

Siphoning off SSA funds

Lack of accountability and disregard of instructions from higher authority can make a failure of a system. That is precisely what is obtaining in the case of implementation of centrally sponsored Sarv Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) scheme in the State. Sanctioned in 2002, the State Education Department was supposed to open 10,000 Primary and Middle Class schools in the State. Thousands of crore of rupees were sanctioned and released for the scheme. Now that nearly eleven years have passed ever since the scheme was sponsored, there are complaints that many of the schools exist only on paper and on ground nothing exists. The money shown as spent on the new institutions has been siphoned off by the concerned authorities in Education Department and the contractors. On receiving complaints from various quarters, Deputy Chief Minister, who also holds the charge of the Education Department, issued a circular to the Deputy Commissioners of all districts to conduct physical verification of the new schools opened under SSA scheme and report the matter to him within a stipulated time. Only one Deputy Commissioner (Samba) has sent in the report. Others have not responded despite a reminder from the Deputy Chief Minister. One fails to understand why the DCs are not willing to get physical verification of the schools conducted and reported. After all crores of rupees are involved and there seems no accountability. This is clearly a case of bad governance and the blame has to come to many persons managing the show. Verification is not inquiry. Only after a verification report comes in, the Deputy Chief Minister will be in a position to decide whether or not a formal inquiry into the case of corruption and siphoning off of the money is to be framed against the concerned authorities. The complaints of non-existence of school buildings gain strength when the Deputy Commissioners fail to order physical verification. Cases like these can be cited by the Central Government as instances of the State Government unable to provide efficient governance.

The Deputy CM should hold detailed inquiry into the matter and identify all officials responsible for this fiasco.

Rail travel catching momentum

Number of railway passenger increased hundred percent after the Prime Minister dedicated the 11 kilometer long Banihal-Qazigund rail link to the nation last month. Passengers have found fascination with this new mode of travel. But the result is that there is large scale overcrowding of railways in the valley in both sectors viz. Srinagar – Banihal and Srinagar-Baramulla. The number of travelers per day has risen to 18000 after the opening of Qazigund-Banihal rail tunnel. Chief Controller of Railways in Kashmir said in an interview that the large-scale increase in the number of travelers would naturally mean that more coaches shall have to be added and the frequency of trains shall have to be increased. But in all probability this is not going to happen that soon. It is a good decision on the part of railway authorities to keep an eye on the situation and wait for a few months to come to a final decision on how expansion in terms of coaches and frequency can be met. But the scenario of commuters going atop the railways and sitting on thereof is a very dangerous thing to do. The railway police authorities have the duty to check and stop this practice. Any accident happening on account of negligence of the railway police will be fraught with serious consequences and it will bring the railways to disrepute. That is not at all acceptable. The railway is going to play very crucial and historical role in changing the economy and lifestyle of the people of the State in general and of the valley in particular. As such all care has to be taken that railways run smoothly and without any mishap in the valley. We congratulate railway authorities for the good job they have been doing in Kashmir and people are eagerly waiting for the day when rail journey from Jammu to Baramulla will commence.

Refer news item, 'Govt. gives nod for incorporating 'best areas' of 73rd amendment' DE July 30. The decision of the State Government to incorporate some major provisions of 73rd amendment of the constitution of India into the Panchayati Raj Act is a healthy development as it will in real sense empower Panchayati Raj institutions in the State. It may be said here that without granting them financial powers, these institutions are toothless tigers. The financial powers will enable them work independently and execute developmental works on time. In other words PRIs will not have to depend on whims and caprices of the State Government functionaries. It is this handicap that prevented PRIs from taking firm roots in the State and evolution of local governance in the State. While granting them financial powers, it is essential that accountability and transparency in financial dealings remain their main concern. Recently, it was reported that two Panchayat members were involved in financial bungs. Power brings responsibility and this principle should be observed in letter and spirit.

Yours etc....
Rajinder Jamwal
Samba

Higher Education -Still a dream in India

Dr.Banarsi Lal and Dr. Vikas Tandon
It is really a matter of grave concern that the most of the Indian youths discontinue their education when they reach the 16th year of age. According to a report published in a newspaper, out of 333 million literate youth population, only 10 per cent are graduates and 76 per cent are matriculates or below. The country is striving very hard for making a mark globally in the area of education and research. It is our common experience that a matriculation certificate does not assure even a peon's job. Most of these youths

labour ban are difficult to implement because of social conditions and economic disparity. 80% of all recognised schools at the elementary stage are Government-run. This clearly indicates that Government is the largest provider of education in India. However, due to shortage of resources and lack of political will to carry out this herculean task, education system suffers from massive gaps including high pupil-teacher ratio, shortage of infrastructure and poor level of teachers training. The Government of India has made lot of efforts to ensure quality education to the people. The District Primary



engage in low-paid menial jobs. Following independence, India viewed education as an effective tool to bring about social change through community development. The administrative control was effectively initiated in the 1950s. In 1952, the Government of India grouped villages under a Community Development Blocks programme, an authority under national programme which could control education in up to 100 villages. The Block Development Officer oversaw a geographical area of 150 square miles with a population of around 70,000 people. The community development programmes comprised agriculture, animal husbandry, rural industries, health and sanitation, family planning, women welfare, child care and nutrition, education, youth welfare, cooperatives etc. There were many programmes and schemes in all the areas of development, covering the total community segments, artisans, small and marginal farmers, women and people below the poverty line.

If the Indian history is analysed closely in the field of education, it is easily discernible that the rural education programmes continued throughout the 1950s. A sizable network of rural education was set up and 52,000 Community Development Blocks were established. Education in India is mainly provided by the Government agencies. Control and funding are carried out at three levels- Central, State and local. Education up to 14 years of age has been made a fundamental right. The Union Government has also banned child labour so that the children do not enter hazardous working conditions. But both free education and child

Education Programme (DPEP) was launched in 1994 with a view to universalising primary education in India, by reforming and vitalising the existing primary education system. 85% of DPEP was funded by the Central Government and the remaining 15 per cent was funded by the State Government. It was also supported by UNICEF and other international agencies. DPEP had opened 1,60,000 new schools including 84,000 alternative education schools delivering alternative education to approximately 3.5 million children. This primary education scheme has shown gross enrolment ratio of 93-95% for the last three years in some states. The current scheme for universalisation of education for all is Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which is one of the largest education schemes in the world. Although the enrolment has been enlarged but the quality of education remains low.

The quality of government schools is low, so 27% of the Indian children are educated in private institutions. It has been observed through several researches that the students studying in private institutions did better than the students who read in Government institutions. But it is fact that private schools fail to provide education to the poor children. It is observed by all of us that private schools cover entire curriculum and offer extracurricular activities such as sports, science fairs, dramas, music activities etc. The student-teacher ratio is more in private schools than the Government schools. As far as in-service training is concerned, 43.44 per cent Government schools teachers get it, whereas only 2.32 per cent teachers in unaided schools

receive such training. The National Policy on Education in 1986 has provided environment awareness, science and technology education and introduction to traditional elements such as Yoga into the Secondary School Education System. A significant feature of India's Secondary School Education is the emphasis on inclusion of the disadvantaged sections of society. Another important feature is its emphasis on profession-based vocational training to help students to get skills for finding a vocation of their respective choices. A special Integrated Education for Disabled Children programme was launched in 1974 with a focus on primary education was converted into Inclusive Education at Secondary Stage.

The Kendriya Vidyalaya project was launched in 1965 with an objective to provide the uniform education in many schools. A door-to-door survey was conducted in Jodhpur, Rajasthan to find out the number of out-of-school and working children as part of national campaign titled "I want a teacher too" reveals a disgusting fact.

This survey was conducted by a Non-Government Organisation, "Pratham Council for Vulnerable Children," in Jodhpur and five other cities. 31,559 children were surveyed and this survey was carried in 142 red pockets of these cities.

Slum areas and urban communities that had the highest number of underprivileged children were covered under this survey. The survey found that full-time formal education is still the distant dream for a number of children, especially working children in Jodhpur city. In 1986, the National Policy on Education decided to restructure education in tandem with the social framework of each Indian state, keeping in mind larger goals. It emphasised on education that was mainly needed in the women's conditions. Emphasis was given on expanding girls' occupational centres and primary education, secondary education and higher education in both rural and urban institutions. Efforts were made to connect problems like low school attendance with poverty and dependence of housework on girls.

Although many countries differ in many counts from each other, the world today's is regarded as a single community. Human Development Reports since 1990 consider health and education as the chief indicators of human progress. Education is certainly the key which alone can prove a solution to multiple issues. If we really want to have a robust society, education should be available to each and every youth of the country. Higher education opens the doors of opportunity and prepares a solid ground for uninterrupted growth in almost all the areas. Our country youths should be encouraged for higher education. Higher education can equip them with power and perseverance to keep on marching towards the betterment of society. If they fail to get the higher education, the country will be unable to face the challenges of future.

Of doctors and politics

Mubashar.M.Mir

Previous some years have been full of impediments for the medical students whether they are MBBS doctors or dentists or physiotherapists. Government attitude towards medicos with its self styled policies and decisions could be perhaps taken as a routine approach whereby they first thrill the public by stretching over the maximum capacity in the medical courses despite an already limping infrastructure. As far as the grilling component is concerned it has been well illustrated by the events that happened in the passing years. Marked by massive protests and strikes by the medicos starting from the strike launched by the Junior Doctor Association (JDA) regarding their pay anomalies in the 6th pay commission and the post graduation stipend while the government looked quite helpless and kept putting forth the lack of funds as an excuse. After the issue was some how clenched by the government the new cracker that erupted was concern of possible De-Recognition of Govt. Dental College Jammu due to massive deficiency of teaching infrastructure and astonishing as it may sound, non availability of a Principal for the college, the post kept waiting for a full time principal for a long period.

As soon as it subsided, the unfortunate and limping health and medical infrastructure was marred by another protest of physiotherapists who were facing wrath of unemployment, thanks to the false assurances of the Government and their senseless recruitment of hundreds of physiotherapy students despite scanty posts for their absorption. There is hardly any doubt that the politics driven system played with the emotions of the common medical aspirant by first permitting massive admissions to physiotherapy colleges despite knowing that our state had meager resources to absorb the same, a step which was purely subject to vote bank politics and then getting their hands up when it came to answer their ill deeds. One may question the policy makers to justify the issue of such medicos with respect to the production-absorption equilibrium.

A VIEW POINT

Now when one could have asked for no more professional blunders by non professional political brains, another missile stood ready to be launched by increasing seats for MBBS in the medical colleges of the state. The political think tanks are all set to repeat history of physiotherapists under the roof of medical colleges just to win public applaud. It is hard to believe how the medical colleges who are constantly at threat of De-Recognition by Medical Council of India due to lack of adequate teaching staff and or infrastructure could bear the load of more perhaps almost double the strength that it is carrying at present. Our medical education system which is hardly sufficient to support current strength of the batches of MBBS and post graduation courses and in fact needs much more to bring it to the optimum level is going to be overloaded and believing that it will function smoothly without hampering the quality of medical studies is something hard to take in.

Perhaps the drivers of medical education system who are far from related to the profession are unable to make out that what is needed more desperately is improvement in quality of medical education and that quantifying the problem is going to fetch more trouble. It is nothing but the superficial vision of the government, which is unable to perceive far than the surface of the problem. Every time a question about problems in the health and medical system emerges, all that the government can think of is banning private practice and increasing medical seats. In fact the problem lies deeper. With the limited lot of good specialist doctors in the state, banning private practice of doctors in off duty hours actually amounts to preventing the needy patient from seeking the consultation of their doctor, which they were not able to reach because of long line of patients in the hospital. It actually deprives the patient of visiting a doctor of his choice and the concerned specialty, which he could have done by going to the doctor's clinic by paying a sum of a hundred rupees or so. The delusion that the political intelligentsia has is that increasing the number of doctors will eliminate the problems in health system but actually this is going to massively damage the healthcare services indirectly. The shortage of doctors is actually a dilemma. In actual there are hundred of doctors in the state who are jobless because the government has failed to recruit doctors through public service commission for years forcing many doctors to migrate outside the state for better opportunity. Overall it seems that the government is not serious in understanding the root cause of hurdles in the health and medical education system, all they care about is gaining political mileage.

As far as the common man is concerned, he is not concerned about finding a doctor as much as he is concerned about finding a proficient doctor. It is high time for the government to understand that increasing the burden on an already rickety structure can deteriorate the situation. Health setup of every state is its lifeline and playing with it can have disastrous implications. It is imperative for any developing organization to rectify the loopholes and deficiencies in its existing setup and try to optimize it before taking the next leap forward.

Indo-US trade relations

Damage controlling exercise

K.N. Pandita

Earlier this month, high profile Indian team landed in Washington to attend the annual Leadership Summit of US-India Business Council (USIBC) and US-India CEO Forum. The team sought to explore prospects of direct foreign investment in India and stimulate the quantum of Indo-US trade, which is very low keeping in sight the size of the partners in business.

Since the Indian delegation comprised top echelons of economic policy structuring module, and also since I happened to be holidaying in the US, I was naturally interested in keeping track of the details of crucial deliberations trickling down in the American print media.

Before arriving in Washington, the delegation comprising Finance Minister Chidambaram and Minister of Trade and Industry Anand Sharma, was engaged in private probing exercise in New York to fathom the mood of the American side. From this informal exchange, the India side is reported to have received a mouthful, which indicated that the path, which the Indian delegation sought to tread, was rough and uneven. The first salvo was delivered without any reservations.

Vice Chairman of Planning Commission Montek Singh

Ahluwalia tried to sell the argument of that while the Indian government was not averse to bringing in economic reforms to make smooth bilateral economic relations yet the reforms had to wait owing to the politics of Parliamentary elections slated for 2014. Chidambaram reacted that he had only heard the lament and that hardly made things intelligible to the American side. Anand Sharma reserved his clarifying narrative for the USIBC session in Washington and chose to vent ideas about trust deficit. However, at the CEO Leadership meet in Washington he was more articulate.

In Washington, Senator Mark Warner of the US made some plain speaking while reflecting on current status of Indo-US trade relations. He said the trade relations had got stuck up and no activity worth calling movement forward in widening and deepening trade relations was in sight. Casting veiled aspersions on India's non-delivery stances, he said the US wants to finish what we had started.

The Senator projected American initiative as positive and timely, which needed to be responded to with equal earnestness. He talked of 2005 Indo-US nuclear deal that produced 2008 Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) exception and Obama's rapid negotiations of

reprocessing arrangements completed in 2010. He claimed these were illustrations of what could be accomplished when the two countries are working in a spirit of shared enterprise. This indirectly meant that India did not play the matching role and thus has been happening the phenomenon of a stalemate in relationship.

In the Washington round-table, among others, six former US Ambassadors to India came together to voice their concern on lowering of the graph of trade relations between the two countries in recent years. Frank Wisner plainly said that he had noticed in the last year decline in the brand of India, which is a serious problem. Another stalwart of Indo-US policy observers, namely Robber Blackwill who saw the relationship troubled as of now, expressed similar concerns. Going a step further he warned these could get worse if the two governments did not arrest the trend.

The former Ambassadors pleaded that the sides need to get over the present hump and resurrect the momentum. In their view there was decline in the brand of India among business. India, they believe, is going through slowing growing rates, declining business confidence, and troubles in rupee. Dismissing election pretext, the former Ambassadors argued

that India could address these issues even on the eve of parliamentary elections and generate FDI.

However, one of the former Ambassadors to India, Mr. Pickering advocated for a Second Green Revolution in India as the first revolution had been brought about by the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao when India was faced with economic recession. He strongly favoured forward movement of Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline, a project stoutly opposed by the Americans. He made forceful argument in highlighting the energy need of India and called it crucial to overall movement forward of Indian economy. He called a move in this direction as creative set of leverage.

Another former Ambassador Mr. Celeste (1997-2001) seconded Pickering's theory of "creative set of leverage" and argued that it (IPI gas pipeline) could break conventional thinking.

He exhorted US businessmen to invest in India's healthcare and education areas and advised that at least the first step of 7-year old Indo-US nuclear deal should be completed.

It will be reminded that the Indian Parliament refused to compromise on the nuclear liability law. The Ambassadors were of opinion that it was unlikely that the deal will be

consummated. The two countries must move forward in Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT). The bilateral nuclear deal should not get killed as it has been brought about with a great labour.

USIBC Chairman and CEO MasterCard Worldwide, Ajay Banga also regretted cracks in Indo-US relations and said there is need to repair these. He believes that political leadership should step in and create transparent, predictable and consistent business environment. Among grave concerns to investors are India's tax policy, local manufacturing restrictions, challenges to innovation and intellectual property rights? He thinks that the US side cannot meet the demand for IT and soft wear solutions without support from temporary additions to their skilled workforce ---- an area where India is their best possible partner. He thinks that it is not only in the interests of the US to open doors to more skilled workers but also to ensure that immigration reform does not discriminate against our partners nor limit US companies in choosing where their service lies.

Mr. Banga has also met with the US Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker and conveyed to him India's deep concern over these "killer amendments" in the immigration bill, which passed the Senate and now

await House action.

Ratan Tata, the Co-Chairman of the Council also spoke of decreasing trust between the two sides and counseled the need to reconstruct it. He frankly said that the US was the easiest business partner to deal with.

In final analysis, the narrative of status and prospects of economic relations between the two countries was handled deftly by either side without raising ambiguities. It was felt that at the care both sides wanted things to move speedily. In nutshell, the US wants India to make her laws and conduct of business grounded on realities of relationship and also envision the enormous scope it could open up for both the countries. On Indian side there was ample show of willingness to bring about economic reforms notwithstanding legislative, political and other constraints.

Two issues are more prominent. One is of Foreign Direct Investment and the second is carrying forward the remaining steps in connection with bilateral nuclear deal. From Indian side, the irritant of "killer amendment" to immigration rule has to be removed and the path cleared for IT and technological partnership in that the enterprise becomes complimentary to just and equitable economic relationship.

Incorporating 73rd amendment

Refer news item, 'Govt. gives nod for incorporating 'best areas' of 73rd amendment' DE July 30.

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It may be said here that without granting them financial powers, these institutions are toothless tigers. The financial powers will enable them work independently and execute developmental works on time. In other words PRIs will not have to depend on whims and caprices of the State Government functionaries.

It is this handicap that prevented PRIs from taking firm roots in the State and evolution of local governance in the State. While granting them financial powers, it is essential that accountability and transparency in financial dealings remain their main concern. Recently, it was reported that two Panchayat members were involved in financial bungs. Power brings responsibility and this principle should be observed in letter and spirit.

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Panchayat members, as has been in consideration of the Govt deserve to be paid rightful remuneration for the time they have to devote for village activities. The onus of supervision of village works, as devolves on their shoulders, can effectively and sincerely done only if contracts for such works are not authorised to them. Both contractorship and supervision if given to a person the quality of work can't be achieved. And perhaps, this has been the reason for poor completion of village projects like buildings, roads etc.

It is like a pimple growing upon an ulcer. Already thick wave of corruption and system of commission is very much prevalent, combining both the duties, that is supervision and contractorship in one hand would mean total collapse of quality control of the works done. In the fitness of things it is necessary that no Panchayat member should be given contract of Panchayat works and instead, remuneration, as justified, be paid to them for their services.

Yours etc.....
Keshwa Nand Sharma
Salehri (Sunder Bani)

Readers Write

Sports infrastructure

Sir,
Apropos news item 'Strengthening sports infra my priority' DE July 30.

If sports sector has not flourished much in this State, it is because there is not much infrastructure in the State.

In some districts there are no stadium where payers could practice for games. Wherever they exists there is no arrangement for coaching and guidance.

If any player has proved his mettle on state or national level it is due to his individual achievements. Organising tournaments at District or State level is nothing but mere wastage of time and

money. Sports as a subject should be taken seriously by the sportsmen as well as Sports Ministry. A well defined Sports Policy is the first requirement in this direction.

The Sports Policy itself will take care of other aspects like infrastructure, and coaching of players.

Besides, incorporation of sports into school curriculum will help in inculcating sports culture among students at a young age. Therefore, there should be no delay in taking such a step.

Yours etc.....
Anshu Sharma,
Jammu