

The Sunday Statesman
With which is incorporated
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Not just a job

As India sets up what the government considers exhaustive protocols to vaccinate citizens against coronavirus, it is necessary to place in the public domain every single aspect of the programme, and subject it to the widest scrutiny, if only to avoid the criticisms that health authorities in the first country to launch mass vaccinations are now facing. The United Kingdom's decision to adopt a mix-and-match vaccination programme ~ one that permits the first shot to be administered using one vaccine and the second with another ~ has drawn widespread criticism. Experts believe that authorities in the UK have been forced to accept this unwieldy compromise because of the shoddy way the vaccination programme was taken up. Now, health officials have said that if a second dose of a vaccine is not available, or if the manufacturer of the first shot is unknown, another vaccine may be used. This runs counter to guidelines in the United States, where Atlanta's Centre for Disease Control has laid down that authorised vaccines "are not interchangeable" because the "safety and efficacy of a mixed-product series has not been evaluated." It has said in emphatic terms, "Both doses of the series should be completed with the same product." The impossible position that the United Kingdom confronts, as it grapples with a raging virus that has now mutated to pose fresh challenges, was perhaps inevitable considering the logistical challenge of launching a vaccination drive when supplies were uncertain and, in any event, far outstripped demand. UK health authorities first cleared the Pfizer vaccine and later the product developed by AstraZeneca. While there are some similarities between the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines, there are also significant differences between the two, including the quantity of ingredients and different immunological methods. The United Kingdom is also slated to receive the vaccine developed by Moderna in a few months which, on present indications, will only add to the muddle. Even before UK health authorities opted to accommodate a vaccination protocol that many experts deem scientifically unsustainable, there had been concerns raised about the threats posed to public health by expedited vaccine programmes, leading one infectious disease expert to tell an American newspaper, "We're kind of in this Wild West."

Another decision taken by UK authorities with its vaccination programme has raised almost equal consternation. The country has decided to administer the first dose of the vaccine to as many people as it can, which of necessity will mean that administration of the second dose would be delayed, perhaps by up to 12 weeks. Such delays could impact the vaccine's ability to boost the protective powers of the first dose, experts warn, suggesting that in some situations could render the exercise counterproductive. It is these pitfalls India must avoid, for while dry runs and grand plans can make headlines, proper logistical planning is vital to avoid the scary implementation we see in the UK. Just any jab will not do.

Magic Man

People who have long known Sourav Ganguly more intimately than loyal hacks claiming improbable proximity to him concede that he loves to be everything that is indicative of a special position ~ simultaneously, if possible. They say that well might he, cricket board chief in a disputatiously prolonged tenure, nurture a secret wish to coach India to a World Cup triumph. He could also harbour ambitions of leading global cricket relishing the same authoritative status as Jagmohan Dalmiya, his mentor. It is his multi-faceted exploration of life - can you think of another Indian cricket supremo who hawked so many products on television or a peer of Ganguly the administrator revelling in his role as the USP of a reality show? ~ which adds a special dimension to the currently widespread speculation about his becoming West Bengal's Bharatiya Janata Party chief minister after the 2021 elections. A mugshot and a tantalising headline ensure page-one prominence for any bilge predicated on the continuing, amazing popularity of a cricketer who played his last innings years ago. Coffee House chats revolve around his calculatedly anodyne comments. Reactions from leaders ~ puny or titanic ~ to those nuggets of celebspeak fuel more putatively political copy, adding considerably to West Bengal's ill-concealed and massive pride in itself. Neither Sunil Gavaskar nor Sachin Tendulkar is thought so seriously of in Mumbai. Rahul Dravid, similarly scrutinised, will feel too embarrassed to talk. Ganguly apparently does not mind being hero-worshipped in his own domain. And if an administrative partnership with Jay Shah in the Board of Control for Cricket in India hints at a BJP link, tenuous or cast-iron, leading to conjectures about an impending political fixture, staying in the headlines is a bit of all right. It adds a fresh lease of life to the Ganguly legend. Also, if he is wanted by a poll-anticipating outfit to give it a leg up and there is something in the deal for him, how can it be anything other than a gift-wrapped offering? But Ganguly, it is said, thinks of everything. He has not cut Asoke Bhattacharjee ~ still jokingly referred to as the Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s erstwhile minister for Dada ~ out of his life just because the Left Front is out of power. Purportedly close to the current power-wielders in New Delhi, it is not as if, say self-appointed courtiers of his cricketing empire, he has drifted away from Mamata Banerjee, who engineered his ascent to the top of the pecking order in Dr BC Roy Clubhouse. Also, Ms Banerjee knew in advance of Ganguly's visit to Raj Bhavan. "I don't think he'll join the BJP given that it's going to be extremely hard for him to bypass Didi," says a Cricket Association of Bengal insider. Ganguly, though, is not to be taken for granted. Clarity, it is said, is likely to be elusive until January's Supreme Court hearing of the case of his BCCI tenure. But once the legal verdict comes through, his decision will have to be irrevocable. There is no getting away from that.

Engels Revisited

The proletariat had become the majority, he argued, and the prospect of taking power by electoral means, through universal suffrage, made it possible to defend revolution and legality at the same time

Friedrich Engels understood even earlier than Karl Marx the centrality of the critique of political economy. When the two first got to know each other, he had published many more articles ~ although it was his friend who was destined to become world-famous in this domain.

Born in Germany 200 years ago, in Barmen (today a suburb of Wuppertal), he was a very promising young man, whose father, a textile industrialist, had denied a chance to study at university and directed him into his own firm.

Engels had therefore taught himself, with a voracious appetite for knowledge, and he signed his pieces with a pseudonym to avoid conflict with his conservative, strongly religious family. He became an atheist, and the two years he spent in England ~ where he was sent at the age of twenty-two to work in Manchester, at the offices of the Ermen & Engels cotton mill ~ were decisive for the maturing of his political convictions.

It was then that he personally observed the effects of privatization, capitalist exploitation of the proletariat and competition between individuals. He made contact with the Chartist movement and fell in love with an Irish working woman, Mary Burns, who played a key role in his development.

A brilliant journalist, he published accounts in Germany of English social struggles and wrote for the English-speaking press about the social advances underway on the Continent.

In 1845 Engels published in German his first book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. The subtitle emphasized that it was based "on direct observation and genuine sources", and he wrote in the preface that real knowledge of proletarian working and living conditions was "absolutely necessary to be able to provide solid ground for socialist theories".

It would have a sequel in many later surveys. An introductory dedication, "To the Working Class of England" further pointed out that his work "in the field" had given him direct, not abstract, "knowledge of the workers' real lives". He had never been discriminated against or "treated by them as a foreigner", and he was happy to see that they were free of the "terrible curse of national narrowness and national arrogance".

In the same year, after the publication of *The Holy Family* (his first joint book with Marx), Engels went to England with his friend and was able to show him what he had earlier seen and understood there. Marx finally gave up the critique of post-Hegelian philosophy and began the long journey that led, twenty years later, to the first volume of *Capital*. Then the two friends wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) and participated in



the revolutions of 1848-1849, that ended with the success of the reaction.

In 1849 Engels returned to England and, like Marx, would remain there until his death. He became the "second violin", as he put it, and in order to support himself and to help his friend (who was often without an income) he agreed to manage his father's factory in Manchester, until 1870. Even during those twenty years, however, he never ceased to write.

In 1850 he published *The Peasant War in Germany*, a history of the revolts in 1524-25, which sought to show how similar the middle-class behaviour at the time was to that of the petty bourgeoisie during the revolution of 1848-49, and how responsible it had been for the defeats incurred. He also wrote nearly a half of the five hundred articles that Marx contributed to the *New-York Tribune* between 1851 and 1862, in which he reported to the American public on the succession of wars in Europe.

Not seldom he proved able to foresee developments and to anticipate the military strategies used on various fronts, earning for himself the sobriquet by which he was known to all his comrades: "the General". His journalistic activity continued for a long time, and in 1870-71 he published his *Notes on the Franco-Prussian War*, a series of sixty articles for the English daily *Pall Mall Gazette* that analysed the military events preceding the Paris Commune. These received much apprecia-

tion and testified to his perspicacity on such matters. Over the next fifteen years, Engels made his principal theoretical contributions in a series of occasional writings that opposed the positions of political opponents in the workers' movement and sought to clarify controversial issues. The *Anti-Dühring* (1878), which he described as "a more or less connected exposition of the dialectical method and the communist world outlook", became a crucial reference for the formation of Marxist doctrine.

Although we need to distinguish between Engels's works of popularization, in open polemic against the simplistic shortcuts of the time, and the vulgarization performed by the later generation of German Social Democracy, his recourse to the natural sciences opened the way to an evolutionary conception of social phenomena that diminished Marx's more nuanced analyses. Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, a reworking of three chapters of *Anti-Dühring* for educational purposes, had an even greater impact than the original text. But despite its merits and the fact that it circulated almost as widely as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Engels's definitions of "science" and "scientific socialism" may be seen as an example of epistemological authoritarianism, subsequently used by the Marxist-Leninist vulgate to preclude any critical discussion of the theses of the "founders of communism".

The Dialectic of Nature,



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Unfair to target Sen

SIR, The editorial 'V-B debunks Sen (Dec 29) is timely and appropriate. Amartya Sen should be considered a pride of Santiniketan, Bengal and India. He is not only a Nobel laureate but also an eminent economist, a prominent thinker and author of high international repute.

The central theme of his 'Argumentative Indian' and other works is that assortment of different cultures and religions is the tradition of India since the time of known history. The thinking of such a personality is radically different from the ideology of the present rulers who believe in a majoritarian ideology. The present Vice Chancellor of Viswa Bharati, an unworthy occupant of the august seat who is unaware of the birthplace of Rabindranath Tagore, is being used to malign Amartya Sen.

In another report on the issue published today, a politician has criticised Amartya Sen on the plea that "people of this country have voted decisively" and

"Mr Sen should refrain from maligning the country". In other words, once a party is voted to power, it is beyond the reach of criticism and the government of a country is synonymous with the country.

On the plea that criticism of the government tantamount to anti-national activity, many intellectuals and journalists have been arrested. It should be borne

in mind by the detractors of Amartya Sen that his voice reverberates louder than theirs in the international forums.

Yours, etc., Sanjit Ghatak, Narendrapur, 30 December.

DISHEARTENING

SIR, In your editorial 'VB debunks Sen' you have tried to defend the indefensible. Being a Nobel Laureate does not absolve Amartya Sen of the crime of illegally encroaching the property of Visvabharati University. Rather being such an international-

ly renowned person, Sen should have himself surrendered the illegally occupied land to the Central University authorities. It is very disheartening to see my beloved newspaper targeting the Visvabharati VC Prof. Bidyut Chakraborty for wrongly stating that Tagore was born in Santiniketan.

Though the VC should have been extra careful to avoid these mistakes, this does not make him a villain. Rather in my opinion he has done the correct thing to

expose all those who have encroached the central university property. Amartya Sen should either prove that his bungalow Pratichi has not encroached Visvabharati land or should vacate the occupied land immediately and put an end to this controversy.

Yours, etc., Purushottam Chattopadhyay, Kolkata, 29 December.

ELABORATE

SIR, I compliment Devendra Saksena for his elaborate analysis of anganwari work-

ers' plight in his article 'Failing Institutions' (29 December).

He has very rightly said that to attain sustainable development goals (SDG) by 2030, anganwari workers need to be properly qualified or trained.

The scheme under the ICDS project needs strict surveillance. The food supplied is alleged to be of poor quality with less nutritive value. Few months ago there had been a newspaper report that a pregnant lady was made to sit with a platter containing varieties of cooked food which was taken away after being photographed.

I expect a similar write up on the National Health Mission (NHM). Corruption, fund diversion and misuse of money and manpower are often reported, presumably by the urban local bodies.

Lower level employees are poorly paid for multifarious activities. Administrative control should lie with medical personnel and free from politicians or non-technical experts.

Yours, etc., Basudeb Dutta, Durgapur, 30 December.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN** ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Indonesia readies for UK strain

The Indonesian government has drawn up a list of preventive measures following a new coronavirus variant that was discovered in the UK, says national Covid-19 task force chief Doni Monardo. On December 24, Doni said Minister of Coordinating Maritime Affairs and Investment Luhut Pandjaitan had conducted a ministerial meeting in the previous week to anticipate the new strain of the coronavirus, which has reportedly been detected in Australia and Singapore.

In the meeting, Luhut also invited epidemiologists to provide the government with insight and feedback regarding Covid-19 mitigation in the country. The task force, Doni went on to say, had also attempted to reduce the chances of coronavirus transmission in the country by limiting entry for foreigners and Indonesians who departed from countries that had detected the new Covid-19 strain, including the UK. "The government has started denying entry to British nationals, hopefully this can protect our people," said Doni during December 24's virtual discussion entitled *Outlook 2021: Wajah Indonesia Setelah Pandemi* (What Indonesia will look like after the pandemic).

In regard to the new coronavirus strain, the task force has also released an addendum to task force Circular No 3/2020 on travel health protocols for the Christmas and New Year holidays during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The additional regulations include a temporary ban on entrance permits for foreigners travelling from the UK, as well as stricter health protocols for Indonesians and foreigners coming from European countries and Australia

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to Indonesia. Indonesians who wish to return home from the UK are required to show a negative PCR test result, taken at most 48 hours prior to their departure. They are also required to undergo a five-day quarantine starting from their arrival date. Those travelling in from Europe and Australia are required to present a negative result from a PCR test taken in their country of origin no more than 48 hours before departure. The policy is effective from December 22 to January 8, next year. Doni said up to 3,000 foreigners who entered Indonesia were tested positive for Covid-19. "The cases could increase rapidly if we do not maximise the efforts of our airport personnel," he added. On December 21, scientists from the UK's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) discovered a new variant of coronavirus that has been spreading rapidly in Britain, Reuters reported.

The new variant is said to carry mutations that make children more susceptible to coronavirus infection than with the previous strains. Moreover, the emerging mutated SARS-CoV-2 variant is up to 70 per cent more transmissible compared to the previous strain in the UK.

IN MEMORIAM

RAYCHAUDHURI SATYA PRASAD (January 3, 1986), RAYCHAUDHURI MIRA (September 12, 1997) ~ Fondly remembered by Mala, Bijoy, Ajoy and their families.



ELDERLY

SIR, Apropos 'Worrisome trend: Elderly being abandoned by kin at hospital' (*The Statesman*, 28 December), has once again exposed the plight of elderly citizens at the hands of their near and dear ones. This happens because of the lack of any comprehensive legislation to compel sons and daughters to look after their parents in their old age. It is important to have stringent laws with compulsory punishments, otherwise this type of negligence towards elderly parents would be difficult to curb. As of now, there are about 12 crore elderly citizens across the country of which many are languishing. Many are not even safe, and some are even killed in order to grab their properties.



Yours, etc., Baniprasanna Datta, Kolkata, 29 December.