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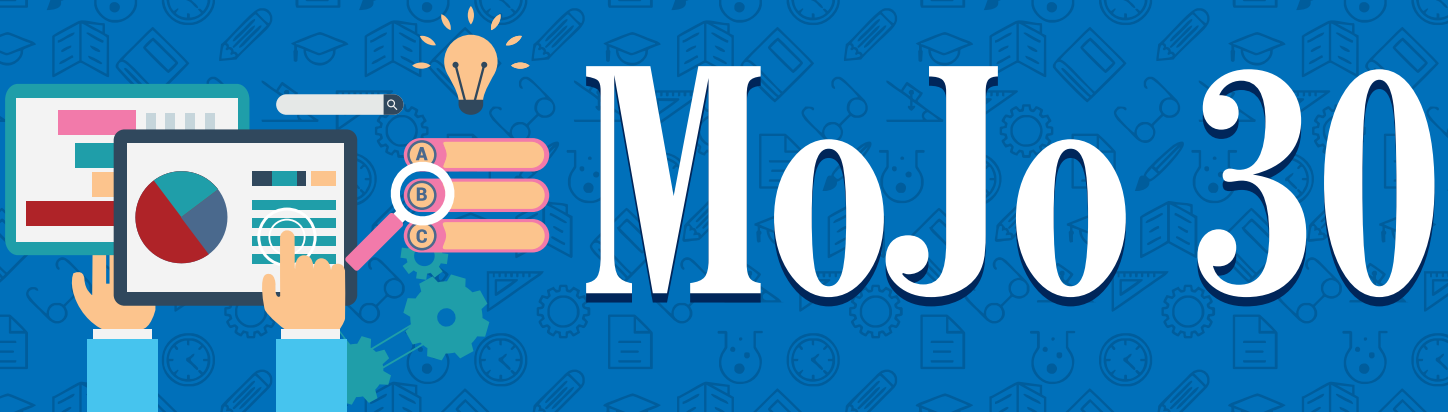
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VICTORY IN A LONG BATTLE FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Women - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

This year shall be remembered as a landmark in Indian military history for years to come. The Supreme Court of India, on February 17, delivered a much-anticipated ruling that [allows women to serve as permanently commissioned \(PC\) officers](#) in 10 combat support arms and services of the Indian Army. The Supreme Court also directed the central Government to rescind the embargo on command appointments for women officers.

This July, the government issued [formal sanction offering PC to women officers](#) of the Indian Army. This is the culmination of a struggle for equal opportunity that began almost 27 years ago when the Army inducted the first batches of women as officers in non-medical corps .

Parley | [Should women be given command posts in the Army?](#)

I call the judgment iconic not only because it allowed women officers equal opportunities to serve in the Indian Army but also because the judgment addressed the issue of regressive mindsets. The onus of implementing this change rests with the leadership, but the direction has been shown.

The Indian armed forces began inducting women in the non-medical branches in the year 1992, as short service commission (SSC) officers. The scheme initially allowed for a five-year service period, which was revised to 14 years. In the armed forces, both men and women opt for the Short Service Commission. However, upon completion of 14 years of service, male officers could get a permanent commission. Women officers who had put in the same number of years of service, were denied this privilege.

In a quest for equality, many officers of Indian Army and Indian Air Force (Lieutenant Colonel Seema Singh was one of the first from the Army) filed cases in the Delhi High Court seeking to remove discrimination between genders. I was one of the petitioners from the Indian Air Force, fighting for Permanent commission (*Jasmine Kaur vs. Union of India WP (C) 8492/2009*). In 2010, the case was adjudicated in favour of granting PC to women officers, thus paving the way forward.

Also read | [Supreme Court allows permanent commission for women in Navy](#)

The Indian Air Force was first among the three services to grant PC to SSC women officers. The Indian Army chose to appeal in the Supreme Court, citing reasons of peculiar service conditions and operational requirements. A notification by the Government of India in 2019, suggested PC to women officers with less than 14 years of service, practically leaving a sizeable set of senior women officers out of the gambit. Now with this judgment, women who don 'The Olives', have finally obtained parity with their male counterparts.

The Supreme Court also issued a directive to ensure that women are not restricted to staff duties. Approximately 30% of women officers in the Indian Army are deployed in combat zones (Civil appeal Nos 9367-9369 of 2011 *Secretary, Ministry Of Defence vs Babita Puniya & Ors.*) performing similar duties like other officers. The policy issued by the government of India in 2019, was discriminatory to exclude them from command positions.

With the grant of PC, women officers will now be entitled to serving till the age of retirement and not forced to look for alternative careers after 14 years. This will provide clarity on their career paths and place women officers on an equal footing with men for promotions, professional growth, and provide job security.

Editorial | [Arms and the women: On gender barrier in Indian Army](#)

Despite forming a relatively minuscule 3.29% of the total strength of the Indian Army, women in all branches of the army have served shoulder to shoulder with male officers in operational field areas (The Indian Air Force has almost 13% women in the officer cadre). Selection for command appointments in the Indian Army eluded women officers earlier. Now, women officers can be considered for command roles, career postings and many other opportunities to distinguish themselves professionally.

A grant of PC will accrue many other employee benefits, as, 'In service career courses' (such as the National Defence College, College of Defence Management, the Army War College, etc), the Defence Services Staff College, options in higher studies (such as a Master of Business Administration or a Master of Technology), pension, ex-servicemen status and consequent benefits to name a few.

In addition, allowing a motivated set of experienced women officers in permanent cadre would be a small way to mitigate the shortage of officers (estimated at 18% of the authorised strength (Civil appeal Nos 9367-9369 of 2011, Secretary, *Ministry Of Defence vs Babita Puniya & Ors.*) in the Indian Army.

The Hindu In Focus Podcast | [The resistance to women in command positions and combat in the army \(and how far we still have to go\)](#)

With women already in combat support arms and Services, is the entry of women in combat arms the logical next step? Is the patriarchal mindset in India the only hurdle in allowing the entry of women into combat arms? Are there social issues in exposing our women to hazardous combat situations or capture by enemy forces? Given the evolving nature of warfare supported by technology, many of us do not consider this a question of gender ability but of performance, opportunity, and a fighting chance. However, each of these questions merits separate discussions, determined by the maturity and mindset of the system.

Countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have been conservative about women in their respective combat arms, while others like the Israeli Defense Forces have achieved widespread integration of women. I am sure we are on the correct path to further integration in future.

Also read | [Supreme Court verdict on permanent commission to women officers: A blow to stereotypical mindset, says lawyer](#)

Before we hail this step, another question needs to be addressed. Will women get the opportunity to directly join the services as permanently commissioned officers? I ask this with knowledge on the rationale behind the introduction of the SSC cadre. The terms of employment of short service commission are subject to change and conversions into PC are based on force requirements. It is possible that based on cadre forecast, an SSC officer may not ever get a chance of converting to PC if there are no vacancies. This policy fairly applies to all SSC officers irrespective of gender. However, it must be noted that for women, the SSC is the only inroad into the armed forces (except the Medical Corps). There is no provision for women to choose defence as a long-term career right at the outset as a PC officer. When parity of allowing entry of

women as permanent cadre is attained, it would truly be a level-playing field in terms of equal opportunity and career advancement.

Jasmine Kaur is Wing Commander (retired), Indian Air Force

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ONE ERROR RECTIFIED, MANY TO GO

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Women - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

In 2005, Parliament amended the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 to bring daughters of coparceners on a par with sons in a joint Hindu family. The law bestowed upon daughters the same rights and liabilities as that of sons. In *Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma* (2020), the Supreme Court held that a coparcener's daughter would become a coparcener in her own right by birth, thereby setting aside the *Prakash v. Phulavati* (2015) judgment that created a condition for a daughter to avail her right of being coparcener only if her father was alive on the date of this amendment.

There is a difference between rights conferred by the [Hindu Succession Act of 1956](#) and the [amendment of 2005](#). In 1956, equal right of succession at par with a son was given to a daughter, but only after the demise of the father or mother. The 2005 amendment, however, gave the right to property to a daughter in a joint Hindu family during the lifetime of the father. As a matter of fact, right of succession is not a confirmed right and can easily be negated by the father or mother by creating a will. The 2005 amendment changed that; the right could no longer be negated.

Also read | [Daughters have equal birthright to inherit property: Supreme Court](#)

Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma is a progressive pronouncement that rectified an error committed by the Supreme Court. In *Prakash v. Phulavati*, the Supreme Court delved into the prospectivity or retrospectivity of the law creating coparcenary rights in favour of daughters. It applied the basic premise that the law is always prospective unless it is retrospective either expressly or by necessary intendment. The court held that as there was no express provision for giving this law a retrospective effect, it cannot be applied retrospectively. It created a condition that the rights under the amendment are applicable only to living daughters of living coparceners as on September 9, 2005; however, it gave no reason as to why this was chosen as a condition. The condition seems to have overstretched the scope of interpretation. The status of a daughter to be subject to her father being alive is apparently a mistake. The death of an individual should not determine the rights of their heirs. If any right had accrued in the daughter's favour by a legislation, the same can't be disturbed by death of her father.

Coming to the 2005 amendment, if the legislature had any doubt about the prospective or retrospective applicability of the right created in favour of the daughter, then it would not have specifically added a proviso to Section 6 subsection (1). The proviso mentions that all those property rights, which have already been settled before December 20, 2004, by way of any transfer, partition, will, etc., shall not get affected by this right. Similarly, the explanation to subsection (5) of Section 6 mentions that this law shall not affect any registered partition deed effected before December 20, 2004. Both the proviso and explanation clearly indicate that this law created rights and entitlements in favour of daughters and an exception was carved out to protect the disturbance, the retrospective application of law could have created.

The Hindu Explains | [What is coparcenary property in Hindu law?](#)

In the present judgment, *Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma*, the court rightly held that as laid down in Section 6 (1) (a), daughter is to be a coparcener by birth; so there is no question of being prospective or retrospective. It is the physical status that matters and should not be linked to a date. Even in the case of unregistered partition deeds executed before December 20, 2004,

the court has opened a new window for daughters. Daughters can claim a right even in an unregistered partition deed which has not been proved conclusively.

Editorial | [Right by birth: On daughters and Hindu succession act](#)

Legislative errors disentitling daughters still exist as seen in the U.P. Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950. Such discrimination is based purely on gender. There is a need to examine all the existing laws and wherever discriminatory practices exist, they need to be amended appropriately.

Jyotika Kalra is Member, National Human Rights Commission. Views expressed are personal

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A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: E-governance - applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential incl. Aadhaar & Digital power

The [Committee of Experts on the Non-Personal Data Governance Framework](#) has recommended in its report, among other things, making privately held non-personal data “open”. The objective is to make such data available for general use, though the committee does lay down conditions for such data transfers. This has raised concerns about state interference in the private data ecosystem. We think that the report is a missed opportunity to address the governance frameworks around what are some of the most important non-personal data sets in a country — those created by government agencies, or those resulting from taxpayer money.

Non-personal data are data that do not identify an individual. Nonetheless, such data can be useful in either framing public policy or creating and providing new services. For example, aggregate data from land registries can tell us a lot about land use patterns. Data related to traffic flows can be used to guide traffic management. Non-personal data are also viewed as critical for development of the AI ecosystem.

Comment | [Towards robust data regulation](#)

Some of the most important non-personal data sets are held by the government, or result from taxpayer funding. There are five reasons why these should be open to the citizens of the country. First, the state should be transparent about information that it has. This will improve accountability. This is one of the reasons why the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, mandates the disclosure of government data on a suo moto basis. Second, if taxpayer money has funded any of the data sets, then it is an obligation of the state to return the fruits of that funding to the taxpayer. Third, by permitting the reuse of government data sets, we avoid the need for duplication. Fourth, government data sets, curated according to publicly verified standards, can lead to increased confidence in data quality and increased usage. Finally, free flow of information can have beneficial effects on society in general.

In theory, we know that the government agrees with this proposition. Besides the RTI Act, we have in place many policies that promote and provide for openness of such data. For instance, one of the nine pillars of the Digital India Policy is “information for all”. The National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP), 2012 requires all non-sensitive information held by public authorities to be made publicly accessible in machine readable formats (subject to conditions). The government has also set up an Open Government Data Platform to provide open access to data sets held by ministries and other agencies of the government. Various States have also either created their own data portals or have provided data sets to the Open Government Data Platform.

Comment | [Treating data as commons](#)

In practice, the quality and quantity of data sets published by the government are still well short of ideal. In addition, the government’s general reticence to make valuable information sets available to the public is well known. There are two reasons for our failure to create an open data-based society. The first is lack of clarity in some of the provisions of the NDSAP or the relevant implementation guidelines. The second is the inability to enforce guidelines appropriately, which has meant that data sets released by governments are often inconsistent, incomplete, outdated, published in non-machine readable or inconsistent formats, include duplicates, and lack quality (or any) metadata, thereby reducing re-usability. The

Gopalakrishnan Committee could have evaluated what is going wrong with existing policies and practice pertaining to government data, and deliberated on how these can be addressed. Instead, the report largely focuses on the dangers posed by data collection by private sector entities.

Without going into the merits or demerits of taking an interventionist approach to the data ecosystem, many of the concerns that should be addressed in the report that are central to the governance of the data ecosystem have sadly remained in the background. For instance, India's cybersecurity framework continues to be woefully inadequate, while even the Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee report of 2018 highlighted the need to restrict the growing power of the state to carry out surveillance.

Comment | [Moving beyond geopolitics](#)

Since data governance is a relatively new concept in India, the government would be better served in taking an incremental approach to any perceived problems. This should begin with reforming how the government itself deals with citizens' data. This would engender greater trust in data governance practices and, importantly, allow the development of state capacity to govern the data ecosystem.

Rishab Bailey and Renuka Sane are researchers at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, Delhi

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TREATING DATA AS COMMONS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: E-governance - applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential incl. Aadhaar & Digital power

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The Gopalakrishnan Committee set up by the government on developing a governance framework for non-personal data recently put out its draft report for public consultation. The report's main purpose is to ensure wide sharing and availability of data in society. To ensure that companies share the required data, it was found necessary to develop strong conceptual and legal basis for data-sharing requirements and obligations.

To understand why data sharing is needed, and its importance to a strong and fair digital economy, we must first recognise the infrastructural nature of data. Industrial age infrastructure — roads, electricity, etc. — were often publicly owned. Even if there was some private role, these were run as closely regulated public utilities. The idea was to ensure widespread availability of such infrastructural elements to all, and avoid wasteful duplications. Society's data have a similar nature for a digital economy.

The digital age came with useful digital services that everyone lapped up. Many of these services were free or highly subsidised. The infrastructure versus over-the-top services distinction may initially have not been too significant. But that difference becomes important as digital corporations begin to dominate all sectors, including important ones such as education and health.

That very few corporations have vertically integrated all the digital components involved in delivery of any digital service is the reason for their becoming such huge global monopolies. Seven out of the top 10 companies globally today have a data-centric model. Such unsustainable concentration of digital power has a significant geopolitical dimension, with complete domination globally of U.S. and Chinese companies. At the national level its deleterious effect is of exploitation of consumers and small economic actors, and of strangulating competition and innovation. There are calls worldwide to break up Big Tech; to moderate their monopoly power. Their monopoly is best addressed by separating the infrastructural elements of digital service provision from the business of digital service delivery. There are two key infrastructural components of a digital economy: data and cloud computing. The Gopalakrishnan report and this article focus on the infrastructural element of data.

Infrastructures are to be equitably provided for all businesses. Data have similar characteristics. But today, dominant digital corporations are building exclusive control over any sector's data as their key business advantage. Start-ups try to ape the same mode. What is needed, however, is to treat data as infrastructure, or 'commons', so that data are widely available for all businesses. The digital businesses then shift their key business advantage from exclusive access to data to employing available data for devising digital services for consumers' benefit.

The Gopalakrishnan committee takes such an infrastructural view of data. Data collected from various communities are considered to be 'owned' by the relevant community. Such 'community ownership' means that the data should be shared back with all those who need it in society, whether to develop domestic digital businesses or for producing important digital public goods. With a robust domestic data/AI industry, dependence on U.S. and Chinese companies will reduce.

It is for these purposes that the Gopalakrishnan committee proposes the concept of 'community data'. Only the data collected from non-privately owned sources, from society or community sources, have to be shared when requested for. Data from privately owned sources remain private. Since a community requires a legally recognisable body to articulate its data ownership claim, the committee introduces the concept of community trustees that could be various bodies representative of the community.

Data collectors are considered as data custodians that will use and secure data as per the best interests of the community concerned. Data trusts are data infrastructures that will enable data sharing, sector-wise, or across sectors, and which can be run by various kinds of third-party bodies. The committee recommends a new legislation, because ensuring and enforcing data sharing will require sufficient legal backing. A Non-Personal Data Authority is also envisaged to enable and regulate all the envisaged data-sharing activities.

India is the first country to come up with a comprehensive framework in this area. Starting early in this important digital policy and governance area may just provide a formidable first mover advantage for India to acquire its rightful place in the digital world.

Parminder Jeet Singh works with the Bangalore-based NGO IT for Change. He is a member of the Gopalakrishnan Committee. Views are personal

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EDUCATION AND THE TOWN-COUNTRY DIVIDE

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

(Written by P V Krishna Bhat and G Krishna Kumar)

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) has said that the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) will lay a strong foundation for “Naya Bharat”. This is the first education policy after 34 years — that’s too long a wait and the present system was not meeting the society’s changing needs.

More than a century ago, Maharishi Aurobindo said, “It is an education proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of; not indeed something faithful merely to the past but to the developing soul of India to her future need to the greatness of her coming self-creation to her eternal spirit”.

The Kothari Commission Report (1964-1966), a fine piece of work that was never implemented properly, suggested that India’s expenditure on education should be increased to 6 per cent of GDP. Isn’t it intriguing that even in 2020, we are aspiring to spend 6 per cent of GDP on education?

The Kothari commission report had suggested, “the strengthening of centres of advanced study and the setting up of a small number of major universities which would aim to achieve the highest international standards”. This is relevant even today. Sample this: We have 993 universities and 39,991 colleges in the country. But none of them figures among the world’s top-ranked universities. It is beyond doubt that there is a need to improve all the universities and colleges in the country. But improving all of them at one go is likely to be an impossible task. The government should identify a select few universities and provide them with all the support to see that they develop as centres of excellence comparable with the best universities in the world. A time-bound road-map to this effect will be required.

Opinion | [NEP 2020 is a milestone in India’s journey to becoming a knowledge superpower](#)

Considering the transformation that the NEP aims to achieve, the government must embark on a large scale re-orientation programme for teachers. The teachers need to accept and assimilate the transformation for effective implementation of the policy. The transformation of education in Germany is an apt example. After the unification, the teaching faculty in East Germany was put on a six months re-orientation programme in order to assimilate the democratic values of the government.

Notwithstanding the current COVID19 crisis that has led to reverse migration from cities to the rural hinterland, we have a serious issue on migration from rural to urban areas. India’s urban population was 27.81 per cent in 2001, it had crossed 34 per cent in 2019 and is expected to be 38 per cent in 2020. For this trend of urban migration to be arrested, we need a renewed focus on agriculture, farming and allied sectors – while also concentrating on jobs and education.

In the present system, students with a rural background who pursue higher education end up migrating to cities for jobs. They find themselves alienated from the rural surroundings despite having a rural background. It is only appropriate that such students and youth from rural areas are provided with leadership training that will enable them to remain in the rural areas and contribute towards the overall development and economic growth of rural areas. Such leaders can make a big impact on allied industries as well.

The Kothari commission report stated that “Education for agriculture and research in agriculture and allied sciences should be given a high priority in the scheme of educational reconstruction. Energetic and imaginative steps are required to draw a reasonable proportion of talent to go in for advanced study and research in the agricultural sciences”. NEP 2020 emphasises knowledge systems, including tribal knowledge, and thereby brings back focus on the agriculture sector.

The National Research Foundation (NRF) is expected to support research in agriculture by coordinating between researchers and other stakeholders. We should learn from countries like Australia and New Zealand, which have attained high productivity in agriculture and allied sectors mainly due to increased funding on research initiatives for improving agricultural productivity. No wonder Australia counts on agriculture as the fastest-growing industry — at over 16 per cent annually. Australia envisions its agriculture sector to be worth \$100 billion by 2030. Can we have a target for India as well?

A recent report states that of the 13.77 lakh anganwadi centres, over 3.6 lakh do not have toilets and 1.59 lakh do not have drinking water facilities. Over 1.75 lakh positions are vacant in anganwadis. The government should fix these issues on a war footing.

It is heartening that NEP 2020 aims to support teachers and students in rural areas. However, bringing the rural students on par with the urban students in terms of teaching facilities and infrastructure will be a challenge considering the wide disparities in the socioeconomic and infrastructural facilities available to students.

In order to provide a level playing field for the students from rural and tribal backgrounds, necessary bridge infrastructure must be put in place. The 1,000/day target set by the PM Modi for equipping all villages with fibre optic connectivity is a step in the right direction.

Considering that the target for Bharat net implementation has been continuously delayed, let's hope the revised target is met. In addition to the digital infrastructure, we must have localised content available for teachers and students. It is equally important that physical infrastructure, be it roads or un-interrupted electricity, be made available in the rural hinterland.

Bhat is Chancellor, Odisha Central University, Koraput and G Krishna Kumar is an ICT professional and columnist based in Bengaluru. Views are personal

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APPROPRIATE STRATEGY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA BANNING MORE CHINA APPS INCLUDING PUBG

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: E-governance - applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential incl. Aadhaar & Digital power

The [blocking of a hundred more Chinese mobile applications](#) suggests that the Indian government, not for the first time in recent months, wants to make it amply clear that it will not shy away from leveraging its position as a massive market for technology in dealing with potentially dangerous geopolitical issues. Since June, when border tensions between India and China turned ugly, the government has till now stepped in thrice to block many Chinese applications in one go. In the latest such decision, on Wednesday, it blocked 118 apps, including the widely popular gaming app, PUBG, as well as WeChat Work and Baidu, owing to these being “prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of State and public order”. Over 200 Chinese apps, which were accessed by millions of Indian users, have been blocked in all till date. The decision has been taken based on several complaints, a press release said, of these apps “stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users’ data in an unauthorized manner to servers which have locations outside India”. It could be argued that loss of access to the Indian market will sharply affect the ambitions of the Internet giants emerging from China, but it remains to be seen if this tech-side intervention is effective as a counter in a geopolitical fight. Also, how far can India go to keep the Chinese players, who are well entrenched in the global tech supply chain, off the Indian market without prejudicing its own growth?

It is difficult to argue against decisions that are taken on the plank of national security, especially one arrived at by invoking the government’s power under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, a section upheld by the courts previously. But it would be well argued that the Indian approach should have followed due process, where the focus was on ensuring compliance with the law. Instead, the Indian response to complaints has been to straight away block these apps en masse. Meanwhile, millions of Indians who were engaging with these platforms, some gainfully, have to scramble for alternatives. To add to this, the [data protection law](#), a dire need in this age, is not yet there. All this does not bode well for a country with aspirations of global leadership of tech, an industry which thrives on global networks and rules. Ironically, China, which for years has unleashed widespread censorship of information and kept apps from outside off its Internet, has found a rare chance to take the moral high ground. It has [criticised India's move](#), accusing it of “abusing the concept of national security”. The last thing India needs is to be compared with China as far as its Internet regulation goes. It certainly needs a more considered approach to tech regulation.

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NO CORRELATION BETWEEN CT VALUES AND COVID-19 SEVERITY

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

Inaccurate indicator: The RT-PCR test presently being conducted is qualitative in nature and may only give a rough estimate of viral load.

Currently in India, RT-PCR tests can tell if a person is infected with novel coronavirus or not. It does not reveal the amount of virus (viral load in scientific parlance) present in the person. But there is an indirect way of knowing the amount of virus that a person might be harbouring.

The PCR test amplifies the genetic material from coronavirus through multiple cycles. Since coronavirus has RNA, it is first converted into DNA, and each cycle of amplification doubles the amount of DNA. If there is just one DNA molecule to start with, the amount of DNA after 30 cycles of amplification will be 2³⁰ (2 raised to 30) times, or one billion molecules. If there is more genetic material to begin with, then fewer cycles of amplification would be sufficient to detect the DNA.

Writing in her blog, Dr. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw of Biocon says that when she got her sample tested for coronavirus infection with RT-PCR, she asked for the cycle threshold (Ct) value to assess her viral load. She decided to home quarantine under tele-supervision as the Ct value was 23 (meaning only 23 cycles of amplification were needed for DNA detection). She then says: "My RT-PCR test on day 10 was still positive but with a Ct value of 33, suggesting a very low and non-infectious viral load generally attributed to dead virus shedding."

While the cycle threshold value can be suggestive of the amount of virus in an infected person, there is no reliable way of correlating the Ct value with COVID-19 disease severity or infectiousness.

"There are no studies to show correlation of disease severity and Ct value. A low Ct value indicates higher viral load, and this may be correlated to a person being more able to transmit the virus (infectious). I must caution that transmission depends on many other factors, so there is no direct correlation," virologist Dr. Shahid Jameel, CEO of DBT-Wellcome Trust India Alliance says in email to *The Hindu*.

"In my view, there is a relationship between cycle threshold value and the probability of shedding infectious virus, the lower the number the higher the likelihood. But there is no real evidence-based established number where you can say, above 30 [Ct value], you will definitely not be infectious. That said, by [Ct value] 35 you will be unlikely to be infectious," Dr. Gagandeep Kang, Professor of Microbiology at CMC Vellore says in an email to *The Hindu*.

A paper published in the *European Journal of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases* says: "Patients with Ct above 33-34 are not contagious and thus can be discharged from hospital care or strict confinement for non-hospitalised patients."

In a July 27 letter to the Chief Secretary of Karnataka, Dr. Balram Bhargava, Director-General of ICMR, says that there are "no reliable studies to definitively prove a direct correlation between disease severity/infectiousness and Ct values."

Unlike measurements made using a blood sample, real-time RT-PCR is not an absolute but only

a relative measure of viral load. “RT-PCR test presently being conducted is qualitative in nature. Ct values may give only a rough estimate of viral load,” Dr Bhargava says.

The Ct values can vary depending on how the sample has been collected. Very often, a poorly collected nasopharyngeal or oropharyngeal swab can have very high Ct values, thus leading to incorrect conclusions about infectiousness or disease severity.

“Ct values are also determined by technical competence of the person performing the test, calibration of equipment and analytical skills of the interpreters,” Dr. Bhargava notes. There have been umpteen instances when people have tested positive one day and negative the next day and again tested positive another day.

The Ct values can also vary depending on the kind of specimens collected from the same person. For instance, nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal samples collected from the same person can have different viral loads, making Ct value a less reliable measure to assess a person’s infectiousness or disease severity. Also, the amount of virus present in nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal samples can vary when collected at different times even on a single day.

Patients in early symptomatic phase may have relatively less viral load and hence have high Ct value, which may subsequently change. “In such cases, high Ct values will give a false sense of security,” Dr. Bhargava says. “Viral loads will increase with time and then go down. It would be a sort of bell-shaped curve,” elaborates Dr. Jameel.

Besides the amount of virus present in a person, disease severity depends on host factors. “Some patients with low viral load may suffer from very severe disease due to triggering of the immunological responses. Hence high Ct values [reflecting low viral load] may give a false sense of security,” the Dr. Bhargava adds.

The high sensitivity and the nature of PCR test that looks only at the genetic material and not the virus itself can produce false positives even when the person has fully recovered as seen in over 260 people in South Korea who tested positive after recovering. But later studies found that PCR was detecting just the dead viral fragments. High Ct values may thus mean either low levels of virus or fragments of viral RNA.

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NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 IS A REVOLUTIONARY REFORM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY – PRAKASH JAVADEKAR

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

Mumbai | Pune: 5th September 2020

Union Minister Shri Prakash Javadekar has termed the National Education Policy 2020 as a revolutionary reform of the 21st Century. Delivering the key-note address at the Centenary Year Teachers' Day Celebration of the Parle Tilak Vidyalyay Association of Mumbai through video link, he said early childhood education, enquiry-based education, teacher training, foundational and numeric literacy, have all been laid emphasis on. The Minister said NEP 2020 will empower our youth, which will take the nation forward in the 21st century. "The policy is such that it will make the teaching – learning experience enjoyable for both students and teachers" he added.





Shri Javadekar expressed confidence that India would double the Gross Enrolment Ratio within the next 10 years from the current level of about 25%. He said students across the country have become aspirational and economic growth has pushed parental earnestness to provide good education for their children. Wider geographical spread of higher education institutions, especially covering rural areas and increased demand would be the critical factors that will improve GER in India, he added.

The Minister began his address by invoking Lokmanya Tilak's views on education as means of creating awareness, He said the new policy lays emphasis on foundational and numerical literacy and institutes like National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) would give access to education to all. The Minister underlined the importance of Early Childhood Education as the main characteristic of NEP. He said, 3 -8 years of Age Group is to build Cognitive skills, curiosity and mental capacity. He also said that the education with subject understanding is important rather than rote learning.

While activity based learning is emphasized at the early states, 9th to 12th education would focus on detailed, relevant and new knowledge, which will induce scientific temper among children. Shri Javadekar said research and innovation are key to enabling our education mould globally competitive citizens. He said 3,000 'Atal Tinkering Labs' are running successfully to encourage research based innovation, which is essential for building an Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

Speaking about the role of teachers in the society, the Minister said " a teacher does not simply teach through books or black boards. Ideal teacher is the one who instills values in students through his/her conduct". Four year integrated B.Ed degree is being introduced to provide holistic training programme for teachers, which will include practical teaching skills. It will encourage teachers to become teachers by choice and not as a last resort, he added.

Shri Javadekar said, the National Education Policy has been formulated after extensive consultations. Recalling his days as the HRD Minister, he said 13-14 subject experts had

worked with great sincerity and zeal under the leadership of Dr. K Kasturirangan.

About Parle Tilak Vidyalay Association

Parle Tilak Vidyalaya Association is an educational organization operating mainly in Mumbai suburbs. On June 9, 2020, the organization entered its centenary year. Inspired by the great personality of Lokmanya Tilak, some patriotic citizens of Vile Parle founded the Parle Tilak Vidyalaya Association (PTVA). The first Marathi school, Parle Tilak Vidyalaya, was started on June 9, 1921. There were only 4 students in the school initially. Today, the institute has 5 schools, 3 colleges and a Management Institute, with a total enrollment of over 20,000 students. Among the alumni of Parle Tilak Vidyalay Association are veterans like Maharashtra's beloved writer Pu. La. Deshpande, Shetkari Sanghatana founder Sharad Joshi, former Indian Air Force chief Air Chief Marshal Pradip Naik (R) . The institution has also produced many politicians, social activists, entrepreneurs and actors.

(PIB Mum-MD/ RT / DW/PM)

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EMPOWER THE YOUTH FIRST

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Human resources, Youth, Sports and related issues

Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives to attend the Independence Day celebrations at the historic Red Fort in New Delhi on August 15, 2020. | Photo Credit: [Reuters](#)

On [Independence Day, the Prime Minister belaboured his government's leitmotif](#) of an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. In today's India, we can achieve that goal of self-reliance only if we enhance our citizens' capabilities. Given our demographic composition, we must begin by empowering our youth.

The 2014 National Youth Policy (NYP) defined youth as persons between 15 and 29 years. This cohort accounted for 27.5% of the population then. According to the NYP report, the Central government spends about 2,710 per youth on education, skill development, employment, healthcare and food subsidies. The total amount is pegged at more than 90,000 crore. Assuming that States spend an equal amount, the total investment in our youth would be under 1% of the GDP, hardly commensurate with their population and potential.

A World Bank report pegged the projected cost (read: loss) of not investing in children and youth at 4% of the GDP every year. Of this, the costs of unemployment account for 0.6%. As of 2017-18, youth participation in India's labour force was 38.3%. Drawing from the 2018 State of Working India Report, we peg the youth unemployment rate to be at least 18.3% (3.47 crore youths). About 30% of youth fall under the 'neither in employment nor in education' category and 33% of India's skilled youth are unemployed. Further, around 50 lakh youth are expected to be entering the workforce annually. Following the COVID-19 lockdown, the CMIE estimated a loss of 14 crore jobs in April alone of which 2.7 crore concerned youth. These numbers, coupled with impending grim implications of the pandemic, have landed us in uncharted turbulent economic waters.

The aspirational younger generation born after 1991 invariably hold the key to India's economic and political future. India has just a decade's time to seize the opportunity and realise this youth demographic dividend. Therefore, it is an appropriate time to launch an Indian Youth Guarantee (IYG) programme, akin to the European Union Youth Guarantee (EU-YG) but tuned to our country's context. EU-YG emerged in 2010 at a time when youth unemployment rates were soaring above 20%. An IYG initiative, with statutory backing, can function as a facilitatory framework for ensuring gainful and productive engagement of youth.

At a time of fiscal stress, one way to allocate budgetary resources would be to create a Youth Component Plan, earmarking a specific percentage of funds under a separate head on the lines of the Special Component Plan for the Scheduled Castes and the Tribal Sub-Plan. The Youth Component Plan would be formulated by States/Union Territories/Central Ministries to channelise flow of outlays and benefits proportional to the percentage of youth population based on sub-regional requirements.

IYG should not be just another budgetary scheme. Its strategic goal should be to ensure that within a fixed time frame, young people graduating from college or losing a job either find a good quality job suited to their education and experience or acquire skills required to find a job through an apprenticeship. An important aspect of IYG should be to rope in the district administration and local bodies for effective outcomes. Existing youth schemes and skilling infrastructure need to be dovetailed and streamlined while leveraging industry to enable an in situ empowerment of youth.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been very effective in providing rural livelihood security and social protection. Yet only about 4% of youth in the labour force have been impacted by it. While an urban youth employment programme will be a new intervention, we believe that rural youth employment should be instituted alongside MGNREGA. IYG needs to be implemented across the country to address youth unemployment particularly given the rapid structural changes in the economy.

How would such a guarantee identify the needs of the youth? The Youth Development Index (YDI) in India serves as an advisory and monitory tool for youth development. It helps recognise priority areas, gaps and alternative approaches specific to each State. The index also packs a new dimension of social inclusion to assess the inclusiveness of societal progress due to prevalence of systemic inequalities. In short, YDI can be revisited and deployed to play a vital role in crafting a region-specific IYG. A focus on our youth is the first step towards self-reliance. It is time we summon the political will to guarantee our youth a viable future.

C.R. Kesavan is a former Vice President of the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development. K.R. Vignesh Karthik is a doctoral researcher at King's College, London

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40% CHILDREN NOT FULLY VACCINATED: NSO REPORT

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

Although almost all children in India are vaccinated against tuberculosis, and receive their birth dose of polio vaccine, two out of five children do not complete their immunisation programme, according to the 'Health in India' report recently published by the National Statistical Organisation (NSO).

Most of these children remain unprotected against measles, and partially protected against a range of other diseases.

In the national capital, less than half of all children have been given all eight required vaccines.

The report is based on the 75th round of the National Sample Survey (July 2017-June 2018) on household social consumption related to health.

Across the country, only 59.2% of children under five years are fully immunised, according to the NSO report. This contradicts the Centre's Health Management Information System portal data, which claimed that full immunisation coverage for 2017-18 stood at 86.7%.

Eight doses

Full immunisation means that a child receives a cocktail of eight vaccine doses in the first year of life.

About 97% of children across the country received at least one vaccination — mostly BCG and/or the first dose of OPV at birth — a statistic that remains steady across income groups and geographies. However, only 67% of children are protected against measles.

Only 58% got their polio booster dose, while 54% got their DPT booster dose.

Among States, Manipur (75%), Andhra Pradesh (73.6%) and Mizoram (73.4%) recorded the highest rates of full immunisation. At the other end of the spectrum lies Nagaland, where only 12% of children received all vaccinations, followed by Puducherry (34%) and Tripura (39.6%).

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DIGITAL DISCONNECT: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON ONLINE LEARNING AND DIGITAL DIVIDE

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

The full report of the NSO's survey of '[Household Social Consumption on Education in India](#)', for July 2017-June 2018, highlights the poor state of computer and Internet access in several States. The disparities are glaring among different economic strata as well. The [digital chasm that separates the privileged from the deprived](#) remains unbridged years after the broadband policy of 2004, and its effects are painfully evident during the pandemic as students struggle to log on to online classes. While some poorly connected States may have improved since the survey period, the gaps are so stark that any development could only be modest. Only in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala did the survey find Internet access exceeding 50% for urban and rural households taken together, while Punjab, Haryana and Uttarakhand exceeded 40%, unimpressive numbers still. Large States — Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka — had access below 20%. In today's milieu, net access is critical, considering that even where mobile phones and laptops are available — some States provide them under student welfare programmes — they cannot be meaningfully used in its absence. If net connectivity is 5% to 10% in rural Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and West Bengal, only a slim minority can hope to do any academic work. Many remote locations have reliability problems and power deficits, making it a challenge to keep gadgets operational even offline.

Prime Minister Modi has acknowledged the digital divide by announcing in his Independence Day address that all [villages would be connected with optical fibre cable](#) in 1,000 days. This target, reflecting enhanced ambition, follows the one set in 2011 to link panchayats through a national optical fibre network — to raise administrative capacities through information infrastructure. Evidently, successive governments have dropped the ball. States have not shown the alacrity to make a big leap either, and the deficit has now dealt a blow to students. To make up for lost time, connectivity for education must be prioritised. Mapping the needs of each district based on the NSO data will help identify areas where children do need equipment and connectivity. Such efforts have been launched globally in the wake of COVID-19, some in partnership with the telecom sector to leverage its capacity for surveys and mapping. Some companies in India have made the valuable suggestion that their used desktop computers could be refurbished and donated, for which governments need to open a programme. On the network technology front, a new gigabit speed 'wireless fibre' standard is being viewed in developed countries as a leapfrog option to link inaccessible areas; it involves high capacity spectrum (E and V bands), and is commercially not contentious. The government needs to look at all possibilities and go into overdrive to bridge the digital divide.

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Suresh Nambath

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SELF HELP GROUPS ACROSS THE COUNTRY BEING GEARED UP TO PREPARE THE VILLAGE POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN FOR INTEGRATION WITH THE GRAM PANCHAYAT DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

The Article 243G of the Constitution intended to empower the Gram Panchayats (GPs) by enabling the State Governments to devolve powers and authority in respect of all 29 Subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule for local planning and implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice. The local bodies (GPs) play a significant role in the effective implementation of flagship schemes on subjects of national importance, for transformation of rural India. In 2015, the Fourteenth Finance Commission grants were devolved to GPs that provided them with an enormous opportunity to plan for their development themselves. Since then, local bodies, across the country are expected to prepare context specific, need based Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP).

Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) brings together both the citizens and their elected representatives in the decentralized planning processes. GPDP is expected to reflect the development issues, perceived needs and priorities of the community, including that of the marginalized sections. Apart from the demand related to basic infrastructure and services, resource development and convergence of departmental schemes, GPDP has potential to address the social issues. GPDP is conducted from 2nd October to 31st December, every year across the country, under the People's Plan Campaign (PPC).

Since last two years, the PPC guidelines and the joint advisory issued by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Ministry of Rural Development, has mandated Self Help Groups and their federations under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) to participate in the annual GPDP planning process and prepare the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP). VPRP is a comprehensive demand plan prepared by the Self Help Group (SHG) network and their federations for projecting their demands and local area development which needs to be integrated with the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). The VPRP is presented in the Gram Sabha meetings from Oct. to Dec. every year.

This planning exercise is an integral component of the convergence effort between the DAY-NRLM and the Local Self-Government Institutions (Panchayati Raj Institutions). Circulars/advisories have been issued by MoPR and MoRD in 2018-19 and 2019-20 on the preparation of VPRP and its integration into GPDP. The process allows poor families, who are members of SHGs formed under DAY-NRLM, to raise their demands in a participatory method and submit the final plan to the Gram Panchayats for consideration. It starts with plans prepared by the SHGs, consolidated by the VOs and finally a comprehensive plan prepared at the level of the Gram Panchayat. The final VPRP would be submitted in the Gram Sabhas held for GPDP.

Objectives of VPRP are three-fold

Components of VPRP

Demands under VPRP are categorized into five major components:

Training on VPRP for State Missions

With the current Covid-19 situation, DAY-NRLM designed an online training program to train all State Missions across the country on VPRP, in partnership with Kudumbashree (National Resource Organisation), National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad and Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

A set of ready to use tools, training modules, audio/videos and experience sharing videos etc. were developed as resource materials for the online VPRP training, based on the Kudumbashree NRO's experience in preparation of village poverty reduction plans in 5 states namely – Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh where pilot projects on PRI-CBO convergence have been implemented with their support. Resource material was shared with the states, which were amended as per the states needs and translate in the local language. A web-based application to monitor the progress of trainings by State Missions has also been developed.

The trainings were conducted in two phases for the staff and other resource persons from 34 states and UTs. State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRD) and other partner agencies had also participated in the virtual training. The first phase of training was conducted from 13th to 25th August 2020, where 11,687 participants were trained. The first phase of the training focused on building understanding on VPRP and GPDP concepts as well as the process for preparation each component, final plan consolidation and submission in Gram Sabha and role of State Missions. Despite the inherent limitations of virtual trainings, the overall response from participants was positive and encouraging. After completion of the Phase 1, the participants had conducted a small pilot exercise on the process, with a small sample of SHGs and one Village Organisation (VO) to learn the process.

The second phase of the training (one day each for each State) was conducted from 3rd to 5th of September, 2020 for the State Missions, where 10,583 participants were trained. Phase 2 was focused on sharing the action plans for rolling out VPRP including a session on monitoring the roll out of the VPRP through MIS developed.

These trained Resource Persons will in-turn impart training to the Community Resource Persons and they will be facilitating the SHGs and VOs in preparing the VPRPs, which will then be consolidated and presented by VOs at Gram Sabha meetings for integration with GPDP.

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POLICY LESSONS IN TAMIL NADU'S LANGUAGE FORMULA

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

The New Education Policy misses the vital empirical evidence of Tamil Nadu following a language formula that is distinctly at variance with that of Delhi for the past 50 years and yet achieving significant positive social and economic changes. That many are oblivious of it is surprising.

It was the decision of C.N. Annadurai, who realised the Dravidian movement's dream of achieving governmental power, that beyond Tamil and English (in order of preference) no other language would be taught in the schools of Tamil Nadu either as a language or medium of instruction. The far-sightedness of this decision can be better appreciated if one goes through the language policy adopted by various developed countries.

National Education Policy | [Why has language been a sensitive matter in Tamil Nadu?](#)

Most countries follow a one-language formula (invariably mother tongue) for teaching children in the primary classes. On reaching middle school they are given a chance to learn one more language, mostly English. As there is no imposition through schools, voluntary learning of other languages is widely prevalent in these countries. Be it students of literature, sociology, or people involved in international trade, their knowledge of five or six languages is quite normal.

All countries faced with the enormous challenge posed by the new century, invariably give preference to the English language after their mother tongue. Japan and Singapore can be cited as two countries which handle language policy as a strategic tool to achieve socio-economic development. Singapore's success in this area is phenomenal and closely comparable to the situation in India. It was the mission of Lee Kuan Yew, the architect of modern Singapore, giving equal status to English and mother tongue as a prerequisite not only to work closely with the international community but also to bring in big ticket changes. In many ways this can be compared to Annadurai's mission.

Lee Kuan Yew attributed the international acclaim Singapore received for its success mainly to its two-language formula. Though Chinese by birth, his elitist family spoke English at home. Having studied in English schools and receiving his higher education in Cambridge, he understood the importance of English for the then undeveloped society in coping with international competition.

Also read | [T.N. Chief Minister rejects three-language formula in National Education Policy](#)

Importantly, Lee Kuan Yew realised that a multicultural society such as Singapore could enhance its status only if each of its cultural groups felt that it was on a par with others. He viewed that the lingua franca of the country should be equidistant to all cultural groups, thereby creating fair competition and opportunities. Only in this background were Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English declared as common languages with the lingua franca being English.

The mainstay of Annadurai's argument, while insisting that all the national languages should be made official languages and English should be the common link language, was that the official language should be equidistant to all the members of a multilingual society. English would fit the bill for both students of Hindi and Tamil. Making Hindi alone as the official language would

create disparity among various linguistic groups other than the Hindi-speaking population which will result in partial treatment, giving unfair advantage to the Hindi-speaking population. Annadurai was against this injustice.

Editorial | [Language of unity: on rejection of the three-language formula](#)

Annadurai was also particular that English is the language we communicate with a larger world. The American example he cited during a parliamentary debate is worth mentioning: "When USA emerged as a nation only 20% of the people went from the British Isles...Yet America has chosen English as the official language."

What Annadurai dreamed of as a language policy for 'the Dravidian land' was actually implemented in Singapore by Lee Kuan Yew. Singapore had much more justification to adopt Chinese as its sole official language than India insisting on Hindi being the sole official language. Even today the population of Hindi-speaking people has not crossed 50% in India; in Singapore, 74.2% of the population is Chinese, 13.2% Malays and 9.2% Indians. If Lee Kuan Yew had wished he could have well declared Chinese to be the sole official language and satisfied the Chinese who were in a majority. He could have used this as a nationalistic tool and cemented his place politically forever. But he resisted this temptation.

He not only selected English but also recognised languages of every social group. He mandated that each Singaporean should learn their respective mother tongue along with English. He was of the firm view that only the roots one has in his/her mother tongue would be shaping his/her future personality.

The world celebrates the decision made by Lee Kuan Yew after taking into consideration the possibilities, limitations and challenges faced by a third world country. They praise him for his two-language policy which prepared Singaporeans in advance for globalisation. Have the 'experts' ever discussed the contribution of Annadurai's two-language formula in the background of Tamil Nadu being one of the developed States in India despite not possessing a trade and big capital like Gujarat or Maharashtra or having water resources and land fertility like Kerala and Punjab or the political bargaining power by sheer size and population by States such as Uttar Pradesh? And when will they be discussing the Indian government's failure in the language policy in the backdrop of inequalities prevailing among societies since Independence?

Though comparable to Singapore in far-sightedness and in the forefront as far as India is concerned, in the present scenario, Tamil Nadu's education standards are not comparable to Singapore's in terms of outcomes. Our students suffer a serious handicap while dealing with English and Tamil languages. And they do not have command over either. Yet this is not the failure of the two-language formula *per se* but of its implementation and the present Indian educational ecosystem.

Even teaching in the mother tongue or the teaching of two languages is filled with challenges, does India take into account the challenges in teaching three languages? If India is really interested in the new education policy capable of creating new generations, Delhi can acquire that vision only by studying the educational ecosystem throughout the world and comparing it with the strengths and weaknesses of Tamil Nadu's. Working towards the possibility of implementing the two-language formula successfully throughout India would throw light not only on India's education policy but also on its official language policy.

Translated by Venu Mani. E-mail: samas@hindutamil.co.in

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FOREIGN FUNDS & NGOS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

The story so far: The licences of 13 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been suspended under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, this year. Their FCRA certificates were suspended and bank accounts frozen. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said it had received “serious adverse inputs” regarding the working of several NGOs which come under the ambit of the FCRA in tribal areas. The licences of at least two NGOs working in Jharkhand have been suspended.

What is the FCRA?

The FCRA regulates foreign donations and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect internal security. First enacted in 1976, it was amended in 2010 when a slew of new measures were adopted to regulate foreign donations. The FCRA is applicable to all associations, groups and NGOs which intend to receive foreign donations. It is mandatory for all such NGOs to register themselves under the FCRA. The registration is initially valid for five years and it can be renewed subsequently if they comply with all norms. Registered associations can receive foreign contribution for social, educational, religious, economic and cultural purposes. Filing of annual returns, on the lines of Income Tax, is compulsory. In 2015, the MHA notified new rules, which required NGOs to give an undertaking that the acceptance of foreign funds is not likely to prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India or impact friendly relations with any foreign state and does not disrupt communal harmony. It also said all such NGOs would have to operate accounts in either nationalised or private banks which have core banking facilities to allow security agencies access on a real time basis.

Who cannot receive foreign donations?

Members of the legislature and political parties, government officials, judges and media persons are prohibited from receiving any foreign contribution. However, in 2017 the MHA, through the Finance Bill route, amended the 1976-repealed FCRA law paving the way for political parties to receive funds from the Indian subsidiary of a foreign company or a foreign company in which an Indian holds 50% or more shares.

The amendment, according to legal experts, followed accusations that the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress had been receiving foreign funds for political activities from the U.K.-based Vedanta Group from 2004 to 2012. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), a public advocacy group, had filed a public interest litigation petition at the Delhi High Court in 2013 against both parties for violating FCRA norms by accepting foreign funds. Both parties challenged a High Court order, which had termed the donations illegal in 2014, and moved the Supreme Court. They withdrew the petitions after the FCRA was amended retrospectively.

How else can one receive foreign funding?

The other way to receive foreign contributions is by applying for prior permission. It is granted for receipt of a specific amount from a specific donor for carrying out specific activities or projects. But the association should be registered under statutes such as the Societies Registration Act, 1860, the Indian Trusts Act, 1882, or Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956. A letter of commitment from the foreign donor specifying the amount and purpose is also required. In 2017, the MHA suspended the FCRA of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), one of India's

largest public health advocacy groups, on grounds of using “foreign funds” to lobby with parliamentarians on tobacco control activities. After several representations by the PHFI to the government, it was placed in the ‘prior permission’ category.

When is a registration suspended or cancelled?

The MHA on inspection of accounts and on receiving any adverse input against the functioning of an association can suspend the FCRA registration initially for 180 days. Until a decision is taken, the association cannot receive any fresh donation and cannot utilise more than 25% of the amount available in the designated bank account without permission of the MHA. The MHA can cancel the registration of an organisation which will not be eligible for registration or grant of ‘prior permission’ for three years from the date of cancellation.

Have there been suspensions in the past?

According to MHA data, since 2011, the registration of 20,664 associations was cancelled for violations such as misutilisation of foreign contribution, non-submission of mandatory annual returns and diversion of foreign funds for other purposes. As on September 11, there are 49,843 FCRA-registered associations.

What about international donors?

The government has also cracked down on foreign donors such as the U.S.-based Compassion International, Ford Foundation, World Movement for Democracy, Open Society Foundations and the National Endowment for Democracy. The donors have been placed on a ‘watch list’ or in the ‘prior permission’ category, barring them from sending money to associations without the MHA’s clearance.

The amended FCRA law allows political parties to receive funds from the Indian subsidiary of a foreign company or a foreign company where an Indian holds 50% or more shares

The amended FCRA law allows political parties to receive funds from the Indian subsidiary of a foreign company or a foreign company where an Indian holds 50% or more shares

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THE HINDU EXPLAINS

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

The story so far: On Saturday, the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca said they were [resuming clinical trials for a new coronavirus vaccine](#) across all U.K. sites. On Tuesday, the U.K.-based biopharma company [AstraZeneca had said it was suspending the Phase-3 global trial](#) of AZD1222, the COVID-19 vaccine it has been developing with Oxford University researchers. The vaccine, by all accounts, was among the handful that had reached the final but most daunting stage of trials and is slated to be available commercially by mid-2021. The pause was announced after a volunteer in Britain fell ill. On September 12, Oxford University and AstraZeneca in separate releases said the independent review process had concluded and following a nod from the regulator, trials would resume in the U.K. There was no word in the releases about resumption of global trials or details of the volunteer's illness.

There are similarities and differences in the way new drugs and vaccines are tested. Broadly both follow a four-stage process when they are tested in people. After a drug has proven itself safe in a variety of animals — usually mice, rabbits, hamsters and primates that mirror human physiology and the way it reacts to diseases — it enters Phase-1 studies. A small group of volunteers is given the drug in small doses and monitored to see if it is safe and whether it was well tolerated. This is also when any occurrences of side effects are closely monitored. On an average, 10-50 candidates are chosen. In the normal course, those undergoing the trial must report results to the drug regulator which gives the go-ahead for the next stage of trials. Phase-2 is when a group of volunteers, usually in the hundreds, are selected. This is the stage when researchers try to determine what dosage would be necessary for it to take effect or produce the desired response. In the case of the COVID-19 vaccine, this is the stage when it's determined if the inoculation had triggered a desired level of antibodies and a sufficient cell response in terms of stimulating T-cells that are known to block and neutralise the virus particles respectively. Again, side effects and adverse reactions are monitored and reported.

Comment | [The participants we need in Phase 3 trials](#)

Each of these stages can take several months and that includes the time taken to recruit patients as well as the time involved in observing the effects of drugs and vaccines at various intervals of time. Such data is again sent to regulators, who, if satisfied, give the green signal for Phase-3. In this stage, the drug or vaccine is tested at multiple locations in thousands of volunteers or patients. In the case of a drug, this is the stage when a new drug is compared to the existing standard of care and when it must prove that it is either more efficacious, or is of similar potency but is safer, better tolerable or delivers any of the goods that the drugmakers had claimed when making the drug. In the case of a vaccine for a new disease, there is usually nothing to compare it to, so Phase-3 becomes a larger version of the Phase-2 trial. A Phase-3 trial is held at multiple locations to capture the demographic variability in the population. It is also double-blinded and randomised and may have multiple treatment arms, meaning some participants may get a placebo, some may get lower doses, some higher doses, and in an ideal trial, neither the doctor nor the recipient knows who is getting the drug and who the placebo. When the scale and scope of a trial increases and a diverse population group is exposed to a new vaccine, the odds of encountering adverse and the dreaded 'severe adverse reaction' are magnified. When severe reactions are manifested, medical researchers have to determine if the reaction was due to the drug and if a pattern is apparent, a drug or vaccine can be pulled out. Because of the multiple locations and the number of patients that are required, this is also the most expensive stage of a trial. Sometimes, phases are combined, given the kind of drug or vaccine and the urgency of the situation. Several COVID-19 vaccines are being developed on

accelerated time lines.

For the vaccine candidate, called AZD1222 for now, the company had begun recruiting 30,000 volunteers for Phase-3 trials in the United States. The Pune-based Serum Institute of India, which had been contracted to manufacture a hundred million doses for 92 countries including India, had also started to test the vaccine on a proposed group of 1,600 volunteers in India. However, it emerged that a recipient of the vaccine in the United Kingdom contracted transverse myelitis, an inflammation of the spinal cord, and this led AstraZeneca to pause its trials. Suspension of vaccine trials is not out of the ordinary but Serum Institute initially said it would not halt the India trial because no adverse reactions had been reported here. However, after a show-cause notice from the regulator, the Drugs Controller- General of India, the company said it would halt recruitment of volunteers until AstraZeneca finishes evaluation of the safety data.

Comment | [More than a vaccine, it is about vaccination](#)

According to a release from Oxford University, the independent review process has concluded and following the recommendations of both the independent safety review committee and the U.K. regulator, the MHRA (the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency), trials will restart in the U.K. “We are committed to the safety of our participants and the highest standards of conduct in our studies and will continue to monitor safety closely,” the release said.

Coronavirus | [Oxford vaccine trial pause a wake-up call: WHO Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan](#)

A drug or vaccine candidate that clears Phase-3 is usually approved and licensed and the entire infrastructure of the company is devoted to ramping up production and working out the logistics of storing the drug or vaccine safely without it degrading or losing potency. Once the product goes out into the field, there is post-marketing surveillance, or a Phase-4, where all instances of the product’s failure and adverse events are recorded. Companies are expected to furnish periodic data to the drug regulator.

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REDUCING INDIA'S CANCER BURDEN

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

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)-National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research (NCDIR) National Cancer Registry Programme Report of August 2020 has estimated that the number of cancer cases in India in 2020 is 13.9 lakh. India has seen a steady rise in cancer cases over many decades. A 2017 report showed that India's cancer burden increased 2.6 times between 1990 to 2016, and deaths due to cancers doubled during the time.

Almost two-thirds of these cancer cases are at late stages. In men, the most common cancers are of the lung, oral cavity, stomach and oesophagus, while in women, breast, cervix, ovary and gall bladder cancers are the most common. Tobacco use (in all forms) is a major avoidable risk factor for the development of cancer in 27% of cancer cases. Other important risk factors include alcohol use, inappropriate diet, low physical activity, obesity, and pollution.

Also read | [Report predicts 12% rise in India's cancer burden](#)

Cancer causes loss of lives and also has a tremendous socioeconomic impact. Reducing cancer is a prerequisite for addressing social and economic inequity, stimulating economic growth and accelerating sustainable development. But merely investing in cancer treatment is not an economically viable option. We need to focus on three key aspects: risk reduction, early detection and programmatic and policy solutions.

Cancer occurrence is a complex interplay of host and environmental determinants, which makes it difficult to predict it at an individual level. But it is estimated that nearly 50%-60% of cancer cases can be avoided by tackling the known risk factors effectively. Community empowerment through a multisectoral approach that brings together government, private practitioners and civil society to increase health literacy and promote certain behaviour can go a long way in reducing potential risk factors. Improved awareness can also prevent stigma attached to the disease. We need to ensure that health systems are strengthened so that there is greater access to screening and vaccination, early detection, and timely, affordable treatment.

Also read | [One in 10 Indians will develop cancer during their lifetime: WHO report](#)

Population health approaches are also relevant for large-scale impact. Programmatic and policy-level solutions need to be driven by data. The information collected through the National Cancer Registry Programme has been used effectively over the years to advocate for better access to screening, early detection, referral, treatment and palliative care services. It has also helped shape cancer research in the country, which is of crucial importance to guide our efforts on cancer prevention and control. Making cancer a notifiable disease could be one of the ways to help drive this research further by providing greater access to accurate, relevant data that can drive policy decisions.

India is committed to achieving a one-third reduction in cancer-related deaths by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, and it has made considerable progress. India has improved in some areas, such as personal hygiene, which are distant drivers of cancer. Government programmes such as Ayushman Bharat, Swasthya Bharat, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Poshan Abhiyaan and Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana and initiatives such as FSSAI's new labelling and display regulations and drug price control can encourage inter-sectoral and multi-sectoral action. Other initiatives such as the National Health Policy, the National Tobacco Control Programme, and the National Programme for Prevention and Control

of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke are also paving the way for progress.

Also read | [India's cancer care facilities highly inadequate, says parliamentary panel](#)

Our approach should not simply focus on diagnostics, treatment modalities and vaccines, but emphasise inclusivity in thinking and action for equitable solutions that can greatly reduce the impact of cancer across all socioeconomic levels in the country.

Dr. Balram Bhargava is Director General, ICMR, and Secretary, Department of Health Research; and Dr. Prashant Mathur is Director, ICMR-NCDIR, Bengaluru

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THE ALLIED AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONS BILL, 2018

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

- The Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018 was introduced in Rajya Sabha by the Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Mr. Jagat Prakash Nadda on December 31, 2018. The Bill seeks to regulate and standardise the education and practice of allied and healthcare professionals.
- **Allied health professional:** The Bill defines ‘allied health professional’ as an associate, technician, or technologist trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury, or impairment. Such a professional is trained to support the implementation of any healthcare treatment recommended by a medical, nursing or any other healthcare professional. An allied health professional should obtain a diploma or degree, with a duration of at least 2,000 hours.
- **Healthcare professional:** As per the Bill, a ‘healthcare professional’ includes a scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, researches, or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, or promotional health services. A healthcare professional should obtain a degree, with a duration of at least 3,600 hours.
- **Allied and healthcare professions:** The Bill specifies certain recognised categories of allied and healthcare professions in the Schedule. These include life science professionals, surgical and anaesthesia related technology professionals, trauma and burn care professionals, physiotherapists, and nutrition science professionals. The central government may amend this Schedule after consultation with the Allied and Healthcare Council.
- **Allied and Healthcare Council of India:** The Bill sets up the Allied and Healthcare Council of India. The Council will consist of 48[*] members, including: (i) six members (at the level of Joint Secretary) representing various Departments/ Ministries of the central government, (ii) one representative from the Directorate General of Health Services, (iii) two Directors or Medical Superintendents appointed on a rotational basis from amongst medical institutions including the AIIMS, Delhi and JIPMER, Puducherry, (iv) three members appointed on a rotational basis from various Councils such as the Indian Nursing Council, and the Medical Council of India, and (v) 12 members representing State Councils.
- **Functions of the Allied and Healthcare Council:** Functions of the Council include: (i) framing policies for regulating the education and practice of allied and healthcare professionals, (ii) maintaining a Central Register of all registered allied and healthcare professionals, (iii) providing minimum standards of education, courses, maximum tuition fee, and proportionate distribution of seats, and (iv) providing for a uniform entrance and exit examination for the allied and healthcare professionals.

- **State Allied and Healthcare Councils:** Within six months from the passage of the Bill, state governments will constitute State Allied and Healthcare Councils. The State Councils will consist of 29 members, including: (i) one member representing medical sciences in the state government, (ii) two members representing state medical colleges, (iii) two members representing charitable institutions, and (iv) 20 members from recognised categories of allied and healthcare professions, nominated by the state government.
- Functions of State Councils include: (i) enforcing professional conduct and code of ethics to be observed by allied healthcare professionals, (ii) maintaining respective State Registers, (iii) registering and inspecting allied and healthcare institutions, and (iv) ensuring uniform entry and exit examinations.
- **Establishment of new institutions:** The Bill states that: (i) if any person wishes to establish an allied and healthcare institution, or (ii) if an established allied and healthcare institution wants to open new courses, or increase its admission capacity, or admit a new batch of students, it will have to seek prior permission from the Council. If the person or allied healthcare institution fails to seek such permission, then any qualification granted to a student from such an institution will not be recognised under the Bill.
- The respective State Councils will verify the standards of any allied and healthcare institution where education in the recognised categories is being imparted. If these institutions do not conform to the standards specified by the Council, the State Council may withdraw recognition granted to them.
- **Offences and penalties:** No person is allowed to practice as a qualified allied and healthcare practitioner other than those enrolled in a State Register or the National Register. Any person who contravenes this provision will be punished with a fine of one lakh rupees.

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[*]This document was corrected for typos on January 8, 2019.

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THE ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights Issues - Consumer Rights in India

Highlights of the Ordinance

- The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020 allows intra-state and inter-state trade of farmers' produce beyond the physical premises of APMC markets. State governments are prohibited from levying any market fee, cess or levy outside APMC areas.
- The Farmers Agreement Ordinance creates a framework for contract farming through an agreement between a farmer and a buyer prior to the production or rearing of any farm produce. It provides for a three-level dispute settlement mechanism: the conciliation board, Sub-Divisional Magistrate and Appellate Authority.
- The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 allows the central government to regulate the supply of certain food items only under extraordinary circumstances (such as war and famine). Stock limits may be imposed on agricultural produce only if there is a steep price rise.

Key Issues and Analysis

- The three Ordinances aim to increase the availability of buyers for farmers' produce, by allowing them to trade freely without any license or stock limit, so that an increase in competition among them results in better prices for farmers. While the Ordinances aim to liberalise trade and increase the number of buyers, de-regulation alone may not be sufficient to attract more buyers.
- The Standing Committee on Agriculture (2018-19) noted that availability of a transparent, easily accessible, and efficient marketing platform is a pre-requisite to ensure remunerative prices for farmers. Most farmers lack access to government procurement facilities and APMC markets. It noted that small rural markets can emerge as a viable alternative for agricultural marketing if they are provided with adequate infrastructure facilities.
- The Standing Committee also recommended that the Gramin Agricultural Markets scheme (which aims to improve infrastructure and civic facilities in 22,000 Gramin Haats across the country) should be made a fully funded central scheme and scaled to ensure presence of a Haat in each panchayat of the country.

PART A: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ORDINANCE

Context

Agricultural markets in India are mainly regulated by state Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) laws. APMCs were set up with the objective of ensuring fair trade between buyers and sellers for effective price discovery of farmers' produce.^[1] APMCs can: (i) regulate the trade of farmers' produce by providing licenses to buyers, commission agents, and private

markets, (ii) levy market fees or any other charges on such trade, and (iii) provide necessary infrastructure within their markets to facilitate the trade.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture (2018-19) observed that the APMC laws are not implemented in their true sense and need to be reformed urgently. Issues identified by the Committee include: (i) most APMCs have a limited number of traders operating, which leads to cartelization and reduces competition, and (ii) undue deductions in the form of commission charges and market fees.¹³ Traders, commission agents, and other functionaries organise themselves into associations, which do not allow easy entry of new persons into market yards, stifling competition.^[2] The Acts are highly restrictive in promotion of multiple channels of marketing (such as more buyers, private markets, direct sale to businesses and retail consumers, and online transactions) and competition in the system.¹³

During 2017-18, the central government released the model APMC and contract farming Acts to allow restriction-free trade of farmers' produce, promote competition through multiple marketing channels, and promote farming under pre-agreed contracts.^[3]^[4] The Standing Committee (2018-19) noted that states have not implemented several of the reforms suggested in the model Acts.¹³ It recommended that the central government constitute a Committee of Agriculture Ministers of all states to arrive at a consensus and design a legal framework for agricultural marketing. A High Powered Committee of seven Chief Ministers was set up in July 2019 to discuss, among other things: (i) adoption and time-bound implementation of model Acts by states, and (ii) changes to the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (which provides for control of production, supply, and trade of essential commodities) for attracting private investment in agricultural marketing and infrastructure.^[5]

The central government promulgated three Ordinances on June 5, 2020: (i) the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020, (ii) the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020, and (iii) the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020.^[6]^[7]^[8] The Ordinances collectively seek to (i) facilitate barrier-free trade of farmers' produce outside the markets notified under the various state APMC laws, (ii) define a framework for contract farming, and (iii) impose stock limits on agricultural produce only if there is a sharp increase in retail prices. The three Ordinances together aim to increase opportunities for farmers to enter long term sale contracts, increase availability of buyers, and permits buyers to purchase farm produce in bulk.

Key Features

The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020

- **Trade of farmers' produce:** The Ordinance allows intra-state and inter-state trade of farmers' produce outside: (i) the physical premises of market yards run by market committees formed under the state APMC Acts and (ii) other markets notified under the state APMC Acts. Such trade can be conducted in an 'outside trade area', i.e., any place of production, collection, and aggregation of farmers' produce including: (i) farm gates, (ii) factory premises, (iii) warehouses, (iv) silos, and (v) cold storages.
- **Electronic trading:** The Ordinance permits the electronic trading of scheduled farmers' produce (agricultural produce regulated under any state APMC Act) in the specified trade area. An electronic trading and transaction platform may be set up to

facilitate the direct and online buying and selling of such produce through electronic devices and internet. The following entities may establish and operate such platforms: (i) companies, partnership firms, or registered societies, having permanent account number under the Income Tax Act, 1961 or any other document notified by the central government, and (ii) a farmer producer organisation or agricultural cooperative society.

- **Market fee abolished:** The Ordinance prohibits state governments from levying any market fee, cess or levy on farmers, traders, and electronic trading platforms for trade of farmers' produce conducted in an 'outside trade area'.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020

- **Farming agreement:** The Ordinance provides for a farming agreement between a farmer and a buyer prior to the production or rearing of any farm produce. The minimum period of an agreement will be one crop season, or one production cycle of livestock. The maximum period is five years, unless the production cycle is more than five years.
- **Pricing of farming produce:** The price of farming produce should be mentioned in the agreement. For prices subjected to variation, a guaranteed price for the produce and a clear reference for any additional amount above the guaranteed price must be specified in the agreement. Further, the process of price determination must be mentioned in the agreement.
- **Dispute Settlement:** A farming agreement must provide for a conciliation board as well as a conciliation process for settlement of disputes. The Board should have a fair and balanced representation of parties to the agreement. At first, all disputes must be referred to the board for resolution. If the dispute remains unresolved by the Board after thirty days, parties may approach the Sub-divisional Magistrate for resolution. Parties will have a right to appeal to an Appellate Authority (presided by collector or additional collector) against decisions of the Magistrate. Both the Magistrate and Appellate Authority will be required to dispose of a dispute within thirty days from the receipt of application. The Magistrate or the Appellate Authority may impose certain penalties on the party contravening the agreement. However, no action can be taken against the agricultural land of farmer for recovery of any dues.

The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020

- **Regulation of food items:** The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 empowers the central government to designate certain commodities (such as food items, fertilizers, and petroleum products) as essential commodities. The central government may regulate or prohibit the production, supply, distribution, trade, and commerce of such essential commodities. The Ordinance provides that the central government may regulate the supply of certain food items including cereals, pulses, potatoes, onions, edible oilseeds, and oils, only under extraordinary circumstances. These include: (i) war, (ii) famine, (iii) extraordinary price rise and (iv) natural calamity of grave nature.
- **Stock limit:** The Ordinance requires that imposition of any stock limit on agricultural

produce must be based on price rise. A stock limit may be imposed only if there is: (i) a 100% increase in retail price of horticultural produce; and (ii) a 50% increase in the retail price of non-perishable agricultural food items. The increase will be calculated over the price prevailing immediately preceding twelve months, or the average retail price of the last five years, whichever is lower.

PART B: KEY ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Availability of buyers for farmers' produce and infrastructure

The Trade and Commerce Ordinance provides buyers the freedom to buy farmers' produce outside the APMC markets without having any license or paying any fees to APMCs. The Contract Farming Ordinance provides a framework for buyers and farmers to enter into a contract (before a crop season starts) which guarantees farmers a minimum price and buyers an assured supply. The third Ordinance amends the Essential Commodities Act to provide that stock limits for agricultural produce can be imposed only when retail prices increase sharply and exempts value chain participants and exporters from any stock limit. The three Ordinances aim to increase the availability of buyers for farmers' produce, by allowing them to trade freely without any license or stock limit, so that an increase in competition among them results in better prices for farmers.^[9] While the Ordinances aim to liberalise trade and increase the number of buyers, this may not be sufficient to attract more buyers.

For instance, in 2006, Bihar repealed its APMC Act with a similar objective to attract private investment in the sector and gave charge of the markets to the concerned sub-divisional officers in that area.^[10] This resulted in a lack of required marketing infrastructure as the existing infrastructure eroded over time due to poor upkeep.^{1,2} In unregulated markets, farmers faced issues such as high transaction charges and lack of information on prices and arrival of produce.² The Committee of State Ministers, constituted in 2010 for agricultural marketing reforms, observed that complete deregulation of markets did not help in attracting any private investment.² It noted that there is a need for an appropriate legal and institutional structure with a developmental type of regulation to ensure orderly functioning of markets and to attract investment for infrastructure development.² The Standing Committee on Agriculture (2018-19) recommended that the central government should create marketing infrastructure in states which do not have APMC markets (i.e. Bihar, Kerala, Manipur, and certain union territories).^{1,[11]}

Note that the Ordinances do not repeal the existing APMC laws (as done by Bihar), but limit the regulation of APMCs to the physical boundaries of the markets under their control. The Ordinances may result in increased competition, which may also make APMCs more efficient in providing cost-effective services for marketing.^[12] Further, for farmers selling their produce outside the APMC markets, the prices prevailing in APMC markets can serve as a benchmark price, helping in a better price discovery for farmers.

Gramin Agriculture Markets: The Standing Committee noted that availability of a transparent, easily accessible, and efficient marketing platform is a pre-requisite to ensure remunerative prices for farmers.¹ Most farmers lack access to government procurement facilities and APMC markets.¹ Small and marginal farmers (who hold 86% of the agricultural landholdings in the country) face various issues in selling their produce in APMC markets such as inadequate marketable surplus, long-distance to the nearest APMC markets, and lack of transportation facilities.¹ The average area served by an APMC market is 496 sq. km., much higher than the 80 sq. km. recommended by the National Commission on Farmers (Chair: Dr. M. S. Swaminathan) in 2006.¹

The Standing Committee (2018-19) noted that Gramin Haats (small rural markets) can emerge as a viable alternative for agricultural marketing if they are provided with adequate infrastructure facilities. It recommended that the Gramin Agricultural Markets scheme (which aims to improve infrastructure and civic facilities in 22,000 Gramin Haats across the country) should be made a fully funded central scheme and scaled to ensure presence of a Haat in each panchayat of the country. The central government has proposed development of basic infrastructure in Gramin Haats through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and of marketing infrastructure through the Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund.^[13] The Fund will be set up by NABARD to provide Rs 1,000 crore to states at a concessional interest rate for development of marketing infrastructure in Gramin Haats.¹³

[1]. [Report No. 62, Standing Committee on Agriculture \(2018-19\): 'Agriculture Marketing and Role of Weekly Gramin Haats'](#), Lok Sabha, January 3, 2019.

[2]. Report of Committee of State Ministers, In-charge of Agriculture Marketing to Promote Reforms, January 2013, <https://dmi.gov.in/Documents/stminprreform.pdf>.

[3]. [Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing \(Promotion and Facilitation\) Act, 2017](#), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, April 2017.

[4]. [Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Contract Farming \(Promotion and Facilitation\) Act, 2018](#), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, December 2017.

[5]. "High Powered Committee of Chief Ministers constituted for 'Transformation for Indian Agriculture'", Press Information Bureau, NITI Aayog, July 1, 2019.

[6]. [The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce \(Promotion and Facilitation\) Ordinance, 2020](#), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, June 5, 2020.

[7]. [The Essential Commodities \(Amendment\) Ordinance, 2020](#), Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, June 5, 2020.

[8]. [The Farmers \(Empowerment and Protection\) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020](#), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, June 5, 2020.

[9]. "PM chairs Cabinet Meeting to give historic boost to Rural India", Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, June 3, 2020.

[10]. [Investment in Agricultural Marketing and Market Infrastructure – A Case Study of Bihar](#), Research Report, National Institute of Agricultural Marketing, 2011-12.

[11]. [Conference of Agriculture Ministers of the States on Model Acts](#), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, July 8, 2019.

[12]. [F.No. 26011/3/2020-M.II.](#), Agricultural Marketing Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, June 5, 2020.

[13]. [Report No. 8, Standing Committee on Agriculture \(2019-20\): Action taken by the government on the report 'Agriculture Marketing and Role of Weekly Gramin Haats'](#), Lok Sabha, December 12, 2019.

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INITIATIVES TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE QUALITY EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

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

The Government of India has launched SamagraShiksha - an Integrated Scheme for school education, w.e.f. 2018-19, which is an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class XII and aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels of school education. It envisages the 'school' as a continuum from pre-school, primary, upper primary, secondary to senior secondary levels and subsumes the three erstwhile centrally sponsored schemes i.e. SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA), RashtriyaMadhyamikShikshaAbhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).

Bridging gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education is one of the major objectives of the scheme. The scheme reaches out to girls and children belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), minority communities and transgender. The scheme also gives attention to urban deprived children, children affected by periodic migration and children living in remote and scattered habitations. Under the scheme, provision has been made for giving preference to Special Focus Districts (SFDs), Educationally Backward Blocks (EEBs), LWE affected districts, and aspirational districts while planning interventions like setting up of primary schools, upper primary schools, construction of additional classrooms, toilets, Kasturba Gandhi BalikaVidyalayas (KGBVs).

A comprehensive initiative called **PM eVIDYA** has been initiated which unifies all efforts related to digital/online/on-air education to enable multi-mode access to education. This will benefit nearly 27 crore school going children across the country. The initiative includes, where work is in progress.

The information was given by the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' in a written reply in the Lok Sabha today.

MC/AKJ/AK

The Government of India has launched SamagraShiksha - an Integrated Scheme for school education, w.e.f. 2018-19, which is an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class XII and aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels of school education. It envisages the 'school' as a continuum from pre-school, primary, upper primary, secondary to senior secondary levels and subsumes the three erstwhile centrally sponsored schemes i.e. SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA), RashtriyaMadhyamikShikshaAbhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).

Bridging gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education is one of the major objectives of the scheme. The scheme reaches out to girls and children belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), minority communities and transgender. The scheme also gives attention to urban deprived children, children affected by periodic migration and children living in remote and scattered habitations. Under the scheme, provision has been made for giving preference to Special Focus Districts (SFDs), Educationally Backward Blocks (EEBs), LWE affected districts, and aspirational districts while planning interventions like setting up of primary schools, upper primary schools, construction of additional classrooms, toilets, Kasturba Gandhi BalikaVidyalayas (KGBVs).

A comprehensive initiative called **PM eVIDYA** has been initiated which unifies all efforts related to digital/online/on-air education to enable multi-mode access to education. This will benefit nearly 27 crore school going children across the country. The initiative includes, where work is in progress.

The information was given by the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' in a written reply in the Lok Sabha today.

MC/AKJ/AK

END

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CONSUMER WELFARE FUND

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights Issues - Consumer Rights in India

The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 had set in motion a consumer movement in the country. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 which came into effect from 20th July 2020, and replaces the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 would give greater fillip to the ongoing consumer movement in the country. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 provides for establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers as a class. The Act provides for simplifying the consumer dispute adjudication process in the Consumer Commissions, which include, among others, empowerment of the State and District Commissions to review their own Orders, enabling a consumer to file complaints electronically and file complaints in Consumer Commissions that have jurisdiction over the place of his residence, video conferencing for hearing and deemed admissibility of complaints if the question of admissibility is not decided within the specified period of 21 days. To simplify the adjudication process, mediation, as an Alternate Dispute Resolution mechanism, has been provided in the new Act. The Act introduces the concept of product liability and brings within its scope the product manufacturer, the product service provider and the product seller, for any claim for compensation.

To protect the interests of the consumers, the Govt. has launched the “Jago Grahak Jago” campaign through electronic and print media for consumer awareness and joint awareness campaigns on consumer rights and responsibilities in key sectors – Health, Food, Financial Services and other Departments for greater consumer awareness. The Government has set up a National Consumer Helpline and to cater to the needs of consumers, regional languages, six Zonal Consumer Helplines have also been set up at Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Jaipur, Guwahati & Patna.

The Consumers have been able to redress their grievances/ complaints against any defect in goods purchased or deficiencies in any services availed including any unfair/restrictive trade practices adopted, through specialized quasi-judicial agencies, now commonly known as ‘consumer commissions’, that have been established at the District level (District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission), State level (State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission) and National level (National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission). These consumer commissions have been mandated by the law to render simple, inexpensive and speedy adjudication of consumer complaints. The details of cases filed and disposed of by the Consumer Commissions in the last three years 2017, 2018, 2019 and current year is as follows-

NATIONAL CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION

2017

2018

2019

2020 (till 13.09.2020)

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

10807

5883

8992

6379

7800

6530

2327

2486

STATE CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION

2017

2018

2019

2020 (till 13.09.2020)

Name of the State

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Andhra Pradesh

571

466

738

362

539

647

76

254

A & N Islands

4

6

2

5

8

1

2

0

Arunachal Pradesh

4

2

11

0

3

4

0

0

Assam

119

16

127

36

72

39

12

13

Bihar

295

96

164

37

87

2

26

0

Chandigarh

1236

1191

887

997

646

591

252

130

Chattisgarh

1096

1137

1190

1163

1090

1044

325

438

D & N Haveli / Daman &Diu

0

0

0

0

0

0

0

0

Delhi

2965

2175

2357

1745

1864

1858

329

457

Goa

238

165

194

139

129

188

32

25

Gujarat

1046

1189

1297

1219

1143

1289

494

381

Haryana

2620

1425

2236

1189

1624

717

520

154

Himachal Pradesh

414

276

459

339

536

419

155

142

Jammu & Kashmir

54

29

71

9

25

18

0

0

Jharkhand

353

56

332

43

139

42

36

12

Karnataka

586

0

14

0

1142

9

753

5

Kerala

1185

418

990

587

616

587

190

177

Lakshadweep

0

0

1

0

0
0
0
Madhya Pradesh
2520
576
829
1141
2831
2145
800
606
Maharashtra
3485
932
2546
1382
2829
1694
774
243
Manipur
11
14
14
6

10
5
4
0
Meghalaya

5
2
3
1
0
0
0
0

Mizoram

8
0
11
6
3
1
2
0

Nagaland

0
0
10
2

5
6
0
0
Orissa
960
254
700
123
542
146
182
237
Pondicherry
41
31
17
26
7
1
6
1
Punjab
2072
2491
1817
2024

1874

1689

500

703

Rajasthan

1678

2153

1355

1746

1651

1720

496

532

Sikkim

4

4

5

3

7

8

0

3

Tamilnadu

562

334

559

287

514
280
99
504
Telangana
918
1029
1029
663
1100
560
616
173
Tripura
68
80
47
54
52
51
12
21
Uttar Pradesh
3096
3809
2904
2544

1984

1881

490

339

Uttarakhand

212

294

331

289

508

155

138

10

West Bengal

2641

2164

2140

2692

2088

2080

515

455

Total**31067****22814****25387****20859**

25668

19877

7836

6015

DISTRICT CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION

Name of the State

2017

2018

2019

2020 (till 13.09.2020)

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Andhra Pradesh

1761

2205

1935

1791

1974

1289

494

204

A & N Islands

32

28

24

40

34

27

14

9

Arunachal Pradesh

14

19

26

10

27

4

0

0

Assam

452

423

406

382

354

192

131

62

Bihar

2408

479

3015

1403

3236

1732

826

367

Chandigarh

1845

2053

1424

1573

2346

1972

776

532

Chattisgarh

3218

2497

4531

3505

4248

4126

1604

1438

D & N Haveli / Daman & Diu

8

4

8

1

3

2

0

0

Delhi

5261

4026

4362

4727

4255

4103

1016

835

Goa

190

444

169

180

182

189

78

61

Gujarat

7739

6682

8222

6267

11545

6755

4843

2588

Haryana

7671

10048

7509

7255

11352

7947

5138

1862

Himachal Pradesh

1464

1591

1411

1523

1491

1697

274

262

Jammu & Kashmir

421

100

413

314

189

127

0

0

Jharkhand

1199

646

1222

627

945

294

232

32

Karnataka

8061

9500

8909

8533

8887

8126

3193

2487

Kerala

5317

5234

4729

4596

4937

2862

2148

1095

Lakshadweep

4

3

0

2

0

0

0

0

Madhya Pradesh

10560

7530

8312

4013

11935

10019

5357

2746

Maharashtra

12268

13714

14964

12279

16691

13752

6083

3795

Manipur

26

30

18

18

25

12

2

8

Meghalaya

51

26

48

26

39

33

7
1
Mizoram

55

30

67

33

49

18

11

47

Nagaland

10

0

12

0

11

0

0

0

Orissa

3360

2538

2934

2167

3367

1390

1559

567

Pondicherry

59

57

41

54

54

0

15

0

Punjab

7913

6684

8524

6097

9667

7376

4475

1751

Rajasthan

14998

14356

10681

11295

9813

11509

5012

2559

Sikkim

17

13

25

19

27

21

1

2

Tamilnadu

2729

2231

2826

3040

3107

2596

867

414

Telangana

1769

1604

2173

1887

2258

2238

777

1197

Tripura

182

183

109

134

149

121

66

31

Uttar Pradesh

16580

9839

16844

10485

17982

7716

5754

1576

Uttarakhand

1058

774

1172

1253

1356

1891

823
677
West Bengal
5442
5447
5088
4523
5512
4361
1588
900
Total
124142

111038

122153

100052
138047
104497
53164
28105

The Consumer Welfare Fund was created in 1992 with the objective of providing financial assistance to promote and protect the welfare of the consumers, create consumer awareness and strengthen consumer movement in the country. Financial assistance is provided to Voluntary Consumer Organisations / Institutions for undertaking consumer advocacy / awareness and to State Government / Union Territories for setting up State Consumer Welfare

Fund. The details of funds provided to States / UTs for strengthening the consumer movement during each of the last three years and the current year, State / UT-wise is as follows-

GRANTS RELEASED TO STATE GOVERNMENTS UNDER CONSUMER WELFARE FUND

Financial Year 2017-18

S. No.

State / UT

Amount Released

1.

Jharkhand

Rs 313.47 Lakh

2.

Nagaland

Rs 60.00 Lakh

3.

Telangana

Rs 479.00 Lakh

Total

Rs 852.47 Lakh

Financial Year 2018-19

S. No.

State / UT

Amount Released

1.

Andhra Pradesh

Rs 133.92 Lakh

2.

Jharkhand

Rs 36.53 Lakh

3.

Rajasthan

Rs 750.00 Lakh

4.

Telangana

Rs 0.08 Lakh

Total

Rs 920.53 Lakh

Financial Year 2019-20

S. No.

State / UT

Amount Released

1.

Andhra Pradesh

Rs 48.64 Lakh

2.

Mizoram

Rs 180.00 Lakh

3.

Sikkim

Rs 450.00 Lakh

4.

West Bengal

Rs 750.00 Lakh

Total**Rs 1428.64 Lakh****Financial Year 2020-21: Nil**

This information was given in a written reply by the Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Shri Danve Rao saheb Dadarao in Lok Sabha today.

APS/SG/MS

The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 had set in motion a consumer movement in the country. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 which came into effect from 20th July 2020, and replaces the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 would give greater fillip to the ongoing consumer movement in the country. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 provides for establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers as a class. The Act provides for simplifying the consumer dispute adjudication process in the Consumer Commissions, which include, among others, empowerment of the State and District Commissions to review their own Orders, enabling a consumer to file complaints electronically and file complaints in Consumer Commissions that have jurisdiction over the place of his residence, video conferencing for hearing and deemed admissibility of complaints if the question of admissibility is not decided within the specified period of 21 days. To simplify the adjudication process, mediation, as an Alternate Dispute Resolution mechanism, has been provided in the new Act. The Act introduces the concept of product liability and brings within its scope the product manufacturer, the product service provider and the product seller, for any claim for compensation.

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The Consumers have been able to redress their grievances/ complaints against any defect in goods purchased or deficiencies in any services availed including any unfair/restrictive trade

practices adopted, through specialized quasi-judicial agencies, now commonly known as 'consumer commissions', that have been established at the District level (District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission), State level (State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission) and National level (National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission). These consumer commissions have been mandated by the law to render simple, inexpensive and speedy adjudication of consumer complaints. The details of cases filed and disposed of by the Consumer Commissions in the last three years 2017, 2018, 2019 and current year is as follows-

NATIONAL CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION

2017

2018

2019

2020 (till 13.09.2020)

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

10807

5883

8992

6379

7800

6530

2327

2486

STATE CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION

2017

2018

2019

2020 (till 13.09.2020)

Name of the State

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Andhra Pradesh

571

466

738

362

539

647

76

254

A & N Islands

4

6

2
5
8
1
2
0
Arunachal Pradesh

4
2
11
0
3
4
0
0

Assam

119
16
127
36
72
39
12
13

Bihar

295
96

164

37

87

2

26

0

Chandigarh

1236

1191

887

997

646

591

252

130

Chattisgarh

1096

1137

1190

1163

1090

1044

325

438

D & N Haveli / Daman &Diu

0

0

0
0
0
0
0
0

Delhi

2965

2175

2357

1745

1864

1858

329

457

Goa

238

165

194

139

129

188

32

25

Gujarat

1046

1189

1297

1219

1143

1289

494

381

Haryana

2620

1425

2236

1189

1624

717

520

154

Himachal Pradesh

414

276

459

339

536

419

155

142

Jammu & Kashmir

54

29

71
9
25
18
0
0
Jharkhand
353
56
332
43
139
42
36
12
Karnataka
586
0
14
0
1142
9
753
5
Kerala
1185
418

990

587

616

587

190

177

Lakshadweep

0

0

1

0

0

0

0

0

Madhya Pradesh

2520

576

829

1141

2831

2145

800

606

Maharashtra

3485

932

2546

1382

2829

1694

774

243

Manipur

11

14

14

6

10

5

4

0

Meghalaya

5

2

3

1

0

0

0

0

Mizoram

8

0

11
6
3
1
2
0
Nagaland

0
0
10
2
5
6
0
0
Orissa

960
254
700
123
542
146
182
237
Pondicherry

41
31

17

26

7

1

6

1

Punjab

2072

2491

1817

2024

1874

1689

500

703

Rajasthan

1678

2153

1355

1746

1651

1720

496

532

Sikkim

4

4

5
3
7
8
0
3
Tamilnadu
562
334
559
287
514
280
99
504
Telangana
918
1029
1029
663
1100
560
616
173
Tripura
68
80

47
54
52
51
12
21
Uttar Pradesh
3096
3809
2904
2544
1984
1881
490
339
Uttarakhand
212
294
331
289
508
155
138
10
West Bengal
2641
2164

2140

2692

2088

2080

515

455

Total

31067

22814

25387

20859

25668

19877

7836

6015

DISTRICT CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION

Name of the State

2017

2018

2019

2020 (till 13.09.2020)

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Filed

Disposed

Andhra Pradesh

1761

2205

1935

1791

1974

1289

494

204

A & N Islands

32

28

24

40

34

27

14

9

Arunachal Pradesh

14

19

26

10

27
4
0
0
Assam
452
423
406
382
354
192
131
62
Bihar
2408
479
3015
1403
3236
1732
826
367
Chandigarh
1845
2053
1424
1573

2346

1972

776

532

Chattisgarh

3218

2497

4531

3505

4248

4126

1604

1438

D & N Haveli / Daman & Diu

8

4

8

1

3

2

0

0

Delhi

5261

4026

4362

4727

4255

4103

1016

835

Goa

190

444

169

180

182

189

78

61

Gujarat

7739

6682

8222

6267

11545

6755

4843

2588

Haryana

7671

10048

7509

7255

11352

7947

5138

1862

Himachal Pradesh

1464

1591

1411

1523

1491

1697

274

262

Jammu & Kashmir

421

100

413

314

189

127

0

0

Jharkhand

1199

646

1222

627

945

294

232

32

Karnataka

8061

9500

8909

8533

8887

8126

3193

2487

Kerala

5317

5234

4729

4596

4937

2862

2148

1095

Lakshadweep

4

3

0

2

0
0
0
0
Madhya Pradesh

10560
7530
8312
4013
11935
10019
5357
2746

Maharashtra

12268
13714
14964
12279
16691
13752
6083
3795

Manipur

26
30
18
18

25
12
2
8
Meghalaya

51
26
48
26
39
33
7
1

Mizoram

55
30
67
33
49
18
11
47

Nagaland

10
0
12
0

11
0
0
0
Orissa
3360
2538
2934
2167
3367
1390
1559
567
Pondicherry
59
57
41
54
54
0
15
0
Punjab
7913
6684
8524
6097

9667

7376

4475

1751

Rajasthan

14998

14356

10681

11295

9813

11509

5012

2559

Sikkim

17

13

25

19

27

21

1

2

Tamilnadu

2729

2231

2826

3040

3107

2596

867

414

Telangana

1769

1604

2173

1887

2258

2238

777

1197

Tripura

182

183

109

134

149

121

66

31

Uttar Pradesh

16580

9839

16844

10485

17982

7716

5754

1576

Uttarakhand

1058

774

1172

1253

1356

1891

823

677

West Bengal

5442

5447

5088

4523

5512

4361

1588

900

Total**124142****111038**

122153

100052

138047

104497

53164

28105

The Consumer Welfare Fund was created in 1992 with the objective of providing financial assistance to promote and protect the welfare of the consumers, create consumer awareness and strengthen consumer movement in the country. Financial assistance is provided to Voluntary Consumer Organisations / Institutions for undertaking consumer advocacy / awareness and to State Government / Union Territories for setting up State Consumer Welfare Fund. The details of funds provided to States / UTs for strengthening the consumer movement during each of the last three years and the current year, State / UT-wise is as follows-

GRANTS RELEASED TO STATE GOVERNMENTS UNDER CONSUMER WELFARE FUND

Financial Year 2017-18

S. No.

State / UT

Amount Released

1.

Jharkhand

Rs 313.47 Lakh

2.

Nagaland

Rs 60.00 Lakh

3.

Telangana

Rs 479.00 Lakh

Total**Rs 852.47 Lakh****Financial Year 2018-19****S. No.****State / UT****Amount Released**

1.

Andhra Pradesh

Rs 133.92 Lakh

2.

Jharkhand

Rs 36.53 Lakh

3.

Rajasthan

Rs 750.00 Lakh

4.

Telangana

Rs 0.08 Lakh

Total**Rs 920.53 Lakh****Financial Year 2019-20****S. No.****State / UT**

Amount Released

1.

Andhra Pradesh

Rs 48.64 Lakh

2.

Mizoram

Rs 180.00 Lakh

3.

Sikkim

Rs 450.00 Lakh

4.

West Bengal

Rs 750.00 Lakh

Total**Rs 1428.64 Lakh****Financial Year 2020-21: Nil**

This information was given in a written reply by the Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Shri Danve Rao saheb Dadarao in Lok Sabha today.

APS/SG/MS

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DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN FOR SCHEDULED CASTES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of STs, SCs, and OBCs - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

As a part of the socio-economic and financial inclusion strategy of the Government to ensure that all segments of the society, particularly the Scheduled Castes, are benefited and adequate funds are allocated for their development, the concept of Development Action Plan for SCs (DAPSC - earlier known as Allocation for Welfare of SCs or SCSP) is being implemented by the Government so that targeted financial and physical benefits can accrue to the Scheduled Castes. Under DAPSC, certain percentage of funds are earmarked by Ministry/Department wise exclusively for the welfare of SCs, for implementing identified schemes/programmes. As per the Ministry of Finance guidelines, funds under the SC component are not re-appropriated to Non-SC heads. Besides, most State Governments and the Union Territory Administrations are also allocating part of their budget for the development of SCs.

As per Census 2011, the total SC population in the country, including Uttar Pradesh, is 20.14 cr. which is 16.6% of the total population of the country. There is no provision for State-wise allocation of funds under DAPSC, however, the total funds allocated under various Schemes under DAPSC during the last three years and the current year is as below:

	Year
	2017-18
	2018-19
	2019-20
2020-21	
DAPSC Allocation	
In Rs.cr.	
	52605.81
	56618.25
	81340.74
	83256.62

The DAPSC allocation has been increasing on a year-to-year basis and its percentage to the total allocation under the identified schemes has been higher than the percentage of SC population in the country as per the Census 2011.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has developed an online-web portal (e-

utthaan.gov.in) for monitoring the progress against financial, physical and outcome targets under the DAPSC. Nodal Officers have been appointed by the concerned Departments/Ministries to ensure better monitoring of the programme. Regular meetings are also held by this Ministry with the concerned Ministries/Departments to ensure proper utilization of the funds.

This information was given by Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Shri Ramdas Athawale in a written reply in Lok Sabha today.

NB/SK/jk/SJ&E-2/15-09-2020

As a part of the socio-economic and financial inclusion strategy of the Government to ensure that all segments of the society, particularly the Scheduled Castes, are benefited and adequate funds are allocated for their development, the concept of Development Action Plan for SCs (DAPSC - earlier known as Allocation for Welfare of SCs or SCSP) is being implemented by the Government so that targeted financial and physical benefits can accrue to the Scheduled Castes. Under DAPSC, certain percentage of funds are earmarked by Ministry/Department wise exclusively for the welfare of SCs, for implementing identified schemes/programmes. As per the Ministry of Finance guidelines, funds under the SC component are not re-appropriated to Non-SC heads. Besides, most State Governments and the Union Territory Administrations are also allocating part of their budget for the development of SCs.

As per Census 2011, the total SC population in the country, including Uttar Pradesh, is 20.14 cr. which is 16.6% of the total population of the country. There is no provision for State-wise allocation of funds under DAPSC, however, the total funds allocated under various Schemes under DAPSC during the last three years and the current year is as below:

	Year
	2017-18
	2018-19
	2019-20
2020-21	
DAPSC Allocation	
In Rs.cr.	
	52605.81
	56618.25
	81340.74
	83256.62

The DAPSC allocation has been increasing on a year-to-year basis and its percentage to the total allocation under the identified schemes has been higher than the percentage of SC population in the country as per the Census 2011.

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MINISTRY OF AYUSH TAKING VARIOUS INITIATIVES TO INTEGRATE THE MODERN AND TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS OF MEDICINE

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

No conflict exists between modern medicine and AYUSH systems with regard to efficacy of medicines, treatments and procedures.

The Ministry of AYUSH is taking various initiatives to integrate the modern and traditional systems so as to facilitate a meaningful, cross learning and collaboration between two systems. The highlights of such initiatives have been the following: -

This information was given by the Minister of Health and Family Welfare Dr. Harsh Vardhan in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha today.

MV/SK

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BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF DISABILITY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Persons with Disability including Mentally Ill People - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Nearly 75 years ago, the United Nations (UN) was created in the face of intolerance and discrimination to reaffirm faith in the dignity and worth of humans, and in the equal rights of women and men. Its fundamental values postulated that in order to live sustainably, we must practise tolerance and endorse the values of equality. However, if we are to stay true to the values of the UN, we must bring marginalised communities from the fringes back into the development mainstream.

Well-known for his advocacy of disability rights, singer Stevie Wonder, who was blind, once declared that 'love's in need of love today'. In a plea to elicit support for the community of persons with disabilities, he stressed the importance of counteracting the cycle of oppression. It was a call for greater equality made many years ago, but the promises still remain unfulfilled.

Data | [How disabilities make life difficult for the affected](#)

Based on recent estimates, over a billion people worldwide are impacted by disability and the stigma surrounding it. According to the World Health Organization, nearly 15% of the world's population has some or the other form of disability, making disabled people the largest global minority. Continuous discrimination denies them equal access to education, employment, healthcare and other opportunities. Essentially, what we are looking at is an enormous reservoir of untapped resources excluded from the workforce.

The stigma attached to persons with disabilities, compounded by a lack of understanding of their rights, makes it difficult for them to attain their valued "functionings", which Amartya Sen defined as capabilities deemed essential for human development. Furthermore, women and girls with disabilities are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. About 80% of the estimated one billion persons with disabilities worldwide live in developing countries. The International Labour Organization, using data from the latest national Census (2011), reports that 73.6% of persons living with disabilities in India are outside the labour force. Those with mental disabilities, women with disabilities and those in rural areas are the most neglected.

As is the case with most crises, the COVID-19 pandemic has had its worst impact on marginalised communities. For instance, students with disabilities have found it extremely difficult to access remote learning through digital platforms. The UNESCO's 2019 State of the Education Report of India acknowledges that inclusive education is complex to implement and requires a fine understanding of the diverse needs of children and their families across different contexts. India has made considerable progress in terms of putting in place a robust legal framework and a range of programmes that have improved enrolment rates of children with disabilities in schools. However, further measures are needed to ensure quality education for every child to achieve the targets of Agenda 2030, and more specifically, the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Comment | [Disabled and extremely poor](#)

Globally, UNESCO joined its partners in the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network to raise awareness about the need to put in place strategies to mitigate the impact of school closures on learners with disabilities. The implementation of the groundbreaking National Education Policy

2020 provides a historic opportunity to utilise the immense potential.

Two of the most celebrated icons of music, Stevie Wonder and Andrea Bocelli, and star Indian para-athlete Deepa Malik have already set the tone for making inclusion the norm. With the right investments, youth with disabilities in India can also be the country's largest asset. The pandemic has shown us that we are only as healthy as our neighbour. It has exposed the large cracks of inequality, urging us to ponder over our responsibilities towards each other. Let us use this time as a catalyst for change and work together to ensure that all persons with disabilities enjoy the full range of human rights.

Eric Falt is the director, UNESCO New Delhi and UNESCO representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka

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Suresh Nambath

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THE EPIDEMIC DISEASES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020

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

- The Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on September 14, 2020. It amends the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897. The Act provides for the prevention of the spread of dangerous epidemic diseases. The Bill amends the Act to include protections for healthcare personnel combatting epidemic diseases and expands the powers of the central government to prevent the spread of such diseases. The Bill repeals the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance that was promulgated on April 22, 2020.
- **Definitions:** The Bill defines healthcare service personnel as persons who are at risk of contracting the epidemic disease while carrying out duties related to the epidemic. They include: (i) public and clinical healthcare providers such as doctors and nurses, (ii) any person empowered under the Act to take measures to prevent the outbreak of the disease, and (iii) other persons designated as such by the state government.
- Under the Bill, an 'act of violence' includes any of the following acts committed against a healthcare service personnel: (i) harassment impacting living or working conditions, (ii) harm, injury, hurt, or danger to life, (iii) obstruction in discharge of duties, and (iv) loss or damage to the property or documents of the healthcare service personnel. Property includes: (i) clinical establishment, (ii) quarantine facility, (iii) mobile medical unit, and (iv) any other property in which a healthcare service personnel has direct interest, in relation to the epidemic.
- **Protection for healthcare personnel and damage to property:** The Bill specifies that no person can: (i) commit or abet the commission of an act of violence against a healthcare service personnel, or (ii) abet or cause damage or loss to any property during an epidemic. Contravention of this provision is punishable with imprisonment between three months and five years, and a fine between Rs 50,000 and two lakh rupees. This offence may be compounded by the victim with the permission of the Court. Further, if an act of violence against a healthcare service personnel causes grievous harm, the person committing the offence will be punishable with imprisonment between six months and seven years, and a fine between one lakh rupees and five lakh rupees. These offences will be cognizable and non-bailable.
- **Compensation:** Persons convicted of offences under the Bill will also be liable to pay compensation to the healthcare service personnel whom they have hurt. In the case of damage or loss of property, the compensation payable to the victim will be twice the amount of the fair market value of the damaged or lost property, as determined by the Court. If the convicted person fails to pay the compensation, the amount will be recovered as an arrear of land revenue under the Revenue Recovery Act, 1890.
- **Investigation:** Cases registered under the Bill will be investigated by a police officer, not below the rank of Inspector. The investigation must be completed within 30 days from the date of registration of the First Information Report.
- **Trial:** The inquiry or trial should be concluded within one year. If it is not concluded within this time period, the Judge must record the reasons for the delay and extend the time period. However, the time period may not be extended for more than six months at a time. When prosecuting a person for causing grievous harm to a healthcare service personnel, the Court will presume that person is guilty of the offence, unless the contrary is proved.
- **Powers of the central government:** The Act specifies that the central government may regulate: (i) the inspection of any ship or vessel leaving or arriving at any port, and (ii) the detention of any person intending to travel from the port, during an outbreak. The Bill expands the powers of the central government to regulate the

inspection of any bus, train, goods vehicle, ship, vessel, or aircraft leaving or arriving at any land port, port, or aerodrome. Further, the government may regulate the detention of any person intending to travel by these means.

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THE FOREIGN CONTRIBUTION (REGULATION) AMENDMENT BILL, 2020

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020 was introduced in Lok Sabha on September 20, 2020. The Bill amends the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010. The Act regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution by individuals, associations and companies. Foreign contribution is the donation or transfer of any currency, security or article (of beyond a specified value) by a foreign source.
- **Prohibition to accept foreign contribution:** Under the Act, certain persons are prohibited to accept any foreign contribution. These include: election candidates, editor or publisher of a newspaper, judges, government servants, members of any legislature, and political parties, among others. The Bill adds public servants (as defined under the Indian Penal Code) to this list. Public servant includes any person who is in service or pay of the government, or remunerated by the government for the performance of any public duty.
- **Transfer of foreign contribution:** Under the Act, foreign contribution cannot be transferred to any other person unless such person is also registered to accept foreign contribution (or has obtained prior permission under the Act to obtain foreign contribution). The Bill amends this to prohibit the transfer of foreign contribution to any other person. The term 'person' under the Act includes an individual, an association, or a registered company.
- **Aadhaar for registration:** The Act states that a person may accept foreign contribution if they have: (i) obtained a certificate of registration from central government, or (ii) not registered, but obtained prior permission from the government to accept foreign contribution. Any person seeking registration (or renewal of such registration) or prior permission for receiving foreign contribution must make an application to the central government in the prescribed manner. The Bill adds that any person seeking prior permission, registration or renewal of registration must provide the Aadhaar number of all its office bearers, directors or key functionaries, as an identification document. In case of a foreigner, they must provide a copy of the passport or the Overseas Citizen of India card for identification.
- **FCRA account:** Under the Act, a registered person must accept foreign contribution only in a single branch of a scheduled bank specified by them. However, they may open more accounts in other banks for utilisation of the contribution. The Bill amends this to state that foreign contribution must be received only in an account designated by the bank as "FCRA account" in such branch of the State Bank of India, New Delhi, as notified by the central government. No funds other than the foreign contribution should be received or deposited in this account. The person may open another FCRA account in any scheduled bank of their choice for keeping or utilising the received contribution.

- **Restriction in utilisation of foreign contribution:.** Under the Act, if a person accepting foreign contribution is found guilty of violating any provisions of the Act or the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976, the unutilised or unreceived foreign contribution may be utilised or received, only with the prior approval of the central government. The Bill adds that the government may also restrict usage of unutilised foreign contribution for persons who have been granted prior permission to receive such contribution. This may be done if, based on a summary inquiry, and pending any further inquiry, the government believes that such person has contravened provisions of the Act.
- **Renewal of license:** Under the Act, every person who has been given a certificate of registration must renew the certificate within six months of expiration. The Bill provides that the government may conduct an inquiry before renewing the certificate to ensure that the person making the application: (i) is not fictitious or benami, (ii) has not been prosecuted or convicted for creating communal tension or indulging in activities aimed at religious conversion, and (iii) has not been found guilty of diversion or misutilisation of funds, among others conditions.
- **Reduction in use of foreign contribution for administrative purposes:** Under the Act, a person who receives foreign contribution must use it only for the purpose for which the contribution is received. Further, they must not use more than 50% of the contribution for meeting administrative expenses. The Bill reduces this limit to 20%.
- **Surrender of certificate:** The Bill adds a provision allowing the central government to permit a person to surrender their registration certificate. The government may do so if, post an inquiry, it is satisfied that such person has not contravened any provisions of the Act, and the management of its foreign contribution (and related assets) has been vested in an authority prescribed by the government.
- **Suspension of registration:** Under the Act, the government may suspend the registration of a person for a period not exceeding 180 days. The Bill adds that such suspension may be extended up to an additional 180 days.

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HIV/AIDS PATIENTS IN INDIA

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of People with HIV-AIDS - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

As per the latest HIV estimates report (2019) of the Government, India is estimated to have around 23.49 lakh people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) in 2019. The HIV epidemic has an overall decreasing trend in country with estimated annual New HIV infections declining by 37% between 2010 and 2019.

HIV infection in India is mainly caused by engagement in high risk behaviours. The main high-risk behaviours identified for HIV infection in India includes unprotected heterosexual behaviour, unprotected homosexual behaviour, and unsafe injecting drug use behaviour.

There are no dedicated hospitals for the treatment of HIV/AIDS patients. However, under the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) of the Government, as on July 2020, there are 570 Anti-retroviral treatment (ART) Centers and 1264 Link ART Centers.

State/UT-wise details of people living with HIV/AIDS in 2018 and 2019 as per the latest HIV estimates report (2019) is at Annexure.

Annexure

Statement on State/UT-wise people living with HIV/AIDS in 2018 and 2019 (In lakh)

State/UT	S No
	2018
	2019
Andhra Pradesh	1
	3.28
	3.14
Arunachal Pradesh	2
	0.01
	0.01
Assam	3

	0.21
	0.21
	4
Bihar	
	1.31
	1.34
	5
Chhattisgarh	
	0.42
	0.43
	6
Delhi	
	0.66
	0.68
	7
Goa	
	0.05
	0.05
	8
Gujarat	
	1.04
	1.04
	9
Himachal Pradesh	
	0.07
	0.07
	10

Haryana

0.45

0.45

11

Jharkhand

0.22

0.23

12

Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh

0.06

0.06

13

Karnataka

2.80

2.69

14

Kerala

0.24

0.24

15

Meghalaya

0.11

0.11

16

Maharashtra

4.05

3.96

	17
Manipur	
	0.29
	0.29
	18
Madhya Pradesh	
	0.59
	0.59
	19
Mizoram	
	0.20
	0.20
	20
Nagaland	
	0.22
	0.23
	21
Odisha	
	0.50
	0.49
	22
Punjab	
	0.66
	0.66
	23
Rajasthan	
	0.62

	0.63
	24
Sikkim	
	0.003
	0.003
	25
Tamil Nadu	
	1.59
	1.55
	26
Tripura	
	0.02
	0.03
	27
Uttarakhand	
	0.11
	0.11
	28
Uttar Pradesh	
	1.61
	1.61
	29
West Bengal	
	0.73
	0.74
	30
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	

	0.005
	0.005
	31
Chandigarh	
	0.02
	0.02
	32
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	
	0.01
	0.01
	33
Daman & Diu	
	0.005
	0.005
	34
Puducherry	
	0.05
	0.05
	35
Telangana	
	1.60
	1.58
	36
India	
	23.81
	23.49

The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare), Sh Ashwini Kumar Choubey stated this in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha here today.

MV/SJ

HFW/20Sep2020

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	3.14
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	0.01

	3
Assam	
	0.21
	0.21
	4
Bihar	
	1.31
	1.34
	5
Chhattisgarh	
	0.42
	0.43
	6
Delhi	
	0.66
	0.68
	7
Goa	
	0.05
	0.05
	8
Gujarat	
	1.04
	1.04
	9
Himachal Pradesh	
	0.07

	0.07
	10
Haryana	
	0.45
	0.45
	11
Jharkhand	
	0.22
	0.23
	12
Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh	
	0.06
	0.06
	13
Karnataka	
	2.80
	2.69
	14
Kerala	
	0.24
	0.24
	15
Meghalaya	
	0.11
	0.11
	16
Maharashtra	

	4.05
	3.96
	17
Manipur	
	0.29
	0.29
	18
Madhya Pradesh	
	0.59
	0.59
	19
Mizoram	
	0.20
	0.20
	20
Nagaland	
	0.22
	0.23
	21
Odisha	
	0.50
	0.49
	22
Punjab	
	0.66
	0.66
	23

Rajasthan

0.62

0.63

24

Sikkim

0.003

0.003

25

Tamil Nadu

1.59

1.55

26

Tripura

0.02

0.03

27

Uttarakhand

0.11

0.11

28

Uttar Pradesh

1.61

1.61

29

West Bengal

0.73

0.74

	30
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	
	0.005
	0.005
	31
Chandigarh	
	0.02
	0.02
	32
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	
	0.01
	0.01
	33
Daman & Diu	
	0.005
	0.005
	34
Puducherry	
	0.05
	0.05
	35
Telangana	
	1.60
	1.58
	36
India	
	23.81

23.49

Source: India HIV Estimates 2019 report

The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare), Sh Ashwini Kumar Choubey stated this in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha here today.

MV/SJ

HFW/20Sep2020

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E-LEARNING IN INDIA, A CASE OF BAD EDUCATION

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

Equality of opportunity to all is one of the basic principles of our Constitution. From an educational point of view, John Dewey, American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, strongly argued that “[A]n environment in which some are limited will always in reaction create conditions that prevent the full development even of those who fancy they enjoy complete freedom for unhindered growth.” Another point he makes equally strongly is that for good education, one must lead the child’s current interests and abilities organically to logically organised human knowledge. This second point is an indicator of the quality of education.

Our education system was never very efficient even in the best of times. The COVID-19 pandemic has rendered it extremely biased and faulty. The main thrust of providing learning opportunities while schools are shut is online teaching. There are several sets of guidelines and plans issued by the government, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) for this purpose. The Internet space is teeming with learning schemes, teaching videos, sites and portals for learning opportunities. The content of all government sites and schemes is primarily the NCERT-issued Alternative Academic Calendar (<https://bit.ly/3kE5nCN>), videos of teaching, digital editions of textbooks, and links to other such material.

Also read | [Why e-learning isn't a sustainable solution to the COVID-19 education crisis in India](#)

There are three pertinent issues in this whole effort of online education and schemes that need serious consideration. One, an exacerbation of inequality; two, the pedagogical issues leading to bad quality education; and three, an unwarranted thrust on online education, post-COVID-19.

It is worth repeating a truism that calamities, be they natural or man-made, affect the underprivileged the hardest; COVID-19 is no exception. The plight of millions of migrant labourers, many of who walked thousands of kilometres right in the beginning of the lockdown, proved the point adequately. A similar but less noticed deprivation is being visited to children of the same people, which may push the next generation in a direction of even greater comparative disadvantage.

In our society there is no large movement that may generate any hope of an improved situation in terms of equality and social justice. Therefore, any positive change that might come about will be a cumulative result of the development of capabilities and grit in individuals. The COVID-19 shutdown has affected this opportunity for the poor even harder than their counterparts from well-to-do sections of society. The government began plans for students with no online access only by the end of August. The plans themselves were the usual glib talk always served to the poor. These plans assume semi-literate or illiterate parents teaching children, community involvement, mobile pools, and so on. Anyone with an understanding of rural India will immediately note these to be imaginary. As a result, whatever online or digital education is available is for students with only online access. Thus, digital India may become even more unequal and divided than it already is.

Comment | [Can online learning replace the school classroom?](#)

Even if one takes it as an emergency measure (that ‘something is better than nothing’) and also accept ‘for some is better than no one’ despite it being against the principle of equal opportunity, the quality of online teaching-learning leaves much to be desired. The NCERT declares in its

Learning Enhancement Guidelines (<https://bit.ly/3iWdxWD>), or LEG that 60-70% students, teachers and parents consider learning satisfactory. However, its survey asks a single question on the feeling of students using the criteria of 'joyful to burdensome'. The happiness or otherwise of the student while learning is, of course, important, but it says nothing about the quantum and depth of learning.

Listening to lectures on the mobile phone, copying from the board where the teacher is writing, frequent disconnections and/or having blurred video/audio can hardly and organically connect the child's present understanding with the logically organised bodies of human knowledge.

Also read | [M.P. village returns to conventional mode as e-learning remains elusive for tribal students](#)

If one sees videos of teaching mathematics, science, history, and the English language, one can hardly avoid noticing problems with them. In the science and mathematics videos, in particular, there are many misconceptions and ambiguities. The emphasis is more on 'tricks' to remember for success in an examination than laying the stress on conceptual understanding.

The government of Delhi also uses videos by the Khan Academy ("a nonprofit with a mission to provide a free, world-class education to anyone, anywhere"). Many American educators have questioned the quality of teaching and have pointed out inadequate or plainly wrong concepts, particularly in mathematics. To quote an article in *The Washington Post*, [Khan Academy: The revolution that isn't](#): "teachers... are concerned that... the guy who's delivered over 170 million lessons to students around the world... considers the precise explanation of mathematical concepts to be mere 'nitpicking'."

Also read | [In the time of online classes, Northeast waits for a faint signal from a distant tower](#)

The secondary students are in a better position still because of their relative independence in learning and possible self-discipline. The beginners in the lower primary can get nothing at all from this mode of teaching. An example of assumptions in the NCERT's planning in LEG can be instructive; it is glibly pronounced that "for a child in grade I, the learning outcome — associates words with pictures — can be easily taught with the use of resources available from or at home such as newspapers, food packets, things at home, TV programmes, nature, etc. All that will be needed is guidance to the parents." Well, if it were all that simple, then why are our children not learning to read and write? Education does not happen in chance encounters with print. As Michael Joseph Oakeshott who also wrote on education would say, it requires well-connected, regular efforts that are incrementally building to help the child focus his attention and to provoke him to distinguish and to discriminate, and develop a habit of staying on task. And this requires help from someone who knows the child as well as understands the objective of education. Food packets and newspapers in the hands of even 'guided' semi-literate parents will be good enough to present a plan on paper, but will be completely useless for the child's learning.

Comment | [The pandemic imposes a steep learning curve](#)

IT has been presented as a harbinger of a revolution in education for more than three decades now. However, all reliable studies seem to indicate that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the classroom helps in already well functioning systems, and either has no benefits or negative impact in poorly performing systems. That does not indicate much hope from IT in our education system.

The NCERT's LEG states that "COVID-19 has created a situation which demands transformation in school education... the transaction mechanisms in school education may go

through a drastic change. Therefore, even if the pandemic will get over, its traces will be there and school education needs to remodel itself....” It recommends that “alternative modes of education for the whole academic session including Internet-based, radio, podcast, community radio, IVRS, TV DTH Channels, etc.” should be developed. This transformation of schools in the current understanding of pedagogy, suitability of learning material and quality of learning provided through IT will further devastate the already inadequate system of school education in the country. Of course, IT can be used in a balanced manner where it can help; but it should not be seen as a silver bullet to remedy all ills in the education system.

Also read | [NSO report shows stark digital divide affects education](#)

The importance of an institutional environment cannot be overemphasised when one thinks of online teaching. Even when the institutions function sub-optimally, students themselves create an environment that supports their growth morally, socially and intellectually in conversations and interactions with each other. The online mode of teaching completely forecloses this opportunity.

In conclusion, our democracy and public education system have, as usual, left the neediest in the lurch and are providing bad education to those who matter.

Rohit Dhankar is Professor, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, and Founder Secretary, Digantar, Jaipur, Rajasthan. The views expressed are personal

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THE ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY (REGULATION) BILL, 2020

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

- The Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020 was introduced in Lok Sabha on September 14, 2020. The Bill seeks to provide for the regulation of Assisted Reproductive Technology services in the country.
- **Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART):** The Bill defines ART to include all techniques that seek to obtain a pregnancy by handling the sperm or the oocyte (immature egg cell) outside the human body and transferring the gamete or the embryo into the reproductive system of a woman. Examples of ART services include gamete (sperm or oocyte) donation, in-vitro-fertilisation (fertilising an egg in the lab), and gestational surrogacy (the child is not biologically related to surrogate mother). ART services will be provided through: (i) ART clinics, which offer ART related treatments and procedures, and (ii) ART banks, which store and supply gametes.
- **Regulation of ART clinics and banks:** The Bill provides that every ART clinic and bank must be registered under the National Registry of Banks and Clinics of India. The National Registry will be established under the Bill and will act as a central database with details of all ART clinics and banks in the country. State governments will appoint registration authorities for facilitating the registration process. Clinics and banks will be registered only if they adhere to certain standards (specialised manpower, physical infrastructure, and diagnostic facilities). The registration will be valid for five years and can be renewed for a further five years. Registration may be cancelled or suspended if the entity contravenes the provisions of the Bill.
- **Conditions for gamete donation and supply:** Screening of gamete donors, collection and storage of semen, and provision of oocyte donor can only be done by a registered ART bank. A bank can obtain semen from males between 21 and 55 years of age, and oocytes from females between 23 and 35 years of age. An oocyte donor should be an ever-married woman having at least one alive child of her own (minimum three years of age). The woman can donate oocyte only once in her life and not more than seven oocytes can be retrieved from her. A bank cannot supply gamete of a single donor to more than one commissioning couple (couple seeking services).
- **Conditions for offering ART services:** ART procedures can only be carried out with the written informed consent of both the party seeking ART services as well as the donor. The party seeking ART services will be required to provide insurance coverage in the favour of the oocyte donor (for any loss, damage, or death of the donor). A clinic is prohibited from offering to provide a child of pre-determined sex. The Bill also requires checking for genetic diseases before the embryo implantation.
- **Rights of a child born through ART:** A child born through ART will be deemed to be a biological child of the commissioning couple and will be entitled to the rights and

privileges available to a natural child of the commissioning couple. A donor will not have any parental rights over the child.

- **National and State Boards:** The Bill provides that the National and State Boards for Surrogacy constituted under the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019 will act as the National and State Board respectively for the regulation of ART services. Key powers and functions of the National Board include: (i) advising the central government on ART related policy matters, (ii) reviewing and monitoring the implementation of the Bill, (iii) formulating code of conduct and standards for ART clinics and banks, and (iv) overseeing various bodies to be constituted under the Bill. The State Boards will coordinate enforcement of the policies and guidelines for ART as per the recommendations, policies, and regulations of the National Board.
- **Offences and penalties:** Offences under the Bill include: (i) abandoning, or exploiting children born through ART, (ii) selling, purchasing, trading, or importing human embryos or gametes, (iii) using intermediates to obtain donors, (iv) exploiting commissioning couple, woman, or the gamete donor in any form, and (v) transferring the human embryo into a male or an animal. These offences will be punishable with a fine between five and ten lakh rupees for the first contravention. For subsequent contraventions, these offences will be punishable with imprisonment for a term between eight and 12 years, and a fine between 10 and 20 lakh rupees.
- Any clinic or bank advertising or offering sex-selective ART will be punishable with imprisonment between five and ten years, or fine between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 25 lakh, or both.
- No court will take cognisance of offences under the Bill, except on a complaint made by the National or State Board or any officer authorised by the Boards.

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WHY CIVIL SOCIETY MATTERS - EDITORIALS - HINDUSTAN TIMES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Peoples' Participation-Role of Civil Society in Governance

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The Lok Sabha has passed the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill 2020 regarding non-governmental organisations (NGOs) without debate, which is unfortunate. NGOs are not without their problems, but the estimated three million such bodies that exist in India are a vital and important element of civil society. Many of them implement and monitor the government's welfare policies, operating at the grassroots level where the official apparatus is often non-existent. They also provide a voice for marginal groups and social movements, offering a safety valve that prevents the country's millions of local mutinies from becoming uprisings.

NGOs functioned for decades with thin or non-existent regulations. Self-proclaimed societies were not required to register, and trusts and religious foundations functioned without transparency and financial auditing. The introduction of the Section 25 non-profit company, aligning NGO finances and management with those of a normal firm, was a crucial reform. The new legislation should have moved further on this path. Instead, the new FCRA amendments obsess about the flow of foreign fund to such bodies. No one can question the need for NGOs to be transparent about their sources of funding, whether foreign or domestic. But there is a thin line between enforcing transparency and using rules to allow official interference and harassment in the sector. Much of the present bill crosses that line and moves toward a licence-raj on NGOs.

NGOs are a heterogeneous category. Regulations regarding NGOs, therefore, should be about basic principles and requirements. The bill introduces a questionable degree of micro-management. An NGO should be required to state how much it spends on administration, but the level of spending should not be a government concern. Restricting inter-NGO money transfers ignores that many NGOs are funding bodies or sub-contract their operations to other NGOs. And that funding should be routed through a specified bank branch has little logic. The Right-wing has, wrongly, constructed foreign-funded NGOs as a threat. While some excesses have been rightly curbed, if this is marked by political vendetta, it will open the doors for all forms of harassment, of all kinds of organisations, under different regimes. The government should send the bill to a select committee of the Rajya Sabha. NGOs are a necessary component of

civil society and this bill needs greater public debate and scrutiny.

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AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING COMPLEXES (ARHCS), SUB-SCHEME UNDER PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA - URBAN (PMAY-U) WILL BE IMPLEMENTED BY PUBLIC/PRIVATE BODIES

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

Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs), a sub-scheme under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U) will be implemented by Public/Private bodies either by converting the existing Government funded vacant complexes into ARHCs or by constructing, operating and maintaining ARHCs on their own available vacant land.

This scheme has been formulated in line with the vision of “Aatma Nirbhar Bharat” to create a sustainable ecosystem of affordable rental housing solutions for urban migrants/ poor. It envisages to create a conducive ecosystem for Public/ Private Entities through policy incentives which will leverage investment for creating affordable rental housing stock.

In order to provide impetus to the Public Private Partnership under this scheme, following incentives/ benefits have been proposed by Government of India and State/UT Governments as mentioned below:

Beneficiaries for ARHCs will be from Economically Weaker Section (EWS)/ Low Income Group (LIG) who are urban migrants/poor. They include labour, urban poor (street vendors, rickshaw pullers, other service providers etc.), industrial workers and migrants working with market/ trade associations, educational/ health institutions, hospitality sector, long term tourists/ visitors, students or any other persons of such category.

This was informed by Minister of State (I/C) for Housing and Urban Affairs Shri Hardeep Singh Puri in a written reply in the Lok Sabha today.

RJ/RP

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GOVERNMENT IS IMPLEMENTING A NUMBER OF SCHEMES / PROGRAMMES TO INCREASE LITERACY RATES AND EDUCATION LEVEL OF STS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of STs, SCs, and OBCs - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Ministry of Tribal Affairs has been implementing a separate Central Sector Scheme 'Eklavya Model Residential Schools' (EMRSs) from 2019-20. The objective of EMRS is to provide quality upper primary, secondary and senior secondary level education to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students to enable them to access the best opportunities in education and to bring them at par with the general population. 285 EMRSs are currently functional across the country.

As per Census 2011, literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 59% whereas the overall literacy rate was 73% at all India level.

As per Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report 2017-18 published by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, literacy rate for STs is 67.7% and corresponding figure over all is 76.9%. The PLFS 2018-19 report reveals an improvement in literacy rate of STs at 69.4% as compared to 78.1% over all.

Government is implementing a number of schemes / programmes to increase the literacy rates and education level of STs, which are given below:

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES / PROGRAMMES INTER-ALIA BEING IMPLEMENTED TO INCREASE THE LITERACY RATES AND EDUCATION LEVEL OF STS

This information was given by Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Shri Arjun Munda in a written reply in Rajya Sabha today.

NB/SK/jk/Tribal Affair-2/22-09-2020

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M/O TRIBAL AFFAIRS INTENDS TO ESTABLISH NATIONAL TRIBAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE (NTRI) AT DELHI

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of STs, SCs, and OBCs - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Ministry of Tribal Affairs intends to establish a National Tribal Research Institute (NTRI) at Delhi to act as body of knowledge & research and as a think tank for tribal development. However, no proposal for collaboration with NGOs is under consideration of the Ministry.

The NTRI envisages to serve the purpose of mentoring and hand holding support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) located in various States, and to ensure quality and uniformity in research works, evaluation studies, training, awareness generation among tribals, showcasing of rich tribal heritage including languages, habitats and cultivation and production practices such as cloth weaving etc. NTRI may also house auditorium for national level conferences.

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GOVERNMENT HAS LAUNCHED YUWAAH – A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM TO MAKE YOUNG PEOPLE CAREER READY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Human resources, Youth, Sports and related issues

Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports and United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) have signed a “Statement of Intent” on 20.07.2020 to establish YuWaah, Generation Unlimited (GenU), a global multi-stakeholder platform in India. As per the Statement of Intent, the objectives of this project are:

Support young people by providing entrepreneurship classes (online and offline) with successful entrepreneurs and experts, towards establishing entrepreneurial mindset among young people.

Upskilling of young people on 21st century skills, life skills, digital skills through online and offline channels and support them through self-learning, for their productive lives and the future of work.

Create linkages with aspirational economic opportunities to connect young people with employment opportunities, including building pathways to connect them with jobs or self-employment. For this, innovative solutions and technology platforms will be engaged to take maximize the scale and reach.

Providing career guidance support to young people through career portal as well as through job-readiness and self-exploration sessions to make young people career-ready.

The role of Department of Youth Affairs in this project is to provide relevant experts to participate on the YuWaah Technical Working Groups/ Task Forces.

This information was given by Union Minister of State (IC) for Youth Affairs and Sports, Shri Kiren Rijiju in a written reply in Lok Sabha today.

NB/OJA/UD

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GOVERNMENT TO SET UP MEDICAL DEVICES PARK IN KERALA

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

Kerala will soon house one of the first medical device parks in the country, focusing on the high-risk medical device sector to provide full range of services for the medical devices industry like R&D support, testing, and evaluation.

MedSpark, the medical devices park envisaged as a joint initiative of Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences & Technology (SCTIMST), an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India, and the Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation Ltd (KSIDC), the industrial and investment promotion agency of the Government of Kerala is going to be established in the Life Science Park, Thonnakkal, Thiruvananthapuram.

This medical device park will stand out with its emphasis on the high-risk medical device sector involving medical implants and extracorporeal devices, in which SCTIMST scores with its knowledge.

The Medical Devices Park will create an enabling support system for R&D, testing and evaluation of medical devices, manufacturing support, technology innovation, and knowledge dissemination, all of which are the full range of services that the medical devices industry seeks. These services can be utilized by the medical device industries located within the MedSpark as well from other parts of India. This will benefit small and medium-sized medical devices industries, which dominate the medical devices sector.

Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister, Government of Kerala, will lay the foundation stone for Medical Devices Park on Thursday, 24th September 2020.

“Sree Chitra has made substantial contributions to the biomedical devices sector over the last 30 or more years and has established itself as a pioneer in this field. This is a milestone for biomedical devices industry in the country and is fully aligned with the Honorable Prime Minister’s Vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat”, said Dr. VK Saraswat, NITI Aayog Member and the President of SCTIMST.

“The aspect that will distinguish this Medical Device Park from the few other similar projects proposed in the country is that it will focus on the high-risk medical device sector involving medical implants and extracorporeal devices, the domain in which SCTIMST has considerable expertise and experience,” Prof. Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary DST commented.

“The park is being established under the Technical Research Centre for Biomedical devices program of the DST, through a knowledge partnership with KSIDC, Government of Kerala, tapping the ecosystem that exists in the city with several research and academic institutions and health care centers. It was possible with the support of various departments of the Central Government and Niti Aayog,” said Dr. Asha Kishore, Director, SCTIMST.

MedSpark can leverage the existing advantage of the Kerala State in the high-risk medical device manufacture and develop it into the most sought after destination for setting up medical device industry in India.

Currently, Kerala has a number of medical device companies with an annual turnover in excess

of Rs. 750 crores, most of them operating with technologies transferred from SCTIMST.

When completed, the MedSpark will have:

NB/KGS/(DST Media Cell)

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THE G IN NGO

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Bill (FCRA) 2020, passed by the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday and the Lok Sabha a day earlier, puts many question marks on the viability of NGOs at a time when the country especially requires robust civil society organisations and networks to deal with a range of challenges including the ravages of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). The government claims that its aim is to bring about transparency in the working of non-profits. That is an unexceptionable goal, and questions relating to financial propriety have, indeed, been asked of some NGOs. However, some of the provisions of the Bill that now awaits the President's approval — capping the administrative expenses of non-profits at 20 per cent of their foreign donations, requiring them to have a State Bank of India account at a Delhi Branch, prohibiting the transfer of grants received under FCRA to any other outfit and sweeping powers to the Ministry of Home Affairs to cancel the FCRA certificate of an NGO — speak of the Centre's mistrust of the entire civil society sector. These clauses could make almost any non-profit vulnerable to harassment and shrink the already embattled space for civil society activity in the country.

According to the government's FCRA dashboard, there are more than 20,000 non-profits registered under the FCRA act. They are engaged in diverse activities, relating to human and labour rights, gender issues, healthcare, environment, education, legal aid, even research. They endeavour to plug gaps in the government's programmes and reach out to sections of people often left untouched by state projects. During the pandemic, many such organisations have tried to bridge the gap between state agencies and the most vulnerable sections of the population, migrant workers for example, by generating awareness and facilitating the transfer of government aid. In fact, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) has repeatedly said that the fight against the [coronavirus](#) "is a combination of the efforts of the government and the civil society". Community-level outfits and self-help groups have led from the front in the battle against the virus in several states, including Kerala, Odisha and Rajasthan. In the past, such grass roots organisations have been enabled by collaborations with bigger NGOs and research agencies that have access to foreign funding. The new FCRA provisions — especially the one that constrains NGOs from sub-granting — threaten this spirit of collaboration in the country's development sector.

NGO activity is not just about philanthropy. Their engagement with people at the grass roots level acquaints civil society workers with the deficiencies of government programmes, and often makes them ask difficult questions — about discrimination, marginalisation, violation of constitutional rights, human dignity. Such interventions and criticisms are crucial to a humane society. In fact, civil society initiatives have informed some of the path-breaking laws in the country, including the Environmental Protection Act, Right to Education Act, Forests Rights Act and Right to Information Act. To hobble such activism, by burdening it with distrust and suspicion, does a disservice to democracy.

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WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Women - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Government has taken several measures aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among women in the country. These include:

1. **Initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE):**
2. **Initiatives of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME):**

This information was given in a written reply by the Union Minister of Women and Child Development, Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani in Lok Sabha today.

APS/SG/RC

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DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Children - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

The Ministry of Women & Child Development implements following schemes to promote the development of women and children across the country:

As Anganwadi Services is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, the overall management and monitoring regarding implementation of the ICDS Scheme are being done by the concerned State Government/UT Administration.

The Ministry does not directly provide any grants to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's).

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THE FOREIGN HAND: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON FCRA AMENDMENTS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

[Amendments to the FCRA](#), drafted without consultation with stakeholders and [passed with limited discussion in Parliament](#), further clip the wings of India's battered civil society. New regulations put onerous conditions on civil society organisations, and educational and research institutions that have partnerships, including of a financial nature, with foreign entities. Passions overwhelm rationality in conversations on foreign influences, and it could well be true that a portion of such foreign assistance may be reaching the wrong hands. In Parliament, the BJP alleged that foreign money was being used for religious conversions. In 2017, the government barred American Christian charity, [Compassion International](#), accusing it of supporting conversions. The debate on religious propagation and conversions must be delinked from the question of foreign funding. There are adequate laws against conversion by inducement, and the right or wrong of it cannot be decided against the touchstone of the source of funds, native or foreign. Some of the restrictions appear well meaning, but could impact NGOs besides showing up India to be overregulated.

The [International Commission of Jurists has said the new law was incompatible with international obligations](#) and India's own constitutional provisions on rights. Seamless sharing of ideas and resources across national boundaries is essential to the functioning of a global community, and should not be discouraged unless there is reason to believe the funds are being used to aid illegal activities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often cited the ancient Indian ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* as the framework for its global engagement. The pandemic has only underscored the importance of this approach. As a growing economy, India under Mr. Modi has been proactive in seeking global capital and technology. The aversion appears to be towards select categories of global ideas and ideals — environmentalism, human rights and civil liberties. Organisations working in these fields have often had their patriotism being called into question. To be fair, this approach predates the current government, and it was during the UPA that an official report even quantified the GDP losses allegedly caused by environmental NGOs, insinuating a foreign conspiracy against India. Such paranoia does not go well with India's legitimate ambitions to be a global player. The BJP and the Congress are well aware of the limits of the national-foreign binary. In 2017, both joined hands to legislate an escape route after receiving funds from foreign entities in violation of FCRA provisions. Thousands of NGOs serve extremely disadvantaged sections, at times filling in for the state, at others, supplementing it. A presumption of guilt against them all, followed by control, amounts to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The world is poorer when new barriers are raised.

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SELF HELP GROUPS AND THEIR FEDERATIONS OF DAY-NRLM, MORD PARTICIPATING ACTIVELY IN RASHTRIYA POSHAN MAAH 2020 TO IMPROVE AWARENESS ON HEALTH AND NUTRITION ISSUES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

September month is celebrated as Rashtriya POSHAN Maah each year to give momentum to convergence and behaviour change efforts as envisioned under the POSHAN Abhiyaan (2018), Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment to reduce undernutrition in adolescents, pregnant and lactating mothers and children.

To celebrate this year's Rashtriya POSHAN Maah, all the necessary advisories and guidance informing the themes to be focused upon, activities, etc. were issued by Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, to state missions. A video-conference on 7th September, 2020 was also held under the chairpersonship of Joint Secretary, MoRD with all State Missions to discuss and plan the POSHAN Maah activities. In line with the national themes of POSHAN Maah i.e. identification and tracking of children with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and plantation drive for promotion of kitchen gardens, state missions have been undertaking the following activities.

- i. Active participation of SHGs members and their federations wherever the situation is conducive and with adequate precautions like safe distancing, wearing mask and hand wash and or use of sanitizers, as per the COVID-19 guidelines.

With guidance and support from national mission, all state missions are observing POSHAN Maah with full vigour and in compliance with COVID-19 protocols. Activities like Webinars, POSHAN rallies, POSHAN rangolis, POSHAN pledges, recipe competitions, sensitization, promotion of nutri-gardens, convergence meetings etc. have been initiated on ground by the state missions and communities are participating actively to make this POSHAN Maah a success and take this opportunity to further reinforce the messages related to health, nutrition, sanitation etc.

Adopting "Dashasutra" strategy in 2016, Food, Nutrition, Health and WASH (FNHW) integration has become an integral part of the objectives of the Deendayal Antodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) under Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). To improve the status of Health, Nutrition, Sanitation etc. of

the Self-Help Group (SHG) members under DAY-NRLM and their families, state missions are undertaking initiatives for integrating these issues in SHG's agenda and activities in selected geographies. Further, to support POSHAN Abhiyaan and encourage behaviour change, state missions have been actively participating in events like POSHAN Maah and POSHAN Pakhwada under POSHAN Abhiyaan across the country.

Events like Rashtriya POSHAN Maah provide an opportunity to fast track DAY-NRLM's efforts to percolate key messages in an intensified manner to the intended beneficiaries and to fortify convergence among key stakeholders across all administrative levels. During POSHAN Maah 2019 Mission organized 11.39 lakh activities with 16.39 crore participants (as per Jan Andolan portal). Mission in close coordination with Ministry of Women and Child Development, nodal Ministry for POSHAN Abhiyaan, has undertaken activities for ongoing POSHAN Maah 2020.

States have been urged to diligently follow the COVID-19 prevention protocols and maximally utilize the technology platforms for disseminating key messages and reaching SHGs and their families. State missions have identified the nodal person, developed action plan, identified activities, percolated the guidance to districts and blocks and are now converging with relevant departments (WCD, Health, PRI and others) across levels (district/block) to better plan, coordinate and organize the POSHAN Maah events.

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