

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

Date: 01-06-16

देश में रोजगार संकट की क्या हैं वजह?

अभीक बरुआ और तुषार अरोड़ा

बड़े पैमाने पर विनिर्माण को लेकर अत्यंत कम अवसर और कमजोर तकनीकी प्रशिक्षण के चलते देश में बेरोजगारी का संकट गंभीर होता जा रहा है। इस संबंध में बता रहे हैं अभीक बरुआ और तुषार अरोड़ा भारतीय श्रम ब्यूरो द्वारा जारी किए गए रोजगार संबंधी आंकड़ों ने 'रोजगाररहित वृद्धि' की बहस को एक बार फिर जन्म दे दिया है। यह एक ऐसा जुमला है जिसका श्रेय तमाम अर्थशास्त्री लेना चाहते हैं। वस्त्र, चमड़ा, धातु, वाहन, रत्न एवं आभूषण, परिवहन, सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी एवं बीपीओ तथा हैंडलूम, पॉवरलूम जैसे आठ क्षेत्रों पर आधारित आंकड़े बताते हैं कि वर्ष 2014-15 के बीच रोजगार निर्माण में 68 फीसदी की जबरदस्त गिरावट आई है। इस अप्रत्याशित गिरावट को भले ही कुछ लोग प्रादर्श की दिक्कत मानें लेकिन एक क्षण ठहरकर अपेक्षाकृत बड़ी तस्वीर पर नजर डालना बेहतर होगा। अगर आर्थिक वृद्धि का लक्ष्य संगठित क्षेत्र में बेहतर उत्पादकता और वेतन भत्तों वाले रोजगार सृजित करना है तो यकीनन हम दिक्कत में हैं। बीते डेढ़ दशक से हालात कमोबेश ऐसे ही बने हुए हैं लेकिन अब यह देखना श्रेयस्कर होगा कि समस्या का जो हल सन 2000 में उचित प्रतीत होता था, क्या वह अब भी काम का है?

जननांकीय बदलाव के बीच युवाओं के श्रम शक्ति में शामिल होते जाने के बीच बेरोजगारी की स्थिति लगातार बिगड़ती जा रही है। रोजगार के हालिया आंकड़े हासिल कर पाना मुश्किल है और समूची अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए इसके सबसे करीबी उपलब्ध आंकड़े वर्ष 2011-12 के हैं। श्रम ब्यूरो ने जिन आठ क्षेत्रों के अनुमान जताए हैं उनमें विनिर्माण से लेकर सेवा क्षेत्र तक सभी शामिल हैं। सन 2010 में उद्योगों में रोजगार निर्माण 11 लाख के आंकड़े के साथ अपने उच्चतम स्तर पर पहुंचा और उसके बाद इसमें गिरावट आने लगी। देश की श्रम शक्ति में सालाना औसत 1.2 करोड़ लोग शामिल होते हैं।

क्या जीडीपी में विनिर्माण की हिस्सेदारी बढ़ाने का जोरशोर से उछाला गया फॉर्मूला और लचीले श्रम कानून अब कारगर होंगे या उनकी तय मियाद बीत चुकी? कुछ विश्लेषक इसे मोदी सरकार के प्रदर्शन के स्कोर कार्ड के रूप में देखना चाहेंगे। यह दो वजह से अनुचित है। पहला, रोजगार वृद्धि आकलन में हमारा इतिहास बमुश्किल चार दशक पुराना है। इसे प्रभावित करने वाले कई कारक भी हैं। उदाहरण के लिए शिक्षा नीति, श्रम कानून, अधिकतम पैमाने तक जाने वाली नीतियां। इनकी बदौलत रोजगार रहित वृद्धि की समस्या और संस्थागत रूप ग्रहण करेगी। दूसरी बात, चक्रीय कारकों की बात करें तो बीते कुछ सालों में हालत और अधिक खराब होती गई है। बाहरी मांग कमजोर पड़ी है और चीन तथा पश्चिम एशिया जैसे हमारे बड़े बाजारों की हालत खस्ता है।

पुराने ढर्रे की वृद्धि आधारित अर्थव्यवस्था एक प्राकृतिक बदलाव की बात करती है। यानी कृषि से विनिर्माण की ओर और फिर सेवा क्षेत्र की ओर। हमारे नीति निर्माताओं के साथ दिक्कत यह है कि उन्होंने इस प्रक्रिया में विनिर्माण को भुला दिया। उसकी हिस्सेदारी तेजी से कम हुई। ऐसे में दलील यही है कि विनिर्माण को बढ़ावा देना एक तरह का हल साबित हो सकता है।

यहां एक अंतरराष्ट्रीय नजरिया कारगर होगा। भारत प्रीमेच्योर डी-इंडस्ट्रियलाइजेशन (अर्थशास्त्री डानी रोड्रिक के शब्द) में अपनी विशिष्ट स्थिति नहीं रखता। इस स्थिति में सेवा क्षेत्र का विकास तेजी से होता है और इस दौरान विनिर्माण पर पूरा ध्यान नहीं दिया जाता। अरविंद सुब्रमण्यन और अमृत अमरियापू के एक अध्ययन में कहा गया है कि वर्ष 1988 में जहां औद्योगीकरण में 30.5 प्रतिशत श्रम शक्ति का उच्चतम स्तर और प्रति व्यक्ति आय 21,700 डॉलर थी वहीं सन 2010 में यह स्तर घटकर 21 प्रतिशत और 21,200 डॉलर हो गया था। इस अवधि के दौरान भी हिस्सेदारी धीरे-धीरे कम होती गई।

बहरहाल भारत अगर विनिर्माण की हिस्सेदारी बढ़ाने का प्रयास करे तो भी उसके सामने समस्याएं हैं। कल्पना कोचर, रघुराम राजन और उनके सह लेखकों (इंडियाज पैटर्न ऑफ डेवलपमेंट: व्हाट हैपन्ड, व्हाट फॉलोज, 2006) को उद्धृत करें तो देश की तृतीयक शिक्षा और तमाम नीतिगत विसंगतियों ने विनिर्माण के लिए चुनौती उत्पन्न की होगी और उसे कौशल

आधारित उद्योग बना दिया होगा। शिक्षा को कौशल आवश्यकता का मानक मानते हुए हमारा अध्ययन बताता है कि पंजीकृत विनिर्माण मध्य से उच्च वर्ग की सेवाओं के बीच कौशल आधारित ही है। यह देखते हुए कि देश के सामने श्रम शक्ति ज्यादा और कौशल कम है, जीडीपी में विनिर्माण की हिस्सेदारी बढ़ाना बस काम नहीं आने वाला। देश में विनिर्माण में सुधार को उपलब्ध कौशल से जोड़ना होगा। कहा जा सकता है कि मेक इन इंडिया का अर्थ हमारे लिए यह होगा कि हम कम कौशल वाले उत्पाद तैयार करें।

प्रश्न यह है कि क्या व्यापक विनिर्माण के ये अवसर अभी भी मौजूद हैं? गौरतलब है कि चीन 1990 और 2000 के दशक में इनका फायदा उठा चुका है। स्वचालन इसे लेकर एक स्पष्ट चुनौती पेश करता है। अंतरराष्ट्रीय रोबोटिक्स महासंघ के अनुमान के मुताबिक सेवा और विनिर्माण क्षेत्र के 65 प्रतिशत रोजगार के समक्ष स्वचालन का जोखिम है। वैश्विक औद्योगिक क्षेत्र में वर्ष 2002 से 2014 के बीच स्वचालन में औसत वृद्धि 15 प्रतिशत रही है जबकि औद्योगिक उत्पादन वृद्धि केवल तीन फीसदी रही है। हम यह दलील भी देते हैं कि कर्मचारियों को कुशल बनाने के लिए भरपूर काम करने की आवश्यकता है। इस बात के स्पष्ट प्रमाण मौजूद हैं कि एक ओर जहां कौशल में बहुत बड़ा अंतर मौजूद है, वहीं कुशलता हासिल करने वाले श्रमिकों को भी रोजगार हासिल करने में कोई आसानी नहीं हो रही है। न ही कुशलता का प्रमाणपत्र उनको रोजगार बाजार में मदद करता है। कौशल विकास के लिए प्रशिक्षण देने की व्यवस्था (अप्रेंटिसिंग) कामयाब साबित नहीं हुई है। वर्ष 2013 में ऐसे प्रशिक्षुओं (अप्रेंटिस) की संख्या ढाई लाख थी। मंत्रालय के आंकड़े बताते हैं कि गत वर्ष अप्रेंटिस प्रोत्साहन योजना की शुरुआत के बाद से फरवरी 2016 तक महज 288 नए अप्रेंटिस औपचारिक रूप से शामिल किए गए। जबकि सरकार ने मार्च 2017 तक 100,000 लोगों को प्रशिक्षित करने का लक्ष्य तय कर रखा है। जाहिर है उस लिहाज से यह आंकड़ा अत्यंत कम है। इस पहली का एकमात्र उपयुक्त जवाब यह नजर आता है कि देश में दिया जाने वाला प्रौद्योगिकी आधारित प्रशिक्षण नियोक्ताओं की जरूरत से मेल नहीं खाता और अप्रेंटिसशिप की योजनाएं अत्यंत सतही प्रतीत होती हैं।



जनसत्ता

Date: 31-05-16

धोखे का संचार

आरएलटी यानी टेलिकॉम ऑपरेटर रेडियो-लिंक टेक्नोलॉजी के इस्तेमाल ने मोबाइल कंपनियों ने वह हथियार दे दिया है, जिससे वे अपनी सेवाओं की खराब गुणवत्ता पर परदा डाल कर उसकी जिम्मेदारी से बचने की भी कोशिश कर सकते हैं।

कुछ समय से मोबाइल पर बात करते हुए बीच में फोन कट जाने की समस्या बढ़ती जा रही है। लेकिन मोबाइल कंपनियों की ओर से अब तक सिर्फ तकनीकी खराबी या कमी बता कर इस पर परदा डालने की कोशिश की जाती रही है। जब ट्राई यानी भारतीय दूरसंचार नियामक प्राधिकरण की ओर से इसे 'कॉल ड्रॉप' यानी संबंधित मोबाइल कंपनी की सेवा में कमी के रूप में चिह्नित करके जिम्मेदारी तय करने और उपभोक्ताओं को इसकी भरपाई करने की कवायद शुरू हुई तो कंपनियों ने मोबाइल टॉवरों की कमी और दूसरी तकनीकी बाधाओं की दलील पेश करना शुरू कर दिया। लेकिन ट्राई और मोबाइल कंपनियों के बीच उलझी कॉल ड्रॉप की समस्या का हल नहीं निकला। अब तक बीच में अचानक फोन कट जाने को नियामकीय ढांचे के तहत कॉल ड्रॉप के तौर पर दर्ज किया जाता है, जिसके लिए मोबाइल कंपनियों और उनकी सेवा की गुणवत्ता में कमी को जिम्मेदार माना जाता है। लेकिन नई तकनीकी का फायदा उठा कर मोबाइल कंपनियों ने अपने हिस्से की इस शिकायत से बचने का रास्ता निकाल लिया है। आरएलटी यानी टेलिकॉम ऑपरेटर रेडियो-लिंक टेक्नोलॉजी के इस्तेमाल ने मोबाइल कंपनियों ने वह हथियार दे दिया है, जिससे वे अपनी सेवाओं की खराब गुणवत्ता पर परदा डाल कर उसकी जिम्मेदारी से बचने की भी कोशिश कर सकते हैं। दरअसल, यह एक ऐसी तकनीक है जिसके सहारे किसी कॉल के कट जाने या दूसरी तरफ से आवाज नहीं सुनाई देने के बावजूद फोन का कनेक्शन कृत्रिम रूप से जुड़ा हुआ दिखता है। अगर उपभोक्ता अपनी समझदारी से उस कॉल को न काटे तो वह जुड़ी दिखेगी और आगे जितनी देर तक कोई व्यक्ति उसे जुड़ा समझ कर बोलता रहेगा, उसके लिए पैसे उठते रहेंगे।

इस तरह, यह प्रक्रिया कॉल ड्रॉप नहीं, बल्कि इस तरह दर्ज की जाएगी कि उपभोक्ता ने खुद फोन काटा। इसमें कंपनी या उसकी सेवाओं की कोई जिम्मेदारी नहीं बनती और उसके लिए उपभोक्ता से पूरे पैसे वसूल किए जाएंगे। जाहिर है, यह किसी आधुनिकी तकनीकी का सहारा लेकर लोगों को ठगने की तरह है। अब तक ट्राई ने कॉल ड्रॉप सहित खराब सेवा के लिए मोबाइल कंपनियों पर दो लाख रुपए तक का जुर्माना तय किया हुआ है। लेकिन पिछले महीने सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने ट्राई के उन नियमों को निरस्त कर दिया, जिनके तहत टेलिकॉम ऑपरेटर को प्रति कॉल ड्रॉप एक रुपया और एक ग्राहक को हर रोज अधिकतम तीन रुपए के भुगतान का निर्देश दिया गया था। उसके बाद पहले तो मोबाइल कंपनियों ने टॉवरों की कमी की दलील पेश की और अब अपनी सेवा की खराब गुणवत्ता को ढकने के लिए आरएलटी का उपयोग शुरू कर दिया है। इस क्षेत्र में दर्जनों कंपनियों के बीच प्रतियोगिता का हासिल यह होना चाहिए था कि उपभोक्ता को कम खर्च पर बेहतर और अच्छी गुणवत्ता वाली सेवा मिले। लेकिन हाल के दिनों में बात करने से लेकर इंटरनेट तक के खर्चों में बढ़ोतरी हुई है, बल्कि सेवाओं से संबंधित कई तरह की शिकायतें आने लगी हैं। बिना मांग किए कोई सेवा शुरू करके पैसे काट लेने की शिकायत आम रही है। यह ट्राई की जिम्मेदारी बनती है कि वह इस सब पर तत्काल रोक लगाए।

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Scrap sourcing rule for all retailers

The commerce ministry wants to convince the finance ministry to ease the rule on mandatory local procurement for iPhone maker Apple. Removing the local sourcing norm is welcome, but not doing it selectively for some.

The sourcing rule, which mandates single-brand retailers to buy at least 30% of what they sell from Indian vendors — preferably from micro, small and medium enterprises, village and cottage industries, and artisans — must be scrapped.

Fiddling with policy — to define cutting-edge technology for a product to qualify for an exemption from the sourcing rule — is needless. A case-to-case approach will also raise concerns on arbitrariness.

Some goods can be made efficiently and cheaper in large enterprises, and some other goods, such as automobile components, in small units.

The best course is to allow the economics of production — scale, capital intensity, cost of skills, transport costs and so on — to determine where and how things are produced, depending on the underlying forces of technology at any point of time.

The decision on how much to source locally and how much from abroad must be left to the retailer.

Make in India should not become screwdriver assembly of imported kits. To make India a manufacturing hub and nurture the SME sector, we need reforms on multiple fronts.

Manufacturing is throttled by the shortage of power, capital, roads, telecom connectivity, efficient logistics and skills, besides red tape and corruption.

The government is moving determinedly to remove these constraints and raise India's ranking on the ease of doing business.

States are vying hard to improve the ecosystem and offer incentives. Infrastructure is being improved. Trust these measures to boost manufacture, rather than choke retail with irrational conditions.



Date: 31-05-16

Raja Mandala: Regional India, global South Asia

As other powers engage South Asian nations, Delhi must deal with a changing Subcontinent.

Written by C. Raja Mohan

Their presence at the G-7 summit at Ise-Shima, Japan, last week was hardly noticed in India. But among the six leaders of the developing world present in the outreach session were Sheikh Hasina, prime minister of Bangladesh, and Maithripala Sirisena, president of Sri Lanka.

The Japanese invitation to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka underlines the remarkable rise in Tokyo's strategic interest in the Subcontinent. It also highlights the growing salience of South Asian nations on the international stage.

Japan is a late entrant to this game; China has already begun to integrate India's neighbours into its larger international and regional strategies. The \$ 46 billion China-Pakistan economic corridor is only one example. In another, Beijing has given Colombo and Kathmandu the status of a "dialogue partner" in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

As other powers begin to devote quality time to engaging South Asian nations, big and small, Delhi must lend additional depth and energy to its current

“neighbourhood first” strategy. Above all, it must come to terms with the unfolding globalisation of the Subcontinent.

Much of the international discourse on South Asia often gets reduced to the India-Pakistan relations; this only helps mask the significance of the other nations in the region. And the reference to them as “smaller nations” of the region is largely inaccurate.

In terms of population size, Bangladesh is the eighth largest in the world with its numbers standing at more than 160 million. Afghanistan (33mn) Nepal (29mn) and Sri Lanka (21mn) are at 40th, 46th and 57th positions respectively. Only Bhutan and Maldives, with their populations below 1 mn, may be termed as mini states.

Since independence, India has been compelled to pay special attention to a Pakistan that punched way above its weight in the world. An Islamic identity, critical geopolitical location, association with Western military alliances and the possession of nuclear weapons have given Pakistan much weight in regional affairs.

India has also devoted considerable energy towards Afghanistan that has been at the centre of the Great Game for more than two centuries. It has become a vital part of India’s strategy towards Pakistan and the battle against violent religious extremism. With its focus on the Af-Pak region, however, Delhi has tended to miss the growing strategic significance of the other nations in the neighbourhood.

Bangladesh is today one of the fastest growing economies of the world and is open to massive investments in the infrastructure sector. No wonder, China and Japan are competing vigorously for project contracts in Bangladesh. Both Beijing and Tokyo also see the country as the fulcrum of the eastern subcontinent and a bridge between South Asia, China and South East Asia.

Long viewed as India’s buffers to the north, Bhutan and Nepal have now become theatres of contestation with China. To the South, Sri Lanka is rediscovering its

central location in the Indian Ocean, as all major powers like China, US and Japan pay unprecedented attention to Colombo.

Maldives, which straddles the vital sea lines of communication in the Indian Ocean, has now become a highly coveted piece of maritime real estate as China turns its gaze upon the Indian Ocean.

The new geopolitical dynamism animating all corners of South Asia poses a number of important challenges for India. One, Delhi no longer has the luxury of viewing the region as India's "backyard". It must begin to recognise the growing gulf between its claims of primacy in the region and the growing economic, political and military influence of China in the Subcontinent.

Two, the new international opportunities have allowed the ruling elites in our neighbourhood to pursue greater "strategic autonomy" from India. This means Delhi will have to work harder than ever before to retain its historic leverages in the neighbourhood.

Three, the economic geography of the Subcontinent was inherently in India's favour. Partition, the inward economic orientation of socialist India, and the neglect of connectivity and commerce at and across the frontiers has seen Delhi squander many of the inherited advantages. Modi's India is trying hard to compensate but the scale and scope of its initiatives are no match to the Chinese efforts to reconfigure the economic geography of the Subcontinent.

Four, India's "neighbourhood first" strategy is complicated by its deep involvement in the internal politics of the South Asian nations. Unlike in the past, those who resent India's intervention don't have to merely lump it. They have countered it by seeking intervention of other powers. Delhi, therefore, will have to rethink the nature of its intervention in the internal affairs of its neighbours.

Last but not the least, India must stop seeing itself as the "lone ranger" in South Asia. While it must necessarily compete with rival powers when they threaten its

interests, it must also learn to collaborate with friendly powers, wherever possible, in shaping the regional environment. This requires a new mindset in Delhi that focuses on strategic regional outcomes rather than the right to unilateral means.



Date: 01-06-16

Seeking synergy, not ideology

Government should partner civil society, but the latter's advocacy should be evidence-based.

Civil society is a global phenomenon. It is widely known as an influential 'third sector', after the government and business/ industry. Civil society is a natural partner of the socioeconomic development of a nation. Any government would recognise its worth and would naturally prefer to work with this sector for the growth and success of the country.

In India, we have a vibrant civil society. However, the relationship between civil society and the state seems to be very often quite adversarial. Civic or public engagement with the state needs to be meaningful, so that the effectiveness of the government is enhanced in shaping its policies and programmes. The government has to tap into the knowledge, experience, ideas and insights shared by civil society and suitably dovetail them into policy-making processes. This, however, cannot be done in a partisan or ad hoc manner.

The NDA government is open to partnership and dialogue with civil society and business, and has taken definitive steps in this regard. **The idea of the government is to make policy formulation and decision-making more transparent and accountable.**

It has been noticed that many issues of concern to civil society are still to be addressed. Civil society or the voluntary sector plays a very crucial role in addressing rural poverty and empowering people. Its contribution to nation building is vital.

But the sector is facing many challenges and impediments **as it is still regulated or controlled by a set of almost obsolete or redundant laws. The registration laws, Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), provisions in the income tax laws – all these need to be periodically reviewed and revised** in order to enable the sector to function independently and impartially.

Even after 69 years of Independence, we are still talking about ‘azadi’ from poverty, unemployment, inequality, etc. Is this not the failure of our long-standing policies and attitudes? We have to fix the responsibilities of any such failures to the past misrule of the country. **Civil society should learn to engage in evidence-based advocacy rather than an ideology-based approach**, which would make its very motives seem suspect. A few of them are bigots and engage in partisan campaigns against the government.

I would not hesitate to challenge the attempts of a few small-minded and petty groups among civil society who claim that only their viewpoints are correct, just and democratic and representative of a larger public opinion. **They do not seem to recognise the wisdom of the elected representatives in a democracy. This apparently is due to their partisan perception nurtured by select political ideologies.**

Civil society has to be apolitical. Representatives of civil society tend to lose their legitimacy when their actions acquire unmistakable political hues yoked to certain ideologies. **Political neutrality is indispensable for credible civic engagement.** A needless and baseless paranoia has been created that the NDA government is against civil society.

A few frustrated 'beneficiaries' of the previous regimes are undemocratically and unfairly spreading a politics of hatred against this government and its leader. Unlike the previous government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the NDA government came to power with an overwhelming majority. We believe in upholding the principles of democracy and the rule of law, two of the key elements for good governance.

While we respect dissent and freedom of speech and expression, the government cannot be a mute onlooker when violations of the laws take place. **Moreover, dissent and freedom of expression are not absolute and are subject to reasonable restrictions.**

The FCRA or the sedition laws are not the sudden invention of this government. They have been on the statute for long and there was never any genuine attempt to debate on these issues. I personally feel that genuine concerns need to be addressed through open debate and cooperation.

The government is duty-bound to take action against violators of the law, or those who abuse the system and create agitation and restlessness in society. The government has a moral and constitutional duty to maintain peace and harmony and law and order under all situations in the country.

With regard to FCRA issues, let me state on record that all the review and process of **suspending or cancelling the registrations of organisations which violated FCRA started during** the previous regime, especially from the time **the anti-Kudankulam nuclear power plant agitation began.** Many organisations were put under the scanner during the previous UPA government.

The government needs constructive criticism to improve its policies and programmes. The country has countless challenges and concerns which include poverty, unemployment, education, malnutrition, drought, agriculture, climate change, water, sanitation, open defecation, TB and public health. Addressing these issues is the topmost priority of the

government, a task which demands the combined efforts of the government, civil society as well as that of business and industry.

The 2014 general election gave us a democratic as well as a historic verdict, which paved the way for an important regime shift. The government is answerable and accountable to fulfil the mandate – a mandate for development. We do strongly believe in respecting and nurturing the plural ethos of the nation.



Date: 31-05-16

No country for the old?

India needs to focus on providing for the elderly health, housing, and dignity

When it was reported that Kanubhai Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and his wife moved into an old age home in New Delhi recently, it caused a stir, with the Prime Minister promptly calling Mr. Gandhi, and two Ministers, one from the Union government and the other from the Delhi government, paying them visits. The Prime Minister also reportedly directed the authorities to ensure that the couple has a comfortable stay at the Guru Vishram Vridh Ashram.

His concern must have caused a collective sigh of relief for the 87.6 million people aged above 60 in India, as it drew the attention of a nation almost obsessed with its 'demographic dividend' to a crucial problem. Considering India is expected to be home to 300 million elderly people by 2050, it is time it paid heed to the problems of those who are as old, or even older, than the independent nation itself is today. Else the country will be faced with a large incidence of degenerative diseases, accompanied with serious gaps in the geriatric medical ecosystem, a changing joint

family structure, the lack of 'grey-friendliness' in public spaces, transport, housing, and a virtually non-existing policy framework to tackle these issues.

Taking care of the elderly

With about 50 per cent of the elderly being financially dependent on others, it is affordable housing, healthcare, and the psychological and social manifestations of ageing that we will struggle to respond to as a country with no social security and dismal elderly care facilities. What will be the combined impact of this trend on small, nuclear families, along with an improvement in lifestyle and an increase in degenerative diseases and life spans, especially for women? Where are we going to live as we grow old and who is going to take care of us?

Clearly Parliament had some of these issues in mind when it passed the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act in 2007. The model Act makes it obligatory for children or relatives to provide maintenance to senior citizens and parents. It also provides for the setting up of old age homes by State governments.

Despite this, however, it is a fact that most people in India would rather suffer than have the family name sullied by taking their own children to court for not providing for them. This need to maintain a façade is combined with a lack of knowledge of rights, the inherent inability of the elderly to approach a tribunal for recourse under the law, and poor implementation of the Act by various State governments.

So what happens to those who have been turned out from their homes, or have lost a partner, or just can't manage to live on their own anymore, especially since the number of old age homes the Centre supports under the Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP) has seen a decline from 269 homes in 2012-13 to a dismal 137 in 2014-15? The Centre has asked State governments to ensure that there are old-age homes whose functioning can be supported under IPOP, but since it is optional for the State governments to do so, the total number of old-age homes remains abysmally low.

Need for a pragmatic approach

While we hope that the Indian family continues to be stronger than in most countries and provides a caring environment for the elderly, it can't be the basis for our ability to support the elderly. India needs to take a serious look at the needs of the elderly in a more pragmatic and holistic manner. For starters it could focus on the three key aspects of health, housing, and dignity.

Each of these is a large issue on its own, but it is important to first strengthen the health-care system. If 18 per cent of the population is going to be over 60 years of age by 2050, then it becomes almost crucial to encourage research in geriatric diseases, and push for building capacity in the geriatric departments across the primary and tertiary health-care systems. There also seems to be a growing informal industry of home care providers, which urgently needs regulation and mandated guidelines so that a large pool of certified and affordable trained home care givers can help provide basic support, prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, and keep the elderly in the familiar environs of their homes as far as possible.

Next, there needs to be a network of old age homes, both in the private and public sector. While the private sector has taken the lead in setting up some state-of-the-art facilities, most of these are priced well out of the reach of ordinary citizens. State governments must be mandated to set up quality, affordable homes.

As traditionally supportive social structures are changing and the elderly are increasingly losing their 'status' as the family patriarchs, it is also time that we did our bit to help address the indignities and loneliness that this change is bringing. Businesses could look at harnessing the talent of elders by retaining or hiring older workers and offering flexible working hours for those who want to continue working after retirement. Industry will benefit by retaining their knowledge and experience and the elderly will continue to be financially independent and retain their sense of self-worth. At the community level we also need to increase the avenues for older people to participate in local issues, in resident associations, set up and manage spaces for community interaction, to leverage their experience as a resource, give

them an opportunity to share their concerns, and to help them feel that they contribute socially and have a purpose in life.

The one big issue that doesn't get enough attention today is that old people deserve dignity. Apart from ensuring appropriate medical help, there needs to be more awareness about common degenerative diseases like dementia so that family members, care-givers, and society at large are sensitised to incontinence, the momentary lack of comprehension, the hallucinations — all the painful behavioural, physical, emotional and mental struggles of those who suffer from these diseases.

In a country that still worships Bapu, there is hope that we will thank his grandson some day for setting off a much-needed discussion on the painful issues that senior citizens face today.

Barkha Deva is Associate Director at the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies. These are her personal views.

Date: 31-05-16

The MGNREGA index

SHOBHIT MATHUR & NOMESH BOLIA

Figuring out key parameters on which to measure a State's performance provides a playbook of best practices for others to follow.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 (MGNREGA) aims at “enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.” In the financial year

2015-16, Rs.42,084 crore was spent on MGNREGA. As there has been no serious attempt to rank the implementation of MGNREGA across States so far, we assessed the implementation of the Act by the States between 2015 and 2016.

Performance indicators

We selected three performance indicators to rank the States: average days of employment per household, percentage wages paid within the promised 15 days of enlisting to work, and the work completion rate. Each indicator measures the implementation of MGNREGA in the State on an important output. Collectively the three indicators capture the key aspects of MGNREGA implementation, namely, employment generation, wages paid in time, and assets created as promised.

First, even though MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of employment, the national average has always been below 50 days. Comparing this value across States, we found that [Tripura](#) was able to provide 95 days of employment on average. Manipur and Goa were at the lower end, providing 16 and 18 days of employment, respectively. Second, MGNREGA requires that wages be paid within 15 days of closing the muster roll. Last financial year, only 40 per cent of the wages were paid within the stipulated time of 15 days. Manipur stood out in this case with 82 per cent of wages being paid within 15 days while Meghalaya was only able to pay wages for 4 per cent of the people on time.

Third, work completion rate refers to the number of works completed compared to works started, in percentage terms. Mizoram performed best in this case with a 92 per cent work completion rate. Tripura, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh also had work completion rates of above 80 per cent. Arunachal Pradesh was at the bottom at just 20 per cent work completion rate.

Performance score

The absolute values of each performance metric are scaled to a value between 0 and 10 by dividing with the highest value across States (to get a value between 0 and 1)

and multiplying it by 10. We added up the scores across all performance indicators to come up with the score out of 30. The stacked bar chart ranking the States on their overall score out of 30 is shown in the graphic.

Findings

It is interesting that two north-eastern States are at either extreme of the ranking: Tripura on top with a score of 26.8 and Arunachal Pradesh at the bottom with a score of 7.1. Mizoram was a close second with a score of 26.3. Chhattisgarh, Goa, Meghalaya and Punjab all ranked second from the bottom with a score of 12.7. Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand were two major States with a high ranking. West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were major States with a low score of 14.

This ranking intends to give an overview to the policymakers of what works in each State and what doesn't. The implementation practices from the high-ranking States in each category could be replicated in other States. For example, looking at the macro picture it is not clear why MGNREGA is able to provide below 50 days of employment on average nationally. This is possible due to shortage of funds or due to lack of demand for work due to low wage rates. The reasons could vary across and within States. Analysing the State-wise data, we see that Tripura was able to generate about 95 days of employment per household. The reasons for the high employment days in Tripura need to be studied, so that they can be replicated in other similar States. Similarly, a big State such as Andhra Pradesh was able to pay 80 per cent of the wages within the promised 15 days of enlisting to work, and Madhya Pradesh was able to achieve 82 per cent work completion rate. The best practices in each of these high-performing States should be documented and shared with the other States, so that the performance of each State can go up. For example, Andhra Pradesh is known for widespread computerisation of the processes which reduces corruption and ensures timely transfer of funds.

The Centre seems committed to MGNREGA. About 2 per cent of the [Union Budget](#) or 0.3 per cent of the [GDP is allocated to the scheme](#). Ensuring that this amount reaches the people who opt to work, while creating durable rural assets, is

important. This mega scheme needs local fixes and innovations to become more efficient and effective. This points out the aspects of implementation lacking in various States and gives an idea about where to look to make implementation successful. The ranking also recognises States that are performing well, and can be used to allocate funds and resources in a targeted manner.

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Pulgaon blaze

Fire at largest ammunition depot highlights security shortcomings

A massive fire at the Central Ammunition Depot in Pulgaon, Maharashtra, has led to an extraordinary number of deaths and injuries to army personnel. The Pulgaon depot, located 110 km from Nagpur, is the largest ammunition centre in India that stores a wide range of munitions. The blaze which began in the early hours of the morning required 10 fire engines working for nearly five hours to be brought under control. Meanwhile, civilians living in the vicinity of the depot had to be evacuated. A probe has been ordered to ascertain the exact cause of the fire.

It goes without saying that the Pulgaon depot holds immense strategic significance for the army given its size and quality of ammunitions. This is precisely why sabotage – no matter how remote the possibility – can't be completely ruled out at this point. True, the depot was well-guarded. But investigators need to consider the probability of an inside job. The second area of focus of the probe should be internal processes. If the blaze turns out to be an accident, two questions arise: How did such a mishap occur at a highly sensitive military depot and why couldn't the fire be brought under control quickly without casualties?

Defence minister Manohar Parrikar is supposed to be one of the better performers in the NDA ministry. He cannot evade responsibility and must ensure such incidents aren't repeated. It's tragic that the armed forces are losing men and hardware to incidents that are extraneous to their service. Consider that the Indian navy has suffered a spate of accidents in recent years. This clearly highlights procedural lacunae which, going by the Pulgaon fire, haven't been addressed properly. Parrikar needs to act now in undertaking a thorough overhaul of safety procedures in the armed forces.
