

The good 'news' in newspapers

Total readership is up and everybody is happy with the new Indian Readership Survey. Will revenue growth follow?



MEDIASCOPE

VANITA KOHLI-KHANEKAR

First the good news. More than 425 million Indians read a newspaper in the first quarter of 2019. That is up from 407 million in the first quarter of 2017, says the IRS or Indian Readership Survey 2019, released in the last week of April. That is not surprising. Defying trends in most other markets, newspaper readership and

circulation in India has continued to grow over the last decade. The Audit Bureau of Circulations data for 10 years ending 2016 shows average circulation grew 4.87 per cent to a total of 63 million copies. Print media has been among one of the most profitable segments of the ₹167,400 crore media and entertainment industry in India.

Why then have revenues been stagnating for the last three years?

And that brings me to the worrying part. Over the 10 years ending 2018, print's share in the media revenue pie fell from 30 per cent to just over 18 per cent. This was on a growing base, so in absolute numbers the print industry almost doubled in size. But the last three of those 10 years have been tough. From ₹30,330 crore in 2016 the (ad plus subscription) revenues that newspapers and magazines earned inched to ₹30,550 crore in 2018 going

by data from EY. Funnily enough the reasons have less to do with the internet — the usual suspect in other markets — and more to do with the industry itself.

The biggest, which this column has talked about, is readership data. It is the currency used to buy and sell advertising space, the source of over 70 per cent of industry revenues. For four years from 2013-2017 publishers re-jigged the metric, then sulked and fought about the results it threw up. In those data dark years, advertisers shifted their spends to other media, including digital, even as demonetisation and then the goods and services tax hit the print industry hard. Reliance launched Jio that sent data prices crashing and consumption jumped from 0.8 gigabytes per person per month in 2016 to over 8 GB in 2018.

Think of it this way — one film takes about a GB of data. Over 550 mil-

lion Indian broadband subscribers are now downloading the equivalent of over eight films every month. It could be films, TV shows, sports or news. Some OTT or streaming video apps now command over 100-200 million unique users. The consumer now has more distractions than he did when publishers started squabbling in 2013.

By the time an IRS that was acceptable to everyone came out, early in 2018, it seemed like it was too late. So far ad revenues haven't picked up. One reason, say advertisers is that the key metric that IRS touts post the fracas is total readership (in the last month) instead of average issue readership or AIR (yesterday). Going by AIR the numbers haven't gone up substantially. Advertisers, however, continue to buy ad space based on AIR.

You could argue that advertisers are likely to use the metric most likely to push down rates — whether it is cost per rating point in TV or AIR in print. Also AIR doesn't work for all advertisers. For long term brand building goals total readership is bet-

ter. Most publishers and advertisers know this. Not having a metric simply gave them a tool beat down rates and they want to keep it there.

The silver lining is the growth in total readership and the huge uptick in online. According to IRS 2019, about 54 million people are reading a newspaper online. comScore, which focuses on digital media, puts the number of people reading news online at over 279 million. Of the top 20 online publishers from India, 11 are mainstream media houses such as Times Internet, HT Media, India Today Group and The Indian Express Group going by comScore. Most publishers are pretty much on the ball on digital. Online revenue and profit numbers — which I analysed recently for some — are looking good. Early trends, especially on subscription, too are encouraging.

Rising online and offline readership should eventually give a nice bump to revenues, especially in this election year, pushing revenue growth back to 7-9 per cent levels again.

By IRS 2020 the news from the newspaper business should get even better.

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CHINESE WHISPERS

Dumping proof



Former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh and senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader Shivrath Singh Chouhan found himself facing the wrath of an agitated group of Congress workers on Tuesday. Chouhan had attacked Congress President Rahul Gandhi and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath for "deceiving" farmers of the state. He had alleged that while Gandhi claimed that loans of farmers had been waived within two hours of the Congress forming a government in the state, in reality, Nath had sent messages to lakhs of farmers saying that the waiver couldn't be carried out since the Model Code of Conduct was in place. To clear the air, a Congress delegation, led by leader Suresh Pachouri and attended by a large group of party workers, reached Chouhan's residence carrying huge bundles of documents containing details of farmers whose loans had been waived off. They handed over a list containing the details of 21 lakh farmers who had benefited under the loan waiver scheme. Pachouri's entourage left after dumping the bundles of documents at Chouhan's residence.

Reel vs real

His vitriol against the enemies across the border in movies such as *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* and *Border* might have ensured box office success, but the Bharatiya Janata Party's Gurdaspur candidate Sunny Deol doesn't seem willing to display the same machismo in real life. The actor-turned-politician admitted at a campaign rally in Haryana that he doesn't know much about the Balakot air strikes or the state of India-Pakistan relations. Talking to journalists at a gathering on Tuesday, Deol refused to take a stand on these two issues in particular. "I am here to serve people, if I win then maybe I will have my opinion, not now," said the 60-something candidate.

Mamata finds a gap

Observers have pointed out how the term "secularism" has been missing from the speeches of various Congress party leaders this election season. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has made no bones about her national ambitions, has obviously sensed an opportunity in that, if the number of times she has emphasised her party's "secular" credentials in her rallies is anything to go by. While speaking at a campaign meet in West Bengal's Bishnupur Lok Sabha constituency earlier this week, she made the point once again. The T, M, and C in her party's name stood for "temple, mosque and church", she said.

Realty hits a green hurdle

Easing rules to improve Ease of Doing Business ranking has ended up in court

NITIN SETHI

One of the National Democratic Alliance government's major achievements in the last year of its tenure has been to improve India's rankings in the Ease of Doing Business index. India moved 23 steps up the charts to reach 77 on the Ease of Doing Business ranking. A key contribution to this improvement came from simplifying the layers of permissions required for the real estate and construction industry.

The ranking system assessed how few and how fast construction permits are secured in Delhi and Mumbai. The government secured a better ranking in 2018 through this narrow focus of bringing reforms in the two major cities but it also made a concerted effort to provide an overall regulatory relaxation for the real estate industry across the country, particularly tweaking norms for environmental clearances.

The problem is that these over-arching regulatory relaxations that influenced the Ease of Doing Business ranking for the real estate business are stuck in litigation (see table). When challenged by environmentalists before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and other courts, the alternative green clearance regime the NDA government tried to set in place has been repeatedly stayed. The cases are still in court.

The central thrust of several

changes the Union government introduced to help the real estate sector by tweaking the environment regulations was three-fold. First, the tweaks sought to reduce the number of green permits required. Second, they passed the onus of giving these clearances to municipal authorities. Third, they laid down simple and preset conditions under which these clearances would be granted. These relaxed norms were designed to help particularly large construction projects, such as malls and housing colonies.

The permits, the government decided, would be given by municipal authorities with barebone conditions that were preset. These the builders could secure along with the building plan approvals that are given by district authorities. The real estate projects were also exempted — through executive orders — to not require additional permits under the Acts that regulate air and water pollution.

But environmental groups petitioning against these changes raised both procedural concerns in how these eased norms had been established as well as the consequences they would have on the environment.

To be sure, centralised green clearances to real estate projects through a process that other industries also have to undergo have always been controversial. Real estate groups have warned that centralising these clearances open avenues to rent-seeking. Other critics have noted that the clear-



GREEN SIGNALS

Environmental norms NDA relaxed for the real-estate sector that the courts stayed

June 2016 notification stayed by NGT

To exempt building construction projects of built-up area between 20,000 and 1,50,000 sq m from need to get environmental clearance from Centre

Exempt the requirement of "Consent to Establish" for building construction projects of built-up area between 20,000 and 1,50,000 sq m

June 2017 stayed by NGT

Notification to relax norms for built up area permissible for a land development project

November 2018 notification stayed by Delhi High Court

To exclude building construction projects of built-up area between 20,000 and 50,000 sq m from the requirement of environmental clearance

ance process also did not aid in better planned urbanisation.

Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) is one of the prominent environmental think tanks that has argued for a decentralised regime for environmental approvals for the sector. But it has argued for *decentralisation* and not *deregulation* — recommending that state- and district-level capacities to assess such

projects should be augmented and that environmental management should be a strengthened but separate function at the local level. Eventually, even CSE disagreed with the form and nature of "reforms" that the Union government brought about.

In trying to remove multiple green permits for the real estate sector, the government tried to short-circuit the legislative changes that were



additional permits under the Acts that regulate air and water pollution.

INSIGHT

Who wins in the Mindtree saga?

Why did V G Siddhartha not sell back his shares to Mindtree or other friendly investors? What were the compulsions?



PANKAJ CHANDRA

From *raag* Malkauns to Guernica, from the splendor of moon-landing to the first gush of water in Aswan dam — all have been constructed to evoke a sense of uniqueness, unusual human achievement, and beauty that heighten our inner sensibilities. Organisations are somewhat like that — lifeblood for many, saviour for others, but above all termed beautiful or ugly based on how they conduct themselves and evoke the inner sensibilities of employees, customers and shareholders.

As a former independent director of Mindtree, the value of the beauty of its organisational culture, which is in the eye of the beholder, is not amiss. Organisations, like musicians, become the persona of the *raag* that they are singing. Manufacturing has its own beauty, its own sound of music on the shop-floor but is very different from that of an airport or a retail store selling only designer perfume. So are the mindsets, hearts of people, and char-

acteristics of organisations that inhabit the deep corners of their different customer organisations. It helps them deliver accurately. That makes Mindtree and L&T fundamentally very different. One is amazed as to how can such a capable organisation like L&T not see this dichotomy. Its argument is that Mindtree could be kept as a separate entity.

Wanting to keep Mindtree separate is an implicit recognition of Mindtree's cultural uniqueness and a prayer to the winds of time by L&T. Innovative organisations safeguard matchless cultures, instead. Acquisitions are done to synergise with existing offerings of firms; to strengthen or enter new areas, platforms or geography; find new customers for its products; keep parts of the acquired organisation, perhaps the digital in the case of Mindtree, and to sell others to increase its own value. Never is it to grow the acquired organisation more than itself — well sometimes it does happen when one wants to shed one's own organisational cloak and take on the persona of the other! Most organisations that have been forcefully acquired in the last few decades — be it Mannesmann or RJR Nabisco or AOL etc, don't exist anymore. So why would Mindtree?

One salient by-product of unique cultures is that they allow you to build unique capabilities. Mindtree gave India the Aadhaar engine and unique intellectual property-driven solutions like Bluetooth stacks. The list is long. And therefore, the outcomes from



Mindtree has regularly won customers against better equipped, larger organisations because of its leadership's complementary perspective

organisations in the same sector are dissimilar despite having similar strategies. Mindtree has regularly won customers against better equipped, larger organisations because of its leadership's complementary perspective like the coming together of blue, black and white to make Guernica (where else would you find all founders sitting as one in a single, relatively small, open office), its culture of seamless invigoration, and its can-do attitude. The value of curiosity, courage and responsibility is ingrained in the culture from the day a young graduate enters Mindtree Kalinga, Mindtree's Global Learning Centre that takes pioneering immersive learning to the next level. All this allowed for introspection, transparency and innovation and hence building of a fearless environment. That you had to care for the other — whether your customer's customer or your team member — was a natural outcome of this competitive yet empathetic culture. L&T should

study this and ensure that this culture jives with its own. Else, this is a disaster in making for all.

The loss of Mindtree would be a loss for the Indian IT industry for sure. It could mean the end of an institution especially when the leadership and the organisation do not want it. Innovation is generally the first casualty in such situations. Such acquisitions lead to changing of the board and the leadership team including driving down the acquirer's vision. The big question would be who stays as most capabilities in service organisations lie in people and their processes. And will customers move if key characteristics of the delivery organisation — especially its cultural capacity — changes? One has not talked about the operations aspects of such an acquisition that will require aligning of Mindtree systems, processes, client delivery, billing, travel norms, HR practices, financial representation etc to L&T's way of functioning. The best-case scenario is that it would take four to five years for such an acquisition to become somewhat integrated. Who has patience in these days to listen to Rashid Khan's soul touching *alap khayal*, *Tu hai malik mera*, in *raag* Malkauns?

The Mindtree story is closely tied with the role of V G Siddhartha, its largest single shareholder in the past, who patiently supported the culture and the pathways chosen by Mindtree. But a mystery remains: then why did he not sell back his shares to Mindtree or other friendly investors? What were the compulsions? Only he would know. And that makes L&T's attempt to take over even more difficult for Mindtree to accept. At the end, it is about choosing a way of life.

The author is vice-chancellor of Ahmedabad University and former director of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore. Views are personal.

LETTERS

Identify the root cause

This is with reference to the second editorial "Audit rot" (May 7). The editorial has analysed the audit failure of Satyam and Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services in great detail and one tends to agree with the causes identified. But the root cause for the degradation of the audit work remains unaddressed. The reason for the audit failure is the appointment procedure under the Companies Act. The Act may follow global procedure but it has failed miserably in India. A company whose management is being reported to the stakeholders is appointing its own judge! This makes a mockery of independence.

I feel that an independent appointing authority like the Comptroller and Auditor General of India should be set up to which companies should deposit the audit fees. The independent body should appoint the auditors of all listed and unlisted companies with a threshold turnover. This body should also pay the fees to the audit firm. This way the auditor will remain accountable to the appointing authority and the independent body shall be at liberty to remove the auditor for any misdemeanour and shall also be empowered to blacklist a defaulting auditor, stopping all future appointments. The appointment procedure can also be made independent with the use of advanced algorithms. The root of the rot lies in the appointment and payment. Unless that is checked, all talks of cleaning the system remain futile. No one

can rely on honesty through self-regulation when the stakes run into crores.

Deba Pratim Ghatak Durgapur

Didi's arrogance

This refers to "I don't want to share dais with expiry-PM as elections are on: Mamata" (May 7). It goes without saying that such an arrogant response to the Prime Minister's call was least expected of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. As observed by the author, Banerjee's conduct stood out in sharp contrast to that of Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. However, Mamata-didi thought it wise to safeguard her own political future by continuing with her political visit to Kharagpur to monitor the situation there. Was it not her constitutional and moral responsibility to leave everything aside and come to the immediate rescue of the hapless victims of cyclone Fani, which also affected her own state?

For no fault of theirs, the people of West Bengal were deprived of the much-needed financial and other assistance similar to what the PM announced in Odisha. But who knows, Banerjee may still blame the Centre. What an irony!

S Kumar New Delhi

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HAMBONE



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Trade war re-ignites

India must step carefully amid Sino-US trade tensions

Trade tensions between the US and China have once again flared up. President Donald Trump has said that he will more than double tariffs on \$200 billion worth of US imports from China, from 10 per cent to 25 per cent, and might further target another \$325 billion of imports with 25 per cent tariffs. Mr Trump has long argued that tariffs on Chinese imports are too low and he reiterated that point on Twitter, saying that China was now paying billions into the US treasury because of tariffs. This is, of course, not quite correct — tariffs are paid by importing companies at the border. According to most econometric studies of the impact, much of the burden is being borne by US consumers, in the form of higher prices, or by US companies that are having to lower margins. It is uncertain therefore if Mr Trump can indeed afford to go through with his threat.

However, the markets have responded negatively to the suggestion that a Sino-US trade war is not, in fact, close to a ceasefire. While it is possible that this is merely Mr Trump's notion of negotiation, there is also a possibility of further disruptions ahead. It is true that it is now mainstream political wisdom in the US that more pressure needs to be put on Beijing to alter its behaviour in international trade. Particular concerns have been raised about the alleged theft of intellectual property from US companies. It is also important to note that, while the use of tariffs is not popular among the US' allies and partners, there is broad agreement in many countries that the trading system needs to be restored to a more level playing field in such a manner that Beijing does not take undue advantage.

For India, this is a moment both of risk and of opportunity. It is a risk if Indian exporters continue to be caught up in measures that are, in fact, impelled by Beijing's misbehaviour. Unfortunately, India — which has its own problems with a trade deficit with China — has not sufficiently convinced the US, or for that matter the European Union or Japan, that it is in the same boat. Thus there is the possibility that there will be pressure from the developed world to dilute the advantages offered to developing economies under the international trading system, which would negatively impact India — even though India remains five times poorer than China. Urgent trade diplomacy is required to resolve this issue. It is also important that India goes the extra mile to ensure that the new atmosphere in Washington does not continue to impact Indian exports — already the Generalised System of Preferences is in the process of being withdrawn from India and HI-B visas have turned even more restrictive. Thus New Delhi must be more careful about its protectionist moves such as preferences for domestic mobile manufacturing, government sourcing rules, e-commerce restrictions and data localisation. On his India visit, US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross hammered home the point that India had not made any progress on its restrictive trade policies despite repeated requests. If instead, India can take advantage of this new atmosphere to increase its footprint in world trade, then it has a chance of creating the jobs that have been sadly missing in the past years of jobless growth.

A misleading bar

Disallowing the Big Four from offering legal services is unconstructive

The Bar Council of Delhi's directive to the Big Four accountancy firms not to offer legal services to their clients in India is a retrograde move that is transparently protectionist in intent. The Bar Council was acting on a petition filed by the Society of Indian Law Firms (SILF), which stated that foreign audit and consulting firms providing legal services in India contravene the Advocates Act, 1961. Accordingly, the Bar Council has asked EY, KPMG, Deloitte and PwC to submit a list of lawyers who have been hired by them to offer clients legal services. This directive appears to overlook the recommendations of an expert panel under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) made in November last year that audit firms be allowed to offer their clients legal services and the Advocates Act be amended to accommodate this. The expert panel was set up in response to a complaint by the lawyers' lobby in 2015. The MCA panel made a pertinent point in explaining its decision: It stated that multidisciplinary firms should be encouraged and to this end, auditors should be allowed to expand their portfolio of services. To this could be added the fact that allowing the Big Four to offer multi-disciplinary services also facilitates foreign direct investment, since most of them are service providers for the world's largest multinationals.

It is also difficult to overlook the double standards in SILF's complaint. India law firms themselves have recently expanded to offer a suite of services that traditionally fall within the domain of audit firms, such as forensic audits, commercial due diligence and merger & acquisition services. Local law firms have argued that allowing Big Four audit firms to offer legal services creates a dangerous conflict of interest. These firms could well contravene their statutory fiduciary duties in scrutinising a clients' accounts in the interests of acquiring mandates for consultancy and legal businesses. This is a valid argument that has gained credence with the implosion of IL&FS, Satyam, Global Trust Bank and so on, all of which have been audited by the Big Four. But those same risks are also embedded in the multi-disciplinary domestic law firms. The remedy for this lies in a law modelled on the Glass-Steagall Act that separated investment and commercial banking and served the US admirably for decades.

By the same token, there is nothing to stop the MCA from restricting audit and law firms from offering clients a suite of services. This is not the first time domestic lobbies have attempted to block the entry of foreign law firms. In 2009, Lawyers' Collective appealed against the Reserve Bank of India approval for a foreign law firm to open an office in India to act as a liaison with its clients in and outside India for providing legal services. The contention, which was upheld, was that the liaison activity in question "was nothing but practising the profession of law in non-litigious matters". Though the letter of that ruling is unexceptionable, its timing was ironic, because India was then on its way to becoming a major back office for overseas legal services. Indeed, when India's negotiating position in global trade and services has consistently been predicated on opening markets to Indian IT, accounting and related services, this would be a constructive approach.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



China's emergence as a scientific power

BRI is being leveraged as a platform for collaboration in scientific fields. Should India join this specific component of the forum?

The second Belt and Road Forum convened in Beijing over April 25-27 was attended by 40 heads of state/government. From South Asia, Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan and President Bidhya Devi Bhandari of Nepal were in attendance. Other South Asian countries, with the exception of India and Bhutan, sent ministerial level delegations. In the first such Forum held in 2017, the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and Sri Lanka were present.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been presented as an ambitious Chinese designed and Chinese financed global infrastructure building initiative aimed at creating a network of land and maritime, energy and digital and integrated economic corridors with China serving as the central hub. That remained the focus of the second Forum but the BRI is also being leveraged as a platform for collaboration with partner countries in several other domains

Recently, the science journal *Nature* carried articles on how China is utilising BRI to establish an impressive network of institutions and collaborative projects globally covering several areas of scientific research including agriculture, health, water resources, energy systems and artificial intelligence. The Chinese Academy of Science (CAS) which is the apex science policy institution in the country, has established five research facilities in China and nine in other countries, for R&D which is specifically related to the BRI. One such facility in Sri Lanka should ring warning bells in India. The South China Institute of Oceanology based in Guangzhou has set up an

Ocean and Climate Research facility at the University of Ruhuna at Matara in Sri Lanka to study the meteorology and geology of the Indian Ocean. A Chinese oceanographic research vessel will be collecting data which may be of use to Sri Lanka but will provide immense volume of strategic data which will support Chinese naval, in particular, submarine operations in an ocean space adjacent to Indian shores. In both Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Chinese researchers are engaged in research in local herbal medicines and traditional knowledge systems, which may be of immense value in the production of new drugs.

The CAS is spending \$268 million on S&T (science and technology) projects under the BRI. This includes an impressive number of scholarships which are on offer to students from partner countries for undertaking research in Chinese universities and research institutes. Currently, there are 7000 Pakistanis being funded each year in PhD courses in the next few years. A whole new generation of scientists trained in China are emerging in developing countries, replacing an older generation educated in the West.

At the latest BRI Forum, China appeared willing to work together with multilateral institutions and some Western countries in undertaking projects in third countries. It has also shown willingness to address some of the growing concerns over the BRI financing methods which could lead to a debt trap for partner countries. President Xi Jinping announced a Debt Sustainability Framework for Partner Countries which would assess the viability of BRI projects in partner countries. In order to



SHYAM SARAN

An unfair formula?

Collections under the goods and services tax (GST) in April 2019 have inspired many commentators to believe that the revenue shortfalls, seen under this head in all the past months since its inception in July 2017, will soon be a thing of the past. Even some government officials have expressed the hope that ₹1.14 trillion of GST collected in the first month of the current financial year would help them meet the target set in the interim Budget for 2019-20.

How realistic are these beliefs and assumptions? The government's expectations of meeting the target are primarily based on the way it has allocated the revenues collected under the Integrated GST or IGST to the Centre under the Central GST (CGST) and to the states under the State GST (SGST). Remember that the IGST is a tax levied on all interstate supplies of goods and services, and on imports.

Now, in April 2019 as much as ₹54,733 crore came from the IGST, while ₹21,163 crore were collected from the CGST, ₹28,801 crore from the SGST and ₹9,168 crore from the GST Compensation Cess. That made it a total GST collection of ₹1.14 trillion.

Out of the ₹54,733 crore collected under the IGST, the government allocated ₹20,370 crore, or about 37 per cent, to the CGST and ₹15,975 crore (29 per cent) to the SGST. Another ₹12,000 crore collected under the IGST was shared equally between the Centre and the states. After this settlement, the IGST was left with ₹6,388 crore, which too should remain with the Centre. This raised the total IGST allocations at ₹32,758 crore for the CGST and ₹21,975 crore for the SGST.

In other words, the Centre apportioned for itself about 60 per cent of the IGST collected in April, and the states got about 40 per cent. This appears to indicate a significant change in the sharing formula followed in the first few months after the launch of the

IGST in July 2017. States got higher allocations from the IGST for all the eight months of 2017-18 (from August 2017 to March 2018) and for April 2018. The allocations for the CGST began to be higher than those for the SGST from May 2018, but the difference used to be very small. For instance, the CGST's share in the IGST was just 52 per cent even in October 2018, compared to the SGST's share of 48 per cent.

It is of course logical that the CGST's share in the IGST should be a little higher than that of the SGST. This is because most taxpayers adjust their IGST credit first against the CGST and then against the SGST.

Thus the unallocated IGST should naturally belong more to the CGST and less to the SGST. But what has happened in April 2019 is a sharp swing in the IGST allocations in favour of the CGST. It is possible that the Centre has now become wiser and has decided to follow an allocation system which gives it more from the IGST and helps boost its revenues. But the states will obviously be unhappy and they are likely to complain about this once the elections are over.

With a 60 per cent share in IGST, the Centre's collections under GST in April 2019 were estimated at ₹53,921 crore. If the target of ₹66 trillion of CGST and IGST revenues in 2019-20 is to be met, the average monthly collections should be about ₹55,000 crore. Thus, the shortfall in April 2019 is only about ₹1,079 crore, much lower than what it used to be in all the months of 2018-19. But once you change the formula for sharing the IGST with the states, the GST collections in April do not look that impressive.

The assessment of whether the tax collections are enough to meet the annual target is also dependent on the way the GST system works. A portion of the revenues collected in any month under the GST system pertains to some transactions conducted in



NEW DELHI DIARY

A K BHATTACHARYA

address environmental concerns related to the BRI, CAS has set up a Silk Road Environment Programme and has also agreed to partner with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, a think tank, to carry out an environmental assessment of BRI projects. How transparent these actions will prove to be remains to be seen.

While India has stayed away from the BRI, there is little doubt that the Chinese have managed to get most of the world on board. This includes those countries which had expressed serious reservations two years ago and had spurned Chinese invitation to sign up. Japan is one such major country. Several EU countries, the latest being Italy, have also decided to participate. The New Zealand Prime Minister has conveyed to China her country's willingness to contribute to the adoption of best practices in project design and accounting procedures for BRI projects. What we are witnessing is a Chinese readjustment of BRI to address some of the concerns which have been raised over the past few years. There is also a willingness to bring in international institutions such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and UN agencies to add credibility and provide comfort to partner countries.

What should be India's response to this changing context? There is no reason to alter our position of principle that as long as BRI projects violate India's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as the China-Pakistan economic corridor undoubtedly does, India is unable to endorse it. However, this should not exclude working together with China on projects where there is mutual benefit and benefit to a third partner country. This was implicit in the Wuhan Consensus between leaders of the two countries, which restored balance in India-China relations after the tensions generated by the Doklam stand-off in 2017. In infrastructure development, India's development of the Chabahar port in Iran and the planned northern rail and road corridor from there into Central Asia and beyond, can link up most usefully with the Eurasian transport corridor which China is developing. The trilateral highway linking India, Myanmar and Thailand could also be integrated with the north-south rail and road links which are joining southern China to the countries of Indo-China and beyond, with Mandalay as a nodal point. Beyond this India should look at the possibilities of S&T cooperation with China in areas of interest using the BRI platform. Despite there being a number of bilateral agreements on promoting S&T collaboration, there has been virtually no practical results so far. China has not even become a member of the International Solar Alliance in spite of solar energy being an obvious area of cooperation. Would it be worthwhile for India to convey to China its willingness to participate in specific BRI infrastructure projects on a case by case basis and to become part of the S&T component of BRI? This may soften the impact of India not signing up to the BRI as a whole, but also open up opportunities of meaningful cooperation in S&T where both countries could bring something to the table.

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the previous month and some transactions in the month of the collections. But the portion of revenues from transactions conducted in the previous month is always much larger when the collections are for the first month of a financial year. This is because transactions usually see a huge bump in the last few weeks of the last month of a financial year. Thus the April collections in the GST system see a more than normal increase.

In April 2018, the GST revenues touched ₹1.03 trillion, the first time it crossed the ₹1-trillion mark. It also jumped by 12 per cent over ₹92,167 crore collected in March 2018. But in May 2018, GST collections were only ₹94,016 crore, a decline of over nine per cent. So, don't be surprised if the GST collections, after recording a month-on-month rise of 7.5 per cent in April 2019, also record a similar decline in May 2019.

The April 2019 collections, however, should give the government comfort for a different reason. The GST revenues have gradually stabilised at a slightly higher rate of monthly collections. Between August 2017 and March 2018, the monthly collections hovered at around ₹84,000 crore to ₹96,500 crore. During 2018-19, the monthly collections crossed the ₹1-trillion mark on four occasions. In this period, the GST Council cut rates on a large number of items twice — once in November 2017 and again in December 2018.

In spite of that, monthly collections under the SGST have risen from around ₹22,000 crore in December 2018 to ₹28,800 crore in April 2019. For the CGST as well, the growth has been significant — from about ₹16,400 crore in December 2018 to ₹21,100 crore in April 2019. These are positive signs for a new taxation system. But it is the 60-40 formula for sharing the IGST collections in favour of the CGST that has given the Centre an added advantage in meeting its annual GST target. States are likely to view this as an unfair formula. Once that formula changes, the prospects for the Centre's own GST collections may not remain as bright as they appear now.

Debating the Muslim identity



BOOK REVIEW

VIKRAM JOHRI

In the book under review, Rakshanda Jalil, a noted translator of Urdu prose and poetry, offers a wide-ranging analysis of the history of the language in the subcontinent and ties it with the pluralistic ethos of India. She also discusses what being Muslim means in today's times and stresses how a discussion on integrating the community is overdue.

Ms Jalil divides her book into thematic sections: There are chapters on the literature of partition, on Urdu pulp fiction, and on Urdu poets celebrating Diwali and Christmas. From Faiz Ahmed Faiz's writings on peasants to

Amir Khusrau's poetry of the commonplace, Ms Jalil quotes at length from a variety of sources and provides meticulous translations, bringing out the variety and depth of cultural and social eclecticism in Urdu writings.

While these sections can be savoured by any lay reader, it is her analysis of Muslim identity that adds another dimension to the book. As the book's title suggests, Ms Jalil is against the idea of conflating a community and its mores with a certain dress code or food habit. Yet, she is also critical of the regressive nature of the "burqa", whose wearing, she reiterates, is not a Quranic edict but a social custom.

Ms Jalil calls such attempts at stereotyping the "othering" of the community. At several points, she quotes personal examples of experiencing this "othering". She writes about being grilled as a child about her connection to Pakistan. She writes of her shift from Delhi's Gulmohar Park to Jamia, and what the

move entailed for her social life. She worries for her daughters in a climate of increased polarisation.

While such grievances are real, Ms Jalil is quick to blame their origin on an increasing right-wing ethos that pits the Muslim as "bomb-throwing, beef-smuggling, jihad-spouting". Her argument reminded me of the poster of last year's film *Mulq* in which a bellicose Taapse Pannu, defending a Muslim man in court, asks, "Kya farak padta hai ki woh Muslim hai?" (What does it matter if he is a Muslim?)

Such questions assume that those who debate Muslim identity are all bigots to a person denying Muslims their essential humanity. But the issue is more complex than that. Muslims, for

example, follow a separate civil code — this means that a Muslim man, say, can have more than one wife, and until recently, could divorce her by uttering the word "talaq" thrice. It is arguable, then, if the difference that all right-thinking people call for celebrating encompasses practices that are debatable at best and disharmonious at worst.

Similarly intricate is the question of the burqa. On the one hand is the argument of modesty and a woman's right to dress as she chooses; on the other is the question of women's rights and the deeply problematic conflation of modesty with covering the face. And it goes even beyond this: in the wake of Sri Lanka bombings and the banning of all face coverings in that country, the issue has

acquired a security dimension.

Popular cinema, interestingly, has grown more open to challenging truths about the community that have traditionally been shunned in cultural products for fear of stereotyping. In 2017's *Secret Superstar*, a Muslim girl comes up against opposition from her family as she dreams of becoming a singing sensation. In last year's *Gully Boy*, a talented rapper must protect his mother from an abusive father who has married a much younger woman.

In both films, the women of the household are shown struggling for basic rights — in *Secret Superstar*, the singer's mother is a victim of domestic abuse and *Gully Boy* turns around a dramatic sequence in which the rapper's father beats his wife. Such depictions on film would have been impossible earlier. One wonders if this is an outcome of the polarisation that Ms Jalil speaks of, or, more likely, an attempt to look squarely at problems that are the source of communal stereotyping.

In last year's *Raazi*, an Indian spy marries a Pakistani so that she can share state secrets with her backers at home

— a glorious, if tragic, account of Muslim patriotism. Ms Jalil's book mirrors the dichotomy between *Secret Superstar* and *Gully Boy* on the one hand and *Raazi* on the other. What should the ordinary Muslim worry about: bread-and-butter issues or the majoritarian impulse?

The bogey of the jihadi Muslim may have roots in the rise of global terror but that is not, Ms Jalil argues, the principal problem the community faces and should not be the yardstick by which it is judged. There are far more pertinent issues around survival, gender rights and freedom that Muslims need to address. There is bigotry and hate, yes, but there are other forces churning the community and an enlightened outcome rests on the ability of Muslims to seek and welcome reform.

BUT YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE A MUSLIM

Rakshanda Jalil
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Opinion

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TALKING TO PAKISTAN

BJP leader Ram Madhav

It's (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit) is an opportunity for Pakistan. If something credible comes out in the next one month or so... I'm sure the relationship will have some improvement. But the onus is on them (Pakistan) now

From Modi to Rahul, the campaign touches new lows

EC needed to be more pro-active and should have written to PM as Ashok Lavasa suggested; should have warned Rahul as well

EVEN IN THE context of the BJP's campaign against the Congress party's corruption—the CAG report on some instances, like A Raja's 2G telecom case, provided enough independent proof of this—prime minister Narendra Modi saying the late Rajiv Gandhi was 'bhrashtachari number one' was a new low in a campaign that, on all sides, is plumbing new depths with each passing day. One wrong cannot justify another, but it is equally appalling to see how Congress party chief Rahul Gandhi repeats his Modi-gave-₹30,000cr-to-Anil-Ambani allegation with gay abandon every other day despite having zero evidence. Indeed, even the Supreme Court's contempt notice to him was for his lawyer's disingenuous attempt to argue that Gandhi's 'regret' for having distorted the SC's ruling was really an 'apology'; it was not for Gandhi making statements about Modi's alleged complicity without proof. And, with equal aplomb, Gandhi found it easy to distort one of the BJP's proposed Bills as one that gave more powers to forest officials to "shoot Adivasis with impunity". If top leaders like the BSP's Mayawati polarised voters by asking Muslims to vote in one block against the BJP, Union minister Maneka Gandhi made it abundantly clear she wouldn't help Muslims if they didn't vote for Modi.

And, if the BJP polarised the elections by fielding someone like terror-accused Sadhvi Pragya Thakur, is it to blame more than former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh who first came up with the term 'Hindu terror' as if to counter the globally recognised phenomenon of Islamic terror? Indeed, Singh had even claimed Mumbai Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) chief Hemant Karkare had told him—before Karkare was killed in the 26/11 attacks—that he feared Hindu extremists would kill him; Karkare was in charge of the investigation that eventually led to Sadhvi Pragya's arrest. Singh, in fact, made this statement at the launch of a book that claimed 26/11 was actually an RSS plot, not one hatched by Pakistani terrorists. It is obvious the prime minister has the greatest responsibility to conduct himself with a certain dignity during elections, but can it be said the responsibility is only his?

In any election that is as closely fought as this one, the campaign deteriorating into a communal one is always a possibility especially since, while the Model Code of Conduct prevents appealing to voters along religious lines, the fact is that major political parties—and this is not just the BJP—have aligned themselves with various religious/caste groupings. While that is something political parties and the country's intellectuals need to think about once the heat of the current battle is over—is asking for votes on religious grounds a bad thing if asking for them along caste lines is kosher?—in such a situation, the role of constitutional bodies is critical. While the Supreme Court did ask Rahul Gandhi to apologise for his remarks on the SC having declared that there was corruption in the Rafale deal and that Modi had given Anil Ambani a ₹30,000 crore contract, it did so only after BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi filed a criminal complaint against Rahul Gandhi before it. The Election Commission (EC), similarly, was slow to act on incendiary speeches. It is true that, when all political parties choose to violate the rules, it is difficult to act against them all. And if the EC is to bench either a Modi or a Gandhi, it is difficult to say where this will go, but in this context, the response of Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa—who was, sadly, outvoted by his colleagues in the EC—is commendable. While not spelling out what the EC should eventually do, going by a report in *The Economic Times*, Lavasa was of the view that the EC should write to the prime minister asking for his cooperation in implementing the Model Code of Conduct as a first response to the complaints about some of his speeches.

Jobs vs Consumption

If many jobs are being created, why is consumption sputtering?

THE CONSUMPTION ENGINE that was expected to drive the economy, in the absence of meaningful private sector investments and slowing government expenditure, seems to be sputtering. That has been evident, for some time now, from the lacklustre home sales and weak passenger vehicles sales. Moreover, the pace of growth in retail loans from banks, too, has been trending down since November, 2018. Now, the sales of consumer staples has slowed. In fact, the data on private final consumption expenditure for Q3FY19—a growth of 8.4% year-on-year (y-o-y)—was somewhat puzzling given the festive season had been a particularly dull one. But then, there has often been a lack of correlation between the macro-numbers and the high-frequency data.

While smaller spends on relatively big-ticket items such as homes is not so surprising in a slowing economy, the limited purchases of two-wheelers and cars, for nearly six months now, is worrying. Moreover, the loss of momentum has been seen in both rural and urban markets. True, there has been a fairly sharp increase in prices of cars and bikes, thanks to changes in the regulations. But, if the economy is doing so well and so many well-paying jobs are being created, as the government claims is the case, spends on these items should be more robust. Hero MotoCorp reported an 11% fall in volumes in Q4FY19 while TVS Motors reported a volume increase of just 2.1% y-o-y. That established products aren't able to push through volumes reflects how purchasing power has been limited. Economists point out this is due to incomes growing slowly or staying flat, or even, in some instances, shrinking. Household savings have fallen over the past few years. The physical plus net financial savings of households as a share of GDP was 18% in FY16, 17.1% in FY17 and 17.2% in FY18. These levels were much lower than the 20%-plus seen in earlier years—the recent peak was 23.6% in FY12. Physical savings, which were 15-16% of GDP in FY12 and FY13, dropped to sub-10% in FY16, recovering to 10.8% in FY17 and 10.6% in FY18. Again, the net financial savings of households—as a share of GDP—has come off to 6.3% in FY17 and 6.6% in FY18.

Unless incomes rise meaningfully, neither spending nor savings can pick up. The new government cannot afford to spend beyond a point since tax revenues are not particularly buoyant. An uncertain regulatory environment, tax terrorism and weak labour laws have sapped the confidence of the business community. There needs to be better regulation, whether in telecom, oil & gas or labour; else, companies will not invest. Since the government does not have the ability to kickstart the economy with a stimulus, better governance is the only way out.

RightMESSAGE

Benetton's #UnitedByVote ad campaign is a refreshing example of what companies can do in public interest

THE CLOTHING COMPANY, United Colours of Benetton, or more simply, Benetton, has never shied from explicitly political ads—political not in the sense of endorsing some party or outfit, but making a progressive statement on issues such as homosexuality/homophobia, war, capital punishment, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s-90s, organised crime. While the tone of the ads were local—the bloodied uniform of a Bosnian soldier or American prisoners in the death row or a man murdered by the mafia in Italy or an inter-racial lesbian couple with an adopted child of Asian descent—the message was global: anti-war, anti-death penalty, anti-organised crime, pro-diversity. In India, it has been uncharacteristically reticent. To be sure, it has put up ads speaking about racial harmony, but that doesn't pack the same punch as, say, hypothetically, a *janaudhari* Brahmin shown with his arm on a Dalit's shoulder. It is not that companies in India have stayed clear of controversial—political—ads. Surf Excel recently became a target of relentless online abuse and threats from trolls for, ironically, using Holi as a backdrop to give a warm, sincere message on communal harmony. Tata Tea's famous *Jaago Re* campaign is another example. Yet, it was Benetton that was conspicuously silent. But no longer. The company brought out a full-page ad on the front two pages of a national news-daily on Sunday, with a rather forceful message.

Against a blurred picture of a woman in the background, the ad talks about the regressive, divisive politics of major political parties in India. The parties are not named, but you know which these are. It talks about parties that police what is acceptable as food in India, what clothes are acceptable, how they erode trust in the country's democracy with their attacks on the EVMs, how they want to dictate who should be hated. The final line in Benetton's #UnitedByVote ad, referencing universal adult franchise, is "It is time to... show them who has the power". That is as frontal as the company—any company—could get. If more of corporate India becomes conscience-keeper to the masses, it wouldn't be a bad thing at all.

POWER SHARING

THERE IS A NEED TO WORK ON CONSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS. A MAJOR ISSUE, FOR INSTANCE, IS THE ABSENCE OF CLEARLY-DEFINED REVENUE SOURCES FOR LOCAL BODIES

Why states are failing decentralisation

DESPITE THE 73RD and 74th Constitutional amendments, except in a few states, there has been little progress at decentralisation—to both rural and urban local bodies. Most state governments have been reluctant to devolve the functions, funds and functionaries for delivering public services at the local level. The functions assigned are unclear, funds uncertain and inadequate, and decision-making functionaries are mostly drawn from the state bureaucracy. Local bodies do not even have powers to determine the base and rate structure of the taxes assigned to them. The states have not cared to create institutions and systems mandated in the Constitution, including the appointment of the State Finance Commissions, and even when they are appointed, states have not found it obligatory to place their reports in the legislature. In fact, the local bodies are not clear about delivering local public goods, with the prominent agenda of implementing central schemes obscuring their functions.

Admittedly, despite the landmark amendments, the effort at decentralisation reform has essentially been top-down. Part IX was inserted into the Constitution with Article 243 (A to O) specifying matters such as the constitution of local bodies, elections and the functions to be devolved under Schedules 11, 12, and 243 (I and Y) mandating the appointment of the State Finance Commissions by the Governor every five years to balance their functions with funds. Article 280 was seeded with an additional term of reference to the Union Finance Commission to recommend measures for augmenting the consolidated funds of the states to supplement the resources of local bodies. The major 'birth defect' of the entire process is that the ownership and responsibility for local governments rests squarely with the state government ensnared in Entry 5 of the State List in the Seventh Schedule. Thus, the Constitution vests the responsibility of creating and sustaining local bodies entirely to the discretion of the state governments.

M GOVINDA RAO

Chief economic adviser, Brickwork Ratings, and councillor, Takshashila Institution Views are personal



Article 243 (G and W), relating to the powers, authority and responsibilities to rural and urban local bodies, merely specifies that the state governments, "...may, by law, endow the panchayats and municipalities with powers and authority to enable them as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon these bodies subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to the preparation of economic development and social justice, performance of functions and implementation of schemes entrusted to them including those specified in the 12th Schedule". Thus, it is entirely left for the states to decide, what and how much powers and functions should be devolved to the third level.

There are no easy mechanisms to ensure compliance of even the provisions prescribed in the Constitution by the states. Most states have not complied with the requirement of appointing Gram Sabhas (243 A), Ward Committees (243), District Planning Committees and Metropolitan Planning Committees. There have been several attempts to postpone elections though they are required to hold them well before the expiry of the prevailing elected body or before six months if the body is dissolved for some reason, as required under 243 K and U. Although under Article 243 (I) and (Y), the states are required to appoint State Finance Commissions and place the reports received in the legislature, their records show complete violations of the Constitutional provisions.

One of the major shortcomings in the scheme is the absence of clearly defined revenue sources for local bodies. There is no separate list of tax bases assigned to them in the Constitution, and they have

to depend on the state governments to levy the taxes that the states choose to devolve. In fact, even when the taxes like property tax is assigned to them, local bodies do not have the discretion to change the base and rate structure. Any proposal for the change has to be approved by the state government.

What is the role of Union Finance Commission in furthering the decentralisation process? While one would like to think that an organic link is provided to it by seeding an additional term of reference in Article 280, enabling it to act as a champion, a careful reading of the Article shows that the role is confined to recommend measures to augment the Consolidated funds of the states to supplement the finances of local bodies based on the recommendations of the State Finance Commissions. The Union Finance Commission cannot directly transfer funds to local bodies; its job is only to augment the consolidated funds of the States to supplement the resources of local bodies. Again, the role is supplemental and the main responsibility of financing lies at the door of the state governments based on the recommendations of respective State Finance Commissions.

There is some speculation that the Fifteenth Finance Commission will advance the cause of decentralisation and include performance-based incentives in their recommendations. The package of performance-based grants recommended by the Thirteenth Finance Commission (TFC) was discontinued by the Fourteenth Finance

Commission (FFC) mainly because it considered that the Constitution gives discretion to the states in choosing the extent and form, and does not suggest a particular model of decentralisation. It also considered that the role of the Union Finance Commission is only supplemental, as stated above. Moreover, according to the performance grants recommended by the TFC, the local governments were to get the performance grants only when the state governments fulfilled the 13 conditions listed! Not surprisingly, states had no incentive to comply.

The FFC considered that it had a limited role in fostering decentralisation in the prevailing Constitutional scheme. It stated, "...We note that ... the Constitutional provisions give primacy to the role of the States in this regard, by placing local government squarely in the State List... In our view neither the TOR nor the Constitution permits the Finance Commission to play any role in the devolution of powers to panchayats and municipalities or to promote a particular model of decentralization." (Para 9:63; p.111)

How can we move forward on decentralisation? In terms of a legal frame-

work, it is important to specify a separate list of functions and sources of revenue to local bodies to create clarity of functions and independent sources of finance. Second, there should be clear mechanisms to ensure that the states comply with the Constitutional provisions, particularly in the appointment and implementation of the recommendations of the SFCs. Finally, the top-down process must be supplemented with the bottom-up effort. Sustainable decentralisation comes from people's demand for decentralisation. Unfortunately, there is very little objective intellectual discussion or advocacy based on serious research on the subject which is important for a participatory democracy and responsive local public service delivery.

In terms of a legal framework, it is important to specify a separate list of functions and sources of revenue for local bodies to create clarity of functions and independent sources of finance

Boeing's Max defence a textbook mess

Quibbling over the meaning of "safety features" adds to a litany of errors the company has already committed

DAVID FICKLING

Bloomberg



FOR DECADES, BUSINESS schools have taught Johnson & Johnson's handling of its 1982 Tylenol scandal as a textbook example of good crisis management. In the future, we can expect Boeing Co.'s treatment of its two 737 Max crashes to join the syllabus—as an example of what not to do.

Engineers at the planemaker discovered problems with the aircraft's angle-of-attack sensors within months of the model's first delivery, but didn't share its findings with airlines, regulators or even senior management until much later, the company said Sunday.

That we're still getting incomplete details of the situation—almost two years after the problems were first found, and six months after the Lion Air crash last October that brought it to wider attention—is an almost perfect inversion of the Tylenol lesson.

When Johnson & Johnson found someone was lacing the pain-relief medicine with cyanide, it removed the product from shelves and followed a policy of maximum transparency to reassure customers. As a result, it remained ahead of the developing story and, eventually, regained their trust.

Boeing's response has been starkly different. For more than a month, reporters and experts have been asking questions about the angle-of-attack sensors and their relationship with Boeing's Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (an automated feature designed to prevent the plane from stalling). Many stories have pointed out how customers that paid for additional func-

tions got a warning when data from the 737 Max's two such sensors disagreed—with the implication that essential safety features were available only to those who paid extra.

Boeing's response to this line of inquiry has been that the absence of the disagree alert on basic-model planes wasn't the result of company policy but an accident, and that once discovered it was deemed acceptably low-risk to wait until a software update to fix the problem. In other words, it didn't leave the alert disconnected out of venality, but out of incompetence.

Let's just go through the litany of errors here. Boeing introduced a new automated feature, MCAS, that depended on input from angle-of-attack sensors. It failed to inform pilots properly about the new feature, despite the clear ways in which it changed the plane's aerodynamics and handling. On top of that, the company accidentally removed functionality that had previously alerted pilots to faults in the sensors controlling MCAS. Through ignorance of this second problem, it again failed to inform pilots of the way their cockpit set-up had changed.

It is a mess, and made worse by the fact that Boeing's prevarication looks like denial. With 346 people dead, the company's main defense boils down to quibbling about the meaning of the term "safety feature." (In Boeing's view, because angle-of-attack data don't form a central part of a pilot's classic flight display, an alert about faulty readings can't be considered a safety feature.)

Here's an alternative reading:

Whether you call them safety features or not, indicators telling pilots that something unexpected is happening to the aircraft can make the difference between life and death.

Thanks to innovations by aerospace manufacturers including Boeing itself, aircraft are extraordinarily safe these days. They lose control in flight only in extremely unusual and unpredictable circumstances. As a result, pilots are often more like investigators than drivers—most needed when something goes wrong. When that happens, they may have just seconds to solve the problem, so need as much information as possible at their fingertips.

When Air France Flight 447 crashed off the coast of Brazil in 2009 killing 228, the initial problem was caused by a strikingly similar set of events—conflicting airspeed readings that caused the autopilot to disconnect in a way that appears to have left the crew, flying in darkness, unable to discern what was going wrong. Too much information risks overwhelming pilots in a tense situation; depriving them of information can be equally dangerous.

Why is Boeing behaving so differently to Johnson & Johnson? One advantage that the drug company had is that the Tylenol poisonings weren't its fault, so it had little to lose from being as open as possible. In the case of the Boeing 737 Max, as we are gradually learning, it is going to be hard to paint the company's actions in such blameless tones.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Low politics, PM-style

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lowered himself by saying that Rajiv Gandhi 'died as Bhrashtachari No 1'. He seemed to have forgotten that speaking ill of the dead does not go down well with the people of India steeped in tradition. He conveniently omitted to mention that the Delhi High Court cleared Rajiv Gandhi of the charge of corruption and the Vajpayee government did not file an appeal against the HC judgment. The Prime Minister must lead by example; but in Modi we have a Prime Minister who stoops so low as to speak ill of an assassinated Prime Minister. It was lamentable that Modi chose to diminish his stature by a 'negative campaign' instead of a positive one enlisting his achievements. Increasingly, Modi looks like a leader fighting a losing battle. May be, he dragged Rajiv Gandhi's name to avenge Rahul Gandhi's jibe, chowkidar chor hai. It was a crowning irony that Modi, of all people, spoke of Rajiv Gandhi's 'courtiers'. Meanwhile, it is to Rahul Gandhi's credit that he offered Modi 'love and hugs' despite his denigration of his father as 'Corrupt No 1'. Insulting remarks by the prime minister, made out of desperation, could well boomerang on him and his party's prospects in the final phases of polling.

— G David Milton, Maruthancode

ECI clean-chit to Modi

The ECI gave clean chits to Narendra Modi and Amit Shah over violations such as communally coloured speeches and invoking the Army to solicit votes, probably keeping them above the law of the land. Such action of the EC seeds doubt over its integrity.

— SK Khosla, Chandigarh

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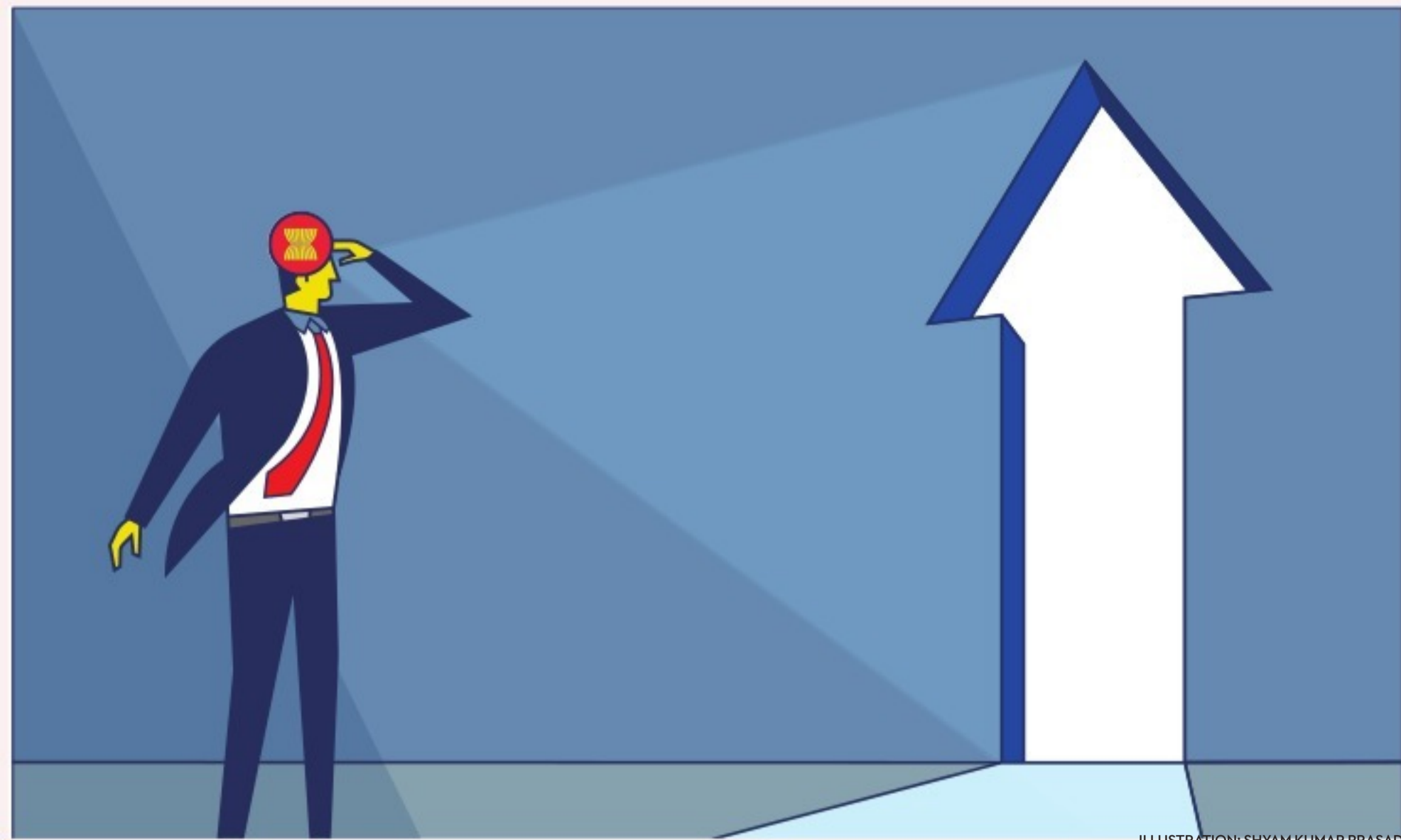


ILLUSTRATION: SHYAM KUMAR PRASAD

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The way forward for RCEP

While our negotiators bargain hard for an inclusive and balanced Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, domestically we must focus on eliminating niggles our manufacturing sector and exports are facing. The first phase of 'Make in India' was promising. We saw eagerness from foreign companies setting up plants and assembly units in India. The next phase may well focus on transforming this initiative to 'Make for India' where the needs of the external market, but more importantly the domestic market, are met through production in India

THE REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (RCEP)—the proposed free trade agreement between 10 ASEAN member states and their six FTA partners, namely India, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea—talks have been underway for over six years now, with over 25 rounds of negotiations between all FTA partner countries. The 16 member countries have now set a deadline of end-2019 to conclude the negotiations. The trade bloc comprising the ASEAN, Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand accounts for 25% of global GDP, 30% of global trade, 26% of FDI flows, and 45% of the total population. From India's point of view, RCEP is critical. RCEP countries account for almost 27% of India's total trade. Exports to RCEP

countries account for about 15% of RCEP's total exports, and imports from RCEP countries comprise 35% of India's total imports.

The negotiations, until now, have been fraught with difficulties, with India accused of being 'conservative' in its approach towards tariff negotiations, according to media reports. A final decision on RCEP is expected to come only post-elections under a new government at the Centre.

Both Indian negotiators and the domestic industry have been vocal about their discomfort with respect to opening up of the domestic market to Chinese exports. This is understandable, given the massive Chinese overcapacity in key manufacturing industries, and major support programmes in the form of financial, non-financial and trade mea-

asures for the domestic industry, which give an edge to Chinese producers over other trade partners.

In order to do an independent assessment of the impact of RCEP on the Indian industry, the government has roped in three premier think tanks to prepare the way forward for RCEP negotiations, which is a step in the right direction. A NITI Aayog note (*A Note on Free Trade Agreements and Their Costs*, Dr Saraswat, Priya, Ghosh 2018) co-authored by the writers of this article had earlier highlighted that India's combined trade deficit with FTA partners like the ASEAN, Japan and South Korea has almost doubled in the last eight years. India's trade deficit with the RCEP bloc of over \$100 billion is almost 64% of its total trade deficit, of which China alone accounts for over 60% of the deficit. The report also highlighted that the quality of trade has deteriorated under the ASEAN-India FTA. According to the UN's Harmonised system of product classification, products can be grouped into 99 chapters and further into 21 sections like textiles, chemicals, vegetable products, base metals, gems and jewellery, etc (similar to sector classification). The analysis shows that trade balance has worsened (deficit increased or surplus reduced) for 13 out of 21 sectors. This also includes value-added sectors like chemicals and allied, plastics and rubber, minerals, leather, textiles, gems and jewellery, metals, vehicles, medical instruments and miscellaneous manufactured items. Sectors in which trade deficit has worsened account for about 75% of India's exports to the ASEAN.

Apart from this, we would like to highlight some issues that need consideration of the policy-makers and independent agencies undertaking the assessment. First, China's manufacturing surplus and dumping of goods across the world is quite well known. China is the recipient of the highest number of Anti-Dumping Duty (ADD) measures in the world, with 926 ADD measures against it (1995-2017), which amounts to almost a quarter of all ADD measures globally. Most of these measures are concentrated in sectors where China has overcapacity, with more than a quarter of investigations in base metals (272), followed by chemicals (192), machinery and electric equipment (104), and textiles (75). Concomitantly, China's penetration in the Indian market has been massive. China dominates both in terms of value-added import items as well as labour-intensive industry imports. Overall, India imports

almost 20% of its non-oil imports from China. Almost 60% of India's electric machinery imports, 36% of machinery and equipment imports, and 37% of organic chemical imports are from China. Due to its massive overcapacity and financial and non-financial government support, China is able to create a significant edge over its trading partners. A recent OECD report (2019) highlights that the Chinese aluminium industry received the highest amount of financial and non-financial support (from 2013-17), far ahead of its other global peers.

Against this backdrop, India must have a plan to deal with this massive support that China offers its industries, leading to overcapacity and price undercutting post-RCEP. Therefore, we suggest that appropriate safeguard clauses need to be put in place within RCEP in case injury to domestic industry is found. A clause on provisional safeguard measures should also be introduced. Within the FTA, provision should be made for safeguard measures to be invoked if a volume or price trigger for the concerned products is reached.

Second, given the current state of Indian industry, phased elimination of tariffs is necessary, especially with respect to some key manufacturing industries that have long gestation periods until they start running on full capacity. An example of this kind of negotiation was the India-Japan FTA where India negotiated for most of its tariff lines under sensitive track (almost 63% under sensitive track, 14% under exclusion). This was in contrast to the ASEAN-India FTA wherein 76% of the tariff lines were opened up for complete duty elimination. Therefore, at least a 15-25 years' tariff elimination schedule should be negotiated for key sectors like chemicals, metals, automobiles, machinery, food products and textiles, which individually contribute more than 5% to India's manufacturing GDP and employment, respectively. Thus, as suggested, phased elimination of few key manufacturing industries is absolutely essential with respect to China.

Third, policymakers should be cognisant of the use of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) by China. According to reports, even though China has agreed to open almost 92% of their tariff lines, expecting India to reciprocate in the same manner, serious concerns over China's NTBs merit the attention. China's usage of NTBs like complex product certification process, labelling standards, custom clearance, pre-shipment inspection and import licensing has hindered India's access to their markets. Dealing with NTBs is costly and, therefore, we must factor in this associated barrier before we move ahead with trade pacts, RCEP in particular.

While our negotiators bargain hard for an inclusive and balanced RCEP, domestically we must fiercely focus on eliminating niggles our manufacturing sector and exports are facing. The first phase of 'Make in India' has been promising. We have seen eagerness from foreign companies setting up plants and assembly units in India, bringing in valuable foreign capital and technical know-how. The next phase may well focus on transforming this initiative to 'Make for India' where the needs of the external market, but more importantly the domestic market, are met through production in India. Not only will this produce meaningful jobs, but also add to India's heft in trade treaties. These transformational plans will require support in the form of a new industrial policy that creates the necessary incentives for MSMEs to be an active part of this process. These are necessary complements for ensuring maximum leverage out of our trade deals, especially RCEP.

China's usage of non-tariff barriers has hindered India's access to their markets. We must factor in such things before we move ahead with trade pacts, RCEP in particular

Over two tonnes in space

**YOGINDER
K ALAGH**

The author is a former union minister



Was our A-SAT experiment just that? Or was it more—civilised countries, after all, flex muscles in the pursuit of their larger objectives abroad?

We showed what we knew—that we can put over two tonnes in space, do it accurately, and manoeuvre it. In fact, we can do more. We can deliver payloads of this kind over 2,000-plus kilometres. So our enemies should watch out. We describe in this piece, how we acquired these capabilities. But before that, let's assure ourselves—and then our friends also across the world—that our destiny is greater than sabre-rattling.

Rajiv Gandhi had gone to Moscow for a discussion with Mikhail Gorbachev. Getting bored, he asked his aide Gopi Arora, "Anything new?" Arora replied both he and we are "reforming." Let's cooperate around that with new-generation projects and not just steel plants and heavy machinery. Let's also cooperate on reform strategies and share experiences on the progress.

Later, I was sent to negotiate these details. Incidentally, during that mission, I asked Sam Pitroda, who in those days was working on a modern communication strategy for India (the Centre for Development of Telematics; C-DOT), if he would be a part of my delegation? He wanted to come and that is the origin of his Soviet bloc business connection. The Soviets laid it out. My counterpart was a Soviet electronic engineer trained in the US, one of Gorbachev's technocrat young leaders. During that visit, we also met Vladimir Putin, who was the Party chief in Leningrad (now St Petersburg). I took from home a list of 'needs' we were not getting from elsewhere, in which they had the capabilities. One of them was cooperation in delivering the technology of developing payloads in space.

Rajiv was assassinated and Gorbachev removed. His successor would not bite on this cooperation and it was only with Putin that those deals were revived. But after the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief, whom I knew from his Ahmedabad days, what will we do? These chelas of Satish Dhawan were all Nehruites to the core. He replied, "Sir, we will do it ourselves." But how? "The origin, Dr Alagh, is the technology of boiling milk: we will start with that." We allocated special resources for them, and the rest is history. In four months they had tested successfully the technology under stationary conditions, and in less than two years the descendants of the Aryabhata had readied to put the rocket in space for an Indian communication satellite to be used for 'educational' purposes. But chancelleries the world over knew that India had the power to swing it militarily very quickly, in a period of weeks.

Civilised countries use the threat of power to achieve democratic social objectives at home and the pursuit of their larger objectives abroad. The threat of the use of power was developed as a fine art by political economy thought leaders like Chanakya, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Disraeli and Giuseppe Mazzini. Dictators, who actually used this power causing havoc, ended up in the dustbins of history.

Our security interests in Afghanistan, the access route to our trade with Central and West Asia through the strategically located port town of Chabahar, and in fighting those who will wreck the democratic Indian State, need the back-up of the mailed fist. But this power needs to be perceived as a threat. That too we must make an effort for it to be seen only as a hidden threat. The day-to-day work has to be done with the velvet glove. Large decisions are very confident and powerful nations. They cannot fritter away their reservoirs of power, in fits of insecurity.

Our security interests in Afghanistan, the access route to our trade with Central and West Asia, and fighting those who will wreck the democratic Indian State, need the back-up of the mailed fist

PUBLIC HEALTHCARE

Can India get it right?

India can learn from the Accountable Care Organisations (ACO) model of the US, in which a group of doctors, hospitals and other care providers together manage care of a group of patients

**SUJATA SAUNIK &
DILEEP MAVALANKAR**

Saunik, an IAS, is Takemi fellow at Harvard University; Mavalankar is director, IIPHG. Views are personal

INDIA HAS EMBARKED on a major re-hauling of its publicly-funded health system. It includes, at the top, development of new AIIMS, renovations and expansion of old medical colleges, and at the bottom conversion of health sub-centres to health and wellness centres. There is also major health insurance upgrade via Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Scheme. Finally, the government is getting serious in improving the health of the population. But, in this process, we need to learn from various models in the world.

A new model of care and insurance has started working in the US. Accountable Care Organisations (ACOs) are a group of doctors, hospitals and other care providers that together manage care of a group of patients. The ACO system works at the community health centre level and is designed for helping patients manage their illnesses and reduce healthcare costs by preventing and reducing unnecessary and preventable admissions to a hospital.

In the ACO model, the doctor and health insurance plan managers talk to each other to help coordinate the patient's care for them. It is a payment mechanism that allows for quality care to be given to the people for their healthcare needs in a combination of public and private health-care insurance plans. Support and guidance is also provided to patients for enrolling into a healthcare plan if they are uncovered. In addition, the ACO model works on health package integration to

assist in helping patients get access to integrated behavioural health and substance use services in the primary care setting. Patients requiring high-grade medical or surgical treatment are assisted with quick referrals to nearby hospitals. Often, the ACO model in a community health centre does not have in-patient services, although it works seven days a week with reduced hours during the weekends.

All Medicare (the US national health insurance programme for Americans aged 65 and over and young people with end-stage diseases, funded by a combination of payroll tax, premiums and surtaxes from beneficiaries) and Medicaid patients (low-income families, pregnant women, people with disabilities and elderly requiring nursing care) are covered by the local com-

munity health centre under the ACO model. This is the main driver of the fund flow to the centre. The integrated healthcare model also helps provide support to patients for alcohol, tobacco and substance abuse. A range of services, including lab tests, primary medical care, geriatric care, nutrition, dental and ophthalmic care with shorter waiting periods helps people to visit community healthcare centres and receive expert advice, drugs and vaccines without having to visit the nearest hospital for minor ailments. There could be lessons from the ACO model in the US for the Indian public healthcare system reform.

India's public healthcare system provides free medical consultation, basic lab tests, free drugs and vaccines and refer-



ral when needed. Hence this system should be strengthened. Free provision of medical consultation, tests and drugs and routine immunisation should form the main plank of the wellness centre programme. It should be supplemented by screening for blood pressure, diabetes and risk factors for heart diseases such as lipid levels in blood. Screening for cancer, kidney diseases and eye problems should be also added in the public healthcare system.

There should be integration of primary healthcare services under one roof, with AYUSH, as these services are non-invasive and popular with communities, along with the facility for rapid referral to hospitals when needed for high-level care. This may work very well for the pop-

ulation covered under each such centre. State-run insurance schemes can provide a gateway by helping advise people on their benefit packages, which are already being planned under NHPS.

Several sub-centres staffed by auxiliary nurse midwife (ANMs) are the primary maternal and child care service delivery centres in rural India. These ANMs can be equipped with staff, facilities such as freezers for vaccine, and a full drug dispensation pharmacy including AYUSH medicines to start running wellness centres in the ACO model. The government is already planning to put a community health officer in each health and wellness centre.

Another unique feature could be making this community centre the hub for

people to get information of all social sector welfare schemes. Community workers involved in various schemes could come together on a fixed day or two each week and provide information and paperwork support to the intended beneficiaries.

This is an untapped opportunity for India to leapfrog to a new healthcare delivery model and move towards universal health coverage, provided the scheme is designed well to have an array of services under one roof, empathy and respect for the patient, a payment model for fund flow, community outreach and quality care delivery. It is unrealistic to expect doctors to be everywhere and work round the clock, and for people to pay nothing for quality healthcare. For this model to be sustainable there should be a system of enrolment based on income criteria, linked to ration/Aadhaar cards, and provided free to low income groups but with co-payments for the rest. One of the ways to link the primary care system and NHPS could be to make each sub-health centre and public health centre the registration point for NHPS. One can also make a medical examination mandatory before enrolling in NHPS so that many problems can be detected early and treated under NHPS. It will also help establish a referral system for NHPS and a link in the minds of the people that they have to go first to the public healthcare system to get benefits of NHPS. Such gatekeeping can reduce the cost by promoting prevention and reducing fraud.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Once upon a poll

The 1990s were the most violent years in Bihar's electoral history. That gloomy picture has changed



SUSHIL KUMAR MODI

NOT JUSTICE

Panel's report on allegations against CJI falls short on yardsticks of transparency and fairness

THE THREE-MEMBER PANEL probing charges of sexual harassment against Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi had a task much broader and more critical than its stated remit. Given that it was investigating allegations levelled against the highest office of the country's apex court, the panel needed to answer questions that pertained, inevitably, to the integrity of the institution itself. Upon it also lay the onus of instituting procedures that mitigated the unequal power relations in a case where a former junior employee of the court was ranged against the CJI. In a report submitted on Monday, the panel has given a clean chit to CJI Gogoi. It has "found no substance" in the charges. But this denouement — an ex parte report, which will not be made public — raises more questions than it answers.

The committee comprising Justices S A Bobde, Indira Banerjee and Indu Malhotra wrapped up the inquiry in sittings over four days, three of which were devoted to questioning the complainant. On the third day, the complainant withdrew from the probe alleging that the panel did not adopt "a procedure that would ensure fairness and equality". She accused the committee of not informing her about its procedures, denying her legal help, not recording its proceedings and not providing her with a copy of her depositions before it. Each of these four points raises issues of power asymmetry. The committee's task was, no doubt, complicated by the fact that the SC's "in-house procedures" do not have provisions to deal with charges against the CJI. But the apex court has, over the years, also interpreted and re-interpreted Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Constitution to lay down the rights of working women. The probe was a chance to extend such jurisprudence to a situation inside the institution of the court.

The panel's recourse to an ex-parte investigation is problematic. Aside from the fact that such a probe is against the principles of natural justice, the apex court has, in February this year, ruled that an ex parte verdict can be set aside under the Code of Civil Procedure. And by not making its report public, the panel has come up short on the requirement of transparency that should have been fundamental in a case of such gravity. It has argued that the verdict in *Indira Jaising vs Supreme Court of India* does not enjoin placing in public "the report of a committee constituted as a part of the In-House Procedure". But surely a probe into an issue where the institutional propriety of the SC is in question cannot hearken to pre-RTI jurisprudence — which *Indira Jaising* is. The panel's verdict goes against the Court's tradition of interpreting the law creatively for the sake of upholding and strengthening constitutional morality. The Court has corrected itself in the past. It should do so again

PRUDENCE FOR FUTURE

EPFO needs linkage with market determined rates. That would be in long-term interest of its growing number of subscribers

A MONTH BEFORE the announcement of national polls this year, the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) announced an interest rate of 8.65 per cent for millions of its subscribers for 2018-19, which is 15 basis points higher than what it paid in the previous fiscal. Now that the polls are in the last phase, it is time for a reality check and for some tough decisions. The finance ministry, which has to ratify the interest rate proposed by one of the world's top social security providers, has flagged its concerns on the higher pay-out this time in the context of the potential risks to some of the EPFO's investments in troubled firms such as IL&FS. The ministry's worry stems from the fact that the organisation may have to dip into its surplus if some of the investments turn sour and the prospect of demands being made on the government to underwrite such losses. That may be a little overblown considering that its investments in IL&FS amount to Rs 574.73 crore, a tiny slice in an investment portfolio now over Rs 10 lakh crore.

Yet, an interest rate of 8.65 per cent for its subscribers — exempt from tax at all three stages — contributions, earnings and withdrawal, is over one per cent higher than the risk free ten-year government bond and much more attractive than other schemes such as small savings and PPF. The EPFO would be left with a residual surplus of only Rs 151.67 crore after the high payout in 2018-19. Clearly, this rate is out of sync with the markets and is unsustainable. Recognising the need to move away from administered rates and to prevent distortions, the government has benchmarked returns on small savings schemes to the yields on government bonds. The EPFO, too, now needs to have a linkage with market determined rates. Over the past few years, the organisation has transformed, reflected in the huge expansion in coverage with formalisation of the workforce, better compliance and governance, besides faster resolution of claims and the use of technology.

In the same spirit of change, and in the long-term interest of its growing number of subscribers, the EPFO should adopt a more prudent fiscal course. The asset to GDP ratio of pension and retirement funds in many countries in the West is well above 100 per cent but it is in the low single digits in India. The government has much at stake in ensuring sound governance in the EPFO, not just because of its social security obligations but also given its potential to fund long-term infrastructure projects and to emerge as a stabilising influence in India's financial markets.

A ROYAL ADDITION

Babies are cute, and must be celebrated. But royalty continues to benefit from a willing suspension of disbelief

THIS EDITORIAL MARKS the failure of the French Revolution. A nonagenarian matriarch — whose largely unemployed family owns vast amounts of unearned, inherited property — has just been blessed with her eighth grandchild. Of course, births are joyous occasions, and there is nothing wrong with celebrating a baby.

But all royalty is a lie and worse. Go back far enough into a clan's genealogy and their greatness is based on the ability to do violence and institutionalise it. And, given the fact that this point was made quite forcefully — the importance of liberty, equality and fraternity was brought home on the edge of the guillotine in 1789 — the abiding fascination for the House of Windsor and other absentee landlords is somewhat worrying. In Japan, for example, the loss of collective reason is being marked by a shrewd businessman selling jars of air to mark the end of a royal era.

So, why are otherwise able citizens of modern democracies taken in by the trials, tribulations, joys and sorrows of blue-blooded reality TV stars? Well, British royalty, like many others, has managed to stay relevant, adapted to the changing times. In an age of global warming, rising threats of authoritarianism and the rise of machines, they are real-life Disney characters, distractions that keep reality from becoming overwhelming. In fact, such is the power of this celebrity that even as the greatness of Great Britain is under a cloud thanks to Brexit, the fandom of its first family only grows, colonising Asia, Africa and the Americas, a shadow of a once vast and cruel empire. To maintain this mirage, all that Prince William and Meghan Markle must do is preen and wave and fit into a carefully-crafted public image.

PEOPLE LIVING IN Bihar shudder at the mere mention of this era. It doesn't take one by surprise if we were to call the 1990s the darkest phase of Bihar's electoral history. The period must have a special mention in the Guinness World Records for registering the maximum number, and probably worst forms, of electoral violence perpetrated in this state.

Yes, there are myriads of records of violent elections in the developing world, but their tolls are just no match for Bihar. A poll watcher might jump onto the bandwagon and say that, look, 270 people died in last month's general elections in Indonesia. But look carefully, this is the number of poll staff succumbing to fatigue resulting from counting millions of ballots, and no violence.

Though almost all Hindi heartland states witnessed moderate to heavy electoral violence during this period, Bihar certainly accounted for the major chunk. Bihar's history of electoral violence during 1990-2004 is replete with incidents of murder, loot, arson, kidnapping, intimidation, and other crimes. For the electorate, the poll season always came as a time to practise caution in general life. For the contestants, too, this was a harrowing time. But the major difference was that while the contestants either won or lost, the electorate always lost. Lost lives, lost rights, lost property, lost dignity.

Official statistics say 641 lives were lost to poll-related violence during a total of nine elections between 1990 and 2004. Out of this, 196 people died only during panchayat polls in 2001, which had been held after a long gap of 23 years in Bihar. A total of 28 lives were lost in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. All these people died either in the run-up to elections, or on the poll day itself, or in many cases, even after the polls were over in a constituency. Law and order had hit rock bottom.

Let's compare these figures with those of the Lok Sabha elections of 2009 and 2014 and the assembly polls of 2005, 2010 and 2015. Eight lives were lost to incidents of grievous

nature in the above-mentioned two Lok Sabha elections and seven in the above three assembly elections taken together. The last assembly elections in 2015 saw not a single casualty for such incidents. This looks miraculous, but is a fact.

Hundreds of crimes were spun around just one purpose, booth loot. This practice dates back to 1927 when a re-poll was ordered, during district board elections, for the first time in the electoral history of Bihar, and probably India. However, there's no official record of it. And then it went on to scale new heights. Initially, booth loot was the "business" of a "few", but its gradual passage into the hands of criminals, who later themselves began testing their mettle by contesting polls rather than merely working for their "lords", first maligned and then finally tore apart the very character of political institutions.

Booth loot and the consequent re-poll and countermanding of polls had become a norm. Lok Sabha elections were countermanded in Patna twice, in 1991 and 1998. This was the state of the state capital. Imagine what could have happened in smaller towns and villages. There are well kept dossiers of the reports sent by the returning officers to the Election Commission and to the state government. Even the decisions of the Election Commission regarding the countermanding of polls were contested at times. But then those decisions were purely based on what returning officers wrote in their reports. In Chhapra, in 2004, the Election Commission had a great deal of difficulty in calling it a void. Finally, the poll was countermanded. These are just a couple of glaring examples.

Many other incidents of countermanding are well documented in the media and recorded on the government files. An incident worth a mention here is when two dozen legislators, including ministers, had been apprehended, capturing booths during the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. There can't emerge a more gloomy picture if one looks at the number of times a re-poll was ordered

in the state. The very tools of representation were given a silent burial. Can you imagine, polls were reconducted on 4,995 booths in just one state, that is, Bihar, and in just one election year, that was the 1998 Lok Sabha elections.

Compare this with the Lok Sabha elections of 1952 when only 26 booths went to a re-poll. So, booth loot became a far more organised "business" and the number of re-polls ordered more than quadrupled 45 years after the country's first election. Assembly elections were not far behind in leaving their own mark. During the assembly elections of 1995, a re-poll was ordered on 1,668 booths. Similarly, 1,420 booths saw a re-poll during the assembly elections in the year 2000.

By the time the ballot went electronic and Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) made their advent in Indian elections in 2004, the electorate had lost faith in due process and subsequently the voting percentage had also nosedived in Bihar along with a few other north Indian states. By the way, even the EVMs were not spared. News of EVMs destroyed by miscreants during the process of electioneering abounded those days. And then some icing on the cake was also in waiting.

This became available when the management of a poll area on polling day was put to the test. Against the usual talk of EVM "tampering", which has all so far been proved false and termed a gimmick, I would talk of their "management". It wasn't unusual those days for journalists to report how deployment of police and paramilitary forces was tampered with, so that EVMs, or say a booth, can be "managed", forget "tampered".

Post-2004, why is it so difficult to document such "management" at poll booths, or destruction of EVMs, or tampered deployments of security forces, or, the near-impossible now, a booth loot? That's food for thought.

The writer is Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar

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TARUNABH KHAITAN

A MANDATE MORE TRUE

Ranked-choice voting system could deepen democracy, prevent polarisation

ELECTIONS TO THE Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas take place under the first-past-the-post (FPP) system. Under the FPP, a candidate only needs to get more votes than any other candidate to win a seat. It over-translates the votes of the winning party into seats, which is why the BJP won over 50 per cent seats in Lok Sabha despite winning only 31 per cent of the popular vote in 2014. The FPP also encourages political polarisation because a party with a sufficiently energised base needs to convince a relatively small number of unaffiliated voters in order to win an election. A party opposed by a majority of voters forms the government.

This democratic deficit of the FPP has been long recognised. The main alternative that has been suggested over the years is some version of the proportional system (PS). Under PS, voters do not vote for individual candidates in particular constituencies. Instead, they vote directly for a party. A party that gets 31 per cent of the votes wins 31 per cent of seats, usually subject to a threshold requirement that a party has to secure a basic minimum share of the popular vote (say, 5 per cent) in order to get any seats at all.

Our Constitution does not mandate the FPP, but it does require elections to be conducted on the basis of territorial constituencies. Although it is possible to design a mixed PS system based on territorial constituencies, PS may actually exacerbate polarisation. Under PS, all that a radical party needs in order to win 10 seats in a 100-member house is to convince 10 per cent of the electorate

through a hateful and polarising campaign, even if the remaining 90 per cent detest its ideology. What we need is a voting system that goes beyond FPP's yes-no binary and is sensitive to the strength of voters' preferences — whether she loves a party, or merely tolerates it, or loathes it.

There is one such system, which would reduce democratic deficit, discourage polarisation and respect territorial constituencies. It is variously called the preferential vote, alternative vote or ranked-choice vote system (RCV), used in Australia, Papua New Guinea and the American state of Maine. Under the RCV, instead of voting for only one candidate, a voter ranks her candidates in order of preference.

Say a voter ranks candidate E as her number 1 choice, candidate C as number 2 and candidate F as number 3. In the first round of counting, every voter's first-ranked votes alone are counted. If any candidate reaches the 50 per cent mark, she is declared the winner. If not, the candidate with the lowest share of first-rank votes — say, candidate E — is eliminated. The second-rank votes of voters whose first choice was E are now counted and added to the tally of remaining candidates. If a candidate now closes the 50 per cent mark, that candidate wins. If not, this process of elimination and re-distribution is continued until either one candidate crosses the 50 per cent mark, or is the last one standing.

The democratic deficit in RCV is markedly lower than FPP, because the winning candidate secures or comes very close to the 50

per cent mark. It also eliminates the need for strategic voting. An FPP voter whose first preference is the BJP but strategically votes for Trinamool because she wants to ensure the defeat of the CPM candidate can, under the RCV, honestly rank the BJP candidate as her first choice, the Trinamool candidate as her second choice and so on.

The RCV should also reduce political polarisation. Under this system, parties cannot win elections by relying solely on their base. They need not only enough first-rank votes but also a sufficient number of second and third-rank votes. This will require them to build broad social coalitions.

An optional RCV is not only constitutionally viable but even endorsed by the Constitution. When MPs elect our President or Vice-President, they also rank the candidates on the ballot — the Constitution calls it a "single transferable vote" (STV), but in a single-winner voting, there is no difference between STV and RCV. In Indian conditions, a limited optional RCV might be logistically better. Instead of mandating the ranking of all candidates, a voter can have the option of ranking up to three top choices: She may cast only a single-unranked-vote, or rank her top two or her top three candidates. Such a 1-2-3-vote system would deepen democracy and reduce political polarisation.

The writer is an associate professor in law at the Universities of Oxford and Melbourne. He is also the General Editor of the Indian Law Review



MAY 8, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

TITO AND NAM

THE YUGOSLAVS ARE hedging their bets about attending the Havana summit of non-aligned nations. Will President Tito, who has attended every non-aligned summit since the movement's inception, make an appearance at Cuba, or will Belgrade send a lower-level delegation? This impression was unmistakable at the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Josip Vrhovec's news conference. Asked during his visit to New Delhi if President Tito would attend the Havana summit, Vrhovec said in good humour, "You will have to ask President Tito personally". But he added that it depended on the host country to follow all the principles of non-alignment and thereby

establish its credibility with all non-aligned nations so that they have no reservations about attending the summit.

MOYNIHAN DEBATE

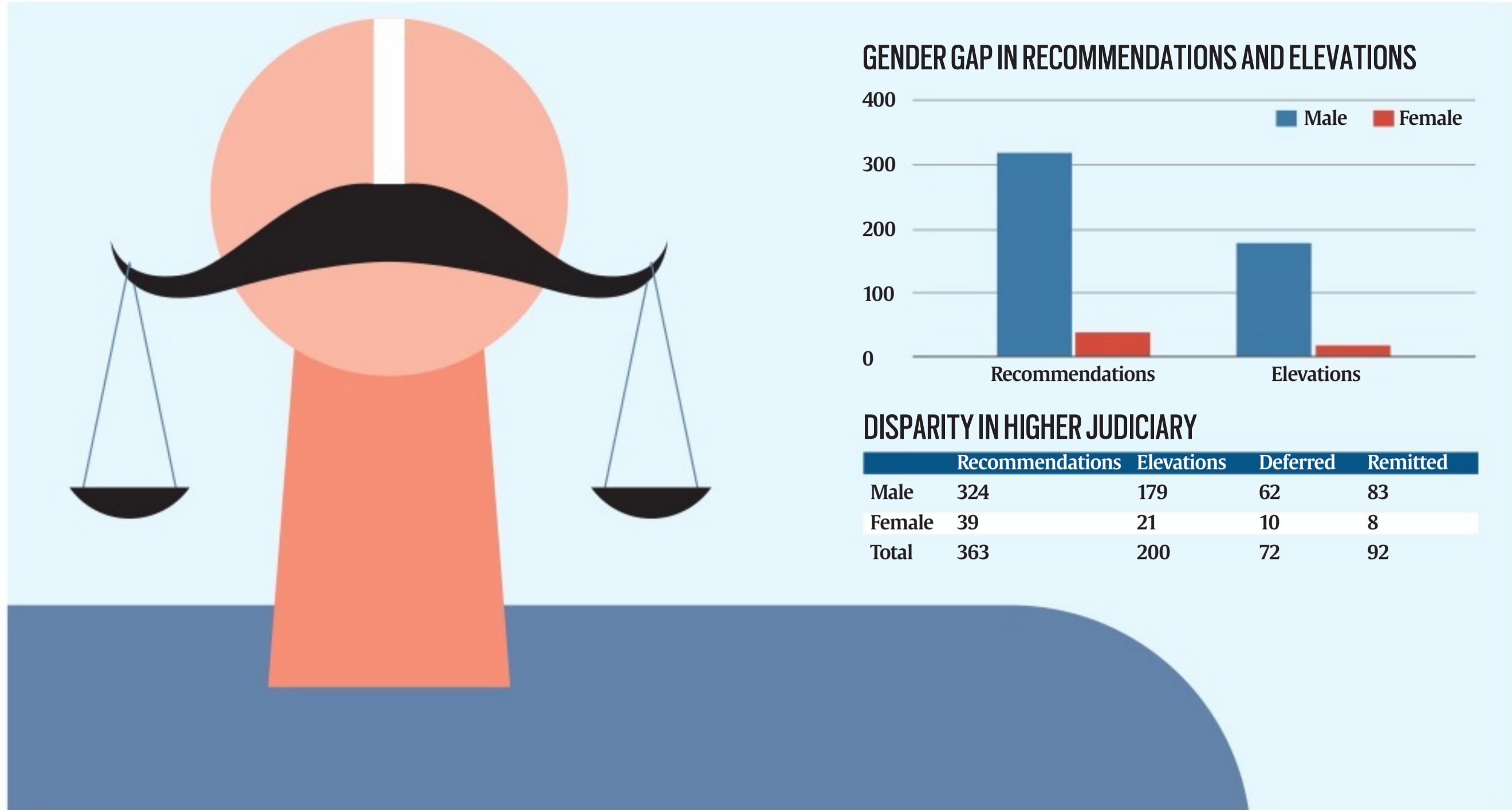
THE EAGERLY-AWAITED Lok Sabha debate on the charge by the former US Ambassador to India, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, that the Congress Party under Mrs Indira Gandhi asked for and got US money to fight elections, collapsed after the initial speeches today, and ended with an anti-climax of a reply by Home Minister H M Patel. "It is a subject we shall study in the Home Ministry," Patel said in his staid civil servant manner, and then added "but it's not going to be a simple ex-

ercise". It was desirable to control the inflow of foreign money, but "it's not easy to say what steps will be taken". The only new information he gave the House was the disclosure that the Home Ministry had contacted the US State Department for additional details of payments, and the State Department had refused to offer further comment.

PRINCE CHARLES VISIT

BRITISH CROWN PRINCE Charles will pay a two-week official visit to India in November. The tentative dates for his visit are from November 18 to December 6. He will have meetings with the President, prime minister and other government leaders.

THE IDEAS PAGE



DISPARITY IN HIGHER JUDICIARY

	Recommendations	Elevations	Deferred	Remitted
Male	324	179	62	83
Female	39	21	10	8
Total	363	200	72	92

CR Sasikumar

No courts for women

The current crisis in the SC is an opportunity to address the serious gender disparity on the bench



DEEPIKA KINHALL

THE INDIAN JUDICIARY is facing its worst hour of crisis. The allegation of sexual harassment and victimisation levelled against the Chief Justice of India by a former Supreme Court staffer, followed by what can only be termed as a mockery of due process and law, has brought the judiciary to a tipping point. It is now left with no choice but to undertake a massive exercise in introspection and reform. Judicial reforms are no longer empty rhetoric. They are essential to keep the judiciary from becoming irrelevant and severed from the idea of justice. Nothing can be more damaging to this idea than going unheard and unrepresented before the judiciary — a fear that constantly plagues all disadvantaged sections of the society, especially women.

In the context of the apathy shown towards the woman complainant by an all-male bench (headed by the CJI) in the immediate aftermath of the allegations, and by the in-house committee which has given a clean-chit to the CJI, one cannot help but ponder: Would this incident have been handled differently if the judiciary was not as male-dominated as it always has been?

The judiciary is one of the least diverse institutions in India, with the lack of gender diversity being the most visible yet ignored aspect. Since 1950, the SC has had only eight female judges out of 239, with the present three out of 27 being the highest concurrent representation women have ever had on the SC bench. In the subordinate judiciary, merely 27.6 per cent of the judges are female. This lack of women on the bench, at all levels of the judiciary, is at the very root of the impunity with which the top court has, in a sin-

gle stroke, destroyed decades worth of progress made in deterring sexual harassment of women from all walks of life.

The stark gender disparity on the bench is reflected in, and in fact, stems from the minimal representation of female advocates in the bar as well. The deep-rooted systemic issues that act as barriers for women to enter and remain in the legal profession are all too well known. Even if a female advocate crosses these barriers to continue and thrive in her profession, the current collegium system for the appointment of judges is simply not designed to ensure her elevation to the bench. At present, the appointment of a judge to a high court is based on a recommendation made by a collegium of the three senior-most judges of that HC, and approved by a collegium of the three senior-most judges of the SC. Although the state and central governments have a role to play in the process, the final say, for all practical purposes, rests with the SC collegium.

This appointments process in itself is severely lacking in women's representation. In 25 HC collegiums across the country, there are just five senior female judges with 19 of the collegiums having no female judge at all. Only one woman so far has been a member of the SC collegium (Justice Ruma Pal), with Justice R Banumathi set to become the second later this year; and, at least until 2025, no female judge is going to occupy the CJI's position.

This nearly all-male composition of the highest decision-making bodies in the judiciary has made gender disparity a self-perpetuating phenomenon which becomes amply clear when one studies the decisions made by the SC collegiums in the recent past.

This author undertook a study of 80 (out of 191) SC collegium resolutions made public since October 2017, pertaining to elevations of judges to the SC and various HCs, and it shows that the gender gap in the judiciary is here to stay.

The data shows that out of the 363 persons recommended for elevation, merely 39 were female (just over 10 per cent). Of these, only 21 were confirmed with the remaining

18 names either being remitted to the HCs or deferred for later appointments. Interestingly, for both male and female candidates, the conversion rate from recommendation to elevation is the same, around 55 per cent: It would be tempting to conclude from this that the all-male SC collegium is immune to the gender of the recommended candidates. However, what it actually signals is that this body is simply not invested in correcting the prevailing gender disparity.

In the current scheme of things, the chances of female judges occupying decision-making positions, either as chief justices or as part of the HC and SC collegiums in significant numbers, is very bleak. Hence, the only way out of this vicious cycle is for the nearly all-male collegiums to go beyond their inherent biases and take affirmative measures to improve gender diversity on the bench. The HC collegiums should consciously recommend more female names for elevation and the SC collegium must consider such recommendations more favourably. Further, the female judges should be elevated early enough in their careers so that they make it to the collegiums and become decision makers (the average age of the 19 female judges elevated since October 2017 is 53 years).

Lack of gender diversity is not just a perception problem. It is seen to have a real impact on the manner of proceedings and the nature of the final verdict — as is evident in the present instance. Especially in the judiciary, gender diversity is a virtue in itself — it reassures litigants that diverse opinions are taken into consideration and re-instills their trust in the justice-delivery system. The present calamity in the judiciary, as unfortunate as it is, also provides an unprecedented opportunity to course correct on several accounts. Here's hoping the men in power have the wisdom to seize it.

The writer is senior resident fellow, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, Karnataka. Inputs by Anamika Kundu and Alok Prasanna Kumar

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"No weapon, it seems, large or small, novel or traditional, lethal or merely limited to 280 characters, is neglected when Donald Trump is in a mood to throw his weight around." — THE INDEPENDENT

The OBC-ness of Narendra Modi

If caste is about experience, the PM has never spoken about any discrimination he faced on account of his birth



KANCHA ILAIAH SHEPHERD

THERE IS a saying in English: "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear almost any 'how'." Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to occupy the highest position without answering any why and how. But the citizens have a right to pose whys and hows to him since he is the prime minister.

Why did Modi twist a young inexperienced "dynastic" daughter's remark about "neech rajneeti" as "neech jati" and bring up his Other Backward Caste (OBC) background while campaigning in UP in 2014? Why does he want to avoid a debate on his caste status in 2019? How much of oppressed caste consciousness did he have during his tenure as prime minister? Is there any evidence in Modi's many biographies that he suffered caste discrimination at any stage in his life or that he fought that discrimination with the kind of caste consciousness seen in Mahatma Phule, Periyar EV Ramasamy and Babasaheb Ambedkar? Is it that Modi used the enlistment of his caste in the central OBC list to become prime minister? Did the RSS/BJP allow him to use the OBC status to win over OBC voters?

When Mayawati, Tejashwi Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav allege that the PM's OBC status is *naqli*, Modi must at least recall a few anecdotes to illustrate how he suffered discrimination and humiliation in his life because of his caste background.

Our birth, of course, is an accident, but did Modi's birth into his caste make him feel it was a "fatal accident", as Rohith Vemula felt, at any stage of his life? Did he ever feel that the tortuous pain an OBC person or a Dalit suffers is his own? Caste discrimination is a continuous systemic process that has affected generations. Where does the nation see the generational discrimination in Modi's life?

Yet the oppressed castes appreciated when he said "I came from a neech jati" and I want to serve them as prime minister. The appeal of Modi even moved the OBCs in West Bengal, where caste identity had been pushed under the red-carpet.

Has he revealed any discriminated caste consciousness and caste culture when he was in power at Delhi? Are not the cattle growers who lost their right to sell and buy their hard-grown animals because of the upper-caste government in UP mostly OBCs? What did the OBC PM do about it? The discrimination structured into the being of an OBC — that too most backward — is not an issue of claims but an experiential process realised in one's life. Dhyanjay Keer's biographies of Phule and Ambedkar recall the humiliation they faced. They fought the humiliation not for their own sake but for the sake of the entire OBC and Dalit communities, for the sake of transforming this nation.

Modi turned chaiwala and chowkidar

into metaphors to establish his OBCness and claim suffering. But not all chaiwalas and chowkidars are OBCs. Manu dharma has not ordained these occupations for the Shudras, the varna to which the OBCs belong. There are upper-caste chaiwalas and upper-caste chowkidars!

Modi's OBC background was talked about when he became chief minister of Gujarat in 2002. I wrote in December 2002: "Narendra Modi's victory with a two-thirds majority in Gujarat has signalled the emergence of a strong, independent OBC (Other Backward Class) leader in the BJP." The nation did not come to know about his caste background because he spoke about it. The nation got to know about it through media after his community was included in the central list of reservation just before he became chief minister. He did not talk about it when he was chief minister of Gujarat. And, he had not mentioned it during the 1990 Mandal struggle.

Modi has disputed the allegation made by Mayawati, Akhilesh Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav that he belongs to an unreserved upper caste. But he also ought to tell the nation how he has experienced discrimination in the society, in institutions and organisations he has worked on account of his caste. That is what all "neech jati" people do.

According to Mayawati, Modi got his caste included in the OBC list only after he became the CM. In response, Modi has claimed he actually belongs to a "most backward caste, not just backward caste". His caste name is Modh-Ghanchi. Historically, Modh-Ghanchis are oil mongers. At no stage in history has the Modh-Ghanchi community been considered as Shudra. However, Modh Ghanchi, Teli-Sahu, Teli-Rathod, Teli-Rathore were added to the central OBC list as per the order 12011/36/99-BCC dt 04.04.2000. Hence, Modi is officially an OBC.

But what about that caste's cultural history? Does it have Shudra links? Was Modh-Ghanchi community a part of the Shudra varna?

Modi's caste was added to the OBC list when the BJP held office in Delhi and Modi was an influential general secretary of the party. It was Sushil Modi, now deputy chief minister of Bihar, who claimed on TV after Narendra Modi's PM candidature was announced, that the BJP was the first national party to propose an OBC PM candidate. Many were surprised that the RSS and BJP, which do not accept a discourse centred on caste, allowed this. I, for one, thought it was a good thing.

A section of the OBCs who were outside the fold of the BJP, voted for the party in 2014. But within a short time, the forces that matter in the RSS/BJP started opposing OBC reservation. The PM did not object even once to their negation of OBC reservation. During Modi's tenure there were no policy initiatives to uplift the OBCs.

Karl Marx left for us a principle that explains this sort of behaviour. He wrote: "It is not consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."

The writer is a political theorist and social activist



MANMOHAN VAIDYA

Hindu, by any other name

Bharat's identity is intrinsically tied with the eternal philosophy of Hindutva

FOR AGES, Bharat has offered a unique view of life because it is based on spirituality. Bharat believes that Truth can have various forms, names and paths to reach it. Though diverse, all these paths are equal. Bharat sees unity in diversity and has a capacity to establish unity amongst such expansive variety. It doesn't see diversity as difference: This brand of spirituality teaches us that every soul is potentially divine and the same divinity pervades all things, animate or inanimate, and hence we all are connected with each other. To realise this connectedness, to expand its ambit and to work accordingly towards the betterment of the connected, is the basis of Dharma. Dharma, which is different from religion, is not exclusivist; it includes, connects and benefits all.

This view of life is the Hindu view and all those who live in Bharat, irrespective of their caste, region, religion or language, subscribe to this view of life. Hence, being Hindu or "Hindutva" has become the identity of all Bharatiyas. The founder of RSS, K B Hedgewar, made this Hindutva the tool to awaken the sense of unity among all Bharatiyas — connecting them with each other irrespective of their caste, religion and language. He started organising the entire society by binding them together with this thread of Hindutva.

However, those who, for their individual

and political gains wanted to keep the society divided started opposing Hindutva and the Sangh by calling them communal, regressive, divisive and anti-minority: The opposition to and rejection of the seminal works of great souls and Hindutva proponents like Swami Vivekananda and Dayanand Saraswati was condemned by levelling these allegations.

But the activities of the Sangh, built on the foundation of Hindutva, kept expanding despite the ill-will directed at it. Then, the same ill-intentioned critics started saying that Hindutva is alright, but there is a demarcation between soft-Hindutva and hard-Hindutva. The Hindutva of someone like Swami Vivekananda is soft, but RSS practices hard Hindutva, which is condemnable. Books such as *Why I Am Not a Hindu* and then *Why I Am a Hindu* have been written by such naysayers, but irrespective of such attempts, acceptance of Hindutva has grown exponentially. This is because it's the soul of Bharat and an expression of its consciousness: It cannot be countered by books that seek to compete with the epics.

Elements with vested interests started creating confusion by calling Hinduism a virtue and Hindutva an evil. A media house recently asked me, "What is the difference between 'Hinduism' and 'Hindutva'?" I told them that it's one and the same. One is in Hindi whereas the other is in English. S

Radhakrishnan wrote a book in English, titled *The Hindu View of Life* and used the term "Hinduism". Had he written it in Hindi, he would have used "Hindutva". If Savarkar had written his book, *Hindutva*, in English, then he might have used the term Hinduism. That said, it is my personal belief that an apt translation of Hindutva should be "Hinduness" instead of "Hinduism".

RSS sarsanghalak Mohan Bhagwat has clearly enunciated the meanings of "Hindu" and "Hindutva" in his three-day lecture series at Vigyan Bhavan. But propagandists won't refer to it because it does not suit their mala fide intentions. The real ideological battle is between the two different ideas of Bharat. One is the Bharatiya concept with roots going back to age-old spiritual traditions of the nation, and the other is an alien or foreign conceptualisation.

A journalist-turned-politician recently stated that in this election, the choice to be made is between "Hindu India" and "Hindutva India". The only reason people like him talk of Hindu India is because of the growing influence of "Hindutva". It doesn't reflect their conviction but convenience. Given that Bharat is coming together and uniting due to "Hindutva", their casteist, communal and regional politics is weakening everyday and their support base is eroding. For their petty politics, it is imperative

for them to divide society — if not in the name of caste, language or religion, then on the basis of Hindu and Hindutva. But today, the common Bharatiya is not foolish enough to fall into their trap. Their sense of entitlement has, thus, been challenged.

Another term which is being used to spread confusion is "Hinduvaadi" or Hinduist. There are capitalist, communist or socialist ideologies in the world, but in Bharat there is no place for any "ism" like in the West. The "ism" in the west have a hegemonic tendency to impose their world-view on others, even by force. In Bharat, "Hindutva" (Hinduness) refers to people living and leading their personal, familial, social and professional life in the light of this spirituality based on a holistic view of life, called "Hindu".

It is, therefore, imperative to expose the conspiracy to divide and confuse, and to establish the eternal philosophy of Hindutva, by dedicated action and practice. This will result in the unfolding of Bharat's identity, known to the world since centuries, and Bharat's *purusharth* will manifest in every sphere of social and national life. In his essay, *Swadeshi Samaj*, Rabindranath Tagore rightly says — "First of all, We will have to become what We actually are".

The writer is joint general secretary of the RSS

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

CREDIT TO ODISHA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Taming the tempest' (IE, May 7). Much has changed since the super cyclone of 1999 which killed around 10,000 people in Odisha. Much of it owes to the high level of preparedness of the state government and other agencies. Accurate updates about the cyclone's path by the India meteorological department helped in containing the cyclone's effects. But there's no room for complacency. With extreme weather phenomena increasing due to climate change, there's a need to constantly expand disaster management capacities. **Sanjay Chopra, Mohali**

PARTISAN POLICE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'High insecurity' (IE, May 7). It is unfortunate that the Delhi CM was heckled and attacked in the presence of Delhi Police. This is not a one-off event. It is incumbent upon Delhi Police to be more vigilant. Such assaults invite the apprehension that there is a tacit understanding between the attackers and the law and order machinery. **Deepak Singhal, Noida**

SECURITY MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A false discourse' (IE, May 3). The writer accuses Prime Minister Narendra Modi of using "emotive national security issues" in the

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

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current general elections. However, this is not the first time that such issues have been raked up. Indira Gandhi justified the imposition of Emergency on the grounds of threats to national security. Margaret Thatcher raised the issue of Falklands crisis in UK's elections in 1983. In 1984, the Congress under Rajiv Gandhi again raised the plank of national security. **P M Kamath, Mumbai**



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

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

ISSUES AND CONTENDERS
IN SOUTH AFRICA'S ELECTION

SOUTH AFRICANS will vote on Wednesday to elect a new National Assembly and legislatures in each of the country's nine provinces. These will be the sixth democratic general elections in South Africa in the 25 years since the end of apartheid in 1994. The result of the elections will determine who will become the country's next President.



ANC poster in Johannesburg, AP

Main contenders

African National Congress (ANC), the party of South Africa's historic struggle to overthrow apartheid, has won every election since 1994, when Nelson Mandela became President. Mandela was succeeded by ANC leaders Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, and the incumbent Cyril Ramaphosa, with Kgalema Motlanthe serving at the post for a few months between the tenures of Mbeki and Zuma. While Ramaphosa is widely expected to return as President, the ANC, which has always polled between 60% and 70% of the vote, could see its support sliding to a historic low of under 50%

Democratic Alliance (DA), is the main opposition party. Its leader Mmusi Maimane, 38, an electrifying speaker and energetic campaigner, has been Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly since 2014. Maimane is seen as being the cleanest of the three politicians in the race to be President.

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is a far left party founded by Julius Malema in 2013, the year after he was expelled from the ANC. After the elections of 2014, the EFF became the third-largest party in the National Assembly. Malema is an agenda-setter in many ways; he is also seen as being a "reckless populist", and has been accused of several kinds of fraud and economic crimes in the past.

Issues in the poll

The rampant corruption during the years of ANC rule, which has caused deep disillusionment among voters and given the DA and EFF hope and campaign issues, dominates the election. South Africa's official unemployment rate is 27.1%, and more than six million people out of a population of 58 million are without jobs. Former President Zuma faces 16 charges around an international arms deal that was negotiated in 1998, and a public inquiry is under way into the role of the Indian-origin business family of the Guptas, who are accused of "capturing" several major state enterprises during Zuma's presidency.

Results of election

Both the 400-seat National Assembly and the 30-80 seat provincial Assemblies are elected by a system of 'closed list' proportional representation. The President is elected by the members of the National Assembly. The Independent Electoral Commission has up to seven days after the vote to declare the results but it has, in the past, announced results within three days.

SIMPLY PUT
Why biodiversity report matters

Comprehensive assessment of state of nature has found 1 million species at risk of extinction because of man-made reasons. How was it compiled, and can it bring about change? What does it mean for India?

AMITABH SINHA & SOWMIYA ASHOK
PUNE, BEIJING, MAY 7

A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND report released on Monday by an international group of scientists, whose findings were reported in The Indian Express Tuesday, is being hailed as one of the most important scientific studies of our time. The report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is the most comprehensive scientific evaluation ever made of the state of our nature, and gives a detailed account of health of the species that inhabit this earth, and the condition of habitats that they live in and depend upon.

Among the findings that are making global headlines is the assessment that as many as 1 million different species, out of a total of an estimated 8 million plant and animal species, are facing the threat of extinction, more than at any previous time, because of changes brought about in natural environments by human activities. The report says that 75% of Earth's land surface and 66% marine environments have been "significantly altered", and that "over 85%" of wetland area had been lost. But, on an average, these trends were less severe on areas controlled or managed by indigenous people and local communities (like tribal communities in India).

What is IPBES

IPBES is a global scientific body very similar in composition and functioning to the better-known Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that makes periodic reviews of scientific literature to make projections about the earth's future climate. IPCC's assessment reports, which won it the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007, form the scientific basis on which the international negotiations on climate change have been happening.

IPBES is mandated to do a similar job for natural ecosystems and biodiversity. Formed in 2012, this is the first global assessment report by the IPBES (IPCC, set up in 1988, has produced five assessment reports, and sixth one is under preparation). IPBES has produced a few regional and specialised reports earlier. Like IPCC, IPBES does not produce any new science, it only evaluates existing scientific knowledge to make assessments and projections.

Unlike IPCC, however, the IPBES assessment reports are likely to feed into and inform several multilateral processes. The two UN Conventions — Convention on Biological Diversity that addresses biodiversity issues, and the Convention on Combating Desertification that deals with sustainable land management — are likely to be guided by this report in future. It is possible that so would be a host of other international agreements and processes, like the Ramsar Convention on wetlands, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, or the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

The India connection

The report does not have country-specific information. But as a major biodiversity hotspot, vast areas, especially the coastline, of which are under tremendous stress due to large population, India can identify with most of the trends pointed out in the report.

For example, it says 23% of global land area had shown a reduction in productivity due to degradation, and that between 100 to 300 million people were at an increased risk of floods and hurricanes because of loss of coastal habitats and protection. It says plastic pollution had increased 10 times from 1980, the number of large dams (those with a height of 15 m or more) had reached almost 50,000, and that human population had more than doubled since 1970s, and the number of urban areas had doubled since 1992. All these trends have been clearly visible in the case of India, and bring with them the associated risks to natural ecosystems highlighted in the report.



Hawksbill Turtles in coral reef, Maldives. 33% of reef forming corals, sharks and shark relatives are faced with extinction. Andrey Arnyagin/Shutterstock.com

TELLING NUMBERS

What humans have done to nature

8 million

estimated number of animal and plant species on Earth

1 million*

of these species are threatened with extinction, many within decades (*approx.)

40%: amphibian species threatened with extinction

33%: reef forming corals, sharks and shark relatives, and 33% marine mammals threatened with extinction

680: vertebrate species driven to extinction by human actions since the 16th century

+/-10%: tentative estimate of proportion of insect species threatened with extinction. Total insect species are 5.5 million.

3.5%: domesticated breed of birds extinct by 2016

70%: increase since 1970 in numbers of invasive alien species across 21 countries with detailed records

47%: proportion of terrestrial flightless mammals (besides 23% of threatened birds) whose distributions may have been impacted by climate change already

>6: species of ungulate (hoofed mammals) would likely be extinct or surviving only in captivity today without conservation measures

TIP FOR READING LIST

THE MAN WHO TALKS TO THE DEAD

BRITAIN'S TOP forensic pathologist Dr Richard Shepherd has been cutting up bodies for 35 years, and reckons that he has performed over 23,000 autopsies in his career. Beginning with the Hungerford massacre of August 1987, he has examined the evidence in a very large number of high-profile cases — including the Clapham Junction crash of 1988 in which 35 people were killed, the 1989 Marchioness disaster on the Thames in which over 50 people died, the death of Princess Diana in Paris in 1997, the 9/11 terrorist attacks that killed 3,000 people in the United States, the London bombings of July 7, 2005, and the Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005.

"Bodies speak to me," Dr Shepherd told GQ magazine in an interview last year. "They give me answers, but the hardest thing [for the dead person's relatives] to see is that the insertion of that knife into their loved one is an act of respect and maybe of love."

This "man's inhumanity to man", as Dr Shepherd described it in the interview, pushed him over the edge in 2016, and left him with Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD). *Unnatural Causes: The Life and Many Deaths of Britain's Top Forensic Pathologist*, is his memoir.

About his PTSD, Dr Shepherd told the BBC that although he was used to death, "there comes a moment when you can't compartmentalise it". The trigger, he said, had been the ice cubes in his drink that reminded him of Bali in 2002 when corpses had to be kept on ice to prevent them decaying — but the roots of the breakdown possibly lay in his first major case in 1987. "Maybe I should have gone to see a counsellor once a year," he told the BBC.

In the book, he speaks of his fear of shutting his eyes, lest his mind be "pursued by body fragments". "There were intestines. Spongy livers. Hearts that did not beat. Hands. The clawing stench of decay that took my breath away." At times, he thought "it better to die than to live like this".

Unnatural Causes, says the publisher's promotional description of the book, "is a record of an extraordinary life, a unique insight into a remarkable profession, and above all a powerful and reassuring testament to lives cut short".



FORESTS



Tree stumps in Madagascar; result of deforestation and slash & burn farming. Dudarev Mikhail/Shutterstock.com

50%: agricultural expansion that occurred at the expense of forests

68%: global forest area today compared with pre-industrial level

7%: reduction of intact forests (>500 sq km with no human pressure) from 2000-13 in developed and developing countries

URBANISATION

>100%: growth of urban areas since 1992

105%: increase in human population (from 3.7 to 7.6 billion) since 1970 unevenly across countries, regions

>2,500: conflicts over fossil fuels, water, food and land currently occurring worldwide

OCEANS & FISHING

33% Marine fish stocks being harvested at unsustainable levels

7% Underfished

60% Maximally sustainably fished

3-10%: projected decrease in ocean net primary production due to climate change alone by the end of the century

3-25%: projected decrease in fish biomass by end of century in low and high warming scenarios, respectively

+/-50%: live coral cover of reefs lost since 1870s

100-300 MILLION: people in coastal areas at increased risk due to loss of coastal habitat protection

>107: highly threatened birds, mammals and reptiles estimated to have benefited from the eradication of invasive mammals on islands

HEALTH



Kuta beach, Bali. Plastic pollution has multiplied 10 times since 1980. Maxim Blinkov/Shutterstock.com

40%: proportion of global population lacking access to clean and safe drinking water

>80%: global wastewater discharged untreated into the environment

300-400 mn TONNES: Industrial wastes dumped annually into the world's waters

CLIMATE CHANGE

1°C: average global temperature difference in 2017 compared to pre-industrial levels

>3 mm: annual average global sea level rise over the past two decades

5%: estimated fraction of species at risk of extinction from 2°C warming alone, rising to 16% at 4.3°C warming

Source: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, first assessment report

Why US has cleared dengue vaccine with conditions, where India stands

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

SANOPI PASTEUR'S controversial vaccine dengvaxia has been approved by the US Food & Drug Administration, the first dengue vaccine to get the regulatory nod in the US.

Dengvaxia ran into trouble two years ago when the Philippines had to suspend a school vaccination programme following several casualties. That is why the FDA has now cleared it for use only in people who have a previous history of the disease, particularly in dengue-endemic areas.

The background

Dengvaxia is basically a live, attenuated dengue virus. An attenuated virus is a virus that retains its properties of triggering an immune response in the body but its ability to lead to a disease is compromised. Three dengvaxia shots are administered,

with the second and third given six and 12 months after the first one. It was cleared in three randomised, placebo-controlled studies over approximately 35,000 individuals in dengue-endemic areas, including Puerto Rico, Latin America and the Asia Pacific region. It was found to be about 76% effective in 9-16-year-olds already exposed to the disease.

The need for a vaccine

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 400 million dengue virus infections occur around the world. Of these, approximately 500,000 cases develop into dengue haemorrhagic fever, which contributes to about 20,000 deaths, primarily among children. In India, until November 26, 2018, 89,974 dengue cases were reported, with 144 deaths. In 2017 the counts were 1,88,401 and 325 respectively. India is among the dengue-endemic countries.

Dengvaxia is the first dengue vaccine to be licensed, Mexico being the first country to clear it in 2015. Subsequently it has been cleared in some 20 countries but what happened in 2017 in Philippines has raised question marks about CYD-TDV, as dengvaxia is known in technical parlance.

The Philippines casualties

Ten deaths were reported in the island nation in 2017 in the aftermath of a school vaccination campaign with dengvaxia. Some 800,000 school children had been vaccinated when adverse events started being reported and the campaign was suspended. Sanofi, in a statement soon afterwards, urged health authorities to update the product label. The statement said: "Based on up to six years of clinical data, the new analysis evaluated long-term safety and efficacy of Dengvaxia in people who had been infected with dengue prior to vaccination and those who had not. The analy-

sis confirmed that Dengvaxia provides persistent protective benefit against dengue fever in those who had prior infection. For those not previously infected by dengue virus, however, the analysis found that in the longer term, more cases of severe disease could occur following vaccination upon a subsequent dengue infection." In other words, Sanofi admitted the vaccine was not safe to be used in people with no history of the disease. WHO too issued a statement saying that it has asked the company for more data.

Earlier this year, Philippines permanently halted the sale distribution and marketing of dengvaxia.

The FDA recommendation

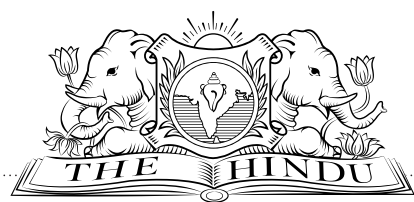
In its announcement last week, FDA said the vaccine can be used for the prevention of dengue "caused by all dengue virus serotypes (1, 2, 3 and 4) in people ages 9 through 16 who have laboratory-confirmed

previous dengue infection and who live in endemic areas".

"Dengvaxia is not approved for use in individuals not previously infected by any dengue virus serotype or for whom this information is unknown. This is because in people who have not been infected with dengue virus, Dengvaxia appears to act like a first dengue infection — without actually infecting the person with wild-type dengue virus — such that a subsequent infection can result in severe dengue disease. Therefore, health care professionals should evaluate individuals for prior dengue infection to avoid vaccinating individuals who have not been previously infected by dengue virus," the FDA said.

India's position

In May 2017, India turned down a recommendation of the Subject Expert Committee of the Drug Controller General of India and told Sanofi that there could not



Prisoner of procedure

The in-house panel resorted to its power at the cost of fairness to the complainant

It was a test of great import that one of India's great institutions failed. The main question was whether the Supreme Court would live up to the standards of fairness it expects of all authorities while inquiring into a former woman employee's complaint of sexual harassment and victimisation against the Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi. An *ad hoc* committee, following an informal procedure, has concluded that the allegations have "no substance", but the findings will not be made public. The report cannot be reviewed judicially. No one else, not even the complainant, knows what evidence was examined and who else testified apart from herself. All that is known is that she was heard, and questioned, at two sittings. She later withdrew from the inquiry, saying she was denied the help of a lawyer or a representative, that she found the questions from a panel of three sitting Supreme Court judges quite intimidating, and that she was not clear how her testimony was being recorded. There is no doubt that the committee remained impervious to the power imbalance in the situation. Perhaps she ought not to have pulled out from the probe, despite these grievances. The panel's conclusion would have been even starker had she been present to hear how Justice Gogoi defended himself; and who among the court officials, if any, answered her specific and documented charges about the administrative harassment she was put through following the alleged incident of sexual harassment. The most relevant parts of the complaint were the transfer orders and disciplinary inquiry against her, the role of the court administration in dismissing her, and that of the Delhi Police in arresting her on a complaint of alleged bribery and initiating disciplinary action against her husband and his brother, both police personnel. It is not known if any of these officials were examined.

The manner in which the court dealt with the complaint on the administrative side has been less than fair. It is true that the in-house procedure devised in 1999 envisages only a committee of three judges to deal with allegations against serving Supreme Court judges. The fact that a special law to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace is in force since 2013 appears to have made no difference. The court could not bring itself, even in the interest of appearing fair, to adopt a formal procedure or allow the complainant to have legal representation. For all its judicial homilies on fairness, when it comes to dealing with its own the Supreme Court has come across as a prisoner of procedure and displayed an alarming propensity to mix up its institutional reputation with an individual's interest. "The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins remorse from power," wrote Shakespeare. The decision by the 'in-house committee' is an egregious instance of a hallowed institution abusing its own greatness by letting its power speak, and not the compassion for which it is renowned.

Now there are two

As the poll process enters the home stretch, desperation and exhaustion are evident

In the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections, just 51 seats across seven States went to the polls, but its outcome could be critical to the fortunes of the BJP. It had won 39 of these seats in 2014, and its allies two. In fact, the BJP's hopes of retaining power at the Centre, and therefore the Opposition's hopes of defeating it, hinge a lot on their respective performances in the fifth and the next two phases. As with the previous four phases, the voter turnout was similar to that in 2014; initial estimates were that the cumulative turnout for the 51 seats was 63.26% on Monday, compared to 61.75% in 2014. One of Indian democracy's big successes has been the high number of registered voters who exercise their franchise; and as turnouts remain healthy, old theories about the incumbency or anti-incumbency potential of such turnouts have crumbled. What, however, continues to be the hallmark of Election 2019 is the sustained attempt by the BJP to prevent the campaign from being about its own record of five years in office. In an unseemly and controversial statement ahead of the fifth phase, Prime Minister Narendra Modi raked up the Bofors controversy with an uncharitable reference to former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. He followed it up with a challenge to Congress president Rahul Gandhi to debate Rajiv Gandhi's term in office, three decades ago. Mr. Modi also used the campaigner's pulpit to liken cross-border military operations undertaken by Indian forces during the Congress regime to "video games". In turn, the Congress charged Mr. Modi with double standards as he had earlier sought to place the armed forces beyond scrutiny and accused those who raised questions on their performance of being unpatriotic.

Politicians, dead and living, are legitimate subjects of public scrutiny as much as armed forces and the security establishment, particularly during elections. But such debates must be conducted in a civil tenor and within limits – and in a manner that informs pressing matters of governance. It is unclear whether Mr. Modi's statements would have helped the Congress in Amethi and Rae Bareilly, constituencies from which Mr. Gandhi and his mother Sonia Gandhi, respectively, are contesting and which went to the polls in the fifth phase. Mr. Modi has also tried to create a wedge in the Opposition by repeatedly stating that Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati was the victim of a conspiracy between her alliance partner and Samajwadi Party chief, Akhilesh Yadav, and the Congress. The BJP's resistance to any focus on issues of livelihood and liberty has put the burden on the Opposition parties to pull public discourse back towards policy, something they have managed with varying and often dismal degrees of success.

All for one, none for all

The marginalisation of Muslims has been appropriated to serve the BJP's nationalism outreach



HILAL AHMED

The attitude of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) towards Muslim communities in the last five years is seen in two very different ways. The rhetoric of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas' (with everyone, everyone's progress) is often invoked, particularly by pro-BJP commentators, to argue that questions related to Muslim marginalisation/representation should not be raised at all. The government is committed to 'development of all and appeasement of none' and it will take care of Muslim concerns as well. This argument is used extensively to justify every form of lawlessness, including the lynching of Muslims in the name of Hindu reaction.

The background

On the other hand, there is an equally straightforward secular narrative of Muslim victimhood, which reminds us that the BJP is a communal Hindutva party controlled by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The landslide victory of the BJP in 2014, the argument goes, has given the RSS an opportunity to target Muslims simply to create a Hindu Rashtra. Establishing a link between violence against Muslims and declining number of Muslim MPs and MLAs, we are told that the Narendra Modi government is primarily anti-Muslim.

No one can deny the fact that we live in a communally polarised environment, in which Hindu victimhood is systematically nurtured by invoking anti-Muslim feelings in the name of nationalism. However, there is a serious need to go beyond this polarisation so as to systematically analyse the contours of the BJP's nationalism with regard to Muslim communities.

One may unpack the contemporary moment of Hindutva at two levels: the Narendra Modi go-

vernment's formal official response towards Muslim backwardness, especially with regard to the Sachar Committee Report; and the nature of the BJP's informal anti-Muslim discourse, which in a way constitutes the basis for its own version of nationalism.

Minority welfare

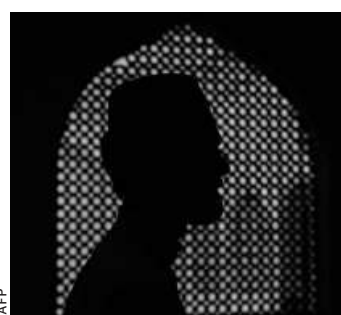
The BJP's 2014 poll manifesto recognised Muslim backwardness as an important political issue. It argued that it would take care of Muslim concerns – such as modernisation of madarasas, protection of Urdu and streamlining of the Waqf Boards. Most importantly, it was promised that the party would 'ensure a peaceful and secure environment, where there is no place for either the perpetrators or exploiters of fear'.

Although there was no mention of the Sachar Report in the 2014 manifesto, the Ministry of Minority Affairs accepted it as an important reference point for all its schemes and programmes. The government also went ahead with the post-Sachar Evaluation Committee and persuaded it to submit its report in September 2014.

The Ministry still recognises the 15 Point Programme introduced by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for the welfare of minorities as guiding principles to deal with the exclusion of minorities, including Muslims. In fact, a study was commissioned by the Modi government in 2016 to evaluate the impact of these 15 points on minority communities.

These technical-procedural aspects of governance, however, should not be exaggerated. The 'Action taken Report' submitted by the Ministry to Parliament with regard to the implementation of the Sachar Report in 2018 categorically rejects a few crucial and politically sensitive recommendations.

For example, the Action Taken Report does not accept the inclusion of Arzal (Dalit) Muslims into the Scheduled Castes (SC) list. It also refuses to create the proposed all-India cadre of officers for the State Waqf Boards and Central Waqf Council. However, the other 'non-controversial' recommenda-



tions of the Sachar Report are acknowledged.

This selective treatment of the Sachar Report by the BJP is not surprising. The BJP has never been interested in the Sachar Report, especially on the question of the inclusion of Muslim and Christian Dalits in the SC category. However, despite this highly critical position, the Modi government not only recognised the Sachar Report but also submitted a fully worked-out Action Taken Report.

Does it mean that the Modi government is also involved in what BJP leaders, including Mr. Modi, often call 'Muslim appeasement'?

Link to nationalism discourse

The government's delicate position on Muslims as a marginalised/underrepresented community is inextricably linked to the media-driven discourse of nationalism which has been carefully produced in the last five years.

This nationalism has two core elements. First, it aims to recreate a new collective self-perception of Indianness. Evoking the old European-style 'one-language, one culture, one nation' framework, it is established that celebrating Hindutva (not Hinduism) in public life must be treated as a precondition for patriotism and Indianness. Since Hindus have been the main addressees of this project, Muslims are nowhere in the picture. However, this strange absence of Muslims is used to create an impression that the patriotism of Muslims needs to be probed.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's three lectures on Hindutva delivered in September 2018 are a good example. Despite claiming that 'Hindutva without Muslims is meaningless', he did not deviate

from the RSS's rather known position on Muslims. He relied heavily on the controversial distinction between 'Indian religions' and the religions that originated outside to define Indianness in strict Hindu terms.

This inside/outside binary is actually linked to the second core element of contemporary nationalism: 'territorial security'. The pro-BJP media reconfigured the old rhetoric of 'foreign enemy' so as to legitimise its elusive search for internal 'enemies'. Terms like 'jihadists' for Muslims, 'urban Naxals' for human rights activists and 'sickular' for secularists were employed simply to re-establish the hegemony of the Hindutva version of nationalism.

Use of marginalisation

The demands posed by this exclusionary nationalism for Muslims, however, can also be read rather differently. In the last five years, Hindutva forces have experimented with at least five issues that were directly related to Muslims: ghar wapsi, love jihad, cow protection, triple talaq and a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Despite launching a highly sustained and organised campaign on each of these issues, the Hindutva forces actually failed to provoke Muslim communities into any collective action/ reaction.

This failure has forced the BJP establishment to reorganise itself to produce a Hindutva-centric yet anti-Muslim discourse of nationalism. The Muslim underrepresentation in various fields actually becomes an important point of reference in this schema.

It is important here to remember that the term 'Muslim' has emerged as a legitimate political category in the last two decades. This process began in 1993 when the National Commission for Minorities defined Muslims (and other religious minorities) as a national minority. This move, in a way, strengthened the already worked out idea of a 'Hindu majority'. It had now become easier for the Hindutva essentialists to argue that the minorities, especially Muslims, are appeased and pam-

pered at the national level. This argument evolved as political rhetoric in the mid-1990s to underline Hindu subjugation.

The Modi government, it seems, has rediscovered the idea of Muslim marginalisation for a radically different purpose. Unlike the Congress/United Progressive Alliance, the BJP government does not show any interest in highlighting the achievements of the Ministry of Minority Affairs. Nor does the party overplay the 'Muslim support' card. It simply keeps the issue of Muslim underrepresentation alive for three possible political strategies.

First, the party often invokes Muslim marginalisation to legitimise its inclusiveness and accommodating approach. After all, Sabka Saath is still a slogan of the party, which has been recently re-phrased as "development with dignity" in the 2019 poll manifesto.

Second, Muslim marginalisation is also appropriated to demonstrate Hindu benevolence and generosity. BJP leaders have used this strategy during the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill debates to make a case for privileging Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities living in the neighbouring country. In a sense, it is a conscious attempt to produce a grand Hindu identity at least in South Asia.

Finally, the relationship between Muslim marginalisation and underrepresentation is exploited to evoke the fear of Muslim separatism. This is exactly what the BJP has been doing with regard to the debates on Article 370. The attempt of the party to polarise the Jammu and Kashmir regions on religious lines is a revealing example.

It would be interesting to observe how this relationship between nationalism and Muslim marginalisation survives after the 2019 general election.

Hilal Ahmed, an Associate Professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, is the author of 'Siyasi Muslims: A story of Political Islams in India'

On the political fringes

The exclusion of migrants from the electoral process reveals the caste- and class-driven nature of mainstream politics



MANISH K. JHA &
AJJEET KUMAR PANKAJ

While political commentators have been busy analysing voter preferences in the general election 2019, one segment, namely migrants, continues to be overlooked.

The Election Commission of India (EC), on February 21, clarified that NRI voters cannot cast votes online, and that an NRI who holds an Indian passport can vote in his/her hometown after registering as an overseas voter. But the roughly 60 million people moving across the country as migrant workers find it difficult to cast their votes because their voting rights are mostly at the place from where they migrate. The scale of lost votes due to migration is large. It may not be an exaggeration to say that there seems to be a general agreement to let the votes of domestic migrants go missing in the electoral process. Migrants remain a political issue despite their poverty, vulnerability and insecurity.

Yet, we know very little about the way migrants engage with politics, especially in elections. How do migrants ensure that they remain politically relevant in the villages they leave behind? What roles do caste and identity play in their voting preferences?

At the receiving end

Despite it being a significant contribution to the growth and development of cities, migration is perceived as a problematic phenomenon. Poor migrants often find themselves at the receiving end of 'nativist' politics. They are projected as a 'problem' for the local population around issues of employment and unemployment, use of place and space, identity and political affiliation. The physical threat and verbal abuse that migrants experience can be gauged in the numerous statements of leaders of various political parties. References to migrants often include terms and phrases such as 'infiltrators', of those who 'need to possess a permit for work' and 'lacking in values, culture and decency'. Such allusions are in contradiction to the provisions in the Indian Constitution that allow freedom of movement by ensuring the right to reside and settle in any part of In-



dia. The process of 'othering' of migrants produces heightened anxieties, and this 'manufactured anxiety' is deployed for political gains.

In the city

Mostly working in the unorganised sector and drawing meagre wages, migrants often find it difficult to visit their home States to cast their vote. In cities, they find it challenging to make their presence felt during elections. For example, a group of NGOs (Aajeevika Bureau and its partners) found that as one moves from panchayat to Vidhan Sabha to the Lok Sabha elections, the participation rate comes down by 10.5% at each step. Unlike the family and kinship association in a panchayat election, caste and community affiliations are the driving force in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. While candidates

or their affiliates mostly meet the travel expenditure for upper caste and other backward caste migrants, Dalit migrants are motivated to travel at their own expense and participate aggressively with the clarity of caste identity and political affiliation.

In a city, migrants rely on support from relatives, friends and fellow migrants for accommodation, employment and to negotiate wages. Through these interactions, migrants build social networks and political connections. Region, religion, village and the caste identity of migrants play a crucial role in these processes. These elements of 'identity' contribute to the mobilisation of migrants in the city to tackle hostility as well as participation in politics. For example, migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar form various social organisations, such as the Uttar Bhartiya Mahasangh, the Uttar Bhartiya Mahapanchayat and the Jaiswar Vikas Sangh, to deal with migrant issues. Of these, the Jaiswar Vikas Sangh is exclusively initiated by Dalit migrants and confined mainly to the issues of Dalit migrants in Mumbai.

Key issues

Contrary to received wisdom, migrants seldom bother about civic

problems such as water and sanitation. Rather, their primary concern revolves around macro-issues such as employment, inflation and poverty. Dalit migrants are troubled by caste-based discrimination, exclusion, atrocities and reservation, which in turn determine their political choices. They often say, "we shall align with those who speak for us", which conveys their preference. Many of them are candid about their support for the Bahujan Samaj Party. One has often heard the line, "Yadavs stay with the Samajwadi Party and the Rajput aligns with the BJP; as we are exploited we cannot go with them and hence our place is with the BSP".

The manifested political articulation of migrants often makes mainstream political parties uncomfortable, which then label them outsiders as obstacles for development and let their votes drop in the electoral process. The exclusion of migrants from the electoral process, in a way, reveals the caste- and class-driven nature of mainstream politics.

Manish K. Jha is Professor at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Ajjeet Kumar Pankaj is Assistant Professor at the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh

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.

Election and the EC

While the jury is still out on who the victor will be in the general election of 2019, the loser is, without much thought, the Election Commission of India (OpEd page, "The Election Commission must act tough", May 7). In the eyes of the people, its credibility as a neutral umpire in the respected exercise of elections has been dented, largely due to its own making. While it deserves to be appreciated for carrying out the humongous task of conducting elections efficiently, its lenient approach in checking the excesses of political parties, especially those of the ruling party, is

unacceptable. It did not move to take note of the explicit oversteps of the ruling party until it was rapped on the knuckles by the Supreme Court. Even after being reminded of its own powers, it did not find it fit to act. The Model Code of Conduct exists only on paper. The EC should reinvent its role.
Dr. D.V.G. SANKARARAO,
Nellimarla, Andhra Pradesh

Blows to the frame

It is cause for concern that there are negative reports about highly respected constitutional bodies such as the Election Commission, the Comptroller and the Auditor General, and the Central Bureau of

Investigation, to name a few. But what is worrying is a recent addition to the list – the judiciary (Editorial page, "A miscarriage of justice", and OpEd page, "The Supreme Court belongs to everyone", both May 7). Never could one have imagined in one's wildest dreams that there would be a complaint of sexual harassment against the Chief Justice of India. At a time when most political leaders and the executive have fallen from grace, the only bastion of hope is the judiciary. It is frightening to think of the pillars of democracy crumbling one after the other. If democracy is to survive, all the wings should display exemplary behaviour and

respectful conduct. The fourth pillar too should do likewise by keeping its moral standards above reproach.
A. MICHAEL DHANARAJ,
Coimbatore

■ The very serious charge levelled against the Chief Justice of India is a case in which the institution itself was on trial and which demanded the highest standards of fairness. An ex-parte inquiry, after denying the woman employee legal assistance, has belied the expectations of the people. To top it all, making the procedure opaque by not releasing the findings of the committee raises questions about the right to information. There is

a real danger that the top court may no longer claim to be the sentinel *qui vive*.
D. NAGASAILA,
RAM SIDDHARTHA,
Chennai

Cricket and a nation

The photograph (Standalone picture, 'Sport' page, "Reliving the golden moment", May 5), of Kapil Dev posing with the 1983 World Cup Trophy during his recent visit to Lord's, instantly brought back fond memories of the unforgettable image of June

25, 1983. The striking picture still finds a place in sports publications and television documentaries, as a new era was born in Indian cricket that day. There are only a few moments in history when sport spills into cultural and political life. One thinks of how the rainbow nation was born out of the 1995 Rugby World Cup. In a sense, the 1983 win was a moment of equal magnitude for India.
R. SIVAKUMAR,
Chennai

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:
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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
Editing error: In the Business Review page interview, "We expect prices to rise over time" – with Dipak Haksar, CEO of ITC Hotels – (May 6, 2019), the second deck headline erroneously referred to him as MD.
The Reader's Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

The National Register of Cruelty

It is horrific and undemocratic for a nation to be putting the onus on citizens to prove their Indianness



RAJU RAJAGOPAL

Fear writ large in his eyes, Shaukat Ali knelt suppliantly on the pavement, surrounded by a hostile crowd demanding, "Are you Bangladeshi? Is your name in the NRC [National Register of Citizens]?" Reports said that Ali was beaten up for allegedly selling beef and was forced to eat pork, an act of ultimate humiliation for a Muslim. Fortunately, Mr. Ali escaped relatively unharmed, but when the mob finally went home, he had lost his livelihood of three decades.

That image from the streets of Assam in April was disturbing in itself, but its import for the future of a secular India was even more chilling, as we witness a dangerous new intersection of beef, faith and citizenship on the ruling party's electoral road map.

An unwise proposal

As if on cue, just one day later, the BJP vowed to implement the NRC all across India. The party has referred contemptuously to illegal immigrants as "termites... eating our grain... and taking our jobs". Unmindful that such reckless rhetoric is an invitation to street violence, the BJP has added fuel to the fire by promising a path to citizenship to almost all but Muslim illegal immigrants. In short, the party is seeking to weaponise the NRC even before the project has fully played out in Assam — a proposition that has been quickly rebuffed by many in the Northeast.

The ground reality is that the NRC in Assam has only recently entered its most sensitive phase of adjudicating claims and objections, involving thousands of senior government officers and data experts, with numerous companies of Central police keeping peace. More than 90% of the 40 lakh people who were excluded from the final draft have filed 'claims' for reconsideration, and 2.65 lakh 'challenges' have also been filed, questioning the inclusion of others. The Supreme Court, which is supervising the entire process, has set a hard deadline of July 31 for the final



"It is premature to declare the NRC a success in Assam and push for its implementation in other States." Those whose names were left out of the draft NRC collect 'claim' forms in Morigaon district, Assam in 2018. •RITU RAJ KONWAR

NRC, an uphill task given the sheer scale and complexity of the exercise at hand. Under these circumstances, it is premature to think of the NRC as a success in Assam, and it is unwise to push for its implementation in other States before assessing the fallout in Assam.

What is the endgame?

No one can predict how many claimants will ultimately succeed in getting on to the final NRC, but what we do know for sure is that there is no clear plan for what happens to those who don't make it. If one were to take the BJP's manifesto seriously, non-Muslims would get a reprieve, while Muslims, possibly including many Indian citizens who are unable to produce the right documents, would be deemed stateless. Thereafter, they may get a hearing at one of the hundreds of Foreigners Tribunals yet to be constituted, and if they fail, they could be destined for the dozens of detention camps that are yet to be built. To quote Aman Wadud, a Guwahati lawyer: "A foreigner can be deported only when the country of origin accepts them... When Indian citizens are declared as foreigners for hyper-technical reasons (lack of documents), they can never be deported..." The result is indefinite detention."

As per the government's own admission, the tribunal process has not gone well in the past, prompting the Supreme Court to call the whole process a "joke". For example, of the 46,000 declared foreigners since 2015, only four were actually deported, and only 2,000 are currently in detention. As for where the other 44,000 went, even the government does not seem to know.

The court is very conscious of this reality and has been urging the government to explore more humane alternatives to prolonged detention. But unfortunately, every suggestion from the court as well as from retired bureaucrats and police officers has been summarily dismissed. That includes proposals to grant them 'refugee status', or give them work permits, or release them under sureties, or with ankle bracelets, and so on. All of this, unfortunately, lends a certain amount of credence to sceptics who claim that some of the intractable problems of our times remain unresolved only because of their potency as political wedge issues.

The court, however, seems under-terred in seeking to end what it has called "external aggression". It has been aggressively questioning the government about what comes next after the final NRC, but as of now, there is little clarity on what the endgame

is. So, here is problem one: Officials have been working hard for over three years to create a 'fair and transparent' process that is blind to an applicant's faith, language and ethnicity. They have made lakhs of house-to-house calls and pored over 6.5 crore personal records dealing with birth and marriage, citizenship and refugee status, family trees, land and tenancy, banks and LIC, and so on, often going back to the original issuers to authenticate them. But now, even before their mammoth effort is complete, the BJP has thrown cold water on them by promoting the idea that some illegal immigrants are more welcome than others. That notion corrupts the very spirit of the NRC, and can hardly be deemed a success.

States will push back

Problem two is the assumption that the Assam experience can be readily replicated in other States. But in reality, the NRC in Assam is a direct response to its unique history as a bulwark against illegal migration, which resulted in the promises of the Assam Accord of 1985. Naturally, a majority of Assamese have been more than willing to submit themselves to the rigours of the NRC. But there is no such history nor affinity to the NRC in most other States, which are dealing with many more pressing problems than illegal immigration. In the end, notwithstanding the mandate of the Citizenship Rules of 2003, millions of poor and marginalised communities may simply be unable to comply with the onerous demands of the NRC, triggering a needless humanitarian crisis. As this reality sinks in, States will surely start to weigh the social costs of the NRC against its murky endgame, and they are bound to push back hard.

Setting aside all other considerations, the very idea that a nation should be putting the onus on every citizen to prove their Indianness 72 years after Independence is at once horrific and undemocratic. This is a proposition that must be vigorously scrutinised and debated before there is any attempt to implement the NRC beyond Assam.

Raju Rajagopal was a volunteer Civil Society Outreach Coordinator for UIDAI. He now shares his time between Berkeley, CA and Chennai

Surveillance wars in space

Mission Shakti is a giant leap for India, but only a small step in the world of counterspace



MADHUMATHI D.S.

The dust and furore kicked up by India's Anti-Satellite Missile (ASAT) test on March 27 is yet to settle. Critics have not stopped worrying about the potential harm that floating debris may cause to other satellites around that band in the sky. Years after Russia, the U.S., and China (referred to here as the Big Three) made a mark in this area, India too has shown that it can hit back at enemies attacking from space.

Military experts say that possessing the highly difficult capability to conduct such a test is important and essential for ensuring national security in space. Mission Shakti, as it is called, has earned India a place in an exclusive club of 'space defenders'. However, a peek into counterspace, the world where such dangerous space activities are practised covertly by the Big Three, shows that while Mission Shakti is a giant leap for India, it is only a small step in that world. The new measure of space supremacy lurks in counterspace now, and not so much in planetary excursions and astronauts' outings. This is why the Big Three have been relentlessly pursuing for decades activities that enable them to rule space militarily, for offence or defence purposes.

Playground for confidential activities

According to academic reports, policymakers and those tracking the military space, for several years now, the space between 600 km and 36,000 km above the earth has been the playground for such secret activities. Most people have no idea about what is happening up there.

Around the time Mission Shakti took place, the Center for Strategic and International Studies based in Washington, D.C. and the Secure World Foundation came out with reports detailing counterspace capabilities that different countries have today and their sense of threat to space assets. The reports document that satellites have been launched to sidle up to other satellites in the same orbit. Satellites with robotic arms or handles have touched or nudged their siblings in orbit. Mother (or nesting) spacecraft have gone up to 'deliver' baby spy satellites in orbit. Satellites have sneaked up to high perches to see, overhear and sense all that happens in space and on the ground. The intent of being in counterspace is thus surveillance and es-

spionage. In times of war, the intent could even be to capture or disable a rival's space assets in orbit.

Some say that the U.S. and Russia have always had some counterspace capabilities in their over 60-year-old space race. But this century, they have reportedly developed deadly armories that can be either unleashed into or from space.

Loud concerns have been raised over rendezvous and proximity operations (RPO) in space. The actor countries neither acknowledge nor discuss such activities and give them other names. In an RPO event, one country sends a satellite that clandestinely sits next to one of its own (or another country's) orbiting satellites. The motive could be to inspect and assess the target's nature, eavesdrop on it, or even subvert its functions. The fear is that in extreme cases, the target may even be 'abducted' or taken control of. Fortunately India is not there — for now.

Loitering in orbit

Satellites of each of the Big Three has been caught loitering in orbit at different times, and the victims have cried foul. In September 2018, French Defence Minister Florence Parly was reported to have charged that Russian satellite Luch-Olymp was lurking too close to — and spying on — a Franco-Italian military communications satellite, Athena-Fidus, in 2017, that is, the previous year.

The U.S. has reportedly had its share of RPOs and other acts. In the foreword to the CSIS report, U.S. policymaker Jim Cooper says, "Every nation's satellites face increasing threats... The risk of a space Pearl Harbor is growing every day." He cautions that today countries depend so much on their satellites that "cripple our satellites and you cripple us".

Countries are also honing non-kinetic, electronics and cyber-based methods to prevent satellites of other countries from spying on their regions. Cyber attacks can destroy, steal or distort other satellites or ground stations. The attacker gains control of the space asset.

"No one will declare that they are pursuing these kind of technologies but all are doing it, all have to do it, specially major players," says Dinesh Kumar Yadavendra, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, a Delhi-based think tank of the Ministry of Defence. In times of war no one is spared, and a country must be ready with its counter-security tactics, he says.

What could India's people in military space have up their sleeve? It is most unlikely that they will tell us.

madhumathi.ds@thehindu.co.in

SINGLE FILE

Belt and Road 2.0

With the second Belt and Road Forum, a paradox is now apparent at the heart of the initiative

DHRUVA JAISHANKAR



Six years after it was unveiled, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) assumes another avatar. In its initial form, it was all things to all people, a catch-all for China's international engagement. But in fact it had multiple, layered objectives. The first concerned

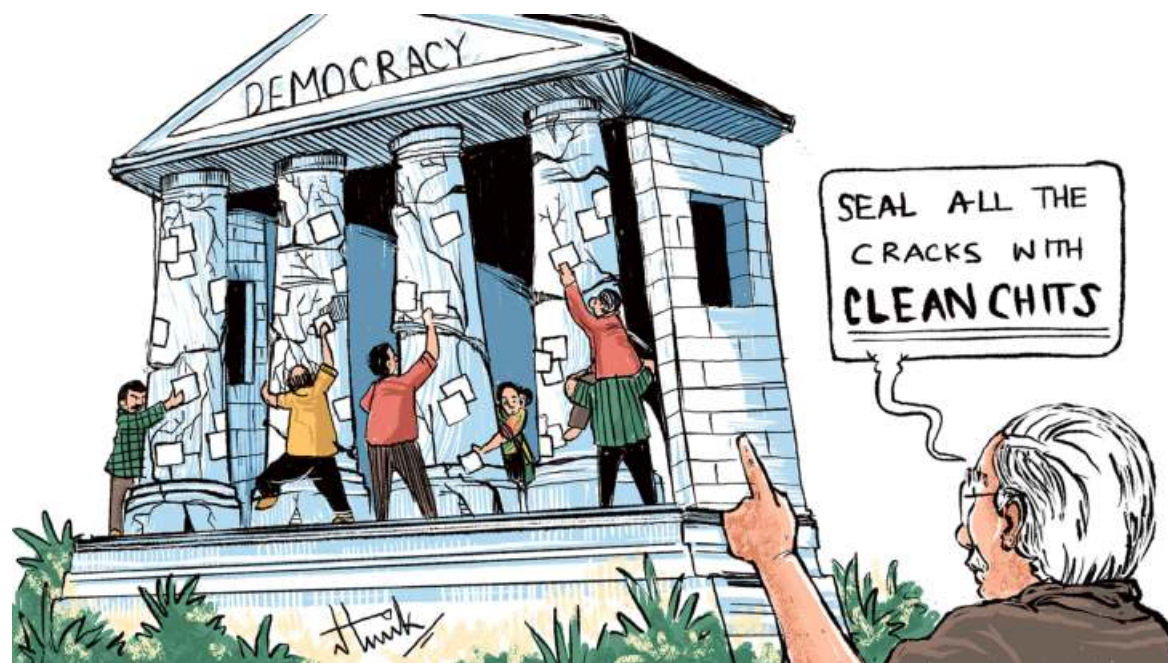
domestic economics: exporting surplus industrial capacity and cash reserves overseas to keep China's economy humming, its industrial output flowing, and its employment levels high. The second concerned domestic politics: a signature foreign initiative to associate with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The third concerned security: stabilising Western provinces and the Eurasian hinterland. And the fourth concerned strategy: leveraging China's new-found economic heft for political objectives in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and creating new standards and institutions in a bid to challenge U.S. leadership.

But Beijing may have moved too soon and too quickly. As the second Belt and Road Forum (BRF) concludes, a paradox has become apparent at the heart of its ambitious initiative. On the one hand, there has been a strong backlash. The economic viability of Chinese projects is now viewed with considerable scrutiny. In capitals around the world, the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka is being described as a warning sign. The BRI's sustainability is called further into question as Chinese debt, especially that held by state-owned enterprises, mounts. Additionally, security concerns have begun to predominate as far afield as in the European Union, the South Pacific and Canada. The role of China's state in its business dealings is being deliberated openly. China's military base at Djibouti has injected an overtly military element to its external engagement. And political pushback to Beijing is also discernible, whether in Zambia, the Maldives or Brazil.

Yet, despite these obvious deficiencies, the allure of the BRI remains strong. Many countries still see China as an attractive alternative to slow-moving democratic bureaucracies and tedious lending institutions. There are also political motivations at play: a minor agreement on the BRI is a useful tool for Italy's Eurosceptic government to send a strong political message to the EU. Beijing has also become more flexible, the tone of this year's BRF less triumphalist. Chinese overseas financial flows have slowed since 2017, and the focus has shifted away from massive infrastructure projects to realms such as digital technology.

Given these contrasting trends, the future of the BRI is more uncertain than ever. For India, which boycotted the BRF for the second time on grounds of both sovereignty (the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor traverses Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) and unsustainability (particularly in the Indian Ocean), it means continuing to monitor China's international engagement closely.

The writer is a Foreign Policy Fellow at the Brookings Institution's India Center



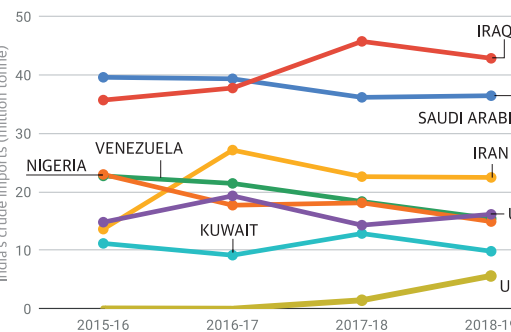
DATA POINT

Dearer on Indian pockets

India will be significantly hit by the Trump administration's decision to end waivers that allowed the import of crude oil from Iran without facing U.S. sanctions. Iran has been among India's top and most preferred sources of crude oil. Crude from the U.S., an alternative exporter, comes at a hefty price. By **Sumant Sen**

Crude sources from abroad

Iran has been one of India's top suppliers of crude oil over the years. In 2018-19, 10.9% of India's crude demands were met by imports from Iran. While Iraq is India's top supplier of crude oil since 2017-18, there has been a sudden jump of 288% in imports from the U.S. since 2017-18. The chart shows India's top suppliers of crude oil and their contribution over the years



Crude from the U.S.

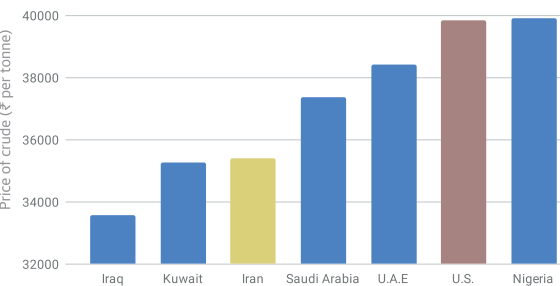
The U.S.'s exports to some of the world's largest oil consumers, including India, Japan, S. Korea, and Italy, have increased significantly over time.

(Figures in 1000 barrels/day (b/d))

Country	2015	2016	2017
Argentina	465	591	1158
Canada	427	359	354
China	1	22	221
India	1	0	26
Italy	4	20	50

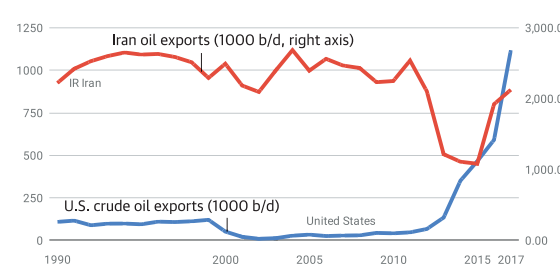
Coming at a greater cost

While Iran's crude oil exports to India, at ₹35,395 per tonne, were relatively cheap in 2018-19, the U.S.'s crude exports, at ₹39,843, were among the most expensive. The graph shows the cost per tonne of crude oil imports from major countries



Contrasting fortunes

There has been a huge rise of 734% of global crude oil exports from the U.S. from 2013 to 2017. Iran's crude oil exports dipped in 2013 following global sanctions, but recovered after they were lifted. The chart shows crude exports of U.S. and Iran



Sources: Ministry of Commerce GoI, OPEC, US Energy Information Administration

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FROM THE ISSUE OF MAY 9 AS THERE WAS NO ISSUE ON MAY 8

Israel produces atom bombs

Israel has become the world's sixth nuclear power and has built atomic bombs, with French help, at a secret plant deep in the Negev Desert, according to the West German News Magazine Der Spiegel. The magazine, in its latest issue, said at least five, and possibly six 20-kiloton bombs had been produced at the closely guarded plant, near Dimona. Security was so stringent that a damaged Israeli jet fighter which strayed into the Dimona area during the 1967 June war with Arabs was shot down by an Israeli Hawk missile and the pilot killed, it said. Israel was already capable of delivering its atomic bomb with its A-4 Skyhawk jets, it said, and added that Israel would receive the first of 50 American built F-4 Phantoms this autumn. In Cairo, the U.A.R. officials said that the U.A.R. would produce its own atomic bombs if Israel developed a nuclear weapons capability.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 8, 1919.

Constable Shooting Case.

Mr. Swinhoe, Chief Presidency Magistrate [Calcutta], resumed enquiry to-day [May 7] under the circumstances connected with the alleged shooting of constable Seepujan Sing. An application was made on behalf of the constable for process against Sergeant White. The Magistrate referred it to the second Magistrate who fixed the 14th instant for hearing. Another application was made for an adjournment of enquiry which was refused at which counsel appearing for the constable retired. Mr. J. Cohen, Honorary Magistrate, who recorded the statement of the constable at hospital examined said that the constable had stated he was struck by a sergeant, but he could not say whether he was struck by a bullet or knife. Three doctors from hospital who attended the constable deposed that the wounds could not have been caused by a bullet from a revolver.

POLL CALL

Proxy

Service voters are members of the armed forces of the Union or States, or members of forces to which provisions of the Army Act are applicable, or those who are employed under the Government of India and are outside the country. Such voters are entitled to appoint any person as their proxy to cast a vote on their behalf and in their name at the polling station. The proxy must be an ordinary resident of that constituency. He or she need not be a registered voter but must not be disqualified to be registered as a voter. The provision for voting through proxy is valid till the person making the appointment is a service voter. Once appointed, the proxy will continue until his or her appointment is revoked by the service voter.

MORE ON THE WEB

Srivilliputhur's dying art form

<http://bit.ly/templeparrot>

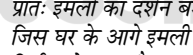


जिंदगी में नीम को घुसने न देना ही मेरी एकमेव कामना है

वैशाख के महीने में कुछ ही लोग आनंदोत्सव मान पाते हैं, क्योंकि थूप तेज होते-होते महुअ अपना समस्त रस टपका के पात-पात रह जाता है, कोयल की कूक के मंद पड़ते ही अपनी मंजरी डालता है और वसंत के स्वागत में उमगने वाले फूल अपना रस मधुछूतों में समर्पित कर पुरछा जाते हैं, पर विवाचिवाली थूप और हहकारती लू में नीम झुस उठता है। वैसे में नीम से युगों-युगों से परिचित हूँ, पर मेरा इससे समझौता नहीं हो पाया, आयुर्वेद की सारी शिक्षाएं और प्रकृति के चिकित्सा के समस्त ढाँचा या छया न असफल रहे हैं।

बबूल की दातून मुझे भली लगती है, पर नीम की तिताई अभी तक सहन नहीं हो सकती। न जाने कितनी बार आँखें करुआ आई हैं, जीभ लोहा हो गई है, कान झनझना उठे हैं और मन तिता गया है, पर तब भी इस नीम से भी अधिक तीली दुनिया से मैं तीता न हो सका। मेरे बाबा कहा करते, प्रातः इमली का दर्शन बड़ा अशुभ होता है और जिस घर के आगे इमली का पेड़ लग जाए, वह निवेश हो जाता है। शुभ-अशुभ वंश-निवेश तो मैं नहीं जानता, इतना जानता हूँ कि इमली का अमलोन पत्तियों की स्मृति अब भी मुँह में पानी भर देती है और अथपकी बलुही इमली की फली मिल जाए, तो मैं अब भी गुलाब-जामुन को तलाक दे सकता हूँ। नीम में क्या मिलता है, गंध असह्य, स्वाद असह्य, यहाँ तक कुसुमित नीम का रूप भी असह्य। इसलिए आम में फल न आए, महुए में कूचे न लगें, गुलाब में कली न आए और मधुमास सूना चला जाए, पर नीम बराबर फूलेगा, बराबर फरेगा और इतना फरेगा कि अकुला देगा मृत्यु के स्पर्श से डरने वाले नीम की पत्ती चबाते हैं, चबाते रहेंगे, इस नश्वर शरीर से मोह करने वाले नीम के नीचे छंटाते हैं, छंटाते रहेंगे और शीतल के उपासक नीम की डाली चढ़ाते हैं, चढ़ाते रहेंगे, पर मैंने कसम खाई है जिंदगी की, और जिंदगी में नीम को घुसने न देना मेरी एकमेव कामना है।

प्रसिद्ध साहित्यकार।



असर डाल सकती है, जिसका आकार तो अमेरिका के एक छोटे राज्य आयोग जैसा है, लेकिन जहाँ 16 करोड़ लोग रहते हैं। दशकों के ज्वारीय रिपोर्ट के एक अध्ययन में वैज्ञानिकों ने पाया था कि नदियों तथा नहरों के जटिल संजाल में गंगा डेल्टा में बसे बांग्लादेश में वैश्विक औसत की तुलना में उच्च ज्वार बहुत तेजी से बढ़ रहा था। जाधवपुर यूनिवर्सिटी में समुद्रविज्ञानी सुगाता हाजरा कहते हैं कि सुंदरवन में जमीन का कुछ नुकसान हो सकता है, लेकिन उनका अध्ययन बाघों पर कम नाटकीय प्रभाव पड़ने का संकेत देता है।

बांग्लादेश के वन विभाग के अधिकारी जहिरुद्दीन अहमद कहते हैं कि निचले क्षेत्रों और वहाँ बसने वाले बाघों को बचाने के लिए कई कदम उठाए गए हैं। वह कहते हैं कि ऐसी फसलें लगाई जा रही हैं जो उच्च लवणयुक्त पानी में पैदा हो सकें। तलछट पुनर्विनिर्माण ने भी स्वाभाविक रूप से कुछ द्वीपों की ऊँचाई बढ़ाई है। 'द वैनिशिंग: इंडियाज वाइल्डलाइफ क्राइसिस' की लेखक प्रेरणा बिंद्रा कहती हैं कि बाघों का निवास लगातार सिकुड़ता जा रहा है, फिर चाहे वह जलवायु परिवर्तन के कारण हो या औद्योगिक विकास के कारण, और उनके संरक्षण के अच्छे विकल्प नहीं तलाशे जा रहे हैं। उनके मुताबिक बांग्ला टाइगर को बाघों के किसी अन्य रिजर्व में स्थानांतरित किया जाना कोई व्यावहारिक विकल्प नहीं है। आखिर आप इन बाघों को कहाँ रखेंगे? कोलाल और भीड़ से भरे इस ग्रह में आखिर कहाँ उपयुक्त जगहें बची हैं?

-साथ में हरि कुमार
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इस साल सीआईएससीई 12वीं की परीक्षा में दो बच्चों ने सौ फीसदी अंक हासिल कर ऐतिहासिक उपलब्धि हासिल की है, तो वहीं तेलंगाना में विभिन्न परीक्षाओं में नाकाम रहे बीस से अधिक विद्यार्थियों की खुदकुशी शिक्षा प्रणाली के विरोधाभास को ही दिखाती है।

सौ में सौ

पिछले

कुछ वर्षों से 12 वीं और दसवीं बोर्ड की परीक्षाओं में नब्बे फीसदी से अधिक अंक पाने वाले विद्यार्थियों की संख्या में लगातार हो रही बढ़ोतरी की कई तरह से व्याख्या की जा सकती है, लेकिन इससे असहमत नहीं हुआ जा सकता कि बच्चे अपनी प्रतिभा और मेहनत के दम पर अंकों की किसी भी तरह की चुनौती का सामना करने में पीछे नहीं हैं। इस साल सीआईएससीई की 12वीं (आईएससी) की परीक्षा में कोलकाता के देवांग कुमार और बंगलुरु की विभा स्वामीनाथन ने सौ फीसदी अंक हासिल कर अपना लोहा मनवाया है। केंद्रीय या राज्यों के किसी बोर्ड में पहले कभी ऐसा नहीं हुआ कि 12 वीं की परीक्षा में किसी बच्चे को हर विषय में सौ में सौ

अंक मिले हों। इससे पहले सीबीएसई की बारहवीं की परीक्षा में इसी साल दो बच्चों ने पाँच सौ में 499 अंक हासिल किए थे और कहा जाता है कि शीर्ष तीन स्थानों पर एक-एक अंक के अंतर से 23 बच्चे आए। यही नहीं, 94,299 बच्चों ने 90 फीसदी से अधिक अंक हासिल किए, वहीं सीबीएसई की दसवीं की परीक्षा में दो लाख तीस हजार बच्चों ने 90 फीसदी से अधिक अंक हासिल किए। इन नतीजों को देखकर लगता है, मानो विद्यार्थियों ने परीक्षक के सामने ही चुनौती रख दी है कि, देखें कैसे एक अंक भी काटते हो! वहीं अंकों की इस होड़ के दूसरे पक्ष पर भी विचार करने की जरूरत है, क्योंकि 12 वीं और दसवीं की परीक्षाओं में नाकाम रहने वाले अनेक बच्चों के खुदकुशी कर लेने की खबरें भी आ रही हैं। अकेले तेलंगाना में इस वर्ष विभिन्न

बोर्ड परीक्षाओं में नाकाम रहने वाले बीस से अधिक बच्चे खुदकुशी कर चुके हैं, जो हमारी शिक्षा व्यवस्था के विरोधाभास को ही दिखाता है। मुश्किल यह है कि अधिक अंक प्राप्त करने के बावजूद बच्चे आश्वस्त नहीं हो पाते कि उन्हें उनकी पसंद के कॉलेज में दाखिला मिल पाएगा। इसका सबसे बड़ा उदाहरण दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय है, जहाँ पिछले कुछ वर्षों से कई प्रसिद्ध कॉलेजों में कट ऑफ सौ फीसदी तक चली जा रही है! असल में जितनी संख्या में विद्यार्थी 12 वीं पहुँचकर आ रहे हैं, उस अनुपात में उच्च शिक्षा के अच्छे संस्थान नहीं हैं, इसी वजह से बच्चों में अंकों की होड़ बढ़ रही। शिक्षा में बढ़ते इस असंतुलन को दूर करने के लिए व्यापक स्तर पर पहल की जरूरत है और यह तब संभव होगा जब यह राजनीतिक वर्ग की चिंता में शामिल हो।

जलवायु परिवर्तन की जद में



संयुक्त राष्ट्र को सौंपी गई ताजा रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक बांग्लादेश और भारत में चार हजार वर्ग मील में फैले सुंदरवन में जलवायु परिवर्तन और ग्लोबल वार्मिंग के कारण बांग्ला टाइगर के अस्तित्व पर खतरा मंडरा रहा है।



काई शुल्ज

आधारित है और यह सुंदरवन में वन्यजीवों के अस्तित्व को लेकर किए गए मौजूदा अध्ययनों के अनुमानों को ही पुष्ट करता है। वर्ष 2010 में वर्ल्ड वाइड फंड फॉर नेचर के नेतृत्व में किए गए एक अध्ययन में अनुमान व्यक्त किया गया था कि समुद्र सतह में महज 11 इंच की वृद्धि सुंदरवन में कुछ दशकों के भीतर ही बाघों की संख्या में 96 फीसदी तक कमी कर सकती है। हाल के एक अध्ययन में

पाया गया कि जलवायु परिवर्तन ने दुनिया के तटरीबन आधे दुर्लभ स्तनधारियों को पहले के अनुमानों से कहीं अधिक नुकसान पहुंचाया है। सुंदरवन पर लई रिपोर्ट तैयार करने वाली टीम के प्रमुख शरीफ ए मुकुल और उनके सहयोगियों ने समुद्र सतह के स्तर में बढ़ोतरी से परे जाकर बाघों के अस्तित्व को मिल रही चुनौतियों का अध्ययन किया। समुद्र सतह में वृद्धि से 2050 से 2070 के बीच बाघों के

वैज्ञानिकों ने एक नए अध्ययन में चेतावनी दी है कि जलवायु परिवर्तन और समुद्र का बढ़ता जल स्तर अंततः बाघों के दुनिया के आखिरी और सबसे बड़े प्राकृतिक निवास को खत्म कर सकता है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र को सौंपा गया इस रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक बाघ जमीन पर निवास करने वाली तटरीबन पांच लाख प्रजातियों में से एक है, जिनका अस्तित्व उनके प्राकृतिक निवास को मिल रही चुनौती के कारण खतरे में है।

बांग्लादेश और भारत में चार हजार वर्ग मील दलदली जमीन पर फैले सुंदरवन में दुनिया का सबसे बड़ा मैंग्रो (उष्णकटिबंधीय) जंगल और समुद्र परिस्थितिकी है, जिससे सैकड़ों पशु प्रजातियों को जीवन मिलता है, जिनमें दुर्लभ बंगाल टाइगर भी शामिल है। लेकिन यहां की 70 फीसदी जमीन समुद्र सतह से सिर्फ कुछ फीट ऊपर ही है और इस क्षेत्र में जलवायु परिवर्तन का व्यापक असर हो सकता है। ऑस्ट्रेलिया और बांग्लादेश के शोधार्थियों ने साइंस पत्रिका द टोटल एनवायरमेंट में प्रकाशित शोध में यह आशंका जताई है।

इन दोनों देशों के दस शोधार्थियों द्वारा तैयार इस रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक तपते ग्रह के कारण हो रहे परिवर्तन से वहाँ बचे कुछ सौ बंगाल टाइगर का अस्तित्व खत्म हो सकता है। उनका निष्कर्ष है कि 2070 तक बांग्लादेश की तरफ सुंदरवन में बाघों के लिए कोई उपयुक्त निवास नहीं बचा होगा। यह शोध पत्र इंटरनैशनल पैनेल ऑन क्लाइमेट चेंज (आईपीसीसी) द्वारा दशाएँ गए जलवायु परिवर्तन के परिदृश्य पर

मंजिलें और भी हैं

>> अजय ओली

पदयात्रा कर बच्चों को भीख मांगने से रोक रहा हूँ

मैं उत्तराखंड के पिथौरागढ़ का रहने वाला हूँ। मेरा इवेंट मैनेजमेंट का बिजनेस था, जिसका टर्नओवर लगभग 40 लाख रुपये सालाना था। उस समय मैं लखनऊ में एक इवेंट कराने गया था। हम रात के तीन बजे वापस लौट रहे थे। तभी मैंने देखा कि कुछ बच्चे जो दिन में भीख मांगते हैं, एक जगह पर इकट्ठा थे। तभी वहाँ एक और व्यक्ति आया। उसने उन बच्चों से सारा रुपया ले लिया और उसके बाद कुछ रुपये उन बच्चों में बाँट दिए। अगले दिन जब हम वहाँ गए, तो दर्जनों बच्चे भीख मांगते दिखाई दिए। बच्चों को इस तरह से देख मेरा मन अंदर से झकझोर उठा। मुझे लगा इनके लिए मुझे कुछ करना चाहिए।

मेरे दादाजी हमेशा मुझसे कहते थे, सिर्फ अपनी खुशी के लिए हर कोई जीता है, लेकिन दूसरों की खुशी के लिए बहुत कम लोग जीते हैं। इस कहावत को ही अपने जीवन में सर्वोपरि रखकर मैं देश को बाल मजदूरी और बाल भिक्षा से मुक्त करने और लोगों को जागरूक करने के उद्देश्य से नंगे पैर चलने लगा। सितंबर 2015 को नंगे पैर पैदल यात्रा के साथ इस मुहिम की शुरुआत मैंने अपने शहर से की। इससे मेरा होसला बढ़ता गया। अब तक मैं सात राज्यों में करीब 12,500 किलोमीटर की पदयात्रा कर चुका हूँ। मैं एक दिन में लगभग 40 किलोमीटर चलता हूँ। यात्रा के दौरान मैं लोगों से बाल मजदूरी और बाल भिक्षावृत्ति खत्म करने की अपील करता हूँ। एक दिन मैं में करीब 700 लोगों से बातचीत करने का लक्ष्य रखता हूँ। इसके लिए स्कूल और कॉलेजों में भी जाता हूँ। वहाँ बच्चों और लोगों को भीख नहीं देने की शपथ दिलाता हूँ, साथ ही भीख मांगने वाले बच्चों को शिक्षित करने में सहयोग देने के लिए जागरूक करता हूँ। लगातार पैदल चलने के कारण कई बार लोग मुझे पागल समझ लेते हैं। पंजाब में तो एक होटल मालिक ने मुझे कमरा देने से ही मना कर दिया। कुछ लोगों ने मेरे अभियान का विरोध भी किया। उनका मानना था कि भीख देने से पुण्य मिलता है, जबकि मैं उन्हें भीख देने के खिलाफ जागरूक कर रहा था। हालाँकि अब लोग मेरे अभियान को समझते हैं, और मेरा सहयोग करते हैं।

घर पर पढ़ने वाले बच्चों का खाना मां बनाती हैं और पढ़ाई-लिखाई की देखरेख मेरे पिता करते हैं।

मेरा मानना है कि हम लोग बच्चा समझ भीख तो दे देते हैं, लेकिन उसका एक छोटा-सा हिस्सा उन बच्चों के पास जाता है, बाकी का इन बच्चों से भीख मंगवाने वालों के पास। वहीं, बच्चा जब बड़ा हो जाता है तब तक उसे भीख मांगने की आदत हो जाती है और भीख न मिलने से वह अपराधी की राह पर निकल पड़ता है। वर्ष 2016 में मैंने अपने घर पर ही घनश्याम ओली वाइल्ड वेलफेयर ट्रस्ट की स्थापना की। इसके साथ शेल्टर हाउस भी बनाया हुआ है। मेरे प्रयास से अब तक तेरह हजार से अधिक बच्चों को विभिन्न शिक्षा केंद्रों के माध्यम से नि:शुल्क शिक्षा दी जा रही है। साथ ही भोजन और चिकित्सा की उनकी जरूरतें भी पूरी की जा रही हैं।

घर पर पढ़ने वाले बच्चों का खाना मेरी मां बनाती हैं और उनकी पढ़ाई-लिखाई का काम मेरे पिता करते हैं। यात्रा के दौरान मैं बच्चों को आत्मनिर्भरता के लिए तरह तरह की हैंडमैड चीज़ें बनाता भी सिखाता हूँ। इससे बच्चे पढ़ाई के साथ व्यस्त भी रहते हैं और उनकी थोड़ी बहुत कमाई भी हो जाती है। बच्चों का भीख मांगना और श्रम करना कितना दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण होता है। स्कूल जाने की उम्र में बच्चे होटलों, टावों, दुकानों, घरों में श्रम कर अपने परिवारों के लिए पैसा जुटा रहे हैं। अगर समाज को बदलना है, तो सबसे पहले हमें खुद में ही बदलाव लाना होगा।

ईरान पर प्रतिबंध से उपजी चुनौती

अमेरिका के ईरान से कच्चे तेल की खरीद पर लगी पाबंदी से मिली छूट दो मई को समाप्त करने के साथ ही चिंता के कई प्रश्न खड़े हो गए हैं।

भारत अपनी आवश्यकता का करीब 83 प्रतिशत तेल आयात करता है। प्रतिबंध की घोषणा होने तक भारत कुल तेल आयात का लगभग 26 प्रतिशत ईरान से आयात करता था। हमारे लिए इराक एवं सऊदी अरब के बाद तीसरा सबसे बड़ा आपूर्तिकर्ता ईरान ही रहा है।

अमेरिका का सीधा लक्ष्य ईरान के संपूर्ण निर्यात को बंद कराना है। अमेरिका का यह राख कितना सही है और कितना गलत इस पर दो राय सकती हैं, पर इसके प्रभावों को लेकर नहीं। सरकार कह रही है कि आपूर्ति में संभावित कमी के मद्देनजर वैकल्पिक स्रोतों की तैयारी कर ली गई है। सऊदी अरब, संयुक्त अरब अमीरात, इराक और रूस ने भारत को हर तरह का सहयोग करने का आश्वासन दिया है। सऊदी अरब एवं संयुक्त अरब अमीरात ईरान विरोधी देश हैं। वे अमेरिका के साथ हैं, इसलिए वे नहीं चाहेंगे कि भारत जैसा बड़ा तेल खरीदार किसी समस्या में फँसे। दोनों देशों से हमारे संबंध बेहतर हैं। इन सबके अलावा भविष्य को ध्यान में रखते हुए भारत ने पिछले कुछ सालों में कई कदम उठाए हैं। दूसरे देशों के साथ मिलकर कच्चे तेल की बड़े स्तर पर प्रसंस्करण के लिए रिफाइनरी स्थापित हो रही है। महाराष्ट्र के रत्नागिरी में ऐसा ही एक इंटीग्रेटेड रिफाइनरी एंड पेट्रोकेमिकल्स कॉम्प्लेक्स बनाया जा रहा है। यह रिफाइनरी हर दिन 12 लाख बैरल क्रूड ऑयल

खाड़ी में तेल के बड़े उत्पादक देशों सऊदी अरब, इराक और संयुक्त अरब अमीरात ने आपूर्ति बढ़ाने का संकेत दिया है, ताकि कीमतों में कोई उछाल न आए। इसके बावजूद क्या तेल की कीमतों को स्थिर रखना संभव है?



अवधेश कुमार

प्रोसेस करने की क्षमता रखेगी। दूसरे देशों पर निर्भर रहने के अलावा अपने स्रोतों को मजबूत बनाने की नीति पर भी भारत काम कर रहा है। इस दिशा में सरकार ने कुछ नीतित्वात्मक बदलाव किए हैं। तेल निर्यात का अर्थव्यवस्था से सीधा संबंध होने के कारण और कई प्रश्न हमारे मन में हैं। इनमें सबसे पहला प्रश्न कीमत वृद्धि से जुड़ा है। अगर तेल की कीमतें बढ़ती हैं, तो महंगाई बढ़ेगी, रुपया लुढ़क सकता है, जिससे भारत को आयात के बदले ज्यादा पूंजी चुकानी होगी और शेर बाजार भी नीचे आ सकता है, (हालांकि डॉलर में मजबूती से निर्यात में लाभ होगा) व्यापार घाटा, राजकोषीय घाटा तेजी से बढ़ेगा और कुल

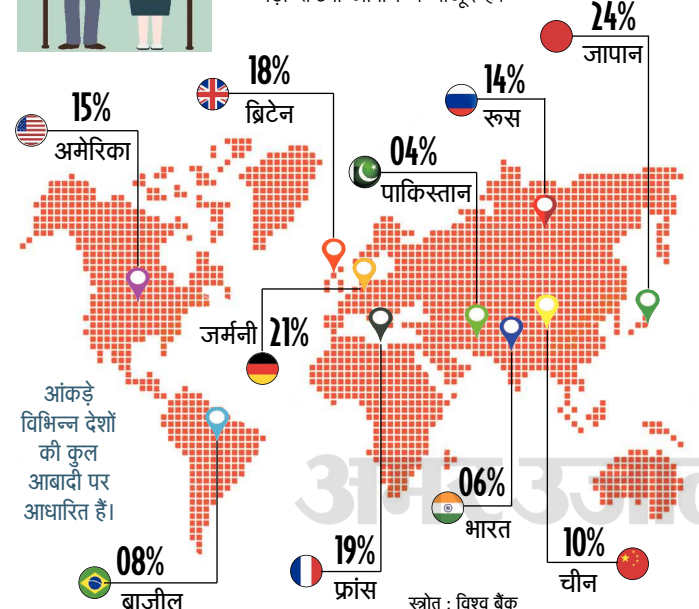
मिलाकर इससे विकास दर प्रभावित होगी। भारत या चीन जैसे देशों की विकास दर गिरने का असर पूरी दुनिया पर होगा। क्या तेल की कीमतों को स्थिर रखना संभव है? अमेरिकी छूट के अंत के साथ अंतरराष्ट्रीय बाजार में कच्चे तेल की कीमतें बढ़ रही हैं। कच्चे तेल की कीमत पिछले छह महीनों के सर्वोच्च स्तर पर पहुंच चुकी है। खाड़ी में तेल के बड़े उत्पादक देशों सऊदी अरब, इराक और संयुक्त अरब अमीरात ने आपूर्ति बढ़ाने का संकेत दिया है, ताकि कीमतों में कोई उछाल न आए।

एक बड़ा प्रश्न ईरान के साथ संबंधों के भविष्य का भी है। भारत का ईरान के साथ सांस्कृतिक-राजनीतिक एवं आर्थिक संबंध काफी गहरे हैं। तेल की भूमिका इसमें छोटी है। भारत ईरान पर पूरी तरह प्रतिबंध के साथ नहीं जा सकता। भारत ने वहाँ काफी निवेश किया हुआ है। भारत ने वहाँ चाबहार बंदरगाह विकसित किया है, जिसके साथ सड़क एवं रेल मार्ग विकसित करने सहित कई परियोजनाओं पर काम कर रहा है। चीन से वहाँ हमारी सीधी प्रतिस्पर्धा है। वहीं अमेरिका भारत को द्विपक्षीय व्यापार में सबसे ज्यादा मुनाफा देने वाला देश है। इसलिए उसके बिल्कुल विरुद्ध जाना भी धातक होगा। भारत के समक्ष इन दोनों के साथ संतुलन साधने की चुनौती है।

खुली खिड़की

65 वर्ष से ऊपर की आबादी

दुनिया के विभिन्न देशों में बुजुर्ग आबादी बढ़ रही है। विश्व बैंक की रिपोर्ट बताती है कि 65 पाए कर चुके लोगों की बड़ी संख्या जापान में मौजूद है।



पशु-पक्षियों से सीखो

गंधर्वराज विश्ववसु की पुत्री मदालसा परम तपस्वी व विद्वान महिला थीं। वे अपने पुत्रों को शास्त्रों के उदाहरण देकर उपदेश दिया करती थीं कि शरीर क्षणभंगुर है, आत्म तत्व ही सब कुछ है। सांसारिक मोहजाल में फँसकर जीवन व्यर्थ नहीं गंवाना चाहिए। मदालसा के पति राजा ऋतुध्वज ने एक दिन कहा, 'प्रिये! तुम तीन बच्चों को ज्ञानोपदेश देकर सांसारिक जगत से विरत कर चुकी हो। चौथे पुत्र अलंक को तो राजधर्म के उपदेश दो, जिससे वह हमारे वंश को आगे बढ़ा सके। मदालसा ने पति का आदेश शिरोधार्य कर अलंक को शिक्षा देनी शुरू कर दी। एक दिन मदालसा ने कहा, 'पुत्र, हम पशु-पक्षियों के जीवन से बहुत कुछ सीख सकते हैं। कौवे से आलस्य रहित रहने की शिक्षा लेनी चाहिए। भौरों से रसप्राही और मृग से सदा चौकन्ना रहने की सीख लेनी चाहिए। जैसे सप फन फैलाकर, फुफकारकर अपनी रक्षा के लिए दूसरों को डराता है, उसी प्रकार राजा को शत्रु को डराकर रखना चाहिए। राजा को हंस के समान नीर-क्षीर विवेक करने वाला होना चाहिए। उसे सूर्योदय से पहले उठकर कल्पपालन में लग जाना चाहिए। उन्होंने अपने बेटे को सभी के साथ समान व्यवहार करने की शिक्षा देते हुए कहा, 'जैसे चंद्रमा और सूर्य सर्वत्र समान रूप से अपनी ऊर्जा का प्रसार करते हैं, वैसे राजा को समानता का व्यवहार करना चाहिए। वही राजा अमर होता है, जो प्रजा के हित व कल्याण को सर्वोपरि महत्व देता है।'

हरियाली और रास्ता

प्रोफेसर, नोट और सफलता

प्रोफेसर अबुज नाथ की कहानी, जिसने बच्चों को उनका मोल बताया।



आईआईटी के प्रोफेसर अबुज नाथ ने फैसला किया कि वह बारहवीं के फेल बच्चों को कोचिंग देकर आईआईटी में दाखिले के लिए तैयार करेंगे। उनके सभी दोस्तों ने उनका खूब मजाक उड़ाया, क्योंकि टॉपर बच्चों के लिए भी आईआईटी की परीक्षा निकाल पाना आसान नहीं होता। पर प्रोफेसर ने कोचिंग की शुरुआत की और पहले बैच में उन्हें 17 बच्चे मिले। पहले ही दिन उन्होंने छात्रों से पूछा कि खुद को कितना महत्वपूर्ण समझते हैं? किसी छात्र ने हाथ नहीं उठाया। फिर प्रोफेसर ने जब से 500 रुपये का एक नोट निकाला और छात्रों से पूछा, आपमें से कितने लोग इसे लेना चाहेंगे? सभी बच्चों ने हाथ खड़े कर दिए। प्रोफेसर ने नोट को गीली मिट्टी से भरे एक मग में डाल दिया और वहाँ से उस गड़े नोट को निकालकर पूछा, अब कितने लोग इसे लेना चाहेंगे? फिर सभी ने हाथ खड़ा कर दिया। अब प्रोफेसर ने नोट जमीन पर फेंककर उसे पैर से मसल दिया। फिर उसे उठाकर पूछा, अब इसे कौन लेना चाहेंगा? सबने नोट की तरफ देखकर मुँह बनाया, लेकिन एक बार फिर सबने हाथ खड़े कर दिए। प्रोफेसर ने कहा, देखा, नोट चाहे मिट्टी में सना हुआ हो, चाहे कितना भी दबा-कुचला हुआ हो, उसकी कीमत कभी कम नहीं होती। ठीक इसी तरह से हमें भी यह पहचानना चाहिए कि हमारी कीमत क्या है। एक बार अगर हम अपना मोल समझ जाएं, तो हमारे प्रयास, हमारी मानसिकता, हमारे कर्म सब उसी के रंग में ढल जाएंगे। कई बार विपरीत परिस्थितियों में हम अपना आत्मविश्वास खो देते हैं। लेकिन उस वक़्त अगर हम यह तब तक खड़े कि हमारा मोल इससे बहुत ऊपर है, तो हमारे प्रयास और मानसिकता वापस हमें खींचकर उस जगह पहुंचा देगी, जिसके हम योग्य हैं। प्रोफेसर अबुज नाथ को समाज के 11 बच्चों का चयन आईआईटी में हुआ।

हमारी योग्यता का एक महत्वपूर्ण आकलन हमारी सोच है।

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 69

फिर ठिड़ी कारोबारी जंग

अमेरिका और चीन के बीच कारोबारी जंग की आग फिर भड़क उठी है। अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप ने कहा है कि वह चीन से होने वाले करीब 20,000 करोड़ डॉलर मूल्य के आयात पर शुल्क को दोगुने से भी अधिक बढ़ाकर 10 फीसदी से 25 फीसदी कर देंगे। इसके अतिरिक्त 32,500 करोड़ डॉलर मूल्य के अतिरिक्त आयात पर भी जल्दी

ही शुल्क दर को बढ़ाकर 25 फीसदी किया जा सकता है। ट्रंप लंबे समय से कहते रहे हैं कि चीन से होने वाले आयात पर शुल्क दर बहुत कम है। उन्होंने टिवटर पर एक बार फिर इस बात को दोहराते हुए कहा कि अब चीन को इन दरों के चलते अमेरिकी राजकोष में सैकड़ों करोड़ डॉलर की राशि जमा करनी पड़ रही है। हालांकि यह बात सही नहीं है।

यह शुल्क, आयात करने वाली कंपनियों द्वारा सीमा पर चुकाया जाता है। अधिकांश आर्थिक अध्ययन बताते हैं कि इसका ज्यादातर बोझ अमेरिकी उपभोक्ताओं को बढ़ी हुई कीमत के रूप में चुकाना पड़ रहा है या फिर अमेरिकी कंपनियां अपना मार्जिन कम करके इसकी भरपाई कर रही हैं। अभी यह निश्चित नहीं है कि ट्रंप अपनी चुनौती पर आगे कार्रवाई करेंगे या नहीं।

यद्यपि बाजार का मानना है कि कि चीन-अमेरिका के बीच कारोबारी युद्ध जल्द समाप्त नहीं होने वाला है। उसने इसे लेकर नकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया दी है। बहुत संभव है कि यह बातचीत की शर्तें तय करने का ट्रंप का तरीका हो लेकिन भविष्य में विसंगति उत्पन्न होने की आशंका तो है। यह सही है

कि अमेरिका में अब आम राजनीतिक समझ यही है कि चीन पर दबाव बनाया जाए ताकि अंतरराष्ट्रीय व्यापार को लेकर उसका रवैया बदले, खासतौर पर अमेरिकी कंपनियों की बौद्धिक संपदा की चोरी को लेकर हाल के दिनों में काफी चिंता जताई गई है। यह बात भी ध्यान देने लायक है कि एक ओर जहां टैरिफ का इस्तेमाल अमेरिका के सहयोगी और साझेदार मुल्कों में लोकप्रिय नहीं है, वहीं कई देशों में इस बात पर व्यापक सहमति है कि व्यापारिक व्यवस्था को और अधिक बराबरी वाली बनाना होगा ताकि चीन इसका अनुचित लाभ न ले सके।

भूगत के लिए यह जोखिम और अवसर दोनों साथ लाया है। अगर भारतीय निर्यातक चीन के गलत व्यवहार से प्रेरित तरीकों में

उलझते रहे तो यह जोखिम की बात है। खेद की बात है कि भारत, जिसकी चीन के साथ कारोबार को लेकर अपनी अलग दिक्कतें हैं, उसने न तो अमेरिका को संतुष्ट किया है और न ही यूरोपीय संघ या जापान को। संभव है कि विकसित विश्व की ओर से ऐसा दबाव बने कि विकासशील अर्थव्यवस्थाओं को अंतरराष्ट्रीय व्यापार व्यवस्था के तहत मिल रहे लाभ की पेशकश खत्म कर दी जाए। भारत पर इसका नकारात्मक असर होगा, भले ही वह चीन से पांच गुना गरीब है। इस मसले को हल करने के लिए तत्काल व्यापारिक कूटनीति की आवश्यकता है। भारत को आगे बढ़कर यह सुनिश्चित करना चाहिए कि अमेरिका में बदलता माहौल भारतीय निर्यात को प्रभावित न करे। पहले ही प्राथमिकता की

व्यवस्था समाप्ति की प्रक्रिया में है और एच-1बी वीजा पाना और भी कठिन हो गया है।

भारत को अपने यहां संरक्षणवादी उपायों को लेकर भी सजग रहना होगा। चरलू मोबाइल विनिर्माण, ई-कॉमर्स पर कड़ाई, सरकारी सोर्सिंग नियमन और डेटा का स्थानीयकरण ऐसे ही मुद्दे हैं। अमेरिकी वाणिज्य मंत्री विलबर रॉस ने अपनी भारत यात्रा के दौरान कहा है कि भारत ने निरंतर अनुरोध के बाद भी प्रतिबंधात्मक व्यापार नीतियों को शिथिल करने की पहल नहीं की है। अगर भारत इस नए माहौल का लाभ वैश्विक स्तर पर अपनी छाप छोड़ने में कर सकता है तो उसके पास नए रोजगार तैयार करने के अवसर हैं। बीते कुछ वर्षों में इसकी भारी कमी महसूस की गई।



अजय मोहंती

फंसे हुए कर्ज के समाधान के दिलचस्प मामले

इस हफ्ते कर्ज भुगतान में चूक करने वाली दो कंपनियों के दिवालिया समाधान के बारे में एनसीएलटी का फैसला आने की संभावना है। इससे अवगत करा रहे हैं तमाल बंदोपाध्याय

भारत के दिवालिया समाधान कानून के तहत गठित राष्ट्रीय कंपनी कानून अधिकरण (एनसीएलटी) अगले कुछ दिनों में 6,113 करोड़ रुपये के भारी-भरकम कर्ज से संबंधित दो मामलों का निपटारा कर सकता है। इन दोनों ही कंपनियों पर सबसे ज्यादा बकाया कर्ज भारतीय स्टेट बैंक (एसबीआई) का है। पंजाब नेशनल बैंक, केनरा बैंक और आंध्र बैंक ने भी इन कंपनियों को अच्छा-खासा कर्ज दिया हुआ है।

इन दोनों कंपनियों का नाम वाणिज्यिक बैंकों को भेजी 28 चूककर्ता कंपनियों की उस सूची में भी शामिल था जिन्हें भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक (आरबीआई) ने दिसंबर 2017 के अंत तक एनसीएलटी में ले जाने को कहा था। आरबीआई ने कहा था कि अगर दिसंबर 2017 के मध्य तक ये कंपनियां बकाया कर्ज का भुगतान नहीं करती हैं तो फिर उन्हें एनसीएलटी कार्यवाही का सामना करना होगा। आरबीआई ने जून 2017 में 12 बड़ी चूककर्ता कंपनियों की पहली सूची जारी की थी जिनके खिलाफ दिवालिया प्रक्रिया तत्काल शुरू की जानी थी। उसके बाद आरबीआई ने अगस्त के अंत में संकटग्रस्त कंपनियों की दूसरी सूची भी सौंपी थी। ये ऐसे खाते थे जिनकी 60 फीसदी बकाया राशि को 30 जून 2017 तक बैंकों की गैर-निष्पादित परिसंपत्तियों के तौर पर वर्गीकृत किया जा चुका था। इन दोनों सूचियों में शामिल कुल राशि भारतीय बैंकिंग प्रणाली में फंसे कर्ज का करीब आधा हिस्सा बन जाता है। दिवालिया कानून के तहत किसी मामले का निपटान 180 दिन के भीतर करना होता

है लेकिन उस सीमा को 270 दिन तक बढ़ाया जा सकता है। एनसीएलटी के मुंबई पीठ में उत्तम वैल्यू स्ट्रील्स लिमिटेड और उत्तम गैल्वामेटैलिक्स लिमिटेड कंपनियों के कर्ज समाधान की दो याचिकाओं को स्वीकृति दी थी। बैंकों को 270 दिनों की यह मियाद 3 अप्रैल को पूरी होने के बाद समाधान प्रक्रिया पूरी करने के लिए 20 दिन और मिले।

एक बार चूककर्ता के चिह्नित हो जाने के बाद ऋणदाताओं की समिति (सीओसी) समाधान प्रक्रिया पर नजर रखने के लिए एक समाधान पेशेवर (आरपी) की नियुक्ति करता है। अगले चरण में एक सूचना जापन तैयार किया जाता है और संभावित बोलौकर्ताओं से अभिरुचि पत्र देने को कहा जाता है। बोलौकर्ताओं की योग्यता का परीक्षण करने के बाद उनकी बोलियों का मूल्यांकन किया जाता है और सबसे ऊंची बोली लगाने वाले की पहचान की जाती है और तब सीओसी इसकी जानकारी एनसीएलटी को देता है। इन दोनों कंपनियों के समाधान पेशेवर नियुक्त हुए राजीव चक्रवर्ती (पीडब्ल्यूसी के पार्टनर) को इसी हफ्ते एनसीएलटी से इस समाधान योजना पर स्वीकृति लेनी है। सवाल है कि समाधान योजना क्या है और निविदा में किसने बाजी मारी है? ये दोनों मामले एकल रिज्डकी वाली दिवालिया समाधान प्रक्रिया की प्रगति को रेखांकित करते हैं जिससे संकट में फंसी परिसंपत्तियों के समाधान की लागत एवं समय कम करने की संभावना होती है।

विजेता टीम में संकटग्रस्त परिसंपत्तियों में निवेश करने वाली फर्मों कारवाल इन्वेस्टर्स और नीतिया कैपिटल रिसेसिज एडवाइजर्स के नाम शामिल हैं। उनकी बोली में कहा

गया है कि कारवाल आर्सिल ट्रस्ट एआरसी नाम से एक ट्रस्ट बनाएगा जिसका 15 फीसदी फिलहाल भारत की सबसे पुरानी परिसंपत्ति पुनर्गठन कंपनी एसेट रिक्स्ट्रक्शन कंपनी (ईडीए) लिमिटेड के पास है। इन संकटग्रस्त कंपनियों में उत्तम वैल्यू स्ट्रील्स की महाराष्ट्र के वर्धा में हॉट-रोलड की उत्पादन क्षमता करीब 10 लाख टन है। इसके लिए वह उत्तम गैल्वामेटैलिक्स से बांध पिपा आयरन खरीदती है। कारवाल खाद्य एवं कृषि उत्पादों की दिग्गज कंपनी कारगिल की निवेश इकाई है। वर्ष 2010 में गठित नीतिया कैपिटल लंदन एक निवेश कंपनी है जिसकी कुल हैसियत 1,000 पौंड है। वर्ष 2018 में उसने 2.76 लाख पौंड का घाटा उठाया था।

विजेता बोलौकर्ताओं की तरफ से किए जाने वाले भुगतान के ढांचे एवं कार्यक्रम पर नजर डालते हैं। उन्होंने 2,541 करोड़ रुपये की बोली लगाई है जिसमें से 625 करोड़ रुपये अग्रिम दिए जाने हैं। कर्जदाताओं को एक रकम मिल जाएगी लेकिन ये दोनों कर्जदार कंपनियों को 15 फीसदी ब्याज पर कर्ज के रूप में दी जाएगी। बाकी 1,200 करोड़ रुपये पांच वर्षों के भीतर दोनों कंपनियों के आंतरिक स्रोतों से पूरी की जाएगी। बोलौकर्ताओं का महंगा कर्ज चुकाने के बाद क्या ये कंपनियां इतना कमा पाएंगी कि बैंकों का बकाया लौटा सकें?

इस पैकेज में 198 करोड़ रुपये की कम-से-कम तीन साल के लिए कारोबार प्राप्ति या और बकाया भी हैं। इसके अलावा 248 करोड़ रुपये आपूर्तिकर्ताओं को करीब दशक भर पहले अग्रिम भुगतान के तौर पर दिए गए

हैं। ये आपूर्तिकर्ता प्रवर्तकों- लॉयड्स स्टील इंडस्ट्रीज और फ्रंटलाइन रॉल फॉर्म्स प्राइवेट लिमिटेड की समूह कंपनियां हैं।

यह हिस्सा बैंकों को किए जाने वाले भुगतान की योजना में शामिल है। अगर एक साल के भीतर बैंकों को यह रकम नहीं मिलती है तो उसे बट्टे खाते डाल दिया जाएगा। कुछ व्यापार प्राप्ति या और अग्रिम कई वर्षों से लंबित हैं। आखिरकार 270 करोड़ रुपये राज्य सरकार से सब्सिडी के रूप में आएंगे। इस अनुदान की प्राप्ति को लेकर कई तरह की शर्तें जुड़ी हुई हैं। परिचालक लेनदारों पर कंपनियों के 1,017 करोड़ रुपये बकाया हैं। उन्हें तीन करोड़ रुपये का उदार अंशदान का भी वादा किया गया है। बैंकों को 625 करोड़ रुपये का आश्वासन दिया गया है, 2,541 करोड़ रुपये का नहीं। ऐसे में बैंकों को करीब 90 फीसदी तक का नुकसान (डेयरकट) उठाना पड़ेगा जबकि पहले 60 फीसदी का अनुमान बताया गया था।

इस अंतिम बोली के पहले कई दावे एवं प्रतिदावे सामने आए थे। सिनर्जी मेटल्स ऐंड माइनिंग फंड्स, एआरटी स्पेशल सॉल्यूशन फाइनेंशियल और इन्वेस्टमेंट ऑपरच्युनिटीज प्राइवेट लिमिटेड के कंसोर्टियम ने 3,300 करोड़ रुपये का समाधान प्रस्ताव पेश किया था लेकिन उसे नकार दिया गया था। जेएसडब्ल्यू स्टील लिमिटेड और लिबर्टी हाउस ग्रुप ने भी बोली लगाने की मंशा जताई थी लेकिन उन्हें रोक दिया गया।

अब ये सवाल रह गए हैं:

- करीब 10 अरब डॉलर की परिसंपत्ति का प्रबंधन करने वाली और तीन दशकों का अनुभव रखने वाली कारवाल ने महज 1000 पौंड परिसंपत्ति का प्रबंधन करने वाली नीतिया के साथ जोड़ी क्यों बनाई है?
- क्या नीतिया ने कर्जदाता बैंकों को यह बताया कि उसके चेयरमैन जोहानस सिटार्ड ने अप्रैल में इस्तीफा दे दिया? आर्सेलमिंटल के लक्ष्मी मित्तल के विश्वस्त सहयोगी सिटार्ड ने शायद समाधान योजना रखने के बाद इस्तीफा सौंपा है।
- नीतिया कैपिटल के संस्थापक एवं सीईओ जय कृष्ण सराफ लंदन में रहते हैं। क्या वह 10 लाख टन क्षमता वाले स्टील संयंत्र को चला सकते हैं?
- समाधान योजना में सबसे पहले निवेशकों का पुनर्भुगतान करने की बात कही गई है। इससे क्या बैंकों का बकाया लौटाने की संभावना की क्षमता प्रभावित नहीं होगी?
- सबसे बड़ी लगाने वाले कंसोर्टियम को बेहतर पुनर्भुगतान प्रस्ताव रखने के बाद भी क्यों नकार दिया गया?

निविदा प्रक्रिया बंद होने के बाद भी नई बोलियों लेने से अनावश्यक देरी होती है और प्रक्रिया पर ही सवाल खड़े हो जाते हैं। हालांकि इससे मूल्य आकलन में मदद मिलती है। मेरा मानना है कि बैंक ऑफ़ क्रेडिट, विजया बैंक और कुछ अन्य इस समाधान प्रस्ताव से सहमत नहीं थे। इन दोनों कंपनियों का पूंजीकरण मूल्य करीब 1,350 करोड़ रुपये है जो समाधान प्रक्रिया के तहत बैंकों को दिए गए आश्वासन का करीब दोगुना है। (लेखक बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड के सलाहकार संपादक, लेखक एवं जन स्माल फाइनेंस बैंक लिमिटेड के वरिष्ठ परामर्शदाता हैं)

इस चुनावी मौसम में काम की खबरें क्यों हैं नदारद

मैं जिस संगठन के साथ काम करती हूँ, वह पर्यावरण एवं विकास पर केंद्रित पाक्षिक पत्रिका 'डाउन टु अर्थ' प्रकाशित करता है। इस पत्रिका के प्रकाशन का उद्देश्य पैसे कमाना नहीं है और न ही यह बाजार या वाणिज्य की पैदाइश है। यह हमारे आसपास की दुनिया, रोजमर्रा की जिंदगी और जीवन के बारे में जानकारी साझा करने का जरिया है ताकि हमें ऐसा ज्ञान हासिल हो जो हमें बदलाव लाने की शक्ति दे सके। जब हम कोई रिपोर्ट तैयार करते हैं तो हम अपना मिशन छिपाने की कोई कोशिश नहीं करते हैं लेकिन पत्रकार के रूप में हम जमीनी स्तर से आने वाली खबरों एवं घटनाओं को रिपोर्ट करने की दक्षता में तटस्थता कायम रखते हैं। हमारा आग्रह और राजनीति पूरी तरह मुक्त है, कॉर्पोरेट चमक-दमक के पदों में छिपी नहीं है। लेकिन हम दुनिया में जो बदलाव लाना चाहते हैं उन्हें अंजाम देने के बारे में हम खुलकर चुनौती देते हैं।

आज मैं आपसे आज के भारत और आज की दुनिया में डाउन टु अर्थ और ऐसे दूसरे प्रकाशनों की प्रासंगिकता के बारे में चर्चा करना चाहती हूँ। आज की दुनिया दूसरों के दोष ढूँढने वाली है और पहले कभी भी इस तरह नीचे गिरने की होड़ नहीं देखी गई है। देशों का बदतर रूप देखने को मिल रहा है, लोगों का ध्रुवीकरण करने के लिए नेता जहर उगल रहे हैं। इस द्वेषपूर्ण विमर्श के गर्द एवं गुबार में असली मुद्दे गुम होते जा रहे हैं। इस बहस में संपन्न होने के बाद भी नकद दिया गया।

विवाद प्रक्रिया बंद होने के बाद भी नई बोलियों लेने से अनावश्यक देरी होती है और प्रक्रिया पर ही सवाल खड़े हो जाते हैं। हालांकि इससे मूल्य आकलन में मदद मिलती है। मेरा मानना है कि बैंक ऑफ़ क्रेडिट, विजया बैंक और कुछ अन्य इस समाधान प्रस्ताव से सहमत नहीं थे। इन दोनों कंपनियों का पूंजीकरण मूल्य करीब 1,350 करोड़ रुपये है जो समाधान प्रक्रिया के तहत बैंकों को दिए गए आश्वासन का करीब दोगुना है। (लेखक बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड के सलाहकार संपादक, लेखक एवं जन स्माल फाइनेंस बैंक लिमिटेड के वरिष्ठ परामर्शदाता हैं)



जमीनी हकीकत

सुनीता नारायण

कुछ भी देख रहे हैं उन असली खबरों की सुगबुगाहट को भी चीख में बदलने के लिए कोशिश करना हमारा दायित्व और काम दोनों है।

भारत में आम चुनावों की प्रक्रिया जारी रहने में इस बात को जोर देकर कह रही हूँ। अगले कुछ दिनों में हमें एक नई सरकार मिलेगी या पुरानी सरकार को ही नया कार्यकाल मिल जाएगा। जो भी हो, सच यह है कि हमारे आज और आने वाले कल को प्रभावित करने वाले मसलों पर लिखने के लिए 'डाउन टु अर्थ' जैसी पत्रिकाओं का मौजूद होना जरूरी है।

इस चुनाव में हमने देखा है कि लोगों के लिए मायने रखने वाले असली मुद्दे चर्चा से पूरी तरह बाहर हैं। मसलन, अजीबगरीब मौसम लाकर फसलों को बरबाद करने वाला जलवायु परिवर्तन, इस चुनौती से संपन्न होने के खिसानों को राहत नहीं देने वाली बीमा कंपनियां, किसानों को उनकी मेहनत के बराबर उपज की कीमत न मिल पाना, आजीविका एवं स्वास्थ्य को नष्ट कर रहा प्रदूषण और देश के बड़े हिस्से में बनते सूखे के हालात जैसे मुद्दों पर कोई चर्चा नहीं हो रही है।

ऐसा लगता है कि कोई भी असली मुद्दा हमारी चिंता के केंद्र में ही नहीं रह गया है। असल में, इन मुद्दों को उठाने से लोगों को आकर्षित नहीं किया जा सकता है। सोशल मीडिया भी इन प्रवृत्तियों को नजर अंदाज करता है। नेता आज वहाँ की तुलना दिलाना चाहते हैं कि वे क्षेत्र-विशेष के लिए अहम स्थानीय मुद्दों को भुलाकर भी चुनाव जीत सकते हैं। ऐसे में चुनाव भी जहरीले बयानों और ध्रुवीकृत समाज बनकर रह गए हैं।

लेकिन यह भी एक सच्चाई है कि भले ही इस चुनावी मौसम में उम्मीद करती हूँ।

कानाफूसी

हर्षवर्धन के बोल

अगर केंद्रीय मंत्री और दिल्ली की चांदनी चौक लोकसभा सीट से भाजपा प्रत्याशी हर्षवर्धन की बात पर यकीन करें तो हमारे शरीर को 45 मिनट से अधिक नींद की जरूरत नहीं होती। पेशे से चिकित्सक हर्षवर्धन ने सोमवार को नई दिल्ली में एक संवाददाता सम्मेलन में कहा कि अगर कोई व्यक्ति अपने चेतन और अवचेतन मस्तिष्क को ध्यान और अन्य प्रक्रियाओं के जरिये लंबे समय तक के लिए सुला सके तो उसके लिए 45 मिनट की नींद पर्याप्त होगी। वह चुनावी मौसम में अपनी दिनचर्या के बारे में बात कर रहे थे। उन्होंने कहा कि वह रोज 3 से 4 घंटे की नींद लेते हैं। यह पहला मौका नहीं है जब उन्होंने सामान्य समझ को चुनौती दी है। गत वर्ष उन्होंने कहा था कि मशहूर भौतिकीविद स्टीफन हॉकिंग ने भी यह स्वीकार किया था कि वेदों के सिद्धांत अल्बर्ट आइंस्टाइन के ई=एमसी स्क्वायर के मशहूर समीकरण से बेहतर हैं। हालांकि वह इसका स्रोत नहीं बता पाए थे।

‘साध्वी’ स्वरा भास्कर

क्या अभिनेत्री स्वरा भास्कर राजनीति में आने की तैयारी कर रही हैं? पिछले दिनों मध्य प्रदेश की राजधानी भोपाल पहुंची स्वरा ने भारतीय जनता पार्टी की लोकसभा प्रत्याशी प्रजा सिंह ठाकुर के बारे में अपने बयान से विवाद पैदा कर दिया। एक कार्यक्रम में शामिल होने आई स्वरा ने कहा, 'अगर मैं भी भगवा साड़ी पहन लूं तो क्या लोग मुझे भी साध्वी कहकर पुकारेंगे? क्या यह संभव है?' हालांकि वह सक्रिय राजनीति में नहीं हैं लेकिन वह टिवटर आदि सोशल मीडिया में चर्चा पर सरकार की निरंतर आलोचना करती रहती हैं। अप्रैल में उन्होंने बिहार के बेगूसराय लोकसभा क्षेत्र से भारतीय कान्युनिस्ट पार्टी के प्रत्याशी कन्हैया कुमार के पक्ष में चुनाव प्रचार भी किया था।



आपका पक्ष

देश की बहाल शिक्षा व्यवस्था

पिछले एक महीने से देश में चल रहे चुनाव के कारण जमीनी मुद्दे पीछे छूट रहे हैं। उत्तर प्रदेश और तेलंगाना में शिक्षा व्यवस्था की मार लाखों छात्रों को झेलनी पड़ रही है। तेलंगाना की चंद्रशेखर राव की सरकार में 22 छात्रों ने आत्महत्या कर ली। यह पिछले कई वर्षों की तुलना में सबसे अधिक है। वहां की सरकार ने एक निजी कंपनी को परीक्षा की कॉपीयों की जांच का जिम्मा सौंपा था। कुल 9.74 लाख कॉपीयों में से करीब 3.28 लाख कॉपीयों में कई तकनीकी खामियां पाई गईं जिससे बहुत से छात्रों के अंकों में हेराफेरी की घटनाएं सामने निकल कर आईं। आखिरकार, 22 छात्रों की जान जाने के बाद छात्रों और अभिभावकों के बढ़ते आक्रोश के कारण सरकार ने एक जांच कमेटी बना दी। लेकिन सवाल यह है कि इतने व्यापक स्तर पर सरकारी विफलता का खमियाजा छात्र भुगत रहे हैं। दूसरी ओर देश की हिंदी



पट्टी राज्यों में से एक उत्तर प्रदेश में 10 लाख के करीब छात्र हिंदी विषय में फेल हो गए। दसवीं के 5.74 लाख, 12वीं के करीब 4.23 लाख फेल छात्रों के नाम सूची में शामिल हैं। पत्रकारों के पूछे गए सवालों के जवाब में बोर्ड के अधिकारी कहते हैं कि हो सकता है कि छात्रों ने इन विषयों को गंभीरता से नहीं लिया हो। पिछले

केंद्र तथा राज्य सरकार को शिक्षा व्यवस्था दुरुस्त करने के लिए दोस कदम उठाने चाहिए

साल बिहार बोर्ड में भी परीक्षाफल के दौरान ऐसी घटनाएं सामने आईं थीं। तब उस वक्त की मौजूदा नीतीश सरकार की देश भर में काफी किरकिरी हुई थी। सरकार

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

कि अमेरिका करीब 200 डॉलर मूल्य की चीनी वस्तुओं पर आयात शुल्क बढ़ाकर 25 प्रतिशत कर सकता है। ट्रंप के इस बयान के बाद बाजार में व्यापक असर पड़ा और सेंसेक्स तथा निफ्टी में गिरावट दर्ज की गई। इससे पहले अमेरिका ने ईरान से तेल आयात पर पाबंदी लगाने की बात कही थी। अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति के हालिया बयान के कारण चीन के बाजार में भी गिरावट दर्ज की गई है। अमेरिका के बढ़ते प्रतिबंध के कारण वैश्विक बाजारों में उथल-पुथल मचो चुकी हुई है। इसका खलिखला विकसित देशों की अर्थव्यवस्था पर पड़ेगा। ईरान पर प्रतिबंध लगाने से कच्चे तेल के सबसे बड़ा उत्पादक देश से निर्यात प्रभावित होगा। इससे कच्चे तेल के वैश्विक कीमतों पर प्रभाव पड़ेगा। वर्तमान में भारत ईरान से बड़े पैमाने पर कच्चे तेल का आयात करता है। इसका भुगतान डॉलर में होता है लेकिन प्रतिबंध के कारण आयात प्रभावित होगा और भारत को नुकसान होगा।

संकट में धरती

धरती पर जीवन का प्राकृतिक तंत्र तंत्र गति से नष्ट हो रहा है. दस लाख जीवों और पौधों की प्रजातियाँ विलुप्त होने के कारगर पर हैं. इस त्रासदी से मानव सभ्यता का अस्तित्व भी खतरों में है. पृथ्वी के स्वास्थ्य का पहला व्यापक अध्ययन कर दुनियाभर के 450 वैज्ञानिकों ने इस भयावह संकट को रेखांकित किया है. संयुक्त राष्ट्र द्वारा जारी इस अध्ययन के अनुसार, प्रकृति के नष्ट होने की गति वीते एक करोड़ वर्षों के औसत से सैकड़ों गुनी अधिक है. पहले के युगों में जैविक और भौगोलिक कारकों से बड़े पैमाने पर प्रजातियाँ नष्ट होती थीं तथा परिस्थितिकी में परिवर्तन होता था. परंतु वर्तमान संकट मनुष्य की अंधाधुंध आर्थिक वृद्धि की वजह से पैदा हुआ है. पानी की कमी और जलवायु अस्थिरता के रूप में इसके गंभीर नतीजे भी हमारे सामने आने लगे हैं. धरती पर जीवन के विविध रूपों के सहभागिता से ही सबका अस्तित्व बना और बचा हुआ है. उदाहरण के तौर पर हम मधुमक्खियों को ले सकते हैं, जो परागण में मदद कर दुनिया के 30 फीसदी खाद्य उत्पादन में योगदान करती हैं. जलीय शैवाल पानी को शोधित करते हैं. जंगल बाढ़ रोकने में सहायक होते हैं. मिट्टी में पाये जानेवाले जीव उसकी उर्वरा बढ़ाते हैं. पिछले साल अक्टूबर में बर्लिन विश्वविद्यालय के एक अहम रिपोर्ट में आकलन दिया था कि 1970 से अब तक 60 फीसदी स्तनधारी जीव, रेंगनेवाले जीव, पक्षी, महलियाँ आदि दुनिया से खत्म हो चुके हैं. यदि मानव आबादी में 60 फीसदी कमी आती, तो उत्तर अमेरिका, दक्षिण अमेरिका, अफ्रीका, यूरोप, चीन, ऑस्ट्रेलिया समेत ओशेनिया के

बढ़ते तापमान, आपदाओं की आवृत्ति, जलवायु परिवर्तन और प्रदूषण पर अब ठोस पहलकदमी की जरूरत है. यह पूरी धरती के लिए आपात स्थिति है.

देश व द्वीप खाली हो जाते. इससे तबाही का अंदाजा लगाया जा सकता है. साल 2018 में ब्रिटेन के नेशनल एकेडमी ऑफ साइंसेज के अध्ययन में पहली बार जैव भार का व्यापक आकलन किया गया था. इसके मुताबिक सभी जीवों में मनुष्य की 7.6 अरब आबादी का हिस्सा महज 0.01 फीसदी है, परंतु सभ्यता की शुरुआत से हम स्तनधारियों की 83 फीसदी आबादी और आधे पेड़-पौधों को बर्बाद कर चुके हैं. अगर बर्बादी का यह सिलसिला आज थम भी जाता है, तब भी प्रकृति को पहले की स्थिति में आने में 50 से 70 लाख साल लग जायेंगे. संयुक्त राष्ट्र की रिपोर्ट में स्पष्ट शब्दों में कहा है कि मानव जाति के भविष्य को बचाना है, तो वैश्विक आर्थिक और वित्तीय तंत्र में ठोस बदलाव करने होंगे. तीन साल के अथक अध्ययन के बाद तैयार की गयी 18 सूची में इस रिपोर्ट को 130 देशों की सहमति मिली है जिनमें अमेरिका, रूस और चीन भी शामिल हैं. नीति-निर्धारकों के लिए इस रिपोर्ट की मुख्य बातों को 40 पन्नों में समेटकर पेश किया गया है. इसमें कहा गया है कि इतिहास में मनुष्य ने हमेशा ही धरती को नुकसान पहुंचाया है, पर बोलते पांच दशकों ने भयानक घाव दिये हैं. बढ़ते तापमान, आपदाओं की आवृत्ति, जलवायु परिवर्तन और प्रदूषण पर अब ठोस पहलकदमी की जरूरत है. यह पूरी धरती के लिए आपात स्थिति है.



विशेष शक्ति

जो ईश्वर से प्यार करता है, वह भयमुक्त होता है. ईश्वर अपनी एक विशेष शक्ति के द्वारा पृथ्वी का सब कुछ नियंत्रण कर रहे हैं. जो कुछ होता है, उसका मूल उत्स ईश्वर हैं. उसी उत्स की ओर ऐसे कई विभाजन, ऐसे कई कर्तव्य निर्धारण किये गये हैं, जो अंत तक उनकी धारावाहिकता स्थायी रखे रहता है. जैसे कुछ लोग किसी-किसी देश में शायद उन्मत्ति के लिए विभिन्न प्रकार की कार्यधारा, विभिन्न योजना बना लेते हैं. इतनी फसल होगी, उस फसल को ग्राम से शहर ले जाने के लिए सड़क की आवश्यकता होगी. तो ईश्वर को अज्ञस्त प्रकार की चिंता में व्यस्त रहना होता है, अज्ञस्त प्रकार की भावधारा के संग संश्लिष्ट रहना पड़ता है. अतः उनकी जो गति है, उनका नियंत्रण भी करना होगा. इस नियंत्रण व्यवस्था को ही कहा जाता है यम. हमारी सृष्टि सर्वात्मक है, सर्वतोमुखी है, किंतु वहां नियंत्रण की व्यवस्था नहीं रहने से गोलमाल हो जायेगा. तो यह जो यम या कोई शक्ति क्रियाशील है, उसी एक तत्व से, एक सत्ता से सभी भय करते हैं. भय करते हैं, इसलिए यह शृंखला है. नहीं तो सब कुछ विशृंखलित हो जाता. हवा भय करती है, इसलिए सब समय बहती है. हवा की भी निश्चय इच्छा है कि थोड़ा बैठे, थोड़ा आराम करे, क्योंकि सब समय उसे दौड़ना पड़ता है, किंतु कोई उपाय नहीं है. वह एक सत्ता जो बैठी है, वह चाहती है कि हवा सब समय बहती रहे. वायु का स्वभाव ही है चलना. इसलिए उसका नाम है वायु. नहीं तो ऐसे ही वायु का ठीक अर्थ ही नहीं होता है. जो गतिशीलता की रक्षा करते चलती है, वहीं वायु है. अर्थात् यमराज भी ठीक समय पर विक्रुल घड़ी मिलाकर, जिसके पास जब उपस्थित होना है, ठीक उसी समय पर उपस्थित हो जाते हैं. पहले भी नहीं, पीछे भी नहीं तथा किसी को छोड़ देने का अधिकार उन्हें नहीं दिया गया. जिसका जन्म हुआ है, वहीं यम से भय पाता है. जन्म होने से ही मृत्यु होगी, तब यम के नियंत्रण में वह आ ही जाता है. किंतु यम के इस भय से बचने का उपाय है ईश्वर की शरण में आना. क्योंकि यम ईश्वर से भय करता है.

कुछ अलग

गांव और झोपड़ी की यात्राएं

छुट्टियाँ आ रही हैं. लोग अपने बाल-बच्चों समेत कहीं बाहर जाने का कार्यक्रम बना रहे हैं. इन दिनों बहुत से लोग बच्चों को गांव घुमाने ले जाते हैं. गांवों में लोग कैसे रहते हैं, चक्की पर आटा पीसते हैं कि नहीं, गांव-पैस कैसे पालते हैं, दूर तक लहाते खेतों को देखना कैसा होता है, गांव का खान-पान कैसा होता है आदि.

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हिंदी फिल्मों में दिखे गांव एकाएक रुचि का विषय बन गये हैं. ये प्रेमचंद की कर्त्तव्यों में आनेवाले गांव नहीं हैं. इसमें तो गांव का खाना परोसने के लिए बड़े-बड़े ढाबों, होटलों की व्यवस्था है. विदेशी लोग भारी संख्या में इन्हें देखने आते हैं. जो चीजें अब गांव की दुनिया से भी विदा हो रही हैं- जैसे चक्की, चूल्हा, नारियल की रस्सी की खाट, बोरसी, खरल, छाछ बिलोने वाली बड़ी-बड़ी मथानियां, बैल गाड़ियाँ आदि को भी बहुत सी जगहों पर शो पीस की तरह रखा जाता है. इन्हें इस्तेमाल करती अरतें भी दिखायी जाती हैं. यही नहीं, कच्ची दीवारों वाले छप्पर पड़े घर भी दिखाये जाते हैं. यह बात अलग है कि बाकिरश के दिनों में इन घरों में रहनेवालों पर जो बीबीति है, वह नहीं बताया जाता, क्योंकि इससे यात्रियों का मनोबल गिर सकता है. वे तो भारत के गांवों को किसी अचरज की तरह देखते आते हैं, उनकी समझने की हल करने थोड़े ही आते हैं.

इस पर्यटन में गांव की अरत को कुछ पैसों देकर अपने-अपने स्थान के गीत, नाच-गाने के लिए भी रखा जाने लगा है. क्योंकि लंबे घूंटट काढ़े अपनी-अपनी भाषा में बोलती ये

अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति ट्रंप अपने बड़बोले ही नहीं उटपटांग और अभद्र बयानों के लिए भी खासे बदनाम हैं. विशेषणों की इस सूची में आप अप्रत्याशित को भी जोड़ सकते हैं. दुनिया के लगभग सभी देश अब तक इसके आदी हो चुके हैं. लेकिन, अभी कुछ दिन पहले उन्होंने चीन के विरुद्ध नये और कहीं अधिक कड़े आर्थिक प्रतिबंध लगाने की जो धींस भरी धमकी दी है, वह भौचक्का कर देनेवाली है. ऐसा लग रहा है कि उन्होंने अचानक फिर कलाबाजी खायी है, बिना इसके नतीजों का अनुमान लगाये, क्योंकि दो चार ही दिन पहले उन्होंने यह संकेत दिये थे कि चीन के साथ संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका अब सुलह की पेशकश कर सकता है. उच्च-स्तरीय चीनी प्रतिनिधिमंडल इस वार्ता के लिए निकलने की तैयारी पूरी कर चुका है.

ट्रंप के तेवर मुठभेड़ वाले हैं. उनका मानना है कि अब तक जो चीनी उत्पाद प्रतिबंधों के दायरे से बाहर रखे गये थे, उन्हें भी अविलंब 10 प्रतिशत से बढ़ा 25 प्रतिशत की दर वाले शुल्क के शिकंजे में कसा जायेगा और कोई भी उत्पाद डंड से अभयदान की अपेक्षा नहीं कर सकता. इस पैलान का गंभीर असर चीनी शेयर बाजार पर पड़ा है, जिसके सूचकांक में 5.5 प्रतिशत से अधिक की गिरावट दर्ज हुई है. चीनी पत्र-पत्रिकाओं में ट्रंप को अमेरिकी कॉमिक्स के खलनायक के रूप में चित्रित किया जा रहा है. ट्रंप इस खतरे से बेखबर लगते हैं कि इन प्रतिबंधों का किटना बुरा प्रभाव अमेरिकी अर्थ व्यवस्था पर पड़ रहा है. अर्थशास्त्रियों का मानना है कि अमेरिका में एक व्यक्ति के लिए रोजगार पैदा करने की कीमत लगभग 8,15,000 डॉलर साबित हो रही है. फिलहाल चीन ने इस बात का कोई संकेत नहीं दिया है कि वह घुटने टेकने जा रहा है. इतना ही नहीं चीन ने अमेरिकी चेतावनी को अनसुना कर ईरान से तेल की खरीद में भी कोई कटौती नहीं की है. वह अपनी संप्रभुता का क्षय नहीं होने दे रहा है.



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खतरा काल्पनिक नहीं, वास्तविक है. दुर्भाग्य यह कि हमारे यहां आतंकवाद के खतरे को लेकर इतने मतभेद हैं कि अगर कोई घटना हो जाये, तो उसकी पुनरावृत्ति रोकने के लिए सख्त कदम उठाने का माद्दा भी कमजोर हो गया है.

देश दुनिया से

ट्रेड वार से चीन को होगी हानि

चीन और अमेरिका के बीच ट्रेड वार जारी है. इस युद्ध में अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप भारी दिख रहे हैं. वहीं चीनी राष्ट्रपति शी जिनपिंग को इससे शायद ही लाभ मिले. यदि दोनों देशों के बीच समझौता होता है, तो इससे निश्चित तौर पर ट्रंप को साख बढेगी. वहीं जिनिपिंग की छवि को नुकसान पहुंचने की संभावना है. अमेरिका के साथ चीन के संबंधों को बेहतर बनाने में जिनिपिंग बुरी तरह असफल रहे हैं. इसके विपरीत, 1949 में कम्युनिस्ट राष्ट्र की स्थापना के समय से ही इसके नेता इस संबंध को महत्व देते आये थे. इसका उन्हें भारी लाभ भी मिला था. लेकिन जिनिपिंग आक्रामक व कट्टर हैं. उनके नेतृत्व में आधिकारिक मीडिया में अमेरिकी विरोधी बयानबाजी फैल गयी है. चीनी सरकार एशिया में अमेरिका की सैन्य उपस्थिति को चुनौती देने में लगी हुई है. वह ताइवान और दक्षिण चीन सागर को लेकर भी आक्रामक है. चीन ने अमेरिका से टकराव मोल लेते हुए अलास्का के तट पर अमेरिकी जल के माध्यम से चीनी युद्धतैल भी भेजे हैं. ऐसा उसने बल प्रदर्शन के लिए किया था. चीन के उपरोक्त कदमों को बाखलाये ट्रंप ने चीन के साथ टैरिफ वार शुरू कर दिया, जिसके दूरगामी प्रभाव पड़ने की संभावना है.

ची-इंग लिया

भारत में कुछ अदूरदर्शी विश्लेषक अमेरिका द्वारा चीन की घेराबंदी से हलस रहे हैं, यह सोचकर कि जो काम भारत खुद करने में असमर्थ था- चीन पर अंकुश लगाने का- वह अमेरिका ने कर दिखाया है. हम स्वयं यह मानते हैं कि भारत का स्थायी बैर-भाव चीन से है पाकिस्तान से नहीं, पर इसके बावजूद हम इस घड़ी यह सुझाना चाहते हैं कि अमेरिका द्वारा इस तरह चीन का कद बौना करने की चेष्टा हमारे हित में नहीं. यदि ट्रंप चीन को बंधिया करने में सफल होते हैं, तब भारत को खारिज करना उनके लिए और भी आसान हो जायेगा. वह पहले ही हमें ईरान से अपंग करने में कामयाबी हासिल कर चुके हैं. हमने यह जतला दिया है कि हमारी रीढ़ कितनी लचीली है. यह अपेक्षा करना तर्कसंगत नहीं कि ईरान से तेल की खरीद में कटौती के बाद वह देश हमें चाबहार जैसी परियोजनाओं में सामरिक सहकार के अक्सर सुलभ कराता रहेगा. ईरान की घेराबंदी के लिए अमेरिका ने एक जंगी जहाज इस क्षेत्र में पठाया है, जिसे भड़कानेवाली कार्यवाही ही कहा जा सकता है. इस संदर्भ में हमारा मौन चिंताजनक है.

हम इसी बात से मुदित मन हैं कि हमने मसूद अजहर को अंतरराष्ट्रीय दहशतगर्द घोषित करवाने में कामयाबी हासिल कर ली है. बाकी दुनिया में जो भी घट रहा है,



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यदि हमने चीन की तरह प्रतिरोध का फैसला किया होता, तो चीन के बाद दूसरा सबसे बड़ा बाजार अमेरिका के हाथ से निकल जाता. उसको खुद वाणिज्य युद्ध की बड़ी कीमत चुकाने का दर्द महसूस होने लगता.

से ऐसा लगता है कि वह अभी से खुद को सर्वशक्तिमान समझने लगी है. पेप्सी ने कुछ किसानों पर सैकड़ों करोड़ का मुकदमा दायर कर दिया इस आरोप के साथ कि उन्होंने इसकी बौद्धिक संपत्ति की चोरी की है. यहां इस विषय का

विश्लेषण संभव नहीं पर यह याद दिलाने की जरूरत है कि अंतरराष्ट्रीय कानून तथा भारत द्वारा मान्य संघियों के अनुसार ऐसा दावा दायर नहीं किया जा सकता.

ट्रंप का दुस्साहस इसी कारण बढ़ा है कि वेनेजुएला तथा मेक्सिको में गैरकानूनी हस्तक्षेप की आलोचना करने की हिम्मत हमने नहीं दिखलायी है. हमारा क्लेश इस कारण है कि हम कोई छोटा देश नहीं, जो पारंपरिक रूप से अमेरिका का रक्षित बगलबच्चा रहा हो या उसका संधिभ्रि. यदि हमने चीन की तरह प्रतिरोध का फैसला किया होता, तो चीन के बाद दूसरा सबसे बड़ा बाजार अमेरिका के हाथ से निकल जाता. उसको खुद की एवज में ईरानी तेल आयात की भरपाई सऊदी अरब तथा अमेरिका के तेल से करने का वचन दिया है.

यह फैसले निश्चय ही हमारे राष्ट्र हित में नहीं. ट्रंप की नजर में अगर पहले नंबर पर चीन अमेरिकी हितों को नुकसान पहुंचानेवाला देश है, तो भारत इसके ठीक बाद दूसरे नंबर पर खड़ा है. अगला निशाना वहीं बनेगा. इस बारे में शक की गुंजाइश नहीं कि जल्दी ही भारत को यह चेतावनी दी जाये कि यदि उसने चीन के साथ अमेरिकी प्रतिबंधों के बावजूद आर्थिक व्यापार में कटौती नहीं की, तो उस पर भी कड़े प्रतिबंध लग सकते हैं. कुछ अहकारी अमेरिकी कंपनियों के हिंदुस्तान में आचरण से ऐसा लगता है कि वह अभी से खुद को सर्वशक्तिमान समझने लगी है. पेप्सी ने कुछ किसानों पर सैकड़ों करोड़ का मुकदमा दायर कर दिया इस आरोप के साथ कि उन्होंने इसकी बौद्धिक संपत्ति की चोरी की है. यहां इस विषय का

प्राथमिकता होनी चाहिए सुरक्षा

पूरे चुनाव अभियान के दौरान एक बात लगातार गुंजती रही है कि सुरक्षा खतरा का हव्वा वस्तुतः सतारूढ़ घटक जान-बूझकर लोगों का ध्यान जरूरी मुद्दों से भटकाने के लिए खड़ा कर रहा है. जबसे महजही चरित्र वाला वैश्विक आतंकवाद प्रचंड रूप में सामने आया है हमारे देश में लगातार बहस चलती रही है कि यह खतरा वाकई है या सरकार लोगों का ध्यान भटकाने के लिए भय पैदा करती है? जैसे ही आप देश की सुरक्षा की बात करेंगे एक वर्ग द्वारा आपको त्वरित प्रतिक्रिया मिलेगी कि भाजपा अपनी विफलताओं को छिपाने के लिए राष्ट्रवाद और सुरक्षा की बात कर रही है. यह विषय का कितना सरलौकरण है, इसका अंदाजा उन लोगों को अवश्य है, जिन्हें विश्वव्यापी आतंकवाद के खतरनाक आगामी से लेकर पड़ोस के अन्य मंसूबों का पता है. दुनिया के किसी भी देश के लिए सुरक्षा प्राथमिकता होती है. जिस देश और समाज ने सुरक्षा प्रबंध के प्रति लापरवाही की, उसे भयावह परिणाम भुगतने पड़े. श्रीलंका इसका ज्वलंत उदाहरण है. आईएस ने श्रीलंका में फिर हमलों की धमकी दी है. इस धमकी से परे आपातकाल के बीच कई हजार फौज और पुलिस के जवानों के ऑपरेशन के दौरान बीच-बीच में हो रहे विस्फोट इसकी पुष्टि कर रहे हैं कि पूरे देश में बारूद बिछ गया था. एक दूसरी घटना सैदावरुड में हुई, जहां तलाशी अभियान के दौरान आतंकवादी गोली चलाने लगा. पंधर लोग मारे गये. ऐसी और न जाने कितनी घटनाएं सामने आयेगी. श्रीलंका इस भयावह स्थिति से बच सकता था. भारत ने उसे खुफिया इनपुट दिये थे, अमेरिका ने भी चेताया था, लेकिन वहां के अधिकारी यह मानने को तैयार ही नहीं थे कि आतंकवाद उनके यहां आ सकता है. चर्च पर धमकी की सटीक सूचना भारत ने हमले के दिन एवं उसके कुछ दिनों पूर्व भी दी थी. लेकिन, पुलिस प्रमुख ने उसे गंभीरता से लिया ही नहीं.

वस्तुतः 2009 में लिट्टे के अंत के साथ श्रीलंका आंतरिक सुरक्षा को लेकर धीरे-धीरे निश्चित हो गया था. इसका लाभ उठाकर आईएस से प्रेरित आतंकवादियों ने व्यापक जाल फैला लिया. घटना वह होती है और बयान आईएस जारी कर देता है. वह उन आतंकवादियों के नाम भी बता देता है, जो संघर्ष में या आत्मघाती हमले में मारे गये. जिस नेशनल तौहीद जमात और उसके नेता जाहरान हाशिम को आतंकवाद का मुख्य सूत्रधार माना गया है, उसके बारे में पुलिस को कई बार शिकायतें मिलीं, पर गंभीरता से उसको छानबीन नहीं की गयी. भय यह पैदा हो रहा है कि भारत जिस तरह की मानसिकता में जी रहा है, कहीं एक दिन हमारे यहां भी वैसी स्थिति पैदा न हो जाये. आखिर श्रीलंका हमले के सूत्र भारत से भी तो जुड़े हैं. जाहरान हाशिम गुप्तचुप तरीके से भारत आता था और

उसके भाषण के वीडियो यहां पहुंचते थे. हाशिम 2017 में दो बार भारत आया था और कुछ महीनों तक यहीं रहा. हाशिम तमिलनाडु तौहीद जमात (टीएनटीजे) के साथ भी जुड़ा हुआ था. हालांकि, अभी तक इस संगठन के आतंकवादी गतिविधियों में किसी तरह की संलिप्तता के प्रमाण नहीं है. किंतु यह तथ्य देश को पता होना चाहिए कि एनआईए को कोयम्बटूर में आईएस मांड्रूल की जानकारी मिली और उसकी जांच के दौरान जो कुछ प्राप्त हुआ, उनके आधार पर भारतीय अधिकारियों ने श्रीलंका की खुफिया एजेंसियों को आतंकवादी हमले के संबंध में अलर्ट भेजे थे. एनआईए की जांच के दौरान बहुत सारे तथ्य सामने आये और छह लोग गिरफ्तार किये गये. सात लोगों के खिलाफ न्यायालय में आरोपपत्र लगे हैं. एनआईए की जांच में साफ हो गया कि ये सभी आईएस की हिंसक चरमपंथी विचारधारा से प्रभावित थे.

सोचनेवाली बात है कि जिन आरोपियों की गिरफ्तारी से श्रीलंका में हमला किये जाने की जानकारी मिली, उनसे भारत में हमले की कोई सूचना नहीं मिली होगी. ऐसा हो सकता है क्या? जांच एजेंसियां संपूर्ण मामले के सामने आने के बीच आये तथ्यों को सार्वजनिक नहीं करतीं. अगर ये भारत में पकड़े गये, तो खतरा किसी दूसरे देश के लिए नहीं हो सकता. आप एक वर्ष में ही आईएस से प्रभावित संभावित आतंकवादियों या मांड्रूलों के पकड़े जाने या सामने आने की घटनाओं पर नजर दौड़ा लीजिये, तो आपको आसन खतरों का अहसास हो जायेगा.

खतरा काल्पनिक नहीं, वास्तविक है. दुर्भाग्य यह कि हमारे यहां आतंकवाद के खतरों को लेकर इतने मतभेद हैं कि अगर कोई घटना हो जाये, तो उसकी पुनरावृत्ति रोकने के लिए सख्त कदम उठाने का माद्दा भी कमजोर हो गया है. श्रीलंका तो हमले के बाद जड़ता की स्थिति से बाहर आकर पूरी तरह गतिशील हो गया है. मसनल, बुर्का एवं नकाब पहनने का निषेध, शूक्रवाक को समाज पहने के लिए मस्जिद में एक्जिट न होने, चर्चों को खतरा समाप्त होने तक बंद रखने जैसे कदम उठाये हैं. स्वयं मुस्लिम समुदाय के अग्रणी लोग अगर आकर अपील कर रहे हैं कि सुरक्षा खतरा देखते हुए बुर्का और नकाब नहीं पहनना चाहिए. हमारे यहां ऐसे कदम उठाये जायें, तो धार्मिक स्वतंत्रता पर आघात से लेकर न जाने क्या-क्या आरोप लगने लगे. भारत आतंकवाद ही नहीं, आंतरिक सुरक्षा द्वारा दिये गये बयानों से लड़ने के लिए आवश्यक संकल्प के अभाव वाला देश बन चुका है. पाकिस्तान प्रायोजित आतंकवाद के विरुद्ध कदम भी यहां विवाद के विषय बनते हैं और एक वर्ग तो इसे उन्मादित राष्ट्रवाद का कदम तक साबित करने लगता है. यह स्थिति हर विवेकशील व्यक्ति के लिए चिंताजनक है.



आपके पत्र

मर्यादित आचरण का चौरहरण

इस चुनाव में नेताओं के भाषा का स्तर इतना गिर गया है कि पहले दो जाने वाली निकटतम गाली भी आजकल के नेताओं के मुख से निकलने वाले जहरबुझे कटाक्ष को सुनकर शर्मसार हो जायेगी. ऐसा लग रहा है कि चुनाव नहीं हो रहा है अपितु दो दुश्मन देशों के बीच युद्ध चल रहा हो. हर आने वाले दिनों में उससे भी भयंकर व तीव्र विस्फोटक 'शब्दभेदी' बाण 'छोड़े जा रहे हैं, जो इस देश के शालीन, सभ्य और शिक्षित लोगों के दिलों में इतने मर्मांतक चोट पहुंचा रहे हैं कि वे चोट बम के गोलों से भी अधिक 'पीड़ाव्यक्त' हो रहे हैं. 60-65 साल पूर्व दिवगत हुए सम्मानित पूर्वजों को भी गाली देने और उनके लिए अपमानजनक भाषा के प्रयोग नहीं रुक रहा है. यह बहुत ही दुःखद, निंदनीय और राष्ट्रहानि का काम सर्वथा बर्हसनीय है. भड़काऊ, गाली-गलौज और अमर्यादित भाषा पर तुरंत लगाम लगनी ही चाहिए.

निर्मल कुमार शर्मा, गाजियाबाद

फिर थप्पड़ की गूंज

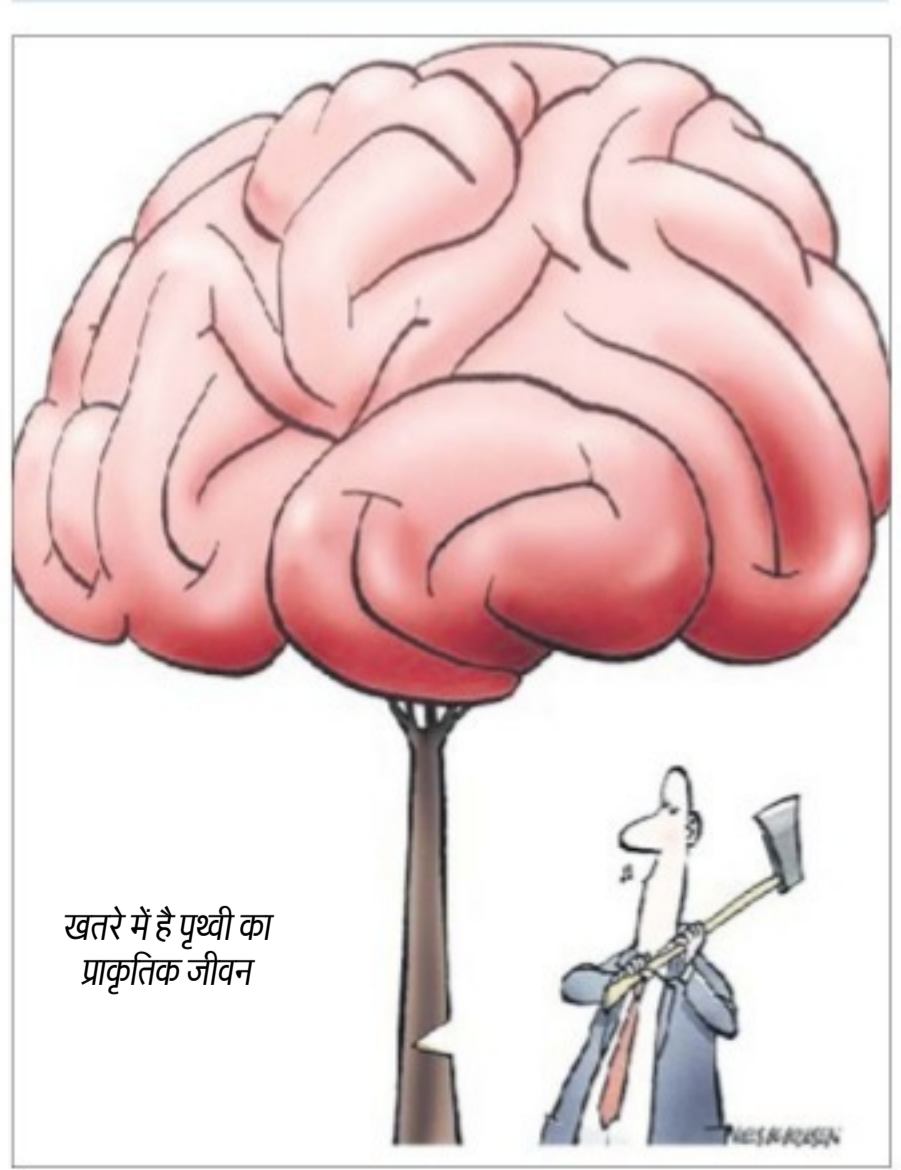
चुनाव प्रचार के दौरान दिल्ली के मुख्यमंत्री अरविंद केजरीवाल को फिर थप्पड़ मारा गया. यह घटना निंदनीय है, लेकिन विचार करने की आवश्यकता है कि बाज-बाज केजरीवाल पर ही ऐसे हमले क्यों हो रहे हैं? यद्यपि हमला करने वाला 'आप' का ही सदस्य और प्रशंसक बताया जा रहा है. परंतु वह सेना पर केजरीवाल द्वारा दिये गये बयानों से वह उनसे अलग था तथा केजरीवाल तथा 'आप' के नेताओं द्वारा प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के बारे में दिये गये बयानों से वह नाराज था. आम आदमी पार्टी तथा इसके सर्वसाधकों को आत्म-विश्लेषण करने की आवश्यकता है कि सेना पर संदेह जताना और नरेंद्र मोदी पर अनर्गल व बिना सबूत के आरोप लगाने से न केवल आम जनता में रोष है अपितु उनकी ही पार्टी के सदस्यों और समर्थकों में भी असंतोष व्याप्त है. आरोप तब तो सही है जब आपके पास सबूत हों, अन्यथा जनता को बेवकूफ नहीं समझना चाहिए.

रातप्रकाश सनोदिया, राँधीगाँ, दिल्ली

आलोचना के प्रति पूर्वाग्रह ठीक नहीं

बुलंदशहर की हिंसा के बाद पूरे देश में गौरक्षा के नाम पर निर्दोष लोगों की हत्या के बाद जिस तरह भाजपा, संघ और उससे जुड़े संगठनों का विरोध हुआ, वह होना चाहिए था क्योंकि लोकतंत्र में जिस तरह पुलिसवाले सुरक्षित नहीं, तो जनता कैसे सुरक्षित हो, इस तरह की टिपण्णी भी कई फिल्म हस्तियों की आयी. लेकिन सहानुभूति की परिभाषा तब क्यों पक्षपाती हो गयी, जब एक पुलिस अधिकारी के सुसाइड नोट में ममता बनर्जी का नाम आया. तब क्यों नहीं विरोध हुआ? ये घटनाएं दिखाती हैं कि समाज अपनी-अपनी विचारधाराओं के अनुरूप अलग-थलग हो गया है. जिस नसीरुद्दीन शाह को सुबोध सिंह की मौत अपने बच्चों पर खतरे की तरह दिखती थी, उनकी पुलवामा हमले पर चुपणी क्या दिखती है? एक सच्चे लोकतंत्र में आलोचना जितनी ज्यादा आवश्यक है, उतनी ही ज्यादा आलोचना के प्रति पूर्वाग्रह उतना ही ज्यादा खतरनाक.

सिद्धांत मिश्रा, फून्पुर, उत्तर प्रदेश



साभार : बीबीसी

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