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# **CIVIL SERVICE**

TIMES OF INDIA 23.9.11 CIVIL SERVICE

## **Dalit IAS babu in MP alleges bias, threatens suicide**

Deshdeep Saxena

BHOPAL: A Dalit [IAS officer](#) in Madhya Pradesh alleging denial of promotion even after he was cleared in a graft case has threatened to commit suicide if the state government takes any disciplinary action against him. Ramesh Thete (51), a controversial IAS officer of 1993 batch, was suspended in a bribery case in 2002 and was reinstated in May this year after successfully challenging his suspension in the Supreme Court.

Thete alleged the government was not promoting him even after his reinstatement. He is posted as an under secretary in the [Narmada Valley Development Authority](#) (NVDA). Thete's batch mates have already been promoted as secretary in the state.

Sources said some senior officers warned Thete that he would have to face disciplinary action if he refused to restrain himself. Two days back, Thete sought an appointment with the chief secretary, which was reportedly denied.

"I have been a victim of casteism, corruption and money power," Thete said before sending SMS to reporters. His message said: "Anushasanheenta ka notice diya jata hai to Vallabh Bhavan ke samne meri lash hogi" (my dead body will lie before the state secretariat building if a notice of disciplinary action is given to me). The message also warned of "Dalit anger" in case he was "forced" to take the extreme step.

Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan refused to comment on Thete's threat. "The chief secretary will look into the issue," he said. Chief secretary Avni Vaishya said the government was trying to help the IAS officer. "He is disturbed. So far nothing official has come to me (about his suicide threat). We are trying to help him within the extent of law," said the chief secretary.

Thete was caught by the [Lokayukta police](#) in February 2002 for allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 1 lakh from a principal of Industrial Training Institute, Betul. Thete was serving as director of employment and training.

# **DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

## **FORCE FIELD**

Regular floods and droughts have not yet made West Bengal sufficiently attentive to disaster and devastation. The earthquake brought to the fore another category of disasters, and exposed the need, in places tragically, for the awareness of safety techniques. In this case, however, it would be unfair to blame West Bengal for being caught so completely off guard. Earthquakes of the scale that occurred last Sunday are hardly common, and such an intense tremor had not happened in years. The full force of it was felt in Sikkim, where its epicentre lay, in Nepal and North Bengal, although the tremors spread further south in Bengal, to Orissa and Bihar and elsewhere to parts of North India as well. There was immediate destruction and tragedy, especially in Sikkim, Nepal and parts of North Bengal; in earthquakes, such tragedies are perhaps not always avoidable, especially in mountainous areas. But what can be avoided is the panic, the lives lost and limbs injured in the mad rush to get away, to get out, to flee in any direction that fear prompts. Like a fire drill, there should be an earthquake drill; people must know how to get to safety safely.

For there is a possibility that the big earthquake may not remain such a rare event as it has so far proved to be. Tectonic plates slipping one below the other in the Himalayan region makes the area unstable. The strain built up is released when rocks far below reach their fracture points. With a big quake, energy is released, although not all of it. Repercussions may continue for a time, but it cannot be predicted whether the next big one will come in months or in years. The extra cause for discomfort in the last incident is that the quakes that followed the big one were not really aftershocks; the sources of two lay close to the epicentre but did not originate from it. For scientists and experts, this may suggest continuing instability in the region, where the shifting of the plates at one point is putting great strain in another direction. This

may or may not signal more quakes. But experts have suggested a certain degree of quake-readiness in the vulnerable areas: checking schools and hospitals in case endangered people suddenly need shelter being one example. But the people must be told what to do and where to go in case of emergency; this can be done through public information campaigns. Half the job is done if people keep calm and can help themselves.

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**RBI mid-quarter review: the preoccupation with inflation**

C. R. L. NARASIMHAN

A student walks past an advertisement for bank loans in Mumbai. The RBI last Friday raised the interest rates by 25 basis points in its 12th hike since March last year to combat near double-digit inflation. Oil firms also hiked petrol prices by 5 per cent to stem losses from high crude prices.

A plethora of conflicting trends and signals made the Reserve Bank's mid-quarter review a complex affair. Two important macro economic data — industrial production numbers for July and the Wholesale Price Index-based inflation for August — were scheduled last week, just days ahead of the policy meet.

Both have a substantial influence on the monetary policy formulation. The Index of Industrial Production data for July confirmed the slowdown in economic growth. At 3.3 per cent, it is the slowest rate of growth in almost two years. It was 8.8 per cent in June and a robust 9.9 per cent in July, 2010. Contraction in production of both capital and intermediate goods accounted for a substantial portion of the decline. Growth in manufacturing, which constitutes 75.5 per cent of the IIP, hit a 21-month low at 2.3 per cent in July, down from 10.8 per cent during the same month last year. Growth during April-July this year has averaged just 5.8 per cent.

The weak data prompted calls for a pause in monetary tightening. Industrial growth, especially manufacturing, is highly interest rate sensitive.

At another level, it is also suggested that the GDP growth projections for the current year need to be reworked. For instance, the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister had pegged the industrial growth at 7.1 per cent for this fiscal, which would deliver economic growth of 8.2 per cent. The assumption was that agriculture would grow by 3 per cent and services by 10 per cent.

Of course, the biggest worry is inflation. Headline inflation as measured by the WPI rose to 9.78 per cent for August from 9.22 per cent a month ago. Core inflation (non-food manufactured inflation), which the RBI tracks carefully, rose to 7.8 per cent from 7.5 per cent. The RBI's target range for inflation at the end of this fiscal is 7 per cent.

### **Stark choice**

So on the eve of its policy meet, the choice before the RBI was as stark as it could ever be. Should it raise the policy rates to douse inflation a course of action that seems to suggest itself automatically given the persistence of inflation? Or should it pay heed to several appeals, including from the highest levels of the government and 'pause'?

The RBI had hiked the rates 11 times between March, 2010, and July, 2011. The repo rate on the eve of the policy meet was 8 per cent.

Complicating the decision making is the worsening sovereign debt crisis in Europe and the high unemployment amidst low growth in the U.S. While the Indian financial sector is insulated from the European crisis, exports might see a demand contraction in these developed markets. But by far the biggest impact of the sovereign debt crisis is on global commodity prices, whose phenomenal upsurge in the recent past drove up inflation. Theoretically, the crisis in Europe should soften commodity prices. However, the fall in commodity prices, including those of petroleum, has been arrested. The unconventional methods adopted in the U.S. to stimulate the economy — through ultra soft monetary

policies — are bound to push up global commodity prices, by increasing liquidity.

### **Growth to be sacrificed**

Finally, the argument that the RBI should take into account the deceleration in the economy is valid only up to a point.

In the first quarter of the current year, the economy grew by 7.7 per cent only marginally lower than the 7.8 per cent growth of the previous quarter. That there is a deceleration is not in doubt but there is no danger of a collapse. The RBI itself has on more than one occasion made it clear that a portion of the growth momentum will have to be sacrificed as it pursues an anti-inflationary policy.

On Friday, the RBI hiked the policy repo rate by 0.25 percentage point for the 12th time to 8.25 per cent. The reverse repo rate has consequently been fixed at 7.25 per cent and the marginal standing facility rate at 9.25 per cent.

In a brief crisp policy statement, the RBI has explained the rationale of its action. Global macroeconomic outlook has worsened since the RBI's quarterly review of July 26.

The sovereign debt crisis in Europe has worsened. The U.S. economy is beset by high unemployment and weak growth. India's exports, now on a high growth trajectory, are expected to falter in the face of weak demand from the developed countries. Since domestic demand is also weak, partly due to the monetary action, there could be a case for revising downwards the RBI's growth estimate for the current year. Recently, the rupee has depreciated sharply against the dollar.

The RBI attributes this to increased risk aversion. It remains to be seen as to how far capital inflows will be affected. Food prices have remained persistently high despite a satisfactory monsoon.

No longer can they be treated as a temporary phenomenon. There are structural factors both on the supply and demand side underpinning food inflation.

The RBI expects inflation to moderate towards the end of the year as past monetary actions work their way through the system.

Monetary policy operates with a lag. Hence, a premature withdrawal of monetary tightening will be counter-productive and harden inflation expectations. The mid-quarter policy statement does not give a clue as to when the monetary tightening will begin to be phased out. Evidently the central bank will wait for a reversal in the inflation trajectory. Global developments will, of course, play a part.

## **Some dismal signals**

Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Is the Indian economy becoming ungovernable? The increasing confusion over inflation, the increasing pessimism over the government's ability to ease supply and cost constraints on the economy, should prompt us to ponder this question seriously. Ungovernability is manifest in three different signs. First, the economy becomes increasingly resistant to any conscious goals set by the state. In a general sense, of course, the state cannot set goals for the economy as a whole. But it does make sector-specific interventions, often to enable the economy to function. The state's ability to make these interventions is in serious question.

The protests over the nuclear plants in Tamil Nadu can be seen at two levels. It is certainly about nuclear safety. But it is also part of a wider pattern of resistance to the state, whether it is on issues like mining or land. A few years ago, the state might have got away on these issues by the simple fiat of its power. But now it cannot. Resolving these issues requires structures of negotiation or reservoirs of legitimacy the state does not have. So in sector after sector, where purposeful intervention by the state is required, there is a sense of stasis. India's looming energy crisis, which may turn out to be the single biggest drag on the Indian economy, is entirely a product of our ungovernability.

It could be argued, with some merit, that ungovernability varies across states. Gujarat is clocking breath-taking growth. Bihar and Orissa, admittedly from a low base, have been doing well. But the overall picture is not as rosy as it should be. The ability of the state in three

powerhouse states, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, now hangs in the balance. Bihar has restored basic governance. But its growth is largely due to public expenditure. It is, to put it mildly, by no means clear that the state has the negotiation capacity to create an urban or industrial powerhouse. Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Haryana cannot sustain growth momentum. And they may also face crucial governability challenges. In Gujarat, it is likely to be environment-related issues, in Haryana labour. It would be foolish to assume that the states will have the wherewithal to negotiate challenges to their purposes.

The second and subtler sign of ungovernability is this. An economy is governable where there is a common set of signs whose meaning most of the actors can agree upon. There is always a degree of uncertainty in the basic workings of an economy. But sometimes the information base of an economy and interpretation of signals breaks down immeasurably. It is almost like a breakdown in language, where a speaker intends a compliment but it is heard as an insult. The disarray in economic policy reflects a breakdown of any common canons of interpreting signals. If consumer spending does not slow down as expected when interest rates rise, what does this reflect? Raising interest rates is supposed to temper inflation. But can it, under some circumstances, contribute to a self-fulfilling spiral of expectations about inflation? Most economic relationships are premised on the “*ceteris paribus*” clause. What if you don’t know what the *ceteris paribus* is? Unclarity over a common frame of interpretation is probably exacerbated in rapidly transitioning economies.

Take just two examples. Is it the case, as some have alleged, that India now has two new rigidities that make cost adjustments of the kind we were used to more difficult? The first is greater school enrolment which has an impact on labour prices. The second is, increasing regulatory requirements of all sorts are making it more difficult for different actors to enter the economy at lower price points. Both these outcomes may be

desirable. But tackling inflation in an economy where you did not have these rigidities, versus one in which you do, might be a different cup of tea. The point is that there is no common understanding of the scale or significance of these rigidities. Economic actors act on causal beliefs. Often these causal beliefs are self-fulfilling: things happen because we think they will happen. But there are moments in an economy when these causal beliefs unravel. If you talk to a wide range of actors, you will get the impression that India is in this limbo. But when a sense of causality becomes even more tenuous, an economy can become ungovernable. The government has not realised that it needs credible structures of negotiation. But it has also not realised that effective, clear and consistent communication is a central element in restoring a sense of common meaning.

The third sign of ungovernability is the increasing salience of the exit option. It is no secret that India's major companies are looking overseas, not simply as strategic investments or enhancing technological capabilities. They are now self-consciously hedging against political risk. In fact, medium and small business in India has exactly this legitimate complaint against government. Big business is shielded by its ability to exit: it is hedged against currency fluctuations because it can diversify, it can generate captive power and is hedged against energy crisis, and it can even tap into cheap credit abroad. But when the sum total of a government's efforts for creating an enabling environment is focused on big business, it is a sign that it does not quite know how to govern an economy that can create a level playing field for all actors.

These signs of ungovernability do not suggest an impending implosion. Far from it. At least two of these signs can be a source of hope. In the short run, social mobilisation will induce paralysis. But in the medium run it will put more pressure on the state to be trustworthy. The uncertainty in interpreting economic signals is a consequence of the fact that there is a multifaceted transition underway. We are not grasping

these complex relationships. But the greatest risk in both these cases is presumptuousness: the state cannot wish away new forms of social resistance. It will have to learn new strategies for negotiating genuine concerns. But the state should also not presume that old platitudes about how the economy works still hold. Old platitudes can do harm.

This current moment can be an opportunity. It allows a conversation from new premises. But politics is increasingly distracted by its own theatrics. India is at a great historical moment. But the most disquieting sign of ungovernability is that there is little political discussion of what this moment means or the urgency it should represent.

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# **INTERNATIONAL RELATION**

TELEGRAPH 21.9.11 INTERNATIONAL RELATION

### **India needs good relations with neighbours: Chidambaram**

(PTI) India is in troubled geographical location, Union Home Minister P Chidambaram said today and stressed on the need for improving relations with neighbouring countries.

"We can choose our friends, but not our neighbours. We can make history but cannot unmake geography. Therefore we need to build on what we have," he said at Bharat Chamber of Commerce.

"We have to build on good relations that we are able to forge (with neighbours) and need to work hard to improve relations in conditions which are not as good as we want them to be," he said.

Referring to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's recent visit to Bangladesh, he said, it was a major effort to build relations with that country which was helped to find its feet in 1971.

It was in India's national interest that it helped Bangladesh become a strong and prosperous country. "We cannot build a Berlin Wall between India and Bangladesh. We must build relations and help them build capacity. The starting point to this exercises is to find solutions to some long-festering issues."

Maintaining that some problems like Tinbigha corridor should have been resolved long ago, he said "We had made up our mind that we will solve this problem. It was resolved in a few minutes. We said use the corridor 24 hours a day instead of 12 hours a day."

The Tinbigha problem was solved in a spirit of 'give and take,' and "We

haven't given or taken much. It required a certain amount of statesmanship to give a little and take a little," Chidambaram said.

The problems of enclaves, land in adverse positions and undemarcated boundaries would also have to be solved in the spirit of give and take.

It took 51 years to solve the problem of undemarcated boundaries with Bangladesh, including Tinbigha "With a little give and take, we have been able to find solutions to these problems and I compliment all the chief ministers of the bordering states for standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Government of India in resolving the issues."

Although the Teesta water-sharing and of access to India from Bangladesh remained to be resolved, "I am confident that given time, patience and some degree of statesmanship, these two problems will be solved.

"Never before in the last 40 years have we had a moment in our history where we can say with a degree of assurance that India and Bangladesh were poised to forge a very close relationship for mutual benefit," he said.

India should seize the moment to forge a strong relation with Bangladesh. "Just as it has done with Bhutan and Sri Lanka before the beginning of the ethnic conflict and hopes to do with Nepal," he added.

# **MASS MEDIA**

**Defending Press freedom  
It should never be curtailed**

Kuldip Nayar

PAKISTAN may not have democracy in the sense the world knows. Nor will it pass the muster in the economic field. But it has to its credit an independent judiciary and free media which lawyers and journalists have won after long battles in their respective fields. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka cannot emulate Pakistan because both have authoritarian rule. The judiciary and the media exercise independence to the extent the two governments allow, although Bangladesh is a shade better than Sri Lanka.

India is a different cup of tea. The country's constitution and the democratic system guarantee free functioning of both the judiciary and the media. Yet the baffling point is that the Manmohan Singh government, battered by scams running to a loss of billions of dollars to the exchequer and the Anna Hazare movement to have an anti-corruption Lokpal (ombudsman), did not interfere in the functioning of either the judiciary or the media.

However, while licking the wounds, the government has begun a new way of thinking: should the media and the judiciary have the freedom they enjoy? It is like finding fault with the sea after the ship has been wrecked because the captain failed to act. Home Minister P. Chidambaram, Human Resources Development Minister Kapil Sibal and the experienced Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee are reported to have urged the Prime Minister to "do something" to correct the two.

For action against the media, the suppressed report by the Press Council of India has come in handy. "Paid news" is not to the liking of

journalists or the people. And it would help cleanse the field if the guilty could be spotted and punished. But the government's proposed remedy is to give teeth to the council. Such a measure has been discussed many a time and rejected because the Press Council is not another law court, but a forum where peers judge peers. The sanction is moral and ethical, not legal. The government's proposal may defeat the very purpose of the council. Talking to bodies like the Editors' Guild and union of journalists may be more beneficial.

I dare the government to bring a Bill to curtail the Press freedom. Rajiv Gandhi, hurt by the criticism on the Bofors gun scandal, tried to have an anti-defamation Act. There was such a widespread protest that he had to beat a hasty retreat. In democracy, the media hands have a duty to perform. They cannot be silenced by the group of ministers or even the entire Cabinet. Left to the government, nothing would appear in the Press except official handouts.

The government's mind is clear from the manner in which its television network, Doordarshan, treated the Hazare movement. It just did not cover it, the biggest story since Gandhian Jayaprakash Narayan's movement in 1974. India's tax payers finance Doordarshan. It does not have to depend on advertisement. Readers or viewers would always revert to private avenues to get the news. This is exactly what happened when the Congress government imposed censorship in 1975.

The fact is that no government wants strong media or judiciary. It has a way to indirectly influence the judiciary because the budgetary allocations are made by the government. The media can be "disciplined" through corporate sectors which have a large advertisement budgets. Justice Srikrishna suggested this in a report on Telengana. He did a tremendous job in naming the leaders who killed Muslims in the 1993 riots. But I did not know that he too could be on the government side. His suggestion to the Home Ministry is that the media should be managed to build opinion against separate statehood for Telengana. He

has even gone to the extent of recommending the use of government advertisements as an inducement to turn the opinion in favour of a United Andhra Pradesh. How naïve he is.

Rattled by the Hazare movement, the government is playing its old game by digging out cases against Hazare team members Prashant Bhushan, Arvind Kejriwal and Kiran Bedi. And I do not know why Manish Tewari who rescued himself from the standing committee should return to it? Is the government serious about the working of the standing committee? I did not like Kiran Bedi asking Agnivesh, earlier a Hazare team member, to prove his credibility. His public service goes back to the time when Kiran Bedi was a cadet in the Police Academy. And what secrets he could have divulged when every move of Hazare was transparent? It is in the government's interest to create cleavage among people working for Hazare. Kiran Bedi or, for that matter, anyone else should not play into its hands.

As for the judiciary, the members of different parties are peeved over the obiter dicta of judges' while hearing a case. Such remarks never make part of their judgment. For example, a Supreme Court judge said a few days back that people would teach a lesson to the government. This was a realistic assessment against the background of the countrywide anti-corruption movement. It is apparent the government and the Opposition have not liked the remark. But should Parliament go overboard to counter it?

Giving vent to their annoyance, members of a House panel of Parliament have recommended to the government to set up a mechanism to scrutinise the declaration of assets by the Supreme Court and High Court judges (what about the Cabinet ministers who too have declared their assets?). But the bizarre proposal is that the media should be prohibited from publishing names of judges under probe. This reminds me of the days of the Emergency (1975-77) when no judgment could be published without clearance from the authorities.

Whether names are published or not, they soon become talk of the town. All this should not in any way affect the independence of the judiciary. Hazare did well to keep it separate from the ambit of the Lokpal. After all, the Lokpal pronouncements are subject to a judicial review. How could, therefore, the judiciary come under the Lokpal? Yet, the judges should shed their sensitivity over what forms the contempt. There is a lesson in how Lord Chancellor in the UK treated a remark after a judgment. The remark was that he was an old fool. His reply was that he was indeed old. As for fool, it was a matter of opinion. He let the matter rest at that.

High Court and Supreme Court judges in the subcontinent should take a lesson from Lord Chancellor's attitude. They use the rule of contempt of court at the drop of a hat. The authority should rarely use it but never against the media. The two are on the same side.

# **POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT**

## **PLAYING HARD TO GET**

### **- An embattled UPA is an advantage for Mamata Banerjee**

Ashok Mitra

The prime minister and his government have egg on the face because of the Teesta fiasco. West Bengal's chief minister, he lamented in public, had been informed of the details of the treaty proposed to be signed with Bangladesh at least a fortnight before the date of the Dhaka visit; she did not express any misgivings; it was only at the very last moment that she backed out. Some "other" considerations, the prime minister speculated, must have been at work to change her mind.

It would be astonishing if the eminence heading the United Progressive Alliance government failed to identify the reason for the last-minute act of somersault on the part of the West Bengal chief minister. She has made, and continues to make, a great many promises to her electorate. Perhaps she is congenitally that way; just as her talk frequently runs wild, she tends to over-commit her fledgling regime in different directions. Commitments, if meant to be kept, call for not only administrative and legislative initiatives, but budgetary provisions as well. Her finance minister is set a whale of problems. For she seems to be equally determined not to impose any additional tax burdens which could cheese off her support base. The finance minister has to face this formidable challenge against the backdrop of a huge accumulation of indebtedness of the state government largely due to existing constraints of Centre-state financial arrangements, including the tyrannical practice of the Union government to charge inordinately high rates on loans accorded to the states.

The state finance minister has tried to make the best of a seemingly hopeless situation. He has chosen to dissemble. For meeting the condition set by Article 202 of the Constitution, he has presented an annual financial statement. But it is hardly a budget. The departmental allocations he has indicated mean little since these are being revised every day, forenoon and afternoon, by the chief minister's torrential flow of fresh promises. Far more bizarre though are the revenue proposals in the annual financial statement for 2011-12. There are some token imposts on certain categories of alcoholic drinks and tobacco products; the rest is silence. The finance minister has to feign unconcern; there was, he has gone on record saying, no reason to panic, he will get the rest of the funds needed through the *deus ex machina* of a drastic revamp of tax administration. He must have sounded hollow even to himself.

The chief minister is nonetheless not the least bothered, and not because she is a babe in the wood in financial matters, she is confident of her own worth and capability. She knows she is now a figure of awe in the country. She has achieved a feat none others could achieve over a span of more than three decades. She has, singlehandedly, ejected the-threatening-to-be-there-for-ever Left Front from the seat of power in West Bengal, thereby capturing international headlines. She has to be treated with the greatest of deference. She is, besides, well aware of the current parlous state of the United Progressive Alliance regime in New Delhi, more precisely, of its principal constituent, the Congress. The comptroller and auditor general and the Supreme Court of India are giving it no respite; almost every week, a new instance of defrauding the public exchequer is coming into the open. The other major partner of the Congress in the ruling coalition at the Centre besides her own, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, is at the moment in a sulk; it thinks the Congress did not do enough to save its two leaders — the minister it had sent to the Union government and the daughter of its supreme head — from going to prison. Both rampant corruption and runaway inflation are intensifying public disenchantment with the Congress. On top of

everything else is the Anna Hazare phenomenon that has hit the government like a sandbag. The adversity of the regime at the Centre is for the West Bengal chief minister a heaven-born opportunity. She has 19 members of parliament to do her bidding in the Lok Sabha; they are her bargaining counter. Politics in the country has long ceased to be the arena where the battle is between contending principles or doctrines. Amorality is installed as king emperor, the guiding dictum is you-satisfy-me-and-I-will-satisfy-you, bargaining *a la* market place is what it is all about. The West Bengal chief minister is determined to use the solid block of 19 votes in the Lok Sabha to extract money and even more money from the Congress prime minister and the Congress finance minister. She has already got one lot of special releases. That she considers as piffle; she needs more, much more. She will keep harassing the UPA regime for newer and substantially larger transfers of funds, and at most reasonable terms, every now and then. If this is blackmail, let it be so; the crux of the matter is whether it works. The chief minister is sanguine it will. She cares two hoots if differential treatment to her state raises awkward constitutional issues. Where there is a will, there is, her instinct tells her, a way; those running the Central administration know umpteen devious ways to bypass the edicts of the Constitution. She has equal disdain for both the Finance Commission and the Planning Commission and their beliefs and predilections; she knows these bodies are putty clay in the hands of the Centre and can be always overruled. Her horizon does not extend beyond West Bengal. She must get the funds she wants to make her position secure in the state, or else....

As the chief minister surveys the scene, she realizes her chances lie in making maximum use of the space between now and the Lok Sabha poll due in 2014; it will be an altogether new ball game after that, the rules of which cannot be unravelled at this point of time. She therefore has to squeeze out of New Delhi whatever is squeezable over the next two-and-a-half years. In this situation, why not add more strings to her bow, why not look around for more bargaining counters which could render the Centre even more vulnerable to her shrill demands? A thought suddenly

occurs almost like serendipity. By playing hard to get on Teesta, she may be in a position to push the New Delhi regime to an even more awesomely difficult corner. She is no statesman; what the impact of her obduracy could be on Indo-Bangladesh relations and, much more, on the geopolitics of South Asia, does not detain her. Whether the failure to clinch the riverine treaty with India would be a major setback for the Awami League in its ongoing skirmishes with Begum Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party is not on her agenda. Howsoever explicit the prime minister's public anguish, he cannot brush aside the nitty-gritty of realpolitik: given the present lie of the land, the West Bengal chief minister could hardly be cold-shouldered. Apart from other things, both he and she are aware that she has picked an issue which is of a substantive nature and impinges on domestic sensitivity. Irrespective of the till-now unchallenged constitutional prerogative of the Union government to enter into agreements and treaties with foreign governments and international agencies, it simply is not practical politics to sign a treaty on Teesta without the concurrence of the West Bengal government. Those spending lazy hours delving into the mystique of game theory may be ready with their roster of suggestions regarding how to counter the wiles of the chief minister: an Anna-weary government in New Delhi has, however, neither enough courage nor enough energy left with it.

For sure unwittingly, but the chief minister has helped to revive memories of a controversy that was astir when the government then presiding over in New Delhi hurriedly accepted the stringent rules and conditionalities of the World Trade Organization adversely affecting national sovereignty. The WTO has, in consequence, come to exercise jurisdiction over spheres that the Indian Constitution specifies to be within the exclusive purview of the states, such as agriculture or social services. One or two state governments had then expressed their reservations; these were pushed under the carpet by the Centre. Without question there is here a gray area of the Constitution. The Union government has the sole right to enter into treaties with international

entities and foreign governments: is this right, however, absolute and does it render infructuous decisions made and statutes enacted by state regimes within spheres the Constitution has reserved for them? The issue should perhaps have been taken to the nation's highest judiciary, but was not. It remains of acute relevance though.

The chief minister of Bihar is waiting in the wings; the moment New Delhi accords some extra-special financial dispensations to West Bengal, he will pounce upon the Centre, demanding similar considerations for his state as well. He too, nonetheless, has admitted that the West Bengal chief minister has a point, the Centre must safeguard a constituent state's interest while signing a foreign treaty and must have adequate prior consultations with the state's government for that purpose; it must carry along the state before proceeding to put the seal of imprimatur on the treaty.

These are hard times for the Centre.

# **RIGHT TO INFORMATION**

## **Soon, click to file RTI pleas**

Sandeep Ashar

MUMBAI: Citizens will soon be able to file [Right to Information](#) (RTI) applications related to state departments while sitting at home.

The state government on Thursday decided to evolve an [RTI portal](#) for a single-point access to all information and services under the sunshine Act.

According to Nandkumar Jantre, secretary, general administration department (administrative reforms), government of Maharashtra, the main objective of setting up the portal is to allow online filing of applications. He added that the portal will also facilitate tracking the status of an RTI application online. The decision was taken at a meeting convened by chief minister Prithviraj Chavan to discuss the implementation of recommendations made by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission.

The portal will also reduce RTI-related paperwork for government offices and provide a common platform for making and updating voluntary disclosures. Jantre further said that the portal will facilitate centralized monitoring of the status of RTI applications, enabling detection of cases where applications have not been disposed off in time. Jantre said that the plan was to launch the portal within two months.

In another citizen-centric decision, Chavan directed authorities to ensure that all departments and government offices compulsorily display and observe the citizen's charter, which assigns a fixed time-frame for delivery of services. In fact, the Chavan-led government has even decided to examine the feasibility of introducing a new legislation in the

form of the Right to Services Act to fix penalties on officials failing to observe the time-limit for delivery of various services.

The central commission, which was led by union minister Veerappa Moily, has submitted 15 reports recommending measures to improve ethics, accountability, and transparency in administration. Some of these include decentralization of powers, expanding e-governance, strengthening the Lokayukta, and regular online updates of government resolutions, and decisions. With implementation of these reforms necessitating a major administrative overhaul and infrastructure upgrade, Chavan decided to appoint a high-powered committee under chief secretary Ratnakar Gaikwad to monitor and drive its implementation. A task force will be appointed in each department to implement the reforms.

Chavan also directed officials to strengthen the public grievance system and extend the Lokshahi Din to taluka level during the meeting. Discussions on filling up vacancies at a war footing and revisions in pay grades for employees were also discussed, officials said.

# **RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

## **Rural Gujarat is now more industrious**

Chitra Unnithan

AHMEDABAD: [Rural Gujarat](#) is fast catching up with its urban counterparts in terms of both income and savings, says a study by faculty of [Indian Institute of Management](#), Ahmedabad (IIM-A). At the national level, however, the gap between urban and rural consumers is widening in income, consumption and savings with people in villages lagging further behind, the study says.

The study - Estimating Urban and Rural Incomes in Gujarat, 1993-94 to 2004-05 - by IIM-A faculty members Ravindra Dholakia and Manish Pandya, a research officer at the department of economics and statistics, government of Gujarat, also breaks the myth that urban areas are centres for manufacturing. The study says that rural areas in Gujarat are becoming more productive, efficient and centres for large-scale, registered manufacturing activities, while urban areas are becoming centres for the small scale, unregistered manufacturing and service sector activities. "It is clear that rural areas in Gujarat are growing faster than the urban areas in terms of income originating and hence in terms of employment opportunities.

This needs to be explicitly recognised while formulating and implementing any programmes and schemes to generate more rural employment artificially," Dholakia said. The study has considered incomes of three benchmark years - 1993-94, 1999-00 and 2004-05 for the estimates. The estimates indicate that during 1993-94 to 1999-00, per capita state income at current prices increased by 98%, urban income by 86%, and rural income by 101%. During 1999-00 to 2004-05, the per capita state income at current prices grew by 69%, urban income by

63%, and rural income by 74%.

Thus, rural per capita incomes in Gujarat grew faster than urban per capita incomes during 1993-94 to 2004-05.

The study suggests that since the investment behaviour of rural Gujarat is likely to be significantly different than more educated and environmentally more exposed urban investors, efforts need to be taken to divert these additional savings to better schemes from unproductive channels of gold, silver and land. In the country as a whole, on the contrary, the urban consumers have greater concentration of income that results in higher consumption and savings.

# **SOCIAL POLICY**

## MATURING WITH ALCOHOL

### - The absurdities of raising the legal drinking age abound

Ruchir Joshi

Here we go again. The population of India is supposed to be 1,210,193,422. Of this mass, maybe 5,000 MPs, legislators, politicians and bureaucratic rule-makers are adults and the rest of us, the remaining 1,210,188,422 are, well, children.

From Independence onwards we haven't been allowed to see people kissing on screen. At least not *desis*. Foreign-types have no morals clearly, and no *eintho/jhootha* qualms either, and thus they constantly keep entwining their tongues and mixing their saliva with the desired one — obviously not something practiced by many people in our brave 64-year-old republic. Simultaneously, we were proscribed from reading such and such books because they would corrupt our tender morals. If some of the banned books weren't about Chatterley our sexuality, they were going to Satanize us into killing each other. Then there was prohibition, with its bridesmaids of Permit Rooms, doctors' chits for wealthy 'alcoholics', bootleggers and lethal hooch-brewers, prohibition which, bizarrely, still continues in certain parts of India.

What we don't realize is that each of these proscriptions has its roots in our time under the British Empire. The censoring of our films comes out of the Indian Cinematograph Act of 1918 when the Empire decided it needed to control this burgeoning new medium. Their pellicular panic had to do with both the possibilities of (cinemato)graphic depictions of sexual acts and the fact that a mass visual medium such as this could very easily help foment anti-Empire passions. By the time we swallowed

and regurgitated this into independent India's Cinematograph Act of 1952, these fears had been reduced to just the sex bit, it being unlikely that people attempting revolution would have access to a capital-intensive medium like the cinema. With the spread of the printing press, the British first brought in restrictions at home and then tweaked them to suit their purposes in the colonies. In the case of books, the main fear at home was of pornography, but in India it was perhaps more of seditious literature. Nevertheless, the instruments of control remained draconian. If political tracts were banned in India till 1947, in Britain specific books by James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller only became legal over the counter in the 1960s.

The business of alcohol prohibition has a slightly different history. As historian David Hardiman explains so lucidly in his essay "From Custom to Crime: The Politics of Drinking in Colonial South Gujarat", the British first began to levy tax and control over breweries and distilleries in England, Scotland etc in the early 19th century, during the spread of the Industrial Revolution. It was these laws and this attitude, completely unsuitable and unfair to the inhabitants of South Gujarat, that the *raj* administration slapped upon the local *adivasis*. From privately tapping toddy in small quantities and with low alcohol levels for daily consumption — part and parcel of the tribals' traditional way of life — the *adivasis* had to cede the making of toddy and *mahua* to Parsi businessmen who could afford to purchase the licences from the British. The Parsis then centralized production and increased alcohol content so they could transport the toddy further and keep it longer. The increased alcohol content and the business of paying for your drink at a *theka* led tribals into alcoholism, indebtedness and eventual servitude to the same booze-barons for generation after generation. It is into this grim situation in South Gujarat that a self-righteous Gandhi arrives in the second decade of the 20th century. His simple solution is to bring about an unofficial, or, rather, anti-official ban of alcohol.

Being averse to alcohol himself, it clearly never occurs to MKG to try

and win back the tribals' traditional way of drinking from the *raj*. MKG spins cloth to counter the import of British cloth, MKG makes salt to fight the salt tax, but MKG does not tap toddy from a date palm. If somehow Gandhi had internalized that celebrating life while being mildly or sometimes extremely intoxicated was as intrinsic a part of Indian life as it was of Brazilian, British or French life (and here we have to accept that the tribals living across India's midriff, from the Surat coast to the Burma border, were as Indian as anybody else), the story of our society's relationship to alcohol might have been very different. As it is, having spread the net of his Vaishnav-bourgeois morality on top of *adivasi* life, Gandhi then tried to turn his teetotalitarianism into an ideal for the whole sub-continent. Of the three pet monkeys MKG stroked and fed, celibacy, teetotality and vegetarianism, only the last has any moral or ecological branch-hold in today's world.

Regardless of Gandhi's wishes, the Westernized elite of the Indian Congress continued to drink, one sensible great man even sending Bapu a polite but frank letter expressing his unwillingness to give up fine wines and good Scotch. The brown-*sahibs* serving under the *raj* drank triumphantly, before and after Independence, even as they continued to hold the reins of the administrative system, the military and the judiciary. The diplomats drank constantly since it was part of the job-requirement, even as Indian embassy dinners, for a long while, were drier than the Saudi desert. The new industrialists and *boxwallah* captains never once put down their glasses. For the first few decades of freedom, the tiny middle-class continued to be conflicted about drink, some of them never touching booze even as they mimicked their favourite screen heroes swaying about drunkenly, their anthem being "*Mai peeta nahi hun, pilayi gayi hai!*" I don't drink, I've been made to drink! The people who got constantly lanced in the liver by succeeding governments' short-sighted policy on alcohol were, of course, those of the poor who dared reach for some liquid comfort: *tharra*, *chullu* and various lethal chemistries all combined to turn a normal ingestive

activity into a miasmatic hell that led to further penury if not immediate and painful death. The people who made and continue to make the most illegal money from this twisted business are the politicians and policemen in the states around which prohibition has briefly or constantly wrapped its tentacles.

The business of the drinking age in different states, 21 in some places, 25 in others, is directly connected to this fake distaste for alcohol. The absurdities of an age-25 drinking limit abound. If someone became captain of Indian cricket team as Tiger Pataudi did at the age of 21, they would have to face some hard-bitten Aussie or supercilious, pretend-English, South African opposite number at a formal dinner and raise a toast with Fanta. If the couple of 24-year-olds who stood for the state elections in WB, one each from TMC and CPI(M), had won seats, they would have been able to vote on matters of life and death in the assembly but not have a drink in a bar after a hard day's debating — "*Ei khokon! Ain bolchhey tumi shudhu Horlicks khaabey!*" "Hey little boy, the law says you can only have Horlicks!" We can trust men and women in their early 20s to fly fighter aircraft worth millions but not with a drink in their hand.

Even as one wishes two great overseers of prohibition, Narendra Modi and Kisan B. Hazare, the best of luck for quick and effective fasts unto death, one has to examine ways of affirming life, both among the young and the not-so-young. 50 per cent of India's population is between 0 and 25 years of age. I don't have the statistics, but I'm willing to bet that in this segment of our population the deaths and damage caused by alcohol abuse don't reach even a miniscule percentage of the deaths and injuries caused by road accidents. One of the most dangerous addictions trapping the young in this country is the addiction to speed. It's something that cuts right across class and region. I, for one, would be more than happy if the drinking age across India was reduced to 18 but, with the strictest of monitoring, the driving age raised to 30.

# **WOMEN**

TRIBUNE 13.9.11 WOMEN

## **TRAGEDY OF CHILDBIRTH**

Shree Venkatram

**IN** the 15 minutes you might take to read this article, three Indian women in the prime of their life would have succumbed to complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth. In all probability they would have left behind newborn babies or toddlers, many of whom would die or be consigned to a life of undernourishment, neglect and a compromised future.

It is very risky becoming a mother in India. According to a Unicef estimate, India sees 78,000 maternal deaths. Other agencies have pegged the figure to be higher. There are districts in the country, Purulia for example, where nearly half the women die during pregnancy and child birth. For each one of these deaths, scores of others suffer acute maternal morbidity that leaves them permanently disabled and confined to a lifetime of pain and misery. The irony is that most of these women could have been easily saved.

Over the decades there has been some progress in bringing down maternal deaths. But the decline has not been fast enough. For a country which has become the preferred medical destination for people from around the world for complicated surgeries, to have women die from childbirth related causes is a real shame. According to the State of the World's Children, 2009 there are 450 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, the figure having fallen from 540 ten years earlier. The latest Sample Registration System (SRS) survey puts the figure at 212 while the World Health Organisation and some other international agencies peg it at 231 and some others at 250. Whatever be the figure, one thing

is clear: India is nowhere near reducing the number to 109, the target set for 2015 under the Millennium Development Goals.

## CAUSES BEHIND HIGH MMR

### Undernourished mothers

A slew of social, economic and administrative factors contribute to the making of this monumental tragedy, which gets compounded as it impacts another generation. The poor diet of the women, the lack of importance attached to their lives, low level of education, early marriage, the woefully inadequate medical services, the corruption that exists in the system are some prime factors responsible for the high Maternal Mortality Ratio(MMR) in India. Among the major causes of maternal death are excessive bleeding during childbirth, prolonged and obstructed labour, infection, unsafe abortion, disorders related to high blood pressure and anaemia. Forty-seven percent of maternal deaths in rural India are attributed to excessive bleeding, obstructed labour and anaemia resulting from poor diet.

The National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS-3) shows that 36 per cent of Indian women are chronically undernourished and 55 per cent are anaemic. In a recent study in Rajasthan, 70 per cent of adolescent girls were found to be suffering from moderate to severe anaemia. The Harvard School of Public Health found a link between a mother's height and the health of her children using Indian data. Children with mothers shorter than 4 feet 9 inches were 70 per cent more likely to die than those whose mothers were at least 5 feet 3 inches tall. Maternal height indicated a mother's own childhood health and has a direct bearing on the next generation. An anaemic mother's children are more likely to be

#### Signs of emergency during pregnancy and childbirth

- Bleeding
- High fever
- Convulsions, blurred vision
- Labour pain over 12 hours
- Placenta retained over 30 minutes

*Maternal mortality is defined as the death of a woman during pregnancy or delivery, or within 42 days of the end of pregnancy from a pregnancy-related cause.*

#### Maternal Mortality Ratio in few states

Annual number of deaths of women from pregnancy-related causes per 100,000 live births From the worst states to the best

Assam	390
Uttar Pradesh	359
Rajasthan	318
Punjab	172
Haryana	153
Gujarat	148
Tamil Nadu	97
Kerala	81

underweight, have anaemia and face the risk of death. Over 2 million children less than five years old die every year.

### **Early marriage**

Half of India's girls are married off before their eighteenth birthday. A teenage pregnant girl faces a greater risk to her life and that of her unborn child, more so if she is anaemic. The NFHS-3 reports that 28 per cent of women had become mothers by 18 years of age. Younger women are also more likely to experience domestic violence. In many Indian homes this continues during pregnancy and compromises the well being of the mother-to-be and the unborn child. So ingrained in us is the fact that women are some lowly creatures who need to be beaten by men that a national survey has noted that 57 per cent young men and 53 per cent young women think it is okay for men to beat their wives! Changing such an attitude is a monumental task.

### **Chinks in schemes**

It has been six years since the launch of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) which aims at strengthening the health system and the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), where cash assistance is given to poor women to deliver in an institution. The figure varies from Rs 700 to Rs 1400 depending on the category the state has been put under. Data shows that women are going into the institutions as the number of 'beneficiaries' have been rising every year reaching 90 lakh beneficiaries now. India sees about 27 million births every year, pointing to the fact that a large percentage of women still deliver without medical supervision, especially in rural areas and much work still needs to be done to cover them.

There has been criticism against cash transfer schemes. The astronomical amount could be used for enhancing the health infrastructure which is woefully inadequate. Initial studies reveal that women are staying for a couple of hours only in the institution so as to collect the incentive amount. The stipulation is that the woman stays for

at least 48 hours so that she and the newborn can be under medical supervision and any complication can be met. But now, while delivery is taking place under trained hands, the mother and child are not under observation and in case of any complication cannot get the attention needed. Most often, the referral system is poor and the health centres and hospitals do not have the required staff or even lab facilities.

### **Ailing health system**

The availability of nurses and doctors remains a big issue. Posts of gynaecologists, paediatricians and technical laboratory staff are lying vacant even in better run states like Punjab. The nurses who man government hospitals are overworked affecting service. There is a crying need for more health centres and hospitals. Unless the capacity and infrastructure is enhanced, India will not be in a position to offer institutional delivery to all its women. And that does not look like happening soon.

Last year, there was a huge public outcry against the callousness of the public health system in the Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh which saw 26 maternal deaths from April to November. Civil society teams visited the district on a fact finding mission as did NRHM's Advisory Group on Community Action. They found a complete mismanagement and lack of basic infrastructure: A Primary Health Centre functioning from a very dilapidated building, an ANM who could not check blood pressure, no Haemoglobinometers to conduct the very essential haemoglobin test on pregnant women, the absence of ante-natal check up, only a nurse and a dai to manage the labour room and 60 beds for 16 hours at the district hospital where 300 deliveries take place in a month. There had been no augmentation of staff after the start of the NRHM and JSY, and there were no review, monitoring or redressal mechanisms in place.

## **WAY FORWARD**

Apart from addressing such mismanagement and proper deployment of resources, much more needs to be done. Poonam Muttreja who heads the Population Foundation of India, says all out efforts need to be made to keep girls in school and postpone marriage. This way early marriage which poses a risk to their lives could be avoided. She advocates cash and food incentives for antenatal care so that the pregnant woman can be monitored for anaemia and blood pressure. And lastly she calls for a bigger investment in family planning. When babies are not wanted, they are neglected, she says. People should know about and be able to easily access spacing methods. The states with the lowest Contraceptive Prevalence Rate also have the worst MMR. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh report very high unmet needs for family planning and also have a high MMR.

The task ahead is indeed monumental. But it must be taken up as top priority for at stake is the health of India's women and future generations.

*The writer works in the development sector*