

Accelerating formalistion

India has become more formal job friendly with recent ESIC reforms



MANISH SABHARWAL & RITUPARNA CHAKRABORTY

In 1965 Professor Milton Friedman warned India that the Mahanalobis economic model being adopted “threatens an inefficient use of capital by combining it with too little labour at one extreme and an inefficient use of labour by combining it with too little capital at the other extreme”. Unfortunately he was right; a dysfunctional labour law regime over the next 50 years ensured that most of our 6.3 crore enterprises have created informal jobs with low productivity that pay low wages. Much regulatory cholesterol still exists but last week’s repricing of health insurance premiums to reflect costs for the Employee State Insurance (ESI) is an

important labour law reform will accelerate enterprise formalization and social security penetration. ESI is often insultingly described as self-financing; unclear what that means because ₹22,000 crore was confiscated from employee salaries last year by the Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC). More painfully, ESIC only paid out 50 per cent of the contributions it collected as benefits. This overcharging has not only lead to an unacceptable ₹75,000 crore cash hoard, the revision of contribution rates from 6.5 per cent to 4 per cent will reduce employee salary confiscation for low wage employees— the only kind covered by ESI — by about ₹7,000 crore. This tweak is not an argument against ESI but an acknowledgement of Renaissance physician Paracelsus’s warning “The dose makes the poison”. Anything powerful enough to help has the power to hurt if administered in the wrong proportion. This revision to contribution rates for the first time in 20 years is important for many reasons. It recognises that there is no reason to be accumulating huge amounts of cash confiscat-

ed from employees. It recognizes that past contribution rates have been higher than required. It recognises that in a cost-to-company world of compensation, salary is the property of employees. It recognises that an unreasonable gap between *chitthi-waali* salary (gross) and *haath-waali* salary (net salary in hand) breeds informal employment. It recognises an appetite to take on vested interests. It recognizes that social security reform is an important component of labour reform. This scepticism about ESI is not cynicism about social security; a modern state is a welfare state and spreading India’s prosperity needs a well designed and sustainably financed safety net. However, ESI’s accountability for outcomes is weak even for plumbing problems; the portal is down often, hard copy requirements exist, hospital visit are often required for photos and doctor signatures, a six month block instead of three months or real time, challenges in transferring contributions and merging numbers, moving away from sub-code wise remittance, disconnect between branch offices and dispensaries, portal

unable to accept accidents reports for the last three months, address of new dispensaries yet provided in portal, unclear procedure for correction of names, Joint undertaking procedure not implemented, and much else. Over the decades ESI has had weak oversight; what else explains the board not fixing excessive contribution rates and poor dispensary service? The only sustainable fixes are competition and governance. Sustaining reform will need governance overhaul; the current board of ESIC is too large (58 members), has too many generalists (no specialised sub-committees), is a geriatric ward (no age limits), has too little turnover among members (no term limits). The board does not think strategically about the Institution of ESI (the provision of health insurance) and ESI as an Institution (its human capital, technology, training, performance management, structure). ESIC needs competition; we must implement the previous NDA budget announcement that employees can choose who manages their premiums. Maybe we should merge CGHS with ESIC; nothing improves services more than getting rid of VIP rooms, lanes and access. If that is not acceptable, a second best choice may be merging ESIC with Ayushman Bharat; a medical rather than trade union “thought world” is better for contributors. ESI’s

dysfunctionality is demonstrated by only enrolling 12 lakh of India’s 6.3 core enterprises over 70 years. GST enrolling the same number of enterprises within two years demonstrates that design is a powerful lever. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar - whose 1943 report laid the foundations for the ESI Act in 1948 - said “A great man is different from an eminent one in that he is ready to be the servant to society”. ESI’s greatness comes from its monopoly rather service to society via capabilities, outcomes, and politeness. This must change. Social security is vital infrastructure but blindly copying the West without their incomes or recognizing the current problems of their safety nets is delusional. Important design issues for ESI - who pays, who delivers, who governs - need further review because an unintended consequence of past design is widespread low productivity employment with most Indian enterprises being dwarfs (small that will stay small) rather than babies (small that will grow). With few formal employers, there are few formal employees. Thankfully recent ESI reform indicates a willingness to deal with the labour laws that don’t protect employees and discourage formal employment.

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A slowdown for smelters

Reduced concentrate output globally and heightened demand from Chinese smelters are to adversely affect the supply of feedstock for Indian smelters

KUNAL BOSE

The close to 1-million tonne (mt) Indian copper industry has three constituents, of which the biggest Hindalco has a 500,000-tonne smelter in Gujarat’s port city of Bharuch. Vedanta’s 400,000-tonne unit at Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu has remained inoperative since March 2018 — first for plant maintenance and then the local government ordering its closure for causing damage to the environment. Of the three, the 76.05 per cent government-owned Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL) is alone vertically integrated from mining of ore to smelting to making value added continuous cast (CC) rods. As Hindalco and Vedanta do not own mines in the country, their reliance on imports of metal in concentrate (MIC) for its smelting into refined copper is total. But this is quite a common global practice with Japan making around 1.5 mt of refined copper based on copper concentrate imports. China, which stepped up copper production by 8 per cent to 9.03 mt in 2018, made record imports of 19.72 mt of concentrate, up 13.7 per cent over 2017. When standalone smelters such as those belonging to Hindalco and Vedanta import MIC for smelting, they get treatment and refining charges (TC/RCs) from mining groups. TC/RC, negotiated between mines and the global smelting industry, is a discount given by mines

for conversion of concentrate into refined copper. TC/RCs are, therefore, a principal source of revenue for smelters. Production of value added CC rods in the downstream, an area of strength for Hindalco is also an important revenue stream for smelters. There is an established pattern to setting TC/RCs on an annual basis at negotiations, invariably intense, held between major miners and smelter owners during the LME week every October and also during Asia Copper week in November, the latter is more focussed on Chinese copper producers. While TC/RCs thus fixed are taken as benchmark for copper concentrate supply contracts for the whole of the following year, a number of factors such as availability of concentrate, which in turn depends on mines in operation in major copper ore producing countries such as Chile, Peru, Zambia and Indonesia and global smelter capacity in operation. Dynamics of TC/RCs are particularly in focus this year. Spot TC/RCs for Asia Pacific are down to their lowest in at least six and a half years, squeezed by ramp-up of MIC consumption by smelters against a backdrop of tightening supply of the smelter feedstock. Worryingly for smelters, which find their margins already squeezed, spot TC/RCs look set to stay under pressure. At the current TC/RCs, there is a major climbdown from January’s \$90-\$94 a tonne. Hindalco



Managing Director Satish Pai has said during a recent earnings conference call that copper concentrate market will likely see a deficit of around 100,000 tonne in 2019. This is to happen because of reduced production at several regions. Grasberg copper mine in which the Indonesian government had acquired 51 per cent ownership, previously majority-owned by Arizona-based Freeport-McMoran is having major production problems as the authorities have laid down rules for disposal of tailings, which are proving to be too difficult to honour. Grasberg, which is the world’s second largest copper mine and unarguably the most complex of all mines with its main pit being at 4 km above sea level is far from finding an economically feasible solution to tailings disposal. This big Indonesian mine

apart, Chile’s Codelco, the world’s top copper miner, reported an 18 per cent year-on-year fall in its first quarter copper production. What could further tell on Codelco production are the unresolved industrial problems. Zambia is coming down hard on miners found to be in breach of environmental and financial regulations. According to Pai, the issues concerning mines in three continents and also the prospect of the “majority of smelters that experienced disruptions in 2018 being fully ramped up” are likely to lend “tightness to concentrate market in the second half of 2019.” The combination of “reduced concentrate output and heightened demand from Chinese smelters is likely to adversely affect TC/RC values at the spot level,” he says. When will the Vedanta smelter

reopen remains anybody’s guess. But whenever operations start at Thoothukudi, there will be some extra pressure on TC/RCs, which move in tandem with concentrate supply situation and demand for smelter feedstock. Not only are the majority of Chinese smelters back in business following their maintenance shutdowns but new smelting capacity of about 400,000 tonnes has been commissioned in the country that accounts for half the world’s copper use. A major concern for the industry is the likelihood of deceleration in global copper ore supply growth as operating mines contend with rising production costs resulting from systematic grade declines and resource depletion, says a DBS Asian Insights report. At the same time, low exploration in recent years is limiting new discoveries. DBS forecast is “global mine production will grow at a CAGR of 2.9 per cent” up to 2022. In the face of tightening of global supply of ore, the demand for copper in India will continue to grow at a healthy rate of around 8 per cent. This is as it should be since this country with a per capita consumption of 0.6 kg is way behind China’s 6 kg and the global average of 2.7, says Santosh Sharma, chairman of HCL. What copper concentrate HCL makes is good to take care of about 5 per cent of national demand. This being the context, Sharma believes that by pulling out all the stops to achieve ore production to 20.2 mt in the next six years from 2018-19 output of 4.122 mt, which yielded 32,439 tonnes of concentrate, HCL will cement its long-term viability.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Bickering over sport

Kerala seems to be moving towards a legal framework to make *Kaalayattam* (bull race), *Kaaliavayal* (bullock-cart race) and *Maramadi* (cattle race) legal. A private Bill has been tabled in the Assembly by MLA Anup Jacob. The Bill claims these are an integral part of the state’s agrarian culture and do not involve cruelty against animals. Reports suggest the government is keen on the Bill being passed without a hassle. The government’s alacrity is understandable, given the furore surrounding *Jallikattu* in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, where the sport was approved through an Act by the Assembly. If this Bill is passed, it would undo a Kerala High Court order in 2015, which said that the Centre’s notification prohibiting the use of bulls as “performing animals” was applicable to sports like *Maramadi*.



First day, first show

On the first day of the 17th Lok Sabha, Members of Parliament turned up in their state or community’s traditional attires, shawls and headgear, while a section wore saffron. Bihar MPs Gopal Jee Thakur and Ashok Kumar Yadav came in traditional Maithili attire and headgear, while most of the Assam MPs donned traditional Assamese *gamocha*. YSR Congress MPs from Andhra Pradesh had their *Angavastram*, dotted with the picture of party chief and Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy. Arunachal Pradesh MP Tapir Gao wore the traditional blue Arunachali jacket. Secretary General of Lok Sabha Snehlata Shrivastava by mistake called Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan to take oath and soon rectified it as the latter is a Rajya Sabha Member.

No samadhi for Vairagyanand

A priest in Bhopal was just going to take *samadhi* (a state of deep meditation) on Sunday when the police moved in to thwart his plan. Vairagyanand Giri had predicted that in the Bhopal Lok Sabha elections, the victory of Congress leader Digvijaya Singh was just a formality. He had also said if, on the outside chance, Singh lost he would take *samadhi*. After Singh conceded defeat to Sadhvi Pragna Thakur of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Vairagyanand Giri was untraceable for a while. At some point, he wrote to Bhopal Collector Tarun Kumar Pithode, requesting him to allow him to fulfil his promise. Pithode rejected the request and asked the police to ensure nothing untoward took place. In a statement Vairagyanand later said, “The *yagna* has failed. I respect the mandate of the people.”

ON THE JOB

Young women return to labour markets



MAHESH VYAS

Labour statistics from CMIE’s Consumer Pyramids Household Survey for the period January-April 2019 shows a perceptible increase in the labour force participation rate of women in the age group 20-24 years. Female labour participation rate in this age group was 13.4 per cent during this period. This is the highest female labour participation rate in this age group since the September-December 2016 survey. We believe that this is a significant development. Female labour participation rates had fallen across age groups after demonetisation in November 2016. The overall ratio has not recovered since, from its pre-demonetisation level which was around 16 per cent. Prima facie, the adverse impact of demonetisation on female labour force participation rate continues. During the January-April 2019 survey, the overall female labour force participation rate was down to 11 per cent. But, this survey also contains signs of a possible turnaround. To avoid any effects of seasonality, we compare the female labour force participation rate during January-April 2019 with the rates during January-April 2018, January-April 2017 and with the pre-demonetisation period of

January-April 2016. During January-April 2016, the female labour force participation rate was 15.7 per cent. This fell to 12.7 per cent in the same months of 2017 and then 11.4 per cent in 2018 and now to 11 per cent in the same four months of 2019. This fall in female labour participation rate was almost across all five-year age groups. We say almost because between 2016 and 2017, there was one exception. In the age group 55-59 years, female labour participation rate did not fall but it rose by 0.18 percentage points. In subsequent surveys, this age group showed substantial fall in the female labour participation rate — by 2.1 and 1.2 percentage points in the 2018 and 2019 survey, respectively. In 2018, while all age-groups showed a fall in the female labour force participation rates, the age-group 20-24 years did not show a fall. It increased, albeit negligibly, by 0.02 percentage points. The two neighbouring age-groups — 15-19 years and 25-29 years showed a fall in the participation rate by 0.6 and 0.7 percentage points. The increase in female labour participation rate was in the age-group 20-24 years. It was too small an increase and was hemmed by other groups that did not show an increase. But, 2019 shows that the small increase seen in 2018 was possibly an early sign of a turnaround. The 20-24 year bracket is a vital age-group when young people join the labour force. Any significant increase in this young age-group is therefore important. The female labour force participation rate of the 20-24 age group increased by 2.5 percentage points from 10.9 per cent during January-April 2018 to 13.4 per cent during January-April 2019. This is significant. The two neighbouring age-groups

also show a small increase in the participation rates. The young 15-19 years age group showed an increase in its female participation rate by a negligible 0.05 percentage points. But, the increase in the 25-29 years age-group is much better at 0.25 percentage points — from 13.04 per cent to 13.29 per cent. Evidently, young women are returning to the labour markets. There is still some distance to travel, though. The labour force participation rate of women in their twenties was around 17.5 per cent in early 2016. In early 2019, it was less than 13.4 per cent. There are two related positive signs regarding female labour force participation rates in the CPHS results of early 2019. First, the fall in female labour force participation rates in 2019 over 2018 is much lower than it was in 2018 over 2017. This is true of all age-groups. And second, the fall in labour participation rate among younger women is much lower than it is among the relatively senior women. While it is heartening to note the return of young women into the labour markets in greater numbers, it is important to highlight the challenges they face in finding jobs. The unemployment rate among young entrants into the labour force is usually high. But, in the case of 20-24 year old women it is exceptionally high. And, the unemployment rate for these also increased sharply in early 2019 compared to the level in early 2018. The failure to provide jobs to these young women may discourage new cohorts from entering the labour markets. The economy needs to meet the aspirations of its young labour force that is keen to work.

The author is the MD & CEO of CMIE

LETTERS

Gold standard



This refers to the report “RBI joins peers to buy gold insurance” (June 17). While it is comforting to note that the RBI is augmenting the gold component in India’s foreign exchange reserves, efforts to account and mainstream the country’s domestic gold stock are not moving fast. This should be done urgently as the measure will bring down the need to import gold which is a drain on our precious forex reserves. According to media reports, recently the Guruvayur temple in Kerala decided to deposit 350 kg out of its gold stock with the State Bank of India; this deposit will earn 8.75 kg gold per annum as interest for the temple. Surprisingly, the gold will have to be transported all the way to Mumbai for refining and standardising to be accepted as deposit by the SBI. Earlier also, the temple had deposited gold with the bank. Other temples like Tirupati and Siddhivinayak (Mumbai) have also deposited part of their gold stocks with banks. One single deposit of Tirupati earns per annum interest equivalent to the value of 80 kg gold.

To make gold deposit schemes popular, measures like starting facilities for refining and certification of standards, building public trust in such schemes and incentives for accounting and mainstreaming gold stocks beyond a threshold level with institutions and individuals will be necessary.

M G Warriar Mumbai

Involve pvt sector



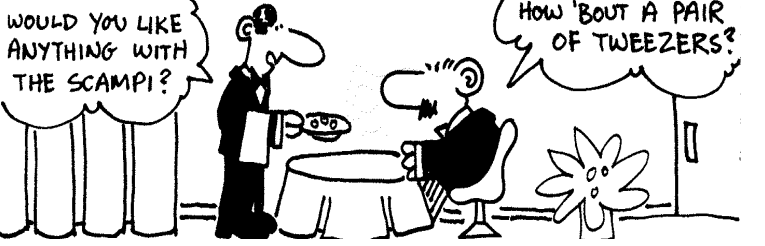
This refers to the article “Navy finds defects in Scorpene” (June 15). It is unfortunate that despite three decades of experience in submarine construction, public sector shipbuilder Mazagon Dock Ltd. is unable to meet minimal operational and safety standards. It is imperative for

the government to involve the private sector in the submarine and warship building programmes for the Indian Navy. This is also a good opportunity to revive several private sector shipyards, which were booming just a decade ago but are languishing now due to a lack of new orders. Several yards are undergoing the insolvency resolution process, but are unable to find suitable bidders primarily due to lack of orders. It would be a wise move to reserve fresh naval orders for the private sector in order to attract leading players in the heavy engineering sector from India as well as abroad to bid for these stressed assets. Fortunately, the state of the art infrastructure commissioned by private sector yards during their peak years is intact. This would also fit in well with the government’s objective to reboot the economy. The experience of China and South Korea has established that compared to other industries, the shipbuilding sector has the highest economic multiplier effect on jobs, investment and growth of ancillary industries. .

S B Bhalarao Mumbai

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HAMBONE



Don't overprice

5G spectrum pricing can't be at the cost of the industry

The ball is in the telecom regulator's court once again to decide the course of the industry at a challenging juncture. Last week, the Digital Communications Commission (earlier Telecom Commission) had asked the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) to review its 5G spectrum recommendations of August 2018, including the steep reserve price set by it then. While the DCC, the highest decision-making body in the government on telecom, took the right step in sending the one-year-old recommendations back to the regulator, keeping in view the stressed financials of the telcos and the overall low-key investment climate, it's up to Trai now to show the way by not falling for the temptation of revenue maximisation for the government. The regulator should rather look at the health of the telecom industry, which is saddled with debts of ₹4.3 trillion, rather than trying to get a big buck from the auction, to be spread across bands, including 3,300 to 3,600 MHz for 5G services.

It's true that the spectrum money is a major revenue source for the government facing a difficult fiscal situation. But Trai's primary responsibility is to ensure the industry does not go down further through extravagant bidding and that the element of competition remains. Established in 1997 by an Act of Parliament after the entry of private service providers, the stated mission of Trai is to create and nurture conditions for the growth of telecommunication. More importantly, it has to "provide a fair and transparent policy environment which promotes a level playing field and facilitates fair competition". Trai must not ignore its mandate.

At the current reserve price for spectrum, across multiple frequency bands recommended by Trai for the upcoming auction this year, the government could mop up around ₹5.83 trillion (\$83.8 billion). But telcos, already caught in a tariff war after the entry of Reliance Jio and its disruptive pricing, could see a further erosion of their earnings if spectrum price, considered among the highest globally, is not brought down. Recent consolidation has resulted in making telecom a three-player industry, which once had more than 10 participants. Any further consolidation or exit will mean the telecom industry will be left with no competition. India cannot afford that scenario.

The aggressive bidding by telcos during the 3G auction in 2010 was the starting point of the industry's decline. By 2016, when telcos were already bruised and had a substantial debt pile, they exercised restraint — the spectrum sale ended in just five days and the government could raise only ₹65,789 crore revenue against ₹5.63 trillion (base price) worth of spectrum put up for sale. If telcos do what they are claiming, the next auction could be a repeat of the 2016 flop show. Two leading companies, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone-Idea, have said they will not participate in the 5G auction at the current reserve price of ₹492 crore per megahertz. According to telecom industry estimates, the recommended base price is 30-40 per cent higher than the rates in markets like South Korea and the US. If the 5G price is not reduced and two top players opt out, it will spell the end of a level-playing field in telecom for years. It's the turn of both Trai and the government, which has the powers to reject the recommendation of a regulator, to act responsibly.

Misplaced sub-nationalism

Mamata Banerjee's latest gamble suggests desperation

When she came to power in 2011, Mamata Banerjee had vowed to change West Bengal: *Poriborton* was the Bengali word she employed in a campaign that unseated the Left Front. Now, having created the conditions for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) juggernaut to make significant inroads in the state by polarising the electorate on religious lines for no good reason, she has chosen to interpret her next challenge in the narrowest possible terms, by invoking Bengali sub-nationalism. Those living in West Bengal would have to learn to speak Bengali, she told a gathering three days ago in a district in south Bengal. Her motive was transparently to identify the BJP with a northern, Hindi-speaking hegemony. Her calculation is that since Bengali speakers account for over 85 per cent of the state, her appeal would act as a cultural rallying point.

If anything, Ms Banerjee has displayed a unique tone deafness. First, the "Hindi/Hindu" identity has patently not deterred Bengalis from voting for the BJP in larger numbers, delivering 18 seats from just two in 2014. Second, she has misunderstood the nature of Bengali sub-nationalism. It is true that Bengalis harbour an elevated sense of cultural pride. The average Bengali will never fail to remind others that her state boasts two Nobel prize winners (Rabindranath Tagore and Amartya Sen), one Oscar winner (Satyajit Ray) and the writer of India's national anthem (Tagore), and a scientist whose name was hyphenated with Albert Einstein (Satyendra Nath Bose) in a famous discovery. Little of this, however, has translated into parochial or nativist predilections. This is principally because the icons of Bengali politics and culture cultivated a national and internationalist outlook.

No one embodies this multi-culturalism more than Bengal's most famous son, Tagore. But even if he were excluded, the list of those with a similar outlook is long and varied: Swami Vivekananda, who contributed to the concept of nationalism in colonial India; Rammohan Roy's Hindu revival movement, which drew on the monotheism of Christian Unitarianism; Bengal School artists such as Nandalal Bose, who incorporated Japanese influence into his unique *oeuvre*; Ray, who admitted to being influenced by Hollywood; Subhas Bose, whose progressive, inclusive politics was ahead of its time. In post-independent India, cultural politics has never been a factor at the hustings, and Ms Banerjee may find herself playing into the BJP's hands if she chooses to invoke it now.

In this respect, she also appears to have a short memory. Just two years ago, her insistence on imposing Bengali in Darjeeling violently revived the movement for a separate Gokhaland. The agitation brought the region to a standstill, impacting tourism and practically destroying that season's tea crop, the state's biggest export earner. Ms Banerjee was forced to backtrack, but should she choose to pursue her linguistic chauvinism anew, Darjeeling could erupt again, adding to the cycle of political violence that is disrupting life in the state. This attempt to rally her base is the latest in a series of mis-steps by Ms Banerjee in countering the BJP. They bear all the hallmarks of desperation and ideological bankruptcy. She urgently needs to come to her senses if what little hold she has over her state and her people is not lost.

Animal lovers



KITABKHANA

T C A SRINIVASA-RAGHAVAN

Book wise, the last six months have been very lucky for me. I have constantly discovered new authors and wonderful books.

First, I found the mystery crime thriller writer, Sujata Massey. Her stories are situated in the Bombay of the 1920s.

Then I found that extraordinary book on the Great Indian Hedge by Roy Moxham. He found that British customs had planted a 2,300 mile-long hedge to prevent the smuggling of salt between British India and Indian India, that is, the princely states.

And last month I chanced upon a book by Radhika Govindarajan, a young anthropologist who teaches in the US. Its title, *Animal Intimacies*, is what drew my attention. It is about the sociological aspects of the relationship between humans and animals in India and is absolutely fascinating, aside from being well written.

Indeed, it reminds me of another book that I came across in a library in Korea in 2013 by the Princeton anthropologist, Marvin Harris. It was called *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches*.

Mr Harris had argued in that book that

people always do something for rational reasons that are grounded in the socio-economic context. Ms Govindarajan, however, doesn't refer to this book. But she does mention a paper by Mr Harris in the bibliography.

Nit-picking aside, this is a seriously good book which all Indians who know English should read. After all, under the new dispensation, animals have acquired a new halo — we are being asked to do things vis-a-vis animals for political reasons as well. Ms Govindarajan discusses this in her chapter on cows.

The other chapters are on monkeys, goats, bears and pigs. It seems each of these animals has a special place in the overall scheme of things.

Swadeshi versus foreign cows

The people of Uttarakhand, at least where Mr Govindarajan carried out her studies,

seem to believe that the Indian *pahari* cow is superior to the imported Jersey one, even though the latter yields more milk and is generally stronger. The *pahari* cow, however, is endowed with divine *shakti* such that it is to be always preferred to the foreign one.

That said, when it comes to slaughter, neither is to be offered up because a cow is a cow and woe be to the nation that allows them to be slaughtered. These are such deep-rooted beliefs that Ms Govindarajan can find no rational explanation for it. She dismisses Marvin Harris's explanation about what economists call value-in-use. It has to be something more she says but is unable to tell us precisely what that something more is except that the *pahari* people and the *pahari* cows have a special relationship.

All that she is able to find out is that there is a bias in favour of the *pahari* cow such that even the cows from the plains are not seen as being comparable. So the prejudice is not just Indian versus Foreign but also *pahari* versus non-*pahari*.

There's something else I learnt: Upper caste people in Uttarakhand who would not sell *pahari* cow milk to the Dalits, had no problem selling them Jersey cow milk.

Bear truths

The chapter on bears is a real zinger. It seems women in Uttarakhand's villages tell stories how bears make off with women and

"do to them what men do to women".

If this sounds outlandish, Ms Govindarajan says similar stories can be found in the West also. Indeed, she quotes a man called Edward Topsell who

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



A question of trust

For investors to return to NBFCs, trust needs to be rebuilt in the financial system and its guardrails

There has been a degree of surprise among observers as to why the NBFC crisis continues to simmer and even worsen. Both NBFC (non-bank financial company) and HFC (housing finance company) stocks were darlings of the markets before the IL&FS default. They were growing very strongly, had good profitability and were beneficiaries of the deepening money and credit markets. At one time, they accounted for almost 25 per cent of the incremental credit growth in the system. The stocks were rewarded with high multiples and were seen as following the same value creation path delivered by the private banks previously.

If these stocks were among the best performers pre September 2018, why is no one willing to buy the sector (bar a handful of companies with strong industrial house backing) today, despite many of these stocks being down between 50 per cent and 75 per cent?

The reason for investor apathy is that there is a total break down of trust in the system. Public market investors do not have access to the books of these financial companies. In the absence of being able to see the loan books themselves, public market investors have to rely on external agencies for confirmation of asset quality, governance etc. It is here that there is a total break down of trust.

Post the IL&FS debacle, rating agencies have lost credibility. How was this highly leveraged and complex giant allowed to remain at AAA or even AA+ for so long? It was only downgraded after defaulting. On what basis were such high ratings given? What about surveillance and monitoring of the ratings? The credibility of the rating agencies was damaged even further once other large NBFCs (many of whom

were rated AAA) were also downgraded to non investment grade and in some cases straight to default. Some of the downgraded institutions have a large quantum of retail fixed deposits and even retail debentures outstanding. Public market investors are currently not willing to take the ratings provided by the agencies at face value. Who knows which institution will get downgraded next? The slew of downgrades seems to indicate that IL&FS was not an isolated incident.

Many institutions which are facing short-term liquidity issues despite reasonable ratings, are suffering from this ratings distrust. In a normal environment, they should have access to liquidity. Yes, there are asset liability mismatches, but everyone does not have a solvency issue. The lack of trust in the ratings is choking off liquidity.

Another similar issue is also with the top auditors in India. All four of them have been caught in one controversy or another. If I am not mistaken, it may be possible that for the coming year none of the top four auditors will be allowed to audit a scheduled commercial bank. Again, there seems to have been serious accounting irregularities at IL&FS. If you can't trust the competence of the auditors, how do you believe the numbers they are signing off on? If you can't trust the accounts, how do you know what is the real asset quality or profitability of the institution. You also have the spectacle of audit firms suddenly resigning from the companies they have been auditing for years. They can resign in a day, but what happens to the shareholders or lenders to these firms? They are left holding the can, as they cannot exit with the stroke of a pen.

The guardrails of the financial system. Rating agencies and auditors, both are under a cloud at



AKASH PRAKASH

How serious is the NBFC crisis?

The Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy statement of June ticked all the right boxes. It delivered the predicted 25 basis point policy rate cut. It said the policy stance had moved from "neutral" to "accommodative", which suggests that further rate cuts could be in the offing. It mentioned that the system had moved to surplus liquidity in June.

But nagging questions remain. One is whether liquidity is adequate to ensure complete transmission of the cumulative cut in policy rates of 75 basis points over the last three monetary policy statements. Out of the 50 basis point (bp) cut in the policy rate prior to the latest statement, 40 bp has been transmitted to the yield on 10-year government securities. However, only 21 bp has been transmitted to the weighted average lending rates.

The RBI Governor said "adequate" liquidity would be available in the system for all productive purposes. What is adequate liquidity? The central bank appears to be guided by the call money rate, whether it is close to the repo rate or not. This may not be the right indicator for judging liquidity in relation to economic growth.

The call money rate could be low because a few large banks have excess funds while small banks cannot borrow beyond a point because of limits on overnight borrowings. Banks may be able to borrow but they cannot lend because they lack enough regulatory capital. The time may have come to provide a liquidity target that the market can readily track and that reflects the growth needs of the economy. The old-fashioned would swear by M3, the broad measure of money supply. Why not restore it? Or provide an equivalent indicator?

Another troubling question: Is there enough liquidity to ward off financial instability? For several months now, the markets have been jittery about systemic risks posed by NBFCs. The jitters have increased

following the downgrades of two well-known NBFCs. The RBI doesn't seem to share the markets' nervousness. The policy statement makes no mention of NBFCs. The RBI has made clear time and again that it does not believe in providing any special liquidity window for NBFCs. It has preferred to focus on overall liquidity and has left it to banks to channel funds to NBFCs on merits.

In his interaction with the media, the RBI Governor seemed to exude a certain confidence about the RBI's assessment of the sector. The RBI, he said, was monitoring developments and was committed to ensuring a "robust, well-functioning NBFC sector". It would take steps required to ensure that developments in the sector did not impact financial stability. The media discerned in the statement echoes of ECB President Mario Draghi's famous quip about doing "whatever it takes" to protect the euro.

So far, the RBI's assessment about the NBFC sector has turned out to be correct. Doomayers had forecast a "Lehman moment" on account of NBFCs last October.

We survived. Then they said that the NBFC sector would have to cross a hump in May. No sign again of a systemic crisis.

If the RBI thinks it has a grip on financial stability, that's great news. But it's not enough that the system doesn't go belly up. Economic growth is flagging. Since NBFCs cannot grow credit as in the past, banks have to fill the gap. Ensuring liquidity is only one part of the story. The other part is providing adequate capital to public sector banks. The big question is whether the finance minister can muster the necessary capital without help from the Bimal Jalan committee on the RBI's economic capital framework.

Mr Subramanian's bombshell

Arvind Subramanian's working paper highlighting

the moment. In the absence of trust in these guardrails, investors will need to see the asset books of the NBFCs and HFCs themselves and come to their own judgement about asset quality and profitability. Public market investors do not have access to the books. We have to rely only on publicly disclosed and available information. In the past, when there was no trust deficit, we could rely on this publicly disclosed information to make investment decisions. There was faith in the quality of the information provided. With trust in the rating agencies and audit firms, there was no need to second guess everything. Today, it is different. The rumours and noise surrounding certain NBFCs also add to the confusion and climate of fear. It is very difficult to think calmly, deploy capital and invest in these leveraged financials when you worry about the accuracy of the numbers and ratings which are in the public domain.

The only way out of this mess, in the short term is for private equity to step up. The private equity shops can ask for access to the books and take the time to do the diligence. They have the ability to see the numbers in much greater detail than public market investors. If a credible private equity shop were to invest in one of these stressed NBFC/HFC, it would add credibility immediately and would crowd in investment from other investors. The investment would signal that what you see is what you get and that we can trust the numbers. The extent of recapitalisation will provide the growth capital needed and reopen access to liquidity.

The other alternative would be for the regulator to do a stress test on the books of these troubled financial institutions. Lay out the assumptions used in terms of stress parameters and disclose the quality of the underlying book. What are the real NPAs? What capital hole, if any, needs to be filled under the stress assumptions used (stress assumptions could be an economic recession, fall in real estate prices, rise in rates etc).

Such a stress test, blessed by the regulator, will give investors confidence around the actual condition of the asset books of many of these NBFC/HFCs and allow investment decisions to be made on hard analysis and not fear.

There is too much gossip around this sector. Every day one hears rumours about one institution or another in trouble. People are worrying about career risk when either lending to or investing in these financial companies. You have a liquidity crisis which is now morphing into a solvency crisis. The only way to kill these rumours is to have a stress test on the asset quality of the troubled institutions. This will stop all the rumours and reopen access to capital for those select institutions which are being unfairly penalised by the markets due to the current environment of distrust.

What started out as a liquidity crisis is now becoming a solvency issue. NBFC/HFCs are being forced to desperately sell good retail assets to maintain repayments. Many have been denied liquidity now for eight months. They have almost entirely stopped lending, with inevitable consequences for the economy. Most will have to be recapped and given new equity. This can only happen if trust is rebuilt in the system and its guardrails.

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the over-estimation of GDP growth in the period 2012-16 has proved less explosive than it seemed at first sight. For a couple of days, habitual BJP-baiters had a field day claiming that the government's economic achievements had been inflated. (They seemed to overlook the fact that three out of the five years covered by Mr Subramanian's findings pertain to the UPA government). But the initial shock at being told that the Indian economy had been reduced to 4.5 per cent crawl seems to have dissipated.

You can't ascribe it entirely to astute media management. Had the findings been credible, foreign investors would have reacted. If India is not the fastest growing large economy, it undermines a key premise on which India has been attracting capital flows. We would have heard from investors, investment bankers and rating agencies. There's been a resounding silence.

A fair inference is that the markets are reluctant to buy Mr Subramanian's thesis. Leaving aside methodological issues, Mr Subramanian doesn't tell us what went wrong in 2012-16. What economic shock caused growth to slump to an average of 4.5 per cent after decades of higher growth?

One plausible factor is the as yet unresolved banking crisis. The Economic Survey of 2016-17, prepared during Mr Subramanian's stint as chief economic adviser, entirely discounted this factor. The Survey noted that, unlike in the US, Europe and Japan, "... it (the twin balance sheet problem) co-existed with strong levels of aggregate domestic demand, as reflected in high levels of growth..." This was more than two years into Mr Subramanian's term.

Mr Subramanian might have circulated his paper more widely amongst academics and amongst the government's agencies and invited a critique before publishing it. His rushing into print with findings that are potentially damaging to India's economic standing has not helped the cause of imported economists.

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wrote about this inter-species lovemaking in detail. Bears, he said, were of "lustful disposition" and did it like men.

But once again, as with the cows, this kind of relationship between humans and animals seems to have no comprehensible explanation. What's more, these stories are all mostly in the female domain. The men know about them, of course, but it is the women who talk about bears, sometimes to shame men into doing to them what the bear will do to them. The bears, of course, are better endowed.

One woman told Ms Govindarajan the following about what her grandmother had told her: "She (the grandmother) said they were doing it for an hour. She saw the whole thing. The sounds!... She said the bears don't get tired. They keep doing it, keep doing it, keep doing it."

Another woman told her: "Just think what if they were to do that to one of us. I would die of exhaustion if he were on top of me for three days".

Anyone would, I guess.

Minor fix on ESIC suggests no big labour reforms soon

Cutting payout to high-cost ESIC good but doesn’t fix issues like giving workers a choice; little hope for big labour reform

REDUCING THE MANDATORY contribution to the Employee State Insurance Corporation—ESIC provides medical and other benefits to 3.6 crore persons today—by over a third will, undoubtedly, be a relief for workers. The move by the Narendra Modi government, however, appears quite timid when seen in the context of just how little ESIC gives workers. Indeed, that is why, in his 2015 budget, then finance minister Arun Jaitley had spoken of how ESIC—and EPFO—had hostages rather than clients, and promised to give workers a choice. In the case of EPFO, Jaitley spoke of the dormant accounts—workers have lost tens of thousands of crore as these haven’t been transferred to their new jobs—and in the case of ESIC, he spoke of its low claims ratio. As a result of the low claims ratio—as compared to 95-100% for most medical insurance, that for ESIC is 37-50%—ESIC’s surpluses have soared from ₹6,162 crore in FY16 to ₹14,936 crore in FY18. As a result, ESIC’s reserves are around ₹75,000 crore today, and the bulk of this is kept in bank fixed deposits; ESIC has so much money, it is even building medical colleges, and all of this is funded by workers who earn an average of around ₹10,000-12,000 per month.

Given how group insurance costs a lot less, surely the government could have given workers more options that cost a lot less and probably give better cover. While LIC, for instance, charges a premium of ₹1,529 per annum to a 20-year-old for a 20-year cover for ₹6 lakh—going up to ₹6,273 for a 45-year-old—the group insurance Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana scheme charges a mere ₹330 for everyone between 18-50. And, as compared to ₹100 per ₹1 lakh of personal accident cover from non-life insurers, the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana charges a mere ₹12 peryear for a ₹2-lakh cover. Group medical insurance—for 3-4 crore persons—would, similarly, cost a small fraction of what individual mediclaim cover does today.

Apart from ₹20,000-crore-plus in dormant accounts which represents a dead loss to subscribers whose money is stuck, even now, the bulk of EPFO investments are made in low-risk PSU bonds. And yet, the EPFO charges 2%—it was 4.4% in 2014—of the monthly contribution as an administrative charge, making it the world’s costliest mutual fund, especially for government securities. Even equity MFs charge around 1% when money is invested directly. Also, while few see this as a cost for workers, the fact that EPFO gives workers just 8-8.5% return versus 12-13% in the National Pension Scheme also means their post-retirement corpus is much smaller if they are tied to the EPFO; at least so far, the government has not given workers the option to move from EPFO to NPS. Given the poor state of jobs creation, India needs a sharp burst of reforms that have to give more flexibility to employers as long as workers are compensated properly; in contrast, apart from steadily raising the minimum wages, state governments even put a cap on how much overtime can be done, and at what wage. While it was hoped the Union government would move on this, especially given the poor state of employment growth in the country, the weak moves on ESIC don’t augur well.

A chronic illness

WB medical crisis a symptom of underfunded public health

THERE IS NO doubt that the West Bengal government could have handled the doctors’ protest in the state—following a junior doctor receiving a non-fatal, but grievous, injury at the hands of a patient’s family alleging medical negligence—a lot better. For one, the olive branch that chief minister Mamata Banerjee eventually extended should have come right at the protest’s germination. Instead, Banerjee gave the striking doctors an ultimatum, of joining work within four hours of her announcement or risking sacking. Thanks to the shoddy handling, doctors across the country struck work in solidarity, tripping the country’s already limping public healthcare system. And, of course, this allowed the issue to become politicised in an unbecoming manner. But, for all of Banerjee’s faults, the fact is that the pressure on the public health infrastructure and talent in the country is crushing and nurtures the conditions that lead to such patient-medico clashes, especially with an effective grievance redressal mechanism summarily absent.

According to the latest National Health Profile (NHP), the average government doctor in India caters for 11,082 patients. In West Bengal, this ratio stands at 1:10,411—while this may seem palatable in comparison to the national average and the worst-performing Bihar’s 28,391 patients per doctor, the WHO’s ideal doctor-to-patient ratio is 1:1,000. As per reports, India’s 462 medical colleges produce 56,748 MBBS graduates every year. Yet, to meet the needs of a population of 1.4 billion, and growing at around 26 million per year, this woefully inadequate—India falls short by as many as 600,000 doctors. Primary health centres bear the worst of this burden, lacking 10,112 female health workers, 11,712 female and 15,592 male health assistants, as well as 3,000 doctors. Close to 2,000 such primary health centres operate without a single doctor, and there is a shortfall of 5,000 surgeons in community health centres—this means nearly all the burden is on the district and municipal hospitals, government medical colleges/hospitals and medical research institutions in the metros.

The crisis of health workers is not limited to doctors; government hospitals in India are short-staffed on paramedical and nursing staff, too, which affects the quality of healthcare delivery. As per the WHO, the minimum is of 22.8 healthcare workers per 10,000 people, and India is among the 83 countries that fail to meet this standard. India lags behind the globally accepted standard for nursing assistants too—despite 3,123 training institutions graduating 125,764 nurses annually, India operates with only 0.1 nurses per physician, or one nurse per 10 physicians, as opposed to the norm of 2.8 nurses per physician. While the central government claims that these shortfalls shall be overcome by 2022 as the number of seats at medical colleges have been increased, government investment in healthcare remains abysmally low. Compared with the global average of 6%, the government intends to invest only 2.5% of the national GDP in healthcare by 2025. According to the 2018 NHP, the investment currently stands at 1.02% of the GDP—or ₹3 per person per day in absolute terms, as per an IndiaSpend analysis. This, of course, places a heavy burden on the patient—nearly 70% of the expenditure on health in India is met out of the patient’s pocket while the global average for out-of-pocket expenditure is 18%—and therefore the crushing pressure on the existing public healthcare infrastructure, including research institutions.

GreaterEVIL

Plastic is a significant environmental threat, but its replacements pose other environmental risks

REPORT BY Denmark’s ministry of environment and food highlights the environmental impact of cotton totes have vis-à-vis low-density polyethylene bags (LDPE). It says, considering all factors besides marine litter—plastic is nearly the sole contributor to this—cotton totes are worse for the environment. The ministry estimates that a cotton tote would have to be reused 7,001 times more than a LDPE bag to prove an effective substitute, thanks to the environmental footprint of cotton cultivation and the manufacturing for the bag. The report also says that transitioning to cotton or paper bags will also affect the environment adversely—because this involves deforestation, ozone depletion, unsustainable usage of water, and toxicity.

The report says organic cotton is even worse—bags from organic cotton must be reused 20,000 times to prove effective as a substitute for LDPE. Cotton is a very water-intensive crop and cultivation could draw a lot of fossil-fuel based power. Similar issues also arise in case of paper, wherein large scale deforestation must occur to cater for that need. For instance, the need to make toilet papers soft has taken a toll on Canada’s boreal forests. As of now, 127 countries favour a ban on single-use plastics. The world has to come to terms with the idea that anything ‘single-use’ will affect the environment drastically; but a ban plastics will not deliver the environmental boon we seek.

● BUDGET STALEMATE

ANY COUNTERCYCLICAL ACTION COULD EXPOSE THE ECONOMY TO UNMITIGATED RISKS. IF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OPTS TO DEVIATE FROM THE NEW GLIDE PATH, THE DEBT WILL FURTHER ACCUMULATE

Modi 1.0 exhausted all fiscal space

DECISIVE POLITICAL MANDATE and a fragile economy have raised expectations for a power-packed FY20 budget. This is anticipated to be significantly different from the interim one. As Modi government 2.0 prepares to reshape revenue parameters in view of the sharp shortfall in FY19 and reorient expenditures accordingly, it is tempting to seek recourse to structural deficit and defer fiscal consolidation permitted by the amended FRBM Act (2018). Many, wary of such a move, counsel restraint. But before adjudicating on the most appropriate fiscal policy in the current context, especially with the financial sector in considerable turmoil, a medium-term macroeconomic risk analysis is called for!

To spend or not to spend

Contrary to Modi government 1.0’s fiscal consolidation claim, the central government’s debt-GDP ratio has inched rather modestly towards 40%, which is what the newly amended FRBM Act (2018) targeted by FY25. Moreover, it piled up much more debt outside the budget, raising extra budgetary resources (EBRs) flagged by the CAG and widely reported in the financial press. Analysts estimate the general government deficit (Centre and States), including these EBRs, at 8.5-9.0% of GDP. The NK Singh FRBM review committee had estimated available total financial resources (domestic and foreign) at 10% of GDP; its broader proposition was for equal distribution between public and private sectors, or 5% of GDP each. Analysts worry that if the largest dissaver, the government, is appropriating about 90% of the economy’s financial surplus, then what is left for the private sector.

Thus, the big picture is amply clear—the resultant high cost of capital is real and crowding-out of private investment a distinct possibility. Many economists, including this author, who were highlighting the role of structural rigidities in obstructing monetary policy transmission, missed this point until the gigantic amount of EBRs came to light. But now, the loop appears complete—lending rates (cost of capital) are high because of high bank term-deposit rates, which compete with small savings, interest



Delhi based economist
Views are personal

rates on which are linked to treasury yield with high term premium. The elevated term premium, in turn, reflects market’s worry about general government debt piling up as financial savings dry out! It is unfortunate the monetary policy committee (MPC) and RBI have been reluctant to flag this.

The fallout has deprived the economy of reaping the dividend from lower inflation. Some analysts advocate that RBI infuse more durable liquidity in the system. But such prescriptions are, at best a short-term solution, raising long-term inflationary concerns. Many also advise the government to lower small savings rates. But here, too, one is not sure if this could trigger a flight of savings to mutual funds and stocks for better yields as long-term inflation expectations remain unanchored. The most sustainable way forward, therefore, is for the government to retreat from further EBR accumulation and stay the course as per FRBM Act, 2018.

What could go wrong?

If the central government opts to deviate from the new glide path or does not rein in EBRs, then debt will further accumulate and inevitably require even sharper corrections in coming years to meet the 40% debt-GDP ratio target for the centre in FY25. If growth concerns persist into FY21, the government might be forced to amend the FRBM Act once more (already revised in 2015, pushing the 3% fiscal deficit target to March 2018, which remains unachieved), further delaying the road map. This would risk credibility, impacting the term premium. It could also complicate the 16th Finance Commission’s job of prescribing fiscal austerity to state governments, which is essential to achieve the general government debt-GDP ratio target of 60% in FY25.

Of course, it could be argued, as indeed some do, what is so sacrosanct

about a 60% debt-GDP ratio! If inflation hasn’t flared up despite such massive government borrowings in the last five years and the current account deficit remained within 2% of GDP (considered sustainable through capital account financing), then why should the government worry? After all, the government deferred the consolidation path thrice in the last five years and heavens will not fall if it did so one more time!

What if growth slowdown is structural not cyclical?

Most analysts characterise the current slowdown as cyclical, which could persist for two quarters before a recovery in H2: FY20. RBI projects a gradual recovery from Q1: FY20 itself, in fact, with GDP growth returning to 7% and above in the second half. But circumspection is required about the nature of new GDP estimates: while consumption moderated somewhat, investment fell quite sharply in the last quarter. Why should that happen? While slower consumption was anticipated following the NBFC stress and consequent lending slowdown, investment was expected to pick up in line with bank credit growth and steadily improving capacity utilisation through FY19.

If these estimates are indeed closer to reality, the presence of some structural elements in deceleration of both consumption and investment cannot be ruled out. Some leading indicators for April-May 2019, for instance, further contraction in motor vehicle sales, slower air traffic growth and deceleration in credit off-take, support such apprehension! For evidence, look at the press analyses of Q4 results: most corporates

faced a sharp increase in interest expenses that significantly impacted net profit margins—early signs of balance sheet stress. If firms could not pass on their costs due to demand constraints, then why should they invest, irrespective of where capacity utilisation stood! If GST, the biggest reform, and the construction of miles of roads and railways under Modi 1.0 have not yielded the efficiency gains to offset the rising cost of capital, then surely it is time to introspect! Under the circumstance, should the government take on more debt to increase the misery of the private sector?

Eternal trouble makers: Oil prices and Capital flows

If growth concerns persist into FY21, the government might be forced to amend the FRBM Act once more; further delaying the road map

Another issue flagged above is if the fiscal deficit during Modi 1.0 was no less than the UPA-II period, then how did inflation not flare up? To us, the answer is very simple: because private investment demand was near-dormant, aggregate demand remained somewhat controlled. As capacity utilisation gradually moves towards a threshold, one would expect private sector investment to revive. But, if the government continues to borrow more, pressures could build up. Luck has favoured the government with low oil prices and abundant capital inflows, but to expect these two volatile elements to remain benign in the medium-term is risky. Global trade and finance is being pushed into layers of uncertainties each day and one can only hope these do not suddenly turn into a volcano, forcing major trading countries towards competitive devaluations! Better to prepare for such eventualities by creating the space for private sector to borrow within the domestic economy.

It is time for reckoning: Set realistic tax and non-tax revenue targets—recognise that ambitious tax revenue targets germinate tax terrorism in non-linearly. Restructure revenue expenditure to create space for capex. Stay the course on borrowings to avoid any unmitigated risks and allow monetary policy to work its way.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Encephalitis deaths

It would seem that India is not a country for poor children. The outbreak of encephalitis has claimed the lives of as many as 83 children in the 1 to 7 age group in Bihar’s Muzaffarpur. It is a human tragedy linked to food security and health care systems. It would be a betrayal of humanity if we ignore the child deaths or develop a sort of mental resistance to them or accept them as a normal state of affairs in our country. Clearly, the victims were undernourished infant children from impecunious families. It is not sufficiently appreciated that chronic malnutrition and abysmal health care make young children especially vulnerable. Politicians promise much in food security and health care, but deliver little. Possibly they don’t show the political will because they attach no great value to the lives of the poor and even consider them ‘sub-human’ and ‘expendable’. Saving the lives of children, an enormous task, must get priority. Many Indian children suffer more malnutrition than in sub-Saharan Africa. Children everywhere and of all nationalities should get nourishing food. If we are truly patriotic, we cannot wait to provide our underfed, anaemic children the required daily calorie-intake. Mere full-throated chanting of Bharat Mata ki Jai won’t do. We cannot be proud of being the ‘world’s third largest economy’ and ‘on the brink of global success’ when children die for want of food and health care. A ‘superpower’ cannot have the ‘largest concentration of impoverished citizens on Earth’ or countenance child deaths in any of its geographical area. —G David Milton, Kanyakumari

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Climate change is an undeniable reality

A constantly changing climate is all that most people on Earth know. Perhaps it’s not a surprise that politics is catching up, and perhaps policy will as well

IN MAY, THE Toronto Star launched an in-depth series on climate change in Canada, with a straightforward title: “Undeniable.” It’s an apt description of the evidence within the reporting and elsewhere in publicly available data.

“Undeniable” might be a useful descriptor, but let’s frame climate change differently: how this reality manifests itself within the human experience, and how politics are being shaped by that experience. Let’s begin with global average temperatures.

Global surface temperatures have surpassed the 1951-1980 average every year since 1977, which means anyone born since has lived their entire lives in an already changed climate.

In 2015, the global median age was just below 30, so a changing climate is the only thing most people on Earth have known.

Different age groups have contrasting views of a climate of constant change and volatility. A recent Gallup poll separated Americans into three climate change cohorts:

■ “Concerned believers” are highly worried about global warming, think it will pose a serious threat in their lifetime, believe it’s the result of human activity, and think news reports about it are accurate or underestimate the problem.

■ “Cool skeptics” hold the opposite views on the same four questions: They worry little or not at all about global warming, do not think it will pose a serious threat in their lifetime, think it’s attributable to natural environmental changes, and think the news exaggerates the problem.

■ Those in the “mixed middle” hold a combination of views. For instance, some

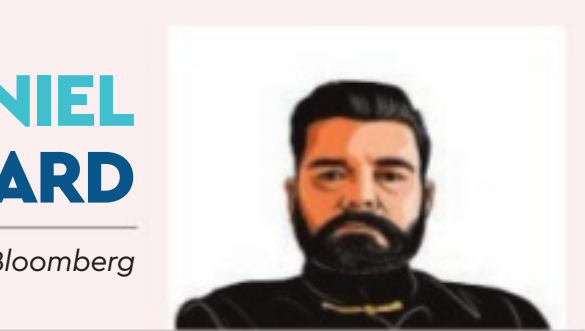
believe global warming is caused by humans but aren’t worried about it, while others express the reverse perspective—saying warming is a natural phenomenon, but they are highly worried about it.

Those cohorts generally map to age: The younger the person, the more likely it is that they are a concerned believer.

But extreme weather is moving public opinion on climate change, too. University of Illinois professor Scott Irwin showed just how dire this year’s intersection of extremely wet weather and the Corn Belt’s planting season is. By the 22nd week of the year in three previous years of extremely late corn planting, at least 80% of the crop was already in the ground. This year, the corn crop was only 67% planted.

That slowing planting progress comes as the U.S. just endured its wettest 12 months since 1895. There’s a trend in this pattern, too, similar to that in global surface temperature: above the 20th-century average not for years, but for decades.

According to the National Weather Service, the Mississippi River’s June 9 crest in St. Louis was the second-highest, behind the 1993 record, and six of the river’s 12 major crests on record have



occurred since 2013. For someone living in the area, those river crests probably don’t feel like outliers; they might begin to register as the new normal. *The Economist*, reporting from flooded Illinois, says “floods and storms are altering American attitudes to climate change.”

This changing attitude can also be seen in the field of Democratic presidential candidates. Elizabeth Warren, who “has a plan for that,” has “My Green Manufacturing Plan for America.” Joe Biden has “Joe’s Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice.” Washington state Governor Jay Inslee has not only America’s Climate Mission, but also a plan for Global Climate Mobilization. In the same way that a changing climate is the reality for most people, it is becoming a political reality.

A constantly changing climate is all that most people on Earth know. Perhaps it’s not a surprise that politics is catching up, and perhaps policy will as well. Markets, too, are catching up, as we’ll explore next week.

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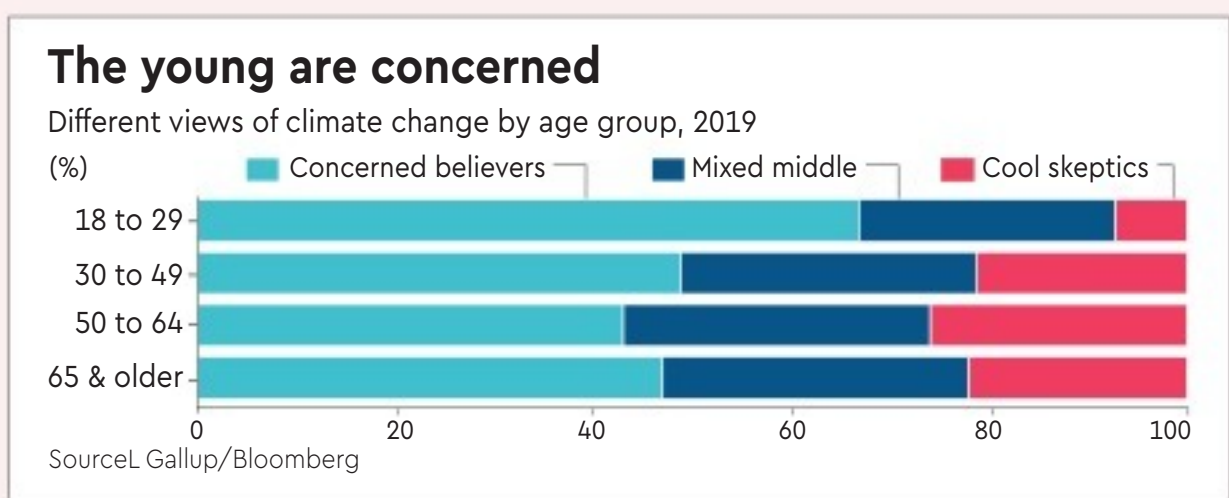




ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

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Economic challenges for the new government

The four major challenges are fixing the country’s financial sector, especially its banks; continuing to reform the tax system; reducing outflows of funds due to loss-making or inefficient government enterprises; and truly reforming the agricultural sector

NARENDRA MODI AND the NDA won a famous electoral victory last month, consolidating political power in a manner that many had not imagined was possible in contemporary India. The country of a “million mutinies” seems to be increasingly aligning with a particular vision of national identity. But political power is no guarantee of success in economic policy. Improving the material well-being of India’s long-suffering masses will require

focused attention to the nation’s economic challenges. What are they? The foremost challenge, I would argue, is fixing the country’s financial sector, especially its banks. Finance is both the fuel and the lubricant of the economy’s engine: fuelling growth by channelling funds to productive investment, and lubricating transactions and day-to-day economic activities. The overhang of debts that are on the balance sheets of banks and other financial institutions, but will almost certainly never be

repaid, prevents new investment taking place to the degree it needs to. The new bankruptcy law, and the Reserve Bank of India’s attempt to make it operational and effective, has run into obstacles, which, if not removed, will allow the situation to linger and even worsen, rather than the hoped-for improvement. In that case, the skyrocketing ranking in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business measure will be meaningless. Whether additional new laws or new regulations are needed is up to the experts, but clearly there has to be political will to move quickly through a process that will inevitably be painful.

The next challenge lies in the country’s tax system. India is closing in on three decades of reform of what used to be a devastatingly inefficient tax system. But it remains an underperformer in terms of its tax-to-GDP ratio, adjusted for its per capita GDP. The goods and services tax (GST) still needs to be simplified and implemented fully. Simplification, and possibly even lowering of rates, can improve both compliance and enforcement. Continuing to broaden the income tax base, and working out an effective and non-capricious way of collecting corporate taxes—especially from multinational corporations—both have to be done. Recent governments have resorted to retroactive tax judgements that undermine certainty and trust, and will only discourage investment. While local and other subnational taxes can often be inefficient, the Centre should consider allowing local and even state governments to increase their tax authority, even by piggybacking income tax surcharges on central collections. This last measure would need a constitutional amendment, but improving the assessment and collection of property taxes requires no legislative change, just political will and administrative competence. Property taxes are relatively progressive and should be difficult to avoid. In any case, increasing public resources in ways that are non-distortionary and non-extortionate is an imperative. The need for these resources to clean up the financial sector mess adds to the urgency.

On the other side of the government’s accounts, reducing outflows of funds due to loss-making or inefficient government enterprises is a third urgent challenge. Air India is the most obvious case, since it burns taxpayer money in a market that serves the relatively well-off. But there are problems across many sec-

tors, including electric power, hospital-ity, and, of course, banking. There is a vicious circle at work here, since there are many existing jobs at stake, while new jobs are not being created rapidly enough. But it is better to sell off such enterprises with restrictions on immediate job cuts, than to perpetuate value destruction: creative contracts are needed. This avenue of reducing government ownership will be important for a sustainable financial sector, beyond the short-run clean-up of balance sheets.

A fourth challenge lies in the agricultural sector. Rural India, where the majority still reside, remains relatively poor and is falling further behind. Restrictions on marketing and trade often constrain the ability of farmers to get the most value for their crops. Intermediaries continue to exert disproportionate power in markets for inputs and products. Crop procurement schemes are inefficient and also subject to intermediary capture. Insurance that reduces risk and uncertainty barely exists, exposing farmers to unsustainable debts that, then, lead to fiscally costly loan waivers. Agricultural

extension has not kept up with the needs of modern agriculture. Thus, the government intervenes inefficiently and in the wrong places, often not doing things where it could really add value. This has been a common theme in Indian economic policy, but agriculture has reformed the least, under cover of protecting the poor, but actually keeping them in relative poverty.

There are other challenges as well, of course, but even tackling just the above four effectively would make an enormous difference. The vice-chairman of NITI Aayog, Rajiv Kumar, spoke of a priority list of “big bang” reforms right after the election results. It included much of the above list, along with other reforms such as ones aimed at labour and land laws. So nothing in the above is particularly original. Further, he spoke of making progress in the first 100 days, which would be remarkable if it happened. Of course, proper formulation and implementation can take time, but even strong public commitments to tackle specific challenges can be useful.

Having a strengthened government with a significant continuity of expertise and decision-making can certainly help in moving forward more expeditiously than is typical for India. Perhaps we will see some truly positive developments in economic policy over the course of the monsoon season.

Rural India, where the majority still reside, remains relatively poor and is falling further behind ... agriculture has reformed the least, under cover of protecting the poor, but actually keeping them in relative poverty

NEW GOVERNMENT

EVEN WITH ALL THE EUPHORIA around India’s election results, the country’s key economic indicators remain depressed. If the economists are right, one of Asia’s largest economies seems to be losing its glitter and sheen. Sales data across consumer goods, automobiles and tractors have slumped. The Index of Industrial Production is virtually stagnant and unemployment is upwards of 7%. Based on overall economic data, India’s economy grew at a six-quarter low of 6.6% in the October-December period. GDP growth for FY19 is pegged between 7.3% and 7.5%, depending on whose estimates you rely on.

Despite the lacklustre economic data, India remains a bright spot in an otherwise uncertain global economic narrative. Now armed with the BJP’s overwhelming victory and decisive mandate, India has a real opportunity to shine brighter. There is a weight of expectations from the new government’s Union Budget to be presented in July, with the hope that a bold set of reforms will help kick-start private consumption, rejuvenate the rural economy and accelerate public expenditure in areas like infrastructure development.

Even as we anticipate what the inaugural Budget will hold, the market for PE investments in India remains positive. In fact, 2018 was watershed year for PE/VC investments, with investments peaking at \$35.8 billion and exits at \$26 billion. Fundraising by PEs/VCs rose by nearly

How will PE/VC investments fare?

BFSI, healthcare, renewables, FMCG present significant opportunities for deal-making

IQBAL KHAN

The author is partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co



40% year-on-year, adding to the vast reserves of dry powder already available in the market. Private equity in India is indeed at a historic inflexion point.

Early data from 2019 suggests that the country’s M&A landscape is off to a strong start, thanks to a number of enabling factors. The first on the domestic front is renewed political certainty after the BJP’s overwhelming win. Foreign investors, in particular, have long remained wary of fragile coalition governments, so a majority win should be a source of comfort. The second factor on the international front is escalating trade tensions between the US and China. The trade war could lead to significant dislocation in the international markets, with countries like India stand-

ing to gain, provided we can transform the economy into a production hub.

The third factor lies in the increasing divestiture of non-core assets as Indian companies seek to reposition themselves to focus on their core business. A recent EY survey showed that 81% of companies planned to divest assets within the next two years, providing plenty of opportunity for both PE investors and strategics. Finally, India’s PE deals have come of age and have demonstrated the potential for successful and well-structured exits: this year will likely see larger and more complex deals, given the assurance investors now have that the Indian market can deliver reliable returns.

In my assessment, the banking and

financial services, healthcare, technology, renewables and FMCG industries will continue to dominate the narrative in 2019, and will present significant opportunities for deal-making this year and beyond. In all such sectors, there is a huge potential for large, complex transactions, focused towards acquisition of control and buy-outs as Indian promoters themselves become more comfortable with the idea of ceding control. Within the healthcare sector, we see new opportunities in pharmaceuticals, particularly in view of the recent developments between the US and China.

The “trade war” between the two economic superpowers has given a new lease of life to Indian API manufacturers who are now seeking to gain a stronger

foothold as China moves from APIs towards innovation. Another significant opportunity for prospective investors within the pharma space is the market for pharmaceutical distribution. India’s pharma distribution market is extremely fragmented and is in urgent need of consolidation. An opportunistic investor could find greater value and opportunity in leading the consolidation process and extracting efficiencies from a newly-created supply chain network.

The renewable energy sector is yet another potent investment theme. India now ranks fourth in the world in wind power-based capacity, and sixth in solar. And yet the addressable market opportunity in renewables is massive—90% of

India’s energy still comes from fossil fuels and nearly two-thirds comes from coal. India has pledged that renewable energy will be 40% of its electricity generation capacity by 2030, but vast gaps in the achievement of this target remain. There is at least a \$17 billion shortage of equity, and a \$36 billion shortage of debt, highlighting an attractive market opportunity.

As with all opportunities, it is best for investors to approach the market with cautious optimism rather than unbridled enthusiasm. While deal volumes look promising, a repeat of 2018 is less likely. An abundance of dry powder and a significant increase in the number of PE players mean valuations will remain high. Investments in IT services will need to be well-thought-through because of the increasing pressure on margins—Indian IT service providers are forced to hire locally due to visa issues.

Additionally, investment activity and deals will remain closely linked to much-needed reforms in the IBC process (for example, introduction of pre-packs and US-style 363 auction sales would substantially increase deal certainty, proper asset valuations and restructuring certainty), and will have to respond to the ongoing liquidity crunch that has followed the retrenchment of PSU banks from the overall economy. If the new government can rise to the challenges of these reforms, it can ensure a healthy pipeline of deals and exits in India. PE investors will then have plenty to write home about.

● FLEXI BENEFITS

Offering holistic employee wellness

ARMAAN SETH

The author is head, HR, Philips India Subcontinent

Employers must see themselves as facilitators of benefits, not just providers

THE SHIFTING PRIORITIES of today’s workforce, rapid evolution of technology and an increasingly competitive talent landscape have contributed to significant adjustments in business models globally. From adoption of smart technology to the rise of automated processes, the business world is becoming more agile by the day. The modern workplace is characterised by technologically-advanced tools, untethered workspaces and the influence of the millennials. To remain relevant in this changing landscape, many organisations are shifting to a more flexible workforce model.

Flexible benefit plans have become increasingly popular with employers these days, as organisations are tapping into the increased functionality, giving employees an opportunity to customise it to their unique lifestyle and needs. According to the recent Deloitte’s study of millennials in India, by 2020, India is touted to have 64% of millennial workforce in the working age group.

The millennial generation is the largest age group to emerge since the baby boomers, and as this group grows significantly as a proportion of the workforce over the next 20 years, organisations will need to make major adjustments in their engagement models. Considering that health and childcare expenditures have risen tremendously over the past several decades, this has had a major effect on businesses’ ability to offer benefits. These allow employees to customise their selection based on their needs and requirements, which are constantly changing. These employee benefit plans may include health insurance, retirement benefit plans, and reimbursement accounts that employees can use to pay for out-of-pocket health or dependent-care expenses. Today’s workforce is hungrier to advance and is more opportunistic than previous generations, and flexible health benefits have become much more pronounced in their minds.

To attract and retain top talent, organisations offer holistic employee wellness through these programmes that suit individual needs as well as provide transparency and flexibility. Offering flexibility gives employees and recruiters more options, and creates a greater pool of talent for them to choose from when looking to hire new people. A key advantage of consumer-driven health plans is these offer current employees better quality of life, and develop mutually-beneficial relationships. Benefits tailored to individual needs can improve employee satisfaction. From the employer standpoint, this flexibility means employers can save money by not spending on benefits that individual employees do not value. This type of plan structure may allow smaller employers a way to offer more benefits without excessive expenditures. But moving to a flexible benefits programme is not easy. It involves redesigning the benefits package with professional employee communications. To justify such a large-scale HR project, the programme must deliver on containing costs and increasing employee satisfaction.

A flexible workforce model addresses concerns specific to each generation. Knowing that baby boomers are looking ahead to retirement or reduced working hours, Generation X is looking for work-life balance and millennials are drawn to work that inspires them, adopting a flexible work model can allow businesses to appeal to a diverse range of talent.

To specifically address the treatment and care of LGBT employees and to provide benefits coverage equally to all employees, organisations have revisited their health benefit programmes to ensure that LGBT couples are eligible for the same company benefits as others. LGBTQ-supportive flexible policies can have an instant effect on individual employees, consequentially creating less workplace discrimination and improved comfort about being openly LGBTQ at work.

In a nutshell, employers are starting to see themselves as facilitators of benefits, not pure providers. They are realising they can get more value by allowing young employees to choose the benefits that suit them best. A healthy person at the beginning of her career, for example, is more likely to want flexible benefits that support an independent lifestyle. In contrast, a long-time employee who is nearing retirement is likely to favour a more predictable structure weighted towards retirement savings. Flexible health benefit packages stand out as one area that can be made more appealing to the millennial workforce, thereby improving employee engagement, attract and retain talent that delivers better outcomes for both employee and employer.





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TELLING NUMBERS

Countries reducing n-warheads but modernising arsenals: report

A REPORT by a think-tank has found that the worldwide total of nuclear warheads has decreased since 2018 but countries are modernising their nuclear arsenals. The 2019 Yearbook of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which is part-funded by the Swedish government, said that nine nuclear-armed countries (including India) had a total of some 13,865 nuclear weapons at the start of 2019, which is a decrease of 600 nuclear weapons from 14,465 at the start of 2018. Figures for North Korea were not added to the total on account of uncertainty.

The report separately counts “deployed warheads” (warheads placed on missiles or located on bases with operational forces) and “other warheads” (stored or reserve warheads and retired warheads awaiting dismantlement). For India, it gives a fig-

ure of 130-140 “other warheads” in 2019, the same as in 2018.

Of the 13,865 nuclear weapons, 3,750 are deployed with operational forces and nearly 2,000 of these are kept in a state of high operational alert, SIPRI said. It attributed the decrease mainly to Russia and the US—which together still account for over 90 per cent of all nuclear weapons—further reducing their strategic nuclear forces pursuant to the implementation of the 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) while also making unilateral reductions. SIPRI added, however, that both Russia and the US have extensive and expensive programmes under way to replace and modernize their nuclear warheads, missile and aircraft delivery systems, and nuclear weapon production facilities.



WORLD NUCLEAR FORCES, JANUARY 2019

COUNTRY	DEPLOYED WARHEADS*	OTHER WARHEADS**	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2018
USA	1,750	4,435	6,185	6,450
Russia	1,600	4,900	6,500	6,850
UK	120	80	200	215
France	280	20	300	300
China	—	290	290	280
India	—	130–140	130–140	130–140
Pakistan	—	150–160	150–160	140–150
Israel	—	80–90	80–90	80
North Korea	—	—	(20–30)	(10–20)
TOTAL	3,750	10,115	13,865	14,465

* ‘Deployed warheads’ refers to warheads placed on missiles or located on bases with operational forces. ** ‘Other warheads’ refers to stored or reserve warheads and retired warheads awaiting dismantlement. Total figures include the highest estimate when a range is given. Figures for North Korea are uncertain and are not included in total figures. All estimates are approximate.
Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2019

TIP FOR READING LIST

WHEN RACE IS TAKEN AS ‘SCIENCE’

LAST YEAR, British science journalist Angela Saini’s widely acclaimed *Inferior: How Science Got Women Wrong — and the New Research That’s Rewriting the Story* examined sexism in science and used scientific arguments to counter various patriarchal notions. Now, in *Superior: The Return of Race Science*, Saini



looks at another misconception in science — that race is a biological entity.

Engaging with scientists and historians around the world, Saini explores the concept of race, and how it evolved. Even great scientists looked at race as a scientific characteristic and white people at the top of the hierarchy. Charles Darwin saw “gradations between the ‘highest men of the highest races and the lowest savages’.. Men were above women and white races above others.” Carl Linnaeus, who pioneered the globally standardised format for biological names, placed humans into four categories identified with colour — red (the Americas),

white (Europe), yellow (Asia) and black (Africa).

After World War II, scientists made an effort to move away from race science. “Scientists have reached general agreement in recognising that mankind is one: that all men belong to the same species, Homo sapiens,” read a statement in 1950 by 100 scientists, policymakers and diplomats, brought together by UNESCO. Saini argues that white supremacists continued to study race science in the shadows, and it is now witnessing a revival. In its review of the book, *The Guardian* cites the example of Richard Spencer, president of the white supremacist organisation National Policy Institute. “Authoritarian leaders around the world look to people like this and to their underlying race ‘scientists’ to add intellectual ballast to their prejudice on issues ranging from equality to immigration,” *The Guardian* review says.

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA & SANTOSH SINGH

MUMBAI, PATNA, JUNE 17

IN THE outbreak of acute encephalitis syndrome (AES) in Bihar, which has witnessed close to 350 cases and 103 deaths until Monday evening, most of these deaths have been attributed to hypoglycaemia, or low blood sugar. Hypoglycaemia is a commonly seen sign among patients of AES, and the link has been the subject of research over the years.

What causes AES?

AES is a broad term involving several infections, and affects young children. The syndrome can be caused by viruses, bacteria or fungi. In India, the most common cause is the virus that causes Japanese encephalitis (JE). Health Ministry estimates attribute 5-35% of AES cases to the JE virus.

In Bihar, the Directorate of Health Services (DHS) claimed that the JE virus had caused only two of the AES cases this year (this assessment came at a time when the total cases were 342). The syndrome is also caused by infections such as scrub typhus, dengue, mumps, measles, and even Nipah or Zika virus. In the latest outbreak in Muzaffarpur, the cause is yet to be clinically identified in most of the children.

How is hypoglycaemia linked to AES?

The combination of AES with hypoglycaemia is unique to Muzaffarpur, Vietnam and Bangladesh. “Hypoglycaemia is not a symptom but a sign of AES. In Bihar, convulsions in children (which is AES) are found in combination with hypoglycaemia. This hypoglycaemia is caused by malnourishment and lack of proper diet,” said Dr Kavinder Sinha, former Director of Health Services in Bihar. With 98% of AES patients in Bihar also suffering hypoglycaemia, doctors are attributing deaths to the latter. A 2014 study in Muzaffarpur by Dr Arun Shah and T Jacob John suggested that hypoglycaemia was the trigger that led to diagnosis of encephalitis

What explains the connection?

In 2014, a research paper, ‘Epidemiology of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome in India: Changing Paradigm and Implication for Control’ drew a parallel between cases in Bihar’s Muzaffarpur and in Vietnam’s Bac Giang province. In both places, there were *litchi* orchards in the neighbourhood. “The possible association with some toxin in *litchi*



One of many children admitted at SK Medical College, Muzaffarpur. Santosh Singh

or in environment needs to be documented. Methylene cyclopropyl glycine (MCPG) which has been known to be a content of litchi fruit has been shown to cause hypoglycaemia in experimental animals,” the study said.

Dr Sinha said when *litchi* harvesting starts in May, several workers spend time in the fields. “It is common for children to feed on fallen *litchis* and sleep without food. The toxin in *litchi* lowers blood sugar level during night, and these children are found unconscious in the morning,” Dr Sinha said.

However, this remains a subject of debate. “If toxins from *litchi* were causing hypoglycaemia, then these cases should have remained consistent each year and affected children of all socio-economic strata. This year, all deaths have all been recorded in the lower income groups,” said Dr Ragini Mishra, Bihar state surveillance officer. She added that while the cause of AES is still being researched, hypoglycaemic AES may be caused by malnutri-

tion, heat, lack of rain, and entero-virus.

What is the history of AES in this region?

The first AES case was recorded in 1995 in Muzaffarpur. Eastern UP too sees frequent outbreaks. There is no fixed pattern, but a year with high temperature and scanty rain usually witnesses high cases. “Last year we had very few cases (in Muzaffarpur). A few days of high temperature was usually followed by rain showers. This year, the heat has been prolonged with no spells of rain,” said Dr Mishra. There were 143 deaths in 2013 and 355 in 2014, which dropped to 11 in 2017 and 7 in 2018.

What makes this region so vulnerable?

Malnutrition is high in both states, and malnourished children are prone to infection. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare data show UP and Bihar together account for over 35% of child deaths in country. National

THE SYNDROME, THE VICTIMS

AES affects the central nervous system, mostly in children and young adults. It starts with high fever, hampers neurological functions causing seizures, confusion, delirium, even coma. An outbreak usually happens during the monsoon (June-October); cases are also reported during April-June in Bihar.

AES DEATHS IN BIHAR

2014	355	2017	11
2015	11	2018	7
2016	4	2019	103

AES IN INDIA

6% Fatality rate in India

632 deaths across 17 states

25% Fatality rate among children

10,485 cases diagnosed in 2018

■ Bihar & UP worst affected; cases also reported from Assam, Jharkhand, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Tripura,

Source for India figures: NVBDCP

Family Health Survey-4 data show that in 2015-16, 48% children aged less than five in Bihar were stunted — the highest in India.

A team from the Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta, and Christian Medical College, Vellore, has concluded that heat, humidity, unhygienic conditions and malnutrition, unique to these areas, together contribute to the rise in AES. Incidence is higher in *litchi* fields around which malnourished children live.

How is the government tackling AES?

The Bihar government introduced free vaccines at all primary health centres. The current coverage is 70%. The central and state governments have conducted awareness campaign since February asking people not to expose their children to sun, ensure a proper diet and increase fluid intake. Dr R D Ranjan, DHS director, said early hospital referral and standard treatment for convulsions, high fever and vomiting can save lives.

GM cotton: what is allowed, what farmers sowed

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS

PUNE, JUNE 17

LAST WEEK, a group of more than 1,000 farmers gathered in a village in Akola of Maharashtra to sow seeds of an unapproved, genetically modified variety of cotton, defying government regulations. The government is now investigating what was planted.

The event was organised by Shetkari Sanghтана, a farmers’ union once led by the late Sharad Joshi. About two decades ago, Joshi had led a campaign for the introduction of genetically modified food crops. The campaign played a major role in the approval for Bt cotton, a transgenic variety of cotton.

What is allowed

Bt cotton remains the only GM crop allowed to be cultivated in the country. Developed by US giant Bayer-Monsanto, it involves insertion of two genes viz ‘Cry1Ab’ and ‘Cry2Bc’ from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* into cotton seeds. This modifica-

tion codes the plant to produce protein toxic to Heliothis bollworm (pink bollworm) thus making it resistant to their attack. The commercial release of this hybrid was sanctioned by the government in 2002.

In India, it is the responsibility of the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) under the Environment Ministry to assess the safety of a genetically modified plant, and decide whether it is fit for cultivation. The GEAC comprises experts and government representatives, and a decision it takes has to be approved by the Environment Minister before any crop is allowed for cultivation.

Besides Bt cotton, the GEAC has cleared two other genetically modified crops — brinjal and mustard — but these have not received the consent of the Environment Minister.

The variety now sown

The farmers in Akola planted a herbicide-tolerant variety of Bt cotton. This variety (HtBt) involves the addition of another gene, ‘Cp4-Epss’ from another soil bacterium, *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*. It is not cleared

by GEAC. The farmers claim that the HtBt variety can withstand the spray of glyphosate, a herbicide that is used to remove weeds, and thus it substantially saves them de-weeding costs. Farmers spend around Rs 3,000-5,000 per acre for de-weeding. Along with the uncertainty in finding labour, de-weeding threatens economic viability of their crops, they say.

Why it’s a concern

Genetic changes made in a plant can make it unsafe for consumption, have adverse impacts on human or animal health, or introduce problems in the soil or neighbouring crops. There is an elaborate process of tests and field trials to be followed. Critics of GM technology argue that some traits of genes start expressing themselves only after several generations, and thus one can never be sure about their safety.

What the law says

Legally, sale, storage, transportation and usage of unapproved GM seeds is a punishable offence under the Rules of

Environmental Protection Act 1989. Also, sale of unapproved seeds can attract action under the Seed Act of 1966 and the Cotton Act of 1957. The Environmental Protection Act provides for a jail term of five years and a fine of Rs 1 lakh for violation of its provisions, and cases can be filed under the other two Acts.

Farmers who assembled in Akola alleged that the HtBt variety is being surreptitiously used by farmers across the country, smuggled from abroad. Maharashtra’s Commissioner of Agriculture has registered 10 police cases and impounded 4,516 packets of HtBt seeds this year alone.

What next

Akola’s District Collector has assured that farmers will not face any action but organisers of the event would be acted against. The district administration has sent samples of the sown seeds to a laboratory in Nagpur to verify whether they were indeed an unapproved GM variety. The Environment Ministry has written to the state government seeking a factual report on the incident.

New ISI chief: his rise to post, what his appointment signals to world, India

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

MUMBAI, JUNE 17

ON SUNDAY night, Lt General Faiz Hameed was appointed the new director general of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence, the military-led spy agency. The ISI, with its outsize say in national politics and foreign policy, not least in shaping Pakistan’s “mullah-military alliance”, is today among the world’s most significant intelligence agencies.

Though it is the Prime Minister who appoints the ISI chief “in consultation” with the Army chief per the Constitution, in reality it is the Army who decides who he wants in the job. In turn, the DG ISI is answerable only to the Army chief. He is the *de facto* number two in the Pakistan Army, and arguably in the country after the Army chief. That seems truer today as the civilian government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan struggles to get into stride, and the Army’s influence grows. Pakistan daily *The News* reported on Monday that the government is in the process of setting up an Economic

Security Council with Army chief Gen QamarJaved Bajwa as one of the members.

The appointment

Lt Gen Hameed replaces Lt Gen Asim Muneer, who was appointed to head the ISI only eight months earlier. No other ISI chief has had a shorter stint. He has been moved as Corps Commander Gujranwala.

After Lt Gen Naveed Mukhtar and Lt Gen Muneer, Hameed is Bajwa’s third spymaster since he became Army chief. His appointment was foreshadowed when he was promoted to a three-star general along with three other major-generals in April 2019.

His appointment, announced by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Sunday night along with a host of other appointments in the Army, comes months before Gen Bajwa’s three-year term ends in November 2019. Like Bajwa, Hameed is also from the Baloch Regiment. In his new role, he carries heft enough to see off challengers to Bajwa within the Army in case he wants an extension. That would last until 2022, when Hameed would be among a small group of



Lt General Faiz Hameed

generals favourably positioned for the top job.

Rise to prominence

Immediately prior to his appointment as the head of ISI, Hameed led the counter-intelligence wing of the ISI. He most famously brokered a deal that ended a siege on Islamabad by protesters of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik, in November 2017.

The Labbaik, an extremist Bareilly group, was protesting a change in the oath of office

in the Elections Act that it said diluted Pakistan’s anti-Ahamadiyya laws. The then PML(N) government headed by PM Shahid Abbasi had to cave in to its demands, including the resignation of then Law Minister Zahid Hamid. The agreement brokered by the Army, bears Lt Gen Hameed’s signature as a guarantor. The document ended with praise for the Army, and gratitude to General Bajwa for “special efforts” and “for saving the nation from a big catastrophe”. As the crowds dispersed, a major-general was reportedly seen distributing white envelopes with Pak Rs 1,000 each to the protesters.

Earlier this year, a Supreme Court bench, which had taken *suo motu* the case of the 2017 seige, said members of the armed forces should not engage in any political activity, and passed adverse remarks against the ISI, and said the events around the sit-in continue the perception that the intelligence agency interferes in the country’s politics.

The wheel has turned full circle. While Hameed is now ISI chief, a reference has been brought against Justice Faez Isa who wrote the verdict.

Hameed was also in the eye of a storm ahead of the 2018 Pakistan elections when former PM Nawaz Sharif accused him of engineering defections from his PML(N) to Imran Khan’s PTI. At the time, Director-General ISPR Lt Gen Asif Ghafoor came out strongly in Hameed’s defence, stating “[then] Maj Gen Hameed has played an important role in combating terrorism and his detractors do not understand the scope of his post”.

What India will watch for

As the head of the ISI, which is known as a ‘state within a state’, Hameed will practically run Pakistan from the shadows and crucial aspects of its foreign policy, including relations with India, and will be in charge of safeguarding Pakistan’s interests in the ongoing “Afghan peace talks” between the US and the Taliban.

From New Delhi, he will be watched for how he directs the relationship of the ISI with the two UN-designated terrorist groups focused on India, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Lashkar-e-Taiba/Jamat-ud-dawa, and their leaders, Masood Azhar





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Claiming the Indo-Pacific

India must play a key role in shaping the narrative in the region



GIRISH LUTHRA

SEARCH FOR CURE

Clashes involving doctors and patients underscore the need for institutional initiatives to restore the relationship

THE DOCTOR'S STRIKE in Kolkata's NRS Medical College that snowballed into a nationwide stir has flagged the faultlines in the doctor-patient relationship. More than three lakh physicians in several parts of the country struck work on Monday in response to a call by the Indian Medical Association (IMA); their counterparts in West Bengal called off a week-long strike late evening after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee agreed to their demands. The IMA has demanded a safe working environment and a "national law against violence in hospitals". There can be no quarrel against this demand. However, it's also a fact that 19 states, including West Bengal, have passed the Protection Of Medicare Service Persons And Medicare Service Institutions (Prevention Of Violence And Damage To Property) Act, which outlaws attacks against physicians. Offenders can be sentenced to jail term of up to three years and levied a fine of Rs 50,000. The failure of such remedies to curb violence against medical personnel points to deeper problems that dog the doctor-patient relationship in the country's hospitals.

The atmosphere at the emergency, casualty or OPD wards of most government — and private — hospitals is nowhere close to being congenial for those suffering serious illness. Tempers often run high when patients have to contend with overcrowded and unhygienic facilities, the waiting time to meet specialists is painfully long and several visits have to be made to get even basic investigations conducted. At the same time, the debate on medical ethics in India has not progressed much beyond the doctor-patient binary. This has not only prevented the satisfactory resolution of complex systemic problems pertaining to the rights of patients and physicians, but has also resulted in junior doctors becoming the face of the failure of the country's healthcare system. One such doctor incurred the wrath of a deceased patient's family at NRS Medical College.

Whatever be the provocation, the violence against doctors is inexcusable. But the episode lays bare an aspect of the country's healthcare system that hasn't received adequate attention in the policy discourse: Physicians, especially junior doctors, lack the communication skills to engage with emotionally-charged relatives of patients suffering life-threatening diseases. Such skills hold the key to building trust between doctors and their patients — or their relatives. The doctor's relationship towards patient is largely paternalistic. This means that very rarely does a doctor convey to a patient, in a jargon-free language, the complexities of his ailment or counsels him about dealing with its symptoms or prepares him mentally for a long-drawn therapy. Young doctors have scarcely any training in being empathetic while conveying bad news to patients' relatives. These lacunae have much to do with the IMA's dwindling credibility. Hit by several scams in the past five years, the internal regulator of medical practice in India has failed to be an interlocutor between doctors and patients. The NRS incident underscores the need for institutional interventions to rebuild the doctor-patient relationship.

APATHY AND DENIAL

The deaths of manual scavengers in Gujarat must serve as a catalyst: The matter can no longer be brushed aside

AMONG THE MOST significant steps undertaken by the Narendra Modi government in its first term was ending the culture of silence around sanitation. Unfortunately, the zeal of the Swachh Bharat Mission does not seem to have percolated to those at the bottom of the social and economic pyramid in urban India. The death of seven people — three hotel staff and four cleaners — in Dabhoi, a town in Vadodara district, Gujarat, while cleaning a septic tank, is a shameful symptom on many counts. First, it highlights how the provisions of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 continue to be flouted. The deaths are also a reminder of the fact that official statistics, including in Gujarat, serve only to brush under the carpet the fact that manual scavenging continues.

According to the Gujarat Safai Kamdar Development Corporation, sewers are no longer cleaned manually. Yet, as recently as June 2018, four cleaners died after inhaling noxious fumes in a sewer in Vadodara. This seeming contradiction can be explained, at least partially, by the fact that private contractors, some of which are reportedly employed by municipalities across India, frequently flout the safety provisions of the 2013 Act. State governments appear to be in denial of this reality: An inter-ministerial task force set up in 2017 found in its survey across 12 states that the number of manual scavengers was under-reported by about 400 per cent. The implication is clear — most states either severely under-report, or are simply unaware, of the scale of the problem.

The path, going forward, is clear. First, municipalities and state governments across the country, following the example of Delhi and Hyderabad, must ensure that every sanitation worker is provided with equipment that ensures their safety. This must include basic materials like gloves, masks and helmets, to the sewer-cleaning machines that the Delhi Jal Board is ensuring that former manual scavengers, and the families of those who have died manual scavenging, are provided through low-interest bank loans. Second, operators in the private sector must be given both carrot and stick: Any violation of the Prohibition of Manual Scavengers Act must be dealt with severely and the use of the latest technology incentivised. Finally, the Swachh Bharat's ambit must, on a mission mode, ensure that the apathy and denial that has surrounded the practice of manual scavenging, both in governments and the society at large, be put to an end.

DADDY COOL

US politicians get a reminder from electorate that parenting matters even in presidential polls

HANGING DIAPERS AND keeping track of your child's football matches might come with more perks, as male politicians on the campaign trail for the 2020 US presidential race are realising. It could, for instance, also translate into a happy electorate and what can be more win-win than that? For the first time, male candidates are faced with the question that has dogged their female counterparts for years — what about the children then? The dads in the political fray seem to recognise this changing dynamic, stepping up to acknowledge that parenting is a two-person job.

When it comes to the pursuit of greater professional glory, men — and not just politicians — often seem to have an invisible opt-out clause written in their contracts. It's only in the last decade, with the rise and rise of social media bridging the gap between the personal and the professional, that politicians have realised the efficacy of letting their electorate get a glimpse of their emotional lives. One of the first American presidents to successfully negotiate the thin line between privacy and emotional connect was Barack Obama, who spoke regularly about his daughters, Malia and Sasha. Unlike Obama, the Republican Sarah Palin, pitched as the hockey mom who also fought corruption, failed to garner empathy for her political ambitions when she ran for the vice president's office, not least for her decision to contest when she had a baby with Down Syndrome and two other children at home.

Yet, you only need to look at New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to realise that contemporary politics has scope, even if limited, to accommodate ambitions and go beyond gendered roles. And that, as for women, it's equally possible for men to be hands-on parents and still run for the highest office of the land.

THE PREVAILING AND emerging international order, characterised by a new form of internationalism and hazy geopolitics, finds centrality in the Indo-Pacific region. It is the new arena for strategic rivalry, within the bounds of interdependence, and all major players have made Indo-Pacific-related policy and posture pronouncements in the recent past. The region's share of world merchandise trade is over 75 per cent and its seaports are the busiest in the world. Its contribution to global GDP is around 60 per cent. The region is also critical to world energy flows, for both suppliers and consumers. The rise of China (and President Xi Jinping's grand Belt and Road Initiative), the realignment of US global strategy, the new approach adopted by India, Japan, ASEAN, France and other key players and new partnerships have further underlined the salience of the region.

It is true that the Indo-Pacific has some very diverse sub-regions, where systems, environments and challenges differ widely. Yet, the region is now a coherent strategic space due to its increased interconnectedness. The geographical expanse of the region, however, is open to interpretation. While the US considers this region to be from "the West Coast of the United States to the western shores of India", the other perception includes the area from "the East Coast of Africa to the West Coast of the United States".

There is an increasing recognition of the importance of maritime security, maritime commons and cooperation. In the last few years, almost every joint or vision statement at the end of summit-level talks or meeting between major maritime powers accords high priority to maritime security and stability.

China has made a decisive move from a continental to maritime mindset, with its maritime orientation becoming central to its overarching ambition of seeking a new model for great power relations. The Chinese posture has underlined the need for an equal and equitable world order, and has stressed that the American approach to global and regional issues has become redundant. The US Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, released on June 1, outlines the US posture and plan to retain its influence in the region, through partnerships and preparedness. It underlines the strategic rivalry with China, identifying it as "a revision-

There is need to give shape and substance to SAGAR, with an appropriate implementation plan. Bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral, and multilateral partnerships in the Indo-Pacific should be strengthened. India should initiate new cooperative projects, and accelerate the momentum of ongoing projects in infrastructure, manufacturing, trade and tourism, with special focus on connectivity, coastal areas and ports.



AJEY LELE

LAST WEEK, INDIAN Space Research Organisation (ISRO) head K Sivan spoke about India building its own space station by the end of the next decade. The announcement came as a surprise, but ISRO seems to have been working on this project for some time. The first indication came in 2017 when Rs 10 crore was budgeted for an orbital rendezvous and docking experiment between two satellites. Docking expertise is essential when two separate free-flying units in space are required to physically link with each other. This technique is important to link the space shuttle with the space station. The second indication was when the human space flight mission (2021/22) was announced in August 2018. This suggested that India was preparing to undertake microgravity experimentation.

India's space station is expected to be very small with limited utility. It would be placed in an orbit, 400 km above earth. ISRO has mentioned it would start planning for the station only after the successful completion of a manned space flight, slated for 2022. ISRO has now called for proposals for experiments, including docking, to be carried out on the orbiting platform (PS4-OP). For the last few years, ISRO has been experimenting with its PSLV rocket in different ways. Now, a single PSLV rocket can put satellites in different orbits. PSLV launch vehicle is a four-stage rocket. On two occasions (PSLV-C44 and PSLV-C45

NEW HORIZONS

ISRO should invite private sector to join in building the proposed space station

missions) in 2019, ISRO successfully converted the fourth stage (PS4) of the rocket into an orbital laboratory. Such laboratories are normally hosted on space stations.

Since the project is in the inception stage, some questions about the proposed space station should be asked.

First, is India trying to reinvent the wheel? Should India not have participated in the International Space Station (ISS) experiment? The ISS is now in the last leg of its existence and is expected to become redundant during 2024-28. India could not have been a part of the ISS in its heyday since it was excluded from such projects because of Delhi's nuclear policy; ISRO and DRDO were taken out of the export control list only in 2011.

Second, what are the scientific benefits of microgravity experimentation? It offers the scientific community a range of subjects to conduct research in, from astronomy and meteorology to biology and medicine. Also, materials is one arena where India should make major investments. Breakthroughs in this field would have major commercial and strategic benefits.

Third, why is India planning for a very small space station? ISS, which is a joint project of 16 countries (the US, Russia, Europe, Japan, etc), is a 400-tonne station, while the proposed Chinese space station (Tiangong programme) is likely to be a 80-tonne station.

India is proposing a 20-tonne station to serve as a facility where astronauts can stay for 15 to 20 days. Would it not be wise to have a project with much bigger dimensions where scientists can stay longer? There is a need for ISRO to learn from the past experiences of missions to the Moon and Mars. These missions offered limited scope for scientific experimentation since India's heavy satellite launch vehicle, GSLV, was not ready in time, and ISRO could not send heavier scientific payloads. But with India making a breakthrough with cryogenic technology, ISRO is expected to have better options by the end of next decade to carry a heavier payload to the low earth orbit.

Fourth, is the project economically viable? Cost consideration could emerge as a major issue. So, India must involve the private sector in such projects. Recently, NASA has declared that the ISS would be open for commercial business and people could "purchase" a ticket to visit ISS. India could think of developing such projects under a public-private partnership model.

Major projects like the space station are national projects. They may not offer any immediate scientific/technological benefits, but investments must be sustained. Private industrial houses within India should be encouraged to participate in such projects.

The writer is senior fellow, IDSA, New Delhi



EXECUTIONS ORDER

THE SUPREME COURT notice of June 8, asking the Union government to request all states to stay executions till the constitutional validity of the death sentence has been decided, has yet to reach the government. The notice was issued on writ by Mal Singh, challenging the constitutional validity of death sentence under Section 302 of the IPC. The section leaves it entirely to the court's discretion to award death sentence on a conviction for murder. Officials of the law and home ministries said they had not so far heard anything on the subject from the SC. The states are also not aware of any such notice since they are to be informed about this only by

the Centre.

POWER CRISIS

THE CLOSURE OF industrial units in Bombay and the rest of Maharashtra had a telling effect on industry and the working class on the first day of the five-day closure. Enquiries revealed that most of the industrial and textile units in the city observed complete closure, rendering thousands of workers idle. A mill owners association spokesman said practically all the 61 textile units in the city, including those managed by the National Textile Corporation, remained closed entailing the industry a loss of over Rs 3 crore per day. He said those laid off would be paid 50 per cent

of their wages as lay-off compensation.

ARMS CUTBACK

THE UNITED STATES president, Jimmy Carter, outlined his proposals for cutting nuclear arsenals in the 1980s to the Soviet president, Leonid Brezhnev. Their military chiefs opened direct consultations for the first time since World War II. "I think he sees in it a greater probability of peace and stability," a senior US official said of Brezhnev's reaction to Carter's arms control proposals. The official, who declined to be identified, said one result could be cutbacks in one weapons systems beyond these constrained by the SALT II treaty to be signed tomorrow.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

A new approach

Jal Shakti Mantralaya should promote decentralised, but integrated water resource management and service delivery



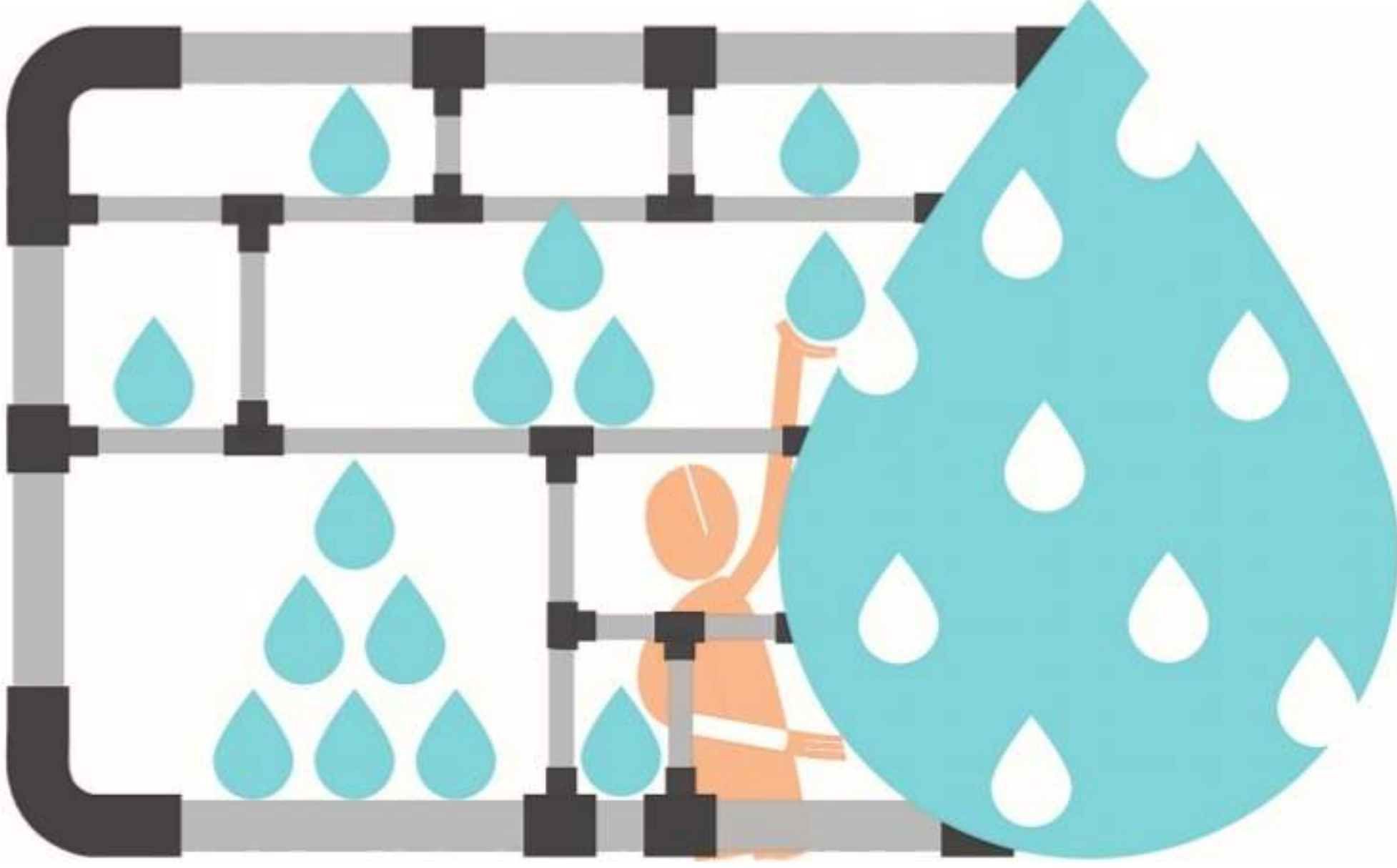
PARAMESWARAN IYER

WATER IS AT the top of the development agenda of the new government, as emphasised by the prime minister at Niti Aayog's governing council meeting last week. Encouraging the participating chief ministers to give top priority to the subject of water in all its different avatars, especially conservation, the prime minister emphasised that the first concrete step taken by the central government towards a holistic and integrated perspective on water has been the constitution of the new Jal Shakti Mantralaya. This bold institutional step has integrated the erstwhile Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation with the former Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, and has led to the formation of a single new ministry focused on water with a capital W. This is a major step towards the consolidation of the management of water resources with delivery of drinking water and sanitation — a much-needed step in the direction of ensuring India's water security — as well as a thrust towards the goal of providing safe and adequate piped water supply for all households.

Until now, the institutional landscape for water in India has been somewhat fragmented, with about seven ministries and more than 10 departments having a say on different aspects of water management and use. Not only have these had some overlapping roles and responsibilities, but no single body had the ultimate oversight and authority necessary to resolve conflicting issues and take the necessary decisions. This led to these ministries and departments working in silos. While the Niti Aayog had made a solid start at integrating the sub-sectors of water by creating an integrated water management index and ranking states on this basis, the creation of the new Jal Shakti Mantralaya is a big bang governance reform which will have a permanent and positive impact on integration in the water sector.

Integrated water management in India has never been more relevant than it is today. India is entering water crisis territory, with certain estimates indicating that water demand will exceed supply by a factor of two by 2030 if we continue with a business-as-usual approach. This has the potential of driving economic losses of an estimated 6 per cent of GDP by 2050, and potentially leading to a significant percentage of our population having limited or no access to drinking water. Recent satellite data has also shown that India's taps could run completely dry in the medium term, with cities like New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad completely running out of groundwater.

Some inefficiencies in the water sector have led to challenges with respect to important outcomes such as rainwater storage, and greywater treatment and reuse. Presently, India captures only eight per cent of its annual rainfall, among the lowest in the world. Lack of proper maintenance of existing infrastructure causes further losses of almost 40 per cent of piped water in urban areas. Treatment and reuse of greywater is almost non-existent. As a benchmark, Israel, another country facing severe water shortages, treats



CR Sasikumar

100 per cent of its used water, and recycles 94 per cent of it, meeting more than half of its irrigation needs through this reused water.

In terms of drinking water, while 81 per cent of all habitations are currently estimated to have access to 40 litres of water per day through some source, only about 18 to 20 per cent of rural households in India have connections for piped water supply. One of the priorities of the new government is to provide piped water supply to all rural households by 2024 in a sustainable manner. The Jal Shakti Mantralaya will also need to promote decentralised, but integrated, water resource management and service delivery, with a key focus on water conservation, source sustainability, storage and reuse wherever possible, by involving the communities themselves, as they are the primary stakeholders. There are important lessons to be learned from the best practices of decentralised planning for water conservation such as in Hiware Bazaar, Maharashtra and the Swajal model of community-based drinking water in Uttarakhand — which need to be scaled up.

In water stressed areas, especially in the designated dark blocks and in areas affected by water quality issues, surface water based multi-village schemes need to be designed, while in groundwater rich areas, single village, groundwater-based schemes with end-to-end source sustainability measures should be encouraged. These schemes also need to have provisions for rainwater harvesting through household or community storage, which can also be used for recharging groundwater. Other local methods of water storage and conservation must also be encouraged. A good example of local approaches to developing infrastructure for storage of water is seen in Dewas district in Madhya Pradesh. Here, through government support to farming communities for building ponds as alternative storage and supply sources, the district has achieved a 6 to 40 feet rise in the water table, even while increasing irrigated area by 120-190 per cent.

Another area of focus for water conservation in each drinking water scheme is developing infrastructure for collection and basic treatment of domestic non-faecal waste-water, kitchen or bathing waste water — also called greywater — which typically accounts

Raising awareness and changing perceptions on water also needs to be an important priority. Even today, water is regarded as an infinite resource and is abundantly wasted in many parts of the country, while others suffer drought-like conditions. Behaviour change communication initiatives for both internal and external stakeholders will be critical in changing attitudes towards water. All stakeholders, from state governments to citizens must be taken on board and a national consensus will have to be built.



COLIN GONSALVES

Assam's communal exercise

NRC violates constitutional morality, principles of international law

THE CASE of Mohammad Sanaullah — where Sanaullah, a former soldier, was declared a foreigner by an Assam Tribunal — exposed a gaping hole in the National Register of Citizens. No doubt, the state will scramble to correct the injustice. But for the poor in the state, nobody will bother.

A tribunal meet on the NRC and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), 2016, revealed that the Muslim minority in the state is angry at the sheer injustice of millions of them being suddenly declared foreigners. Some have been put in detention centres in violation of international law. According to the National Human Rights Commission, they face deplorable conditions. They are terrified as they anticipate employment termination and denial of government health and education services.

On the other hand, the indigenous and tribal people of Assam are fed-up with what they consider to be their growing marginalisation: Unchecked in-migration has continued despite the Assam Accord of 1985, an enactment intended to curb in-migration. They are furious at the central government-proposed CAB, which will regularise millions of migrants. Fortunately, leading members of both communities have displayed extraordinary statesmanship. The highlight of the meet was an exchange with

some tribal leaders who, when asked if they would press for deportation of those declared "foreigners," answered — off-the-record — that they would not take such an extreme stand. Rather, they said the burden of in-migration ought not be on Assam alone.

Civil society is categorical that governments, in the past, betrayed them by not implementing the Assam Accord, and wants effective protection of the rights of the indigenous including prohibition of land transfers: They have become a rapidly shrinking minority in their own land. And the proposal to enact the CAB is seen as the last straw.

The central government's move to establish the NRC and deport four million residents of Assam also leaves India vulnerable to the charge of ethnic cleansing. There are millions of stateless people in the world, and India has now added four million to the list: That these people have lived in Assam for decades and are entirely integrated into the local community makes the Indian case stand out on the international stage for its sheer inhumanity.

Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that everyone has a right to a nationality. The UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, 1961, cre-

ates an international obligation to prevent statelessness and prohibits the withdrawal of nationality in situations where persons would be left stateless.

The judiciary, which could have played an important role in restraining the government, has added fuel to the fire. It is one thing to direct measures to prevent illegal migration, and quite another to propose forced deportations. It is perfectly lawful for the state to identify and evict subversives within a migrant population, but it is not permissible to collectively punish millions of poor migrants. Thus, state action must be directed towards sealing the borders and regularising those who have resided in India for decades — as has been done by the Supreme Court in the case of the Chakmas.

The NRC process, however, is downright disgraceful and bereft of the rule of law. Relevant panels have heard heart-wrenching testimonies of people who had their citizenship stripped away in the most arbitrary manner. To establish citizenship, the burden of proof has been shifted — by unconstitutional legislation — to the migrant. The state can arbitrarily pick up members of the minority community, accuse them of being foreigners, and then pack them off to the Foreigners Tribunals to prove their innocence: The presumption of innocence, in this whole process,

has been done away with. The migrants are required to produce documents to prove their presence in the state prior to 1971. This is an onerous condition to have in a state where floods are a regular feature that drown homes and destroy records. The poor, in any case, find documentation impossible to grapple with. History will condemn this exercise as ethnic cleansing, pure and simple.

The Foreigners Tribunals are required by law to have judicial members. Tribunals without judicial members are unheard of. And yet, the Foreigners Tribunals flourish with an ever-increasing number of non-judicial members. Their appointments depend on the advocate's closeness to the political powers-that-be. Their tenure extensions depend on the number of persons they have declared foreigners. Their understanding of the law is sometimes so poor that people declared Indian citizens are tried again, until a tribunal finally declares the person to be a foreigner. The legal principle of *res judicata*, we are told, does not apply.

The judiciary should have kept its distance from this communal exercise that can only bring India shame at the international level.

The writer is a senior advocate, Supreme Court of India, and founder director of Human Rights Law Network

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It seems extremely unlikely that Tehran has any hubristic inclination to confront the US directly. Yet at present there is no sign that either side is willing to halt the escalation." — THE GUARDIAN

Xi's Hong Kong headache

The street protests threaten to dim Beijing's aura of invincibility



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

CAN WHAT HAPPENS in Hong Kong stay in Hong Kong? The consequences of the continuing protests in the city against a proposed law that lets authorities extradite citizens to mainland China may not remain confined to the island. The simmering discontent in Hong Kong threatens to become a prolonged political headache for President Xi Jinping.

This month saw thousands of people in Hong Kong march in protest against a bill that seeks to prevent the city from becoming a haven for criminals. But the protestors fear the law will be misused to target political dissidents and ordinary citizens and send them to summary trials in China.

Caving into the pressure from the protestors, which escalated after clashes with the police on June 12, the Hong Kong administration suspended action on the bill at the end of last week. The chief executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, announced there will be more consultations with the public on the issues involved. The protestors, however, have continued their marches. Nearly two million people turned out on Sunday demanding that the bill be withdrawn and not merely suspended. They also want Carrie to resign. On Monday, Beijing said it stands firmly behind Carrie.

Protests are not new to Hong Hong and have erupted frequently over the years. Five years ago in late 2014, the "Umbrella Revolution" mobilised people against the proposed electoral reforms that fell way short of the public expectations for deepening representative government. The protests ended after a crackdown by the authorities.

Back in 2003, there were protests against the efforts to implement a new law that sought to criminalise sedition and subversion against the People's Republic of China (PRC). The protests compelled Hong Kong government to withdraw the bill and its chief executive to step down.

The trouble is rooted in the special nature of the relationship between Hong Kong and the PRC. Imperial China ceded Hong Kong to Britain in the 1840s after the First Opium War. Hong Kong soon became a thriving international commercial centre with its special access to southern China. Hong Kong continued to serve as the gateway to China even after the Communists took charge in 1949.

When Deng Xiaoping opened up China for foreign investment in the 1980s, low-cost production from Hong Kong moved across the border. As most of its manufacturing moved into China, Hong Kong reinvented itself as a major financial centre servicing the rapid growth across East Asia.

As he leveraged Hong Kong to modernise China's economy, Deng was also determined to bring Hong Kong under PRC's sovereignty. In 1984, the politically inventive Deng nego-

tiated with Britain a framework for Hong Kong's integration with the mainland based on the principle "One Country, Two Systems". Under it, Hong Kong would become a part of China but retain a significant measure of autonomy for half a century. Integration over an extended period, it was hoped, would be painless. Britain handed over Hong Kong to China in July 1997, just a few months after Deng passed away.

Under the agreement called the Basic Law, Hong Kong retained its currency and political-legal system for 50 years — until 2047. But the inherent contradictions soon came into view as China sought to accelerate the extension of its sovereignty over Hong Kong amidst the city's resistance.

Hong Kong is not a democracy by any stretch; the city's focus has always been commerce and China's growth has energised Hong Kong. Yet, as the frequent protests show, Hong Kongers are reluctant to give up the few political liberties they have — including the freedoms of speech and assembly.

If China had become more liberal, the absorption of Hong Kong could probably have been easier. But China under Xi has moved towards greater political conservatism and ideological rigidity. The Communist Party has probably bet that Hong Kong was too minor a matter amidst China's rise and the grander scheme of things that Xi had in mind.

But the Hong Kong trouble comes at an inopportune time for President Xi. He is locked in a trade war with the US. The US Navy is pushing back against the Chinese naval assertion in the Indo-Pacific and strengthening its security partnerships in the littoral.

The long-dormant Taiwan question seems to be back in play. Beijing does not rule out a forceful unification of Taiwan that it calls a "renegade province". The US insists on a peaceful process of unification that is in tune with Taiwanese popular sentiment. Washington is lending credibility to that proposition with intensified diplomatic and military support for Taiwan. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong protests rob the credibility of the proposition that Taiwan can unify with China on the basis of "One Country, Two Systems".

Sections of the Chinese media have accused the US of orchestrating the protests. But the Trump Administration has shown little interest in promoting human rights anywhere; its main focus is on trade. The US Congress, however, is threatening punishment — by taking away some of the special privileges that Hong Kong enjoys under US law. Trouble in Hong Kong might well provide Trump additional political leverage in the unfolding "systemic rivalry" with China.

With the political aura of invincibility that he has constructed for himself, President Xi can't be seen as bending under American pressure on any issue. Putting the extradition bill on hold last week was a rare political retreat for Xi. He can't afford to have the Hong Kong protests, which are gaining widespread support within the city, linger on.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEW WORLD ORDER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bishkek lessons' (IE, June 17). With the uncertainty in the global geopolitical environment, the alignment of Russia and China and the changing goals of Indian diplomacy, it has become necessary to counter the belligerence of the US. Indian diplomacy must emphasise strengthening regional groupings like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The outreach to the Central Asian republics is very important because they are rich in natural gas and oil and can help India meet its energy needs. It is, therefore, imperative that New Delhi walks the tightrope between Moscow and Beijing, while guarding its interests.

Pranay Kumar Shome, via email

WATER WOES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'If the rains fail' (IE, June 17). India needs adequate rainfall because it is largely an agriculture-based country. The four-month long monsoon season gives us 80 per cent of rain and it shapes the pattern of farming. This year, we are suffering from a shortage of rainfall. As a result, our economy is also badly affected. It is important to have a plan in place for such contingencies.

Tapomoy Ghosh, Katwa

MORAL BLINDNESS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Case for

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.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

compassion' (IE, June 17). It is true that those at the top of our hierarchical, whether in terms of caste or class, remain insensitive to the plight of the masses until they fall prey to themselves. The medical fraternity's support to the case of violence in West Bengal seems hypocritical and opportunistic. In other cases of discrimination, for example of Dr Payal Tadv, there has been no similar outrage.

Anurag Ekka, Ranchi



Gloves off on trade

As India finally imposes retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods, flexibility should inform policy

The government's decision to finally go ahead and impose retaliatory tariffs on 29 U.S. goods with effect from June 16, almost a year after it first announced them, unambiguously signals that on trade India has decided to join issue with President Donald Trump's protectionist administration. Clearly, the trigger for the move was the U.S. withdrawal of duty-free access to Indian exporters under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) from June 5. Mr. Trump chose to go ahead and proclaim on May 31 that he was terminating India's designation as a beneficiary developing country over Delhi's failure to assure the U.S. of "equitable and reasonable access to its markets", notwithstanding the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his new Council of Ministers had just been sworn in the previous day. This reflects an unwillingness to meet India halfway on trade. Not that there had been no warning lights flashing. On a visit to New Delhi in early May, U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross had made no bones about the administration's perception of India being a "tariff king" that adopted "overly restrictive market access barriers". Mr. Ross had also threatened India with "consequences" were it to impose the retaliatory tariffs. Now, the government led by Mr. Modi and his key interlocutors on trade, including the new External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, have sent a strong message that India is not going to be compelled to negotiate under duress.

The change in tack on India's part also indicates that it is done, at least for now, with a more conciliatory stance after it had kept delaying the imposition of retaliatory tariffs over the past 12 months. During that period India had not only to contend with the withdrawal of GSP status but also had to, under a U.S. ultimatum, terminate its imports of vital crude oil from Iran, with which it has had a long-standing and strategic relationship. To be sure, India has much at stake in ensuring that economic ties with its largest trading partner do not end up foundering on the rocky shoals of the current U.S. administration's approach to trade and tariffs, one that China has referred to as "naked economic terrorism". Trade is not, and must not be viewed as, a zero-sum game. To that end, the government ought to review with flexibility some of its decisions such as the data localisation requirements and the new e-commerce regulations that have become a sore point with the U.S. side, including business investors. Indian trade negotiators also need to impress upon their American counterparts the importance of ensuring that market access for Indian services exporters remains free of new, restrictive visa curbs. The counter-tariffs have now lent the Indian side a bargaining chip that the U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, will have to grapple with during his visit later this month.

The litchi link?

In Bihar, authorities failed at several levels in preventing deaths due to encephalopathy

The death of over 90 children in about a month in Muzaffarpur district of north Bihar due to low blood sugar level could have easily been prevented with some foresight and early care. Six years ago, a two-member team invited by the State government suspected that a toxin (methylenecyclopropylglycine, MCPG, also known as hypoglycin A) naturally present in litchi fruit was responsible for the mysterious deaths; a large Indo-U.S. team confirmed it in 2017. The two-member team found that undernourished children who ate the fruit during the day and went to bed on an empty stomach presented with serious illness early the next morning. In 2014, the team saved 74% of sick children through a simple intervention – infusing 10% dextrose within four hours of the onset of illness. The recommended prevention strategy – making sure that no child goes to bed without eating a meal – adopted from 2015 ensured a sharp drop in the number of children falling sick. It is appalling that this year the government failed to raise awareness on this strategy. Worse, some doctors came up with alternative explanations for the illness and even pointed to the heat wave.

While the most common causes of acute encephalitis syndrome are traced to a bacteria or a virus and it takes at least a few days before presenting serious symptoms and deaths, the toxin in litchi causes serious problems overnight. While well-nourished children who eat the fruit remain unaffected even if they go to bed on an empty stomach, the under-nourished ones are at grave risk. Blood glucose falls sharply causing severe brain malfunction (encephalopathy), leading to seizures and coma, and death in many cases. This is because undernourished children lack sufficient glucose reserve in the form of glycogen and the production of glucose from non-carbohydrate source is blocked midway leading to low blood sugar level. This causes serious brain function derangement and seizures. While 5% dextrose infusion serves the purpose in cases of general low blood sugar, children suffering from acute hypoglycaemic encephalopathy can be saved only by infusing 10% dextrose within four hours of illness onset. Recovery is rapid and complete if 10% dextrose is infused within the golden hours. Infusing a higher concentration of dextrose is necessary to completely stop the attempt by the body to produce glucose from non-carbohydrate source. If encephalopathy was indeed the cause of death, this simple medical intervention could have saved many lives. Dextrose infusion could have been done even as children were being transported to hospitals in ambulances. The failures were at the stages of both prevention and care.

A blinkered understanding of migration

The draft emigration Bill is more about managing the export of human resources than being a humanitarian framework



S. IRUDAYA RAJAN & VARUN AGGARWAL

India has been home to one of the longest and largest episodes of emigration in the world, from the Second Century BC, when Alexander the Great took back Indians to Central Asia and Europe, to the present times where Indians, moving out on their own volition, form one of the world's largest populations of emigrants. This population is also diverse in every aspect, from its geographical presence and skill sets to their purposes for migration and migration strategies.

A large emigrant population has many benefits for India: the much-discussed international remittances (which touched \$80 billion in 2018), and also a positive impact on foreign direct investments, trade and foreign relations. The Indian diaspora also provides much needed philanthropic activities in health and education to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Of course, they do fund political parties of their choice during the elections.

There is another side to the Indian emigration story, which is characterised by information and power asymmetries in the global labour markets to include exploitation, inhuman living conditions, violence and human rights violations.

Lost focus

Since Independence, a steadily increasing number of low-skilled emigrants moved to destinations in West Asia. In order to safeguard their rights and welfare, the government enacted the Emigration Act, 1983. Perhaps it was an Act

that was 'formulated with the mindset of the 19th century, enacted in the 20th century and implemented in the 21st century'.

In the last 35 years, to cite the government, "the nature, pattern, directions, and volume of migration have undergone a paradigm shift". So, in an effort to update and upgrade this framework, a draft Emigration Bill, 2019 was released. Almost a decade in the making, it aims to move from the regulation of emigration to its management.

Unfortunately, its provisions fail to match the ambitions of its objectives. They continue the post-1983 ad hoc approach towards emigration, relying on the regulation of recruiting agents/employers and the discretion of the government. In fact, the bulk of it focusses on establishing new statutory bodies and giving them broad and vaguely defined duties.

Crucial exclusions

What is most positive about the draft Bill is the inclusion of all students and migrant workers within its purview and the abolishment of the two passports (emigration clearance required and emigration clearance not required, or ECR and ECNR) regime based on a person's educational qualifications. This will significantly improve the collection of migration flow data when compared to the current system, which excludes most migrants leaving India. Despite these developments, most trajectories of migration from India continue to be excluded.

For instance, Indians reuniting with family members abroad (who can be Indian emigrants, non-resident Indians and/or foreign nationals) constitute a major chunk of out-migration from India. Studies show that each member of emigrant families often contributes towards remittances sent back home. Many family migrants often convert their immigration



status and become workers, which is a factor not given thought in the 2019 draft Bill.

In an increasingly hostile political environment for migrants globally, these "dependent migrants" have increasingly little economic or political freedom at their destinations, an example being the recent attempt by the Trump administration in the U.S. to repeal the employment eligibility of spouses of high-skilled H1B immigrants (a majority are from India). Also alarming are numerous instances of Indian spouses being 'lured' abroad in marriage and then stranded or exploited. Between January 2015 and November 2017, the government received 3,328 such complaints.

Another excluded category is that of undocumented migrants. The perception is that undocumented migrants are those persons who leave India through informal channels, but most migrants become irregular on account of expired visas/permits. In West Asia, when migrant workers flee their employers to escape exploitation, a single police complaint can make them 'undocumented' for no fault of theirs. Data from the U.S. and Europe reveal a dramatic rise in the number of Indians being apprehended for immigration-related crimes. These migrants live in incredibly precarious situations, with many living in poverty.

Family migrants and irregular migrants abroad are as vulnerable,

if not more, as workers and students and warrant at least equivalent protection and promotion of their welfare.

Regulation of intermediaries

The draft Bill incorporates many already established ad hoc regulations and obligations for recruiting agents. It also includes subagents (often a relative or friend of the potential migrant) and student enrolment agencies into its regulatory purview. These intermediaries play an instrumental role in minimising information asymmetries and migration costs. Thus, any regulatory framework needs to balance strong disincentives for migrant welfare-destroying practices with the efficient supply of affordable intermediary services for prospective workers and students.

However, in the past decade, while emigration from India to West Asia has been decreasing, emigration from Bangladesh to this region has increased in the same period, which is attributed to a more liberal emigration policy. This suggests that the prescribed regulatory process in India has inadvertently created barriers to migration – for instance, nurses can be recruited only through government recruitment agencies – and increased the cost of emigration.

Further, given that student enrolment agencies have a different business model and a completely different customer base, i.e. students applying overseas, it is unclear why they are prescribed the same regulations as recruitment agents.

What about return migrants? To effectively ensure their welfare, any emigration policy framework needs to be considerate of the complete migration cycle: the pre-departure, journey, destination and return. The 2019 draft Bill addresses only the first three parts of the cycle while completely ignoring return migration. Globally, one

in four migrants today is a return migrant. In fact, most Indian migrants in West Asia return home – the current estimate of return migration in Kerala alone ranges between 1.2 and 1.5 million according to the Kerala Migration Surveys conducted by the Centre for Development Studies since 1998.

Rights-based approach for all

Many of the oversights in the draft Bill reiterate the government's restricted understanding of migration from India; there is no complete database number of Indian migrants abroad. There is also an erroneous assumption that Indian migrants in a developed destination country have sufficient protection and welfare. The draft Bill personifies the government's primary view of emigration policy as a means for managing the export of human resources rather than a humanitarian framework to safeguard Indian migrants overseas.

Migration is a complex and highly dynamic process with constantly evolving profiles of migrants and their destinations. Only an ex ante-migrant rights-based approach that is inclusive of all Indian migrants abroad can be considerate of this and provide them adequate security and welfare. There are a whole host of multilateral migration-related treaties and conventions which can provide the necessary guidance for a truly visionary and future-proof Indian emigration policy framework.

Without drastic changes to the draft Bill's approach, we will miss the opportunity to fulfil the hard-fought shared objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

S. Irudaya Rajan, a Professor at the Centre for Development Studies, Kerala, is the lead author of the Kerala Migration Survey 2018. Varun Aggarwal is the founder of India Migration Now, a migration research agency in Mumbai



ANIKET AGA

A month ago, Bt brinjal genetically modified (GM) to resist the brinjal fruit and shoot borer (an insect), was found growing illegally in Haryana. This was a different Bt brinjal from the one developed by the Indian company, Mahyco, in which Monsanto has a 26% stake. Mahyco's Bt brinjal has been under a moratorium since 2010. Even as the government clamped down on the illegal GM crop, some farmer groups have demanded the release of Mahyco's Bt brinjal and other GM crops in the regulatory pipeline. It is true that the moratorium was imposed by the then Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, despite being cleared by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the apex regulatory body for GM crops. But is Bt brinjal actually ready for release?

The impacts

Before imposing the moratorium, Mr. Ramesh had sought comments from a range of experts and concerned groups on environmental impacts and implications for consumers and farmers. Despite demands from activists and social scientists, the Ministry of Agriculture has not offered evidence that

Bt brinjal will benefit farmers. Ironically, the National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research anticipates that if Bt brinjal performs as Mahyco proposes, brinjal output will increase and retail prices will fall, benefiting consumers far more than farmers. The report ignores the scenario that companies might charge premium prices for Bt brinjal seeds, in which case farmers may not benefit at all.

On biosafety issues, scientific opinion is divided down the middle. While some scientists such as Deepak Pental of Delhi University were in favour of releasing Bt brinjal, others such as the late Pushpa Bhargava, entomologist David Andow of the U.S., and the then Vice-Chancellors of the Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University and the Dr. Y.S.R. Horticultural University highlighted crucial deficiencies in the characterisation of Bt brinjal, and in the environmental impacts assessment. The ecologist, Madhav Gadgil, warned of contamination of India's diverse brinjal varieties. Biodiversity is critical for nutrition and sustainability, and the government's own task force on biotechnology (2004) had recommended that no GM crop be allowed in biodiversity-rich areas.

Further, a majority of the technical expert committee appointed by the Supreme Court (in the public interest litigations over GM crops), recommended a ban on genetically modifying those crops for which India is a centre of origin



or diversity. Brinjal happens to be such a crop.

Nutrition issues

In terms of nutrition, there seem to be some significant differences between Bt and ordinary brinjal. Many health researchers and professionals, and scientists such as immunologist David Schubert of the Salk Institute, U.S. and Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign have argued that Bt brinjal poses risks to human health. M.S. Swaminathan and V.M. Katoch, then the Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research, asked for long-term (chronic) toxicity studies, before taking any decision on Bt brinjal. Further, they asked that these be conducted independently, instead of relying exclusively on Mahyco for data.

Bt brinjal found no support from State governments. Kerala and Uttarakhand asked for a ban on GM crops. States with substantial brinjal cultivation, i.e. West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar opposed the release pending rigorous, extensive testing. As did Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and undivided Andhra Pradesh. These States were ruled by parties across the political spec-

trum. In 2012 and 2017, respectively, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Science & Technology, Environment and Forests assessed the GM controversy. Both committees expressed grave concerns about lapses in the regulatory system. In fact, the Committee on Agriculture was so alarmed by the irregularities in the assessment of Bt brinjal, that it recommended "a thorough probe by a team of eminent independent scientists and environmentalists", which never happened. Further, both committees endorsed labelling GM foods to protect a consumer's right to know. However, since retailing is largely unorganised, enforcing truthful labelling is a logistical nightmare, and the Ministry of Agriculture believes it is impractical. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has only recently begun putting labelling rules into place.

No scientific consensus

In sum, there is a moratorium on Bt brinjal because there is no scientific consensus on its safety and efficacy, and because the States and Parliament have profound misgivings about the regulatory system. In recent years, pests have developed resistance to Bt cotton, forcing farmers to spray lethal pesticides. This led to over 50 deaths by pesticide-poisoning in Vidarbha in 2017. A GM-based strategy of pest control is unsustainable, all the more so since farmers, already pressed for land,

ignore the government's recommendation to plant refuge crops.

We cannot wish all these concerns away simply because some farmers want to try Bt brinjal, or farmers in Bangladesh have been cultivating Bt brinjal since 2013. Farmers do not and cannot assess long-term impacts on ecology and health, which needs more rigorous and sensitive studies than those conducted so far. Yet, in the nine years since the moratorium, there has hardly been any progress toward addressing these issues. If anything, the problem of sustainable, remunerative farming has become more acute, and alternative strategies such as organic and zero budget natural farming, which do not allow GM seeds, are gaining ground.

At the very least, the government must detail the steps it has taken since 2010 to address the scientific lacunae, clarify precisely how Bt brinjal will benefit farmers, put the infrastructure to ensure labelling into place, and demonstrate how Bt brinjal fits in with sustainable farming and biodiversity conservation. As things stand, Bt brinjal runs counter to the framework for agricultural development and farmers' well-being devised by parliamentary panels and the government's own task forces and expert committees.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Dispel the war clouds

When there is scant evidence to prove that Iran is involved in the attacks on tankers in the Gulf of Oman, it is clear that the U.S. will use anything as an excuse to attack Iran ('World', "U.S. does not want war with Iran", June 17). If, indeed, the U.S. does not want war with Iran, then its aircraft carriers already deployed in the region should be sufficient to oversee the free passage of oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. There is no need for America to threaten Iran by saying that it will send additional strike forces with bombers and missiles to the region. For its part, Iran must declare

that it will not bottle up oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz.

As war clouds loom large over the region, the leading powers of the world, including India, must urge the U.S. and Iran to sit at the diplomatic high table and scale down tensions.

KANGAYAM R. NARASIMHAN, Chennai

The 2019 outcome

A number of opinion page writers assume that the entire population in the country cast their votes, especially in the 2019 election, purely based on religion or caste (Editorial page, "The Gujarat model, nationally", June 17). What a biased assumption. There

is hardly a word about schemes benefiting the poor and the downtrodden such as gas connections, bank accounts, provision of toilets, a decisive leadership and, most importantly, a corruption-free government. The Opposition is always portraying the ruling party as having the sole aim of creating a majoritarian nation where the minorities have to suffer. An objective article will show otherwise.

S. NATARAJAN, Bengaluru

ICC World Cup

After India's 336, Pakistan's innings began on a disastrous note, at Manchester. But for a

century stand between Fakhar Zaman (62) and Babar Azam (48) there was nothing to write home about. Kuldeep Yadav ensured Pakistan's misery. It was an emphatic win for India in the end ('Sport' page, June 17).

ANANDAMBAL SUBBU, Navi Mumbai

■ The ICC Cricket World Cup 2019 is turning out to be a sham, getting decided more on point sharing than a proper game because of rain-affected matches. One can understand a game or two getting washed out but what is happening seems to be the order of the day. Teams sharing points with known weaker teams will

lose out while the ones with very few wins might enter the semi-finals. The ICC's point that reserve days or alternate venues cannot be arranged needs a critical review. We live in modern times and solutions must be got to ensure 50 overs to each side. The winner should feel that the World Cup was earned and not gained as a lottery.

GOPAL SUTAR, Bengaluru

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A front-page report, "Indian batting juggernaut crushes Pakistan by 89 runs" (June 17, 2019), erroneously said that Fakhar Zaman and Babar Azam added 114 for the second wicket. Actually, the duo had added 104 for the second wicket. The same mistake was found in the Sports page story headlined "Rohit leads the charge as India asserts superiority over Pakistan."

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The danger of territorial nationalism

The Opposition has not done enough to defend India's inclusive and plural ethos



MANASH FIRAQ BHATTACHARJEE

Talking to the American political journalist, Norman Cousins, in 1961, Jawaharlal Nehru shared his idea of democracy: “I would say that democracy is not only political, not only economic, but something of the mind.” Nehru emphasised democracy as “a certain tolerance of others and even of others’ opinions... a certain contemplative tendency and a certain inquisitive search for truth.” Democracy for Nehru was akin to a political culture where a hundred opinions could bloom.

Since the Narendra Modi government took power in 2014, the mind of democracy is under attack. There is intolerance towards differences. Democracy is facing political authoritarianism. The return of the Modi government at the Centre has tightened Hindutva's grip on the political narrative. Despite the agrarian crisis, job unrest, and the hardships of demonetisation, the electoral outcome was in the BJP's favour. Making political capital out of the air strikes on Balakot, playing up the threat to the nation's security over real issues, and using divisive language worked for the BJP.

Ideology of the state

Hindutva is no longer a political ideology of a political party. It is now an ideology of the Indian state. In 2015, when about 40 writers and artists returned their Sahitya Akademi awards in protest against the silence on the killing of writers by Hindu right-wing organisations, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley called it a “manufactured paper rebellion” by writers of “Left or [with] Nehruvian leaning.” The murder of writers was sidelined by an ideological allegation. The political tactic was to turn an issue of public morality into a friend-enemy discourse.

Since the JNU incident of 2016, we witnessed the mainstreaming of the term “anti-national” by BJP members. Anyone who raised concerns on violence against Kashmiris, spoke against war, supported writers and



“Territorial nationalism is a predatory idea that hunts for enemies.” People wait to check their names on the draft list of the National Register of Citizens centre in a village in Nagaon district, Assam. • REUTERS

journalists facing threats, welcomed the idea of Pakistani artists in India, spoke up for Muslims attacked for allegations of cow slaughter or beef consumption, or simply questioned the government faced the epithet. The BJP became the sole custodian of national pride and security.

Defending Nehru's idea of India

Nehru's idea of India was defended by sections of India's civil society rather than the Congress or other secular parties. A section of mainstream media dropped its ethics and peddled the government's line. A handful of journalists braved legal, physical and verbal threats in order to ask the truth. When journalist Ravish Kumar asked Congress president Rahul Gandhi why he did not defend “Nehru's legacy”, Mr. Gandhi skirted the question. Mr. Gandhi also spoke against hate, and for love, in his election campaign. But he was iffy in naming the real victims of hate politics. This weakened the counternarrative, and failed to bolster confidence in the electorate.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee took the BJP's anti-minoritarian agenda head-on. She risked public mood to oppose the National Register of Citizens (NRC) being implemented in Assam, and welcomed the refugees in her State.

Earlier, she sided with the United Nations in support of granting asylum to the Rohingya, against the position of the Central government. She managed a thin victory – the BJP made big inroads into West Bengal with an unprecedented 40% vote share. The general secretary of the CPI(M), Sitaram Yechury, admitted that Left supporters shifted allegiance to the BJP. The instrumental aim of the Left parties was to dislodge the local rival, not the BJP, and this helped the BJP's cause. Improvising on Lord Acton, the conservative writer, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, had warned in *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* that “loss of power corrupts, and absolute loss of power corrupts absolutely.”

Has “the mind of India” (to borrow Nehru's phrase) shifted to the right? If the mind has abandoned the spirit of democracy and fallen for territorial paranoia, then yes. In *We Or Our Nationhood Defined*, the ideological guru of the Hindu right, M.S. Golwalkar, defined the nation as “hereditary territory”. Hindutva is a territorial project. Thinking is reduced to marking territory, an act of self-preservation. It promotes exclusionary laws, as seen in the move to implement the NRC nationwide. This will throw the lives of poor migrants into a legal quagmire. The detection, detention and deportation of “fo-

reigners” will make people turn into stateless populations without rights.

According to Golwalkar, “Hindu religion, Hindu culture and Hindu language (the natural family of Sanskrit and her off-springs) complete the Nation concept.” India is imagined as mono-religious, mono-cultural and mono-lingual. Golwalkar's options for minorities were either to “adopt” the majority culture “or to live at its mercy”. When the Hindu vigilantes force Muslims to chant “Jai Shri Ram!” and “Bharat Mata ki Jai!”, it isn't just perverse cultural pride that is involved, but the surplus pleasure of humiliating others.

Since 2014, India in the nationalist narrative is being imagined as a fortress being guarded against imagined enemies and hated political opponents and minorities. Ideological opponents are forced to fear every word and act of nonconformity. Muslims are killed or harmed on mere allegations of beef eating and cow slaughter. Territorial nationalism is a predatory idea that hunts for enemies.

Cultural heterogeneity

Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India*, “A Buddhist or Jain in India is a hundred per cent product of Indian thought and culture, yet neither is a Hindu by faith. It is, therefore, entirely misleading to refer to Indian culture as Hindu culture.” Nehru's idea of India is not reducible to a single faith. “In later ages”, Nehru wrote, “this culture was greatly influenced by the impact of Islam, and yet it remained... distinctively Indian.” Cultural transformation of religions in India is the basis of its heterogeneity, and a historical fact. In Nehru's enlightened view, India is not a Hindu idea, or a Hindu nation.

The poet-critic, Octavio Paz, in his book *In Light of India*, wrote: “India, as a country and as a history, is much greater than Hinduism.” Despite being an admirer of Hindu thought and architecture, Paz was aware of the immense contributions made by other cultures.

Humility is a desirable ethic for civilisations to live by. If India lives in territorial paranoia and exclusion, it will lose its mind.

Manash Firaq Bhattacharjee is the author of *Looking for the Nation: Towards Another Idea of India*

Unleashing the potential of urban India

India could learn from the U.K.'s model of City Deals



V.R. VACHANA

The Global Metro Monitor 2018 reports that 36% of employment growth and 67% of GDP growth were contributed by the 300 largest global metros, with those in emerging economies outperforming those in advanced economies. Metropolitan areas concentrate and accelerate wealth as these are agglomerations of scale that concentrate higher-level economic functions. Nine Indian metros feature in the top 150 ranks of the economic performance index. By 2030, India will have 71 metropolitan cities, of which seven would have a population of more than 10 million. Clearly metropolitan areas are going to be a key feature of India's urbanisation and will play a crucial role in fuelling growth.

A fragmented architecture

Article 243P(c) of the Constitution defines ‘metropolitan areas’ as those having “population of ten lakhs [a million] or more, comprised in one or more districts and consisting of two or more municipalities/panchayats/ other contiguous areas, specified by the governor through public notification to be a metropolitan area”. It recognises metropolitan areas as multi-municipal and multi-district entities. It mandates the formation of a Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC) for preparing draft development plans, considering common interests between local authorities, objectives and priorities set by Central and State governments, and investments likely to be made in the area by various agencies. To ensure the democratic character of the MPC, it is mandated that at least two-thirds of the members of the committee must be elected by and from among the elected members of the municipalities and chairpersons of the panchayats in the metropolitan area, proportionate to the ratio of their respective populations. The size and manner of filling such seats are left to the State's discretion.

MPCs were expected to lay frameworks for metropolitan governance, but on the ground they do not exist in most cases. Janaagraha's Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (ASICS) 2018 found that only nine out of 18 cities mandated to form MPCs have constituted them. Where constituted, their functionality is questionable, with the limited

role of local elected representatives raising further questions on democratic decentralisation. Thus, the provision for an MPC has not introduced robust governance of metropolitan areas, as the metropolitan areas continue to be a collection of parastatals and local bodies in an entirely fragmented architecture.

The U.K. has rolled out ‘City Deals’, an agreement between the Union government and a city economic region, modelled on a ‘competition policy style’ approach. The city economic region is represented by a ‘combined authority’. This is a statutory body set up through national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate decisions, and which is steered by a directly elected Mayor. This is to further democratise and incentivise local authorities to collaborate and reduce fragmented governance, drive economic prosperity, job growth, etc. ‘City Deals’ move from budget silos and promote ‘economic growth budget’ across regions. The U.K. has established nine such combined authorities. Australia adopted a regional governance model along these lines in 2016 and has signed four City Deals till date. Meanwhile, China is envisioning 19 seamlessly connected super city clusters.

India, however, is yet to begin the discourse on a governance framework for the future of its metropolitan areas. It is yet to recognise that disaster management, mobility, housing, climate change, etc. transcend municipal boundaries and require regional-level solutions. The World Bank notes that despite the emergence of smaller towns, the underlying character of India's urbanisation is “metropolitan”, with towns emerging within the proximity of existing cities.

Way forward

It is time India envisions the opportunities and challenges from a ‘city’ level to ‘city-region’ level. The Central government must create a platform to build consensus among State governments. Perhaps, the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2018, drafted by the Expert Committee for Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Restructuring, could offer direction. It proposes for a Greater Bengaluru Authority headed by a directly elected Mayor, responsible for the overall planning of Greater Bengaluru with powers for inter-agency coordination and administration of major infrastructural projects across the urban local bodies within the area. However, this Bill is yet to see the light of day.

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SINGLE FILE

Across sectors, over time

Policies should be directed towards longer-term Sustainable Development Goals rather than short-term growth

VINOD THOMAS & NAMRATA CHINDARKAR



The re-elected government has a unique chance to change India's policy direction from a drive for short-term GDP growth at any cost to confronting the vast social and environmental gaps. A way forward is to make the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the policy guide rather than short-term GDP growth. SDGs target human, social and governance improvements, and their linkages. Studies in Asia document the impact of corruption in aggravating illegal logging and deforestation. And environmental destruction and climate change hurt the poor the most. Other crises resulting from a short-term focus at the expense of the long term also harm the poor the most. The 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 2007-08 global financial crisis are examples. Even when policy assessments show the merit of looking at lasting welfare, there is political pressure to only show immediate growth. To overcome this conundrum, we need to bring together three approaches in evaluation: impact evaluation, cost-benefit analysis, and objectives-based evaluation.

Impact evaluation can serve as a valuable way to gauge the causal effects of a programme – for example, providing vaccination to the population. An example is an impact evaluation of 24x7 rural electrification in Gujarat, showing that benefits of reliable electricity go beyond having lighting and have positive spillovers on maternal and child health.

Cost-benefit analysis too has a growing role to play in enlarging the focus of evaluation. For example, growth analysis could give special attention to the time frame when impacts are assessed to ensure that sustainability is rewarded. Cost-benefit analysis could also apply distributional weights to address income disparities.

Extensions of objectives-based evaluation can show the importance of considering growth plus equity and the impacts of natural disasters. Odisha is an example in 2019 of ensuring early warning and evacuation. But budget allocations for preventing calamities remain woefully inadequate.

India is ranked 130th out of 189 countries in the UN's human development index, and 114th among 142 countries in gender gap. Of the world's 30 cities that are ranked worst in air pollution, 22 are in India. India needs to vastly increase spending on education, health and the environment, and build smart components into projects. An example of incorporating social inclusion is that of the JICA-funded Delhi Metro, which included gender elements.

The new administration can direct policy towards longer-term SDGs rather than short-term growth. To support this effort, policy assessments that only have a myopic focus on one sector and election cycles need to give way to ones that span across sectors and over time.

The authors are Visiting Professor and Assistant Professor respectively at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore



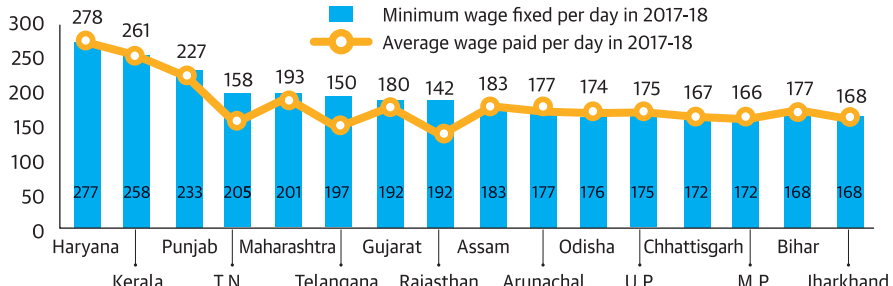
DATA POINT

Promise & delivery

The gap between the number of households that demanded jobs and the number met in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) widened marginally in the financial year 2018-19. In at least nine States the wage rates paid were below the minimum assured in FY18, according to a report published by the Centre for Policy Research. By **Srravya C**

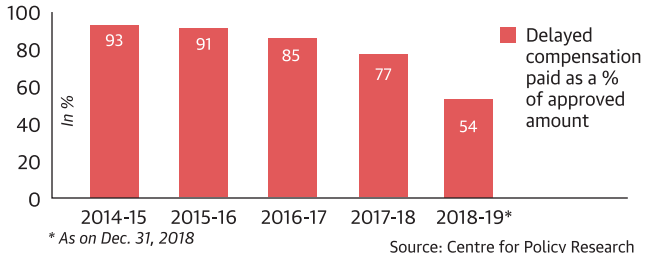
Falling below the minimum

In Rajasthan, the average wage rate for workers was ₹192 in FY18 – ₹50 less than the minimum fixed by the Central government. In at least eight other major States, the rate was less than the minimum guaranteed



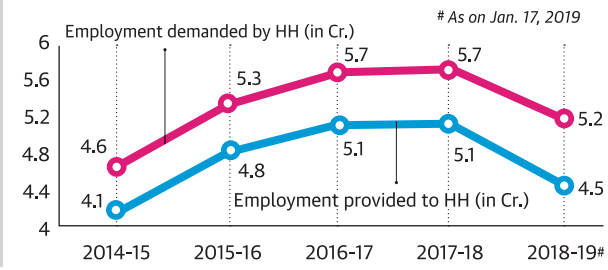
Delayed pay checks

In FY19, only 54% of the amount approved to compensate the delays in wage payments have reached the aggrieved workers. MGNREGS workers are entitled to receive a compensation, if there are delays in wage payments. The compensation amount is based on the duration of delay. The proportion of delay compensation paid to workers has been decreasing in the last five years



Demand-supply gap

In FY19, only 4.5 crore households (HH) were provided with jobs through the scheme – 70 lakhs less than the demand.



FROM The HINDU. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 18, 1969

Work permits for non-citizens in Malaysia

About 3 lakhs non-citizens in Malaysia will have to register themselves for work permits beginning next month, the Minister for Labour, Mr. V. Manickavasagam, said in Kuala Lumpur today [June 17]. All non-citizens over the age of 12 would have to register themselves for work permits whether they were working temporarily or on permanent basis. Self-employed people also would have to register though they may not have to take work permit. The Minister said the permits would not be issued automatically but it was not the intention of the Government to cause hardship to those who gave loyal service to Malaysia. He assured the investors that the relevant Act would be applied as liberally as possible so as not to affect industrialisation. Mr. Manickavasagam said the Ministry of Home Affairs will also keep a complete record of non-citizens employed in the country.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 18, 1919.

Calcutta Improvement Trust.

The Government of Bengal has issued a resolution reviewing the progress made by the Calcutta Improvement Trust during the last three years. The resolution says that in spite of the difficulties arising out of war-time conditions and the litigation in which the Trust was involved in regard to the acquisition of surplus lands, much has been done in the transformation of congested areas and insanitary slums and the planning of new streets. Of the sixteen improvement schemes submitted to the Government during the last three years, twelve have received sanction and one is under consideration while three have been abandoned or modified. Of these the most costly scheme is central avenue, a wide thoroughfare passing through from north to south, the acquisition of land for which will cost two hundred lakhs gross and fifty lakhs net.

CONCEPTUAL Cyberchondria

PSYCHOLOGY

This refers to severe anxiety that is fuelled by medical information found on the Internet. People who try to self-diagnose their health condition by searching their symptoms on search engines usually suffer from cyberchondria as they often misdiagnose their condition. They may, for instance, experience the unfounded fear that they suffer from serious diseases like cancer even though the symptoms they experience may be better explained by a medical condition that is far less serious. While cyberchondriacs may be searching the Internet to feel better, the information they find on the Internet might, in fact, increase their anxiety.

MORE ON THE WEB

Multilingualism on display in 17th Lok Sabha

<http://bit.ly/MultilingualismLS>

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 104

अधिक कीमत सही नहीं

दूरसंचार उद्योग चुनौतीपूर्ण दौर से गुजर रहा है और गेंद एक बार फिर दूरसंचार नियामक के पाले में है। गत सप्ताह डिजिटल संचार आयोग यानी डीसीसी (पूर्व में दूरसंचार आयोग) ने भारतीय दूरसंचार नियामक प्राधिकरण (ट्राई) से कहा कि वह अगस्त 2018 की 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम अनुशंसाओं की समीक्षा करे। इसमें उस वक़्त तय भारी-भरकम आरक्षित

मूल्य शामिल हैं। डीसीसी दूरसंचार मामलों में सरकार की सबसे बड़ी निर्णय लेने वाली संस्था है। उसने एक वर्ष पुरानी अनुशंसाओं को नियामक के पास वापस भेजकर सही किया है। ऐसा उसने शायद दूरसंचार कंपनियों की खस्ता वित्तीय हालत और समग्र रूप से कमजोर निवेश संबंधी माहौल को देखकर किया है। अब यह ट्राई पर निर्भर करता है कि वह सरकार

का राजस्व बढ़ाने की इच्छा पर लगाम कैसे लगाती है। नियामक को 5जी सेवाओं के लिए बैंड नीलामी से अधिकतम राशि जुटाने के प्रयास के बजाय दूरसंचार उद्योग की संहत पर ध्यान देना चाहिए जो 4.3 लाख करोड़ रुपये के कर्ज में डूबा हुआ है।

यह सही है कि स्पेक्ट्रम से आने वाली राशि सरकार कठिन वित्तीय हालात से जुझ रही सरकार के लिए राजस्व जुटाने का एक बड़ा माध्यम है लेकिन ट्राई की प्राथमिक जवाबदेही यह सुनिश्चित करना है कि भारी-भरकम बोली लगाकर उद्योग जगत की स्थिति आगे और खराब नहीं हो तथा प्रतिस्पर्धा का तत्त्व बरकरार रहे। सन 1997 में संसद के एक अधिनियम द्वारा स्थापित ट्राई का घोषित लक्ष्य है दूरसंचार क्षेत्र के विकास के लिए उचित माहौल तैयार

करना। इससे भी अहम बात यह है कि इसे एक साफ-सुथरा और पारदर्शी नीतिगत माहौल मुहैया कराना होता है जो समान कार्य क्षेत्र और निष्पक्ष प्रतिस्पर्धा का अवसर दे। ट्राई को इसकी अनदेखी नहीं करनी चाहिए।

ट्राई द्वारा इस वर्ष आगामी नीलामी के लिए तमाम प्रीक्वेसी बैंड में अनुशंसित स्पेक्ट्रम के मौजूदा आरक्षित मूल्य की बात करें तो इससे सरकार को 5.83 लाख करोड़ रुपये की राशि मिल सकती है लेकिन दूरसंचार कंपनियां पहले ही शुल्क को लेकर लड़ाई में उलझी हुई हैं। रिलायंस जियो के आगमन और उसकी उथल-पुथल मचा देने वाली कीमतों के बाद अगर स्पेक्ट्रम कीमतों को कम नहीं किया गया तो कंपनियों की आय में और भी गिरावट देखने को मिल सकती है। भारत में स्पेक्ट्रम की कीमत

पहले ही विश्व स्तर पर ऊंची कीमतों में शुमार है। हालिया सुदृढ़ीकरण के कारण दूरसंचार क्षेत्र तीन कंपनियों वाला बन गया है जबकि एक समय 10 से अधिक कंपनियां कारोबार में थीं। अगर भविष्य में फिर ऐसा सुदृढ़ीकरण होता है तो दूरसंचार उद्योग में प्रतिस्पर्धा ही समाप्त हो जाएगी। हम उस स्थिति के लिए तैयार नहीं हैं।

सन 2010 में दूरसंचार कंपनियों द्वारा आक्रामक बोली प्रक्रिया इस उद्योग के पराभव की शुरुआत थी। सन 2016 तक जब दूरसंचार कंपनियां कर्ज में डूब चुकी थीं, उन्होंने प्रतिरोध करने का प्रयास किया। स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी महज पांच दिन में समाप्त हो गई। सरकार बिक्री के लिए उपलब्ध 5.63 लाख करोड़ रुपये के आधार मूल्य वाले स्पेक्ट्रम

के बदले केवल 65,789 करोड़ रुपये जुटा सकी। अगर कंपनियां अपनी बात पर कायम रहੀं तो आगामी नीलामी 2016 का दोहराव होगी। दो प्रमुख कंपनियां भारती एयरटेल और वोडाफोन-आइडिया ने कहा है कि वे 492 करोड़ रुपये प्रति मेगाहर्ट्ज की मौजूदा आरक्षित कीमत पर 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी प्रक्रिया में शामिल ही नहीं होंगी। दूरसंचार उद्योग के अनुमान के मुताबिक अनुशंसित आधार मूल्य दक्षिण कोरिया और अमेरिका के बाजार की कीमतों से 30-40 फीसदी ज्यादा है। अगर कीमतों को कम नहीं किया गया और दो बड़ी कंपनियों ने बोली में हिस्सा नहीं लिया तो दूरसंचार क्षेत्र में समानता का अंत हो जाएगा। सरकार और ट्राई दोनों को जवाबदेही से काम करना चाहिए।



विनय सिन्हा

एनबीएफसी संकट को बेकार नहीं जाने दें

एनबीएफसी में व्याप्त संकट में हमारे लिए सबसे बड़ा सबक है म्युचुअल फंड और क्रेडिट रेटिंग एजेंसियों की भूमिका। इन एजेंसियों ने अत्यंत खराब स्थिति वाली कंपनियों को उच्चतम रेटिंग प्रदान की। विस्तार से जानकारी दे रहे हैं देवाशिष बसु

बीते नौ महीनों में चुनिंदा गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनियां (एनबीएफसी) मसलन दीवान हाउसिंग एंడ్ फाइनेंस (डीएचएफएल), इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर लीजिंग एंड फाइनेंशियल सर्विसेज (आईएलएंडएफएस) तथा अनिल अंबानी समूह की कुछ कंपनियों की हालत खस्ता रही है। इसकी वजह से वित्तीय क्षेत्र में तमाम उथलपुथल मची। शेयर बाजार का एक हिस्सा भी इससे प्रभावित हुआ। बैंकों और म्युचुअल फंड को इसलिए तकलीफ का सामना करना पड़ रहा है क्योंकि उन्होंने इन संकटग्रस्त वित्तीय कंपनियों को ऋण दिया। यह संकट कितना गहरा है और इससे क्या सबक निकलते हैं? पहली बात जो हमें पता है वह यह कि सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के वित्तीय कंपनियों को ऋण देने के मामले में आगे हैं। इनमें भारतीय स्टेट बैंक भी शामिल है। यह एक समय सरकारी बैंकों में सबसे बेहतर माना जाता था लेकिन अब यह फंसे हुए कर्ज का पोस्टर बॉय बन चुका है। दूसरी बात जो हमें पता है, वह यह है कि यह संकट सन 1980 और सन 1990 की तरह समूचे एनबीएफसी क्षेत्र को नष्ट

नहीं कर रहा है। उस दौर में दर्जनों लीजिंग और फाइनेंस कंपनियां, जिनमें से कई छोटी कंपनियां शामिल थीं, उनका रातोरात दिवालिया निकल गया था। बीते वर्षों के दौरान वित्तीय कंपनियों के नियमन में काफी सुधार हुआ है और उनमें से अधिकांश का नेतृत्व बेहतर कॉर्पोरेट प्रबंधकों के हाथ में है। यही कारण है कि केवल तीन एनबीएफसी ही मौजूदा संकट की शिकार हुई हैं। इन तीनों मामलों में संकट इसलिए उत्पन्न हुआ क्योंकि प्रबंधन अतिमहत्वाकांक्षी था और उसने येनकेन प्रकाश प्रोजेक्ट, ऋण पुस्तिका और मुनाफा बढ़ाने का प्रयास किया। ध्यान दीजिए तो आपको बजाज फाइनेंस, एचडीबी फाइनेंशियल सर्विसेज (एचडीएफसी बैंक की खुदरा फाइनेंस कंपनी), पीएनबी हाउसिंग, कैनफिन होम्स है। एलआईसी हाउसिंग आदि इसके असर से पूरी तरह सुरक्षित हैं। गत वर्ष उनके मुनाफे और ऋण की गुणवत्ता दोनों में सुधार हुआ। केवल चंद वित्तीय कंपनियां नुकसान में हैं जिन्होंने बिना जांच परख के अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र की कंपनियों को ऋण दिया और

इन कंपनियों ने पैसे की हेरफेर की। ये कंपनियां और आईएलएंडएफएस, जो स्वयं में एक श्रेणी है, इनका व्यवस्थित ढंग से नकदीकरण करने की आवश्यकता हैं। ऐसे में भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक का कहना सही है कि यह शैडो बैंकिंग का संकट नहीं बल्कि एक ऐसी समस्या है जो चुनिंदा फर्म तक सीमित है।

मैं बहुत अधिक जोर नहीं दे सकता क्योंकि समझदार लोगों की ओर से बिना सोचे समझे प्रतिक्रियाएं तथा नीतिगत उपाय सुझाए जा रहे हैं। एक टेलेविजन चैनल से बात करते हुए फाइनेंस कंपनी पीरामल एंटरप्राइजेज के मालिक और श्रीराम समूह की दो कंपनियों के हिस्सेदार अजय पीरामल ने कहा कि आरबीआई विशेष फंड की व्यवस्था कर सकता है जो एनबीएफसी को ऋण दे सके। या जो नुकसान का पहला झटका सहे। उदाहरण के लिए वह 10 फीसदी ऋण का बोझ सहन कर बैंकों से एनबीएफसी को और अधिक ऋण देने को कह सकता है। उन्होंने यह भी सुझाव दिया कि आरबीआई एनबीएफसी को अल्पावधि के प्रपत्र पर ऋण देने के लिए स्पेशल परपज

व्हीकल भी तैयार कर सकता है। इसके अलावा बाह्य वाणिज्यिक उधारी का सहारा भी है। आज सस्ती आवास वित्त कंपनियां भी इनसे पैसे जुटा सकती हैं। क्या आरबीआई समूचे अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र में ऐसा कर सकता है?

अगर पीरामल कुछ ऐसा जानते हैं जो बाकी लोगों को पता नहीं है, तब तो ठीक है, वरना आरबीआई द्वारा शुरुआती 10 फीसदी का बोझ वहन करने की सलाह अतिवादी प्रतीत होती है। अब तक आरबीआई ने दूरी बनाए रखी है और कहा है कि किसी विशेष सहयोग की आवश्यकता नहीं है। पीरामल को दरअसल करना यह चाहिए कि बिना किसी चर्चा के खराब कारकों को तंत्र से बाहर करना चाहिए और इस दौरान उनकी बेहतर परिसंपत्तियों का चयन करके अपने वित्तीय परिचालन को मजबूत करना चाहिए। ऐसा करके ही तंत्र की सफाई की जा सकती है और उसे मजबूत बनाया जा सकता है। बैंकों को खराब कंपनियों को अधिक ऋण देने को कहकर इसमें सुधार नहीं हो सकता।

कौन से बैंक अधिक ऋण देंगे? बेहतर निजी बैंक पहले ही अच्छी परिसंपत्तियों का चयन करने में लगे हुए हैं। जब हम कहते हैं कि बैंकों को अधिक ऋण देनी चाहिए तो यह सरकारी बैंकों का जिम्मा होता है। बीते 40 वर्ष में ये बैंक भ्रष्ट और अक्षम ऋण वितरण के कारण करोड़ों रुपये गंवा चुके हैं।

तमाम लाभ चुनिंदा गड़बड़ी करने वाले प्रवर्तकों के हाथ लगने के बाद नुकसान को समाजवादी अंदाज में साझा करना पूंजीवादी तंत्र के काम करने के तौर तरीकों से एकदम उलट है। अगर हमें प्रोत्साहन भी चाहिए तो भी पहला कम होगा मौजूदा प्रवर्तकों से निजात पाना और उनकी जगह पेशेवरों की मदद लेकर कंपनी का बेहतर से बेहतर मूल्य हासिल करना। ठीक वैसे ही जैसा सरकार ने आईएलएंडएफएस के साथ किया। परंतु देश के सरकारी बैंक नरेश गोयल तक को समय पर निकालने में नाकाम रहे और जेट एयरवेज डूब गई। ऐसे में एनबीएफसी के लिए समझदारी भरी प्रोत्साहन योजना दिवास्वप्न ही है।

वास्तविक सबक

इस संकट का मुख्य सबक है म्युचुअल फंड और क्रेडिट रेटिंग एजेंसियों की भूमिका। इन्होंने खराब प्रपत्र पर अधिकतम रेटिंग प्रदान की। दोनों का नियमन भारतीय प्रतिभूति एवं विनियम बोर्ड करता है। उसे इन दोनों से सख्ती बरतनी चाहिए। सन 2017 में तेजड़िए और फंड उद्योग म्युचुअल फंड के प्रचार के बाद लोगों से आने वाली आवक को संभाल नहीं सके। इससे निवेश की गुणवत्ता गिरी। बहरहाल, जिस प्रकार सड़क कच्चे को बाहर फेंक देता है वैसे ही बाजार ने तेजी के दिनों में म्युचुअल फंड द्वारा लाचार ग्राहकों को बेची गई खराब परिसंपत्तियों को खारिज कर दिया। अगर सेबी समुचित कदम नहीं उठाता है और नियमन में बदलाव नफ़्त करता है तो यह बार-बार होगा। इस संकट को आधे-अधूरे उपायों से जाया नहीं किया जाना चाहिए और समुचित हल निकाला जाना चाहिए।

कचरे का कारोबार और गरीबी की मार

मेरी नजर कचरे के एक विशाल



जमीनी हकीकत

सुनीता नारायण

चुका है। इसे हमारे समय की विकृत चक्रोय अर्थव्यवस्था भी कहा जा सकता है। हम कचरा उत्पन्न करते हैं, जमीन और अपनी आजीविका को नष्ट करते हैं, उसके बाद गरीबों को कोई विकल्प देने के बजाय हम उसी कचरे का कारोबार शुरू करते हैं जिसे हमने उत्पादित किया और फेंका है।

मैं वहां पर्यावरण प्रदूषण (निरोध एवं नियंत्रण) प्राधिकरण (ईपीसीए) के चेयरमैन के साथ गई थी क्योंकि मैं समझना चाहती थी कि कचरे को खुले में जलाए जाने से रोकने के लिए क्या कदम उठाए गए हैं। इससे पहले जब चेयरमैन भूरे लाल ने इस क्षेत्र का दौरा किया था तो उन्हें टिकरी और मुंडका प्लास्टिक फैक्टरी में बहुत बड़े पैमाने पर (यह कम करके बताया गया) कचरा मिला था। उन्होंने इस कचरे को हटाने और नियंत्रित रूप से जलाने के लिए एक ऊर्जा संयंत्र ले जाने का निर्देश दिया था। इससे पिछले जाड़ों में बहुत अधिक फर्क पड़ा था।

बताया गया कि इस बार खुले में बहुत कम कचरा था। कारोबारियों ने हमें बताया कि कचरा भी एक संसाधन है। वे उसे यूही जलाए जाने नहीं दे सकते। परंतु सच यह भी है कि कचरे का एक प्रकार ऐसा भी है जिसका पुनर्चक्रण संभव नहीं है। हम जैसे तमाम लोग जो जूते खरीदते हैं, उनके लिए एक जानकारी यह है कि जूतों का ऊपरी हिस्सा दोबारा प्रयोग में नहीं लाया जा सकता। उसे जलाना पड़ता है। ऐसी तमाम अन्य चीजें भी हैं। उदाहरण के लिए बहुस्तरीय प्लास्टिक, हर बार जब हम प्रसंस्कृत और डिब्बा बंद चीजें खते हैं तो हम ढेर सराा प्लास्टिक कचरा उत्पन्न करते हैं।

इसमें भी दो राय नहीं है कि टिकरी और बहादुरगढ़ जैसे ये बाजार जहां सबसे गरीब लोगों

को रोजगार मिलता है, उनके चलते ही आज हम सब शहरों में रहने वाले कचरों के ढेर में डूबने से बचे हुए हैं। ये बाजार गरीबों के श्रम पर आधारित होते हैं। ये गरीब हमारे कचरे को छंटते हैं, उसमें से किसी भी कीमत वाली चीज को अलग करते हैं और उसे प्राथमिक संग्राहक को बेच देते हैं। वह उसे आगे बेचता है और यह सिलसिला चलता रहता है। यह अनौपचारिक कारोबार है लेकिन बहुत संगठित तरीके से काम करता है। मुझे बताया गया कि इस बाजार में कचरे से 2,000 उत्पाद छंटे जाते हैं और इनकी कीमत 5 से 50 रुपये प्रति किलोग्राम तक होती है। इसके कारोबारी जीएस्टी चुकाते हैं। पहले सरकार ने 18 फीसदी जीएस्टी लगाया था जिसे अब घटाकर 5 फीसदी कर दिया गया है। सरकार इस कारोबार से भी आय अर्जित करती है। इसका समर्थन किया जाना चाहिए क्योंकि यह कचरे से संसाधन बनाता है और हमारे आसपास कचरे के ढेर लगने से बचाता है। हमें इस कारोबार के बारे में कुछ नहीं पता। परंतु हम मानते हैं कि इसे गंदा माना जाता है। नगर निगम कचरा डालने के लिए जमीन दे देंगे लेकिन उसके पुनर्चक्रण के लिए कुछ नहीं करेंगे। हमारे शहरी नियोजन में कबाड़ की दुकानों के लिए कहीं जगह नहीं है।

यह ऐसा मुद्दा है जो मुझे खाए जाता है। इस कचरे के प्रबंधन के किसी मॉडल क्या होना चाहिए? क्या हमें यह बात स्वीकार कर लेनी चाहिए कि यह कारोबार गरीबों को आजीविका मुहैया कराता है इसलिए यह बेहतर है? इसका अर्थ यह होगा कि हम अधिक से अधिक वस्तुओं का इस्तेमाल करें और उन्हें रद्द करते चलें। क्या यही भविष्य की राह है? मैं यह सवाल केवल टिकरी के संदर्भ में नहीं कर रही बल्कि यह हमारे आसपास की पूरी दुनिया से जुड़ा सवाल है। चीन द्वारा अपने दरवाजे विदेशी कचरे के लिए बंद किए जाने के बाद पुनर्चक्रण करने वालों ने अपना कचरा बेचने के लिए विभिन्न देशों की तलाश शुरू कर दी। क्या यह हमारी कचरा समस्या का हल है? यकीनन नहीं। इस विषय पर हम आगे चर्चा करेंगे।

कानाफूसी

जल संकट

चेन्नई में सड़क के किनारे खड़े होकर हल्का-फुल्का खाना अब बीते दिनों की बात हो गई है। शहर में जल संकट बढ़ने के साथ ही छोटे रेस्तरां और खानेपीने के अन्य ठिकानों में अब पूरा भोजन मिलना बंद हो गया है। चेन्नई होटल ओनर्स एसोसिएशन के एक निर्णय के बाद ऐसा किया गया। शहर में सड़क के किनारे चलने वाले इन रेस्तरां के मालिकों के इस संगठन का कहना है कि इडली और डोसा जैसे स्नैक्स जिनमें काफी कम पानी की आवश्यकता होती है, उनकी बिक्री जारी रह सकती है लेकिन सांभर और रसम के साथ पूरा भोजन अब शायद नहीं परोसा जाएगा क्योंकि पूरा भोजन बनाने में काफी पानी की आवश्यकता होती है। अगर ऐसा होता है तो बड़ी तादाद में बर्तन साफ करने की समस्या से भी निजात मिलेगी। चेन्नई में 12,000 लीटर पानी की लॉरी जो इस माह के आरंभ में 1,800 रुपये की थी वह पहले 2,500 रुपये की हुई और अब वह 5,000 रुपये की हो चुकी है।

वाम दलों का एकीकरण

देश की राजनीतिक बहसों में एक सनातन बहस यह भी है कि आखिर भारतीय कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी (भाकपा) और मार्क्सवादी कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी (माकपा) एक कब होंगी? इस वर्ष लोकसभा चुनाव के बाद भाकपा ने एक बार फिर माकपा से संपर्क करके एकीकरण की बात कही। इन दोनों दलों में माकपा का आकार बड़ा है लेकिन मौजूदा लोकसभा में उसके केवल तीन सांसद हैं जबकि भाकपा के दो सांसद इस बार लोकसभा में हैं। भाकपा के महासचिव एस सुधाकर रेड्डी ने हाल ही में माकपा महासचिव सीताराम येचुरी से मुलाकात की और एकीकरण की प्रक्रिया के बारे में चर्चा करते हुए उन्हें एक पत्र सौंपा। माकपा ने यह पत्र केंद्रीय समिति की बैठक में वितरित किया लेकिन इस बारे में कोई निर्णय नहीं लिया गया। भाकपा को उम्मीद है कि कम से कम माकपा के कार्यकर्ता पार्टी नेतृत्व पर एकीकरण के लिए दबाव बनाएगा। माकपा का गठन सन 1964 में भाकपा से निकले कुछ नेताओं ने ही किया था



आपका पक्ष

स्वास्थ्य व्यवस्था दुरुस्त करे सरकार

पश्चिम बंगाल के डॉक्टर अपनी सुरक्षा के लिए पिछले कई दिनों से हड़ताल कर रहे हैं। डॉक्टरों को अपनी मांगों के समर्थन में पूरे देश से समर्थन मिल रहा है। देश के कई राज्यों के डॉक्टर पश्चिम बंगाल के डॉक्टरों के समर्थन में हड़ताल कर रहे हैं। इससे देश की स्वास्थ्य व्यवस्था चमराने लगी है। अस्पतालों में पहुंचने वाले मरीज इलाज नहीं होने के कारण परेशान हो रहे हैं। पूरे देश के डॉक्टरों के हड़ताल पर चले जाने के कारण सिर्फ आपातकालीन सेवा ही चल रही हैं। राजधानी दिल्ली में निजी अस्पतालों में स्वास्थ्य सेवाएं बाधित हैं। अखिल भारतीय आयुर्विज्ञान संस्थान (एम्स) के भी डॉक्टरों ने हड़ताल का समर्थन किया है तथा एक दिन कार्य बहिष्कार का फैसला किया है। खबरों के मुताबिक एम्स के डॉक्टर एसोसिएशन ने पहले हड़ताल में शामिल नहीं होने का निर्णय लिया था। लेकिन एक जूनियर डॉक्टर पर हमले के बाद



हड़ताल का समर्थन कर दिया।

डॉक्टरों पर हमले तथा उनकी सुरक्षा के मुद्दे पर अब केंद्र सरकार को पहल करनी चाहिए। किसी राज्य में शांति व्यवस्था की जिम्मेदारी राज्य सरकार को होती है। पश्चिम बंगाल सरकार डॉक्टरों को सुरक्षा देने में तथा डॉक्टरों को मनाने में नाकाम रही है। अब देश के कई राज्यों के डॉक्टर हड़ताल पर चले

पश्चिम बंगाल के डॉक्टरों की हड़ताल के समर्थन में पूरे देश के डॉक्टर एकजुट हो रहे हैं

गए हैं। अतः केंद्र सरकार को पहल कर डॉक्टरों की उचित व्यवस्था करके हड़ताल को समाप्त करना चाहिए। दूसरी ओर बिहार के मुजफ्फरपुर में दिमागी बुखार के

पश्चिम बंगाल के डॉक्टरों की हड़ताल के समर्थन में पूरे देश के डॉक्टर एकजुट हो रहे हैं

गए हैं। अतः केंद्र सरकार को पहल कर डॉक्टरों की उचित व्यवस्था करके हड़ताल को समाप्त करना चाहिए। दूसरी ओर बिहार के मुजफ्फरपुर में दिमागी बुखार के

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

उस जगह का उल्लेख अवश्य करें, जहां से आप ईमेल कर रहे हैं।

राजस्थान, पूर्वी उत्तर प्रदेश और गुजरात तक नहीं पहुंच पाया है। इससे मौनपूरी बारिश में कमी आई है तथा बिहार, झारखंड तथा ओडिशा में तेज गमी पड़ रही है। बिहार में लू चल रही है जिससे कई लोगों की मौत भी हो चुकी है। मौसम विभाग के अनुसार मौनसून की सुस्त रफ्तार के कारण 43 प्रतिशत बारिश में कमी आई है। देश के कई राज्यों में बारिश नहीं होने के कारण तेज गर्मी पड़ रही है तथा लू चल रही है। दिल्ली, उत्तर प्रदेश सहित कई राज्यों में पारा 40 के पारे पहुंच चुका है। बारिश नहीं होने का खमियां खाता किसान, व्यापारी तथा बाजार को भुगतना पड़ रहा है। बारिश की कमी के कारण खेतों में बुआई नहीं हो रही है। अनाज, सब्जी तथा खाद्य पदार्थ के दाम बढ़ रहे हैं। पशुओं को चारा नहीं मिलने के कारण दूध उत्पादन कम हो गया है। एक गाय जहां 6 से 10 लीटर दूध देती थी अब 3 से 4 लीटर ही दूध दे रही है। दूध कंपनियों ने भी दूध के दाम बढ़ा दिए हैं।

कर चोरों पर नकेल

आर्थिक अपराधों पर अंकुश लगाना वित्तीय व्यवस्था को सुदृढ़ करने की अनिवार्य शर्त है. बीते वर्षों में अर्थव्यवस्था को औपचारिक और पारदर्शी बनाने की दिशा में सरकार ने ठोस प्रयास किया है. इस क्रम में अब कर चोरों से कड़ाई से निपटने की तैयारी हो रही है. केंद्रीय प्रत्यक्ष कर बोर्ड ने कुछ विशेष प्रकार की कर चोरी, जैसे कि विदेशों में काला धन जमा करना, के मामलों में नये निर्देश जारी किया है. सोमवार से लागू हुए इन नियमों से भारी शुल्क या अर्थदंड देकर आर्थिक अपराधों से बरी होने की परिपाटी का अंत हो जायेगा. अभी तक ऐसा होता था कि विदेशी बैंकों में जमा अघोषित रकम या रखी गयी संपत्ति का खुलासा होने पर दोषी व्यक्ति आर्थिक दंड के रूप में बड़ी धनशक्ति सरकार को देकर अपराधमुक्त हो जाता था. हालांकि, 2015 के काला धन निरोधी कानून में चक्रवृद्धि हिसाब से रकम देकर बरी होने पर पूरी तरह रोक लगा दी गयी थी, परंतु उसमें भी 30 फीसदी कर तथा भारी अर्थदंड का प्रावधान है. अब कर चोरी कर बाहर धन भेजनेवालों को कर और उसके ब्याज के हिसाब से पैसा जमाकर बच

कर चोरी रोकने के उपायों से न सिर्फ सरकार का राजस्व बढ़ेगा और सार्वजनिक खर्च के लिए अधिक राशि उपलब्ध होगी, बल्कि अर्थव्यवस्था की गति और पारदर्शिता में बढ़ोतरी होगी.

अवहेलना कर किसी और देश की कमाई को ऐसे देशों में दिखा देती है, जहां करों की दरें बहुत कम हैं. ऐसी कंपनियों द्वारा कर चोरी को रोकने के लिए विकसित अर्थव्यवस्थाओं के समूह के बहुपक्षीय समझौते पर भी भारत ने हस्ताक्षर किया है. इसके तहत अभी 90 देश वित्तीय खातों और कर संबंधी सूचनाओं का आदान-प्रदान करते हैं. भारत उन देशों में है, जहां आयकर और अन्य प्रत्यक्ष कर देनेवालों की संख्या आबादी के अनुपात में बहुत कम है. ऐसे लोगों की बड़ी संख्या है, जो पर्याप्त आमदनी के बावजूद कर नहीं देते हैं. रिपोर्टों के मुताबिक, चालू वित्त वर्ष के पहले दिन यानी एक अप्रैल से सरकार ने ऐसे लोगों की सूचना जुटाने की एक परियोजना शुरू की है. इसमें सोशल मीडिया और अन्य स्रोतों से व्यक्ति द्वारा बतायी गयी आमदनी से अधिक खर्च पर नजर रखने का इंतजाम किया जा रहा है. अभी तक सूचना तकनीक के विपुल डेटा भंडार से ऐसी जानकारी जुटाने की व्यवस्था बेल्जियम, कनाडा, ब्रिटेन, ऑस्ट्रेलिया जैसे कुछ ही देशों में है. वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) परिपद भी कर चोरी रोकने के नियमों को कड़ा करने को कोशिश में है. ऐसे उपायों से न सिर्फ सरकार का राजस्व बढ़ेगा और सार्वजनिक खर्च के लिए अधिक राशि उपलब्ध होगी, बल्कि अर्थव्यवस्था की गति और पारदर्शिता में बढ़ोतरी होगी.



विषय और विषयी

जड क्या है ? जड़ है शक्ति घनीभूत रूप. मन क्या है ? जड़ तत्व के चूर्णीभूत होने से मन की उत्पत्ति होती है. मान लो, तुमको बहुत कष्टकर शारीरिक श्रम करना पड़ता है. स्वाभाविक रूप से इसमें एक समय थक जाओगे. यदि तुम कोई शारीरिक श्रम नहीं किये हो और दस घंटा लगातार बौद्धिक श्रम कर रहे हो, इसमें भी तुम थक जाओगे. इस अवस्था में तुम शरीर और मन दोनों में ही थकावट महसूस करोगे. इसलिए मनुष्य का शरीर केवल जड़ देह नहीं है, एक ही साथ यह मानसिक देह और आध्यात्मिक देह भी है. परंतु आध्यात्मिक देह बोलकर कोई अस्तित्व नहीं हो सकता है. मनुष्य को है पंचभौतिक शरीर और है एक मानसिक देह, जिसमें विभिन्न स्तर हैं. परंतु आध्यात्मिक क्षेत्र में कोई देह रह नहीं सकता. आध्यात्मिकता है साक्षीतत्व, जो देहयुक्त कोई सत्ता तो नहीं हो सकती. परंतु यह साक्षीतत्व शरीर से संबंधित है. तुम्हारा शरीर जो कुछ कर रहा है, तुम्हारी आत्मा उसके साथ संबंधित है, और जान रहे है, साक्षी रूप में देख रहे हैं कि वह क्या कर रहा है. तुम्हारी आत्मा तुम्हारे मानस देह का भी साक्षीतत्व है, जो देख रहा है कि तुम्हारा मन क्या कर रहा है, अतः ये हुए साक्षी सत्ता. यह कोई देह नहीं है. जब यह साक्षी तत्व किसी व्यक्ति के साथ संपर्कित हो जाते हैं, तो हम उसे कहते हैं, अणु साक्षीतत्व अथवा जीवात्मा. और जब वह इस विश्व के सब अस्तित्वों के ज्ञाता हो जाते हैं, तब वे परमचेतन्य सत्ता हो जाते हैं. आध्यात्मिक साधना अणु विषय को भूमाविषय में रूपांतरित करना है. मान लो, कोई एक अणु अस्तित्व है, यह अणु अस्तित्व एक सीमा रेखा के बंधन में आबद्ध है और सीमा रेखा का मतलब ही हैं- तमोगुण का बंधन. जो कुछ भी सीमारेखा में बद्ध है, वह सत्त्वगुण, रजोगुण और तमोगुण- मूल त्रिगुण तत्वों के दायरे में आ जाते हैं. जब कोई क्रिया संपादित होती है, उसमें दो सत्ता रहती है- विषय और विषयी. दृष्टवस्तु है विषय और द्रष्टा है विषयी और इन दोनों के बीच दर्शन रूप क्रिया, जो विषयी और विषय में योगसूत्र स्थापित करती है.

श्रीश्री आनंदमूर्ति

कुछ अलग

न हो दिल की गलियां सूनी

मेरे क्वॉट्सएप पर एक जोक आया- कभी कभी मेरे दिल में खयाल आता है... अगर तुम साढ़े दस बजे सो जाती हो, तो तुम्हारे क्वॉट्सएप पर लास्ट सीन ढाई बजे रात क्यों दिखाता है ? जोक पढ़कर मेरे दिमाग की बत्ती जल

गयी. असल में नये-नये एप हमारी जिंदगी में किस तरह असर डाल रहे हैं, इसका अंदाजा हमें खुद नहीं है. एसएमएस में तो आप झूठ बोलकर निकल सकते थे कि मेसेज नहीं मिला. पर ये नये-नये चैटिंग एप, लास्ट सीन और ब्ल्यू टिक वाला स्टेटस आपकी सारी हकीकत खोल देते हैं.

यारी-दोस्ती करना अच्छी बात है, पर यारी-दोस्ती जब ज्यादा और गलत लोगों से हो जायेगी, तो आपको समस्या आयेगी ही. एक ओर मोबाइल क्रांति ने हमें ग्लोबली कनेक्टेड तो कर दिया ही है. वहीं कहीं हम नेट बैकवर्ड न घोषित कर दिये जायें, इस चक्कर में जितने चैटिंग एप इंटरनेट पर उपलब्ध हैं, वे सब हमारे मोबाइल पर होने चाहिए. इस लालच ने कब हमें इतना एक्सप्रेशनलेस कर दिया कि हम अपने रीयल एक्सप्रेशन को भूल टैक्निकल एक्सप्रेशन यानी एमोजी के गुलाम बन गये हैं. हंसी आये या ना आये, अगर 'हा हा हा' लिखकर कोई स्माइली बना दो, सामने वाला यही समझेगा कि आप बहुत खुश हैं. पर क्या आप वाकई खुश हैं ?

अक्सर हम चैट पर यही कर रहे होते हैं. वचुअल चैटिंग में हम जीवन की असली समस्याओं का हल ढूँढने लग गये हैं. हमारे फोनबुक में बहुत से लोगों के नंबर सेव रहते हैं और

संपादकीय प्रभात

चुनाव नतीजे और नीतीश कुमार फैक्टर

लोकसभा चुनावों में बिहार के नतीजों ने सबको आश्चर्यचकित किया है. कई धारणाएं, पूर्वानुमान तथा राजनीतिक पंडितों के आंकड़े एक बार पुनः गलत साबित हुए हैं. सबसे अधिक चौंकानेवाली दो घटनाएं हैं. पहली, जदयू और इसके नेता नीतीश कुमार की बढ़ती स्वीकार्यता और दूसरी आरजेडी में उत्तराधिकार का असफल प्रयोग और परंपरागत दकियानूसी राजनीति का खात्मा. कई राजनीतिक विश्लेषकों का मानना है कि बिहार से जातीय राजनीति समाप्त हो चुकी है. बिहार और देश जातिविहीन समाज की तरफ बढ़ रहा है. ऐसे चिंतक हजारों साल की सामाजिक विषमता, उससे पैदा हुई गैरबराबरी आदि को नजरअंदाज करने की गलती कर रहे हैं. निःसंदेह यह चुनाव अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति पद्धति की तर्ज पर हुआ है, जिसके केंद्र बिंदु सिर्फ नरेंद्र मोदी थे तथा अन्य विषय गौण रह गये. लेकिन ऐसा माननेवालों की भी लंबी तादाद है कि बिहार से केंद्रीय मंत्रिमंडल के विस्तार में दुर्बल वर्गों की अन्देखी की गयी है. इन वंचित समूह के लोगों ने लंबी कतारें बनाकर एनडीए को जिताने तथा नरेंद्र मोदी को शिखर पर पहुंचाने में महती भूमिका निभायी है.

मंडल कमीशन के लागू होने के बाद 50 फीसदी से अधिक आबादी रोमांचित और आंदोलित हुई थी कि उनके तबके को शिक्षा व रोजगार के अवसर में आनुपातिक हिस्सेदारी मिलेगी. दक्षिण के तमिलनाडु की भूमि से समानता का यह आंदोलन लखनऊ और पटना में फलने-फूलने लगा. शुरू के दिनों में मंडल के समर्थक नेताओं और पार्टियों के प्रति चुंबकीय आकर्षण था. आज जब ये दल धराशायी हो चुके हैं, तो आत्मचिंतन की बजाय चुनाव आयोग और ईवीएम को निशाना बना रहे हैं. अच्छा होता कि इन दलों के परिवारों के प्रमुख, परिवार व पार्टी के साथ बैठकर गंभीर चिंतन करते. इन दलों का उदय कांग्रेस पार्टी की परिवारवादी,

जातीय वर्चस्ववादी और भ्रष्टाचार में डूबी राजनीति के विकल्प के रूप में हुआ था. इन उभरते हुए नेतृत्व व समूहों को डॉ लोहिया ने चेताया भी था कि जब ये व्यक्ति या समूह राजकाज के शिखर नेतृत्व पर होंगे और प्रशासन का संचालन करेंगे, तो इनका आचरण पूर्ववर्ती शासकों से बेहतर व भिन्न होना चाहिए. यूपी-बिहार की समता व समानता की पक्षधर पार्टियां अपने कुशासन की वजह से आज लुप्त हो गयीं.

कटु आलोचना, विरोधियों के तीखे आरोपों के बावजूद इस आंदोलन का एक टुकड़ा जदयू न सिर्फ सलामत रहा, बल्कि उसका वोट प्रतिशत प्रत्येक चुनाव के बाद बढ़ता चला गया. आज यह मत प्रतिशत 22 फीसदी हो गया है. निःसंदेह निष्ठावान, ऊर्जावान कार्यकर्ताओं की फौज भी निरंतर सक्रिय भूमिका निभाती रही परंतु सबसे बड़ा कारण इस दल के मुखिया नीतीश कुमार का स्वावलंबी आचरण, परिवारवाद व धन-अर्जन करने की तुष्णा से कोसों की दूरी तथा जाति की बजाय वर्ग व समूह की राजनीति को केंद्रित करना भी इन्हें प्रारम्भिक बनाये रखता है.

साल 2014 जदयू की चुनावी प्रदर्शन का खराब दौर रहा, जब पार्टी को केवल दो सीटें मिलीं. लेकिन उस समय भी इसे 16 फीसदी मत मिले थे. साल



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जब समूची राजनीतिक पार्टियां वोटों के झुंडों को संगठित करने में लगी रहती हैं, तब बिहार में लोक से हटकर सामाजिक कुरीतियों के विरुद्ध हल्ला बोल किया गया है.

दर्जनों योजनाएं चलायी गयी हैं. बिहार में पुरुषों से

अधिक महिलाओं का मत प्रतिशत रहा. मधनिषेध विरोधियों के लिए यह सबक भी है. कैसे सामाजिक कुरीतियों के कारण सामान्य परिवार गृह क्लेश व अन्य

संस्कृति के एक सिपाही का जाना

मुझे अच्छा लगा कि गिरीश रघुनाथ कर्नाड को संसार से वैसे ही विदा किया गया, जैसे वे चाहते थे- निःशब्द ! कोई तमाशा न हो, कोई शवयात्रा न निकले, कोई सरकारी आयोजन न हो, कोई क्रिया-कर्म भी नहीं, भीड़ भी नहीं, सिर्फ निकट परिवार के थोड़े से लोग हों- ऐसी ही विदाई वे चाहते थे.

मुंबई में समुद्र के पास, बांद्रा में उनके अस्त-व्यस्त घर में लंबी चर्चा समेटकर हम बैठे थे. जीवन का अंत कैसे हो, ऐसी कुछ बात उस दिन वैसे ही निकल पड़ी थी और मैंने कहा था कि कभी बापू-समाधि (राजघाट) पर, शाम को घूमते हुए अचानक ही जयप्रकाशजी ने कहा: ‘मुझे यह समाधि वगैरह बनाना बहुत खराब लगता है... जब ईश्वर ने वापस बुला लिया, तो धरती पर अपनी ऐसी कोई पहचान छोड़ने में कैसी कुरूपता लगती है ! हां, कोई बापू जैसा हो कि जिसकी समाधि भी कुछ कह सकती है, तो अलग बात है. समाज परिवर्तन की धुन में लगे हम सबकी समाधि इसी समाधि में समायी हुई माननी चाहिए.’ फिर मेरी तरफ देखते हुए कहा, ‘तुम लोग ध्यान रखना कि मेरी कोई समाधि कहीं न बने !’ गिरीश बड़े गौर से मुझे सुनते रहे. आज जयप्रकाश की समाधि कहीं भी नहीं है. गिरीश धीमे से बोले, ‘अच्छा, यह सब तो मुझे पता ही नहीं था ! मैं जेपी को जानता ही कितना था ! लेकिन कुमार, यह अपनी कोई पहचान छोड़कर न जानेवाली बात बहुत गहरी है.’

मैं उनको जानता था, पढ़ा भी था, पर मिला नहीं था कभी. इसलिए ‘धर्मयुग’ के दफ्तर में जब धर्मवीर भारतीयों ने मुझसे कहा, ‘प्रशान्तजी, ये हैं गिरीश कर्नाड !’ तो मैंने इतना ही कहा था, ‘जानता हूं !’ गिरीश कर्नाड ने आत्मवीर्य से हाथ आगे बढ़ाया. जब तक गीतकार वसंतदेव उनसे मेरे बारे में कुछ कहते रहे, वे मेरा हाथ पकड़े सुनते रहे और फिर बोले, ‘मुझे बहुत खुशी हुई यह जानकर कि ऐसे गांधीवाले भी हैं !’

साल 198४ की बात है. फिल्म ‘उत्सव’ की तैयारी का दौर था- शूट्रक के अति प्राचीन नाटक ‘भृक्षकटिक’ का हिंदी फिल्मीकरण ! शशि कपूर से मेरा परिचय था, तो मैं जानता था कि वे ऐसी किसी फिल्म की कल्पना से खेल रहे हैं. बात गिरीश कर्नाड की तरफ से आयी थी. तब कला फिल्मों का घटोटा था. शशि कपूर मसाला फिल्मों से पैसे कमा कर, कला फिल्मों में लगा रहे थे. मुझे लगता था कि उनकी इस चाह का कुछ लोग अपने मतलब के लिए इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं. ‘उत्सव’ के साथ भी कुछ ऐसा ही तो नहीं ? भारतीयों चाहते थे कि उनकी तरफ से मैं ‘उत्सव’ के बनने की प्रक्रिया को देखूं-समझूं और फिर इस पर लिखूं. मैंने उनकी बात स्वीकार की और तब से गिरीश से मिलना होने लगा.

गिरीश का महाराष्ट्र से रिश्ता कुछ मजेदार-सा था. मां-पिता छुट्टियों

देश दुनिया से

एडीबी ने किया पाक को मदद देने से इनकार

पाकिस्तान को उस वक्त शर्मिंदगी का सामना करना पड़ा, जब मनीला स्थित एशियन डेवलपमेंट बैंक (एडीबी) ने 3.4 अरब डॉलर की मदद पाकिस्तान को देने की बात से इनकार कर दिया. गौरतलब है कि पाक सरकार ने कहा था कि उसे एडीबी से 3.4 अरब डॉलर मिलेगा. बीते दिनों पाक सरकार के दो सीनियर अधिकारियों ने घोषणा की थी कि एडीबी 3.4 अरब डॉलर पाकिस्तान को बजट सपोर्ट के रूप में देगा. इसके बाद प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान के आधिकारिक सलाहकार डॉ अब्दुल हफीज शेख ने अपने आधिकारिक दिवटर हैंडल से ट्वीट कर कहा कि एडीबी के दो सीनियर अधिकारियों से उनकी बैठक हुई है. हफ्तेज ने भी एडीबी से आर्थिक मदद मिलने की गुफ्टि की. डॉ शेख ने कहा था एडीबी पाकिस्तान को बजट सपोर्ट देगा. शेख ने कहा था कि एडीबी के साथ बैठक में उसके प्रोग्राम के तहत इस रकम पर सहमति बनी है. प्रधानमंत्री के सलाहकार ने यहां तक कह दिया कि एडीबी दो अरब डॉलर इस वित्तीय वर्ष में जारी करेगा. शेख ने कहा था कि इससे विदेशी मुद्रा भंडार में स्थिरता आयेगी. यह मदद हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था में परियोजनाओं के लिए अतिरिक्त होगी. हम आर्थिक सुधारों में एडीबी की प्रतिबद्धता की सराहना करते हैं. लेकिन अब एडीबी ने इससे इनकार किया है.

प्रभात खबर 12

उत्पीड़न का शिकार हो रही थी, किसी से छिपा नहीं है. इन गूंगे-बहरे मतदाताओं के स्वर रोजमर्रा के मुद्दे नहीं बनते, लेकिन प्रचंड गर्मी में लंबी कतारें लगाकर मतदान में इनके स्वर मुखर जरूर हो जाते हैं.

जब समूची राजनीतिक पार्टियां वोटों के झुंडों को संगठित करने में लगी रहती हैं, तब बिहार में लोक से हटकर सामाजिक कुरीतियों के विरुद्ध हल्ला बोल किया गया है. बाल विवाह, मधनिषेध, वृद्ध सम्मान योजना समेत कई सामाजिक पहलें सिर्फ बिहार में ही हुई हैं.

लोकसभा चुनाव में जदयू प्रमुख ने 171 जनसभाएं कीं. महागठबंधन के नेता एक दूसरे को जब नीचा दिखाने में लगे हुए थे, तब एनडीए की तिकड़ी मोदी, पासवान व नीतीश कुमार एक दिन में तीन से चार सभाएं कर अपनी जनकल्याणकारी योजनाओं का ब्योरा दे रहे थे. एनडीए में असहयोग की कोई शिकायत नहीं थी, जबकि नेता प्रतिपक्ष के कुनबे में विस्फोट की खबरें सुर्खियों में रहा करती थीं. सर्वण आरक्षण को लेकर भी नये-पुराने नेतृत्व में भयंकर विवाद थे, जिसकी चपेट में कई दिग्गज उम्मीदवार भी स्वाहा हो गये. राहुल गांधी की सभा में तेजस्वी यादव की अनुपस्थिति की चर्चा आज भी है. कद्दावर नेता शकील अहमद गठबंधन के विरुद्ध उम्मीदवार बने तथा नेत्री रंजीता रंजन को हराने में राजद के रणबांकुरे अतिरिक्त सक्रिय हो गये. इससे इतर मोदीजी की सभा से पहले स्वयं नीतीश कुमार तैयारियों का आकलन किया करते थे. ऐसे तमाम संयुक्त प्रयासों ने एनडीए को समरस बनाने का काम किया. केंद्र व राज्य सरकार के विकास कार्यों ने भी जीत में बड़ी भूमिका अदा की है. साल 2020 का चुनाव नजदीक आ गया है और मौजूदा आंकड़ों के अनुसार, एनडीए की लगभग 224 विधानसभा सीटों पर बढ़त है. यह बढ़त टूटे, बिखरे और आभाहीत तथा हाशिये पर जा चुके महागठबंधन के लिए काफी है.



आपके पत्र

ट्रंप का रवेया ठीक नहीं

अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप ने रविवार को अपने एक ट्वीट में लंदन के मेयर सादिक खान की खिंचाई की. वहां चाकूबाजी की एकाध घटना घट गयी थी. ऐसा तो लगभग हर शहर में होता है, तो क्या राष्ट्रपति सभी शहरों के मेयरों को हटाने की मांग करेंगे ? बड़े देश के बड़े राष्ट्रपति का बड़पन इसी में है कि वह छोटी-मोटी घटनाओं को नजरअंदाज करके चले. उनके खुद के देश में लगभग प्रत्येक सलाह किसी चर्च में, स्कूल में, सड़क पर गोलोबारी की घटनाएं होती रहती हैं. इसके लिए क्या वह शहर के मेयर को हटवा देते हैं ? पाकिस्तानी मूल के सादिक खान चूँकि शुरू से ही ट्रंप के आलोचक रहे हैं. इसलिए इन्हें निशाना बनाया जा रहा है. फासीवादी और अतिराष्ट्रवादियों की पहचान ही यही है कि वे कभी खुद की आलोचना बर्दाश्त नहीं करते. सादिक खान विपक्षी लेबर पार्टी से ताल्लुक रखते हैं, इसलिए शायद ब्रिटिश सरकार भी उनका साथ नहीं दे रही है.

जंग बहादुर सिंह, गोलवाही, जमशेदपुर

योग का विकल्प नहीं

पुरातन काल से ही भारतीय सभ्यता व संस्कृति ने स्वस्थ शरीर को मानव जीवन का अभिन्न हिस्सा माना है. प्राचीन समय में गुरुकुलों में दी जाने वाली शिक्षा में योग की महत्ता समझ कर इसे पाठ्यक्रम का हिस्सा बनाया गया था, लेकिन धीरे-धीरे वक्त के बदलने के साथ-साथ योग की परिभाषा भी बदलती गयी और सब अपने-अपनों से निकलकर योग महंगी मशीनों के जाल में कैद हो गया. पता ही नहीं चला. अपने जीवन को सुगम और स्वस्थ बनाने की चाहत कब निःशुल्क योग से वातानुकूलित कमरों में सिमट गयी और महंगे व्यायाम ने हल्का रोग दे दिया, पता ही नहीं चला. मानव समाज इस बात को भलीभांति समझ चुका है कि योग का कोई विकल्प नहीं है. योग को आत्मसात कर जहां एक ओर हम भारतीय सभ्यता और संस्कृति को मजबूती प्रदान कर रहे हैं, वहीं दूसरी ओर स्वस्थ और निरोग जीवन की अभिलाषा को नया आयाम दे रहे हैं. योग दिवस के बहाने ही सही वृहद स्तर पर योगाभ्यास का आयोजन हो रहा है. निस्संदेह योग को यदि हमारे जीवन का हिस्सा बनाया जाए, तो स्वस्थ शरीर की संकल्पना पूरी हो जायेगी .

सौरभ पाठक,बुड़

अंधे कुएं में छलांग!

केजरीवाल सरकार का महिलाओं को बसों और मेट्रो में मुफ्त सफर कराने का फैसला एकदम अंधे कुएं छलांग लगाने जैसा है. अव्वल तो दिल्ली में पहले ही बस और मेट्रो सेवा पर्याप्त नहीं है. मुफ्त यात्रा सुविधा से भीड़ और बढ़ेगी और हालात ज्यादा बिगड़ेंगे. महंगा किराया और उसका देने वाली जनता को निराशा होगी और उसका मनोबल टूटेगा. इसके अतिरिक्त बसों और मेट्रो का राजस्व घटने से वेतन आदि के भी और लाले पड़ेंगे. प्रख्यात बुद्धिजीवी और मेट्रोमैन श्रीधरन जी ने भी इस मुफ्त सफर को गलत माना है. आशा है केजरीवाल सरकार इस पर विचार करेगी.

महेंद्र मान, अलीपुर, दिल्ली

पोस्ट करें : प्रभात खबर, 15 पी. इंडस्ट्रियल एरिया, कोकर, रांची 834001, **फैक्स करें :** 0651-2544006, **मेल करें :** eletter@prabhatkhabar.in पर ई-मेल संक्षिप्त व हिंदी में हो. लिपि रोमन भी हो सकती है

