



Scoring on health

States, now with greater resources at their command, must upgrade primary health care

The Health Index 2019 released by NITI Aayog makes the important point that some States and Union Territories are doing better on health and well-being even with a lower economic output, while others are not improving upon high standards. Some are actually slipping in their performance. In the assessment during 2017-18, a few large States present a dismal picture, reflecting the low priority their governments have accorded to health and human development since the Aayog produced its first ranking for 2015-16. The disparities are stark. Populous and politically important Uttar Pradesh brings up the rear on the overall Health Index with a low score of 28.61, while the national leader, Kerala, has scored 74.01. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra join Kerala as the other top performers, with the additional distinction of making incremental progress from the base year. The NITI Aayog Index is a composite based on 23 indicators, covering such aspects as neonatal and infant mortality rates, fertility rate, low birth weight, immunisation coverage and progress in treating tuberculosis and HIV. States are also assessed on improvements to administrative capability and public health infrastructure. For a leading State like Tamil Nadu, the order of merit in the report should serve as a sobering reminder to stop resting on its oars: it has slipped from third to ninth rank on parameters such as low birth weight, functioning public health centres and community health centre grading.

For the Health Index concept to spur States into action, public health must become part of mainstream politics. While the Centre has devoted greater attention to tertiary care and reduction of out-of-pocket expenses through financial risk protection initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, several States remain laggards when it comes to creating a primary health care system with well-equipped PHCs as the unit. This was first recommended in 1946 by the Bhole Committee. The neglect of such a reliable primary care approach even after so many decades affects States such as Bihar, where much work needs to be done to reduce infant and neonatal mortality and low birth weight, and create specialist departments at district hospitals. Special attention is needed to shore up standards of primary care in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Assam and Jharkhand, which are at the bottom of the scale, as per the NITI Aayog assessment. The Health Index does not capture other related dimensions, such as non-communicable diseases, infectious diseases and mental health. It also does not get uniformly reliable data, especially from the growing private sector. What is clear is that State governments now have greater resources at their command under the new scheme of financial devolution, and, in partnership with the Centre, they must use the funds to transform primary health care.

RCEP next steps

India cannot afford to fall out of the free trade agreement negotiations

Leaders of the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations have resoundingly committed to conclude negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership free trade agreement by the end of 2019. Some like the Malaysian Prime Minister went a step further, suggesting that countries not ready to join the RCEP, notably India but also Australia and New Zealand, could join at a later date, allowing a truncated 13-member RCEP to go ahead. Others insist that all 16 members must agree on the final RCEP document. It is clear that ASEAN, which first promoted the RCEP idea in 2012, is putting pressure on all stakeholders to complete the last-mile negotiations. The ASEAN summit, which ended in Bangkok on Sunday, agreed to send a three-member delegation to New Delhi to take forward the talks. RCEP includes ASEAN's FTA partners – India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand – and the FTA would encompass 40% of all global trade among economies that make up a third of global GDP. India has been keen to join. But six years into negotiations, its concerns remain: opening its markets for cheaper goods from countries like China and South Korea; and ensuring that RCEP countries open their markets for Indian manpower (services).

India has a trade deficit with as many as 11 of the RCEP countries, and it is the only one among them that isn't negotiating a bilateral or multilateral free trade agreement with China at present. As a result, although negotiators have agreed to New Delhi's demand for differential tariffs for its trade with China *vis-à-vis* the others, India has also made tagging the "Country of Origin" on all products a sticking point in RCEP negotiations. Despite its misgivings, however, the government has reiterated that it is committed to making RCEP work, and any attempt to cut India out of the agreement was "extremely premature". In the next few months, India will be expected to keep up intense negotiations, and most important, give a clear indication both internally and to the world that it is joining RCEP. To that end, the Commerce Ministry has begun consultations with stakeholders from industries that are most worried about RCEP, including steel and aluminium, copper, textile and pharmaceuticals, and has engaged think tanks and management institutes to develop a consensus in favour of signing the regional agreement. Giving up the chance to join RCEP would mean India would not just miss out on regional trade, but also lose the ability to frame the rules as well as investment standards for the grouping. Above all, at a time of global uncertainties and challenges to multilateralism and the international economic order, a negative message on RCEP would undermine India's plans for economic growth.

Negotiating the forks in the road of diplomacy

India needs a substantive and defined account of its own objectives to steer its strategic course in these stormy times



SUHASINI HAIDAR

Seldom in the recent past has the impact of one month meant more in Indian foreign policy than the present one. And rarely have meetings on the sidelines around one summit carried as much import on India's future policies as the G-20 summit in Osaka (June 28-29), where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold bilateral meetings with at least eight world leaders (most notably U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin), and participate in two parallel trilaterals, the Russia-India-China (RIC) and Japan-U.S.-India (JAI). Two weeks ago, in June, he also held a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Bishkek.

In a few months, he will meet the three world leaders again for more substantive meetings: with a visit to Vladivostok (the Eastern Economic Forum in September), a possible dash to Washington during the UN General Assembly, again in September, and the Wuhan return-visit by Mr. Xi to India in October. Between these two sets of meetings, Mr. Modi has his work cut out on a number of issues, each of which represents a fork in the road, depending on India's decision on them: a fork where the U.S. holds one prong and the Russia-China axis holds the other.

Trade concerns

On trade, the tussle is evident. Many in India had rejoiced when the U.S. first declared a trade war on China, given India's long-standing concerns about China's unfair

trade practices. However, as Mr. Trump trained his guns on India next, the joy evaporated, and choices for the Modi government changed. At Osaka, Mr. Modi will meet Mr. Trump in an effort to give trade issues another try, but he also plans to attend the RIC trilateral as well as a meeting with leaders of BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa), both of which will focus on countering the U.S.'s "unilateralism" on trade. In the months ahead, New Delhi must make another choice, on whether to sign up for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a trade grouping that has taken centre stage after the U.S. walked out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. If trade issues with the U.S., India's largest trading partner, remain intractable, it is not hard to see that the RCEP bloc, with China in it, will become more prominent in India's trade book.

Energy and communications

The choice on energy, and in particular on Iran, comes next. When the Trump administration pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement in May 2018, but granted India and a few other countries a waiver to continue oil imports (as well as one for Chabahar trade), the government had assumed it could muddle through the Iran-U.S. confrontation. Instead, it has lost on both principle and profit. After accepting U.S. sanctions on oil imports, India's intake of cheaper, better Iranian crude will dip from about 23.5 million tonnes in 2018-19 to zero in 2019-20. The waiver for Chabahar turned out to be a red herring as banks, shipping and insurance companies have declined to support India-Afghan trade through the Iranian port for fear of sanctions affecting their other businesses. What follows now will be more difficult for New Delhi, as the U.S. has sanctioned the top rungs of Iran's government and the Is-



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lamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Having meekly submitted to U.S. sanctions, will India now also abjure contact with the Iranian leadership or reject the U.S.'s demand? And where will India's investments and its dreams of larger connectivity via Chabahar and the Russian-led International North-South Transport Corridor go, in the event of a full-scale confrontation between the U.S. and Iran? Willy-nilly, the forks in the road are presenting themselves and choices must be made.

Another choice New Delhi will be forced to make in the next few months is on telecommunications and building its 5G network, for which trials are due to begin in September. The U.S. has made it clear that it expects the Modi government to exclude the Chinese telecom company, Huawei, over security concerns, and threatens to withhold intelligence and security cooperation if India allows this company to control its 5G networks. China has made it equally clear that India must make an "unbiased" choice and will oppose any move to cut Huawei out of the trials. On the Russian S-400 missile system deal too, its a black-or-white decision for the government to make as the U.S. makes it clear that going ahead with the deal won't just invoke sanctions but will close the door to American high-tech and advanced aircraft deals.

Taking firm steps to emancipation

The 2019 election mandate should make the Muslim community ponder over its future



MARKANDEY KATJU

The results of the elections to the 17th Lok Sabha and the scale of the mandate for the Bharatiya Janata Party have made many Muslims in India despondent. But perhaps it is a blessing in disguise.

Since Independence, Muslims have been treated as a vote bank by the Indian National Congress and other so-called secular parties; the community has only been used by the political class with very little having been done for them.

As the Justice Rajinder Sachar Commission has reported, most Muslims in India are still relatively poor and backward. They have been in the grip of reactionary maulanas and crafty politicians with their own vested interests in mind and who have propagated the idea that no government at the Centre and in many States could be formed without their help. This

illusion has now been shattered by the result of the 2019 general election. The recent interview by Karan Thapar with former Union Minister Arif Mohammed Khan illustrates this.

The number of seats won by Muslims in this election could now force the community to ponder over their welfare, how to remedy the situation and improve their lives.

The main cause of their sorry plight is their backwardness, which in turn is due to the reactionary and feudal mindsets of some leaders who claim to represent them both from the clergy and the political class.

Path to progress

In order to change this, the community will have to take three radical steps. The first is demanding a uniform civil code for all Indian religious communities. This, by implication, means an abolition of the outdated feudal Sharia law. The law is a reflection of social conditions at a particular historical stage of a society's development. So as society changes, the law too must change. How can a medieval law be applicable in the 21st century? The abolition of Sha-



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ria will not mean the abolition of Islam. Almost the entire old non-statutory Hindu law was abolished by the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 – but Hinduism has not been abolished by that.

Sharia treats women as inferior. It permits talaq (verbal) only to Muslim men, not women, and is thus a Damocles sword over the latter. It gives only half as much to daughters as to sons in inheritance. It sanctifies the backward-looking rule of nikah halala. All this has helped keep the community backward; when women who constitute half the Muslim population are not treated as equals, it obviously and adversely affects the

entire community.

The second is a demand to abolish the burqa as it constricts the freedom of women. However, many have said it should be the women's choice whether to wear a burqa or not. But, surely, no such choice should be given as it constitutes a 'negative' freedom. There should be no freedom to continue backward feudal practices and they should be suppressed if the country (including Muslims) is to progress, as was done in Turkey by the leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. A heavy fine should be imposed on women wearing the burqa, as has been done in parts of Europe.

The third is a demand to abolish the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), a non-statutory body set up in 1973 in the time of Indira Gandhi, whose eye was on the Muslim vote bank. The AIMPLB comprises reactionary clerics and other people most of whom have reactionary mindsets whose aim is to protect and continue the outdated feudal reactionary Sharia law, which in fact harms Muslims. The AIMPLB strongly opposed the progressive and humanitarian Shah Bano judgment (1985), which granted maintenance to divorced Muslim women,

and which led to the Rajiv Gandhi government getting the judgment legislatively annulled. Recently, the AIMPLB took another reactionary step by advocating the setting up of Sharia courts in every district.

A note for youth

Atrocities on Muslims such as lynching or hate speeches, or framing of false charges should be condemned. But there can be no support for backward practices, whether among Muslims or Hindus (such as the caste system or looking down on Dalits). It is time now for Muslims, particularly the youth, to rise and demand putting an end to feudal reactionary practices which are the biggest cause of backwardness in the community. This is the only means to their salvation. As Maulana Azad said to Muslims in 1947 at the Jama Masjid: "Nobody can drown you unless you drown yourself. Nobody can defeat you unless you defeat yourself. The moment you realise this, you develop the confidence that this country is ours, along with others."

Justice Markandey Katju is a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India

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.

Word of caution

The report that the Chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) has written to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, cautioning him about the growing view that the Trump administration appears to be coercing India on various fronts rather than negotiating with it is a welcome development (June 26). There is perhaps a realisation that this could have grave repercussions for U.S. diplomacy. India, Russia and China could make common cause with each other, which could be detrimental to the U.S. interests. Given that the HFAC has oversight responsibilities over the U.S. State Department, one hopes that the visiting U.S. Secretary of State will heed the words of wisdom.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Indian prisons

The rot in India's prison system cannot be glossed over (Editorial page, "The state of Indian prisons", June 26). In addition to this, the subject of the 'New Prison Manual 2016' is important. It includes provisions such as access to free legal services, additional provisions for women prisoners, rights of prisoners sentenced to death, inspection of prisoners and modernisation of prisons. Whether the prison authorities are following the manual or not is the moot point. If the answer is negative, then this too is another violation of the basic rights of prisoners.

SUSHANT DHEKALE, Kolhapur, Maharashtra

■ The data on prisoners reflect the scant interest evinced by many governments in dealing with the issue. It would be no

exaggeration to say that undertrials are caged like birds for years due to poor legal options and the penurious condition of inmates. That there is ignorance of legal privileges such as Section 436 A of the Code of Criminal Procedure is unacceptable.

N. VIJAI, Coimbatore

■ Vary rarely does the system help rehabilitate a prisoner for the period he or she was incarcerated even when acquitted. There is stigma attached to the person which can affect his or her ability to make a new life. Quick trials and humane treatment within the system can do much more than reforms that exist on paper.

ARYA S.T., Ashti, Wardha, Maharashtra

Hate crimes

The murder in Jharkhand is distressing, but even worse is the indifference shown by

the custodians of the law (Editorial, "Lynching redux", June 26). Such incidents happen time and again as the perpetrators have political backing. Though such incidents come to light, one is sceptical whether the victims get justice. One waits for the day when the spirit of brotherhood is rekindled.

LEELA KALLARACKAL, Chennai

■ It is India's image that gets affected as the foreign media sifts through such deplorable episodes, portraying India in a bad light and insinuating political patronage. These perpetrators need to be given exemplary punishment. Also the religious chanting in Parliament is unwanted. Our lawmakers have been given the mandate to legislate and govern the country and not to portray themselves as the champions of any religion.

DEEPAK SINGHAL, Noida

■ Why is the Prime Minister failing to find the time to consistently condemn mob lynching? Doesn't his idea of an inclusive India include the minorities? Silence is the greatest enemy of justice. Tolerance and cultural relativism have always been India's virtues but it looks as if these are being eclipsed. The government cannot abdicate its constitutional responsibility to uphold human rights especially when the world is watching.

MEENA YADEM, Hyderabad

Water management

The water scarcity in Chennai is a good example of

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Late correction: The report, "Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is Congress Lok Sabha leader" (June 19, 2019), erroneously described Mr. Chowdhury as a Member of Parliament representing *Murshidabad*. Actually, he represents *Baharampur*.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

INTERVIEW | K. KASTURIRANGAN

‘The education system needs change, not fine-tuning’

The Chairman of the committee which finalised the draft National Education Policy, 2019, on Board exams, teacher training and improving the quality of research

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The K. Kasturirangan Committee, which submitted the draft National Education Policy to the Ministry of Human Resource Development in May, has invited comments on the document till June 30. Mr. Kasturirangan, chairman of the committee and former head of the Indian Space Research Organisation, talks about the features of the policy. Edited excerpts:

How was the committee constituted?

■ The work on the present policy started in Smriti Irani's time [when she was Union Minister of HRD]. After eliciting opinions from a cross-section of society, the T.S.R. Subramanian committee was set up. In parallel, there was a report from the MHRD. I was called by Prakash Javadekar, who was the [HRD] Minister then. There were some issues with the Subramanian report which we were asked to revisit. We also had the MHRD report. We were asked to use all this and come up with a report which did not have issues and which could withstand the next 20 or even 30 years of India's development. But when we studied it, we felt that what was needed was not a fine-tuning of the existing policy but a re-look. So, we started with a clean slate.

While the idea of school complexes sounds good in urban and semi-urban areas, what about areas where access to schools is a problem?

■ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan had put forth [the idea] that within a specified distance there should be a school. Schools have come up, but there are many schools which have only six students or only one teacher. This is not the idea of school education. There is no playground, there is no idea of a societal interface with the child. Wherever we have a cluster of schools, we can move to this concept of school complexes a little faster. School complexes will grow

fast in some places. And that will give us information on how to operate in the more complex systems. We are not talking about overnight change. We can't do that in a country with such diversity. Geographically if the schools are not easily connected, we have to provide facilities like cycles [to students].

You mentioned India's complexity. There are several iniquities which cannot be ignored. Given this, why does the policy have just half a page on the education of Dalits and OBCs?

■ At different places we have touched upon the education of underprivileged classes, including setting up special education scholarships for them and selecting teachers from amongst them for local requirement. Don't just read the title of Dalit or underprivileged and see the paragraph under that. Read the whole document and you will see in several places we revisit this question with respect to that area. If you take the sum total of that, you will see the whole picture of what we are saying.

The typical problems faced by Dalit children are different from those faced by economically backward children from a different caste. Do you address this?

■ If you bring solutions for Dalit students into the educational process, it may be a tall order for education to deal with it. This is a societal problem. What we have tried to do is make sure that Dalits do not suffer for want of op-



SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

portunities. What opportunities? Access to education – you can go to nearby places and study as well as others. Second, Dalits will get 100% scholarship. Many small concessions given by the government will be retained and, if necessary, upgraded.

The policy suggests several Board exams each semester for eight semesters. Isn't the load a lot more than it is now?

■ Students can take the Board exams as soon as they are thorough with a particular subject. In case they are not happy with the outcome of that exam, they can take it again in another six months. There is nothing sacrosanct about writing the exam at a particular time and doing well. [It is not as if] their future is ruined if they don't perform well in the exam.

Once exams are completely digitised, the student can give the exam. And if he finds he has scored well, he has completed the exam. Another aspect is that as he gets more and more credits as he passes more exams, these credits can be carried forward. So we think this system provides minimal pressure. And we do away with rote learning; it is a formative test.

Can this not be achieved within the existing system?

■ The existing system has intrinsic issues. There are several thousand schools with merely six or eight students. Or only one teacher. What kind of satisfactory model can you develop around this for school education?

The school exam system has to be changed. The exam system is difficult because youngsters are stressed by the rote learning approach. Teachers have to be re-trained or new teachers have to be brought in because the pedagogy is going to be very different. The whole system has to undergo a change, so fine-tuning the existing system to achieve the level of aspiration projected here doesn't seem to be feasible.

The draft policy advocates an extreme degree of centralisation. Even though education is in the Concurrent List now, State autonomy is not really considered in this.

■ We are aware that education is in the Concurrent List. States have a major responsibility. They have the school. Every State will have its regulatory body set up by the school. Accreditation will be separated from regulation,

Schools have come up, but there are many which have only six students or only one teacher. This is not the idea of school education.

but the accreditation process will lead to some aspects of regulation.

Whereas the national frame-setting will provide the guidelines for framing the curriculum, and a pedagogy for that, it is up to the State to decide what will be the curriculum and pedagogy. Similarly, like the national accreditation authority, you have the State accreditation authority. This policy will enable the State to considerably innovate, bring in new ideas, and try to create dynamic changes. There is always a consultation process that is available with the Centre with respect to the four or five bodies which will control education. But that in no way will put direct control on what is happening at the State level.

You are talking about public education. But there is an advisory to shut down standalone teacher education institutions across the country as soon as possible. Your comments?

■ Teacher education institutes have mushroomed in the thousands. I don't want to talk about how they have operated, what kind of degrees have been given and what the outcomes have been. School teachers are going to build the youth of tomorrow. We think school teachers should come from higher education institutions. Transfer them to higher education institutions, give them a four-year B.Ed. They can be given liberal education for two years followed by areas in which they will be teaching. They have to be given comprehensive knowledge, learn pedagogy and communication skills. And make sure that they can frame curriculum.

What is the time period over which this transformation can happen?

■ Existing Anganwadi teachers can be trained in six months. Those with two-year education degrees can be transformed in a year. And for the future you have a four-year course. So, within four years we should be able to get people. But we also need a throughput – it is a large number. We think we need to put this on a priority.

There is extreme centralisation of research in higher education.

■ I think centralisation and decentralisation have meaning when there is a scale in which they operate. In India, research is 0.69% of the GDP. Compare this with the U.S. where it is 2.4% or 2.5% of the GDP. So, centralisation has no meaning when you are talking about this kind of money. There is no question of any "isation". Currently, if you look at the outcome in terms of papers, it is just improving because of the university support being given by the Department of

Science and Technology (DST). If you look at the number of patents, it is 30,000 or 40,000 compared to 6,00,000 and 7,00,000 in the U.S. and even more in China. Even in this, about 70% of the patents come from NRIs. So, if you look at the overall scenario of industrial outcomes, social outcomes, strategic outcomes, and the kind of money that is going into this, and the number of papers, patents and such parameters, India is not at all in a happy situation.

One of the reasons is that nearly 93% of university students go to state universities which are pathetic in terms of research quality. Second, the research itself, though well supported, is mostly given to institutions where there is some capability. So you get more funding for institutions like the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research or a CSIR lab, or a DRDO lab, or ISRO. Some of the Central universities and IITs do get some funds, but it is not sufficient. I think one needs to improve considerably the money and along with it the infrastructure and the number of researchers who will contribute.

We always talk about the percentage of GDP going into research. When are we going to talk about the research going into GDP?

How do you propose to achieve this?

■ So, we thought there should be a [national] research foundation. It should be all encompassing, including science, engineering, social sciences and humanities. First of all, the competitive grant from DST and other institutions... we will [have a] similar thing with respect to the university system, primarily. But it does not stop other institutions from asking for money, and it will be done on a competitive basis. The second is seed capa-

bilities in a university system so that they can start undertaking research. Seeding can be in any area depending on what the universities' interests are and what the local demands are. There are many scientists who are retired. They can go and mentor the universities. They will be given a remuneration, they can research, produce papers, even take students for the first five or 10 years. The place gets operational.

The research foundation will enable research grants from government institutions. This is the third element.

There are industrialists. They always say we are ready to give money, but we don't get any output. So, create a tighter system of monitoring. The government will help with this kind of monitoring, evaluation and mid-term correction. This can improve the confidence of industry. This will create a new generation of researchers who will teach the next generation of learners. With this nexus between teachers and learners, the university will have a different kind of atmosphere.

What does the policy say about reservations?

■ We have no authority to tamper with that. But what we have done is, there are people who need to be supported because financially or otherwise they are underprivileged. We need to make sure that this is strictly enforced. And that there is no room for misuse of that kind of thing by institutions. And suggest if there are any inadequacies in the implementation that need correction. Beyond that I can't say anything more. But it will be in favour of the fact that we need to ensure that the underprivileged are not condemned to be there.

A longer version of the interview is available on www.thehindu.com

SINGLE FILE

Cinema as education

‘Virus’ is a reminder of the role of cinema in spreading social good

KUNAL RAY



Aashiq Abu's recently released Malayalam film, *Virus*, is captivating. The film is a chilling document of the deadly Nipah virus outbreak that affected parts of Kerala last year and how the State machinery mounted an impressive defence to tackle the grave situation. It records in laborious detail the meticulous planning undertaken by many individuals to solve the crisis, saving many lives that could have been further endangered. This is a prime example of cinema that is educative. I am no lover of socio-realist films which can sometimes be pedantic and preachy, but *Virus* is an important moment in the history of contemporary Indian cinema, which is increasingly assailed with propaganda films. To me, this film is a reminder of the role of cinema in spreading social good.

Fiction films on medicine and public health are rare in India. Cinema has often been used to critique the lack of medical facilities, poor healthcare, infrastructure and illustrate people's suffering. Most of these films only present the problem without offering any solutions or follow-up to the crisis. While these issues cannot be marginalised, *Virus* shows how to deal with adversity using public knowledge and the workforce. It also depicts the positive role played by the local media in preventing panic and effectively disseminating information. Cinema is a documentation of our times and the knowledge that this film has archived will be available to a large populace for future action if needed. Furthermore, it makes no attempt to glorify the powers that govern the state or peddle any ideology that, for example, the filmmaker might favour. It is a lesson in objective storytelling.

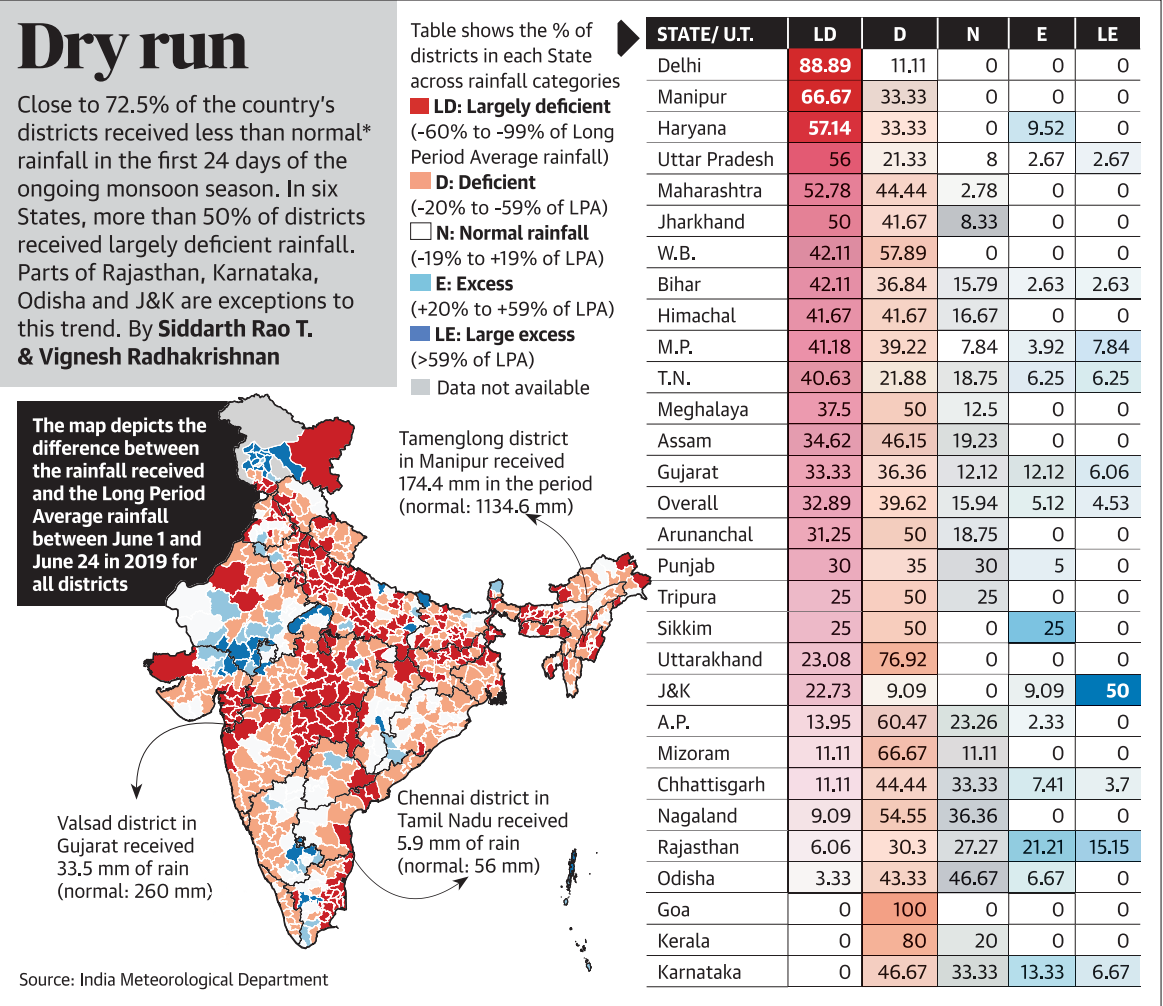
Besides, the film involves several key members of the Women in Cinema Collective, which has attracted much consternation since its formation in a heavily male-dominated industry. I am hopeful that the film will further bolster their position as purveyors of content-driven and socially relevant cinema. *Virus* places women at the core of its narrative. The film is unimaginable without them because women were the key players under the leadership of the remarkable K. K. Shailaja, Kerala's Minister of Health and Social Welfare.

But how does contemporary Malayalam cinema manage to do this? Here is an example of a rare mainstream film practice that merges excellent storytelling with riveting performances. The distinctions between art-house cinema and commercial cinema dissipate. The film shows patients suffering, with concerned families by their side. It eschews melodrama completely without foregoing its humanism. At the end of the day, cinema ought to help us recognise characters as fellow human beings with their vulnerabilities. *Virus* does that. It is the triumph of good storytelling coupled with the right intent.

The writer teaches literary and cultural studies at Flame University, Pune



DATA POINT



FROM The ~~India~~ Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 27, 1969

New types of sounding rocket

Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, told Pressmen here (Trivandrum) to-day [June 26] that a three-stage Centaure rocket, capable of reaching an altitude of 350 kms, would be fabricated in India by the end of this year. This completely Indian-made rocket would be an "improved version" of the two-stage French Centaure rocket, which could carry payloads only to heights of about 160 km. The two-stage Centaure rocket is already being made in India under an agreement with Sud-Aviation, France, the entire rocket hardware being manufactured at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay. The rocket has been used at the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station for measurement of electron density in the upper atmosphere.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 27, 1919.

Death Sentences in the Punjab.

(From an Editorial)

We cannot but profoundly regret the decision of the authorities not to postpone the carrying out of the death sentence passed on several accused tried by Martial Law tribunals in the Punjab pending appeal to the Privy Council. The prisoners should be given every opportunity of establishing their innocence and it passes our understanding why they should be denied this elementary right. There are also other very weighty considerations why, in bare justice to the condemned men, this request, preferred by various public bodies and distinguished Indians, should be acceded to without any hesitation or delay. The proclamation of Martial Law, the measures of repression taken under that authority and the sentences passed against the alleged offenders have caused as great, if not greater, horror as the circumstances which, in view of the authorities, necessitated such drastic action.

CONCEPTUAL
Motivated tactician

PSYCHOLOGY

This refers to an individual who alternates between sloppy thinking and more careful analytical thinking depending on his level of motivation. The idea of the motivated tactician has been used as a model in social psychology to better understand common social behaviour. In some cases, it might make sense for an individual to use cognitive short-cuts to arrive at important decisions. For instance, individuals may often employ stereotypes as a tool to help them economise time and effort while dealing with a collective of strangers. In other cases, like when dealing with an individual member within a collective, proper analytical thinking may be employed.

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