



Kerala's trauma

All efforts, private and governmental, need to be stepped up to assist flood-affected people

The unprecedented deluge in Kerala unleashed by heavy rain, overflowing rivers, brimming dams and massive landslides has overwhelmed the State government and rescue agencies, as they struggle to make a complete assessment of the devastation. More than 160 people have died since August 8, and several are missing. The State government faces the challenging task of rescuing people who are marooned in far-flung houses in several districts and providing them food and water until the teams get to them. About 2,23,000 people had been moved to more than 1,500 relief camps as of Friday, with more waiting to join. A respite in rainfall has aided the relief efforts, but as Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan acknowledged, it will take a major effort, using a combination of boats and aircraft from the Air Force, the Navy and the Coast Guard and legions of rescue personnel, to get all the stranded people to safety. The reduction in rainfall should help the National Disaster Response Force, which has committed 55 teams, intensify its efforts to reach those who are stranded. In fact, disaster management units in other States too should assist those working on the ground to deal with Kerala's catastrophic floods; apart from helping, they will gain valuable experience as well. Going forward, the task of reconstruction will have to be addressed, covering public buildings, residential homes, roads and other infrastructure. A subsidised housing programme may be needed in the worst-hit areas, with tax breaks offered to residents.

There is an outpouring of goodwill and support from across the country and even abroad, and the State government has acted quickly to make online contributions to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund possible through a dedicated portal. Liberal donations will help the government in large-scale relief and post-flood rehabilitation initiatives. Support groups from neighbouring States such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have begun sending relief material, although the disruption to road connectivity has left a lot of it stranded at the inter-State borders. These volunteer efforts can be better targeted if the district authorities in Kerala put out advisories on the nature of relief needed, and the locations and the modalities of transfer. More immediately, it is important to continue with the air-dropping of food, water, candles, matches and other essentials to the worst-hit areas. Many control rooms have been opened, but integrating the mechanism by merging the various phone numbers into three or four, at one per region, and allocating sufficient phone lines, will help citizens use them more easily. Hopefully, the worst is over. With full dams and overflowing rivers, Kerala desperately needs a benign shift in the weather to be able to cope with a disaster on a scale it has never seen before. It indeed needs all the support it can get.

Continental shifts

India is well-placed to prove a thing or two at the Asian Games in Indonesia

The Asian Games begin in the Indonesian cities of Jakarta and Palembang on Saturday, providing Indian sport a bracing opportunity to prove its composite progress at the global level. While confined to competition from within Asia, the Asiad is keenly contested, involving some of the best sportspeople in their respective disciplines. China continues to be the behemoth, and it is a pointer to its overall excellence that having finished at the top of the table in the last edition, in 2014, at South Korea's Incheon, it also secured the third highest number of gold medals in the 2016 Olympics at Rio de Janeiro. In fact, South Korea and Japan, which also finished in the top three at Incheon, were among the leading ten at the Olympics. (In an on-going burst of sporting diplomacy, South Korean and North Korean athletes will march behind a common flag in Indonesia.) In the last edition, India finished eighth, with a tally of 57 medals, including 11 golds. This time around, expectations are high, given a line-up that includes badminton's World Championships runner-up P.V. Sindhu, Commonwealth Games and former junior World champion javelin-thrower Neeraj Chopra, 400 m under-20 world champion Hima Das, and shooters Manu Bhaker and Elavenil Valarivan.

In badminton, India has never gone beyond the bronze at the Asian Games, but the presence of two Olympic medallists, Sindhu and Saina Nehwal, may well change that. India may not be a powerhouse in track and field. All the same, athletics has brought the country more than half its golds across Asiads. Now, Chopra begins as the favourite to wrest the javelin gold. The 4x400 m relays – there are three, with the introduction of a mixed relay – may also bring some joy. Much depends on how the Athletics Federation of India handles the Nirmala Sheoran issue. The Asian women's 400 m champion had stayed away from national camps. The AFI has a dilemma as in a crackdown on doping it had repeatedly stressed that non-campers would not be included. It is not clear if it will make an exception for Sheoran. India will be eager to grab both golds in kabaddi. The women's and men's hockey teams have had an encouraging run leading up to the Asian Games, and they would look to make a statement in style two years ahead of the Tokyo Olympics. Veteran Leander Paes's decision to pull out at the last minute depletes India's tennis reserves further, and with the number of golds on offer down from seven to five, the challenge of bringing in its traditional haul of tennis medals will be tough – India won 5 in tennis in 2014, including a gold. But away from the medals table, Indonesia 2018 will provide a glimpse of the changing profile of sport, with eSports debuting as a demonstration sport.

No child left behind

To get good nutrition to all Indians, we need delivery models that are collaborative across domains



VINITA BALI

The urgency to address poor nutrition in India, especially among children, adolescent girls and women is compelling, and re-confirmed in virtually every survey – from NFHS-4 in 2015-16 (the latest available information), to the Global Nutrition Report 2016 and the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2017, which ranks India at 100 out of 119 countries, with a low overall score of 31.4. Among children less than 5 years, wasting (low weight for height), continues to be 21% in the 2017 index – it was 20% in 1992. There has been a reduction in stunting (height for age) – from 61.9% in 1992 to 38.4% in 2017, reported in the GHI 2017. Mortality among children less than 5 years old has declined to around 5% from 11% during the same period, according to both the GHI and the NFHS. However, 25% of India's children less than 5 years old are still malnourished.

Add to this the fact that 190.7 million people in India sleep hungry every night, and over half of adolescent girls and women are anaemic, and the conclusion is obvious – despite a 7% compound annual growth rate over the last decade and the various programmes to improve nutrition, levels of under-nutrition are unacceptably high.

No time to waste

This grim reality has rightly lead to a renewed emphasis to address the various forms of poor nutrition – stunted, wasted, anaemic and underweight children; anaemic girls and women, especially in the 15-49 age group. The recently announced flagship program of the Ministry of Women and Child Development will be anchored through the National Nutri-

tion Mission (NNM), or Poshan Abhiyaan, with its own specific budget of ₹9,046 crore and a proposed World Bank loan of \$200 million, to ensure convergence among the various programmes of the government. Additionally, NITI Aayog has worked on a National Nutrition Strategy (NNS), isolated the 100 most backward districts for stunting and prioritised those for interventions.

A cynical view would be that we have seen such declarations before – after all, the special attention to nutrition was highlighted in 2008 when the Prime Minister's National Council on India's Nutrition Challenges was constituted. A detailed report, "Addressing India's Nutrition Challenges", was submitted in 2010 by the Planning Commission, the convergence of an extensive and multi-sector consultation. But nothing changed significantly.

The optimistic view says that exploring new models to address the structural and systemic issues on a priority basis, learning from what has worked or not, and single-minded focus on implementation will be critical to delivering better nutritional outcomes and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, to which India is a signatory. Additionally, initiatives like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, where implemented, will contribute positively to nutrition outcomes, and well-structured public-private partnerships could be the catalyst.

Seen in this context, the overhaul of capacity and capability in three existing programmes, designed to reach populations most at risk, should be the first priority – namely, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), with its network of 1.4 million Anganwadi Centres, reaching almost 100 million beneficiaries who include pregnant and nursing mothers and children up to 6 years; mid-day meals (MDM) that reach almost 120 million children in schools; and the Public Distribution System (PDS) that reaches over 800 million people under the National Food Security Act.



MANOJ CHOWDHURY

The National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) has set very ambitious targets for 2022 and the Poshan Abhiyaan has also specified three-year targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition and low birth weight by 2% each year, and to reduce anaemia by 3% each year. For purposeful action, it is imperative to have common goals and metrics for improving nutrition, which can then be disaggregated by year, State, district, etc., into a nutrition dashboard, with metrics that are clear and measurable and a real-time tracking mechanism, much like we track economic data. It is interesting to note that the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB), established in 1972, was dissolved in 2015.

Both the NNS and the NNM have recognised the criticality of working collaboratively across Ministries; yet both are silent on the constructive role that the private sector, development agencies and civil society can and must play in realising these ambitious goals. Altering the fundamentals of poor nutrition requires multiple and sustained interventions over a period of time – increased availability and accessibility of nutritious food, potable water, hygiene and sanitation, primary health care, etc. The approach, commitment and resources therefore have to be inter-generational, multi-sector, multi-dimensional and multi-year. To simplify a complex issue, the challenge for India is to simultaneously address insufficient and poor diets, inadequate hygiene and sanitation and better management of disease and infections. Success in this domain will be

driven by coordinated action on multiple fronts, but there are at least three urgent priorities.

Three priorities

One, to adequately re-engineer the ICDS, MDM and PDS for greater effectiveness. This is an ideal initiative for public-private partnerships as the strength of good private sector companies is in creating and designing frameworks, structures, processes and metrics for action, implementation and tracking. For example, involving the best nutritionists to work with local communities on calorie and nutrition dense supplementary foods, using easily available local ingredients that are within the ICDS and MDM budget guidelines, and produced by self-help groups, could easily be anchored by the relevant private sector and development agencies, working with State governments, and considered a corporate social responsibility initiative. The key advantages of this disaggregated supply model are that it engages local communities, generates employment and ensures minimal leakage as it works with and inside the community. This will also ensure that space and other constraints of lack of hygiene at Anganwadi Centres do not become impediments in the supply of nutritious food.

Two, to mandate and scale staple food fortification comprising edible oil, wheat, rice and dairy products, in addition to salt. There is persuasive evidence from several countries of the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of large-scale staple food fortification to address "hidden hunger" or micro-nutrient deficiencies. The effectiveness of iodised salt in significantly reducing iodine deficiency is well-established in India empirically. The success of micro-nutrient fortified food is that it does not entail a change in behaviour. Considerable work will also have to be done to make fortified rice and wheat available through the PDS. This requires addressing the supply chain capability to deliver – another ex-

cellent PPP initiative, that has been piloted in several States for edible oil and wheat flour and can easily be replicated. A case in point is the mandate of July and August 2017 to use fortified oil, salt and wheat flour in the ICDS and MDM by the Ministries of Women and Child Development and Human Resource Development, respectively. In the absence of coordination with industry to create an effective supply chain, this proposed intervention will be another missed opportunity.

Mandatory fortification with micro-nutrients often sparks an emotional debate, and the way to think about it is that these universally consumed staple foods become the carriers of vitamins and minerals that people need but do not get in sufficient quantity from the food they consume.

Three, multiple campaigns designed to inform, communicate and educate on nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive behaviours like breast feeding, diet diversity, hand-washing, de-worming, safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation. Nutrition has to be "marketed" and made interesting, engaging, simple and personally relevant – this is an expertise where the private sector can meaningfully contribute.

Awareness and delivery

Nutrition is complex, and therefore its delivery must be simplified through greater awareness and actions. The delivery models must be collaborative across domains, with clear decision rights and hard-wired processes, enabled by technology and a significant investment in strengthening people competencies. Unless economic growth improves social and human development, it cannot be sustained. Equally, economic growth itself is impeded by low levels of productivity in an under-nourished and malnourished population.

Vinita Bali is a strategy adviser and independent director, and chairs the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition

How the 'deep state' gamed the system

Imran Khan's election victory has ushered in a new normal for Pakistan



ZORAWAR DAULET SINGH

Uninterrupted democracy for the past decade has inspired hope that Pakistan is changing and that history might be a false guide to a new type of civil-military relationship inside Pakistan. The peaceful transition to a new electoral force represented by Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf is seen by some as further proof of an evolving system where civilian politicians, by drawing their power from mass electoral politics, are emerging from the shadow of an army-dominated state. And since civilian politicians do not have any apparent stake in confronting India, democratisation in Pakistan would eventually transform the geopolitics of the sub-continent. Is there any basis for such an assessment?

A complex backdrop

We must introduce a little more complexity into the enticing civil-military model that sometimes underlies Indian thinking. Pakistan's tryst with democracy has always been a complicated affair. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan is the closest

we can trace to a genuine civilian advantage over the military structure. But the circumstances were unique. The Pakistan army had been thoroughly discredited after its defeat in the 1971 war. And yet, despite such favourable conditions, India's quest to re-arrange the decks within Pakistan utterly failed. Bhutto was able to use his weakness and generate goodwill – and hope for a new Pakistan – in Delhi to soften its post-war posture. Ironically, one of the strongest civilian leaders in Pakistan's history did more to salvage the Pakistan army – extracting the 90,000 prisoners of war from India and territorial losses on the western front – than a military dictator has ever achieved.

Nevertheless, the Pakistan army learned its lesson and in the 1980s consciously cultivated a new network of politicians to counter-balance the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). As Christophe Jaffrelot notes, "From the start of his career in Punjab under Zia's patronage until the election campaign of 1990, [Nawaz] Sharif owed his political success wholly to military support. But even if he was the most famous client of the security establishment, he was not the only one to enjoy its protection." Similarly, Imran Khan should be viewed as another strategic investment by the deep state that dislodged the erstwhile two-party



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structure monopolised by the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the PPP.

If an assertive civilian political elite could send the Pakistan army back to its barracks, Indian policymakers would welcome and even encourage that trend. But any hypothesised civil-military struggle rests on two fundamental assumptions.

First, the civilian elite must be genuinely committed to re-defining Pakistan's identity towards a more positive nationhood. Many observers recognise that there is a general anti-India identity problem in that Pakistani nationalism coheres itself by projecting an opposite "other" – a secular India. This negative identity has been historically cultivated and sustained by the military establishment to fuel its own vast political economy privileges, and to ensure that Pakistani nationhood does not lose its sense of purpose. But the last decade of democracy has shown little momentum towards a progressive discourse or quest by

civilian leaders to question the idea of Pakistan. When in power, politicians have pursued far more modest goals. Rather than re-imagining alternative identities for Pakistan, they seem mainly interested in self-interest and survival.

Second, it is presumed that the army cannot game the civil-military system or successfully neutralise any challenge to its authority or rival conceptions of the national interest. The Pakistan army's successful co-optation of institutions like the judiciary, the election commission and the media shows that it actually relishes its role as the unaccountable arbiter of Pakistan's overall political destiny, but without being at the forefront of state governance, which constrains its hand and taints its prestigious position in the body politic. It is instructive that a October 2017 Gallup survey found that 82% of Pakistanis trusted their army more than any other political institutions even as a majority (68%) welcomed democracy as a political system. Such favourable ratings would quickly disappear with martial rule, as the army discovered first-hand during the Pervez Musharraf years.

On the civilian side, there is no evidence to claim a defiant struggle with the military establishment in the Pakistani politician's conception of her or his own interests. In fact, more often than not, the ci-

vilian political elite is eager to compromise and cut deals with the army, especially if that enhances its policy agency in the non-security spheres. Pakistani scholar Ayesha Siddiqi's thesis of a symbiotic military-civilian relationship where politicians rarely question the primacy and vanguard role of the army and both groups collectively profit from the systematic plundering of the economy remains more plausible than ever before.

A 'hybrid state'

The recent election in Pakistan suggests a more sophisticated system – referred to as a 'hybrid state' – has come into being where the military establishment, acutely conscious of the costs of martial rule, has promoted an alternative framework so that there is a 'buffer' between the army and society. The recurring backlash and legitimate grievances of the people are borne by expendable politicians absolving the real authority behind the scene from any responsibility for governance and developmental failures. The political parties and civilian elite seem to have embraced their role in this metamorphosis of Pakistan's "managed" or "guided" democracy.

Zorawar Daulet Singh is a Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi

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.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee

The glorious tributes to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a great son of India, are a lesson in history for the younger generation (Editorial - "Consensus-maker"; Editorial page - "A statesman and an orator", and the special double spread - "Atal Bihari Vajpayee", all August 17). There is a dire need for appreciation and implementation of the social values and the political ideology he lived and strived for, establishing peace and harmony not only in Indian society and the subcontinent but also across the world. Taking a leaf out of the book of his inspiring statesmanship, the present

leadership in the BJP would do well to carry all sections of society along.

P.H. HEMA SAGAR,
Secunderabad

■ What make Vajpayee stand out was his probity in public life and his vision for a new India. His Golden Quadrilateral road project which promoted growth and development, and his Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana have transformed lives. He was dignified and decisive. His famous bus-trip to Lahore was another path-breaking effort to mend fences with a recalcitrant neighbour. It is unclear whether India will see the likes of him again.

KANGAYAM R. NARASIMHAN,
Chennai

■ In the passing of Vajpayee, India has lost a towering statesman and a multi-faceted parliamentarian. Apart from his by and large impeccable political track record, he will be noted for immaculate qualities of head and heart. Bharat has lost a 'Ratna'.

P.K. VARADARAJAN,
Chennai

■ A politician of enviable repute, a statesman of international stature and, above all, a simple human being, Vajpayee's fiery speeches will be remembered for being laced with wit and humour which could have even his staunchest opponents spellbound. His name inspires the kind of

admiration that very few politicians can command.

BHAGABAN NAYAK,
Berhampur, Odisha

Kerala floods

The floods in Kerala have shown the absence of quality and robust trials related to disaster communication. Strategies being identified as useful by public managers in the context of the Kerala floods should be fine-tuned.

K.M.K. MURTHY,
Secunderabad

■ The media based in Kerala is doing a good job in helping connect the authorities to affected families. However, an issue that has featured repeatedly is the loss of basic communication. This could have been an ideal time to

test a service such as 'Project Loon', a service by Google's parent company, Alphabet Inc., using high-technology helium balloons. The project has been proven to be successful in disaster relief,

its extensive use in Puerto Rico, South America, being an example.

SANDEEP NAIR,
Manama, Bahrain

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the article "Nuance in sexual politics" (Single File, Op-Ed page, Aug. 17, 2018), the sentence that said, "... would have been widely hailed if the accuser had been female and the accused male", should be recast to say: "... if the accuser had been female and the accused male." The sentence that said, "... the dynamics of the case suggest that it may always be a good idea to disregard the fraught ambiguity of human relationships..." should have said: "... suggest that it may not always be a good idea to ..."

The report, "Tight security sought for J&K local polls" (some editions, Aug. 16, 2018) erroneously said the PDP ruled the State along with the BJP from 2015 till June 2017. It should have been till June 2018.

In the story about Ease of Living Index (Aug. 14, 2018), the headline should have read "Pune tops Ease of Living Index; Patna among lowest-ranked cities" as it was Rampur which was ranked the lowest of 111 cities - and not Patna.

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