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B-SCHOOLS FACE A MOMENT OF RECKONING

In an edgy job environment, the lure of an MBA degree has diminished for many. How will it regain relevance?



Many institutes have either halted or left the placement process incomplete because of the lockdown. Most tier II and tier III B-schools are struggling to place their students, say experts.

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Aakriti Bansal and her batchmates organized themselves into a Telegram and WhatsApp group soon after they joined an MBA programme at the Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad, in June. Networking is different this year, you see. Smaller groups of five students Zoom to familiarise themselves and discuss current affairs—the impact of covid-19 on the Indian economy, the banning of Chinese apps by India, if India is ready for electric vehicles. Bansal is in the middle of an online pre-orientation. Classes are expected to start soon, online again. The e-experience isn't something most students would have bargained for. Bansal, nevertheless, hoped that by the end of the course in 2022, she would pick up skills that would polish her into a better professional. She expects to be offered a job with an annual salary package of ₹17-18 lakh, more than three times what she was drawing in her last stint, as a brand executive in an e-commerce firm.

Like Bansal, millions of Indians continue to see value in an MBA degree every year. Not only is it a shot at a better pay, in a good deal of cases, the degree is a passport to switching careers. Of course, everything depends on the reputation of the school, what is taught, the alumni network, and the sort of companies that knock on the door during campus placements. India has nearly 5,000 management schools and by most accounts, an overwhelming majority of them are mediocre institutions that don't add much value to CVs. India produces upwards of 400,000 MBAs a year. Only in 20 schools is the starting salary more than the fees paid. And only 19% of the MBAs are technically qualified to take up jobs. Shiv Shivakumar, group executive president of corporate strategy and business development at Aditya Birla Group and a former president of the All India Management Association (AIMA), informed.

The long tail of mediocre B-schools now faces a crisis. On the demand side is a tight employment market. Campus placements are usually conducted between December and April. According to AIMA, many management institutes have either halted or left the placement process

incomplete in 2020 because of the lockdown. Most tier II and III B-schools are still struggling to place their students. Students who joined schools in 2019 may not get good internship opportunities. This will have a direct impact on the final placement of 2021, the body stated.

On the supply side, intake of students for one-year courses hangs in the balance. There is uncertainty about the path of the economic recovery and by extension, the jobs market next year. The better schools are better off. *Mint*, in January, reported that the average salary offer was up 7-15% in top B-schools compared to the last placement season. But even they need a pivot. Online delivery of content is a new beast and professors are ill-prepared. Schools need to refresh what they teach as well as create new content since business models have undergone dramatic shifts in under two months.

India's best management schools are mostly stand-alone institutions. Both academics and employers are questioning if they are capable enough to prepare students for complex problems in a world that is seemingly more multi-disciplinary. Sunil Kant Munjal, chairman at Hero Enterprise, pointed out that three themes are consistent with every company at the moment. Every business is inducting more technology, building a new level of efficiency in operations and a completely new cost model. "If business schools are not teaching these, they will get left behind," he said. Munjal is the chancellor of IIM Mumbai University and is on the governing council of IIM Ahmedabad and on the board of ISB.

The black swan event has raised yet another question: Are Indian business schools equipped to train people to expect the unexpected? "The reality of life is that this is not the last time we will see a crisis. We will see more of them, whether it is due to climate change, technological changes, or cultural and social changes. The best and the smarter schools have to make this as an inherent part of their curriculum—plan for the unplanned," Munjal said.

THE SUPPLY CONUNDRUM
Mudit Gupta is a consultant with India's ministry of statistics and programme implementation where he works on complex surveys. He is thinking of doing an MBA—next year. "I am looking

for an international business management programme for next year. Universities are offering an e-experience currently, which is not very valuable," he said. Gupta would much rather prefer networking with batch mates, the old-fashioned style. "I want to get out and interact with peers around. MBA is all about peers."

That's one of the challenges B-schools face in 2020. Besides interactions with like-minded students, an MBA class gains from interactions with rockstar faculty and a great campus life, which is intellectually stimulating, pointed out Shivakumar. "If I am doing an MBA this year, the experience will be very different because the bulk of the courses will be online. Students will ask if they should be paying ₹15-25 lakh for a reduced experience. Deferrals will be big," he said.

There are more nuances to the supply conundrum. There are broadly three types of MBA programmes. The conventional two-year course that is preferred by freshers and those with work experience of less than three years; a one-year-degree that is tailored for professionals with work experience of four-five years or more. A third category is part-time programmes.

While the demand for MBA programmes that don't require prior work experience are expected to remain stable or even increase, B-schools that require work experience may see reduced intake in current circumstances. Why is that? "If a person is already in a job, he would think twice before letting go and joining an MBA programme in 2020 given the economy. Keeping the job is a big deal now," Rekha Sethi, director general at AIMA, said.

In a good year, short-term management programmes are a hit with working professionals because they have to take only a year's break from work. Recruiters seem to like it too but 2020 is tricky. "A top class one-year programme. The reason is that these programmes usually admit experienced people. From a recruiter's perspective, it is easier to integrate a person who has already worked into a working environment versus someone who has never worked. This is why one-year programmes have a decent demand in terms of placement," A.K. Balaji Prasad, managing director of Drishi Strategic Research Services, a market research company, said. Prasad is secretary of IIM Calcutta's alumni chapter in Mumbai. "However, now, two-year programmes would be preferable because by the time you are getting out, the economy would have had time to recover," he added.

WHAT

Millions of Indians continue to see value in an MBA degree every year. India has nearly 5,000 management schools and an overwhelming majority of them are mediocre

BUT

The long tail of mediocre B-schools now faces a crisis. On the demand side is a tight employment market. On the supply side, intake of students hangs in the balance

ALSO

Online delivery of content is a new beast and professors are ill-prepared. Schools need to quickly refresh what they teach as well as create new content

So what happens to the long tail of mediocre institutions given the short to mid-term challenges? Their student intake is expected to dip but many of them would continue being aloof. Education is recession proof in India considering the country's young demographic. "In a crisis time, you need more hope. Educational institutions are organizations of hope. That's why parents and young kids will continue to come to these institutions—despite the fact that many of them provide low-level, low-quality education," Pankaj Chandra, vice-chancellor of Ahmedabad University and a former director of IIM Bangalore, explained.

WHAT TO WATCH

Around September of last year, Rishey at IIM Bangalore, taught case studies on the airlines industry and on Uber. The discussion on airlines revolved around competitive dynamics and commoditization. Uber was about how the company disrupted private transport.

Then, the pandemic disrupted the disrupter—private transport is expected to make a comeback as people avoid shared mobility. And airlines companies face a

sudden deep drop in demand. Content relevant a few months ago has gone stale. New content, therefore, has got to emphasize more on such contingencies and business continuity planning. Krishnan thinks the importance of resilience, managing crisis and climate change will be underlined in bold.

This is not just true of Indian schools. Global B-schools appear to be preparing for such changes, too. Vijay Govindarajan, Cox distinguished professor of management at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, and Anup Srivastava, Canada research chair at Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary, both seem to think that currently, schools focus a lot on "algorithmic learning" or where there are predetermined answers to predetermined questions.

Schools will have to reduce emphasis on algorithmic learning and increase the emphasis on "higher order skills", they stressed in an email response to *Mint*'s questions. These skills include creativity, empathy, leadership, conflict management, strategic thinking, understanding technological progress, disruption, crisis management, problem solving, and dynamic decision making among others.

Meanwhile, the dialogue around business ethics is expected to get sharper in India post the migrant crisis. For the last few decades, businesses have practised a very narrow kind of capitalism, which is to deliver financial results and profits. This drives the share price and total shareholder return (TSR). Rewards for executives are aligned to these goals, Anjali Bansal, founder of Avana Capital, pointed out. Bansal is on the governing body of SP Jain Institute of Management and Research.

"However, we need to have a greater focus on ethics, values, sustainability, building responsible businesses versus building just a business. Companies are talking of ESG (environment, sustainability, governance) goals, diversity and inclusion, being responsible. The leadership is expected to deliver on these goals," she said. "It is a good time now to include this as part of the learning and development agenda in companies, both to educate and train the leaders as well as passing it on to their juniors who they mentor," she added.

A few academicians see a bigger role for management schools in the future. B-schools could metamorphose into a platform for dialogue between the gov-

ernment and other stakeholders such as businesses and NGOs. Rajendra Srivastava, dean of ISB, suggested. That could help resolve complex problems like the pandemic India is grappling with. Srivastava also spoke of a "life-long learning contract" with students, going ahead. The speed of change and uncertainty implies that executives would need to refresh what they learnt every few years. That could mean shorter but more frequent executive management programmes for the alumni.

"We should be teaching how to manage crises. Then there is new technology such as the Internet of Things and blockchain. Someone who has got their MBA 10 years back doesn't have this as part of their toolkit," the dean said.

THE RISE OF TECH

The ministry of human resource development's National Institutional Ranking Framework shows an interesting trend. ITs and other technology institutions that offer management programmes are climbing in the pecking order. In 2020, there are seven technology institutes in the top 20 when it comes to management rankings. There were just two in 2016. Recruiters see this trend accelerating post the pandemic with every company in the middle of a digital transformation—tech institutions are set to become a bigger force in management education.

"Only in recent years have we seen tech institutions such as IITs, NITs and NITs gain prominence in management education. This is because 15 to 20 years ago, strategy and management consulting were considered two sides of the same coin. Subsequently, this shifted to strategy, management and operations consulting. Today, strategy/operations consulting and technology have become two sides of the same coin," Ramakumar Ramamoorthy, chairman and managing director of Cognizant India, said. "In this

changed context, no strategic road map or business process reimaging exercise can be undertaken without a deep understanding of what digital and related technologies can do to the organization," he added.

More competition for the top stand-alone B-schools isn't such a bad thing. It could force them out of complacency and aid in pivots, much like the businesses they supply talent to have done in recent months.

One of the challenges faced by B-schools in 2020 is that the bulk of the courses are online, and students are questioning if these give enough bang for the buck

OUR VIEW



Reform the WHO but do not undermine it

The US decision to quit the world's top public health organization reflects poor judgement. The WHO has been woefully behind the corona curve, but reforms should be the way ahead.

Nearly three months after the US halted its funding of the World Health Organization (WHO), and more than a month after saying it would quit membership of the international public health body, US President Donald Trump's administration has formally notified the United Nations of its withdrawal. Unless this decision is reversed by an occupant of the White House after the US presidential election in late 2020, America will no longer be a member of the WHO by this time next year. This is a highly unfortunate turn of events, especially at a time the world needs global cooperation at its best to fight a pandemic that threatens us all. Covid-19 rages on, and efforts to snuff it out must not fall victim to political mud-slinging across the globe. The US is the world's sharpest hit country, and its leader has been pointing fingers at others for its misfortune. Along with China, where the disease first emerged, the WHO has been at the receiving end of Trump's fury. Among other things, the US president has accused the organization of helping China cover up the origins of the virus that causes covid-19. He has also called for WHO reforms. While the body has denied the US allegations, it has also been woefully behind the corona curve. Regardless of the politics at play, there seems a clear case for changes that could help turn the health body more effective in keeping the planet's population as healthy as possible.

The WHO got off to a poor start by taking inordinately long to declare the covid outbreak a pandemic. Verifiable signs had emerged not just of its highly contagious nature by mid-January, but also of its spread beyond China. But the WHO dithered in raising a global alarm

until it was too late; it could have advised a closure of borders, for example, but did not. Given its stature and authority on such matters, charitable criticism put that down to an inherent sense of caution. It did not want to exceed the evidence it had, they said. The WHO's failure that is currently in the news is its apparent playing down of the danger of airborne viral infections. All along, its safety guidelines had laid emphasis on contact as a mode of corona transmission for people to guard against. Sneezes and coughs, the WHO had warned against, but it was only this week that it partially acknowledged the peril of virus particles staying suspended in the air for prolonged periods, especially in spaces with poor ventilation. This came after an open letter from some 200 scientists urged it to widen its warnings.

Yet, none of that justifies abandoning the WHO. It has a vital role in gathering information from across the world and advising health authorities on covid-19. Its rejection by the world's richest and most powerful country should worry us. If authoritarian governments appear to wield undue influence over the organization, there must be a way for democracies to fix such a problem. For one, executive authority at the WHO needs to shift from political appointees to healthcare technocrats who command global respect for their work. For another, the WHO's operations need greater scrutiny. As of now, Ethiopia's former health and foreign minister Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus heads the body, and WHO critics have hinted at Addis Ababa being beholden to Beijing for investment inflows. Whatever the truth of these charges, the WHO ought to be restructured. If this will take broader UN reforms, we should embark on these too.

MY VIEW | HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE

Hong Kong is losing its freedom and the world mustn't look away

Its people deserve our support as they fight China's efforts to snatch their democratic rights away



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With the world grappling with coronavirus and the United States president out playing golf, China has seen an opportunity. It has passed a sweeping law that undermines Hong Kong's civil liberties and restricts fundamental rights. Many in Hong Kong do not want independence; they want to be left alone, they want to protect the freedoms they have, and China is taking away those freedoms.

Books critical of the Chinese government are reportedly being removed from public libraries. Companies like Facebook, Twitter, Google and Microsoft have said they won't comply with government orders seeking user data until they have familiarized themselves with the new law. Insensibly, TikTok, a Chinese company, is pulling out of Hong Kong. Human rights groups based in Hong Kong may have to reassess their presence and staffing. The city that once boasted of Asia's freest media is closer to a future that was always possible and dreaded. The aftermath of the Asian economic crisis of 1997-98 had led to the closure of some publications based there—*Far Eastern Economic Review* (where I was correspondent), *Asiaweek*, and the *Wall Street Journal in Asia* (for both of which I wrote), all folded over time.

History is speeding up; what was feared in 2047 is happening now. Hong Kong was promised 50 years of auton-

omy under a Sino-British Accord of 1984, but China is in a hurry. It has pressed the fast forward key. The world watches a disaster in slow motion. That's not mixing metaphors. China had always wanted to turn Hong Kong into a Chinese city; the world is watching what was predictable but avoidable. It may seem as if nothing has changed. The Hong Kong skyline looks the same; the Hong Kong dollar is still pegged to the greenback; the odd sampan runs up in the harbour; and the MTR stations are still called Admiralty and Central—surely it can't be so bad? The form remains, the substance changes.

When the Sino-British Accord was signed, creating the so-called Basic Law and the "one-country-two-systems" model, it was based on an assumption that in 50 years, China would become more democratic and Hong Kong's freedoms would infect China. Hong Kong offered values, like the rule of law if not democracy, and the protection of rights not full representation. It could only have worked if China played by the rules under the world's vigilance.

At first, China was patient. It imitated Hong Kong by building shiny glass towers, attracting foreign capital, investing in infrastructure, luring companies to employ Chinese workers who couldn't form real trade unions, and gave foreign investors what they loved: an ability to make profits, an uncomplicated, pliant workforce, and world-class infrastructure. True, investors remained concerned about transparency, corruption and the rule of law, but for that, there was Hong Kong with its intellectual property lawyers, tax experts, and private bankers. As time passed and Shanghai and other cities prospered, Hong Kong's singular importance began to diminish. And what it had and China didn't (some political freedom) was not a priority for most investors, nor for many governments.

To be sure, the Basic Law ensured the rule of law and restrained state power. In the years before 1997, governor Chris

Patten tried to ensure some rights for Hong Kong voters, for which he received abuse from the Chinese. Each year on June 4, thousands of people came to Victoria Park in Hong Kong with candles, holding a vigil for Tiananmen Square martyrs, infuriating China. But clever dictators can play the long game, and this is Xi Jinping's moment.

One day, one Hong Kong's freedoms have begun to vanish—death by thousand cuts. The silencing of dissent, the dragon, but the protestors had adopted "water" as their metaphor, spreading across the city in unpredictable ways; water seeking its own level, finding its pathways. They had risen in 2014 with the umbrella revolution; they rose again last year, opposing a dangerous extradition law.

I was in Hong Kong last year, and with a friend who lives there, I had walked among demonstrators near Causeway Bay. There were thousands of people, many of them wearing masks to conceal their identity. They were peaceful and spirited; they sang the soaring anthem of the movement, *Glory to Hong Kong*, they boycotted shops owned by pro-Beijing businesses; students painted campus walls with graffiti of slogans from the French and American revolutions and other liberation movements; and they cleaned up the litter after the demonstrations so that the city could resume business. The students and people I spoke to wanted to preserve what they had; they did not want more, and now they will get less.

Hong Kong culturally Chinese, but its people speak Cantonese, not Mandarin; they use an older script, not the simplified modern text. China fears what might happen if it becomes Hong Kong. Were that to happen, it would be good for China's people. What Hong Kong's brave people deserve is global sympathy, but what they're getting is apathy, as world leaders go about learning the correct angle at which etiquette would have them bend while bowing to the emperor in Beijing.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

We do not want to see a Hong Kong that enjoys freedoms on paper but whose autonomous status conceals the workings of a totalitarian state.

JOSHUA WONG

GUEST VIEW

Let's not underestimate India's foreign policy expertise

GAUTAM BAMBAWALE



is a former Indian ambassador to Bhutan, Pakistan and China

We have in India many armchair foreign policy "experts" who seem to cast their opinions without having an iota of experience on foreign policy formulation or its implementation. One such pious opinionist is the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) bureaucrats, with a few exceptions, are jacks-of-all-trades. From this assumption, for which no proof was advanced nor felt necessary, a conclusion was drawn that the Indian foreign service establishment does not have the ability to provide real inputs for how our governments should conduct foreign policy.

Really? Then, how do you explain that for over seven decades, India has been boxing well above its weight in the international arena. How did India get elected to the United Nations (UN) Security Council for 2021-22 with one of the largest positive vote counts? 77? This was not the result of luck. This was achieved through the assiduous cultivation of friends and partners, as well as the handing out of favours over decades and

then encasing them when required. The question that arises is whether the efforts of India's foreign service establishment get a fair appraisal from critics. The frame of reference for any such analysis needs to be the long-term interests of the country. This calls for strategic thinking.

If you consider the fact that the current Indian ambassador to Russia is a fluent speaker of the country's language and is on his third assignment to Moscow, with wide array of contacts and a deep understanding of that civilization and culture, you would acknowledge that the IFS is well specialized in its role.

Take another example. India's ambassador to the United States is doing his third stint at Washington DC over a 35-year career, and this is his fourth posting in that country. He knows the ins and outs of the US political system and has reliable contacts on both sides of the political aisle.

Similarly, the joint secretary at the external affairs ministry dealing with Russia and Eurasia is a veteran of two postings in that nation, and is adept at an envoy therein dealing with Russia.

It may also surprise those who subscribe to the jack-of-all-trades view that the officer being brought back to head quarters to deal

with the "PAI desk" (for Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran) is a veteran of stints in Islamabad and Kabul. This choice was not an accident. It was a result of policies developed over decades, and the fruits of these have been in evidence for over a decade now.

India's external affairs ministry and the IFS encourage specialization from the moment a new recruit joins the ministry. Language specialization, in particular, has assiduously been cultivated over the years, and this trend was greatly encouraged when the late Sushma Swaraaj helmed India's foreign policy.

To be sure, these policies are not new. But they received a significant impetus during Swaraaj's tenure as India's foreign minister. This is one among many reasons why the Foreign Service Institute in New Delhi is named after her.

Field specialization has indeed been a hallmark of the IFS with individual officers having to perform long stints in either economic or cultural diplomacy, on political or

consular matters, and even in multilateral diplomacy. This knowledge is crucial to appreciate how a foreign secretary who has served as high commissioner to Bangladesh and ambassador to the United States, worked at India's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, and also held the key joint secretary (UN) position in New Delhi, gets prepared and gains enough experience over a 35-year career to be able to perform the high-level task bestowed on India's senior-most diplomat.

Without understanding these processes, it would be foolhardy of armchair experts to think that they could provide better advice to the government, based merely on an assessment shaped by what seem like a

few best-sellers and visits to the capitals of sundry countries. Their trouble with such an under-informed analysis for foreign policy is that it tends to place short-term interests before long-term strategic ones. An approach that isn't professionally thorough to the degree necessary for the conduct of

diplomacy could easily be reversed for its lack of depth when the government's approval vote for the country. Critics of the IFS do not necessarily make able diplomats.

The external affairs ministry, as it happens, also draws on the expertise available in academia and the think-tank community for ideas and policy advice. This goes beyond government-sponsored institutions such as the Indian Council of World Affairs and the Manohar Parikar Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses.

To the ministry's credit, private organizations from across India are also involved in the process, sometimes by being tasked to prepare position and policy papers on specific subjects. A whole ecosystem for ideas in international relations has been created in India. This is a relatively recent development, going back over the past decade. The ministry also employs interns with appropriate credentials. Critics, however, appear not to have noticed such innovations.

The government of the day is getting excellent advice on foreign policy formulation from the IFS. This is true in the past as well. The reason for its silence—its experts and practitioners with a long-range view who have been given the responsibility for formulating Indian policy.

Time-tested processes are in place to aid our policymakers and these have served Indian diplomacy well

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2020

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Who is caring for children?

Pandemic has been devastating for adolescents. Identifying their areas of stress, detachment and confusion must be integral part of teaching-learning in time of crisis



In the current value, the non-material, tangible connections, programmes, engagements, get-togethers, festivals and assemblies seem to have lost all meaning. In fact, I think I have grown up very fast as compared to any other generation of my age. Today, more than ever, I feel triggered, flooded and overwhelmed by this situation. The question that wells up in my mind is what happens today? How will I step into tomorrow? My dreams have been replaced by stress, anxiety and uncertainty.

This cry of help came from an adolescent in school, who was unable to cope. The coronavirus apocalypse has been devastating for adults, but adolescents have been impacted by it in a much greater manner.

Between the ages of 13 to 17, teens and tweens have increased developmental motivation that makes it hard to isolate them. The hormonal changes during puberty combined with adolescent dynamics make them highly attuned to social status and peer groups.

Caught in a vacuum, at a time when they were ready to launch themselves, many teens are wading through complicated emotions. They have had to adjust to online learning, isolated from their friends, and eliminate meaningful events from their calendars. They mourn the loss of school groups, sports and informal get-togethers. The ritual of going to class and hanging out with people who they have grown up with, even if they have not been close friends, seems over.

Till now, the majority of children were in a vacation mode, but the reality of not going back to school has suddenly dawned upon them because the pandemic shows no signs of abatement. Levels of frustration, nervousness and disconnection have become much greater. A nostalgia of events pre-March has become intense.

A lot of adolescents hope to get back to school, but they have a little time to officially close the book on their lives in school. Due to this pandemic, children are afraid of venturing outside their homes. Suddenly, their safety and security has been threatened and challenged from multiple angles. The more common stressors that teens are facing are loved ones becoming ill, non-stop pandemic news, family economics with their parents' losing jobs, loss of traditional milestones in their school activities that are significant rites of passage, fear of catching a flight, visiting a grocery store or even going to a dentist. All these have impacted their mental health.

Adolescence is a state of major transition. It's when they start finding their identity, their sense of self from their peer group.



AISHWARYA BHARTI

THE JANUARY 10 judgment of the Supreme Court on internet restrictions in Kashmir was criticised as one "ignoring rights and remedies". The May 11 judgment on the same issue was described as an "abdication of duty". The former judgment, in *Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India*, laid down guidelines to test the validity of internet suspension orders and their periodic review. The May 11 judgment, in *Foundation for Media Professionals vs Union of India*, ordered the constitution of a special committee to review the orders passed by the J&K authorities by applying the safeguards laid down by the Court in its January 10 judgment. In a recent webinar hosted by CAN Foundation Harish Salve cautioned: "Everybody who has a point of view today thinks the Supreme Court is a national dashboard, on which everybody who has a point of view, has the right to throw a dart. This must stop."

The case is about internet availability in Kashmir, which has a vexed background and a complex geo-political history. It has been on the receiving end of well orchestrated and incessant proxy war waged by an unstable neighbour. The repeal of Article 370, re-organisation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and the prospect of a brighter future for Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh, propelled our neighbour into a desperate mode. The COVID-19 crisis has only added to the complexity of the situation on the ground. The recent turn of events in Kashmir is part of this trend. The excessive firepower and



C.R. Sankar

in processing a range of very intense emotions from fear and anger to sadness and grief, the result can lead to a chronic anxiety disorder.

Different teens are having different reactions. For introverted adolescents, the current situation is giving them a sense of calm or relief. The extroverts, whose energy is recharged by communication, are devastated by the quarantine.

It is very important to be on the lookout for warning signs of depression, which range from emotional changes, feelings of despair and emptiness, mental changes, difficulty in focusing and thinking, physical changes including eating habits, weight and sleeping patterns. It is imperative that we take very seriously, acts of self-harm or even words that may lead to it.

Disorders have emerged affecting mood swings, behaviour and sleeping patterns due to the excessive use of technology. This 24-hour rhythm has now become the new norm, and has broken up the space between waking and sleep.

Parents are trying to balance their own work and the remote-learning schedules of their children, trying to find ways to help them cope. Parents have to acknowledge the anxieties of their children and have an open and honest discussion about the struggles they are facing, but with a level of reassurance.

Adolescents watch adults for psychological cues. If parents are calm, the children, in turn, will be more confident of their well-being. What may seem trivial to an adult may be very important to a teen or a tween.

In the immediate now, and forever, we must stop worrying about the learning gaps, but think about how our children will cope with anxiety, uncertainty and change. Can our children breathe, meditate, relax, experience tenderness, trust, and do they know if they have a self to find? If what is being taught in school and at home is not connected with the child's happiness, survival and sanity, then, who is caring for our

not the best approach: Parents must show compassion and validate their concerns because they will not get the moments they are missing back. The citation ceremonies, farewells, annual days, school carnivals, all these make up the sights, sounds, feelings and fragrances of the growing-up years. It is their participation and reaction to these that will make them the adults of tomorrow.

Schools and the homes have changed roles. The online teaching model has to be embedded with an emotional compass more than anything else as mental health issues have already pinnacled and the domino effect is going to be felt across time. Social-emotional learning will help children to cope and prevent arousal symptoms and strong negative emotions. Capsules of meditation, yoga, motivational conversations will help to deconstruct the conflict that children are facing. Identifying their areas of stress, detachment and confusion should become an integral part of the teaching-learning experience.

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The writer is principal, Springdales School.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The French president's time in office has been beset by crises. As a deep post-coronavirus recession looms, the biggest one is yet to come"

—THE GUARDIAN

Quid without a quo

India's trade agreement with China was one-sided to begin with



BIBEK DEBROY

BILATERAL AGREEMENTS are an outcome of negotiations. To get something you want, you yield on others. There is quid pro quo and reciprocity. Thanks to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), since 1948, reciprocity has been built into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Gains and losses needn't always be defined in narrow economic terms—the quid and the quo can be strategic. However, a quid without the quo doesn't sound rational. Outside the then socialist bloc, India was the first country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). This happened on January 1, 1950. Pakistan followed a few days later. India followed through, in October 1954, with a trade agreement with PRC, apparently based on "equality and mutual benefit". At least, that's what the preamble to the agreement said. This trade agreement overrode many historical rights India possessed (trade missions/trading posts) in Tibet. They were signed away. Therefore, for the benefit to be mutual and not unilateral, India must have gained something. This was a narrow trade agreement. Unlike contemporary times, there was no talk of cross-border labour or capital movements. The gains could have been trade, or not-trade.

In any such trade agreement, while negotiating, negotiators try to identify products where their country has a comparative advantage, though comparative advantage is necessarily dynamic and changes over time. I try to get market access for items where my country is competitive and try to bargain and prevent market access for items where my country is relatively uncompetitive. This is the principle behind trade negotiations. As broad heads, China was allowed to export—cereals, machinery, minerals, silk and silk piece-goods, animal products, paper and stationery, chemicals, oils, and miscellaneous items. India was allowed to export—grains, rice, pulses, kyanite, unmanufactured tobacco, raw materials and unmanufactured ores, wood and timber, hides and skins, chemicals, vehicles, and miscellaneous items. At that time, both countries were planning to industrialise. China with a first five-year plan in 1953. India with a first five-year plan in 1951. That being the case, you would expect industrialisation aspirations, and moving away from agriculture, to be reflected in items either side was trading against each other. If you look at those broad heads, this is not the impression you get. For example, India would export wood and timber, but China would export paper and stationery. China would export machinery, but India would export raw materials and unmanufactured ores. That is, barring chemicals and vehicles, India would remain a primary produce exporter to

China, a continuing trend this trade agreement contributed to. However, China's exports would be broad-based and have manufacturing items.

So far, I have stuck to broad heads and these are heads as mentioned in the trade agreement. Those weren't days when trade negotiators followed harmonised customs nomenclatures with digits pinning down items. Such physical descriptions sufficed. Let's look at sub-heads, under those broad heads.

Under paper and stationery, we find newsprint, mechanical pulp-free printing paper, packing paper, stencil paper, blotting paper, fountain pens, pencils, ink, printing ink, and numbering machines. At that time, India had a strong domestic base in producing all these. Indeed, when Article XVIII of GATT was amended in 1954 to introduce Article XVIII, justifying quantitative restrictions (QRs) on imports on the balance of payments grounds, one of the eight items India imposed QRs on was fountain pens. China's fountain pen manufacturing base in Shanghai, other than Hero, is of later vintage. The Shanghai Hero Pen Company traced its antecedents back to 1931. That is when the Wolff Pen Manufacturing Company was founded, re-named Shanghai Hero Pen Company later. Companies like Jinbao didn't exist then. Given India's fountain pen and ink base, it was a bit strange that in 1954, it was pre-decided that China would have a comparative advantage in exporting fountain pens and ink and India would not. To reiterate, we clamped down on gains gained from pens from the rest of the world, allowed them specifically for China and didn't wish to export our own to China. If Hero pens became ubiquitous in later decades, that wasn't only due to smuggling through Nepal. Those were legitimate imports. This is only an example to illustrate the broader point about a biased trade agreement.

Trade is not based on narrow notions of comparative advantage. A country can simultaneously export and import the same item. However, if an item figures in one country's list and not on the other's, that suggests an odd kind of preference. In market access schedules, items specifically mentioned are important. What's dumped into a "miscellaneous" basket is relatively insignificant. If you scrutinise the schedules, you will find non-manufacturing items in China's miscellaneous list, but many manufactured items in India's miscellaneous list (light engineering, plastic manufactures, cement, agricultural implements, paper). By any yardstick, the 1954 agreement was one-sided. Today, any negotiator who agreed to this would be hailed over coal. Nor, since GATT was already been established in 1948, could one claim that India lacked in related negotiating capacity.

I mentioned the quid pro quo gains of trade or non-trade. Obviously, there were trade gains. One side gave and received little in return. Non-trade gains are also dubious. "Equality and mutual benefit" was picked up in the trade agreement and incorporated into Panchsheel later in the same year.

The writer is chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the PM. Views are personal

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MODEL STATE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Crisis of the future' (IE, July 8). The Mid Day Meal scheme has been in the news for all the wrong reasons—from corruption to non-nutritional meals being provided. Kerala has indeed been a torchbearer not only in providing cooked meals even during the pandemic but in handling the COVID crisis. This was only after the NHRC and Patna High Court order that the Bihar government sprang into action. All other states need to learn from Kerala.

Bal Govind, Noida

FAR APART

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Line of actual decontrol' (IE, July 8). The government's measures to discourage the import of Chinese goods may end up hurting India's economic interest in the long run. India does not have the ability to produce cheap, quality products. The technological gap in manufacturing vis-à-vis China is vast. This will make products costlier, and the people will suffer.

Gracy Singh, Delhi

LEARNING VS EXAMS

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'CBSE to reduce burden, crunch syllabus for Class 9 to 12' (IE, July 8). Since the pandemic is likely to end soon, what is more important—survival or saving the academic year? Why jeopardise the future of stu-

IDEAS ONLINE

BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE
RICHARD KAMEI

MARKET DOMINANCE
THROUGH ACQUISITIONS:
SANJAY K PANDEY

www.indianexpress.com

den's by holding Class 9 to 12 exams in 2020-21 on the basis 70 per cent of the syllabus? Won't these students with a 30 per cent gap in their knowledge stare blankly when they go to higher classes?

Vinod Dhir, Ahmedabad

REVIEW QUOTAS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Social Justice' (IE, July 8). The caste-based reservation in legislatures, education, and public employment is unique to India. The founding fathers of our republic originally extended reservation to legislatures to 12% (IE, July 8). Since then, they have likely to end soon, what is more important—survival or saving the academic year? Why jeopardise the future of stu-

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

The writer is a senior advocate practising in the Supreme Court and former member, Supreme Court Bar Association

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Failing students

America's visa curbs reek of coercion, bias

COVID-19 has not only devastated lives and livelihoods across the globe, but also played havoc with the academic calendar. Amid the restrictions necessitated by the pandemic, educational institutions have been engaging with students through online classes — a 'something is better than nothing' option that factors in the current unfeasibility of in-person teaching. In a move betraying total disconnect with the situation on the ground, the Donald Trump administration has made it tougher for international students to stay and study in the US. America's Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has said that it would not allow holders of student visas to remain in the country if their institution goes fully online for the upcoming fall season. These students face the risk of deportation if they don't shift to universities and colleges offering a blend of in-person and online coursework.

The US State Department claims that this 'temporary accommodation' provides greater flexibility to foreign students, but it's actually a coercive step that severely limits their choices and forces them to 'take it or leave it'. The rash decision will particularly hit Indian and Chinese nationals as the two countries together account for about half of the over 11 lakh international students in the US. With India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla promptly expressing concern over the development, the US is likely to find itself under increasing diplomatic pressure to do a rethink sooner than later.

The Trump administration has chosen to play the 'us versus they' card months before the presidential elections. The divisive order, which has been challenged in a federal court by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), could prove to be counterproductive in more ways than one. Slamming the door on a large group of foreigners would deprive America of a major money-spinner at a time when its economy is in the doldrums. With no sign of a let-up in the Covid crisis, US universities and colleges are justified in switching to the online mode, albeit as an ad hoc, stop-gap measure. Maintaining the standards of education matters; so does the safety of students and teachers. The challenge lies in striking a balance between the two considerations.

Criminal rip-off

Covid a fertile ground for scams

EVEN before Punjab could get to the bottom of the registration of fake construction projects to pocket Rs 3,000, which was being distributed among distressed workers last month, irregularities have marred the Ayushman Bharat Sehat Bima Yojana for the same set of workers involving Rs 750 each. The cheats — middlemen, labour and health officials et al — seem to have found novel ways to outsmart the system of linking the Aadhaar card of a beneficiary with the fund transfer to his/her bank account. It was touted as a foolproof shield against such misdeeds. Incidentally, it also led to the exposure of the fraud.

The Covid crisis has become a fertile ground for scammers as they brazenly dig into schemes envisaged to deal with the health emergency and its emerging economic consequences. The fishy activities that have the unmistakable stamp of the complicity of officials/politicians and middlemen leave an unbearable stink. For, they reek of a criminal rip-off of the state in most need of honest deals during a public health calamity: patients, healthcare staff and millions of poor workers reeling under the crippling financial blow wrecked by the lockdown. Unmoved by the plight of the sick or the poverty-stricken, the charlatans don't seem to leave any opportunity of making money that this time of grave adversity has thrown their way. The substandard PPE kits of Punjab, the overpriced hand sanitizers and face masks scam of Himachal Pradesh that took the scalp of the state BJP chief, or the purchase of dysfunctional ventilators, all leave a whiff of illegitimate profiteering and underhand deals.

Even as citizens, moved by the plight of the Covid-19, have been generously donating towards initiatives such as PM Cares, it is a pity that government funds are being usurped by some unscrupulous few. The swindlers must be brought to book and given exemplary punishment at the earliest. Quick dispensation of justice is the key to every legitimate person duly benefiting from government schemes and to checking further malpractices.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction. — John F. Kennedy

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune

LAHORE, FRIDAY, JULY 9, 1920

The 'Marhatta' and Non-Co-operation.

REFERRING to Lala Lajpat Rai's statement in the postscript to his recent letter to *The Tribune* that the *Marhatta* had partially supported his proposal, we said that our own reading of the paragraph of our contemporary was different, that his position was at best doubtful and that in all probability he did not agree with Lala Lajpat Rai. We now know that the *Marhatta* not only differs from Lala Lajpat Rai as well as Mr. Gandhi, but is in substantial agreement with ourselves. Its latest issue it writes:—"In all conscience and with deep respect for both of the national leaders, we cannot subscribe to this boycott of Council elections, as proposed. We hold that the best interests of the country will be served only by entering into the Councils and fighting the battle there." Nor is there any difference of opinion between us as regards either the legitimacy or the exact place of non-co-operation in the national programme. We have said more than once that universal non-co-operation is a tremendous reserve of moral power we have in our hands to be used sparingly but quite decisively when circumstances make it necessary and possible to use it. Is not this also the meaning of the following passage in the *Marhatta*:—"We have abiding and deep faith in non-co-operation and believe that the speediest of all constitutional agitation is and can be non-co-operation only. We differ only in its practical application." The *Marhatta* itself seems to hold practically the same view that we do, because it tells us in the same breath that "we must begin with responsive co-operation which means co-operation commensurate only with the efforts which the Government puts forth to satisfy our demands." Between responsive co-operation and non-co-operation and policy we have consistently advocated namely, that we should support only those measures and policy of the Government that make for greater national self-fulfilment.

Beating China at its game

Curbs are important, but India must work with other regional & global powers



G PARTHASARATHY
CHANCELLOR, JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA UNIVERSITY
& FORMER HIGH COMMISSIONER TO PAKISTAN

PM Modi visited Ladakh on July 3 to express the nation's gratitude to the armed forces and paramilitary for their role in defending the country, while facing serious challenges posed by China. His visit also came in the wake of seething public anger and calls for retribution, because parts of the Galwan valley and the Pangong Tso had come under Chinese control. Referring to China's perfidy in seeking to expand its land and maritime frontiers, Modi noted: "Whenever the obsession for expansionist victories takes over someone, it causes danger to world peace." He pointedly added: "Expansionism has been dangerous to mankind."

China's disastrous invasion of Vietnam in 1979, its ill-advantaged intrusions in Sikkim in 1975, the serious setbacks in its intrusions in Sumerong Chu in Arunachal Pradesh in 1988, and in Doklam in 2017, have demonstrated that China's army is not invincible. The Chinese have refused to disclose their casualties in the Galwan misadventure. Reliable western journals have, however, disclosed that 43 Chinese soldiers were killed in hand-to-hand combat. The Chinese must now understand how a relatively small, but determined group of Indian Army soldiers responded strongly, decisively and effectively, when their unarmed compatriots were treacherously killed. Modi pointedly noted that "territorial expansionism" was the biggest threat to humanity. He was alluding to China's arbitrary territorial claims on virtually all its neighbours, including Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the



KEEP A PACE: At the same time, military and diplomatic contacts and dialogue with China are essential.

China will continue to work closely with Pakistan to undermine and contain Indian influence and power.

Philippines and even Russia, where some Chinese are now reviving claims to the Russian port of Vladivostok, which has been a part of Russia since 1860. China's past actions, aimed at expanding its frontiers, will now meet greater opposition from its immediate neighbours, across the western Pacific Ocean. China had thus far overcome such opposition by a policy of 'divide and rule', backed by crude threats to those who disagree with it. Its 'disincentives' have included crude use of maritime military power against countries like Vietnam, Brunei, the Philippines and Indonesia. The primary motive for such behaviour is to have unchallenged access to 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 180 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the South China Sea. China has used its powerful navy to take control of vast tracts of the sea, from its ASEAN maritime neighbours.

Three days after Modi's visit to Ladakh, NSA Ajit Doval had detailed discussions with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. India's Special Representative announced that

Doval and Wang Yi agreed to complete the ongoing disengagement along the LAC and ensure de-escalation. This will reduce current tensions, but will not end the repeated violations of the LAC whose contours the Chinese refuse to define? It would require further negotiations to get China to pull out from Pangong Tso. This effort would have to be complemented by active international diplomacy that focuses on Chinese intransigence.

The leaders of ASEAN member states, meanwhile, have demanded that territorial and other differences should be settled in accordance with the provisions of the UN Convention of the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). They added: "UNCLOS sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out." The International Court of Arbitration at The Hague had issued a clear ruling in 2016 on a claim brought under the UNCLOS, against China, by the Philippines. The ruling was in favour of the Philippines. While China is a signatory to the treaty,

which established the tribunal, it has refused to accept the verdict.

China cannot be pleased with the international diplomatic fallout of its behaviour. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo launched a scathing attack on China on June 25, averring that the US would deploy additional forces in the Indo-Pacific Region in response to growing Chinese threats to India and other countries. He indicated that he had spoken to his counterparts in the EU about threats China posed to its 'peaceful neighbours like India'. He also alluded to Chinese threats to Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, and its disregard for maritime frontiers. Pompeo's words have been accompanied by the unprecedented deployment of two US nuclear-powered aircraft carriers in the Indo-Pacific region. India should, in turn, promote greater maritime cooperation between members of the recently formed Quad grouping, comprising the US, Japan, India and Australia. This grouping is moving towards coordinated actions to counter Chinese territorial threats.

We are now seeing the beginning of movements across many parts of the world, and particularly across Asia, objecting to China's territorial ambitions and its 'Belt and Road' infrastructure projects. But, given the size of its economy and its conventional and nuclear weapon capabilities, China's global influence will remain significant. It will continue to work closely with Pakistan to undermine and contain Indian influence and power. It will also seek to undermine Indian influence in Nepal and Bangladesh. Thus, while our bilateral economic restrictions on China are important, we should remember that China will be incensed only if we work in coordination with other regional and global powers. It is, nevertheless, imperative that military and diplomatic contacts and dialogue with China should continue, while China's moves to undermine the security challenges we continue to face, in Ladakh and elsewhere, across our borders with China.

Dread of the rejection slip!

SUMIT PAUL

ANY writer's biggest apprehension is to receive a rejection slip. I, too, am mortally apprehensive of rejection. In this age of Internet, one doesn't get a rejection slip of yore. Instead, one gets a mail stating that the submission hasn't been found worth carrying. The heart does a somersault when the piece is accepted. Waiting for the piece to be approved is akin to waiting for the board results, or waiting for a beloved. At times, some friendly and sympathetic editor writes to you that the piece needs some corrections and it should be a bit longer or shorter. So, resend after necessary changes.

Years ago, I got a rejection slip in Urdu from a Pakistani newspaper. The editor took pains to send a letter to me in India that he was rejecting my piece as it didn't fit into any slot of the paper. Though I was dejected, the language of his rejection slip is something I cherish even after so many years. He stated, 'Nihayat hi shaandard likha hai. Aapki Urdu bhi behad saaf hai aur ek bhi ghalti nahi hai, lekin main ise kahaan tawajjuh doon samajh nahin paa raha hoon. Isiye bade aqas ke saath janaab ko lauta raha hoon' (Your writing is so well. Your Urdu is also very good and there's no mistake. But I'm clueless where I should place it. Therefore, I am sending it back to you with regret).

Many newspapers, especially in Europe, still appoint qualified people to write decent rejection slips that shouldn't hurt the contributors, and these rejection slips, at times, examples of euphemistic English and literary gems. Here are a few examples of wonderfully written rejection mails. Also note the implied humour. The poem after you've mailed has all the emotions but the editor doubts whether it'll be able to evoke its readers' emotions. So, we regret. Better luck next time! (*The London Times*, 1998).

A rejection slip from a publishing house in the US was sent to none other than Ernest Hemingway regarding his manuscript of *A Farewell to Arms*. "We've had enough of love stories against the backdrop of wars. So, we bid farewell to your nicely written book." Rejection slips could be sarcastic as well depending upon an editor's moods and disposition. I once got a rejection mail from a renowned publication: "I've been receiving your articles regularly. They deserve to be carried, albeit after a few years." It punctured my creative ego so badly that until that editor was at the helm, I didn't send my pieces!

I'm sure, this nightmare of rejection has haunted all writers in all ages across the world, and will continue to haunt, so long as there are contributors and fastidious publications.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Not in haste

Reference to 'ICMR jumps the gun' (July 6), it would be an honour if India comes out first with a vaccine against Covid-19. But as a young citizen, I think the deadline that the ICMR has declared is just unrealistic. If the deadline declaration is only due to political and public pressure, it is a big concern for everyone. Under the normal circumstances, vaccine trials require a certain period, mostly in years. Many a time, there are unexpected side-effects of a vaccine after several years, and also, no one can guarantee its durability. Hasty production or declaration of Covid-19 vaccine may not only increase the risk of many side-effects, but also concern about human life.

HARSHAL SURESH DESALE, PUNE

China can't be trusted

The developments at the LAC are surely a cause for concern, keeping in view the hypocrisy of China, though on the face of it, China feigns innocence. The telephonic talk between our NSA and the Chinese foreign minister has for the time being helped in de-escalation, but to trust China will be a blunder. 'One may smile, and smile, and be a villain' is true of China. The need is to be more cautious and vigilant and weigh all

and cons in the right perspective.

SANTOSH JAMWAL, HAMPIRUR

Two-child norm

No country can become *atmanirbhar* if the population increases by 180 lakh per year or one Australia is added every year. A consensus should be reached to introduce a system of incentives and disincentives. A massive awareness programme for observing a two-child norm should be launched on the scale of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. There was a very successful programme in Haryana in 1980. A person was required to bring one case of family planning operation before joining duty after recruitment.

RN MALIK, GURUGRAM

Halwara airport

It is heartening that the government has decided to start constructing the Halwara airport on priority, but being a common citizen of Ludhiana, may I ask what is wrong with the development of Ludhiana airport? Why the huge funds to be spent on developing the Halwara airport in the coming months and years cannot be used to upgrade the international airport at Ludhiana, which is already in operation in stages for the last many years?

ASHOK JAIN, SAHNEWAL

Biodiversity matters

Refer to the middle 'Feathered visitors & their long history' (July 7); people should be cognisant and aware of detrimental upshots of diminishing biodiversity. Each species plays its specific role. The rivet popper hypothesis suggests the importance of species richness in the maintenance of the ecosystem. To tackle the emerging stumbling blocks like global warming, climate change, radiation, air pollution, waste management etc., conservation of biodiversity should be our most urgent need. Recreational activities in nature's meadow make our day, and enrich our lives.

VINOD KUMAR GARG, BARNALA

Marvellous nature

I greatly enjoyed the middle 'Feathered visitors & their long history' (July 7). It is so true that nowadays we are witnessing so many marvels of nature that man has been forced to step aside. Hopefully, we will learn and continue to not interfere with nature even after this crisis ends. Sometimes it feels like we humans are the actual virus that nature is trying to get rid of. Even in my garden, I see doves and mynths making nests in the bougainvillea. Their merry chirping wakes me up every morning.

HS BEDI, MOHALI

How ayurveda heals

Appropos of the editorial 'Misleading brand name' (July 8); *nutra*, *pitta* and *kapha* do not just mean acid, bile and phlegm but represent bio-physics, bio-chemistry and bio-mass forces in the human body. They carry all body functions, physiological and pathological. During wellness, they remain in balance. Correction of abnormal function is a treatment approach by means of *samanaya* and *visheshaya dravyas* or methods, so as to bring *tridosh* or *trimaas* to physio-pathology, like the modern medical approach.

NARESH DALAL, JHAJHAR

Will change come?

In my 70th year, I am still awaiting the answer when will we stop demeaning our citizenry by using terms like *gorb*, Scheduled Caste etc. When Modi came to power, I had high hopes that he would take action on key problems. Why can't we reallocate the mafia operating in our country? Why can't we have centres for the need of assistance to become self-reliant, instead of begging? Why can't we have a social security system that takes care of everyone's needs of health, shelter and food? When in Opposition, all parties tended to disregard the work done by their predecessors. The chair alone interests the politicians.

COL. KULBIR SINGH (RETD), CHANDIGARH

