

# India is not kind to its elderly

More data on abuse could help tackle the problem effectively

**B**elieve it or not, around one in five older persons experience abuse in India, which is home to close to 110 million persons who are more than 60 years old. Just as abuse takes many forms — psychological, financial exploitation, neglect, and physical — so can abusers, who can be from the family, an acquaintance or a stranger. Strangers

**ourtake**

are unkind, with close to half of India's elders facing abuse in public that's bad enough to make them avoid stepping out. Psychological abuse that undermines self-worth by name-calling or embarrassing is the most pervasive. Other abuse includes refusal to meet basic needs, such as food, housing, clothing and medical care, destroying property or preventing them from seeing friends and family.

The national estimates of the past year abuse prevalence rate varies widely, from between 43.7 in Egypt, 36.2% in China, 29.3% in Spain and 20.8% in India to 2-6% in Britain, said a WHO-supported study, with the rates of abuse being higher for older people living in institutions than in the community. In India, most elders live with their families and within the community — 71% of India's elders stay in rural areas and 9% in urban, shows Census data — which shows a major chunk of abusers are people they know. With traditional roles crumbling and the old-age dependency ratio climbing from 10.9% in 1961 to 14.2% in 2011, elders past the most productive time of their lives are considered a burden.

Persons who are 60 years old in India on average have 18 more years of life ahead of them. Sixty years is too early to retire, older persons work when they have the option. In rural areas 66% of older men and 28% of older women work, compared to a lower 46% of older men and 11% of older women in urban areas. India must provide them with alternative livelihoods that can make the most of their skill and experience. Elder abuse is one of the least investigated types of violence and the least addressed. Apart from livelihoods, India needs to improve data on abuse, improve response and help rehabilitate those who need support.

## Unlocking PSU land for housing is a bold idea

Access to a home is linked to several rights like work, health and social security

**I**ndia's housing shortage at the beginning of the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-17) was estimated at 18.78 million units. This shortage will only become more acute, especially in urban areas, as more and more people pour into the cities from rural areas. As per Census 2001, about 72% of the population lived in rural areas and 28% in urban areas. By Census 2011, this became 69% rural population and 31% urban population. This is the first time since India's independence that the absolute increase in population was more in urban areas than in rural areas.

One of the key reasons for this housing shortage, in especially in the affordable category, is lack of availability of urban land, rising construction costs, regulatory issues and lack of access to home finance for low-income groups. In a bid to overcome the land challenge, the Centre recently launched a long-delayed process to sell 2,000 acres of unused land belonging to unprofitable State-owned enterprises, which according to some estimates hold more than one million acres of surplus land. If activists are to be believed, India has enough land for all uses, including housing, "if we use our existing resources with prudence". The need of the hour is to evaluate land use and take stock of land that is locked up with PSUs, especially given the contentious nature of land acquisition.

But the decision to unlock the unused land will not be easy because over the years, the government has failed to sell these lands because of a lack of clear guidelines, inadequate records and a lack of coordination among ministries. Hopefully, the process will now be streamlined. Housing, after all, is not just about having a roof over our heads. Access to adequate housing can be a precondition for the enjoyment of several human rights, including the rights to work, health, social security, vote, privacy or education.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



# We need Muslims to tackle terror

India must applaud the community for being one of its strongest partners against jihadi groups

**D**o you know Danish Ahmed? If you don't you should. He needs to be applauded. While studying at an engineering college in Dehradun, through social media he came in contact with terrorists in south Kashmir. Hearing provocative statements and reading incendiary literature made him anxious. Leaving behind his happy dream to be an engineer, Ahmed decided to return to Kashmir and become a jihadi instead.

Once he returned to the Valley he realised that the jihad was just an eye wash. Many of the youngsters enrolled in his batch of jihadis were disillusioned and looking for ways to return to the mainstream. He also discovered that this was a battle being waged not by Islam but by Pakistan. Many of those who called themselves separatists were involved in extortion and loot. Not just this, disputes between villagers were being resolved at gunpoint and money being sought in return. He became disenchanted. Ahmed had returned to become a fighter, not a criminal.

When he discussed this with his associates he was shocked to realise that a majority of them were similarly disgruntled. They felt that they should be handling keyboards and not Kalashnikovs. But they were help-

less in overcoming two obstacles: First, the police may harass them if they returned to the mainstream. Second, other terrorists may inflict harm on them and their loved ones.

Many such scary examples were fresh in their mind. For instance, the house of the south Kashmir family that the extremists suspected informed the armed forces about Burhan Wani before he was killed was set on fire. The young daughter was defamed and the family rendered homeless. Like Kashmiri Pandits, they are now forced to lead a life of nameless refugees in their own land.

The police and intelligence agencies were aware of this discontent. They were keeping a close watch on Ahmed and his associates. Gauging what was on his mind, the armed forces also took the initiative. He became part of the group of people who had returned to the correct path after being misled.

Among the things that Ahmed told the armed forces was something that took them by surprise: Many of his associates had embarked on the path to militancy just to impress girls. The colourful tales of Burhan Wani's life are something that fascinate the younger generation.

Before Ahmed, other youngsters had displayed similar courage. If you recall, a few



Former Hizbul Mujahideen militant Danish Ahmed in Tral, May 28  
WASEEM ANDRABI/HT

youngsters from Mumbai had escaped from Isis terror camps. They had revealed that in these camps, jihadis from India are treated badly. They are fortunate if they get an opportunity to go to the frontline. Indians were assigned less significant tasks such as supplies and maintenance, where cleaning toilets is considered an important job. The government, civil society and the media should felicitate these youngsters who've returned to the mainstream and unmasked

non-State actors. Their stories will always prove useful to prevent youngsters from getting misled. A matter of relief is that a large number of other youth are vying to join the army, the police and paramilitary forces in Jammu and Kashmir. Girls form music bands and students from the state compete to succeed in the country's toughest exam for the civil services.

This is the best way to fight terror in a constructive fashion. It is a trend that should be welcomed as much as possible because guns can just hope to bring a temporary truce and not lasting peace. The road to peace always passes through prosperity. Fighting individual poverty and adverse circumstances, these youngsters are busy paving the way for others. With the wind blowing in the other direction, the leaders of these militants are worried. In a recent video, dreaded militant Zakir Musa is heard calling Indian Muslims shameless, since they are not helping the terrorists in the siege of India. Youngsters such as Danish Ahmed have demonstrated that they don't need a certificate of being Muslims from hollow and two-faced terrorists.

This is the quality that makes Indian Muslims stand out. It is for good reason that home minister Rajnath Singh keeps reiterating that our strongest partners in the fight against terror are Indian Muslims. We should appreciate and applaud them.

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NEW BENEFIT



The Telangana government's decision to provide pension to single women will give them self-respect and a measure of independence  
SUNIL GHOSH/HT

## Dole for single women is a short-term measure

Along with providing pension, Telangana must educate them, give property rights and skills to get employment



USHA RAI

**T**he Telangana government's scheme of ₹1,000 pension for single women, not covered by any other social security scheme, is welcome. It is recognition of the growing number of women who remain single because of various responsibilities such as bringing up siblings, working, not having the finances to get married or being abandoned. Though the concern for widows and senior citizens has been recognised through welfare schemes, the recognition of single women for benefits is a new phenomenon.

Though ₹1,000 is not a large amount considering the rising cost of living, it is a beginning. The rub is, however, in implementation because accessing government welfare schemes is like running an obstacle race. Married women of over 18 years have to provide proof of separation for a year to be eligible. If documents are not available, the tehsildar has to ascertain their status. In the case of unmarried women they have to be 30 years in rural areas and 35 in urban areas and their annual household income should be less than ₹1.5 lakh and ₹2 lakh respectively. If the beneficiaries remarry, get a permanent government job or improve their financial status,

the benefits are withdrawn. So the marital and financial status of the beneficiaries has to be updated. Many women in rural India are illiterate and they will have to be listed for the new benefit. They have to deal with touts and administrative staff. So if these hurdles can be dealt with, pension for single women would be a beginning for a better life for them.

The other challenge is accessing money from post offices. At Gurgaon, many of the old who descend on the post office on pension day cannot walk or see. Many are illiterate. Sometimes they are accompanied by a son who waits in the queues. At times there is not enough money in the post office kitty and the pensioners go back. The post office staff, burdened with work, has no time to give individual attention to old women. Space in post offices is limited and there are no separate queues for women or senior citizens. Telangana has said the pension will be disbursed by the postal department after biometric or iris verification. This could only add to the chaos. Though small, the joy pension brings, is visible. It gives women self-respect and a measure of independence. But the system of disbursement has to be streamlined.

Finally, let us not forget that the best way to secure the single woman's future, especially if she is just 18 or 30 years, is to educate her, provide property rights and a skill so that she can earn and join the mainstream for a meaningful life. That should be next goal of the Telangana government.

Usha Rai is a senior journalist  
The views expressed are personal

## Can Sushma inspire a govt- Opposition tango?

The BJP leader has a good equation with Sonia Gandhi and is largely acceptable to other political parties



VINOD SHARMA

**T**here is scope for intelligent speculation when the government is scouting for talent on the promise of assembling a consensus on the candidature for the top constitutional office — the Republic's President.

Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Venkaiah Naidu have met, among others, Congress president Sonia Gandhi to convey the desirability of a bipartisan candidature. But they desisted putting a name or a face to the principle behind the move. It's true the Congress did not consult the BJP on Patibha Patil's 2012 candidature, which led to an unedifying campaign for the office. The saddest part was that Patil succeeded APJ Abdul Kalam, who was the National Democratic Alliance-I and the Congress' consensus choice. A tango is doable even now. Utopian though it may seem in our divided polity, the objective should be to get the best person for the job. There's no paucity of people whose competence compliments their acceptability. Take the case of external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj. She's political and partisan to the BJP. But there can be convergence on her name.

The possibility of her candidature is open. Unlike Naidu, who was initially counted among the aspirants, she hasn't been drafted for talks with the Opposition. That keeps her in the reckoning, also ruling out the other two interlocutors: Rajnath and Arun Jaitley.

Swaraj's prospects acquire special value if the NDA is honestly seeking a consensus on the next president. She has a rapport with Ms Gandhi and the prime minister knows that. In December last year, he had assigned her to separately brief the ailing Congress leader on the army's surgical strike across the Line of Control. That's not to suggest that the

**INTELLECTUAL-DIPLOMAT GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI WAS SECRETARY TO PRESIDENT KR NARAYANAN. HE HAS THE LINEAGE AND SCHOLARSHIP TO MATCH THE HIGH CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICE**

Sonia-Swaraj equation will automatically translate into Congress support. She'd have to contest and win. But the Opposition will be divided and the battle one-sided. Others in the BJP stable such as Uttar Pradesh Governor Ram Naik or Odisha's Draupadi Murmu don't measure up to the office at stake. That brings one to the non-political side. Names that at first glance qualify as potential consensus candidates are in public domain: E Sreedharan, Azim Premji, NR Narayana Murthy and Nandan Nilekani.

One's inclined to add to the list geneticist MS Swaminathan, albeit not for the reasons the Shiv Sena did. At 92, age is against him. But the protagonist of the Green Revolution is presidential grade. He's active and is mentally agile. One cannot but also take note of intellectual-diplomat Gopal Krishna Gandhi who was secretary to President KR Narayanan. He has the lineage and scholarship to match the office. But ideologically he may not be acceptable to the BJP.

Two recent presidencies are cited by advocates of domain expertise in Rashtrapati Bhawan: Narayanan, an administrator-diplomat with experience of electoral politics; Abdul Kalam a rocket scientist of repute. Their overlapping presidencies had their share of run-ins with AB Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh. But they conducted themselves with the dignity befitting their constitutional mandate.

Narayanan had a role in the deployment of army to check the 2002 Gujarat riots. He broke precedent to become the first sitting-President to vote in a general election (1999) and kept pending Vajpayee's proposal to confer Bharat Ratna on Veer Savarkar.

A student of Harold Laski, the politically savvy Narayanan had a keen sense of history. Kalam was less endowed on either count. So he signed, while on a visit to Moscow, a proclamation sent by the UPA to dissolve the Bihar assembly. Kalam wanted to resign when the action was held "unconstitutional" by the Supreme Court. Had he not allowed himself to be persuaded to continue, Singh's government would have fallen, what with the president owning up responsibility for following the Cabinet's advice?

Looking back, their disagreements with the executive were principled, not political or temperamental. They did not work at cross-purposes with elected regimes. They only sought to work the oath they took: To preserve, protect and defend the Constitution. That's the way the presidency hasn't always been. But needs to be: Honest, upright and unattached.

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LET'S US PLAY, READ AND HAVE FUN WITH OUR CHILDREN

Madhu Mehrotra

Many parents have endless complaints about their children. However, most of the time, it is parents who have forgotten to set the correct example. This can be set right by exhibiting polite manners, courteous language, punctuality and other such values. Children learn by observing. My colleagues often face a herculean task getting the students to submit their assignments, projects and written work on time. On the other

hand, we don't face that problem in the staff room, when we have to submit work. The simple reason, the corrected exercise books, test sheets, worksheets are all returned within 24 hours of submission.

Here's another example to illustrate my point. Two neighbours had identical garden plots. The first had a prize-winning immaculate row of flower beds. The other, a dishevelled array of plants growing in not so neat-rows of flower beds. Unfortunately, the children of the first home could hardly

distinguish one flower from another; whereas the children of the second home knew every detail about the plants. Let us work along with our children rather than expect them to know how hard we work, when all they see us do is surf the channels. Let us play, read and have fun with them if we want to have a complaint-free life.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal)  
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