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THE GIST of

THE HINDU ❖
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SCIENCE REPORTER ❖

THE HINDU

With MCQs & Questions for Mains

Science Reporter

Kurukshetra
A JOURNAL ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

YOJANA

Press Information Bureau

News from
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Gist of
The Hindu

TELANGANA BIRTH-PANGS

By getting a resolution rejected the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill for creating Telangana passed by the State Assembly just before the deadline set by President Pranab Mukherjee to consider the Bill, Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy did what little he could to protect what he saw as his political constituency: those standing for a united Andhra Pradesh in the Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra regions. Neither the delay nor the ultimate rejection of the Telangana Bill by the Assembly will have any bearing on the creation of the new State if the Centre stands firm on its decision on Telangana. The Chief Minister, in raising legal and technical objections to the Bill, might have managed to convey the opposition of large sections of the people in Seemandhra to the division of Andhra Pradesh, but the manner in which the proceedings of the House were conducted from the day the Bill was introduced till the day it was rejected reflects badly on his government and the democratic traditions of the legislature. Speaker Nadendla Manohar, who too is politically opposed to Telangana, put the Chief Minister's contentious resolution to a voice vote amid noisy scenes, and declared the motion carried in a matter of two minutes. It was obvious from the regional representation in the House that those opposed to the Bill constituted a majority. The Bill presented a chance to address the concerns raised by the proposal to bifurcate Andhra Pradesh. Instead, the time was used for political posturing and the reiteration of known positions by both sides. Pro-Telangana members, on their part, did not press for a division amid the din, perhaps because they did not want to expose their lack of numbers. The voice vote was, in effect, the only mode of expression of the views of the legislature.

Now that the onus is on the Centre to shepherd the Bill through Parliament, the Congress must eschew any temptation to use this issue as part of any electoral strategy before the Lok Sabha polls. With the national leadership of the party backing the creation of Telangana, and the State unit divided on geographical lines, making this a campaign issue is anyway fraught with risks. No political consensus on the Bill is possible at this late stage, but the Centre can bring in amendments to the Bill to incorporate the concerns of other parties and representatives of Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra. As the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party is necessary in the Rajya Sabha, the Congress will have to keep the Bill open for amendments. The State legislature was robbed of a free, reasoned debate on the issue, but hopefully Parliament will consider all aspects of the Bill before bringing Telangana into being.

KEEPING PEOPLE AND TIGERS SAFE

As conservation of wild species becomes more successful, higher levels of human-wildlife conflict are being reported in many parts of the country. The outcome of such encounters is a distressing number of human lives lost, and the tragic elimination of the wild creatures involved in the attacks. The 'man-eating tiger' incident in Dodabetta in the Nilgiris, which ended in the gunning down of the cat, brings to the fore the dilemma of ensuring a safe distance between wild animals and people. Evidently, there are no easy answers to this question, not just in India but in several other countries that have well-protected wildlife. Two strategies often adopted to prevent conflict rely on modification of human and animal behaviour. Farmers are encouraged to switch to cash crops to avoid attracting elephants, while forest departments provide access to water within protected areas to stop animals from moving out. Wild creatures in turn learn to avoid places rendered inaccessible through trench-digging and building of fences. Yet, these are by no means fail-safe interventions. It is necessary to identify areas for intensive protection, and encourage forest-dwelling communities to move out — of course, with sufficient attention devoted to their rehabilitation at a new location.

Removal of problem animals often becomes unavoidable if there are human casualties and there is a prospect of more people being killed. It would appear ironic, but conservation advice in such circumstances is usually to swiftly eliminate the lone animal, such as the Dodabetta tiger, rather than attempt slow capture and risk negative public attitudes to tigers as a whole. Unfortunately, it is not easy to identify the individual tiger or leopard, and the conflict may continue even after one animal is shot dead. In Chikmagalur district, for instance, 17 leopards had to be shot in 1995 before the problem of attacks on people stopped. Research evidence supports a strategy that relies on 'spatial separation' of people and animals as a more rewarding means of conflict reduction. If isolated villages and free ranging cattle are moved out of the small land area that makes up India's protected forests, the risk of an encounter with fierce creatures can be brought down. The problem today is that successfully managed national parks and sanctuaries are witnessing a rise in tiger and leopard numbers, leading to the dispersal of old and injured animals towards habitations on the periphery and even beyond. Future conservation strategies would have to rely on well-administered wildlife sanctuaries, and equally on a voluntary resettlement programme for forest communities.

NO SOUTH CHINA SEA AIR ZONE, CHINA ASSURES ASEAN COUNTRIES

China has rejected reports suggesting it was planning to set up an air defence zone over the disputed South China Sea, saying it was "yet to feel any air security threat" from its Southeast Asian neighbours.

In November, China established its first Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over parts of the East China Sea, amid an increasingly tense stand-off with Japan over the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. An ADIZ is a defined area in international airspace within which countries monitor and track aircraft heading towards their territory.

The setting up of the ADIZ heightened tensions with Japan, as it overlapped with Japan's zone and included the disputed islands. China at the time defended the move, pointing out that Japan had established its own ADIZ in 1969.

After a Japanese newspaper reported that China was considering setting up a second such zone over the South China Sea – a move that would be certain to worry the half a dozen or so countries that have competing claims over the sea's waters and islands – the Chinese Foreign Ministry was quick to deny the report, and also, at the same time, accuse Tokyo of attempting to fan tensions.

China-Japan relations have soured over the past year over the disputed islands, and issues relating to wartime history and the Japanese occupation of China during the Second World War. China was especially angered by a visit by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the controversial Yasukuni war shrine - a memorial for Japanese who died during the war that also enshrines 14 Class-A war criminals – which was the first by a Japanese leader in seven years.

The rising tensions with Japan have coincided with an apparent diplomatic outreach by China to other Asian countries, ostensibly aimed at attempting to isolate Tokyo. China's ties have warmed with South Korea, which was also angered by Mr. Abe's Yasukuni visit.

Last year, both President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang visited ASEAN countries. A year after Chinese vessels had run-ins with ships from both Vietnam and the Philippines near contested South China Sea islands, tensions with both countries have subsided. China recently signed an agreement for joint exploration with Vietnam.

IRDA SETS UP 9-MEMBER PANEL TO REVIEW REFORMS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Insurance regulator IRDA has set up a nine-member committee to review the 14 non-legislative recommendations made by the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission (FSLRC).

The committee will also examine the extant legislative and regulatory framework in compliance 14 non-legislative recommendations (NLRs), IRDA said in an order.

The non-legislative recommendations are related with consumer protection, transparency and capacity building, among others.

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) said the committee will submit its report by April-end.

The committee members include C.R. Muralidharan, G. Prabhakara, and Mathew Varghese, all ex-Members, IRDA and M.S. Sahoo, ex-Member, SEBI.

The committee will identify the gaps and possible improvements in the extant framework vis-a-vis the 14 NLR. The panel will also suggest changes or modifications to the extant framework in compliance with the 14 NLR.

While not much progress has been made towards implementing the recommendations made in FSLRC report, which was submitted to the government in March last year, the Finance Ministry has called for early implementation of the non-legislative proposals contained therein.

The finance ministry recently asked regulators to voluntarily implement the non-legislative recommendations of FSLRC, while issuing a 'guidance handbook' on this matter.

According to the guidance handbook, there are a number of recommendations in the FSLRC report which are in the nature of governance enhancing and do not require legislative changes.

The implementation of the NLR made by the FSLRC was discussed by the Financial Stability Development Council (FSDC).

In its report, the FSLRC has recommended sweeping changes to the way financial sector is regulated in the country, including in areas ranging from banking and insurance to capital markets, among others.

SCIENTISTS CREATE BONE-LIKE MATERIAL THAT IS LIGHTER THAN WATER BUT AS STRONG AS STEEL

Materials shape human progress – think stone age or bronze age. The 21st century has been referred to as the molecular age, a time when scientists are beginning to manipulate materials at the atomic level to create new substances with astounding properties.

Taking a step in that direction, Jens Bauer at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) and his colleagues have developed a bone-like material that is less dense than water, but as strong as some forms of steel. "This is the first experimental proof that such materials can exist," Bauer said.

Since the Industrial Revolution our demand for new materials has outstripped supply. We want these materials to do many different things, from improving the speed of computers to withstanding the heat when entering Mars' atmosphere. However, a key feature of most new materials still remains in their strength and stiffness – that is, how much load can they carry without bending or buckling.

All known materials can be represented quite neatly in one chart (where each line means the strength or density of the material goes up ten times):

The line in the middle at 1000kg/m3 is the density of water – all materials to its left are lighter than water and those on the right are heavier. No solid material is lighter than water unless it is porous. Porous materials like wood and bone exhibit exquisite structures when observed under a microscope, and they served as inspiration for Bauer's work.

For many years, material scientists have thought that some empty areas on the compressive strength-density chart should be filled by materials that theory predicts. Computer simulations could be used to indicate an optimum microstructure that would give a material the right properties. However, nobody had tools to build materials with defined patterns at the scale of a human hair.

With recent developments in lasers and 3D printing, however, a German company called Nanoscribe started offering lasers that could do just what Bauer wanted. Nanoscribe's system involves the use of a polymer that reacts when exposed to light and a laser that can be neatly focused on a tiny spot with the help of lenses.

A drop of a honey-like polymer is placed on a glass slide and the laser is turned on. A computer-aided design is fed into the system and the slide carefully moves such that the laser's stationary focus touches only those points where the material is to be made solid. Once complete, the extra liquid is washed away, leaving behind materials with intricate internal structures.

However, these materials on their own are not as strong as Bauer wanted. So he coats them with a thin layer of alumina (aluminium oxide) before subjecting them to stress tests. Based on the tests, he was able to improve the theoretical models he used to design the internal structure of the materials. Their results were just published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Even though alumina layers increase the density of these materials, all of them remain lighter than water. Bauer's strongest material has a specific honeycomb internal structure and is coated with a 50 nanometre-thick (billionth of a metre) layer of alumina. It beats all natural and man-made materials that are lighter than 1000kg/m3, being able to withstand a load of 280MPa (mega pascals is a unit of measuring pressure), which makes it as strong as some forms of steel.

There are limitations. Nanoscribe's system can only make objects that are tens of micrometres in size. "One of their newer machines can make materials in the milimetre-

range, but that's about it for now", Bauer added. But that is not enough for any real-life application.

However, there have been rapid improvements in all the areas this work relies on: 3D printing, new polymers and laser technology.

That means we may soon have a suite of new, super lightweight materials for everything from skis to aircraft parts. If nothing else, Bauer's work shows that we are definitely in the molecular age.

UN DELEGATION MEETS WITH ARMED GROUPS IN MALI

The U.N. Security Council met on Monday with representatives of armed Tuareg groups active in northern Mali as part of an effort to accelerate peace talks with the government, though participants said disagreements on conditions for the talks had not been resolved.

Tuareg rebels launched a rebellion in northern Mali in early 2012 that gave way to a military coup, allowing them to take control of the country's north. However, al-Qaeda-linked Islamic extremists later took over much of the north, prompting France to launch a military intervention in early 2013.

Though Mali held successful presidential and legislative elections last year, security in the north remains precarious, and the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad in particular maintains a strong presence in and around the northern city of Kidal.

Despite the efforts of various mediators, negotiations between the armed groups in the north and the government of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita have stalled. Last month, Tuareg rebels withdrew from negotiations set to take place in Algeria after concluding that their push for greater autonomy would not be addressed. Authorities in Bamako are emphasizing a decentralization process that would bolster the Bamako-based government's presence throughout the country.

One of the chief goals of the Security Council visit, which ended on Monday, was to accelerate peace talks with all groups in northern Mali.

The visiting U.N. delegation also met with local authorities and received briefings on the work of the country's U.N. peacekeeping mission. On Sunday France's U.N. ambassador Gerard Araud said the mission would reach its full operational capacity in July, one year after it took over peacekeeping activities.

PRESSURE ON FARMLAND

The government, it appears, is yet to find ways to address conflicting demands on land. Instead of quickly charting a comprehensive approach to land utilisation, it continues to speak in different voices and at cross purposes. The latest addition to the policy confusion is the move to consider Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in agricultural land bought for real estate purposes. Existing Foreign Exchange Management Act regulations prohibit the use of FDI funds to buy farmland. However, real estate companies have tried to bypass these restrictions. Last year, the Enforcement Directorate imposed a fine of Rs. 8,600 crore on Emaar MGF for allegedly using foreign funds to buy agricultural land. The Ministry of Urban Development now wants to ease these restrictions, and the government has constituted a three-member Cabinet committee to look into it. The reasoning behind this move is that 100 per cent FDI is already permitted in developing townships, housing and other infrastructure projects. Hence, it would be only logical to extend it and allow the purchase of agricultural land for construction purposes. The other arguments are that restrictions create bottlenecks and delay projects, and that buying of agricultural land on the outskirts of a city is inevitable and necessary.

On the face of it, relaxing FDI norms may appear to be a rational step, but in the absence of a clear-cut land use policy and plans, it will hasten unrestricted acquisition and unplanned conversion of farmland and lead to hoarding of land. In 2013, the Ministry of Rural Development published a draft National Land Utilisation Policy. It convincingly argued that the shrinkage of per capita ownership of agricultural land and the demand to produce more food — 245 million tonnes in 2013 to 307 million tonnes in 2020 — necessitates the protection of fertile land. The National Policy for Farmers, announced in 2007, insisted that the government conserve productive land and allow any change in use only under "exceptional circumstances." These two policies make no distinction between foreign and local investment. The government has not acted on a recommendation to revive land use boards, which could provide guidelines to State governments. Nor has it implemented the idea of delineating and integrating land utilisation zones under the development plans. These measures are necessary to map the availability of land and coordinate demands for it. It is imperative to correct any institutional deficiencies and strengthen local level land-management plans to ensure an orderly process of urban development and prevent detrimental effects on agriculture and environment.

AN UNJUSTIFIED DELAY

The interminable delay in resolving the outstanding issues concerning the prosecution of two Italian marines accused of killing two Indian fishermen off the Kerala coast in February 2012 is becoming a diplomatic embarrassment to India. The Supreme Court has been adjourning the matter repeatedly in the hope that the Union government would find a solution, and in the latest instance it has given the Centre one more week to report a settlement. The main issue appears to be the National Investigating Agency's insistence on invoking an anti-piracy law — the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Maritime Navigation and Fixed Platforms on Continental Shelf Act, 2002 — which prescribes the death penalty for those causing death during an act of violence against any ship or vessel. The NIA is ready with its charge sheet, but is awaiting the outcome of proceedings in the Supreme Court before filing it in a special court. While there may be genuine reasons for the delay in resolving the matter, the country cannot afford to be seen as the cause. Italian President Giorgio Napolitano has said Indian authorities have managed the case in contradictory and disconcerting ways. The European Union, which opposes the death penalty in all circumstances, has also warned of a possible adverse impact on trade relations with India.

It is particularly surprising that India's approach should be marked by doubt and uncertainty even after the Supreme Court mapped the contours of the proposed prosecution in a January 2013 verdict, in which it held that only the Centre, and not Kerala, would have jurisdiction to try the case. The issue raised by the marines is whether the anti-piracy and anti-terrorism law can be invoked against them after the court had directed that the proceedings be under the Maritime Zones Act, 1976, the IPC and the CrPC, and the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982. The wisdom of invoking the anti-piracy law in a case involving a crime that was possibly committed under the impression that the targets were pirates, is open to question. As the incident took place in India's Contiguous Zone, the Supreme Court had held that the Union government was entitled to prosecute the marines, but that it was subject to Article 100 of UNCLOS 1982, which says all states shall cooperate in the repression of piracy. Caught between national outrage against what many here see as wanton killing by trigger-happy marines, and the imperative of according a fair trial to the suspects, India seems to be faltering at both the diplomatic and legal levels. It needs to finalise a credible and legally sustainable approach to avoid diplomatic setbacks or, worse, a judicial invalidation

CANCER: LOW DOSE GAMMA RADIATION SHOWS PROMISE

Holding out potential for effective cancer therapy in future, researchers from German Cancer Research Centre and the University of Hyderabad have found a novel anti-tumor role of low dose of gamma radiation in mice as well as human subjects of pancreatic cancer.

In the study, the researchers irradiated pancreatic tumors bearing mice to low dose of gamma radiation (2Gy) which is around 20 times less than the dose normally used clinically for cancer treatment. The lower dose irradiation significantly triggered T cell immune responses and reduced tumor growth, they found. In a human clinical study, patients in advanced stage of pancreatic cancer were irradiated locally with 2Gy dose of gamma radiation in a therapeutic setting and it produced similar results.

In the entire process, macrophages played an indispensible role in augmenting T-cell aided immunity against established and solid pancreatic tumors.

Macrophages are the integral part of both innate and adaptive immune system and normally involved in destroying invading foreign bodies. Most interestingly, they act like double-edge swords of immune system and could control as well promote tumor growth, mentioned Dr. Hridayesh Prakash, (Ramanujan Fellow), Department of Biochemistry, University of Hyderabad.,

During initial stages of tumor development, these macrophages posses tumour regulatory potential, mediated by nitric oxide and pro-inflammatory factors. However, under the influence of immunosuppressive tumour micro-milieu, they get converted and promote tumor growth.

In further experiments, the researchers found that replacement of resident macrophages with gamma ray programmed macrophages in an adoptive transfer setting was sufficient to augment T cell immunotherapy and successful tumor rejection even in the absence of additional irradiation of recipient tumor bearing mice.

The researchers also found that blocking INOS enzyme activity, the key marker of tumor regulatory macrophages, led to abolishment of T-cell immunotherapy and tumor rejection.

Dr. Prakash said the study demonstrated the role of iNOS+ macrophages in conditioning tumor

microenvironment favoring T cell immunotherapy as well as angiogenesis in mice and successful tumor rejection.

He said their novel findings have tremendous therapeutic potential in dealing with persistent bacterial infections like H pylori which is associated with cancer development. The re-activation of macrophages was of paramount requirement for both, effective eradication of pathogens and in minimizing the risk of infections that could lead to cancer.

MALALA NOMINATED FOR 'CHILDREN'S NOBEL PRIZE'

Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai has been nominated for the World Children's Prize in Sweden for her crusade for education rights for girls.

Liv Kjellberg, 15, a member of the international prize jury, said Malala is a child herself and she stands up for girls' rights to education in not only Pakistan, but also the world. According to Dawn News, Malala was last year nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and won the European Union's Sakharov human rights prize for her fight for the right of all children to education.

The 16-year-old, who lives in Britain following extensive medical treatment, was shot by the Taliban in 2012 for her outspoken views supporting education for girls in Pakistan.

The World Children's Prize, also known as the 'Children's Nobel Prize', was founded in 2000 and aims to raise awareness of children's rights in 60,000 schools in 110 countries through educational programmes, the report added.

''SIMLA AGREEMENT CAN'T OVERRIDE UN RESOLUTIONS''

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Tasnim Aslam, in response to questions, that the argument of the Simla agreement having made UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir invalid had no legal basis.

Ms Aslam was asked, in the light of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's statement, if Pakistan was ready to look for options other than its stated position since India says that the UN resolutions do not stand because of the Simla agreement. She said that countries are condemned every year on various forums in the UN, on one issue or the other, for violating the UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

"I don't understand how can one country decide that UN resolutions are no more valid and how can a bilateral agreement, which does not even say that this intends to override the UN Security Council resolutions, which in any case it could not, override the UN Security Council resolutions," she explained.

If at some stage India and Pakistan reach an agreement on the settlement of the Kashmir dispute, legally speaking, she pointed out they would have to go back to the UN Security Council to get another resolution to endorse that agreement.

She welcomed the recent statement by the Indian foreign secretary to a delegation of Pakistani journalists that a solution to Kashmir is in India's interest as well. Ms Aslam said that, "I think we have reached a stage where the choices before our countries are very clear. We have to have peace for progress, development and for stability. To have sustainable peace, we need to have serious negotiations and settlement of all the disputes and outstanding issues."

Regarding the death of an Indian fisherman in Landhi jail, she said the foreign office had not got any details but it had seen reports that he was ailing for a long time. She said there is the question of the dead body of another person who died earlier. These issues have been discussed and the foreign office was working with the Indian High Commission to make sure that their bodies are repatriated to India.

On the stand off on the trade across the Line of Control (LoC), she said the bus service has been resumed. On the trucks issue also, discussions are going on. The Indian High Commissioner met the Foreign Secretary and among other things, this issue was discussed. "We have accepted the Indian proposal for an early convening of the Joint Working Group on cross LoC trade in order to revisit the modalities. We have been talking about enhancing the monitoring and scanning procedures. So these could be taken up in the meeting of this committee," she added.

DEALING WITH A TOXIC LEGACY

President Barack Obama's recent statement of his Afghanistan policy has again revealed the intractable situation the United States has faced since it led the invasion of that country in 2001. In his State of the Union address to Congress on January 28, Mr. Obama said the mission there would be completed by the end of the year, and that thereafter the U.S. and its allies would support a "unified Afghanistan" as it took responsibility for itself. With the agreement of the Afghan government, a "small force" could remain to train and assist Afghan forces and

carry out counterterrorism operations against any al-Qaeda remnants. Washington has withdrawn 60,000 of its troops from Afghanistan since Mr. Obama took office in 2009, but 36,500 remain, with 19,000 from other countries in the NATO-ISAF coalition. Western plans are for a residual force of 8,000 to 12,000, two-thirds of them American, but sections of the U.S. military have suggested a U.S. strength of 10,000, with 5,000 from the rest of the coalition. Mr. Obama is discussing the options with senior officers.

The President wants to avoid a repeat of Iraq, which with the exception of Kurdistan has become a battleground between Sunni and Shia leaders, claiming over 7,000 lives in 2013 alone. But over Afghanistan he is caught in a cleft stick. Afghan President Hamid Karzai is yet to sign the deal for NATO-ISAF troops to stay; he would prefer his successor to sign the agreement after he leaves office in April 2014, but the successor will not take office until September. Secondly, Mr. Karzai has infuriated Washington by planning to release 37 Taliban detainees, by blaming American forces for terrorist attacks on civilians, and by calling the U.S. a "colonial power." Yet the Afghan National Security Forces, which include the police, number 334,000, or about 20,000 below the numbers envisaged for them, and the U.S. Department of Defense has reported to Congress that the ANSF cannot operate on their own. The U.S. public have little wish to continue the war, but the military may have its own agenda. The September 2013 quarterly report by the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction shows that of nearly $100 billion in reconstruction aid, $97 billion went towards counter-narcotics, security, and other operations; only $3 billion was used for humanitarian aid. If the President feels hemmed in, it is because of the toxic legacy of his predecessor George W. Bush who went into the country in search of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. At the end of 12 years of American occupation, Afghanistan has not emerged as a more secure place; nor has the U.S. had much of a success in nation-building.

ICC TO VOTE ON RADICAL REVAMP PLAN

India will push for significant control over the ICC's revenue and power structure when a radical revamp plan is put to vote in a meeting despite strong resentment from the Cricket Boards of South Africa, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The controversial restructuring of the ICC, which would cede executive decision-making to India, Australia and England, requires consent of eight of the 10 member Boards and it remains to be seen whether the dissenting Boards remain adamant or agree to the changes.

The three Boards could relent if the 'Big Three' offer some lucrative tour assurances in bargain.

Pakistan, Sri Lanka and South Africa have refused to back the plan stating that it only makes the 'Big Three' more powerful.

BCCI President N. Srinivasan has, however, defended the proposal stating that a strong India would be good for world cricket and that efforts were on to get a consensus among ICC members.

During the ICC Board meeting in Dubai, a final decision on the proposal was deferred due to a lack of unanimity among the member boards.

At the Dubai meeting, the BCCI's status as the most influential cricketing body in the world was formally acknowledged with a bulk of its demands getting passed.

While BCCI's demand for immunity of the 'Big Three' in a two-tier Test format was ruled out, it had its way in deciding the exclusive bilateral series agreements from 2015-2023.

The revamp plan focuses on the establishment of an Executive Committee (ExCo) and Financial and Commercial Affairs Committee (F&CA) to provide leadership at an operational level, with five members, including BCCI, Cricket Australia and England and Wales Cricket Board representatives.

The decks were also cleared for N. Srinivasan to become the chairman of the ICC Board with effect from June 2014.

Similarly, a Cricket Australia representative will be the chairman of the Ex-Co while the ECB representative will be head of the F&CA committee.

BCCI also had its way in doing away with the proposed World Test championship. The Indian Board managed to keep the Champions Trophy (50-over format) among the three ICC tournaments being organised every four years.

The ICC Board also decided to create a 'Test Cricket Fund' from which all other members (excluding BCCI, CA, ECB) will be equally paid to encourage Test cricket.

PROJECT GETS ENVIRONMENT CLEARANCE DESPITE SC ORDER

Environmental clearance was granted to a 300-MW hydroelectric power project on February 3 even as a

Supreme Court order dated August 13, 2013 clearly said the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and the State government must "not grant any further environmental clearance or forest clearance for any hydroelectric power project in the State of Uttarakhand, until further orders."

The 300-MW Lakhwar project, which received the clearance from the MoEF, is located in the Upper Yamuna River Basin in Dehradun.

In 1986, a 420-MW Lakhwar-Vyasi hydroelectric power project was granted environmental clearance. The project was then under the Uttar Pradesh Irrigation Department. Work continued till about 1992. The projects are now under the Uttarakhand Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (UJVNL). Once the projects were divided into a 120-MW Vyasi project and a 300-MW Lakhwar project, a separate environmental clearance was sought for the Vyasi project.

Regarding the forest clearance for the Lakhwar project, a highly placed source in the Forest Department said: "The MoEF's version was that this is not a new permission. Permission was earlier granted for the diversion of forest land [when the project was under the Irrigation Department] and only the agency has changed."

For environmental clearance, the Expert Appraisal Committee considered the Lakhwar project in November 2010. However, many unresolved issues were raised by the EAC, including those related to the construction of a barrage.

Himanshu Thakkar of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (SANDRP), said: "The issues raised by the EAC have been left unresolved. There has been no Environmental Impact Assessment of the Lakhwar project. If there is no EIA, then there is no Environment Management Plan. This implies no monitoring. How can the project be granted environmental clearance without these basic requirements?"

After the Supreme Court order, a committee was formed by the MoEF in October last year to "assess whether the existing and ongoing/under-construction hydropower projects have contributed to the environmental degradation and, if so, to what extent."

GREEN TRIBUNAL BANS TYRE BURNING IN PUBLIC

The National Green Tribunal has banned the burning of tyres at public places, such as roads and areas surrounded by residential buildings and also during protests by political and religious groups as it is likely to cause health hazard.

The Western Zone Bench of NGT was hearing the petition against the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) and the State of Maharashtra, filed by a group of 14 lawyers who argued that burning tyres on the streets creates toxic smoke and poses a serious threat to the environment by increasing air pollution.

The petition had specifically sought relief through a ban on burning tyres during agitations by political and religious groups.

"There has been a complete absence of any rule on environment protection when it comes to burning of tyres on the streets," said Asim Sarode, one of the petitioners, adding that the NGT order is a positive step in the direction of reducing air pollution.

As per the tribunal's ad-interim order, the local police shall take immediate cognisance of burning of tyres. "Any dereliction in the directions given as above may entail penal consequences as enumerated in Section 26 of the National Green tribunal Act, 2010," said the order.

Under Section 26, a failure to follow the order can result in a penalty of up to Rs 10 crore, which may be extended to Rs 25 crore and/or imprisonment of three years.

INDIA RANKS 5TH IN CONSUMER CONFIDENCE: REPORT

In terms of consumer confidence among emerging market economies, India has been ranked fifth in a list that was topped by China, says a Credit Suisse report.

According to the latest emerging consumer survey by Credit Suisse in partnership with global market research firm Nielsen, confidence among emerging market consumers has deteriorated during the last year.

Around 26 per cent of respondents believe that their personal finances would improve over the next three months as compared to 28 per cent a year ago.

Meanwhile, optimism level in India has also slipped four percentage points over last year and India was ranked fifth in the list. Among others, Indonesia was ranked third in the list, followed by Mexico.

However, beneath the headline readings, there are signs of an underlying improvement, as more people believe this is a good time to purchase big ticket items and more people now expect inflation to fall, the report said.

Rural areas have seen a much bigger improvement than urban areas in most categories. The net balance of

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those expecting income to rise rather than fall was (+) 6 per cent in rural areas versus (-) 15 per cent in urban areas.

In terms of spending categories, there has been more growth in discretionary categories such as smartphones and cars in 2013.

However, the improving trend is expected to continue going forward, alongside areas such as watches and branded goods.

More generally, trading up seems to be the theme. People are buying smartphones rather than conventional mobiles and fewer people bought entry-level cars.

"The survey is particularly timely given the currency and stock market pressures some of the Emerging Markets surveyed are currently experiencing," Credit Suisse's Global Head of Research for Private Banking and Wealth Management Giles Keating said.

For this report, nearly 16,000 face-to-face interviews with consumers across nine economies were conducted. These include Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, South Africa and Mexico.

US TO ANNOUNCE TRADE ACTION AGAINST INDIA

US Trade Representative Michael Froman will announce a new "trade enforcement action" with regard to India in Washington, the federal agency said, raising concerns that there could be another spike in tensions in the bilateral relationship.

The upcoming announcement comes in the wake of reports highlighting the lobbying by industrial collectives such as the US Chamber of Commerce, to get the Obama administration to press India further over its intellectual property rights (IPR) protection.

Indian Commerce Minister Anand Sharma however indicated that the USTR had not given New Delhi any advanced notice about the trade enforcement action.

Other groups such as the US International Trade Commission have scheduled hearing this week to "look into Indian trade and investment practices."

In particular, the US Chamber of Commerce is said to be urging the USTR to classify India as a "Priority Foreign Country," described as "a tag given to the worst offenders when it comes to protecting intellectual property," and potentially a trade sanctions trigger.

In its annual "Special 301 Report" on the adequacy and effectiveness of IP rights protection by US trading partners, the USTR in 2013 noted, "India remains on the Priority Watch List… [after it made] limited progress in improving its weak IPR legal framework and enforcement system."

That report further emphasised, "In many areas, however, IPR protection and enforcement challenges are growing, and there are serious questions regarding the future condition of the innovation climate in India across multiple sectors and disciplines."

The USTR said at the time that Washington "continues to urge India to reconsider how it can meet legitimate domestic policy objectives by fostering rather than undermining that innovation climate."

IRAN REJECTS INCLUSION OF BALLISTIC MISSILES IN NUCLEAR TALKS

Iran, for now, has fended off an attempt by the United States to include Tehran's ballistic missiles within the ambit of an on-going nuclear dialogue, signaling a tussle between the two countries to draw maximum political advantage out of the talks.

Iran's deputy foreign minister, Abbas Araqchi, declared that his country's ballistic missile programme would not be discussed during Tehran's nuclear dialogue with the six global powers.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran's defensive issues are neither negotiable nor subject to compromise, and they (defensive issues) will be definitely among our red lines in any negotiation," said Mr. Araqchi.

A nuclear deal, signed in November, resulted in the commencement of a dialogue between Iran and its interlocutors--United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany —which envisions lifting of all sanctions against Tehran within six months, provided it could be verifiably ascertained that Iran was not in pursuit of atomic weapons.

Ballistic missiles can be used for delivering nuclear warheads. But Iran insists that its missile programme does not have a nuclear dimension as it is not developing atomic weapons. Iran has developed a series of missiles, some of which may have a range above 2,000 kilometers.

Mr. Araqchi's remarks follow an assertion by Wendy Sherman, the lead U.S. nuclear negotiator at the talks with Tehran, during a Senate hearing, that Iran's ballistic missile programme would be addressed as part of a comprehensive nuclear deal.

Analysts say that Iran is adopting a tough posture, but, which, at the same time, is finely calibrated to ensure that there is no breakdown in talks.

The delicate balancing act was evident when Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reached a seven point agreement entailing practical steps that Tehran would undertake prior to May 15, in order to build confidence about its nuclear intentions.

But the Iranians have insisted that access to the Parchin military facility, which the IAEA has been seeking in the past, will not be granted. "Inspection of Parchin is not within the framework of these seven steps," said Behrouz Kamalvandi, the spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI), in Tehran.

Reinforcing his country's finely tuned line, the head of the AEOI, Ali Akbar Salehi warned that in case the six global powers failed to abide by their commitments under the Geneva nuclear deal, Iran could return to its original nuclear activities "in a matter of hours."

Nevertheless, the Iranians couched their hardline stance in language that suggested that they were ready for a bargain. Mr. Araqchi roundly criticised the U.S. decision of February 6 to blacklist nearly three dozen companies and individuals for evading anti-Iran sanctions. These included entities operating in Turkey, Spain, Germany, Georgia, Afghanistan, Iran, Liechtenstein and the United Arab Emirates. But the Iranian diplomat also added that caveat that the US administration might have adopted these measures due to "domestic pressure" seeking additional unilateral sanctions against Tehran.

■ DISQUIETING PROCESS

In a country and in a region that has witnessed prolonged conflict, there can be no quarrel with the proposition that the smallest chance for peace has to be grasped. But the recently launched talks between the Pakistan government and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan give rise to too many disquieting questions, including about the kind of peace Pakistan wants, and the Pakistani state's vision of itself. After months of contradictory statements, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's acceptance of the TTP's long-standing offer of talks came in the midst of a ruthless bombing campaign by the militants from Karachi to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and right after 20 soldiers were killed near the North Waziristan tribal area. Representatives of the two sides have already met once to plan a "roadmap" for the negotiations. The TTP is not participating directly, but through interlocutors in two of Pakistan's Islamic parties,

the Jamat-i-Islami and one faction of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, almost as if these were its political wing. One of the TTP's negotiators is the former head of the Lal Masjid, the Islamabad mosque that under him became a terrorist stronghold. These representatives will be accountable to a 10-member Taliban committee. Through its own interlocutors, the government has said that talks must be held within the framework of the country's Constitution and that their scope be limited to "insurgency-affected" areas. It wants the TTP to stop its terrorist attacks, and a time frame fixed for talks. It is yet not known if the Taliban and the government are on the same page on these points.

This is not the first time that Islamabad has tried to make peace with the militants. Every previous effort failed because the Taliban refused to submit to the state's writ. Each time they came back stronger, their network of militancy in Pakistan expanding constantly, while the state's own confusion on militancy and jihad helped Islamists occupy a large share of the national mindspace. It has come to a point where the Taliban now dictate terms, confident too with their brethren Taliban in Afghanistan on the ascendant. If Pakistan's political leadership and its security establishment had at all absorbed the lessons of 2001, they would have been doing everything to prevent a repeat of history after the drawdown of foreign troops from Afghanistan. Instead, what appears to have trumped again is Pakistan's desire for influence in Afghanistan, plus the delusion that it can somehow control the Taliban and other militants on both sides of the Durand Line. It is hard to escape the feeling that the region's instability is going to get worse. India has to be on guard.

■ CRICKET'S MOMENT OF TRUTH

The true merit of the insightful report of the Justice Mudgal committee appointed by the Supreme Court lies not only in its factual findings, but in the compelling case it presents for a thorough clean-up of cricket in the country. The main report's authors, Justice Mukul Mudgal and L. Nageswara Rao, have avoided the beaten path of giving 'clean chits' to top administrators or finding scapegoats, and laid bare the facts in an orderly way. The report provides a sound basis as well as an opportunity to address the malaise the game suffers from in terms of business practices that lack transparency, unbridled commercialism that ignores obvious conflicts of interest, and an overall atmosphere conducive to venality. It rejects the stand of Board of Control for Cricket in India president N. Srinivasan and India Cements, which owns Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League, that Gurunath Meiyappan

was not its owner or principal, and the astounding claim that he was no more than an enthusiastic follower of the team. By describing him as the face of the franchise and undoubtedly a team official, and concluding that he had indulged in betting and passing on information, the report has rendered the CSK franchise liable to termination under certain clauses in the Franchise Agreement and the IPL Operational Rules. These clauses cast a responsibility on the franchise to ensure that each of its officials complied with all rules, including the anti-corruption code. The report recommends further investigation into allegations of betting and spot fixing against Raj Kundra of Rajasthan Royals.

Of course, it has to be borne in mind that the main report bases its conclusions on police records, and that these are not meant to be treated as findings of guilt in respect of criminal offences. The separate report by the committee's third member, Nilay Dutta, does not agree that Mr. Meiyappan could be considered the team's owner, although he was an official under the Operational Rules. Also, he does not want to accept the allegation of betting against Mr. Meiyappan, unless taped conversations relating to this were proved authentic. He favours a comprehensive investigation into the entire issue of betting and fixing in cricket. It is clear that the present measures undertaken by the BCCI in combating sporting fraud are insufficient. Going beyond its terms of reference, the main report has flagged the conflict of interest involved in Mr. Srinivasan being head of the cricket board as well as being associated with a franchise owner. It is a moment of truth for Indian cricket, and the Mudgal committee has presented to the Supreme Court weighty reasons to undertake a thorough cleansing of the sport.

INDIA TO FOLLOW NEW OECD STANDARD TO COMBAT BLACK MONEY

Global economic body OECD unveiled a new "game-changing" mechanism to combat the menace of offshore tax evasion, a protocol to which India is a signatory with the purpose of tackling black money.

"The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development will formally present the standard for the endorsement of G20 finance ministers during a February 22-23 meeting in Sydney in Australia," the world body, whose economic policies are followed by over 120 countries, said in a statement.

"The G20 invited the OECD to develop a global standard on automatic exchange of information in 2013 and remains the driving force behind the move toward greater tax transparency worldwide," it said.

India has already signed the OECD's global standard for automatic exchange of information between tax authorities two years back and once the new format is implemented, the country will follow the new protocols envisaged in it.

A senior Finance Ministry official in New Delhi said the new protocols are aimed to smoothen the automatic exchange procedures which are used to crack cases of offshore tax evasion and illegal stashing of money.

"Developed by the OECD together with G20 countries, the standard calls on jurisdictions to obtain information from their financial institutions and exchange that information automatically with other jurisdictions on an annual basis," the OECD said.

"It sets out the financial account information to be exchanged, the financial institutions that need to report, the different types of accounts and taxpayers covered, as well as common due diligence procedures to be followed by financial institutions," it said.

The new standard, the Paris-based body said, draws extensively on the previous work on the automatic exchange of information.

"It incorporates progress made in this area within the European Union and ongoing efforts to reinforce global anti-money laundering standards," the body said.

OECD Secretary General Angel Gurria called the new norms a "game changer."

"Globalisation of the world's financial system has made it increasingly simple for people to make, hold and manage investments outside their country of residence," Mr. Gurria said.

"This new standard on automatic exchange of information will ramp up international tax co-operation, putting governments back on a more even footing as they seek to protect the integrity of their tax systems and fight tax evasion," he said.

CHALLENGES FOR A NEW IOA

For more than 14 months, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) stubbornly refused to listen to reason. It engaged

in a 'no-win' stand-off with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), staking the country's Olympic future. It drew contempt for its officials amidst a power struggle, before accepting the inevitable. Suspended by the IOC in December 2012 for violation of the Olympic Charter, the IOA eventually bowed to every diktat of the former in holding fresh elections on February 9 under IOC-dictated rules. This has paved the way for India's return to the Olympic fold. What started off as a tussle between the Union government and the IOA regarding the implementation of the National Sports Code, ended up in a 'cleansing' operation that kept out officials "charge-framed" by courts from the elections ordered by the IOC. The IOC advocates 'principles of good governance' while the IOA has through the years tried to hide behind the cloak of 'autonomy' ordained in the Charter. The government, faced with criticism both within and outside Parliament about poor administration of sports in the country, had started tightening the rules governing the IOA and the national federations, when the IOC slapped the suspension on India.

The quick response of the IOC in lifting the suspension to enable the Indian tricolour to be flown at the ongoing Winter Olympics at Sochi, Russia, showed that it was completely satisfied with a repentant IOA. The IOC might have managed to push through more stringent clauses than that could have been possible in other times while demanding clarity to the IOA constitution. But problem areas still remain. The IOA could be expected to bargain hard with the government in order to retain what is left of its autonomy and that of the national federations when the draft National Sports Development Bill is amended. The 25 per cent representation in the Executive to Athletes' Commission members, as incorporated in the draft, is far from reality. The continuation of State Olympic associations as voting-members in the IOA, in a clear attempt to manipulate vote banks, is much against the provisions in the Olympic Charter, and the wishes of the IOC and the government. National federations in boxing, fencing and taekwondo remain suspended by the respective international federations and were barred from voting in the recent IOA elections. The IOA needs to facilitate their quick return to international sports. Faction feuds within federations should be tackled urgently, and so too questions related to the democratic functioning of the sports bodies that have come up in court cases. The IOA chief, N. Ramachandran, who represents a new phase and has taken over in challenging circumstances, has his task cut out.

SPECTRUM OF SUCCESS

After the two relatively unsuccessful attempts to sell 2G spectrum in November 2012 and March 2013, it was a case of third time lucky for the government as it hit pay dirt with the latest round of auctioning that ended on Thursday. With all the spectrum on offer in the 900 MHz band sold out and 80 per cent of that offered in the 1800 MHz band sold for a total of Rs.61,162 crore — which is substantially higher than the reserve price — the government is patting itself on the back for what it calls a big success.

Yet, this has to be viewed in the backdrop of a couple of issues. First, this auction was critical for two of the biggest telecom operators in the country, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone, because their licences are set to expire later this year, and to continue in business they had to pick up spectrum irrespective of the price.

So, an element of desperation was built into the bidding from the moment it began, pushing up valuations. With a new entrant in the form of Reliance Jio Infocomm queering the pitch by adding to the competitive element, it is not surprising that the final values of the 900 MHz spectrum for Delhi and Mumbai were 105 per cent and 72 per cent more than the reserve price. Of course, it could be argued that this is exactly how markets work and as the owner of the spectrum the government is entitled to get the best price.

That brings us to the second point. The auction can be truly termed as successful only when telecom services develop at affordable prices for the consumer. If the high spending by operators in the auction forces them to raise tariffs, the objective will be lost. This is exactly what happened in the 3G arena where companies outbid each other paying big bucks for spectrum, only to discover that the market was not willing to absorb the high tariffs. The net result is that 3G services have not taken off in a big way. The signals on tariff now are mixed, with the operators complaining about the money they had to cough up for the spectrum — which they are bound to anyway — but they have stopped short of saying that tariffs will rise. The competition in the market will probably ensure that tariffs do not shoot up immediately, at least for voice telephony. Groaning as they are under high debt levels, it is unlikely that telecom companies will be able to convince banks to lend more to them now; banks are under pressure from the RBI anyway as they are over-exposed to the sector. It remains to be seen how these companies manage their funds.

Yet, all things considered, the bottomline is this: the auction and the money put on the table by the operators prove, yet again, the attractiveness of the telecom market in the country, notwithstanding the fact that it is already 900 million connections strong.

MYSTERY OF MARS 'DOUGHNUT ROCK' SOLVED

Scientists have found that the mysterious rock resembling a jelly doughnut discovered on the red planet is a piece of a larger rock broken and moved by the wheel of NASA's Mars Rover Opportunity in early January.

About 4 cm wide, the red-centered rock, dubbed Pinnacle Island, caused a stir last month when it appeared in an image the rover took on January 8 at a location where it was not present four days earlier.

Recent images have shown the original piece of rock struck by the rover's wheel, slightly uphill from where Pinnacle Island came to rest, scientists said.

"Once we moved Opportunity a short distance, after inspecting Pinnacle Island, we could see directly uphill an overturned rock that has the same unusual appearance," said Opportunity Deputy Principal Investigator Ray Arvidson of Washington University in St Louis.

"We drove over it. We can see the track. That's where Pinnacle Island came from," Arvidson said.

Examination of Pinnacle Island revealed high levels of elements such as manganese and sulfur, suggesting these water-soluble ingredients were concentrated in the rock by the action of water.

"This may have happened just beneath the surface relatively recently or it may have happened deeper below ground longer ago and then, by serendipity, erosion stripped away material above it and made it accessible to our wheels," Arvidson said.

Now that the rover is finished inspecting this rock, the team plans to drive Opportunity south and uphill to investigate exposed rock layers on the slope.

SCRAP 15 OF 44 DAMS PLANNED ACROSS SIANG IN ARUNACHAL: CWC REPORT

A report commissioned by the Central Water Commission has recommended scrapping of 15 of the 44 dams planned across the Siang river in Arunachal Pradesh. It has also suggested stricter regulations for the ones that are to be built in future.

The report has warned that the proposed 44 dams, meant to establish a capacity of 18,293 MW, will affect the river ecology and biodiversity and the region all the way down to Assam. Cumulatively, the projects will impact more than 500 km of river stretch. Of this, 353 km will be converted into reservoirs, and water will travel through tunnels for another 160.8 km. More than 18,000 hectares of forests will be impacted.

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests will consider the report at the next meeting of its Forest Advisory Committee before it assesses the controversial 700-MW Tato II project, which the UPA government has pushed hard to clear. But the CWC report notes that the downstream impact of the dams will be felt all the way to Guwahati.

The report notes: "Siang Lower HEP (2,700 MW), Siang Upper Stage II (3,750 MW) and Siang Upper Stage I (6,000 MW) are planned to cover almost the entire length of the Siang in India. 208.5 km of the river will be converted into one continuous reservoir as all three projects are planned back-to-back without any free flowing intermediate river stretch."

The report only asks for the smaller capacity dams, with a total capacity of 473.5 MW, to be done away with.

"It is strongly recommended that after dropping these projects, these river reaches should be kept free. These projects should not be re-allotted by altering their features, locations and names. Also on other free stretches/tributaries, no further hydropower projects should be planned/allotted in the entire Siang basin even if they are small (less than 25 MW) and do not fall within the purview of the EIA notification," says the report.

The Ministry has decided to assess the Tato II project for clearance, claiming it is the first project in the river basin, though it assessed the 1,000-MW Siyom (Middle Siang) project for environmental clearance as far back as 2004-05.

The Ministry's panel for forest clearances will also review the Lower Yamne State I and II projects, which fall in the Siang river basin and add up to 184 MW. The CWC report has assessed this sub-basin to be of the highest biodiversity value in the overall Siang basin.

Timeline: Telangana

1948	Indian Army annexes princely state of Hyderabad, which comprised different regions including Telangana.
1950	Telangana became Hyderabad State.
1952	First elections held in Hyderabad State.
Nov 1, 1956	Telangana merged with Andhra State, which was carved out of Madras State, to form Andhra Pradesh, a united state for Telugu—speaking people.
1969	'Jai Telangana' movement for separate statehood to Telangana began. Over 300 people killed in police firing.
1972	'Jai Andhra' movement began in coastal Andhra for separate Andhra State.
1975	Presidential order issued to implement Six Point Formula, providing some safeguards to Telangana.
1997	BJP supported demand for Telangana state; in 1998 election, it promised 'one vote two states'
2001	K. Chandrasekhara Rao floated Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) to revive Telangana movement.
2004	TRS fought elections in alliance with Congress, wins five Lok Sabha and 26 assembly seats. UPA includes Telangana issue in common minimum programme.
2008	TDP announced support for Telangana demand.
2009	TRS contested elections in alliance with TDP but its tally came down to two Lok Sabha and 10 assembly seats.
Sep 2	Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy died in helicopter crash, triggering political uncertainty.
Oct 2009	Chandrasekhara Rao began fast—unto—death for Telangana state.
Dec 9	Centre announced decision to initiate the process for formation of Telangana state.
Dec 23	Following protests in Rayalaseema and Andhra regions (Seemandhra) and en mass resignations of MPs and state legislators, centre put the process on hold citing need for consensus.
Feb 3, 2010	Centre set up five—member Srikrishna committee to look into Telangana issue.
Dec 2010	Srikrishna committee submitted its report, suggested six options
July 30, 2013	UPA coordination panel and Congress Working Committee decided to carve out Telangana state. Protests in Seemandhra.
Oct 3, 2013	Union cabinet approved the proposal to divide Andhra Pradesh. A Group of Ministers (GoM) was constituted to prepare the roadmap after consultations with all stakeholders.
Oct 25, 2013	Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy raised banner of revolt against Congress leadership. He wrote letters to president and prime minister urging them to stop bifurcation process.
Dec 5, 2013	Union cabinet approved draft Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill 2013 prepared on the basis of recommendations by the GoM. Bill sent to President Pranab Mukherjee with a request to make a reference to Andhra Pradesh legislature to obtain its views under Article 3 of the Constitution.
Dec 9	The President gave time till Jan 23 to the state legislature to give its views.
Dec 12, 2013	Bill brought to Hyderabad in a special aircraft and amid tight security.
Dec 16, 2013	Bill introduced in both houses of state legislature amid clashes between Seemandhra and Telangana lawmakers.
Jan 8, 2014	After disruptions for several days, debate finally began on the bill in assembly and council.
Jan 21, 2014	State government sought four more weeks to debate the bill. The President gave one week.

Jan 27, 2014	Chief Minister Kiran Kumar Reddy gave notice to assembly speaker for a resolution to reject the bill.
Jan 30, 2014	Amid ruckus, both houses of state legislature passed by a voice vote official resolutions, rejecting the bill and appealing to the President not to send the bill to parliament.
Feb 5, 2014	Chief minister staged sit—in in Delhi to oppose bifurcation.
Feb 7, 2014	Union cabinet cleared the bill and rejected Seemandhra leaders' demand to make Hyderabad a union territory. Bill sent to the President for his approval to table it in parliament.
Feb 11, 2013	Congress expelled six MPs from Seemandhra for moving no—confidence motion against government.
Feb 13, 2014	Bill introduced in Lok Sabha amid clashes between MPs from Seemandhra and Telangana. L. Rajagopal, a MP from Seemandhra, used pepper spray in the house. Speaker suspended 16 MPs including Rajagopal for rest of the session.
Feb 18, 2014	Lok Sabha passes Telangana bill

IRAN, P5+1 EYE COMPREHENSIVE DEAL

Envoys from Iran and six world powers noted the positive negotiating atmosphere but kept expectations low as they started talks in Vienna on a comprehensive deal to end the stand-off over Tehran's nuclear programme.

Building on an interim deal that was reached in November in Geneva, Iran and the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany are aiming to agree on further limits to Iran's nuclear programme to rule out that it could build a nuclear weapon, in return for the permanent lifting of all sanctions against Tehran.

However, officials stressed this week's round had the modest goal of agreeing on the timing and political level for the diplomatic process ahead.

Both sides want to agree on a long-term timeframe during which Iran would further cut back its uranium enrichment, limit its uranium stock, remove doubts about its plutonium-producing Arak reactor project and allow even more intrusive inspections.

In return, the sextet is offering to permanently scrap all remaining sanctions, including the ban on Iranian oil exports that have added to Tehran's economic woes.

The Geneva deal, which has been implemented since January, consists of only partial enrichment curbs and the suspension of a limited set of sanctions.

While many countries worry that Iran could use uranium or plutonium to build a nuclear weapon, Tehran's leaders insist that they are only interested in civilian nuclear technology.

RUSSIA, ESTONIA SIGN HISTORIC BORDER PACT

Russia and Estonia have signed a border pact that took the two countries 23 years to negotiate.

The Foreign Ministers of the two countries, Sergei Lavrov and Urmas Paet, sealed the border treaty at their meeting in Moscow. Estonia is the last of the three Baltic states to have legalised its border with Russia.

It is the second time the two countries finalised the pact. The first time they signed it in 2005, but Russia recalled its signature after Estonian Parliament added a preamble referring to a long-dead 1920 treaty between Russia and then independent Estonia. The mention of the treaty opened the way for Estonia to advance territorial claims to two Russian border towns.

Estonia eventually backed away and dropped any mention of the controversial treaty. Russia also insisted on including a pledge that the two countries have no territorial claims to each other.

Mr. Lavrov made it clear that Russia will continue to press its grievances on Estonia.

"We do not shy away from complicated issues that remain in our relations," he stated at a joint press conference with his Estonian counterpart.

Mr. Paet expressed the hope that Russia would now lift its restrictions on Estonian food exports to Russia imposed earlier this year. Estonia sends more than 18 per cent of its farm exports to Russia and is keen to attract more Russian tourists.

CHINA EDGES INDIA OUT TO BECOME TOP GOLD BUYER

China emerged as the largest buyer of gold in the world in 2013 having bought 1,066 tonnes. In doing so, it surpassed India as the largest gold consumer.

The Indian consumer's famed, insatiable appetite for gold was impacted in 2013 by government-imposed curbs on imports of the yellow metal, resulting in total volume demand for gold growing 13 per cent and a mere 3 per cent in value terms.

The resulting squeeze in supply of gold saw India cede its position as the leading globally buyer of gold to China. According to a report released by World Gold Council (WGC) – Gold Demand Trends, in 2013, Indian gold demand grew to 974.8 tonnes; up 13 per cent vis-à-vis China's demand which rose 32 per cent in 2013 to 1,066 tonnes.

"Unlike China, India has no policy position on gold and gold consumption," Somasundaram P.R., Managing Director, India, World Gold Council (WGC), told this correspondent . "Indian demand is an aggregate of purchases across the country. Unlike in India, the officially stated Chinese government policy is pro-gold," he said.

China wants to play a huge role in the global gold market, and has been systematically moving in that direction," Mr. Somasundaram said. China was now pushing for gold price quotes in renminbi, he said. "Instead of London, they are keen to determine international price of gold," he pointed out.

Despite several representations by the Indian industry to the government to ease import restrictions on gold, the high import duty of 10 per cent and the 80:20 scheme continue. "The spot premium here is now around $ 200 per ounce," the WGC India chief said, adding, "import duty has to be brought down as the arbitrage taking place is not at all healthy."

Consumers could live with high import duty, he said. The 80:20 scheme, however, had put a lot of stress on industry, he said.

In 2013, to some extent, supply was easy in the first-half of the year before restrictions came about, and low prices in April saw heavy buying.

"People plan gold purchases on an annual basis as they allocate resources for the same. Many had purchased their stock in April at low prices," he said, adding that in 2014, there seemed to be no such benefit likely.

A GLIMMER OF SYRIAN HOPE

The Geneva II conference on Syria ended on Saturday in a predictable standoff between President Bashar al Assad's regime and a section of the opposition National Council for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SNC), but it was remarkable that the talks, held indirectly with United Nations and Arab League mediator Lakhdar Brahimi moving between the two sides, took place at all. The conflict will enter its fourth year on March 15; it has so far killed 136,000 people and displaced over two million amid atrocities by all involved. Even a short truce a few days ago for the residents of the besieged city of Homs to leave or acquire food was negotiated not in Geneva but by the Homs Governor, Talal al Barazi, and the UN's resident coordinator, Yacoub El Hillo. Meanwhile, positions at Geneva II – where the parties were to start implementing the plan reached at Geneva I on June 30, 2012 – remain bitterly entrenched. Damascus brands the opposition terrorists and insists that Mr. Assad will not step down; the SNC, for its part, only attended under pressure from its Western and West Asian allies and after a series of internal disagreements. Of its 119 members, only 75 attended the vote in Istanbul, voting 58-14 to go to Geneva II; the representatives of Syria's 10 per cent Kurdish minority also boycotted the Swiss talks. Any chance of wider participation had ended on January 16, when the officially sanctioned opposition National Coordination Committee (NCC) said it would not attend.

Even worse complications obtain. The Syrian situation has been called a proxy war involving the West, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar on the opposition side, and Russia and Iran plus the Hezbollah on the regime's side, but certain opposition leaders resent being used thus, and government officials speak of being treated like vassals by Iran, Russia, and the Hezbollah. In addition, the al Qaeda-linked faction, the Islamic State of Iraq and al Shams (ISIS), holds the provincial capital of Rakka in central Syria, and serves a purpose both for Damascus, which tells the West that if the government fell al Qaeda would win, and for the SNC, which submerges its internal differences to fight ISIS. Furthermore, Iran, which could well have some leverage on Mr. Assad, had no option but to pull out of Geneva II when Washington stated the precondition that Mr. Assad step down in any transition process. The one glimmer of hope in all this is that since October 2013, opposition and government members have been meeting privately at the Château de Bossey in Switzerland. As the United States

and Russia will almost certainly back any agreement they reach, it is imperative that those involved continue talking and that all others stay away.

NEW GUIDELINES HELP BYPASS NBW NOD FOR DAMS IN SIKKIM

In order to bypass the need for a mandatory clearance from the National Board of Wildlife (NBW) for a slew of dams being developed in Sikkim, the Environment Ministry has slashed the protective zone around the hill State's national parks and sanctuaries from the existing 10 km to an insignificant 25-200 metres.

Under the orders of the Supreme Court, any project falling within 10 km of a national park and sanctuary has to be whetted by the standing committee of the NBW unless a different site-specific protection ring is declared for each of these national parks and sanctuaries.

The standing committee of the board had earlier submitted a report to the Ministry warning that several dams in the State were coming up without the mandatory clearance and Sikkim faced a Goa-like situation with rampant and illegal development of these dams likely to cause devastation just as unlawful mining had done in the coastal State.

The committee had said the proposed Teesta V, Teesta III, Dik Chu, Panan, Tashiding and Ting Ting hydroelectric projects were coming up without the clearance.

But the Ministry has now come up with a way to bypass the wildlife board by sticking to the apex court orders merely technically but not in spirit. The court order said the 10 km protective zone (technically called the Ecosensitive Zone under the Environment Protection Act, 19XX) would be enforced unless the Centre and the State government notified a different perimeter based on scientific assessment. These zones were mandated to ensure that the wildlife parks did not get affected by industrial and development activities that happened right on the edge of these rich wildlife areas.

But the Ministry has quietly put out draft notification to reduce these protective zones around five national parks and sanctuaries from the existing 10 km to a negligible 25-200 metres. The Hinduaccessed these draft notifications for Pangolakha, Singba Rhododendron, Fambonglho, Kyongnosla Alpine wildlife sanctuaries and the Khangchendzonga National Park, which are yet to be publicised by the Ministry.

ODIA GETS CLASSICAL LANGUAGE STATUS

Odia became the sixth language of the country to get "classical language" status after the Union Cabinet conceded a long-pending demand for putting it in the same league as Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

Odia is billed as the first language from the Indo-Aryan linguistic group and the case for making it a classical language was also premised on the fact that it has no resemblance to Hindi, Sanskrit, Bengali and Telugu. The proposal was moved by the Culture Ministry.

Once a language is declared classical, it gets financial assistance for setting up a centre of excellence for the study of that language and also opens up an avenue for two major awards for scholars of eminence. Besides, the University Grants Commission can be requested to create – to begin with at least in Central Universities – a certain number of professional chairs for classical languages for scholars of eminence in the language.

The criteria for declaring a language as classical mandates high antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1,500-2,000 years, a body of ancient literature/texts which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers and a literary tradition that is original and not borrowed from another speech community. Also since the classical language and literature is distinct from the modern, there can also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots

INDIA, BAHRAIN SIGN THREE MOUS

India and Bahrain signed three agreements to expand cooperation in key areas, including trade and business. The agreements were signed in the presence of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

After delegation-level talks between the two leaders, both sides signed three agreements in the fields of economic engagement and sports and to ensure cooperation between the Foreign Service Institute of the External Affairs Ministry and the Diplomatic Institute of the Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The leaders reviewed bilateral trade, and agreed to boost economic cooperation in diverse sectors. Bahrain has been seeking investments from Indian firms in various sectors.
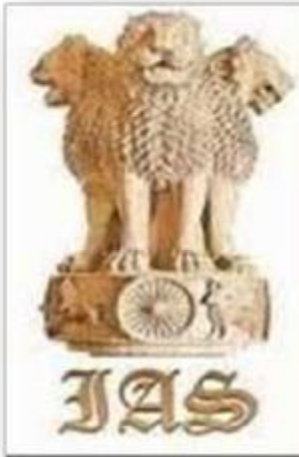
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The memorandum of understanding in the fields of youth and sports aims at strengthening bilateral cooperation through institutional exchanges. Another one is to establish a high-level joint commission for bilateral cooperation to replace the Joint Committee for Technical and Economic Cooperation established in 1981.

CHINA'S ASSURANCE ON POK CORRIDOR

China said the economic corridor that it is planning to construct to link its western Xinjiang region to Pakistan, through parts of the disputed Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), was not directed at "a third party" and would not pose any "detriment" to India's concerns on the Kashmir issue.

Parts of the economic corridor, which envisages expanding road links along the Karakoram highway and building energy pipelines, runs through PoK, which borders the Xinjiang region and provides the only possible land link between China and Pakistan.

While India has voiced its concerns about the project, citing China's stated position of not interfering in the Kashmir dispute, Chinese officials have maintained that their investments were only on a commercial basis and "without prejudice" to the dispute.

This week, China and Pakistan discussed taking forward the corridor plan, during the on-going visit of President Mamnoon Hussain to Beijing. Both sides on Wednesday signed an agreement for upgrading the Karakoram highway from the China border all the way to Islamabad.

Asked about India's concerns about the corridor passing through PoK, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters China's cooperation with Pakistan on the project was "to improve well being".

"The relevant cooperation is not directed at a third party, and it will have no detriment to the relevant parties' position on the [Kashmir] issue," she said. "With regard to whether the economic corridor passes through Kashmir, as far as I have learnt, the joint committee for construction of the economic corridor has been established and a second meeting has been held coinciding with the [President's] visit".

Ms. Hua reiterated China's position that it would not involve itself in the dispute between India and Pakistan. "I don't know if they have talked about whether this corridor passes through this region, but I can tell you that we hope the Kashmir issue can be properly resolved through consultation and negotiation between India and Pakistan," she said.

JAPAN'S FUKUSHIMA PLANT LEAKS RADIOACTIVE WATER

About 100 tons of water containing high levels of radioactive material leaked at the damaged Japanese nuclear power plant in Fukushima, the operator of the plant said.

Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) said it had detected the leak from a storage tank at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station on Wednesday night.

The leaked water contained 230 million becquerels per litre of beta-ray emitting substances, consisting mainly of strontium 90, broadcaster NHK reported, citing Tokyo Electric officials.

The level is about 7.6 million times the government's limit for water allowed to be released into the ocean, NHK said.

The cause of the leak is still under investigation, said Tokyo Electric spokesman Masaaki Fukai.

But he said it was likely to have been caused by a faulty valve in the pipes that transfers water from a decontamination facility to storage tanks.

Two other valves leading to the troubled storage tank were also left open, which seems to have resulted in the unexpected flow of water into the tank and caused an overflow, Mr. Masaaki said.

Tokyo Electric said the latest leak had stopped earlier on Thursday, six hours after the trouble was first detected.

The operator did not believe the contaminated water had reached the Pacific Ocean because "the tank is located several hundred metres away from the sea and there are no spillways near the tank," Mr. Masaaki said.

Tokyo Electric is injecting water into the three reactors to keep them cool, and has been battling leaks from storage containers where the resulting radioactive water is being stored.

CABINET APPROVES CONTINUATION OF NANO-SCIENCE MISSION

The Union Cabinet gave its clearance for the continuation of the National Mission on nano-science and technology in its second phase in the 12th plan period at a cost of Rs. 650 crores.

Launched in May 2007, the mission has been working to help scientists, institutions and the industry in terms

of promoting basic research, development of adequate manpower resources, augmentation the infrastructure for research and generation of socially useful products.

Announcing the Cabinet decision, an official statement noted that as a result of the efforts led by the mission, India has moved from the fourth position to the third in the world in terms of scientific publications in nano-science and technology.

It also noted that Indian scientists now have access to global state-of-the-art facilities like the photon factory at Tsukuba, Japan and Petra III in Hamburg, Germany and that the mission has created a platform for a national dialogue towards development of standards for nanotechnology and for laying down a regulatory framework roadmap for the cutting edge technology.

PENSION DEAL FOR VETERANS

As a parting gift that would presumably fetch some electoral returns from families of ex-servicemen and serving defence personnel, who represent a vocal vote bank in themselves, the UPA-II government has announced the acceptance of the long-pending demand for 'one rank, one pension' (OROP) for defence veterans. The removal of anomalies in the pension regime, caused following the Fifth and Sixth Pay Commission awards, is only fair and just. Soldiers of the same rank and same length of service should thus receive a similar quantum of pension, regardless of when they retire. Currently, those who retired before 2006 receive less than their counterparts, even their juniors, retiring later. The scheme will cost an estimated Rs.2,000 crore a year, although the interim budget has made a provision only for Rs.500 crore for the current year. While the details emerge, some scepticism over whether it truly meets the OROP concept or will only provide modified parity in pension, seems to be doing the rounds. But by and large, the decision appears set to benefit some three million defence pensioners from 2014-15. There are 2.4 million retired military personnel in India, besides widow-pensioners and others. In pitching the demand, defence personnel have long argued that they work in a sharply pyramidal system, with retirements coming early on in service unlike their civil service counterparts who serve until the age of 60. While just a few men in uniform make the cut and rise to higher positions in the services, almost every civil servant attains superannuation while at the top of the ladder. This leads to a marked difference in their pensions as well. While other grievances relating to medical and disability benefits and so on remain, OROP is a well-deserved deal for retired defence personnel.

While the concerns of veterans' welfare are addressed, issues that India's armed forces are confronted with on the personnel front should not be lost sight of. Just this week, the Standing Committee on Defence in a report tabled in Parliament expressed "dismay" at the shortage of personnel in the armed forces. It noted that the Army has a "record shortage" of 9,384 officers: while the authorised strength is 52,859, it is making do with 43,475 officers. Shortages face the Navy and Air Force as well. In the other ranks, the Army is short of 20,561 personnel, while the Navy is short of 1,561 officers and 11,825 sailors. The Air Force is short of 659 officers and 3,674 Airmen. Shortfalls and gaps in force levels need to be realistically assessed and addressed to meet India's defence needs. It should also be ensured that armed forces personnel continue to get a morale boost in terms of pay, perquisites, working conditions and career prospects.

LOK SABHA PASSES AMENDED NARCOTIC DRUGS BILL

The Lok Sabha passed the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Bill, 2011, simplifying the regulations for procuring and possessing narcotic drugs when used for medicinal purposes.

Once passed by the Rajya Sabha also, it would bring relief to thousands of cancer patients in the country who use opioid for acute and chronic pain relief.

Use of morphine was under strict regulation under the NDPS Act, 1985, and lengthy bureaucratic procedures discouraged its manufacturing in the country and limited its availability at medical institutions that care for cancer patients.

The amendments will prescribe the forms and conditions of licence or permits for the manufacture, possession, transport, import inter-State, export inter-State, sale, purchase, consumption or use of essential narcotic drugs and charge a fee for that.

The Indian Association of Palliative Care (IAPC) had been pushing for the passage of the amendment Bill in Parliament.

ICELAND MOVES TO WITHDRAW EU APPLICATION

Iceland's centre-right government is to seek parliamentary approval to withdraw its application to join the European Union (EU), opting not to restart accession talks that were put on ice a year ago.

A bill proposing the withdrawal was sent to parliament and was due to be debated next week, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson told.

The move came after the parliamentary caucuses of the ruling parties — the centrist Progressive Party and the conservative Independence Party — voted to withdraw the application.

In comments on the proposal quoted by online news site Visir.is, the government said it "did not have a support base" to complete the accession process.

Opinion polls have consistently shown a majority of Icelanders oppose joining the EU.

Iceland was instead to focus on its ties with the EU as member of the European Economic Area (EEA) — the free trade zone comprising non-EU countries Liechtenstein and Norway, and the 28-strong EU bloc.

Iceland opened membership talks in 2009 under a left-leaning coalition that took office in the wake of the financial crisis that saw Iceland's main banks collapse.

The accession talks were put on ice ahead of general elections in April which resulted in a change of government, opposed to EU membership.

When the centre-right coalition took office in May, 27 negotiation chapters had been opened with the EU of which 11 were "provisionally closed", said a study commissioned by the Foreign Ministry.

The report from the Institute of Economic Studies at the University of Iceland said six chapters including the challenging issue of fisheries, a mainstay of the country, had not been opened.

India very important member of piracy contact group: US

India, which has the largest number of pirates in its custody, is a very important member of the piracy contact group, a senior U.S. official has said.

U.S. Coordinator for Counter Piracy and Maritime Security Donna Hopkins said "India is a very important member of the Contact Group and, in fact, chaired a plenary" and has more pirates under its custody than any other country.

"There is almost no littoral country, no naval country, and no major shipping country that has not contributed actively to the contact group. And the two that you've mentioned have been very important partners," she said.

Ms. Hopkins said at present about 1,430 Somali pirates — either suspected and being tried or convicted and in prison in 21 countries. Somalia, after India, has the largest number of pirates under its custody.

Ms. Hopkins said there has been no piracy hijacking off the coast of Somalia since May 2012.

"This is the lowest rate of attempted hijackings in over six years, and certainly since the peak of the crisis in 2011. No ships are currently held hostage by Somali pirates, although there remain at least 49 hostages whom the international community are working to free," she said.

She said the remarkable drop in piracy was primarily due to two things: proactive counter-piracy operations by the many national navies and missions that are preventing and disrupting pirate attacks off the coast of Somalia and in the eastern Indian Ocean, and better self-protection by commercial ships, including the use of embarked armed security teams.

The CGPCS is a group of countries and organisations with a common interest in eliminating piracy from the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. It was constituted in 2009 to facilitate the discussion and coordination of actions among states and organizations to suppress piracy.

■ BACK FROM THE BRINK IN UKRAINE

Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovych has recognised the increasingly dangerous nature of the situation in his country by announcing early elections and a return to the 2004 Constitution, which will limit the President's powers. This follows escalating violence over the last several days, in which — according to the Health Ministry — 77 people, including police personnel, have been killed and 577 injured. International condemnation was rapid, with U.S. President Barack Obama warning against Ukrainian military involvement and calls for sanctions coming from German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande. Reactions within Ukraine have included the occupation of civic buildings in the western city of Lviv; rail services between the capital, Kiev, and Lviv were suspended, and at least 45 Ukrainian athletes have returned home from the Winter Olympics in Sochi. The violence caused severe divisions throughout the country, with several police officers siding with or joining the protesters; as it was, the Yanukovych government had long incurred public distrust for corruption and nepotism.

In addition, the President's own moves had exacerbated the uncertainty; for example, he replaced the

head of the armed forces, Colonel-General Volodymyr Zamana, with Admiral Yuriy Ilyin, but without giving reasons. The Defence Ministry also said the military might be used for "antiterrorist" operations, but legally the government is obliged first to impose a state of emergency, and the armed forces have rightly resisted getting involved. One ugly development has been the rising political star of far-right groups such as Prawy Sektor (Right Sector) and the anti-Semitic Svoboda, the third-largest opposition party. Right Sector says it did not agree to the February 19 "truce" and that there was "nothing to negotiate." The focus now, however, must be on orderly and peaceful progress towards elections which must be impeccably conducted if the country is not to face further crises. That particularly requires genuinely constructive conduct on the part of Russia and the European Union; the latter has been less than straightforward at times, as its earlier association agreement with Ukraine — which Mr. Yanukovych abandoned in December 2013 — was tied to International Monetary Fund conditions and to closer military cooperation between Ukraine and the EU's NATO-dominated military institutions. Crucially, only 30 per cent of Ukrainians supported the deal, which also incurred Moscow's displeasure. Now, however, Ukrainians have an opportunity to make their own decisions about their future in the best possible way, with a democratic election; they must make the most of it.

SECURITY COUNCIL CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN SUPPLIES TO SYRIA

The United Nations Security Council has passed a unanimous resolution on the delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria — the decision flowing from a consensus that the government and the armed opposition would be held responsible for providing relief to the people entangled in the bloody conflict, which has already claimed over 100,000 lives.

To enable the flow of humanitarian supplies, the 15-member Council called for an immediate end to all forms of violence in the country and strongly condemned the rise of al-Qaeda-affiliated terror, the U.N. News Centre said.

"Russia has backed the resolution when it was agreed upon and became balanced," said Vitaly Churkin, Moscow's representative at the U.N., after the Council had voted. Opposed to "regime change," the Russians had rejected an earlier version of the western-backed resolution, which, in their view singularly targeted the government of Syrian President, Bashar Al-Assad.

The Council urged all parties engaged in the conflict to lift sieges on population centres, including Aleppo — Syria's largest city, Damascus and Rural Damascus as well as Homs, which had for long become a militant stronghold. It also called for de-militarising medical facilities, schools and other civilian facilities, affirming that "medical neutrality" must be maintained.

Without fixing responsibility on either side, the resolution urged "all parties" to cease the targeting of civilians, by means that include the indiscriminate use of weapons for shelling and aerial bombardment with barrel bombs. The Syrian government has been accused of using barrel bombs, which are essentially explosives-filled oil drums that are dropped from helicopters. The media has extensively reported the apparent use of these weapons, which has pointedly fed into the debate on whether it was now justifiable to supply the armed opposition with anti-aircraft weaponry, to neutralise the advantage held by government forces in the air.

John Kerry, the U.S. Secretary of State, has welcomed the resolution calling it a "hinge point" in the three-year-old Syrian conflict.

"After three years of slaughter and savagery, people rightfully will question whether progress is possible, but this resolution holds the promise of something real," he observed. The resolution has asked U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to report to the Council every month on the progress in compliance. The document includes a provision of "further steps" against those who do not comply, but does not specify what these steps could be.

While the Americans and their western partners have made their hostility to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad well known, Russia, the main supporter of the government in Damascus, has asserted that keeping the Syrian State functional was essential to complete the humanitarian mission.

At the UN headquarters, Mr. Churkin singled out gunmen, who fire at aid convoys, use civilians as human shields and commit terrorist acts as impediments to successful relief efforts.

China, which appears to have synchronised its stance on Syria with Russia, has pencilled the spotlight on the pursuit of a political solution to the crisis. Beijing's representative at the UN, Liu Jieyi noted that aid alone is a temporary solution. He stressed that a political solution

to the crisis is required, which had begun with last month's Geneva 2 conference. The Chinese representative also pointed out that Saturday's resolution affirms the respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence and unity. It also sends a strong unified message to all sides to work towards the improvement of humanitarian conditions in Syria.

CHINA'S MOON ROVER GOES INTO THIRD PLANNED DORMANCY

China's first lunar rover Jade Rabbit, which woke up ten days ago after being declared dead, has entered its third "planned dormancy" even as mechanical issues that might cripple the vehicle still unresolved.

The rover named Yutu (Jade Rabbit) in Chinese entered its 14-day dormancy on Saturday, with the mechanical control issues unresolved, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

According to the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (SASTIND), Yutu only carried out fixed point observations during its third lunar day, equivalent to about two weeks on Earth.

Yutu's radar, panorama camera and infrared imaging equipment are functioning normally, but the control issues that have troubled the rover since January persist.

During the lunar night, when there is no sunlight to power rover's solar panels, it is expected to stay in a power-off mode and communication with Earth is cut.

Yutu touched down on the moon's surface on December 15, some hours after lunar probe Chang'e-3 landed.

The rover was designed to roam the lunar surface for at least three months to survey the moon's geological structure and surface substances and look for natural resources.

But problems emerged before the rover entered its second dormancy on the moon on January 25 as the lunar night fell.

According to SASTIND, the mechanic control abnormality occurred due to the "complicated lunar surface". Experts had feared that it might never function again, but Yutu woke up on February 12, two days behind schedule. The news caused a stir in China's social networking circles.

The Chang'e-3 lunar probe, which carried Yutu to the moon's surface, also entered dormancy in the wee hours on Sunday, after carrying out observations of celestial bodies and the Earth's plasmasphere using its optical telescope and extreme ultraviolet camera.

China is the third country to soft-land on the moon after the United States and the Soviet Union. Chang'e-3 is part of the second phase of China's lunar program, which includes orbiting, landing and returning to Earth.

The country has also sent probes to orbit the moon in 2007 and 2010, the first of which crashed onto the lunar surface at the end of its mission.

According to the SASTIND, the Chang'e-2 has become China's first man-made asteroid, and is currently 70 million km from the Earth.

CERC NOTIFIES POWER TARIFF REGULATIONS

Changes are on the anvil in the way incentives and tax liabilities get calculated for Central power generation and transmission firms as the the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) has notified new tariff regulations.

The new norms will be in force for five years — from April 1, 2014, to March 31, 2019. They are not applicable to generating stations or inter-State transmission systems, where tariffs have been discovered through competitive bidding.

As per the new norms, notified by the CERC on February 21, there are key changes with regard to tax and calculation of incentives for thermal power plants.

The changes would be negative for the country's largest power producer NTPC and state-run transmission utility Power Grid, among others. NTPC stock fell 11.43 per cent to close at Rs.117.05 on the BSE, while Power Grid was down 0.40 per cent at Rs.94.75.

The base rate of return on equity (RoE) should be "grossed up with the effective tax rate of the respective financial year," according to the CERC.

For this purpose, the effective tax rate should be considered on the basis of actual tax paid in the respect of the financial year by the concerned generating company or the transmission licensee.

"The actual tax income on other income stream (that is, income of non-generation or non-transmission business, as the case may be) shall not be considered for the calculation of effective tax rate," the regulator noted.

The base rate of RoE would be 15.5 per cent for thermal generating stations, transmission system, including communication system, and run of the river hydro generating station.

Besides, the regulations require thermal plants to calculate incentives based on plant load factor (PLF) rather than plant availability factor (PAF). However, the incentive for every unit of electricity generated has been kept flat at 50 paise/kWh.

SRI LANKA SLAMS UN RIGHTS CHIEF FOR 'UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE'

The United Nations has called for an independent international probe into allegations of war crimes in Sri Lanka during the final battle with the LTTE, prompting an angry reaction from Colombo which rejected the demand and slammed it as "unwarranted interference".

In a UN report, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay asked for setting up of an independent probe and said Sri Lanka had "consistently failed to establish the truth".

"The High Commissioner believes this can no longer be explained as a function of time or technical capacity, but that it is fundamentally a question of political will," the report stated.

"She remains convinced that an independent, international inquiry would play a positive role in eliciting new information and establishing the truth where domestic inquiry mechanisms have failed," it said.

President Mahida Rajapaksa's government formally rejected Ms. Pillay's demand for "an independent, international inquiry".

The international community has found fault with Sri Lanka for dragging its feet on the issue of national reconciliation with the Tamil minority and failure to set up a mechanism to address concerns over human rights abuses during the final phase of the war with the LTTE that ended in 2009.

Sri Lanka's permanent mission in Geneva, in a statement from the government, slammed Ms. Pillay, saying her report "reflects the preconceived, politicised and prejudicial agenda which she has relentlessly pursued with regard to Sri Lanka".

The government contends that "it has nevertheless continued to make significant progress in its own reconciliation process and has continued to regularly update the Council on such progress".

The government "reiterates its categorical rejection of the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report, which reflects bias and is tantamount to an unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state".

Sri Lanka said the report gave scant or no regard to the domestic processes ongoing in the country within the framework of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission and its action plan of implementation.

Ms. Pillay's report is being seen as a preamble to the US-sponsored resolution against Sri Lanka at the UN rights body late next month.

ISRO TO LAUNCH ASTROSAT IN 2015

The Indian Space Research Organisation intends launching Astrosat, an astronomical satellite, in 2015.

To be launched aboard a PSLV rocket, the satellite would have six pieces of equipment built by the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, he said addressing the 32nd convocation of Mangalore University on the Mangalagangotri campus.

Dr. Radhakrishnan said India had satellites to study weather, environment and water security and to help in communication. RISAT I, first indigenously built all-weather, radar-imaging satellite launched two years ago, opened up access to the microwave remote sensing system. It could see through cloud cover — for instance, in assessing flooding — and its radar worked in darkness. It was being used to monitor kharif crops such as paddy and jute.

Dr. Radhakrishnan later told presspersons that ISRO's entry into social media was to make the younger generation discuss science, especially space programmes. It would help draw young people, particularly those aged 18-34, to science.

PANEL ON NEW BANK LICENCES SUBMITS REPORT

The Bimal Jalan panel which was scrutinising applications for new bank licences has submited its report to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The report contains names of entities eligible for bank licences. It was not immediately known how many applicants have been shortlisted by the high-level advisory panel.

The panel started the process of evaluations with the first meeting on November 1, 2013.

Other members of the committee are former RBI Deputy Governor Usha Thorat, former Securities and Exchange Board of India Chairman C B Bhave and Nachiket M Mor, Director of the Central Board of Directors of the RBI.

The central bank issued guidelines for licensing of new banks on February 22 last year and issued clarifications in June.

Public sector units India Post and IFCI and private sector Anil Ambani group and Aditya Birla group are among the 25 players in the fray for bank licences. Bajaj Finance, Muthoot Finance, Religare Enterprises and Shriram Capital have also applied.

In the past 20 years, the RBI has licensed 12 banks in the private sector in two phases. Ten banks were licensed on the basis of guidelines issued in January 1993.

Kotak Mahindra Bank and Yes Bank were the last two entities to get banking licences from the RBI in 2003—04.

India has 27 public sector banks, 22 private sector banks and 56 regional rural banks.

In the 2001 round of guidelines for new licences, the committee members were C G Somiah, former government auditor CAG, I G Patel, former RBI Governor, and Dipankar Basu, former head of State Bank of India.

■ GIVING AGRICULTURE ITS DUE

There are obviously several dimensions to India's recent agricultural performance which Finance Minister P. Chidambaram in his budget speech termed as "stellar". A week before the budget, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar had announced that foodgrain production is on course to touch a new record of 263 million tonnes, up from 255.36 million tonnes last year. The good performance is seen with regard to other crops too. Estimates of production of sugarcane, pulses, cotton and oilseeds are also encouraging. A good agricultural season has contained farm prices, and moderating food prices are behind the steep fall in both retail and WPI inflation in January. Just as important, news of a bumper agricultural harvest has, to some extent, dampened inflation expectations. Arguably, the most noticeable feature has been the contribution of agriculture to overall GDP growth this year. The Central Statistical Organisation in its advance estimates has projected growth in agriculture and allied activities at 4.6 per cent during the current year, with overall GDP growing at only 4.9 per cent. Since industry and the usually dependable services sector have disappointed, the farm sector is seen to have almost single-handedly underpinned recent economic growth. Even over a longer period the track record has been good. Over the past ten years, agriculture has grown by around 4 per cent a year on an average, but it must be pointed out that during most of that period the monsoons were satisfactory.

It is obvious from recent experience that supportive government policies by themselves cannot keep agricultural production growing at a high rate during periods when the monsoons fail or are below par. The question has therefore been asked whether during 2014-15, the monsoons will continue to be beneficial. With dependence on the monsoons still being high, for next year the contribution of agriculture to economic growth cannot be taken for granted. Ironically, the very success of agriculture has exposed the weakness of some government policies, which are tilted towards cereals, to the detriment of other essential food products. Specifically, the periodic hikes in minimum support prices and open-ended procurement have resulted in an imbalance, leading to a glut in the production of rice.

Minimum support prices have in practice become procurement prices, and with State governments adding to it a bonus, the cost of procurement has become high. Besides, storage has been a serious problem. Government godowns are overflowing at a time when cereal inflation is still high. All this suggests that the government's major intervention in the farm sector through minimum support prices needs a closer look.

■ IRAN KEEPS THE DOOR OPEN

The Vienna talks between Iran and the E3/EU+3 group, acting for the P5+1, reached a constructive conclusion on February 20, with Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton making identical statements, in Farsi and English respectively, that the parties had identified all the issues necessary for a long-term deal. In effect, they have agreed on the framework for a "comprehensive and final agreement." The next round of talks is to start on March 17, again in the Austrian capital. Under the interim agreement, Iran will stop producing uranium enriched to nearly 20 per cent, will dilute half the stockpile it has already enriched to the same level, and will continue converting the rest to a form unsuitable for further enrichment. In addition, Tehran will not enrich uranium in about half the centrifuges at Natanz and three quarters of those at Fordo. It will manufacture equipment

only to repair existing machines, and will put the Arak heavy-water reactor on indefinite hold. It will not build any more enrichment facilities. Furthermore, the International Atomic Energy Agency will be able to inspect Natanz and Fordo on a daily basis, and the Arak reactor at least on a monthly basis.

On the other side, the western countries in particular have undertaken not to impose further nuclear-related sanctions if Iran fulfils its Vienna commitments; they will also pay Iran a total of $4.2 billion in oil revenues, allow Iran to resume exporting precious metals, suspend sanctions on Iran's petrochemical exports, and permit the Islamic Republic to import goods and services for automobile manufacturing plants. In addition, they will maintain their current levels of crude oil imports from Iran, and will allow Iran's civil airlines to acquire spare parts and services. Yet the deal already faces interference. Israel is pushing certain western governments to include Iran's missile programme in future talks, thereby showing its own anxiety that a final agreement will be reached without it. Saudi Arabia, which sees Iran as a theological and political rival, will also view the current prospects with alarm. Iran's willingness, however, to keep the door open need cause neither surprise nor suspicion. It was in fact the United States which, by providing uranium enriched to 93 per cent, helped start Iran's nuclear programme in 1967, and Tehran aimed for nuclear self-sufficiency only after the West imposed sanctions on the Khomeini regime in the 1980s. There could be no clearer evidence for continued engagement between the P5+1 and Iran, and both sides must reach fair and just final-status arrangements without delay.

CENTRAL AFRICAN DILEMMA

In December 2013, France intervened in an African civil war for the second time in a year, again under impeccable United Nations authority, but it now faces an increasingly difficult predicament in the Central African Republic (CAR). The first intervention, in Mali, was a success for French President François Hollande, as French and African Union (AU) troops restored stability and blocked an imminent takeover by the Maghreb-based and al Qaeda-linked extreme Islamist group Ansar Dine. In CAR, however, several constraints obtain, such as local conditions, French public reluctance to commit more troops, and the unwillingness of the European Union and the United States to help. These are making it more likely that CAR will collapse into what a U.N. official has called ethnic-religious cleansing, even though the country has no history of religious strife. Even partition now looms, despite desperate efforts by CAR Interim President Catherine Samba Panza; half of CAR's 4.6 million people are Christians, and 15 per cent, or about 700,000, are Muslims. The fighting has taken at least 2,000 lives and displaced about a million people, many of whom are barely surviving in terrible conditions; 80,000 Muslims have reportedly fled the north to Chad and the west to Cameroon. The killings have been extremely brutal, and Christian militias, called the anti-balaka (Sango for anti-machete), are massacring Muslim civilians in revenge for killings of their co-religionists by Muslim militias called the Séléka, which engaged in such killings themselves after overthrowing President François Bozizé in March 2013.

French troops in CAR, however, have not done everything they could have done, even if their numbers have been raised from 1,600 to 2,000, and their task is to help a 6,000-strong African Union force; the narrow streets in the capital Bangui and dense vegetation in the rural areas make heavy military equipment and air power ineffective, and more ground troops are needed. Human Rights Watch emergency director Peter Bouckaert has told the BBC that he saw French troops sitting still while civilians were murdered barely yards away, and other eyewitnesses speak of Chadian troops escorting Séléka fighters across the border; the Chadian army has lost men and has reportedly killed CAR civilians. In addition, western interest in the country is low; it is landlocked and of little strategic importance to the west. In other regions of the world, nevertheless, concern is growing, and West Asian governments are paying closer attention. A failure of political will in France, the EU, and the United States could make CAR yet another target for what could well be externally-funded Islamist extremists.

A WATER AGENDA

It is the time of the year when political manifestos are being written and candidates are traipsing the length and breadth of constituencies meeting and confabulating with voters. The election season is the right time to engage with the governance system to address burning problems which are faced by the electorate. Since it happens to be the onset of summer, water will be the priority item for many a candidate to grapple with and address.

The situation with drinking water is abysmal. Most of our cities and towns get intermittent supply of water once in several days and that too of dubious quality. Most of the slums and low income areas get even lesser water, if at

all, and people have to struggle and pay a huge sum for a pot. Even for irrigation water there is a struggle for many. Rain-fed irrigation as well as groundwater-based irrigation systems are a reality for the vast majority of farmers and groundwater is running out very fast.

Our water supply institutions are simply incapable of bringing water to all. Institutional reform is a must and building capacity even more important. Is it time for specialised drinking water institutions to be created for both rural and urban areas charged with the responsibility with bringing 24/7 water supply and sewerage service to all at affordable price?

Our rivers, lakes and tanks in all our cities and towns are in a state of distress. Even in villages the state of water bodies is pathetic. Is it not time that the specialised water institution also take responsibility for all water bodies in the cities and towns and revive them too?

This will not only augment scarce water resources but also recharge the aquifers and make available groundwater for the supplemental requirement of the city and its residents.

Rainwater harvesting has received lip service. Now is the time to launch a national mission on harvesting rain with specific time-bound deadlines to make sure that each and every drop of rainwater is conserved in homes and buildings and in lakes and ponds for use over the entire year.

Pollution has been a bane for water bodies with entire rivers biologically dead for long stretches. A war on pollution will need to be declared and a national river and lake revival mission started immediately. By preventing both domestic and industrial pollution, the state of the environment can be enhanced and water quality improvement can make available more water for higher quality use.

Sanitation has been a bug bear for India, with the single largest number of people defecating in the open coming from this country. Within three years open defecation will need to be eliminated by launching a people's movement for a clean environment. Especially in cities, treated wastewater with the setting up of sewage treatment plants can become a resource to fill lakes, wetlands and rivers and enhance bio-diversity.

CLEAN INDIA INITIATIVE

Water and sanitation are state subjects as are rivers and groundwater. However, an impetus from the Centre and urgency to address problems in a mission mode can trigger

a Clean India initiative which can provide good water and sanitation for our citizens, improving dramatically their quality of lives and creating the right platform for launching an economic growth model. Clean rivers and lakes are both supporters and indicators of development.

LOOMING MILITARY BREAKDOWN

In a nation where instances of admission of individual responsibility are depressingly rare, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral D.K. Joshi's resignation following the tragic accident on INS Sindhuratna is welcome evidence that some officials, at least, still hold themselves to the highest standards. Behind his resignation, though, lies a terrifying story: India's military is, literally, on the verge of breakdown. In recent years, each military chief has told Defence Minister A.K. Antony of the growing danger that India might prove unable to fight future wars. Even as the Army has been instructed to be prepared to fight a war on two fronts, acquisitions of desperately needed armour and artillery systems have been endlessly delayed. The Air Force is warning that its combat fleet will start shrinking from 2017; squadrons are rationing flying time to prolong the life of aircraft for as long as possible. The Navy is well below strength, and its increasingly obsolescent platforms are dangerous. Last year's explosion on board INS Sindhurakshak, one of 10 significant accidents involving the Navy in the last seven months, caused more damage than the Navy ever suffered at war. Perhaps most dangerous, all three services face large-scale deficits of officers, because the armed forces' pay scales and service conditions are too poor to attract the skilled young people modern militaries need. There are more than a few in the armed forces who are asking whether the civilian leadership is not just as responsible for the deaths on board the Sindhuratna as Admiral Joshi, whose resignation the Union government was so quick to accept.

Though Mr. Antony's years in office have seen him maintain his stellar reputation for personal probity — which is no mean achievement in itself — he has done little to address the looming crisis in Indian defence. Equipment purchases have stalled at the whiff of scandal, often forcing the forces to restart the acquisition process, that can last years. In fairness to Mr. Antony, the problem is not all of his making. The depreciation of the rupee against the dollar, and India's slowing growth, have stripped him of resources badly needed for modernisation. Yet, there is no glossing over the fact that too little has been done on defence reform and capacity-building. India can only hope it is not too late. The last Indian military chief to

hand in his resignation was General K.S. Thimayya, who did so in 1959 to protest Defence Minister V.K. Krishna Menon's refusal to consider his plans to prepare the Army for a war with China. Prime Minister Nehru persuaded the legendary General to take back his resignation, but chose not to persuade his Defence Minister to take the threat of war seriously. The consequences still haunt India.

FROM AUSTERITY TO GROWTH

In a noticeable change in its stance, the G-20, comprising the world's biggest economies, at the recent meeting in Sydney decided to shift emphasis from championing austerity to promoting growth at a time when the financial crisis in seen to be receding. Towards that end, Finance Ministers and central bank governors of the G-20 agreed to target reforms aimed at adding more than $2 trillion to the global economy over five years. Political leaders from the bloc who will meet in November are expected to outline what reforms they expect to implement to achieve the target. Yet the tasks of identifying reforms and implementing them in a synchronised manner among countries are not easy. For one, the world's biggest economies are not a homogenous lot. Even the traditional categorisation such as advanced and developing economies falls flat when individual countries in each sub-group exhibit diverse characteristics. Among advanced economies, the U.S. is ahead with recovery gathering steam. Countries of the EU, on the other hand, are still struggling to come out of the recession, although they have put their worst days behind them.

Another important development often highlighted by institutions such as the IMF is that while in the early post-recovery period, China and India along with a few other developing countries were spearheading global growth, the position is now reversed with the advanced economies led by the U.S. emerging in the forefront. All these explain why the joint G-20 communique cannot be anything but bland. It talks of ambitious but realistic policies to lift the collective GDP to 2 per cent above the trajectory implied by current policies, over the coming five years. The fixing of a numerical target for future growth is considered significant. In the past, the G-20 has shied away from fixing numbers in such areas as fiscal adjustments. India's strong views on the deleterious consequences of the U.S. Federal Reserve's ongoing taper process were accommodated in the final communique, which calls for a continuous calibration of monetary policy settings by individual countries and their communication to one another. Another of India's key concerns — the reform of the IMF quota system to give developing economies a greater say — was also taken on board. The G-20, comprising the biggest industrialised and developing countries accounting for 85 per cent of the world economy, might have regained some relevance which it was fast losing as countries went their own ways, However, even its most notable success — persuading members to shift gears from austerity to growth — has met with scepticism from certain key members, who have termed the numerical targets aspirational rather than realistic.

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FINANCING INDIA'S QUEST FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH OVERAGE

UNIVERSAL HEALTH coverage (UHC), as aconcept, is about people having access to needed healthcare without suffering financial hardship, thus, encompassing improvements in access, quality and financial protection. UHC aims to achieve better health and development outcomes, prevent people from being impoverished due to health-related causes and give people the opportunity to lead healthier, more productive lives. UHC has also featured prominently in discussions around the post-MDG agenda as a possible goal for the post-2015 global development agenda.

In recent years, a large number of countries around the world have stepped up their activities aimed at achieving Universal Health Coverage for their people. In India too, UHC is now clearly on the policy agenda and there is increasing willingness of central as well as state governments to increase their outlays for the health sector. However, within this overall commitment to increase public health spending, there are difficult decisions to be taken on allocating new resources between personal health care, catastrophic care and population-based public health interventions, when all of these are inadequately financed at present.

The recently approved 12th Five Year Plan clearly lays out its long term objective of establishing a system of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in the country (Planning Commission 2012). A significant increase in public health expenditure, by about 1 per cent of GDP per year, is aimed to be achieved by the end of the 12th plan. Hitherto, India's health sector has been challenged by overall low levels of public financing, entrenched accountability issues in the public delivery system and the persistent dominance of out-of-pocket spending. However, several recent initiatives have been introduced by the central and state governments in India, aimed at addressing some of these challenges and to improve the availability of and access to health services, particularly for the poor and vulnerable groups in the country.

India's Health Financing Context

India has long been a low spender on health care, and allocated approximately 4.1 per cent of GDP or US$40 per capita in 2008-09 to the health sector. In terms of India's share in global health expenditure, the country with over 17 per cent of the world's population manages with less than 1 per cent of the world's total health expenditure. The share of health spending has also not kept pace with the country's dynamic economic growth.

Public spending on health as a per cent of GDP has varied little over the last two decades, hovering at about 1 per cent.

In 2005, government (central, state and local) was the source of about one-fifth of spending while out-of-pocket payments represent about 70 per cent - one of the highest percentages in the world. Though, no official estimates are available for recent years, WHO estimates put the share of government expenditure at 30 per cent and that of out-of-pocket payments at about 60 per cent for 2011, a significant improvement over 2005, but still very high for the country's level of socio-economic development.

Health finance and delivery in India have developed along four main and mostly parallel lines. The first, and the far largest, is out-of-pocket spending by households. Nearly all this spending is directed to fee-for-service private providers, but some are for user fees collected at public facilities. This method of finance places considerable financial burden on poor households, and is seen as one of the important reasons for impoverishment in Indians.

The second is tax-financed, direct public delivery which, in principle, is available for all of India's population. Operated mainly by the states, the public delivery system, which includes the centrally sponsored activities funded

under NRHM, runs facilities at primary, secondary as well as tertiary levels, and accounts for about 20 and 40 per cent of outpatient and inpatient utilization in the country respectively. Considerable inter-state variation exists, especially in inpatient utilization and there are significant sub-national disparities across various dimensions of vulnerability.

The third segment consists of social insurance schemes for formal private sector workers and government employees. These schemes are generally mandatory and most are financed through employee and employer contributions via a payroll tax, but also benefit from partial government subsidies.

The fourth segment is voluntary private insurance (PHI) which emerged in the late 1980s but has grown rapidly in the 2000s. In 2004-05, PHI accounted for 1.6 per cent of total health expenditure, but reached an estimated 3 per cent by 2008-09.

Health Finance and Outcomes

India is significantly below its global comparators in terms of public expenditure on health as a share of GDP among countries with similar levels of income (GDP per capita in current US dollars). At its current level of income, most countries exhibit higher public spending on health as a share of their GDP than India (World Bank, 2010).

Large disparities in health outcomes are still evident across states and social groups and improvements have not been shared equally. Public subsidies for health have historically favored the better off segments of society.

India's quest for UHC must address these issues of adequacy, effectiveness, efficiency and equity of public health spending.

Recent Programs

The bottom-up design for expansion of health coverage, starting with coverage of the rural and the poorest segments of the population first, and the rapid scale-up of population coverage in a short period of time, are unique facets of India's recent strides towards universal health coverage.

Two prominent national programs in this respect have been the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (now rechristened as National Health Mission) and the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) of the Ministry of Labour and Employment. In addition, several state programs such as the Rajiv Aarogyasri scheme launched by the state government of Andhra Pradesh and similar programs such as the Vajpayee Arogyashri Scheme (Karnataka), Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (Tamil Nadu), Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (Kerala), Rajeev Jeevandayee (Maharashtra), Mukhyamantri Amritam (Gujarat), Megha Health Insurance scheme (Meghalaya), Mukhya Mantri Swasthya BimaYojana (Chhatisgarh), and RSBY Plus (Himachal Pradesh) are examples of state-government led efforts to expand access to tertiary, surgical care for their poor and vulnerable population groups.

They all aim at extending health coverage and improved financial protection to the poor and other vulnerable groups in the country, are fully subsidized by the government and to the extent of their benefits packages, they are 'cashless' for their beneficiaries, not requiring any contributions, upfront payments to providers or bearing a share of the costs of treatment.

Introduced in 2005, NRHM is the flagship initiative of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), Government of India, aimed at expanding health coverage in the country. In a context where the country's constitution lays out health as being a subject for state governments, NRHM supplements and strengthens the state-owned public health systems by providing additional resources with a focus on rural areas, primary care and public health programs. NRHM also leverages this financial support to facilitate the creation of institutional mechanisms that enable some degree of financial autonomy and a faster flow of funds. NRHM has led to several service delivery innovations and to significant, though still inadequate, increases in central government investments in health, especially for public health interventions and primary care. In addition to significantly increased financing, the flexibility around hiring contractual staff, supply chain reforms, introduction of a cadre of grassroots workers paid entirely based on performance, innovative financial flow mechanisms and an overall increased emphasis on public health expenditure, distinguish NRHM from the situation prior to its existence.

One of the largest components in NRHM is the Janani Suraksha Yojana, which offers a conditional cash transfer to poor women for availing free institutional maternity services created under NRHM, and is currently utilized by over 10 million women each year. Over 22 million children stand fully immunized each year (NRHM 2012). However, it is also a fact that an overwhelming 80 per cent of ambulatory care and as much as 60 per cent of inpatient

care continues to be obtained outside the public health system (NSSO 60th round data).

Since 2007, the new wave of Government Sponsored Health Insurance Schemes (GSHISs) such as RSBY and state programs inspired by Rajiv Aarogyasri in AP, has introduced a new set of arrangements to govern, allocate and manage the use of public resources for health, including an explicit (and delivered) package of services, greater accountability for delivering services, and a bottom-up design to reach universal coverage by first achieving coverage of the poor. GSHISs have been able to scale up rapidly. By 2010, about 240 million Indians were covered by GSHISs, about 19 per cent of the population. Accounting for private insurance and other forms of coverage, more than 300 million people, or more than 25 per cent of the population, had access to some form of health insurance in 2010.

In the light of current trends, and assuming continued political and financial support from the government, insurance coverage is expected to reach more than 630 million persons, 50 per cent of the population by 2015.

Gazing into the Crystal Ball

The recent efforts towards UHC have high visibility and have also helped raise the political profile of health in the country, which has led to additional financing for programs aimed at providing access to affordable, quality healthcare for the most vulnerable groups in the country.

Significant central investments in NRHM and RSBY form part of the stated strategy of the plan, and a similar expectation is also made from the state level.

Summing Up

Preventive interventions and effective case management for non communicable diseases at the primary care level can contribute significantly in reducing the need for hospitalization, thereby, simultaneously improving quality of life for the beneficiaries and containing the costs of hospitalization programs. Also, lessons from the demand-side financing schemes in aligning facility-level incentives for inpatient care can be used to introduce a performance-based remuneration system for public facilities providing primary care. If these programs can be coordinated in this manner for future expansion plans, their current configuration could be a promising foundation for a reformed health finance and delivery system. The increased commitment to strengthen the magnitude of public health spending, and the initial lessons from the

current generation of UHC programs, together augur well, with great potential to catapult forward India's march towards Universal Health Coverage.

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE PROGRESS

The world is going through troubled times. There is concern everywhere about the sustainability of the present paradigm of progress. Trust in institutions of government and business is low.

Scenarios of India's future prepared by The Planning Commission in the run up to the 12th Five Year Plan (which commenced in April 2012) had laid out that India's economic growth rate was declining sharply because there was 'sand in the wheels' of institutions. The scenarios analyzed that the declining trust of India's citizens in institutions of government, political parties and big business, was creating a policy log-jam. Unless the trust could be restored, the wheels of progress will not be able to move faster.

2014 has dawned with the agenda laid out for political parties who will be competing for citizens' support in the national elections in a few months' time. The agenda is 'reform institutions'. Institutions must serve the people and not be fiefdoms of people in power. Government institutions must deliver the outcomes people need, not merely absorb large amounts of public funds. Good service from public institutions is the people's right Not a favour they must pay a bribe for.

Reforming Institutions

Institutions—of the state, of business, of democracy, of justice— have been developed by human beings, over centuries, to fulfil the needs of their societies. Institutions are vehicles with which societies realize their aspirations. Indeed, homo sapiens can be distinguished from other animal species by their deliberate development of institutions for the management of their affairs. Animal, bird and insect communities have innate, institutionalized rules that govern their behaviour. But so far as we know they do not, unlike human beings, consciously change and improve these institutionalized rules.

The conditions in which humanity's social and economic institutions must perform have changed dramatically in the past two decades.

An Unprecedented Storm

As the 21st century unfolds, there are four strong winds blowing across the world and converging to create an

unprecedented storm which is challenging business and government institutions that are not designed for these conditions.

The first strong wind is the idea of free markets and capitalism. This is not a new idea. Often attributed to Adam Smith, it has been around for at least 200 years.

With the spread of free markets everywhere and into India too with the opening of our economy in the 1990s, economies of many countries have been growing faster. Most noteworthy is the growth of the two billion-people plus countries—China and India. The growth of their economies is enabling many millions of people to escape poverty.

Economic growth in free markets fo Rows the principle of cumulative causation. As the market is opened up, those who already have some assets--financial, educational or access to political power—can take advantage of the opportunities available. And their incomes and wealth grows faster than that of those who do not have these assets.

Thus, economic growth in freer markets is accompanied by increase in gaps of income and wealth. So it is no surprise that Gini coefficients are increasing in China, Russia, India and in other countries that have embraced the free market and capitalism. In time, the benefits of economic growth trickle down to the poorer people when they begin to acquire access to education, finance and employment opportunities.

The second wind that has been gaining strength across the world is respect for the rights of all human beings—white or black, male or female, rich or poor. This is a more recent force than capitalism. This force, of respecting the rights of all, combines well with the idea of democracy. It has been gaining a lot of strength in the last two decades, with the collapse of the totalitarian governments in the Soviet Union and the revolutions of the Arab Spring.

Blowing around deep within this second strong wind is the notion of justice, equity and fairness. From the perspective of economists, there may be nothing wrong with disparities increasing as economies grow. It is part of the game, they may say. But is it fair from a human perspective, ask others.

The third wind is a voice speaking loudly to us, literally out of the Earth.

There is concern everywhere with the state of the environment. Now we all agree that the paradigm of economic growth that has brought the rich countries their wealth is not sustainable. Mankind's global footprint—which is a measure of the pressure that human activity exerts on the resources of the earth—was 60 per cent of the earth's capacity to renew itself in 1960. It has reached 130 per cent of the earth's capacity now. We are no longer living off the revenue account. We are eating into our natural capital.

The fourth wind, of more recent origin, is the gale force of information. Within the last twenty years only, telecommunications and the internet have enabled people to reach out and be reached in a way unprecedented in human history. This wind has become a category six storm.

With these four storm winds converging only within the last ten years, an unprecedented storm has formed. With information flowing around and many more voices being heard, two major concerns can be heard more loudly in this storm, about the way the world is progressing. One is, "Our pattern of economic growth is not sustainable". The other is, "Our pattern of economic growth is not fair".

These concerns are putting pressure for reform in institutions of capitalism, government and democracy so that the economic growth can be more sustainable, more inclusive and more fair.

With its econimic reforms since the 1990s, India joined the world of global trade and finance just when, with the fall of the Soviet Union, ideas of open, free market, capitalist economies had claimed an ideological victory. Concepts of democracy and human rights have been built into India's constitution and its political discourse since the independence of India from its colonial rulers in the middle of the last century. India has 3.3 million NGOs. A noisy and free media in the country has been supplemented by communications over cell phones and internet-enabled social media.

The growth of the Indian economy has slowed sharply in the last two years. The root cause is a policy log-jam. This log-jam has been created by the mistrust of citizens in institutions of government and big business and collusion amongst them. What we are hearing in India is the rumble of democracy, as it down-shifts into a lower gear to pass over steeper hills it has encountered. Attention of Indians has shifted to the condition of the country's institutions. The agenda for the next national elections in 2014 has become: who can citizens trust to clean up institutions and put the economy into a faster gear?.

'Institutions', as Nobel Laureate Douglass C. North explains, are not merely 'organizations' with their hierarchies and budgets. Institutions are also the processes by which societies perform functions. Institutions also include the norms by which societies conduct themselves. Therefore, deep institutional reform requires change in the implicit 'theories-in-use' that guide the conduct of our affairs.

A New Architecture of Institutions

Governance in 21SI century conditions requires a new architecture. It must be formed around four 'L's.

The first L is localization. Power and control of governance must be shifted much more from remote centers down to localities.

The second L is lateralization. Silos in management and silos amongst academic disciplines are required for specialization. However, they prevent the development and implementation of systemic solutions, which is what we must have now.

The third L is learning. The paradigm of governance must change from obtaining more control of the system for improving the ability of the system to learn.

The fourth L is listening. We will understand the whole system if we will listen to others.

The first three Ls—localization, lateralization and learning are congruent with the principles by which complex self-adaptive systems operate. The fourth L—conscious listening—is specially required in human systems.

Modern communication technologies seem to provide the means to listen to the masses. Millions can express themselves in Tweets and posts on social media platforms. However, as policy-makers using these mediums of communication have realized, these mediums' vast reach and speed may make democratic communication more difficult, not less.

The Internet and social media are providing a profusion of unfiltered information that can overwhelm without informing. What is the signal emerging from all that chatter and noise on social media platforms? And, how does one ensure that democratic principles are at work when obtaining inputs electronically? Are some technology-savvy people 'stuffing the ballot boxes' with multiple responses, whereas the views of many not so savvy are not being counted at all?

When there are ideological differences amongst persons and organizations, there is much greater reluctance to meet others, who they consider the opposition. This makes deliberation amongst the people much more difficult. Sections of citizens may agree on what 'people like them' want. However, citizens cannot come to an agreement about what "we, all the people" really want.

The ubiquity of information with which people are being bombarded through the internet, social media, and multiple 24x7 news channels has surpassed human capacities— biological and mental—for the amount of information that a person can process at any one time. Therefore, to cope with the increasing "attention deficit disorder" that we are suffering from with information overload, we must consciously or unconsciously choose what and who we pay attention to. We must choose the channels and internet communities we will connect with and the opinion makers we will follow.

Our choices will be inevitably guided by our underlying beliefs about the sort of ideas and people we like and those we do not. Thus, people are being driven into "conceptually gated communities" in which they listen to people with the same beliefs. And they shut out others, who may have fundamentally different beliefs.

I conclude with the imperative for leaders. Citizens in each country and then all countries together must have an integrative vision of sustainable progress. More effective processes must be designed for people to participate in the shaping of policies that affect their future. The 21st century leader's role has to be to lead and facilitate the dialogue.

■ TRANSFORMING RURAL INDIA WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Digital Technologies have made a dramatic impact in not just bringing the world closer for everyone but, as netizens, everyone is now part of the global village. The intimacy and the familiarity with each other, experienced in villages are now being sensed in the global digital village as well. As a result, it is easy to reach out to communities and get across the message to anyone if we have the real desire to do that. We have recently witnessed how the political and the governing process itself has been transformed in Delhi on account of the power of active communication and collaboration amongst people. Opinion making, experience sharing and building leaders overnight are the new exciting trends of the digital technologies. The potential of collaborative technologies in the context of

rural upliftment, can lead to path breaking socio economic changes. Arab Spring set the stage for re imagining the world we live in, in recent times. Any revolution the world has lived through, has been the resultant of a shift in the beliefs and vision of people collectively, when large communities of people are influenced by such information which makes them think differently. In the past, the medium of such communication were books or radio or public meetings. Television and Internet have taken the world by storm and digital technologies in particular have empowered the people through timely and reliable information which can also be verified. Thus, it is exciting to envisage how the rural masses can be enthused to seek and share information about various aspects of their lives leading to better opportunities for themselves.

The Indian rural market is undergoing transformation with better access to information and changing patterns in demand structure and lifestyle. According to ruralmarketing. org, India has 6.27 lakh villages and business in rural India grew at about 11 per cent annually over the last decade. FMCG sales are expected to grow to $33 billion by 2015, of which $22.1 billion will be contributed by rural areas. Poverty levels have dropped to 22 per cent in 2011-12 from 37.2 per cent in 2004-05 as per the reports of the Planning Commission. While this is a very positive development, the challenge going forward would be not only to reduce the level further, but is also to ensure the people who have moved up, remain there and become part of the growth story. This would require focus among others, things, on education and skill development leading to better livelihood options.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that digital technologies hold a great promise for rural development and transformation. Broadly, we could classify the ICT offerings meant for the rural sector into three categories. The first would be those solutions which are aimed at 'empowerment'. The second would be 'enablement'. The third category would be 'market expansion'. Let us try and take a look at some examples of each of these dimensions to understand how ICT is "making a transformational impact on the rural sector.

When we examine the first dimension - empowerment - E chaupal comes up as a fine example. E chaupal, with over 6500 kiosks in 40,000 villages in 10 states covering 4 million people, is an after quoted example of efficient supply chain system empowering the farmers with timely and relevant information and enabling them to get better returns for their produce. Because of the community centric approach it adopts, the system has managed to create opportunities for providing other offerings as well to the farmers - insurance and farm management practices, to name a few.

The e-governance system is the example of the second dimension-enablement - with immense potential to create transparency and good governance through IT. The successful implementation of this system in areas such as land records in the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and others is indeed a great step in removing the malpractices and creating assurance of rightful ownership with the citizens. In recent times, Aadhar has been seen as yet another tool to empower the masses by confirming their identities. Despite the recent judgement of the Supreme Court and the opposition to this scheme on the grounds of politicization, security and privacy, Aadhar is a good example of ICT solution attempting to provide access to monetary benefits by establishing the correct identity and through this approach, trying to expand the rural economy by energizing the dynamics of the economic system.

The third dimension, namely market expansion with digital technologies, can be gleaned from several examples. Village and heritage tourism in remote parts of the country have picked up a huge momentum on account of awareness being created through online portals and thus attracting more visitors as compared to the past. Direct connect with the potential customers with the smart use of digital technologies through ecommerce has facilitated a large number of artisans and agro based small enterprises in the rural areas to bring in new businesses from new markets. Women's livelihood is being facilitated amongst the weavers' community in the north eastern states by marketing their products through the internet medium and thus, facilitating custom orders or off the shelf sales without women having to travel long distances to exhibit their wares. We need a game plan for orientating of rural India with such case studies on using the technology to market their services to wider audiences outside of the rural base- be it web presence and marketing for their traditional crafts and arts or farm produce to customers globally or bring in customers to their base through smart communication strategies, marketing their villages as holiday destinations.

While we see benefits from all three dimensions of engagement through digital technologies, we would be able to experience substantial upliftment and sustainable development only when the purchasing capacity also increased in rural markets. India's rural income is slated to grow from US$ 572 to USD 1.8 trillion by the year 2020. 70

per cent of population which lives in rural India accounts for about 50 per cent of India's GDP. Per capita GDP in rural areas has been growing faster than in urban locations since 2000 which stands at 6.2 per cent CAGR versus 4.7 per cent. Hence, most companies have recognized the need to shift focus to rural from urban in order to get the lion's share of the market. The big challenge sellers face is, how to reach the dispersed rural masses with diverse cultures and languages and find cost effective means of making this happen. Digital technology could be one of the means of achieving this but how feasible is it to implement in the Indian countryside? Let us examine some of the key trends of digital penetration and usage in rural India.

Out of the 833 million people residing in the rural parts in India, according to the Internet and Mobile Association of India, as of June 2012, there are 38 million Internet users and 12 per cent of them could access the Internet on their mobile phones. What is noteworthy is that this population that accesses internet via mobile phones has increased seven fold in just two years -from 0.50 million in 2010 to 3.6 million in 2012. Key factors that have helped in increasing mobile penetration in rural areas include failing prices of handsets, increased battery life, lower data charges and improved network infrastructure and this trend is likely to continue. There is still a very sizeable market for used mobile phones majority of which are not connected to the internet. It is estimated that the unique mobile users are around 100 million. Awareness and access of internet via mobile phones for entertainment and communication are currently the highest as compared to other online services such as e-commerce, education, jobs and social media, which are slowly but steadily picking up pace.

In the coming years, as mobile and internet usage increases in the rural markets, organisations targeting the rural markets need to come up with a marketing strategy vastly different from today's approach to the market. As opposed to the urban markets, the challenge in the rural markets is targeted reach rather than gaining their attention. On account of significant. Variations in the profiles of rural "population, homogeneous approaches may not work. With a sound database and analytics of profiles of individuals, targeted marketing for products and services could be successful. Rural customers traditionally value community recommendations for their buying decisions. Social media marketing can be gainfully deployed with smaller communities focusing on their interest areas and using them to promote products and services. Building partnerships with NGOs, financial institutions and Government agencies to create social platforms and through these platforms, gently nudging the rural customers to buy their products and services, is required to be done. ITC and HLL are two good examples of early practitioners of ICT in rural marketing who have been successful using such approach to win over rural customers. Personal devices like smart phones and tablets are non intrusive media available for marketing organisations to reach out to such customers in innovative ways.

The rural population which is connected via mobiles, is predominantly putting it to use for the purpose of entertainment and communication. One of the key inhibiting reasons for not using other content is due to lack of relevant content available in local languages. Businesses would be able to benefit a great deal by being attentive to this need and ensuring that content relevant for decision making is made available to the rural masses in vernacular languages in an entertaining manner.

Although, last mile connectivity continues to be the major challenge to establish the reach with the rural areas, there have been innovative initiatives like DakNet in Orissa and Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) in Gujarat through buses equipped with ICT using which, the rural citizens are able to access the internet for their needs. While penetration of personal devices and access to the internet will grow steadily, in the medium term, Common Services Centres (CSCs), set up by various State Governments, could be leveraged to some extent. CSCs were announced and rolled out with a lot of fanfare but the public-private partnership envisaged is yet to come up with a sound business model. Organisations keen on tapping rural markets cannot ignore these CSCs and, in fact, should study carefully the successes achieved in some states and use them to pilot their plans for rural markets. Understanding the usage patterns of rural netizens, determining how to stay engaged with them, sizing up internet enabled and non enabled mobile phone usage and creating appropriate content in vernacular languages, would be critical to making digital marketing a success in the rural areas.

In the case of IT products/solutions, very few offerings have been designed specially keeping in mind the rural customer. Further, most of the solutions or products - IT or non IT have often aimed at addressing the needs of the population and not necessarily enhancing the demand side. It is when IT solutions are designed to create new demand that there will be overall expansion of rural economy powered by digital technologies. Although,

the Government has been keen on bridging the digital divide and has initiated several projects towards this objective, there is a huge requirement for building more IT products and solutions leading to noticeable change in the rural economy. Of late, there are several innovative social ventures being conceived around the use of digital technologies aimed at the rural segment. Rural BPOs, for instanc nave caught the imagination of some entrepreneurs, although replication of this model in many locations with consistent quality and predictability of business have been not easy. In states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Goa where the difference between rural and urban living styles and the aspirations of the youth, are not very divergent rural vs urban locations, we are seeing an interesting phenomenon of the same set products and services being relevant to both audiences, albeit with a difference in pricing to take care of the purchasing power capabilities. Apart from designing IT products or solutions, providing access is equally an important subject of attention. The ISPs and the State Governments are assiduously working towards expanding the last mile connectivity and it would be only a matter of time by when this dream is realised. In rural areas, we are witnessing the power of digital technologies in everyday life through examples such on online ticketing and electricity bills payments, matrimonial alliances, even if people do not have access to digital devices at home, as the cyber cafes and shared desktops are handy and offer inexpensive alternate access.

The key stakeholders in rural development involving the grass root level organisations and NGOs, the Government, the technology providers and providers of rural centric offerings would have to come together and create an integrated approach aimed at expanding the rural economy. The Citizen Service Centres (CSCs) which were designed to address this objective and launched with much fanfare in many states, have unfortunately not taken off due to lack of viable business models attractive to the investors and offerings appealing to the rural audience. The need for building a technology enabled education system which brings in the best of expertise and teaching pedagogies at the fingertips of the students is much more significant in rural India than the urban locations where students do have choices. We need a MOOC like approach to skill development oriented programs in vernacular languages, which could be delivered through CSCs and schools in rural locations. The project involving 34 ITIs in Kerala, majority of which are in remote parts of the state, for training students in employable skills using CISCO'S Webex system supported by the dual language content and

training delivery by Global Talent Track is an example of how with the blend of innovation and technology, the needs of rural youth could be addressed, despite the challenges of power and other infrastructure issues.

Rural transformation through ICT innovations requires a long term approach with an appetite for risk taking and tolerance for failure. Although, some of the current venture fund initiatives are supporting the proposals that are aimed at 'inclusive India', there is also a need to create venture funds with the specific focus on innovation for rural India as the demand generation and the characteristics of market functioning are very different from the urban models and their customer mindsets. With the growth of agriculture segment hovering around 2 per cent, and the resources being scarce, the objective of equipping the villages to embrace knowledge economy powered by digital technologies has to be vigorously pursued to build a sustainable development plan.

◼ HIGH PRICES OF PATENTED MEDICINES IN INDIA: CAN WE DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT?

India was once considered to be among the highest priced nations in the world in pharmaceuticals. With the abolition of product patent protection in pharmaceuticals in 1972, the situation changed fundamentally. India emerged as a major player in the global pharmaceutical industry receiving world-wide recognition as a low-cost producer of high quality drugs. But from 1 January 2005, drug product patent protection has been re¬introduced in India to comply with the requirements under the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Reminiscent of the period before the 1970s, patented drugs are again being sold in the country at exorbitant prices. A 60 ml injection of Sanofi-Aventis anti-cancer drug Jevtana (generic name: cabazitaxel), for example, cost about Rs. 3,30,000. Roche's Herceptin (trastuzumab) is sold at Rs. 1,10,000 and Merck's Erbitux (cetuximab) at Rs. 92,000 (see Table 1 for other drugs costing more than Rs 50,000 for each dose).

The principal economic rationale for granting patents is that it will stimulate investment for research for innovation. The basic presumption is that developing new drugs is expensive. It is argued that without patent protection, others may be able to imitate new products, thereby limiting the innovators' ability to recoup the research and development costs. Hence, the innovator

will not have any incentive to undertake such R&D or to publicly disclose it. A delay in imitation through patent protection would stimulate R&D for innovation. This impact on innovation is the expected positive effect. But, patent rights which exclude others from producing and marketing the product, lead to inhibition of competition leading to high prices and less access. This is the negative effect. The net benefits of the patent system to society have remained controversial over the years. What is recognised in patent laws around the world and also emphasized in the TRIPS agreement is that, the protection of the rights of the patentees is not the sole concern of patent laws. Article 7 of TRIPS on "Objectives" and Article 8 on "Objectives" specifically speak of the mutual advantage of both producers and users of technological knowledge, stress the need for a balance of rights and obligations and empower the member countries to take steps to prevent abuse of patent (and other intellectual property) rights.

Two important flexibilities which TRIPS permits to tackle the negative consequences of product patent protection are: (i) Exemptions from grant of patents in certain cases and (ii) Compulsory licensing. India has used the former quite successfully by inserting Section 3(d) in the amended Patents Act when re-introducing product patents in pharmaceuticals in 2005. The Supreme Court of India has recently rejected the plea of Novartis for patent protection for its anti-cancer drug sold in the name of Glivec or Gleevec. The Novartis patent case involving Section 3(d) has attracted world-wide attention. Though, it has significant implications, it can be argued that if the high prices of patented drugs are to be checked, 'proper use of compulsory licensing is of more critical importance. Unlike Section 3(d), India has not yet been able to use the compulsory licensing provisions effectively.

Patent is given for a limited time period, currently for 20 years under TRIPS. Thus, after the expiry of the patent, other firms can and do enter the market and that results in a fall in the prices and hence of profits of the patent holder. That indeed is the intention of patent laws. But the multinational corporations (MNCs) holding patents such as Pfizer, Glaxosmith Kline,

Roche, Novartis often try to block or delay this competition by getting secondary patents on minor changes to the product, a practice which has come to be known as 'evergreening'. The secondary patents, for example can be salts, esters or other derivatives of patent expired drugs. These are technically "new" drugs with a new chemical structure but may have essentially the same

therapeutic effect - innovation is often absent, limited or trivial. In such cases, the countries are justified in denying the patent because the objective of the patent system is not to encourage or permit patenting of new forms of old drugs just to extend the patent term. But in the name of innovation, even in these circumstances, product patents are granted in countries such as the United States- a model which many developing countries willingly or not so willingly follow.

Section 3(d) tries to regulate such abuses of the patent system. Under Section 3(d), "the mere discovery of a new form of a known substance which does not result in the enhancement of the known efficacy of that substance" is not patentable. Novartis applied for a patent for imatinib in the United States (US) in April 1994. After getting marketing approval, what the company started selling as the drug for treating chronic myeloid leukemia was not imatinib, but a derivative of it viz., imatinib mesylate (brand name: Glivic or Gleevec). It did not apply for a separate patent for imatinib mesylate in the US because as the Supreme Court judgment shows, the Novartis patent covered not only imatinib but also imatinib mesylate. Novartis could not at that time apply for a patent for imatinib/mesylate in India because India is not required to provide protection for a patent applied or granted elsewhere before TRIPS came into being, i.e., before 1 January, 1995.What Novartis did in India after 1995 (in July 1998) was to apply for a patent for the beta crystalline form of imatinib mesylate. But the Supreme Court ruled that the beta crystalline form does not satisfy the section 3(d) criterion. Supreme Court denied the patent to Novartis because Novartis could not demonstrate that the new form (beta crystalline) of the known substance (imatinib mesylate) enhanced the therapeutic efficacy of the drug.

It will be more difficult to indulge in 'evergreening' in India. Considering the strict criterion of efficacy, new forms of non-patented drugs or patent-expired drugs will not be easy. The Patent office in India is unlikely to grant such patents unless therapeutic efficacy is demonstrated. And demonstrating that new forms are therapeutically more effective may not be that easy as the Novartis case suggests. Thus, medicines such as Gleevec which otherwise would have been patented with high monopoly prices will not be patentable and hence will be more affordable. The

Supreme Court decision is consistent with TRIPS and has been arrived at not arbitrarily but by following transparent and internationally accepted legal processes. Thus, other countries which have stricter patent regimes

might be induced to introduce similar provisions in their patent laws to make drugs more affordable. Thus the judgment has significant international implications as well.

A Compulsory licence is an aut010121020102 authorization by the government to non-patentees to use the patent, for example to manufacture and sell the patented medicine without or against the consent of the patentee on payment of royalties. As different studies and reports have highlighted, in a product patent regime, a proper compulsory licensing system is of vital importance to deal with the negative implications of product patent protection on prices. If Indian companies are given licences to produce a patented drug, competition among manufacturers would drive down prices, but the royalty paid to the innovators would continue to provide funds and the incentive for R&D.

The amended Act has elaborate provisions on compulsory licensing. The "general principles" stress the importance of making the patented invention available at "reasonably affordable prices to the public," to secure that these are worked in India, and not to enable patentees to enjoy monopoly power by importing. In fact, an application for a compulsory licence can be made on the ground that the "reasonable requirements of the public" have not been satisfied, or that the product is not available at a "reasonably affordable price," or that the patented invention has "not worked in the territory of India."

Can there be any doubts that medicines with prices more than Rs. 50,000 per dose are not reasonably affordable? But though, it is almost a decade that the granting of product patents has started in India, only one compulsory licence has been granted till now to Natco, an Indian generic company for an anti-cancer drug, sorafenib tosylate (sold as Nexavar by the patentee, Bayer).

As the experience of countries where compulsory licensing has been effectively used, as for example in Canada in the past suggests, what is crucial is to have straightforward, transparent and fast procedures. A patent holder will naturally be opposed to any compulsory licences. The Canadian experience shows how the practice and the procedures can be such that the patentees have practically no opportunity to delay or prevent the grant of compulsory licenses. But in India, that has not been the case. The entire process is excessively legalistic. The procedure is open-ended without any time limit imposed for the grant of compulsory licenses and provides the patentees the opportunity to buy time through litigation. The huge legal expenses involved in fighting the MNCs holding the patents and the uncertainty may dissuade the

generic companies from applying for licenses in the first place. These are not mere theoretical possibilities. This is precisely what happened in India before the 1970s and is happening now after 2005. The current procedure for the grant of compulsory licences is essentially similar to that before the 1970s when India recognised product patents in pharmaceuticals. Only two compulsory licences were granted then. The main reason was the cumbersome procedure. It is the same procedure which the 1970 Act inherited for products other than pharmaceuticals and now the amended act has retained and made applicable for all the products including pharmaceuticals. TRIPS imposes some conditions relating to the grant of compulsory licensing. But TRIPS also provides the countries adequate flexibility to devise their own system. TRIPS, for example insist that non-patentees will have to first try to get a voluntary licence on reasonable commercial terms from the patent holder. But guidelines can be issued for reasonable terms. The maximum time period can also be stipulated. In this case, the procedure can be very simple - if the applicant does not get a voluntary licence within that time and on these terms, it can be given a compulsory licence.

Another flexibility which India can utilize is to directly control the price of patented drugs. Price control is not forbidden under TRIPS or any other agreement of the WTO. But two important differences between price control measures and compulsory licensing must be noted. If the price is controlled, the MNCs holding the patent may not sell in India at all. If they do, then drugs do become more affordable but that does not provide any room for generic companies. Compulsory licensing not only makes the prices more affordable through competition. It also ensures some space to generic companies, whichis vital for their long term sustenance.

■ HALTH EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Equity means social justice or fairness; it is an ethical concept, grounded in principles of distributive justice.

Equity is not the same as equality. The concept of equity is inherently normative, that is, value based while equality is not necessarily so.

Health equity refers to the study of differences in the quality of health and health care across different populations. It is a political concept which differs from health equality (which is any measurement of difference in health outcome). Equity in health can be—and has widely been—defined as the absence of socially unjust or unfair health disparities. 'Equity' implies some kind of

social injustice, whereas 'equality' does not. The concept of health equity focuses attention on the distribution of resources and other processes that drive a particular kind of health inequality—that is, a systematic inequality in health (or in its social determinants) between more and less advantaged social groups, in other words, a health inequality that is unjust or unfair.

There are always some differences or inequalities among health status of different people and different communities. But not all health inequalities are unjust or inequitable. If some improvement in health condition is not possible, it is unfortunate but not unfair. Whenever inequalities in health are avoidable, yet are not avoided, they are inequitable. Here is an example-women, in general, live longer than men.

This is likely to be a consequence of biological sex differences, and is not, therefore, inequitable. However, in cases where women have the same or lower life expectancy as men - that is, where social conditions act to reduce the "natural" longevity advantage of women - this inequality is a mark of gross inequity.

These differences may include differences in the "presence of disease, health outcomes, or access to health care" across racial, ethnic, sexual orientation and socioeconomic groups. Similarly, the term 'disparities' may be used instead of 'differences' to indicate a moral valuation.

Health equity can be defined as follows:

Horizontal equity: The equal treatment of individuals or groups in the same circumstances.

Vertical equity: The principle that individuals who are unequal should be treated differently according to their level of need.

Causes of Inequity

Inequities in health are not only the unequal distribution of health but also the unfair distribution of health due to unfair or inadequate social arrangements. Key features of health inequities are that they are socially produced, systematic in their distribution across the population, and unfair. Health inequities emerge from a systematically unequal distribution of power, prestige and resources among groups in society.

Defining and identifying health inequities, thus, involves analysis with respect to social justice and the social determinants of health. To enhance the understanding of how inequities in health are rooted in societal structures, the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH), WHO developed a conceptual framework of the social determinants of health inequities .

The most important social determinants i.e. structural determinants of health inequities are Income, Education. Occupation, Social Class, Gender and Ethnicity. These structural determinants of health inequities operate through a set of intermediary determinants of health to shape health outcomes.

The main categories of intermediary determinants of health are: material circumstances; psychosocial circumstances; behavioral and/or biological factors; and the health system itself as a social determinant. Material circumstances include factors such as housing and neighbourhood quality, consumption potential (e.g. the financial means to buy healthy food, warm clothing, etc.), and the physical work environment. Psychosocial circumstances include psychosocial stressors, stressful living circumstances and relationships, and social support and coping styles (or the lack thereof). Behavioural and biological factors include nutrition, physical activity, tobacco consumption and alcohol consumption, which are distributed differently among different social groups. Biological factors also include genetic factors.

Economic Status and Health Financing

Usually, the lower an individual's socioeconomic position, the worse their health. Poverty and poor health are inseparably linked. The spectrum of health status and outcomes goes hand in hand with the socioeconomic status. In general, people have worse health than those above them but better health than those below them.

Poverty has many dimensions - material deprivation (of food, shelter, sanitation, and safe drinking water), social exclusion, lack of education, unemployment, and low income - that all work together to reduce opportunities, limit choices, undermine hope, and, as a result, threaten health. Poverty has been linked to higher prevalence of many health conditions, including increased risk of chronic disease, injury, deprived infant development, stress, anxiety, depression and premature death.

Government health spending is around 1 per cent of GDP, while the total spending on health in India is around 5 per cent of the GDP. India has one of the highest levels of out-of-pocket payments for health care in the world, which imposes a large financial burden on individuals and households. Thus, it puts more strain on families when they are in a situation having highest need for money. This

has been argued to be one of the reasons for the inequities in health observed across the country.

Regional and Rural/urban Differences in Health Based on Economic Status

It is usually seen that utilization of health services as well as health status indicators are always better in urban population than slums and rural or tribal population. Also, differences are also seen across different regions in India. The inequities are still higher among EAG (Empowered Action Group) states as compared to Non-EAG states.

Gender

Socioeconomic inequality is often cited as the fundamental cause for differential health, outcomes among men and women. Gender as a structural determinant of health operates through different intermediary determinants that influence the maternal and reproductive health of women and their access to care. Gender norms have also been shown to influence attitudes towards the use of contraceptives and women's ability to make decisions on family planning.

Early marriage and early pregnancy results in high fertility and puts woman in danger of anemia and pregnancy complications. Infant mortality is also high among the children of these young mothers. A weak health system, including weak information systems, discontinuity of care, unsupported health workers and limited referral and accountability mechanisms, has implications for the ability to prevent maternal mortality among women seeking care during delivery.

Education

Education, particularly woman's education, makes significant difference in utilization of RCH services and health seeking behaviour. Children of uneducated mothers are more likely to be malnourished. Effects of education can also be seen on other determinants of health like income, employment and living conditions.

Social Class

Socially backward groups like SC/ ST and OBC are usually associated with lower use of reproductive health services and poorer health outcomes. According to the NFHS (National Family Health Survey), the likelihood of receiving any type of ANC(anti-natal care) is lowest among women belonging to SC or ST. Only 18 per cent of the births among these women are conducted at a health facility, compared to 51 per cent among women, who do not belong to SC, ST, or any OBC.

Occupation

Occupation is one of the key determinants of socio-economic status. Poor employment conditions expose individuals to health hazards, which are more likely in low-status jobs.

Environmental Factors

Disparities can be seen in environmental factors such as inadequate water and sanitation, indoor air pollution, overcrowding, poor housing conditions and exposure to vectors of disease.

It should be noticed that factors like malnourishment and nutritional deficiencies are distributed lopsidedly among different socioeconomic strata and so are the preventive measures for, diseases.

In utilization of health care services, one can observe various barriers faced disproportionately by marginalised/vulnerable groups like-

- Economical barrier- user fees, hidden cost of utilizing services like travel cost, wage loss, consumables and bribes, opportunity cost of long waiting period, inconvenient timings
- Absence of female doctors, referrals to higher services
- Behaviour of staff like lack of regard for privacy and dignity particularly of women and adolescents, verbal abuse, bribe
- Lack of accountability, flexibility in public sector and its over bureaucratic nature

Health Equity in India-Facts and Figures:

Various sources of reliable data on health and health care in India like NFHS, DLHS(District Level Household Survey), SRS(Sample Registration System), NSSO, etc are used to gather information on indicators of health status. Various indicators of health status can be used to measure the inequities in distribution of health by different parameters like socioeconomic status, gender, region, caste, etc.

When we think of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), a good indicator of overall health situation of a particular society, as well as other mortalities below 5 years, the rural area is always at the receiving end for any caste or income group. The decrease in mortality indicators follows the pattern of social ladder in Indian society, barring few exceptions.

Among various castes, scheduled castes (SCs) are having the worst indicators for neonatal and infant mortality. Scheduled tribes (STs) are having greater under 5 mortality, particularly in rural areas, as compared to any other caste groups.

In case of wealth quintile, it is found that all three mortality indicators are higher among lowest income quintile group and decreases steadily with rise in income quintile. Disparities of urban rural residence and that of caste are faced to a greater extent by people in lower income groups.

Infant mortality is not uniform across the country. It ranges from 12 in Kerala to 56 in Madhya Pradesh. Underdeveloped states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha, Assam and Madhya Pradesh bear great burden of Infant mortality whereas developed states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have lower IMR.

The inequities in maternal health services in India can be seen when we look for full Ante Natal Care (ANC), institutional deliveries and unmet need for family planning. The coverage of full ANC and institutional deliveries is very less in rural areas as compared to urban areas. Unmet needs for family planning, both for spacing as well as limiting, are greater in rural areas.

The coverage of full ANC as well as institutional deliveries is lowest among women belonging to STs followed by SCs. The social ladder pattern is also seen in these two indicators with women belonging to other castes having highest coverage of maternal health services and lowest unmet needs for family planning.

Similar pattern is seen for all indicators for maternal health services across wealth quintiles. The coverage of full ANC as well as institutional deliveries is lowest among women belonging to lowest wealth quintile and gradual increase is seen with rise in income.

The coverage of immunization is lower in rural areas as compared to urban areas. The immunization coverage was lowest among Scheduled Tribes (46 per cent) as compared to others (63 per cent). Nearly 73 per cent of the children belonging to the highest wealth quintile households received the full vaccination package, whereas it was less than half of that (36 per cent) among children belonging to the households with the lowest wealth quintile.

Gender differentials can be observed in full immunization coverage. Fifty-five per cent of boys were fully immunized as against 52 per cent of girls.

Contrastingly, exclusive breast feeding is higher in rural areas, STs and those in lowest wealth quintile as compared to their counterparts. This is most probably due to lack of resources to opt for any substitute. Morbidities like diarrhoea and respiratory tract infection are more in rural, lowest wealth quintile and SCs and also receiving of treatment like ORS therapy is less amongst them.

Upto 5 years of age, gender based differential in anemia is very less but great disparities are seen, rural areas, STs, SCs and among those belonging to lower wealth quintiles.

Three standard indices of physical growth that describe the nutritional status of children:

- Height-for-age (stunting)
- Weight-for-height (wasting)
- Weight-for-age (underweight)

Almost half of children under five years of age (48 per cent) are stunted and 43 per cent are underweight. About one fourth (24 per cent) children are severely malnourished by height-for-age and almost one sixth (16 per cent) by weight-for-age while about one fifth are wasted. Very few children under five years of age are overweight. Undernutrition is substantially higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Hindu and Muslim children are about equally likely to be undernourished, but Christian, Sikh and Jain children are considerably better nourished. Children belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes or other backward classes have relatively high levels of undernutrition according to all three measures. Children from scheduled tribes have the worst nutritional status on almost every measure and they also show high prevalence of wasting. Children from households with a low standard of living are twice as likely to be undernourished as children from households with a high standard of living. Undernutrition is most pronounced in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand.

Nutritional status of women can be assessed by Body Mass Index (BMI). The BMI is defined as weight in kilograms divided by height in metres squared (kg/m2). A cut-off point of 18.5 is used to define thinness or acute undernutrition.

About one third women are acutely malnourished and more than 50 per cent are anaemic.

Undernutrition and anaemia among women is considerably higher in rural areas than in urban areas. ST followed by SC women and those in lower wealth quintile are found to have higher levels of anaemia and

undernourishment. Anemia among pregnant women also shows great differences in rural areas as compared to their urban counterparts. Nutritional disparities among women closely follow the social and wealth ladder.

Though, maternal mortality ratio is on the decline (254 in 2004-06 to 212 in 2007-09) in India, still vast differences are seen across states. EAG (Empowered Action Group) states and Assam are still lagging behind compared to non-EAG states and carry greater burden of maternal deaths.

Monitoring of Equity

To monitor these inequities, generation of high quality reliable data regarding health status and health care utilization by periodic surveys is mandatory. Surveys like NFHS (National Family Health Survey), DLHS (District Level Household and Facility Survey), NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization) and SRS (Sample registration system) are providing useful data in this regard. HMIS (Health Management Information System) is a new initiative by government to provide service information which will prove to be very valuable in the near future.

Conclusion

Far-reaching health, health care and its utilisation inequities still persist in India across socioeconomic status, caste, gender, place of residence and region. Any combination of these determinants further deteriorates the condition. To minimize these inequities, continued surveillance of health and health care utilization is necessary.

▪ FLAGS ON THE HEALTH MAP

Government of India has been implementing various programmes to ensure accessible, affordable and equitable healthcare services to all. The Planning Commission has increased the outlay for health and family welfare schemes in Eleventh and Twelfth Five Year Plan considerably with the objective of "establishing a system of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in the country."

National Rural Health Mission

Launched in 2005, National Rural Health Mission is an overarching project in mission mode that strives to provide effective healthcare to rural masses in the country with a focus on states with poor public health indicators and/or weak healthcare infrastructure. The programmes under NRHM can broadly be categorised into two: Reproductive & Child Health Programmes (RCH) and National Disease Control Programmes. RCH programmes address the issues and challenges relating to maternal and child healthcare through a range of initiatives. The important initiatives include:

Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)

Launched in 2005 as a key component of NRHM and being implemented in all states and UTs with special focus on low performing states, JSY aims to reduce maternal mortality and neo-natal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among poor pregnant women. Under JSY, pregnant women from rural BPL families are provided Rs. 1,400 as incentive to use government healthcare facilities and also to cover travel costs and other expenses.

Janani-Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK) aims to provide free and cashless healthcare services to pregnant women including normal deliveries, caesarean operations (up to 30 days after birth) in public health institutions in both rural and urban areas.

Navajat Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (NSSK)

Launched in 2009, NSSK attempts to impart special training to healthcare providers at the District Hospitals, Community Health Centres and Primary Health Centres in the interventions at birth aimed at significantly reducing Infant Mortality Ratio. The programme is part of the policy if embedding child health strategy as an integral part of maternal health.

Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK)

Launched on 7 January 2014, RKSK is the nation's first comprehensive adolescent health programme. The programme is committed at promotion of adolescent health mission across India and would address the health needs of 243 million adolescents constituting 21 per cent of the total population in the country.

National Disease Control Programmes

Non-communicable diseases like cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, are on the rise in the country due to changes in life style. Communicable diseases such as Tuberculosis, Leprosy, Vector borne diseases, HIV/ AIDS among others also continue to be a major public health challenge. These endemic diseases result in high morbidity, mortality and adverse socio-economic impact. Therefore, national level

programmes on diseases have been implemented with a renewed vigour and focus under National Rural Health Mission.

National Vector Borne Diseases Control Programme (NVBDCP)

A comprehensive programme for the prevention and control of vector borne diseases, NVBDCP covers diseases like Malaria, Filaria, Kala-azar, Japanese Encephalitis, Dengue and Chikungunya.

Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP)

Launched in 1997 and implemented in a phased manner, Revised National TB Control Programme - an application in India of Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DQTS) - is a revamped strategy to control Tuberculosis with the objective of curing at least 85 per cent of new sputum positive TB patients.

National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP)

With the use of Multi Drug Therapy (MDT), under NLEP, introduced in 1983, India achieved the goal of elimination of Leprosy defined as less than 1 case per 10,000 population at the national level in December 2005. For further reducing the disease burden, 209 districts in 16 States/UTs with Annual New Case Detection Rate (ANCDR) of more than 10 cases per 100,000 population have been identified for special action under NLEP.

National AIDS Control Programme (NACP)

NACP has the overall goal of "halting and reversing the epidemic in India" over the five year period. It places highest priority on preventive efforts while, at the same time, seeking to integrate prevention with care, support and treatment.

National Programme for Prevention & Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases & Stroke (NPCDCS)

Launched in 2010, NPCDCS is being implemented in 100 districts across 21 states, and attempts to control the targeted diseases through inducing behaviour and life style changes.

The National Programme for the Health Care for the Elderly (NPHCE)

Initiated in June 2010 with the main objective of providing preventive, curative and rehabilitative services to the elderly persons at various levels of healthcare delivery system, NPHCE is under implementation in 100 identified districts of 21 States. Eight Regional Medical Institutions (Regional Geriatric Institutions) have also been selected under the programme to provide separate and specialized comprehensive heafth care to senior citizens.

National Mental Health Programme (NMHP)

The National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) was introduced in 1982 with the objectives of ensuring availability and accessibility of mental healthcare for all in the foreseeable future, particularly to the most vulnerable and underprivileged sections of the population. It also aims to promote community participation in the mental health service development and to stimulate efforts towards self-help in the community.

National Programme for Prevention and Control of Deafness (NPPCD)

A programme on pilot basis in identified 25 districts of 10 states and one UT, die main objective of NPPCD is to train professionals in early identification, diagnosis, treatment of ear problem, development of institutional capacity and promote outreach activities and public awareness. The long term objective is to prevent and control major causes of hearing impairment and deafness, so as to reduce the total disease burden by 25 per cent of the existing level.

National Programme for Control of Blindness

Launched in me year 1976 as a 100 per cent centrally sponsored scheme, NPCB strives towards achieving the goal of reducing the prevalence of blindness from 1.4 per cent to 0.3 per cent by the year 2020. Its objectives are:

National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP)

NTCP aims at creating public awareness against ill-effects of tobacco use, setting up of testing labs and monitoring adult tobacco surveys. The programme also strives to provide baseline estimates of tobacco prevalence and the status of implementation of Tobacco Control Law in the country.

Pilot Programme for Prevention of Burn Injuries (PPPBI)

Launched in 2010 as a pilot project covering three states Haryana, Himachal Pradesh & Assam for two years, the programme aims at the establishment of burn's unit in one Medical College and two District Hospitals in each state.

Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY)

A comprehensive, smart card based, cashless and paperless social health insurance scheme for BPL families, RSBY provides annual hospitalisation cover up to Rs. 30,000 for five members in a family. The number of families that are enrolled in RSBY has gone up from 4 million on 3a March 2009 to 34.16 million on 28th February 2013.

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)

PMSSY was launched in the year 2006 to bridge the huge gap in the accessibility of healthcare services in the rural and urban areas.

Under the programme, 6 institutions in the model of All India Institute of Medical Science would be set up along with the extensive upgrading of 13 government medical colleges. The locations would be Patna, Raipur, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Jodhpur, and Rishikesh. In addition to the above discussed programmes and schemes, the Twelfth Plan proposes an integrative and overarching project, National Health Mission (NHM) that covers both rural and urban poor.

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ACCELERATING PACE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT-SOME CRITICAL ASPECTS FOR SUCCESS

The Government has been, since country's independence, formulating policies, programs, projects and schemes and investing significant financial resources through every Five Year Plan to accelerate the rural development. All these programs and schemes being implemented by the concerned ministries and departments of the union and state governments in the area of education, health, drinking water, sanitation, transport and communication and supporting infrastructure, among others, have shown varying degree of response and performance at the grassroots level, and of course, much less than expected in respect of measureable indicators of human development index. In the context of India being emerging as a strong economy and committed to bring about a rapid and sustainable economic growth through various reforms, the rural development programs must sharply focus on people's participation and rural organizations as the key attributes for their success accompanied by equally important aspects, inter alia, concept of integrated development, planning process, Growth Center Approach, management inputs, communication system and supporting Management Information System to improve the effectiveness of programs and achieve the desired objectives of the program.

Concept

The policy and programs of rural development aim at alleviating rural poverty, generating employment and removing hunger and malnourishment accompanied by the enrichment of the quality of human life as reflected by significantly improved human development index. The problem of rural development, however, is not merely one of development of rural areas but of the development of rural communities to dispel ignorance and poverty and assist the process of creating a self-reliant and self-sustaining, healthy modern little communities. Rural development can no longer be now identified with mere increase in country's GDP or even per capita national income. The increased income is expected to be so distributed as to result in significant diminution of inequalities of income and wealth and reflect better human development index. Every rural family should have its reasonable share in the generation of the GDP and increasing per capita income.

Integrated Development

The objective of the national policy should be to reconstruct and develop the rural economy in such a way that income flowing from the ownership of productive assets, skills and labor would be distributed more equitably. It, therefore, focuses the need for building viable rural communities of functional rural clusters with improved dwellings, dependable and convenient energy supplies, adequate transport and communication facilities that link it to the larger world, suitable health and educational facilities, access to credit and markets, culturally invigorated and no longer compartmentalized by barriers of castes and feudal distinctions based on land ownership and occupation. In this process, the concept of integrated development of rural areas acquires significance and added importance. Integrated development means that the planning of diverse aspects of development cannot be attempted in isolation through a project or even a program approach but it is integrated to take account of their mutual interaction and their linkages, with a view to achieving the total development of human being and the geographical area, thereby bridging the rural-urban gap.

While endeavoring for the integrated rural development, it is necessary to understand the specific characteristics of rural society which give rise to the problems of rural development as distinguished from other kinds of development.

These characteristics mostly relate to the predominance of:

[i] land in production with uneven distribution of land and other relevant assets

[ii] agriculture and allied activities

[iii] self-employment and family labor among the land-owning working force

[iv] underemployment and casual employment among the working force who hire out their labor for wages

[v] rural income on seasonal factors with consequent uncertainty and wider fluctuations in income and

[vi] factors influencing low level of development in rural areas as compared to urban areas which include demand for local non-agricultural goods and services; capital per capita excluding land; employment of science and technology; energy and machinery; human resources development in terms of literacy, education, health and technical as well as managerial skills; development and welfare services; communication and information; absence of people's organizations to redress grievances, monitor implementation of development programs and functioning as pressure groups; lack of adequate power to take decisions on the part of local officials and greater distance from decision-making authorities.

Integrated Rural Development [IRD] envisages the optimum utilization of the natural, physical and human resources of a given rural area for the enrichment of the quality of life of its population. Optimum utilization takes into account not only production of goods and services without environmental degradation but also their distribution and employment enabling the rural poor to cross the poverty line. The projects formulated for the purpose should be such as can maximize their mutual additive impact on each other and result in a higher than the total sum of its components.

Planning Process

Planning exercise for IRD should consider provision of the basic institutional conditions necessary for maximization of rural productive resources, securing/mobilizing mass participation and ensuring equitable distribution. It is essential that basic pre-conditions for IRD should be a radical change in land distribution, supply of other productive income-generating assets and inputs needed for production along with appropriate machinery for their

equitable distribution and setting up people's communities with the specific purpose of ensuring access to and utilization of developmental facilities by the rural people.

The plan of IRD must seek a maximum share of self-help and self-reliance on the part of rural population. The concept of the welfare which "governs the national policy of most of the developing countries is built on grants and subsidies. This concept fails to stimulate self-reliance and leads to habit of dependence. This, in turn, results in a larger role of the Government officials, power politics and failure to develop local participation.

While rural development cannot do without an inflow of resources from outside the area, there is no reason why it should not be accompanied from the outside with a built-in policy of contributions in kind, if not in cash, from the local beneficiaries and subsequent mobilization at source of at least a part of the gains from the development. The failure to adopt such a policy has resulted in Community Development Program leading to a revolution in rising expectations that seek fulfillment from outside instead of on self-help and reverting to stagnation when the initial help given from outside stops.

Alleviating Poverty

The Herculean task of alleviating rural poverty cannot be accomplished through piecemeal effort and in isolation of total development of rural areas/rural economy.

The entire planning exercise is, therefore, required to be geared up in favor of

[i] optimum utilization of the growth potential of the villages to increase income, employment, and production

[ii] ensuring a proportionate gain of development to the weaker sections of the society

[iii] fulfilling the minimum needs of the people

[iv] augmenting the duration and productivity of employment in their existing occupations, inter alia, through up gradation of technology, imparting required skills and setting up of non-exploitative institutions for credit, marketing and services

[v] alleviating chronic unemployment through employment on public works

[vi] building up of social and economic infrastructure

[vii] reorienting existing institutions and organizations in order to protect the interest of the poor

[viii] building up of appropriate organizations of the

rural poor especially to protect them from the exploitation,

[ix] promotion of a progressively more egalitarian structure of ownership of assets.

Growth Center

Experiences of various rural development programs introduced in the earlier Five Year Plans have shown that a mere project approach or a sectoral approach is not adequate to lead to an overall development of the rural area and distribution of benefits to local population, particularly the weaker sections of the society. The magnitude of unemployment and poverty and the potential for development of farm and non-farm sector varies widely among regions and, also, within regions. Different areas in the country are at different levels of development and have varying degrees of development potential depending on resources and endowments. The efforts have to be made to make the programs area specific and utilize the local endowments for growth, social justice and full employment. Besides, effort has to be made to plan for integration of various programs and establish appropriate linkages for optimal utilization of local endowments consistent with the Plan objectives, local needs/aspirations and environmental balance.

The Growth Center exercise, in this endeavor, can be an effective instrument in improving the well-being of the rural population. The Growth Center project can provide blueprints indicating the possible locations for education, health and such other facilities. Based on the principle of "equal accessibility", the Growth Center approach can bring several community facilities like health, education, transport and communication, local administration etc. within easy reach of all the population.

These Growth Centers should be equipped with all the required facilities, which may help the rural population to get their work done in the area itself rather than visiting cities/towns, viz.

[i] a permanent training center to impart practical and vocational training in the field of agriculture, rural/cottage industries, agro-based industries and business and service sectors,

[ii] a mobile training-cum-demonstration unit to provide on-the-spot training, repair services and maintenance facilities for agricultural and industrial machineries

[iii] a marketing-cum-warehousing facilities that can provide safe storage and efficient marketing of farm produce and products of cottage industries

[iv] forest and grass nursery to raise forests, fruits, fuel and fodder

[v] a developmental school based on the " earning while learning" principle and to develop a cadre of self-employed and dedicated workers to take care of human, animal, plant, soil health and climate change

[vi] a residential component to provide basic housing facilities for workers in the project area.

This would need Intensive research and investigation to:

[i] identify the existing areas which could be developed as Growth Centers together with their associate areas in terms of an economic base and a range of population

[ii] determine the suitability of population range villages for the purpose of making the Growth Center viable

[iii] understand inhibiting social factors and anomalies

[iv] determine norms of viable village communities in terms of economic investments and social amenities and effectiveness of community institutions like the panchayats, cooperatives

[v] suggest eventually, as may be necessary, lines of possible change in the structure and base unit of planning and administrator

Management Input

It is the implementation of IRD program that is posing most formidable managerial challenges even when financial and material inputs are not serious constraints. While the KVIC, Handlooms, Handicrafts, Coir, Sericulture, DRDAs, DICs and public sector banks have been for many years to play their role, none of them and all taken together have demonstrated the level of management and managerial expertise necessary to manage programs of the magnitude and diversity that the IRD envisages. The Management Institutes including MM, IRMA, NIBM, NIRD, among others, can endeavor to understand and overcome the managerial deficiencies existing in the above referred develop-oriented agencies already involved in planning and implementing their mandated programs having organic link with the IRD. Given the right attitudes and motivations, many of the scientific disciplines can be applied to resolve problems of rural development. There are institutions, such as Anand Milk Union Limited and Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation which have

recruited professional managers and applied the scientific principles of management development with success in the field of rural development. The Management institutions can devote some more attention to the economic, social and technical problems of rural development.

Communication System

Development is above all a human process and not just a mechanical or technological change. Development does not mean the construction of physical structures, installation of machines or adoption of latest technology. In the ultimate analysis, it is the development of the people which requires creating in them the awareness of their surroundings, understanding of their problems, identification by them the opportunities available for a better life, a capacity to work out what needs to be done and formulating programs to resolve problems and fulfilling their needs, goals and aspirations. Thus, for the development of the people, what is required is education of all the rural households that can inspire them for a better living. This is the reason why in program of the Community Development in 1953, high priority was accorded to social education amongst men, women and youths and to extension media as a basis of community action in the field of agriculture and other aspects of rural life. However, in recent years in the field of rural development more emphasis has been placed on the hardware of the physical programs and financial expenditure as compared with social education. A more comprehensive program of rural communication is required to deal with rural programs covering all sectors of the rural economy and all sections of the rural society. The content, means, methods and techniques of such rural communication programs need to be carefully designed and institutions established.

For reaching these programs to the remote corners of the country, a number of techniques could be successfully employed, such as

[i] visits to villages, arranging meetings and seminars, organization of demonstrations on farms

[ii] distribution of publicity materials like posters and leaflets

[iii] use of mass media communication like films, radio and television, especially the community radio, rural forum and instructional television experiments

[iv] training programs for farmers, artisans and rural leaders including village women and youths

[v] exhibitions in the villages, at rural training institutes and agricultural universities

[vi] mobilization of rural institutions like Mahilamandals, Yuvakmandals, cooperative institutions and PRIs. For communication to be effective, the communication system must work hand-in-hand with the development workers. The development worker knows what needs to be communicated but perhaps not how to communicate. The technology and programs to be communicated form a part of what is called the stock in trade of the development works. Development is a micro-process where as mass media of communication involves certain amount of centralization.

Effective MIS

The Management Information System [MIS] in case of IRD is to be made most effective as the MIS is a process through which the monitoring authority of the IRD has to get proper feedback from grassroots at reasonable time lags that can facilitate him to take immediate corrective steps to plug the loopholes and minimize the leakages from the scheme.

Besides, it provides him with the information regarding the impact of the scheme in respect of important variables which could be analyzed on time and placed before the policy makers for introducing necessary changes, if any, in the policy and implementation of the IRD keeping the overall national objective in view.

Experience suggests that the performance formats developed by the district level authorities for calling the periodic information concentrate more on physical and financial progress of the IRD. While not much information is provided which would help the monitoring authorities to understand the real factors leading to lower or exceptionally higher achievements in relation to targets, the formats do not provide data and information on important variables and measurable indicators like output, employment, income, quality of life etc. These do not provide adequate feedback to the central monitoring authority for initiating corrective measures.

The MIS for IRD calls for strengthening and capacity building of the existing organizational set-up, and redesigning the monitoring system. An effective MIS for IRD requires collection, compilation and analysis of the data and information by qualified and trained personnel at each decision-making level. Adequate investment in putting in place appropriate computerized MIS and trained staff is the need of the hour.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES-THROUGH YEARS

Rural development has been an integral part of nation's socio-economic development. Rural development can no longer be identified with mere increase in Gross National Product or even per capita national income. The increased income should be distributed so as to result in significant diminution of inequalities of income and wealth. Every rural family should have its reasonable share in the generation of GNP and sharing increased per capita income. Integrated rural development means optimum utilization of natural and human resources of a given rural area for the enrichment of the quality of life of its population. Optimum utilization emphasizes production, distribution, employment, upliftment of rural poor above poverty line and environmental harmony. Rural economic activity is considered in the context of market economy and the inadequacy in the supply of capital and skills in the rural areas. Integrated rural development considers the links of the rural area concerned with its market relations, the two-way mobility of capital, labor, policies on economic growth and social justice.

People participation and rural Development: Integrated development of rural and undeveloped areas has been an issue of concern throughout the world. In Indian context the thrust of each Government activity since freedom has been to empower marginalized segments of society but the approach has suffered from over exposure and under implementation. There has been plethora of case studies on the causes of under development but practically at grass root level an impactful and effective solution to generate a widespread transformation is still awaited. One aspect that is emphatically appearing from the studies is lack of awareness, information and initiative among the unprivileged segments of the country. Even the Knowledge Commission reiterated vital need of formation of knowledge society by empowering the masses through assisting them identify and utilize knowledge in resource generation. The masses need to be trained to cope with new situation by fulfilling information needs linking to their priorities and possibilities. Another outcome of developmental studies is that the rural poor have little or no participation in their own developmental efforts which has appeared as a critical bottleneck in initiating and sustaining development of under-developed areas. The impact of non-participation is lack of control of the common masses on their own environment which has been the major concern in front of grassroots empowerment. The starting point for development cannot be anything else other than the people themselves. The developmental efforts have often concentrated on physical and economic factors, while the human element is ignored.

Post Independent Reforms in India

[1] Community Development Program [1952] and National Extension Services [1953]: With the launching of Community Development Program and establishing a network of National Extension Services in the villages a beginning was made to create awareness among rural communities of the potential and means of development. This institutional infrastructure at grass-root level facilitated abolition of intermediary landlords system and implemented land reforms that enabled farmers to adopt technologies in agriculture.

[2] Panchayati Raj [1959]: Panchayati Raj was created on October 2,1959 on the recommendations of Balvantray Mehta Study Team (1957). The team had suggested a scheme of democratic decentralisation for streamlining the Community Development programme (1952), which had been introduced to bring about a silent revolution in rural society by awakening the dormant forces of progress in it. The scheme provided for a three tier structure of Panchayati Raj with the Gram Panchayat at the base, the Panchayat Samiti in the middle and Zila Parishad at the top. The Panchayati Raj underwent the phase of development (1959-1964), the phase of stagnation in (1964-1971) and the phase of decay (1971-1977). The phase of its revival started in 1978. And resulted in the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992). The phase of development in fact had started after the submission of the Report by the Balvantray Mehta Study Team in 1957. The first step in that direction was its approval by the National Development Council. This was followed by the Conference of the Ministers of Local Self Government of various states at Hyderabad. It was resolved to accept the scheme of democratic decentralization suggested by the Team and approved by the Council. However, it was also decided that every state should have the freedom to adopt the scheme as per its requirements. But there should be democratically elected and organically linked bodies at the village, the block and the district levels. Moreover, there should be a genuine decartelization of powers to the Panchayati Raj institutions. Rajasthan was the first states to introduce it on October 2 1959. By 1962, the Panchayati Raj had been set up in almost all the states of Indian Union. This happened because the Congress party was not only ruling in the centre but also in all the states

India except Kerala. Another reason was the support to the Panchayati Raj by the then Prime Minister of India and the leader of the Congress party, Jawaharlal Nehru. The credit for it should also be given to S. K. Dey, the first Union Minister of Community Development, Cooperation and Panchayati Raj (1957-1966). It was he who had convinced Nehru on the necessity of Panchayati Raj for the success of parliamentary democracy in India. He was of the view that the Gram Sabha should be linked with the Lok Sabha for this purpose. The phase of stagnation started in 1964 after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru because his successor as Prime Minister, Shri Lai Bahadur Shastri did not share Nehru's enthusiasm for democratic decentralisation. Moreover he had to give priority to increase in agricultural production on account of the food shortage. The growth of the Panchayati Raj remained stagnant during 1964-1971.

[3] High Yielding Varietiy Programme [I960]: Green revolution has been the most spectacular success story from India which made the country self reliant in foodgrain production. The success is manifestation of futuristic vision, faith, courage and the sincere efforts on the part of the scientists and the Government of the day. One choice before the country was to go for spread of new seeds of high yielding varieties (HYV) of wheat and rice. Dr. M. S. Swaminathan is one of the main architects of Indian Green Revolution, which started in 1960s and pulled the country from pawl and gloom of hunger and malnutrition and saved millions of lives.

[4] Indira Awaas Yojana [1995]: IAY is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development to provide houses to the poor in the rural areas. The objective of the Indira Awaas Yojana is primarily to help construction/ upgradation of dwelling units of members of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, freed bonded labourers, minorities in the below poverty line and other below poverty line non-SC/ ST rural households by providing them a lump sum financial assistance.

[5] Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana [2000]: Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched on 25th December 2000 as a fully funded Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide all weather road connectivity in rural areas of the country. The programme envisages connecting all habitations with a population of 500 persons and above in the plain areas and 250 persons and above in hill States, the tribal and the desert areas.

[6] Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act [2005]: The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, (MNREGA) was notified on September 7, 2005. The objective of the Act is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

[7] National Social Assistance Programme [1995]: The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) then comprised of National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS), National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) and National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS). These programmes were meant for providing social assistance benefit to the aged, the BPL households in the case of death of the primary breadwinner and for maternity. These programmes were aimed to ensure minimum national standards in addition to the benefits that the States were then providing or would provide in future. Thus, presently NSAP now comprises of the following five schemes:- *(1) Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS):* Under the scheme, BPL persons aged 60 years or above are entitled to a monthly pension of Rs. 200/- up to 79 years of age and Rs.500/- thereafter.*(2) Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS):* BPL widows aged 40-59 years are entitled to a monthly pension of Rs. 200/-. *(3) Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS):* BPL persons aged 18-59 years with severe and multiple disabilities are entitled to a monthly pension of Rs. 200. *(4) National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS):* Under this scheme a BPL household is entitled to lump sum amount of money on the death of primary breadwinner aged between 18 and 64 years. The amount of assistance is Rs. 10.000. *(5) Annapurna:* Under the scheme, 10 kg of food grains per month are provided free of cost to those senior citizens who, though eligible, have remained uncovered under NOAPS.

[8] PURA [2004-05]: PURA aims to achieve a holistic and accelerated development of compact areas around a potential growth centre in a gram panchayat by providing livelihood opportunities and urban amenities to improve the quality of life in rural areas. It recognizes the rapid growth potential of rural India if enhanced connectivity and infrastructure are provided. The rural population would then be empowered and enabled to create opportunities and livelihoods for themselves on a sustainable and growing basis. Aajeevika Skills: is the skill and placement initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (MoRD). It evolved out of the need to diversify incomes of the rural poor and to cater to the occupational aspirations of their youth. The

programme's focus is on skilling and placement in the formal sector for rural youth who are poor.

[9] Aajeevika Skills [2009]: Its origins in the 'Special Projects' component of the Swamajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). Besides helping to reduce poverty, it rides on the hopes and aspirations for a better quality of life in large sections of the rural poor. Ajeevika Skills aims to skill rural youth who are poor and provide them with jobs having regular monthly wages at or above the minimum wages. Skilling and placement under Aajeevika Skills involves eight distinct steps i. Awareness building within the community on the opportunities, ii. Identifying rural youth who are poor iii. Mobilising rural youth who are interested, iv. Counselling of youth and parents, v. Selection based on aptitude, vi. Imparting knowledge industry linked skills and attitude that enhance employability.

[10] Watershed Development (Revised - 2001): The Watershed approach has conventionally aimed at treating degraded lands with the help of low cost and locally accessed technologies such as in-situ soil and moisture conservation measures, afforestation etc. and through a participatory approach that seeks to secure close involvement of the user-communities. The broad objective was the promotion of the overall economic development and improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the resource poor sections of people inhabiting the programme areas. Many projects designed within this approach were, at different points of time, taken up by the Government of India. The Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP) were brought into the watershed mode in 1987. The Integrated Wasteland Development Programme (IWDP) launched in 1989 under the aegis of the National Wasteland Development Board also aimed at the development of wastelands on watershed basis. The focus of these programmes has, with the advent of the Department of Land Resources (DoLR) shifted to the enhancement of the viability and quality of rural livelihood support systems.

[11] HARIYALI [2003]: New projects under the area development programmes shall be implemented in accordance with the Guidelines for Hariyali with effect from 1.4.2003. the main objectives are: Harvesting every drop of rainwater for purposes of irrigation, plantations including horticulture and floriculture, pasture development, fisheries etc. to create sustainable sources of income for the village community as well as for drinking water supplies. Ensuring overall development of rural areas through the Gram Panchayats and creating regular sources of income for the Panchayats from rainwater harvesting and management.

[12] National Horticulture Mission [2005]: To promote holistic growth of the horticulture sector through area based regionally differentiated strategies, the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) was launched in the country, during the Xth Plan with effect from 2005-06. The scheme has enhanced horticulture production, improved nutritional security and income support to farm households and others; has established convergence and synergy among multiple on-going and planned programmes for horticulture development. The scheme has also helped in generating employment for skilled and unskilled persons, especially unemployed youth.

[13] Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms [2005]: The scheme was launched in May, 2005 with an objective to support State Governments efforts to revitalize their extension system. The scheme promotes a decentralized farmer-driven and farmer-accountable extension system through a new institutional arrangement for technology dissemination in the form of Agriculture.

[14] Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana [2007]: To provide benefits to the farmer community, the Ministry of Agriculture has launched the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) during the Financial Year 2007-08 to encourage the States to invest more towards agriculture and allied sectors so as to achieve 4% annual growth. This would help in increasing the production and productivity. The Ministry has envisaged an outlay of Rs.25,000/- crore for the 12th Five Year Plan. The scheme requires the States to prepare District and State Agriculture Plans for creation of such infrastructure, which are essential to catalyse the existing production scenario for achieving higher production. The scheme provides adequate flexibility and autonomy to the State Governments in selection, planning and implementation of project under this new flagship scheme.

[15] National Food Security Mission [2007]: Understanding the importance of food security, the National Development Council in its 53rd meeting held on 29th May, 2007 adopted a resolution to launch Food Security Mission comprising of rice, wheat and pulses to increase the production of rice by 10 million tons, wheat by 8 million tons and pulses by 2 million tons by the end of Eleventh Plan. Accordingly National Food Security Mission has been launched since Rabi 2007 with a financial outlay of Rs. 4882 crore (Eleventh plan period).

[16] Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana [2009]: To improve the present status of women in Agriculture, and to enhance the opportunities for her empowerment, Government of India has announced "Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana" (MKSP), as a sub component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and decided to provide support to the tune of Rs. 100 crore during 2010-11 budget. The primary objective of the MKSP is to empower women in agriculture by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity, as also create and sustain agriculture based livelihoods of rural women.

Conclusion: The sustainable development intervention in the rural areas largely depends on the successful and effective implementation of rural development programmes. Since independence the country has formulated various rural development programmes and has restructured and revamped them envisaging their wider outreach and acceptability. However, the issues, challenges and concerns relating to the implementation of the rural development programmes have remained more or less the same. The need of the hour is the convergence of all development interventions at the grass-root level so as to enhance necessary infrastructure in the backward regions and ensure capacity building and skill up-gradation.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN NORTH EAST INDIA

The need for development programmes especially rural development programmes was comprehended as a result of several famines and food scarcities that occurred in India during the period of 1860 and 1870 and again between 1890 and 1900. During the period, the Government officials apprehended food grains and controlled the market to ensure their distribution to the needy people of rural areas. This humanitarian outlook towards the rural needy indigenous people may be termed as the beginning of the rural development in India. However, in the planned economic development in the post independent scenario, the development acquired top priority and the development of various sectors of the economy has been a major area concern of successive Five Year Plans.

India's North-East region always has been paid special prominence in all the developmental programmes of Government of India. The eight north eastern states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura are considered as special category states and their development plan are financed by the Centre on the basis of 90% grant and 10% loan. They are also allowed to use 20% of the Central assistance for non-plan expenditure as resources and level of development are significantly below the national average. The performance of five programmes viz. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana(SGSY)/ National Rural Livelihood Mission(NRLM)/AAJEEVIKA,IndiraAwaasYojana(IAY), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana(PMGSY) and National Social Assistance Programme(NSAP) of the Ministry of Rural development in the north east India are analysed below.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), currently known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of country by providing at least one hundred (100) days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household, whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The most distinguishing feature of MGNREGA is its approach towards empowering citizens to play an active role in the implementation of employment guarantee schemes, through gram sabha, social audit, participatory planning and other activities.

The Act covered 200 districts in its first phase, implemented on February 2, 2006 and was extended to 330 additional districts in 2007-2008. All the remaining rural areas have been notified with effect from April, 1, 2008.

The Central Government has released a total amount of Rs.2376.98 crore to the North Eastern (N-E) States during the year 2012-13. The actual expenditure of the all the eight states are 1684.23 crore against the total available fund of Rs.3244.4 which is of 51.91% of the available fund. As far individual states are concerned, highest fund is utilised in Assam (78.52%) followed by Meghalaya (72.59%) and Mizoram (54.56%). The utilisation of the remaining states is below 50% of the fund available. The lowest fund is utilised by Arunachal Pradesh which is only 11.49% of the fund available. Again, Tripura has the highest fund available which is more than double than Assam and almost four, five times than the other N-E States.

Highest mandays have been generated by Tripura followed by Assam which is 40.88% and 20.62%

respectively of the total mandays generated in the whole North East States. Lowest mandays have been observed in comparatively less populas states Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)/ National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) / AAJEEVIKA

The single self-employment programme of Swamajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), launched with effect from 1.4.1999, has been conceived keeping in view the strengths and weaknesses of the earlier schemes of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and Allied Programmes along with Million Wells Scheme (MWS).

The objective of the programme was to bring the existing poor families above the poverty line by covering all aspects of self employment viz. organisation of the rural poor into Self help Groups (SHGs) and their capacity building, planning of activity clusters, infrastructure build up, technology, credit and marketing. Generally, the list of BPL households identified through BPL census duly approved by the Gram Sabha will form the basis for identification of families for assistance under SGSY. This programme was merged with National Rural Livelihood Mission from April 1, 2013.

Most of the states are in transition stage from SGSY to NRLM i.e. they are in a stage of setting up the various systems required for smooth and efficient implementation of the programme. So fund utilization during this period is quite low. In this stage, the expenditure is mainly on social mobilization and capacity building of the grassroots institutions. Some of the key achievements of NRLM in these states are

- State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLMs) set up in 6 states-Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Full time Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) have been appointed in Sikkim, Mizoram, Tripura and Nagaland.
- Identification of intensive area of operations and Annual Action Plan (AAPs) prepared and submitted by 6 states- Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Basic core team at State level recruited in 6 states-Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. (Annual Report 2012-13, MORD,GOI)

Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)

Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development and has been in operation since 1985-86. The prime objective of IAY is to provide financial assistance to build dwelling units for SC/ST, free bonded labourers and also to non SC/ST rural poor below poverty line by providing them grants-in-aid. Though IAY is shared between the Centre and States in the ratio 75:25, however for the N E states the funding pattern is 90:l0.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)

The PMGSY launched in December, 2000 as a 100% Centrally Sponsored Scheme, aims at providing rural connectivity to unconnected habitations with population of 500 persons or more in the rural areas by the end of the Tenth Plan period. During the financial year 2012-13, a total amount of Rs. 1049 crore has been released to the N-E states.

The expenditure during that period was Rs. 929.12 crore. The utilisation of funds of N-E states under PMGSY is shown in the Table: 5. Against the targeted length of 2660 kms, a total length of 1441 kms has been completed, which is 54% , and the total number of habitations covered 309 against the target of 340, which is 91%, during 2012-13.

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

The NSAP was launched with effect from 15th August, 1995 as a 100 per cent Centrally Sponsored Scheme with the aim to provide social assistance benefit to poor households in the case of old age, death of primary breadwinner and maternity. At present NSAP comprises-(i) Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), (ii) National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) and (iii) Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS) and (iv) Annapurna.

NSAPs are implemented by Rural Development Department in the state of Assam and Meghalaya and by Social Welfare Department in the rest of the states. Some states also made monthly contribution to the schemes.

Under IGNOAPS, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram contributed Rs.50 per month, Nagaland contributed Rs.100 per month and Sikkim and Tripura contributed Rs.200 each per month. Under IGNWPS, Sikkim and Tripura contributed Rs.100 and Rs.200 respectively.

Conclusion

North Eastern states of India are recognised as special category states and get special consideration in funding pattern in the Government Schemes. To accelerate the development process, the Central Government has taken a number of steps which also includes initiatives of the government to stipulate earmarking of 10% of the Budget (Gross Budgetary Support-GBS) of the Central Ministers/ Departments and creation of Non-Lapsable Central pool of Resources (NLCPR). Most of the ongoing rural development schemes are interventions towards food security, creation of conditions for socio-economic development and enhancing the capacity level of rural poor to enable them to engage in productive activities. Besides, the Ministry of Rural Development also conducted separate Performance Review Committee (PRC) meetings to ensure that more times are available to them to bring out their special problems. Though the financial allocation and its disbursement on rural development programmes have been increasing, the most of the areas of the north east region are still backward and remote. These areas are untouched by the development programmes of the government. The officials and policy makers, who prepare plans and programmes, should adhere to the ground reality of the problems of north eastern states and to identify the factors that hinder the developmental process. Finally, a dynamic role of the state and its intervention is must for proper implementation of rural development programmes in North East lndia.

THE INTERPLAY OF IPR AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The linkage between Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs,) biodiversity and traditional knowledge (TK) is of recent origin. Biodiversity refers to "the variability among living organisms from all sources and the ecological complexes of which they are part and includes diversity within species or between species and of eco-systems." (Sec 2 (b) of the Indian Biological Diversity Act, 2002). TK on the other hand is the result of intellectual activity in a traditional context. It is intricately woven into the living styles and practices of communities.

Despite the tall claims, the sad reality is that traditional knowledge is threatened by unauthorized use. IPR regimes have miles to go before they can claim to be saviours of TK systems. An oft quoted case study is that of Cupuacu - a tree belonging to the cocoa family that has been cultivated along the Amazon since time immemorial. Today Brazil has been reduced to the insignificant role of a supplier of raw material. It is Japan that holds the IPRs- whether it be patents or trade marks.

With most of the original genetic materials located in the biodiversity hot spots of developing countries, the natural question that crops up is - " Is the destructive face of colonialism showing up again?" Is it a continuation of "the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the looting of the East Indies and the turning of Africa into a warren for the hunting of black skins that was once supposed to signalize the rosy dawn of the era of capitalists production"?

Biodiversity

The term biodiversity is a broad concept. It is the totality of genes, species and ecosystems of a region and encompasses the entire life system that exists in a natural setting. There are various types of biodiversity - genetic diversity species diversity and ecosystem diversity.

India has two of the 18 biodiversity hotspots-the areas that have the most endemic species and are most endangered by habitat loss. The evil quartet of habitat destruction, overkill, introduced species and secondary extensions described by Jared Diamond are looming large over the horizons of these areas.

This threat to habitat dates back to the colonial period which was marked by the European settlers 'incarceration of the savages' and the appropriation of their 'wild lands' under the guise of converting 'the haunt of wolves, bears and more savage men' into 'habitations of rational and civilized people'. In reality, it was an era of appropriating the resources of the earth, breaching the original unity of man and nature and transforming the planet into an "object of huckstering". This greedy policy -ruinous to man and nature- unfortunately continues in the post colonial era too. From tea and sugarcane through cotton and eucalyptus trees to kiwi fruits and king prawns, farming systems are put in place to cover the tables of distant consumers. Conversion of nature for plantations, aquaculture and water reservoirs is continuing unabated. Biodiversity is becoming the casualty of unsustainable policies. They are leaving behind a trail of clear-felled forests, poisoned soils, eroded landscapes and over fished waters and are ultimately exacerbating poverty.

Traditional Knowledge (TK)

TK is the collective knowledge, beliefs and practices of indigenous people on sustainable use and management

of resources. It embodies the wisdom developed over generations and encompasses agricultural knowledge, medicinal knowledge, biodiversity – related knowledge and the like. Oft quoted classic examples of medicinal TK are:

i) Methi to bring down blood glucose.

ii) Composition of jamun, bitter gourd, jaggery and egg plant to treat diabetes.

iii) Kala jeera to treat hepatitis and asthma.

The Intergovernmental committee of WIPO has identified specific threats to TK including

a) Unauthorised commercial exploitation

b) Insulting, degrading or culturally offensive use of material that is the subject matter of TK

c) False or misleading indications that there is a relationship with the communities in which the material has originated.

d) Failure to appropriately acknowledge the source of the material.

Needless to say, there are four primary reasons as to why TK should be protected.

a) Conserving the environment

b) Improving the livelihood of TK holders.

c) Benefiting national economies in a knowledge driven era

d) Preventing biopiracy

IPR vis-a-vis Biodiversity & TK

To quote from the United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,

'Indigenous people are entitled to the recognition of the full ownership, control and protection of their cultural and intellectual property. They have the right to special measures to control, develop and protect their sciences, technologies and cultural manifestations, including human and other genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs and visual and performing arts.'

Benefit sharing may take the form of

a) Monetary benefit sharing (license fees, royalty etc)

b) Non monetary benefit sharing (technology transfer, joint IPR ownership etc.).

The basic question that arises here is: is the IP system compatible with the values and interests of traditional communities – or does it privilege individual rights over collective interests? What can be done to ensure that IP protects TK? The answer lies in a comprehensive strategy with national & international dimensions.

There are two basic ways of protecting TK:

a) **Positive protection:** This has been described by the Intergovernmental Committee as "based on the active assertion of rights by the owners and custodians of TK." Classic examples are protective legislations and use of contracts in the interest of indigenous communities.

b) **Defensive protection**: Preventive patent applications and defensive trademark registration come within the ambit of this definition. The application herein does not seek to gain rights, but merely prevents third parties from getting unfavourable IPR in the same subject.

The basic modalities through which TK could be protected are :

i) The existing Intellectual Property Rules (Geographical Indications and Trade Secrets) are the two most suitable forms of IP in this regard

ii) Sui Generis protection to match identified needs of TK holders.

iii) Contracts (the most flexible way to protect TK).

In India, there is no specific legislation to protect TK, Instead, the intellectual property legal framework provides protection to TK through the various provisions therein. Examples of such legislation include:-

a) The Copy right Act 1957

b) The Patent Act 1970

c) The Trademarks Act 1999

d) The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection)Act 1999

e) The Designs Act 2000

f) The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act 2001 (PPVFR Act)

g) The Biological Diversity Act 2002 (BD Act)

a) Turmeric

The crux of the issue in this case was the patent issued by USPTO to the University of Mississippi Medical Centre in 1995 for its use in wound healing. In fact, the patent holders were two non-resident Indians -Suman Das and Harihar Cohli. The CSIR raised objections and submitted 32 references from ancient Indian scriptures. The issue herein was two fold:-

i) Whether the claimed invention fits into the patent criteria.

ii) The violation of IPRs and biopiracy under CBD.

This was a landmark case which India won, but the issues remained - lack of proper documentation of bioresources, the virtual absence of information to USPTO regarding TK and the ground reality that we cannot chase and challenge every TK based product research.

b) Neem

Patenting of neem properties by a US multinational company raised much eyebrows due to three reasons:-

i) Local indigenous farmers would no longer be able to use their products based on neem without paying royalties.

ii) Consumers who will be using the alternative medicines based on neem properties would not get them at an affordable price.

iii) The community as a whole is entitled to get the share of profits from the multinational as per CBD.

The issue of IPRs over the neem tree was challenged at the Munich office of the EPO by the EU Parliamentary Green Party, Dr Vandana Shiva and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement. After years of legal battle, the neem patent was finally revoked. .

c) Basmati

The patenting of basmati, the queen of fragrance, by a US based multinational-Rice Tec Inc-raised much eyebrows. Needless to say, the decision to grant patents is a violation of TRIPS and the Gl regime. To make matters worse, the Rice Tec was having an international market with the brand name as Kasmati and Taxmati and after having patent rights, it was planning to label the rice as Basmati and export the same. India stood to lose in the markets of EU, UK and Middle East in this regard. Moreover, the livelihood economy of the marginal Indian farmer was at cross roads. It is not only biopiracy but also a trade mark deception and a case of "passing off trade". The most important victory as India could see in this regard is the change of nomenclature from Basmati lines and grains to rice lines BAS 867, RT 1117, RT1121.

d) Monsanto

The patenting of wheat gene by Monsanto caused much apprehensions. The new variety was developed from the primitive Indian race Nap Hal which is ideal for making bakery products. The issue was the possibility of future infringement cases against Indian farmers for nonpayment of royalties to Monsanto. The Green Peace, RFSTE and Bharat Karshak Samaj jointly challenged the patent. The patent was finally revoked on 5th October 2004 thanks to the European data base that shows that Nap Hal was collected from Uttar Pradesh in 1948. But the issues remain.

e) Fiji and the Kava case

Kava has been cultivated in Fiji and Vanuatu since times immemorial. However, the L'Oreal group (a French company) has now patented the use of kava to stimulate hair growth. The patented company can now obtain exclusive rights to the plant, thereby demanding full profits associated with usage, ultimately creating a monopoly of ownership over the plant.

Where have we gone wrong?

In reality, biopiracy is the outcome of the stark contrast between the viewpoints of the rich countries that possess technology and finance and the poor ones that are endowed with diverse genetic resources. To quote from the UNEP.

"Intellectual property rights systems either encourage the appropriation of TK for commercial use without the fair sharing of benefits or... violate indigenous cultural precepts by encouraging the commodification of such knowledge."

Needless to say, bioprospecting - the search among living organisms for compounds that have commercial value as active ingredients in pharmaceuticals, pesticides etc- is controversially justified by the contention that it provides biologically rich but economically poor countries a means to save nature by selling it. As the present day IPR considers documented knowledge as prior art, incorporating TK (which is largely oral) in the framework of prior art raises its own set of problems.

There are descriptions under which something may in a relevant sense be known without anyone being aware of its chemical composition or even that it has an identifiable molecular structure.

These issues of protection of TK and interpreting the same in harmony with IPRs need to be resolved in right earnest.

The right path ahead will be one wherein:-

a. Indigenous communities can exercise a veto on whether to provide private parties with access to genetic resources located on native land.

b. access is strictly denied to those who undervalue TK

c. rights of indigenous people are safeguarded through PIC while preserving the integrity of scientific research

d. a balance is struck between the economic benefits of bioprospecting and the fundamental right of self-determination

e. monetary and non monetary benefits are shared with the knowledge - owners in a just and equitable way.

Harmonizing IPR laws, placing ethnobotanical knowledge in public domain and fostering indigenous commercialization can go a long way towards channelizing benefits from exploitation of TK back to the indigenous communities.

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BUNDELKHAND SUPER THERMAL POWER PROJECT

The foundation stone of NTPC`s 2640 MW Bundelkhand Super Thermal Power Project was laid by Shri Jyotiraditya Scindia, Union Minister of State of Power (I/C) at Barethi, Chattarpur District of Madhya Pradesh . Comprising of 4 units of 660 MW each and with environment friendly super critical technology, the project is expected to contribute significantly to the economic and social development of the region.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Jyotiraditya Scindia said that the Barethi power project is an important milestone for the state as well as the entire country. The power project will help to make Bundelkhand one of the most prosperous regions of the State.

The State Energy Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Sh. Rajendra Shukla said that the government is pro-actively taking up all energy related projects in line with the future power requirements of the state. He said that it is a matter of pride to have a professional company like NTPC contributing to the growth of MP.

Fifty percent of the power generated from the project will be supplied to the state of Madhya Pradesh. The estimated cost of the project is approx Rs 18000 crore and is envisaged to be commissioned in the 13th Plan linked to development of coal mine.

NTPC presently meets about 24 % of the total power requirement of Madhya Pradesh allocated from its various stations and has its largest power station in the country Vindhyachal Super Thermal Power Station of 4,260 MW installed capacity, situated in Singrauli district.

With laying of foundation stone in Bundelkhand, NTPC has over 4500 MW of capacity under construction in Madhya Pradesh which includes largest solar power project of 50 MW at Rajgarh, 1600 MW Gadarwara Super Thermal Power Project in Narsinghpur Distt. , 500 MW is also under construction at Vindhyachal and 2640 MW at Barethi.

NTPC being the largest power utility in the country has been playing a major role in meeting the power needs of the country and contributing to the economic and social development of the country. NTPC has been ranked No.1 Independent Power Producer globally in Platts Top 250 Global Energy Company ranking for the year 2013. NTPC`s operational performance in terms of Plant Load Factor (PLF), Availability Factor, Planned Outage and Forced Outage has been better than most large power stations in the world.

TROPEX

The Indian Navy's major annual exercise 'TROPEX' (Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise) concluded recently. The exercise involved large scale naval manoeuvres in all three dimensions viz. surface, air and underwater, across the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The month long exercise was aimed to assess the operational readiness of naval units, validate the Navy's war fighting doctrine and integrate newly included capabilities in its `Concept of Operations`. Around 60 ships and submarines, and 75 aircraft took part in this exercise, along with participation of units from Indian Air Force and Indian Coast Guard. The exercise also saw the `maiden` participation by the newly acquired P 8I Long Range Maritime Patrol aircraft and the nuclear submarine, Chakra.

The exercise also provided the Indian Navy with an opportunity to validate its network centric warfare capabilities, with effective utilisation of the recently launched Indian Navy's Satellite, GSAT 7.

NSF FOR THE SPORT OF HOCKEY

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has given recognition to 'Hokey India' as National Sports Federation (NSF) for the sport of Hockey. According to a communication sent to all concerned, the Ministry has said, 'Hockey India' is made responsible and accountable for the overall management, direction, control, regulation, promotion and development of the sports discipline, i.e. Hockey (Men and Women).

The communication said, in order to be eligible for assistance and continuing the recognition of Government of India, 'Hockey India' is required to follow the guidelines of the government issued from time to time and also those prescribed in the National Sports Development Code of India.

NATIONAL CYCLING ACADEMY

The Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Shri Jitendra Singh inaugurated the Sports Authority of India National Cycling Academy (SAI NCA). The academy with complete back-up facilities has been set up following the decision taken in the 42nd meeting of the Governing Body of SAI. The academy will be financed by the Govt. of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports through Sports Authority of India with a long-term perspective of making it a top notch Academy which is financially independent and a self-sustaining venture.

Speaking on the occasion, the Sports Minister Shri Jitendra Singh said, the Academy shall cater to the identification and nurturing of young talent at both sub-junior and junior levels and the training of elite athletes on a run up to their preparations for international/national competitions.

Since Cycling Federation of India, an affiliate of the International Cycling Federation, is a major stakeholder in the Cycling discipline, necessary arrangements by way of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) seeking their support and giving them conducive environment shall be entered into.

In the second phase, after the initial setting up and stabilizing of the Academy is achieved, SAI shall also approach the World Cycling Centre of UCI at Aigle (Switzerland) to make their coaches available from time to time to guide in the training techniques and finally convert the academy into a satellite centre of the UCI World Cycling Centre.

Once the Academy is fully functional, the stream of revenue generation to make the Academy self-reliant shall be opened by way of offering the facilities in the Academy to the athletes in the different countries for training as well as for practice sessions. It is expected that most of the Asian Countries, who do not have indoor track facilities will opt to train at this venue on payment basis and this will generate enough funds to make the Academy self-sustainable in the long run.

India recently had success in Asian Track Cycling Championship held at Bangkok (Thailand) in 2013, getting first-ever Gold medal in the history of Cycling.

EXCHANGE RATE OF FOREIGN CURRENCY

In exercise of the powers conferred by Section 14 of the Customs Act, 1962 (52 of 1962), and in super session of the notification of the Government of India in the Ministry of Finance (Department of Revenue) No.13/2014-CUSTOMS (N.T.), dated the 20th February, 2014 vide number S.O.496 (E), dated the 20th February, 2014, except as respects things done or omitted to be done before such super session, the Central Board of Excise and Customs(CBEC) hereby determines that the rate of exchange of conversion of each of the foreign currency specified in column (2) of each of Schedule I and Schedule II annexed hereto into Indian currency or vice versa shall, with effect from 7th March, 2014 be the rate mentioned against it in the corresponding entry in column (3) thereof, for the purpose of the said section, relating to imported and export goods.

SCHEDULE-I

S.No.	Foreign Currency	Rate of exchange of one unit of foreign currency equivalent to Indian rupees	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
		(a) (For Imported Goods)	(b) (For Export Goods)
1.	Australian Dollar	56.10	54.75

2.	Bahrain Dinar	167.85	158.65
3.	Canadian Dollar	56.35	55.10
4.	Danish Kroner	11.50	11.15
5.	EURO	85.40	83.45
6.	Hong Kong Dollar	8.00	7.85
7.	Kuwait Dinar	224.80	212.35
8.	New Zealand Dollar	52.55	51.10
9.	Norwegian Kroner	10.40	10.10
10.	Pound Sterling	103.85	101.75
11.	Singapore Dollar	49.10	47.95
12.	South African Rand	5.95	5.55
13.	Saudi Arabian Riyal	16.85	15.95
14.	Swedish Kroner	9.70	9.40
15.	Swiss Franc	70.05	68.35
16.	UAE Dirham	17.25	16.30
17.	US Dollar	62.00	61.00

SCHEDULE-II

S.No.	*Foreign Currency*	*Rate of exchange of 100 units of foreign currency equivalent to Indian rupees*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
		(a) (For Imported Goods)	(b) (For Export Goods)
1.	Japanese Yen	60.65	59.20
2.	Kenya Shilling	73.15	69.00

A FILM ON INDIAN WOMEN SCIENTISTS "SCIENTIFICALLY YOURS"

Vigyan Prasar, Department of Science and Technology, Govt. of India jointly with NISCAIR, CSIR has developed an inspirational film titled "Scientifically Yours" on Indian Women Scientists who helped in shaping the Indian Science.

The highlights of the film were shown on the eve of International Women`s day in New Delhi. The film on Indian women scientists is a unique one as this section of society has not been sufficiently covered in the country. This is an effort to bring the living women legends in science on to the centre stage with their achievements and contributions and communicate to the youth of the country.

A panel discussion with the scientists who are part of the film having such an inspirational film for motivating the young students in science and sharing their experiences in making the film was also organized on the occasion.

The film is likely to help in creating role models for students and researchers especially for girl students and motivate them in pursuing careers in basic and applied sciences. The film would be shown for awareness generation in schools, colleges, universities across the country.

The women scientists have been identified from various fields of research such as Physical Sciences, Biological sciences, Chemical sciences, Immunology,

Agriculture etc. The film has been produced in discussion mode at CSIR–NISCAIR. A 13-episode film has been developed of 26 minutes duration each. .

The film covers the selected living women scientists, highlighting their achievements and advancements and journey made by them in Indian Science. Following eminent scientists have been covered such as Dr. Indira Nath, pioneer in the field of medical sciences who made major contributions and worked for Leprosy, Dr.Bimla Butti,an eminent physicist who worked in the field of Plasma Physics from Physical Research Laboratory, Dr. KasturiDatta, pioneer in Cellular & Molecular Biology worked in JNU, Dr. Manju Sharma, renowned biotechnologist from DBT, Dr. Chandrima Shaha, profound Endocrinologist and present Director of Indian Institute of Immunology, Dr. Chitra Sarkar, an eminent Neuropathologist from AIIMS, Dr.Vibha Tandon, renowned scientist working in field of Medicinal Chemistry at JNU, Dr. Rupamanjari Ghosh, Quantum physicist from JNU, Dr. Shashi Wadhwa, renowned medical professional and Dr. Sunita Saxena, eminent scientist from ICMR who works in the field of Pathology .

GUPTA PERIOD SCULPTURES DISCOVERED

Sarnath in Varanasi (UP) is the place where Lord Buddha gave his first sermon and thus it is also called the place of origin of Buddhism.

Archaeological Survey of India has once again started excavations at the Protected Site of Sarnath from 19th February, 2014 after a gap of over 80 years with the main objective of collecting samples for dating in the labs through C14 method from the earliest levels of the site to find out if there are remains of pre-Mauryan era available at the site as the site in the past has yielded remains of the time of King Asoka but Buddha had come to the site more than 200 years before Asoka and stayed there for some time and a well established monastic system existed afterwards which is also mentioned in the pillar edict of Asoka from the site.

Dr B.R. Mani, Additional Director General, Archaeological Survey of India who is directing the excavation informed that during the British period in excavations not much emphasis was given on stratigraphy and succession of cultural deposits and as such in spite of so many years of early excavations no section drawing is available. The second objective of present excavation is also to define different strata from the earliest times to

the 12th century A.D. when the site was abandoned after medieval period attacks. In one of the trenches near the circular shrine some rare pieces of Gupta art of Sarnath school depicting Lord Buddha in various postures have been found which are considered to be very significant find. The work is supervised by Shri Ajay Srivastava, Deputy Superintending Archaeologist, Sarnath.

Both seated and standing Buddha images have been recovered from Gupta levels in one of the trenches. One important sculpture of Buddha is depicting the scene of his descent from Tusita heaven where he is believed to have given sermon to his mother Mayadevi and the place where he descended from heaven is famous as Sankassa in Pali literature and identified with the fortified city of Sankisa in Farukhabad district, incidently which was also excavated by Dr Mani from 1995 to 1997.

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF POST-GRADUATES IN 15TH LOK SABHA

15th Lok Sabha has seen a record increase in number of post-graduates taking the number of such members to 256 as compared to 157 in 14th Lok Sabha. Infact 15th Lok Sabha has around 78% of the members having graduate, post-graduate or doctorate degree. Number of under-matriculates members has fallen sharply from 112 in 1st Lok Sabha to 20 in 15th Lok Sabha.

Though there is no educational qualification stipulated in the Constitution of India to contest the elections, the emerging trend suggests more and more academically educated candidates are winning the elections. Number of candidates having graduates and higher degrees has gone up from 56% in the 1st Lok Sabha to 78% in 15th Lok Sabha. Number of candidates without matriculation has decreased from 23% in 1st Lok Sabha to around 3% in the 15th Lok Sabha.

Though there were candidates without any formal education whatsoever who contested the elections, 15th Lok Sabha does not have even a single illiterate member. There are as many as 24 members who hold doctorate degrees. Also, a decrease in number of graduates in 15th Lok Sabha has accounted for increase in number of post-graduates and higher degrees. There were more number of graduates and less number of post-graduates in 14th Lok Sabha which has been reversed in 15th Lok Sabha.

MILLION TONNES OF FREIGHT

Indian Railways have carried 953.05 million tonnes of revenue earning freight traffic during 1st April 2013 to

28th February 2014. The freight carried shows an increase of 41.63 million tonnes over the freight traffic of 911.44 million tonnes actually carried during the corresponding period last year.

During the month of February 2014, the revenue earning freight traffic carried by Indian Railways was 86.93 million tonnes. There is an increase of 3.32 million tonnes over the actual freight traffic of 83.61 million tonnes carried by the Indian Railways during the same period last year.

FINE OF RS. 1 CRORE UPON GOOGLE

The Competition Commission of India(CCI)has imposed a fine of Rs. 1 Crore upon Google for failure to comply with the directions given by the Director General(DG)seeking information and documents.

The order was passed on a reference made by the DG to CCI alleging inter alia non-cooperation by Google in the pending investigations.

The DG was investigating the informations filed by M/s Matrimony com private limited and Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) against Googlefor alleged abuse of market power in the relevant markets of online search and search advertising.

CCI also directed Google to cooperate with the investigations by furnishing such other informations/ documents which may be required by the DG during the course of further investigations.

The common order of the Commission was passed in Case Nos. 07and 30 of 2012.

LARGEST AND SMALLEST PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES

As per the latest figures of electorate data available with the Election Commission of India, the largest five parliamentary constituencies of the country in terms of number of electors together constitute 1,16,51,249 electors while the smallest five together constitute 7,56,820 electors. The total electorate size in the largest five constituencies is thus 15.4 times of that in the smallest five constituencies. Malkajgiri in Andhra Pradesh with 29,53,915 electors has the largest number of electors while Lakshadweep with 47,972 electors has the smallest number of electors.

IRON ORE HANDLING COMMENCED AT MORMUGAO PORT

Iron Ore Handling has commenced at Mormugao Port. This followed easing of the ban by the Supreme Court on the sale of iron ore which has already been mined while continuing the ban on extraction of Ore. The Mechanical Ore Handling Plant of Mormugao Port is highly versatile capable of loading a Panamax size vessel in a single day.

On 5th of October 2012, the top court of the country banned extraction and transportation of Goan iron ore in a bid to clamp down on illegal mining thereby freezing shipments. The Govrnment of Goa had earlier invited bids for sale of about 11 million tons of ore through E-auction lying at various locations following the Supreme Court order. The buyers will be allowed to ship the ore overseas or sell locally. About 2 lakh tons of ore had been lying at Mormugao Port.

MOST EFFICIENT NAVRATNA

HAL received the "Most Efficient Navratna 2013" award at the fifth Dalai Street Investment Journal Awards night held in New Delhi . HAL Chairman, Dr. R.K. Tyagi received the award from the jury.

The awards were presented to the various PSUs in different categories in recognition of their performance and contribution to the Indian economy. Mr. T.K.A. Nair, Advisor to PM and Dr. Pritam Singh, Director General of International Management Institute, New Delhi, addressed the top executives representing Maharatna, Navratna, Miniratna, government Insurance Companies and banks.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Tyagi dedicated the award to all HALites and said the company is on its way to future growth through measures taken on various fronts such as R&D, modernization, customer initiatives, quality and thrust given on indigenization

HAL has notched-up the highest ever turnover of Rs. 15,180 crores for the FY 2013-14 surpassing the previous year's figure of Rs. 14,324 crores. "We crossed the psychological barrier of Rs. 15,000 crores and the production has been pretty good as we produced 60 aircraft and helicopters, achieved the initial operational clearance (II) of LCA and filed record 209 patents during the year", said Dr. R.K. Tyagi, Chairman, HAL. "We are preparing the company for 2020 and beyond", he added. HAL`s Value of Production (VOP) for FY 2013-14, stood at Rs. 15,296 crores as against the figure of Rs. 14,202 crores of the previous year. The operating profit went up to Rs. 1,651 crores in the FY 2013-14 as against Rs. 1,194 crores in 2012-13.

PSLV-C24

The President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee has congratulated the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) for the successful launch of PSLV-C24.

In a message to Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, Chairman of ISRO, the President has said, "My heartiest congratulations to you and your entire team at the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) for the successful launch of PSLV-C24, carrying the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS)-1B.

The launch of PSLV-C24, with IRNSS-1B marks an important landmark in our space programme and demonstrates, yet again, India's capabilities in space launch technology. The nation will immensely benefit from the applications of IRNSS which include terrestrial, aerial and marine navigation, disaster management, vehicle tracking and fleet management etc.

Kindly convey my greetings to the members of your team of scientists, engineers, technologists and all others associated with this great mission. Our nation is grateful for their hard work and proud of their accomplishments

DADASAHEB PHALKE AWARD FOR THE YEAR 2013

Veteran film lyricist, director, screen writer, producer and poet Shri Gulzar has been conferred the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for the year 2013. He is the 45th Dada Saheb Phalke Award Winner. The award is conferred by the Government of India for outstanding contribution to the growth and development of Indian Cinema. The award consists of a Swarn Kamal (Golden Lotus), a cash prize of Rs.10 lakhs and a shawl. The award is given on the basis of recommendations of a Committee of eminent persons set up by the Government for this purpose. This year, a seven member jury consisting of eminent artists, after due deliberations, unanimously recommended Sh. Gulzar for the prestigious award.

Born in 1934 in Punjab in pre-independence India, Shri Gulzar started his career in 1956. As a lyricist, he got his first break in Bimal Roy's 'Bandini' . He has worked with leading music directors including Sachin Dev Burman, Salil Chowdhury, Shankar Jaikishan, Hemant Kumar, Laxmikant-Pyarelal, Madan Mohan, Rajesh Roshan, Anu Malik, and Shankar–Ehsaan–Loy. He has had outstanding partnerships with Rahul Dev Burman, A. R. Rahman and Vishal Bhardwaj. Along with lyrics, he has also contributed to several films as script, story and dialogue writer. Films directed by Gulzar have won numerous awards and critical acclaim. Among them are 'Mere Apne', 'Koshish', 'Áandhi' 'Kinara', 'Khushboo', 'Ángoor', 'Libaas' , 'Meera', 'Lekin'and 'Maachis'. He has worked on the small screen as well; having created outstanding series like 'Mirza Ghalib' and 'Tahreer Munshi Premchand ki'. He wrote lyrics for several Doordarshan serials including 'Hello Zindagi', 'Potli Baba ki' and 'Jungle Book'. The list is long.

Shri Gulzar was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2002, and the Padma Bhushan in 2004 . He has won a number of National Film Awards and 20 Filmfare Awards. At the 81st Oscars in 2009, he won the Academy Award for Best Original Song for "Jai Ho" (shared with A.R. Rahman), for the film 'Slumdog Millionaire'. In 2010, the same song won him a Grammy Award in the category of 'Best Song Written for a Motion Picture, Television or Other Visual Media'.

Gulzar`s poetry has been published in three compilations: 'Chand Pukhraaj Ka', 'Raat Pashminey Ki' and 'Pandrah Paanch Pachattar' (15-05-75). His short stories are published in 'Raavi Paar' (also known as 'Dustkhat' in Pakistan) and 'Dhuan' (smoke). He is also credited with having created a new type of stanza in Urdu poetry named 'Triveni' (stanza of 3 lines). Gulzar's contribution to mainstream cinema is well recognized, assuring him a place in the annals of Indian cinema.

Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Shri Bimal Julka congratulated Gulzar Saab on this momentous occasion.

PORTAL 'RAILSAVER'

In a move to further improve energy efficiency on Indian Railways, a web based Electrical Energy Management System, RAILSAVER, developed by Centre of Railway Informatics System (CRIS), an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Railways, was inaugurated by Shri Kul Bhushan, Member Electrical, Railway Board here today. He said that this portal will be very useful for Indian Railways in reducing carbon foot print which is very important for addressing the challenges of global warming and sustainability of our environment. He also stated that Indian Railways is determined to reduce the cost of electricity by adopting various means like procuring power through trading, bilateral arrangements etc.

Shri Bhushan further stated that the portal RAILSAVER will provide a perfect IT based platform for energy consumption data which will pave the way for systematic collection, assimilation, interpretation and analysis of data in evolving future strategies for conceiving, implementing and further intensifying energy conservation efforts on Indian Railways. He also sought support of UNDP in linking of RAILSAVER web-site with

other Railroad systems so that the best practices on energy efficiency, benchmarks for specific energy consumption etc. can be shared and adopted by amongst each other.

The portal is a part of the project for "Improving Energy Efficiency in Indian Railway System" being executed by Indian Railways under programmatic framework of UNDP through Global Environmental Facility (GEF) funding of US $ 5.2 million. The project envisages defining framework for energy conservation initiatives on Indian Railway system by introduction of energy efficient technologies and adoption of various measures in traction and non-traction sub-sectors.

Slew of measures like adoption of energy efficient luminaries and equipment, deployment of new generation 3 phase energy efficient electric locomotives and electrical multiple units etc. have resulted into substantial savings in electricity consumption in the past. This portal will further facilitate in saving energy upto 15% by the year 2020 through improved energy efficiency measures as laid down in Railway's vision document. The project after implementation will be immensely helpful in creating awareness of energy efficiency measures, understanding importance of such measures, availability of knowledge bank on these measures, availability of training modules amongst many others.

ROAD SAFETY CYCLOTHON

Olympian Wrestler Sushil Kumar Flagged Off Road Safety Cyclothon here this morning in presence of cricketer Ajay Jadeja ,Shri Vijay Chhibber, Secretary Road Transport &Highways and Shri. Bhim Sain Bassi, Commissioner of Police, Delhi. The Senior officers of the Ministry and Delhi Police also participated in the cyclothon. The 5 km cyclothon was organised by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways in collaboration of Delhi Police and the International Road Federation.

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has been making effort to make the issue of road safety , a national movement by involving various sections of society and stakeholders. In this common effort towards making roads safer, one of the areas of weakness identified has been low level of focus accorded to the safety of population using bicycles in the country. Cycles alone account for around 8000 fatalities every year. Use of reflectors and reflective tape on bicycles ensures that they are visible, and hence safe, at all times. It is with this in mind that it was decided to highlight this aspect by organising a 5 km Cyclothon involving civil society, youth and others.

India today faces an epidemic of road accidents which results in over 1.38 lakh fatalities and a substantially larger number of injured and disabled, causing immense socio economic trauma to victims and their families. At a macro-economic level it is estimated by various agencies that road accidents in the country accord for a loss of almost 2% GDP every year, in addition to the personal trauma.

IRCON SIGNS MOU WITH TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL INDIA

Ircon International Limited, a Public Sector Undertaking under the Ministry of Railways, signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Transparency International India (TII) for implementing Integrity Pact. This MOU is aimed at maintaining complete transparency, integrity and accountability in all its major contracts and procurement. The MoU was signed by Shri Mohan Tiwari, CMD, IRCON, and Dr. S.K. Agarwal, Chairman, TII in the presence of senior officers of IRCON and TII.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Agarwal said that the Integrity Pact will not only ensure efficiency, but it also helps in building public trust and enhances the credibility of the organisation. So far, 47 PSUs have signed the pact.

Integrity Pact is a tool conceived by the Berlin-based Transparency International to fight corruption in public procurement through a voluntary agreement between a buyer and the prospective vendors/bidders, refraining both sides to exercise any corrupt influence on any aspect of the contract.

In his address, Shri Tiwari said that the company has been voluntarily adopting all the Corporate Governance measures in its endeavour for transparency in public procurement, and implementing Integrity Pact is another step in this direction.

CENTENARY OF NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN INDIA

National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) is a truly representative organization of Protestant and Orthodox churches in our country. It brings together the Churches and other Christian organizations for mutual consultation, assistance and action in all matters related to life and witness. Since its inception a century ago, inspired by Jesus Christ's eternal message of love, compassion, forgiveness and selfless service, the NCCI has made invaluable contributions towards the noble task of nation building. It has faithfully served our Christian compatriots and the society at large.

Over the years, the NCCI has undertaken concrete programmes and projects in critical areas, such as education, healthcare, natural disaster relief and rehabilitation and ecological degradation. It has focussed on adult and vocational education; providing productive employment for the youth, through setting up industrial cooperatives and implementing cottage industry projects such as tanneries, poultry farming, mat-weaving, brush-making.

The Vice President Hamid Ansari was there for the release of the commemorative postage stamp to mark the centenary of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI).

The NCCI provides a vibrant platform for various denominations of the Christian church and related organizations to exchange ideas and views on relevant social, economic and political issues of common interest and concern. It is laudable that the NCCI, in true Christian tradition, serves the people on the basis of their needs and without any consideration to their creed, race or political belief. Over the years, the NCCI has undertaken concrete programmes and projects in critical areas, such as education, healthcare, natural disaster relief and rehabilitation and ecological degradation. It has focussed on adult and vocational education; providing productive employment for the youth, through setting up industrial cooperatives and implementing cottage industry projects such as tanneries, poultry farming, mat-weaving, brush-making.

As the National Council of Churches, it addresses concerns related to oppression and injustice in all its forms. Recognising the realities of our society, it is particularly engaged in the task of upliftment and empowerment of the deprived and marginalised sections of our society, such as the Dalits, Tribals, Women and the Physically Challenged.

The NCCI has also acted against the rising trend of religious extremism and communalism by encouraging responsible evangelism and inter-faith dialogue and harmony. By nurturing better understanding among different Christian traditions in the country, it continues to be a facilitator of inter-church togetherness. It would be appropriate to say that the NCCI has been an important vehicle for promoting the overall well-being of our society and country. It has set an example for others to follow by its spiritual and people-oriented work.

THOUSAND YEAR OLD PRATIHARA PERIOD MINT

The ancient mounds at village Bohar Majra in Rohtak are gradually disappearing in the wake of coming up of new colonies under HUDA. The mounds located near Sri Baba Mastnath University have never been protected by either ASI or the State government. It was during the middle of January 2014 that Prof. Manmohan Kumar, a retired professor of MD University, Rohtak informed Dr. B R Mani, Additional Director General, ASI to do something to understand the site as it has yielded some terracotta moulds for making coins. The site was informed to be under constant levelling.

ASI decided to immediately do some salvage operation through exploration followed by excavation, if required. Dr. Mani ADG visited the site on 2nd February, 2014 and in a brief exploratory survey could collect 31 pieces of terracotta coin moulds for casting coins of King MihiraBhoja, the mightly ruler of the Pratihara dynasty of Kannauj who ruled between 836 and 885 AD and whose empire covered almost entire northern and central India.

Regular salvage excavation at the site started with the approval of the DG, ASI on 15th February, 2014 under the direction of Dr. B R Mani, Additional Director General, ASI assisted by Sri V.C. Sharma, SA and staff of the Chandigarh Circle of ASI. So far seven trenches of 3 squares of 10 x 10 m have been excavated revealing remains of a rectangular structure considered to be the mint, of almost 20 x 10 m which seems to have belonged to about 8th century and probably continued to exist till about 11th century AD. The bricks used are around 30 x 20 x 5 cm in measurement. According to Dr. Mani ,"the ceramic assemblage and other evidences of material culture suggest that it is a single culture site, though there are three structural places connected with the habitational deposit which is at the maximum around 3.25 m in thickness. The site has yielded hundreds of terracotta coin moulds and crucibles from the last phase of the site and an interesting fact is that some potsherds are having glazed surfaces of primitive type over red ware pottery. Knife edge bowls are the features of all the three phases of the site".

The mint site is spread over an area of about 100 m in east-west and 50 m in north-south direction amidst a comparatively very large spread of an early medieval city site at village Majra which seems to have been occupied after the destruction of the earlier city site of Rohtak which is located at Khokra-Kot a few kilometers towards north-west from the locality of Majra. The discovery of the mint belonging to the Pratihara period is the first of its kind ever found in the country.

IMPORTANCE OF MSME SECTOR IN OUR ECONOMY

The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, presented the National Awards to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

and also to the Banks for here excellence in Micro & Small Enterprises Lending recently.

Congratulating all the distinguished entrepreneurs who received awards the Prime Minister expressed the hope that their example will motivate entrepreneurs all over the country to strive for higher standards of performance.

The Prime Minister said "The MSME sector is of vital importance to our national economy. It accounts for 8 per cent of the country's GDP, 45 per cent of its manufactured output and 43 per cent of our exports. It provides employment to over 10 crore people. Our Government has always believed that strong performance of this sector is necessary for us to achieve the objective of rapid and inclusive growth. It is a matter of considerable satisfaction for all of us that the MSME sector has grown at a healthy rate of 10 per cent in recent years."

To promote the growth of the MSME sector the Prime Minister said that additional measures were announced in the Budget for the Financial Year 2013-14. These included continuation of non-tax benefits available for MSMEs for three years even after an enterprise graduated to a higher category. Fifteen additional tool rooms are being set up in the country with World Bank assistance to facilitate skill development and promotion of new technologies in the MSME sector. Regeneration of traditional industries is being given focused attention and this is expected to benefit 4 lakh artisans engaged in these activities. Another recent initiative to assist the MSME sector is the setting up of the 'India Inclusive Innovation Fund' (IIIF) for promoting grass-root level innovation.

S.K. SINGH AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN IFS

The Vice President of India Shri M. Hamid Ansari presented "3rd S.K. Singh Award for Excellence in Indian Foreign Service" to Shri Sibi George, the 1993 batch officer of IFS recently. Addressing on the occasion, he said that Late Shri S.K. Singh was a distinguished diplomat and was his senior in IFS. He extended his felicitations and best wishes to Smt Manju Singh ji and the S.K. Singh Memorial Trust for keeping alive the rich legacy of late Shri S.K.Singh through the institution of this Award. He congratulated Shri Sibi George for his outstanding services rendered to our compatriots in Saudi Arabia and said that his achievements attain more importance given the difficult situation our citizens had to face in Saudi Arabia.

He opined that having spent almost four decades in IFS, he was of the belief that Diplomacy is a métier which is best practiced in the quiet. A successful diplomat is one who performs his mandated tasks with discretion & without much visibility. The very nature of the job is such that confidentiality, at times, coupled with geographical distance, makes it difficult for the public at large to appreciate the tremendous work done by diplomats in foreign lands and even at Headquarters. Consequently accolades or recognition are difficult to come by for most diplomats.

PASSPORT SEVAL THROUGH COMMON SERVICES CENTERS

The Ministry of External Affairs, along with CSC e-Governance Services India Limited {which is promoted by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY)}, is all set to launch Passport related services through the vast network of over one lakh Common Services Centers (CSCs) across rural hinterland. The initiative would largely bridge the digital divide in the country.

The CSC Scheme was approved by the Government of India in September 2006 for setting up of 100,000+ (One Lakh+) Internet enabled centers in rural areas under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). The CSCs are the delivery points for Government, Private and Social Sector services in the areas of agriculture, health, education, banking, insurance, pension, utility bill payments, entertainment, etc. to rural citizens of India at their doorstep. The passport related services are being added as part of their bouquet of services.

Under the Passport Seva, the Ministry of External affairs has made it mandatory to complete the entire form filing process on-line, including payment of applicable fee and scheduling of appointment for seeking Passport related services. The CSCs would facilitate filling and uploading of Passport application form, payment of applicable fee (through debit/credit card or through SBI internet banking/ challan mode) and scheduling of appointment for the visit to the Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) at nominal charge not exceeding Rs. 100/-. As per the appointment schedule, an applicant will have to visit the PSK for completion of application submission process (including collection of digital photographs/biometrics, verification of supporting documents and approval). The services through CSCs would be available throughout the week, including during the weekend.

The services would first be launched in pilot mode at 15 select CSC locations in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand in the second week of March 2014.

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Gist of
Science Reporter

TURNING OFF 'AGING GENES'

Calorie restriction has been shown to prolong lifespan in yeast, worms, flies, monkeys, and, in some studies, humans. Now Keren Yizhak, a doctoral student at Tel Aviv University's Blavatnik School of Computer Science, and her colleagues have developed a computer algorithm that predicts which genes can be "turned off" to create the same anti-aging effect as calorie restriction.

The findings, reported in Nature Communications, could lead to the development of new drugs to treat aging.

Yizhak's algorithm is the first to look for drug targets not to kill cells, but to transform them from a diseased state into a healthy one. The algorithm, called a "metabolic transformation algorithm," or MTA, can take information about any two metabolic states and predict the environmental ' or genetic changes required to go from one state to the other. "Gene expression" is the measurement of the expression level of individual genes in a cell, and genes can be "turned off" in various ways to prevent them from being expressed in the cell.

Some of the genes that the MTA identified were already known to extend the lifespan of yeast when turned off. Yizhak applied MTA to human metabolic information. MTA was able to identify a set of genes that can transform 40-to-70 percent of the differences between the old and young information from four different studies. While currently there is no way to verify the results in humans, many of these genes are known to extend lifespan in yeast, worms, and mice.

One day, drugs could be developed to target genes in humans, potentially allowing us to live longer. MTA could also be applied to finding drugtargets for disorders where metabolism plays a role, including obesity, diabetes, neurodegenerative disorders, and cancer.

GENE THAT INFLUENCES THE ABILITY TO REMEMBER FACES IDENTIFIED

New findings suggest the oxytocin receptor, a gene known to influence mother-infant bonding and pair bonding in monogamous species, also plays a special role in the ability to remember faces. The finding may lead to new strategies for improving social cognition in several psychiatric disorders.

A team of researchers from Yerkes National Primate Research Center at Emory University in Atlanta, the University College London in the United Kingdom and University of Tampere in Finland made the discovery, which was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

According to author Larry Young, this is the first study to demonstrate that variation in the oxytocin receptor gene influences face recognition skills. He and co-author David Skuse point out the implication that oxytocin plays an important role in promoting our ability to recognize one another, yet about one-third of the population possesses only the genetic variant that negatively impacts that ability. They say this finding may help explain why a few people remember almost everyone they have met while others have difficulty recognizing members of their own family.

The Emory researchers previously found the oxytocin receptor is essential for olfactory-based social recognition in rodents, like mice and voles, and wondered whether the same gene could also be involved in human face recognition. They examined the influence of subtle differences in oxytocin receptor gene structure on face memory competence in the parents, non-autistic siblings and autistic child, and discovered a single change in the DNA of the oxytocin receptor had a big impact on face memory skills in the families.

According to Young, this finding implies that oxytocin likely plays an important role more generally in social information processing, which is disrupted in disorders such as autism. His previous research found mice with a mutated oxytocin receptor failed to recognize mice they previously encountered.

DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS FROM HINDU

1. In the context of the controversy related to the creation of Telengana state, discuss the provisions of the Constitution related to the reorganizations of state. **(200 words) 10 marks**

2. What are the major concerns and challenges in the conservation of Tigers in India, in recent years? **(100 words) 5 marks**

3. Discuss the emerging security threats in the South East Asian region. What is the role of major economies like India, China and Japan in these developments. **(200 words) 10 marks**

4. Evaluate the recommendations of the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission (FSLRC). **(200 words) 10 marks**

5. Outline the major issues in the Post-civil war period in Sri Lanka. What are the implications of these developments for India. **(200 words) 10 marks**

6. Bring out an evolutionary sketch of the International Cricket Council (ICC) from its birth to the the recent changes. **(200 words) 10 marks**

7. Union Ministry of Environment and forests (MoEF) has recently ignored the Supreme Court's directives regarding the stay over several projects in Ecologically sensitive zones. Discuss the framework in which the environment projects are cleared by the MoEF. **(200 words) 10 marks**

8. What major steps have been taken by the international organizations like OECD, to combat black money. **(100 words) 5 marks**

9. What is the mandate and provision of the newly made Nirbhaya Fund? **(100 words) 5 marks**

10. Discuss the changing balance of power of the international politics, in the context of the Iran-P5+1 talks. **(200 words) 10 marks**

11. 'Odia' was recently given the status of Classical Language. In this context, analyze the contribution of Odia literature in the evolution of the Indian culture. **(200 words) 10 marks**

12. There was a nuclear leakage in the Japan's fukushima plant. In this context, discuss the viability of the nuclear energy for human society. **(100 words) 5 marks**

13. Discuss the role of India in combating piracy in the international waters, in the context of growing capabilities of Indian navy. **(200 words) 10marks**

14. In the context of Ukraine crisis, discuss the possibility of a renewed cold war. What could be the different aspects of the cold war now. **(200 words) 10 marks**

15. What are the implications of the declining productivity of the Parliament. Discus in the light of record low performance of the last Lok Sabha. **(200 words) 10 marks**

16. Bring out the scope of bank penetration in India, after the introduction of new Private Banks, which have been allowed by the Bimal Jalan Panel. **(100 words) 5 marks**

17. Discuss the linkage of the former colonies, with the former- colonial powers, in the context of recent crisis in Central Afican Republic (CAR). **(200 words) 10 marks**

18. Discuss the problem of water availability and security in Indian cities, in the contemporary age. **(100 words) 5 marks**

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MCQS FOR THE HINDU

1. China established an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over which area:
   a. South China Sea
   b. East China Sea
   c. Indian Ocean
   d. West China Sea

2. To which two states has the dispute related to the Diaoyu Islands related:
   a. South Korea-North Korea
   b. China- Japan
   c. China- Indonesia
   d. Japan- South Korea

3. The Committee to review the 14 non-legislative recommendation made by the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission (FSLRC), includes the following members, except-
   a. C. R. Muralidharan
   b. G. Prabhakara
   c. V. S. Pradamba
   d. Mathew Varghese

4. The Lower does gamma radiation (2Gy) affects the organisms by:
   1. Triggering T cell immune responses and reducing the tumor growth.
   2. Eliminating the viruses that cannot be treated by traditional medicine.

   Which of the above statements are correct:
   a. 1 only
   b. 2 only
   c. Both 1 and 2
   d. Neither 1 and 2

5. The Telangana Bill has been rejected by the Andhra Pradesh Assembly, in this case possible outcome will be:
   1. The Bill will lapse, as it did not get the state support.
   2. The Governor of Andhra Pradesh might recommend the imposition of President's rule in the state, for not agreeing with the Central directives.

   Choose the correct option:
   a. 1 only
   b. 2 only
   c. Both 1 and 2
   d. Neither 1 and 2

6. Recently, an environment clearance was granted to a 300-MW hydroelectric power project, inspite of a Supreme Court's stay on any such projects in the region. Name the project:
   a. Lakhwar project
   b. Kullu Project
   c. Vyas Project
   d. Kishtwar Project

7. Supreme Court has constituted a Committee to investigate the IPL scam, under the Chairmanship of-
   a. Justice Mudgal
   b. L. Nageswara Rao
   c. C. N. Rao
   d. V. N. Vahanvati

8. A report commissioned by the Central Water Commission has recommended scrapping of dams planned across a river in one state. Which is the state:
   a. Andhra Pradesh
   b. Himachal Pradesh
   c. Arunachal Pradesh
   d. Kerela

9. Consider the following statements about the proposed Nirbhaya Fund:
   1. The government proposes to increase the grant to the Nirbhaya Fund by Rs. 1,000 crore;
   2. the mandate of the fund will be annual and lapsable for each financial year.

   Which is the correct statement:
   a. 1 only
   b. 2 only
   c. Both 1 and 2
   d. Neither 1 and 2

10. Recently, Russia finalized a border Pact with which of the following countries:
    a. Ukraine
    b. Latavia
    c. Estonia
    d. Tajikistan

11. Recently, the Geneva II talks were held to discuss which issue:
    a. Global Warming
    b. Syrian Crisis
    c. Economic Crisis in Europe
    d. South Sudan Crisis

12. Consider the following statements-
    1. The Constitution, originally, gave the classical language status to Sanskrit, Telegu, Malyalam, Kannad, Tamil and Odia.
    2. Bengali was given the classical language status in 2013.

    Which of the above statements are correct:
    a. 1 only
    b. 2 only
    c. Both 1 and 2
    d. Neither 1 and 2

13. Consider the following statements:
    1. National Mission on Nano-science and technology was launched in May 2007.

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2. India is ranked third in terms of scientific publications in nano-science and technology.

Which of the above statements are correct:
a. 1 only
b. 2 only
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 and 2

14. To which project does Jade Rabbit refer to-
a. China's first lunar rover
b. a precious gem created in Germany
c. NASA's space project to Neptune
d. Chinese Defense Programme

15. Which Panel has been made to scrutinise applications for new bank licences by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)-
a. Bimal Jalan Panel
b. Nariman Panel.
c. Urjit Singh Panel
d. Kaka Kelkar Panel

■ ANSWERS

1.	b	2.	b
3.	c	4.	a
5.	d	6.	a
7.	a	8.	c
9.	a	10.	c
11.	b	12.	d
13.	c	14.	a
15.	a		

MCQS FROM PIB

(**Note:** *In all the questions below, first consider the statements and answer accordingly.*)

1. i) "Scientifically Yours" is an inspirational film on Women Scientists who helped in shaping the Indian Science.

   (i) Lumbini is the place where Lord Buddha gave his first sermon and thus it is also called the place of origin of Buddhism.

   Which of the above statement/statements is/are NOT true?
   i) only i
   ii) only ii
   iii) both i and ii
   iv) neither i nor ii

2. i) NTPC has been ranked No.1 Independent Power Producer globally in Platts Top 250 Global Energy Company ranking for the year 2013.

   ii) NTPC presently meets about 100 % of the total power requirement of Madhya Pradesh and Haryana.

   Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?
   i) Only i
   ii) Only ii
   iii) Both i and ii
   iv) Neither i nor ii

3. i) TROPEX stands for Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise.

   ii) The exercise involved large scale naval manoeuvres in all three dimensions viz. surface, air and underwater, across the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean

   Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?
   i) Only i
   ii) Only ii
   iii) Both i and ii
   iv) Neither i nor ii

4. i) Recently. the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has given recognition to 'Hokey India' as National Sports Federation (NSF) for the sport of Hockey.

   iii) In order to be eligible for assistance and continuing the recognition of Government of India, 'Hockey India' is required to follow the guidelines of the government issued from time to time and also those prescribed in the National Sports Development Code of India.

   Which of the above statement/statements is/are false?
   i) Only i
   ii) Only ii
   iii) Both i and ii
   iv) Neither i nor ii

5. i) The minimum educational qualification stipulated in the Constitution of India to contest the elections is Matriculation.

ii) Number of candidates having graduates and higher degrees has gone up from 56% in the 1st Lok Sabha to 78% in 15th Lok Sabha.

Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?
i) Only i   ii) Only ii
iii) Both i and ii   iv) Neither i nor ii

6. i) Malkajgiri which has the largest number of electors ,as per the latest figures of electorate data available with the Election Commission of India is located in Maharashtra.

ii) While Lakshadweep with 47,972 electors has the smallest number of electors.

Which of the above statement/statements is/are NOT true?
i) Only i   ii) Only ii
iii) Both i and ii   iv) Neither i nor ii

7. i) The "Most Efficient Navratna 2013" was awarded to HAL.

ii) The applications of IRNSS which include terrestrial, aerial and marine navigation, disaster management, vehicle tracking and fleet management etc.

Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?
i) Only i   ii) Only ii
iii) Both i and ii   iv) Neither i nor ii

8. i) National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) is a representative organization of only Orthodox churches in India.

ii) Commemorative postage stamp was released to mark the centenary of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) recently.

Which of the above statement/statements is/are NOT true?

i) Only i   ii) Only ii
iii) Both i and ii   iv) Neither i nor ii

9. i) Shri Gulzar has been conferred the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for the year 2013 and he is the 45th Dada Saheb Phalke Award Winner.

ii) This award is conferred by the Bollywood industry.

Which of the above statement/statements is/are NOT true?
i) Only i   ii) Only ii
iii) Both i and ii   iv) Neither i nor ii

10. i) RAILSAVER' is a part of the project for "Improving Energy Efficiency in Indian Railway System" being executed by Indian Railways under programmatic framework of UNDP through Global Environmental Facility (GEF) funding of US $ 5.2 million.

ii) This portal will further facilitate in saving energy upto 15% by the year 2020 through improved energy efficiency measures.

Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?
i) Only i   ii) Only ii
iii) Both i and ii   iv) Neither i nor ii

ANSWERS

1.	a	2.	a
3.	c	4.	d
5.	b	6.	a
7.	c	8.	a
9.	b	10.	c

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