



Unedifying episode

The Supreme Court has defused the situation, but concerns remain over stand-off in Kolkata

In its ostensibly even-handed intervention in the stand-off between the Central and West Bengal governments over the manner of investigation of the Saradha Chit Fund case, the Supreme Court has de-escalated political tensions, at least for now. The decision allowed both sides in the face-off to claim “moral victory” – even if it was West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who was forced to climb down from the aggressive posture she took in denying the Central Bureau of Investigation room to question Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar. However, while ordering him to cooperate with the CBI in “neutral” Shillong, the Court restrained the CBI from taking any coercive action against Mr. Kumar. The Police Commissioner and his Special Investigation Team investigating the chit fund case had been served a number of notices to appear before the CBI before it sent a team to his house in Kolkata. While Ms. Banerjee may have reason to believe that the timing of the CBI’s operation was politically motivated, her government’s response – manhandling and detaining the CBI officials – was shocking and inexcusable. In the polarised political atmosphere, her belligerence expectedly secured the backing of a large number of Opposition parties, and even had the Congress rally around her during an impromptu sit-in protest. However, in attempting to obstruct the CBI action in a court-ordered investigation, Ms. Banerjee once again demonstrated that she is prone to taking arguments over administrative procedures to the streets. A decade ago, she burnished her credentials as the Opposition leader who would dethrone the Left Front combine in West Bengal with her agitation over the Singur land acquisition. But her attempt now to bring the State, where she heads the government, to a grinding halt speaks poorly of her political maturity. Ms. Banerjee is free to read political motives into the actions of a Central agency – but she must conduct that fight politically and by heeding her responsibilities as a Chief Minister. To hold a dharna in aid of an officer who is required for questioning does her no credit.

There are bound to be questions whether this matter should have been escalated to such an unpleasant level. The CBI says there was no proper response to the earlier summonses it sent to the Police Commissioner, and alleges that he could have destroyed evidence that was initially gathered by the Special Investigation Team that he had supervised in the initial stage of the probe. But it is doubtful whether descending on a senior officer’s residence on a Sunday evening with a large team of officers was the right course of action for the CBI, as it was liable to be interpreted as a high-handed attempt to browbeat and embarrass the State government. The only way the CBI can escape this impression is by showing that it was justified in demanding the questioning of Mr. Kumar and establishing proof of its suspicions about his role in covering up the scam.

Timely review

The very idea of an ‘angel tax’ on start-ups must be reconsidered

Start-ups troubled by the so-called angel tax may soon receive some concession from the government. On Monday, the Centre set up a five-member working committee to look into revising the norms of the angel tax imposed on start-ups. The tax, which was first introduced in 2012 to curb money-laundering through the sale of shares of private unlisted companies at bloated prices, has caused a lot of anguish among start-up investors in the country. Start-up owners have complained that income tax officials have asked many start-ups to cough up money when they try to attract capital into their entities by issuing new shares. For its part, the IT department fears that start-ups may be used as convenient tools to launder illegally acquired money, so a tax on investments beyond a certain threshold is necessary to deter such shady operations. But while the intent of such an angel tax may be justifiable, the arbitrary nature of it means the cost of unintended consequences could be larger than the supposed benefits. In trying to curb money-laundering, Section 56(2)(viiB) of the Indian Income Tax Act, 1961 gives income tax officials a free hand to harass even genuine start-ups looking to raise investments for their growth. Under the Act, the IT department is free to arbitrarily decide the fair value of a company’s share and tax start-ups if the price at which their new shares are sold to investors is higher than the fair value of these shares. The broad-brush tax on all investments means an unnecessary cost is imposed on the wider start-up community simply because of the lack of better means at the government’s disposal to tackle black money.

The committee set up by the government will, among other things, consider raising the threshold beyond which new investments into start-ups will be taxed. It is expected that start-ups with aggregate paid-up share capital and share premium of less than ₹25 crore, against the previous threshold of only ₹10 crore, will not be taxed while attracting new investment. This would definitely make life easier to a certain extent for angel investors and start-ups. But it will not address the real problem with the angel tax, which has to do with the unbridled power that it vests in the hands of the income tax authorities. Investors, foreign or domestic, may become wary of investing in new ideas when they are taxed while risking money on untested ventures. So the government should look to withdraw the angel tax and focus instead on building the capability to better identify and rein in illegal wealth. Otherwise it risks killing the nascent start-up ecosystem in the country.

Cracks in the framework

With the systematic weakening of institutions, the government risks pushing all resistance to the streets



NEERA CHANDHOKE

The Government of India has reportedly suppressed its own data on current employment, or rather job loss, in the country. It has, thereby, compromised the autonomy and the standing of the National Statistical Commission. This is the latest instalment in the rather sordid story of institutional decay in India, overseen by the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This is not to suggest that previous governments did not undermine institutions. The internal Emergency imposed on the country from 1975 to 1977 initiated the process. The government tried to tame bureaucrats as well as the highest court in the land. Postings and appointments were manipulated to suit the ruling dispensation. The BJP government has, however, earned the dubious distinction of sabotaging the autonomy of several political institutions in rapid succession.

Necessary checks

Institutional decay occasions worry because it affects ordinary citizens in disastrous ways. All governments, even those which have been democratically elected, betray an inexorable will to power. Expectedly, expansion of government power violates constitutional rights to freedom, equality and justice. The only way citizens can be protected against any arbitrary and unlawful exercise of power is by limiting the power of government. Liberal democrats, always sceptical of state power, have tried to contain dramatic surges of power

er by charting out of constitutions and institutional design. Institutions, as the embodiment of formal and informal rules, assure citizens that the government exercises power according to some norms that enable as well as regulate state capacity.

This makes for good political sense when we remember that most human activity is structured by systems of rules – take the intricate and rule-bound game of chess or cricket. Relationships, households, the economy, society, the games we play and do not play take place and develop within the framework of rules. Human beings are social, but we cannot be social unless we know what is expected of us, and what we should do or not do. Without rules that govern relationships – for example, the norm that friendship is based on trust – we will not know what is worthwhile and what is not, what is preferable and what should be avoided, and what is appropriate and what is expedient.

The Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor has argued in his famous work, *Sources of the Self* (1989), that institutions embody ‘strong evaluations’. We learn to discriminate between right and wrong, better and worse, and higher and lower. These evaluations are not judged subjectively by our own desires or impulses. Institutions, which stand independently of us, give us standards that allow us to evaluate. Following Taylor, we can rightly wonder why political power should be exercised, implemented and executed without rules. Assertions of political power adversely affect our interests and our projects. We should be in a position to judge when this power is exercised fairly or unfairly. Rules in a democracy assure us that justice is synonymous with fairness.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Moreover, rules make our worlds predictable. We know what the boundaries of the freedom of expression are, we know that if the police arrests us tomorrow, we have the right to appoint a lawyer and appeal to the judiciary. Without institutions and rules our life would be chancy, unpredictable and fickle. We would inhabit a space empty of certainties, expectations, aspirations and evaluations.

Rules, not whims

In a democracy, individuals are governed by institutions, and not by men. If we do not live in an institutional universe, we will be at the mercy of capricious individuals. Democrats would rather be administered by a system of rules we can scrutinise and evaluate. Of course, rules can be, and are, unfair. But at least we can struggle against rules. We do not have to commit murders to get the ruling dispensation out of power. We might have to carry out a thousand peaceful demonstrations, approach the courts, lobby our legislative representatives, engage in civil disobedience, or withhold our vote. In a world stamped by the decline of institutions and the exercise of arbitrary power, the only way to dislodge a government is through violence.

The present government has tampered with institutions by ap-

pointing its own people to positions of authority, and by using the Enforcement Directorate, Income Tax authorities, the Central Bureau of Investigation and the police as bulldozers to flatten out any site of opposition. In civil society, human rights organisations have been pulverised by blockage of funds, raids and arrests. The shameful way in which human rights activists have been incarcerated without a shred of evidence testifies to the subversion of the rule of law. The ultimate aim of government action is to dismantle institutions, and the delicate relationship of checks and balances among them. This bodes ill for democracy.

The development contravenes the spirit of the freedom struggle. As far back as the 1928 Motilal Nehru constitutional draft, the leadership of the national movement opted for constitutionalism to abridge unpredictable use of power, and grant basic rights to citizens. On November 4, 1948, B.R. Ambedkar, responding to criticism of the draft Constitution in the Constituent Assembly, clarified that the Constitution provided but a framework for future governments. But: “If things go wrong under the new Constitution, the reason will not be that we have a bad constitution. What we will have to say is that Man was vile.” The Indian Constitution established major political institutions, Parliament, executive and the judiciary, laid out the relationship between them, provided for judicial review, and codified political and civil rights. The constitutional framework does not provide thick or substantive conceptions of how we shall think, and in what we shall believe. It provides us with a thin framework that guarantees constitutional morality, or respect for the Constitution as the basis of

political life.

Today the ruling party wants to legislate a thick conception of the good. We are instructed to worship the nation, respect the cow, glorify the coercive arm of the state, and listen on bended knees to leaders. Frankly the discourse is reminiscent of the naïve, and often crude, nationalist scripts authored and acted out by the film star Manoj Kumar in the 1960s. We can avoid watching his films without fear of harassment, but we cannot defy the government without being abused and subjected to violence of the pen and tongue.

Upending the balance

The government arrests civil society activists who engage with policy, and vigilante groups attack individuals who dare transport cattle, legitimately, from one part of India to another. Immediately the sympathies of the police and magistrates, some sections of the media and public opinion swing towards the perpetrator, not the victim. The leaders of our ruling dispensation seem to have no respect for the rule of law, nor for the rules that regulate speech in public spaces.

Ultimately institutionalised power that is subject to regulation, and that can withstand the scrutiny of the political public, is meant to protect citizens. Unfortunately, in the India of today institutions are used to protect the ruling class, and its sins of omission and commission. The people who rule us should know that when the relationship between citizens and the state is governed not by institutions but by individuals, politics takes to the streets. And then a thousand revolts happen. We pay heavily for institutional decline.

Neera Chandhoke is a former Professor of Political Science at Delhi University

A series of unfortunate missteps

Fixing the federal fallout of the Kerala flood relief funding row requires care



T.P. SREENIVASAN

The differences between the Kerala and Central governments over the denial of external assistance to rebuild the State after the devastating floods of August last year surfaced again last month, in the Kerala Governor’s policy speech in the Assembly as well as the statements of a Kerala Minister at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Varanasi. Governor Justice P. Sathasivam had said that the Kerala government had requested the Centre to enhance its borrowing limit to mobilise additional resources for rebuilding the flood-hit State. “We are still awaiting a favourable response from the Central government in this regard,” he added. Minister K.T. Jaleel, who represented Kerala at the conclave, complained that he was not allowed to raise the issue there. The bitterness over the flood money still persists.

Competitive federalism, in the context of interaction with foreign countries, promoted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has proved to be a double-edged sword. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan now stands accused of violating rules regarding the seeking of foreign assistance. He remains unclear on how to make up for the shortfall, of several crores. The Central government is unable to provide the funds while Kerala has been stopped in its tracks from

seeking resources from abroad, either from the Kerala diaspora or from friendly foreign governments.

The present situation is a result of a series of errors of judgment and misunderstandings on both sides. Mutual political suspicion and a lack of appreciation of the complexities of the international situation have brought about a confrontation. The Chief Minister may have even made diplomatic and tactical misjudgments.

Diplomatic trajectory

India had no qualms about receiving foreign assistance for disaster management till 2004. But when India’s aspiration for permanent membership of the UN Security Council met with strong resistance, New Delhi hit upon the idea of forcing a vote in the General Assembly. The game plan was to secure a two-thirds majority and then attempt to embarrass the permanent members into supporting the expansion of the Security Council. The two false presumptions were that India would win the required number of votes and that the Security Council would wilt under pressure from the General Assembly. In fact, many Assembly members were opposed to the veto even for the existing permanent members and had no interest in creating more permanent members with veto. India thought that it could win over the other countries if it was seen to be helping them in emergencies rather than seeking such assistance for itself.

The tsunami of 2004 and the threat of piracy in the Indian Ocean provided India an oppor-



THULASHI KAKKAT

tunity to test its new posture. Everybody was grateful, but it made no difference to India’s claim to permanent membership. There were other factors too which militated against India’s claim. The Modi government decided, however, to lay down the rules regarding foreign assistance in order to bring some clarity to the situation.

The rules, which were framed in 2016, clarified that India would not solicit any assistance but would receive relief assistance, even as cash, from individuals, charitable institutions and foundations. If cash were to be offered bilaterally by foreign governments, the matter would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Even before the extent of the damage was fully known, I had urged the Central government in early August 2018 to make a suitable amendment to the rule as the damage in Kerala was beyond the capacity to handle it. Needless to say, nobody responded at that stage.

The UAE’s offer

The saga of the offer by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) began when the Prime Minister was informed by the UAE authorities that relief assistance was being put together as a special gesture, which

the Prime Minister reciprocated with a warm reply of gratitude. But the Kerala Chief Minister’s announcement that the UAE would provide ₹700 crore, made on the same day as the Central government’s announcement of a provision of ₹500 crore, opened a Pandora’s box. It appeared as though the UAE was more generous than New Delhi was to Kerala and that the Central government was not empathetic to Kerala’s plight because of political considerations. Moreover, the source of the information was supposed to have been an Indian businessman in the UAE. An embarrassed UAE government then asked its Ambassador in New Delhi to deny that there was any specific offer of ₹700 crore.

An immediate consequence was a reluctance by other governments to make any offer of bilateral assistance. No one could answer the question whether any offer from other governments would be accepted. When the Thai Ambassador in Delhi was stopped from being at a ceremony to hand over relief goods to an Indian official, the world was convinced that India would not accept resources. The issue was politicised as one between the Bharatiya Janata Party and the ruling CPI(M) in Kerala.

It was against this backdrop that Kerala put forward an unwise proposal to dispatch its Ministers abroad to collect donations. This was unacceptable in the context of the policy that had crystallised after the floods in Kerala and the Central Government having refused permission for Ministers other than the Chief Minister to travel to countries. Apart from the

ignominy of soliciting donations, there was a clear likelihood of receiving very little by way of cash donations. The possibility of loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank became distant as the Centre refused to raise the limits on loans from these global organisations that a State government could take. The emergence of the Sabarimala crisis further eroded the credibility of the State Government and much of the empathy over the flood damage was also lost.

The Prime Minister had always maintained that marshalling of resources is the responsibility of the Union government according to the Constitution. Now the only option before Kerala is to demand more funding from the Centre to make up the shortfall. Undoubtedly, the situation is a tragedy of errors caused by an inadequate familiarity with decision making and the complexity of international relations.

India is a federal state, but unitary in nature when it comes to national security and foreign policy. Individual States may have some advantages in dealing with some countries in their neighbourhood, but they will do well not to transgress the thin line when it comes to managing international relations. Now it will take longer for trust to be established to have competitive federalism work again.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Stand-off in Kolkata

It is a moot question whether West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee can save the country and the Constitution by preventing a constitutionally established Central agency from doing its duty (Page 1, “Opposition leaders call on Mamata, back her protest”, February 5). Ms. Banerjee has been elected by the people of West Bengal to govern the State and not to sit in dharna in the heart of Kolkata. If she thinks that her police chief, who is allegedly involved in a major scam, is above board, then she must fight it out not in the streets but in the

country’s top court. The blank endorsement to her stir from political figures who themselves were/are associated with major scams would lend credence to the BJP’s line that the political parties supporting Ms. Banerjee are an alliance of the corrupt. Ms. Banerjee must ask her police chief to face the investigation until his innocence is proved.

KANGAYAM R. NARASIMHAN, Chennai

■ The timing of the CBI’s action certainly leads to the perception that all this has been planned with the general election in view. The Central government’s anti-

corruption stance is flawed as there seems to be no action being taken against those associated with the ruling party and who face allegations of corruption. In Tamil Nadu, the BJP is seen to be supporting a party perceived to be corrupt. If the Prime Minister wants to prove that he is serious about going after the corrupt, he must demonstrate that it is being done without any political bias.

S. BALA, Coimbatore

A distressing cycle

It is disheartening to note the difficulties being faced by those left out of the draft National Register of Citizens

in trying to prove their citizenship (Editorial page, “A national register of exclusion”, February 5). Although the exercise is an essential part of the commitment to the people of Assam, as a part of the Assam Accord, it merits a more humane approach. The account amply illustrates how the marginalised are left to fend for themselves amid bureaucratic inefficiencies and procedural complexities. It is imperative that there be course corrections; otherwise the exercise runs the risk of fuelling a parallel movement against the state by those being victimised now. And if this happens, it would only heighten unrest

in the already disturbed Northeast.

YOGESH AGGARWAL, New Delhi

Fighting cancer

One needs to express deep appreciation to cancer survivors, those who are bravely fighting the disease and also the medical fraternity. It is a combination of medicine, the fighting spirit and the never-say-die attitude which will aid them in recovery. It was Norman

Cousins who said, “Drugs are not always necessary. Belief in recovery always is.” The answer to cancer is: Never give up, fight back. Greater awareness and early interventions are much needed to tackle the disease (Chennai, “Media should improve public understanding of cancer: N. Ram”, February 5).

T.S. KARTHIK, Chennai

MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

“India rises to No. 2”, said a Sports page (Feb. 5, 2019) heading. It was erroneous because India was already at No. 2 in the ODI ranking. To say that it rose to No. 2 is wrong. It would have been appropriate to say “India remains at No. 2.”

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THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | RUCHIR SHARMA

'The 2019 election is going to be all about alliances'

The global investor on the coming general election, the anti-incumbency trend and why he thinks the Indian state is socialist

NISTULA HEBBAR

In his latest book, 'Democracy on the Road: A 25 Year Journey Through India', investor Ruchir Sharma has catalogued the 27 national and State elections that he has tracked over a quarter of a century in his personal capacity. Mr. Sharma, who is the head of emerging markets and chief global strategist at Morgan Stanley Investment Management, discusses the 2019 general election, explains why India has the highest anti-incumbency rate among major democracies and why it can never be a China on economic reforms. Excerpts:

There is a thread running through your book about India's "deep distaste for incumbents". Do you mean Indians instinctively throw out governments, whatever their record?

■ The word anti-incumbency was coined in India. When I write for *The New York Times* or such publications, and I use the phrase, they don't know what I'm talking about because the phrase was coined here. That's because India has the highest rate of anti-incumbency among major democracies in the world. In the U.S. and the U.K., most incumbents tend to get re-elected. In the U.S., for example, two-thirds of Presidents and Governors who stand get re-elected; in India, two-thirds lose their elections. That's what the data say.

There are two or three reasons why this happens. The foremost is that the state in India is broken. Politicians want to do stuff and promise stuff, but the state is just broken and cannot deliver. It just falls through the cracks. For example, yesterday, I was in Bijnor [Uttar Pradesh], and before the District Magistrate's office, a big protest broke out by sugar cane farmers over the question of dues. The whole issue is that you can keep announcing things, like minimum support price, but the moment you take your payment slip

to the Food Corporation of India, they give you the run-around. The mechanism is so broken that your daily interaction with the government is very frustrating and possibly the only thing you can do is vote people out. Secondly, it doesn't take much to vote people out because of the fragmented polity. In most States in India, you can win most seats by securing 30% of the vote share, so then just a 3-4% vote swing is enough to change the fortunes of a government, or if the Opposition comes together, it can change things. These are factors that distinguish India from other countries.

There have been many instances of governments being voted back. How do you explain that?

■ Again, there are a couple of things. There was a period of time, between 2005 and 2010, when a lot of incumbents won elections in India. A couple of things happened in that period. One, the economy was booming and inflation was fairly low, and two, because the economy was booming there was a lot of welfare that could be done, as governments were able to spend on these programmes. This really helped those governments come back to power.

Having said that, one of the more insightful statements which I have repeated



R.V. MOORTHY

twice in the book is by a Mangaluru MLA, U.T. Khader, who said that winning elections in India is like fighting a battery of six tests with a minimum passing mark on each. You can't rely on just one factor – if you don't do enough welfarism, you will lose; you have to get the caste arithmetic and religious politics right; or some huge allegation of corruption hits you. In American politics, there is a far more obvious connection between economics and politics. That argument appears simplistic in the Indian context.

You say that India's national elections are a series of State elections. Can you explain?

■ That's what happened in 2004, in 2009, and, in fact, in most non-wave elections, unlike the 1984-85 Rajiv Gandhi wave and the mini wave, mainly in north India,

■ Narendra Modi and Amit Shah have a belief that the entire media is 'liberal' and out to get them. It's a different situation from, say, 15 years ago, when the word liberal was not used so pejoratively.

for Narendra Modi in 2014. In Delhi and Mumbai, we are preoccupied by questions like, "If Modi doesn't return in 2019, then who comes in his place?" But it doesn't work that way in the rest of India. We are a truly parliamentary system. One bit of data that I keep quoting is that in 2004, the gap between Atal Bihari Vajpayee's popularity and that of Sonia Gandhi's was much larger than the current one between Modi and Rahul Gandhi, and yet because she was able to stitch good alliances,

the Congress was able to win. Even this election, it's going to go State by State.

Coming to political personalities, you say that Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati hasn't been able to accrue much influence outside Uttar Pradesh or grow beyond it.

■ It's amazing to me how no regional leader has been able to grow nationally, and with Mayawati, you would have thought with a large Dalit population across the country, she would have become a pan-Indian presence. But the fact remains that Dalits are not a monolithic bloc of votes. The one State where I remember people telling me that Mayawati could have a big influence was Maharashtra, and yet she is a complete non-entity there. Being a prime ministerial candidate is a different matter and

more a negotiation based on how many seats she gets, but her case proves to me that India is truly a 'continent' of 29 States and it is almost impossible for a leader who is strong in one State to replicate it everywhere else.

A part of your interest in politics was also to see whether there would be a leader who could push economic reforms. In the book, you come to the conclusion that the Indian DNA is statist and socialist.

■ In this country, there is no constituency for privatisation today. Is there any scenario in which you think that any big push for privatisation will be launched after the 2019 polls? I don't think so. There was some chance in 2002, there was some chance with Modi in 2014. To me that is the evidence – that what I said about statism stands. The good thing in India is that the private sector is so vibrant because of some liberalisation in the past that it can carry the can, but that is also why India can never grow like China. In the early years of its development, China had no welfare state; it spent entirely on roads and infrastructure. The Indian polity will not allow that.

Through your many years of covering polls, you have met several political leaders – right from the time they were introduced to politics to when they were more mature in politics. What are the changes in Rahul Gandhi from when you met him in 2007 to now?

■ In 2007, it was a two-hour-long meeting in which he spoke for an hour and 59 minutes. He didn't want to engage much despite the fact

that he had just entered politics and it was a roomful of fairly experienced political watchers. The unfavourable impression was of being spoken down to. Over the years we found that he was much more interested in engaging and listening. We don't know how much of that is change and how much is based on feedback. There is, of course, no doubt that he has improved a lot as a campaigner from 2007.

What about Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and her formal entry into the Congress? Will she be able to make a critical difference to the Congress's fortunes?

■ I think the days are gone when you could just land and your charisma would work. That India is not there anymore. You also know how

■ The idea of building the Congress based on just Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's charisma... that concept no longer exists.

deeply entrenched caste equations in Uttar Pradesh are. To disturb them at this stage will be a very difficult thing to do. If I were to be asked on how she can make the biggest difference, it would be to get her to focus on one thing. Let's say she manages to be the combined Opposition candidate from Varanasi against Modi. Then you can focus that energy on one thing, but the idea of building the Congress so that it's a serious contender by April 2019 based on just charisma... that concept no longer exists. The deliverables from Priyanka should be adjusted in that way if she is to make an impact.

You have described several tense meetings of your travel group with Prime Minister Modi and BJP president Amit Shah. Why is that?

■ They have a belief that the entire media is 'liberal' and out to get them. It's a different situation from, say, 15 years ago, when the word liberal was not used so pejoratively. They really believe that the media is out to get them and it colours that interaction.

But a lot of it also informs a narrative of Modi versus all, and if not Mr. Modi, then anarchy. How well do you think that will work in 2019?

■ Rajiv Gandhi tried something similar in 1989 and that didn't work so well. It may work with some sections of the people, especially the middle class, but at the broader level people vote for the party they want to and not see what's going to happen after the election.

In your view, what will be the overarching issue informing the 2019 election? Will it be jobs, rural distress, Ram Mandir, or Mr. Modi's own version of Hindutva?

■ This election is going to be all about alliances. Narendra Modi's support base is still strong, there could be a little in and out on that, and he could still get 31% of the vote share, but the seats this time could be way less than the 9 to 1 ratio, which was the highest vote-to-seat conversion ratio in the entire electoral history of India.

In how many States the Opposition will be able to put up good alliances will determine the course of this election.

SINGLE FILE

Risks to global growth

Instead of resorting to nationalism and unilateral action, countries should strengthen the multilateral framework

ELLIOTT HARRIS



On the surface, the world economy remains on a steady trajectory. Many developed economies are operating close to their full potential with unemployment rates at historical lows.

Yet, headlines do not tell the whole story. Beneath the surface, a worrisome picture of the world economy emerges. The newly released World Economic Situation and Prospects for 2019 illustrates how rising economic, social and environmental challenges hamper progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. There are many risk factors that could inflict significant damage on longer-term development prospects. Over the past year, trade policy disputes have escalated, and financial vulnerabilities have increased as global liquidity tightens.

Should such a downturn materialise, the prospects are grim. Global private and public debt is at a record high, well above the level seen in the run-up to the global financial crisis. Interest rates remain very low in most developed economies, while central bank balance sheets are still bloated. With limited monetary and fiscal space, policymakers around the globe will struggle to react effectively to an economic downturn. Given waning support for multilateral approaches, concerted actions – like those implemented in response to the 2008-09 crisis – may be difficult to arrange.

Even if global growth remains robust, its benefits do not reach the places they are needed most. Incomes will stagnate or grow only marginally this year in parts of Africa, Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Many commodity exporters are still grappling with the effects of the commodity price collapse of 2014-16. The challenges are most acute in Africa, where per capita growth has averaged only 0.3% over the past five years. Given rapid population growth, the fight against poverty will require faster economic growth and dramatic reductions in income inequality.

Most importantly, the transition towards environmental sustainability is not happening fast enough. The nature of growth is not compatible with holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. In fact, the impacts of climate change are becoming more widespread and severe. The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are increasing, damaging vital infrastructure and causing large-scale displacement. The human and economic costs of such disasters fall overwhelmingly on low-income countries.

Many of the challenges are global in nature and require collective and cooperative policy action. Withdrawal into nationalism and unilateral action will only pose further setbacks for the global community, especially for those already in danger of being left behind. Instead, policymakers need to work together to address the weaknesses of the current system and strengthen the multilateral framework.

The writer is the UN Chief Economist and Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development



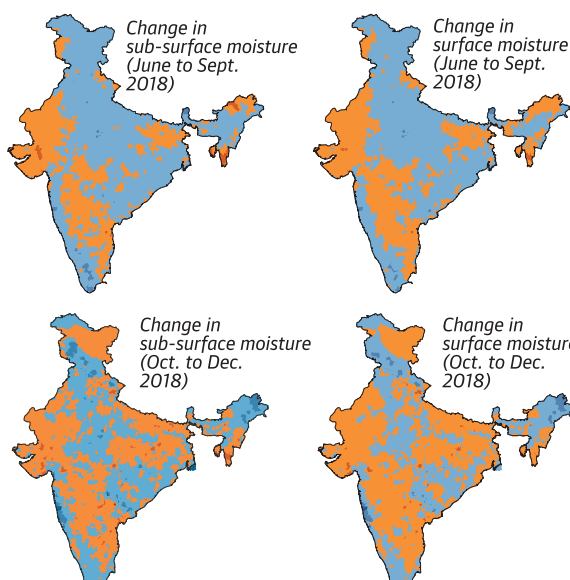
DATA POINT

Dry run

Severe shortage of rain in 2018* reduced the soil moisture in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan & Karnataka, leading to an agrarian drought. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan

On the surface of it

The maps depict the change in soil moisture in 2018 compared to the long period average (LPA) in 4,300 blocks across all districts in the country. Blocks in brown had lower moisture in 2018 than the average. The darker the brown, the higher the loss in moisture. Areas in blue had higher moisture in 2018 than the average. The lack of surface moisture hinders seed germination after planting and the lack of sub-surface moisture deters the growth of a crop



SOIL MOISTURE IN 2018 MINUS (-) AVERAGE SOIL MOISTURE IN A TALUK
-3 0 +3
Maps, data sourced from NASA Soil Moisture Active Passive (SMAP) Satellite and processed by Raj Bhagat Palanichamy

Quantifying the loss | The higher the share of blocks with inferior soil moisture in a State, the more severe the farm distress. The table shows the % of blocks in each State which had lower soil moisture in 2018 compared to the LPA. This figure is given for States where the distress is significant. For example, in Gujarat, 81% of the blocks had lower sub-surface soil moisture than the LPA in 2018 in the June to September period. The corresponding figure for surface moisture was 88%

State	June to Sept.		Oct. to Dec.	
	Sub-surface	Surface	Sub-surface	Surface
Mizoram	88	88	88	88
Tripura	81	94	81	69
Gujarat	81	88	75	78
Bihar	68	70	79	83
Arunachal	50	69	13	19
Maharashtra	48	59	57	64
A.P.	48	57	65	71
Rajasthan	44	45	56	67
Karnataka	43	45	56	66
Tamil Nadu	39	45	35	45
Manipur	37	50	73	70
J & K	36	43	43	21
Jharkhand	35	45	71	74
Chhattisgarh	27	29	32	43
W.B.	27	30	54	65
M.P.	19	18	50	57

Most blocks in Gujarat, Bihar, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka had inferior soil moisture levels during the Kharif season in 2018. This worsened in most of these States during the Rabi season. Most blocks in Jharkhand, West Bengal and M.P. had decent moisture during the Kharif season, but the situation worsened during the Rabi season

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 6, 1969

Israel rejects Nasser's plan

Israel last night [Feb. 4] flatly rejected the ideas of President Nasser for a solution of the West Asia conflict as "a plan for liquidating Israel in two stages." The first official reaction to President Nasser's interview with 'Newsweek' magazine this week came in a statement from the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr Abba Eban, who said: "The solution put forward by Nasser is this – first, Israel is to withdraw to the previous armistice lines with the Egyptian troops and Air Force reoccupying Sinai. Then, with Egyptian support, the so-called 'resistance fighters' will move to liberate their homeland." Eban said the continued presence of Israel at Sharm el Sheikh, at the southern tip of Sinai, was necessary to ensure Israel free access to the sea. Mr. Eban said Israel would be guarded against any further closure by President Nasser of the Straits of Tiran at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba which leads to the Israeli port of Eilat.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 6, 1919

The Coercion Bills. The Country's Protest.

Reports have been received of a number of public meetings from all parts of the country protesting against the introduction of Rowlett Bills in the Imperial Legislative Council. [At the Imperial Council in New Delhi on February 5] - Notice of the following further amendments to the Rowlett Bills has been given in addition to the one already given by Mr. Patel. Mr. Surendra Nath Banerjee will move that in the motion for referring the Bill to a select committee for the words "on or before the 6th of March 1919", the words "within six weeks after the passing in Parliament of the Reform Bill to be introduced to give effect to the Montagu-Chelmsford report", be substituted. Mr. K.K. Chanda will move that the motion for referring the Bill to a select committee do stand over till the Simla Session of the Council. He will also move that the Select Committee do report to the Council during the Simla Session. [At the Bombay Congress Committee] - The Council of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee have passed a resolution emphatically protesting against the introduction of the Criminal Law Amendment Bills which propose to give unheard of powers of most dangerous description involving unwarrantable and unnecessary interference with the people's fundamental rights.

CONCEPTUAL Napoleon complex

PSYCHOLOGY

Also known as the short man syndrome, this refers to the controversial idea that short people suffer from a sort of inferiority complex that causes them to compensate for their short stature through other means of aggressive behaviour. The Napoleon complex is named after French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte who, according to some, is believed to have adopted an attitude of dominance in order to compensate for his short physical stature.

MORE ON THE WEB

Watch: All you need to know about ISRO's GSAT-31

http://bit.ly/GSAT31

'Lego-like' solar and driver-less cars

A huge transition is underway in electricity, transport and green finance



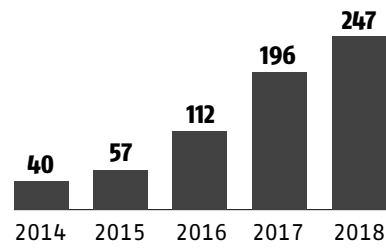
VANDANA GOMBUR

The electricity sector in the world, and in India, looks very different than it did a decade ago, with solar and wind farms — big ones and tiny ones — pumping power to homes and factories. A fuel transition is also underway in the transportation sector, as is automation. As many as 61 companies are testing autonomous driverless cars in California, while the number of testers in China went up to 35 at the end of last month, according to BloombergNEF (BNEF). To track the transition in electricity, transport and green finance, here are four things to keep track of this year:

■Solar and wind power: New solar installations globally last year were close to 110 gigawatts, and may set another record by crossing 125 gigawatts this year, according to early estimates from BNEF. Solar panels have become "Lego-like", according to the principal economist at the Beijing-headquartered Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Jang Ping Thia. The panels are being installed on the ground, on rooftops and floated on water bodies to quietly generate power across the world. In the wind sector, almost 54 gigawatts of new wind farms were added globally last year, and the projected addition for the current year is 70 gigawatts, with over 10 per cent of that offshore. India is taking its first steps to install offshore wind, with a tender likely to be issued in the first half of the current year. ■Sustainability-linked loans, also known as ESG-linked loans, provide benefits to the borrower if specific environment, social or governance metrics are satisfied. The loans need not necessarily be earmarked for green projects, as is the case, for instance, with the proceeds of

SUSTAINABLE DEBT FINANCE

Sustainable debt financing (\$ billion)



Source: BloombergNEF

green bonds. According to the latest data from BNEF, sustainability-linked loans jumped 677 per cent to \$36.4 billion in 2018. Singapore's real estate developer CapitaLand was among the companies that secured a sustainability-linked loan last year: A \$300 million (USD 222 million) five-year, multi-currency loan from DBS for general corporate purposes. Also in Singapore, agribusiness group Wilmar International signed a deal with OCBC Bank where the interest rate was pegged

to the company's sustainability performance.

Total sustainability debt finance increased to \$247 billion in 2018, with green bonds making up the largest, \$182 billion chunk, followed by sustainability-linked loans. The balance was made up of sustainability bonds, social bonds and green loans. Expect to hear a lot more about sustainable finance this year, and also about standards like the Green Loan Principles. ■Self-driving vehicles, also known as driverless or autonomous vehicles, are moving closer to reality with car manufacturing companies, software developers, ride-hailing companies like Uber, and telecom network providers jumping in to secure a piece of the action. Google's Waymo is widely seen as the leader in this space, with millions of miles driven in testing, and a live pilot underway in Arizona. U.S. BNEF expects much more activity in this space in 2019 in the U.S. and in China, where as many as 15 cities have allowed public road testing of autonomous cars. In India, the Mahindra Group has already demon-

strated a self-driving tractor. This "will open up entirely new possibilities in farming", according to Anand Mahindra, chairman of the group. ■Electric vehicles and oil displacement: Worldwide, there are over 5 million electric vehicles on the road (including buses and other commercial vehicles), with a good number running on China's roads, as well as on thoroughfares in Europe and the U.S. It is possible that the sales of conventional internal combustion engine or ICE vehicles may have already peaked. Even if that is not quite the case yet, restrictions on the purchase of such vehicles are being imposed or mooted in several cities globally to manage pollution and congestion. This has impacted oil consumption and demand. BNEF will be announcing its 2018 estimates for oil displacement by electric vehicles later this quarter. In India, electric buses are already plying their trade in many cities, and they are set to increase in number this year. In terms of total cost of ownership, electric buses tend to be cheaper, though the upfront costs are higher than a diesel vehicle. Organising charging infrastructure for electric buses is also less of a challenge.

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CHINESE WHISPERS

Journalists wear helmet



PIC: MANANI KAPUR

The battle of wits between Chhattisgarh journalists and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state unit over the alleged assault of a scribe by party workers last week continues. On Tuesday, local journalists protested in a unique manner. Many attended press briefings by the party wearing helmets meant for two-wheeler riders (pictured). One of them also said their new dress code was part of the *Patrakar Suraksha Abhiyan* or save journalists campaign. "We will lift the visors when we have to ask a question and lower them back after having spoken," he added.

Fall from grace

Yoga guru turned businessman Ramdev's close aide and co-founder of Patanjali Ayurved, Acharya Balkrishna, was awarded a D.Litt degree by Awadhesh Pratap Singh University in Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, recently. Before reaching Rewa Balkrishna had a brief stay at a VIP guest house in the state capital Bhopal. Observers pointed out how this particular visit was different from his earlier visits to the state capital. Earlier, when Ramdev or Balkrishna visited the state, they would be surrounded by political leaders, ministers and bureaucrats all the time. They would be hounded by journalists who would later complain how Balkrishna didn't offer "media sound bites". This time around, a junior government official was the only visitor he had to contend with at the guest house.

Face to face with Rahul

In what is seen by many as the Congress' answer to the Prime Minister's *Mann Ki Baat*, the party on Tuesday afternoon posted a short clip on social media that shows its president Rahul Gandhi, dressed casually in black, talking to a group of students in a Delhi restaurant. After introducing himself, the 48-year-old says, "Welcome to the first episode of 'Apni Baat Rahul Ke Saath'." Congress leaders later said it was an impromptu conversation — the students were told that a leader of the party would talk to them, but they were stunned when it turned out to be Rahul Gandhi. "I thought I will have a chat with some of the young people and get a sense of what they are thinking," said Gandhi. The interaction was a slightly tweaked version of similar interactions Gandhi had before launching the Congress' manifesto ahead of the 2014 national election.

Why national data will remain contested

The expansion and transformation of the Indian economy has altered the scale of measurement and the way data is gathered

SUBHOMY BHATTACHARJEE

A few years ago, then chairman of the National Statistical Commission (NSC) Pronab Sen released the results of the sixth national Economic Census to a minuscule crowd of reporters in central Delhi. Last week, when the vice chairman of Niti Aayog Rajiv Kumar called a press conference to contest an employment report prepared by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), it was a media event that was posted on YouTube.

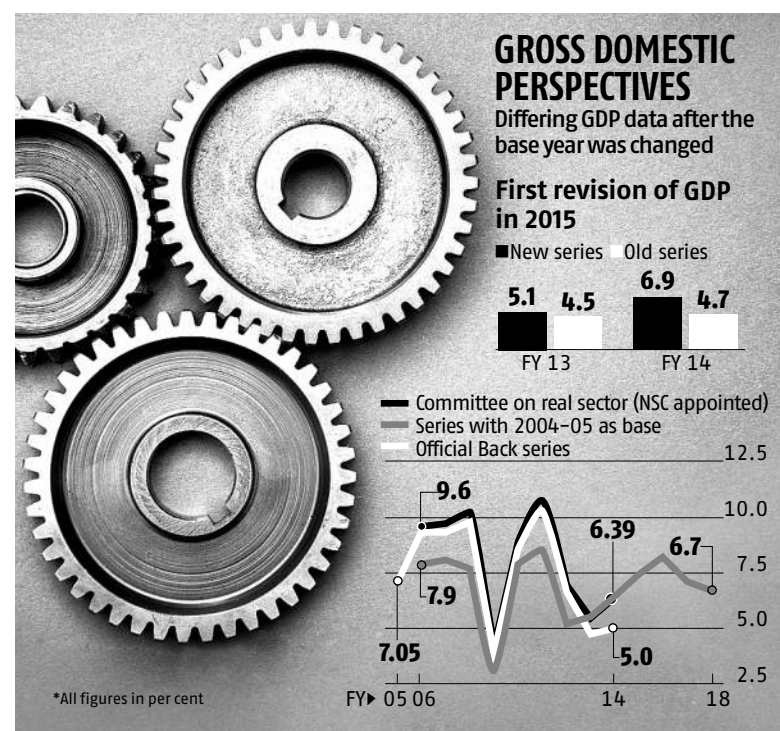
The firestorm over the latter report, reported by *Business Standard* (the government maintains it is just a draft report), continues. National statistics are now contested territory and the battle over them will intensify in the years to come.

The Indian state prints statistical reports on a wide range of topics, mostly economic. Including monthly and annual ones, they number about 30 in a year, plus a few sample surveys. But as more such data has come under scrutiny the focus has turned to how it is collected.

The 4,800-odd officers of the Indian Statistical Service and the subordinate statistical services have a long history of compiling the data. The Indian Statistical Institute was set up in 1932, but the first synchronous census was conducted even earlier, in 1881. That makes India one of the oldest nations to set up a robust statistical machinery. The Central Statistics Office coordi-

nates these activities. It compiles the National Accounts from which the GDP data emerge. The index of industrial production, consumer price indices, human development statistics including gender statistics, the annual survey of industries and the economic census are all its domain. Assisting it is the NSSO, which carries out sampling on an all-India basis to throw up estimates for several of those data. Just as it did through the Periodic Labour Force Survey from April 1, 2017, which showed unemployment at a 45-year high for 2017-18, suggesting that demonetisation and the advanced deadline to introduce the Goods and Services Tax had taken its toll, a fact picked on gleefully by the opposition.

There is an interesting pattern to the recent data-related controversy. Apart from employment data, the government also criticised the first series of revised GDP data on a new base year when it was published in 2015 for favouring the second term of the United Progressive Alliance. Things got complicated in 2018, when an NSC committee, which sets standards for government statistical work, calculated a back series with the new base year to show GDP growth through the UPA decades as being better than earlier reported. The statistics ministry rechecked the data and published a revised back-series months later that put the UPA's performance in less flattering light, which the Congress party called "a joke".



Beyond politics, most of the swings in the data have a lot to do with the huge changes sweeping through the Indian economy. "The challenge of measuring the economy has deepened," says N R Bhanumurthy, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy professor and member of one of the key statistical committees.

From 2000, when it was \$462 billion economy, India became a \$2.13 trillion beast in 2018. Sectors within have also waxed and waned in importance. Imagine trying to measure a cycle running on a country lane and continuing to track it as it metamorphoses into a vehicle travelling on an expressway. This is at the heart of the challenge

India's statisticians face. In recent years, almost every one of the periodic statistics of the economy has had to change both the scale of measurement and the way the data is gathered. The ministry of statistics has commissioned the seventh economic census, the results of which are due towards the end of 2019. As its name implies it is a sort of national business register that lists every sort of economic enterprise in the country from the smallest to the largest. It too could stoke controversy. Why?

Started in 1977, the database has had to be updated frequently. The fifth census was in 2005 and the sixth was published in 2014. Already several changes

have become necessary since then. The number of virtual enterprises for instance, have shot up since then along with the number of people employed in them.

To get round these problems, the ministry of statistics has roped CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, under the ministry of information technology, to do the enumeration. This is the first time the ministry has asked an agency outside its own workforce to do data collection work, except for the population census. This is significant.

About 15,00,000 enumerators are being trained to gather the data for the economic census. According to Dinesh Tyagi, CEO of CSC e-Governance Services, the same force could also be used for the population census, which, if everything runs to plan, could be held every two years instead of 10 years at present.

The ministry also signed up with National Council for Applied Economic Research in January 2019 to obtain new data technologies and build capacity. For instance, the Urban Frame Survey, the bedrock of blocks on maps that statisticians use to select their samples, has been digitised since November 2017. It is now based on satellite imagery, in collaboration with the National Remote Sensing Centre.

All these changes mean more granular measurement instead of broad-brush estimates. Some of this has already happened like the replacement of the manufacturing sector-based Annual Survey of Industries with the MCA-21 data compiled by the ministry of company affairs. The new sets of data tumbling out don't discredit the older ones; they are simply measuring a vastly different sized economy. But governments will need to be prepared to respond.

INSIGHT

Improved equity, wider coverage

How PM-KISAN scores over loan waivers and Rythu Bandhu



RAMESH CHAND & SK SRIVASTAVA

Gross value added (GVA) in agriculture increased by more than 4.5 per cent at 2011-12 prices during the recent three years including advance estimate for the year 2018-19. This is one of the best growth witnessed in Indian agriculture. However, this growth in GVA at constant prices did not bring same kind of cheers to farmers because of low prices of farm produce. Farmers sell their produce at current prices, and not at constant prices, and growth in farmers' income in real terms is affected by current prices as well as farm prices relative to prices paid by farmers. Implicit price deflator for the agriculture sector increased by merely 1 per cent during 2017-18 and declined during 2018-19. In contrast, implicit price deflator for the non-agriculture sector increased by 3.54 per cent and 5.45 per cent in these two years. As a result, the terms of trade for agriculture witnessed a decline during this period of high growth in output, which implies that the growth rate in farmers' income in real terms remained much lower than the growth rate in their output.

Similarly, WPI for food during 2018 did not witness any increase while some crops show significant fall in their wholesale prices in 2018 over 2017, creating a situation of high increase in output but a decline in income of producers of those crops. The decline in relative prices of farm produce has led to significant dissatisfaction among farmers.

The depressed prices of farm produce and resulting low food inflation, have been beneficial for consumers but they are adverse for the producers, particularly for small and marginal farmers who are very vulnerable to price and production fluctuations and depend heavily on agricultural income for livelihood. This created a need to provide some support to small and marginal farmers to supplement their income. A popular response has been loan waiver or cash payment based on ownership of agricultural land like the Rythu Bandhu scheme of Telangana. Both these initiatives have come under serious criticism. A majority of farmers still do not take loan from institutional sources and are thus not entitled to any benefit from loan waiving and those who follow discipline of repaying loan on time feel cheated. The limitation of acreage-based payment is that 14 per cent farmers who are medium and large sized corner more than half of the support and 86 per cent of the

farmers, who are small and marginal, get only 47 per cent share.

The Union government has responded to the situation by announcing the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM Kisan) in the Budget 2019-20. The scheme will be implemented with effect from December 1, 2018 with the budgetary provision of ₹20,000 crore during the current financial year and ₹75,000 crore for the year 2019-20. Accordingly, PM-KISAN involves direct cash transfer of ₹2,000 in the bank account of each farmer, with up to 2 hectares of land holdings, by March 2019, plus ₹6,000 in three equal instalments in year 2019-20. It is pertinent to ask how much this support will matter for the small and marginal farmers and whether it will benefit tenant farmers.

The average land holding of small and marginal farmers is 0.59 hectare, of which 0.53 hectare is under cultivation. The cost and income based on the advance estimate of GVA for the year 2018-19 can be used to assess the contribution of PM-KISAN to the small-farm economy. The average expenditure on inputs for small farm holdings (0.53 hectare) is about ₹13,000 while the expenditure on hired labour is about ₹10,000. The annual net income out of this land holding is estimated at ₹45,000. The assured income support of ₹6,000 is sufficient to cover 45 per cent of the cost of inputs or 25 per cent of the cost

of production including hired labour at such farms. The income support under PM-KISAN will supplement the farm income of small and marginal holders from the crop sector by about 13 per cent. However, there are bound to be large variations in the share of income support announced in the Budget in the average farm income across states.

The biggest advantage of this scheme over loan waiver and Rythu Bandhu is that it will also benefit tenant farmers to the same extent as the land owning farm households. According to a nationwide NSSO survey tenants constitute 13.7 per cent of total land holdings and 80 per cent of them own some agricultural land. Based on their own land, tenant farmers are eligible to receive cash transfer of ₹6,000. Only 2.6 per cent of the operational land holdings are operated by landless households, who may not be able to prove their claim for the benefit of this scheme. Overall, PM-KISAN will cover 97.4 per cent small holders including tenants.

PM-KISAN seems quite attractive in terms of equity and coverage of farmers. In total it is estimated to cover 84 per cent of all farm households. The experience of direct cash transfer under PM-KISAN will be useful in designing a larger scheme of DBT for farmers combining all subsidies and support for the agriculture sector in the future.

Chand is member, NITI Aayog & Srivastava is agricultural economist with NITI Aayog Views are personal

LETTERS

Why delay?

This refers to "Navy, Air Force modernise; Army still mired in high personnel costs" (February 5). Procurement of modern equipment and adoption of new technologies, which will also result in trimming the unwieldy manpower especially in the Indian Army (with around 1.4 million serving and 1.1 million in reserve), should continue to be a priority for India's defence forces.

The glaringly low budget provided for the Army, with practically nothing left for modernisation of equipment and ammunition, needs to be reviewed. Such an approach may give credence to the criticism that defence procurement is guided by the lobbying power of companies or countries marketing these products rather than ground-level necessities.

As surveillance power of the Air Force and striking power of the Navy improves, the need to deploy the Army to guard every mile of the border may reduce. Still, because of the kind of threats coming from across the border, the Army should get the same attention in maintaining its personnel and equipment efficiently. The budget for procurement of modern equipment or providing training to personnel should not come down by diversion of money to payment of salaries or pension which itself should get equal priority. Let us not forget the

impact the delay in pension revision had on the morale of the serving personnel in the defence services in the not-so-distant past.

MG Warriar Mumbai

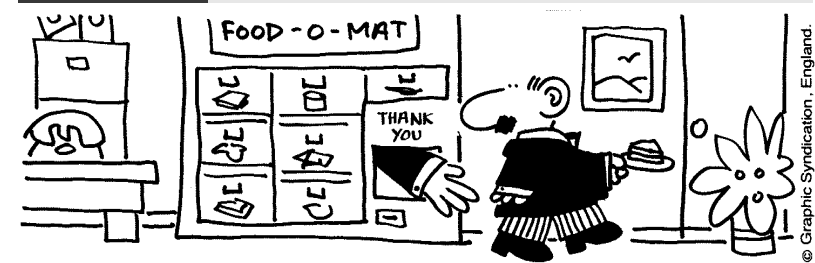
Didi for democracy

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is in the news these days after she escalated her street fight against the Centre and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) by vowing to continue her satyagraha till February 8 to save the country and its Constitution. It is true that Banerjee's anti-Centre protest has caused a tsunami all over the country and many parties from the Opposition have announced their support for her. It will be not wrong to say that Banerjee is fuelling her prime ministerial ambition by pitting herself directly against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. She and other leaders from her party have often attacked the Centre on the floor of Parliament and even outside. I hope that her protest will free the country of all anti-democratic elements.

FR Murad Kolkata

Letters can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to: The Editor, Business Standard Nehru House, 4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg New Delhi 110 002 Fax: (011) 23720201 • E-mail: letters@bsmail.in All letters must have a postal address and telephone number

HAMBONE



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Infrastructure woes

Redistributive schemes take their toll on allocation

The first National Democratic Alliance government, under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, gave infrastructure development priority and treated it as the most important engine of economic growth and job creation in the country. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi too this focus has stayed, as reflected in allocations in the last four Budgets. In this year's interim Budget, however, the central focus was on reaching out to the disadvantaged sections of society. To a great extent, the government's Budget priorities mirrored the electoral pressures as well as the populist tone across political parties in the run-up to the elections. That is why the focus was on the direct income support for small and marginal farmers, the pension scheme for unorganised sector workers, and the income tax rebate to those earning up to ₹5 lakh annually. On the whole, it appears the government has had to rationalise its resources and cut its budgetary allocations to infrastructure development in order to accommodate the additional expenditure on account of schemes such as PM-KISAN and income tax rebate.

That does not mean that Finance Minister Piyush Goyal did not showcase what all have been achieved by the government in the past five years. In particular, he singled out the success of the UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) scheme, which has resulted in the number of operational airports crossing 100. As a result, domestic passenger traffic has doubled during the last five years. He also pointed out the success of the Indian Railways in safety. A big aspect of that success story is the fact that all unmanned level crossings on the broad gauge network have been eliminated. These changes have meant fast connectivity to those parts of the country that were difficult to access in the past. For example, Arunachal Pradesh is now on the air map and states such as Meghalaya and Mizoram now figure on India's rail map for the first time. Another first was the movement of the first freight container from Kolkata to Varanasi, using inland waterways. On the roads and railways front, too, there is much to cheer when one looks back. With 27 km of highways being built each day (the pace has increased in recent months), India is the fastest highway developer in the world.

Despite these successes, the interim Budget has been disappointing on this front; it's clear politically guided redistributive schemes have taken their toll on this sector's allocation. As such, even though the railways has received its highest ever capital expenditure (capex) of ₹1.58 trillion, including an all-time high budgetary support of ₹64,587 crore, the road and aviation sectors were not that lucky. For instance, the government has reduced its budgetary support to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) by over ₹631 crore. As a result, the NHAI would have to now gear up for higher fundraising through borrowing and monetising road assets. Similarly, budgetary support for Sagarmala, the flagship scheme for reducing logistic costs along the coastal areas, is down to ₹550 crore in FY20 after the government could spend only ₹381 crore in FY19 despite a Budget allocation of ₹600 crore.

Defusing a crisis

SC intervenes in an unnecessary stand-off in Kolkata

The Supreme Court of India deserves accolades for having steered clear of the political minefield while adjudicating the dispute between the West Bengal government and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) over the latter's investigation of the Saradha and Rose Valley scams. In a carefully non-partisan manner, the apex court told the CBI it could not arrest Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar, but also directed him to appear before the CBI at a neutral venue such as Shillong. The CBI also filed a contempt petition against the chief secretary in West Bengal and the director general of police, and the Court asked those officials to furnish their replies later this month. One indication of the Court's even-handedness is that both sides have claimed victory. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said this had vindicated the government's stand against intimidation and that Mr Kumar had always been willing to meet the CBI in a mutually agreed location; the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has focused on the Court's direction to Mr Kumar to meet the CBI.

The facts of the Saradha or Rose Valley cases are not the main issue here. The question is why issues have come to such a pass that a near-constitutional crisis has been precipitated. Both the BJP and Ms Banerjee's Trinamool Congress are guilty of having politicians accused of close ties to the disgraced chit fund promoters, so there is nothing much to choose between them on this issue. But the ugliness of the scenes in Kolkata this week is a sign of the dangers of political brinkmanship. The Centre — few would buy the argument that the CBI was acting on its own entirely — should not have sent so many officers on a "secret mission" to Mr Kumar's residence. The local police should have treated the CBI with greater respect. And on no account should the Central Reserve Police Force have left its barracks without the permission of the state government. Thus, a series of errors and escalations on all sides led to an unfortunate, high-stakes confrontation, which the Supreme Court was forced to defuse. Both Ms Banerjee and the Centre should adopt a more hands-off approach and let the investigators do their job. The CBI should not be used as a political football.

It is clear that the police chief should make himself available for legitimate questioning by the CBI, that the CBI should operate with greater sensitivity to the expectations of local police forces, and that the Union government should stop politicising an incident with unfortunate connotations for the federal character of India. Ms Banerjee must also revise her illiberal, take-no-prisoners political style. The West Bengal government's refusal to let Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath use his chopper in the state is not just petty. Since it comes in the run-up to an election campaign, it is a blatant and obvious misuse of power. There should be no double standards when it comes to upholding the basic parameters of a federal democracy such as India.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA



India's employment: The true picture

Results from the Periodic Labour Force Survey are not comparable with the previous Employment-Unemployment Surveys

A sound policy framework requires the support of robust institutions that collect and transmit good data regularly. I am a great believer in robust data being essential in diagnosing the right problem to target and to devise smart solutions for it. In the context of the ongoing debate on India's employment scenario, we need to make efforts to improve the availability of quality data so that a narrative driven debate can be resolved through objective evidence. Currently, there are three contesting narratives. The first narrative is of jobless growth, which implies that India is creating insufficient jobs. The second is opposite to first and advocates that there is no issue of employment. The third, which I believe to be true, is between the first two suggesting that though there is sufficient employment, the true challenge is to create well-paying quality jobs. Unfortunately, the leak of data from the first year of the two-year Pilot Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), before it could be fully verified, and subsequent media reports jumping to conclusions based on incomplete and half-baked data, have added confusion and misdirection to the prevalent situation rather than helping.

Being a member of the National Statistical Commission (NSC), it is my prerogative to bring the facts into public domain. The report had neither been made available nor circulated to me for approval. The report was made available after I demanded it post the data leak controversy. The report does not have my approval. In fact, the meeting held on December 5 to finalise the report was attended only by Acting Chairman P C Mohanan. Even, Ms J V Meenakshi was not present in the meeting. As a standard practice, with this being the first of its kind exercise, the process of official data release should pass the most stringent scrutiny and careful verification and should definitely be subjected to peer review.

An impression has been created that the findings of the PLFS show a large jump in India's unemployment compared to the previous Employment-

Unemployment Surveys (EUS), which was last concluded in 2011-12. This is erroneous since the previous surveys and the new PLFS cannot be so easily compared. The PLFS is a two-year pilot started in July 2017, which includes a quarterly urban and an annual rural survey. The objective is to have more frequent data on labour market and hence it departed from the previous EUS exercise, which happened once every five years. Amongst other things, the PLFS has updated the sampling techniques used, a different sampling frame using 2011 Census, and adopted new data collection methods.

Let me show you how this conclusion of job loss based on comparison with 2011-12 survey data is faulty. Besides employment data, the survey also presents the basic demographic data such as an estimate of total population in the country. The PLFS estimates India's total population in 2017-18 to be lower than the EUS 2011-12. If we were to accept all such comparisons at face value, we should also be having the headline that "India's population declines in the last 6 years". There is no apparent reason for population estimates to decline in six years if one considers that the methodology and coverage of the two surveys were same and that over the previous EUS surveys (2004-05, 2009-10 and 2011-12), the estimated population showed a growing trend largely in line with the country's official population growth rate. Another strange trend is the rate of urbanisation, which seems to have nearly stalled during 2011-12 to 2017-18. This is at odds with what we know about growth in Indian cities from numerous credible sources — all of which point that India is fast urbanising. India's rapid urbanisation has been confirmed even by NASA's satellite imagery of nightlights. Shall we also believe that India's urbanisation has stalled despite what empirical and anecdotal evidence shows us?

In the current debate, many argue that employment generation is happening at a slower pace than workforce growth. However, comparison of the PLFS with the 2011-12 survey suggests that even the absolute



AMITABH KANT

Romancing Brexit, then and now

Brexit Romance, a recent novel by Clémentine Beauvais, was set up in July 2017, exactly a year after the Britons voted for Brexit — the most discussed referendum in modern history. Indeed, the islanders have been romancing the idea of divorcing Europe for quite some time, even before the marriage. Britain had joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, and immediately took a referendum on it in 1975. Nearly two-third of the people opined in favour of continuing with the EEC, so did the main political parties and the press. The EEC changed the name to European Union (EU) in 1993. So, this 1975 referendum was nothing but the first Brexit referendum, although people grossly miss its reference. Certainly, the much-discussed June 2016 referendum is the second one in this context.

Even before Britain joined the 'Common Market' of Europe, British author Daphne du Maurier had written her novel *Rule Britannia* in 1972, where she described that after joining the 'Common Market' Britain had taken a fictional referendum. And this resulted in Britain breaking out from the 'Common Market'.

Thus, it is safe to imagine that Britain had the desire to withdraw herself from the EU since the very beginning, possibly more than any other member state. I always wonder why Britain had so much desire to break the tie with Europe. Several researchers had projected grossly negative economic impacts of the possible break-up — on agriculture, trade, industries, job market, educational institutions — even before June 2016, yet the British romanticism with the idea of Brexit continued. Is that associated with the island's geographical isolation? Does Britain have a different kind of national prejudice? Is it somewhat associated with

their heritage of setting up colonies worldwide? Or were they afraid of so many immigrants from former colonies and also from Eastern Europe?

However, romancing the idea of Brexit is quite different from 'Brexit Romance', as depicted by Clémentine Beauvais in her novel. This is purely a post-referendum syndrome. In the sweet-bitter-sweet novel, a canny entrepreneur set up a secret start-up — the eponymous *Brexit Romance* — to arrange Anglo-French marriages, to match young Europhilic Brits to generous-minded French people. The objective was to obtain dual nationality, French and English, if the couple stay married for five years, and to get back the European citizenship for the Brit in the process. Beauvais draws a realistic and terribly accurate portrait of today's youth — their willingness to trade off political concern with romantic relationships in the backdrop of an unprecedented socio-economic and cultural crisis — and a complex political climate of the UK and Europe, where marriage was seen not as a pact of love, but a contract of interest between two people sharing the same convictions. However, is a European passport so lucrative in the post-referendum Britain? Is the impact of Brexit so severe to the island? Yes, Beauvais believes so. So do many others. For example, Irish citizenship is open to Britons having Irish parents or grandparents, and there is a 22 per cent increase in the number of Britons applying for Irish passport in 2018. And requests for German citizenship from more than 3,380 British Jews have been received by the German Embassy in London since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 until January 2019, whereas only around 20 such requests were made annually in the years before Brexit.

Certainly, Brexit referendum had tremendous social and political impact — Britain has already experienced

number of people employed in the country has been declining at the rate of two million every year since 2011-12. This is completely at odds with any other socio-economic data available. For instance, India's real gross domestic product (GDP) has grown by 50 per cent during this period. Economic growth has come about with expansion in every sector — from infrastructure to housing, transport to healthcare and from professional services to retail. It is inconceivable that such growth could happen concurrently with shrinking number of employed workforce, which would strictly imply that productivity and capital accumulation is driving whole of India's growth. Independent report by Brookings concluded that number of people living in extreme poverty in India has reduced from 268 million in 2011 to less than 50 million. It would be difficult to explain how such rapid reduction can happen if unemployment is also rising rapidly. Finally, the massive jump in unemployment seems to also contradict with another finding in the same PLFS — growing earnings and wages across different employment types. If the labour market conditions were as poor as the unemployment rate suggests, then the economic logic would expect falling or at least stagnant wages. But they aren't. For example, the earnings/wages of rural women, for which unemployment rate is particularly high, have grown consistently in each quarter starting July-September 2017 and reached growth of 13 per cent and 8 per cent respectively by the last quarter.

It is overwhelmingly clear that the results from the PLFS are not comparable with the previous EUS, and the PLFS should be used strictly for measuring the changes from the baseline in 2017-18. We have seen this before also — doing surveys in India has always been tricky with small changes in methodology producing unexpected results. The PLFS also highlights fall in labour force participation rate. Even if true, it does not mention that it could be a result of other factors such as increase in attendance in school and higher education.

The problem lies with the methodology. The sample size was too small when technology could have facilitated responses from higher number of households. In rural areas, the number of households surveyed were a mere 55,000. This has to be seen in the context of 160 million households in the country. The percentage works out to be 0.03 per cent — about three households for every 10,000. Even in household selection, 75 per cent weightage was given to households who have higher number of 10th pass members above 15 years. In the present scenario there is huge probability of continuing education for above 15 years. Most people in 15-18 group would be continuing education. Those still studying would respond in a manner that they are looking for employment. The sample size is so small that sensitivity of the data will be very high. In urban households one household giving wrong answer in each area will show labour force participation rate number in the range of 25 per cent. There is no source of validation with real time data. The surveyors used were from outsource agency — not necessarily the right person for such interaction. Though these surveyors were provided with a tablet for recording data, they were not given SIM and data connectivity. Even locations were not captured. I am amazed that in today's world real time data and technology was not utilised.

[End of part 1. The second and concluding part of this article will appear on Thursday.] The writer is CEO of NITI Aayog. Views expressed are personal.



ATANU BISWAS

Why JLF is forever young



PAGE DOWN

MIHIR S SHARMA

It rained one day during the Jaipur Literature Festival. I expected the worst; I expected rain-soaked lawns, an empty venue, drenched writers and ruined books. But nothing of the sort happened. Thousands braved the rain to stand —

writers that they had perhaps never heard of earlier. Everything ran on time, no venues were evacuated — in spite of the fact that almost all of them are in shamianas — and the books were safe.

The contrast from a similar rainy day almost a decade ago was stark. The books tent had flooded, talks were shifted around — and it was, I agree, intimate and charming, and I was impressed by how the volunteers reacted. Even so, the difference brought home to me how much JLF has changed over the past years, into an event organised with such precision that even unseasonable rain no longer discommodates it.

There is a ritual to going to Jaipur: the opening dinner at the Rambagh Palace, a little awkward as people try to figure out who is there that year and who isn't; the presence of the political power of the

moment in Rajasthan on the first day, delivering a speech or on a panel; the concert at the spectacular Amer Fort, blazing out into the night; and, of course, the inevitable dry day that you can't avoid in late January, either Netaji's birthday or Republic Day. And in the middle of all this, a blur of panels, some with old favourites — Simon Sebag Montefiore always gets a full house, as he did this time for a blood-soaked talk about the Romanovs — and some featuring entirely new breakout stars, such as the Australian YA author Markus Zusak.

For me, however, the highlight of each year's JLF is always one of the less-heralded and unexpected sessions. Frequently these feature writers from a tradition or a country relatively unfamiliar to me; or perhaps a historian who is a leading light in his field but is not a household name. This

year, my favourite session was one that wasn't even on the programme, featuring the librarian of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Christopher de Hamel has written a book — which I have now ordered — called *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* in which he tries to distill the experience of walking into a library, being given an early medieval manuscript, and turning the pages (without gloves on, which he says is important). His presentation was fascinating and very funny; and he was visibly delighted with the quality of the questions from the audience, including one about the 15th-century Voynich Manuscript in the Yale University library, which is written in some sort of unknown script and inspired Lev Grossman's *Codex*.

It is hard to be a cynic at JLF. I mean you can try, but it doesn't seem worth it. It feels so young. Yes, there are lots of young people drinking tea and sunning themselves on the lawns and apparently uninterested in the actual sessions. But, equally, there are thousands of young people

who do crowd into sessions that you would think are quite distant from anything that they might be interested in. There they were in a session about the troubled border between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, and about the communities divided and united by those lines on a map; or in a session about biography writing, the highlight of which was a startling story from a biographer of Ernest Hemingway about the "ritual" that eccentric writer planned to conduct in that bit of northern Italy in which he had been shot during the Great War. (Google it or better still buy Andrea de Robilant's book.) Perhaps most warming, however, was the quiet and fascinated crowd as Audrey Truschke, Parvati Sharma, Ira Mukhoty and Rana Safvi discussed the Mughals. It wasn't just that it was an all-female panel, and that most people probably didn't notice — the ultimate defeat of tokenism, I'd say — but also that it was a reminder that, even in an age of fake history and hateful Whatsapp forwards, there is a place for and an interest in

the work of real historians.

JLF is, yes, more polished and professional than it was in its earlier years. After a few years in which there was always some headline or another that emerged from it, it has managed successfully to avoid controversy. Even the troubles of its sponsors no longer seem to hang over its head — after all, this year the main sponsor was Zee and while the festival was on stories were appearing about its corporate troubles and its shares tanked. Who sponsors it rarely matters; on stage at the final debate was Kapil Sibal, complaining that his own new television channel was being denied satellite slots by the powers that be. (Harvest TV is now up and running, and quite watchable.)

Yet, even if JLF has now emerged from tempestuous adolescence into comfortable adulthood, it still manages to have a youthful enthusiasm about it. Or perhaps that's just what it inspires in people like me, who spend most of the rest of the year being crabby. Either way, it's an achievement.

The writer is professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Battlefield Kolkata

Centre, Mamata should let law take its course

THE CBI's investigation into the Saradha and Rose Valley chit fund scams has snowballed into an all-out slugfest between the Centre and the Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal Government. With barely a couple of months to go for the Lok Sabha elections, Mamata has accused the Modi government of indulging in political one-upmanship by misusing the premier investigating agency. The wannabe Prime Minister's sit-in in support of Kolkata police chief Rajeev Kumar indicates that she is in no mood to back down and will take the fight to the finish. Home Minister Rajnath Singh has been equally forceful in warning the state not to mess around with the law.

The beleaguered CBI has been in the news of late mostly for the wrong reasons, and Sunday's high drama in Kolkata was no exception. A bureau team, which went to Kumar's residence in the city's Loudon Street area to question him, was denied permission, bundled into police jeeps and whisked away to a police station, where its members were detained for a while. The probe agency's attempted swoop may or may not have been politically motivated, but the cops clearly overstepped their powers by manhandling and intimidating CBI officials. Such misconduct is nothing short of goondaism, an obvious case of preventing a public servant from discharging his duty. What makes it worse is that the Chief Minister, too, is obstructing the course of justice.

Ironically, both camps are accusing each other of attacking the federal system, even as the controversy is likely to become a major issue in the upcoming General Election. Yet again in the picture, the Supreme Court will hear the CBI's plea against the Kolkata Police Commissioner, who is accused of planning or trying to destroy electronic evidence related to the scams. In this unsavoury tussle, the law has been the prime casualty. The onus is now on the judiciary to restore order and constitutional sanity. It needs to be conveyed unequivocally to the politicians that they can't get away with using government officials as pawns in their power game.

Amritsar airport a busy hub

Turnaround registered as flights, projects take off

WITH the growth of Amritsar's Ram Das Jee International Airport outclassing most other airports in the country, it seems that its flight towards success has finally taken off. Largely fuelling this welcome development is the doubling of direct international flights from the Holy City to eight last year. As flights to Birmingham, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai and Bangkok were launched, foreign air traffic in Amritsar soared by 48 per cent as compared to 2017, as per the Airports Authority of India. The growth in the domestic passenger footfall was also a significant 8.6 per cent, taking the number of flyers choosing to board from or land here from nine destinations to the highest-ever mark.

Riding on the steady increase in passenger traffic and new connectivity, the airport is now airborne on the revenue path to black. While the loss incurred in 2015-16 was Rs 43 crore, it declined to Rs 39 crore in 2016-17. In the fiscal year ending 2018, it registered a 66 per cent slide in losses as they trickled to a mere Rs 13 crore. Aided by an infrastructural push, the airport should soon be out of the red. On the horizon are three new destinations — Patna, Jaipur, Kolkata — awarded under the UDAN-III scheme. The authorities must tap the demand of both the global and domestic passengers and offer world-class facilities. There should be no cause for a repeat of the 2013 fiasco when international flights were discontinued from Amritsar, landing the airport in heavy losses.

The airport has a tremendous potential for earning revenue as Amritsar is a tourist hub. Lakhs of devotees from across the world offer prayers at the Golden Temple. Last year's passenger footfall of 2.6 lakh can be easily surpassed. In this year of Guru Nanak Dev's 550th Gurburp celebrations, there is a demand for flights to London, Toronto and Vancouver. Plus, with the opening of the Kartarpur corridor, more connectivity would ease the pilgrimage of many more devotees. The Civil Aviation Ministry would do well to look into airlines such as the Turkish Airways, Oman Air, Fly Dubai that are willing to start flights from Amritsar.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Commerce diminishes the spirit, both of patriotism and military defence. — Thomas Paine

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1919

Is not the Opposition Short-sighted?

FROM what we can gather, the opposition to the proposal for a five or six years' course is based largely on the ground that it will be disadvantageous in its operation to the parents of boys belonging to agricultural or artisan classes. If we are right in this surmise, we are bound to say that not only is there nothing in this ground of opposition peculiar to the Punjab, but it is short-sighted. Everywhere among the masses the proposal for the introduction of compulsory education has met with some opposition on this ground, and everywhere else it has been overcome through the growth of the conviction in the better mind of the community that the children belong not merely to their families, but to the State and that it is the State's duty to give them that education. Shall it be said our Mahomedan brethren are slow in their recognition of this elementary truth of modern life?

Manufacture of Standard Cloth.

WE welcome the decision of the Government of India to give effect to the Act recently passed to manufacture standard cloths at rates fixed by Government and sold to the people through Government agencies. The decision was postponed in view of the temporary fall in the price of cloth in November and December, but subsequent enquiry has shown that in all provinces the price of cloth, both retail and whole sale, has maintained the upward tendency, and both profiteering and combination continue. This has rendered it necessary to manufacture and distribute standard cloths at prices fixed by Government. In the United Provinces, Behar and the Punjab the necessity for this action has been felt for some time past.

Defence on a Budget

India's security system is in deep trouble; deep reform is crucial



MANOJ JOSHI

DISTINGUISHED FELLOW, OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI

THE allocation for defence in the 2019-20 Budget is over Rs 4.31 lakh crore as against last year's revised figure of around Rs 4.05 lakh crore, a 6.4 per cent increase over the revised estimates. Since the total government expenditure for the coming year is Rs 27.84 lakh crore, it represents a figure of 15.5 per cent of the Central government expenditure, as compared to that of 16.5 per cent last year.

With a Rs 210 lakh crore GDP estimate, the proportion spent on defence amounts to 2.05 per cent, which is considered quite respectable. But if, as per the Ministry of Defence (MoD) convention, we count only the revenue and capital expenditures, and minus the Rs 17,000 crore spent on the MoD, we come up with another more alarming figure of 1.4 per cent. It has come down from 2.08 per cent, when the Modi government assumed office in 2014-2015.

Another figure teases out the full picture better — that of capital expenditure. The Rs 1.03 lakh crore spent on the capital outlay of the defence services represents 30.7 per cent of all capital expenditures of the Central government. So, the country is spending one-third of its annual outlay of capital expenditure on defence, which is why it is obviously short-changing education, health, social welfare and infrastructure.

Last year, all three services complained that they were not even provided enough money to pay for ongoing acquisitions, leave alone new ones. The Navy wanted Rs



THE CRUNCH: The services don't have enough money for even ongoing acquisitions.

There can be huge savings through integration of the three services, reducing headquarter formations, joint logistics, training and housing, but manpower cost is a challenge.

36,000 crore as capital outlay but was only given Rs 20,900 crore. The Army projected Rs 45,000 crore, but was given Rs 26,813 crore, which would have not even taken care of its ongoing commitments totalling Rs 29,033 crore. The fact that the government has increased the capital outlay by nearly 10 per cent to Rs 1.03 lakh crore means little.

Indeed, before the Budget, there were a slew of announcements declaring that the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) had approved of a submarine project worth Rs 40,000 crore and okayed Rs 1,200 crore for the Milan anti-tank missile. In December, there was approval for four Talwar class frigates and Brahmos missiles for Rs 3,000 crore; in September, Rs 9,100 crore for Akash missiles and some other schemes; in August, the procurement of 111 utility helicopters for the Navy worth Rs 21,000 crore, and another set of equipment costing Rs 24,879 crore; in June, there was an approval of defence equipment worth Rs 5,500 crore.

Clearly, there is something unreal

about these decisions, given the available resources. According to one observer, the DAC cleared 'Project 75I' submarines in January for the third time in the last decade, which has also, uncharacteristically, seen the overall cost of the project coming down in each instance. And, of course, we have the controversial Rafale deal for which we will presumably have to begin payment in 2019-2020.

That all this appears shambolic is not surprising. India's defence system is in deep trouble and little or nothing is being done about it. Simply put, the system cannot be run effectively unless it undergoes deep reform, which, in the circumstances, can only be carried out by the political class. PM Modi seems to be uninterested in this process; he's happy to live in a make-believe world of Bollywood achievements. Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman lacks the clout to push through anything.

A country like India has many serious security challenges. It is no one's case that it should cut defence expenditure. But there is something no Indian should forget — our prin-

cipal national goal is to end mass poverty and deprivation in the country. Experts will tell you that the poverty rate has halved over the past decade. But that only means people who earn roughly \$3 or Rs 230 a day and Rs 6,800 a month. This means that a family must feed, clothe and shelter itself within that amount.

The elephant in the room, too, is well known. The figure of Rs 1.22 lakh crore paid out as defence pensions is nearly one-third of the defence expenditure. No one grudges the ex-servicemen their pensions and their right to OROP. But the government cannot make that as an excuse to underfund the military. Another like amount, roughly Rs 1.25 lakh crore are the pay and allowances of the defence personnel, including the civilians working there.

While there can be huge savings through integration of the three services, reducing headquarter formations, joint logistics, training and housing, manpower cost is the real challenge.

Compared with other militaries, given the threats we confront, the overall numbers are OK. However, there is considerable room to re-distribute personnel — reducing the Army, enhancing the Air Force, Navy and specialised personnel who can service the new military, which needs to be better networked and supported.

While pay and allowances cannot be grudged, there is need to keep the pension bill low. There is a way to manage this, if there is a 'whole of the government' approach. This means insisting on a compulsory stretch in the military for all those wanting government jobs. A five to seven-year service in the armed forces would have an 18-year-old available for recruitment in the civil services, paramilitary and the police at the ages of 23-25.

The Parliament's Standing Committee on Defence did recommend a compulsory five-year service as a pre-condition for jobs in the Union and state governments. Not surprisingly, the proposal is still doing the rounds of the government.

Retreat of the humane side

SANJEEV TRIKHA

NATIONALISM is not a show-piece to be worn on the sleeve. It is ingrained, to be felt, experienced and lived. No one can resist goose bumps when the National Flag is hoisted amid the singing of the Anthem on various national and international platforms.

A few days back, on my visit to Amritsar, I grabbed the opportunity to fulfil my desire of watching the retreat ceremony at Attari-Wagah. With a certain imagination and excitement, I headed towards the post. Flags of both countries were visible from the road, atop structures on either side. The high-flying flags fill one with a distinct feeling of euphoria, but at the same time, indicate the limits of man-

made boundaries and compulsions.

The heart rejoices at the sight of birds flying freely across the borders, the whiff of air flowing without caring for the border lines soothes the body and cajoles the heart and soul, too. Both countries share the air, the ambience, the birds, the ecology of trees on either side. Nature is generous, but we humans have rigidly compartmentalised our movements, painfully shackling ourselves in geographical and psychological boundaries.

Sitting in my seat at the extreme end, a couple of steps away from the border gates, I found myself more curious about the happenings on the other side: the people, their attire, their mannerisms... all appeared like ours. The retreat ceremony began with a resounding start, as sound sys-

tems on both sides were given a green light to roar out their counterparts. Both sides, suitably cued by men with baton, got euphoric as the adrenaline in the form of slogans was pumped into their veins. Contrary to my perceptions, the ceremony was sans any cultural presentation.

The parading security personnel appeared more concerned about their challenging gestures of flexing muscles and moustache, generating a fair amount of excitement among people. But it did nothing for my cerebral churning. Amid the fanfare, chaotic and loud music, and chanting of slogans, I sat there lost in thoughts. My perceived aspirations and imagination lay shattered. The only part that fascinated me was when both flags were lowered with due honour. As the ceremony ended

and people from both sides started leaving, I waved to people on the other side, which was reciprocated with the same warmth. Suddenly, a strong voice intercepted my engagement. I was told by a security man not to resort to such signals. The humanist sentiment in me started arguing with the nationalistic sentiment.

Retreating from the security zone, I drove freely back to the city. The giant flags driven by the unprejudiced winds, fluttering in the same direction — sometimes towards the Indian side and other times leaning towards Pakistan — appeared to be mocking me. I reached my hotel and got busy with routine activities, leaving the human approach to the mercy of the political bosses on both sides, which needs a suitable and timely retreat.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Jittery Mamata

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee is flexing her muscles in a bid to turn the state into her exclusive property, apparently allowing no other leader/authority to pitch their case without putting up hurdles. After stopping people from attending Amit Shah's rally to denying permission to land Yogi Adityanath's chopper, the Trinamool leader appears to be in a state of jitters, with the sole objective of halting Modi's juggernaut. She went overboard to launch a sit-in demonstration against the Centre. The CBI team swung into action at the behest of the SC to unearth the complicity in the scam. She is also eyeing the PM's seat by riding the crest of the Mahagatbandhan wave.

UPANT SHARMA, PANCHKULA

End 'didigiri'

Refer to 'Mamata vs CBI in Kolkata showdown' (Feb 4); the detention of CBI officials in Kolkata is a direct attack on the Constitution. The Central government should take strict action so that no politician in future shows his or her *dadagiri* or *didigiri* to India's prestigious institutions.

ROHINI SHARMA, CHANDIGARH

HAL under scanner

Apropos the editorial 'HAL takes a beating' (Feb 4), the Mirage crash in Bengaluru, four days after the crash of HAL-handled Jaguar aircraft in UP, has again put HAL under a big question mark about its ability. The IAF has been unhappy over delays in the supplies of Su-30s, Jaguars, Mirage-2000s and the LCA. The pathetic work ethics of HAL is likely to blunt the Opposition's accusation of the government overlooking HAL as a partner for the Rafale contract.

SS PAUL, NADIA

AIIMS only in name

What is the use of the announcement of building another AIIMS when the existing AIIMS are crying for attention owing to poor infrastructure and shortage of qualified doctors and paramedics? The government should stop fooling the public before elections. Name one city in the country which has become 'smart' during the past four and a half years?

BHUPINDER KOCHHAR, BY MAIL

The number game

Apropos 'A bagful of fiscal trouble' (Feb 4), the problem with the Budget is such that when you try

to fix one loophole, another one will pop up. The interim Budget is full of loopholes. As elections are approaching, the Budget seems to be a gimmick to garner votes. The writer's concerns regarding the fiscal health of the country are genuine. The government should have given a thought before announcing the basic permanent income to certain groups of people. The unemployment level has not been addressed, making the Budget less solution-oriented. How will the government cope with the Budget implications?

JASPREET SINGH, PATIALA

Long wait for Lokpal

Refer to 'Appoint Lokpal or will return Padma: Hazare' (Feb 4); PM Modi has done a lot of commendable work in the country along with the commitment of 'Sabka saath sabka vikas', while not yet fulfilling the promise of the appointment of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas in the states. Thus, the social activist's indefinite hunger strike is justified. The Modi government should seriously consider the demands for the immediate appointment of the anti-corruption Ombudsman, implementation of the Swaminathan commission's

recommendations for agrarian reforms, and electoral reforms.

SHAKTI SINGH, KARNAL

Can we know when?

Reference to the news report 'PM: Will break back of terrorism' (Feb 4); we have been hearing such speeches from the Prime Minister ever since he took over the reins of the nation in 2014. But we have not heard him say 'we have broken the back of terrorism in Kashmir'. Will it be broken in the coming two and a half months before this government goes? We are anxiously to hear the answer.

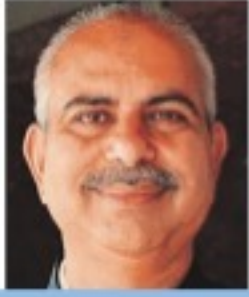
RK KAPOOR, CHANDIGARH

Women's ticket share

Apropos the article 'Ensure women get equal share of party ticket' (Feb 4), the representation of women is a must because if they can't represent society in Parliament, it will not be possible to achieve a progressive society. Men and women have different psyche, and therefore different ideologies. The law of nature also allows both to work in harmony in order to attain balance in society. Let's not make society one-gender representation.

MANMEET KAUR, NEW DELHI

Advantage Mamata in slugfest with Centre



RASHEED KIDWAI
SENIOR JOURNALIST & AUTHOR

IT'S advantage Mamata Banerjee. Just at a time when Rahul Gandhi held a highly successful Jan Akanksha Rally at the Gandhi Maidan in Patna, showcasing himself as a prime ministerial candidate, the West Bengal Chief Minister boisterously upstaged him within four hours. If Rahul had some erstwhile UPA allies standing by his side, Mamata's support base cuts across regions and a predictable political line-up. NDA ally Shiv Sena found merit in Mamata's cause, so did Odisha's Naveen Patnaik, Aam Aadmi Party's Arvind Kejriwal, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, young gun Hardik Patel, arch-rival CPI, National Conference's Omar Abdullah, DMK's MK Stalin, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's Hemant Soren and many more.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) team's aggressive attempt to question Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar for his alleged link to a chit fund scam has provided Mamata not just the limelight or good optics, but also momentary leadership of all those who are opposed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. If the Modi government, the Union Home Ministry and West Bengal Governor Keshari Nath Tripathi go further to consider the dismissal of the state government, Mamata

would not be a loser. She will emerge in the VP Singh mould of 1989, upstaging not only the Congress but also many of her peers in regional outfits. Even within West Bengal, the BJP has no iconic leadership to match Mamata or the charged Trinamool Congress cadre.

Getting support from most regional leaders, the Chief Minister now has a potent plank of protecting the federal structure and restoring institutional integrity in institutions such as the CBI. The Centre's move to deploy Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in the Union Government's offices in the Bengal capital is baffling as law and order is solely a State subject. The CRPF does not have the mandate of the Railway Protection Force or the Defence Security Corps that is empowered to protect railway and defence properties, respectively.

The Congress, which fancies itself as a national alternative to the BJP, is nowhere in sight. For, it has its own chequered history of undermining interest of the states and politicising institutions such as the CBI.

Rahul's predicaments are many. It is a fact that the Congress was instrumental in getting the Saradha scam probed by the Supreme Court. However, today, the party is not in a position to champion itself as an anti-graft crusader. At the same time, Rahul seems reluctant to stand in the long queue of politicians extending support to Mamata. Rahul may have called Mamata up, tweeted against the Modi government, but that is it. The head of the grand old party is instinctively against the very idea of playing second fiddle to a person who broke from the Congress



LIMELIGHT: The CBI team's aggressive attempt to question the Kolkata police chief has provided West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee momentary leadership of all those who are opposed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

If the Centre and the West Bengal Governor consider the dismissal of the state government, Mamata would not be a loser. She will emerge in the VP Singh mould of 1989, upstaging the Congress and many of her peers in regional outfits.

ranks to achieve a pivotal position on her own strength.

There are many searching questions on why the Modi government opted for this risky course of action. What was the great hurry to nab a serving police officer holding a high rank in Kolkata on a Sunday evening?

After all, the Saradha ponzi scam investigations have been going on since 2013. What is more intriguing is the fact that the (mis)adventure was initiated a day before the new Director of the CBI was to take over. The new occupant, Rishi Kumar

Shukla, who was on an Air India flight from Bhopal to New Delhi, had no clue about what was going on in Kolkata and the doings of his number two at the headquarters, Nageshwar Rao. Among other things, Shukla, as the former DGP of Madhya Pradesh, has tons of experience in understanding state sentiments. He has often been a victim of the political slugfest between the BJP and the Congress.

There is a feeling among some retired colleagues that Rao wanted to remain in the CBI and make him-

self indispensable for the new boss who was about to take over. The crucial issue is whether he had political blessings for any specific objective. The BJP was getting national attention when Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was denied permission to land in Bengal and hold public meetings. Even on the much-debated Citizenship Bill, the BJP in Bengal had the chance to consolidate its position. These issues were a major talking point across West Bengal, but the brazen CBI handling on a Sunday seems to have tilted public opinion against the BJP.

It is also worth pointing out that the conduct of Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar, himself a public servant, has neither been professional nor above board. There were at least two summons to him subsequent to the one which led him to write to the then CBI Director Alok Verma in 2017. In not responding to the summons, Kumar was not complying with the law. The least that was expected from an officer was for him to have written to the Director again or to have sought judicial protection. Perhaps in his first communication, Kumar could have added that he would be happy to clarify doubts and queries in the minds of the CBI team as part of his professional duty and for that purpose requested for a detailed questionnaire.

Somewhere, an impression is gaining ground that Kumar was seeking protection from his state political bosses. In the coming days, such an impression can be highly injurious to him and the service he represents, even if he wishes to join Trinamool Congress in the future.

Pro-poor policies can lessen economic inequality



JASPAL SINGH
PRINCIPAL SECY, PLANNING, PUNJAB

Public spending on education, healthcare, social welfare and other services availed by the poor can go a long way in addressing economic inequality. It ensures that a higher share of the national income is made available to them. Greater emphasis on the social sector also equips the poorer sections of society to contribute better to national growth and increase their earning capacities.

BRITISH statistician and economist Arthur Bowley propounded that the share of labour in national income remains constant over time. This came to be known as Bowley's Law. It held its own till 1970, after which it started crumbling the world over as inequalities started rearing their ugly head. India has been no exception. However, the issue has got considerably focused attention in recent years, partly due to the debate generated by the World Economic Forum — an annual affair of the world's rich who recently met at Davos (Switzerland) — and partly due to the work done by Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty, besides organisations such as Oxfam.

The working class is hit hard as its share in the national income goes down. It hurts the rich, too. The share of national income, which is denied to the working class due to inequalities, fails to contribute to the aggregate demand, thus inhibiting economic growth. The share of national income, cornered by the capitalists, contributes to the aggregate demand but only partially because a major part of that income is saved, a part of which gets invested in assets such as gold and real estate. This investment in unproductive assets also contributes to black economy. Inequalities hurt market efficiency as well. Businesses are driven by the profit motive. High capital share in national income satiates this profit motive and thereby curtails the need for both investment and innovation



DIVIDE: The regulatory framework must ensure that the growth in wages is realised.

required to maintain bottom lines. High capital share, thus, inhibits growth. Since in a scenario of inequality, the lion's share in growth is pocketed by the rich capitalists, their interests are also hurt as growth gets curbed.

Thomas Piketty, in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, theorises that if the rate of return on capital is more than the rate of interest, inequalities accentuate. The underlying principle seems to be that in the case in hand, the capital is earning a much higher rate of return at

the cost of the workers, thus contributing to inequalities. But there are other factors too. The first and primary among them is the low level of wage rates as compared to executive salaries and the shareholders' dividend. The problem is severe in the countries with large populations and low productive capacities, leaving the labour to the mercy of the market forces. As Keynes found, markets equilibrate at less than full employment. The market economies present a scenario where labour supply exceeds demand, which exposes

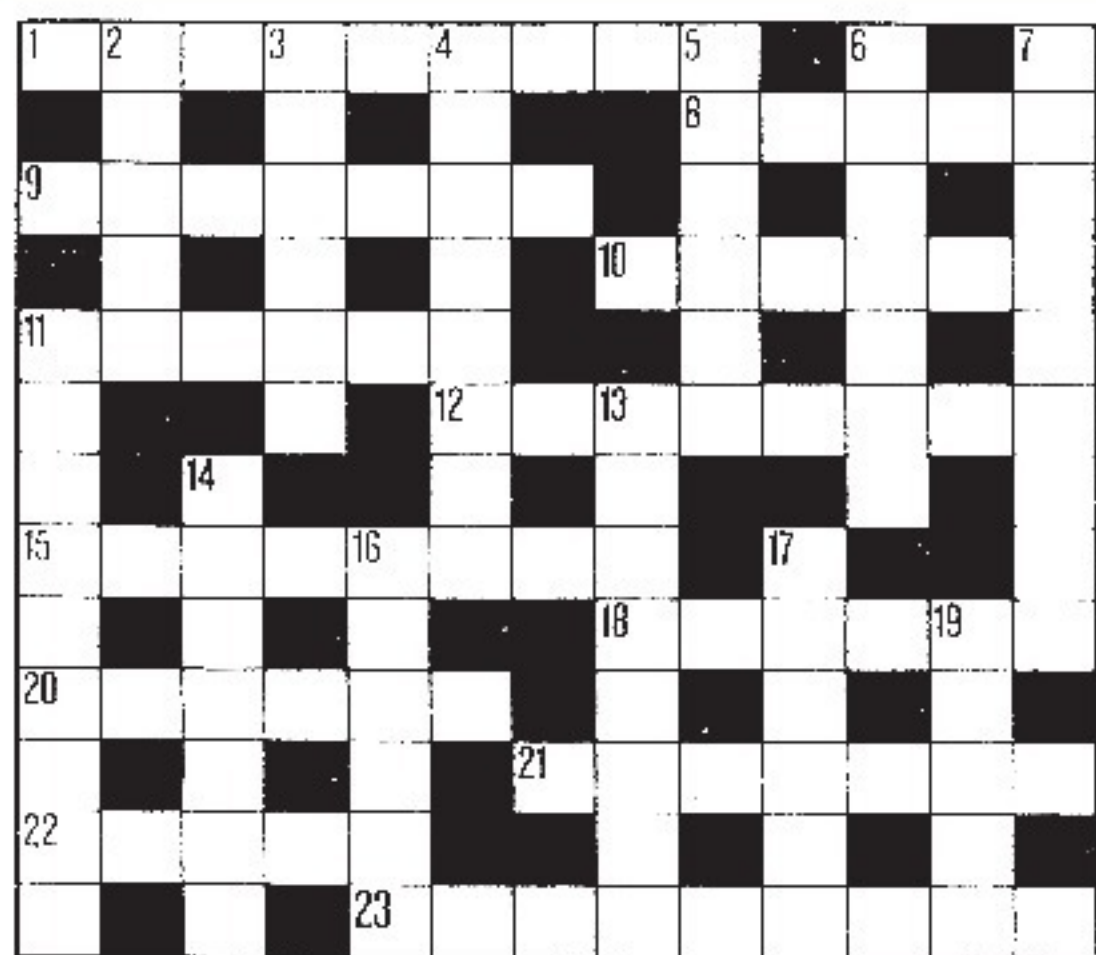
labour to exploitation.

The key question is how the wages should grow over time to maintain a fair share of the labour in the national income. The first factor to be considered here is the inflation prevailing in all growing economies. As the physical goods and services produced remain the same, inflation becomes a zero-sum game. The incomes of the producer-suppliers increase with inflation, while the purchasing power of the consumers goes down. A rise in wage levels equal to the rate of inflation will, therefore, ensure a steady but stagnant standard of living for the workers. However, as the economy grows, it will be unjustified if the workers' standard of living does not improve. It will, therefore, be tempting to say that wages should increase at the real rate of growth increased by rate of inflation to maintain a constant share of labour in the national income. However, as the population also grows, this wage level will lead to distortion and the share of labour in the national income will grow disproportionately high. The rate of growth of wages, therefore, should be the real growth rate of economy plus the rate of inflation minus the rate of population growth. The regulatory framework must ensure that this growth in wages is actually realised, failing which inequalities are bound to widen. An important policy tool here could be the prescription of appropriate minimum wages and more importantly an effective mechanism for its implementation.

Tax policies are the second important factor to be considered to deal with disparities and inequalities. Progressive tax policies, which require the rich to pay at higher rates than the poor, ensure that distortions due to the low wage rate are corrected to some extent. However, progressive tax regimes are as good as their implementation. Thus, tax evasion and tax dodging by the rich can easily counterbalance the effort. Indian economy with progressive tax policies but high tax evasion and tax avoidance is a case in point. Inequalities are further manifested in wealth disparities. Wealth tax or inheritance tax could be another policy tool to deal with economic disparity.

The third major factor is the public spending policies of the government. Public spending on education, healthcare, social welfare and other services availed by the poor can go a long way in addressing economic inequality. It ensures that a higher share of the national income is made available to the poor. Greater emphasis on the social sector also equips the poorer sections of society to contribute better to national growth and increase their own earning capacities. The indirect subsidies, such as the fertiliser subsidy, routed through the suppliers, often end up lining the pockets of the rich. The use of modern technology (direct transfer of money to beneficiary accounts) presents a good policy option to the public authorities to directly address inequalities.

QUICK CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Silence, 4 Cavi, 7 Rove, 8 Question, 10 Gunrunning, 12 Freely, 13 Osprey, 15 Expatriate, 18 Accolade, 19 Comb, 20 Yemen, 21 Pointer.
Down: 1 Shrug, 2 Lavender, 3 Equine, 4 Cosa Nostra, 5 Vain, 6 Lengthy, 9 Ku Klux Klan, 11 Breakout, 12 Fantasy, 14 Hard up, 16 Ember, 17 Scam.

ACROSS

- 1 Easily angered (9)
- 8 A tropical fruit (5)
- 9 Motivate (7)
- 10 Unlucky accident (6)
- 11 Outer edge (6)
- 12 Summons to wake (8)
- 15 Encourage (8)
- 18 Amount produced (6)
- 20 Painter (6)
- 21 Marine mammal (7)
- 22 To rebuke (5)
- 23 An inexpensive paper (9)

DOWN

- 2 Happen again (5)
- 3 Strabismus (6)
- 4 Overdrawn at bank (2,3,3)
- 5 Extensive dominion (6)
- 6 Conical termites' nest (7)
- 7 Illegal seizure of power (4,5)
- 11 Self-employed (9)
- 13 Virulent (8)
- 14 Refrain from voting (7)
- 16 To decrease (6)
- 17 Mental dullness (6)
- 19 Combination (5)

SU DO KU

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

MEDIUM

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 5, 2019 TUESDAY

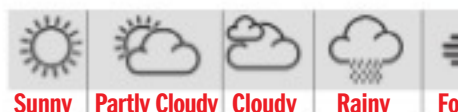
- Vikrami Samvat 2075
- Shaka Samvat 1940
- Magh Shaka 16
- Magh Parvishte 23
- Hijari 1440
- Shukla Paksh Tithi 1, up to 5.16 am
- Vya Yoga up to 8.56 am
- Dhanishtha Nakshatra —
- Moon enters Aquarius sign at 7.35 pm
- Panchak start 7.35 pm
- Gupt navratre start.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

FORECAST

SUNSET: TUESDAY 18:01 HRS
SUNRISE: WEDNESDAY 07:11 HRS



CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	20	11
New Delhi	22	10

PUNJAB		
Amritsar	20	09
Bathinda	21	08
Jalandhar	21	09
Ludhiana	22	11

HARYANA		
Bhiwani	20	10
Hisar	21	10
Sirsa	20	10

HIMACHAL PRADESH		
Dharamsala	14	04
Manali	11	-03
Shimla	13	04

JAMMU & KASHMIR		
Jammu	20	09
Leh	01	-08
Srinagar	05	0

UTTARAKHAND		
Dehradun	26	08
Mussoorie	16	06

TEMPERATURE IN °C

Opinion

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2019

SEEKING PEOPLE'S OPINIONS

Vijay Rupani, chief minister of Gujarat

Earlier, manifestos of all parties were prepared at the party headquarters. Now, we have decided to take this exercise a step further and invite direct suggestions from people



Why is no one talking about the elephant in the room?

PSUs are free to borrow, but if the borrowing is based on a sovereign guarantee, it has to be part of the govt debt

IN ALL THE din about the deficit, economist Sajjid Chinoy has drawn attention to the elephant in the room. This is the sharp unhealthy spike in the government's off-budgetary borrowings over the past few years. Unable to borrow beyond a point for fear of sending the yield soaring and unwilling to cut back on expenditure at a time when the private sector has been strapped for cash, the government has funded growth by enabling public sector units to borrow and guaranteeing their borrowings. Chinoy estimates the government's total deficit has climbed to an uncomfortably high level of 8.5% of GDP for 2018-19 and that is excluding the borrowings by the state PSUs.

To be sure, PSUs are entitled to borrow to run their businesses and it is no one's case that they shouldn't leverage their balance sheets. However, if the government is providing either an explicit or implicit guarantee, it cannot afford to leave the borrowings uncovered. That is simply not prudent. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that Subhash Garg, the DEA secretary, believes the level of NHA's borrowings don't matter because it is a sovereign surrogate and not borrowing on the strength of its own balance sheet. That may be so but, since the government is indeed guaranteeing NHA's borrowings—else it could not have offered retail bonds at the rate that it does—there needs to be a provision in the budget. Merely disclosing the liabilities is not good enough and it is imprudent to think that these liabilities are not part of the fiscal deficit but the government's debt. The fact is it is the government—and the taxpayer—which will need to make good these borrowings in the event of a default by the PSU. NHA's borrowings rose a sharp 66% to ₹75,384 crore at the end of March 2017 and are estimated to have risen further to ₹1.2 lakh crore in March 2018. Its finances are in a shambles given the combined loss in 2015-16 and 2016-17 was close to ₹500 crore. Moreover, the business is in a mess because the net cash generated from operating activities in the two years to 2016-17 was a negative ₹,774 crore.

Indeed, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has pointed out that NHA has not maintained proper books of accounts and other relevant records. It has pointed out that the fixed assets are overstated by ₹2.17 lakh crore since the assets are held on behalf of the government. Also, the CAG has noted that including borrowing costs of ₹4,068 crore for 2016-17 on completed projects is in contravention of generally accepted accounting practices. So it is not as though all PSUs are in fine fettle with modest debt-equity ratios as the DEA secretary Garg makes it out to be; many of them don't have the scope to borrow but are rated AAA simply because they are backed by the sovereign. There is no harm in the government providing a guarantee but it should build in these liabilities into its accounts. Downplaying off-budget borrowings such as those by Food Corporation of India (FCI), which borrowed 1.3% of GDP in 2017-18 and 1% of GDP in 2018-19, does not make for good public finances. Interestingly, the interim budget revised the EBRs via the FCI in FY19 to ₹1.96 lakh crore, 170% higher than the budget estimate. The total off-budgetary borrowings, according to the interim budget, stood at ₹2.74 lakh crore for 2018-19.

Making Swachh Bharat better

Govt must work on water supply, safe fecal waste disposal

WHILE THE UNION government claims the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) success is a resounding success—in terms of improving sanitation coverage, or the number of households with toilet ownership, it definitely is—more needs to be done to realise its vision. Recently, in his speech in Parliament while presenting the Interim Budget 2019, finance minister Piyush Goyal claimed that the NDA-2 government at the Centre “initiated the world's largest behavioural change movement with the Swachh Bharat Mission... (SBM) has succeeded in changing the mindset of our people.” However, a recent study by the Research Institute for Compassionate Economics (R.I.C.E.) finds, even though toilet coverage is significantly up, it is still far from being universal—the SBM portal suggests 98.6% of Indian households have access to toilets—and nearly 44% of the rural population in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Rajasthan still defecate in the open. As per the official SBM database MP, UP and Rajasthan have achieved 100% sanitation coverage of rural households, i.e., households with toilets. But the R.I.C.E. study found that, while rural sanitation coverage has drastically improved in these four states—it is up from 37% in 2015-16 (NFHS data) to 71%—it is still some distance away from universal coverage. The jump in sanitation coverage is certainly attributable to SBM—while 57% of the rural households without a toilet in 2014 had one by 2018, 42% of these got it with government support. But, in effecting behavioural change, SBM has still a long way to go.

To be sure, improving household sanitation coverage is an important goal for a country like India, where ODF levels are the highest across the world, and to that end, SBM has more than just plugged the implementation gaps left by the precursor scheme, Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan. But, a focus on just toilet-building reflects a rather blinkered approach. While the R.I.C.E. survey finds that open defecation levels have come down in all four states, around 23% of rural households that owned a latrine in these states still defecated in the open—the number remains unchanged from 2014; worse, the number of toilet-owning households defecating in the open has increased in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. So, clearly, curbing open defecation needs more than just mere access to toilets. There are many factors why SBM, despite improving sanitation coverage, hasn't managed to spur toilet usage. However, the most important factor, many experts point out, is that SBM doesn't take an integrated sanitation route, one that includes access to water supply, villages, running water in toilets and waste management. The last is indeed an acute need, given the R.I.C.E. study found that, of the toilets constructed with government support in the four states, nearly 60% weren't twin-pit latrines—this model, of having two pits for fecal sludge to allow for greater decomposition of the waste and pathogen reduction, is recommended by the government. Given the massive positive returns for health and productivity SBM can have—simply by reducing contamination of water, it can bring down childhood malnourishment levels, infectious disease burden, lost man-hours due to disease—the government must make water supply and safe fecal matter disposal the prime features of SBM 2.0. Else, the SBM vision will remain stunted.

Warming Warning

Two studies on ice-melts, in the Hindu Kush and in the Arctic, foretell the danger the world will soon face

THE HINDU KUSH Himalayan region—spread over 3,500 square kilometres across eight countries including India, Nepal and China—is warming faster than the global average. The HKH region supports the lives and livelihoods of over 210 million people and, as the source of 10 major Asian rivers, the HKH also provides essential resources, especially water, to over a billion people and feeds the grain baskets of Asia. What is unfortunate is that, even if carbon emissions are dramatically and rapidly cut, succeeding in limiting global warming to 1.5°C, 36% of the glaciers in the HKH will be gone by 2100. If emissions are not cut, the loss soars to two-thirds, a newly released report found. Glacier melting at the HKH region accompanies the retreat of Arctic glaciers, exposing surfaces that haven't seen the sun for at least 40,000 years. A team of researchers from University of Colorado used radiocarbon dating measures and found that the vegetation they were testing in Canada were at least as old as the oldest age that radiocarbon dating can detect: 40,000 years. The melting of glaciers increases river flows, pushing up the risk of high-altitude reservoirs engulfing communities.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development's (ICIMOD's) Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment Report is the first-ever assessment of impacts of climate change on the ecologically important but fragile region. This region is a heat sink in summer and a heat source in winter, and this influences the Indian summer monsoon. So, any changes in this region would have a bearing on the monsoon itself that already shows signs of changes in spread and distribution and, in turn, on the livelihoods and ecological systems dependent on it. The need, following the report's warning, is now for informed science-driven advocacy for urgent climate action and immediate conservation efforts. The disastrous impact of glacier-melting will leave the world at large reeling.

● PLEASE ALL
WHILE ₹18,500 CRORE WOULD BE LOST AS TAX REVENUE, IT WILL BE MADE UP BY HIGHER CONSUMPTION, LEADING TO INCREASED COLLECTIONS, THUS MAKING THE FISCAL ARITHMETIC STRONG

The sweetest Budget of them all

THE INTERIM BUDGET for FY20 will go down as the 'sweetest fiscal document' because it is truly what, in economics, is called a Pareto optimal state, where several people are better off and no one is worse off. Rarely do we have a Budget that gives and never takes. As this Budget typifies this phenomenon, it is quite remarkable. In fact, if the assumptions made here are workable in all future years, it is great times for taxpayers as well as beneficiaries because we will continue to pay the same if not less tax and still get more from the government. Just how has this alchemy been made possible?

The Budget speech has made it clear that tax collections, be it direct or GST, have been very buoyant mainly because the tax base has increased. Therefore, lower GST rates have worked wonders and brought in the goodies as we pay lower prices and the government still collects its revenue. The direct tax base has widened sharply due to two measures which the government has taken in the last two years in the form of demonetisation and GST. The revised GDP numbers show that demonetisation did not stifle growth but actually fostered higher income which is seen also in the budgetary tax collection numbers. Therefore, the FM thought it fair to start rewarding taxpayers and the best way to do so is to start from the bottom and, while ₹18,500 crore would be lost as tax revenue, it will be more than made up by higher consumption which would automatically increase collections thus making the fiscal arithmetic strong. Will inflation increase on this score? To a certain extent, if people spend more on consumer goods, the industry will benefit. But given excess capacity, this should not translate into inflation. The same holds for food where prices have come down due to excess supply. If consumers spend more, then the surpluses should be consumed without any inflationary implications.

MADAN SABNAVIS
Chief economist, CARE Ratings
Views are personal



To buttress this point, the government has projected growth of 11.5% in GDP which looks fair enough and reasonable as it is a combination of 7.5-8% growth in real GDP and inflation of 3.5-4%, which few can contest. The size of the Budget has increased by 13.5% in FY20 which is lower than the 14.7% growth in last year's. This still gives space to distribute

tions cannot be grudged.

Economists always tend to play spoilsport and ask as to from where does the money come from. Here, the final deficit number remains unchanged and the net borrowing programme is higher by just ₹50,000 crore which can be absorbed well by the system. Therefore, from the point of view of prudence, there can be no quarrel. RBI is to pay an interim dividend this year to support the FY19 Budget which will probably also increase next year. This is critical. Also the decision on how to monetise the reserves of RBI will offer a lot of comfort to the government as this can actually fund several programmes, including the farmer payouts as well as bank recapitalisation. Interestingly, the latter has

not found mention in the Budget which means it will come from outside. This will be a major source of funding for the Budget as the spectrum sale component has ceased to be of interest to players given their financial situation today.

The final weapon which has been fired to ensure fiscal prudence is disinvestment. Even for FY19, the amount has not been changed and is at ₹80,000 crore which will go up to ₹90,000 crore next year. But disinvestment now has become a routine exercise and while economists and analysts keep analysing how it will

There are higher allocations for NREGA and, if one adds the other central programmes, the poor are definitely better off

Reimagining the Davos conference

Year after year, the focus of the conference has ended up more backward-looking than forward-looking and the delegates should, instead, collect and discuss best practices for dealing with usual levels of uncertainty

MOHAMED A EL-ERIAN

Chief economic adviser at Allianz, was chairman of former US president Barack Obama's Global Development Council



I DO NOT attend the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. But my sense is that, as in previous years, this year's participants ended up extrapolating more from the recent past than genuinely looking into the future for pivots and tipping points.

This was true both at the macro level and in terms of the key individual issues that attracted the most attention, according to multiple media reports (and the media are extremely well represented at this event). As a result, this globally renowned gathering of influential government and corporate leaders appears to have missed, once again, an opportunity fully to realise its considerable potential. There is a reason why Davos tends to be backward-looking. Leaders naturally come to it focused on what they have experienced most recently. If others have experienced the same thing, the Davos echo chamber amplifies the themes so that they dominate conversations about both recent developments and future prospects.

The two meetings before the 2008 global financial crisis had a rather optimistic tone, dismissing the warnings of the few who sensed that the “great moderation” and the era of unfettered finance were likely to come to a painful end. The January 2009 meeting was the complete opposite, projecting crisis and global recession well into the future. Such misreadings of what lies ahead haven't been limited to periods surrounding crises. Just consider what happened at the previous gathering, in January 2018, and compare it to this year. A year ago, most leaders had just come off the strongest quarter of global growth in years. What is more, activity was picking up in virtually every country around the world. As they heard about one another's experiences, the Davos delegates embraced the notion that the world had entered a period of synchronised growth in which positive feedback loops would

turbocharge the process. They gave little attention to the fact that, with the notable exception of the United States, most countries were experiencing largely one-off growth drivers.

At this year's Davos meeting, by contrast, the macro mood is said to have been much gloomier. The consensus was that we are heading for a synchronised slowdown in global growth, with a heightened risk of self-feeding vicious cycles. But again, this fails to distinguish between one-off factors whose impact is temporary and largely reversible—such as the partial US government shutdown and an episode of miscommunication by the Federal Reserve—and the sort of secular weakness that Europe is experiencing. Most of the issue-specific discussions this year focused on China-US trade tensions and Brexit. Here again, the temptation was to extrapolate future developments based excessively on what had just happened. The Davos consensus seemed to be that China-US trade disputes would intensify during 2019. But the likelier scenario is that tensions diminish as China realises what South Korea, Mexico, and Canada already did in dealing with the US administration: rather than a tit-for-tat tariff escalation, the best approach for a country's short-term growth and longer-term development is to make concessions to the US on issues of genuine grievance. These include rules that force technology transfers—such as joint-venture requirements—and the theft of intellectual property.

On Brexit, the central scenarios at Davos focused on either a continuation of the current no-peace-no-war process or, alternatively, a hard exit for the United Kingdom from the European Union. Yet, because this has already proved to be a very “slow Brexit” process, with Britain's Parliament repeatedly unable to agree on a replacement for the current EU-UK relationship, the probability of a soft Brexit is

materially increasing. So is the probability, albeit lower, of a second referendum, which was once thought an unlikely, if not unthinkable outcome. Simply extrapolating the future from what has just occurred usually leads Davos delegates down false trails. Davos—both its organisers and its participants—would do a much better job by making three changes to the way the event is managed.

Firstly, the meeting should actively propose alternative scenarios for serious discussion. This year's agenda, for example, should have included a possible return in 2019 to divergent growth and the associated risks and opportunities. In addition, Davos should collect and discuss best practices for dealing with usual levels of uncertainty for both businesses and government policy-making. Finally, when it comes to short-term prospects, the event needs to spend a lot more time on other themes that I suspect will prove more important than either Brexit or China-US trade tensions in the period ahead. These include the changing attitude toward regionalism, central bank policy challenges, and the scope for more government-policy coordination among advanced economies. The annual Davos gathering is too big an opportunity not to be exploited properly. Yet, year after year, the focus has ended up more backward-looking than forward-looking, and the just-concluded iteration appears to have been no exception. A revamp would play an important role in fulfilling the stated objective of Davos: engaging “the foremost political, business and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas”. And it would ensure that more of the participants go looking for actionable, substantive content rather than ending up being there primarily to see and be seen.

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take place, the process has been really straight forward and assuring. Either one PSU buys another or the LIC steps in and buys shares or the existing company buys back its shares. In all these processes, surpluses with PSUs get transferred to the government. A small part goes to the government as dividend and the larger one as disinvestment. Therefore, one should actually stop debating on whether this target will or will not be met because axiomatically targets are always met as the route is well defined and institutionalised. The stock market should get used to the fact that disinvestment does not mean more stocks in the market and hence should stop guessing the quantum that will enter the fray.

The Budget is hence an ideal one which can be scaled up over time assuming the growth numbers work out right. In fact, curiously, the GDP number used for FY18 and FY19 are the first advance estimates for FY19. With the revised estimate for FY18 being upped significantly one day before the Budget was announced, if the nominal GDP growth rates for FY19 and FY20 are recalculated then the fiscal deficit ratio for FY19 would be 3.3% (as GDP would be ₹191.98 lakh crore as against the assumed ₹188.40 lakh crore) while that for FY20 would be 3.3% (as GDP would go up to ₹214.05 lakh crore instead of ₹210.07 lakh crore).

Also, the moment it is accepted that a lot of public sector money, which includes RBI, can be used for financing the Budget, then nothing is impossible. This can be combined dexterously with deferred payments which are rollovers and off-budgetary borrowings to reach the target. Meanwhile, when revised GDP growth numbers point upwards, automatically the denominator increases and the fiscal target is maintained. But as all this has been done without causing pain and there should be no complaints as such, even from the economist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Brexit, what is the deal?

Uncertainty and public unrest continue to aggravate as the geopolitical environment in the UK and EU regions remains largely complicated. Tough opposition by political entities and rising speculations over availability/pricing of goods, including basic necessities, on account of a no-deal Brexit have further dampened the business sentiment. Despite a favourable outcome of the trust vote and the consent to re-negotiate a deal with the EU, the overall public confidence is significantly diminished, in the absence of crystal-clear exit terms and prevailing ambiguity over the fulfillment of the referendum. Capital markets are defensive and fairly range-bound, as the potential turbulence in the near-term poses a risk to the growth of emerging economies. Political stability in the immediate future is impeded by challenges of meeting the stipulated timeline, executing a viable/acceptable deal and collaboration with the opposition — Girish Lalwani, Delhi

A win-win verdict

The Supreme Court pronounced a ‘balanced judgment’ for both the Central and West Bengal governments to claim ‘moral victory’. That the Kolkata police commissioner Rajeev Kumar should appear before CBI in the neutral venue of Shillong and co-operate with the investigation was victory for the Centre. That he cannot be arrested was victory for the state government. Rajeev Kumar is a witness and not an accused in the case. Seldom is a witness arrested. The mistimed gunning for the Kolkata police chief by the CBI was self-defeating. It precipitated the state into a crisis. It is ingenious to suppose that BJP alone is ‘clean’ and all other parties are ‘corrupt’ — G David Milton, Maruthancode

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

NAVEEN P SINGH

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● INTERIM BUDGET

Structurally strengthening farm sector

Elections are round the corner and waivers are the hot topic, but they merely address the symptoms around farm distress, not cure the disease. The Budget, thankfully, unveiled fundamental measures for long-term stability of the farm sector. But a key area of concern remains lack of measures to address falling crop prices. MSP was earlier sharply hiked for 22 crops, but there are no takers at the support price

THE SUSPENSE HAS been unveiled. Most of us were aware that agriculture will get the top billing, and the focus of this year's Budget will be on addressing key issues pertaining to farm distress, as elections 2019 will be fought on the farmland. But the form in which it will be done has been unveiled in the spends. The finance minister, while presenting the Interim Budget, launched a number of measures focused around major issues surrounding the economics of the granaries of the country.

The government launched the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM-KISAN) that will offer direct income support of ₹6,000 per year to small and marginal farmers having landholding of less than 2 hectares, and will address the problems of indebtedness that prevented them to access funds once and for all in its own way. It is a known fact that land fragmentation on account of repeated divisions has contributed to rural distress. Landholdings have doubled in the past 45 years, from 7.1 crore in 1970-71 to 14.57 crore in 2015-16, resulting in decline in the average size of farms by more than 50%, at 1.08 hectares. As per provisional estimates of the Agriculture Census 2015-16, there are 12.56 crore marginal and small farmers having less than 2 hectare holdings and together constitute 86.21% in 2015-16 against 84.97% in 2010-11. The PM-KISAN will address discontent among such small farmers as the sum will meet the input cost for cultivation and, most importantly, will be delinked from crop prices. The good news to elige farmers is that the scheme would be

made effective from December 1, 2018, and the first instalment for the period up to March 31, 2019, would be paid soon. This scheme is in line with the Rythu Bandhu scheme of Telangana, which transfers ₹4,000 per acre per crop on per-acre basis without a holding size limit. For two crops in a year, it makes up to ₹8,000 per year. The KALIA scheme of Odisha provides direct benefits to *krushaks* (farmers).

There have been no dearth of schemes, but the policies of elevating the rural economy always have had a lag and effectiveness in implementation is an area of concern. The current move seems to address this lag by directly monetising farmers.

In other measures to support the rural economy, ₹60,000 crore has been set aside for MGNREGA. Also, there is now ₹19,000 crore for the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana as against ₹15,500 crore in the previous year—to provide alternative employment opportunities. However, care should be taken in implementation at the granular level, in such a way not to wean away labour from peak season farming activities. The government has announced to build 1 lakh digital villages in the next five years. In order to promote fisheries, the government has proposed a separate department of fisheries and extended the benefit of 2% interest subvention to farmers pursuing animal husbandry and fisheries, for those who avail loans through the Kisan Credit Card. Diversification of farms will ameliorate the problems surrounding dependence on a single economic activity of farming. In all, the ministry of agriculture & farmers' welfare could corner ₹1,40,764 crore as BE in 2019-20 (a large sum for PM-KISAN) as compared to RE of ₹79,025.74 crore, but a very less proportion totalling only ₹8,078 crore (65% is administrative and logistics expense) has been allocated to agricultural R&D in 2019-20, which is almost the same as the current fiscal RE. This warrants an increase in the agricultural R&D spending as the payoffs have been quite significant in the past and will grease the wheels of sustainable economic development.

A key area of concern remains lack of measures to address falling crop prices. MSP has been sharply hiked for 22 crops, but there are no takers at the support price. The fall in prices has been attributed to record production and decline in global crop prices. As per the Fourth Advance Estimates, foodgrain production during 2017-18 has been at a record 284.8 million tonnes, higher by 3.5% against previous year. The task of protecting farm incomes from price instability remains to be fulfilled by the policymakers in the coming years.

Thankfully, the government preferred to monetise farmers instead of waiving off farm loans. Elections are round the corner and, obviously, farm loan waiver remains the hot topic addressing the symptoms around farm distress, but not curing the disease. The Budget has unveiled some fundamental measures for long-term stability of the farm sector. Let us sincerely hope that budgeted measures will ameliorate the economics of small and marginal farms, and go a long way in structurally building up the farm sector.

An anonymous assessing officer?

NAVEEN AGGARWAL

The author is partner & COO, Tax, KPMG in India



E-assessments are here to stay

WHEN THE ROBERT Zemeckis blockbuster 'Back to the Future' hit cinemas in 1985, critical success apart, sceptics and viewers alike were baffled at the idea of autonomous cars and virtual reality. Enter 2019, these concepts seem closer to reality. So, when the Interim FM signalled his government's intent of making the tax assessment process swifter, stronger, predictable and 'anonymous', delivered through a virtual interface, I would not yet discount this ambition in disbelief.

Picture this, the next time you go through a process of e-assessment and instead of interacting with a single officer through the e-filing portal, you now have access to a cross-sectoral and geographically-dispersed team to carry out the assessment, equipped with the domain understanding and nuances of your specific industry to better appreciate the business practices you operate within. Enter the anonymous assessing officer—a radical and path-breaking idea, indeed. In 2015, the government launched a pilot project on voluntary basis to conduct an email-based assessment in five metros, which was extended to two more in 2016. Taxpayers were given an option to undergo email-based assessment. In 2017, this facility was incorporated into the e-filing portal being used by taxpayers. And finally in 2018, the CBDT, vide Instruction 1/2018 dated February 12, 2018, directed that all cases barring certain exceptions shall be subjected to e-assessments. The Finance Act, 2018, introduced amendments to create a framework and lay down operational guidelines for e-assessments.

While the progress has been good, the procedures have thrown up some challenges that need to be addressed to make this idea work.

Getting the technology right—size and spec: A critical aspect that will determine the success of this idea is the government's IT infrastructure. Specifically, the ability to handle data (a) in terms of size and (b) in terms of volume would be key. If we peep into the not-so-dated past, government servers have often crashed when they experienced high volumes of data traffic, especially closer to filing deadlines. Given the sensitive nature of the assessment proceedings, the government can ill-afford similar crashes. Therefore, the importance of a robust IT infrastructure cannot be overestimated.

Removing legal loops: From a legal perspective, a valid service of notice is a critical prerequisite to constitute a valid assessment proceeding. While necessary amendments have been made in the income-tax law to constitute email communication as a valid mode of service, there are instances where notices are uploaded on the portal but a corresponding email is not sent to the taxpayer. Anomalies like these could lead to litigation and potentially render the proceedings void. Therefore, either the law must be amended to explicitly state that uploading a notice on the online portal constitutes a valid service or IT systems must be streamlined to ensure that emails are automatically sent, without exception, as and when notices get uploaded.

Achieve process perfections: While practice makes perfect, revolutionary ideas do not normally give you a large incubation buffer. Therefore, from a procedural perspective, the government needs an 'ace' before the bets are called. For example, the current system does not have any provision for granting adjournments. In case a taxpayer uploads a submission seeking more time, the e-assessment portal neither accepts nor rejects the request, leading to uncertainty for the taxpayer on the next date for filing submissions.

A winning team: While not so much of a challenge at the planning stage, this could be a critical lever to determine failure or success of this initiative. On-board the right skills with a credible sector, domain expertise, and ensuring mechanisms to facilitate collaborative working free from bias would be a core area for the government to focus on as it moves into the advanced stages of implementation.

'You cannot stop an idea whose time has come'. In my view, the time for e-assessments is here, and here to stay. While the transformation from age-old archaic practices is inevitable, this change cannot be at the periphery and needs to impact the entire process and make assessments more taxpayer-friendly and transparent. As long as this focus and commitment stays with both the government and taxpayers, there is little doubt the Indian tax ecosystem will be cruising ahead in its journey to autonomous success.

Moving the needle on agriculture

Reforms and structural changes are a continuous process and more needs to be done

AJAY S SHRIRAM

Chairman & senior managing director, DCM Shriram

THE EXPECTATION OF a big announcement for rural India was high, and the Budget did not disappoint. Before getting into the specifics, a positive trend that may have gone unnoticed is the conversation has moved from farm output to farm income. Having achieved self-sufficiency plus surplus in production, the

country need not worry about "where will food come from?" With farmers having delivered, it is incumbent on us to ensure they earn adequate income to support family and meet aspirational goals.

Providing assured income support to small and marginal farmers under PM-KISAN is historic. First, it will provide relief from distress on account of low prices. Second, such a transfer leaves the choice of how to use the money to the farmer. Third, an unintended benefit would be that all land records will get fully streamlined once and for all. A spot that was expected by some was a loan waiver. It's encouraging the government didn't choose that route, as it results in poor credit discipline and

lowering credit rating, which eventually hurt the farmer.

Setting up of a department of fisheries is welcome, as it needed focus. The FM rightly emphasised its importance by pointing out we are the second-largest producer in the world, plus it provides employment to 1.5 crore people. With significant change in food consumption patterns and the shift towards high-value proteins, fisheries will fill this gap.

Farming is risky business, often not understood by urban dwellers. Uncontrollable factors are many, from fall in commodity prices to natural calamities. The proposal to extend interest subvention for farmers affected by severe natural calamities, for the entire period of rescheduling of their loans, is welcome. A unique feature was articulation of a 10-year vision. The goals set were stretching and give a clear direction to the nation. Expectedly, rural India and sustainable agriculture found a prominent place, as India races to become a \$10-trillion economy.

While the Budget solve all woes of farmers? Certainly not. Reforms and structural changes are a continuous process and more needs to be done. Freeing agriculture markets from licensing, land leasing, stable trade policy, encouraging food processing/linking farmers with modern trade, allowing use of biotech, growth in non-agricultural jobs, etc, are work in progress and will certainly be on the radar of policymakers. Finally, the question is: Where will the money come from? Fortunately, India is sitting in a sweet spot. With a rapidly growing economy and buoyancy in tax collection along with low inflation rates, the downside is indeed very low.

Making India more open to business

A conclusion to Cairn dispute would send a message to investors that India is a stable investment destination

MUKESH AGHI

The author is president & CEO, US-India Strategic Partnership Forum. Views are personal



Retrospective taxation: This issue continues to concern investors. The government's retrospective tax claim against Cairn Energy and the resulting dispute has perpetuated concerns among investors about the transparency and stability of the Indian tax regime. For instance, the law imposing tax on indirect transfer of assets in India may have been enacted in 2012, but the tax is applicable to all transactions that took place from 1962 onwards. The controversy surrounding this issue

is whether it is fair to impose a tax with retrospective effect whereby a company's business decisions are based upon the tax situation that exists today? It is difficult for a business to organise its activities today based on a future law that will be made applicable from today. An ideal tax system should be predictable, clear and stable. While the Modi government has categorically stated that it will not issue any new retrospective actions, there are several high-profile cases throughout the



BJP's reign, which are yet to be resolved. Now that a final resolution of this dispute is expected shortly under the UK-India Bilateral Investment Treaty, we believe a commitment by the government of India to swiftly respect/adhere to the terms of the Treaty ruling on this matter would offer assurance to global investors.

Oil & gas industry: Ironically, one such case is in the oil & gas industry where the government has initiated a number of positive reforms over the last four years,

including open acreage policy, pricing reforms and liberalised licensing policy.

In 2015, the PM set a target of reducing India's oil dependence by 10% over the next five years, but imports have actually risen. India imported 77% of its crude oil requirements in 2014 and this has increased to over 83% in 2018, according to the Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell Report—India spent more than \$87 billion on crude oil imports in FY18, which represents 25%-plus increase from last year.

The government continues to seek private investment to raise domestic oil & gas production, which has stagnated in recent years, while fuel demand has risen annually. A change in domestic production would be of significance in view of India's rapid economic growth, which could be impacted due to expanding gaps between energy demand and supply.

Current oil prices allow India an opportunity to attract serious investments in the oil & gas industry. In fact, Cairn Energy is leading the charge, contributing about 25% to the country's domestic crude oil production in FY18. Investment in energy is critical to achieving India's development ambitions—to support an expanding economy, to bring power to those who remain without it, to fuel the demand for greater mobility, and to develop infrastructure to serve what would soon be the world's most populous nation.

Top-50: We applaud improvements in ease of doing business made by the government, and believe that expediting a conclusion to the long-running Cairn dispute by respecting the Treaty ruling would strengthen the message that the business environment in India is predictable, stable and attractive to global investors.



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@expressindia.com

THIS WORD MEANS

MAGNETIC NORTH POLE

How it is different from geographic north, why it is drifting fast towards Russia, what that could lead to

SOWMIYA ASHOK & AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, PUNE, FEBRUARY 5

SINCE MONDAY, news publications across the world have been reporting that the magnetic north pole is drifting fast from the Canadian Arctic and towards Russia. What is this phenomenon about?

Two north poles

The Earth has two pairs of north and south poles. The geographic poles are defined by the axis around which the planet rotates, and are fixed. The Earth behaves like a giant bar magnet — well, almost — and this behaviour defines its magnetic north and south poles, which are not static. A compass points towards magnetic north.

The Earth's magnetic behaviour is far more complex than that of a simple bar magnet. Its north poles and south poles move around sometimes erratically. Over large periods of time, they change their locations significantly, sometimes even interchanging their positions. The last time it so happened, with the magnetic north pole getting somewhere near where the magnetic south pole currently is, was about 780,000 years ago. But this time period is not fixed either.

The origin of Earth's magnetism lies in its outer core, a more than 2,000-km layer of liquid iron and some other metals like nickel, that surrounds the central core, or the innermost part. This liquid iron is in constant motion due to Earth's rotation and various other reasons, and this motion produces a magnetic field.

The magnetic north pole, or south pole, does not coincide with the geographical north or south pole. Currently, the magnetic north pole is located somewhere over northern Canada, a fact discovered in 1831 by Sir James Clark Ross. Since then the magnetic north pole has been moving across the Canadian Arctic towards Russia, and has moved hundreds of miles over the last several decades.

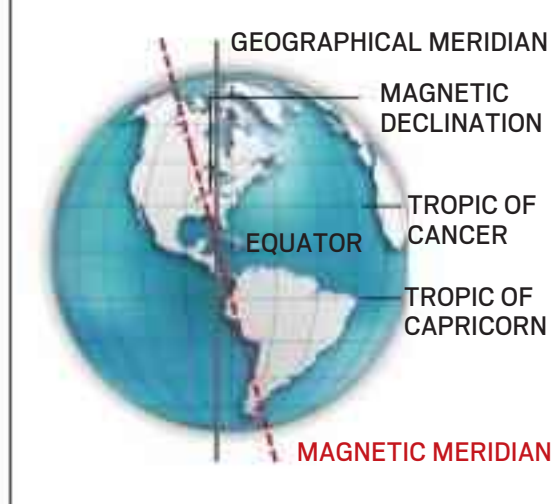
What is new

Scientists have now realised the pace of this movement has suddenly increased, quite significantly, from about 14-15 km per year till the 1990s to about 55 km per year in the last few years. This led to scientists on Monday updating the World Magnetic Model (WMM) that tracks this movement. It was a year ahead of schedule. Every five years, a new and updated version of the WMM is released. The last update was 2015 and the next was scheduled for end-2019. However, by early 2018, scientists realised that the faster movement of the magnetic north pole had made it so inaccurate that it was "about to exceed the acceptable limit for navigational errors".

Why it is moving faster

This is something that scientists do not have full clarity on. The movement of liquid iron and other metals in the outer core of the Earth is known to influence the magnetic field, but this movement is chaotic

TWO NORTH POLES



The midnight sun shines across sea ice in the Canadian Arctic. AP

and turbulent. Scientists do not fully understand how the movement happens or why. The study of the phenomena happening inside the earth can only be done indirectly or through computer modelling, because of the extremely hot temperatures prevailing there. Scientists hope that this acceleration in the shifting of magnetic north pole would throw some new insights into the phenomena happening deep inside the Earth's surface.

The consequences

The entire transportation sector, especially aviation and shipping, depends on correctly knowing the position of magnetic north to chart out their navigation paths. Similarly, it is crucial for militaries, who need to know this for firing their missiles or for other purposes. Knowing the magnetic north is vital for a number of civilian applications as well.

A standalone school compass would not be affected by this change in position of magnetic north. It will reorient itself to the new resultant magnetic north pole. But this standalone school compass is no longer used for modern requirements of navigation in aviation, shipping or military, or even in our mobile phones. This is because school compasses are not very precise as they get affected by local magnetic fields that may be present.

The compasses that are used in modern instrumentation are much more sophisticated, digital and more accurate. This is the reason why they need to be recalibrated to reflect the change in the magnetic north pole. This is what the unscheduled release of the WMM has done. It has released a set of software that will update these instruments to the new positions of the magnetic north pole.

DECISION 2019

THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

RJD banks on sharpening old binary, BJP seeks the right balance, Nitish looks at coalition of social extremes

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, FEBRUARY 5

Why is the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) opposed to reservation for the poor among the so-called 'forward castes'?

When the 10% quota in jobs and educational institutions for the economically weaker sections (EWS) was announced, the RJD found itself in two minds. Lalu Prasad, who broke away from the Janata Dal to form the RJD in 1997, had found his mojo in the post-Mandal era, riding to power on the back of backward identity politics in a state riven by deep faultlines of caste. From 1990, when Lalu first became Chief Minister of Bihar, to 2000, when Rabri Devi completed her term, the RJD's politics remained strongly anti-upper caste. When Rabri Devi came back after Nitish Kumar's eight-day stint in 2000, however, the RJD formed the government with the Congress — and was forced to recalibrate its stance towards the upper castes. This broadly remained the RJD's line for the next 15 years — until the elections of 2015.

That year, with the political landscape of North India having been changed by the rise of Narendra Modi, the RJD entered into the Mahagathbandhan with Nitish's JD(U) and the Congress against the BJP-led NDA. In the campaign, Lalu switched back to his hard rhetoric of the 1990s, seizing upon RSS sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat's call for a review of the policy of reservations, and telling an election meeting in Raghapur (Vaishali): "Ee baar phir backward-forward bhe gelo (It is backwards versus forwards once again)."

Politically for the RJD, that situation has not changed since. Despite the desertion of Nitish, its best chance of defeating the BJP lies in countering the consolidation of the Hindu vote through an appeal to caste identities, and sharpening Bihar's old forward-backward binary. OBCs, EBCs, Muslims, and at least some SCs are the natural constituency of the RJD. After slight initial hesitation, therefore, the party leadership of Lalu, his son Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, and Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha, decided to oppose the EWS quota. However, to signal that it was not against the poor among the upper castes, the party nuanced its opposition — targeting the Rs 8-lakh criterion in the government's definition of EWS. How can someone who earns over Rs 66,000 per month be "poor", Tejashwi has been asking.

But does the RJD have no base among the upper castes?

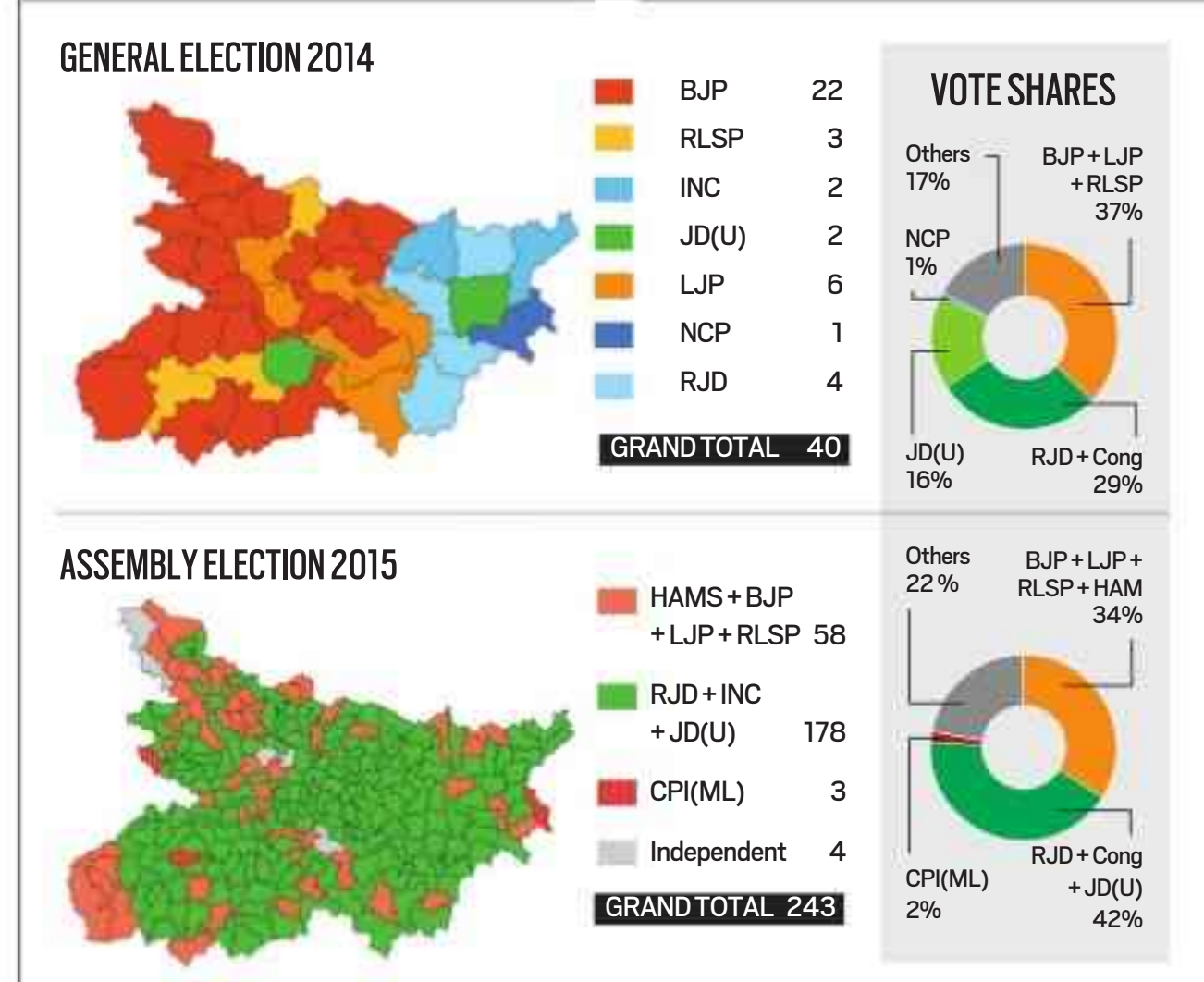
It does have some upper caste people in its top leadership, such as national vice president Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, and former MPs Jagdanand Singh and Prabunath Singh. The late Umashanker Singh was also a prominent upper caste leader of the party. However, most of these leaders got votes because of personal popularity in their areas. While this has been helpful for the RJD — in the fifteenth Lok Sabha (2009), for example, Lalu was kept company by the three Rajputs, Raghuvansh, Jagdanand, and Prabunath — for the party as a whole, upper caste voters have always come as a bonus. That is why, despite some open dissent from its upper caste leaders such as Raghuvansh, the RJD has decided to put its faith in its core constituency. The estimated 14% Yadavs, most of the 29% EBCs and 17% Muslims, and a sizeable chunk of the 16% SCs will, it is hoping, make it worthwhile to give up entirely on the

How is the quota for economically backward playing out in Bihar?

In caste faultlines, parties search for their poll pitch



Tejashwi Prasad Yadav of RJD in Patna; he has been opposing the EWS quota. Nandendra Kumar Singh



much smaller and more uncertain 12% upper caste vote.

How will the Congress reconcile its own backing of the EWS quota with its ally, the RJD's opposition to it?

Like the RJD, the Congress too, has decided to go back to its old core of upper caste and Muslim voters, along with a section of EBCs and SCs. Of the 16 upper caste candidates that the Congress fielded in the 2015 Assembly polls, 12 won. The Congress has been upset with the RJD's opposition to the EWS quota, and worried about the impact it can have in the transfer of votes within their alliance. For example, Meira Kumar, the potential Congress candidate in Sasaram, may not get upper caste support — and, should the RJD field Raghuvansh from Vaishali or

Muzaffarpur, the Congress could struggle to explain the RJD's position on the EWS quota to its upper caste voters. Indeed, the party faces a Hobson's choice in Bihar — despite its frustration with the RJD, it cannot risk the senior partner leaving it out of the opposition alliance altogether.

But doesn't the JD(U), too, have an OBC base? Why has Nitish's government decided to enforce the quota?

The JD(U) and erstwhile Samata Party have been with the BJP since 1996, barring the four years from June 2013 to July 2017. Even in the 1995 Assembly polls, Samata tried to tell non-Yadav OBCs, EBCs, SCs, and upper castes that Lalu was against them, and favoured Yadavs unduly. Nitish's prime constituency has always included non-Yadav

OBCs and a good chunk of the untapped EBCs. In addition, he has created his own constituency among the SCs, identifying 21 Scheduled Castes as Mahadalits, who have been getting benefits of about 20 welfare and education schemes since his first full term (2005-10).

With the BJP, the JD(U) is looking at a "coalition of social extremes", where upper castes and Dalits coexist and vote together for the same alliance. Nitish, whose government will pass the EWS quota Bill in the coming Budget Session, would be hoping that his return to the BJP has assuaged the anger of upper castes whom he had upset by going with Lalu in 2015. The harvest, he hopes, will come in the form of good mutual conversion of votes, even though he may field fewer upper caste candidates than his partner, the BJP.

And where does the BJP stand in this complex situation?

Its goal is Hindu consolidation, and it has been trying to do a good balancing act. It has been trying to counter the RJD's attempts at creating a backward-forward binary by underlining that the EWS quota is an addition, and has not taken away from the existing quota for OBCs and SCs. The Bihar BJP has called a meeting of its OBC wing on February 15-16 — to be addressed by Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, and Shivraj Singh Chouhan — to disseminate the message of the Centre's "eight-point welfare programme" for OBCs, including giving the OBC Commission constitutional status, the facility of self-attestation for OBC certification, and paving the way for venture capital loans for OBC entrepreneurs. The BJP, with its allies JD(U) and Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP, is looking at the consolidation of non-Yadav OBC votes, EBC votes, mostly from the Dhanuks and Nishads or Sahnis (boatmen), and Dalit Paswan and Mahadalit votes. It will field its OBC star campaigners in selected constituencies to try to neutralise the RJD's attack on the EWS quota. Two major BJP OBC faces — Chouhan and Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das — will address the party's OBC meet next week.

So, can it be assumed that the EWS quota will be a major election issue in Bihar?

It will be an issue among both the beneficiary upper caste voters, as well as the OBCs, EBCs and SCs whom the RJD will try to tell that the central government's move is the first step towards taking away their own quota. The RJD did this successfully in 2015 — the Election Commission had found pamphlets being distributed in Araria, telling voters that the BJP was "trying to end reservation". But the fact that Lalu is in jail and ill, could seriously handicap the RJD's campaign. Tejashwi, who has been prolific on Twitter against the quota, will be tested during the campaign.

The strength of the Congress's campaign on this issue will probably be decided by how hard Tejashwi pushes, and how much traction he gets. The NDA will attack this apparent faultline within the RJD-Congress alliance. The BJP, JD(U), and LJP have already started to remind voters of the RJD slogan from the mid-1990s — "BHURIA BAL saaf karo", a provocative call to "remove" the upper caste Bhumihars, Rajputs, Brahmmins, and Lalas, as Kayasthas are known in Bihar.

NEXT
#9 Why is the Vishva Hindu Parishad now lowering the Ayodhya heat?

Haryana's South connect: when it made Telugu second language in school

VARINDER BHATIA
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 5

LAST WEEK, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, a Punjabi by ethnic roots, took his audience by surprise when he delivered a speech in nearly flawless Tamil. As Khattar's speech during Pongal festivities in Haryana went viral, it led to comments about the Tamil language's supposed connection with Haryana — that the link goes back four and that Tamil was Haryana's "second official language" until 2010. Later, Khattar added a new dimension to the discussion: while he had learnt Tamil 40 years ago, Haryana actually has a connection with another South Indian language — Telugu. Some 50 years ago, Telugu was declared the state's "second language". A look at how this came to be:

Why Telugu

Telugu was made the state's "second language" — to be taught in schools — but it was not the "second official language" for official communication. And the reason reportedly concerns Haryana's disputes with Punjab. Haryana was carved out of Punjab

on November 1, 1966, but till date the two states continue to be in dispute over water sharing, education, airport and even a joint state capital in Chandigarh. A number of veteran politicians, bureaucrats and journalists said that it was around 1969 when Haryana's third Chief Minister, Bansilal, got so upset with the repeated disputes that he decided to introduce any other language as the second official language. The objective, apparently, was to prevent making Punjabi an official language.

Officers and political sources cited additional reasons behind Bansilal's decision. The government wanted to promote a South Indian language as the South was witnessing intense anti-Hindi agitations in those days. "Bansilal wanted to show that if a North Indian state could adopt a South Indian language, they should not protest against Hindi," a veteran said.

Veteran politicians and bureaucrats also recall that Bansilal wanted to give Haryana's students the opportunity to learn at least two Indian languages, one from the North (Hindi) and the other from South (Telugu). A few recall that at that time, Bansilal is said to have toyed with the idea of a sister-states relationship with Andhra

Pradesh, but the idea did not mature because the then Andhra Pradesh politicians did not see much benefit from such a relationship with a remote, newly created northern state.

What it means

Practically, there is not much relevance for a second language in a state, except that it needs to be taught in schools if students opt for it. It is primarily recognised as such with a specific objective, usually as a gesture towards a particular community that comprises a significant population in a state. But once it is declared, the government is bound to provide specific infrastructure for teaching the second language in schools. A former bureaucrat explained that it creates job vacancies and people get employment. Thus, when Telugu was incorporated as second language in Haryana to be taught in schools, teachers were also appointed to teach the language.

Where it stands

Current and retired bureaucrats of Haryana recalled that since the decision had been taken by then Chief Minister Bansilal, it had to be implemented. Thus, the state



Bansilal (seen being sworn in as CM in 1996) introduced Telugu as second language around 50 years. Archive

government in the early 1970s appointed around 100 teachers to teach Telugu in government schools. Gradually, however, all

those teachers were either accommodated in the teaching of other subjects or resigned, since there were no students to teach Telugu to. The idea did not take off as expected. In June 2017, incumbent Chief Minister Khattar visited Hyderabad and hinted at introducing Telugu as a correspondence course through a university or a college in Haryana. "Many people from Telangana work in Faridabad and Gurgaon and the idea is to help their children learn their mother tongue," Khattar said while addressing a Making of Development India (MODI) programme in Hyderabad on June 9, 2017.

Punjabi is official

Haryana's Official Languages Act was enacted in 1969. With this Act, the Punjab Official Languages Act, 1960, which was earlier applicable to Haryana, was repealed. Hindi was now specified as official language of the state and English was to be used for legislative and judicial correspondence (with Hindi-translated copies). Telugu was not mentioned in the Act, 1969. The Act also had three amendments, but Telugu never found any mention in any of those.

The last amendment was in 2004, dur-

ing Om Prakash Chautala's regime, when Punjabi was introduced as the second official language of the state. "The Haryana Official Language (Amendment) Bill 2004" was moved by then Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sampat Singh and passed unanimously. It said that as per the 1991 Census, 7.11% of the population was Punjabi-speaking and thus it was essential to declare Punjabi as the second official language in addition to Hindi, which was then an official language along with English. It was unanimously passed in the Vidhan Sabha on December 1, 2004; the Governor gave his assent on December 14; a notification was issued on December 15. It was aimed at wooing the Punjabi electorate ahead of Lok Sabha elections in 2005.

In 2009, Bhupinder Singh Hooda promised voters that he would declare Punjabi as the second official language — which the amendment had already done. Once elected to power, Hooda's government on January 28, 2010 issued a notification declaring Punjabi as the state's second official language for the purposes of "receipt of representation scripted in Punjabi by the state government and its office; and promotion of Punjabi language and Punjabi literature".

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Budget's blind eye

It fails to address dismal productivity, not just in agriculture, but across all workers



BHASKAR CHAKRAVORTI

I MUST SAY I didn't expect the cow to make it to the Budget. But it did.

Other than that twist in the plot, the rest of the interim budget speech from an interim minister that was, mercifully, not interminable, was wholly unsurprising. After all, who can blame the government? There is an election ahead and this fact was hard to miss. The urban middle class? Check. Farmers? Check. Workers, most of whom are in the unorganised sector? Check. You get the picture.

Now, it remains to be seen if some of the goodies here — for example, a tax exemption for income up to Rs 5 lakh to appease the middle class or a Rs 6,000 annual cash handout to poor farmers in a scheme that will cost Rs 75,000 crore annually added to a scheme to provide a monthly pension for workers in the unorganised sector after they turn 60 years old — will exacerbate the fiscal deficit significantly enough and whether that ought to be a cause for worry in the future. That said, I am glad that the farmers at the proverbial bottom of the agricultural pyramid and the workers in the unorganised sector — which pretty much covers most of the worker pyramid — were offered some form of an economic cushion, even if a rather thin one.

Call me overly pessimistic but I don't see the deep structural problems that afflict the agricultural sector and the low wage trap that the Indian workforce finds itself in being addressed by either political party in the near term, regardless of the election outcome. Yes, these are stopgap measures and may even create a disincentive to take any of the larger steps needed for meaningful structural reforms. But it is better than nothing.

What else can one say about this rather ho-hum budget? Where one should be worried is that budgets are inherently about data and projections based on intelligent calculations based on economic assumptions and models. What I find worrying is the spate of statistical skulduggery that is coming to light in advance of elections. It makes me quite uneasy about completely buying all the statistics and projections in the budget.

To get a sense of my discomfort, consider, first, the magical revision of national income statistics that set GDP growth rocketing up to 7.2 per cent in 2017-18 from a more modest 6.7 per cent. Even the post-demonetisation period got a nice bonus: A bump from 7.1 per cent to 8.2 per cent for 2016-17. These numerical bounties arrived on the heels of an earlier revision. In November, when the government made sharp downward revisions in GDP numbers for 2009-10 and 2010-11, bringing down the average GDP growth rate during the 2008-09 to 2012-13 period making the Manmohan Singh — y'-know that "accidental Prime Minister" — era look a lot less rosy than the present one and India's only record of double-digit annual GDP growth seem like an accident. The overall message from all this revisionist statistics seems to be: As long as you don't get too caught up in the petty methodological details, there is more GDP in every pot now than ever before.

Even if one were to take the methodological revisions as part of the natural process of improving national accounts and statistics, it is deeply troubling to learn that the National Sample Survey Office, which had pegged the 2017-18 unemployment level at 6.1 per cent, a 45-year high and triple the rate five years earlier, had been compelled to suppress its findings. The report was due for release in December and now two commissioners responsible for reviewing data in the report have resigned in protest of the suppression of the findings ahead of the elections. Prior to this, the Labour Ministry had, since 2016, discontinued its routine practice of publishing employment statistics.

This string of revisions and suppressions are enough to make my eyes glaze over as I read all the statistics in the budget announcement. The acting finance minister says that this budget has been prepared with a moderate impact on the fiscal deficit. He assures us that the fiscal deficit for 2019-20 is no more than 3.4 per cent of GDP and the government has "taken further steps" to consolidate the fiscal deficit in years to come, with

a target of 3 per cent in 2020-21 as well as in 2021-22. He adds that many good things are expected to happen in the interim and cites even more statistics. Gross tax revenue is expected to go up, according to this plan, to 12.1 per cent of GDP in 2019-20 and 2020-21, climbing up after that to 12.2 per cent. We have few assurances that more statistical jujitsu will not happen down the road.

This makes the budget seem like a house of cards. So, what should we bank on, then, given that a budget is, after all, about statistics and, one hopes, methodologically honest estimations of the impact on the future? My bottomline is that I would take all these figures with a healthy helping of salt. In an ideal budget, I would be looking for meaningful policy measures that were not just stop-gaps or giveaways to appease vote banks. I would have been looking for a budget that struck at the core of what ails the Indian economy: Dismal productivity, not just in the agricultural sector, but across all the workers. India ranked 158th among 196 countries in terms of "expected human capital," according to a recent study published in the journal, Lancet. Expected human capital is the number of years an individual can work at peak productivity between the ages of 20 and 64, based on the life expectancy adjusted for health, and the years of schooling adjusted for the quality of learning.

I looked in vain for some genuine measures to boost productivity in the minister's speech. And the only true productivity related policy proposal was related to the surprise element in this year's budget: The cow. Thank goodness for the Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog which is designed to "upscale sustainable genetic upgradation of cow resources" to enhance the productivity of cows. Well, I guess, it's a start.

The writer is Dean of Global Business at the Fletcher School at Tufts University, founding executive director of Fletcher's Institute for Business in the Global Context and a non-resident Senior Fellow of Brookings India. He is author of The Slow Pace of Fast Change

A VISIT, A MILESTONE

Pope Francis's visit to UAE highlighted a much-needed message: Faith must unite, extremism is the road to ruin

IT IS TOO early to say if Pope Francis's history making visit to the United Arab Emirates — the first by a pope to the Arabian peninsula — is a game-changer in a world in which religious extremism, politicised religion, and terrorism in the name of faith have become all too normal. But it certainly strengthens the case against a belief that has been around for a while now — that the world is in the midst of an inevitable and inescapable "clash of civilisations". At a time of great strife in the Arab world, the visit was extraordinary messaging, not just by the Pope but by his hosts as well. Pope Francis, who is by far the most unconventional head that the Catholic church has known, was in the UAE at the invitation of Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who has declared 2019 his country's Year of Tolerance. He described the visit as a "landmark in the development of human relations and dialogue between different cultures". In keeping with this theme, the kingdom has launched a series of programmes to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, enough for the Pope to praise the UAE as "a land that is trying to be a model of coexistence, of human brotherhood, and a meeting place among diverse civilisations and cultures". Ahead of his visit, the Pope also underlined that faith "unites and does not divide, it draws us closer despite differences, it distances us from hostilities and aversion".

For the UAE, which knows the economic benefits of diversity only too well, and has turned into a land of many faiths over the decades, the visit was not just about scoring a diplomatic point, but integral to the realisation, across the Arab world, in the time of ISIS, that extremism is the road to ruin. MbZ, as the Crown Prince is known, pulled out all the stops — the Pope addressed a mass where expatriates from India and the Philippines made up the majority of the congregation, and participated in an inter-faith dialogue with the Grand Imam of Cairo's Al Azhar seminary, who was also invited to visit at the same time as the Pope.

In recent years, the UAE has kept pace with its changing demography to allow different religious practices and today boasts several Hindu temples and churches. The UAE's ambassador to India has written in this newspaper that his country's leadership believes that peace and prosperity are impossible unless the conditions for peaceful co-existence of all cultures and faith exist everywhere. That should be obvious, but all too often, these days, it has to be reiterated, and said out loud.

WRIT IN SNOW

Study on receding glaciers in Hindu Kush underlines need for cooperation between countries that share Himalayas

SUCCESS IN MEETING the Paris Climate Pact's most ambitious target might not be enough, a recent study says, to prevent a serious meltdown in the Hindu Kush Himalayas. Released on Monday, the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development's (ICIMOD) "Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment" reveals that more than 35 per cent of the glaciers in the region could retreat by 2100, even if the global temperature rise is capped at 1.5°C. This could destabilise the hydrology of large parts of South Asia, China and Myanmar.

Regions in higher altitudes tend to warm faster than low-lying lands. So, a global temperature increase of 1.5°C could mean at least a 1.8°C temperature rise in the Hindu Kush Himalayas, the ICIMOD study warns. This will have a major bearing on the ice-fields, which are the largest repository of permafrost outside the polar regions. The region's snow is the source of 10 major river systems — including the Ganga, Indus, Brahmaputra and Mekong — in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. Large-scale warming could drastically alter the river flows in these countries. The receding glaciers could cause a deluge in the rivers during the monsoon while the flows are likely to plummet during the dry seasons, with serious implications for irrigation, hydropower and ecosystem services.

Climate scientists have tried to link the Subcontinent's erratic monsoons over the past 10 years — days of intense rainfall combined with drought-like conditions — to global warming. They have, however, stopped short of identifying the exact causes of these extreme weather events. The ICIMOD study offers clues that the receding glaciers might be the reason for the changing monsoon. "The number of intense precipitation days and intensity of extreme precipitation have increased overall in the last five decades. If these trends persist, the frequency and magnitude of water-induced hazards in the (Hindu Kush Himalaya) region will increase," it says. This is a significant conclusion given that developments in the Himalayas are known to have a spin-off on the monsoon in the Subcontinent. The ICIMOD researchers point out that more studies are required to firm up the links between extreme weather events in the higher reaches of the Subcontinent and the erratic weather in the plains. For this, they advocate more data sharing between the countries that share the Hindu Kush Himalayas. Even more salient is their message that political differences between these countries should not come in the way of joint efforts to build resilience of vulnerable communities and shore up the region's water security. Such cooperation must go alongside meeting the Paris Climate Change Pact's goals.

FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN

The best thing about the West Indies' series win against England is that it offers hope for the future

WEST INDIES CAPTAIN Jason Holder was suspended for a match for slow over rates and no one complained. The year was 2017 and West Indies had just lost to New Zealand by an innings. No one likes losers. Now, West Indies have triumphed with a series win against England and all hell has broken loose after their captain Holder has been banned for a Test for slow

The best thing about this win is that it offers hope for the future. For the first time in two decades, there seems to be a will in place. Even the administrators are doing the right thing. The West Indies CEO Johnny Lavender went against prevailing wisdom in the islands that countenanced slow bowpitchers and the knockabouts the

A GRAND NARRATIVE

A rediscovery is afoot of forgotten heroes and civilisational ethos



SACHCHIDANAND JOSHI

IT IS THE collective awareness about our accomplishments achieved through the ages that fills us with a will that propels us. Instilling heroes and heroic struggles in anyone's consciousness is an important way to build a strong society, nation or civilisation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been at the forefront of shaping a grand narrative of civilisational awareness within the younger generations.

Using waterways is both economically and ecologically prudent. Despite possessing a 7,500 km-long coastline and many rivers of civilisational significance, India hadn't really utilised this means of transport in modern times. It is the Modi government that is making a great effort to reap this potential with inland waterways projects and port development under "Sagarmala". Has this model emanated from a deep sense of history?

In 2016, PM Modi inaugurated the Maritime Investment Summit 2016. Can you guess who he remembered on the occasion? B R Ambedkar. You need to acknowledge PM Modi's sense of history when he said, "Many of us may not know that Babasaheb created two powerful institutions related to water, navigation and power. They were: The Central Waterways, Irrigation and Navigation Commission and The Central Technical Power Board. Dr Ambedkar is also the architect of the water and river navigation policy in India." In the 38th edition of 'Mann Ki Baat', speaking of the glorious history of India as a

naval power, he said, "Very few people might be aware that most navies of the world allowed women on warships much later. But in the Chola navy, a large number of women played leading roles and that too about 800-900 years ago." Today, he is also reviving India as a naval power with the strategic actions around Iran's Chabahar port and Myanmar's Sittwe port.

It is to the credit of PM Modi that he broke the monopolisation of credit for building modern India. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's heroic memory has been in the spotlight because of PM Modi's efforts. He declassified the documents related to Netaji and hoisted the national flag on Red Fort to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the formation of the 'Azad Hind Government'. The INA trials at the Red Fort are well known but what is also well known is that the building in which the trials happened lay forgotten inside the Red Fort Complex. On Netaji Subhas Bose's jayanti this year, the PM inaugurated a museum in the same building dedicated to Netaji and INA. The museum forms part of the complex of four museums which are collectively known as "Kranti Mandir." Museums dedicated to the 1857 War of Independence and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre also form part of the complex.

Almost every political party has used Ambedkar's name but a meaningful tribute had always eluded him. It took the Modi government to develop five important places re-

lated to Babasaheb's life as "Panchateerth".

Generations to come will remember that it is Narendra Modi in his capacity both as chief minister of Gujarat initially and then as prime minister who ensured a fitting tribute to the man who unified India — Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel — with the tallest statue in the world. Through Swachh Bharat, the revival of khadi, setting up of a National Salt Satyagraha Memorial at Dandi, Mahatma Gandhi's memory and ideals have always remained at the centrestage.

It is endearing to see the way in which PM Modi claimed the legacy of democracy to India's credit standing on the soil of London. While unveiling Lord Basaveshwara's statue there in 2015, he said, "long before the Magna Carta, considered the first charter of democracy, 12th-century Indian philosopher Basaveshwara gave the world the ideals of democracy."

Be it history or culture, PM Modi knows how to take inspiration from the civilisational values that India has in abundance and instil the same spirit in the younger generation. His initiatives to bring back the stolen statues and artefacts of India from various countries and using the power of the Ramayana and Buddha to connect with the other parts of the world indicate a grand narrative of India as a global power not just driven by its present and future but also by its past.

The writer is member-secretary, IGNCA

FEBRUARY 6, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



BHUTTO JUDGMENT
JUDGEMENT IS TO be announced by the Pakistan Supreme Court in the appeal by the former prime minister, Z A Bhutto, against the death sentence, Radio Pakistan reports. An announcement in Rawalpindi said if the judgment goes against Bhutto, his lawyers may file an application for a review. The Supreme Court has already spent 10 months considering the appeal, which is against the Lahore High Court's ruling that Bhutto was guilty of involvement in a plot to murder one of his political opponents. Bhutto's wife, Begum Nusrat Bhutto, said there would be no appeal for mercy if the judgment went against him. A BBC correspondent in Pakistan

said if on the other hand, the Supreme Court overturns the sentence, the military authorities have it clear that there are other

KHOMEINI'S PM
AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI named an oil engineer, Mehdi Bazargan, as prime minister of a provisional government to pave the way for the creation of an Islamic republic in Iran.

SC FREES UNDERTRIALS
THE SUPREME COURT released 25 undertrial prisoners lodged in Patna and Muzaffarpur jails in Bihar on personal bonds. Their names had appeared in The Indian Express dated

January and 9. Justice Bhagwati, on his own behalf and on behalf of Justice Pathak and Justice A D Kaushik, also directed the State of Bihar to furnish within two weeks from today a list of undertrial prisoners lodged in the jails of Bihar for a period of more than 18 months, together with a description of the reference charts and the date from which they have been in jail. In another habeas corpus petition filed by Kapil Hingorani, an advocate of the Supreme Court, on the basis of the Indian Express reports, Justice Krishna lyer, on his own behalf and on behalf of Justice O Chinnappa Reddy, directed the following 17 undertrials mentioned in the petition to be released forthwith on bonds.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The fear is that with a general election looming in India, the ruling party will be seeking to play up its Hindutva philosophy all the more vociferously to get votes."
—DAWN

With an ocean of salt

Interim budget does little to tackle unemployment, poverty. And it is clear that the government's figures cannot be trusted



RAJEEV GOWDA

LAST MONTH, I was part of an all-party delegation of MPs from Karnataka, led by a Union cabinet minister, who met the Union rural development minister. We requested him to release the MGNREGA funds overdue to Karnataka. We pleaded that the poorest of the poor, who turn to MGNREGA as a lifeline, were being discouraged from accessing the programme as they were not being paid for a long time because the Centre had not released the funds they owed to the states. Therefore, when I hear Piyush Goyal announce big amounts as funds allocated to MGNREGA, I can only respond with a weary laugh.

Goyal has learned the art of hype well from his prime minister. But the voters know better and will confront them with reality in a few months. For where voters had been promised Rs 15 lakh in their Jan Dhan accounts, only a few farming families will receive a pittance of Rs 3.30 per day. When the average loan burden is Rs 45,000, they will receive Rs 6,000 per year, far lower than the income transfers offered by Telangana and Odisha, and a far distance from being debt free as envisioned by Congress state governments.

The interim budget is overflowing with announcements aimed at targeting different sections of voters. But it is instructive to see who is left out. The Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana targets land-owning farmers, when it is actually landless labourers and tenant farmers who are experiencing rural distress more acutely. As has been the pattern of this government's budgets, they have been ignored once again. The urban poor have also been ignored. Whereas the urban middle class have got a tax rebate, which, here's the catch, can only be put into effect by a new government. So, it's *jumla* time yet again.

The eve of the budget was also marked by the leak of the NSSO jobs report. This showed that unemployment under Prime Minister Narendra Modi was at a 45-year historic high. Jobs are hard to find and, as CMIE has shown, 1.1 crore jobs have been lost in 2018 alone. The Modi era has been devastatingly destructive for job seekers. The worst affected have been India's young men and women.

There is nothing in the interim budget which seeks to address this challenge. Goyal talks of Startup India while offering no relief to startups from the daft and draconian Angel Tax. MUDRA loans are mentioned but the majority of the loans are so small, it would be difficult to run a

pakoda stall. The farmer income support, the middle-class tax rebate, and numerous other programmes have been announced as being supported through resources saved under other programmes announced in the previous budget, the last one for which this government had a mandate. This means that none of those prior announcements has been backed with adequate fund allocation and proper implementation. So, it's no surprise when targets have not been met. Or, as in electrification, targets have been met by slashing them downwards to claim a pyrrhic victory.

The BJP's social media is awash with how the defence budget is at an all-time high, hiding from the people how this year's defence budget is one of the lowest when seen as a percentage of the GDP.

The government wants us to believe that the economy did well and revised the growth rates upwards to 8.2 per cent for the year when it unleashed the surgical strike on the economy called demonetisation. The truth comes through clearly from IMF Chief Economist Gita Gopinath's study that shows demonetisation caused a decline in the national economic activity of roughly 3 percentage points or more. The intensity of night lights decreased during and after demonetisation. Employment contracted. Industries witnessed a slowdown.

That the budget did not address the question of record unemployment demonstrates its priorities. Instead, the government had tried hard to hide the NSSO numbers, which revealed the bitter truth. This budget thus shows how the Modi sarkar has abandoned our youth amidst talk of Uber driving.

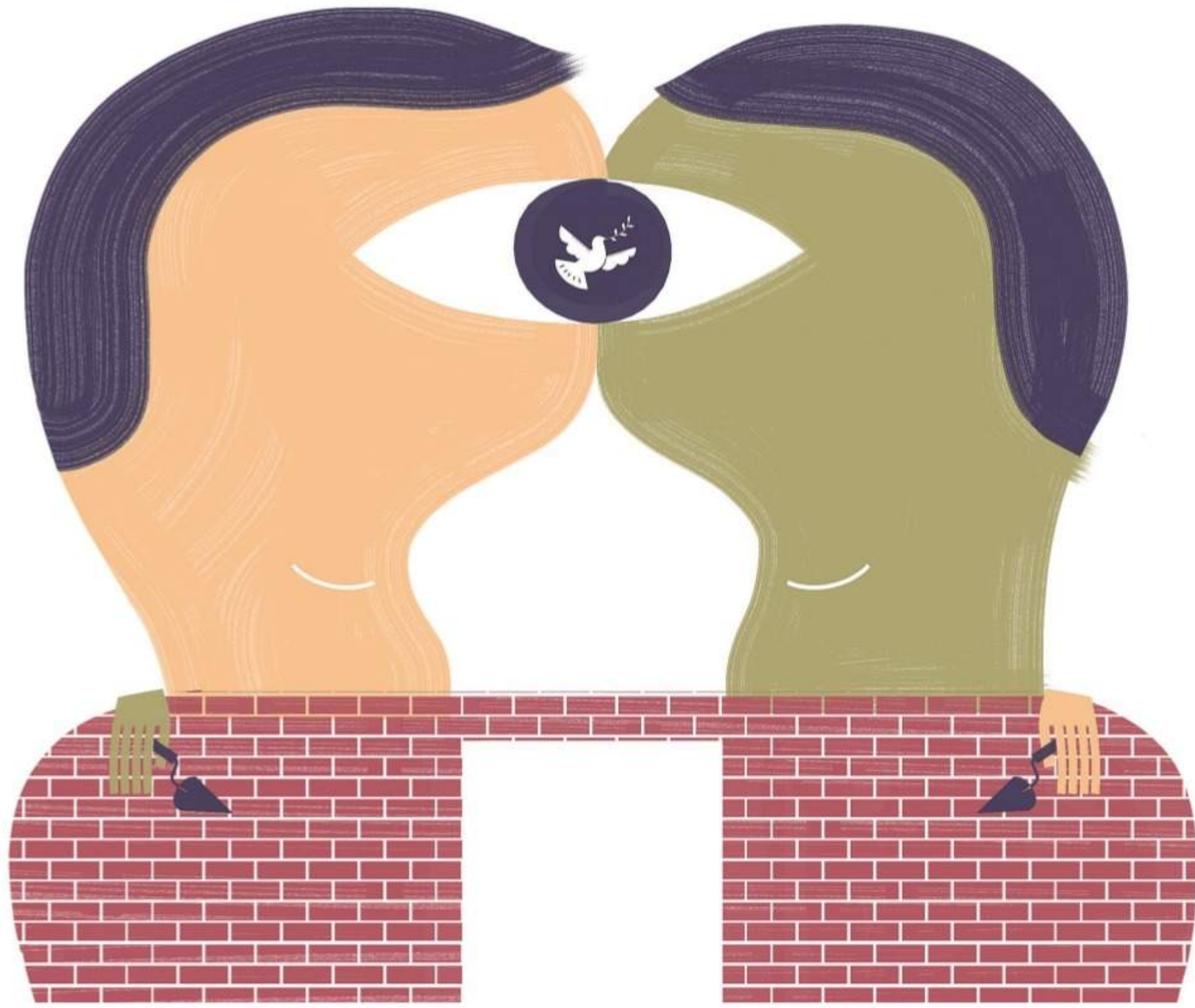
There is a vast difference between the government's promises and its implementation of various X-in-India programmes. Ujjwala hype does not show how few people have come back for an LPG refill. Swachh Bharat remains a toilet building programme rather than one which has actually eliminated open defecation or controlled manual scavenging.

New project announcements have been at a 14-year low. Exports have fallen. Foreign Direct Investment has gone down and, so, the newly renamed DIPP has not released numbers after August.

It is clear that the government's numbers have to be taken with an ocean's worth of salt. They have no credibility. They have emerged from the ruins of the reputations of India's statistical establishment.

This is a government playing with smoke and mirrors. The people of India will shortly give a befitting response to these *jumlas* and errors. Only then will we see a budget whose numbers can be believed. Only then will the pain of our fellow Indians be relieved.

The writer is a Congress MP and chairs its research department



C R Sasikumar

A new temple, a new mosque

Ayodhya's disputing sides can come together. The Supreme Court can direct them to do so



RAJMOHAN GANDHI

like scenario, acknowledgment of wrongdoing and restitution leads to justice as well as reconciliation.

Passions, politics and pressures may produce a Ram temple anyway, with or without a Supreme Court order. If such a temple emerges without an admission of the wrongfulness of the demolition, the Hindu-Muslim divide will deepen and Muslim fears will intensify.

Also, the new temple, no matter how grand, may rest on shaky foundations. Parents may tell their children: "See that glittering temple over there? It was built with deceit and force. First a great lie was spread that a Ram idol had mysteriously appeared inside the mosque when in fact it was surreptitiously inserted. Forty-three years later, the mosque was demolished despite repeated pledges to courts and the world that it would not be touched." People will say to themselves: "Lord Ram was known for saying that life may be sacrificed but one's word must be kept. He was loved and honoured for that statement. Is this a temple for that Ram?"

In their 2012 study of the demolition's history (*Ayodhya: The Dark Night*), researchers Krishna Jha and Dharendra K Jha detail the idol insertion of 1949 as also the persistent effort of Swami Akshay Brahmachari, an eye-witness, to bring that pre-dawn insertion to public knowledge. A fearless believer in Hindu-Muslim friendship, the Swami lived until 2010.

In 1949, the carefully planned placement of the idol was portrayed as a miracle. Though KKNayar, the region's deputy commissioner, was sympathetic to the insertion and refused to undo it, he conceded in a letter to the UP government that "the installation of the idol in

the mosque has certainly been an illegal act". Nayar's observation was quoted by P V Narasimha Rao in his 2006 book on the demolition, *Ayodhya: 6 December, 1992*. In 1949, Nayar (who became a Jana Sangh MP in 1967 from Bahraich in UP) claimed that he was helpless before the illegal installation. Similarly, Rao, who was the prime minister when the 1992 demolition occurred, said in his 2006 book and to Parliament in 1992 that he was helpless before the demolition.

We are now in February 2019. Ignoring history can be convenient, but erasing it does not seem possible. Yet it is not impossible for a nation to come together to address the past's mistakes.

Will Ayodhya's disputing sides voluntarily come together as I have imagined? Very unlikely. But the Supreme Court can direct them to do so. We have to rebuild our society, return it to some civility. We have to restore Hindu-Muslim relations. We have to become respectable in the world. Indians have to recover pride in their country's lawfulness.

History's facts cannot be scratched out. What happened in Ayodhya in the 1520s, in 1949, and in 1992 cannot be changed. But yesterday's follies can be admitted and consigned to the past. They should not be allowed to burn our todays and tomorrows.

A new temple and a new mosque rising as a result of a Supreme Court direction for justice and reconciliation would lift everyone's spirits. At this testing time, the Supreme Court may be in a position to add significantly to India's peace and India's honour.

The writer is research professor at the Centre for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The bare bones of a settlement are not hard to identify. One, the Hindu side admits the error in demolishing the mosque. Two, the Indian state admits its failure to prevent the demolition. Three, the Muslim side acknowledges the Hindu community's wish to see a Ram temple rise on the site as also the Hindu community's belief that a temple had once stood where the Babri Masjid was built. Four, not far from the site, and yet not too close to it, space for a new mosque is made available by the Hindu side and the Indian state.

EVEN AS A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court seems ready to hear the case about the Ayodhya site where the Babri mosque (said to have been built in the 1520s) stood until its demolition in December 1992, the central government has asked the Court to release from its custody land surrounding the site so that the construction of a Ram temple can begin there. With good reason, this Ayodhya question has been linked to the general election that is due before May. The question should, however, be examined in a broader perspective. In fact, we should ask even at this late stage whether or not statesmanship and a spirit of give-and-take can produce a settlement.

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VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

SHLOKAS IN SCHOOL

THE EDITORIAL IN *Organiser*, attacking a petition by lawyer Veenayak Shah opposing Sanskrit prayers in Kendriya Vidyalayas, claims by invoking fraudulent principles and defying the basic philosophy of the Constitution is in fashion. The editorial expresses surprise at the fact that the Supreme Court has accepted the petition and now recommended its hearing by a Constitution Bench. "Before deliberating on any such case, we need to keep in mind the thinking of our Constitution makers on the issue and what can be the possible implications if the logic of petition is accepted," it says.

The editorial adds that the petition by Shah has argued that Sanskrit prayer recitation is a violation of Article 28 (1) as it promotes "Hinduism". "... If this logic is extended, then every institution of Bharat will have to change their motto. Why then the

Supreme Court work with the motto (sic), *Yato Dharmastato Jayah*, [which] means 'Where there is Truth (the dharma), there is Victory (justice)', which is a quote from [the] Mahabharata? With this absurd argument, our armed forces and even organisations like [the] DRDO are communal, as all of them have as their motto Sanskrit shlokas. As all entries in the Parliament are carved with the Sanskrit shlokas, even those will have to be removed. Even our Constitution has depictions from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Upanishads; then our Constitution can be termed as a communal document with this illogical petition," the editorial adds.

The editorial concludes with remark that the danger of erasing Sanskrit shlokas from prayers is "eliminating the Sanskriti of Bharat, the only long-lasting view of life rooted in the integral approach and well-being for all".

MODI AGAIN

A COVER STORY in *Organiser* claims that the old proverb — "nobody is a permanent friend or enemy in politics" — is well-suited in the context of the recent "unholy" alliance between the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The alliance, it

claims, is based solely on self-interest. Taking note of past political relations between the two parties, the article says that much water has flowed into the river since the 1995 "guest house" incident, when SP "hooligans" (allegedly) attacked Mayawati. "Now we are in (the) 21st-century... when one may see the lowest political ground to defeat a single identity - 'MODI' (sic). The BSP was 'blown away' by the Modi wave of 2014 and hardly survived it in the 2017 UP assembly elections. Similarly, the SP barely retained its status for name-sake as the principal Opposition in the assembly election, the report claims and adds: "So they ganged up to fight (the) Modi wave jointly based on their 2014 poll vote-share, assuming to merge vote share of each. (sic)"

The article also conjectures that with the presence of Priyanka Gandhi in UP, the electoral battle will become "quadrilateral" with multiple poles and the division of votes will actually benefit the BJP. According to the report, the Lok Sabha polls will be fought on the question of who will be next prime minister. With the complete absence of a PM candidate in the Opposition, Modi will provide the BJP with a clear majority of seats in UP — around 50-55 — which will suffice to have him return

to office, the article claims.

FALSE UNITY

AN ARTICLE IN *Organiser* claims that between the Opposition's latest show in Kolkata on January 19 and their first parade on May 23 last year, the chemistry and distance between them has changed. "Of course, they remain united in their hope (masked as resolve) to see that the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi are away from any serious reckoning for power after the 2019 polls. But, beyond their wishful thoughts, there is little to show any unity in terms of strategy or willingness to overcome their ambitions to pursue the larger goal of a BJP-mukt sarkar," asserts the article. The article adds that Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, in May 2018, rubbed shoulders with Mayawati, Akhilesh Yadav, Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Pawar, Chandrababu Naidu, Sitaram Yechury and others at the initiative of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda on the portico of the imposing Vidhan Soudha when H D Kumaraswamy was sworn in as chief minister of Karnataka. "Cut to February 2019, it is for everyone to see how the alliance has fared today".

Compiled by Lalmani Verma

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A STANDOFF DEBATED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The spectacle' (IE, February 5). Showdowns like the one between the Centre and the West Bengal government have become a common feature of Indian politics. This disturbing development owes to the BJP-led NDA government's inclination to use law enforcement agencies to settle political scores. In a democracy, the government must treat its political foes and friends as fairly and equally as possible, to be seen as being above suspicion.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The spectacle' (IE, February 5). The dhama by the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to prevent the CBI from questioning Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar shows the complete breakdown of the state's administration. This is the first time that a chief minister of a state has gone on an indefinite sit-on with a public servant. Banerjee has accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP President Amit Shah of trying to organise a coup. But one wonders why the West Bengal chief minister is so agitated about the CBI interrogating Kolkata's police commissioner.

Tushar Anand, Patna

EYE OPENER

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Oh so backward' (IE, February 4). The article shows how flawed our general idea of backwardness is. The inspiring example of Mon makes us question our own sensibilities. Many of us who live in the so-called "forward" cities are surrounded by non-biodegradeable

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

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wastes for which we alone are responsible.

Dikshita Damodaran, Delhi

BITTER PILLS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Budget's how question' (IE, February 4). Skill generation and job creation are extremely important but they take time. Direct transfers to farmers, tax breaks to the middle class and agricultural subsidies put a great strain on the exchequer but they are extremely necessary for providing transient respite to the distressed beneficiaries.

Anish Manchanda via e-mail

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 11 अंक 302

संकट का अंत

सर्वोच्च न्यायालय की इस बात के लिए सराहना की जानी चाहिए कि उसने पश्चिम बंगाल सरकार और केंद्रीय जांच ब्यूरो (सीबीआई) के बीच छिड़ गए राजनीतिक विवाद से जुड़े मामले में निर्णय देकर एक बड़े संकट को टाल दिया है। यह मामला सीबीआई द्वारा सारदा और रोज वैली घोटालों की जांच से जुड़ा हुआ है। देश की

सबसे बड़ी अदालत ने निष्पक्ष ढंग से सीबीआई से कहा कि वह कोलकाता के पुलिस आयुक्त राजीव कुमार को गिरफ्तार नहीं कर सकती है। साथ ही उसने कुमार को भी निर्देश दिया कि वह शिलॉन जैसी तटस्थ जगह पर सीबीआई के समक्ष उपस्थित होकर उसके उचित सवालों के जवाब दें। सीबीआई ने पश्चिम बंगाल के

मुख्य सचिव और पुलिस महानिदेशक के खिलाफ अवमानना याचिका भी दायर की और अदालत ने दोनों अधिकारियों से भी मांग की कि वे इस महीने के अंत तक अपना जवाब प्रस्तुत करें। न्यायालय की समतापूर्ण दृष्टि का एक और संकेत यह भी है कि दोनों पक्षों ने इसे अपनी-अपनी जीत बताते हुए दावे किए। पश्चिम बंगाल की मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी ने कहा है कि अदालत के निर्णय से राज्य सरकार का यह कहना सही साबित हुआ है कि उसे डराने की कोशिश की जा रही थी और कुमार किसी साझा सहमति वाली जगह पर सीबीआई से मुलाकात के लिए हमेशा से तैयार थे। भारतीय जनता पार्टी (भाजपा) ने अपना पूरा ध्यान इस बात पर केंद्रित रखा कि

अदालत ने कुमार को सीबीआई से मुलाकात करने का निर्देश दिया है।

सारदा अथवा रोज वैली से जुड़े मामलों से जुड़े तथ्य यहां अहम मुद्दा हैं ही नहीं। सवाल यह है कि आखिर क्यों मामला यहां तक पहुंचा और एक संवैधानिक संकट जैसी स्थिति उत्पन्न हो गई। भाजपा और बनर्जी की तुणतुण कांग्रेस दोनों इस बात की दोषी हैं कि उनके करीबी ताल्लुकालत चिटफंड के आरोपित प्रवर्तकों से हैं। ऐसे में इस मुद्दे पर दोनों के सही गलत होने की बात ही बेमानी है। परंतु कोलकाता में जो कुछ हुआ वह राजनीतिक आपदा के जोखिम को दर्शाता है। केंद्र सरकार को इस बात पर कम ही लोग यकीन करेंगे कि सीबीआई पूरी तरह अपनी इच्छा से काम कर रही है। जाहिर है

सरकार को सीबीआई अधिकारियों को कुमार के आवास पर सिक्रेट मिशन पर नहीं भेजना चाहिए था। स्थानीय पुलिस को सीबीआई के साथ अधिक सम्मान से पेश आना चाहिए था। केंद्रीय रिजर्व पुलिस बल को भी बिना राज्य सरकार की इजाजत के अपने बैरक नहीं छोड़ने चाहिए। यानी हर तरफ से गलतियों का एक सिलसिला सा चल निकला जो बिल्कुल दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण था। इस विवाद में काफी कुछ दांव पर लगा था और इसे हल करने के लिए सर्वोच्च न्यायालय को हस्तक्षेप करना पड़ा। बनर्जी और केंद्र सरकार दोनों को कहीं अधिक सतर्क रख अपनाया चाहिए था और जांचकर्ताओं को उनका काम करने देना था। सीबीआई को राजनीतिक फुटबॉल की तरह इस्तेमाल नहीं करना चाहिए।

यह स्पष्ट है कि कोलकाता के पुलिस प्रमुख को सीबीआई के वैध सवालों के जवाब देने के लिए उसके सामने प्रस्तुत होना चाहिए। वहीं सीबीआई को भी स्थानीय पुलिस बलों की आकांक्षाओं के मद्देनजर कहीं अधिक संवेदनशीलता का परिचय देना चाहिए। केंद्र सरकार को भी ऐसी घटना के राजनीतिकरण से बचना चाहिए जो देश के संघीय ढांचे को प्रभावित करने की स्थिति में हो। बनर्जी को भी अपनी अनुदार राजनीतिक शैली बदलनी चाहिए। पश्चिम बंगाल सरकार द्वारा उत्तर प्रदेश के मुख्यमंत्री योगी आदित्यनाथ को प्रदेश में हेलीकॉप्टर न उतारने देना सत्ता का खुला दुरुपयोग है। भारत जैसे संघीय लोकतांत्रिक देश में ऐसे दोहरे मानकों का प्रयोग करना उचित नहीं।



अजय मोहंती

पुल-विहीन सड़क दामोदर नदी की

अठारहवीं सदी में कई सड़कें ऐसी थीं जिनके रास्ते में पड़ने वाली बड़ी नदियों पर पुल ही नहीं होते थे। इस अजीबोगरीब समस्या के बारे में बता रहे हैं विवेक देवराय

‘सफर थकान और दर्द से भरपूर था। और इस दौरान ऐसे अनुभव हुए जो भारत भर में रेल यात्रा से जुड़े नीरस विवरणों से पूरी तरह अलग थे। हंटर ने अपनी विक्टोरिया बग्घी में सवार होकर सड़क मार्ग से सफर किया। इस बग्घी को हमेशा दो घोड़े खींचते थे जबकि तीसरे घोड़े को पहले ही अगले मुकाम पर भेज दिया जाता था। दामोदर नदी के तट पर पहुंचने के बाद बदकिस्मत यात्रियों को नदी की प्रचंड धारा का सामना करना पड़ता था।’ यह विवरण ‘लाइफ ऑफ सर विलियम विल्सन हंटर’ किताब का अंश है। अधिकतर लोग विलियम विल्सन हंटर को ‘इम्पीरियल गेजेटियर ऑफ इंडिया’ के लिए याद करते हैं जबकि बंगाली उन्हें 1868 में प्रकाशित ‘एनल्स ऑफ रूरल बंगाल’ के लिए याद रख सकते हैं। अभी जिस यात्रा का जिक्र हुआ है वह 1866 में वीरभूम के सिउरी से मिदनापुर के हुए सफर का है। आज इन दोनों जगहों के बीच सड़क मार्ग से दूरी 245 किलोमीटर है। इस दौरान आपको दामोदर नदी पार करनी होगी। राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग 39 (अब नया एनएच 14) होने के बावजूद इस रास्ते से जाने में आपको करीब छह घंटे लग जाएंगे। वर्ष 1866 में हंटर वीरभूम के असिस्टेंट मजिस्ट्रेट एवं

कलेक्टर थे और उन दिनों वह शायद ‘एनल्स ऑफ रूरल बंगाल’ के लिए सामग्री जुटाने में लगे हुए थे। फ्रांसिस हेनरी स्काइन ने 1901 में हंटर की जीवनी लिखी थी और ऊपर वर्णित आख्यान उसी किताब से लिया गया है। बांकुड़ा का जिला गेजेटियर वर्ष 1905 में प्रकाशित हुआ था। जब मैं इन पुराने जिला गेजेटियरों को पढ़ता हूं तो उनमें उपलब्ध सामग्री के भंडार और उनके लेखकों की पढ़ने की आदत से हैरत में पड़ जाता हूं।

बांकुड़ा के जिला गेजेटियर के लेखकों ने भी स्काइन की लिखी हंटर की जीवनी पढ़ी थी और संचार के साधनों पर लिखे गए अध्याय में हंटर की यात्रा और उससे जुड़ी पीड़ा को भी उस गेजेटियर में बखूबी पिरोया था। गेजेटियर को उद्धृत करें तो, ‘1902 तक जिले में कोई रेल लाइन नहीं थी और यहां पहुंचने का सबसे आसान तरीका एक रेल मार्ग से रानीगंज तक पहुंचें और फिर बाकी रास्ता सड़क मार्ग से पूरा करें। हालांकि यह न केवल महंगा पड़ता था बल्कि यात्रा थकाऊ भी होती थी। इस दौरान दामोदर नदी को भी पार करना पड़ता था। रेल लाइन अब बांकुड़ा के पूर्व से पश्चिम छोर तक जाती है लेकिन भीतरी इलाकों तक जाना काफी मुश्किल होता है क्योंकि रास्ते में कई नदियां

मिलती हैं जिन पर कोई पुल नहीं है। हालांकि पुलों के अभाव के अलावा जिले की सड़कें काफी अच्छी स्थिति में हैं और रायपुर के आसपास के दक्षिण-पश्चिमी छोर के अलावा जिले का हरेक हिस्सा उनसे जुड़ा हुआ है।’ सवाल उठता है कि केवल सड़कें ही क्यों मौजूद थीं, कोई पुल क्यों नहीं था? आम तौर पर लोग ऐसी स्थिति के बारे में नहीं सोचते हैं। कोई भी किसी मार्ग को लेकर यही सोचगा कि रास्ते में नदी आने पर पुल भी बने होंगे।

हाल फिलहाल तक हमारे पास ऐसा कोई आंकड़ा नहीं था जो राष्ट्रीय राजमार्गों पर मौजूद पुलों की संख्या और उनकी हालत के बारे में बता सके। भारतीय पुल प्रबंधन प्रणाली (आईबीएमएस) के सौजन्य से अब हमारे पास राजमार्गों पर बने ‘पुलों की सेहत’ के बारे में एक सर्वे के आंकड़े उपलब्ध हैं। अब हमें पता है कि कुल 1.72 लाख पुलों में से करीब 6,000 पुलों की संरचनात्मक हालत ठीक नहीं है।

इसका जवाब तलाशने के लिए हम 1908 के इम्पीरियल गेजेटियर के पन्ने पलटते हैं। इसके मुताबिक, ‘साल भर में आठ महीनों से अधिक समय तक नदियों की मौजूदगी होते हुए भी भारत के मैदानी इलाके रोजमर्रा के संचार साधनों के जरिये पार किए जाने

लायक हैं। अलग-अलग स्थानों पर आवाजाही के लिए इसे कोई बाधा नहीं माना जाता रहा है। यहां तक कि 18वीं सदी के अंत तक सैन्य उद्देश्य के लिए भी बनी हुई सड़कों को कोई मांग नहीं होती थी। ऐसी स्थिति में परिवहन मुख्य रूप से ग्रामीण रास्तों पर मवेशियों के जरिये होता था। लोग या तो इन पशुओं की सवारी करते थे या पालकियों में बैठते थे।’

करीब उसी समय रेल मार्गों का निर्माण शुरू हुआ जिसने नई सड़कों के चरित्र एवं कामकाज दोनों पर गहरा असर डाला है। रेल प्रणाली के विस्तार के साथ अब और ज्यादा जरूरी हो गया है कि सड़कें ऐसी दिशाओं में बनाई जाएं जो रेल मार्गों के प्रतिद्वंद्वी नहीं, पूरक की भूमिका निभाएं। इसी के साथ पक्की सड़कों की मांग भी बढ़ी है। 1823 में मैलोनी ने ग्रेट दक्कन रोड के नागपुर-जबलपुर खंड के बीच सड़क की हालत सुधारने की वकालत करते हुए कहा था ‘स्थानीय उपज की वास्तविक मात्रा उपभोग से अधिक थी। देश की संपन्नता के लिए अधिशेष उत्पाद को दूसरी जगह पहुंचाने के लिए सस्ता एवं सरल संचार अपरिहार्य है।’

यह टिप्पणी कम शब्दों में ही यह बयान कर देती है कि 19वीं सदी के शुरुआती दौर में सड़कों के निर्माण के पीछे का सामान्य मकसद क्या होता था? फसलों की कटाई का समय नदियों में पानी कम होने का भी वक्त होता था, लिहाजा ग्रांड ट्रंक मार्गों को छोड़कर बाकी सड़कों में पुलों के निर्माण की जरूरत ही नहीं समझी गई। कई बड़ी नदियों पर अभी तक स्थायी पुल नहीं बन पाए हैं और उनकी जगह तैरते पुल या नौकाएं ही आवागमन का साधन बनते हैं। इस तरह, शुरुआती दौर की अधिकांश सड़कें निचले इलाकों असल में नदियों के किनारे तक पहुंचने का साधन भर होती थीं। रेलवे के आगमन के साथ ही हालात बदल गए और पक्की सड़कों और नदियों पर पुलों की मांग बढ़ गई ताकि पूरे साल रेल मार्ग तक संपर्क कायम रखा जा सके। शुरुआत में नदियों पर पुल इसलिए नहीं बनाए गए थे क्योंकि उनको जरूरत ही नहीं समझी जाती थी। लेकिन रेलवे के आने से यह धारणा भी बदल गई।

आईबीएमएस के सर्वे के मुताबिक राजमार्गों पर 1.34 लाख पुलिया, 32,806 छोटे पुल, 3,647 बड़े पुल और 1,835 बहुत बड़े पुल बने हुए हैं। इनमें से बहुत सारे पुल कई दशक पहले उस समय बने थे जब वाणिज्यिक वाहन अपेक्षाकृत कम वजन के साथ दौड़ते थे। इस सर्वे से पता चला है कि राष्ट्रीय राजमार्गों पर बने 23 पुलों में से 11 साल से भी अधिक पुराने हैं। ढोला-सदिया जैसे आधुनिक पुल के साथ इन पुलों का भी वजूद है।

बांकुड़ा और दामोदर से जुड़ी सामग्री का अध्ययन करते समय मुझे बांकुड़ा के सालटोरा प्रखंड के कई गांवों के बारे में भी पता चला जो दामोदर नदी पर बने पुल के जरिये आसनसोल से जुड़े हुए थे। लेकिन वह पुल शायद बांस से ही बना था।

(लेखक प्रधानमंत्री की आर्थिक सलाहकार परिषद के चेयरमैन हैं। लेख में व्यक्ति विचार निजी हैं)

वर्टिकल खेती को बढ़ावा देने के लिए नीतियां लाए सरकार

कृषि जोत सिकुड़कर अत्यावहारिक बन रही है और परंपरागत कृषि अलाभकारी हो रही है। ऐसे में वर्टिकल खेती ने फसल उगाने के एक आकर्षक तरीके के रूप में ध्यान आकृष्ट करना शुरू कर दिया है। कृषि की इस अनोखी प्रणाली में पौधों को दीवारों से जुड़ी अलमारियों पर रखे कंटेनरों में या उगाया जाता है या लंबे फ्रेम या पिपर पर टांगा जाता है। इससे पौधों को अपनी पूरी ऊंचाई तक बढ़ने और हर पौधे तक प्रकाश को पहुंचने की पर्याप्त जगह मिलती है। छतों, बालकनी और शहरों में बहुमंजिला इमारतों के कुछ हिस्सों में फसली पौधे उगाने को भी वर्टिकल कृषि के ही एक हिस्से के रूप में देखा जाता है। हालांकि इसके सबसे अच्छे नतीजे तब मिलते हैं, जब ऐसी खेती इमारत के भीतर या पॉलि हाउस में की जाती है। इनमें पर्यावरण की दशाओं को नियंत्रित किया जा सकता है। वर्टिकल कृषि का बुनियादी उद्देश्य कम से कम जगह में ज्यादा से ज्यादा संख्या में पौधे उगाना है। इसमें क्षैतिज की तरह ऊर्ध्वाधर जगह का इस्तेमाल किया जाता है।



खेती-बाड़ी सुरिंदर सूद

इसमें पौधों के बीजों को टेस्ट ट्यूब में सिंथेटिक माध्यम में उगाया जाता है और कृत्रिम प्रकाश और पर्यावरण मूल्यांकन किया जाता है। वर्टिकल फार्म में उगाए जाने वाले उत्पाद बीमारियों, कीटों और कीटनाशकों से मुक्त होते हैं। आम तौर पर इनकी गुणवत्ता बहुत बेहतर होती है, इसलिए उनके दाम भी ज्यादा मिलते हैं। इस समय वर्टिकल कृषि मुख्य रूप से बेंगलूर, हैदराबाद, दिल्ली और कुछ अन्य शहरों में होती है। यहां उद्यमियों ने शौकिया तौर पर वर्टिकल खेती की शुरुआत की थी, लेकिन बाद में व्यावसायिक उद्यम का रूप दे दिया। इन शहरों में बहुत से उद्यमी हाइड्रोपोनिक्स और एयरोपोनिक्स जैसे जानी-मानी प्रणालियों का इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं। हाइड्रोपोनिक्स में पौधों को पानी में उगाया जाता है। इस पानी में आवश्यक पादप पोषक मिले होते हैं। एयरोपोनिक्स में पौधों की जड़ों पर केवल मिश्रित पोषक तत्वों का छिड़काव किया जाता है। गमले में लगे पौधों के मामले में आम तौर पर मिट्टी की जगह पर्लाइट, नारियल के रेशे, कोको पीट, फसलों का फूस या बजरी का इस्तेमाल किया जाता है।

हालांकि वर्टिकल कृषि के कुछ पेचीदा पहलू भी हैं। ये दिक्कतें मामले पर निर्भर करती हैं और इसलिए उनसे हर मामले के आधार पर निपटा जाना चाहिए। इनमें से एक चुनौती पौधों के लिए पर्याप्त प्रकाश सुनिश्चित करना भी है। अगर उस इमारती ढांचे की इकाइयों में पर्याप्त मात्रा में सूरज की रोशनी उपलब्ध नहीं है तो कृत्रिम प्रकाश की व्यवस्था की जानी चाहिए ताकि पौधों की सामान्य वृद्धि हो सके। इसमें

एलईडी बल्ब और ट्यूब मददगार साबित हो सकते हैं, जिनकी लागत अब काफी कम हो गई है। इमारत के अंदर के पौधों तक सूरज की रोशनी पहुंचाने के लिए प्रकाश परावर्तकों का भी इस्तेमाल किया जा सकता है।

परागण एक अन्य चुनौती है, विशेष रूप से क्रॉस पॉलिनेटड फसलों के मामले में। इस पर ध्यान देने की जरूरत है। इनडोर फॉर्म में परागण कीट नहीं होते हैं, इसलिए परागण हाथ से करना होता है। इसमें लागत आती है और समय भी खर्च होता है। अब बहुत से उद्यमी इस उद्देश्य के लिए वर्टिकल फॉर्मिंग इकाइयों में मधुमक्खी पालन से शहद और मोम, प्रोपोलिस और रॉयल जेली जैसे महंगे उत्पाद प्राप्त करते हैं, जिसे बेचकर अतिरिक्त आमदनी अर्जित की जा सकती है।

भारत में वर्टिकल फॉर्मिंग के मामूली प्रसार की मुख्य वजहों में से एक शोध एवं विकास मदद का अभाव है। वर्टिकल खेती की तकनीक को बेहतर बनाने और लागत कम करने के लिए मुश्किल से ही कोई संस्थागत शोध चल रहा है। वर्टिकल खेती के समर्थक भारतीय कृषि अनुसंधान परिषद के सहायक महानिदेशक टी जानकीराम कहते हैं कि खेती की इस प्रणाली को लोकप्रिय बनाने के लिए ऐसे शोध की तत्काल जरूरत है।

सरकारी और निजी दोनों क्षेत्रों को शोध एवं विकास केंद्र स्थापित करने के बारे में विचार करना चाहिए ताकि वर्टिकल कृषि को प्रोत्साहित किया जा सके। इससे इस कृषि प्रणाली के आर्थिक, पर्यावरण और

अन्य लाभ हासिल किए जा सकेंगे। कृषि उपज की बड़ी मात्रा को शहरों में भेजने से यातायात जाम और वाहन प्रदूषण समेत जटिल समस्याएं पैदा हो रही हैं। इसके अलावा इन उपजों को भेजने की भारी मालभाड़ा लागत आती है। इसे मद्देनजर रखते हुए शहरों को अपनी जरूरत के एक हिस्से की आपूर्ति स्थानीय उत्पादन से करनी चाहिए। इसलिए सरकार को वर्टिकल कृषि को बढ़ावा देने के लिए नीतियां लानी चाहिए।

कानाफूसी

पत्रकार से मारपीट

भाजपा की छत्तीसगढ़ इकाई को पत्रकारों के भारी प्रतिरोध का सामना करना पड़ा। दरअसल हुआ यू कि भाजपा के कुछ पदाधिकारियों ने सुमन पांडेय नामक एक पत्रकार के साथ कथित तौर पर मारपीट कर दी। इसके बाद पांडेय ने पुलिस में प्राथमिकी दर्ज करा दी और पार्टी के तीन कार्यकर्ताओं को गिरफ्तार भी कर लिया गया लेकिन पत्रकारों का गुस्सा शांत नहीं हुआ। उन्होंने राज्य में पार्टी के मुख्यालय के समक्ष धरना देकर अपनी नाराजगी प्रकट की। इसके बाद नेता प्रतिपक्ष और प्रदेश भाजपा के कार्यवाहक अध्यक्ष धर्मलाल कोशिक गतिरोध दूर करने के लिए सामने आए। नाराज पांडेय ने अपने सवाल किया कि पहले वह यह बताएं कि क्या पत्रकारों को पार्टी मुख्यालय में मारपीट करने के लिए बुलाया जाता है। उन्होंने तंज में यह तक कह दिया कि आगे से बुलाए जाने पर पत्रकार 20 मिनट



सोशल मीडिया योद्धा

वर्ष 2014 में लोकसभा चुनाव में भारी पराजय के बाद कांग्रेस को एक बात समझ में आ गई थी कि जनमत तैयार करने में सोशल मीडिया की बहुत अहम भूमिका है। ऐसे में 2019 के आम चुनाव की तैयारी में जुटी पार्टी इस सबक का इस्तेमाल करने में लगी हुई है। पार्टी की युवा इकाई देश के हर लोकसभा निर्वाचन क्षेत्र को ध्यान में रखते हुए सोशल मीडिया टीम तैयार कर रही है। इस टीम को झूठी खबरों का पर्दाफाश करने, पेड न्यूज की पहचान करने आदि का प्रशिक्षण दिया जाएगा। इस समूह को पार्टी सुपर 272 सोशल मीडिया योद्धा का नाम दे रही है। पार्टी ने देश भर के युवाओं का आह्वान किया है कि वे आगे आकर बदलाव लाने के पार्टी के देशव्यापी अभियान का हिस्सा बनें।

आपका पक्ष

सीबीआई बनाम राज्य पुलिस और जांच

पश्चिम बंगाल में सीबीआई और राज्य पुलिस के बीच टकराव का एक नाटकीय घटनाक्रम देखने को मिला। शारदा चिटफंड घोटाले की जांच कर रही सीबीआई की एक टीम कोलकाता पुलिस आयुक्त से पूछताछ करने उनके आवास पहुंची। पुलिस आयुक्त के घर पर तैनात पुलिसकर्मियों ने सीबीआई की टीम को गेट पर ही रोक लिया तथा टीम के सदस्यों को हिरासत में लेकर थाना ले जाया गया। शायद देश में यह पहला मौका होगा जब जांच करने गई सीबीआई की टीम को ही हिरासत में लेकर थाना लाया गया हो। इसके बाद पुलिस आयुक्त के घर पर पुलिस बल तैनात कर दिया गया तथा उनके घर को एक किले में तब्दील कर दिया गया। कोलकाता स्थित सीबीआई कार्यालय में बड़ी संख्या में पुलिसकर्मी तैनात कर दिए गए। सीबीआई में पुलिस बल तैनात होने के बाद केंद्र की ओर से सीआरपीएफ के जवानों को भेजा



गया लेकिन तबतक पुलिस वहां से जा चुकी थी। इधर घटना की सूचना मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी तक पहुंची। मुख्यमंत्री तत्काल पुलिस कमिश्नर के घर पहुंच गई और केंद्र सरकार द्वारा सीबीआई के कथित दुरुपयोग को खिलाफ धरने पर बैठ गईं। समय बीतने के साथ ही तुणतुण कांग्रेस के कार्यकर्ताओं ने पूरे राज्य में धरना प्रदर्शन शुरू कर दिया। रात में ट्रेनें

कोलकाता में सीबीआई टीम की कार्रवाई के खिलाफ मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी धरने पर बैठ गईं

रोक दी गई तथा प्रधानमंत्री का पुतला जलाया गया। शारदा चिटफंड घोटाले की जांच की जद में पुलिस आयुक्त के आते ही इसकी आंच तेज हो गई जो पूरे

पश्चिम बंगाल में फैल गई। मामले ने राजनीतिक रूप ले लिया तथा इसपर राजनीति शुरू हो गई। सवाल यह है कि जांच को प्रभावित करना क्या देश के खिलाफ उठाया गया कदम नहीं है। अगर किसी व्यक्ति पर जांच चल रही है और वह ईमानदार है तो उसे जांच में सहयोग करना चाहिए। वहीं अगर मुख्यमंत्री ही जांच के खिलाफ धरने पर बैठ जाए तो इसे क्या कहा जाए। करीब 20 हजार करोड़ रुपये के शारदा चिटफंड घोटाले का सत्य उजागर होना चाहिए तथा दोषियों को सजा मिलनी चाहिए जिसने गरीब लोगों का पैसा हड़प लिया।

किशोर कुमार, नोएडा

रोजगार सृजन के लिए घंटे कर का बोझ

संगठित क्षेत्र में रोजगार लगातार घट रहे हैं। सरकार रोजगार गारंटी

पाठक अपनी राय हमें इस पते पर भेज सकते हैं : संपादक, बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड लिमिटेड, 4, बहादुर शाह जफर मार्ग, नई दिल्ली - 110002. आप हमें ईमेल भी कर सकते हैं : lettershindi@bmail.in
उस जगह का उल्लेख अवश्य करें, जहां से आप ईमेल कर रहे हैं।



घर की अवधारणा रूह से ज्यादा जुड़ी होती है

मुझे लोग अक्सर पूछते हैं, आप किस देश के वासी हैं और उन्हें उम्मीद रहती है कि मैं भारत का नाम लूं। अपनी जगह पर व बिल्कुल सही हैं, क्योंकि मेरा रक्त और विरासत, दोनों भारत से शत-प्रतिशत जुड़े हुए हैं। बावजूद इसके कि मैं एक दिन के लिए भी भारत में नहीं रहा। मैं इसकी हजारों भाषाओं और बोलियों में से किसी का भी एक शब्द बोल नहीं सकता, इसलिए मुझे लगता है कि मुझे खुद को भारतीय कहने का कोई अधिकार नहीं है। मैं जब हांगकांग या सिडनी या वैंकूवर जाता हूँ, तो देखाता हूँ कि ज्यादातर बच्चे मेरे मुकाबले ज या दा अंतरराष्ट्रीय और बहुसांस्कृतिक हैं। उनका पूरा जीवन भिन्न-भिन्न जगहों में बिताए कालखंडों को जोड़कर निर्मित होता है। उनके लिए घर कोई ठहरी हुई जड़ चीज नहीं होती, बल्कि निरंतर निर्मित होती हुई एक कलाकृति है। हममें से अधिकांश लोगों के लिए घर की अवधारणा मिट्टी की तुलना में रूह से ज्यादा जुड़ी होती है। मुझे कोई अचानक यह पूछ ले कि आपका घर कहाँ है, तो मेरा मन फौरन मेरी प्रियतमा या अंतरंग मित्रों या उन गीतों की तरफ तकने लगता है, जिन्हें साथ लिए-लिए मैं दुनिया भर में घूमता रहता हूँ। मेरा घर सिर्फ भाव रूप में मेरे अंदर बसा हुआ है। अनेक स्तरों पर मुझे लगता है कि यह मुक्ति की चरम सीमा है। जब मेरे दादा-दादी जन्में होंगे, तो उनमें निश्चय ही घर का भाव प्रबल रहा होगा, समुदाय का भाव भी। यहां तक कि जन्म के साथ विरासत की तरह उन्हें श्रुतवा का भाव भी जरूर मिला होगा और उनसे बाहर निकल पाने की कोई सूरत शायद ही उन्हें सूझी होगी। विदेशियों से घिरे रहने की खूबसूरती यह है कि आप निरंतर सजग बने रहते हैं। यात्राएं मेरे लिए प्रेम करने जैसी होती हैं, क्योंकि अचानक आपकी सभी अनुभूतियों को सजिक हो जाना पड़ता है।

बिना सोचे-समझे दूसरों के बारे में धारणा बनाना अहंकार का सूचक है।

-ब्रिटिश में जन्मे अमेरिकी निबंधकार

सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने अपने आदेश में सीबीआई और कोलकाता पुलिस कमिश्नर के अधिकार क्षेत्र और कानूनी बाध्यताओं को स्पष्ट कर दिया है, इसके बावजूद केंद्र और राज्य के बीच जारी सियासी टकराव खत्म होता नहीं दिख रहा है।

आखिर कब तक

शारदा

घोटाले की जांच के सिलसिले में सुप्रीम कोर्ट के तजा फैसले से सीबीआई के अधिकार क्षेत्र और कोलकाता पुलिस के कमिश्नर राजीव कुमार की कानूनी बाध्यता को लेकर स्थिति जरूर स्पष्ट हो गई है, लेकिन पश्चिम बंगाल की मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी और भाजपा की अगुआई वाली केंद्र सरकार के बीच टकराव कम होता नहीं दिख रहा है। दिलचस्प यह है कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट के आदेश को ममता और केंद्र सरकार दोनों ही अपनी नैतिक जीत बता रहे हैं। वास्तव में देखा जाए तो राजीव कुमार को सीबीआई के समक्ष पेश करने का अदालत का निर्देश अपने पुलिस कमिश्नर के बचाव के लिए धरने पर बैठती ममता बनर्जी के लिए बड़ा झटका है। हालांकि अदालत ने राजीव कुमार

की गिरफ्तारी पर फिलहाल रोक लगाई है और सीबीआई को निर्देश दिए हैं कि वह उनसे तटस्थ जगह शिलांग में पूछताछ करे। यह आदेश ही केंद्र और राज्य के बीच बढ़ती दूरी को रेखांकित करने के लिए काफी है। मुख्यमंत्री होने के नाते ममता बनर्जी को लाखों लोगों के हितों से जुड़े इस मामले को उसकी निर्णायक परिणति तक पहुंचाने में मददगार होना चाहिए, लेकिन वह इसे राजनीतिक रंग दे रही हैं। इसी तरह केंद्र सरकार के अधीन काम करने वाली सीबीआई की मंशा पर सवाल उठाए जा सकते हैं कि आखिर पांच साल पुराने मामले में उसने अचानक यह तेजी क्यों दिखाई। लोकसभा चुनाव से महज दो महीने पहले शुरू हुए इस घटनाक्रम ने सत्तारूढ़ भाजपा और विपक्ष के लिए पश्चिम बंगाल को टकराव का मंच बना दिया है। दरअसल

प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी और भाजपा अध्यक्ष अमित शाह की योजना में पश्चिम बंगाल इस बार खास मायने रखता है, जहां 42 सीटें हैं और हाल के दिनों में यहां अपना जनाधार भी बढ़ाया है। दूसरी ओर ममता बनर्जी ने थोड़े दिनों पहले ही विपक्षी दलों की बड़ी रैली कर ताकत दिखाई थी, जिसमें 23 दल शामिल हुए थे। ऐसा पहली बार नहीं है कि भ्रष्टाचार से जुड़े मामलों को कानूनी लड़ाई राजनीतिक ढंग से लड़ी जा रही हो, लेकिन भाजपा के शीर्ष नेताओं की रैलियों में बाधा पहुंचाकर तुणमूल सरकार ने लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों को कोई कम नुकसान नहीं पहुंचाया है। चूंकि इस मामले से जुड़ी सुनवाई अदालत में अभी चल रही है, जिसमें सीबीआई और पश्चिम बंगाल सरकार के बीच शह और मात का खेल चल रहा है और सियासी तमाशा भी।

बदलता बांग्लादेश और हसीना की चुनौतियां

बां

ग्लादेश के संसदीय चुनाव में भारी बहुमत से जीतने शेर हसीना को आत्मविश्वास के साथ काम करने का अवसर दिया है। उनके गठबंधन ने 299 में से 288 सीटें जीतीं और अब उनके सामने कोई विपक्ष नहीं बचा है। नई सरकार गठन के अब लगभग एक महीना हो चुका है और वह देश को राजनीतिक स्थिरता प्रदान करने और तेज आर्थिक विकास की राह पर चल पड़ी हैं।

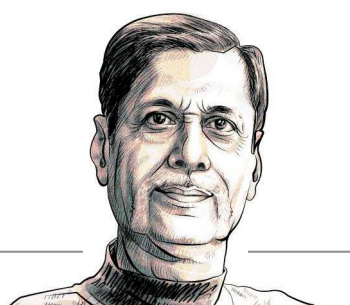
जैसा कि चुनाव से एक दिन पूर्व भारतीय पत्रकारों के एक समूह के साथ बातचीत करते हुए उन्होंने कहा था कि अगर एक बार फिर से वह चुनाव जीत जाती हैं, तो 2021 में वह राष्ट्र की 50वीं वर्षगांठ का नेतृत्व करेंगी। उनकी यह इच्छा तो पूरी हुई, पर उनके सामने कुछ बड़ी चुनौतियां भी हैं। उन्हें राजनीतिक, आर्थिक और सामाजिक रूप से समावेशी विकास के लिए प्रयत्न करना चाहिए। खास तौर से उन्हें अर्थव्यवस्था का दस तरह से विकास करना होगा, जो बढ़ती असमानताओं को कम करे।

उनके नेतृत्व में अब बांग्लादेश पीढ़ीगत बदलाव के लिए भी तैयार है, जिसका पहला संकेत उन्होंने मंत्रिमंडल गठन के समय दिया। उन्होंने पुराने सलाहकारों को बेशक बनाए रखा है, पर मंत्रिमंडल में उन वरिष्ठों को जगह नहीं मिली है, जिनमें से कई उनके दिवंगत पिता शेख मुजीबुर्रहमान के साथ काम कर चुके थे। इसके बजाय उन्होंने मंत्रिमंडल में युवा चेहरों को ज्यादा जगह दी है। यह जरूरी भी था, क्योंकि उन्हें मुक्ति के बाद की पीढ़ियों की आकांक्षाओं को पूरा करना है। बांग्लादेश के युवा भी अन्य देशों के युवाओं की तरह महात्वाकांक्षी हैं और वे दुनिया के साथ कदम से कदम मिलाकर चलना चाहते



बांग्लादेश में नई सरकार के गठन के लगभग एक महीना हो चुका है और हसीना सरकार देश को राजनीतिक स्थिरता प्रदान करने और तेज आर्थिक विकास की राह पर चल पड़ी है।

महेंद्र वेद, वरिष्ठ पत्रकार



हैं। इसलिए इन्होंने देश को एक युवा मंत्रिमंडल दिया है, जो जोश और आत्मविश्वास के साथ नई पीढ़ी की आकांक्षाओं को पूरा करेगी।

जमीनी हकीकत यह है कि आर्थिक विकास में निरंतर तेजी और भारत सहित अन्य दक्षिण एशियाई देशों से सामाजिक विकास सूचकांकों में आगे रहने के कारण वहां हर कोई हसीना से खुश प्रतीत होता है या सापेक्ष राजनीतिक स्थिरता के प्रति सहमत है। अपनी तमाम खामियों के साथ

इसमें हसीना के दस वर्षों के शासन का काफी योगदान है। बांग्लादेश की अर्थव्यवस्था में वहां के गारमेंट उद्योग का बड़ा हाथ है, जिसमें 70 फीसदी से ज्यादा महिलाएं काम करती हैं। स्वयं महिला होने के नाते हसीना ने महिलाओं के सशक्तीकरण की दिशा में भी काफी काम किया है। गारमेंट उद्योग से बांग्लादेश को सबसे ज्यादा विदेशी मुद्रा हासिल होती है। अगर वह आंतरिक विरोधाभासों

को ठीक से प्रबंधित कर पाती हैं और उम्मीद करें कि यदि उन्हें बाढ़ या चक्रवात जैसी प्राकृतिक आपदाओं से निपटना नहीं पड़े, तो लगता है कि बांग्लादेश तेज आर्थिक विकास और बेहतर सामाजिक वातावरण के लिए तैयार है।

हालांकि एक खतरा की आशंका है। चुनावी हार और राज्य द्वारा जारी अभियोजन के चलते इस्लाम से बेहद प्रभावित युवाओं का एक वर्ग ज्ञात विदेशी संपर्क और धन के बल पर कट्टरपंथी बन सकता है। इसलिए हसीना सरकार को धार्मिकता और धर्म के बीच एक रेखा खींचने की जरूरत है, जिसका इस्तेमाल समाज को अस्थिर करने और भविष्य में परेशानियां पैदा करने के लिए किया जा रहा है। ऐसा करने के लिए नई सरकार को सेना, पुलिस और अर्ध सैनिक बलों को खुली छूट देने के खिलाफ बेहतर निगरानी रखनी होगी, ताकि यह सुनिश्चित किया जा सके कि वे संविधानेतर प्रतिक्रिया न बनें। बांग्लादेश में 15 वर्षों तक सेना या सैन्य निर्देशित शासन रहा है और एक नाजुक अर्धसैन्य नेतृत्व की सेना पर निर्भरता देश में फिर से सेना के लिए दरवाजे खोल सकती है। खुद हसीना सरकार को भी संविधानेतर शक्ति बनने से परहेज करना चाहिए।

इस चुनाव पर भारत के लोगों की काफी नजर थी और इसके नतीजे को लेकर गहरी दिलचस्पी थी। इसको मुख्य वजह यह है कि इस चुनाव के नतीजे का स्पष्ट असर भारत के पूर्वी और पूर्वोत्तर क्षेत्र की आंतरिक सुरक्षा पर असर पड़ने वाला है। इसके अलावा बांग्लादेश की प्रधानमंत्री शेख हसीना भारत समर्थक मानी जाती हैं और उनका रुख हमेशा भारत के प्रति सकारात्मक रहा है। इस चुनाव का एक महत्वपूर्ण पहलू था कि पहली बार भारत चुनावी बहस का हिस्सा नहीं बना। पिछले के चुनावों में भारत को या तो

खलनायक दिखाया जाता था या सहयोगी के रूप में वर्णित किया जाता था। भारत विरोधी राजनेता बांग्लादेश के लोगों को भारतीय आधिपत्य के खिलाफ चेतावने थे। पिछले चुनाव में शेख हसीना की पार्टी अक्वामी लीग को 'भारत का दलाल' कहा गया था। ऐसी बातें इस बार के चुनाव में नहीं हुईं।

हसीना ने हमेशा अपने देश की आजादी की लड़ाई में भारत की सहायता को स्वीकार किया है और पूर्वोत्तर भारत के उपवासियों को बांग्लादेश की धरती का इस्तेमाल करने से रोकने के लिए उनके शिविरों को दृढ़ता से खत्म किया है। हम भी अपने इस पड़ोसी देश को ऊर्जा और व्यापार के क्षेत्र में लगातार मदद कर रहे हैं। हमारे देश के प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने कहा था कि मौजूदा समय भारत-बांग्लादेश रिश्ते के लिए स्वर्ण काल की तरह है। खालिदा जिन्ना के शासन काल में (वर्ष 2001-06 के दौरान) भारत को काफी कुछ सहना पड़ा था, जबकि शेख हसीना का शासन भारत के अनुकूल है। भारत के अलावा हसीना ने चीन से भी अच्छे संबंध विकसित किए हैं, जिस पर मुझे नहीं लगता कि भारत को तब तक कोई एतराज होना चाहिए, जब तक उसका कोई कदम भारत के खिलाफ न जाए।

कम से कम चुनाव में इस्लामवादियों को पराजित कर हसीना एक अस्थिर राष्ट्र को राजनीतिक स्थिरता प्रदान कर सकती हैं। हालांकि ऐसा कोई नहीं है, जिसे पूरी तरह से धर्मानुरेपक का जगह सत्ता है और हसीना खुद धार्मिक रुढ़िवाद के एक हिस्से से जुड़ी हैं और इस्लाम को वहां के राष्ट्र धर्म के रूप में बनाए रखा है, फिर भी उम्मीद की जा सकती है कि बांग्लादेश एक उदारवादी इस्लामी राष्ट्र बना रहेगा। जब दुनिया के कई हिस्से में चरमपंथ और आतंकवाद से मुकाबला जारी है, तब यह पर्याप्त है।

तट पर कराहते 'चमत्कारी' कछुए

पर्यावरणविदों की लाख कोशिशों के बावजूद हर साल हजारों कछुओं की मौत हो रही है। जबकि कछुए जल-पारिस्थितिकी के संतुलन में अहम भूमिका निभाते हैं, वैसे भी ओलिव रिडले कछुए कुदरत की शानदार नियामक हैं।



पंकज चतुर्वेदी

रेत को ही चुनते हैं। दुनिया भर में ओलिव रिडले कछुए के घरौंदे महज छह स्थानों पर ही पाए जाते हैं और इनमें से तीन स्थान ओडिशा में हैं। ये कोस्टारिका में दो व मेक्सिको में एक स्थान पर प्रजनन करते हैं। ओडिशा के केंद्रपाड़ा जिले का गरियामाथा समुद्री तट दुनिया का सबसे बड़ा प्रजनन-आशियाना है। इसके अलावा रूसिकलया और देवी नदी के समुद्र में मिलनस्थल इन कछुओं के दो अन्य प्रिय स्थल हैं।

इस साल ओडिशा के तट पर कछुए के घरौंदों की संख्या शायद अभी तक की सबसे बड़ी संख्या है। अनुमान है कि लगभग सात लाख घरौंदें बन चुके हैं। यह भी आश्चर्य की बात है कि वर्ष 1999 में राज्य में आए सुपर साइक्लोन व वर्ष 2006 के सुनामी के

बावजूद कछुओं का ठीक इसी स्थान पर आना अनवरत जारी है। वैसे वर्ष 1996, 1997, 2000 और 2008 में बहुत कम कछुए आए थे। ऐसा क्यों हुआ? यह अब भी रहस्य बना हुआ है। 'ऑपरेशन कच्छप' चला कर इन कछुओं को बचाने के लिए जागरूकता फैलाने वाले संगठन वाइल्डलाइफ सोसायटी आफ ओडिशा के मुताबिक, यहां आने वाले कछुओं में से मात्र 57 प्रतिशत ही घरौंदे बनाते हैं, शेष कछुए वैसे ही पानी में लौट जाते हैं।

आठ साल पहले ओडिशा हाई कोर्ट ने आदेश दिया था कि कछुओं के आगमन के रास्ते में संचालित होने वाले ट्रालरों में टैड यानी टर्टल एक्सक्लूजन डिवाइस लगाई जाए। ओडिशा में तो इस आदेश का थोड़ा-बहुत पालन हुआ भी, लेकिन राज्य के बाहर इसकी परवाह किसी को नहीं है। 'फैगशूड' के बढ़ते प्रचलन ने भी कछुओं की शानत बुला दी है। इसे शुभ मान कर घर में पालने वाले लोगों की मांग बढ़ रही है और इस फिरक में भी इनके बच्चे पकड़े जा रहे हैं। कछुए जल-पारिस्थितिकी के संतुलन में अहम भूमिका निभाते हैं, वैसे भी ओलिव रिडले कछुए प्रकृति की चमत्कारी नियामक हैं। अभी उनका रहस्य अनसुलझा है। मानवीय लापरवाही से यदि इस प्रजाति पर संकट आ गया, तो प्रकृति पर किस तरह की विपदा आएगी? इसका किसी को अंदाजा नहीं है।

हरियाली और रास्ता

महंगी गाड़ी और खुद्दार लड़का

एक गरीब और खुद्दार लड़के की कहानी, जिसने राम को अपनी सोच बदलने पर मजबूर किया।



राम के बड़े भाई ने एक बार उसे एक महंगी गाड़ी रोहफे में दी। एक दिन बाहर निकलने पर राम ने देखा कि चौदह-पंद्रह साल का एक गरीब लड़का गाड़ी के अंदर झांक रहा था। राम को आते देखकर वह पीछे हटा गया। फिर धीरे से उसने राम से पूछा, अंकल, क्या यह गाड़ी आपकी है? राम बोला, हां, मेरे भाई ने यह कार मुझे तोहफे में दी है। लड़का हैरान होकर बोला, अच्छा! राम सोचने लगा कि अब यह बोलना, काश, मेरे पास भी ऐसा ही भाई होता। लेकिन इसके बजाय वह लड़का बोला, काश, मैं भी एक दिन ऐसा भाई बन पाऊं। राम उसकी बातों से प्रभावित हुआ। उसने लड़के से कहा, चलो, तुम्हें तुम्हारे घर तक छोड़ दूँ। दोनों गाड़ी में बैठ गए। जब गाड़ी आगे बढ़ी, तो लड़के ने उससे कहा, क्या आप मेरे घर के सामने कुछ देर रुक सकते हैं? राम ने मुंह बनाते हुए सोंचा, मैंने जरा-सा उससे पूछ क्या लिया, अब वह मुझ पर ही सवारी करेगा। राम कुछ जवाब देता, इससे पहले ही वह लड़का बोल पड़ा, बस वह जो सीढ़ी दिख रही है न, वहीं पर रुक देना। मैं बस दो मिन्ट में आया। कुछ ही पल बाद राम ने देखा कि वह लड़का वापस चला आ रहा है, लेकिन बहुत धीरे-धीरे संभलकर उतरते हुए। राम ने देखा कि उसने अपनी गोद में एक और लड़के को उठा रखा है, जिसके दोनों पैर नहीं हैं।

अंतिम सीढ़ी पर अपने भाई को बिठाकर वह लड़का बोला, देखा, जैसा मैंने तुम्हें ऊपर बताया था, ठीक वैसी ही है न। अंकल के बड़े भाई ने उन्हें यह गाड़ी तोहफे में दी है। एक दिन मैं भी तुम्हें ऐसी ही गाड़ी तोहफे में दूंगा और तुम उसमें सैर करना। राम को अपनी गतती का एहसास हुआ। गाड़ी से उतरकर राम दोनों लड़कों से बोला, क्यों न हम आज ही सैर पर चलें?

बिना सोचे-समझे दूसरों के बारे में धारणा बनाना अहंकार का सूचक है।

मंजिलें और भी हैं

>> वाजेद खान बिदकर

घटिया हेलमेट के खिलाफ सड़क पर अनूठी लड़ाई

मोटरसाइकिल या स्कूटर चलाते वक्त हमें हेलमेट इसलिए प्रयोग करना चाहिए, ताकि किसी भी अनहोनी के वक्त हम सलामत रहें। लेकिन अक्सर यह देखा जाता है कि दुर्घटना की आशंका या अपनी हिफाजत के लिए नहीं, बल्कि पुलिस व आर्थिक दंड से बचने के लिए लोग हेलमेट प्रयोग करते हैं। कुछेक तो घर से हेलमेट लेकर निकलते हैं, लेकिन उनके सिर पर वह तभी आता है, जब उन्हें लगता है कि अगले नुक़द पर पुलिस वाले मिल जाएंगे। यातायात नियमों के प्रति यह लापरवाही मुझे सालती है। मैं अक्सर यही सोचता हूँ कि आखिर ऐसा कब होगा कि लोग पुलिस से बचने के लिए नहीं, बल्कि अपनी अनमोल जिंदगी की सुरक्षा की खातिर हेलमेट इस्तेमाल करेंगे। लोगों की इसी मानसिकता का परिणाम है कि फुटपाथ पर घटिया किस्म के हेलमेट बेचने वालों का गोरखधंधा भी फल-फूल रहा है। लोग कानूनी कार्रवाई से बचने के लिए सी-दो सी रुपये में बिकने वाले मानकविहीन हेलमेट खरीद लेते हैं। जिससे वे यातायात नियमों के दायरे में तो आ जाते हैं, पर हेलमेट प्रयोग करने का उद्देश्य कहीं से भी नहीं पूरा होता। अपने अब तक के जीवन में मैंने न जाने ऐसी कितनी सड़क दुर्घटनाओं के बारे में सुना है, जिसमें बाइक सवार की जान हेलमेट पहनने के बावजूद नहीं बची। कारण वही कि उन्होंने हेलमेट के नाम पर घटिया प्लास्टिक का ढांचा पहना हुआ था। जिससे उनकी जान बचने के बजाय उल्टे मुसीबत में पड़ गई।



हेलमेट की जगह मैं सिर पर बर्तन रखकर बाइक चलाता हूँ, ताकि लोग अच्छे हेलमेट प्रयोग के प्रति जागरूक हों।

वालों का ध्यान सिर्फ हेलमेट की जरूरत पर न जाए, बल्कि वे इसकी गुणवत्ता पर भी ध्यान दें।

मुझे हैरत तब हुई, जब मेरे अजीबो-गरीब हेलमेट के बावजूद पुलिस ने मुझे कहीं नहीं रोका। इससे समझ में आता है कि व्यवस्था और नियमों में किस हद तक सुधार की गुंजाइश है। लेकिन मैं मानता हूँ कि यदि हेलमेट के मानकों को लेकर कोई सख्त नियम थोप भी दिया जाए, तो भी लोग बाज नहीं आएंगे। बाजार में पहले से मानकीकृत हेलमेट मौजूद हैं, लेकिन ज्यादा कीमत होने से लोग उन्हें नहीं खरीदते। कीमत की शिकायत एक तरह से वाजिब भी है। समाधान यही हो सकता कि सरकार को अच्छे हेलमेट के प्रयोग को प्रोत्साहित करने के लिए कुछ योजनाएं चलानी चाहिए। जब राष्ट्रहित में बिजली बचाने हेतु सरकार एलईडी बल्बों के लिए सब्सिडी दे सकती है, तो लोगों का जीवन बचाना कहाँ से कमतर उद्देश्य है। क्या यह राष्ट्रहित नहीं है?

मैंने कई दफे यातायात पुलिस के दफ्तर से संपर्क करके अपनी बात पहुंचाई है, लेकिन नतीजा कुछ खास निकला नहीं। हां, बस इतना बताया गया कि यातायात की नियम पुस्तिका में हेलमेट की गुणवत्ता की बात कही गई है। और लोगों से अपेक्षा की जाती है कि वे आईएसआई मार्का हेलमेट का ही प्रयोग करें। लेकिन हकीकत नियम पुस्तिका के इन ध्यौरों से बाहर है। मेरा प्रयास है कि लोग अच्छे हेलमेट की जरूरत समझें।

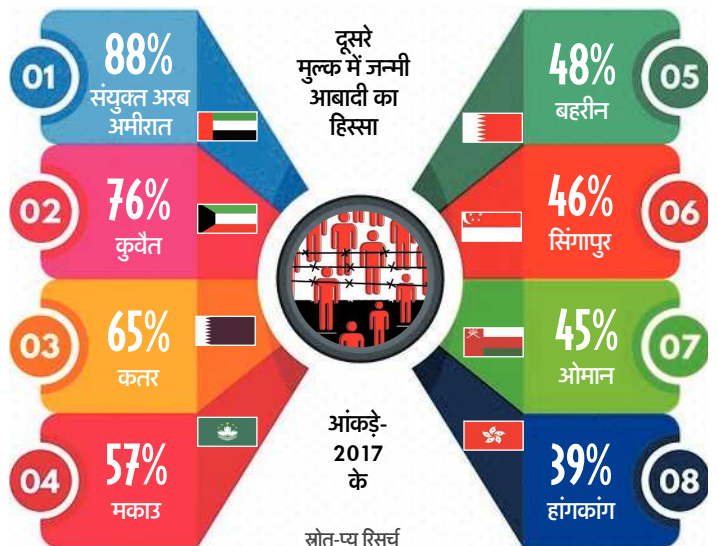
-विभिन्न साक्षात्कारों पर आधारित।



खुली खिड़की

देशी-विदेशी का अंतर

पश्चिम एशियाई मुल्कों की आबादी में बड़ा हिस्सा उन लोगों का है, जो उन देशों के बजाय विदेश में जन्मे हैं। संयुक्त अरब अमीरात की कुल आबादी में मात्र बारह फीसदी लोग ही ऐसे हैं, जिनका जन्म यूई में हुआ है। इन देशों में भारतीयों की अच्छी-खासी ताबाद है।



लोटे की चमक

श्री रामकृष्ण परमहंस रोज अपना लोटा बहुत लगन से राख या मिट्टी से मांजकर खूब चमकाते थे। रोज के इस परिश्रम से श्री परमहंस का लोटा खूब चमकता था। उनके एक शिष्य को श्री रामकृष्ण द्वारा प्रतिदिन बहुत मेहनत से लोटा चमकाना बड़ा विचित्र लगता था। एक दिन वह श्री रामकृष्ण जी से पूछ ही बैठा, महाराज! आपका लोटा तो वैसे ही खूब चमकता है। इतना चमकता है कि इसमें हम अपनी तस्वीर भी देख लें। फिर भी रोज-रोज आप इसे हंसकर बोलें, बेटा! इस लोटे की चमक एक दिन की, एक बार की मेहनत से नहीं आई है, इसमें आई मेल को हटाने के लिए नित्य-प्रति मेहनत करनी ही पड़ती है। ठीक वैसे ही जैसे जीवन में आई बुराइयों, बुरे संस्कारों को दूर करने के लिए हमें रोजाना ही संकल्पपूर्ण परिश्रम करना पड़ता है। वास्तव में स्वयं को अच्छे व्यक्ति में बदलने के लिए हमें रोज के अत्यास से दुर्गुणों का मूल दूर करना पड़ता है। लोटा हो या व्यक्ति का जीवन, उसे बुराइयों के मूल से बचाने के लिए हमें रोजाना ही कड़ा परिश्रम करना पड़ेगा। तभी इस लोटे या इंसान की चमक बची रह सकती है। प्रत्येक व्यक्ति को इसी प्रकार नित्य अपनी बुराइयों को दूर करने का प्रयास करते रहना चाहिए।



सत्संग

-संकलित