



## A model protest

Maharashtra's farmers win hearts and minds; their issues must be addressed everywhere

The gruelling six-day march of nearly 200 km from Nashik to Mumbai by thousands of farmers, with the aim to gherao the Maharashtra Assembly and sensitise the government to their problems, was remarkable. The manner in which they conducted themselves – without disrupting the lives of other citizens and refraining from aggressive sloganeering – is not how India's myriad protesters typically behave. And, while urban India usually has little patience for agrarian problems, many Mumbaikars not only backed the stir but also pitched in to help with food, water, medical aid, and even footwear. While Opposition parties as well as BJP ally Shiv Sena backed the farmers and tribals in an attempt to isolate Devendra Fadnis's administration, he managed to emerge unflustered and deal with the issue effectively. The farmers were persuaded to complete the final leg of the march early on Monday to avoid inconveniencing commuters, and halt peacefully 2 km from the Assembly so that government emissaries could negotiate with their representatives. By evening, 'deeply humbled' by the farmers' reasonable approach, Mr. Fadnis said he respected them and had no problem in accepting most of their demands, leading the farmers to end the stir and board special trains to go back home. While this should perhaps serve as a model for protesters and administrators across India, there is also a lesson to be learnt about how to deal with unrest of this nature, which other States such as Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have had to contend with.

A six-month deadline has been set for changes that will take some doing, with a written assurance that some of the demands will be pushed through immediately. A large number of the marchers were tribals with no land titles; therefore, the promise that the 2006 Forest Rights Act will be implemented in letter and spirit is welcome. The demand that caveats to the State's loan waiver scheme be dropped so that genuine small farmers are not excluded is also being considered. The efficacy of loan waivers in alleviating farm distress is limited at best. A few droughts or disruptions later, another waiver would be called for if no institutional reforms are undertaken to free constricted agricultural markets. However, having announced a waiver scheme, the State should ensure that small farmers don't get left out. Maharashtra's farm sector shrunk by over 8% in 2017-18, but the distress goes beyond its borders and demands for raising the minimum support price in line with the M.S. Swaminathan Commission report are spreading, with Haryana farmers picking up the baton on Tuesday. The BJP-led government at the Centre, which has been promising doubling of farm incomes and higher prices, and is to seek re-election a year from now, would do well to take note too. The Gujarat election, which was marked by sharply different voting patterns in urban and rural areas, was a rude reminder of how agrarian distress can impact the election result.

## Fire in the woods

The Theni tragedy begs an inquiry by the Tamil Nadu government into warning systems

The forest fire in Tamil Nadu's Theni hills that claimed the lives of 11 trekkers and severely injured many others is a heart-rending tragedy, with many of them being women who were out to celebrate International Women's Day. Questions are naturally being asked whether the Forest Department failed to stop treks during the February-June fire season, and whether the response to the early distress alerts was slow. It appears that the difficult terrain gave many of those caught in the fire line little chance, and proved challenging for the State's rescue operation launched in coordination with the Central government. The residents of the hills played a commendable role in aiding the effort. Yet, several families are left scarred as they try to cope with the loss of loved ones. The tragedy has highlighted the lack of emphasis on safety in the way such events are organised. Indeed, if there is any lesson that can be learnt from the episode, it is that such adventures should place safety above everything else, and that the government has a key role to play in evolving the protocols. In a country with rich landscapes and forests, the wish to briefly leave the urban life behind and take to the outdoors is but natural.

But as the trek from Kurangani to Kolukkumalai shows, there are hazards. The risk of fire is particularly important, given that 55% of forest cover in India is assessed by the Indian Space Research Organisation as being vulnerable. With constant improvements to remote sensing capabilities, and through partnerships with organisations such as the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Remote Sensing Centre has been issuing day and night fire alerts to forest departments. This should have alerted the Forest Department to stop trekking tours, and the State government's inquiry into the Theni tragedy should reveal whether it was part of the alerts system, and whether they were actually issued. The probe should also determine whether the fires were triggered by burning of grass on the lower slopes. Ideally, the database of fires, including the GIS information, should be made available on the Internet. Also, organisers need to be trained in fire escape manoeuvres, and carry the right equipment, including wireless communication sets. Care must be taken to see that small children are not part of such groups. Raising safety standards in tourism and creating safe experiences is the imperative, as more young Indians will continue to seek adventure. The importance of raising the capabilities of district hospitals has also been underscored by the disaster.

# The French connections

The Macron visit underlined the growing strategic convergence that draws India and France together



RAKESH SOOD

With French President Emmanuel Macron's recent visit to India, the India-France Strategic Partnership launched in 1998 seems finally to have come of age. In these two decades, both sides have gradually enhanced cooperation in diverse fields covering civil nuclear, defence, space, counter-terrorism, education, research and development in science and technology, culture, urban development, climate change, trade and economics and people-to-people contacts. The slew of bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding signed, the detailed 'joint statement' and accompanying 'vision statements' on cooperation in space and the Indian Ocean Region, the boat ride in Varanasi, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's warmly reciprocated diplomatics indicate that the relationship has received a momentum that gives it critical mass and greater coherence.

### A shared world view

As a country that has prided itself on its 'exceptionalism', France has always been sympathetic to similar Indian claims based on its ancient civilisation. This is why both countries were quick to voice support for global multi-polarity once the Cold War ended. French discomfort with the U.S.'s unipolar moment in the 1990s was evident when it described it as a 'hyper-power'.

Defence cooperation with France began in the 1950s when India acquired the Ouragan aircraft and continued with the Mystères, Jaguar (Anglo-French), Mirage 2000, Alizé planes and the Alouette helicopter. Joint naval exercises, later christened Varuna, date back to 1983.

Cooperation in the space sector

has continued since the 1960s when France helped India set up the Sriharikota launch site, followed by liquid engine development and hosting of payloads. Today, it is a relationship of near equals and the 'vision statement' refers to world class joint missions for space situational awareness, high resolution earth observation missions with applications in meteorology, oceanography and cartography. Inter-planetary exploration and space transportation systems are cutting edge science and technology areas that have also been identified.

Yet the Cold War imposed limitations on the partnership. After the Cold War, France decided that its preferred partner in the Indian Ocean Region would be India. In January 1998, President Jacques Chirac declared that India's exclusion from the global nuclear order was an anomaly that needed to be rectified. After the nuclear tests in May 1998 when India declared itself a nuclear weapon state, France was the first major power to open dialogue and displayed a far greater understanding of India's security compulsions compared to other countries. It was the first P-5 country to support India's claim for a permanent seat in an expanded and reformed UN Security Council.

### Building a partnership

With the establishment of a Strategic Dialogue, cooperation in defence, civil nuclear, space, intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism has grown. An agreement for building six Scorpène submarines in India with France help was signed in 2005. Similarly, technology sharing and acquisitions of short range missiles and radar equipment were concluded. Joint exercises between the air forces and the armies were instituted in 2003 and 2011, respectively. The government-to-government agreement for 36 Rafale aircraft, salvaged out of the prolonged negotiations for the original 126 which were at an impasse, was as much driven by tech-



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nical requirements as by political considerations. The ambitious offset target of 50% (nearly ₹25,000 crore), properly implemented, can help in building up India's budding aerospace industry.

In the nuclear field, an agreement was signed about a decade ago for building six EPR nuclear power reactors with a total capacity of 9.6 GW for which negotiations have been ongoing between the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) and Areva, and now EdF. Terror strikes in France in recent years by home-grown terrorists have enlarged the scope of counter-terrorism cooperation to include cyber security and discussions on radicalisation.

Even though these areas provided a robust basis for engagement, it remained primarily at a government-to-government level. In recent years, it was clear that for a wider partnership, strengthening business-to-business and people-to-people relationships was essential. Climate change and renewable energy resources, particularly solar, soon emerged as a new plank, reflected in the multilateral initiative of the International Solar Alliance. Another area identified was urban planning and management of services like housing, transport, water, sanitation, etc using the public private partnership model which the French have employed successfully. Mr. Macron's visit has enabled progress to be registered across a variety of sectors including the strategic partnership areas.

There has been a growing convergence of interests in maritime cooperation. Like India, France

has expressed concern about China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean Region. French overseas territories in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans provide it with the second largest exclusive economic zone globally. It has long maintained bases in Reunion Islands and Djibouti and established one in Abu Dhabi in 2009. This regional dimension is reflected in the Vision Statement on cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

The signing of MoUs regarding the provision of reciprocal logistics support to each other's armed forces, exchange and reciprocal protection of classified information and developing shared space studies and assets for maritime awareness provide the basis on which to strengthen joint naval exercises. With the U.S., naval cooperation has been easier with the Pacific Command which covers China and the region up to the Bay of Bengal but more difficult with the Central Command which covers western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea because of Central Command's privileged relationship with Pakistan. Therefore strengthening cooperation with France, particularly in the western Indian Ocean Region makes eminent strategic sense even as India develops its presence in Oman (Duqm) and Seychelles (Assumption Island).

The agreement on the industrial way forward between NPCIL and EdF affirms that work at Jaitapur will commence before the end of 2018. Equally significant are the two agreements signed between EdF and other French entities and L&T and Reliance, respectively, reflecting the engagement of Indian industry.

Trade has grown in recent years but at \$10 billion is half of the trade with Germany. The signing of nearly \$16 billion worth of agreements at the business summit indicates that private sectors in both countries are beginning to take notice. There are nearly 1,000 French companies present in India including 39 of the CAC 40 while over a hundred Indian busi-

nesses have established a presence in France. In the past, Indian companies saw the U.K. as the entry point for Europe; now with Brexit approaching, Mr. Macron has cleverly pitched that India should look at France as its entry point for Europe and Francophonie! The flagship programme of Smart Cities in which France is focussing on Chandigarh, Nagpur and Puducherry is taking shape as more than half the business agreements signed related to electric mobility, water supply, waste management and smart grids.

### Educational links

Potentially, the most significant was the focus on youth and student exchanges. Currently about 2,500 Indians go to France annually to pursue higher education, compared to more than 250,000 from China. A target has been set to raise it to 10,000 by 2020. The agreement on mutual recognition of academic degrees and the follow-on Knowledge Summit, where 14 MoUs between educational and scientific institutions were signed, is a welcome move.

Tourism is another area that has received attention. A target of a million Indian tourists and 335,000 French tourists has been set for 2020. Given that France receives over 80 million tourists a year and India around nine million, these targets may seem modest but reflect that while there are only about 20 flights a week between India and France, there are four times as many to Germany and 10 times as many to the U.K.

The Strategic Partnership has already created a solid foundation; other aspects have now received the much needed focus and with proper implementation, it can add to the growing strategic convergence that draws India and France together.

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# An urgent prescription

India needs to shore up public sector capacity for making medicines



K. SRINATH REDDY & SHAKTIVEL SELVARAJ

India is rightly acclaimed to be the pharmacy of the world, with its huge private sector capacity for producing branded and unbranded generic drugs. Much of this growth took place after India opted for process patenting over product patenting in 1970. This changed to a product patent regime in 2005, providing sufficient time for growth of the generic drug industry in the private sector. However, this period has also seen the decline and near disappearance of public sector capacity for manufacture of drugs and vaccines. That is a cause for worry.

### Beyond profit motive

Public sector capacity for manufacture of essential drugs and vaccines is very much needed to ensure that our population is not denied access to drugs that the Indian private sector is unable to produce or supply at affordable cost. These include drugs where compulsory licences may need to

be issued by the government for patent protected drugs or even off-patent drugs which are commercially unattractive to private manufacturers. Compulsory licensing (CL) is a mechanism permitted by the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement to enable countries to issue licences to domestic drug manufacturers to produce and market affordable generic versions of life-saving drugs needed for meeting serious public health challenges that are of extreme urgency. This allows countries to overcome patent restrictions to assure availability of such drugs when the situation demands. Drugs effective against multi-drug resistant tuberculosis and anti-cancer drugs are clear examples of such a need, which should be addressed through compulsory licensing. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has now invited expressions of interest from drug manufacturers to produce generic versions of two effective but expensive anti-tubercular drugs, bedaquiline and delamanid. Patients with drug-resistant TB require a combination of both these drugs.

India has used the CL route previously to permit two Indian companies, Natco and Cipla, to produce a potent anti-cancer drug nexavar. This enabled a 32-fold re-



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duction in the cost of the drug. However, extensive litigation followed with action initiated by Bayer, the multi-national manufacturer of the patented version. This appears to have dampened the appetite of private drug manufacturers to avail of the CL route for the manufacture of generic versions of the new anti-tubercular drugs. While both Indian and global demand for these drugs is very high, will the Indian pharma respond? The experience of price negotiation with the patent-holding companies is not encouraging, if they do not see evidence of a government's intent to use the CL route as an imminent possibility.

If the domestic private sector drug manufacturers are not ready to apply for CL, for whatever reason, public sector capacity to seek and utilise such licences becomes indispensable. With the acquisition of Indian drug companies by foreign manufacturers, or 'strategic alliances' which place shackles

on the Indian partners, public sector capacity for manufacturing life saving drugs under a CL is the much needed fall-back option. Similarly, drugs for neglected tropical diseases are of little interest to the commercially driven private drug industry. Active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), which are needed for drug manufacture (formulation), are now mostly imported from China. This makes India highly vulnerable to disruptions in supply and cost escalations in import. National security demands that we develop both public and private sector capacity within the country, with suitable government support and incentives, to ensure uninterrupted and inexpensive availability of APIs.

The High Level Expert Group Report on Universal Health Coverage for India (2011) clearly articulated the need for strengthening public sector units (PSUs) which have drug manufacturing capability. The report stated: "The use of PSUs will offer an opportunity to produce drug volumes for use in primary and secondary care facilities as well as help in 'benchmarking' drug costs. The existence of PSUs would also provide an opportunity to utilise the provision of Compulsory Licensing under TRIPS." Effective implementation of the Ayushman Bharat initiative

calls for investment in expanding public sector capacity for producing essential drugs and APIs, even as the domestic private sector is incentivised to offer quality assured generics at a lower cost through a policy of pooled public procurement. This also embodies the spirit of Make in India.

### Ensuring universal access

A report of the UN High Level Panel Access to Medicines (2016) called upon countries to safeguard and fully utilise the rights conferred by the TRIPS flexibilities as confirmed by the Doha Declaration of the WTO. The UN report also urges member states of WTO to adopt a permanent revision of Paragraph 6 of the TRIPS agreement to enable "swift and expeditious export of pharmaceutical products produced under compulsory license". India should take the lead in ensuring universal access to affordable drugs through such measures. Investment in public sector capacity is essential to ensure that the country can exercise that leadership even on occasions when the private pharmaceutical sector does not fully align with that objective.

K. Srinath Reddy and Shaktivel Selvaraj are from Public Health Foundation of India. The views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Import of 'forgiveness'

A report on Congress president Rahul Gandhi's remark that his sister and he have "forgiven" Rajiv Gandhi killers needs further clarification ("Have forgiven father's killers: Rahul", March 12) as it conveys the idea that they could all be released. The statement conveys his personal opinion, but legal experts must clarify whether there is any provision in India's criminal justice system to foreclose a case and grant total relief to the accused based on a statement of pardon from the victim's family. Those in prison are likely to move courts for reprieve citing this as a precedent.

P. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

### Speaking abroad

It is unfortunate that Mr. Gandhi used his panel discussions in Singapore to criticise the BJP government by talking about people being divided and institutional structures being changed. It is deplorable that he should use an interaction with the Indian diaspora to wash dirty linen in public for political mileage. The audience was sure to have been expecting him to give them some idea about the Congress's policy on industrial development for India, ensuring corruption-free governance and using India's superior skill force in all spheres. He should have also outlined how Singapore could get involved. Instead, his

political immaturity and anger against the government will only continue to hamper his political progress.

M.R. NATARAJAN, Chennai

### Raining energy

In the U.S., big ticket retail stores have long taken the lead to cover their broad and empty roofs with solar panels. Walmart, as early as 2012, installed more solar panel capacity on their stores' rooftops than the entire state of Florida. Their stores now get as much as 30% of their power from the sun. The panels on Walmart's roofs are owned and operated by third party solar companies from which the company buys energy through power-

purchase-agreements. India, a sun blessed nation, needs an optimum mix of such power generation/purchase agreements. As viable power storage technologies come to occupy prominence, discoms will be needed to cater to an expanding geography.

R. NARAYANAN, Navi Mumbai

### Danger zone

There is increased interest by the younger generation in trying newer forms of adventure sports such as mountain climbing, surfing and para-sailing which makes one wonder whether they are falling into the trap of untrained and unprofessional clubs, thereby risking their lives.

In the accident in the Kurangani hills, I wonder whether the trekkers were aware of precautions to be taken. In several places in India where there are adventure activities, safety measures are hardly

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

>>Two sentences in the report, "Confusion in cockpit possibly led to the crash" (March 13, 2018) need to be recast as: "One possibility the investigation committee will surely look... is whether the crash happened because of steep turn [at low speed]."

"Nepal's airways are known not to be very safe, but that is mainly because of short take-off and landing (STOL) [aircraft having to service precarious mountain airstrips]."

Muhammad Yunus was erroneously referred to as the winner of the economics Nobel in the report headlined "Dalai Lama at Science Congress?" (March 13, 2018). The Nobel Peace Prize for 2006 was awarded to Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank.

In the Business Review Page Explainer – "What is (ISA) International Solar Alliance" (March 12, 2018) – it was stated that only 56 countries had signed the ISA Framework Agreement. Actually, 60 countries have signed the agreement.

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