

The dangers of packaged food

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Packaged food is impacting the food availability of millions of marginalized people. It increases the market value of raw materials in the supply chain and makes large food processing companies major players in the market. Packaged food also poses dangers to human health.

The Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) 2020 indicates that acute hunger has increased across the globe since the pandemic began in 2013. Amongst the 50 partner nations of GRFC, the number of people enduring food insecurity has risen from 112 to 123 million between 2019 and 2020. This crisis is especially acute in nations under conflict such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan.

Climate change-linked droughts and economic shocks are the major drivers of hunger in Haiti, Pakistan and Zimbabwe. With the prospect of hunger looming large over millions, processed food has gained popularity in both developed and developing nations.

An estimate says that the global market share of packaged food will reach US\$ 463.65 billion by 2027, from \$ 304.98 billion in 2019. Food habits have changed markedly worldwide in last few decades. In India, the packaged food market value was estimated to be \$ 26.28 billion in 2019. This is expected to rise to \$ 122.78 billion by 2025 – an almost five-fold increase. The food processing industry accounts for 32 per cent share of India's food market.

Artificial food additives are used in packaged food to improve taste, add colour and increase shelf life. But most of the chemicals in food additives and artificial colour may cause cancer and negatively impact human health.

According to Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), there are about 11000 permitted food additives. Aspartame, saccharin and corn syrup are the most popular additives used in packaged food, as artificial sweeteners for beverages, candies and chewing gums.

Monosodium Glutamate (MSG), is used to enhance the flavour of food. It is associated with metabolic and neurological disorders, obesity and adverse effects on the repro-



ductive organs. It causes numbness of the neck, arms, and back as well as headache, dizziness, and palpitations.

Sodium Nitrite, used commonly to preserve canned food, is believed responsible for causing colorectal cancer. With chronic use it can result in heart problems by damaging blood vessels and hardening the arteries. Sodium benzoate is the most popular food preservative that prevents food spoilage. If this chemical is used to preserve juice or beverages containing organic acids, it can produce 'benzene,' a carcino-

genic by-product activated by light. Benzene is known to cause blood cancer. In the early 1990s, the US Food and Drug Administration urged companies to stop using this in soft drinks. But in India this chemical is still widely used to preserve fruit juice products and Indian traditional medicine (Ayurveda) products.

Dependency on packaged food has increased in India. Migration of people to cities, growth of supermarket and retail shops and increase in the number of nuclear families have all contributed to the high

demand for packed and preserved food. The availability and demand of these packed foods are now a matter of health concern: India is already battling with the increasing of number of cancer patients each year.

According to an estimate of the National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR) India, about 2.25 million people live with cancer and more than 1.5 million new cancer patients are being registered every year. A 324 per cent rise in cancer cases was reported in India between 2017 and 2018.

With the food security of mil-

lions at risk and agricultural production getting impacted by climate change through extensive draughts, packaged food is adding to this burden. It is not only impacting the market value of raw products but negatively impacts the health of consumers. Sustainable food marketing needs to be promoted with stringent regulation on the use of chemicals in processed food.

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POLITICAL DIARY | KALYANI SHANKAR

Decoding the future of Sasikala

The evolution as a leader of Vivekanandan Krishnaveni Sasikala, a close associate of late Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalitha, was cut short in an abrupt manner when the top court intervened and convicted her in the disproportionate assets case in 2017. She almost became the chief minister after Jaya's sudden demise. Emerging from the shadows of her leader she staked her claim to the top slot, but nemesis caught up with her.

After serving her four-year term, Sasikala is now out of prison. What will be her future? Much has changed in the politics of the country and the state in the last four years. She had the hold of AIADMK for over three decades as Jaya's shadow. Regardless of the pros and cons of her return it is clear that she continues to be in the news. She could have become a factor in the upcoming Tamil Nadu polls, but there is not much time.

As a convicted person, she is not the same Sasikala as four years ago. Two of her handpicked leaders in the AIADMK have become the current rulers and are against her. E Palaniswamy (EPS) is the chief minister, and O. Pannarselvam (OPS) is his deputy. Both have consolidated their positions within the party and the government. Moreover, the BJP, which hopes to improve its Tamil Nadu's fortunes, has been pulling strings from Delhi on the AIADMK



leaders after Jaya's demise.

The "Mannargudi mafia," as Sasikala's extended family was called, has lost its influence in the party. Sasikala has no house to return to. Jaya's residence, Veda Nilayam where she lived with Jaya earlier, has come under the government control. That is why she is

building a palatial home near Veda Nilayam, which is getting ready for her occupation. Above all, she cannot contest elections for the next years upon being convicted. She has to play politics from behind. In short, the political landscape remains complicated now.

EPS and OPS have full control

of the party and government now. The duo has gained confidence with a comfortable administration in the state besides retaining power with BJP and other small allies. While the BJP was persuading the two leaders to accept Sasikala in the AIADMK front, EPS reportedly told PM Modi during his meeting with him last week that there was no chance of such a thing. EPS opened a Rs. 79 crore memorial for Jayalalitha to make it clear that Sasikala has no claim to the late Chief Minister's legacy.

Sasikala has few options, although she has plenty of money to spend. An obvious choice is to rejoin AIADMK by reaching an agreement with Panneerselvam and Palaniswami that she will preside over the party and run the government. After tasting power, Palaniswami is not ready for this.

The second is to lead the third front. The party Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam, floated by Sasikala's nephew T T V Dhinakran in 2017, has been waiting for her return. Sasikala still wields some influence among her Thevar community, which dominates the AIADMK. EPS is from the other influential Gounder community. The AMMK won about 4 per cent of the voting share in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, about 15 per cent of the AIADMK votes. Last time (2016) to fight the opposition by splitting anti-

government votes, a third front was launched. Among the other parties joining the third front in such a scenario are S Ramadoss' PMK and Captain Vijayakanth's DMDK.

The third choice is to prepare for the next Assembly and Lok Sabha polls. People close to her claim that this might be the best option for her. She could choose this option if nothing else materialises.

The last and least preferred choice is to withdraw from politics citing health reasons like superstar Rajnikant did last month. But Sasikala is a strong personality and knows the intricacies of politics. Many remember how she slammed the Jaya memorial. With eyes full of tears, she hit at the memorial thrice with her fists before going to prison. AIADMK interpreted the three thumps as indicating that she would overcome hurdles, treachery, and the plotting against her. Those who have been working closely with her believe that she won't give up.

The big question is not what impact Sasikala will have on AIADMK, but how much impact it will have. She could split the party, but only if the AIADMK loses the elections. The DMK remained united even after Jayalalitha's death. One thing is sure. Sasikala is used to political intrigue. With abundant knowledge of Tamil Nadu politics, she is not likely to remain quiet. Also, it all depends on how BJP looks at her political career. Whether Tamil Nadu welcomes her or shuns her is the key to her future.

NOW AND AGAIN

A blessing in disguise

BUDDHADEV NANDI

I am extremely conceited about being a staunch follower of the adage "Self-help is the best help". Unlike other members of our family, never did I allow even maidservants to wash my clothes or any female member of the family to make my bed, iron my clothes and even sew a button of my shirts and trousers. I revere Gandhi as the embodiment of self-help.

I did not feel uncomfortable about advocating self-help until the pandemic visited us. Maidservants whom I had so far thought did nothing special were dismissed. The onus of the daily chores of the family were distributed among adult members except my octogenarian father, a retired high school teacher. I was entrusted with the duty of washing utensils. For the first few days I enjoyed the task and was praised for washing utensils better than the maidservants.

Gradually, the task became so tedious that I would recoil from the sound of utensils being placed in the kitchen sink. Then I thought sweeping and swabbing floors might be less boring though more laborious. After a few days, the disillusionment set in. Only then did I realise the importance of maidservants who performed a large part of the household chores.

Over eight months, there were many challenges. The first one that the family had to face was that the toilet bowls and the long, narrow but shallow drain needed to be cleaned. I contacted our sweeper. But he declined as he was sure he would contract the virus from the drain. I cleaned the toilet pans with a brush and a toilet cleaner. For the long, narrow drain I had to use a bladed spade.

The wooden door of the bathroom broke. The carpenter known to me was told by his wife to stay at home. Finding no other solution, I bought a small hand saw, a chisel, a hand drill, a small hammer and other simple tools to repair the door and make it usable.

But when the super cyclone Amphan ravaged our garden uprooting two big trees in mid-May, a portion of our huge compound wall was razed. I had the same trouble as before when I went in search of a mason. I was forced to buy a set of trowels of different shapes and sizes and other simple masonry tools to repair the wall myself.

With the progress of time, we faced multifarious problems that called for electricians, plumbers, and so on. I purchased the necessary tools to surmount ordeals caused by the absence of handymen. Once I even sustained a mild electric shock while changing the condenser of a slow fan.

Now carpenters, electricians, plumbers and masons are available almost as before. But I do not contact them for minor problems. Likewise, a good many neighbours acquainted with me, facing similar troubles, have become adept in different chores that had seemed to them quite exotic before the invasion of the virulent pandemic.

100 YEARS AGO

A "LORD SINHA ROAD"

To The Editor Of The Statesman

SIR, - To commemorate the name of Lord Sinha of Raipur the Madhupur Municipality has named a road after him. It is known by the name of "Lord Sinha Road." True, it is the duty of the people to preserve the name of those who are held in high respect, but we really fail to understand why the word "Lord" has been prefixed to his name in connection with a road named after him. There are many streets, roads, parks, public halls and libraries, etc., in the metropolis of British India which are named after the names of Viceroy and Governor-Generals of India but the word "Lord" has been dropped in the case of one and all. There is a Ripon Street which has been named after our late beloved Viceroy Lord Ripon, there is Clive Street and many other streets and roads named after them who endeared themselves to the people of this country by their noble acts.

MADHUPURITE.
Madhupur.

THE UNREST AT MADHUPUR

To The Editor Of The Statesman

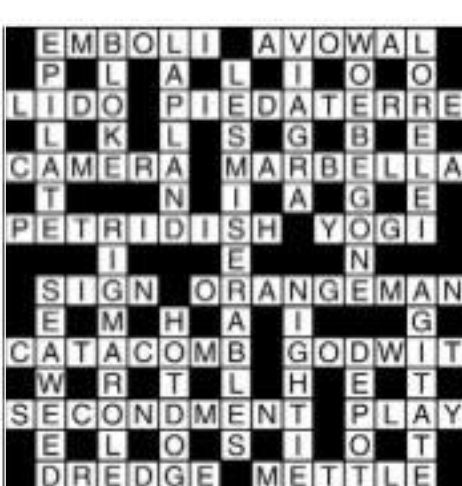
SIR, - The strike of cooks and sweepers of the European population in this station has continued since January 26. The boycott of butchers, bakers and vendors has not so far been successful. There seems to be nothing to satisfy the strikers, so far as the conflicting rumours go, as it is stated that some will not resume duty unless they receive 100 per cent increment and others unless they receive orders from some of Mr. Gandhi's followers. So far no action seems to have been taken by any of the authorities or perhaps if they have, they have not been any way successful. The state of affairs is very deplorable, more especially in the railway colony itself, where men tired out from a hard day's work have everything to do for themselves. Further, from all appearances, the insanitation is likely to cause illness. It is time that some measures were adopted by the authorities concerned.

W.M.

CROSSWORD

NO 28811

SOLUTION FOR 24 JANUARY



ACROSS

- Fun was had in bed cavorting as newlyweds? (7,3,4)
- Ignorant article in Le Monde about American conflict (7)
- Complain about name-dropping in club (7)
- Heather regularly spent years in Chad (5)
- Lurking wild lion and tiger (9)
- Eve maybe one on board (5,4)
- Charlie meets unknown cleric (5)

DOWN

- Keeps nursing old leader of French general legislature (5,2,7)
- Joint that is primarily raunchy and more disreputable (7)
- Mineral article absorbed by metal kitchen implement (9)
- Urine's a little vile (7)
- The reverberation effect made on lutes originally? (7)
- Three car makers organised test of public opinion (6,8)

DOWN

- Dissension following trial (7)
- Old description of Smlodon! (4,2,3,5)
- Attending twice today (2,7)
- Chemical engineer defends right to telephone customers (9)
- Important lady found in wreckage of Nazi car (7)
- Enmity encountered in Tehran courthouse (7)
- Vocal supporter for one who delivers babies? (5)
- People in authority briefly entertaining computing tax (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

