

# EVA STALIN IAS ACADEMY

12/24, Muthuranga Mudali St, next to Deepam Hospital,  
West Tambaram-600045

## *The advent of a holistic approach to 'one health'*

**T**he interdependence between humans, animals and environment has been made increasingly evident with the emergence of pandemics such as COVID-19. It is not just humans who are affected by pandemics but also livestock – an example being the outbreak of lumpy skin disease that has spread across countries.

The recent decision on the 'National One Health Mission' by the cabinet marks a milestone. In July 2022, the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) endorsed the setting up of the 'National One Health Mission'. Since then, 13 Ministries and Departments as well as science funding agencies – this includes the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Department of Pharmaceuticals, and AYUSH, or Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy – the Ministries of Health, Animal Husbandry and Environment as well as Defence came together to shape the mission, taking one of the most holistic approaches to one health and pandemic preparedness in the world. There was consensus among the leadership of these Ministries to have a National Institute for One Health. Based in Nagpur, it is to be the anchor in coordinating activities nationally, and the nodal agency to coordinate international activities across the space of one health. The foundation stone of this institute was laid by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 11, 2022.

**More a journey**  
The goals of the 'National One Health Mission' are to develop strategies for integrated disease surveillance, joint outbreak response, coordinated research and development (R&D) and ensure seamless information sharing for better control of routine diseases as well as those



**Ajay Kumar Sood**  
is the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India

The 'National One Health Mission' is the result of recognition that only a coordinated approach will ensure a better response to disease outbreaks

of a pandemic nature. While diseases that affect humans such as COVID-19 are well known, diseases that affect animals such as foot and mouth disease or lumpy skin disease can hit productivity and trade. Similarly, these and other diseases such as canine distemper affect wild animals and their conservation. Only a coordinated approach will ensure that we are better prepared for such diseases as well as those that can cause the next pandemic such as avian influenza or Nipah.

Pandemic preparedness is incomplete without there being a focus on strong R&D. Focused R&D can ensure that we are better prepared for emerging diseases through the development of tools such as vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics, that is critical for India and the world. This is where all the participating departments such as the DBT, CSIR, the Indian Council of Medical Research, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the Department of Pharmaceuticals will play a role. It is not just government departments but also our academic centres and the private sector that will be the critical stakeholders in making this a reality. All these efforts can become effective only when there is close coordination between the Centre and States. Therefore, working with States will not only help them in introducing this approach in a much better way at the ground level, but the lessons also learned in the process of implementation will help in evolving an effective strategy – the approach to One Health is more a journey than a destination.

### **A network of laboratories**

Under the mission, a national network of high-risk pathogen (Biosafety level or BSL 3 and BSL 4) laboratories has been created. Bringing such laboratories that are managed by different departments together will serve to address the disease outbreak response better regardless of

human, animal and environmental sectors. There will be better resource utilization of expensive but much-needed infrastructure but also good linking from across sectors better to tackle diseases such as Nipah that involve bats, pigs, and humans, for example.

Further, India has to augment its epidemiology and data analytic capability. Under the mission, efforts are being made to apply artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning and disease modelling to address these issues and coordinate capacity building in epidemiology across sectors. Emerging approaches such as genomic surveillance from wastewater showed promise during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be expanded to other sentinels such as places where animals (livestock or wildlife) congregate for a broader set of diseases to be taken up so that we mainstream these approaches to be a part of routine surveillance across human, livestock and environmental sectors.

### **A global subject**

'One Health' is a global topic. During India's presidency of the G-20, this approach was highlighted and widely endorsed by all the members to work together in specific areas such as building better surveillance capacity, analytic capability and setting up an international network of 'One Health' institutes.

'One Health' is not just limited to diseases. It concerns wider aspects such as antimicrobial resistance, food safety, plant diseases and the impact of climate change on all of these. Intersectoral topics such as 'One Health' require close engagement of not just different governmental agencies but also non-governmental organisations, academia, the private sector and also citizens. Such an approach focused on an actionable framework will further the goal of moving closer to the clarion call of 'One Earth, One Health' and 'Health for All'.

# EVA STALIN IAS ACADEMY

12/24, Muthuranga Mudali St, next to Deepam Hospital,  
West Tambaram-600045

## *Katchatheevu demands thinking outside the box*

In his first term in office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi entrusted to his colleague and then Union Minister of State for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, Pon Radhakrishnan, the task of finding a solution to the Indian fishermen's issue with Sri Lanka. Mr. Radhakrishnan had invited 200 fishermen from Rameshwaram to hold discussions with the officials concerned in New Delhi. As he was aware of this writer's work on the subject, Mr. Radhakrishnan invited this writer too. In a public meeting at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s headquarters, 19 of the fishermen spoke about the ceding of Katchatheevu and how Indian fishermen were being shot by the Sri Lankan Navy. When this writer's turn came, he complimented the fishermen for their lucid speeches. But he added that none of them had touched upon the relevant problem. At this point he asked: "Do the Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen have the right to fish in their waters?" There was stunned silence in the hall.

From the perspective of Tamil Nadu, the root cause of the problem is a conflict of interests. On the one side are the two governments which do not want to reopen the issue of Katchatheevu. On the other side are the Indian fishermen who will not easily give up a means of livelihood which they have enjoyed for several years.

There are two interrelated issues that should be kept in mind. First, the unilateral scrapping of a bilateral agreement will have profound consequences not only on India-Sri Lanka relations but also with several of India's other neighbouring countries. Bilateral agreements have a sanctity of their own and cannot be scrapped based on the whims and fancies of every party in power. At the same time, the Centre should be urged to take immediate steps to ensure the livelihood of fishermen on both sides of the Palk Strait. It would be unwise to attempt to create a Berlin Wall in the Palk Strait. India and Sri Lanka are like Siamese twins. What afflicts one will affect the other.

### **The quest for a peaceful solution**

This writer's research on the subject began in early 1990. The objective was to find a peaceful solution so that the livelihood of the fishermen was not in jeopardy. The greatest problem was that all the primary sources relating to Katchatheevu had been taken away by New Delhi. At that time there was no Right to Information Act and this writer had to rely on secondary sources and interviews with the lead players.

In 1974, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was in the Opposition. In a debate in the Lok Sabha, he characterised the gifting of Katchatheevu as *Bhoo-dan*. He asked BJP leader Jana Krishnamurthy to file a case in the Madras High Court seeking judicial remedy. Jana's appeal was dismissed because he could not produce even a shred of evidence to prove that Katchatheevu was a part of the Zamindari of the Raja of Ramnad and that once the Zamindari was abolished, it



**V. Suryanarayan**  
is the Founding Director and Senior Professor (retired), at the Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies (CSSEAS), University of Madras.

It would be unwise to attempt to create a Berlin Wall in the Palk Strait. Instead, the Palk Bay must be thought of as the common heritage of India and Sri Lanka

had become a part of the Madras Presidency.

After studying the pros and cons, this writer came up with two suggestions. First, get back the island of Katchatheevu on lease in perpetuity – Tin Bigha in reverse. The sovereignty of Sri Lanka would be upheld but India could use the island and the surrounding waters for the purpose of fishing as a result of lease in perpetuity. Those days, Tamil Nadu fishermen did not venture far into Sri Lankan waters. The second suggestion was to allow Indian fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters up to five nautical miles. There was a precedent to this. Under the 1976 Agreement, Sri Lankan fishermen were permitted to fish near the Wadge Bank, near Kanniyakumari, for three years. While the Tamil Nadu governments (both the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) accepted this writer's suggestions, the greatest obstacle was in the form of New Delhi refusing to reopen the issue.

### **Introduction of trawling**

Another important point needs to be highlighted. In the 1960s and 1970s, India faced a severe financial crisis. Indira Gandhi gave several incentives for ventures that earned foreign exchange. At that time prawns were a great delicacy in Japan and the European countries. As a result, bottom trawlers were introduced in the Palk Bay. The ethnic conflict was a godsend for the Indian fishermen. The Sri Lankan government had banned fishing and the Tamil fishermen from Sri Lanka came to India as refugees. They were employed by trawler owners and with their guidance, Indian fishermen began venturing deep into Sri Lankan waters. India's foreign exchange earnings went up, but most of it was due to prawns that were caught in Sri Lankan waters.

The use of bottom trawlers did incalculable harm to the sea bed. The trawlers swept away everything from the sea bed, resulting in no fish being available on the Indian side of the Palk Bay. Indian fishermen have to enter Sri Lankan waters to fish. And Sri Lankan fishermen began to complain that Indian trawlers would also destroy their sea bed. What is more, bottom trawlers are banned in Sri Lanka.

The need to have good personal relations with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mrs. Bandaranaike was the main reason guiding India's Sri Lanka policy. By early 1974, Mrs. Gandhi was determined to cede the island. According to S.P. Jagota, then Director of the Legal and Treaties Division, Mrs. Gandhi overruled the views of senior officials. What is more, she was even prepared to modify the median line so that Katchatheevu would fall on the Sri Lankan side. The Agreement, however, provided for the continued use of Sri Lankan waters around the island for the purposes of fishing, but this right was also given up under the 1976 Agreement.

M. Karunanidhi's attitude, to say the least, was strange. Before the signing of the Agreement,

then Foreign Secretary Kewal Singh visited Madras to hold discussions. M. Karunanidhi should have followed the stance taken by B.C. Roy, who went to the Supreme Court of India on the issue of transfer of Berubari to East Pakistan. B.C. Roy submitted evidence that Beru Bari was an integral part of India and to give away Indian territory to a foreign country, the Constitution would have to be amended. The Court upheld the claim.

M. Karunanidhi should have filed a case in the Court and prevented the ceding of the island. Instead, he got a resolution passed by the State Legislative Assembly. A resolution on a subject exclusively under the Centre's jurisdiction is not binding, whereas a judicial decision is binding on all concerned. This writer repeatedly asked then Law Minister S. Madhavan why M. Karunanidhi did not follow the West Bengal example. There was no convincing answer. It is reasonable to conclude that New Delhi had blackmailed M. Karunanidhi into submission.

Two interrelated points must be highlighted. Even if India were to get back the island of Katchatheevu, the problems faced by Indian fishermen will continue. And, if the Sri Lankan government were to file a case in the International Court of Justice – as the Philippines did against China a few years ago – India's image in the comity of nations would take a nose dive. Let us remember that the judgment indicted China. The politicians of various hues in Tamil Nadu who are raising an outcry today about Katchatheevu should realise that the problems Indian fishermen face are the result of Indian fishermen venturing deep into Sri Lankan waters and also the excessive use of bottom trawlers, which are banned in Sri Lanka.

### **The need for bold decisions**

Every challenge provides an opportunity. The problems in the Palk Bay can be solved only if we start thinking outside the box. Here are two suggestions. The Palk Bay is not a barrier but a bridge between India and Sri Lanka. We must convert the Palk Bay from being a contested territory to one that is a common heritage. The first essential prerequisite is for the Government of India to ban all fishing equipment which are banned in Sri Lanka. And then, we should work to ensure that fishermen can equitably enjoy the rich marine wealth. There can be a formula: Sri Lankan fishermen can fish in the Palk Bay for three days, while Indian fishermen can fish on the other three days. One day can be a holiday. Second, let us encourage the Tamil fishermen of both countries to meet, form cooperative societies, and venture into deep-sea fishing. The trawlers can be modified into vessels that can assist the mother ship.

Such joint ventures will also help repair the damage Indian fishermen have caused to the livelihood of their Tamil counterparts. It is only bold initiatives such as these that can lead to a win-win situation.

+