

COUNTRY CODE

RAHUL JACOB

Singh's handsome reelection win in 2009 was seen as a chance to recreate the reforms momentum of the 1990s when he had been finance minister. More banner headlines greeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi as India's Margaret Thatcher or Shinzo Abe when Modi received an absolute majority in 2014. but neither made progress

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substantially revising labour laws, for instance. Ikea and Coke announced billion-dollar bets on India in the summer of 2012. But some time in 2012, Rahul Gandhi told NDTV a week ago, Congress' leadership, including Singh, decided liberalisation had run its course. Now, Gandhi feels India needs to find a "new model" that doesn't enrich just the top 2-3 per cent. He wouldn't let on whether this meant, say, a marginal tax rate of 70 per cent. Gandhi's English is enigmatic and his Hindi unidiomatic. Elaborating, he sounded like Robin Hood played by Ajit, the movie star of yesteryear: "Past se future ko jodhna padega".

It was a stark repudiation of Congress' most notable achievement in the past three decades. The manifestoes of the Bharativa Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress are dispiriting if you are foolishly hoping that privatisation would be included even just for discussion. The headlines about widespread unemployment should have prompted — in a country more honest with itself — proposals to make it easier for companies to hire and fire workers. "What I don't understand is the mindset that leads to the perpetuation of resistance to labour law reform," observes Pronab Sen, India's former chief statistician.

Both parties aspire to building India into an export powerhouse — never mind that data released Thursday showed export growth in April slid to 0.64 per cent, compared with a year ago, as many labour-intensive sectors continue to face liquidity issues. Congress may call it "Make for the world" and the BJP "Make in India", but neither has a clue about what it will take to embed India into mobile phone or athletic shoe supply chains. The Reserve Bank of India's industry credit data for the year ended March 2019 shows that many sectors that are typically labour intensive, such as leather, textiles, and gems and jewellery, saw gross bank credit decline. Both manifestos read like a wishlist for Santa: Congress would raise expenditure on education to 6 per cent of GDP while the BJP thinks a global yoga industry is a springboard to becoming the third largest economy in the world.

Even before this campaign of non-stop abuse and majoritarian flag-waving, Indian elections scarcely ever mentioned reforms. The poor are infinitely more numerous than the middle class, and voter turnout in poor rural areas much higher than in Mumbai or Bengaluru, even more so this year. Long before our age of TV interviews about prime ministerial poetry and mango-eating preferences, even "lion"-hearted P V Narasimha Rao hardly ever made a table-thumping speech about the bold reforms his government enacted. We may have a mixed up economy – alternately socialist/feudalistic, topped up with crony capitalism — but our lingua franca is socialism. Milton Friedman's 1955 critique of the Mahalanobis' Five Year plans broadly applies to 2019's manifestos — they are obsessed with (ill-defined) targets and expand too little on what remains India's fundamental problem: Its human capital.

More than a quarter of a century ago, a massive World Bank study sought to identify what had created the East Asian economic miracle that stretched from China, Korea and Taiwan to city-states such as Hong Kong and Singapore. It could only identify two common planks: openness to trade and widespread, good quality primary education. In any case, it's too late now. Even with the US-China trade war forcing multinationals to relocate production bases, I would bet Vietnam, Bangladesh and even Ethiopia will be beneficiaries rather than India. We have wasted decades playing petty politics, our only Olympian gold-medal sport. Now, India's fate is to oscillate between what Rathin Roy aptly described as the "compensatory state" where, in effect, the state must pay people reparations for its many failures and h axis of blunt minority-bashing vividly on display in 2019 to offset the effects of its Stalinist impulses such as demonetisation and anti-profiteering agencies.

Regardless of who wins next week, we can only look to the future with fear. Trade is slowing; our ports, our poorly trained labour, and our over-valued exchange rate hobble our chances to get at a diminishing global factory jobs pie. Our non-bank financial companies' crisis is apparent in the collapse of auto sales in April. The recent financial results of consumer goods companies suggest India's middle class is no longer growing. The existing members of this exalted cohort are curbing their spending as savings rates slide. Our environment, from the hollowed-out hillsides of the northeast to the coming water crisis in Bengaluru to the polluted gas chambers of north Indian cities, is nearing the tipping point of Malthusian collapse. It will be the 55th anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru's death on May 27. The sentimentalists among us can only hope the new government of whatever description will not be sworn in on that date. It is at least a comfort Nehru did not believe in an after-life.

Why this kolaveri di, didi?

You can't beat Mamata Banerjee in street politics — she pours her heart and soul into pulverising her rivals



PLAIN POLITICS

ADITI PHADNIS

ll this past week, if elections were Abeing Tought, they ment fought in West Bengal. Mamata being "fought", they were being Banerjee singlehandedly turned the last phase of the elections into a gladiatorial fight, forcing the Bharativa Janata Party (BJP) to come out on the streets.

You cannot beat Mamata Banerjee in street politics. The Congress, the Left parties — they are all her victims. She pours her heart and soul into pulverising her rivals. Not for her sophistication and intellectualism. She believes in raw power.

At a cabinet meeting, just after the Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo (and make no mistake, supremo is what she is) Mamata Banerjee had thrown a tantrum, a minister exclaimed in exasperation: "What is wrong with Mamata Banerjee?"

The question was a rhetorical one, but one of his Bengal colleagues took his time to answer it. He took off his glasses, polished them, put them back on and said evenly: "If someone thinks she's a better poet than Rabindranath Tagore, a better musician than Beethoven and a better painter than Leonardo da Vinci, then everything is a problem".

Banerjee is viewed by the political community (cutting across party lines) as a problem child who should not be allowed among grown-ups unescorted. But to the people of Bengal, her life is an open book and she is always, unfailingly one of them. In a state that lionises poverty, she continues to live in a simple house with a tin roof near a mosquito-infested open canal. Her style statement runs to simple handloom saris, rubber chappals and a modest Indian watch. Not for her flashy mobiles and fancy cars. She has a rule that she never breaks: She never eats in anyone's presence — only when she is alone — presumably because she lives among people who don't know where their next meal is coming from.

Banerjee grew up in straitened circumstances, having lost her father when she was just a teenager. Her "people" are her family. So much so that she has an unbroken rule: She never attends any family functions. (Her nephew Abhishek, widely seen as her successor, got engaged to a girl in Delhi some years ago. Festivities went on for three days. Although Mamata had no other pressing engagements, she just staved away.)

Her strongest bond was with her mother. When she used to leave her Kalighat home for work, her mother would come to the door to see her off. She would crane her neck, look back and settle back in the car only when she had lost sight of her mother. Contrary to common perception, Mamata is not particularly close to her brothers. She is impulsive, has strong likes and dislikes and trusts very few people.

Her mentor in politics was the Mayor of Calcutta, Subroto Mukherjee who got Mamata's first lok Sabha nomination in 1984. She contested against a CPI (M) heavyweight, lawyer and later Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee, from Jadavpur, defeating him so thoroughly that he could never contest from that constituency again.

Mukherjee privately rues the day he let Mamata loose on Bengal. The man who got the Calcutta Corporation to pass a resolution that Sourav Ganguly should get a Padma award, says he deserves the Bharat Ratna: "Dancing on my head is Mamata Banerjee; under my command is the army of sweepers employed by the corporation. With all this, I am still running the corporation. Shouldn't I get an award for this feat?" he once said in a TV interview.

With all this, how did Mamata allow the BJP to acquire a mass presence in Bengal?

Trinamool supporters say she has only herself to blame. New mosques are sprouting all over Bengal on public land. Tourists are warned by well-wishers never to get into an altercation with a Muslim on the streets: the police have orders to arrest you first and ask you questions later. Mamata has imposed affirmative action to the point of absurdity. This has naturally led to counter-action: The Hindus who never thought of themselves as Hindus are now banding behind the BJP. Ram has entered the land of Durga.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi told a rally in the state that many, many MLAs from Trinamool Congress are in touch with the BJP. If the Trinamool Congress does badly, there will be an exodus of MLAs into the BJP: Assembly elections are due in just 24 months. Bengal is the BJP's new frontier.

That isn't marketing spiel, Inside

the Atelier a sales associate shows

customers a large touch monitor

with several combinations and per-

mutations for ordering hand-craft-

ed leather shoes. It's cutting edge

and quite unlike what many inter-

national labels offer. So what has he

done different in the last year?

Singhania says the focus has been on the real estate business -

Raymond has just launched its first

project in Thane — which is com-

pletely different from textiles. "It's

all about the permissions," he says.

Raymond owns 130 acres in Thane, valued around ₹5,200 crore accord-

Lunch over, the waiters arrive

with a mango roulade cake for

dessert for me which I decline and

Singhania ponders vanilla ice-cream

and then decides against it and then

pick up a strain of thought. It is from

his mistakes that he has learnt the

most, he says. Which did he learn

the most from, I ask. Raymond's

denim merger was one. In 2006

Raymond tied up with denim maker

Uco of Belgium and what emerged

was a player with a combined capac-

wrong reason, or maybe not enough

Seconds later we are interrupted

which Singhania looks at before

he explains, from product review

meetings to manager meetings to

someone landing up unscheduled

and so on. While his day starts at

around 7.30 am, Raymond's boss

says he only manages to grab the

day's newspaper and emails post

8.00 pm. "I've reached that stage

ing to market estimates.

LUNCH WITH BS ▶ GAUTAM SINGHANIA | CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR | RAYMOND

Simple is the new cool

Singhania tells Pavan Lall why Trump's sparring with China has been good for business and how he keeps tabs on the goings-on in his company while not being involved day to day

lad in a V-necked, orange pima cotton T-shirt emblazoned with his team logo "GHS", grey track pants and Tommy Hilfiger flip flops, Gautam Hari Singhania, chairman and managing director of the Raymond Group, is meeting me on a warm afternoon at the JK House, Raymond's headquarters on Warden Road. I am directed to the Atelier Lounge, which is part high-end boutique and part men's upscale country club, which features a bar replete with single malts, an exhaustive French wine list, and a gigantic 12-foot flat-panel TV that could be mistaken for a billboard.

Of late, the sports gear is de rigueur for him — far removed from pinstripe power suits. "Well. I'm not part of (daily) management anymore," is his answer with a halfsmile, followed by the rider, "I'm not involved day to day but don't think I don't know what is happening every day."

From throwing legendary bacchanalian parties in Powai, Mumbai, that lasted from sundown to sunset and finished off with a champagne breakfast he personally curated, Singhania is now obsessed with maximising shareholder value, handing over operational charge to male and keening Daymond in the competitive edge.

That may seem a charmed life from the outside but there are huge pressures, he says, adding that is "the professional hazard of an type A personality". At 53, Singhania does have his plate full. There's the disruption across industries, geopolitics and the shifting sands of leadership in corporate India on the one hand, and his growing realty business and an unfortunate and very public spat with his father and former Raymond Chairman Vijaypath Singhania, on the other.

Waiters silently bring foldable tables in front of us to set them up for lunch.

Did it have to come to what it did with his father? Singhania pauses, then says: "There is nothing hidden about the dispute between my father and me. "He wants me to do things that are not possible. The company is on one side and my father on the other. The dispute is personal and my job is to firewall my family issues from that of the organisation." Is resolution likely? "God willing, hopefully one day, who knows. I've tried my best and of course I'm open to it. Who wouldn't like to resolve issues?'

Waiters return bearing silver

Laid out in neatly arranged identical bowls are paneer masala, navratan korma, jeera aloo and cucumber raita. These are accompanied by warm, crisp naans. We dig in with our hands. The food is simple, but fresh and perfectly prepared with minimum spice and oil. Singhania speeds through lunch; I follow suit. "I'm a pretty normal guy who is doing his job," he says almost reading my mind as I wonder if jeera aloo is what the yacht-owning, Lamborghini-driving, vicuna-jacket-wearing promoter consumes

The Cathedral & John Connon School alumnus remembers taking work trips in Dakota aircraft to faclacour and Allahahad and the diet on the plane would be home-cooked fare like puri saag and curd along with chatter on business. "I'm simple about everything: I like non-spicy vegetarian food, family is very important, and religion is part of my life."

But of course: he takes his wife and daughters on skiing trips to Switzerland when he takes a breather, I learn. The lesser known facts include his regular visits to the Venkateswara temple in Tirupati every quarter and the frequent talks he hosts for spiritual leaders.

While Singhania has been at the helm of Raymond for close to two decades now, in the late 1980s he also ended up working for The Indian Post, a family-owned newspaper. "It was challenging to go from situation and the paper was sold to textiles to newspapers, which was a Gujarat Samachar.' Today, Raymond has over 1,100 perishable commodity and which I

knew nothing about. But my time

there was great," he says, "In the end.

I was caught between other media

giants and an unfortunate political

stores across 550 cities, a retail distribution network spread over 20.000 locations, from metro cities all the way to tier 10 towns. But there are challenges. If earlier it was about licences to do business — one could get by even if the product was bad - today there are more companies in the fray, consumers are sharper and the whole game has changed, says Singhania. The emphasis is on the brand and the marketing. The real "challl-enge" — he stretches the word for emphasis — is how you keep reinventing things and make them new.

At the B2B end, Raymond is ity for 47 million meters per annum. making made-to-measure suits and However, multiple issues arose that supplying fabric to international led to the collapse of the tie-up. The consequence was heavy restructurchain stores such as Macy's, JC Penney and Debenham. "Trump's ing costs. "Maybe I did it for the sparring with China is good for business," he says. Khadi has been added homework went behind it, but it was as a fabric and apparel choice, as has a mistake." he admits. "You learn ethnic wear to include ornate sherand move on, you can't ponder over wanis. Singhania has consciously spilt milk.' pushed men's accessories. "A very by an assistant bearing a white note senior industrialist's wife reached out and said that her husband wantexclaiming. "Some notice would ed to have all their shoes have been nice. Push it by half an done by us," he recalls.

do all the suits also."

in my life where, left to myself, I'm happier not to travel." His advice for millennial

entrepreneurs? "The thing about managing money or people when you get to a certain scale is that you have to have a core value system in place and do the right thing," he says. "That's also the harder road and to stay the course is even more so. But that's the journey of life."

Beti padhao, dowry badhao?



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

he other day, when Ram Kumar Singh came to say goodbye before leaving for his village, I asked why he was going at this time. He wanted to cast his vote, he said. "And I also have to check out a prospective groom for my daughter," he added. I was immediately interested, having had many conversations with him about his eldest girl. Straitened financial circumstances might have forced him to seek employment in Delhi, but every time he spoke it was evident that Singh's heart was with his daughter, a final year student in Allahabad University. "She's not keen on marriage right now as she wants to study further to become a teacher." he said. "But I have told her that she should do that if she's lucky enough to marry someone who lets her.'

I wondered aloud why Singh was hellbent on getting his daughter married. She was a bright student and likely to make something of herself with his support. Singh responded by saying that he just couldn't afford it. For people like him, higher education for daughters entailed expenditure not only on tuition fees, but had other invisible consequences. When he explained these consequences, I realised that "Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao" and other government programmes to empower girls would be more impactful if there were a concurrent effort to change mindsets and cultural practices.

"If I succeed in arranging my daughter's marriage right now, I'll have to give maybe a motorcycle and some gold in dowry," Singh said. "In my community, marriages without dowry are unheard of." However, if he were to let his daughter study further, that too a vocational course in teaching that was bound to get her a good job, circumstances would change. For then he would have to look for grooms with qualifications and jobs better than those of his daughter's. "Usually, boys in my community who have good jobs in banks or the government demand a house or car at the time of marriage," he

said. Singh, who works as a security guard in Delhi and earns about ₹14,000 per month, can't afford to give so much. "I also have a younger daughter to marry off in a few years," he said.

There was another equally compelling reason why he wanted his daughter to get married instead of studying further and getting a job. The older she became, the more he would have to give in dowry. Singh explained that in his community, if a good job made a bachelor more eligible, it was youth which was a girl's most saleable asset. "So, much as I love my daughter," he said, "I will be happier to see her married young than have a successful career."

I realised that with the deeper penetration of education, Singh's daughter's generation could look forward to better livelihoods than those of their fathers. Yet, their lives continued to be governed by regressive cultural practices like dowry. "I probably won't be able to afford getting my daughter married if she became a government school teacher," he said. "Neither can I afford to gamble with her future by waiting for a good dowry-less match," he said. That's why he believed that women's empowerment schemes, were good for empowered women. "For girls like my daughter," he said, "early marriage is the best.

Gangland? No way!



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

fall the sobriquets heaped by the right — "sickulars", "libtards", 'presstitutes" — the one I'm most partial to is Khan Market "gang". As a partial liberal, part-time secular, disqualified member of the fourth estate, it felt good to be nominated for the moniker on the very day a bunch of us chose to partake of its dubious pleasures. It wasn't entirely to our satisfaction because election-induced prohibition took the edge of what could have been a pleasant weekend lunch. Far from planning coups or bandying politics, the only thing subversive on our mind was the option of choices on the menu. Not quite a gang, we were just a bunch of giggly, gossipy excolleagues somewhat melancholic for lack of liquid sustenance.

Khan Market is useful if not central to our existence. For most of us, its book stores have been a whistle-stop for piling up the latest thrillers, biographies, summer reads and those endlessly banal books on the state of India's society, politics and business. My own children don't visit the bookstores but do keep its many bars and restaurants in reasonable profit. My wife shops — or sends me to shop —for meats and cheeses, and I stock up on tonic water and handy bites while there. There's a reasonable variety of breads to be found. My son discovered, quite by chance, a haberdashery where he gets his office wear tailored. There used to be an apothecary we would patronise, but it deals more in spa and beauty products than medicines now.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

There's other stuff we pick up from Khan Market — the season's first cherries, for instance, our dog's pet snacks and shampoos, gifts for friends, crockery, cutlery, readymades and shoes. I've had paintings framed here, and bought condiments. Flowers too, though they're expensive and best bought outside the cemetery behind the market. My driver used to take our cars there for repair, and for reconditioning audio systems or ordering upholstery and floor mats, but has since shifted his custom to another.

cheaper place. Those of us who don't have the patience to shop for lights in the wholesale markets of Old Delhi find Lok Navak Bhawan convenient, though there's a part of it that stinks inexplicably of urine.

Khan Market's come a long way from vhen it had neighbourhood-style *kirana* shops, a mithaiwalla from where we bought samosas, one of the best music shops in the city, and a butcher who would make fresh keema while you waited. These have all gone the way of history. Khan Market is now more expensive and caters to the well-heeled, an aberration in the government colonies that surround it. But it has something the tonier malls don't — a sense of belonging, a place for people like us who don't flash branded bags and tint their hair blonde. It may be mere coincidence that it shares the vicinity with India International Centre and India Habitat Centre where the literati and culturati meet, and remains a place where you're more likely to bump into friends and acquaintances than at most soirees.

It doesn't feel "gang" like, and the parking can be an ordeal, but if there is a Khan Market tribe, it isn't something to be wary of. That it comes without a membership fee and doesn't require prior approval is merely a bonus.

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WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

Fertile ground for populism

nce the dust raised by the elections has settled, a new government will have to deal with the economic slowdown. The issue to focus on is not the usual one of how long growth will stay in the 6.5 per cent region before moving back up to 7 per cent and beyond. First, because we should not assume automatic reversion to what existed before, and second because the credibility of the GDP (gross domestic product) numbers has been shredded. Instead, the focus has to be on real numbers that can't be fudged, and these tell a troubling story.

Merchandise exports have been flat for most of the last five years. This reflects the failure of domestic manufacturing, and has made the economy more inward-looking. Tax revenue was buoyant but has now dropped short; collections from the goods and services tax especially suggest that business is not buoyant. The consumption numbers show a dip across many sectors, affecting corporate sales and profits. Balance sheet stress continues because of high levels of debt. All too many entrepreneurs are still busy with debt reduction efforts; some are giving up and selling out, mostly (it would seem) to foreign investors, and others are simply going bust.

The "core sector" output numbers on steel, cement and electricity don't suggest buoyancy. Corporate projects tallied by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy are still at a long-term low, and the government funding of projects has been squeezed (or payments not made for past work done) because of the revenue shortfall. The external account is comfortable because of capital inflows, but the current account deficit is too large for comfort.

The financial sector continues to be a drag. Credit flow has recovered but banks are still in trouble (the state-owned banks have provided for bad loans at a staggeringly high level of ₹52,000-plus crore in the latest quarter — nearly twice the earlier figure). The next tier of lenders, the non-banking financial companies, faces a liquidity problem flowing from general loss of confidence about what is hidden in their balance sheets.

What does any government do when faced with such an all-encompassing, multi-faceted slowdown? It uses monetary and fiscal measures to stimulate economic activity. But interest rate cuts by the Reserve Bank have not so far found reflection in the real rates in the market. As for fiscal policy, the deficit is too large for offering any tax discounts, unless the government simply gives up on fiscal discipline. If it does do that, a higher level of government borrowing will create bigger problems for monetary policy. There is a third solution, which is to force down the value of the rupee to make Indian products cheaper overseas and thereby competitive, and to make India an attractive sourcing base for global players, but no one in government has wanted to go down that road.

The real danger is that the momentum created by past reforms has run out of steam, and that we need a fresh set of structural reforms designed to make the system more competitive. There has been all too little of such reform in the last 15 years, and so the agenda remains unchanged: Reforming the factor markets (land, labour, capital). This means changing key laws, and forcing stateowned companies to face hard budget constraints (no bail-outs for Air India and its ilk). This is next to impossible politically, given that the losers will be workers and farmers who are already seen as having lost out.

The flow of facts and logic leads to one conclusion: The country should be ready for slower growth. This is already evident, but has been masked by the fiddling with (and suppression of inconvenient) GDP and employment numbers. The economy dropped to well below the key 7 per cent growth benchmark towards the end of the Manmohan Singh government, and even the official statistics put it at lower than 7 per cent today. Since that is not fast enough to provide jobs for the young, the fall-out will be political and social, on ground made fertile by an under-performing economy for the rise of populism.

If Pragya wins on Thursday

Never has one constituency had such a bearing on Indian nationalism and the pretence of a Gandhian polity. So what if PM Modi doesn't forgive her in his heart?

Singh for one achievement. She has succeeded in doing what no one has yet been able to do to Narendra Modi and Amit Shah: Put them on the defensive

She also managed to do another thing her party brass truly hates: To lose the power of deciding headlines. After brilliantly using the strategy of changing and controlling the headlines for five years, the BJP ends the campaign with just the one they didn't want. For the first time in this the entire duration of their public lives yet, Mr Modi and Mr Shah were given a case even they found indefensible.

A few of the BJP's Twitter-happy usual suspects, including minister Anantkumar Hegde and IT cell head Amit Malaviya, initially jumped to her defence or to take "the debate on Gandhi and Godse forward". All were squashed. The last five years have shown that the BJP can defend or dismiss as irrelevant anything offensive by a party person against anyone, individual or community. This includes an "Ali versus Bajrangbali" bigot, why should there be electricity on Eid but not on Diwali dog-whistle, a "Modi ki Sena" claim, the "illegal immigrants are termites" slur, the Rahul the "Pappu" has now brought his "Pappi' (Priyanka) crack.

But taking on the Mahatma, forget it. Some might do it in whispers, debate his "blunders", blame him

for Partition, but in drawing rooms, goshthis or shakhas. Never in public. Not after having spent the past seven decades distancing your ideological parent RSS from his assassination.

Here, a prized, saffron-clad candidate, a Hindutva icon undertrial in a terror case you fielded and defended with the usual "innocent until proven guilty" line, is calling the Mahatma's assassin a patriot. You do not take on the legacy of a man you also hail as Father of the Nation. Not in the year of his 150th birth

anniversary when you've so successfully taken away the Congress party's original icon. The prime minister himself takes great pride in escorting his foreign counterparts to landmarks associated with the Mahatma, rode the train in Pietermaritzburg, blogged on the 89th anniversary of the Dandi march, held forth in Champaran on the centenary of that satyagraha, got photographed spinning the charkha in Sabarmati and made Gandhi's familiar, rounded spectacle frames the logo of his precious Swachh Bharat programme.

This, from Pragya Thakur, who actually counts for a big cipher either in vote-catching ability or the party's moral positioning, is a vicious kick in her prime minister and party chief's guts. They can't even complain, because they are the ones who consciously pulled her out of nowhere.

7 hy, was explained by Mr Shah at his press conf-Why, was explained by MI Shall at the party's erence with Mr Modi. He said it was his party's "satyagraha" against the Congress party's campaign

e have to acknowledge 'Sadhvi' Pragya to malign the Hindus by inventing the bogey of saf-

Please make note of two points here. The first, the reason why it is now impossible for his party to distance itself from 'Sadhvi' Pragya: She was their deliberate choice, to make what they see as a principled point. And second, an irony: Even to explain this political statement, the expression Mr Shah used was a Gandhian trademark: Satyagraha. When you employ the unique form of non-violent protest Gandhi gifted to mankind to defend your choice of a person who hails his assassin as a patriot, you know where you are headed.

Never do the wrong thing even if for the right reasons is a good principle, in life or politics. The BJP has a bone to pick with Digvijaya Singh, we know. He has been the Congress party's most vocal spokesman on "Hindu terror". He has also gotten ahead of himself, raising questions about New Delhi's Batla House encounter and the sacrifice of vet another heroic police officer, Mohan Chand Sharma, decorated with a posthumous Ashok Chakra for that encounter, like Hemant Karkare in 26/11. Later, he also spoke in endorsement at the release of a book calling 26/11 an RSS conspiracy.

In the BJP's view, he deserved to face the most prominent face among the radical Hindu activists arrested on terror charges. Until late last month. when Pragya Thakur made her first headlines by

calling Hemant Karkare names and claiming that he died because she put a curse on him and his family (we should remember that his shattered wife also died six vears after his death in 26/11, incidentally on the anniversary of the September 29 Malegaon bomb blast), and then boasted she had climbed the dome of Babri Masjid to break it, quick damage control was done. Partly by sending her on a maun vrat (vow of silence) and partly by counter-attacking Digvijaya and the Congress for

having "similarly insulted" Mohan Chand Sharma. Her praise for Godse now leaves her party no place to hide.

Since 1989, the BJP has pursued a sharp strategy of slow and controlled escalation. At any point of time, beginning with the early days of L K Advani's Avodhva movement, a more extreme "fringe" has been cultivated. In the course of time, some are dumped. Remember Sadhvi Rithambara, Praveen Togadia, even Vinay Katiyar. Some are mainstreamed, from Uma Bharti to Sakshi Maharaj, Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti (of Ramzade and Haramzade fame), to Yogi Adityanath.

This worked for three decades, but was too clever to last. Some of us had foreseen this. Do check out Mainstreaming the Lynch-Fringe, my National Interest just after the Akhlaq killing by gau rakshaks in Dadri. Pragya is only the latest, and the most embarrassing example. It can't even be described as a misstep, because the party president has himself told us that this was a deliberate, well-thought out move, a satyagraha.



This was an utterly unwise statement of intent, drawn partly from an all-conquering hubris and partly from a misreading of how Indian nationalism has evolved.

It lies in believing that somehow Hinduism (and, by implication, Hindutva) is the primary glue that keeps India together, and defines its nationalism. Further on, it narrows down Hinduism and Hindutya to the RSS-Hindi heartland vision: One faith, one people, one language, one nation. India is much too diverse to keep its cohesion like this. Mr Modi has to remember that even if he gets a full majority, in four of the southern states, Andhra, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the BJP will be blessed to win even two seats out of 103 if at all. All parts of India, like these, will resent this kind of Hindu-isation, an immune reaction will kick in, setting off a centrifugal rash. This runs contrary to the vision of our founders who built us as a voluntary federation of states. There was no one vision flowing from a faith, a scripture or an ideology. That is why India has not only stayed together so marvellously, but become stronger and more secure with the passage of each decade. And the ideological state next door, Pakistan, broke up.

India's great gift to the modern world is its comfort with diversity. This, in a world where different cultures find it increasingly difficult to co-exist, as in West Asia, is a brand value that will have the greatest return on investment. going ahead. And if India is the world's greatest brand for diversity, Mahatma Gandhi is what Swiss philosopher Carl Jung would call its brand archetype.

Fighting, repudiating, bad-mouthing Nehru is easy. Some people already call Indira and Rajiv Gandhi's assassins heroes. Mahatma Gandhi, even for those on the extreme Hindu Right who believe he founded the politics of Muslim "appeasement", is suicidal to target. Mr Modi may indeed be honest in saying his heart will never forgive Pragya. He could begin by praying that she doesn't win next Thursday. Or, it will be an embarrassing five years swearing by the name of Gandhi, and carrying along in your parliamentary party one hailing his killer a hero.

By Special Arrangement with ThePrint

China could pay a high price for US tariffs



MOHAMED A EL-ERIAN

y putting more barriers in China's path to US markets and, in the process, risking some short-term damage to the domestic and global economies, the US President Donald Trump could exact a heavy long-term cost on the world's second-largest economy. Indeed, he may even threaten China's chances of eventually entering the ranks of high-income countries.

Chinese leaders have long known that they need to change their development model if they are to make this difficult transition, powering through the dreaded "middle-income trap" that's tripped up so many tain about their economic prospects, securing further productivity gains and

other developing countries. For two decades, Chinese households revert to parking away they relied on global markets to provide a crucial tailwind while they pursued reforms at home. But this is changing now that the US is increasing tariffs on Chinese imports and limiting their tech companies' access to US markets. Also, some US companies have appears to have stalled in the last 12 while their contributions to China's debt already begun to reorient their supply chains away from the mainland.

With external tailwinds turning into headwinds, China will need to rely far more on domestic demand to generate prosperity. To do so without building up risks in the financial system, Beijing would need to promote far greater household consumption and private investment, rather than relying on the debt-fuelled government investment and inefficient state owned enterprises that have helped drive domestic engines of growth for most of the last several decades.

This effort will fail unless the government can overcome three habits that tend to reassert themselves whenever economic and financial insecurities increase in China.

The first is the tendency for households to sock away more money as a form of selfinsurance. Especially when they're uncer-

higher savings to safeguard their future ability to pay for things like hospital bills, education for their family, and retirement.

China's success in prudently reducing months. The latest high-frequency economic data, including this week's lowerthan-consensus expectations for retail sales and industrial output, suggests the problem may get worse before it gets better. China needs to do more to provide households with pooled insurance mechanisms (including improving health insurance. education and pension systems) so that they can feel more confident spending.

The second trend is the tendency for the government to revert to fiscal and monetary stimulus whenever the economy hits a soft patch. Recent evidence suggests that such measures are less effective than they used to be, requiring much more debt per unit of GDP to stabilise growth. This only adds to the risks building up in China's financial system. Most development economists argue that to avoid the middle-income trap, countries instead must lead with the supply side,

diversifying their domestic economic base.

NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

The third is the government's tendency to fall back on state-owned enterprises to boost GDP. Most available evidence suggests that the efficiency and productivity its household saving rates in recent years of these companies is low and declining, increasing. China instead should be empowering its more efficient private companies to be responsible for the bulk of jobs and growth in the economy.

So far China has resisted following the examples of Canada and Mexico in making concessions to the Trump administration in order to defuse trade tensions and build a more sustainable economic relationship with the US. If it also cannot resist indulging these three habits, its multi-decade record of impressive economic performance, not to mention its future prospects, will be at serious risk. That would only further embolden those US policy makers who. driven by both economic and national security considerations, hope their actions now will dampen China's ability to challenge America's global dominance.

Gizmos & early users

EYE CULTURE

SHREEKANT SAMBRANI

arendra Modi's claim of havclose to or before the beginning of their use anywhere in the world. That may not be entirely undeserved. But one's claim to be an early user of an innovation need not be questioned merely because the person is from India, not known for its receptivity to new

devices (especially in the last century). I am almost certainly the first user of laptop computers in India and among the earliest in the world. In early 1985, I had begun an association with a Canadian engineering consulting company working on a project for East India Hotels. We struck an immediate rapport. In the Canadians' Delhi visit in February-March that year, I initiated them into the intricacies of one-day cricket while watching live telecasts of the World Championship Series then being played in Australia (in which Ravi Shastri won an Audi car as the player of the series).

When they returned in April, one of them had a Toshiba T1100 portable computer introduced globally just days earlier, which he had bought right before leaving for India for Canadian \$3,000. The covetous gleam in my eyes was evident to everyone, especially the leader of the Canadian team. He persuaded his colleague to sell the machine to me for ₹30,000 and voilà! I was the proud owner of this wonderful new piece of hardware within 10 days of its being on the market.

The Toshiba machine was technically not the first portable computer. Some experimental devices had been on the scene off and on for about a decade. But the Toshiba offering, fully compatible with the IBM PC, was "the world's first mass-market laptop computer," as its manufacturer most truthfully claimed.

A generation later, it can be called with some justification the dinosaur of laptops: It was slow, had only 256 kb RAM, no hard disk, used the then not readily available 31/2" diskettes (the standard ones were the 51/4" floppies), had a monochrome orange display and limited graphic ability and bulky as well. Toshiba proudly and rightly said it weighed just(!) 4 kg and fitted into a briefcase (it did, but took up all the space). But in 1985, it was nothing less than a marvel.

I had a presentation to make to the Oberoi board, with such distinguished members as B K Nehru and certainly not the last!

Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. Although I showed the key numbers in an overhead transparency presentation, I had saved the sensitivity analysis on the laptop. The venerable ing used a digital camera and board members were completely conemail in 1987 has got him bad vinced when the "little" machine answered all their what-if question with a few quick key strokes. The happy hour post the board meeting was entirely consumed by their eager handling of the computer.

A few weeks later, I had a meeting with Baba Kalyani of Bharat Forge. He used to come to the office after a morning round of the shop floor. That day he was a little behind the schedule. As I waited, his senior personal secretary wanted to know what was in my shoulder bag. I told her it was a computer. She did not believe it until I took it out and showed her. More than a decade later. I had called up Mr Kalvani's office to fix an appointment. I introduced myself and the voice at the other end said, "How can I forget you? You introduced me to laptops!'

Late in 1985, I went to North America for a series of meetings and discussions. Although airport security then was not as stringent as it is now, I had to invariably take out the laptop every time and demonstrate that it was a computer, much to the great amazement of the security personnel. And if I worked on it during a long wait in the departure lounge, a crowd was sure to collect, oohing and againg about the little wonder.

It was not just the hardware. The Canadians also gave me Microsoft Word, then just introduced. I found it much more user-friendly as compared to then Indian standard Wordstar and started using it immediately. People did not ask for soft copies of documents in those days, so I was spared the need of converting Word files into Wordstar. But I still think in Lotus 123 before building Excel worksheets!

So Mr Modi might be right in claiming to have used a digital camera in 1987, because Megavision started selling its Tessera camera then. He could have picked it up in his travels abroad or one of his many admirers may have presented him one. But the first truly digital camera, the Fuji DS-1P, came into the market in 1988, a year after Mr Modi claimed to have taken Lal Krishna Advani's digital picture. He could surely not have sent it through email, because the rudimentary, noncommercial services then available to select few anywhere in the world could not handle large picture files. Oh well, that would not be the first time when truth has been embellished a little and

Celebrity overdose on IPL helps or hurts brands?



YES, BUT... SANDEEP GOYAL

he IPL this year was an even bigger hit with television reach topping 444 million viewers — 259 million in Urban, 186 million in Rural — in BARC Week 18, May 3 data, and video viewership on Hotstar crossing 175 million in just the fourth week of the tournament. Subsequent weeks data, I am sure, will show even higher numteams slugged it out for supremacy in the stadia, there was another much bigger battle of the brands raging off the field, on your TV screens. So much was after all at stake.

Vodafone started a new trend way back in 2009 when they launched a special 'IPLonly' campaign with the ZooZoos, based on the realisation that the T20 tournament is the biggest (and zaniest) television property of the year, by far, and hence merits brand Lloyd aircons; Dream 11 had Dhoni who was

creatives that are different. The ritual has gained momentum over the years, and today many more brands debut on the IPL, and there are many more who create bespoke advertising only for the IPL window. Tata Harrier, Netflix Selection Day, and Sporto Red were among the noticeable debutants this year; Cadbury Fuse, Dream 11, PayTM, Zomato Premier League, Frooti, Myntra, and Vimal Elaichi, besides some others, broke new campaigns on the six-weeks long tournament on Star Sports. Similarly, on Hotstar, 'IPL-only' campaigns were run by Wrogn, Peter England wedding suits, Netflix-Bahubali, Halaplay, Fanfight, Freecharge, Budweiser, Cadbury gems, and ZooZoo Fanbreaks. All underlining the growing importance of the IPL to most brands seeking millennial audiences. Yes but, the most dramatic change that

the IPL has witnessed this year is the overload of celebrities being used by various brands to stand-out at the IPL. There was bers. No wonder, therefore, while the eight one, not two, not three but four Akshay Kumars on show in the Tata Intra mini-truck ad: Akshav was also seen peddling Envy 'French' deos and Policybazaar; Virat and Anushka were together, yet never in the same frame, in Google Duo and Myntra; Virat was alone in TooYumm; but featured alongside Harmanpreet and Mithali Raj for Royal Challenge; Ajay Devgn was selling Vimal Kesri; newly-weds Deepveer cosied up for

Alia Bhatt and Varun Dhawan were seen together in the Frooti Life campaign; new comers Vicky Kaushal and Kartik Arvan were featured by Vivo and Oppo; Aditya Roy Kapur was also roped in by Oppo; Aamir Khan was in PhonePe and Vivo; Shahrukh was playing mentor to kids in Byju and V-Nourish; Hema Malini continued her longstanding support to Kent RO; Mr Bachchan was fixing it for Dr Fixit; Ayushmann played pivot for Polycab; Ranbir Kapoor and Paresh Rawal were paired again in a new commercial for Coca Cola; Ranbir was also paired with Deepika in the Asian Paints ad. Phew! The list could go on and on and on, and if I were to also include the various cricketers from the various franchises featuring in team sponsor ads, it would be endless.

Suffice it to say there was almost as much of Bollywood on screen as cricket and cricketers in IPL 12. Celebrities, young and old, old and new, had been hired by brands as if without them their brand would have no identity. On the contrary, methinks, in the overcrowded celebrity parade during IPL, brands that did not use these famous crutches perhaps fared better. Swiggy with its endearing advertising, sans any famous faces, had ads that had both cut-through and high memorability. Who can forget the 'gulabjamun' ad they put out last year, and an equally hilarious sequel this year?

On IPL, there is undoubtedly a lot of

also pushing Bharat Matrimony and redBus; celebrity clutter. To neutralise that, one would presume, brands need to either hire a bigger star to dwarf competition or have creatives that are really outstanding and different. Unfortunately, both formulas don't necessarily always work. Just having a top-leaguer like Virat or Akshay may not really help because these

busy stars are the face of far too many brands. The danger therefore is that the star is remembered, the brand is not. Newcomer V-Nourish must have paid a bomb to hire Shahrukh, and aired its commercials with high frequency in the finals, but few if any would actually recall the brand name. Shahrukh to most viewers was just Byju.

For creatives that stand out, you have to either invest in creating a property like the ZooZoos or there is little hope of differentiation. Ranbir's acting and mannerisms are just the same in Coca Cola and Asian Paints; Aamir in PhonePe as the grandfather is almost wasted; four Akshays in Tata trucks don't tell the story any better.

So, have a celebrity by all means; but let him or her not just merge with the crowd of other famous faces. At ad-spots that cost ₹9-10 lakh per 10 seconds, and an endorsee that puts you back for a crore to 10-crore, if you are on IPL your choices are limited: either stand-out or get-out.

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1111011 SATURDAY, MAY 18, 2019



POST-WWII ORDER GONE

German chancellor Angela Merklel

There is no doubt that Europe needs to reposition itself in a changed world. The old certainties of the post-war order no longer apply... they are forcing us, time and again, to find common positions

RationalExpectations





More support for I-regret-collegium

Justice JS Verma regretted his role in collegium-creation, Fali Nariman wished he never won & now Justice Kurian has regrets

OT SURPRISINGLY, GIVEN how the sexual harassment charges against CJI Ranjan Gogoi were handled, to the allegations of intimidation of the complainant, the pendulum seems to be swinging away from the untrammeled power of the collegium, and towards the more consultative process envisaged by the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Bill that the Supreme Court contemptuously struck down in 2015. Indeed, the power of the collegium has been abused so often, and for so long, the disillusionment set in quite some time ago.

The collegium taking over the appointment/transfer of judges from the governmet began with the First Judges case and got further consolidated in the Second Judges case in 1993. In 2009, Fali Nariman, who was one of those who won the Second Judges case, said he regretted winning the case since the collegium hadn't really lived up to expectations. And CJI JS Verma, the author of the main judgment also regretted this, arguing that what he had envisaged was not primacy of the judiciary in appointments/transfers, but a more effective government consultation with the CJI instead of just a token one.

The latest to say I-regret-the-collegium is Justice Kurian Joseph who was one of the four judges who rejected the NJAC; only Justice J Chelameswar, who stopped attending collegium meetings as they were opaque/arbitrary, voted for NJAC. So, what was a 4:1 defeat could have become 3:2 if Justice Joseph had felt this way a few years ago, and who is to say this wouldn't have swayed another judge to make it a 3:2 NJAC victory? At a Vidhi Legal book-launch, Justice Joseph said that he was expressing his regret considerably faster — in under four years — than CJI Verma; while he was once optimistic about the collegium, he said, it had only got worse. Indeed, even as he agreed with Justice Lokur on how separation of powers in the NJAC judgment—between government and judiciary—"is the tec-

With Justice Kurian

regretting his

collegium-support,

the anti-NJAC ruling

could have been 3:2

instead of 4:1 and

that could have

persuaded a third

judge to come

around—a case of

repent at leisure

tonic structure of the Constitution", Justice Kurian had ruled "the present Collegium …lacks transparency, accountability and objectivity..The trust-deficit has affected the credibility of the Collegium …very serious allegations and many a time not unfounded too, have been raised". In 2015, his judgment spoke of blatant violations, bad appointments, dictatorial attitude of the collegium, etc, but at that point, he felt, "to me, it is a curable situation yet".

Ironically, such is the CJI's complete power, much of what Justice Gogoi accused then CJI Dipak Misra of doing—in that famous press conference along with three other judges—such as presiding over benches where he had a self-interest, were things he repeated as CJI; he presided over the first bench that discussed the sexual harassment allegations, and even said this was part of a larger conspiracy to hobble him.

While the four judges raised the issue of judicial corruption—including allocating cases to certain benches— with

then CJI Misra, they also spoke of Justice CS Karnan who gave a list of 20 corrupt sitting/retired Supreme Court and high court judges. While the letter of the four judges spoke of the need to "revisit the process of appointment of judges and to set up a mechanism for corrective measures other than impeachment", no action was taken under CJI Gogoi. Indeed, even after the bribery charge against Justice Nirmal Yadav of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, she was only transferred to another court and her case is still pending after a decade; there has been no proper investigation of the charges made against judges—including the then CJI—by former Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Kalikho Pul in his suicide note. Some of this falls under the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill that was brought into Parliament in 2010—it was to have a National Judicial Oversight Committee, a Complaints Scrutiny Panel and an Investigation Committee—but it got scuttled.

While collegium-supporters feel judicial independence is part of the Constitution's

basic structure, and that consultation with the CJI means concurrence — which is how the CJI has the last word — Justice Chelameswar said this was not the case in countries like the US and the UK; in the US, the president appoints judges with the advice and consent of the Senate. And while the proximate cause for the collegium was the government riding rough-shod over the judiciary, Justice Chelameswar pointed out that the transfer of 16 high court judges by the President in 1976 was done in consultation with the CJI. He records how "of 53 appointments of Judges to some High Courts made in 1984-85,32 were made on the recommendations of acting Chief Justices...it is believed that the senior most Judges of some High Courts (from where the said 32 recommendations had originated) who initiated those recommendations as acting Chief Justices, were made permanent Chief Justices only after they agreed to recommend names suggested by the Executive".

And, on the issue of the independence of the judiciary being part of the basic structure of the Constitution, Justice Chelameswar quotes BR Ambedkar as saying, "it would be dangerous to leave the appointments to be made by the President, without any kind of reservation or limitation, that is to say, merely on the advice of the executive of the day" and that "to make every appointment which the executive wishes to make subject to the concurrence of the Legislature is also not a very suitable provision". And yet, Ambedkar says, "to allow the Chief Justice practically a veto upon the appointment of Judges is really to transfer the authority to the Chief Justice which we are not prepared to vest in the President or the Government of the day. I therefore, think that that is also a dangerous proposition".

The current crisis in the SC will blow over, especially if the judges close ranks, as they did after CJI Misra retired. But till there is untrammeled power for the Collegium and the CJI and there is no independent mechanism to investigate/sack corrupt judges, the crisis will keep reappearing. The latest cases—three of them within the space of a few months—where SC orders were changed by lower functionaries are yet another symptom of this.

GenderGOOGLY

Some Bengaluru colleges are punishing girls for better performance by posting higher cut-offs for them vis-a-vis boys

TIS RATHER unfortunate that some colleges in Bengaluru are fixing higher cut-offs for girls for admission into pre-University (PU, or +2/XI-XII) because girls have performed better than boys, and the colleges fear that a flat cut-off would mean that girls will significantly outnumber boys in the colleges, affecting "gender balance". This is nothing but punishing girls for performing better. The irony is that the proponents of this "affirmative action" are citing an order of Karnataka's department of pre-university education that was meant to encourage colleges to admit more girls—the department had asked colleges to follow an equal number of girls and boys seat-matrix to ensure more girls were given admission. The order did not specify anything on posting separate cut-offs.

given admission. The order did not specify anything on posting separate cut-offs.

In Bengaluru's reputed Christ Junior College, the science cut-off for boys and girls is 94.1% and 95.1, respectively, while in MES PU College, it is 92% and 95%! Similar cut-offs have been posted for the arts and commerce streams, too. Affirmative action is based on historic and continuing social disadvantage. While women have suffered such disadvantage in a deeply patriarchal set up—a reasonwhy there were fewer women in colleges—by no stretch of understanding can boys be considered disadvantaged in the particular case. Each individual case may vary, but as a norm, boys would have received the same opportunities to learn. Also, in the face of any fear of boys being left behind by girls, the focus should be on creating more infrastructure. When nearly every expert sees greater participation of women in the labour force as key to future growth, stunting them at the start is a cardinal sin.

RATE OF PROGRESS

FROM JANUARY 2015 TO JUNE 2018, THERE WERE SEVEN REDUCTIONS IN THE REPORATE, AMOUNTING TO 200 BPS, AND BANKS' WALR CHANGED BY 205 BPS DURING THE PERIOD

Banks have been transmitting rate cuts

RE WE BEING unfair when we constantly fret over the slow transmission of interest rates by banks when the reporate is cut? This has become a habit of late, one where there is a lot of concern raised on the slow transmission process. The storyline is now familiar. RBI lowers the repo rate and is joined by the government which presses banks to take action on lending rates. Periodically, bankers are summoned to Delhi, and the case is put forward on lowering rates. The view put forth by economists and analysts is that the banks are not following RBI's suit, and that blunts the efficacy of monetary policy. How far is this true?

Two things need to be understood here. The first is that the lending rate is driven by a formula. There is the base rate and the MCLR (an improvement over the base rate concept), which is driven by a formula. One variable in the formula is the reporate; that, however, affects a very small part of the total cost of funds and is negligible (total LAF borrowings at repo rate is fixed at 1% of NDTL). The most important component is the deposit cost, which has to change. If this cost changes, the base rate or MCLR will come down accordingly. This becomes the benchmark for banks to decide on other lending rates. Therefore, the crux is the changing of the deposit rate and the benchmark lending rate.

The second is that the mechanics of interest rates changes. Banks first have to lower deposit rates. But all deposits are generally contractual and have fixed rates till maturity. Hence, when it comes to time deposits, the new price can come in with a hiatus, say, when the deposits come for renewal or when new deposits are reckoned. Therefore, even if deposit rates are lowered, the impact on cost would come with a lag. Now, when it comes to lending rates, once



lowered, it would be applicable for all loans and, hence, the revenue would dip for the bank when rates are reduced. Hence there is a priori reason to believe that the pace of lowering of lending rates will be calibrated with time. But what is the true picture?

The accompanying graphic looks at the changes in interest rates developments since January 2015. The movements in the repo rate are mapped with the changes in the extent to which the WALR (weighted average lending rate) on fresh rupee loans sanctioned has moved.

The idea here is to look at the month in which the reporate was changed and see the corresponding change in the WALR during the period when the new reporate change was valid, which would be till the next change in policy was announced. From January 2015 to June 2018, there were seven reductions in the reporate (six occasions of 25 bps each and one of 50 bps), amounting to 200 bps, and the weighted average lending rate (WALR) of banks changed by an equivalent of 205 bps during this period. This indicates an elasticity factor of 1. When the repo rate was increased by 50 bps in the next two policies, the WALR for banks rose by 51 bps, which is again an elasticity of 1. Therefore, if one tracks the changes on the repo and the reaction of banks to these changes, it does appear that banks have been very receptive to policy. There is little reason to believe that there is any

The change will not be instantaneous for sure and will take time to

transmission issue with banks.

work out, as can be seen in the graphic. There are processes involved in the bank where the ALCO meets and decides on the interest rate action. In fact, when the rate-cut is allowed to work through for a longer period of time, which can be more than six months, then the effect is sharper and the past rate-cuts also get included in the final impact. This has been so in all the three instances when the WALR has changed by more than 40 bps over the longer time period. In two of these cases, the reaction was to an immediate cut of only 25 bps—in October 2016 and August 2017.

Hence, quite to the contrary, it appears that banks have actually been very receptive to RBI's policy changes and passed on the benefit of lower repo

rates to the customers. This does not appear apparent when one looks at just the base rate or MCLR that have tended to be sluggish in changing as they are driven by the formula where the deposit rate is critical. This is probably why it does look as if banks lower their deposit rates at a faster pace than their lending rates. But, as the data shows, this is not true and banks do in fact give a good part of the benefit to the average customer. In fact, one could argue that banks have been doing so even though the NPA levels have been high, where the credit risk environment has not been congenial. Ideally, these rates should be less than elastic when the credit risk perception is higher.

This data should also satisfy RBI that has been trying to reconcile the phenomenon of reporate changes with market interest rates. In a way, it is a vindication of the efficacy of monetary policy. Data, however, indicate that the interest rate cut should be given time to work through and, typically, a longer time-period relates well with policy changes. There is definitely no need to get overly critical of bank reaction to policy changes.

Change in repo

	Quantum of change	Period of new repo rate	Quantum of change in WALR
Jan 2015	-25	Jan-Feb 2015	-17
March 2015	-25	Mar-May 2015	-22
June 2015	-25	Jun-Aug 2015	-9
Sep 2015	-50	Sep'15-Mar 2016	-50
Apr 2016	-25	Apr-Sep 2016	-12
Oct 2016	-25	Oct 16-Jul2 017	-55
Aug 2017	-25	Aug 17-May 2018	-40
Jun 2018	+25	Jun-Jul 2018	+23
Aug 2018	+25	Aug 18-Jan 2019	+28
Feb 2019	-25	Feb 2019	-12
Apr 2019	-25		
Source: RBI			

Don't drag India into a trade war

India's future, trading some short-term gains for more important long-term returns is implicitly required

For the US to be a stakeholder in



Bloomberg

First China. Now India? In recent months, US president Donald Trump has made clear that the trade war will reach beyond the People's Republic. Not only has he threatened Japan and Europe with import duties on cars, he's repeatedly blasted India as "the tariff king."

Trump has obsessed over the Asian giant's high levies on Harley-Davidson motorcycles and complained about its modest \$24.3 billion surplus in trade with the US. In March, the president gave Congress notice that he plans to terminate duty-free privileges for \$5.6 billion worth of Indian exports to the US. He could do so at any moment.

And Trump may not stop there. His administration is toying with the idea of exercising the same legal authority used to levy unilateral tariffs against China to impose higher duties on India. Imagine the world's largest democracy, which Washington has diligently sought to enlist as an ally against Beijing, being lumped together with America's main strategic competitor.

India represents the rare bright spot in US foreign policy. With much difficulty, a years-long, bipartisan effort has greatly deepened ties with the prickly emerging power. Once considered the ultimate swing state, India is now seen as the fulcrum of the White House's Asia strategy.

Trump's trade tactics appear to reflect a belief that the US can fight tooth-and-nail with friends such as Europe and Japan without jeopardizing broader strategic ties or undermining efforts to balance China. Even in the unlikely event he's right, given that those longtime allies count on the US security umbrella, that's hardly a winning play in India.

The country hasn't entirely shed a post-colonial mindset; it fervently values its autonomy and its place as a

non-aligned nation. Regardless of how powerful strategic ties have grown in recent years, India still has no interest in a formal alliance with the US.

Successive US administrations have generally been willing to respect India's choices. At the same time, they've quietly labored to strengthen habits of cooperation. Through a series of actions — in particular a civilian nuclear agreement reached in 2005 — these administrations have effectively declared: "India's rise lies in America's interests."

If frictions were now limited to rade, those common

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trade, those common interests might provide enough glue to maintain this positive momentum. Instead, the Trump administration's complaints have expanded to include demands that India cut oil imports from Iran to zero and abruptly end significant arms purchases from Russia, or else face sanctions. The

president has even belittled India's significant development contributions in Afghanistan. All this only reinforces the suspi-

cions some Indians still hold about US reliability. Being a stakeholder in India's future implicitly requires trading some short-term gains for more important long-term returns. The Trump administration should remember that an economically vibrant India will also be a much more capable strategic partner.

A hasty step such as removing developing-nation trade benefits, on the other hand, could begin to undermine the core logic of the partnership. Whatever government emerges from Indian elections that conclude later this month may well decide it

has little choice but to respond with retaliatory duties.

This would run counter to India's own interests, of course. A trade confrontation with the US would undermine its argument that global companies should choose its huge, young, tech-savvy market as an alternative to China. Foreign investment is crucial to helping India develop its economy and play a more robust regional role.

It's also worth pointing out that Trump is not entirely wrong. India is in need of trade reform and could have taken useful steps after Washington launched an April 2018 investigation

into its practices and before the onset of the current political season. Instead New Delhi made scant progress and even slid backwards. The new government should swiftly revisit illiberal trade policies that hamper India's regional economic integration, exports, global competitiveness and labor productivity.

A number of those

policies are actually designed with China in mind. Like the US, India runs by far its largest trade deficit with its wealthier neighbor. If just afforded a chance, it might quietly lend a hand to US efforts to change China's trade approach.

The Trump administration should give Indian leaders at least a couple months to get organized and draft some serious proposals, including on e-commerce restrictions. While the US dukes it out with China, India can hopefully get its act together and give Trump less incentive to launch another ill-advised trade assault.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BJP loses its moderate guard It is sad that in this day and age we

are expending our time and energy on discussing whether Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse was a terrorist or a patriot. Things have now come to such a pass that a candidate fielded by India's ruling and principal party could openly hail Godse as a desh bhakt. One man's terrorist is not just another man's freedom fighter, but also a patriot, it would seem. Pragya Singh Thakur's unabashed glorification of Godse was clearly beyond the pale. Still several BJP leaders are unapologetic about her eulogizing Godse. One BJP leader described Mahatma Gandhi as the Father of Pakistan. Another leader said if Godse killed one person, Rajiv Gandhi killed thousands, 1700, to be precise. Thankfully, Sadhvi agreed to toe the party line of respecting Mahatma Gandhi and refusing to extol Godse as a patriot. BJP was under political compulsion and pressure to extract an apology from the saffron-clad 'firebrand' leader. Be that as it may, it is hard to comprehend why a patriot should kill or want to kill another patriot or compatriot. To her credit, Sadhvi did not say that Mahatma Gandhi was not a patriot. While Sadhvi was honest enough to say what she felt about Godse, most of her party men are hypocritical. They share her view of Godse, still maintain a strategic silence condemn one among their number for fear of public anger. The glorification of Godse by a person who prospered in BJP tells us something about the party and its virulence. Despite the claimed divergence between her 'personal view' and 'party view', Sadhvi certainly represents Sangh Parivar's world-view or else she would not have risen to her present 'stature' and 'fame'. With the take-over of BJP by the Modi-Shah duo, the moderates in the mould of Vajpayee in what is essentially a Hindu rightwing party have become extinct. — G David Milton, Maruthancode

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

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FINANCIAL EXPRESS

The many facets of Sino-US trade dispute

The bottom line is that Xi Jinping may have provoked the dispute, departing from the dictum of China "biding its time" before its time—a cumulative backlash to China's actions in Taiwan and North-east Asia, and the South China Sea



The author is a Singapore-based Sinologist, and adjunct fellow at the Institute of Chinese

has retaliated with a tariff hike of 5% to

has multiple dimensions.



25% on \$60-billion worth of US goods. advantage on an 'on and While China has framed the retaliatory off' basis. The Chinese measures in terms of respect and dignity, themselves may not be the American tariffs go well beyond the necessarily opposed to economic dimension. In fact, the Ameri-'regulatory mechanism' as they view the can response appears as part of an evolving strategy that takes a long-term pic-CCP as the reincarture of China as an economic and nated Confucian strategic rival. Clearly, the trade dispute 'paternal state'/emperorship of yore that upholds the There is ample writing on the wall to suggest that the here and now matters 'mandate of heaven', and

(CCP)/state could work it to

much less to the American long-term national interests rather strategic interests. The recent statement than personalistic interests. by the US Secretary of State, Mike Pom-That said, the American tarpeo-that of China posing a challenge of iffs go well beyond the economic dimension and should be understood in "an authoritarian regime that's integrated economically into the West in in the context of China's rise and recent ways that the Soviet Union never was" actions. China's territorial claims in the is an inkling of how the US views China: East and South China Sea, land reclama-Somewhat of a formidable combination tion, military facilities and maritime of the politics of the Iron Curtain with the militia in the South China Sea have caused concern. In a striking departure, economics of the Japanese miracle. This constitutes the backdrop to the Sino-US British and French ships have joined the Freedom of Navigation Operations trade talks. (FONOPS). Recently, India participated in The US has cited China reneging on negotiations where the 'enforcement naval exercises with the US, Japan and the

mechanism' remains a point of con-Philippines in the South China Sea. Other key differences between the US tention. The US has been trying to pin China down to legislation—regulations and China include Taiwan and Northand laws embedded in the legislative east Asia (North Korea), areas where process aimed at curbing forced tech-China challenges the primacy of the American 'pivot'. On Taiwan, China feels nology transfer and intellectual property protection, rather than have the a national anxiety underpinned by a feelcontinued scenario where foreign coming that time is running out for reunifipanies are welcome into China but have cation. This has to be understood in the to partner with local companies, which context of Taiwan's demography. Taiwan forces transfers. has a population of 23.7 million and 40.7

While it is a forgone conclusion that both the US and China will be affected by tariffs, China will be more so. In the US, the load of tariffs will impact US importers and indirectly impact consumers who now have to pay more for Chinese goods. For the Chinese, the tariff hike shows that President Trump is no 'paper tiger'

is the current median age. Those aged 65 and above will make up 20% of the total population by 2026. In other words, the post-1949 generation (born and brought up in Taiwan) is increasing, and the older generation with memories of China and

the emotional impulse of reunification is decreasing.

ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

Instead of reunification, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who faces re-election (January 2020), has called for support of Taiwan's democracy, tellingly saying:

"...I think the experience of Hong Kong teaches the Taiwanese a lot."

As for North-east Asia, it continues to be unstable, with renewed tensions following North Korea's resumption of shortrange missile tests (May 4 and May 9, 2019), the first missile launches since the North Korea's ICBM in 2017. In a parallel development, the US has seized North Korean cargo ship named Wise Honest (exporting North Korean coal) for violating sanctions. Wise Honest has been towed away to Pago Pago, American Samoa.

North-east Asia has gained centre stage once again, given that the diplomatic high following President Trump-Chairman Kim summit (Singapore, 2018) has touched a new low—following the dismembered talks at the President Trump-Chairman Kim summit (Hanoi, 2019).

> The optics in North-east Asia is critical, given that it is the last bastion of the Cold War between China, North Korea and Russia on one hand, and the US, South Korea and Japan on the other.

> Much of the enthusiasm surrounding the 4.27 Panmunjom Declaration (April 27, 2018), which marked the first Inter-Korean meet in a decade, has dissipated. The key Panmunjom Declaration for Peace Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula at Panmunjom (the first Inter-

Korean meet) that affirmed the conversion of the armistice agreement into a peace agreement and a nuclear-free Korean peninsula is yet to materialise. The fourth Inter-Korean meet is yet to take place. On ground, UN operations have stalled DMZ Tours to Panmunjom at the DMZ (Demilitarised Zone).

The US has been frustrated that sanctions on North Korea have had limited impact on North Korea, given that for China and Russia, North Korea is a 'core interest'. North Korea has been holding up, despite being in the midst of what the UN estimates a severe 'hunger crisis'. Ten million North Koreans are at risk after a bad harvest, with the 2018-19 food crop production 4.9 million metric tonnes, the lowest since 2008-09. The food deficit is estimated to be 1.36 million metric tonnes.

The South China Sea and North-east

Asia speak volumes about the niggling issues festering in the US backyard, whilst Sino-US talks are out in the front yard.

While it is a forgone conclusion that both the US and China will be affected by the tariffs, China will be more so. In the US the load of the tariffs will impact US importers and indirectly impact consumers who now have to pay more for Chinese goods. The US may tilt towards a 'better late than never'approach. For the Chinese, the tariff hike shows

that President Trump is no 'paper tiger' Despite the hoopla surrounding Sino-US trade talks (or even the summit meeting with Chairman Kim in Hanoi), Trump has walked away, holding the line. This is a departure from the previous decades when China was given leeway, when it was weaker. Trump's stance may have a favourable bearing on his reelection bid in 2020. On China's part, reactions to the tariffs

have been low-key and, if anything, have been downplayed by the official media. China's commerce ministry has said that 'necessary counter measures' would be taken. Vice-Premier Liu He has sought restraint on both sides and need to nip 'unlimited escalation' in the bud likening the talks to 'running a marathon ... that gets harder as you reach the final stages'.

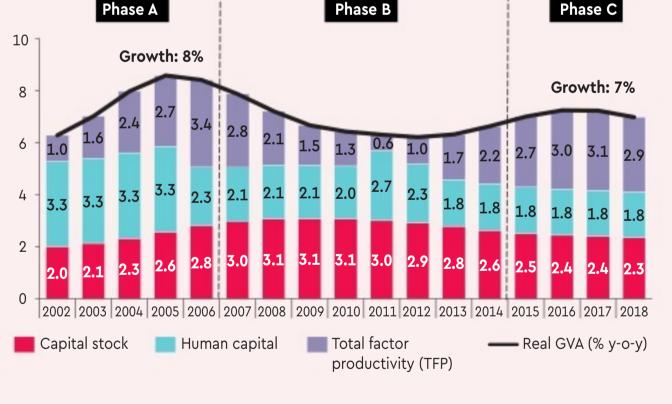
Chinese media is showing restraint, too. The People's Daily (Communist Party's newspaper) carried an article saying the US had "misjudged China's strength, capacity and will, further escalating trade friction between our two countries." The China Daily'deeply regrets'the tariff hike, running a collection of comments by global analysts on the implications of the tariffs. Even the *Global Times*, known for its acidic tongue, showed uncharacteristic restraint, saying that 2019 marked 40 years of Sino-US relations and that "at 40, one should no longer be confused." China is not blowing its own trumpet about the retaliatory tariffs either.

Despite the lowbrow, low-key, muted criticism of America and, importantly, the absence of criticism about China's own political leadership, there is little escaping political damnation. In China, where 'face' (mianzi or 'keeping face') is key, China seems to have 'lost face' in the global order. Has China erred in judgement and made a miscalculation-of departing from the dictum 'biding its time'before its time? That is the question that Zhongnanhai must ask itself.

DATA DRIVE

India's growth curve: TFP peaked in 2006

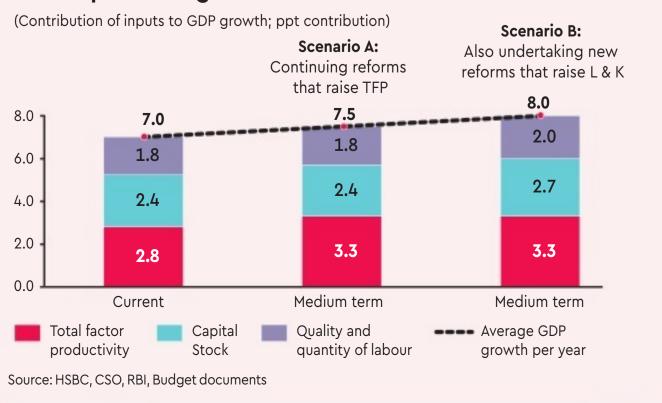
(Contribution of inputs to GDP growth; ppt contribution)



Private investment remains weak



Augmenting labour and capital is critical for raising India's potential growth



Post May 23, focus on reforms

FTER THE ELECTION results are announced on May 23 and a new government at the Centre is formed, the focus must shift towards the reform agenda. As gross domestic product is assumed to be produced by combining physical capital and human capital at the economy's overall level of productivity or total factor productivity, pushing up growth from 7% to 8% would require reforms that augment capital and labour. A report by HSBC says that the period from 2004 to 2006 reported a spurt in total factor productivity and the capital stock,

raising India's potential growth. Strong global liquidity and growth too helped, which pushed up India's potential growth level to 8%.

After the global financial crisis in 2008, India's growth started falling and all drivers of growth—capital, labour and total factor productivity weakened considerably. Growth performance since 2015 has been different as the drivers are no longer moving in tandem. The report points out that the growth in the capital stock is falling, reflected in the decline in investment rate. Gross fixed capital

formation dropped to 28.6% of GDP in FY18 from an all-time high of 34.3% as private sector investment remained stagnant at 11% of GDP during the period. Household investment, which accounts for small and medium enterprises, reported a steep fall—from 15.7% of GDP in

The report underlines the fact that even if the new government does not undertake any new big bang reforms, but simply focuses on recently enacted ones like GST, IBC and digital payments to settle down, potential growth could

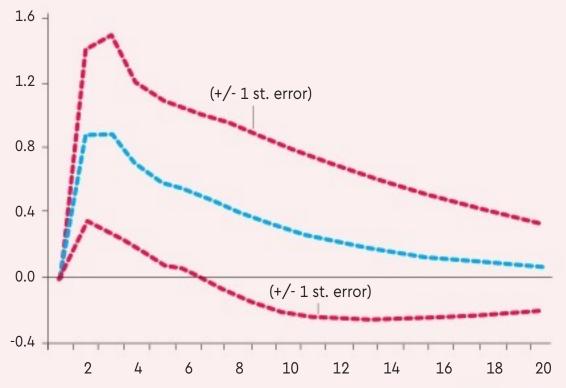
FY12 to 10.3% in FY18.

rise from 7% to 7.5% through impact

on total factor productivity. In order to raise public investment in a fiscally responsible way, the government needs to raise revenues. Disinvestment, improving GST structure, enacting a new and improved Direct Taxes Code and monetising land holdings can help in raising funds. Higher fiscal revenues, the HSBC report says, will give some legroom for raising public, and thereby private investment, as higher public investment tends to crowd in private investment in the country.

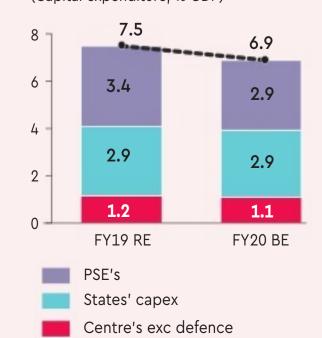
Public investments crowd in private investment

(Unit response of all new private projects to one unit rise in all new public projects)



Public sector's spend on capex is likely to fall

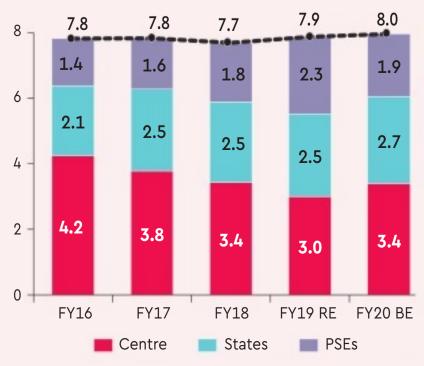
(Capital expenditure; % GDP)



--- Total exc defence

Public sector is running an elevated borrowing programme

(Gross market borrowings; % GDP)



WORDLY WISE

INTOLERANCE IS ITSELF A FORM OF VIOLENCE AND AN OBSTACLE TO THE GROWTH OF A TRUE

DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT. — MAHATMA GANDHI

The Indian EXPRESS

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

BJP's SADHVI TEST

Party may have sent her a show cause notice. But it is Sadhvi who has posed a question to BJP on its nationalism

ADHVI PRAGYA THAKUR, accused in the Malegaon terror blasts case, who is out on bail and the BJP's candidate for the Lok Sabha elections in Bhopal, has been issued a show cause notice by the party for her comments hailing Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse as a "patriot". The BJP's disciplinary committee has given her 10 days to respond, reiterated party president Amit Shah at a press conference on Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi by his side. The PM has, separately, condemned Candidate Pragya's remarks. The PM and the party president have publicly disapproved of the Sadhvi's comments, therefore, not long after they staunchly endorsed her controversial candidature. Yet, the BJP's Sadhvi problem may only just have

Pragya Thakur's praise of Godse follows close on the heels of her outrageous claim that it was her curse that sent Hemant Karkare to his death — the Maharashtra ATS officer, who led the probe into the Malegaon blasts case, died fighting terrorists during 26/11. At that time, too, the BJP was compelled to distance itself from her remarks. There is no predicting what the BJP may have to rush to explain or apologise for next — possibly on the floor of the House, if she should win the election. But appointing a permanent spokesperson for apologies for Pragya Thakur's remarks may not be a solution either. The Sadhvi's comments on Gandhi have only brought to the fore a simmering predicament that will not go away. There is a deep strain of unease within the BJP and the Sangh Parivar with Gandhi, and his repudiation of the majoritarian claim and ethos, even as the Modi-BJP has set out to appropriate political-cultural icons, especially Gandhi, in order to relegate the Congress. But the problem lies not in debating Gandhi, nor in criticising him. In fact, if anything, his deification as Father of the Nation has meant that a deeply political thinker has not got his due share of disagreement. The problem, really, is that today, the refuting of Gandhi comes wrapped in a toxic nationalism that encourages a sense of seige in the Hindu majority, rides on a historical and cultural illiteracy, and intolerance of the Other, and even emboldens violence.

Those like the Sadhvi were once said to be the BIP's fringe. Today, her elevation in the party is posing a crucial question mark against its moderate space. While a party can carry along internal complexities and contradictions, Pragya Thakur's candidature from Bhopal, and her comments, highlight a larger question that the show cause notice sent to her does little to answer: Does the BIP participate in, does it own up to, her version of desh bhakti, her brand of nationalism? It is not so much the BJP that is asking the Sadhvi to explain herself today. It is the Sadhvi who has posed a question to the BJP on its nationalism that it cannot evade or escape.

10 YEARS LATER

Sri Lanka is still to take steps towards reconciliation and accountability, a decade after the LTTE's defeat

T IS 10 years since the Sri Lankan military defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam decisively, ending a long and violent chapter in the history of the island nation, one that India was drawn into for a full decade, first on the side of the LTTE, and then against them. The LTTE started off as an insurgency in response to the failure of the country's dominant Sinhala-Buddhist leadership to accommodate Tamil political aspirations. In their quest for an independent Eelam, the Tigers built themselves into a formidable fighting machine that conscripted children and used human shields, as well as a ruthless terrorist group that, with the 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, introduced the world to suicide bombs. By the time its leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, was killed at the end of the war on May 18, 2009, it had lost all political purpose and had rejected every chance at a peaceful settlement. Prabhakaran had turned it into a cult of the leader. Over three decades, he led the Tamil people into four self-serving "Eelam Wars", for which they paid the heaviest price.

Rid of the LTTE, Sri Lanka could have been magnanimous in its military victory and made efforts to heal the wounds of the Tamil community by addressing immediate post war issues, including accountability in the Sri Lankan forces. Instead, unfazed by international censure, it gave in to a triumphal Sinhala-Buddhist militarism, fanned by the Rajapaksa clan that saw this as the way to perpetuate its own power. President Rajapaksa's 2014 electoral comeuppance was supposed to be Sri Lanka's new dawn. The militarism wound down immediately, and in its first few months, the unlikely coalition of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, seemed ready to do what it would take towards political reconciliation and accountability, including a list of commitments to the UN Human Rights Council. Unfortunately, their bickering with each other ensured that some of those steps remain implemented on paper only, while constitutional reform to address the Tamil political question is stuck.

The Easter bombings, claimed by the ISIS and carried out by what so far seems like an ISIS inspired local group, have rudely destroyed whatever recovery Sri Lanka had managed to make. The aftermath of the attacks that killed more than 250 people have cracked wide open new ethnic faultines that might have been addressed if the Sri Lankan polity had taken the task of nation-building and constitutional reform after the war as a serious and urgent project. That the top two leaders of the country are still engaged in a game of one-upmanship with each other inspires little confidence.

A MERRIER GAME

AirBadminton could rope in a new demographic, let some fresh air and fun into the court

AKING A CUE from how the sport grew organically in back lanes and parks, where more recreational players toss around the shuttle than those sweating it out in high-ceilinged indoor courts, AirBadminton is racing towards a 2020 season. This development holds the potential for roping in a new demographic from untouched corners of Africa and America as well as mixed 3-member teams from the traditional hubs, in a fun format never seen before...

For Indians, these are merry tidings. Not many childhoods have missed out on the hurriedly assembled net and the endless summer afternoons and winter evenings spent playing casually outdoors, with the sole motive of keeping the shuttle in play. Badminton

is perhaps the most popular recreational sport right upto the senior citizens category. This isn't too dissimilar to the 3X3 basketball that Americans indulge in with hoops casually jutting out of outer walls. Or how South America scouts for its footballers — Pele and Maradona were first spotted off the streets. Closer home, Indian outdoor shuttlers are perhaps closest to how Pakistan channels its tape-ball cricketers and routinely unearths 150+ pace bowlers catapulted into the national team. Next to cricket, badminton has been India's second largest participatory sport — perhaps more even, given girls are not kept away from the 'building compound' games. An organised tournament structure for the outdoor sport might well mean that a Pullela Gopichand or Prakash Padukone with their highly trained eye get invited as chief guests to many such breezy AirBadminton outdoor tournaments, and can scout the thousands who for many reasons, financial mostly, never knocked on the doors of the state of the art academies.

Gulf crisis, India's stakes



Turmoil in Persian Gulf will hurt India's economy. Delhi must rethink policy options if US ignores its concerns

Sanjaya Baru

THE GEOGRAPHY, POLITICS, security and stability of West Asia over the past century have always been about oil. Nations were created, regimes were changed and wars have been waged in the name of oil. From the First World War till the Second Gulf War, it was about Western powers securing access to oil. Over the past decade, with the US becoming self-reliant on the energy front, the focus of US policy has shifted to retaining control over the sources of supply, and not just ensuring its supply. This is by now a commonplace observation. But it is an observation that merits repetition. Renewed tension in the Persian Gulf is not about over-powering Iran-sponsored terrorism. It is about securing control over Iran-produced oil.

Structural changes in the market for energy have, in particular, reduced US dependence on imported oil and, in general, Western dependence on hydrocarbons. While the trans-Atlantic nations, especially the US, no longer depend on Gulf oil, Asian economies, including China, Japan, South Korea and India, depend critically on Gulf oil. India's dependence on imported oil has risen sharply over the past decade, and now exceeds 90 per cent of its domestic consumption. By destabilising regions of the world that supply oil and gas, the US is throwing sand into the engine of Asian economic growth, keeping Rising Asia off-balance.

Be it hydrocarbons or

nuclear, any denial of access

to new sources of energy or

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damage as a consequence of

economic containment of

China. Indian diplomacy

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hurting India.

will, therefore, have to ensure

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hurting China do not end up

could suffer collateral

US policy of the geo-

growth prospects as much as

Consider the fact that US hostility towards Venezuela and Iran is having the effect of imposing constraints on the supply side at a time the market for oil was shifting from being a sellers' market into becoming a buyers' market. Decline in oil consumption and the increased use of renewables had begun to ease demand pressures, but geopolitics has intervened to once again destabilise the market. The countries most hurt are India, China and several developing coun-

Having reinforced US influence within the Arab Sunni world, the US has been seeking to secure control of the Shia Islamic world Kuwait are the major oil exporting nations that increasingly sell their oil to Asian economies, including China, India, Japan, Korea and the ASEAN economies. Regime change in Venezuela is also impacting the supply of oil. That President Trump seeks the geo-eco-

— including Iraq, Syria and Iran. Saudi Arabia,

the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Iran and

nomic containment of China is no secret. In an influential treatise, *The Rise of China vs The* Logic of Strategy (2012), Harvard scholar Edward Luttwak made the point convincingly that the only way the US could deal with a rising China would be through its geoeconomic containment, applying "the logic of strategy in the grammar of commerce", by restricting Chinese exports into (US) markets, denying raw materials to China insofar as possible, and stopping whatever technology transfers China would still need for the future. Luttwak suggested that US policy goal ought to be to slow down China's economic growth so as to ensure adverse domestic economic and political consequences that would exert pressure on China's leadership to act more in accordance with Western interests.

Many countries, including India, may appreciate Trump's trade policy action against China because they have all been saddled with a persistent imbalance in their trade with China. However, bringing energy into play will not be acceptable to most economies, especially those like India that are now excessively dependent on imported Gulf oil. Nor, indeed, can India afford to support any policy of containment against China that would also end up hurting India.

That the military threat to Iran could in fact be part of such a geo-economic containment is a point that another Harvard scholar has more recently made. William R Polk, a professor of history at the universities of Harvard and Chicago, views Iran as "the missing pillar in an American policy of imperium in imperio toward China. One way or another — threat, surrender, regime change or war — Trump believes that Iran must be brought into line." The "Trump Doctrine", suggests Polk, is that the US should be able to dictate the pace of Chinese economic growth by controlling the price and supply of oil.

The use of access to energy as a neo-imperialist tool in a strategy of restraining the rise of emerging economies is an argument that has long been made even in the discourse on climate change. The former chief economic advisor to the government of India, Arvind Subramanian, had dubbed it "carbon imperialism" - the strategy of denying access to coal and other hydrocarbons in the name of climate change and thereby, hurting developing country growth prospects.

Be it hydrocarbons or nuclear, any denial of access to new sources of energy or any increase in the cost of energy can only hurt India's growth prospects as much as it would hurt China. India could suffer collateral damage as a consequence of US policy of the geo-economic containment of China. Indian diplomacy will, therefore, have to ensure that economic actions being taken by the US aimed at hurting China do not end up hurting India also. Hence, India has a stake in ensuring peace and stability in the Persian Gulf.

Sure, India can diversify its sourcing of oil and reduce its dependence on Iranian oil, as it has done before, but the problem of rising cost will remain. The destabilisation of the Persian Gulf will impact prices even before it impacts supply. That is already happening. If President Trump is insensitive to India's concerns, New Delhi will have to seriously rethink its foreign policy options since sustaining high economic growth with low inflation is a fundamental developmental priority and a key strategic objective.

The writer is Distinguished Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies & Analysis, New Delhi

CURSE OF THE BLACK LAW

Asia Bibi's plight retrains the spotlight on Pakistan's Blasphemy Law

KHALED AHMED

THE BIG news on May 8 was that Asia Bibi, acquitted two years ago by the Supreme Court of blasphemy, was finally allowed to leave for Canada to join her already exiled family. She had rotted in jail for eight years as the judges refused to challenge the injustice of Pakistan's infamous Blasphemy Law. What the sessions court had ruled could not be set aside by the High Court either. Even at the Supreme Court, it took a lot of guts to let the innocent woman walk.

A Christian, Asia Bibi was convicted of blasphemy in 2010 under dubious circumstances. She was treated as an untouchable by society, and called unclean because of her religion whereupon a quarrel ensued. She was then accused of insulting the Holy Prophet, triggering prompt police action who put her in jail. A cleric "maulvi" said she had, indeed, blasphemed.

This "black law", Pakistan Penal Code's (PPC) Section 295-C, inserted into the Penal Code by an Act in 1986, has made hundreds rot in jail. It seeks to punish with death individuals who insult the Holy Prophet in "word gesture or innuendo" — it typically targets the minorities in Pakistan.

The Ahmadis, declared a non-Muslim minority in 1974, collectively insult the Prophet by allegedly violating the doctrine that he was the last prophet. All Christians, by reason of their belief in the Old Testament, attract death penalty because the Old Testament, which the Muslims believe is fake, contains insulting references to the prophets mentioned in the Quran. All the Shia community, who disagree on the status of the Companions of the Prophet, by innumay be collectively liable to be punished under the law. Since "insult" happens by innuendo, des-

endo insult the Holy Prophet, and therefore

ecration of the Holy Quran can also be converted to "insult" if the judge so decides. Hundreds of cases where the Christian community has been assaulted by mobs, relate to the dispossession of land, removal from job, plunder and rape. Most cases have been reported in the press with a slant that goes against the minority community. The police have, more often than not, joined hands with the mobs to persecute the Christians, and the judges have passed unfair judgements under pressure from groups pursuing vengeance through the Law.

When the accused have been awarded bail, they have been either attacked and wounded or killed, thus establishing the trend of not awarding bail to the accused. The biggest flaw in the law, apart from conviction on the basis of innuendo, is its FIR, used by the semi-literate police officer to arrest individuals whom he is unable to protect from the mob. Or, he leverages it to let off individ-

uals on the payment of a heavy bribe. Why is Pakistan doing it? The latest wisdom is that the majority community wishes to retain or enhance its identity through what social scientist Francis Fukuyama calls "isothymia" or the collective urge to be recognised as "equal". He explains the injustice arising out of this urge: "Contemporary identity politics is driven by the quest for equal recognition by groups that have been marginalised by their societies. But that desire for equal recognition can easily slide over into a demand or recognition of the group's superiority. This is a large part of the story of nationalism and national identity, as well as certain forms of extremist religious politics today."

India follows in the footsteps of Pakistan in setting aside what its founding fathers had sought to avoid while writing its constitution. The violence unleashed against the minorities by mobs in the streets while no existing law supports or allows it, is the new "identity" trend. Fukuyama says: "National identities can be built around liberal and democratic political values, and the common experiences that provide the connective tissue around which diverse communities can thrive. India, France, and the United States are examples of countries that have tried to do this. Such an inclusive sense of national identity remains critical for the maintenance of a successful modern political order for a number of reasons."

Most Indians who react negatively to my opinion in The Indian Express express nothing but contempt for Pakistan. But it is shocking how most Indian critics of Pakistan forget the imitative groove into which India itself has fallen despite the fact that India has no comparable Blasphemy Law dishing out death as the minimum punishment.

Pakistan is trapped. Its top judiciary, when not manned by Islamists, lets the victims walk after an average period of six to eight years in jail. But a victim can get presented before a court manned by "pious" judges, in which case, he is sure to go to his death.

> The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

May 18, 1979, Forty Years Ago

ABSENT SIR

GOVERNMENT WHIPS WERE under severe criticism from within the Janata Party in Parliament over the defeat of the Constitution's 46th Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha today. Judging from the vote, there was no difference of opinion in the party or in Parliament over the amendment which seeks to give statutory status to the Minority Commission and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission. Yet the bill fell through because not even the minimum 273 members were present in the House at the time of voting. Nearly 280 Janata members of the Lok Sabha were in town last night to cast their vote in the JPP polls, but in the House

This "black law", Pakistan

295-C, inserted into the

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today, out of the 205 members who voted for the Constitution Amendment Bill, not more than 180 members could be from the Janata Party, which had the main responsibility in seeing the official bill through.

SPECIAL COURTS BILL

THE PRESIDENT GAVE his assent to the Special Courts Bill that was passed by the Lok Sabha last week. The bill, which will be gazetted tonight as the Special Courts Act, paves the way for the early trial of Indira Gandhi, her son Sanjay Gandhi and some of her Emergency associates. The government is initiating steps to set up three special courts in Delhi. The Chief Justice of India and the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court have been requested to nominate three sitting judges to these courts.

ALIGARH VIOLENCE

SOME PARLIAMENT MEMBERS are responsible for incitement in the incident that occurred in Aligarh, recently. The minister of state for home affairs, S D Patil, said in the Rajya Sabha today that he had information that "certain honourable members did incite." He did not name them and no member pressed him to say who they are. He was replying during the nearly five-hour long discussion on the incidents resulting in the closure of Aligarh Muslim University.



THE IDEAS PAGE

Dividing to rule

The contemporary use of the policy of divide and rule demonstrates the persistence of the temptation colonial rulers had given in to



KRISHNA KUMAR

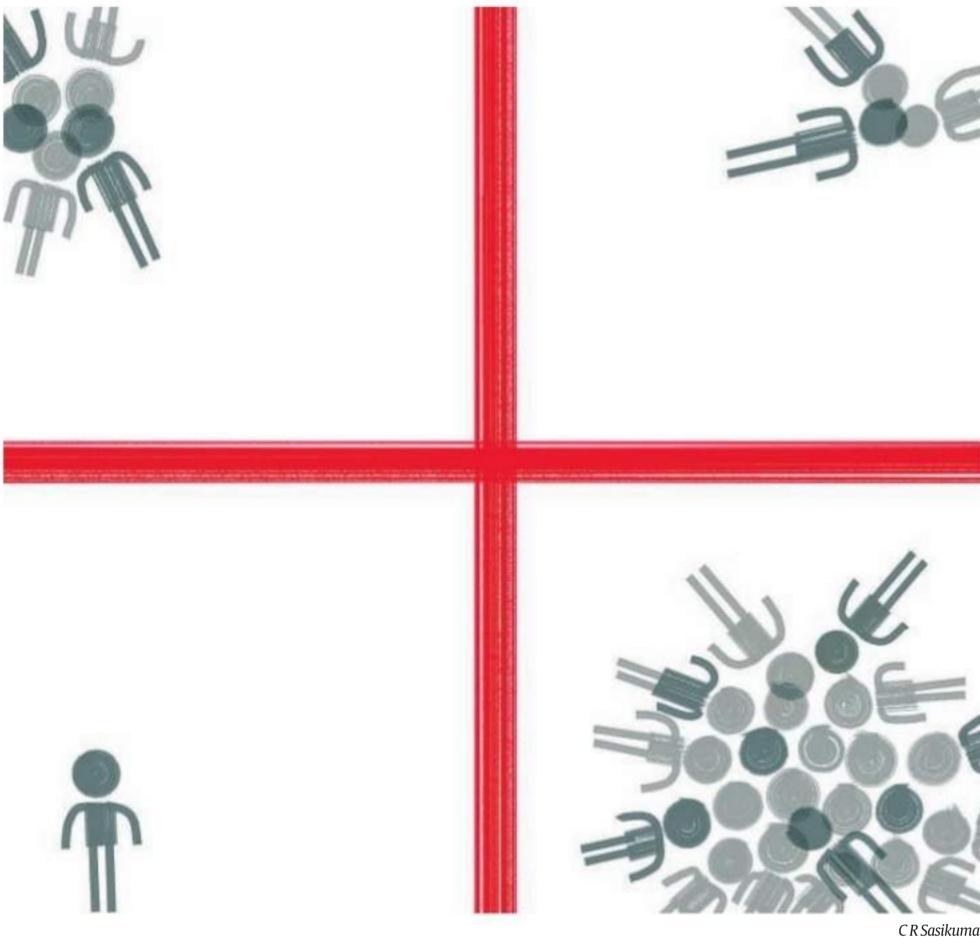
"BEG TO DIFFER" was one of the many phrases that made no sense but you had to get used to them in order to learn English. That this phrase would one day become essential had never occurred to me. Now it has. I feel like using it all the time these days. Differing from another person in public is full of risk, so if begging secures you some kindness in advance, there is no harm in begging. This is, of course, not why an English gentleman said, "I beg to differ".

Many old expressions that have gone out of use in the native land of the English continue to be used in India. Our system of education keeps them alive. They are regularly used in administration, police procedures and in the judiciary. As an English-using nation, our status has improved and many of our English writers are treated as mothertongue speakers.

Consider the staple of colonial history. The English practised a divide and rule policy, according to several Class 8 history textbooks. According to them, Partition was a consequence of this policy. If that is so, why are we doing the same thing now? Divide and rule seems to have become the winning ideology of the current election. We call it differently now. The term preferred by television anchors and the press is polarisation. They say the outcome of this election will depend on the extent to which the polarising rhetoric of the ruling party succeeds. Other parties are also said to be following this approach except they are polarising along regional or caste lines.

If this is indeed a continuation of colonial strategies, we should return to authors like Paul Scott and Albert Memmi. I read the latter in a course on Third World development. Along with Franz Fanon, Memmi made immense sense though both these authors were concerned with Africa. The story of India was different from that of Africa and Latin America, but there were continuities too. The ones in economic relations between the colonisers and the colonised were easy to notice and grasp. Not so visible were the psychological parallels, especially because figures like Gandhi made India look and feel different from anywhere else. He seemed to have given India a new identity, putting the fear of imperial power at rest. Memmi's thesis was that loss of identity and fear push the colonised towards religion. If Gandhi averted that fate for India, his success was neither total nor permanent. Had it been so, the colonial formula of divide and rule on religious lines wouldn't have come back to haunt this election.

Having taught colonialism for over two decades, I am used to facing the criticism that it is an irrelevant topic. The fact that the system of education continues to carry numerous marks of its colonial legacy does not make colonialism a worthwhile topic of study. Unless you present it as history, you can't get very far with students who believe that colonialism ended when India gained freedom. They attribute its living legacies to inefficient administrators and politicians. It doesn't help much either if you try to distinguish colonial rule from colonial relations



and the ideology they signify. Gandhi's critique of the colonial worldview arouses some interest in the few who agree to wonder why education does not fortify people against divisive propaganda. Indeed, the view that the common people are emotional and their hearts are more important for votes than their minds is also a colonial legacy. Many senior British administrators were guided by the stereotype of Indians as emotionally driven people, lacking rationality. This stereotype gained popularity among Indians who started to identify with colonial masters, not just in lifestyle but in ideas and perceptions too.

An important distinction needs to be

made about election propaganda. Identity politics is part of a much larger social phenomenon. It has grown in recent decades in response to the growth of collective selfawareness and communication among dispersed members of communities. Creation of vote banks along caste lines is one thing; actively promoting religious otherness is quite different. The emotive potential of the two processes also differs. In the first case, people who see their caste identity as means of consolidating their material interests come together without necessarily hating others who identify with a different voting collective. In the case of divisive otherness along religious lines, inimical feelings are mixed with anger and aggression.

The advantage that colonial rulers derived by using divide and rule policies was that they weakened resistance. What advan-

Our diversity alone will save us when divide and rule is back in business. No emotion seems to last long in a diverse social landscape. Nor does any emotional mood cover India's territorial vastness. Even during patches of war, such as 1962, 1965 and 1971, the awareness of problems like water and food shortage was quite widespread. Regional issues remained

day? It will make India less governable even if you win one more chance to govern it by putting the coloniser's strategy to fresh use. It will also weaken the state apparatus. Institutions in charge of maintaining law and order have not outgrown the legacy and shadow of colonial history. As recent events show, even institutions that directly manage the electoral process now prefer to overlook than intervene. Our diversity alone will save us when di-

tage can a divide and rule strategy offer to-

vide and rule is back in business. No emotion seems to last long in a diverse social landscape. Nor does any emotional mood cover India's territorial vastness. Even during patches of war, such as 1962, 1965 and 1971, the awareness of problems like water and food shortage was quite widespread. Regional issues remained sharply capable of influencing politics. This is unlikely to change, and the current phase is particularly prone to the force of diversity. A slow and staggered election schedule has also helped to keep emotions temporal and stuck to local anxieties. No emotion lasts long, no matter how assiduously it is aroused. Divide and rule might have served as a strategy during certain phases of colonial rule, but it did not work in every case. Its contemporary use merely demonstrates the persistence of the temptation that India's colonial rulers had felt during their stay.

> The author is a former director of NCERT and a Hindi writer

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Brexit is obviously important, but it seems clearer now that the only way it will be resolved is through a fresh referendum." — THE INDEPENDENT

It's about social justice, not welfare

To fulfill constitutional requirement, reservation must be based on a rigorous identification of economic backwardness



ABUSALEH SHARIFF AND MOHSIN ALAM Внат

THE INTRODUCTION OF the 124th constitutional amendment that provides the possibility of quotas for the "economically weaker sections" (EWS) has rekindled the debate on reservations. These quotas diverge from reservation policies for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other socially and educationally backward classes, by jettisoning caste or community identity as the basis of identifying beneficiary groups.

Parliament's power to amend the Constitution is limited by the basic structure doctrine, according to which no law can violate the Constitution's essential features. In order to meet the established constitutional parameters, the conceptualisation and implementation of EWS reservations must satisfy the principle of equality and the constitutional mandate of social justice that are basic features of the Constitution.

Before the Supreme Court approved caste as the basis of defining "socially and educationally backward classes" or OBCs in 1992, caste reservations beyond SCs and STs had attracted controversy. In the *Indra* Sawhney case, the Court held that reservations were designed, among other things, to provide a share in power and representation to the classes, which were historically excluded from such avenues.

The key to the acceptance of a castebased interpretation of the OBC category was the Court's endorsement of the Mandal Commission's argument that a low caste status represented a form of marginalisation that was so entrenched and trans-generational that it could not be dismantled by either being blind to it, or only through welfare measures. The Court's observation that reservations are not poverty alleviation programmes should be interpreted in this light. Reservations are particularly ineffective for distributing economic benefits, but more meaningful in distributing opportunities, as a matter of representation, among the marginalised classes which do not have an adequate share in governance.

These conclusions led the Court to also hold that reservation policies must be based on empirically-sound and rigorously-applied criteria of backwardness. The implementation of the EWS category must thus involve a rigorous empirical process of identifying the criteria of economic backwardness. It cannot be just about relative poverty or poverty plain and simple, but must indicate compelling forms of trans-generational poverty that demand measures beyond welfare policies. Only this conceptualisation and procedure will be able to justify the requirements of equality and social justice.

The present models adopted by the Centre and state governments violate these standards. The government has not constituted any commission to conduct a rigorous empirical analysis and instead has chosen income and asset criteria by fiat. They also run into practical and conceptual problems. Let us take the income criteria.

Practically, the income criteria is unworkable owing to the difficulty in assessing personal incomes in India and the fact that only a fraction of the population pays income tax. In 2018, only 8.3 per cent of the total labour force paid income tax, which in all likelihood were employed in the organised sector. The threshold of Rs 8 lakh per annum that is being touted as the income qualification may end up including everyone but the top few percentage of the Indian population. If 95 per cent of India's population technically fits into the category, the category has definitely not been defined in a meaningful fashion that can serve an affirmative action scheme.

The problem is not so much in the threshold of income but in determining EWS on a single axis like income or asset holding This will be severely inadequate in identifying the sections that suffer from trans-generational economic disadvantages that place severe barriers in equal participation and opportunity. It is only for this latter class of citizens that the government can make a persuasive case of reservations above and beyond welfare measures as a matter of equality and social justice.

So, is it possible to create an index of economic indicators that adequately define EWS on these lines? The Mandal Commission's recommendations were unprecedented in boiling down the complexity of social stratification in India into measurable indicators of social, educational and economic backwardness. Defining EWS will also be a challenging exercise, but far from being impossible provided a commission is allowed to evolve appropriate criteria and methodologies.

Some possibilities are relatively easy to start with. Rakesh Basant, an economist who was also a member of Sachar Committee, has argued that parental education has a strong impact on higher education participation, much higher than even caste or community affiliation. Other economic criteria can supplement parental education status to prepare a composite index of EWS. These could include households headed by females, applicants who belong to rural areas, individuals or households located in notified slums, whose primary income source is manual labour, and who are migrants from poorer states like UP, Bihar or West Bengal. The index can also contain disqualifications for the creamy layer — ones that exclude households which own a specified portion of land or own living quarters of specified size in cities and towns, an automobile, or have at least one family member with a group A or

B job with the Central or state government The EWS reservations could add a desirable dimension to India's reservation scheme But this would depend on whether the policy is implemented scrupulously in line with the fundamental constitutional precepts.

committee and is with the US-India Policy Institute, Washington DC; Bhat is assistant professor of law and executive director, Centre for Public Interest Law, Jindal Global Law School

Shariff was member secretary, Sachar



Drowning in the current

Nuanced interventions, not bureaucratic silos, will help to clean the Ganga

sharply capable of

influencing politics. This is

unlikely to change, and the

current phase is particularly

prone to the force of diversity.

SOWMIYA ASHOK

IN NOVEMBER LAST year, three men from Bihar entered a drain in Varanasi. They were promised Rs 5,000 each, quick income in time for their visit home for Chhath Puja. Within the hour, two of them fainted, and died from the noxious gases. Their cousin, who escaped with a broken leg, told me that they were daily wagers who worked only on construction sites. They were not equipped to enter drains.

But on that day, they were rounded up, and promised more money to break a concrete wall inside a large drain that would divert sewage towards the Dinapur Sewage Treatment Plant (STP). The work was part of a Rs 34-crore sewage network, contracted locally under the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG). But no safety equipment was provided to any of them. Two days later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flew to Varanasi to inaugurate the STP at Dinapur as part of his government's efforts to clean the Ganga. The men's names found no mention in the FIR filed four days after the incident.

On April 26, when Modi filed his nomination to contest once again from Varanasi in the ongoing general elections, he told an Aaj Tak reporter that "water should also be a festival". "In the past, water bodies were worshipped. Had these left liberals treated (the) Ganga like mother, nobody would have polluted the river," he said. "Indians considered the Ganga to be so holy that it would wash sins. Throwing trash into the Ganga should

be stopped. Sewage should not flow into the Ganga. I have focussed on that, the results are there to see."

But what about all those people who might think of the Ganga as their mother? What about their source of livelihood for that hour, day, week, month, year, or even lifetime? For those men from Bihar, tasked to smash a wall inside a drain, it was wages that would pay for a child's tuition, a parent's ailment. This is the case for several other men and women who live and work along a river that flows over 2,200 kms across five states. They serve as the frontline staff who carry out the dirty work during festivals, like the Kumbh Mela, so that politicians can later take credit in campaign speeches.

Take Kanpur, for example. Six writ petitions have been filed over the last nine years by a supervisor, an operator, a scrubber operator, a safai karamchari, and two pump operators at the Common Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) in Jajmau.

These petitions have demanded regularisation of work, better pay, health benefits, and provident fund options for the 200-odd men who manage a plant that treats tannery waste laced with chromium in the most polluted city along the river. The men are sick, and have been getting sicker over the last two decades - skin disorders, lung problems, heart conditions. They showed me the pills they take, the prescriptions they carry in their shirt pockets, the contaminated bore-well water they cannot drink. Nobody eats vegetables grown in Jajmau.

Many of them have worked at the CETP for nearly two decades and speak fondly about a river on the banks of which they grew up. Eighty per cent of the funds (nearly Rs 20,000 crore) sanctioned under the NMCG, till six months ago, had gone towards putting in place sewage infrastructure — an integral part of which is the labour that runs the show. They bear the brunt to make the Ganga safe and clean for those who have the privilege to worship the river as their mother.

If the goal is to have a cleaner river, the objective should be to make more nuanced interventions. The cleanliness of the river on the ground is driven by engineering. The onsite senior engineers at STPs, overwhelmingly men from mechanical and electrical backgrounds, think of cleanliness "within norms". It narrows down to checking boxes after parameters have been met.

This does not consider the health of the worker, the health of the river from an environmental standpoint or ensuring that the processes in place work smoothly. The responsibility for cleaning the river instead seems to be cordoned off, contained within the compound walls of the executing agencies across the cities that I visited.

The official version of how the system works is straightforward: Intercepting polluting drains, diverting and capturing it at a particular place, pumping it towards an STP, and treating the sewage to reduce the level of contaminants before pouring it back into the river. It is a policy that works perfectly in theory, but encounters hiccups in sprawling cities which have a chronic plastic pollution problem and where numerous houses are not connected to the sewerage network.

An interaction I witnessed in Kanpur between two officials, one from the Jal Nigam and another from the Kanpur Nagar Nigam, arguing over who is responsible for keeping solid waste out of the drain, was telling. The officials disagreed on how to ensure that people don't dump waste into the drain.

Meanwhile, behind them, sitting on a low wall of the Sisamau Nallah was Barkun Nisha. "All the city waste flows into the drain," she told me. "People throw mattresses and anything else they want to dispose off. In the monsoon, we wade through sewage in our homes because the drain overflows into our homes."

Behind her, a Nagar Nigam truck dips a fork claw into the drain and excavates solid waste and dumps it in the truck. There was no clear idea as to where the waste will be taken. Residents gather to watch — children are pushed back for their safety. Someone shared a story of a child having fallen into the drain 30 years ago, and found floating on the Ganga.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WORRYING CHANGE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A new poriborton' (IE, May 17). West Bengal was exceptionally peaceful after the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the Gujarat riots. It is now communally charged. The TMC has inflicted violence on cadres of other parties. The destruction of Vidyasagar's statue signifies the growing intolerance in the state.

Vasant Nalawade, Satara

JUDGING JUDGES

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Undue criticism,' (IE, May 13). One wonders whether the writer took into account the fact that being procedurally correct need not necessarily mean being fair and just. The fact that the procedure laid down by the court does not allow engaging a lawyer by the complainant should be reason enough for questioning it. The writer's idea that we should trust our judges if we want our democracy to function is worrying. Democracy is not about trusting individuals but respecting the rule of law and law cannot be divorced from justice. Judges must also be judged by the same yard sticks we use for others, especially in the matter of sexual harassment cases.

Apurba K Baruah, Guwahati

WORK IN PROGRESS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'IBC hits and misses' (IE, May 16). There is no

LETTER OF THE WEEK

COURT AND SOCIETY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Undue criticism' (IE, May 14). Since 1999, when the in-house procedure of the Supreme Court evolved an informal inquiry procedure (which the eminent jurist describes as "peer review") much has changed with respect to legal provisions to prevent sexual harassment of women in work places. The Me Too Movement has shown that workplaces have not yet become safe for women. The skewed gender ratio in the higher judiciary would impinge on the peer review procedures as well. It is time that the SC evolved procedures to enforce on itself the standards of women's rights it sets for the society.

Shruti George, Jaipur

doubt that IBC is the best thing to happen as far as bad debt resolution is concerned. A recovery of Rs 70,000 crore is an indication of the same. It will take time to evolve. All stakeholders should strive to reduce the resolution time and bring it as close to 270 days.

Bal Govind. Noida

EDITORIAL

External woes

Given the widening trade deficit, urgent measures are needed to boost exports

The estimates for foreign trade showing a sharp slowdown in merchandise export growth in April, to 0.64% from a year earlier, ought to add to concerns about the economy. If one were to strip away the 31% surge in shipments of petroleum products to overseas markets, India's export of goods actually contracted by over 3% in dollar terms last month. In contrast, overall merchandise exports had expanded 11% year-on-year in March, with the growth in shipments excluding petroleum products exceeding that pace by about 50 basis points. The slump in exports was fairly widespread, with 16 of the 30 major product groups listed by the Commerce Ministry reflecting contractions, compared with the 10 categories that had shrunk in March. Worryingly, shipments of engineering goods declined by over 7% after having expanded by 16.3% in March, while the traditionally strong export sectors - gem and jewellery, leather and leather products, textiles and garments and drugs and pharmaceuticals - all weakened. These are all key providers of jobs and any protracted pain across these industries will impact jobs, wages and consumption demand in the domestic market. While the contraction in gem and jewellery exports widened to 13.4% in April, from 0.4% in March, the slump in the leather segment broadened to 15.3% from 6.4%. And the pace of growth of garment exports decelerated to 4.4% from 15.1% in March.

Imports grew by 4.5% to \$41.4 billion in April, accelerating from March's 1.4% pace as purchases of crude oil and gold continued to increase. While the 9.3% jump in the oil import bill, from March's 5.6%, can partly be explained by the rise in international crude prices (Brent crude futures, for instance, advanced 6.4% in April), India's insatiable appetite for gold, as reflected in the 54% surge in imports last month, must give policymakers cause for reflection. Excluding oil and gold, however, imports shrank by more than 2% last month, signalling that import demand in the real productive sectors is largely becalmed. As a result of merchandise imports outpacing exports, the trade deficit widened to a five-month high of \$15.3 billion. The widening trade shortfall will add pressure on India's burgeoning current account deficit, which at a provisional \$51.9 billion in the first nine months of fiscal 2018-19 had already surpassed the preceding financial year's 12-month shortfall of \$48.7 billion. With stronger headwinds ahead in the form of an escalating trade war between the U.S. and China, and its knock-on impact on global growth, the outlook for export demand is far from reassuring. Add the rising military tensions in West Asia and its potential to further push up oil prices, and the scope to contain the trade and current account deficits seems significantly challenging. Clearly, this would be one more pressing concern for the new government to address.

Holding the centre

Europe's mainstream parties must not take fright at the perceived appeal of populism

n May 23, as the results of the Indian elections emerge, in Europe the world's second largest democratic electoral process will get under way. More than 425 million voters are eligible to participate in elections that will take place over a four-day period to select 751 members of the European Parliament for a five-year term. There would have been 705, but for the delays to Brexit, which means Britain will participate too. Thousands of candidates from hundreds of parties as well as independents will seek votes, and the winners will form cross-national groupings in the House based on their political ideology. With turnout usually low (43% in 2014), predictions can be tricky, but expectations are that far-right and Eurosceptic parties will make gains. Last month, Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and figurehead for the far right in Europe, Matteo Salvini, launched the campaign for the European Alliance of People and Nations, alongside allies from Germany to Denmark, on a platform invoking tougher immigration rules and in some cases Euroscepticism, uniting parties that had once been split between groupings. In Britain, the appeal of anti-European sentiment has manifested itself in the success of the Brexit Party, formed in January by former UK Independence Party head Nigel Farage – it is projected to win a 34% share of the vote. In Germany, the right-wing Alternative für Deutschland is expected to make gains, while in France the right-wing National Rally (former National Front) could to do better than President Emmanuel Macron's En Marche.

There is a risk that centre-right and centre-left coalitions will fail to command a joint majority. The temptation will be for centrist parties to see these elections as yet another sign that populism is on the rise, and a cause they must in one way or another pander to. In Britain, this has certainly been the case with the rightward lunge of the Conservative Party, while in Germany the centre-left SPD has toughened its stance on asylumseekers. Yet, this would be the wrong message to take. What is under way is vastly more complex. It is certain that people are seeking alternatives amid stagnating wages and living standards, with many shunning mainstream parties in their quest – but to infer that all see populism as the route ahead would be naive. Green parties, for example, are expected to make their best showing yet across the continent, as public support for an agenda that encompasses progressive climate change policies and social justice has grown. European parliamentary elections should certainly trigger alarm bells for the mainstream parties, but should also motivate them to look imaginatively for fresh answers, rather than attempting to rehash decades-old illiberal ones.

A referendum on the Prime Minister?

Hindutva nationalism as embodied by Narendra Modi has remained the dominant narrative of the Lok Sabha polls



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

amesh and Rajesh, two brothers in Atari Khejra, around 50 km from the Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal, could be counted among the so-called aspirational generation that supported Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. In their mid-20s and wiser by five years now, they laboured to explain their continuing support for Mr. Modi, who they want in office for a second term. The brothers run a tea shop by the highway and their backward caste Kurmi family owns some land. Their farm incomes remain nonremunerative, material life remains as tough as ever, and they are not beneficiaries of the several welfare schemes launched by the Modi government. But finally they came up with one reason that they sounded fully convinced about: "India has become number 1 in the world under Mr. Modi."

Jettisoning economic issues

A widely popular explanation for Mr. Modi's 2014 success was that he had jettisoned Hindutva for reforms/development. There was no evidence to support this theory in fact, evidence suggested the opposite, as he declared himself a "Hindu nationalist" ahead of the campaign and repeatedly raised cow slaughter, "infiltrators", etc. through the 2014 campaign. But this had become justification for a segment of his elite supporters. Mr. Modi never promised a list of reforms, though he did promise

jobs. So the difference between 2014 and 2019 has not been that Mr. Modi has returned to Hindutva, but the complete removal of jobs and development from the agenda by systematically blocking or contaminating official data on these topics. If 2014 was about seeking economic progress through Hindu consolidation, in 2019 national glory was itself the Core Modi voters are convinced

that India is a superpower, that his strident rhetoric has scared Pakistan and China. In a particularly jaw-dropping moment of adulation for Mr. Modi, a young tourist guide in Agra, a Jat, who by conventional wisdom should be a supporter of the anti-BJP coalition of the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal in Uttar Pradesh, said: "Who in the world knew Manmohan Singh? Donald Trump stands up when he meets Narendra Modi." His financial situation is worse than it was in 2014, but he believes that demonetisation has done a world of good for the nation. To ask about the promises of 2014 itself has become an anti-national act. "To talk about jobs, we need to have a country first, right?" Mr. Modi's supporters retort. This suspension of logic and rational thinking and the intangible abstract of national glory can be found across the Hindi heartland. This is not to deny the existence of a cohort of transactional voters who rooted for Mr. Modi – the recipients of the subsidised cooking gas and houses, for instance.

This euphoria disconnected from self-admitted reality is borne out in the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies's pre-poll survey, in which more people thought employment opportuni-

ties had reduced, prices had gone up, welfare had shrunk, social disharmony had risen and corruption had spiked, but still wanted a second term for Mr. Modi. Only on one question, more people thought Mr. Modi has done well:

'India's image in the world'. This kind of support for Mr. Modi cuts across caste, though upper castes are its fulcrum. But this support could be mobilised only when the question was specifically framed whether they want a second term for Mr. Modi, sidestepping all local questions and daily experience. Mr. Modi's attempt has been to make the entire election into a referendum on him, and his success will depend on whether or not he managed to push a critical mass of the voters to look beyond their material well-being.

The Congress challenge The Congress under Rahul Gandhi challenged this delusional populism by questioning the militarism and ultra-nationalism underlying it and promising a minimum income guarantee for all under a scheme called NYAY (Nyuntam Aay Yojana). While this fuelled some hope for the party's resurgence, its impact as a pan-India alternative to Hindutva has been limited. This is primarily due to the patronising tone of the party's messaging, as opposed to the empowering tone of Hindutva.

Therefore, the Congress's performance will depend largely on its ability to amplify local factors, the performance of its governments where they exist, and better management of elections compared to 2014. In Chhattisgarh, the Congress has achieved this objective in significant measure. "Mr. Modi's campaign in 2014 was economy plus emotions, but this time he was only emotions. Our campaign was only economy and lacked emotions," a Congress functionary summed it up. "In 2004 we beat the BJP when we both talked about material aspects."

The U.P., Bihar narrative

The Hindutva narrative has been challenged the most in U.P., followed by Bihar, and among two communities everywhere: Muslims and tribals, who were not vocal. West Bengal is in a different category as the BJP is still trying to expand its footprint. Bihar and U.P. are extremely critical in 2019: 93 of the BJP's 282 seats in 2014 came from these two States. The critical mass of the Muslim electorate and the deep-rooted history of social justice politics that has offered a counter-polemic to the Hindutva agenda make these States distinct. This unique combination of demographic and historical factors makes the Gujarat model of Hindutva - to reduce to irrelevance Muslims and tribals, and win an overwhelming majority among the rest - difficult in these States.

The BJP achieved that feat in 2014, and hopes to repeat it in 2019. A shared existential threat from the BJP united Yadavs, Dalits and Muslims in U.P. and Bihar and their numerical heft offers the strongest pushback to Hindutva in 2019. The BJP has the solid backing of the upper castes and non-Yadav backwards, and a section of Dalits in Bihar. That may not be good enough to match the 2014 figures in U.P., but Bihar offers better prospects for the party. The BJP's performance therefore will depend on whether and to what extent it has lured Yadavs, and in U.P. non-Jatav Dalits and Jats. That will depend on the extent to which Mr. Modi could make it a referendum on himself in U.P. and Bihar. Unlike the Congress, the BJP has been relentlessly reaching out to all backward castes and tribals.

DELHI THE HINDU

SATURDAY, MAY 18, 2019

Traders, the traditional social base of the BJP, expressed resentment over demonetisation. Muslims and tribals offered but did not as much vocalise their opposition to Hindutva. There were no fatwas calling on the Muslims to vote in any particular direction in 2019. BSP chief Mayawati, representing Ambedkarite Dalits, mobilised her supporters on a staunchly political platform, but her refusal to accommodate the Congress in the U.P. alliance may have cost the alliance. Trinamool Congress chief and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has fought the Hindutva plans for West Bengal in the streets. All told, in regions where the BJP is strong, Hindutva nationalism personified in Mr. Modi remained the dominant political force in 2019. Any public desire for his removal from his office, if it exists, has not been an outcry. The Congress's gains will be proportional to the impact of local factors, and not on account of any national alternative that it has put

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Charting a clear course in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific wing in the Ministry of External Affairs gives strategic coherence to India's Look East policy



Though the term Indo-Pacific has been gaining traction in some time now, it achieved operational clarity after the Indian vision was presented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018. His speech underscored that for India the geography of the Indo-Pacific stretches from the eastern coast of Africa to Oceania (from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas) which also includes in its fold the Pacific Island countries.

Many mechanisms India's Act East policy remains the bedrock of the national Indo-Pacific vision and the centrality of ASEAN is embedded in the Indian narrative. India has been an active participant in mechanisms like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IO-RA), in ASEAN-led frameworks like the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, the ASEAN Regional Forum as well as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and the Mekong-Ganga Economic Corridor. India has also been convening the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium,

in which the navies of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) participate. India has boosted its engagements with Australia and New Zealand and has deepened its cooperation with the Republic of Korea. Through the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation, India is stepping up its interactions with the Pacific Island countries. India's growing partnership with Africa can be seen through the convening of mechanisms like the India-Africa Forum Summits. India's multi-layered engagement with China as well as strategic partnership with Russia underlines its commitment to ensuring a stable, open, secure, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

India views the Indo-Pacific as a geographic and strategic expanse, with the 10 ASEAN countries connecting the two great oceans. Inclusiveness, openness, and ASEAN centrality and unity, therefore, lie at the heart of the Indian notion of Indo-Pacific, Security in the region must be maintained through dialogue, a common rules-based order, freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and settlement of disputes in accordance with international law. More connectivity initiatives impinging on respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability should be promoted.

A natural corollary

The setting up of the Indo-Pacific wing in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in April 2019 is a natural corollary to this vision. Given

SINGAPORE how the term Indo-Pacific has been gaining currency and how

major regional actors such as the U.S., Japan and Australia are articulating their regional visions - including this term in their official policy statements - it was becoming imperative for India to operationalise its Indo-Pacific policy. The renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command as well as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act in December 2018 showcase Washington's more serious engagement with the Indo-Pacific. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept was unveiled by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016, and Australia released its Foreign Policy White Paper in 2017, which details Australia's Indo-Pacific vision centred around security, openness and prosperity.

Given the huge geography that the Indian definition of Indo-Pacific covers, there was a need for a bureaucratic re-alignment to create a division that can imbibe in its fold the various territorial divisions in the MEA that look after the policies of the countries which are

part of the Indo-Pacific discourse. This wing provides a strategic coherence to the Prime Minister's Indo-Pacific vision, integrating the IORA, the ASEAN region and the Quad to the Indo-Pacific dynamic.

The integration of the IORA means that attention will continue to be focused on the IOR. This can be a result of the growing Chinese footprint in the Indian Ocean and Chinese diplomacy in the region. Indian Navy also are also taking note of the developments in this region and this wing can work in coordination with these two organs as well. Given New Delhi's stakes in its immediate neighbourhood, a more focused and inte-

grated approach is needed. Additionally, ASEAN forms the cornerstone of India's Act East policy and Indo-Pacific vision. As ASEAN now enters into deliberations to carve out its own Indo-Pacific policy, it underscores a shift in the stand of the sub-regional organisation towards the Indo-Pacific concept. Initially there was a lurking fear within the grouping that the Indo-Pacific concept might just overshadow ASEAN's centrality and importance. Visualising the ASEAN region as a part of the wider Indo-Pacific shows an evolution in the region's thinking, opening new possibilities for India's engagement with grouping.

Challenges ahead

India's bureaucratic shift is an important move to articulate its regional policy more cogently, cohe-

rently and with a renewed sense of purpose. There are still challenges for India, especially how it will integrate the Quadrilateral initiative which got revived in 2017 with its larger Indo-Pacific approach. It will also be important for the new MEA division to move beyond security and political issues and articulate a more comprehensive policy towards the region. Commerce and connectivity in particu-The Ministry of Defence and the lar will have to be prioritised if India is to take advantage of a new opening for its regional engage-

> While India has been consistently emphasising "inclusiveness" in the Indo-Pacific framework, it will be challenging to maintain a balance between the interests of all stakeholders. There are differences between India's vision and the U.S.'s strategy for the Indo-Pacific even as countries like China and Russia view the Indo-Pacific with suspicion. As geopolitical tensions rise between China and the U.S., the MEA's new division will have its task cut out if India's long-term political and economic interests in the region are to be preserved. A bureaucratic change was indeed needed, but going forward the challenge would be to see how effectively this change manifests itself in managing India's growing diplomatic footprint in the Indo-Pacific.

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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.

A wise decision

The Congress's decision points to the importance of regional parties in forming coalition governments ("Congress will not insist on Prime Minister's post: Azad", May 17). Actually, announcing the prime ministerial candidate ahead of an election is to rely on the charisma of an individual rather than bank on the policies and manifesto of the party. The Prime Minister should be appointed by the party holding a majority in the Lok Sabha, not be elected by the voters directly. Personality cults are harmful to nations. KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO,

A shameful remark

The BIP, which nominated the terror accused Pragya Singh Thakur to contest the Bhopal seat as if there was no other worthy person in the party to be fielded. should hang its head in shame for the encomium paid by its 'sadhvi' nominee to a murderer ("Pragya calls Godse 'patriot', whips up storm", May 17). If the saffron party is truly 'national' and respects the Father of the Nation, it should not allow her to contest the election. She has lost all moral right to be a Member of Parliament. SHALINI GERALD,

Gandhi is among the most

India but in the world. He is the symbol of our nation. It is deeply upsetting that the assassin of Gandhi has been called a patriot. I also can't understand why politicians are talking about past events when there are so many issues in the country today to debate.

revered leaders not just in

VIDHYA B. RAGUNATH,

A partisan Commission The Election Commission's actions are partisan ("West Bengal tango", May 17). All its recent one-sided decisions show that the EC has a lot to answer for. The 10 p.m. deadline to end campaigning in West

Bengal was clearly intended

to allow the Prime Minister's rallies there. How can anyone believe in democracy when a constitutional body entrusted with ensuring the largest democratic exercise loses credibility? V. PADMANABHAN, Bengaluru

Liberal talk

The concern of liberals about the erosion of institutions and the change in the 'idea of India' in contrast to the immediate concerns of the people is a topic that is woefully underexamined ("Is the future of Indian democracy secure?", May 17). World over, the trend of 'strong leaders' grasping power

and riding populist waves points to the alarming erosion of the liberal consensus that had once dominated the post-war world order. However, discussions in the English media focus mainly on these 'liberal issues'. Instead, there is a need for closer examination of whether the institutions of the liberal project have delivered equity and social justice in India. HARIKRISHNA VARMA, Ernakulam

Principles of coalition

There are three factors which determine the effectiveness of coalition governments in India ("Is coalition government worse than single-party rule?", May 17). One, the alliance should be of likeminded parties, at least on critical issues. Two, it should be led by a leader who has wide appeal across the nation. Three, post-election alliances are not only detrimental to the proper functioning of a government, but are a mockery of democracy as parties that fight against one another come together to form the government later. If the coalition is formed on a pre-election agenda, it would add to its strength and longevity. Y.G. CHOUKSEY,

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:

THE HINDU DELMI SATURDAY, MAY 18, 2019

GROUND ZERO 7

The foot soldiers of Hindutva in West Bengal

As ideological barriers give way and political activists switch sides, the BJP is relying on its tried and tested ways of getting into the mainstream on the strength of a host of communal organisations. **Suvojit Bagchi** reports on the rise of the BJP as tensions flare up and rumours abound in election time

n an oppressively hot day in Baruipur, 50 km south of Kolkata, in South 24 Parganas district, Swarup Dutta sits in a shop crammed with stabilisers and inverters. He slowly sips his morning tea while chatting with three middle-aged men. Outside, banners of the Trinamool Congress showing the grim visage of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee are erected. But that doesn't reflect the political leanings of the four men inside. Dutta is one of the founders of the Hindu Jagran Manch, an organisation affiliated to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), in Baruipur. The Hindu Jagran Manch, according to its website, aims to "enable social harmony and Hindu unity, propagate in public interest Hindu myths, and rehabilitate the victims of love jihad," among other

The four men discuss the ongoing general election, which has been marred by violence in West Bengal. Much has changed in the eastern State in just a decade. The West Bengal political landscape underwent a transformation in 2011 when the Trinamool rode to power, bringing to an end the Left Front's 34-year rule. Eight years from then, the contest is not between the Trinamool and the Left, or even the Trinamool and the Congress. A new national player is making inroads everywhere. The Bharatiya Janata Party's steady rise is not necessarily because of the party's activities; it is supported by a host of organisations in West Bengal and has deep coffers. Established over the last three decades, these organisations have multiplied since the Trinamool came to power. Their rise has forced the Trinamool to change its election strategy and adapt to the new challenge in ways dictated by its competitor. This is a story of the work done by some of the agencies that lend their support to the BJP.

Jumping ship

Samir Naskar, 40, who has dropped in for a chat, is a member of the Hindu Jagran Manch, which is still unregistered here. He is a former member of the Sonarpur Zonal Committee and Panchayat of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Now, he is a committed foot soldier of the BJP.

"What to do? Dilip-da wanted me," he explains. "Dilip-da" is the BJP State president Dilip Ghosh, who was particularly keen on roping in Naskar because of his ability to manage elections. Naskar says he switched recently from the Hindu Jagran Manch to the BJP. The reason is "understandable," says Dutta. "Naskar has worked with Dilip-da in the Manch. They share a bond." It is against the blurring of boundaries between ideologically inimical parties that the 2019 election is playing out.

Naskar used to be in charge of booth management for the CPI(M) – his task was to gather together boys in his Panchayat, Pratapnagar, which is adjacent to Baruipur, to mobilise voters to reach the booths and vote, he says. Now, he is the poll manager of the BJP in four Panchayats, which together have about 67,000 voters.

"Today, Hindus are supporting the BJP because of Mamata's policy to appease the Muslims," says Naskar. His grouse with the CPI(M) and the Trinamool is that they are "reluctant to protect the interests of Hindus". He adds: "Last month, Muslims planned a *jalsha* in Sangur village in Pratapnagar. We stopped them from organising it. The police arrested me."

With the participation of activists like Naskar from across the State, the Hindu Jagran Manch's main programme, Ram Navami, has witnessed a massive surge in participation. In 2014, Ram Navami celebrations got a big boost when the Manch provided logistical support. "We felt that the youth needed an icon in Bengal. We decided to give the Ram Navami celebrations a push. We formed celebration committees and Naskar played a key role in that," Dutta says. He reads from a yellow diary: "Last year, 20,61,000 people participated in the Ram Navami rally. Among them, 3,89,135 were matrishakti (women). Till about a few years ago, there were only a few thousand who attended the celebrations.'

Soon after BJP leaders participated in armed Ram Navami rallies, this year the Trinamool, not to be left behind, also organised processions, with participants beating drums and shouting 'Jai Shri Ram!' Trinamool leaders admit that they were - and still are - unsure about their strategy "to counter the Hindutva brigade". The district president of the Trinamool in Malda, Moazzem Hossain, who is contesting this time, says, "We do not have cadres who are informed and educated to monitor the Sangh Parivar. They [Hindutva organisations] are operating at many levels." One such 'operation' involves taking candidates to local and lesser-known shrines in the evenings, have them perform an aarti, and take the blessings of the temple priest. When a priest endorses a candidate in front of 200-500 people, it makes a difference.



"The Trinamool's bigger challenge beyond May 23 will be Hindutva outfits which are not clearly visible on ground, unlike the BJP. "A religious procession marking the Ram Navami festival in Siliguri in April, 2019. (Below): An Ekal Vidyalaya in a tiny hamlet, Kalitala, in the Habibpur developmental block of Malda district, West Bengal. • AFP/ SUBHAM DUTTA



Neither does the Left Front have a strategy. In the Kolkata office of the Party of Democratic Socialism, founded by the CPI(M)'s rebels in 2001, Samir Putatundu, one of the founders, says they "never monitored the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] outfits over the years, as neither the BJP nor the RSS was perceived as a threat." With the Left now floundering in West Bengal, and with the Trinamool still its main adversary in the State, more and more of its supporters are moving to the opposite ideological camp, the BJP.

A new icon in Bengal

The VHP office is located in a nondescript four-storey building on which is painted the emblem of the organisation, a giant banyan tree. Inside the office, located in central Kolkata, is a poster of Lord Krishna and two cows on the door. It reads, 'Only those who protect cows will get our votes'. Elderly Bengali women in white saris run around offering *prasad* in the office, someone is cooking *bhog*, and there is a strong fragrance of flowers.

The organisation secretary of the VHP, Sachindranath Sinha, does not deny that the VHP has been working with temple priests for a long time. "It is called Dharmacharya Samparka Bibhag [the blessings of priests are sought for every activity of the VHP]. There are half a dozen other departments of the VHP doing various kinds of work such as empowering women [through Durga Vahini], skill development, etc.," Sinha says. The VHP liaises with sadhus and arranges free pilgrimages for them to the Maha Kumbh Mela and places of religious significance.

The organisation has only been growing, Sinha says. "The Bajrang Dal is the youth wing of the VHP. Four years ago, we had 5,000-7,000 members. Now we have 70,000." He credits the rise of the Bajrang Dal to Lord Ram and the general growth of Hindutva in the State. "A few years ago, after the government

change, we began noticing how the minorities were growing from strength to strength. The majority community was complaining and the BJP was failing to take advantage of the situation," he says. "We decided then to act and began promoting Ram Navami to engage the youth."

There was some apprehension in putting the spotlight on Lord Ram in a State where Durga, Kali, local gods celebrated in Bengal's literature such as Manasha and Itu, and other godmen are celebrated, he says. "But we felt we should select only that icon, which has helped us grow elsewhere, to mobilise people. This year we have had rallies in all the 512 of the VHP's own blocks."

Sinha agrees that their programmes have helped "the BJP increase its vote share," but insists that the VHP is not "connected to elections". "We are a religio-social organisation," he says firmly. Sinha smiles while talking of the Trinamool adopting the same strategy to garner votes. "They've realised that the Hindu votes are consolidating behind the BJP."

Changing strategy

At the Ram Navami celebrations in April, thousands of people could be seen brandishing hefty metal swords and rocket launchers made of thermocol. Ratna De Nag, the incumbent MP of Hooghly, stood at the tail end of the rally, following the sword-wielding men and "monitoring the situation", according to her associates.

"The ruling party is adopting the narrative of the Opposition. And that is the victory of the Sangh Parivar," says Sanjeeb Mukherjee, retired Professor of Political Science, Calcutta University. "Owing to a lack of ideology, the Trinamool is borrowing the narrative of its rivals from time to time. Earlier it had a pro-peasant narrative, which it had borrowed from the Left. Now it has a pro-Hindutva narrative, which it has borrowed from the Right."

But the Trinamool could also turn this into an advantage, he says. "An important characteristic of Mamata is that she is a quick learner. Not having a strong ideology helps her to continuously improvise. This is a kind of jugaad in the world of politics." But while the Trinamool "adapts", there is no way to tell which direction its flock will turn.

Biswanath Das (name changed) is a reasonably affluent political activist. He lives on the bank of the river Padma in Murshidabad's Jalangi block. "We are officially Trinamool and unofficially BJP," says Das. Das, a Trinamool Panchayat Samiti member, was denied a ticket when internal infighting broke out within the Trinamool. He was also attacked by members of a faction of the Trinamool. He still has a neatly spread Trinamool flag on the roof of his house. "The Hindus here are all with the BJP, but the flag is for protection," he says.

Nation-building

Seemanta Chetana Mancha (SCM), a platform to increase awareness about borders and commit to the nation-building process, is another success story of the Hindutva brigade in Bengal. Standing in a floodplain of the Padma, the SCM's State Committee member, Tapash Biswas, says the organisation, which "closely coordinates with the Border Security Force", has grown dramatically. "Our job is to ensure that people like Biswanath Das are aware of their rights as citizens living on the bor-

Owing to a lack of ideology, the Trinamool is borrowing the narrative of its rivals from time to time. Earlier it had a propeasant narrative, which it had borrowed from the Left. Now it has a pro-Hindutva narrative, which it has borrowed from the Right.

SANJEEB MUKHERJEE Retired Professor of Political Science, Calcutta University





many levels.

MOAZZEM HOSSAIN
District president of the Trinamool in Malda

der. They report cases of cow theft, smuggling and atrocities by the 'majority' in Murshidabad," says Biswas, a swayamsevak. Muslims, who constitute about 70% of Murshidabad's population, are the majority in the district.

Colonel Dipak Bhattacharya, the South Bengal president of the SCM, says the organisation was launched in Bengal decades ago, but began to grow only from 2017. "In the last four years, from very few volunteers we are now have about 30,000 in the State, of which 20,000 are in South Bengal," he says. The Colonel became a full-time swayamsevak after retirement, he says.

The SCM is popular in border States like Rajasthan and Gujarat. One of the key programmes that popularised the SCM in the border towns and villages of Bengal was "stopping land transfer to Muslims". Many Hindu families, especially aged couples whose children live in Kolkatta, were selling their property to Muslims and leaving the border areas to be with their children, the SCM members say. "So, we undertook a programme to reach out to those couples. We told them that if every Hindu family leaves the area, then the border will be completely dominated by Muslims. The programme gave a major boost to our membership," Bhattacharya says. Other programmes such as providing protection to cows and ensuring jobs have attracted more people.

Skill development

Along the banks of the river is a giant and partly rusted gate covered with bougainvillea. This is the Bhalukbona Gramotthan Prashikshan Kendra. The organisation was founded in Kolkata in the late 1980s and is credited for the BJP's growth in the tribal areas of central India by national leaders of the party.

As the gate opens, visible on a plaque are words by Prime Minister Narendra Modi: "Our mission should be skill development to take the country forward." The Bhalukbona centre, located deep in Malda's Habibpur block which has a 50% Scheduled Caste and 30% Scheduled Tribe population, is running the Prime Minister's skill development programme on a huge campus.

"Since 2001, the Ekal Vidyalaya has been in operation, but from 2011, we developed the Gramotthan project to ensure jobs for the villagers in the area," says Kanai Pande, the man in charge of the Bhalukbona project. Pande, a swayamsevak, takes us on a guided tour

of the campus which has a Ram Mandir, a *goshala*, a computer-training school and various skill development programmes to impart training to courier boys or automobile mechanics. But the real success story is the 85,000 Ekal schools in India. "Bengal has about 3,600 of such schools, of which 250 are in Malda," says Pande.

It is early morning. Dalit and Adivasi children chant the *Gayatri Mantra* in Kalitala village in Habibpur. The school has one teacher, Jolly Mondal, who is pursuing a Master's degree. She gets ₹1,000 as honorarium per month and "enjoys teaching". The children under her watch recite a series of poems recounting the greatness of Sita and Savitri. The children say that their favourite hymn is the *Bijaya Mahamantra*, in praise of Lord Ram.

Pande insists that Ekals are "both non-religious and non-formal schools" and that they follow the government-approved syllabus for children up to the fourth grade. These schools, some of which are residential, impart education in sports, language, culture and patriotism. "We teach children to love their country through songs. There are 90 such schools in Habibpur block, besides many run by the RSS," says Pande. Both Ekal and Gramotthan are funded by "well-wishers in many countries, especially the United States."

On way to the city, Pande says that the good work of the Ekal should "benefit the BJP" in the elections. How? "We run the finest Ekal school in Balurghat and it has an impact in the area," he says. Sinha says there are "50 families connected to each Ekal", and the teacher is asked to reach out to each family to talk "about religion and the country". The teachers do not talk about the elections necessarily, he says. But come elections, the parents carry forward the message of voting for the country first, an oft-repeated comment of BJP leaders.

The bigger challenge The heady mix of nationalism and religion has clearly found a resonance in the once Marxist State of West Bengal. Bengal now slips into the last phase of what has turned out to be a violent battle for the ballot. With educationist Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's marble bust smashed into smithereens following a clash between the BJP and the TMC a few days ago, and both blaming each other for the episode, the tension in the State has only increased. Messages about religious communities are being forwarded by organisations, many of which were founded in post-Independence Bengal, managed to survive during the Communist era, and are now consolidated in Trinamool's Bengal. The Trinamool's bigger challenge beyond May 23 will be these Hindutva outfits which are not clearly visible on ground, unlike the BJP.



A ND-N

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड वर्ष 12 अंक 78

लोकलुभावनवाद

बाद देश की नई सरकार को आर्थिक मंदी का सामना करना होगा। उसके सामने वृद्धि दर को दोबारा 6.5 फीसदी से बढाकर 7 फीसदी पहुंचाने जैसे स्वाभाविक मुद्दे भर नहीं होंगे।

पहली बात तो यह कि हम स्वत: पुरानी वृद्धि दर तक नहीं पहुंच सकते और दूसरा सकल घरेलू उत्पाद (जीडीपी) के आंकड़ों की विश्वसनीयता संकट में है। इसके बजाय उन वास्तविक आंकड़ों पर ध्यान देना होगा जिनके साथ छेड़छाड़ करना संभव नहीं है। ये

चुनाव से उपजी आपाधापी के समाप्त होने के आंकड़े परेशान करने वाली कहानी बयान करते हैं। बीते पांच वर्ष के दौरान अधिकांश वक्त वाणिज्यिक वस्तुओं का निर्यात स्थिर रहा। यह घरेलू विनिर्माण की नाकामी को दर्शाता है।

> इसके कारण अर्थव्यवस्था में आंतरिक बातों पर ध्यान देने की प्रवत्ति बढी है। कर राजस्व की स्थिति अच्छी थी लेकिन अब उसमें गिरावट देखने को मिली है। वस्तु एवं सेवा कर का संग्रह खासतौर पर यह बताता है कि कारोबार की स्थिति बहुत अच्छी नहीं है। कई क्षेत्रों के खपत के आंकडों में भी गिरावट आई है। इसका

असर कारोबारी बिक्री और मुनाफे पर भी पडा है। बैलेंस शीट पर तनाव बरकरार है क्योंकि कर्ज का स्तर काफी ज्यादा है। तमाम उद्यमी अभी भी कर्ज का स्तर कम करने के प्रयास में लगे हैं। कुछ हार मानकर विदेशी निवेशकों के हाथ बिकवाली करने में लगे हैं। प्रमुख क्षेत्रों मसलन स्टील, सीमेंट और बिजली आदि के उत्पादन के आंकड़े भी कोई सकारात्मक संकेत नहीं देते। सेंटर फॉर मॉनिटरिंग इंडियन इकनॉमी द्वारा प्रस्तुत कॉर्पोरेट परियोजनाएं अभी भी काफी निचले स्तर पर हैं और परियोजनाओं को किया जाने वाला सरकारी वित्त पोषण थम गया है। राजस्व में कमी के चलते अतीत में हुए काम का भुगतान भी नहीं हुआ है। बाह्य खाता सहज स्तर पर है क्योंकि पूंजी की आवक बनी हुई है, परंत चाल खाते का घाटा बहुत अधिक है।

वित्तीय क्षेत्र की दिक्कतें बरकरार हैं। ऋण की स्थिति में सुधार हुआ है लेकिन बैंक अभी भी संकट में हैं। सरकारी बैंकों के फंसे हुए कर्ज के लिए बीती तिमाही में 52,000 करोड़ रुपये का प्रावधान किया गया जो इससे पहले के आंकडे से दोगुना है। ऋणदाताओं की अगली कड़ी यानी गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनियों के सामने नकदी का संकट है क्योंकि उनकी बैलेंस शीट में क्या कुछ छिपा है इसे लेकर भरोसा

कम हो चुका है। ऐसी

बहुपक्षीय मंदी से जुझ रही कोई

भी सरकार क्या करती है ? वह मौद्रिक और राजकोषीय उपायों के जरिये आर्थिक गतिविधियों को बढ़ावा देती की है वह कहीं गायब न हो जाए। यही कारण है। परंतु भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक द्वारा ब्याज दरों में कटौती अब तक बाजार की वास्तविक दरों में नजर नहीं आ रहा। जहां तक राजकोषीय नीति की बात है घाटा इतना अधिक है कि किसी तरह की कर रियायत की पेशकश नहीं की जा सकती है, बशर्ते कि सरकार राजकोषीय अनुशासन को पूरी तरह न त्याग दे। अगर वह ऐसा करती है तो उच्च सरकारी उधारी से मौद्रिक

नीति के लिए अलग समस्या खड़ी हो जाएगी। एक तीसरा उपाय भी है, और वह यह कि रुपये का अवमूल्यन करके विदेशों में भारतीय उत्पाद को सस्ता और प्रतिस्पर्धी बना दिया जाए। ऐसे में भारत वैश्विक कारोबारियों के लिए एक आकर्षक स्रोत बन जाएगा। परंतु कोई भी

सरकार इस राह पर चलना साप्ताहिक मंथन नहीं चाहती। असली खतरा यह है कि अतीत के

टी. एन. नाइनन

सुधारों ने जो गति प्रदान है कि हमें ऐसे ढांचागत सुधारों की आवश्यकता है जो व्यवस्था को अधिक प्रतिस्पर्धी बनाएं।

बीते 15 वर्ष में ऐसे बहुत कम सुधार देखने को मिले हैं। यही कारण है कि श्रम, भूमि और पूंजी बाजार जैसे कारक बाजारों में सुधार नहीं हुआ। इसका तात्पर्य यह हुआ कि प्रमुख कानूनों में बदलाव किया गया और सरकारी कंपनियों को बजट अवरोधों का सामना करना पड़ा। मिसाल के तौर पर एयर इंडिया को कोई बेल आउट नहीं देना। यह राजनीतिक तौर पर लगभग असंभव है क्योंकि इसका नुकसान कामगारों और किसानों को होगा जो पहले ही परेशान हैं। तथ्य हमें एक और निष्कर्ष की ओर ले जाते हैं: देश को धीमी वृद्धि के लिए तैयार रहना चाहिए। यह बात पहले ही स्पष्ट हो चुकी है लेकिन जीडीपी और रोजगार के आंकडों के साथ छेड़छाड़ करके इसे लगातार दबाया जाता रहा। अर्थव्यवस्था मनमोहन सिंह सरकार के कार्यकाल के आखिरी दौर में ही 7 फीसदी के स्तर से नीचे आ गई थी और आज तो सरकारी आंकडे भी इसे 7 फीसदी से कम बता रहे हैं। चूंकि यह गति युवाओं को रोजगार दिलाने के लिहाज से पर्याप्त नहीं है इसलिए इसका राजनीतिक और सामाजिक असर होना लाजिमी है। एक कमजोर अर्थव्यवस्था में यह लोकलुभावनवाद के उभार के रूप में नजर



आम चुनाव, गठबंधन और अर्थव्यवस्था

असहमति और विविधता को बचाए रखने और सहकारिता वाले संघवाद के संरक्षण के लिए एक व्यापक गठबंधन कहीं बेहतर होगा। यह ऐसी व्यवस्था हो जहां केंद्र और राज्य मिलकर निर्णय लें। बता रहे हैं नितिन देसाई

पहंच रहा है। इस दौरान हम देश के इतिहास के सबसे कटु प्रचार अभियानों के साक्षी बने। नीतियों को लेकर न के बराबर बहस देखने को मिली जबकि सरकार के प्रदर्शन का भी कोई बचाव नदारद ही रहा। इसके बजाय परस्पर आरोप-प्रत्यारोप, अतीत की घटनाओं का उल्लेख और यहां तक कि प्रतिपक्ष की देशभिक्त पर सवाल उठाने. उसकी चारित्रिक हत्या करने तक की घटनाएं देखने को मिलीं। अक्सर इसका आधार सोशल मीडिया पर फैली फेक न्युज बनी।

हममें से जो लोग आजादी के बाद के शुरुआती वर्षों में पैदा हुए वे अक्सर राजनीतिक बहस से नदारद हो रही सभ्यता के लिए अफसोस करते हैं। परंतु इस चनाव प्रचार अभियान में तो राजनीतिक बहस नए स्तर तक गिर गई। यहां तक कि इसका स्तर हमारे लोकतंत्र के भविष्य के प्रति भी आशंका उत्पन्न कर रहा है। वरिष्ठ नेताओं ने मतदाताओं को वर्गीकृत करते हुए जो वक्तव्य दिए हैं वे अनुचित हैं क्यों कि उनमें प्राय: अल्पसंख्यकों को निशाना बनाया गया है जो संविधान का तिरस्कार है। ऐसे तमाम वक्तव्य देश के नागरिकों की समता को चुनौती देते हैं जो हमारे लोकतंत्र की बुनियाद है।

इस विभाजनकारी सोच को वैधता मिलना देश की एकता को सबसे बडा

चुनाव अंतिम चरण में खतरा है। आज की राजनीतिक बहस में संकीर्ण राजनीतिक लाभ के लिए धर्म के आधार पर भेद को बढ़ाया जा रहा है। इसे सत्ताधारी दल के घोषणापत्र में भी महसूस किया जा सकता है जो सांस्कृतिक विरासत के खंड में केवल एक धर्म का जिक्र करता है। भविष्य में यह विभाजन बढ़कर जाति, भाषा या क्षेत्र के स्तर पर हो सकता है।

> एक खतरनाक दलील यह भी है कि देश को एक मजबूत केंद्र सरकार की आवश्यकता है जिसका नेता करिश्माई हो और लगभग तानाशाही शैली में शासन कर सकता हो। एक स्वस्थ लोकतंत्र की राजनीतिक प्रक्रिया में संतुलन और एक दुसरे पर नियंत्रण आवश्यक है।

> हमारे राजनीतिक ढांचे का सबसे संतुलनकारी आयाम है हमारी संघीय व्यवस्था जहां कई राजनीतिक दल अलग-अलग राज्यों में शासन कर रहे हैं। राज्य सरकारें तमाम धर्म, जाति और सांस्कृतिक समूहों के लोगों को राजनैतिक प्रतिनिधित्व का अवसर देती हैं। ऐसी कोई भी बात जो इस समृद्ध संघवाद को क्षति पहुंचाए, हमारे लोकतंत्र के लिए खतरा है। राज्य सरकारों का नेतृत्व देश की विविधता का परिचायक और केंद्र की तानाशाही प्रवृत्ति को रोकने वाला है।

आजादी के बाद के शुरुआती वर्षों में एकदलीय शासन के अधीन भी सी राजगोपालाचारी, गोविंद वल्लभ पंत, बीसी रॉय, रविशंकर शुक्ला, बीजी खेर

और गोपीनाथ बारदोलोई जैसे मुख्यमंत्री पंडित नेहरू के राजनीतिक समकक्ष थे। हमें विविधतापूर्ण नेतृत्व और सहशासन की इस भावना को बचाना होगा।

तानाशाही भरा और विभाजनकारी राजनीतिक एजेंडा न केवल लोकतंत्र और सामाजिक समरसता के लिए बल्कि हमारी आर्थिक संभावनाओं के लिए भी खतरा है। सीमित रोक वाला शक्तिशाली नेता नोटबंदी जैसे मूर्खतापूर्ण कदम उठा सकता है। सत्ताधारी दल के भीतर प्रभावी आंतरिक जांच परख वाली व्यवस्था में ऐसा होना असंभव था।

केंद्र सरकार को यह भी याद रहना चाहिए कि तमाम विकास क्षेत्रों के लिए प्रभावी कार्यकारी दायित्व का निर्वहन राज्यों पर बहुत हद तक निर्भर है और वित्त आयोगों द्वारा सशर्त अनुदान में कमी के साथ वे लगातार आत्मनिर्भर होते जा रहे हैं।

भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था को सहकारी संघवाद की आवश्यकता है जो केंद्र और राज्यों के साथ मिलकर निर्णय ले। ठीक जीएसटी परिषद के तर्ज पर। केंद्र में क्षेत्रीय दलों के साथ गठबंधन सरकार का बनना सहकारी संघवाद का बेहतर उदाहरण है। यह मान्यता सही नहीं है कि गठबंधन सरकारें अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए सही नहीं हैं क्योंकि तीन कमजोर गठबंधन सरकारों के दौरान हमें इसका उलट देखने को मिला है।

स्थानीयता को बढ़ावा देगा। इससे आंतरिक प्रवासन कठिन होगा और वृद्धि प्रभावित होगी। दिल्ली-मुंबई औद्योगिक कॉरिडोर की महत्त्वाकांक्षी परियोजना के कारण पश्चिमी राज्यों में बड़े पैमाने पर प्रवासन होने की संभावना है। दक्षिण के राज्य तेजी से ऐसे जनांकीय चरण में पहंच रहे हैं जहां कामगार आबादी की वृद्धि दर धीमी है। उन्हें अस्थायी और स्थायी दोनों प्रवासन की आवश्यकता पडेगी। परंत् इससे भी अधिक यह अलगाववादी भावनाओं की खुराक बनेगा और केंद्र के सत्ताधारी दल के नियंत्रण के बाहर के राज्यों के साथ राजनीतिक बहस की स्थिति और खराब होगी।

आगामी 23 मई को क्या नतीजे आएंगे यह कहा नहीं जा सकता है। हम सभी उन लोगों से बात करते और उन्हें सुनते हैं जिनसे हम सहमत होते हैं। ऐसे में परस्पर विरोधी बातें सुनने को मिलती हैं। इस शोर का बहुत बड़ा हिस्सा शहरी क्षेत्र से उभरता है। परंतु नतीजे छोटे कस्बों और गांवों से तय होंगे। क्या ये खामोश मतदाता कृषि संकट, छोटे कारोबारियों की कठिनाइयों आदि से प्रभावित होंगे या फिर वे जाति या राष्ट्रवाद के नाम पर अपना निर्णय देंगे।

नतीजे चाहे जो भी हों। अगले महीने सत्ता में आने वाली सरकार को कठिन आर्थिक परिस्थितियों का सामना करना होगा। केंद्र सरकार की वित्तीय स्थिति भी बहुत अच्छी नहीं है। 2018-19 के संशोधित अनुमान से 1.6 लाख करोड़ रुपये कम राजस्व, राजस्व घाटे का 3.4 फीसदी से बढ़कर 3.9 फीसदी हो जाना और कर-जीडीपी अनुपात में गिरावट इसकी बानगी हैं।

बढ़ती तेल कीमतें चालू खाते के घाटे, राजस्व घाटे और मुद्रास्फीति पर दबाव डालेंगी। अमेरिका और चीन के बीच कारोबारी जंग विश्व अर्थव्यवस्था में धीमापन लाएगी। इस कठिन वृहद आर्थिक हालात में नई सरकार पर चुनावी वादे पूरे करने, सब्सिडी और बुनियादी व्यय बढ़ाने आदि का दबाव होगा। इससे वृहद आर्थिक हालात और बुरे हो सकते हैं।

चुनाव परिणाम में वास्तविक अंतर राजनीतिक क्षेत्र में महसूस होगा। अनुमान तो यही है कि आने वाले दिनों में हमें मौजूदा की तुलना में कहीं अधिक बडा गठबंधन देखने को मिलेगा। इसका नेतृत्व मौजूदा सत्ताधारी दल के हाथ में रह सकता है। अगर उसका प्रदर्शन बहुत ही कमजोर रहा हो तो हालात बदल भी सकते हैं। चाहे जो भी हो, विविधता को लेकर उत्पन्न हुआ जोखिम कम होगा। कहीं अधिक लचीले राजनेता विभाजनकारी नारेबाजी और व्यक्तिगत स्तर पर तैयार चुनावी नीतियों से दूरी बनाएंगे। यह स्वागतयोग्य होगा। परंतु एक गठबंधन सरकार का यह भी अर्थ होगा कि किसी भी वक्त चुनाव होने का खतरा भी मंडराता रहेगा।

लोकतंत्र और असहमति को बचाए रखने की यह कीमत हमें चकानी पड सकती है। हमें इस सवाल के जवाब के लिए प्रतीक्षा करनी होगी कि देश के मतदाता अगले कुछ वर्ष तक कैसा अधिनायकवादी वृत्ति वाला केंद्र हिंदुस्तान चाहते हैं।

बंगाल के मोर्चे पर ममता की भाजपा से कड़ी जंग

ऐसा लगा कि इस हफ्ते अगर कहीं चुनावी जंग लडी गई तो वह पश्चिम बंगाल में ही थी। ममता बनर्जी ने अकेले दम पर आम चुनावों के आखिरी चरण को योद्धाओं की जंग में तब्दील कर दिया जिसका नतीजा यह हुआ कि भारतीय जनता पार्टी (भाजपा) को भी सडकों पर उतरने के लिए मजबूर होना पड़ा।

लेकिन मुश्किल यह है कि ममता को सड़क की राजनीति में नहीं हराया जा सकता है। पहले कांग्रेस और वामदल भी ममता की इस राजनीति का शिकार हो चुके हैं। वह अपने विरोधियों को चकनाचूर करने के लिए अपना दिलोजान लगा देती हैं। ममता अपने परिष्कृत अंदाज और बौद्धिकता के लिए नहीं बल्कि जमीनी संघर्ष के लिए जानी जाती हैं।

तृणमूल कांग्रेस की सुप्रीमो ममता ने जब कुछ झल्लाहट भरा बरताव किया था तो मंत्रिमंडल की बैठक में एक मंत्री ने चिढ़ते हुए कहा था, 'ममता बनर्जी की आखिर समस्या क्या है?' सवाल थोडा अटपटा था लेकिन उनके बंगाली सहयोगी ने इसका जवाब देने के लिए थोड़ा समय लिया। उन्होंने अपना चश्मा उतारा, उसके शीशे साफ किए और फिर उसे दोबारा पहनने के बाद कहा, 'अगर कोई यह सोचता है कि ममता रवींद्रनाथ ठाकुर से बेहतर कवि हैं, बीथोवन से बेहतर संगीतकार हैं और लियोनार्दो दा विंची से बेहतर चित्रकार हैं तो फिर हर बात में समस्या है।'

ममता को तमाम दलों का राजनीतिक तबका ऐसे बिगड़ैल बच्चे की तरह देखता है जिसे बड़े लोगों के बीच अकेले जाने की इजाजत नहीं दी जानी चाहिए। लेकिन बंगाल की जनता के लिए तो ममता की जिंदगी एक खुली किताब है और वह हमेशा ही उन लोगों में से एक रही हैं। गरीबी को काफी अहमियत देने वाले इस राज्य में ममता अब भी टीन की छत वाले एक साधारण घर में रहती हैं और पास में ही मच्छरों की भरमार वाला नाला भी है। उनका पहनावा भी काफी साधारण हैं। वह हाथ से बनी सुती साडी, रबर की चप्पलें और एक साधारण घड़ी पहनती हैं। महंगे मोबाइल फोन और चमचमाती कारें शायद उनके लिए बनी ही नहीं हैं। वह



सियासी हलचल आदिति फडणीस

अपने बनाए एक नियम का पालन हमेशा करती हैं - वह कभी भी दूसरों के सामने खाना नहीं खाती हैं। शायद इसकी वजह यह है कि उनके आसपास ऐसे लोग रहते हैं जिन्हें पता ही नहीं होता है कि उनका अगला भोजन कहां से आएगा?

ममता का पालन-पोषण मुश्किल हालात में हुआ था। जब वह एक छोटी बच्ची थीं, तभी उनके पिता का निधन हो गया था। अब उनके लिए ये अवाम ही उनका परिवार है। वह इस बात को इतनी शिद्दत से मानती हैं कि अपने परिवार के किसी भी समारोह में शामिल नहीं होती हैं। (ममता के उत्तराधिकारी माने जा रहे उनके भतीजे अभिषेक बनर्जी की कुछ साल पहले दिल्ली में सगाई हुई थी। करीब तीन दिनों तक कार्यक्रम चलते रहे लेकिन ममता ने कोई खास व्यस्तता न होते हुए भी उन कार्यक्रमों से खुद को अलग ही रखा था।)

ममता अपनी मां के काफी करीब हुआ करती थीं। जब वह स्थित अपने घर से निकलती थीं तो उनकी मां उन्हें छोडने के लिए घर के दरवाजे तक आती थीं। कार में बैठी ममता अपनी गरदन घुमाकर अपनी मां को तब तक देखती रहती थीं, जब तक वह आंखों से ओझल नहीं हो जाती थीं। आम धारणा के उलट ममता अपने भाइयों के उतने करीब नहीं हैं। वह तुनकमिजाज हैं, पसंद-नापसंद को लेकर सख्त राय रखती हैं और बहुत ही कम लोगों पर भरोसा करती हैं।

राजनीति में उनके मार्गदर्शक कलकत्ता के महापौर सुब्रत मुखर्जी रहे हैं। मुखर्जी के प्रयासों से ही ममता को 1984 में पहली बार लोकसभा चुनाव लंडने का मौका मिला था। उस चुनाव में ममता के सामने मार्क्सवादी

कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी (माकपा) के दिग्गज नेता सोमनाथ चटर्जी थे। जादवपर सीट पर हुई उस चनावी जंग में ममता ने सोमनाथ को इस कदर मात दी थी कि वह दोबारा उस सीट से चुनाव नहीं लड़े।

मुखर्जी निजी बातचीत में उस दिन को कोसते हैं जब उन्होंने ममता को पूरे बंगाल में प्रभाव जमाने की खुली छूट दी थी। सौरभ गांगुली को पद्म पुरस्कार दिए जाने की मांग का प्रस्ताव कलकत्ता निगम में पारित कराने वाले मुखर्जी कहते हैं कि वह तो भारत रत्न के हकदार हैं। उन्होंने एक टीवी साक्षात्कार में कहा था. 'मेरे सिर पर ममता नाच रही हैं, मेरे नियंत्रण में निगम के सफाईकर्मियों की फौज है। मैं अब भी निगम ही चला रहा हूं। क्या इस उपलब्धि के लिए मुझे पुरस्कार नहीं मिलना चाहिए?'

सवाल है कि इस सबके

बावजूद ममता ने बंगाल में

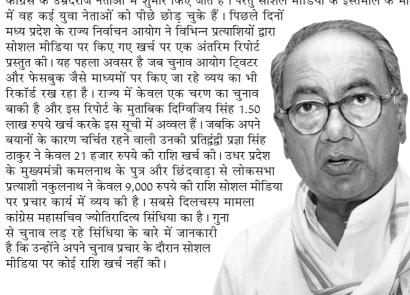
भाजपा को अपना आधार मजबूत करने का मौका कैसे दे दिया? तृणमूल के समर्थक कहते हैं कि इसके लिए ममता केवल खुद को ही दोष दे सकती हैं। पूरे बंगाल में सरकारी जमीन पर नई मस्जिदें बन गई हैं। बाहरी पर्यटकों को उनके शुभचिंतक यह सलाह देते हैं कि कभी भी सड़क पर किसी मुस्लिम के साथ बहस न करें। अगर ऐसा किया तो पुलिस पहले आपको गिरफ्तार करेगी और फिर पूछताछ करेगी। ममता ने बेतुकेपन की हद तक सकारात्मक कार्यवाही का नियम लाग किया हुआ है। स्वाभाविक तौर पर लोगों के बीच इसका प्रतिवाद हुआ है और जिन हिंदुओं ने कभी खुद को हिंदु मतावलंबी के तौर पर नहीं देखा था, अब वे भी भाजपा के पीछे लामबंद हो रहे हैं। मां दुर्गा की धरती कहे जाने वाले बंगाल में अब भगवान राम ने भी दस्तक दे दी है।

प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने बंगाल में एक रैली में कहा था कि तृणमूल कांग्रेस के कई विधायक भाजपा के संपर्क में हैं। अगर लोकसभा चुनाव में तृणमूल का प्रदर्शन खराब रहता हैं तो उसके विधायकों के भाजपा के पाले में जाने की संभावना बनेगी। दो साल बाद बंगाल में विधानसभा चुनाव भी होने वाले हैं। जाहिर है कि बंगाल अब भाजपा का नया मोर्चा बन चुका है।

कानाफूसी

युवाओं पर भारी दिग्गीराजा!

मध्य प्रदेश के पूर्व मुख्यमंत्री और भोपाल संसदीय क्षेत्र से कांग्रेस के प्रत्याशी दिग्विजय सिंह कांग्रेस के उम्रदराज नेताओं में शुमार किए जाते हैं। परंतु सोशल मीडिया के इस्तेमाल के मामले



आपका पक्ष

अमेरिका का ईरान पर प्रतिबंध

ईरान पर अमेरिकी प्रतिबंध लागू

होने से वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव पड़ेगा जिससे भारत भी अछूता नहीं रहेगा। इराक और सऊदी अरब के बाद ईरान तीसरा सबसे बड़ा कच्चे तेल का उत्पादक देश है। भारत अपनी पेट्रोलियम ऊर्जा की जरूरतों को पुरा करने के लिए 80 प्रतिशत आयात करता है। ईरान भारत के लिए सिर्फ कच्चे तेल का निर्यातक देश ही नहीं है बल्कि दोनों देशों के ऐतिहासिक सांस्कृतिक एवं आर्थिक संबंध भी रहे हैं। अफगानिस्तान में शांति एवं स्थायित्व के लिए ईरान का सहयोग महत्त्वपूर्ण है। साथ ही भारत के लिए मध्य एशिया तक पहुंच सुनिश्चित करने की दृष्टि से चाबहार बंदरगाह एक महत्त्वपूर्ण कड़ी है। हालांकि प्रतिबंधों से चाबहार को बाहर रखने का



अस्थायी आश्वासन अमेरिका ने दिया है। यह भारत के लिए मध्य एशिया का व्यापारिक द्वार खोलेगा। पिछले कुछ वर्षों में भारत और अमेरिका के रिश्ते प्रगाढ़ हुए हैं। ऐसे में भारत के लिए अमेरिकी प्रतिबंधों को नजरअंदाज करना अमेरिका द्वारा ईरान पर प्रतिबंध लगाए जाने से भारत पर प्रतिकूल असर पड़ेगा

लगे प्रतिबंधों को नहीं मानता है तो उसे भी प्रतिबंधों का सामना करना कठिन होगा। अगर भारत ईरान पर : पड सकता है। मौजूदा समय में

lettershindi@bsmail.in उस जगह का उल्लेख अवश्य करें, जहां से आप ईमेल कर रहे हैं।

सैन्य शक्ति है। विश्व व्यापार के सभी मार्ग अमेरिकी बैंकिंग से होकर गुजरते हैं। अंतरराष्ट्रीय व्यापार के लिए अमेरिकी डॉलर एक महत्त्वपूर्ण कड़ी है। साथ ही चीन भारत के मुख्य प्रतिद्वंद्वी के रूप में उभरा है जो भारत को प्रत्येक मोर्चे पर मात देने की कवायद में जुटा है। वहीं सिल्क रोड इनिशिएटिव के माध्यम से वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था को विभिन्न आयामों से जोड़ने के लिए प्रयासरत है। इन परिस्थितियों में भारत को एक मजबूत शक्ति की सहायता की जरूरत होगी जिसके माध्यम से चीनी आर्थिक साम्राज्यवादी नीतियों का काट प्रस्तुत कर सके।

अमेरिका सबसे बड़ी आर्थिक एवं

पाठक अपनी राय हमें इस पते पर भेज सकते हैं : संपादक, बिजनेस स्टैंडर्ड लिमिटेड, 4, बहादूर शाह जफर मार्ग, नई दिल्ली - 110002. आप हमें ईमेल भी कर सकते हैं :

कर्मचारी बचाए जेट एयरवेज को

जेट एयरवेज के कई कर्मचारी बेरोजगार हो गए हैं। अगर कर्मचारी अपने वेतन को 25 से 30 प्रतिशत कम कर कंपनी से मिलने वाली सुविधाओं में कटौती करें तो कंपनी को बचाने में मदद मिल सकती है। अगर दसरी एयरलाइंस कंपनियां मुनाफा कमा रही हैं तो जेट एयरवेज भी अपने घाटे से उबर सकती हैं। कई वर्ष पहले केरल में एक कंपनी को बंद होने से उसके कर्मचारियों ने बचाया था। कंपनी के कर्मचारियों ने खर्च कम किया तथा कंपनी को चलाया था। ब्रिटेन की एक कंपनी के कर्मचारियों ने कंपनी को बंद होने से बचाया था। जेट कंपनी के कर्मचारी यूनियन ऐसे उदाहरणों पर गौर कर सकते हैं तथा कंपनी को बचा सकते हैं।

गंगाबिसन कलंगी, नासिक



पश्चाताप मनुष्य के अंत :करण को पवित्र करने वाला भाव है

चुनाव प्रचार का समापन

आखिरकार राजनीतिक दलों और साथ ही देश की जनता को लंबे चुनाव प्रचार से मुक्ति मिली। इसे संयोग ही कहा जाएगा कि चुनाव प्रचार के समापन के मौके पर भाजपा अध्यक्ष ने भी संवाददाता सम्मेलन किया और कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष ने भी। एक ओर जहां राहुल गांधी ने अपनी बात कहने के साथ ही संवाददाताओं के सवालों के जवाब दिए वहीं दूसरी ओर भाजपा की प्रेस कांफ्रेंस में केवल अमित शाह ने ऐसा किया। चूंकि उनके साथ प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी भी संवाददाता सम्मेलन में उपस्थित हुए थे इसलिए यह अपेक्षा की जा रही थी कि वह भी सवालों के जवाब देंगे. लेकिन उन्होंने यह कह कर इन्कार कर दिया कि यह तो पार्टी अध्यक्ष की प्रेस कांफ्रेंस है। यह एक प्रश्न हो सकता है कि भाजपा अध्यक्ष की ओर से बुलाई गई प्रेस कांफ्रेंस में नरेंद्र मोदी को सवालों के जवाब देने चाहिए थे या नहीं और उनके जवाब पार्टी नेता के तौर पर माने जाते या फिर प्रधानमंत्री के तौर पर, लेकिन यह भी अपनी जगह सही है कि उनसे सवालों के जवाब की उम्मीद की ही जा रही थी। इसलिए और भी, क्योंकि पांच साल के अपने कार्यकाल में उन्होंने एक बार भी विधिवत तरीके से किसी संवाददाता सम्मेलन को संबोधित नहीं किया। इसे लेकर सवाल भी उठते रहे हैं। अब जब उन्होंने अपनी सरकार की वापसी का दावा किया तब फिर यह उम्मीद की जाती है कि वह इस सवाल के लिए गुंजाइश न रहने दें कि वह प्रेस कांफ्रेंस का सामना क्यों नहीं करते? यह सही है कि प्रधानमंत्री ने विभिन्न अवसरों और खासकर चनाव के मौके पर मीडिया से बातचीत की है. लेकिन प्रेस कांफ्रेंस का आयोजन कर सवालों के जवाब नहीं दिए। आखिर वह इसकी अनदेखी कैसे कर सकते हैं कि शासनाध्यक्षों की ओर से संवाददाता सम्मेलन आयोजित कर पत्रकारों के सवालों के जवाब देने का चलन पूरी दुनिया में है और इसे स्वस्थ लोकतंत्र की निशानी माना जाता है।

करीब-करीब एक ही समय पर कांग्रेस और भाजपा के शीर्ष नेताओं की ओर से आयोजित प्रेस कांफ्रेंस में एक उल्लेखनीय अंतर यह भी देखने को मिला जहां भाजपा अध्यक्ष अमित शाह और प्रधानमंत्री ने दावे के साथ यह कहा कि उनकी सरकार फिर से बनने जा रही है और पर्याप्त बहुमत से बनने जा रही है, वहीं राहुल गांधी ने ऐसा कुछ कहने से इन्कार कर दिया। उनका तर्क था कि जनता के निर्णय के बारे में वह कुछ नहीं कहना चाहते। वह केवल यही कहने तक सीमित रहे कि उन्होंने नरेंद्र मोदी को घेर दिया है और उनकी वापसी नहीं होने वाली। चुनाव नतीजों को लेकर अपने पक्ष में कोई दावा न करने के पीछे कुछ कारण हो सकते हैं, लेकिन इसे उनके आत्मविश्वास से जोड़कर भी देखा जा सकता है। जो भी हो, चंद दिन बाद ही यह साफ हो जाएगा कि किसकी सरकार बनने जा रही है, लेकिन अच्छा यह होगा कि राजनीतिक दल इस पर विचार करें कि चुनाव के दिनों में जैसा कटु माहौल बन जाता है उससे कैसे बचा जाए? उन्हें कम से कम यह तो सुनिश्चित करना ही चाहिए कि यह माहौल चुनाव के

बालिका निकेतन

देहरादून स्थित बालिका निकेतन में बालिका की आत्महत्या का मामला बेहद चिंताजनक है। इस पूरे घटनाक्रम ने बालिका निकेतन और नारी निकेतन की सुरक्षा व्यवस्थाओं पर सवाल खड़े कर दिए हैं। ऐसा पहली बार नहीं है जब बालिका निकेतन की व्यवस्थाओं को लेकर सवाल उठे हैं। राज्यपाल बेबी रानी मौर्य ने गत वर्ष यहां सुरक्षा एवं स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं को लेकर सख्त नाराजगी जताते हुए उनमें सुधार के निर्देश दिए थे। यहां तक कि व्यवस्थाओं की मासिक रिपोर्ट नियमित रूप से राजभवन भेजने को कहा गया। बावजूद इसके व्यवस्थाओं में कोई बदलाव नहीं आया। इससे पहले दिसंबर 2017 में पांच बालिकाओं के यहां से भागने का प्रकरण सामने आया था। शासन ने इसकी जांच कराई, जिसमें कई चौंकाने वाली बातें सामने आईं, मगर इस पर कोई ठोस कार्रवाई नहीं हुई जून 2018 में स्कूल जाते समय एक बालिका गायब हो गई थी। सितंबर 2018 में यहां बालिकाओं को संक्रमण का सामना करना पड़ा। इस घटना के सार्वजनिक होने के बाद यहां स्वास्थ्य जांच की व्यवस्था शुरू की गई। वहीं, नारी निकेतन में भी संवासिनियों से मारपीट, अच्छा भोजन न दिया जाना और रहने की व्यवस्थाओं को लेकर पूर्व में सवाल उठते रहे हैं। इन पर सरकार व शासन ने कई बार सख्ती की, लेकिन इसके बावजूद यहां इस प्रकार की घटनाओं का बढ़ना प्रबंधन व विभागीय लापरवाही को प्रदर्शित करता है। यदि ऐसा नहीं है तो फिर क्यों यहां इस तरह की घटनाएं लगातार सामने आ रही हैं। हाल में बालिका निकेतन में किशोरी की मृत्यु प्रकरण में भी कई खामियां सामने आई हैं। मसलन, यहां तो न एंबुलेंस हैं और न ही कोई डॉक्टर। इस कारण यहां के बच्चों के बीमार पड़ने पर उन्हें इलाज के लिए सरकारी अस्पतालों में लाना ले जाना पड़ता है। इन व्यवस्थाओं पर न तो कभी शासन ने गंभीरता दिखाई और न ही विभाग ने। बालिका व नारी निकेतन में अहम बात यह है कि यहां नाबालिग बालिकाओं व महिलाओं को उचित मार्गदर्शन की जरूरत होती है ताकि उन्हें समाज की मुख्यधारा में लाया जा सके। सरकार व प्रशासन को इस मुद्दे की संवेदनशीलता समझकर उचित कदम उठाने होंगे।

मोदी और अंतरराष्ट्रीय मीडिया



प्रो. निरंजन कुमार

आखिर अमेरिका, ब्रिटेन, पाकिस्तान की मीडिया में बिल्कुल समान नजरिये वाली खबरें और लेख कैसे सामने आ रहे हैं?

मेरिकी पत्रिका 'टाइम' के हालिया अंतरराष्ट्रीय संस्करण के आवरण पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी की तस्वीर के साथ शीर्षक छपा-'इंडियाज डिवाइडर इन चीफ' यानी भारत को विभाजित करने वाला मुखिया। इसकी मीडिया और सोशल मीडिया में काफी चर्चा रही। विपक्षी नेताओं और खासकर कांग्रेसियों ने इसे अपने पक्ष में भुनाने की कोशिश भी की। यह बात और है कि इसी आवरण कथा में राहुल गांधी को कुछ भी न सीखने वाला बताया गया था। अंतरराष्ट्रीय मीडिया में लोकसभा चुनाव के सिलसिले में पीएम मोदी के बारे में ऐसे लेखों और खबरों की भरमार है। टाइम के अतिरिक्त द इकोनॉमिस्ट, न्यूयॉर्क टाइम्स और पाकिस्तान के 'डॉन' और अन्य अखबारों को इस संदर्भ में देखना प्रासंगिक होगा कि पिछले लगभग डेढ महीने में उन्होंने भारतीय चुनाव को किस रूप में चित्रित किया? उनकी रिपोर्टिंग के पीछे की मानसिकता क्या है और भारतीय अभिजन वर्ग से इसका क्या संबंध है? 'टाइम' की आवरण कथा के लेखक आतिश तसीर हैं जो पाकिस्तान के पूर्व राजनेता सलमान तसीर के बेटे हैं। वह भारत के अलावा पाकिस्तान भी जाते रहते हैं। वह अमेरिकी नागरिक हैं और बतौर लेखक पहचान खते हैं। आतिश तसीर ने लिखा कि क्या विश्व का सबसे बडा लोकतंत्र मोदी सरकार के पांच साल और झेल सकता है? इस लेख में अर्थव्यवस्था और विकास के मोर्चे पर मोदी की नाकामी, किसानों की बदहाली, मुसलमानों के खिलाफ गौ-रक्षकों की हिंसा और उनके साथ

तथाकथित भेदभाव आदि मृद्दों पर मोदी को घेरा गया है। तथ्यों के आधार पर देखें तो आर्थिक मोर्चे पर मोदी सरकार के पांच वर्ष मनमोहन सिंह के पिछले पांच साल से बेहतर नजर आते हैं। मनमोहन सिंह के समय आर्थिक विकास की औसत दर जहां 6.7 फीसद रही वहीं मोदी सरकार के दौरान यह दर 7.6 प्रतिशत रही। अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष, विश्व बैंक आदि ने भी भारत को दुनिया की सबसे तेजी से बढ़ती अर्थव्यवस्था की मान्यता दी। टाइम के इसी अंक के एक अन्य लेख में भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था में सुधार के लिए मोदी को एकमात्र उम्मीद के तौर पर देखा गया, लेकिन उसकी चर्चा नहीं हुई।

यदि किसानों की स्थिति देखें तो उनकी बदहाली के पीछे विभिन्न सरकारों की बेरुखी या गलत नीतियां रहीं। मोदी सरकार ने किसानों की दशा सुधारने के लिए पहली बार ठोस कदम उठाए। फसलों के न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य को लागत से डेढ़ गुना किया। मूल्य बढ़ोतरी के साथ सरकार ने यह भी सुनिश्चित किया कि कृषि उपज की खरीद भी हो। 2009-14 में जहां सिर्फ सात लाख मीट्रिक टन दलहन और तिलहन खरीदे गए वहीं 2014-19 में 94 लाख मीट्रिक टन की खरीद हुई। इसके अतिरिक्त किसान फसल बीमा योजना और छोटे किसानों के लिए 6000 रुपये सालाना किसान सम्मान योजना लागू की गई ताकि दशा को सुधारा जा सके। कथित गौ-रक्षकों द्वारा मुसलमानों के खिलाफ हिंसा की घटनाएं अत्यंत दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण और निंदनीय हैं। हिंसा का सहारा लेने वालों को सख्त सजा दी जानी



चाहिए। मोदी ने अक्सर ऐसे तत्वों की भर्त्सना की और उनके खिलाफ कड़े कदम उठाने के लिए राज्य सरकारों को निर्देश भी दिए। इसके बावजूद उतनी सख्ती से कार्रवाई नहीं हो पाई जितनी जरूरी थी, लेकिन इसकी अनदेखी नहीं की जा सकती कि कानून-व्यवस्था राज्यों के अधिकार क्षेत्र वाला विषय है।

मोदी सरकार पर जाति-पंथ के आधार पर भेदभाव का आरोप पूरी तौर पर गलत है। शौचालय, गैस सिलेंडर, बिजली, आयुष्मान समेत अन्य अनेक योजनाओं का लाभ बिना किसी भेदभाव सभी गरीबों को दिया गया। देसी-विदेशी मीडिया में भले ही कुछ लोग मोदी को मुसलमान विरोधी के रूप में चित्रित करें, लेकिन अरब देशों में उनका आदर है और उन्हें सम्मानित भी किया गया है। सऊदी अरब और संयुक्त अरब अमीरात, दोनों ने उन्हें अपने सर्वोच्च सम्मान से नवाजा है। सच्चर समिति की रपट इसका साक्षात प्रमाण है कि खुद को मुस्लिम हितैषी बताने वाले राजनीतिक दलों ने मुसलमानों का कितना हित किया है? दूसरी ओर मोदी सरकार में अल्पसंख्यक कल्याण संबंधी योजनाएं कहीं प्रभावी ढंग से लागू की गईं। साफ है कि टाइम की आवरण कथा तथ्यों की सही तरह से छानबीन किए बगैर लिख दी गई। इस कथा में मोदी का अंध विरोध साफ झलकता है।

चुनावों के दौरान न्यूयॉर्क टाइम्स की कुछ।

खबरों के शीर्षक देखें-'भारत में चुनाव, किसान पीड़ित। 'मोदी का डरावना अभियान', 'मोदी के शासन में हिंदू राष्ट्रवादी उभार से भारत और विभाजित', 'चुनाव अधिकारी की घने जंगल में यात्रा ताकि अकेला हिंदू पुजारी मतदान करे।' गौर करें कि यह नहीं लिखा गया कि भारत का चुनाव आयोग इतना मुस्तैद है कि निकोबार में आदिवासियों के लिए समुद्र में नाव से मीलों यात्रा करके मतदान की व्यवस्था कराई गई, जबिक आमतौर पर ये आदिवासी मतदान नहीं करते। द इकोनॉमिस्ट की एक खबर का शीर्षक देखें- 'भारत के चुनाव अभियान में गंदी चालें, मतदाताओं को डराना, प्रतिद्वंद्वियों को धमकाना, नेताओं की खरीद'। शीर्षक के ठीक नीचे भाजपा कार्यकर्ताओं का फोटो छपा था। एक अन्य रपट-'नरेंद्र मोदी के नेतृत्व में भारत की सत्तारूढ़ पार्टी लोकतंत्र के लिए खतरा', 'अल्पसंख्यकों में भय'। पाकिस्तानी अखबारों 'डॉन', 'द नेशन', आदि अखबारों की सुर्खियां भी अलग नहीं-

'मोदी ने जहरीले धार्मिक राष्ट्रवाद का माहौल बनाया', 'ईवीएम समीक्षा की विपक्ष की मांग ठुकराई।' इस शीर्षक से लगता है मानों सरकार ने इसे ठुकराया है, जबकि सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने विपक्षी

'भारत में 20 लाख ईवीएम लापता,' ऐसी बेबुनियाद रिपोर्ट एक भारतीय अंग्रेजी पाक्षिक पत्रिका में छपी। एक चैनल में भी यही खबर चलाई गई। इसका चुनाव आयोग ने खंडन किया 'चनाव में बडे पैमाने पर मतदाता वंचित,' ऐसी खबर एनजीओ की एक कथित वामपंथी पत्रिका में प्रकाशित की गई। इस खबर के अनुसार तीन करोड मुस्लिम और चार करोड़ दलित मतदाता सूची से गायब हैं। यह वह एनजीओ है जिसे 2006 में फोर्ड फाउंडेशन ने विभिन्न गतिविधियो के लिए दो लाख डॉलर अनुदान दिया था। ध्यान रहे विदेशी धन को लेकर बने एक पुराने कानून का मोदी सरकार ने कड़ाई से पालन करते हुए जब एनजीओ वालों से हिसाब मांगा तो रातों रात 20,000 एनजीओ गायब हो गए थे। मोदी से उनकी नाराजगी स्वाभाविक है। साफ है कि झुठी खबरें चुनाव आयोग और सरकार को बदनाम करने के मकसद से छापी गई। अगर इनमें सच्चाई होती तो मोदी विरोधी खेमा कोर्ट पहुंच चुका होता।

क्या यह हैरानी की बात नहीं कि अमेरिकी ब्रिटिश, पाकिस्तानी मीडिया में बिल्कुल समान नजरिये वाली खबरें और लेख छप रहे हैं? क्या यह इत्तफाक इसलिए है, क्योंकि वामपंथी विचारक, लुटियन बुद्धिजीवी और विदेशी धन पा रहे एनजीओ मोदी विरोध के नाम पर एकजुट हैं? सच्चाई जो भी हो, इसकी अनदेखी नहीं की जा सकती कि जैसा लेख 'टाइम' में छपा वैसे न जाने कितने भारतीय मीडिया में छप चुके हैं। ऐसे लेख मोदी के प्रति दुराग्रह को भी जाहिर करते हैं और बुद्धिजीवियों के एक वर्ग की कुंठा को भी (लेखक दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय

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आपदा में तब्दील होता जलवायु परिवर्तन

इस माह पहली मई को ब्रिटेन की संसद ने एक अभूतपूर्व कदम उठाते हुए 'पर्यावरण एवं जलवायु आपातकाल लागु करने का प्रस्ताव पारित किया। इसके पहले वेल्स एवं स्कॉटलैंड ने भी इसी तरह के आपातकाल की घोषणा की थी। यह अपने आप में एक क्रांतिकारी कदम था। इसने पूरी दुनिया का ध्यान जलवायु परिवर्तन से होने वाले आसन्न कुप्रभावों की ओर आकृष्ट किया। इसने भारतवासियों का ध्यान अधिक खींचा, क्योंकि ठीक उसी समय फणि तूफान ओडिशा एवं अन्य पूर्वी तटीय इलाकों में तबाही मचा रहा था। जलवायु परिवर्तन पिछले कई दशकों से दुनिया के लिए एक संवेदनशील मुद्दा बना हुआ है। इस पर संयुक्त राष्ट्र के साथ-साथ अन्य संस्थाओं की ओर से सम्मेलन और कार्यक्रम आयोजित होते रहे हैं। इन दिनों ग्रेटा थुनबर्ग नाम की स्वीडन की एक किशोरी चर्चा में है। उसने पर्यावरण सुरक्षा विषय पर संसद के सामने हजारों विद्यार्थियों के साथ प्रदर्शन करके एक मिसाल कायम की। जलवाय परिवर्तन से होने वाले नकसान के प्रति जागरूकता जगाने एवं निदान खोजने हेतु इस प्रदर्शन ने सारी दुनिया का ध्यान खींचा और वह ग्लोबल वार्मिंग के विरुद्ध जन प्रदर्शन की प्रतीक बन गई।

ग्लोबल वार्मिंग का ही नतीजा है जलवायु परिवर्तन। 19वीं शताब्दी की औद्योगिक क्रांति के बाद पथ्वी की सतह और महासागरों के औसत तापमान में लगातार वृद्धि हो रही है। इसका मख्य कारण कारखानों के अलावा मनष्य के दैनिक क्रियाकलापों के कारण उत्सर्जित होने वाली ग्रीनहाउस गैसें हैं। भुमंडलीय वातावरण का तापमान एक स्वभाविक संतुलन प्रक्रिया से नियंत्रित होता है। सूरज से आने वाली गर्मी अगर वातावरण में अवशोषित हो जाती है तो पृथ्वी की सतह का तापमान बढ़ जाता है और यदि सूरज से आने वाली गर्मी पृथ्वी की सतह से परावर्तित होकर पुनः वायुमंडल



आपातकाल संबंधी प्रस्ताव के प्रभाव पर दुनिया भर की नजर रहनी चाहिए

ब्रिटिश संसद

के पर्यावरणीय

में वापस हो जाती है तो पृथ्वी का तापमान नहीं बढ़ता। यदि तापमान स्थिर करना है तो वातावरण में ग्रीनहाउस गैसों की मात्रा नियंत्रित रखनी होगी जिससे सौर उर्जा का अधिकतम परावर्तन हो जाए। अंधाधुंध उद्योगीकरण और जीवनशैली के कारण बेहिसाब ग्रीनहाउस गैसों का निर्माण हो रहा है। आज उर्जा के प्रमुख स्रोत के रूप में कोयला, प्राकृतिक तेल एवं गैस का उपयोग हो रहा है। इस कारण कार्बन डाइऑक्साइड का उत्सर्जन वायमंडल में होता है। दूसरा कारण वनों की कटाई है। वृक्ष वातावरण से कार्बन डाइऑक्साइड का अवशोषण करते हैं एवं ऑक्सीजन छोड़ते हैं। वक्षों की कटाई से यह संतलन बिगड़ जाता है। आजकल प्रचलित बहुफसली खेती के कारण भी वातावरण में ग्रीनहाउस गैसों की मात्रा बढ़ रही है। जानवरों के द्वारा भी मीथेन गैस का उत्सर्जन होता है। इसके अलावा उर्वरकों एवं कीटनाशकों का उपयोग भी पर्यावरण के लिए ठीक नहीं।

अपशिष्ट निपटान यानी वेस्ट डिस्पोजल भी एक समस्या है। हमारे यहां अपशिष्ट प्रबंधन का तरीका सही न होने और कचरा जमा होने या उसके जलाने से भी धरती की सतह एवं जलस्रोतों में मीथेन एवं अन्य दूसरे विषैली गैसों की

मात्रा बढ़ती है। इसी प्रकार खनन संबंधी गतिविधियों से भी ग्रीनहाउस गैसों का निर्माण होता है। धरती के बढ़ते तापमान से पूरी दुनिया के साथ भारत की चिंता भी स्वाभाविक है। एक रपट में बताया गया है कि 19वीं शताब्दी की समाप्ति के बाद से भूमंडल के तापमान में वृद्धि जारी है। यह तापमान अगर 1.5 डिग्री सेंटीग्रेट तक बढ़ता है तो इसके घातक परिणाम होंगे। इससे मौसम चक्र प्रभावित होगा और अनावृष्टि, बाढ़, चक्रवात आदि का खतरा बढ़ जाएगा। अगर तापमान दो डिग्री सेंटीग्रेट तक बढ़ा तो हालात और विनाशकारी होंगे। ग्लोबल वार्मिंग को रोकने के लिए 197 देशों ने पेरिस समझौता किया था। समझौते के तहत 2100 तक पृथ्वी की सतह का तापमान 1.5 डिग्री सेंटीग्रेट से अधिक नहीं बढ़ने देने का संकल्प लिया गया था। भारत ने इस समझौते के लिए कदम उठाए हैं, लेकिन अन्य विकासशील देशों की तरह भारत के सामने गरीबी हटाने की चुनौती है। इस चुनौती का सामना आर्थिक विकास से ही संभव है जिससे हम समझौता नहीं कर सकते।

पर्यावरण की बिगड़ती स्थिति के लिए मूल रूप से विकसित देश जिम्मेदार हैं। सबसे अधिक ग्रीनहाउस गैसों का उत्सर्जन उन्हीं के द्वारा किया जा रहा है। केवल अमेरिका और चीन मिलकर 40 प्रतिशत ग्रीनहाउस गैसों का उत्सर्जन करते हैं। न्यायसंगत यही होगा कि ग्लोबल वार्मिंग के लिए जो जितने बड़े कारक हैं उन्हें निवारण हेतु उतना ही आगे बढ़कर उदारता से योगदान करना चाहिए। देखना है कि ब्रिटिश संसद का पर्यावरणीय आपातकाल संबंधी प्रस्ताव कितना प्रभावी होता है? जलवायु परिवर्तन को एक आसन्न आपदा के रूप में देखा जाना चाहिए और उससे निपटने के लिए असाधरण कदम भी उठाए जाने चाहिए।

(लेखक बिहार विधानसभा के अध्यक्ष हैं) response@jagran.com



धर्म मानव-जीवन की आचार-संहिता है जो हमें कर्तव्य-पालन की दिशा और प्रेरणा प्रदान करता है। धर्म वैसा ही है, जैसा आकाश। जैसे घटाकाश, मठाकाश कहने से आकाश अनेक नहीं होता, उसी प्रकार विभिन्न नाम होने से धर्म अनेक नहीं हो सकता। धर्म वह वस्तु है जिसे सभी जन, समाज व मतावलंबी, सर्वोत्कृष्ट मानते हैं। धर्म को सभी मत-मतांतर सुख की प्राप्ति का निमित्त समझते हैं। सभी संप्रदाय उपदेश देते हैं कि विश्व की अति सुंदरतम

वस्तु को छोड़कर धर्म धारण करो। सभी ज्ञानी, संत विद्वान, चाहे वे किसी धर्म के मानने वाले हों, यही शिक्षा देते हैं कि धर्म से कुछ और नहीं है। कुछ विद्वानों का मत है कि धर्म धारण करने से पुरुष, देवपुरुष बन जाता है गीता, वेद, उपनिषद आदि युगों से हमें धर्म की शिक्षा दे रहे हैं। धर्म का सिद्धांतों में किसी को दुख न पहुंचाना, क्रोध लालच न करना, मीठे व हितकर वचन बोलना जैसे तत्व शामिल हैं। ये सामाजिक जीवन को पुष्ट रखने वाले हैं। जिस समय मनुष्य में ये गुण विद्यमान थे, वह सतयुग था धीरे-धीरे मनुष्य के स्वभाव व व्यवहार में अंतर आता गया त्यों-त्यों यग का ह्रास होता गया। सतयग के बाद त्रेता औ उसके उपरांत द्वापर ने दस्तक दी। फिर कलयुग आया।

वर्तमान में मनुष्य के भीतर उत्तम गुणों का अभाव हो रहा है। इसी कारण यह कलयुग है। धर्म ही श्रेष्ठ है। वह मनुष्य के महत्व और यश को पराकाष्ठा तक पहुंचाता है। धर्म की राह पर चलने वाले को इस जगत में अर्थ और सुख तो प्राप्त होता ही है, साथ ही परलोक में भी अभ्युदय और अभीष्ट की प्राप्ति होती है। परंतु साधक को धर्म के मार्ग पर चलने हेतु प्रारंभ में क्षति अवश्य उठानी होती है। जीवों के प्रभव अर्थात कल्याण हेतु धर्म का विधान किया गया है, अतएव जो वस्तु प्रभव संयुक्त हो, उसी को कल्याण रूपी धर्म समझना चाहिए। चोरी, अन्याय, वध आदि से मनुष्य को क्लेश न हो, इसीलिए धर्म को विधान कहा गया है जो मनष्य नित्य सभी का भला चाहता है, मन, वचन, कर्म से सबके हित में लगा रहता हो, वही धर्म को जानता है धर्मात्मा वही है जिसकी आत्मा निष्पाप और उसका चरित्र स्वच्छ हो। जिसका अंतःकरण मिलन है, उसे जुही का हार भी जलते हुए अंगार की भांति कष्ट देता है। इसीलिए धर्म के मर्म को आत्मसात करना बहुत उपयोगी होता है। डॉ. विजय प्रकाश त्रिपाठी

2019 में सबसे अधिक अरबपतियों वाले देश 705 285 146 102 97 82 57 सऊदी अरब ब्रिटेन स्रोत : वेल्थ–एक्स फ्रांस भारत हांगकांग स्विट्जरलैंड रूस जर्मनी चीन अमेरिका

शिक्षा का बदलना होगा स्वरूप

देवेंद्रराज सुथार

आधुनिक शिक्षा प्रणाली केवल और केवल नंबरो की बुनियाद पर टिकी है। सर्वाधिक अंक अर्जित करने वाले छात्र का ही यशगान होता है। मीडिया में भी उनका भरपूर महिमामंडन किया जाता है। छात्रों को इस नंबरों की दौड़ में अव्वल आने के लिए अभिभावक प्रलोभन देते हैं व अनुचित दबाव डालते हैं। कई बार अभिभावकों की अपेक्षा के अनुसार अंक न आने पर छात्र हताशा के गर्त में चले जाते हैं। हीनता व निराशा का बालमन पर इतना गहरा आघात पहुंचता है कि वे नादानी में अपनी जिंदगी ही नष्ट कर देते हैं। नंबरों की इस होड़ में बच्चों की नैसर्गिक प्रतिभा दब रही है। उनकी मौलिक सोच एवं रचनात्मकता का ह्रास हो रहा है। मौजूदा शिक्षा शिक्षित बेरोजगारों की संख्या ही बढ़ा रही है। 19वीं सदी में मैकाले ने भारत को जो शिक्षा प्रणाली प्रदान की वह सिर्फ बाबू बनाने वाली साबित हो रही है।

आज हमारे देश का तथाकथित शिक्षित वर्ग अपने वेदों, पुराणों व प्राचीन ज्ञान-विज्ञान को अवैज्ञानिक, असत्य, काल्पनिक, रूढ़िवादी व अंधविश्वासी मानता है और पश्चिम द्वारा कही गई हर बात को सही व वैज्ञानिक मानता है। आज

शोध–अनुसंधान को बढ़ावा देकर हमें कौशल विकास से जुड़ी शिक्षा प्रणाली अपनानी होगी जो रोजगार दिला सके

का शिक्षित वर्ग राम को रामा, अर्जुन को अर्जुना व योग को योगा कहकर स्वयं को गौरवान्वित महसूस करता है। आज जहां विकसित देश शोध एवं विकास पर सर्वाधिक ध्यान दे रहे हैं। वहीं भारत में इसके विपरीत देखने को मिल रहा है। भारत में शोध-अध्ययन की गुणवत्ता महज डिग्री हासिल करने तक ही सीमित है।

शोध से जुड़े आंकड़े बताते हैं कि ब्रिक्स देशों में केवल भारत ही ऐसा देश है, जहां शोध पर कुल जीडीपी का मात्र 0.9 फीसद खर्च किया जाता है। दूसरी ओर चीन में यह 1.9 फीसद, रूस में 1.5 फीसद, ब्राजील में 1.3 फीसद तथा दक्षिण अफ्रीका में एक फीसद खर्च होता है। इसी वजह से राष्ट्रीय उच्च शिक्षा मूल्यांकन परिषद ने भी अपनी सर्वेक्षण रिपोर्ट में यह स्पष्ट किया है कि भारत में 68 फीसद विश्वविद्यालयों और 90 फीसद कॉलेजों में उच्च शिक्षा की गुणवत्ता या

तो मध्यम दर्जे की है या दोषपूर्ण है। इन संस्थानों के 74 फीसद डिग्रीधारी छात्र बेरोजगार हैं। बीते दिनों एक रिपोर्ट में खुलासा हुआ कि देश में 60 फीसद विश्वविद्यालयों और 80 फीसद कॉलेजों से निकले छात्रों के पास न तो तकनीकी कौशल है और न ही भाषा की दक्षता है। यही कारण है कि ऐसे छात्र उचित रोजगार नहीं पा सकते।

हमने यह समझने में बहुत देरी कर दी कि अकादिमक शिक्षा की तरह अपनी नई पीढ़ी को बाजार की मांग के मुताबिक उच्च गुणवत्ता वाली कौशल विकास से जुड़ी शिक्षा देना भी हमारे लिए जरूरी है। एशिया की आर्थिक महाशक्ति दक्षिण कोरिया ने विकास के मामले में चमत्कार कर दिया है। वर्ष 1950 तक विकास के स्तर और विकास दर, दोनों ही मामलों में दक्षिण कोरिया हमारे मुकाबले कहीं नहीं था, लेकिन आज उसकी गिनती भारत से एक पायदान आगे वाले देशों में होती है और विकास के कुछ पैमाने पर वह जर्मनी जैसे देश को भी पीछे छोड़ चुका है तो इसमें बड़ी भूमिका कौशल से जुड़ी शिक्षा की है। निश्चित रूप से कौशल विकास को बढ़ावा दिए बिना देश विकसित व आत्मनिर्भर नहीं हो

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

सियासी सुविधा का सवाल

राजीव गौड़ा और सलमान सोज- इन दो कांग्रेस नेताओं का लेख 'अर्थव्यवस्था की बिगड़ती तस्वीर' किसी चुनावी सभा का भाषण प्रतीत होता है। इसमें तथ्यों के साथ मनमाना खिलवाड़ किया गया है। बतौर उदाहरण जरा देखिए, लेखकों के अनुसार तिमाही के सकल घरेलू उत्पाद में कमी के कारण 1.6 लांख करोड़ रुपये के राजस्व की कमी हुई, जो वास्तविक राजकोषीय घाटे को बढ़ाकर 4.5 प्रतिशत कर देगी, किंतु पिछले पूरे साल के घाटे के आंकड़े तो 3.2 प्रतिशत पर ही विद्यमान हैं। यही नहीं इस वित्तीय वर्ष के प्रथम दो महीनों में जीएसटी का संग्रह रिकॉर्ड तोड़ 2.20 लाख करोड़ पहुंचा है, जो गत वर्ष के औसत से लगभग 30 हजार करोड़ रुपये अधिक है। वास्तव में कांग्रेस अपने खुद के उत्पादित आंकड़ों के प्रयोग में निपुण है, यदि अधिकृत आंकड़े उसके अनुकूल न हों। लेखक कहते हैं कि रोजगार के बारे में प्रधानमंत्री व वित्त मंत्री ने बोलना ही छोड़ दिया है। आप लोगों ने उन्हें ध्यान से सुनना ही छोड़ दिया है, वर्ना जब उन्होंने बताया कि साढ़े चार करोड़ नवीन मुद्रा लोन जो दिए गए, उनसे न्यूनतम 4.5 करोड़ रोजगार तो सुजित हुए ही होंगे, जबिक संभावना इस बात की अधिक है कि प्रत्येक लोन-प्राप्तकर्ता ने कम से कम एक बेरोजगार को काम अवश्य दिया होगा। अगर आधों ने भी ऐसा किया है तो नवीन मुद्रा लोन ने लगभग सात करोड़ भारतीयों को रोजगार दिया। जिन छह करोड़ पुराने उद्यमियों ने अपने कार्य विस्तार के लिए मुद्रा लोन लिए, उन्होंने भी कम से कम तीन करोड़ लोगों को काम दिया ही होगा। सरकारी स्तर पर अनेक बार ये तथ्य दिए जाने, मोदी-जेटली एवं अन्य मंत्रियों द्वारा दोहराए जाने के बावजूद यदि गौड़ा-सोज को लगता है कि सरकार रोजगार के मोर्चे पर फेल है, तो उन्हें सड़कों-गलियों

मेलबाक्स

में अनुपलब्ध बेरोजगारों की फौज अपना दृष्टिकोण बदलने को शायद मजबूर कर सके।

अजय मित्तल, मेरठ

कायम रहे लोकतंत्र की गरिमा

चुनाव के बाद यदि राजग को बहुमत नहीं मिला तो विपक्ष एकजुट होकर नरेंद्र मोदी को सत्ता में आने से रोक सकता है। यदि चुनाव से पहले महागठबंधन की अवधारणा को मूर्त रूप दिया जाता तो चुनाव में बराबर की टक्कर हो सकती थी, लेकिन स्वहितों के टकराव के कारण महागठबंधन का सपना साकार नहीं हुआ। किसी भी दल या गठबंधन की सफलता के लिए एक सर्वमान्य सक्षम नेतृत्व का होना अनिवार्य है। लेकिन विपक्ष के पास आज भी कोई ऐसा मजबूत धागा नहीं है जो विपक्ष के बिखरे मनकों को एक माला में पिरो सके। वर्ष 2014 के आम चुनाव में भाजपा को नरेंद्र मोदी के रूप में एक सक्षम नेतृत्व मिला और वह दस साल बाद अपने बलबूते सत्ता के सिंहासन पर जा बैठी। इसलिए सबसे अहम प्रश्न यही है कि यदि विपक्ष को सरकार बनाने का अवसर मिला तो प्रधानमंत्री का सेहरा किसके सिर बंधेगा ? यह प्रश्न फिलहाल भविष्य के गर्भ में है जिसका पता 23 मई को चलेगा। भले ही कोई हारे कोई जीते, राष्ट्र के लोकतंत्र की गरिमा बनी रहनी चाहिए। रणजीत वर्मा, फरीदाबाद

गलतियां करने की लगी है होड़

राजनीति में आदशों की बात बेमानी हो गई है। सभी दल एक- दूसरे को नीचा दिखाने पर तुले हुए हैं। आरोपों का जवाब प्रत्यारोपों से दिया जा रहा है। कही व्यक्ति विशेष का

महिमामंडन है, तो कहीं मानहानि का अनुचित प्रयास। एक दूसरे पर कीचंड उछालने में लगे हुए दल, खुद के गिरेबां में झांकने की हिम्मत नहीं करते। एक के गलत कार्य (या बयान) को दसरे के गलत कार्य (या बयान) बताकर सही ठहराया जा रहा है। गलतियों के अनुसरण में सब आगे हैं और उनके लिए माफी मांगना किसी गुनाह से कम नहीं है।

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सफाई कर्मियों की भी ला जाए सुध

नालों व सीवर लाइनों की सफाई करते वक्त सफाई कर्मियों का मारा जाना दुखद है। आज तकनीकी के क्षेत्र में एक से बढ़कर एक आधुनिक उपकरण बनाए जा रहे हैं, ताकि इंसानी को परंपरागत तरीकों से कार्य करने से बचाया जा सके। क्या नालों व सीवरों की सफाई के लिए ऐसे उपकरण तैयार नही किए जा सकते, जिससे सफाई कर्मियों को मौत के मुंह में जाने से बचाया जा सके। सफाई कर्मी भी किसी भी परिवार का हिस्सा हैं। उनकी मृत्यु का दर्द पूरे परिवार को झेलना पड़ता है। उनके जीवन की रक्षा प्राथमिकता होनी चाहिए।

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इस स्तंभ में किसी भी विषय पर राय व्यक्त करने अथवा दैनिक जागरण के राष्ट्रीय संस्करण पर प्रतिक्रिया व्यक्त करने के लिए पाठकगण सादर आमंत्रित हैं। आप हमें पत्र भेजने के साथ ई-मेल भी कर सकते हैं।

> अपने पत्र इस पते पर भेजें : दैनिक जागरण, राष्ट्रीय संस्करण, डी–210–211, सेक्टर–63, नोएडा ई-मेल: mailbox@jagran.com

दैनिक जागरण

आजकल



शाहिद ए चौधरी

18 मई 2019

पश्चिम बंगाल की मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी और देश के प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के बीच कल तक जिस तरीके से स्तरहीन वाकयुद्ध चुनाव प्रचार के दौरान देखने को मिला है, वह दर्शाता है कि तृणमूल कांग्रेस और भाजपा के बीच राज्य में कांटे की टक्कर है। यहां मोदी अभियान अन्य राज्यों की तुलना में भिन्न है, खासकर इसलिए कि तृणमूल कांग्रेस के आठ वर्षों के शासनकाल ने प्रधानमंत्री को बोलने के लिए काफी मसाला दिया है, लेकिन यही अवसर केंद्र में मोदी के पांच साल के शासन ने ममता बनर्ती को भी दे दिया है। स्तरहीन जुमलेबाजी का यह मुख्य कारण यही है। जहां मोदी का फोकस हिंदुत्व और स्पीड ब्रेकर दीदी पर है, वहीं ममता का फोकस 'एक दुई तीन, बीजेपी के बिदाई दिन' पर है। दोनों ही तरफ से विकास, योजनाओं, जनता की समस्याओं आदि का कोई उल्लेख नहीं किया गया है।

पश्चिम बंगाल के अनेक हिस्सों में चिलचिलाती गर्मी में ममता बनर्जी अपने प्रयासों से तापमान में और इजाफा कर रही हैं, जबकि भाजपा ने आखिरी चरण के मतदान के लिए अपनी पूरी ताकत झोंक दी है। ममता घिरी हुई बाघिन का एहसास करा रही हैं कि अपने क्षेत्र का एक इंच भी देने के लिए तैयार नहीं हैं। स्टेज पर वह मोदी और भाजपा के विरुद्ध दहाड़ते हुए कहती हैं, 'वह सोचते हैं कि हिंदुओं व मुस्लिमों को आपस में लड़ाकर वह बंगाल जीत लेंगे। उन्हें वोट चाहिए, लेकिन हम उन्हें स्टोन चिप्स से भरा रसगुल्ला देंगे।' दिलचस्प बात यह है कि वामपंथियों, जिनका बंगाल कभी गढ़ था, उनका कोई जिक्र ममता अपने भाषणों में नहीं कर रही हैं। यह बंगाल की राजनीति में नाटकीय परिवर्तन है। वामपंथ लगभग लुप्त हो गया है। कमजोर हो चुकी कांग्रेस पहचान के लिए संघर्ष कर रही है, इसलिए भाजपा ही बंगाल में मुख्य विपक्ष है। पश्चिम बंगाल के 30 प्रतिशत मुस्लिम भाजपा के राडार में नहीं हैं, इसलिए दोनों तृणमूल व भाजपा बंगाली हिंदू मतों के लिए हताशा भरा संघर्ष कर रही हैं।

हिंदुत्व पर बल देते हुए मोदी-शाह जय श्री राम के नारे लगाते हुए ममता पर 'मुस्लिम तुष्टीकरण' का आरोप लगा चुके हैं। दूसरी ओर तृणमूल के जवाबी नारे जय बांग्ला और जय मां काली है। भाजपा हिंदुत्व राष्ट्रवाद का कार्ड खेल रही है और ममता बंगाली गर्व का कार्ड खेल रही हैं। ममता अपने भाषणों का अंत हिंदू श्लोकों से कर रही हैं। उनके समर्थक शंख भी बजाते हैं। मां काली पर जो अत्याधिक बल है, उससे कहीं मुस्लिम विचलित न हो जाएं इसलिए अपनी धर्मिनरपेक्षता को जाहिर करने के लिए ममता अपने भाषण के बीच में 'अल्लाह अकबर' कहना नहीं भूलती हैं, लेकिन उनका फोकस

दिल्ली के लिए पश्चिम बंगाल में संग्राम

रविवार को पश्चिम बंगाल समेत देश के अन्य राज्यों में 17वीं लोकसभा के लिए आखिरी चरण का मतदान होगा । हालांकि देश के अन्य राज्यों में लोकसभा सीटों के लिए चुनाव प्रचार नियमानुसार शुक्रवार की शाम समाप्त हुआ, लेकिन पश्चिम बंगाल में तृणमूल कांग्रेस और भारतीय जनता पार्टी के कार्यकर्ताओं के बीच झडप होने के कारण प्रचार को एक दिन पहले ही यानी गुरुवार की शाम को ही रोक दिया गया था।पश्चिम बंगाल का चुनाव इस मायने में भी इस बार थोड़ा अलग कहा जा सकता है, क्योंकि यहां पर चुनाव प्रचार के दौरान न केवल अमर्यादित भाषा का इस्तेमाल किया गया. बल्कि हिंसा भी फैलाई गई । चूंकि दोनों दलों ने अपनी ओर से पूरी जोर आजमाइश की है और शायद इसीलिए यह माना जा रहा है केंद्र की सत्ता में बंगाल की अहम भूमिका हो सकती है



लोकसभा चुनाव में भले ही तुणमूल बढत बना ले, लेकिन आगामी विधानसभा चुनाव में उसकी राह मुश्किल दिख रही है

बांग्ला गर्व पर ही रहता है।

वामपंथ को परास्त करने के लिए तृणमूल ने बंगाल की राजनीति में धर्म को जगह देने का प्रयास किया। इस तरह उसने अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से भाजपा के हिंदुत्व के लिए उपजाऊ जमीन प्रदान कर दी। इसलिए अब दुर्गा पूजा भी राजनीतिक युद्धों का मैदान बन गई है, जबकि पहले वह जश्न, खुशी व सांस्कृतिक मेल-मिलाप का अवसर हुआ करती थी। बहरहाल बंगाल मधुसुदन दत्त व सुकुमार रे की भूमि है, इसलिए शायद यहां उत्तर भारत के आक्रामक हिंदुत्व को स्थान न मिले, पर कांग्रेस व वामपंथ के कमजोर होने पर जो लोग ममता का विकल्प तलाश रहे हैं वे भाजपा की ओर आकर्षित हो रहे हैं।

इस पृष्ठभूमि में यह प्रश्न प्रासंगिक है कि क्या इस बार भाजपा तृणमूल के गढ़ को भेद पाएगी? बंगाल में नए जाति समीकरण बन रहे हैं। भाजपा का नागरिकता विधेयक पर बल, उत्तर पूर्व के जबरदस्त विरोध के बावजूद, इसलिए था कि वह पूर्वी पाकिस्तान से आए बंगालियों को, जो नागरिकता अधिकारों के लिए अब भी संघर्ष कर रहे हैं, अपने पाले में लाना चाहती थी।

गौरतलब है कि वर्ष 2014 में भाजपा को 17 प्रतिशत वोट हिस्से के साथ 87 लाख मत मिले थे, जबकि तृणमूल कांग्रेस को 39.8 प्रतिशत वोट शेयर के साथ 2.03 करोड़ मत मिले थे। यह बड़ा फासला उसी सूरत में कवर हो सकता है जब वाम मोर्चा और कांग्रेस पूरी तरह से एक प्रतिशत से नीचे आ जाएं, जो फिलहाल संभव नहीं दिख रहा है। फिर इस बात को भी अनदेखा

नहीं किया जा सकता कि पश्चिम बंगाल में तृणमूल ने चुनावी रणनीति में वैसी ही महारत हासिल की हुई है जैसी भाजपा की गुजरात में है। यह सही है कि ममता को पराजित करने की इच्छा से कुछ वामपंथी विचारधारा को एक किनारे रखते हुए बीजेपी के पक्ष में टैक्टिकल वोटिंग कर सकते हैं, लेकिन इस बात से भी इन्कार नहीं किया जा सकता कि बड़ी संख्या में वामपंथी भाजपा के हिंदुत्व की तुलना में तुणमूल के बांग्ला गर्व को प्राथमिकता देना पसंद करेंगे। बहरहाल अनुमान यह है कि वाम मोर्चा अपना 15 से 20 प्रतिशत वोट शेयर तो बरकरार रख लेगा. लेकिन उसके लिए एक भी

सीट जीतना कठिन होगा। पश्चिम बंगाल की 42 लोकसभा सीटों में से कम से कम 25 पर तुणमूल और भाजपा के बीच सीधा मुकाबला है, लेकिन बहुत अधिक अंतर के साथ। भाजपा इस बार तो इस फासले को शायद कम न कर सके यानी तृणमूल कांग्रेस अपना गढ़ बचा सकती है, लेकिन भविष्य ममता के लिए अच्छा दिखाई नहीं दे रहा है। अगर भाजपा मजबूत स्थानीय नेतृत्व विकसित करने में सफल हो जाती है तो वह वर्ष 2021 के विधानसभा चुनाव में तृणमूल कांग्रेस को अधिक अच्छी टक्कर दे सकती है।

चुनाव में हार और जीत तो लोकतंत्र का हिस्सा है, लेकिन जिस घटिया स्तर की प्रचार राजनीति (जिसमें वास्तविक मुद्दे पूर्णतया नदारद रहे) हुई है, वह पश्चिम बंगाल की सामाजिक व्यवस्था के लिए बहुत चिंताजनक है। पश्चिम बंगाल में वामपंथ के लगभग तीन दशक के शासन ने सांप्रदायिक तत्वों को हाशिये पर डाल दिया था, अब नरेंद्र मोदी और ममता बनर्जी चुनाव जीतने के लिए जो प्रयास कर रहे हैं उससे यह तत्व फिर से मुख्यधारा में आ सकते हैं, जो न तो पश्चिम बंगाल के लिए अच्छा है, और न ही देश के लिए।

- इमेज रिफ्लेक्शन सेंटर

किसकी होगी सत्ता, कहना मुश्किल

चुनाव आखिरी पड़ाव की तरफ बढ़ चला है। सब जगह चर्चा का एक ही विषय है कि कौन बनेगा प्रधानमंत्री? मोदी, ममता, माया या कोई और? बहुमत नहीं मिलने पर मोदी तो सरकार बना सकते हैं, पर कांग्रेस शायद नहीं बनाएगी। आजादी के बाद से केंद्र में अधिकतम समय कांग्रेस की सरकार रही है। अकेले नेहरू-गांधी परिवार के तीन सदस्य ही 37 साल 303 दिन सत्ता में रहे। नरेंद्र मोदी के पहले सिर्फ अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी ही ऐसे गैर-कांग्रेसी थे जो पूरे पांच साल प्रधानमंत्री रह पाए थे। बाकी गैर-कांग्रेसी प्रधानमंत्री, आधा कार्यकाल भी पूरा नहीं कर पाए।

आगामी 23 मई के बाद भी अगर किसी दल को स्पष्ट बहुमत नहीं मिला, तो सरकार भाजपा या कांग्रेस की बैसाखियों पर ही बनेगी। प्रधानमंत्री बनने की दौड़ में बहुत सी महत्वाकांक्षाएं उछल-कूद मचा रही हैं। वर्ष 1967 के बाद से वर्ष 2018 तक जिन-जिन राज्यों में राष्ट्रीय दलों के अलावा तीसरा विकल्प यानी स्थानीय राजनीतिक दल उपलब्ध था, जनता उसे ही सत्ता सौंपना बेहतर समझती रही है। परिधि से केंद्र की दूरी बढती रही। वास्तव में केंद्र के नेताओं के पास, स्थानीय समस्याओं, सवालों के जवाब देने की समझ ही नहीं रही और कोई भी उन राज्यों की आम जनता का विश्वासपात्र नहीं बन पाया। तथाकथित राष्ट्रीय दल कमजोर होते गए और राज्य स्तर के दलों की बैसाखियों

के सहारे चलना पड़ा। राज्य में ऊपर से थोपा लीडर अधिक दिन टिक नहीं सकता।

ऐतिहासिक तथ्य-सत्य यह है कि क्षेत्रीय दलों ने जब-जब केंद्र से हाथ मिलाया, अगले चुनाव में जनता ने उसे घर बैठा दिया। वर्ष 2014 के आम चुनाव, उत्तर प्रदेश में 2017 के विधानसभा चुनाव और उसके बाद कई अन्य राज्यों में चुनावों में आए परिणामों को देखते हुए यह लगा था कि अवाम अब क्षेत्रीय दलों की राजनीति की बजाए राष्ट्रीय दलों की तरफ बढ़ रही है। दलित-पिछड़े लोग अपनी सुरक्षा और सुविधा पाने के लिए सत्ताधारी वर्ग की शरण में जा रहे हैं। देश की राजनीति बदल रही है। सिर्फ कांग्रेस व भाजपा की जीत राष्ट्रीय राजनीति की ओर मुड़ रही है। छोटे दलों का अस्तित्व धीरे-धीरे समाप्त हो रहा है।

फरवरी 2018 के लोकसभा उप-चुनाव से पहले सपा-बसपा का गठबंधन और बीती मई में कर्नाटक चुनाव के बाद कांग्रेस और जेडीएस का मधुर मिलन, बता रहा है कि क्षेत्रीय दल अपना अस्तित्व बचाने के लिए राजनीतिक मतभेद भूलकर दशकों बाद भी आपस में मिलकर समझौते कर रहे हैं, कर सकते हैं। लालू-नीतीश ने भी यह रस्म निभाई थी। खैर उप-चुनावों में उत्तर प्रदेश में सपा-बसपा की जीत और कर्नाटक के परिणाम यह भी बता रहे हैं कि क्षेत्रीय दलों का आधार समाप्त नहीं हुआ। बिहार में भी एक लोकसभा उप-चुनाव लालू यादव की झोली में गया है। पंजाब और राजस्थान के उप-चुनावों में भी 'कमल' नहीं खिल पाया था।

दिसंबर 2018 में हुए विधानसभा चुनावों में मध्य प्रदेश में भाजपा को 41 प्रतिशत और कांग्रेस को 40.9 प्रतिशत वोट मिले, पर भाजपा को पांच सीट कम मिली। राजस्थान में भाजपा को 38.8 प्रतिशत और कांग्रेस को 39.3 प्रतिशत वोट मिले, लेकिन सीट 27-28 अधिक। छत्तीसगढ़ में वोट में काफी ज्यादा अंतर है, सो सीट भी अधिक हैं। जरूरी नहीं कि वोट अधिक या कम होने से सीट भी अधिक या कम हो। बहुमत के लिए एक अधिक वोट ही काफी है। यही गणित है। यही खेल है आंकडों का। प्रजातंत्र में सत्ता का खेल। बहुमत का खेल।

चुनाव 2019 से पहले ही कई नेता इस्तीफा देकर इधर-उधर गए। मित्र से शत्रु बन गए हैं और शत्रु से मित्र ! चिंतन शिविर में कोई किसी की नहीं सुन रहा। हर जगह गहरा 'दल-दल' है और यह राजनीति के अपने ही बोये 'बीज' हैं। वर्ष 2017-18 में हुए चुनावों के आधार पर ही आगे की चुनावी राजनीति रणनीति तय हुई है। जनता मौन है, उसका अंतिम फैसला क्या होगा कहना कठिन है, मगर एक बात साफ है कि स्पष्ट बहमत न होने से सियासत के संकट बढ़ेंगे। कई राज्यों में सत्ताधारी दल को नकसान की आशंका है। दक्षिण भारत और अन्य राज्यों में जनाधार बढने की संभावना न्यनतम हैं। निस्संदेह विपक्षी दल 2014 से बेहतर स्थिति में हैं और इस बार कुछ अधिक सीटों की उम्मीद में हैं। फिलहाल यह कहना मुश्किल है कि किसके बूते बनेगी सरकार। - इमेज रिफ्लेक्शन सेंटर

खरी-खरी

विक्रम-बेताल की नगर परिक्रमा

डॉ. पिलकेंद्र अरोरा

राजा विक्रमार्थ ने हठ न छोड़ा।श्मशान के पेड पर लटके हुए बेताल के शव को उतारा, कंधे पर टांगा और नगर परिक्रमा पर निकल कर बोले- बेताल, आज तुम कोई पुरानी कहानी सुनाकर मुझे बोर मत करना ! ये चुनाव का मौसम है, आंखों देखा हाल सुनाना।

अवश्य राजन ! परंतु पहले आप अपने स्वर्ण आभूषण किसी गुप्त स्थान पर छुपा दीजिए। आजकल बहुत सख्ती है! कहीं आपकी चेकिंग न हो जाए!

ओह! थैंक्यू बेताल। वैसे भी राज्य में

बहत कड़की है ! सुनो राजन! यहां किसी भी एंगल

से लगता नहीं कि चुनाव का मौसम है! न कट आउट, न बैनर, न पोस्टर, न पंपलेट, न झंडे, न डंडे, न ढोल, न ढमाका, न नारे, न बिल्ले, न मंच, न माला, न माइक ! न हुड़दंग, न पुलिस ! ये कैसा चुनाव है? इससे ज्यादा शोर-शराबा तो हमारे जमाने में कॉलेज यूनियन के चुनाव में होता था! इधर देखो, एक नेता जी पद-यात्रा करते हुए जनसंपर्क पर हैं। गले में कितनी सारी मालाएं हैं। डर है कहीं उन्हें सर्वाइकल की प्रॉब्लम न हो जाए! और वे झुक भी कितना रहे हैं! लगता है मानो उनकी रीढ़ ही नहीं है! वे रोड पर शो कर रहे हैं, जबकि भीड़ ही नहीं है। इस जनसंपर्क रैली में कार्यकर्ताओं का काई अता-पता नहीं है। लगता है सारे कार्यकर्ता, नेता बन गए हैं! आखिर कब तक वे गुर्गे बनकर झंडे ही उठाते रहेंगे!

उधर देखो, कुछ लोग दौड़ रहे हैं। क्षमा करें महाराज ! ये तो लोगों से अधिक से अधिक मतदान की अपील कर रहे हैं। उनके हाथों में तख्तियां और फ्लैक्स हैं। पर दुर्भाग्य यह है कि दान में मिली चीज का महत्व कौन समझता है ! इसीलिए चुनाव के पहले वोटर 'मत-वाले' होते हैं और बाद में अधिकतर नेता 'मतवाले'! चुनाव पूर्व 'हम साथ-साथ हैं' और बाद में 'हम आपके हैं कौन?'

राजन, चुनाव में इतनी शांति मैंने मरने के बाद पहली बार देखी! सच कहूं, मैंने जिंदगी में कभी कंबल नहीं खरीदा और न ही अपनी पत्नी के लिए साड़ी! चुनाव के दिनों में मुझे देसी-विदेशी ब्रांड की 'दवाई इतनी मिलती थी कि साल भर का स्टाक हो जाता था ! मुफ्त की पीकर मैं और लोकतंत्र, दोनों ही बीमार हो गए, पर मैं लेता रहा और एक दिन बेताल बन गया मैं मरा नहीं था, राजन ! शहीद हुआ था ! लोकतंत्र की रक्षा के लिए ! चलो अब मुझे वापस श्मशान छोड़ आओ ! वरना मैं तुम्हारे सिर के टुकड़े-टुकड़े कर दूंगा!

ट्वीट-ट्वीट

गांधी होने में 'एक उम्र ' लगती है, गोडसे तो 'एक पल' में हुआ जा सकता है! कुमार विश्वास@DrKumarVishwas

साध्वी प्रज्ञा को मन से माफ न करने का प्रधानमंत्री मोदी का बयान बहुत सराहनीय है। देश के प्रधानमंत्री से हमेशा ऐसी ही अपेक्षा की जाती है कि वह साफ दिशा दिखाएं कि गलत गलत ही होता है और सही, सही। अब बेहतर है कि भाजपा को अपनी भयंकर गलती को सुधारते हुए प्रज्ञा को पार्टी से भी बाहर कर देना चाहिए।

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भारत पिछले 75 वर्षों से महात्मा की पुण्य भूमि रहा है।जब दनिया भर में नैतिकता का हास हुआ तो इसी म्याल ने रोशनी



दुनिया में अरबों लोगों को प्रभावित किया। कुछ चीजें पवित्रता के दायरे में रहनी चाहिए वरना हम तालिबान बनकर उन्हीं प्रतीकों का विध्वंस करने लगेंगे जिन्होंने हमें एकजुट आनंद महिंद्रा@anandmahindra

ती पर स्वर्ग कहे जाने वाले जम्म कश्मीर में चुनावी गहमागहमी पूरी तरह से थम गई है। भौगोलिक और राजनीतिक रूप से देश के अन्य हिस्सों से भले ही यह राज्य अलग है, लेकिन चुनाव के समय यहां भी बिजली, पानी, सड़क, स्कूल, अस्पताल, रोजगार और बुनियादी आवश्यकताएं मुख्य चुनावी मुद्दे रहे हैं जिसे ध्यान में रख कर जनता ने अपने मताधिकार का उपयोग किया है। रोजाना टीवी और अखबारों की सुर्खियों में रहने वाले जम्मू कश्मीर को प्रकृति ने अपनी विशेष नेमतों से नवाजा है। प्राकृतिक रूप से यहां पानी के स्रोत जैसे नदी, नाले, ग्लेशियर झरने, बर्फ से ढंके पहाड़ और हरियाली एक अलग ही छटा बिखेरती है, जिसे देखने के लिए साल भर दुनिया के कोने कोने से पर्यटकों का तांता लगा रहता है। इसीलिए इसे एशिया का

सवाल थोड़ा मुश्किल, मगर हकीकत है सरकारी उपेक्षाओं और सामाजिक पिछड़ेपन

यहां के निवासी आज भी परेशानियों और मुसीबतों भरी जिंदगी जीने को मजबूर हैं। लोगों को विकास की लौ जलने का अब भी इंतजार है। राज्य में ऐसे कई क्षेत्र हैं जो सामाजिक और आर्थिक रूप से ही नहीं, बल्कि बुनियादी रूप से भी अत्यंत पिछड़े हैं। सीमावर्ती क्षेत्र पुंछ के मंडी तहसील अंतर्गत नागानाड़ी गांव इन्हीं पिछड़े क्षेत्रों में से एक है, जहां पहुंचने के लिए सड़क की सुविधा भी नहीं है। आलम यह है कि इस गांव तक पहुंचने के लिए पहाड़ों के घुमावदार और उबड़-खाबड़ रास्तों और कलियां नदी के किनारे घने जंगलों से होकर पांच से आठ घंटे पैदल चलना पड़ता है। पहाड़ी रास्ते इतने संकीर्ण हैं कि जरा सी असावधानी से इंसान हजारों फीट नीचे खाई में गिर कर मौत के मृंह में समा सकता है। दूसरी ओर ये जंगल इतने सघन हैं कि कोई महिला तो छोड़िए पुरुषों का भी अकेले गुजरना खतरे स्विट्जरलैंड भी कहा जाता है। लेकिन दूसरी से खाली नहीं होता है। कहा जाता है कि इस ओर धरती का यही सुंदर इलाका कई तरह की जंगल से गुजरने के लिए एक साथी और हाथ



में लाठी आवश्यक है। नागानाड़ी में मुश्किलें केवल सड़कों की कमी का नहीं है, बल्कि सामाजिक जीवन भी यहां कठिनाइयों से भरा है। शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में भी यह गांव काफी पिछड़ा हुआ है। स्थानीय निवासी हाफिज बशीर अहमद के अनसार धार्मिक शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में नागानाड़ी अन्य क्षेत्रों की अपेक्षा काफी आगे है, लेकिन आधुनिक और वैज्ञानिक शिक्षा यहां नाममात्र की है। गांव में रहने वाला कोई भी बच्चा पांचवीं कक्षा तक भी नहीं पहुंच सका है। गांव में एक प्राथमिक

विद्यालय तो है परंत नाममात्र के लिए। स्कुल की दुर्दशा का आलम यह है कि स्थानीय निवासी इसके भवन का निजी प्रयोग के लिए इस्तेमाल करते हैं। एक स्थानीय निवासी के अनुसार इस स्कूल में दो शिक्षकों की नियुक्ति हुई है, जिनमें एक शिक्षक यहां कभी आए ही नहीं, जबकि दूसरे शिक्षक महीने में किसी एक दिन आकर अपनी पुरी हाजिरी बना लेते हैं। स्कल में न तो किसी ने कभी पढाई होते देखी है और न ही मीड डे मिल कार्यक्रम के तहत कभी भोजन बनते देखा है। बच्चों को मिलने वाली

को कोई जानकारी नहीं है। शिक्षा विभाग के किसी अधिकारी ने भी आज तक इस स्कूल का हाल जानने का प्रयास नहीं किया है। कमी केवल शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में ही नहीं है,

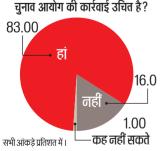
बल्कि बिजली, पीने का साफ पानी और स्वास्थ्य जैसी बुनियादी आवश्यकताएं भी इस गांव के लोगों को मयस्सर नहीं है। मनरेगा जैसी अनेक लाभकारी योजनाओं के बारे में स्थानीय निवासियों को कोई जानकारी उपलब्ध नहीं कराई गई है। बुनियादी आवश्यकताओं की कमी ने नागानाड़ी गांव को विकास की दौड़ में बहुत पीछे धकेल दिया है। ऐसे में किसी को भी अंदाजा लगाना मुश्किल नहीं होगा कि यहां के निवासी किस तरह कठिन परिस्थितियों में जीवन बसर करने पर मजबूर हैं। वहीं शिक्षा की कमी से नई पीढ़ी का भविष्य कितना अंधकारमय है, इसकी गंभीरता का अंदाजा लगाना भी मुश्किल है। क्षेत्र के निर्वाचित जन-प्रतिनिधियों को भी शायद नागानाड़ी गांव के लोगों की मुसीबतों से कोई वास्ता नजर नहीं आता है।

देश को आजाद हुए 72 साल से अधिक का वक्त हो चुका है। विकास की दौड़ में हम आसमान छूने की ओर बढ़ रहे हैं। मेक इन इंडिया और डिजिटल इंडिया जैसी योजनाओं ने भारत को विश्व गुरु बना दिया है। किशोर वैज्ञानिक प्रोत्साहन योजना और खेलो इंडिया जैसी अनेक योजनाएं युवाओं के कौशल को आगे बढ़ाने में कारगर सिद्ध हो रहे हैं। वहीं दूसरी ओर नागानाड़ी जैसे देश के दूरदराज क्षेत्रों में जमीनी हकीकत कुछ और ही बयां

कर रहे हैं। सवाल यह है कि देश के सीमावर्ती क्षेत्रों में रहने वाले इन बच्चों के भविष्य का जिम्मेदार कौन है? सरकारी योजनाएं इनके किस काम की हैं, जबकि इन्हें बुनियादी सुविधाएं भी मयस्सर नहीं हैं? ऐसे में बेटी बचाओ-बेटी पढ़ाओ योजना कैसे कामयाब होगी, जब गांव की बेटी को प्राथमिक विद्यालय की सुविधा तक नहीं है? इनकी कठिनाइयों का सिलसिला आखिर कब तक थमेगा? सवाल थोडा मुश्किल मगर हकीकत है।

- चरखा फीचर्स

जागरण जनमत कल का परिणाम बुद्ध पूर्णिमा पश्चिम बंगाल में चुनावी हिंसा को देखते हुए



आज का सवाल हुआवे पर अमेरिकी सख्ती से क्या अमेरिका व चीन के बीच ट्रेड वॉर की तल्खी और बढ़ेगी?

अपनी राय और अधिक लोगों तक पहुंचाने के लिए अपने मोबाइल के मैसेज बॉक्स में जाकर **POLL** लिखें. स्पेस देकर Y, N या C लिखकर 57272 पर भेजें Y –हां, N–नहीं, C–कह नहीं सकते

परिणाम जागरण इंटरनेट संस्करण के पाढकों

जनपथ

सावरकर से चिढ़ उन्हें राणा जी से बैर उनके शासनकाल में राम मनाएं खैर । राम मनाएं खैर अगर हो वश में इनके तो असली इतिहास उड़ेगा तिनके–तिनके । जिनकी खातिर तीर्थ रहा एडवीना का घर, जाने उनका वंश भला कैसे सावरकर! – ओमप्रकाश तिवार्र

बुद्धत्व ही है जीवन का मूल

बुद्ध ने कभी भी हिंदू धर्म या उससे संबंधित विचारों, पद्धतियों और दूसरे सामाजिक – आध्यात्मिक प्रतीकों का विरोध नहीं किया। वह हिंदू धर्म की ही एक आध्यात्मिक शाखा की पड़ताल करते रहे



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ज बुद्ध पूर्णिमा है। इसी दिन महात्मा

विकेश कुमार

आज बुद्ध भूणना स्टब्स्स स्ट्रा था, बुद्ध का जन्म लुंबिनी में हुआ था, जबिक उनका लालन-पालन कपिलवस्तु में हुआ। ये दोनों ही क्षेत्र आज की भू-स्थिति में नेपाल में हैं। बुद्धकाल में रचित बुद्ध वंश की परंपरागत जीवनी के अनुसार उनके पिता राजा सुद्धोधन शाक्य राष्ट्र के प्रमुख थे। शाक्य जनजाति कई पुरातन जनजातियों में से एक थी। महात्मा बुद्ध का पारिवारिक नाम गौतम था। गौतम के नामकरण संस्कार में ही उन्हें सिद्धार्थ नाम दिया गया। 16 वर्ष की आयु में उनका विवाह यशोधरा से हुआ। पिता की इच्छा थी कि सिद्धार्थ एक महान राजा बनें। उन्होंने सिद्धार्थ को धर्म, वेद-पुराणों से लेकर मानवीय

जीवन के कष्टों की गहन शिक्षा प्रदान की। परंतु अंत में सब निष्फल हुआ। वास्तविक जीवन लक्ष्यों की खोज हेतु 29 वर्ष की आयु में उन्होंने घर-परिवार और भव्य राजभवन त्याग दिया। वे एक अनिश्चित मार्ग पर बढ़ चले। यात्रा के दौरान उन्हें रोग-व्याधि, वृद्धावस्था से घिरे मनुष्यों और सार्वजनिक जीवन की

कठिनाइयों-विसंगतियों को देखने का अवसर मिला तो वे मनुष्य-जीवन में उत्पन्न होनेवाली इन परिस्थितियों के प्राकृतिक कारक की खोज के लिए बेचैन हो उठे। उन्होंने एक तपस्वी का जीवन अंगीकार कर लिया। इस तरह सिद्धार्थ ने हमेशा के लिए राजभवन का परित्याग किया और एक भिक्षु बनने के लिए महाप्रयाण किया। बुद्ध के रहते और उनके परिनिर्वाण के

बाद भी अनेक भौतिकवादी उनकी पत्नी यशोधरा और बालक राहुल के प्रति चिंता दर्शाते हुए बुद्ध के निर्णय को अनुचित बताते हैं। ऐसे लोगों को सोचना चाहिए कि सिद्धार्थ ने यशोधरा और बालक को जंगल में नहीं छोडा था। उन्होंने व्यक्ति, परिवार, समाज के जीवन से वैर व अलगाव भावना वश होकर गृहत्याग नहीं किया। गृहस्थ न होने में उनकी कोई प्रतियोगी इच्छा नहीं थी। जीवन रहस्य अनुसंधान की उनकी दार्शनिक इच्छा में उनका कोई स्वार्थ न था। उनका अभिज्ञान था कि जीवन के बाद मृत्यु के रहस्य को सुलझाने के लिए उन्हें अत्यंत बेचैन किए हुए था। जीवन-मृत्यु से मुक्ति के लिए वे आत्म-अनुसंधान करना चाहते थे। वे इसमें सफल भी हुए।

कालांतर से बुद्ध का एक संवेदनशील जीवन-दर्शन समाज में उभरता रहा। बुद्ध की तरह आत्मिक पवित्रता रखनेवाला कोई भी व्यक्ति यह दर्शन स्वीकार करता है कि परिवार की लालसा तथा उत्तरदायित्व का बोध तब ही उचित होगा, जब जीवन अमर हो अथवा गृहस्वामी, स्वामिनी तथा उनके बच्चों यानी एक पूरे परिवार का जीवन एक साथ ही समाप्त हो। इसके विपरीत परिवारीजनों का एक-एक कर अलग-अलग मृत्यु का वरण करना कितना अनुचित काल-सिद्धांत है। इस काल धारणा को बुद्ध ने चुनौती दी। इसके स्थान पर बुद्ध ने प्रयासों से एक प्रकार से जीवन के बाद भी अपने, अपने परिवार की कहीं किसी अंश रूप में उपस्थिति स्थापित की। शारीरिक रूप में सिद्धार्थ, यशोधरा तथा राहुल जीवन-पर्यंत अलग-अलग रहे, परंतु शरीर नश्वर होने के बाद भी उत्तरोत्तर संपूर्ण मानव जीवन के आत्मदर्शन में वे सभी आज तक एक साथ विचरण कर रहे हैं। यह सब बुद्ध के उस निर्णय से ही संभव हो सका, जो उन्होंने परिवार में बंधने की अपेक्षा उससे दूर भू-भागों में जीवन

को ढुंढने के रूप में लिया।

सामान्य रूप में बुद्ध के जीवन सिद्धांतों की व्याख्या में धर्म, जाति, वर्ग, देशकाल आदि के सीमांकन किए गए हैं। जबकि वास्तव में वह संत तो भूलोक के किसी भी तरह के मानवजनित भेदों से बहुत दूर एक अपूर्व अवस्था में स्थिर था। वह जीवन को सामान्य मानवीय दृष्टि से नहीं देखते थे। उनकी दृष्टि में जीवन-मृत्यु के बीच से बहुत ऊपर उठकर सोच-विचार करने की साधना-क्षमता थी।

साधना करते हुए शरीर त्याग करना आत्मलब्धता को प्राप्त होना है। जीवन क्या है, यह प्रश्न हर्षातिरेक और पीड़ा-प्रताड़ना दोनों मनः स्थितियों में मानव के अंदर अवश्य कौंधते हैं। लेकिन जीवन का जो मूल उद्देश्य है, उसका ज्ञान हर्ष और पीड़ा दोनों अनुभवों से रिक्त होकर ही मिलता है। बुद्ध जीवन की अस्पष्टता, विडंबना के विचार से आंदोलित हुए। मनुष्य की वृद्धावस्था, रोगी काया देखकर वे अंतःस्थल में विचार करने लगे कि मानव की यह परिणति, दुर्गति ही होनी है तो परंपरागत भौतिक जीवन के इष्टतम लक्ष्य कैसे प्राप्त होंगे। शरीर की आवश्यकताओं की पूर्ति करते-करते जीवन एक दिन जर्जर हो जाएगा।



बने रहने तक यही होता रहेगा। बुद्ध ने इसी बात पर विचार कर गृहस्थ त्यागा और संतत्व स्वीकार किया। फिर बुद्ध के विचार में यह भी नहीं था कि वह अपनी नई विचार-साधना के लिए कुछ त्याग कर रहे हैं या घर छोड़ रहे हैं।

यह तो एक स्वाभाविक घटना थी, जो जगताभ्युदय के लिए आध्यात्मिक तरीकों से घटित होनी ही थी। कोई भी व्यक्ति तत्व ज्ञान से ऐसे ही जुड़ सकता है। बुद्ध के विषय में विचार करते समय इस संसार के समस्त अनुभव-उद्भव- पराभव तिरस्कृत हो जाते हैं। बुद्ध का कोई भी अभिप्राय उनके लिए संग्रहणीय, प्रवचनीय, वर्णनीय नहीं था। वह अपने अध्ययन-शोध- साधना से स्वयं को भी प्रभावित करने की इच्छा नहीं रखते थे। उनके आत्म-साक्षात्कार में वैचारिकता- बौद्धिकता के आधार पर विश्व-विजय का अभिमान नहीं था। बुद्ध के त्याग-तप में से निकलकर जो मूल्य उनके अनुयायियों तथा सामान्य लोगों के लिए सीख बनते हैं, वे उन्हें अपनाने का आह्वान नहीं करते। बुद्ध ने अपने प्रवचन में हिंदू धर्म या उससे संबंधित विचारों, पूजा-पद्धतियों और दूसरे प्रतीकों का विरोध नहीं किया। वे तो हिंदू धर्म की ही एक आध्यात्मिक शाखा की गहराई से पड़ताल करते रहे। बुद्ध के परिनिर्वाण के बाद उनके सिद्धांतों के नाम पर राजनीति करने के लिए बौद्ध धर्म और अनेक ऐसी सैद्धांतिक संज्ञाएं प्रचलन में आ गईं, जो किसी न किसी तरह से हिंदू धर्म के लिए चुनौतियां थीं। हिंदू धर्म से ईर्ष्या रखनेवालों ने बुद्ध के सिद्धांतों का सहारा लेकर बलात बुद्ध धर्म गढ़ा, जिसकी परिणति आज भी समाज, देश और सबसे ज्यादा हिंदू धर्म झेल रहा है।