

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.

— Upton Sinclair

## Hikes for them, woes for us

**O**n the last day of the just concluded session of the two Houses, Karnataka legislators gifted themselves hikes in salary, perks and allowances without batting an eyelid. The Karnataka Legislature Salaries, Pensions and Allowances (amendment) Bill-2022 and the Karnataka Ministers Salaries and Allowances (amendment) Bill-2022 were passed by a voice vote amid the din raised by the Opposition Congress party members who staged a dharna. The bill added an extra feather to their cap with salaries and attendant allowances set to go up automatically every five years from now onwards.

The salary hike is a ritual that usually comes on the ultimate day of the session. Symbolic protests by members of the Left—if any of them are left at all—have marred the otherwise consensual decisions. But finally, everything ends on a happy note.

Everyone knows that legislators hold the state kitty in their hands and are entitled to gift themselves whatever they deem fit for the work they do. And they obviously feel no prickle of conscience while awarding themselves benefits no ordinary Indian can even dream of.

The hike in monthly salary is understandable—from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 75,000 for the Chief Minister and from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 40,000 for legislators. But the enhancement of house rent, house maintenance allowance, guest allowance, sumptuary allowance, travel allowance, and above all, raising of the monthly entitlement of petrol from 1,000 litres to 2,000 litres per month for ministers, is sure to raise eyebrows.

Not to be missed is the point that there is no bar on many of them carrying on their professions as lawyers, journalists or chartered accountants during their non-session days. One wonders if a common Indian can dream of even a fraction of such hikes these rich lawmakers have approved for themselves without much hassles.

Of late, the average duration of Legislature sessions has been dipping constantly. It is well below 70 days annually in most of the states.

Of the few days that legislators are supposed to meet and debate, much gets wasted in sparring, adjournments, closure of business after the customary obituary references, weekends, and pandemonium over some issue.

Should not legislators be accountable for loss of precious transactional hours and the lack of business expected of them?

It is also pertinent to ask if the legislators can decide for themselves what they need to be paid and allowed to carry home as perks. A democratic polity without such scrutiny is likely to attract erosion of public trust and credibility.

# Post-pandemic resilience of Indian agri exports

Agri exports have been increasing in the post-pandemic period. Concerted efforts are needed for sustaining the pace of growth and for creating a name for Indian agri products in global markets

Jayanti Kajale

**I** During the pandemic, economic activity, especially trade flows across the globe, have been affected adversely. It is amply clear now that while there has been contraction of overall merchandise trade, global agri trade has remained much more resilient during the pandemic year 2020-21. In the case of India also, the figures indicate an increasing trend in value of agri exports during 2020-21. India has managed to remain integrated with global agri markets since the outbreak of the pandemic and benefited from this integration.

### Rise in agri exports in 2020-21

The value of agri trade including agri and allied products in rupee terms which was around 2.52 lakh crores in 2017-18 and 2.75 lakh crores in 2018-19, dropped to around 2.52 lakh crores in 2019-20 due to lockdowns, but rose to around 3 lakh crores in the post lockdown period of 2020-21. This indicates that the pandemic created opportunities for our exports of agri products. It also underlines the need to maintain the pace of increase in exports for achieving the target relating to export growth.

Major commodity groups that led the growth in agri exports are food grains, spices, sugar, oilseeds sector products and horticultural products. Marine products and buffalo meat which were major items in the export basket till 2018-19 however registered a decline in the year 2019-20 and their exports could not reach earlier levels by 2020-21. Under food grains, though basmati rice has been the major item of export traditionally, exports of non-basmati rice have registered an increase after March 2020 as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. As per the Agricultural and Processed Food Exports Development Authority (APEDA) data, our exports of non-basmati rice to a number of countries, including China, increased steeply. Wheat exports have risen by a massive 800 percent (over a small base) in value over the previous year, with Bangladesh accounting for 50 percent of total wheat exports. Export of sugar as well as spices has been increasing over the last 10 years



and during the covid period as well. Other smaller commodity segments which registered considerable increase are horticultural and oilseed sector products.

### Weaker supply chains

This rise in agri exports immediately after the complete lockdown is attributed to opportunities that the pandemic created for Indian agricultural exports to developing and a few developed countries, many of which were adversely affected due to the pandemic-enforced weaker supply chains. Adverse weather conditions in countries like China was another reason for higher demand. Shipments of cereals were sent to a number of new countries besides the regular destinations.

Our production in this period was adequate for supporting the incremental demand. Estimates for the years 2019-20 and 2020-21 show an increase in the production of all major commodity groups. Our food grain production has crossed record 300 million tons mark in 2020-21 and production of other commodity groups such as oilseeds, sugarcane and some horticultural commodities has also recorded an increase.

### Looking ahead

The key question the positive export trends pose is whether these would be sustained in the post-pandemic period when normalcy is established. The agri

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export policy of 2018 envisages doubling of agri exports from US\$ 30+ billion in 2018 to US\$ 60+ billion by 2022. For this, in rupee terms, the exports would have to increase from around 2.75 lakh crores- level of agri exports in 2018-19 to around 5 lakh crores by 2022. Achieving this target by this year seems difficult. However, to reach this target in the near future, a number of policy measures need to be put in place.

Maintaining an overall stable export policy regime to provide incentives to agri exporters is essential. Arbitrary usage of trade instruments such as export bans and higher level of minimum export price of the commodity to be exported has frequently been observed, especially in case of commodities such as onion. The major objective of the government behind these has been managing the demand and supply imbalance and price levels in the domestic economy. These trade policy tools are often the easiest macro policy options available in the short run. However, this leads to disruption of exports and loss of trust in the international markets.

Apart from this, sustained efforts by government and non-government institutions are necessary for establishing Indian products in newly created foreign markets for various agri commodities such as food grains and for creating niche markets for growing agri product

segments such as horticultural and oilseed sector products. Diversification of the agri export basket by tapping the diverse production basket is also vital.

Efforts at increasing our exports would be fruitful when farmers are integrated into the global value chain to reap the benefits of international prices. One way to integrate small farmers with the value chain is by participating in collectives—cooperatives, companies, other organisations—that reduce the cost of marketing and improve bargaining strength. Such institutional mechanisms should be promoted. Supporting farmers for improving quality and for complying with global sanitary and phytosanitary standards is essential, particularly for perishable horticultural and livestock products. Connecting farmers to digital technologies for providing extension services and market intelligence is also required.

As suggested by the High Level Advisory Group on trade related issues, projecting demand and prices of commodities in future for appropriate sowing decisions needs to be promoted. Also, providing market intelligence to the agri exporters for supplying products to international markets facing shortages and for tapping new opportunities opened up due to the pandemic is critical. As recommended in the Agri Export Policy 2018, analysis of existing export-oriented infrastructure across value chains would be helpful for creating robust infrastructure for promoting agri exports. The recently announced budget for the year 2022-23 has focussed on the creation of rural infrastructure and delivery of digital and hi-tech services to farmers. This is expected to increase connectivity of the farmers with markets and reduce their costs. Also, initiatives such as promotion of usage of drones for agri activities, promotion of nutri cereals, funding for agri start-ups and processing activities and support to the FPOs are expected to increase various agricultural activities and strengthen supply chain for agri products.

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## Trending on Trail



Photo from the early 1950's when he passed out of college. A man full of love, never saw him discriminate on religion, race, color or caste. Gave his life serving his country, community, from leading unions to parliament. Fought religious fanatics his entire life.

Zuber Jafri@zuberjafri

ED, IT, NCB, CBI, Pakistan, Dawood are all BJP's campaign tools, deployed from time to time to help BJP narrative. Maharashtra exposed CBI in SSR case, we exposed NCB in the Drugs case and today ED stands exposed for having reduced itself to becoming an extended department of BJP.

Priyanka Chaturvedi @priyankac19

Art has been a form of resistance since time memorial. Humor is disguised defiance. It is the intellectuals who distinguish between what is good and bad art.

UrbanShrink@UrbanShrink

## Honouring black historical figures

Every year since 2016, a majority of congressional Democrats have published Facebook or Twitter posts recognizing Black History Month

Samuel Bestvater

**A** growing share of congressional lawmakers have taken to social media each February to commemorate Black History Month, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of their Facebook and Twitter activity. Nearly two-in-three members of Congress (64%) mentioned Black History Month on Facebook or Twitter in February 2021, up from just 29% in 2015.

Previous research by the Center has found that Democratic lawmakers are more likely than Republicans to mention the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on social media. The new analysis finds that Democrats are also more likely than their GOP counterparts to discuss Black History Month on social media.

In every year since 2016, a majority of congressional Democrats have published Facebook or Twitter posts recognizing Black History Month. That share increased by 9

percentage points between 2020 and 2021, with 91% of Democratic lawmakers doing so last February. By contrast, fewer than half of congressional Republicans have mentioned Black History Month in each year since 2015. But that share has also risen substantially over that time period, including an increase from 29% to 36% between 2020 and 2021.

Black members of Congress have produced a sizable share of such posts in recent years. While Black lawmakers have accounted for 9% of members of Congress in the last two years, they accounted for a combined 35% of members' posts mentioning Black History Month in February 2020 and 2021. Black members of Congress are overwhelmingly Democrats.

When it comes to the specific language used in lawmakers' posts about Black History Month, "celebrate" and "honor" have been two of the most commonly used substantive terms. Each word has appeared in 19% of such posts

When it comes to the specific language used in posts about Black History Month, "celebrate" and "honor" have been two of the most commonly used words

since 2015. Other common terms include "civil rights" (used in 12% of posts), "justice" (10%) and "equality" (8%). In addition to examining the terms used in lawmakers' posts about Black History Month, Pew Research Center identified the individuals, both historical and contemporary, who were referenced by the largest number of lawmakers in these posts. In both February 2020 and February 2021, civil rights icon Rosa Parks was the single most-mentioned individual in lawmaker posts about Black History Month: 40 lawmakers mentioned Parks in this context in 2020 and 41 did so in 2021. Individu-

als appearing in the top 10 in both years also included the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, and Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman in Congress.

Other historical figures have been mentioned in these posts in response to recent events. For instance, NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson—who died on Feb. 24, 2020—was the third most-mentioned figure in February 2020. And in 2021, the most-mentioned figures included Kamala Harris, who had recently been elected vice president, and John Lewis, a civil rights leader and member of Congress who had died in July 2020.

Members of Congress also differ by party when it comes to which individuals they have mentioned in their social media posts honouring Black History Month. Many of these contemporary or historical figures, for example, have been mentioned more by Democratic members than by Republican

members. This includes references to individuals killed by police and whose deaths helped set in motion the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, such as George Floyd (referenced by six Democrats and no Republicans in posts about Black History Month in February 2021) and Breonna Taylor (mentioned by three Democrats and no Republicans that month). Republicans, in turn, have often referenced Reconstruction-era Black politicians who served in Congress as Republicans, such as Hiram Revels (mentioned in 2020) and Joseph Rainey (in 2021). GOP lawmakers have also referenced contemporary conservative political or legal figures who are Black. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, for example, was mentioned by six Republican members of Congress in posts about Black History Month in February 2020 and February 2021 combined, but by no Democrats.

(Courtesy: PEW Research Centre.)

## Letters to Editor

Dear Reader, send in your letters to: [letters@newstrailindia.com](mailto:letters@newstrailindia.com)

### BMTC employees get Covid boosters

The Akshaya Patra Foundation conducted a Covid-19 vaccination drive for the employees of BMTC. This drive aimed to vaccinate over 20,000 employees across BMTC bus depots in the city, including drivers, mechanics and admin staff. I would like to thank the volunteers of the Akshaya Patra Foundation for arranging a third dose (booster) for people whose job it is to interact with lots of people. The booster shot is essential for BMTC employees. And to motivate people, every person who came forward to get vaccinated, received a free post-jab lunch and a Raksha kit - which is a customised ration kit with groceries for 21 meal servings. Keep the good work going!

—Uma A.S, Bengaluru

### Namma Metro should have last mile connectivity

Travelling by metro will improve our health, save time, is cost-effective and a means of our physiological wellness. But the BMRCL should plan something big in the last-mile connectivity department, as getting to the destination from the metro station is not easy. Care should also be taken to avoid felling trees as much as possible as we have seen that without any reason, many trees have been chopped. This should be taken care of and air pollution will further reduce.

—Rashmika, Bengaluru

### Body shaming and abuse

A woman in Bengaluru set herself on fire after years of dealing with the mental torture from her husband. He constantly harassed her about not looking good enough and told her to die so he could marry another woman. The victim reportedly adjusted to her plight as she had two little children. It is sad to see such incidents of cruelty based on body shaming occur. Still for most men, the only criteria of qualification for a good wife remains good looks and skills in the kitchen. It is disappointing to see them remain so negative in what seems like a progressive society.

—Aditi, Bengaluru