दैनिक जागरण

अंतहीन इच्छाओं से केवल संतुष्टि का भाव ही बचा सकता है

एचएएल की नाकामी

बेंगलुरु के पास लड़ाकू विमान मिराज-2000 का दुर्घटनाग्रस्त होना और उसमें वायु सेना के दो अनुभवी पायलटों की मौत हो जाना एक बेहद गंभीर घटना है। आवश्यक केवल यह नहीं है कि इस घटना पर गंभीरता का परिचय दिया जाए, बल्कि यह भी है कि उन कारणों की तह तक सचमुच जाया जाए जिनके चलते देश ने एक लड़ाकू विमान के साथ अपने दो पायलट भी खो दिए। एक साथ दो पायलटों की मौत इसलिए बड़ा नुकसान है, क्योंकि लडाकू विमानों के पायलट बेहद गहन प्रशिक्षण के बाद तैयार होते हैं। चूंकि उनके प्रशिक्षण में समय के साथ तमाम संसाधन भी लगते हैं इसलिए परीक्षण उड़ान के दौरान उनकी मौत राष्ट्रीय क्षति है। निःसंदेह लडाकू विमानों के साथ कुछ न कुछ जोखिम रहता है, लेकिन आम तौर पर परीक्षण उड़ानों के दौरान कोई गड़बड़ी होने पर पायलट खुद को बचा लेते हैं। बेंगलुरु में ऐसा नहीं हो सका। यहां मिराज-2000 लड़ाकू विमान के दुर्घटनाग्रस्त होने के बाद यदि उसे उन्नत करने वाली हिंदुस्तान एयरोनॉटिक्स लिमिटेड यानी एचएएल रक्षा विशेषज्ञों और पूर्व सैन्य अधिकारियों के साथ आम लोगों के निशाने पर आ गई है तो यह स्वाभाविक है। अगर यह माना जा रहा है कि एचएएल की खामी परीक्षण उड़ान पर निकले पायलटों पर गाज बनकर गिरी तो इसके लिए यह सरकारी कंपनी अपने अलावा अन्य किसी को दोष नहीं दे सकती। लड़ाकू विमानों की मरम्मत करने और उन्हें उन्नत बनाने में एचएएल का रिकार्ड बहुत ही खराब है। यह वही एचएएल है जिसकी तथाकथित उपेक्षा का रोना कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष राहुल गांधी रोते रहते हैं। क्या राफेल सौदे को विवादास्पद बताने की धुन में एचएएल की कामयाबी और महानता के गुण गा रहे राहुल गांधी मिराज के दुर्घटनाग्रस्त होने पर कुछ बोलेंगे? क्या उन्हें यह अहसास हो पा रहा है कि वह अपने संकीर्ण राजनीतिक फायदे के लिए जिस एचएएल को एक मोहरा बना रहे हैं उसका कामकाज बेहद दयनीय है?

संकीर्ण राजनीतिक हितों के फेर में एचएएल की नाकामियों की अनदेखी करना राष्ट्रीय हितों को जानबूझकर चोट पहुंचाने के अलावा और कुछ नहीं। इससे संतुष्ट नहीं हुआ जा सकता कि मिराज हादसे में दो पायलटों के मारे जाने की घटना की जांच के आदेश दे दिए गए हैं, क्योंकि इस तरह की तमाम जांच पहले भी हो चुकी हैं और नतीजा शून्य है। इसकी अनदेखी नहीं की जा सकती कि चंद दिन पहले उत्तर प्रदेश के कुशीनगर में जो जगुआर विमान नष्ट हुआ था वह भी एचएएल ने उन्नत किया था। एचएएल की ओर से तैयार अथवा उन्नत किए गए विमान जिस तरह हादसे का शिकार होते रहते हैं उसे देखते हुए किसी को इस सवाल का जवाब देना ही होगा कि आखिर इस सरकारी कंपनी के दोयम दर्जे के कामकाज की अनदेखी कब तक की जाती रहेगी? यह अपेक्षाओं पर खरा न उतर पाने वाली सरकारी कंपनियों के बेजा बचाव की प्रवृत्ति का ही परिणाम है कि रक्षा सामग्री के उत्पादन के मामले में भारत का प्रदर्शन बहुत ही गया-बीता है। अब जब रक्षा विशेषज्ञों के साथ वायु सेना प्रमुख भी एचएएल के कामकाज से संतुष्ट नहीं तब फिर यह जरूरी है कि हमारे नीति-नियंता चेत जाएं।

विपक्ष का विरोध

पश्चिम बंगाल विधानसभा में शुक्रवार को बजट सत्र के शुभारंभ पर राज्यपाल केसरीनाथ त्रिपाठी जब अभिभाषण पढ़ रहे थे तो कांग्रेस और वाममोर्चा के सदस्यों ने शोर मचाना शुरू कर दिया। वे पोस्टर-बैनर लगाकर सदन में पहुंचे थे, जिन पर सरकार विरोधी नारे लिखे थे। अभिभाषण के दौरान वे अपनी सीट पर खड़े हो गए और फिर शोर मचाते हुए वेल में उतर आए। अभिभाषण खत्म होने तक उन्होंने सदन में शोर मचाया और सरकार विरोधी नारे लगाए। बाद में जब धन्यवाद प्रस्ताव हुआ तो विपक्ष के नेता अब्दुल मन्नान ने अभिभाषण पर बहस नहीं कराने के सरकार के निर्णय पर सवाल उठाया। इस पर स्पीकर विमान बनर्जी और संसदीय कार्य मंत्री पार्थ चटर्जी के साथ मन्नान की नोकझोंक हुई। स्पीकर ने मन्नान को आश्वस्त किया कि अगले सत्र में राज्यपाल के अभिभाषण पर बहस कराई जाएगी। खैर, स्पीकर के हस्तक्षेप से विपक्षी सदस्य शांत हो गए। विपक्ष ने स्पष्ट किया है कि उनका विरोध जारी रहेगा, जो सदन की कार्यवाही के बहिष्कार की हद तक जा सकता है। स्पीकर ने अभिभाषण पर चार दिनों तक सदन में बहस कराने की विपक्ष की मांग को स्वीकार नहीं किया है। विपक्ष के नेता अब्दुल मन्नान का कहना है कि अभिभाषण पर लगातार बहस कराने की परंपरा है। सोमवार को वित्त मंत्री बजट पेश करेंगे और मंगलवार को ही बजट सत्र संपन्न हो जाएगा। शुक्रवार को राज्यपाल के अभिभाषण से बजट सत्र शुरू हुआ और मंगलवार यानी तीन दिनों में ही बजट सत्र का समापन कर दिया जाएगा। विधानसभा के संसदीय इतिहास में इतना संक्षिप्त बजट सत्र कभी नहीं हुआ है। इस पर संसदीय कार्यमंत्री पार्थ चटर्जी का कहना है कि विधानसभा की नियमावली में कहीं नहीं लिखा है कि राज्यपाल के अभिभाषण पर बाद में बहस नहीं कराई जा सकती है। उनका यह तर्क सही हो सकता है, लेकिन विपक्ष के विरोध का भी औचित्य है। आखिर जब विधायी कार्य का अभाव है तो कम से कम राज्यपाल के अभिभाषण और बजट पर पर्याप्त बहस कराने की व्यवस्था करने की विपक्ष की मांग को अनुचित नहीं कहा जा सकता है। विपक्ष सर्वदलीय और विधानसभा की बिजनेस एडवाइजरी कमेटी की बैठक का बहिष्कार कर चुका है।

चुनाव के साथ आर्थिक सेहत की चिंता

संजय गुप्त

यह संतोषजनक है कि सरकार ने उन्हें गलत साबित किया जो यह मान रहे थे तीन राज्यों के चुनाव में मिले झटके के बाद वह लोक-लुभावन योजनाओं की झड़ी लगा देगी

मोदी सरकार ने अपने आखिरी बजट में गरीब किसानों, मजदूरों और मध्यम वर्ग को राहत देने वाली जो अनेक घोषणाएं कीं उनके बारे में संदेह नहीं कि वे आम चुनाव को ध्यान में रखकर ही की गई हैं। चुनावी वर्ष में प्रवेश कर रही किसी भी सरकार के लिए मतदाताओं को रिझाने के लिए घोषणाएं करना उसकी अपनी राजनीतिक जरूरत होती है। इस जरूरत की पूर्ति करना उसका अधिकार है। हर सत्तारूढ़ राजनीतिक दल चुनाव के पहले बजट में जनता को लुभाने की कोशिश इसलिए भी करता है, क्योंकि पहले की घोषणाओं का असर एक बड़ी हद तक कम या खत्म हो जाता है अथवा वे उतनी आकर्षक नहीं रह जातीं। इस बार मोदी सरकार ने जो घोषणाएं की हैं उनमें सबसे महत्वपूर्ण है छोटे किसानों को सीधे उनके खाते में सालाना छह हजार रुपये देना। यह योजना इसलिए विशेष है, क्योंकि अन्य कल्याणकारी योजनाओं में अफसरशाही की निर्णायक भूमिका होने के कारण लाभार्थियों को समुचित लाभ नहीं मिल पाता था या फिर वे भ्रष्टाचार की भेंट चढ़ जाती थीं। इस बारे में पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री राजीव गांधी का यह कहना सही ही था कि केंद्र सरकार किसी योजना में एक रुपया भेजती है तो लाभार्थी तक पहुंचते-पहुंचते 10-15 पैसे ही रह जाते हैं। ऐसा इसलिए होता था, क्योंकि पहले की योजनाएं सीधे लाभार्थी के खाते में धन देने यानी डीबीटी पर आधारित नहीं होती थीं। डिजिटल तकनीक के चलते अब ऐसा करना आसान हो गया है और अनेक योजनाओं में इसका सफल परीक्षण भी हो चुका है। एक तथ्य यह भी है कि तब बहुत कम गरीबों के पास अपने बैंक खाते होते थे। अब करीब-करीब सभी गरीबों के पास जन-धन खाता है। यदि पहले के सिस्टम के रहते छोटे किसानों को छह हजार रुपये सालाना की सहायता देने की कोई योजना शुरू की जाती तो अच्छी-खासी रकम सिस्टम में ही खप जाती और फिर भी सभी लाभार्थियों को रियायत देना मुश्किल होता।

अंतरिम बजट में मोदी सरकार की एक अन्य उल्लेखनीय घोषणा पशुपालक किसानों को कर्ज में दो प्रतिशत की छूट देने की है। मनरेगा के लिए 60,000 करोड़ का आवंटन भी ग्रामीण जनता को राहत देने वाला है। असंगठित क्षेत्र के मजदूरों को तीन हजार रुपये की मासिक पेंशन देने की घोषणा ने भी सबका ध्यान खींचा है। सामाजिक सुरक्षा को सुनिश्चित करने वाली इस घोषणा के अलावा मोदी सरकार ने आंगनबाड़ी और आशा योजना के तहत मानदेय में 50 प्रतिशत वृद्धि तो की ही है, कामकाजी महिलाओं का मातृत्व अवकाश 26 हफ्ते किया है। महिलाओं को लाभ देने वाली एक अन्य घोषणा उज्ज्वला योजना के तहत दो करोड़ मुफ्त गैस कनेक्शन देने की भी है। अंतरिम बजट की एक और बड़ी घोषणा पांच लाख रुपये तक की आय को आयकर से मुक्त करने की है। सामान्य बचत योजनाओं में निवेश करने पर आयकर में छूट का यह लाभ 6.5 लाख रुपये तक बढ़ जाएगा। स्टैंडर्ड डिडक्शन की सीमा को 40 हजार रुपये से बढ़ाकर 50 हजार रुपये करने से भी मध्य वर्ग को लाभ मिलेगा।

अवधेश राजपूत

इस वर्ग के लिए एक आकर्षण यह भी है कि अब दूसरे घर से मिलने वाले अनुमानित किराये पर टैक्स नहीं देना होगा। इसी तरह एफडी के ब्याज पर 40 हजार रुपये तक टैक्स नहीं लगेगा। लोगों को सीधे राहत पहुंचाने वाली इन घोषणाओं के अतिरिक्त सरकार ने कुछ ऐसी घोषणाएं भी की हैं जिनसे आम आदमी को कुछ न कुछ परोक्ष लाभ मिलेगा। सरकार ने जो कल्याणकारी घोषणाएं की हैं उनसे करीब 25 करोड़ लोगों के लाभान्वित होने का अनुमान है। इनमें 10-12 करोड़ छोटे एवं सीमांत किसानों के अलावा असंगठित क्षेत्र के दस करोड़ श्रमिक हैं। इसके अलावा तीन करोड़ आयकर दाता भी हैं, जो टैक्स छूट से लाभान्वित हुए हैं। माना जा रहा है कि अगर इनमें से आधे लोगों ने भी भाजपा के पक्ष में मतदान किया तो वह आसानी से फिर सरकार बनाने में कामयाब हो सकती है।

बजट घोषणाओं के बाद स्वाभाविक तौर पर जहां भाजपा और सरकार यह मान रही है कि वह किसानों, मजदूरों के साथ मध्य वर्ग को संतुष्ट करने में सफल रहेगी वहीं विपक्ष इन घोषणाओं को नाकाफी और नाकाम बताने में जुट गया है। छोटे किसानों को साल में छह हजार रुपये की मदद देने के फैसले का कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष राहुल गांधी ने यह कहते हुए उपहास उड़ाया कि यह राशि तो 17 रुपये प्रतिदिन ही बैठती है।

कांग्रेस ने अपने नेतृत्व वाली संप्रग-एक सरकार के अंतिम दिनों में किसानों का 70 हजार करोड़ रुपये का कर्ज माफ किया था और इसके सहारे चुनाव जीतने में कामयाबी हासिल की थी। क्या उस कर्ज माफी से किसानों और देश का कोई भला हुआ था? तथ्य तो यही है कि संप्रग-2 सरकार के समय भी किसानों की हालत खराब रही। बीते कुछ समय से एक सोचा-समझा अभियान यह जताने के लिए चलाया जा रहा है कि किसानों की हालत बहुत खराब है और इसके लिए मोदी सरकार ही पूरी तौर पर जिम्मेदार है। यह ठीक है कि पिछले वर्षों में इस सरकार ने किसानों के लिए जो कुछ किया उससे उनकी स्थिति में वैसा सुधार नहीं आ सका जैसा आना चाहिए था, लेकिन इसकी अनदेखी नहीं की जा सकती है कि मोदी सरकार की ओर से जो कदम उठाए गए हैं वे दीर्घकालिक सुधारों पर केंद्रित हैं।

निःसंदेह यह समय ही बताएगा कि आगामी आम चुनाव में मतदाता किसे वोट देते हैं और किसकी सरकार बनेगी, लेकिन इतना जरूर कहा जा सकता है कि मोदी सरकार के पास अंतरिम बजट के पहले भी किसानों और मजदूरों को राहत देने वाली योजनाओं को शुरू करने का अवसर था। पता नहीं इस अवसर का लाभ क्यों नहीं उठाया गया? यदि ये योजनाएं पहले ही शुरू की जातीं तो शायद आज स्थिति दूसरी होती। ध्यान रहे कि यदि गरीबों को कल्याणकारी योजनाओं के तहत सीधे पैसा मिले तो वे उसे अपने तरीके से और अपनी जरूरत के हिसाब से खर्च करने में समर्थ होते हैं। इसी कारण यह कहा जाता है कि अन्य मदों में सब्सिडी को समाप्त कर लाभार्थियों को सीधे धनराशि उपलब्ध कराई जाए। इससे उनके जीवन स्तर में कहीं बेहतर तरीके से सुधार आ सकता है। देखना है कि किसानों को सीधे पैसा देने की योजना कितनी लाभदायक साबित होती है? जो भी हो, यह गौर करने लायक है कि सरकार ने वित्तीय अनुशासन के चलते पैसा पानी की तरह बहाने से परहेज किया।

इसके विपरीत पहले की सरकारों ने चुनावी लाभ के लिए वित्तीय अनुशासन की अनदेखी कर राजकोषीय घाटे को बढ़ने दिया। मोदी सरकार ने वित्तीय अनुशासन का परिचय देकर परिपक्वता का ही प्रदर्शन किया है। यह भी उल्लेखनीय है कि पार्टी और सरकार ने यह भी साबित करने की कोशिश की है कि उसे अपने पर भरोसा है। यह संतोषजनक है कि उसने उन लोगों को गलत साबित किया जो यह मान रहे थे तीन राज्यों के चुनावों में मिले झटके के बाद सरकार मजबूरी में लोक-लुभावन योजनाओं की झड़ी लगा देगी। यह अच्छा हुआ कि भाजपा और मोदी सरकार ने इन लोगों की ओर से बनाए जा रहे दबाव में आने से इन्कार किया।

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साहित्य में साहस का प्रदर्शन

साकेत सूर्येश

विरले ही ऐसा कोई अवसर उत्पन्न होता है जब आपका लिखा हुआ कुछ नजर में आकर पढ़ लिया जाता है

मेरा मानना है कि भयभीत लोगों का साहस और बेमौका बोल पड़ने का शौक साहित्य, विशेषकर व्यंग्य को जन्म देता है। आत्मा के भीतर की कुलबुलाहट जब मध्यमवर्गीय भीरूता के संपर्क में आती है तो व्यक्ति व्यंग्य लिखने लगता है। इसका आनंद यह होता है कि लेखक मन ही मन अपने पराक्रम पर मुग्ध हो लेता है और किसी को पता भी नहीं चलता कि तीर चला किधर और लगा कहां?

हिंदी के व्यंग्य लेखक प्रायः अधिक साहसी होते हैं। इधर कुछ समय से अंग्रेजी लेखक भी साहसी होने का दावा पेश करते रहे हैं। प्रेमचंद के फटे जूतों पर दावा ठोकते हुए वे प्रतिष्ठित और साधन-संपन्न साहित्य सम्मेलनों के मंच से सरकार को कोसते हैं और मजरूह की मासूमियत ओढ़कर तंत्र के दमन की शिकायत करते हुए फर्राटे से अपनी फेरारी मे निकल जाते हैं। जब ये सरकार को कोसते हैं तो उनका साहस देखकर किसी भी नए लेखक का अचंभित होना और पथभ्रमित हो जाना संभव है, किंतु निकट से विश्लेषण पर हम पाते हैं कि ये सरकार का विरोध करते हैं, सत्ता का नहीं। वर्तमान में सत्ता और सरकार का अर्थ भिन्न है।

इस सारी गोल-मोल कथा का अभिप्राय यह है कि अंग्रेजी लेखक, जो अक्सर पत्रकार भी होता है, जो मंत्रिमंडल नियुक्तियों का अधिकार खोकर पुनः सत्ता और सरकार के एकीकरण को प्रयासरत रहता है, भले ही छद्म शौर्य पर तालियां जमा कर ले, महिमामंडित हो ले, साहस का फुल कोटा और अधिकार केवल और केवल हिंदी व्यंग्य लेखन को ही प्राप्त है। अंग्रेजी में एक शब्द है 'ब्रिंकमैनशिप' जिसका हिंदी अनुवाद-कुल्हाड़ी पर पैर मारने-की प्रवृत्ति माना जा सकता है। जब हम 70 के दशक में आपातकाल के आसपास शरद जोशी जैसे लेखकों को इंदिरा जी पर, भजनलाल जी पर लिखते देखते हैं तो पाते हैं कि यह प्रवृत्ति हिंदी व्यंग्यकारों में प्रचुर मात्रा में भरी है। मुझे लगता है मेरा भी ऐसा स्वभाव है। इससे पहले आप मेरे इस प्रकार गाल बजाने से उत्साहित हो उठें, मैं अपने संदर्भ में इस प्रवृत्ति की तह में जाता हूं। वैसे तह तक जाने से मैं और आप बहुत ज्ञानी नहीं हो जाएंगे, किंतु फिर भी मैं जाऊंगा और मेरा निवेदन है कि आप भी आएं, क्योंकि मुझे तो अपनी बात हर हाल में कहनी ही है और चूंकि आप इन पंक्तियों को पढ़ रहे हैं इसलिए मुझे यह भी पता है कि आपके पास समय है। सो तह तक जाने से मुझे लगता है कि हिंदी व्यंग्यकार के तौर पर अपने साहस के पीछे मेरा अपठनीय होना है और उपेक्षित होना है।

बहुधा तीक्ष्ण से तीक्ष्ण लेखन संपादकों की सजग दृष्टि के पार इसी विश्वास के कारण हो जाता है कि इसे पढ़ता कौन है? इस व्यंग्य वीरता के पीछे भारतीय समाज का कान्वेंटीकरण है। हिंदी व्यंग्यकार अपनी साहित्यिक नगण्यता को लेकर आश्वस्त होता है अतः 'अपन किसी के बाप से नहीं डरते' का भाव लिखकर लेखनी उठाता है और वाम-दक्षिण का भेद त्यागकर उत्पात मचाता है। वह यह नहीं बताता कि इस वीरता के पीछे अपन को किसी का बाप भी नहीं पढ़ता-वाला विश्वास भी है। विरले ही ऐसा कोई अवसर उत्पन्न होता है जब आपका लिखा हुआ कुछ पढ़ लिया जाता है और आपसे कहा जाता है कि थोड़ा नरम कर दें, बदल दें। ऐसे समय हिंदी व्यंग्यकार उस मध्यवर्गीय बालक की भांति चमत्कृत सा हो जाता है जिसके अभिभावक उसे चलना-बोलना तो बड़ी शिद्दत से सिखाते हैं और फिर मौके की नजाकत के मुताबिक चुपचाप बैठ जाने को कह देते हैं। ऐसा मेरे साथ बहुत कम ही होता है। मेरे प्रकाशकों का भी मानना है कि इसके हाशिये पर हीरो बनने से किसी का कुछ बिगड़ना नही है।

मेरा मानना है कि जैसा बौद्धिक कान्वेंटीकरण प्रबुद्ध, प्रतिष्ठित भारतीय समाज में आज है, हिंदी व्यंग्यकार सुरक्षित भाव से व्यंग्य लिखे जा सकता है। साहित्यिक पुरस्कारों के अभाव में आप उन्हें लौटाकर समाज की दिशा और दशा तो बदल नहीं सकते हैं, सो बेखटके लिखें, आग उगलें और साहित्य के न सही रद्दी-कबाड़ी वालों के प्रिय लेखक बनने का प्रयास करें। यही मैं कर रहा हूं। मैं निरंतर लिखते रहकर रद्दीवालों के माध्यम से गृहिणियों को स्टील की कटोरियां दिलाने को कटिबद्ध हूं। मुझे विश्वास सा हो चला है कि कबाड़ी समाज रद्दी के निर्माण में बहुमूल्य योगदान के लिए एक न एक दिन मुझे महान साहित्यकार मानेगा। मेरी अपठित लेखक होने की छद्म वीरता एक दिन मुझे साहसी और जुझारू लेखक का सम्मान अवश्य देगी, ऐसा मुझे विश्वास है। मुझे पदक और कप न मिलें, जिन्हें मैं जरूरत के वक्त लौटा सकूं, परंतु मैं अपने पाठकों को प्लेट और कटोरियां अवश्य दिलाऊंगा, ऐसा मेरा प्रयास है।

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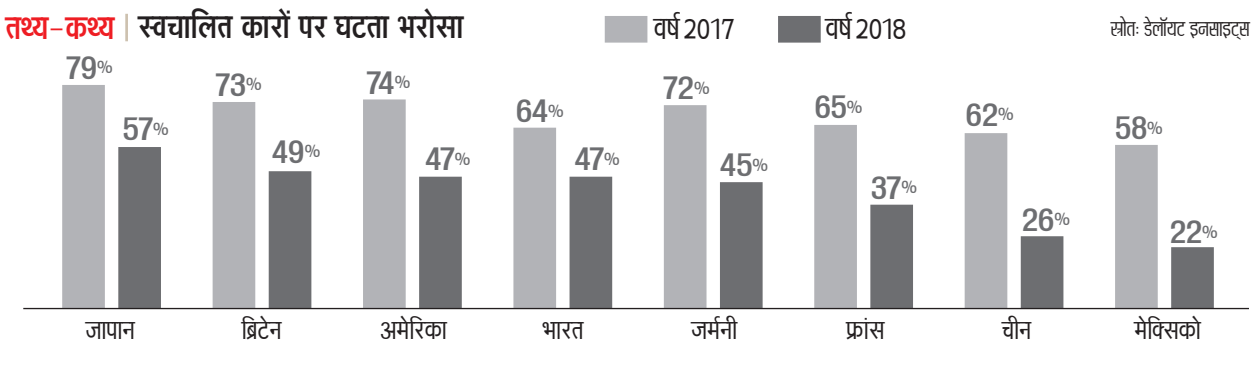


ऊर्जा

तीर्थ

हमारी संस्कृति में तीर्थों के महत्व का विस्तार से वर्णन है। उन्हें धर्म, संस्कृति और जीवनशैली से जोड़कर देखा जाता है। संस्कृत में तीर्थ का अर्थ है-पार उतारने वाला, पाप से तारने वाला, पवित्र भावों का संचार करने में समर्थ आदि। तीर्थों की महिमा को हमारे मनीषियों ने कुछ इस प्रकार समझाया है कि तीर्थों में सकारात्मक ऊर्जा व्याप्त रहती है, जो वहां पहुंचने वाले व्यक्ति को ऊर्जा से परिपूर्ण कर देती है। हृदय कभी-कभी इस विचार से भारी हो जाता है कि इतना जीवन गुजर गया और हम अपनी इस विरासत यानी अपने तीर्थों की पावन मिट्टी स्पर्श नहीं कर पाए और इस कारण उन लोगों से स्वयं को कमतर करके देखने लगते हैं जो तीर्थों का दर्शन कर खुद को धन्य मानते हैं। एक ग्लानि जैसा भाव मन को घेर लेता है, लेकिन इस तथ्य से मन में ग्लानि का भाव महसूस करने की जरूरत नहीं है।

यदि हम अपनी जीवनचर्या के अतीत व वर्तमान पर ध्यान दें तो पाएंगे कि किन्हीं परिस्थितियों के कारण हम अपने जीवनकाल में भले ही अनेक पवित्र तीर्थ स्थलों का दर्शन न कर सके हों, लेकिन फिर भी हम अनेक कर्म करते रहते हैं जो किसी तीर्थ सरीखी शांति और पुण्य प्रदान कर पाने में समर्थ होते हैं। इस कथन का यह प्रयोजन नहीं है कि हम तीर्थों के महत्व को किसी भी रूप में नकार रहे हैं। अपनी जीवन यात्रा में अपनी सीमा से बाहर निकलकर, निःस्वार्थ भाव से दूसरों के प्रति कुछ कर जाने में तर जाने की अनुभूति किसी तीर्थ से कम तो नहीं। हम जाने-अनजाने अपने चारों ओर छोटे-छोटे तीर्थ बनाकर पुण्य कार्य करते हैं। किसी भूखे को भोजन, अभावग्रस्त की मदद, अनपढ़ को ज्ञान प्रदान कर शिखर तक पहुंचाने का जीवन पर्यंत प्रयास क्या तीर्थ-दर्शन से कम पावन व सुखवर्धक है? विविध कलाओं या खेल जैसी क्रीड़ाओं में पारंगत होना व उस ज्ञान को बांटना अपने में तीर्थ जैसी अनुभूति प्रदान करता है। आध्यात्मिक तीर्थस्थलों तक पहुंचना एक सौभाग्य है, परंतु यदि ऐसा न हो पाए तो अपनी रचनात्मक कार्यक्षमता व सकारात्मक सोच से अपने तीर्थ स्वयं ही बनाने का प्रयास करना चाहिए। लोगों के साथ परोपकार भाव अपनाकर आप पुण्य की प्राप्ति व मोक्ष के मार्ग को प्रशस्त करने में समर्थ हो सकते हैं। यह लक्ष्य कठिन तो है, लेकिन असंभव कदापि नहीं।

छाया श्रीवास्तव

पृथ्वी को बचाने की अनोखी कोशिश

मुकुल व्यास

वैज्ञानिक ज्वालामुखी विस्फोट की कृत्रिम प्रक्रिया अपनाकर पृथ्वी के तापमान को कम करने की कवायद में जुटे हैं

अमेरिका में हार्वर्ड विश्वविद्यालय की इंजीनियरिंग टीम ने एलान किया है कि वह एक बड़े ज्वालामुखी विस्फोट के प्रभावों को दोहरा कर सूरज की आंच को मंद करना चाहती है। वैज्ञानिकों को उम्मीद है कि ऊपरी वायुमंडल में सूक्ष्म कणों के छिड़काव से सूरज की कुछ किरणें पृथ्वी पर आने से पहले ही वापस अंतरिक्ष की ओर परावर्तित हो जाएंगी। इससे ग्लोबल वार्मिंग को रोकने में मदद मिलेगी। जलवायु को कृत्रिम रूप से प्रभावित करने वाले प्रोजेक्ट 'जियो-इंजीनियरिंग' के अंतर्गत आते हैं। फिलीपींस में 1991 में माउंट पिनाटुबो ज्वालामुखी फटने के बाद दो करोड़ टन से अधिक सल्फर डायोऑक्साइड ऊपरी वायुमंडल (स्ट्रैटोस्फीयर) में फैल गई थी।

सूरज की किरणों को अवरुद्ध करने वाले बादलों ने 18 महीने तक पृथ्वी के तापमान को 0.5 डिग्री सेल्सियस कम बनाए रखा था। हार्वर्ड की टीम कुदरती तौर पर हुए इस प्रभाव को दोहराना चाहती है। वैज्ञानिकों का मानना है कि यदि तापमान में ऐसी कटौती की अवधि को बढ़ा दिया जाए तो जलवायु परिवर्तन के दुष्प्रभावों को रोका जा सकता है। हार्वर्ड के जियो-इंजीनियरिंग प्रोजेक्ट का नाम स्कोपेक्स (स्ट्रैटोस्फेरिक कंट्रोल्ड परटरबेशन एक्सपरिमेंट) है। इस पर करीब 30 लाख डॉलर खर्च आएगा।

इस प्रयोग के तहत अमेरिका के दक्षिण-पश्चिम में एक एयरशिप को करीब 20 किलोमीटर की ऊंचाई पर भेजा जाएगा। एयरशिप आकाश में चाक डस्ट (कैल्शियम कार्बोनेट) का धुआं छोड़गा। इस रसायन के छिड़काव के बाद यह देखा जाएगा कि इससे सूरज की रोशनी कितनी बिखरी और ऊपरी वायुमंडल में क्या-क्या रासायनिक परिवर्तन हुए। वहीं ब्रिटिश वैज्ञानिकों ने चेतावनी दी है कि ऐसे प्रयोगों से वर्षा चक्र अस्त व्यस्त हो जाएगा जिससे दुनिया के बड़े हिस्सों में अकाल और सूखा पड़ेगा।पृथ्वी को सूरज से दूर करने के सुझाव पर नासा के वैज्ञानिकों ने गंभीरता से विचार किया था। इससे भी ज्यादा अजीबोगरीब सुझाव यह है कि पृथ्वी को अपनी जगह से खिसकाने के लिए धूमकेतुओं को पृथ्वी की दिशा में मोड़ दो।

अमेरिका की येल यूनिवर्सिटी में खगोल विज्ञान के प्रोफेसर ग्रेग लाफलिन ने कहा कि वैज्ञानिक किसी धूमकेतु या क्षुद्रग्रह को सावधानीपूर्वक पृथ्वी की तरफ इस तरह मोड़ सकते हैं कि वह हमारे बगल से निकल जाए और अपने गुरुत्वाकर्षण खिंचाव से पृथ्वी को सौरमंडल में दूर ले जाए। उनका कहना है कि यह कोई अनोखी तकनीक नहीं है। पृथ्वी की तरफ आने वाले क्षुद्रग्रहों और धूमकेतुओं की दिशा मोड़ने के लिए ऐसी ही तकनीक अपनाने का सुझाव दिया गया है। उन्होंने कहा कि हमें पृथ्वी को आगे खिसकाने के लिए कोई बड़ी ताकत नहीं चाहिए, सिर्फ उचित योजना बनानी पड़ेगी। इस सुझाव के समर्थकों का कहना है कि इससे हमारे ग्रह के जीवन में छह अरब वर्ष का इजाफा हो जाएगा। लेकिन इस सुझाव के आलोचकों ने कहा कि गणना में छोटी सी भूल से विनाशकारी टक्कर हो सकती है जो कुछ जीवाणुओं को छोड़कर समस्त जीवों का सफाया कर देगी।

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

राजरंग

अटक गई सांस

हाल ही में चुनावी गठजोड़ कर उत्तर प्रदेश की राजनीति में छोटे यादव ने भले ही अपनी राजनीतिक चतुराई का डंका पीट दिया हो, लेकिन उनकी पार्टी के बड़े-बड़े नेताओं के होश फाख्ता हो गए हैं। कल तक खुशी से मिठाई बांटने वाले इन नेताओं तक को मालूम नहीं कि आगामी चुनावों में उनका अपना टिकट पक्का होगा अथवा नहीं। समझौते में अभी यह तय नहीं हो पा रहा है कि कौन सी सीट गठबंधन के किस घटक दल के खाते में जाएगी। खुद पर खतरा मंडराने का आभास होते ही उनकी मुश्किलें बढ़ गई हैं। इन दिनों ऐसे नेताओं की पूरी कोशिश पिछले लोकसभा व विधानसभा चुनावों में अपनी सीट पर मिले मतों की छानबीन करने की है। पार्टी में उच्च पदस्थ नेताओं को भी इस बारे में कुछ नहीं पता है। ऐसे में यह कठिनाई और बढ़ गई है। दरअसल, छोटे यादव पार्टी में किसी और की सुनने को तैयार नहीं हैं।

अभिभूत हैं बड़े साहब

बजट के बाद वैसे तो सरकार के सभी मंत्री और राजग सांसदों के चेहरे खिले हुए और हौसले बुलंद है, लेकिन सरकार के एक वरिष्ठ मंत्री उसके पहले से ही बड़े अभिभूत नजर आ रहे है। हालांकि इसकी वजह किसी की भी समझ से परे है। असल में हुआ यूं कि उन्हें अब रामराज्य से कम कुछ दिख ही नहीं रहा है। राष्ट्रपति के अभिभाषण की तुलना भी उन्होंने भगवद्गीता से कर दी। उन्होंने अंतरिम बजट को भी रामराज्य की तरफ बढ़ने वाला कदम बताया। इससे भी ज्यादा चौंकाने वाली बात जो है, वह यह कि पिछले दिनों वह पृथ्वी विज्ञान मंत्रालय के एक कार्यक्रम में पहुंचे और बोलने के लिए खड़े हुए तो उन्हें पृथ्वी विज्ञान बोलने में बार-बार परेशानी हुई, इसके बाद तो उन्होंने मंत्रालय का नाम ही बदलने की सलाह दे डाली। बोले, विभाग का नाम भारतमाता मंत्रालय क्यों नहीं रख दिया जाए। हालांकि इसके बाद जमकर ठहाके भी लगे। खैर जो भी हो, पर मंत्री जी के अचानक इस बढ़े हुए आत्मविश्वास से सभी अचंभित जरूर हैं।

उड़ी का जोश

लालकृष्ण आडवाणी संभवतः उन गिने चुने राजनेताओं में से एक हैं जिनका फिल्मों के प्रति जबरदस्त आकर्षण जगजाहिर है। वह खुद बताते हैं कि शुरुआती संघर्ष के दिनों में हिंदी फिल्में ही उनके और उनके साथी स्वर्गीय अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी के लिए गम भुलाने का जरिया बनती थीं। इस उम्र में भी फिल्म देखने का उनका शौक उसी तरह से जवां है। अंतरिम बजट के दिन भी इसकी बानगी तब दिखाई दी जब आडवाणी ने धीरे से वित्त मंत्री गोयल को उड़ी के बारे में बोलने के लिए उकसाया। लोकसभा के इस पूरे कार्यकाल में आडवाणी अमूमन चुप्पी ही साधे रहे हैं, लेकिन शुक्रवार को बजट के दिए उन्होंने गोयल को उड़ी की याद दिलाई और गोयल ने भी इसका पालन किया। आडवाणी ने सिर्फ उड़ी के जिक्र के दौरान मेज बहुत जोश से थपथपाई, वरना बजट भाषण के अधिकांश समय वह चुपचाप ही बैठे रहे।

ढीले हुए तेवर

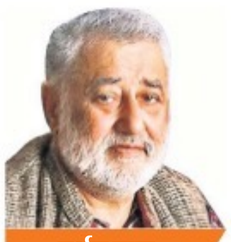
भाजपा के उन सांसदों के तेवर फिर ढीले पड़ने लगे हैं जिनके टिकट आगामी लोकसभा चुनाव में कटने की आशंका है। सरकार की बजट घोषणाओं के बाद ऐसे सांसदों की अकड़ ढीली पड़ने लगी है जो बीते दिनों तीन राज्यों के विधानसभा चुनाव में पार्टी के हारने के बाद यह कहते घूमते दिख रहे थे कि पार्टी अब कैसे उनके टिकट काटेगी। दरअसल राजनीतिक गलियारों में यह चर्चा आम थी कि लोकसभा चुनावों में मौजूदा सांसदों खासतौर पर उत्तर प्रदेश के कई मौजूदा सांसदों की जगह पार्टी नए चेहरों को प्राथमिकता देगी। जिन सांसदों को खुद इस बात का अहसास था वे किसी तरह अपनी स्थिति को ठीक करने में जुटे थे। लेकिन मध्य प्रदेश, राजस्थान और छत्तीसगढ़ में सरकार से बाहर होने के बाद इन सांसदों ने राहत की सांस ली थी। लेकिन शुक्रवार को अंतरिम बजट पेश होने के बाद ही इनके चेहरे का रंग उड़ गया। ऐसे कई सांसद तो संसद के गलियारे में यह कहते हुए भी सुनाई दिए कि अब टिकट पाने की जुगत भिड़ाने में फिर से जुटना होगा।

संस्थापक-स्व. पूर्णचन्द्र गुप्त. पूर्व प्रधान संपादक-स्व.नरेन्द्र मोहन. संपादकीय निदेशक-महेन्द्र मोहन गुप्त. प्रधान संपादक-संजय गुप्त, जागरण प्रकाशन लि. के लिए: नीतेन्द्र श्रीवास्तव द्वारा 501, आई.एन.एस. बिल्डिंग,रफी मार्ग, नई दिल्ली से प्रकाशित और उन्हीं के द्वारा डी-210, 211, सेक्टर-63 नोएडा से मुद्रित, संपादक (राष्ट्रीय संस्करण) -विष्णु प्रकाश त्रिपाठी*
दूरभाष : नई दिल्ली कार्यालय : 23359961-62, नोएडा कार्यालय : 0120-3915800, E-mail: delhi@nda.jagran.com, R.N.I. No. DELHIN/2017/74721 *इस अंक में प्रकाशित समस्त समाचारों के चयन एवं संपादन हेतु पी.आर.बी. एक्ट के अंतर्गत उत्तरद

अंतरिम बजट में छोटे किसानों को वित्तीय राहत

किसानों की परवाह करती सरकार

अपने आखिरी बजट में मोदी सरकार ने किसानों के लिए कई बड़े फैसले लिये हैं और छोटे किसानों की न्यूनतम आय निश्चित करने की दिशा में कदम भी बढ़ाये हैं. गौरतलब है कि देश में कृषि संकट की स्थिति बनी हुई है और समय-समय पर किसान संगठनों के प्रदर्शन भी होते रहे हैं. ऐसे में, सरकार द्वारा किसानों के लिए की गयीं घोषणाएं बेहतरी की दिशा में कम-से-कम शुरुआती कदम मानी जा सकती हैं. इन्हीं बातों के मद्देनजर **इन दिनों** की प्रस्तुति...



दर्शन पाल
किसान नेता

किसानों पर कर्ज का बोझ एक बहुत बड़ी समस्या है. एमएसपी से किसानों को जो घाटा हुआ है, उससे किसानों पर कर्ज का बोझ बढ़ा ही है. उदारीकरण के बाद से ही किसानों ने इस देश को जितना दिया है, हमारी सरकारों ने उन्हें उतना भी नहीं लौटाया है.

देश किसानों का कर्जदार

हम दुनिया में चाहे जहां भी रहें, अगर हमें सबकुछ से वंचित कर दिया जाये, तो हम जी लेंगे. लेकिन, अगर हमें भोजन से वंचित कर दिया जायेगा, तो हमारा जीवन नामुमकिन है. खेती-किसानी हमें जीवन देती है, इसलिए हमें अपने किसानों के हितों के बारे में ज्यादा सोचना चाहिए. इस बात को समझने के लिए विद्वान होने की जरूरत नहीं है, लेकिन पता नहीं क्यों हमारी सरकारें समझती ही नहीं हैं. हमने क्या मांगा था सरकार से? इतना ही न कि स्वामीनाथन कमीशन के हिसाब से किसानों को मिनिमम सपोर्ट प्राइस (एमएसपी) मिले. हालांकि, इसके लिए सरकार ने पिछले बजट में किसानों को एमएसपी लागत का डेढ़ गुना देने का फैसला लिया, लेकिन उससे भी कुछ फायदा नहीं हुआ. हम यही चाहते हैं न कि हमारे किसान आत्महत्या नहीं करें. लेकिन, क्या इसके लिए सरकारों के पास कोई ठोस नीति है? क्या छह हजार रुपये सालाना यानी किसानों को 500 रुपये महीने देना उनका मजाक उड़ाना नहीं लग रहा है आपको? क्या यह खैरात नहीं लग रही है? किसान अपने हक की बात कर रहे हैं, लेकिन सरकारें उन्हें खैरात बांट रही हैं. बजट में हुई इस घोषणा के बाद से हमने कई किसानों से बात की, लेकिन एक भी किसान खुश नहीं दिखा. मैं पंजाब में रहता हूं और पिछले दो दशक से देख रहा हूं कि एक भी किसान ऐसा नहीं है, जो अपने बच्चों को किसान बनाने के बारे में सोचता हो. सब अपने बच्चों को पढ़ने भेजते हैं और खेती से दूर रखते हैं.

किसानों पर कर्ज का बोझ एक बहुत बड़ी समस्या है. एमएसपी से किसानों को जो घाटा हुआ है, उससे किसानों पर कर्ज का बोझ बढ़ा ही है. उदारीकरण के बाद से ही किसानों ने इस देश को जितना दिया है, हमारी सरकारों ने उन्हें उतना भी नहीं लौटाया है. सरकार को चाहिए कि किसानों के बच्चों के लिए सेवाओं और उद्योगों में नौकरियां दे, ताकि खेती करते हुए कम से कम वे आत्महत्या तो न करने पायें. जिस तरह से आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर सवर्णों के लिए दस प्रतिशत आरक्षण का प्रावधान किया है सरकार ने, क्या किसानों के लिए ऐसा नहीं कर सकती थी? क्या किसानों के मुकाबले आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर सवर्णों की हालत ज्यादा खराब है? इन सब बातों को ध्यान में रखते हुए हम किसानों की मांग है कि जिस तरह से सरकारी कर्मचारियों को रिटायरमेंट के बाद पेंशन मिलती है, किसान और खेतिहर मजदूरों के लिए भी ऐसी व्यवस्था की जाये, ताकि वे अपना बाकी जीवन गुजार सकें. तमाम किसान संगठन इन सब बातों की मांग करते आ रहे हैं, लेकिन सरकारों की नीतियों में किसान कहीं ठहरते ही नहीं लगते हैं. देश को यह बात सोचना चाहिए कि किसान उसके लिए भोजन पैदा करते हैं. देश इसके लिए किसानों का कर्जदार है. खेती की लागत कैसे कम हो, इसको किसान नहीं कर सकता, यह काम सरकार का ही है.

बजट में किये गये वादे

चुनावी साल में केंद्र सरकार के आखिरी बजट को अंतरिम वित्त मंत्री पीयूष गोयल ने पेश किया. इस बजट में पांच ऐसे प्रमुख वादे किये हैं सरकार ने, जिनसे किसानों को आनेवाले समय में फायदा पहुंचेगा.

वित्तीय राहत का प्रावधान: सरकार ने छोटे एवं सीमांत किसानों को निश्चित आय उपलब्ध कराने की बात बजट में कही है. इस योजना को प्रधानमंत्री किसान सम्मान निधि नाम दिया गया है. इस योजना के अंतर्गत, दो हेक्टेयर यानी लगभग पांच एकड़ तक की जमीन के मालिक किसान परिवारों को छह हजार रुपये की राशि प्रति वर्ष सीधे उनके खाते में प्रदान की जायेगी. यह राशि किसानों को तीन किस्तों में मिलेगी. इस योजना से देश के 12 करोड़ किसान परिवारों को फायदा पहुंचेगा. इसे 1 दिसंबर, 2018 से ही गिनती में लाया जायेगा और 31 मार्च 2019 तक की अवधि तक की पहली किस्त का भुगतान इसी वित्त वर्ष में कर दिया जायेगा. इस योजना को साकार करने के लिए सरकार पर लगभग 75 हजार करोड़ रुपये का बोझ पड़ेगा.

गायों के लिए राष्ट्रीय कामधेनु आयोग : इस बजट में राष्ट्रीय गोकुल मिशन के लिए आवंटन को बढ़ा दिया गया है और 750 करोड़ रुपये कर दिया गया है. इसके अलावा, गायों के उत्पादन व उत्पादकता को बढ़ाने के लिए राष्ट्रीय कामधेनु आयोग के गठन की घोषणा की गयी है, जो गायों के लिए सुरक्षा कानूनों को ठीक तरह से लागू करने का काम करेगा और अन्य कल्याणकारी स्कीमों को लागू कराने में भी भूमिका निभायेगा.

मत्स्य पालन विभाग का गठन: बजट के दौरान मत्स्य पालन पर सरकार ने अहम घोषणा की. दुनिया का दूसरा सबसे बड़ा मछली उत्पादक देश भारत है. मत्स्य पालन से देश के लगभग 1.45 करोड़ लोगों को रोजगार प्राप्त हुआ है. इतना ही नहीं, इस मामले में भारत कुल वैश्विक उत्पादन में 6.3 फीसदी की हिस्सेदारी रखता है और हाल के सालों में यह क्षेत्र सात प्रतिशत की सालाना दर से बढ़ोतरी दर्ज कर रहा है. इस सेक्टर के विकास को सुनिश्चित करने के लिए सरकार ने मत्स्य पालन विभाग बनाने का निर्णय लिया है.

किसान क्रेडिट कार्ड के कर्ज पर ब्याज सब्सिडी: बजट में इसकी घोषणा भी हुई कि देश में पशुपालन और मत्स्यपालन कर रहे किसानों को किसान क्रेडिट कार्ड से कर्ज लेने पर दो प्रतिशत का ब्याज सब्सिडी मिलेगा. सरकार ने यह कहा कि अगर किसान तय समय के अंदर अपना कर्ज चुकाते हैं, तो उन्हें तीन प्रतिशत की अतिरिक्त ब्याज सब्सिडी प्रदान की जायेगी.

प्राकृतिक आपदा की स्थिति में छूट : यह बजट किसानों के लिए बहुआयामी कहा जा सकता है. प्राकृतिक आपदाओं से प्रभावित किसानों को दो प्रतिशत की ब्याज सब्सिडी प्रदान की जायेगी और उनके कर्जों के पुनर्निर्धारण की अवधि में तुरंत भुगतान के प्रोत्साहन के रूप में 3 फीसदी अतिरिक्त ब्याज सब्सिडी भी दी जायेगी.

विगत वर्षों में आम बजट में कृषि क्षेत्र के लिए घोषणाएं

वित्त वर्ष 2014-15

- एग्री-टेक इंफ्रास्ट्रक्चर फंड के लिए 100 करोड़ रुपये की राशि अलग से निर्धारित करने की घोषणा.
- आंध्र प्रदेश व राजस्थान में कृषि विश्वविद्यालय, तेलंगाना व हरियाणा में बागवानी विश्वविद्यालय के लिए 200 करोड़ रुपये की घोषणा.
- सभी किसानों को सॉयल हेल्थ कार्ड प्रदान करने के लिए 100 करोड़ रुपये की राशि का आवंटन. देश भर में 100 मोबाइल सॉयल टेस्टिंग लेबोरेटरी स्थापित करने के लिए 56 करोड़ रुपये का अतिरिक्त आवंटन.
- जलवायु परिवर्तन की चुनातियों से निपटने के लिए 100 करोड़ की शुरुआती राशि के साथ राष्ट्रीय अनुकूलन निधि की स्थापना.
- देशी नस्ल के मवेशियों और मत्स्य पालन को बढ़ावा देने के लिए 50-50 करोड़ रुपये का आवंटन.
- भूमिहीन किसानों की सहायता के लिए नाबार्ड के माध्यम से पांच लाख संयुक्त कृषि समूह को वित्त प्रदान करने की घोषणा.
- देश में गोदामों की क्षमता बढ़ाने के लिए 5,000 करोड़ रुपये का आवंटन.

वर्ष 2015-16

- माइक्रो-इरिगेशन, वाटरशेड डेवलपमेंट और प्रधानमंत्री कृषि सिंचाई योजना के लिए 5,300 करोड़ रुपये आवंटन की घोषणा.
- नाबार्ड के ग्रामीण आधारभूत विकास निधि कोष के लिए 25,000 करोड़ रुपये.
- दीर्घ अवधि ग्रामीण ऋण कोष के लिए 15,000 करोड़ रुपये.
- लघु अवधि सहकारी ग्रामीण ऋण पुनर्वित (रीफाइनेंस) कोष के लिए 45,000 करोड़ रुपये.
- लघु अवधि क्षेत्रीय ग्रामीण बैंक (आरआरबी) रीफाइनेंस फंड के लिए 15,000 करोड़ रुपये.

वर्ष 2016-17

- कृषि और किसानों के कल्याण के लिए 35,984 करोड़ रुपये का आवंटन.
- नाबार्ड में दीर्घ अवधि सिंचाई निधि के लिए 20,000 करोड़ रुपये के शुरुआती कोष बनाने की घोषणा.
- 6,000 करोड़ रुपये के अनुमानित लागत के साथ भूजल संसाधनों के सतत प्रबंधन के लिए कार्यक्रम लागू करने की घोषणा.
- थोक बाजार को ई-बाजार प्लेटफॉर्म उपलब्ध कराने के लिए एकीकृत कृषि बाजार ई-प्लेटफॉर्म बनाये जाने की घोषणा.
- प्रधानमंत्री ग्राम सड़क योजना के लिए आवंटन की राशि बढ़ाकर 19,000 करोड़ रुपये करने की घोषणा.
- प्रधानमंत्री फसल बीमा योजना के लिए 5,500 करोड़ रुपये का आवंटन
- किसानों के ऋण भुगतान बोझ को कम करने के लिए 15,000 करोड़ रुपये का प्रावधान.
- डेयरी परियोजना के लिए 850 करोड़ रुपये प्रदान करने की घोषणा.

वर्ष 2017-18

- फसली क्षेत्र का 40 प्रतिशत हिस्सा फसल बीमा के दायरे में लाने की घोषणा और इसके लिए 9,000 करोड़ रुपये का आवंटन.
- दीर्घ अवधि सिंचाई निधि के कोष में 20,000 करोड़ रुपये की वृद्धि.
- राष्ट्रीय कृषि बाजार (ई-नैम) का दायरा वर्तमान के 250 से बढ़ाकर 585 किये जाने की घोषणा.
- नाबार्ड के तहत डेयरी प्रसंस्करण और अवसंरचना विकास निधि की स्थापना के लिए 2,000 करोड़ रुपये का शुरुआती कोष बनाने की घोषणा.

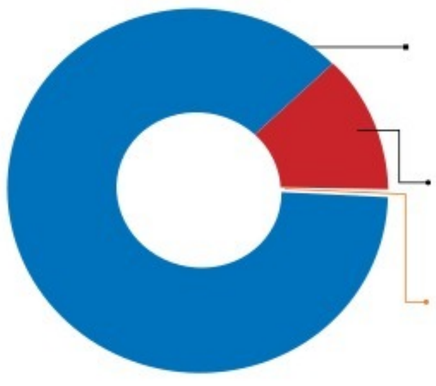
वर्ष 2018-19

- खरीफ की उन सभी फसलों के लिए, जिनकी घोषणा पहले नहीं की गयी थी, न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य उसकी लागत का डेढ़ गुना देने का निर्णय.
- संगठित खेती और संबंधित उद्योगों के समर्थन के लिए 200 करोड़ रुपये की राशि के आवंटन का प्रस्ताव.
- ग्रामीण कृषि बाजारों में कृषि विपणन अवसंरचनाओं (एग्रीकल्चर मार्केटिंग इंफ्रास्ट्रक्चर) को बेहतर बनाने के लिए 2,000 करोड़ रुपये के कोष के साथ एग्री-मार्केट इंफ्रास्ट्रक्चर फंड बनाने की घोषणा.
- खाद्य प्रसंस्करण मंत्रालय के आवंटन को 715 करोड़ रुपये से बढ़ाकर 1,400 करोड़ रुपये किये जाने की घोषणा.
- 'ऑपरेशन फ्लड' की तर्ज पर 'ऑपरेशन ग्रीन्स' को लॉन्च करने के लिए 500 करोड़ रुपये का प्रस्ताव.
- मत्स्य पालन और पशुपालन करनेवाले किसानों को किसान क्रेडिट कार्ड देने का प्रस्ताव.
- बांस क्षेत्र को बढ़ावा देने के लिए 1,290 करोड़ रुपये के परिव्यय का प्रस्ताव.
- 10,000 करोड़ रुपये के कोष के साथ फिशरीज और एक्वाकल्चर इंफ्रास्ट्रक्चर डेवलपमेंट फंड स्थापित करने की घोषणा.
- कृषि क्षेत्र के लिए संस्थागत ऋण को 10 लाख करोड़ से बढ़ाकर 11 लाख करोड़ किया गया.
- प्रधानमंत्री कृषि सिंचाई योजना के तहत भूजल सिंचाई योजना के लिए 2,600 करोड़ रुपये का आवंटन.

इतिहास में पहली बार किसानों को पद्मश्री

भारत को कृषिप्रधान देश माना जाता है. लेकिन इतिहास में पहली बार ऐसा होने जा रहा है, जब किसानों को पद्म सम्मान प्रदान किया जायेगा. चुने गये सभी 11 लोगों में से 10 विशुद्ध रूप से किसान हैं, जिन्हें देश का चौथा सबसे बड़ा नागरिक सम्मान दिया जायेगा. सामान्यतया, भारत सरकार कला, शिक्षा, उद्योग, साहित्य, विज्ञान, खेल, चिकित्सा और समाज सेवा के क्षेत्र में ही यह पुरस्कार देती रही है, लेकिन इस बार किसानों को भी 'अन्य' श्रेणी में पुरस्कार के लिए चुना गया है. गौरतलब है कि साल 2013 में किसानों को भी पद्म सम्मान देने की मांग बड़े पैमाने पर की गयी थी. इससे पहले केवल कृषि क्षेत्र में योगदान देनेवालों को पद्मश्री मिला है, लेकिन किसानों को नहीं मिला था. साइंस व इंजीनियरिंग क्षेत्र से 'हरित क्रांति' के जनक कहलानेवाले एमएस स्वामीनाथन को और वर्गीज कुरियन को दुग्ध उत्पादन के लिए ट्रेड व इंडस्ट्री क्षेत्र से पद्मश्री मिला था. इस बार किसानों को चुना गया है, लेकिन सरकार ने कृषि के लिए अभी कोई श्रेणी नहीं बनायी. हालांकि, यह एक अच्छी शुरुआत है, जिससे कृषि संकट से जूझ रहे देश के किसानों के बीच अच्छा संदेश जायेगा और उन्हें संबल हासिल होगा. चयनित किसानों में हरियाणा के कंवल सिंह चौहान, बिहार की राजकुमारी देवी, गुजरात के वल्लभभाई वासराभाई मारवानिया, राजस्थान के जगदीश प्रसाद पारिख, हुकुमचंद पाटीदार, ओडिशा की कमला पुझारी, उत्तर प्रदेश के भारत भूषण त्यागी, रामशरण वर्मा, आंध्र प्रदेश के वेंकटेश्वर राव यदलापल्ली और मध्य प्रदेश के बाबूलाल दहिया और पंजाब कृषि विश्वविद्यालय के वीसी बलदेव सिंह ढिल्लन शामिल हैं..

भारतीय किसानों के पास जमीन



86.2% छोटे किसान, (0-2 हेक्टेयर जमीन)

13.2% मझोले किसान, (2-10 हेक्टेयर जमीन)

0.6% बड़े किसान, (10 हेक्टेयर से ज्यादा जमीन)

स्रोत : एग्रीकल्चरल सेंसस 2015-16 सौजन्य : बीबीसी

सुनिश्चित हो किसानों की आय

देविंदर शर्मा
कृषि अर्थशास्त्री

सरकार ने अंतरिम बजट में किसानों के बारे में जो बात सोची है, वह ठीक जान पड़ती है. लेकिन, क्या सोच कर उसने छह हजार रुपये सालाना का प्रावधान किया है, यह कुछ समझ नहीं आया. मुझे यह बात समझ में नहीं आती कि सरकार ने बजट में किसानों को जो छह हजार सालाना देने का प्रावधान किया है, इससे भयानक कृषि संकट से कैसे निबटा जा सकता है. यह भी समझ में नहीं आता कि 500 रुपये मासिक के अनुदान से किसान आत्महत्या कैसे रुक पायेगी. मुझे तो यही समझ में नहीं आता कि सरकार ने यह सब किस दिव्य-दृष्टि के तहत किया है. क्या किसान का जीवन-स्तर महज पांच सौ रुपये में ऊंचा उठ जायेगा?

एक बात बहुत स्पष्ट है कि सरकार ने यह प्रावधान करके अपना ही नुकसान किया है. यह पांच सौ रुपये सरकार के खजाने से भी निकल जायेगा और किसानों तक पहुंच कर भी उन्हें कोई लाभ नहीं देगा. इसका मतलब साफ है कि यह पैसा न इधर का रहा, न उधर का रहा. यानी सरकार का पूरा पैसा बरबाद हो जायेगा. तेलंगाना और ओड़िशा में किसानों को लेकर अच्छी योजनाएं चल रही हैं, हालांकि दोनों अलग तरह की योजनाएं हैं. केंद्र सरकार को तो कम से कम इन दो राज्यों से सीख लेते हुए उनके योजनाओं में किये गये प्रावधानों से बेहतर प्रावधान होना चाहिए था. आखिर सरकार किसानों को 12 हजार रुपये प्रतिमाह क्यों नहीं दे पाती? यह कोई ज्यादा नहीं है और इसका सरकार पर उतना बोझ नहीं पड़ेगा, जितना कि रोना रोया जाता है. साल 2008-09 से अगर आप देखें, तो हर साल कॉरपोरेट को 1.86 लाख करोड़ रुपये सरकार ने दिये हैं. कॉरपोरेट को यह रकम देना अब तक जारी है. यानी हम दस साल में 18 लाख 60 हजार करोड़ रुपये अब तक कॉरपोरेट को दे चुके हैं. लेकिन, इसका कोई बहुत बड़ा फायदा तो नहीं मिला देश को. तो फिर वित्त मंत्री इसे बंद क्यों नहीं करते और उस पैसे को कृषि में क्यों नहीं लगाते? ऐसा करने से न तो वित्तीय घाटा बढ़ता और न ही यह सवाल उठता कि पैसा कहां से आयेगा. बीते दस साल में कॉरपोरेट को दिये जा रहे पैसे पर किसी अर्थशास्त्री ने सवाल नहीं उठाया कि इसे बंद कर दिया जाना चाहिए, क्योंकि यह पैसा व्यर्थ जा रहा है. किसी ने यह नहीं कहा कि इससे वित्तीय घाटा बढ़ा रहा है. आखिर क्या कारण है इस देश में कि जैसे ही किसानों को देने की बात होती है, सब लोग डंडा लेकर पूछने लगते हैं कि आखिर पैसा आयेगा कहां से. सरकार की सारी नीतियां पूर्वाग्रह से ग्रसित हैं और किसानों को लाभ पहुंचानेवाली नहीं हैं. मैं हमेशा कहता हूं कि किसानों के लिए एक निश्चित आय का आयोग बनाया जाना चाहिए यानी 'फार्मर्स इनकम कमीशन'. खेती-किसानी संकट में है. चुनौती यह है कि एक किसान को प्रतिमाह अठारह

हजार रुपये की आय सरकार सुनिश्चित करे. इसके लिए सरकार को चाहिए कि वह अच्छी नीतियां बनाये. बाकी कृषि सुधारों के लिए तो यह कहना मुश्किल है कि सरकार कुछ कर पायेगी. लेकिन अगली सरकार को किसान की निश्चित आय के बारे में सोचना ही चाहिए.

ट्रंप के खिलाफ खड़ी साहसी हैरिस

डेविड ब्रुक्स

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कमला हैरिस ने 2020 के राष्ट्रपति चुनाव का अभियान जिस धमाकेदार अंदाज में शुरू किया है, वह अपनी कहानी आप कहता है। ट्रंप को करारा जवाब देने के लिए हैरिस जैसी जांबाज व्यक्तित्व की ही जरूरत थी। लेकिन सवाल यह कि अमेरिका के प्राइमरी वोटर्स क्या एक अश्वेत महिला को चुनना पसंद करेंगे।

कमला हैरिस के बारे में हम जितना ही अधिक जानते हैं, वह उतनी ही ताकतवर प्रतीत होती जाती हैं। वह विविध विशेषताओं का आश्चर्यजनक संगम हैं-वह उच्च शिक्षित हैं, उन्होंने सड़कों पर लड़ाई लड़ी है और वह कठोर अनुशासन वाली अभियोजक हैं। इसके अलावा मौजूदा दौर में वह सबसे मजबूत और ऊंची नाक वाली प्रगतिशील भी हैं। विरोधियों की सामूहिक गिरफ्तारियों के इस दौर में अनेक वामपंथी कठोर अभियोजक कमला हैरिस की आलोचना करते हैं। लेकिन अब डेमोक्रेटिक पार्टी वाम वैचारिकता की ओर मुड़ चुकी है और पुलिस तथा अभियोजकों के प्रति उसका संदेह और बढ़ गया है, ऐसे में, भावनात्मक रूप से भी यह पार्टी अधिक मजबूत हुई है। डेमोक्रेटिक पार्टी के प्राइमर वोटर्स चूंकि डोनाल्ड ट्रंप को कड़ी चुनौती देना चाहते हैं, ऐसे में, वे इसके लिए सबसे मजबूत और सबसे जांबाज योद्धा को चुनना चाहते हैं। कमला हैरिस की सख्ती को देखने-परखने के बाद शायद वे उन्हीं ट्रंप के खिलाफ मुकाबले के लिए चुनें।

कमला हैरिस उच्च शिक्षित, प्रगतिशील, समृद्ध माता-पिता की संतान हैं। उनके पिता स्टेनफोर्ड में प्रोफेसर हैं। जबकि ब्रेस्ट कैंसर रिसर्चर उनकी मां ने पच्चीस साल की उम्र में पीएच.डी. की डिग्री ली। हैरिस बैले (नृत्य नाटिका), वायोलिन, फ्रेंच हॉर्न और सभी काम बेहद कुशलता से संपन्न करने की विशेषता के साथ बड़ी हुई। वह हावर्ड जैसे प्रसिद्ध स्कूल में पढ़ने गई, विभिन्न छात्र संगठनों की वह प्रमुख रही और लॉ स्कूल में जाने से पहले फेडरल ट्रेड कमीशन पर उसने इंटर्नशिप की। बाद में हैरिस ने एक प्रसिद्ध लॉ फर्म के पार्टनर से शादी की और राजनीति में भी सक्रिय हुईं। लेकिन खुद लॉ फर्म जॉइन करने के बजाय हैरिस ने एक अभियोजक के तौर पर काम करने का फैसला लिया, जो बहुत साहसी निर्णय था। अभियोजक के रूप में काम करते हुए हैरिस एक ऐसी दुनिया के संपर्क में आई, जहां भाई छह साल की बहनों से बलात्कार करते हैं, जहां घरेलू विवाद में एक व्यक्ति अपनी गर्लफ्रेंड के सिर की खाल उतार लेता है, जहां बच्चों को स्कूल भेजते हुए उनके माता-पिता न केवल आर्थिक मुश्किलों से जूझते हैं, बल्कि बच्चों की सुरक्षा के लिए भी चिंता और तनाव में रहते हैं।

दरअसल अपराध न्याय व्यवस्था एक

प्रतिकूल और शत्रुतापूर्ण व्यवस्था है, और ऐसा लगता है कि इस व्यवस्था ने ही हैरिस को लड़ाकू मनोवृत्ति का बना दिया है। उन्होंने खुद को इस तरह ढाल लिया है, जिसे द *न्यूयॉर्कर* के बेंजामिन वैलेस-वेल्स ने *शत्रु पर टिकी आंख* कहा है-यानी किसी भी स्थिति में अपने दुश्मन को भांप लेने की क्षमता हासिल कर लेना। संस्मरण की अपनी किताब द *ट्रथ वी होल्ड* में हैरिस ने अपने राजनीतिक अभियान का विस्तार से वर्णन किया है, जिसे वह मजबूत दुश्मनों के खिलाफ कठिन लड़ाई बताती हैं। सेनफ्रांसिस्को डिस्ट्रिक्ट एटॉर्नी के पद पर चुने जाने के लिए वह अपने पूर्व बॉस के खिलाफ खड़ी हुईं और जीतीं।

कैलिफोर्निया के राजनीतिक दिग्गज विली ब्राउन से नजदीकी का उन्हें लाभ मिला, जिनकी वह प्रेमिका थीं। ब्राउन ने उन्हें अनइम्प्लॉयमेंट इंश्योरेंस अपील्स बोर्ड और कैलिफोर्निया मेडिकल एसिस्टेंस कमीशन में नियुक्त करवा दिया। इसका हैरिस को सिर्फ राजनीतिक नहीं, बल्कि आर्थिक लाभ भी मिला, क्योंकि दोनों संस्थाएं उन्हें मोटी तनख्वाह देती थीं। इन दोनों संस्थाओं के साथ उनका रिश्ता कई साल तक चला, लेकिन एक समय ऐसा आया, जब हैरिस ने यह स्पष्ट कर दिया कि इन उपकारों के बदले अगर ब्राउन उनका अपने राजनीतिक हित में इस्तेमाल करना चाहते हैं, तो वह संभव नहीं है। और उसके बाद न केवल ब्राउन से उन्होंने अपने संबंध तोड़ लिए, बल्कि उन संस्थाओं से भी वह अलग हो गईं। संस्मरणों की उनकी उस किताब में ऐसे प्रसंग भरे पड़े हैं, जहां वह ताकतवर लोगों के खिलाफ लड़ाई लड़ती हैं। सीनेटर के रूप में उनका करियर विभिन्न कमेटियों की बैठकों के दौरान ट्रंप प्रशासन के अधिकारियों से उनकी तीखी झड़प से भरा पड़ा है।

मुझे संदेह है कि ट्रंप को हराने के लिए डेमोक्रेट्स अपने में एकता लाने की कोशिश करेंगे। वे बर्नी सेंडर्स जैसे व्यक्तियों को ट्रंप के खिलाफ खड़े नहीं करना चाहेंगे, जो डेमोक्रेटिक पार्टी की संरचना और उसकी पहचान के ही खिलाफ हो। बल्कि वे ट्रंप के खिलाफ ऐसी शख्सीयत को सामने लाना चाहेंगे, जिसने डेमोक्रेटिक पार्टी के विचारों को अपने जीवन में पूरी तरह उतार लिया हो, जैसे कि कमला हैरिस। वे ऐसी व्यक्तित्व को सामने लाना चाहेंगे, जो सीधी बहस में ट्रंप को ध्वस्त कर दे, जैसे कि कमला हैरिस। यह देखना दिलचस्प होगा कि प्राइमरी वोटर्स इन सवालों को किस तरह लेना चाहेंगे-क्या अमेरिका इतना नस्लवादी और स्त्री-विरोधी है कि वह एक अश्वेत महिला को नहीं चुनना चाहता? या वह यह मानता है कि मुकाबले में एक अश्वेत महिला को खड़ा कर देना ट्रंप को करारा जवाब होगा? यह मानने का कारण है कि हैरिस की निडर और बेबाक छवि बेहद महत्वपूर्ण राजनीतिक अभियान में उनकी मददगार साबित होगी।

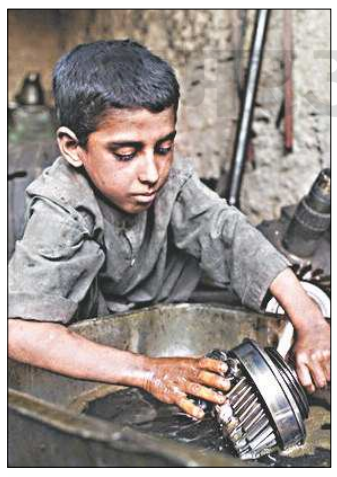
श्यौराजसिंह बेचैन

प्रोफेसर, दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय

बचपन बचाने की फिक्र किसे है?

हाल ही में संपन्न हुए जयपुर साहित्य उत्सव में एक सत्र बचपन पर विमर्श करने के लिए रखा गया। बचपन को संरक्षित करने के लिए ही संविधान निर्माताओं ने संविधान के अनुच्छेद 23, 24 में यह प्रावधान रखा कि चौदह साल से कम उम्र के बच्चों को किसी फैक्टरी आदि में ऐसा श्रम नहीं कराया जा सकता, जिससे उनकी शारीरिक क्षति होती हो, उनका शारीरिक शोषण होता हो और विकास रुकता हो।

बचपन की सबसे बड़ी जरूरत स्वास्थ्य और शिक्षा है। लेकिन जिन बच्चों को चौदह साल की उम्र तक स्कूल के दर्शन ही न हुए हों, धनी वर्ग सामाजिक जिम्मेदारी न निभाए और सरकारें उदासीन हों, तो उनके लिए कानून का क्या लाभ? सत्तरवां गणतंत्र दिवस मना चुकने के बावजूद हम हजारों बच्चों को बाल श्रम की गिरफ्त से मुक्त नहीं कर पा रहे हैं। सियासत किसी भी दल की हो, वे चौदह साल से कम उम्र के बच्चों में दिलचस्पी नहीं लेते, क्योंकि वे मतदाता नहीं होते। मतदाताओं के लिए तो आरक्षण भी लाया जा सकता है। लेकिन उन बच्चों का प्रतिनिधि कौन है? उनकी नाराजगी किसका वोट प्रतिशत प्रभावित कर सकती है? शिक्षा नहीं है, तो अधिकार चेतना भी नहीं है।



अमेरिका में ओबामा की बेटी रेस्तरां में काम करके श्रम का महत्व समझती है, हमारे यहां बच्चे बचपन से ही दो तरह के नागरिक बनने की तैयारी करते हैं।

रही बात कुछ करने की, तो देश के बच्चों के लिए तो देश के पहले प्रधानमंत्री से लेकर वर्तमान प्रधानमंत्री तक प्रेम, लगाव और आत्मीयता प्रकट करते आए हैं, पर देश के बच्चे मूलभूत शिक्षा के अधिकार से भी वंचित हैं। बच्चों के बीच आम और खास की दीवार उठ रही है। नेताओं, अभिनेताओं, अधिकारियों और संपन्न वर्ग के बच्चों के लिए खास तरह के स्कूल, ट्यूशन और उनके कौशल विकास पर आम बच्चों की तुलना में हजार गुना निवेश हो रहा है। शिक्षा समान, मुफ्त और सुलभ होने का जो सपना आजादी के दीवानों ने देखा दिखाया था, उसका तो मानो जनाजा निकाल दिया गया है। विकसित देशों में प्राथमिक से लेकर इंटरमीडिएट तक की शिक्षा समान, गुणकारी और निःशुल्क है। हमारे देश में हजारों बच्चों से उनका बचपन छिन रहा है। पश्चिम बंगाल के सरकारी स्कूलों में अंग्रेजी का लौटना या दिल्ली के सरकारी स्कूलों को प्राइवेट स्कूलों के मुकाबले में खड़ा करना एक उम्मीद तो है, पर बिहार, उत्तर-प्रदेश में सरकारी स्कूलों में अंग्रेजी न होने से धनी वर्ग आम बच्चों के साथ अपने बच्चे नहीं पढ़ा रहा। गरीब के लिए भी सरकारी स्कूल बंद हो रहे हैं। बच्चों में बढ़ता अलगाव समान नागरिक निर्माण की कल्पना को धक्का पहुंचाता है।

ऐसे ही समय में जयपुर साहित्य उत्सव में एक सत्र का विषय था 'आजाद बचपन की कल्पना।' साहित्य का प्रयोजन नेक है। जो कानून की नहीं सुनते, शायद साहित्य की सुनें। देश की रक्षा और सेवा के लिए केवल धनी बच्चे महत्वपूर्ण नहीं होते, हाशिये का बचपन जीने वाले बच्चे भी देश का भविष्य हैं। पर जयपुर शहर प्रतिबद्ध है कि यहां के ऐसे किसी धंधे में चौदह-पंद्रह साल से कम उम्र के बच्चों को नहीं लगाएगा, जिसमें उनकी शारीरिक क्षति होती हो। बाल शोषण से आजाद करने की दृष्टि से जयपुर दूसरे शहरों के लिए अनुकरणीय मॉडल बनना चाहता है। इसके लिए शहर ने व्यवसायियों, उद्योगपतियों, राज्य सरकार, जिला प्रशासन, स्थानीय निकायों और बाल कल्याण के लिए काम कर रही संस्थाओं का सहयोग लेना आरंभ किया है। बाल श्रम के कारणों को समझा जा रहा है। बिहार से तस्करी कर बच्चों को लाने वालों पर कानूनी कार्रवाई करने की योजना है। बाल श्रम को पूरे देश से इतनी जल्दी और आसानी से समाप्त नहीं किया जा सकता, पर इसके लिए सकारात्मक मानस तैयार करना अच्छा प्रयास हो सकता है।

सामान्य तौर पर सार्वजनिक शिक्षा में सुधार के क्या उपाय हो सकते हैं? चौदह साल से कम उम्र के बच्चों की न केवल शिक्षा मुफ्त की जाए, बल्कि गरीब और असमर्थ परिवारों के बच्चों को राज्य अपने खर्चे पर रोजगारोन्मुख क्वालिटी एजुकेशन की व्यवस्था करना आवश्यक है। तदुपरांत शिक्षा को आंशिक तौर पर शारीरिक श्रम से जोड़ा जाए, शिक्षा ग्रहण करने के दौरान ही बच्चे को पार्ट टाइम काम सिखाया जाए। यह गरीब-अमीर, सभी के लिए अनिवार्य हो, जिस तरह कनाडा, ब्रिटेन और अमेरिका आदि देशों में सप्ताह में बीस घंटे किसी ऐसी जगह काम करना होता है। यह संस्कृति हमारे बच्चों को जिम्मेदार आत्मनिर्भर और श्रम का सम्मान करना सिखाएगी।

यह गलत प्रवृत्ति है कि कुछ बच्चे केवल पढ़ते हैं, शारीरिक श्रम करना नहीं सीखते। इसके विपरीत कुछ बच्चे केवल श्रम ही करते रहते हैं, पढ़ते नहीं हैं। अगर काम करके बच्चा पढ़ता है, तो खुद को हीन समझने लगता है। बच्चा यदि अनाथ है, तो उसके लिए सरकारी-गैर सरकारी संस्थाएं या तो हैं नहीं अथवा स्वस्थ नहीं हैं। लावारिस बचपन बच्चे के लिए मुश्किलें पैदा करता है। बाल श्रम करने वाले अपने परिवार के पेशे में ही सिमटने को मजबूर होते हैं। मजदूर का बेटा बाल मजदूरी करता है। कुली का बेटा कुली के पास बैठता है, होटल में बर्तन साफ करता है, खेत में मजदूरी करता है, सीवर की सफाई के काम में लगता है। पर वह मंदिर के पुजारी की बगल में जाकर नहीं बैठ सकता। पर विकसित देशों में ऐसा नहीं है। ब्रिटेन के प्रधानमंत्री का बेटा भी सामान्य काम कर सकता है। पूर्व अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति ओबामा की बेटी रेस्तरां में काम कर सकती है। अपने यहां ऐसा नहीं है। इसी का नतीजा है कि हमारे यहां बचपन से ही दो तरह के नागरिक बनने की प्रक्रिया शुरू हो जाती है।

नितिन गडकरी होने का मतलब

गडकरी की मुखर अभिव्यक्तियों के बावजूद भाजपा नेतृत्व ने सार्वजनिक तौर पर एक शब्द तक नहीं कहा। आरएसएस ने भी उन्हें फटकार नहीं लगाई। संभवत: हर कोई असमंजस में है और स्पष्ट नहीं है कि हालात को कैसे नियंत्रित करना चाहिए।

पी चिदंबरम

पूर्व केंद्रीय मंत्री

श्री नितिन गडकरी एक अनूठे नेता हैं। वह खुद स्वीकार कर चुके हैं कि वह खाने के शौकीन हैं, सजीले कपड़े पहनते हैं और लगता है कि जीवन का पूरा आनंद उठाते हैं। सार्वजनिक समारोहों में बोलना उन्हें रुचिकर लगता है और वह इस तरह बोलते हैं, मानो उन्हें दुनिया की कोई परवाह नहीं है।

और इस सबके साथ ही वह एक स्वयंसेवक भी हैं। ऐसा माना जाता है कि वह आरएसएस के पसंदीदा लोगों में से हैं। उन्होंने अपने क्षेत्र नागपुर (महाराष्ट्र) को संवारा है और आरएसएस, अपनी पार्टी के नेताओं और पार्टी के कार्यकर्ताओं को खुश रखने की कोशिश की है। श्री गडकरी और श्री फडणवीस, दोनों का संबंध नागपुर से है और दोनों एक ही क्षेत्र और नेताओं और कार्यकर्ताओं के एक ही राजनीतिक आधार से अपना समर्थन प्राप्त करते हैं। महाराष्ट्र में यह चर्चा रही है कि गडकरी महाराष्ट्र का मुख्यमंत्री बनना चाहते थे, लेकिन नरेंद्र मोदी ने उनकी योजना को ध्वस्त कर दिया। मोदी ने अपने वफादार फडणवीस को पसंद किया। गडकरी की महत्वाकांक्षा पर अंकुश लगाने के लिहाज से यह एक चालाक कदम था। हालांकि इससे बेपरवाह गडकरी ने खुद के लिए अलग राह बना ली।

गडकरी के नगीने

गडकरी को अपने विभागों, राजमार्ग और सड़क परिवहन, जल संसाधन, नदी विकास और गंगा संरक्षण पर ध्यान केंद्रित रखने वाले मंत्री के रूप में जाना जाता है। मंत्री के रूप में उनका प्रदर्शन मिश्रित है। राजमार्ग निर्माण के मामले में उनका प्रदर्शन अच्छा है, गंगा संरक्षण के मामले में शोर-शराबा अधिक है और जल संसाधन विकास के मामले में प्रदर्शन खराब है और सिंचाई परियोजनाओं में वह चिंताजनक रूप से पीछे हैं। अपने कार्यालय से बाहर वह रूखे हैं और बेबाक तरीके से अपनी बात कहते हैं। मार्च, 2018 में एक मीडिया द्वारा आयोजित एक कॉन्क्लेव में उन्होंने कहा, 'अतीत में मीडिया ने हमें अच्छे दिन के सवाल पर फंसा दिया था। मैंने जो कुछ कहा उसे तोड़-मरोड़कर मत प्रस्तुत करना। अच्छे दिन जैसा कुछ नहीं होता... अच्छे दिन मानने पर होते हैं, यदि आप ऐसा मानते हैं, तो वह हैं।' इसके बाद अगस्त, 2018 में जब आरक्षण की मांग पर आंदोलन तेज हुआ, तब उन्होंने कहा, 'यदि आरक्षण दे भी दिया जाए, तो नौकरियां नहीं हैं। प्रौद्योगिकी के कारण बैंकों में नौकरियां सिकुड़ गई हैं। सरकारी भर्तियां ठप हैं।' अनेक लोगों को संदेह है कि गडकरी के निशाने पर आंदोलनकारी नहीं (आरक्षण की मांग करने की वजह से) बल्कि मोदी सरकार थी (रोजगार सृजन में नाकाम रहने के कारण)।

हाल के समय में उन्होंने चतुराई से दिए गए अपने बयानों के जरिये हल्के झटके दिए। छत्तीसगढ़, मध्य प्रदेश और राजस्थान के चुनाव नतीजे गडकरी के लिए एक बड़ा अवसर बनकर आए। उन्होंने शब्दों को दबाया नहीं। उन्होंने कहा, 'सफलता के कई बाप होते हैं और विफलता अनाथ होती है, इसलिए जब सफलता मिलती है तो उसका श्रेय लेने के लिए दौड़ शुरू हो जाएगी और विफलता मिलने पर लोग एक दूसरे के ऊपर उंगली उठाना शुरू कर देंगे। नेतृत्व में प्रवृत्ति होनी चाहिए कि वह विफलता और नाकामियों की जिम्मेदारी भी ले। संगठन के प्रति नेतृत्व की वफादारी तब तक साबित नहीं होगी, जब तक कि वह हार की जिम्मेदारी न ले।'

इस वर्ष गणतंत्र दिवस के मौके पर वह कहीं अधिक मुखर थे। उन्होंने कहा, 'लोग ऐसे नेताओं को पसंद करते हैं जो उन्हें सपने दिखाएं। लेकिन यदि ये सपने पूरे नहीं होते तो जनता ऐसे नेताओं की पिटाई भी करती है।'

चुनौतियों से मुकाबले को तैयार

इसमें किसी को संदेह नहीं कि उनके निशाने पर नरेंद्र मोदी थे। यदि भाजपा को पूर्ण बहुमत नहीं मिलता या फिर वह सरकार बनाने में नाकाम रहती है, तो माना जाता है कि गडकरी पार्टी में मोदी के नेतृत्व को चुनौती देंगे।

इससे पहले गडकरी ने परोक्ष रूप से भाजपा अध्यक्ष अमित शाह को निशाने पर लिया था। 24 दिसंबर, 2018 को आईबी एन्डॉवमेंट लेक्चर में गडकरी ने कहा, 'यदि मैं पार्टी का अध्यक्ष हूं और मेरे सांसद तथा विधायक अच्छा प्रदर्शन नहीं कर रहे हैं, तो इसके लिए कौन जिम्मेदार होगा? मैं।' इसी समारोह में उन्होंने प्रधानमंत्री के समक्ष भी चुनौती पेश की : 'सहिष्णुता भारतीय व्यवस्था की सबसे बड़ी संपत्ति है। आप सिर्फ इसलिए चुनाव नहीं जीत सकते कि आप अच्छा बोलते हैं...आप विद्वान हो सकते हैं, लेकिन लोग आपको वोट नहीं देंगे। यदि कोई सोचता है कि वह सब जानता है, तो यह भूल है- लोगों को नकली प्रचार से बचना चाहिए।'

गडकरी ने वे सारी बातें कह दीं, जो भाजपा के भीतर कोई असंतुष्ट कहता या विपक्ष का कोई नेता कहेगा। उन्होंने परोक्ष रूप से प्रधानमंत्री को विफल सपनों का सौदागर कहा और उन्हें इस बात के लिए आड़े हाथों लिया कि उनमें हार की जिम्मेदारी लेने की प्रवृत्ति नहीं है; उन्होंने प्रधानमंत्री पर असहिष्णु होने और नकली प्रचार में लिप्त होने के आरोप लगाए। वास्तव में कैबिनेट के एक सहयोगी की ओर से यह कठोर शब्द हैं!

घबराया हुआ नेतृत्व

इन मुखर अभिव्यक्तियों के बावजूद भाजपा नेतृत्व ने सार्वजनिक तौर पर एक शब्द तक नहीं कहा। आरएसएस ने भी गडकरी को फटकार नहीं लगाई। संभवतः हर कोई असमंजस में है और स्पष्ट नहीं है कि हालात को कैसे नियंत्रित करना चाहिए। मुझे संदेह है कि पार्टी नेतृत्व इसलिए कार्रवाई करने में झिझक रहा है, क्योंकि उसे पता है कि ऐसे और अनेक नेता हैं, खासतौर से छत्तीसगढ़, मध्य प्रदेश, राजस्थान और उत्तर प्रदेश से संबंध रखने वाले सांसद, जिन्हें लोकसभा के नतीजों और अपने खुद के भविष्य को लेकर आशंकाएं हैं। 2014 में भाजपा और उत्तर प्रदेश के उनके सहयोगी अपना दल ने इन चार राज्यों की 145 में से 135 सीटें जीती थीं। किसी भी तरह का आकलन कर लें तो भाजपा इन 135 सीटों में से 80 सीटें गंवा सकती है। गडकरी और उनके समर्थक ऐसे नतीजे की अपेक्षा करना चाहेंगे। रोजाना फुसफुसाहट तेज होती जा रही है और गडकरी और उनके समर्थक, इससे खुश हो सकते हैं!

बहुत से लोग (इनमें सबसे नए हैं रामविलास पासवान) अंदाजा लगा रहे हैं कि भाजपा का आंकड़ा 2014 के 282 सीटों से नीचे हो सकता है। यह गिरावट जितनी तेज होती जाएगी आप निश्चिंत हो सकते हैं कि इससे गडकरी चमकते जाएंगे!

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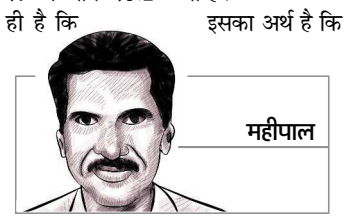
जिसकी संख्या भारी, उसकी कम हिस्सेदारी

बेरोजगारी की समस्या का एक मुख्य कारण यह है कि कृषि क्षेत्र की भागीदारी राष्ट्रीय आय में घटती जा रही है, लेकिन उस गति से इस क्षेत्र पर आधारित कार्यरत जनसंख्या की भागीदारी उतनी कम नहीं हो रही है, जितनी होनी चाहिए।

आजाद भारत में 1951-52 से लेकर 2016-17 के बीच औद्योगिक क्षेत्र की औसत वृद्धि दर 6.1 प्रतिशत रही और सेवा क्षेत्र की 6.2 प्रतिशत, जबकि खेती की औसत वृद्धि दर मात्र 2.9 प्रतिशत ही रही। इसका नतीजा यह हुआ कि कृषि क्षेत्र की सकल घरेलू उत्पाद (जीडीपी) में हिस्सेदारी, जो 1950-51 में 53 प्रतिशत से भी अधिक थी, वह 2016-17 में मात्र 15.2 प्रतिशत रह गई। यह स्वाभाविक ही है कि जैसे-जैसे देश की अर्थव्यवस्था तरक्की करती जाती है, कृषि क्षेत्र का राष्ट्रीय आय में हिस्सा कम होता जाता है। अगर इसकी तुलना कुछ विकसित देशों से करें, तो पाते हैं कि दक्षिण कोरिया में कृषि की राष्ट्रीय आय में भागीदारी दो प्रतिशत है, फ्रांस में 1.5 प्रतिशत है, जापान एवं अमेरिका में मात्र एक प्रतिशत ही है, और इंग्लैंड में मात्र 0.5 प्रतिशत ही है। हमारे यहां इन देशों की तुलना में कृषि की भागीदारी राष्ट्रीय आय में ज्यादा है।



महीपाल

इसी तथ्य से जुड़ी बात जो अधिक महत्वपूर्ण है, वह यह कि यह क्षेत्र कितनी जनसंख्या को रोजगार प्रदान कर रहा है। इस दृष्टिकोण से देखते हैं, तो पाते हैं कि भारत में लगभग 45 प्रतिशत जनसंख्या को कृषि-क्षेत्र रोजगार प्रदान करता है। जबकि विकसित देशों में यह भागीदारी दक्षिण कोरिया में पांच प्रतिशत, जापान में तीन प्रतिशत एवं फ्रांस में दो प्रतिशत है।

बेरोजगारी की समस्या का एक मुख्य कारण यह है कि कृषि क्षेत्र की भागीदारी राष्ट्रीय आय में घटती जा रही है, लेकिन उस गति से इस क्षेत्र पर आधारित कार्यरत जनसंख्या की भागीदारी उतनी कम नहीं हो रही है, जितनी होनी चाहिए। यहां एक महत्वपूर्ण बात यह भी है कि कृषि क्षेत्र में लगी जनसंख्या पूर्ण रूप से रोजगार रहित नहीं है। इसका संबंध 'छिपी बेरोजगारी' से है।

इसका अर्थ है कि एक साल के अंतर्गत जितने दिन संपूर्ण रोजगार के लिए कार्य करना चाहिए, उससे कम दिन काम मिलता है। लेकिन वे कृषि के कार्य को छोड़ भी नहीं सकते, क्योंकि अगर वे कृषि से अलग हो जाते हैं, तो कृषि-उत्पादन गिरेगा। इसलिए अगर यों कहें कि देश में बेरोजगारी तो है ही, लेकिन उससे भी अधिक समस्या 'छिपी बेरोजगारी' की है, तो कहीं अधिक स्पष्ट होगा। मतलब जो कार्य कर रहे हैं, उसमें उन्हें या तो उचित मजदूरी या वेतन नहीं मिलता या उन्हें कम समय के लिए रोजगार मिलता है।

वर्तमान में देश की जनसंख्या लगभग 132 करोड़ है। जिनमें लगभग 14.5 करोड़ युवा बेरोजगार हैं। 'श्रम-ब्यूरो' का ताजा सर्वेक्षण बताता है कि पिछले चार सालों में बेरोजगारी ने पिछले सारे रिकॉर्ड तोड़ दिए हैं। निर्माण, टेलीकॉम, ऑटोमोबाइल एवं एयरलाइन्स क्षेत्रों में श्रमिकों की छंटनी हुई है।

भूमिहीन मजदूरों की स्थिति भी गंभीर समस्या बनती जा रही है। राष्ट्रीय प्रतिदर्श सर्वेक्षण कार्यालय के 70वें

दौर के अनुसार वर्तमान में 58 प्रतिशत से अधिक भूमिहीन मजदूर दलित समाज से हैं, 47 प्रतिशत जनजाति समाज से हैं और 41 प्रतिशत ओबीसी से हैं। अगर देश में शिक्षा, सुरक्षा, रोजगार एवं चिकित्सा की जरूरत है, तो वह इन्हीं वर्गों को है। देश में 86 प्रतिशत छोटी कृषि जोतों में कार्यरत सीमांत कृषकों की स्थिति भी बेहतर नहीं है।

अभी हाल में राष्ट्रीय समग्र विकास संघ के द्वारा 'बेरोजगार युवा, एवं असंगठित श्रमिकों की समस्या एवं समाधान पर हुए एक सेमिनार में जाने का मौका मिला। इसमें बताया गया कि ऑक्सफेम की एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार एक प्रतिशत पूंजीपतियों के पास देश की 48 प्रतिशत संपत्ति थी, जो पिछले चार वर्षों में बढ़कर 73 प्रतिशत हो गई है। यह अजूबा नहीं तो क्या है।

सरकारी नौकरियों में कटौती होती जा रही है। प्रोफेसर रवि श्रीवास्तव ने उपरोक्त सेमिनार में बताया कि यह बड़ी विडंबना है कि वैसे तो संगठित क्षेत्र बढ़ता जा रहा है, लेकिन इसमें बड़ी मात्रा में नौकरियां असंगठित हैं, क्योंकि लगभग 45 प्रतिशत नौकरियां ठेका-प्रणाली से दी जाती हैं। देश से जो निर्यात हो रहा है, वह पूंजीगत उद्योगों से हो रहा है, जिन उद्योगों में श्रम अधिक मात्रा में है उनसे विभिन्न वस्तुओं का निर्यात कम है। अगर रोजगार को एक पिरामिड की तरह से देखें, तो सामने आता है कि शीर्ष पर उच्च जातियों का वर्चस्व है और जैसे-जैसे नीचे की ओर आते हैं, तो संख्या दलित, आदिवासी एवं पिछड़ों की बढ़ जाती है। अगर इस तथ्य को सरकारी नौकरियों की स्थिति से देखें, तो बात स्पष्ट हो जाएगी। उदाहरण के लिए, ग्रेड 'ए' श्रेणी की नौकरियों में अनुसूचित जाति की भागीदारी 11.6 प्रतिशत है, जबकि उनकी आबादी है 16.6 प्रतिशत। अनुसूचित जनजाति जिनकी भागीदारी इस श्रेणी में मात्र 4-5 प्रतिशत ही है, आबादी है 8.6 प्रतिशत। ओबीसी की भागीदारी मात्र 8.4 प्रतिशत है, जबकि उनकी जनसंख्या देश की कुल आबादी का 52.1 प्रतिशत है। सरकारी नौकरियों की 'डी' श्रेणी में (जिसमें सफाई-कर्मी भी शामिल हैं) अनुसूचित जाति की भागीदारी 17.2 प्रतिशत, आदिवासियों की 7.2 प्रतिशत व ओबीसी की भागीदारी 14.1 प्रतिशत है। जबकि अगड़ी जातियों की संख्या इस श्रेणी में 61.6 प्रतिशत है। दूसरा तथ्य यह सामने आता है कि अनुसूचित जाति की वर्ग 'डी' में भागीदारी ही उनकी जनसंख्या से अधिक है अन्य किसी भी श्रेणी में उनकी भागीदारी जनसंख्या से कम है।

स्पष्ट है कि समाज में एक खास वर्ग को अधिक लाभ मिल रहा है, जबकि उसकी जनसंख्या भी कम है। जबकि समाज का एक बड़ा वर्ग जिसकी जनसंख्या 80 प्रतिशत के आसपास है, उसको जितना मिलना चाहिए वह नहीं मिल रहा है।

(लेखक भारतीय आर्थिक सेवा के पूर्व अधिकारी हैं।)

दूसरी नज़र

■ पी चिदंबरम

गडकरी होने का अर्थ

नितिन गडकरी एक अलग किस्म के राजनेता हैं। खुद स्वीकार कर चुके हैं कि वे खाने के शौकीन हैं। सज-धज में रहते हैं और लगता है कि जीवन का आनंद ले रहे हैं। उन्हें सार्वजनिक कार्यक्रमों को संबोधित करने में मजा आता है और जब बोलते हैं तो ऐसा लगता है जैसे दुनिया में किसी चीज की फिक्र नहीं है उन्हें।

इसके साथ ही वे एक स्वयंसेवक भी हैं। माना जाता है कि वे आरएसएस के प्रिय हैं। अपने निर्वाचन क्षेत्र, नागपुर (महाराष्ट्र) का पूरा खयाल रखते हैं और आरएसएस, अपने पार्टी नेताओं और कार्यकर्ताओं को भी खुश रखते हैं।

गडकरी और देवेंद्र फडणवीस दोनों ही नागपुर के हैं और उनके समर्थक उसी क्षेत्र, उसी राजनीतिक आधार, नेताओं और कार्यकर्ताओं से आते हैं। महाराष्ट्र में चर्चा है कि गडकरी महाराष्ट्र का मुख्यमंत्री बनना चाहते थे, लेकिन नरेंद्र मोदी ने उनके मंसूबों को विफल कर दिया। मोदी ने अपने निष्ठावान देवेंद्र फडणवीस को चुना। समझा गया कि गडकरी की महत्त्वाकांक्षाओं, अगर कोई हो तो, को काबू में रखने के लिए यह एक चतुराई भरा कदम था। लेकिन किसी के काबू न आने वाले गडकरी ने फिर भी तरीके खोज लिए और अपने लिए रास्ता बना लिया।

गडकरी उवाच

गडकरी को अपने मंत्रालयों- राजमार्ग और सड़क परिवहन, जल संसाधन, नदी विकास और गंगा शुद्धिकरण- पर पूरी तरह ध्यान केंद्रित रखने वाला माना जाता है। मंत्री के रूप में उनके प्रदर्शन का रिकार्ड मिला-जुला रहा है। राजमार्गों के निर्माण में बढ़िया, गंगा शुद्धिकरण के नाम पर प्रचार, जल संसाधन विकास में आशा से कम, और सिंचाई परियोजनाओं में खेदजनक रूप से पीछे।

अपने दफ्तर के बाहर, बोल-चाल में वे एकदम बेबाक और स्पष्टवादी हैं। मार्च, 2018 में, मीडिया की ओर से आयोजित एक कॉनक्लेव में उन्होंने कहा, 'अतीत में कई बार अच्छे दिन को लेकर मीडिया हमें सवालों के जाल में फंसा चुका है। मैंने क्या कहा, कृपया उसकी गलत व्याख्या न करें। यहां अच्छे दिन जैसी कोई बात नहीं है... अच्छे दिन एक विश्वास है, अगर आपको भरोसा है तो यह है।' फिर अगस्त 2018 में जब आरक्षण की मांग को लेकर आंदोलन सिर उठा रहा था, उन्होंने कहा, 'आरक्षण दे भी दें, लेकिन नौकरियां तो हैं नहीं। तकनीक के कारण बैंकों में नौकरियों के अवसर घट गए हैं, सरकारी भर्तियां ठंडे बस्ते में हैं।' बहुत से लोगों को शुबहा हुआ कि गडकरी के निशाने पर आंदोलनकारी (आरक्षण की मांग करने वाले) नहीं, बल्कि रोजगार सृजन में विफल मोदी सरकार थी।

हाल में अपने चतुराई से दिए गए बयानों से वे छोटे-मोटे बवंडर खड़े करते रहे हैं। छत्तीसगढ़, मध्य प्रदेश और राजस्थान के चुनाव नतीजों ने उन्हें एक सुनहरा मौका उपलब्ध कराया। उन्होंने अपनी बात रखने में कोताही नहीं की। उन्होंने कहा, 'सफलता के बहुत से बाप हैं, लेकिन विफलता हमेशा लावारिस होती है, और जब सफलता थी तो इसका श्रेय लेने की होड़ थी, लेकिन विफलता की स्थिति में लोग एक-दूसरे पर उंगली उठाना शुरू कर देते हैं। नेतृत्व को अपनी हार और विफलता स्वीकार करना भी आना चाहिए। संगठन के प्रति नेतृत्व की निष्ठा तब तक साबित नहीं होगी जब तक कि वह हार के लिए अपनी जिम्मेदारी स्वीकार नहीं करता।'

गणतंत्र दिवस, 2019 को वे और भी मुखर थे : 'जनता उन राजनीतिक नेताओं को पसंद करती है, जो उन्हें सपने दिखाते हैं। लेकिन अगर ये सपने पूरे नहीं हुए तो जनता इन नेताओं की पिटाई भी करेगी।'

चुनौती की तैयारी

किसी के भी दिमाग में इस बात को लेकर संशय नहीं था कि निशाने पर मोदी थे। अगर भाजपा को पूर्ण बहुमत नहीं मिला या सरकार बनाने में खुद को अक्षम पाती है, तो ऐसा माना जाता है कि उस स्थिति में गडकरी पार्टी में नेतृत्व के लिए मोदी को चुनौती देंगे।

इससे पहले गडकरी इशारों में ही भाजपा अध्यक्ष अमित शाह को भी लपेट चुके हैं। चौबीस दिसंबर, 2018 को आइबी इंडोमेंट लेक्चर में गडकरी ने कहा, अगर मैं पार्टी अध्यक्ष हूं और मेरे सांसदों, विधायकों का प्रदर्शन अच्छा नहीं है, तो कौन जिम्मेदार है? मैं हूं।' उसी कार्यक्रम में उन्होंने एक गुगली प्रधानमंत्री की ओर भी फेंकी : सहिष्णुता भारतीय व्यवस्था की सबसे बड़ी संपदा है। सिर्फ अच्छा भाषण देने से आप चुनाव नहीं जीत सकते... आप विद्वान हो सकते हैं, लेकिन लोग आपको वोट नहीं देंगे। जो यह समझता है कि वह सर्वज्ञ है, गलती कर रहा है- लोगों को कृत्रिम मार्केटिंग से परहेज करना चाहिए।

गडकरी वे सारी बातें कह चुके हैं, जो भाजपा का एक असंतुष्ट कह सकता है और जिसे सारे विपक्षी नेता कहेंगे। वे परोक्ष रूप से लगभग प्रधानमंत्री को सपनों का नाकाम सौदागर करार दे चुके हैं और हार की जिम्मेदारी लेने की उनकी अनिच्छा के लिए झिड़की भी दे चुके हैं; वे प्रधानमंत्री पर असहिष्णुता और कृत्रिम मार्केटिंग में लिप्त होने का आरोप भी लगा चुके हैं। निस्संदेह, एक मंत्रिमंडलीय सहयोगी की ओर से ये काफी सख्त अल्फाज हैं।

भौंचक्का नेतृत्व

इन तमाम बयानों के बावजूद भाजपा नेतृत्व ने सार्वजनिक रूप से एक शब्द भी नहीं कहा है। आरएसएस ने भी गडकरी को फटकार नहीं लगाई है। संभवतः वे चकराए हुए हैं और उन्हें सूझ नहीं रहा कि स्थिति को कैसे संभाला जाए। मुझे शक है कि किसी कार्रवाई को लेकर उनकी झिझक इसलिए भी है कि पार्टी नेतृत्व जानता है कि गडकरी जैसे और भी नेता हैं- खासतौर से छत्तीसगढ़, मध्य प्रदेश, राजस्थान और उत्तर प्रदेश के सांसद- जो लोकसभा चुनावों के नतीजों और अपने राजनीतिक भविष्य के प्रति आशंकित हैं। 2014 में भाजपा और उत्तर प्रदेश में इसके सहयोगी (अपना दल) ने इन चार राज्यों में दांव पर लगी 145 में से 135 सीटें जीती थी। किसी भी गुणा-भाग के हिसाब से इस बार भाजपा इन 135 से 80 सीटें गंवाने के कगार पर है। गडकरी और उनके समर्थकों को शिद्दत से बस इसी नतीजे का इंतजार है। इसकी चर्चाएं रोजाना तीव्रतर हो रही हैं और गडकरी एवं उनके उत्साही समर्थकों के कानों में मिसरी घोल रही हैं!

और भी ऐसी आवाजें उठने लगी हैं (नवीनतम रामविलास पासवान) जो भविष्यवाणी कर रही हैं कि चुनावों में भाजपा की सीटों की संख्या 282 से नीचे आने वाली हैं। अब जब, यह फिसलन जारी है, तो आप आश्वस्त हो सकते हैं कि इसी के साथ गडकरी के श्रीमुख से निकले बयानों की पुनरावृत्ति भी बढ़ेगी!

विषमता की जड़ें

नरपत दान चारण

भारत के संदर्भ में ऑक्सफेम की ताजा सर्वेक्षण रिपोर्ट में बताया गया है कि 2018 में देश के शीर्ष एक प्रतिशत अमीरों की संपत्ति में उनतालीस फीसद का इजाफा हुआ है, वहीं पचास फीसद गरीब आबादी की संपत्ति में महज तीन फीसद की बढ़ोतरी हुई। पिछले साल भारतीय अरबपतियों की संपत्ति प्रति दिन 2200 करोड़ रुपए बढ़ी। वहीं देश की 77.4 फीसद संपत्ति पर दस फीसद अमीर लोग काबिज हैं। रिपोर्ट में यह भी बताया गया है कि भारत में रहने वाले 13.6 करोड़ लोग 2004 से कर्जदार बने हुए हैं। गौरतलब तथ्य यह भी सामने आया है कि 2018 में अठारह नए अरबपति बने, इस तरह अब देश में कुल अरबपतियों की संख्या एक सौ उन्नीस हो गई है, जिनकी संपत्ति पहली बार बढ़ कर चार सौ अरब डॉलर के स्तर को पार कर गई है। ऑक्सफेम ने अनुमान लगाया है कि 2018 से 2022 के बीच भारत में रोजाना सत्तर नए करोड़पति बनेंगे। इस सर्वेक्षण से इस बात का पता चलता है कि सरकारों द्वारा स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा जैसी सार्वजनिक सेवाओं का कम वित्तपोषण करके, अमीरों पर कम कर लगा कर तथा कर चोरी रोकने के पुख्ता इंतजाम न कर पाने से असमानता बढ़ रही है।

इस रिपोर्ट में खास और चिंताजनक बात यह बताई गई है कि इस आर्थिक असमानता में सबसे ज्यादा महिलाएं प्रभावित हो रही हैं। इस सर्वेक्षण से यह स्पष्ट होता है देश में अमीर और गरीब के बीच असमानता लगातार कायम है। गौरतलब है कि विकास की मौजूदा प्रक्रिया के कारण एक तबके के पास हर तरह की विलासिता के लिए पर्याप्त धन उपलब्ध है और दूसरी तरफ गरीब लोगों की बुनियादी आवश्यकताओं की पूर्ति नहीं हो पा रही है। गरीबी उन्मूलन के प्रयास तो हो रहे हैं, मगर वह नाकाफी है। तभी तो एक वर्ष में गरीबों की आय में महज तीन फीसद की वृद्धि दर्ज की गई है। यह चिंताजनक है।

मुद्दा

> देश की गरीब आबादी को आय के सम्मानजनक स्तर तक लाना ही होगा। गरीबी उन्मूलन के लिए खाका बना कर नई कार्ययोजना को त्वरित रूप से क्रियान्वित किए जाने की जरूरत है, ताकि फासले को पाटा जा सके।

देखने में आ रहा है कि आज वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था के जिस उदारीकरण और निजीकरण के समर्थक मॉडल को अपनाया गया है वह अमीर और गरीब की खाई को पाटने के बजाय और अधिक चौड़ा कर रहा है। पिछले सालों के रिकॉर्ड को देखने पर नजर आता है कि देश में दस फीसद पूंजीपति लोगों की आय में कई गुना वृद्धि हुई है, जबकि दूसरी ओर दस फीसद आम लोगों की आय में कोई खास इजाफा नहीं हुआ है। घरेलू उत्पाद में खरबपतियों की संख्या में इजाफा हो रहा है, वहीं कृषि में जीडीपी का स्तर घट रहा है। एक तरह से विकास दर से संबंध उद्योगपतियों और कारोबारियों तक ही सीमित हो रहा है। आवश्यकता समावेशी विकास की अवधारणा पर ध्यान केंद्रित करने की है, मगर धरातल पर असमानता है।

विकास का पैमाना आर्थिक और सामाजिक समानता कायम करने वाला और गरीबों के जीवन स्तर को तीव्र गति से ऊंचा उठाने वाला होना चाहिए। बड़ी आबादी के पास आय के साधन नहीं हैं, अर्थतंत्र में यह बदलाव देश की गरीब आबादी के लिए नकारात्मक पहलू है। अब सवाल है कि क्या विकास का यह पैमाना उचित है, जो देश को अमीर-गरीब के साथ ही कृषि-उद्योग और गांव-शहर के बीच बांट कर विषमता को बढ़ाने का काम कर रहा है। आर्थिक विकास की वर्तमान प्रक्रिया क्या इस दशा में परिवर्तन लाने में सहायक हो पाएगी। हमारी वर्तमान विकास नीति का लक्ष्य और दर्शन क्या है? यह भी स्पष्ट होना चाहिए। जो सारे आर्थिक विशेषाधिकार मेट्रो सिटी के एक खास पूंजीपति तबके के पास ही कायम है, वह गैरकानूनी आय और कालेधन की समांतर अर्थव्यवस्था की भी उपज है। गरीबी बढ़ने का यह भी एक प्रमुख कारण है।

आर्थिक असमानता की वजह से आम लोगों के जीवन स्तर में कमी के साथ ही कई और समस्याएं जन्म लेती हैं, जैसे तेजी से बढ़ती आर्थिक असमानता बड़े पैमाने पर कुंठा को जन्म देती है। समाज के आर्थिक रूप से निचले स्तर पर आजीविका के लिए संघर्षरत किसी व्यक्ति के लिए नैतिकता और ईमानदारी अपना मूल्य खो देती है। यानी इससे सामाजिक असमानता भी जन्म लेती है, जो टकराव का कारण बनती है। ध्यान देना होगा कि चंद हाथों में सिमटी समृद्धि की वजह से देश का एक बड़ा वंचित तबका अमानवीयता से शून्य अपसंस्कृति का शिकार हो रहा है। एक राष्ट्र में उच्च और निम्न स्तर के लोगों के दो भाग एक तरह से राष्ट्र का आंतरिक आर्थिक विभाजन है। देश का एक बड़ा तबका जो अकुशल है, जिसे शिक्षा और तकनीक का ज्ञान नहीं है, वही गरीब है। अगर इनके हाथों में गृह उद्योग और लघु ग्रामीण उद्योग दिए जाएं तभी ये आगे बढ़ेंगे। लेकिन बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनियों ने अपने उत्पादों का जाल छोटे-छोटे कस्बों तक फैला रखा है, जो गरीबों के पेट पर लात मारने जैसा है, क्योंकि इससे कुटीर और लघु उद्योग की वस्तुओं की बिक्री नहीं हो पाती।

गरीबों को हुनर और काम देने के साथ ही उनके समग्र जीवन स्तर को ऊपर उठाने का प्रयास होना चाहिए। कर्ज माफी और मुफ्त सुविधाएं देना गरीबी को चिरस्थायी बना कर उनका राजनीतिक उपयोग करने की रणनीति मात्र है। बढ़ते पूंजीवाद के कारण नव-उदारवादी नीतियों तथा खुदरा क्षेत्र में विदेशी निवेश की नीतियां गरीबों के लिए अहितकारी साबित हुई हैं। गरीबों की कीमत पर बढ़ती अमीरी गरीबी निवारण के मार्ग में बहुत बड़ी बाधा बन गई है। आधुनिक आर्थिक अवधारणा विषमता को बढ़ने से रोकने में सफल नहीं हो पाई है। गरीबी नियंत्रण के लिए सरकार को कुछ त्वरित कदम उठाने की जरूरत है, जैसे ग्रामीण अर्थव्यस्था की मजबूती के लिए, पशुपालन और कृषि में तकनीकी सुधार के साथ सुविधाएं और प्रोत्साहन देना होगा। स्वरोजगार के अवसरों में वृद्धि की जानी चाहिए। गांवों को स्वरोजगार केंद्र के रूप में विकसित करने की आवश्यकता है। अधिक से अधिक महिलाओं को स्वरोजगार के अवसर उपलब्ध कराने होंगे। व्यापक सामाजिक सुरक्षा योजनाएं बनाई जानी चाहिए। साधनों के निजी स्वामित्व, आय और साधनों के असमान वितरण और प्रयोग पर नियंत्रण लगाया जाना चाहिए। अमीरों की पूंजीवादी नीतियों में बदलाव करके उसे वंचित लोगों के जीवनस्तर को ऊंचा उठाने वाली जनकल्याणकारी योजनाओं के लिए उपयोग किया जाना चाहिए। भारत में कंपनियों के शीर्ष एक्जीक्यूटिव का वेतन करोड़ों में है, वहीं ग्रामीण गरीबों के पास श्रम और आय की दिनों दिन कमी होती जा रही है। इस समस्या के समाधान के लिए ग्रामीण भारत के विकास को मुख्यधारा से जोड़े जाने की जरूरत है।

अब कई अर्थशास्त्री यह मानने लगे हैं कि गांधीजी द्वारा बताए गए मार्ग को छोड़ कर देश ने बड़ी गलती की है, जिसका खमियाजा गरीबी के साथ आज हम भुगत रहे हैं। गांधीजी का मानना था कि कृषि विकास हमारी योजनाओं का मुख्य आधार होना चाहिए, जिसकी बुनियाद पर गृह उद्योग तथा ग्रामोद्योग की रूपरेखा गांवों के विकास के लिए बनानी चाहिए। आज कृषि और गृह उद्योग दोनों हाशिए पर हैं। अमीरों को भी गांधी दर्शन सादगी और भौतिक आवश्यकताओं पर नियंत्रण का मार्ग दिखाता है, जो गरीबों के कल्याण के लिए भी उपयोगी है। लोकतंत्र विभिन्न वर्गों के लोगों के भौतिक, आर्थिक, सामाजिक और आध्यात्मिक संसाधनों को सार्वजनिक हित में लगाने की कला है। अब देश की गरीब आबादी को आय के सम्मानजनक स्तर तक लाना ही होगा। गरीबी उन्मूलन के लिए खाका बना कर नई कार्ययोजना को त्वरित रूप से क्रियान्वित किए जाने की जरूरत है, ताकि फासले को पाटा जा सके।

गरीबी बांटने की परंपरा

कभी वे दिन थे, जब कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष इतनी अजीब, इतनी रहस्यमयी बातें किया करते थे कि हम राजनीतिक पंडित विश्लेषण कर ही नहीं पाते थे। याद है, जब उन्होंने दलितों को नसीहत दी थी कि उनको आगे अगर बढ़ना है, तो उनको वृहस्पति ग्रह की रफ्तार से चलना होगा! याद है, जब उन्होंने कहा था कि भारत देश नहीं है, मधुमक्खियों का छत्ता है! इस बात को हम तो समझ नहीं पाए, लेकिन नरेंद्र मोदी समझ गए कि यह ऐसा पत्ता फेंका है राहुल गांधी ने, जो 2014 के आम चुनावों में बहुत काम आएगा। सो, 'शहजादे' का मजाक जब उड़ाया करते थे चुनाव अभियान में तो हमेशा याद दिलाते थे कि 'जिस भारत को हम माता समझ कर पूजते हैं, उसको शहजादे मधुमक्खियों का छत्ता समझते हैं।' फिर जब राहुलजी ने कहा कि गरीबी एक मानसिक अवस्था है, तो इसको मोदी ने तुरुप का पत्ता बनाया 2014 में। राजनीतिक पंडितों के लिए कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष का यह वक्तव्य इतना रहसमय था कि इसका विश्लेषण करने की तकलीफ ही नहीं किसी ने उठाई।

वक़्त की नब्ज़

■ तवलीन सिंह

> अच्छा हुआ कि आने वाले आम चुनावों से पहले ही हम जान गए हैं कि राहुल गांधी के राजनीतिक और आर्थिक विचार क्या हैं। अच्छा हुआ कि हम समझ गए हैं कि वे अपने परिवार की गरीबी बांटने वाली परंपरा को कायम रखेंगे।

हाल में राहुलजी में परिवर्तन दिखने लगा है। अपने राजनीतिक और आर्थिक विचारों को अब स्पष्ट तरीके से बयान करने लगे हैं अपने भाषणों में। सो, राजनीतिक तौर पर उन्होंने स्पष्ट कर दिया है कि उनकी दृष्टि में भारत के दो हिस्से हैं- एक है अमीरों, धनवानों का भारत, जो नरेंद्र मोदी का भारत है और दूसरा है गरीबों, किसानों, मजदूरों का भारत, जिसकी सेवा उनकी कांग्रेस पार्टी करती आई है और भविष्य में करना चाहती है। इस दूसरे भारत को ध्यान में रख कर उन्होंने पिछले हफ्ते रायपुर की एक आमसभा में ऐलान किया नाटकीय अंदाज में कि उनकी सरकार जब बनेगी तो हर गरीब भारतीय को न्यूनतम आमदनी की गारंटी दी जाएगी, ताकि 'न कोई भूखा रहेगा हिंदुस्तान में और न कोई गरीब।'

नेक दिल हैं कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष और गरीबों के लिए दर्द भी है उनके दिल में, लेकिन उनके आर्थिक विचार इतने पुराने हैं कि उनका यह भाषण सुन कर मुझे उनकी दादी का दौर याद आया। याद आया वह 1971 वाला आम चुनाव, जिसमें उन्होंने पहली बार 'गरीबी हटाओ' का नारा बुलंद किया था। इतना लोकप्रिय हुआ यह नारा कि इंदिराजी के नाम से जुड़ गया। इसके बाद हर चुनाव में इंदिराजी याद दिलाना नहीं भूलती थीं कि 'वे कहते हैं इंदिरा हटाओ, मैं कहती हूं गरीबी हटाओ।'

गरीबी हटाने पर लाखों करोड़ रुपए खर्च हुए इंदिरा गांधी के दौर में, लेकिन गरीबी नहीं हटी। उनके बाद जब उनके बेटे राजीव प्रधानमंत्री बने, तो उन्होंने भी गरीबी हटाने का खूब प्रयास किया, लेकिन पाया उन्होंने कि गरीबों तक हर सरकारी रुपए के सिर्फ पंद्रह पैसे पहुंचते थे। यानी गरीबी हटाने के लिए जिन समाजवादी आर्थिक नीतियों को उन्होंने अपनाया था, वे तकरीबन पूरी तरह नाकाम रहीं। गरीबी तभी कम होने लगी भारत देश में, जब सोनिया गांधी ने नरसिंह राव को प्रधानमंत्री नियुक्त किया और उन्होंने लाइसेंस राज समाप्त करके निजी निवेशकों को आमंत्रित किया अर्थव्यवस्था में निवेश करने के लिए। इसके बाद ही देखने को मिले हैं भारत में संपन्नता और समृद्धि के थोड़े-बहुत आसार। गरीबी हटी तो नहीं है, लेकिन इस हद तक कम हुई कि भारत अति-गरीब श्रेणी से निकल कर आर्थिक महाशक्ति बनने के सपने देखने लगा है।

नरसिंह राव की आर्थिक दिशा लेकिन सोनिया गांधी को पसंद नहीं थी, सो जब उनकी बारी आई, उन्होंने वापस वही आर्थिक रास्ता चुना, जो इंदिरा गांधी ने चुना था गरीबी हटाने का वादा करके। इस रास्ते पर चलने वाले राजनेता लेकिन गरीबी हटाने के नाम पर अक्सर सिर्फ गरीबी बांटने का काम करते हैं, क्योंकि स्पष्ट करते हैं कि धन पैदा करने वाले लोग उनकी नजरों में खलनायक हैं, जो धन पैदा करते हैं सिर्फ अपने स्वार्थ के लिए, जनता की भलाई के लिए नहीं। सो, धन पैदा करने का काम सरकार को अपने हाथों में ही रखना चाहिए। यही है समाजवादी विचारधारा का बुनियादी सिद्धांत।

समस्या यह है इस सोच में कि सरकारें ज्यादातर पैसा खर्चना जानती हैं, पैसा बनाना नहीं। सो, गरीबी हटाने की जिन विशाल योजनाओं को तैयार करती हैं, उनके लिए पैसा हमेशा कम पड़ जाता है। जो मिलता है उसका भी काफी हिस्सा गरीबों को न जाकर सीधा जाता है भ्रष्ट अधिकारियों और राजनेताओं की जेबों में। अब जब कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष ने अपनी राजनीतिक और आर्थिक सोच स्पष्ट करने की शुरुआत की है, साफ दिखने लगा है कि वे गरीबी बांटने का काम करेंगे, उसे हटाने का नहीं। हटा कैसे सकेंगे जब उनकी नजरों में धन पैदा करने वाले जो मुट्ठी भर लोग हैं भारत में, वे सब चोर हैं जो इस देश के उस भाग में रहते हैं, जहां रहते हैं नरेंद्र मोदी के 'सूट-बूट' वाले दोस्त।

यही सूट-बूट वाले हैं राहुलजी, जिनके पैसों से आपकी न्यूनतम आमदनी वाली योजना के लिए पैसे आ सकते हैं, लेकिन इनको ही आप दुश्मन बना बैठेंगे तो आपको क्यों देंगे आपकी इस महान गरीबी हटाने वाली योजना के लिए पैसा? शायद उनके किसी करीबी दोस्त या सलाहकार ने कुछ इस तरह की बातें कही होंगी उनके भाषण के बाद, क्योंकि अगले दिन ही राहुल गांधी की तरफ से एक दूसरा वक्तव्य आया, जिसमें उन्होंने सफाई देने की कोशिश की। इसमें उन्होंने कहा कि ऐसा नहीं है कि उनको हर अमीर हिंदुस्तानी से नफरत है, नफरत उनको सिर्फ नीरव मोदी जैसे लोगों से है।

जो हो, अच्छा हुआ कि आने वाले आम चुनावों से पहले ही हम जान गए हैं कि राहुल गांधी के राजनीतिक और आर्थिक विचार क्या हैं। अच्छा हुआ कि हम समझ गए हैं कि वे अपने परिवार की गरीबी बांटने वाली परंपरा को कायम रखेंगे।

खेल पलटने का खेल

पहला 'गेम चेंजर' : प्रियंका कुलवक्ती राजनीति में आईं। पूर्वी उत्तर प्रदेश की महासचिव बनीं।

हर चैनल पर प्रियंका के पुराने फुटेज तैरने लगे। दिलजले जलने लगे।

एक एंकर : इसका मतलब राहुल फेल! जी नहीं राहुल पास!

हाय हाय 'गांधी डाइनेस्टी'! वंशवाद वंशवाद! बहन और भाई एक साथ!

चैनल बोले : प्रियंका गेम चेंजर! प्रियंका गेम चेंजर!

पहले ही क्या चमत्कार किया था, जो अब उत्तर प्रदेश में करेंगी?

कांग्रेसी प्रवक्ता : प्रियंका पूरे देश की हैं, उनमें करिश्मा है।

न्यूज अठारह : उनका चेहरा इंदिरा गांधी की याद दिलाता है। एक ओर इंदिरा का चेहरा लगा रहा, दूसरी ओर प्रियंका का चेहरा लगा रहा।

हर एंकर के लिए : प्रियंका गेम चेंजर! हाय! उत्तर प्रदेश का गणित बिगड़ा।

हर चैनल पर एक ही सवाल रहा : किसका गणित बिगाड़ेंगी प्रियंका?

एक एंकर : सपा-बसपा का गणित बिगाड़ेंगी प्रियंका!

दूसरा : भाजपा का गणित भी बिगाड़ेंगी प्रियंका!

इंडिया टुडे ने लाइन लगाई : क्या प्रियंका यंग इंडिया को साथ ला सकती हैं।

इसके बाद एक भाजपा नेता का सौंदर्यबोध आहत हुआ। वे कह उठे 'चाकलेटी चेहरा!'

एक एंकर नाराज होकर बोलीं : ये कैसा 'सेक्सिस्ट कमेंट' है। ये 'मिसोजिनस्टिक मांइडसेट' है।

इस बीच एक अंग्रेजी चैनल हिंदी में आने की कहने लगा। अंग्रेजी एंकर ठीकठाक-सी हिंदी बोलने लगा। चलो अंग्रेजी को भी हिंदी में आना पड़ा!

बलिहारी ब्रेकिंग न्यूज की कि ज्यों ही चंदा कोचर आदि पर एफआइआर की खबर आई, त्यों ही एक बड़े मंत्री द्वारा सीबीआइ को चेताने की खबर ब्रेक हुई कि सीबीआइ अधिक दुस्साहस न दिखाए और हे प्रभु, एक बंदे का तुरंत तबादला हो गया!

इसे कहते हैं : 'जाको राखे साइयां मार सके न कोय!'

इस बीच उत्तर प्रदेश के सीएम योगी जी ने ऐलान कर दिया कि अगर सुप्रीम कोर्ट नहीं कर सकता, तो हम चौबीस घंटे में मंदिर बना सकते हैं!

इसके बरक्स सुब्रमण्यम स्वामी जी ने ऐलान किया कि मंदिर का मुद्दा दस सेकंड में निपट सकता है!

इतनी सुंदर जुगलबंदी के दिनों में केंद्रीय मंत्री गडकरी जी पता नहीं क्यों अक्सर कुछ विषम स्वर लगा दिया करते हैं कि सबका जी खट्टा हो जाता है। इस बार भी लगा दिए कि नेता जब सपने दिखाते हैं, तो अच्छे लगते हैं, लेकिन पूरे नहीं होते तो जनता पिटाई भी करती है।...

बाखबर

■ सुधीश पचौरी

> मंगलवार को केंद्र सरकार ने सुप्रीम कोर्ट में अर्जी लगाई कि अयोध्या में 2.77 एकड़ विवादित स्थल को छोड़ बाकी सड़सठ एकड़ अविवादित जमीन को अधिग्रहीत करने की अनुमति दी जाए, ताकि उसे रामजन्म भूमि न्यास को दिया जा सके।...

कांग्रेस के एक नेता ने चुटकी ली कि कोई बताए कि यह कहा किसके लिए गया है?

शिवसेना ने अर्थाया कि गडकरी जी ने अधिकांश जनता की भावना व्यक्त कर दी है।

यानी कि 'समझने वाले समझ गए हैं ना समझे वो अनाड़ी हैं!'

इतनी बढ़िया धांय धांय में सिद्धरमैया एक महिला के अपमान के चक्कर में कुटते रहे। महिला सामने माइक लिए शायद देर तक बोलती रही। फिर माइक खींचने के चक्कर में महिला की साड़ी का पल्लू खिंच गया। फिर क्या था, एक चैनल ने तुरत लाइन लगाई: 'कांग्रेस इंसल्ट्स इंडिया'! 'गलती' पूर्व सीएम की, लेकिन कुटाई सीधी कांग्रेस की। जबकि अन्य एक चैनल ने दिखाया कि महिला के हाथ से माइक खींचने के चक्कर में 'अनजाने पल्लू खिंच गया'।

कि इसी बीच राहुल ने फिर एक 'गेम चेंजर' मारा। वे एक रैली में बोले कि अगर चुनाव में जीते तो सभी गरीबों को 'न्यूनतम आय की गारंटी' देंगे। चैनल बताने लगे कि हर गरीब को बारह सौ से अठारह सौ रुपए तक मासिक आय दी जाएगी।

एक चैनल ने इसे 'राहुल का सिक्सर' कहा।'

एक भाजपा प्रवक्ता कहने लगे : मैं नहीं समझता कि ये कोई गेम चेंजर हैं! राहुल झूठ बोलने के आदी हैं उनकी साख नही हैं। कांग्रेसी तो खुद भ्रष्ट हैं।...

अभिषेक मनु सिंघवी बोले : यह योजना सभी के लिए है। अगर राहुल घोषणा करते हैं तो क्या परेशानी है, आप उसके आगे देखें।...

एक अर्थशास्त्री ने पूछा : लेकिन कौन गरीब है, इसका पता कैसे लगाएंगे?

एक अन्य भाजपा प्रवक्ता ने कहा कि राहुल कोई नई बात नहीं कह रहे। पीएम ने गरीबों पर फोकस किया है। अभी डिटेल्स तो दें एमपी में किसानों को क्या दिया इन्होंने?

एक प्रो-राहुल पत्रकार कहने लगे : कांग्रेस आजकल एंजेडा सेट कर रही है। भाजपा सिर्फ प्रतिक्रिया करती है।

मंगलवार को केंद्र सरकार ने सुप्रीम कोर्ट में अर्जी लगाई कि अयोध्या में 2.77 एकड़ विवादित स्थल को छोड़ बाकी सड़सठ एकड़ अविवादित जमीन को अधिग्रहीत करने की अनुमति दी जाए, ताकि उसे रामजन्म भूमि न्यास को दिया जा सके।...

यह सप्ताह का आखिरी गेम चेंजर रहा। सुब्रह्मण्यम स्वामी ने कहा कि केंद्र सरकार का यह पॉजिटिव कदम है।

योगी जी ने इसका स्वागत किया। अयोध्या के बाबा लोगों ने इसका स्वागत किया। एक धर्म नेता ने तो एक चैनल की बातचीत में यहां तक कह दिया कि बसंत पंचमी के दिन रामलला का भव्यमंदिर बनाने की शुरुआत की जा सकती है!

Why everybody loves UBI

The Budget has promised an assured income to farmers, Rahul Gandhi a minimum income guarantee, and Sikkim a universal basic income by 2022. Back in 2016-2017, the Economic Survey said UBI was an idea whose time was ripe for discussion. As that talk picks up in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, ANKITA DWIVEDI JOHRI parses the debate, starting from India's only two pilot projects

FINANCE Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday unveiled the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi promising "assured supplemental income" to disadvantaged farmers. On January 28, Rahul Gandhi said a Congress government would provide "minimum income guarantee" to the poor. Sikkim's SDF government has assured universal basic income to its 6.10 lakh people by 2022. In more constrained terms, the Telangana govern- ment's Rythu Bandhu scheme and Odisha's KALIA also assure a fixed amount to farmers. Months to go for what would be a bitterly fought general election, basic income, which once seemed likely to remain a matter of debate — and stay in the pages of an Economic Survey — now appears a real possibility.

Eight winters ago, the first ever pilot in India to test the feasibility of a basic income programme was carried out in a West Delhi slum — prompted by complaints over a "clogged" PDS scheme. The participants had Rs 1,000 transferred to their accounts per month for 2011, to spend anyhow they liked. Soon, nine villages in Madhya Pradesh were picked for the Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfers Project, the 18-month trial the only large-scale basic income programme conducted in India.

In the first, recipients were given money in exchange for PDS. In the second, 6,000 p eo- ple (all members of a household) got money over and above the schemes. The results, in both cases, the organisers say, were "positive".

Sitting outside her two-room shanty in West Delhi's Raghubir Nagar slum, Leelaben says when she was first told she would be given Rs 1,000 per month in exchange for h er ration, she was apprehensive. "But the qual- ity of the grains at the PDS shops was so poor, I decided to go ahead," says the 67-year-old.

Leela, a widow, was one of the 100 women in the area who voluntarily opted for the 'Delhi Cash Transfer' pilot study, organised by the NGO Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). "I earn about Rs 2,500 per month. Apart from the wheat from PDS shops, with the extra Rs 1,000, I could buy sugar, oil, spices. I didn't have to stand in queues outside PDS shops or government hospitals," says the mother of 10, all of whom are married.

Also, says Leela, who now stays with one of her sons, "for the first time, I could save so me money". "I got my grandchildren enrolled in tuition classes," she beams.

SEWA Bharat Chairperson Renana Jhabvala says they approached then deputy chairman of the erstwhile Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, sometime in 2009. "We told him about a basic in- come pilot in exchange for PDS. He liked the idea and said why don't we start from Del hi."

One of the charges against the universal basic income (UBI) idea is that people would waste the money. Jhabvala says their findin gs were opposite — "Most households spent t he money well." The pilot study also found that "cash transfers did not adversely affect food security", and the basic income allowed households to "spend more on healthcare".

The Economic Survey 2016-17 that first stirred a serious UBI debate in India cited the MP study, which was also run by SEWA, wi th funding from UNICEF, and in coordination with the state government. "One of the ma jor findings of the study is a shift from wage labour to own cultivation... the study also shows that if the right amount is given as a basic income, the positive effect is dispropor- tionately higher than what the monetary value is. In other words, the emancipatory value of basic income is several times greater than its monetary value," the Survey said.

The 40-page chapter in the Survey that dealt with the issue was titled 'Universal B asic Income: A Conversation With and Within the Mahatma' — the discussion centring around whether Mahatma Gandhi would have en- dorsed UBI. It called it "a powerful idea wh ose time even if not ripe for implementation is ripe for serious discussion... It could be to the twenty first century what civil and political rights were to the twentieth."

What works

Over the years, in the face of poor alloca- tion, leakages and corruption in government schemes, the idea of a UBI has found resonance with political parties and economists. The failure to tackle poverty and unemployment has added more force to the pro-UBI argumen t.

Ramkanya (left), family in Mali Badodia village. Many villagers bought goats with what they saved from the money received. These have multiplied. *Gopal Verma*

'We thought this project would last forever'

In 2011, nine villages in Madhya Pradesh were made part of a pilot study, where villagers were given a basic, assured sum for close to 18 months. While some say it changed their lives forever, others say they worried a little less over basic needs, even if briefly

MIILIND GHATWAI

IN 2011, when villagers of Mali Badodia in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh were asked if they were ready to be part of a pilot project on unconditional transfer of money, Ramkanya Kevat refused to sign the papers. "Many of us ran away from the surveyors. We thought after giving us money, they would either take away our homes or land," recalls the 60-year-old, petting her goats.

Her village was part of the Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfers Project, a pilot project by SEWA, with funding from UNICEF.

The only such large-scale basic income project to be conducted in India, the Madhya Pradesh pilot was organised in nine villages over nearly 18 months. Twelve villages, similar in demography and income to the nine villages under the pilot study, were selected as 'control villages' — they did not receive the basic income. At the end of the pilot, the 'outcomes' of the nine villages were compared to the control villages, and the results were seen as "positive".

Back then in Mali Badodia village, a day's wage was a little more than Rs 100. Under the pilot, every adult member was given Rs 200 a month and children Rs 100 each for a year, between June 2011 and May 2012. Between July 2012 and November 2012, the amount was hiked to Rs 300 for an adult and Rs 150 for every child.

Amid the debate over Universal Basic Income, the Kevats are among the few Indians who know what an assured minimum income entails. "*Paisa mila tha* (we got the money," they all say.

Annapurna Prajapati, a volunteer from Indore, recalls that only when villagers got money regularly, were they convinced that their belongings would not be taken away.

While Kevat likes the idea of an assured income, she says she would not want UBI to replace subsidies such as ration.

"Who will give us wheat and rice at Re 1? Even now, we have to buy grains from the market because the subsidised ration doesn't last a month. We pay Rs 125 for 5 kg of wheat from the market," she says.

For Mangubai, 45, the "scheme" meant that at least during those 18 months, the family did not have to go to moneylenders, who lend at exorbitant rates — 5 per cent per month, sometimes even 10.

Bavsingh Kevat, 58, says the money helped him get treatment for his wife Lilabai, who had suffered a paralytic stroke. He had to take her to Mhow for treatment regularly. Given that the family owned less than two bigha, daily wages were the main source of income. "I don't know what I would have done if not for this extra money," he says.

Most people in Mali Badodia go in search of work to nearby places because they are either landless labourers or own small plots of land. Many of them say they used the money to buy goats, whose numbers have now multiplied. Also, it helped them overcome their inhibitions about visiting banks.

Further away, Ghodakhurd, a tribal hamlet with 120 houses that's about 50 km from Indore in Mhow tehsil, has only recently got a road. Here, between January and December 2012, each adult got Rs 300 a month and the children Rs 150.

Tulsabai Dawar gushes about the scheme, saying it changed everything for her — it helped her buy goats and then buffaloes and cows. In her backyard are nearly a dozen cattle. She not only sells milk but also the *mawa* she makes at home. Her husband Bhavarsingh, who worked as a daily wager earlier, now takes care of their cattle.

Though almost self-sufficient now, Dawar thinks the scheme, if started again, would bring more stability to her family. She claims her two sons, guest teachers in a nearby school, have not received any payments over the last few months. The family owns a television and a sewing machine.

Some months, Radhabai Dawar, in her 40s, works at a potato wafer factory nearby. "We get work only for a few months in the factory. And when we do, there is always the fear that if we don't report to work because of illness, we will be replaced. So we go even when we are ill," she says.

The family owns a couple of cattle and a few goats, and a two-bigha land on which they grow maize. While they earn Rs 6,000 a month, their monthly expenditure is around Rs 4,000, and she feels a regular extra income would be a boon. "But the PDS ration should continue. We can then use this money elsewhere," she says.

"When the scheme started we thought it would continue forever," says Shardabai Dawar, another villager.

While both Mali Badodia and Ghodakhurd are villages where SEWA works actively on projects for women, Shahawada village in Depalpur tehsil of Indore, which was also part of the pilot, knew nothing of SEWA or assured income until their volunteers approached them.

"Everyone thought something would be taken away. But once they were convinced they could only benefit from it, there was a scramble for opening bank accounts," says Ranjit Chaudhary, one of the first persons to sign up for the project.

Talking of how they were happy to get the cash, Mansingh Keshav Chaudhary, 50, says, "Farmers are always short of money, so we welcomed the money."

Unlike in Mali Badodia and Ghodakhurd, here in Shahawada, there are few claims of how the scheme "transformed" lives, yet many acknowledge that the pilot left them with some extra money to supplement their meagre income.

"It helped us pay school fees on time, buy medicines," says Radheshyam Chandel.

"The first thing farmers or the poor do when they are short of money is put off buying new clothes. That's why you see so many of us in torn clothes. That changed when we had extra money," says Narayan Chandel, another villager.

EXPLAINED

Good in theory, but will it work on the ground?

AT ONE level, the idea of UBI is simple: an unconditional, regular, periodic cash payment to all citizens, without any requirement of work, with 'universality' and 'unconditionality'. But it is these factors itself that complicate the UBI discussion, ranging from how much to give and to who all, to who will pay for it and what to take away.

Subramanian and his co-authors suggested transfer of about Rs 18,000 annually (Rs 1,500 per month) per household to cover 75 per cent of the rural population, at a total fiscal cost of about 1.3 per cent of GDP or about Rs 2.64 lakh crore, except the "demonstrably well off".

QUBRI, the paper said, would bank on the 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) to identify the rural poor.

On how they arrived at the Rs 1,500 per month figure, Subramanian says, "There is no magic number that will appeal to all. Plus, there are trade-offs because of budget constraints. We looked at various combinations of coverage, benefit per household, and fiscal costs. It seemed that a 75 per cent coverage of rural households with a transfer amounting to about 1/3rd of the current consumption of the poorest could be affordable. To qualify as 'basic' it must be a reasonable enough amount, and the 1/3rd number (higher for the poorest households) was reasonable."

Arguing that QUBRI would be better than Rythu Bandhu and KALIA, he notes that it also includes non-farm rural households. "Rythu Bandhu and KALIA, while laudable, require onerous identification requirements, land titling, proof of tenancy etc. Our proposal aims to simplify it, to identify only the relatively small portion who will not be eligible."

But, while a large part of the debate is centered around 'who gets the money' and 'how much', it has also been about who bears its fiscal burden. Subramanian's QUBRI paper proposes that the amount be shared between the Centre and states.

For QUBRI, Subramanian suggests cutting down farm subsidies and pruning Centrally sponsored schemes. "QUBRI should not be financed from RBI resources, not least because they are one-time and cannot finance a permanent QUBRI entitlement, and by the states or Centre breaching their existing fiscal commitments," the QUBRI paper says.

Subramanian adds that as per their proposal, MNREGS and PDS would stay, as would old age pensions and maternity benefits. "We have identified other schemes that might be removed, such as interest rate subsidies, price deficiency, and fertiliser subsidies."

Milan Vaishnav, Director and Senior Fellow, South Asia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, says that instead of scrapping schemes, states could be given "greater untied funds from the Centre". "Scrapping a flagship social scheme like MNREGS is a blunt instrument, when not all states will face the same requirements," he says.

But Vaishnav also points out that a "truly universal UBI" would mean "an income top-off to all households, which would do nothing to reduce inequality". "If, on the other hand, India pursues a quasi-UBI (which only targets poor households), this would have a salutary impact on inequality."

Economist Banerjee, however, says that "in the medium run, the idea would be to scrap PDS and MNREGS, but not before UBI is up and running. For that reason and others, the amount paid should probably go up over time."

Both Banerjee and Vaishnav also dismiss the argument that a guaranteed income will impact labour participation. "Our research suggests that making poor people richer does not make them lazier, if anything the opposite," says Banerjee. "And, if they refuse to clean the sewers manually because they are not so desperate, great. The government needs to be forced to upgrade these services."

The concerns

Over the years, various basic income pilots have been conducted across the US, Europe, Asia and Africa. In 2017, battling high unemployment, Finland handed out €560 (Rs 48,835) per month to 2,000 jobless people as a trial, without requiring them to work or seek employment. Last month, the government stopped it, against opposition, saying it wanted to explore alternative welfare measures, and without revealing the trial's results.

Brazil has an 'anti-poverty' programme called 'Bolsa Familia', involving a cash grant to families below a certain income level, provided they meet conditions such as overseeing their children's school attendance.

"Basic income programmes have been piloted in Canada, Finland, southern Africa, Kenya. Alaska has a great scheme in which royalties from oil are deposited in an investment fund, and every citizen receives an annual dividend. As far as I am aware, all these have been successful," says Standing.

However, Jayati Ghosh, professor of economics at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, School of Social Sciences, at Jawaharlal Nehru University, cites the example of Iran, where the government is struggling with its 'targeted subsidy plan' because of inflation. Arguing against UBI, she says, "Nobody has clarity on who will get what amount, and what happens when prices go up. Any form of UBI will only be useful when it comes on top of guaranteed Universal Basic Services (UBS), which includes health, education. In India, we are looking at UBI as a substitute to UBS. It is problematic and obscene."

Ghosh also questions Subramanian's plan of using the SECC to choose beneficiaries. "The SECC says nothing about a person's income. Also, no one has given any information on the schemes that will be scrapped for UBI."

Following the release of the Economic Survey 2016-17, former Planning Commission member Bhalchandra Mungekar wondered whether "dismantling the existing schemes would compensate for their present benefits, once these are converted into direct cash transfers". "The MDM offers hot, cooked meals to more than 150 million school children... The MNREGS gives 60 to 70 days employment annually to about 200 million unskilled persons... The dismantling of the PDS will adversely affect the bottom 50 to 60 per cent of poor consumers," he wrote in *The Indian Express*.

SEWA's Jhabvala also stresses that UBI should not depend on 'poverty-testing' for its implementation. "The core idea of UBI is universality. If we get into who is poor and who is not, the the idea will crumble," she says.

There are also concerns that the very nature of Indian politics could muddy the UBI waters. Experts argue that ahead of polls, parties might want to increase the basic income amount or re-introduce certain subsidies. "On the one side I think it would be great if the political competition focuses on giving away money rather than towards reservations and creating jobs in the Railways. On the other hand I worry that opening an efficient pipeline would encourage irresponsible promises, which will now be more credible, which will then cause problems for those who manage to over-promise and win," says Banerjee.

Standing suggests the government should begin on a small scale. "I would start with low-income rural communities, perhaps all tribal communities, and gradually roll it out further."

The UBI chapter in Economic Survey 2016-17 concluded by saying the scheme would have Gandhi's approval. "The Mahatma as astute political observer would have anxieties about UBI as being just another add-on government programme. But on balance he may have given the go-ahead to UBI."

ACROSS THE AISLE

P CHIDAMBARAM

The importance of being Mr Gadkari

MR NITIN Gadkari is an uncommon politician. By his own admission he is a foodie, he wears chic clothes and seems to enjoy life. He enjoys speaking at public functions and he speaks as if he does not have a care in the world.

At the same time, he is a *swayamsevak*. He is believed to be a favourite of the RSS. He nurses his constituency, Nagpur (Maharashtra), and keeps the RSS, his party leaders and his party workers in good humour.

Mr Gadkari and Mr Devendra Fadnavis belong to Nagpur and draw their support from the same region and the same political base of leaders and workers. The talk in Maharashtra is that Mr Gadkari wanted to be chief minister of Maharashtra but Mr Narendra Modi scuppered the plan. Mr Modi chose Mr Devendra Fadnavis, a loyalist. It was supposed to be a smart move to check Mr Gadkari's ambitions, if any. However, the irrepressible Mr Gadkari has cut loose and carved out a path for himself.

Gadkari Gems

Mr Gadkari is known for his focused attention to his portfolios — highways and road transport, water resources, river development and Ganga rejuvenation. He has a mixed record of performance as a minister. Good in highway construction, hype about Ganga rejuvenation, underperformance in water resource development and woefully behind on irrigation projects.

Outside his office, he is blunt and forthright in his utterances. In March 2018, at a media-organised conclave, he said, "Media has in the past trapped us over the question of *achche din*. Please don't misinterpret what I say. There is no such *achche din*... *Achche din* is a belief, if you believe, it is there." Again in August 2018, when the agitations for reservation were gathering strength, he said, "Even if reservation is given, there are no jobs. Jobs in banks have shrunk because of technology. Government recruitment is frozen." Many people suspected that Mr Gadkari's target was not the agitators (for demanding reservation) but the Modi government (for its failure to create jobs).

In recent times, he has been creating minor storms by his cleverly crafted statements. The election results of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan gave Mr Gadkari a great opportunity. He didn't mince words. He said, "Success has many fathers but failure is an orphan as, when there is success, there will be a race to take credit, but, in case of failure, everybody will start pointing fingers at each other. Leadership should have the *vrutti* (inclination) to own up defeat and failures. Loyalty of the leadership towards the organisation will not be proven till the time it owns up responsibility for defeat."

On Republic Day, 2019, he was more outspoken: "People like political leaders who show them dreams. But if those dreams are not fulfilled, the people will thrash these leaders."

Preparing to Challenge

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that the target was Mr Narendra Modi. If the BJP does not win an absolute majority or finds itself unable to form the government, it is believed that Mr Gadkari will challenge Mr Modi for the leadership of the party.

Earlier, Mr Gadkari had obliquely targeted Mr Amit Shah, the president of the BJP. Delivering the annual IB Endowment lecture on December 24, 2018, Mr Gadkari said, "If I am the party president and my MPs and MLAs are not doing well, then who is responsible? I am." At the same event, he threw a challenge to the prime minister as well: "Tolerance is the biggest asset of the Indian system. You can't win elections only because you speak well... you might be a *vidwan* (learned person) but people may not vote for you. One who thinks he knows everything is mistaken — people should refrain from artificial marketing."

Mr Gadkari has said all that a dissident in the BJP could say or all that an Opposition politician would say. He has virtually called the prime minister a failed dream merchant and chided him for lacking in *vrutti* to own responsibility for defeat; he has accused the prime minister of being intolerant and one who indulges in artificial marketing. Strong words indeed from a Cabinet colleague!

Leadership Flummoxed

Despite these utterances, the BJP leadership has not said a word in public. The RSS also has not rebuked Mr Gadkari. Presumably, everyone is baffled and not clear about how the situation should be handled. I suspect the hesitation to act is because the party leadership knows that there are many more leaders — especially MPs from Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh — who are apprehensive about the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections and their own political future. In 2014, the BJP and its ally in UP (Apna Dal) won 135 of the 145 seats at stake in these four states. By any calculation, the BJP is poised to lose at least 80 of those 135 seats. That is the outcome that Mr Gadkari and his supporters would devoutly wish for. The murmurs are growing louder every day and that should be music to Mr Gadkari and his merry band of followers!

More and more voices (the latest is Mr Ram Vilas Paswan) are predicting that the BJP's individual tally in the elections may slide from the 2014-high of 282. As the slide continues, you can be certain that the frequency of Gadkari gems will rise!

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@Pchidambaram_IN

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FIFTH COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

Confusion better than certainties

THERE WAS a time when Rahul Gandhi's political and economic ideas were so mysterious that they confused our finest pundits. When he spoke of the "velocity of Jupiter" to solve the Dalit question, most political pundits were bemused. When he said India was a beehive and not a country, it left us even more mystified. And, he handed Narendra Modi his trump card in the 2014 general election. Beehive is a word that translates badly into Hindi and Modi had much fun mocking him for calling "our beloved Mother India" a beehive. Recently, things have changed.

The man who the Congress party hopes will replace Narendra Modi has started articulating his economic and political ideas with startling clarity. Politically, he sees India as divided between "the rich and the poor" and charges Modi with being interested only in pleasing "15" rich Indians. It has never been clear which 15 Indians he is talking about, but this is a charge he has been making for the past four years, most memorably when he made that sneery comment about Modi's government being a "*suit-boot ki sarkar*". A government of the suited and booted.

What is now very clear is that the Congress president sees himself as a man who is against rich Indians and on the side of those who are poor. Even so, his announcement before last week's Budget, that if the Congress won in 2019, it would ensure that India implemented an economic policy that guaranteed every poor Indian a basic minimum income, was over the top. His India, he declared grandly, would become a country in which "not one person would be hungry and not one person would be poor".

As I watched him make this speech, against an opulent backdrop of marigold and jasmine streamers, memories of his grandmother's "*Garibi Hatao*" election came back. It was Indira Gandhi's defining election. She became in the popular mind the prime minister who would eradicate poverty. Other memories came back. Of elections, much after that one in 1971, in which she would assure the barefoot, hungry, desperate people who flocked to her rallies that she was their saviour. Standing among them, I would gaze with their eyes at the chopper that brought her and see that they saw her as not just their champion but as a goddess.

She never managed to "eradicate poverty" but she succeeded very well in setting up a vast infrastructure to redistribute it. There was nothing else she could have done because she despised private enterprise so much that she created a licence raj that entrusted the job of creating wealth to officials, while fining entrepreneurs who dared produce more than their quotas. With the exception of China, there is no country where officials have succeeded in creating wealth. So it was only after a prime minister who did not belong to our imperial dynasty took charge, that India stopped being a country of starving millions.

As soon as Mrs Gandhi's daughter-in-law became India's de facto prime minister, she returned to economic policies that served once more to redistribute poverty. Modi did not reverse these 'poverty alleviation' schemes, so the price Indian taxpayers pay for food security and job guarantee schemes is already beyond calculation. Add on to this astronomical bill the cost of a programme to guarantee income to the poorest Indians, and there will not be any money left to build the infrastructure that could actually make India rich. Taxpayers' money will be spent entirely on the infrastructure to redistribute poverty.

In keeping with Rahul Gandhi's economic vision, his Chief Minister in Rajasthan has already announced plans to provide a generous dole to the unemployed. Would it not be better to try and create the jobs they need? Would it not be better to build roads to villages that have none? And drinking water facilities and schools and hospitals. In the process of building this desperately needed rural infrastructure, would there not inevitably come jobs? I believe so, but then I am not only not a socialist, I take a very dismal view of socialism. I believe that it serves only to redistribute poverty while demonising those who create the wealth to make this redistribution possible.

Perhaps the Congress president would have done better not to begin articulating his economic and political ideas so clearly just before a general election. Perhaps he would have done better to just bang on about the "*chowkidar*" being a "*chor*", because then we would not have discovered that his ideas are so obsolete and unfeasible that his own party was forced to abandon them. In that brief period in which they were abandoned, India began to take baby steps towards becoming a country with the hope of prosperity, instead of being an economic basket case. What we do not need is another leader who believes in redistributing poverty.

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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Holes in the Net

Despite gloomy reports of its prospects in the 2019 elections, the BJP puts up a brave face. The party brains trust assumes that even if the NDA is well short of the halfway mark, there is a safety net because neutral parties in four states, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu, will eventually back the single-largest party. But, by unnecessarily poking its nose in Tamil Nadu politics, the BJP may have lost the support of the two main political contenders in a state which contributes 39 Lok Sabha seats. True, the DMK is now with the Congress, but by propping up the weak AIADMK government led by E K Palaniswami and O Paneerselvam, the BJP has alienated the main inheritor of Jayalalithaa's mantle, TTV Dhinakaran, who has popular support even if he doesn't have the party symbol.

Aap ki Pasand

The Congress high command has a problem convincing its party state units in Haryana, Delhi and Punjab regarding a tie-up with AAP for 2019. It fears that if it doesn't tie up, the BJP stands to benefit. This happened in the Jind Assembly by-election last week, when the Congress's Randeep Surjewala came third, behind Digvijay Chautala's new party that teamed up with AAP. The Congress's local units are reluctant for the tie-up since they fear that their clout will diminish in seat distribution. The high command, on the other hand, fears that the BJP could win all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, for example, if there is no alliance with AAP. Incidentally, in talks with potential allies in states, the Congress's position is that seat-sharing agreements cannot be based only on the party's performance in the last parliamentary polls, when its popularity was at its nadir, and that its performance in the last three parliamentary elections must be taken into account.

Proximity Pays

Many high-flyers in the Congress were eyeing the key post of general secretary in charge of organisation after Ashok Gehlot's departure to Rajasthan. But to everyone's surprise, Rahul Gandhi picked the relatively unknown K C Venugopal, an MP from Kerala, who carries some baggage. Venugopal's performance as in-charge of the Karnataka Assembly polls was lacklustre and he has faced allegations of sexual misconduct in his home state. Venugopal's strength is that he does not belong to the old-guard faction, nor is he one of the high-profile young heirs of political dynasties. But Venugopal's biggest plus point is that he was allotted a seat in the Lok Sabha right next to Rahul. Venugopal used this proximity to his advantage. He makes it a point to attend Parliament regularly and stands unobtrusively beside his party chief whenever possible.

Belated Award

When the late journalist Kuldip Nayar met Manmohan Singh for the first time, Singh, then economic adviser to the government, told him: "You deserve the Bharat Ratna". His remark was in appreciation for Nayar's work in trying to bridge the gulf between Hindus and Sikhs post-1984. However, when Singh became Prime Minister, far from recommending an award for Nayar, he never even invited him for a cup of tea during his 10-year tenure. Nayar felt that he probably did not want to risk annoying Sonia Gandhi. Ironically, Nayar was posthumously awarded the Padma Bhushan last month, though the well-known journalist had often written critically of Modi. Nayar's recollections of his meetings with Singh and other key figures of India's political history — Gandhi and Jinnah to Indira Gandhi, Vajpayee and Modi — are featured in his latest book, *On Leaders and Icons*, which will be released posthumously this week. Among the many interesting anecdotes, Nayar recounts that Sanjay Gandhi informed him after the Emergency that he had assumed his mother would not call elections for three to four decades.

Kicked Upstairs

While Priyanka Gandhi's induction as AICC general secretary in charge of eastern Uttar Pradesh was greeted with euphoria, many are puzzled by Jyotiraditya Scindia's appointment as general secretary of western UP. The Madhya Pradesh royal has little association with the region. In this strange work allotment, Congress workers are also curious to know who gets control of Awadh in central UP. Scindia's selection was perhaps an attempt to mollify him since the party could not make him president of the Madhya Pradesh unit, although he had earlier been denied the chief minister's post. The seasoned Kamal Nath, backed by the shrewd Digvijaya Singh, ensured that Scindia was totally cut off from state politics. Nath continues as MPCC chief, at least till the polls. By elevating Scindia to the same status as Priyanka, the Congress felt it could smooth Scindia's ruffled feathers.

HISTORY HEADLINE

India's story, through its Budgets

SHAJI VIKRAMAN

IN the opening note of his book A *View From the Outside: Why Good Economics Works For Everyone (2007)*, a collection of columns he wrote for *The Indian Express* between August 2002 and March 2004, former finance minister P Chidambaram noted that Budgets, which once had inviolable sanctity, had over time become a bag of tricks for governments, and the figures they contained had lost much of their meaning. And interim budgets now go beyond just spending allocations for the first four months of the new fiscal before a new government takes over.

Over the seven decades of the Republic, the presentation of the Budget has remained one of the most important events in the country's economic calendar. Unlike in Western countries that have shrunk the Budget to just a statement of annual revenues and expenditure, India, with its federal structure and wide disparities, has abided with a lengthy and complex procedure that offers a broad indication of the policy direction of the government.

Besides the expenditure and revenue budget — which is among the earliest to be printed in the captive press in the basement of North Block that houses the Finance Ministry — there is the speech of the Finance Minister, a receipts budget, and a medium-term fiscal policy statement.

Because much is at stake in the Budget, both politically and in terms of the economy, finance ministers have a series of meetings with the Prime Minister to first get a broad direction and to then discuss the major proposals, especially the ones that can be politically sensitive.

The breadth and depth of intervention differs from PM to PM. Ahead of the so-called 'Dream Budget' of February 1997, when finance minister Chidambaram went to the United Front prime minister H D Deve Gowda with his radical proposal for three tax rates — 10 per cent, 20 per cent and 30 per cent — Gowda just said, "Let's do it. Don't (be) afraid!" As Chidambaram put it later, it was a policy equivalent of slog overs in cricket — going for broke.

With the country teetering on the brink of an economic precipice, prime minister P V Narasimha Rao threw his political backing behind his finance minister's historic July 24, 1991, Budget. Manmohan Singh famously invoked Victor Hugo — "No power on Earth can stop an idea whose time has come... Let the whole world hear it loud and clear. India is now wide awake" — and announced proposals that began the unshackling of the Indian economy.

Dr Manmohan Singh giving finishing touches to the 1991 Union Budget. *Express*

As the Budget proposals for 1999-2000 were being finalised, prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee underlined to finance minister Yashwant Sinha the importance of following the principles of a rule-based, non-discretionary tax system — "*siddhant se kariye*".

A year earlier, he had advised Sinha to give priority to the rural sector and farmers, and to ensure that the Budget proposals were non-inflationary.

The ideas of the finance minister and prime minister have not always been aligned. In the Budget of 2011-12, for example, finance minister Pranab Mukherjee announced a retrospective capital gains tax on Vodafone despite serious resistance from most top government functionaries. The damage this inflicted forced Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to provide an assurance in his first Budget in July 2014 that the NDA government would not in ordinary course bring any change retrospectively, which would create a fresh liability for companies.

Budget proposals have sometimes put finance ministers in a spot. In 1998, excise duty on petrol was proposed to be raised by Re 1 in the Budget, but a miscalculation by another arm of the government led to the levying of a higher duty at the stroke of midnight when the new rates became effective. Finance minister Sinha was forced to scramble to undo the damage in Parliament.

Jaswant Singh, who succeeded Sinha as Vajpayee's finance minister, had to beat a hasty retreat after proposing a modest increase in the price of urea in his Budget proposals for 2003-04.

Sinha piloted a significant change in Budget conventions. Until 1999, the Union Budget was presented at 5 pm — a carry-over of tradition from the Raj. Sinha and his top officials felt it would be sensible to move to a morning timing, which would lead to a far more rational and informed debate on the Budget, and better analysis. Also, Sinha has said, the countless interviews that followed the presentation of the Budget would leave him exhausted late in the night. Prime minister Vajpayee, the Lok Sabha Speaker and Rajya Sabha Chairman, and all political parties quickly came on board, and on February 27, 1999, Sinha rose to present the Union Budget for 1999-2000 at 11 am.

Over the last three decades, starting with 1991-92, federal Budgets in India have reflected the rising graph of the economy. By 1997, Chidambaram could say that "Our beloved India is far stronger today than she was six years ago", and then predicting in 2004 that "this century will be India's century". In 1998, Sinha said a strong, prosperous India that was keen to deal with the world as equal partners was in the process of being built; in 2003, Jaswant Singh said there was palpable impatience in the country for progress and growth; not responding swiftly ran the risk of the world "passing us by". Last year, Arun Jaitley said India stood out among the fastest growing economies of the world, and that he was sure that "the New India which we aspire to create now will emerge".

All these pronouncements by successive finance ministers in their Budget speeches will be put to test in the years to come.

OUT OF MY MIND

MEGHNAD DESAI

Income guarantees

RAHUL GANDHI has proposed a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG). It is the first serious economic proposal he has made since he became president of the party. Until now, he has only made personal attacks on the Prime Minister. But MIG is not new. The Congress has always proposed some scheme to make poverty tolerable rather than remove it. There is a saying: "Don't give a hungry man fish. Give him a fishing rod." The Congress has never subscribed to that. The idea of giving a bit more to the poor has been the perennial policy of the Congress. It amounts not to *Garibi Hatao* but *Garibi Nibhao*. It also gives the recipients perverse incentive to stay poor. In this, it is similar to loan waivers to farmers, which give them an incentive not to repay loans. In 2018, loan waivers cost Rs 2,23,638 crore for 34 lakh farmers, or Rs 77,000 per farmer, most of them rich. To remove, rather than alleviate, poverty, spending on education and health would have been more effective than food subsidies.

Universal Basic Income (UBI) was part of the Economic Report of then Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian. UBI has the advantage of being universal like the franchise. Everyone gets it. MIG is selective. The issue with either UBI or MIG is the affordability. There already are subsidies and entitlements for BPL households.

The Indian government collects less than 20 per cent of GDP in tax. It has a deficit of 3 per cent plus. We have to ask, what proportion of the population receives the benefit and what proportion of the per capita income will the beneficiary receive? UBI would go to all adults, who are two-thirds of the population. Per capita income is about Rs 1.5 lakh, just under Rs 3,000 per week per person or Rs 4,500 per adult. What fraction of Rs 4,500 can you afford to give to each? If the government collects only 20 per cent, then you have to ask how much of Rs 900 can you spare from all other expenses to give as basic income? One per cent will be Rs 45 per person per week, around 5 per cent of the GDP. That is unaffordable.

Rahul Gandhi's scheme may cover only 20 per cent of the population. If it gives Rs 1,000 per household — two adults and three children — per week, the cost for five crore households is about Rs 2.1 lakh crore. It comes to around 1 per cent of GDP. But the problem of perverse incentives, avoided by universal payments, remains. But UBI is expensive.

Arvind Subramanian has proposed a quasi-universal scheme for rural India, which covers 75 per cent of the rural population. It gives Rs 1,500 per month per household and at 1.3 per cent of the GDP, he has worked it out to Rs 2.64 lakh crore. The advantages of the scheme are greater coverage and no disincentive effects.

The Budget has proposed a relief scheme for subsistence farmers at Rs 6,000 per year. This is a modest sum to begin with, but will be increased in the future. The problem is that it keeps the subsistence farmer on the land rather than giving him a chance to move out of a precarious existence.

It looks like India will not have UBI but a patchwork quilt of partial income support schemes. The problem is of improving the incentives from consumption to productive growth.

CHATTERBOX

Up in arms

Has anyone noticed that Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Parkash Singh Badal and party leader Sukhbir Badal... none of them have expressed any opinion on the Union Budget 2019-20 ? This is the first time that SAD, which praised the Budget last year, hasn't quite been eloquent about the Budget this time. Last week, on Friday, the general secretary of the party, Manjinder Sirsa had issued a general statement that if the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) did not stop meddling in the affairs of gurudwaras, the SAD could consider breaking the alliance and walking out of the coalition. This might be too extreme, but the provocation seems to be the moves made by the BJP to install Sikh members from its party to lead the bodies that run gurudwaras across the country — including in Nanded, Patna and Delhi. There are also reports that the Centre is mulling significant amendments in the Gurudwara Management Act. This has provoked SAD leaders to say that if this happens, the Sikhs will rise to defend their religion which is more important to them than anything else.

Making a move

A member of the Janata Dal United (JDU) and legislator of the Bihar council, Rishi Mishra has quit the JDU and joined the Congress. Mishra said he contested the election against the BJP. How could he now continue to justify his presence in the JDU when it had become an ally of the BJP ? He made it clear that he has no problems with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar but could not stay as an alliance partner of the BJP.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"The demonetisation year was the best year of growth (8.2%) under Mr Modi. So, let's have another round of demonetisation.This time let's demonetise 100 rupee notes."

Former Finance Minister P Chidambaram in New Delhi, February 1

CHECKLIST

EDUCATION: WHAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS ACHIEVED IN FOUR YEARS

- Government spending (Centre and States): Total expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP has declined from 3.1 per cent in 2013–14 to 2.7 per centin 2017–18
- The Higher Education Funding Agency (HEFA) was set up to promote the creation of high quality infrastructure in premier educational institutions. The HEFA has been tasked to mobilise ₹1,00,000 crore to meet the infrastructure needs of higher educational institutions by 2022.
- A draft Bill, Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018, was released on June 27, 2018. The Bill seeks to repeal the University Grants Commission and sets up the Higher Education Commission of India.
- The Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy (Chair: T S R Subramanian) submitted its report on May 7, 2016. The report proposed a New Education Policy to improve the quality and credibility of education by addressing implementation gaps.
- The Ministry of Human Resource Development launched a scheme 'Samagra Shiksha', which seeks to provide holistic education from preschool to senior secondary levels. It subsumes three existing schemes, namely: (i) Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, (ii) Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, and (iii) Teacher Education. The budget allocation for the scheme is ₹34,000 crore for 2018–19, and ₹41,000 crore for 2019–20 in July 2018.
- Government declared six institutions as 'Institutions of Eminence' on the recommendations of an expert committee.These included three finstitutions from private sector, and three from public sector.

OPINION

M VENKAIAH NAIDU

Let us shape a new India that Gandhi dreamt of

I am indeed pleased to be here to unveil the 150-square-metre wall mural of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, which is made of terracotta kullads.

It is also a matter of great pride for us that at a time when the nation is celebrating Mahatma's 150th birth anniversary, the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has decided to mark the occasion with a unique display of Gandhi's image made by the potters.

The image is a true reflection of Gandhi's belief in the potential of craftsmanship and village industries.

I am told that 150 potters from different parts of the country had gathered at Morbi in Gujarat – the birthplace of Rashtrapita – to produce this mural.

It is certainly a 'Tribute with difference'. It is an external manifestation of a deep reverence we have for the man who gave a timeless message through his life. It is a worthy tribute to the man who restored dignity to the manual labour. It is an artistic hymn created by village potters across the nation –from Leh to Maharashtra and from Chhattisgarh to Varanasi.

I would like to compliment KVIC for promoting village industries and the highly skilled potters because this mural is also a tribute to the exquisite craftsmanship of the potters.

I came to know that the concept of making this grand wall mural came after the huge success of KVIC's 'Kumhaar Sashaktikaran Yojana' in Varanasi, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi had distributed 280 electric potter wheels along with blungers, pug-mills and kilns to 300 potter families on September 18, 2018. It not only increased the income of village potters by four to five times, but also enhanced their output in the same ratio. This is an example of how up gradation of skills and technological advancement can transform rural economy.

As per the Indian world view, the entire world is one large family. The following verse from the Ramayana encapsulates this universal vision. "Only the narrow minded categorise people as 'our own' and 'others'. For those who have a large heart, the entire world is just a large family"

One corollary of this view, which follows from the concept of the whole world being seen as one family, is the attitude of empathy, of sharing and caring, of a sharp focus on alleviating the agony of fellow human beings. His deep sense of compassion and inclusiveness permeated his outlook on humanity. Mahatma Gandhi's life embodied this attitude and value system.

Gandhi experimented with himself a great deal and never suggested anything to anybody in which either he did not believe himself or did not follow himself. That is how he had acquired the moral authority to suggest that "Be the change you want to be"

It was he who said, "I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity; for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone".

He specially cared for the marginalised. He was a strong proponent of Gram Swaraj and truly believed that development of villages was vital for the development of the country.

This message of Gandhiji is vital at this juncture as India is at the cusp of transforming into a major economy. With a consistent growth rate of over 7 per cent, India is expected to become the third largest economy in the world in the coming years.

However, the fruits of development and prosperity must reach every section and every corner, particularly the rural areas. Efforts must be made on a war-footing by all stakeholders to end the urban-rural divide. Here, I would like to remind all of you that Gandhi ji had established the "All India Village Industries Association" at Wardha and devoted most of his time towards reorganization of Indian villages. He worked relentlessly towards revival of village crafts, agro processing industries, and promoted village cleanliness and sanitation.

Rural crafts do play a remarkable role in village development. Also, pottery plays an important role in studying culture and reconstructing the past. Recently, the Ministry of Railways has decided to use locally produced, environment-savvy terracotta products like Kullads, glasses and plates for serving catering items to passengers. This will certainly enable the local Kumhar community to earn higher income.

The life of Mahatma is all about internal reflection, self purification and harmonisation of individual and universal objectives. The principle of 'Ahimsa' so eloquently propounded by Mahatma encompasses all aspects of our personality ranging from our thoughts to our deeds. If every human being is at peace with himself or herself, there will be peace all around in the outer world.

Gandhi experimented with himself a great deal and never suggested anything to anybody in which either he did not believe himself or did not follow himself. That is how he had acquired the moral authority to suggest that "Be the change you want to be".

We are celebrating the 150th Birth Anniversary of that great soul this year. The best way of paying a genuine tribute to Mahatma is to sincerely introspect as to whether we are living the values of this great son of our country.

Let us practice some of the essential values he stood for like 'empathy' and 'service', 'truth' and 'non-violence', 'inclusion' and 'sustainable development'. Let each one of us shape a new India that Gandhi and other leaders had dreamt of just as the potters have given shape to a dream creation through their deft hands.

Speech by Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, after unveiling the 150-square-metre wall mural of Mahatma Gandhi made of terracotta kullads, in New Delhi on January 31.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

About 56 per cent of people surveyed in rural MP, Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh by research advocacy group Research Institute For Compassionate Economics (RICE) reported being aware of at least one of the three coercive practices — being stopped from open defecation, threats of withholding government benefits and threats of fines — deployed by the government staff or members of community vigilance groups, if they failed to build latrines or continued with open defecation. **Nikhil Srivastav,** director of research and sanitation at RICE, a graduate student of the Lyndon B Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, and one of the co-authors of the paper explains to **Swagata Yadavar**.

'People will learn from examples'

After the launch of RICE and AI's working paper, some people asked why not talk about the improvements in reducing open defecation achieved by Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) post-2014, rather than about people who still practice open defecation. Your comment.

Our study finds that there is a 26 per cent reduction in open defecation in rural Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, but 44 per cent of rural residents in these states continue to defecate in the open. These are the facts.

We are also concerned about what happens after a region is declared open defecation free (ODF). Good examples of this are Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan [by October 2, 2018, 25 states and union territories had declared themselves ODF, *IndiaSpend* reported, but SBM claims and data were questionable]. These states have been declared ODF, and now they lack resources for tackling open defecation where it is still going on. By talking about open defecation continuing in these 'ODF' regions, we want people to focus on the problem. Unless everyone accepts that the task is incomplete, we cannot hope the government will continue working on convincing rural Indians to use latrines.

Do you think that the challenges to achieving sanitation goals associated with social beliefs around caste and purity have reduced?

India, even before the SBM was launched, was seeing a decrease in open defecation at a rate of 1 per cent per annum. Now, under the SBM, the rate is a little over 6 per cent per annum. Some people switched to using latrines because they wanted to; others switched because they were coerced to. Our data shows that large [single] pit latrines remain more likely to be used, and small pit [including twin pit] latrines continue to be looked down upon. Rural Indians still worry about emptying pits, which they associate with manual scavenging, and thus continue to be averse to using smaller latrines like twin-pits, though these are inexpensive. People want large pits that don't have to be emptied for generations. They want a 10x10x10 feet pit [1,000 cubic feet capacity].

The ministry of drinking water and sanitation, responding to our report on the working paper's findings, said researchers failed to distinguish between coercion and affirmative community action. So they don't consider actions like we have seen in many videos —of people being humiliated, punished and beaten up for defecating in the open—coercive?

Q&A

NIKHIL SRIVASTAVA

director, research and sanitation, RICE

There are publicly available videos on the internet that show some of the worst instances of coercion — poor villagers being beaten up by government officials, a woman being dragged out of fields by government workers, etc. Also, every now and then reports covering such coercive activities in rural areas surface in the national media. Local media covers these instances more frequently. Photos abound of government buildings bearing threatening messages that households without toilets will be fined and lose government benefits. One such poster, published by *Dainik Bhaskar,* said *"Shasan ke aadesh anusaar:* [toilet *na banane par*] 500 *rupay ka jurmana aur ration bhi nahi diya jayega aur sarkari suvidha se vanchit kiya jayega*" [By government orders: ₹500 fine, ration and government services will be withdrawn for not building toilets].

One out of every four households we surveyed told us that they had heard of threats to withhold government benefits like rations in their village. In India, people have a right to benefits like food.

There are two broader problems with such sanctions and coercive activities: one that many rural households depend on government rations and pensions, and taking these away means starvation for some families. The other is that such sanctions often reinforce the existing caste hierarchy in villages. A block level official, while explaining the process of forming Nigrani Samitis, told us that samiti members usually include the sarpanch, the MLA, a ward member and other respected people who the villagers listen to or even fear, such as lambardars [powerful zamindars]. The official said those are the people they ask for help in persuading villagers.

Of the 23 per cent people who own a latrine but continue to defecate in the open, do you know how many of them had to build their own latrines and how many of these were twin-pits? Are they continuing to defecate outside because they are not happy with their twin-pit latrines?

People with twin-pit latrines are more likely to defecate in the open than people with large, single pit latrines that are normally emptied mechanically. Many people believe that a twin-pit latrine will fill up in a year or less, and are disgusted by the prospect of emptying it manually, even after the faeces has decomposed. I remember talking to a woman in MP. She was talking about a television advertisement [promoting twin-pit latrines issued by the SBM-Rural] featuring [Bollywood actor] Akshay Kumar, where he says that the faecal sludge becomes son khad [fertiliser]. She looked at me and said, "*Unhe karna hai to karne do, humse nahi hoga*" (let them empty the pit if they want, I can't do it].

The kind of social ostracisation that Dalits [scheduled castes], especially Valmikis [a Dalit community who form the majority of manual scavengers who empty latrine pits] face is inhuman. "Hookah-pani band hoga" is one phrase we heard over and over again. It means that people will face similar ostracisation and social repercussions if they empty the pits themselves.

So people underestimate the time it will take to fill a twin-pit latrine?

Accountability Initiative's own study showed that 61 per cent of people underestimate the time it will take for their latrine pits to fill. The World Health Organisation says that a pit of 50 cubic feet will take around five years for a family of five members to fill. The government is pushing twin-pit latrines under the SBM, that add up to about that much volume, but what people really want is an even larger pit.

When we are talking about pits, we have to talk about two different sets of people--people who can afford to build large, expensive pits and those who cannot. The former are building expensive pits. Twin-pits are only being constructed under the SBM where people cannot afford to build latrines, and have faced pressure to build it.

The government cannot build 10x10x10 feet pits for everyone, or even 7x4x6 feet pits for everyone. But everywhere in the world, including in Bangladesh and the west, there is the concept of out-houses which are inexpensive latrines with single pits of about 50 cubic feet. The government hasn't promoted such inexpensive latrines here. We have missed the opportunity to make people understand the benefits of inexpensive latrines.

Remember when the MDWS secretary emptied latrine pits? Those are the kind of actions that should happen. I hope one day the prime minister will set an example by emptying a latrine pit, and show that there is no shame in doing so. Everyone can and should do it.

Source: IndiaSpend

The house that nature built

From collecting rainwater to recycling used water, a startup in Bengaluru is changing the way people live, writes **Sneha Bhattacharjee**

Harnessing natural light, wind and raindrops to make houses. This was the concept Abijith Priyam focussed on for his debut venture of building eco-friendly houses. His company, buildAhome.com, creates sustainable houses from naturally available resources.

An engineer by profession, Priyam, along with his team of 50 people, takes into account simple concepts of everyday science to construct eco-friendly houses that can leave you impressed. The venture was started in 2016 and so far it has built 45 houses across the country.

THE OTHER INDIA

The team recently worked on a house in Mangalore that is fittingly named "urvi", which means earth. It focuses on the principles of sustainable architecture and leaving minimal carbon impact on the environment. This seemingly simple idea, however, was hard to implement in a city like Mangalore where there are two seasons of extreme weather – hot summers and incessant rains. "We wanted to build a home that did not need any additional cooling. That is, it will cool on its own and not with the help of air-conditioning," says Priyam.

The company designed the concept of the house keeping the city's weather as the central theme. Hot summers meant long sunny days and so solar panels were installed on the roof that generate the entire electricity requirement for the house — from lighting bulbs to heating water. "We gave used solar roof tiles as well that not only generate heat, but act as a substitute for Mangalore tile. The PV (photo voltaic) panels too are used as a material for roofs," he adds.

The second defining feature of this house is the way it uses water. Most of the requirement is met by rainwater. A borewell is provided only as a backup for the dry months.The house has an underground tank, with a capacity of over 50,000 litres, and recharge pits to tap rain water to replenish the ground water. The water used for everyday chores is also reused. "The house recycles and reuses its water through what is called a grey water filtration technique. In this, the water from the sinks, the kitchens and the showers get recycled, and is used for flushing and landscaping purposes," says Priyam.

The recycling is done using an oil and grease trap, a rain water filter and a water filter with chambers that purifies the water. The house also has a natural cooling system. Cool air comes from two water bodies within the vicinity and the draft enters the house via a 12-feet *jaail* wall and roof ventilators that have been incorporated in the design.

The eco-friendly concepts extends to every aspect of the house. The exterior of the house is made of clay products and locally-sourced materials. Although concrete is used in the core structure, the amount is half of the requirement of conventional houses. "We have used earthern pots and filler slabs for the concrete structure. This helps in cooling as well as reduces the use of cement and steel," says Priyam.

The flooring of the house, on the other hand, is made of *athamagudi* tiles that are handmade and thus more eco-friendly because factory-made tiles emit a large amount of greenhouse gas. For the stairs, the pond and master bedroom, hardwood flooring is used. The chipped off and leftover tiles from inside flooring and granite are used in the terrace. The terrace has a high-performing thermally-insulated and water-proof membrane that is protected by these broken tiles which prevent the roof from heating at all.

The Mangalore house that was built by Abhijith Priyam and his team focuses on the principles of sustainable architecture and leaving minimal carbon impact on the environment

The wooden doors and windows are reclaimed from demolished homes. No new tree was cut for the doors or windows of the home. The glass window panes allows light to enter the house but not heat. The two skylights of the home too have the same high-performing glass and the false ceiling in the living room is made from locally available bamboo. The house has an abundance of greenery inside as well as outside. Instead of a brick compound, the house is fenced by plants. There are plenty of plants inside too. Besides keeping the air fresh, these plants have properties that repel mosquitoes and reptiles away.

The company is now working on a project in Bengaluru and Mysuru each. "More and more people now are willing to go for an eco-friendly house," says Priyam. The only reason people do not want a green house, he says, is lack of awareness and misconceptions about costs. "This entire Mangalore house, including the fittings, cost ₹57 lakh. So, it is not that building a green house will cost you more. The difference is only in the products that go into building the house, and how you procure them," says Priyam.

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Behind the speech

Budget speeches conceal more than they reveal

There is one thing that all Budget speeches have in common. The finance minister delivering the speech may be interim or permanent; the poet quoted may be Tamil, Bengali, or North Indian; the emphasis may be on farmers, or on the middle class, or on government employees — but all Budget speeches conceal more than they reveal. It is not the purpose of a Budget speech to reveal and explain the details of the Union Budget, but in fact to conceal them. This is not because of a search for cheap applause lines — multiple such applause lines might exist in a speech, but unlike an American president's State of the Union address, they are not the point of the Budget speech. The point of a Budget speech is in fact to guide the interpretation of the Budget, and specifically to guide the eye away from those clauses of the Finance Bill or entries in the Demands for Grants that actually matter.

In the interpretation of Budget proposals, what matters is understanding the trade-off that is made. As even a first-year economics student knows, budgeting is by definition an exercise in trading off one need against another, subject to a constraint. For governments, the macro trade-off is between fiscal rectitude, expenditure, investment, and taxation. Within this, there are multiple smaller trade-offs to make — who bears the brunt of taxation, who will benefit from extra spending, which social and economic priorities will receive funding. Yet it is rare to discover a Budget speech that makes this trade-off explicit. Parliamentarians expect to hear a long list of things that are being funded, and not those that are being defunded or taxed. The sole exception was, perhaps, taxes on cigarettes, which multiple finance ministers in the past have been happy to specifically name. It is remarkably easy, on listening to a Budget speech, to be lost in admiration of the genius of the finance minister in question — any finance minister — who has somehow managed to provide something to everyone without apparently straining the finances of the government unduly.

It is only when the Budget papers are carefully scrutinised that the true picture emerges. The observer will discover then, for example, that defence expenditure might have been squeezed — even if a finance minister has pointed out in his speech that the allocation is "the highest ever". For example, the latest speech has told you the defence budget has crossed ₹3 trillion for the first time. But the actual allocation will show that the outlay has barely kept pace with inflation — as has been the case over and over again across governments.

When ministers have significantly increased the allocation to a department or a scheme, they are happy to tell the world how much higher the allocation is than the previous Budget estimates in percentage terms. If the increase is not significant, they will instead mention the difference in rupee terms. But when they have squeezed it, they will likely instead state in their speech just the allocation without mentioning the previous year's outlay. If, during the course of a financial year, the allocation for a scheme has been increased — as happens with NREGS frequently — then the minister will mention how much higher the new allocation for the coming year is than the previous Budget estimates, and not how much higher it is than the Revised Estimates. If instead that ministry, department or scheme found that the finance ministry had not disbursed money over the year, then the speech will highlight how much higher the new outlay is than the Revised Estimates.

Sometimes, the most crucial aspect of the Budget — and the one that determines how the Budget is remembered or written about — is only discovered hours or days after the speech, because it is hidden somewhere in the Finance Bill. Such was the case, for example, with the famous Vodafone retrospective tax amendment — which startled observers noticed only several hours after then finance minister Pranab Mukherjee had stopped speaking. The truth is that a Budget speech is often terrific entertainment — but it is rarely useful.

How to build defence capabilities

India needs to move beyond being a licensed weapons producer, and acquire the capability of developing globally competitive weapons systems that meet its requirements

KHUTUB HAI

There has been considerable discussion about India's defence industry, including the ongoing debate in Parliament over the purchase of Rafale aircraft, connected offsets and the technical capability of our leading defence PSUs. It is a sad commentary that even 70 years after attaining independence, India is incapable of designing and developing its own MMRCA, and there are doubts whether its premier aerospace company — HAL — is capable of manufacturing these aircraft under transfer of technology. This holds good for most other defence PSUs which may be required to manufacture other complex weapon systems.

Clearly, over the past seven decades, India has failed to put in place a robust defence industrial base capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century. With the cost of imported weapon systems increasing prohibitively, we can no longer afford to acquire such systems from foreign states/companies that require a steady increase in defence budgets. The country has to move beyond being a licensed weapons producer and must rapidly acquire the capabilities and capacities to design and develop weapon systems that meet its requirement and are globally competitive.

Among the challenges that arise in setting up a modern defence industrial base, three factors stand out. First and foremost is the requirement to have a large reservoir of research talent in advanced technology disciplines. Without sustained availability of a quality technology base, no country can be globally competitive in the defence sector. Sadly, India lacks advanced technology human resources capable of quality research work. A recent report by Clarivate Analytics that lists 4000 of the world's most influential researches is most depressing. Only 10 Indians are mentioned in the list (the US tops with 2639, UK has 546 and China 482).

While there are many reasons for this poor performance, one of the most important aspects that promote a deeper understanding of the research work required for complex weapon systems is systems sciences, or systems engineering. This crucial aspect of technological competence is missing from the syllabi of our IITs and engineering colleges. Most leaders and programme managers of high-end technology projects are graduates of systems engineering (MSc/equivalent), while in India, our scientists tend to learn on the job, leading to time and cost over-runs and poor quality. The country needs tens of thousands of systems engineers if we aspire to be self-contained in our research for design and development of weapon systems.

The second attribute of a defence industrial base is a high-end technology infrastructure that enables research work for design and development. To be fair, at the time of Independence, India had no defence infrastructure in place, strange for a country that had a robust defence manufacturing capability even in the 16th century. The Mughals developed advanced capabilities for manufacture of heavy and light cannon, and the Marathas set up a thriving ship-building industry towards the end of the 17th century. During British rule, this manufacturing capability was suppressed and later demolished.

A concerted effort was put in place in the 1950s and 1960s to set up capacities for research and manufacturing through the creation of the DRDO, Ordnance Factories and Defence PSUs. Crucially, the private sector was ignored, a grave mistake that even 70 years later the country is struggling to rectify. In later years, no effort was made to modernise this infrastructure to respond to the challenge of the 21st century. The result: The weapon systems produced in the country have failed to satisfy our own armed forces, leave alone attracting global attention for exports.

Capacities for defence research and manufacture were set up in the 1950s and 1960s but the private sector was ignored

The third and most important requisite for a defence industrial base is the presence of an R&D system that is self-sustaining and economically rewarding. The current system of a state-controlled and monopolistic R&D stifles motivation and is a constant drag on the need for innovation and modernisation of systems and procedures. Up to the end of the Second World War, most defence R&D was state-funded and high-end defence technologies enabled a wide variety of civilian technologies to ride piggyback, especially in the fields of aerospace, electronics and telecommunication. Today the roles have been reversed, with defence technologies borrowing heavily from advances made in the industrial sector. The technologies of today contained in a cell phone may well be used to provide a vital function in a missile system.

By definition, a defence industrial and technological base incorporates the industrial and technological assets of a country that are of direct or indirect importance for the production of defence equipment and war-fighting capability. It is obvious therefore that the defence sector's needs should be coordinated with other technology-intensive fields such as space, civil aviation, telecommunication, electronics, atomic energy and ship-building. The Indian defence industry must shift its current R&D, which is focused on a "product strategy", to a broader investment and focus on a "capability strategy" around the various disciplines that comprise the defence industrial base.

At a conservative estimate, India imports over $50 billion worth of telecom and electronics products every year. A broader engagement and investment in R&D projects will enable economies of scale, reduce financial risk in R&D and incentivise private sector participation in the design and development of weapon systems required by our armed forces. This R&D model, also known as "convergence strategy" for its union of technology in defence and industry, is a vital requirement to respond to the wide range of technology applications in the 21st century.

The three attributes of a defence industrial base are connected and heavily dependent on each other. A sustained availability of skilled researchers with access to modern and high-end infrastructure can be harnessed to work on a convergence strategy of R&D that is globally competitive. To achieve this, India needs to lay out a roadmap with clear-cut executive action plans for implementation, to ensure that in 10 years we have an adequate pool of quality research scientists and systems engineers, modernised infrastructure through the setting up of research institutes in collaboration with the private sector, and an entrepreneurial system of R&D in place based on a convergence strategy. A frank and open debate in Parliament is needed and a political consensus arrived at to provide continuity to the implementation of the programme of modernising our defence industrial and technology base.

The writer is Managing Director, Firmbase Consulting, a defence consulting company

Right to inherit land a myth for Indian women

AKANSHA DUBEY

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2018 ranks India 108th out of 142 countries, with no improvement over 2017. India ranks lower on all pillars of the gender gap — economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival ranking, and political empowerment. We see significant economic disparity between genders in India.

There is a drastic difference between genders in the right to inherit land. More than a decade has passed since Hindu laws that govern succession were amended. Termed as a moment of triumph in 2005, daughters were recognised as co-partners in a joint Hindu family and were made joint holders of family property. Until 2005 only Hindu males could rightfully hold a share in family property. Now daughters are entitled to a share in ancestral family property after their father's death under section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (Act). However, in a 2013 study Landesa found that even eight years after the 2005 amendment only one in ten women inherited agricultural land.

State-specific laws governing devolution of rights in agricultural land present a grim picture. Personal laws like the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 apply to devolution of rights in agricultural land only in a few states such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. In Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, daughters and sisters do not inherit agricultural land. These states give limited rights to widows and widowed mothers where, in case of remarriage, their right of inheritance is lost. Local laws in these four states prefer male relations (through the male line) in the order of succession to agricultural land. Only male descendants primarily inherit family agricultural land.

There is a drastic difference between genders in the right to inherit land. Over a decade after the Hindu Succession Act was amended, only one in ten women inherit agricultural land

Widows of male lineal descendants are preferred in Jammu and Kashmir but are given low preference in the order of succession. Low preference leads to very low chances of inheritance for women in the family. Delhi gives inheritance rights to widows over agricultural land, but not daughters. In Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, daughters and sisters do inherit agricultural land, though married daughters have a lower preference. At least UP gives an unmarried daughter a primary right of inheritance to a male Hindu's property, but in Uttarakhand an unmarried daughter is quite low in the order of succession. Besides, many states are silent on whether personal religious laws apply to agricultural property. This silence can be interpreted to mean either recognition or thwarting of women's inheritance rights.

The Indian Constitution demarcates the legislative domain of the Centre and states. "Wills, intestacy and succession" and "transfer of property other than agricultural land" (entries 5 and 6) are part of the Concurrent List and can be legislated upon by Parliament and state legislatures. "Rights in or over land" and "transfer and alienation of agricultural land" (entry 18) are state subjects and cannot be legislated upon by Parliament. Under the Indian Constitution these subjects are the exclusive domain of states. Following this most states in independent India enacted local laws that govern devolution of tenancy and succession rights in agricultural land.

Here the 2005 amendment creates a strange scenario. Under the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Parliament recognised a daughter's share in family property along with another controversial and less noted change. Prior to 2005 the Act did not apply to any law related to fragmentation of agricultural land, fixation of land ceilings and devolution of tenancy rights in agricultural land. The 2005 Amendment repealed this provision in section 4(2) of the Act with the aim of encouraging women's rights to agricultural land. Since matters relating to agricultural land were considered a state subject under entry 18, repealing section 4(2) of the Act creates confusion among states. Does this removal extend the Act to all aspects of agricultural land? Or does it throw the ball back to the states?

Recently, in *Archna vs Deputy Director of Consolidation and Others*, the Allahabad High Court upheld that the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 does not apply to agricultural land in UP. Agricultural land was considered an exclusive domain of the state legislature, where Parliament has no power to legislate. The court asserted that repealing section 4(2) cannot lead to an automatic application of the Act to agricultural land. Existing state laws and Parliament's lack of clarity on repealing section 4(2) of the Act create an avoidable gap.

This gap creates a lack of uniformity in inheritance rights even within a religious sect (Hindus). Varying interpretations by state high courts limit the reach of this welfare amendment. Such loopholes fuel orthodox mindsets of a male-dominated agricultural sphere. Right of inheritance and subsequent ownership of agricultural land further women's empowerment and financial independence. Inheritance rights to agricultural land are instrumental in elevating women in rural areas. There is a dire need to push for state amendments to local laws. Women are equal representatives of the family legacy. No primitive law or customary interpretation can take this away.

The writer is a Stanford Fellow, Landesa. These views are personal

OTHER VIEWS

Chanda Kochhar case raises systemic governance issues

The bank's board first gave her a clean chit, so regulators must up their game

The inquiry by former Supreme Court judge Justice BN Srikrishna into the allegations against former ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar has taken eight long months to confirm what seems apparent - that she did not conduct herself as she should have in relation to conflict-of-interest issues. It was only last week that the Central Bureau of Investigation filed an FIR against Ms Kochhar, her husband Deepak Kochhar, head of the Videocon group Venugopal Dhoot and ICICI Bank executives for sanction of credit facilities in violation of rules, that caused a loss of ₹1,730 crore to the bank. But clearly, Ms Kochhar erred, and badly at that, in not disclosing to the bank's board her husband's business connections with the Videocon group, which was a client of the bank.

The inquiry report holds her guilty of violation of the bank's "code of conduct, its framework for dealing with conflict of interest and fiduciary duties, and in terms of applicable Indian laws, rules and regulations." The bank's board has accepted the report and decided to treat her voluntary resignation from the bank in October as "termination for cause", also deciding to claw back all bonuses paid to her since April

option entitlements. These are strong penalties, but the question is: How did the board give her a clean chit as recently as March last year? Clearly, regulators need to up their game.

The Hindu, February 1

Obfuscation solves nothing

Sanctity of data should be respected

The resignation of two non-governmental experts of the National Statistical Commission, including its acting chief, in protest against the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) withholding or delaying the release of its jobs data, report points to blatant political intervention in the work of autonomous bodies that do crucial data-gathering tasks. Leaked data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017-18 suggests a major crisis over unemployment, much of which can be traced back to the disruptive force of the November 2016 demonetisation exercise. The stalled report is said to have revealed that unemployment — at 6.1 per cent in 2017-18 — has been at its highest in the past 45 years, according to NSSO figures. The comparative figures for 2012 are 2.2 per cent. The youth unemployment rate, which is probably more relevant to today's troubled times, is now at "astronomically high levels" of between 13 to 27 per cent.

There is something sacrosanct about gathering data, which loses credibility if there is government intervention. Data helps not only governance but also private enterprise in a country with a burgeoning population. An ostrich-in-the-sand act is obviously not going to help in the face of what is a huge national challenge of finding jobs for hundreds of millions, even as millions more youth join the workforce every year.

The Asian Age, February 1

BJP falls back on *mandir*

It's a bid for electoral victory

The leopard never changes its spots. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre, headed by Narendra Modi, has proved that old adage all over again. It is back to the Ram *mandir* construction issue. Building the Ram *mandir* is one sure way of satisfying the devotees of Ram, as well as the restive Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its ideological siblings. The BJP-led government has asked the Supreme Court's permission to return the "non-disputed" part of the government-acquired land to its original owners, a claim that is being contested. These include a trust formed to monitor the construction of the temple. The BJP's request is being cheered by members of its government as well as its sibling outfits as a step towards temple-building.

The government is going by the measurements suggested by the Allahabad High Court's 2010 verdict and the earlier 1994 Supreme Court ruling that restrictions would only apply to the "disputed" area. It is the 2003 Supreme Court verdict that *status quo* be maintained in the whole area that the government is politely pretending not to have noticed. The government's request seems to be a nudge in that direction as well as a reassurance to the *mandir*'s champions. The BJP has fallen back on its oldest theme in its bid for electoral victory.

The Telegraph, February 1

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

A poll-centric Budget

Dole for farm sector, some cheer for the salaried

AS expected, the Modi government has made an all-out populist push with its interim Budget weeks before the General Election. It's undoubtedly a now-or-never attempt to win over various disgruntled sections, particularly the farming community, the salaried class and the pensioners. Agrarian distress was a crucial factor that led to the BJP losing out to the Congress in the Hindi heartland states of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. The Congress stole a march on the saffron party by promising and then duly implementing the loan waiver scheme. With its distant dream of doubling farmers' income by 2022 finding few takers, the government has come up with Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, a scheme for direct benefit transfer of Rs 6,000 to small and marginal farmers. It's not only too little, but also too late in the day. Instead of conceptualising sustainable solutions, the government has succumbed to the temptation of dishing out a band-aid dole that won't do much to keep the farmer out of the debt trap.

The BJP has also tried to placate the lower middle class, one of its major sinews of support, by doubling the threshold income tax rebate limit to Rs 5 lakh. Public memory is short, but not short enough to forget the disruptions caused in the recent years — the crippling effect of demonetisation and the chaotic rollout of the GST regime. A mega pension scheme has been announced for the unorganised sector, which had borne the brunt of the note ban and is being wooed by the Congress with its 'guaranteed minimum income' promise.

In all, these exchequer-draining initiatives are expected to cover at least 25 crore people. The ruling party is banking on them to lap it all up. However, it would be tough for the BJP to convince the electorate why it had taken the government so long to announce these welfare measures. 'Why now?'will be the restless voter's obvious question. Desperately eyeing another term, the BJP needs credible answers.

Fatal highways

Road safety a casualty in Haryana

THESE figures hurt: as per the Traffic and Highways Department of Haryana, 5,118 persons were killed in road accidents in the state in 2018; in 2017, the number of precious lives lost on the road was 5,120; and in 2016, the fatalities touched 5,024. Those injured in the mishaps in each of these three years were nearly double the death casualty. What is more hurtful is the story revealed by these statistics: with the death toll hovering around 5,100 each year, the state and national highways criss-crossing Haryana continue to be unsafe, snuffing out a shocking 14 lives per day in 31 accidents, on an average. Commuters must reach their destinations safe and sound rather than fall prey to death traps.

There is hardly any traveller who can claim to have not felt his heart in his mouth as he had a close shave with another vehicle on an Indian highway. Rashly driven vehicles, overloaded trucks and buses, drivers speeding past, caring two hoots for traffic rules, are all too commonly witnessed both inside towns and cities and on highways. Not only do such drivers put their own lives at risk with reckless and irresponsible behaviour, but even innocent passersby going about their business in right earnest many a time have to pay with their limbs or lives. A little carelessness by one person behind the wheel can ruin another, both physically and financially. It is no surprise that the main causes of accidents have been identified as rash driving, wrong parking, poor road engineering, drunken driving, overloading and speeding.

As the road safety week begins on February 4, the authorities and people of Haryana need to resolve to abide by traffic rules and not just indulge in empty sloganeering. Accidents are very much avoidable. Education about road safety and rules must begin in schools. Only if every road user drives carefully and those violating rules are fined heavily will the mishap rate drop. The authorities must review accident-prone spots, width of roads and lanes as also weed out incompetent drivers obtaining licences fraudulently and unroadworthy vehicles. We have tolerated far too much death and mayhem on our roads.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Creativity starts when you cut a zero from your budget.

— Jaime Lerner

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1919

Social Welfare Work.

AS a sequel to the labour strikes in Bombay one should welcome the interest shown by Sir George Lloyd in the activities of the social service societies in that city and the encouragement he gave by his inspection and advice. His Excellency visited the Servants of India Society, a hospital for the poor, the Fazlbhoy Ibrahim Homes and other institutions established for the benefit of the working classes. These by no means satisfy all the present demands and His Excellency was right in saying that there was great room for extension of the work all round, especially in the form of housing and sanitary improvements. Every working class family should be housed properly and its sanitation should be guaranteed by some responsible authority. Charitable work cannot go long in meeting the requirements. What is required is that proper housing and sanitary conditions should be ensured on a business basis or as part of an agreement between the employer and employees, the State also sharing a part of the cost.

The Proposed Section 510 A.

IN our leading article, we have referred at some length to some of the provisions of the new Bills in their legal aspect. One provision of Bill No. 1, viz., section 510A., Cr.P.C., introduces some new matter which requires examination. It provides that in the trail of offences against the State, the fact of the previous conviction of the accused as well as the fact of his habitual and voluntary association with a person, convicted of an offence against the State, shall be relevant. Under the Indian Evidence Act, a previous conviction is relevant as evidence of bad character, but not the fact of his association, albeit habitual and voluntary, with any person, convicted of an offence against the State.

'Dream State' comes alive

The NDA's interim Budget ticks all the boxes, but issues remain

JAYSHREE SENGUPTA

SENIOR FELLOW, OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

SOMETHING FOR ALL: A small farmer can hope to get a basic annual income of ₹6,000.

The job front, however, remains unaddressed. The youth, whose votes will matter, may not be easily convinced by the varnishing of real problems in the interim Budget.

IT was hardly an 'interim Budget' but rather a grandiose one — if not in scale but in content. Finance Minister Piyush Goyal unfurled it with great flair and confidence. He made sure that no voter's welfare was perceived to be excluded. There were expectations over the past few weeks that the NDA government would spare no efforts to make all the right political moves through its sixth and last Budget to win the elections. But no one would have anticipated that it would go the whole hog to appease farmers, workers from the unorganised sector, the middle class, women and senior citizens. It was no doubt an unprecedented coup on the part of the NDA government which left Rahul Gandhi's eyes glazed in wonder.

Listening to the list of achievements of the government in the past four years from the newly appointed Finance Minister, one would have thought India is not only the fastest growing, but also the best governed country. 'India is marching towards prosperity to a New India 2022... It will be clean, healthy, with access to water and farmers would have doubled their incomes.' India has also achieved inflation control and experienced increased FDI inflow. He promised that India will be without corruption and free of communalism. It seemed like a 'dream State' that he was talking about rather than the real India with millions of problems.

The reality is that the state of agriculture needs immediate attention and the youth needs jobs. Out of his kitty came a big dollop of dole for farmers. The small and marginal farmer will get a basic income of Rs 6,000 annually, which he will be thankful for because it would come from the government and not the moneylender, to whom he would have to pay high interest. The government has turned Keynesian in believing that an increase in purchasing power in the hands of the people will create demand that will create jobs and make the economy grow.

In the same vein, the government has reduced the income tax for the middle class. The standard deduction has been raised to Rs 50,000 from Rs 40,000. The basic income tax slab has been raised to Rs 5 lakh from Rs 2.5 lakh. Expenditure on medicines and medical insurance are subject to exemption. This will be highly appreciated by senior citizens. This generous act of the government will benefit 3 crore employees and win the hearts of the middle class.

Regarding capital gains in real estate, the rollover benefit of capital gains from property has been increased from one residential house to two. This rollover on capital gains, up to Rs 2 crore, can only be exercised once in a lifetime.

Workers in the unorganised sector have also received due and much-needed attention and a scheme has been devised, which will give them a monthly pension of Rs 3,000 after the age of 60. The contribution of Rs 100 a month will be matched by the government contributing an equal share. The government is already providing Rs 500 crore for the scheme. This measure will benefit 10 crore workers. It is no doubt a big and unprecedented step by any government at the Centre and will offer some amount of social security to the 42 crore informal sector workers who are otherwise without any social protection. They are vulnerable to being fired and remain jobless for months and also have no means of support in case of an illness or accident. It will be a boon for many and they will thank the government with their votes.

For the MSMEs, the government has already done quite a lot, especially after their productivity and employment was adversely affected by demonetisation. They are of special importance because of the large numbers involved in the sector. The Budget has granted 2 per cent interest subvention for MSMEs with Rs 1 crore loan, which will provide relief to their strained finances.

Many economists would think that by not being able to meet the fiscal deficit, the government has made a big mistake. But having a fiscal deficit of 3.4 per cent of the GDP, instead of 3.3 per cent for 2018-19, is no great sin, especially when the slippage was due to a good cause and was aimed at giving the farmers income support in difficult times. A sum of Rs 75,000 crore has been allocated for the scheme. The Budget also announced an allocation of Rs 19,000 crore for the construction of rural roads and Rs 60,000 crore for MNREGA scheme that will guarantee incomes to the rural population for 100 days of work.

The Finance Minister also announced that the debt-GDP ratio, which is high at 70 per cent, will be reduced to 40 per cent by 2024/25. This would, however, be difficult when the mega schemes pan out as states would run into deficits. A high debt-GDP ratio indicates a huge outgo towards interest payments by the government which could have been used for supporting social schemes.

The government has also pleased the defence services sector by enhancing the allocation to it by over Rs 3 lakh crore. The minister also pledged to have clean energy, with more electric vehicles on the roads which would mean less pollution in the future.

On the job front, the minister did not disclose any specific plans. The expectation seems to be that the economy will keep growing at a fast rate and jobs will be created alongside. The government seems to be reluctant to accept the latest jobless data produced by NSSO, which clearly says that unemployment is at a high rate of 6.1 per cent. Jobless youth are to be found in both rural and urban areas in large numbers. Many of them would be first-time voters. They may not be so easily convinced by the varnishing of real problems provided by the government in the interim Budget and their votes will matter.

A wile to win over Winston

GEORGE N NETTO

IN the 1970s, I often accompanied my British planter-boss during his inspection of Munnar's sprawling tea estates. His driver would take me to his bungalow, from where we would set out together. While waiting for him, I invariably faced a problem quite literally — his big and ferocious Alsatian.

Winston was seldom leashed. The apple of the Brit's eye, he had a free run of the bungalow and I was never comfortable with him snooping around. He regarded every visitor with suspicion, usually greeting them with a low, menacing growl that gave one the creeps.

I earnestly wished the boss wouldn't leave me alone with Winston, who I often felt would love nothing better than to annex a part of my fundament without further ado. When I mentioned my fears, my boss brushed them aside. Winston had never been known to be vicious, he reassured me. Yet, my unease persisted.

Strangely enough, though I was a fairly regular visitor, familiarity didn't seem to breed any trust in Winston as far as I could see. Rather, it appeared to generate animosity in him, quite inexplicably. I decided I had to earn the dog's trust and goodwill somehow.

Usually the Brit's butler would serve me biscuits and tea while I waited for him in the sitting room with Winston lurking around. I had noticed that the dog always eyed the biscuits wistfully but never came anywhere near them, thanks to its strict upbringing.

One day on an impulse, I quietly tossed Winston a biscuit. He lunged forward and gulped it. I flipped him another and he snapped it up in midair. Lo and behold, several biscuits later, Winston's tail was wagging furiously in the friendliest manner for the first time ever, his smouldering eyes expressively asking for more. What a dramatic change in his behaviour!

Thereafter, we got along famously. Gone were the nasty growls. Instead, I was greeted with exuberant tail-wagging whenever I visited the bungalow. The butler, however, was quite baffled by my sudden preference for Britannia cream crackers. The plateful placed before me was now invariably empty when he came to remove it, whereas earlier I used to leave the biscuits untouched, drinking only the tea.

It was a well-guarded secret known only to Winston and me. As with humans, the way to a dog's heart is through his stomach.

Thank God for it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Medical fee cap

Reference to 'No regulation on MBBS fee for now' (Feb 1); it is clear from the actions of the government that it lacks the intent and will to implement the amendment to cap the fee. It will have an adverse impact on the medical profession, as the present situation facilitates the issuance of licence to incompetent professionals to play with the lives of helpless patients. They will also charge exorbitantly for their service to get a full return of their hefty investment. Brilliant and able students will be deprived of medical education due to lack of money. The government should reconsider its decision.

SANDEEP, PATIALA

All-out temple politics

Refer to the article 'The unfair Ayodhya move' (Feb 1); murky politics is being played by the BJP at the eleventh hour of the general election. Those who were shouting from the rooftop that the corrupt Congress should be thrown out of power, are now themselves indulging in dirty vote-bank politics, using corrupt ways, even by amending the Constitution, for their selfish interests. Making people fight with one another for power, by diverting the attention of the masses from the government's failures to uplift the standards of living, providing jobs as promised, giving world-class education and healthcare facilities, only for votes is condemnable.

RK KAPOOR, CHANDIGARH

Sops count?

The interim Budget has been carefully drafted for the election year, touching upon almost every possible benefit, for all sections of society. Should the performance of a government be judged by the sops it offers, or the realities of its performance over the past five years at the ground level?

VIR PARTAP SINGH, HOSHIARPUR

Probe ICICI board role

Apropos the editorial 'Chanda Kochhar indicted' (Feb 1), some time ago, the ICICI Bank board had given a clean chit to its CEO Kochhar, supporting her actions. A probe was conducted by the board itself, which should have been conducted by an independent economist appointed by the Finance Ministry or the RBI. Kochhar's indictment is justified but the board's role must be reviewed. It had the opportunity to set things right, but it did not have the intent in pursuing the matter honestly and to its logical end. The board was interested only in protecting its CEO. This raises serious questions on the management culture of the so-called best private bank.

LAL SINGH, BY MAIL

Congress misstep

After the 2017 Assembly polls in Punjab, it was expected that in the Assembly elections in adjacent Haryana, the Congress would come back to power. However, the Jind result is contrary to anticipation. Opposition parties in Haryana need to revise their strategy. The Chautalas must unite and give the command to their younger generation. The Congress committed a blunder by fielding MLA Randeep Surjewala. The Congress took its voters for granted. It reflects the arrogance and high-handedness of the high command. It has not only damaged the reputation of its national spokesperson, but also earned the displeasure of Congress voters in Kaithal as well as Jind.

GURDEV SINGH, MOHALI

Lesson in defeat

Apropos the editorial 'Jind jolt for INLD, Congress' (Feb 1), the Congress' loss is a report card on its progress, which is not up to the mark. The Congress thinktank needs to ponder over it. Its candidate lost, though he was the party spokesman. This defeat at the threshold of the coming General Election does not portend well. The party president is busy in exposing the BJP and consolidating his base in the electorally largest state of Uttar Pradesh, where the political atmosphere is hotter, but he needs to know that a defeat — even in a bypoll in any other state — may affect people's mood and opinion.

RAJENDRA PRASAD SINGH, NEW DELHI

Why blame AOC?

Refer to 'IAF moots action against two officers over Pathankot attack' (Jan 31); the proposed action seems ill-conceived. Protection of a vast perimeter of an air base is not easy. There are several vulnerable points, which need periodic checks and regular maintenance. Adequate number of watchtowers is needed; perimeter lighting must be optimum; and night patrol adequate to ward off terrorist attacks. The Air Officer Commanding (AOC) of an air base, despite his best efforts, cannot plug all loopholes. DSC personnel comprising former soldiers posted at the stations are deployed to man security gates and sentry posts. They are not equipped to meet terror challenge. It is unfair to take action against the AOC or the Station Commander for their perceived failure.

WG CDR CL SEHGAL (RETD), JALANDHAR

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by **e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com**

Let collegium's decisions be transparent

YOGESH PRATAP SINGH
REGISTRAR, NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY, ODISHA

NO organ of the State is expected to exercise power beyond what is granted by the Constitution. This has been highlighted by the Supreme Court in many cases, particularly in 'Golak Nath vs State of Punjab' (1967). The Constitution is supreme and all authorities, including the judiciary, shall conform to this supreme law of the land which manifests the will of the people. Traditionally, the judiciary was understood to be the least 'dangerous' branch of the State, but this is no longer true. Now, judiciary wields more powers than those conferred upon it by the Constitution. The power of the courts has increased worldwide at an exceptional pace in the past few decades and Indian judiciary has been a frontrunner.

In exercise of its power of judicial review, the judiciary has not only regulated the administrative powers of the Union and the State executive, but also significantly controlled the prerogative powers of the head of the State (President and the Governor) i.e. power to grant pardon, power to promulgate ordinance etc. It has effectively endeavoured to control the powers of various other instrumentalities of the State and independent constitutional and legal functionaries, such as the Election Commission of India, Union Public Service Commission, Finance Commission and the Central Vigilance Commission.

Appropriation or misappropriation of due process and its further extension into a substantive due process has empowered the judiciary to declare a law made by the legislature unconstitutional, unjust and even arbitrary. Gradually, the judiciary also brought under its purview the constitutional amendment Acts. The judiciary has also extended its jurisdiction and powers to the subjects of legislative privileges. While Parliament has been claiming absolute sovereignty in matters of its privileges, the judiciary has staked its claim as a custodian of the Constitution. As a result, the judiciary and the legislature have been at loggerheads on the justifiability of legislative privileges.

The Constitution made certain matters non-justiciable i.e. kept them outside the realm of the judiciary, for instance the non-enforceability of the Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 37). Later, the Ninth Schedule (Article 31-B) was introduced as another forbidden territory for the judiciary to keep certain laws, particularly those relating to land reforms, beyond the scope of judicial review.

However, disproportionate use of judicial review has debilitated even these express limitations. In the Jagadambika Pal case (1998) and the Jharkhand Assembly case (2005), the Supreme Court meddled with the powers and privileges of the legislature and diluted the essence of Article 212. Directing the presiding officers of the legislatures to discharge their functions in a given manner was unworkable and unacceptable. How could the executive authorities like the Chief Secretary of the state government or police officials be able to maintain order, arrange for the presence of the legislators and for their entry inside the House? If this was allowed, they would have been substituting the presiding officers in the matter of maintenance of discipline.

OVERREACH: The courts' power has increased worldwide at an exceptional pace. Indian judiciary has been a frontrunner.

Why can't the standards of judicial review which the Supreme Court applied to others be applicable to the collegium's decisions, which are administrative in nature? The collegium is perhaps the only institution in our constitutional framework that has become an *imperium in imperio* — an empire within an empire without any limitation on its powers.

In a significant judgment ('IR Coelho vs State of Tamil Nadu'), a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court held that there could not be any blanket immunity from judicial review of laws inserted in the Ninth Schedule.

The apex court held that though the appointment is ultimately an executive act, the doctrine of judicial review did not justify the primacy of the executive. In the 'Second Judges' case, it held that 'consultation' really meant 'concurrence', and that the CJI's view enjoys primacy since he is "best equipped to know and assess the worth" of candidates. The CJI, in turn, was to formulate his opinion through a body of senior judges that the court described as the collegium. In the 'Third Judges' Transfer' case, the Supreme Court further held that the collegium will comprise, in the case of appointments to the apex court, the CJI and his four senior-most colleagues — and, in the case of appointments to the High Courts, the CJI and his two senior-most colleagues. Additionally, for appointments to the High Courts, the collegium must consult such other senior judges serving in the Supreme Court who had previously served as judges of the High Court concerned. The SC later discarded the idea of the National Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, terming it unconstitutional.

Paradoxically, the Supreme Court which tried to keep a constant check over every other organ/institution/body under the Constitution failed to apply a similar method of disciplining to its own functions. How is a judge appointed to the High Court or elevated to the Supreme Court, how is a judge appointed as the Chief Justice of a High Court and how and when is a judge transferred from one High Court to another? Are the views of the consultee judges given due weight by the collegium? The simple answer is: the public does not know anything about it even after 25 years of such a mechanism in practice. The reason has been the Supreme Court's attitude towards the Right to Information Act despite preaching how vital is the citizen's right to know how its public institutions are functioning.

The recent recommendation of the collegium to elevate two High Court judges to the apex court by superseding 32 judges with greater seniority and more shockingly after negating its own recommendation to elevate P Nandrajog, Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court, is an obvious outcome of this mysterious system.

Why can't the standards of judicial review which the Supreme Court applied to others be applicable to the collegium's decisions, which are administrative in nature? The collegium is perhaps the only institution in our constitutional framework which has become an *imperium in imperio* i.e. an empire within an empire without any limitation on its powers.

The powers to appoint judges were appropriated by the Supreme Court under the guise of judicial independence, i.e. independence from executive and legislature but not independence from accountability. If serious thought is not given, the whole process will remain "a sacred ritual whose mystery is confined only to a handful of high priests," as Justice PN Bhagwati once described it.

Nations should strive for cognitive security

PUKHRAJ SINGH
CYBER-INTELLIGENCE SPECIALIST

We have seen how political polarisation amplified by the internet led to mob lynchings and communal riots. A perpetual tension has seeped into our living rooms. Our pluralism offers a natural defence against foreign interference, something which should be fostered rather than tampered with.

ONE of the things which social media has taught us is how insidiously it can alter our behaviour and even the nature of reality perceived by us. Richard Burr, Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, commented that the barrage of Russian disinformation which influenced the 2016 US elections sowed such divisions that it literally nudged Americans to fight on the streets.

Closer home, we have seen how political polarisation amplified by the internet led to mob lynchings and communal riots. A perpetual tension has seeped into our living rooms — ideological disagreements are often leading to the souring of relationships.

While the playbook of manipulation of human behaviour could be traced to the information warfare doctrines of the 19th century, technology allows malicious actors to perpetuate it on a scale that is difficult to fathom.

By hoovering up personal data from Facebook, Cambridge Analytica psychologically profiled the British populace so accurately that it was able to change the outcome of Brexit.

By weaponising psychometrics — a branch of psychology leveraging data sciences to deduce personality traits — it sent tailored messages to individuals over social media, using a strategy called micro-targeting, exacerbating their biases. Like a parasite, it burrowed deep into the minds of people to trigger cognitive dissonance. It is a mental conflict which occurs when our beliefs are challenged by new information, thus suppressing rational behaviour with an emotional response.

INSIDIOUS: Technology allows malicious actors to perpetuate manipulation of human behaviour on a scale that is difficult to fathom.

SOFWERX, a think tank of the US Special Operations Command, recently held an event to debate radical ideas on 'Countering Weaponised Information'. One of the takeaways was that we are merely scratching the surface when it comes to mass behavioural modelling. The Russian influence operations and Cambridge Analytica's machinations were just trailers.

Dr David Perlman, who studied applied physics at Caltech and electrical engineering at the University of Washington, now pursues his interest in cognitive science through a doctorate at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

As one of the speakers, he asserted that the psycho-social biases underpinning information warfare are so consistent that they affect everyone — even those who strive to be most objective or rational.

He advised us to inculcate a 'bias hygiene' by beginning with the assumption that we are already biased. Perlman recommended that we 'red-team' our brain, borrowing a methodology from hacking which tests cyber defences using offence.

There is indeed some method to the madness of trolls and other fringe elements which poison social media, as Perlman explained. Using vicious and divisive propaganda, they aim to stretch the Overton Window — which defines the informal boundaries of acceptable public discourse.

With a 'door in the face' instead of a 'foot in the door' — that is, by directly jumping to extreme positions instead of gradual escalation — trolls trick people and the mainstream media into legitimising issues which were earlier deemed inappropriate. A perfect example would be when terms like 'anti-national', *ghar wapsi* and 'love jihad' gained wide visibility and amplification as the mainstream media tried to scrutinise them. It walked into a well-laid trap.

Unfortunately, any government effort to debunk misinformation may fall flat as counter-propaganda is in itself a form of propaganda. And no amount of fact-checking may come to our rescue, as a study by the MIT's Media Laboratory on Social Machines shows that, on Twitter, lies travel much faster than the truth.

Perlman summated, "This multidimensional space [of data-driven behavioural modelling] is the battlefield… this abstract space of ideas. Adversaries are now able to visualise at that level."

Sara-Jayne Terp, a 'data nerd' exhibiting savant-like brilliance, was earlier the chief of the United Nations' big data division. She is working on the Global Disinformation Index. Speaking at the event, she pointed out that of the 20 or so 'attack surfaces' of the brain, malicious actors have just weaponised a few. Terp remarked on our obsession with fake news, an imprecise parameter for the validation of online content. 'Fake-ness' is contextual, topical and time-dependent. She concluded on a positive note that when it comes to cyber-enabled information warfare, we have just started to give a structure to the attackers' Tactics, Techniques and Procedures. Terp hinted that the time-tested frameworks of cyber defence could hold promise for this domain as well.

The concluding speaker was Wing Commander Keith Dear, a DPhil candidate at Oxford University's Department of Experimental Psychology and a research fellow at Oxford's Changing Character of War Programme. Dear stressed that warfare is fundamentally persuasive. So, it always had a cognitive premise. And as such, psychology must play a much greater role in the military's operational, tactical and strategic planning.

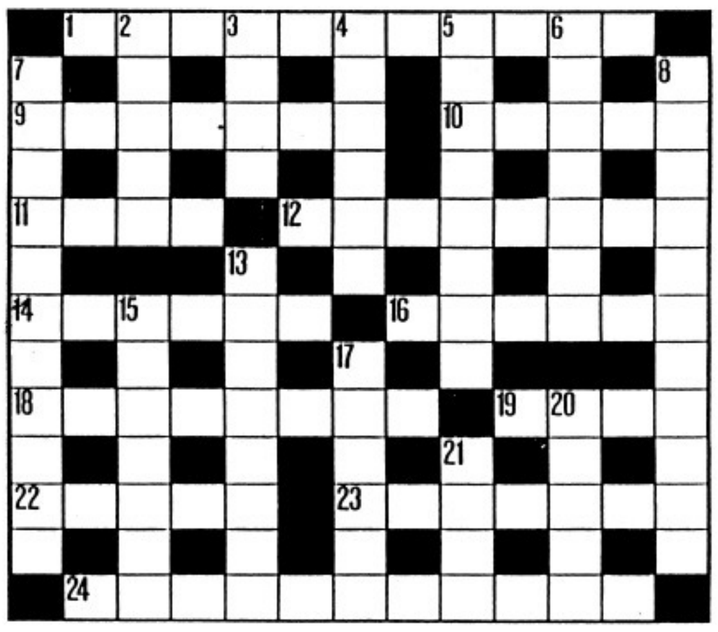
Dear divulged that Cambridge Analytica-like profiling is now possible not just with social media, but also with passive indicators like how you type, speak and even your eyeball movements.

Quoting latest research, he exposited that human minds make probabilistic, predictable and replicable errors that are fully exploitable. By 2020, even commercial data brokers would hold 5,200 gigabytes of data for every person on earth — equalling 18.5 million books. Using Artificial Intelligence, adversaries could induce mass psychosis, breaking societies and nations.

Dear strongly recommended that nations should strive for cognitive security, which may become more important than guarding borders or modernising armies.

For India, a lesson from the former deputy director, National Security Agency, Chris Inglis, holds true, "Diversity beats audacity." Like the Himalayas, our pluralism offers a natural defence against foreign interference, something which should be fostered rather than tampered with.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Pre-emptive attack (5,6)
9 Elucidate (7)
10 North American cattle farm (5)
11 Variety of chalcedony (4)
12 Traveller on foot (8)
14 Formal discussion (6)
16 Was inclined (6)
18 Unexpectedly (8)
19 Hard persistent toil (4)
22 Colloquial language (5)
23 Confront boldly (7)
24 Ready when needed (11)

DOWN
2 Suggest (5)
3 Influence (4)
4 Elaborate ice cream dish (6)
5 Refined (8)
6 Related (7)
7 Seek to predict (6-5)
8 Ruthless interrogation (5,6)
13 Direct (8)
15 Boastful threats (7)
17 Larger than life (6)
20 Get to know (5)
21 To staunch (4)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Guffaw, 4 Opponent, 9 Openly, 10 Hallmark, 12 Down, 13 Clown, 14 Plan, 17 All-important, 20 White feather, 23 Haul, 24 Diary, 25 Swan, 28 Perverse, 29 Bogota, 30 Nowadays, 31 Pained.
Down: 1 Good deal, 2 Free will, 3 Ally, 5 Play with fire, 6 Only, 7 Enable, 8 Taking, 11 Bloodthirsty, 15 Omaha, 16 Sneak, 18 Showdown, 19 Drunkard, 21 Chopin, 22 Burrow, 26 Send, 27 Iota.

SU DO KU

5	7		4		6		8	9
1				2				5
		2				3		
		9	7		3	4		
4								7
		7	1		8	5		
		4				9		
8				3				1
7	5		6		4		2	3

EASY

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 2, 2019 SATURDAY

Vikrami Samvat	2075
Shaka Samvat	1940
Magh Shaka	13
Magh Parvishte	20
Hijari	1440

- Krishan Paksh Tithi 13, up to 9.19 pm
- Vajra Yoga up to 7.04 am
- Purvashadha Nakshatra up to 11.55 pm
- Moon enters Capricorn sign at 6.39 am

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

4	3	7	2	1	8	9	6	5
5	6	1	7	9	4	3	2	8
2	9	8	6	5	3	1	7	4
3	8	6	5	4	1	2	9	7
9	4	2	8	7	6	5	1	3
1	7	5	3	2	9	8	4	6
7	2	4	9	3	5	6	8	1
6	1	3	4	8	2	7	5	9
8	5	9	1	6	7	4	3	2

FORECAST

SUNSET: SATURDAY 17:59 HRS
SUNRISE: SUNDAY 07:13 HRS

Sunny | Partly Cloudy | Cloudy | Rainy | Foggy

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	21	06
New Delhi	22	10
PUNJAB		
Amritsar	19	05
Bathinda	20	05
Jalandhar	20	05
Ludhiana	21	07
HARYANA		
Bhiwani	22	06
Hisar	22	06
Sirsa	20	05
HIMACHAL PRADESH		
Dharamsala	13	03
Manali	08	–03
Shimla	11	01
JAMMU & KASHMIR		
Jammu	18	05
Leh	–01	–10
Srinagar	06	–01
UTTARAKHAND		
Dehradun	22	06
Mussoorie	12	01

TEMPERATURE IN °C

WHO

Kamala Harris, Democratic hopeful

Kamala Devi Harris is a 54-year-old American senator from California, of Indian and African descent, and candidate for President of the United States in 2020. Ms. Harris announced her candidacy on Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January 21) and launched her campaign in Oakland, California, a week ago. She is the second African-American woman (and the first Indian-American) in the Senate and first Indian and African (Jamaican) woman to have been California's Attorney-General. Ms. Harris, when asked about her firsts, often quotes her mother as saying, "You may be the first to do many things, but make sure you're not the last."

Where did she grow up?

Ms. Harris was born in Oakland, California, to two Ph.D students at the University of California, Berkeley – Shyamala Gopalan from Chennai, who was studying nutrition and endocrinology and eventually became a breast cancer researcher, and Donald Harris from Jamaica, who was studying economics and went on to become a professor at Stanford. The two met during the civil rights movement and would take Kamala and her sister Maya on marches. They divorced when Harris was seven. Harris's Indian grandfather, P.V. Gopalan, was a diplomat with the Government of India and a former freedom fighter and her grandmother was an activist for birth control in India. "She was the purest form of the Harris women...we're all diluted versions of my grandmother," Ms. Harris told *Vogue* last year. "My mother, grandparents, aunts and uncle instilled in us the pride in our South Asian roots," Ms. Harris writes in her memoir *The Truths We Hold*, released this January, adding, "My mother understood very well that she was raising two black daughters... and she was determined to make sure we would grow into confident, proud, black women." Ms. Harris attended a prominent black college, Howard University, and is a member of the country's largest black sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha.

Where does she stand?

In 2004, Ms. Harris became San Francisco's District Attorney, and in 2011, California's Attorney-General. Ms. Harris's contradictory stances as a public prosecutor have drawn criticism from many on the left. She has been praised for her efforts to reduce recidivism through education and training, introducing racial bias training for police officers and for not backing California's Proposition 8 (a ban on same sex marriage). She has been criticised for her hardline positions on crime. Most notably, while Ms. Harris is personally against the death penalty – in 2004 she did not seek the death penalty for a man who had killed a police officer – she defended the death penalty's presence on the statute book in California in 2014, when she was Attorney-General.

What is her platform?

Ms. Harris's campaign slogan is 'Kamala Harris, for the people,' the words she first said as a public prosecutor, introducing herself in court. Ms. Harris has said she is an advocate of Medicaid for All (her proposal to get rid of private health insurance was controversial and her campaign staff later presented a softer position on this) and will provide the largest middle-class tax cut in history. She also spoke out against big banks and corporations, alluded to the unfairness of tax giveaways for the rich, spoke of uniting Americans and making education a fundamental right at her campaign launch.

What is in store?

It is hard to tell at the moment how Kamala Ms. Harris will fare in the 2020 race. Harris has to first win the Democratic nomination – no mean feat as the field is diverse and crowded and new candidates continue to declare their interest (Cory Booker, an African-American Senator from New Jersey, declared on Friday that he would run). A Politico/Morning Consult poll conducted on January 25-27, before Mr. Booker announced his candidacy, ranked Ms. Harris as the third favourite candidate of Democratic voters, below former Vice-President Joe Biden and Independent Senator from Vermont Bernie Sanders.

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

WHAT

The lowdown on MGNREGA funding

WHAT IS IT? The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme has been allocated ₹60,000 crore in the Budget for 2019-20. It is less than what was spent on the scheme in the current year, that is, the revised estimate for 2018-19, which stands at ₹61,084 crore. In his Budget speech, Finance Minister Piyush Goyal noted: "Additional amount would be provided, if needed." The original 2018-19 Budget allocation for the scheme, a lifeline for landless labourers and rural workers, was ₹55,000 crore. However, by the end of 2018, 99% of the funds had been exhausted. A number of States already had a negative net balance. The activists protested that people were being denied work in several States. The Rural Development Ministry, which administers the scheme, asked for a supplementary allocation and was granted ₹6,084 crore in early January, taking the revised estimate for the year to ₹61,084 crore.

HOW DID THIS COME ABOUT? A look at the funding patterns over the last decade shows this is not the first time allocations for the scheme are lower than what was spent in the previous year. In most years, supplementary allocations later in the year have ensured that the final amount spent has risen at least incrementally each year. However, the revised estimates for 2012-13 were actually lower than the previous year, while the amount spent in 2014-15 was exactly the same as in the previous year. When MGNREGA funding is adjusted for inflation, a bleaker picture appears, making it clear that both the UPA and NDA governments have short-changed the scheme for several years now. In 2011-12, the revised estimate was ₹31,000 crore. For the next four years, the inflation-adjusted amount spent on the scheme was lower than ₹30,000 crore in 2011 terms. The current allocation of ₹61,084 crore drops to just ₹41,013 crore in 2011 terms, when adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index for rural labourers.

WHY DOES IT MATTER? Rural workers are being discouraged from registering with the scheme, being denied work even when they do register, and are facing long delays in payment of wages even when they do get work. Researchers, activists and elected representatives blame this on the lack of sufficient funding. The promise of the MGNREGA is to enhance livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of wage employment a year to households that want it. If work is not provided within 15 days, applicants are entitled to an employment allowance. Thus, work is a legal entitlement under the scheme and funding should be demand-driven.

However, researchers have found a widening gap between demand and supply of work. A study of 3,500 panchayats in 2017-18 found that the employment provided was 32% lower than the work demand generated. Researchers calculated that in order to meet the registered work demand last year, the scheme should have had an allocation of ₹76,131 crore. Workers are also facing weeks- and months-long delays in payment of wages, often without compensation. Finance Ministry documents admit that one of the causes is the non-availability of funds.

WHAT LIES AHEAD? The future funding situation is bleak, given that the government's "highest ever allocation" tag disguises the pending liabilities. If the total allocation of ₹61,084 crore had come through on the budget day, the scheme would still have a negative net balance of ₹3,270 crore, according to its financial statement on February 1. The next two months are the peak season, and workers have been promised an additional 50 days of work in drought-hit areas. Researchers predict that the deficit could grow as high as ₹12,000 crore by the end of this financial year. With Central money running out, States have also been asked to use their own funds to pay workers over the next two months, with the promise of an April refund. These deficits and liabilities will eat into the allocation for next year, slashing the amount available for new works in 2019-20.

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

WHY

parties in Tamil Nadu are against 10% quota

What is their stand?

The 103rd Constitution Amendment, through which the Centre has introduced a 10% quota for the economically weaker sections among communities that do not enjoy any other form of reservation, has drawn near universal opposition from almost all major parties in Tamil Nadu. When it was introduced as the 124th Constitution (Amendment) Bill in Parliament, the AIADMK, the ruling party in the State, and considered to be friendly towards the BJP, spoke out against it in both Houses of Parliament. Its MPs walked out during the vote. Kanimozhi, DMK MP, moved a motion to refer the Bill to a select committee, but it was defeated. R.S. Bharathi, organising secretary of the DMK, has challenged the amendment in the Madras High Court. The Viduthulai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), an ally of the DMK, has moved the Supreme Court against it. D. Veerasekaran, an advocate who belongs to the Dravidar Kazhagam, has also approached the High Court.

Why is there such opposition?

Tamil Nadu is a pioneer in providing reservation in employment and education as a social justice measure. Its backward classes reservation history goes back to 1921. For historical and ideological reasons, therefore, the concept of social justice in the State is anchored firmly in the belief that reservation is a tool to ameliorate the conditions of sections of society that had been discriminated against in the past and that had suffered deprivation of employment and educational opportunities on account of their social backwardness. Here, reservation is seen not merely as an exception to the equality clause in the Constitution, but is considered an important and essential component of equality. In other words, equality acquires deeper meaning only if social injustices of the past are undone through preferential treatment for backward classes and other affirmative action programmes.

What are their principal objections?

The first and foremost objection to the 10% reservation for the economically poor in other classes is that it cannot be used as a poverty alleviation measure. The amendment to the Constitution to add an enabling provision for extending quotas on economic grounds is seen as a perversion of the idea of social justice. So far, only social and backwardness and educational backwardness were valid grounds for reservation. Many in Tamil Nadu believe economic disadvantage among sections of the advanced castes can be addressed through other measures such as job creation, provision of scholarships and financial concessions. However, carving out a quota among government jobs and educational opportunities cannot be a just solution. One principal reason is that a family's economic condition is variable, whereas social status based on caste or community cannot change. Someone getting a new job, a promotion or an additional breadwinner in the family may result in a change in a person's economic status. On the other hand, the social disability caused by being born in a particular caste cannot be easily undone.

Are there any other apprehensions?

Yes, there are fears that this will lead to shrinking of opportunities for those already enjoying reservation. A significant section of the population is already covered by the State's total reservation of 69% for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, the backward classes, the most backward classes and denotified communities.

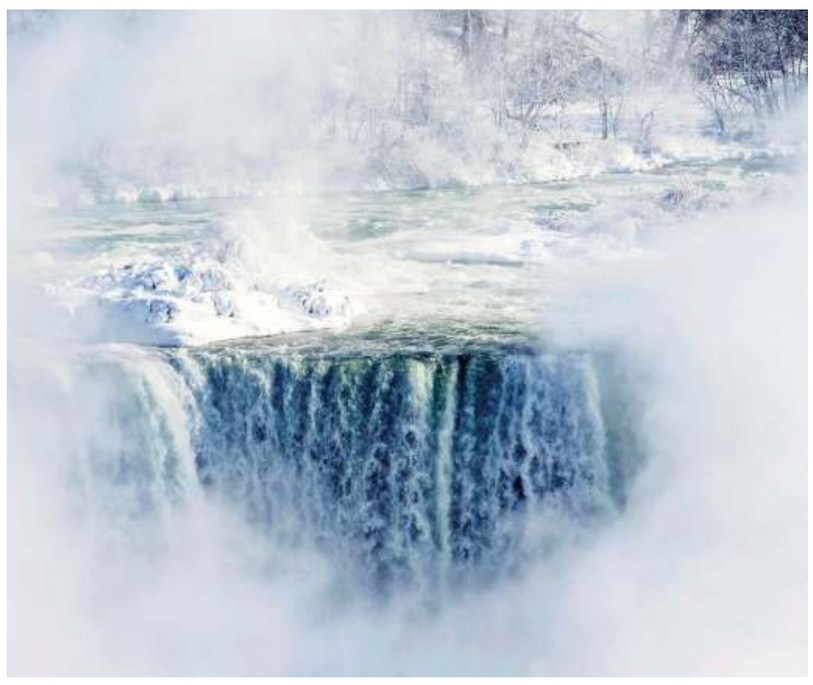
The backward class quota has a sub-quota for backward class Muslims and the Scheduled Caste reservation has a sub-quota for Arundhatiyars, considered the worst-off among the Scheduled Caste. All of them are eligible to contest on merit under open competition too. The open quota may now come down by 10%. Further, there are fears the courts may insist on the 50% judicial cap on total reservation, and may order a cut in the caste-based quotas to accommodate the economic quota.

K. VENKATARAMANAN

WHEN

31 January 2019

Deep freeze: Tens of millions of Americans braved Arctic-like temperatures on Thursday as low as minus 49 degrees Celsius that paralysed the U.S. Midwest and were blamed for 21 deaths. News agencies said warmer-than-normal weather was on the way, but that offered little comfort to the homeless enduring a chill that caused frostbite in minutes. The cold has been blamed on a phenomenon called the 'polar vortex'. Meteorologist Mark Chenard said a polar vortex refers to the upper level jet stream that circulates around both the North and South Poles, keeping the coldest air there. When that jet stream occasionally weakens and buckles, he told Reuters, it disrupts weather patterns — bumping warmer air into Alaska and pushing cold winds down into the U.S. Midwest and East Coast. Pictures show ice flowing in the Merrimack River as it heads to the Atlantic Ocean in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and the impact of freezing temperatures on the Horseshoe Falls in Niagara in Canada. ▪ AFP, AP



WHERE

Maharashtra struggles to amend APMC Act

The Maharashtra government's attempt to amend the Maharashtra Agriculture Produce Marketing (Development and Regulation) Act, 1963, has hit a roadblock again. It had to withdraw the Bill from the Legislative Council even after it was passed by the Assembly. The amendment Bill has been in the works for over 14 years and owing to its politically and economically important stakeholders, who are farmers, traders and 'mathadi' workers (head loaders), the government has struggled to push through the changes.

What is the problem?

After it was passed in the Assembly last November, the Mumbai and Pune APMCs called a strike, alleging that the proposed amendment severely limited their powers. One of the important amendments the Bill seeks to bring about is to free essential items from the purview of APMCs and allow them to be sold outside.

Farmer organisations such as the Shetkari Sanghatana, formerly led by Sharad Joshi, support this amendment. "Sharad Joshi always said that the APMC Act is one of the main reasons why farmers are prey to the monopoly of traders," said Anil Ghanvat, president of Shetkari Sanghatana.

What are the changes?

The Bill also has a provision that the APMCs can continue to levy cess/market fee on the produce brought and traded in their mandis, but cannot charge anything on goods traded outside. The traders' lobby had said no levy should be charged if the produce was sold outside. Following the meeting between the stakeholders and the government, sources said a compromise was reached to abolish this levy altogether. One of the amendments that was opposed by traders and farmer organisations was the direct payment to farmers from traders for purchase of more than ₹2 lakh, bypassing the *Adta* (the middleman). According to both, the *Adta* plays an important part as an assurer to both parties, and eliminating his role would be harmful to traders as well as to farmers.

Maharashtra is the second State after Bihar to attempt such amendments. While Bihar scrapped it altogether, Maharashtra is trying to do the same, by first allowing traders or processors to deal directly with farmers. Neither they nor the farmers will have to go to the APMC yards to buy and sell their produce. The buyers can directly buy from farmers based on the price quoted by them. Unable to get the Bill cleared in both Houses of the Legislature, the government in August 2016 de-listed fruits and vegetables from the purview of the APMC through a resolution. Further, it was expanded to all farm products. Apart from the government claim that farmers will get a better price after the amendment, it believes that the competitive environment will help the APMCs improve their infrastructure as well as their quality of service to attract farmers. According to Mr. Ghanavat, farmers will go to the market which gives them a better price, be it private buyers or the APMCs.

How many APMCs are there?

Maharashtra has 306 APMCs. The APMC Act had made it mandatory for farmers to sell all their crops in the mandi within a geographically delineated market area under a particular committee's jurisdiction. A few lakh traders and head loaders survive on these committees. It is alleged that local political interests drive all the decisions taken by the APMCs. The supporters of the Bill claim that political compulsions have forced successive governments not to push for the amendments.

Shashikant Shinde, leader of the head loaders and one of the MLAs opposing the Bill, said it is being introduced to serve the interests of multinational companies. According to him, the APMCs provide a mechanism which ensures at least a minimum support price for the farmers' produce, and outside the APMCs, farmers will be forced to sell at a price quoted by companies.

The State government will continue to hold meetings with the stakeholders, and is likely to present the Bill, approved by all, in the budget session from February 24.

ALOK DESHPANDE

What about some human intelligence first?

To consider AI as a replacement for human intelligence is to repeat the age-old mistake of expecting god to solve problems without humans making any effort

THE CONTROVERSIAL INDIAN

TABISH KHAIR
is an Indian novelist and academic who works in Denmark

Artificial intelligence (AI) is all the rage these days. A recent article noted that 'robots' – shorthand for AI in the tabloids – will be able to write a fiction bestseller within 50 years. I suppose that would be shocking to me as a novelist if most fiction bestsellers were not already being written by 'robots'. Or so one feels, keeping publishing and other vogues in mind: a bit of this, a bit of that, a dash of something else, and voila, you have a bestseller!

Intelligence and skills

In that sense, perhaps the rise of AI will make us reconsider what we mean by human intelligence. This discussion has been neglected for far too long. Take my field: literature. The Chinese company, Cheers Publishing, lately offered a collection of poems written by a computer program. So, are poets, generally considered to be suicidal in any case, jumping off cliffs in droves as a consequence? Well, this is a selection from one of the AI poems I found online: "The rain is blowing through the sea / A bird in the sky / A night of light and calm / Sunlight / Now in the sky / Cool heart / The savage north wind / When I found a new world."

Yes, there are aspiring poets – and sometimes established ones – who write like this, connecting words centripetally or centrifugally to create an effect. I think they should have been pushed off literary cliffs a long time ago. Because this is not poetry; this is just the technique of assembling words like poetry. There is a difference between the intelligence required to write poetry and the skills required to write it. That poetic intelligence is lost without the required poetic skills, but the skills on their own do not suffice either.

The fact that lines like this, written by AI, can be considered poetry does not reflect on the intelligence of AI. It reflects on the intelligence of those readers, writers, critics, editors, publishers and academics who have not yet distinguished between gimmickry and mimicry on the one side and the actual freshness of a chiselled line on the other.

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK PHOTO

But this is a small example. Surely, AI might also make us discover our basic lack of intelligence in other areas, including that of considering something like IQ to be a sufficient index of human mental capacity! Because if we think that AI can replace human intelligence, then we are simply not thinking hard enough.

Work and leisure

One of the major failures here is that of considering intelligence to be something different from and raised above the activity of living. This leads to the misconception that intelligence can be relegated to something else – say, a robot – without becoming something else. Human intelligence cannot be passed on to something else: What is "passed on" is always a different kind of 'intelligence'. (I would call it cleverness, until further evidence to the contrary.)

Even the arguments that AI – or, as in the past, robots – can enable human beings to lead a gloriously workless existence is based on a similar misconception. Because human intelligence is embedded in human existence, 'work' as human activity in the world is not something human beings can do without. The fact that we resent 'work' at times – and in hard and boring jobs, often all the time – does not change this. What we resent is not acting in the world ('work') but being made to act in the world against our better and natural inclinations ('salaried work,' mostly). To think that AI and robots can just create a lifetime of 'leisure' for human beings is to not know what human beings are. It shows a lack of intelligence.

It is because human intelligence is embedded in human living and acting that human beings have the ability to adopt contradictory positions, or no position at all. From the perspective of 'pure' intelligence, this seems to be a flaw. But it is only a flaw if one divorces intelligence from living and acting in the world, for the latter often throws up situations of unresolvable ambiguity and ambivalence. In different ways, both religion and literature know this – and that is the reason why they retain a central role in human consciousness.

There is much that we can do with AI, just as there is much that we have done with the wheel. But to consider AI a replacement for human intelligence – or humanity – is to repeat an age-old mistake. This mistake relates to god. No matter whether god exists or not, it has always been a mistake to expect him to 'solve' problems without human effort. The Prophet of Islam is said to have once told a man who claimed that he believed in Allah so much that he never tied up his camel: "First tie up your camel and then believe in Allah." Buddha, pressed to answer if there was a god, supposedly replied: "It would make no difference to mankind in the world."

It is ironic that the often atheistic fans of AI who believe that it is 'The solution' are making the same mistake that some of the religious made in assuming that god can be 'The solution' – without ongoing and intelligent human effort.

A Non-Defamation Agreement

How to protect oneself legally, logically and semantically against a defamation suit

ALLEGEDLY

G. SAMPATH
is Social Affairs Editor, The Hindu

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK PHOTO

For some time now I've been meaning to write a candid, courageous, no-holds-barred article naming every name and exposing every sordid detail about a defence deal involving flying objects that shall, for the moment, remain unnamed. Please don't think I'm spineless. In any case, when was the last time anyone saw a spine on Indian soil? In 1857? It's just that my lawyer keeps warning me that in India, speaking the truth can bankrupt you *and* land you in jail. Frankly, I don't get it.

Firing defamation suits

Like you, I also keep reading in the papers about this crony capitalist whose full-time hobby is filing defamation suits. Again, I'm not naming him only because my lawyer insists that I don't. He says I may end up attracting a ₹56,000 crore defamation suit against me and the IT guy who helped me write this column by fixing my laptop when it crashed in terror after the opening sentence.

But tell me something. If your character is truly without blemish – it has to be, in order to be eligible for defamation, since you can't defame someone whose reputation is already faecal matter – how will binge-filing defamation suits help? In fact, if someone uses defamation suits like an AK-47 – going *dhar-dhar-dhar-dhar* against anyone and everyone – it would be counterproductive. This person would end up with the reputation of being a defamation maniac, which, if you ask me, is not something you'd expect from a paragon of virtue. As Shakespeare said, reliance on defamation suits provokes suspicion.

Personally, I am not a judgmental person. If you want to make money by compromising India's defence interests, who am I to judge? As a patriotic taxpayer, I do not mind it in the least if my income tax helps a fellow Indian to pay off his debts.

But as my lawyer explained to me, with criminal defamation, the process IS the punishment. I finally understood why my favourite novel, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, is called "Der Process" in German. Because it's the process, stupid!

So before I speak my mind on this defence deal, I wish to protect myself legally, logically and semantically against the faintest possibility of a defamation suit. Also, the way things are with the Mongolian judiciary (just to be clear, when I say Mongolian, I mean Mongolian), I don't want my fate sealed in an envelope.

Terms and conditions

Therefore I'm not taking any chances. I want you to read carefully the terms and conditions under which you are consuming this column. I am grateful to my lawyer for drawing up this Agreement at such short notice and without even charging GST. Here goes:

1. This column that you are reading is a de facto Non-Defamation Agreement (NDA) between you (hereinafter referred to as 'you') and the column's author (hereinafter called 'me').

2. All the provisions of this Agreement are effective as of the date of publication of this column or your date of birth, whichever is earlier, and shall remain in force until you and/or your reputation die(s), whichever is later.

3. Pursuant to (1) above, through the act of reading this column, you have entered into a legally binding Agreement with me, whereby you are deemed to have sworn on your mother and/or father/guardian, as applicable, that you will never, ever, either directly or through a proxy, file a defamation suit against me or any of my friends, family members, ex-girlfriend(s), or any other individual, organisation, mammal or reptile, pliable or otherwise, who claims to be, or has ever been, a journalist.

4. You acknowledge that Indian defamation laws are nonsense and that anyone who thinks of using them against anyone should pre-emptively drown himself or herself in a vat of double-toned cow urine.

5. If ever you feel an irrepressible urge to file a defamation suit, you will do so only after fulfilling two conditions: (a) Watch *The Accidental Prime Minister* and *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* back-to-back five times without a single toilet break; (b) sing the first 18 lines of 'Vande Mataram' without any mistakes and without using words like 'Pulkistan' and 'Sumantra Bhusmani'.

6. You undertake to indemnify, in perpetuity, the author of this column and his progeny, both current and future ones, if any, from any damage (real or imagined) that may accrue to your reputation (real or imagined) from anything that this author may have ever written or may ever write in the future.

7. All disputes arising from this Agreement will be settled by a five-judge bench of a Kangaroo Court where the Chief Kangaroo will be myself, and the other four kangaroos will be picked by a one-member collegium headed by myself.

8. You biometrically signed this Agreement and accepted all its provisions the moment your eyes fell on the headline or any other line(s) of this column, including the defamatory lines in the visual misrepresentation of the author's winsome visage at the top of this column.

Stupa-hopping in Sarnath

In the land where Buddha gave his first sermon and the Ashoka Pillar was found

WHERE STONES SPEAK

RANA SAFVI
is a historian, author and blogger documenting India's syncretic culture

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK PHOTO

In the 6th century BCE, a young man left the comforts of his royal home in search of truth. For six years, he followed extreme ascetic practices and became totally emaciated. It was then that he realised that this was not the way to nirvana. He eventually found enlightenment under a tree in Bodh Gaya. Prince Siddhartha became Buddha, or the Enlightened One.

Teachings of Buddha

From Bodh Gaya, Buddha went to the Deer Park (Mrigadava) in Sarnath, where the five monks who had been with him during his ascetic phase were staying. It was there that he gave his first sermon, an event known as the Dharma Chakra Pravarttana, or turning of the wheel of law. In ancient times, this place was known by many names – Rishipatana, Mrigadava and Mrigadaya. The word Sarnath comes from a corruption of the name Saranganatha (lord of deer).

In his first sermon to these five companions, Buddha spoke of the Four Noble Truths and the eightfold path that frees people from suffering. He said that there are two ways of life: one is to indulge in all the pleasures of the world and the other is to deny oneself these pleasures. The middle path is the way to achieve nirvana, he said.

It is in Sarnath that Buddha laid the foundation of his sangha, or organisation of monks. He had 60 disciples, who he sent to different parts of the country to spread his teachings. He also established an order of female monks, which was joined by his wife.

Two hundred years after Buddha, the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka, fought the Battle of Kalinga and, disgusted by the bloodshed, became a Buddhist. It is to him that we owe many of the beautiful stupas and monasteries in Sarnath. We also owe a huge debt to Sir Alexander Cunningham, who excavated the Dhamekh, Dharmarajika, and Chaukhandi stupas along with a monastery and temple between 1834 and 1836. Many excavations followed these, the most famous among them being the 1904-05 excavation by Friedrich Oscar Oertel of the Ashoka Pillar, including the Lion Capital.

Invasions and restorations

I have visited Sarnath many times, and each visit is as magical than the previous one. Entering the gate the first thing one sees are the remains of excavated monasteries. As I walked beyond that, I saw a huge group of devotees sitting around in prayer at the Dharmarajika stupa. It was an enchanting sight, for they were oblivious to the sun beating down on them and chanted their sacred texts.

This stupa is the one said to have been built by Ashoka to commemorate Buddha's first sermon. Today it is just a low and flat platform as it "was pulled down in 1794 by one Jagat Singh of Banaras," says B.R. Mani in *Sarnath: Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. He says, "Jagat Singh, the Diwan of Raja Chet Singh of Banaras, dug the stupa mound in 1793-94 for the purpose of obtaining building material, both stones and bricks, for the erection of a market place in the city after his name."

On top of the Ashoka pillar in Sarnath was the the Lion Capital and the Dharmachakra, but the Lion Capital is now housed in Sarnath museum, while the pillar remains where it was originally. The Lion Capital was adopted as the national emblem of India in 1950.

With remains of excavated monasteries on both sides, I walked up to the Dharmekh stupa, which is synonymous with Sarnath. After Ashoka, the other rulers who added to Sarnath's glory were the Kushans, the Guptas and Harshavardhana. Under the Guptas, the Dharmekh stupa was encased with stone-carved floral designs. Sarnath suffered from the Huna invasions, but Harshavardhana later restored some of the earlier buildings. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang (602-664) left detailed accounts of the Dharmarajika stupa and Ashoka's lion pillar. He found 1,500 monks living there.

Sarnath also suffered when it was attacked by Mahmud of Ghazni. Mahipala, the Pala king, restored the monuments. Architect James Fergusson, in *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture,* remarks on the similarity between the sculptured band on the central part of the Dharmekh stupa, which has "geometric patterns of great intricacy", and the carvings done on the two earliest mosques in Delhi and Ajmer. The calligraphy on the screen of Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque, built by Qutbuddin Aibak in the Qutub complex in Delhi, does bear resemblance to the stupa. I have often wondered at the presence of the eternal knot associated with Buddhism in this complex.

The last great monument of Sarnath, a monastery named Dharmachakra Jina Vihara, was built in the 11th century by Kumaradevi, wife of Govindachanda of the Gahadavala dynasty.

Sarnath's importance as a Buddhist centre diminished with time. But there are many other interconnections between historical characters which never cease to amaze me. According to an inscription at Chaukhandi stupa, Humayun sought refuge in Sarnath when he was escaping from the Battle of Chausa.

What qualities should we expect from our leaders?

Our political leaders must owe supreme loyalty to nothing but the country's constitutional values.

THE PUBLIC EYE

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We expect individuals to be their own leaders, to take charge of their lives, to assume responsibility for their decisions. But when individuals group together, a problem arises. Groups can't take charge of themselves, nor can every member simultaneously take charge of the entire group. Someone from the group is invariably asked to show the way, to become the primary agent, to lead. This is simply a fact: groups can't do without leaders. Every sporting team has a captain, a school or college has a principal, a company has its CEO, institutions have their directors, and governments their presidents, chief or prime ministers.

Yet, not everyone who occupies high office is a leader. A person who merely coordinates the actions of others or has management skills is not a leader. Moreover, not everyone who assumes the role of a leader is able to play it well. What qualities then make for a leader? Which virtues are required to provide ethical leadership? I suppose there is little new one can say on this matter. But let me still give it a shot in the hope that it serves as a good reminder. And in the election year, why not focus on qualities necessary for political leadership? Here I can identify four.

Being inclusive

First, if a person is chosen to lead the group, it is her responsibility to take care of the interest of each person of the entire group. This often entails putting collective interest before her own interest or that of her preferred group. For this to happen, she must first be able to identify the common good, to have a grasp of what is acceptable to all, to have an inclusive vision. This requires an infinite capacity to listen to others, to learn from them, to have the intellectual ability to critically examine and evaluate what everyone wants and needs, and then put them all together.

Second, since this intellectual formulation can only be the first step, an estimate of the real quality of a decision is not known until it is implemented; its deficiencies begin to show up only when put into practice. This requires him to keep his ear to the ground, listen patiently to criticism to judge if his policies are working. He must not be defensive when criticised, or evade uncomfortable questions, but face criticism head on and be able to sift the wheat from the chaff. It also necessitates that a leader show flexibility and an ability for course correction by admitting mistakes. He should know that one's stature is not diminished by accepting fallibility.

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Third, a leader must be a good communicator, and that is greatly helped if he has a way with words. But all the rhetorical flourish is of no avail if the speech lacks sincerity and conviction. A conviction with no relation to truth or actual outcomes is dishonest. Eloquence, though a good quality, is hollow without truth. Isn't it better to quietly do the job at hand rather than make grandiose claims or promises that can't be kept?

Finally, a good leader knows that nothing can be achieved without the collective expertise and wisdom of a support team. And when it comes to the entire country, such a team consists of a battalion of groups and institutions. How should members of such teams be picked? It is tempting to induct people who belong to a common caste, region or religion. But such people are prejudiced in their thinking, serve their own particular group or merely themselves. They can't be good for the country as a whole. A good leader must rise above narrow, irrelevant considerations to select his team.

Unafraid of rivals

It is equally tempting to pick those one has taken a fancy to, who are personally loyal. But such people often lack spine. Fearful people with poor ability can never offer good advice to their leader and could allow bad decisions to prevail that push the country down a ruinous path. Besides, they are often among the first to backstab the leader once out of power. Thus, personal likes and dislikes too must be set aside. I doubt if younger readers know that Nehru inducted into his cabinet Dr. Ambedkar, his long-standing, pre-eminent critic, as also the founder of the Jan Sangh, Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Abraham Lincoln, the 19th century American President, was also exemplary in this matter. The man he appointed as his Secretary of War was earlier his superior in legal practice and had on occasion even humiliated him. But over time Lincoln was convinced that the interest of the nation during war would be best served by bringing this rather arrogant man into the cabinet. This led him to set aside personal resentment, forgive him and appoint him to a very crucial job in his cabinet. Great leaders don't hold grudges, are not vindictive and do not care if they have been wronged in the past by anyone so long as they are convinced that he will do no wrong in the future. Magnanimity isn't just a personal moral quality but a necessary political virtue.

Clearly then, a leader must have a knack of appointing persons best suited to his team who have proven ability, understand the purpose of the job, can speak their mind, and are able, without fear, to disagree with the leader if need be. Above all, they must understand the inclusive public philosophy that guides the nation. But such persons can be identified only by one who possesses these qualities and is himself devoted to this public philosophy. In India, this means that our leaders must owe supreme loyalty to nothing but our constitutional values.