

*There's something wonderful about entertaining people on vacation. Everyone is there to have a good time.*  
Jennifer Hudson

## The NRC exercise in Assam

The Assam Government is now preparing a National Register of Citizens living in the State, sixty-seven years after the first NRC was done. The Bengalis living in Assam, Hindus as well as Muslims, fear that it is a clever ploy to deny citizenship to many of them. Some glaring 'inaccuracies' suggest that the fear is not without basis. For example, the name of Maulana Badruddin Ajmal, president of the All India United Democratic Front, a party recognized by the Election Commission of India, is missing from the NRC, while the name of a proclaimed rebel and a fugitive from law, Paresh Barua of the anti-talk faction of the ULFA, is recorded as a citizen. Scores of cases have come to notice in which some members of the same family have been recorded as Indian citizens while some others have not been. Those left out will be declared illegal immigrants and deported. Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has, however, assured that all 'genuine citizens' whose names have been omitted, will have nothing to fear. Their names will be included. But his assurance has failed to carry conviction.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has already issued a warning that if the NRC is a camouflage exercise to drive out Bengalis from Assam, it will be resisted. There is something curious and contradictory about the present exercise which formally ended on December 31 of the last year. Going against the provision of the Assam Accord of 1985, the Centre has decided to grant citizenship to all those Bengali Hindus who have migrated from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971, the date on which Bangladesh declared independence from Pakistan. Giving citizenship to those who are to be considered illegal immigrants according to the Assam Accord but denying citizenship to those who have been resident in Assam from long before 25.3.1971 and whose citizenship cannot be doubted is a mystery that the Centre alone can explain.

The BJP has all along accused the Congress of indulging in 'vote bank politics' by allowing illegal immigrants from Bangladesh to settle in Assam and giving them citizenship. Today, the BJP which is ruling both the Centre and Assam is doing the same vote bank politics by recognizing illegal Hindu immigrants as Indian citizens. The result is that the Assamese-speaking people of the Brahmaputra Valley are apprehending that they may be eventually outnumbered by the immigrant Bengalis. This fear is likely to revive the traditional conflict between the Assamese and the Bengalis which became a thing of the past. The Centre is, indeed, playing with fire.

# Chouhan's Yatra and hopes

## REFLEX ACTION

L S Herdenia

Year 2017 was a highly stormy year both for the government and the people of Madhya Pradesh. Unprecedented happenings took place during the year. Most important was farmers' agitation. The agitation was so violent that the police had to kill about six agitators when the situation went out of control. The angry farmers and their supporters destroyed public property including buses, vehicles etc. In a bid to defuse the crisis, the chief Minister announced help of Rs. One crore each to the families of deceased.

However the agitation continued in some other parts of the state. Meanwhile state government announced several measures to satisfy farmers including purchases of pulses, onions and wheat on war footing. Stocks purchased were so huge that the government did not have space to store them. The result was that several thousand tonnes of pulse and onions were decomposed and had to be thrown in forest and other isolated places. Still farmers resorted to agitation at some or other places. Though Chief Minister announced several pro farmer measures but still he could not formulate policy to keep them fully happy. Since elections are due at the end of this year it is very crucial for the ruling BJP to satisfy farmers. As is well known, Shivraj Singh Chouhan completed 12 years of remaining in power this year. It was a record itself. Obviously he wants to have another term in the coming election.

Whether he will be able to do this, future will alone tell. For this he has to take several other steps. For example, not only he has to improve his relations with administration but he has also to ensure that they work hard for implementing pro-people policies and decisions. CM is not satisfied with the performance of bureaucracy. He has given expression to his anger many times by holding out the threat that he would not hesitate in publicly hanging those officers who failed to perform to his satisfactions. Often people's representatives including members of parliament, MLAs, office bearers of elected bodies like corporation and panchayat are heard complaining about cooperative non-comparative and arrogant behaviour of officers and

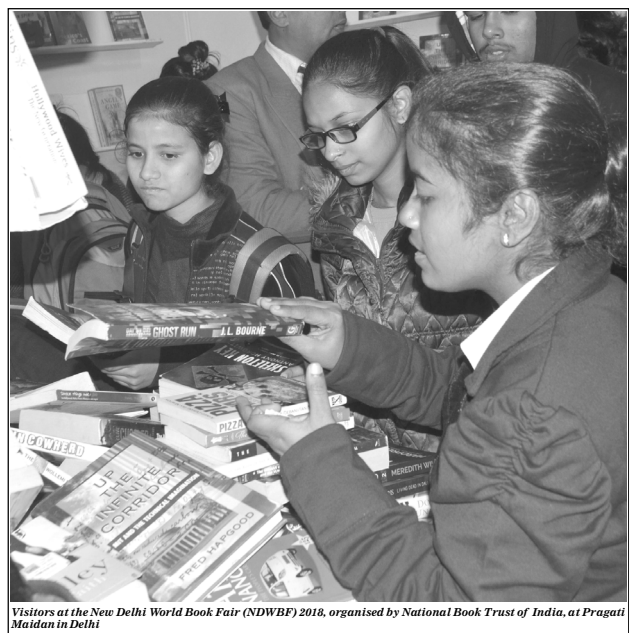
employees. At present the state is busy with Ekamta Yatra. In honour of Adi Shankaracharya to honour his contributions for the revival of Hindu faith. In this activity also the state machinery is totally involved. People are questioning on religious activities are being organised with the government expenditure. Before that huge funds were also spent on holding Simhashtha. Whatever may be the cost, the chief minister will continue to organise such activities.

In a message to the people Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the year 2017 has departed. Many sweet memories stay on with us. We have had 2017 a memorable year, which witnessed a host of radical initiatives and historical achievements. Let us be ready to welcome 2018 with these lovely memories, he said. According to the Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh is advancing faster in every sector. The people deserve all the credit. They are amazingly enterprising and have all the capability to take enduring pains in the interest of the State. The achievements of 2017 clearly underline the fact that MP's spirited people are full of confidence and have unshakable determination. With the creative energies and positive thinking of the people, Madhya Pradesh has scored new records in development sector. This will continue in 2018. Chauhan said People are expected to enthusiastically participate in governance for desired results. It is a matter of great satisfaction that they have discharged their duties and responsibilities tirelessly. I find that the people of Madhya Pradesh deserve the credit for unprecedented development in the state. Their role is greater than that of the government. I hold that every task remains incomplete without people's cooperation and

support. I regard them as experts on many subjects and have always respected their wisdom, he said. "Last year, we had many challenging moments but they were chased away. Thanks to the cooperation and support of the community. Many challenges have been addressed permanently. Innovative Price Deficit Payment Scheme for poor farmers is a shining example of this. Now, farmers will no longer suffer losses even if prices of crops fall.

"Similarly, the concern of our talented students about educational expenses has been taken care of. Their worries are permanently over. They have to simply concentrate on study and score good marks. The government will take care of their education. The examinations are not far off. I would like to urge my dear students to give a New Year gift to your parents by securing good marks", the CM mentioned. After Narmada Seva Yatra, people's faith has been vigorously manifested in the ongoing 'Ekamta Yatra', which began in Ujjain and will culminate on January 22 at Omkareshwar. People are acquainting themselves with the legacy of Adi Shankaracharya, who brought about India's cultural integration. A huge 108-ft-tall statue of Adi Shankaracharya will be installed at Omkareshwar as a mark of tribute from the people of Madhya Pradesh. Ekamta Yatra is a journey that aims at spiritual awakening of the masses.

Chauhan believes that spiritual progress along with development is equally important. This changes attitude towards governance. It drives away attention from corrupt practices. Spiritual orientation deepens faith in honest means and results in and develops a healthy mindset. That's why he has taken some initiatives like Tirtha Darshan Yojna, Narmada Seva Yatra, Ekamta Yatra, which are going to enrich spiritual understanding. The integration of government, society and spirituality is a necessary dimension of good governance, he feels. CM's supporters say that the chief minister is sure to get political capital out of these yatra and he will be able to influence voters in the next assembly elections later this year. (IPA)



Visitors at the New Delhi World Book Fair (NDWBF) 2018, organised by National Book Trust of India, at Pragati Maidan in Delhi

# Jobs policy must focus on quality

## FOCUS

Nantoo Banerjee

It is good to know that the government is working on a first ever national employment policy that will address the crucial issue of jobs creation in the country. The policy is intended to outline a comprehensive road map with focus on creation of quality jobs across sectors through economic, social and labour policy interventions.

It may be announced in the upcoming budget session though it may take several months before the final document is ready. The task is, by no means, easy. The existing economic environment and job market situation are quite complex. Manufacturing, a universal source of stable employment, is playing a second fiddle to the services sector. The government's 'Make-in-India' programme is yet to make an appreciable breakthrough. Imports of low-technology products and components are flooding the market. Job seekers are increasingly facing the curse of underemployment, part-time and contract assignments and low remuneration. As it is, their future looks uncertain. High unemployment rates generally benefit employers to freely fix employment terms based on the demand-supply situation.

Hopefully, those in the government are fully aware of the rising trend of underemployment where workers' jobs don't use all their skills, education, or availability to work. There is as

much a problem of visible underemployment as disguised unemployment. Going by the routine definition, under visible underemployment, employees work fewer hours than is typical in their field.

They are willing and able to work more hours, but cannot get full-time employment. They often work two or three part-time jobs, just to make ends meet. In the case of invisible underemployment, workers are in full-time jobs that don't use all their skills and qualifications. Unfortunately the latter is becoming increasingly common for want of jobs suitable to one's education and skills. This type of underemployment is difficult to measure. It requires extensive surveying that compares workers' skills, education versus job requirements. Workers have little choice to find jobs that will utilise their skills. Underemployment has a more adverse effect on those with college or post-graduate degrees in technical or general education.

Frequent media reports show how overqualified people have been looking for jobs even in Class IV category under state and central governments. After the new Pay Commission awards, more secured government jobs, which now carry somewhat decent remuneration across categories, are being increasingly preferred by job seekers. Recently, huge job losses of engineers and skilled

workers in IT, telecom, steel, engineering and mining, mainly in the private sector, are posing a new challenge to India's growing unemployment market. Overseas job visa restrictions, mergers and amalgamations in the telecom, steel, banking and other sectors, bankruptcy proceedings and depression in certain industries are having a major impact on industries in multiple sectors. The telecom industry alone lost a quarter of their employees in just last two or three months. It had undergone layoffs due to various reasons such as company mergers, shut-downs and fierce competition.

This instability in the market has affected startups. According to Amit Jain, director, Mangalbhavan.in, "it is not that the people are lacking in talent or are not capable of doing anything, but due to being surrounded by negative energy, their success is being hindered. In October, most of the calls we received for job consultation and counselling are from the people of Telecom sector. Out of all job counselling related calls, the ratio of calls from telecom sector increased to 45

percent from an earlier 20 percent in the past couple of months." This insecurity and hesitation are certain to increase over the coming months as the industry norms are changing rapidly and competition is getting fiercer by day. In order to save on the expenses, companies naturally get rid of employees, who account for nearly five per cent of the operational costs in the telecom sector.

Under the circumstances, the government's hands seem to be tied. The proposed national employment policy will require a thorough research not only on how to create new jobs for entrants, but also on retraining job losers to find fresh employment elsewhere. It must find ways to offer financial sustainability to both job losers and new job seekers. It must be able to financially support those after retirement. The present minimum pension for retired industrial workers, above 60 years of age, is ridiculously low, only Rs.1,000 per month. While government pensions are dearness allowance linked, industrial workers get only a fixed pension. The cost of social security and survival concerns of industrial

workers will have to be borne by the entire society and not by their employers alone. The fast growth of the retail sector and e-commerce has made the employment scene highly complex and uncertain for employees.

According to the latest joint report by FICCI-NASSCOM and EY, nearly 25 per cent of the workforce in the retail sector would be deployed in jobs that have radically changed skill set requirements. Most industry experts believe that creation of highly optimised supply chains would drive growth in retail in the next five years. "New business models such as e-commerce and mobile based e-retailing are increasingly becoming popular in India across tier I, II and III cities. The impact of this growth is already visible on the job market," says Anurag Falik of EY.

Understandably, a multi-pronged employment policy will include incentives for employers to create more jobs, reforms to attract enterprises and help for medium and small scale industries, which are major job providers. The policy is expected to take up the twin issues of providing quality jobs to over 10 million youth being added to the country's workforce every year and ensuring that more of these are created in the formal sector. As of now, barely 10 per cent of the country's 400 million workforce is in the organised sector. (IPA)

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  - Female swan
  - Come forth
- DOWN
- Lays bare
  - Clear to see
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