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TELLING NUMBERS

How the states scored in NITI Health Index: top and bottom 3 in key indicators

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

LARGER STATES (TOP 3 & BOTTOM 3 IN BOTH REPORTS)

STATE	SCORE		RANK		CHANGE
	2015-16	2017-18	2015-16	2016-17	
Kerala	76.55	74.01	1	1	—
Andhra	60.16	65.13	8	2	▲
Maharashtra	61.07	63.99	6	3	▲
Punjab	65.21	63.01	2	5	▼
Tamil Nadu	63.38	60.41	3	9	▼
Rajasthan	36.79	43.10	20	16	▲
Odisha	39.43	35.97	18	19	▼
Bihar	38.46	32.11	19	20	▼
UP	33.69	28.61	21	21	—

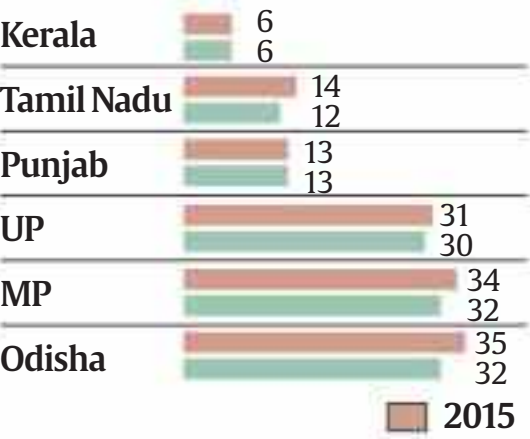
Smaller states: Mizoram (1), Manipur (2), Meghalaya (3), bottom Nagaland (8).

UTs: Delhi ranks 5 among 7. Top Chandigarh, bottom Daman & Diu (7).

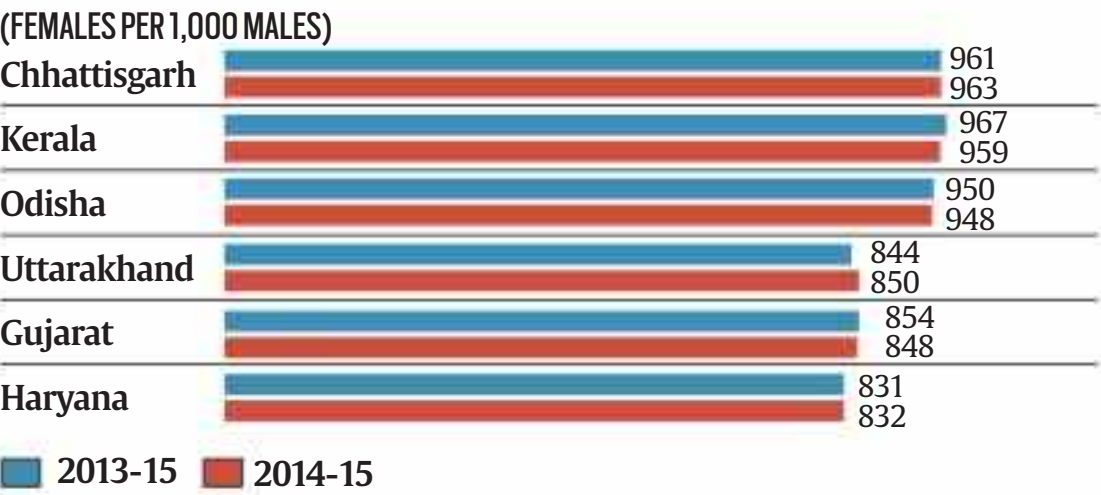
Source for all data: NITI Aayog report

IN THE second edition of the NITI Aayog health index report card (*The Indian Express*, June 26), Kerala was once again ranked the best among the states while Uttar Pradesh was at the bottom. The “Healthy States, Progressive India” rankings. These rankings are on the basis of a Health Index, which is a composite score incorporating 23 indicators covering key aspects of performance in the health sector. These include several indicators relating to health outcomes (such as neonatal mortality rate, under-five mortality rate, low birth weight among newborns), indicators relating to governance and information (such as integrity of data) and inputs/processes (such as positions vacant at hospitals). The graphics show the performers of the top three and bottom three in some of the major indicators relating to health outcomes.

NEONATAL MORTALITY RATE (DEATHS PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS)



SEX RATIO AT BIRTH



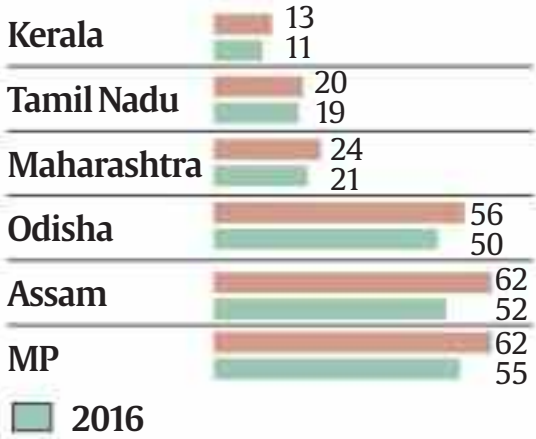
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE

State	2015	2016
W Bengal	1.6	1.6
Tamil Nadu	1.6	1.6
Punjab	1.7	1.7
MP	2.8	2.8
UP	3.1	3.1
Bihar	3.2	3.3

LOW BIRTH WEIGHT (%)

State	2015	2016
J&K	5.9	5.5
Andhra	6.7	5.6
Jharkhand	7.4	7.1
Tamil Nadu	13.0	15.5
W Bengal	16.4	16.4
Odisha	19.2	18.2

UNDER-5 MORTALITY RATE (DEATHS PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS)



SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Rain check: large area, low amount

The delayed monsoon has finally picked up and covered large parts of the country, but rainfall is still 36% short of normal for this time. What factors held it back, what is the forecast for the rest of the season?

ANJALI MARAN

PUNE, JUNE 26

AFTER A two-week delay, the monsoon is finally progressing northwards, and has covered most parts of southern, central and eastern India. The monsoon has reached Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and most of Madhya Pradesh.

However, it is still bringing less than expected rainfall. For the month of June so far, the rainfall over the country as a whole has been deficient by 36% compared to what is normal until this stage. This deficit is unlikely to be made up in any substantial manner in the remaining days of the month. But the India Meteorological Department has predicted good rains in July and August.

Delayed arrival

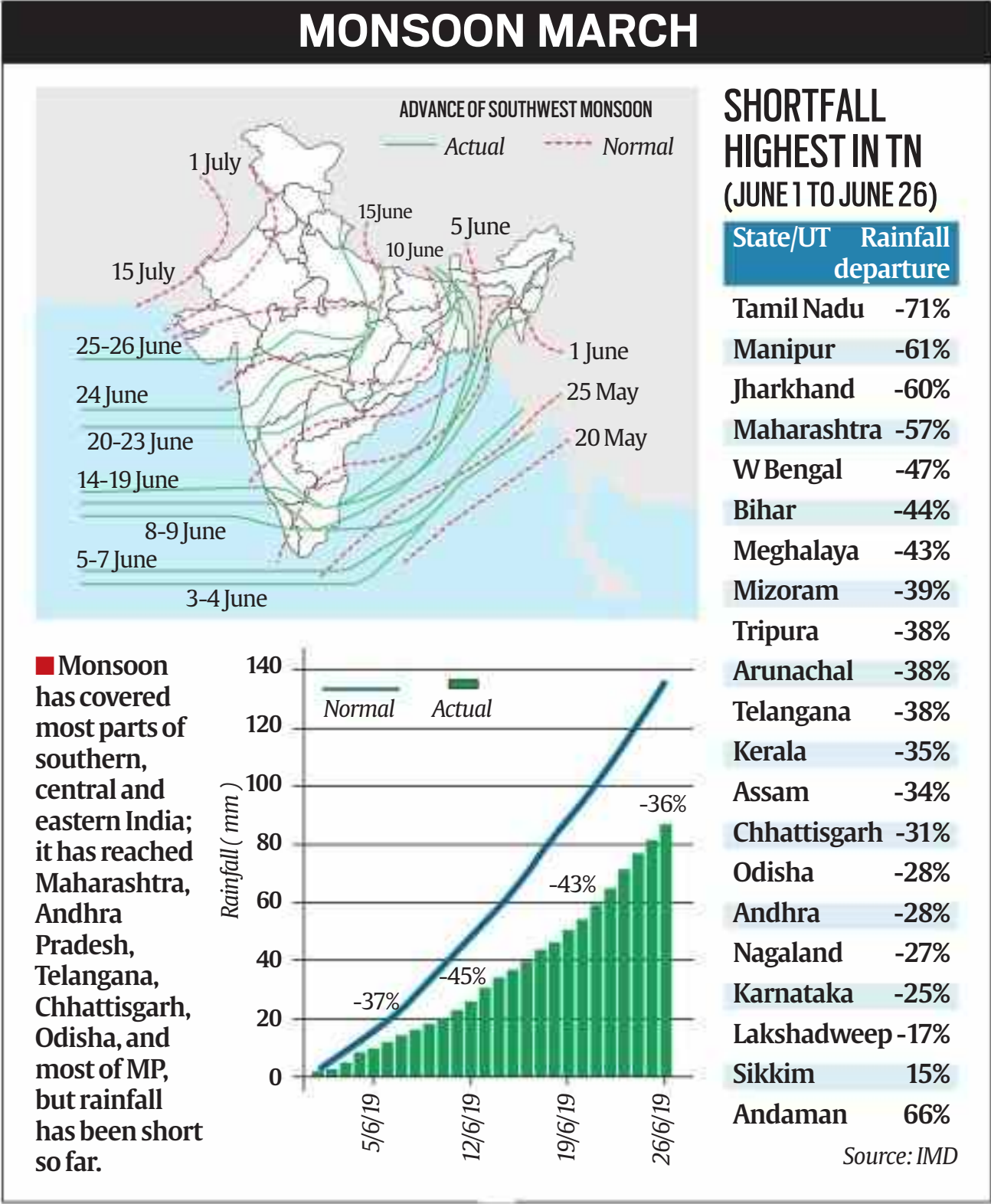
During the onset phase over the Indian mainland, the monsoon currents were severely oppressed by the prevailing mid-latitude regime, forcing these currents to take longer to establish. Since the winter of 2018, there were strong and frequent western disturbances passing through much of the southern latitudes and altogether delaying the onset over Kerala. The continuous flow of strong western disturbances, too, made it difficult for the already weak monsoon currents to penetrate. As a result, the onset over the Kerala coast happened on June 8 instead of the normal date of June 1.

After that, the monsoon has progressed much slower along its western arm than along the eastern arm. This has been due to a number of reasons.

East-West mismatch

Soon after its onset over Kerala, the very severe cyclonic storm Vayu was formed in the Arabian Sea. As it progressed northwards, it hindered the advance of the monsoon which lay centred over Kerala for nearly a week. This, because the system attracted significant amounts of moisture from the southern peninsular regions and also from parts of Maharashtra, thereby slowing down the pace during the initial advancement of the monsoon.

Last winter, an Arctic burst had resulted in severe cold including sub-zero temperatures across the globe. The Indian southwest monsoon appears to be affected by some of its remnants, even in June. Meteorologists ob-



served extra-tropical circulation prevailing over much lower latitudes over the Indian subcontinent and adjoining north Indian Seas (Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal) until a few days ago — even after the onset of the monsoon over the Indian mainland. This resulted in conditions that were not supportive enough for the smooth inflow of monsoon currents blowing from the Arabian Sea, A K Srivastava, head, climate research division at IMD,Pune, told *The Indian Express*.

Under normal atmospheric conditions, warmer northwestern regions and a relatively cooler equatorial belt facilitate and pull over the monsoon currents from southern hemisphere across the Arabian Sea along the western coast towards the land. However, this year, extra-tropical anomalies over the

extreme northwestern region and the neighborhood left the entire region cooler, acting as a deterrent to the incoming monsoon winds. Besides, there was no low pressure system formed over the Arabian Sea that could have alternatively aided the monsoon progress along the west coast.

These, according to IMD officials, led to slower-than-expected progress of the western branch of the Southwest monsoon. Consequently, it did not bring significant amounts of rainfall over regions along the west coast. The otherwise heavy rainfall-experiencing areas including Kerala and Konkan-Goa remain rainfall-deficient by 35% and 54%, respectively, until June 26.

Contrarily, the situation with respect to the eastern branch of monsoon progressed

THIS WORD MEANS: NON-PERMANENT MEMBER, UNSC

India seat endorsed: how are countries elected?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

MUMBAI, JUNE 26

INDIA'S CANDIDATURE for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council has been endorsed unanimously by the Asia Pacific group, which comprises 55 countries, including Pakistan. “A unanimous step. Asia-Pacific Group @UN unanimously endorses India's candidature for a non-permanent seat of the Security Council for a 2-year term in 2021/22,” India's permanent representative at the UN, Syed Akbaruddin tweeted.

10 countries, 5 seats

The endorsement means that India has a “clean slate” candidature – that is there is no other contestant from the group – for the elections that will be held for five non-permanent members next year, for the 2021-22 term.

Each year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members out of a total of 10, for a two-year term. These 10 seats are distributed among the regions thus: five for African and Asian countries; one for Eastern European countries; two for Latin American and Caribbean countries; two for Western European and other countries.

Of the five seats for Africa and Asia, three are for Africa and two for Asia; there is an informal understanding between the two groups to reserve one for an Arab country. The Africa and Asia Pacific group takes turns every two years to put up an Arab candidate.

Elections for terms beginning in even-numbered years select two African members, and one each within Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Terms beginning in odd-numbered years consist of two Western European and Other members, and one each from Asia-Pacific,

Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Asian contests

Unlike Africa, which has formalised a system of rotation of its three seats according to the region, the Asia-Pacific grouping often seen contests. Last year, there was a contest between Maldives and Indonesia.

Irrespective of whether a country is a “clean slate” candidate and has been endorsed by its group, it needs to secure the votes of two-thirds of the members present and voting at the General Assembly session (a minimum of 129 votes if all 193 member states participate). Formal balloting takes place at elections to all the main UN bodies.

When contested, the elections for non-permanent seats can be fraught and can go on for several rounds. In 1975, there was a contest between India and Pakistan, which went to eight rounds. Pakistan won the seat

faster, as a low pressure system formed in the Bay of Bengal fuelled for its swifter progress over the east and Northeast. On June 26, the northern limit of the monsoon currently was passing along Veraval, Surat, Indore, Mandla, Pendra, Sultanpur, Lakhimpur Kheri and Mukteshwar areas.

The late surge

The monsoon progress remained largely stagnant for nearly 10 days and stuck around south interior Karnataka and central Tamil Nadu until June 19. Thereafter, it made progress to some parts of southern Maharashtra on June 20The pace of its progress since then showcased a marked improvement as Maharashtra, along with all states in the Northeast, east, and south and some states in central India, were rapidly covered as on June 25.

As of June 26, the monsoon has fully covered Kerala, Lakshadweep, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar islands, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and partially covered Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

With the monsoon in its active phase — rainfall intensity between light and moderate spells — the countrywide rainfall deficiency as of June 26 stood at 36%. In other words, the actual rainfall of 86.3 mm is 36% lower than the normal of 135.6 mm for this time of the year.

IMD subdivision-wise, Andaman and Nicobar (66%), East Rajasthan (32%) and Jammu and Kashmir (25%) have so far received above normal rainfall this season and have been categorised under the excess rainfall category. North Interior Karnataka (-1%) and Lakshadweep (-17%) have had normal rainfall. The remaining 31 subdivisions have had deficient rain or none.

The monsoon is expected to strengthen towards the end of this month. Forecasts suggest the formation of a fresh low pressure system over the Bay of Bengal around June 29 or 30. This system will then send a fresh monsoon pulse that will help the further advancement of monsoon to the remaining areas along northwestern and Central India during July 1-July 3. The IMD has forecast heavy rains around July 2 and July 3 along the west coast, mainly for Konkan-Goa and north interior Karnataka.

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

Did high methane level indicate life on Mars? The science and the setback

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

LAST WEEK, NASA's Curiosity rover discovered high amounts of methane in the air on Mars, leading to excitement whether this was an indication of life on the Red Planet, or beneath its surface (*The New York Times* report published in *The Indian Express*, June 24). But on Monday, NASA reported that the methane had fallen back to usual levels. The setback means the question of life remains unanswered. What were scientists hoping to find, and what does methane signify?

What is methane?

On Earth, methane (CH₄) is a naturally occurring gas. Most of the methane on Earth is produced in industrial processes — some of it by microbes, and some occurring as underground natural gas that had been formed by earlier generations of microbial life. Many of these methane-pro-

ducing microbes live in the digestive systems of animals, especially cows.

However, methane can also be produced by abiotic processes (those that do not involve living organisms). It has been found to occur in formations such as rocks, springs and aquifers, and studies have concluded that it was formed there by chemical reactions between carbon and hydrogen atoms at low temperature.

Once it is released into the atmospheres of either Earth or Mars, methane is relatively short-lived. Since the time the gas was first detected on Mars, it has been considered a potential biomarker. The first time was in 2003 by the Mars Express, a European Space Agency orbiter. Since then, there has been further evidence of the gas in Mars' atmosphere.

So what's new?

In most previous observations, the concentration of methane in the Martian air has been low. Then in 2013, Curiosity — which had landed on Mars in 2012 — de-



Curiosity Rover, which has detected high methane level. NASA

tected methane in a concentration of seven parts per billion by volume. Now, methane concentrations on Earth are

much higher — the global mean is over 1,800 parts per million — but the Mars measurement caused excitement because

it was much higher than previous readings. This concentration continued for about a couple of months, then ebbed away before scientists could establish where the methane came from.

Last week's readings were an unprecedented 21 parts per billion. On Earth, it created excitement to the extent that scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory cancelled Curiosity's original schedule for the weekend, so that it could repeat the experiment. They were hoping to detect the source of the gas, and in the process clues that might point to the existence of life on the Red Planet.

What now

On Wednesday, NASA reported that the second reading had fallen back to less than 1 part per billion..

This suggests that last week's methane detection was a transient methane plume, which has been observed in the past, NASA explained on its website. While scientists have observed the background levels rise and



HE DID NOT WANT THE APPLE FOR THE
APPLE'S SAKE, HE WANTED IT ONLY BECAUSE IT
WAS FORBIDDEN. — MARK TWAIN

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

No MOBOCRACY

PM Modi has expressed anguish at Jharkhand lynching. His message must be urgently heeded — and enforced

ELEVEN MEN HAVE been arrested and two policemen suspended for the murder of Tabrez Ansari, who died on Saturday, four days after a mob grievously assaulted him for suspected theft in Jharkhand. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in the Rajya Sabha that the lynching in Jharkhand has “pained” him. “Doshiyon ko kadi se kadi saza milnee chahiye (the guilty should be punished severely)”, he said. On coming back to power with an enhanced mandate, PM Modi had added “sabka vishwas” to his pledge of “sabka saath, sabka vikas”. Recent reports that have come in from some states of mobs forcing Muslim men to chant “Jai Shri Ram” and “Jai Hanuman”, and the murder of Ansari, who, too, was forced to do so by the mob that tied him to an electric pole and attacked him, have drawn attention to the urgent need for the PM’s message to be heeded — and enforced.

The incident in Jharkhand adds to a grim tally: At least 18 persons have been reportedly targeted and killed by a mob in the state since March 2016. There have been few convictions in these cases. Shockingly, in one instance, men convicted in a lynching incident at Ramgarh were later honoured by Jharkhand BJP leaders, including then Union minister Jayant Sinha. Mob violence is not confined to Jharkhand, nor is it a feature only of BJP-ruled states. However, the impression that the party in power condones mob justice, or looks the other way, especially if it targets individuals of the minority community, seems to have empowered vigilante groups in BJP-ruled states. It has also added a communal dimension to mob violence in these states. Shaken by these incidents, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court headed by then Chief Justice of India, Dipak Misra, ruled in July last year that Parliament must “create a separate offence for lynching and provide adequate punishment for the same”. The Court said “a special law in this field would instil a sense of fear for law amongst the people who involve themselves in such kinds of activities”. A Group of Ministers was set up to look into the matter. There has been no visible progress on the matter since.

The fact is that existing laws are sufficient to tackle mob violence and vigilantism — if the executive has the political will to do so. The Raghubar Das government in Ranchi has done well to arrest those suspected of lynching Ansari. But its work is not yet done. It needs to ensure that due process is taken to its just conclusion, the culprits are punished and help is provided to the victim’s family. A stern message needs to be sent out that any attempt to subvert the law and due process will be punished quickly and firmly.

SMALL STEPS FORWARD

A new report suggests measures to ease woes of small businesses. Its recommendations are well-judged

THE COMMITTEE SET up to undertake a comprehensive review of the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector, which has submitted its report to the RBI, has examined issues such as access to finance and infrastructure bottlenecks that continue to plague the sector. Broadly, its suggestions are well-judged.

Lack of access to finance continues to be an impediment to the sector’s growth. Bank lending continues to be disproportionately geared towards large entities, leaving a huge funding gap for MSMEs. The committee traces this skew to two factors — high level of non-performing assets (NPAs), and high cost to servicing. Typically, banks tend to restrict credit flow to MSMEs, discouraged by the high level of bad loans, which range between 8 to 11 per cent. A major reason for these bad loans is delay in buyer payments. MSMEs struggle to recover their dues from both the private and the public sector. To address this problem, the committee has suggested that public sector procurement from MSMEs be routed through the GeM portal to bring transparency in procurement and to quicken payments. This, if monitored closely, could help shorten the payment cycle considerably. There is also the suggestion that the MSME development act be amended to ensure that all MSMEs mandatorily upload their invoices to an information utility, which will display names of defaulting buyers. This, it hopes, could “act as a moral suasion on buyers”, ensure timely payment, and thus minimise NPAs. But this is easier said than done. Big companies, with greater bargaining power, are likely to continue to stretch out the credit cycle. There is also the issue of documentation. Banks are wary of lending in the absence of detailed financial information as it makes assessing credit worthiness difficult. The problem is compounded by lack of collateral. To address this issue, the committee proposes a novel approach. Rather than relying on the traditional balance-sheet based funding route, it has proposed shifting to a cash flow based lending model. This not only provides greater clarity on the payment capacity of firms, but can also help in determining the repayment schedule.

The committee has also suggested doubling the collateral free loan limit to Rs 20 lakh, up from the current limit of Rs 10 lakh. While the move could address the sector’s cash flow issues considerably, coming at a time when concerns are being voiced about the true extent of bad loans under Mudra, this could be a risky proposition.

GIFTING A SLOGAN

By banning a barb against Imran Khan, Pakistan’s deputy speaker may have handed Opposition a rallying cry

QASIM KHAN SURI, deputy speaker of Pakistan’s National Assembly (its central legislature), should have stuck to the tried-and-tested “sticks and stones” defence. Instead, he let a word get to him. When the House echoed for over an hour with chants of Imran Khan being a “selected” prime minister, Suri banned the use of the word. To make sure the implication of the Opposition’s taunt is made clear to everyone who learns about the incident through the media, Suri added: “This is a House of elected representatives!”

Even a passing glance at the proceedings of Pakistan’s Parliament and provincial legislatures is enough to register, among Indians, a sense of familiarity. The same raucousness, sense of manufactured outrage, trading of insults — and yes, genuine debate — can be seen in snatches in Pakistan. But, and this is important, its legislative office-bearers seem not to have realised exactly how to balance the neutrality of their office and the loyalty to their political formations. And in using the former to please the latter, one is likely to do more harm than good. Already, a motion has been filed in the Punjab Provincial Assembly condemning the ban, and the Opposition seems to be realising that the word carries enough meaning to be a rallying cry against PM Khan.

After all, “selected prime minister” begs the question: Selected by whom? The Pakistan “deep state” — army, intelligence networks, etc — of course. By banning the use of the word in the assembly, the deputy speaker has ensured its implication is widely discussed outside. What he should have done was leave the trading of barbs to those who are still officially partisan legislators. Or he could have taken a cue from his counterparts in India, where Speakers maintain at least the appearance of being non-partisan. A ban, after all, could turn a barb — which could have been responded to by the treasury benches in kind — into a slogan.



SUJATHA RAO

AS PER MEDIA reports, 172 children have died in the space of three weeks in Muzaffarpur, Bihar. This is higher than the 122 deaths recorded in the 2014 outbreak. Clearly, no lessons seem to have been learnt. This is unacceptable and the media outrage is justified.

A similar tragedy occurred at Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh in 2017, when over 600 children reportedly died of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES). Now, in Muzaffarpur, AES is once again in focus. The *Lancet Global*, a leading and authoritative medical journal, published a study analysing the 2014 deaths in Muzaffarpur.

The findings were disturbing: The case fatality rate was 31 per cent; 55 per cent of the sick children were boys with three quarters of them below four years age; the case patients’ measurements showed that 16 per cent of them were “wasted” and 65 per cent “stunted” (due to chronic hunger). Drawing from the detailed examination of the case records, blood tests, socioeconomic profiling, etc, the experts concluded that the plausible — not necessarily sufficient — causal pathway to deaths could have been litchi consumption on an empty stomach, causing hypoglycemia, requiring treatment. The study concluded that three steps need to be taken to prevent such deaths: Reduce litchi consumption by children during the peak season; ensure consumption of the evening meal; and in suspected cases requiring treatment, ensure a rapid glucose correction.

The *Lancet* study, along with the evidence of AES around Muzaffarpur, brings out three unacceptable factors: One, the continued lack of clarity on the direct and distal causal factors that should and could have been addressed on priority, enabling the formulation and enforcement of protocols for prevention and treatment. This is particularly saddening since within a space of five years, we have had at least four outbreaks of child deaths in Bihar and UP — 2014, 2016, 2017 and now 2019 accounting for over 1,700 children dying needlessly.

Two, the children who died were all from poor families whose poverty status was multidimensional — unclean habitation,

Let’s politicise health

It is time the political leadership adopted a zero-tolerance policy to laxity in healthcare

The children who died were all from poor families whose poverty status was multidimensional — unclean habitation, poor housing, overcrowding, hunger, illiteracy etc. The recent case has two more important points to be noted. Eating litchis per se is not the cause: Eating unripe, rotten litchis, from the ground and partially consumed ones, followed by no meal are. It does not require much imagination to understand the typology of the children who eat such type of litchis and ‘skip’ evening meals.

poor housing, overcrowding, hunger and illiteracy. The recent case has two more important points to be noted. Eating litchis *per se* is not the cause: Eating unripe, rotten litchis, from the ground and partially consumed ones, followed by no meal are. It does not require much imagination to understand the typology of the children who eat such type of litchis and “skip” evening meals. One article suggested that the enquiry showed that some of the deceased children had no food for three days. So, the causal factor is clearly poverty-associated hunger and dietary practices.

The third factor is the collapse of the primary healthcare system. Bihar does have a legacy issue. Healthcare in general and primary care in particular has been severely neglected in the past. The 52nd Round of the NSSO had clearly shown that 22 of the 33 million people impoverished due to health expenses were from the four northern states of rural UP, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. This was the justification for the NRHM initiative. The improvements in rural healthcare resulted in Bihar reducing its IMR from 60 per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 38 and maternal mortality is 165 per 1,00,000 births in 2016. Even as the agenda of revitalising a moribund primary healthcare system is unfinished, policy attention shifted to non-communicable disease control and hospital insurance. These are misplaced priorities as the disease burden of Bihar, as per the ICMR study of 2015, shows that communicable diseases alone account for 43 per cent of the disease burden — others being non-communicable and chronic diseases which too can be largely prevented and require to be diagnosed early and managed in primary healthcare settings. Significantly, 70 per cent of deaths are premature, with almost 30 per cent of them among children under 14 years, while the top four causal factors of mortality are malnutrition, air pollution, contaminated water, poor sanitation and poor diet — high levels of anemia.

These risk factors which provide a home to virus and bacteria, again require to be addressed at the household/community levels by primary healthcare workers.

Preventive measures and simple treatments like providing glucose correction can be done in PHCs and community centres at the block level. Thus, while the condition of district hospitals — without basic equipment and adequate skills is unacceptable and require to be improved without delay — adding 1,500 beds is not the answer. As the Ebola experience of Sierra Leone and Liberia conclusively demonstrated, constructing big hospitals at great expense was not what contained the epidemic, strengthening community health did.

The nation-wide anger of the junior doctors and of people in Muzaffarpur is a wake up call for country’s political leadership to go beyond rhetoric. Infectious diseases know no boundaries and are unafraid even of the powerful. Containment of these diseases requires waging a war against their underlying social determinants — clean air, water, sanitation and nutrition and access to primary healthcare.

This is not a choice but an imperative and a fundamental pre-requisite for development. Economists advising governments on achieving growth need to appreciate this factor, one that several other countries have long understood. Growth needs to be measured not in GDP terms nor on ease of business, but on longevity of life, ease of living, productivity, well-being and innovation. To drive home this point, that countries like India continue to deny, the World Bank developed the Human Capital Index showing that the drivers of growth are education and health: A fact that the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health chaired by Jeffrey Sachs noted in 2000. Under the HCI, India ranks 115 out of 157 countries.

Health is a political question. It is time that the political leadership collectively agrees to set aside partisan acrimony and adopts a zero-tolerance policy to any laxity on matters related to health. It is time that leaders decisively demonstrate that they care and that every life counts.

Rao is former Health Secretary, Government of India and author of Do We Care? India’s Health System



P D T ACHARY

THE 10TH SCHEDULE of the Constitution, commonly referred to as the anti-defection law, is facing the most serious challenge yet in its 34 years of existence. The challenge is not judicial, but political. Legislators show a tendency to ignore the law and defect to the parties in power. Earlier this month, 12 out of the 16 members of the Congress Legislature Party in Telangana “merged” with the TRS, the ruling party in Telangana. Close on the heels of this defection, four members of the Rajya Sabha, from the Telugu Desam Party “merged” with the BJP and became members of the legislature party of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha. Quite surprisingly, the media in general has approved of this act of defection as a valid exercise in accordance with the law — that if two-thirds of the legislators of a party merge with another party, it would be a legally valid merger. This is a wrong interpretation of the law.

The 10th Schedule was enacted to put an end to the scourge of defection. The political class viewed defection as such a serious menace to the stability of the democratic system that the anti-defection law was made a constitutional law. Constitutional authorities such as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and the Speaker of Lok Sabha, who act as tribunals in defection cases, have scrupulously followed the spirit of the law in deciding the cases under the 10th Schedule.

The spate of defections taking place now

GREENER PASTURES

The anti-defection law is routinely misinterpreted

Para 2(1)(a) of the 7th Schedule disqualifies a legislator, however, if he voluntarily gives up the membership of his party. So any MLA or MP is liable to be disqualified if he leaves his party voluntarily. But Para 4 is in the nature of an exception.

have brought back the focus to this law once again. Does any provision of this law actually allow any legislator to move out of his party and join another party without any legal hitch? This question has assumed great importance in the context of the Telangana Congress MLAs merging in the TRS and the TDP MPs of Rajya Sabha merging with the BJP. They seem to assume that having two-third of the total number of members of their respective parties means they can merge with the other parties, without incurring disqualification.

Para 2(1)(a) of the 7th Schedule disqualifies a legislator, however, if he voluntarily gives up the membership of his party. So any MLA or MP is liable to be disqualified if he leaves his party voluntarily. But Para 4 is in the nature of an exception. It exempts such legislators from disqualification upon fulfilling two conditions: One, his original political party has merged with the other party; two, two-thirds of the legislators of that party have agreed to such a merger. The Speaker can exempt them from disqualification only on the fulfilment of these two conditions. This makes it clear that any merger mentioned is between the original political party and the other party. But a mere merger between two parties is not enough for invoking the protection of Para 4.

After all, the entire 10th Schedule relates to the defection of legislators. Therefore, their role

in the merger process is very crucial. Thus, this Para says, that for the purpose of exempting a defecting legislator, the merger shall be deemed to have taken place only if two-thirds of the legislators have agreed to such a merger. If the legislators have not agreed to the merger, there is no merger under Para 4. The lawmakers have used words very carefully. The words “two-thirds of the Members. have agreed to such merger”, used in Para 4(2), make it abundantly clear that the merger takes place between two parties and the requisite number of legislators of that party must agree to such merger. Thereafter, the speaker exempts those legislators from disqualification. It may be noted here that the legislators do not merge, they only agree to the merger done by their original political party. Thus, a merger between the political parties concerned has to take place first. Only then can the legislators “agree to such merger”.

In all the cases mentioned above, the legislators have acted on the assumption that all that is required to do is for them to “merge” with the other party and the merger of their original political party is not necessary.

This is a misreading of the law. The sooner they realise it, the better for them as well as for the democratic system.

The writer is a former secretary general of the Lok Sabha

JUNE 27, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

BOEING’S RACISM

THE BOEING AIRCRAFT Company and Lloyds of London have stated in a Washington court that since an average Indian earns only a dollar a day, his life is cheaper than an American’s. Consequently, any financial damages given to an Indian passenger, who died aboard Air India’s 147 flight 855, on January 1, 1978, should not be computed on Californian living standards. In making this racial and arbitrarily comparative observation on human life, the Boeing company has refrained from adding that the price of its aircraft do not differ when sold to poor or wealthy nations. Also the grief at the loss of a family member is the same universally, and

cannot be weighed in dollars and cents. The multi-million dollar case on behalf of the 213 people who died off the Bombay coast has been intensifying gradually.

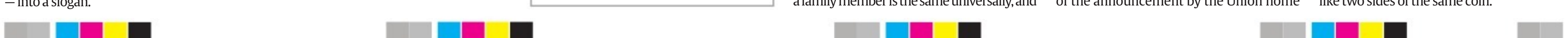
CRP DISMISSALS

ABOUT 441 CENTRAL Reserve Police personnel in Trivandrum were dismissed from service. The dismissal was ordered for their participation in the strike that began on June 21, said an official spokesman. Action against some more would be taken soon. However, they would be given time to explain their position, the spokesman said. The action against the CRP personnel came in the wake of the announcement by the Union home

minister, H M Patel, that four battalions, including two stationed near Trivandrum, would be disbanded.

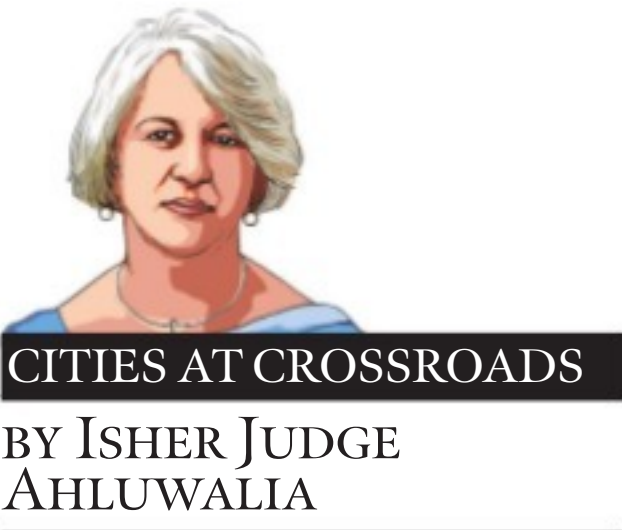
KARNATAKA CONG PLAN

THE GENERAL BODY of the newly formed Karnataka Congress party called upon its rank and file to safeguard political stability and economic development in the state. The chief minister, Devaraj Urs, was elected leader of the break-away majority of the Karnataka Congress Legislature Party. The economic resolution adopted by the general body noted that in Karnataka, economic development and political stability have been like two sides of the same coin.



Not just pipes and tankers

A compact between the Centre and states is necessary to address India’s water-related challenges. This should involve local governments and communities of water users



CHENNAI HAS BEEN in the news recently for its water crisis. Scuffles and suffering have been reported from different parts of the city. Water crimes in Ranchi have also hit the headlines. Cities in Madhya Pradesh have seen stabbings and killings over water, and the police has been called upon to guard water tankers and water sources. Cape Town in South Africa was the first major city in the modern era to face the threat of running out of drinking water, as reported by the BBC in February 2018. The BBC listed another 11 cities most likely to run out of water. This list included Bengaluru.

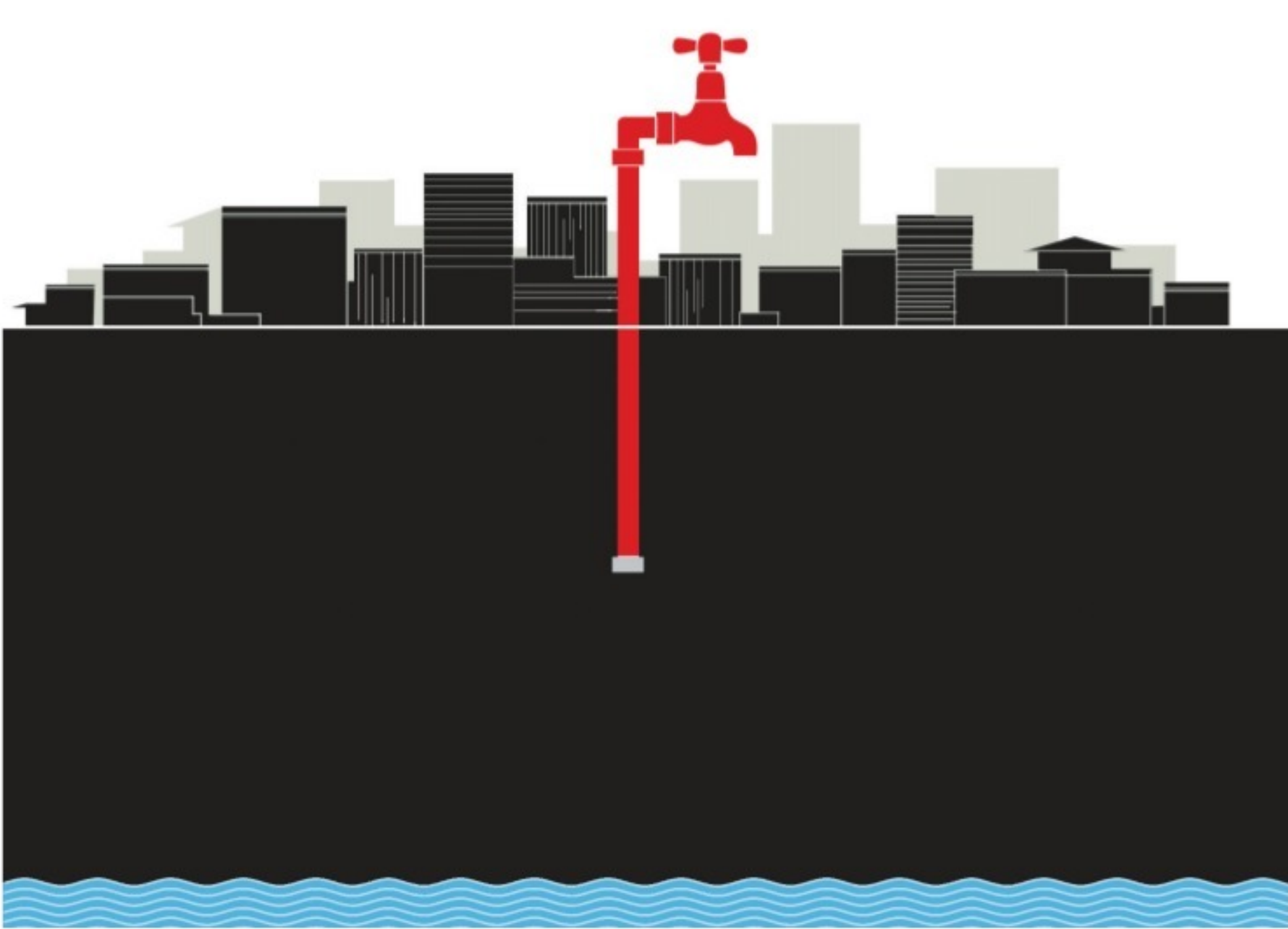
The 2030 Water Resources Group on “Charting Our Water Futures” set up by the erstwhile Planning Commission in 2009 had projected that if the current demand pattern for water continues, by 2030, the available water will meet only about half of India’s demand for water. Ten years later, in 2019, the water crisis is here and it is taking its toll in rural as well as urban areas of India. We are staring at a train wreck in slow motion and we need to act fast and act boldly to avoid the crash.

Water scarcity in India has come about not so much from insufficient supply as from the way in which we manage the water we have. Agriculture uses 78 per cent of India’s water, and uses it very inefficiently (agricultural water use efficiency is 30 per cent for surface water and 55 per cent for groundwater in India, compared with 77 per cent in Israel). Notwithstanding the large investments in irrigation networks, about two-thirds of water used for irrigation comes from groundwater. Two factors — the huge electricity subsidies for farmers to pump groundwater and the fact that groundwater is largely unregulated — have led to a steady explosion in groundwater use through tube-wells for irrigation over the past several decades. About 80 per cent of the rural demand for drinking water is also met by groundwater.

Urban India’s inefficiency in water use arises from inadequate, old and dilapidated distribution networks, inefficient operations, inadequate metering, incomplete billing and collection, and a general state of poor governance. Another source of inefficiency comes from not treating wastewater and using the recycled water for specialised uses such as horticulture, and also for flushing toilets. Under-pricing of urban water also contributes to wasteful use. If something is under-priced, users will use more of it.

Most of us living in cities expect to have access to drinking water from taps in our homes. This requires a distribution network of pipes which can bring water from the basic source of bulk supply to our homes. However, access to treated tap water is available to only 62 per cent of urban households (Census 2011). Those who are unconnected to the piped network and include mostly, but not only, the poor, have to rely on buying water from tankers at exorbitant rates. This leads to increasing but unaccounted use of groundwater by extensive digging of borewells to meet the demand deficit.

There is clearly a need to expand coverage to the “unconnected” population. This will call for the expansion and renovation of the



Suvajit Dey

infrastructure of the distribution network. It will also call for additional supplies of water, especially because the groundwater that is currently being used to supply this population is expected to dry up. The Niti Aayog has projected that the groundwater of 21 cities will run out by 2020 (that is, next year) and the cities include Bengaluru, Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad.

Financing the expansion in urban water supply will be a problem. Even if the capital cost of the infrastructure is made available either through National Missions or public-private partnership, the operation and maintenance cost of running the system (and in the case of PPP, a large part of the capital cost) will have to be recovered through user charges. Pricing water is important both for demand management and for economic viability of water delivery systems.

We also need to mobilise more supply of water from basic natural sources. Only then can greater connectivity result in piped water delivery to all in urban areas. The mobilisation of additional supplies poses a major challenge since the natural recharge zones are increasingly eroded because of unplanned urbanisation.

We also need to deal with the supply constraints arising from the neglect of the rivers, lakes, ponds and other waterbodies in and around our cities that feed the reservoirs which are the bulk sources of water. These water bodies need to be protected from encroachment so that our catchment area for water storage and rainwater harvesting is not reduced. This requires strict vigilance on land-use planning and building permissions in our cities. It may even warrant removal of existing encroachments. An important role has to be played by the state governments concerned, including ensuring compliance with the environmental guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and the National Green Tribunal. Above all, increased water-use efficiency in agriculture is critical to release water supply from agriculture for other uses.

The quality of water issue is also very significant because of its serious implications for public health. Only about 30 per cent of

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the municipal waste water or sewage is treated and the rest is released untreated into the rivers and/or the ground. Because of the density and concentration in urban areas, contamination from wastewater happens much faster. It is also important to ensure that untreated sewage is not dumped into open stormwater drains through which it is carried and discharged into water bodies. Surveys of groundwater in recent years show higher and higher levels of microbiological contamination. It is essential to ensure that the wastewater is treated before it finds its way back into our basic source of water and contaminates it.

Water is even more important than food for survival. No wonder that water governance is intimately linked to politics. It reminds me of the Pakistani play *Kaala Maunda Bhes* (*Black is My Attire*), which I saw in Delhi some 20 years ago. In the play, the owner of the only well in the village, Khoosay Shah (literally, the Lord of the well), reigned supreme and his rule was called “Khoosay Shah di Sarkar” which was subordinate only to what was called the Vaddi Sarkar, that is, the Almighty. Cities in Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh certainly have no *Khoosay Shah* yet, but the crisis of water supply seems just as acute.

It is clear that management of water requires a holistic approach, taking account of the multiple aspects that have been spelt out above. In a way, setting up of the Ministry of Jal Shakti is a recognition of this, except that the ministry deals with rural water needs only. We cannot split urban water from rural. Water will flow from rural to urban and vice-versa, and has always done so. Besides, reshaping water governance will require state governments and local governments to take coordinated action in a federal system. What is needed is a political compact between the Centre and states to jointly address the challenges of saving India’s water, while actively involving local governments and engaging with the communities of water users. It is a tall order but there is no alternative but to begin.

The writer is chairperson, ICRIER, Delhi, and former chairperson of the high-powered expert committee on urban infrastructure and services

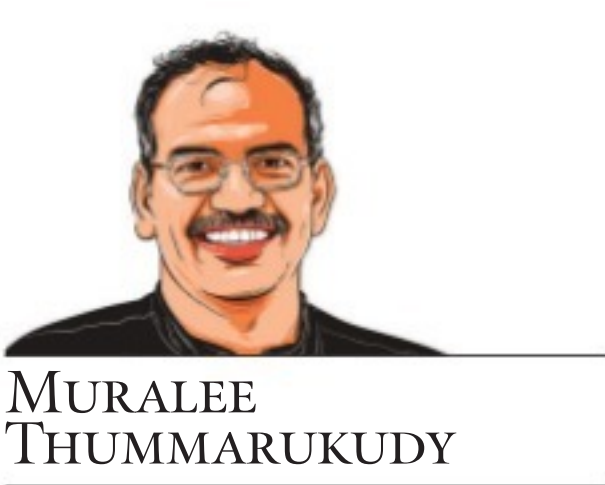
WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The demolition job on the Obama climate legacy continues: the rules limiting methane emissions from oil and gas wells, the climate agreement in Paris, now the clean energy plan. Next on the hit list? Probably Mr. Obama’s fuel economy standards.”

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

Speaking in many tongues

Emphasis of New Education Policy on teaching multiple languages is welcome. But do we have enough skilled teachers?



THE DRAFT New Education Policy (NEP) places great emphasis on language education. It identifies the benefits of children being multilingual, states how the knowledge of and fluency in English creates an elite group within the country and how knowledge of foreign languages can be beneficial to employability. This considerable attention and importance to language education in the draft policy goes all the way from primary education to the doctoral level.

The policy proposes that children from class 1 (age 6) onwards are taught three languages simultaneously. There is a proposal that one of the Indian classical languages (Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, etc) is taught between class 6 and 8. An additional compulsory course is the “Languages of India” for all students at the upper primary level (class 6-8), which will cover all the major languages of India — a few phrases, their history, heritage and structure. At the secondary level (class 9-12), children will be able to choose one or more foreign languages. The new higher education policy envisages a liberal arts approach, which means that the continued learning of language will be possible (and, in fact, encouraged) throughout the degree programmes whether in science, engineering or medicine. Finally, those pursuing doctoral research will have to study how to communicate scientific aspects of their work in a local language so as to promote their ability to communicate outside their professional domain in an Indian language.

Research around the world has concluded that children are enthusiastic about learning new languages. Many European countries already teach up to three languages to their children at the primary level and it is understood that being multilingual has advantages not only for employment but also for intellectual development. If the NEP is implemented unchanged, Indian students will have the record of being prepared with the maximum number of languages when they leave school education. The question is: How well can such a policy be implemented in all parts of the country within a short span of time? The educational policy document has not delved into the question of how to translate the policy in the field. Good intentions alone cannot deliver the desired educational outcome.

Take the question of three languages being taught in primary school as an example. India has about 1.4 million schools imparting elementary education. Currently,

they mostly impart education only in their mother tongue with a very small percentage that teach English at the elementary level. Assuming that one will need at least one teacher per school to teach one language, it will take at least one million English teachers and another one million teachers in other languages to have this policy implemented. While English language teachers could still be found locally, where will the teachers for the third language come from?

If 2,21,000 elementary schools in Uttar Pradesh need to teach a language in addition to English and Hindi, one would need 2,21,000 teachers of Malayalam, Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati, etc, to be available in UP. While it is true that children are enthusiastic and able to study many languages when they are young, the research also presumes that the teaching of such languages is also competent. Considering that our country still has 92,000 single teacher schools, will the single teacher then end up teaching English as well as another language? Can such teaching be efficient and competent? The net result could be that only students in urban areas and elite schools will be able to afford the full implementation of the policy.

The same holds true for foreign languages. As the curriculum provides option for learning a foreign language, urban and elite schools will soon have French, Spanish, German, Chinese, etc. in their curriculum. How soon can that be scaled across 1,35,000 secondary schools and 1,09,000 senior secondary schools? Do we have so many foreign language teachers in India? Will this proposal further widen the rural-urban, rich-poor divide in educational outcomes?

These apprehensions notwithstanding, I am very enthusiastic about the potential of the NEP on many aspects, including languages. If the government truly apply its mind, there are many ways to bridge this gap. For example, retired English teachers and English graduates can be mobilised in a nation-wide campaign to ensure that every child in India has access to English language. Undergraduate students from across the country can be given basic pedagogic training and “teach for India” scholarships to go and stay in another state and teach their language. India could offer 1,00,000 scholarships to foreign nationals to come and teach their native languages (including English). All these will not only improve our language education but also broaden our perspective.

Technology, in many ways, is eliminating or at least reducing the importance of language learning. But in the interim, we can leverage technology to teach languages as well as improve the standard of language teachers.

The writer is Operations Manager, United Nations Environment Programme. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily that of the United Nations

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RESPECT DISSENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Ease the tension’ (IE, June 26). The resignation of RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya was expected. He had fallen out of favour with the government with his dissent. However, creative tensions amongst the various policy makers are a good sign and augurs well for a democracy. The resignations in the RBI should serve as an eye-opener for the government and push it towards becoming more accommodating of divergent points of view.

Deepak Singhal, Noida

BSP’S CHALLENGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Family firm’ (IE, June 26). By giving important posts to her brother and nephew, the BSP supremo Mayawati is walking the path of dynastic politics, without sensing the political churn in the country. Moreover, the tendency of Dalits to vote as a community has undergone a change. As the results of the 2019 elections show, Dalits do not follow the herd mentality. The BSP is on the wane and the induction of Mayawati’s family members will do nothing but hasten the party’s downfall.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

POOR DECISION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Nature vs nuptials’ (IE, June 26). It is difficult to understand why the Uttarakhand government allowed the mega wedding at Auli, considering that it had all the makings of an environmental disaster.

Sangeeta Kampani, Delhi

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

MAKE POLLS SIMPLE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Pollarising’ (IE, June 21). After the Indian republic came into being, the first few elections were held along with the Lok Sabha elections. The system went askew when governments began to fall before the completion of their term. The Narendra Modi government’s initiative of reverting to the old system is welcome. The modalities of the proposal, though, need debate. The Opposition’s boycott, therefore, is unfortunate. The onus is now on the NDA government to allay their fears.

Lal Singh, Amritsar



Naive like a puppy

It’s time humans stop expecting cats to relate to them as dogs

THE EDITORIAL, ‘Puppy eyes’ (IE, June 19) claims that dogs have evolved to manipulate human emotions, based on a finding by a research group at the University of Portsmouth. The cited study finds that there is a specialised muscle found above the eye sockets of dogs that allows them to modulate their facial expressions, and specifically assume the fabled “puppy eyed” look to which we hapless humans find ourselves jelly-legged with love and adoration. The research is a legit find, having made its way into one of the world’s foremost scientific journals with extremely wide readership. But even then the study — and the editorial — left me a bit baffled with its (almost puppy-like) naïveté.

The idea that humans react fondly to facial features that reflect those of babies of our own species has been the leading theory in this field since being proposed in 1943 by Konrad Lorenz, whose work in instinctive behaviour instills a gospel-like reverence, despite his Nazi politics. Since that time, there has been an abundance of evidence that indeed, humans do respond to the young of most vertebrate and mammalian species because of the similarity of facial and bodily

features in human babies — a flat head, chubby cheeks, round big eyes, a small pudgy nose, rotund bodies and short extremities. In that sense, almost all species have evolved, including our own, to invoke feelings of love that ensure protection, nourishment, shelter instead of cruel treatment or harm. The evidence in the University of Portsmouth study is at best a missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle trying to understand the biological changes that underlie the process of domestication and bifurcation of the canine species from the wolves. However, as for whether dogs are capable of emotional bonding, there is so much scientific evidence in its favour, that it is not a question anymore, actually. Dogs and wolves share 99.9 per cent of their genomes but in chromosome six, at a few loci, our canine friends differ in the expression of few genes that influence social interactions, suggesting they are hard wired

to interact favourably with our species. The erstwhile cat parent in me takes offence at the bad rap that is in the share of cats, including in the editorial. Cats are not manipulative: We just don’t understand as much about their behaviour as we do for dogs. Even genetically, the difference between domesticated cats and their feral counterparts are not as stark as the difference between dogs and wolves. Further, research suggests that while dogs recognise us as a separate species and their endearing behaviours are reserved for human interactions, a dog is likely never to behave with a fellow canine as he might react with a human. A cat, in contrast, treats us just as physically bigger cats. All their behaviour towards humans, hissing, purring, kneading, rubbing their bodies, raising their tails are behaviors they routinely conduct with other cats. This does

not make them manipulative, it is just our lack of understanding the feline world. But what tickled the funny bone in me was the obviousness of the research — and at points, the editorial too. Before the existence of this muscle was known, no one knew their dogs had them wrapped around their little finger-err-paw? It is almost similar to the analogy of the clinical trial testing on whether jumping without a parachute increases the chances of death in pilots. Of course, biological features in all domesticated animals evolved to evoke feelings in humans that would be of evolutionary advantage to such animals. The jump from evolution to manipulative is so abrupt, I am reminded of the Bengali litterateur Sandipan Chattopadhyay, who while once critiquing the love of jargon in leftist theoreticians had remarked, it is but a pity that the frog is not aware of its own scientific name.

Turns out, not only dog owners, the poor canines are equally ignorant about their own manipulative abilities.

The writer is assistant professor, Department of Psychology, Ashoka University