

## Administrative inefficiency

No fewer than 16 water works projects were approved for Bandipora district that have been abandoned for no specified reason. Local MLAs brought the matter to the notice of the authorities. In 2011, the matter figured in the District Development Board. The case lingered on. A year later in June 2012, legislators vehemently protested against the carelessness of authorities to move the matter and induce the contractors to resume completion of the works in hand. All that was done was to constitute a Committee under the chairmanship of the District Development Commissioner of Bandipora, which would study the current status of the projects and submit a report. The committee completed its assignment and submitted the report to the Commissioner Secretary GAD and copies to all concerned departments involved in the schemes. A year is about to go by when the report was submitted and no action whatsoever has been taken. The report has stated misutilization of Government funds by the executing agency in connivance with the concerned contractors of the schemes.

Nearly a year has passed by and no action has been taken. No enquiry has been instituted into the allegation of misuse of funds. Is it because some people with vested interests are involved that are using political clout to cover up the entire episode? It has to be remembered that the water works taken in hand were meant to bring relief to the population of the district facing difficulties of access to drinking water. A democratic Government's primary duty is to cater to the needs of the people at large. Service to the people and meeting their legitimate demands make sense when we talk of democracy. But what can be said of a system in which public interest is advertently sacrificed for personal interests. It is a case not only of misuse of public funds but also of misuse of public trust. This case is an eye-opener for the Government because it embodies the sordid story of rank inefficiency dogging the Government institutions. The entire effort of sponsoring 16 projects of water works in the district boils down to enquiry after enquiry with action either elusive or non-existent.

## Resentful employees in Ladakh

State employees in Ladakh region are resentful on discrimination made in their emoluments when compared with what the Central Government employees are paid. The latter are paid 12.5 per cent of their basic pay as special allowance on the basis of harsh climate and difficult living conditions in Ladakh region. Employees of J&K State posted to the same region have justification in demanding same special allowance as well because the climatic and living conditions for them are the same as for the Central Government employees. It is not fair to use different yardsticks for the same category of employees. Naturally resentment adversely affects the output of work. State employees have expressed their resentment. It has to be noted that State employees usually avoid postings to Ladakh region. Not only that even many refuse posting to Ladakh on promotion and forego the benefits that would accrue to them. This is because of the harshness of severe climatic conditions.

There is growing resentment among the State employees. They have brought their complaint to the authorities but have not been responded sympathetically. The Government should take a decision in this matter before the employees are forced to go on strike and paralyze routine work in the offices. We believe that employees posted to inhospitable regions should be given many other facilities as well besides special allowances. The incentives would ultimately help in running better administration in far-flung areas.

The concerned department should lay no stone unturned to make them functional to provide timely relief to people.

Yours etc.....  
Sanjeev Kumar  
Nagrota

# Political hypocrites

This is a political column. So the only reason why you are reading about dance bars this week is because it was for entirely political reasons that they were closed in Maharashtra in 2005. Political reasons so narrow that the opinion of vociferous middle class moralists was given precedence over the livelihood of thousands of women who supported whole families on what they earned. And, so hypocritical that the Home Minister of Maharashtra, R.R. Patil, has never dared admit that dance bars have nothing to do with child prostitution. Little girls are no use in dance bars because they look like little girls even if they are dressed in the glittering skirts and veils of bar dancers but they can be easily turned into prostitutes in the pitiless brothels of Mumbai where depraved old men come to satisfy their disgusting desires.

Mumbai is one of the world's largest centres for child trafficking according to organizations that work to stop this awful commerce and most trafficked children end up in the brothels. If Mr. Patil were sincere about ridding this city of child trafficking he needed only to wander down to the sad, squalid brothels under this city's Kennedy Bridge, a stone's throw from his office, and he would find the real victims. Instead, he chose to go for an easier target and ended up depriving 75,000 bar dancers of their livelihood and closing down bars that were a uniquely Mumbai institution and an amusing side product of Bollywood. The Supreme Court has reversed a serious injustice in its recent judgement and we can only hope that Maharashtra's narrow-minded

and hypocritical politicians do not find some other way of preventing the dance bars from opening again.

If they are genuinely interested in ending the horror of child prostitution they need to work harder to ensure that the brothels of Mumbai stop forcing children to become sex slaves. This can easily be done because the police know exactly which brothels have children in them and which ones do not. If they do not stop child prostitution it is because the brothel owners make enough money to keep the police happy. If anyone can change things it should be the Home Minister that is if he is really interested in stopping the most sickening form of child abuse.

Around the time that Mr. Patil closed the dance bars in

while playing outside her parents' pavement home in Delhi. She was sold to a brothel under the Kennedy Bridge and forced to have sex with more than ten men a day in a cubicle no wider than a large desk.

She came back with us the day we went on the raid to search for a scrap of paper on which she thought was written her parents address. When we got to the brothel she searched desperately in a blue plastic vanity case filled with cheap cosmetics and she searched under the narrow wooden plank that had been her bed. She did not find it and it clearly broke her heart. As we were leaving Ian Dowling, the man who ran the rescue centre where she had been taken, told me that she was HIV positive. In Mumbai there are hundreds of thousands of

## ON THE SPOT TAVLEEN SINGH

2005 I was doing a programme for NDTV's Hindi channel called Indianama. One of the first episodes I did was about child prostitution in Mumbai and I was able to do it only because the police chief at the time, Anami Roy, was eager to publicize the raids that he was conducting on brothels. The story that unfolded for me that day was so horrible that by the time we finished visiting brothels late that evening I had a high fever and was sickened to my soul. I met young girls, some no more than fourteen years old, who had been kidnapped and forced into prostitution before they reached puberty. I remember in particular the story of a girl whose name I think was Rubina who was kidnapped

girls like her in the brothels. They should be easy to find but for this to happen you need political leaders who are motivated by more than hypocrisy and tokenism.

Because of their fraudulent motives girls who made an honest living and good money out of dancing in bars were driven into the streets. Some were forced into prostitution, some were trafficked to countries in the Middle East and some found whatever work they could to feed their families. In the words of a bar dancer I interviewed for a column that appeared in April 2005, 'Where we could make Rs 200 and Rs 300 a day we barely manage to make Rs 20 and sometimes it gets so bad the owner gives us a few rupees to

go and eat a meal'. The girls I interviewed in the 'dancers room' of a bar just after the ban came into effect came from very poor families in Calcutta, Kanpur and Lucknow. They were mostly illiterate so their employment options were limited but the moralists who imposed the ban could not have cared less. They come from middle class families who mostly believe that poor people are 'bad' at the best of times.

Moralists are not easily defeated either. Like all puritans they believe righteousness is on their side. So if the Supreme Court does not keep a careful eye on what is going to happen now it is entirely possible that the same people will get back into action and find some other way to ensure that dance bars do not come back into business. It is the city that has to give licenses for a bar to open and the licenses may become impossible to get. If this happens it would be a tragedy for Mumbai because I remember the dance bar in which I went to do my interviews as a happy place filled with music, lights and gilded ceilings. The brothels of Mumbai, on the other hand, I remember as places that reek of evil, exploitation and disease. The rescued child prostitutes I talked to told stories of being beaten and starved if they refused to service customers. Even on days when they were sick they were forced to work and more often than not all they 'earned' were two meals a day and some clothes. If Mr. R.R. Patil is sincere in wanting to do something good for Mumbai it is the brothels he needs to attack. The question to ask is why he has not already done so.

# Welcome Kudankulum

Dr Monika Koul

The good news is that Kudankulum Nuclear Power Plant is all set to be commissioned and is ready to generate power. Tamil Nadu Power woes will soon be a history and power crisis all over the state may come to an end. Hours of power cut that result in loss of productivity and revenue generation will be a thing of past. Yet, there is hue and cry over its commissioning. Political parties and some vested interests have started lobbying against the government and are raising slogans and creating ruckus. The question that needs to be addressed is: Why is there so much antagonism towards the Indian Nuclear Policy and why people in India people are so anti-nuke when it is going to solve the energy crisis which country is challenged with? Many people and several NGOs are spreading various misconceptions against the technology and blaming it as a persistent threat to the adjoining ecosystems that are in vicinity of the plant. Fishermen are being misinformed and misled regarding the possible health hazards of nuclear radiations and their impact on health. Supreme Court of India has already looked into opponents view and their concerns over the Nuclear Power Plant and the bench has already given their verdict in favour of the power plant. The skeptics and apprehensions regarding the technology have been debated and discussed over at length. The experts of nuclear technology, scientists, policy makers, Non-government organizations and representatives of public have extensively deliberated on the topic at various platforms. There is no conclusive opinion and there are no scientific data to support that the nuclear energy generated from this plant or the plant per se is not safe. Yet, people are being carried away by false propaganda regarding the issue and are set to again demand the closure of the plant.



Are our actions justified? Are we a bunch of illiterate people who can be misled by anybody? In a Democracy like India aren't we responsible for our actions as well. Is it alright to stop anything coming in India because public is not well informed and do not participate and help in informed decision making? Why are we always anti-technology? Why can't we weigh all the pros and cons of technology and decide what we want. Today, India is seen as a global leader. Other nations are looking at India as a future destination of investment. We need more jobs for youth, better infrastructure for industry and electricity is a big issue in front of us. Tamil Nadu is seen as a potential state to attract investors and Kudankulum Power Plant is an answer to many problems that the state is facing. Extensive Environment Impact Assessment has been carried out in the area and the summary statement and EIA report has clearly recommended the project to be safe and given environmental clearance to it. We have to understand that construction of the project started 24 years earlier with a joint collaboration with the then USSR, now Russia. It has been 24 years of scientific and technological inputs that have gone to make the dream project into reality. Thousands of scientists and technologists have studied minutest details of the plant...right from the design, site selection, the mechanics and physics involved and many other details. Scientists and experts have been consulted at each and every step of execution, fluid testing, study of chemical reactions involved and other attributes. Dr A.P. J. Abdul Kalam the missile man of India and a great nuclear scientist has been giving public lectures regarding its safety and clearly pointed out that arguments against the plant have no scientific credibility. International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) has declared this plant as one of the safest in the world and vouches for its design and expected delivery. VVER reactor used in this plant belongs to the most advanced family of Advanced Pressure water reactors (PMRs). It is also seen as one of the best sources of non-conventional energy sources at present as the net emissions of green house gases (GHGs) is going to be highly reduced in comparison to Thermal Power Plants. It will also help country to abide by the recommendations of Kyoto Protocol and hence help the environment and boost the economy.

It is important to bring to the public notice that a 15 member expert Group represented by scientists, State Government nominees and 4 representatives of the peoples group analyzed the various attributes of the project and have firmly concluded that there are no health risks and hazards involved. After the Fukushima Nuclear Accident in Japan, there is an increased concern over any accident and its impact on people, biodiversity and natural resources. The committee has clearly stated that the previous nuclear accidents were not because of the plants as such but because of the faulty design of the equipments and designs. Besides, if we go by statistics, the casualties or deaths due to nuclear accidents has been very low and almost negligible till date. More deaths occur due to road accidents in many states of India. However, the point of debate still is that can we afford to say no to this technology at this hour. The answer is categorical "No". None of the technologies can come without a risk. We have to get to basic economics and do a cost benefit analysis- some serious auditing.

The requirement of power is increasing and we have a deficit that is a serious stumbling block in the progress of our nation. It holds a great promise...we cannot wait to take decision in favour of that is unseen. That many people presume can happen. It is the time to welcome Kudankulum with open arms and harvest the benefits or we shall again lose an opportunity.

(The author is Assistant Professor Hans Raj College, University of Delhi)

# Panchayats and child sex ratio

Sanjeev Arora

India is ranked very low in the Human Development Index. The priority of human development would be defeated without the promotion and empowerment of women and girls who constitute nearly 48.46 per cent of total population as per 2011 census. Constitution of India provides equal rights to both men and women as a fundamental right. But in reality, the prevailing patriarchy social structure of India is predominantly responsible for the secondary and subjugated status of women in the society. They are subject to discrimination from womb to tomb. These disparities are reflected in the various indicators of human development such as health, education, nutrition etc. Violence against women remains one of the most pervasive, yet normal manifestations of gender inequality. Violence against women takes a variety of forms from female foeticide, infanticide, child marriage, malnutrition, sex abuse, trafficking and dowry harassment etc. A pernicious form of violence against women is "elimination of girl child"-Fall in child sex ratio.

One of the demographic features of India, Child sex ratio for the 0-6 age group has diminished from 927 in 2001 to 914 in last census. Decline of girl child ratio is continuous for last five decades. CSR in India has declined by 62 points (976-914) while the CSR in J&K has fallen by 97 points (from 957 to 860). Child sex ratio seemed normal till 1981; afterwards there has been steady decline both at national level as well as in the individual states. The standard of sex ratio at birth is biologically stable. Ideally the child sex ratio should be around 950 girls per 1000 boys in the absence of social and behavioral interference. This clearly points to the fact that economic growth and human development seldom

moves together, when it comes to improving gender relation. As per 2001 census, only five districts had CSR less than National average i.e. 934 whereas within a decade of time it has declined to the range of less than 919 (National average in 2011) in fifteen districts. Not only in a backward State like Odisha but the same dismal sex ratio is also found in developed states like Maharashtra (883:1000), Haryana (830:1000), Jammu Kashmir (859:1000), Punjab (846:1000) as per 2011 Census. Where have all these missing girls gone?

Despite a slew of laws to prevent female foeticide and schemes to encourage families to have girl child the ratio has declined. Unlike several social legislations directed at changing social behaviour and practices, the pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act 1994 demands ethical medical practices. Unfortunately it has not been able to prevent determination of pre natal sex and female foeticide. In fact, both for the effective implementation of the law as well as for creating collective consciousness to discourage this rampant discrimination against the girl child a person to person social movement need to be initiated at Panchayat level. The recent elections of PRIs in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has given a new life to Panchayati Raj Institutions.

In Jammu and Kashmir more than thirty thousand grass root leaders get elected recently and have become agents of change for planning and execution of different development programmes in a participatory approach. State government has delegated powers and responsibilities to manage 14 departments have been devolved to Panchayats including monitoring and supervision of Health Centres and AWC. Thus the elected representa-

tives especially women are expected to extend their hands in creating a gender just society by dissemination of right kind of information, minimizing the impact of stigma and ensuring livelihood.

Generally the agenda of discussion in Gram Sabha meeting is on infrastructure, IAY house and pension scheme. They seldom discuss on issues of social development such as ensuring attendance of doctors in primary Health Centres or teachers in schools. They never take up other retrograde trends such as trafficking, malnutrition or female foeticide. There is a significant gap between the issues raised for discussion in the Gram Panchayat and the issues that are important to women. So it is the need of the hour for Panchayat to develop strategies to address the issues and challenges of child sex ratio.

Strategies to address the issue of Child Sex Ratio

- \*Gram Panchayat can take initiative to call for special Gram Sabha to discuss about CSR, the impact of having larger men than women. It is also important to demystify the myths about sex determination of foetus and increase the value of girl though advocacy.

- \*There is a need of overall transformation of social attitude, where girls are seen as ASSET than LIABILITY. Regular holding of Mahila Sabha, discussion, deliberation on the impact of CSR on Society and illegality of sex determination test would definitely help in changing the mindset of parents.

- \*Sex determination is possible only after three months of pregnancy. Under the scheme of Mamata, the pregnant women have to register themselves at Anganwadi Centre. Those who register after three months are likely to have gone for sex determination of foetus. These cases should be brought to the notice of Gram Panchayat.

Since Ward Member (female) is the Chairperson of the Anganwadi Centre Monitoring Committee. It would be easier on her part to closely monitor the registration of pregnant woman and persuade her to register at Anganwadi Centre after the first month of conception. This platform can put pressure to change mindset and create collective consciousness among the people.

- \*NGOs which work for women empowerment should take this serious issue on their agenda and undertake sustained IEC interventions in Gram Sabha and Mahila Sabha with the support of Panchayat.

- \*Panchayat can also select some volunteers of SHGs who can take active lead in educating their members and others in the society through organizing the social campaign.

- \*Gram Panchayats are the only bodies accessible to almost each / every individual in the village. It is the responsibility of elected Panchayat representatives and volunteers as concerned citizens, to see that neighbours, relatives do not indulge in sex selection. They should keep a watch on the agents or touts who facilitate the family of pregnant woman in sex determination test, female foeticides and should immediately report to the police.

- \*It is the responsibility of the Panchayat Institutions to be vigilant to ensure that no clinic/medical professional engaged in this activity.

- \*The Panchayati Raj Institutions can become a critical catalyst for creating an enabling environment for women and girls by moulding attitude and behaviour of people. While the problem won't be solved immediately, it must be addressed urgently.

(The author is Urban and Regional Planning Gender Consultant, Ministry of Women and Child Development Government of India)

## Equip Trauma Centres

Sir, This has reference to the news item 'Fully equip trauma centres on highway' DE July 17.

In view of increasing number of accidents on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway it is appreciated that the Departmental Related Standing Committee (DRSC-II) has taken cognizance of the fact that there is need to equip all 12 Trauma Centres located on Highway so that they become fully functional and provide quick medical aid to victims.

Many precious lives could be saved if road accident victims are provided immediate medical aid. In view of treacherous nature of road, landslides due to rains, rash and negligent driving every year many people lose their lives. Most of the victims succumb to injuries as they do not get timely assistance. Realizing the need for Trauma Centres, the successive Governments set up these centres. Now, in case they do not function properly and do not render service to the needy then whole purpose of these centres is defeated. Besides, there existence will prove like that of a white elephant - burden on exchequer and human resource loss.

The concerned department should lay no stone unturned to make them functional to provide timely relief to people.

Yours etc.....  
Sanjeev Kumar  
Nagrota

## Mining activity

Sir, Refer news item 'Mining set to adversely affect ecology of Vaishno Devi Shrine' DE July 17.

One does not know whether any survey has been conducted in the area to assess the impact of mining of Magnesite on the forests of Trikuta Hills where sacred Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi is located. As reported, the mining activity in the vicinity is feared to adversely affect ecology of the area and prove hazardous for health of thousand of pilgrims visiting the shrine.

So no activity should be carried out which is going to harm the sacred shrine. Before carrying out the activity, the concerned should put in place measures which would ensure that no damage is done to ecology of the area.

Besides, inquiry should be instituted why environment clearance was granted fraudulently as is reported in the news report.

Yours etc....  
Om Parkash Mehra  
Kachi Chowni,  
Jammu

## Readers Write

### Let State Government act

Sir, Refer news item 'Centre rejects J&K Govt proposal for Special package to quake victims' DE July 17. The rejection of J&K Govt proposal for special package to earthquake victims by the Central Government should not stop the State Government from extending relief to people of this region.

Rather Government should harness all possible measures within its domain to ensure that quake-hit victims do not suffer more. Besides, formulating a strategy to extend helping hand should not take more time. If any assistance is not extended at the earliest possible time frame, then providing the same at a later stage is of no purpose.

The people in this region have suffered extensively. Schools have collapsed, cracks have appeared on houses, many lost their lives. Tragedy of such nature cannot be ignored. It has to be tackled earnestly and quickly.

Therefore, the State Government should explore all possible means to extend a helping hand to these people at the earliest.

Yours etc....  
Sunil Sharma  
Digiana