



Teachers and quotas

Bill on reservation in central academic cadre provides relief to disadvantaged sections

Legislation to overcome the effects of court verdicts is not always a good idea. However, sometimes an exception ought to be made in the larger public interest. One such law is the Centre's Bill to ensure that reservation for scheduled castes, tribes and other backward classes in appointments to central educational institutions is preserved. The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Bill, 2019, passed by the Lok Sabha, replaces an ordinance promulgated in March. Its main object is to restore the system of treating an institution or a university as a single unit to apply the reservation roster, and thus help fill 7,000 teaching vacancies. It seeks to get around a 2017 judgment of the Allahabad High Court striking down University Grants Commission regulations that treated the institution as the unit for determining the roster, and directing that each department be the relevant unit. In short, reservation should be department-wise, and not institution-wise, the court ruled. The Supreme Court rejected the Centre's appeal against the order. But the narrower basis for applying quotas would mean fewer aspirants from OBC and SC/ST sections would be recruited as assistant professors. In the interest of social justice, it had to restore the system of having a wider pool of posts in which the quotas of 27% for OBC, 15% for SC and 7.5% ST could be effectively applied. From this perspective, the Bill provides welcome relief for aspirants from the disadvantaged sections of society.

It is not that the court was manifestly wrong in applying the roster based on a smaller unit, that is, a department in a university or institution. The High Court noted that having the whole institution as a unit would result in some departments having only reservation beneficiaries and others only those from the open category. But the counterpoint is equally valid. Having the department as the unit would mean smaller faculties would not have any reservation. In the roster system, it needs 14 posts to accommodate SC and ST candidates, as their turn would come only at the seventh and 14th vacancy. There may be no vacancies in many departments for many years, with none from the reserved categories for decades. On the other hand, taking the institution as the unit would give more opportunities for these sections. According to the UGC's annual report for 2017-18, nearly two-thirds of assistant professors in Central universities are from the general category. Their representation would go up further, as the present Bill also applies the 10% quota for the economically weak among those outside the reservation loop. Applying the court's department-wise roster norm would have deepened the sense of deprivation of the backward classes and SC/ST communities. To that extent, the new enactment will serve a vital social purpose.

Trump in North Korea

The U.S. President appears committed to diplomacy in dealing with North Korea

U.S. President Donald Trump made history on Sunday when he stepped on to North Korean soil from the demilitarised zone (DMZ) that separates the two Koreas. He is the only American President to have visited North Korea, the isolated, nuclear-armed dictatorship that is historically seen as an enemy in Washington's policy establishment. The President's surprise announcement, via Twitter, that he was ready to visit the DMZ to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was typical of Mr. Trump, who enjoys conducting off-the-cuff personal diplomacy. North Korea seized the opportunity, and both leaders met at the DMZ, held talks for nearly an hour and decided to resume parleys that have stalled since the two leaders' failed summit in Hanoi. Mr. Trump deserves credit for infusing fresh life into the nuclear negotiations. His intervention came at a time when North Koreans were growing impatient over lack of progress in the matter of ties. In recent weeks, they had personally attacked U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and targeted the South Korean leadership over the sanctions and the logjam in talks. Now that both Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim have met and decided to set up teams on both sides to hold negotiations, the impasse is broken. But key challenges remain.

Mr. Trump appears to be committed to diplomacy in addressing the North Korean issue. Pyongyang, though often cryptic in its responses, has also shown interest in staying engaged with the U.S. Mr. Kim has, in principle, agreed to denuclearise the peninsula, which is the goal of the U.S. as well. But the critical question is when and how it should be done. The Hanoi summit collapsed chiefly as the U.S. considered the compromise that North Korea offered insufficient to warrant reciprocity with sanctions relief. North Korea had agreed to close down the Yongbyon facility, its main nuclear fuel production site, but the U.S. rejected the offer, saying the North's nuclear capability is now much more diversified and goes beyond that one plant. When they resume talks, the question of how much the North should compromise to get at least a partial reprieve from sanctions will be back. If the U.S. sticks to its maximalist demands such as complete denuclearisation, the talks are likely to run into trouble again. For Pyongyang, nuclear weapons are its insurance against potential external aggression, and it would accede to total denuclearisation only if its security concerns are ensured and sanctions are fully withdrawn. Both sides should learn from their failure in Hanoi. They can take small steps towards the final goal. The U.S. could demand a total freeze on North Korea's nuclear activities, besides shutting down Yongbyon, which the North has already agreed to, in return for providing partial reprieve from sanctions. Constructive and reciprocal confidence-building measures would mean that Mr. Trump's personal diplomatic outreach and the momentum it created won't be in vain.

Reclaiming the space of non-violence

Civil society must reinvent Gandhi as a political philosopher in the struggle against violence that has crushed solidarities



NEERA CHANDHOKE

The Bharatiya Janata Party government took over barely a month ago, and already a spate of attacks on the minority community, particularly the horrific incident in Jharkhand, have further scarred the body politic. Citizens who have some notion of what we owe other people merely because they are human, have protested in words, verse, and deed. I am not positing a causal relationship between this government and rising incidents of crime against minorities: merely pointing out a striking coincidence.

A handful of criminals hold the minorities to ransom. They hold our society to ransom. The poet Gulzar had written: '*Phir giri garden, sar katne lage/Log bat te hi, khuda batne lagey/Nam jo poochey koi...dar lagta hai/Ab kise poojhe koi... dar lagta hai/Kitni baar sooli par mujhe tangaa hai chand logon ne*'. Once again necks have fallen/once again heads are hacked off/People have been divided/now Gods are also divided/If someone asks my name I am petrified/Who shall I now worship? I am frightened/How many times will a handful of people string me up on a stake?

There was a time when beef politics was used as an excuse to target and murder. The ban on beef was satirised by the poet Saghar Khayami thus: '*Nafraon ki jung mein dekho to kya-kya hogaya/Sabziyan Hindu hain, bakra musalman ho gaya*'. Just see what has hap-

pened in this war of hate, vegetables have become Hindu and the goat is now Muslim. Today these vicious hoodlums do not need an excuse. They lynch, injure and murder at will.

Time for contemplation

It is time to reflect on what these everyday incidents of violence do to us. It is time to reclaim the space of non-violence that has been under relentless attack by murderers who take the name of lord Ram to kill, photograph and celebrate killings. It is time to ask this: What exactly does violence do to a society? Why is violence bad politics?

When the 'finger of violence' writes the alphabet of power in blood on peoples' bodies, the script is ineffaceable; the imprint it leaves on the body politic is indelible. Violence leaves stigmata much like the murder of Duncan left blood on Lady Macbeth's hands: 'Will these hands ne'er be clean?' The power of violence over human beings cannot be underrated. It is not a weapon that we pick up and discard at will. It is a 'quagmire that relentlessly sucks people into its murky depths. From here there is no escape. When violence holds individuals and groups in thrall, moral disintegration follows'. We, the people of India become helpless spectators of violent acts committed on our fellow citizens.

We are not the cowards that surround a vulnerable human being, bully and lynch him to death. Violence is the spectacle, we are the consumers of these nauseating acts even if we do not want to. These acts belong to the world of Marquis de Sade; the sexual impulse is indisputably connected to violence. Today these acts have become our world. And we have



become as defenceless as the victim.

Recreating Satyagraha

Some of us protest, write petitions, assemble, record our disgust, abhorrence, and pain. Does the government listen? It is time that we in civil society stand up and recreate Gandhi's notion of Satyagraha. Satyagraha differs from methods of violent action, because it emphasises self-suffering. The eyes of our people might be opened, as Gandhi suggested, by the suffering of the satyagrahi. Gandhi opts for self-suffering rather than make another person suffer, for many reasons. This mode of politics impacts the collective consciousness.

As people begin to reflect on and analyse the injustice to which they and their fellow citizens have been subjected to, an injustice that needs to be battled, they also come to think about the methods that should be used to battle these injustices. In the process, they are politicised and motivated to act. And this Gandhi felt was revolutionary because public opinion becomes a vital force, challenges injustice, and challenges the government for its acts of omission.

This course of action demands courage. Distinguishing satyagra-

ha from passive resistance and other forms of civil disobedience, Gandhi suggested that the philosophy is not a weapon of the weak. It demands tremendous moral strength and fortitude because it commands that we relentlessly battle with injustice with steadfastness, commitment, fearlessness, and willingness to accept punishment.

The philosophy of satyagraha enlightens the mind, but, more importantly, it gives to us a theory of action. In the process, the agent becomes aware of the distinction between what is right and what is wrong, gets sensitised to injustice and the need to fight for justice against the abuse of power. She becomes aware of the virtues of non-violence. She makes the transition from an audience that consumes violence to an agent of change. It is only then that the Indian people will come into their own, and we will recreate the freedom struggle as a second freedom struggle.

For this we must realise that if we wish to lead a good life, we can only do so in a good society, a society that understands the value of the human being irrespective of her religion. But violence diminishes us in many ways; it reduces our humanity. Violence befuddles and reduces us to inaction. Non-violence illumines our minds. It is only then that we the people of India can transit from being spectators to participants in the second freedom struggle

Gandhi rejects violence for two reasons. Violence stems from the conviction that the perpetrators of violence are right, or that they know the truth. Their truth – whether this truth is what the world is about, or what the position of different individuals in this world should be, or how the world

should be organised, or how relationships in this world should be patterned, or how the world should be perceived – has to be imposed on others. The logical corollary of this premise is that the other appears before them as a lesser human being, or as not fully human.

Search for truth

But we can never know what the truth is. We have to search for the truth, because truth or in Hindi, *sat*, is not an object, it is a state of being. Since none of us know the truth, we have to search together. None of us has the competence to punish other people through violent words, deeds, or even thoughts.

There is a stronger argument that Gandhi makes for negating violence. In the western tradition, we ought to treat others in the same way as we would like to be treated. According to the Hindu doctrine of Advaita or non-dualism, Gandhi argued that those who hurt others assault their own integrity. Others are ourselves in a different form. Let us reflect on this.

Gandhi negated violence, because he saw it as reducing citizens to consumers, because it presupposes a flawed conception of the truth, and because it ultimately harms the perpetrator. Civil society has to reinvent Gandhi, we have to make him relevant not as the Mahatma but as a political philosopher who guides us in our struggle against the senseless violence that has crushed our sentiments and our solidarities. This is the objective of the second freedom struggle.

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Not by wishful thinking

A \$5 trillion Indian economy may be attainable if domestic saving and investment are stepped up



R. NAGARAJ

In early June, at a NITI Aayog meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set a clear and bold economic target – to grow India into a \$5 trillion economy by 2024. It is now for 'Team India', as the meeting was bannered, to translate this target into a plan and policies and programmes. Historically, such goals by popularly elected leaders have voiced the aspiration of voters and energised nations to realise their potential.

How realistic?

What does the targeted \$5 trillion economy mean in familiar economic terms? It is ₹350,00,000 crore of gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices, at ₹70 to a U.S. dollar exchange rate. India's (provisional) GDP in 2018-19 at current prices is ₹190,10,164 crore (or \$2.7 trillion), which means the annual per capita income is ₹1,42,719, or about ₹11,900 per month.

The target implies an output expansion by 84% in five years, or at 13% compound annual growth

rate. Assuming an annual price rise of 4%, in line with the Reserve Bank of India's inflation target, the required growth rate in real, or inflation-adjusted, terms is 9% per year. To get a perspective, India officially grew at 7.1% per year over the last five years, but the annual growth rate never touched 9%. Hence, the target seems ambitious. Is it doable?

How Asia fared

How does the target compare with the Asian experience? China, with a historically unprecedented growth record in its best five years, during 2003-07, grew at 11.7%; South Korea, between 1983 and 1987, grew at 11%. So, Mr. Modi's target is smaller than the best historical records and may seem realistic.

What would it take to grow at 9%? No country grew at such a pace without mobilising domestic saving and raising fixed investment rates.

In the last five years, on average, the domestic saving rate was 30.8% of gross national domestic income (GNDI), and the investment rate (gross capital formation to GDP ratio) was 32.5%. Assuming the underlying technical coefficients remain constant, a 9% annual growth rate calls for 39% of domestic saving rate and 41.2% of investment rate. Correspondingly,



shares of private consumption need to shrink to about 50% of GDP from the current level of 59% of GDP at current prices, assuming foreign capital inflow remains at 1.7% of GDP.

In other words, India will have to turn into an investment-led economy as it happened during the boom last decade (2003-08) before the financial crisis, or like China since the 1980s. Granting that rapid technical progress or changes in output composition could reduce the required incremental capital-output ratio (ICOR), it nevertheless will call for a nearly 8-9 percentage point boost to saving and investment rates.

If, however, the economy has grown at a much slower pace than the officially claimed rate – as the on-going GDP debate suggests and at 4.5% as the former Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian has pegged it – then Mr. Mo-

di's growth target would become even more daunting.

Low domestic saving rate

These stark facts call for a re-thinking in the ruling dispensation that seems to hail India as a consumption-led growth story. There is a belief that greater foreign capital (FDI) inflow would fill in the investment gap, as evident from the NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman's various pronouncements. History shows that no country has succeeded in accelerating its growth rate without raising the domestic saving rate to close to 40% of GDP. Foreign capital can fill in some vital gaps but is not a substitute for domestic resources. Even in China, FDI inflows as a proportion of GDP never exceeded 5-6%, most of which was in fact round-tripped capital through Hong Kong for securing better property rights at home.

Gross FDI inflow into India peaked in 2008-09 at 2.7% of GDP, decelerating thereafter. As it increasingly consists of private equity (PE) with a three- to five-year tenure, mostly acquiring capital assets (contrary to the textbook FDI definition as fixed capital formation for the long term) net FDI rate is lower than the gross inflows, standing at 1.5% of GDP in 2017-18. Hence, there is a need for caution against the exuberance (or

opportunistic bias) that FDI will help to get to the \$5 trillion GDP target.

What is serious is that the economy has slowed down for a while now. The domestic saving rate has declined from 31.4% in 2013-14 to 29.6% in 2016-17; and gross capital formation rate from 33.8% to 30.6% during the same period. The banking sector's ability to boost credit growth is limited by non-performing assets (NPAs) and the governance crisis in the financial sector. Export to GDP ratio has declined rapidly, with a looming global trade war on the horizon, as has been indicated by the Baltic Dry Index. The highly regarded leading indicator of global trade, currently trading at 1354 is forecasted to decline to less than 1,000 index points by the year-end (a decline from its historic high of 11,793 points in May 2008, just before the financial crisis set in).

Given the foregoing, the \$5 trillion target appears daunting. It may yet be doable, provided policymakers begin with a realistic assessment, by willing to step up domestic saving and investment, and not by the wishful thinking of FDI-led growth accelerations in uncertain economic times.

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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.

By a thread

Karnataka is in for a political crisis. The manner in which the Indian National Congress is crumbling in Karnataka also sends an ominous signal to the dwindling strength of the JD(S) coalition in the Legislative Assembly. It appears as if the Congress is obsessed in convincing its president to withdraw his resignation threat rather than being concerned about the political crisis that is slowly enveloping the State, a political development that the Bharatiya Janata Party is sure to take full advantage of (Page 1, "Coalition govt. shaken as two Cong. MLAs quit in Karnataka", July 2). N. VISVESWARAN, Chennai

Free Metro rides

Why should women alone reap the benefits of what seems to be an appeasement tactic by the Delhi government? What about students, senior

citizens and the differently abled? Don't they deserve a free ride too? Government subsidies and discounts on tickets to women might be a better way to go about it (OpEd page, July 2). KSHITIJ MANI TRIPATHI, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Path to progress

The plight of Muslims has no relation with the issues projected in the article, "Taking firm steps to emancipation" (Editorial page, June 27). The issues that Muslims face are the same as that of any marginalised community in India. On the hijab, wearing it cannot be called a negative freedom as it harms none. As far as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board is concerned, not even 1% of the Muslim community is aware of its existence. The needs of Muslims pertain to security, education, employment and health care. NADIRA KHAN, Koraput, Odisha

■ I am in complete agreement with the point that the cause of backwardness is the lack of education and opportunities. No one is forced to wear the hijab; it does not cause any harm to others, nor does it influence others towards any evil action. On the inheritance law, Islam is the only religion which allows a double share for women. It is not Sharia laws that come in the way of progress of Muslims but their lack of academic opportunities. Dr. THAHIRA IQBAL, Chennai

■ The article rightly argues about Muslims being victims of 'vote bank politics', but offers no solution for the present condition of the community. Abandoning the Sharia law or banning the burqa may not provide substantial changes in underlying concerns such as a lack of representation in legislative-executive bodies, rising numbers in incarceration and the high

level of poverty. These are issues that need to be addressed through education and community level programmes. Muslims in southern India are in a better position than those in the north. It is to be noted that in South India, though labelled as being conservative, there is much better progress than the rest of India in terms of literacy, community efforts and political awareness. The community faces many challenges, but banning the burqa is not a solution. AHMAD HUSSAIN, Mangaluru

■ The writer's appeal to the Muslim community to stop conflating regressive practices as an essential component of its faith cannot be brushed aside as unsolicited advice or unwarranted interference in its internal matters. What he leaves unstated, however, holds the key to the Muslim community's emancipation from its sense of victimhood which appears to be more

self-inflicted than the result of state oppression. Muslims don't need opportunistic political patrons who have a vested interest in keeping them backward. The community badly needs responsible interlocutors from within its fold who can responsibly articulate the community's aspirations and empower it to tap into the opportunities provided by a democratic secular society without falling into the entitlement trap. The 'Kerala model' with its focus on the educational advancement of the community, especially of women, is the gateway to the community's socio-economic progress. V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN, Thiruvananthapuram

No thought

There is water scarcity and there is scant common sense too as far as city planning is concerned. This is evident following the short bursts of rain that Chennai has had since June-end. Exponential

amounts of money are being spent on storm water drains, pavement makeovers, concrete road medians and flyovers with absolutely no attention being paid to the possibility of using these facilities to channelise rainwater run-off. The newly laid storm water drains seem to have been executed in great haste. The pits are now filled with tar and bitumen after the roads have been relaid, preventing percolation. Pavements and concrete medians have been laid on all arterial roads without ensuring the harvesting of rainwater. No facility seems to exist to harvest the large volume of rainwater that runs off these ugly concrete structures. Spirited public opinion must be mobilised before the government embarks on projects with blinkered vision. ANAND ARAVAMUDHAN, Chennai

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No home even a decade after the war

The Indian and Sri Lankan governments need to speed up voluntary repatriation of Tamil refugees



T. RAMAKRISHNAN

A recent order of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, directing 65 refugees from Sri Lanka to apply for Indian citizenship, has again brought into sharp focus the need for the two countries to resolve a long-pending problem.

The problem concerns the future of about 95,000 refugees in Tamil Nadu who fled Sri Lanka between 1983 and 2012. Of them, around 60,000 are housed in 107 State government-run camps with substantial financial assistance from the Centre. The rest are called non-camp refugees. They live on their own and are required to report to the local officials at periodical intervals. Tamil Nadu provides accommodation to the largest number of refugees among States.

Sixty-five ‘stateless persons’

The case before the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court concerned 65 “stateless persons” who arrived in Tamil Nadu in 1983-85 following the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983 and were mostly put up at a refugee camp in Tiruchi. Their ancestors were indentured labourers who were taken to Sri Lanka during the British Raj to work in tea plantations. Their main demand was that they should be regarded on a par with repatriates covered under the bilateral agreements of 1964 and 1974. They did not want to be mixed up with the Tamil refugees from the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka.

However, the Union and State governments labelled them as “illegal migrants” as they had entered India without valid documents. The Centre said that the petitioners could not demand citizenship as a right even if they fulfilled the eligibility criteria. The authorities, however, assured the refugees in the early 1990s that they would not be forcibly deported.

While conceding that granting citizenship was within the “exclusive executive domain” of the Centre, the High Court asked the petitioners to apply for Indian citizenship. This



“Not every refugee living in Tamil Nadu is keen on acquiring Indian citizenship”. Sri Lankan refugees return to Sri Lanka from India in 2015. ■AFP

should be considered a moral victory for the petitioners as the judiciary has agreed, in principle, with their contention.

The court ruling has created an opportunity for the Centre to resolve the problem once and for all. And the problem is not just about granting or refusing citizenship; it is also about the absence of a comprehensive migration or refugee policy in India. There are over 2.25 lakh refugees in the country, including around 1.08 lakh Tibetans and 18,000 Rohingya. The absence of a policy along with other factors has contributed to the slow pace at which voluntary repatriation of refugees from Sri Lanka is taking place, though 10 years have lapsed since the end of the civil war in the island nation.

Issues faced by refugees

According to one estimate, 60% of the people in the camp, including 90% of the minors, were born in Tamil Nadu. Even though there are a number of opportunities for young refugees to pursue higher studies, barring medicine, qualified persons have not been able to get regular employment as major companies are reluctant to hire refugees. To seek employment in other countries, these refugees require Sri Lankan pass-

ports, which they can secure only in that country. In view of the perception of this process being laborious, some refugees have attempted to leave Tamil Nadu illegally. Such attempts have invariably failed.

Apart from this, there are some other issues that haunt the young refugees. To which country do they belong: India or Sri Lanka? If the country where they were born, raised, educated and married is not theirs, then where is home? Should a country about which they have only heard from their parents be considered their country of origin even though it may appear to be alien?

The case of the refugees from Sri Lanka is unique vis-a-vis other South Asian countries as they are excluded from the ambit of a Bill tabled in Parliament early this year to amend the Citizenship Act of 1955. Only non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan were covered in the Bill. The Citizenship Amendment Bill lapsed, but the government is firm that it will enact it.

Going back to Sri Lanka

Not every refugee living in Tamil Nadu is keen on acquiring Indian citizenship, however. Many want to go back. Some have decided to go back, even though the Sri Lankan econo-

my, the lack of livelihood opportunities there, and access to quality education are genuine concerns for them. The Easter Sunday blasts this year temporarily halted the incremental repatriation, which resumed last month. The silver lining for the refugees is that the North, especially Jaffna, and hill country areas dominated by the Tamils are relatively safe, which encourages them to go back. As many as 7,818 refugees went back to Sri Lanka in 2011-18, according to a document of the Sri Lankan government. According to an official of the Tamil Nadu government, 367 returned this year.

A study by the Chennai-based Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation reveals that approximately 28,500 refugees, all living in camps, are “stateless persons” and entitled to get Sri Lankan citizenship in the light of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003, and the Citizenship Amendment Rules of 2009.

There are also political compulsions for the refugees to return. The prolonged civil war and its adverse demographic impact on Tamils has had a direct bearing on the numerical strength of elected representatives of Tamils in Sri Lanka’s Parliament (Sri Lanka follows a system of proportional representation). The Tamil National Alliance and Indian government should discuss the refugee problem.

Sri Lanka has said that it favours the return of the refugees. But mere statement of intent is not sufficient. It has to be followed up with action – the authorities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces should ensure that there are no illegal occupants of lands belonging to the refugees.

The governments of the two countries, aided by officials in Tamil Nadu and the Northern and Eastern Provinces, should plan ways of speeding up voluntary repatriation. This should include a package of assistance.

India and Sri Lanka should begin the spadework now so that the stage is set for the repatriation of willing refugees in a big way when Sri Lanka elects its President later this year. The two countries should keep in mind that the refugee issue has to be handled in a humane manner. There should not be any scope for the use of force.

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Healthcare’s primary problem

It is imperative to promote community-based care rather than relying only on hospital services



SOHAM D. BHADURI

The deaths of 154 children in Bihar due to acute encephalitis syndrome (AES) has laid bare the precarious capacity of the State’s healthcare apparatus to handle outbreaks. AES has been linked to two factors: litchi consumption by starving children and a long, ongoing heat wave. As promises of bolstering the health infrastructure are being made, it is important to analyse what could have formed the ideal line of action.

AES is largely preventable both before and just after the onset of the disease, and treatable with high chances of success on availability of medical intervention within 2-4 hours of symptoms. Therefore, the first signs of an outbreak must prompt strong prevention measures. These include, apart from a robust health education drive and replenishing primary health centres (PHCs) with essential supplies, extensive deployment of peripheral health workers (ASHA workers) and ambulance services to facilitate rapid identification and management of suspected cases. Vacant doctor positions in PHCs must be urgently filled through deputation. Furthermore, short-term scaling-up of the Poshan Abhiyaan and the supplementary nutrition programme – which makes available hot, cooked meals for pre-school children at Anganwadis along with take home ration for mothers and distribution of glucose/ORS packets in risk households – are imperative. Nearly every one of these elements lies undermined in Bihar.

Crumbling healthcare in Bihar

In Bihar, one PHC caters to about 1 lakh people rather than the norm of 1 PHC per 30,000 people. Furthermore, it is critical for such a PHC, catering to more than three times the standard population size, to have at least two doctors. However, three-fourths of the nearly 1,900 PHCs in Bihar have just one doctor each. Muzaffarpur has 103 PHCs (about 70 short of the ideal number) with 98 of them falling short of basic requirements outlined by the Health Management Information System. Bihar, one of the most populous States, had a doctor-population ratio of 1:17,685 in 2018, 60% higher than the national average, and with only 2% of the total MBBS seats in the country. There is also a one-fifth shortage of ASHA personnel, and nearly one-third of the sub-health centres have no health workers at all. While the State

reels under the highest load of malnutrition in India, a study found that around 71% and 38% of funds meant for hot, cooked meals and take home ration, respectively, under the supplementary nutrition programme, were pilfered. Meals were served for just more than half the number of prescribed days, and only about half the number of beneficiaries on average actually got them.

This is not all. Even those PHCs with adequate supplies remain underutilised. Perennial subscription to selective healthcare services by PHCs, like family planning and immunisation, have cultivated the perception that PHCs are inept as centres of general healthcare. This leads patients either directly to apex government hospitals situated far away or to unqualified private providers. This results in a patient losing precious time in transit and landing up in a hospital in a critical and often irreversible stage of illness.

Merely strengthening the tertiary care sector will be inefficient and ineffective. Most attention was focused on the poor state of the Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital in Muzaffarpur, with 600 beds, already functioning beyond its full capacity. Hospitals in Muzzafarpur have a bed occupancy of over 300%, three times the full occupancy. In such a case, even a significant addition of hospital beds and ICUs won’t solve the problem. ICUs can only deal with the most advanced cases. A narrow focus on the hospital sector will wastefully increase costs, ignore the majority of cases, increase the number of cases that are in advanced stages, while continuing to overstretch public hospitals.

Revamp primary health infrastructure

The solution lies in building more functional PHCs and sub-health centers; scaling-up the cadres of ASHA workers; strict monitoring of nutrition programmes; and addressing the maldistribution of doctors and medical colleges. The resultant robust primary care system can then be geared towards being more responsive to future outbreaks. We should also bolster our technical capacity to better investigate the causes of such outbreaks and operationalise a concrete long-term strategy.

Policy documents, while emphasising on financial and managerial aspects of public health, fail to address the aberrant developmental paradigm of our health services. Decades of hospital-centric growth of health services have eroded faith in community-based healthcare. In these circumstances, even easily manageable illnesses increase demand for hospital services rather than PHCs. There is need to work on inculcating confidence in community-based care.

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Why policemen kill themselves

Long hours of work, no holidays and large vacancies in the force cause stress and depression

M.P. NATHANAEL

On May 11, 2018, senior Maharashtra IPS officer Himanshu Roy committed suicide in Mumbai. He was suffering from cancer and resultant depression. Another IPS officer, Surendra Kumar Das, committed suicide in Kanpur in September 2018 due to “family issues”. Ajay Kumar of the Delhi Police, who was suffering from depression, chose to end his life in New Delhi on April 4 this year.

Reasons for suicide

These are just a few instances of suicide in the police. Over 940 police personnel committed suicide in the five years till December 2018. This includes personnel of the Central Armed Police Forces. As many as 54 Delhi Police personnel chose to end their lives in the last four years. In Tamil Nadu, 166 policemen took their lives between 2010 and 2014, while in Maharashtra and Kerala, the figure was 161 and 61, respectively. In the last three years, 105 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force, entrusted with the onerous responsibility of looking after the internal security of the whole country, committed suicide.

The reasons for suicide among the police are manifold. Police personnel have no fixed hours of duty. They are considered to be on duty all the time. This deprives them of the luxury of spending time with their families. They are frequently made to work for anywhere up to 16 hours a day. Families are ignored and this leads to familial conflicts. Festivals are given a go-by as they have to be on duty to ensure peace in their areas. K. Annamalai, a 2011 batch IPS officer of the Karnataka cadre, who resigned from service recently, said that though he enjoyed the challenges of being a police officer, he missed many important functions and “the small things in life”.

Denial of leave is another sore point that affects the efficiency of the police and leads to frustration. Though no superior generally likes to deny leave to his or her subordinates, operational requirements most often warrant a full-strength force to deal with varied law and order problems.

While it is easy to apportion blame on the officers for suicide or fratricide, it is the system that stands to be inculcated. Due to large vacancies in the police forces, a huge responsibility rests on the available personnel to maintain law and order.

The health of police personnel has taken a toll because of erratic working hours and lack of physical exercise. Many of them are known to suffer from stress-related diseases such as depression and obesity. Unable to cope, they end their lives.

Filling up vacancies

To arrest the growing incidence of suicides, the government needs to take multi-pronged steps with urgency. An acute shortage of personnel in the police has to be of immediate concern. In 2014, there was a short-



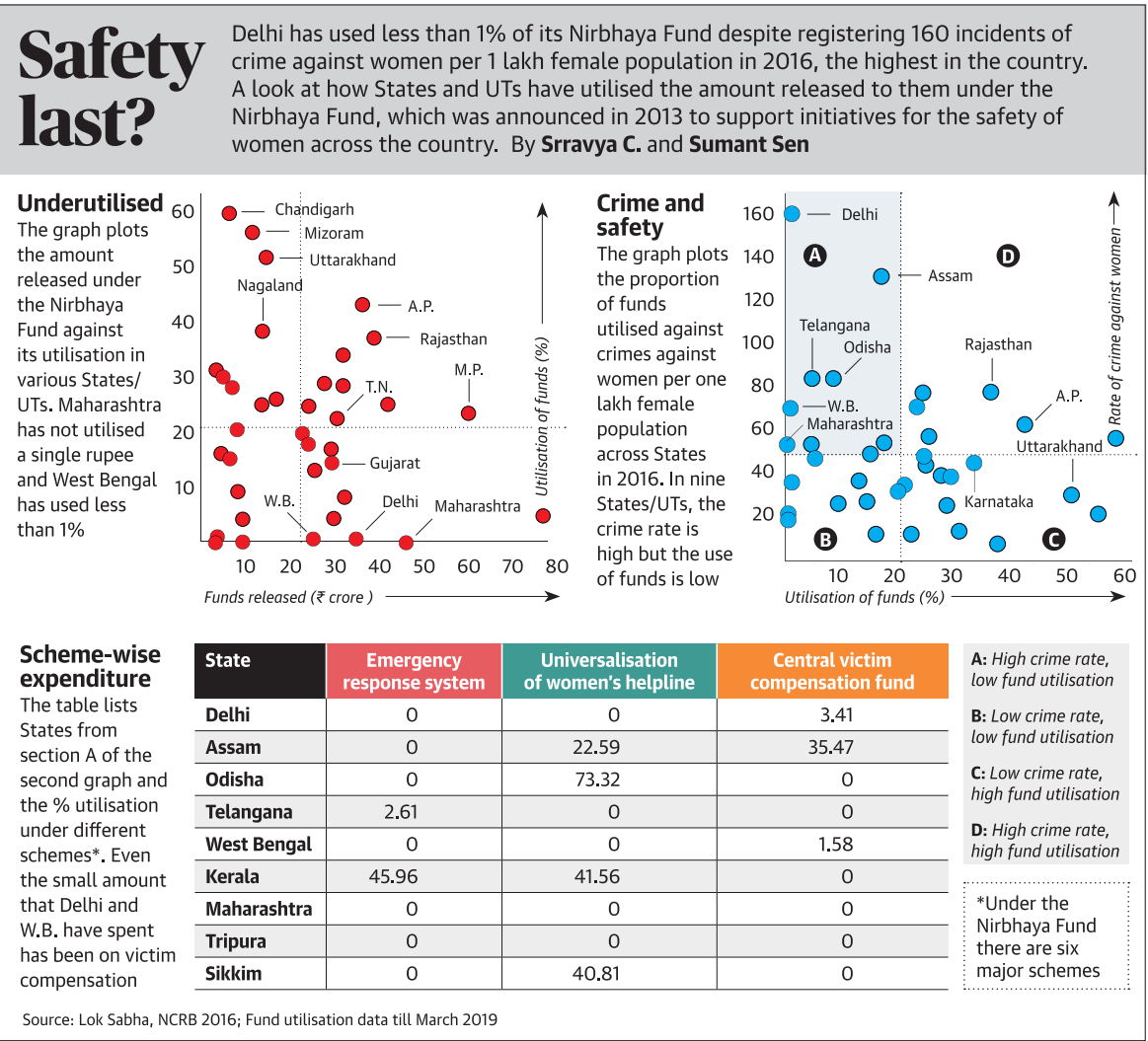
tage of over 5.6 lakh personnel against the sanctioned strength of 22.8 lakh. An in-depth study of the requirement of police personnel over the next decade would be conducive to plan recruitment and training in a phased manner.

Senior officers need to identify personnel with deviant behaviour. The Delhi Police has taken a step forward in this direction to identify personnel with psychological disorders to put them through counselling sessions. Frequent interactions between officers and subordinates will help subordinates air their grievances freely. Solutions can be jointly worked out. Even if the grievances are not immediately redressed, it will be soothing for an officer to share his or her problems with a senior officer. It might even forestall a suicide attempt.

The writer is a retired Inspector General of Police with the CRPF



DATA POINT



FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 3, 1969

Big Four warning to Israel

The Big Four powers warned Israel yesterday (July 1) to refrain from taking measures that might change the status of Jerusalem. The warning came from the delegates of the four countries in the Security Council on the second day of a debate on a Jordanian charge that Israel was planning the total annexation of the Holy City. The U.S. Ambassador, Mr. Charles Yost, said the Israelis had “no right to make changes in laws or in administration other than those which are temporarily necessitated by their security interest.” Britain’s Lord Caradon said that to prejudice the future of Jerusalem would bar the door to peace and make another conflict inevitable. Mr. Alexei Zakarof of the Soviet Union backed Jordan’s proposal that a world-wide arms embargo be applied against Israel while France’s M. Armand Berard said any measures or legislative decisions taken by Israel to modify Jerusalem’s status were invalid. The 15-nation Council session came as the Big Four powers broke off their top-level talks on West Asia pending the outcome of bilateral discussions between Moscow and Washington. The four-way talks are expected to resume next month.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 3, 1919.

Indians in South Africa.

(From an Editorial)

The South African papers received by the mail bring further particulars of the debate in the Union Parliament on the Asiatics (Land and Trading) Bill. It would appear that two most reactionary amendments to an already very unjust and obnoxious Bill have been adopted in Committee by the House. One of these, we note, was passed in spite of the opposition of the South African Government. This amendment was passed by 45 votes to 31, whereby the authorities in the Transvaal, who had the issuing or authorising of trading licences, might, without reason assigned, refuse the application of any Asiatic who was not engaged in trade on the 1st instant. Speaking on the amendment, the Minister of Justice uttered a warning against panic legislation such as the amendment would be. The amendment, he said, would throw on the Government the responsibility for issuing further general dealers’ licences. Moreover, it would work a great hardship on Indians born in that country.