

INDIA CALLS THE US BLUFF

The US diplomats never expected that the MEA would summon and give them a dressing down on their government’s interference in the internal matters of India. Of all the nations, India has never bowed before any country’s hegemony; nor has it tried to browbeat others to let the US try to bully it. This is the Western mindset and hegemony that India with Narendra Modi as leader is trying to point out and circumvent. There are a thousand wrongdoings happening in the US and India never comments. An Indian chief minister facing trial for alleged corruption has nothing to do with the USA or the rest of the world. He is not facing a summary trial. Indian judiciary is as competent and independent as, perhaps of the USA or other advanced democracies. The West, as EAM Dr S Jaishankar said, has to learn to mind its business and not give lectures to India.

ISRAEL IS UNDETERRED

Israel is bracing for a final operation to get its nationals taken hostage by Hamas released. This is despite the UN Security Council passing a resolution on an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Israel is adamant in continuing its pressure on the Hamas on hostages. No resolution is enough to make Tel Aviv give up the operation which has nearly flattened the cityscape of Gaza while destroying the miles and miles of underground tunnels running through the city’s entrails for storing arms and using the same as escape routes by Hamas terrorists. The UN seems to have lost its dominance; it has started looking like a scarecrow that is torn by the birth that it is supposed to protect the crop against. India’s proposition that the UN should become more representative and that negotiations and not rampant condemnations of Israel’s act in self-defence, even disproportionate as it may appeal, are more relevant.

Mechanisation needed to tackle farm issues

A S Mittal

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Food Processing insists on the urgent need to increase the mechanisation of farms for small and marginal farmers in India. Their recent report highlights that wholesome mechanisation is not only essential but crucial to overcoming the multifaceted challenges faced by the farming sector, which plays a pivotal role in the country’s economy.

Despite India’s accounts for only 2.4 per cent of the world’s geographical area and 4 per cent of its water resources, its farming sector supports 17 per cent of the global population and 15 per cent of the livestock, contributing 20 per cent to the nation’s GDP and creating employability to 65 per cent population. Therefore, there is a dire need to enhance productivity and profitability through increased mechanisation among small and marginal farmers and in low mechanisation areas to revitalise Indian agriculture and boosting farmers’ incomes requires moving beyond traditional practices to advanced mechanisation.

Status of Mechanisation:

Our country’s agriculture mechanisation level is below 40 per cent lower than developing nations such as China 60 per cent and Brazil 75 per cent. It is worth noting that agrarian states like Punjab and Haryana had led the green revolution having mechanisation levels around 40 per cent, while in other areas such as the north-eastern states of India, it is negligible.

The Committee has pointed out that 86 per cent of the total land holdings are in small and marginal size groups, which require special efforts for their mechanization. They have emphasized that small farmers face significant difficulties in purchasing machinery unless machines appropriate for small holdings are made available or farmland consolidation takes place. It is expected to take another 25 years to reach the level of 75 per cent mechanization.

A Catalyst for Growth: The imperative



role of farm mechanisation is instrumental in reducing cultivation costs and enhancing productivity through efficient resource utilisation.

Experts and committees have highlighted that agricultural mechanisation in India contributes to making judicious and cost-effective use of inputs, leading to savings in seeds by 15-20 per cent, in fertilisers, an improvement in germination rate by 7-25 per cent, savings in time by 20-30 per cent, in weed by 20-40 per cent, in labour by 20-30 per cent, an increase in cropping intensity by 5-20 per cent, and an increase in crop yield by 13-23 per cent. This also helps in the conservation of natural resources like water, soil nutrients, etc.

Farm Machinery Landscape:

The agriculture and allied sectors like livestock farming demand continuous modernization. The diversity in farming, whether large-scale or small-scale and rural labour scarcity necessitates a broad spectrum of agricultural equipment. From basic tractors to sophisticated combine harvesters, the sector requires a nuanced understanding of the equipment’s specific applications and requirements, spanning feeding equipment, poultry tools, corral systems for cattle and more attributed to the Indian agricultural machinery market is estimated to be worth a whopping US\$16.73 billion in 2024 and is

projected to reach an impressive US\$25.15 billion by 2029.

Steps to Propel Mechanisation:

First, Establishment of the Directorate of Agricultural Engineering: The parliamentary Committee recommends that to monitor and implement the Government’s mechanisation policy effectively and efficiently, a Directorate of Agricultural Engineering is needed in each state. Currently, it only exists in Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, but the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) is working towards establishing it in all states. Agricultural Engineers are also needed at Block and District Levels as there is no engineering manpower to demonstrate, train, help in repairs/maintenance and guide farmers at their doorstep.

Second, Farm Machinery Banks: Since farm machinery is expensive, small farmers find it difficult to purchase it. To address this issue, the Government has introduced custom hiring centres and farm machinery banks in almost all states, where farmers can share machines. However, the benefits of these schemes have not reached the gram panchayat level.

Third, Full-fledged Scheme: In September 2022, the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation was merged with Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, which diluted its mandate. Therefore, the Govern-

ment should establish a full-fledged Agriculture mechanism scheme to speed up the process.

Fourth, Funding for R&D: The budget allocation for the Research and Development (R&D) of the Farm Mechanisation Scheme has been declining steadily over the past four years, with a significant decrease of 30 per cent from 2019-20 to 2023-24.

Fifth, Tax and Duty Incentives: To promote low horsepower tractors, which are mostly used by small and marginal farmers and orchard growers, the tractor and its components attract 12 per cent GST. This means a small tractor costing about Rs 5-7 lakh leads the farmer to pay Rs 60-84 thousand as GST. GST can be reduced to nil or 5 per cent to make it more affordable for small farmers. Tax and duty incentives are also essential to support manufacturing units in low-mechanisation areas for sustainable growth.

In conclusion we can only agree with the Standing Committee.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee stresses the urgent need for enhanced farm mechanisation to support India’s small and marginal farmers. Despite its significant agricultural contribution, India’s mechanisation levels lag behind global counterparts, hindering productivity and profitability.

With 86 per cent of land holdings in small and marginal categories, targeted efforts are crucial. Mechanisation not only reduces costs but also enhances productivity and conserves resources. To drive mechanisation, the committee recommends establishing agricultural engineering directorates, expanding access to farm machinery through banks, revitalising existing schemes, boosting funding for research and development, and offering tax incentives. These measures are essential for revitalising Indian agriculture, increasing farmers’ incomes, and ensuring sustainable sectoral growth. By embracing comprehensive mechanisation, India can overcome multifaceted agricultural challenges and secure its position as a global agricultural leader while empowering its farming community.

CHALLENGES TO THE HOLISTIC IDEAL

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Since ancient times, the medical profession has been considered a noble profession, for its members render a valuable service to mankind by preventing, alleviating, controlling or eliminating disease, pain and suffering. Through the knowledge of the physical body and the laws of health and hygiene, doctors provide patients with measures of great relief and recovery when they are passing through a great physical or mental crisis, are facing the worst of physical troubles or mental tensions or are fighting for life. So, the members of the profession truly needed to be complimented by the society.

However, it has been observed lately that many members of the medical profession in this era of increasing urbanisation and the spread of industrial civilisation and technological culture also face the great pressures of materialism and are hard-pressed for time. Being always in a hurry and with the object of providing medicine to the largest possible number of patients within the set time limits, they are now more and more preoccupied with only the physical well-being of their patients, almost overlooking the changes required in the outlook or per-



sonality traits of the patients.

Even though they know that most diseases are psychosomatic and that the lifestyle, personality traits and behavioural patterns of a person also play a major role in causing stress or trauma or in aggravating the disease, they, for various reasons, do not or cannot pay adequate attention to the social and moral dimensions of health and

disease.

The reason for this is that their main attention is on the symptoms and on prescribing suitable medicines.

But, if we think deeper, we find that, without controlling, reducing or eliminating the psychic or the behavioural causes, there cannot be any lasting cure for many diseases.

Another serious thing that occurs as a result of moral or social ill-health of a person but which is not given serious attention is that not only does the person himself suffer from its evil effects on his body but, as a result of these psychic factors, he causes ill-health to many others also who live with him, work with him or deal with him. For example, a person of an irritable nature, or one who easily loses his temper or is prone to anxiety, not only suffers from avoidable worry and tension but often causes mental tension and anxiety to others also. Worse still is the social strife, family turmoil or political upheaval the moral and social ill-health of a person creates. Hitler, for example, was socially and morally ill and mentally sick.

Most of our present-day problems are due to the moral and social ill-health of our citizens, most of them generating a chain reaction and contributing peacelessness to the total atmosphere. So, while doctors talk of holistic health, hypertension, psychosomatic diseases, drug addiction or AIDS, we wish that due attention is also paid to the turmoil caused by one’s moral sickness or social illness in the socio-political or socioeconomic atmosphere of society.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

From addiction to artistry: Painting a new future

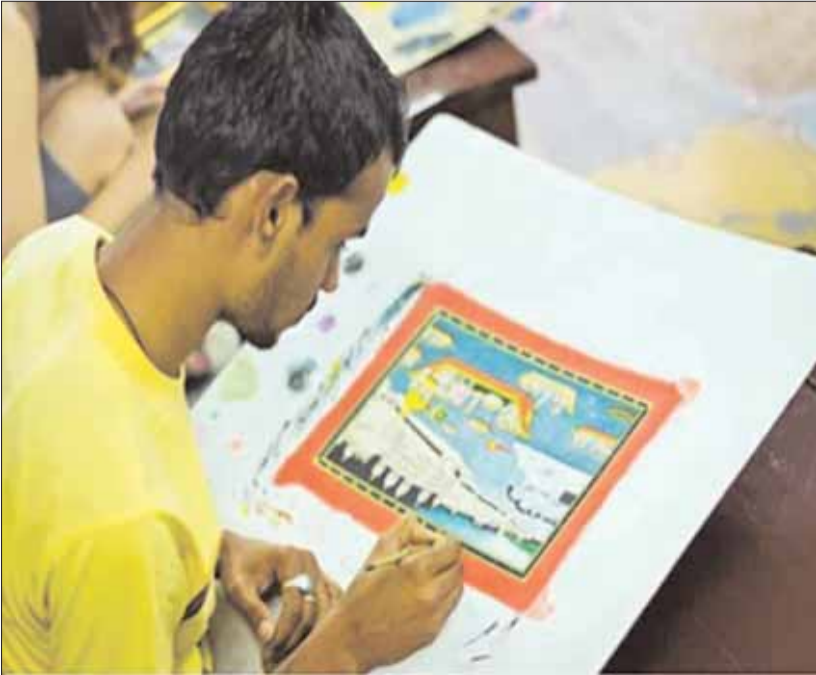
SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

Manglemba Ningombam was 29 when he started experimenting with drugs like many of his friends in his village in Imphal, Manipur. When it started to impact their lives, some of them were able to give it up. Ningombam wasn’t one of them. Over the next 15 years, this addiction would spin his life into a vicious cycle of highs and lows. Personal crisis and the death of his parents exacerbated his loneliness, leading him to consider ending his life. Fortunately, a local NGO was able to reach out in time and admit him to a drug addiction and rehabilitation centre. This was to change his life forever.

While admission to a rehabilitation centre provided the medical and counselling support to wean him off drugs, it was an innovative intervention conducted here that catalysed the transformation. Implemented jointly by Makers Foundation, a Manipur-based not-for-profit working to empower the

alcohol and drug user community, and CADAP, a community-based organisation of drug users, the initiative to provide training in decorative wall painting has opened new doors. This skilling has given them a source of livelihood and income and the confidence to overcome stigma, a big barrier to recovery. Most importantly, it has brought hope and belief that a meaningful life without drugs is possible, thus also reducing the chances of drug abuse relapse.

Ningombam, who was a part of the first batch of 400 trainees of this decorative wall painting programme started in 2022, is now its salaried lead trainer. Just how life-saving this journey has been can be gauged by the fact that there are more than 1.2 lakh psychoactive substance dependants in Manipur. The state’s proximity to the Golden Drug Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam) and its large-scale poppy cultivation means easy availability of drugs. It has given Manipur the dubious



distinction of having one of the highest prevalence rates in opioid use and an increasing number of drug addicts in the state’s rehabilitation centres. Internal conflict and lack of employment opportuni-

ties have compounded the problem, leading to a high percentage of relapse among those undergoing rehabilitation.

It was this challenge that led to the focus on skill-building as a

means to break the chain. Makers Foundation began exploring ways to build the capacity of the substance-dependent community to become economically empowered once they had completed the treatment course. It hit upon the idea of decorative wall painting and partnered with AkzoNobel, a leading paints and coatings company, to provide the training. Besides providing the monetary resources for the programme, AkzoNobel, which also runs paint academies for training in decorative painting, joined hands to provide the necessary skills. At the end of the 16-day training in decorative wall painting, those with potential are selected for an advanced course of 30 days at AkzoNobel Training Centre in Kolkata.

It is not just the self-confidence that this intervention has been able to restore among the trainees. It has also been accepted by their families. For Bhimo, 37, learning a new skill and getting a job as a trainer at Makers Foundation

helped him not only to stay off his addiction to alcohol but also helped regain the trust, respect and support of his family. When positive impacts like this and the encouraging feedback from the community led to the scale-up of the intervention to Assam last year, Bhimo was sent as a trainer. This was also in keeping with their Therapeutic Community Model based on the premise that a rehabilitated alcohol/drug user was better equipped to inspire other users to achieve their potential.

Though it has been challenging, with 44 per cent of the 6.7 million substance users being adolescents, the initiative has so far trained 200 persons admitted to rehabilitation centres in Assam’s Tinsukhia district. Hopefully, this initiative will now be able to empower the many invisible substance-dependent women and girls in need of a helping hand.

(The author is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views expressed are personal)