

Stanford and Rutgers, respectively. But until their study, little research had been conducted on whether the crops live up to their billing. After collecting data for three years from farmers in 320 households, the researchers concluded that GM rice increases farm productivity, mostly by cutting the cost of pesticides. They found that GM rice yielded at least as much per acre—and sometimes more—while requiring only one-eighth as much pesticide. That matters a lot to China, which faces

pollution and health problems as the world's largest pesticide user.

Chinese authorities, having already spent several billion dollars on agricultural biotechnology research and development, are “struggling” with the issues of biosafety and the acceptability of GM rice domestically and in international trade. Three years ago, the authors wrote that China was on the threshold of commercializing GM rice. In their current report, they make no predictions on when or

even if GM rice will be approved; they think China should “seriously consider” the move. Yet with rice consumption decreasing as affluence enables the Chinese to eat more meat and other foods, some researchers question the need for controversial GM rice.

Even so, given China's vast population, GM rice could help the poor and add \$4.2 billion a year to the economy, the authors write. It could also set off a global chain reaction, leading to the commercialization of GM rice, wheat, corn, and other crops, not only in China but around the world.

OTHER NATIONS

Strictly Merit, Indian Style

THE SOURCE: “In the Name of Globalization: Meritocracy, Productivity, and the Hidden Language of Caste” by Surinder S. Jodhka and Katherine Newman, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct. 13, 2007.

THE MERIT PRINCIPLE HAS conquered India. Human resource managers of Indian companies say that the traditional bases of hiring—nepotism, regional ties, and caste—are not affordable now that India is becoming an economic powerhouse. But India has its own way of judging merit, write sociologists Surinder S. Jodhka of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and Katherine Newman of Princeton. Virtually every hiring manager the two researchers interviewed emphasized that asking questions about family background was critical in evaluating a potential employee.



China boasts the developing world's largest biotechnology research program, but has yet to sanction the sale of genetically modified rice. If it does, the rest of the world may follow.

Such questions would be avoided like the plague by American companies fearful of lawsuits over employment discrimination.

A multinational Indian shoe manufacturing company, for example, looks for merit by assessing family characteristics such as the educational level of the parents, the employment history of brothers and sisters, and whether the applicant lives in the city or the country, says its human resources manager. Because it's impossible to delve very deeply into the character of a job seeker in an interview, "the successes of the rest of the job applicant's family stand in as proof that the individual . . . is reliable, motivated, and worthy," the authors write.

But the new Indian merit principle still makes it nearly impossible for Dalits, once called untouchables, and other disadvantaged applicants to be hired. The majority of India's 160 million Dalits are rural, landless laborers whose parents and siblings have not had access to a good education or stable job in the formal economy.

The new system also discriminates against the scions of the very rich, Jodhka and Newman write. Employers seek workers who are humble. Job candidates from wealthy families "have an inner pride within them which makes them arrogant," says the human resources director of a car manufacturing firm.

The language of meritocracy that has spread around the globe, Jodhka and Newman say, should, at least in India's case, be taken with a "heavy grain of salt."

OTHER NATIONS

Hanging Out With Hezbollah

THE SOURCE: "Sanctioned Pleasures: Youth, Piety, and Leisure in Beirut" by Lara Deeb and Mona Harb, in *Middle East Report*, Winter 2007.

WHEN THE REAL ESTATE MARKET took a dive in Beirut a decade ago, developers moved to diversify their investments by filling a new market niche. In the city's Hezbollah-dominated southern suburbs, they figured out a way for Shia Muslims to relax, piously.

They are building Internet cafés such as Café.Yet and hotel and restaurant complexes such as the al-Saha Traditional Village in the dense urban precincts where *hala islamiyya*, or Islamic ambience, prevails. Like their Christian counterparts in the United States, Lebanon's Muslim entrepreneurs are erecting summer camps and fitness clubs in hopes of attracting religiously minded young people. They open beaches, public gardens, and amusement parks that comply with Muslim customs. Snack bars and upscale restaurants feature modern décor, high-quality food, coffee, and hookahs, write Lara Deeb and Mona Harb, of the University of California, Irvine, and the American University of Beirut, respectively.

Rising incomes—powered by foreign remittances, high rates of return emigration, better education, and more stable governance in recent years—have created a generation of young, media-savvy consumers in the stronghold of Hezbollah—which is considered a terrorist

organization by the United States but runs municipal governments in parts of Lebanon.

The new shops and cafés forswear alcohol and nonhalal meat, and ban singing that is considered seductive and conducive to dancing. Commonly understood rules prohibit unrelated men and women from touching or sitting too close to one another. Women's beaches are screened from men's. Some women's pools are designed so that views from land, sea, or air are obstructed. A few Internet cafés feature booths where pious women can surf the Web with propriety.

Hezbollah has built "political entertainment" sites in Beirut, showcasing the exploits of its militia.

Hezbollah itself has built "political entertainment" sites, specializing in summer camps and exhibitions showcasing the exploits of its militia, the Islamic Resistance.

The party has tried to keep the Shia leisure industry, which took off between 1998 and the Israeli-Lebanese war of 2006, in line with Hezbollah's notions of correct Islamic behavior. It has encouraged informal boycotts of cafés and restaurants it considers too loose. Shia scholars regularly rule on whether certain establishments comply with religious law—although they often disagree on what is "appropriate." In a surprising number of instances, the authors report, young people have been tougher judges than the scholars.