

The Weekly

OBSERVER

India lags behind on Millennium Development Goals

The United Nations in various summits of 1990s agreed to a set of eight goals for achieving progress among its member nations. They were called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goal was set for 2015 - a term of 15 years. The MDGs are set keeping in view the extremely miserable conditions in some of the third-world countries. India and China being the most populated countries of the world are significant in the MDGs to help increase the world averages.

At this time, when we are halfway through the term of MDGs, some review is needed. The MDG monitor of the United Nations shows India as lagging behind in five out of eight goals. The numbers for India are not very encouraging. 34.3% of our total population of 1.169 billion still lies below a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of one dollar. The population below the national poverty line (NPL) is 28.6%. The net enrolment ratio in primary education is a commendable 94.6%, but only 73% of them reach even the fifth grade, and the primary education completion rate is less than 60%. Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is 74 per 1000, and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is 540 per 1000. A huge number of people in the country are infected by Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. More than 14% of the total population does not have access to drinking water.

In some of these key indicatory figures, India is comparable to Sub-Saharan Africa, which is the most backward in the goals. In marginal terms, extreme poverty was more common in Sub-Saharan Africa in 1999 at 47% as compared to 37% in South Asia, but in absolute terms the comparison does not exist because the South Asian population is almost twice that of the Sub Saharan region. Orissa and Madhya Pradesh had similar infant mortality rates as Guinea and Tanzania, while it was lower in Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon according to comparable data in the late

1990's. The maternal mortality rates of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa are very similar to that of Botswana, Cameroon and Malawi.

Sub-Saharan Africa's poverty rate is 44%. The rate of enrolment in primary education for girls is still more than 15% lower than that for boys. In India it is about five per cent lower. 41.1% of Sub-Saharan people live on a PPP below one dollar. Its IMR is 166 per 1000; MMR is 1 per 16, extremely high by all standards. 64% children received measles vaccine in the area, while in India, only about 54% were immunized. Only 29% of its children are underweight, as against the figure of 48.5 % in India.

Health and education currently find only four per cent allocation in the five-year plans of India, which is very less considering the high population and the country's backwardness. The nation needs not minor but serious reconsiderations of its strategies for achieving the MDGs. The country needs to look beyond the superficial liberalization/privatization/globalization ideas and start working at grassroot levels to achieve greater progress.

The numbers game in India:

Population below a PPP of \$1 - 34.3%
Population below NPL - 28.6%
Primary Education Completion Rate - 59%
Total Forest cover - 23%
Access to drinking water - 86%
Infant Mortality Rate - 74 per 1000
Maternal Mortality Rate - 540 per 1000

Of tripods and human nature

ITIKA SHARMA

Tripod, also known as stand, support, trivet, etc. appears to be just another tool, used to hold the camera to give the camera person's hand some rest and to make sure that the recording is not shaky. But what happens when the tripod shakes?

Three aspects define the personality of each human being, namely - understanding of facts, of humour and of grief. These are the three legs of tripod on which a person's being depends. While mastering all three would make one perfect (a utopian thought), there is sure certain degree of each, which is a basic essential. All human's are like tealeaves, they show their true colours when they are put in boiling water. The strongest person is he who can boil in the water and still hold these qualities.

The first leg of the tripod of life is the way we comprehend facts. Most of us do not understand the difference between "talking" about facts and

"understanding" them. We often talk a lot more than what we understand. Ideally, it's always better to talk about only what you understand completely. But we choose the easiest resort of shutting our eyes and ears to the reality and baking new facts that satisfy our fantasy. Between all this the reality gets twisted, turned and curved.

The second leg of this tripod is the understanding of humor. I've asked many of my male friends about what gets them attracted towards a girl and many of them say it's her understanding of wit. Humor is very essential for everyone's life. It is very essential to understand that not everything that is said is true and worth arguing about. Often we need to understand that a decent joke can change the reality of things.

Our interpretation of grief is the third leg of the tripod. There's an old saying that when you smile, the world smiles with you but when you

cry, you cry alone. From how I understand it, if this leg is missing in your tripod, you are doomed. Sensitivity towards understanding problems and sorrow is what differentiates a human being from a good human being. Supporting and comforting your weeping child makes you a better parent, standing by a crying parent makes you a good offspring and providing a strong shoulder to a grieving friend makes you a good human being. Fighting along with someone through their grief is not about standing, looking and wanting to know 'what is she saying'? It is about writing a note, a post scriptum to let her know that you will always be there for her and leaving it by the pillow.

Indian society is sometimes referred to as a disorganized one. But if only each one of us stick to these three legs our tripod would never shake and our lives would have a steady support. But if the tripod is lost...

In the mailbox...

Grow trees, don't chop them

The felling of trees on Bellary road for widening of roads by the BBMP was really a sad action. And this comes at the same time when it is also replanting trees around Parade Grounds and Indira Gandhi Musical Fountain. Bangalore is known as the Garden city of India, but the reputation will leave it soon if the trees are not allowed to survive. The corporation should realize that green cover does not mean merely grassy lawns but also well - grown trees!

Shalu Yadav

Rahul Gandhi: the future PM

Rahul Gandhi elected as new AICC General secretary. The new leader is from the famous political family in India. There are lots of duties in front of the General secretary. In his speech he mentioned about India's youth leaders. People expecting more from the youth general secretary. The future Prime Minister of India's new duty is work like his father. Oppositional parties are watching this power play as a preplanned one. Rahul's strategy is focusing on the youth leadership.

Rohan Ramesh

The other side of Pak emergency

I read an article in The Indian Express, by Shobha De, where she spoke to some friends of hers in Pakistan, who gave her a very different view about the situation. They said that the situation has actually improved there and people have become more efficient following the emergency rule imposed by Musharaff. All I have read in newspapers is how the emergency is bad. But in a country like Pakistan, where the political situation is so bleak, wasn't emergency needed? Can't we have more articles where they show some positive side of this emergency?

Shikha Shadeo

Sci & Tech page please!

It would be nice if you could dedicate a page to science and technology in your newspaper so that apart from political, business and international news your readers could themselves abreast with the latest happenings in the science world. For example, I read recently about netbots in the Times of India which is something really important that all computer users should be aware of. They are virus programs that get into your computer and steal your personal information. They are used by hackers and recently, computer companies in India have fallen prey to them. Such news could be carried in a sci & tech page.

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Private circulation only



Matchstick makers, flower sellers: exploiting our children

As another Children's Day rolled by, international apparel major GAP withdrew garments sourced from India from its 3,000 stores following reports of use of child labour by one of the company's vendors in the capital's Shahpur Jat area. The report said that children as young as 10 years old were working for a GAP sub-contractor and complained of working long hours, going unpaid and being subjected to threats and beatings.

This move sparked off a chain of debates on the ethical and legal implications of employing child labour, which is rampant in our country. Fifty per cent of agricultural labourers in India are children. The exports of our country which is the biggest producer of all consumer goods is irreversibly dependent on the children labourers who were 134 million at last count. Behind every tile laid for construction, every cup of tea in restaurants, every cracker busted in Diwali, every matchstick, every flower picked for export, there are frail hands of our tiny totters.

Using children to work in homes in the city is an unbridled practice in our country. These children are usually uprooted from villages, brought to the city by their own families and sold ruthlessly in households or factories for a pittance of a few thousand rupees.

There is a constant conundrum about reconciling the welfare and education of children with guaranteeing them and their families who are dependent on them, basic means of survival.

As long as there is poverty, child labour will continue to haunt our society. It's easy for people to sit in their ivory towers and pontificate that child labour should be banned. But these are the people who are oblivious to the grim reality in the third world countries where the children will otherwise lapse into begging, drugs and crime, all of which happen in smooth synchronization.

Lets, for a change, not sit on the defensive and preach against child labour without considering the social construct of our society of which, underprivileged section forms the predominant fraction.

Pulling them off work without a comprehensive rehabilitation plan is like hitting at stomachs of children we want to liberate and throwing them into a vicious, unrelenting and endless life of misery and destitution. But formulating an alternative rehabilitation program, given the convoluted ways of the panjandrum in our country, isn't exactly a cakewalk. Our government passes these child labour laws with grandiloquence which look flawless on paper, but in practice, are just reduced to pseudo-rational gobbledegook and political hooey. We don't have adequate machinery to implement them and extricate the kids from the shackles of slavery.