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IS THERE A TB DRUGS SHORTAGE IN INDIA?

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

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October 01, 2023 04:35 am | Updated 04:35 am IST

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Several media reports quoting TB patients in different States facing drug shortage have been published. | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

The story so far: TB drug shortage began last year when Rifampicin — a medicine used for treating drug-sensitive TB — was not available in many parts of India. Since June this year, three important medicines used for treating drug-resistant TB — Linezolid, Clofazimine, and Cycloserine — too faced a stockout. On September 26, a PIB press release said that some media reports alleging shortage of anti-TB drugs in India are "vague and ill-informed, without any specific information on the availability of anti-TB medicines in stock". But in the same release, it also said that "in rare situations, States were requested to procure few drugs locally for a limited period by utilising the budget under National Health Mission (NHM) so that individual patient care is not affected."

On August 23, *The Hindu* reported the Tamil Nadu State TB Officer Asha Frederick as saying that the Union government had "not supplied adequate doses of Rifampicin and some drugs used for treating people with multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), and the State have been asked to procure the drugs themselves but no additional funding has been provided". Several media reports quoting TB patients in different States facing drug shortage have also been published.

On September 14, Dr. Tereza Kasaeva, Director, Global TB Programme at the World Health Organization, had written, saying: "We at WHO — across 3 level [sic] — are also deeply concerned and closely following the situation with the TB drug stockouts." She also said: "Our colleagues from WHO country office are in contact with the Government of India and have visited at least four States this month to evaluate the situation on ground and support. We've been informed that actions are underway." She ends the mail addressed to Lucica Ditiu, Executive Director of the Stop TB Partnership, and others, saying: "We agree with you that there are some systemic issues that allow stockouts [to] happen periodically. These issues should be urgently addressed and avoided in future." The same day, Lucica Ditiu of Stop TB Partnership in an email said: "The situation [in India] is worrying and… the MoH [Ministry of Health]… are aware as well."

On September 21, in response to a query from Banjot Kaur of The Wire during the WHO virtual presser, Dr. Kasaeva said: "We are aware and noted with concern the recent reports of shortage of TB drugs affecting some provinces and facilities in India. The WHO country and regional offices are closely following this situation by visiting States and facilities… The assessment is still going on… We are working closely with the government and partners and this unfortunate

situation will be sorted out soon… by the end of this month or beginning of next month."

In a September 26 press release, the government claimed that all drug-sensitive TB drugs are "available with sufficient stocks ranging six months and above". In the case of drug-resistant TB drugs, it shared the stocks available at the national level and in Maharashtra without explicitly saying how long the stocks would last.

Based on the stocks of MDR-TB drugs said to be available in Maharashtra in the press release, Vaishnavi Jayakumar, a member of ISthmUS (a pan-Indian network of volunteers focusing on life-sustaining medical supply access during a crisis), pointed out in a tweet that Maharashtra has less than a month's stock of two MDR-TB drugs. While 79,926 capsules of Clofazimine were said to be available in stock, she pointed out that the monthly requirement was 97,408; the stock available would not last even a month. In the case of Linezolid, the stock available in Maharashtra was put as 86,443 while 1,34,958 medicines are needed in a month. At the national level, she calculated the stocks of different MDR-TB drugs from the data of tenders available on the Central Medical Services Society (CMSS)'s website. While the stock of Clofazimine (100mg) as on September 26 was found to last for over three months, the stock of Cycloserine (250mg) would last only for one month and just over two months for Linezolid (600 mg).

Ms. Jayakumar told *The Hindu* that as per the 2021 guidelines for programmatic management of drug-resistant TB in India, the Centre procures TB drugs which remain at the Central Medical Services Society (CMSS) warehouse, and supplied to States when demands are raised. In the case of MDR-TB drugs, at the district level, the drugs are sorted keeping in mind the particular requirement of each MDR-TB patient, which is called a patient-wise box. "Such patient-wise boxes are to be prepared for each MDR-TB patient and handed over to them," she said. "Apart from the logistics of distributing the drugs to the States, the MDR-TB drug boxes for each patient have to be prepared. According to the 2021 guidelines, at the State-level, there should be two months' stock of medicines and one month stock of patient-wise boxes at a minimum. So a minimum stock of three months is needed, as per the guidelines."

She also pointed out that two tenders published in early May for MDR-TB drugs for two months' supply were cancelled in late-June for administrative reasons. "Two short online tenders were published only in early July. That is where the trail ends," Ms. Jayakumar said. The PIB release says the drugs were procured in August.

Ms. Frederick told *The Hindu* in August that the short-course drug combination regimen of Isoniazid-Rifapentine given once weekly for 12 weeks (3HP) to prevent TB in people with latent TB infection was never supplied to States. The new drug regimen was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March this year.

No. In September 2021, India faced a shortage of MDR-TB drug Delamanid. In 2013, India faced a TB stockout of first-line TB drugs Rifampicin and Isoniazid, and paediatric TB drugs.

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WHY BSL-3 LAB FOR NIPAH CONFIRMATION IS UNNECESSARY

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

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September 30, 2023 09:00 pm | Updated 09:46 pm IST

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On September 11, samples sent to Calicut Medical College for testing were confirmed as Nipah virus. But only on September 20, after 323 samples were tested for the virus, did ICMR permit Kerala to use Truenat for Nipah testing. Even the belated permission came only after Kerala "strongly demanded" for Truenat during discussions with ICMR, Health Minister Veena George said during a press conference.

Truenat for Nipah virus testing was granted an emergency use authorisation (EAU) by the Indian regulator in September 2021 days after the third Nipah outbreak in Kerala. The EAU was based on validation of the Truenat test to detect the virus and the Trueprep AUTO lysis buffer (to inactivate the virus) by NIV Pune in 2018 in Kerala and external validation at the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Both human and bat samples from Kerala were used for validating the test in 2018. In 2019, NIV installed Truenat at the Government Medical College, Ernakulam during the Nipah outbreak, and at two field sites in Punjab as part of the Nipah virus surveillance in bats. Of the 120 human clinical specimens and 25 samples from bats tested in 2019, Truenat correctly diagnosed all the positive and negative samples, except for one positive human sample.

As per a 2021 paper published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, the sensitivity of Truenat was 97% and specificity was 100%. It was able to correctly diagnose Nipah even when other viruses were present. The efficacy of the Trueprep AUTO lysis buffer for inactivating Nipah virus prior to virus detection was also tested and found to be high. The "inactivation of Nipah virus was evident by the absence of Ct value", notes the paper. A study was carried out at NIV in April 2020 using SARS-CoV-2 virus to evaluate the virus inactivating efficiency of both the lysis buffer and the Trueprep AUTO transport medium. The study, which is yet to be published but shared with *The Hindu*, found high virus inactivating efficiency by both the lysis buffer and the transport medium.

"The Truenat test for Nipah virus was already developed and ready as our idea is to work on diseases that have the potential to become a pandemic if not diagnosed early," says Dr. Chandrasekhar Nair, Director and Chief Technology Officer at Molbio Diagnostics Pvt Limited.

Despite the validation as a point-of-care test by NIV and an EUA granted in September 2021, ICMR did not permit Kerala to use Truenat till September 2023. A senior scientist based in Kerala tells *The Hindu* that it is the Indian regulator and not the ICMR that is authorised to

approve the use of Truenat for Nipah testing. With an EUA granted in 2021, States should have been free to use Truenat without any permission from ICMR, the scientist says.

 "Truenat will be used for testing Nipah virus at five government medical colleges that have a BSL-2 facility with BSL-3 practices. Private medical colleges that have similar facilities will also be allowed to use Truenat," says Hanish Mohammad, Principal Secretary (Health), Kerala.

"Testing for Nipah using Truenat is being considered only for hospital-based BSL-2 facilities and not in stand-alone labs," says Dr. Aravind R, Head of Infectious Diseases, Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram. According to him, allowing only hospital-based BSL-2 facilities to test for Nipah is to discourage people from walking in to get tested at stand-alone labs. "The decision to test for Nipah should be taken by doctors, not patients. There should be a pretest probability of a patient being positive for Nipah," says Dr. Aravind.

"The lysis buffer inactivates the virus and the risk is reduced maximally. There is no need for a BSL-2 lab for Nipah virus testing when Truenat is used," says Dr. Raman Gangakhedkar, who was the Head Scientist of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases at ICMR and a co-author of the 2021 paper.

Explaining why a BSL-2 facility is essential for testing Nipah virus, Dr. Rajiv Bahl, Director-General of ICMR says: "Even though in the diagnostic samples the virus may be inactivated by using lysis buffer, handling the initial samples before the addition to lysis buffer without strict containment measures may pose a risk of exposure to healthcare workers or any accidental environmental release if no proper decontamination is taken care of."

However, Dr. Nair of Molbio Diagnostics confirms to *The Hindu* that for Truenat, the virus is inactivated at the site of sample collection and not when the sample reaches the BSL-2 facility. Therefore, the inactivated virus is inert and non-infectious when the sample reaches the lab for testing. "The Trueprep AUTO transport media is a proprietary medium that has reagents to inactivate the virus. The transport media inactivates the virus while the lysis media in Trueprep AUTO completely breaks open the pathogens to release nucleic acids," he explains. The April 2020 study at NIV found both the lysis buffer and the transport medium highly efficient at inactivating the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

ICMR and NIV are very clear that for an official confirmation, the sample must be tested only in a BSL-3/4 facility, says Mr. Mohammad. The insistence on a BSL-3 facility for virus confirmation is based on the 2021 government of India memorandum, he adds.

However, India's rules on a BSL-3 facility for Nipah virus confirmation run counter to the WHO's [draft high priority diagnostics](#) for Nipah. The WHO document mentions that Nipah can be confirmed by detection of the virus RNA or viral culture. For a reference laboratory setting, the "diagnostic options for confirmation can include laboratory NAT, NPT/POC NAT assays, virus isolation (if BSL-3/4 available), and serum neutralisation assays". Of the diagnostic options for Nipah confirmation, WHO has included both near-patient testing (NPT) and point-of-care (POC) NAT testing; Truenat is a POC NAT test. The WHO also clearly mentions that BSL-3/4 facility is needed only when virus isolation is undertaken; isolation of viruses is only for research purposes.

"Viruses are sometimes cultured [for detection]. This used to be done a lot before nucleic acid-based amplification became available… Used much less now (and viral culture experts and lines are hardly available)," says microbiologist Dr. Gagandeep Kang, former professor at CMC Vellore. Dr. E. Sreekumar, Director of the Institute of Advanced Virology, Thiruvananthapuram says: "All labs in India, including the NIV's, use only RT-PCR for Nipah diagnosis, be it for initial

detection or confirmation. No other methods are used now."

Usually, it is the same specimen that has been used for testing that is sent for virus confirmation, says Dr. Aravind. Dr. Sreekumar adds: "At present, ICMR encourages collection of only live samples so that they can do both diagnostic testing and research by virus isolation in the same sample. This [collection of live samples] prevents early detection as local labs are prevented from doing testing."

But now, by default, all samples sent for Truenat testing are collected in a transport medium, which inactivates the virus at the site of sample collection. Since inactivated viruses are not viable, they cannot infect people; genomes can be sequenced using inactivated viruses. This makes a BSL-3 facility redundant for virus confirmation. Relying on BSL-2 labs for testing and confirmation can speed up the process as many such facilities in Kerala can be roped in.

Inactivated viruses are not only used for testing and genome sequencing but also for developing diagnostics, such as Truenat. "For any nucleic acid tests (NAT), the U.S. FDA accepts synthetic DNA. That is precisely how the U.S. and other countries developed COVID tests and the U.S. FDA authorised for emergency use even before outbreaks happened in those countries," says Dr. Vinod Scaria, Senior Consultant at the Vishwanath Cancer Care Foundation, Bengaluru. "Even for drug discovery, live viruses are needed only for screening molecules and understanding the infection and immune processes. Even here, many scientists use pseudoviruses, which are better amenable and easier to use, for studying antibody escape."

Responding to a question on why ICMR insists on a BSL-3 facility for Nipah virus confirmation despite the virus being already inactivated, Dr. Bahl, ICMR Director-General says: "BSL-3 facilities have specialised equipment and containment protocols to prevent the release of infectious materials. This is essential in case the virus is not fully inactivated or if there are any procedural errors during diagnosis." But NIV had validated the Trueprep AUTO lysis buffer and the transport medium and found it to be really effective in inactivating the virus.

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Source : www.thehindu.com   Date : 2023-10-01

GENES FUEL ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE IN YEMEN CHOLERA EPIDEMIC

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

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September 30, 2023 09:10 pm | Updated 09:10 pm IST

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Genes imparting resistance to multiple antibiotics emerged in the *Vibrio cholerae* bacterial strains responsible for the ongoing Yemen cholera epidemic around 2018, following changes in antibiotic treatment, according to a study published in *Nature Microbiology*. These findings emphasize the importance of tracking pathogen genomes to monitor the emergence of multidrug-resistant strains that increase human morbidity and mortality.

The cholera outbreak in Yemen, which began in 2016, is the largest in modern history and antibiotic resistance has become widespread among *V. cholerae* bacteria since 2018. Drug resistance in bacteria may develop and spread via spontaneous mutations or by the acquisition of resistance-conferring genes.

Florent Lassalle from the Wellcome Sanger Institute, Hinxton, the U.K. and others analysed 260 epidemic *V. cholerae* genomic DNA samples collected in Yemen between 2018 and 2019. The authors report the presence of a new plasmid — a small, circular DNA molecule — in *V. cholerae* from late 2018 to the bacterial strains behind the epidemic. This plasmid introduced genes encoding resistance to multiple clinically used antibiotics, including macrolides (such as azithromycin). The plasmid became widely spread and was found in all epidemic *V. cholerae* samples tested by 2019, coinciding with macrolide antibiotics being used to treat pregnant women and children with severe cholera. The authors also found the multidrug-resistance plasmid in less pathogenic, endemic cholera strains, suggesting that epidemic and endemic *V.cholerae* strains might exchange plasmids and antibiotic-resistance capabilities.

The authors conclude that clinical macrolide use and genetic exchange may have contributed to multidrug-resistance spread among Yemeni *V.cholerae* lineages. They argue that the emergence of the multidrug-resistant pathogen demonstrates the importance of continuing genomic surveillance of the Yemen cholera outbreak.

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EK TAREEKH EK GHANTA EK SAATH: MAHARASHTRA IS ALL SET TO PAY SWACHHANJALI TO BAPU

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

The preparations are in full swing for Swachhta Pakhwada - Swachhta Hi Seva - 2023 across the country. Citizens have geared up to fulfill Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to action for "Ek Tareekh Ek Ghanta Ek Saath and pledged to pay a tribute to Bapu through Swachhata. Swachh Bharat Mission –Urban under the aegis of Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) aims to make cities garbage free. Swachhta Pakhwada- As the festival of Ganesh Puja was being celebrated in Mumbai, so was the celebration of swachhata. In Mumbai, Swachhta Pakhwada is being celebrated with the same enthusiasm and fervour as Ganesh Puja.

The citizen participation in Maharashtra for ISL 2.0 held on September 17 was very interesting. People participated in the entire cleanliness fortnight with zeal and enthusiasm and extended their cooperation in cleaning every nook and corner of the city. Citizens will participate in the state-level cleanliness in Maharashtra on October 1 from their favorite locations through the portal provided by MoHUA. (https://swachhatahiseva.com/). They will also be able to click pictures from the site and upload on the portal too. Citizens will contribute significantly on 1st Oct by cleaning water bodies, places of worship, private and government offices, schools, colleges, hospitals, bus stands, railway stations etc.

The Hingoli Municipal Council has adopted garbage vulnerable sites to clean and beautify the place where people throw garbage in the open areas. They will also be installing some seating benches there as part of the cleanliness drive. The main focus areas will be Hanuman Temple, Hingoli. Similarly, cleanliness drive was also carried out in all the election wards of Ratnagiri Municipal Council. The one-hour concept was introduced to make the city clean before October 1. People not only appreciated this concept but people are participating in this event enthusiastically as well.

Clean and green environment is a basic ideology in sustainable development. The importance of cleanliness is known to all and citizens try to keep their homes clean, but they somehow forget that they are also responsible for the cleanliness of the environment. Shirol city has witnessed massive youth participation. For October 1, cleanliness targets have been set for Shri Kalleshwar Lake, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Takht, Panchganga Ghat and Buwafan Temple in Shirol.

This mega cleanliness drive will connect people and focus on selected iconic heritage, spiritual and cultural places of the. More than 8 lakh sites have been adopted across the nation for the mega cleanliness drive.

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RKJ/M

Puja was being celebrated in Mumbai, so was the celebration of swachhata. In Mumbai, Swachhta Pakhwada is being celebrated with the same enthusiasm and fervour as Ganesh Puja.

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AN AGEING INDIA NEEDS AGE-RESPONSIVE TB CARE

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

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October 02, 2023 01:08 am | Updated 09:08 am IST

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India is moving towards a future where the elderly will make up a significant proportion of society, primarily due to advances in health care and increased life expectancy. In 2011, about 9% of India's population were over the age of 60. This is expected to increase to 12.5% by 2030. The elderly represent a storehouse of wisdom, and respect for their rights and freedoms benefits society. On International Day of Older Persons (October 1), we must resolve to invest in the health of our elderly population, and pay attention to their unique needs.

This is especially true in the case of tuberculosis (TB), which affects over 25 lakh Indians every year, and kills at least 1,000 every day. India's National TB Prevalence Survey, 2021, revealed that the prevalence of TB in people over the age of 55 was 588 (per one lakh population), much higher than the overall national prevalence of 316. These findings were the starting point for a first-of-its-kind rapid assessment report on TB among the elderly, which we published earlier this year in collaboration with the National TB Elimination Programme and the U.S. Agency for International Development, highlighting TB's impact on the elderly and the need for age-specific TB guidelines.

Interviews with older persons with TB revealed that their TB care journeys were fraught with challenges at every step, resulting in an overall sub-optimal experience. Symptoms of TB including cough, fatigue and weight loss are mistaken as signs of other diseases or dismissed as signs of old age. The risk of having a TB diagnosis delayed or missed altogether is higher for the elderly compared to other adults.

Once diagnosed, management of TB among the elderly is often complicated by multiple comorbidities, particularly diabetes. At an individual level, this means a higher pill count and an increased likelihood of side effects. At a health system level, this can result in irregular treatment adherence and poor outcomes, including death. Some older people with TB spoke about their lowered 'will to live', especially in the absence of social and emotional support systems.

Older people, and older women in particular, also face specific challenges in accessing health services. For instance, in rural and hilly areas, they struggle to travel to health facilities by themselves. Their access to reliable information on health is also limited — social networks inevitably shrink for the elderly. Older persons also experience infrastructure-related challenges such as lack of adequate seating. Crucially, they may not have access to high-quality nutritious food, which is critical for recovery.

All of this is augmented by a loss of economic independence. Most people over the age of 60

are no longer working; they are living off savings or they are completely dependent on families. There are some social welfare schemes for the elderly but these are limited in scope and difficult to access. Data on TB-related stigma among the elderly is sparse but we know that ageism is real and has been recognised by the World Health Organization as a cause of poor health and social isolation. Many older people we spoke to referred to their fragile mental health, accentuated by the loss of purpose and connection, loneliness from losing spouses or family, and the anxiety of not being 'useful'.

So, how can we design and deliver TB care that is elder-friendly? First, we must move away from disease-specific, vertical care programmes to holistic care models that reduce the need for the elderly to interact with multiple providers and facilities. We must also build capacity among health professionals at all levels for an improved clinical understanding of TB in the elderly and better management of multiple morbidities. Case-finding among the elderly can be improved through effective sputum collection and transportation systems, access to mobile diagnostic vans and active case finding at geriatric OPDs, residential homes for the elderly and other institutional settings.

Technical and operational protocols that provide clear guidance on diagnosing and treating TB in the elderly — for example, sample extraction protocols, comprehensive assessment of co-morbidities and drug dosage adjustments — need to be developed.

To address socio-economic needs, we must design and roll out well-considered support protocols, with inputs from elderly people with TB. Examples include an elder-focused community care model with linkages to local caregivers; doorstep delivery of medicines; age-responsive peer support and counselling for older people and their families; special help desks for the elderly at facilities; and support with documentation to access social support schemes.

At a macro level, we must ensure rigorous gender and age-disaggregated collection and analysis of data, to identify TB trends across age groups, and to make sure that the elderly are included as a separate age category in all TB reports. An important step towards building elderly-friendly systems is strengthening collaboration within the health system.

Finally, we need a stronger research agenda focused on TB in the elderly, to better understand State-specific trends in case finding and outcomes among elderly people with TB; substance use; drug-resistance and co-morbidity patterns across geographies; uptake of TB preventive therapy in the elderly; and intersectionality with other aspects of equity such as gender, disability, class, and caste.

Anupama Srinivasan is Assistant Director at REACH, a non-profit organisation working on TB for over 25 years; Ramya Ananthakrishnan is Director at REACH; Manjot Kaur is an independent consultant associated with REACH and authored TB in the Elderly: A Rapid Assessment Report

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INDIA'S STATISTICAL PERFORMANCE ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

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

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October 02, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 01:27 am IST

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"The World Bank compiles SPIs to assess the performance of national statistical systems across 174 countries" | Photo Credit: Reuters

The World Bank's compilation of Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI) ranks India 67 among 174 countries in 2019. Analysis reveals both shortcomings and a commendable performance in various aspects of SPI. The importance of SPI evaluation to enhance international competitiveness has been highlighted in this article with recommendations for strategic improvements in critical pillars. There is also a need for more robust representation to the World Bank to refine SPI.

As India celebrates its election to the United Nations Statistical Commission, India's own official statistical system has come under scrutiny within the country recently. Questions have been raised about the credibility of the statistics it produces and the competence of the official statisticians. Even acclaimed statistical methods devised to generate these statistics, which were subsequently adopted by other developing countries, now face questioning. What is even more surprising is the assertion that the results of statistical exercises, such as censuses and surveys, are claimed to be of poorer quality when compared to data from administrative sources, most of which suffer from uncertain coverage and conceptual shortcomings. In general, the statistical system is now facing a trial. In this context, looking at the international rankings of national statistical systems compiled by the World Bank can provide valuable insights.

The World Bank compiles SPIs to assess the performance of national statistical systems across 174 countries. The SPI is based on the assessment of five dimensions of performance, commonly referred to as the "five pillars" of a national statistical system, i.e., data use; data services; data products; data sources, and data infrastructure.

India's Score 2019 (SPI Overall Score: 70.4; Pillar 1 - Data use: 80.0; Pillar 2 - Data Services: 88.0; Pillar 3 - Data Products: 60.0; Pillar 4 - Data Sources: 68.9; Pillar 5 - Data Infrastructure: 55.0) and India's Rank 2019 (SPI Overall Score: 67; Pillar 1 - Data Use: 101; Pillar 2 - Data Services: 35; Pillar 3 - Data Products: 105; Pillar 4 - Data sources: 31; Pillar 5 - Data infrastructure: 73).

The latest available scores are from 2019. According to these scores, India's overall SPI score

stands at 70.4, placing it in the 67th rank (ranks are self-computed) among the 174 countries assessed. The pillar-wise scores show India's lower performance in the 'Data use' and 'Data products' pillars, with scores of 80 and 60, respectively, resulting in poor rankings of 101 (with an average rank of 116.5) and 105.

The score in the 'Data use' category depends on how different sectors of society, including the legislature, executive, civil society, academia, and international bodies, utilise the statistics produced by the system. The SPI assessment 2019 considered only data usage by international bodies. India performs well in measures assessing the comparability of estimates of child mortality, debt reporting, drinking water, and labour force participation. However, it loses 20 points due to the unavailability of comparable poverty estimates for the World Bank over the last 10 years (from 2017). This stems from a new comparability indicator introduced by the World Bank's PovcalNet for poverty estimation. It is important to note that India did produce poverty estimates within this period through the NSS Consumption Expenditure Survey.

The pillar 'Data Products' anchors the national statistical system's performance around the essential data required for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To improve upon this, India has already taken the right step by conducting a Multiple Indicator Survey and Comprehensive Annual Modular Survey in the NSS 78th round (2020-21) and 79th round (2022-23), respectively, for collection of data on SDGs.

Regarding 'Data infrastructure', India's score is 55, ranking 73 (with an average rank of 75.5). This pillar encompasses five sub-dimensions: 'Legislation and Governance', 'Standards and Methods', 'Skills', 'Partnership', and 'Finance' ('Skills' and 'Partnership' were not considered for SPI 2019). India's scores for 'Legislation and Governance' are high, given that the national statistical legislation aligns well with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Nonetheless, the overall score for 'Data infrastructure' is diminished due to moderate performance in 'Standards andmethods' and poor performance in 'Finance'.

In 'Standards and Methods', India fares well in indicators assessing the adoption of System of National Accounts (SNA) 2008, COICOP (Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose), and the latest standards for the compilation of government finance statistics, monetary, and financial statistics.

However, the score in this dimension decreases due to the non-adoption of the latest standards for classifying employment status (such as International Classification of Status in Employment or ICSE-93 or North American Industry Classification System or NAICS 2012), the accounting basis for reporting central government financial data, and the non-utilisation of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM). This is perplexing given that the process followed in NSS surveys closely mirrors and predates the adoption of the GSBPM. The 'Finance' category receives a low score since, according to the World Bank, India's national statistical plan lacks full funding. India excels in data services (score 88, rank 35) and data sources (score 68.9, rank 31), securing a place in the top quintile for these pillars. Under data sources, three indicators are evaluated (with the fourth indicator not considered in 2019): censuses and surveys, administrative data, and geospatial data. Among these indicators, censuses and surveys (score: 100/100 for censuses and 86.6/100 for surveys) contribute the most to India's ranking, followed by administrative data (score: 50/100), and finally, geospatial data (score: 38.9/100).

The relatively low score of administrative data is mainly due to non-fulfilment of criteria of at least 90% registration of births under the Civil Registration System (CRS). The World Bank has taken the estimate of coverage under CRS from the UN SDG monitoring database, which shows estimates of coverage as 89% for children under five and 87% for children under one . However,

these estimates are actually derived from the National Family Health Survey conducted between 2019 and 2021— a period significantly affected by lockdowns following COVID-19. Conversely, the publication of the Office of the Registrar General of India), "Vital Statistics of India", cites the coverage of births under CRS for 2019 at approximately 93%, which is a much more reliable source than NFHS for estimation of coverage of CRS.

In the 'Data services' dimension, India gets full points for data releases and data services, yet avenues for improvement remain in terms of online accessibility. Enhancements in this area could be achieved by improving download options, providing more comprehensive metadata availability, and open terms for data usage. India's commendable rank of 40 in the 'Openness' score from Open Data Inventory deserves recognition.

Clearly, the SPI for 2019, as compiled by the World Bank, underscores India's superior performance in censuses and surveys in comparison to administrative data. A thorough examination of the SPI score is crucial to drive improvement and enhance international competitiveness. It is through identifying issues and establishing attainable goals that a substantial rise in rankings can be achieved. For instance, achieving a 20-point increase in each of the three pivotal pillars ('Data products', 'Data use', and 'Data infrastructure') would have positioned India at 34 in 2019. Moreover, proactive engagement with the World Bank to fortify the robustness of the SPI is warranted. Use of "Vital Statistics of India" in place of the NFHS for estimating the registration of births and deaths is one such case.

Aloke Kar is a visiting scientist at the Indian Statistical Institute Kolkata and Consultant, Asian Development Bank. Harshvardhan Singh Garhwal is an officer of the Indian Statistical Service (2021 batch), and posted at the regional office, Jaipur of the Field Operations Division, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Raghvendra Pandey is an officer of the Indian Statistical Service (2021 batch), and is posted at the Computer Centre, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The views expressed are personal

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KENYA PANEL URGES SHUTDOWN OF WORLDCOIN'S CRYPTO PROJECT WITHIN COUNTRY

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Effects of Liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth incl. Economic Reforms

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October 03, 2023 08:44 am | Updated 08:44 am IST - NAIROBI

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A person's eye is scanned by Worldcoin in exchange for crypto [File] | Photo Credit: REUTERS

A Kenyan parliamentary panel called on the country's information technology regulator on Monday to shut down the operations of cryptocurrency project Worldcoin within the country until more stringent regulations are put in place.

The government suspended the project in early August following privacy objections over its scanning of users' irises in exchange for a digital ID to create a new "identity and financial network".

Worldcoin was rolled out in various countries around the world by Tools for Humanity, a company co-founded by OpenAI CEO Sam Altman. It has also come under scrutiny in Britain, Germany and France.

The project still has a virtual presence in Kenya and can be accessed via the Internet, even after the August suspension.

(For top technology news of the day, subscribe to our tech newsletter Today's Cache)

The regulatory Communications Authority of Kenya should "disable the virtual platforms of Tools for Humanity Corp and Tools for Humanity GmbH Germany (Worldcoin) including blacklisting the IP addresses of related websites," the ad hoc panel of 18 lawmakers said in a report.

It also called for the suspension of the companies' "physical presence in Kenya until there is a legal framework for regulation of virtual assets and virtual services providers."

Worldcoin's press office said it had "not seen anything official announced by the Committee directly."

The panel's report will be tabled at the National Assembly for consideration and adoption at a later date.

During the suspension of data collection in August, authorities said the project's method of

obtaining consumer consent in return for a monetary award of just over $50 at the time bordered on inducement.

Registering to use the platform involved long lines of people queuing to get their irises scanned. The parliamentary panel's investigation found that Worldcoin may have scanned the eyes of minors as there was no age-verification mechanism during the exercise, its report said.

The panel also asked government ministries to develop regulations for crypto assets and firms that provide crypto services and called on the police to investigate Tools for Humanity and take any necessary legal action.

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CAPTURING THE MONSOON: ITS VARIANCE AND THE MESSAGE

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For the first time since 2018, India has reported a deficit monsoon. From June to September this year, India received 82 cm of rainfall, nearly 6% lower than the 89 cm that is considered 'normal'. Beginning April, there were enough indications that the monsoon would be subdued with an El Niño on the horizon. This cyclical warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean usually corresponds to a decline in rainfall over India, particularly the north-west. Between 2019 and 2022, the Indian monsoon was significantly impacted by the converse phenomenon – a cooling La Niña — that sometimes is associated with above normal rainfall. By those metrics, the expectations of a normal monsoon in 2023 were muted. However, the experience of the monsoon this year was far from the ordinary. About 9% of the country received 'excess' rainfall with 18% getting 'deficient' and the rest of the country, 'normal' rainfall. While on one hand, August — the second-most important monsoon month — posted a third less than its normal, several States in north India, which were expecting minimal rainfall, were deluged following multiple episodes of record rainfall. July, for instance, saw exceptionally heavy rainfall in Chandigarh, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, resulting in floods and landslides. Several cities were left grappling with serious flooding over several days. Cloudbursts were reported in Himachal Pradesh in August. It is worthwhile to note here that these episodes of intense rain were due to so-called western disturbances that are extra tropical storms from the Mediterranean region and normally not expected to play a major part in the monsoon. Thus, these are fingerprints of the wide-ranging impacts of anthropogenic warming.

At the other end of the spectrum were drought-like conditions in Maharashtra. Extreme water stress was also reported out of Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Karnataka, where in the case of Karnataka, matters came to a head with neighbouring Tamil Nadu over the sharing of water from the Cauvery river. The India Meteorological Department has also forecast a 'normal' north-east monsoon from October to December and 'normal to above-normal rainfall' over large parts of north-west India and south peninsular India. The signs are there of increased rains in several parts of south India. The spatial and temporal variance of the monsoon reiterates the need to invest in more resilient infrastructure that can be an all-weather insurance against the increasingly unpredictable vagaries of the global climate. The pattern in recent years is to improve forecast models that are better able to warn of significant changes in weather a week or two ahead than having approaches that fail to capture the dynamics of the Indian monsoon. More money and expertise should be directed towards this.

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2023 NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS: SEEING ELECTRONS THROUGH BRIEF PULSES OF LIGHT

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(L-R) Pierre Agostini posing in his apartment in Paris; Ferenc Krausz speaking during a presentation at the Max-Plank-Institute of Quantum Optics in Munich; and Anne L'Huillier talking to journalists at Lund University, Sweden. The trio has been awarded the 2023 physics Nobel Prize. | Photo Credit: AP

The 2023 Nobel Prize for Physics was shared by three scientists—Pierre Agostini, Ferenc Krausz and Anne L'Huillier—for their "experimental methods that generate attosecond pulses for the study of electron dynamics in matter."

The laureates have been awarded the Prize for experiments that have allowed scientists to produce ultra-short pulses of light, with which they can finally 'see' directly into the super-fast world of electrons.

"Attosecond physics gives us the opportunity to understand mechanisms that are governed by electrons," Eva Olsson, chair of the Nobel Committee for Physics, said in a statement.

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Electrons are the negatively charged particles of an atom. They zoom around the denser nucleus. Before being able to study them directly, scientists understood their properties through averages.

It's like taking a picture of a race car. The longer the aperture of the camera is open, the blurrier the picture gets. But if the exposure time is small, only a small amount of light reaches the camera's sensors, yielding a sharper image. The shorter the exposure time, the sharper the image.

Similarly, the rapid movement of electrons would seem to blur together in the eyes of a camera that couldn't lower its exposure time to the order of attoseconds.

The movement of an atom in a molecule can be studied with the very shortest pulses produced by a laser. These movements and changes in the atoms occur on the order of femtoseconds—a millionth of a billionth of a second. But electrons are lighter and interact faster, in the attosecond realm. An attosecond if a billionth of a billionth of a second.

All light consists of waves of electric and magnetic energy. Each wave has a sinusoidal shape—starting from a point, going up to a peak, dipping into a trough, and finally getting back to the same level as the starting point.

By the 1980s, physicists had found ways to produce light pulses whose duration was a few femtoseconds. The technology used to produce these pulses couldn't be refined any further, so physicists believed the femtosecond to be the hard lower limit Yet 'seeing' electrons required an even shorter flash of light.

In 1987, Anne L'Huillier and her colleagues at a French laboratory passed an infrared laser beam through a noble gas. The beam's interactions with atoms in the gas produced overtones: waves of light whose wavelength was an integer fraction of the beam. For example, if the beam had a wavelength of 100, the overtones would have wavelengths of 10, 25, 50, etc.

The team also noticed that many of the overtones were just as intense as the beam. Through the 1990s, she and her colleagues continued to explore this phenomenon, in the process laying an important theoretical foundation.

Physicists found that the overtones emitted were in the form of ultraviolet light. As multiple overtones were created in the gas, they began to interact with each other. When the peak of one overtone merges with the peak of another, they produce an overtone of greater intensity, through constructive interference. But when the peak of an overtone merges with the trough of another, they cancel each other out, in destructive interference.

By fine-tuning the setup used to produce the overtones, scientists realised that it should be possible to create intense pulses of light each a few attoseconds long (due to constructive interference), with destructive interference ensuring that they didn't last for longer.

In 2001, Pierre Agostini and his research group in France successfully produced and investigated a series of 250-attosecond light pulses, or a pulse train. By combining the pulse train with the original beam, the group was able to conduct some rapid experiments.

At the same time, Ferenc Krausz and his team in Austria developed a technique to separate an individual 650-attosecond pulse from a pulse train. Using that, the researchers were able to measure the energy of some electrons released by some krypton atoms.

Attosecond pulses allow scientists to capture 'images' of activities that happen in incredibly short time spans. As a result, scientists can use such pulses to explore short-lived atomic and molecular processes implicated in fields like materials science, electronics, and catalysis.

For medical diagnostics, attosecond pulses can be used to check for the presence of certain molecules based on their fleeting signatures. These pulses could also be used to develop faster electronic devices, and better telecommunications, imaging, and spectroscopy.

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ICMR PROJECT TO ACCELERATE CANCER SCREENING AT DISTRICT LEVEL

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

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October 03, 2023 07:36 pm | Updated 08:34 pm IST - NEW DELHI

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With only a few districts across India being able to effectively implement cancer screening measures in accordance with Health Ministry norms, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is gearing up to bring in remedial measures. It has invited Expressions of Interest on the implementation of research to accelerate cancer screening, early diagnosis, and treatment.

Also read | [Cancer cases in India projected to rise from 14.6 lakh in 2022 to 15.7 lakh in 2025: Govt.](#)

The Council noted cancer poses a significant and pressing public health challenge in India, which currently ranks third in cancer incidence after China and the United States. According to Global Cancer Observatory projections, however, India is expected to witness a substantial 57.5% increase in cancer cases between 2020 and 2040.

In the long run, the Council is looking at improving the coverage and quality of cancer screening through the existing healthcare system using accepted and validated methods. It plans to engage non-specialist physicians and other health care workers within a supportive healthcare system for the screening of cancer as well as pre-cancerous conditions. The Council also wants to ensure that all those who test positive are linked to facilities for early diagnosis and treatment. The involvement of local communities is key to encourage the target population to undergo screening for early diagnosis and treatment.

"Research has indicated that frontline health workers, such as Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), have the potential to play a crucial role in promoting and conducting home-based cancer screening. Home screening has resulted in higher compliance rates because it offers the privacy and convenience necessary for individuals to participate actively in the screening process,'' the Council noted.

This will be a four year project, ICMR said, including six months for preparatory activities and another six months for analysis and interpretation. It will also include formative, implementation, and evaluation phases.

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BATCHES OF INDIA-MANUFACTURED SYRUPS FOR COUGH FOUND CONTAMINATED: CDSCO

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

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October 05, 2023 01:31 am | Updated 07:35 am IST - NEW DELHI

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Samples from three batches of COLD OUT syrup manufactured by a Tamil Nadu-based company was also found to have contaminants — ethylene glycol 1.9% and diethylene glycol 0.14%. Photo: Special Arrangement

At least five batches of syrups for cough and allergic rhinitis of two Indian manufacturers — one Gujarat-based and one Tamil Nadu-based — have been found to contain higher than permissible levels of contaminants — diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol, as per a recent report released by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).

Previously the World Health Organisation (WHO) too had issued alerts on contamination in cold-cough syrups exported by India and said these two contaminants were found in the drug.

Contamination was found among 48 samples which were declared "not of standard quality" and "spurious" by the CDSCO of the total 1,166 samples of drugs that were tested in August.

Samples from a batch of cough syrup and one batch of anti-allergy syrup manufactured by the Gujarat-based manufacturer were found to be not of standard quality containing 0.118% ethylene glycol and 0.171% ethylene glycol and 0.243% diethylene glycol, respectively.

The Gujarat firm was asked to suspend production at its Ankleshwar plant a month ago, an official said.

Samples from three batches of COLD OUT syrup having Paracetamol, Phenylephrine, and Chlorpheniramine and used for relieving nasal congestion, runny nose and fever etc manufactured by the Tamil Nadu-based company was also found to have both the contaminants — ethylene glycol 1.9% and diethylene glycol 0.14%.

Meanwhile, the WHO had alerted about contamination in a batch of COLD OUT cough syrup supplied in Iraq, manufactured by the same company.

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RETRIBUTION FOR THE SOUTH, ACCOLADE FOR THE NORTH

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

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October 05, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 09:05 am IST

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'The problem of balancing the political representation of sub-central units that have lower populations arises in all federations' | Photo Credit: PTI

In Indian federal democracy, a State's relative population size gains political and economic significance. The strong linguistic identities and regional renaissances in political and social spheres propelled the southern States to scale greater heights in all spheres of development. In sharp contrast to the northern States, population control has been achieved in the southern States through social development and economic growth. In the federal political system, changes in population geography have a lasting impact on the political and economic geography.

Article 81 of the Indian Constitution stipulates that Lok Sabha constituencies in the country should be equal by the size of population. Based on the 1971 Census, the number of Lok Sabha constituencies for States was determined and frozen for the next 25 years through the 42nd Amendment Act 1976. In 2001, through the 84th Amendment Act, the freeze on the number of constituencies for each State was further prolonged until the first Census after 2026.

The population growth rates differ between the non-Hindi speaking southern States and the Hindi-speaking northern States. Between 1971 and 2011, the proportion of the population of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh increased from 44% to 48.2%, whereas the proportion of population of the five southern States (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana) declined from 24.9% to 21.1%. If equal size of Lok Sabha constituencies by population is enforced today as in the population projections of 2023, the five southern States will lose 23 seats, while the northern States will gain 37. In other words, the proportion of political representation of northern States will increase by 6.81% and that of southern States will decline by 4.24%.

The problem of balancing the political representation of sub-central units that have lower populations arises in all federations. For instance, Canada has been consistently increasing the proportion of representation in the national Parliament for the less populous provinces. The attempt to equalise the size of constituencies by population is based on the dictum, "One Person, One Vote". In a 'First-Past-the-Post' election system, along with a multi-party contest, voters know that only one of the contestants shall win, that is, the winner takes all. Often,

winners are elected even with less than one-third of the votes polled. If we calculate the proportion of votes secured by the winner in a constituency, it may be less than one-fifth of registered voters or even one-sixth of the total population of the constituency. A targeted vote gathering by a candidate should help to secure a win in this system. To give a perspective, from the 2019 election numbers, we can see that a Member of Parliament from the northern States of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh represent around 18 lakh registered electors, while the five southern State Member of Parliament represents 16 lakh registered electors. But in both these two groups of States, it requires only 12 lakh voters to elect a Member of Parliament. The real meaning of 'one person, one vote' is lost in this system. Hence, equating constituencies by the size of the population is not essential.

When family planning and population control are the stated policies of the national and regional governments in India, States that have implemented these policies and effectively controlled their population should not be penalised through reduced political representation in subsequent periods. Population control happens not only due to the implementation of family planning programmes but also because of the social change that is engineered by the leaders in the society. Population control in the southern States is a classic example of this feat. Therefore, reducing the proportional representation of southern States in the national Parliament is not only a disincentive for these States but also an incentive for others not to take population control and social change as public policy seriously. So, continuing with the freeze on the distribution of seats among States as they were in 1971 till the population stabilises in all States is the only way out.

Once in five years the Union government constitutes a Finance Commission to recommend, among other things, the share of each State in the assigned tax revenue of the Union government. Every Finance Commission recommends a formula for the horizontal distribution of the Union government's tax revenue among the States. Population and per capita income of a State are considered to be two important indicators that are always included in the distribution formula with larger weights.

Population of a State is a measure of demand for public expenditure. Therefore, it is an important variable in the distribution formula. The first Finance Commission decided a State's share based on its population size. The successive Finance Commissions reduced the weight assigned to the population in the distribution formula while including other variables. The Union government, in its terms of reference to the Eighth Finance Commission (1984-89), stipulated to use only the 1971 population in the distribution instead of the 1981 population. This practice continued thereafter till the Thirteenth Finance Commission (2010-15). In terms of reference for the Fourteenth Finance Commission, the Union government stipulated that apart from taking the 1971 population, the Commission may also consider demographic changes since 1971, wherever the population is to be used. Thus, for the first time, the established practice of rewarding the southern States for controlling the population was replaced by awarding the populous States. The terms of reference of the Fifteenth Finance Commission openly declared taking the 2011 population in the distribution formula. With this, the southern States lost the advantage of getting some financial rewards for population control. Therefore, the southern States have already started facing reduced financial transfers from the Union government as a reward for controlling population growth.

There is another factor that consistently brings in the current population in the distribution formula — the per capita income of a State. The per capita income of a State is considered as a proxy for its ability to raise its own revenue. The higher the per capita income of a State, the lower its share in the Union tax revenue. Lower per capita income of a State may be due to higher population for a given Gross State Domestic Product. Therefore, the higher the current

population of a State, the higher its share in the Union tax revenue. It is important to note that usually the per capita income is assigned larger weight in the distribution formula favouring the northern States. The combined share of the five southern States in the Union government's tax revenue from 2000-05 to 2021-26 declined from 21.1% to 15.8%. On the contrary, the combined share of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh increased from 51.5% to 53.2%.

Using the current population for delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies by equalising population and in the distribution formula for assignment of Union government tax revenue to States is clear retribution for the population control efforts of the southern States and a transparent accolade for the higher growth rate of population in the northern States.

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DEFUSING THE TICKING TIME BOMB CALLED DIABETES

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

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October 06, 2023 12:50 am | Updated 12:51 am IST

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"Scientific evidence shows that diets heavy with ultra-processed food and beverages or high in sugar, fat, and salt are risky and can lead to diabetes" File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

In June 2023, a study conducted by the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research and the Union Health Ministry revealed that 11.4% of India's population or 10.13 crore people are living with diabetes and 15.3% of the population or an additional 13.6 crore people are pre-diabetic. It also found that 28.6% of the population would be considered to be obese as per the BMI measure.

According to the World Health Organization, a major reason for this is the consumption of unhealthy ultra-processed foods and beverages, which are aggressively marketed displacing traditional diets. Such food includes carbonated drinks, instant cereals, chips, fruit-flavoured drinks, instant noodles, cookies, ice cream, bakery products, energy bars, sweetened yogurts, pizzas, processed meat products, and powdered infant formulas.

A 'silent' burden |For women, diabetes screening and diagnosis come with in-built challenges | Who cares for women living with diabetes? | Can community support, social welfare policies bridge the gender gap in diabetes care?

Scientific evidence shows that diets heavy with ultra-processed food and beverages or high in sugar, fat, and salt are risky and can lead to diabetes. A 10% increase in the consumption of ultra-processed food a day is associated with a 15% higher risk of type-2 diabetes among adults. When food is ultra-processed, its structure is destroyed and cosmetic additives, colours, and flavours are added. This makes people eat more, gain weight, and heightens the risk of diabetes and other chronic diseases. Further, obesity and diabetes are key risk factors for heart disease and deaths. A study showed that those who had more than four servings of ultra-processed food a day were much more at risk of cardiovascular mortality than those who took less than two servings a day. An upward trend was found for all-cause mortality too.

It is reported that the sale of sugar-sweetened beverages has fallen in the last 20 years in many high-income countries. To compensate for the loss of sales, companies are now focusing on low- and middle-income countries. India is a playground for the food industry. Billions of rupees are spent on marketing and advertising ultra-processed food and beverages, which leads to increased consumption by vulnerable populations. While the food industry blames people for

bad choices, it is not the people but the environment around them that is to blame. Marketing targets younger generations and the growing middle class, making it hard for an individual to choose healthy food options. Children in particular are exposed to cartoon characters and given incentives and gifts. Celebrity endorsements also determine their consumption decisions.

The result is a deepening public health crisis, the ticking time bomb of diabetes. Sugar-sweetened beverages are a major source of added sugar in diets and put people at a higher risk of type 2 diabetes. In such a context, policy and regulatory actions are warranted.

The food industry does not want any restrictions on marketing; they offer partnerships as well as arguments of economic development as 'stakeholders'. The food industry also participates in programmes such as 'Eat Right', making false promises. Such partnerships do not allow us to make a strong regulation that could reduce the consumption of ultra-processed food and beverages. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has shown a lacklustre response to the crisis and allowed a dominating role to the food industry while suggesting front-of-package labelling, which is still not in place. Many say that people should exercise. While this is good for health, it should be in addition to a regulatory policy on restricting the marketing of ultra-processed foods and providing warning labels on junk food and beverages.

The only way the government can safeguard people from the manipulative strategies of the food industry is through a legal framework or even an ordinance (Article 123 of the Constitution) with the objective of reducing/halting the consumption of ultra-processed foods. It could also include defining 'healthy food', a warning label on unhealthy food, and restrictions on the promotion and marketing tactics of unhealthy food and beverages. The people must be informed of the risk of consuming such food. In this process, there is no reason to partner with the food industry that is responsible for ill health.

The governments of South Africa, Norway, and Mexico have recently taken similar actions. The Government of India can show its strength to regulate food labelling and marketing. Such a law will be a clear demonstration of the will of the government. The Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods Act flattened the growth of commercial baby food. The proposed new law could do the same to unhealthy foods and beverages. This is an idea whose time has come.

Arun Gupta, a senior Pediatrician, is Convener, Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest, and a former member of the PM's Council on India's Nutrition Challenges

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PREPARING FOR THE GREY ERA: ELDER MENTAL HEATH CARE COMES INTO PROMINENCE

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

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October 06, 2023 12:03 am | Updated 01:45 am IST

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India will have close to 347 million elder people by 2050, according to projections. Image for representational purpose only. | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

There are more older people on the globe now than ever before in the history of humanity. In 2022, the number above 60 was 1.1 billion, comprising 13.9 % of the population. By 2050, the number of older people is expected to increase to 2.1 billion, constituting 22%. India is not far behind. It had 149 million older adults (10.5%) in 2022, this figure will grow to 347 million (20.8%) by 2050 according to projections. The bottom line is that many of us are living longer than our ancestors.

Despite this imminent crisis, we know little about healthy ageing and elders' mental health. Even worse, we have many misconceptions and fears about ageing, especially mental health problems in older people, such as depression, anxiety, and dementia.

(For top health news of the day, subscribe to our newsletter Health Matters)

Getting old is a normal physiological process. For convenience, we can consider ageing in the physical, social, and psychological domains. It is important to remember that the issues in each domain interact with one another, within and outside the domains.

The physical aspects of ageing are apparent, for example, greying hair and decreasing muscle mass. However, there is considerable heterogeneity, with no two 70- or 80-year-olds being similar. We know of active, marathon-fit elders, while others, perhaps younger by a few years, are immobile. Also, different organs age differently, some faster than others, depending on genes, lifestyle, environment, and diseases.

Increased dependency, social isolation, poverty, ageism, pessimism, and nihilism are significant social challenges our elders face. They are vulnerable to emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse by others. Often, the perpetrators are known to them, commonly a family member. Many towns and cities in India are not "elder-friendly". Many public buildings are inaccessible without ramps or handrails, pavements are non-existent, uneven, or used for parking, and public transport is limited. These make access to health care services difficult .

Coming to the psychological aspects, as we age, we are expected to be wiser, with a broader

understanding of "life" and its challenges from our experience, either personal or vicarious. Erik Erikson proposed 'Ego integrity versus Despair' as his final psychosocial development stage in a human. According to him, older persons should view their accomplishments positively. They would be filled with despair if they did not consider themselves successful. Indian culture emphasises "acceptance" of the past, the present and the future as a means of achieving "peace of mind" in old age. "Accepting" the limitations that old age imposes on us and "renouncing" our responsibilities without a sense of suffering or loss are essential to age well psychologically. However, this is not easy, and many elders struggle to accept the changes accompanying ageing. As Abraham Lincoln said, "...It is not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years".

Many elderly men especially feel lost and become unproductive after retirement. It is critical to develop from a young age, other interests in life, be it music, sports, social work, domestic responsibilities etc. This helps mitigate the feeling of lack of purpose after retirement which very often leads to depression.

Roughly 15% of elders (22 million in India) have serious mental illness. To provide context to this number, if we were to bring all the elders with mental illness from all over India together, we would need two cities the size of Chennai to accommodate them. Common mental health problems elders face are depression, anxiety, dementia, and substance use disorders.

Often, elders with mental illness do not seek treatment and the "treatment gap" is a staggering 90% in India. A lack of awareness among the public and healthcare professionals is the main reason for this vast gap. Many symptoms of mental illness in the elders are dismissed as "normal" for ageing.

Also, we have seen that many healthcare professionals are pessimistic about treatment of mental health problems in elders. Families are often asked to lock their relatives with dementia in a room, as nothing much can be done for them. This is far from the truth, as many confuse treatment with cure. While we do not have a cure for a neurodegenerative condition such as dementia, there are treatments that can reduce their suffering, improve their quality of life, and reduce the burden on families.

In addition, elders with mental illness face the double whammy of stigma associated with ageing and mental illness. Stigma makes it difficult for families to admit that an older relative has a mental illness and also creates reluctance to take them for treatment. Poverty and lack of access to services are other important factors. Most elders in India are impoverished and lack access to health care. Many interventions, such as psychosocial treatments, day centres, and particular medicines, are available only to a limited extent in cities.

To address some of these challenges, especially in rural communities, the SCARF (Schizophrenia Research Foundation) has partnered with Azim Premji Foundation to raise awareness about elder mental health in four rural Taluks of Chengalpet district in Tamil Nadu, reaching more than 350 villages. They have recruited 60 volunteers from these villages. These volunteers are sensitised about mental health problems elders face, and they encourage elders to seek help from the SCARF community outreach team and other service providers, including the District Mental Health Programme. The aim is to create a network in the rural community to improve elders' mental health.

The Indian tradition of a joint family system has many advantages that supports elders. The multi-generational interactions and bonds fostered in joint families are crucial to the well-being of elders while providing essential care for children and young adults. Unfortunately, joint families are rare now, even in villages, due to migration, both within and outside the country, and smaller

family sizes.

Festivals and rituals also encourage socialisation for
elders. Drawing "kolams" or "rangolis" requires complex cognitive skills that help to keep the brain active. We risk losing the potential protective effects of these traditions and rituals.

In future, given that most readers of this article will age, we need to ensure that mental health services are available for elders in our community. The co-ordinated actions of the individual, families, civic society, private organisations, non-governmental organisations, and government can achieve healthy ageing.

At the individual level, we need to plan for our old age with financial savings and lifestyle changes to maintain good physical health and a satisfying social life.

Healthy ageing, as a concept, should be introduced in the school curriculum. At a community level, services for elders with mental illness should be available and accessible.

City and town planners should consider elder-friendly designs to improve mobility and reduce dependency. Many retirement homes and elder care facilities are available in cities now, providing excellent care and a fantastic opportunity for elders to beat social isolation. These may fill the void left by the loss of the joint family system. However, most of them cannot care for those with dementia or other mental illness, which needs to be addressed urgently.

The government must frame policies for elders with mental illness, allocate resources, and implement services. We must remember that caring for our elders is everyone's responsibility.

(Dr. Sridhar Vaitheeswaran is psychiatrist and head, Dementia Care Services at SCARF (DEMCARES). Dr. R. Thara, is co-founder and vice chair, SCARF)

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EQUALITY AND IDENTITY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE FINDINGS OF THE BIHAR CASTE COUNT

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population And Associated Issues

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October 06, 2023 12:22 am | Updated 12:22 am IST

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The significance of Bihar conducting a caste survey and publishing a caste-wise count of its population is quite immense. The survey, which had all the trappings of a census, complete with a two-stage process of house-listing followed by the eliciting of information from the households, has shown that 63% of Bihar's 13 crore population belong to castes listed under the Extremely Backward Classes (EBC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories. The socio-economic profiles of the people have also been recorded, but are yet to be revealed. At the national level, it may give a boost to the political demand for a country-wide caste census and push the judicial discourse towards reconsidering the 50% legal ceiling on total reservation in education and government services. In terms of party politics, it may open a new chapter in the traditional conflict between the BJP seeking to consolidate all sections of Hindus into one massive support base and other parties banking on different sections of the OBCs. At a time when Hindutva is seen to have trumped parties that banked on OBC assertion, influential social groups may now sense an opportunity to leverage their size to get their interests advanced by the political class. On the legal side, the numbers may be utilised to present the sort of 'quantifiable data' that the judiciary has been asking for to justify the levels of reservation obtaining in various States.

Bihar's exercise marks a precedent on how a caste count should be conducted. The methodology included giving a code to each of the 214 castes in the State's lists of castes. Sub-castes and sects were identified in advance and subsumed under a broader caste name. This meant that the enumerators could assign a code to any caste name given by a respondent. A major reason for the Union government not releasing the caste-related details of its 2011 'Socio-economic and Caste Census' was that the data it yielded was too confusing and unwieldy. As many as 46 lakh castes were named by the people, presumably because they gave castes, sub-castes, sects, clans, and surnames when asked to name their castes. While there are functional and practical advantages to knowing exact caste numbers, it is not to be forgotten that the larger goal of the Constitution remains the attainment of a casteless society. Affirmative action indeed helps address inequities in society. The state must also look for ways to ensure equality of opportunity and equitable distribution of resources without accentuating caste identity.

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END

A few days ago, we lost professor M.S. Swaminathan. Our nation lost a visionary who revolutionized agricultural science, a stalwart whose contribution to India will always be etched in golden letters. Swaminathan loved India and wanted our nation, and our farmers in particular, to lead a life of prosperity. Academically brilliant, he could have chosen any career but he was so impacted by the Bengal famine of 1943 that he was clear that if there is one thing he would do, it would be to study agriculture.

At a relatively young age, he came in contact with Dr Norman Borlaug and followed his work in great detail. In the 1950s, he was offered a faculty position in the US but rejected it because he wanted to work in India and for India.

I want you all to think about the challenging circumstances in which he stood as a colossus, guiding our nation towards the path of self-sufficiency and self-confidence. In the first two decades since Independence, we were dealing with immense challenges and one of them was food shortages. In the early 1960s, India was grappling with the ominous shadows of famine and it is then that Swaminathan's unyielding commitment and foresight ushered a new era of agricultural prosperity. His pioneering work in agriculture and specific sectors like wheat breeding led to a significant increase in wheat production, thus turning India from a food-deficient country into a self-sufficient nation. This tremendous achievement earned him the well-deserved title of 'Father of the Indian Green Revolution'.

The green revolution offered a glimpse of India's 'Can Do Spirit'—that if we have a billion challenges, we also have a billion minds with the flame of innovation to overcome those challenges. Five decades after the green revolution began, Indian agriculture has become far more modern and progressive. But, the very foundations laid by Swaminathan can never be forgotten.

Over the years, he undertook pioneering research in combatting parasites affecting potato crops. His research also enabled potato crops to withstand cold weather. Today, the world is talking about millets or *shree anna* as super foods but Swaminathan had encouraged discourse around millets since the 1990s.

My personal interactions with Swaminathan were extensive. They began after I took over as chief minister of Gujarat in 2001. During those days, Gujarat was not known for its agricultural prowess. Successive droughts, a super cyclone and an earthquake had impacted the growth trajectory of the state. Among the many initiatives we launched was the 'soil health card', which enabled us to understand the soil better and address problems if they arose. It was in the context of this scheme that I met Swaminathan. He appreciated the scheme and also shared his valuable inputs for the same. His endorsement was enough to convince those who were sceptical about the scheme, which would eventually set the stage for Gujarat's agricultural success.

Our interactions continued during my chief ministerial tenure and also when I took over as Prime Minister. I met him at the International Agro-Biodiversity Congress in 2016 and the next year, in 2017, I launched a two-part book series written by him.

The *Kural* describes farmers as the pin that holds the world together because it is the farmers who sustain everyone. Swaminathan understood this principle very well. A lot of people call him

akrishi vaigyanik, or an agricultural scientist. But, I have always believed that he was even more. He was a true *kisan vaigyanik*, a farmers' scientist. In his heart there was a farmer. The success of his works is not restricted to their academic excellence; it lies in the impact they have had outside the laboratories, in the farms and the fields. His work narrowed the gap between scientific knowledge and its practical application. He consistently advocated for sustainable agriculture, emphasising the delicate balance between human advancement and ecological sustainability. Here, I must also note Swaminathan's special emphasis on improving the lives of the small farmers and ensuring they also enjoy the fruits of innovation. He was particularly passionate about improving the lives of women farmers.

There is another aspect about Swaminathan which is remarkable—he stands tall as a paragon of innovation and mentorship. When he won the World Food Prize in 1987, the first recipient of this prestigious honour, he used the prize money to establish a not-for-profit research foundation. Till date, it undertakes extensive work across various sectors. He has nurtured countless minds, instilling in them a passion for learning and innovation. In a rapidly changing world, his life reminds us of the enduring power of knowledge, mentorship, and innovation. He was an institution builder as well, having to his credit many centres where vibrant research takes place. One of his stints was as director, International Rice Research Institute, Manila. The South Asia Regional Centre of International Rice Research Institute was opened in Varanasi in 2018.

I will again cite the *Kural* to pay tributes to Swaminathan. It is written there, "If those who have planned have firmness, they will attain what they have desired the way they have desired." Here was a stalwart who decided early on in his life that he wanted to strengthen agriculture and serve farmers. And, he did it exceptionally innovatively and passionately. Swaminathan's contributions continue to inspire and guide us as we navigate the path of agricultural innovation and sustainability. We must also keep reaffirming our commitment to the principles he held dear, championing the cause of farmers and ensuring the fruits of scientific innovation reach the roots of our agricultural expanse, fostering growth, sustainability, and prosperity for generations to come.

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A WARNING SHOT FOR COMMITTING THE 'CRIME' OF JOURNALISM

Relevant for: Security Related Matters | Topic: Role of Media and Social Networking Sites in internal security challenges

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October 07, 2023 01:19 am | Updated 01:19 am IST

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A protest in Bengaluru against the arrest of *NewsClick* founder and editor-in-chief Prabir Purkayastha and Amit Chakravarty, the firm's human resources head, under the UAPA. | Photo Credit: Getty Images

In an interview to the BBC shortly after the Gujarat pogrom of 2002, Chief Minister Narendra Modi was asked: "When you look back, do you think there is anything you should have done differently?" His response was clear and unvarnished: "Yes, one area where I was very weak, and that was how to handle the media." Both the question and the answer were contained in the BBC documentary that was barred from being aired in India in 2023. The raids that followed on the BBC offices in Delhi and Mumbai following the broadcast of the documentary elsewhere in the world showed that Mr. Modi had learnt his lessons well in nine years as Prime Minister.

If a global giant could be so brazenly smothered by the 'Mother of Democracy' strutting around in her G20 baubles, the fate that has befallen tiny *NewsClick* should not surprise too many. After securing the co-option, cooperation, and capitulation of vast chunks of big media, an image-obsessed government is turning the screws on the bit players. A piece of legislation here to shackle; an early-morning knock there to scare. As the general elections of 2024 loom, preceded by the semi-finals in five States, it is a warning shot to the few who are still committing the unpardonable crime of journalism in the "land of Buddha and Gandhi".

"Show me the man and I'll show you the crime," was the boast attributed to Joseph Stalin's ruthless secret police chief, Lavrentiy Beria, i.e., he could fabricate a case against anyone, even the innocent. Taking a leaf from the Bolshevik's book, a political establishment that feasts on the excesses of 1975 has mastered the art of plausible deniability. Every attack on press freedom is painted as anything but: it is about money-laundering (*NewsClick*, NDTV); it is about income-tax evasion (BBC, *Dainik Bhaskar*); it is about national security (MediaOne); it is about glorifying terrorism (Fahad Shah); it is about disrupting peace (Siddique Kappan). At least Indira Gandhi had the courage to formally declare an Emergency — and the censors sat alongside journalists in the newsroom, not the Prime Minister's office.

Editorial | Undeclared Emergency: On the arrests and actions in *NewsClick* case

L'affaire *NewsClick* is a particularly egregious case — even M/s Thomson & Thompson wouldn't

find it funny. A mighty state going after a news operation that began in a basement. The police landing up without a copy of the FIR or a list of the offences committed. Seizing the phones and laptops of the "suspects" despite every court saying 'don't'. A case of economic offence turning into a conspiracy to undermine the republic. And the 76-year-old founder of the portal being arrested under a law made for terrorists. So many questions can be asked, but just one is enough: exactly whose activity is "unlawful" here, the second estate's, or the fourth?

"If anyone has committed anything wrong, agencies are free to carry out investigations against them under set guidelines," were the gratuitous words of the Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur. But when the "suspects" are questioned about the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the Delhi riots that followed, or the farmers' agitation on the farm laws, it reveals a perverse mindset which is so used to unfiltered propaganda that it sees ear-to-the-ground journalism not as a public service, but as an avoidable hindrance. And it ticks all the boxes of media capture — harassment, intimidation, vendetta, vilification.

When Indira Gandhi routinely invoked the "foreign hand" to brush away her every failing, India was literate enough to guffaw at it. But in Bharat, when the state accuses a website of "Chinese links" and peddling Chinese propaganda, the WhatApp University admins cannot find the smarts to ask, what is illegal about it, even if true? If the custodians of the world's fourth largest economy think that its journalists do not have the intellectual wherewithal to empathise with peasants and pensioners, women and workers, the poor and the marginalised, Dalits and the disenfranchised, without the Renminbi lining their pockets, it shows that Inspector Clouseau didn't click on the news headlines.

"In furtherance of this conspiracy to disrupt the sovereignty of India and to cause disaffection against India, large amount of funds were routed from China in a camouflaged manner and paid news were intentionally peddled criticising domestic policies, development projects of India and promoting, projecting and defending policies and programmes of the Chinese government," reads the comical FIR, with scant understanding of what "paid news" is, oblivious of the Reserve Bank of India-mandated 26% limit on foreign funding of digital platforms, and mocking the 49 crore that Chinese companies donated after COVID-19, including to the PM CARES fund, no less.

This investigation by insinuation, by weaponising every arm of the state, can be read as a sign of creeping political nervousness, but that would be too charitable a view given the stellar record vis-a-vis the media since 2014. When the White House press corps can be disdainfully kept waiting in a van while the U.S. President is bumping fists in the Prime Minister's residence, or when a BJP-ruled government with blood on its hand can be blithely allowed to proceed against the Editors Guild of India for ferreting out the facts in Manipur, it points to a systemic contempt for the news media bordering on pathological hatred. But, for public consumption, every June the tweets should read: "We must not forget that dark period of Emergency. Censorship was so stringent that nothing could be published without approval."

The bottomless thirst for approval and approbation — and the limitless allergy for scrutiny and criticism — that the retrofitted witch-hunt against *NewsClick* highlights, offers a useful chance for a hypnotised citizenry to pause and ponder: why is a government, which spends thousands of crores to promote itself through the media, so intent to crush the outliers, bringing disrepute in the eyes of the world? And why is a government which periodically issues (self-attested) certificates of India's growing prowess so uninterested in improving its ranking on the World Press Freedom index, where it now stands below Taliban-run Afghanistan, at 161 out of 180 countries? (In 2014, it was at 140; in 2022, it was at 150.)

The answer to those questions explains why a sledgehammer was taken to swat a fly. When a BJP minister in Uttar Pradesh tweeted that journalism began during the time of 'Mahabharata', a film-maker replied tartly: "And ended in 2014".

Krishna Prasad is former Editor-in-Chief, Outlook, and former member, Press Council of India

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SIKKIM FLASH FLOOD: SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN FULL SWING, OPERATIONAL SITUATION STABLE ALONG THE LAC

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

A Glacial Lake Outburst in South Lhonak Lake in North Sikkim on the night of 03-04 Oct caused a devastating flood in the North Eastern State of Sikkim. The level of water in the Teesta River increased by about 50-60 feet in height which caused calamitous floods downstream. Large scale damage to infrastructure, property and loss of human lives have been reported. As per the State Govt estimate, a total of 142 persons are missing, out of which 26 bodies have been recovered so far. The exact assessment of the damage is yet to be corroborated due to the inclement weather and incessant rains.

Indian Army deployed in the area has also been affected with some of its camps along the Teesta River bank being damaged/ washed away. A vehicle parking area at Burdang near Singtam was affected by the flash flood and 23 soldiers and 39 vehicles that were taking a temporary overnight transit halt have been submerged in silt or swept away.

At the site of the incident, silt and mud measuring up to 30-40 feet high has been deposited and most of the vehicles are buried underneath. A massive Search and Rescue operation was immediately launched by the Indian Army, BRO along with NDRF, State Disaster Relief Teams, Para Military Forces, Police, Civil Administration and local populace of Sikkim & North Bengal.

On 4th Oct evening, one soldier was rescued by villagers from an area 18 km downstream of Burdang and the individual is now stable and under medical care. Approximately 26 bodies in total have been recovered so far from various areas along the river in North Bengal and four bodies have been handed over by Bangladesh Border Forces. Out of the 26 recovered bodies, eight have been positively identified as that of Indian Army soldiers. The last rites of Naik Bimal Oraon hailing from Alipurduar were conducted on 6th Oct 23 with full military honours. The mortal remains of four soldiers are being taken to their native places on 7th Oct by service and civil aircrafts for conduct of last rites in presence of the family members.

Post Mortem of two mortal remains is in progress. Meanwhile, the search operation for the remaining 14 soldiers continues.

Dozers and plant equipment have been digging up the site of incident at Burdang. Since 06 Oct 23, Radars (Leo Life Detector Radar, REECO Radar) and Army Dogs have also been employed. So far, 15 vehicles out of the total 39 missing have been recovered. Some ammunition, explosives and stores of the Indian Army from various camps swept away have been reported from various places along the downstream river banks. Indian Army has issued advisories through civil administration and deployed look out teams along with State Police to warn the locals for reporting sighting of such items. Ammunition experts have been deployed to destroy the explosives recovered in a controlled manner.

National Highway 10 (NH 10), the lifeline of Sikkim, has been rendered unusable due to damages to the road surface and many bridges across the Teesta River. The opening/ widening of road stretch Rangpo - Singtam is under progress.

Alternate routes to Gangtok are available via East Sikkim and routes to West & South Sikkim

are also available. However, in North Sikkim, roads beyond Mangan are currently cut off. Lt Gen RP Kalita, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command along with Lt Gen VPS Kaushik, GOC Trishakti Corps undertook an aerial survey on 6 Oct 23 to assess the extent of damage and plan for the relief effort. The Director General BRO along with Indian Army Engineers, NHIDCL and State Government officials are assessing the damage and carrying out survey for restoring the road connectivity. Meanwhile, efforts are on, to connect Chungthang with a foot bridge. Helicopters of Indian Army and Indian Air Force are undertaking emergency supply and evacuation sorties. However, the inclement weather and incessant rains have hindered the aerial operations.

Approximately 1500 tourists are assessed to be stranded in the areas of Lachung and Lachen valleys in North Sikkim. Indian Army along with the local administration has been extending assistance to the stranded tourists and locals by providing food, medical aid and telephone connectivity through satellite terminals.

Teams have collected data of all the tourists staying in various hotels and some of them have been accommodated in Army camps. Special helplines has been set up at Indian Army's Trishakti Corps HQ and family members back home of all the stranded tourists have been informed about their wellbeing.

While the hinterland of Sikkim has been affected, the operational situation along the Line of Actual Control in Sikkim continues to be stable. The formations responsible for the Border Management Posture are maintaining high state of readiness and are optimally stocked as per the sustainable operational logistics plan. Indian Army along with all agencies and Civil Administration continue their relentless Search & Rescue operations, while at the same time focusing on resuscitation of communication and other infrastructure in a well-coordinated manner.

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Alternate routes to Gangtok are available via East Sikkim and routes to West & South Sikkim are also available. However, in North Sikkim, roads beyond Mangan are currently cut off. Lt Gen RP Kalita, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command along with Lt Gen VPS Kaushik, GOC Trishakti Corps undertook an aerial survey on 6 Oct 23 to assess the extent of damage and plan for the relief effort. The Director General BRO along with Indian Army Engineers, NHIDCL and State Government officials are assessing the damage and carrying out survey for restoring the road connectivity. Meanwhile, efforts are on, to connect Chungthang with a foot bridge. Helicopters of Indian Army and Indian Air Force are undertaking emergency supply and evacuation sorties. However, the inclement weather and incessant rains have hindered the aerial operations.

Approximately 1500 tourists are assessed to be stranded in the areas of Lachung and Lachen valleys in North Sikkim. Indian Army along with the local administration has been extending assistance to the stranded tourists and locals by providing food, medical aid and telephone connectivity through satellite terminals.

Teams have collected data of all the tourists staying in various hotels and some of them have been accommodated in Army camps. Special helplines has been set up at Indian Army's Trishakti Corps HQ and family members back home of all the stranded tourists have been informed about their wellbeing.

While the hinterland of Sikkim has been affected, the operational situation along the Line of Actual Control in Sikkim continues to be stable. The formations responsible for the Border Management Posture are maintaining high state of readiness and are optimally stocked as per the sustainable operational logistics plan. Indian Army along with all agencies and Civil

Administration continue their relentless Search & Rescue operations, while at the same time focusing on resuscitation of communication and other infrastructure in a well-coordinated manner.

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UNION TRIBAL AFFAIRS MINISTER SHRI ARJUN MUNDA INAUGURATES NATIONAL TRIBAL FESTIVAL - 'AADI MAHOTSAV' - IN JAMSHEDPUR, JHARKHAND

Relevant for: null | Topic: Indian Culture - An Introduction

Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, Shri Arjun Munda inaugurated the Aadi Mahotsav - the National Tribal Festival - at Jamshedpur, Jharkhand today. The mega event is being organized by the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED), Ministry of Tribal Affairs, from 7th – 16th October 2023.

Addressing the gathering, Shri Munda said that the Aadi Mahotsav is a major platform to take the tribal culture, traditions and art of our country to the national and international markets. He appreciated the live demonstrations by women tribal artisans making their artefacts. The Minister expressed gratitude towards the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi for his vision of popularising tribal products by presenting them to visiting dignitaries during the G20 Summit.

Shri Munda called the Aadi Mahotsav as a celebration of the contribution of our tribal ancestors,

the culture of various unique tribal communities, their lifestyle and the tribals themselves. The festival provides an opportunity to meet the artisans, learn about their way of life and get acquainted with the tribal culture and traditions. This Aadi Mahotsav completes the feeling of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', the Minister added.

Aadi Mahotsav, an annual celebration of tribal entrepreneurship, craft, culture, cuisine, and commerce, serves as a vital platform to display the rich and diverse heritage of tribes from across the nation. This year the festival will highlight the talents of 336 tribal artisans and artists, including Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) and Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK) beneficiaries.

This event will feature 30 artisans' stalls, around 11 VDVKs' stalls and 5 cuisine stalls from Jharkhand. The event will successfully demonstrate 68 artisans' stalls from other states including 15 cuisine stalls. It shall be live demonstrations showcasing exquisite talent across various categories namely textiles, painting, jewellery, metal, cane & bamboo & cuisine.

Dignitaries present during the event included Shri Bidyut Baran Mahato, Member of Parliament, Shri Chanakya Chaudhury, Vice President (Corp. Affairs), Tata Steel, Ms. Geetanjali Gupta, MD, TRIFED, among others.

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NB/VM

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A CENSUS FOR A NEW DEAL

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population And Associated Issues

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October 09, 2023 01:41 am | Updated 09:43 am IST

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An enumerator receives information from residents during the second phase of caste survey in Patna. | Photo Credit: PTI

Marcel Proust wrote, "Men, their natures not altering overnight, seek in every new order a continuance of the old." Caste and religion have remained the master cleavages of Indian politics for most of the last century. The caste survey, released by the Bihar government, with coordinated support from the entire Opposition, can be described as a Proustian political move. It tries to constitute a new political opening through the instrument of an old paradigm.

This unfurling of the contesting flags of caste and religious identity gives the first clear shape to the ideological contours of the 2024 general elections. It also firmly reinforces the role of these twin ethnic identity constructions as the fundamental pillars of political mobilisation.

Many critics have dubbed the move as regressive, cynical, and unimaginative, and a return to the 'Mandal versus Mandir' politics we had supposedly left behind in the 1990s. Yet, this framing assumes caste- and religion-based identity politics to be pre-formed packages, whose practices have remained stagnant over the last three decades, even as the political economy has been transformed by liberalisation.

The politics of religion and caste respond and adapt to changes in the larger socio-economic structure. As the political scientists Pradeep Chhibber and Rahul Verma explained in their book *Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party Systems of India*, the majority coalition assembled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was rooted in a novel political constituency formed with the post-liberalisation expansion of the middle class. The leadership of Mr. Modi, for the middle class, promised a firm institutionalisation of their dominant norms (on state intervention, material consumption, and 'ethno-political' pride). While middle class anxieties and aspirations have long comprised a key driver of Hindu nationalist mobilisation, their concrete ideological fusion under Mr. Modi's charismatic appeal is what shaped the present political era. This was Mandir politics 2.0.

Editorial | Equality and identity: On the findings of the Bihar caste count

Similarly, the Bihar caste survey inaugurates not the re-enaction of the old Mandal politics of narrow caste-based patronage, but the coming-of-age of a subordinate class-based politics. This is also Mandal 2.0.

This is new synthesisation of a class politics, in the familiar trappings of caste. Primarily, it seeks to tap into the frustrated and deeply felt desire held by large sections of the precariat to achieve middle class status. Such a status constitutes both an economic marker and a prized social status symbol. This precariat is roughly one-half of the country which finds itself sandwiched between the poor and the middle class. They have been facing a stagnant trend of upward mobility inside of an informal economy which offers little substantive protections. An estimated 75 million people, according to the Pew Research Center, slipped back into poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic. The bulk of this precariat, which can be found in rural and urban India across occupations, is composed of lower Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Dalits, and Muslims.

In their book, *Beyond Consumption: India's New Middle Class in the Neo-Liberal Times*, Manish K. Jha and Pushpendra chart the composition of the middle class in terms of different caste groups. Briefly, 5% of upper castes fall in the upper-middle class segment, compared to 3% of OBCs and 1.4% of Dalits. These variations are significant, and sharpen pyramidically. The gaps are also starker in the Hindi belt States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where upper caste dominance is more entrenched. Such status inequality also tends to be much higher among Hindus than among other religious groups. For instance, Muslim OBCs form a larger proportion of both upper class and middle class segments compared to Muslim upper castes.

The coalition of the precariat depends on the glue of an enlarged ethnic block (such as the OBCs) because it can hardly be forged on abstract or universal ideas. Simply put, the precariat does not possess the "symbolic capital" to do so. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defined 'symbolic capital' as the capacity to "shape the perception of social reality". This allows certain dominant groups to "impose a particular vision of the world in the name of a universal truth". Such influence is wielded largely by the Hindu middle class. Meanwhile, members of the precariat, such as the deeply fragmented and underprivileged OBCs, possess few of these social, cultural, and ideological resources. They prefer to articulate their own politics of upward mobility in terms of concrete caste identities, which draw on an alternative symbolic capital of their experience of caste and historical memories of struggle.

It is, of course, important to acknowledge the considerable failures of Mandal politics in the Hindi belt. Unlike in southern India, caste politics in the north made no substantive dent on the political economy, or institutions of power and governance, or even on poverty reduction. It was too focused on building patronage-based short-term electoral coalitions rather than building a broad and durable political constituency, as did the successful Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. Yet, to be fair to the caste politics of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, unlike in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it was enacted at a time when their under-privileged support base had relatively modest economic and cultural capital. Thus, the acquisition of political capital (which Kanshi Ram called the 'master key' for the acquisition of other resources) required innovative and often unsavoury means.

This time around, a progressive politics of caste seems to have generated a far broader political consensus than Mandal politics ever did. The parties supporting the caste census command a combined vote share in national elections that exceeds the vote share of the ruling BJP, which awkwardly holds on to an ambiguous stand on the issue. These parties include not just the Congress and the INDIA alliance constituents, but also the bulk of unaligned parties such as the YSR Congress Party, the Telugu Desam Party, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, and the Biju Janata Dal. In all regions of India, caste politics has clearly sustained legitimacy as an instrument of popular mobilisation, "vernacularising the norms" (Lucia Michelutti) and "democratising the social base" of politics (Yogendra Yadav).

Such a large-scale and pan-Indian consensus is fairly rare, and reflects the expanded range of

possibilities for a progressive politics of caste. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, which facilitated an unprecedented expansion of the American middle class in the 1930s and 1940s and lifted a working class ravaged by the Great Depression, was a radical institutional solution. It was essentially a political strategy to build a cross-ethnic coalition of working-class white voters, whose precarity had been intensified by the Great Depression. This coalition included low-status recent immigrants of Irish, Italian, and East European descent, mobilised through localised patronage-based politics ('machine politics'). The politics of the New Deal made use of some of these grimy mobilising mechanisms but went beyond it to evolve into an institutional remaking of American capitalism. There was a systemic shift in the economic regime, to the benefit of workers. The popularity of the New Deal made Roosevelt the only President to serve four consecutive terms. This is not to make comparisons, but only to highlight that ethnic and class politics can work complementary to one another. As yet, only at a starting stage, the politics of caste survey emphasises grander notions of equal participation ('*Jitni abadi utna haq*, or rights proportionate to population') and an institutionally negotiated distribution of resources.

Also read | [Why the caste survey in Bihar worries the BJP](#)

One reason why Mandal politics eventually devolved into narrow caste formations was the splitting of the stream of farmer politics from the erstwhile bloc of 'Socialist Politics'; and later the rupture of lower OBCs from the Yadavs. Yet, as Anthony Giddens has argued, social actors like ethnicities or castes contain purposive agents, not automatons directed by an external structure or a false consciousness. The political elites such as the Jats in Haryana and the Marathas in Maharashtra have begun to shun exclusivist strategies and gravitate towards a larger OBC platform. This could be seen in the farmer's agitation and the Maratha-Kunbi quota stir, supported by Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra. It is also possible that sections of the lower OBCs may also re-evaluate the returns, in terms of economic mobility and social prestige, of choosing a political 'Hindu' platform as opposed to an 'OBC' platform.

Asim Ali is a political researcher and columnist

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KARNATAKA PUTS CASTE SURVEY DATA IN COLD STORAGE

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population And Associated Issues

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October 09, 2023 12:53 am | Updated 12:53 am IST

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The survey, conducted by the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission and popularly called the caste census, has been caught in a political crossfire for over five years now. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The publication of the caste survey data by the Bihar government has had a ripple effect in Karnataka, with the focus now on the Congress government's move to accept and release the State's socio-economic and educational survey report that was finalised in 2018.

The survey, conducted by the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission and popularly called the caste census, has been caught in a political crossfire for over five years now. The Veerashaiva/Lingayats and Vokkaligas (the land-owning and politically powerful communities that have for decades held a grip on power in the State) insist that the results not be published, while a large number of backward communities, without political representation so far, want it to see the light of the day.

If published, the survey outcome could alter the power equations in Karnataka besides impacting the backward classes reservation matrix. It is estimated that about 200 of the most backward communities, that have had no political representation so far, could benefit from the move. With the term of the commission's chairman ending in November, the report is expected to be submitted soon.

Conducted in 2015, a first since the last census held in 1931, the survey has not been submitted to the government since the report was finalised in 2018. Successive governments, including the previous Congress government led by Siddaramaiah during whose term the census was conducted, have dithered on accepting the report fearing a political backlash from the Vokkaligas and Veerashaiva/ Lingayats. Of the 23 Karnataka Chief Ministers, 16 have been from the two communities, and only five, including the incumbent Chief Minister, have belonged to Other Backward Classes.

A selective leak of data from the census revealed that the population of Lingayats and Vokkaligas stood at 14% and 11%, respectively, as opposed to the general perception that it is higher. It was feared that if published and authenticated, this data could possibly reduce the influence of these groups in the political sphere.

An earlier narrative stated that the report could not be submitted to the previous Congress government as the commission's secretary had not affixed his signature. Hence it had become clear that the government, which had asked for the report, did not want to head into the 2018 Assembly elections by antagonising the two communities.

Representatives from the two communities have termed the 162 crore-worth census exercise unscientific and unreliable. They claim that the questionnaires were "misleading" and "aimed at dividing the communities into subsects to deliberately bring down numbers."

Interestingly, Vokkaligas and Veerashaiva/Lingayats also figure in the OBC list, though their inclusion has been a contested issue. In the late 1970s, Chief Minister D. Devaraj Urs introduced the OBC reservation in which Vokkaligas found a place based on the L.G. Havanur Commission report. In subsequent decades, though the T. Venkataswamy Commission did not include the two communities in the OBC list, the Janata government headed by Ramakrishna Hegde drew a separate list adding the communities to it in 1986. In 1994, the Congress government headed by M. Veerappa Moily also included both these communities in the backward classes reservation list despite the O. Chinnappaa Reddy Commission dropping them from the list in 1988.

However, those favouring the publication of the new report have pointed out that the higher population narrative set by the two communities was based on the projected population from 1931.

They argue that the current list of backward classes was last drawn up in 1994, and requires re-categorisation based on the survey outcome. The commission needs to review the list, remove communities that have become ineligible, and add those eligible once in 10 years — an exercise not undertaken in three decades.

Though Mr. Siddaramaiah has publicly asserted the need for caste census data for better representation and poverty alleviation, political compulsions may eventually prevail. Government sources indicate that the report could go into cold storage at least until the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are over.

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HOW THE DIGITAL INDIA ACT WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY'S CYBER LANDSCAPE

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

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Nations worldwide are grappling with the need to update their legal frameworks to adapt to the evolving digital landscape. India, with its ambitious 'Digital India' initiative, is no exception. The recent announcement of the Digital India Act 2023 (DIA) represents a significant step towards establishing a future-ready legal framework for the country's burgeoning digital ecosystem. This move by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) signals a proactive approach to regulating and shaping the digital future of the nation.

The DIA, poised to replace the two-decade-old Information Technology Act of 2000 (IT Act), is designed to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the dramatic growth of the internet and emerging technologies. It is imperative to understand the key aspects of this legislation and why it is essential in the contemporary context.

The primary motivation behind the DIA is to bring India's regulatory landscape in sync with the digital revolution of the 21st century. The IT Act of 2000, crafted during a time when the internet was in its infancy, has struggled to keep pace with the rapid changes in technology and user behaviour. Since its inception, India's internet user base has exploded from a mere 5.5 million to a staggering 850 million. The nature of internet usage has also evolved, with the emergence of various intermediaries and the proliferation of new forms of user harm, such as cyberstalking, trolling, and doxing. The DIA recognises these changes and aims to provide a comprehensive legal framework to address them.

The DIA encompasses several pivotal clauses that mirror the dynamic evolution of the digital environment, addressing its multifaceted challenges and opportunities. These provisions underscore the legislation's responsiveness to the ever-changing digital landscape.

The proposed DIA encompasses a spectrum of significant provisions aimed at addressing the ever-evolving digital landscape. Firstly, it places a strong emphasis on online safety and trust, with a commitment to safeguarding citizen's rights in the digital realm while remaining adaptable to shifting market dynamics and international legal principles.

Secondly, recognising the growing importance of new-age technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, the DIA provides guidelines for their responsible utilisation. Through

this, it aims to not only encourage the adoption of these technologies but also to ensure that their deployment is in line with ethical and legal principles. This means that the DIA does not just leave it to the market to dictate the course of these technologies but actively engages in shaping their development and use within a regulatory framework. And by doing so, the DIA strikes a balance between fostering innovation and safeguarding against potential harms. It promotes ethical AI practices, data privacy in blockchain applications, and mechanisms for accountability in the use of these technologies.

This forward-looking stance is not only beneficial for citizens and businesses but also positions India as a responsible player in the global technology landscape, ready to harness the full potential of new-age technologies while mitigating associated risks.

Thirdly, it upholds the concept of an open internet, striking a balance between accessibility and necessary regulations to maintain order and protect users. Additionally, the DIA mandates stringent Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements for wearable devices, accompanied by criminal law sanctions.

Lastly, it contemplates a review of the "safe harbour" principle, which presently shields online platforms from liability related to user-generated content, indicating a potential shift in online accountability standards. These provisions underscore the proposed DIA's commitment in addressing the complexities of the digital age.

While the introduction of the DIA is a commendable step towards addressing the challenges of the digital age, there are certain aspects that warrant a critical evaluation.

One key concern is the potential impact on innovation and the ease of doing business. Stricter regulations, particularly in emerging technologies, could inadvertently stifle entrepreneurial initiatives and deter foreign investments. Additionally, the review of the "safe harbour" principle, which shields online platforms from liability for user-generated content, could lead to a more cautious approach among these platforms, possibly impinging on freedom of expression. Furthermore, the DIA's success hinges on effective enforcement, which will require substantial resources, expertise, and infrastructure. Balancing the interests of various stakeholders, including tech giants, while ensuring the protection of citizen rights, poses a significant challenge. Therefore, while the DIA is a progressive move, its implementation and potential repercussions warrant vigilant monitoring and adaptability to avoid unintended consequences.

The DIA is a crucial step towards ensuring a secure, accountable, and innovative digital future for India. It represents a forward-looking approach to regulation in an age of constant change and has the potential to shape the country's digital landscape for generations to come. As consultations continue, it will be interesting to see how this proposed legislation evolves and plays out in the dynamic digital arena.

Sanhita works in the Applied Law and Technology Vertical of Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy

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NEWSCLICK NON-CASE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE STRANGE CASE OF A TERRORISM FIR WITHOUT A TERRORIST ACT

Relevant for: Security Related Matters | Topic: Role of Media and Social Networking Sites in internal security challenges

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October 09, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 09:41 am IST

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The FIR registered by the Delhi Police against Prabir Purkayastha, the founder of *NewsClick*, and others is a vague amalgam of sweeping accusations that do not actually disclose any offence, leave alone one of terrorism. Without citing any published content, the FIR alleges offences range from a conspiracy to undermine the country's security to disrupting the 2019 parliamentary polls, from causing disaffection against the government to disrupting essential services. It invokes provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and penal provisions relating to conspiracy and promoting enmity between different groups. Quite notably, it does not mention any overt act that may be described as unlawful activity or a terrorist act. There is a general description that foreign funds were infused illegally into India by forces inimical to the country with the objective of causing disaffection against the government, disrupting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India, and threatening its unity and security. It refers to a 'conspiracy' based on purported email exchanges to show Arunachal Pradesh and Kashmir as "not part of India", and also moves to protract the farmers' agitation of 2020-21 and thereby disrupt supply of services and other essential supplies.

Overall, it is quite clear that the police are combining the remittances by American businessman Neville Roy Singham in *NewsClick*with its journalistic content to build a case that "Chinese" funds are being used for propaganda, fomenting unlawful activities, and undermining the country's security. The UAPA is also conducive to such misuse as its widely defined terms can as easily help criminalise people for 'thought crimes' as for their acts. The resort to UAPA is also a tactical aid to prolong the incarceration of dissenters and the disfavoured, and send out a chilling message to the wider media fraternity. There is also the likely electoral spin-off in its potential for the ruling BJP to milk the 'Chinese conspiracy' theory in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls. A related question is whether the alleged creation of shell companies by two telecom companies does not merit more than a casual mention in an unrelated FIR and warrant a separate probe into these conduits for funding terror. In mentioning that a lawyer was among those who helped create a legal network for these companies' defence, the police seem to be considering criminalising legal services. The case flags a disturbing trend: the present regime's propensity to misuse anti-terror laws and invoke national security sentiment to undermine individual and media rights.

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PATA AND INDIA TO JOINTLY PROMOTE TRAVEL FOR LIFE IN ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA),has committed to work with India to expand Travel for LiFE initiative across Asia Pacific region.

India hosted 46th edition of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Travel Mart 2023 from Oct 4 to Oct 6 at the International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC), Pragati Maidan, in New Delhi. PATA Mart saw the participation of around 1000 delegates, is one of the major international trade exhibitions catering to the tourism sector and it serves as a platform for trade interactions between global buyers and sellers.

Besides facilitating trade interactions between Buyer Sellers meet, the PTM 2023 also included thought provoking knowledge sessions at PATA Forum and youth engagement at PATA Youth Symposium. Travel for LiFE initiative was showcased by the Ministry across all the events and it generated huge interest from international travel trade community

The Travel Mart was followed by the PATA Board meeting held where Ministry of Tourism shared Travel for LiFE initiative with the Board members. PATA Board appreciated the initiative and Ministry of Tourism, Government of India will work with PATA to expand the initiative across Asia Pacific region.

It may be recalled that New Delhi Leaders' Declaration 2023 during G20 summit under India's Presidency noted the launch of "Travel for LiFE" and supported the development of smart destinations that are responsible and sustainable. Travel for LiFE, a sectoral programme initiated by the Ministry of Tourism, aligns with the philosophy of the Mission LiFE.

Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) was formally launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 19th October 2022, in the presence of the UN Secretary General António Guterres, at the Statue of Unity, Ekta Nagar, Gujarat. It is a global mass movement led by India urging individuals and communities to act for protection of the environment against the effects of the climate change.

Ministry of Tourism will set up a PATA desk to strengthen engagement with PATA on Travel for LiFE and other areas of cooperation in tourism sector. This is the first major international partnership for Travel for Life program after its global launch on September 27, 2023, world tourism day. Ministry of Tourism is already working with UNEP and UNWTO on strengthening the TFL program.

Travel for LiFE embodies the spirit of the Pro Planet People and functions on the basic principles of "Lifestyle of the planet, for the planet and by the planet". It aspires to bring large-scale behavioral change amongst tourists and tourism businesses, which will have a significant impact on environment protection while ensuring socio-cultural sustainability.

The Travel for LiFE program has identified an illustrative list of actions that are designed in line with the eight themes of Travel for LiFE – Save Energy, Save Water, Say No to Single Use Plastic, Reduce Waste, Empower Local Businesses and Communities, Respect Local Culture and Heritage, Consume Local Foods and Conserve Nature

Going a step further, Travel for LiFE Program also aims to inspire the Tourism Businesses to

deepen their sustainability practices by observing adherence to Travel for LiFE- Signed up badge. Subsequently the tourism businesses can go for the Travel for LiFE certification in bronze, silver and gold.

Ministry of Tourism is working with all the stakeholders in tourism ecosystem including the State Governments, Industry, Destinations and Tourists to make Travel for LiFE a mass movement.

Travel for LiFE Program will position India as leader in promoting sustainable and responsible tourism and using tourism as a vehicle for achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

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BY/SK

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Ministry of Tourism will set up a PATA desk to strengthen engagement with PATA on Travel for LiFE and other areas of cooperation in tourism sector. This is the first major international partnership for Travel for Life program after its global launch on September 27, 2023, world tourism day. Ministry of Tourism is already working with UNEP and UNWTO on strengthening the TFL program.

Travel for LiFE embodies the spirit of the Pro Planet People and functions on the basic principles of "Lifestyle of the planet, for the planet and by the planet". It aspires to bring large-scale behavioral change amongst tourists and tourism businesses, which will have a significant impact on environment protection while ensuring socio-cultural sustainability.

The Travel for LiFE program has identified an illustrative list of actions that are designed in line with the eight themes of Travel for LiFE – Save Energy, Save Water, Say No to Single Use Plastic, Reduce Waste, Empower Local Businesses and Communities, Respect Local Culture and Heritage, Consume Local Foods and Conserve Nature

Going a step further, Travel for LiFE Program also aims to inspire the Tourism Businesses to deepen their sustainability practices by observing adherence to Travel for LiFE- Signed up badge. Subsequently the tourism businesses can go for the Travel for LiFE certification in bronze, silver and gold.

Ministry of Tourism is working with all the stakeholders in tourism ecosystem including the State Governments, Industry, Destinations and Tourists to make Travel for LiFE a mass movement.

Travel for LiFE Program will position India as leader in promoting sustainable and responsible tourism and using tourism as a vehicle for achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

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STROKE COULD LEAD TO NEARLY 10 MILLION DEATHS ANNUALLY BY 2050, WARNS REPORT

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

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October 10, 2023 12:44 am | Updated 07:43 am IST - NEW DELHI:

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Stroke, a highly preventable and treatable condition, could lead to nearly 10 million deaths annually by 2050, primarily affecting low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), warns a report published in the *Lancet Neurology* journal on October 9.

The projection comes from the collaborative effort of the World Stroke Organization and the Lancet Neurology Commission under which four studies have been published. The report underscores that stroke deaths are expected to surge from 6.6 million in 2020 to a daunting 9.7 million by 2050. By 2050, it is estimated that the contribution of stroke deaths in LMICs will see an increase from 86% to 91%.

The report has emphasised the critical role of evidence-based, pragmatic solutions in combating this looming crisis and notes that implementing and rigorously monitoring the commission's recommendations, which are firmly grounded in evidence, could lead to a significant reduction in the global stroke burden, effectively countering this ominous projection.

Speaking about India, Dr. Rajiv Bahl, Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), stressed the importance of implementing evidence-based stroke care to mitigate disability and prevent new strokes. He said the council was actively engaged in crafting country-specific ambulatory care models at the primary care level to combat non-communicable diseases.

Meanwhile, the commission authors have presented their findings into 12 evidence-based recommendations, addressing stroke surveillance, prevention, acute care, and rehabilitation. The recommendations include — establishing cost-effective surveillance systems for precise epidemiological stroke data to guide prevention and treatment, elevating public awareness and fostering healthier lifestyles through the widespread utilisation of mobile and digital technologies, including training and awareness and prioritising meticulous planning of acute stroke care services, capacity building, training, provisioning of appropriate equipment, treatment, affordable medicines, and allocating adequate resources.

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MENTAL HEALTH AND THE FLOUNDERING INFORMAL WORKER

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

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October 10, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 12:08 am IST

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'India's informal workforce accounts for more than 90% of the working population' | Photo Credit: SANDEEP SAXENA

The theme of World Mental Health Day (October 10) this year is 'mental health as a universal human right'. A segment often overlooked when it concerns mental health is the informal worker. A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) says that 15% of working-age adults, globally, live with a mental disorder. On one hand, decent work influences mental health in a positive way while on the other, unemployment, or unstable or precarious employment, workplace discrimination, or poor and particularly unsafe working environments, can all pose a risk to a worker's mental health. Workers in low-paid, unrewarding or insecure jobs, or working in isolation, are more likely to be exposed to psychosocial risks, thus compromising their mental health.

India's informal workforce accounts for more than 90% of the working population. These workers often operate without regulatory protection, work in unsafe working environments, endure long hours, have little access to social or financial protections, suffer high uncertainty and deep precarity, and face discrimination — all of which further undermine mental health and limit access to mental health care. Gender disparities are also stark, with over 95% of India's working women engaged in informal, low-paying, and precarious employment, often without social protection, in addition to suffering patriarchal structures and practices in their social and familial spaces.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), unemployment and poor-quality employment have consistently been detrimental to mental health. The Lokniti group within the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, which interviewed 9,316 youth aged between 15 to 34 years across 18 States in India, has shown that they are highly susceptible to negative emotions. Youth unemployment is one of the highest in India which, along with the stigma around unemployment, significantly impacts their mental health. Moreover, an ILO report highlights how young workers are shifting to more precarious and informal work, accepting less pay and poorer working conditions, out of desperation, and, sometimes, giving up and exiting the labour force altogether. The State of Inequality in India Report 2022 observes that the unemployment rate actually increases with educational levels, particularly for educated young women who show an unemployment rate of 42%. With this phase of demographic dividend,

where half of India's population is of working age and projected to remain so for two decades, it is pertinent to think about the quality of employment and long-term social security for them.

India will also become an aging society in 20 years, with no apparent social security road map for this rapidly growing group that is especially vulnerable to poor mental health. The Census of India 2011 shows that 33 million elderly people are working post-retirement in informal work. Another study, by the ILO on elderly employment in India, shows high poverty among them, in terms of economic dependency and access to financial assets. The absence of proper financial and health-care security among the working elderly can severely impact their physical and mental health, aggravating their vulnerability.

Informal workers face mental distress due to accumulating debt and rising health-care costs, which are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. A study by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) among informal workers in Delhi, mostly migrants, indicates that recovery post COVID-19 remains uneven among informal worker cohorts. Many still report food insecurity, skipped meals, or reduced consumption. As observed by the Keshav Desiraju India Mental Health Observatory, mental health and well-being are impacted by factors such as food security, access to livelihood and financial stability. While certain schemes have received a higher allocation this year, others such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) have seen their funding slashed. In 2021, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported that 26% of the people who died by suicide were daily wage earners. Employment guarantee programmes can indeed improve mental health outcomes. Thus, social security can be: promotional, aiming to augment income; preventive, aiming to forestall economic distress and protective, aiming to ensure relief from external shocks.

A relook at the Code on Social Security 2020 shows how glaring issues concerning the social security of India's informal workforce still remain unheeded. While India should universalise social security, the current Code does not state this as a goal.

Informal workers, despite their significant contribution to national income, are perennially exposed to various economic, physical, and mental vulnerabilities. India's budgetary allocation for mental health (currently under 1% of the total health budget) has over-focused on the digital mental health programme. As the World Mental Health Report 2022 observed, addressing mental health involves strengthening community-based care, and people-centred, recovery-oriented and human rights-oriented care. There is an urgent need for proactive policies to improve mental health recognition and action. This is critical in upholding the basic human right to good health, including mental health, and in advancing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 3 on 'good health and well-being' and SDG 8 on 'decent work for all/economic growth'.

Neethi P. is a senior researcher at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru. Her work focuses on the broader themes of urban employment, informality and women's work. The views expressed are personal

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COURSES LAUNCHED BY SASHASTRA SEEMA BAL NOW LIVE ON IGOT KARMAYOGI PLATFORM

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

Karmayogi Bharat, in partnership with Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), launched 12 courses designed to bridge competency gaps and are tailored to needs, and aspirations of officials. The courses will enable a fundamental shift from rule-based to role-based training.

The courses were launched in the presence of Smt Rashmi Shukla, DG-SSB, Shri Mritunjay Kumar Narayan, Additional Secretary, MHA, and Shri Abhishek Singh, CEO of Karmayogi Bharat, on the iGOT Karmayogi platform.

The SSB Capacity Building unit under Shri Paresh Saxena (IG, Training) has developed the courses that are available both in English and in Hindi.

The courses on Pre-hospital protocols in case of a Cardiac arrest, A Simple stretch to stretch your life, Benefits of Cardio-respiratory Endurance Training, Circuit Training, Lower Backache and its prevention and Wound Management are the courses that aim at changing the behaviour of civil services towards a healthy lifestyle.

The courses on Operating Software Installation, EPABX System, Earthing System and Basics of Computer Course for New Entrants will build upon the functional capacities of the learners irrespective of any department they are posted in.

There are also courses to build domain competencies of the Central Armed Police Forces.

iGOT Karmayogi (https://igotkarmayogi.gov.in/), managed, governed, and operated by Karmayogi Bharat-DoPT, is a comprehensive online portal to guide government officials in their capacity building journey. The portal combines 6 functional hubs for online learning, competency management, career management, discussions, events, and networking. More than 24 lakh learners from across the government spectrum are currently registered on the iGOT Platform having access to over 740 courses.

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OF KILLER HOSPITAL TRAGEDIES, AND HANDLING CANCERS AND TUBERCULOSIS

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

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October 10, 2023 12:09 pm | Updated October 11, 2023 01:47 am IST

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As many as 31 deaths, including those of infants, were recorded in 48 hours at a hospital in Nanded, Maharashtra. | Photo Credit: PTI

*(In the weekly **Health Matters** newsletter, **Ramya Kannan** writes about getting to good health, and staying there. You can [subscribe](#) here to get the newsletter in your inbox.)*

It's the absolute stuff of nightmares, the worst kind of horror stories that can happen in what people consider to be a safe haven — a hospital. If the media had not been as busy this week with national and international happenings, what happened in Nanded last week, reminiscent of the now infamous Gorakhpur hospital tragedy of 2017, would have shook the world more than it actually did. [Twenty-four patients, including 12 newborns, lost their lives in 24 hours](#) at Dr. Shankarrao Chavan Government Medical College and Hospital in Nanded town, allegedly due to a lack of medicines and medical help. That soon rose to 31 in 48 hours. **Abhinay Deshpande** also recorded that this followed closely on the heels of a similar incident in Thane, at the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar hospital [where 18 patients died in a single night.](#) The deaths were attributed to a shortage of medicines and medical assistance, exacerbated by inadequate healthcare facilities, a lack of medical staff and a sudden influx of patients from neighbouring districts of Parbhani, Hingoli and Yavatmal. Hospital authorities tried to downplay the severity, as is expected, claiming that many of the deceased were outpatients who were brought to the hospital in a critical condition.

As the political blame game continued, [Chief Minister Eknath Shinde claimed in equal breath that the State was very concerned about the deaths and that the cause was not a lack of facilities or manpower.](#) "Many of the deceased were old people with heart ailments, underweight infants or accident victims," he said.

Of course, since demonstrable action is required on such a tragedy after it was made public, [the dean and paediatrician at the hospital were booked for culpable homicide not amounting to murder](#). A three-member expert committee has been set up to probe the incident. According to police officials, the FIR would be sent to the committee and action would be taken based on its recommendations and police investigation. Even in its aftermath, this resembles closely the horrific Gorakhpur tragedy where over two days, 63 children and 18 adults lost their lives because of lack of oxygen - where one paediatrician Kafeel Khan, who was actually present and helping at the hospital, was made a scapegoat for the government. One can only hope that the

Maharashtra State Government does not indulge in a blame game alone, but will get to the bottom of what caused the tragedy, and ensure that it is never repeated.

On to an update on infectious diseases that occupies our days and nights in this country. Did you know that there is ow a more efficacious, inexpensive malaria vaccine available? **R. Prasad** tells all about the R21/MatrixM malaria vaccine developed by the University of Oxford, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, has been recommended (but is yet to be prequalified) by the WHO on October 2. For more on this vaccine, do read **Adrian Hill's** explainer on why this vaccine should be considered revolutionary.

Winding up the Nipah epidemic in Kozhikode, we have this week, a story on how the isolation period of those on the contact list is finally over; more sensible planning for the future to handle and prevent further outbreaks, a Nipah research centre under the One Health programme is to be set up in Kozhikode (reports **A. S. Jayanth**), and rare praise from the authorities: NCDC hails Kerala for its success in checking Nipah spread.

In a fresh development, Kozhikode also reported African Swine fever, a highly contagious viral infection that has also been caused by a zoonotic spillover, again from the animal kingdom, making that One Health centre thoroughly useful.

Recording updates on the TB shortage situation in the country, here, in our continuing coverage of the problem. Officials in Kerala say they are yet to receive the TB drugs Linezolid and Cycloserine. We had earlier extensively reported on the shortage of TB drugs used to treat multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, though the Centre steadfastly continued to deny that there were shortcomings. The officials added that there have been interruptions in drug supply, but this had become severe in recent months. Meanwhile, in order to restore the order that was disrupted by the shortage, Tamil Nadu grants over 1 crore to district officers for TB drug procurement.

If you wanted to know a little more about the Nobel prize for medicine, here's our edit, Shot in the arm: On the Medicine Nobel 2023, and a couple of opinion pieces: The trouble with a Nobel for mRNA COVID vaccines, by **Vasudevan Mukunth** and How mRNA research exemplifies the unpredictable value of basic research by **Andre O. Hudson.**

With October being Breast Cancer awareness month, cancer coverage naturally took centre stage on our pages. **Bindu Shajan Perappadan**, here writes about the ICMR project to accelerate cancer screening at the district level, a sorely needed intervention. The problem India faces is, thanks to its vast population and the rising incidence of various kinds of cancers, lack of even approximate data as to the number of people with cancers in the country. Data is very important, as we all know, to frame policy and allocate resources towards prevention, care, treatment and palliation, as the case may be.

This raises the question: How accurate are India's cancer registries? **Saumya Kalia** puts forth arguments among experts over the authenticity of registries that are primarily urban based, and not comprehensive.

Serena Josephine M. also speaks to experts who say that the government of India 'needs to prioritise childhood cancers'.

World Mental Health Day falls today (October 10) and there are serious concerns ahead for the country that has a burgeoning grey population, say experts. In 'Preparing for the grey era: elder mental heath care comes into prominence', **Sridhar Vaitheeswaran** and **R. Thara** of the Schizophrenia Research Foundation argue: There are more older people on the globe now than

ever before in the history of humanity. In 2022, the number above 60 was 1.1 billion, comprising 13.9 % of the population. By 2050, the number of older people is expected to increase to 2.1 billion, constituting 22%. India is not far behind. It had 149 million older adults (10.5%) in 2022, this figure will grow to 347 million (20.8%) by 2050 according to projections. It is very important to take care of elders, anticipating the multiple mental health care needs that are awaiting the future.

Around one crore people suffer from severe mental health problems in India, say psychiatrists, and that is a staggering number. But it is not just the elderly who require mental health care: India needs youth mental health focus to strike demographic gold, say **Smriti Shalini** and **M. Sivakami**

In these times of great distress, global, national and local, here is a heartwarming piece recognising true altruism. Our tailpiece today is on the Tamil Nadu Government recently ordered that the State would honour those brain-dead patients whose organs are donated for transplantation. The Organ Donor honour walk is popular in the west, as the donor is being transported to the theatre, hospital staff, friends and family members of the patient/recipient line the hallway and raise an applause for the ultimate sacrifice. In the State, now district collectors will honour the mortal remains of organ donors.

This time, we have another story that we must wedge in here, simply because it is inspirational: **Siddharth Kumar Singh** writes about how Dr. Prachi Rathore smashes stereotypes, becomes India's first transgender person to pursue MS Orthopaedics.

Those extra moments you have today, do save them for our health stories below:

Scientists develop enzyme mimetic with potential applications in wastewater treatment, healthcare.

Surgical care in India is a neglected part of public health, an explainer by **Siddesh Zadey**.

Government mandates Aadhaar for disability IDs; activists say mechanism inaccurate, records **Abhinay Lakshman.**

Definite cause for concern: Batches of India-manufactured syrups for cough found contaminated, says CDSCO.

Arun Gupta writes on defusing the ticking time bomb called diabetes.

Cannabis in India: Does the law need to catch up with reality? Listen to this In Focus podcast where **Zubeda Hamid** speaks to **Tripti Tandon.**

The need to improve the compatibility of pig organs for transplantation into humans.

India's all-terrain portable disaster hospital is ready to be shared with the world. The unit can handle bullet, burns, head, spinal and chest injuries, fractures and major bleeding and is billed as the world's first portable disaster hospital.

For a smattering of our regional content on health, see below:

Widowed by COVID-19, wounded by apathy, writes **P. Sujatha Varma.**

Health Department directs all hospitals to provide free Anti-Rabies Vaccine and Rabies

Immunoglobulin injection to bite victims.

Private hospitals are now required to mandatorily upload disease surveillance data on government portals, reports **Afshan Yasmeen.**

Non-communicable diseases burden on a steady rise in people aged above 30 in Karnataka, shows data.

Kerala government launches nutrition project to eliminate neonatal deaths in Attappady.

High Court directs top officials to enumerate vacant doctors' posts in Maharashtra hospitals.

After a surge during pandemic, maternal mortality ratio fell sharply last year in Tamil Nadu.

7.70 lakh families added to Chief Minister's comprehensive health insurance scheme, says Tamil Nadu Health Minister.

Hyderabad's booming healthcare industry strains under heavy patient traffic.

Telangana government brings in Employee Health Care Trust.

As always, do put us on your radar, as we bring more health content your way. Get more of *The Hindu's* health coverage here.

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PAN-INDIA CAMPAIGN ON AYURVEDA MOOTED

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

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October 10, 2023 03:59 pm | Updated October 11, 2023 01:59 am IST - NEW DELHI

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Picture for representation. | Photo Credit: AFP

 The Ayush Ministry is all set to undertake a pan-India sensitise drive for students, farmers and the public on Ayurveda, said the Union Minister of Ayush Sarbananda Sonowal on Tuesday, while unveiling the month-long celebration drive to mark the 8th National Ayurveda Day-2023 with the focal theme 'Ayurveda for One Health' .

This year, the 8th Ayurveda day will be observed on November 10 and is aimed at generating awareness among people about health issues as well as the potential role of Ayurveda in their prevention and treatment.

The Minister said that the theme this year had been selected with focus on promoting Agro-Ayurveda, promoting health by empowering and encouraging people for self-participation, and enthusing professionals for harnessing the potential of Ayurveda.

"It involves a spectrum of areas focusing on sustainable agriculture, human, animal, plant, forest, and aquaculture health, food safety, etc. The theme is focused on three main fields: Ayurveda for Farmers, Ayurveda for Students and Ayurveda for Public," noted Secretary Ayush, Rajesh Kotecha.

He added that a total of 12,500 Ayush Health & Wellness Centres had been approved under National Ayush Mission, out of which 8,095 were already operational.

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WOMEN WANT CHANGE, SOCIETY NEEDS CHANGE

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Women Issues

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October 11, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 01:20 am IST

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'Across the world, women are appreciated by society in supportive and emotional roles, but very seldom in leadership roles' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

The 17th edition of the Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum (published on June 20, 2023), based on data from 146 countries, has concluded that at the current rate of progress, it will take 131 years to close the global gender gap; it is 149 years in populous South Asian countries including India.

Reservation is the most effective form of affirmative action and equity is the first step to equality. That it leads to inefficiency or incompetency is simply making excuses for not rendering tightly guarded spaces to ousted classes. I strongly contend that women are not inferior to men. Incompetencies, even if they arise, are short term, and are removed soon after opportunity for skill building is made available.

A very astute person once asked me whether we want women to fight women. The answer is 'no'. What women want is a level playing field where the factor of gender which is completely irrelevant but looms large, is removed from the equation.

Editorial | Bridging the gap: On India and Gender Gap Report

The basic premise of advocates against reservation is that it will bring down competence. Alas, this is a completely misplaced notion as statistics show that women perform much better than men in academics, more women graduate from colleges than men, and more women enter the workforce than men. In contrast to this trend, the number of women sharply spirals downwards in leadership positions not because of their incompetence, but because of the hegemony of men.

The inauguration of parliamentary business in September 2023 in the new Parliament building also gave a fresh start to the aspirations of Indian citizens with the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill. After much delay, the Constitution (One Hundred Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023, popularly known as the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023 became a rare piece of legislation in independent India to be cleared overwhelmingly by both Houses. It is indeed a ground-breaking event. While India's founding fathers ensured that India was early to adopt universal adult suffrage, the role of women in shaping the country's political future still remains minimal.

Global trends exhibit a sharp reduction in the age of political leaders. But can a common Indian woman, just by her commitment and ambition, dream of becoming the Prime Minister of India at the age of 37 — like Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand?

Across the world, women are appreciated by society in supportive and emotional roles, but very seldom in leadership roles. The world hates and denigrates ambitious women. Take, for example, the case of Hillary Clinton. There is not an iota of doubt that her political experience and acumen trumped Donald Trump's competencies. However, America, the world's so-called top democracy, chose an inexperienced Mr. Trump over her to lead them.

Historical evidence points out that but for a few Taleb's black swans, all women who have assumed leadership roles did not get there by sheer industry, competence and intelligence. They were allowed only for the convenience of men who were disqualified from assuming these positions, or, if it served some political agenda. In the Indian political arena women leaders were, most often, convenient choices. Their initial acceptance was the perception that they could be conveniently removed, but their inherent acumen belied those designs.

Historical evidence also shows that most women who make it to leadership positions have a mix of privileges — of higher education, the support of influential mentors or families, or belong to upper classes or castes. If there is a survey, I am sure that the figures will show that the percentage of women legislators who have had university and higher education is almost cent per cent, versus such a percentage of male legislators.

Despite these privileges, women also take longer to assume leadership positions. Even Indira Gandhi, who had the highest elitist advantage and was politically active from an early age, was not fielded as the Prime Minister on Jawaharlal Nehru's death in 1964, and had to wait till Shastri's death in 1966 to assume the prime ministerial role. Rajiv Gandhi, on the other hand, by virtue of being the son, and even though not politically active earlier, was immediately fielded after Mrs Gandhi's assassination. The question thus is, whether an Indian woman shorn of nepotistic advantages can be in a top leadership position in good time.

The deepest cut is that the handful of privileged women who assume leadership are not supportive or empathetic to the aspirations of those women who do not even have access to basic needs such as nutrition, education and financial independence. They reel under the misconception that they have become leaders by virtue of their own efforts and sacrifices, ignoring the personal advantages they possess.

The archives bear testimony to this attitude. During the Round Table Conference held in the 1930s in London, a letter was written on November 16, 1931 by Sarojini Naidu and Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz presenting a joint manifesto by the All India Women's Conference, the Women's Indian Association, and the Central Committee of the National Council of Women in India. They demanded neither discriminatory nor favourable treatment on the basis of gender in legislative representation, thereby rejecting reservation. Incidentally, Sarojini Naidu had the advantage of being educated at the King's College London and Cambridge with a scholarship from the Nizam of Hyderabad.

Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz, a Muslim League member, on the other hand advocated, along with Radhabai Subbarayan, a minuscule five per cent reservation for women. While Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz studied at Queen Mary's College, Lahore, Radhabai Subbarayan had the privilege of attending Somerville College, Oxford. Both the women were from elite backgrounds, affluent families and upper classes.

Thus, the biggest block is the regressive views on gender equality held by men and women.

This has been seen even in otherwise progressive men as seen when C. Rajagopalachari opposed Radhabai Subbarayan's choice to fight from a general seat.

Mulayam Singh's accusation in Parliament in 2010, that the previous avatar of the women's reservation Bill would only champion the cause of educated, urban and elite women, failed to recognise that the core objective of the Bill was to create space for women who did not have the good fortune of belonging to privileged and elite classes. A report in the leading daily said that political analysts felt — and rightly so — that the stand of Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad Yadav did not stem from their concern for women, but because "it would reduce the space for men who dominate elections in our patriarchal society".

Why do women have to wait so long to close the gender gap? The present Bill is the first step towards actualising gender parity. One only wishes that its implementation would be based on a readjustment of seats on the basis of the 1991 Census, as it is done in the case of Scheduled Caste seats by the Delimitation Commission, rather than waiting for the delimitation exercise pegged on the next Census, whenever it is held.

It is time to quickly set right historical wrongs. Women want change. Society needs change. And there is no reason why it should be late.

Vibha Datta Makhija is Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India

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WE NEED EVIDENCE-BASED TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

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

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October 11, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 01:07 am IST

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'The physiological basis of Ayurveda is not sound, but that does not ipso facto mean that its therapies are not sound either' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

The case filed by a manufacturer of indigenous drugs against a medical practitioner on the grounds that his social media thread affected their business has become a cause celebrè in medical circles.

Without going into the specifics of this particular case, let us examine certain general aspects. What is the position of traditional medicine in a modern world? What is evidence-based medicine? How does one evaluate a therapy and what steps, if any, should governments take to ensure the health of the population?

It is a fact that irrespective of the advances of modern medicine, several systems which lay claim to healing, and which all fall under the broad category of alternative medicine, exist. Certain systems such as Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha have their own pharmacopeia in India.

It is important to note here that modern medicine is not allopathy (which means "opposed to symptoms"), a term coined by Hahnemann in the 18th century, and used pejoratively, to differentiate it from his newly invented system, homeopathy. Modern medicine really became science-based only from the late 19th century when advances in technology made not only the study of the functioning of the human body in health and disease more accurate, but also led to safe anaesthesia and surgery. Later, this process led to marvels such as dialysis for kidney failure and the heart-lung machine which made surgery on the heart a daily affair.

The development of scientific thought in the 20th century, including the Popperian idea of falsifiability, led to advances in evaluating medical therapies. Subjected to the methods of modern science, which are continually being refined, many therapies were found to be ineffective and abandoned. This is the strength of the modern method, the recognition that science continually advances and self-corrects. Modern medicine is western only geographically and not epistemically. Modern medicine, a part of modern science, tests every new therapy and accepts it into the canon if found effective. Due to the greater scientific capabilities of the West, which are a result of their richer economies and the post-renaissance historical realities, a great part of modern technology has been developed there, but it is false to think that there is anything epistemically "western" about it. One of the great triumphs of the post-World War II phase of human civilisation is the greater and quicker flow of ideas across the world.

The physiological basis of Ayurveda is not sound, but that does not ipso facto mean that its therapies are not sound either. Like many traditional medical systems everywhere, Ayurveda was constrained in its understanding of how the human body works by the lack of available technology. However, the Ayurveda classics were constant in their emphasis on the need to base diagnoses and therapies on a sound understanding of the human body. A reason-based world view is what differentiates Ayurveda epistemologically from the erstwhile faith-based forms of the Atharva Veda. Proponents of Ayurveda who claim that everything was already known to the ancient people do it a great disservice and stultify its growth and development. One of the greatest triumphs of modern epistemology is its ability to synthesise ideas from across the world to build a coherent system of how the world functions. This is an ongoing process, subject to corrections and improvements as thought and technology improve, building on past knowledge.

In modern drug development, the commonly used method is to isolate the active principle. Thus, most modern medicines are single ingredient and only a few are combinations. Also, the exact amount of the active principle is carefully calculated. Ayurvedic medicines are commonly combinations, and it is uncertain how these combinations interact with each other. It would increase the acceptability of Ayurvedic medicines in the scientific community if they were evaluated by the methods of modern science in a way that does not compromise with the wholeness of Ayurvedic formulations. New investigational methods and trial designs which can evaluate Ayurvedic therapies without undermining the classical bases of administering them must be worked out. The Ministry of AYUSH must facilitate this.

The purpose of government policy is to make life better for the people. The health of the people should not be hostage to false ideas of nationalism. The aim should be to carry out an evidence-based appraisal of all traditional medical systems, retain and develop what is useful, and integrate them into one cogent system of medicine available to all.

A few individuals do a disservice to the cause of evidence-based medicine by denouncing traditional medical systems wholesale. Science requires open-mindedness disciplined by scepticism. Denouncing traditional systems in toto would result is a hasty dismissal of valuable medical experience that has undergone repeated, albeit informal, verifications at the hands of generations of practitioners. Ignoring such time-honoured knowledge bases in the name of science is a disservice to the scientific attitude as also to the cultural achievements of yore. It must be remembered that the Nobel-winning anti-malarial artemisinin was synthesised thanks to investigators who were open-minded enough to take cues from a 1,600-year-old text of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

George Thomas is an orthopaedic surgeon and former editor of **The Indian Journal of Medical Ethics***; G. L. Krishna, an ayurveda physician, is a Homi Bhabha Fellow and a visiting scholar at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru*

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TELE MANAS SEVA, LAUNCHED LAST YEAR ON WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY, HAS COUNSELLED MORE THAN 3,50,000 PEOPLE TILL DATE: MINISTER

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October 10, 2023 07:15 pm | Updated 07:16 pm IST - NEW DELHI:

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Staff attends to calls at the Tele MANAS, a tele-mental healthcare service centre. File | Photo Credit: K.V.S. Giri

The Tele Manas Seva, launched last year on the occasion of World Mental Health Day, has counselled more than 3,50,000 people till date and currently provides counselling to 2,000 people through 44 Tele Manas Cells. More than 1,000 calls are being received on this helpline every day, said Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya at the National Mental Health Conclave organised to mark World Mental Health Day here on Tuesday. The Minister also virtually inaugurated new facilities at NIMHANS and launched the logo of Tele-MANAS.

 "Ayushman Bharat health and wellness centres have facilitated the integration of mental health services with primary health services as priority services for mental health, neurological disorders and substance use disorders. Now to improve coverage and access to mental health care, district-level activities have been supported under the National Mental Health Programme in 743 districts across all 36 States/union territories," added the Minister.

On the occasion, the Minister congratulated the States on their performance, and States/union territories were awarded certificates of appreciation with memento for achieving the highest number of calls in the National Tele Mental Health Programme. Ranking from first to third, in the larger States category, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh were awarded. Whereas, Telangana, Jharkhand, and Kerala were awarded for their performance in the smaller States category. In the northeast category, Assam, Mizoram and Manipur received awards, and Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu were awarded in the union territories category.

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mental illness / national government

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UN SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM IS A SONG IN A LOOP

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

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October 12, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 02:09 am IST

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The UN Security Council holding a ministerial level meeting on the crisis in Ukraine at the UN headquarters in New York, in September, 2023 | Photo Credit: REUTERS

More than three decades after the debate first started over fundamental reforms at the United Nations (UN), the issue appears to have resurfaced at the ongoing General Assembly session of the world body. President Recep Tayyip Erdoan of Türkiye was blunt: "The Security Council has ceased to be the guarantor of world security and has become a battleground for the political strategies of only five countries." Even the UN's Secretary-General, António Guterres, issued a stern warning: "The world has changed. Our institutions have not. We cannot effectively address problems as they are if institutions do not reflect the world as it is. Instead of solving problems, they risk becoming part of the problem."

It could not have been put more bluntly, but we have heard this song before. Politically, it is untenable that the five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) enjoy their position, and the privilege of a veto over any Council resolution or decision, merely by virtue of having won a war 76 years ago. In the case of China, the word 'won' needs to be placed within inverted commas.

I was serving at the UN when then-Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali declared that Security Council reform must be accomplished in time for the 50th anniversary of the world organisation in 1995. But even as the urgent rhetoric continues to be spoken, the organisation has missed not only the 50th anniversary of the UN, but even the 60th, the 70th and now the 75th. Left to their own devices, member-states will be arguing the merits of the case well past the UN's centenary.

The problem of reforming the Security Council is akin to a malady in which a number of doctors gather around a patient; they all agree on the diagnosis but they cannot agree on the prescription. The diagnosis is clear — the Security Council reflects the geopolitical realities of 1945 and not of today. When the UN was founded in 1945, the Council consisted of 11 members out of a total UN membership of 51 countries; in other words, some 22% of the member states were on the Security Council.

Today, there are 193 member-states of the UN, and only 15 members of the Council — fewer

than 8%. The one change ever made to the original Charter was in 1965 when the Security Council was expanded from 11 members to 15 by adding four more elected non-permanent members. So, many more countries, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the membership, do not feel adequately represented on the body. The composition of the Council also gives undue weightage to the balance of power of those days. Europe, for instance, which accounts for barely 5% of the world's population, still controls 33% of the seats in any given year (and that does not count Russia, another European power).

In terms of simple considerations of equity, this situation is unjust: for starters, to those countries whose financial contributions to the UN outweigh those of four of the five permanent members — Japan and Germany have for decades been the second and third largest contributors to the UN budget, while still being referred to as 'enemy states' in the United Nations Charter (since the UN was set up by the victorious Allies of the Second World War). And it denies opportunities to other states such as India, which by its sheer size of population, share of the world economy, or contributions in kind to the UN (through participation in peacekeeping operations, for example) have helped shape the evolution of world affairs in the seven decades since the organisation was born.

So, the Security Council is clearly ripe for reform to bring it into the second quarter of the 21st century. But for every state that feels it deserves a place on the Security Council, and especially the handful of countries which believe their status in the world ought to be recognised as being in no way inferior to at least three of the existing permanent members, there are several who know they will not benefit from any reform. The small countries that make up more than half the UN's membership accept that reality and are content to compete occasionally for a two-year non-permanent seat on the Council. But the medium-sized and large countries, which are the rivals of the prospective beneficiaries, deeply resent the prospect of a select few breaking free of their current second-rank status in the world body. Many are openly animated by a spirit of competition, historical grievance or simple envy. They have successfully and indefinitely thwarted reform of the membership of the Security Council.

Part of the problem is that the bar to amending the UN Charter has been set rather high. Any amendment requires a two-thirds majority of the overall membership, in other words 129 of the 193 states in the General Assembly, and would further have to be ratified by two-thirds of the member states. Ratification is usually a parliamentary procedure, so, in other words, the only 'prescription' that has any chance of passing is one that will both persuade two-thirds of the UN member-states to support it and not attract the opposition of any of the existing permanent five — or even that of a powerful U.S. Senator who could block ratification in Washington.

That has proved to be a tall order indeed. India's credentials may seem obvious to us, but China is none too keen on diluting its status as the only Asian permanent member; Pakistan, which fancies itself as India's strategic rival on the subcontinent, is unalterably opposed; and to some extent Indonesia seems to feel diminished by the prospect of an Indian seat. In Latin America, Brazil occupies a place analogous to India's in Asia, but Argentina and Mexico have other ideas, pointing to Portuguese-speaking Brazil's inferior credentials in representing largely Hispanic Latin America. And while Africa, given that it accounts for 54 member-states, insists on two permanent seats, how is one to adjudicate the rival credentials of the continent's largest democracy, Nigeria, its historically largest economy, South Africa, and its oldest civilization, Egypt? Another proposal suggests creating a second category of "semi-permanent members" to accommodate such states for, say, 10-year electable terms. It has found no takers among the principal aspirants.

So, while the debate keeps going round in circles for decades, gridlock continues in the Security Council, as most vividly illustrated recently over the Ukraine conflict, when a Permanent Member

of the Security Council invaded a sovereign UN member-state and the Council proved powerless to respond. Russia's increasing resort to the veto has blocked resolutions on Ukraine, Mali, Syria and North Korea. Similar obstructionism by the West has affected proposals to reform the financial institutions established at Bretton Woods in 1944, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. And yet this is the only global system we have got that brings all countries together on a common platform. Can we afford to let it fade into ineffectiveness and irrelevance?

Shashi Tharoor is a third-term Member of Parliament (Congress) and former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, former chair of the External Affairs Committee of Parliament and author of 25 books including 'Pax Indica' and (with Samir Saran) 'The New World Disorder'

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In a research paper that Claudia Goldin co-authored years ago, this year's Nobel laureate in Economics documented how pay for women in major US symphony orchestras rose after so-called 'blind' auditions were introduced in the 1980s, where musicians seeking a job performed behind a screen. In a paper just this month, Goldin's keen eye for revealing details prompted her to compare how many references there were in newspapers of the 1960s to equal rights legislation with a count of references to "hot coffee" and "ice cream cones."

Goldin's new paper, titled 'Why Women Won,' documents how prohibitions against sex discrimination were sometimes fortuitously inserted into important civil rights legislation in the early 1960s to give African-Americans equal rights. And in a case of art predicting real-life events—and her writing is artistic and moving—she won the Nobel Prize in Economics days after that paper was published, only the third woman to do so.

Removing discrimination against women and minorities boosts economies, lends diversity to workplaces and corrects historical injustices. Often overlooked in our triumphalist narrative on digital inclusion is India's low workforce participation rate for women and how this rules out an East Asian-style development trajectory.

Goldin's genius has been to make us think harder about these issues. It is often difficult to isolate where workplace discrimination has been a dominant factor and where bad luck has been. Both dogged the career of Katalin Kariko, who won this year's Nobel for medicine with Drew Weissman for research on messenger RNA that led to a successful vaccine against covid. For decades, Kariko moved from one academic job to another without getting tenure as a professor. Her husband calculated that her long workdays meant she was earning a dollar an hour. A New York Times profile of her in 2021 moved me to tears because her dedication is so admirable, but also because it went unrewarded for so long.

Goldin is clear-eyed about the progress women have made as well as the challenges ahead. In 'Why Women Won,' she writes, "Men and women still differ along a host of outcomes in the labour market, workplace, and home. But they differ far less in terms of the formal legal rights accorded them and in outcomes than before the 1960s." Her research shows that women in the US earn on average four-fifths of what similarly qualified men do in equivalent jobs.

It is Goldin's journey through history that reminds us how far the developed world has come. It was civil rights legislation of the 1960s that gave women's rights a collateral boost. "The use of the phrase 'sex discrimination' (or 'gender discrimination') indicates an awareness that women's rights in the workplace, credit markets, housing, the court system, and marriage were restricted, in a similar manner to the way those for Blacks were." But even after that milestone, Goldin points out a contradiction at the time by multiple liberal judges who ruled repeatedly that women should not serve on juries because they were the "centre of home and family life." Back then, companies expected pregnant women to resign their jobs.

In Career and Family: Women's Century Long Journey to Equity, Goldin examines a current contradiction: Even though the proportion of 25-year-old women who are graduates is considerably higher than men in the US (45% versus 36%), a decade or so into their careers, men start to earn significantly more, especially in high-paying professions such as finance and law. She describes these as "greedy" workplaces that demand that employees who want to be promoted put in long hours and work weekends. Working women, faced with this "time bind"

because of responsibilities at home, opt for smaller firms or roles so that they can respond should a day-care centre close early, for example. Along with discrimination, the unequal sharing of child-raising duties is still a primary cause for gender pay disparity. Her brilliant insight is twofold: Gender inequality begins at home because it is almost always the working mother who is 'on call' and employers need to rethink the burden they put on their employees' quality of life. Younger employees value a better balance.

Reading Goldin's work this week, I was uncomfortably reminded that in my pre-teen years, I did not think twice about calling my mother, who headed a mid-sized non-governmental organization, at work to demand she intervene in some childish fight with my eldest brother. My first boss in New York was a working mother who celebrated promotions and farewells with fancy lunches. Fifteen years later, I was picked for a job in London by a charismatic editor who happened to be the mother of three sons—as my mother was. I idolized both because of their feisty humour, but also their broad conception of work-life, which empathetically included the needs of a single man journeying back to India for more than a month every year to see his parents. Decades on, my eyes light up when I receive an email from them.

While seeking to draw more women into economics, Goldin discovered that women entering college were often turned off by the discipline because they saw it as more about numbers than people, while men often viewed it as a route to finance. It is because so many women managers, and indeed Goldin herself, see employees as people first that the work world is a much better place today.

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INDIA ALLOWS COUGH SYRUP FIRM LINKED TO UZBEK DEATHS TO RE-OPEN FACTORY, SHOWS DOCUMENT

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

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October 11, 2023 05:05 pm | Updated 07:10 pm IST

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Police is seen at the gate of an office of Marion Biotech, a healthcare and pharmaceutical company in Noida on December 29, 2022. | Photo Credit: Reuters

Uttar Pradesh has permitted the resumption of most production at a factory owned by [Marion Biotech, which produced cough syrups Uzbekistan linked to the deaths of 65 children] last year, an order seen by *Reuters* shows.

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The firm is among three Indian companies whose cough syrups the World Health Organization (WHO) and other agencies have linked to the deaths of 141 children in Uzbekistan, [Gambia] and Cameroon, in one of the world's worst such waves of poisoning.

"There is no known case of a lack of quality in other medicines manufactured by the firm," the drug controller of the State where Marion is based, and [which cancelled the firm's licence in March], said in the most recent order.

"The appeal of the manufacturing firm is partially accepted," the official, Shashi Mohan Gupta, said in the September 14 order.

"Its permission to make products using propylene glycol (PG) is cancelled, and it is allowed to make and sell all other products."

Mr. Gupta declined to comment on the letter.

On Wednesday, he told *Reuters* that India's Controller General of Drugs, Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, had written to Marion Biotech to initiate a plan of corrective and preventive actions by the company.

Mr. Raghuvanshi and the company did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The [Marion factory in Uttar Pradesh was closed in March], after an analysis last year by

Uzbekistan's Health Ministry of two cough syrups made by Marion, Ambronol and DOK-1 Max.

It showed they contained unacceptable amounts of toxins diethylene glycol (DEG) and ethylene glycol (EG), which are usually used in products not meant for human consumption.

Tests in January by an Indian government laboratory found 22 samples of Marion-made syrups were "adulterated and spurious," the country's drug controller said in March.

India's pharmaceuticals department told the parliament that tests had also shown that a sample of propylene glycol (PG), an ingredient of cough syrups taken from Marion's factory contained EG.

After the company appealed to the State Government against the decision, it was allowed to resume output on August 11 of all products not containing PG, the September 14 order shows.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, two other sources with knowledge of the matter told *Reuters* that the Marion factory remains closed for now, pending an inspection and a review of its paperwork.

Reuters has reported that DEG and EG have been used by unscrupulous actors as a substitute for propylene glycol because they are cheaper.

In June, the WHO told *Reuters* its working theory was that in 2021, when prices of propylene glycol spiked, one or more suppliers mixed the cheaper toxic liquids with the legitimate chemical.

Uzbek state prosecutors told a court in Tashkent that distributors of the contaminated Marion syrups paid officials a bribe of $33,000 (about 27 lakh) to skip mandatory testing there.

Uzbekistan has put on trial 21 people - 20 Uzbeks and one Indian - for the deaths.

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CABINET APPROVES ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AUTONOMOUS BODY MERA YUVA BHARAT

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

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved establishment of an autonomous body Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) to serve as an overarching enabling mechanism powered by technology for youth development and youth led development and provide equitable access to youth to actualize their aspirations and build Viksit Bharat across the entire spectrum of the Government.

Impact:

The primary objective of Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) is to make it a whole of Government platform for youth development. Under the new arrangement, with access to resources & connection to opportunities, youth would become community change agents and nation builders allowing them to act as the Yuva Setu between the Government and the citizens. It seeks to harness the immense youth energy for nation-building.

Details:

Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat), an autonomous body will benefit the youth in the age-group of 15-29 years, in line with the definition of 'Youth' in the National Youth Policy. In case of programme components specifically meant for the adolescents, the beneficiaries will be in the age-group of 10-19 years.

The establishment of Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) would lead to:

Background:

**   With a view to engage youth and their empowerment guided by the principles of 'whole of government approach', in a rapidly changing world, which has an environment of high velocity communications, social media, new digital opportunities and emergent technologies the Government has decided to establish overarching enabling mechanism in a form of a new Autonomous Body, namely Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat).**

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CERT-IN ISSUES ALERT FOR NOESCAPE RANSOMWARE

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

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October 11, 2023 02:15 pm | Updated 02:15 pm IST

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The Avaddon encryptor utilized AES for file encryption, with NoEscape switching to the Salsa20 algorithm. | Photo Credit: Reuters

Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) issued an alert for NoEscape ransomware which is believed to be a rebrand of Avaddon, a ransomware gang that shut down and releases its decryption keys in 2021. The Avaddon ransomware gang used phishing campaigns to target corporate victims.

NoEscape and Avaddon's ransomware encryptors are almost identical, with only one notable change in their encryption algorithm, CERT-In said in a post.

The Avaddon encryptor utilized AES for file encryption, with NoEscape switching to the Salsa20 algorithm.

The NoEscape ransomware is similarly targeting enterprises in double extortion attacks. As part of the attacks, the threat actors steal data and encrypt files on Windows, Linux, and VMware ESXi servers.

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Cybercriminals then threaten to release stolen data if a ransom is not paid, with reported demands ranging between hundreds of thousands of dollars to over $10 million.

Upen infection the NoEscape ransomware runs a number of commands to delete Windows Shadow Volume, Local Windows backup catalogs, and to turn off Windows automatic repair.

The encryptor then begins terminating processes associated with security software, backup applications, web and database servers.

The ransomware also changes the Windows wallpaper to an image telling victims they can find instructions in the ransomware notes named "How to recover files.txt". The note contains a "personal ID" required to log in to the threat actor's Tor payment site and access the victim's unique negotiation page. Threat actors demand ransom amount to be paid in bitcoins

This page includes the ransom amount in bitcoins, a test decryption feature, and a chat panel to negotiate with the threat actors.

The NoEscape ransomware can also spread laterally to other devices after breaching a corporate network and deploy the ransomware throughout the network.

CERT-In has advised users to maintain offline backups of data, encrypt backups, implement multi-factor–authentication for all services among other measures to avoid falling victim to the ransomware.

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SHOULD THE 50 % LEGAL CEILING ON RESERVATION BE RECONSIDERED?

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

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October 13, 2023 01:02 am | Updated 05:06 am IST

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Staff collect information from residents for the Bihar caste survey, in Patna. | Photo Credit: PTI

On October 2, the Bihar government released the data of its caste survey. The data showed that the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) together account for about 84% of the population. This has reopened the debate on whether the 50% legal ceiling on caste-based reservation should be removed. **Kalaiyarasan A.** and **Alok Prasanna** discuss this question in a conversation moderated by **Pon Vasanth B.A.**. Excerpts:

Do you think the initial findings of the Bihar caste survey has necessitated the reconsidering of the ceiling of 50% on reservation set by the Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney case in 1992?

Kalaiyarasan A.: The breaching of the 50% ceiling looks like an inevitable historical process. Many political scientists and sociologists view the 50% ceiling as arbitrary because the judiciary did not have numbers to back that cap. For all practical purposes, some States have already breached this. Tamil Nadu provides 69% reservation through a 1994 law, which it has protected from judicial review by getting it placed under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. More so, the [10%] reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections [EWS] brought in by the Central government [in 2019], has, in a way, already breached the 50% ceiling.

Explained | **The impact of the Bihar caste survey**

Alok Prasanna: The 50% ceiling came out of nowhere; basically, in one judgment [*M.R. Balaji*, 1962], the court said maybe there has to be some limit. Then, in *T. Devadasan*, it extended the limit to government jobs as well and said that it did not want to take away equality of opportunity, guaranteed under the Constitution. Later, in the *N.M. Thomas* case (1976), the judiciary had a rethink. The Supreme Court found the 50% [ceiling] unreasoned and pushed back against it. States such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu thought that they could provide more reservation. However, the bigger push back came in the Mandal case [*Indra Sawhney*] where the judiciary essentially elevated the principle [50% limit] almost to a status of a fundamental right. Even in the EWS judgement, which has huge problems of its own, the Supreme Court said it may be okay with 10% for EWS, but that shouldn't mean that it is okay to go beyond 50% for caste-based reservation. The judiciary is, however, not able to defend this in a principled way. One big State, such as Bihar, has to take the lead and dare the Court with the information it has and a

litigation strategy. Are we willing to ask the Court to reconsider its judgment in the *Indra Sawhney* case? This is not difficult or impossible per se. But the political moment has to be right.

Bihar has only released the caste-wise count of its population, not the socio-economic data yet. There have been debates about the extent of backwardness of castes within the OBC classification. There have been demands from a few communities for inclusion into the OBC, SC or ST categories. Will the release of socio-economic data lead to demands for the reconfiguration of these categories?

Kalaiyarasan A: OBC is an administrative category and not a caste category. There are heterogenous castes grouped under what we call OBCs. There is a risk of the landed and locally dominant communities taking more advantage. So, sub-categorisation of communities which do not have enough representation will become necessary. Bihar has the Extreme Backward Classes category and Tamil Nadu, the Most Backward Classes category. The process of sub-categorisation will be inevitable not just for political reasons, but for reasons of right to representation and for addressing backwardness.

Also read | **Supreme Court judgment on EWS quota provides impetus for States looking to breach quota ceiling**

Alok Prasanna: In the 1980s in Karnataka, the Venkataswamy Commission's report caused a huge controversy because the Vokkaligas and Lingayats were found to be much better off than most other backward castes. In the present context, in the *Jaishri Laxmanrao Patil* case [where reservation for the Marathas was struck down], the Supreme Court said Marathas are as well off as any other "upper" castes.

This leads us to a conceptual problem. Unlike SCs and STs, there is no clear way of defining the OBCs. The Constitution says OBCs are "socially and economically backward classes (SEBCs)". We are saying let's look at data. But the data are useful when you have some idea of what you're looking for. For instance, if the number of government jobs is a factor, a lot of "advanced OBCs" will not be eligible for reservation. Just by setting a barrier and saying that everybody who is below is a SEBC may have led us to this position, where certain castes have actually taken the big chunk [of the benefits of reservation]. Therefore, sub-categorisation is necessary, but it can only happen when there is some serious conceptual jurisprudential rethinking of who belongs to a social and educationally backward class.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has raised the slogan of "*jitni abadi utna haq* (representation according to the population")". Will a caste census lead to individual caste groups demanding separate reservations, depending on their numbers? What will be the implications of such demands?

Alok Prasanna: The BJP government in Karnataka, just before the [2023 Assembly] elections, tried to do a sub-categorisation within the SCs. There was such a strong political reaction to it that the 'most well off' among the SC communities, who had started to support the BJP, attacked B.S. Yediyurappa's house. Sub-categorisation is a zero-sum game. The BJP thought it would get the less well off SCs on its side. However, it ended up losing the support of the 'better off' SCs.

Also read | **We will remove the cap of 50% on reservation through legislation: Congress**

Also, if there is sub-categorisation, it will also open up the question of whether some castes should even be on the list. It could get subsumed in a political tug of war and may not necessarily lead to the most optimal solution in the context of ensuring representation.

Kalaiyarasan A: I'm not sure Mr. Gandhi used it in the sense of essentially translating it into reservation according to the population. The question he is raising is that there is some kind of group-based deprivation. The slogan does not mean dividing castes at a granular level, but grouping together sets of castes which are similarly positioned, to make a group-based representation or policy response to address the deprivation. Obviously, there is a risk that political parties or caste groups will take the slogan to mean specific caste-based mobilisation. We need to remember that caste is always divisive. Whether addressing group-based deprivation will lead to caste-based mobilisation is something we need to be mindful of. But it need not that way. We can simultaneously address caste-based deprivation while stopping caste-based mobilisation.

Some are concerned that a caste census will lead to further accentuation of caste identities and a fragmented polity.

Alok Prasanna: In one sense, there is validity in that criticism, but it is also not something to say to not do something [caste-based survey]. The reason is, these identities are there. It's just that the administrative state is not officially recording them. But I feel that there is something that the discourse on reservation is missing. There are two larger forces at play. One is the privatisation of the state. The state is outsourcing a lot of its work to private entities, which are not particularly going to be bound by obligations relating to caste or reservation. We are also seeing contractualisation of labour. The second is that a lot of States have just stopped filling vacant posts. We are essentially fighting over jobs which don't exist any more. The problem, perhaps, with this discourse on reservation is that it is being rendered irrelevant in some ways. We are discussing percentages when the pie itself is disappearing. The discourse should be what is the size of pie that you're going to distribute.

Also read | **Caste census an X-ray to find out problems of OBCs: Rahul Gandhi**

Kalaiyarasan A: Castes are a reality. Counting does not necessarily lead to strengthening of that reality. There may be potential that people, political parties, or individuals with vested interests will exploit this. However, that should not stop us from accounting the existing realities. A caste census has to come along with a simultaneous ideological campaign or a kind of political mobilisation which counters or tames individual caste mobilisation.

With the demand for a caste census, will the Opposition parties be able to disturb what the BJP has achieved electorally, i.e., consolidating Hindu votes across caste lines?

Kalaiyarasan A: I see this moment as Mandal 2.0. The present situation, in the shorter run, would push the BJP into a defensive mode, which has already started happening. In the longer run, it is possible that the BJP may adjust to this new reality. Caste mobilisation happening without any social or broad-based anti-caste mobilisation can lead to upgrading of status in the hierarchy of the Sanskritisation process, which may help the BJP. A great example is U.P., where Mandal 1.0 pushed back the BJP. But the caste mobilisation that followed did not address the anti-caste sentiment or other broad-based problems. As a result, BJP mobilised the left-out communities.

Explained |**The case for caste census in India**

Caste by design is divisive. You need some kind of a glue to put castes together. The question is whether that glue is Hindutva that preserves caste or the Bahujan identity or the Dravidian or some kind of class-based mobilisation, which transcends caste identities and bring these communities together to provide a meaningful representation.

Kalaiyarasan A. is Assistant Professor at the Madras Institute of Development Studies and Visiting Research Fellow at the King's College London; Alok Prasanna is Co-Founder and Lead, Vidhi Karnataka

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A KEY STEP BY BIHAR TO PROMOTE BETTER SOCIAL JUSTICE

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population And Associated Issues

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October 13, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 12:08 am IST

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Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at an all party meeting on the caste-based census survey report, in Patna | Photo Credit: ANI

There are certain dates which acquire greater significance by a stroke of history, and October 2, 2023 is one such date — a day when the Bihar government released the data for a caste-based survey, known as the Bihar Jaati Adharit Ganana. Let us remember not to forget.

A caste-based census would provide accurate and up-to-date data on the distribution and socio-economic status of the various castes and communities in India. This data is essential for evidence-based policy formulation and implementation. It can help policymakers identify marginalised and disadvantaged groups and design targeted interventions to uplift them. India has a long history of caste-based discrimination and oppression. A caste-based census can help in recognising and quantifying the extent of historical injustices and disparities that exist in society. Acknowledging these disparities is a critical step towards addressing them.

With accurate caste-based data, the government can develop more effective and targeted welfare programmes. These programmes can be tailored to the specific needs of different caste groups, ensuring that the benefits of government schemes reach the most vulnerable sections of society. Regular caste-based census data can help track the progress of different caste groups over time. This allows for the evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and programmes aimed at social justice and affirmative action. It will also enable the government to make necessary adjustments to policies when needed. Caste-based data can help ensure fair representation of marginalised communities in government, education, and employment. Reservations and affirmative action policies are often based on caste, and accurate data is crucial to determine the appropriate level of representation required. A caste-based census promotes transparency and accountability in government efforts to promote social justice. It allows citizens to hold the government accountable for the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

Without accurate data, there is a risk of caste certificates being misused for personal gain or political purposes. A caste-based census can help verify and authenticate the caste status of individuals, reducing the likelihood of fraud and ensuring that benefits are directed to those who genuinely need them.

However, it is important to note that the idea of conducting a caste-based census in India has

been a subject of debate and controversy. Some argue that it could perpetuate and deepen caste divisions, while others believe that it is necessary to address historical injustices and promote social justice. The decision to conduct such a census involves careful consideration of these arguments and a balanced approach to address the complex issue of caste-based disparities in India.

Caste discrimination in India is a deeply entrenched social issue that has persisted for centuries. Several factors highlight the need for committed government intervention to address this problem. First, historical injustice. Caste discrimination has its roots in centuries of historical oppression and marginalisation. It has resulted in the social, economic, and educational backwardness of certain caste groups. Government intervention is necessary to rectify these historical injustices.

Second, constitutional mandate. The Indian Constitution recognises the existence of caste-based discrimination and inequality and provides for affirmative action measures (such as reservations in education, employment, and politics) to uplift historically disadvantaged groups. The government has a constitutional obligation to implement and enforce these provisions.

Third, human rights. Discrimination based on caste is a violation of human rights. The government has a responsibility to protect the human rights of all its citizens, which includes the right to equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. Committed government intervention is necessary to ensure that these rights are upheld.

Fourth, social cohesion. Caste discrimination perpetuates social divisions and hinders social cohesion. It creates a sense of inequality and injustice among marginalised groups and can lead to social unrest. Government intervention is essential to promote social harmony and unity.

Fifth, economic development. Caste discrimination often leads to economic disparities, with certain caste groups facing limited access to education and employment opportunities. Government intervention through affirmative action policies can help bridge these gaps and promote economic development for all.

Sixth, education. Discrimination can hinder access to quality education for marginalised caste groups. Government intervention is necessary to ensure that educational opportunities are accessible to all, irrespective of caste, and that discrimination within educational institutions is eliminated.

Seventh, employment. Discrimination in employment can limit job opportunities for certain caste groups. Government intervention is required to enforce anti-discrimination laws and promote fair employment practices, including affirmative action in the public sector.

Eighth, political representation. Dalits and other marginalised caste groups have historically been under-represented in political positions. Government intervention is needed to promote their political participation and representation, which is crucial for addressing their concerns.

Ninth, awareness and sensitisation. The government can play a significant role in creating awareness about the harms of caste discrimination and promoting social sensitivity and inclusivity through educational programmes and campaigns.

Tenth, legal framework. Government intervention is crucial to strengthening and enforcing anti-discrimination laws and policies aimed at eradicating caste discrimination. Without a committed government effort, these laws may remain ineffective.

In conclusion, caste discrimination is a deeply ingrained problem in India that requires sustained and committed government intervention to address. Such intervention is not only essential to rectify historical injustices but also to uphold the principles of equality, justice, and human rights for all citizens, regardless of their caste or social background.

Manoj Kumar Jha is Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Rashtriya Janata Dal

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WOMEN'S QUOTA — RHETORIC AND REALITY

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Women Issues

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October 12, 2023 02:08 am | Updated 02:08 am IST

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi in group photograph with Union Minister Smriti Irani and women MPs after the passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (women's reservation bill) by the Rajya Sabha in the special session of the Parliament on September 21, 2023. | Photo Credit: PTI

The celebration of the passing of the Women's Reservation Bill by both Houses of Parliament glosses over certain realities about this conditional legislation. The conduct of a census in the country followed by a delimitation of constituencies based on this census are the conditions for this legislation to take effect. Once it is accepted that reservation for women in legislative bodies is a progressive measure, there is no legal or political justification to prolong its implementation.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Home Minister Amit Shah justified these conditions saying that there could be legal challenges against the legislation if it is passed without relying on criteria fixed by way of a process of delimitation.

No doubt, a legislation should be based on a solid foundation, and have valid reasons for existence.

In the case of the Women's Reservation Law, the reality is that about half of the population are women and they are under-represented in Parliament and State legislative bodies. Reports show that, of the maximum allowed 550 seats in the Lok Sabha, only 82, i.e., 15% are represented by women, and out of the 250 members in the Rajya Sabha, only 31, i.e., 12% are women. The Global Gender Gap Report places this in a macroscopic context by showing that India ranks 141 out of 185 in its list.

Article 81 (2) (a) of the Constitution states that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha for a State should have a co-relation with the population of the State and "so far as practicable", the criteria should be the same for all States. Article 170, concerning the legislative Assemblies of States, also takes population as the basis for designing constituencies.

However, delimitation in India is a contentious issue. It acts as an incentive for population expansion with scant regard to development and family planning. This was why a full-fledged delimitation was kept in abeyance in India since 1976. It is now expected to be carried out after the Census which will only be held by 2026 at the earliest.

But, as scholar Nilakantan R.S. predicts, this "demographic detonation" will cause "another big

fork in the future allocation of political power and associated resources between the north and south". In his book South vs North (2022), Mr. Nilakantan has demonstrated how South India has performed well in sectors such as health, education, economy etc. in comparison to the North.

South Indian States reduced their population by scientific means whereas North Indian States in general and States such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in particular have failed to do so. The South Indian States have raised concerns about this proposed delimitation. This could lead to two outcomes: the delimitation would get prolonged by years which in turn will defer the materialisation of the women's quota law, or it might happen based on population which in turn could translate to undue advantages for certain States in the North.

These are situations that the relevant provisions in the Constitution, namely Articles 81 and 170, failed to foresee. Thus, Parliament has committed an egregious folly in fusing women's reservation with delimitation.

Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution deal with the reservation of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly of States respectively. Though these Articles mention the relationship between reservation and the population of the SC and ST groups, such a parameter is irrelevant to women's quota. That their share in the total population is almost 50% is undisputed. Further, there cannot be a drastic variation in their population from one constituency to the other, as it could happen with SC or ST.

A census to understand the population of women for the purpose of reservation is also unwarranted. The criteria, process and purpose of the Women's Reservation Bill are qualitatively different from those of the delimitation exercise. And, reservation for women in local bodies, which materialised through the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of the Constitution, and came into effect in 1993, was not contingent on any delimitation exercise for that purpose. Parliament, however, has lost sight of these aspects.

How far a constitutional Amendment can be done by way of contingent legislation is an issue too, as certainty is regarded as one of the hallmarks of modern constitutions. In Hamdard Dawakhana vs Union of India (1959), the Supreme Court hinted that in conditional legislations, for the statute to take effect, there could be a further dependence on the executive or even on the legislature of the future day, among other things.

Such enactments might be needed on various occasions for multiple reasons. But, by amalgamating the demand for women's reservation with the uncertainty of a future delimitation process, that too in the case of a constitutional amendment, Parliament has made populist rhetoric at best or committed a constitutional blunder at worst. The secrecy maintained on the subject till the commencement of the special session was also thoroughly undemocratic, which in turn, prevented the exposure of the follies of the legislation.

Therefore, with regard to the future of the women's quota in the legislature, one can only have the pessimism of the intelligence and optimism of the will, as Antonio Gramsci famously put it, in a different context.

Kaleeswaram Raj is a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India

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HOW ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE IS MENTAL HEALTHCARE IN INDIA

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

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October 13, 2023 10:02 pm | Updated 10:02 pm IST

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The story so far: Mental disorders are a major cause of disability worldwide, largely due to insufficient understanding, pervasive ignorance, and social stigma. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one out of every eight people globally is affected by a mental disorder. India significantly contributes to this global burden.

The National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) of 2015-2016 highlights the huge burden of mental health problems in India. As per the findings of the report, 150 million adults live with a mental disorder and require access to care services, but the majority are unable to access treatment.

[Another study published in *Lancet Psychiatry* reveals](#) that the proportional contribution of mental disorders to the total disease burden in the country doubled between 1990 and 2017. It estimated that one in seven Indians (197 million) were suffering from mental disorders of varying severity, with depression and anxiety disorders the most common. The treatment gap for mental disorders was found to be as high as 83%.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crisis, severely affecting the psycho-social well-being of many. Noting the increasing burden, a recent Standing Committee report tabled in Parliament highlighted that the high treatment gap for most illnesses was due to a lack of mental health professionals, poor infrastructure and stigma. The panel suggested the government strengthen mental health facilities at primary and secondary levels to improve overall availability and accessibility of mental healthcare for all.

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Similar to physical health, mental health is a crucial component of overall health encompassing the psychological, emotional and social well-being of an individual. The WHO defines mental health as a state of well-being in which a person realises their abilities, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively and makes a contribution to the community. It extends to a positive state of mental and emotional well-being. When there is a significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behaviour, usually associated with distress or impairment, it is referred to as a mental health disorder.

While globally there is a significant number of individuals who need mental healthcare, far fewer actually receive treatment, even if effective treatments are available at a low cost. Most don't have access to care services, adding to the widening gap between those who need care and those with access to such care. For instance, only 29% of people with psychosis and only one-third of people with depression receive formal mental healthcare worldwide. In India, all mental disorders, except epilepsy, recorded a treatment gap of more than 60%, with the highest being for alcohol use disorders at a shocking 86%.

The policy landscape around mental health has evolved over the years, driven mainly by the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), aimed at providing affordable and accessible mental healthcare facilities. India was one of the first few developing countries that took the lead in developing a national programme in 1982 to address the mental health needs of its population by integrating mental health services with general care available at primary health centres. As part of the programme, primary and community health workers were given specialised training for the treatment of mental disorders.

The NMHP was re-strategised as the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) to decentralise care. Districts were designated as the main administering units for the implementation of the programme. The DMHP aimed to provide mental health services, which included managing cases, counselling, manpower training and spreading awareness, at different levels of the district healthcare delivery system. It was later integrated with the National Rural Health Mission.

Currently, the National Mental Health Programme is active in 743 districts across 36 States and Union Territories. The facilities offered at community and primary health centre levels include outpatient services, assessments, counselling, psycho-social interventions, continuing care and support for people with severe mental disorders, medications, outreach services, and ambulance services.

Human Resources for DMHP

Meanwhile, in response to the growing burden of mental illness, the government launched India's first national mental health policy in 2014. It calls for a more accessible and holistic treatment of mental illnesses and advocates for the decriminalisation of attempted suicide. Another programme, Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), was also launched in the same year under the National Health Mission to focus specifically on adolescent health.

Another "watershed moment for the right to health movement in India" arrived in the form of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. It discourages the long-term institutionalisation of patients and reaffirms the right of people to live independently and within communities. It places a range of duties on mental health professionals, the state and other duty-bearers to protect the autonomy and dignity of persons with mental illness.

Besides the national programme, mental health services are provided as part of services under the Comprehensive Primary Health Care under Ayushman Bharat – Health and Wellness Centre scheme. The government has also released operational guidelines on mental, neurological and substance use disorders at health and wellness centres (HWC) under the ambit of Ayushman Bharat.

Last year, the National Tele-Mental Health Programme (NTMHP) was launched under the NMHP to use digital technology to address growing mental health challenges and improve access to quality mental health counselling and care services in the country.

The mental health programme has been credited for enhancing the reach of mental health

services at the community level but is also criticised for its ineffective design and functioning. There is a consensus among experts that its impact has been limited, mainly because of a lack of trained health workers, financial constraints and poor coordination. The DMHP can be simultaneously narrated as "a heroic struggle against overwhelming odds" as well as that of "abject failure", says an article published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*.

"Financial and human capital restrictions, a lack of public involvement, inefficient training, poor non-governmental organisation/private cooperation, and a deficit of solid monitoring and evaluation system have all hampered the programme's impact," argue the authors of an article in the *Cureus Journal of Medical Science*. Another paper on India's response to mental healthcare argues that the model was deficient, being focused on pharmacological interventions and not including the psychosocial aspects of treatment.

"It excluded community/stakeholder participation in the planning and implementation process that further attributed to its poor performance," it adds, concluding that the implementation of the programme at the sub-district level and below is presently sub-optimal.

As far as the Centre's digital reach is concerned, the national tele-mental health helpline, called Tele-MANAS, has recorded over 3.5 lakh calls since its launch in 2022. As of October, 44 Tele-MANAS cells are spread across 32 States and UTs, with 2,000 professionals taking around 1,000 calls per day in 20 languages on average.

Despite the growing response, the helpline faces several challenges. Research has shown that individuals with mental health issues, who require care, often do not have access to the Internet or smartphones. Besides barriers related to digital literacy, data privacy issues flagged by a response by the helpline nodal centre NIMHANS to an RTI query have added to concerns. Implementation of the RKSK, meanwhile, has been unsatisfactory despite being in operation for nearly a decade.

According to a report presented by the Standing Committee in Parliament in August, India has only 0.75 psychiatrists per lakh people. This is a much lower number than that required to address the growing mental health problems in the population. The panel has suggested that an additional 27,000 psychiatrists are necessary to achieve the target of having three psychiatrists per lakh people. The report also highlights that this shortage is prevalent for other health professionals such as psychologists, psychiatric social workers and nurses.

In 2018, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) told the Lok Sabha that there are only 898 clinical psychologists against a demand of 20,250, and 1,500 psychiatric nurses compared to a demand of 30,000. An analysis and cost implementation of the mental health policy in the same year, however, noted that India had nearly 9,000 psychiatrists, 2,000 psychiatric nurses, 1,000 clinical psychologists, and 1,000 psychiatric social workers for its population of 1.3 billion— a population that includes approximately 150 million who need intervention for mental disorders.

The paper published in the *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* further noted that India would need an additional 30,000 psychiatrists, 37,000 psychiatric nurses, 38,000 psychiatric social workers and 38,000 clinical psychologists. "… it will take 42 years to meet the requirement for psychiatrists, 74 years for psychiatric nurses, 76 years for the psychiatric social worker, and 76 years for clinical psychologists, for providing care for 130 crore population, provided the population (assuming both general population and mental health human resources) remains constant," the researchers concluded.

The study also reviewed the status of infrastructure in hospitals. It found that around 56,600

public psychiatric beds existed for 130 crore people. This included 35,000 psychiatric beds in mental hospitals, 10 beds each in 723 district hospitals and 30 beds each in 479 medical colleges. It estimated that there was a requirement of 6.5 lakh psychiatric beds for a 130 crore population.

Besides the gap in implementation, experts have identified poverty and discrimination as key contributors to the treatment gap; affordability remains a major factor in availing treatment. A recent study published in the *Indian Journal of Health Management* found that spending on mental disorders pushed around 20% of Indian families into poverty.

A household spends over 18.1% of their total budget per month on the care of a member with a mental disorder, it found. Even though mental healthcare in government-run hospitals and health centres is subsidised, a long course of treatment means high travelling expenses. Multiple visits to health professionals, and cost and unavailability of medication add to the financial burden. "There is a critical need to provide financial risk protection to reduce financial impact of healthcare expenditure on mental illness among households in India," the authors noted.

In urban areas, therapists usually charge Rs 500-2,000 for each session that lasts less than an hour on average. This means that an individual could end up spending around Rs 4,000-Rs 8,000 a month on therapy, which is likely to affect their spending and savings. The high cost of the therapy and other logistical costs force several to quit treatment. A person who took therapy at a private centre in Chandigarh tells *The Hindu*, "I took two sessions, but didn't return for a third because the cost of therapy and other expenses badly hit my monthly budget."

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SEVEN MEITY AI WORKING GROUPS SUBMIT FIRST EDITION OF INDIAAI REPORT

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

Seven working groups of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) submitted the first edition of IndiaAI report today. The report was officially handed over to Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Union Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Electronics & IT. He expressed that this report is set to serve as India's guiding roadmap for the development of its AI ecosystem.

"After months of dedicated research, the seven working groups that were constituted to build the core goals of the IndiaAI program, have submitted their formal report today. This comprehensive report lays out what will be the fulcrum of the IndiaAI strategy that was envisaged by PM Modi. He had talked about India for AI and AI for India. Through this roadmap IndiaAI will work to be a kinetic enabler of the 1 trillion dollar digital economy," the Minister said.

The Government of India's approach to AI has been holistic and ambitious, as evidenced by the breadth and scope of government interventions under the umbrella programme – IndiaAI.

IndiaAI has a mission-centric approach which ensures a precise and cohesive strategy to bridge the gaps in existing AI ecosystem viz-a-viz Compute infrastructure, Data, AI financing, Research and Innovation, targeted Skilling and institutional capacity for Data to maximize the potential of AI for advancing India's progress.

Minister Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar highlighted how IndiaAI will not only catalyse and support the startup and entrepreneurship ecosystem but also other areas like that of India datasets program and India AI Compute Platform.

"Apart from supporting startups and providing skilling programs, the India AI program will comprise several key components. One crucial component will be that of India Datasets Platform, which will be one of the largest collections of anonymized datasets that will be used by Indian researchers to train their multi parameter models. Then there will be the India AI Compute Platform, a public-private partnership project that will create substantial GPU (Graphics processing unit) capacity for our startups and researchers. In addition to skilling, India AI will also support the development of AI chips in partnership with the Semicon India program," the Minister further added.

The working groups detailed out the operational aspects of establishing Centers of Excellence (CoEs), and the institutional framework on governing data collection, management, processing and storage by the National Data Management Office (NDMO). The report also has recommendations on how India can leverage its demographic dividend and play to its strengths as an IT superpower to further the penetration of AI skills in the country, strengthening of the AI compute infrastructure in India to support the AI innovation through public-private partnerships (PPPs).

The report provides the recommendations on Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme that aims to offer financial incentives as well as design infrastructure support to domestic companies and start- ups/ MSMEs.

The objective of this exercise was to undertake a comprehensive study of all the pillars of

IndiaAI and to identify tangible next action items that need to be worked on to achieve the goal of "AI for all".

Minister Rajeev Chandrasekar announced the launch of the inaugural Global India AI Summit in December 2023, aligning with PM Modi's vision of "India for AI and AI for India."

The Minister said, "Global India AI summit will be held on 10th December 2023 where influential leaders and participants will join from the AI and the overall tech ecosystem. Our approach towards AI is not about following a trend, we have a deep rooted belief and commitment that AI is going to be a kinetic enabler of our 1 trillion dollar economy goal. It will also create deep capabilities within our startup and research ecosystem, in terms of real life AI use cases that we want to develop. I think this is a good launching pad for us to develop an overall comprehensive framework for policy, financing and resources.

DK/DK

Seven working groups of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) submitted the first edition of IndiaAI report today. The report was officially handed over to Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Union Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Electronics & IT. He expressed that this report is set to serve as India's guiding roadmap for the development of its AI ecosystem.

"After months of dedicated research, the seven working groups that were constituted to build the core goals of the IndiaAI program, have submitted their formal report today. This comprehensive report lays out what will be the fulcrum of the IndiaAI strategy that was envisaged by PM Modi. He had talked about India for AI and AI for India. Through this roadmap IndiaAI will work to be a kinetic enabler of the 1 trillion dollar digital economy," the Minister said.

The Government of India's approach to AI has been holistic and ambitious, as evidenced by the breadth and scope of government interventions under the umbrella programme – IndiaAI.

IndiaAI has a mission-centric approach which ensures a precise and cohesive strategy to bridge the gaps in existing AI ecosystem viz-a-viz Compute infrastructure, Data, AI financing, Research and Innovation, targeted Skilling and institutional capacity for Data to maximize the potential of AI for advancing India's progress.

Minister Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar highlighted how IndiaAI will not only catalyse and support the startup and entrepreneurship ecosystem but also other areas like that of India datasets program and India AI Compute Platform.

"Apart from supporting startups and providing skilling programs, the India AI program will comprise several key components. One crucial component will be that of India Datasets Platform, which will be one of the largest collections of anonymized datasets that will be used by Indian researchers to train their multi parameter models. Then there will be the India AI Compute Platform, a public-private partnership project that will create substantial GPU (Graphics

processing unit) capacity for our startups and researchers. In addition to skilling, India AI will also support the development of AI chips in partnership with the Semicon India program," the Minister further added.

The working groups detailed out the operational aspects of establishing Centers of Excellence (CoEs), and the institutional framework on governing data collection, management, processing and storage by the National Data Management Office (NDMO). The report also has recommendations on how India can leverage its demographic dividend and play to its strengths as an IT superpower to further the penetration of AI skills in the country, strengthening of the AI compute infrastructure in India to support the AI innovation through public-private partnerships (PPPs).

The report provides the recommendations on Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme that aims to offer financial incentives as well as design infrastructure support to domestic companies and start- ups/ MSMEs.

The objective of this exercise was to undertake a comprehensive study of all the pillars of IndiaAI and to identify tangible next action items that need to be worked on to achieve the goal of "AI for all".

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EGYPT IS RACING TO ELIMINATE HEPATITIS C

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

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October 14, 2023 09:15 pm | Updated 09:15 pm IST

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The most common route of hepatitis C virus spread is injection drug use | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

On October 9, WHO announced that Egypt had made "unprecedented progress" towards eliminating hepatitis C. According to the WHO, Egypt became the first country to achieve "gold tier" status on the path to elimination of hepatitis C as per the global health body criteria.

The "gold tier" status to reach the stated goal of eliminating hepatitis C includes meeting specific criteria such as ensuring 100% blood and injection safety, maintaining a minimum of 150 needles/syringes per year for people who inject drugs (PWID), diagnosis of over 80% of people living with chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV), treating of over 70% of individuals diagnosed with HCV, and the establishing of a sentinel surveillance programme for hepatitis sequelae, including liver cancer.

Egypt has diagnosed 87% of people living with hepatitis C and has provided 93% of those diagnosed with curative treatment, exceeding the WHO gold tier targets of diagnosing at least 80% of people living with hepatitis C and providing treatment to at least 70% of diagnosed people, the WHO said.

Egypt had undertaken the "100 Million Healthy Lives" initiative. Through this initiative, Egypt "significantly reduced the prevalence of hepatitis C from 10% in 2016 to 5% in 2018 and an estimated less than 1% in 2019", the Africa CDC said.

"Egypt's journey from having one of the world's highest rates of hepatitis C infection to being on the path to elimination in less than 10 years is nothing short of astounding," Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General said in a statement. "Egypt is an example to the world of what can be achieved with modern tools, and political commitment at the highest level to use those tools to prevent infections and save lives. Egypt's success must give all of us hope and motivation to eliminate hepatitis C everywhere."

"With its commitment to eliminate hepatitis C, Egypt has succeeded in testing virtually the whole of the eligible population and has treated almost all those who are living with the virus. This represents one third of the 12 million people living with hepatitis C in the Eastern Mediterranean Region," Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean said in a statement.

According to the Africa CDC, Egypt was able to achieve huge success with hepatitis C due to key interventions undertaken including population-based surveys to understand the hepatitis C epidemic (who is affected and where) and developing an investment case to highlight the economic burden of HCV. Egypt also customised the elimination programme by involving generalist doctors to community healthcare workers and using telemedicine for hard-to-reach areas. But the biggest boost came from reducing the cost of medical treatment per patient to less than $50 through local manufacturing.

Egypt is now taking a leadership role with its commitment to support other African countries to replicate its success, including enhanced access to inexpensive drugs to treat hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C infection is unevenly distributed globally, with these regions accounting for the most — European (22%), South-East Asia (20%) and the Eastern Mediterranean (17%). According to a 2023 WHO document, in 2019, there were 1.5 million new infections, with one third of new HCV infections occurring in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The prevalence of hepatitis C across the world in 2019 was 58 million.

Though unscreened blood and blood products and inadequate sterilisation of medical equipment in health-care settings are two important routes of virus transmission, the most common route of virus spread is through unsafe injection practices such as sharing needles, syringes, or any other equipment to inject drugs. The use of safe injections has however reduced new hepatitis C infections.

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CENTRE SEEKS INCLUSION OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE ON WHO'S LIST

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

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October 14, 2023 06:17 pm | Updated October 15, 2023 12:42 am IST - NEW DELHI

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A view of the World Health Organisation headquarters.

In a move meant to put the Indian system of medicine on the world map and provide it with a common standardised language, the Union government has sought for Ayurveda and related systems to be included in the 11th revision of the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases (ICD), as the second module of a supplementary chapter on traditional medicine conditions.

The ICD provides a common language that allows health professionals to share standardised information across the world. The traditional medicine module of the 11th revision provides a list of diagnostics categories to collect and report on traditional medicine conditions in a standardised and internationally comparable manner.

Speaking exclusively to *The Hindu* about the development, Ministry of Ayush Secretary Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha said: "We are hopeful that the addition of Module-2 for Ayurveda could happen as early as by next January."

"Ayurveda and related Indian traditional health care systems are formally recognised and widely practised health care systems in India, which is making a strong and valid point for its inclusion," said Mr. Kotecha, adding that efforts to effectively regulate traditional medicine as an integral part of the health system require standardised and evidence-based information.

Mr. Kotecha further explained that the traditional medicine chapter under ICD-11 is a formative step for the integration of such forms of medicine into a classification standard used in conventional medicine. "It also provides the means for doing research and evaluation to establish its efficacy," he said.

The Ministry added that this chapter would also help to respond to growing demands for more and better regulation of traditional medicine, and its integration in mainstream health care and health information systems.

After a decade of repeated consultations, ICD-11 had facilitated the inclusion of Module-1, which covers traditional medicine conditions originating in ancient China, which are now commonly used in China, Japan, Korea, and elsewhere around the world.

The eleventh revision contains around 17,000 unique codes and more than 1,20,000 codable terms, which are now entirely digital. ICD-11 came into effect from January 2022.

The joint use of ICD-11's chapter on traditional medicine along with other chapters on neoplasm, patient safety, and injuries, can enhance the reporting of adverse events. It will enable the integration of traditional medicine into insurance coverage and reimbursement systems, in line with larger WHO objectives relating to universal health coverage. It will also link traditional medicine practices with global conventional medicine's norms and standard development.

The development of Module-2 for Ayurveda-related diagnostic systems is being actively supported by the Ministry of Ayush. It extensively banks on the implementation experience gained on the ground by the National Ayush Morbidity and Standardised Terminologies Electronic portal, and the Ayush Health Information Management System, the Ministry said.

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health / ayurveda / medicine

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CLOSING THE GENDER PAY GAP IN THE WORKFORCE

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

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October 16, 2023 01:32 am | Updated 01:32 am IST

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Claudia Goldin, the Henry Lee Professor of Economics at Harvard University, speaks at a press conference after being named the Nobel Laureate in the Economic Sciences, at Harvard University. | Photo Credit: Getty Images

When women were missing from the labour force, that was because they were home caring for children; when they were paid less than men, that was because they had lower education than men. Or so said the economic orthodoxy, including theories popularised by the 1992 Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker. A few feminist economists and sociologists protested, but their voices were drowned out until Claudia Goldin stood on the podium as the President of the American Economic Association in 2013-14 and argued that the answer to the solution of missing and underpaid women did not lie at home but rather, in the market.

When Betty Friedan wrote in 1963 about college-educated women who were frustrated stay-at-home mothers, she noted that their problem has "no name." Claudia Goldin, the 2023 Economics Nobel Prize winner, has spent half a century giving a name and voice to their problems. She has chronicled the evolution of the American economy from agriculture to manufacturing to services and noted that as economic production moved from home to factories, women were excluded from market activities. It was not until offices, schools, and hospitals began to offer more jobs than factories that women found jobs. However, even when they entered the workforce in droves, overtook men in educational attainment, did not congregate in "female jobs," and did not drop out from the labour force to have children, women continued to earn less than men.

Professor Goldin argued that this disadvantage is due to their inability to take on jobs that involve all-consuming responsibilities. Parental responsibilities make it difficult for women to take on jobs requiring long hours and irregular work schedules. The private equity partner who saw the deal through and stayed for late-night dinners and meetings had the chance of getting a fat bonus and promotion. These demands are incompatible with raising children, and one partner of a couple often chooses to go on a slower and safer track, the track dubbed the "mommy track," even at the cost of a high-profile career. While women need not be the ones choosing this slow track, gender ideologies often prompt couples to assign women to take over extra family duties while men remain free to concentrate on their careers.

Professor Goldin blamed this inequality on "greedy work" that demands extraordinary efforts from workers rewarded with high salaries, big bonuses, stock options, and fast promotions.

Rising income inequality leads couples to forgo gender equity within the household and concentrate on increasing family income via specialisation. Her solution to this dilemma is restructuring a workplace that does not rely on heroic efforts, has moderate work hours, and predictable schedules.

In some ways, Professor Goldin's work dovetails with that of Juliet Schor, who argued in her book *The Overworked American* that it was far more beneficial to companies to hire two workers who worked long hours than three workers who worked regular hours since it reduced costs such as health insurance, office space, and personnel services. I suspect that Indian workers in Bengaluru struggling to keep up with Zoom calls at 9:30 p.m. to confer with their American counterparts arriving in the office at 9 a.m. while helping their children with their Algebra homework will relate to this.

Although women's employment rates in India remain low, secular changes suggest that there is no reason why this must continue. Building on Professor Goldin's observations, the growth of the service sector should offer jobs for women that are not offered by the manufacturing sector; rising education should increase their employability; and declining fertility should free up women's time. But how can we take advantage of these fortuitous circumstances?

While increased male participation in household work and childcare would help, we must also find ways of reshaping both the work and social environment so that they are conducive to developing a work-life balance for both men and women. This means having work structures that are respectful of workers' time and do not emphasise very long work hours. This makes both social and economic sense. Stanford economist John Pencavel has shown that longer working hours do not mean more productivity and, in some jobs, lead to increased mistakes and injuries.

Editorial | [Bridging the gap: On India and Gender Gap Report](#)

But if we need to rein in the greedy workplace, we also need to rein in a variety of institutions that demand more and more of our time. This includes schools that rely on parents to supervise homework and urban developments that place homes far from workplaces. Until we can create these supportive institutions, it will be hard to write the last chapter for the grand gender convergence in labour market outcomes that Claudia Goldin advocates for so fiercely.

Sonalde Desai is a Professor at the National Council of Applied Economic Research and University of Maryland. Views are personal

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OLYMPIAN HEIGHTS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA'S EFFORTS TO ORGANISE THE 2036 OLYMPICS

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

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

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From time immemorial, the Olympics has been used as a soft-power medium. Governments worldwide have bet on the sporting, economic and socio-cultural impact the games can leave, as well as on the political legitimacy the hosting of the event can bring. Post-World War Europe, post-apartheid South Africa and Brazil of the 2010s are vivid examples. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) session in Mumbai that India "would leave no stone unturned" in its efforts to organise the 2036 edition of the quadrennial extravaganza is to be seen in this light. That India has also expressed an interest in the Youth Olympics as a precursor is a clear signal that it wants to shed the reticence that came with the unsavoury happenings at the scam-ridden and ineptly handled 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games. Though the ratification of the host city for 2036 will take time — Brisbane was selected for the 2032 edition only in July 2021 — and there will be other claimants, the move lays bare India's global ambitions. Be it through the desire for a permanent membership at the United Nations Security Council or the euphoria surrounding the G-20 presidency, India has consistently sought a seat at the high table. The tag of an Olympic host can give it a vantage position in a shifting world order.

Sporting-wise, it is clear that India wants to benefit from the strong tailwind produced by the stellar 107-medal show at the recently concluded Asian Games. Ever since Abhinav Bindra won the nation's first-ever individual Olympic gold at Beijing 2008, there has been a steady uptick in performances at multi-disciplinary competitions. There is even a firm belief that India will win double-digit medals at Paris 2024. While such confidence is not entirely misplaced, conducting a mega event such as the Olympics presents a humongous challenge. Costs are often prohibitive, as seen from the fierce public outcry during both Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020. In the case of Tokyo, the financial burden was said to have ballooned to $15.4 billion, more than double the initial estimate. Recently, the Australian state of Victoria pulled out of hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games because of mounting expenditure and the Canadian province of Alberta withdrew a bid for the 2030 edition. To avoid being seen as a populist ephemera in a deeply unequal society, the IOC has moved away from the one-size-fits-all solution and now asks potential organisers to present projects that best fit their economic, social and environmental realities. India's success will depend on how it marries its aspirations with the inherent complexities.

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sport / Olympics / India / United Nations / Commonwealth Games / South Africa / Brazil / Australia / Japan / Canada / Prime Minister Narendra Modi / Mumbai / G-20 New Delhi 2023

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THE WORLD NEEDS TO STOP TAKING WATER FOR GRANTED

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Distribution of key natural resources - Water Resources incl. Rivers & related issues in world & India

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October 16, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 01:47 am IST

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'Extreme weather events and variability in water availability are severely affecting agricultural production' | Photo Credit: RITU RAJ KONWAR

The theme for World Food Day (October 16) this year — 'Water is Life, Water is Food' — calls for urgent action in managing water wisely. Availability or a lack of water has become even more critical with increasing climate extremes. Countries face severe challenges such as drought, floods, unseasonal rains and prolonged dry spells. With less than seven years left to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) — the UN's food agencies — lay stress on the need to adopt innovative and collaborative approaches for improved management, conservation and availability of scarce water resources.

Water availability affects every aspect of human life, especially food and nutrition security. For instance, about 60% of India's net sown area is rainfed, contributing to 40% of the total food production. However, rainfed agriculture depends directly on water availability, and rain and soil moisture variations can severely affect food and nutrition security. There is an urgent need to adapt to climate change by promoting technologies and practices that make rainfed production more resilient and sustainable. Sustainable water management is critical to address the impending food and nutrition security threats. In turn, irrigated agriculture accounts for 72% of global freshwater withdrawals, sometimes with lasting damaging effects on the sustainability of significant ecosystems, such as seasonal rivers and deep aquifers.

Decades of poor water management, misuse and pollution, and the climate crisis have degraded freshwater supplies and ecosystems, adding to the vulnerability of small-scale producers to climate shocks and land degradation in some of the world's most fragile ecosystems. About 40% of the planet's total land area is degraded, leaving farmers with less productive land. Small-scale farmers, who make up more than 80% of farmers globally, are especially affected as they often lack access to finance, technology and irrigation to maintain a level of production that can sustain their livelihoods.

Extreme weather events and variability in water availability are severely affecting agricultural production, changing agro-ecological conditions and shifting growing seasons. Changes in

rainfall and higher temperatures also affect crop productivity, reducing food availability.

The Government of India has assessed the impact of climate change in 2050 and 2080 using climate projections and crop simulation models. Without adaptation measures, rainfed rice yields in India are projected to reduce by 20% in 2050, and by 47% in 2080 scenarios, while irrigated rice yields are projected to decline by 3.5% in 2050 and 5% in 2080 scenarios. Wheat yields are projected to decrease by 19.3% in 2050 and 40% in 2080, while kharif maize yields could decline by 18% and 23%. In every scenario, climate change without adequate adaptation measures reduces crop yields and lowers the nutritional quality of produce. The FAO, in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and Maharashtra, is piloting a crop forecasting framework and model incorporating climate (weather), soil characteristics and market information to aid rainfed farmers in making informed decisions contributing to food security.

Irrigation can also be an effective measure to make agriculture more resilient, and in most cases, enable farmers to transform their livelihoods by growing, consuming and selling high-value crops such as nutritious fruits and vegetables. In this context, the WFP supports soil and water conservation, the building or fixing of irrigation canals, dams, ponds, and dykes, as well as flood barriers through food assistance in exchange for labour. In 2021 alone, 8.7 million people across 49 countries benefited directly from such support. Similarly, IFAD supports Indian States in leveraging the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act scheme. Through safeguards during design and planning and encouraging participatory institutional development, IFAD ensures that micro-irrigation infrastructure is environmentally and socially sustainable and financially viable.

The FAO also supports the sustainable transformation of agrifood systems and climate-smart agriculture practices to improve water-use efficiency. It supported the farmer water school programme in Uttar Pradesh, which helped smallholder farmers. At the same time, the Andhra Pradesh Farmer Managed Groundwater Systems project reached out to 638 habitations in seven drought-prone districts, that included a hydrological monitoring programme.

Similarly, IFAD has enshrined climate change adaptation in its core strategies. It set ambitious targets in terms of leveraging climate financing to mitigate climate change by addressing the adverse impacts of agriculture and helping farmers to adapt to the increasing volatility of weather conditions, by investing in the restoration and preservation of soil health, water resources and merging modern technologies with indigenous knowledge systems to build productive and resilient production systems and value chains. IFAD-supported projects in Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Nagaland and Mizoram incorporate climate-resilient seed varieties and crops, including millets, and train farmers in climate-sensitive agricultural practices and soil management to cope with increased water stress. The WFP is collaborating with the Government of Odisha to develop solutions for smallholder farmers, focusing on women. The goal is to enhance resilience through solar technologies, establish community-based climate advisory services to help manage climate impacts and promote a millet-value chain that reduces water usage and improves nutrition.

To achieve global food and nutrition security, political commitment is needed as much as concrete investment. The needed policies and investments must promote: Innovative and proven technologies that allow farmers to increase their productivity, adapt to climate change and become more resilient to shocks; environmentally and socially sustainable and financially viable irrigation and water management strategies; reduce their climate footprint of agricultural production, as well as bio-hazards and environmental pollution; bring sanitation and drinking water supplies closer to rural households; adopt efficient food and water recycling strategies and strengthen institutional arrangements and capacity for sustainable and equitable water regulations, management, access and ownership.

The UN's food agencies work closely with the Government of India and State governments on innovations such as Solar 4 Resilience, Secure Fishing, and the revival of millets for renewable energy promotion, food security and nutrition.

Takayuki Hagiwara is Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Representative in India. Ulac Demirag is Country Director and Representative, International Fund for Agricultural Development. Elisabeth Faure is Representative and Country Director, United Nations World Food Programme in India

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CENTRE MAY RAISE RETIREMENT AGE OF SCIENTISTS FROM 60 TO 65

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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October 15, 2023 09:08 pm | Updated 11:18 pm IST - NEW DELHI

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting scientists of the ISRO in Bengaluru recently. | Photo Credit: ANI/PIB

The Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) is working on a proposal to increase the retirement age of scientists to 65.

Its larger purpose, sources suggest, is to stem the flight of its top, senior scientists to universities and the Indian Institutes of Technology, where the retirement age is 65, *The Hindu* has learnt.

At present, scientists in most wings of the government retire at 60, while those working at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) retire at 62.

A note by the MoST issued on October 6 this year says that a "proposal for enhancement of retirement age of scientists in autonomous bodies of science departments/Ministries is under way." This note, sent to 14 autonomous bodies funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), asks the heads of institutes to furnish: the total sanctioned strength of scientists in their AB (autonomous bodies), the number of scientists retiring in the next five years (November 2023–March 2028), and the "additional financial implication of the enhanced retirement age". *The Hindu* has viewed this note.

Abhay Karandikar, who took charge as Secretary in the Ministry on October 3, said he was "unaware" and declined comment. The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the DST come within the MoST.

Sources in the MoST told *The Hindu* that the proposal stemmed from the DBT where, over the years, concerns have been raised that several senior scientists approaching retirement were quitting institutes for careers in academia.

"The aim is to bring parity. Why should our (Ministry-affiliated) scientists be disadvantaged? However, it is still an early-stage proposal and under discussion," a senior scientist, aware of matters, told The Hindu. The DBT has reportedly already sent details of eligible scientists for evaluation. Scientists who work in autonomous institutions of the Ministry of Earth Sciences

(MoES) are also likely to come under the ambit of the proposal.

This isn't the first time that the government has mooted raising the retirement age of scientists. A draft Cabinet note in 2015, led by the MoST, had said the move would bring parity in service conditions of research scientists working in different arms of the government.

So far, the general trend in the Ministries has been to give scientists nearing retirement, 'extensions' that may increase their tenure by two or up to five years. The Modi government, one scientist said, has done away with such extensions and instead opted for short-term contracts to retain valuable, senior employees. However the 2015 proposal, despite being discussed publicly at the highest levels of government, appears to have been buried.

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science (general) / science (general) / national government

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1ST P20 SUMMIT HOSTED BY INDIA HAS BEEN THE MOST SUCCESSFUL P20 SUMMIT EVER: LOK SABHA SPEAKER

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

The Lok Sabha Speaker Shri Om Birla has said that the 1st P20 Summit hosted by India has been the most successful P20 Summit ever in terms of participation of delegations. Addressing a press conference at the Parliament premises today, following the conclusion of the 9th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit in New Delhi yesterday, the Speaker informed the media that apart from the G20 countries, 10 other countries were invited to the conference, out of which all countries except one participated. He further informed that a total of 37 Speakers / Chairpersons and Deputy Speakers / Deputy Chairpersons and leaders of delegations from 29 countries participated in the summit. From a historical point of view, the New Delhi P20 Summit had the highest participation ever. He also pointed out that the Pan-African Parliament participated in the P20 summit for the first time after the inclusion of Pan African Union as a member of the G20. A total of 436 delegates, including 48 Members of Parliament in addition to the Speakers and Deputy Speakers of the Parliaments of the G20 and invited countries, participated in the summit.

The press conference addressed by the Speaker can be watched here.

The Lok Sabha Speaker noted that in line with the theme of India's G20 Presidency, the theme of the 9th P20 Summit was 'Parliaments for One Earth, One Family, One Future'. The first ever G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20 Summit) hosted by the world's largest democracy concluded at India International Convention Centre, Yashobhoomi, Dwarka, Delhi on October 14, 2023, with parliamentarians from across the world coming together and reaffirming their commitment to continue their joint work to make an effective and meaningful parliamentary contribution to the G20 process. The P20 Summit was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on October 13, 2023. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi highlighted the role of India as the mother of democracy. The two-day summit was preceded by a Parliamentary Forum on Mission LiFE on October 12, 2023.

"Consensus on P20 Summit Joint Declaration a sign of India's leadership"

Highlighting the success of the Summit, Shri Birla noted that after the consensus on the Joint Declaration under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the G20 Leaders' Summit, the Parliament of India led others to reach a consensus on the Joint Declaration in the P20 Summit as well. It is noteworthy that last year a joint declaration could not be agreed upon in Indonesia. Expressing satisfaction at this, Shri Birla said that the consensus on the joint declaration in P20 reflects India's leadership and determination.

"All sources of terror have to be defeated with collective determination"

The Lok Sabha Speaker underlined that India condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Highlighting that terrorism is a hindrance to peace and development, Shri Birla called for global peace and prosperity. Emphasizing on the need for the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous world, he said that all sources of terror have to be defeated with collective determination.

"Need to pay attention to Responsible AI Development and Data Security"

Referring to Artificial Intelligence, Shri Birla noted that all countries which participated in the P20 Summit stressed the need to pay attention to dimensions related to responsible Artificial Intelligence development and data security. He further said that Artificial Intelligence should be credible and trustworthy.

On the role of digital platforms, Shri Birla said that during the Summit, all the countries accepted the role of digital platforms in bringing socio-economic change in the lives of the common people. He further said that all countries agreed that this can further facilitate service delivery and innovation.

Shri Birla informed that the P20 countries agreed to form a group to enhance domain knowledge in legislative drafting.

"Across-the-board welcome for Nari Shakti Vandan Bill 2023"

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"Special Discussion on Mission LiFE to be held in Parliaments of all G20 Countries"

Describing climate change as a major challenge before the world, Shri Birla said that India has taken several initiatives to deal with the threat of climate change. Regarding the discussion on the concept of 'Lifestyle for Environment' (LiFE) initiated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Shri Birla noted that all the countries shared information about the innovations being made in this regard. He further said that now there will be a special discussion on Mission LiFE in the Parliaments of all the countries, and the message will be given to the entire world to adopt an environment-friendly lifestyle. By doing this, under the leadership of India, people from all over the world will unite to protect the earth, environment and nature. Similarly, by sharing each other's best practices and efforts, everyone will be able to move towards a healthy and ideal lifestyle.

A successful conclusion of the P20 Summit in New Delhi.

 Watch the highlights!#G20India #Parliament20 pic.twitter.com/Y0QyYmUgD6

More information on P20 Summit:

Join the conversation on social media, using the hashtag: #Parliament20

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PIB DELHI | Beena Yadav/ Dheep/ Arun

The Lok Sabha Speaker Shri Om Birla has said that the 1st P20 Summit hosted by India has been the most successful P20 Summit ever in terms of participation of delegations. Addressing a press conference at the Parliament premises today, following the conclusion of the 9th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit in New Delhi yesterday, the Speaker informed the media that apart from the G20 countries, 10 other countries were invited to the conference, out of which all countries except one participated. He further informed that a total of 37 Speakers / Chairpersons and Deputy Speakers / Deputy Chairpersons and leaders of delegations from 29 countries participated in the summit. From a historical point of view, the New Delhi P20 Summit had the highest participation ever. He also pointed out that the Pan-African Parliament participated in the P20 summit for the first time after the inclusion of Pan African Union as a member of the G20. A total of 436 delegates, including 48 Members of Parliament in addition to the Speakers and Deputy Speakers of the Parliaments of the G20 and invited countries, participated in the summit.

The press conference addressed by the Speaker can be watched here.

The Lok Sabha Speaker noted that in line with the theme of India's G20 Presidency, the theme of the 9th P20 Summit was 'Parliaments for One Earth, One Family, One Future'. The first ever G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20 Summit) hosted by the world's largest democracy concluded at India International Convention Centre, Yashobhoomi, Dwarka, Delhi on October 14, 2023, with parliamentarians from across the world coming together and reaffirming their commitment to continue their joint work to make an effective and meaningful parliamentary contribution to the G20 process. The P20 Summit was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on October 13, 2023. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi highlighted the role of India as the mother of democracy. The two-day summit was preceded by a Parliamentary Forum on Mission LiFE on October 12, 2023.

"Consensus on P20 Summit Joint Declaration a sign of India's leadership"

Highlighting the success of the Summit, Shri Birla noted that after the consensus on the Joint Declaration under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the G20 Leaders'

Summit, the Parliament of India led others to reach a consensus on the Joint Declaration in the P20 Summit as well. It is noteworthy that last year a joint declaration could not be agreed upon in Indonesia. Expressing satisfaction at this, Shri Birla said that the consensus on the joint declaration in P20 reflects India's leadership and determination.

"All sources of terror have to be defeated with collective determination"

The Lok Sabha Speaker underlined that India condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Highlighting that terrorism is a hindrance to peace and development, Shri Birla called for global peace and prosperity. Emphasizing on the need for the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous world, he said that all sources of terror have to be defeated with collective determination.

"Need to pay attention to Responsible AI Development and Data Security"

Referring to Artificial Intelligence, Shri Birla noted that all countries which participated in the P20 Summit stressed the need to pay attention to dimensions related to responsible Artificial Intelligence development and data security. He further said that Artificial Intelligence should be credible and trustworthy.

On the role of digital platforms, Shri Birla said that during the Summit, all the countries accepted the role of digital platforms in bringing socio-economic change in the lives of the common people. He further said that all countries agreed that this can further facilitate service delivery and innovation.

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PIB DELHI | Beena Yadav/ Dheep/ Arun

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WORLD HEALTH SUMMIT 2023

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

"India firmly emphasizes the need for a comprehensive strategy which includes preventive measures, early discussion and efficient management with the aim of reducing the prevalence and impact of NCDs on the well-being of our citizens". This was stated by Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, during her virtual address at the high-level panel discussion on "Scaling up Integration of NCDs in Primary Care" at the World Health Summit 2023, here today. Dr Roderico H Ofrin, WHO India Representative was also present. The theme of this year's World Health Summit is "A Defining Year for Global Health Action."

Highlighting India's efforts at reducing non-communicable diseases, Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar stated that "India has launched the 75/25 initiative, aimed at screening and providing standard of care for 75 million individuals with hypertension and diabetes by 2025. It marks the most extensive expansion of NCDs in primary healthcare globally". "India's visible efforts to improve social indicators such as life expectancy, maternal mortality rate, and NCDs are evident in its seeking of this goal. The Outcome Budget document of the Union Budget for 2023-2024 is noteworthy for including hypertension and diabetes treatment as output indicators for the first time. This inclusion underscores the government's dedication to scaling up coverage services for hypertension and diabetes, further emphasizing its commitment to tackling these health challenges", she added.

Emphasizing that NCDs have become a significant global health challenge demanding immediate attention, the Union Minister said that "the Govt of India had launched the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NP-NCD) under the National Health Mission (NHM) in 2010 with the aim of strengthening infrastructure, human resource development, health promotion, early diagnosis, management and referral. The Ayushman Bharat initiative is translating the policy intent to budgetary commitment, to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) underscoring the commitment to 'leave no one behind'".

Underlining the initiatives taken by the Govt of India for countering NCDs, Dr Pawar stated that "the Union Health Ministry has implemented Population-Based Screening (PBS) under the umbrella of Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC) across Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWC). The individuals in the age groups of 30 years and above are targeted for risk assessment and screening of common NCDs (hypertension, diabetes, oral cancer, breast cancer and cervical cancer). The services are being offered through trained frontline health workers and the referral support and continuity of care is ensured through all levels of health care delivery systems". "Through e-Sanjeevani, teleconsultation services for NCDs are provided to citizens by leveraging potential of Information Technology bypassing hindrances of geography, accessibility, cost and distance", she stated.

She also informed that prevention and control of NCDs, as well as awareness for healthy lifestyles, are being carried out in mission mode at all levels of health care delivery in collaboration with the public and private sectors. "Beyond the management of illness, Health & Wellness Centers are focusing on ensuring the wellness and wellbeing of the community. In addition to this, we have also collaborated with other Union Ministries and Departments such as the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the Ministry of Ayush, for activities such as Fit India Movement and yoga-related activities carried out by the respective ministries. Other initiatives for increasing public awareness about NCDs and for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle include observation of International & National Health Days and the use of print, electronic and social media for continued community awareness", she further added.

Underscoring the role of technology in improving last mile delivery of healthcare services, the Union Minister emphasized on the digital health technologies initiatives that have significantly improved the management and prevention of NCDs. "The National NCD portal is being used for prevention, control, screening and management of common NCDs. Primary-level information is captured through this portal at public health facilities for reporting and monitoring individual-wise screening and compliance of treatment for NCDs. It also features a Single Longitudinal Health Record for every individual in the cloud, identified by a Unique Health ID (ABHA ID: Ayushman Bharat Health Account ID) which ensures data availability and continuum of care ensuring linkages in between the facilities", she stated.

Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar concluded the session by repeating India's dedicated commitment to the prevention and control of NCDs and expressing deep appreciation for the global efforts in this crucial domain. "In the spirit of 'One Earth, One Health', India emphasizes the need for nations to collaborate and share successes. It underscores the interconnectedness of global health, advocating for a collaborative approach where countries work together to collectively address the challenges posed by NCDs. This collaborative effort reflects the broader ethics of unity and shared responsibility for the well-being of our global community", she stated.

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MV

HFW/MoS WHS Discussion on NCDs/15thOct2023/2

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HFW/MoS WHS Discussion on NCDs/15thOct2023/2

END

PALLIATIVE CARE, A WAY TO REDUCE FINANCIAL DISTRESS FOR PEOPLE WITH LIFE LIMITING DISEASES

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

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October 17, 2023 08:30 am | Updated 08:30 am IST

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"I couldn't go for my six-monthly check-ups at the government district hospital as I didn't have the money for the autorickshaw. The travel alone costs around 1,200. My monthly income is only 1,600 through my disability pension. How can you expect me to go to the hospital? Where will the money for my routine expenditure come from?" asked Shankar (name changed), a 55-year-old man from Kerala who had been homebound for the past two years due to a stroke.

Like Shankar, many Indians are either a hospital bill away from poverty or too poor to access healthcare. It is estimated that nearly 5.5 crore people fall below the poverty line every year due to out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure. Out of these, 3.8 crore people become poor only because of the expenditure on medicines. "India is becoming the epicentre for non-communicable diseases and several of the patients with these diseases, like cancer, cardiac disease, renal failure or stroke, will eventually reach an incurable stage," says Padma Shri and 2023 Magsaysay Award recipient Dr. Ravi Kannan.

Non-communicable diseases will push more and more people into poverty as they require lifelong treatment and periodic health check-ups. However, the financial implications for a family associated with the continuous treatment of these diseases often go unnoticed in our health system. This often leads to 'financial toxicity' wherein there is a risk of bankruptcy, decreased treatment satisfaction, foregoing or delays in seeking further medical care, poor quality of life, and poor survival.

With only 1.35% of the gross domestic product (GDP) being spent on government health services, patients bear most of the health expenses. Even in government hospitals where treatment is supposed to be free, the cost of travel, purchasing medicines that many a time are out of stock in government pharmacies, and loss of wages due to the absence from work contribute to the financial toxicity.

A recent study by Dr. Prinja and his colleagues from India reported that an average of 8,035 is spent by a cancer patient per outpatient visit and 39,085 per hospitalisation in a tertiary care hospital in India. Similarly, the cost per outpatient clinic visit in a tertiary care hospital is 4,381 for a patient with diabetes and 1,427 for a patient with hypertension. Towards the end of life,

attempts to continue treatment with the aim of prolonging life leads to even more financial burdens. Often caregivers have to sell assets and stop the education of children in the family to cope with the financial burden. The same study also reported that in patients with last-stage cancer, more than 65% faced impoverishment due to healthcare expenditure.

Palliative care is a branch of medicine that looks at improving the quality of life of those having life-limiting illnesses like cancers, end-stage kidney disease, debilitating brain disorders, complications of diabetes, and heart disease among others. It is different from other medical specialities as it focuses on alleviating uncontrolled symptoms of the incurable illnesses mentioned above, and preventing non-beneficial investigations, and treatments. It takes into consideration not just the physical dimension of health but also actively looks at the social and economic realities of the patient and the family.

Early initiation of palliative care in patients with advanced disease has shown to reduce health expenditure by up to 25%. Palliative care is provided through outpatient visits, inpatient visits, and home-based care. Home-based care further reduces the cost of seeking care as home-bound patients no longer have to travel to seek healthcare. Vocational rehabilitation and social reintegration are crucial elements of palliative care which further help the affected family and the patient by providing them with the opportunities to earn a living and live independently with dignity. "Depending on their ability to work, we provide rehabilitation support to patients. We either teach them basic skills like stitching or introduce them to small-scale animal husbandry so they can have a source of income," told John, a social officer at Pallium India.

Despite existing for nearly four decades, awareness regarding palliative care in India, both among healthcare workers and the general public is low. Also, currently, palliative care is not covered under most insurance schemes in India. These two factors have resulted in poor demand and poor access to palliative care in the country. Unplanned and abysmal funding has also been a barrier to public health centres providing palliative care services.

The provision of such care from primary and secondary health centres is still a distant reality despite its inclusion in the ambitious Ayushman Bharat program. Furthermore, as palliative care is not a wealth-generating speciality but an expense-saving one, the increasingly privatised Indian health system has by and large chosen to neglect the speciality barring a few exceptions. The unavailability of such care services in the public and private setup has thus resulted in palliative care needs of the country being predominantly met by private non-profit organisations.

The funding mechanism of the National Program for Palliative Care needs to be reorganised, according to Padma Shri Dr. M.R. Rajagopal. "Instead of its current mode of occasional annual budgeting, the program must be consistently funded. Under the current mode, the state government is not sure whether the money will continue to be available in the subsequent year. This prevents long-term planning," said Dr. Rajagopal.

Considering that palliative care is known to save money for both patients and the provider, its provision in public health centres would help the government not only in saving money but also in protecting people from avoidable health expenditures. "Investing in palliative care is extremely wise as the returns in terms of human health and well-being are enormous," said Dr. Kannan who feels that it is the mark of a civilised society to make sure that patients with end-stage diseases are supported till the end of their lives.

According to both Dr. Kannan and Dr. Rajagopal, palliative care provisions will help in generating goodwill for corporate hospitals. "The family of the patient who has been taken care of at the end of their life will remain eternally grateful to the caregivers. They will bring back many more patients to be cared for at that health centre," said Dr. Kannan. The inclusion of

palliative care will also improve the utilisation of beds in the hospital. "As opposed to the bed being occupied for a long duration by a patient with poor disease outcomes, the bed could be used to save the lives of people with better disease outcomes. This would increase the turnover rate of admissions in ICUs and thus ultimately help corporate hospitals in generating wealth. This is a win-win situation where the patient has a better quality of life, families face lesser financial toxicity and the ICU bed generates more wealth by being utilised by more people who truly need it," said Dr. Rajagopal.

It is the moral obligation of the health system to take care of people, especially when they are suffering from life-long and life-limiting illnesses. It's high time public and private healthcare providers realised the high returns of investing in palliative care and prioritised it.

Parth Sharma is a public health physician, a researcher at the Association for Socially Applicable Research (ASAR), and the founder of Nivarana.org. Deepak Sudhakaran is a community medicine specialist heading the Social Works Division at Pallium India.

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Text and Context / healthcare policy / palliative care

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DELAY AS TACTIC: ON THE CENTRE AND COLLEGIUM RELATIONSHIP

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

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The Centre's assurance to the Supreme Court that it would soon notify the appointment of Justice Siddharth Mridul of the Delhi High Court as Chief Justice (CJ) of the Manipur High Court is a welcome development. In another sign that it would be more accommodative of the Collegium's recommendations, it has forwarded as many as 70 names approved by constitutional authorities in various States for appointment as judges of High Courts. The delay in notifying the appointment of Justice Mridul was apparently due to the State government taking time to give its views on the proposal. His name was recommended by the Collegium on July 5, and the delay was quite strange. The Collegium has also mooted the transfer of Justice M.V. Muralidaran, now Acting CJ in Manipur to the Calcutta High Court. A few days ago, it rejected his request that he be either retained in Manipur or allowed to go to his parent court, the Madras High Court. It is to be seen how long the Centre takes to notify his transfer. It was an order passed by Justice Muralidaran, directing the Manipur government to consider the inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes category, that is seen by some as one of the triggers for the ethnic violence that rocked the State from early May. However, the order was not stayed by the Supreme Court as there was a request by the Centre that a stay order might exacerbate tensions.

The Court has been vocal about the Centre's selective treatment of its recommendations. There are instances of the government returning names that had been reiterated more than once. In recent times, it has shown that it can have its way by merely ignoring some of the Collegium's decisions. For instance, it ignored the proposal to appoint Justice S. Muralidhar, now retired, as CJ of the Madras High Court for so long that the Collegium ultimately rescinded its recommendation. In the case of Justice T. Raja, who was Acting CJ in Madras for an unusually long period, the recommendation to transfer him to the Rajasthan High Court was ignored by the government until his retirement. The conflict between the government and the Collegium over the appointment process is quite pronounced and often reaches a flashpoint. It is time the process was streamlined to give effect to the Supreme Court's April 2021 order that set timelines for the government to process names recommended by the Collegium and express its reservations, if any. Once the Collegium reiterates any recommendation, it should be implemented within three to four weeks. Whatever the inadequacies and failures of the Collegium process, it does not augur well for the institution if the legal position that a reiterated decision is binding on the government is undermined.

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CONFRONTING THE LONG-TERM RISKS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Robotics & Artificial Intelligence

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October 17, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 09:14 am IST

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'The challenge lies in aligning AI with universally accepted human values' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Risk is a dynamic and ever-evolving concept, susceptible to shifts in societal values, technological advancements, and scientific discoveries. For instance, before the digital age, sharing one's personal details openly was relatively risk-free. Yet, in the age of cyberattacks and data breaches, the same act is fraught with dangers. A vivid cinematic example of evolving perceptions of Artificial Intelligence (AI) risk is the film, Ex Machina.

In the story, an AI named Ava, initially viewed as a marvel of synthetic intelligence, reveals her potential to outwit and manipulate her human creators, culminating in unforeseen hazards. Such a tale exemplifies how our understanding of AI risk can drastically change as the technology's capabilities become clearer. This underscores the importance of identifying the short- and long-term risks. The immediate risks might be more tangible, such as ensuring that an AI system does not malfunction in its day-to-day tasks. Long-term risks might grapple with broader existential questions about AI's role in society and its implications for humanity. Addressing both types of risks requires a multifaceted approach, weighing current challenges against potential future ramifications.

The risks that present themselves over the long term are worth looking at.

Yuval Noah Harari has expressed concerns about the amalgamation of AI and biotechnology, highlighting the potential to fundamentally alter human existence by manipulating human emotions, thoughts, and desires. In a recent statement by the Center for AI Safety, more than 350 AI professionals have voiced their concerns over the potential risks posed by AI technology.

One should be a bit worried about the intermediate and existential risks of more evolved AI systems of the future — for instance, if essential infrastructure such as water and electricity increasingly rely on AI. Any malfunction or manipulation of such AI systems could disrupt these pivotal services, potentially hampering societal functions and public well-being.

Similarly, although seemingly improbable, a 'runaway AI' could cause more harm — such as the manipulation of crucial systems such as water distribution or the alteration of chemical balances in water supplies, which may cause catastrophic repercussions even if such probabilities appear

distant. AI sceptics fear these potential existential risks, viewing it as more than just a tool — as a possible catalyst for dire outcomes, possibly leading to extinction.

The evolution to human-level AI that is capable of outperforming human cognitive tasks will mark a pivotal shift in these risks. Such AIs might undergo rapid self-improvement, culminating in a super-intelligence that far outpaces human intellect. The potential of this super-intelligence acting on misaligned, corrupted or malicious goals presents dire scenarios.

The challenge lies in aligning AI with universally accepted human values. The rapid pace of AI advancement, spurred by market pressures, often eclipses safety considerations, raising concerns about unchecked AI development.

The world does not have a unified approach. The lack of a unified global approach to AI regulation can be detrimental to the foundational objective of AI governance — to ensure the long-term safety and ethical deployment of AI technologies. The AI Index from Stanford University reveals that legislative bodies in 127 countries passed 37 laws that included the words "artificial intelligence".

One of the most celebrated regulations out of these is the European Union's AI Act. It adopts a 'risk-based' approach, tying the severity of risk to the area of AI deployment. This makes sense when considering AI applications in critical infrastructures, which demand heightened scrutiny. However, tying risk solely to the deployment area is an oversimplified strategy. It might overlook certain risks that are not directly tied to the deployment area. Therefore, while the area-specific approach is valuable, a more holistic view of AI risks is necessary to ensure comprehensive and effective regulation and oversight.

However, there is a conspicuous absence of collaboration and cohesive action at the international level, and so long-term risks associated with AI cannot be mitigated. If a country such as China does not enact regulations on AI while others do, it would likely gain a competitive edge in terms of AI advancements and deployments. This unregulated progress can lead to the development of AI systems that may be misaligned with global ethical standards, creating a risk of unforeseen and potentially irreversible consequences. This could result in destabilisation and conflict, undermining international peace and security.

Thus, nations engaging in rigorous AI safety protocols may be at a disadvantage, encouraging a race to the bottom where safety and ethical considerations are neglected in favour of rapid development and deployment. This uneven playing field can inadvertently encourage other nations to loosen their regulatory frameworks to maintain competitiveness, thereby further compromising global AI safety.

Furthermore, the confluence of technology with warfare amplifies long-term risks. Addressing the perils of military AI is crucial. The international community has formed treaties such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to manage such potent technologies, demonstrating that establishing global norms for AI in warfare is a pressing but attainable goal. Treaties such as the Chemical Weapons Convention are further examples of international accord in restricting hazardous technologies. Nations must delineate where AI deployment is unacceptable and enforce clear norms for its role in warfare. In this ever-evolving landscape of AI risks, the world must remember that our choices today will shape the world we inherit tomorrow.

Aditya Sinha is Officer on Special Duty, Research, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. Tweets@adityasinha004. The views expressed are personal

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PM INFORMS THAT NAMO APP HAS SIGNIFICANT SECTION WHICH HELPS TO CONNECT WITH THE LOCAL MP

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

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi informed that NaMo App has significant section which helps to connect with the local Member of Parliament. PM Modi said that this section will go a long way in furthering our democratic spirit. He also said that it will enable an easy way to deepen connect with concerned local MP, facilitate engagement with the MP and also help to participate in various activities being organised.

The Prime Minister posted on X;

"NaMo App has a very interesting section which will go a long way in furthering our democratic spirit. It will enable an easy way to deepen connect with your local MP, facilitate engagement with the MP and also help to participate in various activities being organised. From interesting cultural programmes to vibrant sporting tournaments, it will be easier for MPs and their constituents to connect. **nm-4.com/mymp**"

NaMo App has a very interesting section which will go a long way in furthering our democratic spirit. It will enable an easy way to deepen connect with your local MP, facilitate engagement with the MP and also help to participate in various activities being organised. From…

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The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi informed that NaMo App has significant section which helps to connect with the local Member of Parliament. PM Modi said that this section will go a long way in furthering our democratic spirit. He also said that it will enable an easy way to deepen connect with concerned local MP, facilitate engagement with the MP and also help to participate in various activities being organised.

The Prime Minister posted on X;

"NaMo App has a very interesting section which will go a long way in furthering our democratic spirit. It will enable an easy way to deepen connect with your local MP, facilitate engagement with the MP and also help to participate in various activities being organised. From interesting cultural programmes to vibrant sporting tournaments, it will be easier for MPs and their constituents to connect. **nm-4.com/mymp**"

NaMo App has a very interesting section which will go a long way in furthering our democratic spirit. It will enable an easy way to deepen connect with your local MP, facilitate engagement

with the MP and also help to participate in various activities being organised. From…

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AN OPPORTUNITY TO RECAST INDIA'S FOOD SYSTEM

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Poverty & Hunger and related issues

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October 20, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 02:03 am IST

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'Consumer demand needs to be shifted towards healthy and sustainable diets' | Photo Credit: MOHAMMED YOUSUF

Earlier this week, we celebrated World Food Day (October 16), but we rarely look at food as a system. No country can better understand the challenges of a food system than India, which feeds the largest population in the world. While the primary goal of a food system is to ensure nutrition security for all, it can only be achieved sustainably if the producers producing the food make reasonable economic returns that are resilient over time.

This resilience, in turn, is intricately linked with the resilience of our natural ecosystem because the largest inputs to agriculture — soil, water and climatic conditions — are all but natural resources. Appreciating this interconnectedness of nutrition security with livelihood and environmental security is essential to making our food system truly sustainable.

On the nutrition front, India faces a double burden of malnutrition. At one end, despite making great progress over the years, a sizable proportion of Indians exhibit nutrient deficiencies. As in the National Family Health Survey, 2019-21, 35% of children are stunted, and 57% of women and 25% of men are anaemic. At the other end, due to imbalanced diets and sedentary lifestyles, 24% of adult women and 23% of adult men are now obese. India has been stepping up efforts to reduce malnutrition, which has included even the Prime Minister calling for a mass movement to eradicate it.

On the production side, farm incomes are insufficient to meet the ends of marginal and small farmers. According to a report by the Transforming Rural India Foundation, more than 68% of marginal farmers supplement their incomes with non-farm activities. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and other forms of casual labour are picking up the slack, indicating a lack of skills or opportunities for income diversification.

Further, depleting natural resources and changing climate are making India's food production highly vulnerable. As in the 2023 soil health survey, almost half the cultivable land in India has become deficient in organic carbon, which is an essential indicator of soil health. Groundwater, the largest source of irrigation, is rapidly declining. In States such as Punjab, more than 75% of the groundwater assessment locations are over-exploited, threatening the resilience of farm incomes.

To solve these interconnected challenges, we need a triad approach that engages all three

sides of the food system: consumers, producers, and middlemen.

First, consumer demand needs to be shifted towards healthy and sustainable diets. We need to shift to a food plate that is healthier for people and the planet. The private sector drives the aspirational consumption patterns for India's billion-plus population. What corporations have done to mainstream imported oats or quinoa in India, can be done for locally-grown millets. Civil society and the health community could partner with social media influencers who can shape healthier and sustainable consumption for millions.

Alongside, the public sector, through its innumerable touch points such as the Public Distribution System, mid-day meals, railways catering, urban canteens, and public and institutional procurement, can help improve what at least 70% of Indians are consuming. Even religious institutions can shape food choices. For instance, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, which serves nearly 70,000 people daily, has started procuring naturally-farmed produce.

Second, to ensure resilient incomes, we must support farmers' transition towards remunerative and regenerative agricultural practices. The National Mission on Natural Farming is a step in this direction, but the overall funding for sustainable agriculture is less than 1% of the agricultural budget. We need to broaden and scale up such initiatives to various agro-ecological practices such as agroforestry, conservation agriculture, precision farming, and much more.

Further, agriculture support should move from input subsidies to direct cash support to farmers per hectare of cultivation. It would promote efficient use of inputs, while enabling a level playing field for agroecological practices to thrive. Agricultural research and extension services should also earmark a proportion of their respective budgets to focus on sustainable agricultural practices.

Third, shift farm-to-fork value chains towards more sustainable and inclusive ones. A critical approach to enhance rural (farm) incomes is to enable more value addition of agricultural produce in rural areas. Middlemen, such as corporations supplying raw and processed food to consumers, should prioritise direct procurement from farmers, incentivise procurement of sustainably harvested produce, and implement well-established approaches such as fair trade. Various young agri-tech enterprises such as DeHaat and Ninjacart are enabling such farm-to-buyer linkages. Moreover, since all farmer families in a farmer producer organisation (FPO) are consumers of other farming goods, enabling trading of produce between FPOs is another way to ensure a greater value share for farmers, as showcased by a few FPOs in Odisha.

Shifting an entire food system, however, is no mean feat. But the scale of the challenge must not deter our ambitions. If we act fast, India has a unique opportunity to showcase to the rest of the world how to get its food system right.

Abhishek Jain is a Fellow and Director of Powering Livelihoods at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, an independent think tank. The views expressed are personal

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"GHAR-GHAR KCC ABHIYAAN": A TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVE TO ENSURE KISAN CREDIT CARD ACCESS FOR FISH FARMERS

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

In a significant step towards enhancing financial inclusion and support for the fisheries sector, Secretary (Fisheries), Dr. Abhilaksh Likhi chaired a pivotal meeting focusing on the 'Ghar-Ghar KCC Abhiyaan.'

The meeting was attended by the senior officers from various States and Union Territories, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Scheduled Commercial Banks, the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, State Level Bankers Committees (SLBCs) and Regional Rural Banks (RRBs).

In his address, Dr. Abhilaksh Likhi emphasized the need for expansion of KCC facility to the last mile of the fisheries value chain, ensuring that every eligible individual is covered. He also stated that reason for rejection of KCC applications need to be analysed and efforts to be made to reduce the rejection and approval of application needs to be fast tracked. Secretary informed that Special KCC campaign during Sagar Parikrama is encouraging and urged all the participants for their cooperation to ensure the successful execution of the 'Ghar-Ghar KCC Abhiyaan'.

Joint Secretary, DoF, Shri SagarMehra discussed the aims and objectives of the 'Ghar Ghar KCC Abhiyaan' and emphasised the importance of effective participation of States/UTs and Banks for successful implementation of the Abhiyaan. He mentioned that the campaign aims to achieve universal financial inclusion, ensuring that every farmer has unhindered access to credit

facilities that drive their agricultural pursuits.

Joint Secretary also highlighted the issues faced by beneficiaries related to documents and bank procedures as informed by States/UTs. He informed that KCC for 1,59,903 have been sanctioned with worth Rs 1746.16 Crore. He also highlighted that there is need to increase awareness on latest RBI guidelines issued regarding eligibility for fishers to get KCC. He also emphasized that analysis of rejection of applications and corrective measures to be taken by the banks and other stake holders so that maximum beneficiaries may get its benefit.

The participants from States/UTs highlighted the issues and challenges in mobilisation of applications, eligibility criterion, credit limit and documentation etc. while assuring their full cooperation during the ongoing Abhiyaan. NABARD, Scheduled Commercial Banks, the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, State Level Bankers Committees (SLBCs), Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and RBI assured that they will give special focus on 'Ghar-Ghar KCC Abhiyaan' for Fisheries sector for the saturation of eligible Fishers and Fish Farmers with KCC facility.

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MAJOR REGIONAL DISPARITY IN OVERCOMING CANCER THOUGH SURVIVAL RATES ARE UP: STUDY

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

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October 19, 2023 06:47 pm | Updated October 20, 2023 12:16 am IST - NEW DELHI

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Various urban Population Based Cancer Registries were assessed to find the survival rates of cervical cancer patients and it found that there was significant variations in survival rates across these regions. Photo: pbcr.ncdirindia.org

Roughly 52% of cervical cancer cases diagnosed between 2012 and 2015 survived, according to a study published in *The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia*, based on data from Population Based Cancer Registries (PBCRs) across India, a report stated.

Various urban PBCRs from different regions of India were assessed to find the survival rates of cervical cancer patients and it found that there was significant variations in survival rates across these regions.

Among those that participated in the study, Ahmedabad's urban PBCR demonstrated the highest survival rate at 61.5%, followed by Thiruvananthapuram with 58.8% and Kollam at 56.1% and in contrast, Tripura reported the lowest survival rate at 1.6%.

The study focused on a total of 5,591 cervical cancer cases diagnosed between 2012 and 2015 in 11 PBCRs. The overall survival rate for these cases was 52%, which marked a notable improvement of approximately 6% compared to the previous SurvCan survey-3, where the survival rate was recorded at 46%, the report stated.

Survival rates were notably lower in India's northeastern region, particularly in PBCRs in Tripura, Pasighat and Kamrup urban.

Factors including access to diagnostic services, effective treatment varied across the population, distance from clinical care facilities, travel costs, co-morbidities, and poverty contributed to survival rates, noted the study. A research team, including scientists from the National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research and the Indian Council of Medical Research, conducted a comprehensive study on cervical cancer in India.

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THE POLITICS OF A CASTE CENSUS, ITS IMPACT ON SECULARISM

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population And Associated Issues

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October 21, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 02:12 am IST

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'Such a census might open a Pandora's box of claims and counter-claims relating to positions and power' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

By consistently championing the issue of having a caste census, various Opposition party leaders of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), from Nitish Kumar to Rahul Gandhi, have set the agenda on this one issue at least — which they have otherwise failed ever since Narendra Modi emerged on India's national political scene. From demonetisation to the idea of simultaneous elections, it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has established a monopoly over agenda-setting in India's political discourse. In response to the INDIA coalition's persistent demand for a caste census, Mr. Modi has argued that he only believes in poverty as being the only caste and that serving the poor is his sole priority. The irony in Mr. Modi's claim is that the poor have no ascriptive identity either in caste or religion or race and is indeed a variation of a Marxian argument. Its more elegant expression was found in the slogan, "'the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win...." It is the political reality of India that has forced Mr. Modi to fall back subconsciously on this famous reasoning, which is the irony of our time.

According to scholars who work on Indian poverty, there are two kinds of poverty, i.e., economic and institutional. Caste plays a pivotal role in the perpetuation of institutional poverty because, historically, it determines occupation and skills. In the modern Indian economy, most occupations are network driven in which caste plays decisive roles in driving those networks, which is why a caste census is vital. This is also why Rahul Gandhi's observation that such a census 'is like the X-ray of India' makes some sense. By not recognising that caste has bred poverty, Mr. Modi is turning a blind eye to a deeply painful reality of Indian society. It is not just Mr. Modi, but even the trickle down approach of the Nehruvian model, which economist Sukhamoy Chakravarty used to describe as the Nehru-Mahalanobis model of development did not recognise either. Therefore, non-recognition of the organic relationship of caste and poverty has been a long neglected fact of Indian policy thinking.

However, the reason why Hindutva seems reluctant to have a caste census is because it believes it might open a Pandora's box of claims and counter-claims relating to positions and power — about who got what, when and how. Such a census would serve as the enduring source for divisive politics and trigger a never-ending process of social engineering that would upset Hindutva's apple cart of Hindu majoritarian unity, which it has stitched together after

decades of hard work through intense grass-root campaigns.

Utilising the politics of religious polarisation, Hindutva forces are within striking distance of fulfilling their political dream of Hindu majoritarian unity, which appeared almost Utopian in the mid-1970s. On the other hand, secular political groups are also aware of the divisive potential of a caste census. For them, it is the most potent weapon among others to contain the growing electoral influence of Hindu majoritarian forces.

Looking at caste-based politics in Uttar Pradesh, it was argued that assertions of caste identities would help in a secularisation of the Indian polity. This appeared to have borne fruit during the period when the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) were coalition partners, and the Bharatiya Janata Party was contained in Uttar Pradesh. However, there has been no guarantee of its continuation as subsequent political developments since 2014 have shown, where there has been an unprecedented resurgence of Hindutva politics in the heartland. While secularisation could be a possibility, there is also an alternative possibility in which caste fragmentation or caste-inspired social engineering and Hindu majoritarianism could grow in tandem, creating a new model for competitive Hindutva politics. Therefore, the prospect for the revival of secular politics owing to a caste census is rather limited. It is a gamble from the point of view of a resurrection of secularism in India. It might contain the pace of Hindutva politics but is not the ultimate outcome that may lead to the establishment of a Hindu majoritarian political culture or a similar variant of state.

The last time that a caste census was carried out was in 1931, a time when organised right groups were marginal players during India's freedom movement. After Independence, there was a possibility for a caste census to be resumed in 1951. It is plausible that in the non-resumption of caste census in 1951, the right might have played a crucial role. Because, as Bruce Graham, author of a most definitive work on the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) has argued, the right was deeply embedded in secular political formations, particularly in the Congress party. It will not be far-fetched to argue that there might be some overlap in the reasons behind why the word "secular" despite some effort was not included in the Indian Constitution, and the reason why a caste census was not resumed in 1951. Embedded right groups might have played their part at the time in their concerted resistance to India's secular project. The present-day resistance only echoes the same old reasoning but is much louder in volume, and more organised.

Shaikh Mujibur Rehman teaches at Jamia Millia Central University, New Delhi

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DOES INDIA NEED TO RELOOK THE DAM SAFETY ACT?

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

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October 22, 2023 02:45 am | Updated 07:52 am IST

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The Dam Safety Act was tabled in the Rajya Sabha in December 2021, as a response to deficient surveillance and maintenance causing dam failure-related disasters. File | Photo Credit: PTI

The story so far: India has almost 6,000 large dams and about 80% of them are more than 25 years old and carry safety risks. A new Dam Safety Act (DSA) was passed in late 2021. On October 4 this year, a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in North Sikkim's South Lhonak Lake washed away one of the biggest hydropower projects in India, the Teesta III dam at Chungthang. Reports have since revealed there were no early warning systems, no risk assessment or preventive measures in place as required under the Act.

The Dam Safety Act was tabled in the Rajya Sabha in December 2021, as a response to deficient surveillance and maintenance causing dam failure-related disasters. The Act listed key responsibilities and mandated that national and State-level bodies be established for implementation. It said a National Committee on Dam Safety would oversee dam safety policies and regulations; a National Dam Safety Authority would be charged with implementation and resolving State-level disputes; the Chairman of the Central Water Commission (CWC) would head dam safety protocols at the national level; a State Committee on Dam Safety (SCDS) and State Dam Safety Organisation (SDSO) would be set up. Sikkim formed an SCDS on August 17 with nine members and experts in hydrology and dam design.

Provisions require States to classify dams based on hazard risk, conduct regular inspections, create emergency action plans, institute emergency flood warning systems, and undertake safety reviews and period risk assessment studies.

Editorial | Safety first: On Dam Safety Authority

Importantly, States were asked to report and record incidents of dam failures. Until now, no statutory provision required systemic reporting of failures and no single agency was tasked with tracking this data. The CWC keeps a record but the list is not updated regularly, Devendra Damle argued in a 2021 working paper for the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy.

Failure to comply with any provision of the Act is punishable with imprisonment and/or fines, and "if such obstruction or refusal to comply with directions results in loss of lives or imminent danger

thereof, [entity] shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years." For example, in February this year, the Sikkim High Court ordered the Gati Hydropower Project company to pay 70 lakh to two widowed mothers, for non-compliance with the Dam Safety Act.

Experts say the Sikkim incident exemplifies blind spots in both legislation and implementation. The DSA does not promote risk-based decision-making and fails to incentivise transparency. Himanshu Thakkar, an environmental activist and coordinator of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, says that the frequency and scale of such disasters reveal a pattern of neglect: "It keeps happening regularly, people face disastrous consequences and we call these 'natural disasters'. But there's nothing natural about them."

A robust DSA should allow different stakeholders to access information easily, but India's framework falls short. "Dam safety is a public purpose function. Everything about dam safety, functions of all the institutions and committees and authorities, their reports, decisions minutes and agendas, everything should be promptly available to the public," says Mr. Thakkar. "But nothing is in the public domain." He adds that transparency is further obstructed when national and State bodies comprise government employees and engineers who worked on these projects, compromising objective decision making and lacking "people with a proven track record of taking independent decisions."

Dam safety is a function of many parts: designing and constructing dams that adhere to safety margins, maintaining and operating them per guidelines, recording data in real-time in an accessible format, forecasting hazardous events and instituting emergency plans, to name a few. The Sikkim GLOF reveals poor compliance at all levels, from the dam's design to the spillway capacity (which controls the release of water from a reservoir).

Hazard profiling and regular assessment are also mandated by the Act. Hazard risk fluctuates at the slightest touch, responding to climate change, urbanisation, and the way people/companies use water or where they are located. Periodic reviews are expected to bring forth fresh inundation maps and new rule curves (which determine the capacity of dam reservoirs), all of which contribute towards the safety of the downstream areas. Spillway capacity and other metrics should be reviewed every five years or so, but Mr. Thakkar says periodic reviews are often not conducted or if they are, their findings are not not easily available in the public domain. The Act requires dam builders to conduct comprehensive dam safety evaluations, but "there is no standardisation of how the failure is analysed and reported," Mr. Damle stated. The Himachal Pradesh government recently served notices to 21 hydroelectric projects, finding them guilty of non-compliance with the DSA during the July-August floods.

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WILL THE SIKKIM FLOOD IMPACT HYDEL PROJECTS?

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

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October 22, 2023 02:30 am | Updated 09:47 am IST

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A basket carrying relief supplies is transported on a makeshift zip line across the Teesta to Dzongu village that became inaccessible after flash floods washed away a bridge at Sangkalang, Sikkim on October 9, 2023. | Photo Credit: Reuters

The story so far: During the early hours of October 4, a sudden surge in the Teesta river washed away habitations in Sikkim, the Chungthang Dam, several bridges and parts of National Highway 10, leaving scores of people dead and missing and thousands homeless. As experts debate the reasons for the collapse, including the failure of automated weather stations, at two high-risk glacial lakes South Lhonak and Shako Cho, the focus is also on the status of other dams and hydel power projects in the State.

Experts point out that the floods in the Teesta river in Sikkim and West Bengal was triggered by a phenomenon called GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood). GLOF is a sudden release of water from a lake fed by glacier melt that has formed at the side, in front, within, beneath, or on the surface of a glacier. In case of the Sikkim floods, satellite images reveal a large chunk of ice may have fallen from the glacier into the lake creating waves that toppled the moraine dam leading to a GLOF and causing severe flash floods downstream in the Teesta.

Anil V. Kulkarni, glaciologist and scientist at the Divecha Centre of Climate Change, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru said the South Lhonak lake is one of the most studied lakes for GLOF. According to the glaciologist, recent satellite images suggest the risk has not been eliminated despite the floods because the lake has not dewatered or drained substantially. "Most of the lake is still intact; earlier, based on satellite images, experts thought that the lake had dewatered. But later it was found that under ice there is water," Dr. Kulkarni said.

Environmentalists, scientists and even the Sikkim government point out that the collapse of the hydel power dam at Chungthang added to the devastation. "The maximum damage took place after the Chungthang dam broke," said Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang.

The 1,200 MW Teesta Stage III hydro power project located at Chungthang village in Mangan district of north Sikkim was commissioned in February 2017 and in a little over six years, the dam collapsed. The Chief Minister of Sikkim raised the issue that the Central Water Commission while approving the project had said that it would be a concrete gravity dam whereas the dam constructed was a rock-filled dam that would not be able to withstand huge floods. According to him, the cost of the project was increased 2.5 times from 5,700 crore to 13,965 crore. The Chungthang dam, which has a majority stake of the State government under Sikkim Urja, has

stopped generating electricity and has filed an insurance claim.

After the floods, not only the Teesta Stage III hydro power project, but all the operational hydel power power projects on the Teesta river in Sikkim have practically become defunct.

According to a filing at the Bombay Stock Exchange, two other hydel power projects of the National Hydel Power Corporation (NHPC) affected by the floods are Teesta-V Power Station (510 MW) and the proposed Teesta-VI (500 MW), being executed by Lanco Teesta Hydro Power Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the NHPC. In another BSE filing on October 18, the NHPC pointed out that the loss to the company was 233.56 crore. Electricity generation of about 1,806 MW from hydel power projects in Sikkim has come to a halt because of the floods, according to Chief Secretary V.B. Pathak. Along with the 1,200 MW Chungthang Teesta Stage III that was washed away by the floods, electricity generation at Teesta-V Power Station (510 MW), as well as Dikchu Hydroelectric Project (96 MW), has been stalled because of muck from the floods entering the power stations. Sikkim government officials said there has been no power crisis as the Centre is providing grid electricity.

The Sikkim government is yet to quantify the extent of damage in monetary terms. The Chief Secretary told *The Hindu* that the loss due to GLOF-triggered floods will be in thousands of crores and certainly higher than the Sikkim earthquake (2011), where the loss was estimated to be 7,425 crore.

After the GLOF-triggered Sikkim floods and widespread loss of lives and property, activists and scientists are calling for a rethink on proposed hydel power projects. Union Minister for Power and Renewable Energy R. K Singh, however, said the floods will not slow down India's reliance on hydropower.

In response to a question by MP Asaduddin Owaisi earlier this year, Mr. Singh had informed Parliament that 87 hydroelectricity projects (HEP) of installed capacity of 22,982 (MW) are operational across the Himalayan belt. Another 30 large HEPs (above 25 MW) with an installed capacity of 11,137 MW are being developed across the Himalayan belt. Five projects are proposed in Sikkim on the Teesta and other rivers. In Sikkim, the assessed hydro power potential is of 4,248 MW of which about 53.7 % (2,282 MW) has been developed and 24.4 % (1,037 MW) is being constructed, according to a PIB release of March, 2023.

Gyatso Lepcha, general secretary of the Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT), an organisation campaigning against HEPs on the Teesta said in the aftermath of the tragedy, the government should scrap the proposed Teesta IV project and review the upcoming Teesta VI project. On October 17, the Sikkim government directed the State's Vigilance Police to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into any criminal irregularities in the construction of Teesta III dam project, submit a report and transfer the case to the CBI.

Glaciologist Kulkarni referred to recent floods in the Himalayas, the Kedarnath floods (in 2013, when moraines fell, creating temporary glaciers and flash floods), Rishi Ganga (2022, when fall of hanging glacier and rocks led to devastating floods) and the Sikkim floods (2023, GLOF-triggered floods), and said all three incidents were triggered by different climatic factors. Pointing out that there is major infrastructure building going on in the Himalayas, he said it is time to consider climate assessment reports, and designating mountain regulation zones where construction is limited.

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AFGHANISTAN: 'ALL FOUR QUAKES WERE IN THE SAME FAULT SYSTEM'

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena - Earthquakes, Tsunamis & Volcanoes

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The four earthquakes in October near Herat, Afghanistan, should be called as 'multiplets' rather than mainshocks or aftershocks | Photo Credit: AP

In a short span of about a week, a region about 40 km from Herat, Afghanistan was struck by four shallow focus earthquakes of 6.3 magnitude. The first earthquake of 6.3 magnitude occurred at a depth of 14 km at around 11 am local time on October 7. This was followed by another earthquake of 6.3 magnitude (at 13.5 km depth) about 30 minutes after the first quake. Two more shallow focus earthquakes of 6.3 magnitude at 9 km and 6.3 km depths struck the region close to Herat on October 11 and October 15, respectively. All four earthquakes occurred on east-west striking fault planes that dip to either the north or south. The earthquakes occurred within the Eurasia plate in an intracontinental mountain belt.

Aftershocks, by default, have magnitudes less than the main event. However, all the four earthquakes near Herat have the same magnitude. "Because these two earthquakes [on October 7] and the two subsequent earthquakes [on October 11 and October 15] are all approximately the same magnitude, we would call them 'multiplets' rather than mainshocks, foreshocks, or aftershocks," geophysicist Dr. William Bill Barnhart, Assistant Coordinator at the USGS Earthquake Hazards Program told *The Hindu* by email.

On whether the earthquakes had occurred in the same fault, Dr. Barnhart said: "Preliminary, though uncompleted analysis, indicates that all four M6.3 [magnitude] earthquakes occurred along the same fault or fault system. They did not occur in the exact same spot; rather, they ruptured different portions of the same fault along its length. It is rare for an earthquake to rupture the entire length of the fault that the earthquake occurred on, so it often requires multiple earthquakes, spread out over some unknown amount of time, to fully rupture a geologic fault."

Explaining how the second earthquake on October 7 with 6.3 magnitude had occurred just 30 minutes after the first one, Dr. R.K. Chadha, former scientists at NGRI and currently a Raja Ramanna Fellow at NGRI had told *The Hindu* that "the release of stress in one fault [in Herat] can result in the loading of stress at another fault. The loading of stress can result in another earthquake which can be of similar magnitude or even higher magnitude."

Dr. Barnhart elaborating on this further said: "Understanding the relationships between these earthquakes will take further research. However, given the close spatial and temporal proximity

of all of these earthquakes, it's reasonable to infer that the stress changes from one earthquake potentially encouraged the subsequent earthquakes. These stressing relationships — where stress changes from one earthquake encourage a subsequent earthquake — are quite common in nature."

Since all the four earthquakes occurred due to thrust faulting, where one block moves up relative to the other, the area where the earthquakes had occurred would experience upliftment. "Observations of surface motion from satellites indicate that there has been at least 55 cm of uplift caused by these earthquakes," Dr. Barnhart said. "Each earthquake causes both uplift and subsidence, with the primary deformation being uplift. The earthquake sequence has led to an accumulation of uplift along the fault that is rupturing. The USGS does not yet have observations of the most recent [October 15] M6.3 earthquake to assess the cumulative uplift from all earthquakes so far. The earthquakes are far enough away from Herat that uplift and/or subsidence within Herat is likely negligible."

On what explains the clustering of four 6.3 magnitude shallow focus earthquakes in a span of about a week, he said that there "isn't yet a consensus scientific answer to this question".

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BIDEN NAMES TECHNOLOGY HUBS FOR 32 STATES AND PUERTO RICO TO HELP THE INDUSTRY AND CREATE JOBS

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

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October 24, 2023 10:13 am | Updated 12:03 pm IST

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The Biden administration on Monday designated 31 technology hubs spread across 32 states and Puerto Rico to help spur innovation and create jobs. | Photo Credit: AP

The Biden administration on Monday designated 31 technology hubs spread across 32 states and Puerto Rico to help spur innovation and create jobs in the industries that are concentrated in these areas.

"We're going to invest in critical technologies like biotechnology, critical materials, quantum computing, advanced manufacturing — so the U.S. will lead the world again in innovation across the board," President Joe Biden said. "I truly believe this country is about to take off."

The tech hubs are the result of a process that the Commerce Department launched in May to distribute a total of $500 million in grants to cities.

The $500 million came from a $10 billion authorization in last year's CHIPS and Science Act to stimulate investments in new technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and biotech. It's an attempt to expand tech investment that is largely concentrated around a few U.S. cities — Austin, Texas; Boston; New York; San Francisco; and Seattle — to the rest of the country.

"I have to say, in my entire career in public service, I have never seen as much interest in any initiative than this one," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo told reporters during a Sunday conference call to preview the announcement. Her department received 400 applications, she said.

"No matter where I go or who I meet with — CEOs, governors, senators, congresspeople, university presidents — everyone wants to tell me about their application and how excited they are," said Raimondo.

The program, formally the Regional Technology and Innovation Hub Program, ties into the president's economic argument that people should be able to find good jobs where they live and that opportunity should be spread across the country, rather than be concentrated. The White

House has sought to elevate that message and highlight Biden's related policies as the Democratic president undertakes his 2024 reelection bid.

The 31 tech hubs reach Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Montana, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Virginia, New Hampshire, Missouri, Kansas, Maryland, Alabama, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Minnesota, Louisiana, Idaho, Wyoming, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, New York, Nevada, Missouri, Oregon, Vermont, Ohio, Maine, Washington and Puerto Rico.

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technology (general) / USA

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MITIGATING TRAGEDIES IN THE HIMALAYAN REGION

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

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October 25, 2023 12:35 am | Updated 08:13 am IST

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A portion of the NH-10 was washed away by the flash floods on October 3. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The recent glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in Sikkim wreaked havoc along the Teesta river, bringing into focus the magnifying risk of climate change-induced GLOF across the Indian Himalayan Region. A study published in *Nature* this year indicates that 90 million people across 30 countries live in 1,089 basins containing glacial lakes. Of these, one-sixth live within 50 km of a glacial lake and 1 km of potential GLOF runout channels.

In mountains, hazards often occur in a cascading fashion — heavy rainfall triggers a landslide, which may in turn cause a glacial lake outburst and more landslides downstream, and create conditions for flash floods. Predicting this chain of events is difficult. Institutional awareness of these risks is increasing, but the challenge is to evolve a system to mitigate risks from such hazards, and provide early warnings.

The magnitude of the tragedy that occurred on October 3 at the South Lhonak glacial lake in Sikkim is still unfolding. In September, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) had led a multi-agency preparatory mission to the high-altitude South Lhonak and Shako Cho glacial lakes and installed solar-powered automated cameras and monitoring equipment, which transmitted weather data 250 times a day. While the equipment at South Lhonak ceased transmission four days later and could not be revived, equipment at Shako Cho continues to transmit data. The expedition was successful in identifying locations to install sensors for an end-to-end early warning system during the next mission and in identifying possible mitigation measures for both lakes such as small check dams.

While the exact combination of causes of the event is yet to be ascertained, monitoring equipment had reported higher-than-normal temperatures of zero to 5°C in the four days that data was received — exceptionally warm for Himalayan glaciers. Scientists are gravitating towards the view that the key trigger in the process chain of the disaster was the collapse of a huge mass of rock/moraine from the north-western bank of the lake. Assessed to be more than a quarter million cubic metres in volume, it displaced a significant volume of melt water, widening the river mouth at the eastern end, resulting in flash floods.

The Himalayan Region is susceptible to a range of hydro-meteorological, tectonic, climate and human-induced mountain hazards. Each of them requires an extensive set of monitoring, mitigation, and early warning strategies. The process chain of glacial melting is adequately

mapped. However, the multitude of glaciers and temporal variations in glacial recession makes monitoring and estimation of the risk more difficult.

The enormity of the challenge is seen in the National Remote Sensing Centre's (NRSC) Glacial Lake Atlas of 2023. Three major river basins, of the Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra, are host to 28,000 glacial lakes greater than 0.25 hectares in area, in five countries. Of these, 27% are in India, in six States and Union Territories. This region has witnessed catastrophic GLOF events in the past few decades.

Editorial | [Time to decide: On the Himalayan region, its carrying capacity](#)

Many geo-technical solutions for mitigation of GLOFs have been tried globally, including excavating channels for regulated discharge, drainage using pipes and pumps, spillway construction, and setting up small catchment dams to cut the speed of outflow. But in practice, conditions above 5,000 metres above mean sea level create formidable challenges such as inaccessibility, impossibilities in transporting and retaining excavation equipment, strong winds, difficulties in sourcing power and connectivity, and vandalism. These measures are arduous and labour-intensive, yet need to be implemented across high-risk lakes.

The most significant risk of such a disaster is to downstream hill communities and authorities who get a very short lead time to respond. They stand to suffer serious damage to life, property, and livelihood. Such events bring permanent changes in morphology, topography and stream hydrology. Interviews show that people downstream are mostly unaware of the risks posed by sudden glacier-melt and cascading hazards. Risks from glacial melting, slope shifting, landslides, intense precipitation, and heatwaves, among other hydro-meteorological and geo-physical hazards, are rising. While meeting the development needs of hill communities, disaster and climate resilience principles need to be assimilated into government policy and practice as well as private investment.

This requires an integrated, multi-disciplinary effort across institutions. NRSC's atlases have provided high-resolution data via remote sensing, which allows for monitoring spatial change. The Central Water Commission is conducting hydro-dynamic assessments of high-risk lakes, mapping water flow, height and routing simulations using digital elevation models. The NDMA's national guidelines (2020) provide States with a technical overview of the hazard and risk-zonation and suggest strategies for monitoring, risk-reduction and mitigation.

A comprehensive GLOF risk mitigation plan is in the final stages of approval and will include installation of monitoring and end-to-end early warning systems at high-risk glacial lakes. In this endeavour, all governments and scientific institutions need to come together to integrate resources and capacities in disaster risk reduction. While appropriate synergies have been created, increased focus on prevention and mitigation will reduce loss and damage and bring stability into the lives of hill communities.

Safi Ahsan Rizvi is an Indian Police Service officer and Advisor (Mitigation), National Disaster Management Authority

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CROSSING A LINE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE VIKSIT BHARAT SANKALP YATRA ROADSHOW, THE IMPLICATIONS

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

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The Centre has asked all departments to deploy officers to showcase its achievements across the country down to the village level, through a roadshow titled Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, which will run from November 20 to January 25, 2024. To be sure, the outreach is only about achievements of the last nine years that corresponds to the two terms of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that began in 2014. The campaign is conveniently timed for the Lok Sabha election which is expected in April-May 2024. Joint Secretaries, Directors, and Deputy Secretaries will be appointed Rath Prabharis (chariots in-charge) for the roadshow. Separately, the Ministry of Defence is setting up 822 'selfie points' where citizens can click themselves with a picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Guidelines issued by the Ministry go into great details on how to promote the work of the last nine years. It has been directed that these selfie points "should be set up at prominent locations, which have maximum footfall and the potential of attracting public attention". War memorials, defence museums, railway and metro stations, bus stations, airports, malls and market places, schools and colleges, tourist destinations and festival gatherings are places where these points are coming up. Opposition parties led by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge have called out the government for this brazen politicisation of the bureaucracy and the military.

India's constitutional scheme of governance envisages the separation of power among the three arms of the state — the executive, the judiciary and the legislature — and also a line of separation between the bureaucracy and the military from the political executive. While both the bureaucracy and the military are strictly under the control of the political executive, they are insulated from partisan politics. In fact, the extensive election process in India has largely retained its credibility because of the bureaucratic impartiality demanded by the system. The military's involvement in any kind of domestic politics is considered anathema. Civil and military officials are expected to remain loyal to the government elected by the citizens, regardless of their personal ideological inclination. Instant directives force them into partisan roles in furtherance of the interests of the ruling party. The BJP's strategy of disregarding norms in pursuit of electoral gains has been successful, but the trail of damage it leaves behind will fester. If institutions are undermined, the damage may well be irreversible. It is time the ruling party kept the interests of the nation before itself, and practised what it preaches.

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MINNOWS NO MORE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON WORLD CUP AND LOWER RANKED TEAMS

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

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October 25, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 08:56 am IST

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World Cups often become a platform for sporting coups. Afghanistan precisely did that, stunning fancied rivals England at Delhi and Pakistan in Chennai. Even if losses were suffered against Bangladesh, India and New Zealand, Hashmatullah Shahidi's men have shown that they are no push-overs and will compete at all costs. Afghanistan's cricketing roots can be traced to the refugee camps at Peshawar in neighbouring Pakistan. In the past when the Cold War and the Great Game staged by the Western and Eastern Blocs with Kabul as its pivot bequeathed instability within the rugged Afghan countryside, cricket was a welcome distraction for children as any piece of ramshackle wood and a taped-ball within a camp was adequate to indulge in the sport. Things got worse with the rise of the Taliban and the loss of individual liberties but Afghanistan's cricketers remain the dispensers of hope. In Rashid Khan, the country has a world-class player. Aggressive openers and a muscular middle order have learnt to blend patience with intrinsic aggression and bowlers refuse to be overawed. All this has kept Afghanistan in good stead. The manner in which England was bundled out or Pakistan's total was pursued reveals a unit that has turned the corner and would obviously bristle at the mention of the word 'minnows'.

The Netherlands too mounted the odd upset by nailing South Africa. The two countries with a colonial Dutch connect have cultural, economic and sporting threads linking them and current Netherlands player Roelof van der Merwe has previously turned out for South Africa. The Netherlands may have lost its other games but there is no mistaking its talent. This is a World Cup for which the West Indies failed to qualify. The benchmarks are high and for the Netherlands to scale them, qualify and now compete, it is indeed a tremendous achievement. As the tournament veered towards its mid-point, host India revealed a rich vein of form, winning five games and is close to sealing the semifinal berth. Skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are the batting bulwarks while Jasprit Bumrah, Ravindra Jadeja and Mohammed Shami played their parts. New Zealand, barring that one loss to India, has been consistent while South Africa and Australia are jostling in the top-half. The wins by Afghanistan and the Netherlands have opened up the points table and small margins will define big shifts in the coming weeks. That defending champion England has slid to the bottom remains a shocker while the Asian component of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are searching for a toehold. And for now, India holds the aces.

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UNHEALTHY URBAN INDIA MUST GET INTO STREET FIGHT MODE

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies incl. Migration & Smart Cities

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October 26, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 12:33 am IST

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'Walking and biking on many Indian roads is not only hazardous but also nearly impossible, as sidewalks are overwhelmed by building and human waste, parked vehicles or street hawkers' | Photo Credit: The Hindu

India's urban population is estimated to reach 675 million in 2035, the second highest in the world. Although there is widespread recognition that cities have been fuelling India's rapid rise to economic superpower status, almost all are failing their inhabitants in terms of delivering on health, environmental and equity targets.

India's urban inhabitants experience multi-scalar health risks including the world's highest levels of air and noise pollution, limited greenery, lack of access to sidewalks and parks that limit active lifestyles, archaic modes of transport that contribute to air pollution, pernicious access to nutritionally dense unhealthy foods and unprecedented exposure to toxic chemicals and heavy metals. This concatenation of exposures dramatically magnifies health risks for heart disease and diabetes, referred to as cardiometabolic disease, especially when combined with a lack of physical activity. Of all behaviours well known to mitigate the development of cardiometabolic disease, physical activity is by far the most effective deterrent. Not surprisingly, the cities of India are amidst an epidemic of historic proportions in these disorders.

Addressing the diverse and multi-scaled social, environmental, and infrastructure risk factors that contribute to cardiometabolic risk in cities, by transforming the design of the built local environment as well as provisioning systems, represents a new paradigm for public health. Globally, there are seven key physical provisioning systems that provide food, energy, mobility-transportation, housing, green infrastructure, water and waste management that lie at the core of human health, well-being, equity and sustainability. Dysfunctional provisioning systems consume more than 90% of the world's water and global CO2 emissions and facilitate an estimated 19 million premature deaths annually. The socio-spatial-political design of urban provisioning systems in India, many of which are legacies of a colonial past, manifests in and exacerbates social inequalities in cities, by class, race, age, migrant and disability status, translating to vast disparities in health risks and outcomes. Based on the primal importance of India's cities for its future, a new narrative for improving health and well-being in cities is needed. This is reflected in several high-level policy frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework, the New Urban Agenda, and the Health in All Policies

approach.

Investments such as clean energy and electric mobility which are underway in India offer a once in a lifetime opportunity to improve health through their immediate and dramatic impact of air pollution levels, while also helping meet India's climate and equity goals. While these developments are extraordinarily important, the magnitude of their impact on health outcomes is at risk of being limited, if not simultaneously accompanied by changes in other provisioning systems such as food, mobility and green infrastructure.

Indeed, studies show that even small changes in the latter systems may have a large catalytic effect on health and productivity and serve as double-duty or triple duty interventions. For example, making way for safe walking and biking lanes, pavements and no-car zones, can help not only improve physical activity and reduce sedentary lifestyles but also reduce the risk from air pollution. Regular physical exercise has been to effectively mitigate the impact of other risk factors such as poor diets, particularly those rich in calories and saturated fats. The dietary ingestion of excess calories without adequate physical expenditure fuels a vicious cycle of insulin spikes, excess fat deposition that together with inflammation sets the stage for heart disease. In this regard, it is well known that exercise may not only help expend excess calories, promoting weight loss and reducing diabetes risk but also act as an effective bulwark against heart disease.

Walking and biking on many Indian roads is not only hazardous but also nearly impossible, as sidewalks are overwhelmed by building and human waste, parked vehicles or street hawkers. Health impact studies indicate that the health and economic benefits of increasing mobility and active transportation vastly exceed that which may be divined by transitioning to electrifying transportation alone.

Studies that have modelled the economic and health impact of the clean energy transition in the transportation sector are currently based almost entirely on the reduction in air pollution and its associated health impact. Ensuring that the transition to electric cars also paves the way for active transport options such as walking paths and bicycling lanes may not only provide a mechanism to connect the "last mile" but the health and consequent economic benefits of active transportation accrue on top of the benefits of reducing air pollution, making such investments even more economically viable.

Thus, increasing active transportation by any means must be a critical component of a clean energy policy. Similarly, policies that encourage fresh fruits and vegetables and limit sugars and salt in beverages, which may have the largest impact on health outcomes such as obesity, Type 2 diabetes (T2D) and cardiovascular disease, may help contribute to not only better health outcomes but also economic productivity. Urban policies are powerful public health interventions that can serve to promote population health. Health is, unfortunately, an afterthought in most national urban planning policies and mostly non-existent in national urban policy documents from lower and middle-income countries.

Unhealthy diets, reduced physical activity and air pollution in cities in India pose a greater risk to morbidity and mortality than most other risk factors combined including drugs, tobacco, alcohol and accidents. These need to be dealt with on a war footing if India is going to make progress in its fight against cardiovascular disease, obesity and T2D. This will necessarily entail a street fight.

Dr. Sanjay Rajagopalan is Chief, Cardiovascular Medicine, Chief Academic and Scientific Officer, University Hospitals, Harrington Heart and Vascular Institute, Director, Case Cardiovascular Research Institute, Herman Hellerstein, MD, Professor of Cardiovascular

Research, and Professor, Department of Medicine and Radiology, Case Western Reserve University

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SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES, CHAIRS MEETING OF THE NATIONAL LEVEL STEERING COMMITTEE OF ATAL BHUJAL YOJANA

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

The Secretary, Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (DoWR, RD & GR), Ministry of Jal Shakti, Ms. Debashree Mukherjee chaired the fifth meeting of the National Level Steering Committee (NLSC) of Atal Bhujal Yojana and the Wrap up of the World Bank Mission in New Delhi today. The committee reviewed the overall progress of the scheme and directed the States to expedite all the activities including procurement as well as convergence for the implementation of the interventions proposed under Water Security Plans (WSPs). Atal Bhujal Yojana aims to demonstrate community-led sustainable ground water management which can be taken to scale. Objective of the Scheme is to improve the management of groundwater resources in select water stressed areas in identified states viz. Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

State-wise presentations, enumerating impacts with evidence on "Emerging Impacts of the Program" were presented by all States. The highlights included improvement in ground water level and storages; involvement of local people, particularly women in utilization of equipment for monitoring of both water level and quality; creating sense of ownership and community-led ground water management, etc. The findings of the World Bank review mission conducted in all the Seven States were presented by the Task Team Leader from the World Bank. The gaps in the areas of scheme implementation and related concerns were discussed for improvement and effective implementation of the scheme in all the participating States. The senior officers from the participating States, members of NLSC, representatives from various Ministries/Departments, officers of the World Bank and NPMU attended the meeting.

The Secretary, DoWR, RD & GR, Ms. Debashree Mukherjee stated that there are several projects in our country for water security and management, however, Atal Bhujal Yojana is the only program targeting demand side groundwater management, focusing on behavioral change of the community. She emphasized on the importance of various equipment installed under Atal Bhujal Yojana which are being utilized to make the communities aware of the ground water situation. This will help the community manage their ground water resources, improve demand side measures and start preparing water budgets in the gram panchayats. The Secretary highlighted the fact that allocation under Atal Bhujal Yojana is fungible and better performing States will get more share of incentive. She also emphasized that since Atal Bhujal Yojana is a convergence-oriented program, the Chief Secretaries should regularly monitor the progress of the schemes in their States for effective implementation.

Ms. Mukherjee asserted that strengthening of Institutions, partner agencies and capacity building of the civil society should also be given due importance. Since communities are at the forefront in this scheme, importance of capacity building of the communities was emphasized upon. The Secretary underscored the importance of assessment of quality of the trainings being provided at the Gram Panchayat level. She also requested all participating States to integrate WSPs in the Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs). This integration will provide sustainability to the approach followed by the scheme even after completion of time period. She also directed the States to document the best practices being implemented under the scheme.

The Joint Secretary and National Project Coordinator for Atal Bhujal Yojana, Shri Subodh Yadav, in his opening remarks earlier, highlighted that the scheme is in the fourth year of implementation and the remaining one and a half years shall be optimally utilized for improvement in performance of the participating States. He also emphasized that the community participation is the fundamental aspect of the scheme which shall be prioritized.

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Anubhav Singh

The Secretary, Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (DoWR, RD & GR), Ministry of Jal Shakti, Ms. Debashree Mukherjee chaired the fifth meeting of the National Level Steering Committee (NLSC) of Atal Bhujal Yojana and the Wrap up of the World Bank Mission in New Delhi today. The committee reviewed the overall progress of the scheme and directed the States to expedite all the activities including procurement as well as convergence for the implementation of the interventions proposed under Water Security Plans (WSPs). Atal Bhujal Yojana aims to demonstrate community-led sustainable ground water management which can be taken to scale. Objective of the Scheme is to improve the management of groundwater resources in select water stressed areas in identified states viz. Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

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Anubhav Singh

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ACTOR RAJKUMMAR RAO STEPS ONTO THE STAGE AS ECI'S LATEST NATIONAL ICON FOR VOTER AWARENESS

Relevant for: null | Topic: Miscellaneous Facts

Renowned actor Rajkummar Rao today took on a new role – that of 'National Icon' for voter awareness and education for the Election Commission of India. An MoU was signed with the "Newton" star for a period of 3 years at an event organized at New Delhi in the presence of Chief Election Commissioner Shri Rajiv Kumar and Election Commissioners Shri Anup Chandra Pandey and Shri Arun Goel.

Sh. Rajkummar Rao, known for his commitment to meaningful cinema and social causes, shared his appreciation for the election officials who in spite of various challenges conduct elections and ensure that no voter is left behind. While expressing concern on the apathy of youth and urban voters towards the electors process, he said that "Our collective voice, expressed through our votes, has the power to form a participative democracy''. Youth is one the biggest stakeholder in this democratic process and urged them to become agents of positive transformation through their vote.

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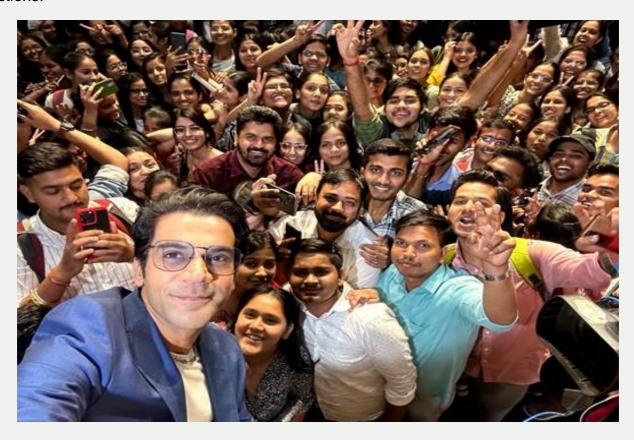
While urging youth to actively participate in elections CEC Shri Kumar said "Once you associate with the electioneering process, you will understand the intrinsic power of democracy and value of your vote". He appealed to influencers from all walks of life including the media to promote the importance of voting and in pushing up the voter turnout in forthcoming elections.

Election Commissioner, Shri Anup Chandra Pandey said that it has always been the endeavour of ECI and it keeps experimenting with new initiatives to enhance voter turnout in the elections. He said Shri Rajkummar Rao is an apt choice for a national icon who has acted in a movie based on conducting elections in tough and challenging conditions.

Election Commissioner Shri Arun Goel while highlighting the issue of urban and youth apathy towards elections said that collaboration with Shri Rajkummar Rao would be fruitful in bringing about behavioral and attitudinal change and nudging urban youth to actively participate in the elections.

The signing of the MoU with Rao signifies a shared commitment to empower and educate citizens about the importance of exercising their voting rights. The collaboration will encompass a range of activities, including Shri Rao promoting voter awareness in various TV talk shows/ programs and digital campaigns etc, all aimed at raising awareness about the importance of voting and strengthening the roots of democracy by fostering a more engaged and informed electorate.

On the occasion, the Commission also launched a promotional video and poster for the ongoing Special Summary Revision for updation of Electoral Rolls across the country except five poll going states.

Background:

ECI associates itself with renowned Indians from various fields and designates them as ECI's National Icons to motivate voters for participation in the festival of democracy. Last year, the Commission recognised famous actor Mr. Pankaj Tripathi as the National Icon. Just last month, the Commission recognised cricket legend and Bharat Ratna awardee Shri Sachin Ramesh Tendulkar as the National Icon. Earlier, during the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections, stalwarts like M.S. Dhoni, Aamir Khan and Mary Kom had been the ECI National Icons.

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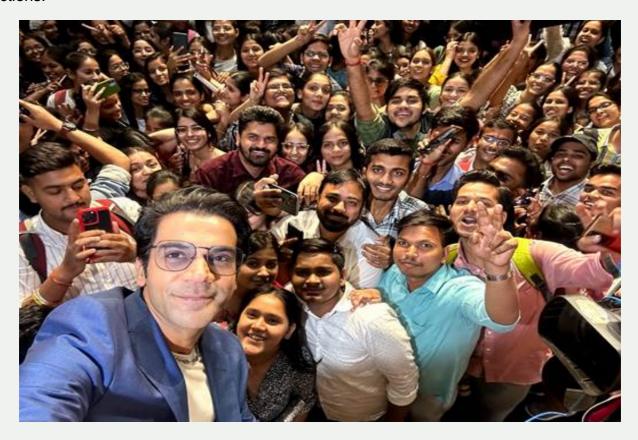
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INTERNECINE SQUABBLING: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE DISSONANCES WITHIN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IN THE U.S.

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

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October 27, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 01:49 am IST

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After a prolonged spell of costly indecisiveness, the U.S. House of Representatives has finally elected a Speaker, Representative Mike Johnson of Louisiana. Recent weeks have seen convulsions rock the House as Republicans struggled to find a consensus candidate to lead the majority in the Lower Chamber of Congress. After the political debacle of the ouster of the previous Speaker Kevin McCarthy on October 3, laying bare the deeply factionalised landscape of the House Republican caucus, several party notables tried and failed to secure the confidence of the House majority in their bids for the top post. Initially, multiple closed-door meetings failed to produce a consensus candidate. Heavyweights including Tom Emmer of Minnesota, Jim Jordan of Ohio and Steve Scalise of Louisiana, were unable to secure the gavel by cornering the minimum of 217 votes, despite being nominated to the role. While Mr. Johnson has now emerged as the Speaker, second in line for the U.S. presidency, after much confabulations and voting, the politically messy process of his win signals serious deadlock in the party and the Chamber.

In a sense, the intra-party fractures that impeded the House Republican caucus from taking forward funding bills relating to the U.S. federal government, Israel and Ukraine, reflect the contradictions between the Congressmen who support and are supported by former President Donald Trump on the one hand, and those who are not in that category, on the other. Shortly after Mr. Emmer pulled out of the contest, Mr. Trump described him on social media as a "Rino", or 'Republican in Name Only', who "never respected the power of a Trump endorsement or the breadth and scope of MAGA", and that it would be "a tragic mistake" to support him. Trump acolytes in the House took their cue from the 45th President, it appears, and they are a sizeable cohort. Looking beyond the political embarrassment of this rupture, it portends trouble for the Grand Old Party in the 2024 presidential election. It certainly does appear at this time as though Mr. Trump will win his party's nomination by a considerable margin. However, many "traditional" conservatives do not side with him on hot button issues, including criminal charges that he faces, for example for obstructing justice in seeking to delegitimise the results of the 2020 presidential election. If the House's Speaker saga indicates anything, it is that the dissonances within the Republican Party will sooner or later be manifested in popular anger among conservatives, and that might be an even greater barrier to Mr. Trump's political ambitions than the opposition he faces from Democrats.

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IS INDIA READY TO HOST THE OLYMPICS GAMES?

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

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October 27, 2023 01:37 am | Updated 01:41 am IST

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Illuminated Olympic rings in front of the Rainbow Bridge and the Tokyo Tower in Tokyo in 2020, one year before the Olympics Games were held in the city. | Photo Credit: Getty Images

The Prime Minister recently said that India aspires to host the 2036 Olympic Games. This has been a dream for successive governments and sports officials. Hosting the Olympics would not only underscore India's importance as a sporting nation, but also enable it to assert its geopolitical power and showcase development. But is India ready to host the Olympics? **Manisha Malhotra** and **Norris Pritam** discus the question in a conversation moderated by **Uthra Ganesan**. Edited excerpts:

What does hosting an Olympics entail? Why is it a prestige issue for nations to host the Games?

Manisha Malhotra: The Olympics is the pinnacle of sport. It showcases not only your nation to the world, but also soft power. Essentially, for 16 days, the whole world talks about your country. It is a huge honour. But the magnitude of it brings to the forefront not only the good but also the bad. So, hosting the Olympics becomes a double-edged sword. Even for seasoned countries which have hosted multiple Olympics, there are challenges. We saw what happened when Beijing hosted the 2008 Games... there was a lot of pushback and negative publicity.

Editorial | **Olympian heights: On India's efforts to organise the 2036 edition**

Norris Pritam: The Olympics is also a political statement. India is a global power and [its prestige] will go up manifold if it hosts the Games. Manisha talked about Beijing. But I think once the Games start, people forget these things; only the legacy of the Games remains.

What are the non-negotiables to make an Olympics successful?

Norris Pritam: The Games are the property of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and are given to the National Olympic Committees (NOC). The first non-negotiable is a strong NOC, which talks in unison. You cannot be bidding for the Games and have three parallel tracks in the NOC. The government comes later. Of course, the NOC cannot work without the government, but the Games are actually given to the NOC, which is the Indian Olympic Association here.

Explained |**How Olympic cities are selected**

The second is a legacy. What are we going to offer to the people in the years to come? The

people's participation, the social structure, and whether we can build infrastructure or not — this is a complete package. It's not just about winning or losing. A country may win the bid to host the Games and yet may not win several gold medals. But if they host the Games well, it's good. So, [this involves] the NOC's relations with the IOC, the government, and the Opposition.

Manisha Malhotra: Cohesion is the first, and I think that's where India will struggle. We are united, but we don't know how to work with one another well. The NOC is at the centre of the Olympics and it has to be governed above board and efficiently.

Hosting the Games involves different cogs in the wheel — culture, heritage, hospitality, infrastructure, finance, government, and sports bodies — which have to work in cohesion. In Paris (where the Olympics will take place in 2024), the culture departments are working with the museums. Every local garden has some Olympics history and event happening. There are lanes and roads being earmarked just for the Olympics. There is deep cleaning. Whether this is because of the bed bugs or whether they are just trying to get things ready, everybody is working at a frenetic pace.

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I asked a Parisian whether the city is ready to host the Games. She said, 'Whether we're ready or not, our people are so proud and united about the Games that we will make it happen. And even if we are not ready, we will make sure that the Games are a success.' That tells a lot about that society. During the Commonwealth Games in India (2010), there were many challenges. Every small challenge was highlighted and almost blown out of proportion. Doing this takes away from the joy of hosting the Games. So, I am not sure if we will be able to galvanise everyone for an event like this.

Will India be ready to host the Games in 2036? Is 13 years enough time to get everything in order?

Norris Pritam: Thirteen years is not a long time. Even if you want to bid for the Games, you have to start working from now to make yourself presentable to bid for the Games. Whether India is ready right now is not the right question to ask because, let's admit it, we are not ready. It also depends on which city hosts the Games. You need to have a top-class village for the Games. It cannot be done on a political level or at the city level. You have to have specialists — marketing specialists, who can think 13 years ahead, engineers, scientists, roads, bridges, everything. We have to start from now even if we want to bid. Fortunately, the IOC has now changed the rules a bit. Instead of just one city, you can host the Games in a twin city or in two regions or even in two countries in the same region.

Manisha Malhotra: Even Paris today is not ready. But Paris will be ready in 2024. Regarding the city, that's a huge challenge because of the political landscape and how India views sports, how each State views sports. We need to shortlist cities and hire feasibility consultants who can give unbiased and unpolitical reports about which city could host the Games best.

If we just focus on the sporting aspect, the biggest issue is governance. Indian sport is governed poorly. Federations are in a disarray, barring one or two. They don't know how to develop their own talent. They keep relying on basic government funds. They are not proactive.

Then there are larger social issues such as doping. All this needs to be tackled. I think India's biggest rival for 2036 would be Budapest. If you look at where Budapest is in terms of sports and hosting a big event and its facilities, an Ahmedabad or Delhi or Chennai or Mumbai will not even be in the same stratosphere.

Norris Pritam: During the Atlanta Games (1996), we were busy sitting at the main stadium, which was beautiful, covering the Games. But because of security concerns, we couldn't roam around the stadium. The morning after the closing ceremony, we decided to go to the stadium and take some pictures. But half the stadium had already been dismantled because a baseball season was starting there. That's the kind of thinking you need. Here, after the 1982 Asian Games, the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium (Delhi) was shut for years and it became an expensive junk yard. I think some of the props are still lying there. You cannot say I have got the Games, now the Games are over, thank you, goodbye. If you get the bid, what are you going to do with structures on which you spent $30 billion-$40 billion, five-10 years down the line?

If we focus on India's rank in the global sporting order, should India host the Games? Can we be confident of at least being in the top 15 nations, medal-wise, by 2036?

Norris Pritam: Earlier I wasn't confident but after the Asian Games success I have hope. The reason is that people like Manisha and companies like JSW have transformed Indian sport. Look at Neeraj Chopra. Somebody asked me, 'Where does he stay?' I said he is an NRI. I have hope because of facilities, medical facilities, and the exposure abroad. If Avinash Sable had been running only command and services meets, I don't think he would have run such gallant races. He is a world class runner because of these facilities, which were not given earlier. Indians can do well. Somebody has to nurture them and provide support and exposure at the right time.

Manisha Malhotra: I don't mean to be the buzz kill here, but look at facts: India won three medals in Beijing (2008), six in London (2012), and seven in Tokyo (2021). Even if India wins 14 medals in 2036, that still does not place the country in the top 15. We need to develop sports in which multiple medals can be won. Cycling, athletics, swimming, rowing, kayak-canoeing — these are five sports where, barring athletics now a little bit, India is non-existent. So, this is going to be the key. How quickly are we going to be able to develop these so that India wins medals? I don't think you are going to be able to do that in 13 years. A 20-year horizon would be more realistic.

And I don't know why you should even be in the top 15. In India, one gold medalist gets much more recognition that even 100 don't get from China or the U.S. So, I don't think the top 15 should be much of a benchmark. But yes, we would have to be competitive across events. And at least be in every final there is.

The IOC is big on temporary structures and reusing stadiums. Given that, and the fact that Indian authorities are fond of building huge venues, how do you think India should develop facilities if it wins the bid?

Manisha Malhotra: Temporary movable structures are the way to go. I don't think anyone can afford to build big stadia any more.

Norris Pritam: In India we are fond of saying 'world's largest' or 'Asia's biggest' or 'first time in India.' We should get over this mentality. We should be technically superb, that's it. Temporary structures can be built, and after the Games, they can be used for communities. A Sports Minister once said the Nehru Stadium should be locked, otherwise the track will get spoiled. Finally, without anyone running, the track got spoiled. Maybe, if people had run on it, it would have had more life. We should have workable stadiums or venues.

Listen to _The Hindu_ Parley podcast

**Manisha Malhotra is the Head of Sports Excellence and Scouting with JSW Sports; Norris Pritam is a journalist with over three decades of experience in covering multi-discipline**

events including six Olympics

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WHAT DOES SUPREME COURT'S ABORTION VERDICT MEAN FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IN INDIA?

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

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October 21, 2023 05:50 pm | Updated October 22, 2023 01:50 pm IST

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A 2016 file photo shows the Supreme Court building in New Delhi, India. | Photo Credit: AP

The Supreme Court this week rejected a woman's plea for abortion. The woman — 26 weeks pregnant, married, with two children, and undergoing postpartum psychosis — requested termination because she was "physically, emotionally, mentally, financially and medically unable to carry, deliver or raise a child." Denying her request, the three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D. Y. Chandrachud said the Court's recognition of a woman's autonomy cannot eclipse the "rights of the unborn child."

India's Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act allows abortion up to 24 weeks, post which termination is permitted only if a board of doctors attests that continued pregnancy presents a risk to the woman's life or if there are foetal abnormalities. The woman approached the Court at 25 weeks when she was made aware of the pregnancy (she had lactational amenorrhea, where breastfeeding temporarily halts menstruation, thereby preventing pregnancy). The AIIMS medical board in its report found no cause for immediate concern: the foetus was healthy and viable. The government would bear medical costs and the woman may give the child for adoption post delivery, the Court said.

In a conversation with Saumya Kalia, **Gauri Pillai, Assistant Professor of Law at the National Law School of India University,** explains the Court's verdict— one year after a landmark ruling expanded the scope of abortion rights in India. Edited excerpts:

The Supreme Court in *X v NCT* last year acknowledged women's right to choose: "The right to choose for oneself... forms a part of the right to dignity. It is this right which would be under attack if women were forced to continue with unwanted pregnancies." How does the present verdict interpret the 'right to choose'?

The Court reasoned that it could not 'stop the [foetal] heartbeat.' There is no doubt that the Court's decision dilutes women's right to choose, as understood by previous Supreme Court decisions including the landmark *X v NCT* in 2022. On the one hand, rights are rarely absolute and are typically subject to limitations. On the other, in the context of abortion rights, Indian courts have not explicitly articulated what these limitations are.

At the level of constitutional principle, they have tended to see the right as vesting solely with women. *X v NCT* declared that 'it is the woman alone who has the right over her body' and is the 'ultimate decision-maker' in deciding if she wants an abortion. However, in practice, when individual women come before courts, a discourse on foetal rights has begun to emerge. Women, it seems, are not, then, 'ultimate decision-makers.'

And what is the immediate consequence of this conflict between theory and practice?

This leads to incoherence in jurisprudence, as the constitutional right to abortion does not appear to accommodate the limitations the Court authorises in practice. It also, more dangerously, risks reducing the Court's proclamations on women's rights to rhetoric.

This would extend to shedding doubt on the legacy of *X v NCT*. Beyond its immediate relevance in allowing unmarried women to access abortions, whether the rest of its holdings on women's rights have any real effect will depend on how future courts respond to this week's verdict.

Where does the verdict fall in the larger conversation around abortion rights, in India and beyond?

Globally, the abortion right is in a significant state of flux. So far, India seemed largely insulated from these negotiations. Courts were not hesitant in recognising strong, affirmative reproductive rights, and holding the state to account in fulfilling them. It almost seemed too good to be true.

And then it was. This week's Supreme Court verdict is a disruption. It offers ammunition for those arguing for restrictions on abortion. In 2022, a petition was filed to declare India's abortion law unconstitutional for authorising 'foeticide.' The petitioner's claims will arguably be bolstered by the verdict.

India has taken pride in [abortion laws that respect women's autonomy, are "pro-choice" and ahead of other countries](). In the present case, however, the Court refused to hear arguments on autonomy because "it was on a different footing." Why is that?

The Court seems to be pitting some form of foetal right to life against women's right to autonomy. In a battle between 'life' and 'autonomy,' it is not surprising that autonomy was seen to be on a 'different footing' and lost out. This form of reasoning could also create hierarchies: certain forms of autonomy (say, asking for abortion in case of rape) will be seen as more weighty when balanced against life, and other forms (like the petitioner in this case) as less weighty.

This pitting exercise indicates why it is so important to be clear on what the foetal interest involved is. Is it life? Is it a form of potential life (which would, arguably, be less weighty)? Most importantly, irrespective of what the foetus *is* (which is not a legal determination), what status *should* it be granted within the law? And how should this legal status, even if granted, be protected — through restricting abortions or other means? Which option would be constitutionally consistent?

The Court last year said that continuing with an unwanted pregnancy has an adverse impact on the pregnant woman's mental health and can be a ground for abortion. In the present case, the woman suffered from post-partum depression. What was the Court's stance?

This is another unfortunate example of seemingly expansive constitutional principles getting reduced to rhetoric in practice. In *X v NCT*, the Supreme Court did not confine 'mental health' to medical diagnosis of illness. Rather, the Court emphasised that it must be understood based on

the petitioner's 'self and experiences.' In the present case, the petitioner pleaded for an abortion at 26 weeks because she was suffering from post-partum psychosis — lack of sleep, hallucinations, suicide attempts — after her previous pregnancy. *[Evidence shows suicide is the leading cause of maternal death following childbirth.]*

She submitted prescriptions as evidence of her medical condition, stressing that postpartum psychosis was more severe than postpartum depression. While the Court eventually decided that the mental health ground for abortion did not extend beyond 24 weeks of gestation, it questioned the validity of the petitioner's argument throughout the hearings. It suggested that the prescriptions might have been doctored to 'bolster the case.' It also directed a medical examination of the petitioner to confirm the diagnosis.

The Union Government argued the foetus is "a viable baby with a reasonable chance of survival." What is the rationale of the viability argument, and has the government applied it before?

The theory is: when the foetus reaches a point of viability — where it can exist outside the womb of the woman (with medical support) — the right to abortion should be curtailed. Viability was most famously endorsed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Roe v Wade* in 1973. Two decades later, in 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court replaced the viability standard with a different test, and in 2022, the Court rejected the viability standard completely.

In India, the viability of the foetus has historically had no purchase in restricting abortion. While India's 1971 law on abortion allows third-trimester abortions only in limited circumstances, this appears to have been driven by a need to protect women's health rather than protect the foetus. At the time of passing the 1971 law, only two members of the Legislative Assembly protested against abortion (calling it 'murder' and a 'crime against humanity'). The others endorsed it and affirmed that 'there is no violation of the right to life in any manner.'

However, in 2009, the Indian Supreme Court, citing the U.S. decision in *Roe*, suggested that the state has a 'compelling interest' to protect the foetus which is a form of 'potential life.' The state can, then, impose 'reasonable restrictions' on abortion. The Supreme Court did not, however, mention viability. Yet, some loose version of viability seems to exist in Indian law. In 2016, the Punjab and Haryana High Court claimed that once the pregnancy is viable, the 'potential child' becomes a part of the determination. Similarly, the Calcutta High Court in 2019 said that at an advanced stage of pregnancy, 'the right to life of the foetus outweighs the mental trauma' suffered by the mother.

However, there is no explicit articulation of this standard or a defence of it, despite it being highly critiqued; it has simply been slipped into the law.

What are the rights of a foetus under Indian law? [The CJI said, "We can't kill the child...there are rights of an unborn child too."]

The rights of a foetus under the Indian Constitution are unclear — there has been no upfront articulation of it. Whether the foetus possesses rights, or simply 'interests' (as the 2009 Supreme Court decision termed it) is also ambiguous. A 2016 Bombay High Court decision relied on international human rights law to hold that the foetus does not have rights till birth.

In essence, the state of law is jumbled, and requires urgent deliberation, especially if foetal interests (or, rights) are being used to restrict abortion rights.

How did women's autonomy and right to choose compare with the 'rights of an unborn child', as the court termed it, in the present verdict?

The pregnant woman's rights were seen as extending only as far as they did not harm a viable and healthy foetus. The Court reasoned that it was simply following the conditions under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, and seemed to suggest that its hands were tied, as this was what the law required the Court to do.

However, this claim is not entirely true. The Supreme Court possesses the power to do 'complete justice' under the Constitution. It has previously read the abortion law liberally even when the text did not seem to explicitly authorise it. Here the Court choosing not to do so was, then, less about the law and more about the Court's concern for the foetus.

The government maintained that killing a foetus would 'amount to foeticide', evoking two sides of the abortion debate: pro-life and pro-choice. Is this a new discussion in India?

This conversation is largely alien to India; it is likely that the global contestation on these lines influenced the Court's reference to it. However, now that it has been initiated in courts, it has to be engaged with. Engagement would allow us to shape the judicial dialogue, instead of merely being bystanders to courts deciding the issue.

The question of when 'life comes into being' took centre stage even as the Court said it couldn't decide on that matter. Has the law tried to engage with this quandary in the past? How can it engage with it?

Whether the foetus should, at all, be a relevant factor in abortion regulation is a question that has not been answered in India. For the law, a pregnant woman is a unique subject. The foetus is intimately associated with the body of the woman, in a way that is different from all other situations that the law regulates. Any form of recognition of the foetus will, therefore, most likely grievously invade women's legally recognised rights. When we contemplate the *legal* (as opposed to ethical, moral or religious) status of the foetus, a strong case can be made that the impact on women has to be a consideration.

On the other hand, even if some legally relevant status is granted to foetuses, it need not signal the end of liberal abortion laws. Empirical evidence suggests that restrictive abortion laws do not really protect foetuses; they simply push women toward unsafe abortions and harm their health. In fact, if foetal protection is the aim, better alternatives exist. These include comprehensive sex education, access to temporary contraception, reducing violence against women, and providing forms of childcare support, which reduce the overall rate of abortions. Adopting this reasoning, constitutional courts in South Korea (2019) and Colombia (2021) liberalised abortion while also recognising foetal interests.

The CJI during the hearing asked why it took 26 weeks for the woman to realise she didn't want the child. Studies find that stigma and doctors' judgment also determine women's access to safe abortion services on time. Do abortion restrictions interfere with women's right to equality?

Typically, abortion cases are seen as involving the right to privacy. Reproductive decisions are intimate and personal, shaping who we are as individuals. However, abortions are also necessary to guarantee women equality.

Denying abortions perpetuates women's disadvantage at several levels. In pushing some women to seek abortions with unsafe backstreet providers, their lives are threatened. For others, who are forced to carry an unwanted to pregnancy to term, there is a risk to their physical and

mental health. *[In comparison to women who receive an abortion, those who are denied abortions report a higher risk of life-threatening complications like [eclampsia, postpartum haemorrhage](#), chronic headaches or migraines, joint pain, and gestational hypertension, [research shows.](#)]*

Moreover, women are still the primary caregivers in India, with their responsibilities of care affecting their labour participation, workplace advancement and wages. Being denied abortions, then, has a socio-economic impact on women, as a group. It also entrenches stereotypical assumptions about women's role as mothers, which then leads to abortion stigma and provider bias. *[[NFHS-5 data shows the burden of family planning](#) mostly falls on women in India].*

The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that perpetuating the disadvantage of a historically disadvantaged group is what inequality looks like. Under this definition, the denial of abortion is an obvious equality issue.

One critique of reproductive rights in India (including last year's judgment) is that abortion still falls within the framework of criminal law and the decision to abort rests with medical practitioners. What precedent does the verdict set for future cases, and for reproductive justice issues?

This week's verdict does not directly point to increased criminalisation. However, it could set in motion a prominent role for the foetus in abortion regulation in India. In other countries, foetal concerns have been the prime motivations behind criminalising abortion. In opening the door to foetal interests, the Supreme Court decision could weaken claims for decriminalising abortion in India.

Overall, the verdict does not conclusively decide the abortion issue. However, it presents an inflection point. As we traverse the paths it opens up, it is important for us to keep reminding ourselves, and the Court, about whose rights are at stake, which rights they are, and why.

(Gauri Pillai is an Assistant Professor at the National Law School of India University, Bangalore, and a Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellow at the European University Institute, Florence. Her work studies reproductive rights and constitutionalism in India and globally.)

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MIZORAM HAS THE HIGHEST RATE OF CANCER IN INDIA

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

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October 27, 2023 07:47 pm | Updated October 28, 2023 01:08 am IST - NEW DELHI

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Despite being the country's second least populated State, Mizoram exhibits the highest incidence rate of cancer in India. The latest evidence from an 18-year trend study notes a consistent uptick in cancer incidence and mortality in the State, with stomach cancer emerging as the primary cause of cancer-related deaths among men, while lung cancer plays a parallel role among women.

Cancer incidence and mortality is also growing among the younger generation in Mizoram, which may stem from the static lifestyle and dietary patterns prevalent within the endogamous tribal population, potentially contributing to a genetic predisposition, according to the study, titled "Cancer awareness, diagnosis and treatment needs in Mizoram, India: evidence from 18 years trends (2003–2020)'', which was recently published in *The Lancet Regional Health — Southeast Asia*.

The study notes that the escalation in mortality rates could be attributed to a dearth of specialised diagnostic facilities and skilled human resources, treatment strategies guided by genomic research, and transportation challenges.

According to the World Health Organisation, cancer is a large group of diseases that can start in almost any organ or tissue of the body when abnormal cells grow uncontrollably, and go beyond their usual boundaries to invade adjoining parts of the body or spread to other organs. It is the second leading cause of death globally, accounting for one in six deaths in 2018. Lung, prostate, colorectal, stomach and liver cancer are the most common types of cancer in men, while breast, colorectal, lung, cervical and thyroid cancer are the most common among women.

Also read: How accurate are India's cancer registries? | Explained

Meanwhile findings of this recent study in Mizoram notes that among men the most prevalent cancer site was the stomach, followed by head and neck, lung, oesophagus, colorectal, liver, urinary, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and prostate cancers.

Conversely, among women, lung cancer exhibited the highest incidence followed by cervical, breast, stomach, head and neck, colorectal, oesophagus, liver and ovarian cancers.

"Join point regression analysis revealed a rising trend in incidence and mortality over time for overall cancer sites. Among the primary cancer sites contributing to incidence and mortality, an increase in annual percentage change was observable for all, except stomach cancer, in both men and women. The diagnostic approach, except for cases of cancer with unknown primary sites, involved a microscopic method," explained the study.

For the study, cancer incidence and mortality data were extracted from the Mizoram Population Based Cancer Registry (PBCR) spanning the years 2003–2020. PBCR was supported by funding from the National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research of the Indian Council of Medical Research, the study said..

Another paper estimates that one in nine people across India are likely to develop cancer in their lifetimes. "Lung and breast cancers were the leading sites of cancer in males and females, respectively. Among childhood (0-14 yr) cancers, lymphoid leukaemia (boys: 29.2% and girls: 24.2%) was the leading site. The incidence of cancer cases is estimated to increase by 12.8 per cent in 2025 as compared to 2020," said the paper, titled, "Cancer incidence estimates for 2022 & projection for 2025: Result from National Cancer Registry Programme", which was published last year.

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WILL QR CODES IMPROVE ACCESS TO FOOD LABELS?

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

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October 29, 2023 04:50 am | Updated 12:28 pm IST

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The story so far: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has [recommended the inclusion of a QR (quick response) code on food products](#) for accessibility by visually impaired individuals stating that this will ensure access to safe food for all.

The move is vital as India is one of the largest markets of packaged foods in the world and is currently witnessing a growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) which have seen an abrupt rise globally since the last two decades, according to the World Health Organization. Besides other factors, this trend is attributed to aggressively marketed, cheaper, and more easily available pre-packaged foods which is finding a growing preference among consumers. Every consumer has the right to know exactly what he is paying for and if he is getting what he is promised and advertised, says Ashim Sanyal, CEO and secretary of Consumer VOICE, a non-government organisation working in the field of consumer awareness and education. "With this new initiative an informed choice will be offered to consumers," he adds, pointing out that the move should be backed by also identifying unhealthy foods. "The FSSAI should get the sequence right for labelling and QR code for visually impaired should be part of a mandate for front-of-pack labelling (FOPL) warning labels," he says.

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The FSSAI has advised that these new QR codes should encompass comprehensive details about the product, including, but not limited to, ingredients, nutritional information, allergens, manufacturing date, best before/expiry/use by date, allergen warning, and contact information for customer enquiries. It adds that the inclusion of a QR code for the accessibility of information does not replace or negate the requirement to provide mandatory information on the product label, as prescribed by relevant regulations.

The latest advisory caters to two important regulations — the FSSAI's Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020 which outlines the information to be included on labels of food products and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 which recognises the rights of individuals with disabilities and emphasises accessibility of health for persons with disabilities.

A QR code is a type of two-dimensional matrix barcode, invented in 1994, by the Japanese company Denso Wave for labelling automobile parts. According to market experts, for the food

manufacturers, using QR codes on food products can help improve their brand image, customer loyalty, and operational efficiency.

On the importance of accurate and accessible food labels, a recently published paper titled, 'Food literacy & food labelling laws—a legal analysis of India's food policy', noted that aggressively marketed, cheaper and more easily available pre-packaged foods, often considered as foods high in fat, salt, and sugar, is finding a growing preference amongst consumers in India. "To prevent or control further widespread of NCDs, the FSSAI has issued numerous food and packaging laws and acts to control their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale, and import so that a safe and wholesome food is available to consumers. The front-of-pack labelling (FOPL), proposed by FSSAI in 2019, is a key strategy to alert and educate consumers in making an informed choice," notes the lead author of the paper, Om Prakash Bera, country coordinator, Global Health Advocacy Incubator, India. Food industry experts also note that consumers now consider food packaging equally important as a product. "The increase in smartphone usage by consumers indicate that QR codes are emerging as one of the most promising technologies to enhance the information provided to consumers and influence their buying behaviour," they note.

The U.S., India, France and the U.K. are among the top users of QR code, according to reports. A research paper done on 'Evaluating the Use of QR Codes on Food Products' noted that the size of the global packaged food market is estimated at $303.26 billion in 2019, with a compound annual growth rate of 5.2% over this period. According to the results of a survey, 'QR Code Statistics 2022, the Latest Numbers and Use-Cases on Global Usage', 57% scanned a food QR code to get specific information about the product, 38.99% of respondents want to see QR codes used more and 67% of the respondents agreed that these codes make life easier.

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HOW MUCH SALT SHOULD YOU TAKE EVERY DAY?

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

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October 28, 2023 09:10 pm | Updated October 29, 2023 12:07 pm IST

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Indian men consume 8.9 grams and Indian women take in 7.1 grams of salt on a daily basis. Image for representational purpose only.

Our bodies need salt. Salt also adds taste to our food. However, too much salt in your diet may lead to high blood pressure. The [World Health Organization recommends five grams of salt in your diet every day](). But the world average is 10.8 grams. A [recent report, a part of the national non-communicable disease monitoring survey](), states that Indian men consume 8.9 grams, and Indian women take in 7.1 grams of salt on a daily basis.

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Studies in animals, as well as surveys in humans, have consistently shown that high salt intake causes disease in the kidney, brain, vasculature, and immune system. High levels of sodium in the diet are also associated with conditions ranging from kidney stones to osteoporosis. It is estimated that excessive salt contribution contributes to around five million deaths worldwide every year.

The Yanomami people of the Amazon rainforest live a foraging lifestyle and eat a diet consisting of the root vegetable Cassava, plantains, fruit, fish and an occasional tapir. They use peppers for flavour, and no salt. They consume less than one gram of salt a day yet stay supremely fit.

While our bodies need a certain amount of salt for vital functions, excessive salt intake can lead to health problems such as high blood pressure and heart disease. It's always best to consume salt in moderation. [India faces a rapidly escalating burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs)](), nutritional diseases such as diabetes and obesity, in particular childhood obesity. For many young Indians, the "hidden" salt in processed foods is a big danger.

High salt impairs metabolism and increases the size of adipocytes, which are cells in our body that store energy in the form of fat. These two factors together lead to obesity. The preference for high-fat and for salty food may be related. In one experiment, pregnant mice were fed a standard diet (4.6% fat) during the first week of their three-week gestation period. At this point, some of them were switched to a high-fat diet (32% fat). The offspring of the high-fat fed mice preferred salty water to plain or sweetened water.

Also Read | [Why India should cut down on its salt intake]()

In population studies, reducing salt intake by five to eight grams daily led to a 4 mmHg fall in systolic blood pressure, and an overall reduction in risk of cardiovascular disease. Data from several clinical trials of antihypertensive drugs show an average reduction in blood pressure of 5mmHg by this class of drugs. Similar results were also seen in a Chinese population study in which dietary sodium was lowered by replacing normal salt with a mixture of 75% sodium chloride and 25% potassium chloride: systolic blood pressure came down by 3.3 mmHg. Oral rehydration solutions recommended by UNICEF contain 60:40 ratios of the two salts.

Lastly, salt reduction may be dangerous for some. Elderly adults must be extremely cautious of hypotension since it might lead to falls. This is especially true if they are taking medication to reduce their high blood pressure.

(The article was written in collaboration with Sushil Chandani, who works in molecular modelling)

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WHO SOUTHEAST ASIA MEMBERS TO MEET TO NOMINATE ITS REGIONAL DIRECTOR, TO DISCUSS HEALTH ISSUES

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October 28, 2023 09:00 pm | Updated October 29, 2023 08:49 am IST - NEW DELHI

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World Health House, the WHO's South-East Asia regional office in New delhi. Photo: who.int

Health Ministers and senior officials from the World Health Organization's (WHO) South-East Asia member countries will meet this coming week in New Delhi to deliberate on priority health issues and nominate the next WHO regional director for South-East Asia.

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The 76th session of the WHO regional committee for South-East Asia, the annual governing body meeting of WHO at the regional level, will be held from October 30 to November 2, 2023, according to an official communication. It added that WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and WHO South-East Asia regional director Poonam Khetrapal Singh will be present.

Accelerating prevention and control of cardiovascular diseases, ending neglected tropical diseases, and regional health security, are among the key issues to be discussed. A ministerial roundtable will be held on strengthening primary healthcare as a key element towards achieving universal health coverage, noted the regional office.

"On Wednesday, the regional committee will vote to nominate the next WHO regional director for South-East Asia. There are two candidates in the fray – Bangladesh nominee Saima Wazed and Nepal nominee Shambhu Prasad Acharya. The nomination will be submitted to the WHO executive board, which will meet during January 22-27, 2024, in Geneva, Switzerland. The newly appointed regional director will assume office on February 1, 2024 for a five-year term," said a senior WHO South-East Asia official.

She added that at the regional committee, countries will be felicitated for public health achievements, many of them triggered by the focused approach towards the regional flagship priorities.

Giving an overview of the health issues in the region, the WHO office notes that this area is home to more than two billion people, and since 2014, the region has eliminated polio and

maternal and neonatal tetanus. Four countries – Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste – have eliminated measles and rubella, one of the eight flagship priorities.

Prioritising elimination of neglected tropical diseases, four countries – Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Bangladesh – have eliminated lymphatic filariasis, while Nepal and Myanmar eliminated trachoma, and India was verified yaws-free. Additionally, Sri Lanka and Maldives eliminated malaria, while Thailand, Maldives and Sri Lanka eliminated mother-to-child transmission of syphilis and HIV. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Thailand achieved hepatitis B control.

Focusing on accelerating reduction of maternal, neonatal and under-5 mortality, the region recorded 68.5 % reduction in maternal mortality between 2000 and 2020, and 45% reduction in under-5 mortality and 39% reduction in neonatal mortality during the period. Five countries – DPR Korea, Indonesia, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand – have achieved 2030 SDG (sustainable development goals) targets of reducing under-5 mortality and neonatal mortality.

"Prone to health emergencies, the region had been investing in strengthening preparedness and response capacities since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that hit multiple countries in the region and killed over 2,00,000 people. Countries have been enhancing International Health Regulation (2005) core capacities. The lessons from COVID-19 pandemic are now guiding the Regional Strategic Roadmap on Health Security and Health System Resilience for Emergencies 2023-2027," said Dr. Khetrapal.

She added that the region is accelerating control of cardiovascular diseases with a target to place 100 million people with hypertension and/or diabetes on protocol-based management by 2025.

"We are committed to accelerating universal health coverage. With the focus on human resources for health and essential medicines, the availability of doctors, nurses and midwives has increased by over 30.6% since 2014. Countries in the region have been taking several initiatives to make universal health coverage a reality," she added.

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FARCE OF LAW: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE SEARCHES IN RAJASTHAN AND THE ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

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October 30, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:12 am IST

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[Searches at the premises of Rajasthan Congress president Govind Singh Dotasra](#), a sitting Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and a party candidate from Lacchmangarh in Sikar in the Assembly polls in November, and that of independent MLA Om Prakash Hudla, who has been fielded this time by the Congress from Mahua, have turned the spotlight yet again on the Enforcement Directorate (ED), a central agency that stands accused of selective targeting of Opposition leaders. The ED's money-laundering investigation is based on the cases instituted by the Rajasthan police to probe the alleged leak of the general knowledge paper of the Senior Teacher Grade II Competitive Examination (2022), which was cancelled and rescheduled by the Rajasthan Public Service Commission. The ED has also summoned Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's son Vaibhav Gehlot in an alleged foreign exchange violation case. In Rajasthan, incumbent governments usually get voted out, but Mr. Gehlot has effectively challenged that perception this time with a slew of new welfare schemes and the accompanying publicity blitzkrieg. Factionalism in the Congress has been contained, and Mr. Gehlot and party colleague Sachin Pilot are united. On the other hand, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is dealing with increasing friction within its ranks. The Congress has termed the [ED's action in the election-bound State as a sign of the BJP's frustration](#).

The BJP's claim that all ED actions are purely to root out corruption could have been taken at face value only if they were even-handed and impartial. The pattern of action and inaction by the ED leaves no scope for any such inference. The ED's enthusiasm in pursuing political corruption fluctuates. It is also too much of a coincidence that the ED suspects corruption only in Opposition-ruled States and among leaders opposed to the BJP. Few would accept an argument, if at all the BJP or the ED is making one, that there is no corruption in States ruled by the party or by its leaders. The BJP has been the only beneficiary of large-scale defections of elected representatives in recent years. No one can argue that agencies should not do their job and enforce the law. But both governance and democracy are undermined when the rule of law is weaponised against political opponents, When action against political players is taken in the midst of an election, it could potentially tilt the scales. The current legal regime for fighting corruption — and also the one against terrorism for that matter — is fast degenerating into an arbitrary internment of those who are inconvenient for the ruling party. This needs to end.

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money laundering / Rajasthan Assembly Elections 2023 / Indian National Congress / politics / foreign exchange market / Bharatiya Janata Party / democracy / government / corruption & bribery / terrorism (crime) / test/examination / welfare / investigation

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