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Swadeshi PATRIKA

AUGUST 2021

Need for a comprehensive E-commerce Policy

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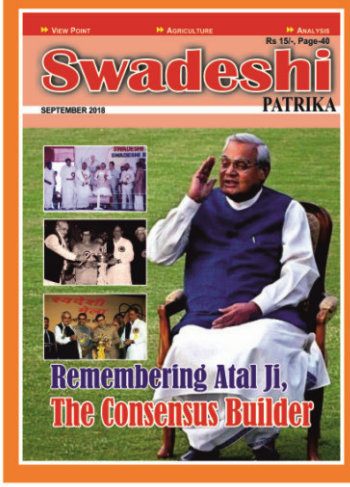
HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY



VOICE OF

SELF RELIANT INDIA

SWADESHI
Patrika

स्वदेशी
पत्रिका

पढ़ें और पढ़ायें

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Decongesting Urban Centres

Come monsoon season and all the Indian metros become mega swimming pools throwing the daily life out of gear and making everyone´s life miserable. Major part of the year these metros have air so much polluted that it is almost poisonous creating deadly diseases among kids and elderly.

This disastrous and complicated situation is result of decades of unplanned urbanization, huge migration of rural population to urban centres in search of better life. As per Economic Survey 2017, during 2001 - 2011 on an average annually 5 - 6 million villagers migrated to cities. None of Indian cities are planned to take in this level of migration while ensuring quality life. Urban infrastructure can neither accommodate this population nor can be expanded.

If this migration is not stopped and urban centres are not decongested, then not only the cities will become unliveable but also the migrating farm labour from villages will create huge supply gap for farm sector impacting agriculture sector drastically. Covid-19 pandemic also has shown us that densely populated places are extremely vulnerable.

Policy makers, Politicians, Bureaucracy, Elected representatives and Industrialists all will need to take the situation very seriously and work towards creating fundamental amenities within rural settings including sufficient employment opportunities so that rural population doesn't need to migrate to cities. This is the only way to improve lives in both rural and urban India.

An example of success story: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sridhar_Vembu.

— **Naresh Sharma,** *is an IT Advisor to Banking and Insurance industry in Sweden and a Swadeshi Warrior.*

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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Quote-Unquote

It is our duty to ensure that our work helps closely knit, bind our India which is filled with diversity.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister, India

RSS will organize nationwide "workers' training" to face the possible third wave of corona and these trained workers will reach about 2.5 lakh places.

Sunil Ambekar
Akhil Bharatiya Prachar Pramukh, RSS

Pakistan has no locus standi on Indian territories and it should vacate all areas (POK) under its illegal occupation.

Arindam Bagchi
Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson, Bharat

India is hugely dependent on the import of pesticides, despite its huge potential to manufacture it. Due to faulty rules favouring imports, import of pesticides are encouraged against the interests of domestic manufacturing. Unfortunately, present draft doesn't include sufficient provisions to safeguard domestic manufacturing.

Dr. Ashwani Mahajan
National Co-convenor, SJM

West Bengal: A Journey from a developed to BIMARU state

Some of the most backward states of India (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh) are traditionally called 'Bimaru' states by generally adding the first alphabet of their name. Time changed, efforts were made for economic development in these states and their growth rate as well as their human development indicators started improving. Despite these efforts, these states are still far behind in comparison to the developed states.

For the last two years 'NITI Aayog' has been publishing the report on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for various states and union territories of the country. According to the NITI Aayog's report 2020-21, on SDGs, Kerala continues to be on the top among states, with 75 points and Bihar is at the bottom with 52 points. Although many states have moved from aspirant (ie less than 50 points) to performer category, yet seven states are still below 60 marks, though, no state is less than 50 points today. That is, all states have reached the category of either performer (with 50 or more points) or 'front runners' (those with a score greater than 65).

The situation of every state is different, thus we need to analyze the performance of the states individually. However, if the performance of two states Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal is analyzed then very interesting facts emerge. In 2019-20, the per capita income of West Bengal was 115748 annually, whereas the annual per capita income of Uttar Pradesh was only Rs 65,704. If we look at the Sustainable Development Goals data, Uttar Pradesh was only slightly behind West Bengal's 62 with 60 points and it seems that if Uttar Pradesh continues to improve its performance in the same way, it may soon overtake West Bengal.

In 2018, West Bengal was ranked 17th in the country with 56 points in the Sustainable Development Goals, while Uttar Pradesh was at the bottom with 42 points. By 2020, West Bengal rose only 6 points to 62, while Uttar Pradesh jumped 18 points to 22nd. That is, while West Bengal has increased by only 6 points in two years, Uttar Pradesh's jump of 18 points has pushed it ahead of many other states.

The issue here is not just for the last two years. West Bengal has been lagging behind in terms of development in the last almost 20-30 years. If the journey from the 8th to the 11th five-year plan is seen, then it is found that the rate of GDP growth of West Bengal was lower than the national average, except in the 9th five-year plan. The main reason for the low rate of GDP growth of West Bengal is that in the first 12 years of the last two decades, while the rate of industrial growth of the country was very high, the rate of industrial growth in West Bengal remained low or even negative and the contribution of industrial sector in the GDP continued to decline. West Bengal, which was an industrialized state, contribution of manufacturing in GDO declined from 11.1 per cent in 2004-05 to 9.21 per cent in 2011-12 as per the Central Statistical Organization's 2004-05 series of estimates. Due to some conceptual changes in the 2011-12 series, this share was reported to be 13.4 per cent in the new series, but that too declined to 10.6 per cent by 2019-20. That is, there has been continuous erosion of the industrial sector, especially manufacturing in West Bengal.

With the decrease in manufacturing, employment opportunities also come down. In order to somehow survive, people engage in petty occupations or become casual workers. Its effect was that whereas 24.1 percent of the workers in the country were in the casual employment, in West Bengal 29.8 percent of the workers were in the casual employment. That is, it can be said that there has been casualisation of labor in West Bengal. On the other hand, Uttar Pradesh, which was a very backward state in the past, has improved its position and the percentage of casual laborers in work force in 2019-20 was only 19.6 percent, less than the even the national average.

The economy of West Bengal shows no signs of improvement in the last almost 20 years. This is the reason that while other states have improved significantly on the Sustainable Development Goals, West Bengal's performance has been utterly unsatisfactory. If the last year is to be reckoned, West Bengal's performance in poverty alleviation was unfavourable because the workers under MGNREGA got less employment than demand. From the point of view of the health indicators, though the mortality rate of children under 5 years of age has decreased, maternal mortality at the time of delivery, increased; though the percentage of institutional deliveries increased. There is a slight improvement in the field of education, but there is no significant improvement in the situation in gender equality, rather the difference in wages between women and men widened. There is very little improvement in terms of level of work and economic development. From the point of view of environment, on one hand the use of chemical fertilizers has decreased, the menace of hazardous waste has increased on the other hand, and on other parameters also, the environment has not improved.

With Uttar Pradesh faring better than West Bengal, it appears that per capita income alone cannot be the only criterion for sustainable development. The Government of West Bengal will have to see that the various parameters of sustainable development are seriously considered. Special efforts will be needed to revive the industrial sector which has been falling behind for the last two decades, by making possible better investment opportunities to make possible better and more employment, with ultimate aim to make lives better.

Need for a comprehensive E-Commerce Policy

To
Sh. Anumpam Mishra
Join Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs,
Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution
Government of India

On the outset, Swadeshi Jagran Manch takes this opportunity to appreciate and welcome the proposed Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, which have been issued under section 94 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. This is an important milestone in consumer protection from new E-Commerce giants, which though are running full fledged E-Commerce, call themselves as merely technology platforms. As per your call for observations/comments on these proposed rules, SJM wishes to submit as under:

1. The Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 have been issued under section 94 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The definition of 'consumer' as defined in section 2(7) of the Act, does not include a person who obtains such goods for resale or for any commercial purposes as well a person who avails of such services for any commercial purposes.

It is apparent that since provisions of the Act do not apply to traders and service providers, as referred above, the rules framed under the Act would also not be applicable to them, and therefore cannot be expected to provide any protection under these rules, even if they are exploited due to dominant position of the E-Commerce giants. There is a general impression that the E-Commerce Rules are applicable to all the parties involved in E-Commerce which is not true. It is therefore, suggested that this aspect must be clarified by way of clarification by the Ministry and DPIIT must make suitable Rules for protection of traders and service providers who avail services through E-Commerce for commercial purposes.

We wish to underline that there are many traders and service providers, which are not getting any protection under the law, due to inadequate or non-existent E-Commerce laws. Small traders (on Amazon, Flipkart-Walmart), drivers on Uber, Ola etc. and small restaurants involved in Zamato etc., hairdressers, carpenters, electricians etc. on Urban Clap etc. and many other workers are subject to severe hardships by these E-Commerce giants, having no protection, at all, against exploitation. Obviously, consumer protection laws cannot provide any protection to these vulnerable sections of the society.

2. Proposed amendment by inserting new Rule 4: Registration of E-Commerce entities-

(a) The proposed amendment requires every E-Commerce entity which intend to operate in India to register itself with DPIIT. It is suggested that the words 'intend to operate in India' be replaced with the words 'supplies goods or services to a consumer in India'. This would be helpful to regulate even those E-Commerce entities also which do not establish offices in India but still have lots of revenue being generated from consumers located in India.

(b) Compulsory registration of giant E-Commerce entities is a welcome step, which will go a long way to regulate for any wrong doings by them. However, it is suggested, to avoid any hardship to E-Commerce entities with very small consumer base in India, a threshold may be prescribed for compulsory registration. This would save small E-Commerce players from avoidable compliances. The definition of MSME may be adopted to define small E-Commerce players.

(c) DPIIT must also create a monitoring mechanism to identify the defaulter E-Commerce entities and must also have an adjudication mechanism for penalising such defaulters.

3. Proposed amendment to Rule 5: duties of e-commerce entities-

(a) Explanation to Clause(a) of Sub-rule (5) of Rule 5 requires E-Commerce entity to appoint a 'Chief Compliance Officer' who is resident and citizen of India. Similarly, Explanation to Clause (b) of Sub-rule (5)

of Rule 5 requires E-Commerce entity to appoint a 'Nodal Contact Person' who is resident and citizen of India and Explanation to Clause(c) of Sub-rule (5) of Rule 5 requires E-Commerce entity to appoint a 'Resident Grievance Officer' who is resident and citizen of India. These designated persons shall be responsible for their respective jobs given in the Rule.

It is suggested that concept of 'officer who is in default' as included in the Companies Act, 2013 be introduced in the E-Commerce Rules also, so that the persons in accordance with whose advice, directions or instructions the E-Commerce entities act can be brought to books in case of any contravention under the Act and the E-Commerce Rules.

(b) Para(e) of sub-rule (2) may be deleted as the same is repeated in sub-rule (3).

4. Proposed amendment of inserting sub-rule (12) to Rule 5 read with Rule 3 (1)(c)

The words "with an intent to maximise the revenue of such E-Commerce entity" may be deleted from the definition of 'Cross selling' in Rule 3(1)(c) as the same is communicating a confusing message that disclosures in clear and accessible manner, as referred in proposed sub-rule (12), are to be given only when the intent is to maximise the revenue and not otherwise.

5. Proposed amendment to sub-rule (14) to Rule 5 -

(a) The intent of these amendments seems to discourage flash sales, with ultimately affecting the consumers by limiting their choices and other ways. However, to avoid any ambiguity, the words 'manipulate the price' in Para (a) and the words "mislead users by manipulating" in Para (c) need more clarity and the parameters may be defined for the same. The following additional paragraphs may be added after (14) (c):

(i) refrain from treating more favourably in ranking services and products offered by the marketplace entity itself or by any third party belonging to the same undertaking compared to similar services or products of third party and apply fair and non-discriminatory conditions to such ranking; and

(ii) provide advertisers and publishers, upon their request and free of charge, with access to the performance measuring tools of the gatekeeper and the information necessary for advertisers and publishers to carry out their own independent verification of the ad inventory; and

(iii) provide to any third party providers of online search engines, upon their request, with access on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms to ranking, query, click and view data in relation to free and paid search generated by end users on online search engines of the gatekeeper, subject to anonymisation for the query, click and view data that constitutes personal data;

(b) Further provisions are required to be included as to which authority/regulator shall be monitoring these actions, if any, by E-Commerce entities.

(c) Para (f) may be replaced with the following paragraphs: "refrain from using, in competition with business users, any data not publicly available, which is generated through activities by those business users, including by the end users of these business users, of its core platform services or provided by those business users of its core platform services or by the end users of these business users; and provide business users, or third parties authorised by a business user, free of charge, with effective, high-quality, continuous and real-time access and use of aggregated or non-aggregated data, that is provided for or generated in the context of the use of the relevant core platform services by those business users and the end users engaging with the products or services provided by those business users; for personal data, provide access and use only where directly connected with the use effectuated by the end user in respect of the products or services offered by the relevant business user through the relevant core platform service, and when the end user opts in to such sharing with a consent."

6. Proposed sub-rule (17) to Rule 5

The past experience is that dominant E-Commerce market places have been misusing their positions to help their related parties and associates and exploited small suppliers operating on their market places and consumers in general. The proposed rules do not define dominant position as well as 'abuse the position'. It is therefore, suggested that the proposed Rule may be replaced with the following para:

"(17) No E-Commerce entity which holds a dominant position in any market shall, abuse its position as provided in subsection (2) of Section 4 of the Competition Act, 2002."

7. Proposed sub-rule (19) to Rule 5

The past experience with dominant market places is that the consumers are not provided complete information about the actual supplier of goods or service and in its absence, proper redressal of consumer complaints is not happening. With the object of having two ways communication between buyers and sellers and without compromising the privacy of the sellers and the consumers, the proposed Rule may be replaced with the following para:

"(19) Every E-Commerce entity shall display clearly and prominently in its invoice, the name, address and contact details in the same font size as that of the e-commerce entity's."

8. Proposed amendments to new Rule 6

It has been noticed that dominant E-Commerce market places are collecting data of fast moving items with goods margins being sold by vendors and provide the same to their related parties or associates to manufacture and /or trade the same on their e-market place with profit sharing or higher percentages of commissions. It is therefore, suggested that para (a) of sub rule (6) of Rule 6 may be replaced with the following:

"(a) ensure that it does not use any information collected through its platform for its unfair advantage or for unfair disadvantage to the sellers.""

9. It is suggested that the following be inserted as Rule (10)

"In the larger interest of the consumers, the E-Commerce market places shall disclose the following information on their website on quarterly basis –

a) Total business executed on their platform

b) Advertisement cost incurred

c) No of complaints received and redressed"

10. (a) It is suggested that suitable rule may also be inserted to provide for capacity building for inspection and enforcement of E-Commerce transactions, unfair trade practices, mis-selling, manipulation of prices, search algorithm and other technical aspects of digital transactions with consumer protection perspective.

(b) E-courts may be established for consumers' grievances redressal.

Dr. Ashwani Mahajan

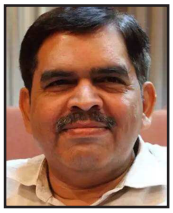
National Co-convenor, Swadeshi Jagran Manch

Rising Forex Reserves: A Boon or Bane

Our policy makers, pink (economic) newspapers and pro-foreign investment economists are all are obsessed by India's rising foreign exchange reserves. In this regard, the government seems to be patting its back that the investment climate in the country has improved. Pink newspapers appear to consider surging foreign exchange reserves as a barometer of the economy's well-being due to rising foreign investments.

It is worth noting that although our foreign exchange reserves have been increasing continuously for the last three decades, but in the last 18 months this growth has become faster than ever. Significantly, the foreign exchange reserves have reached $ 611 billion by July 3, 2021, increasing from $ 431 billion in January 3, 2020 (most significantly during the period of the global pandemic). Compared with 1991, when India faced a situation of acute shortage of foreign exchange, such that our reserves were not enough to pay for imports of even 7 days, today it is the situation that our foreign exchange reserves are enough to pay for 18 months of imports. The growing foreign exchange reserves do give a sense of satisfaction and relief. It is also true that if foreign exchange reserves are not sufficient, there is a danger of default in repayment of interest and principal of foreign loans. We realized this worst scenario in 1991, when we were forced to mortgage our gold with the Bank of England as a guarantee against eminent default.

Citing the same history, some economists consider the rising foreign exchange reserves to be auspicious. They argue that foreign exchange reserves act as insurance for the country, so that there is never a situation of a sovereign default. They also compare India's foreign exchange reserves with that of China's. Significantly, China's foreign exchange reserves are 6-7 times more than India's reserves. We have to understand that China's foreign exchange reserves increased



History is witness that whenever there have been attempts to tax these foreign investors, they have ditched these efforts by 'blackmailing' the government and the country.

Dr. Ashwani Mahajan

mostly due to surplus in balance of payments, thanks to balance of payments (BOP) surplus of China with most of their trading partners. To some extent they also grew due to foreign direct investment. Whereas if we see, the increases in India's foreign exchange reserves, they are mainly due to foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign portfolio/ institutional investment (FPI), because generally our balance of payments remains in huge deficit.

So, more than the amount of foreign exchange reserves, we have to pay attention to what are the sources of increase in foreign exchange reserves. It also has to be kept in mind the far-reaching consequences of foreign exchange received from these sources? Economists agree that the best option as a source of foreign exchange is balance of payments surplus. If our exports of goods and services are more than imports, the foreign exchange thus earned is the best option. This has actually happened in China. But if this foreign currency is obtained by borrowing, then it is the worst option. Even if the foreign exchange is obtained through investment in the stock markets, then also it has many side effects. The first side effect is that it causes volatility not only in the stock markets, but also in the exchange rate. Its result is ominous for the country. Another side effect of this is that the country has to pay a heavy price for this inflow of foreign exchange, as these investors take huge profits to their respective origins and at the same time the value of their assets keep increasing.

Significantly, while foreign institutional investors have invested a total of 281 billion dollars in India till date, the total valuation of their assets has reached 607 billion dollars as of 31 March 2021. Apart from this, they have also earned dividends of $ 64.28 billion. They can sell their $607 billion worth of shares and bonds and go back at any moment and all our foreign exchange reserves can run out in a jiffy. That is why; portfolio investment is also called 'hot money'.

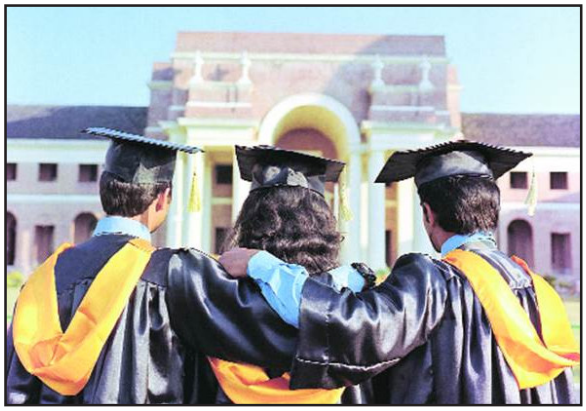
However, foreign investment, foreign loans taken by private companies and remittances by Indians to the home country are all important for increasing foreign exchange reserves. But not all these sources have the similar effect. While remittances by Indians normally don't have any repayment obligations and generally all these amounts remain in India forever; but foreign investors, whether they are foreign direct investors or portfolio investors, all repatriate huge amounts of money. These investors take away huge amount of foreign exchange in the form of dividend royalty, technical fees, interest, salary etc. In addition to that, the share of imports in the products produced by these foreign companies is also very high, due to which huge quantity of foreign exchange outflow happens. Significantly, from the year April 1, 2000 to March 31st, 2021, the total foreign direct investment has been 763.6 billion dollars.

If we take see, in the last ten years (2010-11 to 2019-20), these foreign investors have withdrawn 390 billion dollars, in the form of dividends, royalties, technical fees, interest and salaries; and this amount has been increasing year after year.

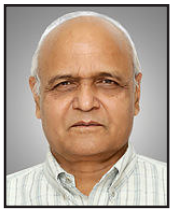
On the other hand, when it comes to portfolio investments, they are even more dangerously more profitable. It has to be understood that there is no stability in the portfolio investment. It is not possible to estimate how much foreign exchange the portfolio investors will bring in and when they will withdraw. Their volatility affects the exchange rate, causing huge losses. Not only this, these investors cause huge volatility in the stock markets. Today, when India's foreign exchange reserves are booming, it's the time to consider what price the country is paying for this growing foreign exchange reserves. Because foreign investors are repatriating huge profits from India, however, the country's returns from these foreign exchange reserves are very negligible. Avenues will have to be found for gainful use of foreign exchange reserves beyond a limit.

History is witness that whenever there have been attempts to tax these foreign investors, they have ditched these efforts by 'blackmailing' the government and the country. Since there is always the fear that these foreign institutional investors may get away with their 'hot money' anytime, it is absolutely necessary to restrict any eventuality of that kind, by regulating them. In this regard, a provision of a 'lock-in period' can be imposed on them. Along with this, if they want to take their money back, then a provision can also be made to levy tax on them. This tax was suggested by an economist named Tobin; hence it is also called 'Tobin Tax'. Today, as our forex reserves are in a comfortable position, it is high time to use these measures to discipline these foreign institutional investors. ❑❑

Higher Education: Autonomy is Need of Hour



Quality education is key to enhance economic prosperity, employability and expand country's foothold in global economy. The sunrise technologies emerging in the wake of fourth industrial revolution (4IR) are poised to offer serious challenge to sustain manufacturing as well as employment, at a time when India has already been experiencing high unemployment rate, unprecedented in last 45 years. Moreover, the level of employment in the country's population of employable age has already come down to 37 % in from 41.8 percent in November 2017. Low share of less than 3% of India in the world manufacturing is largely responsible for Low employment and low labour participation rates. We have 17.8% share in the global population, but contribute less than 3% in world manufacturing. China, with the same size of population as that of India has 28.4% share in world manufacturing. United States is at number two, with 18% share in world manufacturing. Japan contributes 10% in the world manufacturing with just 1.6% share in the world population. Indeed, we rank very low, at 48th place in the global innovations index (GII) owing to a poor rank of 37th in the quality of education, as per the World Economic Forum, and that leads to such a poor level of contribution in the world manufacturing. The Legatum Prosperity Index ranks quality of India's education below 100 in the world. Poor quality and low innovativeness of education pushes down India to a very low rank of 22nd place in the global high technology exports as well. Singapore holds 5th place with 7 times higher high-tech exports than India. China has almost 30 times higher high-tech exports than India.



Education also needs to be set free in the country to excel globally. Autonomy in true sense is the need of the hour, when the country has to embark on the path of excellence.

Prof. Bhagwati Prakash Sharma & Dr. Jaya Sharma

China could overtake India only after mid 1980's by enhancing quality of education. They could achieve it inter alia by increasing the number of researchers to 5 times than that of India and raising science and engineering related research papers to 4 times. Highly cited research papers of Chinese scholars are 8 times of India and the number of patent filings are 300 times of India. Consequently, the capital raised by its tech-startups is also 4.5 times of India. China today has more than 4.5 times of our nominal GDP and 4 times of our nominal per capita income, whereas in 1986 our nominal per capita income and the per capita income on PPP basis respectively, were 15 and 20% more.

Quality and innovativeness of education and research is key to turnaround the industry manufacturing, commerce, agriculture and services in the country. Education in India appears to be increasingly falling behind the international benchmarks of quality and innovativeness.

India needs to develop a world class higher education system. UGC has promulgated a policy to raise 6 world class institutions via, "the UGC "(Declaration of Government Educational Institutions as World Class Institutions) Guidelines, 2016." But, within 2 years of this declaration, may be on realising that achieving the target of raising world class institutions is difficult. So, by 2018, when the first

six institutions were named under this initiative, they were redesignated as "Institutions of Eminence" as opposed to "world class institutions". But, merely enhancing the competence of just 6, out of 44,000 HEIs (920 Universities and 43,000 Colleges including autonomous colleges) cannot help much. Moreover, one of the six was to set up its campus at that time. Indeed, India needs a world class higher education system and not merely 6 HEIs. The emphasis on a select group of institutions and individuals too is not right approach. Rather addressing the needs of the whole system is more important in a vast country like India. The system as a whole can take care of individual institutions. It is also extremely worrisome that inspite of having one of the world's largest higher education network, the high-powered "Empowered Expert Committee (EEC)" appointed by the MHRD could not find even 20 institutes, depicting potential to find place in among the top 500 institutes of global ranking 10 years. Almost after two years of the centre announcing that it would grant the 'Institute of Eminence' status to 20 institutions it had to bring down the number to less than half. As many as 114 institutes had applied for the status. They included 11 central universities, 27 institutes of national importance (so declared by an Act of the Parliament) including top IITs and NITs, 27 state universities, 10 private universities and 4 Greenfield institutes. The Greenfield institute including among the 6 institutes of excellence, the Jio, promoted by the Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) has already been hauled up by the EEC for inordinate delays in taking off. At the review meeting, the Jio Institute team almost after the lapse of 9 months has even extended its target of first academics session from 2020-21 to 2021-22. They could not even adhere to their agreed time lines for commitment of setting up a campus etc.

The country needs a world class 'education system'. Mere blessing of six institutes, for enabling to find place among top 500 institutes of the world in 10 years cannot turnaround the state of education in the country.

Another question that arose at that time was that can only these 6 institutes, being given complete freedom or fullest possible autonomy is enough? The country needs a world class 'education system'. Mere blessing of six institutes, for enabling to find place among top 500 institutes of the world in 10 years cannot turnaround the state of education in the country. Moreover, one of these six HEIs, the Jio Institute is yet to set up its campus and is slated to commence its first session in 2021-22. Decision of offering full autonomy to the 6 or 60 or even 100 institutes cannot lead us to world class Educational System. Education is highly "over-regulated and over-governed in India." Inspections based licensing to open HEIS regulators wherein inspection raj is turning to be a cottage industry for certain inspectors and decelerator for quality.

Rigorous inspections and highly-structured accreditations for the award of approvals, grades & ranks, coupled with slapping of very stringent and overlapping inspections by a plethora of regulators have failed to place the Higher Education Institutes of India (HEIs), at a respectable place in world rankings. Our higher education system comprises 1000 universities and 43,000 colleges, enrolling a total of 3.66 crore students (equal to the population of Canada), fare no where in the world rankings. Out of a vast number of elite HEIs, comprising 103 institutes of national importance like the IITs, NITs, IIITs, AIIMS etc, 47 central universities plus 205 'A' grade accredited universities along with 1653 'A' grade accredited colleges, none of them could find a place in top 150 HEIs of world. China had no place anywhere near us in quality higher education has now its 6 universities among the world's top 100, whereas we have Zero and often have none even among top 200 excepting some occasional years and none among top 100 or ever 150.

The affiliated colleges are most neglected, not only with respect to any academic freedom (except the autonomous colleges), but in according their faculty any berths in the Boards of Studies or Academic Councils, barring some exceptions. There are no uniformity or any benchmarks for this in the Acts of the affiliating universities. In all Bharat has more than 40,000 colleges, the highest in the world. These colleges should get permanent affiliation with reasonable autonomy. The affiliating university should stop treating as affiliated colleges golden egg laying geese. Their faculty needs to be given place in the BOS and AC of

the Universities and career advancement up to the position of a professor. The colleges should not be discriminated in allowing their faculty to supervise research as well. Many affiliating universities avoid to give permanent affiliation, because the renewal fee is golden egg laying goose.

For any higher education system to be world class, it has to focus upon the quality and innovativeness in teaching-learning as well as in research, besides being students-centric and output-based or to say outcome oriented in its focus. To the contrary, our physical infrastructure-centered inspections. Coupled with headcounts of faculty constituting the core of the accreditation grading and rankings are. India could power the IT revolution by the outcome-oriented computer training institutes, falling out of the domain of any regulatory mechanism of UGC, NAAC and AICTE etc. The Indian IT Sector could outshine, wherein India has been hitherto the world's software capital and much ahead of China in software development, largely because the computer education and training was provided by the output oriented institutes, falling out of the ambit of statutory regulatory authorities. The software industry has now rather begun loose its sheen, when the regulatory authorities have stepped into for regularising it. Now when AI and other digital products are replacing software products from the product portfolios of the IT and ITES, Indian IT sector has to do re-skilling and relocation of 30% of its manpower, turning redundant with change of winds. India has just 0.7% share in the world's software product market and totally blunt to make any headway for the AI products. In the era of artificial intelligence and other sunrise technologies, the regulators in India could not sense and have not been able to identify the emerging needs of the market, incorporate them in time in the curricula.

Even the premium institutes, declared as institutes of national importance by an Act of Parliament, numbering 103, too find difficult to fill their seats, as the cream of the applicants, able to afford higher costs abroad prefer to find a berth in the technical institutes abroad. The IITs, NITs, IIITs, AIIMS etc have all been adorned with the states as institutes of national importance by the Parliament. Such a trust deficit among the students and parents towards the public funded premier institutes must be taken as a serious cause of concern by the policy makers, including the government. What can be thought of attracting international students, if the cream of the indigenous students too has such a trust deficit in the quality of teaching-learning and ability to impart employability of country's premier institutions? Large number of students, inspite of getting admission in the top ranking premium institutes of the country, opt to seek admission abroad, even when they do not fall among the top most institutes in the host countries at manifold higher cost outgo.

In the area of quality of research, India ranks 8th with respect to the quality of private and public research institutions across 112 countries, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Index 2018.

In the area of quality of research, India ranks 8th with respect to the quality of private and public research institutions across 112 countries, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Index 2018, whereby India does find a place among the top 10 countries with high quality of research institutes, but there is also a catch. It scores just 0.42 out of 5 in the quality of research institutions index. While the USA tops the list with a score of 3.88. Even China's score is above 3 against a paltry score of 0.42 of ours. The quality of India's research institutes is largely considered below-par, with the country contributing the highest number of low-quality research and bogus journals. Nearly 88 percent of the University Grants Commission (UGC) approved list of journals have been found to be of 'low quality', according to study on Critical Analysis of the UGC- approved list of journals published in Current Science. It is none of UGC mandate, capability or the expertise to assess Journals. It could simply specify criteria like, it being indexed with certain impact factor etc. Lot of irregularities have been alleged to have been committed in their listing, delisting and relisting of journals. Nearly 88% of the UGC approved list of journals have been found to be of low quality according to study on Critical Analysis of the UGC–approved list of journals published in "current Science". Rather this flawed listing of journals have led to the decline of many

quality journals, as the scholars have stopped submitting research papers, for the want of API score, in several quality journals, indexed and enjoying high impact factor. It is none of the business of the UGC to issue licenses to journals. Nor do they have expertise, well defined criteria to judge the journals or the requisite objectivity. There are indexing agencies of repute and objectivity. UGC should have announced merely the agency-specific impact factor up to which the papers would be counted.

Expressing concern at the poor quality of education in India, even Shri NR Narayan Murthy, the Chairman Emeritus, Infosys Ltd., while delivering his convocation address at the Indian Institute of Science in 2015 out of grave disdain at the plight of education quipped, "is there any one invention, idea, or technological contribution of Indian Institutions of higher learning that could make the world a better place, like their western counterparts, which have hundreds of such contributions, transforming the productivity of global corporations from their inventions, as the breakthroughs made by the later are leading to several earth shaking inventions for the delight of people across the globe. Referring to a book of Massachusetts Institute of Technology of the US, entitled "101 gifts from MIT" he asserts that there are several of such institutes from west and worldwide, but outside India that have been adding ever-newer inventions and breakthroughs at an accelerating pace. Murthy has categorically stated in his speech that there is no single such contribution from the institutions of higher learning from India.

The spat of inspections, being bestowed upon the inspectors should not be like an intermittent occupation at short term intervals, wherein the stereotype reports of theirs, having no tangible contribution for the higher education to embark upon the path to quality & innovativeness.

The institution centric, ongoing machinistic ranking of institutes on the basis of static inputs in terms of number of class-rooms, number of labs, number of books in library or the pupil-teacher ratio to aimed at depriving the institutes falling low in these institution-centered indices, altogether ignore the student-centered teaching-learning approaches as well as the teaching inputs. Mere institution-centered assessment, mostly dependent upon the personal judgment or discretion of inspectors, without assessing the real teaching inputs and learning outcomes, without regard to the quality of actual teaching-learning, including the learning and research outcomes fail to sensitise the education providers towards the education seekers. The attitude of inspectors should not be of regulating elites' with a regimental attitude. Instead of mere writing a stereotype report, of lapses and deficiencies very often those beyond the control of the teachers & students and down grading the institute, the inspectors be given the responsibility of mentoring the institute, inspected by them for its time-bound turn around, with short-term and medium term targets of turning-around the institute inspected. The spate of inspections, being bestowed upon the inspectors should not be like an intermittent occupation at short term intervals, wherein the stereotype reports of theirs, having no tangible contribution for the higher education to embark upon the path to quality and innovativeness.

There have been public funded universities with as low as signal digit faculty strength, including the Vice Chancellor, or with 16 to 24 faculty members even when the number of departs exceed over the number of regulars faculty members with 100-500 students into their constituent departments. Whereas they affiliate hundreds of colleges. They prescribe stringent norms of faculty head counts, cadre ratio, physical infrastructure for affiliated colleges, but many of

such affiliating universities lack most of these. Poor head count of faculty in relation to students being admitted and the bane of one-man departments in public funded universities in quite worrisome. The affiliating universities insist for headcount as above and a cadre ratio of 1:2:5 for renewal of affiliation of affiliated institutes. They do grading of affiliated colleges, but never care to comply with the grading criteria themselves. Cases are legion, where the same affiliating universities do never hire the requisite faculty members in their constituent departments(s). Instances are legion, where the affiliating universities with several one man department, run multiple postgraduate programmes, solely through guest faculties. The self-financed institutions mostly have much better head count ratio of faculty to pupils but, many of them often underpay their faculty and staff. But, a better ration of full time teachers vis a vis the number of pupils invariably helps to maintain better teaching-learning environment. Normally, the private universities or other self financed hEIs are set up with a better head count and infrastructure, as they have to attract students with much higher fees and are also subjected to pre-enactment inspections. But, UGC insists to have inspection under section 2(f). Whereas creation of a university is a prerogative of State Legislative Assembly parliament. Who this second license under 2(f) become imperative. The students and their parents spend a considerable time in comparing and contrasting institutions in terms of numerous parameters such as infrastructure, curriculum, learning outcomes and placements to judge an HEI. Today more than half the students have been pursuing studies in self financed institutes or self financed Programmes. The best universities of the world such as Harvard and Stanford could reach and sustain at the top of the pyramid because of the absolute autonomy vested in them by their governments and society.

In 2018 alone the Medical Council of India had denied to conduct second inspection for 73 self financed medical colleges.

In 2018 alone the Medical Council of India had denied to conduct second inspection for 73 self financed medical colleges and arbitrarily refused to renew permission for admissions in 2018-19, whereas the Medical Council of India Act of 1956 clearly provides that the college should be given reasonable opportunity to rectify the deficiencies. This right was denied by incorporating a flimsy rule in March, 2016. In all MCI killed 20,800 seats by denying fresh permission to 73 new colleges and denying renewal to 82 pre-existing colleges. It was done solely by complete lack of requisite transparency in inspections and inspection reports. Due to inadequate medical education facilities there is an exodus of students seeking medical education to Bangladesh and Nepal which fall in the category of least developed counties (LDCs), besides several other counties like China, Georgia, Ukraine and so on. But the MCI had killed 20,800 seats, for which the infrastructure was created at an outlay of not less than Rs 50,000 crores. On an apple to apple comparision one finds that majority of the colleges denied approvals had better infra than several running medical colleges. The bill to replace was placed as early as on December 2017 in Lok Sabha with the promise of transparency and curb corruption in medical education could be notified only by August 8, 2019 due to pulls and pressures of that time. "The National Medical Commission Act, 2019" was passed after much delay. So, transparency and reasonable autonomy is need of the hour.

One should not forget that the erstwhile restrictions and regulations of the sociallisfic era had kept Indian manufacturing volumes and its quality at its lowest ebb. There were rampant scarcities, industry was even not free to fulfill domestic demand due to licesing, quota, permit and bias for the public sectors to the extent of the monopolies of the public sector. The Industries Regulations and Development Regulation-1948, the Controller of Capital Issues, The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission etc. kept the manufacturing highly restricted. Even for capital issues above Rs.10 Lac, prior approval of the controller was mandatory. With the dismantling of all these tainted clearances economy is now free from shackles. Likewise, education also needs to be set free in the country to excel globally. Autonomy in true sense is the need of the hour, when the country has to embark on the path of excellence. ❑❑

Halting the march of Environment Monster

Incessant march towards industrialization, urbanization, and material growth without environmental concerns has led to release of harmful emission of many toxic elements in the atmosphere causing rapid warming of the planet Earth. Global warming and the resultant climate change have become one of the most worrisome concerns in recent times. None of us can be absolved – consumers, businesses and industrial economy – of the responsibilities of contributing to this frightful catastrophe. We are exploiting and destroying nature at alarming rate. Efforts by concerned stakeholders – including the ruling class – to act as guardians of Environment, on the other hand, are woefully short.

Overconsumption, population pressure, intense exploitation of natural resources have led to adverse impact on human well being. Welfare of mankind is being compromised. If exploitation of environment remains unchecked it would undermine the systems that sustain life and livelihood, and for countries like India, derail efforts to improve living standards. According to WWF between 1970-2016 animal population declined by 68%. The UN global biodiversity outlook 5 warns that the world will fail to meet all the 20 targets set in 2010 to slowdown the destruction of wildlife and ecosystem. In this VUCA (Volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world we need to develop sustainably, for which we need to create new paradigms for livelihood, growth and development in harmony with nature. We need to make a transition to develop pathways that take into account the critical role of nature.Failure to do so would undermine the efforts to meet the Paris climate goals and the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

All nations, but more so developing countries like India, have development deficit and need to augment economic growth to bridge it. But they must mainstream nature in their development plans from reduced pollination that lowers crop yields and wild fires that ravage communities to the extinction of creations of rare beauty, loss of biodiversity produces incalculable harm. The planet cannot take any meaningful break if we do not regulate chemicals, reduce and eliminate toxins and circulate all materials. Let's face it, at: present rate of unsustainable consumption fear of annihilation may not be unfounded.

Monstrity of environment is all because of human misdeeds. So, taming it in our favour is also our responsibility!
Dr. KK Srivastava

Woke, a term in modern lingo, refers to being awake, about social issues, including global warming, climate change, sustainable production and consumption.Contrary to popular belief, India is structurally more 'woke' than so called developed western world. Thus while we are told that India is polluted, actually it has a per capita emission of 1.8 tonnes, way lower than the global average of 4.7 tonnes and much smaller compared to the US and Australia that pollute 8 times more, at 16.2 and 16.9 tonnes. India's reduced carbon footprint might be attributed to a lower motorization rate – 18 per 1000 population vs 602 for EU and 747 for the US. It is also due to lower consumption of non vegetar-

ian stuff which produces methane; India has a naturally 'woke' diet. Top 18 out of a list of 172 countries have an annual per capital meat consumption of more than 90 kgs; Indian consumption, one twentieth of that.

India pollutes far less, consumes more frugally, and lives more sustainably than the most. But don't have a complacent smirk. Climate issues have hit us like pandemic-none is spared due to externalities. There are no artificially drawn boundaries segregating us from other nations. Hence India cannot lie low. As it strives to progress faster in terms of material wealth (Remember the goal of $5 trillion economy?!), through the route of industrialization, sustainability is becoming the first casualty – safety of environment, planet earth, and business itself. Human progress is like a triangle with three arms – people, planet and profit, the so called 3 P's. If we wish to increase the size of the triangle, then lengthening all the arms of the triangle simultaneously alone will yield result. Thus, while trying to squeeze more profit will only mean ill effects for the planet and human resources, sustainability at the expense of fair profit is equally not maintainable. Both, along with people, are important: sustainability of business and that of mother earth. There prevails no either or choice. Yet the dilemma is real.

India reduced support to the fossil fuel industry, one of the biggest pollutants, by 4% between 2015 and 2019 while countries in the G-20 forum are failing to meet their commitments. The G20 provided $636 billion in direct support for fossil fuels in 2019. A counter factual however, is that we still have 66 coal powered plants. While it is true that India is the world's third largest carbon emitter (after China and the US) the fact is that we definitely need cheap and reliable power to meet out developmental goals. First, India has to provide clean cooking energy to 800 million people and electricity access to 200 million; second, we have to create jobs and that cannot happen without more and better power; and third, the urban transition will entail huge energy needs. To add to these, the energy transition has to be just because of livelihood implications. To take another example, India discards 15,000 tonnes of plastics daily, of which 43% is single use – a sinister menace. Plastic itself has replaced aluminium, steel, and natural fibers like jute and hemp in many industries. But it remains beyond the pale of established waste collection system for recycling purposes and floats on the surface of earth and ocean for centuries. The choices certainly are not clearcut.

Not that it is not possible to take preventive steps to control environmental damage without compromising industrial progress. This however does not translate into action because of human inertia and apathy. Why does human mind not think consciously and urgently about environment damage, compared with say terrorism? This is because as social mammals, we only think about living beings and their evil designs. If global warming had been unleashed on us by a ruthless despot, we would have been concerned. Second, if a violation fails to transgress moral boundaries, it may not alarm out brain. No human society has moral codes about atmospheric chemistry. Third, the threat it still lurking somewhere in distant future (so we feel). We get concerned about clear and contemporary attack, and not to something which is not even in our line of vision. These, and then some more, reasons have therefore at best led to green washing and Dominic Greens (Remember Quantum of solace, the Bond movie) – the fake environmentalists. Unless we convert ourselves into green consumers, the business will not feel pressured to mould itself. This can be done only if we force the business practices to term green. We need to become 'active green' to engage the business. Then we need to tell the marketer what do we want as regards environment friendly substitute products, at what price preference, with what price performance trade off, and with what kind of underlying appeal (functional, emotional or social). Based on these answers the marketer needs to develop better business practices through innovation in material usage, scouting services and marketing itself. Customer intimacy and competitive advantage need to be looked at from new strategic frameworks; and cooperation along the whole value chain needs to be ensuredso as to incorporate the impact of climate on consumers' changed shopping pattern. Equally, producers have a huge role in transforming the way environment damaging products are produced and consumed.

In sum, companies must realize that in long run sustainability is possible only if they are sensitive to the needs of the planet. Responsible consumers, business process, products, and government policies and action together can ensure sustainability. ❑❑

The author is a noted economist and management thinker.

Environment Protection: Lessons from Past

Environmental resources are indeed precious, and yet are in perilous state. Rampaging marauders have little concern, giving birth to Dominic Greens, the fake environmentalists (Remember, Quantum of Solace, the Bond Movie?). Emissions are continuously rising, earth temperature is scaling up dangerously, people are dying because of the toxic air they are forced to breath, life spans are being cut short, and each new generation is afflicted by more and newer diseases than the previous one. According to a recent survey air pollution is the most prevalent risk factor (76%) among the surveyed population. Even if all the promises of emission cut made in the Paris Accord are honoured – highly unlikely – the world would still be warmer by over 3 degree Celsius. Emission of CO_2 – an externality – cannot be left to the vagaries of an unregulated market, since it will produce excessive harmful gases. Global warming is a particularly scary externality. So, we need to levy penal charges against unsustainable living. But more importantly, we need to incentivize sustainable living practices. Everyone needs to contribute – citizens, business, consumers, managers, and of course the ruling dispensation. In a competitive and global setting businesses have begun to feel the need to incorporate environmental care itself as an integral part of their pursuit of competitive advantage. Enlightened businesses realize that there is no conflict between meeting the needs of the planet and attaining the goal of commercial profit; indeed, green practices are self repaying in a short time horizon for business.

While environmental catastrophe is starkly facing us, solutions are also in sight, some from our past too.

Dr. Jaya Kakkar

Take ITC as an example. The company has over the years built a robust portfolio of environmentally sustainable businesses. It is the only enterprise in the world of comparable dimensions which is carbon negative, water positive, and solid waste recycling positive for more than a decade now. ITC has been ranked number one globally among its peers and number three overall on Environmentally Sustainable Goals (ESG) performance in the food products industry. The company even designs its own buildings paying homage to good environmental practices. It draws inspiration from even our past as we have illustrated later in this article. All stakeholders must realize that in long run sustainability is possible only if we become sensitive to the needs of the Planet. Take the example of building architecture.

The Indian architect of today has multiple choices ranging from the ancient Hindu temple style to the latest in reinforced concrete glass, and stainless steel. Of course India can evolve some new formula, not necessarily based on European precedent, but to meet the changed economic conditions and social habits of the day.

While all problems relating to water scarcity and climate catastrophe may not

lie in the methods and practices of our past, certainly some inspiration may be drawn from the old practices. And we can reduce the present state of collective recklessness and unaccountability towards our environment for example rain water harvesting has been a traditional practice in our past. Storage reservoirs, ponds, lakes, irrigation, canals, step wells, etc. were constructed, maintained, and preserved. Various water bodies were built by kings and emperors who also encouraged village communities and individuals to build and maintain these on their own.

In contemporary times technology offers many easy, even if expensive, ways to ensure amenities like water, light, cooling and heating. So the desire to consider and respect natural elements like climate, topography and orientation towards naturally environment friendly projects has become a matter of discretion. But buildings can be made more eco friendly in a self financing way. Ideally the health of planet should not be compromised in face of lure for the lolly. If mind is applied conflict between planet and profit will vanish. During the ancient and medieval times the architects had to be far more imaginative and focused since they had to meet the limitations for the locale and yet address the aspirations of their royal patrons. For example, Golconda fort and the Qutb Shahi necropolis were constructed so as not to conflict with nature supplied water to the fort using an indigenous system of underground pipes and gravity. The Qutb Shahis devised a five tiered system to ensure water supply. From the bund at Durgam Cheruru water flowed via pipes and aquaduct.

The Qutb Shahi tombs complex was aligned in such a manner as the rain water would flow into pits which in turn would carry it to custom built baolis. Not a drop was wasted. Seven baolis had systems to draw water out using oxen so that the complex always remained clean and verdant. The fort chambers were also so aligned that the winds naturally cooled the interiors. The human had a stone floor with hollow channels underneath, through which boiling water was passed to create steam even as several cold plunge pools offered a respite.

The hotel property ITC Kohenur (Hyderabad) has drawn inspiration from such model of architecture. It has used technology to cooperate with environment, and not attempted to conquer it. The hotel has a narrow Z shape with the building appearing to lean forward at 93 degree N angle. The architect found that such an angle would be the best for lighting and cooling all year round. But since the plot was very narrow on that axis to accommodate a straight building, the edges were angled to a Z. Additionally there are strategically located louvered sections and balcony which enable the building to get sunlight on one hand, as also with shades for segments with tall windows. The tapered shape building reduces the direct blast of the sun on the east-west axis, so that the guests can enjoy sunrises and sunsets without the need for excessive air conditioning to offset the heat. Moreover, wooden louvers and balconies make sure that a low sun will also not cause overheating. The edges of the building are rounded for airflow, and are an ode to the wind smothered boulders, integral to the rocky landscape of this part of the Deccan, which have withstood the long onslaught of the time. The hotel has done well to adopt this.

As Qutb Shahi royalty used to relax in verdant charbaghs, likewise on similar lines sky gardens have been added at various levels to green the hotel as also to allow natural ventilation and fire breaks. The vertical gardens along the entrance, inspired from medieval architects and landscape planners, help cool the building. Indeed sheer wealth of a bygone era's architectural ingenuity must inspire us in modern times to draw lessons in aesthetics and best environmental practices while we design our buildings now. All the architectural devices used by ITC have an impeccable rationale. Medieval rulers created manmade water bodies and naturally cool and airy buildings. But now technology has made us lazy, arrogant and inured to environmental needs. We have a glorious past to look up to, but we tend to run towards West to draw inspiration. Partly because our architects have been fed on a diet of western 'developed world' precepts and practices. Recently we have initiated the mammoth task of constructing the central vista in Delhi. While little is known, indeed remains undisclosed, about the architectural foundations of the project beyond the rudimentary, it may still not be late if the political potentates draw appropriate lessons from our glorious past and pay their obeisance to environment preservation. ❑❑

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USA Debate on COVID Vaccines Has Lessons for Other Countries

The USA was among those countries which were in the forefront of speeding up the development and distribution of COVID vaccines. Over a much longer period the USA has developed a relatively more detailed system of records and data relating to various vaccines. In addition the USA is also known for intense debates on various issues of widespread public interest, and so it is useful to follow this debate here with a view to learning from the experiences here. Although the US government as well as several multinational companies and foundations , including those promoted by billionaires, are deeply committed to very strong promotion of vaccines and any other view is actively discouraged in many ways, nevertheless democratic space is still available here, in media, public campaigns and in courts, for articulation of alternative views.

One aspect of the more detailed record keeping in the USA relates to the much quoted VAERS (Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System), an officially recognized and supported system where adverse events, serious adverse events and deaths following various kinds of vaccines have been recorded for years yielding a lot of data. Although officially recognized studies have also stated that adverse events are seriously underestimated in VAERS, nevertheless this system remains useful for the continuity it provides and providing a lot of data in public domain. There are other sources of official data also which are not so readily shared. Also it must be stated clearly that VAERS does not establish a cause and effect relationship. It merely tells us, in terms of the experience for a certain number of days following vaccine, a certain number of adverse events including deaths that were reported and recorded.

The VAERS system tells us that for the roughly sixteen and a half year period (198 months) from July 1997 to December 2013, counting all the various vaccines that are administered in the USA, many adverse events were recorded

The USA was among those countries which were in the fore front of speeding up the development and distribution of COVID vaccines.
Bharat Dogra

which included 2149 deaths. This figure is available in a paper titled Deaths Reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System 1997-2013, authored by Pedro L. Moro, Jorge Arana, Mario Cano and others. This paper, as its title tells us, is based on what was recorded in VAERS. The paper also tells us that the deaths were mostly of children and reduced towards the end of the period (declining trend). This paper also informs us that hundreds of millions of vaccines are administered every year in the USA.

By dividing 2149 by 198 we find that on average per month 11 post-vaccine deaths were recorded, counting all the various vaccines administered in the USA.

Now let us look at the post-vaccine deaths recorded only for COVID-19 vaccine in the USA under the VAERS since this vaccination started a few months back. During the roughly seven months period from December 14 2020 to July 16 2021, a total of 5467 deaths have been recorded This works out to an average of 781 deaths per month.

Regarding both the previous records and the recent COVID ones, we are here of course referring to the recorded numbers of events (and not to any cause and effect relationship), under the same VAERS system. Nevertheless it is significant to know that in the context of COVID vaccine, 20 per cent of deaths took place within 48 hours of vaccination and 34 percent took place due to illness which started within 48 hours following vaccination.

Hence, to summarize in one sentence, what we see in terms of VAERS records is that the number of post-vaccine deaths recorded per month for just COVID-19 vaccine up to July 16 2021 (781) is more than 70 times of the deaths per month that were recorded earlier for all vaccines combined (11), as revealed in a longer-term study of VAERS records for 198 months, years 1997-2013.

What we see in terms of VAERS records is that the number of post-vaccine deaths recorded per month for just COVID-19 vaccine up to July 16, 2021 (781) is more than 70 times of the deaths per month that were recorded earlier for all vaccines combined (11).

Isn't this disturbing?

Actually the reality may be even more disturbing as the total number of deaths reported in VAERS systems following COVID vaccine is closer to 11000 or nearly double the number we have used, but it was stated recently by official US sources that this includes some deaths in foreign locations which should be excluded. Hence above we have used the much lower adjusted estimate which excludes these 'foreign' deaths. However even a calculation based on those official estimates which are underestimates in more than one way are quite disturbing.

Similar calculations can be made for the European Union, for UK and perhaps for some other countries and regions as well, where there is a continuity of such data for several years.

As pointed out it is also useful to look at the data of other adverse events. During the period of about 7 months following COVID-19 vaccine, in the VAERS system, after excluding foreign location data, till July 16, a total of 425,950 adverse events and 33,748 serious injuries were recorded. The serious adverse events can include serious illness and health problems requiring hospitalization but these can also include health problems which can be the beginning of longer-term disease or disability. All VAERS recorded data is widely known to be a significant underestimate of the actual situation, as admitted in officially recognized reviews or studies. But even the underestimated figures are revealing.

Despite this many observers in developing countries feel that the safety systems in a developed country like the USA must anyway be better than in their countries, even if only factors relating to availability of much higher budgets and advanced technology are considered, Therefore these observers are puzzled how the recorded rates of adverse events including serious adverse events and deaths (in the context of COVID 19 vaccine) are much lower in these developing countries compared to developed countries. Is this a case of there being actually much lesser adverse events (which would be great, if true) in these countries compared to the USA or the European Union, or is this a case of very few of these getting into official records?

Needless to add, proper recording and data collection are extremely important for forming and following correct policy. ❑❑

The writer, a journalist and author, is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Man Over Machine (Gandhian Ideas for Our Times) and Planet in Peril.

India-China: Bhai-bhai to buy-buy to bye-bye

This is a historic month for China. The Communist Party of China (CPC) came into being 100 years ago, in July 1921. Communist China entered the international mainstream a half century ago, in July 1971, when the United States decided to come to terms with the reality of its existence. China's spectacular rise over the past quarter century, as a global trading superpower, the "factory of the world", and as Asia's most powerful nation, ready to challenge America's global dominance, is the stuff of legend.

Yet, even as China celebrates these landmark events, large parts of the world have become increasingly concerned about its assertion of newly acquired hard power — economic and military. In looking back at China's rise a large part of the public discourse in India has been dominated by commentators on foreign policy, security and defence. Regrettably, very little has appeared in print on the social, cultural and human dimensions of China's transformation and rise.

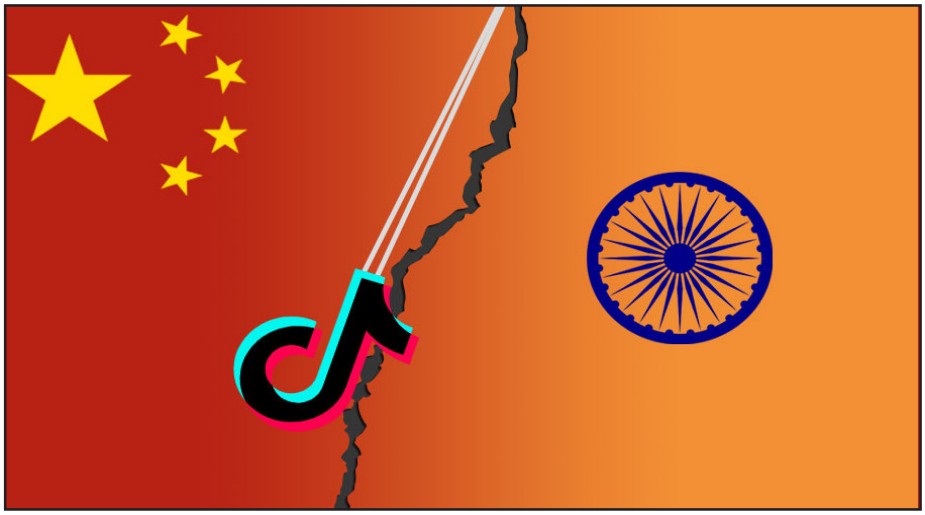
In his recently published pithy narration of the events at Beijing's Tiananmen Square in the summer of 1989 (Tiananmen Square: The Making of a Protest, A Diplomat Looks Back), former foreign secretary and a former Indian ambassador to China Vijay Gokhale observes in passing: "Indians can no longer afford to have a superficial understanding of events involving their largest neighbour and to-be-hegemon, other than at their own peril".

Mr Gokhale is spot on. Yet so much about what appears in print in India about China is about foreign affairs and the economy, written mostly by Westerners or Indians living in the West, and so little from Indians with a first-hand knowledge and experience of life and people in China. For most Indians China is an adversary, a source of cheap products or the home of chow mien.

At one level this is not surprising. The fact is that the interaction between the neighbours has been limited through most history. More important, people-to-people interaction between the two republics over the past three quarters of a

China has risen on the foundations of its human capabilities and Indians ought to have a better appreciation of that.

Sanjaya Baru



century has been even more limited. Little wonder then that even today we depend so much on retired diplomats to educate us about contemporary China. Only a couple of bright Indian journalists and a handful of scholars have been able to bridge the public awareness gap between the two.

This worryingly low level of social and cultural interaction between China and India has dipped further thanks to renewed tensions between the two and the post-Galwan and post-Covid freeze in bilateral interactions. The China-India relationship has moved from the honeymoon days of "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai", and the post-Cold War phase of increased economic and business interaction – "India-China buy-buy", as someone put it — to the current "Cold War" phase of "India-China bye-bye". This is not a satisfactory state of affairs.

Whatever the differences between the two countries, and there are many, there ought to be both a better understanding of each other within both societies and increased people-to-people interaction. For over a century Indians fought Western imperialism and colonialism and yet not only acquired an intimate knowledge of Western culture, science, literature, music and so on, but also benefitted from such knowledge.

India's attitude towards China today should not be very different from the view that Mahatma Gandhi famously expressed of the kind of relationship that he sought with Britain and its people in the midst of the national movement for Independence. When asked by a Briton in that period "How far would you cut India off from the Empire?", Gandhiji replied: "From the Empire, completely; from the British nation, not at all, if I want India to gain and not to grieve. The British Empire must go and I should love to be an equal partner with Britain, sharing her joys and sorrows. But it must be a partnership on equal terms."

Whatever the differences between the two countries, and there are many, there ought to be both a better understanding of each other within both societies and increased people-to-people interaction.

Even as India rejects China's hegemonic ambitions, as it did the hegemony of the West, and disapproves of its authoritarian political system, Indians must acquire a better understanding and appreciation of Chinese society, culture and its knowledge-creating institutions. China is not merely an authoritarian, militarised Communist regime, which it is, but it is also a highly creative and productive knowledge-based society and economy. China has risen on the foundations of its human capabilities. Indians ought to have a better appreciation of that.

The Xi Jinping regime is itself to blame for the acute focus in Indian public discourse on China's negative attributes. However, it is in India's interest to balance that with a better understanding of life in China. The Chinese too should realise that Indians are a proud people with their own memory of their civilisational inheritance and can be nobody's cat's paw.

The history of Indian nationalism is in many ways greater than the history of Chinese nationalism. Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress did not fight for India's liberation alone. They fought for the liberation of all colonised people and against imperialism and colonialism in all its manifestations. Whatever strategic and foreign policy compromises India might make in the short run cannot be a deviation from its "tryst with destiny".

In July 1971, when then US national security adviser Henry Kissinger met Chairman Mao Zedong in Beijing and proposed a US-China condominium against the Soviet Union, China did not give up its civilisational inheritance of being an independent-minded nation. It walked a path that gave it the strategic space for its own rise. India too seeks that space for its own development. Over the past 50 years the people-to-people contact between the United States and China has been intense and extensive. It has created the foundation for a durable relationship even when the two seek today greater strategic space for themselves.

It is in the interests of both China and India that there is similar engagement between their people, even as the two states jostle with each other for strategic space within Asia and the world. People-to-people relationships must stand on their own footing and not always be subject to state-to-state relations. ❑❑

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https://asianage.com/opinion/columnists/110721/sanjaya-baru-india-china-bhai-bhai-to-buy-buy-to-bye-bye.html

Needed public investment in new technologies

China has recently successfully landed its spacecraft on Mars, created temperatures equal to that of the sun in their laboratories, and produced its own fighter jets instead of buying them from Rafael or other manufacturers. These achievements have been made possible because the Chinese government has made huge investments in the creation of new technologies. Needless to say we are lagging behind. Our situation has become more desperate in this period of Covid. Our government is not even able to manage its current expenditures and it is having to borrow huge amounts to maintain the them. Although the Finance Minister has increased the capital expenditures by 35% to Rs 5.5 lakh crore in this financial year 2021-22. However, this amount is very small compared to the needs of investment in technologies. We need to invest heavily if we wish to keep up with the march of technologies at the global level.

The present value of market capitalization of all the public sector undertakings is about Rs 20 lakh crores. This is about 4 times the total annual capital expenditures of the Union Government at Rs 5.5 lakh crore. The government can raise about 4 times more money for these investments if the existing public sector undertakings are privatized.

Certain Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) are will continue to be necessary. For example, the State Bank of India manages the clearing houses in every district of the country. The Central Board of Secondary Education undertakes regulation of schools across the country. Such PSUs are providing "public goods" that are necessarily to be provided by the Government. The regulation of schools cannot be left to the whims and fancies of the private sector. However, other PSUs are no longer essential. For example, banks other than the State Bank of India can be easily privatized without any loss to the economy. Private banks are able to provide the banking services provided by these Public Sector Banks. The possible profiteering and overcharging by private banks can be managed by stricter

If India has to be self-sufficient in many aspects of defence, science and technology then govt. has to make huge investments in new technologies just like the Chinese Govt.

Dr. Bharat Jhunjhunwala

regulation by the Reserve Bank of India. The privatization of these Public Sector Banks will only heat up the competition among the banks and make them more efficient and force them to reduce the price of the services provided by them. Similarly, there is no need for the government to run Air India since other airline companies like Indigo and Spice Jet are able to provide domestic aviation service. Likewise oil companies like Indian oil can also be privatized since private oil companies like Reliance are able to provide the services. The basic point is that there remains no case for the government to undertake these activities in areas where private sector can is competent to provide the required services. Thus I reckon that out of the market capitalization of 20 lakh crores of all the PSUs in the country about 1/4th or PSUs having market capitalization of Rs 5 lakh crores may be retained to provide essential services like managing clearing houses and regulation of schools. The remaining PSUs having market capitalization of Rs 15 lakh crores can be privatized. This amount would be about three times the present capital expenditures of the Union Government. This money can be utilized to invest in the creation technologies so that we can compete with the global powers. We should not forget that the Patriot Missiles of United states were able to destroy Saddam Hussein's army in a few days because they were technologically more advanced. Therefore, investment in technology will be absolutely essential if we have to protect the sovereignty of our country and also strengthen our economy. We should not forget that multinational corporations are remitting huge amounts as royalty payments because they are giving licenses of their patented technologies to Indian manufacturers. Fifty percent of the price of Covid-19 vaccine is being paid to Astra Zeneca and other companies. We would not have had to pay this amount if we had invested in the creation of the Covid-19 vaccines.

The following areas desperately require more investment by the Government of India. First, Artificial Intelligence. Today IBM has a project named Watson which is helping doctors to process the various information about a patient and suggest the future course of treatment. The Artificial Intelligence programmes process the huge of the information about a patient and provide the doctor with a number of alternative course of treatments. The doctor's work is reduced to taking the final call on the alternative treatments suggested by Artificial Intelligence. Thus, we must invest in Artificial Intelligence.

Secondly, investment is required in the Internet of Things (IOT). The security of offices, for example, can be better managed by computers. The computer can process the information about a possible theft and automatically direct the doors to be closed and send message to the police.

Third, the genetic modification is being done across the world. We have seen the possible negative impact of such experiments in the possible creation of the Covid-19 virus in China. But the same genetic technologies can also be used to create more beneficial technologies like improving yields of our crops and making them more resistant to diseases and heat; or genetically modifying potatoes to produce vitamins.

Fourth, we need to invest in promoting our conventional medical systems like Ayurveda, Unani and Homeopathy because Allopathy has its limits. Allopathy it is creating bacterial infections that are resistant to anti-biotics and that are increasing by the day. There is a need for the Government to promote research in alternate medical systems across the globe including, for example, African Tribal Medicines.

Fifth, Virgin Galactic is planning to launch a commercial spacecraft. Indian Space Research Organization has successfully launched a number of satellites of other countries on commercial basis. There is a need to establish a separate PSU to launch commercial space ships and land spaceships on moon and mars. There are a large number of other areas where such investment in new technologies is needed. The government should therefore privatize the non-essential public sector undertakings like banks, airlines and oil companies and use this huge money to invest in new technologies that will increase our technological prowess and help us protect our sovereignty.

A possible counterargument may be that the Government should not renege form its responsibility of welfare of present employees of the PSUs. In think this argument is upside down. By privatizing existing PSUs the employees of the present PSUs remain employed with the buyer of the PSUs. *In addition* new employment will be created in the new PSUs. Thus privatization will create employment, no reduce it. ❑❑

Afghan conflicts hit India with fears of security, high prices

The new session of Parliament may have more to decide than the set agenda of 30 bills as the Afghan situation is turning murkier with a hasty US withdrawal. The house may have to chart out time to discuss the developing situation that sees Taliban, Pakistan and gradually China growing their influence and mostly at the cost of India. The stability of the present Afghan regime is critical for New Delhi not only to save its Afghan investments as also it might hit the supposed better GDP growth at 7 plus percentage. The situation is becoming complex as apart from extra budgetary burden on the covid19 health issues, depressing activities, and high inflation, India's security related expenses may surge to check the fall-out of increased violence in the western part of the subcontinent.

India and Afghanistan share deepened economic and trade links despite uncertainties about achieving a political settlement to the lingering conflict. India has invested over $3 billion in reconstruction and relief work since 2001 when the US-led troops drove the Taliban out of Kabul. Delhi still firmly supports President Ashraf Ghani's government. Four months back in March, during a three-day visit to New Delhi, Afghan foreign minister Haneef Atmar desired that the two countries deepen economic and trade links.

But the recent flash battles with Taliban, tactically supported by Pakistan army, and capture of many strategic areas; are making it difficult. The recent statement of Pak army spokesman Maj Gen Baba Iftikhar, "Pakistan is a facilitator of the peace process but not a guarantor" speaks volumes of Pakistan's complicity. Islamabad had always been against India's humanitarian and developmental work that made India immensely popular in Afghanistan. The recent killing of an Indian photo journalist Danish Siddiqui, embedded with Afghan army reveals the weakening of control by Ashraf Ghani regime.

India has last week withdrew its diplomatic personnel from Kandahar consulate general and closed down consul offices in Herat and Jalalabad amid grow-

The stability of the present Afghan regime is critical for New Delhi not only to save its Afghan investments as also it might hit the supposed better GDP growth at 7 plus percentage.
Shivaji Sarkar

ing threats to Indian employees in these regions not far from Pak border and operational areas of Taliban. The strategy is to weaken the Afghan hold, strengthen Taliban so that it could have renewed vigour at the negotiating table for power sharing. Afghanistan remained a key issue at foreign ministers' discussion at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meet on July 14 in Tajikistan. Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar participated with the foreign ministers of China, Russia, Pakistan and West Asian countries. The SCO joint statement merely stated that international terrorist organisations are destabilizing the country and peace be restored with talks between Taliban and Afghan government.

It does not give any succour to India. The wishy-washy deals of SCO will not solve the issue. As it appears India is on the back foot. The Taliban's historic linkages with Lahkar-e-Taiba and jaish-e-Mohammed are the sore points. Taliban will always stand by these organisations and shelter them even if it gives an assurance to India. This virtually pushes India to the brink of direct or indirect conflicts and increases its security paraphernalia and expenses.

The issue of Iran virtually reneging on Chabahar port and access to central Asia, Taliban has already created problems. India's $ 3 billion investments are virtually at stake. It is likely to impact its external trade as well. The additional burden on India is not easy to fathom but would be substantial.

The Afghan failure of the US is reflecting also on dollar. This is adding to global inflation and it would create further troubles for India. The inflation has virtually crossed the newly-set up tolerance level of RBI at 6 percent up from 5 percent. During the last one year CPI has been rising continuously. The government has announced for its staff 11 percent rise in DA and it may add another 3 percent to adjust to the rising inflation.

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The wholesale price index is also galloping and has reached 12.94 percent as per May figures due to rise in commodity prices in the international market. The sharper rise means the consumer prices would further firm up. The government expenses would go beyond the revised estimates of 7 percent. This would constrain the government on one hand and the other would cause market prices to zoom.

The National Statistical Organisation figures say food, fruit, edible oil prices and daily rise of petrol prices are impacting consumption. (A SBI report on its card uses reveal that high petrol and commodity prices have led people to cut expenses on other items to pay for fuel). In the rural areas, the share of bulk or high value purchases fell 22 percent and low value by 10 percent. People are opting for less than Rs 10 purchases, a sign of severe cash and income crunch. Even for FMCG electronics and apparel, buyers are settling for lower priced products. Overall share of high value products drops- packaged goods by minus 21.6 percent; home care and personal care by minus 2.7 percent, and TV sales fall by 4 percent since end December, 2020.

The lockdown has impacted IIP, which grew at 29.3 percent against a drop of 57.3 percent a year back. It is a positive indicator but not exactly a booster for the economy. The poorer sales and production also mean that the industry would take time to recruit people and employment scenario might take time to brighten up.

International commodity prices are expected to harden, says Bloomberg, because of the volatile Afghan situation. Despite the U.S. having spent an estimated $900 billion on the Afghan conflict, the Taliban are at their strongest controlling more than half the country. The Afghan military, which receives training and advice from the U.S. and its allies, has been hampered by insufficient air power and heavy combat losses and desertions.

India may not have direct involvement in the conflict but it is expected to pay a heavy price for it even in the domestic market. A HSBC Capital Market study warns that upside risks to inflation could re-emerge in the second half of the fiscal as conflict deepens. Corporate are likely to pass on higher prices to consumers and there would be demand side pressure further hardening the prices.

The recovery remains dicey and more so as the Afghan situations gets murkier. The country would have to gird up its loin. ❑❑

Designing Proxy- Businesses on Proxy E-commerce

The big technology-based companies have emerged as controllers of business using e-commerce driven conveniences. The unique selling point of these companies is that the customers are getting advantages and hence their work is holy cow. Their businesses should be worshipped as they have made available many choices and complete transparency to the consumers, whether it be in product purchase or services purchase. They create an impression that the customers are happy and so the policymakers should support them in their endeavors. End of the day it's customers who should be happy and they claim that they practice the philosophy that the Customer is the King. In a globalized world, one entity is a customer to another in one sector and the role reverses in other sectors.

In the global village, it's not about the domestic company or foreign company. It's about the net new job created, net new taxes generated, and the net new growth contributed. It's not about making the unorganized sector organized blindly. The new organized sector which provides the convenience of doing business to the customer by sitting in the living room on their home but kills the independence of service providers is unacceptable. On one hand, the customers are at ease but on the other hand, the whole supply chain including the people involved in the logistics is stressed. A consumer of one product is a supplier of the other product. For example, a person who is a logistics supplier for restaurant food is a consumer when the same person books a taxi. It's the whole business fabric and the social balance which is getting distorted. This is a massive misuse of technology without considering the constraints of social basics. Such business drivers need to be given due diligence.

The policymakers should come up with laws that make such crimes a criminal offense. The promoters who initially had a business should not be in hurry to reach the top in the shortest time by practicing unacceptable business behavior.
Alok Singh

The customer is the most important chain in a business deal. Since these companies provide the convenience of use to the customers and so, it's obvious that such companies will drive the business. It forces unwilling suppliers to partner with such companies. Once they are in their loop the technology companies

start eating the thin margin of small service providers, for example, small hotel owners in case of online platforms for hotel booking, and small taxi owners in case of an online platform for taxi booking. They claim to be a common platform but don't behave like that. Such a business model kills the private label of the small players. The customers perceive themselves to be primarily the client of the proxy platform provider and not the customer of the manufacturer or service provider. The local suppliers are on the verge of collapse. These practices are anti-competition. The competition commission of India (CCI) is looking into such matters. The tools available with CCI seem to be ineffective. They need to be equipped with laws that have sharp teeth. These business models offer no risk to proxy platform providers. They generate business, they impulse consumers to the chosen vendors and the chosen service providers of their choice and don't own the responsibility of employer-employee-related laws. They even practice socially unacceptable advertisement behavior.

It means that these big companies aspire to control the sector, whether it is the vegetable purchase, mobile phone purchase, apparels purchase, food purchase, hotel room purchase, or any other product or service. Each of them initially passes the advantage to the end-user customer and makes the other suppliers in the chain dependent on them. These companies have literally forced the whole system to collapse. They have manipulated their accounting, their sales, their profit, their financing, their tax to the government, their business origin and are facing rage worldwide.

The customers perceive themselves to be primarily the client of the proxy platform provider and not the customer of the manufacturer or service provider. The local suppliers are on the verge of collapse. These practices are anti-competition.

These companies publicly admit that their businesses are at a huge loss and so they don't qualify to pay corporate taxes to the government. But surprisingly year after year despite incurring huge losses their valuation keeps increasing and they are able to attract a huge amount of foreign money in their companies. They create a web that hinders tax collections of all the nations of the world.

These companies don't realize that moment the regulators catch them they will be defenseless. Even the team of the best breed of lawyers won't be able to defend them. They will have to run away from the country. They will move from one court to the other for bail and if they are unlucky they will land in jail, their reputation of success will be ruined, their assets will be ceased and the repercussions will be huge to the stakeholders. The earlier the collateral damage happens better it is for everyone.

The policymakers should make accountable not only the promoters of such businesses but those who are on the payroll of such companies should also be made liable. Few of such proxy platform companies had successfully listed themselves in the stock market and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) couldn't stop them from doing so. The existing laws are hopeless. The ill-informed investors are at huge risk.

The policymakers should come up with laws that make such crimes a criminal offense. The promoters who initially had a business should not be in hurry to reach the top in the shortest time by practicing unacceptable business behavior. The corporate governance laws won't spare them for their misdeeds in the long run. The domain expert top-level employees of such companies who participate in the strategic decision-making process should not be discounted as far as a partner in crime is concerned. Most of the best brains working for such companies got trained themselves in institutes of national importance at a much-subsidized rate on taxpayer's money and are now on the payroll of proxy platform companies should also not be spared. The best lawyers, the best finance expert, the best accounting experts, the best operations expert, the best human resources people, and the entire best mind that are willing to rent their expertise for generating income for them to have a lavish lifestyle at the cost of small and marginal business owners are criminals of the nation. Such people can do any harm to society. The laws need a look into it. The government can come up with its own platform which is fair to small and marginal business providers as well as transparent to the consumers. ❑❑

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New agricultural paradigm

State sponsored propaganda about "miraculous yields" extended the phenomenon across the country ruining soil fertility and the nutritions value of food crops; the impact on public health was noticed by the medical community, but all voices were silenced.
Sandhya Jain

The over-hyped green revolution of the late 1960s introduced varieties of dwarf rice and wheat in northern India, with a cocktail of chemical fertilisers and pesticides that sucked up ground water and gradually made it unfit for drinking as the chemicals leached into the soil and water. State-sponsored propaganda about "miraculous yields" extended the phenomenon across the country, ruining soil fertility and the nutritious value of food crops; the impact on public health was noticed by the medical community, but all voices were silenced. Today, Gurdaspur-to-Delhi trains are called "cancer express", yet there has been no medical study of the harm caused by chemical agriculture to the health of humans, animals, soil, and water resources.

Now, four momentous laws could pave the way for a revolution in which farmers drive the change, with technology playing a supportive role. If government repudiates the genetically-modified food crops lobby, India could return to farming methods that do not require costly inputs and force farmers into a vicious cycle of debt (and even suicide).

On September 16, 2020, one day before the three agriculture-related bills were moved in Parliament, the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2020 was passed, bringing all cooperative banks under the purview of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It means stricter supervision of 1,482 urban and 58 multi-state cooperative banks, with deposits of Rs. 4.84 lakh crore.

The legislation undermines the strongmen who control the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs), mandis, loans, etc. in many States. It is noteworthy that large farmers are resisting the new laws; earlier they opposed MGNREGA as they had to match wages or lose farm labour. The ongoing COVID epidemic has also improved the bargaining power of farm labour, and added to the bitterness of large farmers. Often, agents arranged debt for farmers from private moneylenders, who charged usurious interest and enjoyed political heft; such debt has been linked to farmer suicides in some States.

Simultaneously, the Union cabinet approved Rs 15,000-crore fund for animal husbandry as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package, and a scheme for interest subvention of two per cent to 'shishu' loan category borrowers for one year under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. These developments form the sub-text to the Farm Bills.

The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020 allows sale and marketing of produce outside notified APMC mandis. State governments cannot collect market fee, cess or levy for trade outside the APMC markets; inter-state trade barriers are nixed and provisions made for electronic trading of agricultural produce. No license is needed; anyone with a PAN card can buy directly from farmers. The new system provides a dispute resolution mechanism in case farmers are not paid immediately, or within three days.

The APMCs failed as they allowed vested interests to seize the system. States levied cess to earn extra revenue that was not part of the budget and was used for 'discretionary' development spending, mostly under the chief minister's orders. As the cess increased, political appointees took charge of the APMCs. Even FCI paid cess. Small farmers were burdened with the cost of transport to take their produce to the mandis, and deal with middlemen. For instance, waiting outside sugar mills, with heat evaporating the sugar content in the cane, desperate farmers have succumbed to agents (of nearby mandis) who arrive miraculously and dictate the price.

Under the new Act, politicians and urban elite farmers will find it difficult to get large "agricultural" incomes mandi-certified, and pay zero per cent income tax, as payments have to be made against PAN cards.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 regulates contractual farming rules and state APMC Acts. Farmers can make contracts with a corporate entity or wholesaler at a mutually agreed price. The system already exists in 20 States; PepsiCo buys potatoes from 24,000 farmers across nine States. Further, 18 States already permit private mandis, while Kerala and Bihar don't have APMC mandis at all. More pertinently, the Act prohibits acquiring ownership rights of farmers' land.

The Centre has funded ¹ 6,685-crore for formation of 10,000 farmer producer organisations (FPOs) and ¹ 1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF). The FPO will give farmers higher bargaining power, while AIF and market reforms serve as additional enablers. They can invest in farm equipment, infrastructure and build forward market linkages by making agreements with agribusinesses, thus improving access to technology and investment. Maharashtra's Sahyadri Farmers Producer Co. Ltd., with 8,000 marginal farmers, exports 16,000 tonnes of grapes every season.

The end of socialist-era impediments should stimulate increased private sector investment across the value chain, creating jobs in logistics service providers, warehouse operators and processing unit staff. The rise of food-processing industries could create non-farm jobs in rural areas. India processes less than 10 per cent of output (cereals, fruits, vegetables, fish, etc.) and loses around Rs 90,000 crore annually to wastage. Hopefully, market linkages will motivate farmers to diversify and grow crops such as edible oils, and help reduce India's edible oil import bill that currently stands at over $10 billion.

Finally, The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 removes excessive controls on production, storage, movement and distribution of food commodities; removes cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities, and paves the way for cold chain infrastructure to come up. Previously, controls regarding storage of essential commodities (onions, potatoes, edible oils, jute, rice paddy, sugar) gave draconian powers to authorities to raid "hoarders", confiscate stocks, cancel licensing and even imprison offenders. This naturally discouraged investment in storage as entrepreneurs feared being prosecuted as "hoarders". Lack of storage also contributed to volatility in prices as price stability depends on adequate storage.

Henceforth, The ECA 2020 will be invoked only under extraordinary circumstances such as war, famine, natural calamity of grave nature and extraordinary price rise (100 percent increase in retail price of horticultural produce over the preceding 12 months, or 50 percent increase in retail price of non-perishables over the preceding five years).

Dismissing the propaganda that the new laws would end the minimum support price (MSP), the Centre has quietly ordered procurement, effectively nipping the canard that small and marginal farmers would be shortchanged. It remains to be seen how long the critics can sustain the mobilisation on the streets. ❑❑

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http://swatantramag.com/new-agricultural-paradigm/

Reconstructing Identity and Situating Themselves in History:

A Preliminary Note on the Meenas of Jaipur Locality-VIII

Contradictions in the Meena's 'Brahmanical' origin can be seen here. This theory clearly indicates their tribal origin and matrilineal traditions as Muniji mentions that clans were named after mothers and the Meenas were named after their mothers, Meena and Maina." However, the tribal origins are quickly Sanskritized'. Skanda Purana is quoted to mention that Shiva, the God of Kailash, was the lord of the Kshatriya Meenas. The other major PurâGas like Shiva Purana offers yet another mythological origin of the Mainas.

In unifying the community, Muniji quoted Abhidhana Cintamani Koœa, Sabdastoma Mahânidhi%, Siddhanta Kaumudi and other historical traditions to mention the conversion of a few Meenas into Islam who were then known as Meos. Hence, the Meena leadership attempted to unify their community across religious divisions. The Meos who had emerged as a powerful gentry in some parts of eastern Rajasthan interestingly trace their lineage to various Rajput clans: Tomar Rajputs of Delhi, Mathura's Jadus, Jaipur's Kachwahas and Ajmer's Chauhans. Meena PurâGa Bhumika combines 'Sanskritic' traditions of the origin of the Meenas with popular traditions. Bardic chronicles are also quoted by Muniji in which the origin of the Meenas is traced to the Meena avatar of Vishnu: Kshatriva Vishnu). The first Meena king reigned in Satya Yuga and his descendants have been reigning since then. Very interestingly, bardic traditions mention the 36 clans of Rajputs as 'ancient and Adi Sanatan Arya, and the Rajakula Meenas (royal Meenas) as Adivasi Meena-kula (indigenous Meenas or pure Meenas who did not have mixed marriages) having 12 pals, 32 tadas and 5,200 gotras. Some of the leading seers of the twentieth century such as Baba Kali Kamblivale Svami Visuddhanandaji of Haridwar, Mahatma Abhilasa Das ji of Ayodhya and Mahatma Agradasji of Galta are quoted to prove that 'Meena' was an avatâra of Vishnu. Thus, Muniji sought legitimation from a long lineage of seers in claiming a 'Sanskritized' image for the Meenas.

Muniji 'sanskritized' the Meena elite of the bardic traditions. He gave them a respectable past to claim a prestigious present.

Prof. Nandini Sinha Kapur

Muniji devotes an entire chapter in the Meena Purana Bhûmika to the birth of Vishnu Matsya. The chapter titled Matsyavatâraaur Arya DevakulakaItihasa begins with the Puranic account of the mahapralaya (deluge) and Vishnu taking the form of Matsya, a general discussion on the ten avatâras of Vishnu: Matsya, Kachchhapa, Varaha, Nrsimha, Vâmana, Parasurama, Râma, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. Although Muniji quotes the Puranic story of the origin of Matsyaavatâra as given in the Matsya Purana (birth of Vishnu with the upper half of a human body and a lower half of a fish), Muniji denied fish status to this avatara and claimed it was actually a Mahapuruca (a sage), who assisted Manu during the Mahapralaya. And, Muniji declared that the Meenas originated from this Matsya god. However, he laments that subsequently to the birth of the Matsyaavatâra, the community got divided, lost solidarity and the Meena empire' broke into small parts. And then he repeats the traditional divisions of the Meenas into 12 pals, 32 tadas and 5,200 gotras and claims that these divisions originated from the break up of the ancient Meena empire'. Perhaps, the most important point here is the appeal by the Meena leadership for 'unity and solidarity indicative of the typical tribal characteristic of closing intra-tribal divisions. On the other hand, the search for respectability within the great tradition' continued with the claim for Rajput status.

In the subsequent chapters, Muniji constructs a historical account of the royal' houses of the Meenas. Both the imperial Mauryas of Magadh and the later Mauryan dynasty of Mandsaur and Chittor (Chittorgarh locality in district Chittorgarh) are claimed as branches and sub-branches of the Meenas. Raja Mauryadhvaja is upheld as the ancestor of the imperial Mauryan kings, Chandragupta, Bindusara and Asoka and is said to belong to a sub-branch of the Meena Kshatriyas." MahârâjaMânaMaur of the eighth century who reigned at Chittor belonged to the clan of the Maurade (a sub-clan of the Meenas) Meenas. Hence, ancient Indian history and prestigious dynasties are being appropriated to reconstruct a 'respectable' past and present.

In the subsequent chapters, Muniji constructs a historical account of the royal' houses of the Meenas. Both the imperial Mauryas of Magadh and the later Mauryan dynasty of Mandsaur and Chittor (Chittorgarh locality in district Chittorgarh) are claimed as branches and sub-branches of the Meenas.

Muniji 'Sanskritized' the Meena chiefs of the bardic traditions into the 'Candravamœiya' (Rajput) Meena kings of Jaipur of the pre-Rajput (pre-Kachwaha) era. A dynastic and genealogical list of the Candravamœiya Meena kings of Jaipur is provided in Appendix at the end of the book. Maharaja Alansimha was the last of the Meena kings of Jaipur in the pre-Kachwaha period who had his capital at Khohgong. Tod's story of Dhola Rae, the founder of the Kachwaha dynasty brought up by the Meena chief of Khohgong is incorporated into the history of the Meena king of Jaipur, Maharaja Alansimha. Kachwaha prince Dhola Rae was brought up by the Meena king of Jaipur. More importantly, he is stated to have married a Meena princess, daughter of Mauryaking Muraria of Maura kingdom. Thus, for the first time the Meena elite claimed direct social links with the Kachwaha dynasty of Jaipur Subsequently, Dhola Rae in alliance with the Tomar Rajputs of Delhi hatched a conspiracy, exterminated the Meena king and appropriated the Meena kingdom of Jaipur.

The alliance with the Mughals (Tod's story) was dropped and Kachwaha alliance with the Rajputs was highlighted, indicating inter-Rajput network of political and military alliances. Muniji introduced a new element into this popular tradition.A Bhat (a genealogist), named Barhat turned disloyal towards his Meena master and instigated Dhola Rae to appropriate the Meena kingdom of Jaipur by treacherously killing his benefactor. This perhaps points towards Meena rivalry and contestation with the Bhats and Charans who legitimized Rajput power in the medieval period. Bhats and Charans had refused recognition to the Meenas in the royal traditions of Jaipur state. Appropriation/annexation of the capital city of the Meenas, Khohgong and Dhundhar by the Kachwaha prince Dhola Rae is dated to AD 1128.) ❑❑

The Chairperson and Members,
The Standing Committee on Agriculture,
Parliament of India.

Subject: Memorandum of Swadeshi Jagran Manch about Pesticide Management Bill 2020.

Dear Sir/Madams

Swadeshi Jagran Manch is a Socio political platform representing people from various walks of life, working towards promoting indigenisation with a vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat with a balanced approach towards environment, indigenisation, decentralisation and employment.

On the outset, Swadeshi Jagran Manch wishes to express its commitment towards natural agriculture free from chemicals, to safeguard the interests of the people. However, It's highly unfortunate that the Insecticide Act 1968, was not capable to provide enough safeguards against hazardous impacts of these chemicals. Regulation of pesticides in India has been generally unscientific and lackadaisical, which is evident from the large scale deaths and hospitalisations of farm workers and farmers due to acute poisoning, the residues of banned and restricted pesticides showing up in food and environmental samples, export consignments getting rejected on numerous occasions due to pesticide residues, accidental deaths like those of children in Chhapra in Bihar due to pesticide poisoning, spurious/misbranded chemical pesticides being passed off as bio-pesticides, bird/wildlife deaths due to poisonings, fish-kill in water bodies, contaminated environmental resources etc. NCRB data says that in 2019, 31,026 people died in India by insecticides (suicides and accidental intake). If we add chronic exposure impacts of pesticides to this, these numbers would be in millions. India is still continuing with many pesticides which have been banned or severely restricted by many other countries for their hazardous impacts. Though, in modern times, thanks to emerging agro-ecological science's approach to pest management, our existing regulatory regime has not evolved with the same and still lays too much emphasis on 'killing pests' rather than 'managing pests' through numerous highly successful non-chemical practices. On the outset Swadeshi Jagran Manch acknowledges that the present 'Pesticide Management Bill (PMB) 2020' is an improved one, as compared to earlier versions of the Bill. We note with pleasure that the present Bill has extended its scope to include advertising, packaging, pricing, labelling, disposal also in its scope. It states that it may constitute an authority to exercise powers for price fixation and perform functions to regulate the price of pesticides. It also states that registration of pesticide shall also be guided by factors including safety, efficacy, necessity, end-use of the pesticides, risk involved. It also states that Registration Committee may conduct an independent enquiry to verify the information submitted by the applicant.

However, after a perusal of PMB 2020, SJM wishes to point out to the following shortcomings and gaps, which are needed to be taken note of and necessary changes are required to be made to achieve national objectives of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and safety from hazardous impacts of pesticides:

Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission:

1. Country at present is hugely dependent on the imports of pesticides, despite the fact that country has huge potentials with respect to manufacturing of pesticides. Moreover, due to faulty rules favouring imports, import of pesticides were encouraged against the interests of domestic manufacturing. Unfortunately, present draft doesn't include sufficient provisions to safeguard domestic manufacturing. On the contrary, there still exist many provisions, which promote importers' and foreign interests. SJM suggests following inclusion in Section 18 of the draft PMB 2020:

"Registration committee has the rights to refuse the registration for import of ready-made pesticides if (a) that pesticide is already registered and being manufactured in India. (b) If Committee is satisfied that alternatives are available in the country. This would promote domestic manufacturing, and save the economy from import dependence."

2. Through amendment in rules, Central Insecticides Board (CIB) and Registration committee (RC) waived off an important safety provision in 2007. Earlier, Registration of "technical grade" and monitoring of Chemical Composition of this technical grade post registration was an integral part of Insecticide Act 1968 to ensure farmer's safety. Waiving off of this important safety provision for importers, farmers security and environment safety were impacted as well as, domestic manufacturing. There is a need to correct this lapse in the old Act and inclusion of the following provisions in Section 18 of Draft PMB 2020. The Registration Committee shall not

register a pesticide if (a) the "Technical Grade" of the pesticide is not registered in India; (b) it is satisfied that the pesticide does not meet the claims of safety or efficacy submitted by the applicant; (c) where applicable maximum residue limits of the pesticides on crops and commodities have not been specified under the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006. Inclusion of these provisions in the bill would enable regulators to withdraw the "Technical Grade" samples for monitoring the expiry and associated impurities. This would also ensure farmers' and consumers' security, environment and soil preservation as per the Indian standards.

3. There is a clause in Section 22(1) in the draft PMB 2020, which gives unwarranted advantage to MNCs, who generally happen to be the first registrants. This Section 22(1) needs to be deleted. There is no need to empower "First Registrant" to manipulate the registration of "Subsequent Registrants" in India.

4. Assembly and repackaging should not be equivalent to manufacturing as most of the importers are selling the imported pesticides in different brands without value addition and threatens the survival of the domestic manufacturers.

5. To regulate imports of pesticides, provision for imposition of non-tariff barriers should be made to safeguard the life of plants, animals and human being by way of legal provisions on the lines of WTO restrictions, for Sanitary and Phyto sanitary (SPS) measures and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).

6. To safeguard the interests of domestic manufacturers, strict provisions be made in the PMB 2020, not to allow data exclusivity to the innovator company. This would make it possible for Indian manufacturers to produce these chemicals in India, after the expiry of patent.

7. Bio-pesticides and organic/natural pesticides had been the speciality of Indian agriculture and have huge potential in modern agriculture. The proposed Act does not provide adequate recognition, legitimacy, level playing field and registration processes to these novel products. SJM firmly advocate and propose to include special framework for these safer alternatives to provide poison free food to country's populace.

Environmental Safety, Farmers' Heath and Soil Preservation

1. Processes of review of pesticides after registration have not been streamlined. There are other countries which review every registered pesticide periodically five years after registration, to assess the safety of the pesticide based on latest scientific evidence. Further, such a review requires an independent mechanism separate from the body that does the registration in the first instance. In the new Pesticides Management Bill 2020, registration and review are proposed to be done by the same body (Registration Committee) – the body which has registered them will not be best placed to review those pesticides itself. A separate Review Committee consisting of bio safety experts must be constituted to review pesticides, to avoid any bias.

2. A multi-ministerial, broad based body with representatives from state governments, farmers etc., in the form of Pesticide Management Board is being proposed in the new Bill, to replace the Central Insecticides Board in the extant legislation. However, it is being envisaged only as an advisory body with all regulatory authority actually vested in the Registration Committee consisting of a few technical persons. The Pesticides Management Board has to become an empowered regulatory body with oversight authority over 'Registration Committee' and the proposed 'Review Committee' as well.

3. The regulation of pesticides should be free from the influence of the pesticide industry and importers lobby to avoid possible conflict of interest. The new Bill's provisions for prevention of conflict of interest are weak and inadequate. The provisions to prevent conflict of interest at all levels amongst all human resources involved in the regulatory regime must be strengthened (Sec. 10).

4. The new Bill misses out on many such key points; for instance, the new Bill does not specifically and mandatorily list factors such as antidote availability, transparent, independent scrutiny of information on need, alternatives and long-term comprehensive bio safety of a pesticide (the legal language used in the Bill makes such testing optional), precautionary approach being adopted based on bans in other countries.

5. Swadeshi Jagran Manch recommends that the proposed Pesticide Management Board should include independent specialists, beekeeping experts, pollinators, zoologists, marine biologist and also foreign trade experts including specialists from Director General Foreign Trade to appreciate the impact of pesticide usage on exports.

Kindly take note of our suggestions and incorporate appropriately in the PMB 2020.

Dr Ashwani Mahajan (National Co-Convenor, SJM)

SJM suggests changes in consumer protection e-commerce rules

The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM) suggested a host of amendments to the proposed consumer protection e-commerce rules and said the government must also make provisions for the protection of the traders and service providers associated with e-commerce giants. In its suggestions to the Department of Consumer Affairs, the SJM said there is a general impression that the rules are applicable to all the parties involved in e-commerce, "which is not true", as the Consumer Protection Act does not apply to the traders and service providers.

"It is, therefore, suggested that this aspect must be clarified by way of clarification by the (consumer affairs) ministry, and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) must make suitable rules for the protection of traders and service providers who avail services through e-commerce for commercial purposes," the outfit said.

The SJM said there are many traders and service providers, which are not getting any protection under the law, due to the "inadequate or non-existent" e-commerce laws.

"Small traders on Amazon, Flipkart-Walmart; drivers on Uber, Ola etc.; small restaurants involved in Zomato etc.; hairdressers, carpenters, electricians and others on Urban Clap etc.; and many other workers are subject to severe hardships by these e-commerce giants, having no protection at all against exploitation," it said.

The SJM termed the provision for compulsory registration of e-commerce entities under the proposed rules as "a welcome step", saying it will go a long way to regulate the e-commerce giants "for any wrongdoings by them".

"However, it is suggested, to avoid any hardship to e-commerce entities with a very small consumer base in India, a threshold may be prescribed for compulsory registration," it said.

This would save the small e-commerce players from "avoidable compliances", it said and suggested that the definition of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) "may be adopted" to define small e-commerce players in the proposed rules.

The SJM also sought changes in the wordings of the rules for the registration of e-companies to bring under its ambit even those e-commerce entities that do not set up offices in India but still have "lots of revenue" being generated from the consumers located in the country.

"The DPIIT must also create a monitoring mechanism to identify the defaulter e-commerce entities and must also have an adjudication mechanism for penalising such defaulters," it said.

The SJM suggested that the rules should provide for capacity building for inspection and enforcement of e-commerce transactions, unfair trade practices, manipulation of prices, search algorithm and other technical aspects of digital transactions with a consumer protection perspective.

"E-courts may be established for the consumers' grievances redressal," it said.

The SJM noted that e-commerce companies under the proposed rules are required to appoint those as chief compliance officers, nodal contact persons and resident grievance officers who are residents and citizens of the country.

The SJM suggested that the concept of "officer who is in default" as included in the Companies Act, 2013 be introduced in the e-commerce rules also, "so that the persons in accordance with whose advice, directions or instructions the e-commerce entities act can be brought to books in case of any contravention under the Act and the e-commerce rules".

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/rss-affiliate-suggests-changes-in-consumer-protection-e-commerce-rules/articleshow/84613325.cms

India court quashes Amazon, Walmart'sFlipkart bid to stall antitrust probe

An Indian court on Friday dismissed appeals by Amazon.com Inc (AMZN.O) and Walmart's (WMT.N) Flipkart that sought to stall an antitrust investigation into their business practices, dealing a major setback to the U.S. firms in a key market.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) last year ordered an inquiry after allegations from brick-and-mortar retailers that the U.S. firms promoted select sellers on their e-commerce platforms and used to business practices that stifle competition.

The investigation was on hold for more than a year after companies challenged it, denying wrongdoing and arguing that the CCI lacked evidence, but a court allowed it to continue in June. The High Court in southern Karanataka state rejected the U.S. firms' appeals.

"By no stretch of imagination can inquiry be quashed at this stage. The appeals are nothing but an attempt to ensure that action initiated by the CCI ... does not attain finality," a two-judge bench said while reading the decision in court. "The appeals are devoid of merit, and deserve to be dismissed."

The two firms are likely to appeal the decision at India's Supreme Court, according to people familiar with the case. Amazon did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Flipkart said in a statement it would review the court's order, adding that it remains in compliance with Indian laws.

Abir Roy of Sarvada Legal, which filed the antitrust case against Amazon and Flipkart on behalf of a trader group, said the court's decision "further reinforces that the CCI investigation should continue promptly."

The CCI investigation is the latest setback for Amazon and Flipkart, which are grappling with prospects of tougher e-commerce regulations and accusations from brick-and-mortar retailers that the companies circumvent Indian law by creating complex business structures.

The companies face several allegations in the case, including exclusive launches of mobile phones, promotion of select sellers on their websites and deep discounting practices that drive out competition.

In February, a Reuters investigation based on Amazon documents showed it had given preferential treatment for years to a small group of sellers and used them to bypass Indian law. Amazon has said it does not give preferential treatment to any seller.

Trade minister Piyush Goyal last month lashed out at U.S. e-commerce giants for filing legal challenges and failing to comply with the CCI's investigation, saying "if they have nothing to hide ... why don't they respond to the CCI?"

https://www.reuters.com/technology/india-court-quashes-amazon-flipkart-plea-against-antitrust-probe-2021-07-23/

SJM suggests changes in pesticide management bill

The SJM said it has submitted a memorandum to a parliamentary panel suggesting changes in the pesticide management bill that can help achieve the "national objective" of Atmanirbhar Bharat and safety from hazardous impacts of the pesticides.

The parliamentary standing committee on agriculture is examining the pesticide management bill, 2020. The bill, introduced in Rajya Sabha on March 23 last year to replace The Insecticides Act, 1968, was referred to the parliamentary panel on June 3.

"They have invited objections and suggestions from the stakeholders and general public and are conducting hearings. Swadeshi Jagran Manch has given its memorandum to the committee on the issue," SJM said in a statement.

The bill seeks to regulate the manufacture, import, sale, storage, distribution, use, and disposal of pesticides, to ensure the availability of safe pesticides and minimise the risk to humans, animals, and the environment.

Flagging "shortcomings and gaps" in the bill in its memorandum to the parliamentary panel, the SJM said that the proposed law does not include "sufficient provisions" to safeguard domestic manufacturing.

"On the contrary, there still exist many provisions, which promote the interest of importers and foreign interests," it said, suggesting that the bill should provide the registration committee with "right to refuse" registration for import of ready-made pesticides if they are already registered and manufactured in India. The registration committee should also have the right to refuse the registration for import of ready-made pesticides if the committee is satisfied that alternatives are available in the country, the SJM suggested.

http://www.millenniumpost.in/business/rss-affiliated-body-sjm-suggests-changes-in-pesticide-management-bill-446689

Demands Stricter Rules to Rein in US E-Commerce Giants Like Amazon, Flipkart in India

Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) called upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to amend the newly introduced Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, to further check the growing hegemony of American e-commerce giants in India.

While welcoming the new rules, SJM said that several clauses in the new law still do not address the concerns of small Indian traders, who are already at a disadvantage due to the dominant market positions of e-commerce giants. In his communication to the federal Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Mahajan noted that the definition of "consumer" in the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, doesn't include a person who purchases goods for re-sale or other commercial purposes. The Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 come under Section 94 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

"It is apparent that since provisions of the Act do not apply to traders and service providers, as referred above, the rules framed under the Act would also not be applicable to them, and therefore cannot be expected to provide any protection under these rules, even if they are exploited due to the dominant position of the e-commerce giants", the SJM said.

The economic advocacy outfit further claimed that "small traders" on Amazon and Flipkart, or drivers on ride-sharing apps such as Uber were being subjected to "severe hardships" by the e-commerce giants.

"Obviously, consumer protection laws (in their current form) cannot provide any protection to these vulnerable sections of society", SJM said.

The Indian outfit lamented that the new rules failed to define the concepts of "dominant market position" or "abuse" of position, on the back of allegations in India that big e-commerce companies exploit small suppliers who use their services to distribute goods and services. The group said that e-commerce platforms must also ensure transparency in the way they do business by disclosing the details about their total business and advertising costs, as well as complaints received and redressed every three months.

SJM has also suggested a series of amendments to the new e-commerce rules to guarantee that the rights and privacy of end users of products and services are protected.

The outfit said the new law must mandate "proper two-way communication" between buyers and sellers without compromising the privacy of sellers or customers. It complained that consumers are not provided with "proper information" about the actual supplier of goods, which hinders the process of redressing any grievances arising from transactions.

The Indian group additionally noted that dominant e-commerce players were currently indulging in "unfairly collecting" data about goods being sold by their vendors and sharing these details with their "associates". SJM said that India should penalise this unfair business practice under the new rules.

SJM, further called for the creation of e-courts to swiftly resolve e-commerce-related disputes.

https://sputniknews.com/india/202107211083428523-rss-affiliate-demands-stricter-rules-to-rein-in-us-e-commerce-giants-like-amazon-flipkart-in-india/

China criticises NBC Olympics broadcast for 'incomplete map'

China criticised NBC Universal for showing an "incomplete map" of the country in its broadcast of the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics, after a map displayed during the arrival of Chinese athletes included neither Taiwan nor the South China Sea.

The Chinese consulate in New York said the display "hurt the dignity and emotions of the Chinese people", in a post on its official Weibo social media platform on Saturday.

Comcast-owned NBC, which holds U.S. broadcasting rights to the Olympic Games, did not immediately reply to a request for comment sent through its official contacts page.

The Chinese consulate did not specify why it objected to the map but said: "We urge NBC to recognise the serious nature of this problem and take measures to correct the error." China's state-controlled Global Times newspaper also criticised the Olympics broadcast and the display of the map.

Maps' references to self-ruled Taiwan and the disputed South China Sea have stirred controversy in recent years, with Johns Hopkins University last year reversing a decision to show Taiwan as part of China on a map indicating the spread of the coronavirus.

Two years ago, U.S. retailer Gap Incapologised for selling a T-shirt that it said had an incorrect map of China. A picture posted to social media showed that the T-shirt did not include the island of Taiwan or the South China Sea. ❑❑

https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/china-criticises-nbc-olympics-broadcast-incomplete-map-2021-07-24/

Swadeshi Activities

Plantation for Safe Environment

Pictorial Glimpses

Himmat Nagar, Gujarat

Bhiwani, Haryana

Palwal, Haryana

Himmat Nagar, Gujarat

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Swadeshi Activities

Vichar Varga, Madhya Bharat

(31 July–1 August 2021)

Pictorial Glimpses

Vichar Varga, Chittor

(31 July–1 August 2021)

Vichar Varga, Brij

(31 July–1 August 2021)

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