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The displaced must have a say

Resettlement should be dealt with in a humane manner

Narmada Bachao Andolan activist Medha Patkar's 12-day-long fast which has been cut short by the police taking her into custody and putting her in a hospital is not likely to make much difference to the cause she is espousing — that of the appropriate rehabilitation of those displaced by the Narmada dam construction.

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Since Independence, at least 4.4 million people have been displaced due to dam construction. Many who lost their lands when the country's oldest dam, the Hirakud was built, are yet to get adequate compensation. Today, many families of successful farmers who gave up their land to build the temples of modern India have been reduced to daily wage workers, still waiting for full compensation. The rehabilitation, when it is provided, is almost always substandard. The land provided is often waterlogged and uncultivable or simply not enough. There is also the emotional connect to the land that is missed in rehabilitation schemes. People have a strong attachment to the land of their ancestors and their gods and are loath to leave it for a substitute far from their zones of comfort. The main problem is that the displaced people rarely have a say in the selection of the sites where they are to be resettled. This leads to rejection and the exertion of authority by the State as seen in the Narmada cases and those before it. The authorities seem to consider the displaced persons as a homogenous entity, overlooking the fact that they have different needs to pursue their livelihoods and way of life.

It is no one's contention that big projects which deliver much needed water, electricity or roads be put off. If the rehabilitation process was executed in a more humane and holistic manner, many of the problems could be obviated. It would be best looking ahead if these issues were first discussed with the people involved and resolved before starting big projects. And even now, instead of adopting an adversarial position, a dialogue with representatives of the displaced persons would be a better way of ending the dispute once and for all, rather than this endless cycle of protests and arrests.

Hafiz Saeed's political party is fooling no one

India must pressure Pakistan to ensure that he is brought to justice

Reports of Hafiz Mohammed Saeed's plans to form a political party first emerged in the run-up to Pakistan's last general election in 2013. Therefore, his efforts to move the Jamaat-ud-Dawah into the mainstream aren't entirely unexpected. The Milli Muslim League, the new political party floated by Saeed, is clearly an offshoot of the terrorist empire run by him. It is led by Saifullah Khalid, a close aide of Saeed. Though the new party's spokesperson said Saeed and other JuD leaders would not be involved in the new initiative, he acknowledged in the same breath the party would adhere to JuD's ideology and even demanded Saeed's release from house arrest.

Saeed's original organisation — the Markaz Dawat ul-Irshad — has followed a similar plot in the past. When the squeeze was put on the LeT, it re-emerged as the JuD. After the UN banned the JuD in the wake of the Mumbai attacks, it transformed into the Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation. When the international spotlight fell on the FIF, Saeed sought to launch the Tehreek-e-Azadi Jammu Kashmir earlier this year. Even though Pakistan's religion-based parties have not performed well in recent elections, Saeed's impressive welfare network, which includes ambulance services, madrassas and welfare activities for victims of natural disasters, could help him bag a handful of parliamentary or provincial assembly seats in the heartland of Punjab. Such a performance would also help Pakistan's security establishment to sell the myth that Saeed has "reformed".

The truth is Saeed remains the head of a potent organisation, flush with funds and with no shortage of dedicated fighters, that is already active in Jammu and Kashmir and could be mobilised into launching another attack on the lines of the 2008 assault on Mumbai. India must continue to use all resources available to it, including the FATF and UN resolutions, to ensure that Saeed is brought to justice.

RBI's lost the plot on monetary policy

In India, it's better to risk inflation and opt for growth than risk deflation, which destroys jobs



R
JAGANNATHAN

Ever since it got hauled over the coals for allegedly mishandling the post-demonetisation scenario, the RBI seems to have lost some of the halo it was previously endowed with. RBI governor Urjit Patel, with his tongue-tied approach to communicating with the media and public, stands in contrast to his predecessor, whose loquaciousness stretched far beyond monetary policy.

In his defence, one can certainly say that Patel has faced headwinds that were different from those faced by his predecessors. The latter faced one huge disruption or challenge during their tenures, mostly driven by external turbulence or internal fiscal profligacy, but in Patel's case it is none of the above. His 10-month tenure has seen turbulence from unexpected directions almost every alternate month. These disruptions were not externally induced, nor did they have any easy textbook solutions. This is why the RBI under Patel seems to have lost the plot, especially in its core function of monetary policy.

When you have one disruptive variable to deal with, you can try the usual remedies and hope for the best. When you have a series of

disruptions, each cascading into the other, your best may not be good enough. The learning time is too short to figure out pat solutions.

Let me just list some of the disruptions the Patel-led RBI has faced. The first one was the simplest — an institutional change in how interest rates are set, with the governor's prerogative on rates being replaced by a panel of six called the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). While this in itself can't be called a major disruption, what it did was disorient the RBI from its composite role which involves not only deciding the price of money, but also managing growth, maintaining the credibility of the financial system, supervising banks, and managing day-to-day volatility in the money and exchange markets.

Last October, the financial world thought the MPC was the big change, when other, bigger, disruptions were about to crash an already slowing economy. The MPC became almost irrelevant in the process. Whether it was the deluge of deposits coming into banks after demonetisation or the large interest rate subventions and farm loan waivers announced after December 31, the MPC was reduced to a bystander in influencing the price of money. From this month, we have given ourselves another major shock, with the introduction of the goods and services tax from July 1, and we may yet see yet another change before the year is out — a shift in the fiscal year from April-March to January-December. Then there is the new job given to the RBI by the government — enforcing a resolution of bad loans, now edging



■ RBI governor Urjit Patel outside Parliament after the GST launch, New Delhi

towards ₹ lakh-crore.

Patel got a lot of criticism for the thing he was not responsible for: Demonetisation. It was a political decision, an executive decision, and those who disliked the NDA government for various reasons wanted Patel to exercise his independence and either criticise the government or manage the process of remonetisation unilaterally. This would have been the wrong thing to do, and Patel took the flak stoically and refused to be a dissonant voice that could have damaged confidence in the economy further. Despite the RBI's small missteps in the November-December period, this was actually Patel's finest hour, as the central bank managed the whole process of normalisation in four months.

But the allegation that Patel was some kind of government lackey probably got to him, and that is when he veered off in directions that have not been helpful to the economy or his reputation. In particular, the MPC's decision in February to shift monetary policy from "accommodative" to "neutral" needlessly circumscribed the RBI's freedom to act fast to cut rates if inflation showed signs of significant easing. Having prematurely shifted the monetary stance, the next two policies in April and June were delusional. Even as both retail and wholesale inflation were crashing, the RBI sat tight, with the chief economic adviser famously exhorting the central bank for its large "forecast errors" that were "systematically one-sided in overstating inflation".

Let's be clear. The problem we now face, post the economic shocks of demonetisation, the good harvest, the decision to force banks to take large losses by pushing big corporate defaulters into liquidation, and the slowdown precipitated by the shift to GST which will blight sales in two quarters, April-June and the current one) is not inflation. It is disinflation and possible deflation (a situation where prices start falling in absolute terms).

Given a choice, in a poor country like India it is always better to risk inflation and opt for growth than risk deflation, which will destroy jobs and growth. The RBI needs to course-correct, and the August policy needed to see a sharp cut in rates by at least 50 basis points (that is, one half of one per cent). But the MPC and Patel have flunked the test by cutting rates by a niggardly 25 basis points.

It's a pity that the governor is fighting the last war (inflation), when the next one — slowing growth — is upon us.

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The views expressed are personal

RULED OUT



■ There are approximately 5,000 vacancies in the subordinate judiciary, which has a sanctioned strength of 21,000 positions

PRADEEP GAUR/MINT

A common test for lower judiciary is not a good idea

Such an examination will not only lead to elitism but also adversely affect diversity in the judicial system



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

The Centre recently suggested an examination on the lines of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NET) for medical courses to select judicial officers for lower courts. But nine high courts have objected to the plan for such an exam. India has over 620 district courts and the appointments to the state judicial services (below the rank of district judge) are made by the governor in consultation with the State Public Service Commission and the high court. Of the three crore million pending court cases, over 80% are in the lower courts. There are approximately 5,000 vacancies in the subordinate judiciary, which has a sanctioned strength of 21,000 positions.

The SC bench, which supported the Centre's plan, had dispelled apprehensions of the states and HCs that such a test would impinge on the federal structure as their role in appointments of lower judiciary would be taken away by a central agency. The court assured them that they are not introducing all-India judicial services. It said the national test would prepare a merit list of successful candidates and the state would be allowed to appoint judges as per their rules and reserva-

tion policies.

Strangely, however, the SC justified a centralised test in the name of foreign investment and observed that "we are trying to do a service to the nation. No progress can be made in the country if the judiciary is not efficient. No foreign investor would invest in the country if the judiciary is not efficient." The new selection process was also justified by the court in the name of uniformity and to curb the instances of nepotism and favoritism. Everyone knows that allegations of 'uncle syndrome' are common about the appointments in the HCs and elevations to the SC under the collegium system.

But a centralised test has inherent weaknesses: It promotes elitism and adversely affects diversity. Even in the US, it has been found that mostly rich, white and children of politically powerful families make to the common tests. Our judiciary already has poor representation of women, Dalits, minorities and candidates coming from rural background.

To say that NEET has been fully successful is premature. There have been allegations of paper leaks. Getting the test translated into various languages has been problematic. Testing proficiency in the local languages and knowledge of diverse local laws in one test will also be a Herculean task. If at all such a central test is to be introduced, national law universities would be better equipped to conduct it, not any other body.

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The views expressed are personal

On stalking, the State has a largely male viewpoint

A protectionist approach to women's safety reinforces and perpetuates the view that they are weak



MRINAL PANDEY

What is the State from a woman's viewpoint? I once asked a woman MNREGA worker in Rajasthan, Sarkar? She looked at me quizzically. *Hamare tiye to sarkar matlab ala afsar jo majuri deta hai, ya bada नेता, jiski sarkar hai.* (For us the State means a high official who pays our wages, or the top political leader who heads the government). In Haryana today, two top faces of the state as described by Bilari Bai, the bureaucrat and the politician, stand face to face locked in a stare down contest of sorts.

The bureaucrat is the complainant's father. He is a senior IAS officer whose young daughter while driving home at night, was stalked, chased and would perhaps have been sexually molested by the drunken son of a political VIP and his friend. The timely arrival of the father and the police saved the traumatised girl. The duo were promptly arrested and under the supervision and guidance of the father, the girl's FIR was duly registered. At that point according to the girl, the identity of the boy and his political connections were unknown to her or her father or even the police.

That the connections did not remain unknown for too long is evident from what happened to the various charges the boys were booked under. The bailable charges were quietly dropped and the police have since been tight-lipped about their earlier information to the media about the nature of charges in the original FIR.

Soon senior political leaders from the Opposition began to demand that the father of one of the offenders, who happens to be the party chief of the BJP, should resign. The chief minister, reacted by stoutly defending the father of the 23-year-old saying that a father can not be held responsible for the sins of the children. The opposition is making it into a politically-motivated drive against his party.

The first notable point that emerges in the feminist sense, is not if or when and how the

THE STATE FRAMES THE CRIME OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY THAT THE TRADITIONAL INDIAN MALE DEFINES THIS ACT

boys will be punished, but that in cases of alleged sexual harassment despite the complainant being a well-connected woman, the Indian State, both as protector of the victim, registering authority for the FIR, and as defender of the man and his family name, once again comes out vividly as essentially male, looking at the episode from what is epistemologically the male point of view.

Socio-political questions begin to dominate what should be a judicial debate. Since despite the chase and stalking, any actual molestation did not take place, it raises questions of how the complainant can legally prove the final intent? Why should the boy's father be held responsible for his son's alleged misdemeanor? Couldn't the Opposition's demand for his incarceration be driven by political motives? There are dark tweets about the girl's character, inserted and quickly removed but not before they've been noticed. And we enter a familiar terrain where not too long ago faced with a similar situation another chief minister said, "boys will be boys".

The State still frames the crime of sexual harassment and stalking in exactly the same way that the traditional Indian male viewpoint defines this act. So the CM, as the prime representative of the state's authority, legitimises the legal moves, not actively maybe, but through non-interference with the status quo (the law will take its own course, if found guilty the boys will be punished). He also cushions the boy's father against (mostly male) legislators from the Opposition by the time-tested ruse of calling their demand politically motivated.

What does it mean for working women? It clearly tells them that civil society, the domain in which women are distinctly subordinated and deprived of self defence, cases are supported and challenged and heard out ultimately by men. And since most men consider women to be weak and passive, women should be placed beyond the reach of legal guarantees, especially if the accused is linked to a powerful family which can be subjected to calumny for political vendetta.

The girl later spoke to the media and said that all women she knows in Haryana, have had similar scary experiences of being stalked and threatened by drunken men. "Perhaps my body would have been discovered in some ditch the next day like so many others who were not so lucky and privileged. I stick to my charges because if girls like me do not who will?" Here is one who speaks as a woman who has felt the fetid breath of the Beast and realised the indignities suffered by other women. Let's not dilute her stand or drag it in to a muddy political arena.

Mrinal Pandey is former chairperson, Prasar Bharti and a senior journalist.
The views expressed are personal

Seerat Nishchal
My husband and I have applied for an immigration visa. The other day, I was talking to my mother-in-law about our prospects, apprehensions and ambitions and she was stating her qualms and expectations about her life after we leave.
A little before we ended our conversation, she concluded her side of the story by saying these words, "Wherever you go whatever you become and anything you do, always remember to finish off your tasks

Seerat Nishchal

well in time. Never pile up your errands as this leads to unnecessary delay and superfluous complications."
Her advice reminded me of the proverb that I learnt back in school — a stitch in time saves nine.

Many times, we tend to overlook and postpone the simplest of chores hoping to tend to them later. This deferment invariably leads to forgetting certain tasks, stacking up of others and an inevitable failure to accomplish some of the duties within the stipulated time period.

While it's not advisable to over-burden oneself with deadlines related to everyday activities, it's also not wise to put off things that require little effort to be addressed immediately. The satisfaction of ticking off things from your to-do list is immense and it can most certainly be accomplished by avoiding adjournment. Act promptly and simplify your life.

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