



@ieExplained
#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

Telling Numbers

Sexual harassment at work: a few states see bulk of cases

CASES OF sexual harassment at the workplace have gone up year by year since the the Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 came into effect. Under the category “insult to the modesty of women at office premises”, 57, 119, and 142 cases were registered in 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively. Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani said last week in reply to a question in Lok Sabha. These figures are from the National Crime Records Bureau, and 2016 is the latest year for which data are available.

State by state, the data showed huge variations. Of the 142 cases in 2016, Bihar alone accounted for more than half, with 73 cases. This was after no cases had been filed in that state in the previous two years. In a number of states, no case has been filed in any of the three years.

In 2015, a large proportion of the 119 cases was registered in just three states — Delhi (36), Telangana (32) and Maharashtra (27), whose respec-

tive counts dropped to 9, 8 and 11 in 2016. Delhi and Maharashtra had the highest counts in 2014, with 11 and 10 cases respectively.

STATES WITH 10 OR MORE CASES IN 3 YEARS

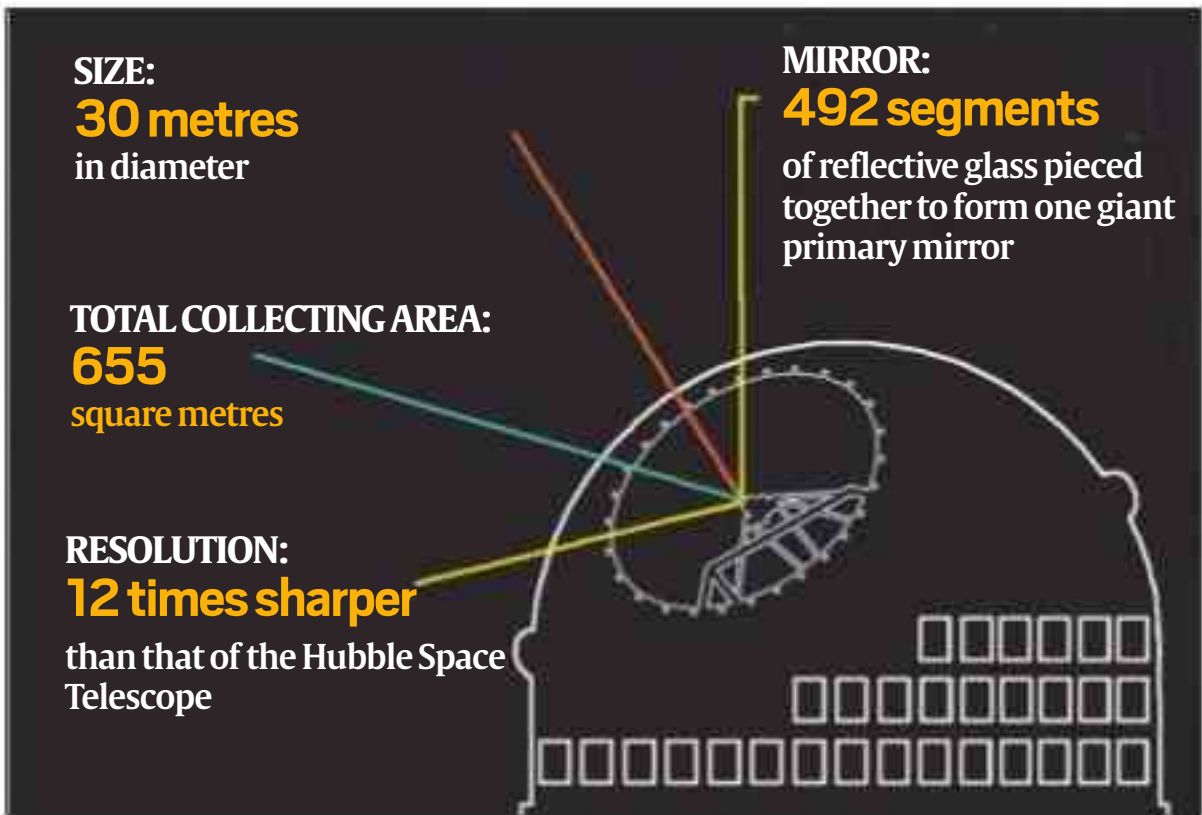
State	2014	2015	2016
Bihar	0	0	73
Delhi	11	36	9
Maharashtra	10	27	11
Telangana	5	32	8
Karnataka	3	5	9
Andhra	3	3	7
Kerala	6	0	8
West Bengal	4	6	0

ZERO CASES IN 3 YEARS:

Arunachal, J&K, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand, A&N Islands, D&N Haveli, Daman & Diu, Puducherry

Source: NCRB data via Ministry of WCD

This Word Means



Source: Thirty Meter Telescope International Observatory

THIRTY METRE TELESCOPE

Its construction is facing protests. Why is it special?

LAST WEEK, Hawaii saw protests against plans to start construction of a giant telescope atop Mauna Kea, the US state's highest mountain at 14,000 feet. Already the site of a number of observatories and 13 large telescopes, Mauna Kea is considered sacred by native Hawaiians who believe that such constructions defile the mountain. After a Supreme Court order recently cleared construction of the newest one, called the “Thirty Metre Telescope”, locals blocked access to the roads last week, leading to several arrests.

The telescope is being built by an international collaboration of government organisations and educational institutions, at a cost of \$1.4 billion. “Thirty Metre” refers to the 30-metre diameter of the mirror, with 492 segments of glass pieced together, which makes it three times as wide as the world's largest existing visible-light telescope. The larger the mirror, the more light a telescope can collect, which means, in turn, that it can

“see” farther, fainter objects. The Associated Press quoted Christophe Dumas, head of operations for the Thirty Metre Telescope, as saying that it would be more than 200 times more sensitive than current telescopes, and would be able to resolve objects 12 times better than the Hubble Space Telescope.

One of its key uses will be the study of exoplanets, many of which have been detected in the last few years, and whether their atmospheres contain water vapour or methane — the signatures of possible life. “For the first time in history we will be capable of detecting extraterrestrial life,” Dumas told The AP. The study of black holes is another objective. While these have been observed in detail within the Milky Way, the next galaxy is 100 times farther away; the Thirty Metre Telescope will help bring them closer.

If the Thirty Metre Telescope cannot be built on Mauna Kea, Spain's Canary Islands is a backup site.

SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

ON FRIDAY, the government introduced in Lok Sabha the Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019, which proposes to give the Centre the powers to set the salaries and service conditions of Information Commissioners at central as well as state levels. The government's move triggered protests from the Opposition.

What has changed?

The Bill amends Sections 13 and 16 of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005. Section 13 of the original Act sets the term of the central Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners at five years (or until the age of 65, whichever is earlier). The amendment proposes that the appointment will be “for such term as may be prescribed by the Central Government”. Again, Section 13 states that salaries, allowances and other terms of service of “the Chief Information Commissioner shall be the same as that of the Chief Election Commissioner”, and those of an Information Commissioner “shall be the same as that of an Election Commissioner”. The amendment proposes that the salaries, allowances and other terms of service of the Chief Information Commissioner and the Information Commissioners “shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government”.

Section 16 of the original Act deals with state-level Chief Information Commissioners and Information Commissioners. It sets the term for state-level CICs and ICs at five years (or 65 years of age, whichever is earlier). The amendment proposes that these appointments should be for “such term as may be prescribed by the Central Government”. And while the original Act prescribes salaries, allowances and other terms of service of the state Chief Information Commissioner as “the same as that of an Election Commissioner”, and the salaries and other terms of service of the State Information Commissioners as “the same as that of the Chief Secretary to the State Government”, the amendment proposes that these “shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government”.

Why are Opposition parties protesting?

The original Act had quantified the tenures, and defined the salaries in terms of existing benchmarks. The amendments are being viewed as implying that, in effect, the terms of appointment, salaries and tenures of the Chief Information Commissioners and Information

SADAF MODAK
MUMBAI, JULY 21

IN 2016, a 17-year-old was booked for the murder of his three-year-old neighbour in Mumbai. The Mumbai city Juvenile Justice Board as well as a children's court directed that he be tried as an adult under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015. Last week, the Bombay High Court set aside these orders and directed that the accused be tried as a minor, saying the Act is reformative and not retributive.

When is a child tried as an adult?

The Juvenile Justice Act of 2000 was amended in 2015 with a provision allowing for Children in Conflict with Law (CCL) to be tried as adults under certain circumstances. The Act defines a child as someone who is under age 18. For a CCL, age on the date of the offence is the basis for determining whether he or she was a child or an adult.

The amended Act distinguishes children in the age group 16-18 as a category which can be tried as adults if they are alleged to have committed a heinous offence — one that attracts a minimum punishment of

seven years. The Act does not, however, make it mandatory for all children in this age group to be tried as adults.



Minister of State in the PMO Jitendra Singh in Lok Sabha on Friday, when he introduced the RTI (Amendment) Bill, 2019. PTI/TV Grab

THEN AND NOW

TERM

2005 ACT: Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Information Commissioners (ICs) at central and state levels will serve for five years.

2019 BILL: Central government will notify the term of office.

SALARY

2005 ACT: At central level, salary of CIC and ICs equivalent to salary of Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners, respectively. At state level, equivalent to salary of Election Commissioners and Chief Secretary, respectively.

2019 BILL: Salaries, allowances, and other terms and conditions of service of central and state CIC and ICs will be determined by the central

government.

DEDUCTIONS

2005 ACT: At the time of appointment, if CIC and ICs (at central and state levels) are receiving pension or any other retirement benefits for previous government service, their salaries will be reduced by an amount equal to that pension. Previous government service includes service under: (i) the central government, (ii) state government, (iii) corporation established under a central or state law, and (iv) company owned or controlled by the central or state government.

2019 BILL: The Bill removes these provisions.

Source: PRS Legislative Research

Commissioners can be decided on a case-to-case basis by the government. The Opposition has argued that this will take away the independence of the RTI authorities. Congress Leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said the Bill is a “threat to the independence” of

the Central Information Commissioner, while Shashi Tharoor called it an “RTI elimination Bill” that removes the organisation's independence. Members of the Trinamool Congress, DMK and AIMIM, too, protested. The government had tried to introduce the amendments

When a juvenile is tried as an adult, when not

statutory criteria must be fulfilled.”

As per Section 15 of the JJ Act, there are three criteria that the Juvenile Justice Board in the concerned district should consider while conducting a preliminary assessment to determine whether the child should be tried as an adult or under the juvenile justice system, which prescribes a maximum term of three years in a special home. The criteria are whether the child has the mental and physical capacity to commit such an offence; whether the child has the ability to understand its consequences; and the circumstances in which the offence was committed. If the Board finds that the child can be tried as an adult, the case is transferred to a designated children's court, which again decides whether the Board's decision is correct.

How do these criteria relate to this case?

Both the Juvenile Justice Board and the children's court had relied on the probation officer's social investigation report and a government hospital's mental health report. The High Court said that neither report brought out “any exceptional circumstances” to compel the juvenile to face trial as an adult. The probation officer's report, submitted in 2018, had stated the child or his family did not have

a criminal record, and called the juvenile “highly manipulative” while also noting that he had “confessed” that the victim was killed “accidentally”. It also noted that the juvenile was counselled on focusing on his studies, and that he had taken and passed his exams while lodged in the observation home. The mental health report said the juvenile had “no psychiatric complaints at present”, was “normal”, and “suffers from no mental incapacity” to commit the offence.

The court said that while the Board had relied on these two reports, it had undertaken no independent assessment. It said that if the Board's criteria of evaluation were followed, “then every case becomes an open-and-shut case”. It said that only because the statute permits a child of 16 years and above to stand trial as an adult in case of heinous offence, it did not mean that all those children should be subjected to adult punishment.

One of the court's key observations was that “essentially, the trial in the regular court is offence-oriented; in the juvenile court, it is offender-oriented. In other words, in the children's court, societal safety and the child's future are balanced. For an adult offender, prison is the default opinion; for a juvenile it is the last resort”.

The Lion King: why legacy endures, what is different in reimaged version

ANVITA SINGH
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

WALT DISNEY STUDIOS has just released a computer-generated imagery (CGI) version of *The Lion King*, re-imagined from its classic animated film. Critics have been mixed in their reviews but the film has found the audience Disney would have expected, with the story of Mufasa and Simba already familiar to viewers since 1994. What is it about the original that makes it so endearing to viewers, and what is different in the new version?

The story: universal appeal

Set in Africa, *The Lion King* is about the cub Simba and his wise father, the King Mufasa, who is killed in a plot by his brother Scar. Blaming himself for his father's death, Simba

runs away, returns grown up and defeats his evil uncle Scar in battle — a narrative unmistakably influenced by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and adapted earlier in Osamu Tezuka's 1960 anime series, *Kimba the White Lion*.

The triumph of good over evil has traditionally worked with all forms of popular culture, and Disney has thrived on it. In fact, some critics of the time felt the plot was too deep for younger viewers. It found a lasting child audience, nevertheless, because it told its story through animals.

If one discounts the Shakespearean influence, *The Lion King* (1994) is based on an original script. This makes it stand apart from most of Disney's best known classics, from *Snow White* and *The Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Bambi* (1942) to *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), all of which were adaptations of fairy tales or contemporary children's stories. As it turned

out, *The Lion King* (1994) proved so popular that the film itself inspired further adaptations, including a Broadway musical.

The effort and the reward

The team behind the 1994 version, including directors Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, reportedly travelled to Kenya's Hell Gate National Park to observe animals in their habitat. Wildlife expert Jim Fowler brought animals into the Disney studio to demonstrate their behaviour, according to press statements of the time. It took Disney animators more than two years to develop the over two-minute stampede scene leading to Mufasa's death, one statement said.

The Lion King became the highest grossing handmade animated feature, with box office collections of over \$986 million. Counting all animated features, it is the



Disney remakes itself.

eighth-highest grosser of all time. Among all films, its collections are the 42nd highest.

The legacy

The 1994 film was followed by two sequels

with a limited release (*The Lion King II: Simba's Pride* and *The Lion King One-and-a-Half*), two television spin-offs (*The Lion Guard: Return of the Roar* and *The Lion King's Timon and Pumbaa*) and three shorts (*Find Out Why, Timon and Pumbaa's Wild About Safety* and *It's UnBungali-able*). *Find Out Why* was an educational series that answered science questions for children; *Wild About Safety* taught children about safety in various circumstances; *It's UnBungali-able* was a game show.

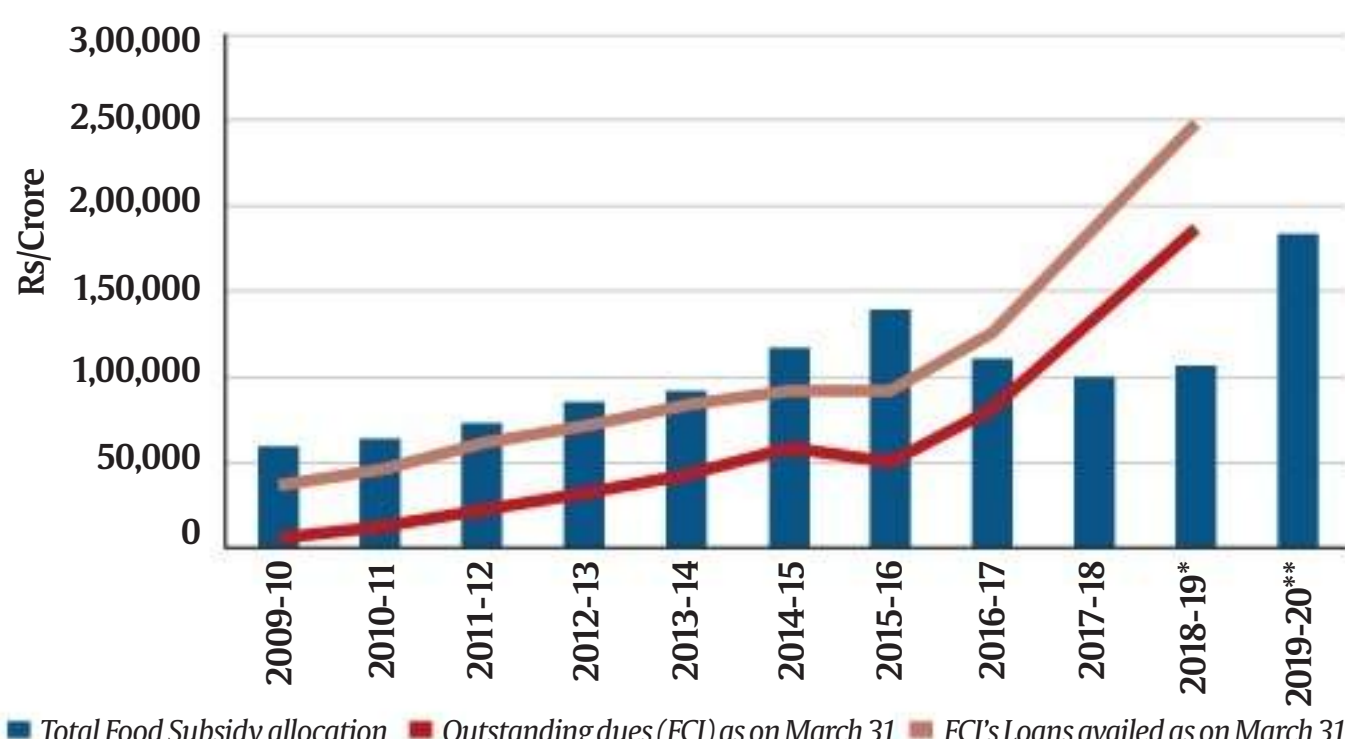
The Broadway musical, which released in 1997, had music by Elton John with lyrics by Tim Rice. The musical made some revisions to the story, and is still running in theatres — it is now the third longest-running Broadway musical.

Two video games are based on the film — *The Lion King* released in 1994 itself, followed by *The Lion King: Simba's Mighty*



The IDEAS PAGE

FOOD SUBSIDY, OUTSTANDING DUES AND LOANS OF FCI (₹ CRORE)

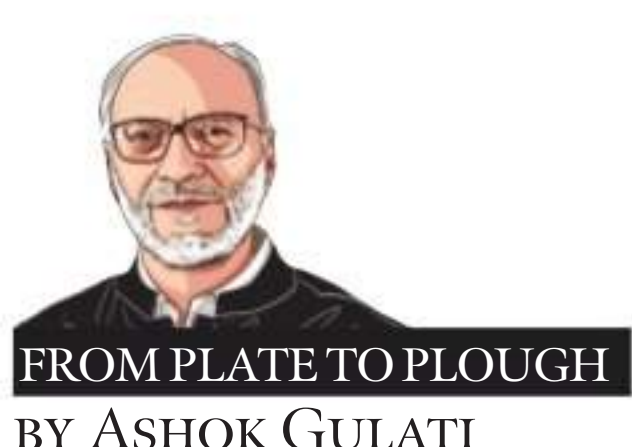


*unaudited; **budget estimates; Source: Budget documents, department of food & FCI

Suvajit Dey

A win-win deal

Replacing subsidies with direct cash transfers to farmers' accounts will empower them as well as consumers



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI

IN HER BUDGET speech, the Union finance minister (FM) said: “At the centre of everything that we do, we keep *gaon, garib aur kisan* in mind.” Here then is a small mantra for her to transform the lives of the kisan and the poor in rural areas. Just streamline the food and fertiliser subsidies by converting them to direct cash transfers to identified beneficiaries. This can be done through the JAM trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile). Such a measure would not only empower the poor and farmers but also usher in a policy shift that can save the exchequer least Rs 50,000 crore every year. The government can invest this in agri-R&D and better water management, in measures to ensure the country’s food security for the next 25 years and to augment farmers’ incomes.

Let us first talk about the food subsidy. The food subsidy allocation in the budget is Rs 1,84,220 crore — let us say Rs 1.84 lakh crore. How many are aware that the pending dues of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) stand at Rs 1.86 lakh crore? Year after year, there is under-provisioning of the food subsidy in the budget and the FCI is being asked to borrow from the banks so that the fiscal deficit can be shown under control. The FCI’s loans from the banks have now crossed Rs 2.48 lakh crore (see figure).

Two things stand out. One, the under-provisioning of the food subsidy — including overdues — in the budget. There is more under the carpet (Rs 1.86 lakh crore) than in the budget (Rs 1.84 lakh crore). Two, the real deficit in the budget is more than what is claimed.

But here I am more concerned about the efficiency, equity and sustainability of the food subsidy regime under the National Food

Security Act (NFSA) — a legacy of UPA-2. Does the FM really think that 67 per cent of the population covered under the NFSA cannot afford basic food? There is more than 90 per cent subsidy on rice and wheat under the PDS — the economic cost of rice hovers around Rs 35 per kg and that of wheat is about Rs 25 per kg, while rice is being sold via the PDS at Rs 3 per kg and wheat at Rs 2 per kg.

Interestingly, in rural areas in a majority of states, rice (paddy) is sold at less than the minimum supporting price (MSP). The landless labourers and small and marginal farmers, most of whom are covered under PDS, produce these staples. The government first buys paddy and wheat from rural areas and, after adding almost 50 per cent cost for procurement, stocking and distribution on top of the MSP price, sells the back most of this grain to people in rural areas. The government can achieve its ends in a much more cost-effective way if it transfers an equivalent amount of food subsidy in the form of cash to the beneficiary’s accounts. The beneficiary will have the freedom to buy anything — rice, wheat, coarse cereals, pulses or even milk and eggs, which are more nutritious. Diversified diets will signal the need for diversification in farms. The government can keep some stocks for strategic purposes but gradually reduce procurement and shrink the size and operations of FCI, especially in areas where the water table is depleting fast — the northwest of the country, for example

Further, the government has to think whether the coverage under PDS should be 67 per cent of the population or if it should be brought down to, say, 40 or even 30 per cent. Also, the NFSA allows the government to hike issue prices. Why should the price of rice be kept at Rs 3 per kg and that of wheat at Rs 2 per kg? This leads to massive diversion of PDS supplies to the open market. The Shanta Kumar Panel had estimated the leakages in PDS at 46 per cent.

The Modi government has introduced PoS machines and weeded out some fake ration cards. But leakages continue — rough estimates put it at 30-40 per cent. Fair price shop (FPS)

The Modi government has introduced PoS machines and weeded out some fake ration cards. But leakages continue — rough estimates put it at 30-40 per cent. Fair price shop (FPS) owners are much smarter than the government. Leakages can be reduced if the issue price is linked to say 50 to 75 per cent of the MSP. If Modi government can do this, not only will that result in massive efficiency and equity but ensure sustainability as well.

owners are much smarter than the government. Leakages can be reduced if the issue price is linked to say 50 to 75 per cent of the MSP. If the Modi government can do this, not only will it result in massive efficiency and equity but ensure sustainability as well.

Now, look at the fertiliser subsidy. The FM has allocated Rs 80,000 crore for fertilisers in the budget. The fertiliser industry says that there is massive under-provisioning. The industry also claims that Rs 38,000 crore of its dues are pending with the government. With this under-provisioning, the subsidy dues will cross Rs 50,000 crore. Which industry can feel upbeat if its dues from the government pile up, year after year?

The problem is that the government does not have the will to revise the urea price, which at roughly \$80 per tonne, is the lowest in the world. The average cost of production of the industry is around \$250 per tonne, import parity hovers around \$300 per tonne and keeps fluctuating, depending on global prices. The government has revived some almost dead plants (for example at Gorakhpur and Ramgundam) that produce urea at more than \$400 per tonne.

It seems there is no economic rationale either in the pricing of urea for the farmers at \$80 per tonne or producing urea, at the margin, at \$400 per tonne. This is leading to large leakages and inefficient use, besides polluting the groundwater table — in fact, the environment at large. Interestingly, crops do not absorb more than 25 per cent of the urea being applied in India. So, basically, we are subsidising the pollution of the environment.

Can the Modi government rationalise these subsidies by converting them into direct cash transfers on a per hectare basis? Our back-of-the-envelope calculations show that the government can save about Rs 50,000 crore every year through such measures. The money can be invested in agri-R&D and water management. That would be the biggest reform in agri-food space

The writer is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIR

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“China’s human rights cannot advance without peace and development. Pence and Pompeo are talking nonsense. The international society is much smarter than what they think.” — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

When Trump meets Imran

The essence of talks: What General Bajwa can deliver on regional peace, what he wants in return



C RAJA MOHAN

TODAY’S TALKS BETWEEN US President Donald Trump and a Pakistani delegation at the White House could mark an important inflexion point in the evolution of India’s north-western frontiers. As Trump seeks to end America’s longest war ever in Afghanistan, Pakistan has an opportunity to reset its troubled relationship with the US, rearrange its regional policy and seek reconciliation with Kabul and Delhi.

Although Pakistan’s leadership has given verbal support to these goals for some time now, Washington, Kabul and Delhi have all been sceptical about Islamabad’s willingness to match words with deeds. In the recent past, Pakistan has certainly teased the US and the South Asian neighbours with some steps — like facilitating talks between Washington and the Taliban and detaining Hafiz Saeed of the LeT.

Briefing the press before the talks, senior US officials said Pakistan will have to “change its policies” towards terrorism and militancy if it wants to rebuild a productive relationship with America. While noting some of the steps that Pakistan has already taken, US officials say these must be made “irreversible and sustainable”.

In Delhi, though, there is entrenched cynicism about the prospects for genuine change in Pakistan. There is also a persistent fear that the US will once again be taken in by Pakistan’s political dissimulation. That is not surprising, given India’s historic experience. Yet, Delhi needs to keep an open mind on the new phase of engagement between the US and Pakistan.

But first to the unusual composition of the Pakistani delegation. When he arrives at the White House, Prime Minister Imran Khan will have the army chief General Qamar Jawed Bajwa and the head of the ISI, Lt General Faiz Hameed in tow. Purists will shake their heads at an Army Chief sitting with the civilian head of government in the negotiations with a major foreign interlocutor. It is not that anyone is in doubt about the army’s control of Pakistan national security policies.

Yet it is interesting that PM Khan is sharing the limelight at the White House with the army chief. He probably had no choice in the matter. For Washington, it is better to have the army and ISI chiefs sitting in the room along with the PM and committing themselves to specific deliverables than having to deal with each of them separately. (One wonders if Bajwa and Hameed will agree to tag along with Imran if and when Pakistan’s premier gets a chance to sit down with Prime Minister Narendra Modi! That might make the India-Pakistan talks more credible. We are now getting ahead of ourselves.)

The Pakistani delegation has a long list of “asks” from Trump: A say in the political future of Afghanistan, American support in getting India to resume talks, restoring bilateral military assistance, facilitating international economic assistance to overcome

the current macro-economic crisis, stop the imposition of additional terror-related sanctions. What does Pakistan offer in return?

On New Year’s Day 2018, Trump tweeted that America had “foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies and deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools.” Since then, Trump has cut off most of the military assistance and ratcheted up the financial pressure on Pakistan. By the end of 2018, Trump was ready to engage the leadership of Pakistan. In December 2018, Trump wrote a letter to Imran Khan asking Pakistan’s help in negotiating a peace settlement in Afghanistan. In January 2019, Trump said he wants to have a “great relationship” with Pakistan, but insisted that Islamabad’s support to US enemies is unacceptable. As it confronted the American wrath, Pakistan agreed to nudge the Taliban into talking to the US. But can Bajwa and Khan really deliver on a peace deal in Afghanistan that satisfies Trump and meets his electoral calendar?

Before getting to peace in Afghanistan, Trump has a much smaller but an important ask from Bajwa — “freedom for Shakil Afridi”. Shakil Afridi was the doctor who helped locate Osama bin Laden through his door-to-door anti-polio campaign. After the US forces raided and killed bin Laden in May 2011, Pakistan locked up Afridi and is said to be treating him rather badly. Afridi’s suffering and the inability to end it rankles Washington.

The second ask from Trump is about the peace talks with the Taliban. Washington wants the Pakistan Army to get the Taliban to accept a permanent ceasefire in Afghanistan. Trump’s Special Envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, however, has struggled even to get the Taliban reduce the level of violence. Nothing makes America look politically diminished in Afghanistan than Washington’s calls for peace amidst the Taliban’s relentless attacks on the innocent civilian population. The US also wants the Taliban to talk with the Afghan government on the transition to new political arrangement. After much effort, the Taliban agreed to let Kabul’s representatives participate, but only in a personal capacity, in an intra-Afghan dialogue earlier this month. The Taliban continues to trash Kabul as a “puppet regime” of Washington.

That brings us to the essence of the negotiations at the White House — about what General Bajwa can deliver on regional peace and what he wants in return. Although Bajwa badly needs to improve ties with Washington, it is by no means clear if the Pakistan army has the will and ability to deliver a seemingly insolent Taliban.

Whatever the outcome of the talks between the US and Pakistan, Delhi will have enough room to respond effectively. In the 20th century, India simply fulminated against the US-Pakistan relationship, opposing its very existence. In the 21st, Delhi has been a lot better at coping with the shifting US-Pak dynamic and occasionally turning it into an advantage for India. Delhi must now be more ambitious and actively shape the triangular relationship with the US and Pakistan.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GET REAL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘After vindication’ (IE, July 19). There has been too much chest thumping after ICJ’s verdict on Kulbhushan Jadhav. The Pakistani establishment, which had no qualms in protecting Osama bin Laden for years, will use Jadhav as a bargaining chip in its dealings with India. New Delhi must be pragmatic. It must not lose sight of the fact that Jadhav was in possession of two Indian passports. We need to put our own house in order if we want to avoid such situations in future.

HN Bhagwat, Chiplun

DATA MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Just window dressing’ (IE, July 19). In order to divert public attention from its failure to deliver in its first term, the NDA government has presented the budget like an election manifesto. Without accurate data, NDA-2.0 cannot estimate the size of the country’s problems.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

FIGURES OF DOUBT

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘Ex-CEA defends his growth numbers, says important to re-visit methodology’ (IE, July 19). Arvind Subramanian has cited macro-economic factors such as steep

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

fall in exports, demonetisation and severe droughts as reasons for weak economic growth. He makes a persuasive argument that the government should revisit its methodology. Revising the methodology will also help remove doubts about growth figures.

Gangadhar Karalay, Nagpur



BY SEEMA CHISHTI

Infrastructure with inclusion

That’s the image Sheila Dikshit built nationally for Delhi

SHEILA JI, MADAM CM, Mrs Dikshit, Madam ji, was so many things to so many people. At least a million lives were personally touched by her.

It was on Delhi’s bus number 10, from Delhi University to Connaught Place, that Vinod Dikshit proposed to Sheila. Sheila was an educated, suave Punjabi girl from Miranda House, then doing her MA and Vinod, her classmate, the only son of Uma Shankar Dikshit, was studying for the UPSC exams and came from one of the most prominent Congress families of the time. It is almost like a plot from a Basu Chatterjee film.

Their marriage was to lay the foundation of a remarkable political figure, whose journey and active political work was coterminous with a long span of the Congress itself.

Delhi’s cosmopolitanism, its sense of being “modern” and “inclusive”, owes much to Sheila Dikshit’s remarkable 15-year tenure as its chief minister. But she was much more than just the office.

Sheila was known in political circles as Bahu ji, during the 1960s and 1970s, when she was being groomed by her father-in-law, Uma Shankar Dikshit, Congress Treasurer and MP, was one of the key poles in the party. He was close to Jawaharlal Nehru, then Indira Gandhi

and also to Rajiv Gandhi. But it was 32-year-old Sheila who became a minister in the Rajiv Gandhi government in the Prime Minister’s Office. She won the Kannauj seat in 1984, taking ownership of the Uma Shankar Dikshit legacy in Uttar Pradesh.

Her time as a minister was followed by a period of estrangement with the Congress as Sheila, along with many other stalwarts, left the party when P V Narasimha Rao secured complete control. She and some others returned only when Sonia Gandhi took charge as the Congress president. Her attempts to win a seat from Delhi — East Delhi — resulted in a loss by 45,000 votes. But the Congress president decided to take a gamble on Sheila as the chief minister in 1998, and that is when things were stirred up.

Condemned as an “outsider” by the entrenched Delhi players, no one gave her a hope in hell in the capital, which was long seen as a city of the Jana Sangh. The BJP had held sway over the rest of the Hindi belt for years, but Sheila was able to secure Delhi for the Congress thrice in a row, a dramatically symbolic feat.

It was the popularity of Sheila Dikshit in the capital, Y S Rajasekhara Reddy in Andhra Pradesh, S M Krishna in Karnataka and its suc-

cess in Maharashtra that allowed the Congress to showcase itself as a party that had strong regional leaders. The Congress could project a sense of the city and people that spoke of both infrastructure and inclusion, allowing it to push both terms — “United” and “Progressive” — in the alliance it led. It is in this nationally-significant signalling that the Sheila Dikshit story became much more than the story of just seven MPs from a half-state.

Delhi, in a decade, became the city of dreams, where more migrants arrived, than in Mumbai. Soon, in the second decade of the 21st century, with urban politics punching well above its numerical weight due to the exponential rise of migration, information and smartphones, what Delhi thought today became what the nation aspired to tomorrow.

It is no surprise that the Anna Hazare-driven India Against Corruption movement picked Delhi to set itself up. The city had become the centre of India. In 2013, with numerous agitations gaining traction in Delhi and beyond, the Dikshit magic wore off. Sheila Dikshit described to Karan Thapar how a week-and-a-half before the election, she crossed Arvind Kejriwal while campaigning in South Delhi and got the sense that people were now bored. Now, “badli” or change was

the mood.

She lost her seat but never a person to be pushed back or refuse a challenge, Dikshit agreed to be the CM “face” of the Congress in UP in 2017, something that fell flat once the Congress suddenly tied up with the Samajwadi Party.

Then in 2019, again, Dikshit was brought in to try and revive the Congress story in Delhi. And while she lost the North-East seat, the Congress managed to be number two in a state where its vote share had seen a dramatic fall after the 2013 loss.

But despite the losses, what Sheila stood for carried the day for her in this small but difficult state. What she represented — something for everybody, and a sense of confidence that defeat could not drown — is something, perhaps, her party should draw from as it faces its deepest crisis in a long time.

Sheila describes with some humour in her memoirs how her mother-in-law lodged her in the store-room with pots and pans when she went visiting, soon after their marriage. She always managed to emerge from the storeroom, sparkling and pleasant, and with a quiet resolve. Rest in Peace, Ma’am.

seema.chishti@expressindia.com

12 THE GOVERNANCE PAGE

FROM STATES
REFORMS TRACKER

BIHAR

Govt buildings to absorb pollutants

The Bihar government will allow the cultivation of vegetables and other vegetation on the rooftops of office buildings. The idea behind Project Green Umbrella, which gets underway from July end, is for government buildings to absorb pollutants and improve air quality. The project will be initiated in Patna.

RAJASTHAN

A law to enforce accountability



Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot

In the latest Budget speech, Rajasthan's chief minister has announced that his government will soon legislate the Rajasthan Social Accountability law. The draft Bill is in the public domain. In many ways, the proposed law builds on the Meghalaya Community Participation and Public Services Social Audit Act of 2017 that made the social audit of government schemes a part of government practice. Rajasthan's proposed law is an attempt to enforce accountability of officials across social sector delivery schemes. Under it, an aggrieved individual must get a reply on her complaint (about the non-delivery of any social welfare scheme benefit) within 30 days.

WEST BENGAL

Govt expands Leather Complex to boost jobs

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has announced that the government has given licences to 187 new tanneries to expand the Calcutta Leather Complex at Bantala, which is Asia's largest integrated leather complex. Most of these tanneries are from Uttar Pradesh. The move is expected to generate 5 lakh jobs.

The Vande Bharat Express, India's first semi-high speed train, was flagged off by PM Modi in February. *Express Archive*

PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION

Investment & upgrade: twin tracks of Railway roadmap

Centre looks at inviting private players to own, operate trains on select routes

AVISHEK DASTIDAR

NEW DELHI, JULY 21

THE NARENDRA MODI-LED government has started its second term by laying out the blueprint for a substantial boost in India's infrastructure. A key element of that is the upgrade of Indian Railways. However, during the Budget presentation, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman accepted that the government did not have the fiscal space to make the kind of heavy investments that are required to modernise the Railways. As such, she proposed to use Public-Private Partnerships wherever possible.

In the days since, it is becoming clear that to begin with, the government will be inviting private companies to own and operate trains on select routes. This is one of the big ideas of the government's "100-day plan" for the Railways that has been approved by the Prime Minister's Office. Another significant initiative is to "corporatise" the seven production units that build coaches, engines, and wheels.

A holding company called the Indian Railway Rolling Stock Company (IRRC) will be put in place and it will control and independently manage all these factories and take care of the bottom line. Railway officials expect the proposed holding company, IRRC, to

be one of the biggest rolling stock companies in the world, beating bigwigs such as Bombardier, Siemens, GE, etc. The IRRC has been modelled along the lines of China's CRRC Corporation Limited, which was created by amalgamating around 40 big and small manufacturing units in 2015 into one corporate entity. The CRRC, a publicly-traded company, is currently the largest rolling stock company in the world.

The question is: Will the private sector play ball? Neelkanth Mishra of Credit Suisse believes it will. "In infrastructure, the cost of laying the lines, the signalling systems, and electrification, etc. are the heavy investment part. Running the train is not as expensive a proposition. So if the returns are good, private companies would be willing to come forward," he says. Kuljit Singh, Partner-Infrastructure at Ernst & Young, views the government's decision to open up to private players as an "entry point". "Start with a de-risked business model and keep passing on more and more risks [over time]," says Singh.

The powerful trade unions have raised concerns about the "privatisation" of the Railways, and its impact on their members. But Railway Minister Piyush Goyal has clarified that the government is only thinking of "corporatising" some units, and that "there is no question of privatisation".

THE
BIG
STORY

EXPLAINED

Why
private
investment

MODERNISING RAILWAYS requires an investment of Rs 50 lakh crore between now and 2030. The capital outlays for Railways is just about Rs 1.6 lakh crore per annum, and even completing sanctioned projects would take decades. The government cannot do this all by itself. But what about the Railways' humbling record at attracting private investment? As Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said to *The Indian Express*: "One failure does not mean everybody is going to fail".

'USP of our Clean Air Programme is that it's a city-specific plan'

EARLIER THIS year, India launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) with a tentative national level target of 20%-30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration in 102 Indian cities by 2024. In an interview to ABANTIKA GHOSH of *The Indian Express*, C K MISHRA, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, unpacks the programme.

THE
POLICY
INTERVIEW
C K MISHRA

Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests

Is this an overall target, or does it apply to every individual city?

This really is an overall target... some cities may do much better than this, some may not. We are looking at an overall reduction of pollutants in the ambient air quality by 20-30%. This has been the international norm as well.

How were the cities chosen?

There is a very scientific way in which they have been chosen. We have monitored the last five years' PM2.5 and PM10 levels, and whichever city has consistently shown a level higher than the normal safe level has been chosen in this... And we have chosen the worst 102 with very high levels of pollution.

Who would be in charge of reducing the particle concentrations?

The USP of this programme actually is that we have not given a standard prescription for the entire country. It is a city-specific plan. Each city has its own problems which lead to higher emissions. For example, some cities are suffering from high PM10 levels because of dust, which could come from roads, the construction sector, etc. There are cities like Kanpur where industrial emission is causing a problem. So the programme is that each city will prepare a city-specific plan and address the issue specific and particular to that city.

The implementing agency for waste is the Ministry of Urban Development. Under the Swachh Bharat Mission, they have set targets, allocated monies to the state, and [the] technology is being discussed with states. They are monitoring it also.

Who is "we"? Is it the responsibility of the state government?

We are actually building capacities of the state governments. International organisations and multinational agencies are helping state governments. Each city has been attached to a technical institution like an IIT or IITM, we have identified knowledge partners who will interact with the city to identify their problems and solutions thereof. Based on that, the city will prepare a plan for reduction of emission that will come to the CPCB,

Does municipal solid waste contribute to air pollution too?

Yes, it does. It contributes to both water and air pollution. Much of the municipal solid waste is burnt because many small cities across the country do not have a system of disposal. So people burn the waste. It is directly impacting air quality. Much of it is flowing into water bodies and impacting water quality. You are creating landfills, for example. Landfill is an air pollution source. The idea across

the country is that recycle and convert as much waste as possible, and the minimum waste should go to landfills.

Is there an international experience in waste management that we can learn from?

Scandinavian countries have done 100% (waste recycling). There are many European countries which have done 100%. You will be surprised to know that some of them are importing waste that is treated as wealth there. It is converted into a resource. We must recognise that per capita generation of waste must reduce, [and that] the generation of [the] wrong kind of waste must come down significantly. If we can do these things we would have tackled the problem to a great extent.

Full interview on www.indianexpress.com

Using parking fine to decongest city streets



LAXMAN SINGH

MUMBAI, JULY 21

ILLEGAL AND unauthorised parking of cars and scooters on roads and streets is endemic across Indian cities. The most common refrain of the violators is that there are no, or at least not enough, legal parking space available. On the face of it, this sounds like a reasonable excuse. After all, Mumbai already has the highest density of vehicles in the state. According to a state transport department study, Mumbai's vehicle density is 510 cars per square kilometre. The shortage of parking is a real issue. However, the fact is, as evidenced in Mumbai, even when there are public parking lots, people barely use them; the occupancy percentage never crosses into double digits.

The city's motorists, therefore, needed

FROM JULY 7 IN MUMBAI, FINES FOR PARKING VIOLATIONS

FOR TWO-WHEELERS

Penalty	₹4,300
Towing charges	₹700
Total fine	₹5,000

■ Delay charges are ₹110 per day, and the maximum amount can go up to ₹8,300

FOR THREE-WHEELERS

Penalty	₹6,900
Towing charges	₹1,100
Total fine	₹8,000

■ Delay charges are Rs 140 per day, and the maximum amount can go up to ₹12,200

FOR LIGHT MOTOR VEHICLES

Penalty	₹7,500
Towing charges	₹2,500
Total fine	₹10,000

■ Delay charges are Rs 170 per day, and the maximum amount can go up to ₹15,100

FOR MEDIUM MOTOR VEHICLES

Penalty	₹7,700
Towing charges	₹3,300
Total fine	₹11,000

■ Delay charges are Rs 220 per day, and the maximum amount can go up to ₹17,600

either an incentive to use the parking lots or a disincentive to stop parking on the road. On July 7, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) unleashed its solution: a new set of rules regulating parking, and a stiff menu of penalties ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 15,000 for those violating the rules. The BMC even included hefty towing charges in

the penalties and announced that if a vehicle impounded for wrongful parking is not claimed within a month, the BMC would auction it. The BMC's new rules essentially stipulate that if a motorist parks his vehicle on the road when there is a public parking lot available within 500 metres, they would attract these fines.

The initial results are promising. In less than two weeks of its implementation, the occupancy in the 26 parking lots, which dot the area in which the BMC has implemented these rules, has gone up by 24 per cent. In the process, the BMC has earned Rs 31.56 lakh in revenues.

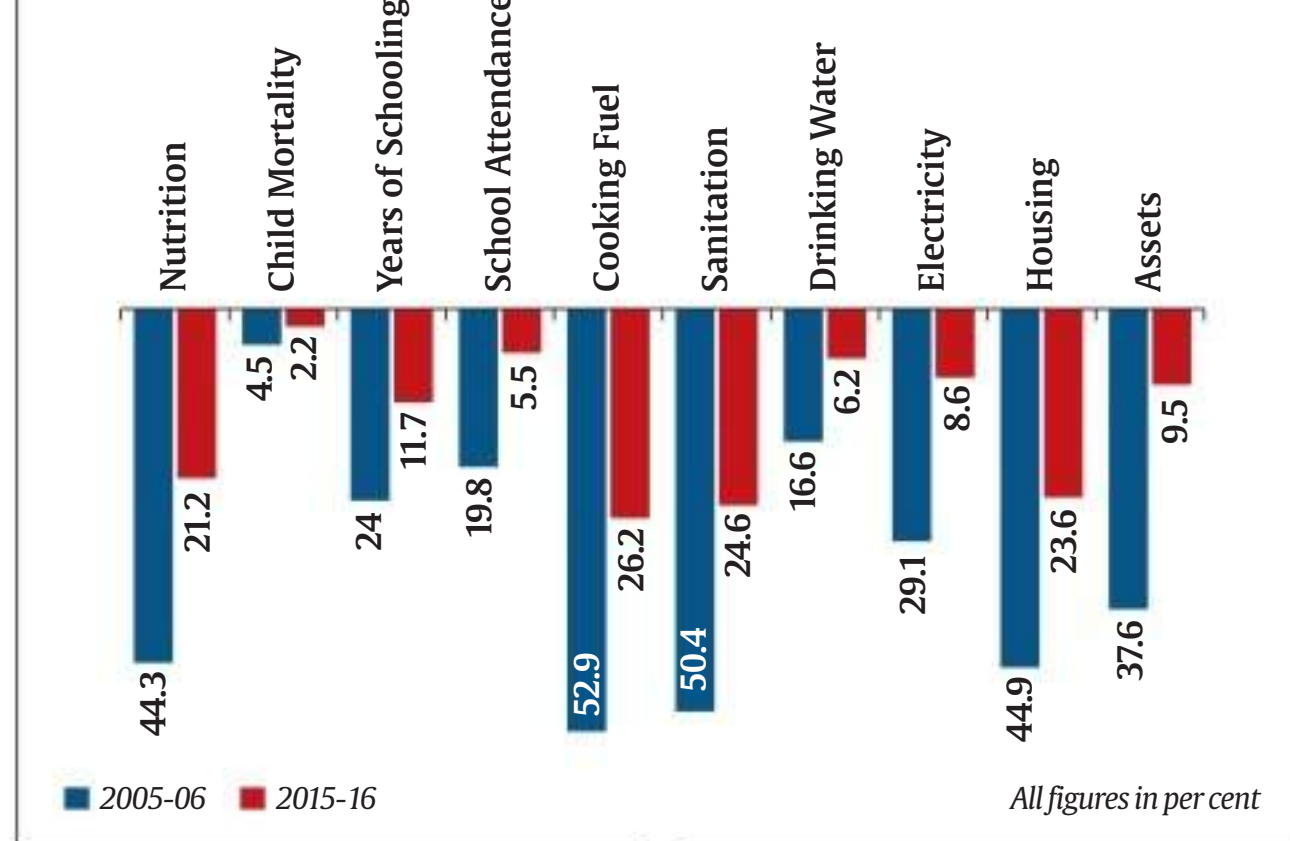
While higher revenues are welcome, the new rules are more about altering behaviour than raising revenues, reducing congestion, and making space for vehicles providing emergency services such as ambulances. A statement from Municipal Commissioner Praveen Pardeshi's office said: "Roads are public spaces and not meant for parking." The BMC hopes that a reduction in traffic congestion will make it easier for buses to ply, further incentivising public transport.

Economist Ashok Datar, who closely maps transport-related issues, especially in Mumbai, hailed the municipality's decision. "In many countries, the cost of parking is more than the cost of the car itself, but in India, when people buy a car, they think they can park anywhere." According to his calculation, in a city like Mumbai where land is expensive, the cost of a parking slot is much higher than the average cost of a car. Datar hopes that BMC's new policy makes buyers check whether they have the space to park their car before they buy it.

IN NUMBERS

SUCCESSFUL DECADE: LIFTING INDIANS OUT OF POVERTY

India improves on all 10 parameters in UNDP's deprivation report



WATER CONSERVATION

From trenches, a Telangana district goes about harvesting rainwater

SREENIVAS JANYALA

PEDDAPALLI, JULY 21

RESIDENTS AND officials of Peddapalli district in Telangana had grown accustomed to facing water shortages. Infrequent and diminishing rainfall, as well as a widespread loss of trees resulted in groundwater levels falling drastically, so much so, that even borewells were rendered useless. This was a bleak picture for a district that was otherwise essentially several hills surrounded by farmland. Farmers such as 40-year old Kondaiah of Nagulapalli village, who own four acres on average, could barely farm on half of their land due to water shortage. The reduced water availability was causing an adverse impact on the everyday life of the villagers.

But an innovative experiment begun in 2016 turned things around in Peddapalli. Officials at the District Rural Development

Agency (DRDA) studied the topography of the area and found that even when it rained, most of the water simply ran off the hill slopes. Their solution was as effective as it was simple: dig trenches to slow down the water run-off. The officials identified 259 out of the 299 hillocks in the district where trenches could be dug.

They decided to dig two types of trenches on the hills. First were the "staggered" trenches. These trenches were dug in a zig-zag fashion, starting from the top of the hill. At the base of the hill, a long unbroken trench — known as continuous contour trench — was dug. When the water reached the contour trench at the base, it was directed towards a farm pond.

The groundwater officer of the district, B Shyam Prasad Naik, said that Peddapalli saw a 32 per cent rainfall deficit in 2017-18, which resulted in groundwater tables falling by up to 12 metres in many places barring the area



The trenches are 10 metres long, 3 metres deep, and just over a half metre wide; Each house in the village has a soak pit that facilitates water absorption.



where the trenches had been dug. Similarly, farmers who had farms close to the hillocks said that many dry bore wells have sprung back to life. Water is now available at depths of 100-200 feet instead of the 500-800 feet earlier. Farmers like Kondaiah have been cultivating previously unused land.

There were other positives as well. The soil from trenches was distributed among farmers to layer their farms, and this further improved cultivation. Successful digging of trenches also gave the officials the idea to dig soak pits outside each house in the villages. Almost all households would earlier release water from their kitchens and bathrooms onto roads or into gutters. The digging of trenches and soak pits turned out to be a great way to generate local employment, as the work was funded under

the rural employment guarantee scheme. The total cost so far, including wages and material, has been Rs 30.33 crore. Since 2016-17, the digging of soak pits has generated 5,23,380 man-days, that of staggered trenches has created

14,72,719 man-days, and digging of continuous contour trenches has created 1,02,885 man-days of work.

Until June 30 this year, the length of the trenches dug on the 259 hillocks was 613 km; work on another 163 km of trenches was ongoing. The work on trenches is by no means done and, going by the evidence, Peddapalli has better days ahead.

No surprises then that the district and its officials recently received praise from Param Iyer, Secretary, Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, when he tweeted about their "excellent work".

