Trespassing former chief

Former Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Dalbir Singh Suhag, was named ambassador to Seychelles a few days ago by the same party that opposed his appointment as COAS. He was placed under a "disciplinary and vigilance ban" by General V K Singh, the then Army Chief and currently a minister of state in the Ministry of External Affairs. Subsequently, V K Singh did everything to stymie General Suhag's appointment to any post. Now, if General V K Singh returns to the Ministry of External Affairs, General Suhag will report to him. Elections seem to have played a central role in General Suhag's life. He was appointed Army Chief by the Congressled UPA-2 government on May 14, 2014, just two days before the Lok Sabha election results were announced. Now, with weeks to go for the announcement of results a full five years later, he has got a post-retirement position. The question is, how did the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) pick up the courage to overlook and ignore V K Singh?

'Silence tells its own story'

It has to be a campaign to beat all campaigns. Shatrughan Sinha begins every campaign speech with "*Khamosh*"! (Silence) then adds, "*ki main sankshep mein kuch points boloonga* (I will be brief)." At one place, someone in the crowd shouted out: "Don't be brief. Give us all the details." To which Sinha replied, "*Shanti mein bhi kranti hoti hai. Kuch toh majboori hogi jo main bewafaa hua* (Silence also tells its own story. There must be a good reason why I became disloyal").

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?



"Modi ji, will you topple every government run by an opposition party by buying lawmakers? And from where do you bring so much money to buy MLAs? You have tried to buy our MLAs many times. Buying AAP leaders is not easy"

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Chief and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in a Twitter response to Vijay Goel's allegation about 14 lawmakers moving out of AAP

CHECKLIST CONSTITUENCIES TO WATCH IN BIHAR (MAY 6)

Sitamarhi: The seat went to the Janata Dal United. But the candidate named by JDU, Varun Kumar returned the ticket to party president Nitish Kumar alleging non-cooperation by local NDA leaders. In the meantime, local BJP leader Sunil Pintu crossed the floor to formally join the JD(U) and is contesting the seat. Pintu has been BJP MLA from Sitamarhi twice and was also minister in the previous NDA government. The mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) has fielded Arjun Rai, considered close to Loktantrik Janata Dal candidate from Madhepura, Sharad Yadav. Madhubani: After he was denied a ticket from the constituency, former union minister Shakeel Ahmad has quit all posts in the Congress and will fight as an independent candidate. Congress ceded to the grand alliance constituent Vikassheel Insan Party (VIP), which has fielded Badri Purbe. Purbe, a

businessman from neighbouring Darbhanga, as the official candidate. However, there is extensive support for Ahmad, with even the local Congress MLA, Bhawna Jha, working for him. He is seen as the only person who can defeat BJP.

Muzaffarpur: VIP floated by Mallah (boatman) community leader Mukesh Sahni, is making its debut appearance. The Mallah caste comes under extremely backward class bracket, carrying surnames like Nishad, Sahni and sometimes Manjhi. The VIP party's candidate in Muzaffarpur is Raj Bhushan Choudhary Nishad, a medical doctor by training. The BJP has fielded its sitting MP Ajay Nishad. Whoever wins will have legitimate claim for Mallah leadership in Bihar. Phoolan Devi is considered the most famous Mallah leader. Muzaffarpur is still known for socialist leader George Fernandes's legacy.



We will continue to advance along path of socialism

s a line of a classical Chinese poem goes, "Spring and autumn are lovely seasons in which friends get together to climb up mountains and write poems." On this beautiful spring day, it gives me great pleasure to have you with us here at the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF). On behalf of the Chinese government and people and in my own name, I extend a very warm welcome to you all.

Two years ago, it was here that we met for the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, where we drew a blueprint of cooperation to enhance policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity. Today, we are once again meeting here with you, friends from across the world. I look forward to scaling new heights with you and enhancing our partnership. Together, we will create an even brighter future for Belt and Road cooperation.

Over the past seven decades, we in China have, based on its realities, constantly explored the way forward through practices, and have succeeded in following the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Today, China has reached a new historical starting point. However, we are keenly aware that with all we have achieved, there are still many mountains to scale and many shoals to navigate. We will continue to advance along the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, deepen sweeping reforms, pursue quality development, and expand opening-up. We remain committed to peaceful development and will endeavour to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

Going forward, China will take a series of major reform and opening-up measures and make stronger institutional and structural moves to boost higher quality opening-up.

First, we will expand market access for foreign investment in more areas. Fair competition boosts business performance and creates prosperity. China has already adopted a management model based on pre-establishment national treatment and negative list, and will continue to significantly shorten the negative list. We will work for the all-round opening-up of modern services, manufacturing and agriculture, and will allow the operation of foreign-controlled or wholly foreign-owned businesses in more sectors. We will accelerate the adoption of supporting regulations to ensure full implementation of the Foreign Investment Law. We will promote supply-side structural reform through fair competition and open cooperation, and will phase out backward and excessive production capacity in an effective way to improve the quality and efficiency of supply.

Second, we will intensify efforts to enhance international cooperation in intellectual property protection. Without innovation, there will be no progress. Full intellectual property protection will not only ensure the lawful rights and interests of Chinese and foreign companies; it is also crucial to promoting China's innovation-driven and quality development. China will spare no effort to foster a business environment that respects the value of knowledge. China will strengthen cooperation with other countries in intellectual property protection, create an enabling environment for innovation and promote technological exchanges and cooperation with other countries on the basis of market principles and the rule of law.

Third, we will increase the import of goods and services on an even larger scale. China is both a global factory and a global market. With the world's largest and fastest growing middle-income population, China has a vast potential for increasing consumption. To meet our people's ever-growing material and cultural needs and give our consumers more choices and benefits, we will further lower tariffs and remove various non-tariff barriers. We will steadily open China's market wider to quality products from across the world. China does not seek trade surplus; we want to import more competitive quality agricultural products, manufactured goods and services to promote balanced trade.

Fourth, we will more effectively engage in international macro-economic policy coordination. A globalised economy calls for global governance. China will strengthen macro policy coordination with other major economies to generate a positive spillover and jointly contribute to robust, sustainable, balanced and inclusive global growth. China will not resort to the beggar-thy-neighbour practice of RMB devaluation. On the contrary, we will continue to improve the exchange rate regime, see that the market plays a decisive role in resource allocation and keep the RMB exchange rate basically stable at an adaptive and equilibrium level. China is an active supporter and participant of WTO reform and will work with others to develop international economic and trade rules of higher standards.

Fifth, we will work harder to ensure the implementation of opening-up related policies. We Chinese have a saying that honouring a promise carries the weight of gold. We are committed to implementing multilateral and bilateral economic and trade agreements reached with other countries. We will strengthen the building of a government based on the rule of law and good faith. A binding mechanism for honouring international agreements will be put in place. Laws and regulations will be revised and improved in keeping with the need to expand opening-up. We will see that governments at all levels operate in a well-regulated way when it comes to issuing administrative licences and conducting market oversight.

These measures to expand opening-up are a choice China has made by itself to advance its reform and development. It will promote high-quality economic development, meet the people's desire for a better life, and contribute to world peace, stability and development. We are convinced that a more open China will further integrate itself into the world and deliver greater progress and prosperity for both China and the world at large.

Edited excerpts from the speech of Chinese premier, Xi Jinping at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, April 26



Ashok Bharti, chairman, All India Ambedkar Mahasabha; and principal advisor, National Confederation of Dalit and Adivasi Organisations talks to **Aditi Phadnis** on the growing Dalit disenchantment with the ruling party and where does the future of Dalit leadership lie

'New leadership is on the horizon'

Are you seeing evidence of Dalit disenchantment with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and when did it begin?

Certainly, Dalit disenchantment with the BJP is widespread. This disenchantment is not localised or limited to a few states or regions. It is nationwide; and has continuously been growing for last few years.

In 2014, Dalits voted in large numbers in favour of the BJP. Like others, they also accepted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pitch for developmental transformation of government and governance. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) resolve, "one well, one temple, and one crematorium" to end the exclusion of Dalits was significant.

But everything changed in October 2015, when two children Vaibhav (three) and Divya (nine-month old) were charred to death at Sunpade in NCR Town Faridabad, when Rajput strongmen torched their household. Instead of condemning the act of his caste men, one Rajput minister in the government made derogatory comments about Dalits. Dalits demanded action against the minister, but no one cared. This was the beginning of disenchantment of Dalits with the BJP. Since then, every incidence of atrocity and gov-

ernment inaction against the perpetrators, has strengthened this.

Apart from this, the government's actions or lack of action on critical interests of Dalits such as reservation, reservation in promotion, judicial pronouncements due to poor defence by the government resulting in dilution of constitutional rights or well-being of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has also contributed to this disenchantment.

PM has repeatedly invoked Dr Ambedkar as a source of his inspiration. He has washed the feet of scavengers at Kumbh. His ministers are eating in Dalit homes, making common cause with them. The BJP has changed many candidates in reserved constituencies. Has all this had some effect?

There is no doubt that the PM has repeatedly invoked Dr Ambedkar and much more than any other PM in the country. He has publically admitted his humble background and has attributed his election as PM to the constitution and Dr Ambedkar. There is no doubt that his government has constructed Dr Ambedkar memorials, which saw no progress in many previous regimes.

one for Dalits and other for the non-Dalits, still exists in large parts of the country, one requires a huge courage to wash the feet of scavengers publically. Even if it was for the optics, washing feet of the scavengers by none less than the India's executive head is historic. This signifies that the Dalits are coming of the "age" where no one could undermine their political worth; and the scale is now tilting from upper caste to the so called lower castes. The ministers eating in Dalit homes, making common causes with them is the continuation of what the PM has been directing.

But, follow up on these acts of reverence.

In our country, where two-cup system.

But, follow up on these acts of reverence, washing feet or having common meal with the Dalits by robust policy framework,

ensuring equal dignity, development and justice to the Dalits, remains largely ignored. It would have been much better had the government strengthened the mechanism, machinery, budgetary allocations to ensure Dalits their constitutional rights as enshrined in the Constitution.

Members of Parliament who
were elected on the reserved seats, could have
lobbied for a "fair deal" for the Dalits in the
government. They could have also alerted the
PM or the government on the dissatisfaction
of the community, but they failed to do so and
it was natural in the design of selection of the
candidates for the reserved seats. In present
political electoral systems, parties choose candidates from among its members and not the
leaders of the community. In my opinion, it
is all linked to Dalit disenchantment.

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ASHOK BHARTI

Chairman, All India

What is the evidence that the political compact between Dalits and Yadavs is also a social compact?

In 1993, the Bahujan Samaj Party-Samajwadi Party (BSP-SP) representing Dalits and Yadavs (OBCs) were joined by others and they formed the government. Currently, the SP-BSP-RLD (Rasthriya Lok Dal) in Uttar Pradesh and Rashtriya Janata Dal-Rashtriya Lok Samta Party-Hindustani Awam Morcha-Vikassheel Insan Party (RJD-RLSP-HAM-VIP) in Bihar are the political compact leading socially marginalised communities.

But, in order to understand this as a social

compact, one must ponder over the caste and *varna* dynamics of the Indian society. In the *varna* system, Yadavs or the OBCs are part of the *shudra varna* and touchable. But Dalits are not the *shudra*; are outside the *varna*; and are untouchable.

Caste/Tribe Census of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Castes, which simply indicates that in most of the states, five-six castes/tribes out of 30 to 100 state specific castes/tribes form the 85 to 95 per cent of the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes. Usually, one or two state specific caste/tribes dominate the population of these communities in all the states. Same is true for the Other Backward Castes in most of the states.

Therefore, once political compact between the Dalits and Yadavs (or OBCs) is in place, this enhances proximity and their social interaction significantly. Both, the Dalits and the OBCs, have faced or continue to face exclusion, humiliation and domination from the same *varna* groups. Therefore, as soon as they join in political compact, social leadership gets active for social compact. In Hindi heartland, specifically in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, mobilisation of Dalits and Yadavs is much larger than any other OBCs. Incidentally, in both the states, Yadavs are the most numerous OBCs and Dalits have significantly large population.

How do you see the future of India's Dalit mobilisation? Its leadership?

I see India's Dalit mobilising more and more. They have learnt that social contract signed between Hindu leaders, including India's busi-

ness interests led by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Ambedkar as Poona Pact in 1932, has been made redundant.

Commitment of the state, which is reflected in policy framework, its representation in court cases, budget allocations for the socio-economic development, representation of Dalits in top bureaucracy, judiciary and outsourcing etc, is declining.

A large reservoir of talent, creativity and innovations, Dalits are constrained by its leadership, be it their own, regional or national political parties.

But, they are innovating and a new Dalit leadership could be seen at the horizon. They are leading national platforms like National Confederation of Dalit and Adivasi Organisations, All India Confederation of SC/ST Employees Associations, Rashtriya Dalit Mahasabha, National Campaign for Dalit Rights, Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Andolan, All India Mahila Adhikar Andolan etc. They have a robust system of Dalit-bahujan youtube channel, which is growing day by day. All these may be in infancy, but are indicative of the future leadership. This leadership is not limited to reservation or atrocities on Dalits, but has a larger development canvas.

What do you think the nature of the opposition will be in the next five years?

The nature of opposition in the next five years would be creative disruption. This would compel the conscience of this country to re-invent its national project of Dalit empowerment. This opposition will inspire Dalit leadership to mobilise for distributive justice.

We will not tolerate any effort to dilute or limit the fundamental freedoms and the idea of equality, liberty, justice and fraternity. We will leave nothing at our disposal to oppose anything that curtails our constitutional rights and the duties of the state towards the weak and the needy.

Lastly, being a huge success story of human advancement, Dalits would like to upscale our success. Hardly having any assets, land, industry or wealth, but Dalits have immensely contributed in creating and sustaining all of these in India. At a time, when India's success inspires people globally, our opposition would aim at limiting this success to only those having a class or the caste. After all, we also have a dream

Touching lives, one at a time

Delhi-based Bravo Foundation provides ailing children with medical assistance to help them lead a normal life, writes **Meghna Chadha**

arrez's life took a turn when he was diagnosed with cancer in 2017. The light went out of his life and all that remained was to survive the ordeal. His worried and helpless family reached out to Bravo Foundation, an organisation that provides ailing children with medical aid to help them lead an independent life. Today, Aararez is on his way to recovery with the hope that he will resume school and play with his friends soon.

"No child should be deprived of education, because of poor healthcare. That is the mission of our initiative" says Rakesh Pandey, founder of Bravo Foundation. The year-old organisation is based out of New Delhi, organising health seminars in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Bihar. It also takes pivotal steps in providing prosthetics to children who are specially abled.

specially abled.

Currently, they have helped
more than 4,000 children who are suffering
from cancer and other disabilities. Children
across India, Africa, Uzbekistan and Central
Asia have benefited from the foundation's initiatives. "Over the next five years, this initiative
will be scaled to provide good healthcare to
more than 10,000 children across India. We are
targeting children in government schools for
healthcare check-ups, which will help us locate

THE OTHER

INDIA

more children in several states across the country" Pandey says.

Bravo Foundation is also supported by Bravo Pharmaceuticals, an organisation dedicated to improve human health and quality of life by providing innovative diagnostics, ehealth solutions, personalised treatment, high quality affordable pharmaceuticals and new generation health products.

For a foundation to help with medical aid, costs can be very high. How does Bravo

Foundation cater to those challenges? An optimistic Pandey responds that the funds come from different organisations across the globe that are dedicated towards providing better healthcare for children. Further in India, they have tied up with several hospitals and NGOs in different metros as well as tier 2 and 3 cities in order to reach out to children in need.

"We are a research oriented organisation so some of our teams provide us data of such children who are in severe need of help," he adds. Some of the foundation's Indian and global part-

ners are Max Healthcare, Apollo Hospital University College London, Tallinn University of Technology, Oxford Consultancy, MMC Healthcare, RIL chemicals PLC and Science Park Tehnopol.

Talking about the impact that Bravo Foundation has had in several lives, Pandey reminisces an experience close to his heart. Shivam from Motihari, a district in Bihar, was



Over the next five years, Bravo Foundation is looking to provide good healthcare to more than 10,000 children across India PHOTO: BRAVO FOUNDATION

12-year-old when he lost his legs in an accident. He had to leave his school and his life had come to a standstill. The foundation assisted him in procuring prosthetic legs and now he is learning to walk again. "These aren't just his legs but they are his wings now," Pandey believes. He also talks about Vivek Mishra and Shivam Mishra from Gopalgunj, both brothers suffering from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Bravo Foundation has stepped in providing everything from counselling, medical aid as well as assistance needed to combat and improve their rare condition.

"India is a country where poor healthcare is impacting education and the quality of life

of children. I see immense talent around, which is going waste and hence the idea of Bravo Foundation was propagated in order to help these children and their families," Pandey says. When asked more about the story behind the inception of the foundation he adds that all his inspirations and incidents are from his own childhood, which was marred by poverty. The story behind the foundation is the hollow space of poverty, hunger and poor healthcare.

"More than the story there is a need for such foundations across India for the betterment of the quality of living of the children across the country. Life needs to be fulfilling in whatever little or more we have," concludes Pandey.

The Yeti syndrome

Yet another myth goes viral

he apparent "discovery" of Yeti footprints by an Indian army mountaineering expedition last week is a reflection of sorts of a growing trend in the national public discourse. After some centuries of earnest search, including in the last one, scientists and biologists have reliably concluded that the Yeti is about as real as the Loch Ness monster or Bigfoot. So how did mountaineers attempting to summit the world's fifthhighest peak suspend disbelief and convince themselves that the mega-sized footprints they photographed belonged to this mythical beast? Could it be the result of oxygen deprivation in the rarefied air?

Himalayan mountaineers over the decades report all sorts of visions in the "death zone" — that is above 26,000 feet, where there is insufficient oxygen to support human life. For instance, Reinhold Messner, the celebrated alpinist who summited Mount Everest solo and without oxygen in 1980, imagined the ghost of George Mallory, who disappeared during a summit attempt in 1924, guiding him down the perilous north-east ridge during his descent in a storm. Now, Makalu is over 27,000 feet but the base camp where the footprints were discovered is roughly 17,000 feet above sea level, low enough for reasonably fit trekkers to access. If oxygen deprivation can be ruled out,

what explains the army expedition's decision to jump the gun and tweet this dubious discovery? The rate at which the tweet went viral is indicative of the credulous nature of the Indian public. Only some of the response was disbelieving - one former MP of saffron persuasion instantly tweeted out his congratulations. No surprise, the international media reported on the "discovery" in amused undertones.

But this is not the first time that India has been rocked by such miracles. In the last decade of the 20th century, long before the advent of social media, the myth of the milkdrinking Ganesh gained such wide credence that reasonably sane individuals felt compelled to coax images of the elephant god to sip spoons of milk — on national TV. Only the manifest failure of this "experiment" countrywide staunched the rumour even if no one explicitly acknowledged the hoax. In the 21st century, this trend of conflating myth and reality found

fresh impetus with the emergence of politicians of muscular nationalist inclination. They strive to draw a connection between India's "Golden Age" (itself a discredited theory among serious historians) embedded in the mists of pre-history and India's impending greatness (if, of course, these people were voted to power).

Thus, over the years, the electorate is regularly treated to such novel theories as ancient India's knowledge of plastic surgery (which is how, we are informed, Ganesh came to acquire his elephant head) to the possession of nuclear capabilities (thanks to the Sudarshan chakra and assorted mythic materiel). When such information is imparted by senior politicians to an imperfectly educated public, it tends to acquire a dangerous credibility, more so when it is linked to modern India's scientific and military achievements. If an Indian Air Force MiG can apparently shoot down an F16 in Pakistani airspace and our space scientists can demonstrate the capability to blow low-orbiting enemy satellites to smithereens, the sensational discovery of the abominable snowman by our brave soldiers would have been an opportune nationalist cause celebre. If only biologists had not played spoilsport and clarified that the abnormally large footprints were probably the overlapping paws of a Himalayan brown bear and a cub (the effect of the sun on ice accounts for the enlargement).

The Yeti continues to figure in folklore and myth even today. Even Hergé created one of his more memorable Tintin stories around it, and it still figures in Bengali popular entertainment. As with the subcontinent's abundant legacy of myths and legends, these stories enrich our society and speak volumes for the richness of our collective imagination. Trving to retrofit them into a tangible reality is futile but also reflects a somewhat pathetic effort at achieving fame.

The power of informality

The informal sector is an untapped reservoir of entrepreneurship that can accelerate the pace of economic growth, job creation and poverty reduction in developing countries

▼Informal firms account for up to half of economic activity in the developing world. Contrary to conventional wisdom, their importance has not declined over the last several decades. The persistence of the informal sector has gone hand in hand with a faster pace of structural transformation and pro-poor economic growth.

India is no exception to these global trends. India's informal sector accounts for over 80 per cent of jobs and 99 per cent of entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector. Even in highly industrialised states like Gujarat, jobs are expanding in the informal sector. India's young demographics, and limited employment generated by the formal sector, has increased the future importance of the informal sector. Its flexibility has enabled millions more women to find jobs and better-manage work-life balance.

Despite its huge size and importance, the role of the informal sector in economic development remains controversial. Some view it as the enemy of the formal sector, and as a parasite competing unfairly with law-abiding formal firms. Others say formal and informal firms are fundamentally different and cater to different markets. And optimists view the informal sector as an untapped reservoir of entrepreneurship that can further accelerate the pace of economic growth, job creation and poverty

We examined these trends in India using plantlevel data for formal and informal enterprises in some 500 districts (see Ghani, Ejaz; O'Connell, Stephen D.; Sharma, Gunjan. Friend or Foe or Family? A Tale of Formal and Informal Plants in India. Policy Research Working Paper No. 6588. World Bank, Washington, DC. ©World Bank).

Friends not foes

Empirical evidence shows that there are huge horizontal and vertical linkages between formal and informal firms. Informal firms are important suppliers of inputs to formal firms. Employment and output have increased in the formal sector in those states in India that also have a greater presence of informal firms. Conversely, informal employment and output are greater in those states that have a greater presence of formal buyers of inputs. Formal enterprises are more competitive in the presence of informal firms, as they change their product mix, adapt to new technology, and outsource more labour-intensive tasks to informal firms. The input-output linkages between formal and informal firms are very strong.

A 10 per cent increase in employment and output in the informal sector is associated with a 16 per cent increase in employment in the formal sector and increase in output by 12.6 per cent. As formal enterprises become more productive, they demand better inputs from informal enterprises, and strengthen the forward spillovers. The backward spillovers are also strong, as informal enterprises purchasing from formal enterprises induce greater output in the formal enterprises. Although the productivity of the informal sector is more important for the formal sector, than vice versa, the two sectors act like friends and family members supporting each other. These linkages generate huge spillovers by working together.

New forms of globalisation

Much of the manufacturing sector's employment growth has come in the form of informal establishments in the tradable sector. The exceptional increase of employment in the informal tradable



sector in India exceeded 10 million jobs, equivalent to the entire net growth of the manufacturing sector. This rise in the informal tradable employment coincided with a strong decline in the non-tradable sector. The concentration of informality in the tradable sector suggests that the growth in traded industries is not due to plants achieving larger economies of scale and shipping goods at a distance, as might have initially been imagined, but an important role played by the informal sector. Informal firms in the tradable sector provide an opportunity to leapfrog the development process, by connecting to global value chains, resulting in greater opportunities for

A 10-per cent employment and output in the informal sector is associated with

a 16 per cent

employment in

increase in

What led to the expansion of informal enterprises in the tradable sector? The key driver is the rapid pace of urbanisation. This connects strongly with the broader spatial development trend of inforthe formal sector mal sector concentrating in the cities. Other factors like the rapid expansion of female

domestic suppliers, increased

exports, and higher produc-

business ownership, subcontracting, and "push" entrepreneurship (entrepreneurs who start businesses out of necessity rather than growth desires) played a smaller role in the rise of informality.

Emerging pro-poor growth agenda

The vast informal sector affects everything from structural transformation, the allocation of activity in the economy, job creation and poverty reduction. Conventional wisdom has focused on the formalisation of the informal sector, but this has not been very successful in most countries. It drives informal establishments out of business, leading to destitution of informal workers and entrepreneurs. Shifting the focus towards strengthening the linkages between

formal and informal firms needs more attention. Economic growth is the cure for informality, and the policy focus should be on boosting the informal sector, strengthening their linkages (product, input, financial and technological) with formal firms, and unleashing the untapped reservoir of entrepreneurship.

The role of urbanisation in strengthening the dynamism of small firms deserves more attention. Cities generate huge agglomeration economies and externalities, and this is greater in the informal compared to formal sectors, which makes a strong case for informal development being an integral part of the urbanisation strategy. Urban planners need to find ways to ensure that informal enterprises are integrated into urban plans, they participate in government procurement schemes, and their concerns are reflected in policy-making processes on land allocation, zoning regulation, and urban infrastructure services. The more the city mayors recognise the influx of the informal sector in cities, and design appropriate policies and investments to support it, the more effective pro-poor growth policy interven-

Industrial and trade policies too should not be targeted just on formal enterprises. Friendships and linkages between formal and informal firms can open new doors for economic growth, job creation, and gender inclusion. Policies are needed to improve access of informal sector to finance, training, technology, quality and productivity, which can induce the formal sector to outsource more higher-end tasks to the informal sector.

The informal economy has played the biggest role in reducing extreme poverty, but this is not enough. The rise of the informal sector is also associated with the rise in the number of people living with no social safety nets. Informal workers may not be poor today, but they can easily fall back into extreme poverty, due to economic shocks.

The writer is lead economist, World Bank

Why NYAY is unlikely to deliver results

SWATI NARAYAN

he Congress Party's poll promise of Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) has earnestly attempted to shift the preelection slugfest to real-world priorities. An injection of one to two per cent of GDP is undoubtedly welcome, in a country renowned for social underspending. But while details are sketchy, unless the straitjacket design of "₹6000 per month to 20 per cent of the poorest households" is judiciously fine-tuned, NYAY is unlikely to reap its full potential of anti-poverty or political dividends.

For one, NYAY targets a mere fifth of Indian households. For perspective, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) provides employment to as many homes at a sixth of the cost. Further, currently a poor Bihari family will receive ₹72,000 annual NYAY handouts without lifting a finger, which is more than the maximum NREGA wages they can earn across four years. So, it is unclear if the maths of this cash transfer makes prudent fiscal sense. It is also unlikely that NYAY's restricted coverage will sufficiently translate into a pan-Indian vote magnet.

Crucially, NYAY as a "surgical strike" on the poorest quintile erodes the fundamen-

There is a need

Madhya Pradesh

It is required at

the national level

recently launched

for an urban

employment

tal advantage of Universal Basic Incomes (UBIs) as universal transfers. After all, as Amartya Sen has pointed out, "benefits meant exclusively for the poor often end up being poor benefits." A recent "Hit and Miss" Development Pathways research, of 38 cash transfers across low and middle-income countries, demonstrates that poverty-targeted programmes ironically miss over half of the

poorest quintile of entitled recipients. The exclusion rate of intended beneficiaries ranged from 97 per cent in Rwanda's Vision 2020 which used community targeting to 44 ner cent in Brazil's Bolsa Familia even with the simplest means-test.

Similarly, NYAY's centralised income cut-offs especially in a country with entrenched rent-seeking is likely to increase the vulnerability of the poor to middlemen. In the last five years, for example, four of every five families with starvation deaths, predominantly dalits, adivasis and minorities, were invariably denied their eligible subsidies. NYAY too, if opaquely targeted, even with the best of "data science", is unlikely to stem this inhuman starvation in the sweltering heat of rural oppression. Instead, lucid universal "categorical targeting" increases the agency of beneficiaries to be aware of and demand their rights. Georgia's Old Age Pension paid to all the elderly or Mongolia's universal Child Money Programme for all children under 17 years, had error rates of less than two per cent.

Therefore, rather than experimental pilots, the time is ripe to expand time-tested lifecycle safety nets, championed by social movements for decades, which

could be neatly dovetailed into NYAY. These could include a diverse basket of cash transfers.

For instance, while NYAY can subsume social pensions the lifeline must also be universalised. Currently, more than half of the 160 million elderly, widows and differently-abled persons are excluded as only those below the poverty line (BPL) or income thresholds are eligible. Worse, the centre pays only an insulting ₹200 per pensioner each month at a tight-fisted 0.04 per cent of GDP, among the lowest in the world. Instead, as illustrated by Jean Drèze, one option is for NYAY to provide individual rather than household entitlements to all pensioners of at least ₹1200 per month.

The second crying need, especially after the suppressed job survey pegs unemployment at its highest peak in 45 years with women acutely impacted, is an urban employment guarantee akin to NREGA. Recently, the victorious Congress in Madhya Pradesh has already introduced a scheme, modelled on Tripura and Kerala. A similar nationwide urban guarantee can be rolled out at the proposed national floor minimum wages.

Lastly, it is paramount to halt starvation deaths. While the National Food Security Act (NFSA) feeds 75 per cent of

the rural population, due to pervasive corruption, elite capture and Aadhaar, acutely marginalised families remain vulnerable to exclusion. On guarantee scheme. the other hand, Odisha, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh with universal coverage, have had one, modelled on fewer deaths. So, the NFSA can be universalised solely in Tripura and Kerala. rural areas or left-out families compensated with a cash allowance.

The cumulative cost of these three initiatives for social pensions, urban employment and rural allowance would be less than the current peak NYAY estimates of ₹3.6 trillion with double the reach of at least 110 million families and fewer expected exclusion errors. There are also several other options to slice the cake.

However, one aspect of NYAY which is insufficiently appreciated is the transfer to female heads of households, as highlighted by Priyanka Gandhi, unlike the BJP's farmer support PM-KISAN. Given that intra-household distribution of resources in India. including food, is heavily gender-biased, the three proposed NYAY variants will further strengthen the support for poor women to tide over women's disproportionate brunt of unemployment, care-giving of the elderly and household kitchens.

In any case, the mere announcement of NYAY on the back of PM-KISAN heralds a welcome new competitive chapter in electoral politics to prioritise welfare. This alone is a giant leap forward. Now the electoral pulse of the nation will determine the verdict on NYAY and its potential variants - to cash in on time-tested lifelines.

The writer is a social activist

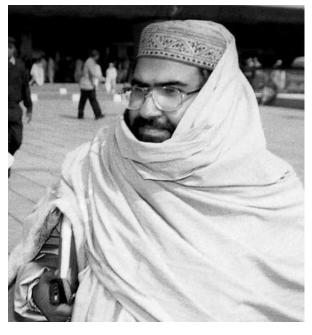
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Naming of Azhar as global terrorist a victory for India

But this chapter will end only when Pak take steps to shut down the JeM

Only The designation of Masood Azhar, the leader of the Jaishe-Mohammad (JeM), the group behind most of the recent big attacks in India from Pathankot to Uri and the February 14 bombing in Kashmir that killed 40 CRPF jawans, is a diplomatic victory for India. Though JeM itself had been designated as early as 2001, Azhar managed to escape the global terrorist tag mainly due to China's "technical hold" against such listing, including earlier this year, when France moved a resolution in early March, with the US and UK as co-sponsors, after the Pulwama attack. But with several shifts in world politics, and despite its own determination to stand by Pakistan in this matter, Beijing had clearly begun to realise the diminishing returns of shielding Azhar, especially as he was fast becoming known as "China's favourite terrorist".

For India, the inclusion of Azhar in the UNSC 1267 list by itself does not bring closure on a chapter that began in 1994 with Azhar's arrest in Kashmir, the hijack of IC 814 to Kandahar, his release in exchange for the passengers, and his setting up a terrorist shop in Pakistan, which then went on to plan and carry out the 2001 attack on Parliament. Pakistan has to take the next steps required under UNSC 1267, which means it must



freeze Azhar's assets, impose a travel ban on him, and put in place an arms embargo against him.

The Indian Express, May 3

The Maoist challenge

A holistic solution is needed

The death of 15 security personnel in a landmine attack in Gadchiroli on Wednesday is another grim reminder of the Indian state's continued failure to crush naxalism. A Quick Response Team was going down the road to Dadpur in Kurkheda where extremists had set fire to three dozen vehicles of a road construction company earlier in the day when the explosion $\,$ blasted the team to smithereens. The ease with which the extremists were able to torch so many vehicles is alarming, and the manner in which the response team blithely drove into an ambush is a shocking example of poor planning. In the process, standard operating procedures, including letting a road-opening team lead the

way, seem to have been

ignored. That the naxals should be able to control the narrative, remain on top of the intelligence, stay nimble and several steps ahead of the security planners should be a matter of deep concern. On top of everything else, most of the police personnel who perished in this latest attack seem to have been local citizens. What effect could this have on the larger process of weaning away the populace from the naxalites? Reality beckons. Even in the prevailing circumstances of a hostile external environment, India cannot afford to take the challenges of internal security lightly.

The Hindu, May 3

An unhealthy situation

EC must respond to people's concerns

Independent institutions tasked with guarding the democracy thrive on public confidence. The Election Commission, for example, has the enormous task of ensuring free and fair elections throughout the country. At the time the democratic republic was taking shape, however, even the most visionary of statesmen could not have foreseen the complications and conflicts, the multiplying ideologies, higher stakes and canny strategies that the burgeoning democracy would bring forth with changing times and mindsets. The model code of conduct for elections has always been a token of its firmness and fairness, something everyone can fall back on. So it is deeply unfortunate

few assembly elections in the last five years have gradually been denting public confidence. Early in April, 66 retired bureaucrats took the unprecedented step of writing to the president of India a letter expressing their pained doubts about the EC's neutrality. It is not that the EC has fallen completely silent regarding MCC violations. But, in spite of admonishing Mr Adityanath for talking about "Modiji ki sena", the EC finds no violation in Narendra Modi's exhortation to firsttime voters to cast the first vote in the name of Balakot and Pulwama. It is best if the EC thinks of ways to respond to people's concerns.

that the 2019 elections and a

The Telegraph, May 3