

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Friday, 29 Nov , 2024

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Amiya Kumar Bagchi, a trailblazing economist and public intellectual, revolutionized Indian economic history by linking imperialism to underdevelopment.

His influential works and institution-building efforts have left an enduring legacy.

Economic historian Amiya Kumar Bagchi passes away

Prabhat Patnaik

Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi, who passed away on Thursday evening, was one of the most outstanding economists, scholars, and public intellectuals of our time. A rebel all his life, he left the college where he had been admitted originally for speaking out against some injustice, and joined Presidency College, Kolkata, which had a freer atmosphere. After his Master's in economics from Presidency, he went to Cambridge University on a West Bengal government scholarship, where he not only finished his doctoral work but also joined the Faculty of Economics and Politics, with a Fellowship at Jesus College.

He had started out as a mathematical economist, in fact a game theorist, but changed course while writing his Ph.D. dissertation and, on the advice of one of his mentors, turned to economic history, a turn

for which we must be highly grateful. Mr. Bagchi was not an economic historian in the narrow sense; rather, he was a macroeconomist working on historical data.

Seeing patterns in data

While digging up new and hitherto unavailable data with a diligence that could match that of the most industrious of the historians, he saw patterns in data which only his macroeconomics could enable him to see. He was thus an altogether new kind of an economist, *au fait* both in economic theory and in applied economics, including economic history. The first outstanding product of his prodigious scholarship was his book *Private Investment in India 1900-1939*, which many reviewers, even critics unsympathetic to his argument, have compared to the monumental works of anti-colonial historiography, such as those by Dadabhai



Amiya Kumar Bagchi

Naoroji, Romesh Chunder Dutt, and D.R.Gadgil. This work was followed by his research on "Deindustrialization in the Indian economy in the Colonial Period" which again provided definitive evidence to clinch a long-standing debate that had gone on since the days of Naoroji and Dutt.

Among his numerous books and articles, most of which are path-breaking, the one that stands out for me is a piece he wrote in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1972, in which he provided a superb and original outline of the dialectics

of development and under-development in a historical setting in the world economy. This work, in its simplicity and its persuasiveness, can be considered a true descendant of Paul Baran's masterly book *The Political Economy of Growth*. It provides a pithy introduction to the argument developed more elaborately, though perhaps with less immediate impact, in his later work, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*. His last magnum opus was *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital* in which he covered a range of experiences of countries in the Global South, focusing on the demographic collapse initiated by imperialism.

After his stint at Cambridge, Bagchi returned to Kolkata to take up a teaching position in his alma mater, the Presidency College, from where he shifted after some years to the then newly established Centre

for the Study of Social Sciences, Calcutta, of which he subsequently became the Director. A staunch believer in Left politics, Bagchi served for a long time as a member and then as the Vice-Chairman of the West Bengal State Planning Board, under the Left Front government. After leaving the government, he established and directed the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata. He remained attached to this institution as a Professor Emeritus till his last days.

An institution-builder

Admired and respected by legions of students whom he taught and guided for Ph.D. work, he was an institution-builder who was an institution himself. He was a pioneer who re-established on a firmer footing the propositions first advanced by the Indian nationalist writers, and in the process illuminated with extraordinary clarity the

workings of imperialism in producing underdevelopment.

All his life however Bagchi remained loyal to Kolkata, never permanently leaving this favourite city of his, even though he had numerous offers of prestigious jobs elsewhere, including in Delhi. Indeed, he was for a long time a remarkable bridge between Kolkata and Cambridge, a friend of distinguished Cambridge economists like Maurice Dobb, Piero Sraffa, Richard Goodwin, and Joan Robinson; he also took great pleasure in listening to Rabindra Sangeet and discussing the latest poem of Shakti Chattopadhyay (his exact contemporary) and the latest play of Utpal Dutt. Above all however, he never lost his faith in a future where there will be a world free of exploitation.

Prabhat Patnaik is Professor Emeritus, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, JNU

Contributions of Amiya Kumar Bagchi

- **Economic History:** Revolutionized the study of economic history in India, combining macroeconomics with historical data analysis.
- **Pathbreaking Research:** Authored *Private Investment in India 1900-1939*, providing critical insights into India's colonial economy and deindustrialization during the British period.
- **Underdevelopment Studies:** Developed original theories on underdevelopment, notably in *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* and *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital*.
- **Institution Builder:** Played a key role in establishing the Centre for the Study of Social Sciences, Calcutta, and the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata.
- **Policy Influence:** Served as Vice-Chairman of the West Bengal State Planning Board, contributing to regional planning under the Left Front government.

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India successfully tested the K4 nuclear-capable ballistic missile from the submarine INS Arighaat, enhancing its nuclear deterrence capabilities.

➔ This development places India among a select group of nations with a nuclear triad.

INBRIEF



India tests ballistic missile with a range of around 3,500 km

India has tested a nuclear-capable ballistic missile with a range of around 3,500 km from a nuclear-powered submarine in the Bay of Bengal, in a major boost to its nuclear deterrence and strategic capabilities, sources said on Thursday. With this, India became part of a small group of nations having the capability to fire a nuclear missile from land, air and undersea. The K4 missile was tested from *INS Arighaat* off the coast of Visakhapatnam on Wednesday, the sources said. It was the first test of the submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) from a submarine, the sources said. PTI

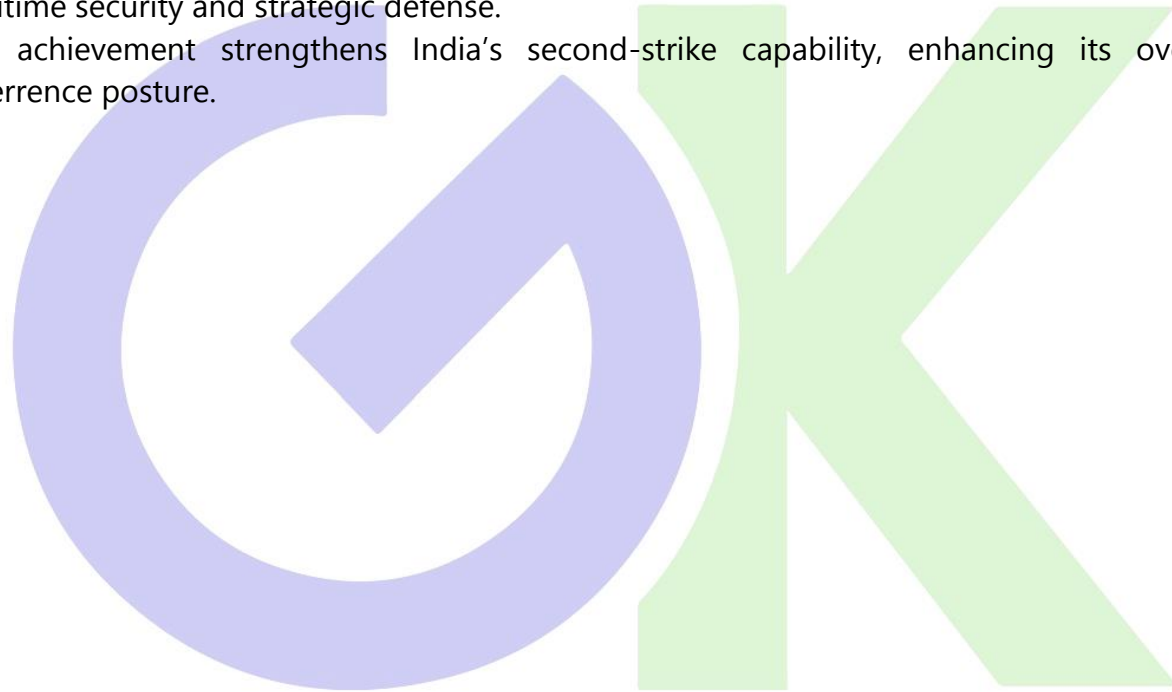
Analysis of the news:

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Daily News Analysis

- India successfully tested the K4 nuclear-capable ballistic missile from the nuclear-powered submarine INS Arighaat in the Bay of Bengal.
- The K4 missile has a range of approximately 3,500 kilometers, significantly boosting India's strategic deterrence capabilities.
- This test makes India one of the few nations in the world with a nuclear triad, capable of launching nuclear missiles from land, air, and sea.
- The missile was launched from INS Arighaat, marking the first-ever submarine-based test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) by India.
- The test was conducted off the coast of Visakhapatnam, showcasing India's advancements in maritime security and strategic defense.
- The achievement strengthens India's second-strike capability, enhancing its overall nuclear deterrence posture.



The article highlights the “Syringe Tide” incident in 1987, which exposed flaws in medical waste disposal in the U.S., and its link to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

- ➡ It contrasts the U.S. response with India’s slower approach to managing biomedical waste, emphasizing legislative actions and challenges.
- ➡ The global HIV epidemic influenced policy reforms in both nations.

Stigma of HIV and birth of biomedical waste regulations

In 1983, two scientists, Luc Montagnier and Robert Gallo, had independently identified the virus responsible for AIDS. By the mid-1980s, HIV/AIDS was viewed as a biological death sentence. The virus’s primary target is immune cells, and medical intervention was extraordinarily challenging then. The epidemic rapidly became a symbol of fear

C. Aravinda

In August 1987, the beaches of the United States witnessed a chilling phenomenon dubbed the “Syringe Tide.” Used syringes and other medical waste, such as blood vials and body tissues, began appearing on the Jersey shore and New York City beaches along the Atlantic coast. The sight of children playing with syringes became a vivid image that spurred a national outcry. The scene, reminiscent of a biological apocalypse, rattled the American public.

The disaster was traced back to New York City’s improper waste disposal, dumping hazardous refuse into fresh landfills (now closed). Though hospital waste has always been unpleasant, its hazardous potential was grossly underestimated. This incident unfolded in the shadow of HIV/AIDS epidemic as a mounting crisis. Just four years earlier, in 1983, two scientists, Luc Montagnier from France and Robert Gallo from the United States, had independently identified the virus responsible for AIDS. By the mid-1980s, HIV/AIDS was viewed as a biological death sentence, with little hope for a cure or vaccine. The virus’s primary target is immune cells, and medical intervention was extraordinarily challenging then. The epidemic rapidly became a symbol of fear, ignorance, and stigma.

The stigma around HIV, fuelled by a lack of understanding and rampant misinformation, was palpable. Syringes on the shorelines were not just a sanitary issue anymore. With the beaches deserted, tourism suffered immensely, leading to economic losses of up to \$7.7 billion. The stigma surrounding HIV, linked with syringes and hospital waste, amplified public anxiety. The confluence of these events—the syringe tide and the HIV epidemic—created a perfect storm.

Public outrage mounted, pushing the Ronald Reagan administration to act. In 1988, the United States passed the Medical Waste Tracking Act, introducing stringent guidelines for medical waste disposal. This was the first time hospital waste was formally categorised as hazardous, requiring systematic regulation and oversight.

The Act marked a turning point, shaping public health policies and environmental safety norms in the years to come. This legislation introduced stringent regulations for the handling, transporting, and disposing of medical waste, forever changing the healthcare



Silent hazard: Alleged medical waste found near Coimbatore Corporation limits. FILE PHOTO

system’s approach to waste management.

India’s journey

While the United States responded swiftly to the syringe tide in the backdrop of the HIV crisis, India’s path to addressing biomedical waste management was slower and marked by distinct challenges. In 1986, India took its first major step toward environmental protection by enacting the Environmental Protection Act, almost 40 years after gaining independence. Coincidentally, 1986 was the year in which the HIV case in India was identified at Madras Medical College in India. However, hospital waste was not yet recognised as hazardous. The Hazardous Waste (Management and Handling) Rules of 1989 did not mention biomedical waste, missing an opportunity for regulation. Thereby leaving biomedical waste disposal to local bodies.

The inadequacies of this system became glaring in the 1990s, particularly in urban areas like Delhi, where pollution levels were soaring. In the landmark case of Dr. B.L. Wadehra vs. Union of India (1996), the Supreme Court lamented that the capital city of Delhi had turned into an “open garbage dump.” The judgment spurred nationwide conversations about waste management, including the critical

Mishandling of biomedical waste still poses risks, particularly in resource-limited settings. Healthcare professionals continue to face occupational hazards. Yet, the progress made is undeniable

issue of biomedical waste. This judicial intervention spurred legislative action. In 1998, Parliament introduced the Biomedical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, marking the first time hospital waste was recognised as hazardous and distinct. The Act empowered the Central and State Pollution Control Boards to monitor and regulate waste disposal, ushering in an era of accountability.

The HIV link

In hindsight, the discovery of HIV and the associated public fear catalysed a global reckoning with healthcare practices. For India, it highlighted the urgent need to protect not just the environment but also the occupational health of its medical workforce. While India charted its own course, it is undeniable that the global response to HIV and the lessons from the U.S. influenced the trajectory of

biomedical waste management reforms.

Biomedical waste management in India has come a long way since the 1990s. The rules have undergone four amendments, with major updates in 2016 and minor revisions in 2020, reflecting the evolving development in waste management technology. Stringent protocols are in place today, ensuring that hospital waste is segregated, treated, and disposed of responsibly.

However, challenges remain. Mishandling of biomedical waste still poses risks, particularly in rural and resource-limited settings. Healthcare professionals continue to face occupational hazards, and gaps in compliance persist. Yet, the progress made is undeniable.

The story of biomedical waste management reminds us that progress often emerges from the depths of crisis. The stigma, fear, and tragedy surrounding HIV/AIDS indirectly gave rise to a cleaner, safer healthcare environment. In the words of Winston Churchill, “Never let a good crisis go to waste”, and so was the HIV crisis.

(Dr. C. Aravinda is an academic and public health physician. The views expressed are personal. aravinda@msj10@hotmail.com)

THE GIST

In 1988, the U.S. passed the Medical Waste Tracking Act, introducing stringent guidelines for medical waste disposal

In 1986, India took its first major step toward environmental protection by enacting the Environmental Protection Act. Coincidentally, 1986 was the year in which the HIV case in India was identified

In 1998, Parliament introduced the Biomedical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, marking the first time hospital waste was recognised as hazardous and distinct. The Act empowered the Central and State Pollution Control Boards to monitor and regulate waste disposal

The “Syringe Tide” Incident (1987)

- ➡ In August 1987, the beaches of the United States were struck by an alarming phenomenon known as the “Syringe Tide.”
- ➡ Used syringes, blood vials, and body tissues began washing up on the beaches, creating a public health scare and widespread panic, especially with children playing with syringes.
- ➡ At the time, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was worsening, and there was widespread fear and stigma surrounding the virus, which further amplified public anxiety about medical waste and its potential health risks.

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Public Reaction and Economic Impact

- The presence of syringes and other medical waste on beaches led to public outrage, influencing both tourism and the local economy.
- Tourism losses were estimated at \$7.7 billion due to deserted beaches.
- The U.S. government, under the Reagan administration, was pushed to act. In 1988, the Medical Waste Tracking Act was passed, marking the first formal regulation of hospital waste as hazardous.
- The Act required strict guidelines for the handling, transporting, and disposal of medical waste, setting a precedent for future public health and environmental safety regulations.

India's Response to Biomedical Waste Management

- In 1986, India enacted the Environmental Protection Act, and the first HIV case was identified in India. However, biomedical waste was not recognized as hazardous at that time.
- The Hazardous Waste (Management and Handling) Rules of 1989 did not address biomedical waste, leaving its disposal to local bodies, which proved ineffective, particularly in urban areas like Delhi.
- In 1996, the Supreme Court's judgment in the Dr. B.L. Wadehra case highlighted the growing pollution crisis in Delhi, pushing the government to take action.

Legislative Action and Reforms in India

- In 1998, India introduced the Biomedical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, officially recognizing hospital waste as hazardous and establishing regulatory oversight through the Pollution Control Boards.
- Over time, the rules were amended, with major updates in 2016 and minor revisions in 2020, ensuring more stringent protocols for waste segregation, treatment, and disposal.

The HIV Link and Its Impact

- The global HIV/AIDS crisis catalyzed a reevaluation of healthcare practices, particularly regarding the safe handling of medical waste.
- India's response to biomedical waste management, though delayed, was influenced by the global context of HIV/AIDS, which highlighted the need for safer, more responsible healthcare practices.

Ongoing Challenges

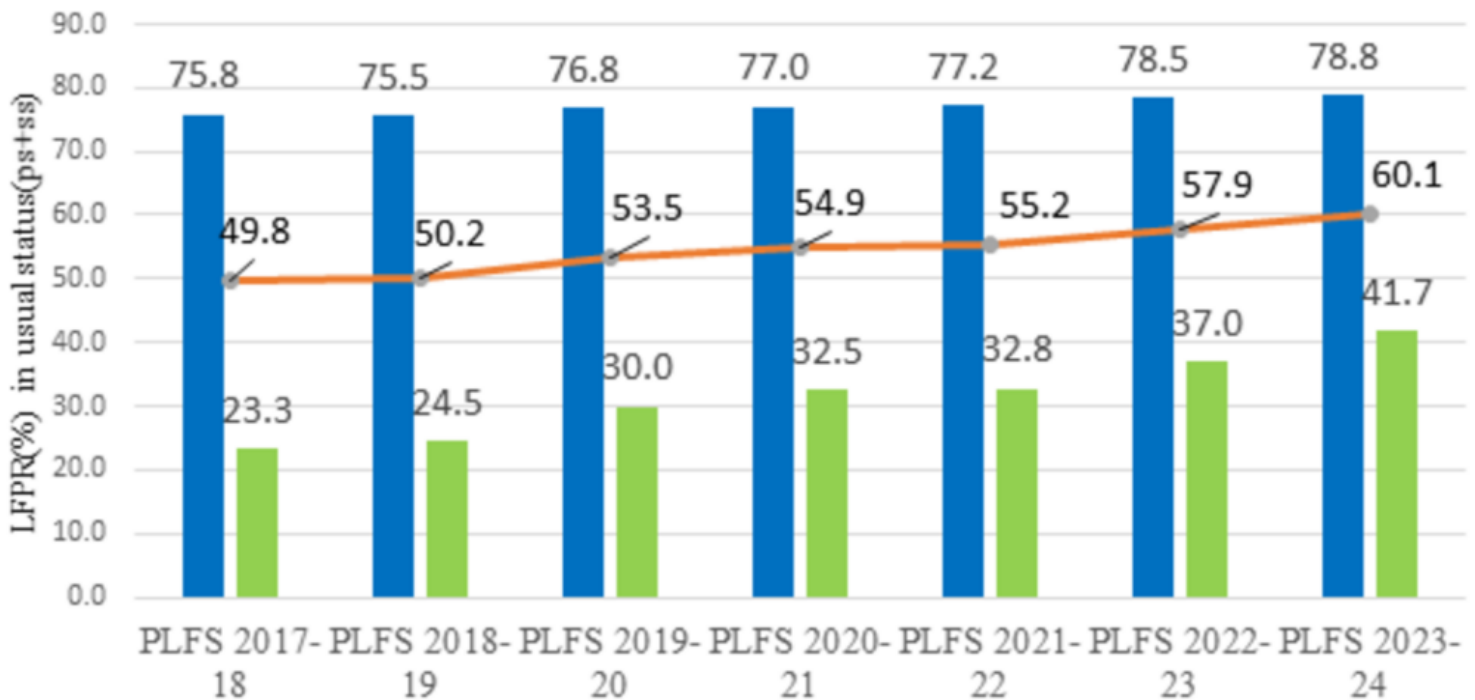
- Despite significant progress, challenges remain in rural and resource-limited areas, where mishandling of biomedical waste continues to pose risks.
- Healthcare workers still face occupational hazards, and gaps in compliance persist, indicating the need for continued efforts to improve biomedical waste management in India.

PIB : GS 2 : Social Justice : Significant Increase in women participation in workforce

The article discusses the significant rise in women's participation in the labor force in India, as indicated by the increasing Worker Population Ratio (WPR) and Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR).

- It highlights various government initiatives aimed at boosting female employment and employability.

LFPR(%) in usual status (ps+ss) for persons of age 15 years and above from PLFS



Analysis of the news:

Worker Population Ratio (WPR) & Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR):

- Data from the Annual PLFS Reports (2017-24) shows increasing female participation in the workforce.
- WPR for women rose from 22.0% in 2017-18 to 40.3% in 2023-24.
- LFPR increased from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 41.7% in 2023-24.

Government Initiatives:

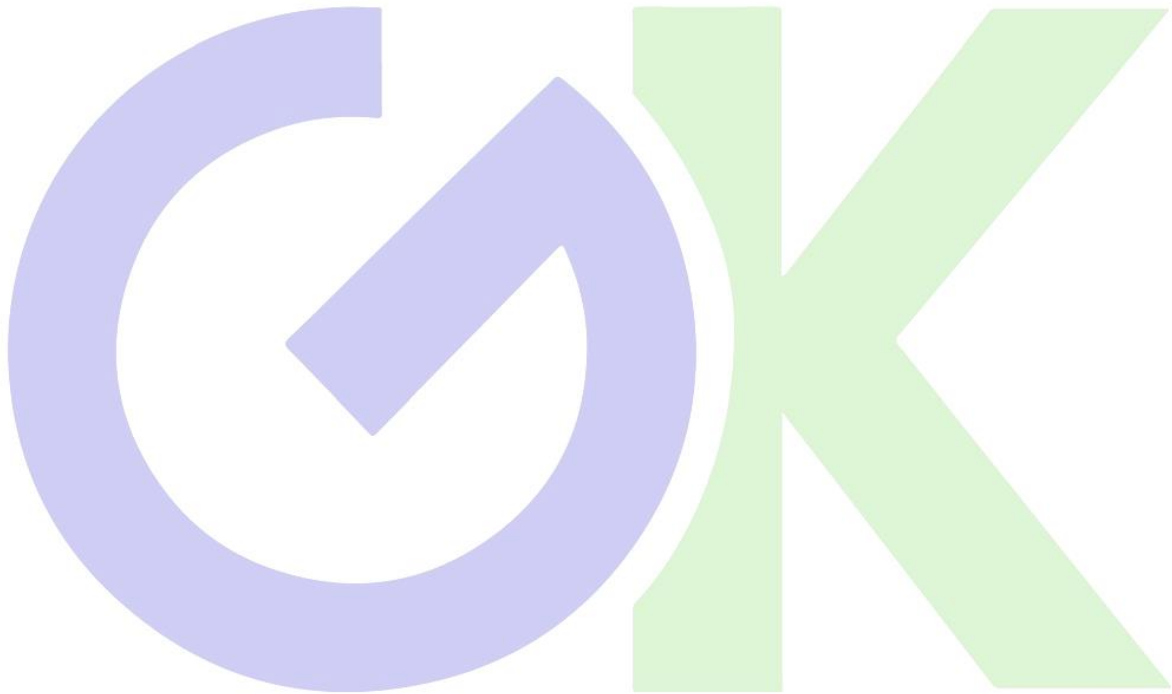
- Prioritizing employment generation and improving employability for women.
- Labour laws include provisions like paid maternity leave, equal wages, and flexible working hours for women.
- Key schemes: Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Stand-UP India, MGNREGS, DDU-GKY, Startup India, SERB-POWER, among others.
- Employment training provided through women-focused vocational institutes.

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➔ **Budget 2024-25:**

- Rs. 2 lakh crore outlay for employment, skilling, and other opportunities for 4.1 crore youth over 5 years.
- Establishment of working women hostels and creches to facilitate workforce participation.



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In News : **SAREX-24**

The 11th edition of Indian Coast Guard's National Maritime Search and Rescue Exercise & Workshop (SAREX-24) will be in Kochi, Kerala on November 28-29, 2024.



About SAREX-24:

- It is conducted under the aegis of National Maritime Search and Rescue Board.
- The theme of the exercise is 'Enhancing Search and Rescue capabilities through Regional collaboration'.
- It signifies ICG's commitment to provide succor during large-scale contingencies regardless of location, nationality or circumstances in the Indian Search & Rescue Region and beyond.
- This event will feature various programmes, including table-top exercise, workshop & seminars involving participation of senior officials from government agencies, Ministries & Armed Forces, various stakeholders and foreign delegates.
- The sea exercise involving two large scale contingencies will be carried out off the Kochi coast with participation of ships & aircraft of ICG, Navy, Indian Air Force, Passenger Vessel & Tug from Cochin Port Authority and boats from the Customs.
- The response matrix in the sea exercise will involve various methods to evacuate distressed passengers, wherein the advent of new-age technology using satellite-aided distress beacons, drones to deploy a life buoy, air droppable life rafts, operation of remote controlled life buoy will be demonstrated.

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Daily News Analysis

- The exercise is designed not only to evaluate efficiency of operations and coordination with national stakeholders, but also to aptly focus on cooperative engagements with the littorals and friendly countries.



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Do new schemes ahead of elections amount to 'voter bribes'?



Reetika Kherra

a development economist working on social policy in India and a professor of economics at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi



Vikas Rawal

Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University

PARLEY

In November 23, the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party-led Mahayuti alliance won a landslide victory in Maharashtra's State elections. Among several reasons cited for this victory are the implementation of the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana – a direct benefit transfer programme introduced by the Maharashtra government in July 2024 – four months ahead of the polls. The scheme, much like its Madhya Pradesh counterpart, which was also introduced ahead of the Assembly elections there, aims to provide monthly financial assistance of ₹1,500 to poor women between the ages of 21 and 65 whose incomes are less than ₹2.5 lakh annually. Critics say such schemes amount to bribing voters and giving the incumbent government an unfair advantage. To discuss this, **Kunal Shankar** spoke to Reetika Kherra and Vikas Rawal. Edited excerpts:

Your initial thoughts.

Vikas Rawal: I think implementing social welfare programmes in response to popular needs, reflected through the political processes is necessary. That said, if this happens just before elections, if it is accompanied by weakening systems of evaluation, independent regulation and so on... And if it does not result in establishing a robust system of social welfare and merely ends in providing election soaps, then there is a problem.

Reetika Kherra: Not so long ago in the southern States, parties promised mixer-grinders. At that time too, the media labelled these manifesto promises as freebies. I think of cash transfers as a modern avatar of those electoral promises. Labelling them as bribes would be wrong, just as it was wrong to label electoral promises as freebies. I do have reservations about certain cash transfers, though I support other kinds of cash transfers, like old age pensions and maternity benefits. What you're probably getting at is that these promises reflect the flaw in our democracy. The only time that ordinary people get a hearing and are remembered by political parties is during elections and it is a pity that electoral promises are reduced to small, visible and short-term gains such as these cash transfers. But for those who are on the margins and largely ignored by the powers that be, they'll just take what they get right?

There's a related question - how much do such promises – mixer-grinder or cash transfers, actually influence voter behaviour? I don't know



At a 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin' scheme event, in Solapur, Maharashtra. File PTI

the answer to that, but as a voter, what would stop me from taking what is due to me through such interventions and yet apply my mind independently to what is a pressing issue for the country and decide who to vote for?

Are DBTs then a failure of the government's attempt to provide better livelihoods, and substitute it with one-time cash transfer schemes?

R.K.: The question arises, do these cash transfers displace spending on health and education? From the point of view of the women who get these cash transfers, they have welcomed it, because they are often vulnerable. But what are cash transfers taking away from, if anything? Fiscally, that's one important question. I was looking at the objectives for the cash transfers to women – what are they trying to achieve? There are three objectives which I've come across – one is they (governments) say economic independence for women, another to improve their health and nutrition. And the third, especially in Tamil Nadu, that it was compensation for all the unpaid domestic work. Each of these raises questions. Take economic independence. Isn't that better achieved by making employment opportunities available to them? Why is the central government starving MNREGA (the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) of funds? It would give women much more money. In Tamil Nadu for instance, they're getting ₹12,000 a year (as part of the State's cash transfer scheme). If women were to get 100 days of MNREGA employment, they would get ₹29,000 a year - more than double what they get through these cash transfers. I talked to a woman recently in Chengalpattu and she absolutely prefers employment over cash transfers. The second objective of health and



As far as the promises of cash are concerned, the media should reflect on its tendency to term them as bribes or freebies. That doesn't mean these cash transfers are without any concerns. The main issue to me is – are cash transfers taking away from welfare spending of other kinds?

REETIKA KHERA

nutrition can also be achieved much better through providing eggs in anganwadis and midday meals. In many North Indian States children are not getting nutritious food. The third objective is compensation for unpaid domestic work: are you then saying that if women are supposed to be doing domestic work only, then they should just be given some money for it? Wouldn't it be much better to think harder about how to change gender norms? So, the problem with these cash promises is not that it is a "bribe", but rather what are they trying to achieve? Where do they fit into our conception of a welfare state?

MNREGA was largely credited for the return of the UPA alliance to power for the second term. Could this question then be twisted to say that even the 100-day job scheme amounted to a bribe? Or is it reducing the larger conception of welfare itself as being opportunistic?

V.R.: I think we both have agreed that at least it's not correct to term these as bribes. You have created such a robust framework with MNREGA, that even a government that's completely ideologically opposed to it has not been able to undo it. It has been forced to acknowledge its importance and to carry forward the programme. The point is that in India, social welfare spending is just too little.

R.K.: As far as the promises of cash are concerned, the media should reflect on its tendency to term them as bribes or freebies. That doesn't mean these cash transfers are without any concerns. The main issue to me is – are cash transfers taking away from welfare spending of other kinds? To give you an example - Karnataka's cash transfer budget for this financial year is ₹28,000 crore – that's twice as much as the Union's budget on mid-day meals. Like I said, I have reservations about some cash transfers while I support others. The national Food Security Act, for instance, which is taking a sort-of a life cycle approach: maternity benefits for pregnant and lactating women, anganwadis

for children under 6, midday meals for school going children. And then there's the PDS. Now the maternity benefits is a cash transfer programme – it's ₹6,000 through the Pradhan Mantri Mathrubhumi Dhana Yojana. That is fixing a big gap in our welfare architecture. We had the maternity benefits for women in the organised sector since 1961. But most women work in the unorganised sector and their right to maternity benefits was not recognised until this 2013 Food Security Act. I support the cash transfer because women get it at a very vulnerable time of their life.

V.R.: If you look at the implementation of welfare schemes since the 1980s, we had various systems of independent evaluation. The Planning Commission used to have an evaluation wing. The National Sample Survey would have survey questions that one could use to assess. CAG would do performance audits of different schemes. All these have been undermined now. We have a situation where evaluation of government programmes has been systematically undermined, and that's a very serious problem, particularly during these kinds of cash transfers. You have evidence to suggest there may be massive corruption in some of these schemes. Historically, schemes that have involved provisioning of goods and services, employment, health facilities, schooling, are where leakages have been less.

R.K.: I have a slightly different view. Corruption and targeting were two big issues with earlier interventions. Corruption was a serious issue with the PDS. It has been an issue with MNREGA. And it remains an issue with the new cash transfers. We must be vigilant no matter which scheme, what form the transfer takes. In the case of cash transfers, it has created a whole army of middle-men through whom these so-called "direct" benefits are transferred. They're actually not direct at all, because in many rural areas there is no proper banking network. And so you have banking correspondents who people have to go and withdraw their money from. These business correspondents are just like the earlier middle-men, who cheated on cement and bricks and wages. On targeting, with MNREGA, the attraction was, those who were not getting minimum wage work would show up. But in these cash transfers, there aren't such robust self-targeting mechanisms...



To listen to the full interview Scan the code or go to the link www.thehindu.com

GS Paper 02 : Governance

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes are often criticized as electoral inducements but appreciated for providing immediate relief to marginalized groups. Discuss the implications of such schemes on fiscal priorities, democratic processes, and long-term welfare policies. (250 Words /15 marks)

Context :

- The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance secured a landslide victory in Maharashtra's state elections on November 23, partly attributed to the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana.
- This scheme provides a monthly direct benefit transfer (DBT) of ₹1,500 to women aged 21-65 with annual incomes below ₹2.5 lakh, introduced four months before the elections.
- Critics argue such schemes may be seen as voter inducements, raising concerns about fairness in electoral processes.

Merits and Timing of Welfare Programmes

- Welfare programmes based on political processes reflect popular needs and are essential for social equity.
- However, their implementation shortly before elections raises concerns about their genuine intent and long-term impact on social welfare systems.
- If such schemes do not establish robust welfare frameworks, they risk being labeled as temporary electoral incentives.

Cash Transfers as Modern Electoral Promises

- Cash transfers are viewed as modern versions of past electoral promises, like providing household goods in southern states.
- These transfers reflect democratic flaws, as citizens often gain attention from political parties only during elections.
- While cash transfers may be welcomed by vulnerable groups, the long-term impact on democratic decision-making remains questionable.

Role of Cash Transfers in Social Welfare

- The objectives of cash transfers include economic independence for women, improved health and nutrition, and compensation for unpaid domestic work.
- Critics argue that these objectives could be better achieved through alternative measures:
 - **Economic Independence:** Employment schemes like MNREGA offer higher earnings and empowerment.
 - **Health and Nutrition:** Providing nutritious meals in schools and anganwadis could achieve better outcomes.
 - **Domestic Work Compensation:** Transforming gender norms is more impactful than monetary compensation for domestic responsibilities.

Comparison with Other Welfare Measures

- Large-scale employment schemes like MNREGA are credited with creating durable welfare frameworks, unlike cash transfers, which may lack long-term stability.
- Welfare schemes should be evaluated for their ability to address structural issues rather than being opportunistic interventions.

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Challenges of Cash Transfers

- Fiscal Impact: Cash transfers can divert funds from essential welfare programs such as health and education.
- For instance, Karnataka's cash transfer budget exceeds twice the Union budget for mid-day meals.

Implementation Issues:

- Corruption and inefficiencies in cash disbursement mechanisms.
- Lack of robust banking infrastructure, leading to reliance on intermediaries who replicate earlier forms of exploitation.
- Targeting Mechanisms: Unlike employment schemes, cash transfers lack robust self-targeting mechanisms, increasing risks of misallocation.

Concerns over Evaluation Mechanisms

- Independent evaluations of welfare schemes have been weakened over time, affecting transparency and accountability.
- Mechanisms like performance audits, national surveys, and robust data analysis, crucial for identifying inefficiencies and corruption, need to be strengthened.

Conclusion

- While cash transfer schemes provide immediate relief to vulnerable groups, their design and implementation raise significant concerns about their impact on welfare spending, targeting efficiency, and sustainability.
- Long-term welfare frameworks should focus on systemic solutions such as employment creation, education, and health infrastructure, rather than short-term cash incentives.