



Inclusion over exclusion

Fears of a vocal section should not override the rights of NRC claimants to due process

With the Supreme Court-led process of updating the National Register of Citizens in Assam nearing its deadline of July 31, the complexities involved in the gargantuan exercise have dawned upon the executive. Both the Central and State governments have sought an extension. But it remains to be seen whether the Court, which has insisted on sticking to the timelines, would relent when it hears the matter on July 23. The first draft NRC published on the intervening night of December 31 and January 1, 2018 had the names of 19 million people out of the total 32.9 million who had applied for inclusion as citizens. The second draft NRC, published on July 30 last, upped it to 28.9 million but left out four million found ineligible. Around 3.6 million of them subsequently filed citizenship claims. An "additional exclusion list" was issued last month containing 1,02,463 names included earlier in the draft list. In anticipation of millions being ultimately left out, the Assam government is moving to set up 200 Foreigners' Tribunals to handle cases of people to be excluded from the final NRC, as part of a larger plan to establish 1,000 such tribunals. The State government is also preparing to construct 10 more detention centres; six are now running out of district jails.

A humanitarian crisis awaits Assam whether the final NRC is published on July 31 or after. In the run-up to the final publication, case after case has emerged of persons wrongfully left out of the list. The process has left no group out of its sweep, be it Marwaris or Biharis from elsewhere in the country, people tracing their antecedents to other Northeastern states, people of Nepali origin, and caste Hindu Assamese. The prime targets of this exercise, however, are Hindu Bengalis and Bengali-origin Muslims of Assam — more than 80% of the 4.1 million people named in the two lists belong to these two groups. Yet, the rationale of the Centre and State in seeking a deadline extension, as found in their submissions in the Supreme Court, betrays an exclusionary bias. The joint plea sought time to conduct a 20% sample reverification process in districts bordering Bangladesh and 10% in the rest of the State to quell a "growing perception" that lakhs of illegal immigrants may have slipped into the list. This, despite the State NRC Coordinator's reports to the apex court suggesting that up to 27% of names have been reverified during the process of disposal of claims. It hasn't helped that the Central government keeps holding out the prospect of unleashing a nationwide NRC to detect and deport illegal aliens, when it has no index to base such an exercise on — the 1951 register was exclusive to Assam. The accent should be on inclusion, not exclusion. The wheels of justice cannot pander to the suspicions of a vocal majority without giving the excluded access to due process.

Unpresidential slant

Trump's racist tweets risk damaging the fabric of American society further

Again gripped the United States, after President Donald Trump attacked four Democratic Congresswomen of colour, asking them to return to the "totally broken and crime infested places from which they came". His tweets raised a furore over their racist tenor and exacerbated the sense of bitter polarisation, given the strident ongoing debate over Mr. Trump's zero-tolerance approach toward undocumented migration. The House of Representatives, under Democratic control, voted to condemn Mr. Trump's remarks as racist, marking the first such reprimand of a sitting President in over a century. Not only did that Congressional rebuke to Mr. Trump pass mostly along partisan lines, by a vote of 240 to 187, but other senior Republicans including Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell defended the President against the racist label. Nevertheless, Mr. Trump hit back again at the four Congresswomen — who have adopted the moniker "the Squad" — on Twitter for what he called their "horrible and disgusting actions", "racist hatred", and for being "anti-America", "anti-Semitic", and possibly communist sympathisers.

Stepping back from the immediate, acerbic terms of this exchange, the bigger concern is that these hateful comments risk damaging the fabric of American society further, as they are an unmistakable and painful hint from their President that legal immigrants, especially people of colour, are not welcome. Yet, there can be no denying the significance of immigrants as a demographic cohort of the country. More than 44.5 million immigrants, at least 13.7% of the overall population, reside in the U.S.; one in seven U.S. residents is foreign-born. Mexicans, Indians and Chinese immigrants are respectively the largest sub-groups within this cohort. It was little surprise then, that Ilhan Omar, one of Mr. Trump's targets, situated the comments in the agenda of white nationalism, arguing that given the direct contravention of U.S. constitutional values implied, it was time to consider impeaching him. Yet impeachment would be an option only if the Senate were also to come under Democratic control, or if there might be some conceivable reason why Republicans would break with their recent record of siding with Mr. Trump no matter how egregious his conduct. A more tedious, but deep-rooted approach would be for liberals of all hues to engage in a meaningful dialogue with their conservative detractors, over what they could agree on as a common minimum agenda and values that could anchor their nation's march into the 21st century. If a nationwide conversation of this sort, aimed at discovering a reasonable middle ground is not undertaken, the very idea of the American dream, of a meritocracy built on harnessing talent from around the world, will unravel fast.

The NEP and liberal arts education

The draft's endorsement of critical thinking would have gained credibility if it had promoted liberal values



KRISHNA KUMAR

A few months ago, a school principal told me about her conversation in the morning assembly with children of the middle (Grades VI-VIII) section. She had asked them for suggestions to turn the school into heaven. Some children suggested a garden, with trees, grass, and flowers blossoming all year round. Others pointed out that the school already had a nice garden. They suggested that heaven should have peace, so we should end all fights. The assembly ended with everyone taking a vow to stop all fighting in the school to make it like heaven. A short while later, two boys came scuffling into the principal's office, quarrelling and seeking her intervention. On inquiry, one of them said, "Ma'am, didn't you say you want our school to be like heaven?" Then he pointed at the other boy and asked, "What is he doing here, Ma'am? He fights with me all the time."

This story came back to me when I started reading the section on higher education in the 480-page draft of the National Education Policy (NEP). I had completed my reading of the section on school education, so I was ready to be told how a future generation that spends its school years under the guidance of the proposed new policy will spend its college years. For improvement in learning at school, the draft NEP wants critical thinking and creativity to be treated as the cornerstones of intellectual development from early childhood onwards. As a term,

critical thinking or inquiry has gained enormous popularity of late. It does not mean 'critical' in the common sense. How the term has evolved in recent educational theory implies the ability to place ideas and problems in a larger context in order to locate creative links and clues by using information and concepts drawn from different subjects. Imagine our youngsters proceeding to higher education after this kind of intellectual training at school: you can picture a transformed college classroom.

Pivotal to reform

In the draft NEP, the section for higher education opens with 'liberal arts' as the key to reform. This is another term that has been gaining currency in India over recent years, but its history is rather different from that of critical thinking. In India, owing to our colonial history, we are more used to the term 'liberal'. In modern education, 'liberal arts' refers to undergraduate courses in America's elite private universities. For years, I have been looking for a suitable term in my mother tongue, i.e. Hindi, to convey the many layers of meaning underlying the word 'liberal'. The common translation is 'udaar' or large-hearted. (I am sure this is the term they will use when the draft NEP is made available in Hindi.) The idea of liberalism as large-heartedness or intellectual generosity ran into trouble when 'neo-liberalism' gained centre-stage in economic policy. The only way one might notice some generosity in it was by recognising the state's willingness to loosen its grip. Neo-liberalism has now settled in, transcending ideological boundaries, but its impact on liberal arts education in America is far from clear. Many scholars have suggested that the turn to-



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wards neo-liberal policies has weakened critical thinking in liberal arts courses. This matter has suddenly become relevant for us in the wake of the draft NEP proposing both critical thinking and liberal arts, virtually in the same breath.

Applying critical thinking

Implementing the draft NEP in my own mind, I thought of using critical thinking to reflect on the prospects of liberal training. The late Professor Ravinder Kumar, an eminent historian of modern politics, was a self-avowed liberal. I once heard him explain why liberalism is the hardest social doctrine to practice. He said the capacity to tolerate your adversaries, with curiosity to understand them, calls for a mutual agreement. If there is no such consensus, i.e. liberal outlook is practised by one side only, it can be frustrating, and might even lead to a tragic failure of liberalism itself. When I hear about liberal arts courses being offered in private universities, I often wonder what future awaits them. How will they face a world in which the 'narrow domestic walls' are rising higher and higher? This metaphor was used by Tagore, a bold liberal, who wanted India to become a 'heaven of freedom'. 'Where knowledge is free', the same poem

said. The liberal arts undergraduate courses I am referring are to cost ₹8 lakh per year.

The draft NEP's support for liberal arts comes with a plea for increased public funding. It also cites employability as a justification. Even more interestingly, the argument excavates historical grounding. It says: "Indian universities such as Takshshila and Nalanda... definitively emphasised the liberal arts and liberal education tradition.... The critical Indian concept of liberal arts has indeed become extremely important in the modern day employment landscape of the 21st century, and liberal arts education of this kind is already being extensively implemented today (e.g. in the United States in Ivy League schools) with great success. It is time India also brought back this great tradition back to its place of origin." (pp. 223-224).

The resounding, elaborate commendation of liberal arts in the draft NEP brought me back to the principal's story about turning her school into heaven. The boy who asked her about his classmate — "What is he doing here, Ma'am?" — was asking a fundamental question pertinent to the future of liberal values. The youngster's query demonstrates that he has internalised the spirit of the age. Many children do that. Their questions carry valuable material to understand our times better and more objectively than we might be able to do as adults, submerged as we are in our ethos, feeling forced to cope with it. The boy's query contained the hope that principal Ma'am, being the custodian of heaven, will exercise her authority to adjudicate in his fight. What were her choices? There were mainly two: to expel the alleged fighter or to ask the complainer to talk to his adversary. Only the latter would

qualify as a liberal administrative measure.

Perhaps this is what the draft NEP also wants in its push for the liberal arts, as a futuristic substitute for the monochromatic 'BA' our system is used to and stuck in. Since the draft NEP is committed to critical thinking, surely its writers had cast a glance at the larger ethos and noticed the demise of several bastions of liberal education. Had they evinced even moderate concern, their endorsement of the liberal arts would have gained credibility. Unless liberal arts graduates are to be produced exclusively for export, their training would have to include the smartness to not let anyone know what exactly you believe in. One suspects that their American counterparts already receive such training.

Let me get back to the heaven alluded to in the principal's story. Trees and peace apart, a school turned into heaven will surely have to resolve the problem of fear, so endemic to our education system. The boy who wanted the principal to adjudicate was not afraid of indicating to her his own preferred solution. It was implied in the question: "What is he doing here?" This stance also carries the hope of impunity from being charged of intolerance. As a grown-up he might say: 'If we want to preserve our neatly fenced heaven, why can't we expel from it the people we don't appreciate?' We might add: isn't this already being argued in many liberal countries, so why should we hesitate? My principal friend, however, followed her instinctive good sense and sent the two boys away, asking them to talk it over and play without a quarrel together.

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Green shoots of economic growth

Without factoring in agriculture, the vision of a \$5-trillion economy will remain a distant dream



NAVEEN P. SINGH & RANJITH P.C.

India's dream of becoming a \$5-trillion economy by 2024 is now in the open with a 'blue sky' vision envisaged in the Economic Survey this year. The document lays down a clear strategy to augment the growth of key sectors by shifting gears as the current economic conditions are smooth in terms of macroeconomic stability to expand growth. However, unless there are adequate investment reforms in primary sectors, steps taken to augment growth in other sectors would be futile.

Investment is the key

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), insufficient investment in the agriculture sector in most developing countries over the past 30 years has resulted in low productivity and stagnant production.

In India, with a steadily decreasing share of 14.4% in Gross Value Added since 2015-16, the sector's contribution to a \$5-trillion economy would be around \$1 trillion — assuming a positive annual growth rate hereafter.

Investment is the key to unlocking the potential of a developing economy. However, the myopic

policy regime in the past several decades has resulted in sluggish investment growth in the farm sector. Therefore, strengthening the sector with an enabling investment package (both public and private) is critical.

First, the wave of investment should touch segments such as agro-processing, and exports, agri-startups and agri-tourism, where the potential for job creation and capacity utilisation is far less. Integrating the existing tourism circuit with a relatively new area of agri-tourism (as a hub-and-spoke model), where glimpses of farm staff and farm operations are displayed to attract tourists, would help in boosting the investment cycle and generate in-situ employment.

Second, investment needs to be driven to strengthen both public and private extension advisory systems and the quality of agriculture and research through collaboration and convergence. It would also serve as a stage to demonstrate resource conservation and sustainable use through organic, natural and green methods, and also zero budget natural farming.

Third, given that India has the highest livestock population in the world, investment should be made to utilise this surplus by employing next-generation livestock technology with a strong emphasis not only on productivity enhancement but also on conservation of indigenous germplasm, disease surveillance, quality control, waste utili-



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sation and value addition. This would lead to a sustained increase in farm income and savings with an export-oriented growth model.

Fourth, investment in renewable energy generation (using small wind mill and solar pumps) on fallow farmland and in hilly terrain would help reduce the burden of debt-ridden electricity distribution companies and State governments, besides enabling energy security in rural areas.

Fifth, a farm business organisation is another source of routing private investment to agriculture. Linking these organisations with commodity exchanges would provide agriculture commodities more space on international trading platforms and reduce the burden of markets in a glut season, with certain policy/procedural modifications.

Pivotal role for data

Finally, data is the key driver of modern agriculture which in turn can power artificial intelligence-led agriculture, e-markets, soil mapping and others. Currently, there are issues of enumeration, maintenance and accessibility to help maintain agri-data on various

fronts. There also needs to be a centralised institutional mechanism to help maintain farm level-data available for real time (virtual) assessment, while also helping plug the loopholes in subsidy distribution, funding and unrealistic assumption in production estimation. This will help in effectively implementing and monitoring various schemes for a pragmatic food system.

It is widely accepted that resource conservation comes with behavioural change, which needs dedicated investment in behavioural farm research sets. Perhaps this would help find a way to leverage nudge policies/choice architecture for resource conservation, fertilizer use, irrigation and electricity consumption. Above all, there is a need to converge fragmented investments (public, private and foreign) to address the structural weaknesses in the agriculture sector, enunciated in the Economic Survey 2016-17.

Trickle-down effect

Though economic transition has seen significant growth contribution from services and industry, agriculture remains the most trusted sector in helping alleviate poverty, hunger and malnutrition and ensuring better income distribution.

An earlier experience of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations has shown that a 1% growth in agriculture is at least two to three times more effective in reducing poverty than similar

growth in non-agricultural sectors. Public investment in agriculture research and development in terms of percentage share in agri GVA stands at 0.37%, which is fairly low in comparison to between 3% and 5% in developed countries.

Also, in real terms, current investment can create an enabling environment to route private investment in R&D. Therefore, public investment in agriculture should see a commensurate rise with a healthy mix of education, research and extension encouraging 'blue-sky thinking' in all segments, while pushing for a targeted pruning of public expenditures on subsidies, kind transfers, loan waivers and populist measures.

Agriculture and its allied sectors are believed to be one of the most fertile grounds to help achieve the ambitious Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs). However, with the current pace of agriculture growth, India requires 'patient capital', as financial returns to investment are unlikely to materialise in the initial years. An inclusive business model facilitating strong investor-farmer relations should be created, with a legal and institutional framework for governance. Expanding institutions is essential to accommodate the developmental impacts of foreign agricultural investment.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Betrayal of verdict

The political conundrum in Karnataka, and the apex court's reaction to it, come as a disappointment to the State's electorate (Front page, "Karnataka CM asked to prove majority on Friday," July 19). Legislators get elected because of the backing of their party and voters choose a party more than the candidate. Hence, it is unethical for MLAs to switch loyalties midway into a term. To pre-empt such crises, the Representation of People Act should be amended and the new rule should stipulate that once a candidate gets elected from a given party's ticket, his resignation, stepping down or demise will result in the party nominating a different member. This

would ensure that the mandate given to a party is not sabotaged by individual politicians and also save the expenditure incurred in conducting bypolls.

B. SUNDAR RAMAN,
Coimbatore

■ The anti-defection law has been often misused by some legislators to suit their unethical and immoral political intentions. However, deleting the 10th Schedule will amount to throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Also, the suggestion that legislators who act in unscrupulous ways should be voted out in subsequent elections may not work in India as polls are fought not on the merits of a candidate but on extraneous factors like caste and money power. The ever-increasing numbers

of legislators with criminal records vindicates this point (Parley, "Does the anti-defection law serve any purpose?" July 19). The Karnataka crisis has turned into a street-fight with legislators switching sides and throwing barbs at each other. The parties care less about what the people want; winning the crown is all that matters to them. The Supreme Court's bizarre verdict on the rebel MLAs has only come as the cherry on the cake. The common man is left scratching his head in bafflement.

A.V.S. SHUBHANGI,
Bengaluru

ICJ reprieve

The International Court of Justice's directive to Pakistan to reconsider the case of Kulbhusan Jadhav can be

construed as an indictment of Islamabad's military courts and its system of dispensing rough-and-ready justice.

However, though the ICJ has halted Mr. Jadhav's execution pending a review of his trial, it has not entertained India's request for either his acquittal or a retrial in civilian courts. The international court did not have the jurisdiction to rule on such matters. Both the countries must now move forward and pursue diplomatic channels to bring closure to the case.

K.S. JAYATHEERTHA,
Bengaluru

Abolish sedition law

Section 124A of the IPC, introduced by the British to curb dissent, is a draconian provision. It is condemnable

that more than 70 years since India's Independence, the state is deploying it not just to settle political scores but also to silence journalists when they report on issues like the Maoist insurgency and communal violence (Editorial, "Sword against pen," July 18). The sedition provision is not just an anachronism in the democratic set-up of the country, it also runs counter to the freedom of speech and expression enshrined in Article 19 (a) of the Constitution. It is high time the government of the day abrogates the provision.

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI,
Nainital, Uttarakhand

Violation of rights

The Indian state's violations of human rights in Jammu and Kashmir in the name of

protecting national security are open knowledge (Editorial page, "OIC's curious record on Xinjiang," July 19). The writer's observations on how countries in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) work may have some substance but it won't be appreciable for India to indulge in 'whataboutery'. The OIC's silence on restrictions in Xinjiang doesn't absolve India of its own responsibilities. If New Delhi wants to get more respect in the international arena, it needs to raise the bar when it comes to protecting the human rights of all its citizens and residents.

BITRA RAGHUVAR,
Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh

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