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# TREATMENT WORTH 61,501 CRORE PROVIDED UNDER AYUSHMAN BHARAT PRADHAN MANTRI JAN AROGYA YOJANA

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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May 31, 2023 07:43 pm | Updated June 01, 2023 01:14 am IST - NEW DELHI:

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The AB PM-JAY is being implemented in 33 States and union territories except Delhi, Odisha, and West Bengal. | Photo Credit: K. Bhagya Prakash

Cancer treatment, emergency care, orthopaedic and urology (kidney-related ailments) top the tertiary care specialities treatment availed by beneficiaries under the [Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana \(AB PM-JAY\)](#) till date, as per data released by the Health Ministry on Wednesday.

Approximately 49% of Ayushman card recipients are women and over 48% of total authorised hospital admissions under the AB PM-JAY scheme have been availed by women, noted the data.

“Also, over 141 medical procedures under the PM-JAY are exclusively earmarked for women,” it said, adding that AB PM-JAY beneficiaries can avail treatment corresponding to a total of 1,949 procedures under 27 different specialities. The yojana has now recorded five crore hospital admissions amounting to 61,501 crore under the scheme.

The flagship scheme being implemented by the National Health Authority (NHA) provides health cover of 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to 12 crore beneficiary families.

The AB PM-JAY is being implemented in 33 States and union territories except Delhi, Odisha, and West Bengal. Till date, 23.39 crore beneficiaries have been verified and issued Ayushman cards for availing free treatment under the scheme. Under the AB PM-JAY, the beneficiaries are issued a co-branded PVC Ayushman card.

Also read | [Hospitals fined for fake Ayushman Bharat claims](#)

The PM-JAY empanelled hospital network consists of 28,351 hospitals (including 12,824 private hospitals) across the country. During the year 2022-23, approximately 56% of the total admissions (by amount) have been authorised in private hospitals while 44% of the admissions have been authorised in public hospitals, the Health Ministry said.

Elaborating on the achievement, a senior Health Ministry official said the AB PM-JAY was launched with the vision to achieve Universal Health Coverage. Currently in its fifth year of implementation, the scheme is helping crores of beneficiaries from poor and vulnerable families by reducing the out-of-pocket expenditure for medical treatments. Consistent efforts have helped achieve several milestones for the PM-JAY in the current year. From issuing 9.28 crore Ayushman cards to scheme beneficiaries to achieving 100% allocated fund utilisation and authorisation of 1.65 crore hospital admissions, the year 2022-23 has been full of accomplishments for the scheme.

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# WRESTLING FOR JUSTICE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE PROTEST BY THE WRESTLERS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

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June 02, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 01:25 am IST

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Wrestlers demanding the arrest of Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president and Bharatiya Janata Party Member of Parliament Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who has been accused of sexual harassment, continue to discuss their plans to keep their stir alive. The protest is no longer about the technicality of the investigations. There can be no two opinions on the platitude of the law taking its own course. The fact that an MP of the ruling party faces no political censure in the face of such serious allegations, including under POCSO, is disturbing for probity in public life, and sports administration. The [Delhi Police maintain that the cases against Mr. Singh are under investigation](#) and a status report will be submitted in the court. But the fact that the police force had to delete its own social media posts that made this benign claim raises questions about the fairness of its probe. On Tuesday, the stir by the wrestlers (they include international medal winners), took an emotional turn when they [gathered in Haridwar to immerse their medals in the Ganga](#). They stepped back at the last moment, but are unwilling to give up their clamour for justice.

The protest has found support from civil society, and has been noticed by international sporting bodies, including the International Olympic Committee and the United World Wrestling that have condemned the police crackdown on the wrestlers, which happened on the day India inaugurated its new Parliament building. Jat farm leaders in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) and Haryana have also come out in support of the wrestlers, resolving to strengthen the agitation. Meanwhile, Mr. Singh, far from facing condemnation by the ruling party, appears to enjoy the patronage of its leadership. The powerful MP from U.P.'s Kaiserganj is blaming the protesters and mobilising his supporters. Once accused in a TADA case, Mr. Singh appears to be too valuable in the BJP's scheme of things. There can be no case that anyone should be punished without due process which involves investigation and trial, but the question of probity must have a higher standard. The allegations against Mr. Singh are of a serious nature that diminish his capacity to be at the helm of a prestigious sporting body. While the criminal investigation must not be influenced by street protest, the message has to be clear to all, particularly the victims and the perpetrators, that there is zero tolerance of sexual harassment in India.

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# RECASTING THE DISCOURSE ON MUSLIM EDUCATION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

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June 02, 2023 12:40 am | Updated 12:40 am IST

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'Learning from best practices, all-out efforts must be made to raise the standards of all schools to a level where all segments of society long to get their children educated in them' | Photo Credit: MURALI KUMAR K.

India is home to about 213 million Muslims, the third largest Muslim population in the world. Over 11% of Muslims in the world live in India. They constitute 14.2% of the country's population. It is a national loss that such a sizeable section of society suffers from severe marginalisation, excessive exclusion, and deep deprivation.

In no sphere of social and economic life, including education, are they represented in the ratio of their population. In higher education, for example, Muslims account for just about 5.5% of total enrollment as well as faculty.

Muslims constitute around 72% of the religious minorities in India, but account for only 22.75% of minority educational institutions. In absolute terms, the number of educational institutions established, run, managed and maintained by the Muslim community would be substantially large. A statement, in 2019, by the Minister of Minority Affairs claimed that 13,000 educational institutions were granted minority status.

The actual number of schools, colleges and universities established, run, managed and maintained would run into several thousand, even after excluding madrasahs and makhtabs. The community ought to owe a great deal to philanthropist forefathers who had the foresight to set up these institutions. Not wanting to rely on the colonial masters, they thought it their bounden duty to provide for the education of their children. They sought to become self-sufficient or 'Atma Nirbhar', to use the contemporary lingua. The tradition has continued, though not with as much fervour and the zeal as before.

Muslims aspire to access quality education for their children irrespective of the kind and type of schools, colleges and universities (government, government-aided and self-financed private). They do not necessarily want to study in educational institutions run by Muslims. Restrained by their socio-economic conditions and circumstances, a vast majority of them are unable to afford them. Therefore, the community must establish many more schools, colleges and universities to provide educational opportunities not only to Muslim minorities but also to all segments of society.

At the same time, Muslim students must be enabled to access any educational institution of

quality and choice. Critically, it appears imminent to improve the quality of educational institutions established and run by the community either as minority or non-minority institutions. Of late, there has been some development in this regard and some schools, colleges and universities have come to be reckoned to be among the best and the most sought-after. Learning from best practices, all-out efforts must be made to raise the standards of all schools to a level where all segments of society long to get their children educated in them.

The task is onerous and the path arduous. It may be easier said than done but will have to be done, sooner rather than later. Most Muslim minority educational institutions, particularly those established in the distant past, are resource starved. The aided ones suffer from a shortage of funds as grants in aid have not kept pace with the expansion in demand. The self-financed ones are constrained by the lack of affordability in the community that they intend to serve, and hence cannot charge adequate fees to cover the cost of maintenance and teachers.

Could the community come forward to support these institutions? Could these institutions attempt full cost recovery with cross-subsidisation and community members agreeing to bear the cost of education of as many students as they can bear? Could the Ulema come together to find the ways and the means of mobilising and utilising zakat for this purpose?

Adequacy of funds for physical facilities, teaching and research infrastructure and human resources may be a necessary condition for promoting excellence. However, it would not be sufficient in itself. Leadership, management and governance need special attention. Leadership, management and governance play a critical role in ensuring that the teaching-learning processes go on smoothly and that excellence in all spheres of the institution becomes a habit.

It is important that managers, managing committees, heads of institutions and their teachers work in tandem towards common institutional objectives as a cohesive team with goal congruence. This can go a long way in improving the teaching-learning process, reputation and brand building. It is a sad reality of our times that the appointment of teachers has been seriously compromised across all educational institutions throughout the country. Para-teachers, part-time appointments and guest faculty engagements on paltry sums have marred the system. Muslim-managed educational institutions have been no exception. Resource constraints may not be the only reason behind such practices.

Corruption and unethical practices in the selection and recruitment of teachers are no more exceptions. Allegations and accusations of demand for payments for permanent appointments have surfaced time and again, and too frequently. It would be naive to expect such teachers to deliver quality education. They may also be least expected to be ethical in the discharge of responsibilities assigned to them. In-service training and professionals too are important and can help teachers stay up-to-date with the latest research, trends, and best practices in education. However, no amount of training is likely to work unless institutions ensure the appointment of the most meritorious teachers by shunning all compulsions, considerations and pressures.

Fostering a positive school culture that promotes student engagement, motivation, and achievement too is a *sine qua non*. Can our institutions put in place restorative justice practices, encourage student-led initiatives, and support positive behaviour? These must involve families and the community in the educational process to promote student success using closer parent-teacher interaction, family engagement events, and community partnerships. The focus should be on fostering a culture of continuous improvement and encouraging stakeholders to seek out opportunities to improve their practice.

Essentially, the discourse on Muslim education must move from mainstreaming of madrasahs and their modernisation. The focus must shift to mainstream schools, colleges and universities,



which cater to 96% of Muslim children.

Furqan Qamar, a former adviser for education in the Planning Commission, is a Professor in the Faculty of Management Studies of Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

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# AT THE ROOT OF INDIA'S MANUFACTURING CHALLENGE

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Infrastructure: Economic Corridors

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June 02, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 01:38 am IST

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'it is with respect to education that India has fallen most behind the countries that are the manufacturing successes of the world' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

The issue of manufacturing or services as the desirable path for India's economy makes the rounds in public fora periodically. In the early part of this century, when India's software exports were booming, it had been asked why India's services sector should not leapfrog over manufacturing to propel the economy forward. This proposal challenged the standard model of economic development, for, in most successful economies, industrial expansion had come first. The frustration of the Indian economic policy maker can be well understood.

The economic reforms of 1991 had almost exclusively focused on manufacturing, but the significant scaling down of tariffs and the dismantling of the 'licence-permit Raj' did not lead to an increase in the share of manufacturing in the economy. Of course, India's manufacturing sector ought not to be seen only in terms of its size. There has been a qualitative change after 1991. The range and quality of products manufactured in India have undergone an impressive increase. The rising quality and variety of the goods produced, without the expansion of manufacturing in relation to the economy, suggests a rising inequality of income.

After the economic reforms of 1991, the next time manufacturing came into the government's view was after 2014, when 'Make in India', with its emphasis on foreign direct investment, was launched. More recently, there has been the Production-Linked Incentive scheme, which essentially subsidises production of certain products. Though announced with fanfare, the first within months of the Narendra Modi government assuming office, the record of these schemes has not been impressive.

The first advance estimates of the national income for 2022-23 show manufacturing growth to be 1.3% for the year, less than that for agriculture and all main segments of services. While the data unambiguously point to the role of the demonetisation of 2016 in the slowing of the manufacturing sector, the persistence of low rates of growth in the presence of policy initiatives that were focused on manufacturing point to something 'structural' holding back the sector in India.

This issue reportedly came up for discussion at a private event, where it was agreed that the economy needs a manufacturing push for the creation of jobs and to raise the growth rate. We

are told that during the ceremony, the Finance Minister addressed the corporate leaders gathered with the remark, "I am sure the Indian private sector is ready. Are you?" Even on earlier occasions, the Minister has publicly referred to the many policy initiatives favouring the corporate sector. Among them, the tax rate had been lowered substantially in 2019 and the government also claims to have improved the ease of doing business. There is also another factor, namely, public investment. In the last Union Budget, capital expenditure was raised by 18.5%. This unusually high increase should come to the aid of the private sector by raising aggregate demand.

Despite the favourable measures undertaken by the government, it would be simplistic to expect industry leaders to achieve a manufacturing push on their own. There is demand to be reckoned with, and this is largely independent of the supply side, which the government has acted upon. Household demand for manufactures inevitably follows the satisfaction of its demand for the necessities of life — food, housing, health and education, none of which can be postponed. For a substantial section of India's households, food occupies a large share. This constricts the growth of demand for manufactures.

The relationship between per capita income and the share of food in household expenditure is strongly negative globally, with the richest countries, such as the United States and Singapore, having low such shares. Of the large economies of the world, the share of food is the largest in India, and its GDP per capita the lowest. Industry leaders have no control over the demand side of the equation. However, the possibility of exporting means that the manufacturing sector of an economy can sidestep a narrow domestic market. After all, the smaller countries of East Asia would never have been able to grow their manufacturing base to such an impressive level had they relied on their domestic markets alone. Taking this route, however, does require that an economy's manufactures are globally competitive.

In a comparison with the economies of East Asia, we can see what is necessary for an economy to be a successful exporter. One is infrastructure and the other is the skill level of the workforce. These determine the cost of production and the type of products that a country can produce, respectively. The export of manufactures is largely by sea. The challenge of reaching the seaports faced by companies located in north India can be imagined. Goods have to first reach the coast by road, and then exporters must deal with the relatively poor infrastructure and practices in India's ports. The competitive disadvantage faced by India's exporters can be seen in the much higher turnaround time for ships in India's ports with that in Singapore. The importance of ports for exports may be seen in a public statement recently issued by a section of Kerala's traders: that they are forced to use ports outside the State as they cost much less to use. While transportation is a big factor, it is not everything yet. Inexpensive power, space and industrial waste disposal services all matter.

But it is with respect to education that India has fallen most behind the countries that are the manufacturing successes of the world. The ranking of countries by the Programme for International Student Assessment reveals this directly. In a group of about 75 countries, the countries of East Asia are at the very top while India barely manages not to be the last. Now, if we do not wish to rely on tests administered by international bodies, we may turn to our very own non-governmental organisation Pratham, which assesses learning outcomes in India's schools. Its widely publicised findings point to the very low reading ability and numeracy of Indian children in their early years. These tests are for schoolchildren.

While there is no standardised test for university graduates, we have leading Indian employers issue statements on the lack of employability of these graduates. This dismal assessment has extended even to an Indian Institute of Technology. India's universities expanded to serve the aspiration of its middle class who wish to avoid manual work. However, for those headed for a

life as a skilled worker, ranging from carpenters to plumbers and mechanics, university is not an aspiration at all. This cohort has been neglected in economic policy-making in India. There is no formal assessment available of the state of the vocational training institutes in India, but we certainly know that they are few and far between. When it existed, the Planning Commission had released data showing that only about 5% of Indian youth have had any kind of technical training. The figure for South Korea was over 85%. It would be naïve to expect India to make a mark on the global stage for manufacturing with such a labour force.

The economic reforms of 1991 were undertaken with a view to raising the presence of manufacturing. To this effect, the trade and industrial policy regime had been overhauled. However, it overlooked the need for an entire ecosystem, including schooling, training and infrastructure for manufacturing to flourish. This has to be built. It cannot be achieved merely through legislation. Liberalising reforms have run their course in India.

### ***Pulapre Balakrishnan is an economist***

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## EXPLAINED

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June 04, 2023 02:18 am | Updated 02:18 am IST

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Students are tested for anemia at a medical camp in a in Tamil Nadu school as part of the Poshan Aayan programme. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

**The story so far:** Questions related to anaemia are slated to be dropped from the [National Family Health Survey \(NFHS-6\)](#) scheduled to begin on July 6. The omission comes after health experts questioned the efficacy of the method being used to estimate haemoglobin levels. India's anaemia burden has grown alarmingly with [NFHS-5 \(2019-21\)](#) finding that 57% of women in the age group 15-49 and 67% children between six months and 59 months are anaemic (from the corresponding 53% and 58.6% respectively in [NFHS-4 \(2015-16\)](#)). The Health Ministry has noted that anaemia is a public health challenge and accurate estimates are needed to tackle the crisis.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), anaemia is a condition in which the number of red blood cells or the haemoglobin concentration within them is lower than normal. Haemoglobin is needed to carry oxygen and if there are too few red blood cells, or not enough haemoglobin, there will be a decreased capacity of the blood to carry oxygen to the body's tissues, resulting in symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, dizziness and shortness of breath among others. Anaemia, according to WHO, may be caused by several factors. The most common nutritional cause of anaemia is iron deficiency although deficiencies in folate, vitamins B12 and A are also important causes. According to the Health Ministry, assessment of anaemia in India is being shifted to the new [Diet and Biomarkers Survey in India \(DABS-I\)](#), launched last year to map diet, nutrition and health status and provide the correct estimate of anaemia among the rural and urban population.

Researchers from Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science and Research, New Delhi, St. John's Medical College, Bengaluru, and the Indian Institute of Population Sciences, Delhi, had cautioned that there is a danger of anaemia being over-diagnosed in India as it follows WHO cut-offs for haemoglobin which may not be suited to India, because the cut-off point depends on the age, gender, physiological status, altitude and other factors. The WHO defines anaemia in children aged under five years and pregnant women as a haemoglobin concentration <110 g/L at sea level, and anaemia in non-pregnant women as a haemoglobin concentration <120 g/L. The study by the Indian team also pointed to differences in the way blood is drawn for sampling in NFHS. The NFHS survey measured haemoglobin in a drop of capillary blood that oozes from a finger prick. This, as per the report, can dilute the blood and give a falsely lower value. The recommended method of venous blood sampling, as per the report, gives a more accurate value.

The Health Ministry says DABS-I is a comprehensive national-level dietary survey, which will define food and nutrient adequacy by collecting individual dietary intake data of different age-groups of people from all States and UTs across the country. The study will also provide nutrient composition data on cooked and uncooked foods from various regions of the country for the first time. On the other hand, NHFS provides information on population, health, and nutrition for India and each State/UT. Besides providing evidence for the effectiveness of ongoing programmes, the data from NFHS helps in identifying the need for new programmes with an area specific focus.

Data on anaemia remains an important indicator of public health since anaemia is related to morbidity and mortality in the population groups usually considered to be the most vulnerable — pregnant women and children under five. A prevalence study on anaemia is useful to monitor the progress of reproductive health. Also, iron-deficiency anaemia reduces the work capacity of individuals and entire populations, with serious consequences for the economy and national development.

Also read | [Malnutrition in India is a worry in a modern scenario](#)

Dr. Antaryami Dash, deputy director, Health and Nutrition, Bal Raksha Bharat (Save the Children), said the proposed method of screening under DABS-I is likely to provide better estimates of anaemia. “There will be appropriate screening but through a different survey and we are hopeful that in the coming years we will be able to make a dent in the prevalence of anaemia across different age groups,” he added. Additionally, Dr. Vishesh Kasliwal, founder, Medyseva (health start-up with e-clinics across the country), stated that NFHS’s strength lies in its ability to provide a broader understanding of the issue and facilitate evidence-based policy-making and targeted interventions.

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# CREEPING CHANGE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE HIGH COURT RULING IN THE GYANVAPI MOSQUE CASE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Judiciary in India: its Structure, Organization & Functioning, Judges of SC & High Courts, Judgments and related Issues

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June 05, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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By holding that a suit filed by five women to offer worship to Hindu deities at the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi was [maintainable](#), the Allahabad High Court has possibly legitimised a clever attempt to question its status. In an order that upholds [a district court verdict](#) to the same effect, Justice J.J. Munir has ruled that the suit is limited in scope to enforcing the plaintiffs' right to worship Hindu deities and that it is not an attempt to convert the mosque into a temple. As a result, he has held that the suit is not barred by the [Places of Worship \(Special Provisions\) Act, 1991](#), a law that froze the status of places of worship as they stood on August 15, 1947. In the process, the court has rejected the objections by the Committee of Management of the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid, Varanasi, that the suit is barred by the 1991 law, as well as the Uttar Pradesh Wakf Act, 1995, and the U.P. Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983. Given the fact that Hindu revanchism has been quite active in claiming that several places of worship of Muslims had been constructed on the ruins of Hindu temples after their demolition, it is a matter of concern that the judiciary has endorsed the use of legal means to lay the foundation to building a possible future claim on the Gyanvapi Mosque.

The court is right in noting that while deciding a motion to reject a civil suit at the threshold, it has to limit itself to the assertions made in the plaint. The plaintiffs have claimed that Hindu deities were being worshipped at the mosque precincts before and after August 15, 1947. In particular, they have claimed that daily worship of Hindu deities was going on at Gyanvapi till 1990, after which it was suspended at the peak of the movement against the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. After 1993, it was limited to a single day every year. A relevant question is whether it is merely a suit to assert a right to worship, or if it is part of a larger design. The court has rejected the objection that the suit is an instance of 'clever drafting' to cover up an attempt to change the mosque's status. However, it should be noted that the plaintiffs also question whether the mosque was built on Wakf property, and assert that property vested in the deity would remain with the deity even if the structure was destroyed. It will be truly unfortunate if the customary right of worship is allowed to lead to incremental or creeping changes to the mosque's status.

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# SPARE THE ROD AND CHANGE THE LAW

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 05, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 12:30 am IST

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People gather at a pharmacy to buy supplies. | Photo Credit: AFP

The Director General of Health Services (DGHS) issued yet another order on May 12 reiterating directions that doctors in Central government hospitals prescribe only generic medicines instead of branded drugs.

The driving force behind these office orders is the standard trope that doctors are in cahoots with the pharmaceutical industry wherein the doctor receives a kickback for each prescription of a particular company's drug. Thus, by forcing them to write only the generic names of medicines, the hope is that the pharmacist will provide the patient with the cheapest available generic drug and thus save them the cost of the more expensive branded drugs. This policy objective obviously rests on the assumption that the pharmacist is a benevolent individual who does not have his own incentives to sell the patient more expensive branded drugs. Such orders have been passed earlier and the most recent order does not hide its irritation at having to repeat previous orders; it threatens government doctors with unspecified "further action" for failing to comply with these directions.

But before threatening its doctors, perhaps the Directorate should conduct a survey among government doctors asking them to explain their reluctance to write prescriptions with just the generic names. It is no secret that many Indian doctors in both the public and private sector simply do not trust the quality of all generic medicines in the Indian market. They have a valid reason for this: India has lagged behind countries like the U.S. in creating the appropriate legal and scientific standards that provide guarantees to doctors on the interchangeability of generic medicines with each other and the innovator drug.

The U.S. created this environment of trust by mandating as far back as in 1977 that most, but not all, generic drugs be tested on human volunteers in order to measure the rate at which the drug is bioavailable; i.e. the rate at which the drug dissolves in the bloodstream. Such testing is required because generic manufacturers may use different excipients like binders, coating and punching machines which directly affect the ability of the drug to dissolve in the blood. If the dissolution profile of the generic drug is same or similar to that of the innovator drug over a time period, it is declared to be "bio-equivalent" and hence therapeutically interchangeable with the innovator drug.

India mandated such bio-equivalence testing only in 2017. Even then, the regulations were vague. But the far more worrying aspect from a public health perspective is the fact that a

recommendation by the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) to ensure that existing generic drugs, approved prior to 2017, also be tested for bio-equivalence, was ignored by the government. This means that a vast majority of drugs in the Indian market have never been tested for bio-equivalence. Hence, the government cannot provide doctors with a legal guarantee that all generic medicines in the Indian market are, in fact, interchangeable with the innovator drug.

If the government cannot provide such a legal guarantee, it should not be barring doctors against prescribing their preferred brands. Many doctors have developed faith in particular brands, not because they receive bribes but because patient feedback has taught them that other brands do not work as effectively.

The lack of bio-equivalence testing is just one of the issues with generic medicines in India. The other massive problem is the issue of stability testing. The key challenge to manufacturing any drug is to ensure that it remains stable through a stressed supply chain in differing conditions of heat and humidity. An unstable drug will start decomposing, possibly reducing its efficacy. Sometimes a tablet will just crumble into powder when removed from its packaging. In other instances, the tablet will be visibly discoloured or if it is a liquid, particulate matter may be visible. Many of these problems can be checked if the law prescribed mandatory stability testing prior to providing marketing approval and also while the drug is in the market. This common requirement across the world became mandatory in India only in 2018, after the government managed to overcome immense opposition from the pharmaceutical industry. But once again, the new regulations not only lacked scientific rigour, but also did not apply retrospectively to generic drugs approved prior to 2018. This means that many generic medicines in the Indian market have not been subjected to mandatory stability testing. This could be an additional reason contributing to quality issues that undermines the trust of government doctors in generic drugs.

Given these issues related to the quality of generic drugs, it is not appropriate for the DGHS to force doctors to prescribe drugs by generic names. Rather, the DGHS must work towards resolving the genuine concerns being raised by doctors. A starting point would be to ask for regulations which require pharma companies to identify on their packaging whether a drug has been tested for bio-equivalence and stability as required by the law. Building the confidence of doctors in generic medicine serves public interest better than threatening them with punitive action for failing to comply with directives on mandatory prescription of drugs by their generic names.

***Dinesh Thakur was the whistleblower in the Ranbaxy case and author of The Truth Pill; Prashant Reddy T. is a lawyer and the author of The Truth Pill***

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# TRAGIC TRACK: ON THE BALASORE TRAIN ACCIDENT AND CORRECTIVE MEASURES BY THE INDIAN RAILWAYS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

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June 06, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:34 am IST

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The [rail accident in Balasore](#) in Odisha on June 2, involving [the collision of three trains](#), is a tragic reminder of the challenges that India faces in modernising and expanding its rail services. At least 275 people were killed and over 900 injured when the Shalimar-Chennai Coromandel Express, the Yesvantpur-Howrah Express and a freight train collided in [the worst rail accident in two decades](#). But an accident of this kind had been foretold, as recently as February this year when a collision between two trains was averted at Hosadurga Road Station in the Birur-Chikjajur section of the Mysore Division of the Railways, thanks only to an alert loco pilot and the moderate speed of the train, which could be brought to a stop. The train had gone off its intended track, which was reported as a result of faulty signalling system and dangerous human intervention. An official record of that incident called for “immediate corrective actions... to rectify the system faults and also sensitizing the staff for not venturing into shortcuts”. The accident in Balasore, it now appears in a preliminary inquiry, followed the same disastrous sequence of mechanical failures and human errors.

The Indian Railways carries nearly 15 million passengers every day now compared to the peak of 23 million a day the year before the COVID-19 pandemic. India has an ambitious plan to improve its rail infrastructure, and in the year 2023-24, 2.4-lakh crore has been allocated for capital expenditure. Accidents per million train kilometre have fallen over the last decade, but poor maintenance of tracks and the rolling stock and overstretched staff are problems that the Railways can no longer camouflage with glitzy facades. Safety measures including anti-collision systems are expanding, but evidently not at an adequate pace. In 2021, the Prime Minister announced that 75 new semi-high speed trains labelled Vande Bharat would be started over 75 weeks, and several have been started already. There has been attention on passenger amenities also, but nothing can be more important than safety. The accident in Balasore should prompt India's railways development plans onto the right track. Speed should be strived for, but safety is paramount. Sabotage is not ruled out in the Balasore accident, which will be probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation. More important will be the corrective measures by the Railways at the operational and planning levels. It will have to find more resources to modernise and rationalise its priorities.

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# USEFUL FIRST STEP: ON PROBING THE ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency & Accountability including Right to Information and Citizen Charter

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June 07, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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The [setting up of a three-member panel](#) by the Union government to probe [the ethnic violence in Manipur](#), that has claimed nearly 100 lives and displaced over 35,000 people, must be welcomed. Its terms of reference are clear — an inquiry into the causes and the spread of the violence and whether there was any dereliction of duty by the authorities. This has the potential to set a process of truth-telling in motion that could nudge the possibility of reconciliation between the wounded ethnic communities. Riots and ethnic violence in particular rarely occur without driving forces — the fact that this occurred in Manipur with the help of looted weapons from police armouries only underlines this. Affixing responsibility for the violent actions to key actors and holding them accountable are the first steps in building trust in those responsible for governance. [That arson and violence continue in the State](#) even after the [Union Home Minister visited affected areas](#) and only [18% of the looted weapons returned](#) to the armouries suggest that distrust among the two ethnic communities, [the Meiteis](#) and Kukis, remains intact, besides indicating the inability of the State government to act as a catalyst for a return to lasting peace.

The paramilitary forces that have created a security grid and are patrolling “buffer areas” between the Imphal valley and adjoining hill areas, where the Kuki people live, to prevent any violence, can only be of limited help. The political representatives of the two communities — MLAs in particular who share party affiliations but differ in their ethnicities — must act as the bearers of peace and reconciliation. The underlying differences between the groups require a longer political dialogue and rumination as they are not easy to solve. Many among the Kukis (and the Nagas) claim that the demand for Scheduled Tribe status for Meiteis — opposed by a section among them — is unjustified, while Meitei sections resent the benefits of affirmative action for “hill-tribes”. The Meiteis also have the grievance that they lack the explicit privilege of owning land in hill areas, unlike the rights that anyone can have in the Imphal valley. Historical patterns of land ownership and dwelling by the Kukis have also made them susceptible to claims that they have encroached on reserved forests, and the steps taken by the government to clear such areas have created an impression of siege mentality among them. A process of reconciliation cannot succeed unless these knotty issues are tackled; for this to happen, representatives of these communities must rise above their narrow sectarianism and look for constitutional solutions. A beginning has to be made to tamp down on the violence, return the displaced to their homes, secure their lives, and isolate those responsible for wanton violence and bring them to justice. Thus, much depends on the commission’s work in this regard.

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# REMOVING AMR FROM THE WHO'S 'PANDEMIC TREATY' WILL LEAVE HUMANS VULNERABLE TO FUTURE PANDEMICS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 06, 2023 01:20 pm | Updated 02:02 pm IST

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A scanning electron micrograph of Staphylococcus aureus bacteria. | Photo Credit: NIAID (CC BY 2.0)

In late May, the latest version of the draft Pandemic Instrument, also referred to as the “pandemic treaty,” was shared with Member States at the [World Health Assembly](#). The text was made available online via [Health Policy Watch](#) and it quickly became apparent that all mentions of addressing [antimicrobial resistance](#) in the Pandemic Instrument were at risk of removal.

Work on the Pandemic Instrument began in December 2021 after the World Health Assembly agreed to a global process to draft and negotiate an international instrument — under the Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) — to protect nations and communities from future pandemic emergencies.

Since the beginning of negotiations on the Pandemic Instrument, there have been calls from civil society and leading experts, including the [Global Leaders Group on Antimicrobial Resistance](#), to include the so-called “silent” pandemic of antimicrobial resistance in the instrument.

## [Explained | The challenge of antimicrobial resistance](#)

Just three years after the onset of a global pandemic, it is understandable why Member States negotiating the Pandemic Instrument have focused on preventing pandemics that resemble COVID-19. But not all pandemics in the past have been caused by viruses and not all pandemics in the future will be caused by viruses. Devastating past pandemics of bacterial diseases have included [plague](#) and [cholera](#). The next pandemic could be caused by bacteria or other microbes.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is the process by which infections caused by microbes become resistant to the medicines developed to treat them. Microbes include bacteria, fungi, viruses and parasites. Bacterial infections alone cause [one in eight deaths](#) globally.

AMR is fueling the rise of drug-resistant infections, including [drug-resistant tuberculosis](#), [drug-resistant pneumonia](#) and drug-resistant Staph infections such as [methicillin-resistant](#)



[Staphylococcus aureus](#) (MRSA). These infections are killing and debilitating millions of people annually, and [AMR is now a leading cause of death worldwide](#).

Without knowing what the next pandemic will be, the “pandemic treaty” must plan, prepare and develop effective tools to respond to a wider range of pandemic threats, not solely viruses.

Even if the world faces another viral pandemic, [secondary bacterial infections](#) will be a serious issue. During the COVID-19 pandemic for instance, large percentages of those hospitalized with COVID-19 required treatment for secondary bacterial infections.

New research from Northwestern University suggests that many of the deaths among hospitalized COVID-19 patients [were associated with pneumonia — a secondary bacterial infection that must be treated with antibiotics](#).

Treating these bacterial infections requires effective antibiotics, and with AMR increasing, [effective antibiotics are becoming a scarce resource](#). Essentially, safeguarding the remaining effective antibiotics we have is critical to responding to any pandemic.

That’s why the potential removal of measures that would help mitigate AMR and better safeguard antimicrobial effectiveness is so concerning. Sections of the text which may be removed include measures to prevent infections (caused by bacteria, viruses and other microbes), such as:

The exclusion of these measures would hinder efforts to protect people from future pandemics, and appears to be part of a [broader shift to water-down the language in the Pandemic Instrument](#), making it easier for countries to opt-out of taking recommended actions to prevent future pandemics.

Measures to address AMR could be easily included and addressed in the “pandemic treaty.”

In September 2022, I was part of a group of civil society and research organizations that specialize in mitigating AMR who were invited the WHO’s [Intergovernmental Negotiating Body](#) (INB) to provide an [analysis on how AMR should be addressed](#), within the then-draft text.

They outlined that including bacterial pathogens in the definition of “pandemics” was critical. They also identified specific provisions that should be tweaked to track and address both viral and bacterial threats. These included AMR and recommended harmonizing national AMR stewardship rules.

### [Also Read | Gutter to gut: How antimicrobial-resistant microbes journey from environment to humans](#)

In March 2023, I joined other leading academic researchers and experts from various fields in publishing a special edition of the [Journal of Medicine, Law and Ethics](#), outlining why the Pandemic Instrument must address AMR.

The researchers of this special issue argued that the Pandemic Instrument was overly focused on viral threats and ignored AMR and bacterial threats, including the need to manage antibiotics as a common-pool resource and revitalize research and development of novel antimicrobial drugs.

While [earlier drafts of the Pandemic Instrument](#) drew on guidance from AMR policy researchers and civil society organizations, after the first round of closed-door negotiations by Member

States, all of these insertions, are now at risk for removal.

The Pandemic Instrument is the best option to mitigate AMR and safeguard lifesaving antimicrobials to treat secondary infections in pandemics. AMR exceeds the capacity of any single country or sector to solve. Global political action is needed to ensure the international community works together to collectively mitigate AMR and support the conservation, development and equitable distribution of safe and effective antimicrobials.

### [Also Read | Antimicrobial resistance is a silent killer, say doctors](#)

By missing this opportunity to address AMR and safeguard antimicrobials in the Pandemic Instrument, we severely undermine the broader goals of the instrument: to protect nations and communities from future pandemic emergencies.

It is important going forward that Member States recognize the core infrastructural role that antimicrobials play in pandemic response and strengthen, rather than weaken, measures meant to safeguard antimicrobials.

Antimicrobials are an essential resource for responding to pandemic emergencies that must be protected. If governments are serious about pandemic preparedness, they must support bold measures to conserve the effectiveness of antimicrobials within the Pandemic Instrument.

*Susan Rogers Van Katwyk is adjunct professor, School of Global Health, and managing director, AMR Policy Accelerator, York University, Canada. This article is republished from [The Conversation](#).*

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# CARDIOLOGIST, WHO PERFORMED HUNDREDS OF SURGERIES, DIES OF HEART ATTACK

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June 08, 2023 03:30 am | Updated 03:30 am IST - Jamnagar

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When his family members found him unconscious in the morning, they called an ambulance. Image for representation purpose only.

A 41-year-old well-known cardiologist in Gujarat's Jamnagar city, Dr Gaurav Gandhi, died after suffering a heart attack at his residence here, his family members and a colleague said on Wednesday.

Dr. Gandhi's sudden death on early Tuesday morning left the city in a state of shock and grief. Hundreds of mourners joined his last journey to a crematorium in the evening and paid tributes to the doctor known for performing a large number of surgeries.

"He had performed a large number of heart surgeries," Dr. H.K. Vasavada of the Guru Govindsinh government hospital, where he used to work, said.

"Cardiologist Dinesh Gandhi suffered a heart attack and died at the hospital during treatment. It is a matter of great shock and grief to the medical fraternity of Jamnagar that such a bright and young doctor is no more with us. May his soul rest in peace," said Dr. Vasavada.

According to his relatives and friends, Dr. Gandhi reached home on Monday night after attending patients at the private Sharda Hospital where he practised. He had his dinner and went to bed.

When his family members found him unconscious in the morning, they called an ambulance. He was taken to the GG Hospital where doctors tried to revive him but failed and declared him dead, they said.

Doctors said he died of a heart attack.

Dr. Gandhi is survived by his aged parents, wife and two children.

Born in 1982, Dr. Gandhi was a renowned heart surgeon and known for performing hundreds of angiography procedure and surgeries.

A post-mortem was performed on the body to ascertain the reason behind the heart attack and a

report was awaited, said people in know of the development.

Those who knew the cardiologist said he led an active life, played cricket and regularly went to gymnasium.

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# END THE DEBATE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE LAW COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION ON SEDITION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

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June 08, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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The [Law Commission's recommendation](#) that the [offence of sedition](#) be retained in penal law, albeit with some safeguards, flies in the face of current judicial and political thinking that the country may not need this colonial vestige any more. [Section 124A of the IPC](#), which describes sedition, seeks to punish speech or writing that brings or tries to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or tries to excite disaffection towards, the government established by law. Its validity was upheld by the Supreme Court as far back as 1962, but with the reservation that it would be a constitutionally permissible restriction on free speech, only if the offence was restricted to words that had a tendency to incite violence or cause public disorder. However, legal experts have pointed out that the panel's report fails to consider how far free speech jurisprudence has travelled since then. While keeping pending sedition cases in abeyance last year, the Court had observed that "the rigours of Section 124A of IPC are not in tune with the current social milieu". The Union government, too, had decided to reexamine and reconsider the provision. The time has come to consider the provision in the light of recent principles to test the validity of any restriction on fundamental rights, especially free speech. Given its overbroad nature, the sedition definition may not survive such scrutiny.

The Commission has sought to address two concerns usually raised about sedition: its rampant misuse and its relevance to the present day. It has repeated the hackneyed argument that a law's misuse is no ground to withdraw it. However, what it has failed to consider is that its very existence on the statute affords great scope for its unjustified use, often with deliberate intent to suppress dissent and imprison critics. It is doubtful if a mere prior sanction requirement, as mooted in the report, or a mandatory preliminary probe, will lead to fewer sedition cases. Further, the panel has argued that the fact that something is a colonial-era provision is no ground to discard it. It has justified the need to keep sedition on the penal statute by citing the various extremist and separatist movements and tendencies in the country, as well as the "ever-proliferating role of social media in propagating radicalisation". This may not be a sufficient reason to retain it, as divisive propaganda, incitement to violence and imputations affecting social harmony can be curbed by other penal provisions. In fact, an effective legal framework against hate speech is what is needed more than one to penalise speech or writing that targets the government. Notwithstanding the report, the government should consider the repeal of the provision.

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# SEDITION — ILLOGICAL EQUATION OF GOVERNMENT WITH STATE

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June 08, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 01:33 am IST

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'The real issue is that the law of sedition contained in Section 124A of the IPC is unconstitutional' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

In its [279th Report](#), the [Law Commission of India has recommended](#) the retention of [Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code](#) which contains the [Law of Sedition](#). It has also recommended enhanced punishment for this offence in the name of national security. While Section 124A provides for a minimum imprisonment of three years, the commission recommends a minimum of seven. In 2022, the [Supreme Court of India had ordered a stay](#) on all existing proceedings and also on the registration of fresh cases ([S.G. Vombatkere vs Union of India](#)) under sedition upon the Union Government assuring the Court of a review of this law at the earliest. The Court's stay order was in consideration of the fact that this law was widely misused by the law enforcement authorities.

The law of sedition in India has a long and infamous history. Section 124A was incorporated in the Indian Penal Code in 1870. The purpose was to suppress the voice of Indians who spoke against the British Raj, as the government did not want any voice of dissent or protest. The wording of Section 124A clearly reveals the intention of the colonial government. Sedition is an offence against the government and not against the country, as many think. The offence is in bringing or attempting to bring in hatred or contempt or exciting or attempting to excite disaffection towards the government established by law. The offence is committed by spoken or written words, by signs or by any other means. Thus, the gist of the offence is bringing a government into hatred or contempt or causing disaffection towards the government of the day.

Editorial | [End the debate: On the Law Commission's recommendation on sedition](#)

The law of sedition was defined and applied in two different ways during the British period. The first major case was Queen Empress vs Bal Gangadhar Tilak 1897 in which the Bombay Court found Bal Gangadhar Tilak guilty of sedition for writing a couple of articles in Kesari, a Marathi weekly, invoking Shivaji, which was interpreted as exciting disaffection towards the British government. Judge Strachy explained the law as: "The offence (Sedition) consists in exciting or attempting to excite in others certain bad feelings towards the government. It is not the exciting or attempting to excite mutiny or rebellion or any sort of actual disturbance great or small.... but even if he neither excited nor intended to excite any rebellion or outbreak or forcible resistance

to the authority of the government that is sufficient to make him guilty under the Section." Later, the Privy Council upheld this exposition of law. Thus, sedition meant exciting or attempting to excite bad feelings towards the government. It was a very draconian law.

The second case was *Niharendu Dutt Majumdar And Ors. vs Emperor* which was decided by the Federal Court. Acquitting the accused Majumdar, Sir Mauris Gwyer, Chief Justice, explained the law as: "Public disorder or the reasonable anticipation or likelihood of public disorder is thus the gist of the offence."

These two statements of the law of sedition given by two courts in British India differ from one another. One defines sedition as disaffection, which was interpreted as 'political hatred of government' and comes within the mischief of sedition. The other interprets it to mean that the offence is committed only when there is incitement to violence or disorder.

It may be noted that the Privy Council, the highest appellate court of that time, approved the law stated by Justice Strachy in Tilak's case. Further, it is said that the opinion of the Privy Council on sedition was not brought to the notice of the Federal Court when it decided Majumdar's case. Otherwise it would have followed the Privy Council's decision.

The brief journey into the British era is necessary to better understand the judgment in *Kedarnath vs State of Bihar (1962)* by the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court and the Law Commission's recommendations for incorporating the essence of that judgment.

*Kedarnath* decided the constitutionality of sedition. The Court held that it is constitutionally valid for two reasons. One, sedition, though an offence against the government, is against the state because the government is a visible symbol of state and the existence of the state will be in jeopardy if the government is subverted. Second, Article 19(2) imposes restrictions in the interest of the security of the state which has wider amplitude and which includes the law on sedition.

Sedition is an offence against the government. Anyone who causes disaffection towards the government is liable to be prosecuted under this law. Disaffection has been defined as 'political hatred' towards the government by the full Bench of the Bombay High Court which upheld the punishment of Tilak. So, causing political hatred towards the government in the minds of the public is the offence of sedition. In this sense, it clearly violates the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. In a democratic republic where people have the freedom to change a bad government, disaffection towards a government cannot be an offence. In fact, it is a part of the democratic process and experience. Therefore, making it an offence directly conflicts with the fundamental rights of citizens. We cannot expect citizens to have any affection towards a bad government.

The law declared by the Privy Council was final, according to which even a gesture which indicates political hatred towards the government comes within the mischief of sedition. Obviously, sedition contained in Section 124A goes against Article 19(1)(a).

However, the Supreme Court had, in an attempt to declare sedition constitutionally valid, admittedly adopted the Federal Court's approach and held that Section 124A is valid but can be invoked only when the words or gestures have a tendency to incite violence. The Court was aware that sedition, as it is worded in Section 124A in IPC and interpreted by the Privy Council, could not have remained in the statute book after the Constitution came into force in 1950. The Court was also conscious of the fact that sedition, as a reasonable restriction on the right of speech and expression, was deleted from the draft Constitution by the Constituent Assembly.



The implication was clear. Sedition was not meant to be a reasonable restriction. But the Court wanted to retain sedition because it was genuinely worried about an imminent communist revolution in the country, which Kedarnath, a local communist in Begu Sarai in Bihar was advocating. But, on a closer scrutiny, we will find that the position taken by the court in Kedarnath is not radically different from Tilak. As per Kedarnath, a tendency to incite disorder would amount to sedition, and actual disorder need not occur. So, in substance there is not much difference between Kedarnath and Tilak.

The Law Commission has suggested that the tendency to incite disorder should be incorporated in Section 124A. The commission defines tendency as a slight inclination. It is a policeman who will detect the tendency to incite disorder in a speech or article, and the citizen will be behind bars for seven years or even for life. In fact, the Kedarnath judgment did not soften the law on sedition. If anything it has brought it closer to the judgment in Tilak without mitigating the rigour of the law. The recommendation for the enhancement of punishment defies common sense when there is a universal demand for the scrapping of this law. The commission could not see the absurdity of a law which punishes citizens of a democratic country for making comments which may cause disaffection towards a government which they have the power to remove.

The real issue is that the law of sedition contained in Section 124A of the IPC is unconstitutional. The Law Commission failed or did not want to see the fallacy in the Kedarnath judgment which did not in effect soften this harsh law but declared that it is constitutionally valid. Kedarnath equates government with state, which is illogical in the context of a democratic republic. Therefore, its attempt to bring sedition within the framework of reasonable restriction under Article 19(2) is constitutionally impermissible.

***P.D.T. Achary is a former Secretary General, Lok Sabha***

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# HYDERABAD-BASED BHARAT BIOTECH RECALLS TYPHOID VACCINE BATCH OWING TO SUBSTANDARD QUALITY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 08, 2023 08:46 pm | Updated June 09, 2023 03:09 am IST - NEW DELHI

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The recall was initiated utilising the principle of abundant precaution based on test results of field samples. File image for representation | Photo Credit: Reuters

Flagged by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) as “not of standard quality”, Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech on June 8 confirmed that it had recalled a batch of its typhoid vaccine.

CDSCO officials found that a batch manufactured at the Hyderabad facility did not comply with the standard specification of the drug controller. While the company in its statement, said that there were no reports of adverse events or safety issues due to the batch in the country, it added that a recall had been initiated.

“Bharat Biotech has initiated a recall of TYPBAR batch 54A22001A (vi polysaccharide typhoid vaccine) and communicated the same to the distribution chain,” a Bharat Biotech statement said.

It added that the recall was initiated utilising the principle of abundant precaution based on test results of field samples by the Central Drugs Laboratory.

According to an alert by CDSCO, the samples of the vaccine by Bharat Biotech were drawn by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Goa and tested by the Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL), Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh.

The TYBPAR typhoid vaccine from Bharat Biotech is the first vaccine in India to get a World Health Organisation Good Manufacturing Practice (WHO-GMP) pre-qualification certificate and is currently sold in more than 50 countries, according to the company.

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# 11% OF INDIA'S POPULATION IS DIABETIC WHILE 15.3% COULD BE PRE-DIABETIC, SAYS STUDY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 09, 2023 12:45 am | Updated 12:45 am IST - CHENNAI

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Around 15.4% of the urban population and 15.2% of rural India are in the pre-diabetic stage. Image for representation purpose only. | Photo Credit: AP

An estimated 101.3 million people in the country could be diabetic and another 136 million in the pre-diabetic stage, a cross-section study, carried out between 2008 and 2020 across the country, has found.

According to the current estimate, about 11% of the country's population is already diabetic with urban India accounting for 16.4% while in the rural population the prevalence is 8.9%.

Around 15.4% of the urban population and 15.2% of rural India are in the pre-diabetic stage. The overall prevalence is 15.3%.

**Also Read | [Treat diabetes as a serious disease and not as a simple disorder, say doctors at webinar](#)**

The estimation is based on an analysis of the prevalence of general obesity; abdominal obesity; hypertension and hypercholesterolemia (presence of bad cholesterol), all of which were found to be higher among the urban population as compared to the rural population.

"It is a ticking time bomb," said R.M. Anjana, managing director of Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre.

A random sampling of the population in all the 31 States found that Uttar Pradesh had the lowest prevalence of diabetes at 4% while Goa had the highest at 26.4%. It is followed by Puducherry with 26.3%; Kerala with 25.5% and Chandigarh with 20.4%. In Tamil Nadu, the prevalence is 14.4%.

"Not all of them would become diabetic. A third of them could reverse their condition to normal but another third will progress and become diabetic," said V. Mohan, chairman, MDRF.

The diabetologist said the study results would be shared with the respective State government so that they can make policies to improve the health of the population. Dr. Mohan said the study results were not a surprise but the numbers that came up were higher than their estimation so

far.

Since 1972, there has been no ICMR study on the prevalence of diabetes in the country. At that time, the prevalence in urban India was 2.3% and in rural India it was 1.5%. The ICMR-INDAB study had been launched in 2008 to estimate the country's NCD burden.

The study was done in five phases between 2008 and 2020 across the country, with each phase covering five States (all seven northeastern States were covered in one phase). Individuals aged over 20 were recruited for the door-to-door survey and 1.24 lakh individuals were part of the survey.

In each State, approximately 4,000 people were chosen (2,800 in rural and 1,200 in urban).

The report, *Metabolic non-communicable disease health report of India: the ICMR-INDAB national cross-sectional study (ICMR-INDAB-17)*, was published in the June edition of *Lancet Diabetes Endocrinology* released on Thursday.

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# GETTING RAILWAY SAFETY BACK ON TRACK AFTER ODISHA

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Infrastructure: Railways

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June 09, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 03:15 am IST

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Restoration work underway at the accident site | Photo Credit: PTI

There have been innumerable television debates following [the train accident](#) involving the 12841 Shalimar-Chennai Coromandel Express, the 12864 Sir M. Visvesvaraya Terminal Bengaluru-Howrah Superfast Express and a goods train at Bahanaga Bazar station in Balasore district, Odisha, on the evening of June 2. But the key question that many panellists have failed to address convincingly, barring the familiar platitudes, is about how the Indian Railways can work to ensure that such catastrophes are never repeated.

First, a recap of what happened. Broadly, the interlocking of signals and routes through a series of relays and logic gates, ensures that a train is guided by signals to a route amid a maze of railway tracks in a manner that would never cause it to encounter another train, ahead or in the rear. In this case, this interlocking was overridden by manual intervention. We also have two causes: in the first, it was most likely done by a signal maintainer who has access to the equipment hut or relay room, who may have been cutting corners to expedite his maintenance work so that the running train is not affected. Or, in the second instance, as the Indian Railways seems to believe, it is the handiwork of 'a saboteur' with criminal intention to cause an accident. The Odisha train accident is now a subject of double investigation; the first, the statutory probe by the Commissioner of Rail Safety, and the second by the Central Bureau of Investigation, which is an unprecedented move by the government. Whatever be the findings, it is not premature to examine the question that has been raised above.

In this specific case, the general public finds it quite bewildering that a callous and cavalier signal maintainer, or for that matter 'a criminal', can meddle with the system and cause havoc of this magnitude. The heart of the interlocking equipment is housed in a central relay room in the main station building and access to this room is similar to opening a bank locker; the station master and the maintainer have keys to a double lock. While tampering with equipment in this room is possible by the maintainer, in connivance or otherwise with the station master, the chances of a criminal acting this way are inconceivable. On the other hand, there are some pieces of remote equipment spread all over a railway station yard which are installed in huts and location boxes, access to which is possible only by the authorised maintainer. The possibilities of tampering are greater in such locations. Reportedly, in this case, it was the equipment in one such hut which was alleged to have been accessed and meddled with in this case. It is not out of place to mention that this system of protecting sensitive signalling equipment is not unique to

India; something similar, if not less stringent, is prevalent even in advanced rail systems abroad.

How do you deal with a scenario in which the authorised maintainer himself (under pressure to clear a fault expeditiously or to execute in a quick manner regular maintenance so that the running of trains does not suffer) adopts shortcuts, thereby endangering the lives of thousands of passengers? Or, that there is a criminal out to cause mayhem? This is akin to a clever hacker accessing a computerised road traffic signalling system in a busy crossing and fiddling with the conflict resolution module, turning on all the lights in both directions to green and causing a massive crash of vehicles.

Stronger safeguards against such misadventures, whether by the custodian himself or otherwise, may be difficult to build but it is something that must be pursued with great resolve. The provision of a double lock system even for remote huts in railway stations will certainly cause great inconvenience to implement, increasing the chances of train delays but is it a great price to pay given the Odisha train accident? This is an age of mobile phones and IT applications and it should be possible to think of a system of multiple digital authorisations to access such equipment without the physical movement of staff other than the maintainers. These are the things the inquiry should look into, going beyond merely identifying the culprits. Work towards devising a safer system should actually begin in earnest without waiting for any inquiry reports.

I have come across some cases of the maintainer resorting to shortcuts, which came very close to creating an accident-like situation. If the inquiry into the Odisha train accident confirms that this was indeed a case of unsafe intrusion by a maintainer, it would be even more important to determine whether this was a one-off case in the zone or whether it was something detected in the normal course but not dealt with sternly. Even if this was done occasionally, the buck has to stop with the top management of the zone.

There is another issue — the larger question of the Indian Railways' safety record and the way forward. Let us look at accident data. Till a decade ago, fatalities caused by railway accidents used to be in the range of 500-plus people every year; but in the last four years or so, the number is now less than 50. Although the Odisha accident has left its imprint on safety statistics, it is important to accept that the general reduction in the accident rate is a result of some positive actions such as the elimination of unmanned level crossings as well as improved track renewal and maintenance.

Therein lies a lesson. It was William Shakespeare who said, "Strong reasons make strong actions." Yes, the rail network in India is largely saturated, the number of train services has gone up exponentially, and there is a need to fill all vacancies in the safety categories. All this makes it even more imperative to focus more on upgradation of track and signalling.

Also read | [Loco pilots of Coromandel Express battle pain and false narratives](#)

The provision of Kavach, the indigenous comprehensive signalling system, could not have prevented this accident. But other aspects of safety do demand faster implementation of Kavach; this would not only enhance rail safety but also improve the sectional capacity to run more trains. While the government having its share of the limelight following the introduction of more Vande Bharat trains and creating a hype around railway station modernisation cannot be grudged, faster execution of track and signalling work is exclusive to this. There is no dearth of funds as the capex investment by the central government in the Indian Railways is at an extraordinary high. Therefore, the least one can ask for is to make the Indian Railways much safer than it is today.

***Sudhanshu Mani is a retired General Manager, Indian Railways, creator of Train 18/Vande Bharat, and an independent rail consultant***

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# PIPED POTABLE WATER ACROSS INDIA WILL AVERT 4,00,000 DIARRHOEA DEATHS, FINDS WHO

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 09, 2023 04:58 pm | Updated June 10, 2023 03:53 am IST - NEW DELHI

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About 62% of rural households have piped water connections; the rest have to find water from other sources. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

“Were the Centre’s marquee Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), a nearly 3.6 trillion enterprise to provide piped potable water to all of India, it would succeed in averting close to 4,00,000 deaths from diarrhoea, a modelling study by the World Health Organization (WHO) and commissioned by the Jal Shakti Ministry,” reported on June 9.

Additionally, this would avoid 14 million DALYS (Disability Adjusted Life Years) from diarrhoea, save close to \$101 billion and 66.6 million hours every day of time that would otherwise have been spent — predominantly by women — collecting water, the authors of the study noted. A DALY represents the loss of the equivalent of one year of full health and are a way to account for the years of life lost due to premature mortality (YLLs) and the years lived with a disability (YLDs), due to prevalent cases of a disease or a health condition, in a population.

Currently about 12.3 crore rural households, or 62%, have piped water connections up from 3.2 crore or about 16.6% from 2019 when the scheme was launched. The Centre has claimed that it will achieve 100% coverage by 2024. A fully functional tap water connection is defined as a household getting at least 55 litres of per capita per day of potable water all through the year.

The WHO study is an extrapolation and doesn’t compute the number of diarrhoeal deaths averted, at the present levels of coverage. It also doesn’t account for the degree of contamination in the piped water now being made available, Dr. Rick Johnston of the WHO and one of the study authors told *The Hindu*. For the data required to arrive at its estimates, the authors used population data from the United Nations, the 2018 National Sample Survey and data on water quality collected by the JJM.

“Currently a potable water connection is being provided every second. Five states viz; Gujarat, Telangana, Goa, Haryana, and Punjab and 3 Union Territories — Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Daman Diu & Dadra Nagar Haveli and Puducherry have reported 100% coverage. Himachal Pradesh at 98.87%, followed by Bihar at 96.30%, are also poised to achieve saturation in near future,” Vinnie Mahajan, Secretary, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, said at an event to publicise the report. “Investing in water and sanitation results in many benefits, including economic, environmental, quality of life, and health. Every dollar invested in sanitation

interventions gives a \$4.3 return in the form of reduced health care costs.”

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# THE NECESSITY OF ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANIES

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Infrastructure: Energy incl. Renewable & Non-renewable

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June 10, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 12:16 am IST

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'The problems with Discoms, however, lie in the domain of political economy' | Photo Credit: G. KRISHNASWAMY

The Electricity Act 2003 provided the framework for the dismantling of the State Electricity Boards and the separation of generation, transmission and distribution into separate companies. Electricity generation was delicensed, while transmission and distribution remained licenced and regulated activities. Promoting competition, protecting consumer interests, and the supply of electricity to all were key objectives of the legislation.

Under the new regime, a competitive industry structure in generation has evolved. The share of private investment in the creation of new generating capacity has increased rapidly. Competitive procurement through long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs) grew and prices discovered through the market turned out to be lower than anticipated under the earlier cost-plus dispensation for determining tariffs. The impressive growth in renewable power is entirely the result of private investment. Tariff-based bids for the supply of electricity to distribution companies (Discoms) has been the key to the extraordinary success of the National Solar Mission. Further, India now has one of the cheapest rates for solar power supply in the world.

When the contours of the new law were being discussed, the introduction of full deregulation and competition (like in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s) was advocated by those who believed that we should adopt the latest 'reforms' from the West. In the U.K., a mandatory power pool had been created where all generators submitted bids for the next day, indicating the quantity they could supply along with the price. These bids were stacked in ascending order of price. The price with the quantity at which the total demand indicated by the suppliers would be met became the pool price for electricity. This mimicked the intersection of the supply and demand curves to get the market price. Full retail competition had also been introduced and consumers could choose from among several suppliers who had emerged to serve the market. Though these reform ideas had a strong constituency (including Enron), these were found to be unsuitable for India.

Power was and is being supplied from individual power plants through long-term contracts at prices determined for each. As the plant depreciates, the fixed (capital) cost component in the tariff declines; the older the plant, the cheaper its electricity. Adopting the free market (power pool) model would have meant that all electricity would be sold at the price of the electricity from

the most expensive plant at which demand would be fully met. The resultant steep price shock could just not be absorbed. For example, electricity from Bhakra Nangal which was being supplied at a few paise per unit would have had to be sold at over 4 a unit then. For decision-makers, such deregulation became a non-starter once the full implications were understood.

The Distribution Licensee (Discom) has the universal service obligation of supplying electricity to meet the full demand of every consumer (existing and new), in its licence area. Therefore, the Discom has the responsibility of projecting demand growth and making arrangements for reliable electricity supply. It does this by entering long-term power purchase contracts. Power-generating capacities have risen rapidly and the power supply position has become comfortable. There has also been the milestone of the completion of rural and household electrification, where discoms have been pivotal.

The Electricity Act gives consumers with a load of 1 MW and above the right to open access, enabling them to buy electricity from whomever they choose to and pay the Discom only for the use of their distribution network and a cross-subsidy surcharge. This cross-subsidy surcharge became necessary as higher-end industrial and commercial consumers pay more and cross-subsidise the lower-end households whose tariffs are less. However, the explicit mandate in the Electricity Act to the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions, to progressively reduce cross-subsidies remains unimplemented. This has resulted in the cross-subsidy surcharge continuing and acting as a barrier. Not many large consumers are meeting their electricity needs even now using open access. At the margins, generating plants may be able to generate electricity over and above what they are required to supply through their existing contracts; Discoms may have surpluses as well as shortages at different points of time. These can be sold. Power exchanges have come up to enable trading and optimal utilisation of the total generating capacity in the country. The exchange prices are volatile — either a little above marginal cost when demand is modest and shooting up when demand surges, necessitating the imposition of price caps. This is not an unexpected phenomenon as demand for electricity is inelastic.

‘Reforms’, ‘markets’, ‘competition’ and ‘consumer choice’ have positive connotations. Discoms are seen as the weak link in the supply chain of electricity, with rising cumulative losses and an inability to pay generators on time. The idea of somehow dispensing with the Discoms and letting the free market solve the problems of the power sector appears deceptively simple and attractive.

The problems with Discoms, however, lie in the domain of political economy. Foremost here is the inability of regulators in the States to determine cost reflective tariffs. State governments find it difficult to give timely subsidies as required by law. This underlying problem cannot be solved by implementing some imported reform idea(s). There is the political economy issue of misgovernance and rent seeking in some States where privatisation, as in Delhi, may perhaps be the only solution.

Investment in generating capacity has been taking place primarily on the strength of long-term PPAs with Discoms. Financing, equity as well as debt are de-risked by these PPAs which have the implicit guarantee of the state. The energy transition to renewables is accelerating and the reliability of power supply is increasing. This is based on Discoms projecting demand and entering long-term contracts for meeting increasing demand. Without Discoms this edifice would collapse; and without new investment, we may face power shortages again. It needs to be noted that the exemplar for reformers, the U.K., did not see significant demand growth, and the consequent need for new generating capacity after the new dispensation came into place. However, to drive their energy transition, the state had to invite bids for renewable energy through “contract for differences” which assured successful bidders’ payment of the difference between the market price and their bid price whenever the market price fell below their bid price.

The war in Ukraine has led to ironical consequences, emanating from a dogmatic faith in the deregulated market. Electricity prices went up many times due to the inelasticity of electricity demand, government was compelled to give cash support for lifeline consumption, profits of energy companies reached record highs, and government had to impose taxes on their windfall profits. In an earlier era, governments would have considered imposing price controls. Gordon Brown, the former Prime Minister, went so far as to call for temporary nationalisation.

The consequences of implementing the reform idea of doing away with the centrality of the Discom must be thought through. Lessons from the experience of the last year in the U.K. should be analysed. There are no quick-fix easy solutions.

Ajay Shankar is Distinguished Fellow, the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) and a former Secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Government of India

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# INDIA LOGGED 31 MILLION NEW DIABETES PATIENTS IN 2019-21: STUDY

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June 09, 2023 02:28 pm | Updated June 10, 2023 03:13 am IST - NEW DELHI

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The prevalence of diabetes in India stands at 11.4%, while 35.5% of Indians suffer from hypertension, additionally abdominal obesity stands at 40% across the population and female abdominal obesity is 50%. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

Thirty-one million Indians became diabetic between 2019-2021, according to a paper touted as “one of the first comprehensive studies covering all States of India” to assess the non-communicable diseases (NCD) burden in the country.

The highest prevalence of diabetes was found in Goa (26.4%), Puducherry and Kerala (nearly 25%) and the study warns that the figures are likely to shoot up in rural areas in the next five years even though the prevalence is relatively low there.

According to the World Health Organisation, diabetes is a major cause of blindness, kidney failure, heart attacks, stroke, and lower-limb amputation.

The prevalence of diabetes in India stands at 11.4%, while 35.5% of Indians suffer from hypertension, additionally abdominal obesity stands at 40% across the population and female abdominal obesity is 50%.

In the past four years, India has added substantially to its burden of diabetics, pre-diabetics, hypertensive and persons with generalised and abdominal obesity which predisposes them to non-communicable diseases and life-altering medical conditions including strokes.

But what does this study mean to the common man and how does it impact the quality of life and life expectancy?

Dr V. Mohan, a senior author of the study, speaking to [The Hindu](#) said that what is happening in India today is that there is availability of surplus food, exacerbated by a culture of overexposure to fast food, lack of sleep, reduce exercise and stress.

“These factors together are driving up the number of NCD patients. The solution isn’t with the government alone — individuals must take responsibility for eating healthy, cutting down on high-carbohydrate foods, fats, sugar, and salt content, sleeping on time and exercising. A little discipline will go a long way in keeping us disease-free and healthy,” he said.

The findings of the study, conducted by the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Union Health Ministry, were published in the journal, *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*, earlier this week.

The study, titled 'Metabolic non-communicable disease health report of India: the ICMR-INDIAB national cross-sectional study (ICMR-INDIAB-17)', found that prevalence of generalised obesity and abdominal obesity in India stood at 28.6 and 39.5%, respectively and it showed that 24% of Indians suffer from hypercholesterolemia — a condition in which fat collects in arteries and puts individuals at a greater risk of heart attack and strokes — while 15.3% of people have pre-diabetes.

But what does this study mean to the common man and how does it impact the quality of life and life expectancy?

Dr. Rajiv Bahl, director-general ICMR, says that the study has shown that diabetes and pre-diabetes are prevalent in India. "The reason why we did it is to understand how to prevent the trend and how to bring about changes in society which will have a lesser burden of these non-communicable diseases. NCDs eventually result in high risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension and others. The answer to that is in wellness, in having a lifestyle that encompasses a healthy diet and more physical activity," he said.

The study notes a national prevalence of 11.4% diabetes, 15.3% pre-diabetes, 35.5% hypertension, 28.6% generalised obesity, 39.5% abdominal obesity and 24% hypercholesterolemia in India. The highest prevalence of the NCD was found in Goa, Sikkim, Punjab, Puducherry (both generalised and abdominal obesity) and Kerala, respectively.

As per the study in 2021, there were 101 million people in India with diabetes and 136 million with pre-diabetes, while 315 million people had high blood pressure, 254 million had generalised obesity, and 351 million had abdominal obesity. Additionally, 213 million people in the country had hypercholesterolaemia.

The results are based on surveying 1,13,043 people (33,537 urban and 79,506 rural residents), in 31 States and Union Territories in the country, between 2008 and 2020.

The prevalence of diabetes and other metabolic NCDs in India is considerably higher than previously estimated. While the diabetes epidemic is stabilising in the more developed States of the country, it is still increasing in most other States. Thus, there are serious implications for the nation, warranting urgent State-specific policies and interventions to arrest the rapidly rising epidemic of metabolic NCDs in India, said, Dr. R.M. Anjana, lead researcher associated with the project.

NCDs have been one of the major concerns of the Health Ministry and according to the study report 'India: Health of the Nation's States — The India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative' released in 2017 by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), it is estimated that the proportion of deaths due to NCDs in India has increased from 37.9% in 1990 to 61.8% in 2016.

The four major NCDs are cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (CRDs) and diabetes, which share four behavioural risk factors — unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, and use of tobacco and alcohol.

"A population-based initiative for prevention, control, and screening for common NCDs — i.e. diabetes, hypertension, and common cancers — has been rolled out in the country under National Health Mission and as a part of 'Comprehensive Primary Health Care'. Under the

initiative, persons more than 30 years of age are targeted for their screening for the common NCDs, in which there is focus on screening of breast cancer and cervical cancer among women. Screening of these common NCDs is an integral part of service delivery under Ayushman Bharat— Health and Wellness Centres,” said the Health Ministry.

It added that the Central government provides technical and financial support to the States/UTs under [the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke \(NPCDCS\)](#), (launched in 2010) as part of National Health Mission (NHM), based on the proposals received from the States/UTs and subject to the resource envelope.

The programme focusses on strengthening infrastructure, human resource development, health-promotion & awareness-generation for prevention, early diagnosis, management, and ensuring referrals to appropriate healthcare facilities for treatment of NCDs.

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# EL NINO RAINS INTENSIFY RECORD DENGUE OUTBREAK IN PERU

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June 09, 2023 02:08 pm | Updated 02:08 pm IST

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A health worker fumigates for mosquitoes to help mitigate the spread of dengue, outside a home at La Primavera shantytown in Piura, Peru, Saturday, June 3, 2023. Dengue, a viral disease transmitted by a mosquito, causes flu-like symptoms, such as muscle pain and fever. | Photo Credit: AP

Peru's worst [dengue outbreak](#) on record could intensify further as an El Nino climate phenomenon brings torrential rains and mosquitoes, driving the death toll this year past 200 with over 130,000 recorded cases, the health ministry said on Thursday.

Most of the deaths have occurred in northern Peru, where hospitals have exceeded their capacity, bringing back recent memories of the health crisis suffered by the country during the coronavirus pandemic.

The country's health authorities have pointed towards the El Nino as one of the key drivers of the surge in cases. The natural climate phenomenon fuels tropical cyclones in the Pacific, boosting rainfall and flood risk in the region.

The spike in cases this year is far higher than a major outbreak in 2017, when there was also an El Nino.

[Explained | Why is a viable dengue vaccine not yet available](#)

A rainy season fosters mass reproduction of mosquitoes due to the accumulation of water in the cities.

Peruvian President Dina Boluarte signed a decree on Thursday declaring a two-month "state of emergency" in 18 of the country's 24 regions to allow swift official action for "imminent danger from heavy rainfall" this year and next.

Dengue is transmitted through the bites of aedes aegypti mosquitoes. Its symptoms include fever, eye, head, muscle and joint pain, nausea, vomiting and fatigue.

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# GOVERNORS CANNOT INDEFINITELY HOLD BACK BILLS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

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June 12, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 01:49 am IST

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Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin at the Government Museum, Egmore, in Chennai. | Photo Credit: ANI

Recently issues have arisen in various States between Chief Ministers and Governors, with regard to the passing of Bills. Chief Ministers feel that Governors have not acted for an unduly long period of time on Bills presented for their assent. This is a tricky situation for a parliamentary democracy, where the people elect a government to enact laws which reflect their will. If an elected government cannot legislate, it could lead to a breakdown of parliamentary democracy.

The Legislature of a State comprises the Governor and the Legislative Assembly (if the State has one House) and a Legislative Council (if the State has two Houses). The Governor has little autonomy in his functioning — it is a settled legal position that he can act only on the “advice” of his Council of Ministers, with the Chief Minister as the head of the Council. The intention of the framers of the Constitution was for the President or Governor to act only on the advice of the Council of Ministers. Actual governance of the country/State is by the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister as the case maybe.

Explained | [The office of the Governor: its origins, powers, and controversies](#)

There is, however, a caveat to this. There are certain instances where a Governor can exercise his discretion independent of the Council of Ministers. Whether a Governor has discretion or not in a particular matter is significant since, as per Article 163(2) of the Constitution, this decision of his cannot be challenged. In *Shamsher Singh v State of Punjab* (1974), the Supreme Court held that a President or a Governor can exercise their discretion independent of their Ministers only where the Constitution expressly permits them to do so.

Article 200 states that when the Governor is presented with a Bill, he can either give his assent or withhold it or return the Bill with certain suggestions. The first proviso of the Article states that after a Bill is presented to him, the Governor may, as soon as possible, return the Bill if it is not a Money Bill with a message to reconsider the Bill as a whole or any part thereof. The House has six months to decide whether or not to accept this request. Once the House returns the Bill to the Governor, he has no choice but to give his assent whether or not his recommendations have

been accepted. The second proviso of the Article gives the Governor discretion to refer a Bill to the President if he is of the opinion that the Bill, if passed, would take away the powers of the High Court. The procedure to be followed when presidential assent for such a Bill is required is set out in Article 201 of the Constitution.

The discretion of the Governor does not contemplate an indefinite withholding of assent to a Bill. Such an action would cause a breakdown of the constitutional machinery. To what extent the Governor's autonomy is recognised under the Constitution can be seen from a few judgments of the Supreme Court.

In *Purushothaman Nambudiri v State of Kerala*, while deciding whether a Bill pending the Governor's assent would lapse upon the dissolution of the House, the Court considered the provisions of Article 200 and 201 to hold that it would not. It held that since there is no time limit prescribed under Articles 200 and 201 for the Governor or the President to give their assent, unlike the House which has six months to decide the recommendations of the Governor or the President as the case may be, it suggests that the framers of the Constitution did not want a Bill pending assent from the Governor to be at risk of lapsing on dissolution of the House.

Though the Constitution prescribes no express time limit, the first proviso does mention that the Governor ought to either give his assent or send the Bill back to the House as soon as possible. In *Shamsher Singh*, the Court held, though not explicitly, that it is only with respect to the second proviso that the Governor exercises discretion independent of the Council. It held that the Governor's power, to reserve Bills for the President's consideration, is one such discretionary power. The Court also highlighted the exceptional circumstances of the Governor acting independent of the Council of Ministers. It held that de Smith's statement on royal assent would hold good even in the context of Indian democracy for both Presidents and Governors ("Refusal of the royal assent on the ground that the monarch strongly disapproved of a bill or that it was intensely controversial would nevertheless be unconstitutional.") In *Nabam Rebia and Bamang Felix vs Dy. Speaker*, the Court also held that in so far as Article 200 is concerned, the Governor exercises discretion only with regard to whether a Bill ought to be reserved for consideration of the President or not. This is important because the Court has also held that Article 163(2) has to be understood in the context of Article 163(1), meaning only those matters where the Constitution expressly permits the Governor to act autonomously cannot be challenged before a court of law. The judgment in *Nabam Rebia* has been referred to a larger bench of the Court with regard to the issue of whether a Speaker is barred from proceeding with deciding matters under Schedule X while a motion for his removal is pending before the House.

Also read | [Should Chief Ministers have a say in the appointment of Governors?](#)

The Governor, therefore, has no discretion to indefinitely withhold assent to a Bill. If a Bill is presented to him, it has to be returned with recommendations or given assent as soon as possible. If it takes away the power of the High Court, the Governor has the discretion to refer it for the President's consideration. Refusing to act on a Bill is in violation of the Constitution, and a Governor's action or inaction in this regard would be susceptible to judicial review.

***Gautam S. Raman is an advocate practising at the Madras High Court***

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# AMPLIFY THE SUBJECT OF ADOLESCENT GIRL NUTRITION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 12, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 12:08 am IST

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'What makes the situation more complex is the fact that a range of factors affects the nutrition uptake in adolescent girls' | Photo Credit: KUMAR S.S.

To unlock the full potential of India's future, we have to prioritise the health and nutrition of its adolescent girls. Adolescence is a pivotal period of cognitive development and, therefore, improving access to nutrition during this "second window of opportunity of growth" compensates for any nutrient deficiencies acquired during early developmental stages in the girl child. Furthermore, adolescent health is a significant indicator of women's labour force participation in India in the long term, as better nutrition improves every young girl's prospect to participate in productive activities. Thus, the country beholds a colossal opportunity to add to its nation's demographic dividend by investing in nutrition interventions in adolescent girls.

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to undernutrition and anaemia due to the onset of menstruation. The findings of the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) confirm these concerns, as a staggering 59.1% of adolescent girls were found to be anaemic. With the NFHS-4 numbers also having reported over 41.9% of school-going girls as underweight, the numbers showcase a worrying trend. What makes the situation more complex is the fact that a range of factors, from environmental conditions to cultural norms that lack a gender-neutral environment within a household, affects the nutrition uptake in adolescent girls.

While progress has been made in improving crucial health indicators in the form of various government initiatives that have successfully achieved optimum coverage, it is however essential to acknowledge that current health interventions do not specifically focus on the nutritional statuses of adolescent girls.

We are, as a nation, far from realising the long-term consequences of overlooking the nutritional needs of young girls. Poorly balanced and insufficient diets can lead to cognitive impairments that affect one's academic performance. This can result in lower educational attainment, which can limit opportunities for employment and economic self-sufficiency later in life. Undernourished adolescent girls are also at a higher risk of chronic diseases and pregnancy complications, which can lead to a higher health-care burden on both families and communities, potentially leading to financial instability and increased poverty. If our girls are less healthy and less educated, they are less likely to participate fully in society, whether through work, politics, or community involvement.

Therefore, it is imperative that we redefine interventions such that we not only centre it around good nutrition but also adopt a life-cycle approach, ensuring that no girl gets left behind. This investment can also help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, as well-nourished girls are more likely to have healthy babies and provide better care for their families. Thus, investing in girls' nutrition is not only the moral obligation of the state but also an economic one, with potential returns in the form of greater and more sustainable economic growth of the nation.

Additionally, a few strategic modifications to existing interventions can significantly expand the scope of its outcomes. The convergence of various government initiatives such as the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) within the umbrella of the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition programme (POSHAN) 2.0 is a step in the right direction, provided it is implemented effectively. Targeted adolescent-oriented schemes such as the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) could include even stronger awareness and nutrition education programmes that would help sustain beneficiary compliance. Targeted and regionally contextualised Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) efforts around adolescent girls' nutrition are sure to generate greater demand and the adoption of good practices. For improved outcomes, it is very imperative for effective convergence and collaborations among all the relevant departments, in a way that fosters a collective endeavour. Routine training of health workers for effective implementation and monitoring of various schemes, and to adapt with an evolving landscape, is also a crucial step in this process.

A holistic narrative on adolescent girls' nutrition, explaining its linkages with overall mental and physical well-being, individual productivity and overall economic growth of the country is needed. This must be packed with evidence/data that effectively appeals to all, to those outside the technical community, and must be framed to make it actionable. This also immediately brings about the need for disaggregated data that allows for effective interpretation.

As an elected representative, it is my duty to amplify this vital discourse on nutrition, to work towards protecting and improving the nutritional status of adolescent girls in our country. It is crucial to acknowledge that tackling the complex issue of nutrition among adolescent girls is not just a health concern, but is an investment in the future of the nation. We have an enormous responsibility, as well as a tremendous opportunity, to ensure the welfare and the upliftment of the nation by prioritising the nutritional needs of India's girls. The strength of a nation is measured by its ability to nurture its future generations; hence, let us work collectively to sow the seeds of a healthier, stronger India, where every girl can reach her full potential.

Gaurav Gogoi is Member of Parliament (Congress), Kaliabor, Assam

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# RESEARCH SHOWS INDIA CAN SHORTEN TUBERCULOSIS TREATMENT

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 13, 2023 09:00 am | Updated 09:00 am IST

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Representative photo of a person receiving treatment for tuberculosis at a hospital. | Photo Credit: Anupam Nath/AP

[Tuberculosis](#) is a dreadful disease with a high mortality, and has consistently been a global health concern. India accounts for around 27% of TB cases worldwide – which is the world's highest country-wise TB burden – thanks in part to its population of 1.3 billion.

In the last decade, the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP), along with the private sector, has successfully found and treated 17.14 million people with TB, including an estimated 1.4 million children. However, the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected TB care and has threatened to reverse the gains made in reducing India's burden. Additionally, the growing problem of drug-resistant TB also threatens the progress we have made in basic disease management.

TB is curable but treatment is challenging. For drug-sensitive TB, a patient must take the medication for six months, and this is a long period for most people. The treatment also includes three or four drugs that can have side effects and are also difficult to swallow at times.

This is particularly difficult when the patients in question are children, who need to abide by a fixed drug regimen under the NTEP. The size and the taste of the tablet are not child-friendly. The NTEP presently recommends a daily dose of medicines under direct observation for six months, which can be tiring for families as well.

It is not surprising that many paediatric as well as adult TB patients discontinue taking treatment due to its long duration and side effects. Sometimes, they feel better and assume that completing treatment is optional. This puts families and other people who are in close contact with a TB-affected person at risk of infection. Stopping treatment prematurely can also contribute to the TB bacteria becoming drug-resistant.

How can we address this issue? One critical way, especially in countries with a high TB burden like India, is to explore new treatment approaches for TB and to integrate them into national plans.

The effort to make TB medicines easier to take is underway worldwide, as well as in India.

[Recent studies](#) in adults who have TB in their lungs considered using a combination of new drugs and existing ones that are currently used for other diseases. The results of these studies are promising, showing that the length of time patients need to stay on their regimen can be reduced from six months to four months.

The [SHINE trial](#), conducted with 1,200 children from four countries (India, Zambia, Uganda, and South Africa), also found that based on the drugs available with the NTEP, children with non-severe TB can be effectively treated in four months instead of six.

That shortening the duration for TB medication cures the patient faster is transformational and also makes TB programme implementation more feasible.

Both studies had participants from India and their results have been included by the World Health Organization, in its TB treatment guidelines. However, India itself is yet to adopt the revised four-month treatment guidelines. There is, in fact, [another study](#) that reported recently that a two-month treatment course could be effective as well.

With a growing political commitment to India's battle against TB, the Indian government must embrace innovation and new approaches to treating this disease.

As it happens, the identification of safe and effective four-month and two-month regimens is the first significant advance in treating the most common form of TB in almost 40 years, and is a monumental achievement. It is also encouraging that more than 30 new chemical compounds that can fight the TB bacterium are in the pipeline.

## **Eliminating TB**

At this time, it is up to researchers to identify the best combinations of these new drugs that are highly efficacious, the least toxic, and can be easily implemented in programmatic settings.

For this kind of research, a highly concerted effort needs to take place that involves both global and local researchers, funders, and regulatory authorities, with firm national and international political support.

Costs are a determining factor but they can be mitigated as well. Global experience in costing has shown that the prices of newer drugs come down when there is political will and when community charters, funders, and the leaders of national programmes negotiate prices with drug manufacturers. Lower costs can in turn motivate the global adoption of newer, shorter-duration, and less toxic drug combinations for diseases like TB.

India's aim to eliminate TB by 2025 is ambitious. The theme for World Tuberculosis Day (March 24) in 2023 was "Yes, we can end TB", which reflects the worldwide desire to eliminate the disease by 2030.

To (re)invigorate this fight, and to align with the vision of being 'TB Free' ahead of the global target, India must consider active screening and case detection along with new guidelines for shorter TB treatment. Policymakers must also consider moving to a shorter treatment course for treating TB at the earliest. If we delay, we stand to lose the fight as well as millions of lives to an ultimately curable disease.

*Vidya Mave, MD, MPH is director of Centre for Infectious Diseases in India and B.J. Government Medical College-Johns Hopkins University Clinical Research Centre, Pune. Aarti Kinikar, MD, is professor and head of Department of Paediatrics, B.J. Government Medical*

*College and Sassoon General Hospital, Pune. Sanjay Gaikwad, MD is professor and head of Department of Pulmonary Medicine, B.J. Government Medical College and Sassoon General Hospital, Pune. The views expressed are the authors' own.*

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# NCDS PLAGUE KERALITES' HEALTH

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 13, 2023 01:10 am | Updated 02:59 am IST - Thiruvananthapuram

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For a State which takes immense pride in consistently coming at the top in the [health index rankings of NITI Aayog](#) every year, [the findings of the ICMR-INDIAB study](#), which puts Kerala right on top with the worst overall indicators for long-term morbidity and mortality due to non-communicable diseases, has undoubtedly come a cropper.

A current diabetes prevalence of nearly 24%, pre-diabetes at 18.1% and hypertension prevalence at a whopping 44%, is certainly not the picture of a healthy State. With more than half the State's population having high cholesterol levels and abdominal obesity, the incidence of cardiovascular diseases and chronic kidney diseases could skyrocket in the near future and have significant impact on the State's health expenditure as well as private spending on catastrophic illnesses.

Kerala has known since the mid or late 90s that NCDs are going to be its biggest health challenge, thanks to the population-based studies led by public health experts like the late Dr. C. R. Soman, who warned about the imminent catastrophe of heart attacks and other chronic diseases in the population because of the unhealthy, carbohydrate-heavy diet and sedentary lifestyle of Keralites.

Public health experts are now raising pertinent questions on where the decade-long NCD control programmes in Kerala have been going. Crores are being pumped in annually for the supply for NCD drugs free of cost through primary health centres. However, the fact that the mean HbA1c levels in the State is 8.3mg/dl indicates poor glycaemic control in general, which again points to poor monitoring and follow-up of patients on NCD drugs at the ground-level.

Experts point out that the high incidence of CKD in the State is a direct consequence of the spiraling levels of hypertension, which again is a result of poor adherence to the drug protocol, apart from factors like unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle.

Yet, the State Health department's sole focus seems to be on devising newer screening programmes to detect disease prevalence in the population. The official website marks the number of cases of diabetes or prediabetes detected as the 'achievements' of the State NCD Control programme.

Identifying the scope of the problem and documenting it is the easy part. But stepping in with effective interventions to increase public awareness about NCDs and its long-term consequences and improving primary prevention of diabetes and hypertension through the

promotion of a healthy lifestyle is where most health systems falter.

The problem is not unique to Kerala. It is a huge challenge to health systems to create, implement and sustain programmes for the promotion of healthy lifestyles because it is not easy to change people's attitudes towards self care, their long-term food habits and food choices or to inculcate new habits like daily exercise.

Researchers have in the past come up with several small-scale diabetes prevention and care models like the Kerala Diabetes Prevention Programme (2018) or the India Diabetes Prevention Programme, which showed that implementing standard treatment guidelines for disease prevention and management; engagement of family/ community and peers in health education and awareness creation; use of innovative technologies (IDPP used mobile phone messaging) and improved training of field-level health workers can significantly improve promotion of lifestyle modifications and healthy habits.

Diabetes management requires the patient to have fair awareness on what makes the blood sugar spike. It all comes down to healthy eating and knowing how and what type of food can affect the blood glucose levels. Limiting carbohydrates, improving nutrition through the increased consumption of vegetables and fruits and daily physical activity are important lifestyle interventions that patients need to imbibe.

Patients also have to be given affordable choices when it comes to diet and medication advice. Adherence to medication has to be ensured through consistent follow-up and people have to be motivated continuously to ensure that the changes they embrace become a part of their lifestyle.

Health experts point out that these are areas where health systems need to focus to prevent the cascade of chronic diseases in the population. Health workers or ASHAs in the field need to be trained better to impart awareness at the grassroots, to follow-up patients rigorously and they should be offered attractive incentives for the same.

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# SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: MORALITY VS EQUALITY

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Judiciary in India: its Structure, Organization & Functioning, Judges of SC & High Courts, Judgments and related Issues

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June 13, 2023 01:05 am | Updated 02:35 am IST

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People from the LGBTQ community participate in a march in Mumbai. File | Photo Credit: Emmanuel Yogini

Just a few days before the Supreme Court of India commenced hearings on [the same-sex marriage issue](#), one of the world's leading philosophers, Michael Sandel, was in India to take part in a media group's conclave.

Introduced as a "rockstar" during the event and prodded to make comments on banal local politics, the significance of his ideas for deeper moral questions facing Indian society remained lost on most.

For example, while arguments based on the various strands of liberalism were being marshalled before the Supreme Court, Sandel's critique of contemporary liberalism should also have been part of the repertoire for consideration.

This critique highlights a difficulty in any attempt to sort out the issue of same-sex marriage within a liberal framework of individual rights.

For, if the Court were to adjudicate on the right to marry it would have to break its neutrality on moral questions about the desirability of marriage, what fits into the institution and what it means to people – a neutrality mandated by its jurisprudence on equal concern for all irrespective of social or personal morality.

In fact the idea of constitutional morality has been used by the Supreme Court in many cases to maintain neutrality on moral issues.

Following this neutrality would mean the Court should stop at ensuring that people's legal rights are protected just like how it held that those in live-in relationships are entitled to legal protection irrespective of the societies' moral view on such relationships.

But to mandate the state to recognise a particular kind of marriage on the basis of equality is to recognise marriage as a social honour and pronounce on its moral worth. It would be violating the liberal tenet of neutrality.

So even for an ardent votary of same-sex marriage like the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, state

intervention in the matter is only the second best option- “[S]o long as the state is in the marrying business, concerns with equality require it to offer marriage to same-sex couples-but. . . it would be a lot better, as a matter of both political theory and public policy, if the state withdrew from the marrying business” [emphasis added].

The idea that the state should be neutral to moral concerns about institutions like marriage is what Sandel calls “bracketing” of moral issues. It assumes human ability to detach oneself from his/ her “stories” or “social and historical roles and statuses.”

In the context of same-sex marriages, the Court will be following this approach if it were to decide in favour of the petitioners only on the basis of equality or privacy. Sandel says “if...social and economic rights are required as a matter of equal respect for persons (only), the question remains why these persons...have a claim on my concern that others do not.”

In other words, citizens who see and value marriage as a heterosexual institution would be asked to recognise same-sex marriages, through their state of course, not as a matter of shared understanding but as “a duty we owe to strangers.”

On the other hand if the matter were to be decided on the basis of “intrinsic value or social importance of the practice” one avoids the alienation that gives rise to fundamentalist tendencies.

This now takes us to the more important question as to whether the Court, or for that matter even a centralised State, is capable of deciding on or resolving moral issues in society.

Sandel cites the example of Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court’s decision in *Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health* (2003) which legalised same-sex marriage not just on grounds of equality and freedom of choice but by pronouncing on the virtues of marriage. In the American context, the Court only had to choose between whether marriage is about “procreation” or “loving relationships”.

In India, the significance of marriage for those who look at it in traditional terms is much more than both. The significance was captured by the Calcutta High Court in 1901 as follows- “it is a ‘union of flesh with flesh, bone with bone’... the union is a sacred tie and subsists even after the death...”

Yale Professor Helen Landemore says “compared to liberal court decisions imposed on a reluctant public, with the potential for backfiring... the most radical and ultimately sustainable changes to have come for gay rights ... were forced on parties and electoral assemblies by ad hoc citizens’ assemblies (Ireland) and the pressure of citizens’ initiatives (Finland)” [emphasis added].

It has been noted by scholars that historically Indian society has not shared the same sense of disgust or hatred with which homosexuals were treated in other parts of the world.

Understandably, there were no social rumblings when homosexuality was decriminalised. It reflected the society’s shared values. Can the same be said about homosexual marriage? Have we, like some western societies, accepted “romantic-love” or companionship and nothing else to be the basis of marriage?

Can the honorific value of marriage be sustained without a heterosexual couple? Ideally these questions should be left for citizens’ assemblies or citizens’ initiatives like in Ireland or Finland. In India too one could look for equivalents. Reviving Gandhi’s “little republics” could be a good

starting point.

*(The author is an advocate practising in the Madras High Court)*

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# E-EDUCATION PLATFORMS, THEIR GENERATIVE AI CHAPTER

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June 13, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 02:29 am IST

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'Time will tell whether regenerative AI tools will really shore up the economic fortunes of online education platforms' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Salman Khan flourished even at the peak of the world economic crisis of 2008. The Khan Academy's online education videos attracted thousands of learners that year. It has gone from strength to strength since then. Khan's not-for-profit enterprise is funded by the likes of the Gates Foundation, Google and Elon Musk. Today, the academy has 130 million learners from across the world, ranging from school-goers to graduate-level learners. Such is the enduring popularity of online education.

As the world recovered from its economic setback by 2011, a new genre of online courses titled 'Massive Open Online Courses' (MOOCs) made their entry, driven by reputed institutions of learning. Though MOOCs have been around since 2008, their institutional origins can be traced to three free online courses offered by Stanford University in 2011. Peter Norvig, Sebastian Thrun, Jennifer Widom and Andrew Ng conducted these courses. Buoyed by the large turnout of learners for these 'pilot' courses, Thrun launched his online education outfit, 'Udacity', in late 2011 as a for-profit company. A year later, Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller followed suit with their venture 'Coursera', which was also registered as a 'for-profit' company.

Not to be left behind, MIT and Harvard joined forces to create 'edX' in May 2012, as a non-profit MOOCs Company. Anant Agarwal, the visionary founder of edX, is widely credited with open sourcing and internationalising the company's 'open edX tech stack'. Although edX was acquired by the for-profit EdTech company, '2U', in November 2021, the company continues to follow 'non-profit considerations when it comes to servicing its open-source stack.

All the three outfits succeeded in launching MOOCs on a global scale, in partnership with the world's leading universities and institutions. As far as India is concerned, the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay and the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore have been the early movers. Both institutions offer a variety of MOOCs courses through the edX platform.

As of 2021, there existed nearly 35 MOOCs Learning Management Systems (LMS) spread across North America, Asia and Europe. The list of large LMS platforms from the developing world includes India's 'Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds' (SWAYAM) launched in 2017 by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. It is one of the world's

largest learning e-portals. According to 'Class Central', the number of MOOCS learners in the world (excluding China) was 220 million in 2021. Coursera accounted for 97 million learners, while edX and India's SWAYAM had enrolments of 42 million and 22 million, respectively.

Despite their seemingly high enrolment numbers, the financials of MOOCS platforms are fragile. The operating expenses of a MOOCS platform are high, partly due to maintenance expenses associated with the LMS tech stack, and partly due to steep marketing costs incurred for enlarging the learner base. On the revenue side, the practice of offering entry-level courses gratis (or at low fees) aggravated the financial crunch faced by these platforms. Although MOOCS platforms, by and large, rely on degree-earning courses to earn revenue, such courses have few takers. A key metric that determines learner enrolments for MOOCS is the probability of potential learners discovering LMS platforms through web-based search engines. Even when a learner stumbles on a platform of her choice, she would still struggle to locate courses that suit her needs from the crowded portfolios of Coursera, edX and Udacity. What compounds the problem is the high rate of dropouts by entry-level learners. In turn, drop-outs reduce the catchment of learners for degree granting programmes.

These factors perhaps explain why Coursera, edX and Khan Academy have gone in for regenerative AI. edX's Chat GPT plug-in helps aspiring learners to successfully locate platforms and courses that suit their requirements. The Khan Academy's chat box 'Khanmigo' challenges learners with thought-provoking questions, while edX's 'edX Xpert' and Coursera's 'AI Coursera Coach' function as virtual assistants that answer queries, provide feedback on assignments, generate quick summaries of voluminous content, and swiftly turn out exam scores. As learning gets interesting and engaging, drop-outs are bound to come down, resulting in more learners progressing to degree granting programmes.

India's SWAYAM has yet to spell out its approach to AI. However, the platform is in for interesting times. The SWAYAM-user community will drastically scale up by 2025, when India's active Internet users become 900 million strong. This rapid scale up will necessitate the utilisation of AI-based learning and teaching services by institutes affiliated to the platform. Unlike the United States and Europe-based platforms, SWAYAM is publicly funded and is driven by the National Education Policy's tenets of inclusivity and cross-disciplinary learning. Indeed, in the coming years, the drift of SWAYAM courses is more likely in the direction of cross-disciplinary course offerings that utilise unstructured data. SWAYAM is thus ideally positioned to derive benefits from the evolving semantic web.

Time will tell whether regenerative AI tools will really shore up the economic fortunes of online education platforms. What is clear at the moment is that global online education brands will not shy away from experimenting with regenerative AI tools.

A. Damodaran is Distinguished Professor, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER)-Prosus Centre for Internet and Digital Economy, ICRIER, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal

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## WHERE ANYONE CAN BE ACCUSED OF SEDITION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

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June 14, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 02:50 am IST

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Students detained under the sedition law. | Photo Credit: AFP

French author Andre Gide once said, “Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens we have to keep going back and beginning all over again.” This captures the current state of the debate on sedition in India. The [279th Law Commission Report](#), laying down the [grounds for retaining sedition](#), is starkly symbolic of how “nobody listens.” The Commission has made three significant recommendations. The first is that [Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code](#), which contains the law of sedition, be amended to incorporate the meaning of sedition which was laid down by the Supreme Court in [Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar](#) in 1962. The second is that the minimum sentence be increased from three to seven years. The third is that First Information Reports (FIR) in sedition cases should be registered only after a police officer, holding the rank of an Inspector or higher, makes a “preliminary enquiry.”

In proposing that an amendment be made to the law by adding the words “tendency to incite violence,” the Commission deflects attention to the ambit of criminality rather than focusing on the source of criminality. The proposed amendment will not fundamentally alter the meaning of sedition as the offence of inciting hatred, contempt and disaffection against the government. The source of the crime remains political speech against the representative government in a democracy. The Commission claims that only those forms of expressions will be penalised which have a “tendency” to incite violence, but muddies the legal waters further by adding that “tendency” means “mere inclination to incite violence rather than proof of actual violence or imminent threat to violence.”

Editorial | [End the debate: On the Law Commission's recommendation on sedition](#)

This recommendation takes us back to the problem that was sought to be remedied by repealing sedition. ‘Tendency’ is a loose formulation which allows for those expressions to be brought within the ambit of law which have no proximate connection or direct causality with public disorder. The ‘tendency’ jurisprudence is an ambiguous standard for any judicial and executive mind, and the nine petitions currently pending before the Supreme Court, filed by persons who were arrested under the sedition law, as well as journalists and former service officials, reiterate this point.

After nearly two years of back and forth between the judiciary and executive in debating the validity of the law, the only addition to the existing scheme is the Commission's proposal that the

police conduct a preliminary enquiry. However, as there is an even more ambiguous standard against which the police have to now judge a particular act on “mere inclination to violence,” when no proof of violence or even actual threat to violence is needed, the Commission’s proposal will cast a wide net on any act that appears seditious. A preliminary enquiry by a police officer will not remedy the fact that celebrating the victory of a rival cricket team or wearing their jersey might still be material which has the “tendency” to incite violence because the proposed amendment asks the police to not look for imminent threats to violence or proof of violence. It paves the way further for police power to reign, especially where the FIR results from complicity with those who have local, state, or national political clout.

The Commission also disregarded developments in foreign jurisdictions which have invalidated sedition laws stating that the “ground realities” are different in other countries. In fact, it turns a blind eye to the ground realities in India. One of the reasons why the Supreme Court in 2021 admitted multiple petitions challenging the constitutionality of Section 124A was the confusion caused by the *Kedar Nath Singh* precedent. If the ratio laid down in *Kedar Nath Singh* succeeded on the ground, India would not have today 174 cases of sedition filed against nearly 950 individuals for criticism of the government, or for acts such as watching a video or dancing to an “offensive” song. These data are borne out in ‘A Decade of Darkness,’ a study by *Article 14* documenting all the cases of sedition filed since 2010.

In retaining sedition, it is clear that the message to the local police officer is to decide whether or not, for instance, a person holding a poster is “inclined” to incite violence without an actual threat to violence. These are not one-off instances of ‘misuse’ of the law that can be remedied via procedural reform; they instead make any of us potential seditionists. In such a case, the person will have to undergo the social stigma of being labelled a ‘traitor’ even before a trial is concluded, face a pre-trial system that favours incarceration over bail, face lengthy trials that result in more acquittals than convictions, and face punishment which has increased in gravity.

Finally, the Commission cites continuities from colonial times, such as the civil services and the police system, to justify sedition. It fails to distinguish ‘colonial’ as a merely historical category from a political system marred by domination, violence and inequality. Sedition is a colonial law because it creates a relationship of suppression between the political rulers and subjects, one that precludes accountability and a right to question. No linguistic change and procedural reform can remedy the problem that Section 124A poses in a post-colonial democracy.

***Lubhyathi Rangarajan is Editor-Databases at Article-14, and led ‘A Decade of Darkness’, a study into the use of sedition in India; Anushka Singh teaches at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi, and is the author of ‘Sedition in Liberal Democracies’***

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## EXPLAINED

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June 13, 2023 05:56 pm | Updated 05:56 pm IST

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A complaint filed in a U.S. federal court claimed that Delta Air Lines inaccurately billed itself as the world's "first carbon-neutral airline" and should pay damages. File | Photo Credit: AP

**The story so far:** For three years, California-based Mayanna Berrin has opted to fly the steeply-priced — but purportedly “green” — Delta Air Lines. Delta in 2020 marketed itself as the “world's first carbon-neutral airline”, investing \$1 billion to work on reducing fuel usage and investing in carbon removal techniques. The carbon claims responded to a growing keenness among people like Berrin who wanted to engage in ecologically conscious air travel, and by extension, participate in a global transition away from carbon emissions. The veracity of these claims is now under scrutiny: on May 30, Berrin [filed a lawsuit](#) — the first of its kind against a U.S. airline's climate claims — arguing Delta Air Line's assertions were bogus, misleading and false.

“If you think you're flying the world's most green airline, and you're not, why wouldn't that be actionable?” her attorney Jonathan Haderlein said in an interview.

The 'green airline' tag is a contested commodity, as flyers and companies alike are realising that flying is a significant contributor to carbon pollution (accounting for more than 2% of all greenhouse-gas emissions). Aviation emissions could grow by 300-700% by 2050, per estimates. *The Hindu* looks at the proposed promises of “green flying”, and the architecture of the aviation industry's carbon-neutrality marketing.

The lawsuit accuses Delta of misleading customers with its sustainability pledges, which were advertised across press materials, social media and merchandise. Delta's in-flight napkins read: “Carbon neutral since March 2020. Travel confidently knowing that we will offset the carbon emitted on your Delta flight.”

Delta relied on “carbon offsetting”, shorthand for a slew of ways companies can reduce or remove carbon emissions from the environment. Activities like planting trees, shifting to cleaner fuel, funding [carbon capture techniques](#) in theory balance out a company's carbon emissions. A single round trip from Mumbai to L.A. [generates 4.8 tonnes of CO2](#) (equivalent to charging 6,00,000 smartphones), but the claim is that the carbon pollution from this trip can be absorbed by trees or carbon vacuums that airlines like Delta supported. All the customer has to do is pay extra to participate in “green flying”. Delta in 2019 said it added 80 new aircraft that were 25% more fuel efficient than those in their fleet. Delta's carbon offset portfolio consists of “half renewables, mostly wind and solar projects in India,” as per a *Bloomberg* investigation.

“I felt comfortable paying more because I was neutralising when I needed to travel for work or to see my family,” Berrin told *The Associated Press*, but she wouldn’t have paid extra had she known there was no merit to these claims.

According to Delta’s [latest ESG report](#), it was responsible for roughly 43.2 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions in 2022 — almost [seven times Botswana’s carbon dioxide emissions](#) from fossil fuels and industry in 2021.

The lawsuit is based on media reports that have found glaring loopholes in the carbon offsetting process. Criticism includes: “inaccurate accounting” of projects where reductions would have occurred regardless of carbon market involvement; failure to immediately offset emissions; relying on impermanent solutions, such as building projects (like forests) that may be destroyed by natural hazards (California wildfires burned more than 1,50,000 acres of forest allocated for the State’s offset programs). A 2022 *Bloomberg* investigation, for instance, found the reductions from the Los Cocos II wind farm project in the Dominican Republic Delta Air Lines paid for would have happened regardless of Delta’s involvement.

“Your flight today dumps carbon dioxide into the atmosphere right now, worsening climate change from this day forth. Saplings planted today won’t grow large enough to offset today’s emissions for decades, nor will investments in speculative technologies like nuclear fusion or direct air capture, even if they eventually become viable.” Betsy Vereckey *How to Choose Carbon Offsets that Actually Cut Emissions*, MIT SLOAN SCH. (Nov. 2, 2022)

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of Berrin and others like her, seeks class-action status, asking for compensation for unspecified damages, disgorgement of profits, and a legal restriction on Delta from making any future “bogus” claims. Delta has denied these allegations, arguing that it has pivoted from carbon offsets “toward decarbonisation of our operations, focusing our efforts on investing in sustainable aviation fuel,” a spokesperson told the *Associate Press*.

A Dutch court in April this year heard a “greenwashing” case against Netherlands-based airline KLM. Rights group Fossil Fuel alleged that KLM’s advertisements suggest flying with the airline is not directly hazardous to the environment, which violates Europe’s consumer laws by misleading customers about sustainability initiatives. “The only manner to fly sustainably is not to not fly or to fly less... Anything that KLM says differently...misleads consumers”, Fossil Fuel’s lawyer said.

Misleading carbon-neutral claims in flying aren’t rare: Ryanair’s campaign that urged customers to fly “Europe’s Lowest Fares, Lowest Emissions Airline” was found to be misleading by a U.K. advertising body in 2019.

A 2021 *Guardian* investigation found the carbon offset systems of most airlines are “flawed” and deceptive. A [June 2022 Greenpeace report](#) found seven of the biggest European airlines — including KLM and Lufthansa — were committing “quite offensive” levels of greenwashing. [Another study](#) which examined 37 airlines’ claims on carbon offsets found 44% of these airlines — such as Air Canada and Swiss Airlines — mislead customers and profited from “green” assertions. In 2021, the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which is home to 300 airlines across 120 countries, [pledged to achieve net zero by 2050](#), in a move that was criticised as “greenwashing” by experts

Carbon offsets work like a game of Monopoly, except instead of money, companies deal in carbon emissions. A company gets “carbon credits” for investment in offset projects, tokens which represent an amount of carbon dioxide which would have been funnelled out of the atmosphere due to these initiatives. Each credit is equal to a metric ton of CO<sub>2</sub>, which would



have caused global warming. These credits allow companies to continue emitting carbon in one place (say, aeroplane travel), with the promise their offsets are reducing emissions *elsewhere* (in distant rainforests). The voluntary carbon-offset market is expected to grow from \$2 billion in 2020 to around \$250 billion by 2050, per [a 2023 report](#) by Morgan Stanley.

The United Nations in 2008 formalised this idea by setting up the Reducing Emissions From Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), believing that the incentives from offsetting will help nations achieve climate goals.

In the aviation industry, carbon offsets have begun to attract customers' attention, as platforms offer flyers to "cancel" their greenhouse emissions by paying extra. A [2022 McKinsey survey](#) found almost half of the respondents said they're "really worried" about climate change, and agreed that the aviation sector should transition to carbon neutrality. MakeMyTrip in June last year partnered with Climes, an Indian start-up, to neutralise the carbon footprint of their travel by investing in a project of their choosing.

However, the offset market has been criticised for appealing to climate consciousness without real effort or impact. One line of scrutiny is about the efficacy of offsets in general: [growing evidence](#) shows reforestation as a climate adaptation programme is ineffective and misleading. They failed to sequester the carbon in the first place, or the gains made were quickly reversed or inflated, a 2019 *ProPublica* investigation of Brazil's rainforests showed.

Another concern hints at the moral problem of greenwashing — where big polluters continue to use fossil fuels and opt for a cheaper route to cutting emissions by way of offsets, all while middle- and low-income nations struggle with climate realities. Experts also argue it lulls people into thinking they are contributing to the environment. While those in favour argue carbon offset programs may work one day towards achieving net-zero goals, the consensus is they bear little to no immediate impact. One [2015 working paper](#) found global CO2 emissions would have been 600 million tons lower if countries had cut pollution at the source instead of buying offsets.

There are also blind spots built into the offset system. The voluntary carbon offset market is self-regulated: there are middlemen in the form of organisations like REDD+ that connect credit buyers and sellers. There are "certification" standards set by companies like Verra which allow companies to create and register their carbon-offsetting projects (the Gold Standard is considered among the most rigorous credit programs).

Offset programs work only when they remove or reduce carbon emissions that wouldn't have been eliminated otherwise, what is called "additionality". Paying to conserve rainforests that no one was planning to cut then technically doesn't amount to offsetting carbon emissions, and the company should receive no credits for it. A *Guardian* investigation in January located several big companies like Delta, Shell and Disney in this blind spot: about 90% of rainforest carbon offsets certified by Verra are likely to be "phantom credits" without accounting for any real reductions and would make global heating worse.

Proving additionality is a structural challenge, for it is hard to track the genuine progress of activities on the ground. Moreover, there is no universally-recognised way to count carbon offsets, and little transparency around their mathematical modelling, making any correlation between carbon reductions and offset programs tenuous. A [2021 paper](#) analysed the "world's largest carbon offset program", the Clean Development Mechanism, and found "at least 52% of approved carbon offsets were allocated to projects that would very likely have been built anyway", amounting to "a substantial misallocation of resources". The program included setting up 1,350 wind farms in India.

Though little data exists about the impact, Norway published a report in 2018 about REDD's assessment, concluding the results of offsets were "delayed and uncertain", the science of measuring was not in place and offset projects often resulted in "leakage", when protecting one area of land led to deforestation elsewhere.

Governments are working to tighten regulations around environmental marketing to discourage greenwashing, such as U.S. regulators updating their "Green Guides" which would rein in claims that are "unfair" or "deceptive". South Korea announced a draft law to penalise companies for false green claims. Greenwashing is considered an unfair trade practice under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, which prohibits misleading claims, but implementation of these regulations remains a challenge.

Activists and experts worry carbon credits within aviation are poorly regulated, little understood and may misdirect the conversation from meaningful climate action by aviation companies. "...the low price of carbon offsets often deters companies from pursuing 'emissions reductions in their own operations and value chains', despite adequate contributions to global climate change mitigation targets necessarily requiring the 'effective reductions of emissions across' 'operations and value chains' instead of reliance on offsets," the lawsuit noted. In the long run, it would prove to be "pernicious for climate goals".

Instead, the focus can be on decarbonising commercial aviation, with the help of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), hydrogen, and full-electric propulsion techniques. But these avenues are predicted to face [obstacles](#) as air traffic continues to grow and innovative decarbonising technologies are far in the distance. A Moody's 2021 report found about 10 million gallons of low-emission aviation fuel was produced globally in 2021, less than 0.02% of industry's current needs.

Environmental and Energy Study Institute executive director Daniel Bresette said in an interview: "Until carbon offsets are better regulated and more transparent, travellers need to exercise due diligence to determine whether they're worthwhile in terms of costs and benefits."

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# THE NEXT FINANCE COMMISSION WILL HAVE A TOUGH TASK

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues relating to Mobilization of resources incl. Savings, Borrowings & External Resources

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June 15, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 01:51 am IST

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'Faultlines across States have in fact deepened in recent years along political, economic and fiscal dimensions' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

The government will appoint a Finance Commission in the next few months to determine how much of the Centre's tax revenue should be given away to States (the vertical share) and how to distribute that among States (the horizontal sharing formula).

In the pre-reform period, the Finance Commission recommendations were not that critical because the Centre had other ways to compensate States, or indeed to play favourites, through plan financing and public sector undertaking (PSU) investments. Post-reforms, fresh PSU investments have thinned out and the Planning Commission was abolished in 2014 with the result that the Finance Commission remains virtually the sole architect of India's fiscal federalism. Its responsibility and influence are, therefore, much larger.

Currently, the Centre gives away 41% of its tax pool to the States. For sure, States will demand that this proportion be raised, but I do not see much room for stretching this further given the Centre's expenditure needs and the constraints on its borrowing limit. Therefore, much of the debate will centre on the horizontal distribution formula.

When the previous Finance Commission was appointed in 2017, its terms of reference became quite contentious because it was asked to take into account the 2011 population figures in determining the expenditure needs of a State. This was a departure from the standard practice until then of mandating Finance Commissions to use the 1971 population numbers so as not to give a perverse incentive to States to neglect family planning with an eye on a higher share of devolution. States which had done well in stabilising population growth rates, typically the southern States, protested against this change in the base year, calling it a 'penalty for good performance'.

A similar conflict arises with regard to revenue deficit grants that the Finance Commission awards to States which remain in deficit on the current account even after tax devolution. In theory, revenue deficit grants have a neat rationale — that every State in a country should be able to provide a minimum level of service to its residents even if it involves an element of cross-subsidisation. The worry is that this too has become a perverse incentive. Why bother raising

revenues on your own when the Finance Commission will compensate you?

Historically, Finance Commissions have struggled to determine how much a State's deficit is due to its fiscal incapacity and how much is due to fiscal irresponsibility. They have tried to tweak the distribution formula to support deficit States without penalising responsible States, a mathematically impossible task since you cannot give more to a State without giving less to another. The net result is that every horizontal distribution formula has been criticised as being inefficient or unfair or both.

These faultlines across States have in fact deepened in recent years along political, economic and fiscal dimensions. When the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost the Karnataka election last month, many political commentators read that as a north-south divide, with the BJP being confined to the northern States while the Opposition parties rule the southern States. Similarly, many headline numbers suggest that the southern States of the country are doing better in terms of infrastructure, private investment, social indicators and the rule of law, which has put them on a virtuous cycle of growth and prosperity and widened the north-south gap.

The bottom-line though is that it is in the very nature of horizontal distribution that richer States compensate poorer States. How to ensure that this happens without deepening the divide will challenge the government in defining the terms of reference of the Finance Commission, and of the Finance Commission itself in delivering on those terms of reference.

The terms of reference of the Finance Commission enjoin it to take into account the expenditure needs and revenue earning capacity of the Centre and States. I believe the forthcoming Finance Commission should use this leverage to focus on two issues in particular.

The first is the egregious practice by the Centre of increasingly resorting to a levy of cesses and surcharges rather than raising taxes. A white paper released by the Tamil Nadu government a couple of years ago pointed out that the proportion of cesses and surcharges in the Centre's total tax revenue had nearly doubled from 10.4% in 2011-12 to 20.2% in 2019-20.

There is a perverse incentive in operation here. The straightforward option for raising revenues is to raise taxes, but if the Centre does that, it has to part with 41 paise to States. On the other hand, if it raises the additional rupee by way of a surcharge, it gets to keep all of it. When the Constitution was amended in the year 2000 giving States a share in the Centre's total tax pool, the implicit understanding was that the Centre will resort only sparingly to cesses and surcharges, and not as a matter of routine as has become the practice. As a result of this breach of understanding, States have felt cheated out of their legitimate share of national tax revenue. The next Finance Commission should lay down guidelines for when cesses and surcharges might be levied, and also suggest a formula to cap the amount that can be raised.

The second issue of focus for the Finance Commission should be government spending on what has come to be called freebies. All political parties are guilty on this count, some more than others, but trying to apportion blame will be a wrong start.

In a poor country, where millions of households struggle for basic human needs, it sounds cruel to argue against safety-nets for the poor. But it is precisely because India is a poor country, that we need to be more circumspect about freebies.

In theory, the restraints imposed by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act should have acted as a check on such populist spending, but governments have found ingenious ways of raising debt without it appearing in the budget books. It is not easy to unambiguously define a freebie, and any check on this will be contested as infringing on the

sovereignty of elected governments. Nevertheless, the next Finance Commission should bite the bullet in the interest of long-term fiscal sustainability and lay down guidelines on the spending on freebies.

After the BJP lost the Karnataka election, the Prime Minister said that the guarantees offered by the Congress in Karnataka were impossible to implement, and if taken forward, 'the country and the State concerned will become bankrupt.' Strong words indeed. In the State Assembly elections to be held later this year, the Prime Minister should walk the talk and invest his political capital to show that the promise of good governance can trump the lure of freebies.

That will embolden the Finance Commission to formalise a mechanism for a restraint on freebies.

***Duvvuri Subbarao is a former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India***

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# STRENGTHENING THE ICDS SCHEME

Relevant for: null | Topic: Important Schemes & Programmes of the Government

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June 15, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 01:58 am IST

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Children share their mid-day meals at an Integrated Child Development Services centre in Chennai in 2021. | Photo Credit: PTI

Notwithstanding contention regarding the assessment methods of various global surveys, it is true that India's high prevalence of stunting, wasting, and anaemia continues to pose public health risks for children and women. India must strengthen its existing social sector schemes, such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), to tackle this. The ICDS targets children aged 0-6 years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers; addresses non-formal pre-school education; and breaks the cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality.

Empirical research highlights the correlation between early-life poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate stimulation, and later cognitive and economic challenges. Studies have shown that interventions focusing on nutrition, education, and health during early childhood can significantly improve human capital, particularly in developing countries. A study published in *World Development* demonstrated the ICDS's positive impact on cognitive achievements, especially among girls and those from economically disadvantaged families. Another peer-reviewed study in *The University of Chicago Press Journals* found that children who were exposed to ICDS during the first three years of life completed 0.1-0.3 more grades of schooling than those who were not. In a study published in the *Natural Library of Medicine*, it was found that adolescents aged 13-18, who born in villages with proper ICDS implementation, showed a 7.8% increased likelihood of school enrolment and completed an average of 0.8 additional grades compared to their peers who did not have access to the ICDS.

As we commend the remarkable strides made by ICDS, it is imperative to acknowledge the pressing need for a thorough reassessment of our approaches. Despite four decades of relentless efforts, the ICDS still faces the herculean task of ameliorating the nutritional and health outcomes for children aged 0-6 years.

A significant first step towards fortifying the programme is to empower Anganwadi workers. Though the cornerstone of the ICDS, they are frequently stretched beyond their limits. As principal operatives in the Poshan 2.0 initiative, these workers bear the onus of advancing child nutrition, health, and education in their communities. Their roles vary widely from employing modern technology, like smartphones and applications, to practical tasks such as delivering health education, managing feeding programmes, and liaising with auxiliary nurse midwives and other healthcare professionals.

An additional Anganwadi worker could be added to each of India's 13,99,661 Anganwadi centers to lessen the load of these workers. Implementing this approach could yield at least five advantages. First, it would lead to better health and educational outcomes. A large-scale randomised controlled trial by Alejandro Ganimian, Karthik Muralidharan and Christopher Walters in Tamil Nadu, conducted to evaluate the effects of increasing staff levels within the ICDS framework, revealed significant outcomes. The addition of a half-time worker effectively doubled the net preschool instructional time, which led to improvements in math and language test scores for children enrolled in the programme. Second, children who remained enrolled also exhibited reduced rates of child stunting and severe malnutrition.

Editorial | [Playing with learning: On status of early childhood education](#)

Third, the cost of a nationwide roll-out of this model is relatively insignificant in comparison to the potential advantages it offers. The estimated long-term benefits, based on expected improvements in lifetime earnings, would be around 13 to 21 times the expenses.

Fourth, the new Anganwadi worker can be given the responsibility of concentrating only on preschool and early childhood education. This would allow existing workers to dedicate more time to child health and nutrition. It would also enable the Anganwadi workers to expand their outreach and serve a larger number of families.

Fifth, apart from improving the well-being of rural communities, this would create job opportunities for local residents, particularly women. It would lead to the creation of 1.3 million new jobs for women across India.

The operationalisation of the Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 proposal hinges on its status as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme. State governments oversee its execution, including administration, management, and monitoring. Consequently, Anganwadi worker recruitment falls under their jurisdiction, guided by regulations and region-specific criteria. This decentralised approach promotes tailored, efficient implementation. The Government of India provides funds for Anganwadi workers' and helpers' honorariums on a cost-sharing basis.

Also read | [MGNREGS workers will build almost 75% of anganwadis in 2023, says Women and Child Development Ministry](#)

Apart from this, the data have shown a significant variation in implementation of the ICDS and the level of skills of Anganwadi workers. This requires further investments in the training programme. Additionally, the exigency for infrastructural improvement in India's Anganwadi centers cannot be overstated. A disconcerting 2.5 lakh centres operate without functional sanitation facilities and 1.5 lakh centres lack access to potable water. Approximately 4.15 lakh Anganwadi centers do not possess their own pucca building.

To unlock the ICDS' full potential and address persistent issues, it is essential to revisit and re-evaluate its strategies and implementation. Empowering Anganwadi workers is just a start.

***Bibek Debroy is Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister; Aditya Sinha is Additional Private Secretary (Policy and Research), Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister***

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# MALE-CENTRIC MEDICINE IS AFFECTING WOMEN'S HEALTH

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 15, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 01:51 am IST

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'It is not just about treatment but also testing and diagnosis where women have been getting a rough deal' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

"If you were a young boy, I could have offered you a bouquet of medicines. Unfortunately, for both of us, you are a lovely young girl," said my daughter's neurologist, writing out her prescription. And then he began to explain the possible side-effects, some mild, some severe. Exactly three decades ago, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) Revitalization Act of 1993 mandated the inclusion of "women and minorities" in clinical trials in a bid to reduce health disparities. Yet, to date, the male model of medicine is thriving, and so is the tendency of treating women as smaller men despite a growing body of research insisting on physiological differences (beyond the reproductive organs) between the sexes. The genetic and epigenetic differences between men and women are also extensively documented.

In India, the "pharmacy of the world", the gender disparity in clinical trials has even bigger implications, thanks to generic drug production and consumption. It has been demonstrated in various studies that women's bodies respond differently to the components of generic drugs.

Professor Cassandra Szoeki, Director of Healthy Ageing Program at the University of Melbourne, Australia, says that thanks to the recent inclusion of women in clinical trials for generic medicine, we now know that "nearly one-fifth of medications showed a difference in the active dose between men and women". Women have been either overdosing, as in the case of Zolpidem, a common sleep medicine, or not getting enough, as in the case of several pain medicines, for decades now thanks to their underrepresentation in clinical trials.

It is not just about treatment but also testing and diagnosis where women have been getting a rough deal. Take, for instance, mental health. According to a study conducted in Tamil Nadu by Nobel laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, along with their research partners, "26 per cent of men and 31 per cent of women aged 61-70 have symptoms indicating a high likelihood of depression".

The study firmly notes that depression rates and the prevalence of anxiety are higher for women than for men worldwide in general. One can add to this a study on human capital conducted by Ernst R. Berndt and others that states that women with an early onset of depression "are less likely to obtain college degrees and less likely to pursue postgraduate degrees". We see the

vicious cycle of women's underrepresentation here.

Like depression, cardiac issues are now acknowledged as having a slightly more prevalence in women. Yet, they continue to be diagnosed and treated like 'lesser men'. Study after study demonstrates that women are less likely to receive appropriate medications, diagnostic tests and clinical procedures even in developed countries such as Canada and Sweden. The stereotype of the "hysterical woman" continues to haunt women even when they need urgent clinical interventions.

The exclusion of women from clinical trials and research projects addressing sex-agnostic critical illnesses such as cancer and heart disease has resulted in a limited understanding of sex-specific symptoms and responses to treatment. When it comes to sex-specific illnesses such as breast or endometrial cancers, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and pregnancy-related issues, there are serious gaps in research that can only be explained by an apathy towards "women's only" issues. United States-based studies show that the funding received for research in migraine, endometriosis and anxiety disorders is much lower in proportion to the burden of these illnesses.

'If men menstruated there would be several multi-million dollar projects studying cramps' — this meme is not funny any more when you look at mortality numbers because of poor reproductive health. World Health Organization data from 2017 show that "every day about 808 women die due to complications of pregnancy and childbirth". Almost all of these were preventable but occurred "due to interaction between pre-existing medical conditions and pregnancy". Pregnant women are further down the ladder of representation in clinical trials and research.

In an equitable world, women would be accepted as an individual category, with race, age and class as subcategories. And an equal amount of time and resources would be spent in finding and providing treatment and health care. How can women even aspire to have access to equal health care when their ailments are not even understood?

India has several progressive policies with respect to women's health including the right to abortion. It is time for policy intervention in the space of sex-specific research in medicine and the implementation of outcomes.

India's G-20 presidency may be an opportune time to highlight this issue in alignment with Sustainable Development Goals on women's health.

***Nishtha Gautam, a Delhi-based author and academic, is the co-editor of the volume on strategic affairs, In Hard Times: Security In A Time Of Insecurity'***

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## EXPLAINED

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June 16, 2023 08:30 am | Updated 08:30 am IST

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A blood glucose meter. | Photo Credit: Getty Images

**The story so far:** The new national estimates for diabetes and other non-communicable diseases (NCD) shows that 31 million more Indians became diabetic in four years (2019-2021).

In 2021, a study found that India has 101 million people with diabetes and 136 million people with prediabetes. Additionally, 315 million people had high blood pressure; 254 million had generalised obesity, and 351 million had abdominal obesity. 213 million people had hypercholesterolaemia (wherein fat collects in arteries and puts individuals at greater risk of heart attack and strokes) and 185 million had high low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol. The decade-long nationwide study was funded by the Indian Council of Medical Research and Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and co-ordinated by the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation. The results of the study are to be published in *The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology* journal.

The study is the first comprehensive epidemiological research paper which includes participants from 31 States and some Union Territories, with a large sample size of 1,13,043 individuals. There are two big trend indicators in the study.

First, diabetes and other metabolic non-communicable diseases, such as hypertension, obesity and dyslipidemia are much more common than estimated previously in India and second, while currently urban regions had higher rates of all metabolic NCDs than rural areas, with the exception of prediabetes, rural India will see a diabetes explosion in the next five years if left unregulated.

The study also highlights interstate and inter-regional variations. The highest diabetes prevalence was found in Goa, Puducherry and Kerala. While prediabetes was prevalent in Sikkim, hypertension was highest in Punjab. Generalised obesity and abdominal obesity were highest in Puducherry, while Kerala had high hypercholesterolemia and high LDL cholesterol. The lowest prevalence of NCDs was found in U.P., Mizoram, Meghalaya and Jharkhand. This cross-sectional, population-based survey of adults aged above 20 years, across the country uses a stratified, multistage sampling design in the study titled — “Metabolic non-communicable health report of India-the ICMR-INDIAB National Cross-sectional Study.”

While the diabetes epidemic is stabilising in the more developed States of the country, it is still increasing in most of the other States. Thus, there are serious implications for the nation,

warranting urgent State-specific policies and interventions to arrest the rapidly rising epidemic of metabolic NCDs in India.

While India in the past four years has substantially added to its burden of diabetics and hypertensive persons with generalised and abdominal obesity, the study gives us an early warning that if not controlled, this population is predisposed to NCDs and life-altering medical conditions including strokes.

Experts have explained that India is facing the dual problem of malnutrition and obesity. There is availability of surplus food, but after being exposed to fast foods, a lack of sleep, exercise and stress creates a perfect setting for NCDs to latch-on.

The answer to this developing pandemic, is in wellness and in having a lifestyle that encompasses healthy diet and exercise. NCDs have also been one of the major concerns of the Health Ministry. It has identified the four major NCDs — cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. They all share four behavioural risk factors — unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, and use of tobacco and alcohol. Programmes have been brought in to strengthen health infrastructure, human resource development, health-promotion and awareness-generation for prevention, early diagnosis and ensuring referrals to appropriate healthcare facilities for treatment of NCDs.

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## CODE RED: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE 22ND LAW COMMISSION AND A UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

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June 16, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:24 am IST

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The [Law Commission's decision to solicit views](#) from the public on the idea of [a uniform civil code](#) appears to be a political initiative aimed at bringing the potentially divisive issue under focus in the run-up to next year's general election. The Commission, the 22nd such panel, has claimed that years have elapsed since similar views were sought by the previous panel, and that a fresh effort was needed to garner varied opinions. The 21st Commission had released a consultation paper in 2018 that categorically said a uniform civil code was "neither necessary nor desirable" at that stage. In a well-reasoned document, it had then argued that the focus of initiatives to reform the various personal laws should be the elimination of all forms of discrimination rather than an attempt to bring about uniformity in the laws governing various religions. The document was progressive in nature, inasmuch as it emphasised non-discrimination over uniformity, and recognised that there could be diverse means of governing aspects of personal law such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption instead of imposing a single set of rules on society. This would entail the removal of discriminatory provisions, especially those that affect women, and adoption of some overarching norms rooted in equality. Nothing significant has happened since to warrant a fresh look, except perhaps a political need for the current dispensation to bring the issue to the electoral arena.

A uniform civil code for the entire country is indeed a lofty goal, but the question whether introducing one for all aspects of personal law would impinge on the freedom of religion has been part of the debate. B.R. Ambedkar viewed it as desirable, but favoured its being voluntary. It is possible that a uniform code may be adopted without offending any religion, but the concept evokes fear among sections of the minorities that their religious beliefs, seen as the source of their personal laws, may be undermined. In fraught times such as the present, a common code will inevitably be seen as an imposition by the majority. Basic reforms can be given priority — such as having 18 as the marriageable age for all across communities and genders. Introducing a 'no-fault' divorce procedure and allowing dissolution of marriage on the ground of irretrievable breakdown, and having common norms for post-divorce division of assets were other matters the previous Commission threw up for a debate. Within each community's laws, it will be desirable to first incorporate universal principles of equality and non-discrimination and eliminate practices based on taboos and stereotypes.

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# GENERIC DRUGS FOR DIABETES, GASTRIC ISSUES, CARDIOVASCULAR AILMENTS SEE HIGH DEMAND

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 16, 2023 08:47 pm | Updated June 17, 2023 03:28 am IST - NEW DELHI

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People gathered at Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra to buy medicine in Bengaluru. File | Photo Credit: K. Murali Kumar

The Jan Aushadhi Kendras selling generic drugs at affordable prices have seen their sales rise more than 170 times over the last nine years, but the government has no intention of making them available online in the near future. "As of now, we have no such plans," Ravi Dadhich, CEO of the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Bureau of India (PMBI) said during an interaction at the Kendra's central warehouse in Bilaspur, Gurugram on Friday.

Medicines to treat gastric issues, diabetes, cardiovascular ailments, and pain have seen the highest sales at the Jan Aushadhi Kendras, under the Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana scheme. The drugs sold at the Kendras are 50% to 90% cheaper than their branded counterparts.

There are plans to increase the number of drugs and surgical equipments available at the Kendras by the end of the year, Mr. Dadhich said. "Currently, the country has 9,484 Jan Aushadhi Kendras which will be increased to 10,000, and the product basket of 1,800 drugs and 285 surgical items is expected to go up to 2,000 and 300 respectively," he said.

There are currently four warehouses under the scheme, located at Gurugram, Chennai, Guwahati and Surat, with the central warehouse at Gurugram being the largest.

Mr. Dadhich emphasised that PMBI places the highest importance on quality parameters and regularly conducts checks to ensure good quality of medicines. "The idea behind the programme is to offer highly subsidised prices without compromising on quality. Each batch of the drugs after its receipt at the warehouses is tested at laboratories accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories for ensuring best quality," he said.

"In the last nine years, the number of Jan Aushadhi Kendras under PMBJP have seen significant growth, with their numbers increasing by 100 times. In all, during the past nine years, total savings of approximately 20,000 crore for the citizens have been possible due to this scheme," he added.

The programme is run on a franchise model, with individual entrepreneurs applying to establish



and run the Kendras. They have separate categories for fast and slow-moving products and also have a section for Ayush medicines.

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# MOUNTING TENSIONS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE THREAT TO SOCIAL HARMONY IN UTTARAKHAND

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Minorities Incl. Linguistic Minorities - Schemes & their performance; Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions & Bodies

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June 17, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:16 am IST

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Festering communal tensions in Purola in Uttarakhand, nearly 400 kilometres north of Delhi, have resulted in the fleeing of most of the town's handful of Muslims. A clutch of self-styled protectors of Hindu interests had called for a congregation on June 15, which was [cancelled at the eleventh hour](#), even as the Uttarakhand High Court asked the State government to ensure that law and order was maintained. Tensions arose from [an alleged attempt by a Muslim man](#) to kidnap a minor Hindu girl from the town, on May 26. The man and his Hindu friend were arrested, and the incident soon became the new war cry for outfits that have been peddling the notion of love jihad, an alleged Islamic scheme to entrap Hindu girls in liaisons. Muslims in Purola became the target of a social boycott, and Hindu landlords were reportedly forced to evict their Muslim tenants. Several such incidents of targeting interfaith relationships have been reported in Uttarakhand in recent months. In a rather bizarre case, an interfaith couple had to call off their marriage even after their families had agreed to their match. Individual rights and choices are being trampled upon by hooligans who claim to protect community interests, a trend that is a serious threat to the rule of law and social harmony.

The Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Pushkar Singh Dhami, has amplified the hate rhetoric of love jihad in recent months even as these disturbances continue. He also ordered the demolition of over 600 tomb shrines associated largely with Muslims, on grounds of encroachment of public or forest land. He has promised strict action against the so-called love jihad and a vaguely framed 'verification drive' of people to keep the State free of disturbances. Meanwhile, random organisations that seek the cleansing of 'devbhoomi' — a reference to Hindu shrines in the Himalayan State — of other faiths, are finding the ruling party's tacit or direct endorsement. A demand for excluding Muslims from the businesses associated with the Chardham pilgrimage circuit is also being given a sympathetic hearing by the administration. Since 2017, Uttarakhand has been in the news for campaigns and hate speeches against people from the minority community, which has been noted by both the Supreme Court of India and the High Court. The State should remain impartial in enforcing the law. The criminal case of attempted kidnapping in Purola should be investigated quickly, and nobody should be allowed to make use of it to propagate communal politics. The leaders should be fair and impartial, and be seen so.

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# RAILWAY SAFETY — LISTEN TO THE VOICES FROM BELOW

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June 17, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 12:18 am IST

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“Many accidents are the culmination of ‘near miss’ situations, unsafe practices or deviations from the norm over a period of time” | Photo Credit: PTI

Nothing focuses the nation’s collective attention on the Indian Railways as a major accident. The triple train collision at Bahanaga Bazar railway station, near Balasore in Odisha on June 2, which led to the tragic loss of over 280 lives, has evoked all the expected responses from various quarters: calls for the resignation of the Minister in charge of the Railways; collective breast beating and despair over where the Railways are headed; the sudden sprouting of ‘railway experts’ offering explanations as to how the accident occurred and remedial measures to prevent accidents in the future, and comparisons with Railway systems abroad. In short, there is an overwhelming sense of déjà vu.

There are, however, a few unique features about this accident. For the first time ever a Railway Minister not only visited the site of the accident but also chose to remain at the site to oversee relief and restoration work till the lines were restored for traffic. Even more exceptional was the visit of the Prime Minister himself to the site of the accident, perhaps a historical first for the Indian Railways. However, his statement that “instructions have been given to ensure proper and speedy investigation of tragedy and to take prompt and stringent action against those found guilty”, even as a statutory inquiry by the Commissioner of Railway Safety was to begin, gave the impression that it had already been determined that the accident was caused by human agency. The subsequent handing over of the inquiry to the Central Bureau of Investigation is also unprecedented, the reason for which is not readily apparent unless criminal intent is suspected. A “preliminary enquiry” by a committee of senior supervisors even as a statutory inquiry by the Commissioner of Railway Safety was yet to begin is also rather unusual.

A collateral casualty of any major accident is cool and objective analysis of the situation. Emotions and hype tend to take over. While it may seem invidious to take refuge in numbers and statistics in the immediate aftermath of a major accident with a large-scale loss of lives of passengers, there is a need to view the situation objectively if any meaningful corrective steps are to be taken.

Statistics show that over the last two decades, the number of derailments which constitute the majority of accidents has drastically declined from around 350 per year around the turn of the millennium, to 22 in 2021-22. This is a commendable achievement by any standards. The fact

that this has been achieved in the context of a nearly threefold increase in freight loading and more than a doubling of passenger traffic lends credence to the conclusion that the overall safety performance of the Railways has improved significantly over the years. The problem with an index such as safety is that all that is required to sully the record is a single major accident. That, unfortunately, is the nature of the beast. Everything about railway safety has been discussed threadbare in a number of committees in the past. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. In all the reports of the various committees, there is perhaps one aspect that has not received sufficient attention. It does not cost much but is perhaps one of the most difficult things to implement.

This concerns the flow of information regarding unsafe practices or situations on a real-time basis. Unlike many other organisations or industries, where the activities or operations are concentrated more or less in a limited area physically (for example, nuclear power plants, steel and chemical plants), the activities of the Railways are spread geographically over a wide area, involving a multiplicity of disciplines (departments) that need to work in close coordination on a real-time basis to ensure the smooth and safe running of trains. In order to ensure uniformity in the compliance of rules and regulations and safety in operations, a large number of codes and manuals have been evolved for different departments over the decades to standardise the procedures as far as possible.

Ever since the inception of the railways in this country, periodic field inspections by authorities at various levels have been one of the main tools for the management to ensure compliance with laid-down procedures and standards of workmanship. Accordingly, every department has evolved a set of schedules for the inspection of various work centres and operational procedures — for every level of the management, from the lowest to the highest. While this system has, by and large, stood the test of time over the decades, it suffers from a few drawbacks, particularly in the context of railway safety.

By its very nature, the “top-down” approach places the onus of detecting deviations from the norm on the higher authorities. It becomes a veritable “cops and robbers” scenario, in which the higher authority looks down on the staff at the cutting-edge level with suspicion and distrust; and, conversely, the staff at the lower levels adopt an attitude of “catch me if you can”. It encourages window dressing and sweeping of problems under the carpet. Transparency and frankness are usually the casualties in such a situation.

This can be counterproductive, particularly in matters that concern railway safety. As is well known, many accidents are the culmination of “near miss” situations, unsafe practices or deviations from the norm over a period of time. Detection and rectification of such deviations at the earliest opportunity can prevent many unsafe situations from developing into serious accidents. While in every case a remedy may not be available, even becoming aware of the shortcomings on a real-time basis can often help the management in avoiding a major disaster.

This is not some idealistic concept. A system called Confidential Incident Reporting and Analysis System (CIRAS) was developed by one of the British universities nearly three decades ago for application on the British Railways in the mid-1990s. The underlying philosophy is to encourage the lower staff to point out deviations on a real-time basis, maintaining the confidentiality of the reporter, and encouraging the expression of frank views. The system, in effect, turns the conventional top down inspection on its head. This is in fact an example of real empowerment of staff.

With the rapid advances in communications and information technology since CIRAS was developed nearly three decades ago, the introduction of a similar reporting system on the Indian Railways should not be difficult.

However, there is a need to sound a note of caution. The success and effectiveness of a CIRAS-like reporting system depends not only on putting in place the physical infrastructure (which is the easier part), but also a total change in the mindset of the management, from the highest to the lower levels, vis-à-vis the staff at the field level. There has to be an attitudinal change from the conventional approach of fault-finding and punishment to a more enlightened ethos of a shared commitment to ensure safety at all levels. The aim should be to correct, not punish. Listen to the voices from below and act. Effecting this change is not easy.

Improving safety and sustaining that improvement involves unremitting drudgery and hard work 24X7, 365 days, year after year — an unglamorous endeavour, all for achieving a non event. It is not spectacular or attention grabbing like the introduction of shiny trains or the commissioning of impressive station buildings. Therein lays the real challenge of sustaining safety on the Railways.

A couple of thoughts in conclusion. Perhaps it is time to have a serious rethink on the recently introduced Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS) scheme, which is bound to destroy whatever loyalty and sense of “ownership” that exists towards a particular discipline (department) amongst the management cadre. That bodes ill for safety management on the Railways. It is perhaps also time to revert to the earlier system of having a full-time Cabinet Minister for the Railways. Unprecedented levels of investments at a time when the organisation is going through a challenging phase of transformation amidst many external challenges requires undivided attention at the highest policy-making level.

***K. Balakesari, formerly of the Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME), was Member Staff, Railway Board***

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# INDIAN STUDENTS MUST BE TAUGHT THAT DOING IS THE NEW LEARNING

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

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June 16, 2023 02:19 pm | Updated 07:01 pm IST

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Representative image. | Photo Credit: Getty Images

Every year, news of suicides of students triggers breaking headlines in India, a billion plus nation where parents have always wanted their children to be the best and brightest.

The parents do not want to compromise. And there lies the biggest problem.

No one denies that the future of a child — arguably — is the biggest concern to a parent. But then, our educational institutes are always on the lookout for the top students, the race starts from the school where scholar badges create a strange divide in the classrooms.

So what happens? In their efforts to push students to maintain their reputation, parents feel pressured and compelled to raise the bar too high for their students to match up to the standards set by these education institutions. What do the parents want? I have a feeling that parents these days are just worried about how the world would perceive their students. And that causes the crisis. This is a crisis of performing nothing but the best, rushing to win a seemingly endless race.

For the last two years, Indians — knowing very well jobs are drying up in the West — have pushed their children to colleges in the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada and the United States. In 2022, an estimated 7.7 lakh Indian students went abroad to study — the highest in six years — and many faced severe challenges in finding jobs later. This was highlighted by M Square Media, a Canada-based education firm. This is not all. The Indian Education Ministry said only 22% of Indian students who studied abroad between 2015-2019 were able to secure employment on returning home.

So, one thing is clear.

Parents — based on how others are performing — often generalise the idea of excellence and success. This is certainly not the right approach but not many studies have come up in India to dissuade parents from taking this highly convoluted approach. As a result, parents continue to follow the wrong path, adopt the wrong approach. And the results are often devastating. Consider this one. Over 13,000 students died in India in 2021 at the rate of more than 35 every day, mainly due to failure in examinations.

The idea of excellence and success is often generalised by Indian parents based on how others are performing. Apart from academics, there are expectations from the children to excel in sports, music and arts. So there is no wholesome development of a student who is constantly pushing boundaries that eventually lead to disappointment, anxiety, stress and suicide. Countless studies in India have said time and again that students routinely experienced pressure from their teachers and parents to perform better academically. As a result, this very harsh competition and limited opportunities make the academic journey highly stressful.

It is like a Catch-22 situation. India continues to produce some of the world's best CEOs and they have all been educated in the West. So, the craze for getting admitted in a top global university will not disappear very soon, unless Indian colleges really match up to the global standards. Some have scaled up their standards but not everyone. And there lies the catch.

So Indian schools are under high pressure to produce over a million talented students each year. The competent attitude of the students helps them excel in various fields. But hold it. The students also encounter high pressure to get top grade marks to gain admission to the preferred course and college.

And there are countless challenges to encounter. This is not happy news; you can always ask the students. And that's not all. The pressure felt by the students reflects on their parents, it can easily be deciphered on the faces of the parents who invest a lot of cash and time to ensure this stupendous success for their children.

Isn't this total madness?

I have often wondered why parents do not think differently when it comes to educating their wards? After all, they can easily take the lead, play some pivotal roles and take the right decisions. This is very crucial because decisions taken at the right time and in the right manner always create the best foundation for children, both in school and college.

Will Indian parents ever learn that doing is the new learning? They need to know that the mad rush for high marks should be dropped and it will save students from unnecessary pressure and anxiety and help them realise the benefits of education. What is more important is that the students would be exposed to the practical world, they will understand what skills and traits are important and what are not. They will have futuristic knowledge and skills, else they will be lost in this big race of grades.

India's education system has evolved, actually accelerated by the pandemic and increasingly, Indian parents are now guiding their children to take the right courses. It has not worked overnight because the Covid is still hovering around but Indian students are learning to lessen the burden of multiple examinations. Actually, I have a feeling that parents in India are now seeking the right kind of examinations which, in turn, can push their children into colleges of their choice. Parents now know the importance of certification courses in the job market.

Apart from a variety of considerations, educated parents emphasise a balanced study pattern that may improve students' overall personality and help them attain long-lasting success. Overall, Indian parents in the current age are helping students realise their strengths and supporting them with value-added courses such as certificates in IT and other skill-building and aptitude-based programmes. That's why they encourage students to choose the Pearson Undergraduate Entrance Examination, which greatly increases potential success and opens doors for more lucrative career opportunities.

This is a good move, by all standards.



India's nightmarish college admission — interestingly — starts in May. It has — for decades — reminded the students that every year that there is very little in life if your marks are below 97%. This has been nerve shattering for thousands of students filling up forms for the entrance examinations. Everyone hopes some college will lower the bar, admissions would be easy. In Delhi alone, more than 4,50,000 students vie for an estimated 56,000 seats in undergraduate courses. It has always been all about mounting numbers and huge crowds of students seeking admissions for the best colleges. This is a system that has refused to change for long.

This needs to change. Else, private colleges will continue to charge high fees and parents will have to pledge family jewellery or insurance certificates to take loans. One needs to remember that India's education loan stands at a whopping 21,000 crore. The average size of education loans for domestic colleges is 4,00,000 while for overseas education, it ranges between 50-60 lakh. And then, there is a Rs 32,000 crore test-preparatory market flourishing, especially in cities like Kota.

This cannot continue anymore, and parents cannot impose their own unfulfilled ambitions on their children, and the children should not be on the edge all the time.

Happy that parents in India are changing, let this change stay. Let this change be constant.

***V. VijayaSai Reddy is a Member of Parliament and the Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture. He is the national general secretary of the YSR Congress Party.***

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## EXPLAINED

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June 18, 2023 04:30 am | Updated 04:30 am IST

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It estimated that about 11% of Indians are diabetic, and 15.3 % of the country is in the pre-diabetic stage. File | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

**The story so far:** There was great interest in the results of the largest, long-term (2008-2020) study on metabolic factors in the Indian subcontinent as part of the [ICMR-InDiab study published in The Lancet](#) (by Anjana Ranjit Mohan et al) last week. It was launched in 2008 to estimate the country's NCD (chronic non-communicable diseases) burden, and done over five phases between 2008 and 2020 across the country, with each phase covering five States (all seven northeastern States were covered in one phase). Individuals aged over 20 were recruited for the door-to-door survey and 1.24 lakh individuals were part of the survey.

It estimated that about 11% of the population is diabetic, and 15.3 % of the country is in the pre-diabetic stage. Given that the study was conducted in the most populous nation in the world, the actual numbers are naturally staggering. As per these estimates, 101.3 million people in the country are diabetic, and in the pre-diabetes stage, there are another 136 million people. Questions are being raised about whether this constitutes an emergent crisis in India and of the urgent methods that need to be employed to handle this situation, and control possible burgeoning of these numbers in the future. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 422 million people worldwide have diabetes, and 1.5 million deaths are directly attributed to the disease each year. Both the number of cases and the prevalence of diabetes have been increasing, and there is a globally agreed target to halt the rise in diabetes and obesity by 2025, according to the WHO.

The thing with metabolic lifestyle disorders, is that with some attention, it is possible to ward off severe complications and a morbid state of life; it is also possible to ensure that the 136 million at the pre-diabetic stage do not proceed to diabetes. "Prevention is key, and here is the window of opportunity," says V. Mohan, Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, which conducted the study funded by the Indian Council of Medical Research. "There is a window of possibility open in a couple of areas and we need to seize it," he explains. He believes the anchor of any intervention programme should be 'prevention' — in the case of diabetics, the aim has to be to prevent the onset of life-threatening complications; and in the case of pre-diabetics, all efforts must be taken to prevent the progress to diabetes, and in rural areas, where the prevalence is still low, the aim should be to keep it that way.

There are multiple studies that show that poor control of blood sugar leads to complications — cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, neuropathy, blindness, and lower-extremity amputation

— which then become a significant cause of increased morbidity and mortality. The question is whether any nation will be equipped to provide comprehensive care to all diabetics who develop complications in the course of living with diabetes. While it is sensible to ensure that there are sufficient facilities to treat the complications, the sagacious approach would be to launch public awareness campaigns on using lifestyle modifications to keep blood sugar within acceptable limits and complications at bay, Dr. Mohan says. Education on a mass scale should be launched across the country for control and periodic check-ups, sticking to the recommended drug regimen and reinforcing health-seeking behaviour, he stresses.

Dr. Mohan explains that while doing the study, researchers encountered a strange phenomenon — that the conversion from pre-diabetes to diabetes was faster in India, in some cases even within six months. So immediate attention must be paid to promoting a healthy lifestyle that would lead to retarding the speed of progress to diabetes, or even prevent movement to diabetes. Urban India accounts for 16.4% of the prevalence while in the rural population the prevalence is 8.9%. Though the prevalence is lower now, this is an area where the possibility for prevention is greater. As traditional lifestyles change and more modern practices take over, it is essential to once again stress on maintaining a healthy diet, getting sufficient moderate to vigorous exercise and periodic testing for those with risk factors and after a certain age group, experts point out.

Periodic epidemiological screening programmes are very important, they say, to catch new diabetics and bring them into the protective net.

The impression, even among researchers, was that the prevalence was high only in metro cities, Dr. Mohan says, adding that they were quite surprised to find that it was similar, or growing in 2-3 tier cities.

In Kerala, said to be top among States with better social development indicators, the prevalence in rural areas had escalated to supersede that in urban areas.

This is a side-effect of progress, one that States should be careful to watch over, experts add.

All the northeastern States were covered in one phase, and the surprises included high prevalence in Tripura and Sikkim. While in Tripura, it was averred that the ethnic composition of the State was different from that of the other States in the region, being populated with Bengalis, leading to a high rate of 13% prevalence; in Sikkim where the prevalence of diabetes and pre-diabetes (31 %) was high, it was put down to its smaller size and relatively better socio-economic indicators there.

Dr. Mohan says there is a plan to do a cross-sectional study to gauge the actual incidence in the community. “What we did was an estimation. For example, in Tamil Nadu, we had the figures from a decade back and that was extrapolated as projections for 2020. We will now do a current study to find out how many actually are diabetic. Now we also intend to go back to the same people — people who then tested as diabetic to see how they have progressed, to assess their quality of life, and see if they have developed complications. The pre-diabetics in that study will also be approached to see how many of them have converted to the next stage, and among people who were not diabetic a decade ago, to follow up on their status now.”

Some of the islands and Union Territories that could not be covered during the study will now be included in the study.

Experts have also indicated tie-ups as part of the public-private partnership mode to involve the larger community in supporting detection and treatment for diabetes.

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# EMERGING MONKEYPOX OUTBREAKS IN ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 17, 2023 09:20 pm | Updated 10:37 pm IST

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Increasing number of cases are being reported from Southeast Asia and Western Pacific region | Photo Credit: AP

Over a month ago, the World Health Organization declared the Mpox global health emergency over. However, even though cumulative cases across the world continue to decline, there has been an increase in reported cases from some countries, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific Region.

Monkeypox, or mpox, is a viral disease that primarily spread to the human population through zoonotic spillovers, with rodents and primates serving as potential reservoirs. Mpox can be transmitted between humans through close contact and exposure to infected bodily fluids or lesions. Sexual contact is also believed to contribute to the spread of the disease particularly among certain demographics.

Mpox was a rare infection that was predominantly restricted to some countries in Africa until early 2022, when a rise in cases across the globe where the disease was not endemic, particularly in Europe and North America. According to the WHO, over 87,000 cases of mpox have been reported to date since January 2022, including 146 deaths.

In recent weeks, although overall global cases of mpox have been decreasing, some regions are seeing an increase in reported cases. In the European region, new cases have been reported from Spain and the U.K. But overall, the large European and North American outbreaks observed in 2022 have been brought under control through vaccination campaigns and increasing awareness about the disease.

The global situation of mpox is, however, far from being resolved, with an increasing number of reports from new countries, with significant impacts observed in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific region. In June 2023, China reported four cases of mpox — two from Beijing and two from Guangzhou — raising concerns about the spread of the disease in the country. Two cases were also reported from Sri Lanka, in patients who had a travel history to Dubai. Earlier this year, mpox was also detected in Thailand, Taiwan, Pakistan and Japan. Incidentally, several cases have a travel history to the Middle East, however, reports from Middle East do not indicate an increase in the number of cases.

Mpox being reported from newer territories is worrisome as the disease is potentially expanding its reach through an undetected spread, posing new challenges in its containment efforts. The lack of a corresponding surge in reported cases suggests that there may be challenges in accurately capturing and documenting cases in the Middle East, suggesting that there may be challenges in detecting cases in the region. This also highlights the need for improved reporting mechanisms to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the African region has also experienced a surge in cases, notably in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nigeria.

Amidst increased globalisation and travel, the need for global public health efforts, cooperation, and resource sharing has never been more crucial. Genomic surveillance of the monkeypox pathogen allows for contact tracing and monitoring of its evolution. However, there is a noticeable lack of genomic data from developing countries, particularly in Asia. As we move forward from the global pandemic, it is crucial to remain vigilant and prepared for future challenges, taking proactive measures to curb infections and protect vulnerable populations.

*(Bani Jolly and Vinod Scaria are researchers at CSIR Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB), Delhi.)*

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# PREPAREDNESS PAYS OFF: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON CYCLONE BIPARJOY

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

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June 19, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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A potent cyclonic storm, Biparjoy, [swept through Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan](#) last week and while it did cause noticeable destruction to the infrastructure, scores of injuries and cattle deaths, [there have been only two reported casualties](#). The India Meteorological Department began issuing its [first reports on the cyclone's trajectory](#) as early as June 8, and by June 11, the agency first [indicated that the storm would not bypass India](#), as previously estimated, but would likely sharply swing towards coastal Saurashtra, Gujarat. The storm was also categorised as falling in the 'very severe' category — average wind speeds of over 115 kmph. The four days of lead time and an estimate of its strength gave enough time for district authorities in Gujarat to begin evacuating people — nearly 1,00,000 people in the coastal regions of the States were moved to shelters and close to 30 central and State disaster relief teams were kept ready. The railways cancelled several trains and fishermen too received advance warnings of the cyclone's impact, that kept them away from the sea.

There were power outages in 1,092 villages, about 5,120 electricity poles were knocked down and an estimated 186 transformers and 2,502 feeders were damaged in the Saurashtra-Kutch region. While shops and establishments have reportedly re-opened, a full return to normalcy is still awaited. Experience from recent years shows that cyclones, whether in the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea, and their [expected impact can be precisely gauged](#) only 36-60 hours ahead. While a greater lead time should in theory mean more time for preparation, the nature of coastal infrastructure, inefficient communication networks and livelihood patterns, combined with the natural fury that cyclones bring about, mean that there are limits to precautionary measures. A cyclone in 1998, that struck Gujarat, reportedly killed nearly 3,000 people, and it can be safely said that India has moved beyond that era. However, there are newer threats on the horizon. Several studies warn that the Arabian Sea, thanks to the effects of global warming, is likely to be the fountainhead of many more severe cyclones. Frequent evacuation cannot be implemented as a permanent policy intervention and efforts must be made to ensure that coastal-regulation-zone norms that prescribe the kind of structures permissible at specific distances from the shoreline must be strictly implemented. The dwellings of rural, coastal inhabitants must be strengthened and natural bulwarks such as mangroves at wetlands must be buttressed for improved resilience.

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# EMERGING CHALLENGES TO THE DRAVIDIAN MODEL

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June 19, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 12:58 am IST

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Chief Minister M.K. Stalin addressing at the first anniversary celebrations of the DMK regime at Attur in Salem district in Tamil Nadu. | Photo Credit: LAKSHMI NARAYANAN E.

The introduction in Tamil Nadu of a Bill raising the number of working hours from eight to 12 hours a day, and its withdrawal amid protests, has reopened the discussion around the strategies for industrialisation that do not undermine workers' rights. The core ideal of the Dravidian model is the pursuit of inclusive industrialisation that addresses both economic deprivations that arise through the market and social deprivation that emerges from caste inequality. The model is about sharing prosperity through productivity. In that sense, the introduction of the Bill raising working hours was a deviation from its core ideal. Even as the Bill stands withdrawn, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government claims that the amendment would have attracted more investments to the State and created employment. This understanding is deeply flawed.

Tamil Nadu is one of the few States to have achieved structural change and poverty reduction simultaneously in India. A key indicator of this is the lower share of agriculture in total employment in the State as against the all-India average. However, this trend is reversing now. The share of agricultural employment increased from 27% in 2018-19 to 30% in 2020-21. Even in absolute terms, it increased from 8.5 million to 10.5 million. The entry of 2 million people into agriculture is driven by distress. The share of manufacturing declined from 20% to 16.8%. The decline is sharper in absolute terms, from 6.5 million in 2011-12 to 5.8 million in 2020-21. Of course, the period discussed here precedes the present DMK government assuming power. Yet, we do not see the course correction followed since then to be promising either. For instance, a recent government release says that State investments worth 2,73,448 crore were secured in two years by signing 224 memorandums of understanding. While we are not sure how much of the investment was actually realised, what is interesting is the claim of the creation of 4,10,561 jobs which work out to be 0.01 per unit of promised capital (less than one job per crore of investment), much lower than earlier. As per the latest Annual Survey of Industries data (2019-20), the ratio of jobs created per unit of capital (number of worker to gross capital formation) investment was 0.58 for Tamil Nadu, 0.34 for Gujarat and 0.33 for Maharashtra. Unless we arrest this trend, we will end up in the situation of diminishing wages and vanishing jobs.

Historically, Tamil Nadu's uniqueness lies in the pursuit of development that delicately balances the needs of capital with a requisite degree of safeguards for workers. As a result, even when wage share in national income has been falling across the world due to increases in capital intensity, Tamil Nadu has a higher share of wages in gross value added (GVA) terms in the

factory sector when compared to most States. The average wage share in GVA for 2019-20 was 21% in the State, nearly twice that of Gujarat (12%) or Maharashtra (14%). The world over, the share of wages has been declining due to policies that favour capital by pushing for labour market flexibility. Tamil Nadu is no exception, but has been able to protect its workers in relative terms. The relative wage levels are higher because of lower levels of contractualisation and the better bargaining strength of labour. The share of directly employed workers in the State was 80% in 2015-16 as compared to the all-India average of 66%. This trend is fast declining now (76% in 2019-20) due to use or abuse of contract labour under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970. There has been a shift against workers both in the interpretation of these acts in courts and on the ground. That is the strength of Tamil Nadu, but it is waning now. In fact, the DMK itself came with the promise in its election manifesto in 2019 that it will work with the Union government to form a tripartite committee to address the grievances of workers at the State and national levels.

Tamil Nadu need not follow this race to the bottom. Dilution of labour laws or tax concessions are not the only source of competitive advantage. The State's advantage lies in its skilled workforce, robust infrastructure, the existing institutional ecosystem that generates positive externality through good forward and backward linkages, and its governance style that reduces operating costs.

While the trend of labour-saving automation in manufacturing and the new-age platform economy is going to be deepened, dispossession of routinised jobs and the shrinking share of the wage bill in the GDP of almost all countries are inevitable. With the average life of a skill becoming shorter and shorter, manufacturing alone may not be the solution for the future of work. The shift to knowledge-based industry in the service sector is inevitable. However, Tamil Nadu's achievement in higher education with a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 51.4% compared to the all-India average of 27.1% has not helped this transition either. The poor quality of school education, lack of infrastructure in higher education, and poor applied skills imparted in vocational education have created a skill gap or employability problem of youth.

Recent efforts in attracting software investments in Tier-2 cities are encouraging. While Naan Mudhalvan, the skill-enhancement scheme for less privileged students, is laudable, the impact of such measures in terms of access to employment is not known.

What Tamil Nadu requires is a renewed approach to address the qualitative aspects of social policy, and an industrialisation strategy that ensures decent wages and dignified working conditions.

***Kalaiyaran A. is Assistant Professor at the Madras Institute of Development Studies and Research Affiliate at the South Asia Institute, Harvard University***

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# CYCLONE BIPARJOY WAS FORECAST VERY WELL – BUT CAN FORECASTS BE IMPROVED?

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

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June 18, 2023 02:57 pm | Updated 10:20 pm IST

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Heavy winds and incessant rains are seen after the landfall of Cyclone Biparjoy at Mandvi, in Kutch, Gujarat, on June 16, 2023. | Photo Credit: AP

Cyclone Biparjoy is still alive and will continue its trek northeastward, bringing some welcome rain to regions sweltering in the summer heat.

By all accounts, the forecasts have been serving the disaster management preparations extremely well. The early warnings, evacuations of tens of thousands in the path of the storm, and the operations during and after the cyclone's landfall have been improved to a world-class-level in recent years.

The super-cyclone of 1999 caused nearly 10,000 deaths. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) received scathing criticism for not accurately forecasting that super-cyclone. Now, the reported number of deaths due to Biparjoy has just been two so far. India has successfully planned and executed integrated forecast systems and computational infrastructure to reduce cyclone mortality by nearly 90% from the first decade of the 21st century into the second decade.

The Nobel laureate Niels Bohr reportedly said that forecasting is really difficult, especially if it's about the future. For complex and nonlinear systems like cyclones and the monsoons, our forecasts will never be perfect.

Then again, our forecasting skills must be measured not just by the errors in the forecast models we build and use but also by tracking how well they serve our disaster management and rescue-and-recovery enterprises. By this measure, India's cyclone forecasts score quite high. India deserves the kudos it has received from across the world for its cyclone forecasts and cyclone disaster management thus far.

But there is no time to rest on these laurels. Forecasts must continue to improve and, in particular, maximise the quantitative skills of the forecasts of cyclone intensities, lifespans, speeds, and tracks. ('Skill' is a term for how accurate the forecasts are.)

Cyclones are guided in their tracks from above by the so-called steering winds while they feed on the energy provided by the warm upper-oceans. As such, a cyclone is a thermodynamic

engine that runs on moving heat from the warm ocean energy into the cold upper atmosphere while producing deadly winds and rain. This is what an IMD-forecast cyclone track looks like:

The green cone surrounding the track is the cone of uncertainty. That is, the cyclone's path (marked by small red spirals) is most likely to remain within this cone. Note that the cone becomes wider the further ahead we move from the cyclone's current location, corresponding to longer lead-times of forecasts.

Such cyclone-track uncertainties arise from errors in our forecasts of steering winds. On the other hand, the forecast errors in intensity, duration, and the speed of the cyclone are the result of errors in our forecasts of oceanic conditions.

These shortcomings in the forecasts arise in turn as a result of many factors, including (but not limited to) a lack of sufficient data for initialising forecast models and deficiencies in various processes represented by the models. To quote from a previous article by this author, 'initialising' a model means "to have the best estimates of temperature, humidity, winds, and so on at each point of the computer model, using data from ocean moorings, weather balloons, satellites, radiosondes, and such."

We need to minimise these errors.

IMD has the unenviable job of being fully exposed to media reports on the forecasts – more than a few of them being potentially wrong – even as a cyclone barrels over the ocean towards the coast. It is obligated to issue forecasts to help with disaster management operations to save lives and property. Indeed, the IMD runs multiple forecast models day and night to obtain cyclone forecasts that are better overall. The results are clearly improving each year even as some shortcomings remain.

Whose responsibility is it to improve the forecasts continuously, even as cyclones are managed successfully, with minimum loss of life and property? Improving the computer models in particular, which actually forecast cyclones, isn't just the responsibility of the IMD, because the department literally works in shifts to issue forecasts.

Citizen participation can lend a hand: we must heed the warnings, follow evacuation orders, avoid visiting places where the risk is high, etc., to ensure the overall success of disaster-management operations.

Another community can play an equally crucial part: India's academic climate community. This community can build teams to work with the IMD to advance the understanding of cyclone processes and to improve cyclone predictions. India has had a small community of climate scientists for many decades but it has focused its research largely on monsoon processes and predictions.

In the last three decades, strategies were developed to upgrade computational facilities and expand the education and training of the workforce required to develop and implement integrated forecast systems. Today, there are a large number of climate science departments and centres at many of the academic institutions. The incentives for and measures of success in this ecosystem are currently not coupled to the national weather-forecasting enterprise, but they should be.

In particular, the country's climate research community can identify specific problems in climate variability, change, and trends that affect India's food, water, energy, health, and infrastructure security, and its economic growth. Individual, curiosity-driven research can go on in parallel, but

the country also needs to incentivise a sufficient number of researchers to build teams to help the IMD improve its forecasts.

Performance metrics in academia must consider the value of contributions made by researchers in bringing their science to serve society. Such translation of science can not only improve cyclone forecasts but also forecasts at all scales for managing the safe and sustained trajectory of India's dreams.

*Raghu Murtugudde is a visiting professor at IIT Bombay and an emeritus professor at the University of Maryland.*

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# SAFETY FIRST: ON INDIAN PHARMA PRODUCTS AND DRUG SAFETY

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June 20, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:45 am IST

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Reports of drugs manufactured in India causing severe harm and dozens of patient deaths from across the world continue to trickle in, the latest being the deaths of two patients in Sri Lanka who were administered Indian-made anaesthetic drugs. Just last month, eye drops manufactured in India had caused eye infection in about 30 patients and blindness in 10 in Sri Lanka. While anaesthetic drugs made in India causing deaths are a first in the recent past, eye drops causing infections, blindness and even deaths were reported a few months ago in the United States, with the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) finding a highly drug-resistant bacteria in them. The series of adverse reports against drugs produced in India began last year when the World Health Organization (WHO) linked the deaths of at least 70 children in Gambia from acute kidney injury, to cough syrups. The culprit ingredient in the syrups was diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol — deadly chemicals used as a cheaper substitute for propylene glycol — that should never have been found in any medicine. Soon after the deaths in Gambia, cough syrups made in India and containing the two deadly chemicals killed 18 children in Uzbekistan in December 2022. In end-April this year, Indian-made cough syrup was again in the news when WHO flagged the contaminated drugs found in the Marshall Islands and Micronesia; the contamination was identified by the Australian regulator. Diethylene glycol-contaminated drugs have led to at least five incidents of poisoning in Chennai, Mumbai, Bihar, Gurugram and Jammu between 1972 and 2020.

The conduct of the Indian drug regulator ever since WHO first raised a red flag in October last year has been on predictable lines. Even after serious violations, it gave a clean chit to the company that had supplied the drugs to Gambia and then went on the offensive to fault the global health body. While WHO held its ground, the drug regulator's stand was exposed — test results from Switzerland and Ghana confirmed the presence of toxic chemicals in the cough syrup sample from Gambia. Also, a detailed causality assessment by Gambia and independent investigations by the Gambian Parliamentary Committee and CDC Atlanta found a link between the deaths and the toxic chemicals. Except for some customary inspections, the Indian drug regulator has so far failed to institute measures to make sure drugs produced in India for export and domestic use are safe. India can continue to be the pharmacy of the global south only if the regulator begins to behave like a watchdog to ensure drug safety, and not as a facilitator for the pharma industry.

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# CAN THE NEW DIET AND BIOMARKER SURVEY TRACE THE ROOTS OF INDIA'S ANAEMIA PROBLEM?

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 19, 2023 07:11 pm | Updated 07:11 pm IST

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Image for representational purpose only. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The Union Health Ministry is rethinking how it takes stock of anaemia across the country. Questions will no longer be included in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), the sixth round of which is scheduled to begin on July 1, due to concerns about “faulty” methodology. Instead, anaemia’s prevalence will be tracked using the new Diet and Biomarkers Survey (DABS), launched in December last year by the National Institute of Nutrition, which will “map the diet, nutrition and health status and provide a correct estimate of anaemia among urban and rural population using state-of-the-art techniques”, officials said last year.

The NFHS is a nationally representative survey providing granular data at the State and district levels. NFHS-5 conducted between 2019-21 showed an “inexplicable” jump in anaemia levels across all age groups: more Indians were anaemic than ever before, with [at least 67% of children having anaemia as compared to 58.6%](#) in the last survey conducted in 2015-16. [World Bank data](#) shows one in two Indian women is anaemic, 20% higher than the world average.

If anaemia were a puzzle, both DABS and NFHS form corner pieces, rich with information that helps make sense of the larger anaemia burden. But experts worry DABS may still not provide what India needs — which is to monitor district-level data closely, identify causes of anaemia outside of iron deficiency and use this data to inform anaemia-focused health interventions at the primary level of care. By dropping anaemia from the scope of NFHS, Dr. Shivangi Shankar, a public health expert, worries “one is taking away a dataset”.

India has recognised anaemia as a public health challenge, launching the [Anaemia Mukh Bharat \(AMB\) strategy](#) in 2018, aiming to provide supplementation to the last mile, raise awareness levels and improve diagnostics. In the Union Budget 2023, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced plans to create [awareness of sickle cell anaemia](#), with universal screening of seven crore people in the age group of 0-40 years in affected tribal areas. Other government schemes, including the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), National Nutritional Anaemia Prophylaxis Programme (NNAPP) and Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan, also list addressing anaemia as a challenge.

[Evidence](#) shows India has increased the iron and folic acid (IFA) supplement coverage for all age groups steadily. However, challenges run parallel to these initiatives: including a lack of

awareness about anaemia causes, undernourishment since birth, resistance to and information gap around iron-folic acid (ICA) tablets, cultural biases that fuel a lack of agency, and deficient health interventions that don't reach the last mile.

Good data forms the backbone of these interventions. The NFHS covered 6.1 lakh sample households across the country, taking blood samples from women and men aged 18-49 years, and children (between 8-59 months). To show anaemia's prevalence, authorities look at a haemoglobin diagnostic cut-off, set at 14 gm/decilitre for men, 12 gm/decilitre for women and between 11 and 12 gm/decilitre at different ages for boys and girls, as per the World Health Organisation (WHO) standard.

The WHO standard was released in 1968 based on smaller studies of European, Canadian and U.S. populations. Evaluation of haemoglobin cut-offs is an active contention point for decades, but WHO standards have remained the norm for conducting India's NFHS, Dr. Shankar notes.

A team of Indian researchers in 2021 published a [study](#) in *Lancet Global Health*, showing that anaemia's case numbers were an overestimation due to a higher haemoglobin diagnostic cut-off set by WHO. One of the authors, Prof. Anura V. Kurpad, [told The Hindu](#) that "normal haemoglobin levels vary across different parts of the world, and diagnostic cut-offs need to be defined in more region-specific ways". If it is an overestimation, the researchers argued that the true prevalence of anaemia in children would fall from 35% (using WHO's standards) to 11%.

The researchers cited data from the novel Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS), conducted between 2016 and 2018. While both NFHS and CNNS measure micro nutritional deficiencies, CNNS collected data on non-communicable diseases among children (such as diabetes) and increased the sample size to include even school-going children between the age of 5 and 19 years. Researchers also noted a difference in the way blood was drawn: NFHS uses a drop of capillary blood from a finger prick, while CNNS opted for venous blood sampling (when blood is taken directly from the vein). In the former case, blood is diluted resulting in a "falsely lower value" of haemoglobin, the researchers said. However, [other studies](#) have observed that capillary blood tests may instead give a higher value of haemoglobin.

Health experts Sylvia Karpagam, Veena Shatrugna and Siddharth K. Joshi [in an article](#) argued the CNNS "is neither a healthy nor a representative population and therefore unsuitable for devising cut-offs". Anaemia cut-offs are arrived at using haemoglobin levels of a 'healthy' populations with no social, economic or nutritional constraints, but the dataset used by the present researchers comprises of 'the most vulnerable, poorest and least educated groups'.

Regardless, Dr. Shankar explains that "when you're doing a large scale study, you don't look for accuracy as much — [data] is an indicator of trends on a large scale." None of the data is *exactly* accurate, but it shows a trend that helps to define the contours of health interventions. The [footnote to NFHS reads](#): "As NFHS uses the capillary blood for estimation of anaemia, the results of NFHS-5 need not be compared with other surveys using venous blood."

Moreover, experts agree that clinically, one would be okay with false positives and aim to eliminate false negatives instead. "In the case of anaemia, clinically it would be okay to over-diagnose anaemia than miss out on someone who actually does have anaemia," say Ms. Karpagam, Ms. Shatrugna and Mr. Joshi. "This presents the real risk of missing out on those women who have mild or moderate anaemia and thus delaying or denying them preventive and primary care."

The [Diet and Biomarkers Survey-I](#), for which the questionnaire is available online, will be conducted by the National Institution of Nutrition along with the Indian Council of Medical

Research (ICMR). It will be the first reflection of “nutrient-composition data” on cooked and uncooked food across India, which can help develop interventions to tackle public health issues like obesity, said Dr. Rajiv Bahl, director general of ICMR last year.

DABS is more in line with what CNNS achieved and may offer more accurate, macro-level figures since it uses the venous blood sampling method. Venous blood sampling is considered the “gold standard” for anaemia diagnosis. A biomarker survey overcomes the limitations of questionnaires that rely on self-reported dietary intake measurements, which can often be biased, and instead more precisely “identify persons with specific dietary deficiency” in support of medical treatment, [evidence shows](#). A biomarker test for anaemia can be used to analyse levels of folate, iron, vitamin B12, copper and zinc in the body, helping trace the cause of anaemia.

Moreover, DABS also links a person’s nutrition profile with anaemia, providing a more comprehensive picture, Dr. Shankar says. The survey form reviewed by *The Hindu* includes questions at the household level, about the food and groceries, type of drinking water, cooking fuel, education status, religion and community details.

What is unclear as of now is the list of biomarkers that will be assessed or how the data will be disaggregated and used for health interventions.

However, the sample size for DABS is restricted to 1.8 lakh people (as opposed to NFHS’s 6.1 lakh). Venous blood testing requires trained personnel who are equipped to draw blood, which restricts the scale of the survey. [Studies show](#) “most populationbased surveys use pointofcare diagnostics and capillary blood” because it allows for testing more people.

“No macro data set can give you that much accuracy... but because there is no [district-level] information, one has no way of making the right intervention or changing an existing policy.” Dr. Shivangi Shankar

Moreover, since this is nationally representative data, it will shift district-specific data to a blind spot. NFHS currently provides a breakdown of anaemia prevalence at the district level. The latest data shows Gujarat has 4,332,282 anaemic children, with Surat (4,31,131) and Ahmedabad (4,23,087) contributing the highest numbers. A local data paucity impedes action that traces variations in a demographi or gauge how people’s health is responding to a universal intervention.

Sickle cell anaemia, for instance, is concentrated in tribal belts and areas that historically have a high malaria burden. Central government-funded schemes such as the public distribution system (PDS) or PM-Poshan (mid-day meals), focusing on iron supplementation, can cause adverse health issues among these communities, [activists warned last year](#).

Experts argue for filling more data gaps in the clinical and social understanding of anaemia. Both DABS and NFHS link anaemia to a haemoglobin deficiency, but assessment should ideally go beyond haemoglobin cut-offs and iron deficiencies, Dr. Shankar notes.

Diverse causes of anaemia, including hemoglobinopathy, inherited genetic disorders and vitamin deficiencies, are often overlooked but still require district-level screening and diagnosis. This skews health interventions — whether through tablets or iron fortification, “all of our interventions towards anaemia currently are focused on pumping iron.”

Moreover, since anaemia affects more women globally, a gendered lens to disease mapping is needed for targeted interventions. It is known that inequitable gender norms exacerbate

anaemia cases among women — systemic disregard for women’s health, unequal food allocation or lack of financial autonomy to seek healthcare shape a district’s anaemia profile. One [BMJ study](#) published in 2018 showed educating women about anaemia could help reduce India’s anaemia burden, outside of nutrition measures.

A comprehensive dataset can map other common causes of anaemia (beyond iron deficiency), and demographic- and region-specific burden, which can help calibrate targeted interventions that account for gender, caste, class and other socio-economic markers.

Dr. Shankar notes that DABS too looks at nutritional profiles and biomarkers, and again puts “anaemia back to the dietary deficiency position, which is not always the case”.

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# SEMICONDUCTOR FAB: THE UNFINISHED AGENDA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

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June 21, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 12:15 am IST

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To set up a semiconductor fabrication plant in India is not mere hubris. There is a growing market. There are also strategic reasons: India's susceptibility to coercion increases due to its dependence on the import of semiconductors. Therefore, the government's 2022 Semiconductor Mission is laudable. But today, there is still uncertainty about whether India will have a fab. In this context, it is important to understand why earlier attempts failed and examine alternate approaches.

The first serious attempt was made in 2007 in the form of a Special Incentive Package (SIP), but it yielded no response. The second attempt in the form of Modified SIP in 2012 fared better. After over two years of extensive outreach with practically all the major fab companies in the world, India came close to having a fab. Two consortia were approved by the Cabinet with an attractive set of incentives. Jaiprakash Associates in partnership with IBM and Israeli company TowerJazz constituted one, while the other was led by Hindustan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation along with ST Microelectronics. The two fabs together involved investment of \$10 billion, and the government offered incentives amounting to nearly \$5 billion in the form of cash and tax cuts. Locations for the fabs were finalised and land was allotted. But finally, both failed to mobilise resources.

Semiconductor fabrication represents the ultimate frontier of human tech advancement. The frontier has been advancing adhering to Moore's law that the number of transistors in a unit area doubles every 18 months. But the progress of miniaturisation is accompanied by higher complexity and costs. As a result, the industry has seen a decline in the number of participants.

China started late in the semiconductor fab industry. But backed by massive government financial support over the last two decades, it acquired hundreds of loss-making fabs from around the world and built its fab industry. Aided by lower manufacturing costs and a massive electronics manufacturing industry, China's chip production has grown rapidly. By the time the U.S., the traditional leader in this game, realised, China had become one of the major producers of chips. Aided by its market supremacy in rare earths, which are essential for chip production, it has a strategic stranglehold on chip-making. Over the last year, the U.S. and its Western allies have blocked the transfer of the latest fab-related technology to China. But this could be a case of closing the stable door after the horses have bolted. The U.S. enacted the CHIPS and Science Act in 2022, with nearly \$40 billion in subsidies, in an effort to bring back semiconductor manufacturing to the country. The European Union sanctioned €7.4 billion for a new fab in France. India will have to contend with these countries in what has become an intense chip warfare.

Investment in a semiconductor fab is one of the riskiest. Billions of dollars need to be recovered before the technology becomes obsolete. This necessitates substantial production volumes for economic viability, often reaching levels that are adequate to meet global demand. It is therefore difficult to conceive of a fab which is based on the domestic market only. The advantage of semiconductors having a small freight-to-price ratio and a zero-custom duty regime under the Information Technology Agreement, 1996, facilitates production in a single location and global sales. This is why no company is interested in setting a greenfield fab.

Developing an ecosystem for chip manufacturing in a greenfield location is a major challenge. Hundreds of chemicals and gases are required for chip fabrication, people need to be trained, and abundant clean water be made available. But above all is the art of chip-making. Despite the best of equipment, poor quality and low yields can make fabs fail.

There are other issues, such as whether to set up a logic/processor, memory or analog fab. An electronic equipment and its functionalities are characterised by their logic chips, which are therefore strategically important and generate the highest profit. The most advanced set of technologies is needed to manufacture them. Analog chips are essential, but have the least strategic value. Memory fabs use the most advanced feature nodes, while analog fabs can be even as large as 130 nm. Logic fabs are the most expensive and analog fabs the least. A relatively easier option is Assembly, Testing, Packaging and Marking (ATMP), to get the fab ecosystem developed before the full-fledged fab is set up. But ATMPs have little value in terms of actual chip-making.

India's strategy has been to set up a new logic fab. China, which acquired loss-making fabs and then set up its own logic fab, provides lessons. Acquiring existing fabs has many advantages: they are reasonably priced, have stabilised technology, a supply chain ecosystem, an established product line, and market. They will enable India to build the fab ecosystem and train human resources. Much lower subsidies would be required, and the funds saved could be used for advanced R&D in fab technologies which will help build state-of-the-art fab in next few years. Another strategy could be setting up ATMPs. Tessolve, now acquired by Tatas, had set up an ATMP in 2013-14. This ATMP is successfully packaging chips upto 7 nm feature size. China has over 100 ATMPs.

China started on the fab journey about 20 years ago. As the Chinese saying goes, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, but the second best time is now.

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# RETHINK THE RETENTION OF SEDITION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

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The Supreme Court of India, in *S.G. Vombatkere v. Union of India* on May 11, 2022, prima facie felt that Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on 'sedition' was not in tune with the current social milieu. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The Law Commission of India in its 279th report, released in April 2023, has [recommended retaining one of the most controversial sections](#) of recent times i.e., [Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code \(IPC\) on 'sedition'](#). The Supreme Court of India, in [S.G. Vombatkere v. Union of India on May 11, 2022](#), had directed all State governments and the central government [to keep in abeyance](#) all pending trials, appeals, and proceedings with regard to Section 124A IPC, as prima facie it felt that this Section was not in tune with the current social milieu. The Law Commission, however, concluded that it was necessary to retain it as it was useful in countering the threat to India's internal security. The Commission also felt that the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967, does not cover all elements of the offence envisaged under Section 124A IPC. The Commission also recommended certain procedural guidelines to prevent the misuse of Section 124A IPC.

Editorial | [End the debate: On the Law Commission's recommendation on sedition](#)

The Law Commission elaborated on the violence perpetrated by the Maoists under Chapter 6 of the report pertaining to 'Threats to India's Internal Security'. The Ministry of Home Affairs data, quoted in the report, show that the number of Maoist incidents ranged from 1,533 in 2004 to 509 in 2021 and the fatality varied from 566 to 147 in the same period. It is also undisputed that the central agenda of the Maoists is to capture political power by overthrowing the democratically elected government through a protracted armed struggle and they need to be tackled stringently.

Despite a dip in the overall Maoist violence over the years, Chhattisgarh still reports the maximum number of Maoist incidents. While the number of Maoist incidents registered in the State varied from 445 in 2014 to 253 in 2021, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data show that the number of cases registered (only) under Section 124A IPC was zero in the years 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2020, and varied from one to a maximum of three in the remaining years between 2014 and 2021. Even the cases registered under the UAPA were close to three per year in the same period. Thus, it is clear that the use of Section 124A IPC in fighting Maoism has been negligible. As the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and resorting to ambush attacks remain the most potent weapons in the hands of Maoists, the most frequently used provisions are sections under the Explosive Substances Act and the IPC. In some cases, the



specially enacted State law, the Chhattisgarh Vishesh Jan Suraksha Adhiniyam (Chhattisgarh Special Public Safety Act), 2005, is applied to curb unlawful activities by the Maoists.

Second, 'unlawful activity' defined under Section 2(1)(o) of the UAPA includes 'any action taken by such individual or association which causes or is intended to cause disaffection against India'. The punishment prescribed is imprisonment for up to seven years and a fine. The only difference between Section 124A IPC and this provision of the UAPA is that in place of the words 'Government established by law in India', the word 'India' is used in the UAPA. As the Supreme Court, in a catena of cases, has held that 'criticising government' does not fall within the ambit of sedition, the 'unlawful activity' as defined in the UAPA seems more objective and less problematic. Any hurdle before any such prosecution under the UAPA that requires central government sanction can be removed by tweaking Section 45 of the UAPA to authorise State governments to act as well as grant sanction for prosecution.

As mentioned by the Commission, the United Kingdom abolished the law on sedition by an Act of 2009 citing two reasons: the first being that there are 'sufficient range of other offences' and the second reason being the political nature of the offence. The Indian case is hardly any different from the U.K. one.

Third, the procedural guidelines for conducting a preliminary inquiry to check '...whether prima facie a case is made out and some cogent evidence exists' (as recommended by the Law Commission) are in conflict with established jurisprudence of writing the First Information Report (FIR), and settled by the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in *Lalita Kumari v. Govt. of Uttar Pradesh and others* (2014). So, if information given to a police station discloses the commission of a cognisable offence, the officer-in-charge has to register an FIR and commence investigation. A preliminary inquiry is permissible only in cases (for example, commercial, matrimonial, related to medical negligence or corruption) that do not disclose the basis of a cognisable offence. Even if it is assumed that a case of sedition could fall under such a category, the purpose of such an inquiry cannot be to ensure whether cogent evidence exists to support the allegations. If such a provision is inserted by an amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) (as suggested by the Law Commission), there is every likelihood of such an amendment being hit by Article 14 of the Constitution and declared arbitrary by the Supreme Court. Similar could be the fate of the provision to mandatorily seek permission from the central or the State government before registering an FIR.

Comment | [Sedition and its roots in rudeness as an offence](#)

Therefore, it would be more democratic if all State governments and political parties deliberate on the Law Commission's report, and public opinion sought to arrive at a more participative (if not unanimous) and agreeable decision.

*R.K. Vij is a former Director General of Police of Chhattisgarh. The views expressed are personal*

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## UAPA FIASCO IN TELANGANA

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June 22, 2023 12:45 am | Updated 12:50 am IST

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A case filed under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act at the Tadvai Police station of Telangana's Mulugu district named 152 people, including leaders of various mass organisations and academics on August 19, 2022. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

A letter from Yedla Kishore, an activist of the Telangana Vidyarthi Vedika and lodged in jail, to a judge, seeking to know the number of cases filed by the police against him would have gone unnoticed if not for the Ranga Reddy district judge, who received the letter and promptly forwarded it to the Telangana Government to send a reply.

The reply to the letter brought out another case filed under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) at the Tadvai Police station of Mulugu district, which named 152 people, including leaders of various mass organisations and academics such as Kishore and Ghanapuram Chandramouli of the Patriotic Democratic Movement (PDM), on August 19, 2022.

Also read | [UAPA misused to file cases against activists, claim rights activists and people's organisations](#)

They were booked under various sections of the UAPA because their names were found in the Maoist literature seized from a forest area during a combing operation.

Former Professor of University of Hyderabad G. Hargopal, former Professors of Osmania University Padmaja Shaw and Gaddam Laxman, Telangana High Court Advocates Association President V. Raghunath, former Judge of Mumbai High Court H. Suresh and top CPI (Maoist) leaders were among the people named in the FIR.

The action did not go down well with Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, who was against slapping the draconian UAPA law in the case. The Mulugu Police have said that sufficient evidence was not found against the accused during the investigation. A memo is being filed in the court with a request to delete their names from the case.

The 52-page FIR has glaring gaps, including missing details such as the age, address and physical features of the accused. Names such as V. Raghunath and H. Suresh found in the FIR were picked up from an old letterhead of the Indian Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL). Justice Suresh of the Mumbai High Court was earlier chairman of IAPL. In fact, Justice Suresh died in October 2020 but the FIR still names him in the case filed in 2022.

There has been no attempt by the police to cross-check the facts in the FIR. The case invited public attention as prominent names were featured in the FIR. There is no explanation as to why the police did not serve summons to the 152 people named in the case.

Also read | [Police to file memo in court requesting deletion of names of Hargopal and five others in UAPA case](#)

At least 400 people face UAPA charges in the State since 2014 and at least 50 of them are languishing in jails awaiting bail. Using select sections of the Act, the police have conveniently 'framed' people critical of the State government's policies and actions.

The police have been invoking Section 3 of the UAPA which says a sign, gesture, word or intention can be construed as unlawful to implicate people without proof. It has become a handy tool for the police to 'fix' people.

Section 43 (d) (5) of the UAPA has been termed 'cruel' and 'stringent' by civil society organisations and human rights outfits. The section allows a magistrate/sessions judge hearing the case to be satisfied that there is prima facie proof of involvement in a case to deny bail. Another contentious issue that needs attention is the judiciary seeking the opinion of the prosecution before granting bail.

Despite the hue and cry by rights activists, 'confession statements' from the accused are used indiscriminately to book cases. In reality, if a person is booked in one case, a spree of other cases with similar charges is slapped on the accused to tie them down with court cases causing immense financial and emotional strain.

By quickly withdrawing the cases against the six academics and others, the ruling Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) Government has pre-empted the Opposition's move to corner it. The Congress party faulted the government but the BJP has kept mum on the issue.

But the issue may not go away soon as UAPA cases cannot be withdrawn easily and due process has to be followed even to dilute it in case the police do not find strong evidence. All that the police will now do is not pursue the case. And, if the National Investigation Agency (NIA) were to take up the case, the issue will complicate the government's move to drop the cases against the six persons.

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# SPARE A THOUGHT FOR PSYCHIATRIC CAREGIVERS TOO

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'A preliminary inquiry into the preparedness of health-care systems to provide caregiver support raises multiple concerns' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

According to National Health Mission estimates, 6%-7% of India's population suffers from mental disorders — i.e., one in four families is likely to have at least one member with a behavioural or mental health disorder. The situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic as long periods of isolation, the fear of losing loved ones, financial difficulty, and uncertainty about the future increased stress levels across social segments. Most of these cases remain untreated due to ignorance and social stigma. In the absence of visible proof of illness, deviations in behaviour are generally attributed to attitudinal issues, marital troubles, financial problems or job stress, while love affairs and examination stress are cited as the usual culprits in the case of teenage behavioural issues. Without proper diagnosis, the patient and their families keep suffering as mental health responses remain mired in myths, stigmas, and taboos.

Over 90% of psychiatric patients in India live with their families. The caregiver is under considerable stress because of the physical and emotional caregiving along with the social isolation, financial difficulties and troublesome behaviour of the patient. A patient's non-adherence to treatment, prevalent in such cases, further exacerbates caregiver stress. In larger families, the primary caregiver burden is shared among family members, but with reducing family sizes, the role falls on the spouse. Chronic mental illness in a nuclear household disrupts daily life and drains family resources. Moreover, women caregivers face challenges in balancing caregiving, career, child rearing, and household chores, and are less likely to receive informal support for psychiatric treatment.

Prolonged caregiving negatively impacts the psychological well-being of caregivers. Caregivers use various strategies to cope which include sharing, spirituality, hobbies, and self-gas lighting; but unhealthy coping mechanisms can negatively impact both caregivers and patients. Hence, the importance of caring for the family caregivers. Counselling services are currently provided to caregivers on request. This is not sufficient as the situation of the caregiver is similar to that of the 'boiling frog' where the individual might not be aware of the emotional strain, and hence will not request for support.

The National Mental Health Programme and the decentralised District Mental Health Programme remain focused on the patient but neglect the caregiver. Given the prolonged

distress experienced by caregivers, it is essential to introduce a structured intervention programme to educate and support the caregivers of psychiatric patients. It should educate them about the illness and their roles and responsibilities, leading to a better sense of control over their own life and helping to cope with the caregiver role. Studies in developed countries show that providing support to family caregivers at the onset of the psychiatric illness of loved ones is crucial for the success of the intervention. Successful intervention models include cognitive behavioural therapy, psychoeducational skill building, family counselling, and peer-support. In psychoeducational meetings with the families, the topics covered include a brief overview of the condition, current symptoms, early warning signals of relapse, available therapies and their effectiveness, safety of treatment, typical side-effects, treatment-related expenses, burden identification, and coping mechanisms. Caregivers receive behavioural interventions, counselling, and helplines to manage anxiety and stress.

A preliminary inquiry into the preparedness of health-care systems to provide caregiver support raises multiple concerns. A lack of trained specialists hinders cost-effective intervention model implementation. India has 43 State-run mental health institutions with 3,800 psychiatrists and 900 clinical psychologists — i.e., one psychiatrist and psychologist for every four lakh and 16 lakh citizens, respectively. Insufficient budget allocation for mental health patients also raises concerns of developing intervention for psychiatric care-givers.

Though private mental health institutions provide some fillip, their services are expensive and beyond reach for many. Mental illnesses are excluded from the list of ailments covered by leading medical insurers in India. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 provided a corrective step with the mandate to treat mental disorders on a par with physical disorders for insurance coverage. Government schemes provided by public sector insurance companies such as the flagship Ayushman Bharat provide coverage for mental disorders. However, coverage by private insurers remains limited.

Several non-governmental organisations and community movements such as Mindroot, Lonpack, and the White Swan Foundation have been engaged in community support work for people with mental illness and their caregivers. However, given the severity of the issue, their scale remains insignificant.

In the backdrop of reducing family size, increasing life expectancy and poor institutional support, the caregiver burden in case of psychiatric illnesses is expected to keep worsening. The lack of tailored interventions may negatively affect caregiver well-being and patient treatment participation. A comprehensive treatment of severe psychiatric illnesses in the future would need building effective partnerships between health-care professionals, informal caregivers, and psychosocial interventions, where required.

***Nisha Prakash, Parvathi Jayaprakash and Jikku Susan Kurian are Assistant Professors at the Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Bengaluru***

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# MEDICINES PATENT POOL DEAL TO MAKE CANCER DRUG CHEAPER

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 22, 2023 08:16 pm | Updated June 23, 2023 03:10 am IST - NEW DELHI

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In a move that would make certain cancer drugs more accessible and cheaper for patients, the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) signed sub-licence agreements with three India-based companies, Eugia, Hetero and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, along with Indonesian firm BrightGene to manufacture generic versions of Novartis' cancer treatment drug Nilotinib. The drug is used for the treatment of chronic myeloid leukaemia (CML), a type of blood-cell cancer.

These are the first sub-licence agreements that MPP has signed for a cancer treatment drug and are the result of a licence agreement signed between MPP and Novartis Pharma AG in October 2022 for their patented cancer medicine. Nilotinib is sold under the brand name Tasigna and marketed worldwide by Novartis.

According to information released by MPP, a United Nations-backed group working to increase access to, and facilitate the development of, life-saving medicines for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the selected manufacturers can manufacture generic versions of Nilotinib in India and seven middle-income countries and supply it in 44 territories included in the licence through a non-exclusive licence agreement, subject to local regulatory authorisation.

The licence includes the opportunity to develop and supply generic versions of Nilotinib in seven middle-income countries, namely Egypt, Guatemala, Indonesia, Morocco, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Tunisia, where patents on the product are pending or in force.

In 2020, the World Health Organization reported that more than 3.5 million new cancer cases were diagnosed in LMICs and premature deaths from cancer in these countries will rise from 2.3 million to 4 million in the next 20 years.

Charles Gore, executive director, MPP, said that they have worked with the four generic manufacturers to develop generic Nilotinib and bring an affordable treatment option to people diagnosed with CML in the selected countries. "Voluntary licensing is a truly impactful way of delivering affordable treatments to tackle the ever-rising burden of cancer in LMICs," he said.

Lutz Hegemann, president of Global Health and Sustainability, Novartis, added that great gains have been seen in cancer survival in the richest countries over the last decade. "However, the benefit of our innovation is not reaching everyone, leaving a risk of cancer becoming a disease that disproportionately kills the poor. Through 'public-private partnerships', we aim to address

barriers to healthcare and expand access to innovative treatment solutions for the long-term for as many people as possible — regardless of location or socio-economic situation. Today's announcement marks the next important step we are taking with our partner MPP as part of our commitment to the Access to Oncology Medicines (ATOM) Coalition," he said.

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# WILL A SHORTER MEDICAL COURSE ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF DOCTOR SHORTAGE IN RURAL AREAS?

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 23, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 01:41 am IST

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A health camp at Demuduvalasa village of Dumbriguda mandal in Visakhapatnam district. |

Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Last month, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee asked the Health Department to consider starting a [three-year diploma course for medical practitioners](#), who would then serve in primary health centres (PHCs). This is not the first time that such a proposal has been considered in the country. India has nearly 1 lakh MBBS seats, but there continues to be a massive shortage of doctors in rural areas. Will a shorter course help bring in more medical professionals to serve where they are needed or will it erode the structure of medical education? **Sudha Seshayyan** and **Soham D. Bhaduri** discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Zubeda Hamid**. Edited excerpts:

What do you think of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's proposal?

**Sudha Seshayyan:** I don't think this is a good idea at this point. One, the diploma course may not train trainees adequately to deal with the conditions in rural areas. We tend to think that since there are not many doctors in rural areas, we could send in people who spend less years in training. But rural areas may not have adequate facilities, infrastructure, or transport. If these trainees are left to deal with an emergency or a critical care situation, will they be able to do that? Two, in the future, what will be their status? [However,] we do have paramedical staff like physician assistants. Maybe they can be trained better to deal with emergencies and then [we can] transport the patient or move in doctors [where needed]. That would be a better idea than this three-year diploma.

**Soham Bhaduri:** There exists a general aversion among professional doctors to practice in rural areas. It's not just about how many doctors we produce, but how we get them there (rural areas). That entails costs to recruit doctors, to retain them, and to take into consideration the turnover. In West Bengal, the number of doctors per 10,000 population is below the national average. So, it makes sense to drive a cadre of doctors who are capable of providing first-level care to the rural countryside, if not of handling critical situations. The proposal for PHCs is a bit askew: PHCs are the most essential rung of the healthcare infrastructure and should possess doctors who are fully trained. But we can consider mid-level healthcare providers who function in sub centres, a rung below PHCs. The recent National Medical Commission (NMC) Act [also] makes a provision for community health officers.

**Sudha Seshayyan:** I agree; we could think of a mid-level healthcare professional who can deal with the immediate situation and [then] try and transport either the patient or the appropriate medical facility (equipment). And it does cost to get full-fledged doctors to rural areas, but that should not prevent the government from doing this, [for] healthcare is a basic amenity.

Is this a discriminatory move, because we are then providing less qualified practitioners for rural populations and more qualified practitioners for urban settings?

**Sudha Seshayyan:** Yes, it becomes discriminatory. Health awareness among the rural population is not very good. Many may not have the means or resources to get the medicines [they need]. In such situations, [if] you have somebody who is a little less qualified, just because you want to think that everyone is [being] given appropriate medical attention, it's not a fair deal at all.

**Soham Bhaduri:** There are two perspectives. One, the entire range of healthcare professionals who serve at sub centres have a crucial role to play in ensuring continuity of care. The ASHA cadres have played a tremendous role in improving health awareness. Second, we need to differentiate between fiscal realities and fiscal ideals. The State has a prime responsibility in ensuring that everybody gets the highest attainable quality of care. But the realities on the ground preclude us from choosing between perfection and any solution at all.

On the discrimination point: if you say we don't have the perfect solution on the horizon, and you don't do anything at all, that engenders an even bigger discrimination.

**Sudha Seshayyan:** There can be never an ideal solution. There needs to be some kind of an interim arrangement when there are not enough fully qualified doctors. But calling [such] a course the equivalent of a full-fledged medical degree [is not correct]. Think of these rural medical practitioners in the future: at some point, there will be academic discrimination. We've had, if you go back to history, the Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery and so on. But we are at a point where we cannot afford to have differentiated degrees. That apart, we need to bring in a system where we make our full-fledged medical graduates realise their social obligations. We do have adequate medical graduates, but we have to take steps to motivate them to go to rural areas.

Are compulsory rural postings helping in this regard?

**Soham Bhaduri:** On attracting doctors to rural areas, we have tried a lot of means over the years. There [have] to be hard incentives, and even incentives have failed. The NMC recently proposed that it wishes to do away with the bonded service. This may not be a good option because in settings that are already deprived of doctors, the marginal gains that arise from having doctors through bonded rural service are higher. We should be looking at ways to recruit more doctors into rural areas rather than retaining them, because recruiting practitioners and retaining them are two different ballgames. To retain them in rural areas is not going to be possible for at least 30-40 years because ultimately, rural doctor shortage is a development problem.

**Sudha Seshayyan:** I've been a medical teacher for many years. I've noticed that [graduates] do not want rural service as they are a little scared they will get stuck there for ages. So, we have to create a system where there is a continuous chain of doctors in rural areas: somebody comes in, maybe serves for two or three years, and then gets out. Several systems of motivation have been tried but have not worked out. But we cannot just say, 'Okay, we failed' and leave it [at that]. You don't create an alternative cadre of doctors just because regular doctors don't want to go to rural areas: that's acknowledging that full-fledged doctor need not go to rural areas. That

would increase the problem [and] would create a larger divide. If we are trying to say our rural population will not get sufficient health care primarily because they are in the rural areas, we are defeating the goals of democracy.

**Soham Bhaduri:** If you look at the short-term courses across developed and developing countries, they provide care of a quality that is largely equivalent to [that of] doctors. So, the accusation that rural and urban areas are being held up to two different standards of care, at least at the sub centre level, would not apply. So, mid-level practitioners at the sub centre level is, I believe, a very important requirement today.

There is a wide disparity in the spread of our medical colleges. Is this something that needs to be tackled to address rural shortages?

**Sudha Seshayyan:** The density of medical colleges in certain areas is high, while in certain other areas it's low. But apart from increasing the number of medical seats, maybe we are not [teaching medical graduates] the right kind of medical ethics. We've had situations where medical graduates compare themselves to engineering graduates and say. 'if they earn at the end of four years, we need that too'. You cannot sacrifice your training for the sake of a job. We may have adequate numbers (of colleges), but density-wise, we'll have to do something to redistribute them, or maybe increase numbers in areas where there is low density.

**Soham Bhaduri:** Medical college distributions follow the general iniquity patterns in India: most medical colleges are concentrated in the southern States and some in forward States like Maharashtra and Gujarat. What exacerbates these patterns is that about 85% of the seats are reserved for candidates from within those States. So, it's an important policy question for us to address. I don't think purely private investments will be able to deal with it; it's going to be government investments. As we see over the last decade, government medical colleges have shown a remarkable increase in numbers. We have good examples from other countries. For example, Myanmar redistributed nursing colleges to decentralise nursing education from Yangon. It has shown great improvement not just in terms of redistributing medical colleges and having representation across provinces, but also in terms of rural retention, because much more than incentives, pecuniary or intangible, recruiting doctors from rural areas and placing them there is one of the evidence-based solutions to improve rural retention.

***Dr. Sudha Seshayyan is former Vice Chancellor, The Tamil Nadu Dr MGR Medical University; Dr. Soham D. Bhaduri is Health Policy and Leadership Specialist; Editor-in-Chief, The Indian Practitioner***

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# A DOORWAY TO AN ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

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June 23, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 01:26 am IST

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‘Globally, the thinking among new-age universities, and ‘educational entrepreneurs’ is to ensure a fine balance between education and enterprise’ | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

New knowledge is always the result of interactions between disparate or competing disciplines. Whenever diverse players from different endeavours come together, institutions and organisations make gains because these joint ventures lead to the creation of a whole new body/ bodies of knowledge.

University systems have always seen this. The modern university system, which is a result of large efforts to institutionalise and scale up research and study in many disciplines, keeps evolving.

Over the years, multidisciplinary studies have seen new disciplines such as biochemistry and computing science, which in turn are spawning dozens of new sub-disciplines including the current rage, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI.

While the modern university system has accelerated the growth and the rise of new disciplines across the globe, innovations that bring together academic and industrial research work are creating economic and intellectual value for universities.

This joint enterprise of academia and industry, for creating innovations that lead to new products, services, platforms and patents, is entering a new phase. This brings us to the next possible evolution of universities, namely, the entrepreneurial university. Of course, this is a provocative idea. One school of academia maintains that universities should be the fount of new knowledge and research, and any attempt at a commercialisation of this vision should not be allowed. But, globally, the thinking among new-age universities, and ‘educational entrepreneurs’ is to ensure a fine balance between education and enterprise, where learners pay an optimal price of attaining knowledge, gaining employable skills, or pursuing serious research.

While we need not get into a debate among these competing ideas, there is a definite need to create instruments and pathways that foster research and lead to a commercialisation of research output, so that the university system can capitalise the intellectual value of a new product or processes.

In India, the University Grants Commission (UGC)'s initiative to institutionalise the concept of ‘Professor of Practice’ is perhaps a right pointer towards an entrepreneurial university.

The UGC's move clearly shows how universities are best positioned to foster innovation, simply because of the flow of new sets of bright minds every year, seeking to push the frontiers of knowledge further.

The UGC has said: "The objective behind introducing [the] Professor of Practice (PoP) is to enhance the quality of higher education by bringing practitioners, policymakers, skilled professionals, etc. into [the] higher education system."

The initiative wants to bring industry and other professional expertise into academic institutions through a new category of positions viz. PoP. This will help take real world practices and experiences into classrooms and also augment faculty resources in higher education institutions. In turn, industry and society will benefit from trained graduates who are equipped with the relevant skills.

A PoP is typically an individual with significant experience in their industry, appointed to a faculty position at a university to share his/her practical knowledge and skills with students. Unlike traditional academic professors, PoPs are often hired from outside academia, and may not be required to have a PhD or other advanced research degree. Based on their expertise and experience in a specific profession or industry, they are expected to bring real-world insights and perspectives to the classroom. PoPs can be found in fields that include business, engineering, law, journalism, and the arts.

In the field of engineering, for example, a PoP can teach courses that focus on practical, real-world applications and share their insights in applied learning. They can serve as mentors for student projects; develop new courses that are more aligned to industry trends; collaborate with other faculty on research projects and point to ways of converting patents into commercial products (which they do regularly in the industry).

PoPs can serve as ambassadors for their universities, building relationships with industry partners and helping to connect students with internship and job opportunities. They can also participate in professional organisations and conferences to stay up-to-date on industry trends and best practices. Thus, PoPs can reshape a university's commercial thinking and energise the actions that add vividity to a university's culture. Teaching and research were the foundational pillars of a university in the industrial era. In today's post-knowledge societies, innovation is the third pillar in universities. This should also be a continuous activity.

When this innovative culture sets in strongly, every academic will be able to synthesise ideas and spin out start-up enterprises. These university-based start-ups would not only incubate ideas but also convert ideas into patents and transform patents into commercial products. The more such ideas grow, the better the idea of an entrepreneurial university gains ground. Its fruition would be a full convergence of research, industry work and academia. The sum of this coalition will be much more than the individual parts.

Perhaps, one day, PoPs will lead to a new generation of 'entrepreneurs in residence', showing the way for bright students to create the next Google on campus.

***K. Ramachandran is a former journalist, and now heads strategy for an edtech company.***

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# ALARMING INCREASE IN LIVER DISEASE CAUSED BY POOR DIET AND LIFESTYLE: DOCTORS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 22, 2023 07:30 pm | Updated 07:30 pm IST

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Unhealthy food and a sedentary life can be fatal.

If alcohol consumption could impact the health of your liver, a sedentary lifestyle, a high calorie diet and excess fats associated with obesity and high blood sugar can be equally detrimental. That Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD), and its advanced form, Non-Alcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH) cases are steadily rising is worrying doctors.

“We are used to hearing about alcohol-related liver damage; however, NAFLD is now steadily becoming a leading contributor to cirrhosis, liver transplantation, and mortality. It is extremely critical to educate the public on the fact that while excess alcohol causes damage to our liver, a sedentary lifestyle, overeating and a high calorie diet such as processed sugar is almost as bad as the damage from alcohol, making it an equal contributor to liver diseases today,” said N Murugan, Hepatologist and Transplant Physician, Apollo Hospitals.

Globally, the prevalence of NAFLD is estimated to be around 25% (22%-28%), while the prevalence in Asia is around 27% (22% - 32%), he said, adding: “However, we have seen the trend to be much higher in India with prevalence among adults at 39% and among children at 35%.”

“We have observed that among a cohort of over three lakh persons who underwent health checks at Apollo Hospitals in the last year - that includes both urban and rural population - 23% were found to have a fatty liver condition. Of these, three-quarters of the people did not have a history of consuming any alcohol, indicating that factors beyond alcohol consumption contribute significantly to this disease,” he wrote in an email.

NASH is an advanced form of NAFLD, R. Surendran, former director, Department of Surgical Gastroenterology, Government Stanley Medical College Hospital, pointed out. “Throughout the world, it is increasing at an alarming rate. About 6.5% of the total population had NAFLD irrespective of age and 20% of this has already gone into NASH. The prevalence of NASH will lead on to cirrhosis of liver and later, liver cancer,” he said.

He added that the difference between NAFLD and NASH was the presence of inflammation in the liver in NASH.

K. Premkumar, associate professor, Hepatology and director in-charge, Institute of Hepatobiliary Sciences, Madras Medical College and Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital, said that NASH was a wide spectrum of disease severity, including fibrosis, cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. "The global prevalence of NASH is estimated between two and six per cent in the general population," he said.

Awareness of NAFLD remained low among patients and healthcare providers, he said. "It is an asymptomatic and slowly progressive disease, both in adults and in children, but fibrosis rapidly progresses in 20% of cases. It is diagnosed only when individuals undergo routine health screening or is incidentally detected during some other evaluation. This is the diagnostic challenge that we and patients face in the early stages," he added.

Currently, NAFLD is increasing in India and is also becoming one of the important causes for end stage liver disease for which liver transplantation is the curative option, he observed.

"A major contributor for NAFLD in India are metabolic risk factors related to an inactive lifestyle and a high consumption of calories especially carbs and fats. In my personal experience as a liver transplant physician, the cases of NAFLD leading to transplants are almost at par with alcoholic liver disease-led transplants today," Dr. Murugan pointed out.

Dr. Surendran said that it was alarming to see that 50% of diabetics, 75% of obese persons and 100% of obese and diabetics have NAFLD. Even non-obese people can develop NAFLD and NASH because of lack of physical activity and junk food. Childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate due to consumption of junk food, he said.

"As obesity, diabetes and hypothyroidism are the major players, controlling them would resolve this. Avoiding saturated fat, controlling weight and increasing physical activity are essential," he said.

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# REEVALUATING THE IMPORT OF CORD BLOOD BANKING IN REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 22, 2023 07:04 pm | Updated 07:04 pm IST

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Blood being extracted in the operation room.

A few days before her baby girl was born on June 20, 2023, Upasana Kamineni, wife of actor Ram Charan, announced on Twitter that she had chosen to preserve her baby's cord blood. She's not the first celebrity to have done so. A while ago, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan said she too, had saved cord blood.

Umbilical cord blood is a rich source of stem cells that can potentially develop into different types of cells, and be used, via a transplant, in the treatment of certain blood, immune and metabolic disorders. These are known as hematopoietic stem cell transplantations (HSCT) and require certain markers to match between the cord blood and the patient, to work.

While over the past decade or so the popularity of cord blood banking has increased among new parents, witnessed by the many banking facilities that have come up across the country, doctors' associations say private banking of cord blood is not a routine recommendation for pregnant women, its use in transplants is decreasing and the areas of regenerative medicine where it could potentially be used, are still, mostly, experimental.

In 2009, when Sumana\* was pregnant with her second child, she decided to consider cord blood banking. "At that point there was a family history of several illnesses: cancer, heart disease and diabetes, and this was seen as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to preserve stem cells," says the 45-year-old Delhi-based professional. For other mothers, like Jaya Sara Varghese, a Bengaluru-based public relations professional, the motivation was primarily a desire to not regret her decision in the future. "When my daughter turns 18, she will take a call on whether to continue banking it or not," Ms Varghese says.

LifeCell International, one of the country's big names in stem cell banking says it currently has a presence in over 200 cities. "In a year, we have signed up around 25,000 customers," says managing director, Mayur Abhaya. The problem of a struggle for a match, he said, has been solved through the company's community blood banking system.

'Community' or 'social' banks, are repositories of stored cord blood from multiple donors, accessible to those who register for these services with the stem cell banking companies. Gurugram-based Cryoviva Biotech says the firm offers private as well as social

banking. The stored stem cells remain the property of the client for the first two years after which they are transferred to the social banking repository, said Sajesh Padman, manager of the company's southern operations

“To find a match you need a large pool of donors,” says Mr. Abaya. “Since we have 80,000 cord blood units stored with us, we are able to provide a good match.” Cryovia says it has over 40,000 units of cord blood stored. Cord blood banking, can cost patients thousands of rupees.

The Bohari family from Maharashtra is one that used this community banking option. Four-year-old Batul Bohari, a resident of Sangamner, was diagnosed in 2018 with aplastic anaemia, a rare condition in which the body stops producing enough new blood cells due to the failure of bone marrow development. Initially, Batul was treated with medications, but slowly her condition deteriorated. When Batul's mother became pregnant again, the family decided to store the baby's cord blood, opting for community banking. But even this did not help Batul when she needed it, as her baby sister's blood was only a 50% match.

“We were aghast. The doctor said two closely-matching cord blood units could be used, and we eventually managed to obtain a second unit from the community pool. The transplant took place in October 2020,” Batul's father, Huzefa Bohari said.

But in general, what are the chances of stored cord blood being used? A FAQ on cord blood banking by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) says “the likelihood of the stored blood being used for HSCT is very small, probably as low as 0.005 to 0.04% in the first 20 years of life.” Consensus has also emerged in recent years, that stored cord blood should not be used for treating one's own genetic condition in the future, because these stem cells could harbour the same genetic abnormality that caused the primary disease.

Of late, the use of cord blood in transplants has been on the decline, says Revathi Raj, paediatric hemato-oncologist at Apollo Hospitals, Chennai. “Up until about five years ago, stem cells from cord blood were used for transplantations in children who had inborn errors of immunity or metabolism: the transplanted stem cells could help cure these genetic conditions. Now, however, a newer method - haploidentical transplants - is more common, where healthy cells from a half-matched donor such as a family member are used to replace the unhealthy ones in a patient.” This method, she says, is faster and has a higher success rate. She however expressed the belief that emerging technologies to increase the number of cells in cord blood units and promote faster growth of new blood cells, may help the future use of cord blood.

The ICMR's 'Guidelines for Umbilical Cord Banking' 2023 too state that the trend is decreasing utilisation of cord blood for transplants in recent years. “Presently, the cord blood stored in private cord blood banks remains under-utilised,” it adds.

None of the professional obstetric-gynaecological associations recommend cord blood banking as a matter of routine to pregnant women, says P. Rafeeka, senior consultant in Gynaecology and Obstetrics, KIMSHEALTH, Thiruvananthapuram. “We don't proactively recommend it, we only discuss it if patients ask us about it,” says Jaishree Gajaraj, former president of The Obstetric & Gynaecological Society of Southern India. Chennai-based gynaecologist Priya Selvaraj concurs. Vidya Bhat, former president of Karnataka State Obstetrics and Gynaecology Association, said around 20% of her patients enquire about stem cell banking and some of them, with insurance cover for banking, opt for it.

The Indian Academy of Paediatrics, in a 2018 statement, said: “Private cord blood banking is not a ‘biological insurance’ and its role in regenerative medicine is still hypothetical. [It] is recommended only if there is an existing family member (siblings or biological parents only),

who is currently suffering from diseases approved to be benefitted by allogenic stem cell transplantation.”

For would-be parents considering cord-blood banking, awareness is important. “There is still a lack of awareness among stakeholders about the uses of cord blood banking. This needs to be countered through widespread information dissemination,” says a senior ICMR official.

\*Name changed to protect privacy

*(With inputs from R. Sujatha in Chennai, C. Maya in Tiruvananthapuram and Afshan Yasmeen in Bangalore)*

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# 'ALARMING' RISE IN DIABETES GLOBALLY BY 2050: STUDY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 23, 2023 04:49 pm | Updated 05:26 pm IST

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Every country in the world will see rates of diabetes rise in the next 30 years without action, according to a new global study. | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Every country in the world will see rates of [diabetes](#) rise in the next 30 years without action, according to a new global [study](#).

There are currently 529 million people in the world with diabetes, the study led by researchers at the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington found. They projected that this will more than double to around 1.3 billion people by 2050.

The majority of the cases are type 2 diabetes, the form of the disease that is linked to obesity and largely preventable, the researchers said.

The increase in prevalence globally is not uniform: Some countries and regions are particularly badly hit. For example, prevalence rates are expected to reach 16.8% in North Africa and the Middle East and 11.3% in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2050, compared to an estimated 9.8% globally. Currently, the prevalence is 6.1%. But every country will be impacted, researchers said.

**Also Read | [11% of India's population is diabetic while 15.3% could be pre-diabetic, says study](#)**

"The rapid rate at which diabetes is growing is not only alarming but also challenging for every health system in the world," said Liane Ong, lead author of the paper, pointing out that the condition is linked to a number of other heart conditions such as heart disease and stroke.

The growing numbers of people with diabetes is in part driven by rising obesity, and in part by demographic shifts: Prevalence is higher among older adults, the study showed. The data from 204 countries does not take into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic because those numbers were not yet available, researchers said.

The study, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is part of a wider series on diabetes published on Thursday in *The Lancet* medical journal. The series calls for more effective mitigation strategies and an awareness of inequality, with the majority of diabetes

patients living in low- and middle-income countries and unable to access proper treatment.

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# INDIA-MADE MRNA VACCINE PRICED AT 2,292, WILL BE AVAILABLE AS A BOOSTER DOSE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 24, 2023 07:59 pm | Updated 11:36 pm IST - NEW DELHI

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Union Minister Jitendra Singh and others during the launch of GEMCOVAC-OM Omicron-specific mRNA-based booster vaccine, in New Delhi on June 24, 2023. | Photo Credit: Shiv Kumar Pushpakar

India's first indigenously developed [mRNA vaccine against the dominant Omicron variant](#) of the COVID-19 coronavirus will cost 2,292, Sanjay Singh, CEO, Genova Biopharmaceuticals, said at a press conference on June 24. The vaccine will for now only be available as a booster or "precaution dose", that is, somebody who has already been vaccinated thrice will be ineligible as the relevant expert committees, which recommend vaccines for public administration, have not permitted companies to administer a fourth dose in India unlike, for instance, in the United States and Europe.

This price, however, is the retail price of the vaccine and the government currently has no plans to make a bulk purchase, as it did in the case of Covishield and Covaxin in 2021, that enabled these vaccines to be available for free at government health centres. "We expect to make this vaccine available as a booster in private healthcare centres as well as export it to several international markets," Dr. Singh added.

GEMCOVAC-OM is the only mRNA vaccine currently approved in India — again under 'emergency use authorisation' — that has been made specifically to counter the Omicron variant. Existing vaccines available as booster shots range from 800 (Innovac, Bharat Biotech's nasal-drop vaccine), 225 for Covaxin, Covovax and Covishield (as of December 2022), and 400 for Corbevax. So far, only 28% of India's population has taken a third or precaution dose, and slackening demand for booster doses means that not all of these vaccines are easily available at health centres, either privately owned or government-run.

Prior to a major 'booster' drive promoted by the Centre in April 2022, Covaxin and Covishield — the main vaccines deployed in India's vaccination programme that has so far administered over 200 crore doses — cost 1,200 and 600, respectively, at private healthcare centres. In a statement earlier this year, Pfizer indicated that booster doses of its mRNA vaccine would likely cost \$110-130, in the absence of government procurement that has so far made the vaccine available for free in the U.S.

The mRNA vaccines manufactured by Pfizer and Moderna are 'bivalent', meaning they contain

synthetic spike proteins that are effective against the older Wuhan strain as well as the newer Omicron strains. “The WHO’s (World Health Organization) latest recommendation is very clear that a monovalent vaccine is the need of the hour and we have been able to produce that,” Dr. Singh said.

This is because it is held that the scores of mutations in the last two years in the coronavirus have rendered the oldest versions of the vaccine incapable of generating a sufficient immune response. N.K. Arora, who heads the COVID advisory group that recommends the timing and dosage of available vaccines for public use, said that current evidence did not merit the need for a fourth dose. “Hybrid immunity [from vaccination plus infection] has meant that many in India already have antibodies in response to Omicron. We have recently discussed this, and at this point, there is no immediate requirement,” he told *The Hindu*. He too was present at the event to launch GEMCOVAC-OM.

Dr. Singh said earlier this week that Gennova Biopharmaceuticals was equipped to make, even if a new variant different from the Omicron types were to emerge, an updated vaccine within 60-100 days. The key challenge addressed, and unique selling point, of GEMCOVAC-OM was that it was stable in a 2-8 degree Celsius range and could therefore be stored in “ordinary” refrigerators. The vaccines could be administered into the skin via a “needle free” PharmaJet system. The company said it had also perfected the technology to ensure that multiple components of the vaccine could be separately produced and integrated in different parts of the world, aiding rapid deployment if the need arose.

Developing the mRNA technology platform was “expensive” and the cost of vaccine was also influenced by prevailing market conditions and whether the Centre decided to purchase a portion of it in bulk, Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, said. The department funded GEMCOVAC at key stages of the vaccine development as part of the COVID Suraksha initiative.

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# JOINING THE HUNT: INDIA AND THE ARTEMIS ACCORDS

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology

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June 26, 2023 02:36 am | Updated 02:36 am IST

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Ambassador of India to the United States, Taranjit Singh Sandhu signs the Artemis Accords with NASA administrator Bill Nelson, in Washington DC, USA on Friday. | Photo Credit: ANI

News of India's [accession to the Artemis Accords](#) has been met with great interest within the space community. India has great aspirations in outer space and by joining the Accords it has signalled an interest in building a greater relationship with NASA and its partners. This is of note, considering ISRO's close ties to Roscosmos. It could signal a shifting away from Russia, following the invasion of Ukraine and the reduced scope of Russian activities in space after the fall of the Soviet Union. Named after the Greek Goddess of the Moon and sister to Apollo, the Artemis Accords themselves are a non-binding multilateral agreement, intending to provide its parties with a set of commitments and standards when making use of resources in outer space. Parties to the Accords gain greatly from the exchange of information and gain access to NASA's [Artemis](#) programme – bringing humans back onto the lunar surface for the first time following the Apollo missions – which would greatly help India's own Gaganyaan mission. Its purpose is rooted deeply within the principle of sharing of scientific findings and knowledge enshrined in Article XI of the Outer Space Treaty (1967). This Treaty acts as the foundation for space law today, with India being one of its 113 parties, along with all other major players in the space sector.

Yet, what is it that [India seeks to gain out of Artemis](#)? To answer this question, we must investigate the history of resource exploitation in outer space and the legal texts that guide it. There are 5 treaties that govern activities in outer space, including the aforementioned Outer Space Treaty. Three of the remaining treaties deal with the rescue of astronauts, the registration of space objects and liability for damages caused by a space operation. This leaves us with the final treaty, the Moon Agreement of 1979. The Moon Agreement is directed towards the use of the Moon and other celestial bodies. It declares that these regions of space must only be for peaceful purposes, with no state allowed to establish military bases or place weapons on celestial bodies. This is an extension of the concept of outer space being reserved for peaceful purposes, which was noted in the Outer Space Treaty. As these treaties were all drafted during the Cold War and the Space Race, there was a real danger of nuclear conflict occurring in Earth orbit, leading to the U.S. and USSR attempting to limit the scope of such a future conflict through treaty law. The Moon Agreement also speaks to how resources may be exploited from these celestial bodies. First, it establishes that the moon and other celestial bodies are 'the province of all mankind'. This makes these areas a 'global commons', a legal term used to describe

international waters, being areas meant for the greater good of humankind, rather than merely for state appropriation. This is extended to the natural resources of the moon, which are meant to be extracted with the guidance on an international regime that would have the power to ration these resources to the states on the Earth. The Moon Agreement further requires state parties to act on celestial bodies keeping in mind the protection of their environment.

Despite being instrumental in the drafting of the Moon Agreement, the United States refused to ratify it. Several nations followed suit, which has led to this being the least internationally accepted of the space treaties. In 2020, the Trump administration released an executive order pointing out that the U.S. was not a party to the Moon Agreement and did not view outer space as a global commons. This order invited other states to utilise opportunities to make use of resources from outer space. This led to the creation of the Artemis Accords later that year, which intend to act as a soft-law alternative to the Moon Agreement. India may be a signatory to the Moon Agreement, yet it has not ratified it. With the war in Ukraine making Russia's space activities more isolated than before, India may be signalling an important shift in its overall space policy by casting its lot with the Americans. The years to come will show the value of this action, with missions already being planned between ISRO and NASA, which may soon see the first Indian aboard the ISS and the first Indian astronaut since Rakesh Sharma, all those decades ago.

Roshan Menon is a candidate in the advanced master's programme for Air and Space Law at Leiden University. He represented the University at the European rounds for the 2023 Manfred Lachs Space Law Moot Court.

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# A NEW REGIME: ON THE EMERGENCY USE AUTHORISATION REGIME IN INDIA AND CLINICAL TRIALS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

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June 26, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 01:05 am IST

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Last week, the Drug Controller General of India cleared, under the provisions of 'emergency use authorisation', a [new mRNA vaccine for COVID-19](#) developed by Pune-based Gennova Biopharmaceuticals, a pioneer in India in developing mRNA vaccines. The vaccine is meant to be particularly effective against the dominant Omicron variant. With the World Health Organization having officially declared the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no longer the obsessive public interest in new variants. Even less so in newer vaccines. Data suggest that the uptake of booster, or 'precautionary doses' of the array of COVID vaccines available in India has been declining for several months. Therefore, the significance of the new vaccine, GEMCOVAC-OM, is that it shows that an Indian company has the capability to make an mRNA vaccine, believed to be amenable to rapid production and scale-up, that could be useful against any future virus.

Normally, vaccines must go through progressive stages of testing, from petri dishes, to animals and expanding cohorts of human test subjects. Doing greater harm than good, or being unable to be better than the alternative in any of these stages is a ground for disqualification. Which is why vaccine development and approvals are a decades-long enterprise. During COVID-19, this risk-averse strategy was deemed unsuitable for the crisis at hand because of which drug regulators globally allowed vaccine makers to combine multiple stages while evaluating efficacy, thus giving greater leeway to experimental formulations. This underlines the basic framework of 'emergency use authorizations (EUA)' adopted by regulators globally. Unlike the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that has for many years been evaluating novel drug and vaccine candidates, India's regulatory system has largely been geared toward evaluating formulations that have been approved abroad and in assessing their suitability to India. Mistrust, arbitrary decree and lax regulations have historically plagued clinical trials in India. More than evidence-based assessment, it was a technicality in India's 'New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019' that allowed EUA in India for COVID-19 vaccines. A credible regime of phased, clinical trials and independent regulation for new drugs is still in its infancy in India. The FDA still authorises updated COVID-19 vaccines under emergency use provisions because while the pandemic is over, COVID-19 is not and thousands continue to die globally. This alone, however, cannot be the basis for continuing with the EUA regime in India. While the flexibility to accelerate should always be present, India must specify a streamlined regulatory process that weeds out non-essential steps but is hawk-eyed on safety and adverse reactions from new drugs and vaccines.

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## REDUCED CEILING, INCREASED ANGER

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June 27, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 12:15 am IST

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Kerala's open market borrowing space is once again at the centre of a political row. The CPI (M)-led LDF government has slammed the Centre for drastically reducing the limit without providing any justifiable reason. Kerala Finance Minister K. N. Balagopal described the decision as an attempt to "choke the State financially" and has demanded that the BJP government reverse it urgently. More recently, there have been indications from the CPI(M) that Kerala intends to take the matter to the Supreme Court.

The latest dispute first grabbed headlines in late May when Mr. Balagopal shared the contents of a letter from the Union Finance Ministry pegging the open market borrowing limit at 15,390 crore, which is lower than the State's projections. The Kerala government contended that it was eligible to borrow 32,442 crore — equivalent to 3% of GSDP — in 2023-24 in line with the Finance Commission recommendations. The State was also confused by the wording of the letter and did not know whether the limit had been set for the first nine months or for the entire 2023-24 fiscal. The letter read, "It has been decided by the competent authority in Government of India to accord consent to the State Government of Kerala under Article 293 (3) of Constitution of India to raise open market borrowing 13,390 crore under proposed borrowing programme of the State for the year 2023-24." (A borrowing of 2,000 crore permitted at the start of the 2023-24 fiscal would be added to this amount, taking the total to 15,390 crore.)

Later, in response to a letter from the State Finance Department, the Centre informed the State that the open market borrowing limit for 2023-24 was set at 20,521 crore, of which 15,390 crore constituted the permitted borrowing for the first nine months (April-December 2023). Mr. Balagopal blamed the Centre for neither providing Kerala with any reason for the reduction nor providing a detailed break-up of the open market borrowing space for the fiscal. Heated exchanges took place between him and the Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan, a senior BJP leader from the State. Mr. Muraleedharan denied that the Centre had slashed the open market borrowing limit. He also presented a set of figures to bolster his argument. Mr. Balagopal responded that neither the State government nor the State Finance Department was aware of these figures.

More recently, CPI(M) Central Committee member and former Finance Minister T. M. Thomas Isaac indicated that Kerala intended to take the matter to the Supreme Court, saying that the State's fiscal rights have now emerged as an "important political question."

In recent years, Kerala's open market borrowing has become a matter of public debate ever

since the Comptroller and Auditor General of India warned that the “off-budget borrowings” by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB), a special purpose vehicle for mobilising funds for infrastructure projects, and the Kerala Social Security Pension Ltd (KSSPL) could plunge the State into a “debt trap,” a fear which the State government rejected as being “wholly unfounded”.

Ignoring the State’s objections, the Centre decided to treat KIIFB and KSSPL borrowings as direct liabilities of the State, resulting in the deduction of 14,312.80 crore from the latter’s borrowing limit in four annual instalments. The State government’s argument that these borrowings are contingent liabilities was not accepted. It had further accused the Centre of adopting double standards in the matter as the latter’s own off-budget borrowings are not included in its overall debt or fiscal deficit.

The Left government has for long maintained that the unsympathetic fiscal policies of the Centre have been straining its finances. A prominent grievance is that it is being denied its due share from the central pool.

While the blame game over the open market borrowing limit progresses ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, it remains to be seen how the reduced ceiling impacts State finances and the LDF government’s development and welfare-oriented initiatives, particularly at a time when the State has already been warned by its Planning Board that mobilising resources for the 14th Five-Year plan period (2022-2027) would be a “challenging task.”

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# LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A FUTURE-READY DIGITAL INDIA

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June 27, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 12:08 am IST

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‘Changes being proposed include a categorisation of digital intermediaries into distinct classes’ | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

The Ministry of Electronics and IT has been actively organising consultations on the proposed “Digital India Bill” to build conceptual alignment on a new law that will replace India’s 23-year-old Information Technology (IT) Act. The goal is to upgrade the current legal regime to tackle emerging challenges such as user harm, competition and misinformation in the digital space. The Union Minister of State for Electronics and Technology, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, said that the first draft of the Bill should be out by the end of June. This is a much-anticipated piece of legislation that is likely to redefine the contours of how technology is regulated, not just in India but also globally. Changes being proposed include a categorisation of digital intermediaries into distinct classes such as e-commerce players, social media companies, and search engines to place different responsibilities and liabilities on each kind.

The current IT Act defines an “intermediary” to include any entity between a user and the Internet, and the IT Rules sub-classify intermediaries into three main categories: “Social Media Intermediaries” (SMIs), “Significant Social Media Intermediaries” (SSMIs) and the recently notified, “Online Gaming Intermediaries”. SMIs are platforms that facilitate communication and sharing of information between users, and SMIs that have a very large user base (above a specified threshold) are designated as SSMIs. However, the definition of SMIs is so broad that it can encompass a variety of services such as video communications, matrimonial websites, email and even online comment sections on websites. The rules also lay down stringent obligations for most intermediaries, such as a 72-hour timeline for responding to law enforcement asks and resolving ‘content take down’ requests. Unfortunately, ISPs, websites, e-commerce platforms, and cloud services are all treated similarly.

Consider platforms such as Microsoft Teams or customer management solutions such as Zoho. By virtue of being licensed, these intermediaries have a closed user base and present a lower risk of harm from information going viral. Treating these intermediaries like conventional social media platforms not only adds to their cost of doing business but also exposes them to greater liability without meaningfully reducing risks presented by the Internet.

So far, only a handful of countries have taken a clear position on the issue of proportionate

regulation of intermediaries, so there is not too much to lean on. The European Union's Digital Services Act is probably one of the most developed frameworks for us to consider. It introduces some exemptions and creates three tiers of intermediaries — hosting services, online platforms and “very large online platforms”, with increasing legal obligations. Australia has created an eight-fold classification system, with separate industry-drafted codes governing categories such as social media platforms and search engines. Intermediaries are required to conduct risk assessments, based on the potential for exposure to harmful content such as child sexual abuse material (CSAM) or terrorism.

While a granular, product-specific classification could improve accountability and safety online, such an approach may not be future-proof. As technology evolves, the specific categories we define today may not work in the future. What we need, therefore, is a classification framework that creates a few defined categories, requires intermediaries to undertake risk assessments and uses that information to bucket them into relevant categories. As far as possible, the goal should also be to minimise obligations on intermediaries and ensure that regulatory asks are proportionate to ability and size.

One way to do this would be to exempt micro and small enterprises, and caching and conduit services (the ‘pipes’ of the Internet) from any major obligations, and clearly distinguish communication services (where end-users interact with each other) from other forms of intermediaries (such as search engines and online-marketplaces). Given the lower risks, the obligations placed on intermediaries that are not communication services should be lesser, but they could still be required to appoint a grievance officer, cooperate with law enforcement, identify advertising, and take down problematic content within reasonable timelines.

Intermediaries that offer communication services could be asked to undertake risk assessments based on the number of their active users, risk of harm and potential for virality of harmful content. The largest communication services (platforms such as Twitter) could then be required to adhere to special obligations such as appointing India-based officers and setting up in-house grievance appellate mechanisms with independent external stakeholders to increase confidence in the grievance process. Alternative approaches to curbing virality, such as circuit breakers to slow down content, could also be considered.

For the proposed approach to be effective, metrics for risk assessment and appropriate thresholds would have to be defined and reviewed on a periodic basis in consultation with industry. Overall, such a framework could help establish accountability and online safety, while reducing legal obligations for a large number of intermediaries. In doing so, it could help create a regulatory environment that helps achieve the government's policy goal of creating a safer Internet ecosystem, while also allowing businesses to thrive.

Rohit Kumar is Founding Partner, The Quantum Hub (TQH), a public policy firm. Kaushik Thanugonda is Senior Analyst, The Quantum Hub (TQH), a public policy firm

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# SPRING CLEANING: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON MEDICAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

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June 28, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:10 am IST

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A quarter of a century is time enough to justify a reassessment of any effort. About 25 years have passed since the existing Regulations on Graduate Medical Education (GMER) were notified in 1997, and the time was ripe to take a relook at all aspects of the system, and adapt them to changing requirements, including demography, socio-economic contexts, and advancements in science and technology. The National Medical Commission's (NMC) new GMER, which was [withdrawn without any explanation](#), attempted to catch up, and correct course, wherever necessary. The medical world is a changed place since the regulations were last drawn up, with emerging diseases, changing demands and expectations of stakeholders also altering the game dramatically. The new regulations aimed at making medical education more learner-centric, patient-centric, gender-sensitive, outcome-oriented and environment-appropriate, while continuing to anchor on the basic principles of teaching medicine. The regulations were progressive in introducing a longitudinal programme based on attitude, ethics, and communication competencies for young medical students, to lay stress on ethical values, being responsive to patient needs, and improved communication, early clinical experience — all skills young medicos will benefit from in the real world. It had specified that didactic lectures would not exceed a third of the schedule; while the bulk of the course would include interactive sessions, practicals, clinical experience, and case studies. Also introduced anew was a family adoption programme through village outreach, for each MBBS student, and a 'pandemic module'. Other significant changes included reduction of the overall time period for students to complete the MBBS course to nine years (from 10), fixed number of attempts to clear papers, and common counselling for admission from 2024. If a student failed to clear any exam, he/she could have appeared in the supplementary examination, the results of which were to be processed within three-six weeks. The students, if successful, could have proceeded with the same batch.

A spring-cleaning of medical education in India is no doubt necessary to clear the cobweb remnants from the past. While a new GMER will enable the country's medical students to be future-ready, the question needs to be asked if the system will be ready to handle the requirements of students who breach odds to climb up to a medical seat. As the NMC takes a step back, with withdrawing the regulations, perhaps it will pause to anticipate and face, with least confrontation, the opposition of several States to common counselling and the exit test.

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# A MODEL FOR QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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June 28, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 02:12 am IST

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Admission-seekers at a college in Chennai. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), adopted by the Ministry of Education to rank institutions of higher education in India, shows a noteworthy feature of Tamil Nadu. Specifically, the [2023 NIRF ranking of the top 100 colleges in India](#) reveals the consistent success of Tamil Nadu in providing higher education that is both of good quality and inclusive. The Tamil Nadu experience, in congruence with the State's motto of development with social justice, offers an important insight for other States.

The NIRF employs a ranking metric comprising five parameters with varying weightage to assess the quality of colleges: Teaching, Learning and Resources (40%), Graduation Outcome (25%), Research and Professional Practices (15%), Outreach and Inclusivity (10%) and Perception (10%). Each of these parameters has several components, which again have varying weightage. Though far from perfect, the metric is reasonably robust as it uses broad-based and curated parameters.

The number of colleges participating in the NIRF ranking has grown from 535 in 2017 to 1,659 in 2020, and 2,746 in 2023. This five-fold increase notwithstanding, the participating colleges constitute only a paltry proportion of the actual number of colleges in India. Since NIRF ranking has already gained wide traction and credibility, it is likely that many good-quality colleges participate in the exercise. A place in the top 100 would bring them repute and increase demand for admission. On the contrary, the non-participating colleges are likely to be poor in quality and seriously lacking in most of the parameters of the ranking metric. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that many good-quality colleges participate in the ranking.

Of the top 100 NIRF-ranked colleges in 2023, Tamil Nadu has the largest share (35). Delhi (32) comes next, followed by Kerala (14) and West Bengal (8). These four States collectively contribute to 89% of the top colleges, which speaks volumes about other regions. Bigger States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Odisha do not have a single college in the top 100. Even the share of the other southern States is abysmal: Karnataka has two colleges, Telangana has one, and Andhra Pradesh has none. The share of Tamil Nadu (35%) is more than double the combined share of the other four southern States (17%).

Is the stellar performance of Tamil Nadu consistent or sporadic? The NIRF ranking of colleges since 2017 reveals that Tamil Nadu has been consistent as the lead contributor of top-ranking colleges in India. Even if we confine the focus to the last five years, when the number of colleges

participating in the NIRF ranking grew rapidly, Tamil Nadu retained its top position (with the exception of 2022, when Delhi was on a par with Tamil Nadu).

Though the larger pattern of four States (Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Kerala, and West Bengal) holding the larger chunk of top colleges has remained for all the years, there have been variations in the share of the rest of the States in some years. For instance, Andhra Pradesh had one top college in both 2022 and 2021 in the ranking, whereas Karnataka's share went up to three in 2021. Barring Gujarat and Maharashtra, the big States hardly had representation in most years.

Is the performance of Tamil Nadu in congruence with its motto of development with social justice? Specifically, are the top-ranked colleges largely confined to Chennai and thereby catering primarily to the urban elites and advantaged social groups or are they dispersed and catering to rural and socially disadvantaged groups? Chennai accounts for only nine (26%) colleges. Coimbatore, with an equal share, competes with Chennai quite consistently. Tiruchirappalli, with five colleges (14%), is next. The remaining 12 (out of 35) colleges are widely spread across 11 places. This broad pattern was seen in other years too. The largest beneficiaries from Chennai, Coimbatore, and Tiruchirappalli are likely to be urban dwellers. Yet, it is also likely that the top-ranked 23 colleges from these three cities, which belong to three different regions, might be equally serving the poor and disadvantaged social groups both from these regions as well as those contiguous to them. This is because Tamil Nadu not only has one of the highest reservation quotas, but also has been quite effective in its implementation of the reservation policy.

Additionally, since more than one-third of the top-ranked colleges are dispersed across places, they not only cater largely to the rural and under-served areas, but also provide an opportunity for quality education for students from poor and disadvantaged social groups who do not have the economic resources and social networks to study in colleges from Chennai, Coimbatore, and Tiruchirappalli. Thus, the colleges based out of Chennai in general and other districts in particular promote both quality and inclusion, and thereby contribute to the goal of development with social justice. Here too, Tamil Nadu's experience is consistent over the years. The only other State which comes somewhat close is Kerala.

Tamil Nadu's impressive and consistent performance in higher education shows that quality and inclusion can be achieved together and consistently. This finding should prompt other southern States, which also have a reasonably inclusive and effective social welfare architecture, to introspect why they lag far behind and inspire them to take action to rectify issues.

***Sunny Jose is RBI Chair Professor at Council for Social Development, Hyderabad. P Raghupathi is ICSSR Senior Fellow at Council for Social Development, Hyderabad. The views expressed are personal***

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# A ROW OVER RICE IN KARNATAKA

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

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June 28, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 01:59 am IST

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Karnataka Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy and Congress leaders stage a protest in Bengaluru on June 20, 2023 against the Central government's refusal to release rice to implement the State's Anna Bhagya scheme. | Photo Credit: ANI

In just over a month since the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government came to power in Karnataka, a row over "denial" of rice by the Centre for Anna Bhagya, one of the State government's flagship programmes to be launched on July 1, has kept the political pot boiling.

The [Centre's flip-flop over the supply of more rice](#) to the State has not only led to a slugfest between the Congress and BJP, but has likely derailed the launch. Besides, the cost of implementation, estimated to be around 10,000 crore, is [likely to go up](#).

Karnataka is now looking at other sources to procure 2.29 lakh metric tonnes of rice per month. This is the amount it requires to provide five kg of free rice per person to over 4.42 crore intended beneficiaries or 1.19 crore households, who are BPL (below poverty line) and Antyodaya card-holders in the State. The five kg of rice under Anna Bhagya is over and above the five kg that is given by the Centre under the National Food Security Act to the poorest of the poor.

Under pressure from the Opposition parties, which have started questioning the delay in implementing the five pre-poll guarantees of the Congress, the Karnataka government scheduled the launch of these schemes. Earlier in May, the first Cabinet had given in-principle approval to implement them. One of the five guarantees, Anna Bhagya, is the only scheme for which the Congress government is dependent on the BJP government at the Centre. Its launch is now uncertain owing to the unavailability of rice and the high cost of implementation.

Just about a fortnight before the launch, the Food Corporation of India (FCI), which had agreed to supply to the Karnataka government the required quantity, [refused to do so](#) a day later, saying it had "to maintain sufficient stocks for market intervention". While the State has bought rice from the FCI under the open market sale scheme (OMSS-Domestic) for supply to the Anna Bhagya scheme earlier, when 7 kg of rice per person was given, the Centre barred States from participating in the OMSS-D in mid-June as part of anti-inflationary measures.

Stung by the response, the government, which was hoping to get a kg of rice at 36.60 from the FCI, cried foul and said it was not asking for rice free of cost. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah

termed the decision as “anti -poor and based on the politics of hate”, and accused the Centre of conspiring to “scuttle” Anna Bhagya. His Cabinet colleagues also attacked the BJP for denying rice to a pro-poor programme. Simultaneously, Mr. Siddaramaiah also appealed to Home Minister Amit Shah to intervene and ensure supply to Karnataka. This too, however, failed to break the deadlock as the Centre categorically informed Karnataka that rice could not be supplied, igniting another round of heated exchanges. Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Minister K.H. Muniyappa said that the Centre’s requirement for national supply was 135 lakh metric tonnes of rice whereas it was sitting on a stock of 262 lakh metric tonnes.

While the Centre has refused to sell rice to Karnataka, the BJP’s State unit, which seems to be in a turmoil after the electoral drubbing, is mounting pressure on the Congress government. It has said it would begin protests if anything less than 10 kg of free rice is supplied, or the launch of the scheme is delayed. The BJP has accused the Congress government of wilfully delaying the launch and trying to shift the blame on the Centre. It has urged the government to either purchase rice from the market or transfer cash to the beneficiaries. The Janata Dal (Secular) has criticised the Congress for being ill prepared before such a big announcement was made.

Meanwhile, Karnataka’s search for rice in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Punjab and West Bengal did not yield the desired results due to factors such as high cost or non-availability. It has so far refrained from speaking to the Karnataka Rice Millers Association and therefore steered clear of any potential allegations of corruption in procurement. The State is now looking at national cooperative agencies such as NAFED, NCCF and Kendriya Bhandar that have indicated their readiness to supply rice. However, the cost remains a concern as State will have to incur additional money on transportation, which will in turn increase the overall cost of implementing the scheme. Today’s Cabinet meeting will be crucial as decisions on the date of launch and cost of implementation of the project will be taken.

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# PLAYED IN INDIA: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA AS CRICKET'S WORLD CUP HOST

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Human resources, Youth, Sports and related issues

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Close on the heels of the [40th anniversary of India's maiden World Cup triumph](#) in 1983, cricket's showpiece event returns to the game's commercial heart. Previously, India hosted the championship in 1987, 1996, and 2011; and even if the 2023 edition's base was well known in advance, it was on Tuesday that the ICC, in tandem with the BCCI, announced [the final schedule of matches](#) that commence on October 5 and conclude on November 19, with Ahmedabad hosting both the inaugural game and the summit clash. The perception that the host nation never wins has waned over the last few editions as India (2011), Australia (2015) and England (2019) broke through the jinx. And as the World Cup returns to India during its festive season, it remains to be seen if the Men in Blue can add to the fireworks. The gimmicky unveiling of the cup up in the skies on Monday was part of the high-decibel marketing campaign, but what matters is the action on the turf. With domestic T20 leagues eating into the calendar, ODIs need the World Cup to stay relevant. The willow game, lost between the romance of Tests and the frenzied thrills of T20, has seemingly ignored the charms of the good old ODI. The latest World Cup may perhaps reboot ODIs.

Cricket is a sport with a limited global footprint and the ICC's big ticket championships play a part in propagating the game beyond the former British colonies. In India, with its summers propping up the Indian Premier League, while domestic cricket draws in the proverbial two men and a dog, this World Cup offers another opportunity to attract the crowds and infuse life into ODIs. That former champions West Indies and Sri Lanka are jostling in the qualifiers remains a sad reality while it is heartening to see Afghanistan in the main draw. Closer home, Rohit Sharma's men have the difficult task of repeating what M.S. Dhoni's troops did in 2011. From that winning outfit, Virat Kohli remains an enduring link and he and his colleagues have to end the drought in ICC events. India last won a title — Champions Trophy — in 2013, and has subsequently failed. Off the field, diplomacy will come into play as Pakistan, upset with India's reluctance to tour, has been aloof; the least the Indian government could do is to smoothen the visa process. Australian Usman Khawaja with Pakistani roots and the Pakistan football squad had to wait for a visa till the last minute, and it reflects poorly on a regime fully aware of sport's soft power.

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# RANKINGS, AND THE REALITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

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The NIRF evaluates institutions on five parameters: teaching, learning and resources; graduation outcome; research and professional practices; outreach and inclusivity; and perception. Photo: nirfindia.org

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) recently released the [India Rankings for 2023](#). This is the eighth consecutive edition of rankings of higher education institutions in five categories — overall, universities, colleges, research institutions, and innovation — and eight subject domains — engineering, management, pharmacy, medical, dental, law, architecture and planning, and agriculture and allied sectors. The NIRF evaluates institutions on five parameters: teaching, learning and resources; graduation outcome; research and professional practices; outreach and inclusivity; and perception. Ranks are assigned based on the sum of marks secured by institutions on each of these parameters. Notwithstanding some of the criticisms on the methodology adopted and the parameters chosen by the Ministry of Education, a scrutiny of the 2023 edition as well as some of the available data on higher education raises some important issues warranting policy attention.

The first is the issue of participation of institutions. According to the Ministry of Education, in this edition of NIRF, 5,543 institutions offered themselves for ranking under overall, category-specific or domain-specific ranking. In all, 8,686 applications for ranking were submitted by these institutions. This has to be seen in conjunction with the total number of universities and colleges in India. As per the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021, there were 1,113 universities and 43,796 colleges in 2020-21. This implies that only 12.3% of higher educational institutions participated in the ranking process. That there is near to no information on the parameters decided by NIRF for the remaining 87.7% of higher education institutions is a matter of concern, especially for a nation aspiring to reap rich demographic dividends. This issue gets accentuated further when we examine the rural-urban divide in participation. The list of top 100 colleges shows scant presence of colleges from rural areas. AISHE data show that about 43% of the universities and 61.4% colleges are in rural areas. The lack of participation of institutions from rural areas raises questions on the inherent urban bias of the ranking framework, reinforced by the choice of parameters.

The second issue is the incongruence between quantity and quality. Of the top 100 colleges ranked by NIRF, 35 are from Tamil Nadu, 32 from Delhi, 14 from Kerala, and the remaining are from the rest of India. According to AISHE, Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of colleges in

the country, followed by Maharashtra and Karnataka. The list of top 100 colleges does not feature a single college from U.P. It features three colleges from Maharashtra and two from Karnataka. The fact that 81% of high-quality colleges are in three States highlights the need for a mission to improve quality across the country, with both the Union government and the States earmarking substantial funds in their respective budgets for this.

Quality differences are evident between private and government institutions as well. In the overall rankings, the highest rank secured by a private institution is 15. In the university rankings, the highest rank secured by a private institution is six. There is also tremendous scope for many more State universities to figure in this list. If the quality of State universities is enhanced, it would also serve the purpose of serving students in rural locations.

The third issue stems from the close correlation between faculty strength and rankings. A comparison between the top 100 and remaining institutions shows vast differences in this regard. The average number of faculty in the top 100 universities is 645, while for the remaining universities it is only 242. In the case of colleges, it is 173 for colleges in the top 100 list and 71 for the remaining institutes. Needless to say, quality education cannot be provided with brick and mortar alone. Even in the case of engineering, where the ranking is often advertised by the institutions, only 33.98% adhere to the AICTE-prescribed faculty-student ratio of 1:20.

Faculty strength and quality also get reflected in scientific publications: 87.71% of the scholarly output from India comes from eligible institutions in the overall category. This means that 12.3% of institutions which have participated in the ranking contribute close to 90% of scholarly output in the country. This is even more startling in the case of engineering, where 99.98% of total scientific publications came from the institutions participating in the rankings. Interestingly, in management, 50% of the institutions which applied for being included in the rankings had zero publications.

The rankings underscore the urgent need for quality enhancement in the higher education system. This requires substantial financial resources. India's share in the overall world scientific publications is about 4.81%. In comparison, China's share of world publications increased from 5% in 2000 to 26% in 2018. This was facilitated by massive research investments by the Chinese government. Between 2000 and 2017, as per an article by Shumin Qiu, Claudia Steinwender and Pierre Azoula in the *LSE Impact Blog*, the number of Chinese universities increased by 140%, research faculty increased by 69%, and public research funding increased ten-fold. If rankings are to serve the purpose of being an input for informed evidence-based policy decisions, then budgetary outlays for higher education needs a quantum jump in India.

***M. Suresh Babu is Professor of Economics at IIT Madras. Views are personal***

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