



Devoid of principle

The defection of four TDP Rajya Sabha MPs to the BJP raises troubling questions

The recent defection of four Rajya Sabha MPs from the Telugu Desam Party to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, merely a month after simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Andhra Pradesh, can only be termed as political opportunism. The fact that these MPs merged with the BJP as a group helped them stay clear of the anti-defection law, which stipulates that a breakaway group constitute at least two-thirds of a legislative party's strength and that it merge with another party. The TDP had been reduced to just 23 and two seats in the newly elected Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Assemblies, respectively. It now commands a much lower legislative profile with just two members in the Rajya Sabha and three in the Lok Sabha. There is a tendency among legislators to seek greener pastures at a time of crisis for their parties, but the nature of these defections suggests that this was not a simple case of leaving a party whose political strength had considerably diminished. The BJP is even more of a non-player in Andhra Pradesh as it does not hold a single seat in the current Assembly and its vote share dipped in comparison to the previous Assembly elections. The reasons for the defections appear to have little to do with the political equations in the parent State.

Some of the defecting legislators have a cloud of suspicion over them as they were subjected to probes by Central Bureau of Investigation, Enforcement Directorate and Income Tax officials over financial transactions. It would be in order to ask whether the defections are aimed at currying favour with the government at the Centre in regard to the investigations. The NDA government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised zero tolerance on corruption, and it is to be hoped that the investigations against two of the defecting MPs continue unhindered. At the same time, the fact that the BJP has chosen to accommodate legislators the party had only months ago castigated for being corrupt, and against whom one of its own MPs had sought action from the Rajya Sabha ethics committee, suggests that the benefits of accrual to its numbers outweighed even the pretence of principle. The BJP has managed to increase its strength in the Rajya Sabha to 75 with the addition of the defectors from the TDP. Fresh elections to the Rajya Sabha are due for a substantive number of seats by 2020, and defections such as these will help the ruling combine get closer to the majority mark in the 245-member Upper House. Even if it is justified as an exercise to increase numbers, it does not reflect well on the BJP, which claims to be a party with a difference. Defections that are not based on ideology or principle undermine parliamentary democracy; a vibrant opposition is equally vital to ensure an efficient government.

Down to two

The leadership battle of the U.K. Conservatives is now between contrasting candidates

The leadership race in the U.K.'s ruling Conservative party has been whittled down to two candidates with contrasting personal styles and political stances. The current Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, is a moderate and will face off against his predecessor, the flamboyant and controversial Boris Johnson. Over 100,000 overwhelmingly pro-Brexit party members will, in mid-July, choose Prime Minister Theresa May's successor via a postal ballot. One option to see through their project of a life-time is to elect Mr. Hunt, a one-time advocate of remaining in the European Union (like Ms. May), and risk not realising the end goal. The other alternative is to choose the hardliner Mr. Johnson, who famously, and erroneously, claimed during the 2016 referendum that London was sending £350 million a week to Brussels. His xenophobic remark about Turkish immigrants flooding the U.K. was said to be among the factors that tilted the 2016 outcome. The principal architect of the leave campaign assured party-men before the current contest that Britain will exit by the October 31 deadline, deal or no deal. Mr. Johnson, a two-time London Mayor, has emerged a clear favourite, polling the highest in all the elimination rounds among Conservative MPs over the past days. Mr. Hunt, on the other hand, is seen as a heavyweight whose vast experience in promoting business ventures could refresh the party's market-friendly image. As Health Secretary he had secured additional funding for the NHS. Mr. Hunt has warned of the dangers of leaving the EU without an agreement, including another general election that could damage the Conservatives' prospects.

The contest is above all else really about picking a leader who can steer the party through Britain's next general election and ensure its future relevance. That means somebody who can stop Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader, from entering 10 Downing Street. After a dismal showing in the May polls to the EU Parliament, the Conservatives also fear support among the rank and file haemorrhaging to Nigel Farage's Brexit Party. Delivering on the 2016 referendum result, in whatever form and at any price, is seen in Conservative strongholds as the ultimate route to resurrection. Meanwhile, there are not many who seriously believe that Britain can realistically renegotiate before the end of October the withdrawal agreement Ms. May signed with the EU last year. Brussels has repeatedly stressed its unwillingness to reopen the deal, still less the contentious Irish backstop. The Prime Minister's election in July would be followed by Parliament's summer recess, allowing MPs little time for legislative business. Short of a spectacular turnaround, the outcome of the Conservative contest looks fairly predictable. Conversely, the course of Brexit is anything but certain, irrespective of whether Mr. Johnson or Mr. Hunt wins the battle of the ballot.

Basic needs, basic rights

India must recognise the right to a minimally decent life, so that no person falls below a certain level of existence



RAJEEV BHARGAVA

Three thoughts occur to me in the aftermath of the horrific tragedy in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, where the systemic failure of health care has killed over a hundred children. First, like the constitutional principle of a basic structure, it is time to articulate an equally robust doctrine of basic rights. Second, these basic rights must be viewed primarily as positive, rights not against interference from the state (negative rights) but to the provision of something by it. Third, just as individuals are punished for legal violations, the government of the day must also be punished for the violation of these basic rights. This punishment need not await the next round of elections but must be meted out immediately, by the law itself. In short, defaulting governments must be held legally accountable. The systematic violation of basic rights must be treated on a par with the breakdown of constitutional machinery.

A solid necessity

But what are basic rights? How are they different from other fundamental rights? Basic rights flow from basic needs such as physical security or subsistence. Needs are different from wants. You may want a chocolate every morning but don't need it. Heavens won't fall if you don't get it. But basic needs are different: their non-fulfilment can cause great harm, even kill. The failure to get an antibiotic if you have a bacterial infection can hurt you very badly. Heavens will fall if you don't get it!

Moreover, wants are subjective; you cannot be mistaken that you desire that chocolate. But you may be misguided, even unaware of what you need. You may not be able to tell if you need an antibiotic because your mind can't tell the difference between bacterial and viral infections. This determination is done by a more objective criterion. Needs depend on the way human bodies are constituted. They are a solid necessity; one cannot get on without them. Nor can they be fulfilled by substitutes. For us, nothing can take the place of water, food and air.

It is true, of course, that though terribly important, basic needs are not what we live for. They don't make our life worth living. But anything really worth pursuing depends on the satisfaction of basic needs. If we are continuously thirsty, cold, hungry, ill or homeless, we will be incapable of even framing a conception of worthwhile life, let alone pursue it. Imagine the plight of those who queue up for long hours to get a bucket of water or a place to bathe, dress or defecate. People suffer if basic needs are met inadequately or with delay. They are then denied a minimally decent life.

When basic needs are not fully met, we feel vulnerable and helpless. We grieve, cry for help, seek assistance. We complain and demand elementary justice from our community, especially from the state. Elementary justice requires that before anything else, the state does everything at its disposal to satisfy all basic needs of its citizens, particularly of those who cannot fend for themselves. We feel aggrieved when the state abdicates this responsibility.

Security and subsistence

But what does the language of rights add to the idea of basic



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needs? First, a right is something that is owed to us; it is not a favour. So, rights help the recognition of anything that satisfies basic needs as an entitlement. Basic rights are claims on the state to provide us with goods and services that satisfy our basic needs. Second, when something is identified as a basic right, it puts the state under a duty to enable its exercise. The state becomes its guarantor. For example, the right to physical security, the first basic right, is socially guaranteed when the state provides its people a well-trained, professional police force. When society and its government reneges on its commitment to do so, we hold them accountable. It follows that basic rights are a shield for the defenceless against the most damaging threats to their life which include starvation, pestilence and disease. As the philosopher Henry Shue, puts it, it is 'an attempt to give to the powerless a veto over some economic, social and political forces that harm them'.

These rights are basic also because many intrinsically valuable rights can be enjoyed only once these rights are secured. Imagine that we have a right to assemble freely in public but that just as one begins to exercise this right, one is threatened with assault, rape or

murder. Most people will simply retreat. Is not a threat to physical security or bodily integrity the commonest weapon wielded by goons, political thugs and oppressive governments?

The second is the right to minimum economic security and subsistence, that includes clean air, uncontaminated water, nutritious food, clothing and shelter. By showing the devastation caused by its absence, the Muzaffarpur tragedy amply proves that the right to primary health care is also an integral part of the right to subsistence. A straightforward link exists between malnutrition and disease. As Dr. T. Jacob John explained in an article in *The Hindu* on June 19, 2019 (OpEd page, "Averting deaths in Muzaffarpur"), encephalopathy, the biochemical disease that results from eating litchi fruit pulp, occurs only in malnourished children. It is common knowledge that malnourishment lowers resistance to disease. A similar link exists between disease, unemployment and poverty.

Credible threats to these rights can be reduced by the government by establishing institutions and practices that assist the vulnerable; for example, by setting up hospitals with adequate number of doctors, nurses, beds, medical equipment, intensive care units, essential drugs and emergency treatments. For this, proper budgetary allocation is required that depends in turn on getting one's political priority and commitment right. When a government fails to provide primary health care to those who can't afford it, it violates their basic rights.

Vulnerability, accountability

To these two basic rights, I add a third – the right to free public expression of helplessness and frustration, if deprived of other basic

rights. The scope of freedom of expression is large and I don't think all of it can be deemed basic. But the relevant part of it is. The right to make one's vulnerability public, be informed about the acts of commission and omission of the government regarding anything that adversely affects the satisfaction of basic needs, to critically examine them and to hold state officials publicly accountable is a basic right on a par with right to physical security and subsistence and inseparably linked to them.

It follows that governments must make arrangements for people to demand that their basic rights be satisfied, to complain when these demands are not met, to report lapses and omissions on the part of governments, point fingers at apathetic government officials, criticise the government for its failures and to do so without fear.

These three basic rights can be summed up in a single phrase, the right to a minimally decent life. This is a threshold right. A society may soar, strive for great collective achievement. There are no limits to the longing for a better life. But the point of having a threshold of minimal decency is that our life must not fall below a certain level of existence. Anything short of a minimally decent life is simply not acceptable. It is this precisely that horrifies us about the callousness of the Bihar government in Muzaffarpur and governments in India more generally. They routinely abdicate responsibility for the suffering they directly or indirectly cause. This is why we must ask why governments are not immediately and severely penalised when they undermine the exercise of these basic rights.

Rajeev Bhargava is Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

A war of masks between Iran and the U.S.

Both governments are trying to avoid a war and yet win a game of appearances



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

On June 20, Iran and the United States came dangerously close to a direct armed conflict, with U.S. President Donald Trump reportedly ordering and then cancelling air strikes against Iran, after it shot down a high-tech U.S. drone over the Strait of Hormuz. A closer look at tensions between the two countries would make it seem as if the Iranian authorities were the ones attempting to escalate a regional crisis while avoiding a full-blown war with the U.S. For the Trump administration, it has been about being careful not to be drawn into a West Asian conflict and having the loss of any U.S. service personnel on its conscience.

Many layers

Yet things are more complicated than what is appearing on news channels. On one side, the Ayatollahs and the Islamic Revolutionary

Guard Corps (IRGC) want to save their necks by convincing the U.S.'s allies in Europe, West Asia and Asia to pressure Washington into easing the devastating economic and financial sanctions that have affected the Iranian economy. On the other side, the hawks in Washington, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, have an ardent desire to restore U.S. deterrence by striking Iranian military infrastructure and nuclear installations. In the middle of this there are a number of state and non-state actors such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which would be the prime targets for Iranian attacks, or which would get militarily engaged on the side of Iran and go after U.S. targets.

Once in war with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the U.S. would have to contend with proxies backed by Tehran spreading across the region, armed with missiles, drones and as suicide bombers. There is virtually no way for Saudi Arabia and the UAE to protect themselves from Iranian proxy attacks. Let us take the example of Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who have fought a coalition led by Saudi Ara-



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bia to a stalemate on the battlefield since 2015 and have succeeded in launching missiles and rockets into Saudi territory. In Lebanon and Iraq, the Iranian regime's proxies have killed hundreds of American soldiers since the early 1980s. In 1983, a group linked to the Iranian-backed Shiite militia, Hezbollah, claimed responsibility for lethal bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and a U.S. Marine barracks.

Nearly a month ago, in a meeting with Iran-linked Iraqi militias in Baghdad, Major General Qassim Suleimani, the chief of Iran's Quds Force, which is a unit of the IRGC, asked them to prepare for a proxy war with the U.S. Strangely, Iran's campaign of proxy war and sabotage will be designed to inflict some suffering on regional and interna-

tional actors that have chosen to be with America in this conflict, while dissuading Mr. Trump and his advisers from taking military action against Iranian interests.

Giving peace a chance

Given that "maximum pressure" sanctions have achieved their goal and the Iranian authorities are desperate to find a way out of this crisis, the role of potential mediators will be crucial. The government of President Hassan Rouhani is quietly trying out all possibilities to find a diplomatic pathway out of the crisis. But a dialogue between Arab leaders and the Iran could begin with more concrete help from Oman and Kuwait in order to de-escalate the war in Yemen and ensure maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz.

Therefore, while Iran and the U.S. are on the edge of the abyss, global diplomacy behind closed doors has been working to find a way out. The removal of Russian missiles from Cuba was former U.S. President J.F. Kennedy grandest success. However, during the Cuban missile crisis, he had two dangerous situations to deal with simultaneously – missile emplacements and impeachment. In the

same way, Mr. Trump is trying to find a way out of the tensions while trying not to damage his chances of a second term in the White House. America's military and technological resources to break down the Islamic regime of Iran are limitless. The only matter to decide is whether it is intellectually wise and politically pragmatic to use all that might.

Both Iran and the U.S. are trying to avoid this war while winning a game of appearances. This game reminds us of the theatrical concept of persona, which gives both Iran and the U.S. a source of political agency and a stable public role to present themselves as being intransigent, inflexible and uncompromising. Consequently, both countries are trying to keep their masks on in order to inscribe themselves on the hearts of humanity. But as Nathaniel Hawthorne writes in *The Scarlet Letter*: "No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true."

Ramin Jahanbegloo is Director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Peace, Jindal Global University, Sonapat

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.

Religious freedom

The self-righteousness and snobbery of successive American governments and their presumed right to pontificate about the religious freedom in foreign societies remain unchanged (Page 1, "MEA rejects U.S. report on state of religious freedom in India", June 24). That the Indian government's critics have latched on to the U.S. State Department's misconceived indictment of India regarding denial of religious freedom to the minorities with a sense of schadenfreude reflects the nation's divisive political culture where passions tend to overwhelm reason and fairness. Media narratives shape foreign perceptions about Indian society and politics. When sections of the media blur the line between objective reporting and sensationalism, the foreign media and governments pick up the noise instead of the right signals. V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN, Thiruvananthapuram

■ The U.S. State Department has exceeded its limits and the MEA's reaction is in line with what a self-respecting nation is expected to do. But for stray incidents by fringe elements, the minorities live in peace and harmony. In a globalised world, India is well aware that it cannot alienate any religion. The U.S. report appears to be based on biased reports and political speeches rather than an in-depth study. The U.S. should also realise that India is in a volatile neighbourhood. V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

■ The MEA's rejection of the report is no surprise as any kind of criticism from within or outside has always been anathema for the present government. Religious freedom or the lack of it has always been a contentious issue and the views of the government and spokespersons of the minority communities have been diametrically opposite. A more recent example would be the oath-taking

ceremony in the 17th Lok Sabha, where frenzied cries of a religious nature were heard from the treasury benches; majoritarianism continues to flourish under the benign gaze of the powers that be. C.V. ARAVIND, Bengaluru

■ There is religious freedom in India, guaranteed under Articles 25 to 28 of the Constitution of India, but it exists only on paper. Fear is thrust upon the minds of the minorities using selective and periodical harassment, targeting and lynching them based on rumours or falsely blaming them. The government should have taken stern action against the perpetrators of the crimes. Instances of lynching, though isolated, underscore that the minorities, especially Muslims, are not secure. Whether it likes it or not, the Central government must know that India is being closely watched by the rest of the world. M.Y. SHARIF, Chennai

Numbers and the future

That India is likely to overtake China as the most populous country by 2027 and be home to 1.64 billion people by 2050 is not heartening news at all (Editorial, "A stable planet", June 22). A reduction in fertility rates in our most populous States is a must. Together with this, education of girl children and the empowerment of women will help arrest population growth. There must be a holistic approach in addressing the issues. It is also time to raise the minimum age of marriage. C.G. KURIAKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

■ The cold reality of an increasing world population, with India set to become the world's most populous nation, is a warning sign. State machinery, policies and social welfare schemes are bound to suffer adversely if there are inadequate resources to feed such a large population. More aggressive population control campaigns need to be put in

place to boost greater awareness about the need for family planning. Realistic development goals need to be set keeping in mind the estimated population figures and the resources needed. OJAL JAIN, Sri City, Andhra Pradesh

Water management

We talk about water management but appear to be doing precious little despite credible scientific data that show growing water poverty. We have ample means to harness nature's bounty. Water bodies are used as dump yards, river banks are encroached upon and lakebeds become sites for real estate. The water crisis, especially in Chennai, has to be taken as a forewarning. Proper water conservation techniques, recycling and reuse of water, mandatory installations for water

harvesting, water collection in lakes and identifying water bodies can help avoid scarcity to an extent. Governments have to work out a plan. M. PRADEY, Kannur, Kerala

■ It is fine to be talking about water conservation techniques that governments must carry out but scant attention is being paid to water use habits at home. It is surprising how much water can be saved by making adjustments in one's habits and ways in the kitchen and washroom. The media should highlight these crucial water saving tips which are as simple as not running the faucet endlessly, fixing water leaks and placing a brick in the cistern. GEETA S., Chennai

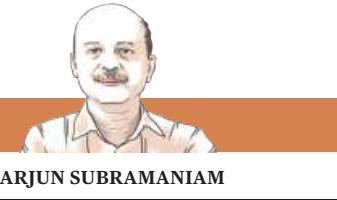
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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: Wild yak was erroneously described as an *endangered* species in a Science & Technology page story titled "Why did woolly rhino, mammoth go extinct?" (June 23, 2019). It is a *vulnerable* species.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail:readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

Upgraded planes in tough skies

The Indian Air Force must lay down clear red lines for continued operational effectiveness



ARJUN SUBRAMANIAM

The recent crash of an AN-32, which was on an air maintenance sortie to the Mechuka Advanced Landing Ground in Arunachal Pradesh, has raised questions on flight safety in the Indian Air Force despite accident rates having declined exponentially over the past few decades.

Air crashes today are subjected to the full glare of the media, exposing vulnerable families of the crash victims to needless trauma and also seriously hampering the remedial measures and outcomes that would flow from professionally conducted accident inquiries. In this milieu, it is important to explore some of the less-dissected issues that continue to plague aviation safety in the IAF.

The IAF flies 38 different types of aircraft and has the most varied fleet among modern air forces. Its fleet comprises aircraft like the MiG-21 and the Avro that hardly fly anywhere else. Seven of these have not had a major accident in the last five years. The long-serving IL-76 has had an accident-free innings in the IAF, a fact that is missed by most.

The U.K.'s Royal Air Force flew the Jaguar for 34 years (1973 to 2007) during which it had 67 accidents. In comparison, the IAF has lost 52 Jaguars over four decades. The U.S. Air Force flew slightly over two million flying hours in 2017 and suffered 83 'Category A' mishaps. During the same period, the IAF flew 2,51,405 hours and had an accident rate of 0.24 for every 10,000 hours of flying. This translates to 8-9 'Category A' mishaps – a comparable ratio. It would be unfair to make literal comparisons as the U.S. Air Force was and continues to be a dispersed force engaged in multiple locations like Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Comparing the mishap rates

While there was a rise of 17% when we consider the 'Category A' mishaps in the U.S. Air Force between 2013 and 2017, there was a decline in the IAF's accident rate from 0.29 (2013-14) to 0.24 (2017-18). Similarly, when



An Indian Air Force AN-32 plane undergoing maintenance and equipment upgrade • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

one compares the mishap rates between the F-16 fleet in the U.S. Air Force and the Mirage-2000 fleet in the IAF over the last five years, there is a positive story that emerges.

There is constant criticism as regards the slow phasing-out of the older variants of the MiG-21 and the MiG-27 fleets, which merits reflection. That these aircraft have no business continuing to fly is a proposition upheld even by senior IAF leadership. However, further investigation reveals a complex web of operational necessities that have forced the IAF to stretch their life and manage the ensuing risks.

For the IAF to remain combat ready for full-spectrum operations, it needs a continuously trained cockpit-to-crew ratio of between 1:1.75 to 1:2 that can undertake operations and seamlessly manage the switch to more advanced platforms as they get inducted into service. Currently, the ratios can barely sustain a limited conflict, leave alone extended ones.

The MiG-21s and MiG-27s were supposed to have been replaced by Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) and Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA), a process that is unfolding at a snail's pace.

Hypothetically, had all the MiG-21s and MiG-27s been phased out without replacement, there was no scope to increase the flying of other fleets to feed the residual pilots, due to maintenance and budgetary constraints. The IAF would then have

been down to 25 squadrons and saddled with large numbers of fighter pilots without operational continuity. It would then have been tough to induct advanced platforms like the LCA and Rafale, which need pilots who are current and proficient.

The IAF had very little choice in the matter and the bottom line is that the risks are rising and must be addressed with greater urgency. The way out is simple – an accelerated LCA production, no hiccups in the ongoing Rafale induction and a fast-tracking of the new deal for 114 fighter jets.

Shortage of training aircraft

As far as other flying accidents are concerned, human error is responsible for around 50% of them while issues revolving around technical, environmental and miscellaneous factors are responsible for the rest. One of the major reasons for human error is training deficiencies due to a shortage of training aircraft.

The non-availability of the HTT-40 to complement the reliable Pilatus, a delayed induction of the Intermediate Jet Trainer and a lack of clarity within the Ministry of Defence about the IAF's proposal to buy additional Pilatus aircraft means that the IAF has keep the 40-year-old Kiran fly-worthy and compromise on training quality and future operational proficiency. The IAF flies air maintenance sorties to support the Indian Army and conducts humanitarian assis-

tance and disaster relief missions in the most inclement of weather conditions and highly varied and inhospitable terrain.

Several weather- and terrain-related accidents on helicopter and transport aircraft like the MiG-17 and AN-32 are caused due to the non-availability of on-board equipment like Ground Proximity Warning Systems and Terrain Following Radar that allow such missions to be conducted in near-blind conditions. The recent accident may never have happened had there been a fleet of medium-lift aircraft with such systems.

Navigating crest tops

An AN-32 can fly well above the crest tops but in case of a single-engine failure, it has to descend below 8,000 ft, which is below the crest tops in the region; hence the ground below has to be in contact at all times. Therefore, in sorties such as this, the route has to planned through known valleys – informed sources point out that the crashed aircraft may have been impacted by a visually obscured mountain located at some distance below the crest top.

Replacing the Avro aircraft with a modern platform that can share the workload of the AN-32, particularly in high-altitude areas, is another key suggestion that can be considered. The Tata-Airbus C-295 with all modern systems has been clearly the IAF's first choice and can maintain 19,000 ft on a single engine that would keep it above mountain tops in all areas serviced by the AN-32.

Accidents will continue to happen and the IAF will have to balance risks with operational necessity. Speedy replacements for MiG-21s and MiG-27s, Jaguars, Avros, Kiran trainers and Cheetah/Chetak helicopters; fast-track modifications and upgrades that are required for operations in remote and hostile terrain; and upgrading of simulators as force enablers and not merely as training aids are among the necessary measures to improve flight safety. Finally, the IAF leadership must lay down clear red lines for continued operational effectiveness – a 'we will fight and train with what we have' attitude has ominous signals.

Air Vice-Marsh Arjun Subramaniam is a retired fighter pilot from the IAF and a visiting professor at Ashoka University

A sound foundation

The draft National Policy on Education has an important reform on the first stage of education



VENITA KAUL

The draft National Policy on Education is in the public domain for comments till June 30, 2019. A commendable reform suggested in the policy is creating a foundational stage as the first stage of school education. This reform proposes to bring the three years of pre-primary and the two years of Grades 1 and 2 into a composite unit with "a single curricular and pedagogical phase of play and discovery-based learning" between the ages of 3 and 8 years.

This proposal suggests a significant departure from the present structure of school education, in which the pre-school stage of 3-6 years is delinked from Grades 1 and 2 and even kept out of the ambit of the Right To Education Act. It is currently under the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

'Best investment'

The proposal's implications need to be understood from two perspectives. One, this implies that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for 3- to 6-year-olds will become an integral part of the organised school structure, and thus become the responsibility of the education department. It should also make ECCE a justiciable right of all 3- to 6-year-olds. The committee considers ECCE to be "among the very best investments" that India could make in education since neuroscience evidence indicates that "over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6".

Secondly, the curriculum for Grades 1 and 2 will be developed in upward continuity with the pre-school curriculum, in terms of both content and pedagogy. If implemented well, this can have a positive impact on children's learning as it would ensure a play-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum for children up to not just 6 but 8 years, which would give them a stronger foundation. This upward extension will further smoothen the transition from pre-school to the primary stage and consolidate the foundation for future learning.

However, two significant concerns identified from collaborative research by Ambedkar University and ASER Centre need to be addressed in implementation. The pre-school curriculum was observed to be primarily a downward extension of the primary curriculum. Children were engaged for most

of the time in copying or rote learning of alphabet and numbers, a practice which is developmentally inappropriate and can be counterproductive from the perspective of a sound foundation.

Play-based learning

Children at this stage require a curriculum which emphasises play-based learning opportunities that promote engagement with play materials, picture books, building blocks, puzzles, etc. and include teacher-led storytelling, conversations, rhymes, emergent literacy and numeracy activities, outdoor and indoor play. These opportunities will enable children to acquire not only the right foundation for development of skills prioritised for the 21st century, i.e. creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and self-confidence, but also an abiding interest in lifelong learning.

The second issue is the rigid structure of the primary grades' curriculum, which changes annually with every grade, thus providing little or no opportunity for children to revisit the previous year's curriculum. This rigidity comes possibly from a mistaken assumption made by curriculum framers that all children enter pre-school or a school grade at the prescribed age and move annually into the next grade, so that each grade is age-wise homogeneous; the reality is very different. Children tend to follow multiple pathways in these early years and it is difficult to predict at what age a child will be in which grade. Participation trends tend to stabilise only by the time children are around eight years old, when most come into the primary stage, often still in different grades. This leads to multi-age, multi-level composition at each level. Since age is a significant factor in learning, this diversity creates incompatibility with the given grade-wise curriculum and creates learning gaps for many children. This rigidity of the grade structure leads to cumulative learning deficits in children over time.

The foundational stage can address this rigidity, but for this the requirement would be to develop a progressive curriculum upward from pre-school to primary stage. Further, it has to be in a spiral, not linear, mode with adequate flexibility to enable children to revisit concepts and learn at their own pace. Most importantly, basing the curriculum on play-based, developmentally appropriate content and pedagogy will help children to develop holistically and enjoy the learning process, an imperative for not only school learning but learning for life.

Venita Kaul is professor emerita, education, Ambedkar University, Delhi

SINGLE FILE

A leader in his labyrinth

The road ahead seems to be a bumpy one for Nara Chandrababu Naidu

SATYA NAAGESH AYYAGARY



REUTERS

This is not a political epitaph or obituary of Nara Chandrababu Naidu or his Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Not yet.

After a four-decade autobahn-like cruise – albeit with a few potholes that he has deftly navigated – the road ahead seems to be a bumpy one for this shrewd politician who has seen more crests than troughs. But this time, the trough appears to be a deep gorge.

Here's why. First, with just 23 seats, "Team Naidu" is too small to offer even a semblance of opposition to the new Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, leader of the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP).

Second, Mr. Naidu's TDP – a party he recast and remodelled, from the original version founded by his father-in-law and iconic Telugu film hero Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, after a revolt – has no 'No. 2' by design. What was a tactical move taken almost a quarter century ago became a rule, and has now turned into the proverbial albatross around Mr. Naidu's neck.

However, Mr. Naidu is known to bounce back. The self-styled CEO in the undivided Andhra Pradesh had a nine-year reign in the zenith of his career – he was even a king-maker during the coalition politics-era of the 1990s at the national level. Defeated in 2004 by his friend-turned-foe Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR) of the Congress, Mr. Naidu had to be content being the Leader of the Opposition. Nonetheless, he rode back to power in the residual Andhra Pradesh after a decade's wait, aided by a mix of political factors – anger among anti-Congress Andhra Pradesh voters peeved at the State's bifurcation; an almost non-existent BJP; and a YSRCP still in its fledgling state.

Almost five years later, Mr. Jaganmohan Reddy has the State's reins. His campaign promise of the return of *Rajanna Rajyam* (YSR's rule, marked by hugely popular welfare policies) with his *Navaratnalu* (nine jewels) covering all sections of the society is what voters bought into. Within days of assuming office, he announced 'Rythu Bharosa', a direct payment scheme covering both landed and tenant farmers and more than tripled the honorarium for thousands of Aasha health workers from ₹3, 000 per month to ₹10,000 per month. Further, he has hiked old-age pensions and provided employment to 1.6 lakh village volunteers to oversee corruption-free delivery of welfare schemes. All these constitute the elements of a welfare state.

In this difficult-to-emulate scenario, a resurgence of Mr. Naidu appears distant. The reason? Though in sound health, he is 69. His heir apparent – son Nara Lokesh – turned out to be a huge disappointment. Further, there's no other acceptable leader in the TDP to take the party forward as he never let anyone grow, a factor endemic in many one-man driven parties. So, Mr. Naidu and TDP have little chance of a third innings in the near future.

The writer is Editorial Consultant, The Hindu, based in Hyderabad



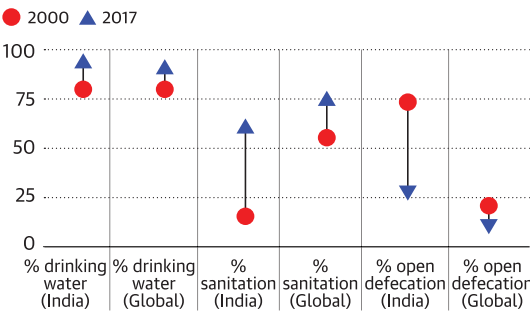
DATA POINT

Down to the basics

Between 2000 and 2017, India, like many other nations, has been able to provide access to drinking water and better sanitation facilities to a larger percentage of the population. With a push from Swachh Bharat, open defecation has dropped drastically. However, demographic inequalities persist. By **Varun B. Krishnan**

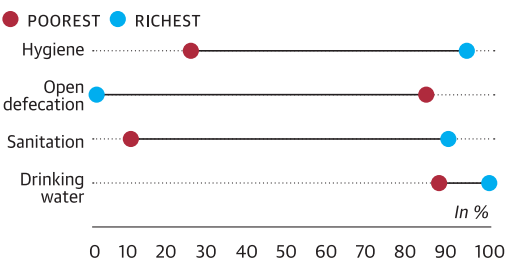
Better over time

About 60% of India's population had access to basic sanitation in 2017 compared to just 16% in 2000. However, the number was lower compared to the overall global %.



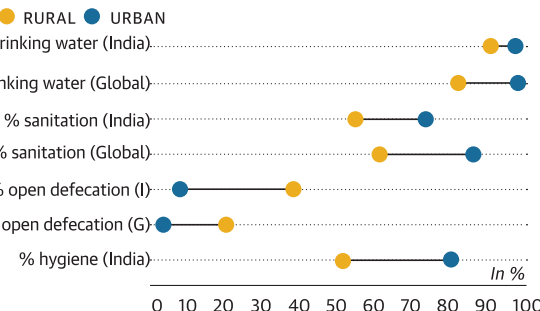
Poorer people are worse off

Gaps between the rich and poor are stark in India, with 82% in the poorest quintile still defecating in the open. The gap was narrowest in access to drinking water



Demographic divide

India's rural-urban disparity is less compared to the global average; but in India's case, percentage differences translate to a higher absolute number of people due to the large population



Regional differences

A much smaller percentage of people in Sub-Saharan Africa have access to basic drinking water and basic sanitation facilities. India is part of Central & Southern Asia

Region	% with access to basic drinking water	% with access to basic sanitation
Sub-Saharan Africa	61	31
N. Africa and W. Asia	92	88
Latin America & Caribbean	97	87
East and South-East Asia	93	84
Central & Southern Asia	99	61

Source: Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (UNICEF & WHO)

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1969

Riot, arson in Hyderabad

Army Units were called out here [Hyderabad] to-day [June 24] to help the police disperse violent Telengana agitators who attacked a hotel and a police station near the Abids circle. When the crowd became unruly the police made a lathi-charge and fired tear-gas shells. Over a dozen persons were injured, two of them seriously in the lathi-charge. The agitation for a separate Telengana reached a crescendo to-day [June 24] when thousands of demonstrators courted arrest in the twin cities and in Telengana districts. In the twin cities alone 3,221 people including 237 women were arrested to-day [June 24]. Wherever one went in Hyderabad city, one could see lorries jam-packed with slogan-shouting Telengana agitators. The Telengana Praja Samiti in a Press note claimed that 50,000 people including 12,000 women and 17,000 students offered satyagraha in 236 places in the nine Telengana districts.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1919

Serious Railway Collision. Very Heavy Casualties.

The 'Leader' [in Allahabad] understands that in Ferozabad accident the names of drivers killed are Mr. Whitting of passenger train and Ramzan of goods train. The guard of the goods train injured is Mr. Pritchard. Other company servants killed and injured were Indians. The 10 passengers injured included Guard D'Silva and four members of his family, one other member, a child having just escaped. Guard D'Silva was on leave at the time. They have been removed to Tundla railway hospital. Other injured passengers are detained at Ferozabad civil hospital. At 2-30 p.m. on Saturday through running was resumed on this section of line as a result of completion of diversion. The accident occurred owing to an error in the handing of tokens at Ferozabad station.

CONCEPTUAL

Medical students' syndrome

PSYCHOLOGY

Also known as the intern's syndrome or the medical school syndrome, this refers to a phenomenon wherein students of medicine who learn about a new disease may begin to think that they suffer from its symptoms. They may even feel that they are at increased risk of contracting it. Some have argued that while medical students may not be predisposed to this syndrome, they may be more prone to its effects simply because they have much easier access to study about different medical conditions than others. Studies, however, have shown mixed results as to the prevalence of the syndrome among medical students.

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How the Indian cricket team's jersey has changed over the years

<http://bit.ly/IndiaCricketKit>