyadarshi (UP, 1980), Atul Bagai (UP, 1983), Rita Singh (UP, 1997), Alok Khare (Assam-Meghalaya, 1992), Rahul Anand (Himachal Pradesh, 1996), Amitabh Mukherjee (West Bengal, 1983), Saroj Kumar Jha (Odisha, 1990), Cherry Malik (Bihar, 2004), AK Tiwari (Maharashtra, 1990), Raj Kamal (Karnataka, 1989) and Sanjay Bhatia (UP 1990), Anil Yadav (MP, 1999).

Despite the fact these officers have gone on unauthorised leave for several years, no action has been initiated against them by the competent authority. The authorities have failed to initiate any penal action against these truant bureaucrats. This flies in the face of the administrative reforms that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has initiated.

The unmistakable irony is that their records are dutifully maintained by the DoPT under the PMO but nobody knows where they are. They have neither been debarred from Central deputation nor can they be denied permission to rejoin active duty when they turn up after several years of 'self-induced coma', said a top official pleading anonymity.

Significantly, the DoPT has recently written to all the State Governments asking them to update it about the current status of these officials.

"The DoPT wants the State Governments to provide it with the complete details of the current stations of these missing officials. It also wants to know what steps were taken to get them back to the cadre," sources in the DoPT said.

According to DoPT officials, Namita Datta, a 1991 batch officer of AGMUT, had gone missing since 2006. She had gone to join the United Nations on an assignment as Governance Advisor, World Bank Washington but never returned.

She had worked in the capacity of Joint Secretary (Home) with the Delhi Government, Additional Secretary to Lieutenant-Governor. Considered to be a very bright officer, she is untraceable now. Even her batchmates cannot recollect her last appearance.

Take the case of Amit Kumar Jain, who belongs to the Sikkim cadre of the IAS 1991 batch, but has been missing from his job since 2003. Shockingly, even after ten years, no

action has been taken against him. His record sheet simply states, 'Absent since 2003'. Alok Khare of the 1992 Assam-Meghalaya cadre has been absent since 2009 and his record sheet is more or less on the same lines as that of Amit Kumar Jain.

The case of Shishir Priyadarshi, a 1980 batch IAS officer is even more interesting. He left on a foreign posting and despite the expiry of his tenure of posting, he has not returned or communicated with the State Government. His application for leave was not accepted in 2008 and he has been absent since then.

Atul Bagai, a 1983 batch officer has been away since 1995. Some say that he has also taken up a foreign assignment and is in Bangkok. Sanjay Bhatia, a 1990 batch officer who is also believed to have taken up an assignment with a foreign institution, has not bothered to inform the State Government about his whereabouts. Rita Singh, a 1997 batch officer, has also not been reporting for work without taking leave from the competent authority.

Rahul Anand of the 1996 batch, however, takes the cake along with LV Nilesh, 1991 Maharashtra and Anil Yadav 1999 MP. Rahul's last posting was as District Collector, Hamirpur in 2005 and since then he has been on extended study leave during which he took a degree from Harvard University before joining the International Monetary Fund. Nilesh, in fact, got his name changed to Nilesh Londhe and joined Microsoft. Yadav's whereabouts are not known for the last ten years.

Puneet Arora the 1997 batch IPS officer of AGMUT cadre was last posted in North district as Additional DCP-II in 2004. He proceeded on study leave to the US and is said to be working there. Arora never resigned or informed the MHA and according to one of his batchmates, "He is very much in the service and also out of it".

According to Rule 7 (2) of IAS Leave Rules: "A member of the Service shall be deemed to have resigned from the service if he/she is absent without authorisation for a period exceeding one year from the date of expiry of sanctioned leave or permission, or is absent from duty for a continuous period exceeding five years, or continues in foreign service beyond the period approved."

However, it seems that for these deserters the rulebook has been set aside. "It is incumbent upon the Government of the day to take notice and initiate punitive measures against them," said another official who does not want to be identified.

HINDU, SEP 14, 2014

State may go in for recruitment freeze

Mani says creation of new vacancies has to be discussed at the Cabinet-level

Finance Minister K.M. Mani has said that the government will go in for a recruitment freeze in the State.

Delivering his keynote address at the State conference of the Assistant Vehicle Inspectors Association here on Saturday, Mr. Mani said the Cabinet had already taken a decision not to create new vacancies during the current financial year. The Finance Department had decided not to sanction any new vacancies this year.

This recommendation was approved by the Cabinet, he said.

He made it clear that the creation of new vacancies had to be discussed at the Cabinet-level, since the expenditure on salary and related matters would register corresponding increase.

The Finance Minister dropped a hint that the future of nine Regional Transport Offices and the creation of vacancies there off were hanging fire.

“If we can augment an additional Rs.100-crore from the motor vehicle sector, we can think of the issue of nine offices and creation of new vacancies,” Mr. Mani said.

He took a dig at the Public Works Department and said that out of the 1.65-lakh-km of roads in the State, only 20 per cent was really motorable.

Steps had to be initiated to make these roads accident-free, he said.

Inaugurating the meeting, Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan, Minister for Transport and Forests, said strict action should be initiated against erring drivers.

Special search

He directed the Motor Vehicles Department (MVD) officials to make special search to find out whether the bus employees were wearing name plates.

The Minister assured the employees that the government would give all encouragement to those who discharged their duty in a commendable manner.

BUSINESS STANDARD, SEP 9, 2014

Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurates meeting of Principal Secretaries of General Administration Departments (GAD)/Personnel Departments

Dr. Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences and MoS in Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Space & Atomic Energy inaugurated the meeting of Principal Secretaries of General Administration Departments (GAD)/Personnel Departments here today which provides an opportunity for face-to-face interaction for achievement of common goals in periodic meaningful dialogue between States and the Centre.

Dr. [Jitendra Singh](#) laid stress on the need of having transparent, objective, responsive and responsible administration for formulation and implementation of policies and programmes for the general public. He highlighted the initiative taken by the present government at the centre by way of simplification of procedure, practices, rules,

replacement of affidavits by self certification, increased use of [information technology](#) etc., to achieve this shared objective. The goal will have to be providing citizen- centric work practices, procedures and policies in personnel management by appropriately leveraging technology.

During the meeting besides the issues of overall improvement in the governance, periodic administrative issues concerning state governments and DOPT like cadre review of IAS, promotion of State Service Officers to IAS, fixation of seniority of promotee IAS officers, officers on inter cadre deputation, reward policies in case of outstanding performance, setting up of additional CBI Courts for speedy disposal of cases, issues relating to training of officers of All India Services/ Central Services and State Services etc. were discussed with the representatives of the State Governments.

The status of training measures taken by different state governments was reviewed. The programmes and assistance available from Central Government was explained to participants. Shri Sanjay Kothari, Secretary (Personnel) emphasized capacity building of Group C employees which constitutes the bulk of bureaucracy and impacts the effectiveness most. States were encouraged to come up with innovative ideas of training Group C employees for achieving higher level of governance.

During the course of deliberation, the Central Government took due note of the various proactive policy initiatives and measures under taken by various state governments like implementation of e-office where 90% of the Secretariat work in Odisha is done through e-office, abolition of affidavits as a reform measure by the government of Punjab, issuance of caste certificate by the Government of West Bengal at school level, Human Resource Management by Government of Gujarat, training of cutting edge functionaries by Governments of Bihar and Assam etc., which have helped in further simplification of government procedures, increased use of IT etc, to make the administration more responsive and citizen centric.

ECONOMIC TIMES, SEP 10, 2014

Jitendra Singh urges retired personnel to work for government in some way

By [Aman Sharma](#)

NEW DELHI: "Oldies, stop nagging your wife at home. Instead work for the government in some way." This was the message on Tuesday from [Minister of State for Personnel, Jitendra Singh](#), for nearly 50 lakh retired government officials in the country.

Singh said the [Narendra Modi](#) government wanted to tap expertise of this huge pool of retired government officials so that they can contribute to the country's growth story rather than just sit at home. First of all, he said, the retiring personnel needed pre-

retirement counseling as many are unable to settle into a retired life after years of active service.

"It is a big, big shock for him. A retiring official is given a good farewell in the evening, his car is pushed by the entire department but the next morning, the Ambassador does not turn up and the driver does not turn up. So he is left with nothing but nagging his wife and causing nuisance for his grand-children, if he has any. Many senior retired officers forget to close the doors of their cars after retirement as someone else was doing it for 30 years," Singh said on Tuesday. He added that such a retired official's family also turns "captive at home" after his retirement.

"The family earlier knew the old man has to get up at 8 AM, get ready and push off and would be back at 6 PM...the daughter-in-law was relieved. So instead of nagging your wife, creating a nuisance at home or keeping your family captive at home, oldies can help the government by working for us in some way. It will be cost-effective for government too as we do not need to pay the same salary," Singh said.

ET was the first to report on June 24 that the Modi government has prepared a concept paper to help retiring employees "transit smoothly to their 2nd Innings" and bring together groups of like-minded pensioners and the ministries which are looking for concurrent audit or evaluation of development schemes being implemented across the country.

Singh said on Tuesday that the government needed the experience of its retired officials and will engage them in some way. One of the suggestions in the concept paper made by government is to use them for evaluation of development schemes being implemented across the country.

CONSUMERS

ECONOMIC TIMES, SEP 11, 2014

Government plans Consumer Protection Authority to protect consumers from unfair trade practices

By Deepshikha Sikarwar & Madhvi Sally

The Narendra Modi government has decided to create an agency similar to the US Federal Trade Commission, known as the Consumer Protection Authority.

NEW DELHI: India will allow consumers to take class action against goods or services providers as part of the new stringent regime likely to be in place by next year to empower buyers.

The [Narendra Modi](#) government has decided to create an agency similar to the [US Federal Trade Commission](#), known as the Consumer Protection Authority, to protect Indian consumers from unfair trade practices and ensure faster resolution of grievances.

Food minister Ram Vilas Paswan on Wednesday said the proposed authority will have executive and investigative powers. "A number of provisions from online filing of complaints, speedy disposal of consumer disputes, concept of mediation process will be introduced to settle disputes in 30 days," he said, referring to the proposed amendments to the [Consumer Protection Act](#) 1986.

A senior consumer affairs ministry official said, "There has been a growing feeling that consumers do not get quick redressal and framework available is lagging behind. There is also a need align the framework in line with global best practices and new business practices that have cropped up."

The authority would also be able to take up cases such as [Saradha](#) deposit scheme to protect classes of investors, also consumers, if they have been duped by a fly-by-night operator.

The ministry of consumer affairs will move a proposal to the cabinet for amendment of the law that would create the authority to protect consumers against unfair trade practices by September end, the official said. The Consumer Protection Act was passed in 1986. "We are keen that bill is taken up in the winter session of the Parliament," the official said.

The authority would be able to take suo motu action and order 'recall, refund and return' of a product if it affects a group of consumers.

Class action suits have been used by consumers in the US and many European countries are also emulating by amending consumer laws. The new law will also have provision for punitive damages without limit, along lines of the US consumer redressal framework.



India does not have a provision for mandatory mass recall of products though some companies have voluntarily done so. The amendments to the law that came into being in 1986 also takes into account the changes in business environment and the emergence of ecommerce delivery platforms leaving consumers vulnerable.

Comprehensive changes proposed to the consumer protection law also include inclusion of a product liability clause that will entitle any consumer to damages irrespective of a civil contract if a product has caused physical, mental, emotional inconvenience. It will cover all aspects of a consumer's dealing with a product including misleading advertisements.

The government is also proposing to allow non-advocates to plead before district consumer forums.

To reform the working of these courts that have a large number of cases pending, the government is proposing to allow only one appeal against a forum's order. Besides, the government is also looking to empower itself to oversee the working of consumer courts to bring efficiency in the delivery of justice to an affected consumer. As many as 15,000 cases are pending at the national commission, including some as old as 17 years.

The industry is supportive but has concerns over some changes, for which the [Confederation of Indian Industry](#) (CII) grouping has given a detailed representation.

"CII is working with the government in the development of robust and practical legislation which safeguards the interests of both consumers and legitimate business," said Kurush Grant, chairman, [CII](#) FMCG Committee.

In order to streamline the 623 district consumer courts in the country, it's proposed to make member salaries and allowances uniform, officials said. In October, the bill will be sent to cabinet and we intend to table it in the winter session," said a government official.

Preeti Shah of Ahmedabad's Consumer Education & Research Centre said the

amendments were badly needed. "The most important thing is the concept of product liability which they have added in the bill," she said.

According to her the concept of the [Consumer Protection Authority](#) was innovative and ambitious.

"If government puts the structure in place as has been envisaged, it will be a great fillip to the consumer movement," she said.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

HINDU, SEP 8, 2015

New highways to economic growth

TRIDIVESH SINGH

While economic diplomacy in India has been going on for two decades, Narendra Modi's test is to ensure that the number of States that reach out to the outside world increases, and that sub-regional linkages within South Asia get strengthened through political will

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made two crucial points in the context of India's foreign policy on August 15, during his Independence day address, and August 16, during the inauguration of two important infrastructural projects in Maharashtra.

On Independence Day, Mr. Modi spoke about the need for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries to fight poverty together, rather than being engaged in meaningless conflict. The next day, speaking after the function to lay the foundation stone of the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust special economic zone at Nhava Sheva, he highlighted the need for State governments to become more active in exports and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). "We at the Centre have to team up with the State governments for export promotion and the States should also work hard individually to help drive exports." The Prime Minister also made the point that States should have their own export promotion councils and be more proactive in attracting foreign investment.

Early initiatives

Mr. Modi's statement on August 16 does not come as a surprise as when Chief Minister of Gujarat, he took the lead in reaching out to the outside world, especially to countries in Asia, like China, Japan and Singapore. During his Chief Ministership, not only did he visit these countries, but also began the "Vibrant Gujarat Summit," an annual event to showcase Gujarat's achievements. Diplomats from a large number of countries attended this event, which began in 2003. During the election campaign in 2014, as well, he made some interesting suggestions with regard to foreign policy. He spoke about the possibility of having representatives of State governments in other countries for promotion of trade and commercial relations, a practice followed by many countries, including the United States. A number of U.S. states have trade offices located in different parts of the world. Seventeen states have trade offices in China. In addition to this, sister city programmes have been used effectively by the U.S. ever since the programme was introduced in the 1950s.

““For closer trade relations and increased connectivity, border States sharing contiguous borders with neighbouring countries need to become

important stakeholders, not just those which are politically significant or are well-represented in Parliament.” ”

Over the past two decades, China, a country Mr. Modi looks up to, has also granted a reasonable amount of autonomy to provincial governments, with provinces having two organisations handling foreign relations. Chen Zhimin *et al* in an article titled “The Provinces and China’s Multi-Layered Diplomacy: The cases of GMS and Africa” (2010) written for the *Hague Journal of Diplomacy* have explained the functions of both these organisations. While the Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) headed by the governor promotes people-to-people relations with other countries and handles issues such as visits by overseas delegations, economic ties with the outside world are handled through the Foreign Economic and Trade Commission (FETC). The trend of Chinese provinces being proactive in economic diplomacy began after the economic reforms of the 1970s; the period of the 1980s and the 1990s were witness to visits by Chinese governors to other countries including the U.S., and frequent exchanges at the provincial level.

Potential roadblocks

State governments reaching out to the outside world began in the 1990s, post-liberalisation of the economy, when Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, N. Chandrababu Naidu reached out to the U.S., and was able to attract investments from IT giants like Microsoft which began investing in Hyderabad. The Karnataka Chief Minister, S.M. Krishna, also made an effort to woo foreign investors. The efforts by Mr. Naidu and Mr. Krishna helped in promoting Hyderabad and Bangalore as investment destinations. While Hyderabad was on the itinerary of U.S. Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, Bangalore was on the schedule of former Chinese Premier Li Peng, in 2001.

While Mr. Modi’s ideas with regard to State involvement in external relations are interesting, he is likely to face a number of roadblocks.

First, while the Modi government may encourage interactions with countries like Europe and Southeast Asia, it remains to be seen how Mr. Modi will view the participation of border States like those on the west (Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat) *vis-à-vis* Pakistan, and those bordering Myanmar in the northeast. There is a strong possibility that in the case of countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan, security issues will overshadow matters pertaining to trade and people-to-people contact. This would be unfortunate, because over the past few years, some border States have been willing to play a constructive role in enhancing land connectivity and strengthening economic connectivity. In this context, Tripura (bordering Bangladesh) and Punjab (Pakistan) clearly stand out. For closer trade relations and increased connectivity, border States sharing contiguous borders with neighbouring countries need to become important stakeholders, not just those which are politically significant or are well-represented in Parliament.

Ensuring balanced development

Second, Mr. Modi's real success would be to ensure that States that are not industrialised develop links with the outside world and benefit from these linkages economically. Currently, it is only a handful of economically developed States like Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh which have reaped the benefits of economic diplomacy with the outside world. Atri Mukherjee, in a report titled "Regional Inequality in Foreign Direct Investment Flows to India: The Problem and the Prospects" (2011), written for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), says that for the period between 2008-2009 and 2011-2012, these six States received 70 per cent FDI; Delhi and Maharashtra between themselves accounted for 50 per cent FDI.

To get over this inequality, it is important not just to develop other States which have been left behind, but also encourage their participation in reaching out to the outside world.

Sub-national models

Here, Mr. Modi would do well to take a leaf out of the book of both the U.S. and Chinese models of sub-national participation in economic diplomacy, where provinces which were not developed were given special attention. In the U.S., James C. Cobb and William Stueck in their book, *Globalization and the American South* (2005), make the point that the southern states took the lead in reaching out to the outside world, as a consequence of which southern states began to lure a large number of foreign businesses by the 1980s and 1990s. If one were to look at the case of China, the catalyst for greater sub-regional participation in foreign policy was the opening up of the economy promoted by Deng Xiaoping and the 1982 Constitution which granted greater authority to provinces. It is not just the coastal provinces which benefited from greater authority in economic matters but also border provinces like Yunnan, which share borders with Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Only last year, a pipeline connecting Myanmar (Kyaukpyu) with China which passes via Ruili in Yunnan became functional. Over the past decade, Yunnan has also emerged as an important economic hub. Kunming, the capital of the province, has been twinned with many cities including Kolkata.

Third, while Mr. Modi has spoken about national interest being paramount and there being no discrimination against States, it remains to be seen whether State governments not being administered by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or its allies are allowed to reach out freely to the outside world. Here, Mr. Modi will have to build political consensus with Chief Ministers from other parties including the Congress.

Role for diplomats

Finally, foreign service officers should take short sabbaticals where they work closely with State governments; something along the lines of the Pearson Fellowship introduced in the U.S., where diplomats actually work in provinces and understand the legislative process in Washington would be handy in this context. An understanding of the local sentiment with regard to foreign policy issues pertaining to the neighbourhood will come in handy in ensuring that sensitive issues are dealt with in a nuanced manner where all

stakeholders are on board. While the Ministry of External Affairs has set up branch secretariats in various cities, these are not active enough and have not been granted enough powers. The number of branch secretariats should be increased and their roles increased. Issues like the visits of foreign delegations to States can be handled by these branch secretariats in tandem with State governments.

While economic diplomacy in India has been going on for two decades, Mr. Modi's test is to ensure that the number of States which reach out to the outside world increases, and that sub-regional linkages within South Asia get strengthened through political will.

(Tridivesh Singh is a Senior Research Associate with The Jindal School of International Affairs, Sonapat. He was a Public Policy Scholar at The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy from November 2013 to March 2014.)

ECONOMIC TIMES, SEP 10, 2014

Planning for 'The Future Commission'

As the [Narendra Modi government](#) completes 100 days in office, the prime minister seems keen to implement far-reaching changes, phasing out the old and ushering in the new. One of the first things he did was to question the relevance of the [Planning Commission](#) - a question also asked by his predecessor Manmohan Singh in 2009.

The commission's inability to keep up speed with change has stood in the way of its primary responsibility - to act as think tank of high standards and futuristic vision, linked to the research and innovation council.

Its past may be glorious but the country has suffered. Though the commission has extra-territorial powers to deal with the states, it only created a vacuum. A few eminent members even implied that there is too much economics within the pane; and almost negligible future orientation and management.

It is ironic that India was more competitive before independence as the first industrial policy (1948), which could have put the country on a fast track, vested powers with the government only, amplifying officialdom and reducing economic competitiveness. The panel's contribution is not denied but the approach was not visionary enough to create a great nation.

The infection was inescapable. It changed the course of goals and responsibilities of the commission, reducing it to a time series regression planning and funding agency. The lack of vision is evident in the incongruity of resource planning, state of monopoly, and ad-hocism in talent and diversity management.

As a result, all the E's of nation's most essential systems - economy, education, environment and energy - are suffering from the ad-hoc systems of future planning and accountability, for example, the case of the University Grants Commission and the All India Council for Technical Education in the education sector.

It cannot run on hired talent and with no accountability of office-bearers.

The question is - do we need such a commission for the government or for the country? Don't we need a body comprising all stakeholders of national development that accounts for the future needs of a country of a billion and plans strategically?

India does not need a commission for planning; it needs a commission to ensure vision and flawless coordination for exceptional execution with integrity.

We can learn from nations that have realized the need for development beyond minor political conflicts, despite facing a scarcity of talent.

Economic growth of European nations like Finland, Poland and Hungary was slow and disturbing under the communist model but they reinvented themselves with new systems. From a highly-depressed economy with hardly any resources, Finland became a highly-developed nation within 20 years by forming the "Committee for the Future" with specific tasks and responsibilities.

Paula Tiihonen, its founding counsellor, told this author recently: "The Committee for the Future, where 17 parliamentarians themselves stake out policy lines for the future, is unique in the world as an institution.

"Many parliaments globally have adapted our model to reorganize their futures-related work. It is independent by nature of functioning, this means that the committee must itself create its success and earn esteem for its work in each and every parliamentary term."

Tiihonen added that the Committee for the Future is always serious and focused to the national agenda under political leadership but not to a political agenda.

The [Future Commission](#) for India should structure itself on these lines and not try to accommodate all ministries, positions and party representatives (like Central Advisory Board of Education which is still colonial in nature).

The executive functions must go to ministries. There should be an efficient and effective team that takes care of education, economy, think tanks, and few ministries with a lean permanent team.

In its new avatar, the commission shouldn't deal with issues related to states directly, for which the government should strengthen the [Inter-State Council](#) (ISC), Finance Commission and ministries for effective and efficient operations on national priorities and fiscal management.

Motivating states to create "The [Future State Commissions](#)" aligned with the central think tanks can also reduce their dependence on the centre.

This will also offer opportunity of inter-state cooperation as think tanks may always engage in higher discussions than governments with a political ideology. The relevance is only justified and sustainable if it focuses on the framework and capacity building of a development than the assistance model which conflicts the basic philosophy of development and subjects to incremental change only.

This new thought demands a bigger role for science, technology and innovation. Such a committee or commission must reflect and opine on questions of execution, delivery and accountability more than planning of limited political aspirations. The call for change is a welcome move but caution equally necessary.

EDUCATION

ECONOMIC TIMES, SEP 11, 2014

HRD ministry to launch e-education courses from top institutes like IIT and IIM

Central universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) will soon start offering massive open online courses (MOOCs).

NEW DELHI: The ministry of human resource development will roll out a host of digital initiatives including free online courses from top institutions, a national e-library for students and a dedicated portal to help students make informed choices about higher education, HRD minister [Smriti Irani](#) said on Thursday.

Central universities, [Indian Institutes of Technology](#) (IITs) and [Indian Institutes of Management](#) (IIMs) will soon start offering massive open online courses (MOOCs), or courses offered on the internet with unlimited participation, free of cost, Irani said in her first press conference after joining office.

The e-library, which will be launched next year, will allow students to access content from premier educational institutions.

The online portal, 'Know Your College', will be a repository of information related to all universities and colleges and will allow students to have their grievances redressed in case they have been misled by an institute or college.

The HRD minister also announced that a national and state-level deliberation on the new education policy will begin in January next year. She did not comment on whether the new policy would incorporate the four-year format for undergraduate courses, but said, "During the national, state and regional level debates we will discuss how the courses should be structured." Irani also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interaction with children on the Teacher's Day on September 5 was viewed by almost 9.5 crore students across 8.5 lakh schools in the country.

The HRD minister evaded questions on whether a similar exercise be held on the Children's Day on November 14, the birthday of the country's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. "You will have to wait for it till the time comes," Irani said.

HINDU, SEP 11, 2014

Public exam mooted for classes 5, 8

TANU KULKARNI

Kimmane Ratnakar

Though there have been efforts to revamp primary education by streamlining the system, the State government, it appears, is set to take a retrograde step by mooting public examinations for classes 5 and 8.

At a meeting with Union Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Irani on Tuesday, officials of the State Education Department, along with Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education Kimmame Ratnakar, mooted introduction of public examination for classes 5 and 8 across the country. This has come in the wake of demands from certain other States in favour of the change. Ms. Irani reportedly said the proposal would be placed before the Central Advisory Board of Education for consideration.

Mohammad Mohsin, Commissioner for Public Instruction, said the move would help in evaluating teaching levels. “We have urged the Centre to examine this policy so that students can be tested in two classes. The move will help address imbalances in the child’s learning level and bring in uniformity in teaching levels,” he said.

Several years ago, the State government had scrapped the public examination for class 7. Now, the only public examination is at class 10.

Educationists and academics have slammed the government’s move. They maintain that introducing public examination in primary classes could increase the children’s stress levels. In fact, Section 30 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act states that “no child shall be required to pass any board examination till the completion of elementary education”. Experts also say this is also against the basic policy of continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE), which promotes activity-based study and discourages rote learning.

Former Primary and Secondary Education Vishweshwara Hegde Kageri, in a press release, said the move would have long-term implications. The government should consult all stakeholders before taking a call on the issue. He also said experts were against examination being the only method of evaluation of a child. Mr. Kageri said earlier measures were taken to reduce importance of examinations in the evaluation of a child after reports of dropout rate and suicide rate among children were linked to exam stress.

However, Mr. Mohsin said the test would not have the practice of detention and was only to evaluate the child’s understanding of the subjects.

HINDU, SEP 8, 2014

LSR students to benefit from illustrious alumnae

VIJETHA S.N.

The college made it to nearly every newspaper in the city when its most famous alumna yet — Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi — paid a visit almost two years ago. However, it is not just her.

Long list

Lady Shri Ram College for Women boasts quite a long list of successful alumnae — from writers and artists to many high up on the corporate ladder, one of the many reasons why a group of women from the college have come together and registered a formal alumnae association — Elsa Association.

“Every year the college would organise an event called Nostalgia. Some of us, who were active, were part of the association that was neither registered nor very organised. Thus, we felt the need for a formal association,” said Chandini Luthra, vice-president of Elsa Association, which is all set to host its first annual general meeting on September 13.

The tickets for the event are selling fast since the word about the meeting got out.

Meant to serve as a platform to network for career and social growth, as well as foster the emotional connect with the college, the association has been given official space in the college as well.

“Students from the college have been successful in different sectors. So there is no reason why the current crop of students should not benefit from it. A mentorship programme is being planned, wherein former students come to the college and counsel students on the career options available, and how it is like to work in a particular job or sector,” said association president Aditi Misra.

“What if you have taken mathematics as your main subject and you hate it? Former students can help deal with such a situation.”

Alumna network

The best jobs that are earned through campus placements are usually because of an alumni or the alumna network. However, it is not just the current crop that can benefit from the association.

“We are waiting for more registrations. Once we reach a certain number, we are going to organise our alumnae under different sectors. A person wanting recommendation from an alumna in a certain field can get one. No one really turns down a person from their own college when it comes to a recommendation,” she added.

Special section

The college library has a special section dedicated to its alumna writers.

“We have so many writers from the college. There is Manju Kapur, Kishwar Desai, Manjul Bajaj, Nivedita Menon, etc....the list is quite long. It warrants a literary fest of our own. We intend to do that in February,” added Ms. Luthra.

More information about the association is available on its website (lsralumna.org).

Tickets for the event are selling fast since the word about the meeting got out. The association has been given official space in the college as well

TIMES OF INDIA, SEP 15, 2014

Panel to invite different sections for suggestions on UGC

JAIPUR: A newly constituted committee to restructure University Grants Commission (UGC) by the HRD ministry has indicated to invite suggestions from academicians, students, researchers and general public to determine educational standards and regulate them.

Dr Hari Gautam, chairperson of this committee, told TOI, "The committee will soon float its website inviting ideas and contributions from all stakeholders. The idea is to identify people who want to contribute in the process of building a robust policy for higher education."

He added the committee will also reach out to the people who made valuable suggestions and assign them some responsibility to take it further. "This is a mammoth task and with the help of people's participation we will achieve the goal in stipulated time period of six months," said Gautam, former UGC chairman.

Gautam was in Jaipur to attend a conference on 'Monitoring Mechanism in Higher Education' organized by RSS-backed Akhil Bharatiya Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh (ABRSM). The conference concluded on Sunday.

The committee was set up to evaluate UGC's performance in coordinating and determining education standards in varsities and regulating them. It was also assigned a role to suggest measures for checking private education sector, encouraging research work and regularizing accreditation system.

He said that besides central institutions, holding dialogue with state universities is also high on the agenda. He explained, "Every state has its own academic character and to form a collective action plan, the need is to understand the concerns of state universities."

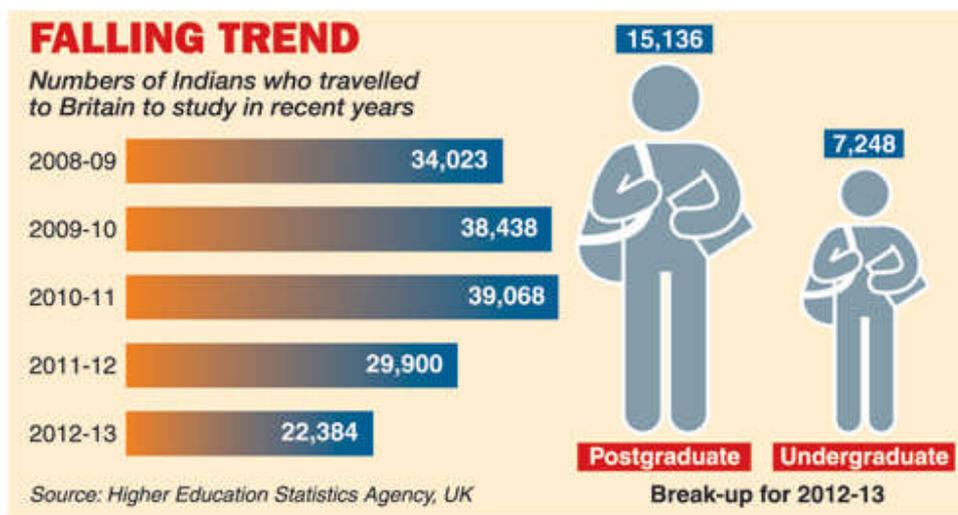
The committee on September 21 will hold an interactive session with the principals of 63 UGC grant colleges in this regard.

TELEGRAPH, SEP 15, 2014

Delhi tit for tat on UK degrees

Cloud on recognition to one-year courses

BASANT KUMAR MOHANTY



New Delhi, Sept. 14: India is rethinking its commitment to recognise the one-year master's degrees awarded in Britain because British universities do not universally accept Indian Class XII certificates, sources told The Telegraph.

Education minister Smriti Irani has told high commissioner James David Bevan that all British campuses must start admitting Indian undergraduates on the strength of their Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) certificates, officials said.

She is likely to raise the matter again when the British minister for universities and science, David Willets, comes visiting later this year at a time fewer Indian students are travelling to Britain because of toughened visa conditions for subsequent employment. (See chart)

Although Cambridge, Oxford and the London School of Economics award two-year master's degrees (recognised in India), many reputable British institutions — including the Universities of Sussex and Liverpool — offer one-year postgraduate programmes.

During a visit by British Prime Minister David Cameron in February last year, the Manmohan Singh government had agreed to recognise the one-year degrees so their holders could pursue further education or secure government jobs in India.

This was to be done through a bridge course —whose duration was tentatively fixed at six months in November — to be designed by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

However, sources said, the Narendra Modi government is not keen to go ahead with its predecessor's commitment without a quid pro quo on undergraduate admissions in Britain.

Although several British universities — including Oxford, Warwick and Durham — have of late begun recognising CBSE certificates, some like Cambridge and the London School of Economics are holding out.

The Modi government has good reason not to want to appear soft on British universities. This is because it has, through the UGC, come down hard on premier Indian institutions

that have not adhered strictly to the 10+2+3 (followed by a two-year master's course) system of education.

It arm-twisted Delhi University to scrap its four-year undergraduate programme that was to be followed by a one-year master's course. It then got the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, to tweak its four-year undergraduate programme and has now gone after the Indian Institutes of Technology.

In these circumstances, the government cannot afford to have a one-and-a-half-year master's system (including the bridge course) for British degrees.

Responses were mixed in the education sector. "If this is true, it's a sad and retrograde step," said Naveen Chopra, chairman of the overseas education consultancy firm, The Chopras.

He dubbed the February 2013 commitment "progressive, sensible and student-friendly" and added that a change of heart would send out "mixed messages" at a time India was talking of bringing its education system "in sync with the world".

But S.S. Mantha, chairman of the All India Council of Technical Education, the technical education regulator, said recognition of degrees should be based on reciprocity. "British universities should recognise the CBSE certificates," he said.

Indian Class XII graduates now have to do an additional course to secure admission to some British universities. The CBSE has taken the matter up with Universities UK, an organisation representing all British universities.

Ravi Lochan Singh, managing director of Global Reach, a Calcutta-based overseas education firm, was opposed to any rethink on the recognition of one-year master's degrees. "I fail to understand how forex or education loans are given to Indian students to go abroad for such degrees if India is going to continue not to (recognise) them," he said.

But UGC sources said the demand from students for recognising the one-year degrees was not high enough, particularly at a time the number of Indian students in Britain was falling. This was why, they said, the matter had progressed slowly even under the UPA government.

No comments could be obtained from the UK Higher Education International Unit, an agency that promotes British education abroad. A 2012 study commissioned by the agency had claimed that Britain's one-year master's degrees were as good as their two-year Indian counterparts.

Furqan Qamar, secretary-general of the Association of Indian Universities — an umbrella body that issues "equivalence certificates" to foreign degrees, thus recognising them — did not explicitly support or oppose the rethink.

He, however, stressed that the criteria for recognising foreign degrees needed revision. Currently, the four criteria are: accreditation in the foreign country itself, duration, admission qualifications, and mode of education (for instance, whether it was taught in classrooms or through distance education).

Qamar said the advance of technology had made a course's duration irrelevant.

“With the introduction of e-learning material and the like, the focus of higher education has shifted towards output (exam results, research) from input (number of classes held, books studied). We need to have a fresh framework to compare Indian and foreign courses in a rational manner,” he said.

The government is preparing such a framework.

HINDU, SEP 9, 2014

Odisha to close down schools with five or less students

The Odisha Government is considering closing down of 165 primary schools across the State due to very low attendance.

According to District System for Education (DSE), which generates information on school infrastructure, these primary schools have five or less students each.

“The information regarding schools having less than five students has come to the notice of the government. Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority has directed district coordinators to enquire about such schools and serve show cause notices as to why they should not be closed down,” Debi Prasad Mishra, School and Mass Education Minister, said on Monday.

Odisha has around 68,000 primary and upper primary schools.

In tribal dominated Rayagada district, there are about 19 schools with less than 5 students each. Gajapati and Ganjam districts have 11 schools each. There are 10 schools having less than 5 students each in Kandhamal. Other districts with schools facing the axe are Sundargarh (10 schools), Jagatsinghpur (8), Sambalpur (8), Subarnapur (8), Bolangir (6), Boudh (6), Angul (5), Balasore (5), Mayurbhanj (5) and Bargarh (5).

“Students studying there will be accommodated in the nearby schools ,” said the Minister. The condition of primary and upper primary schools in interior pockets of the State is poor. Officials in the Department were shocked to find that around 65 schools were functioning without having a single student. In Koraput, as many as 20 schools do not have any student.

HINDU, SEP 9, 2014

Mandatory for scientists to give lectures in schools'

GARGI PARSAI

The Centre has decided to make it mandatory for scientists and researchers of the Departments of Science and Technology, Earth Sciences and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research to undertake 12 hours of lecture classes in schools and colleges in an academic year.

“Scientists, who are mostly confined to their labs will share their talent and experience for free as part of their duties, to inculcate in young students a scientific temper and to bring S and T [Science and Technology] into a larger domain,” Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology, Earth Sciences, Jitendra Singh said here on Monday.

For this, departments, particularly publicly-funded national institutes, will enter into an agreement with schools and colleges. The Ministry of Human Resource Development will collaborate with departments concerned.

“The programme shall be reviewed annually and we shall present to the nation a report card,” said the Minister at a press conference.

“The experiment will help catch young talent,” he added. The CSIR system and the DST have about 6,000 scientists and researchers on their rolls. Dr. Singh said the performance of scientists and researchers would be evaluated every three years.

A special promotion scheme for women scientists, KIRAN (Knowledge and Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing), would allow public sector institutions to make alternate offers to women who have had a break in their career or a change of residence.

PIONEER, SEP 9, 2014

FINALLY, BASTAR GETS NATIONAL TRIBAL VARSITY

In a welcome decision for insurgency-riddled tribal stronghold Bastar region, the Central Government has approved a proposal of Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh for setting up ‘National Tribal University’.

The announcement for the decision was made in New Delhi at the meeting between Singh and Union HRD Minister Smriti Irani. The two leaders also agreed to commence the functioning of the university from the next educational session.

The announcement for the National Tribal University in Bastar, which is mired into illiteracy and poverty for generations, has been welcomed by educationists and intellectuals of Chhattisgarh mainly of tribal-dominated Bastar region, which is made up of seven districts.

Delighted by the decision, the Chief Minister said in a statement that the National Tribal University will hugely benefit the tribal people of Bastar as it will not only impart

education but also help in preservation of tribal culture, tradition, education and natural resources.

He stated that the university will also make 'research and study' about Bastar's biodiversity.

The Chief Minister strongly pitched at the meet for 'school of planning and architecture' in Naya Raipur. He informed the Union Minister that Chhattisgarh has 'Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya' under Sarv Siksha Abhiyaan in 94 development blocks and sanctioning should be made for the remaining 54 blocks too.

The Union Minister assured the Chief Minister that the Ministry will sanction opening of 'Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya' in 31 tribal development blocks in the first phase and the remaining will be completed in the second phase.

On Chhattisgarh's request for providing monetary help for infrastructure development in three newly opened universities in Bastar, Sarguja and Bilaspur, the centre agreed to provide UGC's 'one time catch up grant'.

A delegation of officials of HRD Ministry will soon be visiting the State for inspection of sites suggested by Chhattisgarh for setting up IIT in the State.

ELECTIONS

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 15, 2014

Soon, voting machines will have candidate photos

Electronic voting machines will soon carry photos of all poll hopefuls to curb the age-old electoral practice of confusing voters by fielding dummy candidates with similar names.

The election commission has set up an expert committee to design photo EVMs, likely to be rolled out in Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir, which are slated to go to the polls later this year.

Dummy candidates often swing close elections, polling more votes than the winning margin. The practice was widespread in May's general elections, where around half of the constituencies had two or more candidates with similar names.

In Chhattisgarh's Mahasamund, Congress' Ajit Jogi fielded 10 candidates with the same name as his BJP opponent Chandulal Sahu but narrowly lost the seat. Actor Hema Malini also had to defeat nearly half a dozen other Hemas in Mathura.

Others weren't so lucky. Shazia Ilmi of the Aam Aadmi Party lost last December's Delhi elections from RK Puram by less than 400 votes after dummy candidates received a sizeable share of votes.

In spite of this, the menace wasn't taken seriously by the poll watchdog till a recent Supreme Court directive. In a PIL, lawyer Sunil Goel suggested photos of candidates on EVMs would help in dealing with the problem of dummy candidates.

"We agree that photos on EVMs can help voters in selecting the candidate of their choice," a senior EC functionary said.

The challenge, however, is to redesign the ballot paper used in EVMs, located on the left side of the machines next to the buttons used to vote. The ballot paper contains the list of candidates and their poll symbols.

"We will have to see how photos can be accommodated since there is very little space available on the ballot paper used in the machines," the EC official said.

In some states, the ballot paper contains candidates' names in two or three languages. The EC has also directed that the poll symbol be printed prominently on the ballot paper.

The expert committee will submit its recommendations on redesigning the EVM ballot paper soon but it won't be applicable to the recently-announced Maharashtra and Haryana elections.

FLOODS

HINDU, SEP 9, 2014

Flood fury in Kashmir

As Jammu and Kashmir reels under possibly the worst floods in nearly six decades, and as the toll in terms of lives, property and crops mounts, the question that looms large is whether timely warnings had been issued and measures initiated to let people take evasive action on time. Even admitting that this was a “flash flood” caused by a retreating monsoon, the issue of whether systems to see such disasters coming, with the aid of technology, including real-time upstream monitoring mechanisms and space-based mapping processes, have been laid in place, comes to the fore. These posers are particularly relevant as the region has been buffeted in successive years by serious floods in rivers that have their headwaters in the Himalayan mountain ranges. That there was no warning issued before the water level rose almost overnight along the Jhelum — that flows across the Kashmir basin — has been more or less confirmed from media reportage. The extent of the deluge could be gauged from the fact that some 2,500 villages have been partially or completely submerged. Thousands of people were stranded on rooftops and waiting to be rescued as day broke on Sunday in Srinagar — where even the Army cantonment, the Civil Secretariat, the police headquarters and the High Court were seriously inundated. The Jammu region accounts for most of the deaths so far. Equally bad was the situation in the Pakistan-occupied part of Kashmir across the Line of Control, as also in the Punjab province and Gilgit-Baltistan. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an aerial survey of the scene on the Indian side and termed it a “national-level disaster”; across the border, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif did an aerial assessment. Both were quick to offer mutual help to mitigate the suffering.

The calamity has come during the build-up to elections in the State due by the end of the year. But it is to be hoped that political differences are put aside, and the temptation to indulge in blame-games and score brownie points is avoided, as full-scale efforts to reach rescue and rehabilitation to all the affected persons and regions are mounted by putting every shoulder to the wheel. For the State government led by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, this could be an opportunity to prove its mettle. The tasks are stupendous. Those who have lost their dwellings need to be helped to rebuild them or find alternative accommodation. Livelihood issues need to be addressed. Infrastructure including power and communication links need to be restored quickly. The National Disaster Response Force is active on the scene, and the Army, the Navy and the Indian Air Force are at work. Even as all this is done, long-term plans to forewarn and protect the region that has been ravaged repeatedly by the vagaries of Himalayan floods need to be given top priority.

GOVERNORS

BUSINESS LINE, SEP 8, 2014

Judges as governors

We need rules that insulate the judiciary and the bureaucracy from the temptations of post-retirement office

The political sparring over the appointment of former Chief Justice of India P Sathasivam as Kerala Governor is of far less importance than the larger issue — namely, whether it was appropriate for someone in his position to accept a gubernatorial sinecure. Also, what do such appointments mean for judicial independence? Unfortunately, these important questions have been clouded by political charges and counter-charges. For example, there has been the nasty and unsubstantiated insinuation that the appointment was a *quid pro quo* for judgments delivered. And the embarrassing but somewhat irrelevant ‘charge’ that a senior minister in the Union Cabinet had publicly declared he was of the view that judges should be ineligible for appointment by government to post-retirement jobs. The Government’s defence — that Congress-ruled governments have also placed members of the higher judiciary to gubernatorial office — is a retort that only skirts the larger issues relating to his appointment.

A few things need to be got out of the way to begin with. First, no procedural rules — no, not even norms — were breached in appointing Justice Sathasivam as Governor. Second, although this is the first time that a former CJI has been appointed Governor, consistency demands that anyone who argues that it will compromise the independence of the judiciary, in public perception if not in fact, must object to the many appointments of members of the higher judiciary to gubernatorial office. Yes, it is true that nobody had imagined that a former CJI would accept being a governor, but Sathasivam’s appointment draws attention to a larger problem — the urgent need for norms to govern post-retirement appointments for members of the higher judiciary.

Theoretically, the prospect of a post-retirement job has the potential to influence the pre-retirement conduct of a judge. A total ban on retired members of the higher judiciary taking up other assignments is unpractical. We have retired judges appointed to tribunals and commissions of inquiry; moreover, a statutory body such as the Press Council of India has by convention been chaired by a sitting or retired Supreme Court judge. But there is a difference between calling upon retired judges to perform quasi-judicial functions — where there is room for independence in decision-making — and appointing them as governors. A governor, despite being the constitutional head of a State, is an employee and agent of the Centre. India’s democracy is predicated on an arms length relationship maintained between the Government and the judiciary. This distance is impossible to maintain in an environment in which judges are appointed in what are broadly political capacities — whether as governor, minister, or mere MP. The Election Commission has gone so far as to suggest that there be a cooling off period for all bureaucrats before they even enter party politics. One may quibble about whether this is too stringent and constrictive, but the principle behind the suggestion is hard to contest.

We need some rules or norms that insulate the bureaucracy and the judiciary from the temptation of certain kinds of post-retirement 'benefits'.

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated September 8, 2014)

HINDU, SEP 12, 2014

K. K. Paul gets additional charge as Governor of Manipur and Mizoram

Meghalaya Governor Krishan Kant Paul has been given additional charge of Manipur and Mizoram. He will hold charge of the two States until regular arrangements are made, said a release from the President's Secretariat here on Thursday.

The announcement came after President Pranab Mukherjee accepted the resignation of V.K. Duggal as Governor of Manipur and Mizoram.

Mr. Duggal, former Union Home Secretary and Army Captain, became the ninth Governor to resign after the National Democratic Alliance came to power in May. He took over as Governor of Manipur late last year and was given additional charge of Mizoram on August 8 after Kamla Beniwal was made to resign. He put in his papers 20 days later.

Mr. Paul is a former Delhi Police Commissioner.

His wife, Omita Paul, is secretary to President Pranab Mukherjee.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TELEGRAPH, SEP 11, 2014

MIRACLE MEN- Modi transforms Indo-Japanese ties

Harsh V. Pant

Building on his personal chemistry with his Japanese counterpart, the prime minister, Narendra Modi, reached out to Japan in an unprecedented manner. Modi entertained his host country by displaying his skills as a drummer; he charmed the students by playing the flute and sharing Indian mythological stories during his visit to an elementary school; he expressed his gratitude to Japan for its “trust” in India; he gifted a copy of the Bhagavad Gita to the Japanese emperor, underlining that he had “nothing more valuable to give and the world has nothing more valuable to get”; chided China that “those with 18th-century ideas, [who] engage in encroachments and enter the seas” of others.

Japan also laid out a red-carpet for Modi, his first bilateral visit outside the subcontinent since becoming prime minister in May. Shinzo Abe also went out of his way to receive Modi in Kyoto, where he landed on August 30. Abe underlined that Japan-India relations had “more potential than any other ties in the world” and expressed his desire to elevate the relationship to a special strategic and global partnership.

Though India and Japan failed to conclude a deal on civil nuclear co-operation that would allow nuclear-armed India to import Japanese technology for its atomic power stations, Japan plans to invest \$35 billion in private- and public-sector projects in India over the next five years. During Modi’s trip, India and Japan signed five pacts covering defence exchanges and cooperation in clean energy, roads and highways, and healthcare, among other issues. Japan also lifted the ban on six Indian entities including Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, which had been imposed in the aftermath of 1998 nuclear tests.

During the visit, Modi invited Japanese investments while hard-selling India as a conducive destination for business, particularly for the manufacturing sector. Delivering the keynote address at the Tokyo Stock Exchange, co-hosted by the Japan External Trade Organization, Modi assured the Japanese investors that “there is no red tape, but only red carpet that awaits you in India”. In Kyoto, a pact was signed under which Japan will help Modi’s Lok Sabha constituency, Varanasi, to develop on the pattern of Kyoto as a “smart city”.

Modi’s visit to Japan has certainly energized this bilateral relationship. While Delhi-Tokyo relations have been developing slowly and steadily over the last few years, the momentum seems to have left this very important bilateral partnership some time back. The discussions on civilian nuclear energy cooperation between the two states have been stuck for quite some time now. Abe has come to power in Japan with a strong pro-nuclear power agenda, so the time is ripe to regain the initiative on these negotiations.

China’s rise is the most significant variable in the Asian geostrategic landscape today, and both India and Japan would like to see a constructive China playing a larger role in

the solving of regional and global problems rather than becoming a problem itself. Concerns are rising for both states, about China's assertive diplomatic and military posture. But China's attempts to test the diplomatic and military mettle of its neighbours will only bring Japan and India closer. While New Delhi and Tokyo would like greater transparency and restraint on Beijing's part, there is now a need for them to be more candid about their expectations.

Of all recent Japanese leaders, Shinzo Abe has been the most enthusiastic about the future of India-Japan relationship, giving it an entirely new dimension. In his address to the joint session of the Indian Parliament in 2007, Abe had talked about a "broader Asia" constituted by the Pacific and Indian Ocean countries such as Japan, India, Australia and the United States, which share the common values of democracy, freedom and respect for basic human rights. He argued for greater cooperation among these states. In his book, *Towards a Beautiful Country*, Abe makes the case about Japan advancing its national interests by strengthening its ties with India. He has argued, "It will not be a surprise if in another decade Japan-India relations overtake Japan-US and Japan-China ties."

Building on the idea of a triangular security dialogue between Washington, Tokyo, and Canberra initiated by his predecessor, Abe made known his desire to create a four-way strategic dialogue with the US, Australia and India, a framework that he stressed would be based on their shared universal values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law. Since assuming office in 2012, Abe has once again underscored the importance of not only consolidating Japan's historic alliance with the United States but also expressed a desire to deepen partnerships with India, Indonesia and Australia.

Because of domestic pathologies in both New Delhi and Tokyo, the promise of this partnership has not yet been realized so far. Under the Modi government, New Delhi now has a chance to give a new dimension to its ties with Tokyo. With a new leadership in Delhi with a decisive mandate, the old issues that once seemed insurmountable should be able to find some resolution. India should push Japan into giving Delhi-Tokyo ties a much more substantive dimension and move beyond old shibboleths. The time is right for India and Japan to seize the initiative and transform the strategic landscape in the Asia-Pacific.

In Abe's words, "a strong India is in the best interest of Japan, and a strong Japan is in the best interest of India." And now Modi has underlined that "without Japan, India is incomplete and without India, Japan is incomplete... Japan has hardware, India has software... together we can make miracles". So, there is no excuse now not to build a strong partnership, especially as a rapidly rising China is out to challenge the pre-eminence of both Japan and India as major Asian powers.

The author is Professor of International Relations, Department of Defence Studies, King's College, London

INTERNET

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 15, 2014

Ministers may not be allowed to use Gmail in office

Moushumi Das Gupta

Ministers and bureaucrats may soon be barred from using Gmail, Yahoo or any other email facility that has servers hosted outside India for any official communication. A new draft email policy makes services by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) mandatory for government work.

The policy says service providers other than the NIC – the government’s official email service provider – can be used for personal communication only.

It also restricts officials from forwarding emails from their official ids to their personal ids.

A draft cabinet note on the policy, prepared by the department of electronics and information technology, has been circulated for inter-ministerial consultations. “We will go to the cabinet soon for approval,” said an official.

Sources said though the NIC had provided official email ids to 3.5 million government employees so far, only 700,000 were currently used.

The decision to have an email policy was announced last year to check theft or snooping of critical government data. It was prompted by Edward Snowden’s revelation that the US National Security Agency carried out mass illegal surveillance in many countries, including India.

Government employees were also directed to not use non-NIC email services but the move failed in the absence of a formal policy.

The policy also says that government organizations – including those dealing with national security — that have independent email servers can continue to use them, provided they are hosted in India.

JUDICIARY

DECCAN HERALD, SEP 8, 2014

End death penalty

The Supreme Court's decision that reviews of death sentences should be heard in open court is an acknowledgement of the value of life. It is another safeguard against depriving a person of his life through judicial hurry or inadequate communication of the case of the convict on death row to the judge. It is to be noted that the court has mandated such procedure under Article 21 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to life and liberty to citizens. It has also rightly declared that this right is the most important of all constitutional rights. The issues sought to be raised by a convict in his review plea will get greater clarity in oral arguments advanced by a lawyer in an open court. It is much better than the court deciding the merit of the petition on the basis of a cold written document.

Hearing in an open court will also make the proceedings transparent. The court has limited it to half an hour, in view of the pressure on its time. But the fact that it has gone beyond a 60-year-old rule in order to provide for open hearing underlines the importance it attaches to the need for a fair and reasonable opportunity to a convict to challenge the sentence awarded to him. It has justified its departure from tradition with the observation that a person's life cannot be restored if it is found, after execution, that he or she was wrongly awarded the death sentence. The court's decision, based both on compassion and law, provides another chance for convicts to be heard and judged by the highest judiciary in a final attempt to escape from the gallows.

But what came up before the court was only a question of right procedure, which might avert or minimise the chance of a judicial error in the award of the death sentence. But putting an end to capital punishment should be a matter of principle, not of procedure. As long as the provision exists on the statute book, the courts cannot wish it away, in spite of the rarest of rare doctrine. The idea of death sentence is wrong and bad for very valid reasons: it is primitive, its practice is barbaric and it is not a deterrent against crime. Most countries have abandoned it and many others have suspended it. It is only being human to abolish it. Even an open hearing may not always avert a mistake.

HINDU, SEP 9, 2014

A red herring for judicial independence

ARGHYA SENGUPTA

According to a popular legal adage, hard cases make bad law. In such *cause célèbres*, the need to do justice, respond to widespread public interest and factor in the welter of emotional argument, often clouds dispassionate judgment. The appointment of Justice P. Sathasivam, former Chief Justice of India, as the Governor of Kerala, less than five months after his retirement as Chief Justice, though not a legal dispute, is an archetypal illustration of such a hard case. Interwoven are issues of the independence of the

judiciary, purported favouritism by the government to express gratitude for a favourable decision and the desirability of post-retirement employment of judges to a range of government-appointed positions. Several critics, commentators and politicians have been quick to decry his appointment as an assault on the independence of the judiciary. While the post-retirement appointment of judges by government, especially very soon after their retirement, might lead to justifiable doubts about judicial independence, to use Justice Sathasivam's appointment as Governor as an illustration mischaracterises the issue. It is oblivious to deeper, systemic concerns surrounding post-retirement employment and proceeds on an excessively fragile conceptualisation of judicial independence.

Judicial independence as dogma

Speaking in the Constituent Assembly, Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar warned against conceptualising judicial independence as a dogmatic requirement. Unfortunately, it is precisely such a dogmatic conceptualisation that is widely prevalent today. Such a view considers any interaction between the executive and the judiciary with grave suspicion. Independence, according to it, is fragile and capable of being eroded at the slightest provocation. Its manifestation can be seen in the wanton speculation linking Justice Sathasivam's appointment with a decision given by him quashing a second FIR registered against Amit Shah in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh encounter case (Supreme Court, 2013).

This argument is flawed both in theory and practice. Theoretically, the acceptance of such a view as affecting the independence of the judiciary would mean actively disincentivising judges from adjudicating cases involving politicians, where free and fair justice would be most required. The speculative insinuations made simply owing to a judge hearing such a case, irrespective of the validity of judicial reasoning employed, have the pernicious effect of tarnishing a judge's reputation. Accepting judgeship does not include an implied acceptance of character assassination and must not become so.

Need for systemic reform

In practice, without direct evidence of a *quid pro quo*, or circumstantial evidence of excessive closeness between Justice Sathasivam and the government or any other interested political party, claiming judicial independence to be adversely affected is simply baseless. Even if it is argued that it is not whether the independence of the judiciary is actually affected that is the test but whether there is a reasonable perception that it is so, this reduced threshold is also not met in this case. It would require turning a blind eye to the fact that Justice Sathasivam has been appointed Governor by a government that is different from the government in power when he served as Judge of the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice of India. Further, such an argument would have to be premised on a particularly self-serving conception of a reasonable person as being cynical, captious and dismissive of the notion of judges as persons of high integrity. It would also have to be a person with a superhuman ability to read between the lines of what otherwise reads as an entirely tenable judgment delivered by Justice Sathasivam on the facts of the case. It is trite that such a person would hardly be the exemplar of reasonableness.

This is not to suggest that post-retirement employment of judges in government-appointed positions does not raise legitimate concerns of judicial independence, but simply that this instance does not encapsulate these concerns. In a study by the writer of a representative sample of 50 retirees from the Supreme Court between 2002 and 2012, it was found that 37 judges held post-retirement jobs in 46 government-appointed positions; 14 of these appointments were made by the executive alone.

The numbers demonstrate that the widespread criticism that the judiciary has faced for accepting such positions is arguably justified. The Union Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, a former Law Minister had pithily remarked of there being two kinds of judges — “those who know the law and those who know the Law Minister.” Governments too have been deemed to be complicit in the erosion of judicial independence that such appointments occasion. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, writing extrajudicially on post-retirement employment noted, “Judicial afternoons and evenings are sensitive phases, the incumbent being bothered about post-retiral prospects. The Executive plays upon this weakness to bend the integrity or buy the partiality of the elderly brethren.”

While both the judiciary and the executive are shown in less than salutary light in the matter of post-retirement employment of judges, to suggest that judicial independence is affected simply by pliant judges and a devious executive would be overly simplistic. On the contrary, concerns over judicial independence are deeper and systemic; 24 out of the 37 judges who have been employed post-retirement in government-appointed positions have held the office of a commission or statutory tribunal Chairperson or Member; 23 out of these 24 positions have required a sitting or retired judge by law. Further, these statutes seek to make full use of the early retirement of Supreme Court judges at 65 and even earlier retirement of High Court judges at 62. By usually providing a minimum of three years of service beyond such age, these statutes underline that judges are capable of performing a significant public function beyond the age at which they are considered past their prime for judicial office.

This demonstrates that the current pervasiveness of post-retirement employment of judges leading to concerns about judicial independence is at its core, traceable to statutes setting up various tribunals and commissions that require a judge by law combined with the early retirement age for judges.

To address this, two interventions are necessary — first, the retirement age of both Supreme Court and High Court judges must be increased to either 68 or 70 consistent with a widespread international trend; second, an amendment to the statutes setting up tribunals and commissions and manning them with a professional cadre of tribunal judges or sitting members of the higher judiciary on deputation must be urgently considered. If these are implemented, a post-retirement bar on tribunal and commission employment of judges — the pervasive cause of doubts regarding judicial independence — can be legitimately proposed. This has no relation whatsoever with the appointment of Justice Sathasivam as Governor of Kerala.

An independent governor

As far as the independence of the judiciary being affected is concerned, Justice Sathasivam's appointment is thus a red herring. The key independence question does not pertain to the judiciary but rather the potential his appointment has to restore the independence of the office of the Governor. Both the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) governments are responsible for generally treating the office of Governor of a State as a sinecure for party members, sympathisers and loyalists. In a political atmosphere where gubernatorial appointments are considered by the government and grudgingly accepted by the polity as such, the appointment of a retired judge can be seen as restoring to some extent the dignity of an exalted constitutional office or at least starting a conversation on the principles that ought to govern such appointments.

It cannot be anybody's case, that in comparison to party old-timers, Justice Sathasivam does not bring an independent, politically neutral and dispassionate perspective to the Raj Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram. Unlike a significant proportion of recent appointees, he bears no overt political affiliations and can discharge his constitutional duties without aspersions on his independence. His appointment, unlike other appointments by the present NDA government so far, is the only one perfectly consonant in letter and spirit with the observations of the Supreme Court in *B.P. Singhal v. Union of India* (2010) wherein it said, "[T]here is no question of the Union Government having Governors who are in sync with its mandate and policies."

Though one swallow does not make a summer, Justice Sathasivam's appointment as Governor has the potential to reinfuse a semblance of independence into a hopelessly partisan office. This, rather than its impact on judicial independence, is what it is a precedent for. Conflating the two, especially by making speculative arguments, would amount to a mischaracterisation that is unfair to Justice Sathasivam and counter-intuitively detrimental to the very independence of the judiciary that such arguments ostensibly seek to protect.

(Arghya Sengupta is Research Director, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, a New Delhi-based legal policy think-tank.)

LIBRARIES

HINDU, SEP 9, 2014

Central library plans to increase membership

The District Central Library authorities have planned to take up a campaign to increase membership.

The campaign to be conducted for about a year would focus on enrolling college and school students besides members of service organisations, said A.P.Sivakumar, District Library Officer.

The library is one of the biggest in the State with a collection of more than 1.5 lakh titles under different subjects.

On Monday, the library authorities launched the membership enrolment drive in the city in association with the Rotary Club of Tiruchi Elite and Readers Circle of the District Central Library.

The Rotary and Readers Circle members distributed pamphlets to sensitise people to the importance of reading and the benefits of library.

About 200 members of the Indira Ganesan College of Education enrolled themselves as members of the library during the drive.

A.P.Sivakumar, District Library Officer, Dr.Zameer Basha, G.Rajasekaran, president, Rotary Club of Tiruchi Elite, took part.

HINDU, SEP 9, 2014

Faculty and students want library opened

Submit petition to Collector and ask for police protection

Faculty and students of the Sentamizh College in Simakkal submitted a petition to the Collector asking for their college library, which has been kept locked, to be made accessible to the students.

In their petition, they stated that two former teachers of the college and a member of the Tamil sangam association, who had issues with the college management, entered the college with henchmen on September 5 and vacated students and teachers from the college library.

“They put a lock of their own on the library and it has remained locked ever since. The library has 52,000 books worth Rs. 50 lakh which the students are not able to access,” said K. Muniyandi, Assistant Professor of the Tamil Department.

Nearly 300 students and 15 faculty members had come to the Collectorate and also alleged that they feared for their safety.

“Many of the henchmen are trespassing into the campus in an inebriated condition. They threaten our students and the teachers as well as do not allow them to exit and enter the campus freely. They have parked their vehicles near the campus and are in possession of weapons,” alleged a faculty member. The college at present has over 500 students.

Submitting their petition to District Collector L. Subramanian, the students and faculty asked for police protection to the campus and sought the trespassers be evicted and action be taken against them.

“We have got caught amidst the issues running between the college management and a few outsiders. The library should be opened for us and protection should be increased on the campus,” the students and faculty members stated.

Assurance

Mr. Subramanian assured them that immediate action would be taken and forwarded their complaint to the City police.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 15, 2014

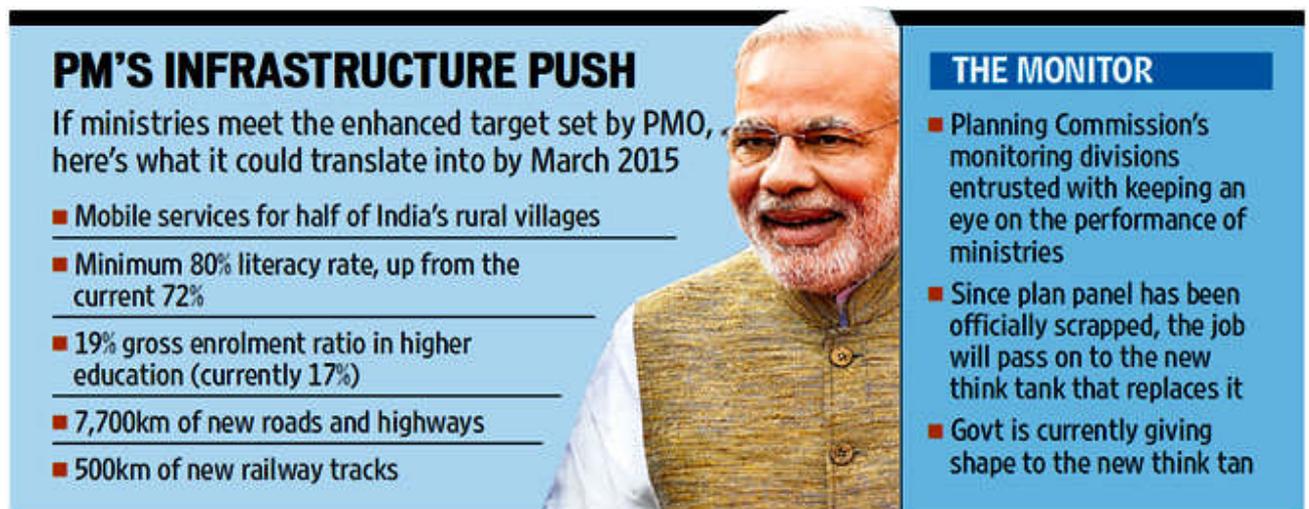
Modi raises performance bar for ministers by 10%

Chetan Chauhan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who recently called himself a 'hard taskmaster', has set his ministers a minimum 10% target for enhancing existing infrastructure in their areas of responsibility by the end of the financial year.

And he plans to keep an eye on them. The task of monitoring the performance of ministries has been given to the Planning Commission, and later to the think tank that replaces it.

The government is currently giving shape to the think tank but has already decided on some of its functions, one of which will be to oversee the implementation of the PM's innovations such as Digital India, Skill India and Swacch Bharat, senior government officials said. It would be required to submit regular reports to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).



PM'S INFRASTRUCTURE PUSH

If ministries meet the enhanced target set by PMO, here's what it could translate into by March 2015

- Mobile services for half of India's rural villages
- Minimum 80% literacy rate, up from the current 72%
- 19% gross enrolment ratio in higher education (currently 17%)
- 7,700km of new roads and highways
- 500km of new railway tracks

THE MONITOR

- Planning Commission's monitoring divisions entrusted with keeping an eye on the performance of ministries
- Since plan panel has been officially scrapped, the job will pass on to the new think tank that replaces it
- Govt is currently giving shape to the new think tan

The PMO's direction, quoting Modi, to ministries to add 10% to existing physical infrastructure and services provided by then by March 2015 would translate into mobile services for half of India's rural villages, a minimum 80% literacy level (from the current 72%) and 19% gross enrolment ratio in higher education (17% now).

The road transport ministry headed by Nitin Gadkari will have to add 7,700km of new roads and highways compared to its target of 7,000km. The PM wants 500km of new railway tracks instead of the 300km target presented by railway minister Sadanand Gowda. Similarly, targets for civil aviation and shipping ministries have also been upped.

"This is the minimum the PMO has prescribed," a government official said, adding that anything over and above would add to the annual performance of ministers and secretaries.

A union minister who refused to be named said the initiative would push them to achieve more. "The Prime Minister is targeting us to do more for the country, and we will try our best. We, as well as the bureaucrats, will be under pressure but it will help us deliver."

The PMO has told plan panel secretary Sindhushree Khullar to prepare a template for reviewing the performance of ministries with the new target in mind. Monitoring divisions of the panel are being strengthened with staff from other units. "We believe the divisions entrusted with monitoring will continue their job till the new think tank is in place," another senior official said.

Khullar has already made a presentation on the performance of core infrastructure ministries for 2014-15 and deliberated on targets suggested by them for the fiscal.

BUSINESS LINE, SEP 11, 2014

Central Ministries allowed to clear projects up to Rs.1,000 crore

Move to expedite clearances

CUTTING RED TAPE			
Central Ministries to clear projects up to ₹1,000 crore	Earlier limit for investment approvals was ₹300 crore	CCEA will consider proposals worth over ₹1,000 crore	Several projects, especially roads, expected to get faster clearance

New Delhi, September 10:

In a move that will hasten decision making, the Centre on Wednesday empowered Central Ministries and Departments to clear projects up to Rs. 1,000 crore by themselves.

Earlier, the limit was Rs. 300 crore. The Government has raised the limit by amending the Transaction of Business Rules for the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.

The move will help dispel the impression about centralisation of power within the Government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's critics have often alleged that the Prime Minister likes to involve himself in all decisions, thus delaying projects. The amendment now stipulates that the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) will consider investment proposals worth more than Rs. 1,000 crore, including those recommended by the Public Investment Board/Expenditure Finance Committee/Expanded Board of the Railway or any other appraisal fora/committee. The exception will be cases where separate thresholds have been laid down by the Cabinet Committee or any other competent authority.

The revision will help ministries such as Road Transport and Highways and those implementing social sector schemes, where investments are huge and require quick decisions. Several road projects involve investments of less than Rs. 1,000 crore but get delayed due to the multi-layered decision mechanism. This has been pointed out both by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and Road Minister Nitin Gadkari. In his Budget speech on July 10, Jaitley said: "The sector (road sector) had taken shape from 1998-2004 under

NDA-I. The sector again needs a huge amount of investment along with de-bottlenecking from a maze of clearances.”

On the same day, Gadkari had said that he was moving a proposal to allow expenditure of up to Rs. 1,000 crore at the ministry-level without having to take additional approvals. He also said that he had proposed flexibility in awarding projects on either public-private partnerships or an engineering procurement contract basis.

The Government aims to award contracts for 8,500 km of roads during the current fiscal year, besides completing construction of 6,300 km.

CUTTING RED TAPE

- Central Ministries to clear projects up to Rs. 1,000 crore
- Earlier limit for investment approvals was Rs. 300 crore
- CCEA will consider proposals worth over Rs. 1,000 crore
- Several projects, especially roads, expected to get faster clearance

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated September 11, 2014)

POPULATION

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 8, 2014

China: 19,000 couples given second child permit

Nearly 20,000 couples have been allowed to have a second child in Beijing under China's controversial One Child Policy, which was recently modified to meet demographic challenges.

So far 21,249 couples have filed birth applications of which 19,363 were granted permission for the second child in the Chinese capital, Beijing Municipal Commission of Health and Family Planning said.

Around 56% of those permitted are women aged between 31 to 35 while another 537 aged above 40, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

China last year relaxed its decades-old one-child policy which was designed to curb population growth as the country grappled with looming demographic crisis with the increase in the numbers of old aged people.

A majority of the Chinese provinces, including the most populated, Henan, have allowed couples to have a second child if either parent is an only child. Beijing followed suit on February 21.

Before the policy was adopted, both parents must be sole children to be eligible for a second child.

The relaxation came as the world's second largest economy is coping with a declining labour force and an aging population.

Demographic experts have said the easing will help promote balanced population growth in the country.

Under the one-child policy, many couples, particularly in China's countryside, had abortions as they prefer boys to girls.

This led to a wide gender gap of 118 male births versus 100 female births in 2010.

POVERTY

FINANCIAL EXPRESS, SEP 8, 2014

Column: Can poverty ever be abolished?

[Meghnad Desai](#)

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The poor, as the Bible tells us, are always with us.

Here we are 150 years since the Victorians discovered the problem of poverty, which, they believed, could be eliminated—we are still measuring poverty, urging ourselves to eradicate it and devising policies to do so effectively. India has had an ongoing National Sample Survey of family expenditure wherein there is a poverty level based on a calorific count standard (later augmented by Suresh Tendulkar) which gives us the head count of poverty. Yet every time the poverty standard is published in terms of rupees per capita per day, there is a storm in the media and people appear to be shocked at how low that number is. Despite careful and continuous measurement which tells us that the headcount may now be down to below 22%, people in public life resist the conclusion. Estimates of poverty rate in India can range from 22% up to 80% depending on whether you take Tendulkar (29.8% in 2009, 21.9% in 2013), World Bank (32.7% in 2009) or Arjun Sengupta (77%) as your measuring rod.

The World Bank tells us that if we fix \$5 as our standard, then 96% will qualify as below the poverty line. In its recent report, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) concluded that poverty in Asia has been underestimated. The real poverty line, according to the report, is not \$1.25 PPP but \$1.51 PPP, which takes the poverty rate from 20.7% to 30.5% for 2010. If you give more weightage to food as against non-food prices while constructing the poverty line, there are extra 141 million poor. If you adjust the poverty standard for vulnerability, you add another 11.9 percentage points and 418 million. Adding all these factors, Asia's poverty rate goes up to 49.5%—1.75 billion people. The poverty line is income-elastic; as per capita income rises, so does the poverty line. In any society, where the poverty line is income-elastic, it would be difficult to reduce the poverty count, much less abolish poverty altogether.

It may also be argued that the issue here is not that of poverty but of inequality. A society with a lower degree of income inequality may end up with a lower headcount than another even at the same per capita income. Indeed, the European Union defines poverty in terms of people below 60% of median income and extremely poor if below 40%.

The non-abolition of poverty is not bad news. It is good news because it reflects our ambition that the poorest among us get a growth dividend as we do who are above the poverty line. Maybe we should track the poverty numbers under each generation's

definition going back to what we wanted to achieve in the previous generation. We can then ask whether we have succeeded not by our standards but by the last generation's. It may be (and I am only guessing) that by the Dandekar/Rath standard of R15 per month per capita as of 1971, poverty headcount is less than 10%.

Even so, a sharp upward revision as the one proposed by the ADB in its latest report is disconcerting. Has poverty gone up in Asia over the last two or three decades of historically high growth rate or has only our poverty line? Should the ADB not have asked the question I put above in reverse? Was poverty in Asia higher on the triple standard now introduced—basic plus higher weightage for food prices plus an insistence on low vulnerability—50 years ago than it is now?

The ADB standard then says in terms of the original Roosevelt norm that for a household to be classified as non-poor it must have a level of income/expenditure high enough to accommodate all shocks (the ADB press release lists “natural disasters, financial crises, illness or other negative shocks”) which can be reasonably anticipated. To define the poverty level as the ADB wants to do, implies that to be non-poor, an individual or a family or an household must have a permanent income above a certain level defined by consumption needs under all possible conditions of uncertainty.

Another way to put it is that the ADB finds the median income as the poverty line since half the Asia's population is below it. If that is the case, perhaps the ADB should move to median income as the cut-off line of poverty as of now just as the European Union sets 60% of median income as its benchmark. But is it reasonable to set the poverty standard which is something of a minimum at that level?

The problem of measuring poverty must not become an obstacle in doing something about it. If we had sustained growth of employment for the millions trapped in low productivity jobs, we could get them a livelihood which will protect them from poverty. That is all we need.

The author is a prominent economist and Labour peer

DECCAN HERALD, SEP 9, 2014

Painting a rosy picture

Devinder Sharma

World Bank and poverty

No one is yet celebrating. Neither the Congress nor the ruling BJP is willing to formally accept the latest poverty vanishing trick performed by the World Bank. By revising the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) index, the World Bank has in one stroke reduced India's

poverty from over 400 million in 2005 to a very impressive 98 **million in 2010**.

This statistical jugglery comes at a time when an expert committee under Prof C Rangarajan, a former economic advisor to the prime minister, submitted its report to the Planning Commission in July this year. By revising the poverty line to Rs 32 in rural areas and Rs 47 in urban areas, Rangarajan committee actually added another 93.7 million thereby raising the number of total poor to 363 million or 29.5 per cent of the population.

Isn't this shocking? While not many Indians will believe that Rangarajan committee's estimates are anywhere near the reality, and in fact is a gross underestimation of the extent of poverty in India, the World Bank's latest estimates only shows that poverty does not require Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets to be achieved or any real effort to combat poverty and squalor. All it needs is a few economists who can play around with statistics. These economists can perform the vanishing trick much better than the Indian rope trick.

According to the World Bank's latest estimates, global poverty has come down overnight from 1.2 billion to 571 million. The earlier poverty line figure in India was Rs 27 for rural areas and Rs 33 for urban areas as computed by the Tendulkar committee a year back. This had raised a storm over the faulty and impractical estimates necessitating the setting up of yet another committee under C Rangarajan.

And if the recommendations of the Rangarajan committee are to be believed, it tells us that there is something dubiously wrong with the way India is trying to deliberately keep poverty low. In all fairness, the new poverty line is nothing but a starvation line. It only tells us how many people need emergency food aid.

World Bank is still worse. In order to justify economic liberalisation, it has been trying to fiddle around with social indicators as well as the poverty line to establish that the market mantra is working. World Bank's chief economist Kaushik Basu defends the exercise by saying: "In case a dollar in Ghana can buy three times what it can but in the United States, then a person who earns 1,000 dollar each month in Ghana is said to earn 3,000 in terms of PPP-adjusted dollars".

The hidden truth

But the reality is that even in the United States, despite being a privatised economy, hunger has shattered 25 years record. A record 49 million people, one in seven, depend upon food coupons to meet their daily food needs. One in four lives in poverty in America.

Global empirical evidence is now emerging challenging the World Bank's deliberate underestimation of poverty. Recent studies (ECLAC 2002, 2011) have conclusively shown that in Latin America for instance actual poverty rates are twice than what the World Bank had projected.

More recently, on April 11, 2014, a study by the University of Bristol published in the Journal of Sociology concludes that the World Bank is painting a 'rosy' picture by keeping poverty too low due to its narrow definition. Dr Christopher Deeming of the Bristol University's School of Geographical Sciences is quoted as saying: "Our findings suggest that the current international poverty line of a dollar a day seriously underestimates global poverty."

In India too, the entire effort of policy planners as well as the numerous expert committees constituted over time to estimate poverty have simply tried to brush the realities under the carpet.

While Rangarajan committee tabulates a new poverty line, way back in 2007, Arjun Sengupta committee report had estimated that 77 per cent of the population or 834 million people were unable to spend more than Rs 20 a day. But more recently, the consumer expenditure data presented by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) 2011-12 paints before us the grim realities.

Accordingly, if you are spending more than Rs 2,886 per month in the rural areas and Rs 6,383 in the urban areas you are part of the top 5 per cent of the country's population. In other words, those spending more than Rs 6,383 in urban areas are in the same category as Mukesh Ambani, Ratan Tata, Nandan Nilekani et al.

For the rest 95 per cent, roughly 118-crore people, life in any case remains tough. With or without the growth trajectory, their life hasn't changed. In fact, with the aggressive pitching by the corporate-controlled media, the growing social divide is getting completely ignored.

Another estimate exposes the glaring inequalities. The economic wealth of 56 people is equal to the economic wealth of 600 million people. No wonder when we take averages like the rising average income, it hides the rapidly growing inequalities. World Bank's deliberate attempt to paint a rosy picture by brushing the poor under the carpet in one single sweep hides the truth. With the passage of time, the unchallenged but repeated use of the latest statistics, get accepted over time. The poor however continue to live in misery.

RAILWAYS

TIMES OF INDIA, SEP 8, 2014

Over 2.25 lakh posts lying vacant in railways

[Mahendra K Singh](#)

NEW DELHI: Railways may be introducing hundreds of new trains every year but the number of employees required to handle the operations has been declining with 2.25 lakh posts currently lying vacant.

At the top level, the key post of member (electrical) in railway board is vacant as also the posts of four general managers (GMs) and several divisional railway managers (DRMs), hindering smooth decision-making.

"The total number of vacant posts in various categories on zonal railways, as on April 1, 2014 is 2,25,863," minister of state for railways Manoj Sinha had recently told Parliament.

The minister, however, argued that efficiency of train operations had shown continuous improvement over the years and there was no compromise on security matters.

But railway employees are not amused with the state of affairs in the transporter.

The pressure is mounting on better quality services after the BJP government raised fares, but the huge backlog in recruitment and inter-departmental fighting at the top is obstructing any betterment in passenger amenities.

Most of the vacancies are in safety-related posts of loco running staff, driver, station master, guard, signal inspector and maintenance staff.

While the key posts are lying vacant due to pressure from departmental lobbies, the latest policy on posting of DRMs is being questioned for giving absolute power to the railway board chairman.

Officers belonging to eight railway services are selected for DRM on the basis of a fixed quota. Out of 68 posts of DRMs, 16 each go to traffic, mechanical and engineering services while nine go to electrical and four to signals.

While the quota itself was strongly opposed by electrical and signals departments whose strength and role has increased substantially in train operations over the years, the new policy states, "The decision of railway board chairman in readjustment of slots among different services is final."

The policy also hides many facts. It says that posting of DRMs does not confer any benefits. But holding DRM post is a criterion for an official to be promoted as GM.

The delay in filling posts has raised serious questions as in past, the appointment of DRMs and GMs were deliberately delayed to scuttle a particular candidate's chances of becoming GM, a board member or railway board chairman.

After the cash-for-promotion scam, officials had demanded that the entire appointment process be recast to ensure there was no manipulation or victimization of those vying for top posts by doing away with the discretionary powers.

But it seems not many lessons have been learnt from the 'railgate' scandal and lobbying and one-upmanship for postings continues unhindered.

For other junior posts, railways, however, maintains that an aggressive recruitment drive is underway to fill up vacant posts. But the recruitment process is mired in controversy after paper leak and other irregularities were noticed.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 12, 2014

Smart tag for 44 cities in govt's first blueprint

Moushumi Das Gupta

Delhi could get two of the smart cities — a brand new one in the city's outskirts to be developed by the Delhi Development Authority and a second in New Delhi Municipal Council area.

This has been proposed in the first blueprint of Modi government's ambitious project to develop 100 smart cities across India. Drafted by the urban development (UD) ministry, the concept note proposes to include 44 cities with a population between 1 to 4 million under the scheme.

As first reported by HT on August 27, the UD ministry's concept note has estimated an annual investment of Rs. 35,000 crore for developing the 100 smart cities.

However, the note stops short of elaborating on how the funds would be generated. The note, which was put online for public discussion, has knocked off parts from an earlier draft which proposed a host of measures for raising funds from the public.

It says that a large part of the financing for smart cities will have to come from private sector and mentions broadly mentions imposing of user charges for utilities and a betterment levy for "enhancing the resource pool" without specifying how much fund would be generated from these measures.

Some of the basic criteria proposed for selecting cities includes cities which have an approved Master Plan, which can commit to provide free right of way for laying optic fibre networks among others.

The note says that a smart city would have facilities ranging from uninterrupted power and water supply, online delivery of all public services, and an effective public transport system among others.

WATER SUPPLY

BUSINESS LINE, SEP 12, 2014

Every drop of treated water counts

MANISH AGARWAL

To address the water crisis, recycling plants can work as PPPs and industry should switch to using such water

Sweet solution The desalination option B Jothi Ramalingam

Some stark facts: India has 18 per cent of world's population with only 4 per cent of total usable water resources. Annual per capita availability of water has declined by 15 per cent in the past 10 years and is estimated to fall to as low as 1140 m³/year by 2050.

The situation could worsen across regions, with variations in distribution of rainfall, proximity to river basins and ground water table levels. Many states may reach water stress state (1700 m³/yr) by 2020 and water scarce state (1000 m³/yr) by 2025. Hence, there is a need for optimum management of existing water resources.

Alternative options

The National Commission on Integrated Water Development Plan suggests that the efficiency of surface water irrigation systems can improve from 35-40 per cent to around 60 per cent. For industrial and domestic users, more technology intensive solutions like desalination projects, industrial and municipal water recycling can be explored. The need to explore supply solutions is critical for industrial users, whose needs are met after meeting the requirements for drinking, irrigation and hydro power, in that order. For industrial users, certainty of supply is more important than water cost, as it consists of 0.2-1 per cent of total cost. Hence, technology-intensive options should be explored to cater to industrial demand. In water stressed states like Tamil Nadu, bulk water rates are already about INR 60/kl while water cost from a typical desalination plant would be in range of INR 50/kl.

Making it work

Desalination projects are primarily in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Gujarat, the majority being captive. In terms of waste water recycling, about 50 per cent of industrial sewage water generated goes untreated.

The key reason for this is the lack of a holistic framework for coordination and policy making across agencies. Under the Constitution, 'Water' is a State subject with Central Government involvement limited to formulating guidelines like National Water Policy and managing inter-state distribution conflicts.

However, the implementation of such guidelines rests with several agencies. For instance, the National Water Mission calls for overall efficiency improvement of 20 per cent in water use through various non-conventional methods. It states industries consuming

significant water should focus on recycling; however, the percentage of water to be recycled is not mentioned. The responsibility of setting up such standards rests with Ministry of Environment & Forest (MoEF) and execution with state governments.

Many states have come up with water policy documents. However, the focus of such policies is on prioritisation, tariff setting, penalty and licensing and there is limited focus on putting together a framework to boost waste water treatment/ reuse, sea water desalination and water conservation.

There is also a need to enhance private participation in technology intensive methods of alternative sources like desalination, water treatment and recycling units. However, there is also a need to ensure that risks are adequately managed among private and public entities from a project finance perspective.

For projects to succeed, two key aspects need to be addressed: Re-prioritisation of alternate supply sources and pricing mechanism.

In brownfield developments, where long term demand for technology intensive solutions like desalination/recycling units is visible, but existing users are already being supplied water from various sources (rivers/ground water etc), there is a need for 'switching off' such sources and reprioritising them for domestic/irrigation use.

Prioritisation of desal/recycled water for industries and contractual flexibility to use earlier water sources as a variable quantity to meet additional demand (which cannot be met through the desal/recycling projects) need to be clearly established.

Pricing mechanism

Though industrial users may be willing to pay higher water tariffs for technology intensive supply solutions, there would still be a need to put in place measures make tariffs acceptable. Commercial blending of tariff is a possible option, especially in dedicated industrial/economic corridors with multiple suppliers. In such regions, rather than having differential pricing for technology intensive solutions and conventional sources, a blended tariff across board would help incentivise use of technology intensive sources.

Again, to make above solutions actually implementable there is a need for developing an integrated approach,.

Resolution of such aspects would go a long way in development of alternate water supply solutions and aid the bridging of the water demand supply gap. (*With inputs from Dhruv Gadh*)

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