

MSME-BACKBONE OF ECONOMY

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have always played an important role in the Indian economy. Currently, about 6.3 crore MSMEs operating in the country not only contribute a major amount to the country's GDP but also provide employment opportunities to a large population. It is noteworthy that this sector also plays an important role in the stability of the labor market, providing approximately 110 million jobs.

In such a situation, with the current special emphasis by the government on the Self-reliant India campaign, the role of MSMEs has become more important from the point of view of India's economy and economic strategy.

While promoting SME bonds will enable MSMEs to benefit from lower interest rates compared to other financial intermediaries, these bonds will also act as a viable high return instrument for informed and educated investors operating in the market. Given the growing importance of the data economy, it has become very important that an independent body is established by the government to advise MSMEs and enable them to move forward in this new digital ecosystem.

Changes in labor laws are a must, but given their sensitivity, these laws will have to strike the right balance between providing a growth-oriented framework for MSMEs and providing adequate protection in terms of workers' rights.

MSMEs form the backbone of a resilient national economy. It is very important to give priority to the development of MSMEs for the strong economic future of the country. Many important steps have been taken by the government in this direction in the last few years.

Ram Janamboomi is a cultural Issue

OMKAR DATTATRAY

Ram Janamboomi temple issue is basically ,primarily and fundamentally a socio-cultural issue .It has also been recently stated the other day by the defense minister Rajnath Singh .He said that the Ram Janamboomi temple issue is a cultural issue for the nation and for the BJP as well .It is not a political issue and thus should not be politicized by the political parties .This cultural issue should not be used as a vote catching machine and thus should not be an issue connected with vote bank politics .So it is not a political issue to get votes in our secular democracy .With a couple of weeks left to inaugurate Ram Temple ,Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said that Ram Janamboomi is not merely a political issue but is a cultural issue for BJP. The consecration ceremony of Ram Janamboomi temple and Ram Lalla will be held on January 22,2024 ,our Prime minister Narendra Modi will be present there ,When asked about getting electoral benefits from Ram temple he said ,this is not a political issue for us to get votes ,Ram Janamboomi is a cultural issues for us ."The consecration ceremony in Ayodhya 's Ram Mandir will be held over seven days ,starting on January 16.On the final day ,January 22 after morning Puja ,the deity of Ram Lalla will be consecrated in 'Marigashira Nakshatra' in the afternoon .But it is unfortunate that before the consecration of Lord Ram ,much politics is being played by the opposition parties, with some calling that the BJP has high jacked the Ram temple inauguration and the consecration ceremony has been reduced to be the political affair of the ruling BJP and they are using the Ram Janamboomi issue to come to power at the centre in 2024.A big congress leader has also said that without Ram ,there is no existence of India and India has no meaning without Ram and congress should accept the plain speaking of its own leader and stop politicizing the Ram Janamboomi itemple issue .Lord Ram is the breath ,soul and the essence of Bharat and India has no meaning without Ram .India cannot be conceived without Ram and Lord Ram is our torch bearer and guiding force .we aim at having Ram Rajya in the country. Today Ram has become a focal point of unification and unity for all over India .All differences and discriminations pale into insignificance before the unifying force of the Lord Rama's consecration .All the people are coming together to make the important event a total success and the people of this country have unflinching faith in Lord Ram who is the symbol of our cultural legacy and cultural identity and therefore it is the force of unification of the people and their efforts for the Ram Rajya .Ram is our national icon and inseparable part of our grand national culture besides being the private religious and cultural icon .Lord Ram is more loved even more than our life and limb .Invitation has gone to top congress leaders including the congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Sonia Gandhi ,but the congress is in confusion over attending the inauguration ceremony of Ram temple .Prallhad Joshi says that it will suffer both ways ,if the leaders attend or if they don't attend .The congress is in a fix over attending Ram Mandir inauguration in Ayodhya .Its prospects will suffer both ways ,if the leaders attend the inauguration or if they skip the inauguration "said union minister Prallhad joshi .In the past congress has questioned the existence of Lord Ram and said that he is the matter of imagination and has no real existence and thus the congress failed to gain power and stands distanced from the people .The entire life story of Rama ,Sita and their companions allegorically discusses duties ,rights and social responsibilities of an individual .It illustrates dharma ,dharmaic living through model characters .Rama's life story is imbued with symbolism .According to Sheldon Pollock ,the life of Rama as told in the Indian texts is a masterpiece that offers a framework to represent ,conceptualize and comprehend the world and the nature of life .Lake major epics and religious stories around the world ,it has been of vital relevance because it, "tells the culture what it is. "Rama's life is more complex than western template for the battle between the good and the evil ,where there is a clear distinction between immortal powerful gods or heroes and the mortal struggling humans .In Indian traditions ,particularly Ramayana ,the story is about a divine human ,a mortal god ,incorporating both into the exemplar who transcends both humans and gods .As a person ,Rama personifies the characteristics of an ideal person .He had within him all desirable virtues that any individual would seek to aspire, and he fulfills all his moral obligations .Rama is considered a maryada purshottama or the best of upholders of Dharma .Rama has been considered as a source of inspiration and has been described as Maryada Purshottama (Ideal Man) and ideal king .He has been depicted in many films ,television shows and plays .Lord Ram was an ideal king and his kingdom was ideal to be imitated and followed by the Kings and even by the modern democrats and rulers .Rama is worthy of emulation and worthy of imitation and that is the reason that father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi laid stress on having a Ram Rajya which will be the ideal rule and will be a panacea of all ills and problems .Thus the political parties especially the saffron parties talk about the relevance of having a Ram Rajya in India and they strive for having it as the ideal rule .Thus Yogi Adhityanath and the most BJP leaders including the top executive the PM talks of having the Ram Rajya in India .Mind Ram Rajya is most secular and is not against any religion and in it people of all faiths are equally treated .In short Ram Janamboomi temple is a socio-cultural issue and is not a political issue but then it turns into votes for the saffron party but basically it is a cultural not a political issue and thus all the political parties should desist from politicizing Ram temple issue and at the present should not politicize the inauguration of Ram temple issue. May Lord Ram free the universe from all negative forces and protect the mankind and let us get inspiration from the cultural life of Lord Ram.

(The author is a columnist, social and KP activist).

Agriculture: 'Changing Waters' and the Sustainable Transition

DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

The population all across the globe is on the rise and on the rise also is the threats to our food systems. The threats emanate mostly from our crude and unsustainable practices that have led to a series of changes on this planet including the climate change. Depleting water resources, deteriorating health of soil, toxicity in the air and loss of bio diversity are the consequences of various anthropogenic activities and pose a great threat to life and various life forms on this planet. Every year about 800,000 people die from causes attributable to climate change. About 1.8 million die from diarrhoea due to lack of access to clean water supply and sanitation and from poor hygiene. About 3.5 million die from malnutrition and about 60,000 die in natural disasters.

The effects of global warming result in reduce of yields of crops like Wheat, Paddy, Maize and important fruit crops. Agricultural productivity might increase modestly in temperate regions for some crops in response to a local warming of 1-3 °C (1.8-5.4 °F), but productivity will generally decrease with further warming. The warming of oceans is predicted to have an adverse impact on commercial fisheries by changing the distribution and productivity of various fish species. The livestock will also be affected by increasing temperature. It will result in lesser milk yields, adverse effect on metabolism of animals and lactation period.

The writing on the wall is thus clear; we won't be able to cater to the food requirements of the growing populace on this planet with the existing agricultural methods. The quote 'changing waters' reflect the changing nature of life. As the water in the river is constantly flowing which means that even within a few minutes water at a particular spot won't be the same as it was earlier. When seen in the context of agriculture, the quote thus conveys the meaning that agriculture also needs to continuously change itself, it has to be a dynamic entity, assimilating and absorbing the positive changes both at the local level as well as from outside. It has to shape and reshape itself in order to sustain the life on this planet. This transition ultimately has to be a sustainable one so that food as well as nutritional security of all is met. The sustainable transition will involve:

Advance Farming System: An Advance Farming System (AFS) is an integrated farming system based on all the usage of new technology which replaces human labour and intelligence with different tools. Advance Farming Systems originated with the introduction of Global Positioning System (GPS) guidance for tractors in the early 1990s and since then this GPS based tractor guidance has become one of the examples of application of precision farming globally. The agriculture sector has always been a labour intensive and under severe pressure to be more and more productive. AFS uses a wide array of IT tools such as GPS guidance, sensors, drones, robotics, autonomous vehicles, variable rate technology, GPS based soil sampling, automated hardware and telemetric and other control systems. All of these have the capability to analyze large amount of data on a short period of time thereby reducing the time taken and the labour intensiveness. It is soft

ware managed and sense monitored.

Promotion of SreeAnna (Millets): Considering the immense potential of millets in nutritional security, their ability to withstand climatic stress and grow in regions otherwise not feasible for cultivation with minimal inputs; these are now being recognized as an ideal solution for countries to increase self-sufficiency and reduce their reliance on imported cereal grains. In India, the year 2018 was celebrated as National Year of Millets. Government has now recognized these millets as Nutri-cereals and comprise of Sorghum (Jowar), Pearl Millet (Bajra), Finger Millet (Ragi/Mandua), Minor Millets i. e. Foxtail Millet (Kangani/Kakum), Proso Millet (Cheena), Kodo Millet (Kodo), Barnyard Millet (Sawa/Sanwa/Jhangora), Little Millet(Kutki) and two Pseudo Millets (Buck-wheat (Kuttu) and Amaranthus (Chaulai). Now, with the year 2023 being celebrated as International Year of Millets, the message is loud and clear. All of us have to work on their revival. Their revival also resonates with some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2 relates to zero hunger; SDG 3 relates to good health and well-being; SDG 12 relates to sustainable consumption and production and SDG 13 being related to climate action).

Enterprise Diversification: Agriculture is not only confined to crops or livestock. Agriculture encompasses a wide range of enterprises which among others also include goatry, sheep, apiculture, sericulture, piggery, floriculture, horticulture, oleiculture etc. Continuing with a single enterprise runs the risk of ruining the fortunes of farmers in case any calamity struck the fields and results in devastation of crops. We need to have approaches which ensure a regular income for the farmers even in case of failure of one crop/enterprise. One such approach is to have more than one enterprise or produce more than one product to avoid having your income totally dependent on the production and price of one product. If profit from one product is poor, profit from producing other products may prevent total profit from falling below acceptable levels. This is what is called as enterprise diversification. Having more than one enterprise ensures that farmer gets compensated from one of the enterprise in case of failure of other. Infact, enterprise diversification is a self-insuring strategy used by farmers to protect against various risks..

Farm Mechanization: One of the limitations of the agricultural sector in the country is the low level of farm mechanization. On the contrary, the fact is that agricultural mechanization helps in increasing production, productivity and profitability by achieving timeliness in farm operations, bringing precision in metering and placement of inputs, reducing available input losses, increasing utilization efficiency of costly inputs (seed, chemical, fertilizer, irrigation, water etc.), reducing unit cost of produce, enhancing profitability and competitiveness in the cost of operation. In the times to come, the timeliness of various farm operations will be enhanced with the use of drones and robots. The use of drones to promote farm mechanization is all set to play a bigger role in areas like crop surveillance, spraying, sowing, and coping-up with weather uncertainties and precision farming. Another

innovative device in this regard is the agricultural robots which have the potential to replace men power. Robots are specialized articles of technology that are capable of assisting the humans with a wide range of operations. They have the capability to analyze, contemplate, and carry out a multitude of functions, and they can be programmed to grow and evolve to match the needs of various tasks. These are being used for an incredible number of tasks to ease the burden on the farmers. Their primary role is to tackle labor-intensive, repetitive, and physically demanding tasks.

Digital Agriculture: Availability of timely and relevant information to the farming community is a critical input in the agriculture production system. Unfortunately due to lack of adequate number of human resources, the information seldom reaches out to them in time. This ultimately affects productivity and production. As such new tools and techniques which do not require the presence of personnels physically in the fields with the farming community have to be developed and exploited. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are acknowledged as key players in knowledge exchange, targeted recommendations, market integration and access to financial services. Digital Agriculture is 'ICT and data ecosystems to support the development and delivery of timely, targeted information and services to make farming profitable and sustainable while delivering safe nutritious and affordable food for all. Today agriculture is witnessing what is called 'digitalisation'. Digitalisation of agriculture has also emerged as another revolution, more so for the large numbers of the world's smallholder farmers. Thus Digitalisation has to be promoted for transition to sustainable agriculture.

Natural Farming: In the recent times, the Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) has emerged as the most popular model in India. According to 'Natural Farming' principles, plants get 98% of their supply of nutrients from the air, water, and sunlight. And the remaining 2% can be fulfilled by good quality soil with plenty of friendly microorganisms just like that exist in forests and other natural systems. A Natural Farming system believes that the soil is always supposed to be covered with organic mulch which creates humus and encourages the growth of friendly microorganisms. Desi cow is also an indispensable part of 'Natural Farming' system. The system requires cow dung and cow urine (Gomutra) obtained from Indian breed cow only. Desi cow is apparently the purest as far as the microbial content of cow dung, and urine goes. Another important aspect is that of Cultures. A farm made bio-culture named 'Jeevamrutha' is added to the soil instead of any fertilizers to improve micro flora of soil. Jeevamrutha is derived from very little cow dung and cow urine of desi cow breed. Natural, farm-made pesticides like Dashpami ark and Neem Astra are used to control pests and diseases. Weeds are considered essential and used as living or dead mulch layer. In ZBNF, multi-cropping is encouraged over single crop method.

(The author writes on agriculture and social issues).

Self-Help Groups(SHG) for Rural Development

DR. BANARSI LAL

Over the years a plethora of poverty alleviation programmes has been implemented in India and a huge amount of social and financial investments has been made to achieve the sole objective of poverty eradication. Most of these programmes were based on top-down approach and did not consider the needs of the people. Activities for poverty alleviation programmes in most cases adhered to fund based development. The economic vulnerable groups were forced to remain underconfident and the guarantee for security of their livelihood was found missing in the entire endeavor to eradicate poverty from the country. Considering the large number of people still living below the poverty line, therefore the resources used for poverty eradication and provision of subsidies in the name of poor have not been much effective in achieving the goal of poverty alleviation. In the late 1990s evaluation reports of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), a major programme for creating self-employment opportunities in rural areas reflected the flaws in the implementation of the programme. After that holistic programme called Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) was announced by the Government of India. This programme was based on group approach rural development where the rural poor were organized into self-help groups.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are small functional groups in rural areas to increase the resource base of the members through the act of thrift and credit among themselves. To form quality groups, rural participation plays a pivotal role in identifying its members who are brought into the SHG-fold through the process of social mobilization. Group functions are assessed and monitored by the external agencies with active support of government, the lead bank of the region and the Panchayats Union. The SHGs developed under various pro-

grammes provide a great opportunity for convergence of various programmes of various ministries and organizations. Necessary training can be provided to the SHGs members to create awareness on community health, traditional and modern agricultural practices, micro-credit, veterinary practices, water resource management, Panchayati Raj and other issues. These trainings could be helpful in increasing the abilities and confidence of the rural poor people that may enable them for an effective contribution towards their own community development. Various micro-enterprises like pickle manufacture, agarbati making, honey and food processing, spices production, dairy farming ,group leaf plate making etc. have proved to be most viable economic activities in the country to drive beneficiaries out of the poverty trap in the rural areas. The products are produced according to the local demand patterns. To sustain the community economic activities, leadership and membership trainings backed by participatory management is a must for the SHGs. The SHGs members if imparted entrepreneurial trainings combined with exposure visits to the successful micro-enterprise of the same nature would have a greater impact on the quality of the products produced by the poor beneficiaries. The success of the economic activities taken by the self-employed persons largely depends on their social influence, their role in decision making process, broader financial base through enhanced thrift and credit activities and widened ownership rights to the assets created by them.

The agricultural extension programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture could be effectively implemented by the help of SHGs members in the rural areas as 66% of the rural people depend on agriculture. Dairy, poultry farming, sheep breeding are preferred activities among rural people. The benefits of the activities can be maximized for the SHGs by ensuring appropriate for-

ward and backward linkages with the activities of the department of animal husbandry and dairy development. The services of SHGs can be utilized for the eradication of diseases like Tuberculosis, Polio, and Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) which are common among the rural people. The SHGs can play an instrumental role in the population stabilization programme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare through reaching the communication as well as benefits of these programmes to the BPL families who tend to have large families leading to higher dependency ratios. Maternal and Infant Mortality Rates are higher in these families. Mechanism would need to be developed for the Reproductive and Child Health Programme benefits to reach the SHGs. The members of the SHGs can be involved in the on-going Adult Education programme of the Department of Education where the self-employed members could be considered for training under Total Literacy Campaign continuing Adult Literacy programme activities. In this endeavor, a major chunk of adult illiterate population could be systematically covered and would have multiplier effect in increasing the performance of the literacy drive in the country. The organizations like Khadi and Village Industries Commission, Small Scale Industries, Ministry of Textiles, Development Commissioner, Handloom etc. have programmes for development of clusters in places where traditionally some activities have been going on. For instance, carpet weaving, handloom, pottery, wood-craft, stone carving cane and bamboo etc. are popular in some parts of the country. There is need to identify all such activities that could be taken up in clusters covering the groups of rural artisans in various areas. Cluster approach has the advantage of bringing in economies of scale as well as developing backward and forward linkages. The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education popularly known as Mid-Day Meals Scheme is under implementation

(The writer is Sr. Scientist & Head, KVK Reasi).

YOUR COLUMN Invites for Ayodhya Ram Temple inauguration

Dear Editor,

The long cherished dream of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has materialised thanks to the relentless fight for justice from the Hindu outfits and much more thanks to the Supreme Court verdict delivered during the regime of Ranjan Gogoi as Chief Justice. Congress employed 24 lawyers to stall the move for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya. It has been announced that invites for heads of political parties have been sent. Mamata Banerjee and Left leaders have declined the invitation. Uddhav Thackeray is seething with anger that invitation has not been sent to him. Now Thackeray does not have a political party of his own. Thackeray must remember that for the sake of sharing power and heading the Maharashtra government, he joined his hands with Congress which was vehemently opposing the construc-

tion of temple in Ayodhya. Ideologically BJP and Shiv Sena were homogenous. Both of them were natural allies. Even with less number of seats bagged by Shiv Sena in the previous Assembly election in Maharashtra, Uddhav staked claim for heading the government which BJP rightly rejected. Yet he gave slip to BJP and formed the government with the help of parties ideologically opposed to Shiv Sena. Now Uddhav is like a fish out of water since parties ideologically opposed to each other cannot coexist. Shiv Sena (UBT) (Uddhav Bal Thackeray) is known for pro-Hindu stance and Congress for anti-Hindu stance. Shiv Sena (UBT) favours Veer Savarkar whereas Congress is dead opposite to Savarkar. In response to the statement of Uddhav that he has not been invited, Acharya Satyendra Das, chief priest at Sri Ram Jannabhoomi temple has responded by saying "Invitations are only extended to those who are devotees of Lord Ram. He has refuted the charge that BJP is fighting in the name of Lord Ram. Our PM is respected everywhere. He has done immense work in his tenure. This is not politics. This is his

devotion". Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has disclosed that he is not in receipt of any invitation. Siddaramaiah is in a party and in the company of parties in close association with Congress which was vehemently opposed to the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Peeved by no invitation to Siddaramaiah, former Karnataka minister H. Anjaneya remarked that "he is Anjaneya and his Ram is Siddaramaiah". If Siddaramaiah is his Ram, can he adorn Siddaramaiah's photo with flowers and garland when he is alive? Can this Anjaneya show in his heart Siddaramaiah like Lord Anjaneya showed Ram in his heart? The strategy of the opposition parties is to blame BJP if they are not invited to the opening ceremony of the temple. If invited, to decline the invitation saying "who is BJP to invite?" Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi have been invited notwithstanding the opposition of Congress through employment of 24 lawyers in Supreme Court against transfer of title of Ramjannabhoomi to Hindu outfits. Kapil Sibal says that Ram is in his heart and he does not need to go to temple in

Unemployment--A major issue

Dear Editor,

Unemployment is a major issue in India today which has been affecting the country's economic and social development. The government has failed to create enough jobs to absorb the growing population. There are a number of ways to reduce unemployment. The government can create jobs through public works, projects and businesses.

Jubel D'Cruz