

A nation is a society united by delusions about its ancestry and by common hatred of its neighbors
William Ralph Inge

Controlling private educational institutions

Health and education have become two highly profitable commodities in a 'globalized' world. Just as private hospitals are more interested in extorting money from the patients or their relations in every possible way, fair or foul, than helping the patient recover quickly, so are the private schools or colleges where the student and his relations are fleeced in various ways. Like donations, capitation fees, uniform, etc. Just as the private hospitals and nursing homes raise their charges arbitrarily without a thought to the patient or his family, so do the private educational institutions raise fees on one pretext or another, whatever the quality or standard of education they impart.

Recently, harassed guardians of several schools which had arbitrarily hiked fees had resorted to road blockade at many places in the State to register their protest against the school authorities. In one school in south Kolkata the school authorities locked up the classrooms, forcing the teachers and students to conduct classes sitting on the floor. It is high time that the Government stepped in and put a rein on hiking of fees at the drop of a hat. Just as in hospitals the quality of treatment needs to be kept under a strict watch so as to ensure that the charges made are commensurate with the quality of treatment, so also charges – under any head and on any pretext – and the quality of education being given in private educational institutions need to be monitored. In fact, the quality of education the students are getting is a matter of concern.

There has been a mushroom growth of private engineering colleges. They charge exorbitant fees but most of them do not have well-equipped laboratories or workshops. As a result, the students do not get practical training which is an essential part of their education. Instances can be multiplied. Some measures need to be taken to ensure that the students who pass from these colleges have requisite theoretical and practical knowledge when they enter service. It is necessary to ensure that the owners of private schools and colleges do not fleece their students or their guardians. Recently, the State Government passed the Clinical Establishment Act. A law on similar lines should be enacted for private educational institutions. Yet another danger is the saffronization of education. West Bengal will not yet face this challenge but in future it may have to. Hopefully the citizenry of West Bengal will be able to preserve and protect the secular character and content of education.

Signs of discontent in MP ministry

REFLEX ACTION

L.S. Herdenia

Two major accidents killing about two dozen persons and chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's outbursts against his own ministers and senior civil servants left many questions unanswered. Chouhan known for his cool and balanced behaviour, sudden lost temper and publicly pulled his ministerial colleagues for their absence from important party meetings.

During his speech at the concluding session of the BJP state executive committee meeting at Mohakheda in Dhar district on April 22, the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan came down heavily on the ministers who gave the meeting a skip. Chouhan said that the ministers who did not attend the meeting without prior information should resign from the executive body. "Big goodbye to ministers who did not come", he said, turning to the state party chief Nandkumar Singh Chouhan. Chouhan said that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi can spend two days at the national executive meeting but our ministers do not have time for party meetings. He said that even the ministers who came, left midway. Among ministers Gopal Bhargava, Omprakash Dhurve, Vijay Shah, Surendra Patwa, Lalita Yadav and Suryaprakash Meena were absent from the meeting. Jayant Mallaiya, Bhupendra Singh and Jabban Singh Pawaya had informed the organisation that they won't be attending the meeting.

Some ministers left Dhar after attending the first day's proceedings. Sources said that organisational general secretary Suhas Bhagat had complained to the chief minister about the absence of the ministers after which his anger burst into open. Prior to his outburst against his senior party colleagues, he also pulled up senior civil servant over their style of functioning and also their manner of behaviour with common men and in particular with people's representative. Civil servants should come out from colonial mindset. The civil services were established by the British government for their own benefits; now the services had been turned into public welfare services, said CM

Shivraj Singh Chouhan while addressing officers at a Civil Service Day event on April 20. He also raised that some officers and departments did not have concern to review the programmes. "The officer issues the letter and sends the information that the recommendations are implemented, but in real case the benefits do not reach the beneficiaries," the CM complained.

He asked the departments to work in coordination, not as two enemy countries because all the work was done for the benefit of 7.50 crore people of the state. He asked the civil servants to take humanitarian decisions, not use bookish knowledge. Many interpretations are being given to the outbursts against ruling party leaders and civil servants. Considerable significance is being attached to chief minister's angry reactions. Sources close to the Chief Minister pointed out that it has been observed that ministers generally ignore chief minister's directions. They rarely visit district of their charge, they do not spend time in rural areas despite CM's advice, follow up action regarding policy decisions is also rare. The same is the state of affairs with civil servants. As it is Madhya Pradesh will go to polls next year. It appears that chief minister is keen that several pro-people decisions should be implemented properly. But this can be done only when minister and civil servants work hard and take their assignments sincerely. While chief minister's angry reactions shook the political and administrative circles, two gruesome accidents have left many questions unanswered. One such accident took place in Indore. This started a second blaze that spread rapidly across shops and gripped nearly the entire lane. "The blast

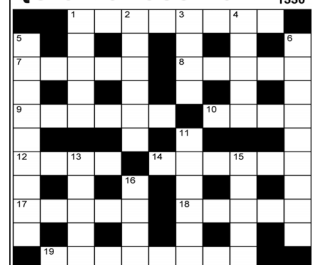
was so powerful that one person from the cracker shop was thrown outside. He sustained critical burns and presumably died in hospital," said Gopal Yadav, a tailor and eyewitness. A quick flight back by shopkeepers and residents, and the recent innovation of firemen on motorcycles prevented a bigger disaster. In another accident thirteen people, including five women, were burnt alive and four critically injured after a barrel of kerosene exploded in a cramped ration shop in Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh on April 21 evening. Villagers claim the death toll is 18. Firemen are literally raking through the pile of burnt out debris to check for bodies. First responders reported bodies burnt to a cinder, some hurled outside the shop. This comes just two days after a massive explosion in a firecracker shop killing seven people in Indore. The Prime Minister's office offered condolences, tweeting: "I pray that those who are injured due to the fire in Chhindwara recover quickly. State government is closely monitoring the situation." Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced a compensation of Rs 4 lakh to the kin of those killed. I pray to the almighty to grant peace to those who lost life and with speedy recovery for the injured...this incident is painful and disconcerting," tweeted Chouhan. April 21 blast took place in Bargi village, around 82km from the district headquarters and 300km southeast of Bhopal. More than 50 people from nine villages had queued up at Bargi's fair price shop to collect kerosene and other food items. Even in late afternoon, it was unbearably hot and there people queued into the shop to get out of the sun. Around 4.55pm, an explosion tore through the crowd, killing 10 of them instantly. The blast was so powerful that it flung many of those waiting outside off their feet.

The doorway was instantly engulfed in flames, cutting off the only escape route. The impact of the blast and the fire brought down walls on three sides but no one could get out because the entire room turned into a fireball, say witnesses. The blasts have become common in Madhya Pradesh these days. (IPA)



Members of the Right to Food and Work Campaign-West Bengal organised a march for a deputation to the Food and Supplies Department on Thursday-Arjith Ganگوی

QUICK CROSSWORD 1550



- Across**
 1. Forebear (8)
 7. Female relation (5)
 8. Spanish friend (5)
 9. Undamaged, whole (6)
 10. Army vehicle (4)
 12. Bird of prey (4)
 14. Gregarious (6)
 17. Banished person (5)
 18. Embarrassing blunder (5)
 19. News gatherer (8)
- Down**
 1. Warn of problem, danger (5)
 2. Grasp tightly (6)
 3. Joint line (4)
 4. Oily fruit (5)
 5. In the glare (anag) (9)
 6. Forced (9)
 11. Looked for (6)
 13. During (5)
 15. Deduce (5)
 16. Written note (4)

Previous solution
Across: 1. Wrinkled, 6. Noel, 7. Sendup, 9. Beefy, 11. Merit, 12. Essay, 13. Angel, 16. Kitten, 18. Yam, 19. Crocodile.
Down: 1. Windbreak, 2. Irene, 3. Last, 4. Dungeon, 5. Eru, 8. Fulcrum, 10. Francis, 14. Guard, 15. Once, 17. It.

SUDOKU: 1837

6	1				8			
			3					6
		3	6	8		7		2
		1			5	8	7	9
2	8	9	4				6	
5	8			1	6	4		
4				5				
7					9	2		

Yesterday's Solution 1836

5	4	3	7	1	6	8	2	9
2	7	8	9	3	4	5	6	1
6	9	1	8	5	2	7	3	4
9	5	7	1	2	8	3	4	6
1	8	4	6	9	3	2	7	5
3	2	6	4	7	5	1	9	8
7	1	5	2	4	9	6	8	3
8	3	9	5	6	7	4	1	2
4	6	2	3	8	1	9	5	7

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Disciplining drug cos, docs

FOCUS

Nantoo Banerjee

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bid to bring about a mandatory code on drug marketing practices to ensure doctors prescribe generic drugs rather than high priced branded medicines and make pharmacists follow the rule for the benefit of the common man is a novel one, though not quite a new idea.

Since 1975, after the submission of the Hathi Committee report, government after government tried to discipline the drug industry and its key on ground marketing tool, prescription writing doctors and surgeons, with modest success. Over the years, prices of drugs, especially the patented and new generation medicines, have sky-rocketed. This is despite the existence of the drug price control order (DPCO, 1985 and 2013), the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (1997) controlling the prices of essential drugs and the government's attempt to fix post-manufacturing expenses (PME) for prescription drugs. And all throughout, doctors were constantly induced to prescribe generic medicines to patients with limited success. The drug firms and doctors have remained adamant. Drug companies, with most leading private practitioners firmly behind them, are already questioning the prime minister's announcement that

there could be a law mandating doctors to prescribe medicines with their generic names instead of brand names. The union health ministry asked the medical community to follow a 2016 notification by the Medical Council of India (MCI) mandating doctors to prescribe medicines by generic names. A generic medicine is a bio-equivalent to a branded drug. Incidentally, there is nothing new about the latest MCI mandate. It has been debated over the years and put in cold storage several times. Even if a law is passed on the subject nothing much is expected to change. It will only promote corruption in the lowest and the most important level of unregulated chemists, who will push products that give them maximum margins. Who will vouch shape the quality and efficacy of such generics? The jobs of drug inspectors and test labs will increase many fold. The system will, at best, promote more dishonest inspectors and test labs. The US system of drug prescription is most unlikely to succeed in India, known to be one of the world's epicentres of business corruption, in the absence of the necessary framework. Ask the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which has to regularly conduct inspections and raids on Indian generic drug exporters to that country, including some of the biggest names in the local

pharmaceutical industry. The proposed Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP) may look somewhat perfect on paper, though not truly potent in practice.

What looks good for the USA, boasting one of the world's strongest law enforcement authorities especially when it comes to human life and health, may mean little to India. Almost 80 per cent of prescription drugs sold in the USA are generics, helping patients and hospitals save billions of dollars every year. The FDA has ensured that generic drugs can be trusted to have the same quality as brand name drugs – but at a cheaper price. It is important to know that this is despite the fact that no American wants to skimp on health, even if it means saving money. The FDA approves a generic drug only after it is sure that it is the same as the brand-name product in terms of active ingredient; strength; use and effect (for example as a pill, inhaler, liquid, or injectable); ability to reach the required level in the bloodstream at the right time and to the same

extent; and, finally, testing standards. The government of India, along with state governments, will have to work really hard to change the country's drug industry practices, drug administration system and regulatory mechanism before a new law or executive order such as UCPMP becomes a success to a reasonable extent.

Few will deny the fact that the government has not achieved much since the report of the Hathi Committee (1975) was made public by the then prime minister Indira Gandhi, who came down heavily on foreign drug firms in India such as Pfizer, Glaxo, Abbott, Sandoz, Wyth, Merck, Roche, Bayer, etc., making big money on manufacturing formulations instead of bulk drugs. The Hathi Committee had emphasized the need for India's achievement of self-sufficiency in medicines and of abundant availability at reasonable prices of essential medicines. One may say India has reasonably progressed in manufacturing formulations as well as basic drugs. It has emerged as a major exporter of generics, under the USFDA

hawk eye. The industry has shown a double digit growth over the last three decades.

Hopefully, the prime minister is aware that on December 12, 2014, the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) announced the details of the 'Uniform Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP)', which was to be effective across the country from January 1, 2015. Earlier, a draft UCPMP, inviting stakeholders' comments, was issued on March 19, 2012, under Manmohan Singh-led UPA government. Immediately thereafter, top officials of a number of concerned departments held several discussions on that draft with the constituents of the pharmaceutical industry. Ministry of Health, Medical Council of India (MCI), besides other stakeholders. It would be good if Prime Minister Narendra Modi finds out why no decision on the subject could be taken for the last five years and if intense lobbying by interested constituents was behind the inaction. Such a backgrounder will save the government of any embarrassment on UCPMP's possible failure, resulting in a chaos in the highly public-sensitive health sector and the process of drug administration before the 2019 Lok Sabha election. (IPA)