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RISKS AND REWARDS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON JALLIKATTU DEATHS

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

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January 19, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:46 am IST

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The deaths of five men in Tamil Nadu in as many events of jallikattu and manjuviratu — in [Madurai](#), [Tiruchi](#), Sivaganga, Pudukottai and Karur districts — and injuries to dozens of persons this week, though unfortunate, are no surprise. Ever since the event resumed in January 2017 after a three-year ban and a massive agitation, participants and spectators alike have been its victims. According to the Animal Welfare Board of India, between 2008-14, there have been 43 deaths and thousands of injuries. As of now, zero human casualty remains an elusive goal, not to speak of the plight of the animal. The Supreme Court of India has reserved its judgment on a batch of petitions questioning the validity of the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(Tamil Nadu Amendment\) Act of 2017](#). Organisers of jallikattu events must note the observation made in late November by the Constitution Bench, which heard arguments over the amendment, that the sport of jallikattu as such might not be brutal but the “form” in which it was being held in the State might be cruel. Proponents of jallikattu, who view the event as a sport, argue that the logic that is applied to football or boxing, where the probability of injury is high, should be extended to jallikattu too. Also, just as the occurrence of mishaps does not trigger the demand for a ban on these two sporting activities, the same yardstick should hold good for jallikattu, which is also [justified in the name of culture, tradition and valour](#). But, what is overlooked is that in football or boxing, or even car racing, the whole game centres around humans, unlike in jallikattu.

At the same time, regulation and safety are being given greater importance. It is comforting that the authorities have tightened the rules. In Madurai district, which has 21 venues, an online registration system allowed bull owners to choose only one out of the three high-profile venues — Avaniapuram, Palamedu and Alanganallur. In Tiruchi, no more than 700 bulls can be released at each event. Of course, elaborate guidelines were issued by the State Animal Husbandry, Dairying, Fishing and Fishermen Welfare Department in late December, on the duties and responsibilities for each stakeholder. Though fairly extensive, the rules should also have stringent penal provisions. The authorities should focus on preventing deaths, at least among spectators, who should be behind impregnable barricades. Also, the government should end the practice of having fancy prizes, such as cars and motorcycles, to draw in youth. After all, jallikattu was originally meant to showcase strength and valour, and the rewards should not be seen as an incentive to overlook the risks to life and limb.

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MINISTER OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS OF ONTARIO PROVINCE OF CANADA VISITS ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF AYURVEDA IN DELHI.

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

Minister of Mental Health and Addictions of Ontario province recently visited All India Institute of Ayurveda in Delhi, feels that propagation of Ayurveda in Canada can help ease the burden of hospitals in Canada as Ayurvedic therapies, principles and lifestyle can keep many diseases at bay. The Canadian delegation led by Mr Michael Tibollo & Canada India Foundation (CIF) visited All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA).

Impressed with the facilities of AIIA, Mr Michael Tibollo said, "The institute helped me to deepen my knowledge and understanding of the importance of East and West medicines and saw here the two can work together for the betterment of mankind. In Canada, we are much focussed on quick results. Many a times, we forget about prevention, education and doing things that lead us to a better lifestyle. Many doctors over here shared their time with me today. They explained to me how interventions using ancient techniques that are tried and proven and have been around for millions of years can reduce the need for acute medicine and acute care in a hospital setting".

"With the help of the Canada India Foundation, we believe that the day is not far away when an institution propagating the knowledge of Ayurveda will be set up there in Canada. We are happy to share data-based evidence with Mr Tibollo and wish that he can present it to the government over there", said Director, AIIA Professor (Dr) Tanuja Manoj Nesari during her meeting with the delegation.

The delegation took a round of the institute and hospital as well as laboratories and other facilities to understand the integrative model adopted by AIIA. The official delegation from Canada was also facilitated by Ministry of Ayush. Director AIIA, New Delhi explained the functioning of different departments including the OPDs, the tertiary care unit, the academic block and the research centre of All India Institute of Ayurveda. A team from All India Institute of Ayurveda also showcased the facilities around the academic and the hospital wing of the institute before the delegation.

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SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR FELICITATES 200 TRIBAL WOMEN WHO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THEIR TRAINING UNDER THE GRAMEEN UDYAMI PROGRAM IN JHARKHAND

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

Key Highlights:

- Over 200 tribal women who had completed their skills training under Phase 3 of the Project, were awarded their certificates

Union Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Electronics & IT, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar today termed skilling as a gateway to opportunity and the Government's endeavor has been to ensure skill opportunities for all in every remote corner of the country while addressing the felicitation programme of the Grameen Udyami Project held at Gumla.



Shri Chandrasekhar said that the skills are an important part of New India's future growth. Our effort has been to provide skilling, keeping in mind the local opportunities and resources available. This will go a long way in reducing migration to cities and also uplift of the local economy, he added.

He emphasized that the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision for an Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant) travels through Atmanirbhar villages and Atmanirbhar Panchayats, and said Atmanirbharta is not possible without the contribution of our tribals (Jan Jatiya).



Over 200 tribal women who had completed their skills training under Phase 3 of the Project, were awarded their certificates at the programme. Union Minister of Tribal Affairs, Shri Arjun Munda and Shri Sameer Oran, Member of Rajya Sabha were also present on the occasion.

Shri Chandrasekhar later met a group of Fellows working under the Mahatma Gandhi Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) scheme from Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu and shared with them Prime Minister Modi's vision about skilling. He said the District Skill Development Plans must focus on creating opportunities for jobs and entrepreneurs for the uplift of the local economy and reflect the vision of Naya Bharat, Naye Avsar, Nayi Sammriddhi.

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Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar had arrived in Ranchi earlier today and visited the holy Manokamna Siddhi Durga Mandir in Lohardaga. He also paid homage at the memorial of Shaheed Devnarayan Bhagat of the Jharkhand police who was martyred fighting against the Naxalites in 2012.

NB/AK

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WHAT IS KEY TO CONTROLLING DIABETES? AWARENESS OR WEALTH?

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Data from the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) indicate that more than the wealth of a person, awareness levels play a relatively superior role in diabetes incidence. But do ground realities support this conclusion drawn using data? **Sonikka Loganathan** speaks to K. Srinath Reddy and Emilija Zabaliute about the wealth-awareness-diabetes link. Edited excerpts:

Q / The NFHS-5 data indicate that 10.6% of women in the poorest 20% households were either on medication to control diabetes or have a random blood glucose level higher than 140 mg/dL (milligrams per decilitre). The corresponding figure for the richest 20% of households is 17%. With such a marginal difference, is it correct to call diabetes a rich man's disease?

A / Emilija Zabaliute: You're right. I think there are a lot of preconceptions, and diabetes is usually associated with surplus food. However, it doesn't really reflect the ground realities. Data show that not only the incidence of diabetes, but also the scale of suffering from chronic illnesses and, especially when it comes to complications, the impact are severe among people with low income levels too. So, in terms of both disease incidence and how people experience the disease, it's not just a rich people's disease, as our popular imagination suggests very often.

A / K. Srinath Reddy: Indeed, neither is it a man's disease, nor is it a rich person's disease. If you look at the global distribution of diabetes, both men and women are affected by it. And we know from global experience that, in general, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and some other chronic diseases start first in the higher socioeconomic group, and then progressively reverse. In fact, the poorer sections become the more dominant victims over a period of time when the epidemics mature into an advanced stage.

A / EZ: Of course, there are a lot of changes in urban diets, but also among poorer folks. We may assume that persons who do physically intensive work will eat traditional diets, but their diets have been changing as well. Not just in India, but across the world, unhealthy food is cheaper. But there are a variety of reasons, and there is no one explanation.

Q / What are some of the factors behind diabetes among the poor beyond what we know, which is diet and exercise? And what kinds of challenges are they facing?

A / KSR: Diet, physical activity, also the kinds of stress levels, sleep levels, all these are

important contributors to body inflammation, which is the underlying basis of both diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The poor now consume far less fruit and vegetables. And they also have polished grain, therefore they don't get much fibre. They consume unhealthy edible oils, which stoke inflammation. Also, if we take body mass index for defining overweight and obesity, the problem is more with the total body fat, or adiposity. If it is distributed much more around the abdominal organs, it is called visceral adiposity, which is much more associated with inflammation and insulin resistance and diabetes. Unfortunately, the kind of unhealthy foods that the poor are forced to eat can lead to a fair amount of visceral adiposity. Routine health services do not really reach the poor in adequate numbers for timely diagnosis. Therefore, diabetes doesn't get detected, or is detected very late, when it has already reached the stage of complications. And even when they do access health services, they're not often treated with the same level of consideration as some of the richer and affluent sections are.

A / EZ: It is crucial to understand that lifestyle is not something people directly choose; this really depends on structural conditions and social processes. Food choices are not necessarily just about a person's individual choices or wishes, they depend on their economic position and social environment.

Q / How would diabetes play out differently between a lower-income person and a higher-income person, once diagnosed?

A / EZ: I worked with people in Delhi who had lower income levels. They could not afford medicines, so they looked for free government medication and insulin doses. But to access that, you have to make a lengthy journey. For working class people to even allocate a day to travel and spend in a hospital is tough. Women, for instance, have child care responsibilities, and it is almost impossible to go to hospital.

Q / When we look at NFHS data, we see that 17.4% of women who had completed zero years of schooling were either on medication to control diabetes or had a random blood glucose level higher than 140 mg/dL. The corresponding figure for women who completed 11 years of schooling was much lower, 8.4%. Can education be used as a proxy for awareness about the disease?

A / KSR: Education matters a lot. If you had asked this question about 50 years ago, or 100 years ago, in India, we would have said that the richer and more educated sections would have more diabetes. But over the last 20-25 years, it's become clear that there has been a reversal of the social gradient. When it comes to diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, education trumps even income. You may have a high income level, but if you're not well-educated, you're more likely to get diseases. If you do not have a high income level, and you're not well-educated, then you're suffering in both ways.

A / EZ: Knowledge is very important. However, during my research, I've never met people who didn't know what diabetes is. Even those persons who had very low literacy levels, very low formal education levels knew what diabetes was. And they actually also had a lot of knowledge on how to control it. They really creatively navigate those care ecologies that are available for them with a lot of effort and manage somehow to assemble care that is needed for them. So, very often people know about the disease, however, it's the everyday constraints and social constraints that prevent them from caring for themselves.

Q / How is diabetes manifesting among rural populations?

A / KSR: Let me first take you to the U.S. Rural America that has more obesity, or diabetes, or hypertension or cardiovascular disease. That was not true about 70 years ago. Health transition

takes place over time, along with developmental transition and urbanisation. Now the same phenomenon is happening in India. The rates are increasing fairly rapidly in rural India. The kind of food they're eating is ultra-processed. With labour-saving transport devices becoming available in rural parts, the physical activity levels are also getting lower.

Q / How does diabetes affect women differently?

A / EZ: India is so diverse that to make generalisations is quite difficult. However, there are communities where mostly women are responsible for cooking, and there is a quiet division of labour. There are also certain familial and gendered hierarchies around food-sharing and food-making. I did some research and found that it's difficult for a woman in India, especially among low-income groups, to cook food for herself separately from the family if she has diabetes, because there's a lack of resources. And that it wouldn't be socially acceptable to put so much effort on your own meals.

Q / Is this really a question of access to information about invisible diseases, rather than of wealth?

A / KSR: We are seeing a huge rise in diabetes in India. So, it's absolutely important for us to make people much more aware of the risk factors, to enable them to have healthier diets which are affordable, to promote greater levels of physical activity, and to educate them about what diabetes is in terms of symptoms, and complications, and motivate them to seek early self-referral.

A / EZ: If you are thinking about medical knowledge, I'm sure that among persons with a high degree of formal education it would be higher. But, is it knowledge about diabetes or is it about diabetes care? Also, does that knowledge actually translate into better care for these persons even if they understand what diabetes is in biological and medical terms? Among poor populations, it really would be mostly the structural issues that wouldn't allow persons to do what the doctors advise.

K. Srinath Reddy is a physician and an Honorary Distinguished Professor at the Public Health Foundation of India

Dr. Emilija Zabaliute is Lecturer, Anthropologist, Durham University (Department of Anthropology). Her field research includes a study on living with diabetes in Delhi, and how it is shaped by family care and gender relations

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FLIP THE PAGE TO THE CHAPTER ON MIDDLE SCHOOLCHILDREN

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January 20, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 01:49 am IST

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‘ASER data shows that even in 2018, basic skills of children in upper primary grades left a lot to be desired’ File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

After a gap of four years, the [Annual Status of Education Report \(ASER\) report for 2022](#) was recently released in New Delhi. This nationwide household survey that covers all rural districts in the country generates estimates for schooling and basic learning for every State in India. Data from 2018 and 2022 can be compared with longer run trends over the last decade to see how the COVID-19 years have impacted India.

The [National Education Policy 2020](#) gives high priority to the acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy skills especially for children in early grades. [“NIPUN Bharat”](#) (where NIPUN is National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) the government’s flagship programme designed to translate policy into practice, is beginning to have traction in many States.

Given that the policy and implementation focus currently is on early years in primary school, it may be useful to also understand how older children in upper primary grades are faring.

In 2018, the all-India rural enrolment figure for the age group 6-14 years was 97.2%. In ASER 2022 data, this is now 98.4%. The rise has been accompanied by a significant shift away from private schools to government schools. Several factors may be at play — decrease in family income, permanent closures of low-cost private schools, and the efforts of many State governments to provide services even when schools were closed such as mid-day meal rations, teaching-learning materials shared remotely, worksheet and textbook distribution.

On the ‘plus’ side, rising enrolment means that more students can benefit for longer, sustained periods of time from schooling. Completion of the entire cycle of eight years of schooling for each cohort of 25 million students is no mean achievement in a country of India’s size and diversity. On the ‘minus’ side, with more and more students going through the middle school pipeline and attending secondary schools, there is increased competition for post-secondary opportunities. Board examinations continue to perform a gatekeeping function. Acute examination stress, grade inflation in school-leaving examinations, difficulties of gaining admission into college, and lack of appropriate jobs for many school leavers are all consequences of high enrolment and completion rates.

Since its inception, ASER has measured foundational skills in reading and arithmetic. The highest reading task on the ASER tool is reading a text at Grade II level of difficulty. In mathematics, the highest level is a numerical three-digit by one-digit division problem, usually expected of children in standard four or so. The assessment is done one on one with each sampled child in the household. The child is marked at the highest level that she/he can comfortably reach. The same tasks are used for all children aged 5 years to 16 years.

ASER data shows that even in 2018, basic skills of children in upper primary grades left a lot to be desired: less than a third of all children in standard five and less than half of those in standard eight could do division in pre-COVID-19 times. These low levels which are worrying declined further between 2018 and 2022, especially in reading. ASER evidence suggests that basic learning levels of middle schoolchildren have remained low and stagnant for over a decade. The “value” add of each year of middle school is small.

In the last 10 years, much has changed such as new technologies, new knowledge domains, and new ways of operating. But within our school systems, many children are reaching standard eight without being sufficiently equipped with foundational literacy and numeracy skills, let alone higher-level capabilities.

Unless children have strong foundational skills, they cannot acquire higher level skills or develop advanced content knowledge. ASER data shows that an “overambitious” curriculum and the linear age-grade organisational structure of Indian schools result in a vast majority of children getting “left behind” early in their school career. In the absence of in-school mechanisms for “catch up”, children fall further and further behind academically. With this comes low motivation to learn and a lack of self-confidence. At the same time, as children reach higher grades, parental and family aspirations for the child’s future increase.

Our school system is driven by preparations for Board examinations. Academic content transacted in schools implicitly assumes that students are being prepared for college. However, the reality is that a college degree is neither relevant nor possible for most students who finish secondary school. It is also not clear that a college degree will lead to the prized white-collar jobs that most students and their families are aspiring for.

Now that schools have stayed open for most of this school year, most children are back in school, the urgency of dealing with “learning loss” is acknowledged, and we have a policy that speaks of “critical thinking” and “flexible pathways through school”, it is time to rethink and rework what happens with our children once they grow past the foundational stage of schooling. Much of the country’s efforts in school education today are focused on ensuring strong foundations for children in the early years. But it is critical that we remember that middle schoolchildren also urgently need support for learning recovery and “catch up”.

Rukmini Banerji is CEO, Pratham Education Foundation

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JUDGING A DECADE OF THE POCSO ACT

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A police officer in Karur, Tamil Nadu, addressing students on the POCSO Act | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Ten years have passed since the [Protection of Children from Sexual Offences \(POCSO\) Act, 2012](#), enacted in consequence to India's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, came into effect on November 14, 2012. The aim of this special law is to address offences of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, which were either not specifically defined or in adequately penalised. Amidst the debate on the poor conviction rate under POCSO and a lowering of the age of consent from 18 years to 16 years (though rejected by the Central government), it is worth evaluating its impact on the ground.

A significant feature of the POCSO Act is its gender-neutral nature. Even though the National Crime Records Bureau has not published data on male and female victims separately, in Chhattisgarh, male child victims accounted for about eight in every 1,000 POCSO cases (0.8%). Though the reported number is not big, it still endorses society's apprehension that the sexual exploitation of male children is also a serious issue that has been largely unreported. Second, there is sufficient general awareness now to report cases of sexual exploitation of children not only by individuals but also by institutions as non-reporting has been made a specific offence under the POCSO Act. This has made it comparatively difficult to hide offences against children.

The storage of child pornography material has been made a new offence. Further, the offence of 'sexual assault' has been defined in explicit terms (with increased minimum punishment) unlike an abstract definition of 'outraging modesty of a woman' in the Indian Penal Code.

However, a large part of the investigation of offences under the Act is still guided by the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). The investigation of penetrative sexual assault cases generally involves recording the statement of the prosecutrix, a medical and forensic science laboratory (FSL) examination, and determination of the child's age. The POCSO Act provides for recording the statement of the affected child by a woman sub-inspector at the child's residence or place of choice. But it is practically impossible to comply with this provision when the number of women in the police force is just 10%, and many police stations hardly have women staff. In 2015, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) introduced a scheme to create an Investigation Unit on Crime Against Women (IUCAW) which was to be made up of 15 police officers (with at least one-third comprising women officers and headed by an additional superintendent of police) in each district. Its aim was to ensure quality investigation of crimes against women on a 50:50

expenditure sharing basis; the response by States to the scheme has been half-hearted. Similarly, despite funds being provided by the Centre to strengthen mahila desks, many police stations still do not have even a single woman staff.

Similarly, though there is a provision to record statements using audio-video means, and a Supreme Court judgment, *Shafiq Mohammad vs The State of Himachal Pradesh* (2018), on capturing and preserving the scene of crime of heinous offences using audio-video means (followed by standardization of technical specifications by the Bureau of Police Research and Development for uniformity), the pilot project has yet to be implemented across States. In the absence of proper infrastructure to ensure the integrity of electronic evidence, the admissibility of evidence recorded using any audio-video means will always remain a challenge. Another provision mandates the recording of the statement of the prosecutrix by a judicial magistrate. Though such statements are recorded in most cases, judicial magistrates are neither called for cross-examination during trial nor are those who retract their statement punished. In such a scenario, such statements get nullified.

Editorial | [Considering consent: On POCSO Act and the age of consent](#)

Second, medical examination of the prosecutrix is conducted according to provisions of the CrPC. However, the medical examination of a girl child is conducted by a female doctor (as specified in the POCSO Act). Even so, and as observed by the Supreme Court of India, there are instances where the banned two-finger test is still in use. Further, there have been no attempts to upgrade the FSLs in States to expedite the examination of exhibits. The fact is that many cases have a charge sheet without an accompanying FSL report, which is then decided by courts.

Third, though age determination of a juvenile delinquent is guided by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, no such provision exists under the POCSO Act for juvenile victims. The Supreme Court in *Jarnail Singh vs State of Haryana* (2013) held that the given statutory provision should also be the basis to help determine age even for a child who is a victim of crime. However, in absence of any change in the law or even specific directions, the investigating officers (IOs) continue to rely on the the date of birth recorded in school admission-withdrawal registers — which, in most cases, parents (in the absence of hospital or any other authentic records) are not able to defend in the court. Age estimation based on medical opinion is generally so wide in scope that in most cases minors are proved to be major. Once a minor is proved to be a major, the probability of acquittal increases based on other factors such as consent or no injury to private parts. Thus, the POCSO Act has made no difference in investigation when it comes to proving juvenility.

Further, the time mandated to complete investigation of rape (as in the CrPC, without a similar provision in the POCSO Act) is two months. Though the aim is to expedite investigation, it has resulted in two significant changes on the field. One, there is much pressure on the IOs to somehow submit a charge sheet in two months irrespective of what stage the investigation is at. The IOs do not want to invite internal punishment as the Ministry of Home Affairs supervises POCSO cases through the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) and State police headquarters. Thus, unfortunately, the focus is largely on completion of investigation in two months irrespective of quality. Second, if a charge sheet was not put up in 90 days of the arrest of the accused, he/she was granted bail. Now, when a charge sheet is put up in 60 days of the FIR (and not arrest), the accused may seek bail immediately after the filing of the charge sheet. Thus, it is the accused, and not the victim, who gets the benefit of completing an investigation in a shorter time.

Editorial | [Error corrected: On interpreting POCSO Act](#)

The POCSO Act provides that the court shall presume that the accused has committed the offence. No conditions whatsoever are laid down in the POCSO Act in contrast to the Indian Evidence Act (Section 114(b)) which clearly provides for the prosecution to prove recent intercourse, and the prosecutrix to state in court that she did not consent. However, it has been observed that even after the minor age of the victim is proved, no such presumption (howsoever small a relevance it may have) is taken up by the court during trial.

Under such circumstances, the expected increase in the conviction rate is unlikely to be achieved. Therefore, it is time that there is a review of the way the POCSO Act is implemented to see how far it has helped victims of sexual exploitation and what more needs to be done to ensure justice.

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

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PM TAKES METRO RIDE FROM GUNDAVALI METRO STATION TO MOGRA IN MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA

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

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi took a metro ride from Gundavali Metro Station to Mogra in Mumbai today. He also launched MUMBAI 1 Mobile App and National Common Mobility Card (Mumbai 1) and undertook a walkthrough of the Metro Photo Exhibition and 3D Model on the occasion. The Prime Minister also interacted with students, daily commuters and shramjeevis involved in the construction of the metro during the metro ride.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by the Governor of Maharashtra, Shri Bhagat Singh Kohsyari, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Eknath Shine and Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Devendra Fadnavis on the occasion.

The Prime Minister's office tweeted:

"PM [Narendra Modi](#) on board the Metro in Mumbai."

PM [@narendramodi](#) on board the Metro in Mumbai. pic.twitter.com/nE03O7nDmW

Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister dedicated to the nation Mumbai Metro Rail Lines 2A & 7, laid the foundation stone for the redevelopment of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus and seven sewage treatment plants, inaugurated 20 Hindufridaysamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Aapla Dawakhana, and started road concretisation project for around 400 kilometres of roads in Mumbai.

Background

The Prime Minister launched MUMBAI 1 Mobile App and National Common Mobility Card (Mumbai 1). The app will facilitate ease of travel, can be shown on the entry gates of Metro Stations and supports digital payment to buy tickets through UPI. The National Common Mobility Card (Mumbai 1) will initially be used in metro corridors and can be extended to other modes of mass public transit including local trains and buses as well. Commuters will not need to carry multiple cards or cash; the NCMC card will enable quick, contactless, digital transactions, thereby easing the process with a seamless experience.

DS/TS

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TEXT OF PM'S SPEECH AT LAUNCH OF DEVELOPMENT WORKS & TRANSFER OF APPROVED LOANS TO BENEFICIARIES UNDER PM-SVANIDHI YOJANA IN MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA

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

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UNION MINISTER DR JITENDRA SINGH SAYS, 'PARIKSHA PE CHARCHA' IS A MOVEMENT DRIVEN BY PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI'S VISION TO BRING TOGETHER STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS AND THE SOCIETY ON A SINGLE PLATFORM

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

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; Minister of State (Independent Charge) Earth Sciences; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh today said, 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' is one of the corner stones, highly required for the 'Exam Warriors', never imagined by anyone for the last seventy years.

Dr. Jitendra Singh said this while attending a district level painting competition, organized under 'Pariksha Pe Charcha', 2023 by Department of Education, Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir.



Dr Jitendra Singh says, 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' is a movement driven by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to bring together Students, Parents, Teachers and the Society on a single platform.

It may be recalled that ahead of Pariksha Pe Charcha 2023, which is scheduled to be held on January 27, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched the 'Modi Masterclass'. Pariksha Pe Charcha is part of the larger movement - 'Exam Warriors'- to create a stress-free atmosphere for youngsters. Shri Modi recently tweeted, "It is exam season and as our #ExamWarriors are immersed in exam preparations, sharing an interesting repository of Mantras and activities that will help ease exam stress and also help celebrate exams".

While addressing students at GDC Kathua, Dr. Jitendra Singh said, 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' has fostered an environment, where the unique individuality of each child is celebrated, encouraged and allowed to express itself fully. It is a part of a larger movement led by PM Narendra Modi to create a stress free environment for the students best described in his path breaking and best-

selling book 'Exam Warriors', Dr. Singh added.



Dr. Singh said, since this era is technology driven and students have everything on their mobile handsets, what is required is identification of talent and proper guidance that can only be done by the teachers of this country. Teachers now have a larger role to play to build confidence among the students so that they will be best guided in the right direction, Dr. Singh added.

Praising PM Narendra Modi as the brainchild behind NEP-2020, Dr. Jitendra Singh said, the motto of NEP-2020 is equitable and inclusive education with many entry and exit points, assuring that no child should be denied access to quality education irrespective of the background. The best part of NEP-2020 is that the 'dropout' word, a stigma of the yesteryears' is going to become obsolete, Dr. Singh added.

Dr. Singh also said that the mentorship program already started throughout the country will be a game changer as this will not only help in the capacity building of students but will create future entrepreneurs who will be job providers leading best startups in the country. The same was emphasized by PM Narendra Modi from the ramparts of Red Fort 'Startup India, Standup India', Dr. Singh added.

Dr. Singh emphasized that the students present here today will be architects of India @2047 who will be energetic enough to lead India towards becoming 'Vishwa Guru' leaving behind every developed nation in the world.



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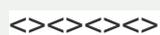
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NATIONAL AIDS CONTROL ORGANISATION FORMS LARGEST HUMAN RED RIBBON CHAIN IN KALINGA STADIUM OF BHUBANESWAR, ODISHA TO CREATE AWARENESS ON AIDS

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

The Odisha State AIDS Control Society, Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of Odisha under the leadership of National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) in coordination with the Department of Sports & Youth Services & Hockey India organized an awareness programme on HIV AIDS by forming the 'largest human red ribbon chain' in the East Gallery of Kalinga Stadium of Bhubaneswar, Odisha on 19th January 2023. The spectators in the gallery included 4,800 students from various schools, Red Ribbon Club members from colleges, people from community, and participants from the Mission Shakti Department.



As per the recent evidences under the National AIDS Control Programme, Odisha continues to have a low HIV prevalence in the state with an adult prevalence of 0.14% and an estimated 52,108 people living with HIV (PLHIV). However, only half of the people living with HIV in the state are on the Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART). To achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 3.3 of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, awareness generation activities are being strengthened among the general public as well as the High Risk Groups in Odisha about the services offered under the umbrella of National AIDS Control Programme.

The chain was formed during the following two matches: -

The moment was witnessed by millions of spectators worldwide through official broadcasting partners such as Star Sports & Disney+ Hotstar through live streaming from 12:30 PM onward. Along with the formation of 'largest human red ribbon chain' in the gallery, Audio Visual materials were scrolled to disseminate the messages related to HIV/AIDS and the National AIDS Toll Free helpline - 1097.

This event created a massive impact among 25,000 plus spectators inside the stadium and millions of virtual audiences around the globe through television & Over the Top platforms.

MV**HFW/ NACO-Largest Human Red Ribbon Chain/19 Jan 2023/3**

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AGING FACTORY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON CHINA'S POPULATION DECLINE

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January 21, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 08:45 am IST

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The last time China's population saw a decline was in 1961, in the midst of a devastating four-year famine following Mao's failed "Great Leap Forward" campaign. The latest decline in population, however, is no blip. The [shrinking of the world's most populous country by as much as 8,50,000](#) in 2022 marks a watershed moment with lasting consequences for China and the world. Beijing announced on January 17 that births in China last year dropped by more than 10% to 9.56 million, with 10.41 million deaths. The 1.411 billion population will certainly be overtaken by India's this year. China's population story holds lessons for countries that have tried robust interventions in social engineering. China has spent the greater part of two decades trying — and failing — to get families to boost birth rates that have been declining since the government introduced a harsh "one-child policy" in 1980. The belated introduction in 2016 of a "two-child policy" to course correct was not met with the enthusiasm that planners had expected for a relaxation announced with fanfare. A government survey found that 70% [would not have more children](#) citing financial reasons.

China's economy is already feeling the impact of demographic change. The 16-59 working age population (2022), was 875 million, a decline of around 75 million since 2010. Wages are rising, and labour-intensive jobs are moving out, predominantly to Southeast Asia. The above-60 population, meanwhile, had increased by 30 million to 280 million. The number of elderly will peak at 487 million by 2050 (35% of the population). China's National Working Commission on Ageing estimates spending on health care for the elderly will take up 26% of the GDP by 2050. Signs are China is already on track to follow Japan's example of a prolonged period of a shrinking workforce with declining growth. As a paper from Japan's Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry pointed out, the proportion of child and elderly populations in China as of 2020 was similar to Japan's in 1990. Moreover, China reached this inflection point faster, with its fertility rate falling from 2.74 to 1.28 in the preceding four-decade period, while Japan's fell from 1.75 to 1.29. The paper pointed out that India's proportion of child and elderly population in 2020 was similar to China's in 1980, just when its economic boom took off. That was made possible only by making the most of its demographic dividend by investing heavily in health care and education to fashion a workforce capable of powering what would become the world's factory.

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THERE IS HARDLY ANY AUTONOMY AT THE PANCHAYAT LEVEL

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Devolution of Powers & Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges therein - Panchayats & Municipalities

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'The devolution of power to local governments remains limited in the absence of administrative decentralisation' File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

A few weeks ago, Balineni Tirupati, an up-sarpanch in Telangana's Jayashankar Bhupalpally district, died by suicide due to indebtedness. He had taken out a loan to undertake development works in the village and was unable to bear the burden after the State government's inordinate delay in releasing bill payments.

A few days before the incident, a few sarpanchs from the incumbent Bharatiya Rashtra Samiti (BRS) — Telangana's ruling Telangana Rashtra Samiti now renamed as the BRS — resigned from office and voiced their anger at not receiving government funds for nearly a year.

Sarpanchs alleged that the failure of the State government to release funds in time has forced them to utilise either private resources or borrow large amounts to complete panchayat activities and meet various targets.

More than three decades after the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts, which gave constitutional status to local governments, State governments, through the local bureaucracy, continue to exercise considerable discretionary authority and influence over panchayats. In India, the powers of local elected officials (such as these sarpanchs in Telangana) remain seriously circumscribed by State governments and local bureaucrats in multiple ways, thereby diluting the spirit of the constitutional amendments seeking to empower locally elected officials.

We analysed statutory provisions of Panchayat Acts in various States and spoke to several sarpanchs and local bureaucrats to assess the extent of decentralisation of powers to panchayats. It quickly became very clear to us that sarpanchs need to have administrative or financial autonomy for meaningful decentralisation.

Gram panchayats remain fiscally dependent on grants (both discretionary and non-discretionary grants) from the State and the Centre for everyday activities. Broadly, panchayats have three main sources of funds — their own sources of revenue (local taxes, revenue from common property resources, etc.), grants in aid from the Centre and State governments, and discretionary or scheme-based funds. Their own sources of revenue (both tax and non-tax)

constitute a tiny proportion of overall panchayat funds. For instance, in Telangana, less than a quarter of a panchayat's revenue comes from its own sources of revenue.

Further, access to discretionary grants for panchayats remains contingent on political and bureaucratic connections.

Even when higher levels of government allocate funds to local governments, sarpanchs need help accessing them. An inordinate delay in transferring approved funds to panchayat accounts stalls local development. In Telangana, this has forced sarpanchs to use private funds for panchayat activities to fulfil mandated targets and avoid public pressure. Delays in the disbursement of funds by the local bureaucracy have led to pressure on sarpanchs leading some to end their life.

There are also severe constraints on how panchayats can use the funds allocated to them. State governments often impose spending limits on various expenditures through panchayat funds. This could include quotidian activities such as purchasing posters of national icons, refreshments for visiting dignitaries, or distributing sweets in a local school at national festivals.

Moreover, in almost all States, there is a system of double authorisation for spending panchayat funds. Apart from sarpanchs, disbursement of payments requires bureaucratic concurrence. The sarpanch and the panchayat secretary, who reports to the Block Development Officer (BDO), must co-sign cheques issued for payments from panchayat funds.

State governments also bind local governments' through the local bureaucracy. Approval for public works projects often requires technical approval (from the engineering department) and administrative approval from local officials of the rural development department, such as the block development officer, a tedious process for sarpanchs that requires paying multiple visits to government offices. It is also not unusual to find higher-level politicians and bureaucrats intervening in selecting beneficiaries for government programmes and limiting the power of sarpanchs further. We surveyed sarpanchs in Haryana's Palwal district and found that they spend a substantial amount of time visiting government offices and meeting local bureaucrats, and waiting to be seen or heard. Sarpanchs reported that they need to be in the "good books" of politicians and local bureaucrats if they wanted access to discretionary resources, timely disbursement of funds, and be able to successfully execute any project or programme in their village.

The ability of sarpanchs to exercise administrative control over local employees is also limited. In many States, the recruitment of local functionaries reporting to the panchayat, such as village watchmen or sweepers, is conducted at the district or block level. Often the sarpanch does not even have the power to dismiss these local-level employees.

Unlike elected officials at other levels, sarpanchs can be dismissed while in office. Gram Panchayat Acts in many States have empowered district-level bureaucrats, mostly district Collectors, to act against sarpanchs for official misconduct. For instance, Section 37 of the Telangana Gram Panchayat Act allows District Collectors to suspend and dismiss incumbent sarpanchs. On what grounds can Collectors act against sarpanchs? Apart from abuse of power, embezzlement, or misconduct, the conditions include mere refusal to "carry out the orders of the District Collector or Commissioner or Government for the proper working of the concerned Gram Panchayat".

This is not merely a legal provision. Across the country, there are regular instances of bureaucrats deciding to dismiss sarpanchs from office. In Telangana, more than 100 sarpanchs have been dismissed from office in recent years. In one such case, the official reason was a

protest (by boycotting an official programme) against the denial of land for an electric substation.

The situation in Telangana is a reminder for State governments to re-examine the provisions of their respective Gram Panchayat laws and consider greater devolution of funds, functions, and functionaries to local governments. State-level politicians and government officials resist giving sarpanchs power because they feel that sarpanchs will misuse funds allocated to a village. This is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. India has limited decentralisation because if local governments get genuine autonomy to allocate the monies, power will shift from the MLAs and State government-controlled bureaucracy to the sarpanch.

(Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available on the State's health helpline 104, Tele-MANAS 14416 and Sneha's suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050. Those in distress could also seek help and counselling by calling helplines from this [link](#).)

Pradeep Chhibber is Professor of Political Science at University of California, Berkeley; Pranav Gupta is a PhD candidate at University of California, Berkeley

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A health worker administers a dose of the Measles-Rubella vaccine to a student during the special vaccination drive at a government school in Malda on January 14, 2023. | Photo Credit: PTI

The story so far: As the new year dawned, so did a crucial target for India. India had set a target to eliminate measles and rubella (MR) by 2023, having missed the earlier deadline of 2020, due to a variety of reasons, exacerbated by disruptions due to the pandemic. An earlier target that was set for 2015 was also missed. It was in 2019 that India adopted the goal of measles and rubella elimination by 2023, anticipating that the 2020 goal could not be reached.

The measles virus is one of the world's most contagious human viruses that kills more than 1,00,000 children every year globally, and rubella is a leading vaccine-preventable cause of birth defects, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Both measles and rubella can be prevented by just two doses of a safe and effective vaccine. Over the past two decades, the measles vaccine is estimated to have averted more than 30 million deaths globally, as per the WHO's statistics. In both diseases, the symptoms are a rash and fever. While measles has a high fatality rate, rubella infection in a pregnant woman will have an impact on the foetus, resulting in birth defects.

From October 2022, [an outbreak of measles in Maharashtra, particularly Mumbai](#), had the authorities worried. As per media reports at least 15 children died among several hundreds who contracted the infection. Coming at the cusp of a year in which India had a crucial target to achieve, it perturbed authorities.

Dr. Jacob John, noted virologist who heads the India Experts Advisory Group for eliminating MR, equates it to a phenomenon similar to COVID-19 infections catching up in China end of last year, since they had 'escaped the previous waves of infection.' "It is a similar phenomenon, because during the winter months of 2020 and 2021 (November to January when there is the usual spurt in cases of measles) there were no outbreaks," he said. The 2022 outbreak was like epidemiological compensation. However, experts aver that this outbreak will contribute to ramping up herd immunity in the population which along with a robust vaccination programme will help achieve the necessary targets.

Though the pandemic led to poor immunisation rates, in a paper, Progress Toward Measles and Rubella Elimination — India, 2005–2021, published on the CDC website, Ratnesh Murugan and others explain the paths the country had taken in getting to where it stands now. During

2010–2013, India conducted a phased measles catch-up immunisation for children aged 9 months–10 years in 14 States, vaccinating approximately 119 million children.

Mission Indradhanush was launched in 2014 to ramp up vaccinating the unvaccinated population. During 2017–2021, India adopted a national strategic plan for measles and rubella elimination, and introduced rubella-containing vaccine (RCV) into the routine immunisation programme, besides launching a nationwide measles-rubella supplementary immunisation activity (SIA) catch-up campaign. It also transitioned from outbreak-based surveillance to case-based acute fever and rash surveillance, and more than doubled the number of laboratories in the measles-rubella network.

“Yes, I would think so,” said Dr. Jacob John. “The main concern is the under one-year population. But if we are able to keep up the tempo of immunisation at 95 % the second dose coverage (which means the first dose coverage has to be higher), it will be possible.”

But the trick, he pointed out, is to do it district by district — give each district a target to achieve the required rate of immunisation, conduct a robust fever and rash surveillance programme, besides testing for MR. He said a well-oiled machinery rests in place, and it is possible to be free of the disease as some other countries have recently demonstrated, including Sri Lanka, the Maldives and South Korea. “My expectation is that 95% will succeed. But what we must remember is that even if 5% miss the target, it is not as if the whole country has failed, we would have indeed achieved significant gains. Besides if we keep monitoring the progress, the districts that are stragglers in implementing the immunisation, can be helped along, with additional inputs,” he contended.

In the process, C.S. Rex Sargunam, paediatrician and president, Tamil Nadu Health Development Association, said it is important to provide full support to the ground level staff who implement the programme — the village health nurses, ASHA (accredited social health activists) workers, anganwadi and ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) workers. “In fact the only way to ensure a target driven approach is successful is to make sure that the people given the tasks are happy doing their job. We do need to improve their service conditions, and make sure salaries are not pending for months.”

He said that while targets will be easier to achieve in States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, thanks to the robust immunisation infrastructure, in the other States, additional efforts should be taken to work towards achieving the target.

The WHO has expressed hope that India could indeed reach the target. “We can reach MR elimination goals in India if we strengthen surveillance by finding, investigating, and collecting and testing a sample for every suspected case, in each district in every State and UT,” said Roderico H. Ofrin, WHO Country Representative to India. Experts underlined the importance of being thorough in public health outreach. As Prabhdeep Kaur, deputy director, National Institute of Epidemiology, ICMR, said: “A threat of infection anywhere is a threat everywhere.”

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PRESIDENT OF INDIA TO CONFER THE PRADHAN MANTRI RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR 2023 TOMORROW ON 11 CHILDREN FOR THEIR EXCEPTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN SIX CATEGORIES

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

The President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu will confer the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar, 2023 to 11 exceptional children in an award ceremony which will take place at Vigyan Bhawan tomorrow i.e. on 23rd January, 2023.

Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi will interact with Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardees on 24th January, 2023.

Minister of Women & Child Development, Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani will interact with the children and congratulate them for their exemplary performances in their respective categories in the gracious presence of Minister of State, Dr. Munjpara Mahendrabhai on 24th January, 2023.

The Government of India confers the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar (PMRBP) award to children for their exceptional achievements. The awards are conferred upon children in the age group 5 – 18 years, for their excellence in six categories, viz. Art & Culture, Bravery, Innovation, Scholastic, Social Service and Sports, which deserve national recognition. Each awardee of PMRBP is given a medal, a cash prize of Rs.1 Lakh and a Certificate.

This year, the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar will be conferred upon 11 children selected from all regions of the country for their exceptional achievement in the field of Art and Culture (4), Bravery (1), Innovation (2), Social Service (1), and Sports (3).

SS/RKM

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ELECTION BUGLE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON ASSEMBLY POLLS IN MEGHALAYA, NAGALAND, TRIPURA

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties

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Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura in the northeastern region of India will [elect new Assemblies in February](#). The Bharatiya Janata Party's stakes are the highest as it seeks to retain power in Tripura and continue to be a key partner of the main ruling entities in the other two States. The BJP is in alliance with Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma's National People's Party (NPP) in Meghalaya and Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio's Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) in Nagaland. The Congress, once the main party in the northeast, is struggling, wiped out in Nagaland, trying to stay afloat in Tripura, and raided by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in Meghalaya. Regional parties in the northeast tend to align with the ruling party at the Centre, and the BJP has expanded its footprint in the region considerably in recent years. A BJP victory in 2018 ended more than two decades of Left Front rule in Tripura. However, being in power has not been easy; its first Chief Minister, Biplab Kumar Deb, was replaced with Manik Saha, a dental surgeon, in 2022, an effort to reverse the decline in the party's popularity. The emergence of the Tipra Motha, a regional party that swept the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council polls in April 2021 has changed the dynamics in 20 Assembly seats in its area. A Left-Congress alliance is also possible.

TMC leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has been trying to gain a foothold in the northeast, but with limited success. In Meghalaya, 12 Congress MLAs defected to the TMC in 2021, but its stock has been depleting since. The TMC is viewed as a Bengali party in the State, where regional sentiments are strong. The party has some patches of influence in the Garo Hills of the State. In Nagaland, the BJP has announced a pre-poll alliance with its current partner the NDPP; in Meghalaya, the BJP and NPP are not only contesting separately but also calling each other names. Alliances in the State are usually forged after the elections. The NPP is facing accusations of corruption, and is being overly influenced by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the BJP's pointsman for the northeast. As usual, indigenous groups in Nagaland have threatened to boycott the polls, pressing various demands. A demand for the creation of Frontier Nagaland being raised by the Konyak Union, an apex tribal body is a new flavour of the season. The BJP is likely to continue with its innovations in dealing with regionalism while the Opposition's capacity to sustain will be tested in these elections.

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IT'S TIME FOR INDIA'S UNIVERSITIES TO JOIN THE WORLD

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Opening to the world means making India more visible on the global academic scene and also learning about, and implementing, best practices from abroad. File

With India assuming the G20 presidency, it is now time for it to join the world's academic community as a major player. Indians are well-known globally as top scientists and academics, university leaders, and key leaders in high tech, but little is known about the academic environment from which they have emerged. India's academic system is now the world's second largest. And, as articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020, the country is actively pursuing reform and improvement.

Opening to the world means making India more visible on the global academic scene and also learning about, and implementing, best practices from abroad. The G20 leadership is an excellent opportunity to do both. Further, one of the priority areas in education during India's G20 presidency is 'Strengthening Research and Promoting Innovation through Richer Collaboration'. India is in a particularly advantageous position — the world sees India as an increasingly important economy and geopolitical player. India also plays an important role in higher education — mainly as an exporter of students and talent in many scientific fields — and especially in information technology and related fields. There is a growing interest abroad in linking with Indian universities and research institutes, not only because of untapped talent but also due to disengagement from China by some Western countries.

India is not only the world's second largest academic system, but also one of the world's most complex and little understood academic environments. Its higher education sector is fragmented, inflexible with tight subject boundaries, and of uneven quality. The NEP's focus is on consolidation, with the goal of bringing flexibility and multi-disciplinary education and improving quality. While private sector colleges and universities will continue to fuel growth, high-quality government institutions such as the IITs and AIIMS are also expanding and improving, and will likely achieve good results if they are adequately funded and permitted to have appropriate autonomy.

India has set up the National Institutional Ranking Framework, which has helped fuel competition among institutions. India's global ranking in scientific publications improved from the seventh position in 2010 to the third in 2020. India ranks third in terms of the number of PhDs awarded in science and engineering. India's Global Innovation Index ranking has also improved

significantly, from 81 in 2014 to 40 in 2022, although it lags significantly behind the U.S. and China.

Indian universities have not scored well in the global rankings. The highest-scoring Indian institution in the 2023 Times Higher Education ranking is the Indian Institute of Science, in the 251-300 range. Another 75 institutions are ranked lower. The best-known institutions globally are the IITs. These do not rank well because they are small, specialised schools and not comprehensive universities, but their quality is much better than their ranking scores. The recent announcement that IIT-Kharagpur will establish a branch campus in Malaysia will help. For India to catch up, both in the rankings and in reality, will take significant investment over a sustained period of time. In comparison, China over decades has invested billions of dollars to improve its top universities — and this shows in the rankings and in measures of scientific output.

There are elements of India's academic environment that are distinctive and worth highlighting to an international audience. These include the emergence of about a dozen top-quality non-profit private universities, mostly funded by philanthropically minded Indians. This elite sector is expanding and is focused on building an international 'brand' for Indian higher education. India uses English as the main language of science and higher education, which makes it much easier to interact with the rest of the world. India has more than 100 research laboratories in diverse areas sponsored by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and other Central government agencies. Some are outstanding in terms of their research contributions and their relationships with India's economy.

India's universities and its scientific prowess are an important part of a soft power strategy. The internationalisation initiatives outlined in the NEP is an important start. India's G20 leadership is also an excellent opportunity to exercise leadership. Two interesting initiatives have been suggested. One is a conference in India of leaders of universities in the G20 countries with the aim of acquainting them with India's academic opportunities. Another is the creation of a prestigious scholarship programme, similar to the Fulbright programme, that would provide top Indian students and faculty time in leading universities abroad and funding to bring top academic from abroad to India. China's version of this is the China Scholarship Council.

Indian universities, researchers, and academics also need to involve themselves in the global scientific community through participation in joint projects, international meetings, and the like. All this will take careful planning, sustained resources, support from the Central and State governments and an expanded international consciousness in the Indian academic community.

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A REMINDER OF THE FLAWS IN INDIA'S URBANISATION POLICIES

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'Another important aspect of urban infrastructure is linked to urban governance, which is in a shambles in most parts of the country.' Picture is of Chennai | Photo Credit: The Hindu

A report by the World Bank, released in November last year, on financing India's urban infrastructure needs, focuses on private investments ameliorating urban problems. The push to attract private capital, since the 1990s, followed by the urban reforms under the United Progressive Alliance I regime, the Smart City mission, and now this report, continues to plague India's policy paradigm in the urban sector.

So, has the reform process really been able to attract private capital to urban infrastructure?

After three decades of reforms, urban finance predominantly comes from the government. Of the finances needed to fund urban capital expenditures, 48%, 24% and 15% are derived from the central, State, and city governments, respectively. Public-private partnership projects contribute 3% and commercial debt 2%.

In the last few years, various reports have estimated a huge demand for funding urban infrastructure; for example, the Isha Judge Ahluwalia report says that by 2030, nearly 39.2 lakh crore would be required. Likewise, the 11th Plan puts forth estimates of 1,29,337 crore for four basic services, 1,32,590 crore for urban transport and 1,32,590 crore for housing. A McKinsey report on urbanisation has a figure of \$1.2 trillion, or 90 lakh crore.

The World Bank estimates that nearly \$840 billion (70 lakh crore) would be needed for investment in urban India to meet the growing demands of the population, and \$55 billion would be required annually. The flagship programmes of the government, the Smart City mission, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), etc., are not more than 2 lakh crore (that too for a period of five years). So, how will such a gap between demand and supply be matched?

The core idea of the report and the solutions suggested include "improving the fiscal base and creditworthiness of the Indian cities. Cities must institute a buoyant revenue base and be able to recover the cost of providing its services". In simpler terms, it means increasing property taxes, user fees and service charges to name a few.

This report already points out that nearly 85% of government revenue is from the cities. This means that urban citizens are contributing large revenues even as the World Bank report's emphasis is on the levying of more burdens in the form of user charges on utilities, etc. But the point is even by enhancing the tax base, will it be sufficient to meet the rising demands of urban infrastructure in the cities?

The answer is that it will not.

The basic problem with this report and other reports drawn up in a similar fashion is that they are made using a top to bottom approach, with too much of a focus on technocentric solutions using very high capital-intensive technologies.

For the urban context, plans must be made from below by engaging with the people and identifying their needs.

Empowering the city governments and the people at large is the second point. In the national task force that reviewed the 74th Constitutional Amendment, chaired by K.C. Sivaramakrishnan, many suggestions were made such as empowering the people, transferring subjects to the city governments, suggesting that 10% of the income-tax collected from cities be given back to them and ensuring that this corpus fund was utilised only for infrastructure building. This would ensure that city governments had an advantage in ensuring rapid transformation.

Another important aspect of urban infrastructure is linked to urban governance, which is in a shambles in most parts of the country. Regular elections should be held in cities and there must be empowerment through the transferring of the three Fs: finances, functions, and functionaries.

Editorial | [Urban visions: On need for policy reform](#)

Cities primarily are run by parastatals and the city governments hardly have any role to play in the smooth functioning of such parastatals.

The World Bank in its report has stated in the report (page 69): "As an example, state-level management of urban water and sewerage functions may be devolved in a time-bound manner. An improved urban legal framework that includes a stable and certain fiscal transfer regime, accords financial powers to ULBs [urban local bodies] along with attendant rules/regulations... will determine the medium- to long-term scale of investment flows for urban infrastructure."

However, the exact opposite is happening. The Shimla water story is an example. The Shimla water works was transformed into a single utility in 2016-17, called the Greater Shimla Water Supply and Sewage Circle (GSWSSC) under the Shimla Municipal Corporation. The Bank rendered help in the form of a soft loan, ensuring an adequate supply of water and proper distribution by the utility, but under the Shimla Municipal Corporation. However, in 2017-18, it changed the character of GSWSSC to a company and formed the Shimla Jal Prabandhan Nigam Limited, now run under a board of directors, but outside the ambit of the municipality.

Such machinations shall not serve the purpose and will be perilous to the entire purpose of the urbanisation in India. The World Bank report is another reminder of the tragedy which Indian urbanisation is witnessing — "policy paralysis from the top".

Tikender Singh Panwar is a former Deputy Mayor, Shimla, and an urban specialist

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CHANGING POLITICS, INCOMPATIBLE GOVERNORS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Functions & Responsibilities of the States, the Governor, the Chief Minister and State COM

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At the Raj Bhavan in Mumbai | Photo Credit: FILE PHOTO: PRASHANT NAKWE

The [Governors are once again becoming public spectacles](#) in many States, as seen in Punjab, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Delhi, and in a few others earlier. Three issues stand out in their grandstanding with the elected governments in the States in question.

First, these are States where non-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) governments are in power. Second, the contrarian interventions of Governors are in the name of the supposed powers of the Union or constitutional rectitude. And third, their disagreements spill out in the open, to the media, reinforcing a political divide. Recently, the Governor of Tamil Nadu, R.N. Ravi, seems to have opened another front, i.e., defining the idea of Indian nationalism and imparting lessons to Tamil people. Fortunately, there are a few Governors, even under non-BJP regimes in States, who have shown the sagacity of sorting out issues with their respective governments without attempting to muddy the waters.

While there have been endless arguments on whether the Governor enjoys discretionary authority or not — and if he does, under what constitutional and legal provisions — they may not be able to clinch the argument on an issue as they do not necessarily rule out the contrarian stances. One of the examples of populist posturing is to play the blame game and accuse the other party of doing the same when it was in power. While such charges may be factually correct or close to the charge, bad precedents may not be good examples to imitate. These charges also do not take into account the great churning that the Indian polity has undergone over the years and the challenges that institutions confront to remain abreast with them.

The arena of the relative autonomy of States underwent a decisive turn from the late 1980s without formally altering the constitutional frame very much. This transformation was manifest in the rise of new political parties with their focus on States, liberalisation of the economy, and greater devolution of economic responsibility to the States. States were made to realise that they could not pass on this responsibility somewhere else.

This shift of power and responsibility was also reflected in policy measures such as the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution authorising local governance, inclusion and devolution of powers; reforms initiated by P.V. Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh team on the economy; and judicial verdicts such as the Bommai case that mandated that the invocation of President's rule

in States called for wider political consensus.

Admittedly, the relative autonomy of States has enhanced their presence as well as responsibilities. This enhanced role of the States does not in any way challenge Union powers, but generally tends to complement and supplement the new challenges and opportunities that it faces. The fears of centripetal tendencies that marked the early years of Independence no more hold good as far as the broad expanses of India are concerned. Atal Bihari Vajpayee detected this shift early and made a remarkable attempt at coalition building (1999-2004) that reflected much sensitivity to the new role that States were called upon to play.

This initiative was also an acceptance of strong regional leaderships in general and regional parties in particular. Strong States were not seen as an affront to national unity but the latter itself was conceptualised as being forged through robust regional bonds. In fact, Vajpayee's political initiative jolted the Congress party from its focus on a centralised polity predisposing it to pre-poll coalitions at its Pachmarhi (1998) and later Shimla conclaves.

While the rise of the BJP and its shift to Hindutva as its ideological plank from 2014 onwards have affected the re-articulation of Indian federalism, the groundswell that led to the appreciation of State autonomy continues to persist even today. Sound reasoning iterates, loud and clear, that States cannot be cordoned off within the boundaries of the fiat of the Centre any longer.

Given the metamorphosis of politics that India has registered, State leadership, be it of the ruling party in the Centre or regional parties, is invariably called upon to assume greater initiative and responsibility. Its performance has a bearing not merely on the States concerned but on the nation as a whole. State-based initiatives have a cascading impact on the neighbouring States as well. If a regional party has performed well, the Centre should try and outshine it by promising to do better. Interestingly, India's constitutional frame — and particularly its interpretation by the judiciary hitherto — has been in synchrony with this shift in the political arena.

In the changed context, Governors assuming that they know better than elected State leadership goes against a reality check, and may not even serve the interests of the ruling party at the Centre. If they invoke constitutional provisions in defence of their actions, such a reading often turns out to be a shibboleth.

While the constitutional reasoning that resulted in the institution of Governor in India may still hold good today, it calls for a re-orientation. As the constitutional head of the State, there are innumerable concerns, particularly the Directive Principles of State policy, that could be the frame of conversation of the Governor with his government. Such a conversation, however, needs to be in the form of an engagement with his government and the State legislature rather than meant to project him as an independent power centre. The changed context also calls for listening to and closely following public voices and deliberated reasoning in the State and elsewhere rather than harping on constitutional status. Moreover, as a link between his State and the Centre, a Governor brings the wider concerns and promises of the State to the attention of the Centre as well as the public at large, which partisan politics may tend to sidestep.

Editorial | [Lines and roles: On Governors](#)

To be in tune with these demands, Governors should not merely have their ear to the ground but also be attuned to the embedded idea of the common good manifest in its institutions and public culture. In a country such as India it is not difficult to find such persons. It is handy to have in these positions elderly politicians who are surplus in the ruling dispensation or retired bureaucrats and public personnel who are subservient to their political masters. Although criticised for some of his administrative preferences and political views, one Governor who I can

recall who measured up to the mark in the changed context was T.N. Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka (2002-07), during a difficult period of change of governments both in the State as well as at the Centre.

Valerian Rodrigues is a former professor at Mangalore University and Jawaharlal Nehru University

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AN INDIA CHAPTER FOR FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES

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January 24, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 12:15 am IST

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For a long time, proponents of the internationalisation of higher education have cherished the dream of foreign universities operating in India. For nearly two decades, they have emphasised the need to provide conducive conditions and an enabling framework for such institutions. But the idea failed to come to fruition due to the concerns of the regulatory authorities and governments in India as well as the foreign higher educational institutions.

Promoting excellence, preventing malpractices, safeguarding the interests of students and protecting national interests have been some of the major concerns. Many were wary of the cultural threat that this initiative posed. Some of those who were at the forefront of preserving the purity of Indian culture are now a part of the political dispensation. Policy planners and regulators have been particularly concerned about how to come up with a framework that attracts the best of the best and deters the fly-by-night kinds of universities.

On the other hand, the sought-after universities are concerned about the potential adverse effect of setting up offshore campuses with their accreditation, ranking and reputation. Truly reputed higher educational institutions operate on a not-for-profit basis and have no materialistic motives to go offshore. A few countries that have such offshore campuses had to hard-sell the institutions the idea by leasing land at almost no cost, bearing the bulk of infrastructure cost and promising them the academic, administrative and financial autonomy that they enjoy in their home country. India could hardly afford any such incentives. Whatever was offered was riddled with caveats and contradictions.

Past setbacks notwithstanding, the idea of having world-class universities establish and operate their campuses in India has been so compelling that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provided that “selected universities e.g., those from among the top 100 universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India. A legislative framework facilitating such entry will be put in place, and such universities will be given special dispensation regarding regulatory, governance, and content norms on par with other autonomous institutions of India.” Even though the NEP favoured a “legislative framework”, the idea is being executed through a regulatory route by the University Grants Commission (UGC). There seems to be determination to get the idea going, even if it amounts to some dilution in standards.

While the policy prescribed “facilitation” and “special dispensation” for the top 100 universities of the world, the draft regulation seeks to lower the standards by extending the scope to the top

500 universities, overall or in any discipline. Further, for the “educational institutions”, just being “reputed” in their home country would be a sufficient requirement. The draft regulation doesn’t seem concerned about the subjectivity and scope of discretion in the above articulation as it believes that the standing committee constituted by the UGC would do an unbiased and thorough job in processing the applications and identifying only the best institutions.

The initiative may still fail due to contradictions in the regulation. The draft regulation demands that the quality of education imparted by these institutions in India must be on a par with the quality of courses at their campus in the country of origin. Yet, it insists that they must not “offer any such programme of study which jeopardises the national interest of India or the standards of higher education in India”. It promises academic, administrative and financial autonomy to foreign institutions but takes that away by asserting that they abide by all the conditions that the UGC and the Indian government prescribe from time to time. The provision that the foreign higher education institutions must not do anything “contrary to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality” might deter the best universities that most value their academic autonomy.

Leaving aside the issue of whether the idea would succeed, one wonders why India is so keen on foreign higher education. During a media briefing, it was stated that foreign universities in India would stop the outflow of \$28-30 billion in foreign exchange. This does not corroborate the data on outward remittances for studies abroad, as reported by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). During 2021-22, foreign outflow on account of studies abroad was no more than \$5.165 billion. Even if we add to it the outflows of \$3.598 billion for education-related travel (though these do not necessarily relate to studies abroad), the total education-related outflows would be \$8.973 billion. One could argue that even \$5.165 billion is a substantive sum and must be stopped from flowing abroad, but the idea of import substitution in higher education is complicated. Students do not go abroad for degrees alone; they also go for the experience, post-study work visas, income opportunities and better career prospects. Studying in a foreign university in India would offer them none of these. Most critically, as they are able to finance a good part of their education abroad through jobs, assistantships and scholarships, they find it more economical.

Still, India needs to have an enabling framework for the entry and operation of foreign higher educational institutions. It must, however, ensure that the best of the best set up their campuses in the country.

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NEEDED, A NEW APPROACH TO DATA PROTECTION FOR MINORS

Relevant for: Security Related Matters | Topic: Basics of Cyber Security and related matters

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January 24, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 09:29 am IST

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'We should not put the onus of keeping our young safe only on parents, but instead it should make it a society-wide obligation' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

How freely should Indian teenagers access the Internet? And what responsibilities do platforms have towards their minor users? These are important questions to answer correctly to achieve India's digital ambitions. The draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill, 2022 currently provides for mandatory parental consent for all data processing activities by children, defined as any person aged under 18 years. This approach however misses the mark on two fronts.

First, instead of incentivising online platforms to proactively build safer and better services for minors, the Bill relies on parents to grant consent on behalf of the child in all cases. In a country with low digital literacy, where parents in fact often rely on their children (who are digital natives) to help them navigate the Internet, this is an ineffective approach to keep children safe online.

Second, it does not take into account the "best interests of the child", a standard originating in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, to which India is a signatory. India has upheld this standard in laws such as the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. However, it has not been applied to the issue of data protection. The Bill does not factor in how teenagers use various Internet platforms for self-expression and personal development and how central it is to the experience of adolescents these days. From taking music lessons to preparing for examinations to forming communities with people of similar worldviews, the Internet is a window to the world. While the Bill does allow the government to provide exemptions in the future from strict parental consent requirements, profiling, tracking prohibitions, etc., this whitelisting process does not acknowledge the blurring lines between what a platform can be used for. For example, Instagram is, strictly speaking, a social media platform, but is regularly used as an educational and professional development tool by millions of artists around the world.

Another issue in the current draft of the DPDP Bill is that each platform will have to obtain 'verifiable parental consent' in the case of minors. This provision, if enforced strictly, can change the nature of the Internet as we know it. Since it is not possible to tell if the user is a minor without confirming their age, platforms will have to verify the age of every user. The government will prescribe later whether verifiability will be based on ID-proof, or facial recognition, or

reference-based verification, or some other means.

Whatever form verifiability takes, all platforms will have to now manage significantly more personal data than before, and citizens will be at greater risk of harms such as data breaches, identity thefts, etc.

Thus we need to shift our approach with respect to children's data before this Bill is brought to Parliament. To avoid the folly of treating unequals equally and blocking off access to the Internet for teenagers these steps are needed.

First, we should move from a blanket ban on tracking, monitoring, etc. and adopt a risk-based approach to platform obligations. Platforms should be mandated to undertake a risk assessment for minors and not only perform age-verification-related corresponding obligations but also design services with default settings and features that protect children from harm. This approach will bring in an element of co-regulation, by creating incentives for platforms to design better products for children.

Second, we need to relax the age of mandatory parental consent for all services to 13 years in line with many other jurisdictions around the world. By relaxing consent requirements, we will minimise data collection, which is one of the principles that the Bill is built on. This relaxation in age of consent in tandem with the risk mitigation approach elucidated above will achieve protection for children online while allowing them access.

This solution draws on the experience and deliberations in the United Kingdom, and in the United States (California, New York, etc.) where age appropriate design codes have been introduced. To tailor this solution to the Indian context, the government should also conduct large-scale surveys of both children and parents to find out more about their online habits, digital literacy, preferences and attitudes.

We must design a policy in India that balances the safety and the agency of children online. We should not put the onus of keeping our young safe only on parents, but instead it should make it a society-wide obligation. We have to get this part of the data protection framework right as India's 'techade' cannot be realised without its young.

Aparajita Bharti is a Founding Partner at TQH, a public policy consulting firm in Delhi. Nikhil Iyer is a Senior Analyst at TQH, a public policy consulting firm in Delhi

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DEMOCRACY AND ITS STRUCTURAL SLIPPAGES

Relevant for: World History | Topic: Political Philosophies- Communism, Capitalism, and Socialism

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January 24, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 12:16 am IST

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An election rally in Allahabad | Photo Credit: Getty Images

The democracy that is functional around the world today — even as it has a long history of evolution — was essentially a 19th century to 20th century western creation. Every civilisation, of course, claims to have had some form of democratic origin. But the institution of universal adult franchise and governance through regular and multi-party elections (the universal norm today) has at the most a 100 years or less of practice behind it. Even in the most “advanced” democracies such as the United States, “universal franchise” of the 1920s did not include African-American citizens. In Britain, women obtained the right to vote in the 1930s, in France in 1944, and in Switzerland as late as 1971, over two decades after their Indian sisters.

Basic to democracy is the devolution of power, and with it, welfare from the elite echelons to the ground level. Devolution occurs on the premise of the individual and equality. In practice, is there a good record for these principles? If one is to go by the long view of history, the answer is ‘yes, most effectively’. The near-universal abolition of autocratic monarchies and hereditary aristocracies and their replacement by governance through popular mandate (with exceptions) and the spread of economic resources, infrastructure, education, health, etc. to the masses, with all their shortcomings and lacunae, call for acknowledgment even as the demand for these grows every day, constantly, and legitimately.

Yet, there is an unbreakable link between the wide spread of this devolution and capitalism. In capitalism’s basic requirement to seek freedom for resources such as land, labour, and movement from the autocratic restraints of medieval monarchies, the notions of the individual’s rights and equality evolved, culminating in the notion of a free market for every kind of resource mobilisation, including labour. It also implied a great deal of uniformity.

It is important to note that human history has been witness to several experiences of equality, mostly in its religious form: non-theistic Buddhism and monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Islam and Sikhism were proponents of social equality. However, equality here demanded the subjugation of the individual to the community or society.

Clearly, humanity’s urge for equality has erupted over and over again in different parts of the world at different times; it was the same urge that had led to the most recent experiment of Marxian socialism in about a third of the globe and a large chunk of the population. However, it is equally important to note that no egalitarian ideology has ever been able to create an egalitarian society. What it does is to reshuffle existing social hierarchies and create some space

for the upward movement of the lower rungs. But the urge for equality has found diverse ways to seek utterance. Its current urge seeks to establish uniformity through the same or similar institutions and practices.

The uniformity takes the form of periodic multi-party “free and fair” elections and guarantees of various kinds of freedoms, especially of the market. The elections are a means of self-correction of government policies and actions.

Are elections truly free and fair?

To begin with, elections divide voters into a dubious majority and a minority. The majority-minority division of 50% plus one and 50% minus one is, in principle, hardly a decisive mandate even as this is treated as one empirically. But the practice of elections belies even this notion of “majority”; there is hardly a government anywhere in the world and at any time that governs through a majority of the mandate. Usually, 30% to 40% of the votes cast give a party a comfortable majority to rule legitimately. This is structured into multi-party elections through “the first past the post” principle; but even in a system such as the United States, Donald Trump could defeat Hillary Clinton even as she received some 2.5 million more popular votes than him, in 2016.

In practice again, contrary to theory, even as the voter is all alone in the polling booth voting as an untrammelled individual, her/his vote is still conditioned by numerous demands on it by family, community, religion, culture, and, above all, by the political alternatives offered by political parties. A loss of individuality is implicated here. The individual does not create the choices which are given by parties, very often wrapped in false propaganda and even more false promises. The individual has the “freedom” to choose one or another of these.

The complete equation of democracy with electoral politics draws one’s attention away from any alternative form of governance. There is no space here for diversity.

This democracy came to India in its most modern form: unconditional adult franchise and multi-party periodic elections. Yet, the operative categories of electoral politics here have mostly been pre-modern: identity politics of caste, sub-caste, community, region, language, etc. Not long ago we were familiar with acronyms such as AJGAR (Ahir, Jat, Gurjar and Rajput castes) and MY (Muslims and Yadavs) and so on, signifying the vote base of different political parties, or what came to be picturesquely called the ‘vote bank’.

Jawaharlal Nehru had hoped that education and the experience of democracy would force a retreat on these operative categories and generate a more “modern” consciousness among the masses. What has emerged is contrary to this. The very success of these mobilisations has reinforced identities instead of weakening them. The Bharatiya Janata Party is determined to create the biggest vote bank which would be ever hard to defeat: the entire Hindu population, comprising 80% of the populace. It can afford to marginalise and thus disenfranchise all others in the residual 20%. Remember the explicit assertion of this strategy by the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister in the form of his line, “80 versus 20” during the run-up to the Assembly elections?

So, as long as we practise this form of democracy, its fault lines and, above all, its link with capitalism will remain unbroken. Yet, the fact that humanity has throughout history sought one or another form of social equality keeps the possibility of this urge erupting yet again more amenable to achieving a reality that has eluded us so far. What its form and its grade of success will be are hard to guess. What can be said confidently is that history is still unfolding and creating a future for us.

Harbans Mukhia taught history at Jawaharlal Nehru University

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DEVELOPING SCHOOLS WITHOUT BARRIERS

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

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January 25, 2023 01:45 am | Updated 08:32 am IST

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Parents and teachers cheer students with intellectual disabilities during a race conducted by the Tamil Nadu Council of Special Schools, in Madurai. | Photo Credit: R. Ashok

“Ma’am, may I please go to the toilet?” or “Can I go play outside?” are usually innocuous requests by most schoolchildren. But for children with disability/disabilities (CWD), these are difficult tasks, due to the higher care needed to complete the actions. These actions become tougher in schools which do not have accessible spaces and other guiding infrastructure to get there safely.

A [UNESCO 2019 report](#) mentioned that CWD comprise 1.7% of the total child population in India (Census 2011). As they are faced with physical, institutional, socioeconomic and communication barriers from an early age, more than 70% of five-year-olds with disabilities in India have never attended any educational institution, the report said. Many CWD also tend to drop out of school as they grow older.

To motivate all children to meaningfully participate in all indoor and outdoor activities without barriers or limitations, the school ecosystem has to be made safe, accessible, and reliable.

Several barriers impede the participation of CWD in accessing educational opportunities such as inaccessible school buses; inaccessible facilities in schools (drinking water facilities, canteens and toilets); and inappropriate infrastructure in classrooms (uncomfortable seating, slippery flooring and low illumination). Misinformed attitudes and perceptions among parents, teachers, staff, and communities further influences the child’s emotional development.

The lack of teaching and learning practices that integrate inclusive technologies and digital equipment to engage the child, such as assistive devices, are additional challenges. At training programmes conducted by UN-Habitat India and IIT Kharagpur recently, school teachers and special educators said that accessible infrastructure within schools, such as ramps or tactile paths, are either in deficit or have not been constructed utilising suitable materials. School management authorities added that if such provisions are maintained regularly and adequate funding is provided for the construction of new infrastructure, we would have accessible places. The cooperation, involvement, and sensitisation of parents and caregivers, teachers, school management authorities, and the local government departments are required so that all these barriers are actively addressed.

[Article 21A of the Constitution](#) and the [Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009](#) outline the fundamental right to education and the right to have free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which adopted a ‘zero rejection policy’, emphasises that “every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education”. India ratified the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). Aligning with this commitment, the government launched the [Accessible India Campaign \(Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan\)](#) in 2015. An important pillar of this campaign is accessibility to built environment. The government has also been supportive of the principle of Leave No One Behind (LNOB), which is the central, transformative promise of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Anchored under the [Mainstreaming LNOB project](#) by UN-Habitat, pilot training programmes on enhancing accessibility and inclusion were implemented in two schools in Delhi with support from IIT Kharagpur and the Department of Social Welfare, Delhi government.

Through interactive training sessions and simulation exercises that encourage empathy-building, more than 400 participants, including children, school faculty and staff, were informed about different types of disabilities among children and the specific barriers experienced in different infrastructure zones of a school. After the simulation exercises, children said they will make more efforts to assist their classmates whenever they can. Various good practices, guidelines, and standards for making buildings, campuses, and infrastructure safe, accessible, and inclusive were also showcased. Even if any combination of these accessibility features is added or adapted in schools, it can go a long way in creating inclusive spaces.

Developing inclusive and accessible schools will be a big step towards not only challenging perceptions about CWD, and the associated discrimination, but also in actualising the zero-rejection policy in schools.

A multi-pronged participatory approach towards providing an enabling environment for the empowerment of future citizens is needed to ensure that stakeholders in the school ecosystem collectively work towards promoting accessibility and inclusion in schools. This includes awareness and sensitisation programmes for children, parents, and caregivers; training trainers for upskilling of school faculty and special educators and providing access to updated teaching toolkits and materials; technical training for local government departments; and a co-learning platform for knowledge-sharing between all.

Additionally, five principles — equitability, usability and durability, affordability, cultural adaptability, and aesthetic appeal — should be embedded from the planning to implementation to evaluation stages of providing infrastructure services in schools.

With the realisation of such an approach, removing the barriers to accessibility in schools will be an uphill battle, but not an insurmountable one.

Adishree Panda is ‘Leave No One Behind’ Project Coordinator, UN-Habitat India; Haimanti Banerji is Professor, Architecture and Regional Planning, IIT Kharagpur

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PM LAUDS WINNERS OF PRADHAN MANTRI RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR

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

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has lauded the winners of the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar (PMRBP). The Government of India has been conferring the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to children for their exceptional achievement in six categories namely innovation, social service, scholastic, sports, art and culture and bravery. 11 children from across the country under different categories of Bal Shakti Puraskar have been selected for PMRBP-2023. The awardees include 6 boys and 5 girls, belonging to 11 States and UTs.

In a series of tweets, the Prime Minister said:

“Had an excellent interaction with those who have been conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar.”

“Proud of Aadithya Suresh, who has shown remarkable resilience. He was diagnosed with a bone disorder but he is not one to have a low morale. He pursued singing and is now a talented singer. He has performed in over 500 programmes.”

“M. Gauravi Reddy is a prolific dancer. She has been performing at various programmes and is very passionate about Indian culture. Delighted that she has been conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar.”

“My young friend Sambhab Mishra is a very creative youngster. He has numerous articles to his credit and is also the recipient of prestigious fellowships. I congratulate him on being conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar.”

“Shreya Bhattacharjee, a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee, is a tabla artist who has a record for playing the Tabla for the longest duration. She has also been honoured at forums like the Cultural Olympiad of Performing Arts. Had a very good interaction with her.”

“I am proud of Rohan Ramchandra Bahir, who jumped into a river and saved a woman from drowning. He displayed great bravery and fearlessness. Congratulations to him on being conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. Best wishes to him for his future endeavours.”

“The phenomenally talented Aditya Pratap Singh Chauhan has been awarded the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar for his strides in innovation. He has been working on developing a cost effective technology for ensuring clean water.”

“Celebrating innovation among the youth! Rishi Shiv Prasanna is passionate about developing Apps. He is equally interested in science as well as popularising it among the youth. Happy to have met this Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar winner today.”

“Youngsters like Anoushka Jolly have shown remarkable compassion and innovation. She is diligently working on an App and other online programmes to spread awareness against bullying. Glad that she is now a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee.”

“We are committed to popularising different sports and emphasising fitness. Hanaya Nisar is a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee who has represented India in various martial arts competitions. She has won various laurels. Proud of her accomplishments.”

“Shauryajit Ranjitekumar Khaire won immense admiration for his success in the 2022 National Games. He is a powerhouse of talent when it comes to Mallakhamb. I congratulate him for the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar and wish him the very best for his upcoming endeavours.”

“Meet Kumari Kolagatla Alana Meenakshi, a distinguished chess player and now, a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee. Her successes in chess have made her shine in various competitions globally. Her accomplishments will certainly inspire upcoming chess players.”

Had an excellent interaction with those who have been conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. <https://t.co/4i8RXHcBYG> pic.twitter.com/QC5ELeWJhR

Proud of Aadithya Suresh, who has shown remarkable resilience. He was diagnosed with a bone disorder but he is not one to have a low morale. He pursued singing and is now a talented singer. He has performed in over 500 programmes. pic.twitter.com/hyMmBMA1f

M. Gauravi Reddy is a prolific dancer. She has been performing at various programmes and is very passionate about Indian culture. Delighted that she has been conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. pic.twitter.com/NRYzY4nExc

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Meet Kumari Kolagatla Alana Meenakshi, a distinguished chess player and now, a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee. Her successes in chess have made her shine in various competitions globally. Her accomplishments will certainly inspire upcoming chess players.

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Had an excellent interaction with those who have been conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. <https://t.co/4i8RXHcBYG> pic.twitter.com/QC5ELeWJhR

Proud of Aadithya Suresh, who has shown remarkable resilience. He was diagnosed with a bone disorder but he is not one to have a low morale. He pursued singing and is now a talented singer. He has performed in over 500 programmes. pic.twitter.com/hyMmBMA1tf

M. Gauravi Reddy is a prolific dancer. She has been performing at various programmes and is very passionate about Indian culture. Delighted that she has been conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. pic.twitter.com/NRYzY4nExc

My young friend Sambhab Mishra is a very creative youngster. He has numerous articles to his credit and is also the recipient of prestigious fellowships. I congratulate him on being conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. pic.twitter.com/qHWqirzFMc

Shreya Bhattacharjee, a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee, is a tabla artist who has a record for playing the Tabla for the longest duration. She has also been honoured at forums like the Cultural Olympiad of Performing Arts. Had a very good interaction with her. pic.twitter.com/PmWLY4telz

I am proud of Rohan Ramchandra Bahir, who jumped into a river and saved a woman from drowning. He displayed great bravery and fearlessness. Congratulations to him on being conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. Best wishes to him for his future endeavours. pic.twitter.com/FPKaMpk7Th

The phenomenally talented Aditya Pratap Singh Chauhan has been awarded the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar for his strides in innovation. He has been working on developing a cost effective technology for ensuring clean water. pic.twitter.com/pHVy9EEOac

Celebrating innovation among the youth! Rishi Shiv Prasanna is passionate about developing Apps. He is equally interested in science as well as popularising it among the youth. Happy to have met this Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar winner today. pic.twitter.com/t0vDBwhvp4

Youngsters like Anoushka Jolly have shown remarkable compassion and innovation. She is diligently working on an App and other online programmes to spread awareness against bullying. Glad that she is now a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee. pic.twitter.com/joIFFRleni

We are committed to popularising different sports and emphasising fitness. Hanaya Nisar is a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee who has represented India in various martial arts competitions. She has won various laurels. Proud of her accomplishments. pic.twitter.com/2q64o4xF1O

Shauryajit Ranjitekumar Khaire won immense admiration for his success in the 2022 National Games. He is a powerhouse of talent when it comes to Mallakhamb. I congratulate him for the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar and wish him the very best for his upcoming endeavours. pic.twitter.com/HfxWoPMHxN

Meet Kumari Kolagatla Alana Meenakshi, a distinguished chess player and now, a Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee. Her successes in chess have made her shine in various competitions globally. Her accomplishments will certainly inspire upcoming chess players. pic.twitter.com/Xod9zR3dIA

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IS THERE A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR INDIAN SPORTSWOMEN?

Relevant for: null | Topic: Role of Women and Women's Organization

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January 27, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 08:32 am IST

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Wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik and others during their protest against the Wrestling Federation of India, in New Delhi. | Photo Credit: PTI

Over a week ago, India's top wrestlers, including Olympic medallists Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia, and World Championship medallist Vinesh Phogat, [staged a protest](#) against Wrestling Federation of India president [Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh](#), accusing him and coaches of the Federation of sexual harassment. [Singh was asked to step aside](#), and the Union Sports Ministry constituted a five-member oversight committee to investigate the charges. The [committee, led by the celebrated boxer M.C. Mary Kom](#), has also been tasked with managing the day-to-day affairs of the Federation until the submission of its report. The controversy has yet again brought into focus the many problems in Indian sports governance. Questions have been raised over the conduct of the newly elected Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Athletes' Commission, and the redressal mechanisms in place. Considering the challenges, is there a level playing field for Indian sportswomen? **Sharda Ugra** and **Deepthi Bopaiah** discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **N. Sudarshan**. Edited excerpts:

How big is the pushback by the wrestlers?

Sharda Ugra: It is a revolutionary act. In the last decade and a half, there have been sporadic complaints. But in this age of television and social media, we have seen senior athletes saying, 'We're standing up for our community as a whole.' Very rarely will an athlete of Vinesh or Sakshi or Bajrang's capabilities and achievements speak out and say, 'We will not leave until the president of the Federation goes.' It's a reflection of how Indian sport has changed and [how] a lot of it has stayed the same.

Deepthi Bopaiah: I agree. Each one of them understands the responsibility of being a role model. And if you don't be the change you want to see, you're not going to see that [change] happening. So many different entities have come forward to professionalise Indian sport; we've made baby steps towards it. But something like this makes you sit back and think, 'Aren't there enough systems and processes?' So, from an athlete's side, it's brave and fantastic; you are walking the talk. But from the administration side, it makes you think, 'Why are they doing that?'

The P.T. Usha-led IOA and the Athletes' Commission dithered in their initial responses. In an era where athlete-driven governance is championed, could they have done better?

Sharda Ugra: Like Deepthi said, 'Are you walking the talk as an athlete who's in an official position?' For both P.T. Usha and Mary Kom, it took more than 24 hours to respond. The Athletes' Commission, which is supposed to be the voice of the athletes, had nothing to say. [Only] Shiva Keshavan put out a tweet. Ten athletes were unanimously elected [to the Commission]. You could ask, 'To do what? Are they just placeholders?' Now Mary Kom has been made in charge, but we've not seen any decisive action or comment on a very troublesome issue, which I'm sure she herself is very familiar with.

Deepthi Bopaiah: I'll answer this in two parts. I feel these are very early days for P.T. Usha and the Athletes' Commission. But I agree with Sharda that you need some sort of an acknowledgement when such a brave step is taken. The second part is, when redressal committees were being set up in corporate India, a lot of it was about creating awareness about the roles people occupied: Why is a particular person on a committee? Can I reach out? We still need to replicate these in Indian sports. On this issue, the turnaround time was much quicker from the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Sports Ministry compared to earlier times, which is good. But the part where I still have concern is, 'How do you report? Who's going to address it and what happens after that?'

There is more awareness and discussion about the seriousness of sexual assault crimes. But is the environment more conducive today to report complaints?

Deepthi Bopaiah: It depends on which section of women are doing it, and what is the support system behind them. Today, [there is] general awareness on prevention of sexual harassment, with the #MeToo movement. But in sport, these discussions are not happening enough. It's seen in smaller groups and workshops, like we do it at our foundation. While women feel more confident and more courageous in bringing up the issue, they still form a very small percentage.

Sharda Ugra: Female athletes, like women in the country, are more confident about speaking out. If they come from a slightly urban set-up, they are able to talk openly about it. The fact that these wrestlers have come out and they come from a sort of rural background will give confidence to a lot of other athletes. Recently, the case of the cyclist who had complained about the coach was a great example of SAI responding quickly. The Cycling Federation said, 'He's been here for 24 years and we've had no complaints.' That doesn't mean he didn't do anything. So, these 24 years show you the sort of change that has happened.

That these athletes staged a protest indicates the massive imbalance in power and a lack of faith in the system. How do we correct it?

Sharda Ugra: This is a classic example of the benevolence of power stepping in. Power here is the Sports Ministry, rather than there being systems and structures in place. The day-to-day operations of a majority of sports federations are run not by a professional office, but by the office of whoever is the president or secretary. That is why when there is any problem, you go straight to the top. This time, it was the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, and then the Sports Minister. In a proper structure, you would have gone to the Athletes' Commission and then to the IOA. This is why the athletes want the Wrestling Federation of India to be restructured, because the ladder that exists there has no rungs in it.

Is there any effort to sensitise those in power to the problems faced by athletes?

Deepthi Bopaiah: It's a combination of things. There is a lot of attention on sexual harassment. But in terms of the abuse of power, there's psychological abuse, neglect, not sending entries to competitions, etc. There are also [imbalances] in terms of socio-economic status and athletic ability. That's why there is an attempt to formalise the National Sports Code. But there are also

people who don't want it to happen because the sense of power goes away. And the athlete is left hanging.

Should we then expand the debate and go beyond reporting on sexual and mental harassment? Such as the lack of equal opportunities to compete, fewer stadiums with women-centric infrastructure?

Sharda Ugra: You can handle all these things together. There is an athlete-centric model of governance that India is having a problem coming to terms with. Enough competitions to take part in, better stadiums, better facilities... these are all reasonable expectations. But we also don't know how many young boys are being harassed, mentally and psychologically. You would sense that women athletes will be going through a significant degree more. If you get the coach-athlete and the official-coach-athlete equations evened out and made respectful, it would make for an enormous beginning.

Deepthi Bopaiah: The word to take away is respect. Our athletes are special. All this pride that we feel is because of their ability. Yes, others work with them, but without the athlete, there is nothing. You need to give them an environment to thrive in, like the Padukone-Draavid Centre for Sports Excellence or the JSW setup in Ballari. We're not giving athletes enough basic infrastructure and basic respect, but we expect medals every four years. The wrestling issue has shaken up the system. It is saying, 'Get it done now.'

How far are we from an ideal sports governance model?

Sharda Ugra: A good distance away. Starting out by accepting that would be great. And also not look at everything from a medal-centric view. Some of our laws are excellent, but are they being implemented? Of our federations, 85-90% are symbols of bad governance. We can be happy if it comes down to 40-50%.

Deepthi Bopaiah: This is unfortunately true. But I feel that private foundations and SAI are all working together. There is some accountability. But when you're talking about a safe environment to thrive in, there are many more aspects. Some say, 'Let's get the medals and other things can be ignored.' That approach is not appropriate. But I have seen changes in the last few years that give me hope. It's great to see athletes stand up for themselves. Having the courage to say that this is not okay and younger athletes should not face similar challenges is amazing. The ball is in the court of the administrators.

Sharda Ugra is a sports journalist with more than three decades of experience across newsrooms at The Hindu , Mid-Day , India Today and ESPNcricinfo; Deepthi Bopaiah is CEO of GoSports Foundation, a non-profit working towards the development of some of India's best Olympic and Paralympic talents

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A 'HOLOCAUST EDUCATION' FOR INDIA TO CREATE A JUST PRESENT

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

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January 27, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 01:53 am IST

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Visitors tour the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial museum in Jerusalem on January 26, 2023, a day ahead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, commemorating the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis during World War II. | Photo Credit: AFP

Six million Jews were murdered in cold blood — a consequence of the worst form of government-sponsored antisemitism in Nazi-Germany. Today, on [International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#) (January 27), we remember those who became the [victims of the unprecedented and systematic killings](#). Remembering the dead is our responsibility, and fighting against antisemitism and hatred is our resolve.

Violence and hatred are learned behaviours that disrupt the core humanitarian principles of peaceful co-existence and acceptance of differences. The Holocaust stands as a jarring example of the deadly consequences of hate crimes and antisemitism that made their way from the fringes to the mainstream. With antisemitism as the case in point, this is particularly dangerous when used for power-related purposes, or to appease anxieties during times of crisis and uncertainty. In this way, ideologies of hate can permeate the social fabric as human frailty gets exploited.

Unfortunately, the world is still struggling with inequality, intolerance, and injustice in many places. As evidence suggests, a host of grave economic, cultural, religious and ethnic issues continue to provoke division, hate crimes, and violence in many parts of the globe. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of antisemitic incidents against Jews all around the world. Most of these were incidents of harassment but hate speech on social media, assaults and antisemitic vandalism have also spiked in recent years. We must counter these phenomena, to avoid wider societal tension and conflict.

Today, as we mark the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, we recall the systematic murder of six million Jews. The Shoah or the Holocaust, in which Jews were systematically targeted solely for being born Jewish, stands out as a defining moment in history. Education about the Holocaust helps us understand the processes and factors that lead to the eradication of human rights and democratic values, and identify circumstances that can lead to the increase in hate speech, violence, and even mass atrocities. It is our duty to remember the past in order to understand that the relevance and impact of the Holocaust transcend time and history.

This path of remembrance is a moral imperative for many countries in Europe, and around the world. One of the key messages of Holocaust remembrance is vigilance against dehumanisation and discrimination. Instead of erasing the past, we must educate people to ensure that there is no residue of this deep-rooted history of discrimination and build up resilience to ideologies of hate and a cognisance of the effects.

Drawing from the concept of 'reparative futures', we must find ways to talk about the past by imbuing the responsibility to 'never forget' and developing competencies to fulfil the promise of 'never again' among the youth.

Important UNESCO initiatives such as the International Program on Holocaust and Genocide Education (IPHGE) are a step in the direction of fostering reparative justice. By teaching the youth to view this catastrophe as a watershed moment in history with the possibility of its recurrence in other shapes and forms elsewhere, we can equip them with fundamental skills, values, and dispositions to address future challenges, such as critical thinking, empathy, tolerance, and respect for human rights.

Coming to terms with this past is equally important for countries that are seemingly unaffected by Nazism and antisemitism. It is unsurprising that for the academic community in India, the Holocaust remains a geographically and emotionally distant historical event.

At a time when antisemitism and other forms of discrimination, Holocaust denial, and distortion are on the rise globally, we must provide the youth with opportunities to engage with this history and interrogate the injustices of the past to create a just present. Likewise, teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to develop and deliver lessons about the history of the Holocaust that resonate with their students in today's world.

After all, forewarned is forearmed. Education suffused with learnings from the past can demonstrate, as Jean-Paul Sartre very rightly said, that individual choices or the lack thereof can indeed make a difference.

Naor Gilon is the Ambassador of Israel to India, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. Philipp Ackermann is the Ambassador of Germany to India and Bhutan. Hezekiel Dlamini is the Officer-in-Charge, UNESCO New Delhi (UNESCO is a member of Team UN in India, together helping deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals)

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TABLEAU BY THE MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS SHOWCASES TRIBAL WELFARE THROUGH QUALITY EDUCATION IN EKLAVYA MODEL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

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

In line with the vision of celebrating our glorious tribal heritage, a tableau by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs showcasing tribal welfare through quality education in Eklavya Model Residential Schools established for ST children across the country featured at the national Republic Day Parade today.

Twenty-three tableaux, seventeen from States/Union Territories and six from various Ministries/Departments, depicting the nation's rich cultural heritage, economic progress and strong internal and external security rolled down the Kartavya Path during the Republic Day parade on January 26, 2023.



This year was special for the Ministry of Tribal Affairs as a tableau on Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) scheme was displayed during Republic Day Celebrations for the first time. The selection process involved scrutiny of tableaux proposals from various States/UTs by an expert committee and several rounds of interactions by the committee members with representatives of the States on the theme, presentation, aesthetics and technical elements of the tableau. Eklavya Model Residential Schools established by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, under EMRS scheme, ensure that quality education must reach the tribal communities inhabiting the remotest parts of the country much the way education was imparted in the lap of nature during times of Gurukuls in ancient India, albeit with all modern amenities.



The front portion of the tableau showcased the emphasis of the Ministry on “Nari Shakti” symbolic of girl education, ensuring equal enrolment of tribal boys and girls at EMRSs. It also emphasized the desire of the tribal students to conquer the world through education. An archetypical pen, illustrative of learning, in the shape of Eklavya’s bow and arrow reflects the single-eyed mission with which tribal students of EMRSs shape their future and realize their dreams. The projection of the knowledge tree in the rear portion reverberated the spread of knowledge and wisdom from EMRS teachers to students and the conservation of tribal culture in its natural landscape which is one of the objectives of EMRSs.

In line with the vision of celebrating our glorious tribal heritage, a tableau by the [@TribalAffairsIn](https://twitter.com/TribalAffairsIn) showcasing tribal welfare through quality education in Eklavya Model Residential Schools established for ST children across the country was featured at the 74th [#RepublicDay](https://twitter.com/RepublicDay). pic.twitter.com/1Hi71aTozR

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UNION HEALTH MINISTER DR. MANSUKH MANDAVIYA UNVEILS WORLD'S FIRST INTRANASAL COVID19 VACCINE, INNCOVACC IN THE PRESENCE OF UNION MINISTER OF STATE (IC) FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DR JITENDRA SINGH

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

Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare unveiled the iNNCOVACC COVID19 vaccine today in the presence of Union Minister of State (IC) for Science and Technology, Dr Jitendra Singh. iNNCOVACC is the world's first intranasal COVID19 vaccine to receive approval for the primary 2-dose schedule, and as a heterologous booster dose. It is developed by Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL) in collaboration with Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance (BIRAC), a PSU under the Dept of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology.



Expressing his elation at the event, Dr Mandaviya said that over 65% of vaccines supplied in the world are from India. Congratulating the BBIL team and the dept of Biotech for bringing about the world's first nasal vaccine, he stated that "being the world's first intra-nasal COVID19 vaccine, this marks a glorious tribute to the call for Atmanirbhar Bharat".



The Union Health Minister added that India's vaccine manufacturing and innovation capability is appreciated all over the world as it has made a mark in producing quality and affordable medicines. He also highlighted that BBIL in collaboration with ICMR introduced COVAXIN in India within a month of the launch of first COVID vaccine in the world.

Congratulating BBIL for innovating another vaccine in collaboration with BIRAC, Dr Jitendra Singh said that "India has taken a lead in developing vaccines and medicines for diseases common in the developing world". He credited Hon'ble Prime Minister's personal intervention and regular monitoring for inspiring and enabling the launching of "Mission Covid Suraksha" which has not only strengthened AtmaNirbhar Bharat but also bolstered India's status as a worldwide vaccine development and manufacturing centre, thus showcasing the strength of India's Science and Technology capabilities. "Next step would be to develop vaccines for non-communicable diseases", he added.



He also stated that ZyCoV-D, the world's first and India's indigenously developed DNA based vaccine for Covid-19 to be administered in humans including children and adults 12 years and above, was also developed in partnership with the Department of Biotechnology in the Ministry of Science & Technology under 'Mission Covid Suraksha' through BIRAC.

iNCOVACC is a cost effective covid vaccine which does not require syringes, needles, alcohol wipes, bandage, etc, saving costs related to procurement, distribution, storage, and biomedical waste disposal, that is routinely required for injectable vaccines. It utilizes a vector-based platform, which can be easily updated with emerging variants leading to large scale production, within a few months. These rapid response timelines combined with the ability of cost effective and easy intranasal delivery, makes it an ideal vaccine to address future infectious diseases.

A rollout of iNCOVACC is expected to begin in private hospitals that have placed advance orders. Initial manufacturing capacity of several million doses per annum has been established, this can be scaled up to a billion doses as required. iNCOVACC is priced at INR 325/dose for large volume procurement by State Governments and Govt of India.

Dr Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary, Dept of Biotechnology, Shri Rajesh Kumar Pathak, Secretary, Technology Development Board and other senior officials of the Ministry were present on the occasion. Dr Krishna Ella, Co-Founder & Executive Chairman, Bharat Biotech and Smt. Suchitra Ella, Co-Founder and MD, Bharat Biotech were also present.

MV

HFV/HFM-iNNCOVACC Launch/26thJanuary2023/2

Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare unveiled the iNNCOVACC COVID19 vaccine today in the presence of Union Minister of State (IC) for Science and Technology, Dr Jitendra Singh. iNNCOVACC is the world's first intranasal COVID19 vaccine to receive approval for the primary 2-dose schedule, and as a heterologous booster dose. It is developed by Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL) in collaboration with Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance (BIRAC), a PSU under the Dept of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology.





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INDIA'S JUGGERNAUT OF CENSORSHIP

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'There has been an increased use of emergency powers on questionable grounds' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has [blocked over 50 tweets on Twitter](#) that carried a link to the [BBC documentary, *India: The Modi Question*](#). In an order on January 20, 2023, the government used emergency powers under the Information Technology Rules, 2021 and Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 to direct Twitter and YouTube to disable access to the documentary within India and prevent its re-upload. Limited information about the blockage is available coming primarily from statements made by officials and reporting by Twitter to the Lumen Database that tracks takedown requests. There are concerns over natural justice, the constitutionality of the direction, and how the IT Rules that are in a perpetual state of proposed amendment.

Natural justice is a fundamental principle in public law when decisions affect fundamental rights such as the freedom of speech. The Supreme Court of India, in the case of Cricket Association of Bengal, recognised that, "[t]he right to receive and impart information is implicit in free speech".

Therefore, any restriction must ordinarily issue a show cause notice, provide the opportunity of defence to the author, and record reasons in an order that is made publicly. Providing reasons allows for the author or publisher, as well as the recipient of the information, to seek judicial remedies and act as a check for constitutionally permitted censorship. So, was such a procedure followed for the 45 people whose tweets were blocked? Were they provided a chance for a hearing, or a copy of the blocking order? Has it been made public? No.

Such practice is contrary to the directions of the Supreme Court in the case of Shreya Singhal vs Union of India. In the case it upheld that blocking powers under Section 69A subject to "reasons have to be recorded in writing in such blocking order so that they may be assailed in a writ petition". However, blocking orders are marked as "secret" or "confidential", then transmitted directly to service providers, making it difficult for the authors an opportunity of defence and the general public to challenge them.

This is why Twitter has approached the High Court of Karnataka. This is also why movie critic Tanul Thakur, whose satirical website was blocked, approached the High Court of Delhi and was able to obtain a copy of the blocking order. Instead, press releases are selectively issued

instead of disclosing the text of orders. This type of “transparency when convenient” becomes a form of opacity. This writer’s colleague, Prateek Waghre, looked at eight press releases over a period and discovered that the tally within them is far lower than the one provided for by the Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting in Parliament in July 2022. The disclosures when made have been related to populist issues such as blocking Pakistani content related to the armed forces, or on Jammu and Kashmir. Notably, there has been no official press release for the online blocking of the BBC documentary.

The blocking has been made under Rule 16(3) of the IT Rules and Section 69(A) of the IT Act, 2000 that allow for “emergency blocking”. However, the term “emergency” itself is not legislatively defined, but following the dictionary meaning would mean “a dangerous situation requiring immediate action”. It permits an expedited process that weakens the already minimal checks by bypassing a committee and also eliminating the opportunity to be heard. It is important to note that these rules have been challenged in courts. In August 2021, the Bombay High Court, in a petition by The Leaflet and Nikhil Waghle, suspended Rules 9(1) and 9(3) that establish a code of ethics for online news platforms and a three-tier grievance redress mechanism headed by the central government. In its interim order it counselled, “it is healthy to invite criticism of all those who are in public service for the nation to have structured growth”.

A month later, on September 17, 2021, the Madras High Court in a petition by musician and author T.M. Krishna noted, “there is substantial basis to the petitioners’ assertion that Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution may be infringed in how the Rules may be coercively applied”. The central government’s response to the more than 20 challenges filed in High Courts was to seek their transfer to the Supreme Court. On May 9, 2022, the top court issued notice, even stayed existing proceedings, but refused to interfere with these interim orders. It means that the directions of the High Courts still hold the force of law. Given this, we would imagine officials to be prudent and avoid undermining their letter and spirit.

However, we have witnessed an increased use of emergency powers, as seen in the eight press releases referred to earlier on questionable grounds. For instance, the BBC documentary has been described by public authorities as “propaganda” reflecting “a colonial mindset”. Even on accepting such an assertion, it cannot be understood how it qualifies as an emergency.

The IT Rules first notified on April 11, 2011 by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) have undergone a radical change. This can be attributed to a centralisation of executive power rather than a rapid metamorphosis of the subject matter for regulation. On February 25, 2021, the rules were amended drastically to increase government control over online platforms and news publishers. Other changes included the creation of grievance officers for social media companies and traceability requirements to increase censorship and break privacy-protecting technologies such as encryption. It also required news publishers to follow a vague moral code of self-censorship that permitted grievances to be escalated to the government, leading to stay orders by High Courts.

On October 28, 2022, rather than address such constitutional concerns, another set of amendments created a government censorship body sitting in appeal of all content moderated by social media companies. This year started with more proposed changes. On January 2, 2023, MeitY wanted to create a self-regulatory system for online gaming and gambling companies, which is illegal on several grounds, including federalism, given that legislation on it is a State subject. Despite reasoned criticism, MeitY pushed ahead. A new provision was proposed on January 17, 2023, which was the last date of this public consultation and modelled as an extension. Another week was provided to respond to a draft that gave the Press Information Bureau a general mandate and any central government ministry as per their allocated area of business, the power to fact-check and take down any online content without

defining the term “fake”. This led to swift condemnation by journalist associations and editorial positions were taken against it by most national newspapers. Only three days later the BBC’s documentary was blocked. Here, events bear witness to the inexorable expansion of IT Rules into the ‘everything law’.

Also read | [13 Jamia students detained by police ahead of planned BBC documentary screening](#)

Today it clothes violations of fundamental rights by creating the pretence of a procedure which permits unlimited censorship powers that are often left to an unbounded imagination and capriciousness. On Republic day, it leaves us to ask a wider question: where do we place free debate and expression in a digital and democratic India?

Apar Gupta is an advocate and Executive Director of the Internet Freedom Foundation

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AIM, NITI AAYOG, CBSE, AND INTEL INDIA COLLABORATES TO REVOLUTIONIZE EDUCATION THROUGH MAINSTREAMING TINKERING AND AI

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

Atal Innovation Mission - NITI Aayog, Central Board of Secondary Education -Ministry of Education, and Intel India have collaborated to bring a change in the education sector by embedding future skills such as AI and Tinkering in the formal curriculum.

The larger aim is to align the NEP 2020's guidance to increase the pace of tech integration for youth, the need to bridge the future skills gap in the country, and optimize the current infrastructure (ATLs, etc.) towards making India AI-ready. Together, they launched the AIoT Integration in School Curriculum in September 2022 and initiated a pilot.

Today's showcase was an outcome of this pilot program and there was,

In his keynote address the chief guest, Dr. Chintan Vaishnav, Mission Director, Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog, said, "It is well known that learning a concept in multiple ways with multiple modes strengthens the understanding of the concept. A lot of effort has gone into creating the exercises produced in this book to facilitate such multi-modal learning. I thank CBSE and Intel India for this collaboration with AIM and congratulate all the participating schools who were part of the pilot of the 'AIoT Integration in Curriculum' program, on being the trailblazers. I hope that this compendium of AIoT integrated lesson plans created by educators is taken up by teachers across the country, to explore AIoT exemplar lesson plans and implement them in the classrooms, with utmost sense of urgency."

The compendium is a collection of lesson plans created by the teachers and each one provides a 360-degree view of how AIoT integration can be used to enhance learning in a classroom.

For example, one of the lesson plans for class 9, helps to guide the students to analyze the reason for pain in the back and develop an AI-led solution where an LED light glows every time it detects incorrect posture and green light glows once the correct posture is retained.

In yet another lesson plan for social science, a student is guided to first make use of the design thinking process to understand why plants die in winter, given an insight into using tinkering tools like sensors and Arduino UNO to record the moisture level of the soil, and then supported to deploy a supervised AI model to predict the plant's health by making use of the recorded data.

Addressing the teachers, educators, and facilitators, present on the occasion, Dr Biswajit Saha, Director (Trainings & Skill Education), CBSE, said that the new methodology will enable the shift in teaching pedagogies from traditional to digital with several additional benefits and increased efficiency. He said, "Integrating AI and Tinkering with lesson plans and making them part of the everyday teaching-learning activities can help enable the students to imbibe the digital-first mindset. We hope this compendium will empower teachers to guide their students and help build a truly future-ready generation."

Ms. Shweta Khurana, Senior Director, Asia Pacific & Japan, Global Government Affairs Group, Intel, elaborated on the need to empower India's young population for the future, "AIoT Integration in Curriculum,' is a collaborative effort between AIM - NITI Aayog, CBSE - Ministry of Education, and Intel India. Our goal is to empower teachers with appropriate, skillsets, mindsets, and toolsets to integrate AI and Tinkering. We hope that through this methodology, the students will gain a comprehensive understanding of how emerging technologies can be used impactfully and responsibly. We sincerely hope that the schools enjoy implementing these lesson plans as much as we did during the journey of curating them together"

The event was held at Dr Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi, and was attended by about 500 educators from schools across NCR.

Post the event, selected students and teachers also got an opportunity to showcase their AIoT projects and interact with Shri Parameswaran Iyer, CEO, NITI Aayog at the NITI Aayog premises.

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THE BLURRED LINES BETWEEN GAMING AND GAMBLING

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

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January 27, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 01:29 am IST

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Being careful with language is a part of the job description for two professions in particular: law and journalism. And when the interests of these two professions — and the appropriate vocabulary to describe those interests — are in conflict, things get tricky.

Recently, at least three people from an industry called me to share information about their advocacy efforts with the government. This industry represents a range of online apps or platforms where users can risk their money to win or, as is the case often, lose what they put in. The games include casino staples such as poker and rummy. These are called online gambling apps in parts of the world.

Editorial | [Gaming and gambling: On the Centre's move to regulate online gaming](#)

While the Constitution gives States the power to regulate “betting and gambling,” platforms have repeatedly and successfully made the case that games such as rummy and poker are ‘games of skill’ and therefore don’t fall into either category.

It is true that platforms carry financial risks, which they themselves have disclosed. And skilful players too can miscalculate and lose huge amounts of money. Yet, calling these apps ‘online gambling’ spells trouble. This is because courts have held that playing games such as poker and rummy requires and rewards application of mind and doesn’t constitute gambling. Who are journalists, then, to say otherwise? The industry prefers the term ‘real money gaming’ or RMG.

Today, States and journalists are scrutinising this industry. A spate of suicides has highlighted the financial and other harms that addiction to such games can cause. Tamil Nadu has attempted to define and restrict these platforms by enacting a law to restrict ‘online gaming.’ This is a far wider category than even the RMG term adopted by the industry and risks conflating video games that entail different risks, and mostly without staking money, with speculative apps which can dictate personal fortunes. The first effort at prohibition, under the AIADMK-led administration, was struck down by the Madras High Court. The DMK-led government asked Retired Justice K. Chandru to lead a committee to examine the issue last year. The committee’s report included insights from schoolteachers, which suggested that it was not just RMG apps that were the government’s focus.

Last August, the Home Department held a consultation. I asked whether stakeholder submissions could be disclosed in public interest. But the submissions were not made public, despite many Right to Information requests seeking copies.

When the Union government put out a draft of a far more liberal approach of regulating this industry, the Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology told reporters that “any game that allows or permits wagering on its outcome is effectively a no-go area.” But the draft he unveiled simply spelt out safeguards for such platforms. And the draft called them ‘online gaming providers’, as did an amendment to the Allocation of Business Rules made shortly beforehand to allow the IT Ministry to regulate this space.

Also read | [Fighting the menace of online gambling](#)

The obfuscation and the blurred lines ultimately end up confusing readers. So, what do we do? To lump in real money games with video games is a journalistically fraught exercise. In my writing, I have used phrases like “games that allow players to stake real money” and “wagering platforms” when referring to games such as rummy and poker. It’s not as unambiguous as “online gambling,” but it gets the message across.

As the online gaming amendment approaches notification, and amendments to it to include other forms of non-wagering video games get formulated, it will be more important to report on what exactly the real money gaming industry is, and what it is not. That is a prerogative for policy clarity as well as a necessity for readers, so that they understand concerns and rulemaking around RMGs.

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IT MINISTRY NOTIFIES OFFICIALS TO HEAR SOCIAL MEDIA COMPLAINT APPEALS

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

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January 28, 2023 02:36 am | Updated 02:36 am IST - NEW DELHI

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The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on Friday notified nine officials to act as members of the Grievance Appellate Committees set up by the Union government, to hear appeals by social media users. The committees, which were formulated under a 2022 amendment of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, will be able to pass orders to ask social media platforms to overrule moderation decisions. The decisions included taking down or restoring content upon complaints by users who will be able to escalate complaints to the bodies, if they are not satisfied with the outcome of a first appeal with the self-regulatory body of which the social media platforms are a part.

Three members have been appointed to each of the three committees. They are: the Chief Executive Officer of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), retired IPS officer Ashutosh Shukla and former Chief General Manager and Chief Information Officer of Punjab National Bank; the Joint Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's Policy and Administrative Division, retired Commodore Sunil Kumar Gupta and Kavindra Sharma, former Vice President (Consulting) of L&T Infotech Limited; and Kavita Bhatia, Scientist G in the IT Ministry, retired Indian Railway Traffic Service officer Sanjay Goel and former Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of IDBI Intech Limited Krishnagiri Ragothamarao Murali Mohan.

The appointment of these committees allows the government to operationalise its anti-deplatforming provision under the IT Rules, a concept that has been struck down by the courts in the United States; an ongoing U.S. Supreme Court case may change the situation, however. As private platforms, social media companies have been given a wide berth to remove content and suspend users, something they have argued is needed to combat hate speech and safety on their sites. The IT Ministry, however, has said that they will have to respect users' constitutional right to free speech, which may soon result in platforms having to host speech that they would otherwise choose to punish.

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FOUNDING IDEALS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON PRESIDENT MURMU'S FIRST REPUBLIC DAY ADDRESS TO THE NATION

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

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January 28, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:46 am IST

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In her [first and customary Republic Day address](#) to the nation, [President Draupadi Murmu](#) [reiterated the founding ideals](#) of the Republic on the eve of the 74th anniversary of the adoption of its Constitution. As the first tribal woman to occupy the highest office in the country, the [15th President of India](#) is emblematic of the Republic's continuing journey of democracy, pluralism and empowerment of the weaker sections. The values of fraternity and democracy that its founding leaders etched into the genetic makeup of the modern nation were derived from the learnings of an ancient civilisation. Ms. Murmu underscored this quality of the Republic — the amalgamation of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. A unified and unifying struggle against British imperialism, as the President noted, was “as much about winning Independence as about rediscovering our own ideals”. Ms. Murmu laid emphasis on the “essence of India” — which is profound and predictable at once. “We have succeeded... because so many creeds and so many languages have not divided us, they have only united us.” A commitment to this creed has sustained the modern nation, and the long and ancient civilisation that evolved and reformed over millennia.

It can be argued that the Republic is continuously in formation, as thoughts and ideas emerge. As new ambitions inspire the country, some foundational principles must remain the timeless codes for survival and success. Ms. Murmu's address reiterated those, while celebrating India's successes in various fields, particularly the economy. While noting India's emergence as an influential leader in global affairs, she underscored the principles of Sarvodaya and Atmanirbhar Bharat — uplift of all, and self reliance — which are guiding the government as they have the earlier ones. Oppression and debilitating poverty continue to shackle vast sections, and India must constantly remember this fact, and certainly on occasions when it reflects on its progress. At various points, challenges to the ideals of the Constitution and the national movement arose in the form of political authoritarianism, sectarian extremism, and separatism, but India overcame them — a reason for satisfaction but also a call for constant vigil. Ms. Murmu's reiteration of the founding principles of the Republic, and her reassurance to fellow citizens come at time when the sanctity of the Constitution is under attack. While debate about the Constitution is also part of the democracy it establishes, adherence to its basic principles is what unifies the people of India. Ms. Murmu made that point.

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PRIME MINISTER SHRI NARENDRA MODI INTERACTS WITH STUDENTS IN THE 6TH EDITION OF PARIKSHA PE CHARCHA

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

Key Highlights

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, interacted with students about upcoming exams today in the 6th edition of Pariksha Pe Charcha Programme. The programme was organised at Talkatora Stadium in New Delhi, where school students of grades 9th to 12th, parents, and teachers had heart to heart interaction with the Prime Minister.

Over the years, Pariksha pe Charcha Programme developed by the Prime Minister has evolved as a larger movement- Exam Warriors wherein students, parents, and teachers from all over the country and abroad interact with him enthusiastically on various topics viz. how to cope up with examination stress and celebrate life as an *Utsav*.





The **38.80 Lakh** students, teachers, and parents, who were shortlisted to ask the Prime Minister questions, were selected from an online creative writing competition on an array of subject and topics. The competition was organised through the MyGov platform from 25th November 2022 till 30th December 2022 and participants were presented with a special Pariksha pe Charcha kit comprising of Exam Warrior book written by the Prime Minister and a certificate.



In this edition of Pariksha pe Charcha, 20 lakh questions were received on various topics ranging from family pressure, stress management, prevention of unfair means, how to stay healthy and fit to career selection etc.

The PPC platform provided a unique opportunity to get the exam-related queries and doubts resolved by applying the mantra given by PM. There were bundle of exam-related topics touched during the program, ranged from parents' pressure to conduct of students in society; from seeking tips to keep away from social media distractions to learning of different languages. He also emphasised on the importance of education for all regardless of gender and the importance of knowing the comprehensive NEP 2020, which will redefine education and provide

new learning opportunities.

The program organised by Ministry of Education's Department of School Education and Literacy was telecast live on Doordarshan (DD National, DD News, DD India), radio channels, TV channels, digital media, including YouTube channels of EduMinofIndia, Narendra Modi, PMO India, PIB India, Doordarshan National, MyGovIndia, DD News, Rajya Sabha TV, Swayam Prabha. This programme was witnessed live by crores of students.

Special arrangements were made by **Eklavya Model Residential Schools** (EMRSs) across the country to telecast the program live at school premises. EMRS students and teaching fraternity from around 400 schools across the country attended the program virtually and resolved to follow PM's words of wisdom and write the exams in a stress and anxiety free manner. Senior officers and staff of the Ministry too virtually attended the Programme to have a taste of the insights and advice shared by the Prime Minister with the students.

Shri Arjun Munda, Hon'ble Minister of Tribal Affairs , on this occasion remarked, "With his unique initiative of "Pariksha Pe Charcha", Hon'ble Prime Minister has set a legacy for generations to come. Under his able guidance, vision and strong leadership, India is relentlessly striving to achieve its goals based on the mantra of 'Reform, Perform and Transform'. I am sure that in the 6th Edition of Pariksha Pe Charcha held today, our Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs), Ashram Schools and lakhs of students who are taking advantage of pre- and post-matric scholarship would have exploited this opportunity to the fullest. I believe that students of our country will no longer be afraid of the examinations and will work hard for their prosperous future. I wish all the very best to our dear students for their upcoming examinations."

The event has been a valuable and enlightening experience and shall go a long way in alleviation of the stress and pressure associated with exams to a considerable extent.

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The program organised by Ministry of Education's Department of School Education and Literacy was telecast live on Doordarshan (DD National, DD News, DD India), radio channels, TV channels, digital media, including YouTube channels of EduMinofIndia, Narendra Modi, PMO India, PIB India, Doordarshan National, MyGovIndia, DD News, Rajya Sabha TV, Swayam Prabha. This programme was witnessed live by crores of students.

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Shri Arjun Munda, Hon'ble Minister of Tribal Affairs , on this occasion remarked, "With his unique initiative of "Pariksha Pe Charcha", Hon'ble Prime Minister has set a legacy for generations to come. Under his able guidance, vision and strong leadership, India is relentlessly striving to achieve its goals based on the mantra of 'Reform, Perform and Transform'. I am sure that in the 6th Edition of Pariksha Pe Charcha held today, our Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs), Ashram Schools and lakhs of students who are taking advantage of pre- and post-matric scholarship would have exploited this opportunity to the fullest. I believe that students of our country will no longer be afraid of the examinations and will work hard for their prosperous future. I wish all the very best to our dear students for their upcoming examinations."

The event has been a valuable and enlightening experience and shall go a long way in alleviation of the stress and pressure associated with exams to a considerable extent.

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BREAST CANCER: MORE INSIGHTS ON HOW HORMONAL THERAPY WORKS

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

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January 28, 2023 08:30 pm | Updated 08:30 pm IST

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Treatable: Hormone therapy is a standard treatment for breast cancer and is often used in combination with other treatments such as surgery.

Work carried out by researchers from the Integrated Cancer Genomics Laboratory at the Advanced Centre for Training, Research, and Education in Cancer (ACTREC) in Mumbai's Tata Memorial Centre has shed more light on the molecular mechanism through which progesterone treatment prior to breast cancer surgery is quite likely to increase the survival rates of patients.

In 2018, a team led by Dr. Amit Dutt at the ACTREC found through in vitro studies that when breast cancer cell lines were treated with progesterone, two genes — SGK1 and NDRG1 — were produced in excess amount (overexpressed). They also found that the expression of a few microRNAs was reduced (down-regulated) in response to the hormone treatment. Two particular microRNAs that were down regulated were found to also regulate the expression of the SGK1 gene.

Since the normal function of the two microRNAs is to reduce the amount of SGK1 enzyme produced, when the level of microRNAs drops, the amount of SGK1 enzyme produced increases. Through the action of SGK1 and two other genes, and the two microRNAs, the ability of the breast cancer cells to migrate and invade is reduced, thus increasing the survival rates of patients undergoing hormone therapy prior to surgery.

In a recently published study in the journal, *Breast Cancer Research*, the team led by Neelima Yadav in Dr. Dutt's lab expanded the scope of their previous work to focus on the role of non-coding genes; non-coding genes do not produce any proteins but regulate the expression of other genes. The work was to uncover the molecular mechanism of any non-coding gene in providing therapeutic advantage of progesterone on breast cancer cells.

The study found that treatment of breast cancer cells with progesterone results in a down-regulation of a long non-coding linc RNA known as the Down Syndrome Cell Adhesion Molecule (DSCAM-AS1).

“As with progesterone therapy, we found that with silencing of DSCAM-AS1 expression, the ability of breast cancer cells to invade and migrate is slowed down,” Ms. Yadav says.

In breast cancer patients, the amount of DSCAM-AS1 present is elevated. The team also found that DSCAM-AS1 behaves like a sponge and depletes the availability of another non-coding microRNA called the miR-130a. And the level of estrogen receptor in breast cancer cells is increased, which serves as an indicator to begin hormonal therapy.

But when progesterone is provided from externally, the amount of DSCAM-AS1 that is available reduces, and thereby the sponging effect of DSCAM-AS1 also sees a dip. This results in elevated levels of the microRNA (miR-130a) that are freely available. As the level of the microRNA increases, there is more of them binding to the estrogen receptor. “The study threw a surprise. We found that miR-130a is known to regulate the level of estrogen receptor in breast cancer cells,” says Dr. Dutt.

Dr. Dutt says the detection of DSCAM-1 in blood or tumour tissue can likely provide information about the aggressiveness of breast cancer and prognosis. “Non-coding RNA-based diagnostic and screening methods are still in the early stages of development. We need further validation before using it in clinical practice,” he says.

“Our study identifies a three-tiered regulatory network wherein DSCAM- AS1 sponges off miR-130a to downregulate estrogen receptor expression in response to progesterone. We show that an increased expression of miR-130a or decreased expression of DSCAM-AS1 corresponds with improved survival outcomes in breast cancer patients, similar to the effects of progesterone treatment,” says Dr. Dutt. “When taken as a whole, our research represents the first step in describing the progesterone-responsive long non-coding RNAs and their mechanistic functional insight downstream of progesterone in breast cancer cells, parallel to other regulatory pathways.”

“The potential therapeutic benefit of progesterone and its mediators is the highlight of the current study,” he says.

Hormone therapy targets hormone receptors in breast cancer cells to slow or stop the growth of cancer. It is a standard treatment for breast cancer and is often used in combination with other treatments such as surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. However, resistance to hormone therapy in breast cancer is a significant problem in treating hormone receptor-positive breast cancer.

One of the main mechanisms of resistance to hormone therapy is the presence of mutations in the hormone receptors themselves or through the down-regulation of its expression levels.

Another implication of the latest study is that when the microRNA miR-130a binds to the estrogen receptors, it might lead to cancer cells becoming resistant to hormone therapy.

“It is currently a hypothesis and has to be verified through further studies,” says Dr. Dutt.

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TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES, INVENTING CULTURE & THE SECRET TO INDIA'S RISING POPULARITY DISCUSSED AT SCO FILM FESTIVAL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: SCO and India

Mumbai | 28 January 2023

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization Film Festival hosted veterans from the film industry in multiple sessions today. In addition to film screenings, discussion sessions were held on various subjects ranging from music to animation and intellectual property rights.



The day began with the screening of the Gujarati film, '**The Last Film Show**'. The day also saw the screenings of **Mom I'm Alive!** From Kazakhstan, **Podelniki (The Riot)** from Russia, **B for Busy** from China and Marathi film **Godavari** under the competition section.



The first panel discussion of the day was on **'Creating Infinite Worlds using Animation'**. Panelists Munjal Shroff, Director of Graphiti Multimedia and Jayakumar Prabhakaran, CEO of Toonz Animation shared their personal experiences in the Indian animation industry. Panelists also discussed how cinema and television were constantly engaging in the act of cultural invention and the social ramifications of the same.



Renowned filmmakers Rahul Rawail and Ramesh Sippy were joined by veteran actor Asha Parekh in an In-Conversation session on **'Indian Cinema's rising popularity in the SCO region'**. The panelists discussed factors that make Indian cinema so endearing along with cross cultural influences in cinema. Ramesh Sippy stated that the simplicity of characters in

cinema is what made blurring of boundaries possible. Asha Parekh cited Music as the reason behind these connections, while Rahul Rawail attributed the attraction towards Indian cinema to its timeless charm.

The day ended with a 'Fire side chat' session titled **Breaking Barriers** with Kazakh singer and composer Dimash Kudaibergen. After leaving the audience in awe by narrating his personal journey to stardom, Dimash Kudaibergen stated that Music is in itself a language that transcends boundaries. The session and the day ended with a true embodiment of togetherness and cooperation as Dimash Kudaibergen sang the hit Bollywood song, 'Jimmy Jimmy' from the film Disco Dancer to a roaring applause.

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OVER 90 FOSSIL NESTS BELONGING TO INDIA'S LARGEST DINOSAURS UNCOVERED

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January 28, 2023 07:45 pm | Updated 07:45 pm IST

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Researchers have uncovered 92 nesting sites containing a total of 256 fossil eggs in central India's Narmada Valley belonging to titanosaurs, which were among the largest dinosaurs to have ever lived.

The finding, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, reveals intimate details about the lives of titanosaurs in the Indian subcontinent.

The Lameta Formation, located in the Narmada Valley of central India, is well-known for fossils of dinosaur skeletons and eggs of the Late Cretaceous Period that lasted from about 145 to 66 million years ago, the researchers said.

Detailed examination of these nests allowed researchers at the University of Delhi, New Delhi and colleagues to make inferences about the life habits of these dinosaurs. They identified six different egg species, suggesting a higher diversity of titanosaurs than is represented by skeletal remains from this region.

Based on the layout of the nests, the team inferred that these dinosaurs buried their eggs in shallow pits like modern-day crocodiles.

Certain pathologies found in the eggs, such as a rare case of "egg-in-egg", indicate that titanosaur sauropods had a reproductive physiology that parallels that of birds and possibly laid their eggs in a sequential manner as seen in modern birds.

The presence of many nests in the same area suggests these dinosaurs exhibited colonial nesting behaviour like many modern birds.

However, the close spacing of the nests left little room for adult dinosaurs, supporting the idea that adults left the hatchlings (newborns) to fend for themselves.

These fossil nests provide a wealth of data about some of the largest dinosaurs in history, and they come from a time shortly before the age of dinosaurs came to an end, the researchers said.

The findings contribute significantly to paleontologists' understanding of how dinosaurs lived and evolved, they added.

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THE INDIAN UNIVERSITY IS IN A FREE FALL

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

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January 30, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 09:01 am IST

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Students at a college in India. | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

At a time when the political discourse in the country is taken to a different level of absolutism, the pursuit of a more encouraging democratic ethos is the need of the times. Academics must learn to be reliant on spirited discussions. They must be the radiant examples of a field where diverse opinions underwrite a robust critical conversation.

As Marcellus says in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Why else would the government invite universities from overseas to open campuses in India? A sense of competitiveness with international universities of repute would unquestionably retard the free fall of our universities. But there is one fear. The new initiative could make India the new global education destination, but it could also further worsen the problem. Outstanding teachers may seek positions in the various branches of the foreign universities. And we could be left with mediocrity, which would lead to further decline. The University Grants Commission must take cognisance of the possibility of such a fallout. To the dismay of many, there is no desire or exercise to find some mechanisms to retard the socio-academic decline of the university.

Before this debacle becomes a reality, let us examine what ails our universities. The abyss between the public intellectual and the stubborn establishment stands wider than ever. Universities are sliding towards self-deluding and bureaucratized governing bodies that lack the ability to handle views alternative to the retrogressive decisions of the academic leadership that has lurched to the Right. To say that India is the third largest economy is of no value when it has miserably failed to give its citizens a world-class university system. The budgetary allocation for education is abysmal.

The point that is often blatantly overlooked by governing bodies of universities is the crucial importance of an academic environment with the understanding of new pedagogical practices. The present state of affairs exposes the valorisation of mediocrity that has resulted in belittling those who accomplish their responsibility with impartiality and have the requisite credentials and talent. This is in keeping with the current practice of side-lining many distinguished academics and vice chancellors and instead making appointments arbitrarily on the basis of ideological allegiances. It is, indeed, a mockery to be subjected to the arrogance and incompetence of a handful of pushovers who conduct the course of higher education not in the interest of rigorous culture of learning and teaching, but for the mere award of coveted positions.

Governing bodies that have worked efficaciously over the years are being sabotaged by an

ideological belief. They are unmindful of the structure rotting at the core, especially with the insouciant acceptance of mediocrity as the norm. Inviolable traditions get bludgeoned to submission, if not annihilation. Until this stops, our institutions of higher learning will remain absent from world rankings.

Our universities have become deeply sclerotic. Spouses of civil servants find easy entrée to university positions. I once mentioned the name of F.R. Leavis, one of the most prominent critics of the last century, during a discussion. A colleague asked who he was. As a joke, I told her that I was speaking of the captain of the English cricket team. She believed it and still remains blissfully ignorant. Most universities abound with such poverty of knowledge.

The free fall of universities in the hands of such teachers results from the infraction of the basic structure of the university constitution. There are procedural irregularities. The indifference of the establishment resonates with the political leadership, which is oblivious of the requirements of building an empowering milieu and an affirmative academic outlook. Instead, we have a disposition that internalises sluggishness, lack of work ethic and ineptitude. Selection committees constituted by university heads find the same faculty members repeated as experts or vice chancellor's nominees, thereby ignoring far more qualified and much senior teachers. Systems that suggest less-than-honourable intent are permitted to flourish with the patronage of the powers that be.

It is disenchanting to note that the teaching fraternity chooses to remain silent on significant issues on which depend the stature of academic excellence. The university's adversarial approach to principles of seniority and merit threatens the stability and academic reputation of not only the university, but also the furtherance of ethical practices. Reform is always welcome and necessary, but destroying age-old and tested institutional practices deeply wedded to democratic traditions is retrogressive.

Ubiquitous discrimination strikes a blow at the very core of academic culture where the teaching community is directed to submit to governing bodies, which in turn are answerable to an overbearing patron seemingly lacking a broad progressive policy that encourages debate and disagreement. The conflict apparently is between viewing a university as a seat of diversity and learning and a seat of conformity and indoctrination.

Such a regressive milieu deepens the sense of distrust. In the present quandary there are few signs of initiating a level playing field or even a public debate on the decline of the university. In such a state of affairs, conscious academics can at least highlight the depth of the rot.

Shelley Walia has taught Cultural Theory at Panjab University

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DEMENTIA: WHAT IT IS, WHEN YOU SHOULD BECOME CONCERNED, AND HOW YOU CAN HELP OTHERS

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

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January 29, 2023 12:15 pm | Updated January 30, 2023 07:58 am IST

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Dementia is a clinical syndrome caused by a range of diseases or injuries to the brain. Worldwide, [47.5 million people](#) have dementia. Given the dramatic growth of the population of older people, the number of people living with dementia worldwide is expected to double every 20 years, going up to 135.5 million by 2050. According to a 2020 report published by the [Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India](#), there are around 5 million people in India living with dementia.

Anant (name changed), an 80-year-old retired district judge, came to our institute with increasing forgetfulness for 18 months. He would misplace commonly used items such as keys, his mobile phone and pens. He would then keep searching for these items. He had also started to lose his way in and around his house. He would be frequently found in his neighbourhood trying to find his bearings. (His son then made him wear a GPS armband.) His social engagements had shrunk, as had his vocabulary. He also had wild mood swings and had become more irritable and aggressive over time.

After he became paranoid and started to think his family members were “out to get him”, they consulted me. The provisional diagnosis was Alzheimer's disease with behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia.

Clinical presentation

The most common cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease. It is implicated in [up to 70% of dementia diagnoses](#). The tragic combination of symptoms in Alzheimer's has a profound and resource-intensive impact on patients, family, friends, and carers.

Early symptoms include absent-mindedness, difficulty recalling names and words, difficulty retaining new information, disorientation in unfamiliar surroundings, and reduced social engagement. More atypical symptoms include impairment in recognising visually presented objects (visual agnosia) despite a normal visual field, acuity and colour vision. Some might also experience word-finding difficulties (anomic aphasia).

As the disease progresses, there is marked memory loss and loss of other cognitive skills, including a reduced vocabulary and less complex speech patterns. This may be accompanied by mood swings, apathy, a decline in social skills, and the emergence of psychotic phenomena.

Advanced disease is characterised by monosyllabic speech, psychotic symptoms, behavioural disturbance, loss of bladder and bowel control, and reduced mobility.

Evaluating dementia

Doctors diagnose dementia on clinical grounds using neuroimaging and neuropsychological tests. The first and foremost step is to obtain a comprehensive medical history of the individual from a reliable informant. A reliable informant is one who knows the individual well; it is typically a family member. Informants themselves can be influenced by their own mental states, such as depression or being in denial, so it is useful to speak with more than one informant to confirm or clarify the individual's narrative.

A slowly progressive dementia over years with insidious onset may point to Alzheimer's dementia. A dementia that progresses rapidly over months may point to dementia due to prion disease. It is useful to determine when the individual was last well instead of determining when the symptoms first showed themselves. Informants frequently minimise early symptoms by attributing them to "normal ageing".

Dementia affects cognition – the mental processes used to obtain knowledge and which inculcate an awareness of our environment. These mental processes also facilitate one's interactions with the environment. They include perception, complex attention, judgement, memory, language, imagination, social awareness, organisation, and learning.

Conducting a cognitive assessment is central to the evaluation of dementia. Common tools for this include the mini-mental state examination (MMSE), the modified mini-mental state examination (3MS) and the Montreal cognitive assessment (MoCA). Such neuropsychological tests can help differentiate dementia from milder cognitive syndromes and/or from normal ageing. The severity of dementia can be 'mild', 'moderate' or 'severe' based on the MMSE score, informed by the degree of impairment in the individual's functioning.

Further work-up using laboratory studies and brain-imaging will be required in most instances. These include a metabolic panel, liver test, blood counts, thyroid test, and vitamin B12 and folate tests. As clinical presentation and history demand, doctors may also ask for additional tests, such as heavy-metal screens, HIV test, syphilis serology, toxicology, electrocardiogram, computed tomography (CT scan), magnetic-resonance imaging (MRI), and chest radiography.

As of today, there is no genetic or biomarker test that can be used to diagnose dementia.

Preventing dementia

The [WHO has identified](#) preventing Alzheimer's disease to be a key element in the strategy to fight the world's dementia epidemic. Economic analyses have found that delaying the onset of the disease by even one year [could reduce its prevalence by 11%](#), while a delay of five years could halve it.

Prevention programmes usually focus on lifestyle risk factors – such as sedentary behaviour, unhealthy diet, smoking, and excessive alcohol use – together with mental wellbeing and risk of cardiovascular diseases.

The [Goteborg Longitudinal Study](#) and the [Honolulu Asia Aging Study](#) have both demonstrated a strong relationship between midlife hypertension and dementia in later life. Aggressively managing vascular risk factors (e.g. keeping systolic blood pressure below 160 mm Hg), high cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity can go a long way in preventing dementia.

Current smokers [have a 50% higher risk](#) of developing dementia relative to those who have never smoked. (Smoking cessation is known to reduce dementia risk to the level of never-smokers.)

Regular exercise helps offset cardiovascular, and in fact broader, health risks. Exercise improves cerebral perfusion, has anti-inflammatory properties, improves synaptic function, and stimulates the growth of new brain cells in the hippocampus. Exercise also has a social and cognitive element that are broadly protective for mental health.

In addition, there is a robust link between depression in late life and the incidence of sporadic dementia. Having depression increases the risk of developing dementia by nearly twofold. The deleterious effects of depression on memory, sleep, and social functioning are well-established. Treating depression in persons with established cognitive impairment is vital.

Higher educational and occupational attainments have consistently been implicated as protecting against developing dementia later in life. One recent study reported that those who attain higher education have a 40% lower risk. The protective effects of education may be due to the longer period of learning, which in turn stimulates the development of larger or more complex neural networks.

The cognitive reserve theory posits that these brain reserves, accumulated by learning, compensate for the underlying dementia pathology and delay the onset of clinical symptoms.

Dementia care

The first pillar of care is to manage the important aspects of the disease, with a goal to reversing their effects or to delay its progression in the brain. The second is to manage the cognitive, neuropsychiatric, and functional symptoms of the disease.

The other two pillars involve providing systematic, evidence-based supportive care to patients and to carers.

An optimal dementia care-team includes the treating psychiatrist, occupational and physical therapists, a nurse, a psychologist, and a social worker.

Except in emergency situations, non-pharmacological interventions form the first line of therapy. But over time, medicines often become necessary, even an integral part of symptom management.

Cognitive symptoms associated with dementia are treated with drugs called cholinesterase inhibitors. Acetylcholine is a neurotransmitter that has been hypothesised to be important in cognition. Two enzymes – acetylcholinesterase and butyrylcholinesterase – degrade acetylcholine. Cholinesterase inhibitors thus increase the concentration of acetylcholine in the brain. They provide modest and temporary stabilisation of the disease process. These don't reverse or stop the degenerative process, however.

These medicines lead to notable but temporary symptomatic improvements [in 10-15% of persons with dementia](#). The symptomatic improvements last for 6-12 months.

Despite the modest immediate benefits associated with these drugs, some additional benefits may be seen in those receiving long-term treatment. In the [Donepezil and Memantine in Moderate to Severe Alzheimer's Disease](#) (a.k.a. DOMINO) study, researchers examined the effects of continuing symptomatic treatment beyond the stage of moderate to severe dementia.

The group that discontinued symptomatic treatment experienced more rapid cognitive decline, worse functional outcomes, and were [admitted to care sooner](#). The trial led to the prevailing consensus that cholinesterase inhibitors [shouldn't be stopped](#) just because the point of severe dementia has been reached.

The behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia include depression, psychosis, agitation, aggression, disturbed sleep, wandering, apathy, and a variety of socially inappropriate behaviours. Together, they precipitate a loss of independence, add to the carer's responsibilities, and result in early placement in nursing care. Non-pharmacological interventions are used to address these problem behaviours.

Neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia respond modestly to aromatherapy, bright light therapy, music therapy, controlled multisensory stimulation, animal-assisted therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy.

Future trends

The [Finnish Geriatric Intervention Study to Prevent Cognitive Impairment and Disability](#) (a.k.a. FINGER) trial was an initiative to understand the secondary prevention of dementia. Researchers recruited persons without dementia aged 60-77 years but who had an elevated dementia risk score (based on age, sex, education, blood pressure, BMI, cholesterol levels, and physical activity) as well as a minor degree of cognitive impairment.

The trial selected an ultra-high-risk population for dementia and trialled multi-domain interventions, involving changes to nutrition, physical activity, education, and cognitive training. The intervention group's cognitive outcomes improved 25-150% compared to the control group, which only received health advice.

Future studies will aim to demonstrate the benefit of such interventions on the principal public health outcome: time to dementia onset. Despite the large societal gains that may accrue from controlling risk factors, we will still need disease-modifying therapies to reduce the global burden of dementia.

We will also need a cultural transition in the public perception of Alzheimer's and other related dementias, before we can reap the full benefits of preventative and therapeutic strategies. Moving from dementia to a framework of brain health will destigmatise cognitive decline, empower people to take more responsibility towards prevention, and encourage society more broadly to adopt inclusive solutions to maintain functional independence.

Let's reimagine dementia care in terms of brain-health centres rather than in terms of memory clinics.

Dr. Alok Kulkarni is a senior geriatric psychiatrist and neurophysician at the Manas Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Hubli.

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G-20 INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE WORKING GROUP MEETING TO BE HELD IN CHANDIGARH ON 30-31 JANUARY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: International Treaties & Agreements, and other important organizations

The first International Financial Architecture Working Group meeting of G-20 under the chairmanship of India will be held in Chandigarh on 30-31 January 2023. The meeting will be inaugurated by the Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shri Narendra Singh Tomar and Food Processing Industries Minister Shri Pashupati Kumar Paras. Shri Tomar reached Chandigarh this evening ahead of the meeting beginning tomorrow, where he was welcomed with cultural performances from Punjab and Haryana.



The International Financial Architecture Working Group is one of the important working groups under the G-20 finance track, which focuses on strengthening the international financial architecture. It will also aim to address various challenges faced by vulnerable countries. Around 100 delegates from G-20 member nations, invited countries and international organizations will participate in the two-day meeting. Discussions during the two-day meeting will be jointly moderated by the Ministry of Finance and the Reserve Bank of India, as well as by the co-chairs of the International Financial Architecture Working Group, - France and South Korea.

The meeting will discuss ways to enhance the stability and cohesion of the international financial architecture and how to make it capable of addressing the global challenges of the 21st century. The meeting will also focus on finding ways to maximize aid to poor and vulnerable countries. On the sidelines of the G-20 Working Group meeting on January 30, a G-20 event titled 'Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs): Opportunities and Challenges' will also be held. The objective of the event is to share country experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the wider implications of CBDCs. Prior to this meeting, a number of events have been organized across the city in Chandigarh, indicating widespread 'people's participation' and interest in the G-20 events under India's chairmanship.

As a precursor a seminar on "Central Bank Digital Currencies: The Indian Story" was organized in Chandigarh on 25 January 2023. The events are aimed at creating awareness about India's chairmanship of the G-20 in 2023 and its theme "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or "One Earth - One Family - One Future".

During India's G-20 Presidency, this working group will meet further in March, June and September to continue discussions on the priorities set under India's Presidency. The discussions at the International Financial Architecture Working Group meeting will inform the G-20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBGs) on key deliberations on related priorities under India's G-20 finance track. The first meeting of the G-20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors is scheduled to be held in Bengaluru on 24-25 February 2023.

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ROUND TABLE ON 'REACHING OUT - INDIA AND THE SCO' ORGANIZE AT SCO FILM FESTIVAL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: International Treaties & Agreements, and other important organizations

Mumbai | 29 January 2023

A Round Table, 'Reaching Out- India and the SCO,' was organised along the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Film Festival in Mumbai. The session aimed to facilitate engagement between the Union Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Indian Industry stakeholders, filmmakers and the Jury members of the Film Festival to explore possible avenues of collaboration between India and the SCO countries. Organized under the aegis of The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, the National Film Development Corporation, and the Film Facilitation Office, Invest India, the session was chaired by Neerja Sekhar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and moderated by Prithul Kumar, Joint Secretary (Films) and Managing Director (NFDC).



During the session, SCO member nations were urged to promote talent exchange and explore Co-production Agreements with India and avail benefits of the existing Indian film incentives through joint projects. Given that there are relatively strong film industries in India and the participating countries, there is immense potential for promoting India as a destination for film industries of other nations. Potential also exists for providing facilities for Indian films being filmed in these countries.



India currently has bilateral audio-visual co-production agreements with China and Russia. There is active consideration for co-production agreements with member countries such as Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Dialogue States such as Turkey. There is close co-operation between the film industries of India, Nepal and Sri Lanka although there are no bilateral agreements. Over the past 6 years there has been one Indo-Chinese Co-Production and One Indo-Russian Co- Production.



A number of films for the SCO countries such as China (5), Iran (2), Kazakhstan (1), Nepal (1), Russia (2), Sri Lanka (1) and Turkey (1) have been granted permission to shoot in India and many Indian films have been shot in almost all the member countries. The main objective of the

roundtable was to share experiences and provide insights and suggestions for improving the overall ecosystem and outreach in terms of

Incentives for foreign production and official co-productions announced by Government of India

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UNION MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE, DR. MANSUKH MANDAVIYA VIRTUALLY ADDRESSES NATIONAL ANTI-LEPROSY DAY

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

“India is making progress and new leprosy cases are declining year after year. With the whole of government, whole of society support, synergy and cooperation, we can achieve the target of Leprosy Mukt Bharat by 2027, three years ahead of the SDG”. This was stated by Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya during his video address at the event to observe the National Anti-Leprosy Day, here today. The theme of this year was “Let us fight Leprosy and make Leprosy a history”.



Reiterating Mahatma Gandhi’s enduring concern for people affected with leprosy, Union Health Minister noted that the concern and commitment to treat leprosy has its origin in our history. “His vision was not only to treat them but also to mainstream them in our society. Our efforts to eliminate leprosy from this country under National Leprosy Eradication Programme is a great tribute to his vision. We are successful in achieving prevalence rate 1 case per 10,000 population at national level in 2005. The need of the hour is consistent efforts to eliminate Leprosy. It is a curable disease, however if it is not detected and treated at the early stage, it can cause permanent disabilities and deformities among the affected person, leading to discrimination of such persons and their family members in the community.”

“Under the visionary leadership of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, we have adopted comprehensive measures for prevention of development of disease. From the year 2016, renewed efforts were made for actively detecting cases under the Leprosy Case Detection Campaign (LCDC)”, he further added.



Accentuating on the efforts of National Leprosy Eradication Programme, Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar, Union Minister of State said, “Our Leprosy Programme of the country strives to detect and treat cases as early as possible, gives treatment free of cost to prevent the development of disabilities and deformities, medical rehabilitation of those with existing deformities. The Welfare allowance has been raised from Rs 8,000 to Rs 12,000 to patients for their reconstructive surgery.”

Highlighting the achievements of the programme, she also informed that the prevalence rate of leprosy has come down from 0.69 per 10,000 population in 2014-15 to 0.45 in 2021-22. Further, annual new case detection rate per 100,000 population has come down from 9.73 in 2014-15 to 5.52 in 2021-22. “The programme also work towards spreading awareness and reducing stigma attached with the disease. Surveillance was also strengthened by introducing ASHA-based Surveillance for Leprosy Suspects (ABSULS) where grassroot level workers constantly engaged in examining and reporting suspects. Special emphasis under the Focused Leprosy Campaign (FLC) was given to areas that were difficult to access or had child cases and cases with disabilities. Since 2015, with the constant efforts under NLEP, we have been able to prevent many cases of disability due to leprosy”, she added. She also emphasized on the need to spread awareness on stigma connected to leprosy.

Emphasizing on the 2027 leprosy eradication target, Shri. S. Gopalakrishnan, Special Secretary, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare noted that the last mile target of 2027 is going to be tougher than what has been achieved so far. But with the experiences, whole of government and whole of society approach, new strategies and the Nikusth 2.0 portal, we can achieve it.



National Strategic Plan & Roadmap for Leprosy (2023-27) and National Guidelines for Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) Surveillance in leprosy were also released during the event along with launch of Nikusth 2.0 Portal. The strategy and roadmap will aid in advancing the campaign against leprosy, to stop transmission, by speeding case detection efforts and maintaining a robust surveillance infrastructure. As India is progressing towards leprosy eradication, a need of strong AMR surveillance system is required to gear up the system. These guidelines will provide the technical guidance in developing and sustaining a robust surveillance system for AMR surveillance in leprosy patients. Nikusth 2.0 is an integrated portal for leprosy case management under National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP). It will aid in efficient data recording, analyzing and reporting of the data in the form of indicators and a real time dashboard at center, state and district levels.

Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar also launched a video for addressing stigma issues attached with leprosy as part of the nationwide awareness campaign.

Ms Roli Singh, AS&MD (NHM), MoHFW, Shri Rajiv Manjhi, Joint Secretary Leprosy, Prof (Dr). Atul Goel, DGHS, Dr. Roderico H Ofrin, WHO representative to India, Dr. Sudarsan Mandal, DDG along with other dignitaries and officials were present at the event.

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HFW/HFM National Leprosy Day/ 23January2023/2

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UNION MINISTERS SHRI TOMAR AND SHRI PARAS INAUGURATE THE MEETING OF G-20 INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE WORKING GROUP

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The two-day meeting of the first International Financial Architecture Working Group of G-20, being held under the chairmanship of India, was inaugurated in Chandigarh today by the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shri Narendra Singh Tomar and Minister of Food Processing Industries, Shri Pashupati Kumar Paras. On this occasion, Shri Tomar said that India is developing rapidly with science and innovation, both of them are deeply connected with the future of India. We have leveraged technology to create the digital public infrastructure. We have been a significant contributor to financial inclusion in global healthcare and the move to sustainable energy while people-centric development is the basis of our national strategy. This is the same philosophy that the theme of our G-20 Presidency, - 'One Earth, One Family, One Future', also underlines.



Union Minister Shri Tomar said that India's chairmanship of G-20 is a proud moment for all our citizens, besides we are well aware of the responsibilities that come with this historic occasion. Today the world is facing many complex challenges, which are deeply interlinked and are not defined by boundaries alone. The challenges being faced are global in nature and require global solutions, therefore the world community today needs to push more towards globally coordinated policies and actions. There is also a need for a renewed faith in multilateralism. Our nation, that is fully committed to democracy and multilateralism, is poised to demonstrate not only multidimensional development but is also ready to display universally recognized power. It is not surprising that India was described as a beacon in a fragile world at the recently held World Economic Forum meeting and India's commitment to climate goals and return to the post-Covid development path has been lauded by one and all.

Shri Tomar said that India is ready to fulfil the responsibility given to it. We will be happy to share our template of the development model, so also we look forward to learning from all. Through our priorities and outcomes this year, through deliberations, we aim to find practical global solutions. In doing so, we also take a keen interest in amplifying the voice of the Developing countries. Shri Tomar said that we cannot leave anyone behind now. Through our inclusive, ambitious, action-oriented and decisive agenda of the G-20, we aim to express the true spirit of

our goal, - 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

Referring to the exemplary contribution of this group in providing aid to the most vulnerable and low-income developing countries in the recent years, he said the measures taken to alleviate the rising insecurity over credit flow are particularly noteworthy. The growing momentum regarding efforts will continue during India's chairmanship in 2023. The group will also consider how we can leverage the group's comfortable position to redesign global and financial governance. Under the chairmanship of India, the group will try to find out how to better equip the multilateral development banks, the major catalysts of development, to meet the global challenges of the 21st century. Remembering the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi on this occasion, Shri Tomar quoted him and welcomed the delegates on behalf of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and all citizens of India, wishing success to the meeting.

Union Minister Shri Paras said in the meeting that India's effort is to facilitate constructive dialogue, create, share knowledge and share the collective aspiration for a secure, peaceful and prosperous world. We have to work together in the direction. He said that during India's presidency of the G-20, it is our responsibility to advance progress and ensure that the international financial architecture today is well equipped to meet the acute challenges and provide maximum support to vulnerable groups. The Prime Minister Shri Modi, in his address to the World Economic Forum, Davos Summit, deliberated upon whether the multilateral organizations are ready to meet the challenges of the new world order. This working group is committed to meeting these challenges and in order to enhance their contribution to development financing towards meeting the development goals, this group may explore options to strengthen these organizations. It is imperative to urgently identify such systems that enable the financial assistance provided by international financial institutions is effectively responsive to the needs. This is important for the low income and developing countries, as they are the major beneficiaries of these resources. Countries most affected by rising debt, again are the low-income countries and most are the middle-income countries. The Working Group can deliberate upon how policy initiatives can address the worsening credit situation. It is the hope that with a diverse array of eminent experts from around the world, the International Financial Architecture Working Group is better poised in coordinating the G20 efforts towards developmental financing, supporting vulnerable countries, maintain financial stability and achieve the goal of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'.



The meeting was attended by IFA co-chairs Mr. William Roos (France), Byungsik Jung (South Korea), Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Finance, Smt. Manisha Sinha, RBI Advisor Smt. Mahua Rai were among dignitaries present.

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MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ ORGANIZED MANTHAN: CHARTING NEW PATHS, AN INDUSTRY CONSULTATION ON E-GRAM SWARAJ 2.0

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

To support the 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' vision at the third tier of Government i.e., Panchayats, by the means of technology, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj organized **Manthan: Charting New Paths, an Industry consultation on e-Gram SWARAJ 2.0** here today. The inaugural session of the national level conference was led by Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

Setting the agenda for the conference, Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar apprised the participants on the longevity of social, economic and environmental welfare at grassroot level by enhancing rural governance through adoption of Digital tools and Technology. He opined that the administrative capacity and effectiveness of regional and local governments must be enhanced, through the provision of technological tools and resources for playing a meaningful role in the course of development. This technology driven governance architecture must be based on a common strategic and programming framework that provides for targeting all interventions to well-defined economic, social, and environmental objectives. The reach, scope, and outcome of government actions must be enhanced through leverage of technology. In this endeavour Industry, researchers, practitioners, knowledge providers, civil society, and public authorities must work closer together to better exploit and share opportunities arising from scientific and technological progress.



Shri Abhishek Singh, President & CEO, NeGD, delivered the Keynote address on the various initiatives undertaken by the Government of India under "Digital India" programme and how technology can be leveraged to enable and ensure last mile delivery. He highlighted that

the Digital Interventions in different schemes being implemented by the Government of India are ensuring transparency, efficiency, and timely delivery of services to the citizens of the country. Shri Singh also mentioned how new age emerging technologies can be leveraged by Government Institutions for better implementation and monitoring.



In his Welcome address, Shri Alok P. Nagar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj called for indispensable adoption of Next Generation Technology interventions with a cross-sectoral and whole-of-government approach in the design, deployment and scale-up of the ICT applications and digital solutions at the Gram Panchayat level.



The Industry Consultation, organised by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, included participation of Industry leaders from Deloitte, Amazon Web Services, Cloudthat, Minfy, Knowlarity, CoRover, Paytm, and PhonePe, marking a new beginning towards fostering digital transformation of rural areas.



This conference has ensured broadening of the vision and visibility of the State Panchayati Raj Departments on the various technology driven innovations underway in the Government landscape, further fuelling the growing appetite for technological solutions above and beyond the existing e-Gram SWARAJ solution in rural areas. This would, in turn, trigger the rural transformation to achieve the vision of Gram Swaraj laid down by Mahatma Gandhi.

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To support the 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' vision at the third tier of Government i.e., Panchayats, by the means of technology, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj organized **Manthan: Charting New Paths**, an **Industry consultation on e-Gram SWARAJ 2.0** here today. The inaugural session of the national level conference was led by Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

Setting the agenda for the conference, Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar apprised the participants on the longevity of social, economic and environmental welfare at grassroot level by enhancing rural governance through adoption of Digital tools and Technology. He opined that the administrative capacity and effectiveness of regional and local governments must be enhanced, through the provision of technological tools and resources for playing a meaningful role in the course of development. This technology driven governance architecture must be based on a common strategic and programming framework that provides for targeting all interventions to well-defined economic, social, and environmental objectives. The reach, scope, and outcome of government actions must be enhanced through leverage of technology. In this endeavour Industry, researchers, practitioners, knowledge providers, civil society, and public authorities must work closer together to better exploit and share opportunities arising from scientific and technological progress.



Shri Abhishek Singh, President & CEO, NeGD, delivered the Keynote address on the various initiatives undertaken by the Government of India under “Digital India” programme and how technology can be leveraged to enable and ensure last mile delivery. He highlighted that the Digital Interventions in different schemes being implemented by the Government of India are ensuring transparency, efficiency, and timely delivery of services to the citizens of the country. Shri Singh also mentioned how new age emerging technologies can be leveraged by Government Institutions for better implementation and monitoring.



In his Welcome address, Shri Alok P. Nagar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj called for indispensable adoption of Next Generation Technology interventions

with a cross-sectoral and whole-of-government approach in the design, deployment and scale-up of the ICT applications and digital solutions at the Gram Panchayat level.



The Industry Consultation, organised by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, included participation of Industry leaders from Deloitte, Amazon Web Services, Cloudthat, Minfy, Knowlarity, CoRover, Paytm, and PhonePe, marking a new beginning towards fostering digital transformation of rural areas.



This conference has ensured broadening of the vision and visibility of the State Panchayati Raj Departments on the various technology driven innovations underway in the Government landscape, further fuelling the growing appetite for technological solutions above and beyond the existing e-Gram SWARAJ solution in rural areas. This would, in turn, trigger the rural transformation to achieve the vision of Gram Swaraj laid down by Mahatma Gandhi.

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MINISTRY OF I&B ISSUES ADVISORY ON OBLIGATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

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

Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has issued the “Guidelines for Uplinking and Downlinking of Television Channels in India, 2022” on 09.11.2022. The Guidelines, among other things, require private broadcasters to undertake public service broadcasting for 30 minutes every day. In this regard, the Ministry undertook extensive consultations with the private satellite TV channel Broadcasters and their Associations and based on their inputs an “Advisory” has been issued on 30.01.2023.

Through the “Advisory”, the Ministry has clarified that the relevant content embedded in the programmes being telecast can be accounted for Public Service Broadcasting. It is also clarified that the content need not be of 30 minutes at a stretch and could be spread over smaller time slots and requires the broadcaster to submit a monthly report online on the Broadcast Seva Portal. The theme for the broadcasting should comprise of content of national importance and of social relevance, including the following, namely

The “Advisory” seeks to achieve the objective of Public Service Broadcasting by private satellite TV channels through voluntary compliance and self-certification.

A copy of the “Advisory” is available on the website of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting at

https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Advisory%20on%20Obligation%20of%20PSB_1.pdf

and the Broadcast Seva Portal at

<https://new.broadcastseva.gov.in/digigov-portal-web-app/Upload?flag=iframeAttachView&attachId=140703942&whatsnew=true>

Saurabh Singh

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CHILDREN AND TEENS AREN'T DOING ENOUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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

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Regular physical activity helps to prevent and manage many chronic diseases. Popular ways to be physically active include walking, cycling, and playing sports. | Photo Credit: Reuters

Physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide. It's also associated with chronic illness and disability.

Recent research estimates that the world could see close to half a billion new cases of major chronic diseases by 2030 if people don't get more active.

Regular physical activity helps to prevent and manage many chronic diseases. Popular ways to be physically active include walking, cycling, and playing sports.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that children and adolescents (5-17 years old) get an average of at least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity.

This should incorporate vigorous aerobic activities, as well as those that strengthen muscle and bone, at least three days a week. It's also recommended that children spend no more than two hours a day on recreational screen time.

These recommendations aim to improve children's physical and mental health, as well as cognitive outcomes.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, physical activity among children and adolescents was already below the recommended levels. In 2016, 81% of adolescents around the world aged 11-17 were considered physically inactive. Girls were less active than boys.

The pandemic has made matters worse. Physical inactivity in children and adolescents has become a global public health priority. It is now included in global action plans.

For example, using 2016 as baseline, the WHO through its Global Action Plan on Physical Activity targeted a 15 percentage point reduction in prevalence of physical inactivity among adolescents by 2030.

This call to action also implored other international organisations and governments to help track progress in physical activity promotion among children and adolescents.

In response to this global physical inactivity crisis, the international call to action, and the need to systematically collect comparable data, the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance recently published a major study, the first to provide a comprehensive assessment of physical activity among children and adolescents.

Published in October 2022, the study included data that were collected before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were among the 682 experts who assessed 10 common physical activity indicators for children and adolescents around the world.

Our study shows physical activity among children and adolescents has not gotten better. About one-third of children and adolescents globally were sufficiently physically active while a little over one-third met the recreational screen time recommendation for better health and well being.

These findings indicate that a significant proportion of children and adolescent who do not meet recommended physical activity guidelines are at an increased risk of negative outcomes as well as developing related chronic diseases at a much earlier age.

Most of the experts involved in our study agree that the childhood physical inactivity crisis is an ongoing public health challenge and the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have made it worse.

When surveyed, more than 90% of the experts reported that COVID-19 had a negative impact on children's sedentary behaviours, organised sport and physical activity. Our findings are supported by numerous studies.

Lockdowns imposed at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic led to school shutdowns and closures of public parks, which hampered children's levels of physical activity.

Research suggests that children's moderate-to-vigorous physical activity decreased by 17 minutes per day during the pandemic. That represents a reduction of almost one-third of the recommended daily activity.

Another global study representing 187 countries showed a collective 27.3% decrease in the daily step counts of individuals after 30 days of COVID-19 related restrictions.

Four African countries participated in our study –Botswana, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The grading ranged from as high as A+ (large majority, 94-100% of children and adolescents achieving recommended levels) to as low as F (less than 20% achieving recommended levels).

Children and adolescents from the four African countries were marginally more physically active than children from the rest of the world.

Also Read | [India's plan to eradicate measles, rubella](#)

They received C- (47–53% of them met recommendations) for overall physical activity compared to the D (27–33% met recommendations) for the rest of the world.

More children and adolescents from the African countries used active transport (B-; 60–66%), were less sedentary (C-; 40–46%) and were more physically fit (C+; 54–59%) compared to the rest of

the world (C-, D+ and C-) respectively.

An important success story from this global comparison of grades is that despite the lack of infrastructure, average grades for individual behaviours were generally better for the African countries.

This could be reflecting necessity, rather than choice. For example, children might be forced to walk to school because there's no affordable transport.

Nonetheless it shows that it is still possible to promote healthy lifestyles even when resources are limited.

Factors such as having supportive family and friends, safer communities, positive school environments and adequate resources are often associated with better participation in physical activity.

Average grades for these sources of influence were generally lower for the four African countries than those of the rest of the world.

These findings demonstrate the challenges related to community safety, a general lack of infrastructure, and funding to support healthy behaviours for children and adolescents in African countries.

Overall, there wasn't enough data to accurately grade all the indicators for the African countries.

Botswana was the only country for which we were able to assign grades for each of the 10 common indicators. The other three countries had at least one incomplete grade each.

Lack of representative data is a common and often recurring problem in many low- and middle-income countries. It also means that our findings must be interpreted with caution.

For example, we can't say with certainty that these findings are representative of all the children and adolescents from these four countries or the region as a whole.

In many parts of Africa, the prevalence of infectious and other diseases justifiably demands attention and resources. These needs can out compete the messages about physical inactivity, whose negative impact may be silent but still detrimental to population health.

We need to persistently advocate for policies and practices, anchored in the African context, and promote equitable opportunities for children to engage in physical activity. These can include active school recesses and extracurricular programmes.

Countries need to ensure access to safe, free public spaces, green spaces, playgrounds and sporting facilities.

Finally, researchers and public health practitioners must track the progress towards meeting the WHO's targets.

By Taru Manyanga, University of Northern British Columbia, Chalchisa Abdeta, University of Wollongong, Dawn Tladi, University of Botswana, and Rowena Naidoo, University of KwaZulu-Natal (The Conversation)

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