

AMRUT FOR DEVELOPING INFRA

A tal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) was launched on June 25, 2015 in selected 500 cities and towns across the country. The Mission focuses on development of basic infrastructure, in the selected cities and towns, in respect of water supply; sewerage and septage management; storm water drainage; green spaces and parks; and non-motorized urban transport. A set of Urban Reforms and Capacity Building have been included in the Mission. As per a written reply to a question submitted in Lok Sabha, the Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Kaushal Kishore informed that his Ministry has approved State Annual Action Plans (SAAPs) of all the States/Union Territories (UTs) amounting to Rs 77,640 crore for the entire Mission period, which includes committed Central Assistance (CA) of Rs 35,990 crore. So far, States/UTs have taken up 5,873 projects worth Rs 82,222 crore, out of which 4,676 projects worth Rs 32,793 crore have been completed, and another 1,197 projects worth Rs 49,430 crore have been grounded, which are at various stages of implementation. Further, overall works worth around Rs 66,313 crore have physically completed and expenditure of Rs 59,615 crore has been incurred. Till date, 134 lakh water tap connections and 102 lakh sewer connections (including households covered through Faecal Sludge and Septage Management - PSSM) have been provided through AMRUT & in convergence with other schemes against targeted 139 lakh water connections and 145 lakh sewer connections respectively.

AMRUT Mission has been subsumed under AMRUT 2.0, which was launched on October 1, 2021 and ongoing projects of AMRUT 1.0 will be funded with CA till 31st March, 2023.

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0 scheme, which has been launched on October 1, 2021 for a period of 5 years i.e. from the financial year 2021-22 to financial year 2025-26, is designed to provide universal coverage of water supply through functional taps to all households in all the statutory towns in the country and coverage of sewerage/septage management in 500 cities covered in first phase of the AMRUT scheme. AMRUT 2.0 will promote circular economy of water through development of City Water Balance Plan (CWBP) for each city focusing on recycle/reuse of treated sewage, rejuvenation of water bodies and water conservation. It will help cities to identify scope for projects focusing on universal coverage of functional water tap connections, water source conservation, rejuvenation of water bodies and wells, recycle/reuse of treated used water, and rain-water harvesting. Based on the projects identified in CWBP, Mission envisages to make cities 'water secure' through circular economy of water.

Mission also has a reform agenda on ease of living of citizens through reduction of non-revenue water, recycle of treated used water, rejuvenation of water bodies, augmenting double entry accounting system, urban planning, strengthening urban finance etc. Other components of AMRUT 2.0 are Pey Jal Survekshan to ascertain equitable distribution of water, reuse of wastewater, mapping of water bodies and promote healthy competition among the cities/towns, technology Sub-Mission for water to leverage latest global technologies in the field of water, information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign to spread awareness among masses about conservation of water. The total indicative outlay for AMRUT 2.0 is Rs 2,99,000 crore including Central share of Rs 76,760 crore for five years. This outlay includes funding of Rs 22,000 crore (Rs 10,000 crore as Central Assistance) for ongoing projects of AMRUT till March 2023.

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THREE CHAIRS

I have recently been thinking of how the enforced solitude during the worst of the epidemic had people responding to it so differently. Some of us, though finding it tedious, settled into the isolation, keeping ourselves busy — even enjoying it; filling our days with books to be read, online courses, creative pursuits, even clearing shelves and cupboards. Others went crazy; no travelling, meeting physically with friends, family or even colleagues, not knowing how to structure working from home, or what to do with swathes of unusual free time.

Reading and re-reading took up a good chunk of my ample free time, a benefit of being a mostly retired person. And I came across these words again from Henry David Thoreau, speaking of his cabin in Walden — “I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society.”

Whether or not one has only three chairs in one's home, this is about more than something to sit on. For Thoreau in a rather isolated place this meant one thing, for us in a crowded city it can mean other things as well.

The space or chair for solitude for us introverts can become the only chair we pay attention to. We wholeheartedly agree with Thoreau's words: “I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time.” But the more extraverted among us focus on the second or third — giving thanks for at least online connectivity that would not have been possible many years ago.

The second chair again works in different ways.

Some of us have a few close friendships, others believe that everyone they meet deserves the title 'friend'. I find it interesting how Thoreau had very clear ideas on friendship — he spoke of friends as those who 'elevate one another' — and bring out the best in each other. It's a two-way process, nurturing and allowing oneself to be nurtured; being the giver and also the receiver.

The third chair is a reminder of our relationship with society. For some, this is restricted to reading papers and watching the news on television, then ranting over something. For others, it's active involvement, however small, in issues of the day that bother us, and doing whatever way we can to make the world around us that small bit better.

The thing is that all three of these needs of solitude, friendship, and society are deeply necessary for each of us, but balance is important for our well-being.

Since we need all three, spending too much time on any one adversely affects the others. It's good to reflect — and self-reflection can be seen as a first-chair task — about which chair you spend excessive time on, maybe to the detriment of the other two. Are you not just self-reflective but rather, too self absorbed? Do you give too much importance to friends, to being liked, and social image, perhaps even using the interactions to avoid understanding yourself better? Do you work for some 'noble cause' yet damage personal relationships? How do you give these compelling and often competing needs of solitude, friendship, and society each their due?

-Marguerite Theophil

Through selfless work, love of God grows in the heart. Then through his grace one realize him in course of time. God can be seen. One can talk to him as I am talking to you. -Ramakrishna

National Farmers Day: Celebrating Farming

■ DR BANARSI LAL

Every year December 23 is celebrated as National Farmers Day or Kisan Divas across India to commemorate the birth anniversary of 5th Prime Minister of India, Choudhary Charan Singh with full enthusiasm and joy. On this day, awareness among the citizens is created to understand the importance of farmers in the society for the overall social and economic development of the nation. Various debates, seminars, webinars, quiz competitions, discussions, workshops, exhibitions, essays, functions etc. are organized by various institutions especially on agriculture across the nation. Choudhary Charan Singh was born on December 23, 1902. He was primarily a peasant and always led an extremely simple life. Choudhary Charan Singh held the office as the fifth Prime Minister of India from 28th July 1979 to 14th January, 1980. He is well known for the budget he represented in 1979. That budget was amalgamated to accomplish the needs of the farmers and included everything that a farmer expects. During his tenure as the Prime Minister, he introduced many policies to improve the lives of the Indian farmers. He took initiatives for the welfare of the farmers and united the farmers' community against the landlords and money lenders across the nation. He always followed the famous slogan 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' given by the 2nd Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri. He was an avid writer and wrote several books depicting his thoughts on the lives of the farmers. He always tried to find out the solutions of various problems of the farming community. Choudhary Charan Singh passed on 29th of May, 1987 but his contributions for the farmers are still known. Charan Singh's peasantry background helped him to understand the real problems of the farmers and he did his best to solve them. He was a son of soil and he contributed immensely to improve the lives of the farmers. Choudhary Charan Singh is credited to formulate and implement the Zamindari Abolition Act. Farmers Day is celebrated to recognize his valuable services rendered to the farmers of the country.

The famous 'Kisan Ghat' in New Delhi is dedicated to Choudhary Charan Singh due to his services for the farmers. Various agricultural institutions and farmers organize agricultural based programmes to pay homage to their beloved leader.

Farmers are the foundation of our nation and they are considered as the incredible asset. Farms are the source of food and economy of the country and they must be acknowledged for that. India is predominantly an agricultural country and agriculture is the backbone of India's economic development. More than 80 per cent of the rural population of India contributes about 20 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture sector is unquestionably the largest livelihood provider and is considered as the largest private enterprise in India. India is the land of villages and agriculture is the main source of income for the farmers. About 70 per cent of the Indian population still thrives on the income generated through cultivation. Farmers are the spine of India. This sector provides the commodities and raw material required in non-agriculture and industrial sector. This sector is significantly contributing to the GDP of the nation. By 2030, when India's population is estimated around 150 crores, the requirement of food grains will be around 334 million tonnes. Agriculture sector is undergoing a structural change with respect to its farm size, cropping pattern and share in the national Gross Value Added (GVA). Now we have achieved high crops production but still there is agrarian crisis. In order to increase the income of the farmers there is dire need to adopt the income centric approach in preference to production. There is need to facilitate the farmers so that they can operate their farm enterprises on the basis of profitable returns. Promotion of agriculture as a true self-enterprise will have to define by the sustainability of resources. Sustainability refers to appropriate use of natural resources, environmentally friendly technologies and protection of bio-diver-

sity with a view to ensure the food and nutritional security of the increasing population. There is need to provide the equal opportunities for all categories of the farmers to grow and earn net family incomes more than they are presently earning. Presently, around 86 per cent of the total numbers of holdings in the country are under small and marginal farmers categories. The average size of holding in the country is around 1.15 ha. The farmers' incomes are linked to the growth rates of agriculture sector. During the 11th plan (2006-7 to 2011 -12), the agriculture growth rate was 3.3 per cent as against the target of 4 per cent. The growth rate of 12th plan (2012-13 to 2017-18) has been less targeted on account of poor performance in 2012-13 and two severe droughts in the year 2014-15 and 2015-16. But the year 2016-17 has shown growth buoyancy. There is need to increase the income of the farmers so that their standard of living can be improved and also generate the savings. Because of lack of savings and non-availability of required quantum of credits, the farmer is compelled to borrow the money from money lenders. It has been observed that indebtedness is an important factor for the farmers' suicides and around 52 per cent of the agricultural households in the country are estimated to be indebted. Government of India in its budget 2016-17 declared its commitment to double the farmers income over the period of six years from 2016-17 to 2021-22. In order to double the farmers income the growth rate of agricultural production is important but that is not sufficient. The emphasis on post-production of crops is also very important so that the income of the farmers can be increased. The Internal Rates of Returns are not uniform from all the sectors. It has also been observed that the livestock, fishing and aquaculture have more growth potential as compared to crops sector. Within the crops sub-sectors, horticulture sector has been registering more growth rates over the last decade. From 2010-11 to 2014-15 the area under horticultural crops increased by 18 per cent while the area under agricultural crops has

increased by 5 per cent. The share of horticultural output as a percentage of agriculture now constitutes 30 per cent.

Road, markets, irrigation, godowns, cold storage infrastructures, knowledge creation through technical development and so on are necessary for the agricultural growth in the country. For instance, improving of road infrastructure leads to reduction in the cost of transportation and thereby the marketing costs can be reduced. The investments by public and private sectors can play a critical role for the agricultural growth in India. Farmers' suicides are an avoidable issue if appropriate and timely interventions are made in agriculture sectors. The policies and programmes of the government should be designed in such a way so that farmers can be facilitated at every stage of crops production and post-production chain. By the Soil Health Card Scheme, the farmer can learn the nutrient and physico-chemical status of the soil and thus can decide the nature and quantum of fertilizers and amendments in soil. Such techniques can reduce the cost of cultivation. By e-National Agriculture Market (eNAM) information farmer can decide whether to sell the farm produce or to postpone for the time being. The Comprehensive Crop Insurance Scheme entitled as Pardhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana aims to insure the farmers' crops at the low premium rates. PM-KISAN is proving as a boon to the farmers. The interventions on food processing, supply chain and value chain management can help the farmers to realize their great monetary returns from their farm produce. Various central and state agricultural schemes and programmes can also be helpful increase the income of the farmers. There is need for the effective review and monitoring mechanism of all the activities at the field level supported by the appropriate Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Also there is crying need to develop climate resilient agriculture.

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Freebies a misuse of economy

■ ISHITA BANDRAL

Freebies stand for anything which is provided for free or any facility provided without any charges. The very concept of freebies is enshrined and supported by directive principles of state policy as a welfare measure for uplifting deprived classes. On one side we thought of an egalitarian society where everyone is more or less equally situated but on the other hand India has so many problems to deal with like poverty, unemployment, corruption and illiteracy. Now the question arises how to secure the basic amenities to the most deprived people and somewhere freebies provide a glance to help them out. Looking at the marvelous history of India, we feel highly immense but we cannot out rightly forget the dark past an example of which is the practice of untouchability, harsh divisions among Kshatriya and Shudras. As a result of this, at present society has been divided into have and have not. 'Have' categorizes those people who possess blind wealth including big businessmen, bureaucrats and political leaders; on the contrary, 'have not' speaks of that section of people who are unable to manage their square meals. So, if any free facility is being provided to this category of the society, out of public funds, then why does it create a debate. Having access to basic amenities of life like food, water, shelter, electricity is fundamental and its State's responsibility to ensure the availability of these amenities to all on constitutional as well as moral grounds.

India is a country which always believes in sharing, peace and

brotherhood. This is our heritage and legacy to carry forward. We would never deny food or shelter even to our enemy whereas these are our own people. Helping them out of public taxes is not a misuse; rather it is the appropriate use. The simplest thing is that if we want to develop we need to develop the majority of those who are in poverty or extreme poverty and this freebie is one way. According to data, Delhi Government provides free electricity, special bus facility to women (pink bus) and Gujarat govt. has no such measure but still produces less revenue than Delhi. The question is why this disparity, if freebies are such a misuse of the economy. The reality is that this question of freebies is nothing but just a political tactic to keep the discussion about anything on flame to gain popularity and raise unnecessary issues for next elections. Why only after corona we are challenging these freebies while they were in existence before that as well? Adding to it, we had a gross loss of economy due to the pandemic and now we are doing nothing but just trying to channelize our loss to different points like pre-poll freebies. This shows lack of functionality on the part of the government. The current scenario relates with the question of pre-poll freebies. Political parties generally promises to provide relief much talked as Freebies for those people, who are still fighting for 'Roti, Kapda Aur Makan' but in actuality after registering win in elections riding on these freebies they build their empire (government) with flying flags on the fake promises, they suddenly forget every promise for 5 years and after 5 years when time of election arrives again, they again

take up same issues for gaining vote bank and this never-ending vicious circle goes on. Poor public who have no one to support, having no option for help, helplessly again trusts those that breaches their promises and never gets basic human facilities. This gloomy picture forces us to think that in this kind of scenario pre poll freebies are a kind measure. The inner conscience of a political leader will never awaken but at least out of greed for votes they will make the administration provide basic human facilities to those who deserve it in the name of pre-poll freebies.

The contrary view is that besides aiding, these pre-poll freebies are often misused by political parties to gain vote banks. During, propagandizing these freebies is used by leaders as a bait to entangle the public in their trap and in turn, they form a majority government. At present, the Supreme Court is looking at the issue of freebies whether to ban them as pre poll promises. The Election Commission is determined towards it. To be precise, freebies is neither a bad option nor a misuse of the economy to develop India where the majority is suffering but corrupting our morals is doing more harm. In the world's biggest democracy like India political leaders must come out of the sphere of corruption and show some political spirit of fair play. Adopting socialist principles, they must come out with an effective plan which can bloom principles of 'Equality and Justice' for all.

Acknowledging & recognizing farmers efforts

■ DR PARVEEN KUMAR

A famous quote of Thomas Jefferson says that 'Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals and happiness.' It is the farmer that contributes maximum towards this pursuit. Today, the country is witnessing a phenomenal increase in food grains production; the agricultural output at present has surpassed all previous records and all this we owe it to the hard work of our farming community that works day and night; be it the intense heat or spine chilling cold. Their contribution is unparalleled. Although the contribution of agriculture sector in the GDP has come down from 50 percent in the years immediately after independence to about 17 percent at present; it in no way means that the contribution of farming community has also decreased. It is their hard work that ensures food and nutritional security for all of us. Life and the existence of the world cannot be imagined without farmers. It is said that everyday at least three times a day, we need a farmer. It is because a farmer is the one who ensures food for all of us even if it means going to bed hungry for him. The scorching heat or the chilling temperature hardly matters for him/her. It is he who ensures food as well as nutritional security for all of us. Farming constitutes one of the oldest practices that mankind knows about and which is still in practice today. It dates back to over 10,000 years. One simply cannot undermine the role of farmer's in our life and economy at large. To ensure that they get due credit and attention that they deserve, countries across the globe observe their 'National Farmers' Day' every year. The event is also popularly called as 'Old Farmers' Day' in the United States (US). There isn't an exact date when celebrating Farmers' Day became a trend, but the tradition is being followed since the early 1800s. In different parts of the country, the National Farmer's Day is celebrated on different dates. In the United States, the National Farmer's Day is observed on October 12; in India on December 23, and in Pakistan the day is celebrated on December 18.

A day at the national level dedicated to the farming community is infact recognition of them and a honour to them towards their services for the humanity and for the mother land. The National Farmers Day in India also known as 'Rashtriya Kisan Diwas' is celebrat-

ed every year on 23 December on the birthday of the 5th Prime Minister of India, Choudhary Charan Singh. Choudhary Charan Singh was born on Dec. 23, 1902 and died on May 29, 1987. He was also a great farmer's leader who remained Prime minister of the country from July 28, 1979 to January 14, 1980. During his tenure as Prime minister of the country, he introduced many farmer friendly policies and enacted much legislation to improve the lives of the Indian farmers. Recognizing his contribution to the agriculture sector and his pro farmer welfare measures, the Kisan Divas in the country is celebrated on his birthday. The Kisan Divas has been celebrated since 2001 in the country. The Day depicts that if the agricultural sector and the farmers are empowered, only than the nation can grow. It is because agricultural sector is a vital contributor to our economy creating and providing livelihood opportunities to more than 50 per cent of the population directly or indirectly. Majority of the rural population including the women folk are engaged in this sector. It is the primary sector providing raw material for secondary and tertiary sectors. The theme of celebration also indicates that by only developing and powering agricultural fields, we gain a state of economic growth with rising more benefits and full employment.

The agriculture sector despite a vital contributor to the country's economy still suffers from some inherent loopholes. Indian agriculture is predominated by the presence of small and marginal farmers. This vital segment of Indian agriculture is often the neglected one; still outside the reach of developmental policies and programmes. They are still outside the formal framework of technological interventions, have no or little access to credit facilities and are not in a position to avail crop and livestock insurance. As this group of producers is located in the interiors in the far flung remote inaccessible areas, they do not have market linkages and often become the victim of middlemen and commission agents. Although government has started many programmes for their empowerment, these do not have cut much ice. The situation more or less has not changed much for them. Small farms are disadvantaged when it comes to accessing markets, credit, and agricultural inputs such as seeds. Agriculture has become a non remunerative sector. More and more farmers are leaving this sector and the youths are not

interested in this. The benefits of the different farmer welfare schemes do not reach all. Only a representative group of farmers avail the benefits. Indian agriculture is characterized by the predominance of small and marginal holdings. About 86 per cent of the farmers are marginal and small. They needed to be included in the farmer welfare programmes and it must be ensured that the benefits of different agricultural schemes percolate down to them. The farm women are also an important part of the agricultural sector in the country. This is also a day to highlight various issues confronting the farm sector and the farming community. Farmers are not satisfied with the Minimum Support Price announced by the government every year. Although the Minimum Support Prices are announced by the Government every year for 22 crops, yet the farmers are not satisfied with the MSP announced by the government and demanding an increase in MSP and a written assurance from the government that the MSP regime will continue even after the enactment of new laws.

There are also many other issues in the agricultural sector in the country. While men go out for earning a livelihood for the family, they are the farm women who are out in their farms, work in the fields performing different agricultural operations right from sowing to harvesting, post harvest processing and storage. They should also be made a part of the development initiatives. The youth must also be actively involved in agricultural sector by motivating them thorough various income generating activities, their skill development and through various agri-reneurship programmes. The government has also been proactively supporting the farming community by starting many programmes for their welfare and rejuvenation of farm sector. PM Kisan Samman Nidhi (PMKISAN) provides financial support to the farming community by way of three installments of Rs 2000 each during Kharif, Rabi and Zaid seasons, so that they can purchase inputs like seeds, fertilizers and plant protection chemicals for sowing and growing of their crops. PM Kisan Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) aims at improving the irrigation potential and efficiency of the irrigation network in the country. Soil Health Cards are being provided to the farmers which contain detailed description of the fertility status of their soils and the recommen-

dation thereof. The marketing structure in the country is also being improved with many marketing reforms. e-NAM is being strengthened to connect all the Mandis across the country so as to enable producers in one part of the country to sell anywhere in the country where remunerative price of the produce is available. Organic and Natural farming is being promoted in the country to reverse the negative effects of chemical led intensive cultivation. Credit and insurance facilities are also being provided and their coverage is also being extended to include all the farmers. Special focus is being laid on the farm women and the youths. For the youths several skill development and entrepreneurship opportunities are being provided with proper hand holding and financial support. Many youth have now turned entrepreneurs and are providing job to many others instead of seeking job from others. Efforts are also being made to double the income of farming community by 2022 and a lot of work has already been done which has resulted in profitability and sustainability of this sector. However, despite being the most important source of livelihood for many people, the problems of farming community are often overlooked or remained unattended to. The events of the National Farmers' Day therefore should focus on educating the public about these issues and empowering farmers with the latest information from the agriculture sector. If we can do anything for the farming community, there is nothing better than to raise their standard of living. December 23 celebration asks us to commit ourselves for the upliftment of this segment of our society, so that the class which provides us with basic necessities like fruits, vegetables and paddy, can be integrated with the mainstream of the society. Besides thanking farmers' for their contribution in food basket of the country, this is also a day to recognize that persons like Choudhary Charan Singh borne in a farmers' family, who start from humble beginnings can occupy the highest chairs in the country by way of dedication, commitment and sincerity. This day also reminds of our commitment to recognize the efforts of the farming community, making them aware of the various programmes made for them and also for the farming community to practice farming in ways that are sustainable and do not interfere with the nature.

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