

LD Hospital still incomplete

Way back in 2009, construction of Lal Ded Memorial Hospital's multi-storey building was begun to ease the great crowding of Kashmir's lone maternity hospital. Four years have gone by and the construction is nowhere near completion. It is learnt that Jammu and Kashmir Project Construction Corporation (JKPCC) has delayed its completion owing to faulty design. Why should the JKPCC have approved the earlier design, which now emerges as faulty? Who had to approve that design and why did he approve it? This asks for enquiry.

It is strange that whenever a major project is undertaken, the Government is constrained to institute one or the other enquiry into various irregularities, financial, constructional, design or environment etc. This is a reflection on the departments that are looking after these projects.

Lal Ded hospital is the only maternity hospital in the Kashmir region. According to statistics revealed, it is found that 80 per cent of the patients come from far off rural areas in districts of Anantnag, Pulwama, Bandipora, Baramulla, and Kupwara etc. This is despite the fact that dispensaries and district hospitals exist in those areas. The doctors are helpless owing to lack of space, equipment and other pre-requisites of hospital infrastructure. Generally relatives accompany patients from rural areas coming to the city hospital and this causes crowding in the hospital. This creates chaotic conditions and the hospital staff is unable to cope with it.

We fail to understand why maternity facilities are not made adequately available at district hospitals? That would reduce pressure on the premier maternity hospital in Srinagar. While designing the multi-storey hospital in Srinagar, the authorities should have also thought of increasing the capacity of district level hospitals to accommodate more maternity cases.

Finally, the Health Department should fix the deadline for completion of the LD Hospital new complex. It should not be left to the sweet will of the construction agency. Delaying a project also means escalation in the cost of construction. We would suggest the Minister in charge of Health and Medical Education to take personal interest in seeing to it that the LD Hospital is brought to completion as early as possible and reduce the pressure on the staff and services of the existing hospital.

Wetlands conservation

Chief Secretary feels that an amount of rupees 120 crore released by the Central Government for Wular Conservation and Management is insufficient and that the concerned authorities should impress upon New Delhi to provide 386 crore rupees for the project. The Chief Secretary has indicated that the Government has already sent Conservation and Management Action Plan of wetlands to the Centre for implementation. Three wetland sites have been mentioned and these are Wular in Kashmir, Mansar in Jammu and Tso-Morari in Ladakh.

Conservation of water bodies is an accepted principle with the Ministry of Environment and water bodies fall within the ambit of that category. All efforts have to be made to preserve them. Conservation and development are possible only when funds are available. The common sense is that these bodies should be preserved and maintained in a manner that they can also generate revenue by attracting tourists. We hope the Government or the concerned department will have drawn a plan to that purpose. While we fully support conservation and preservation programme of wetlands of the State, we also would touch upon the case of Dal Lake in this connection. Hundreds of thousands of rupees were spent on conservation of Dal Lake but despite the entire amount spent, the Dal still presents not an attractive look. The weeds are there and pollution of its water continues. Seventeen thousand homesteads were relocated from their habitats in the Dal and have been rehabilitated elsewhere. If that is all what had to be done with the Dal, it is no success. If this is also to be done with the Wular and Mansar, it will raise many questions. All that the people would like is that the amount sanctioned in the name of conservation of wetlands is utilized properly.

Netas need lesson in hunger

Poonam I Kaushish

How much does it cost a poor man to satiate his hunger and keep body and soul together per day?

A) "One can get a meal for Rs 12 in Mumbai", boasted MP Raj Babbar, not to be outshone coed compatriot Rasheed Massod, "in Delhi the cost is only Rs 5", bragged Union Minister Farooq Abdullah, "nonsense, one can fill one stomach on Rs 1." Really? Are you joking?

Ok, fellow countrymen let lose the volley of expletives, curse all you want of how rotten the State of Denmark is. But this sums up the tragic reality of our heartless, callous desi Marie Antoinettes who have made poverty and hunger into a nautanki. Remember the French Queen's infamous remark, "If the people have no bread let them have cake!"

Alas, our netagan's intemperate remarks are not going to change the reality of the aam aadmi crippled by aamdani adhani kharcha rupiya of soaring vegetable and oil prices and still higher inflation. Where even Rs 33 fixed by the Planning Commission or Rs 20 by the Arjun Sengupta 2007 report cannot buy one two square meals a day and sounds ridiculous.

Raising a moot point: Do our leaders know the reality of Asli Bharat which they ad nauseum vow to protect. Importantly, do they care a damn? Clearly, underscoring that what ails India and its burgeoning poor is not poverty, which can be corrected, but the ruthless heartlessness of our netagan who not only lack humility but also empathy for the garib. Worse, it exposes their sheer ennu and paucity of ideas along-with accentuating their

moral bankruptcy. What to speak of a perspective completely divorced from reality.

Put it down to the economics of politics. Forget eradicating garibi there is no sight even of the much promised roti, cheeni, chawal and dal. Our netagan's remedy? Consume less sugar it leads to diabetes. Bluntly, stop whining and swallow the bitter pill. Mera Bharat is indeed Mahan!

True, the Planning Commission has tried to rationalize even the irrational. It would have us believe a family of five can live on Rs 5,000 a month in urban and Rs 4,080 in rural areas? And that 1800 calories per person per day is the minimum food intake criteria to define the below the poverty line (BPL) down from its earlier 2400 calories in rural areas and 2,100 calories per person per day in urban areas.

But its arguments do not cut much ice. Despite the statistics, the neatly doctored figures of easy virtue, it reels off in support. Obviously, the tweaking of figures helps the Government project a better image at international fora.

Simultaneously, this extremely low expenditure is aimed only at artificially reducing the number of BPL persons to reduce Government expenditure on them and smacks of statistical jugglery and abstract. Wherein, today it proudly asserts that poverty has declined to a record 21.9% in 2011-12 from 29.8% in 09-10 whereby we have only 269.3 million poor people of which 216.5 million reside in rural India.

Why blame them? They don't know what poverty is. They haven't suffered hunger pangs? Why should they? Think. They are more equal than us, the carpet-baggers who thrive on un-ending free lunches

all at the aam aadmi's hard-earned taxes. Chicken biryani for Rs 30, two idlis for Rs 1, dosa Rs 2.4, vegetarian thali (dal, 2 sabzis, raita, rice and 4 rotis) for a princely Rs 10 against Rs 45 from a footpath vendor for the same.

Shockingly, we pay them for this boorishness. Our MPs alone cost the tax payer Rs.1.30 lakhs per month. Topping this, is rent-free accommodation in five acre Lutyens Delhi bungalows, costing the aam aadmi Rs 60 crore annually. Scandalously, on those who can afford the most luxurious of homes or hotels, given that 315 of the 543 lawmakers in the Lok Sabha are crorepatris!

More. If one goes by the per capita equation, our MPs cost to the nation is 100 times what an aam aadmi makes. Thus, obfuscating the harsh reality whether it behoves a poor country to pay such high dividends to its under-serving leaders.

Undeniably, our rulers are playing a game of see-saw with the number of the country's poor. Over six decades post Independence, after spending trillions on education, health and food two thirds of our people continue to be hungry, illiterate, unskilled and bereft of basic medical care. Disillusionment and discontent is spiraling. Borne out by rising farmers' suicides, crime, unemployment, chakka jams etc.

Inexcusably, India has not only a third of the global poor but also there are more hungry people than any other country, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute. The World Food Programme (WFP) is more candid. It says India is home to about 25 per cent of the world's hungry poor.

It quotes Government figures to stress that over 230 million of the rural poor are malnourished which accounts for

nearly 50% of child deaths in India and 43 per cent of children under-five years of age are underweight and more than half of all pregnant women aged between 15 and 49 suffer from anaemia. In absolute terms the figures are staggering. Worse, hunger stalks every State and the condition of its mal-nourished, over 50 per cent, is worse than some sub-Saharan countries. With food prices continuing to rise, naturally more would be pushed to poverty. Yet, over the years, our netagan have turned this dictum on its head and converted populist politics into economic nonsense.

Clearly, the more the polity indulges in the politics of food, more will go hungry. They must stop this pantomime of poverty. Who should one turn for redemption and solace? And where does the buck stop? At our leaders doorstep.

Plainly the callous remarks underscore that the Congress' poll gambit of hamara haath aam aadmi ke saath is a charade. The time has come for the Government to stop making a mickey of the people, arrest galloping inflation and hurtling prices.

The writing is on the wall. In the ultimate, if India cannot provide the aam aadmi with adequate resources to meet his basic needs, it will cripple his full participation in the country's progress. Our leaders must grasp that the Planning Commission's 'poor' joke is no substitute for poverty alleviation.

It needs to remember you cannot continue fooling the people. They need to beware: Agar bhook aur mehanga se aam aadmi ke aankhon ke aansu mit sake, toh din dur nahin hain jab netaon ke vote bhook ke chhakkay choot jaygahn! (INFA)

Situation under control

But no glimmer of hope

Nikhil Gajendragadkar

The first quarter of the new financial year brought grim news for the UPA Government at the Centre. There is no good news for the people either. Industrial production has declined, exports continued its downward trend, and inflation, which we all want to decrease, has increased. On top of it, tax collection also has missed the mark. Still the Manmohan Singh-led Government remains calm and unmoved.

Industrial production or factory output has shrunk. According to statistics released by the Government, its growth rate was minus 1.2 per cent. Sub zero rate cannot be called as "growth rate". In April this rate (or IIP) was just 1.9 % according to "revised" estimate; earlier it was fixed at 2.3 %. These results are declared by the Government itself.

Decline in the growth rate of Capital goods is more disturbing. It shrunk to -2.7 %. Capital expenditure is an indication of the investment by the industry. In 10 out of last 14 months this rate is below zero, which means the Indian industry (or India Inc. as popularly known) is avoiding new investment or it is incapable to do so. Either way it also tells that the Capital Goods Industry is in a bad shape.

This quarter had a surprise in the store (besides large inventories) for Consumer Goods industry too. It (including "Durable" and "Non Durable") saw a negative growth rate. By June end this industry shrank by 4 %. This came as a shock for the industry as a whole and the Government too. Lack of demand - both domestic and international- led to stockpiling of goods. Costly Input forced producers to increase price, which is driving the consumers away. This industry is in a fix.

The auto industry bears testimony to the fact that economy is slowing. In June, car sales plunged by 9 % with sale of commercial vehicles dropping

by 13.45%. For the past eight months this is the trend for auto sector. Increase in input cost is one reason and costly fuel is the other. If transporters cannot get enough business, who will invest in purchasing a new truck or a bus? In other words transporters are not getting enough work. Negative growth of industry and slump in the transport sector are directly related. If there is no demand then where the hell will producers transport their product?

The other tragedy is exports. June saw a decline by 4.57% in exports. Last month, India could export goods worth only \$23.78 billion. Though it saw a decline by 1.11% in May, latest is the largest in past eight months. But imports have not come down proportionately. In May balance of payment (BOP) rose to \$20.1 billion. Compared to April and May import of gold reduced considerably, thanks to steps taken by the RBI and the Government, and BOP or Current Account Deficit (CAD) came down to \$12.2 billion in June. Still overall CAD is as high as 4.8 % of GDP.

The same quarter gave another jolt to the Government on the tax front. Growth in its collection sank to only 8.7%. Slide is prominent in indirect taxes. Of course it is not unexpected. Indian economy in the last two quarters of last year (2012-13) grew at meagre rate of 4.7% and 4.8% respectively. Numbers of the first quarter for GDP growth are yet to come but going by the trend, they will not be encouraging, feel many economists. Excise duty is a major source of income for the Government. It is reduced by 5 %. Corporate Tax comprises one-third of total tax collection. It has grown only by 7.8%. Budget forecast was 16.9% growth in this segment. Service tax has risen dramatically in last few years, so the Finance Ministry relies heavily to boost its finances. The Budget esti-

mated growth of a whopping 35.7% growth in service tax, it registered 15.2% growth in the first quarter.

Excise tax and corporate tax are directly connected with the performance of industrial sector. Auto, textiles, manufacturing, consumer product; nearly every sector is doing badly for last one-and-half year. When industry as a whole slows down, one cannot expect growth in tax collection either. Some vehicle producers have already started reducing production by halting it for few days. This will affect employment.

On one hand production and tax collections are dwindling, inflation is showing no signs of abetting. Retail inflation rate touched 9.87% in June. Preceding three months it did not rise, but was not below 9%. Food inflation was up to 11.84% in June. All varieties of grain, vegetables, fruits, milk and all other food articles are getting "dearer" every week for last three years. One cannot comprehend how the Government can claim that inflation is on decline? Even inflation based on WPI (wholesale price index) in June has inched to 4.86 from 4.70 earlier months and food inflation based on WPI is 9.74 in June from 8.25. Supply crunch is the main reason behind this situation and the Government is doing precious little to rectify it.

Rupee's depreciation against US Dollar has deprived our economy to gain from lower crude price in international market. This has also led to increase in fuel prices in the domestic market. Costly fuel starts a vicious cycle of more inflation. High cost of essential commodities has forced common people to spend more on these items, naturally they cannot think of a home loan or loan for buying a vehicle. Inflation has eroded demand for almost all goods.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced opening up of many sectors for FDI, but there

are no takers. High inflation coupled with huge fiscal and current account deficit are major hindrances in attracting foreign investment. In the past four years the Government did nothing to boost domestic investment and saving. It is spending on so called "social programmes", but that expenditure is not creating assets for the economy and country. The Government's publicity campaign "Bharat Nirman" (Rebuilding India) is actually a proof of such spending. What happened to Mid Day Meal scheme is now in the open with the Bihar tragedy.

Agriculture sector is in dire straits for decades. The UPA Government is paying lip service to farmers for the past seven years. Neither industry nor agriculture is good health, then who will create 10 million jobs needed every year? This Government's quest of "inclusive growth" is in reality pushing many groups away from it.

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On any front there is no glimmer of hope. But Congress and its allies in the UPA are obsessed with next year's General elections. The politicians want to win their seats. That is why they are proclaiming the "situation is under control"...But we know the reality. (INFA)

What after Telangana ?

Kalyani Shankar

At last, Telangana's here. The people of this backward region have realised their sixty-year dream while the prosperous Andhra region has lost out. The Congress Party has taken risks in taking a decision after years of dithering. But the million-dollar question is whether the creation of the 29th state is a solution or a problem? On the face of it, more problems are staring at the Congress than the solutions.

Andhra Pradesh, the first entity formed on linguistic basis was created in 1953 out of the erstwhile Madras Presidency with Kurnool as its capital. With the State Reorganization Act 1956, the merger of Hyderabad and Andhra states took place and Andhra Pradesh state was born in November 1956. Now it has been proposed to carve out the 29th state of Telangana.

While there could be a case for creation of smaller states, the decision on Telangana is a gamble, which could well turn out to be a shortsighted decision. The main assumption is the hope that the Congress can cut its losses in the 2014 elections. Out of the 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana, the party hopes to get at least 15 after a merger of the TRS with the Congress (this has been promised by the TRS chief Chandra Shekhar Rao). The Congress is resigned to losing the rest of the 42 seats in the state. As for the Assembly polls, there will be no Congress presence in Andhra, which had been a citadel of the party.

On the face of it, although there is jubilation in Telangana, the challenges ahead are many for the Congress, the UPA Government and the State Government and even for the newly created state. They include economic and political.

A political turmoil seems to be on the cards, which may turn out to be costly for the Congress. Politically, there can be a backlash as had been witnessed during the Telangana agitation and Andhra agitation in the sixties and seventies. Right now, the supporters of a united Andhra Pradesh are seething with anger, which may turn into violence soon. The Centre has already dispatched more Central forces expecting trouble.

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Nobody knows what course the protests will take. The vested interests may soon jump in to stoke the fire. The fact that Andhra could lose Hyderabad ultimately is one reason for the rich investors from the Andhra region to support protests. The violence may ultimately end up in law and order problem and imposition of President's rule.

Secondly, the impact of the creation of Telangana on other states should be more worrying as it might result in agitations in several parts of the country. Emboldened by the decision, Rayalaseema has begun to demand a separate state. Already the Gorkhaland agitation has been revived in West Bengal and so has the Bodoland demand in Assam. Some working committee members like Mukul Wasnik have raised the Vidarbha issue. Civil Aviation Minister Ajit Singh will revive his long pending Harit Pradesh demand. The BSP chief Mayawati will be emboldened to demand cutting UP into four states. Then there is a demand for Saurashtra, Kutch, Ladakh and many more for smaller states. One way the centre could deal with this is to setup a second State Reorganization Commission to look into the entirety of the issue for smaller states because the Congress has opened up the Pandora's box.

The third is the economic challenge and how to distribute the assets between the newly created Telangana and Andhra. The fortunes of people in both states would be affected. Andhra Pradesh has the risk of losing its primacy. The united Andhra Pradesh boasts of successfully brining down the poverty rate to 9.2 per cent, which is less than half of the national average. There are several concerns about Hyderabad, which have not been addressed fully. There are fears about the real estate prices, which may fall because of the instability. Will more foreign investment come to Hyderabad? Will it continue to be the pride of Information Technology companies? These are questions that remain unanswered.

The fourth is that while there is a case for smaller states, there is also an inherent political instability, which is evident in many smaller states and the North East. Will creation of Telangana result in more regionalism and fracturing of the polity? Even on development, states like Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and most in the North East do not perform well while states like Himachal Pradesh and Haryana have done well. Telangana could go either way.

Fifthly, there is a fear that the naxal infested Telangana might totally go into their hands. This was one of the arguments advanced by the United Andhra Pradesh supporters. Already one third of the country is under the influence of the naxalites. While it will be a good thing if the naxalites decide to come into the mainstream and fight elections, they can also be dangerous.

Looking ahead, now that Telangana has become a reality, a lot of responsibility rests on the leaders of the state who fought for it. They should fulfill the expectations of the people and take the state forward. There should be inclusive politics and determination to build the young state. As of now there is no visionary in the horizon who can achieve this. The Congress has no big leaders in the region while the Chandrasekhar Rao family including his son, daughter and nephew dominates the TRS.

The Congress party has veered towards creating Telangana taking too many risks but the over riding consideration seems to be short-term electoral gains. The immediate impact is that Congress has lost Andhra and may gain Telangana. Only time will tell whether this gamble will work or it will boomerang. (IPA)

Enhance Medical Allowance

Sir,

The State Government Pensioners do not have many but one main demand which they want the authorities to consider it sympathetically by keeping in view their financial constraints which have rendered them quite helpless to fall back on ₹300 being given to them, as medical allowance for undergoing medical treatment and buying of medicines.

The Central Government has provided cashless facilities to its pensioners for undergoing surgical operations besides giving them medicines free of cost throughout the country. The pensioners are also getting medical allowance @ ₹300 per month. But the State Government is neither providing cashless facility nor prescribed medicines to its pensioners. Medical allowance @ ₹300 per month is being given but the same is insufficient to defray expenses in connection with the purchase of their monthly medicines.

The Central Government has every reason to be proud because it wants to see the people of this State happy, healthy and prosperous. It is providing funds in billions during every financial year for building and developing

Jammu and Kashmir as an ideal State of the country. When the Centre does not hesitate to release funds in billions for the health and happiness of the people of this State, I fail to understand why the State Government is indifferent to the demand of its pensioners.

As the demand of the pensioners is quite genuine, they also deserve to be treated in the manner of the Central Government, by providing them the medicines and cashless facilities, or the amount of their medical allowance be enhanced from ₹300 to ₹1000 per month. This type of decision of the Government will have its soothing effect on the mind, body and soul of the pensioners.

So, I on behalf of the State Government Pensioners approach the State authorities with this supplication that it should accept their demand either by providing them medicines at different Tehsils and District levels hospitals of the State or the amount of their medical allowance be enhanced from ₹300 to ₹1000 per month at the earliest.

Yours etc.....
Jagdeep Singh
Rehari Colony, Jammu

Grant State subject status

Sir,

Refer news item 'Madan asks Govt to grant State subject to West Pak refugees' DE Aug 1.

One does not know why West Pak refugees are made to suffer by not providing them State Subject by the successive State Governments. These people have already suffered much during these years. If the Government has a policy for rehabilitation of militants who crossed over PoK for training and carrying out anti-national activities, why it does not grant citizenship rights to the these people who have relentlessly pursued their case with various political parties of the country especially the Congress and the BJP.

In recent past, they have organised mass rallies, and peaceful protests to draw the attention of the concerned authorities towards this human issue. And in turn they get mere assurances from the powers that be and nothing else. Now when elections are round the corner, they will again come into focus, as political parties will try to garner their support. But the moment, the elections are over, the issue will again get lost in political drama enacted by our politicians.

Yours etc.....
Sanjay Sharma
Samba

Readers Write

Home delivery of LPG

Sir,

Refer news item 'CAPD asks consumers to lodge complaint for denial of LPG home delivery' DE Aug 1.

The CAPD has to take many more steps to ensure that consumers get supply of LPG delivered at home. Even now when there are clear cut directions to the Gas Agencies to ensure 100 per cent home delivery of the LPG gas in the Jammu City, most of agencies do not honour the directions. They are still rooted in the old system—asking consumers to assemble at a specified point and get the cylinder from there. In the process, the people who suffer the most are old men and women who are not in a position to lift the heavy cylinders on their backs or get a labour well in time to do the job. These people are compelled to plead to others to help them in this task. The Department should carry out surprise checks to see whether its rules and regulations are adhered to by the agencies. In case they flout rules, they should be taken to task by suspending their licences.

Yours etc....
Milki Ram
Talab Tilloo
Jammu