



Bad call

The BJP's impatience to return to power in Karnataka might send it down a slippery slope

Failure to win ought to hurt less than outright loss, but try telling that to B.S. Yeddyurappa. Unable to reconcile himself to the failure to wrest Karnataka from the grip of the Congress in last year's Assembly election, the BJP strongman is adopting desperate measures to get another shot at becoming Chief Minister. The H.D. Kumaraswamy government has now announced the appointment of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to go into the veracity of an audio clip in which someone is heard offering money and minister-ship to win the support of a Janata Dal (Secular) MLA. Mr. Yeddyurappa has admitted it is his voice in the clip, but claims that it has been edited and doctored. Another BJP leader, Shivanagouda Nayak, was allegedly recorded as having said that the Speaker of the House, K.R. Ramesh Kumar, had been "booked" for ₹50 crore to rule favourably on dissident legislators of the ruling coalition. Unsurprisingly, the BJP is opposing the constitution of the SIT; instead it has called for a judicial inquiry or a probe by a House panel. But since the statements made in the audio recordings allude to transactions that are criminal in nature, law enforcement agencies are better-equipped to uncover the truth. In 2018, the BJP finished as the single largest party, but a post-poll coalition of the Congress and the JD(S) denied Mr. Yeddyurappa the chance to form the government. After being forced to step down in 2011 as Chief Minister in the wake of corruption charges, Mr. Yeddyurappa may have seen the 2018 Assembly election as his chance at political redemption. The prospect of sitting out another five years in the Opposition may have prompted the use of such underhand methods to return to power.

The release of the audio clips shines a light on the Congress and the BJP herding their MLAs into resorts some weeks ago. Accusations that the BJP was trying to buy up dissidents in the Congress have now gained credence. Seven Congress MLAs and one JD(S) MLA stayed away from the Assembly proceedings, raising the suspicion that the BJP was actively wooing dissidents in both the parties to bring down the government. But BJP leaders are now the victims of their own design, as points of contact have recorded conversations offering money and giving assurances for switching sides. The JD(S)-Congress government is by no means a cohesive unit, but the BJP's covert attempts to engineer defections have certainly backfired. The wiser course for the BJP would have been to politically capitalise on the internal contradictions of the coalition government rather than resort to covert means to destabilise it. Desperate measures are aimed at immediate rewards, but these invariably result in long-term damage. The Congress outsmarted the BJP by cobbling together an opportunistic alliance with the JD(S). The BJP will be better served by time and patience, not money power and corruption.

Well oiled

It is easy to see why the Saudi Crown Prince has chosen to include India in his Asia tour

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visits India next week at a time when both countries are seeking to deepen bilateral cooperation. For MBS, as he is widely known, the visit to India, Pakistan, China, Malaysia and Indonesia is an opportunity to re-assess Saudi Arabia's role as a major foreign policy player in Asia amid growing criticism over the Yemen war and the brutal assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. For the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the visit, with general elections approaching, is an opportunity to cap its pursuit of stronger ties with West Asian nations on a high note. High-level visits between India and Saudi Arabia have become the new normal since King Abdullah came to India in 2006, the first Saudi monarch to do so in five decades. Four years later, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh travelled to Riyadh. Mr. Modi visited Riyadh in 2016; last year, he met MBS in Argentina on the sidelines of the G-20 summit at a time when the Crown Prince had already come under sharp criticism in many Western countries. A number of factors have influenced the turnaround in ties between the two countries, which had been underwhelming during the Cold War. When India's economy started growing at a faster clip post-liberalisation, its dependence on energy-rich nations grew. And Saudi Arabia was a stable, trusted supplier of oil. Post-9/11, the two have expanded the scope of their partnership to economic issues and fighting terrorism.

MBS is expected to announce Saudi investments in both India and Pakistan. Saudi Arabia, which has traditionally exercised great influence over Pakistan, had recently offered a \$6 billion loan to Islamabad to stabilise the economy. In India, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have acquired a 50% stake in a refinery complex in Maharashtra. The project remains stalled amid protests against land acquisition, but it shows Saudi Arabia's interest to make long-term investments in India's energy sector. Another subject that that will come up in bilateral talks is Iran. MBS has made containment of Iran his top foreign policy priority, and has U.S. support in this pursuit. India is certain to come under U.S. pressure to cut oil imports from Iran: it has so far walked the tightrope between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Even as its ties with the Kingdom improved over the past decade, India deepened its engagement with Iran, be it on oil trade or the Chabahar port. This is driven by the conviction that while Saudi Arabia is vital for India's energy security, Iran is a gateway to Central Asia. New Delhi is sure to continue this balancing act even as it seeks to strengthen the Saudi pillar of India's West Asia policy.

Dealing with the thought police

It is vitally important that the courts remain free of the discourse on 'urban Naxals' and 'anti-nationals'



GAUTAM BHATIA

On February 5, an Additional Sessions Judge in Punjab sentenced three young men to life in prison. Arwinder Singh, Surjit Singh and Ranjit Singh were convicted under a little-known provision of the Indian Penal Code concerning "waging war against the government of India".

In what heinous manner had the three men waged war against the government, which justified a sentence of life imprisonment? A perusal of the 64-page-long judgment reveals the following. They did not commit any physical violence, and nobody was harmed in any way. They were not caught in possession of weapons. They were not overheard planning any specific terrorist attack, nor were they on their way to commit one when they were apprehended. What did happen was that the men were caught with literature supporting the cause of Khalistan, a few posters that did the same, and some Facebook posts (whose content we do not know) on the subject.

With this being the sum total of what passed for "evidence" in the case, it is clear that the verdict of the Additional Sessions Judge is unsustainable, and will be reversed. It is important, however, for the higher courts to recognise not only that the judgment is fatally flawed but also that it represents a dangerous moment for the judiciary: this is not the first occasion in recent times when a court has abandoned constitutional values in favour of a crude nationalistic rhetoric that belongs more to the demagogue's pulpit rather than to

the courtroom. And in that context, the judgment of the Additional Sessions Judge marks the beginnings of a trend that, if left unchecked, can swiftly erode our most cherished liberties.

Of speech and association

The first – and most glaring – aspect of the judgment is its apparent disregard for the Constitution. At the heart of the Constitution's fundamental rights chapter is Article 19, which guarantees, among other things, the freedom of speech and association. Of course, the state may impose "reasonable restrictions" upon these fundamental freedoms, in the interests of, for example, the security of the state.

In a series of careful decisions over five decades, the Supreme Court has articulated the precise circumstances under which a restriction on the freedom of speech or association is "reasonable". After the famous 2015 judgment in *Shreya Singhal*, in which Section 66A of the Information Technology Act was struck down, the position of law has been clear: speech can be punished only if it amounts to direct incitement to violence. Everything short of that, including "advocacy" of any kind, is protected by the Constitution.

Not only is this consistent with the Supreme Court's jurisprudence, it also harks back to a venerable Indian tradition of civil liberties. In the early 1920s, Mahatma Gandhi famously wrote that the "freedom of association is truly respected when assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects", and noted that the state's right to intervene was limited to situations involving actual outbreak of revolution. The logic is simple: in a pluralist democracy, no one set of ideas can set itself up as the universal truth, and enforce its position through



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coercion. Consequently, as the American judge, Louis Brandeis, memorably observed, "If there be time to expose through discussion the falsehood and fallacies... the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence." The Indian Supreme Court's "incitement to violence" standard responds to this basic insight about civil liberties in a democracy.

Nor is the test diluted just because the issue at stake may involve national security. In three judgments in 2011 – *Raneef*, *Indra Das*, and *Arup Bhuyan* – the Supreme Court made it very clear that the incitement test applied squarely to the provisions of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), India's signature anti-terrorist legislation. In particular, the court cautioned that vaguely worded provisions of these statutes would have to be read narrowly and precisely, and in accordance with the Constitution. So, for example, "membership" of a banned organisation – a punishable offence both under the TADA and the UAPA – was to be understood as being limited to "active membership", i.e. incitement to violence. In particular, in *Raneef*, mere possession of revolutionary literature was categorically held to be insufficient to sustain a conviction, something that was blithely ignored by the Additional Sessions

Judge in his judgment of February 5.

In fact, not only did the Additional Sessions Judge ignore Gandhi, Supreme Court precedent on free speech and association and Supreme Court precedent on the interpretation of anti-terror legislation, he also – staggeringly – managed to ignore categorical precedent on the issue of pro-Khalistani speech! In *Balwant Singh v. State of Punjab* (1995), the Supreme Court had set aside the sedition convictions of two men who had raised pro-Khalistan slogans outside a cinema hall in Punjab, in the immediate aftermath of *Indira Gandhi's* assassination. Even a situation like that was deemed insufficient to meet the high "incitement" threshold, while here the Additional Sessions Judge managed to hold that Facebook posts amounted to "direct incitement".

Judicial objectivity

There is, however, a further point to consider. In the last few years, a discourse has arisen that seeks to paint a set of oppositional ideas as beyond the pale, and those who hold those ideas as being unworthy of civilised treatment. Two phrases have come to dominate this discourse: "urban Naxal" and "anti-national".

Neither "urban Naxal" nor "anti-national" is a term defined by law. These terms have nothing to do with incitement to violence or creating public disorder. But they are also boundlessly manipulable, and exploited by their users to vilify and demonise political opponents without ever making clear what exactly is the crime (if any) that has been committed. Their very elasticity makes them ideal weapons for shoot-and-scoot attacks, and for coded dog-whistles.

It is one thing for these terms to be thrown around in a political dogfight. It is quite another when

they begin to percolate into law-enforcement and legal discourse, where precision is crucial, because personal liberty is at stake. Indeed, it is vitally important that the courts, above all, remain free of this discourse, because it is the courts that are tasked with protecting the rights of precisely those individuals who are demonised and vilified by the ruling majority of the day.

While the Additional Sessions Judge does not use either of these specific terms, his entire judgment, however, is of a piece with this governing philosophy, where conjecture, association, and innuendo take the place of rational analysis. In that context, his judgment is reminiscent of the Delhi High Court judgment that granted bail to Kanhaiya Kumar, while embarking upon a bizarre disquisition involving cancer and gangrene, and the police press-conference in the ongoing *Bhima Koregaon* case which did use the "urban Naxal" term.

Case for care

There is little doubt that the life sentence of Arwinder Singh, Surjit Singh and Ranjit Singh cannot stand the test of law. However, when an appeals court considers the issue, it should take the opportunity to reiterate a hoary truth: a democracy does not jail people simply for reading books, painting posters, or posting on Facebook. And in adjudicating cases involving the life and personal liberties of citizens, courts must take special care to ensure that the temptation to get carried away and forget what the Constitution commands is held firmly in check. That reminder may come when the three men have already lost some years of their lives to prison – but it could not come soon enough.

Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based lawyer

Every drop matters

The regulatory framework must be reformed to ensure access to safe and sufficient blood



KEVIN JAMES & SHREYA SHRIVASTAVA

A ready supply of safe blood in sufficient quantities is a vital component of modern health care. In 2015-16, India was 1.1 million units short of its blood requirements. Here too, there were considerable regional disparities, with 81 districts in the country not having a blood bank at all. In 2016, a hospital in Chhattisgarh turned away a woman in dire need of blood as it was unavailable. She died on the way to the nearest blood bank which was several hours away. Yet, in April 2017, it was reported that blood banks in India had in the last five years discarded a total of 2.8 million units of expired, unused blood (more than 6 lakh litres).

Vigil after collection

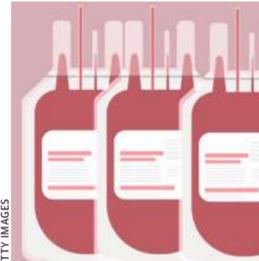
To prevent transfusion-transmitted infections (TTIs), collected blood needs to be safe as well. Due to practical constraints, tests are only conducted post-collection. Thus blood donor selection relies on donors filling in health questionnaires truthfully. The collected blood is tested for certain TTIs

such as HIV and if the blood tests positive, it has to be discarded. However, these tests are not fool-proof as there is a window period after a person first becomes infected with a virus during which the infection may not be detectable. This makes it crucial to minimise the risk in the first instance of collection. Collecting healthy blood will also result in less blood being discarded later.

Blood that is donated voluntarily and without remuneration is considered to be the safest. Unfortunately, professional donors (who accept remuneration) and replacement donation (which is not voluntary) are both common in India. In the case of professional donors there is a higher chance of there being TTIs in their blood, as these donors may not provide full disclosure.

In the case of replacement donation, relatives of patients in need of blood are asked by hospitals to arrange for the same expeditiously. This blood is not used for the patient herself, but is intended as a replacement for the blood that is actually used. In this way, hospitals shift the burden of maintaining their blood bank stock to the patient and her family. Here again, there could be a higher chance of TTIs because replacement donors, being under pressure, may be less truthful about diseases.

The regulatory framework which governs the blood transfusion



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infrastructure in India is scattered across different laws, policies, guidelines and authorities. Blood is considered to be a 'drug' under the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940. Therefore, just like any other manufacturer or storer of drugs, blood banks need to be licensed by the Drug Controller-General of India (DCGI). For this, they need to meet a series of requirements with respect to the collection, storage, processing and distribution of blood, as specified under the Drugs & Cosmetics Rules, 1945. Blood banks are inspected by drug inspectors who are expected to check not only the premises and equipment but also various quality and medical aspects such as processing and testing facilities. Their findings lead to the issuance, suspension or cancellation of a licence.

In 1996, the Supreme Court directed the government to establish the National Blood Transfusion

Council (NBTC) and State Blood Transfusion Councils (SBTCs). The NBTC functions as the apex policy-formulating and expert body for blood transfusion services and includes representation from blood banks. However, it lacks statutory backing (unlike the DCGI), and as such, the standards and requirements recommended by it are only in the form of guidelines.

This gives rise to a peculiar situation – the expert blood transfusion body can only issue non-binding guidelines, whereas the general pharmaceutical regulator has the power to license blood banks. This regulatory dissonance exacerbates the serious issues on the ground and results in poor coordination and monitoring.

Towards a solution

The present scenario under the DCGI is far from desirable, especially given how regulating blood involves distinct considerations when compared to most commercial drugs. It is especially incongruous given the existence of expert bodies such as the NBTC and National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), which are more naturally suited for this role. The DCGI does not include any experts in the field of blood transfusion, and drug inspectors do not undergo any special training for inspecting blood banks.

In order to ensure the involvement of technical experts who can

complement the DCGI, the rules should be amended to involve the NBTC and SBTCs in the licensing process. Given the wide range of responsibilities the DCGI has to handle, its licensing role with respect to blood banks can even be delegated to the NBTC under the rules. This would go a long way towards ensuring that the regulatory scheme is up to date and accommodates medical and technological advances.

Despite a 2017 amendment to the rules which enabled transfer of blood between blood banks, the overall system is still not sufficiently integrated. A collaborative regulator can, more effectively, take the lead in facilitating coordination, planning and management. This may reduce the regional disparities in blood supply as well as ensure that the quality of blood does not vary between private, corporate, international, hospital-based, non-governmental organisations and government blood banks.

The aim of the National Blood Policy formulated by the government back in 2002 was to "ensure easily accessible and adequate supply of safe and quality blood". To achieve this goal, India should look to reforming its regulatory approach at the earliest.

Kevin James and Shreya Shrivastava are Research Fellows at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, New Delhi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Rafale deal

The Hindu has to be commended for providing greater details in the Rafale deal. Though the article may not be a reader's delight in terms of understanding it in depth, it would serve greatly those readers who deal with such subjects (Page 1, 'Exclusive', Rafale deal not on 'better terms' than UPA-era offer', February 13). One has to see whether the series of reports can affect the government. At the same time, one wonders whether they will be able to help the main Opposition party, given its track record in defence deals.

ARUN KUMAR MAHADEVAN, Chennai

■ The CAG report on the Rafale deal was tabled on the last working day of Parliament probably to avoid

an elaborate discussion on the subject. The Opposition has already expressed its reservations, including the point that the CAG should have recused himself. For the government, the CAG report gives a boost to its claim of everything being hunky dory. However, it certainly does not help in putting an end to the political tussle over the deal.

K.R. JAYAPRAKASH RAO, Mysuru

■ The 'parallel negotiations' by the Prime Minister's Office, the "waiver of anti-corruption clauses" from the terms of the deal and "secret meetings" of the businessman in question now lead to the point: it would be ingenious to suppose that the selection of the businessman as the offset partner was not a quid pro quo for the "major and

unprecedented concessions" made to the French. The government has not been able to convincingly counter the Congress's accusation that the Prime Minister acted as, what the Congress calls, the businessman's 'middleman'. The only line it has to defend itself is to call the Congress president a 'lobbyist' for defence firms. Even if the Supreme Court and the CAG have found nothing seriously wrong with the deal, the government should agree to a JPC probe in order not to lose the perception battle.

G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

■ The series shed much light on the murky happenings at the political level. After reading the file notings, one wishes to applaud the uprightness of various Defence Ministry officials for

recording their views without fear or favour. It is evident that a muddying of the deal's waters began at the political level.

R. NAGARAJAN, Chennai

■ With claims and more counter-claims, the deal is becoming confusing for the layman. The daily's investigations do counter certain claims made by the government. However, it is time the government agrees to a probe into the full deal.

D.B.N. MURTHY, Bengaluru

■ It is stated that three out of seven members of the Indian Negotiating Team gave dissent notes. Even in the Supreme Court, in a 3- or 5-judge Bench, they go by the majority judgment, even when there is a dissenting judgment. So, in the case of

the Rafale deal, is there anything wrong if they went by the majority opinion?

U.N. BHAT, Bengaluru

A performer

Legendary Indian cricketer Gundappa Viswanath, who turned 70 recently, was a connoisseur's delight. He raised the standard of his batting when others failed. He added colour to the Indian batting with his repertoire of shots around the wicket ("Sport" page, "Viswanath - the hero and role model - is now 70", February 13). The Karnataka star gets instant recall for his trademark square cut that would often whizz past the gully and point regions, leaving the fielders in awe and admiration. Among Vishy's many great knocks, his 97 not out against the

West Indies at Chepauk in 1975 can be counted as evidence of his power in a crisis situation. It was a masterclass knock scored against the fury of Andy Roberts. The innings was best described by Sunil Gavaskar in his book, *Idols*: "His 97 not out is the finest Test match innings I was privileged to see."

R. SIVAKUMAR, Chennai

■ G.R. Viswanath was the Keats of cricket; so poetic his batting was. He was the "trademark-holder" of the square cut and late cut. His 97 not out at Chepauk in the 1975 Test against the West Indies stood apart. The original 'Little Master' cannot be cloned.

K. PRADEEP, Chennai

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A clarion call to combat climate change

The Green New Deal acknowledges the responsibility of the U.S. for its historical emissions



SUJATHA BYRAVAN

When almost all news about climate change concerns catastrophic events, there are a few shining lights in the U.S. and Europe. One is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 29, the newly elected member of the U.S. House of Representatives. The other is Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old Swede whose school strike outside the Swedish Parliament, in a clear-minded effort to force politicians to act on climate change, has inspired students in many countries to walk out of their classrooms and make similar demands. If Ms. Thunberg's voice is inspiring for the way it has roused the youth, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez is daring in her imagination and policies.

The Green New Deal "is a four-part programme for moving America quickly out of crisis into a secure, sustainable future". It takes its name from U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt's famous New Deal, a series of economic and social measures launched in the 1930s to end the Great Depression. The Green New Deal audaciously aspires to make sweeping changes to the environment and economy and meet all of the U.S.'s power demand from clean, renewable and zero emission energy sources by 2030, while at the same time addressing racial and economic justice. Thus, in many ways, it is more than just a climate change plan. Ms. Ocasio-Cortez along with Massachusetts Senator Edward Markey introduced the resolution in the House and Senate on February 7.

What the deal says

The resolution acknowledges the 1.5° report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the U.S. Fourth National Climate Assessment. It identifies the worldwide effects from warming, the disproportionate responsibility borne by the U.S. as a result of its historical emissions, and calls for the country to step up as a global leader. It speaks about the fall in life expectancy, economic stagnation, erosion of workers' rights, and



"The Green New Deal is an acknowledgement by politicians that economic growth, the environment and social well-being go together." Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (left) and Ed Markey at a news conference about the Green New Deal, in Washington. •THE NEW YORK TIMES

rising inequality in the U.S. Climate change that will asymmetrically affect the most vulnerable sections of U.S. society and ought to be considered a direct threat to national security.

The resolution goes on to recognise the momentous opportunity available to take action. It states that it is the responsibility of the federal government to create a Green New Deal, which would meet its power demand through renewable sources in 10 years. It calls for a 10-year national mobilisation that would build infrastructure, eliminate pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, as much as is technologically feasible, and reduce risks posed by the impacts of climate change.

These goals entail dramatic changes in manufacturing, electricity generation, education, livelihoods, sustainable farming, food systems, an overhaul of transportation, waste management, health care, and strong pollution-control measures. The resolution also calls for international action by the U.S. on climate change. It recognises that public funds would be needed for these changes and need to be leveraged. It

states that the federal government needs to take the full social and environmental costs of climate change into consideration through new laws, policies and programmes. Importantly, the Green New Deal calls for a federal jobs guarantee for all.

A welcome surprise

How far this resolution will go and whether and how it will be diluted in the U.S. Congress is unclear. Many details of the proposal still need to be worked out. It has been called "ridiculous" by some Republicans and has made some Democratic leaders uneasy as well.

But various progressive elected officials, groups, and some activists have lent their support. Almost all Democrats who have announced their candidacy for the 2020 election have backed the resolution. A poll conducted by Yale and George Mason Universities showed that there was support for the deal among most Democratic voters and a majority of the Republicans. One does not know if this appetite for the deal will be sustained, but if extreme events related to climate change continue, people are likely to view radical change

as essential. If we look at the political situation when Roosevelt passed the New Deal, both Houses of Congress were under the Democrats. On the other hand, the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act were passed by President Richard Nixon and were regarded as being radical in their time.

If any country has the "capability" to increase its commitment in renewables, it is the U.S. This clarion call by Ms. Ocasio-Cortez and Mr. Markey is therefore a welcome surprise. The share of fossil fuels in total electricity generation in the U.S. in 2017 was 63%, the share of renewables was 17%, and the share of nuclear was 20%.

The future

It should be noted that until now no U.S. agency or civil society group has publicly acknowledged the responsibility of the country for its historical emissions. The Green New Deal is the sort of resolution the U.S. should have passed after the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. Instead, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed the Byrd-Hagel Resolution, according to which the U.S. ought not to be a signatory to any protocol or agreement regarding the United Nations Climate Convention that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions for Annex-I Parties, the wealthy countries, unless developing countries were also similarly required to limit their emissions.

Meanwhile, Ms. Thunberg's school boycott movement has inspired protests in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Australia and elsewhere. If this spreads to many more countries, it can help apply pressure on governments and the fossil fuel industry and create a bottom-up movement led by the youth for major changes in dealing with climate change.

The Green New Deal is an acknowledgement by politicians that economic growth, the environment and social well-being go together. While these bold moves by two young women have opened windows to winds of change, how far these can progress and whether they will bring the scale of change needed as rapidly as it is required to deal with the world's dire challenge remains to be seen.

Sujatha Byravan is a scientist who studies science, technology and development policy

The PM-KISAN challenge

The top-down, rushed approach of the government in reaching out to farmers is likely to end in failure



APARNA ROY

This year's Interim Budget is being regarded as a big spread for farmers. The government announced its decision to transfer ₹6,000 every year directly to 12 crore farmers holding cultivable land up to 2 hectares through the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme. While this is a progressive step, is it enough to mitigate India's severe agrarian distress?

The agriculture sector employs over 50% of the workforce either directly or indirectly, and remains the main source of livelihood for over 70% of rural households. However, the droughts of 2014 and 2015, ad-hoc export and import policies, lack of infrastructure, and uncertainty in agricultural markets have adversely affected agricultural productivity and stability of farm incomes. Consequently, agriculture growth rates have been inconsistent in the last five years – 5.6% in 2013-14, (-) 0.2% in 2014-15, 0.7% in 2015-16, 4.9% in 2016-17 and 2.1% in 2017-18. This is a major concern. PM-KISAN is aimed at boosting rural consumption and helping poor farmers recover from distress. Although the scheme is valuable in principle, without adequate focus on proper strategy and implementation, it is unlikely to make any meaningful impact.

Inadequate financial support

The merit of cash transfers over loan waivers and subsidies lies in their potential greater efficiency in enabling poor households to directly purchase the required goods and services as well as enhance their market choices. Therefore, the impact of a welfare measure such as PM-KISAN can only be realised through financial support that provides farmers with adequate purchasing power to meet their daily basic necessities. Given that India's poverty line is ₹32 per person per day in rural areas and ₹47 in urban areas, according to the Rangarajan Committee, the income support of ₹17 a day for a household, which is the amount offered by PM-KISAN, is largely insufficient for even bare minimum sustenance of vulnerable farmers. Therefore, to be effective, any cash transfer scheme should first ensure that there is enough cash provided to help bring an affected community out of poverty. For instance, the Rythu Bandhu in Telangana, that the Centre is said to have replicated, provides ₹4,000 per acre to each farmer in each

season, and the Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation scheme in Odisha offers a direct cash transfer of ₹5,000 for a farm family over five seasons, among other benefits.

Moreover, given the volatile market and price fluctuations in different regions, it is important to index the cash transfers to local inflation. The failure of an ambitious plan of Direct Benefit Transfer in kerosene in Rajasthan is a case in point, where the cash transferred to families has been insufficient to purchase kerosene, as the market price increased substantially.

Implementation issues

While cash transfers to households may appear simple, the scheme requires significant implementation capabilities. In a country where a majority of the States have incomplete tenancy records and land data are not digitised (for instance, in Jharkhand, Bihar, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu), identification of beneficiaries is daunting.

The results of a joint study conducted by NITI Aayog and the Union government's Department of Food in 2016 suggest that the government's pilot programmes to replace subsidised food grains with cash in three Union Territories (Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Puducherry) have failed due to data inconsistencies. While 50% of the people received less cash, 17% received more than they were entitled to. More than 40% of the money transferred could not be verified to have reached the beneficiaries. In the absence of updated land records and complete databases, the scheme may end up benefiting only those who hold land titles and not the small, marginal or tenant farmers who are the most vulnerable. Besides, the scheme does not provide a clear design of transfers and a framework for effective grievance redress. In the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, for instance, State governments still struggle to resolve complaints and curb corruption.

PM-KISAN is an ambitious scheme that has the potential to deliver significant welfare outcomes. However, the current top-down, rushed approach of the government ignores governance constraints and is therefore likely to result in failure. An alternative bottom-up strategy and well-planned implementation mechanism would allow weaknesses to be identified and rectified at the local level. The most effective modalities can then be scaled nationally and ensure success.

Aparna Roy is Associate Research Fellow, Observer Research Foundation

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The ABC of sustainable consumption

It will necessarily draw in producers and government agencies through their goods and services

SOHINI MITRA



Expert opinion is that the recent Coastal Regulation Zone Notification 2018 disregards the vulnerabilities of coastal regions to climate change. While the hospitality/tourism industries and local economies stand to gain from the changes, the lives and livelihood of thousands of citizens continue to be at risk.

India's vulnerabilities to climate challenges can no longer be ignored. Government, businesses and civil society have the responsibility of constructive action to address this environmental challenge. It is no secret that governments in India do not prioritise climate change mitigation, fearing that it will impede economic growth and efforts to alleviate poverty. On the other hand, several businesses have already established sustainable mitigative measures in their operations. It is time now for civil society to recognise our contribution to climate catastrophes and commit to containing an already precarious situation.

The role for civil society is to establish efficient and sustainable patterns of consuming essential and luxury products and services and, in the process, improve quality of life in multiple dimensions – physical environment, health and finance, for example. If we hope to make a significant difference, there must be a change in consumption-related thinking and behaviour. This requires that we embed the term sustainability deeply in our thinking and vocabulary, so that it becomes the default mode in which we operate. That implies making mobility choices that result in efficient fuel use and lower carbon emissions. It calls for considering alternative sources of domestic electricity. We need to observe and alter the use of cooling devices and power. How do we consume and manage water in homes and communities? How do we deal with household waste and other items that have outlived their intended utility?

Making changes in our consumption habits will necessarily draw in producers and government agencies through the goods and services they make available. Their involvement offers tremendous opportunity for citizens' needs to be heard. We ought to engage with manufacturers and marketers to co-create products and services that support efficient, sustainable consumption. With policy makers and regulators, we must force a shift in the current stance, to address climate challenges with much greater urgency. Civil society should be more assertive about being included in shaping the country's climate policy.

It is difficult enough for individuals to change entrenched habits and attitudes. Mobilising a large number of diverse people to think differently and learn new ways would likely be a herculean task. Yet, it is possible, demonstrated by instances of positive and sustained civic action by the public.

Altering our lifestyles for sustainability has a silver lining – we have a valuable chance to re-orient our lives for substantive improvement. The sooner we act, the more significant the gain.

The writer is Bengaluru-based and interested in climate change



FAQ

A political stand-off

Amid a grim economic crisis, the power struggle weakens Venezuela further

STANLEY JOHNY

What is happening in Venezuela?

Venezuela has been going through a turmoil for the past couple of years amid an economic meltdown and growing Opposition protests. The crisis took a dangerous turn on January 23 when Juan Guaidó, president of the Opposition-controlled National Assembly, declared himself interim President of the oil-rich South American country, directly challenging the authority of President Nicolás Maduro, who began his second six-year term in January. Immediately after Mr. Guaidó's announcement, the U.S., Canada, Brazil and some other South American nations recognised him as Venezuela's legitimate leader. Mr. Maduro rejected the "coup" attempt and said he was the President of Venezuela. European powers gave Mr. Maduro an ultimatum to announce fresh elections, which he rejected. Later, a host of European countries also backed

Mr. Guaidó. The U.S., meanwhile, imposed new sanctions on Venezuela's state-run oil company, PDVSA – all properties of the company subject to U.S. jurisdiction were blocked and American citizens were barred from trading with the company. The sanctions are expected to cost Mr. Maduro's government \$11 billion in lost export proceeds.

Who is the legitimate leader?

Mr. Guaidó says the Venezuelan Constitution allows the president of the National Assembly to take power as interim President in the absence of an elected President. The Opposition doesn't recognise the 2018 presidential election which Mr. Maduro won. The main Opposition had boycotted the election. Mr. Guaidó and his supporters argue that since the election was a sham, Venezuela doesn't have a legitimate leader, and in such a context as president of the National Assembly, he could take power. This is a contested

claim. Article 233 of the Constitution, which Mr. Guaidó has invoked, lists the circumstances, such as the President's death, dismissal or resignation, where the Parliament chief can assume power and call for fresh elections. The current crisis, triggered by economic woes, government repression and a disputed election, is different. Besides, most constitutional institutions in the country, including the armed forces, back Mr. Maduro. So do Russia and China.

How bad is the economic crisis?

Very bad. The country's inflation is estimated reach 10 million per cent this year. Venezuela has also been facing severe food and medicines shortages for months. The nation's GDP, which was growing at near 10% in 2006, at the height of Hugo Chavez's "Bolivarian revolution", contracted 14.3% in 2018. Almost 90% of the country's population is living in poverty, while per capita income has been falling

since 2014. Amid this crisis, about three million Venezuelans have fled the country, most since 2015.

What's in store?

When Mr. Guaidó declared himself acting President, he may have hoped that he could win over at least sections of Venezuela's armed forces. He's unlikely to topple Mr. Maduro as long as the military is loyal to him. Mr. Maduro's government also has some support among the public, especially the poor, the backbone of the Chavismo government. So the attempts to topple Mr. Maduro are not making headway. On the other side, Mr. Maduro continues to face major challenges. The Opposition has strong support both within and outside the country. And the economic crisis is far from easing. This means the turmoil that has gripped Venezuela is unlikely to ease unless the government and the Opposition find common ground on rebuilding the economy and sharing power.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 14, 1969

Union Cabinet reshuffled

Without dropping anyone or inducting any new incumbent, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi has made a major reshuffle of her 23-month-old Central Cabinet on the eve of the Budget session of Parliament. The Prime Minister has divested herself of the portfolio of External Affairs and has transferred the charge to Mr. Dinesh Singh, till now Minister of Commerce. She has also promoted Mr. B.R. Bhagat to Cabinet rank. The Commerce Ministry has been renamed Ministry for Foreign Trade and Supply and Minister of State for External Affairs B.R. Bhagat has been put in-charge of the new Ministry. Mrs. Gandhi was working on the changes since early yesterday [February 13] and conveyed the changes to the concerned Ministers when they called on her or through telephone. The changes which came as a surprise to many of her colleagues were announced in the early hours of this morning [February 14, New Delhi]. There is no change in the portfolios of Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai, Home Minister Y.B. Chavan, Food Minister Jagjivan Ram, Labour Minister J.L. Hathi, Defence Minister Swaran Singh and Transport and Civil Aviation Minister Dr. Karan Singh.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 14, 1919.

Death Duty in Ceylon.

A Colombo message dated February 9 says: The much debated Bill, which had for its object increasing of revenue from duty on estates of deceased persons has been redrafted and appears in yesterday's Gazette. The only duty which is under the existing law payable after the death of a person is the probate duty under the Stamps Ordinance Bill recently introduced in the Legislative Council, which increased the rate of probate duty. It was referred to a Select Committee and the Committee came to the conclusion that it would be advisable to bring the local law up to date. The present Bill is based on the Finance Act 1894 of the Imperial Parliament as amended by series of other Acts. The important section of the Bill lays down the manner in which the value of an estate is to be arrived at. The value to be estimated by the Commissioner of Stamps is to be the price which it would fetch in the open market, subject to the deduction of reasonable funeral expense, bona-fide debts, and other items set out in the section.

CONCEPTUAL Square-cube law

PHYSICS

Also known as the cube-square law, this refers to the mathematical principle that states that when the size of an object increases, its volume increases by a greater proportion than its area. This principle has been used to explain the anatomy of various living organisms as well as the limits to the construction of certain man-made structures. The bones and muscles of large animals, for instance, are disproportionately larger than those of smaller animals in order to help them withstand the stress exerted by the disproportionately high volume of their bodies. The square-cube law was first proposed by Italian physicist Galileo in his 1638 book *Two New Sciences*.

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