



A thought for today

It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver

MAHATMA GANDHI

Heal The Nation

Implement and scale up Niti Aayog's plan for PPP in healthcare delivery

It's welcome that government think tank Niti Aayog, along with the health ministry and World Bank, has come up with a model of public private partnership to boost India's abysmal record of healthcare delivery. Public health and hospitals in India come under the domain of state governments and the model is in the form of a template which can be used to augment treatment facilities of non-communicable disease in smaller cities. This is a useful channel to expand the provision of healthcare facilities for resource strapped governments and needs to be scaled up radically across the board, as public healthcare delivery managed solely by the public sector has had a poor record in which Indians, in general, have little faith.

To be sure, states have already experimented with PPP in healthcare delivery in a limited way. Odisha announced this year that it had picked a private healthcare provider to operate and manage a cardiac care hospital in Jharsuguda, while Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have devised elaborate insurance schemes which make use of private healthcare facilities for surgical procedures. But there is much scope for expansion as well as a process of trial and error to see what works.

Debate in India too often gets bogged down in ideological debates on public versus private healthcare. But policy needs to be pragmatic and facilitate what works: if the capacities of government and private sector can be brought together in a synergistic way to get healthcare services to cover the entire population, there should be no objection. However, based on India's experience so far, it is important to get the design of PPP right. In the Niti Aayog proposal, there is a benchmark for pricing. This needs to be complemented with proper oversight that will prevent unnecessary medical interventions as well as corruption.

Last but not the least, India has an abysmal doctor-patient ratio and a lot needs to be done to enhance the supply of doctors. Regulation of medical colleges emphasises more on curbs in supply than on ensuring that doctors with a licence to practice are of a minimum quality. Such irrational restrictions need to go, and Niti Aayog had some earlier suggestions to this effect which must be implemented as well. Unless India produces more doctors, whether for the public or private sector, healthcare delivery will not improve.



New Wine In An Old Bottle

Modi government schemes go beyond ribbon cutting, they are meant to produce results

Ravi Shankar Prasad



We often see that Congress has a standard response when it comes to any achievement of the Modi government. It says 'we started this scheme' or 'Modi is just following our schemes'.

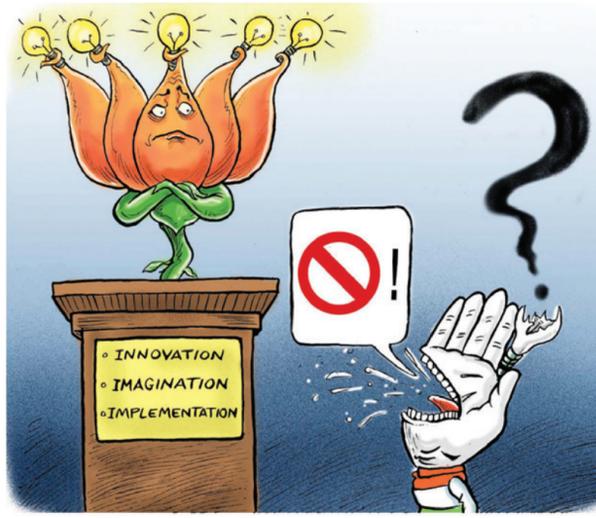
Congress makes a mockery of itself when it doesn't realise that basic responsibilities of all governments are the same. Governments are expected to deliver on infrastructure, health, education, employment opportunities, and so on. So, no party has a trademark on construction of roads. Just for the sake of novelty, spaceships can't be constructed when the requirement is a school.

What sets Prime Minister Narendra Modi apart is innovation, imagination and implementation. Schemes unthinkable in air conditioned offices are envisioned with the help of ground experience, for example Mudra Yojana. Sectors which were untouched for decades have been reinvigorated and great results are seen, for example Swachh Bharat. The scale of schemes has been huge while implementation has been immaculate.

Congress party's behaviour is sometimes like asking Sachin Tendulkar what is the novel thing he does, when every Indian can bat. Just as Sachin bats with the same bat, on the same pitch and with the same rules as thousands of cricketers, governments also have to perform under similar conditions and have to be tested comparatively. What matters is quality of work, imagination, implementation and end results.

In a short span of three years the Modi government has provided social security to around 13.5 crore people, almost equal to Russia's population. It has opened bank accounts of more than 28 crore people, a little short of the entire US population. It provided more than seven crore collateral free loans to small entrepreneurs, more than UK's population. It is providing clean cooking gas to five crore households, similar to the population of Spain.

Let's come now to the allegations of Modi government simply carrying



forward Congress schemes. Governments across the world have various forms of job guarantee schemes. India too has had such schemes running for a long time. MGNREGA is not the first, nor the last such scheme. The first such scheme was started in Maharashtra in 1972 under the name of Employment Guarantee Scheme. It was enacted as the Employment Guarantee Act in 1977.

Since then there has been the National Rural Employment Programme, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme with a guarantee of 100 days of employment, Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana, National Food for Work Programme, et al.

Our government has changed MGNREGA in many ways to fix its various flaws. Productive assets are being created, leakages have gone down drastically, wages are reaching on time, more work is being generated than before and money is reaching the bank accounts of beneficiaries directly.

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The story of Aadhaar is the same. It is not something the UPA government either started or completed.

In May 2001, under the previous NDA government, a group of ministers submitted a report and accepted the recommendation for a multipurpose identity card. In 2003 the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha, which included the clause 'the central government may compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue national identity card'.

For one full term UPA did nothing substantial on this; it took up to June 2009 for the UPA government to establish Aadhaar. It took another year to launch

the name 'Aadhaar' and its logo. But, did BJP taunt Congress for copying its idea and launching Aadhaar?

On Aadhaar the UPA government neither had vision, nor a sense of mission. For them, it was just another scheme to operate in a silo. For five long years, they did not even bother to obtain for it parliamentary approval. Government departments had no clarity about Aadhaar's purpose. In fact there was no Aadhaar to the use of Aadhaar!

Our government has made Aadhaar a critical component of public service delivery and made it a part of more than 100 schemes. The Modi government's proactive use of technology with Aadhaar has helped save more than Rs 50,000 crore in a short span of time.

While Congress and some commentators spread the canard that NDA government has just continued with old schemes, this narrative is far from the truth. The Modi government may have launched fewer schemes than the UPA government in terms of ribbon cutting events. This is because for the Modi government, schemes are meant to produce results and are not just ribbon cutting exercises.

All schemes started by our government have been innovative, with a view to solving actual problems on the ground. They are not just a result of armchair experts' theories, but involve a lot of imagination to address issues that people have been facing for decades.

All schemes started by our government focus on sound implementation. There are stringent monitoring procedures and flaws are fixed quickly. Jan Dhan Yojana, Mudra Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana, Start Up India, Stand Up India, Fasal Bima Yojana, Swachh Bharat are just a few examples.

Thus, it is time Congress and commentators who regurgitate its narratives conceded that the Modi government has been better in terms of designing new schemes and improving previous schemes. That is what governance is all about. If just launching new schemes was governance, perhaps Congress would have never gone out of power!

The writer is Union Minister for Law and IT

Mukherjee To Kovind

PM Modi is the force behind the Union government. President Kovind must be its conscience keeper

Former Bihar governor Ram Nath Kovind's election as India's 14th President was never in doubt after NDA wrested the initiative by naming its candidate first. The impressive victory margin is a reflection of BJP's growth from the Vajpayee era when it pitched APJ Abdul Kalam as a consensual candidate. Kovind bagged more votes than opponent Meira Kumar in 21 out of India's 29 states. Kovind was a BJP member from 1991 to 2015. This will make his task easier and tougher in equal measure. There will be ideological convergence and constitutional imperatives. As head of the executive, Kovind has the power to ask questions to his government and bring to its attention important issues.

This is the precedent set by the present incumbent Pranab Mukherjee, an astute politician who held top ministerial and party positions for nearly four decades. In contrast to his government's silences and muffled condemnation of mob lynchings targeting Muslims for alleged cow slaughter, President Mukherjee repeatedly pleaded for tolerance and communal amity. He questioned the government's recourse to the ordinance route on the land acquisition and enemy property bills and took the opposition to task for frequent disruptions in Parliament. Mukherjee has said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and he disagreed at times, but kept it to themselves.

Ultimately, political stature should not matter. Despite nominal executive powers, the Constitution frees the President from political imperatives which influence executive decisions. As a Supreme Court lawyer, two-term Rajya Sabha member, and Bihar governor Kovind has had ample opportunity to put the constitutional scheme to practice. Kovind won the JD(U) vote from Bihar on his own steam, a recognition of his neutrality and qualification for the new job. With 65% votes won, Kovind must translate this impressive mandate into another distinguished presidency.



'Our stance at Doklam will make positive impression on friends like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives'

With China stepping up its rhetoric on Doklam standoff, Lt Gen (retd) DB Shekatkar, who served as the Indian army's Director General of Perspective Planning and Additional Director General of Military Operations, spoke to Jibby J Kattakayam on the military implications of increasing tensions on the China border as well as the need for enhancing combat capabilities and rationalising defence expenditures, as recommended recently by a ministry of defence committee which he headed:

■ How do you see the Doklam plateau standoff playing out?

Beyond the present standoff, India must look after Bhutan's interests. If our neighbours begin to harbour concerns about India's ability to protect a smaller neighbour, they will lose faith. India must approach Bhutan's concerns militarily and diplomatically. Our stance at Doklam will have a positive impression on our friends like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives. This is where economic preparedness matters.

The Chinese have built up their capacity on the Sikkim sector over a period of time. Earlier they may have come and gone but now their intentions have changed. What the Chinese are saying about 1962 or about Kashmir are all writings on the wall. We need to read in between these lines and act on the implications.

■ There are reports of greater forward deployment by PLA which India has rubbished. What are our strengths and their weaknesses on the LAC?

Altitude determines advantage in mountain warfare. We have this advantage in Sikkim and Bhutan. In Arunachal Pradesh, both sides are at a similar height at most places. In Ladakh, the topography suits them better. The important point is that unlike 1962 we are prepared to counter a misadventure. This was proven in 1967 in Nathu La and 1987 in Arunachal Pradesh.

We do not need to be unduly worried about the reports of forward deployment. They are using the media to wield psychological pressure.

Chinese technology has its limitations in mountain warfare unlike in the plains because of high altitudes and limited maneuverability.

■ How important is the recent decision to give the army's vice-chief emergency financial powers for defence procurements?

Our committee recommended this because empowering the vice-chief will expedite purchases. Even one month's delay in addressing weapon or ammunition shortages can be dangerous. For example, if I need 200 battle

tanks by 2019, the order must be placed today. India's operation requirements are completely different from others. Nobody is producing tanks for high altitude mountain warfare. So, the purchased tanks require customisation. In this situation, only a surety of orders and fund allocations can avoid delays.

■ What is the fate of your committee's recommendations?

I heard the defence ministry has asked services HQs to respond on implementing 98 recommendations. Our desire was that all 188 recommendations are implemented and not in a piecemeal fashion. There is a temptation to protect non-performing turfs like DRDO, Ordnance Factory Board, Defence Estates. We suggested the amalgamation of ordnance factories, labs, training establishments and intelligence collection, and creating joint services war colleges in view of integrated war theatres.

Ordnance factories and depots supply shaving kits, mosquito nets, socks, shoes, etc. Depots buy much of these from open markets. Money spent on non-combat operations and personnel can be used instead for modernisation.

■ How do their inefficiencies affect combat

capabilities?

Eleven ordnance factories can close down tomorrow and nothing will happen. Till today ordnance factories cannot produce a simple weapon like a rifle. Last month, army rejected a Made in India rifle. Those saying products will improve after induction forget the soldier may not live to see the improvement. Successive indigenous tanks have failed to make the grade.

■ Does the absence of a full-time defence minister hurt reforms considering that the dominance of the bureaucracy is a sore point with the forces?

I won't comment on the former because it is a political decision. On the latter part, I will give an example. When I was a major-general, a joint secretary had the 'wisdom' to say in a meeting: "Chiefs will come and chiefs will go but we will remain here." So I asked him: "When the chips are down, and a war is on, you will not be here. Who will be accountable?" Can you name one bureaucrat held accountable? But a chief can be disgraced if something goes wrong.

■ Before 2019, can you suggest three big structural reforms for this government?

The decision to appoint the first Chief of Defence Staff on January 26, 2018, can be taken. Second, make a beginning on an integrated theatre command in the Andaman. Developments in the South China Sea presage a bigger role for Andaman. A start on a western theatre command focussed on Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kashmir is needed.

dilbert



We All Are Drops Of Consciousness

Sant Rajinder Singh

Saints and mystics tell us that we are all connected. We may have outer appearances that differ, but within us is the soul, and all souls are part of God. Whereas meditation helps us see our connectedness when we invert, it is hard to prove this at the physical level, using scientific methods and tools.

Think of connectedness, as water droplets. When all the droplets enter the ocean, they are connected as part of a large body of water. We can remove droplets from the ocean and put them in different jars of various shapes and sizes. By separating out these droplets and putting them in different containers - whether glass, plastic, metal, or any other substance - no matter what the colour or shape of the vessel, the basic structure of the water does not change. Each water droplet is the same as when

it was part of the ocean. We can then take each droplet out of its container and put it back into the ocean; the drop merges back because its properties have not changed. This is an analogy to show how our souls were, at one time, part of God.

We all are drops of consciousness, radiating Light and Sound. When these drops of consciousness are encased in a physical body, they remain the same drops of soul. The difference is that when we look for the drops of soul with our outer eyes, we cannot see them, for the soul is not visible to our physical eyes. However, if we could see with our spiritual eye in meditation we would then recognise the drop of Light and consciousness within us.

Meditation is the process of

realising our inner connectedness. It allows us to turn our gaze from the mirror in which we see our face of flesh and blood to invert to see our spiritual essence made of Light and Music. Meditation is the process of Self-knowledge where we realise our self as soul.

Think of the power of that realisation. All those people against whom we may have bigotry and prejudice no longer look different from us. We see that their outer shapes, sizes, faces and colours are just an outer coat covering the same essence as our own. Likewise, just as we put on clothes of different colours, designs and textures, these garments do not change who we are beneath the clothes. We are the same person whether we wear a coat, a sweater,

pants, a suit, or pajamas. Similarly, when the soul puts on an outer form of a human body, or even an animal, it is still a soul within and this soul is the same essence as our self.

When we develop this vision we no longer see through the eyes of prejudice and discrimination. We break down the barriers that separate one human being from another. We feel connected at the level of the soul.

When we begin to rise into the spiritual realms, we see that the other souls inhabiting bodies have the same essence as we do - all Light, all Sound, and all consciousness. At the level of the soul, we all look the same. When we realise we are all the same, we treat others differently. We recognise the soul as a part of God. Then, we come to see that we are all children of the one Creator.

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Out of step

Why we Indians talk the talk, talk the walk, but don't walk the walk

Jug Suraiya



Two Size XXL city gents having a chat.

1st gent: Did you read that report in the TOI that in order to keep fit we should walk 10,000 steps every day, and that Indians are the world's laziest people who walk the least?

2nd gent: How about all those village women who have to walk miles and miles every day just to get a pail of water?

1st gent: Villagers don't count, particularly if they're women. The report was about city guys like us who don't walk enough, which makes us obese, and gives us diabetes and cardiac problems.

2nd gent: No kidding. So are you going to take up walking?

1st gent: I did, on doctor's orders.

2nd gent: Wow. And has walking stopped you from being obese and getting diabetes and cardiac problems?

1st gent: Dunno. The first day I started walking I had to stop when I stepped in some poo on the road.

2nd gent: Yuck. Cow poo or dog poo?

1st gent: I should be so lucky. Human poo. *Runny* human poo.

2nd gent: Double yuck. What happened after that?

1st gent: The next day I fell into an open manhole.

2nd gent: Golly. Was it a deep manhole?

1st gent: Dunno. Fortunately I didn't fall all the way in as my tummy is bigger than the manhole and I got stuck halfway. They had to pull me out like a cork from a bottle. Pop!

2nd gent: You sure know how to live dangerously. What next?

1st gent: Next I was nearly run over by a speeding BMW driven by a 12-year-old.

2nd gent: Uh, oh. You should always walk on the pavement.

1st gent: I was on the pavement. But so was the BMW.

2nd gent: But why did you do your walking on the roads and not in the park?

1st gent: Where do you think all this happened? On the two-minute walk to the park where I was to do my walk...

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