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Sustainable Progress In Nuclear Energy

ET Editorials

The recent grid synchronisation of the third unit at Kakrapar Atomic Power Project (KAPP), near Surat in Gujarat, is notable indeed. The 700 MW unit is now our largest-capacity nuclear reactor, and the first of at least 16 units planned to balance the grid as we duly rev up green renewable power generation, intermittent and variable in nature. The nuclear route provides clean, stable, baseload power, and is an important element of our energy policy and climate strategy.

The latest unit incorporates the indigenously developed pressurised heavy-water reactor (PHWR) technology, designed for use of natural uranium and avoid fuel enrichment. Note that KAPP has two smaller PHWRs, each of 220 MW capacity. Domestic resource endowments — rather small uranium reserves and bountiful availability of nuclear-fertile material thorium — have prompted India to adopt its well-known three-stage nuclear programme. The stated target is to achieve 63 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2032; uranium imports are no longer a constraint, thanks to the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement, agreed upon in circa 2005 and concluded in 2008.

The ongoing development of a chain of nuclear reactors here appears to have avoided costly time and cost overruns, reportedly due to modular design, standardisation and proven buildup of expertise over the years. The country embarked on its second-stage nuclear programme with the successful operation of a research reactor labelled Fast Breeder Test Reactor. Fastbreeder reactors produce more fissile material than they consume. And the 500-MW Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) is slated to be commissioned later this year. The advanced reactors would enable conversion of thorium into fissile uranium in the third stage.



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Food Maths

Imbalances in India's cereal economy need more than a short-term fix

Jean Dreze, [The author is Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University]



The paradox of “hunger amidst plenty” has haunted India for a long time and shows no sign of going away. On the contrary, it reached a new plane in 2020. On the one hand, the economic recession precipitated by the COVID-19 crisis and national lockdown exposed huge numbers of people to food insecurity. Many household surveys point to reduced food intake in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The latest survey, Hunger Watch, suggests that food insecurity continued well after the lockdown. The government is trying to create an impression that the crisis is largely over, but for informal-sector workers, hardship is likely to

continue for a long time.

On the other hand, excess cereal stocks (mainly rice and wheat) have reached unprecedented levels and are all set to grow further in 2021. Bloated stocks reflect a growing imbalance between procurement and distribution. According to the official Foodgrains Bulletin, cereal procurement was around 70 million tonnes in 2017-18, 80 million tonnes in 2018-19, and close to 90 million tonnes in 2019-20. This year, it may cross 100 million tonnes. Meanwhile, cereal distribution under the public distribution system (PDS) and other welfare schemes has stagnated at around 60 million tonnes. Procurement and distribution do not match because they are driven by independent forces — procurement by minimum support prices (MSPs), distribution by the norms of the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

When the NFSA was being drafted 10 years ago, cereal procurement was around 60 million tonnes. The Planning Commission and finance ministry argued that it would not and should not grow further, and insisted on 60 million tonnes as an upper bound for the cereal requirements of the NFSA. Ten years later, procurement has actually grown by more than 50 per cent.

The imbalance between procurement and distribution was temporarily hidden in 2020 because additional PDS rations of 5 kg per person per month were provided to NFSA cardholders from April to November under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). This led to the release of an extra 30 million tonnes or so, compared with normal levels. After reaching a peak of nearly 100 million tonnes in July 2020 (more than twice the buffer-stock norms), cereal stocks stopped growing. But with the recent discontinuation of PMGKAY, they are all set to grow again in 2021.

In the short-term, there is no simple way of closing the gap between procurement and distribution other than expanding distribution. With farmers demanding higher MSPs and being quite assertive about it, procurement is unlikely to decline soon (except in years of bad harvest). Exports would require massive subsidies, since MSPs tend to be higher than world prices — almost 50 per cent higher in the case of wheat today. So would the use of excess stocks as cattle feed. Large subsidies for exports or cattle feed (not to speak of ethanol) would be hard to justify. Open-market sales would defeat the purpose of MSPs.

The case for expanding distribution arises not only from the lack of sensible alternatives but also from the need to consolidate the food security net in this crisis situation. Ad hoc measures, often prone to confusion and corruption, should give way to sustained entitlements. There are many possibilities in this regard — expanding the Antyodaya programme, updating the population figures used to calculate NFSA coverage, raising monthly cereal rations above the modest norm of 5 kg per person, and universalising the PDS in rural areas and urban slums, among others. Just to amplify the last option, universalising the

PDS in rural areas at NFSA rates (5 kg per person per month) would require an extra allocation of about 15-20 million tonnes per year — barely half of the current gap between annual procurement and distribution.

Another approach would be to simply raise state-wise NFSA allocations by a fixed percentage (say 20 per cent), and let the states decide how to use the additional quotas within the PDS framework. During the last few months, many states have tried to expand the coverage of the PDS as a relief measure, but it is hard for them — especially the poorer states — to do it without central assistance.

Aside from a major gap between cereal procurement and distribution, there is also a looming imbalance between production and consumption. Cereal production has been well above 250 million tonnes for five years in a row, and is likely to cross 280 million tonnes this year. According to the second India Human Development Survey, average cereal consumption was a little below 12 kg per person per month 2011-12. Using this benchmark, aggregate cereal consumption is likely to be around 200 million tonnes today, in a normal year. Sustained poverty reduction would perhaps raise it a little beyond that, but not much. Cereals have other uses than human consumption, but it is not clear how well the surplus can be used.

This imbalance reflects the excessive focus of subsidised procurement on rice and wheat. Perhaps the all-out promotion of rice and wheat served a purpose at one time, when India faced a possible danger of cereal shortage. Today, it makes little sense. Diversification of agriculture, especially towards nutritious crops such as millets, pulses, oilseeds and vegetables, is important not only for better nutrition but also to promote equity and sustainability. This requires more balanced subsidies — for instance, higher MSPs for pulses, combined with more active procurement and the inclusion of pulses in the PDS. The feasibility of including pulses in the PDS was amply demonstrated in 2020 under the PMGKAY — this could work wonders for farmers, poor people, and the environment. Diversification also calls for other forms of public support (such as marketing arrangements, credit facilities, scientific advice, effective insurance), especially for small farmers and deprived regions.

Sooner or later, the double imbalance in India's cereal economy (between procurement and distribution as well as between production and consumption) will need more than a short-term fix. Meanwhile, the need of the hour is to expand distribution under the PDS. Failing that, the country is heading towards another round of wasteful stock accumulation even as poor people struggle to feed their families.

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The listening deficit

The fundamental reform India-and the world-needs is the process of listening to other perspectives

Arun Maira, [Maira, a former member, Planning Commission, is the author of Listening for Well-Being: Conversations with People Not Like Us]

“The democratic process cannot be allowed to be subverted through unlawful protests,” Prime Narendra Minister Modi tweeted, commenting on the storming of the US Capitol by Donald Trump's supporters.

Meanwhile, thousands of farmers are camped in bitterly cold weather around India's capital. They are peacefully protesting amendments to farm laws the government has rammed through without a discussion in the country's elected Parliament. They threaten to carry out a peaceful tractor march in Delhi on the nation's Republic Day if their demands are not conceded by then. These protests in the world's two largest democracies raise questions about the health of the global democratic enterprise.

What is a "lawful" protest? Who determines whether the purpose of the protest is lawful? And which methods of protest are lawful? If such questions should be discussed within a democratically-elected Parliament (or Congress), and if elected institutions do not function, should the people not protest? They must protest, albeit non-violently, in a manner that will make their protest heard as the Indian farmers are, and the protestors in Shaheen Bagh were.

Experts advising the government are prepared for discussions with the farmers provided the discussions are "evidence-based", they say. Which raises more questions. What is evidence required for? What is acceptable as evidence? The experts have their own scientific models about what is important. The farmers have their experience of what matters. Experts want more hard data. Whereas farmers' mistrust of the government's intentions is based on their experience, including the way in which the reforms are being rammed on them. That's not how democracy is supposed to work, they protest.

Liberals everywhere are feeling threatened by the rise of autocratic leaders. Elected leaders may say they work for the people and listen to them. However, the experts who advise them plug people as numbers into their scientific models, even looking down on them as uneducated masses. When leaders rely too heavily on expert advisers for solutions, trust in elected leaders breaks down. Trump rose up on a global wave of citizens' mistrust in the way democratic institutions are functioning. Trump may have fallen, but the wave of illiberalism has not passed. It has risen due to the failure, so far, of two projects to meet citizens' expectations of improvements in the human condition — the project of electoral democracy, and the project of scientific rationality.

The Indian government is being urged by economists and industrialists to implement economic reforms firmly. The people who are the intended beneficiaries are not convinced, as the farmers' are saying. Even experts disagree amongst themselves whether the reforms are the right ones. Indian economists have been very critical in recent years of the Supreme Court's "interference" in the economy, with its decisions in tax matters, etc. It does not have the necessary expertise for economic policies, they say. Caught in the impasse of agriculture reforms, the government now seems inclined to let the Supreme Court decide what should be done. Is this not an admission that the government and the economists who advise it do not have the expertise required for democratic governance?

The expansion of the idea of human rights is the mother force of democracy. Democracy is deepened by the realisation that those who rule always have more power than those they rule over. The nobility over peasants; white people over coloured people; upper castes over lower castes; employers over workers; men over women. The advance of ill-regulated capital across the world in recent years, to promote the ease of doing business rather than ease of living, has given those with more wealth greater power to frame rules than citizens who have no wealth. Democracy must correct this.

The fault-lines in democracy are: Ill-regulated capitalist markets are corroding democracy; experts are misinformed about realities; global elites, who are connected in a global community transcending national borders, are disconnected from common people. They think "global" and believe that thinking

“national and local” is going backwards whereas people within countries everywhere, especially those left behind in the global race, want their governments to look inwards to their needs first.

The Edelman Trust Barometer, an annual global survey of citizens’ trust in institutions reported, in 2020, that: “A growing sense of inequity is undermining trust in all institutions — government, business, the media, even NGOs.” Government, the media, and NGOs are supposed to serve the people. Even businesses realise they must be trusted by the people for their license to operate. They should not have to turn to the government to convince citizens that big corporations are good for the people. Because then the people will believe that the government and corporations are in cahoots to serve corporate interests, and they will lose faith in their own government.

Trust is decreasing because no one is listening to others. The government is not listening to the people, neither are experts. Experts in their specialised silos are not even listening to experts in other silos. Social media is forcing people further into gated communities of “people like us” who are unable, and unwilling, to listen to “people not like us”. Democratic governance is breaking down because no one is willing to listen to people they don’t understand or agree with.

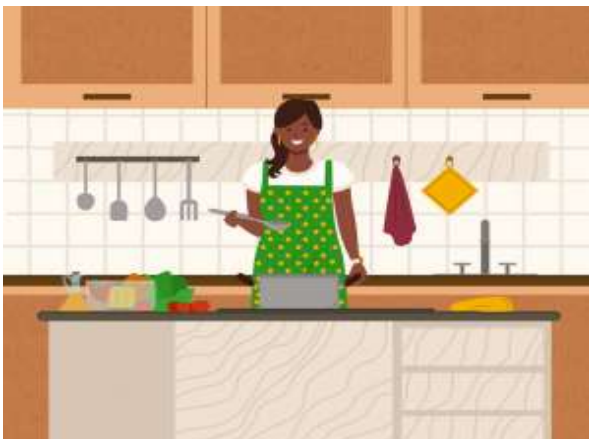
The fundamental reform India needs (and the world too) is a “no tech” one. It is the process of listening to people who do not seem to think like we do. By listening to other perspectives, we will comprehend the system of which we are all small parts; and economists will improve their science too. Moreover, by listening better to each other we can trust each other, and then we can work together, democratically, to make the world better for everyone.

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Home, alone

***A false hierarchy of gender and caste practices has devalued domestic and care work.
The pandemic has sharpened this inequality***

Amrita Dutta



The kitchen is a place of nourishment and skill — but also of the exhausted, unvoiced rage of Indian women. That anger simmers in the just-released Malayalam film, *The Great Indian Kitchen*. But before it boils over, the camera lingers on the hands of women at work: Slicing carrots, peeling tapioca, washing cups, scrubbing dishes, grinding coconut into a chutney on a stone slab, sweeping, mopping, washing. Breakfast follows lunch follows dinner. The men read the newspaper or stretch into a yoga-asana, call out for tea (with milk for him, and without for someone else). They ask for the toothbrush to be handed over and know hot dosas will find the plate, unasked. Scene after scene looks at the

never-quite-finished women's labour at home — as well as the easy, polite entitlement with which men receive the fruits of that work, not even a haldi stain on the assumption that this is how it should be.

This unsettling look at domestic drudgery — both in Jeo Baby's *The Great Indian Kitchen* and the Bengali film *Tasher Ghawr*, about a housewife trapped with her abusive husband in lockdown — is rare in contemporary popular culture. Indeed, to many of us, food is daily pleasure and aestheticism, a link to cultures and histories that make us. But like the salt that disappears into a sambhar or a dal done right, the arduous labour of women in the kitchen and home (and their lack of choice in opting out of it) is an essential — and ignored — ingredient of Indian lives. Here are the facts: The NSSO time-use survey 2019 of nearly 4.5 lakh Indians reveals that women spend nearly five hours every day on unpaid domestic work, compared to 98 minutes by men. Less than 6 per cent of Indian men are involved in cooking, compared to 75 per cent women.

The home is where the majority of Indian women perform work that sustains households and enables men (and privileged women) to take up productive paid jobs in the economy. Even for those women who take up work outside the home, domestic responsibilities shape their choice of work and professional progress. The drag on Indian women's labour force participation (one of the lowest in the world) is not only a function of low education and social status, but also, to a significant extent, of culture — the basket of values that, by tying women's identity tightly to the supervision of children and home, nudges them out of the workforce. "Why do you want to take up a job, when the work you do at home is more important than that of ministers?" says the father-in-law to the newly-wed daughter-in-law in *The Great Indian Kitchen*. Like Schrodinger's cat, the domestic work performed by wives and daughters is both priceless, and of little value.

No matter the strides in education and social practices, in the political and cultural discourse about women, marriage and home are still seen, unquestioningly, as the rightful and natural context for women's lives. So much so that economist Swaminathan Aiyar can prescribe work-from-home (WFH) as a fix to the problem of too few women in the workforce because a) "they do not have to leave home and face molestation or badnaami" and b) because it can make it feasible for them to do "both office and family chores". The Supreme Court Chief Justice finds it possible to suggest that women farmers from Punjab give up their space in democratic protests and return home, rather than bargain for their economic rights. It is the same daddy complex that leads to anti-conversion laws meant to "rescue" Hindu women in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh from the exercise of their own will — and return them to their families, their homes.

For a brief while last year, the middle-class lockdown home — by becoming a simultaneous space for salaried work and unpaid housework — made it impossible to ignore the toil that sustained a house. In the absence of domestic help, schools and childcare, women were stretched thin — but men, too, did more at home. A study by economist Ashwani Deshpande found that the gender gap in domestic work shrunk during the lockdown, but widened again by August, when many men returned to employment.

Around April, I had stepped into full-time kitchen work for the first time in my life, ears ringing with the mocking prophecy of aunts ("In the end, no woman escapes the pressure cooker"). All my life I had determined that I would not turn into my mother, an immensely capable woman whose talent and energy ought not to have been circumscribed by the dazzling meals she cooked, and the exacting, punishing standards of domestic work by which she ran her life. But, here, I was. Working with my mother in the kitchen, I learnt with my hands what I knew in theory — that this is work that demands skill, creativity and organisation; that like all physical labour, it rewires and restores the rhythm of the body; that it

allows the sharing of pleasures that makes us human. Why, then, do men not feel the need to acquire this life still?

Could a salary for housework paid by the state, as Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) leader Kamal Haasan has promised Tamil Nadu women voters, be a way to value this work? While a refreshing acknowledgement of the labour that subsidises the economic activities of society, the proposal leaves the fundamental hierarchy of the patriarchal home unchallenged — that a woman's place is in the home — and absolves it of change. A salary also presupposes a worker's ability to bargain for higher wages, and exit her workplace. Can these negotiations take place in the home, which places men's needs and pleasures at the centre of its workflow? More importantly, how can women determine a fair price, when the labour that sustains homes is so consistently devalued? These are important questions, given that the economic shock of the pandemic is bound to push more women out of the workforce — and into unpaid domestic service. According to Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data, while men recovered most of their lost jobs by November 2020, women didn't — 49 per cent of job losses were of women.

A false hierarchy of gender and caste practices has, indeed, devalued the essential work that sustains us — whether cleaning or cooking or the care of infants and elderly. It allows caste-privileged women and nearly all men to pass on this work to those from "lower castes" and the impoverished — for low wages. This fundamental inequality robs women of self-worth, but also stunts men into pre-fabricated social roles. It radiates out of the home into the public sphere. It shapes workplaces that reward 24×7 male workers who can afford to ignore the demands of the home; eases out women who shoulder precisely that burden or confines them in supportive, secondary roles. It leads to abysmal wages paid to domestic workers. Care work performed by women, largely from the lower castes, remains devalued even in the middle of a pandemic, as is evident in the struggle of ASHA workers. Even professions such as teaching, that tend to employ more women, remain low-paying.

Dismantling these hierarchies – and expanding the imagination of women as citizens independent of the home — might make the family a nourishing place, not only for men.



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चीन के मंसूबे

संपादकीय

गलवान घाटी विवाद की आंच अभी ठंडी भी नहीं पड़ी कि चीन ने अब अरुणाचल प्रदेश में मोर्चा खोल दिया है। अपना पुराना रवैया दोहराते हुए चीन ने कहा है कि तिब्बत के दक्षिणी हिस्से- जंगनान क्षेत्र जो कि भारत का अरुणाचल प्रदेश है, को लेकर उसकी नीति में कोई बदलाव नहीं आया है और वह अरुणाचल प्रदेश को कोई मान्यता नहीं देता। हाल में यह विवाद तब उठा जब अरुणाचल प्रदेश के सुबनसिरी जिले में सरी चू नदी के पास एक छोटा गांव बसा देने की चीनी साजिश का खुलासा हुआ। पिछले एक साल में चीन ने जिस गुपचुप तरीके से इस गांव को बसा लिया, वह उसकी पड़ोसी देशों की जमीन हड़पने की नीति का प्रमाण है। हकीकत यह है कि सुबनसिरी जिले का यह इलाका वास्तविक नियंत्रण

रेखा से सटा है और भारत के हिस्से में पड़ता है। लेकिन चीन ने इस पर कब्जा कर रखा है और इसे विवादित क्षेत्र बना रखा है। ऐसे में सवाल यह है कि अगर इलाका विवादित है भी, तो फिर वह क्यों यहां अवैध निर्माण कर अशांति पैदा कर रहा है। यह इलाका सामरिक और रणनीतिक दृष्टि से बहुत ही संवेदनशील है और यहां किसी भी तरह की चीनी गतिविधि उकसावे वाली कार्रवाई से कम नहीं है। जाहिर है, चीन भारत को घेरने के लिए नए रास्ते तलाश रहा है।

पिछले कुछ सालों में चीन ने अरुणाचल प्रदेश के सीमाई इलाकों में जिस तेजी से अपना जाल बिछाना शुरू किया है, वह इस बात का स्पष्ट संकेत है कि भविष्य में चीन इस क्षेत्र में सैन्य गतिविधियां तेज करेगा। इसी क्रम में तिब्बत की राजधानी ल्हासा से न्यांगची तक रेल लाइन बिछाने की परियोजना पर तेजी से किया है और यह रेल लाइन अरुणाचल प्रदेश के पास से गुजरती है। न्यांगची से लेकर ल्हासा तक चार सौ नौ किलोमीटर की सड़क वह पहले ही बना चुका है। चीन का सारा जोर भारत से लगी साढ़े चार हजार किलोमीटर लंबी सीमा पर जगह-जगह ऐसे निर्माण करना है जिससे सीमाई इलाकों में उसकी पहुंच आसान हो सके। इसीलिए अरुणाचल से लेकर डोकलाम और गलवान तक वह भारतीय सीमा क्षेत्र में पड़ने वाले इलाकों पर कब्जा करता जा रहा है और इन इलाकों को विवादित बना रहा है ताकि भारत इन इलाकों में अपनी पहुंच न बना सके।

भारत और चीन के बीच सीमा विवाद कोई नया तो है नहीं। चीन चाहता भी नहीं है कि सीमा विवाद कभी सुलझे। अगर एक बार सीमा विवाद सुलझ गया तो उसके विस्तारवादी मंसूबे पूरे कैसे होंगे! चीन का भारत के साथ ही नहीं, अपने सभी पड़ोसियों के साथ सीमा विवाद है और हर देश के भू-भाग को उसने इसी तरह विवादित बना कर कब्जा रखा है। अरुणाचल प्रदेश को लेकर भारत का रुख शुरू से ही स्पष्ट रहा है कि यह भारत का अभिन्न हिस्सा है। भारत के रक्षा मंत्रियों के अरुणाचल प्रदेश के सीमाई इलाकों के दौरों पर चीन आपत्ति करता रहा है। हालांकि अरुणाचल प्रदेश में उसकी गतिविधियों पर भारत पर नजर है। सामरिक महत्त्व और चीनी गतिविधियों को देखते हुए भारत ने भी अरुणाचल प्रदेश से सटे सीमाई इलाकों में सड़कों का जाल बिछाने और पुलों के निर्माण के निर्माण का काम जोरों पर है। लेकिन भारत को लेकर चीन जिस तरह की विरोधाभासी और संदेहास्पद कूटनीति अपनाए हुए है, उससे तो लग रहा है कि वह गलवान विवाद को हल करने की दिशा में बढ़ने की बजाय भारत को और बड़े जाल में फंसाने की साजिश रच रहा है।
