



Going forward in Goa

BJP's challenges don't stop with the trust vote; it must end Goa's reputation for rent-seeking

Fractured mandates and post-poll coalitions are not new to Goa, which has had a history of political instability. This time round, after the counting of votes on March 11, the process became even more complex with the issue of government-formation being taken to court. With only 13 legislators in the 40-member Assembly, it was clearly going to be difficult for the BJP to stake a claim to power, but the single largest party, the Congress, was short of a majority too, winning 17 seats. Moreover, the Congress failed to get its own legislature party in order after the elections and was unable to make haste in choosing a leader and finding allies. Support was guaranteed to the BJP by the Maharashtra Gomantak Party, which had been an ally in the outgoing government. With the Goa Forward Party and two independents also hitching their bandwagon to the BJP, it was evident that the party had the upper hand. In the absence of a pre-poll alliance, it is arguable that the Governor should have invited the leader of the single largest party to try to form the government. But there was no likelihood of the Congress being able to command a majority in the House without the endorsement of the MGP or the GFP and independents, something that, notwithstanding its protestations, the party fully well realised. The Supreme Court's decision to not stay Governor Mridula Sinha's invitation to the BJP to form the government may have, at least partially, blunted the criticism that she acted in a partisan manner. With the BJP winning the vote of confidence in the Assembly, a certain post hoc legitimacy has been established, but there is no escaping the fact that this happened in the shadow of a controversy.

While the party will be relieved to have returned to power, the BJP's reduced tally in the Assembly elections is a reflection of a degree of dissatisfaction with its performance. Past State governments in Goa have had a reputation for rent-seeking and paying little regard to violations of environmental norms, especially by the construction, tourism and mining industries. The BJP, after coming to power in 2012, had promised to take steps to eradicate corruption and graft at various levels of the State's administration, but its efforts were found to be lacking. Goa's voters have this time clearly been looking for political alternatives, which is reflected in the success of smaller parties such as the GFP. That the senior BJP leader and Union Defence Minister, Manohar Parrikar, had to be roped in to take over as Chief Minister indicates that the party is aware of the challenges it faces in running a fresh government in Goa. Mr. Parrikar now has a chance to deliver on the pledge he made during his previous tenure, of delivering a better administration.

Return to normal

By pointing to gradual rate increases, the Fed reassures markets and policymakers

The U.S. Federal Reserve has resumed normal monetary service by raising interest rates for the second time in three months. The Fed's decision on Wednesday reflects its confidence in the continuing expansion and signals that its efforts to reflate the world's largest economy are largely on track – with overall inflation seen to be stabilising around its longer-run target of 2% over the next couple of years. Significantly, Chair Janet Yellen stressed that policymakers expect the strengthening economy would warrant “gradual increases” in the benchmark federal funds rate to ensure that the monetary policy stance remains accommodative of growth, even as price stability is ensured. This emphasis on “gradual” provides a degree of policy predictability that markets, for now, can broadly factor in two more rate increases of one quarter of a percentage point each for the rest of 2017 – especially when coupled with a median projection for the signalling rate to reach 1.4% at the end of the year, from the current 0.75%-1.0% range. The statement has allayed fears of an accelerated rate normalisation, that could have triggered a sharp jump in outflows from emerging markets such as India. Investors worldwide are bound to feel more reassured that one of the world's key economic engines is in good shape and that should bode well for global demand. India's exporters, including of software services, are also likely to see a silver lining in the Fed chief's reference to a distinct firming in business investment, after having been soft in 2016, that has helped put business sentiment at “favourable levels”.

Ms. Yellen also flagged caveats to the Fed's projections. Averring that policy is “not on a pre-set course”, she pointed to the potential impact that changes in fiscal policy, among other factors, could have on the economic outlook. While acknowledging that it is still too early to anticipate exactly how the Trump administration's fiscal policies may unfold, the central bank is intimating that it will be closely monitoring the new dispensation's broad budget plans and remains ready to change policy tack if it were to perceive any risks to its price stability goals. There is also the matter of when the Fed may decide to initiate the process of normalising its balance sheet. Given that the central bank's holdings of Treasury bonds and mortgage-backed securities reached record levels in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, any plan to begin unwinding these holdings will need to be very carefully calibrated and communicated in advance to ensure that global markets don't witness a repeat of the “taper tantrum” of 2013. Ms. Yellen stressed just that when she said the Fed “as a matter of prudent planning” had discussed issues related to an eventual change to its reinvestment policy and, while no decisions were taken, would ensure that the process be “gradual and predictable”.

Missing the spirit for the body

It is time that the Censor Board lost its authority to effectively ban films



PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

The Central Board of Film Certification, the ‘Censor Board’ to most Indians, has done it again. It has turned down yet another film. This one, *Ka Bodyscapes* directed by Jayan Cheriaan, has the distinction of having been viewed thrice by the Board. By its act the Board has lowered its credibility, and by association that of the Indian republic in whose name it acts. It is time that its authority to effectively ban films should go. This not because of its provenance – it is after all a vestige of colonialism – but because by refusing to certify the film in question, it has revealed itself as tendentious, driven by prudery, ignorant of India's history and unmindful of the Constitution.

The narrative circle

As *Ka Bodyscapes* cannot be viewed in the cinema hall, and I was not fortunate enough to view it in the private screenings that have taken place in India, I must rely on descriptions of those who have watched it and on the statements of the Board that have made their way into the public domain via the media. So what is the film about? We get an idea from the writ petition filed in the High Court of Kerala seeking restraint on the CBFC's virtual ban. We are told that it revolves around three characters. Haris is a free-thinking artist who also happens to be a Muslim. He is in a relationship with Vishnu who comes from a family of right-wingers and is a Hanuman-bhakt himself, which presumably makes him



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Hindu but does not bring acceptance from his family. They have a friend in Sia who comes from a conservative background and is as Muslim as Haris is. She chooses feminism and faces flak for it. On behalf of the director, the petitioners clarify that the film is about societal attitudes towards individual freedom and is not a critique of religion. Finally, the film is set in Kozhikode, a city the rooted cosmopolitanism of which belies its size.

Now, what are the Board's objections? I rely on what is reported in the media. Thus, on March 3, it was reported in *The Hindu* that the Board has objected that: “... the film is glorifying the subject of gay and homosexual relationship, nudity accentuating vital parts of male body (in paintings)... The film is explicit of scene offending Hindu sensibilities depicting vulgarity and obscenity through the movie.” There is also recourse to the trope of ‘law and order’. It is extraordinary for an order from a public body that there is no trace of reasoning to be found in all this. The Board appears innocent of both our storied past as a people or of the Indian

Constitution. Temple sculpture celebrates sexual union of every kind, which only the philistines miss. Moreover, there is no stricture against the depiction of nudity in Hinduism. Further, the Board appears to not have heard of court judgments which categorically reject the argument of ‘law and order’ as a criterion for banning a film. As for religious sensibilities, the Constitution gives an individual the freedom to practise his or her religion but not the right to be protected from any reference to it that may be interpreted as giving offence. All practices are open to scrutiny and no ‘religious immunity’ is on offer. India is a secular republic and, accordingly, no special rights are accorded to religion. Therefore, all Indians are subject to the laws of the land. Moreover, political rights are due only to individuals. It is by a strange anthropomorphism that sensibility is assigned to a whole religion. A more sensational instance of this was when Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was banned under the Customs Act. By taking recourse to religion, the Board has left it easier to challenge its ruling.

It is true that in India religious identity is often an ascriptive marker of persons, and it is difficult to get very far away from it. But the role of public institutions in a democracy is to wean society away from this practice by weighing in on behalf of individuals trying to break free of oppressive social custom so long as this does not violate the freedom of others. It is not obvious that *Ka Bodyscapes* comes even close to achieving the last. If religions are to be granted sensibility and the religious is the only identity a person is allowed to have, in this instance India's religions must find the film affirming, because when forming intimate associations with persons of other religions, we seemingly recognise one another's religion. But, actually, all this is utterly irrelevant in the context as religion should have no role to play in determining the sexual lives of people.

The CBFC cannot be allowed to get away with the pettiness that it hides behind the fig leaf of religion. Its beef clearly is with “glorifying the subject of homosexuality”, by which prospect the Board is clearly shocked. It cannot be unaware that much of what Bollywood does is the untiring propagation of the heteronormative ideal in human relations. The Board has taken the law into its own hands as there is no legal stricture on the representation of homosexuality in any form. It has gratuitously gone the extra mile. Even Macaulay had contended himself with the somewhat blunt shield of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which is applicable to all Indians. It is a reflection of the career of cultural fascism in India that the rights of Indians of an alternative sexual orientation can be taken away so casually. The right at stake is that of affirmative representation.

There are three ways of seeing

Ka Bodyscapes. The first one is the construction that it is an affront to religion. Of the three, it is the most simplistic. Consider the imagery of Indra's youthful companions, the marut, as men in the sky who relish one another's bodies. Devout Hindus are not upset by this picture as they treat it as beside the point of their belief. The Board reveals its lack of understanding of so confident a religion when it rushes unsolicited to its defence. The second is to see it as a story of friendship between a Hindu and a Muslim directed by a Christian. The academic secularists would be made happy by this characterisation, but it gives primacy to religion, which is what the film is trying to get away from.

The most promising way of seeing the film is to see it as showing how Indians are rejecting social strictures to follow their instincts. I am entirely open to the possibility that whenever I do get to watch Jayan's film I might find it unappealing. Many films on the same theme clumsily purvey stereotypes, are historically inaccurate and politically naive. However, accounts are that this one at least presents gay relationships in a self-affirming way for a change.

On other screens

In its design to torpedo the project, the Board may have unwittingly done more for the gay movement in India than they care to, for as Oscar Wilde had put it, “There is only one thing worse in the world than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.” And, it may have scuttled the possibility of *Ka Bodyscapes* being watched in the cinemas, but there's always Amazon.

Pulapre Balakrishnan is professor of economics at Ashoka University, Sonapat and Senior Fellow at IIM, Kozhikode

Leaving no one behind

The Vision 2030 document should formulate a disability-inclusive development agenda



ANKIT RAJIV JINDAL

The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) is formulating a Vision 2030 document. This document is coterminous with the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all 17 of which equally affect persons with disabilities as they do any other citizen.

The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People conducted a seminar in December 2016. The government, the private sector, and leaders from various development fields participated to take stock of the current situation and deliberate on how disability could be integrated in Vision 2030. A starting point was that the government, the NITI Aayog, and all the associated stakeholders should interpret the provisions of the SDGs in line with the requirements and spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). What may a road map

for creating a disability-inclusive development agenda look like?

A starting point

Disability is still seen as an opportunity for dispensing charity rather than as a development or a human rights issue. The knowledge of MPs and State legislatures must be refreshed on the rights, needs and issues of persons with disabilities based on the changing disability landscape, the UNCRPD, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The NITI Aayog must invest effort in building awareness for NGOs, academics, civil society, the private sector, etc., in order to articulate a disability-inclusive development agenda.

Persons with disabilities must be seen as integral to the decision-making process and not as an afterthought. They must be mentioned in the outcome metrics defined for each goal, target or indicator, and these matrices must elaborate specific strategies for persons with disabilities. There must be seven-year checkpoints for ministries or departments to assess the outcomes. Fair and adequate representation of disability groups during the consultation process is imperative.

The NITI Aayog has mapped each

goal to a nodal ministry and each target with the government's key programmes and departments to make these targets accountable and realise them within a specified time period. However, disability is an issue that cuts across several ministries; it is not just a subject for the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Our analysis indicates that there are 26 ministries where there needs to be a dedicated focus towards persons with disabilities and a specific cell to address their concerns. Specific budgets need to be allocated across initiatives and ministries to address the needs of persons with disabilities. The NITI Aayog too must have a dedicated cell which acts as a focal point and works with all ministries to monitor implementation and track progress across all initiatives for persons with disabilities.

The document must insist that data for persons with disabilities are appropriately collected, maintained and disaggregated. This must include all government initiatives that capture any data related to population or human resources or human development, including employment, education, poverty and hunger. While reporting from the SDGs' point of view, the NITI Aayog



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must ensure that the process of data collection and disaggregation for disability must not be relegated to the silos of seven targets which explicitly mention persons with disabilities, or the additional six targets which mention people in vulnerable situations. In addition, there are universal targets, which must also be achieved for persons with disabilities. Our analysis indicates that there are more than 85 targets across 15 goals encompassing more than 100 indicators where there is a need to collect, analyse, disaggregate and report data for persons with disabilities. All data must be available in the public domain, and published in an accessible format and in a timely manner.

It is important for India to have the addition of a universally accep-

ted disability question(s) on all existing data instruments. The UN recommends the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability, while India has been using a different question. A standard question needs to be developed, taking into account the socio-cultural sensitivities of people with disabilities and their families. The NITI Aayog should call for a national-level consultation with cross-disability groups and arrive at a consensus on the right question, which should then be unified across all data instruments of all sources of demographic information, including the impending Unique Disability ID, the population census, civil registration, sample surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation, Sample Registration System and for all social schemes.

The overarching principle of Vision 2030 is to “leave no one behind”. We, as disabled citizens, are anxious to learn how this crucial document, which will encompass the SDGs 17 goals and 169 targets, will be inclusive of our needs and aspirations.

Ankit Rajiv Jindal is a marketing specialist, social entrepreneur and a disability rights activist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Blaming EVMs

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal seems to stir up some controversy or the other (“Kejriwal, Mayawati up the ante against EVMs”, March 16). Now he says Electronic Voting Machines were tampered with. How has he come up with the pointed figure of having lost 25% of votes to the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party coalition? If EVMs were tampered with, as alleged by him, how did he win the 2015 Delhi Assembly election with an absolute majority? Also, how did the Congress, and not the SAD-BJP coalition which was in power before the election, win in Punjab, if his claims are true? It is sad that Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati has also joined the blame-the-EVMs bandwagon. Faulting EVMs has become a fad for our politicians. In the past too, political veterans who lost elections questioned the conduct of polls and wanted India to revert to

the outmoded and cumbersome method of manual counting. All these objections were rightly put to rest by the Election Commission. To use that same excuse again for a loss is outlandish. An Indian Revenue Service official-turned-politician, and a Chief Minister, Mr. Kejriwal should be careful in airing such views.

R. SAMPATH, Chennai

That leaders are blaming EVMs for their losses is unbecoming of them. Their allegations are an insult to democracy, to the EC, and to the voters. Their accusations go against the grain of science, for Indian EVMs are considered to be among the most tamper-proof in the world.

P.R. KRISHNAN, Thrissur

Saffron sweep

The author has lamented the fact that “secular parties” were unable to offer any alternative to the

BJP's discourse of “communalised development” (“Saffron storm in Uttar Pradesh”, March 16). By secular parties, she might have meant the Congress, the SP, and the BSP. But to be fair, there are no genuine secular parties in the country. All parties are either covertly or overtly playing the communal card for electoral gains. When an entire community votes en masse for a particular party or strategically votes to defeat a particular party, would that promote secularism? Of course, it was wrong on the BJP's part to not give even a single ticket to Muslims in the U.P.

The party's excuses or reasons for this are devoid of merit. It is a fact that Muslim votes have also contributed to the party's spectacular triumph. It is incumbent on the BJP leadership to ensure that Muslims have a justifiable representation in the incoming State

administration. If all the parties opposing the BJP come together with the sole aim of defeating it, these alliances will only be short-lived. It is time for the Opposition to stop deriding Prime Minister Modi, as mere anti-Modi politics has become futile and counterproductive. They need to come up with better and more acceptable alternatives.

C.G. KURIKOSSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

Live proceedings

The Congress, which cried foul against the BJP for “stealing the Goa mandate” from it, has failed in keeping a small flock of 17 MLAs together (“Manohar Parrikar wins floor test with 22 votes in Goa Assembly”, March 16). A welcome fact about the trust vote was that there was live coverage of the Assembly proceedings. As Manohar Parrikar claimed, no one was kept captive and everyone voted of their own volition. This is completely

different from what happened in the Tamil Nadu Assembly last month. All the MLAs who voted for Edappadi Palaniswami were brought from Koovalur before the trust vote and there were no live proceedings. Chaos reigned in the Assembly. Had the proceedings been made public, we would have known whose claim was correct given that different versions emerged from the DMK working president and the Governor. Tamil Nadu could do well to take a leaf from Goa's book.

SUBRAMANIAN N., Chennai

Maternity leave

Private sector companies

must keep in mind that a woman will not bear children every fiscal (“A lost opportunity”, March 16). This means that whether in terms of money or absenteeism, the company would have to bear the cost maybe once or twice in the lifetime of a woman employee. The absenteeism problem can be dealt with if the company encourages the policy of working from home. If the Maternity Bill spoke about paternity leave too, how would the private sector ever make hiring decisions? Its costs would only escalate.

PEARL SAINI, Haryana

MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>The report headlined “Telugu actor's husband kills self” (some editions, March 15, 2017) erroneously referred to actor Jayasudha's husband Nitin Kapur as the cousin of Bollywood actor Anil Kapoor.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail:readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturba Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

LEFT, RIGHT, CENTRE

Are injectable contraceptives advisable?

The government is aiming to control women's fertility rather than uphold their reproductive rights



SULAKSHANA NANDI
is national joint convener, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (Peoples' Health Movement, India)

← LEFT Instead of putting its efforts into improving the delivery of existing contraceptive methods, the government has recently chosen to introduce the injectable contraceptive, depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA), which is known to have adverse effects on women's health.

The articulation of population as a 'problem' or talking in terms of a 'population explosion' is deeply problematic, for it brings with it the spectre of 'control' and eventually, in a country like ours, control over women's body and fertility. Countries that have achieved lower ferti-

lity rates have done so due to economic and social development and improvements in public services, including health services. Simply put, if a family is convinced that their one child or two children will not only survive but be healthy, they won't have more children.

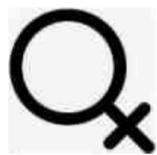
Women, even rural women, today want fewer children. However, they are forced to have more children due to several reasons that range from economic compulsions, lack of negotiating power within the family, to limited access to health services including contraceptive services.

Women's groups and various

health groups have been cautioning the government for decades against introducing injectable contraceptives in the public health system.

Case against injectables

First, there are concerns regarding the preparedness of the government health system to implement this contraceptive method. DMPA may be easy to administer, but health workers need to be capable of assessment before administering it and of managing side effects that some women may experience. Also, DMPA requires administration once every three months. The Government of India guidelines on the injectable contraceptive mention side effects like



menstrual changes, irregular bleeding, prolonged/heavy bleeding, amenorrhea (stopping of menstruation), weight gain, headaches, changes in mood or sex drive, and decrease in bone mineral density. Moreover, studies from Africa have shown that the risk of HIV infection may increase for women who have been administered injectable contraceptives. Second, the government needs to introspect whether existing methods have been made available to people through informed choice, in a safe manner.

Gaps in the system

Regular stock-outs of oral contraceptives and condoms, lack of train-

ing to the auxiliary nurse midwife or ANMs on intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUCDs), instances of lack of informed consent for post-partum IUCD, and the rampant violation of the guidelines for sterilisation, which in 2014 led to the deaths of 13 women, all reflect gaps in implementing and monitoring such programmes. It is strange that while the existing contraceptive methods are not being provided properly, the government has gone on to introduce a method that raises so many questions and may prove to be more complicated in its implementation. Why didn't the government put all its efforts into promoting male vasectomy, for instance, which is a safer option and less of a problem for women?

By introducing DMPA in the pub-

lic health programme, the government also has to answer whose interests are actually being served. There are serious concerns that some agencies are pushing this for profit. Experience from the private sector, where these contraceptives had been made available previously, shows that very few women had opted for injectable contraceptives.

The government should have been more cautious in introducing this method. It appears that by introducing injectable contraceptives under the guise of 'expanding the basket of choices', the government actually aims to control women's fertility rather than uphold their reproductive rights.

As told to Anuradha Raman

This is about expanding the basket of choices. Injectable contraceptives are just an option



S.K. SIKDAR
is commissioner of the family planning division of the Health Ministry

→ RIGHT The Health Ministry is in the process of introducing injectable contraceptives in the National Family Planning Programme (NFPP), with the aim to expand the basket of choices available to women. Introducing modern methods of family planning is a major part of the reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health (RMNCH+A) strategy to improve maternal and infant health indicators, with a special focus on delaying the first birth and the spacing between births. Including injectable contraceptives in the NFPP

will ensure access to preferred contraceptive methods for women.

Stress on quality

Every new programme has to go through a cycle of proper training and capacity-building. Under RMNCH+A, we are trying to ensure that Indian women make an informed choice when they pick a type of family planning or spacing method. After Bilaspur (where 13 women died in a government-run sterilisation camp), we have tried to improve the quality of sterilisation services, a fact that the Supreme Court too appreciated in its 2006 judg-

ment, which set guidelines for female and male sterilisation services on that case. We take quality assurance seriously and are thus in the process of doing away with the camp approach in a phased manner. We have already introduced a permanent cadre of counsellors, to ensure there is information provided to the couple on all the contraceptives available in the basket of choices. Nobody can force this on women in this country, coercion is against the law and the programme is not target-driven. Injectable contraceptives are just an option.

We are trying to change the fact that female sterilisation remains the



more popular choice, accounting for over 75% of contraceptive use in India. It disempowers them. Sterilisation should be the last choice and we are trying to ensure that clients understand the consequences of undergoing a sterilisation operation in a language that they understand through our counsellors and service providers.

'Drug vetted'

As far as the debate around the side effects of the injections is concerned, this drug has been rigorously vetted. The World Health Organisation and most professional bodies have advocated its use. Our

programme focuses on telling women about all the choices she has available, depending on her situation. We have post-partum methods, spacing methods for new parents, and the programme aims to help women select the option most suitable for them, depending on their situation in life. There has been concern about the effect of an injectable contraceptive on bone density and it has to be categorically stated that the bone marrow density is reversible. Global data show that the average number of doses a woman takes is around two to four at a stretch, which is sufficient for her to space her next birth, thereby giving her time to recover from the stress of childbirth and a chance for the child to get the

attention she needs to grow.

We are also introducing injectable contraceptives in a phased manner. They will first be available only in medical colleges and district hospitals and then move downwards. The Health Ministry took this decision to not compromise on quality. We will only make injectable contraceptives available when we have the capacity to deliver counselling at the health facility. Further, the Ministry is painfully aware that male participation needs to increase. There is a programme specifically designed to increase male participation. Meanwhile, women still need to be offered all the choices that are available.

As told to Vidya Krishnan

The real conversation we should be having is about prioritising men's participation in family planning



POONAM MUTTREJA
is executive director of the Population Foundation of India, a not-for-profit organisation working towards gender sensitive policies and programmes for family planning

↑ CENTRE Family planning is a crucial public health programme, directly linked to the health of women, children and families. The government has estimated that if the current unmet need for family planning could be fulfilled within the next five years, India can avert 35,000 maternal deaths and 12 lakh infant deaths.

The real conversation we should be having is about prioritising men's participation in family planning. We need to stop referring to family planning and sexual and reproductive health and rights as wo-

men's issues. They are as much men's issues, society's issues, moral issues, ethical issues, and issues of social justice and human dignity.

Address gender bias

Sustained engagement of men in health and family planning not just as clients of family planning and reproductive health services, but as responsible partners to women is the only way to address the severe gender bias in the programme.

In 2005, the National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS) revealed that 1% Indian men were opting for sterilisation services. In the last 10

years, this number has gone down to 0.3%. We need more doctors trained in providing vasectomy, more counselling for men instead of addressing only women. Evidence suggests that the involvement of men in family planning has many benefits. It can act as a catalyst towards improving maternal and child health indicators, increasing contraceptive uptake, and enabling women to exercise their autonomy and reproductive rights. However, the acceptance of male methods of contraception is marred by many myths and misconceptions, such as loss of virility and libido.

To address these challenges, a



systematic integrated approach with information, education and communication activities for men aimed at dispelling myths and misconceptions could result in a better uptake of contraceptives and an increased shared responsibility towards family planning.

New methods, new fears

In 2015, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) announced the introduction of three new contraceptive methods - Progestin-only Pills, Centchroman and injectable contraceptives - to the basket of contraceptive choices. However, the introduction of DMPA

has led to concern in terms of the possible side effects of the injectable contraceptive and the likelihood of women making uninformed choices.

The Population Foundation of India has advocated strongly with the MoHFW to ensure full preparedness, including the training of service providers, for the roll-out of all new methods. It is critical to address the concerns raised on quality of care and counselling services. The roll-out of injectables must be done by sharing evidence-based information on the benefits and side effects to ensure that a woman makes an informed choice.

There is a direct correlation between the number of contraceptive options available and the will-

ingness of women to use them. Studies indicate that an addition of a contraceptive method leads to an increase of up to 12% in contraceptive usage. Given that NFHS-4 data show that the use of contraceptives has declined, we must ensure that women and men are provided with more choices of contraception.

Women should not be bound to use a method due to lack of contraceptive choices, which would be a direct violation of rights. An expansion in the basket of choices is an effort to ensure that family planning doesn't become coercive due to lack of choices, and can cater to the needs of all individuals, keeping in mind affordability and accessibility.

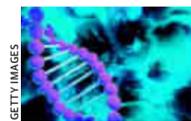
As told to Vidya Krishnan

SINGLE FILE

An unedited mutation

While it might appear that we've cured ourselves of our eugenic baggage, science soldiers on

JACOB KOSHY



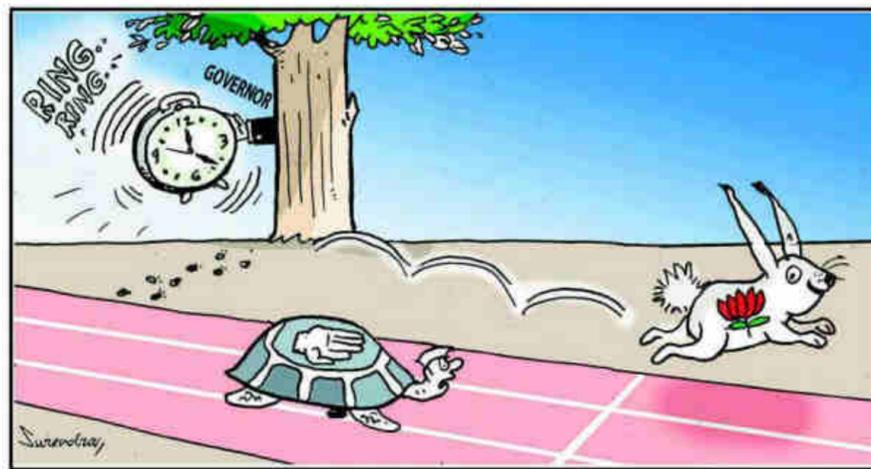
Whenever there's progress in the field of genetics, there's cause for worry. For some years now, these mixed feelings are being evoked by a gene-altering technology called CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats), which refers to a suite of gene-editing techniques. It can be used to target specific stretches of genetic code and to edit DNA at precise locations, permanently modify genes in living cells and organisms, and possibly correct disease-causing mutations. So far, all of the CRISPR-related research is focussed on plants, animals and lifeforms far removed from the human universe. Last week, a team from China reported intriguing results from CRISPR-modified human embryos.

According to the *New Scientist*, the team has corrected genetic mutations in a few cells in three normal human embryos using CRISPR. Previous attempts have always been on abnormal human embryos and success rates (typically less than 10%) were too low to be viable. In this study, normal embryos, tweaked by deleterious mutations introduced by genetically diseased sperm, were corrected. The numbers involved are still low, but the fact that normal embryos seemed to be more receptive to gene-editing is a queasily exciting development.

Improving the human stock

Historians of genetic engineering technology, most recently Siddhartha Mukherjee, have warned that societies, nations and other human collectives have been obsessed with improving the human stock. While it might appear that we've cured ourselves of our eugenic baggage, science soldiers on to find genes for disease, and the modern personalised genetic test, now also available to the Indian affluent, hopes to warn Indians of possible genetic disorders in their unborn. Notions of 'disease' keep changing and while a warning about the fatal familial insomnia (that causes you to die of sleeplessness) may make a decision to abort easier, would a genetic basis for autism or early coronary heart disease make it morally compelling for a couple to terminate a foetus? Beyond ridding the body of known disease, would CRISPR-led tweaks to, say, increasing expression of certain genes that improve athletic endurance be acceptable, a kind of womb-level doping?

Another complication is that CRISPR-led attempts to correct certain genes can sometimes lead to nearby, off-target genes also getting altered (mosaicism). In the quest to correct aberrations, would it be worth the risk to fix what isn't broken? The Committee on Human Genome Editing said in a report last month that gene-editing techniques were too risky to be made widely available. While scientists and ethicists may have so far made the right political noises about restraining gene-editing technology, bruising patent battles are already under way over intellectual property rights to the CRISPR technology. That means commercial interest in it is already so high that there is enough incentive for commercial interests to organise lobbying efforts and bring in legislation to offer gene-editing as a product. CRISPR, yet, can't excise the Orwellian.



CONCEPTUAL

Umwelt/Ethology

In German, Umwelt means "surroundings" and refers to how an organism mentally frames its world. The biologist, Jakob von Uexküll, coined the concept to argue that extrapolating human-centric models of the brain to understand animal cognition was a flawed approach. The eyesless tick, for example, climbs onto a grass stem and sensing butyric acid on the skin of a mammal, lunges, has its fill of blood, lays its eggs and dies. Its life-goal and approach to achieving it constitute the tick's umwelt. Viewed this way, marking dogs, dolphins and chimpanzees as 'smart' and others as 'dumb as dodos' would not only be false but meaningless.

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ACT ONE

The Governor's options

The Sarkaria Commission report spelled them out

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

The legal challenge of the Congress in the Supreme Court against the BJP's claim to form the government in Goa brings to fore a vacuum in the Constitution. In the case of a hung legislature, is the Governor bound to follow the constitutional convention to call upon the single largest party to form the government and prove its majority in the House? Or, as the court endorsed on Wednesday, can a political rival cobble together a post-poll alliance to form a majority that overcomes the single largest party and form the government? The Manohar Parrikar government came to power on a first-come-first-appointed basis despite the fact that the BJP came second in the Assembly elections. The Governor did not consult the single largest party, the Congress, before giving Mr. Parrikar the green signal.

The SC, in turn, said the

Congress did wrong by not staking its claim to form the government. It had shown no proof to the Governor that it had the requisite numbers to prove a majority in the House. The debacle exposes the fact that there are no specific guidelines in the Constitution on who the Governor should invite to form a government in a State where rival parties with narrow majorities engage in a face-off.

The constitutional convention of inviting the single largest party in the case of a fractured mandate has been outlined by the Sarkaria Commission recommendations, which were affirmed by a Constitution Bench of the SC in *Rameshwar Prasad v Union of India* in 2005.

The Commission report specifically dealt with the situation where no single party obtained absolute majority. It provided the order of preference the Governor should follow in selecting a Chief Minister in such a fluid situation: (1)

An alliance of parties that was formed prior to the elections. (2) The single largest party staking a claim to form the government with the support of others, including independents. (3) A post-electoral coalition of parties, with all the partners in the coalition joining the government. (4) A post-electoral alliance of parties, with some of the parties in the alliance forming a government and the remaining parties, including independents, supporting the government from outside.

It is clear that the leader of the party which has an absolute majority in the Assembly should be called upon by the Governor to form a government. However, if there is a fractured mandate, then the Commission recommends an elaborate step-by-step approach and has further emphasised that the Governor should select a leader who, in his/her judgement, is most likely to command a majority in the Assembly.

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 17, 1967

Madras to supply 18,000 tonnes of rice to Kerala

The Madras Government has decided to send 18,000 tonnes of rice to Kerala within the next four or five weeks to meet the difficult food situation in that State. This is the immediate outcome of a 90-minute conference between the Chief Ministers of Madras and Kerala held here [Madras] to-day [March 16]. The Madras Chief Minister, Mr. C.N. Annadurai, assured his fullest co-operation to Kerala, and the two leaders decided to solicit the help and co-operation of the Andhra Chief Minister as well. Though food was the main subject that figured at the conference, the two Chief Ministers also discussed other matters of mutual interest including diversion of the surplus waters of the west-flowing rivers for irrigation in Madras.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 17, 1917

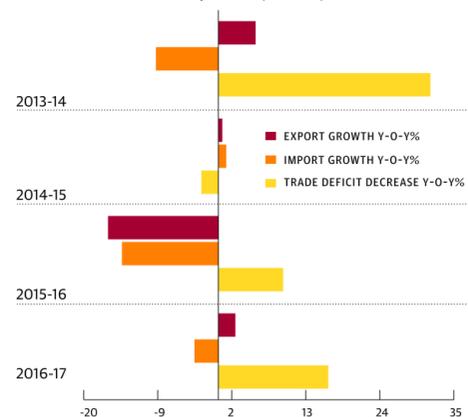
The defence force

A meeting of the graduates and under-graduates of Bombay University was held last evening (Bombay) to consider the question of forming a University Corps in connection with the Defence of India Force. The Rev. Dr. Mackichan, Vice-Chancellor of the University, presided and Principals of different colleges of Bombay and Poona took part in the proceedings. It was resolved to form a corps of University graduates and under-graduates irrespective of caste and nationality. A committee was formed with Captain Kirkwood as Chairman for taking steps to raising the corps and getting it affiliated with the Indian Force raised under the Defence of India Force Act.

DATA POINT

On balance, a healthy trade

An increase in exports (2.53%) and a relative decline in total imports (-3.56%) has helped to reduce trade deficit (by 16.3%) in dollar terms cumulatively for the period Apr-Feb 2016-17



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF COMMERCE