

The Sunday Statesman

With which is incorporated
The Englishman ~ Founded 1821

Ecstasy & Agony

The caption is not a case of emotions getting mixed-up, nor a cheap attempt to upgrade the much-used "after pleasure comes pain." The scientific community in and beyond the Indian Space Research Organisation, indeed millions imbued with national pride (as opposed to what politicians pass off as "nationalism") will be overjoyed at the cabinet sanctioning Rs 10,000 crore for India's first manned space venture. It has injected welcome reality to the Prime Minister's flourish from the ramparts of Shahjehan's Moghul citadel on Independence Day, which some cynics had interpreted as a rather early election promise. The folk at ISRO would be more than thrilled: becoming only the fourth country to mount a manned space mission would go beyond securing a special slot in the history of bids to emulate Jules Verne's *From Earth to Moon*, but serve as handsome recognition of the sustained success in the space exercise. As well as a fitting tribute to the endeavours of the celebrated Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. It is no ambitious pipe-dream, ISRO scientists have been working hard to develop the sophisticated and complex technologies required for Gaganyaan and the GSLV Mk-III launch vehicle that will propel the home-built capsule to its ethereal destination. A series of preparatory missions are scheduled before an essentially Indian system takes three Indians into space. Without taking anything away from the accomplishments of Rakesh Sharma, Sunita Williams and Kalpana Chawla the glory of Gaganyaan lies in it being an essentially Indian essay. And it matters not a whit which party will be in power in 2022 - there is no "space" for political drum-beating over Gaganyaan. Our *netas* must refrain from reducing a potentially-splendid scientific/technological mission to what they did to a cross-border, pre-emptive anti-militant strike. To do so will rob Gaganyaan of much glitter and glory.

Having been that ecstatic it is also necessary to turn to what might agonise. The sanctioning of Rs 10,000 crore to enable Mr Narendra Modi to use the people's money needs to be better explained to the taxpayer: Unlike the JFK-era there is no "space race" involving India, little to lose if someone else conducts a manned space mission ahead of it. Unless ego issues enter the equation. The authorities wax eloquent about the spin-off of a manned space mission but will it help, for example, the IAF that has had to settle for just 36 Rafale fighters, or the Army that is short of top-quality sniper rifles and related weaponry to blunt militancy in the Kashmir Valley? Or ease the stress in the agrarian sector that has pressured thousands of farmers into suicide? The publicity machine of the government and ruling party has to toil over to convince a cash-strapped people that their Rs 10,000 crore will not go up like smoke in outer space.

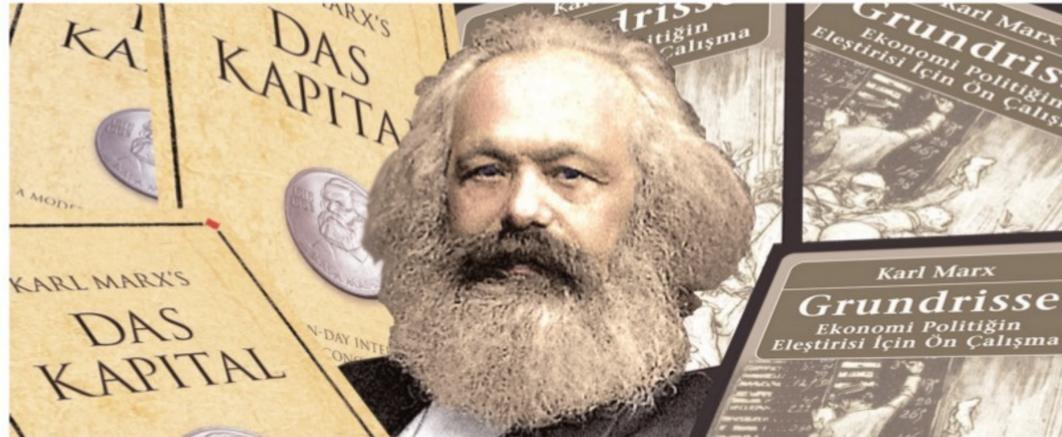
Overdue outreach

It could be churlish to write off reported moves to ease financial distress in the agrarian sector as entirely aimed at a bumper crop of votes a few months hence, yet it would be politically naive not to perceive them as drastic efforts of this election-focused government to help reverse the situation of a few weeks ago when BJP governments were ejected from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh - and dashed were its hopes to establish a presence in Telangana. More than all Rahul Gandhi's ranting about corruption in the Rafale acquisition, the *choukidar* being a *chor* etc, what hurt the Modi-Shah duo was their making light of farm woes, and a skewed belief that higher minimum support prices (MSPs) would suffice. Or that soil-health cards were a cure-all for farmers' woes. The BJP, ever seen as urban-oriented, needs to strive for a rapport with the rural populace, none of its leaders have a rustic following. Rahul did make some fanciful promises: how quickly the new Congress governments in the "heartland" appear to be keeping them could impact the upcoming Lok Sabha poll. For, as the Prime Minister has stressed, the Congress has a history of letting down the farmers too.

There is considerable speculation over what the government is contemplating: loan waivers do not seem to be in favour since the banking sector is already under stress for repayment-defaults by industrialists. A direct transfer benefit to compensate for when market prices fall below the MSP is also, reportedly, under consideration though complications could be created by poor maintenance of land records. Measures taken in several states are also said to be under examination; details of any formula are awaited since rural affairs are not a strong point with the BJP's economic policy planners. Must governmental moves be limited to the financial front only? They are at best short-term, treat only symptoms of the malaise. The farm sector lost priority after the Green Revolution banished the threat of famine, and then the Kurien-led milk revolution put more money into rural households. Alas since then the gap between urban and rural lifestyles has been exacerbated, rural economies have been further hit by cow-vigilantes throwing the livestock business/leather trade out of gear: that has also fuelled communal tensions. There is need to extend the success of the green and white revolutions to the poultry, vegetables, meat-processing and horticulture sectors too: the farmland needs to look beyond paddy, wheat and coarse cereals. The "rich" farmer must no longer be treated with scorn and the farm worker looked down upon. Ensuring education facilities, continuous power supply, cooking gas and even the provision of sanitary toilets must be assured in villages too. The farmer no longer wants pity, he demands his share of the national cake and will not accept the mere crumbs Raisina Hill throws out to him. Has the NDA left it too late?

Thus Capital

Capital went on sale on 14 September 1867. One century and a half after its publication, it has become one of the most translated, sold and discussed works in the story of humanity. For those who wish to understand capitalism, and also why workers must fight for a 'superior form of society whose fundamental principle is the full and free development of each individual', Marx's *Capital* is, now more than ever, an indispensable work



The work that, perhaps more than any other, has contributed to changing the world in the last 150 years, had a long and difficult gestation. Marx started writing *Capital* only many years after he began his study of political economy. Although he had already developed his critique of private property and idea of alienation in 1844, it was the financial crisis of 1857 - which began in the United States and spread across Europe - that ultimately drove him to put pen to page and begin writing what he initially called his "Economy".

With the onset of the financial crisis, Marx foresaw the birth of a new stage of social upheaval that he believed could lead to a revolutionary movement capable of transcending capitalism. He believed that the proletariat urgently needed a critique of the capitalist mode of production. From this was born the *Grundrisse*, eight large volumes in which, amongst other themes, Marx examined the formation of pre-capitalistic economies and elaborated on some important characteristics of his Communist society like the importance of liberty and the intellectual development of the individual.

However, the revolutionary movement that Marx believed would emerge from the financial crisis remained illusory and Marx, now acutely aware of the theoretical shortcomings of his work, did not publish these manuscripts. The only section of the *Grundrisse* that would go to the press, and only after an extensive revision, was "The Chapter on Money". Published in 1859 as *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the text was only reviewed by a single person - Engels. Marx's plan for the rest of the *Grundrisse* was to divide the manuscripts into six books. He believed that this would allow him to dedicate each volume to a separate subject matter: capital, property ownership, wage labour, State, foreign trade and the global market.

When, in 1862, because of the American Civil War, the *New York Tribune* fired him from his job as their European correspondent, Marx - who had worked for the American daily for over a decade - and his family were plunged into the same level of destitution that they had experienced during their early years in

London. Marx only had the help of Engels, to whom he wrote, "Every day my wife says she wishes she and the children were safely in their graves, and I really cannot blame her, for the humiliations, torments and alarms that one has to go through in such a situation are indeed indescribable". His condition was so desperate that, in his worst weeks, he went without food for his children and paper to write on. He applied for work at an English railway office and was denied the job on the basis of his poor handwriting. Consequently, in the face of these indignations, Marx's work continued to suffer from long delays.

Despite these significant hurdles, Marx conducted a rigorous examination of economic theory during this period. In an extensive manuscript entitled *Theories of Surplus Value*, he argued that the major economic theorists of the time had erroneously understood surplus value as either profit or income. Marx, conversely, argued that surplus value should be understood as the specific form through which the exploitation of capitalism was made manifest. This was because the workers gave up a part of their workday freely to the capitalist who then tried to generate surplus value by means of this surplus labour - "it is no longer enough for the worker to produce in general, he must now produce surplus value". The theft of only a few minutes from lunch or breaks of each worker translated into the shift of an immense mass of riches into the owner's pockets. Intellectual development, social obligations and holidays were for capital "merely frills". Factory owners would oppose labour legislation in the name of "freedom to work".

But for Marx, the motto of a capitalistic mindset towards all aspects of life - including the consideration of ecological questions (a topic rarely, if ever, addressed by his contemporaries) - was not freedom but *Après moi le déluge!* ("After us, the flood!").

He believed that the reduction of the working day, together with the additional surplus of labour, constituted the first terrain upon which the class struggle would be fought. By 1862, Marx had chosen a title for his work: *Capital*. He thought he was ready to draft the final version but on top of overwhelming financial difficulties, he now also suffered significant health problems. Nicknamed "the terrible disease", by his wife Jenny, the remaining years of Marx's life would be plagued by ill health. He suffered from carbuncles, a

hideous infection that manifests itself as abscesses, ulcers and serious debilitating boils all over the body. Because of a deep ulcer, followed by the appearance of a large abscess, Marx underwent an operation and "for quite a time his life was in danger". His family was now, more than ever, on the brink of the abyss. Despite these adversities, the 'Moor' (his nickname) recovered and, at the end of December 1865, finished the first draft of what would become his magnum opus. Furthermore, in autumn 1864, he enthusiastically participated in the International Working Men's Association, drafting, during eight intense years, all of its principal political documents. Studying by day in the library in order ensure the merit of his discoveries and working on his manuscript by night, Marx would submit himself to this exhausting daily routine until his body failed him.

By this time, Marx had reduced the size of his initial project from six to three volumes on capital, but he maintained the hope of publishing them together. In fact, he wrote to Engels: "I cannot bring myself to send anything off until I have the whole thing in front of me. Whatever shortcomings they may have, the advantage of my writings is that they are an artistic whole, and this can only be achieved through my practice of never having things printed until I have them in front of me in their entirety". Marx's dilemma, to "do a fair copy of part of the manuscript and

send it to the publisher, or finish writing the whole thing first", was fortuitously solved by carbuncles. Marx was taken by yet another attack, this time the most violent he had ever had, and found himself close to death. He later told Engels that it was "a close shave this time"; the doctor told him that the reason for the attack was excessive work, particularly his late nights work vigils.

After this alarming event, Marx decided to concentrate only on his first book, *The Process of Production of Capital*. Nevertheless, the carbuncles continued to torment him and for entire weeks, Marx was not well enough to be seated. In this desperate state, he even tried to operate on himself using a well-sharpened razor. He later told Engels that he could "lance 'the cur' all by himself". Much to Marx's disappointment, the completion of his work was delayed not by "theoretical considerations" but because of "physical and bourgeois reasons".

When in April 1867, the manuscript was finally finished and Marx was ready to travel to Germany to have the book published, he asked a friend from Manchester, who had helped him constantly for 20 years, - to send him money so that he could free his "clothes and timepiece from their abode at the pawnbroker's". Marx survived with only the essentials without which he could not leave for Germany, where his manuscript would be published. The corrections of the drafts took the remainder of the summer and when Engels observed that the exposition of the idea of "Value-form" was too abstract and had "the marks of the carbuncles rather firmly stamped on it", Marx responded: "I hope the bourgeois will remember my carbuncles until their dying day".

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Beating the chest over surgical strike

SIR, Harsha Kakar has pertinently raised a question of national sentiment in his article "So, what's wrong with beating our chests?" (Perspective, 18 December). The question relates to the Government's celebration of the surgical strikes in the wake of an attack on the Uri garrison 18 September 2016 in which 19 soldiers were killed.

The Special Forces of the Indian army promptly retaliated by launching surgical strikes and successfully destroyed a number of terrorist camps across the border in PoK. The success of the operation does call for rejoicing. This was a fitting reply to Pakistan's systematic strategy of proxy war.



The action of celebrating the surgical strikes is not really being politicised by the present Government, nor is there excessive hype over the strikes.

The Congress always claims that it had reacted to Pakistan's misadventures in a similar manner, but never

announced it. The Congress even doubted whether the army under the Modi government had really launched surgical strikes against Pakistan just as the Pakistan army rejected Indian claims of the strike.

The Congress, which had to contend with serial

scams when in power, is trying to divert the attention of the people by harping on the Rafale deal without doing anything concrete for the country's security and integrity.

Yours, etc., Dipak Kumar Prodhan, Howrah, 20 December.

RBI'S AUTONOMY

SIR, This is with reference to the editorial, 'Prompt corrective action?' (17 December). There is no reference to the failure of Raghuram Rajan and Urjit Patel to protect the autonomy of the Reserve Bank of India. It was also expected that the RBI brass, some of whom had done a stint in the International Monetary Fund, would address the 'autonomous credentials' of the institution.

As it turned out, both Mr Rajan and Mr Patel chose to resign in what appears to be an attempt to save their personal and professional standing. Both were anxious to return to the US to take up a settled assignment.

The Reserve Bank of India ought not to function as a parallel government. That said, the fact remains that its functioning was impeded by the central government.

I do not concur with Shovanlal Chakraborty's letter (16 December) that the appointment of Shaktikanta Das as the RBI Governor was a "reward" for having endorsed a 'monumental blunder', to quote Manmohan Singh.

Yours, etc., Rupam Guha, Kolkata, 17 December.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Laos PM calls for Poverty Reduction Fund

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith has called on the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) to continue to help villagers rise above poverty after learning that a significant number of families remain impoverished. The premier made the comment yesterday to mark the 15th anniversary of the Fund - the government's flagship agency in fighting poverty. He praised the Fund for the hard work it has done over past years by improving the living conditions of people in targeted villages.

The Fund will continue to exist and do its job until all Lao people are free from poverty, Mr Thongloun told local media. Established by the government and foreign donors in 2003, the Fund has carried out 5,948 poverty-fighting projects in 11 provinces and has benefited more than 1.2 million people, most of them living in the country's poorest villages. During the first phase from 2003-2011, projects focused on small-scale infrastructure development and improvement in line with the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy. They included gravity-fed water systems, dispensaries, artesian wells, schools, community roads, bridges, and weirs.

Financing for the first phase of the Fund amounted to more than US\$41 million, of which US\$21.7 million was a grant provided by the World Bank and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), while more than US\$19.3 million was a loan provided by the World Bank. Local communities also contributed some funding. The Fund's second phase from 2011-2016 was carried out with financing of US\$65.7 million. Of this, US\$10 million was contributed by the Lao government while the rest was a grant provided by the World Bank, SDC, and Australia. Since 2012, the Fund has ini-

Vientiane Times

tiated activities covering a wide range of areas such as capacity building, food security, the cultivation of crops for sale, and human resource development. The Fund has made a significant contribution to the declining poverty rate. Poor families have declined to 6.59 percent and the number of villages classified as poor has dropped to 20.5 percent. However, the number of poor families could change as many are believed to have fallen below the poverty line in the wake of this year's severe flooding in provinces across the country. Mr Thongloun asked the authorities in charge to collect and update information in this regard. He said the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and government placed great importance on eradicating poverty and a large amount of money had been invested in this work. The government is facing a challenge in sourcing sufficient funds for poverty-reduction projects amid budget constraints. There is also a growing trend to cut foreign aid to Laos as the country is on track to graduate from Least Developed Country status in 2024.

The premier said the government is intensifying efforts to close loopholes that cause revenue leaks by introducing an electronic system to collect more revenue to fund development efforts including poverty alleviation. The government has also introduced incentives such as tax breaks to encourage investment in rural communities in an attempt to create jobs and generate income for local people. Mr Thongloun recalled the growing development of the nation over the past 43 years since the Lao People's Democratic Republic was proclaimed. Of those, LandSpace, OneSpace and i-Space, all based in Beijing, are the leaders when it comes to research and production capabilities and funding