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**Promises versus Deeds**

While reading the manifestos of two major parties, “Congress will Deliver” of the Indian National Congress (INC) and “Sankalp Patra” of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), I focused on my core interests: environment, climate change, rivers, and issues of jal–jungle–jameen (water, forests and land). In the BJP manifesto, I did not find a section on climate change, but was amazed to spot the word climate in the energy section. On page 22, it says, “India has become a global champion in addressing the issues of climate change through effective and feasible interventions.” However, according to the *Global Climate Risk Index*, 2019, published by Germanwatch, India is the 14th most vulnerable country to the impacts of climate change.

I was surprised to find a dedicated section on environment, climate change, climate resilience, and disaster management on pages 50–51 of the INC manifesto. It states, “It is a bitter truth that India’s environment has deteriorated. The 2018 Global Environmental Performance Index placed India at rank 177 out of 180 countries. The BJP Government has done virtually nothing in the last five years to arrest this decline.” It is another matter that even under the United Progressive Alliance’s (UPA) government, the record on environment was not outstanding, with India’s rank as 155 in 2014 on a similar list. But, a sharp drop of 20 positions in five years is shocking.

The BJP manifesto further claims that “We have ensured speed and effectiveness in issuing forest and environmental clearances.” The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has weakened laws, failed to ensure open consultations and public hearings, and made it simpler for private companies to abuse the nation’s natural resources, including forests, wildlife, aquatic life, mountains, and rivers. This, despite the fact that India has become the world’s second-most polluted country, according to the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago.

Both party manifestos mention the creation of a ministry of water to bring all water-related activities and departments

under one authority, to approach the issue of water management holistically, and ensure better coordination of efforts. Ensuring access to safe and potable drinking water for all households is a priority for both parties, but the BJP manifesto marks a clear deadline of 2024 to achieve this. The Congress manifesto, however, presents a detailed approach stating that special attention would be paid to provide access and democratic sharing of water. It will address these issues by focusing on storage in dams and waterbodies, replenishing groundwater and creating a large participatory programme of water management involving the state governments, civil society organisations, farmers, other users, panchayats, and gram sabhas. It will also use the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to execute public works that will mitigate the impact of disasters such as floods and droughts. It also proposes to “formulate a comprehensive land and water use policy and plan that will include measures for the conservation of ecosystems and the bio-diversity and wildlife contained therein, without affecting the legitimate rights of local communities.”

While these propositions look extraordinary printed on a thick glossy coloured paper, the real picture on the ground is quite the opposite. Parliament has presented a report by the Central Ground Water Board hinting at an imminent water crisis for India. The report states that between 2007 and 2017 (covering both parties’ regimes), indiscriminate groundwater resource consumption has resulted in nearly 61% decline in groundwater levels in India. Most of the programmes carried out focused more on supply than demand, with little effort to increase the efficiency of groundwater use.

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The BJP in their manifesto mentions that it will bring the “sleeping jinn” of the mega engineering project of interlinking of rivers back to life. A new study by the Indian Institutes of Technology in Mumbai and Chennai analysed weather data of over 103 years (from 1901 to 2004) and found that more than 10% of rainfall has decreased over the years, even in river basins that once had a surplus, such as the Mahanadi and the Godavari. In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Assam, the districts that face floods are also suffering from drought. In such a situation, no state will allow a single drop of their water to flow into other rivers or states. Is this project then going to solve the water woes of the country or increase water conflicts? Is it an ill-conceived plan based on outdated ideas that will devastate the riverine ecosystems of the country?

The Congress promises to double the budget allocation for cleaning rivers, including the Ganga, saying, “We will convert the Ganga Action Plan into a People’s Programme and implement the same ... We will allow the import of sand for construction and stop the illegal mining of sand in riverbanks.” But, it is tight-lipped about the uninterrupted flow of the Ganga that is on the verge of death due to several hydro projects approved by their own government. Despite an increase in budget every five years, since the first Ganga Action Plan (GAP) was launched in 1986, till the launch of Namami Gange programme, the condition of the Ganga is depleting year by year. The flow in the river is not required only during the Kumbh Mela for cleansing of human sins, but also to keep her alive for the rest of the year too. The most important aspect of maintaining the *aviralta* or the continuity of the river, always gets ignored.

India has not forgotten the recent death of Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand or G D Agarwal, a world-renowned environment engineer who was on a fast unto death for 111 days and sacrificed his life on 10 October 2018. He was demanding a special act for Ganga, and for stoppage of sand mining and construction of hydro projects leading to death of the Ganga. But, the government ignored his demands. Continuing the fight of Swami

Sanand, young Swami Atmbodhanand is now on a fast unto death, but the government is not paying any attention to his genuine demands.

Even as India is in the midst of the 2019 general election, if its major political parties continue to follow the same way of deluding the nation, the environmental situation will further exacerbate and it will become more expensive in the future to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change. Whatever the verdict of these elections, the new government should launch an aggressive ecological restoration programme in the country, learning from the successful and committed grass-roots movements, and involving youth, women, communities, and civil society organisations to build resilience and generate livelihood opportunities.

**Maulik Sisodia**

RAJASTHAN

### Some Clarifications

This is in reference to the letter “Perplexing Data” by Akhilesh Tilotia (*EPW*, 23 March 2019), commenting on our article “Challenges to Indian Fiscal Federalism” (*EPW*, 2 March 2019). We thank the author for the careful reading of the article, and for highlighting the aspects that needed clarification.

One of the issues highlighted in the letter is that the various components of transfers do not add up to 100. It needs to be noted that the figures in the columns are not mutually exclusive. For example, normal central assistance (NCA) is a component of the state plan. Similarly, revenue deficit grants are a part of the statutory grants provided by the Finance Commission. Hence, the total will not add up to 100. The purpose was to illustrate the changing shares of conditional and unconditional grants in the total transfers of grants from the union to the states.

As regards discrepancy in net proceeds, the method of computation is clear in

the article and the loss to states worked out is correct. Since net proceeds is the basis for computing share of taxes to be devolved to the states, the loss in tax share will be a percentage of the loss in net proceeds arising due to the proliferation of cess and surcharges, and short computation of net proceeds. It is to be taken note of that the figure of net proceeds is not published in the budget documents.

On the gross domestic product (GDP)–gross state domestic product (GSDP) gap, it is well known that 3% of the GDP is much higher than 3% of the GSDP. It can be observed from the Fourteenth Finance Commission Report (Chapter 14, Table 14.2), the 3% fiscal deficit as a percentage of GSDP is 2.75% of the GDP. Also, the fiscal consolidation road map proposed by the Thirteenth Finance Commission (Chapter 9, Table 9.7) shows that the fiscal deficit of states as a percentage of the GDP for the entire period of 2010–11 to 2014–15 ranged between 2.6% and 2.4% of the GDP.

**T M Thomas Isaac, R Mohan**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,

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NEW DELHI

### Corrigendum

In the article “Determinants of Electoral Outcomes: An Analysis of General Elections in India” by Ajit Karnik, Mala Lavani and Manali Phatak (*EPW*, 30 March 2019), the heading of Table 6 should have read as “Results of the Logistic Regression for All Elections from 1998 Onwards.” Note (v) to Table 6 should have been: “Equation (4) includes all observations in elections from 1998 to 2014”.

### Erratum

In the article “Gender Equalisation through Feminist Finance” by Ritu Dewan, the author note should be: Ritu Dewan is former director of the School of Economics and Public Policy, University of Mumbai, Maharashtra.

The errors have been corrected on the *EPW* website.

*The errors are regretted —Ed*

### EPW Engage

The following articles have been published in the past week in the *EPW* Engage section ([www.epw.in/engage](http://www.epw.in/engage)).

- (1) Who Can Represent Muslims in Electoral Politics? Debates in the Muslim Public Sphere—*Ghazala Jamil*
- (2) Politics and Protest: Who Will Win in Tamil Nadu? —*Rahul N*
- (3) ‘All I Want Is One Job’: The Fine Print of Education–Employment Linkages—*V Kalyan Shankar, Rohini Sahni*

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