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Follow Up

Cycling to health
DMRC on Wednesday, October 17 initiated a scheme that allows commuters to hire bicycles to travel between metro stations and their destination. The scheme, started on a pilot basis at Vishwavidyalaya station of Delhi University, will be replicated at the other metro stations depending on the response.

Zimbabwe: A Nation in Crisis
Zimbabwe's trade and investment ties with neighboring South Africa remain very strong, a report has found. The report concludes that South Africa has seized new opportunities from Zimbabwe's decline, and has also gained from the influx of Zimbabwean skills - doctors, nurses, engineers and teachers who've made a move to South Africa. As a result, the South African firms operating in Zimbabwe are making good profits, even if these are undermined by inflation, the report adds.

National News

123- Nuclear conundrum
In past month or so, country has been flooded with thousands of articles on 123-Nuclear Power agreement. One interesting thing about the whole episode is the hype created around the deal, without either the left or the government indulging in some meaningful talk. It all really started when the PM gave a cowboy’s statement in Kolkata, that dared Left to withdraw the support as the 123 deal was more sacrosanct than the government itself. The message, which would not be expected from a statesman, was that whether government falls or not is immaterial, what is important is the deal.

So a deal, which would have been just one of the deals in the ongoing reform process became the hottest national issue. The left obviously hit badly reverted back with tough stand, as any other stand would have surely impacted its vote bank. While political circles were busy defining the stand on something they had never considered important so far, another very interesting thing happened. Media donned the role of mobilizing public opinion on the issue. Nowadays, even a child knows that media is highly political so it was not surprising. What was surprising was the intensity of propaganda – the media camps – BJP, Congress, Left, Indian Americans, came out openly in defending their positions, notwithstanding the fact that they hardly knew what they were trying to defend.

It became one confused muddle where newspaper columns were being filled so that the reader gets the opinion of the camp in the morning. Arguably, two things emerged out of the rhetoric of the metro oriented media – 1. Indian Left is working as an agent of China and hence is an enemy of the nation. 2. The nuclear deal is the best thing happening to the country in last 1000 years. None of the two claims were ever substantiated by anything meaningful. But as it became apparent that the nation doesn’t really care about the rhetoric against left, the anger of the media got converted into frustration and then lament and outright pleading.

Economic times for example carried headline - “US crestfallen, mystified by N-deal development”, as if the success of the deam is most important for US. Similarly, TOI, Indian Express etc. carried out articles accusing Left, and harping on the usefulness of the deal, without ever defining in what sense the deal will be useful. The common man of the US may not give a whisker about India and the cleavage of Hillary may any day be more important a news item, as reported in Indian Express, a section of the press clearly thinks otherwise.

In such a scenario, this article examines some of the tenets of the nuclear power.

The cost of nuclear power
Market believes in maximization of profit and free flow of capital. Economics reins supreme. So what is the cost of the nuclear power? Different estimates in India put it in the range of Rs. 2/kWh. This is costly as compared to most other forms of electricity generation like coal based.

Another study by MIT in 2003 puts the cost at 6.7 cents/KWh. To this should be compared the cost coal based plant (4.2 cents) and gas based ones (5 cents).
The 50% higher cost means that any business that tries to operate in nuclear energy generation will go bankrupt. Possibly this is the reason that there is no new nuclear plant in US for last 30 years, as mentioned in Economic and Political Weekly.

The energy security
The rate of growth of electricity generation in the years from 1947 to 1990 – was 7.5%. This was the same period when state control seemed to cripple industrial growth and arguably resulted in the pitiable growth of the whole country – insultingly called the Hindu rate of growth.

As the growth of power is essential for growth of economy, it would be safe to assume a required growth of 10% in electricity generation in the current era of economic boom.

In 2000, national electricity production was at 100 GW. Share of nuclear energy was 3% and the share of renewable energy sources like wind energy was 3.5%. Here it can be mentioned that civilian nuclear energy program has been pursued in India since 1950s whereas renewable sources of energy have been more or less neglected by the official energy program of the government even till date.
Calculations will show that, we can expect electricity production of 672GW in year 2020 (assuming 10% annual compounded growth). So the projected added contribution of 20GW of nuclear power will still result in a paltry 3% of the total power needs.

We have shown clear leadership in wind energy with companies like Suzlon making to the top 50 stocks and winning orders from across the globe. However, this direction of power sufficiency has been totally ignored by the media.

‘Other’ benefits
Of late, media is talking of ‘other’ benefits. Editorials are being written about how the deal may not mean much in direct terms but a lot in indirect terms. The basic argument here is that the deal will take Indo-US relations to new levels that would enable India to benefit more in areas like space research, satellites, missiles etc. While this appears like a sound reasoning, it would have had much more credence had it come out of the political establishment or the government. As long as the government officially does not vindicate such stand, it remains the dream of newspaper editors.

Freening up coal blocks
On October 27, Indian Express carried front page news in west India edition, titled: “Energy on his mind, deal on pause, PM frees coal blocks”. Most of the national newspapers simply ignored the news that claimed addition of 68GW of power – 3.5 times what was promised by the 123 deal. Even the Indian Express article, in a typical case of ambivalence and contradiction implied that had the deal been through, the coal blocks would not have been freed.

Wheat Import by India
In 2006-07, India imported 6.7 million tones of wheat for around $1.3 billion, as its reserves were depleted. At the same time, wheat production in India is up 8% this year. India’s wheat purchase program has attracted strong criticism from both supporters and opponents of the Congress-led coalition government who say imports at sky high prices were not necessary when domestic production was high. The key issues surrounding this debate are:

Procurement of wheat by FCI falls
A case study of wheat procurement trend in 2006 suggested that with more and more states making pro-corporate sector changes in the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act, the presence of the corporate sector was certain to increase, and displace public procurement. Secondly, the officially minimum support price (MSP) at which grain was to be procured was set just 1.6 per cent higher than the previous year, despite wholesale prices rising 4.3 per cent in the previous year (and fuel prices rising at more than twice that rate). Thus the corporate sector was able to bid just slightly higher than the MSP, and buy up the grain. Many peasants with less holding power disposed of their grain to private traders without much bargain, albeit at slightly higher rate than MSP.

Total public procurement, at 9.2 million ton, was thus just 13.3 per cent of the wheat crop – a historic low. Was the crop so small that it was not possible to procure more? Last year, when the crop was smaller, the Government procured 14.8 million ton. In 2000-01, when the crop was the same size as this year, it procured 20.6 million ton. In the words of Sharad Pawar himself, “Large purchases by private traders, including multinational corporations, have been a contributory factor for the low level of wheat procurement this year.” Perhaps for the first time since the creation of the FCI, private trade held far more wheat than the Government. Inevitably, the Government was now much less able to control open market prices. Domestic private hoards and international traders held the whip hand.

Pawar blames NDA government
“The BJP, which is accusing the government of allowing private traders to purchase wheat, should clarify who purchased the stock in its states. And the decision to allow private purchase of wheat was that of the NDA government,” he countered. At the same time, the BJP- and NDA-rulled states had asked for 83.5 lakh ton under the PDS, which the UPA government had released, he said. “The marginal contribution by these states and their demand for PDS stocks caused the shortfall in the central pool. This situation left the government with no choice but to import,” Mr Pawar added.

Questions over tendering
In May 2007, the State Trading Corporation (STC) rejected the first tender for import, which worked out to around Rs 1,050 million.
per quintal because the trend in the global market suggested that the price could soften after August 2007. Another reason to cancel the tender was that the FCI’s internal assessment estimated that domestic farmers still had stocks of 10 lakh ton, which were ready to sell for a better MSP. Mr Pawar said. “So, we declared a bonus of Rs 50 per quintal and purchased 10 lakh ton. By canceling the import tender, we also saved Rs 250 crore,” the minister pointed out.

But the agriculture minister was rather unconvincing in his arguments about the second tender for imports floated by the STC within a month, which cost the government almost 45% more than the cancelled one. Moreover, this price was almost double the price, which government offered to its own farmers. “Prices in the global market keep on fluctuating. It’s not an unusual thing,” was all he said when asked the reason why the government went for costly imports. The experts attributed reason for the price increase to the shortfall in wheat production due to bad weather previous year in Canada and European countries. Also the fact that India was bound to import such a large amount, made the international grain traders to hike the prices.

USA fails to meet quality norms

International grain traders demanded, and obtained, repeated relaxations of the quality norms for wheat imports with regard to pesticide levels and the presence of pests, weeds and diseases. The purpose of these norms is to ensure that the grain is fit for human consumption, and that various pests, weeds and diseases absent in India not be allowed to spread to Indian wheat. The latter would seriously harm its food security. The US and other importers objected to the norms prescribed for the first tender, who they claimed had prevented US firms from bidding. Canada, the European Union, Russia and Australia also pressed for revision of the norms. Thus, subsequent tender further relaxed the norms to allow 100 banned quarantine weed seeds per 200 kg of samples from a single consignment. Even then USA wheat failed to meet quality standards. “Moreover, Indian consumers do not like red wheat from USA. But any transparent procedure for import cannot exclude certain countries. That has been an issue to contend with,” says food secretary Nanda Kumar.

Infuriated at being excluded, the US government said in July: “India’s very low weed seed standard is nearly impossible for any global exporter to meet, raising questions about the reliability of India’s import inspection process. ...There is no doubt that India’s current standards translate into higher bread and flour prices for Indian consumers. The total cost savings to India from relaxing norms and including US wheat in tenders last year would have resulted in $65 to $85 million in savings.”

A Housing Scam of Rs 300 crore Exposed in Pune

There are three aspects to this reported scam:-

1. A farmer files a complaint of land grabbing on the builder.
2. A corporator had been blackmailing the builder that latter’s corruption will be exposed unless they get 2.5 crore.
3. The builder files extortion complaint with the police.
4. He is arrested for land grabbing.

While the spice tale of the corruption, manipulations and accusations will unfold in coming days, here is a brief overview of what lead to the arrest of Pradeep Ruwal – the builder whose projects dot the landscape of the city.

Pune based construction firm, Amrut Runwal Multi-Housing Private Limited, allegedly executed forged power of attorney in the name of 278 farmers in Manjri, near here, to avail a loan of Rs 300 crore from a multi-national bank, anti-extortion cell of the city police said on Friday, October 26.

Pradeep Runwal of the Amrut Runwal Ltd was arrested along with two others following a complaint of cheating filed by a farmer from Manjri with the Kothrud police here.

Police suspects a bigger racket behind this involving employees from the sub-registrar’s office and other related government offices, besides private agents in Manjri, Barge was quoted as saying.

The scam could involve nearly Rs 1000 crore. “The land involved is 108 acres, while 35 of the 278 names of farmers in the power of attorney were found to be that of persons long dead. This needs a thorough investigation,” said Barge.

Meanwhile in a related development, the anti-extortion cell has booked Congress corporators, Anil Jadhav alias Anya Don and Shankar Pawar, besides Shivaji Gadade, husband of Maharashtra Navniram Sena (MNS) corporator Chhaya Gadade, along with two others for attempting to extort Rs 2.5 crore from the firm by threatening to expose their illegal transactions.

Runwal Multi-Housing Private Limited vice president, Sanjay Raison, had registered a complaint with the Deccan Gymkhana Police a couple of days ago against the corporators, Gadade, Satish Dhotre and Shivaji Chaugule, who were threatening to expose the company.

Barge said Chaugule was a former employee who had worked with Amrut Runwal firm for 11 years. He had assisted Runwal in executing the power of attorney to seek a loan of Rs 450 crore. The bank sanctioned Rs 300 crore. Chaugule was sacked in August and started demanding Rs 50 lakh to “keep his mouth shut.” When his threats failed, Chaugule reportedly joined hands with the corporators in blackmailing the builder. However, Runwal recorded the conversation and approached the anti-extortion cell. Barge said the corporators and their accomplices were summoned for questioning at the Deccan Gymkhana Police Station three days ago. They have reportedly confessed to making the extortion demands.
Recent Survey Results

Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2007

Results of round 2 of the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2007 are out. Here is a summary of the readership of leading publications in lacs:

**English**
- Times of India 136 lacs
- Hindustan Times 61 lacs
- The Hindu 53 lacs
- The Telegraph 30 lacs
- Deccan Chronicle 30 lacs

**Hindi Newspapers**
- Dainik Jagran 536 lacs
- Dainik Bhaskar 306 lacs
- Amar Ujala 282 lacs
- Hindustan 235 lacs
- Rajsthan Patrika 132 lacs
- Punjab Kesari 109 lacs
- Aaj 76 lacs

**Regional Languages Newspapers**
- Ananda Bazar Patrika 158 lacs
- Gujrat Samchar 85 lacs

**National Health Survey Findings**

The final report of the third National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) conducted in 2005-06 in the country’s 29 states contains good news and bad as compared to the NFHS-2 of 1998-99. While women are having fewer children and infant mortality has declined over the seven-year period, anemia and malnutrition are still widespread among children and adults. For the first time the NFHS has collected information relating to men and unmarried women. The exercise involved interviews with around 2,30,000 women (15-49 years) and men (15-54 years), the testing of more than 1,00,000 women and men for HIV and 2,15,000 adults and young children for anemia. Following table summarizes some of the findings.

| Infant mortality (per 1000 live births) | 57 |
| Fertility (number of children) | 2.7 |
| Anemia in children (6-59 months) | 70% |
| Anemia in women | 55% |
| Children receiving all the recommended vaccines | 44% |
| Married Women Facing Domestic violence | 40% |
| Women who think they are beaten justifiably | 20% |

**Invest India Incomes and Savings Survey 2007**

With a sample of over one million households, the ‘Invest India Incomes and Savings Survey 2007’ claims to be the most comprehensive study ever of individual financial behavior, preferences and outlook. It contains profiles and portfolios of India’s 321 million paid workforce.

- 4.2m Indians invest – roughly 1.4% of the total workforce under study
- Individual earnings have gone up remarkably - 30% since 2004-5. This looks extraordinary as this would imply that lower half of country has sank further in last two years and the upper half has grown rich at double the rate of GDP growth.
- Women constitute only 12% of paid workforce
- Indian earners saved 30% of their income in 2006

**Magsaysay Award Winner of the year – P. Sainath**

Palagummi Sainath is the 2007 winner of the Ramon Magsaysay award for journalism, literature, and creative communications arts. To his millions of fans, he needs no introduction. He is a development journalist - a term he himself avoids, instead preferring to call himself a 'rural reporter' or simply 'reporter' - and photojournalist focusing on social problems, rural affairs, poverty and the aftershocks of Globalization in India. He spends between 270 and 300 days a year in the rural interior (in 2006, over 300 days) and has done so for the past 14 years. He is the Rural Affairs Editor for ‘The Hindu’, and contributes his columns to ‘India Together’, where they are archived. His work has won praise from the likes of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen who referred him as "one of the world’s great experts on famine and hunger". The economic reforms launched in 1991 constituted a watershed in India’s economic history and in Sainath's...
journalistic career. He felt that the media’s attention was moving from "news" to "entertainment" and consumerism and lifestyles of the urban elite gained prominence in the newspapers which rarely carried news of the reality of poverty in India. "I felt that if the Indian press was covering the top 5 percent, I should cover the bottom 5 percent", says Sainath.

He quit Blitz and in 1993 applied for a Times of India fellowship. At the interview he spoke of his plans to report from rural India. When an editor asked him, "Suppose I tell you my readers aren’t interested in this stuff", Sainath riposted, "When did you last meet your readers to make any such claims on their behalf?

He got the fellowship and took to the back roads in the ten poorest districts of five states. It meant covering close to 100,000 km across India using 16 forms of transportation, including walking 5,000km on foot. He credits two sympathetic editors at the Times with much of his success in getting the articles published in their present form, since it is one among the very newspapers that has been accused of shifting the onus from page one to page three. The paper ran 84 reports by Sainath across 18 months, many of them subsequently reprinted in his book, Everybody Loves A Good Drought.

For more than two years, the book remained No.1 amongst non-fiction bestsellers on diverse lists across the country. Eventually, it entered the ranks of Penguin India’s all-time best sellers. It is considered THE handbook for NGO activists, with its direct reporting style and sharp focus on social and economic cleavages in society. Typically Sainath, he gave all the royalties from this huge best-seller to fund prizes for young rural journalists.

Canadian documentary film maker Joe Moulins made a film about Sainath titled "A tribe of his own", and when the jury at the Edmonton Film Festival picked its winner, it decided to include Sainath in the award along with the maker of the film because this was ‘an award about inspiration.’

As a reporter, he proved the power of the Press repeatedly. In one state after another, the bureaucracy and politicians acted upon his stories, preferring this to confrontation or denial. Today, more than any other journalist in India, he has been responsible for the attention brought to the raging farmers’ suicides in the country. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Agriculture Commission in Andhra Pradesh to suggest ways for improving agriculture in that state.

Trivia: He is the second Indian to receive the 2007 Ramon Magsaysay Award, equivalent of the Asian Nobel Prize in the category of journalism, literature and communication. The first was the eminent Times of India cartoonist R K Laxman, who got the prize in 1984.

International News

Strikes All the Way

Those who have long memory would remember that not long ago, Indian newspapers used to be occupied with trade unions, strikes and protests. The supporters of the right to strike believed that these activities raise the political consciousness of masses and help make a better tomorrow for everyone. The opponents pointed out the terrible loss of productivity and general anarchy as reasons enough to oppose strikes.

There would have been a status quo for a long time to come, had the end of cold war not warranted India’s change in policies. There are two key changes that have taken place since then – 1. Media has more or less neglected reporting strikes. 2. Indian courts have taken a stand that all forms of strikes should be made illegal.

This month however saw large scale worker unrest across the globe and this article details these events.

France

The rail strike brought France to a standstill on Thursday, October 18. Amongst train drivers, participation was 90 percent. They were joined by local transport workers, postal workers, museum employees and workers of the state gas and electrical companies. Less than one out of twenty long-distance trains was running and the Paris Metro was completely paralyzed. The strike was the biggest labour walkout in France for more than a decade. Participation on Thursday was higher than in 1995, when railway workers paralyzed the country for three weeks and finally forced the prime minister at the time, Alain Juppé, to withdraw a plan to slash the rail workers’ pension plan. That strike undermined the government and led to Juppé’s resignation.

In an interesting turn of event, the President announced that he and his wife have agreed to a divorce at around the same time. Not surprisingly, the news of a single divorce dwarfed the news of strike in the international and national media of France.

On October 27, Air France, Europe’s biggest airline, was forced to cancel 444 flights out of 1,283 as cabin crews walked out to support claims for pay raises and night bonuses. Eighty-four percent of flight attendants have joined the action, the CGT union said. This was the scene at third day of a five day long strike.

Germany

A one-day strike by train drivers paralyzed large parts of the suburban and regional railway network in Germany on October 12. Between 50 to 85% in trains in the country failed to run. Deutsche Bahn scrambled to organize buses, but according to the ADAC national traffic service, the country’s famed autobahn freeways were clogged. GDL had called the daylong strike in line with its struggle Deutsche Bahn over its demands of a cut in the working week by one hour to 40 hours and a pay increase of up to 31 percent for its members. It has rejected a 4.5 percent raise that Deutsche Bahn agreed to in July in talks with two other unions, Transnet and GDBA. Deutsche Bahn carries some 5 million passengers daily.
Finland (Proposed)

Nearly 13,000 nurses across Finland are threatening to resign next month in a pay row, trade union officials say. The Union of Health and Social Care Professionals (Tehy) is demanding a 24% wage increase for its members over 28 months, rejecting employers' 12% offer.

Tehy says half of its 124,000 staff are struggling to survive because of low pay, and many now want to work abroad. If no compromise is found, the mass resignations will cripple Finland's healthcare system, the union warns.

Tehy’s Jaana Reijonaho told the BBC News website that 12,800 members would quit on 19 November if their demand for higher wages was not met. “Hospitals will be paralyzed, especially big ones where many of our members are employed,” Ms Reijonaho said.

Nurses in Finland’s public sector say they are poorly paid and often have to cope with huge workloads.

Israel

On October 10, The Middle and High School Teachers’ Association has declared a general, unlimited strike, covering all middle schools and high schools in the Jewish sector. The teachers said a statement by the organization, “are prepared to strike for weeks, even months if necessary.” Finance Minister Ronnie Bar said on October 8 that since the Finance and Education Ministries have already come to a new wage agreement, no additional fund would be allocated to any settlement with the teachers.

USA

New York taxi drivers were on a daylong strike for the second time in two months on October 27, 2007. The Taxi drivers are protesting Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plans to install satellite navigation systems in their vehicles and machines that take credit cards, the cost of which will partially have to be paid by them.

The film and television industry, one of America's biggest and arguably its most important export, faces a far greater problem in a brewing dispute between the studios and their writers over pay. With the current contractual arrangements due to expire at the end of this month and little progress being made in talks that have been dragging on for nearly a year, the possibility of a strike is growing by the day. For the US entertainment industry the effects of a strike could be catastrophic. The last time the writers walked out, in 1988, it lasted five months and cost the industry an estimated $500m (£250m).

UK

Unions are set to launch a strike ballot unless the BBC agrees not to send out letters seeking volunteers for redundancy. The threat comes after BBC Director General Mark Thompson announced plans to axe 2500 jobs in a bid to bridge a £2 billion funding.

Srilanka

Reported on October 28, teachers are going ahead with a two-day strike in schools throughout the island as the deadlock between the National Salaries and Cadres Commission (NSCC) and the teachers’ unions continues. The strike, to be held, is expected to cripple functions of most schools in the country, except in certain parts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces where the teachers would not be taking part in the protest campaign. Ceylon Teachers’ Service Union secretary Mahinda Jayasinghe said mere statements from the Government that the salary anomalies would be resolved by the end of this year cannot be accepted.” The Prime Minister discussed with us and promised to resolve the problem but he didn’t even send a letter confirming us that he is working on the matter. We only received a letter from his coordinating secretary saying that the Cabinet was informed,” he said.

India

Around 200 Bajaj Auto Limited (BAL) workers took out a morcha from the Kamgar Putla to the district collectorate on Thursday, Oct 18 in Pune. Their demand is that BAL management re-open the Akurdi plant and take back the over 2,000 workers. “We are first going through the collector and if there is no outcome, we are ready for a hunger strike before the collector's office,” said Nair.

In Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, crisis looms large in the public health sector as there seems to be no end in sight to the non-cooperation strike by government doctors which has now crossed 17 days.

In Hyderabad, about 45,000 employees of the Postal Department working in the State will join the nationwide strike on October 30 called by the All-India State Government Employees’ Federation and Coordination Committee of Central, State and Public Sector Employees, Teachers and Workers. The strike is against privatization of the pension scheme and Government’s indifferent attitude to 12 demands of the employees.
WTO Ruling against US Policy on Cotton Subsidies
The WTO ruled on 15 October that the US had failed to bring subsidies and export credit guarantees to US cotton farmers into conformity with the WTO. Brazil hailed the ruling, saying US subsidies had hit world prices, hurting farmers in Brazil and elsewhere.
In 2005, the WTO ruled that U.S. cotton subsidies violate WTO rules and gave the U.S. until September 2005 to reduce them. In response, the USDA agreed to reform export credit programs to comply with the ruling, and Congress eliminated the Step 2 cotton export subsidy program in 2006. But these programs represent only 10% of the overall cotton subsidy programs and some of the most trade distorting programs, like the counter-cyclical payments were left untouched. In September 2006, Brazil asked for a WTO “compliance panel” to determine whether the US has done enough to comply with the ruling.
Today, the WTO has confirmed that the U.S. has failed to reform its agricultural subsidies enough to comply. “Not only did the House of Representatives completely ignore the WTO ruling in passing its version of the 2007 Farm Bill, but it elected to take the brazen step of reinstating subsidies for cotton that were eliminated by the previous Congress, parsing the language to try to slide the subsidy under the WTO screen,” said Raymond C. Offenheiser, president of Oxfam America.

Field Trials Aim to Tackle Poverty
Some of the rich have always known how to help the poor. They are always bursting with new ideas and money. So, what happens when hoards of PhDs and marketing MBAs come together to help the poor? Obviously, they set up lab in the heart of developed world.
Do these new mandarins think that the society is yet another lab experiment? May be it is or may be it will be. After all, 200 years of science and technology has brought about more changes than 10000 years of ice age.
A lab based at the MIT, Cambridge, has more than 60 projects on the go in 21 countries this year. Established in the year 2003, the lab has seen a tremendous growth. And now World Bank is inspired to put US$14.9-million in the methodology pioneered by the lab. The methodology in the question is randomized trial, more commonly associated with drug safety tests, to assess what works and what doesn't in development and poverty interventions.
While formulaic approach to social issues has long been discarded as useless, it does not prevent MIT from taking a “formula drug” approach to it. None the less, some of the observations are interesting enough to mention.
One of the studies, involving more than 30,000 youngsters in rural Kenya, found that deworming children reduced the number of days taken off school by 25% - you would say obvious but well the mandarins had to prove it.
Another study, in India, showed that hiring young local women to help at schools with underperforming students significantly increased test scores, and was six times cheaper than the computer-assisted learning already being tested.
Yet another of the non-scalable study: Treated with insecticide, bed nets are one of the main new tools for controlling malaria, but debate has raged over whether widespread use is best encouraged by handing the nets out free, or charging for them to encourage responsibility. In a trial set up in Kenya, the price at which pregnant women could buy nets was randomized. Results come down firmly on giving nets out free. She found that people who got free nets used them just as responsibly as those who paid for them. Moreover, charging even 75 cents reduced net use by 75%.
The lab is also exploring procrastination, which can actually be a major public-health problem asbut many patients don’t pick up their test results. The lab has found that giving people as little as 10 cents as a reward for picking up their results on the day they are ready significantly increases compliance.
The lab is currently brainstorming similar ideas to improve tuberculosis (TB) treatment. Patients with TB often stop taking drugs as soon as they feel better. With mobile phones now more common in poor countries, the researchers have come up with an idea. A text message reminds patients to take their pill. On opening the pill wrapper they get a code that gives them three minutes’ free call time, “I'd love to test this in a randomized trial,” says Glennerster.
NFDC: Films Under Production
National Film Development Corporation of India is the central agency established to encourage the good cinema movement in the country. The primary goal of the NFDC is to plan, promote and organize an integrated and efficient development of the Indian film industry and foster excellence in cinema. Over the years NFDC has provided a wide range of services essential to the growth of Indian cinema. The NFDC (and its predecessor the Film Finance Corporation) has so far funded/produced over 300 films. These films, in various Indian languages, have been widely acclaimed and have won many national and international awards.

The notable contribution of NFDC has been nurturing and supporting the talent pool in Indian cinema. Some of the big names of Indian cinema like Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal, Saeed Mirza, Goutam Ghosh, Mrinal Sen, Govind Nihlani, Sudhadev Das Gupta, Girish Kasarvalli, T.V. Chandran are NFDC regulars. Just to refresh memories, the list includes movies like ‘Ek Doctor Ki Maut’, ‘Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro’, ‘Suraj Ka Saatwan Ghoda’, ‘Mammo’, ‘Dharav’, ‘Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro’. Though in recent years, the momentum seems missing. Hindi section is even worse, and ‘Raghu Romeo’ is the movie to name, if we look for recent films. NFDC has never been short of throwing surprises at the audiences. A recent DD-1 telecast of little-known movie ‘Rui Ka Bojh’ (made in 1997, starring Pankaj Kapoor) generated surprisingly good viewer responses. In 2003, we have Murali Nair’s Malayalam film ‘Arirampa’ being selected for screening in the prestigious ‘Un Certain Regard’ section of Cannes.

NFDC has consistently tried to bring positive changes in the film-making in the country. A recent example would be NFDC’s proposal for co-production initiative via Film Bazaar 2007 being organized alongside International Film Festival of India (IFFI) scheduled in Goa on Nov 24-26. This is an interesting Co-production Market, organized simultaneously will offer selected directors/producers the opportunity to present their feature film projects (in all languages and at any stage of production) to co-producers, bankers, funds, sales agents, distributors, TV stations, buyers and other potential financiers from India and abroad. At this Market, 15 pre-selected projects drawn from all over India will be presented to all Film Bazaar participants from India and abroad.

In 2007, NFDC made 30 of its movies available online through Jaman, a movie download service focused on independent and world cinema.

Looking forward, below are listed the films, which are currently under production.

Lucky Red Seeds (Writer & Director: Anjali Menon)
Lucky Red Seeds represent the memories seen through the young eyes of Vicky- one of the millions of Indian children raised outside their country. In the mid 1970s, 10-year-old Vicky arrives in Kerala, India to attend his grandfather’s funeral. Vicky’s ancestral home is a beautiful cavernous house in a rural Kerala village. The disjointed big family has come together at the otherwise desolate home. The traditional funeral rites of sixteen days, lay the perfect ground to relive all their mutual quirks and past tensions. Decades later Vicky returns to his ancestral home to tell us about those sixteen days that left indelible impressions on all their lives. His adult reflections are juxtaposed against the childhood visual narrative – bringing to life the magic of childhood and a past era.

Bubble Gum (Director: Sanjivjan Lal)
Bubble Gum is a coming of an age story set in a small industrial town of Jamshedpur in India. It is coming-of-age story not only for Vedant but also his parents who realize how their effort was definitely helping their handicap son integrate well into the mainstream of life but at the same time was isolating their otherwise normal son towards becoming a handicap!

Sanskar (Director: Nabyendu Chatterjee)
An academician high status, loved and respected by all, admired by many for his great qualities, died suddenly far away from his personal surroundings. He died in the arms of a prostitute incognito. The shocking revelation, the unbelievable disgrace of the situation and the total absurdity of the fact created a quake of such magnitude in his close circle of family and friends that long nourished relations began to crack and crumble. His old father, wife, son, friends and colleagues faced a meaningless catastrophe with utter disbelief and with astounded inertia began to evaluate their long relationship with him with hatred and pain. Love waned, faith evaporated, respect disappeared; on the ugly ruins of values only, a bewildered rage prevailed in search of truth.

Via Darjeeling (Director: Arindam Nandy)
The age-old Bengali tradition of “Adda” – where friends gather to exchange stories & gossip over drinks & dinner. In one such meeting, five friends discuss the incident of a honeymoon and a missing husband. “One story, Multiple endings” – what actually happened?

Bioscope (Writer & Director: KM Madhusudhanan)
Bioscope, the film, depicts the inner meaning of moving images. It is a story about Diwakaran, and what became his very close friend, the ‘bioscope’. Traveling through villages, he erected tents and screened early films strips using a projector, known at the time as ‘bioscope’. How did Diwakaran’s inner self start burning like a furnace? How were these early moving images received in the interior villages at the dawn of the 20th century, before the first film was made in Kerala? Bioscope takes us to that realm where history, dreams and memories come together.
Great Paintings: Guernica

Is art political? Is it always political? Can the artist be political and yet create apolitical art? These questions are difficult to answer. The great painter Pablo Picasso said: “The Spanish struggle is the fight of reaction against the people, against freedom. My whole life as an artist has been nothing more than a continuous struggle against reaction and the death of art. How could anybody think for a moment that I could be in agreement with reaction and death? ... In the panel on which I am working, which I shall call Guernica, and in all my recent works of art, I clearly express my abhorrence of the military caste which has sunk Spain in an ocean of pain and death.”

This issue presents this painting along with a small description of the same.

Before The Law: A parable by Franz Kafka

While Anurag Kashyap may or may not have been inspired by Kafka in christening John Abraham as ‘K’ in No Smoking, but many film reviewers have written that similarities with Kafka’s novel The Trial is more than mere coincidence. Kafka’s words speak more than anything about him, and here is a sample of his work. This is a parable, which a priest narrates to ‘K’ in the novel The Trial.

Before the law sits a gatekeeper. To this gatekeeper comes a man from the country who asks to gain entry into the law. But the gatekeeper says that he cannot grant him entry at the moment. The man thinks about it and then asks if he will be allowed to come in later on. “It is possible,” says the gatekeeper, “but not now.” At the moment the gate to the law stands open, as always, and the gatekeeper walks to the side, so the man bends over in order to see through the gate into the inside. When the gatekeeper notices that, he laughs and says: “If it tempts you so much, try it in spite of my prohibition. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the most lowly gatekeeper. But from room to room stand gatekeepers, each more powerful than the other. I can’t endure even one glimpse of the third.” The man from the country has not expected such difficulties: the law should always be accessible for everyone, he thinks, but as he now looks more closely at the gatekeeper in his fur coat, at his large pointed nose and his long, black Tartar’s beard, he decides that it would be better to wait until he gets permission to go inside. The gatekeeper gives him a stool and allows him to sit down at the side in front of the gate. There he sits for days and years. He makes many attempts to be let in, and he wears the gatekeeper out with his requests. The gatekeeper often interrogates him briefly, questioning him about his homeland and many other things, but they are indifferent questions, the kind great men put, and at the end he always tells him once more that he cannot let him inside yet. The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, spends everything, no matter how valuable, to win over the gatekeeper. The latter takes it all but, as he does so, says, “I am taking this only so that you do not think you have failed to do anything.” During the many years the man observes the gatekeeper almost continuously. He forgets the other gatekeepers, and this one seems to him the only obstacle for entry into the law. He curses the unlucky circumstance, in the first years thoughtlessly and out loud, later, as he grows old, he still mumbles to himself. He becomes childish and, since in the long years studying the gatekeeper he has come to know the fleas in his fur collar, he even asks the fleas to help him persuade the gatekeeper. Finally his eyesight grows weak, and he does not know whether things are really darker around him or whether his eyes are merely deceiving him. But he recognizes now in the darkness an illumination which breaks...
inextinguishably out of the gateway to the law. Now he no longer has much time to live. Before his death he gathers in his head all his experiences of the entire time up into one question which he has not yet put to the gatekeeper. He waves to him, since he can no longer lift up his stiffening body. The gatekeeper has to bend way down to him, for the great difference has changed things to the disadvantage of the man.

Special Feature

In the Pursuit of a Healthy Lifestyle

A shift in the thinking of health-behavior researchers makes it official. “Most health-behavior researchers have long abandoned the concept that willpower is sufficient for people to change unhealthy behaviors,” says clinical psychologist Cynthia Castro, PhD, a researcher at the Stanford Prevention Research Center. “Instead, people need specific behavioral skills and an environment conducive to healthy choices. They also need the confidence to change their bad habits.” This shift is indeed helping to explain why we often fail in changing our habits towards better health, despite making up a concrete action plan. Avoiding short-term unpleasantness is favored over long-term health benefits. Avoiding unpleasantness is an emotional response, while long-term health benefits are a cognitive plan. The emotional side of our brain has far more influence over our rational thought processes than the other way around. Part of this is a result of evolution: The affective system is a much older part of the brain, which we share with all animals, than the relatively young cognitive part, known as the prefrontal cortex.

Obesity is not individual’s fault

The largest ever UK study into obesity, backed by government and compiled by 250 experts, reported that obesity is not individual’s fault. Obesity, the authors concluded, was an inevitable consequence of a society in which energy-dense, cheap foods, labour-saving devices, motorized transport and sedentary work were rife. In this environment it was surprising that anyone was able to remain thin, Dr Susan Jebb of the Medical Research Council said, and so the notion of obesity simply being a product of personal over-indulgence had to be abandoned for good. “The stress has been on the individual choosing a healthier lifestyle, but that simply isn’t enough,” she said. From planning our towns to encourage more physical activity to placing more pressure on mothers to breast feed - believed to slow down infant weight gain - the report highlighted a range of policy options without making any concrete recommendations. Industry was already working to put healthier products on the shelf, the report noted, while work was advanced in transforming the very make-up of food so it was digested more slowly and proved satisfying for longer.

A willpower workaround

The experts recommend manipulating the environment to limit the bad choices and make the good choices available. For example, people say they know they are full when the plate is empty or when everyone else is finished. So Wansink suggests using smaller plates during dieting. “It’s a lot easier to change your environment than to change your mind. The best diet is the diet you don’t know you’re on,” he says. One of the biggest skills people need, says Castro, is setting clear, specific goals that are realistic and give them something tangible to shoot for. “Someone who’s saying, ‘I want to lose 3 pounds’ doesn’t tell you how. Instead you’d want to say, ‘I’m going to go out and walk 30 minutes every day,’” she says. Instead of trying to “eat better,” people can set the goal, “I’m going to stop eating foods out of vending machines.”

She says once people have a taste of success, they learn to want it. “I don’t put as much credence in the concept of willpower. You have to build in confidence. Confidence is part of the learning process.” Surrounding oneself with like-minded souls is key, says Humphreys. “The behavior and opinions of the people around us are important. Most people who drink too much hang out with other people who drink too much,” he says. Willpower isn’t completely out the door, however. Stanford psychophysiologist Gross asked students to complete math problems in the presence of loud, funny skits playing on a monitor. The students performed better when told to think of the math exercise as a challenge to their willpower. “If we think of temptations such as candy bars as tests of our willpower, then we see these temptations in a whole new light, and are much better able to stick to our guns,” Gross says.

Research throws new light on the limitations of willpower and the role the environment and the biological makeup plays in fighting habits.

“News – Sans Opinions

“What do you still want to know, then?” asks the gatekeeper. “You are insatiable.” “Everyone strives after the law,” says the man, “so how is that in these many years no one except me has requested entry?” The gatekeeper sees that the man is already dying and, in order to reach his diminishing sense of hearing, he shouts at him, “Here no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I’m going now to close it.”
News Snippets

TCS gets $1.2b Nielsen contract
Tata Consultancy Services Ltd, India's top software services exporter, said on Thursday it had signed a $1.2 billion contract with Nielsen Co, sending its shares up nearly 5 percent.

Brazil declares dengue epidemic
Brazilian Health Minister Jose Gomes Temporao has formally declared a dengue epidemic. By September, the government had recorded 480000 cases of dengue fever, a 50 percent increase from the same period last year.

BSNL to offer new services
Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) awarded Nokia Siemens Network a contract for deploying Broadband access across 7000 Indian villages in India.

Naxal attack in Jharkhand
At least 17 people, including the son of former chief minister Babulal Marandi, were killed while four were injured in a Maoist attack in Jharkhand's Giridih district early Saturday, police officials said. The incident took place in Chilkhari village of Giridih district, about 290 km from state capital Ranchi.

No marriage without a gazetted officer’s blessings
The Supreme Court has asked the State Governments to make marriage registration mandatory, but a reality check reveals that the process is full of harassment for the common men by the very fact that instead of a nominal amount of Rs 150-200 for getting the registration done, one has to end up coughing up Rs 8,000-10,000.

US panel weighs OTC drugs for kids
Over-the-counter cough and cold medicines that have been widely used for decades should not be given to children under 6 years of age, a U.S. advisory panel recommended on Friday. The panel said manufacturers need to conduct clinical trials to show the medicines actually work for children. Members said evidence from studies was lacking and it was inappropriate to keep relying on adult data to suggest the medicines benefit kids.

Bush asks Congress for war funds
US President George W Bush has asked Congress for an extra $46bn to fund the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and finance other national security needs. Some of the money is needed to repair equipment already in use. It brings the overall amount of war funds the president requested for the next budget year to nearly $200bn.

Trusts raid public health cash in panic
NHS trusts across England siphoned off almost £100m from government funds intended to combat obesity, alcohol abuse and sexually transmitted infections as a panic measure to escape financial crisis, public health chiefs revealed.

Dr. Watson in soup over racist remarks
Dr. Watson, who shared the 1962 Nobel Prize for describing the double-helix structure of DNA, and later headed the American government’s part in the international Human Genome Project, was quoted in The Times of London last week as suggesting that; overall, people of African descent are not as intelligent as people of European descent.

In the ensuing uproar, he issued a statement apologizing “unreservedly” for the comments, adding “there is no scientific basis for such a belief.”