

views



BJP will post a historic win in Gujarat

— GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER NARENDRA MODI AFTER THE SECOND PHASE OF THE ASSEMBLY POLLS THAT ENDED ON SUNDAY

The third revolution

Organised retail in agriculture may represent a third stage in the revolution of our rural economy

The entry of large corporates in organised retail in agriculture is facing resistance in certain states like Uttar Pradesh. I have been arguing that organised retail may represent the third stage in the revolution of our rural economy. The first was the Green Revolution, the second the White or the Milk Revolution.

The case against the entry of large corporates in organised retail of agriculture products seems to rest on the following arguments:

- Agriculture and industry are fundamentally different. One cannot apply the ethos of industry to agriculture and vice versa. That is why even developed countries treat agriculture on a different footing, even though only a minuscule percentage of the population, say from three to seven per cent, are dependent on agriculture. There seems to be an atavistic appeal for agriculture representing food security and insurance against annihilation.
- Agri-business in developed countries has led to a reduction in bio-diversity even though productivity has vastly improved. Vulnerability against pests and sudden damage to crops has exceedingly increased. The profit oriented agri-business corporations depend on genetically-modified products.

- At present, in our country the difference between the consumer price for agri-products as compared to the farm gate price is not more than three to four times. The entry of large companies in organised retail will ini-



The first stage was the Green Revolution and then we had the Milk Revolution

tially lead to corporates offering 10-15 per cent less than the prevailing prices. Once the small traders are wiped out in this competition, then the corporates will dictate terms and producers too will be at their mercy since there will be no alternative buyers.

- The use of cold storage and air-conditioning in malls will lead to pollution problems, apart from the loss of taste and flavour of the fruits and vegetables and the nutritive element.

How valid are these objections? Let us counter them one by one.

- The track record of developed countries shows that unlike our country, where nearly 60 per cent of the population is dependent on agriculture, only a small percentage is dependent on agriculture. In those economies, manufacturing and services, especially the latter employ the majority of the population. Why should India not follow this proven route to employment and development? A positive impact of organising retail in agriculture will be improvement

in productivity. The current enormous waste for example in vegetable products to the extent of 40 per cent will be avoided. The fluctuation of prices between seasons when production is more and when it is less will be evened out by a corresponding growth of food processing industries which the corporates will develop in their own interest.

- The fear against GM is mainly a part of the trade politics between US and the EU. After all, our vaunted Green Revolution was based on hybrid seeds. Are hybrid seeds not a case of genetic modification? The loss of bio-diversity is indeed a serious matter. It should be possible to find a modus vivendi under which organised retail by the corporates takes care of the large percentage of the market. Niche markets can be developed for such products like organically farmed foods and vegetables preserving biodiversity, by small producers and traders.

- As regards the case of corporates in leading producers and consumers into a no-win situation, why should we not replicate the excellent model of the White Revolution? The co-operative model in milk ensured that the producers' interests were not compromised. Can we not find a similar model in which the corporates incorporate social responsibility without sacrificing the holy principle of profitability and work out a modus vivendi?

- On the pollution issue, let us apply the same lesson learnt on the sustainable development front. In every sphere of economic activity, green technologies are emerging.

So, what is wrong with corporates in organised retail? The problem is our vote and power-hungry politicians will not hesitate to exploit the emotions of the vast majority of illiterate villages for short-term political gains.

letters to the editor

Students, take care

This is with regard to 'Kin of slain Andhra students leave for US' (MM, December 16). Indian students are usually victims of racist attacks when they go abroad for higher studies. In view of the current scenario, they should not venture out unnecessarily after dark. It would also be in keeping with things to exercise restraint while befriending locals. Before enlisting for any particular foreign institution, students should first check out whether it is a highly crime-prone area.

Suryakant Mhatre

Proactive citizens

This is with regard to 'Let's have a no-car day' (MM, December 16). It is a great idea by Mayor Dr Shubha Raul to support a pollution-free day in January by not driving one's own vehicles and taking to public transport instead. Keeping private vehicles off the streets even for a single day will go a long way towards minimising pollution. Once the idea of travelling by public transport catches on, it could set an example for more such drives in future. A suggestion: it would make sense to begin the drive on Thursday, which is perfect for the purpose since Monday to Wednesday are the most hectic days of the week and from Friday onwards, people look forward to their weekend. Public transport like local trains and BEST buses though should be geared up for the challenge.

Ashwin Hawelkar

Good attempt

This is with reference to 'We couldn't do a Sydney...' (MM, December 16). Even though the response for Batti Bandh was mixed, a beginning has been made. Add to this the fact that the siren too wasn't heard at the given time. Instead of saying the glass was half empty, let us say it was half full and that quite a few persons did try to contribute their mite to the drive. It is nice to see citizens taking the initiative. Greater publicity could have garnered a greater response to such an initiative though.

Aishwarya Prabhu

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bloggers' park

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DEEPAK TURBHEKAR

BATTI BANDH INITIATIVE

■ The Batti Bandh campaign has been a success, even if 10-20 per cent of Mumbai's population participated. The figures will be different if this campaign is repeated in future. It only shows that people are interested and want to help in combating global warming. Also many were unaware of such a movement where on the 15th of December all electrical appliances had to be switched off from 7:30 pm for an hour. Or they had this to say, "How does it matter?" Such people are apprehensive of trying something new. Humans believe that they always need a leader to perform a show — it speaks of our dependency. It's sad to say that we have forgotten the power of 'I'. For the fight against global warming we don't need leaders, we need 'I's. You may have said, "How does it matter?" but remember it's the thought that matters because a thought becomes a habit; a habit becomes your nature; a

nature your character. And it's this character that creates Revolutions. So, don't kill the thought by saying "How does it matter?"

<http://merosoch.blogspot.com/2007/12/mumbai-unplug-how-does-it-matter.html>

■ Switching off and switching on lights at the same time will mean a sudden and huge increase in load on the transformers. The stats provide only one side of the story. No one measured the increase in carbon emissions due to the sudden increase in load. Though the intention is right, the execution isn't. A better way is to incorporate energy-saving habits in our day-to-day lives is using fluorescent lights, which are a better alternative to our power-hungry conventional bulbs.

<http://browneyedkiyoshi.blogspot.com/2007/12/batti-bandh.html>

■ This one hour for just one day will set an example that together we can make a difference.

<http://chennaiytv.blogspot.com/2007/12/mumbai-unplugged.html>



A Batti Bandh appeal on a T-shirt

JUST LIKE THAT! AJIT NINAN



...Not a year-end fancy dress contest with toy guns... It's the uniform of APS — Armed Public School.