



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

From ex-coach, with love

Tokyo is a game changer for Indian hockey. Much hard work, many sacrifices lie behind this moment



HARENDRA SINGH

GOLDEN BRONZE

For decades, Indian hockey has been about bragging of past glory. Tokyo provides a glint of the future

IN THE LAND of the rising sun, Indian hockey has moved from darkness to light with an Olympic bronze that has the glimmer of gold. Medal-less for 41 years in that one sport that they had so overwhelmingly dominated once, India finally drew a line from the past to the present. Since the last Olympics hockey medal in 1980, the country's second-most popular sport, with a strong emotional connection with the masses, has been about wistful memories. For decades, hockey has been about bragging of past glory, and exaggerated tales woven around crumpled black and white pictures of wiry men in oversized cloth jerseys clutching medals or trophies. In the digital era, Indian hockey's glory was a relic. All that changed in Tokyo as a nervous nation that had woken up early with a prayer on its lips was swept up by a wave of euphoria. Like Brazil, when they won the football World Cup in 1994 after a drought of 24 years. Or like West Indies, if it were to re-scale the peak of Test cricket. Or Roger Federer, if he were to conquer Wimbledon again.

For the hockey fraternity, years of so-near-yet-so-far torments could find a release. Failing to qualify for the Beijing Olympics was the nadir, equally harrowing was the demotion it endured in the 1984 and 1988 editions, emerging fifth and sixth in that order. Or the heartbreaks — the 1-0 defeat to Australia in the final pool game in 1992, or the goalless draw against Pakistan that blocked their entry to the knockouts in the subsequent edition. In Sydney, Poland's 69th-minute equaliser in the last pool game snuffed out their medal hopes. The last-minute nervousness was to be a recurring theme. Sydney, London and Rio all reinforced the harsh reality that the best days of Indian hockey could never be recreated. There was fear that they could forever remain frozen in frames of the past.

Tokyo can provide a fresh start to the game that has had its share of false dawns. Multiple junior world titles promised that the sleeping giant was about to wake up but it would soon roll over into another slumber. A robust system, a global hockey league, state-of-the-art infrastructure and world-class support staff were in place but still the senior team lacked spark and success. The constant chopping and changing of coaches denied it continuity and consistency. The Class of 2021 can provide the template for the future. India, the financial capital of world hockey, can now proudly display an Olympic medal and a skilful young team with unflinching temperament. The hockey superpower of the Grass Era now can aspire to be the best on astro-turf as well. Tokyo could be the beginning of a dream, rather than a destination.

IN A SELECT CLUB

India's indigenous aircraft carrier setting sail for sea trials is a historic moment, a big ticket example of atmanirbhar India

WITH INS VIKRANT embarking on its first sea trials, India can rightfully take its place in an elite club of six countries — US, UK, Spain, Russia, France, China — that have the capability and capacity to design and build an indigenous aircraft carrier. This is a historic moment for the Indian Navy, which has long had aircraft carriers but until now, none built at home. The first INS Vikrant, inducted in 1961, and INS Virat which joined the Indian Navy in 1982, were British naval ships, and the INS Vikramaditya is a Russian aircraft carrier. The brand new INS Vikrant is said to be "75 per cent" indigenous, and as such, it is the first big ticket example of atmanirbhar India.

Begun in 2009, Vikrant was to be commissioned by 2014, and has rolled out of the shipyard at a time of concurrence among strategic experts that in order to tackle China's expansionist tendencies on land at the Line of Actual Control, India needs to shed its sea blindness, and convey to its superpower neighbour that it not only means business on protecting its interests in the Indian Ocean, but is also willing to play further afield to recalibrate maritime equations. According to the Navy, the newly built warship will offer an "incomparable military instrument" for power projection over long distances. It will operate the Russian MiG-29K fighters and the Kamov 31 helicopters, as well as the soon to be acquired American MH-60R Seahawk helicopters.

Now that India has built an aircraft carrier, should the Navy make a second one, the planned Indigenous Aircraft Carrier 2, for which it has been seeking a go-ahead since 2015? In signing up to the Quad security grouping of four countries, each with its own China problem, India has in a sense already signalled a shifting of focus from land to sea. Strengthening the Navy should be the logical next step. The budget allocated to the Navy does not seem to suggest that this is the thinking in the top echelons of the military. Amidst all the talk of assertion at sea where Beijing might feel more threatened, another sobering reality check is that the People's Liberation Army Navy, which did not have an aircraft carrier until 2012, is rumoured to have almost finished building a second indigenous carrier. By comparison, India, which deployed the old INS Vikrant to good effect in the 1971 war against Pakistan, is an old hand at aircraft carriers. But going by how many years it took for the Vikrant to be completed, atmanirbharta takes long. A shorter delivery time may serve the purpose better.

DAUGHTER OF DOGRI

Padma Sachdev's love for her mother tongue, and for the folk song, shone through her poetry and prose

EH RAJE DIYAN mandiyaa tundiyaan ne? (Are these royal palaces yours?)", a woman once asked this question of Padma Sachdev. It was a hot day and Sachdev, discovering the woman sitting on her patio, gave her water and pickle with rotis. After the meal, the woman looked up at the palace-like houses across the road and asked her the question that Sachdev took and turned into a piece of poetry that remains one of the most scorching criticisms of the feudal system that has denied basic rights to a majority of the people. Sachdev would write, "those who blinded me... the weapons used against us, do they belong to you?"

Sachdev, known as the mother of contemporary Dogri literature, died in Mumbai on August 4 at the age of 81. Her first collection of poetry — *Meri Kavita Mere Geet*, in 1969 — won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1971. Introducing the book, on its first page, was a much-impressed veteran poet Ramdhari Singh Dinkar. He wrote, "After reading Padma's poem, I thought I should throw my pen away — for what Padma writes is true poetry." Sachdev began writing in the village of Purmandal, where she moved with her family after her father, a Sanskrit professor, died in the turmoil of Partition. As a young girl she would sing folk songs, and secretly add new couplets to them as an experiment. She credited the rhythmic quality of her poems to her understanding of Sanskrit chants.

Moving to Mumbai, she spent time with Dharamvir Bharati, Amritlal Nagar, Harivanshrai Bachchan, Amrita Pritam, Ismat Chughtai, Ali Sardar Jafri, and Gulzar among others. Poetry was shared, thoughts polished and horizons expanded. The result was prose and poetry that was women-centric. She was awarded the Padma Shri in 2001. She realised that it was necessary to write in Dogri, her mother tongue and a language that needed her, even more than Hindi. In her interviews, she would often say, "People call me the mother of contemporary Dogri literature. I'd only like to stay her daughter."

IF I DIE tomorrow, I will die a happy man at peace with myself. I have seen Indian hockey get an Olympic medal, what more can I want? I remember the pain of Sydney 2000 when we lost to unfancied Poland in the dying seconds and lost out on the medal.

I was the assistant coach and remember the tears in the changing room. Dhanraj Pillay, Jude Menezes, the goalkeeper who couldn't forget the thud sound of the ball crashing into the board behind him for years to come, Dilip Tirkey, Ramandeep Singh, Baljit Saini, Mukesh Kumar — everyone was broken.

We had the chance to change the face of Indian hockey but it was not to be. It was our mistake that we couldn't control those last 90 seconds. It's a great game where everything can change in seconds. Like life. And 21 years later, this great triumph in Tokyo, has done its bit to soften that Sydney blow.

I teared up at the final whistle in Tokyo and once again, they are rolling down my cheeks as I write this. But these are tears of joy: *Kitne saal se andar dabaa ke rakha tha inko, ab main inhe behne doonga* (it has been suppressed for so many years, now will let them flow). I am sure it's not just me but the sentiment of many Indians. Cricket might be in our minds but hockey is in our *dil*. That first love will never be forgotten.

We are so grateful that this generation of players didn't repeat that old mistake in the last few seconds. Goalkeeper Sreejesh became a wall. This is an apt time to salute the sacrifices of these players — Olympic medals don't come easily.

I remember Sreejesh sobbing, his head buried in me during my time as the junior team's coach. It was his initial days at the camp. He had come on the first day without the goalkeeper's pads. As time wore on, people started to question his presence and would even say to his face that he was there in the team only because of me. "Harendra ka ladka", they called him. I remember telling

him not to worry, the same people will one day touch your feet.

Another Sreejesh memory pops up. His little daughter was sick at home along with an elder. He told me that there was a problem in the family and he needed to go home. We were able to play a big tournament. I told him he could go, of course, but this is the moment he had been sweating for, for years. This is his chance to show what he is made of. He played, starred, and hasn't looked back since.

It gave me great happiness when he called me from Tokyo, minutes after winning, even before he spoke to his wife and parents. This is just to give you a glimpse about the beautiful coach-player relationship. We go through good and bad times together. The players don't celebrate festivals at home; we are usually at some camp or tournament, eating our daal-roti together. Simple life, great times, small and big sacrifices. And lots of hard work.

Take Harmanpreet Singh, our star attacker. There was a time when he was young and could not always keep the ball down while striking hard and it would be called foul by the referee. He worked his skin off to get close to perfection. A smile escapes when I see him now — the ball flies inch-perfect from his penalty corner drag flicks.

We should salute coach Graham Reid. How well he has trained and selected the right team; he didn't go just for names but picked the squad of men he knew can handle the humid and hot Tokyo. Playing eight games in 13 days is no joke. Reid had it all planned.

Robin Arzell is another name we should all remember. He is the strength and conditioning coach who has made all our boys so fit. Everyone else involved too needs our gratitude. From the buffer analyst, support staff, and huge credit to Hockey India for charting the roadmap, and to SAI for supporting them. Each and every player sparkled. Defender

Amit Rohidas, who has been a second goalkeeper for us, rushing fearlessly towards the striker at penalty corners. Simranjeet Singh, the most intelligent player of the team, and Harmanpreet Singh, our superstar striker. We can keep going through the list.

Everyone had their own struggle. Krishan Pathak, the talented boy who is our stand-by goalkeeper in Tokyo, had lost his mother when he was just 12. Then, in 2016, his father, Teg Bahadur, a crane operator, died and his final rites were in Nepal. I told him the final rites will be over by the time you reach, instead, he should play as a tribute to his father. I played him as the first goalkeeper in that match and told him that his father was watching him. I told Krishna, make your father proud. He did it and hasn't looked back. Sacrifices...

We sportspersons don't ask of others what we can't do ourselves. Not just us, but even our families. Please allow me to tell a personal story. When I was coaching the Youth World Cup team to a win, my son lost vision in an eye. My wife kept it from me until I reached home. "How can I disturb you, you were on duty for the country," she said. Not many will understand, but this is our life, win or lose. Every member of this team has a story like this.

Mark my words, this team will win the World Cup to be held in India in 2023 in front of adoring crowds.

We faltered at the finish on that fateful day in Sydney and missed the semi-final spot. It's a process. There is no failure for a sportsperson. We learn, kick on. It has taken 21 years in this particular instance, but the next generation has done it. For themselves and well-wishers. For the country. For the past. For the future. For Indian hockey, our nation's first love.

The writer has been the head coach of India's men's, women's and junior team. He is currently in charge of the US national side

REWIRING INDIA INC

Consumers could choose, companies faced competition, ambition trumped fear



TARUN DAS

AN ECONOMIC TSUNAMI hit India in June 1991 with the abolition of import and industrial licensing, followed by the doing away of several other laws, controls and regulations. There were two sets of responses from industry. One group felt this was unsustainable: Business would continue as usual, the opposition would force a reversal and life would go on in a protected economy. Those who felt the reforms were wrong, lost the opportunity to change — many well-known business houses went "under". The second set of responses was to strongly welcome the removal of handcuffs on industry, rapidly go into restructuring mode and prepare for a new world. These are the business houses that survived and prospered despite facing multiple new challenges.

The first challenge was the entry of MNCs through the joint venture (JV) route. India attracted them to quickly conclude JVs without doing complete due diligence on the Indian partners. The "cowboy approach" was one description. On the Indian side, companies eager to access new technologies and products, also did not do their homework. The cultural fit had not been worked out and many marriages failed.

Why the haste? Simply because the reforms gave centrality to the consumer who till 1991 did not have a choice. June 1991 changed that. The Indian consumer was given choices and companies, both foreign and Indian, wanted to be their first choice. The surge of new demand from the marketplace transformed the scenario, reflected in GDP growth rapidly moving up to 7 per cent per annum.

Some Indian companies sought more time to adjust, seeking a 'level playing field'. But, many corporates restructured themselves and transformed into competitive forces. The new reality of reduced customs duties and industrial licensing disappearing, removed the protection umbrella and Indian companies, by and large, who had been planning for this day, were ready to face this challenge.

With this came competition. For the first time, Indian companies faced real competition from other Indian as well as foreign companies. Some Indian companies sought more time to adjust, seeking a "level playing field". But, many corporates restructured themselves and transformed into competitive forces. The new reality of reduced customs duties and industrial licensing disappearing, removed the protection umbrella and Indian companies, by and large, who had been planning for this day, were ready to face this challenge.

There was another significant change in June 1991. Till then, the government and industry were at a distance from each other. The micromanagement of industry reflected this mistrust. June 1991 changed all of that. Led by A N Verma, principal secretary to the Prime Minister, the government's dialogue with industry deepened. Consultations were frequent. Feedback on what was happening on the ground was taken regularly. A government-industry partnership became a reality.

Possibly, the most significant change brought about by the reforms pertained to the level of "aspirations" of the industry. There was excitement and ambition to be world-class. Fear became a matter of the past. And, in this, the IT industry led by TCS, Infosys and Wipro played a major role. They stood eyeball-to-eyeball with global competitors and succeeded. They showed that Indian engineers and managers were the best in the world. They exuded confidence which spread to others.

Another major change that flowed from June 1991 was about entrepreneurship —

not just the big boys of the industry, but also, the small and medium sectors that became part of the new energy in industry. Component manufacturing and exports were new initiatives from ancillaries and suppliers of major manufacturers. This was an endeavour that expanded.

Infrastructure had always been the preserve of the public sector. This changed and the private sector was invited to participate, to get into public-private partnerships and end the government's monopoly. No longer would infrastructure be owned, controlled and managed by the government alone.

Banking had been nationalised in 1969, but the reforms of 1991 gave birth to a new private sector bank — HDFC Bank — which, after due diligence by the government and the Reserve Bank of India, opened its doors in 1994. This was a huge step forward in the reform process.

Finally, corporate governance. An industry-led initiative brought out the first-ever task force guidelines and report on corporate governance. This was followed by many other actions and policies.

The private sector, which had been seen very differently up to 1990, was placed at the centre of the reform process. And this has continued and grown since then. There is still a long way to go, but the die that was cast in 1991 has led to a new tsunami of change. Over the last 30 years, the Indian industry has expanded its global reach. Its products and services are internationally competitive, matching the best. The period from 1991-2021 was transformational.

The writer is former Director General, CII

AUGUST 6, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

NO WAGE FREEZE

UNION LABOUR MINISTER N D Tiwari has clarified that the government does not intend to take any measure under the recently promulgated Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance to freeze wages or impound dearness allowance installment payable to government employees. Tiwari said this in his closing speech at the two-day conference of the state labour ministers, seeking to correct the wrong impression created by the Kerala Labour Minister A Mohammed. The Kerala Minister in his speech had opposed the ordinance along with the West Bengal minister. Both had said that the move was a precursor

to freeze wages. The labour minister appealed to the state ministers to remove the misgivings of the trade unions and workers about the ordinance. He said propaganda by vested interests had resulted in these misgivings.

ANOTHER CONGRESS

THE CONGRESS (U) which is yet to recover from the ignominy of derecognition conferred upon it by the Election Commission suffered another setback when Jagjivan Ram and his followers quit the party to form another Congress. While the breakaway group dethroned Devraj Urs and elected Jagjivan Ram as their president, the Congress (U) sus-

pending Ram from the primary membership of the party.

LAWLESSNESS IN TIHAR

HARDENED CRIMINALS WHO, in connivance with civilian officers, rule Delhi's Tihar jail, have struck to get rid of some officials who tried to remove lawlessness inside the jail. The first officer to incur their wrath appears to be V P Garg, assistant superintendent, who had written to the authorities about their illegal activities in connivance with some officers. Instead of taking action on the complaint, the authorities are planning to suspend Garg according to sources in the Delhi administration.



11 THE IDEAS PAGE

A for Aggressive, B for Bully

ABVP routinely takes offence to seminars, film screenings, syllabi. Its strategy of defame-delegitimise-disrupt is effective, and dangerous to country's academic culture



APOORVANAND AND GAUHAR RAZA

THE WITHDRAWAL OF Dr Hari Singh Gour University in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, from an international seminar on "Cultural and Linguistic Hurdles in the Achievement of Scientific Temper" due to bullying by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and the local police must not be treated lightly.

The university had approved the topic, the collaboration and the speakers, but started wavering after the ABVP threatened it with disruption and legal action since there were names in the list of speakers it did not like. According to the student wing of the RSS, these speakers were "anti nationals" it could not tolerate.

The university succumbed finally after the local police shot off a letter to it at the behest of the ABVP stating that it had "references to the past history, anti-national mentality and caste-related statements of the speakers attending the webinar". It warned the university that it might face action under Section 505 of the Indian Penal Code if something went wrong as the webinar was being "perceived as targeting a particular caste or community". The pressure was apparently too much for the university and it buckled at the last moment. A victory for the ABVP.

It is yet another one and only the latest in the list of disruptions of academic programmes by the ABVP, the fraternal organisation of the BJP. Only two months ago, Gilbert Sebastian, an assistant professor of the Central University of Kerala, was suspended by the university because the ABVP reportedly took offence to his class on fascism. From Kerala to Haryana, there are numerous stories of disrupted and aborted seminars, film screenings and classrooms and censoring of syllabi, either directly by the ABVP or at their behest by the authorities.

The ABVP routinely takes offence to the content of the programme or the people involved in it. Either the subject matter of the academic programme is "anti Hindu", "anti Indian" or "anti national" or the speakers or participants are. In the case of the Sagar University incident, the speakers, Gauhar Raza and Apoorvanand, were declared to be anti-national. How can they be hosted by a government-funded university?

One needs to point out, though, that the organisers at the Anthropology Department of Sagar University refused to be browbeaten. They refused to disinvite us and resolved to continue with the preparation for the seminar. At this stage, the desperate ABVP went to a willing police for help. The university authorities have so many more things to look after. One seminar cannot be allowed to jeopardise the material interests of the authorities and the university, especially when the threat comes from the superintendent of police. So, they asked the department to back off.

Defame, delegitimise and disrupt. This is how the ABVP and its fraternal organisations work in destroying the academic culture in India. A very effective method. Because once you make some names controversial, people would like to keep away from them. We have



CR Sasikumar

numerous stories of invitations rescinded, seminars and talks cancelled, as the names involved had been made controversial.

People are not the only targets. Institutions like the JNU have been systematically defamed. So much so that any affiliation with JNU has become a disqualification for admission, appointment and invitation in several places. Such defamation can have other consequences as well. After having been defamed as "anti-national", people like Umar Khalid became vulnerable to physical attacks. There are genuine nationalist fanatics in this country who can threaten your life since they have been told that you are an "anti-national". So, when the ABVP and the organisations of its cohort do it, it goes beyond a particular event, a particular person. It sends a signal to all the institutions and its affiliates as well. It turns into a national malady. Looking for books and persons to defame becomes a national sport.

Similarly, issues, concerns or topics are turned illegitimate for teaching or research. We have seen books, chapters removed, dropped from the reading list, because either their authors were "illegitimate" or the subject matter they dealt with was "not right".

If one scans the list of the topics approved for grants or fellowships by the ICSSR and ICHR, and those discarded, one will get a sense of the direction in which things are being pushed. Without an attack on scientific temper, how can the IITs and IIM be forced to do pseudo science?

Disruption comes after or with defamation and delegitimation. Seminars, film screenings, theatre performances are vandalised and disrupted. The ABVP seldom engages in arguments. The easy way out is to invoke pseudo-nationalism, religious insecurity or questions of caste, and pretend that feelings are hurt. They make a noise, physically attack and disrupt. Very economical!

A national spokesperson of the organisation, when asked that if they find a book problematic why cannot they respond by an essay if not a book, replied: "It takes time". It does not take time to put a matchstick to a book, it takes only five shouting people to go on a rampage in a classroom or seminar. They know very well that academe-

Readers might feel that we are writing this article as we were targeted. We do not deny that. One must not accept abuse and humiliation. It should not become a norm. We should not think that since we were not physically harmed nor arrested, we should ignore this. That would be normalising a bully culture in universities. We need to tell the Sagar police that it not only failed in its constitutional duty, it violated it by working at the behest of a bully who was clearly in the wrong. Should we only pity the Sagar University administration and not tell them that safeguarding the freedom of a department was its duty and that it miserably failed? It went back on its word. That is not leadership.

micians are not trained in shouting, abusing, accusing or fist fighting.

Even a small disruption and abusive slogan-shouting is very effective. Because no department or centre wants its chairs, glass panes broken. What they do after one such incident is to disallow future events. This is how most colleges in Delhi University stopped having drama events or seminars after the ABVP attacked an event in Ramjas College or selected only convenient and "right" themes and people.

All you have to do is to give a wink and the message reaches where it should. Three years back, an editor and an MP reached the conference hall of the University of Delhi to release the journal published by the Students' Union (DUSU), a first of its kind, only to find the hall locked. We were told that the ABVP did not want it to happen and the authorities had obliged.

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The Sagar University episode makes it clear that doublespeak has become the habit of the Indian government. While its policy document speaks for institutional autonomy, the ruling party's student body and other affiliates and its law and order apparatus see to it that the institutions toe their ideological and organisational line and punish them if they deviate. It is for us to record all such violations and keep speaking as long as we still have our tongues intact.

Apoorvanand teaches at Delhi University and Raza is an Urdu poet

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The surging demand for dollars may compel the government to turn to more foreign loans to support the currency, finance the current account and maintain forex reserves at present levels."

—DAWN

End of Kashmir's exceptionalism

Abrogation of Article 370 ended this syndrome, which was exploited by forces within and without. A new generation of leaders must be helped to take over



RAM MADHAV

SEVERAL YEARS ago, when we were initiating dialogue with the PDP to explore the possibility of forming a coalition government in Jammu and Kashmir, I had the occasion to talk with a senior leader of that party. In response to my statement that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was keen on the progress and development of the state, the leader told me that every government in Delhi had talked about it and there was nothing new. Another leader argued that on all human development indices (HDI), J&K was doing better than other Indian states.

As a matter of fact, the state ranked 11th among Indian states in the HDI rankings in 2019, ahead of bigger states like Bihar, UP, MP and West Bengal. The reason was the favourable treatment it had received from the Centre all along. For a population of just 13 million, its budget outlay for 2021-22 is around Rs 1,10,000 crore, whereas the same for UP, which has 20 times the population is Rs 5,50,000 crore. While UP generates an internal revenue of almost 80 per cent of its outlay, J&K generates less than 20 per cent. UP fills its revenue gap through borrowings, while J&K fills it through central grants.

Indicating that development was never the issue, a Kashmiri leader stated at the recently-held Young Thinkers Meet that an average middle-class Kashmiri, unlike those elsewhere in India, owns a house with at least four bedrooms and a private garden with a dozen walnut and a couple of apple trees.

No wonder the mainstream Valley leadership was dismissive about development. So what drove politics in the state? What the leader I am referring to said subsequently provided the answer. There was an insistence on recognising that J&K's merger with India in 1947, although it had other options as a Muslim-majority state, was a concession by its people and, hence, India should perpetually be grateful to them.

This had bred a sense of "Kashmiri exceptionalism" in the mainstream political establishment of the state for decades. Article 370 was seen as India's grateful gesture, not for material development, but as a stamp of acknowledgement of that exceptionalism. Successive governments in Delhi chose to ignore this sullen sentiment and continued to pamper the leadership.

This sense of exceptionalism and the syndrome of "Ladlapan" (of being pampered) dominated the state's politics for seven decades. They were exploited by forces within and without to promote an entire infrastructure of separatism and terrorism in the Valley.

The nullification of Article 370 two years ago was intended to end this exceptionalism. While continuing to promote development for the benefit of ordinary people, the Union

government chose to give the utmost importance to establishing peace and democracy at the grassroots. On the development front, despite Covid, indicators like employment, investments and infrastructure development are showing promising prospects. The unemployment rate has fallen from 19 per cent last year to 10 per cent this year. Over 20,000 people, including women, have been provided loans by J&K Bank of up to Rs 10 lakh. The government plans to take it to 50,000 beneficiaries. The UT now has seven medical colleges and two cancer institutes. Two start-up incubation centres have come up at NIT, Srinagar and IIT, Jammu. On the Covid front, the administration has provided jobs to almost 60 per cent of the eligible population.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha who has completed one year in office has brought dynamism and order in the functioning of the UT. His accessibility, extensive travel by road and focus on grassroots development and democracy have not only energised the administration, but also endeared him to the masses. He has ensured that the process to strengthen grassroots democratic institutions like village, block and district panchayats, which began a couple of years ago, is taken forward by delegating "fund, function and functionality" to those units.

There was a significant drop in the number of terror attacks immediately after the abrogation of Article 370. Although the number of attacks increased marginally last year, it is still lower than pre-August 2019 levels. The number of terrorists arrested has increased significantly, together with the busting of terrorist hideouts, unearthing of tunnels across the borders and diffusing of IEDs. The J&K police has come of age, calling for the reduction of dependence on other security forces. People seem to realise that the special constitutional status is not going to come back, and they do not seem too bothered about it. None of the leaders talked about the revocation of Article 370 at the meeting with the PM last month.

All this points to a significant improvement in the situation. Going forward, a couple of important challenges remain. There was a time in the Valley when people used to taunt each other saying "Nabaz as manz chuy Pakistan" — meaning, "Pakistan runs in your pulse". This is no longer the case with the majority of the population. But there is palpable resentment in a section of the populace which feels it was deceived.

Attenuating this resentment before it is exploited by the "exceptionalists" is important. At the moment, this resentment is finding expression through the rejection of the UT status and the demand for restoration of full statehood. A new generation of leaders not steeped in the glib mindset of exceptionalism is championing these demands. Addressing them through early elections to the legislature and restoration of statehood at the appropriate time will strengthen this leadership. Placing J&K in the hands of this new leadership and reducing dependence on the central government and security forces is the logical aspiration after the annulment of Article 370.

The writer is member, board of governors, India Foundation

State of food insecurity

Problem has been sharpened by pandemic. Governments need to act urgently



VAISHALI BANSAL

INDIA WAS home to the largest number of undernourished people in the world even before the Covid-19 pandemic. The latest edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report, released jointly by five UN organisations in July, reveals that the pandemic and failure on the part of state to combat its effects, has led to a significant increase in the prevalence of hunger and food insecurity in the country.

According to the data presented in the report, the prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity in India rose by about 6.8 percentage points in 2018-20. In absolute terms, the number of persons facing moderate to severe food insecurity has increased by about 9.7 crore since the outbreak of Covid. The irony is that this happened when the government had an unprecedented 100 million tonnes of food grains in its godowns — larger than the food stocks of any country. The country with the largest stock of grain in the world — 120 million tonnes as of July 1, 2021 — accounts for a quarter of the world's food-insecure population. Estimates show that, in 2020, over 237 crore people were grappling with food insecurity globally, an increase of about 32 crore from 2019. South Asia alone accounts for 36 per cent of global food insecurity.

Estimates on food insecurity presented in the SOFI report are based on two globally-accepted indicators of food insecurity: The Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU), which estimates the proportion of people suf-

fering from chronic deficiency of calories, and a more recently developed experience-based indicator called the Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI).

The PoU estimates are based on estimates of per-capita supply of food and distributional parameters estimated using the national consumption surveys. However, since data from consumption surveys are not available every year, these are updated only once in a few years. In the interim, PoU merely captures changes in the average per-capita food supply and is not sensitive enough to adequately capture recent disruptions such as those caused by the pandemic. Since the overall food supply has been somewhat resilient despite the pandemic and consumption surveys have not been conducted by most countries including India, the increase in prevalence of hunger captured by PoU — from 14 per cent in 2019 to 15.3 per cent in 2020 for India — is likely to be an underestimate.

On the other hand, PMSFI estimates are based on data collected through surveys that attempt to capture people's experiences of food insecurity (such as eating less, modifying diet to eat cheaper food, skipping meals, and eating less than adequate food because of lack of money or other resources). FAO commissions Gallup to collect data on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), based on which PMSFI is estimated. Unlike the national consumption surveys, the Gallup World Poll, an annual worldwide survey, was conducted in 2020-21 as well.

The PMSFI estimates presented in the report are particularly important because, since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Indian government has not undertaken any official assessment of food insecurity in the country. In this situation, based on a nationally-representative survey, the PMSFI estimates are the only national-level valid and reliable estimates available on the impact of the pandemic on food insecurity in India. The latest round of surveys, on which PMSFI estimates are based, were conducted from the beginning of the year 2020 up to early 2021, thus allowing for a thorough assessment of the impact of pandemic on people's food security.

It may also be mentioned that not only has the government not conducted its own consumption or food security surveys, it does not approve the publication of results based on the Gallup World Poll. As a result, estimates for India are not published in the SOFI reports. However, these can still be obtained indirectly because the data are presented for South Asia and for "South Asia (excluding India)". Estimates for India can be obtained by comparing the two sets of data.

PMSFI estimates thus derived show that there were about 43 crore of moderate to severe food-insecure people in India in 2019. As a result of the pandemic-related disruptions, this increased to 52 crore in one year. In terms of prevalence rates, moderate to severe food insecurity increased from about 31.6 per cent in 2019 to 38.4 per cent in 2021.

Despite being self-sufficient in the production of major food commodities, problems of hunger and food insecurity are grave in India because of widespread economic distress, high unemployment and high levels of inequality. A large proportion of the poor is dependent on the informal economy in which incomes are too low and uncertain. Unemployment rates have risen sharply over the last few years. High (and fluctuating) food prices, shrinking public investment and the economic slowdown have compounded the distress among working classes and the peasantry. With low and uncertain incomes, families dependent on the informal economy do not have assured access to adequate and nutritious food. These longstanding problems were aggravated last year because of lack of preparation to deal with the pandemic.

The sharp increase in food insecurity points to an urgent need for the government to establish systems for regular monitoring of the food security situation in the country and to universalise access to the public distribution system, at least during the pandemic. Everyone, irrespective of whether they have a ration card or not, should be allowed to take subsidised grain from ration shops. With almost 120 million tonnes of grain currently lying with the government, it requires almost no additional resources.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OMINOUS SPIKE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A Covid warning' (IE, Aug. 5). Alarming rise of the reproductive number (R-value) suggests that the second wave is not over yet and the third surge might strike sooner than later. A new challenge is being posed by the increase in the number of cases of vaccine breakthrough infection and reinfection. The states witnessing a surge need to conduct contact tracing on a war footing and create containment zones depending on the spread of infections. Fast-track emergency approvals by the Centre for all foreign-produced shots are needed to achieve the desired results.

SS Paul, Nadia

This refers to the editorial, 'A Covid warning' (IE, August 5). Since it is not prudent for an economy like India to extend lockdown and restrictions indefinitely, it is imperative to urgently bolster the inoculation measures. Options like ensuring subsidising manufacturing costs, placing bulk orders from producers, and inking bilateral vaccine supply deals should all be explored.

Anjali Bhavana, Thiruvananthapuram

WRONG PRIORITIES

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Wrong way to clean up', (IE, August 5). The government's subsidies for EV manufacturers is a case of misplaced priorities. Other objectives in India's climate journey are of more relevance to facilitate India's re-

duced dependency on fossil fuels, like investing in public transport.

Udit Sarkar, Kolkata

IDENTITY POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The saviour complex' (IE, August 5). The author has rightly called out the government for not listening to the Muslim women protesting at Shaheen Bagh. Gender identity has become a tool for political parties to gain votes. Such politics does help provide empowerment to vulnerable sections. But it also divides citizens. Secular issues that concern women — education, health, safety, security, employment, freedom of choice — seem to have taken a backseat

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