

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

September 2020



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

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Successful Future

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Contents

Recent Bills Passed in the Parliament and Their

Importance	6
The Bills Passed in the Parliament Session	7
Unnecessary Controversies Expose Rotten Politics Over Key Bills	15
The Case of the Three Farm Bills	15
The Case of Labour Laws Reforms	23
The Case of Foreign Contributions Regulation ...	27
Conclusion	30
Highlights	31
The China-India Stand-off:	31
Intra-Afghan Dialogue in Doha:	33
Attacks on Temples in Andhra Pradesh:	33
Temple attacks in recent times	34
Religion in Iran:	35
Domicile Certificates Awarded in Jammu and Kashmir:	37

A DECLARATION

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

RECENT BILLS PASSED IN THE PARLIAMENT AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

The functioning of Parliamentary democracy is riddled with its own contradictions and failures. Nothing brings this out better than the kind of obstructionism that is visible in opposing actions that are undertaken in national interest. Be it inside the Parliament or outside, the system of Parliamentary democracy has been reduced to competition over domination of most vested and selfish interests. This has been one of the main reasons behind the successive governments' hesitation in doing the right thing and instead they compromised with various powerful lobbies due to political calculations.

The recently concluded session of the Parliament has once again brought out an aspect of this, as it showcased how politics of Opposition attempted to prevent the passing of a legislation which was clearly in national interest. The session has been one of the most productive sessions, despite being only 10 days long.¹ It stood out because of the significant bills that were passed and the blindness of the opposition which was opposing these bills just for the sake of it. However, the opposition boycott during the latter half in Rajya Sabha proved to be a boon in disguise.

The Parliament managed to pass a total of 25 bills during this session, many of which were quite significant. Moreover, amid opposition boycott, the Parliament passed 7 significant bills in just three-and-a-half hours and a total of 15 bills during the two days of opposition boycott, including bills related to the regulation of foreign contributions, banking and labour reforms.

¹ While the productivity of Lok Sabha was 100.47%, that of Rajya Sabha was 167% (CG, 2020).

The session not only stood out in terms of the work done, but also exposed before the nation the obstructionist politics of Parliamentary democracy. The cost to the ruling party of passing the bills such as the farmers' bills was the abandonment of the ruling NDA by one of its oldest allies viz. Akali Dal. Other parties – like Samajwadi Party (SP) and Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) – which had been maintaining a distance with the opposition sensed opportunity and joined hands to protest against the bills. Yet, most of these protests – including farmers' agitations – had mostly the core political cadre of the opposition behind them and have been falling flat, unable to sway public sentiment back to the era of socialist-secular mirage.

Their substance is also questionable, propelling existing insecurities to stand as barriers towards any further changes, as will be clear from the detailed discussion of some of the significant bills.

THE BILLS PASSED IN THE PARLIAMENT SESSION

There were 25 bills passed in this Parliamentary session, whose provisions have been briefly discussed below.

I. THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HOMOEOPATHY BILL

- National Commission for Homeopathy will be set up (with 20 members).
- Ensure adequate and high-quality medical professionals in the field.
- Nation-wide common examination systems for studying and teaching in the field.

2. THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR INDIAN SYSTEM OF MEDICINE BILL

- National Commission for Indian System of Medicine

(NCISM) will be set up (with 29 members).

- Adequate and high-quality medical professionals.
- Nation-wide common examination systems for studying and teaching in the field.

3. SALARY, ALLOWANCES AND PENSION OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

- Reduction in salaries of MPs by 30%, and reduction in constituency allowance and office expenses allowed to MPs, for a period of 1 year, due to the COVID19 pandemic.

4. THE SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES OF MINISTERS (AMENDMENT) BILL

- Similar to the other bill on salaries and allowances of MPs, this bill also reduces salaries and allowances of minister by 30% for a year.

5. THE BANKING REGULATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

- Amends the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
- Will bring cooperative banks under the supervision of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- Provisions applicable to banking companies will now also be applicable to cooperative banks.

6. THE FARMERS' PRODUCE TRADE AND COMMERCE (PROMOTION AND FACILITATION) BILL

- Allows inter-state and intra-state trade of farm products beyond the physical premises of APMC (Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee) markets.
- Does not abolish the APMC market, but widens the farmers' choice on selling their produce.
- Though the bill does not mention MSP, the system of

MSP will continue.

- It prohibits the state governments from levying any fee or cess outside of the APMC market.

7. THE FARMERS (EMPOWERMENT AND PROTECTION) AGREEMENT ON PRICE ASSURANCE AND FARM SERVICES BILL

- Creates a framework for contract farming.
- Prior agreement between buyer and farmer prior to production/rearing of any farm produce.
- 3-level dispute settlement mechanism.

8. ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020

- Allows the central government to regulate the supply of certain food items only under extraordinary circumstances (such as war and famine).

- Stock limits may be imposed on agricultural produce only if there is a steep price rise.

9. THE APPROPRIATION (NO.3) BILL AND THE APPROPRIATION (NO.4) BILL

- This is a money bill that allows government to withdraw funds from the Consolidated Fund of India, after approval of Parliament (Article 114).

- The two bills relate to financial years 2020-21 and earlier for money spent during 2016-17.

10. THE TAXATION AND OTHER LAWS (RELAXATION AND AMENDMENT OF CERTAIN PROVISIONS) BILL

- Relief to taxpayers in terms of compliance.

11. THE COMPANIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

- Makes changes to the 2013 Companies Act.

- Decriminalizes various non-compoundable offences in

case of defaults, except frauds.

- Removes imprisonment for various offences which are considered procedural and technical in nature.
- Reduces the fine amount applicable for certain offences.
- Other relief/exemptions to various categories of companies.

12. THE NATIONAL FORENSIC SCIENCES UNIVERSITY BILL

- Will establish the National Forensic Sciences University as an institute of national importance.
- Gujarat Forensic Sciences University, Gandhinagar and Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan National Institute of Criminology and Forensic Sciences, New Delhi will be merged to form the National Forensic Sciences University.
- The newly formed university will have its campuses both in Gujarat and Delhi.

13. THE RASHTRIYA RAKSHA UNIVERSITY BILL

- The Raksha Shakti University, Gujarat will be upgraded to Rashtriya Raksha University. The university will be an institution of national importance.
- Substantive and infrastructural upgrade at various levels will be made.

14. THE BILATERAL NETTING OF QUALIFIED FINANCIAL CONTRACTS BILL

- Bilateral netting refers to offsetting claims arising from dealings between two parties to determine the net amount payable or receivable from one party to the other.
- The bill allows for enforcement of netting for qualified financial contracts.

- The bill will reduce the net exposure and reduce the credit exposure of banks and other financial institutions, and will result in financial savings for the financial system.

15. THE FOREIGN CONTRIBUTION (REGULATION) AMENDMENT BILL

- Amends the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, which regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or donation by individuals, associations and companies, mostly non-profit organisations.

- Provides for reduction in administrative expenses of any NGO receiving foreign funding, from 50 per cent to 20 per cent of annual funds to ensure spending on their main objectives.

- Bars public servants from receiving foreign fund.

- Organisations will be able to receive foreign funding only at a designated FCRA bank account in the State Bank of India in Delhi. From this account, they will be able to transfer the money to their other accounts.

- The concerned SBI branch in Delhi will report to the Home Minister about the source of funds, manner of reception, and the permitted limit of foreign remittance.

16. THE INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY CODE (SECOND AMENDMENT) BILL

- Amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, which provides a time bound process for resolving insolvency in companies and also among individuals.

- Gives relief to companies stressed due to coronavirus pandemic.

- Will temporarily suspend initiation of the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) for defaults arising during

the six months from March 25, 2020. This means that CIRP cannot be initiated by either the company or its creditors for this period.

17. THE EPIDEMIC DISEASES (AMENDMENT) BILL

- Amends the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.
- Protection to healthcare professionals.
- Expands powers of central government.

18. THE FACTORING REGULATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

• Factoring business is a business where an entity (referred as factor) acquires the receivables of another entity (referred as assignor) for an amount. Factor can be a bank, a registered non-banking financial company or any company registered under the Companies Act.

• The bill amends the Factoring Regulation Act, 2011 to widen the scope of entities which can engage in factoring business.

• The amendments are expected to help micro, small and medium enterprises significantly by providing added avenues for getting credit facility, especially through Trade Receivables Discounting System.

19. THE HOMOEOPATHY CENTRAL COUNCIL (AMENDMENT) BILL

• Seeks to further extend the time to form the Central Council of Homeopathy by a year, after two years allowed for the purpose was over.

20. THE INDIAN MEDICINE CENTRAL COUNCIL (AMENDMENT) BILL

• Seeks a year's time to reconstitute the Indian Medicine Central Council and provides for a board of directors to exercise

its powers in the interim period.

21. THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR OFFICIAL LANGUAGES BILL

- Adds Kashmiri, Dogri and Hindi to the list of official languages of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Before this, only Urdu and English were official languages of the former state.

22. THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, HEALTH AND WORKING CONDITIONS CODE

- Consolidates 13 existing Acts regulating health, safety, and working conditions.
- These include the Factories Act, 1948, the Mines Act, 1952, and the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970.
- The Code will apply to establishments employing at least 10 workers.
- It will apply to all mines, docks, and establishments carrying out any hazardous or life-threatening activity, regardless of number of workers.

23. THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CODE

- Seeks to replace three specific labour laws, The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, The Trade Unions Act, 1926, and The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946.
- Provides for a negotiation union in an industrial establishment, having registered trade unions, for negotiating with the employer.
- In case of multiple trade unions, the trade union with support of at least 51% of workers on the muster roll of that establishment will be recognised as the sole negotiating union by the employer.

- Prohibits employers, workers, and trade unions from committing any unfair labour practices listed in a Schedule to the Code.

24. THE CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

- Replaces nine laws related to social security, which are The Employees Compensation Act, 1923, The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, The Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, The Employees Exchange (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act, 1959, The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, The Cine Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1981, The Building and Other Construction Workers Cess Act, 1996, and The Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008.

- Provides for setting up of a social security fund, or funds, to provide welfare benefits like pension, medical cover, and health and death and disability benefits to all workers.

- Workers in the unorganised sector, such as migrant workers, gig workers and platform workers will also be covered under it.

- It also provides for filing of a single return, electronically or otherwise, by the employer and to make Aadhaar mandatory for registration of a member/beneficiary/ any other person to register or for receiving benefit.

25. THE MAJOR PORT AUTHORITIES BILL

- Aims at decentralizing decision making and to infuse professionalism in governance of major ports.

- Seeks to provide for regulation, operation and planning of major ports in India and provide greater autonomy to these ports.

- It replaces the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.

- Will apply to all major ports in the country, located at Chennai, Cochin, Jawaharlal Nehru Port, Kandla, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Mangalore, Mormugao, Paradip, V.O. Chidambaranar, and Vishakhapatnam.

- Is expected to help impart faster and transparent decision making and execution.

(PRS, 2020; OpIndia Staff, 2020)

UNNECESSARY CONTROVERSIES EXPOSE ROTTEN POLITICS OVER KEY BILLS

The bills passed during the session were overall of a positive character. Some of the bills have been long overdue and the difficulty with which their passage was ensured exposed the political selfishness inherent in a Parliamentary democracy. The entire Parliamentary session witnessed immense obstruction and chaos. The Opposition tried its best to corner the government and prevent it from passing some of the politically significant bills, like the three farm bills, the three bills related to labour law reforms and the bill regulating foreign contributions.

THE CASE OF THE THREE FARM BILLS:

The passage of Farm Bills witnessed the worst scenes in the Upper House. The three Farm Bills were – The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020 (FPTC); The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 (FAPAFS); and, The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020 (ECA).

The FPTC breaks the monopoly of the APMC markets over agricultural trade thereby giving farmers greater choice to buy and sell their produce, and competitive price realization.

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE MARKET COMMITTEE

An APMC is a marketing board established by a state government in India to ensure farmers are safeguarded from exploitation by large retailers, as well as ensuring the farm to retail price spread does not reach excessively high levels. Until 2020, the first sale of agriculture produce could occur only at the market yards (mandis) of APMC.

APMCs operate on two principles:

1. Ensure that farmers are not exploited by intermediaries (or money lenders) who compel farmers to sell their produce at the farm gate for an extremely low price.
2. All food produce should first be brought to a market yard and then sold through auction.

Each state which operates APMC markets geographically divide the state. Markets (mandis) are established at different places within the state. Farmers are required to sell their produce via auction at the mandi in their region. Traders require a license to operate within a mandi. Wholesale and retail traders (e.g. shopping mall owners) and food processing companies cannot buy produce directly from a farmer.

The FAPAFS allows contract farming with price assurance for the farmer; and ECA removes stockpiling limits for traders thereby encouraging private investment in storage, reducing wastage and containing seasonal price volatility (Gulati, 2020). The government has also announced the creation of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and an Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to handle post-harvest produce. FPOs – consisting of collectives of small farmers – will help farmers in accelerating cooperative efforts in access to technology, inputs, market, finance, information etc.

On the face of it, there is little that is objectionable in these bills, if implemented well by NABARD, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, which is the implementing

THE MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE

The MSP is price fixed by Government of India to protect the producer – farmers – against excessive fall in price during bumper production years. The minimum support prices are a guarantee price for their produce from the Government. The major objectives are to support the farmers from distress sales and to procure food grains for public distribution. In case the market price for the commodity falls below the announced minimum price due to bumper production and glut in the market, government agencies purchase the entire quantity offered by the farmers at the announced minimum price.

Government announces minimum support prices (MSPs) for 22 mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane. The mandated crops are 14 crops (Paddy, Jowar, Bajra, Ragi, Maize, Tur(Arhar), Moong, Urad, Groundnut, Sunflower Seed, Soyabean, Sesamum, Nigerseed, Cotton) of the kharif season, 6 rabi crops (Wheat, Barley, Gram, Mashur (Lentil), Rapeseed/Musturd and Safflower) and two other commercial crops viz. Jute and Copra. In addition, the MSPs of toria and de-husked coconut are fixed on the basis of the MSPs of rapeseed/mustard and copra, respectively.

Now, with the fact that only 6% farmers sell their produce at MSP to government agencies, it is evident that for the majority of farmers the MSP regime doesn't do any favour and instead, they find it more practical and profitable to sell to the traders even at lower prices than to the government at MSP, possibly due to logistical and procedural hassles and complexity and rampant corruption government machinery.

However, the MSP certainly works as an index and ensures that there is not too much gap between the actual price realized by the farmer and the MSP.

agency (Gulati, 2020). Indian agriculture – in the clutches of politics – has been in need of some of these changes for some time now. While for countries like China and US, farmers have been heavily subsidized and have great freedom to sell

their produce, in India it is the opposite where farmers are under clutches of the APMCs. For India, the Producer Support Estimates (PSES)² as a per cent of gross farm receipts is around -6.5% – a figure running in negative – while for China, Israel and Russia it is between 14 to 16% (Gulati, 2020).

The current protests are centered around the contention that the government will phase out of Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime under the guise of freeing farmers from APMC clutches. This does not account for the simple fact that, first, the government has declared that it will not touch MSP, and second, that even if freer trade does manage to crowd out APMCs it would only be because more farmers are preferring the prices in such trade than in APMCs.

The protestors go to extent of demanding that MSP be made a legal right – an entitlement. However, the MSP regime has been nothing but a political tool, with its effectivity on ground questionable. Yet, the opposition is demanding that the government amend the law to ensure that no private trader buys below the MSP.³ This would make it impossible for the market to work.

The government itself is unable to procure all the 23 commodities for which MSP is announced, including sometimes even wheat and rice across the entire country. Only 6% farmers sell their crops at MSP. Moreover, at present, small farmers form the majority and their access to APMC markets is very low – at the rate of one market for an area of 434.4 sq. km

² PSES refers to annual monetary value of total transfers from consumers and taxpayers to agricultural producers, arising out of overall policy environment/measures taken by the government.

³ It is clear that it would be impossible to execute it if the logistical condition is such that it is profitable for the farmer to sell it at a price below MSP to a trader than to sell it to the government at MSP

on average instead of the recommended one market for 80 sq. km (The Hindu, 2020). The fact that 86% of all land holdings were small and marginal (less than 2 Ha) means that the small farmers dependent on them are net buyers of food instead of net producers, and, therefore, an increase in MSP hurts them the most (Misra, 2020).

It is clearly the small elite, the landowning politicians and the middlemen that will be hurt the most by these reforms. For the sake of this group of vested interests, it is without logic to demand that MSP be made an entitlement, since government cannot keep procuring if the prices fall below MSP and cannot keep disposing of the surplus procured, especially for non-wheat, non-paddy crops which do not even fall within the Public Distribution System (PDS).

It is also not as if the government has suddenly unleashed a new disruptive system. The reality is that the APMC mandi trade accounts for less than a quarter of total agricultural trade. Around 18 states already have private markets in agri-trade, 19 states already have provisions allowing direct purchase of agri-produce and 20 states already have contract farming laws (Himanshu, 2020). Most of the agricultural marketing already happens outside the APMCs, with only 7000 APMC markets across the country, with states like Kerala, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Manipur not following the APMC system at all (Jebaraj, 2020).

With such low effectivity of MSP regime and of the APMC system, it becomes clear why the protests have only been limited to Punjab and Haryana – the two states that have accounted for more than 50% of government procurement of wheat and paddy during the last 5 years. More than 85% of wheat and paddy in Punjab and more than 75% of the same

THE NUMERIC REALITY IN RAJYA SABHA ON THE DAY OF PASSAGE OF FARM BILLS

On September 20th – the day of the passage of the Farm Bills by a voice vote – the total strength of the Upper House was 243 with 2 vacancies. The halfway mark, if all were present and voting, was 122. The BJP was already certain they would manage to pass the bills, since their prior calculations suggested that those voting in favour of the bills would be around 100+, whereas Opposition may not be more than that. Rest may abstain or miss the vote for various reasons.

The BJP has 86 members, JD (U) has 5, while there are 3 nominated members. To this, if we add one member each from Bodoland People's Front (BPF), Republican Party of India (RPI), Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), National People's Party (NPP), Mizo National Front (MNF), Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), and Independent, the BJP was sure of 102 members voting in favour of the bills.

Those against the bills were Congress 40, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) 3, Trinamool 13, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) 4, Samajwadi Party (SP) 8, Left 6, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) 7, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) 5, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) 4, and one each from Janata Dal (Secular), Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), Loktantrik Janata Dal (LJD), Kerala Congress (KC), and Independent, along with 3 Shiromani Akali Dal members. This amounted to 100 against the bills.

Besides there were many third block parties/fence-sitters – Shiv Sena 3, Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) 7, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) 9, Yuvajana Sramika Rythu party 6, Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party (J&K PDP) 2, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) 9, and one each from Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC-M), and a nominated member. Their total was 40. This time they were divided and some, like TRS, declared its support for the opposition.

However, despite this close call on paper – government numbers at 102 and Opposition at 107 – the reality was different. The number of members actually present in the House was as follows:

Party	Strength	Present	Absent
BJP+	103	91	12
Congress+	107	74	33
Third Block	33	26	7
Total	243	191	52

A large number of opposition members were absent from the House that day, and the government was 17 votes ahead of Opposition.

The bills could have passed easily and peacefully if the Opposition had not unleashed the ruckus it did that day. The third block numbers were stacked against the Opposition. Here is the reality of the Third block:

Parties which initially opposed the bills, but did not speak against its passage during debate: Shiv Sena (3), BSP (4), AIADMK (4), BJD (9) (*very mild suggestions*), NCP(3)

Parties which supported the bills: YSRCP (5), AGP (1), TDP (1), TMC (M) (1)

All in all, if the voting had occurred, the Opposition numbers voting against the bill could have just reduced to only about 70. The ruckus unleashed that day prevented this embarrassment of the opposition.

in Haryana is bought by government at MSP rate. The two states also have the most well-oiled and deeply connected APMC markets, with strong linkages between big farmers and commission agents and politicians.

State governments – like Punjab which earns annually 3500 crore from charges on mandi tax and procurement handling charges – are set to lose substantive revenue through these new laws. Therefore, in sum, the concern is not for the majority of farmers, but for the prolongation of a stagnant system, with a motive to simply oppose the government and polarize the society in the name of farmer protection.

The manner in which the farm bills were finally passed in the Upper House substantiated the sinister politics at play. There was a method to the immense madness of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha, revealing that their true intention has been to mislead the public about the Farm Bills. Going by pure numeric strength of MPs in Rajya Sabha on the day of passage of the bills, it becomes evident that the government was favourably positioned to pass the bills, while the Opposition had much less strength of numbers. Hence, they unleashed the ruckus.

It is not only the reality of the numbers that exposed the Opposition's charade that day, but also the fact that the nationwide farmers' protests called on September 25th were a big failure. The only real epicenter of protests were the states of Punjab and Haryana, and to a lesser extent, Uttar Pradesh – here also they were unionized, led by powerful interests and political parties, and mainly symbolic in nature. In the rest of the country, even the subsequent protests called in the following days flopped. The incredulous visuals of Congress farmers carrying out tractor rallies and of so-called farmers burning their tractors, were bound to fail from the outset, as no practical farmer would turn to burn his own tractors for the shake of politics.

The Opposition to the bills itself was a failure on substantive grounds. In its manifesto for 2019, Congress had declared that it will repeal the APMC Act, free agricultural trade and free farmers' markets. The present bills do nothing different. The entire episode has once again reinforced the utilitarianism inherent in the political system and in the DNA of our political parties. At the same time, the failure of the Opposition to succeed in their designs in the name of farmers shows that change is underway.

THE CASE OF LABOUR LAWS REFORMS:

This reform has been debated for nearly 2 decades, but has not been implemented due to obstructionism by political interests. During this session, the bills were swiftly passed as the Opposition was boycotting the later part of the Parliament session. This is yet another measure that generated consternation among the Opposition camp, although to a much lesser and muted extent than the farm bills.

The three bills on labour reforms passed in the Parliament include – Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, Industrial Relations Code and Social Security Code. The government's contention has been that there was a need to consolidate and simplify over 100 state and 40 central laws governing various aspects of industries and labour. The present government is actually working on the recommendation of the Second National Commission on Labour (2002), which has been deferred by successive governments due to political considerations.

Therefore, it was in 2019 that the government had introduced four Bills to consolidate 29 central laws.

1. CODE ON WAGES :

1. Payment of Wages Act, 1936
2. Minimum Wages Act, 1948
3. Payment of Bonus Act, 1965
4. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

2. OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, HEALTH AND WORKING CONDITIONS CODE

1. Factories Act, 1948

2. Mines Act, 1952
3. Dock Workers Act, 1986
4. Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996
5. Plantations Labour Act, 1951
6. Contract Labour Act, 1970
7. Inter-State Migrant Workment Act, 1979
8. Working Journalist and Other Newspaper Employees Act, 1955
9. Working Journalist Act, 1958
10. Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961
11. Sales Promotion Employees Act, 1976
12. Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966
13. Cine-Workers and Cinema Theatre Workers Act, 1981
3. INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CODE
 1. Trade Unions Act, 1926
 2. Industrial Employment Act, 1946
 3. Industrial Disputes Act, 1947
4. CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY
 1. Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952
 2. Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948
 3. Employees' Compensation Act, 1923
 4. Employment Exchanges Act, 1959
 5. Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
 6. Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972

7. Cine-Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1981

8. Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996

9. Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008

Source: PRS Legislative, <https://www.prsindia.org/billtrack/overview-labour-law-reforms>.

While the Code on Wages, 2019 was passed by Parliament, the other three Bills were referred to the Standing Committee on Labour. After its recommendations, the government finally passed the other three bills as well in this session.

In brief, the new labour laws,

- **Make hiring and firing easier** – companies with up to 300 workers can fire workers without prior government approval. Firms with more than 300 workers still need government approval, although if there is no response from the government, then their proposal would be deemed to be approved.
- **Make industrial strikes more difficult** – Persons employed in industrial establishment will now have to give 60 days' strike notice. If proceedings are pending before a labour tribunal, workers cannot go on a strike for 60 days after they are concluded. These conditions apply to all industries. Flash strikes are now outlawed (Haq, 2020). Moreover, the overall legal and social security benefits framework which will tap every worker in organised and unorganized sector or gig workers, is carefully designed to ensure that going on a strike become impossible or too costly.
- Expand social security net for formal and informal workers for the first time by providing for universal

social security. The provident fund (PF), the employees' state insurance (ESI), maternity benefits, gratuity and other entitlements will come under a simplified single law. Public Distribution System (PDS), benefits will be transferable for migrant workers travelling across states.

- Empowers state governments to exempt new factories from rules governing occupational safety, health and working conditions of employees. Moreover, all laws relating to health and hazardous working conditions will be unified under a single law.
- To make hiring easier, the law prescribes a single licence for firms to hire contract workers across different locations instead of the erstwhile regime of multiple location-specific licences.
- The government has also increased the threshold limit of contractor employees from 20 to 50.

These laws are important to streamline labour and industry issues in the country. India has had very rigid labour laws, which have neither benefitted industries nor the workers. They have not benefitted the workers as majority of India's labourforce is in the unorganized sector. Labour laws have been used as a blackmailing tool by a paltry mass of organized, unionized workers, without benefitting the larger workforce. They also did not have any social security and other benefits. For industries, existing labour laws have incentivized industries to keep their size small, so as to evade the laws. The new laws will provide relief to industries, and will also benefit workers, as they will have more coverage. At the same time, hijacking of workers issues by politicised, unionised interests will be done away with.

As India's population grows, for the next 10 years, around 10 million people will enter labourforce each year, keeping India's labour costs low (Khan, 2020).The model for these reforms has been taken from Gujarat reforms under Modi (the then Chief Minister) and Rajasthan (under Vasundhara Raje as CM). In both the states, the laws resulted in a rise in labour productivity without a commensurate increase in wages, and were also accompanied by greater contractualization, and rise in manufacturing activity (Khan, 2020).

THE CASE OF FOREIGN CONTRIBUTIONS REGULATION:

Another important bill passed by the Parliament was the amendment of the FCRA, 2010. The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) was first introduced by Indira Gandhi in 1976. It was further amended and made tougher by the UPA government in 2010. Yet, there were many loopholes that allowed sinister NGOs to operate with impunity – as the UPA was a divided house, Sonia Gandhi's NGO-filled NAC camp never allowed the government much space to function.

The new amendments will ensure that bogus NGOs in India peddling an anti-India agenda in the guise of social service will be completely wiped out. Indeed, under Modi government, many prominent international NGOs – Greenpeace and Amnesty – have been forced to completely stop operations in the country.

The new rules are in continuation of the meticulous steps already being taken by the Modi government since 2015 to keep a check on foreign-funded NGOs. In 2015, the centre increased quarterly e-filing requirements for NGOs. They also had to notify within 15 days any changes in bank account, name, address, aims, objectives and key functionaries.

In 2015 only, the government started cracking down on duplicate FCRA registration numbers, which many NGOs had managed to accumulate. The government cancelled 10,069 FCRA registration in 2015 and another 4,943 in 2017. Till date, the government has cancelled 20,674 licenses.

In 2017, it was revealed that Christian NGOs top the foreign funded NGOs in India (Jain, 2017). Kerala-based Ayana Charitable Trust, the new name under which US-based charity Gospel for Asia was conducting its projects in India, topped the list for foreign funding in 2015-16. Many other christian NGOs are also among the top grossers of foreign fundings.

This year the government suspended licenses of four major top evangelical organizations that have been operating in India since the early-mid 20th century – Ecreosoculis North Western Gossner Evangelical (Jharkhand), Evangelical Churches Association (Manipur), Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (Jharkhand), and New Life Fellowship Association (Mumbai). Besides, two US-based Christian donors, namely, Seventh Day Adventist Church and Baptist Church are also under watch. The government also cancelled licenses of Rajnandgaon Leprosy Hospital and Clinics, and the Don Bosco Tribal Development Society.

The new FCRA law is further expected to strengthen the government's hand in cracking down of activities that seek to interfere in Indian politics or break Indian society through insidious conversions/proselytazion.

The following are the key changes under the new FCRA law:

- FCRA's definition of "public servant" under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been tightened. Now, any government servant, politician, media personnel, among others, will be

scrutinized and regulated from receiving any foreign funding by way of donations.

The immediate implication is that Court officers, academics in Government institutions/Universities, people on boards of statutory bodies set up by the Government of India or State Governments will have to relinquish their positions in FCRA NGOs (OpIndia, 2020).

- It does not allow anyone to receive foreign contributions unless they seek clearance from the Government of India or have a valid FCRA licence. The original law had allowed FCRA licences to be permanent but the UPA government restricted it to five years (The Print, 2020).

- Under the 1976 law, foreign contributions could be spent as desired. Under 2010 law, only 50 per cent of the amount could be spent on administrative expenses. Under the new 2020 law, only 20 per cent could be spent on such expenses.

- In addition, under the new law, Aadhaar numbers of all directors, CEOs and key employees of NGOs, which receive money from overseas, will be made mandatory.

- Under 2010 law, if the government had doubts about the functioning of an NGO, that NGO could be suspended for 180 days. This period has been extended by the government for another 180 days – a whole year.

- The new law prohibits mutual transfer of extra funds between NGOs possessing FCRA licenses.

- In 2010, the UPA had expanded the scope of FCRA to include not just NGOs, but also all organisations of political nature like trade unions, farmers' organisations, workers, youth forums etc. This is retained in the new provisions.

There have been many political and their sponsored NGO protests in the wake of the new laws. Prominent international Organizations like Oxfam and Amnesty have attacked the government for finishing the human rights organizations in the country. Amnesty has accused the government of freezing its bank accounts on September 10th, as a result of which it had to lay off staff and shut its offices.

There is already a legal case against Amnesty's India head. The organization has also been accused of routing money illegally. Amnesty UK remitted large amounts of money to four entities registered in India, terming it as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Amnesty has also never received clearance from previous governments under FCRA. The last time it received clearance was 20 years ago, in 2000.

Such organizations have a record of interfering in India's domestic political issues in the name of human rights and freedom. The new law will help to check this.

CONCLUSION

The government has passed important bills in this session of the Parliament. A detailed look at three of these bills show how important it is to keep overhauling the system from time-to-time. Far from overhauling our institutions, we had instead become slaves to existing rules and machinery, regardless of the adverse effect they were having on the country. This is now changing, as the inadequacies and failures of Parliamentary democracy are becoming all too evident. Increasingly, we seem to be entering a time when holding politics hostage to vested interests is becoming difficult and our slavery to the institutional machinery seems to be subtly loosening.

HIGHLIGHTS

THE CHINA-INDIA STAND-OFF:

Following the August 29/30th clashes between Indian and Chinese forces at the Pangong Tso lake in eastern Ladakh, and Indian Army's subsequent occupation of southern heights of Pangong Tso and even the contested northern heights of the lake (including the Finger 4 heights), there was little concrete breakthrough in resolving the situation. The Defence Ministers of the two countries met on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Defence Ministers' meeting held in Moscow in first week of September. While there was not much breakthrough in these talks, the subsequent talks on the sidelines of SCO held between Indian and Chinese Foreign Ministers created a significant space for resolution of the crisis.

The two countries, in these talks, agreed to a 'five-point consensus' that reaffirmed the framework of bilateral relations between the two countries. More significantly, the countries agreed that this five-point consensus would form the basis of further border talks towards de-escalation. This consensus is as follows:

1. The two Ministers agreed that both sides should take guidance from the series of consensus of the leaders on developing India-China relations, including not allowing differences to become disputes.

2. The two Foreign Ministers agreed that the current situation in the border areas is not in the interest of either side. They agreed therefore that the border troops of both sides should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance and ease tensions.

3. The two Ministers agreed that both sides shall abide

by all the existing agreements and protocol on China-India boundary affairs, maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas and avoid any action that could escalate matters.

4. The two sides also agreed to continue to have dialogue and communication through the Special Representative mechanism on the India-China boundary question. They also agreed in this context that the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China border affairs (WMCC), should also continue its meetings.

5. The Ministers agreed that as the situation eases, the two sides should expedite work to conclude new Confidence Building Measures to maintain and enhance peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

Subsequently, the 6th round of border talks were held between the two countries in late September. The talks, unlike previous rounds, had the presence of both military and diplomatic leadership of both the countries. India decided to send Ministry of External Affairs officials to the talks along with military leadership, so that China could not claim at a later stage that there was inconsistency in India's military and diplomatic positions.

The talks were largely candid and ice breaking, and the two armies issued a joint statement. They were guided by the newly agreed five-point consensus. The two countries also agreed to certain important points viz. both countries would stop sending any further troops to the border, and, neither side will unilaterally attempt to change the prevailing status quo. They resolved to avoid misunderstandings and to hold a further round of military talks to resolve the crisis.

The fact that two sides emphasized on maintaining status quo is also an advantage for India. For, after the advances

made by India during August 29/30 stand-off and during September, especially in the south bank of Pangong Tso, where India has occupied key peaks that it had not controlled earlier, India is placed in a more advantageous position than before. Therefore, a status quo is not a loss but a gain for India.

INTRA-AFGHAN DIALOGUE IN DOHA:

The much awaited intra-Afghan dialogue finally started on September 12th in Doha. While much is being negotiated, what stood out was India's participation in the dialogue. India not only sent representatives to Doha, but India's Foreign Minister also addressed the inaugural session. He made it clear that India was there at the behest of the Afghan government, that supported an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process and that India would not directly engage with the Taliban.

India received an invitation from Qatar upon Afghanistan's suggestion. Pakistan's opposition to inviting India were turned down. Prior to these talks also, even though India refused to participate in earlier negotiations, yet both US and Afghanistan kept India continuously informed about the latest developments – again, much to Pakistan's consternation.

For India, the interest in participating in the intra-Afghan dialogue is to ensure that the Afghan soil is not used for terror activities against India.

ATTACKS ON TEMPLES IN ANDHRA PRADESH:

In recent times, Andhra Pradesh has seen a spate of attacks on Hindu temples, along with allegations of extensive mass conversions to Christianity through the use of money. In September, century old Laxmi Narsimha Swamy temple's chariot was set on fire in Antarvedi – one of the most revered Vaishnavite places. This led to widespread protests against the

government and outrage among Hindus. While Pawan Kalyan-led Jana Sena protested against the incident along with BJP workers, separately, TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu demanded inquiry into the incident, condemned attack on Hindus and demanded a safety audit for all Hindu temples.

While some arrests were made, following such widespread protests, the Andhra Pradesh government decided to hand over the probe to CBI for investigation, suspended the temple executive officer and promised to build a new chariot. Jagan Reddy, the CM, also performed puja at a temple after some days.

However, temples attacks did not stop. Following this, there was an attack on the 12th century Kasi Visweswara Swamy temple, where the Nandi idol was damaged. While these attacks have intensified recently, there have been similar incidents a few months back also. In February, a 50 feet tall ancient chariot of Prasanna Venkateswara Swamy temple in Nellore district was set ablaze – passed off as accident. In January, a series of Hindu idols were desecrated through hammers in East Godavari district.

TEMPLE ATTACKS IN RECENT TIMES

- Nandi idol vandalized in Chittoor (27th September)
- Attack on Kasi Visweswara Swamy temple in Krishna (16th September)
- Hanuman idol in Yeleswaram vandalized (17th September)
- Chariot burning of Laxmi Narasimha Swamy temple in Antarvedi (6th September)
- Chariot burning of Sri Prasanna Venkateswara Swamy temple in Nellore (14th February)

- Idols damaged in East Godavari district (21st January)

In Opposition, Naidu has consistently kept up the attacks on Jagan. He has accused the CM of not condemning attacks on Hindu temples and of not visiting a single temple.

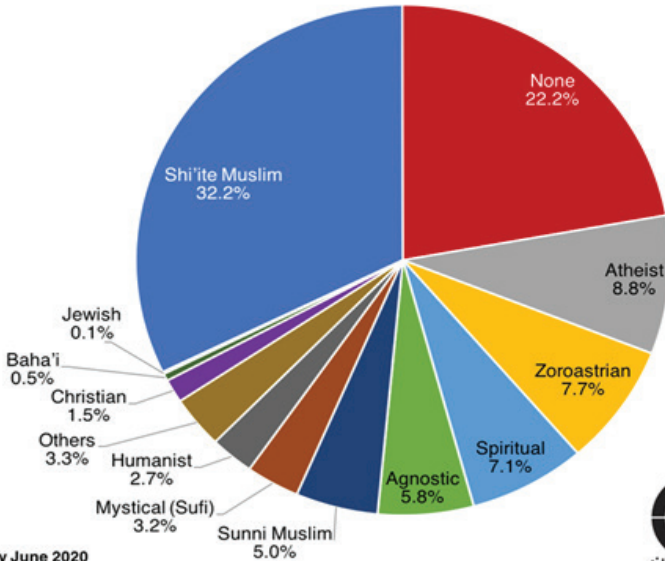
The Jagan government was also forced to shelve the outrageous plan of auctioning 50 immovable properties of the Tirupati temple located in different states, after a furore among the Hindus.

RELIGION IN IRAN:

In June 2020, the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN) co-conducted an online survey – internet penetration in Iran is high and comparable to Italy – about religious attitudes in Iran, and published a widely communicated report. The final sample consisted of 40,000 Iranians presently residing in Iran, which was weighted to the target population of literate Iranians aged above 19, using demographic variables and voting behaviour in the 2017 presidential elections (Tamimi & Maleki, 2020).

The results contradict the official Iran census, – as the following graphics shows – which claims that 99.5% of the population follows Islam. According to this survey, while 78% people believed in God, only 40% people identified themselves as Muslim. Only 32% identified themselves as Shia Muslims. 9% said they were atheists, while 7% prefer to follow ‘spirituality’. 22.2% people did not identify with anything.

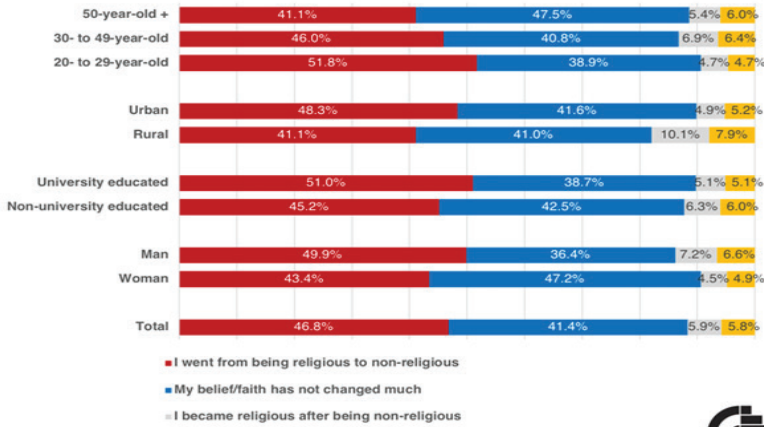
Which of the following is closer to your beliefs and faith?



Survey June 2020
GAMAAN.org



How have your religious (or non-religious) beliefs changed during your lifetime?



Survey June 2020
GAMAAN.org



FOR THE RECORD:

DOMICILE CERTIFICATES AWARDED IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR:

The Jammu and Kashmir government has, within three months (mid-June to mid-September), issued 18.52 lakh domicile certificates. A total of 21,99,513 people had applied for the certificates. Out of these, 20,87,815 applications were found complete and approved, while 1,11,698 were rejected. Out of the approved 20,87,815 applications, 18,52,355 have been issued certificates, while rest of the applications are being processes and will soon be given certificates.

Out of the 18.52 lakh domicile certificates issued, majority include people who already possessed Permanent Residency Certificates (PRCs). The total domicile certificates issued to Non State Subjects stood at 59,993, including, amongst others, 17,978 to West Pakistan Refugees, 1825 Balmiki community members and 755 Gorkhas.

Out of the 18.52 lakh certificates issues, 4,97,238 were issued in Kashmir, while 13,35,643 were issued in Jammu.

The number of West Pakistan Refugees applying for certificates is generally low, as many of them already possess a PRC and therefore qualify for domicile, as per a state official (Sharma, 2020).

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POLITICAL IDEALS AND HIGHER TRUTH

“For instance, you find that Democracy, Socialism and Communism have each some truth behind it, but it is not the whole Truth. What you have to do is to find out the forces that are at work and understand what it is of which all these mental ideas and ‘isms’ are a mere indication. You have to know the mistakes which people commit in dealing with the truth of these forces and the truth that is behind the mistakes also. I am, at present, speaking against democracy. That does not mean that there is no truth behind it – and I know it, yet I speak against democracy, because that mentality is at present against the Truth that is trying to come down.

In order to get the true form – and if you want the unhampered play of the Higher Truth – what you have to do is to be very open and ready for changing all your ideas, personal, social and national.”

*Source: Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo, Page 343, 18
May 1926*