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## This is not a pipeline

There is no issue that is more significant in its moral implications and in the magnitude of its political impact than the issue of food security, write Ashok Kotwal, Milind Murugkar and Bharat Ramaswami.

INDIA Updated: Sep 01, 2011 10:31 IST

Ashok Kotwal, Milind Murugkar and Bharat Ramaswami  
Hindustan Times



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There is no issue that is more significant in its moral implications and in the magnitude of its political impact than the issue of food security. And yet the present course of the national Food Security Bill is headed in a direction that does not bode well for the poor in India.

The National Advisory Council (NAC) would like near-universal coverage but insists that it be delivered through the public distribution system (PDS). The Rangarajan Committee, set up to review the NAC recommendations, would like to scale it down on the grounds that it's not viable. It says the government would be unable to procure so much grain and the subsidy required would be unaffordable too. All of this is under the assumption that the subsidy continues to be delivered through the PDS.

What is proposed is the worst of all possible worlds — a continuation of limited coverage under a wasteful system. Once again we are on the brink of creating another expensive token that will leave a vast number of the poor without the cover of food security. The act will be passed. But the poor won't notice much change in their lives.

It is important to know two things about the PDS. First, targeting has failed. More than half of poor households (defined so by the official poverty line) do not have the below poverty line (BPL) cards that entitle them to maximal food subsidies. Most importantly, given that the poverty line measures bare subsistence, how can we tell apart households that are just above the poverty line from those just below it?

The second thing to know about the PDS is that most of the food subsidy expenditures by the government never reach households, much less the poor among them. About 70% of the food subsidy cost is dissipated as rents to black marketers or as payments towards excess costs of state agencies. Massive exclusion errors question the continuance of targeted programmes.

Near-universal coverage is necessary to avoid these errors. The staggering inefficiency of the PDS means that alternatives to it must be tried. Food subsidies can be directly transferred to consumers through food coupons or smart cards. This would get rid of illegal diversions and reduce excess costs. It would, therefore, be both foolish and tragic to legislate the PDS as the only instrument for food subsidies.

Perhaps, the two decades of fast growth have been responsible for creating aspirations for a better quality of life that never existed before. A party that seizes this opportunity and finds practical solutions to key problems like food security will be the party of the future.

In our minds, protecting the interests of the poor is the *raison d'être* for the Left. By default, the role has been taken up by dedicated members of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) community some of whom are members of the NAC. Indeed, NAC has performed a valuable advocacy role in proposing some of the most progressive legislation in recent times. But if those who consider themselves on the Left defined themselves in terms of the ends rather than the means, there would be much faster progress on the issues they care about.

What we need is a new leadership — one that is sincere about the promises it makes to the poor and is not ideological about the means of delivering them. We need a new leadership that asks whether it is necessarily a sacrilege to talk about the poor and a market-based delivery system in the same breath especially if the alternative is the travesty that the food security bill is in danger of becoming. We need a leadership that recognises that the cost of food security would be high but is able to defend it as a matter of high priority; a leadership that appreciates that it is impossible to sort out the poor from the rest without excluding millions from the coverage; a leadership that can actively look for a way to do right by the poor without breaking the treasury.

smart cards that, at least in principle, indicate that they would be flexible and advantageous to the poor? After all, is this not how innovation occurs — through little experiments that throw up new ideas, and those that succeed replacing the old ideas that have failed?

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We ardently hope that such a leadership emerges, and if it does, it will leave a stamp on the future of India. It will be remembered not for its rhetoric but for its achievements.

*Ashok Kotwal is a professor at the University of British Columbia, Canada; Milind Murugkar is a policy analyst at Pragati Abhiyan, Nasik; and Bharat Ramaswami is a professor at the Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi The views expressed by the authors are personal*

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# News updates from Hindustan Times: India accuses Pakistan of trying to politicise UNSC's terrorist listing process and the latest news

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INDIA Updated: Sep 03, 2020 20:57 IST

HT Correspondent



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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](#)

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### 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](#)

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

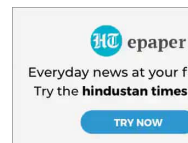
Six opposition-ruled states: West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan --approached the top court on August 28 seeking a postponement of the examinations in view of the coronavirus crisis. [Read More](#)

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### 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](#)



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### 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.

INDIA Updated: Sep 03, 2020 20:33 IST

 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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Home / India News / Covid-19 cases likely to peak by October, warns Kerala CM

# 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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Home / India News / No question hour at 2-day Bengal assembly session, BJP claims, it shows TMC's double standard

# No question hour at 2-day Bengal assembly session, BJP claims, it shows TMC's double standard

The opposition BJP targeted the Trinamool Congress government for scrapping question hour saying the state government was not willing to face people's questions and doing away with question hour showed the TMC's double standards.

INDIA Updated: Sep 03, 2020 20:12 IST

HT Correspondent Hindustan Times, Kolkata



The West Bengal Legislative Assembly will meet for two days next week.(HT FILE PHOTO)

West Bengal assembly speaker Biman Banerjee on Thursday announced that the state's two-day monsoon session will have no question hour due to "paucity of time", a day after his party, Trinamool Congress, MP Derek O'Brien said not having question hour in Parliament was the worst assault on democracy.

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“You don’t allow #QuestionHour where ministers have to stand up and answer Qs from MPs and be held accountable. Now you only condescend to allow written Questions/Answers! Stop throwing crumbs. This is #Parliament Not the Gujarat Gymkhana,” Derek O’Brien had tweeted on Thursday afternoon.

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) targeted the Trinamool Congress government for scrapping question hour at the West Bengal legislative assembly’s two-day monsoon session to be held on September 9 and 10 saying the state government was not willing to face people’s questions and not having question hour showed TMC’s double standards.

**Also read: [Rajnath dials Opposition over Question Hour issue](#)**

“The chairpersons of two houses of Parliament talk to all parties before deciding the schedule of a session. In Bengal, the session is being held only to abide by the norm (of having a session within six months). The government does not want to face questions on raging issues such as corruption in distribution of relief for people affected by Cyclone Amphan or, its failure to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. It shows TMC’s double standards,” said Bengal BJP vice-president Jay Prakash Majumdar.

“The Speaker has not officially informed us that there will be no question hour. We have also come to know about this from sources. He will sit with all parties on September 8,” said CPI(M) lawmaker Sujan Chakraborty.

Banerjee said that it was not possible to have a question-answer session because of paucity of time as the session has been kept short in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Out of 294 seats in the assembly, the TMC has 221 while the BJP has 14 and the CPI(M), 21.

The Speaker also said that legislators, assembly staff, security personnel and journalists will have to undergo rapid antigen tests on September 8 and 9 for which a medical camp will be set up at the premises. Only those testing negative will be given clearance to enter the building.

“The legislators will have to maintain distance and occupy specific seats earmarked for them. Elderly legislators will sit in the main hall and younger members will be asked to sit in the galleries. We will not be able to accommodate all journalists as many seats in the media gallery have to be kept empty to ensure social distancing,” said Banerjee.

No guests will be allowed during the session and vehicles have to be parked outside the main premises.

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