

# EDITORIAL

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## TODAY'S EDITORIAL: Borrow Babus

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Many are going to use the latest Human Development Report released by the UNDP to knock reform and globalisation, as the improvement in India's human development scores during 1975-90 the pre-reform phase was 25 per cent, much higher than the 18.6 per cent improvement recorded during 1990 - 2004.

Despite having a per capita income that is 60 per cent higher than Bangladesh, the latter has better sanitation coverage, which translates into an annual figure of 450,000 infant deaths in India due to diarrhoea alone. But it would be too facile to conclude from this that growth-oriented policies end up hurting the poor.

Growth or no growth, poor administrative capabilities will end up in poor delivery of public services. It's better to look at causality from the other end India's poor physical and social infrastructure, for which misgovernance is responsible, will end up hurting growth.

Economic reform, rather than being stalled, needs to be complemented with political reform that makes administration more efficient.

If a multinational corporation were to underperform the response would be to change its CEOs, managers, sales teams and so on and find out if the new team achieves better results. New recruits could be drawn from any part of the world, merit being the sole criterion.

Could we try out the same approach in public administration? This newspaper invites guest editors from time to time to infuse fresh ideas. Why can't the country invite guest administrators? Rudy Giuliani turned around New York, shouldn't we invite him to be mayor of New Delhi for a few years?

New Delhi is in turmoil because, it turns out, the presence of commercial establishments is liable to put too much pressure on administrative services. New York is studded with high-rises (disallowed in New Delhi) and is a beehive of commercial activity, yet things run smoothly there.

Perhaps Giuliani could show us how it's done. Likewise, running a municipality could be outsourced to babus from Singapore for a year, while our babus stand down and think about how things could be done differently in order to achieve Singapore-like standards of cleanliness and efficiency.

They could then be given a second chance to set things right, and if they failed this time, their retirement could be made permanent. One needn't always look to First

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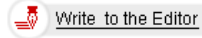
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World countries. If the Grameen Bank worked in Bangladesh, we could invite Mohammed Yunus to set up similar banks in India.

Sri Lanka and China have improved their human development indices much faster than India we could, on a trial basis, ask experienced Sri Lankan and Chinese officials to set up schools or sanitation systems in select Indian districts. Not just private industry, but public administration too could be reinvigorated with global inputs.



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