



THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Go with GM

Permit genetically modified mustard cultivation

For the second time in seven years, India is on the threshold of introducing its first genetically modified food crop. The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the environment ministry's top technical body to examine safety of GM crops, recommended this week commercialisation of mustard. The final call is with the government. Given NDA's promise of doubling farmers' income as well as India's dependence on import of edible oil, it must go with the recommendation. GM mustard, developed by a Delhi University team, has been through extensive safety trials. Last year, the entire dossier of safety studies submitted by the Delhi University team was placed in public domain for review.

Given the sensitivity of the issue, the 26-member GEAC has gone the extra mile. It made sense as Bt Brinjal which was cleared by GEAC in 2010 was held back by the previous government, following a sustained campaign against it by groups opposed to the introduction of GM food. The government's immediate challenge will be to deal with an ongoing Supreme Court hearing on the veracity of safety tests for mustard. Last year, government had told the apex court it would wait for court's approval. Mustard is a winter crop which gives the government a window to prepare the ground for its introduction. The key to the introduction of GM mustard is NDA's willingness to withstand pressure from multiple lobby groups, including Sangh Parivar elements. Beyond following safety protocols and being transparent there is nothing more that can be done on the regulatory side. It is important to keep in mind that Indian agriculture is in dire need of an increase in yields and should therefore be open to introducing new technologies. That's why the government mustn't succumb to ideological lobbying.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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A step in purposeful regional diplomacy

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka, the second in two years, is part of his administration's neighbourhood focus in foreign policy. The visit takes on greater significance as it comes on the eve of China's big push for its mega One Belt, One Road project. However, it would be a mistake to view the Sri Lanka visit through the China prism.

Like Modi's visits and engagements with other countries in the region, this visit is aimed at reiterating and strengthening the existing partnerships, and to reassure our neighbours that India's quest for rapid economic growth and its ascendance in the league table of nations should be seen as a collective opportunity for growth and development, without any element of threat. The South Asia Satellite has served to be a recent reminder of India's commitment on this score. The use of soft power, the historical and cultural ties, and the engagements beyond the economic — the flight between Colombo and Varanasi geared to ease Lankan visitors' access to the Buddhist circuit, and the super-speciality hospital in Dickoya — are all part of an engagement that is designed as partnership. The message is a stark contrast to the one being conveyed by Beijing. New Delhi is not looking to the region to serve as feeders to its ambitions and aspirations. India needs to expand the scope of the engagement: areas like adapting to climate change, education and research collaborations must become part of

the ties that bind India and the countries in the region. The PM did not omit to address the Tamil question either. He announced that India would build an additional 10,000 homes for those rendered homeless. The Sri Lankan president helped out, saying that Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim interests should find common convergence in social justice.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

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दालों की खेती के लिए प्रोत्साहन खोलेगा आत्मनिर्भरता का रास्ता

भारत में व्यापक स्तर पर फैले कुपोषण, खास तौर पर प्रोटीन की कमी की समस्या से निपटने में दालें सबसे अहम स्रोत हो सकती हैं। प्रोटीन और अच्छी गुणवत्ता वाले रेशेदार खाद्य पदार्थों की मौजूदगी से आपका भोजन स्वास्थ्यवर्धक और संतुलित बनता है। इसके अलावा इनमें अधिकांश विटामिन और खनिज भी पाए जाते हैं जो स्वस्थ जीवन के लिए आवश्यक माने जाते हैं। वैश्विक दाल परिसंघ के दावों पर यकीन करें तो दालों के इस्तेमाल से रक्त में कोलेस्ट्रॉल कम करने और रक्त में शर्करा की मात्रा भी नियंत्रित करने में मदद मिलती है। मधुमेह और दिल के रोगों के इलाज के लिए आम तौर पर ये दोनों अहम माने जाते हैं। जानवरों से मिलने वाली प्रोटीन की जगह दालों को स्थान देने से संतुष्ट वसा की मात्रा को कम करने के साथ ही स्वास्थ्यवर्धक रेशेदार पदार्थों की मात्रा को बढ़ाया जा सकता है। इसके अलावा दालों में पाए जाने वाले रेशेदार पदार्थों, खनिजों और अमीनो एसिड तत्वों की वजह से इसे कैंसर जैसी जानलेवा बीमारियों की रोकथाम में भी मददगार माना जाता है। अमेरिका की प्रतिष्ठित वैज्ञानिक पत्रिका 'एनल्स ऑफ द न्यूयॉर्क एकेडमी ऑफ साइंसेज' के मार्च 2017 अंक में प्रकाशित एक शोधपत्र के मुताबिक दालों और अनाजों से मिलने वाले प्रोटीन एक दूसरे के पूरक हैं और एक साथ लेने पर ये शरीर के लिए जरूरी सभी अमीनो एसिड की आपूर्ति कर देते हैं। इस तरह के गुणकारी लक्षणों वाली दालों को भोजन एवं पोषण से संबंधित रणनीतियों एवं कार्यक्रमों में जरूर जगह दी जानी चाहिए जबकि अभी तो इन कार्यक्रमों में अनाजों पर ही ध्यान केंद्रित रहता है। इससे कुपोषण की समस्या दूर करने, लोगों का स्वास्थ्य सुधारने और वैश्विक भूख सूचकांक में भारत की रैंकिंग ऊंची करने में मदद मिलेगी। लेकिन यह मकसद अभी हासिल किया जा सकता है जब दालों की देश के भीतर उपलब्धता को बढ़ाया जाए क्योंकि आयात पर निर्भरता इसकी राह में अड़चनें पैदा कर सकती है।

हालांकि भारत ने दालों के उत्पादन के मामले में वर्ष 2016-17 में ही अपना सर्वोच्च स्तर हासिल किया है। पिछले साल भारत में दालों का उत्पादन 2.2 करोड़ टन रहा था जो एक साल पहले के 1.63 करोड़ टन की तुलना में 35 फीसदी अधिक है। इस उल्लेखनीय बढ़ोतरी के बावजूद भारत दाल उत्पादन के मामले में आत्मनिर्भर बनने से अभी दूर है। कृषि मंत्रालय का अनुमान है कि भारत को दाल के मामले में आत्मनिर्भर बनने के लिए उत्पादन स्तर को 2.35 करोड़ टन से आगे ले जाना होगा। भारतीय चिकित्सा अनुसंधान परिषद का सुझाव है कि स्वस्थ जीवन के लिए हरेक व्यक्ति को रोजाना 52 ग्राम दाल का सेवन करना चाहिए। इस गणना के हिसाब से भारत को 2.8 करोड़ टन दाल की जरूरत होगी जो कृषि मंत्रालय के आकलन से काफी अधिक है। किसी भी स्थिति में दालों की जरूरत तो बढ़ते ही वाली है। दरअसल जनसंख्या की वृद्धि दर से भी अधिक तेजी से दालों की मांग बढ़ रही है। दालों के मामले में आत्मनिर्भरता हासिल करने से संबंधित एक अहम तथ्य यह है कि पिछले साल भारत ने 2.2 करोड़ टन का जो उत्पादन स्तर हासिल किया था उसे मौजूदा नीतिगत ढांचे में बरकरार रख पाना मुश्किल होगा। दरअसल 2016-17 में दालों की रिकॉर्ड पैदावार के पीछे एक वजह तो यह रही कि दालों की ऊंची कीमतों को देखते हुए किसान अधिक रकबे में इसकी खेती के लिए प्रोत्साहित हुए थे। इसके अलावा खरीफ और रबी दोनों सत्रों में अच्छे मौसम का साथ मिलने से भी पैदावार बढ़ी। लेकिन अब दालों की कीमतों में अच्छी-खासी गिरावट होने से बदले हुए हालात में किसान शायद ही पिछले साल की तरह दालों की खेती के लिए प्रेरित हों। इस साल तो अधिकतर दालों के भाव न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य से भी नीचे आ गए हैं। इसके अलावा दालों का बफर स्टॉक जमा करने के लिए

सरकार ने जिस तरह से गलत समय पर बाजार में दखल दिया था, उसने भी दाल उत्पादकों के अलावा उपभोक्ताओं के लिए हालात खराब कर दिए हैं। सरकारी एजेंसियों ने दालों के ऊंचे भावों के बीच ही दालों की खरीद शुरू कर दी थी जिससे आम उपभोक्ताओं की थाली में दाल का पहुंच पाना मुश्किल हो गया। इसी तरह मौजूदा समय में दालों की गिरती कीमतों के बीच ही इन एजेंसियों ने खरीदी दाल को बाजार में पहुंचाना शुरू कर दिया है जिससे उत्पादकों के हित प्रभावित हो रहे हैं। संयोग से दालों का उत्पादन बढ़ाना केवल मुश्किल है, असंभव नहीं। अगर अनुकूल रणनीतियां बनाई जाएं तो तकनीक के इस्तेमाल से दालों का उत्पादन अपेक्षित स्तर तक बढ़ाया जा सकता है। इसका सबसे अच्छा और सरल तरीका यह है कि सर्वाधिक और न्यूनतम उपज वाले इलाकों के अंतर को पाट दिया जाए। अभी तो दालों के उच्च और निम्न उत्पादन स्तर में करीब 34 फीसदी उपज का फर्क है। अगर दालों के प्रति हेक्टेयर उत्पादन स्तर को बढ़ाकर म्यांमार में 700 किलोग्राम से 1,300 किलोग्राम और कनाडा में 2,200 किलोग्राम तक किया जा सकता है तो भारत भी उच्च स्तर को हासिल कर सकता है। इससे भारत न केवल इस बुनियादी खाद्य पदार्थ के उत्पादन में आत्मनिर्भर हो जाएगा बल्कि निर्यातक भी बन जाएगा। इसके लिए सिंचित भूमि में खेती करने वाले किसानों को जल्दी तैयार होने वाली फसलें लगाने के लिए प्रोत्साहित किया जाना चाहिए। दालों की पैदावार बढ़ाने की कोई भी रणनीति कामयाब बनाने के लिए उत्पादकों को लाभकारी प्रतिफल का भरोसा दिया जाना एक तरह से पूर्व-शर्त होगी।



दैनिक भास्कर

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श्रीलंका में संस्कृति के जरिये रिश्ते बढ़ाने की कोशिश

बुद्ध पूर्णिमा के मौके पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी की दो दिवसीय श्रीलंका यात्रा इस उपमहाद्वीप की श्रेष्ठ सांस्कृतिक परम्परा के माध्यम से आधुनिक राजनय को साधने का एक प्रयास है। इसके तहत चीन की अपार आर्थिक-सामरिक ताकत के मुकाबले भारत की पारम्परिक ताकत की अथाह गहराई को खड़ा करने की कोशिश की जा रही है। उम्मीद है कि श्रीलंका भारत के साथ नए किस्म के पंचशील समझौते के बंधन में बंधेगा। इसका तात्कालिक असर दिखाई भी पड़ा है और श्रीलंका ने चीन की पनडुब्बी को फिलहाल इस महीने कोलंबो के बंदरगाह में खड़ा करने से मना कर दिया है।

श्रीलंका के कोलंबो में हंबनटोटा बंदरगाह को चीन ने विकसित किया है और वह उसका इस्तेमाल व्यापारिक गतिविधियों के अलावा सामरिक अड्डे के रूप में करना चाहता है। चीन के राष्ट्रपति शी जिंगपिंग ने 2013 में वन बेल्ट वन रोड की नीति के माध्यम से चीन और मध्य एशिया, पश्चिम एशिया और दक्षिण एशिया के कुछ हिस्सों को जोड़ने का प्रस्ताव रखा था और वह प्राचीन रेशम मार्ग की स्मृतियों को जगाकर इस काम को आगे बढ़ाने में लगा है। भारत इसके जवाब में बुद्धवाद के सांस्कृतिक पक्ष को जगाकर उसके सहारे चीन, श्रीलंका, बांग्लादेश और म्यांमार जैसे देशों से संबंध बेहतर करने का प्रयास कर रहा है।

लेकिन भारत और श्रीलंका के रिश्तों में सबसे बड़ी अड़चन तमिल उग्रवादियों का संघर्ष और उनका दमन रहा है। श्रीलंका ने पूर्वोत्तर श्रीलंका में चालीस हजार तमिल उग्रवादियों और नागरिकों को मारकर समस्या का अंत किया है और दक्षिण भारत की तमिल पार्टियां उसे नरसंहार कहती हैं जबकि भारत सरकार अपनी खामोशी और राजनय से उस घाव को भरने की कोशिश कर रही है। चीन ने भारत और श्रीलंका के बीच

बनी उस दूरी का लाभ उठाते हुए वहां सिर्फ निवेश बढ़ाया बल्कि उसे अपने सामरिक गलियारे का स्तंभ बनाने का प्रयास किया। अब भारत ने श्रीलंका के उन इलाकों में पुनर्निर्माण का प्रस्ताव रखा है, जो तमिल उग्रवाद और सेना की कार्रवाई के दौरान तबाह हो गए थे। इनमें त्रिकोमाली में तेल संग्रह का केंद्र बनाने से लेकर मन्नार-जाफना, मन्नार-त्रिकोमाली और दांबुला-त्रिकोमाली में सड़क बनाने का कार्यक्रम भी शामिल है। देखना है पंडित नेहरू के बाद बुद्ध के नाम पर होने वाला मोदी का नया पंचशील राजनय कितना कारगर होता है।



दैनिक जागरण

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न्यायिक अनावश्यक सक्रियता

सुप्रीम कोर्ट की सात जजों की संविधान पीठ ने कलकत्ता हाइकोर्ट के जस्टिस सीएस कर्णन को अवमानना का दोषी पाते हुए छह महीने की कारावास की सजा सुनायी है। हालांकि, इसके पहले खुद जस्टिस कर्णन ने भारत के मुख्य न्यायाधीश जेएस खेहर के साथ सुप्रीम कोर्ट के अन्य सात जजों को एससी-एसटी एक्ट के तहत पांच साल के कारावास की सजा सुनायी थी। दरअसल, बीते कुछ समय से सुप्रीम कोर्ट के जजों और जस्टिस कर्णन के बीच विवाद चल रहा है। लेकिन, इस विवाद की परिणति इस स्तर पर आ जायेगी कि एक हाइकोर्ट का जज सुप्रीम कोर्ट के जजों को कारावास की सजा सुना दे और वह दिन भारतीय न्यायपालिका के लिए एक ऐतिहासिक दिन बन जाये, ऐसा किसी ने सोचा नहीं होगा। बहरहाल, कानूनी मामले में सुप्रीम कोर्ट से ऊपर कुछ भी नहीं है और वह फैसला सुनाने के लिए सुप्रीम है। इसलिए इस पूरे प्रकरण में सुप्रीम कोर्ट द्वारा जस्टिस कर्णन को छह महीने की कारावास की सजा सुनाने को ही सर्वोच्च माना जाना चाहिए। यह तो हुई सुप्रीम कोर्ट की बात, जहां तक न्यायपालिका का सवाल है, तो जस्टिस कर्णन और सुप्रीम के जजों के बीच जारी इस विवाद और फैसलों के प्रकरण के मद्देनजर, मैं समझता हूं कि आज पूरी भारतीय न्यायिक व्यवस्था में पुनर्विचार की आवश्यकता है। क्योंकि, न्यायपालिका ने ऐसी शक्तियों का इस्तेमाल किया है, जो संविधान के अनुसार नहीं मालूम पड़ता है। इसमें कोई दो राय नहीं है कि किसी मामले के फैसले को लेकर हाइकोर्ट के जजों और सुप्रीम कोर्ट के जजों के पास बहुत शक्तियां होती हैं। लेकिन, उनके फैसलों से ऐसा कतई नहीं होना चाहिए कि उनकी शक्तियों का इस्तेमाल ही अनुचित लगने लगे। सुप्रीम कोर्ट के जजों के खिलाफ जस्टिस कर्णन अपना फैसला सुनाते हुए यह सोचते हैं कि वे अपने अधिकार क्षेत्र में काम कर रहे हैं।

लेकिन, वहीं सुप्रीम कोर्ट भी यही सोचता है कि वह अपने अधिकार क्षेत्र में ही काम कर रहा है। निचली अदालतें भी ऐसा ही सोचती होंगी। इसके बावजूद मैं समझता हूं कि पूरी न्यायिक व्यवस्था पर पुनर्विचार करने की जरूरत है, क्योंकि एक अरसे से अदालतों के जजों पर आरोप लगते रहे हैं कि कहीं वे अपनी शक्तियों का गलत इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं या फिर न्यायपालिका में भी भ्रष्टाचार के अंकुर फूटने लगे हैं। इस प्रकरण से उपजी ऐसी परिस्थितियों की वजह से ही न्यायपालिका पर से लोगों का भरोसा कमजोर होता है और लोग न्याय की उम्मीद करना छोड़ देते हैं। यह एक लोकतांत्रिक देश के लिए कहीं से भी ठीक नहीं है कि वहां की जनता का न्यायपालिका पर भरोसा कमजोर हो जाये।

Date: 12-05-

Once upon a river

Ganga and Yamuna are legal persons now. What does this mean for these cesspools of pollutants, still revered by people, but which have lost any connect to their lived experiences?

In the Third week of March, while welcoming the rivers Ganga and Yamuna as legal persons, Justice Rajiv Sharma and Justice Alok Singh of the Uttarakhand High Court observed that they were inspired by lawmakers in New Zealand. Barely a week earlier, the New Zealand Parliament had conferred legal personhood to the country's third longest river, the Whanganui, bringing to an end a more than 140-year old dispute. In 1840, when the Maori tribes ceded sovereignty to the British colonists, the Treaty of Waitangi promised protection of their natural resources including the Whanganui. But the treaty was observed only in the breach, leading the communities, who profess a deep spiritual connection to the Whanganui, to take the issue of ownership of the river to the courts in the early 1870s. As the protracted dispute drew to a close, Maoris at the gallery in New Zealand's Parliament broke into a song of celebration. Some wept tears of joy. In India, in contrast, where the Ganga is known to have more than 100 names (some say even 1,000), there was scarcely any rejoicing after the Uttarakhand High Court verdict. Even environmentalists were guarded in their response; some were sceptical. A month later, the Madhya Pradesh government's decision to treat the Narmada as a person passed by virtually unnoticed — except for a few media reports. Granting legal rights to the Whanganui took eight years of careful negotiation and intense public debate that was not without its moments of fun — New Zealanders joked if the river might now buy a few “hoppy” beers, vote or be penalised for murder if a swimmer drowns. The Uttarakhand verdict, in contrast, was a matter of few days of stolid courtroom deliberation.

Rivers, it seems, have gone out of the lives of large numbers of people in India, in cities surely. They do become part of public discourse, but only as items of disputes between riparian states, or as beneficiaries — or victims — of large projects or when they go into spate and cause havoc, sometimes even when they run dry. But the river as a part of people's day-to-day experiences is rarely a matter of public conversation. In an article in the environment fortnightly, Down To Earth, the Marathi writer Karuna Futane recalls, “The river was a mother and a bosom pal to women, children, farmers, cattle, birds, insects, animals. A visit to the river meant cleansing and freshening up, inner and outer. You went back from the river rested and healed”. But it's unlikely that rivers today will evoke the excitement experienced by the historian Tapan Raychaudhuri, as a child growing up in Barisal in what is now Bangladesh, in the 1930s. In his memoir, The World in Our Time, Raychaudhuri recalls, “The river flowing by our bungalow was a source of endless thrills. There was the fear of drowning. And what were those dark things floating too close to one for comfort? Crocodiles or pieces of dry wood? Then there were Kanagats, small river sharks. “The Hindi writer Phanishwar Nath Renu's account of the Patna floods of 1975, in Rindjal Dhanjal, has forebodings of the disconnect between urban life and the ways of the river. Amazed at the hordes rushing to watch the rushing waters, one villager remarks, “When Danapur was getting submerged the Pataniya babulog did not even bother to look back. It's your turn now”. Futane's lament — in a different context — is more vivid. “When I told my sons I was going to write about my relationship with the rivers, they were surprised. What is there to write? And what rivers? They are just dirty nullahs. The truth of this strikes me when I look at the rivers now. Sewage and plastic bags,” she writes. The Ganga is one such sorry receptacle of garbage. Over the three decades, much money has gone into cleaning this cesspool: More than Rs

1,800 crore under the Ganga Action Plan in its various avatars. The current government intends to spend more than 10 times this amount: Rs 20,000 crore over five years on the Namami Gange Project. But the project that took off last year is an improvement on its predecessor in very few respects. There are programmes to develop interceptor drains, plant trees and improve the composition of river species. There are also plans to develop Ganga Grams — villages where people will be educated in reducing pollution. Other than that, the project is a replica of the Ganga Action Plan in its emphasis on sewage treatment plants.

Such plants can only do so much because a large section of the country's urban pollution lives outside the reach of sewerage networks. Under the Ganga Action Plan, for instance, the lag between the sewage generation and treatment never went below 50 per cent. Water cleaned by the treatment plants also needs a final cleansing at the river. Where is the water for that? With more than 40 dams, barrages and weirs — and many more planned — the Ganga is drained of her lifeblood. Many of the 21 tributaries and distributaries of the Ganga are little more than seasonal streams — so are many other rivers in the country. This state-of-affairs goes against a fundamental axiom of hydrology: A river has to keep flowing. The Ganga was once known to jump over mountains, a characteristic that gave her the name Lila Lamghita Parvata. As the Ramganga in parts of Uttar Pradesh, it changed course frequently, drawing flak in the folk song, “Tu kyun kunwari rah gayee ri Ramganga”. Legalese can only afford a stunted — and drab — expression to such characteristics. The Uttarakhand High Court observes, “The Rivers Ganga and Yamuna, all their tributaries, streams, every natural water flowing with flow continuously or intermittently of these rivers, are declared as juristic/legal persons/living entities having the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person in order to preserve and conserve river Ganga and Yamuna.” Its inspiration, the New Zealand Parliament, asked two members of the Maori community to represent the Whanganui. In India, where the river is venerated and abused at the same time, the Uttarakhand court took an easy way out of the paradox. It named the director of the Namami Gange project, Uttarakhand's chief secretary, and the state's advocate general, as the Ganga's “legal parents”. Divested of her adulthood, the ancient river should expect more of the same after the verdict. Meanwhile, in Kerala's Alappuzha district, a village panchayat has revived the Kuttemperoor, a channel of the Pamba and Achankovil rivers. The river, which was thick with weeds and had become a cesspool of pollutants in the past 10 years, was revived after 70 days of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Will the feat of 700-odd people in Alappuzha, mostly women, change the discourse on rivers in the country?

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Cure lies elsewhere

Generic medicines can't be the first, or only, step to reduce the cost of treatment

At the inauguration of a hospital in Surat recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his government's intent to bring in a law whereby doctors will have to prescribe only generic medicines. Any conscientious citizen of the country, doctors included, will applaud this initiative as it intends to provide direct financial relief to the common man and limit the influence of major private companies in the pharmaceutical market. Unfortunately, the outcome of the initiative may turn out to be unhealthy in practice. As with most policies, the devil is in the detail. In India, the unholy doctor-pharma nexus results in a symbiotic relationship leading to unnecessary, expensive prescriptions. This, of course, is a matter of grave concern. But it is important to realise that besides the doctor, this unholy nexus also has the pharmaceutical company as an equal partner. The intended legal proposal of the government has the means to rein in the doctor to an extent, but the pharmaceutical company goes unscathed. At present, these companies “bribe” doctors into writing drugs of their choice because doctors have the power to prescribe medicines. Once this power is taken away, as intended by the proposed law, the onus of giving the branded generic drug will be with the chemist. It doesn't require rocket science to understand where the pharmaceutical companies will focus then.

There is a chronic shortage of drug inspectors who look after quality control at manufacturing and dispensing sites of medicines. In 2010, 55 per cent posts of drug inspectors in Maharashtra were lying vacant. In the absence of stringent controls over dispensing chemists in the country, the move will create havoc. Besides substituting prescribed drugs, chemists could be selling more expensive generic drugs to patients, thereby defeating the very purpose of the law. Quality is the other major issue with generic drugs. In the last couple of years, the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) has initiated action against many Indian pharmaceutical companies for alleged violation of good manufacturing practices and other irregularities at the drug manufacturing facilities. This happened mainly with generic drugs, which were manufactured in India and exported to the US. With such poor-quality controls in manufacturing, the intent of the legislation will be compromised. It looks as if the government wants to work in reverse direction to cleanse the grimy Indian drug market. A logical step would have been to institute better quality control in the manufacture of generic drugs first, test their bioequivalence with standard branded medicines, build doctor and patient confidence on the product and then, push for a change in prescription behaviour of physicians. In fact, research papers from across the globe show that physicians need to be reassured and educated about the Drug Regulatory Authority approval system of generic medicines regarding their bioequivalence, quality, efficacy and safety to facilitate use. The policy to implement legislation for the prescription of generic drugs by doctors is a good move, no doubt. But the haste shown by the government in bringing this measure is odd and populist. It is extremely important to reduce the burden of health-related costs on common people, but instead of jumping the gun on generic medicines, alternative methods to reduce costs and improving quality of drugs should be given priority. Bringing in a National Medicine Pricing Policy would be a simple but very effective way in controlling drug prices, without taking away the choice of prescription from doctors. This could be easily done through the government's National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority. Prescription pattern monitoring rules need to be implemented stringently to dent the doctor-pharma nexus. Increasing drug manufacturing units and investing heavily in drug research and development will effectively make India "drug self-sufficient" with a wider and cost-effective "drug reach". Better control of branded generics and patent generics are also measures the government should work on. The government should realise that intent reveals desire, but action reveals commitment. Half-hearted action will only jeopardise future action.

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What's in a generic name?

The core issues are affordable access to medicines and their rational prescription and use

The Medical Council of India (MCI) issued a circular on April 21 drawing attention to clause 1.5 of its regulations regarding the professional conduct of doctors: "Every physician should prescribe drugs with generic names legibly and preferably in capital letters and he/she shall ensure that there is a rational prescription of drugs." Further, the circular said, "For any doctor found violating clause 1.5 of Ethics Regulation, suitable disciplinary action would be taken by the concerned SMC/MCI." This has caused considerable unease among medical professionals. It appears that the MCI has responded to the statement by the Prime Minister on April 17 that the government intended to ensure that doctors prescribe medicines by generic names only. Nearly all drugs have three types of names, the International Union of Pure and Applied

Chemistry (IUPAC), the non-proprietary or generic, most commonly the International Non-proprietary Name (INN) administered by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the brand name. Some countries, such as the U.S., Britain and Japan, have their own generic names or approved names. Once patents have expired, companies other than the original manufacturer can produce and sell the drug. This usually results in significant reduction in costs. These off-patent drugs are called generics internationally. However, the term 'generic' has a different meaning in India's pharma trade. Medicines marketed exclusively with INN names are called generics or generic medicine. The WHO advocates generic prescribing as part of an overall strategy to ensure rational medical treatment and prescribing tailored to local conditions. In India, there are many barriers to rational prescribing. For example, there are a bewildering number of fixed-dose combinations (FDCs), the vast majority of which have no therapeutic justification. These FDCs account for about 45% of the market (about Rs45,000 crore). The British National Formulary lists very few FDCs whereas in India there are thousands.

Of the total domestic pharmaceutical formulations, a market of over Rs1 lakh crore, generic medicines, as understood by the pharma trade, account for not more than 10%, or Rs10,000 crore. Therefore, even if a doctor prescribes a drug by generic name, the patient will generally end up buying a branded product.

A misinformed debate

It simply shifts the focus of promotional activities to the pharmacists. It is well known that different companies offer different trade margins. There is the moral hazard that pharmacists will dispense the brand which offers them the biggest margin. The current diktat by the MCI therefore will not reduce prices for the consumer. Some commentators argue that brand names ensure quality and many doctors believe this. This belief is ill-founded. The recent quality survey by the government found 26 of 32 samples from a particular plant of a prominent multinational drug company to be not of standard quality (NSQ). The most effective way to maintain quality is to have periodic testing and stringent disincentives for poor quality. The best insurance for good quality is good regulation. Some argue that bioavailability and bioequivalence (BA and BE) of generics may not be equal to the original brand. Bioavailability refers to the rate and extent to which the active ingredient of the drug present becomes available at the site of action of the drug. In order for a new generic drug to be licensed, it has to be bioequivalent to the reference drug. It means that BA of the generic drug is similar to that of the reference drug. Of the approximately 800 useful drugs known to modern medicine, bioequivalence is really only important for a few drugs with low solubility and high or low permeability, so the debate about BA and BE is somewhat misinformed.

The present pronouncements by government spokespersons on drug pricing, and concomitant actions by the MCI, appear to put the onus of all the problems in this sector on the medical profession whereas successive governments have taken very few initiatives to reduce drug costs and promote manufacture of only rational medicines. The current method of price control legitimises margins of up to 4000% over the cost of the product. The core issues are affordable access to medicines and their rational prescription and use. These objectives require an enlarged list of essential and life-saving medicines under price control, elimination of all irrational FDCs, no brands for drugs off patent, and briefer officially approved names to make it easier for doctors to prescribe generics including the rational FDCs.

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No quick-fix solution to end plagiarism

The solution lies in a thorough reform of the education system

Concerns over academic dishonesty and plagiarism have risen in the digital age. Violation of academic ethics begins in school when holiday homework is 'outsourced' for a price. Such behaviour, in academic parlance, is defined as passing off another's work as one's own — in short, plagiarism. The consent of parents in such practices lends an air of acceptability to the entire exercise and impressionable, young minds unfortunately process this behaviour as harmless, thereby continuing it in tests conducted in colleges and universities too. It is important to understand the reasons behind such behaviour and formulate remedial measures.

The proximate reasons for cheating in higher education are complicated. Young adults, overwhelmed by the unfamiliar experience of living independently in a new city, are often unable to devote time to study. Since university scores form the basis of short-listing for placements and internships, students use cheating as a quick fix in this rat race. The deeper reasons behind these proximate ones can be identified as the fear of mediocre performance in an exam and an absence of any fear of repercussions if caught. Nebulous understanding of what constitutes academic ethics and the fact that violations are often 'let off' with minor penalties add to the problem. While no single solution can be the 'silver bullet' to this multidimensional menace, a combination of systemic changes (reforming the education system and inculcating values) and short-term steps (improving the conduct of examinations) may help in building a culture of academic integrity.

Unconventional techniques

Counselling should be provided to students and parents to encourage admissions based on interest and aptitude. In addition, curriculum design should be aligned with skill building. It should encourage critical thinking among students. Quality teaching should be incentivised and conversely, a 'no-tolerance policy' towards non-performance should be adopted. Overhauling the evaluation system by focussing more on application of knowledge and introducing 'non-traditional' assessment techniques, such as verbal tests and critical paper reviews, could contribute in reducing the need for and incidence of cheating. It is also crucial to make students realise the gravity of violations of academic integrity. Universities across the world give enormous importance to academic ethics. In India, however, even a reputed institution such as Delhi University has no mention of ethics in either its handbook or website. This lack of sensitivity may be addressed by discussing academic ethics in college orientation programmes, along with making the students sign an 'honour code' statement wherein they submit a written declaration that they will refrain from such practices. Similar steps have been useful in reducing the incidence of ragging in colleges in India.

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