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It simply can't fail

The Food Security Bill must be amended, write Abhijit V Banerjee, Pranab Bardhan, Ashok Kotwal, Milind Murugkar and Bharat Ramaswami.

INDIA Updated: Feb 28, 2012 21:56 IST

HT Abhijit V Banerjee, Pranab Bardhan, Ashok Kotwal, Milind Murugkar, Bharat Ramaswami
Hindustan Times



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The National Food Security Bill has the potential to make a significant difference to the lives of the poor if properly implemented. However, the Bill in its present form has some easily correctible flaws that could cause huge problems in the future. A couple of simple amendments would greatly simplify the implementation and also allow innovation in the delivery of food subsidy.

First, the proposed framework based on three categories of households — priority, general and excluded — is doomed to create the same sort of problems as BPL targeting. If there is one thing that the experience of the BPL list tells us, it is that the identification of the really poor — priority is what it will be called now — is fraught with problems. Even with the best

intentions it's very hard to determine who is really very poor, and who is merely poor,



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Doing it even moderately well is both difficult and costly. Moreover, as we know well, the best of intentions are not always available — the political system has its own way of favouring some and excluding others, and it is often the poorest and the politically weakest who get marginalised. Finally, it is often said, "programmes for the poor tend to be poor programmes".

Having the political heft of the less poor fully behind the entire programme (and not just behind the piece that applies to them) makes the programme much more likely to have durable political and administrative support.

It's much easier to imagine being able to identify the one, significantly wealthier, excluded category. Why not, therefore, just have two categories: the included and the excluded, and treat all included groups equally? Simple arithmetic shows that in terms of grain the per capita subsidy will go from 7 kg per capita to 5 kg per capita for those who get classified in the 'priority sector' and from 3 kg per capita to 5 kg per capita in the 'general sector' and there will be money left over for providing some support for those in the Antodyaya programmes. It's possible that the government will hesitate for fear that it may be accused of going back on its word for those in the 'priority sector'. However, we believe that the political costs of a return to a poorly functioning and corrupt system after introducing a much heralded new legislation could be much higher. The hopes raised by the tabling of the Bill will turn into disillusionment and resentment.

Second, we believe that the Bill should allow greater flexibility to state governments as long as they stay within the resource limits specified by the central government. Each state must be left free to carry out the public distribution system (PDS) reform as it sees fit. Some states may want to change to cash transfers; others may opt to continue with transfers in kind, or go to something intermediate, such as food stamps. In the present form, it's not clear if a state wishes to try, say, cash transfers, it would be able to do so. As it stands, different sections of the Bill are not compatible with each other. For example, Section 7 on 'PDS Reforms' seems to allow for cash transfers. Yet, the rest of the Bill is written strictly in terms of grain transfers. Most significantly, the obligations of the central government are written only in terms of the amount of grain they must supply to the states. If they then switch to cash transfers, could there not be legal challenges? The obligations of the central government should, therefore, be specified not just in terms of the quantity of food grains but also their 'monetary equivalent'.

This will also ensure that the monetary value of resource transfers doesn't erode with inflation.

The UPA government can take credit for enacting some progressive legislation over the last few years. Their claim to being a pro-poor party is partly based on this record. However, how some of these progressive policies have actually worked in practice has left this claim in tatters. If the UPA wants to be identified as pro-poor in the minds of the multitudes, it can't bank on tokenism alone. The voters will base their judgement on what they experience in their day-to-day lives and not on what is written in a piece of legislation. Even from the perspective of what is political advantageous, it would be a mistake to ignore the suggestions that would

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make the Bill more implementable.

The party bosses as well as the Cabinet should take their time to ponder the obvious flaws in the language of the Bill that could potentially create disasters when it is implemented. They should realise that in the minds of the poor, a continuance of implementation failures would loom as a far greater betrayal than the equalisation of subsidies across two impossible to separate categories.

This Bill will unveil the largest poverty alleviation programme in India. It's the most progressive piece of legislations ever contemplated in India. We simply cannot let it fail.

Abhijit V Banerjee is Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Pranab Bardhan is Professor, University of California, Berkeley; Ashok Kotwal is Professor, University of British Columbia; Milind Murugkar is Policy Analyst, Pragati Abhiyan, Nasik; Bharat Ramaswami is Professor, Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi. The views expressed by the authors are personal.

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Maoists deny Ganapathi surrender reports, call it Centre's conspiracy

The Communist Party of India (Maoist) said Ganapathi had voluntarily taken the decision to quit his post as the party's general secretary two years ago due to advancing age.

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INDIA Updated: Sep 03, 2020 21:04 IST


 Srinivasa Rao Apparasu
 Hindustan Times, Hyderabad


Maoists claimed that reports that its leader Ganpathi will be surrendering are false. (FILE PHOTO)

The central committee of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) on Thursday denied the reports of [surrender of its top leader Muppalla Laxman Rao alias Ganapathi](#) to the Telangana government and described them as “brutal lies”.

In a statement sent to the media, spokesman of Maoist party central committee Abhay alleged that the “Ganapathi surrender” story was a conspiracy planned under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah, central intelligence and state intelligence forces of Telangana and Chhattisgarh.

Abhay said Ganapathi had voluntarily taken the decision to quit his post as the party’s general secretary two years ago due to age and common ailments. “It is a common thing in everybody’s life. It has no relation with this brutal lie (of his surrender to Telangana police),” he said.

He alleged that the Modi government was maliciously propagating the surrender theory of Ganapathi to mislead the people and divert their attention from its failures. “The Modi government with saffron ideology has failed internally and externally on all fronts. In order to build confidence in the corporate forces and foil confidence of people in the Maoist party, the government has prepared this high-tension surrender story,” the Maoist party spokesman said.

He claimed that the home ministry’s strategy of making New India by finishing the Maoist party by 2022 has utterly failed. “Our party and the movement have been growing strong in some states like Telangana and elsewhere. Our central committee is committed to the peoples’ cause and is strong with lot of ideological and political experience,” Abhay claimed and appealed to the people not to believe the Ganapathi surrender theory.

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United Nations: India casts its ballot for UNSC election in General Assembly. India garnered 184 votes out of the 192 ballots cast in the General Assembly to win the election for the non-permanent seat in the powerful Security Council. (PTI)

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India lashes out at Pakistan at the UNSC

India on Thursday accused Pakistan of attempting to politicise the UN Security Council's 1267 sanctions committee procedure after members of the world body rejected Islamabad's call to designate two Indian nationals as terrorists. [Read More](#)

Facebook responds to Congress, calls itself 'non-partisan'

"We are non-partisan & strive to ensure our platforms remain a space where people express themselves freely. We take allegations of bias seriously & denounce hate & bigotry in all forms," Neil Potts, Facebook's Trust and Safety Director, responds to letter from Congress' KC Venugopal. [Read More](#)

Supreme Court to hear opposition states' review petition against holding NEET, JEE exams

Six opposition-ruled states: West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan --approached the top court on August 28 seeking a postponement of the examinations in view of the coronavirus crisis. [Read More](#)

Here's what led to PUBG getting banned in India

The Indian government on Wednesday banned PUBG and 117 other China-linked applications. The move comes weeks after the government banned 47 applications which were mostly clones and variants of 59 apps. [Read More](#)

Former England under-19 captain talks about experiencing racism

English county cricket side Yorkshire said it is in contact with former player and former England under-19 captain Azeem Rafiq who claimed that he was made to feel, as a Muslim, like an 'outsider' during his time at the club. [ReadMore](#)

Here's your review for season-2 of 'The Boys'

Read review for the second season of The Boys. [Read More](#)

Unlock 4.0: Plan your Goa trip for the perfect post quarantine vacation

With Goa finally opening up again for tourists, this might be the perfect opportunity to take a little trip down to the sunshine state and enjoy the various sea-side views. [Read More](#)

Couple's wedding anniversary pictures will make you want to hug your partner

A couple celebrated their anniversary with a photoshoot while wearing the attire they donned on their wedding day, 60 years ago. [Read More](#)

Union Minister's reaction on apps ban by the Centre

Ramdas Athawale welcomed the government's decision to ban 118 more mobile apps. The decision was announced on September 2, days after China's fresh provocation along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh. [Watch Here](#)

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Don't meddle in border dispute with India, China tells US

Chinese embassy spokesperson Ji Rong said China and India have the ability to resolve their border disputes bilaterally and Beijing won't accept countries outside the region meddling which will endanger regional peace and stability.

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 Rezaul H Laskar
Hindustan Times, New Delhi

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China has lashed out at the US after deputy secretary of state Stephen Biegun said Washington will push back against Beijing's aggressive actions, including its "outsized" territorial claims on the border with India. (REUTERS)

China on Thursday criticised what it described as "meddling" by the US in the border standoff with India, saying Beijing and New Delhi have the ability to resolve their disputes bilaterally.

Chinese embassy spokesperson Ji Rong was responding to remarks on Monday by US deputy secretary of state Stephen Biegun, who had said Washington will push back against Beijing's aggressive actions, including its "outsized" territorial claims on the border with India.

Ji said China favours a "fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution through peaceful and friendly consultations". The [two sides have been in talks](#) at various levels to seek a peaceful settlement of the boundary issue, she said.

"China and India have the ability to resolve their border disputes bilaterally. We don't accept countries outside the region pointing fingers, let alone meddling or making instigation, which will only endanger the regional peace and stability," she added.

Ji also rejected other remarks made by Biegun at the leadership summit organised by the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum that were critical of China for its "outsized demands to claim sovereign territory in the Galwan Valley on the India-Chinese border or in the South Pacific" and its "assertion of national sovereignty over the territory and territorial waters of other countries".

Nations need to enhance mutual understanding and friendly cooperation, and it is regrettable that senior US officials had violated the norms of international ties and "picked up fights virtually on every front and exploited every opportunity they can to slander and smear China", she said.

"The Chinese side firmly opposes it. We urge the US side to respect facts and truth, stop smearing and spreading rumours," Ji said.

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She reiterated China's assertion that it has "never provoked a war or conflict over the past 70 years" and always insisted on resolving territorial and maritime disputes with neighbours through consultations and negotiations on the basis of respecting historical facts to maintain regional peace and stability.

Ji described Biegun's comments about "predatory practices from the Chinese economy" and "technical theft" as groundless, and said China has firmly maintained the multilateral trading system and an open global economy.

Issues related to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang are "China's internal affairs" and "China does not accept external interference", Ji said.

Ji also noted that 2020 marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and India, and the two sides should adhere to the strategic guidance of the leaders of two countries, strengthen mutual trust and cooperation, and resolve differences through dialogue and negotiation.

"As large developing countries and emerging economies, both China and India are pursuing independent foreign policies. We believe that China and India have the ability and wisdom to handle bilateral relations properly and jointly maintain regional peace and stability," she added.

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Covid-19 cases likely to peak by October, warns Kerala CM

Many independent experts believe that the state's moving growth rate (MGR) for Covid-19 positivity is twice than the national average.

INDIA Updated: Sep 03, 2020 20:17 IST

HT Correspondent | Edited by Sparshita Saxena
Hindustan Times, Thiruvananthapuram



File photo: Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan. (PTI)

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said experts have warned that Covid-19 virus cases will go up sharply by next month in the state and asked people not to lower their guard at this critical juncture. He said test positivity rate was quite high in the last couple of days but it will stabilize soon once testing rate goes up again.

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“Some studies have pointed out that Covid-19 cases will peak by October. We should not let our guard down citing drop in daily cases. Reduced number is due to the lesser number of tests. Onam festivities led to a dip in tests,” he said. The CM said the state’s vigil and surveillance really helped in containing mortality rate to an extent but the threat is far from over.

“Test positivity rate is above 8 now. We have to bring it down to 5. At least 50 percent of the total cases came up in last month. Though we managed to contain a massive spread, the threat remains,” he said, adding that earlier some experts had warned daily cases would go up more than 10,000 in August but the state managed it well.

Also read: [Five-day sero survey in Agra to begin from Friday](#)

Many independent experts believe that the state’s moving growth rate (MGR) for positivity is twice than the national average - 30-day MGR is 122 percent but the national average is only 64 percent in August. There are widespread complaints that many deaths failed to find a place in the government list.

While the official Covid-19 deaths in the state are 316, experts said the number may be more than double. Experts attribute the recent spike to increased testing. Till July, daily test rate was between 10,000 and 15,000 but now the state is trying hard to hike it to 50,000.

Meanwhile, the state has reported 1,153 fresh cases taking its Covid-19 tally to 79,568. As many as 57,732 patients in the state have recovered from the deadly contagion while active cases stand at 21,516. With 10 more casualties, Kerala’s Covid-19 death toll has gone up to 316.



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