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Bow to Ganga's need, don't waste money

ET Editorials

The National Green Tribunal's stinging 543-page judgement on the state of the river Ganga should not come as a surprise. Perhaps it is the evocative nature of the Ganga that compels successive governments to spend ever larger sums of money on cleaning the river, only to fail.

While the tribunal's increased penalties and strictures are welcome, cleaning the Ganga will call for a radical change in approach. The focus must be on the river basin, an ecosystem of its own, and a basin-wide policy across the five states through which the Ganga flows. The local, state and central governments must work in tandem: what one does impacts the rest. Without coordination, any project of cleaning the Ganga will be a Sisyphean task. A ministerial group headed by Nitin Gadkari put the project cost at about Rs80,000 crore. The first step would be to end discharging raw municipal and domestic sewage and industrial effluents into the river. Every day, some 7,300 million litres of sewage is generated along the main stem of the Ganga, while capacity exists only to treat about 2,126 million litres per day.

Nearly 1,200 million litres per day is under construction, but to treat all effluents, the private sector must be induced to invest in treatment capacity, with carrot and stick. The flow required to preserve Ganga's biodiversity must be determined, and water entitlements apportioned among the riparian states, covering hydroelectric projects on the 400-km stretch in Uttarakhand, whose profusion has depressed the river's flow. Cleaning the Ganga is no easy task. But if the government does not adopt an approach focused on the sources of the pollutants, fails to institute a scientifically determined usage and water-apportionment policy, it is doomed to repeat past mistakes, leaving the Ganga to its soiled sorrow.

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Swachh bharat: Volunteering clean information

By: Naina Lal Kidwai & Sanjiv Mehta Kidwai is Chair, India Sanitation Coalition, and Mehta is managing director, Hindustan Unilever

Meet Gurpreet Singh, who believed in Mohandas Gandhi's ideology that the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. For many years, Gurpreet had worked, persevered and excelled at his daily job at one of Hindustan Unilever Ltd's (HUL) factories. But somewhere deep inside, he yearned to do more.

He hoped to do something for his community and his nation. That's when an opportunity came knocking on Gurpreet's door in the form of an innovative programme by HUL called 'Swachhata Doot' (Messenger of Cleanliness). It involved spreading awareness about the connection between cleanliness and eradicating diseases in Gurpreet's village. The programme creatively bundled various facets to create a strong employee volunteering programme. The facets: a large network of 29 factories and 2,000-plus factory workers located in remote locations; an innovation in media to make the message reach far and wide; the will and desire to contribute to the nation.

The idea was to empower factory workers to become Swachhata Doots reaching out to villages with the message of 'Swachh aadat' (clean habits). The India Sanitation Coalition (ISC) with its vision to enable and support an ecosystem for sustainable sanitation has approached other organisations like the Indian Railways. With HUL's support, the ISC hopes to make Swachhata Doot a national movement towards sanitation.

As part of this model, factory workers become agents of behaviour change in their villages by sharing two minute audio stories on three swachh aadats through their mobile phones. Through its network, HUL plans to reach out to five million rural lives. Communication plays an important role in changing behaviour. However, communication strategies in villages can be tricky. With no universal access to the internet and low television penetration, social change becomes a challenge. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) necessitates the need for a change in behaviour, along with the creation of infrastructure. Every year in India, 1.3 million children die before they reach 5, many due to preventable infections. Over 40% of these deaths occur in the neonatal period: the first 28 days after delivery. Something as simple as handwashing can reduce these deaths significantly.

India is one of the leading users of mobile phones: according to a Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) report, as of December 2016, 462 million of the 1.15 billion mobile subscribers are in rural areas. Can a mobile phone be used as a conduit for people to absorb relevant information, build conviction and change mindsets? Absolutely. Each HUL factory works out a congenial schedule that enables volunteering factory workers to set aside some time to act as Swachhata Doots. The workers go back to the villages they have come from (or otherwise allocated locations) and use the mobile phone to give a missed call to a number from where audio content stories on each of the three good habits of drinking clean water, using a clean toilet and washing hands with soap are disseminated.

The programme is also designed to have multiple touchpoints in the village: the mohalla (neighbourhood), aanganwadi (mother and childcare centre) and the school. This initiative runs smoothly, with complete ownership of the factory management team including human resources. Right from training of the workforce on what they need to do as Swachhata Doots to executing the programme is planned in a manner that there is no disruption to business.

As the scale of the programme rests on existing infrastructure of factories and mobile networks, the cost of implementation is also low. A big difference from earlier efforts is that the person communicating the message is from within the community, not an outsider who has always been treated with suspicion. For GoI's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan to be a success, it is important that the message of cleanliness is taken to the interior parts of India where health and hygiene matter the most.

Clean habits will usher a clean India. We need more corporates, public sector undertakings (PSUs) and any organisation for that matter that has human resources like the police, army, railways and schools to sign up on such programmes. All of them can easily train Swachhata Doots, spreading the three habits of WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene). We can only imagine the magnitude of benefit this will bring to India as a national movement towards sanitation. Corporate volunteering is a great way to build an engagement of employees. There can be no better way than to contribute to a massive national agenda. It is a win-win for the employee, the corporate and the country.



दैनिक भास्कर

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समझदारी और शक्ति ही चीन के पैतरो का जवाब

विदेश मंत्री सुषमा स्वराज ने दोकलाम के पठार पर चीन के साथ चल रहे गतिरोध पर राज्यसभा में समझदारी और दृढ़ताभरा बयान देकर यह साबित कर दिया है कि भारत न तो कमजोर है और न ही युद्धोन्मादी। वह चीन से अपने रिश्ते पूरी समझदारी के साथ बनाना चाहता है लेकिन, वह चीन की विस्तारवादी नीतियों और उसके पैतरो को समझता भी है। सुषमा स्वराज का कहना ठीक ही है कि गतिरोध तो चीन ने पैदा किया है, क्योंकि दोकलाम नामक पठार पर भूटान के इलाके में सड़क निर्माण का काम उसने शुरू किया और इससे सिलीगुड़ी के पास भारत के चिकन नेक को हड़प लेने का खतरा पैदा हो गया तो भारत को हस्तक्षेप करना पड़ा। लेकिन चीन का दांव इससे भी आगे है। वह एक तरफ तो यह प्रचार कर रहा है कि हिंदू राष्ट्रवाद से टकराव का खतरा पैदा हुआ है तो दूसरी तरफ इस विवाद को अपने और भूटान के बीच का विवाद बताकर उससे भारत को हाथ खींचने का सुझाव दे रहा है। वह इस विवाद के लिए राष्ट्रीय स्वयं सेवक संघ के धार्मिक राष्ट्रवाद को दोषी ठहरा रहा है। इस दौरान चीनी राजदूत भारत के उन तमाम नेताओं से भी संपर्क कर रहे हैं जो हिंदू राष्ट्रवाद से असहमत हैं। लेकिन यह चीन की भूल होगी कि भारत का कोई भी राजनीतिक दल इस मामले पर मोदी सरकार से अलग हटकर खड़ा होगा। यहां तक कि कम्युनिस्ट पार्टियां भी अब बासठ जैसा रुख अपनाने की स्थिति में नहीं हैं। असली सवाल भूटान की चुप्पी तोड़ने का है। भारतीय सेना अगर दोकलाम में गई है तो भूटान का भी इस मामले पर चुप रहना उचित नहीं है। चीन के रणनीतिक पैतरे को दरकिनार करते हुए भारत को यह तो समझना होगा कि जाति और धर्म के आधार पर उसकी भीतरी लड़ाई उसे कमजोर कर रही है। चाहे पश्चिम बंगाल का धार्मिक ध्रुवीकरण हो या कश्मीर का अलगाववाद उसका फायदा उठाने की कोशिश चीन भी करेगा और पाकिस्तान भी। इसलिए चीन के बहाने ही सही देश के सभी दलों के पास यह मौका है कि जहां वे चीन के राष्ट्रवाद का मुकाबला करने के लिए अपने राष्ट्रवाद को संकीर्णता से ऊपर उठाकर मजबूत बनाएं, वहीं यह भारतीय नीतिकारों और बौद्धिकों को भी सलाह है कि वे चीन से डरना छोड़ दें। चीन राजनीतिक रूप से अभी भी एक कम्युनिस्ट देश है और उससे धार्मिक आधार पर तो संवाद नहीं हो सकता लेकिन, देश का हित छोड़कर भी कोई वार्ता नहीं करनी चाहिए।



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A new (agri) culture

Unless we quickly get our act together, we must be prepared to face the consequences. In any food crisis, it is the top of the food chain that suffers the most. In the case of farmer's distress, the top of food chain is us — the end consumer.

In the last 20 years, according to the government's statistics, more than three lakh farmers have committed suicide in India. The situation of the farmers was never very good to begin with, but has been steadily declining

and has reached its nadir right now. That is why we are seeing spontaneous eruptions of farmers' agitations in state after state across the country. Gradually, these spontaneous agitations are getting organised and now, a coordinated all-India farmers' movement is beginning to take shape which promises to be the beginning of one of the most significant farmers' movement in the history of this country.

The question is: What has brought the farmers to their present state of desperation? The roots of this crisis, in my opinion, lie in the Green Revolution and the policies adopted therein. The situation has also been exacerbated by the government's apathy towards the poor in general and towards farmers and rural folk in particular. The Green Revolution led agriculture towards chemical fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation through large dams and massive irrigation projects. This did lead to higher yields initially and, therefore, that period became known as the Green Revolution with most of the gains coming from the introduction of hybrid variety seeds. However, with chemical fertilisers and hybrid seeds came the problems of resistance in pests and that led to the wider use of pesticides and also of higher potency. This infused poison in the food – especially for farmers, who also inhale the pesticides and, therefore, the higher incidence of cancer and other diseases – it also led to higher input costs and thereafter a gradual decline in productivity because of soil depletion. The chemical fertilisers added only a few chemicals like nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus to the soil without replenishing it with micro-nutrients and the pesticides kill even the soil bacteria. Eventually, the productivity started coming down and with greater use of pesticides, the input cost began to increase. Simultaneously, canals and canal irrigation also led to water-logging and a substantial part of the land became wasteland. In areas which were not irrigated by canals, there was a rise in the unregulated and unsustainable usage of tubewells to mine groundwater, leading its levels to fall rapidly. This led to even deeper tubewells, adding once again to the input costs for the farmers.

The Bhakra Dam was famously called one of the “temples of modern India” by [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) and has often been regarded as a boon to agriculture. Many large irrigation projects were thereafter taken up on similar lines, the most famous being the Sardar Sarovar project in Gujarat, which has been called the lifeline of the state by successive chief ministers. That project has taken up more than 90 per cent of Gujarat's irrigation budget for the last 50 years and today irrigates less than 2 lakh hectares of agricultural land which is roughly 10 per cent of what was promised. It still doesn't irrigate any part of Kuchh or Saurashtra – the arid regions for which it was supposedly made. If instead of this, even half this money had been spent on rain-water harvesting by giving every village of Gujarat a couple of crores for small check dams, every inch of agricultural land in Gujarat would have been irrigated many years ago.

On top of all this we now have repeated droughts and floods – problems that are compounded by climate change. We must also note that the government has fixed minimum support prices (MSP) for just wheat and rice, not for other crops and the MSP so fixed is just about adequate for farmers to meet their costs without giving even minimum wages for their own labour. The Swaminathan Commission had gone into this issue of MSP and had recommended that it should be extended to all crops and should be at least 50 per cent above the average cost price of farmers in each state. Despite a promise by the BJP in its manifesto to implement the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, nothing has been done. In fact, there have been successive cutbacks in the funds allocated to the MGNREGA and other such schemes. Payments for the loss of crops during droughts and floods have not been made despite loan waivers and the ever-greening of loans to big industrialists, who have defaulted on payments to the tune of thousands of crores, by banks. It is only after widespread agitations that some state governments have decided to waive loans to farmers.

However, this is only a temporary solution. If farmers are to be rescued from this crisis we desperately need to change the whole agriculture policy and move it towards organic farming, irrigation by rain-water harvesting and micro-water irrigation, shifting from chemical to organic fertilisers, which will also use less pesticides. It may be noted that contrary to popular belief, the government's data shows that the productivity from organically farmed lands is no less than those farmed with chemicals and pesticides. In addition, the Swaminathan Committee's recommendations must be implemented which will require a considerable amount of money. But that money has to be found. Some of it could come by way of discontinuing the subsidy on chemical fertilisers and some from stopping large irrigation schemes which come at a huge cost and deliver

very little. In India, 50 per cent of the people are still dependent, directly or indirectly, on farming. We cannot ignore their plight anymore. We have been sowing the seeds of the farmers' distress for a long time. Unless we quickly get our act together, we must be prepared to face the consequences. In any food crisis, it is the top of the food chain that suffers the most. In the case of farmer's distress, the top of food chain is us – the end consumer.
