

Collateral-free loans in a \$5 trillion economy

President Kovind’s address to Parliament raises questions on the government’s economic policies



RAISINA HILL
A K BHATTACHARYA

The address of President Ram Nath Kovind to a joint sitting of the two houses of Parliament last Thursday stood out for the way it articulated the Modi government’s economic goals. For a better understanding of what one can expect of the Modi government in its second term, it would be useful to examine the salient economic promises made in the speech.

The goal of growing the Indian economy to \$5 trillion by 2024 has under-

standably grabbed the newspaper headlines. Questions are obviously being raised on whether this is only one of those catchy slogans or the government is serious about achieving in just five years what is clearly a highly ambitious target. Note that the \$5 trillion target was also mentioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address at the meeting of the governing council of the NITI Aayog on June 15. Modi admitted that the target was challenging, but he also said it was achievable. He added that the “states should recognise their core competence, and work towards raising GDP targets right from the district level”. The President too underlined the role of the states in achieving this target. He said the goal would be achieved in collaboration with the states.

It is true that the states growing faster can help the country’s overall economic growth. But putting the onus of achieving that challenging target on the states is significant. It might be a way of the Modi government displaying its faith in cooperative federalism. It could also be

an escape clause. If the 5-trillion-dollar target is not met, the states could easily become the scapegoat.

Either way, the Indian economy’s growth performance in the past provides some indication of the difficulty in achieving the new target. India’s dollar GDP was nominally estimated at about \$2 trillion in 2013-14. It is estimated to have grown to \$2.7 trillion in 2018-19, an increase of 35 per cent. If the target of \$5 trillion is to be achieved in 2024, the growth during this period should be 85 per cent. This is going to be a tall task. Was this idea adequately thought through before making it an official goal? The President already admitted that India was no longer the fastest growing economy in the world. He said: “Today India is among the fastest growing economies in the world.” The RBI Governor also admits that economic activity in the Indian economy is losing traction. Experts point out it would take a few more quarters before the Indian economy could revive growth. The recent GDP growth numbers do not

offer any hope either. So, why was that target set?

The President also said that “keeping in view Industry 4.0” the government would soon announce a new industrial policy. The reference to Industry 4.0 as the context of the new policy is significant. The fourth industrial revolution has promoted the use of technology, automation, artificial intelligence and data analytics. At the same time, it has also threatened the existing types of jobs, posing difficult policy challenges for a country like India where unemployment continues to be a major problem. So, what kind of a new industrial policy can the new government formulate?

The government’s promise that it would formulate a national retail trade policy is also replete with possibilities. The objective of this policy will be to promote retail business, but foreign investors as well as large Indian companies would be eagerly looking forward to its contours. The Modi government’s policy on organised retail, particularly with regard to foreign investment, has been a little ambiguous. One of its core constituencies, small traders, has remained opposed to the opening up of the retail sector. The advent of large e-commerce

players has only increased its vulnerability.

The recent disclosure of the Indian joint venture of Walmart having made some improper payments to Indian government officials in 2011 may also influence the Modi regime’s approach to foreign investment in the retail sector. Will the new retail trade policy make foreign investment norms more restrictive to address such concerns or win over the small traders through some other incentives while opening up the sector?

Referring to the entrepreneurs’ need for capital, the President said that the government would make available loans up to Rs 50 lakh to them, without any guarantee. Loans of this size, without any collateral, are deeply problematic for the health of the financial sector. Banks have just begun to tackle their non-performing assets. Allowing loans up to ₹50 lakh without any guarantee can also open the floodgates to politically motivated loans, whose repayments would be highly uncertain. Unfortunately, the burden of such collateral-free loans would have to be borne largely by the already beleaguered public-sector banks. Is the government encouraging loan *melas* by a different name?

CHINESE WHISPERS

Waste not, want not



As the Tamil Nadu government faces brickbats for not being able to manage the worst water shortage in the history of the state, the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has decided to knock at the doors of the gods. Local Administration Minister S P Velumani, who had earlier stated that the water scarcity was “manufactured news”, was seen participating in a special *puja*, organised by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department, part of the state government, to appease the rain gods. Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami (*pictured*) is also in the line of fire. Frustrated with questions on the allocation of water to VIP homes in Chennai, he declared, “I drink four litres and use only two buckets of water per day.”

No cheers!

To boost revenue collection, officers of the Madhya Pradesh excise department came up with an unusual idea. In the proposed excise policy, there was a suggestion to deliver liquor online, directly to the customer’s doorstep, a la Domino’s or Pizza Hut. The department said it would allot licences to two companies for this purpose. The logic was the state would keep the margin, which went to contractors in conventional selling. When the proposal came to the knowledge of state Chief Minister Kamal Nath, he lost his cool. He trashed the idea saying it would severely dent the image of the state government.

DMK jittery after TDP flux

After a bunch of Telugu Desam Party (TDP) members – including party chief Chandrababu Naidu’s close confidantes Y S Chowdary and C M Ramesh – joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) last week, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leadership is feeling jittery. Two DMK members met Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu around the same time, sparking speculation that some party members, including Dayanidhi Maran, were mulling a switch. Later, the DMK had to issue a clarification that it was a mere courtesy call. But the brass of DMK, which won 23 of the 38 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu in the elections held in April, is not taking any chances. Insiders say their party president has unofficially warned party Members of Parliament not to even greet BJP leaders when they meet on the Parliament premises. He has also designated some older members of the party to keep a watch on the younger ones.

A new challenge for the microfinance industry?

“Fresh start” is a welcome step as it will free up debtors from archaic laws but they need counselling to prevent misuse



BANKER’S TRUST
TAMAL BANDYOPADHYAY

In October 2010, the enactment of a law in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, then a hotbed of the microfinance industry, almost killed it. The law came into force in the wake of a spate of suicides by microfinance borrowers, allegedly harassed by the coercive measures adopted by the collectors of such loans.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stepped in with regulations capping the interest rates, quantum of loans and the number of borrowers a microfinance company can entertain, and formation of credit bureaus, among other things. These brought the industry back from the brink of a collapse. The fact that eight of the 10 small finance banks were microfinance institutions (MFIs) testifies to the resurrection of the industry.

The next blow was demonetisation. In the 50 days between November 10 and December 30, 2016, ₹15.4 trillion worth of currency notes of denominations of ₹1,000 and ₹500 – some 86.9 per cent of the value of the total number

of notes in circulation then -- were withdrawn. That hit the microfinance industry hard as till that time most transactions of small loans were in cash. Their loan growth slowed and bad assets zoomed. The MFIs, which were transforming into small finance banks, also could not escape the brunt of the problem.

Is there a new challenge for the MFIs round the corner? Many in the industry believe so. The origin of the challenge is the so-called “fresh start” process, part of the personal insolvency law. The regulations, part of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016, have already been in place but they have not been notified. This will be done over the next few months.

Under the “fresh start” scheme, small borrowers unable to repay unsecured loans up to ₹35,000 can apply for the automatic debt relief. To qualify for this, the debtors’ gross annual income should not exceed ₹60,000; the limit for the aggregate value of assets is ₹20,000. The debtors owning a “dwelling unit” will not qualify for this.

Under Section 80 of the IBC code, the debtors can apply for the relief. The day the application is filed, an interim moratorium on all debt will come into effect and the lenders will not be able to initiate any legal proceedings against such a debt. The debtors need to move the debt recovery tribunals or DRTs for filing such an application and if the relief is given, the debtors come out of bankruptcy and the unsecured loans are waived off.

As a concept, “fresh start” is an integral part of the US insolvency law.



Those borrowers who can no longer pay their creditors get a “fresh start” by liquidating assets to pay their debts or by creating a repayment plan. They pay their creditors what they can afford but what they cannot afford is discharged; a debt discharged through bankruptcy is no longer legally enforceable against the debtor. According to the US Supreme Court, “(Bankruptcy) gives to the honest but unfortunate debtor... a new opportunity in life and a clear field for future effort, unhampered by the pressure and discouragement of preexisting debt.”

Any attempt to collect or coerce payment from such debtors can be penalised by contempt of the bankruptcy court. In the US, this includes a bill through the mail, a telephone call, or a lawsuit. However, a “fresh start” does not “erase” a debt; the discharge is an injunction that makes a debt uncollectible. The debt still remains and may show up on a credit report, but all activity on the debt stops from the day the bankruptcy is filed.

Many in the microfinance industry as well as commercial banks which lend to such institutions apprehend that such a law in India will encourage small

unsecured borrowers to default and destroy the credit culture.

For the record, the average ticket size of a small loans is less than ₹35,000 — around ₹33,665. Data collected from an industry body show the number of small borrowers across financial segment — MFIs, banks, non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) and not-for-profit entities — are close to 50 million and the outstanding corpus of small loans has been close to ₹1.8 trillion. The average bad loans of banks in this segment is less than 2 per cent, that of MFIs over 3 per cent and NBFCs at least 4 per cent. It is more than 4.5 per cent for not-for-profit organisations.

I could not get data on average assets of such borrowers and also how many of them have their own dwelling place. The MFIs need to give unsecured loans to 85 per cent of their customers. Under the RBI norms, the annual household income of a small borrower from an NBFC-MFI cannot exceed ₹1 lakh; for urban and semi-urban borrowers, this amount is ₹1.6 lakh. The loan given to such borrowers should not exceed ₹60,000 in the first cycle and subsequently, it can be raised to ₹1 lakh.

INSIGHT

Pledging shares & the mirage of prosperity



NUPUR PAVAN BANG &
KAVIL RAMACHANDRAN

Pledging shares has become an easy option to raise funds, even for many well-known business families. Unfortunately, they do not seem to visualise scenarios where the optimistic assumptions about future performance may not always materialise. As of May 2019, 62 per cent of all listed companies in India had pledged at least some (in a few cases all) of their promoters holding. As many as 193 companies’ promoters had pledged 75 per cent or more of their shares and 327 companies’ promoters had pledged at least 50 per cent of their stake. The scenario of lenders liquidating the pledged shares of defaulted borrower is very scary.

Pledging of shares where promoters use their shares as collateral to raise money is not a new phenomenon but has become popular amongst promoters in recent years. It was after the scam involving Satyam Computers in 2009 that the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) made it mandatory for promoters to disclose to the stock exchanges of any pledging of shares. It is often understood as pawning the “family jewel” as a last resort to tide over difficult times. Stock market sees it as a sign of weak financial position of the promoter. Promoters often pledge

shares for personal use like investment in another venture or buying more shares of the company. Pledging shares in a “cash cow” company to fund a risky untested startup or a fledgling business may spook the investors.

Similarly, when the promoters pledge their shares to buy more shares of their own company, it signifies that the promoters think the share is undervalued and/or have confidence in the prospects of the company. It therefore should send a positive signal to the market. However, promoters are not only putting more of their eggs in the same basket but also taking on leverage to do so. Adding to this, the increase in control in the company is based on information asymmetry that exists between the promoters and the minority shareholders. This gives rise to insider trading and governance concerns. In a recent amendment to insider trading regulations, to promote fair market conduct, the Sebi has plugged this gap by closing the trading and pledging of shares window for the promoters starting from the end of a quarter to 48 hours after the declaration of quarterly results by the company.

Trouble begins when the value of the pledged shares falls below the agreed level with the lenders. Many promoters get into the trap of pledging more shares to fill the drop in value in the hope that they will soon be able to revoke the shares by repaying the amount to the lenders.

When stock prices fall or go in a downward spiral and the promoters are no longer able to either pay the money or pledge more shares, the lenders invoke the shares, and sell them in the open market. The promoters may even end up losing control, as has happened with a few companies recently. The implications for business families are grave, particu-



larly with a lot of their family wealth blocked up in the business. Family splits, loss of reputation and bleak career possibilities for the next generation do happen in such cases, resulting in formation of entirely new trajectories of life for everyone.

In a rapidly growing economy, entrepreneurial promoters naturally tend to assume that the rising graph of growth and prosperity will never fall. This is a myth. Pledging beyond small quantities is very dangerous, like overleveraging. Shares are virtual collaterals with very high potential for volatility, due to known as well as many unknowns, including news or events that are totally not related to the company, its performance or management. There is a huge possibility of share prices falling anytime.

Most bankers and lenders fail to learn from history that in a crisis, most assets become illiquid. Most of the risk models do not account for illiquidity. They assume that markets are perfectly liquid. However, that is not the case. Lenders often invoke the pledge and dump shares in the market at very low prices, translating the already downward spiral into a shock. Financial Institutions need to have built-in mechanisms and standards to ensure

that investments are made in assets that can be liquidated at the lowest possible cost.

The Sebi must also put in place a limitation to the percentage of shares that can be pledged, including the cumulative pledged shares after margin calls. Having pledged most of the shares and yet maintaining the voting rights may seem like a good situation to the promoters when in reality their fate is hanging by a day’s movement on the stock exchange. Or, pledging should also suspend voting rights till the pledge is not revoked. If the promoters need to raise more money, they should take a conscious decision to sell their stake in a phased manner or through a strategic sale.

The board of directors must also assert and prevent promoters from taking this treacherous road to the mirage of prosperity. As the custodian of the wealth of all stake holders, the board has a vantage view of the things to happen. It has to exercise its rights instead of being a rubber stamp.

Bang is associate director and Ramachandran professor and executive director at the Thomas Schmidheiny Centre for Family Enterprise at the Indian School of Business

LETTERS

A conflict of interest?

This refers to “Do not throw away the baby with the bathwater” by Somasekar Sunderesan (June 20). The author has admitted that he is professionally attached to the assurance industry. So it is a case of conflict of interest. Even taking his argument on merit, one can hardly agree that the assurance industry is being thrown away with the bathwater. The assurance industry has been defined by him as the chartered accountants and auditors who are required to certify the correctness of the financial transactions of a company which appoints them. I have worked as independent director in several private companies after my retirement for much more than a decade. I have been chairman of Audit Committee also. I realise the importance of the auditors (who are chartered accountants) who really know the details of all the transactions of the company as they examine all vouchers and find out if the various corporate rules have been obeyed by the company. The summary of the transaction details, gross profit and net profit etc are placed before the Board of Directors. If they do not provide a correct set of figures due to inefficiency or collusion, the decision of the Board will never be correct. Presently, the regulators have punished a few of the auditors by banning them for some length of time. This is highly praiseworthy and will prevent corporate fraud. Such move cannot be called a knee-jerk reaction. Good result has followed due

to this as Price Water House, a famous audit company has walked out of auditing the accounts of a suspect company. Calling such action as theatrical and based only on suspicion is most unwarranted. The author is an interested party and his opinion is clearly prejudiced for obvious self-interest and is vitiated by conflict of interest.

Sukumar Mukhopadhyay
via email

Note from the editor: The author had made a clear and explicit disclosure of his role as a lawyer so that his opinion was read along with the perceived interest in his views.

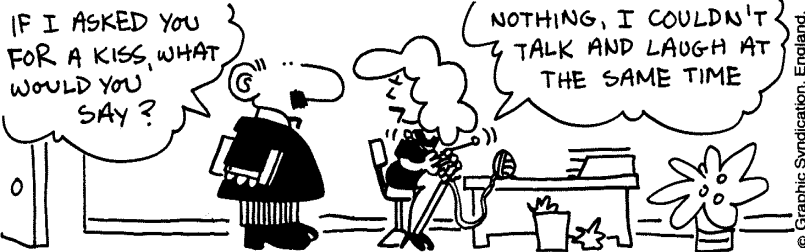
Plan wisely

This refers to “Making dam water reach the farmer” (June 21). The geographical terrain, geological condition sand hydrological requirements vary from place to place in a vast country like India and distribution of water should be made according to the requirements of the local environment. Covering both the geographical and local requirements while considering construction of dams is very important as the level of the water table varies from place to place.

CGopinath Nair Kochi

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HAMBONE



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Raw deal

GST Council has gone overboard on anti-profiteering

The first meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council under Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman continued the healthy tradition of a consultative process, followed in all the previous meetings. On Friday, the Council refrained from taking any decision on rate restructuring and focused more on bringing in stringent norms to check tax evasion. While the much-anticipated proposal for reduction in rates on electric vehicles and chargers was referred to a fitment committee, the contentious issue of a uniform GST rate on lotteries was sent to the Attorney-General. In a signal to taxpayers that it was alive to their concerns, the Council did well by extending the deadline to file annual GST returns for 2017-18 by two months till the end of August and announced that the one-form new return filing system will be applicable from January 1 next year. The in-principle clearance to an electronic invoicing mechanism for business-to-business transactions through a designated official portal was another prudent step.

The same, however, can't be said about the decision to impose a higher penalty on the so-called profiteering by companies. Under the changed rules, if companies guilty of pocketing the benefits of tax cuts meant for consumers do not return the amount within 30 days, they will have to pay a penalty of 10 per cent of the profiteered amount. This is in addition to the requirement of returning the profiteered amount either to the consumer or to the consumer welfare funds set up by the government. The additional penalty would be hard on businesses, specially in the absence of rules and guidance as to what constitutes profiteering. The law does not specifically provide for whether the benefit has to be passed on at a business-entity level or at a product-category level, or at a stock-keeping unit level. This has already led to a series of interpretational disputes involving some of the biggest companies. In other jurisdictions that have undergone the transition to a GST, such as Australia, it has been specified how the equivalent authority should investigate the net margin on a particular product. But in India, nothing is specified other than the process to be followed. It's strange that the GST Council has opted for tougher measures against companies despite its failure to formulate rules even two years after the GST regime was rolled out.

The decision to extend the National Anti-Profiteering Authority's (NAA's) life by two more years is also questionable. The NAA, which was earlier supposed to have a two-year sunset horizon, was in any way a bad idea, made worse by poor implementation. In any case, companies should be free to respond to tax changes, particularly complex ones such as the GST, which have multiple conflicting effects on their costs, in a manner determined by competitive dynamics and commercial considerations. If competitive dynamics are weak and do not allow for a proper transmission of tax cuts, that is the business of the Competition Commission. It is anyway unfair to assume that competition would not result in passing on cost reduction from lower taxes. Even if a temporary authority was required in the initial years because the purpose of the GST introduction was to minimise the effect on the consumer, the NAA should have been wound up within its stipulated time.

Revive Inter-State Council

Institution can give substance to slogan of co-operative federalism

Last week, the prime minister chaired the fifth meeting of the Governing Council of the NITI Aayog, where many issues of national importance, involving coordination between the Centre and the state governments, were discussed. However, not all chief ministers attended the meeting — three were absent. One of those chief ministers, Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal, wrote to the prime minister, saying that attending the NITI Aayog meeting was “fruitless” because the body had no powers to support state plans, as distinct from the now defunct Planning Commission. While Ms Banerjee's refusal may have a great deal to do with politics — the Trinamool Congress is fighting off the expansion of the Bharatiya Janata Party in West Bengal — there is also something in what she says that should be taken seriously. Her letter suggested that the Inter-State Council should be revived as the “nodal” location for discussing matters that involve both the Centre and the states. This suggestion was also made in his speech to the NITI Aayog Governing Council by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

This is a possibility worth considering. The Inter-State Council is indeed the appropriate location for many major issues of national scope to be discussed. For example, the question of simultaneous elections to the Centre and the states, which has been a pet subject of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, should ideally be discussed at an Inter-State Council. Coordination between states on counter-extremist and counter-terror operations is another such issue. Past attempts to knit together separate efforts, such as against the Naxalites, did not necessarily do well and foundered on various questions to do with federalism and states' power to control law and order. Even Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, whose Janata Dal (United) is an ally of the BJP, has spoken of how centrally sponsored scheme drain state resources unduly without giving state leaders even leeway. This is another question that could and should be discussed fruitfully within the context of the Inter-State Council, given that other chief ministers also agreed with Mr Kumar. Many also asked for the backlog of the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme payments to be released. Karnataka Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy complained that revenues from the GST were proving to be disappointing and thus asked that the compensation to the states be extended beyond 2022.

The speeches of chief ministers at the NITI Aayog Governing Council revealed that there are many such issues that go beyond the five-point agenda set out by the Centre for the meeting. The co-operative nature of the GST Council, in which the Centre and the states meet to determine the outlines of the GST, has shown that there is considerable scope for such institutions that give substance to the prime minister's promise of “co-operative federalism”. It is time therefore to revive those institutions that could serve to arrive at a consensus on such issues. Certainly, the Inter-State Council is one such.

ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY



Whither central bank independence

The signal from the RBI governor is that the balance will tilt in favour of the inter-dependence of policies and implicit coordination with the government

For the past five years, the relations between the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have been debated. Much of this debate, however, is based on an inadequate understanding of central bank independence.

Central banks perform four functions: Price stabilisation, which is essential for maintaining trust in the currency; financial sector development and stability, in particular, because of it being the lender of the last resort, especially for banks; reducing volatility in and maximising of output and employment; supporting government borrowing when appropriate; and, very importantly, restraining the use of such borrowing when necessary.

Central banks, however, are creatures of governments, which give them some independence or autonomy. This is to ensure that people have trust and confidence in matters relating to money and finance. At the same time, governments have to ensure that central banks are accountable.

The emphasis on autonomy and accountability varies, depending on the context. To illustrate, during times of crisis and structural transformation, coordination between the government and central banks takes precedence over autonomy.

The period of the 1970s was one of confusion for central banks, with the collapse of the Bretton Woods

system, the onset of the significant euro-dollar market, and severe inflation, partly caused by the oil shock in 1973. The US Federal Reserve's success in containing inflation during 1979-82 shifted focus to price stability and increased the role of central banks. The dominance of market ideology in the 1980s also contributed to a reduction in the role of the government in an economy. Consequently, the independence of central banks and

inflation targeting dominated policy thinking, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The global financial crisis of 2008, however, raised doubts about the efficacy of the nature of central bank independence. Ironically, central banks had to address the problem, which, in some ways, they caused.

There have been three features of the response of central banks to this crisis, namely, (a) unconventional monetary measures; (b) closer coordination with governments and other regulators; and (c) reviewing the approach to central banking. In the approach to central banking, in preference to asserting independence, the emphasis on a single objective and independence stands diluted globally.

Now a decade after the global crisis in 2008, central banks are being attacked by political leaderships. This could be due to governments looking for a scapegoat for the current problems they face, or to the ineffectiveness of monetary policy in many countries, or to the monetary authorities running out of options.



WHAT NEXT

Y V REDDY

Truth & fairness of the auditing profession

Until earlier this month, one of the most farcical professions was auditing. Under the Companies Act, almost all types of companies have to get audited. Then the charade begins. Auditors are supposed to be appointed by the owners — the shareholders — and not the management. But as anyone knows, in all private companies and most public limited ones, it is the promoter families that control both the management and the shareholding. In a tiny number of listed companies where promoters do not have a majority stake, only the management selects the auditor, and outside shareholders are too uninterested to appoint or change auditors. Hence the first ground rule of auditing is “don't rub the managements the wrong way”.

What makes life easy for auditors is the second ground rule — they are supposed to be watchdogs, not bloodhounds, in the memorable phrase of Lord Justice Lopes, who ruled in the Kingston Cotton Mills Co (1896) case. A third ground rule makes life even easier: Auditors are supposed to express an opinion on the true and fair view of accounts. The audit report is merely an opinion, not a certificate or a guarantee of anything. These three ground rules defined the (ineffectiveness of auditors for generations.

This isn't a story of small companies and small auditors alone. When Tata Finance was involved in huge speculative market operations, circular transactions and other suspect deals in early 2000s, the Tatas commissioned A F Ferguson to do a special audit. The Ferguson report, supervised by senior partner Y M Kale, did not give a clean chit to Tata directors. The Tatas rejected the report and Ferguson, heavily dependent on the Tata group for its revenues, sacked Mr Kale.

The system allows for redress against misdeeds but only on paper. You could complain

to the professional body, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), against “professional misconduct” but I know of cases where the ICAI disciplinary council sided with the auditor (who of course had helped bury the accounting fiddle-diddle). Insiders know how this works, so many bright CAs stay away from auditing. The ethical ones (and there are many) feel frustrated.

Earlier this month, in a stunning turn of events, two sleepy but potentially powerful arms of the government changed the rules of this cosy game. On June 11, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) moved the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) to debar auditors of IL&FS Financial Services (IFIN) — Deloitte Haskins & Sells and BSR & Associates — from doing any business for five years for their alleged collusion with the IFIN management. BSR is part of the mighty KPMG network of accounting firms. The MCA's move came after a sterling job done by another organisation, one whose existence we tend to forget — the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO). It alleged that the IFIN auditors connived with former directors to conceal information about wrongdoing. All this has started to have a salutary effect.

Price Waterhouse & Co, another giant in audit, tax and consulting, (banned in 2018 for two years by the securities market regulator for its role in the Satyam scam), resigned as statutory auditor of Reliance Capital in June. It claims that the company “prevented it from performing its duties ... and exercising independent judgment”.

These episodes have come at the right time as institutional change is already underway with the establishment of the National Financial Regulatory Authority (NFRA) to regulate audit, accounting and financial standards. The ICAI opposed the NFRA tooth and nail from 2010 till 2017. The ICAI argues

The world is now searching for a new framework. In any case, to quote Professor Charles Goodhart: “The idea of the central bank as an independent institution will be put aside.”

How independent has the RBI been?

To answer this, we must bear in mind that central banking became an instrument of planned development after 1950. The RBI had to create money whenever the government wanted it. This lasted till 1996.

In 1969, private banks were nationalised by ignoring the RBI's views. The transmission of monetary policy through the banking system depended thus on the cooperation of the government.

Since the financial sector reforms of the 1990s, however, there have been two elements relevant to independence, namely, an end to automatic monetisation and regulation of public sector banks consistent with global standards as well as opening up banking for the private sector. Fiscal dominance, however, continued, constraining the exercise of independence in monetary policy.

In the late 1990s, suggestions were made to adopt inflation targeting, which the RBI opposed. But in 2016, at the instance of the RBI, the government amended the RBI Act to introduce inflation targeting. An institutional mechanism for an independent monetary policy was also put in place.

Since 2016, prima facie, the objectives of monetary policy set by the government have been met but the period was characterised by unprecedented tensions between the RBI and the government.

Personnel independence was diluted in the manner of appointment to the RBI board and of senior functionaries. Financial independence was threatened by demands made by the government on the annual surplus and even the reserves, apart from introducing the concept of advance dividend.

Operational independence was eroded by statements from government officials on the board of the RBI, culminating in the unprecedented act of giving notice under Section VII of the RBI Act to give directions. The contentious operational matters included liquidity and regulating banks, especially public sector banks.

An indication of a recent shift in policy has been given by the governor in his recent speech on “Evolving Role of Central Banks”, delivered on June 17, 2019. He said, “... the fact remains that though the focus of monetary policy is mainly on inflation and growth, the underlying theme has always been financial stability.”

The signal from RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das is that the balance will tilt in favour of the inter-dependence of policies and implicit coordination with the government and the full service nature of the RBI. The next step will presumably be in favour of negotiation for greater autonomy for the RBI within the ambit of the government's policies, in preference to asserting independence.

This will test everyone's skills and patience as the art of central banking lies in convincing the people that the RBI is independent, while assuring the government that its policies are consistent with the government's intentions.

The author is former governor, Reserve Bank of India



BOOK REVIEW

EVAN THOMAS

On February 12, 2016, Justice Antonin Scalia died of a heart attack at a remote luxury resort in West Texas. The Republican Senate leader, Mitch McConnell, wasted no time declaring that his party would not allow President Obama to fill the Supreme Court vacancy.

There were still more than 340 days left in Obama's term, plenty of time for confirmation hearings, but the Republican senators wouldn't even talk to Obama's nominee, the thoroughly worthy and decent Merrick Garland. Democrats loudly protested, portraying McConnell as “the obstructionist in chief.” (McConnell “hap-

pily embraced his image as the dark lord of the Senate,” Mr Hulse notes, and covered a wall of his office with prints of editorial cartoons “saying all sorts of nasty things about him.”) But the Democrats were hardly in a position to complain.

In 2003, the Democratic Senate leader, Harry Reid, had led the first-ever successful filibuster of a nominee to the federal court of appeals, Miguel Estrada. Then, in 2013, when the Republicans played tit-for-tat and began holding up Democratic nominees to the federal courts in the Obama administration, Mr Reid “went nuclear,” in Senate parlance, engineering an end to the filibuster in judicial nominations — a move that left lingering “bit-terness,” Mr Hulse says.

“Blatant hypocrisy,” Mr Hulse declares in this entertaining and shrewd book, is a “defining characteristic” of the United States Senate, certainly in the 21st century. “With control of the Senate frequently shifting between the parties, senators had to master the art of the 180-degree turn, instantly adopting the language and tac-

tics of the opposition party as soon as they exchanged places.”

Shamelessness paid off for the Republicans. Mr McConnell boasted that by preserving an open seat on the Supreme Court, he helped elect Trump president, and Mr Hulse offers polling data to back up this claim. President Trump gloated over the opportunity to stock the rest of the federal bench with conservatives. “You know, when I got in, we had over 100 federal judges that weren't appointed,” Mr Trump declared to a crowd in March 2018. “Now I don't know why Obama left that. It was like a big, beautiful present to all of us. Why the hell did he leave that? Maybe he got complacent.” Actually, Mr Obama left so many judgeships unfilled because the Republicans were able to obstruct and delay.

The Trump administration would not let the same thing happen. Mr Hulse colourfully describes Trump's all-out assault. His chief strategist was the White House counsel Don McGahn, “an

unusual mix of conventional Washington Republican and former long-haired radical libertarian who was an excellent guitar player in a beach bar cover band on the side,” Hulse writes.

He set about this with a single-minded zeal that would have made James Madison blanch. “Previous administrations reviewed and picked judges via judicial recommendation committees, exhaustive review and consultation with the Justice Department,” Hulse says. With Mr Trump's backing, Mr McGahn “wanted to dispense with all that,” and by and large he was able to, thanks to a compliant Republican Senate leadership. Well into Mr Trump's term, the president had appointed 30 federal appellate judges (about one-sixth of the total) and 53 lower court judges, as well as a Supreme Court justice — Neil Gorsuch, who filled Scalia's vacant seat.

At the same time, Mr McGahn could be subtle. He signaled to Justice Anthony Kennedy, who was nearly 82 years old, that if he stepped down, Trump would replace him with a former Kennedy clerk, Brett

Kavanaugh. Kennedy may have been anxious about Trump's somewhat high-handed view of the judiciary, but Mr McGahn knew that Kennedy had a vain side. Gorsuch had also clerked for Kennedy at the Supreme Court.

Mr Hulse, the chief Washington correspondent for *The New York Times*, is not a knee-jerk Trump critic. He actually credits Mr Trump with “cutting through much of the high-minded malarkey about the neutrality of judges with a single tweet.”

Still, as Mr Hulse points out, there is a reason judges go to great lengths to appear impartial and neutral (and, of course, some truly try to be). The legitimacy of the court depends on a public perception that the justices are fair-minded referees in the political battles that break out between branches of government (Exhibit A: the constitutional crisis now erupting over enforcement of congressional subpoenas on the Trump administration). Democracy depends on customs and norms as well as written rules; civility and comity as well as up-or-down votes. Trashing the time-honoured process for nominating and confirming justices can have unintended consequences.

Power can cut both ways. In personnel

as well as policy, the rule is live by the sword, die by the sword: The all-powerful Don McGahn was sacked by Trump for disloyalty when he evaded the president's apparent bidding to obstruct justice. As a longtime Washington correspondent, Mr Hulse is an expert guide through the machinations on Capitol Hill. He does not offer any revelations about Mr Kavanaugh, seemingly accused of sexual assault as a high school student. But he offers a telling scene of Mr McGahn coaching Mr Kavanaugh to push back, hard, against his congressional inquisitors. The tactic worked; Mr Kavanaugh survived. But the spectacle was unifying and, possibly, a harbinger of worse to come.

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CONFIRMATION BIAS
Inside Washington's War
Over the Supreme Court,
From Scalia's Death to
Justice Kavanaugh

Carl Hulse

Harper/HarperCollins Publishers; \$28.99; 310 pages

RationalExpectations

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Budgeting to boost investment

Cutting corporate taxes, or RBI cutting repo, won't help much if the government's policies are seen to be hitting investments

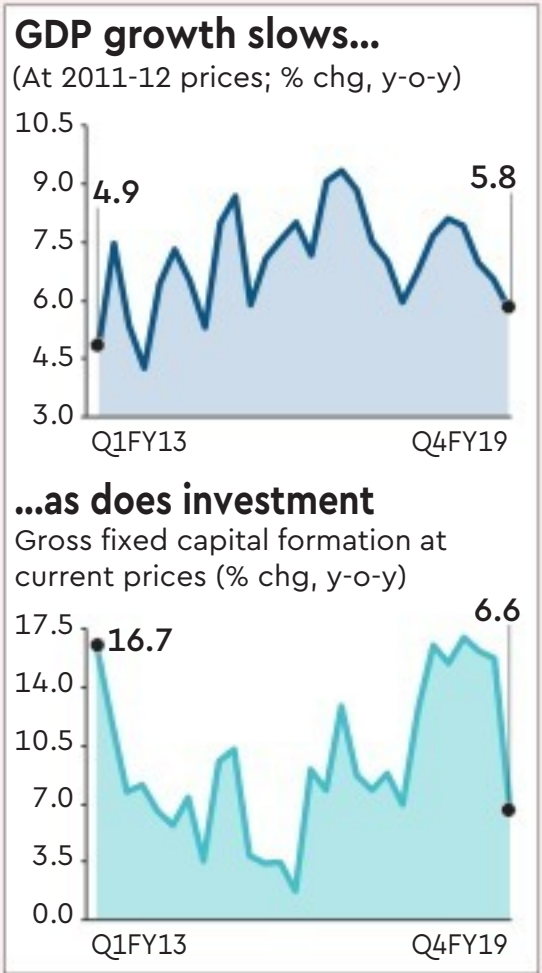
THOUGH GOVERNMENT ECONOMISTS have done a comprehensive job of demolishing ex-CEA Arvind Subramanian's argument that India has overestimated its GDP growth by as much as 2.5 percentage points, what is worrying is that while average growth for FY19 may be a little over 6.8%, that for the January to March quarter (Q4) has fallen to a mere 5.8% versus 8.1% a year ago. It is this growth level that India has to pull itself up from, and the prospects aren't good, which is why some forecasts are looking at an FY20 growth that is lower than that in the previous year.

While growth in private consumption levels have remained at the same 7% level in both Q1 and Q4 of FY19 (they fell from 12% to 10% in terms of current prices), investment growth has collapsed from 13% to 4% (and from 17% to 7% in current prices). In such a scenario, the only way GDP growth can pick up is if investment levels or government consumption rises dramatically—it grew from 7% in Q1 to 13% in Q4 in constant prices, and from 12% to 16% in current prices—but with the government quite cash-strapped, that isn't a possibility; in any case, since government expenditure is just 9-10% of GDP, there is just that much it can achieve. Indeed, given the NBFC crisis, and its impact on credit growth, the downside pressure on GDP growth is even higher.

Some argue that, along with a sharp cut in corporate tax rates—India's are amongst the highest in the world—a sharper cut in repo rates by RBI will do a lot to stimulate investment; so, while finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman can do the first in the budget, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das will do the rest in the next credit policy. Both moves will help, but how much is not clear. Even if RBI cuts repo, this may not translate into lower rates for a variety of reasons, including the fact that the government-mandated savings rates on 'small deposits' puts a floor to bank-deposit rates and, in turn, lending rates. And tax cuts can't help if the investment climate is poor.

If an investor in a power plant can't get enough coal to run it because the public sector monopolist Coal India isn't producing enough, or if a bankrupt state electricity board can't either buy the power or pay for it on time, how will a lower interest rate or a tax cut help?

Though these are not strictly budget issues, traditionally budgets are used to make larger policy announcements that will be followed through during the year; so, apart from the actual numbers on deficits etc, Sitharaman's budget will be watched for whether the government uses it to shed its anti-industry image.



In the case of telecom, as this newspaper has catalogued regularly, the investment climate turned hostile even before RJio's entry with its very low tariffs; while the government used to charge industry a revenue-share at the time it gave out spectrum almost free, it carried on with this even after it started charging an arm and a leg for the spectrum. It was relatively easy for prime minister Narendra Modi to fix this, but Congress president Rahul Gandhi's *suit-boot-ke-sarkaar* jibe seemed to have given him cold feet.

In the oil and gas sector, despite Modi's professed aim to lower import dependence, oilcos do not get the market price for all their output. In the case of natural gas, only that produced from new fields will get the market price; but if firms don't make higher profits on their existing production, how will they invest to find new gas? And while firms are free to get market prices in the case of oil, if the government specifies which buyers are to get how much oil, this ensures there is no real price discovery. Nothing exemplifies this anti-investor attitude better than the government's treatment of UK firm Cairn Energy which, within a few years, produced a fourth of India's oil output. It was slapped with a retrospective tax, its shares worth \$1bn were confiscated and dividends etc worth \$300-400mn were appropriated; indeed, when Cairn (by then sold to Vedanta) wanted an extension of its lease—so that it could add to India's oil production—the government agreed only if Cairn raised the revenue it would share by a whopping 10 percentage points (bit.ly/2OZUy2r).

In the case of minerals like coal and iron ore—even without oil, they comprise 25% of India's imports, and 55% with oil—hardly 10% of India's geology has been explored even though doubling this can create another 5 million jobs. Apart from unconscionable delays in getting environment clearances, as in the telecom sector, rapacious government levies are a big problem; as compared to 8-12% levels globally, Indian levies on most non-oil minerals work out to around 30% of top-line revenues. The government is focused on increasing the country's overall exports—this can't be done if taxes and interest rates aren't slashed and rigid labour laws abolished—but if imports of minerals fall due to higher local production, the forex impact is the same.

If investment levels have fallen dramatically due to poor government policy, so has FDI, from 1.9% of GDP in FY16 to 1.6% in FY19. If the government changes its policy on e-commerce after Walmart spent \$16bn to buy Flipkart, for instance, it is difficult to see how foreign investors are going to remain enthused. Certainly, PE funds and others will bring in money to take advantage of the bargains available at the NCLT, but greenfield investment requires a more predictable regime.

Much like in 1991, the budget will be watched for whether it unleashes a slew of reforms, the new industrial policy that President Ram Nath Kovind spoke of on Thursday. How sweeping the reforms will be depends on whether prime minister Modi thinks India is in a crisis. Given the state of the fisc, the falling investment levels and the rising joblessness, the crisis is apparent even if no one is mortgaging their gold.

WrongDOSE

WHO legitimises TCM; traditional medicine shouldn't be dismissed, but surely the unscientific should be discarded?

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE—non-allopathic medicine—has always been viewed with scepticism. But no form perhaps elicits as much scorn as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). It could be because its dependence on animal parts and its inexplicable popularity—inexplicable because there is very little evidence of most medicines/cure delivering—in China and abroad has led to entire species tottering and crashing. There are cases of success too. Artemisinin, the malaria cure that won Tu Youyou, a practitioner of TCM, the medicine Nobel in 2015, has been described in TCM texts. Now, the WHO has included TCM in its International Classification of Diseases, a highly influential text used to decide diagnosis protocols, and highly regarded by the insurance industry.

An artemisinin perhaps justifies such warming to TCM, but the fact is that for one artemisinin, there are hundreds of dubious products and “medicines” that will also receive legitimacy with such a blanket nod. Given how the Chinese government has doubled down on support to TCM even though it claims that it will only promote evidence-based medicine, the chances are that TCM will receive an unprecedented boost with the WHO's endorsement. While traditional medicine shouldn't be dismissed, the unscientific must be discarded. WHO legitimising TCM makes this all the more difficult.

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

WITH BT COTTON, INDIA GAINED ABOUT \$67 BN IN FOREX FROM EXTRA EXPORTS OF COTTON & COTTON YARN, AND SAVINGS IN IMPORTS, OVER FY03-FY17, COMPARED TO BUSINESS AS USUAL

Satyagraha for HT Bt cotton and Bt brinjal

THE WORD SATYAGRAHA, meaning polite insistence for truth, is associated with political movements of Mahatma Gandhi for civil rights, first in South Africa and later in India. The famous 24-day Dandi March (also known as Salt March), a nonviolent civil disobedience against the British monopoly on salt in 1930, became a symbol of Satyagraha.

But today, it is much in news because of the civil disobedience movement launched by supporters of Shetkari Sanghatana (SS), a farmers' organisation, to defy the controls by Government of India (GoI) on the planting of Herbicide Tolerant (HT) Bt cotton and Bt brinjal. SS was founded by the late Sharad Joshi, one of the most prominent farmers' leader in independent India. He gave up his cushy position in the United Nations to fight for the cause of farmers' freedom to choose the best farm technologies and to sell their produce to the most lucrative markets at home or abroad. Unfortunately, governments since independence, no matter how much they swear by the name of farmers, have constrained our farmers' access to best farm technologies as well as best markets. That's a painful fact which has imposed massive implicit taxation on Indian peasantry to the tune of about \$700 billion (cumulative) from 2000-01 to 2016-17, as per a 2018 OECD-ICRIER study.

HT Bt cotton is not legally allowed by GoI. But, the government's own committee has estimated that it is being planted on about 15-17% of cotton area. Growing any GMO crop illegally attracts a five year imprisonment and a fine of ₹100,000. But so far, no one had been arrested and the illegal trade has been thriving for quite some years. It speaks of not just a massive governance failure but also its connivance with unscrupulous

seed companies where thieves are thriving. Farmers want that technology and are buying those seeds in black markets, at prices much above those declared by the government for non-HT Bt seeds. Now, when SS supporters are openly defying government regulation, GoI has suddenly woken up and asked for action from Maharashtra government. Newspaper reports suggest that one farmer with HT Bt seeds has also been arrested. If the government is really serious not to allow this, let it show its might by arresting hundreds of thousands of farmers who have already planted HT Bt cotton. And why not first arrest the fraudulent seed companies that have been selling these seeds illegally and without any patent. Most people in this trade know who these local companies are and whose shelter they have politically. The big multinational companies, who are the original innovators of HT Bt cotton, have stayed away from this messy business and, in fact, have decided to withdraw most of their high biotech farm technology from India.

Let us peep into this brave new world of GMOs for better understanding. GMO's have been present on the global platform since 1996 and by 2017, for which I have the latest data, were being planted on almost 190 million hectares around the world. A total of about 67 countries have accepted GM crops, of which 24 are planting and others importing and consuming. GMO

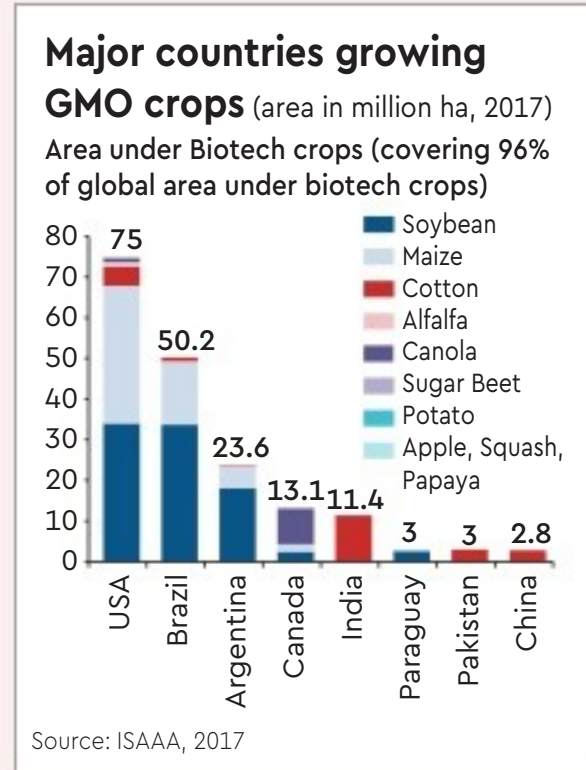
crops range from soya bean, corn and cotton, to papaya, brinjal, and even apples and potatoes! And the landscape ranges from developed nations like the US and Canada to developing ones like Brazil, Argentina, India, Pakistan and China (see graph). There have been no cases of human deaths, disease, or injury from their production or consumption.

It may be noted that Bangladesh, not shown in the graph, has also adopted Bt brinjal and area under that is fast catching up. Bt brinjal is an interesting case study as it was cleared by India's GEAC way back in 2009, but our environment ministry, under pressure from NGOs, could not gather the courage to release it. Now that Bangladesh has taken the same technology from an Indian firm, and is fast scaling it up, will it not be stupid on our part to presume that it will not enter West Bengal, if it has not already done so? GoI needs to wake up!

Almost a similar situation had arisen in March 2002, when it was found that some Indian farmers had planted Bt cotton. The Vajpayee government examined the whole issue considering both bio-safety and farmers' needs. Then, it took a bold decision on March 26, 2002 to legally allow planting of Bt cotton, the first GM crop of India and the only one so far. He extended the original slogan of 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' given by Shastri to include 'Jai Vigyan'. He was very clear that our agriculture should be science-based. Look at the results of this one bold decision by late PM Vajpayee.

Today, about 90-95% cotton area is under Bt cotton, and India has emerged as the largest producer and second largest exporter of cotton in the world. In a much more detailed study that I did with Kavery Ganguly, we estimated that due to this 'gene revolution' India gained about \$67 billion in foreign exchange from extra exports of cotton and cotton yarn, and savings in imports, over the period 2002-03 to 2016-17, compared to business as usual. But more important are the gains to cotton farmers, whose incomes doubled. And the maximum gain was to Gujarat farmers. In fact, we found that Gujarat's 'agrarian miracle' of 8% average annual growth rate in agri-GDP during Narendra Modi's regime as CM from 2002-03 to 2013-14 was triggered and led by Bt cotton. And this was the famous Gujarat development model that also helped him become the PM of India.

It won't be an exaggeration to say that Bt cotton has been the secret force behind Modi's political successes! Given this, can India under Modi 2.0 emerge as a leader in bio-farm technologies, including GMO? Only time will tell.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEP and skills

Apropos of the article "New education policy is a great opportunity to define history," (FE, June 18), it must be kept in mind that young India is advancing to the peak of its demographic bulge—which means that education and skill development are likely to be a top priority for the decades to come. At the same time, NEP is a golden opportunity to bring vocational education into mainstream. While it makes a mention of removing the 'hard separation' of 'vocational' and 'academic' streams, learning and training should be considered as parallel aspects of education right from foundation schools. Also, introducing vocational education right from the foundational stage is the key to removing the taboo attached to it. Lastly, if we want to make our education system effective, one of the most important stakeholders is teachers. A thorough programme right from policy level to redefine the role and development of teachers needs to be undertaken. — Ratesh Gumber, Mumbai

Presidential address

The president's joint address to both houses of the Parliament was disappointing as it just repeated the agenda and promises made by the BJP government five years ago, which remain unfulfilled. The president was totally silent on unemployment and agriculture crises in the country. In the last five years, the country has witnessed falling GDP growth and its highest unemployment rate in 45 years. It is hoped that the promises made by the Modi government will be implemented in the coming term, failing which, people of India will show the same exist door to BJP which they did to the Congress Party. — Bhagwan Thadani, on e-mail

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

IT TOOK A long time coming, but now there are two sets of drafts of education policy available with the government. When the NDA had earlier come to power in 2014, a committee, headed by late TSR Subramanian, had been constituted to work on a policy. It submitted its report within a couple of years, but thereafter yet another group, headed by Dr K Kasturirangan, was constituted to prepare another draft of the new education policy. This group has submitted a draft that has been placed for comments in public domain. Only time will tell whether and when will we finally have a new education policy.

Considering the diversity of the country, the moot point is whether there is a need for another education policy? Shouldn't the country attempt to develop action plans for each state clearly outlining what needs to be done, how will it be done, who will do it, and by when will it be done to provide quality education to every child in the country? However, now that a draft has been put in public domain, let us look at the salient aspects and their relevance in the context of improving the quality of education.

The draft policy touches upon almost all the aspects of school education, but the moot point is whether the draft diagnoses the problems that afflict the sector appropriately, whether there are prescriptions that were not already available, and whether the suggested prescriptions can be delivered on the ground?

The initial years of a child are critical for her overall development. The draft recommends inclusion of preschool education, and this is welcome. But this is nothing new. Such provisions have already been incorporated in Samagra Shiksha that was launched a year and a half ago. The new scheme sought to amalgamate the ongoing Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), apart from extending eligibility under the scheme to preschool education and classes 11 and 12 that were hitherto not available for these segments.

The focus of the draft is on the teacher. The teacher, undoubtedly, lies at the pivot of school education. Issues relating to pre-service training, selection of teachers and in-service training for upgrading of skills have been highlighted in the report. However, all these aspects are well known. The report should have gone into the reasons for issues like prevalence of poor pre-service training facilities in the country. There are a large number of virtually non-existent B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) and D.El.Ed (Diploma in Elementary Education) colleges that are imparting training to teachers. The draft does not suggest anything new to resolve this issue. Then there is wishful thinking in the draft about recruitment of teachers—which is beset with scams. The draft doesn't suggest any foolproof mechanism to select teachers. In the absence of appropriately trained teachers before they get down to teaching, and unless there is a transparent recruitment of teachers in government schools, not much is likely to improve in delivering quality education. Some states have done wonderful work in this regard. The draft report should have examined and mentioned such examples that could be replicated in other states.

The draft recognises the role that DIKSHA (a portal already in place for teachers) plays in imparting in-service training. DIKSHA has many more features relating to teachers. These should have been discussed in the report, as this portal has the potential to resolve a large number of issues relating to teachers.

Revision of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) has been talked about for a while. The draft suggests changes in the framework and rightly lays emphasis on bringing in ethical content in the curriculum. However, the last time the curriculum framework was revised (in 2005), it did not require a new education policy. Should we wait for the policy to do it now?

The draft recommends large-scale changes in the conduct of examina-

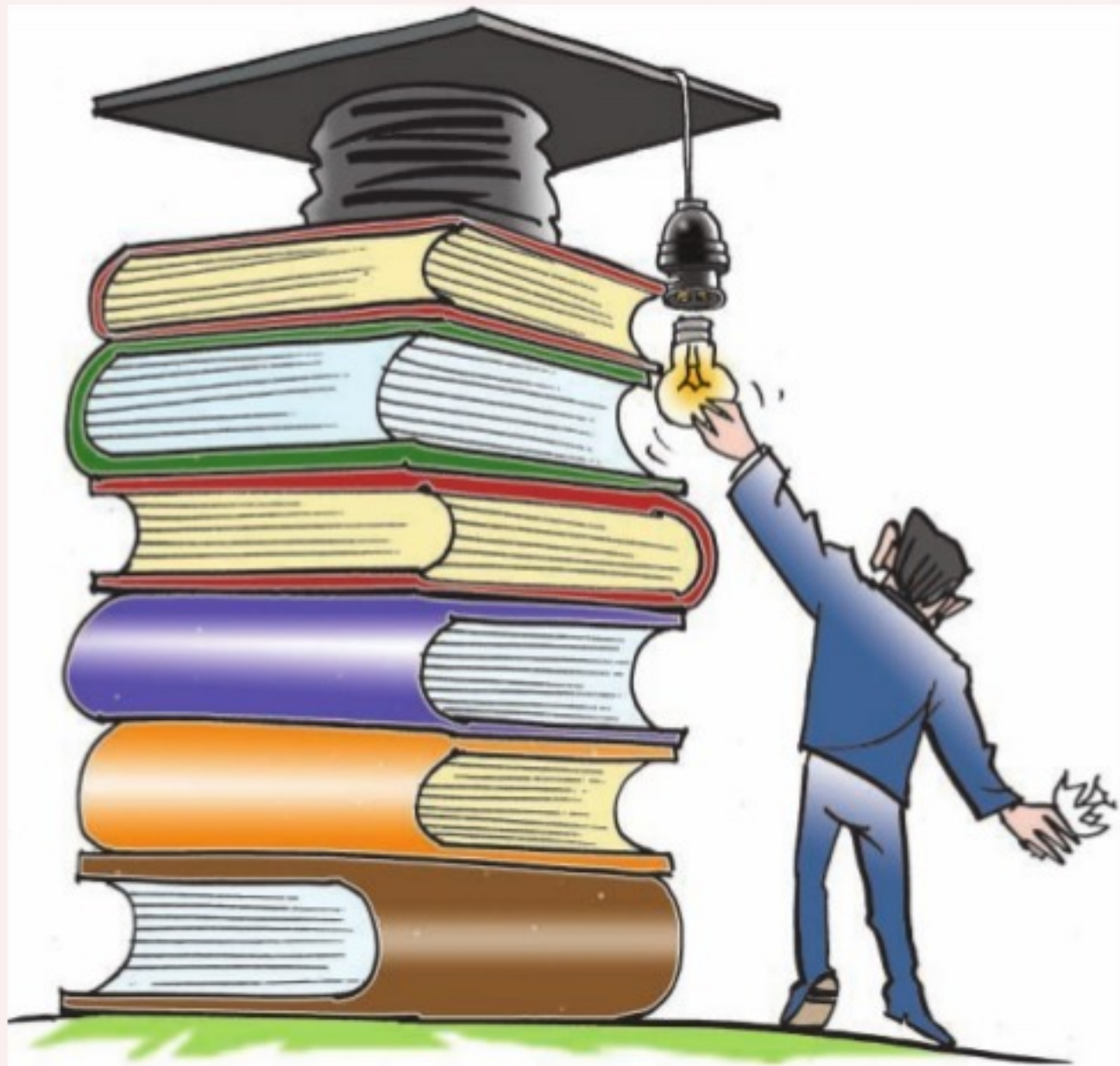


ILLUSTRATION: ROHINIT PHORE

ANIL SWARUP

The author is former secretary, government of India. Views are personal



● **NEW EDUCATION POLICY**

Too many unanswered questions

The draft does not provide for a definitive and time-bound action plan. It accepts the fact that “the challenge is the ability to implement the policy,” but does precious little to address this part. The issues that beset education require to be addressed forthwith without waiting for a policy that may take a long time coming

tions by boards, as also introduction of examinations at various levels. However, no mention is made about the practical problems and the cost of conducting such exams. A separate regulatory authority for school education has also been suggested. However, whether such changes would help in qualitative improvements in learning outcomes is debatable. There are other ambitious recommendations, including those relating to ‘school complexes’. Apart from the issues relating to the utility and efficacy of such institutions, the million-dollar question is how and from where will the money come from? Similarly, the need for having counselors in schools cannot be denied, but how are funds going to become available? For any idea to fructify, it has to be politically acceptable, socially desirable, technologically-feasible, financially-viable, administratively-doable and judicially-tenable. When the states are struggling to pay regular salaries of teachers, how will they be able to implement these recommendations?

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are doing phenomenal work in the field to improve the quality of education. There is just a passing reference about the role of NGOs in the draft. The need for scaling up public-private partnership is missing in the report. Such initiatives do not require major infusion of funds from the government and can be very effective.

A large number of students are migrating to private schools. The draft does not delve into the details of why is this happening, and should it happen? Instead of pushing private schools not to use the term ‘public’, efforts should have been made to get to the bottom of the problem. Is the growth of private schools necessarily a problem? Private schools are playing an important role in imparting school education, and will continue to do so. There are, indeed, a few unresolved issues relating to private schools. These issues need to be addressed. However, to do so, we have to get over the ‘bias’ that we have against them. There could/should have been an out-of-the-box thinking in this regard.

The contentious Section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education (RTE) Act provides for mandatory schooling of children belonging to weaker sections of the society. This has been termed as ‘well-intentioned’. There is an admission of the fact of its inappropriate implementation. The draft, however, does not suggest any remedy except a ‘review’. This exercise should have been done by the group and not leave it to another group.

A lot of faith has been reposed in the draft on the RTE Act. There is a recommendation to extend it to all the remaining classes in the school. This legislation seems to have done more damage to school education. Assessments have revealed that the learning outcomes since the enactment of the law have actually shown a negative trend.

The ‘language’ issue has already created a huge controversy. Why was this issue considered at all in the first place in the draft? Can a ‘formula’ be imposed on the states? Should such a ‘formula’ be imposed? These aspects should have been looked into before making a recommendation.

The draft does not provide for a definitive and time-bound action plan. It accepts the fact that “the challenge is the ability to implement the policy,” but does precious little to address this part. There is, indeed, no dearth of diagnosis and prescription. The problem is of application. The draft neither analyses why such initiatives have failed in the past, nor does it come up with specific recommendations on how to make it happen on the ground. The issues that beset education require to be addressed forthwith without waiting for a policy that may take a long time coming. Plans have already been prepared for Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. What is required is to prepare such action plans for each state separately, as each state has a different set of issues, and set up a mechanism to ensure implementation of these plans.

● **UNION BUDGET**

Ensuring quality learning for all

ASHOK PANDEY

The author is a Delhi-based educationist



Modi 2.0's first Budget must address poverty & quality education as binaries

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi famously said during his victory speech, “India has only two classes, the poor and those who have the responsibility to eliminate poverty.” Lack of education is a significant cause of poverty and access to learning an indisputable alleviator. The people of India, therefore, will expect Nirmala Sitharaman's first Budget to address poverty alleviation and quality education as binaries. Lack of access to quality education hampers school and life preparedness. Add to this shortage of teachers, and inadequate training, and one has a complete recipe for a learning crisis hitting the nation.

Public spending on education: When expressed as a percentage of GDP, the expenditure has fluctuated: from 4.1% in 2000-01, down to 3.3% in 2004-05, up to 4.4% in 2013-14, and down again to sub-4%, as per government figures. A recent strategy documentation released by the NITI Aayog has recognised the need to increase this spending to 6% of GDP. The draft NEP (2019) also envisions doubling of expenditure on education over 10 years.

Two more commitments of the government require additional allocation. First, extending the provisions of the RTE ACT 2009, and the draft NEP 2019 recommends provision for free and compulsory education for all children and adolescents between the ages of 3 and 18, and entails additional outlays. Second, India is a signatory to the UN's agenda of Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal No 4, Quality Education for all, to be achieved by 2030. Massive funding is required to meet these commitments.

A detailed look at education presents two perspectives: psychological and societal—the former deals with learners, teachers, pedagogy and curriculum, and the latter offers us a lens to look at the societal context in which learning occurs (formal, informal and non-formal). We need a comprehensive budgetary provision for building great institutions with an influential culture of knowledge and a long pipeline of committed and well-equipped teachers. On the other hand, it focuses on promoting skills and curiosity-driven education, for which we need additional resources.

Initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan received significant funding previously, impacting the enrolment and retention positively up to the secondary level. Further impetus is in demand to improve the teacher-pupil ratio, in-service teacher education, and reform in curriculum and digitalisation. The announcement made in 2018 to bring various schemes under one umbrella through the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan is expected to take shape in the upcoming Budget. Linked to these efforts is the launch of the Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan—an Indian version of STEM education in the West—fostering creativity and enquiry within the areas of sciences, mathematics and technology. The previous funding of Rs 198 crore needs a solid top-up this time around to promote linkages between schools and institutes of higher education. Such programmes in advanced countries such as Australia and the US have a successful track record. The proposed launch of ‘Revitalising Infrastructure and Systems in Education (RISE) by 2022’, announced by Piyush Goyal in this year's Interim Budget, deserves a stamp of approval.

In addition, a focus on girls' education through Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao; Scheme to Provide Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM); the School Assessment Programme; and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching—through adequate funding—have the potential to reform education like never before. Linked to averting a learning crisis is the importance of investing in mother and childcare. Malnourishment, stunted growth and poor body-weight ratio among children under 5 years of age is a serious concern.

It seems the direction provided by the draft NEP 2019, the country's commitment to UN SDGs, and rising people's aspirations will drive the significant pronouncements for the education sector in the Budget speech on July 5. A Union Budget is not like a parent's wallet doling out of pocket expenses to the offspring. It is about a vision, creating value for quality life, and how to raise robust human capital. It's no wonder, then, that parents spend the most on education of their children, of all the expenses. Should the first woman full-time finance minister not do the same?

● **BLISSING OUT**

Mushroom journey, the trip of a lifetime

Psychedelic tourism is a niche but growing market. The retreats are organised around a “ceremony”

“IT WAS LIKE being transported into a parallel dimension of eternal unfolding completeness and divine bliss. Very powerful, direct and overwhelming. It was a big surprise, but also incredibly obvious. A ‘Doh!’ moment, rather like Homer Simpson,” says Guy, a South African who runs an online-marketing company from Stockholm, and who attended a retreat last month organised by the Psychedelic Society, a British outfit, at a rural artist's haven in the north-east of the Netherlands. Magic mushrooms were banned in the Netherlands in 2007, after a 17-year-old partaker jumped off a bridge. But “truffles”, a form of the mushrooms that grow underground, are legal, and underpin a growing business in weekend trips. Prices for the Psychedelic Society's retreats range from £550 (£700, for those on low incomes, to £1,200. Applicants are screened to weed

out people who should not take the drug, such as those who have had psychotic episodes. The society has organised retreats for three years and now runs one most weekends. The waiting list is in the hundreds.

At the one Guy joined in May, nationalities ranged from American through a range of Europeans to Chinese; motivations from mild curiosity, through a sense of being emotionally or professionally stuck, to grief. Guy hoped to “mend my broken heart”: his partner had left him and their one-year-old son two years earlier.

The retreats are organised around a “ceremony”, in which participants, lying on mattresses, drink a tea made from truffles. While they trip for five or six hours, four facilitators stay with them, to hold their hands if they get scared or listen to their babblings. The rest of the

time is taken up with exercise, dance and “group work” (on, for instance, lowering emotional defences). Lode Lhamo, a French facilitator who adopted a Tibetan name after becoming a Buddhist in India, says the whole team is motivated by “the level of wounding and pain that people carry. We can't really transform society unless people heal themselves.”

Competition is growing. Synthesis Retreats started last year and expects 600-700 clients in 2019 and twice as many next year. Martijn Schirp, a founder, thinks about 20 firms offer a similar service in the Netherlands. There are others in Mexico, where possession has been decriminalised, and Jamaica, where mushrooms are legal. “This whole space is buzzing. There are converging trends: the psychedelic renaissance, wellness, and people looking to buy experiences rather than things,” says Mr Schirp.

A few weeks on, Guy does not think his life has been transformed, but he is grateful for the experience and things are going a little better with his ex. “I had a conversation with her, about things like money, schedules and holidays. The kind of conversation that would normally be difficult. But when things escalated, I was able to pull back a bit.” He feels things have somehow shifted. “I don't want to make out this is a broken-heart medicine, but even if it's a trick of the mind, it kind of worked.”

THE ECONOMIST

Leadership in innovation economy

Business leaders have to continuously stare into the future

HARSHAVARDHAN NEOTIA

The author is president, AIMA, and chairman, Ambuja Neotia Group

THE GRAVITY OF business growth is shifting from capital to creativity. Today, the most valuable companies in the world are primarily innovators.

In the innovation economy, a disruptive mindset is the key to business leadership. It is also essential to break away from the business models that cannot keep up with the market's evolution. A modern business leader must have a strategy to reinvent even a successful business. The innovation economy takes away security from businesses, but it offers unprecedented rewards in the form of lightning-fast growth and great market dominance. In the new world, market belongs to the most vigorous innovator. The first-mover advantage is brief because capital and technology are easily accessible. It is much easier to imitate and enhance a successful product in the new economy than

it used to be. Now, a company has to be not only quick with innovations, it has to continuously listen to the user and upgrade products frequently. Business leaders need to be relentless in growing the company's innovation capability.

The main feature of innovation in the new economy is delivery of total solution to the customer. Aggregation and intermediation are central to innovation and delivering convenience, efficiency and economy to the customer. Contrary to the pop-culture narrative of superhero innovators, innovation is a collaborative venture. Business leaders have to persuade investors, employees, suppliers, customers and even regulators to back disruptive innovations. Regulators are increasingly playing a critical role in bringing innovations to market.

Bringing an innovation to customers can

take a lot of money and work hours without any guarantees of returns. CEOs need to be tenacious and resilient. They have to keep betting on crazy ideas. It is not a coincidence that the least innovative societies in the world are the ones that stigmatise failure.

The quest for innovation also requires CEOs to be in touch with the ground realities. Innovation is often a bottom-up process. CEOs need to maintain direct communication with customer-facing employees and ensure that middle management does not block either information or ideas.

Leaders of conventional businesses face the challenge of insuring the future with innovations while preserving existing revenues. One way of preserving a successful business and reinventing it at the same time is to sandbox innovations. A parallel organisation may be set up to experiment with disruptive products and models. If the alternate venture succeeds in taking the market away from conventional competitors, the mother company could be absorbed in it.

Innovation economy is light on assets and heavy on knowledge. Data is overtaking experience in making decisions and directing strategy. ML, IoT, blockchain are becoming vital for producing innovations. CEOs have to ensure that the organisation is equipped with the tools for acquiring, crunching and applying data intelligence and that every employee can work in a highly automated environment.

In a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world, only the fast learners will survive.

THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"From a long-term perspective, China and the US will not persist with confrontational trade policies."

— GLOBAL TIMES CHINA

Call of New India

Women leaders must be harbingers of harmony and progress, not macho-matchers. There must be gender-parity, not fractional reservation



RAMI CHHABRA

TSUNAMI/Tsunami is how Narendra Modi's return to power is being described. Critics may be sceptical but can hope repin on his post-triumph pledges to turn his back on the ugliness of the political contest, build consensus and carry all: *Sabka vikas sabke saath*, now with *sabka vishwas* to build *Naya India*? With four states going to the polls in the coming months, there will be an early test of whether campaign-mode-Modi reruns or he retains statesmanship beyond showmanship.

As one of the few women who entered the media in the late-fifties — then 18, now 80 — I stand witness that this is indeed a rare karmic moment in the nation's life, one that has come only twice before: In 1971, when Indira Gandhi rose Durga-like post-Bangladesh, arousing hopes that she would revive Jawaharlal Nehru's foundational legacy of India's Third-World leadership set-backed by the Sixties' wars and also, wipe-out poverty; again in 1984, when a nation mourning Indira's assassination gave an awesome peoples' mandate to a youthful Rajiv Gandhi diffidently accepting responsibility thrust by fate. But both times, fate also decreed otherwise. Will this third opportunity created by the nation have proverbial third-time-luck or is it destined to be frittered as before?

The minority issue is upfront and has many to canvas for what it takes to win *vishwas* with a communal-free perspective. But what about the country's largest minority — women?

As the prime minister plans actions to transform India — and politics — he needs to pay more heed to women's field-voices and needs. For the first time ever, a critical-half of voters constituted women, near-parity to male numbers with many exhibiting independent decision-making in vote-casting. This outpouring — despite 20 million women claimed as missing from voters' lists — testifies to the maturity of women's political agency. It is a self-propelled contribution to nation-building, notwithstanding lack of adequate support to women's political contestation from any major political party — other than the BJD in Odisha and Trinamool in West Bengal, which gave 33 per cent and 50 per cent of seats respectively to women-contestants.

The 17th Lok Sabha has the highest tally of women since Independence — 78. This still amounts to a mere 14 per cent of 543 members. A political environment wherein money and muscle-power dominate and women face demeaning sexist/sexualised smearing, militates for the emergence of a very different type of woman-warrior: More thick-skinned macho-clones than the softer gender-influence earlier projected as a potential uplifting force for politics. Further, as a recent study highlights, with the current rate of increase it will take 40 years for women to reach 33 per cent participation in Parliament/legislatures. (Thirty-three percent being the minimum threshold for critical-mass enabling gender impact.)

Demands to revive and pass the Women's Reservation Bill are already mak-

ing the rounds. The Bill, in any case, was a deeply-flawed proposal that sought to unseat one-third sitting members while holding the other two-thirds in perpetual jeopardy. Each attempt at its introduction saw unprecedented scenes of gross misconduct/violence blemishing the august halls, prophesying worse in the streets on its adoption. The vision of 21st century New India needs women-leaders as harbingers of harmony and progress, not macho-matchers; gender-parity not fractional reservation.

Naya India also needs to urgently put in place measures to reverse the massive drop in women's work-participation and threats to freedom of movement. A major issue identified by many pre-election surveys, perhaps a key propelling factor for voting in such large numbers, was the concern about physical security and safety. The plummeting work-force participation in past years, the resonating #MeToo movement, highlight growing insecurity for women in coming out onto the streets, in workplaces/public places, which are their birthright to access. Besides emphasising women's fundamental and constitutional right to dignity and security, bridging the gender gap in work-participation, according to a McKinsey estimate, would add \$770 billion to the Indian economy by 2025. *Naya India* cannot be built unless women hold-up-half-the-sky.

Equally, there is growing threat to women's personal and bodily integrity within homes and neighbourhoods. Building home-toilets was one key step towards women's physical security and it resonated. But cleansing the Internet and social media platforms of the pornography invading homes and turning fathers, brothers, sons, neighbours and of course, strangers into predators, is a burning issue yet left untracked. This is as much a national security-threat requiring prioritised strategic-action that brooks no further delay. Sadly, memes and morphs of political figures elicit political outrage but not the porn that bedevils ordinary women's everyday lives; rape/gang-rape has become a selective political-blame-game blunting the gruesome deadliness of rape per se.

Besides personal security which is paramount, attention to women's issues, including equitable political representation, could spearhead other vital democratic reforms desperately required to cleanse the system of the unabashed growth of money-and-muscle-power, a principal inhibiting factor for women-contestants — and equally, less-muscular-moneyed-men — in the electoral process.

Women's rights are fundamental human rights, not to be examined in silo fashion. Nor by using avante-garde Western-style models that currently dominate feminist thinking and media exposure. Demand for the *freedom from fear* and the *opportunity to grow* is a very different trajectory to pursue than the *freedom to slut-walk/sexually assert*. The former has widespread societal support, the latter provocative media space with societal backlash.

A holistic, interconnected and intrinsically Indian vision cross-cutting sectors and issues needs articulation with time-bound implementation deadlines as a major national priority. It could become the global exemplar.

The writer is a senior journalist and has been member, National Population Commission

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WRONG TIME

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Pollarising' (IE, June 21). It is naive to expect the disparate parties which harbour animosity against each other, particularly after elections, to sit across the table and deliberate on sensitive issues. For any discussion to happen, a positive and conducive environment needs to be evolved. But the current milieu is one of cynicism and mistrust. Second, informed debates and meetings have been overshadowed by TV debates and social media.

Deepak Singhal, Noida

LIBERALS' BLINKERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Once upon a time, a nation' (IE, June 19). According to the article, the country's government received its mandate due to successful story telling. What prevented the liberals from presenting their story?

Girish Das, Noida

QUESTIONS FOR BJP

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'One man show' (IE, January 21). Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, the BJP seems to be becoming akin to the Congress of the 1970s and 1980s. However, the BJP does have a crop of

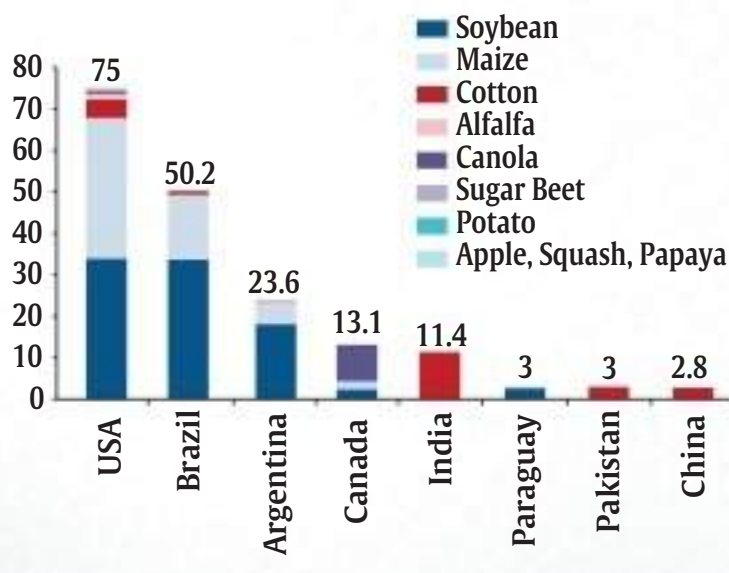
promising young leaders. Moreover, the BJP is also backed by the RSS, which sooner than later will assert itself against the centralising tendencies. The question, however, is: Will the BJP's young crop be in tune with the RSS's agenda?

Smita Pandey, Lucknow

MAJOR COUNTRIES GROWING GMO CROPS

(area in million ha, 2017)

Area under biotech crops (covering 96% of global area under biotech crops)

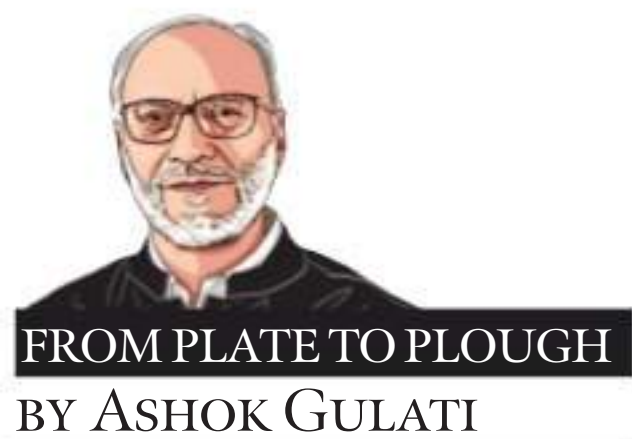


Source: ISAAA, 2017

Suvajit dey

A farm question for Modi 2.0

Can India emerge as a leader in bio-farm technologies, including GMO?



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI

THE WORD SATYAGRAHA, meaning polite insistence for truth, is associated with the political movements of Mahatma Gandhi for civil rights — first in South Africa and, later, in India. The famous 24-day Dandi March (also known as the Salt March), a non-violent civil disobedience act against the British monopoly on salt in 1930, became a symbol of satyagraha.

But today, it is in the news because of the civil disobedience movement launched by supporters of the Shetkari Sanghatana (SS), a farmers' organisation, to defy the Government of India (GoI) when it comes to the planting of herbicide tolerant (HT) Bt cotton and Bt brinjal. SS was founded by the late Sharad Joshi, one of the tallest farmers' leaders in independent India. He gave up his cushy position in the United Nations to fight for the cause of farmers' freedom to choose the best farm technologies, and to sell their produce to the most lucrative markets at home or abroad.

Unfortunately, governments, since Independence, no matter how much they swear by the name of farmers, have constrained our farmers when it comes to access to the best farm technologies as well as the best markets. That's a painful fact which has meant the imposition of massive implicit taxation on the Indian peasantry, to the tune of about \$700 billion (cumulative) during 2000-01 to 2016-17, as per the OECD-ICRIER study (2018).

HT Bt cotton is not legally allowed by GoI. But the government's own committee has estimated that it is being planted on about 15-17 per cent of the cotton area. Growing any GM crop illegally attracts a five year imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1 lakh. But so far, no one

has been arrested, and the illegal trade has been thriving for several years. It speaks of not just a massive governance failure, but its connivance with unscrupulous seed companies where thieves are thriving. Farmers want that technology and are buying those seeds in the black market at prices much above those declared by the government for non-HT Bt seeds. Now, when SS supporters are openly defying government regulations, the GoI has suddenly woken up and asked for action from the Maharashtra government. Newspaper reports suggest that one farmer with HT Bt seeds has also been arrested. If the government is really serious in not allowing this, let it show its might by arresting hundreds of thousands of farmers who have already planted HT Bt cotton on 15 per cent of the crop area. And why not first arrest the fraudulent seed companies that have been selling these seeds illegally, and without any patent? Most people in this trade know who these local companies are and whose shelter they have politically. The big multinational companies, who are the original innovators of HT Bt cotton, have stayed away from this messy business. In fact, they have decided to withdraw most of their high bio-tech farm technology from India.

Let us peep into this new brave world of GMOs for better understanding. GMOs have been there on the global platform since 1996 and by 2017, for which I have the latest data, almost 190 million hectares around the world are being planted. A total of about 67 countries have accepted GM crops, of which 24 are planting and others are importing and consuming. GM crops range from soyabean, corn and cotton to papaya, brinjal, and, even apples and potatoes! There are no cases of human death, disease, or injury. And the landscape ranges from developed nations like the US and Canada to developing ones like Brazil, Argentina, India, Pakistan and China (see graph).

It may be noted that Bangladesh, not shown in the graph, has also adopted Bt brinjal and the area under that is fast catching up. Bt brinjal is an interesting case study as it was cleared by India's Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) way back in

Gujarat's 'agrarian miracle' of eight per cent average annual growth rate in agri-GDP during Narendra Modi's regime as CM from 2002-03 to 2013-14, was triggered and led by Bt cotton. And, this was the famous Gujarat development model that also helped him become the PM of India. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Bt cotton has been the secret force behind Modi's political successes.

2009, but our environment ministry, under pressure from NGOs, could not gather the courage to release it. Now that Bangladesh has taken the same technology, and is fast scaling that up, will it not be stupid on our part to presume that it will not enter the Indian side of West Bengal, if it has not already done so? GoI needs to wake up!

Almost a similar situation had arisen in March 2002, when it was found that some Indian farmers had planted Bt cotton. The Vajpayee government examined the whole issue from a biosafety perspective as well as farmers' needs. Then, it took a bold decision on March 26, 2002, to legally allow the planting of Bt cotton, the first GM crop of India and the only one so far. He extended the original slogan of 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan', given by Lal Bahadur Shastri, to include 'Jai Vigyan'. He was very clear that our agriculture should be science-based. Look at the results of this one bold decision by the late PM. Today, about 90-95 per cent cotton area is under Bt cotton, and India has emerged as the largest producer — and second largest exporter — of cotton in the world. In a much more detailed study that I did with Kavery Ganguly, we estimated that due to this "gene revolution" India gained about \$67 billion dollars of foreign exchange from extra exports of cotton and cotton yarn, and savings in imports, over the period 2002-03 to 2016-17, compared to business as usual. But, more important are the gains to the cotton farmers whose incomes doubled. And the maximum gain was to Gujarati farmers. In fact, we found that Gujarat's "agrarian miracle" of eight per cent average annual growth rate in agri-GDP during Narendra Modi's regime as CM from 2002-03 to 2013-14, was triggered and led by Bt cotton. And, this was the famous Gujarat development model that also helped him become the PM of India. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Bt cotton has been the secret force behind Modi's political successes. Considering this, can India now, under Modi 2.0, emerge as a leader in bio-farm technologies, including GMO? Only time will tell.

The writer is Infosys Chair professor for Agriculture at ICRIER

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

CRICKET, A SYMPTOM

IRFAN Hussain, in his June 22 column in *Dawn*, asks the question that many in and from Pakistan have articulated since the countries seventh straight World Cup defeat to India: Why has the Indian cricket team improved while Pakistan has declined? "Compared to the agile, athletic Indian team, our boys came across as unfit and lacking focus and intensity. Our captain was all paunch and no punch," writes Hussain.

But the decline of the cricket team, as central to Pakistan's public life and political imagination as it is in India, represents failures on two fronts. First, according to Hussain, is the rot in the sport's administration and structuring: "The last 40 years or so have witnessed a steady fall in games played at school and college level. Street cricket has replaced the organised version. And while some talent has come through, by and large, we no longer produce world-class batsmen and bowlers as we once did... And it's true that for corporations and government departments to have their own teams is an anomaly that exists nowhere else as far as I know. However, if the current setup is replaced by teams representing districts and

provinces, funding would be a big concern."

The second aspect, the article highlights, is far more salient. "Expecting excellence in cricket," it says, "while so much else is crumbling around us is unreasonable." Cricket is a symptom of a country where "constant squabbling between institutions, a tendency to centralise power, and a need to seek personal benefits at the cost of the common good have become the norm."

Hussain writes that "connecting the dots, at the heart of this developing crisis is the disaster our educational system has become". Since Zia ul-Haq's administration, after the nationalisation drive in education and other state institutions, two generations of Pakistanis have been subject to "Islamisation", and its effects are visible across institutions.

DEEP STATE DREAMS

MOONIS Ahmar, an international relations scholar, conjectures in *The Express Tribune* (June 21) on India's emerging "deep state". He defines the idea as "a state where some of the state institutions like the military and intelligence agencies run the affairs of the country and prevent any dissent or opposi-

tion to the state narrative. It can also be called as a state within a state." The article is in keeping with many of the newspapers recent contributions on India, theorising its imminent decline as a liberal democracy.

While in the past, India's diversity, institutions, vibrant civil society, the possibility of a deep state emerging was remote. That, argues Ahmar, has changed in the recent past. In something of a conspiracy theory, Ahmar gives three indicators — centred around a somewhat far-fetched nexus between the RSS, the Intelligence Bureau and the rise of Hindu nationalism — to substantiate his point. He also argues that the "role of the Indian Army today in the policymaking process is not submissive as it has several times vetoed the decision of its prime ministers, particularly related to Pakistan."

"With the weightage given to the Indian military and the security establishment, India is fast moving towards becoming a deep state at the expense of its democratic institutions," concludes the article.

REFUGEE DAY KUDOS

THE editorial in *The Dhaka Tribune* on June 20 is rather self-congratulatory, perhaps un-

derstandably so. Since Bangladesh began to bear the brunt of the Rohingya crisis in terms of fleeing refugees, the newspaper's editorial line has consistently made two points: One, that the Bangladesh government must not be alone in handling the crisis; the international community must chip in. And two, that pressure must be put on the Myanmar government to normalise the situation in Rakhine state, ending the ethnic violence so that those that have had to flee with their lives are able to return.

The editorial says: "The prominence with which such crises take place all over the world is saddening, and is nothing short of an insult to the humanity we owe our fellow human beings. But there are instances where humanity did come first. Nowhere is this more evident than in Bangladesh, where over a million Rohingya have taken shelter, having fled the brutality of the Myanmar army, which has used every deplorable act possible against them to ethnically cleanse the region of the Rohingya population. No doubt, Bangladesh has emerged as an example of generosity and humanity in this regard, tackling what is by any means among the greatest refugee crisis of contemporary times."



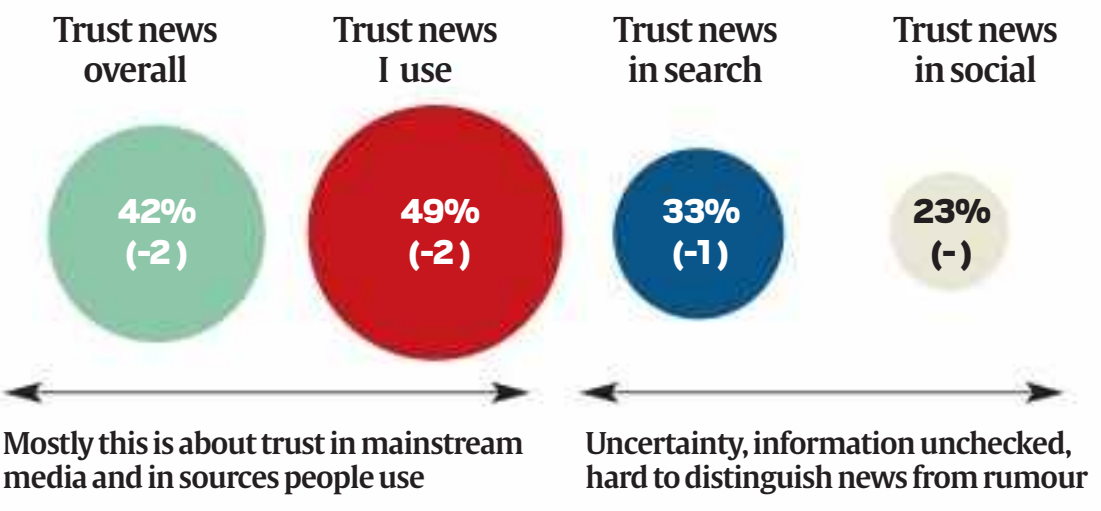
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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

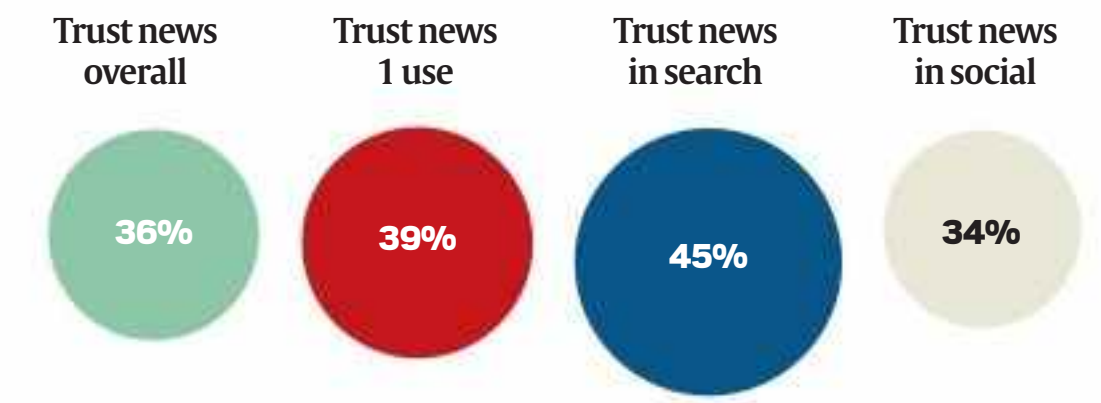
Telling Numbers

Do people trust online news? How Indians, others responded

‘TRUST NEWS FROM EACH MOST OF THE TIME’ (38 MARKETS)



‘TRUST NEWS FROM EACH SOURCE’ (INDIA)



Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford University

KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

TWO RECENT studies have found that less than half of online users trust the news they come across. A comparison between the two suggests that English speaking users in India trust online news overall less than users in other countries do, but they trust news found in search and social media more than those elsewhere do.

Both studies were conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University. The newer one covered more than 75,000 people in 38 markets (excluding India). The earlier one, released two months ago, was specific to India because “Internet use is not yet widespread enough there to make our on-line sample directly comparable to the countries covered here (in the second report)”. The India study was limited to a small subset of 1,013 English speakers and online users, and was not representative of the country, the report said.

The global study also found that except in Nordic countries, “most people are not prepared to pay for on-line news today and on current trends look unlikely to pay in the future.” Even in countries where consumers are paying for online news, they are still only limiting their subscriptions to one source, and in other countries, people are opting for entertainment subscriptions like Netflix or Spotify instead of news, it found.

In India, 36% of respondents trusted the news overall, including 45% in search and 34% in social media. In other markets, 42% of respondents trusted the news overall, with 33% trusting it in search and 23% in social media. Korea, France, Greece, and Hungary trust the news the least and Finland, Portugal, Denmark, and Netherlands trust it the most.

The India survey also found that 55% of respondents were concerned that expressing political views online could get them in trouble with the authorities.

India’s English speakers were on par with other countries in misinformation and disinformation concerns. More than half (55%) in the new study were concerned about their ability to distinguish between real and fake on the Internet, with those in polarised countries such as Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico expressing more concern. In the India-specific study, 57% were concerned with this, while roughly half were concerned with hyper-partisan content.

The issue is related to challenges of “rising populism, political and economic instability, along with intensifying concerns about giant tech companies”, the study says. “It is also raising new questions for journalists over how far to represent populist views, and how to satisfy a readership that no longer splits easily along traditional lines.”

The global study found that populists are more inclined to television news than online news, dampening the role of social media in the rise of figures like Donald Trump. Populists are not more likely to use social media, but they are more likely to engage on social media, especially Facebook. The study measured populism by asking about the distance respondents feel from their elected representatives and how much they want people to make important decisions directly.

News consumers are less critical of the media’s agenda-setting role (25%) and more concerned (39%) with the “negative” view that the media takes on events. Only half the respondents say the media helps them understand the news and 42% say the media fulfills a watchdog role. There were significant gaps between journalists’ and consumers’ perceptions.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

One Poll: one idea, many views

Fresh push for simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls reopens debate over objectives it would meet, concerns it would create. What are the arguments on either side, how have previous efforts played out?

PRADEEP KAUSHAL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 23

REELECTED PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi has renewed the idea of “One Country, One Election”, announcing last week that a committee will be formed to examine the issue, and holding a meeting with leaders of political parties. Many Opposition parties are, however, against the idea of simultaneous polls to Lok Sabha and all Assemblies.

What purpose would simultaneous polls serve, if held?

There are arguments on both sides. Making polls simultaneous would address various concerns, such as reducing the cost of holding elections, and limiting all elections to a single season. At present, there is an election is close in one state or the other at almost any given time, and those who favour simultaneous polls argue that the Model Code of Conduct gets in the way of the government announcing projects or policy plans.

Against the idea, the arguments include the complexity of such an exercise, the widely held view that simultaneous polls would benefit the nationally dominant party at the cost of regional players, and the complications that would arise if any of the governments were to collapse before completing its term. Leave alone state legislatures, even the central government could fall. Of 17 Lok Sabhas since 1952, seven were dissolved ahead of schedule — in 1971, 1980, 1984, 1991, 1998, 1999 and 2004. There would also be logistical issues, requiring about twice as many electronic voting machines and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail machines.

When elections were first held in independent India, were they not simultaneous to begin with?

Lok Sabha and state legislatures went to polls together in 1952 and 1957, with the Congress initially comfortably placed all over the country. The synchronised cycle was first broken in Kerala, in July 1959, when the Centre invoked Article 356 of the Constitution to dismiss the ministry headed by E M S Namboodiripad of the Communist Party, which had assumed power after elections in April 1957. This was followed by state elections in February 1960.

As the Congress’s popularity declined, it suffered major setbacks in several states — Bihar, UP, Rajasthan, Punjab, West Bengal, Orissa, Madras and Kerala — in the 1967 elections. Consequently, Samyukta Vidhayak Dal governments, comprising Bharatiya Kranti Dal, SSP, PSP, Swatantra Party, Jana Sangh and Congress defectors, came to power. Defections and counter-defections ultimately led to the dissolution of Assemblies, which separated the poll cycles of many states from the central one.

At present, Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim are held together with Lok Sabha polls.

In recent years, Assemblies have been completing their tenures, mainly because of



Varanasi on May 19, 2019. Lok Sabha polls come 2 years after one UP Assembly poll and 3 years before the next. Anand Singh

the anti-defection law of 1985 and Supreme Court judgments on invoking Article 356. The Supreme Court had held that the President can put a state Assembly in suspended animation, but cannot dissolve it without concurrence of Parliament. Further, the validity of the proclamation of President’s rule may be examined by the judiciary.

Has the idea of simultaneous polls been explored before?

The Election Commission had suggested back in 1983 that such a system be worked out. The Law Commission headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy, in its 170th Report in May 1999, stated “we must go back to the situation where the elections to Lok Sabha and all the Legislative Assemblies are held at once”.

In 2003, then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took up the issue with Congress president Sonia Gandhi. She appeared initially receptive, but the idea did not take off from there. In 2010, BJP leader L K Advani met with then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, then wrote in his blog: “I found both of them (PM and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee) receptive to a proposal I have been advocating for quite some time: fixed term legislatures and simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls.” He noted that the country witnessed a “mini-general election” every alternate year, and wrote, “This is not good for the health either of our Central and State governments, or of our polity.”

How have matters moved after the NDA came to power?

In 2015, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, headed by E M Sudarsana Natchiappan, compiled a report on ‘Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative

Assemblies’. “The holding of simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state assemblies would reduce: (i) the massive expenditure that is currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections; (ii) the policy paralysis that results from the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during election time; (iii) impact on delivery of essential services and (iv) burden on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time,” the report observed.

However, the Congress told the committee it was “impractical” and “unworkable”. The Trinamool Congress said it was anti-democratic and unconstitutional, while the CPI and the NCP said it was “not feasible”. The CPI(M) too pointed at “practical problems”.

In 2017, in his address to the joint session of Parliament (prepared by the government), then President Pranab Mukherjee expressed concern over frequent elections. They “put on hold development programmes, disrupt normal public life, and impact essential services and burden human resource with prolonged periods of election duty,” Mukherjee said, pleading for a constructive debate.

Also in 2017, in a discussion paper, ‘Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The ‘What’, ‘Why’, and ‘How’”, Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai of NITI Aayog wrote that the elections of 2009 had cost the exchequer about Rs 1,115 crore, and the 2014 elections about Rs 3,870 crore. The total spent on the elections, including the expense incurred by parties and candidates, was several times more.

Has there been an effort to address the concerns that would arise?

In a draft report on August 30, 2018, the Law Commission headed by Justice B S Chauhan held that simultaneous elections could not be held within the existing framework of the Constitution. These could be held together “through appropriate amendments to the

Constitution, the Representation of the People Act 1951, and the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies”. At least 50% of the states may ratify the constitutional amendments. The Commission recommended that all elections due in a calendar year be conducted together. Since a no-confidence motion, if passed, may curtail the term of Lok Sabha or an Assembly, the Law Commission recommended replacing the “no-confidence motion” with a “constructive vote of no-confidence” through appropriate amendments — a government may only be removed if there is confidence in an alternative government.

Last week, in his address to the joint session of Parliament, President Ram Nath Kovind said, “One Nation, Simultaneous Election is the need of the hour, which would facilitate accelerated development, thereby benefiting our countrymen.”

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora stated at a public function that simultaneous elections are “a very desirable goal, but for that, political systems of the country will have to take steps to align the life of a state Assembly with the life of Parliament”.

Is there a meeting point in sight?

The Opposition is wary of a concept that would take away the regional element of state polls, and leave regional personalities overshadowed by national leaders. The hugely expanding BJP, on the other hand, included the idea in its poll manifesto. With Prime Minister Modi as its face, a single campaign and election would take care of all Assemblies and Lok Sabha. Swaraj India president Yogendra Yadav has said the idea amounts to “One Nation, One Election, One Party, One Leader”.

The Opposition is likely to remain hostile to the proposal. The government will have to wait until it has the numbers in Rajya Sabha to carry through the requisite amendments.

THIS WORD MEANS: CONSTRUCTIVE VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE

Provision in Germany, context in ‘One Poll’ push

SAMPAD PATNAIK
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 23

IN THE debate over simultaneous elections, one question being raised is what happens to the common cycle if any one of these simultaneously elected legislatures is brought down by a no-confidence motion. The ruling BJD in Odisha (where Assembly and Lok Sabha elections already coincide) has proposed a solution — a provision on the lines of what is followed in Germany (The Indian Express, June 22). This is based on a concept

called “constructive vote of no-confidence”, also recommended by the Law Commission of India in a 2018 draft report.

The provision

Article 67 [Vote of no confidence] of Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany) sets conditions for moving a no-confidence motion against the Chancellor — the Bundestag (Parliament) may express its lack of confidence in the Federal Chancellor only by electing a successor by the vote of a majority of its members and requesting the

Federal President to dismiss the Chancellor. The President must comply with the request and appoint the person elected.

Article 68 [Vote of confidence] states that if a motion of the Chancellor for a vote of confidence is not supported by a majority of members, the President, upon the proposal of the Chancellor, may dissolve the Bundestag within 21 days. The right of dissolution shall lapse as soon as the Bundestag elects another Chancellor by a majority vote.

Its objective

Since the provision allows Parliament to

withdraw confidence from a head of government only if there is a majority in favour for a prospective successor, it narrows the scope of the Opposition to overthrow the government at will and necessitate elections before the government ends its term.

“The underlying premise is that there is a fixed five-year-tenure (for the House) and that there will be a government no matter what. The government will be presumed to have a majority unless another grouping is in a position to demonstrate that they have greater numbers,” said Pinaki Misra, BJD leader in Lok Sabha.

Record temperatures: trend projected to continue, what it will take to check it

KABIR FIRAQUE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 23

AROUND THE world, record temperatures have become more and more frequent in recent years. This month, Delhi reported its highest ever temperature of 48°C while Churu in Rajasthan crossed 50°C. Last week, the United Nations’ World Meteorological Organization confirmed two very recent readings as being among the hottest on record globally — 53.9°C in Mitribah, Kuwait (2016) and 53.7°C in Turbat, Pakistan (2017). India’s highest ever, too, came as recently as May 19, 2016 — 51°C in Phalodi, Rajasthan.

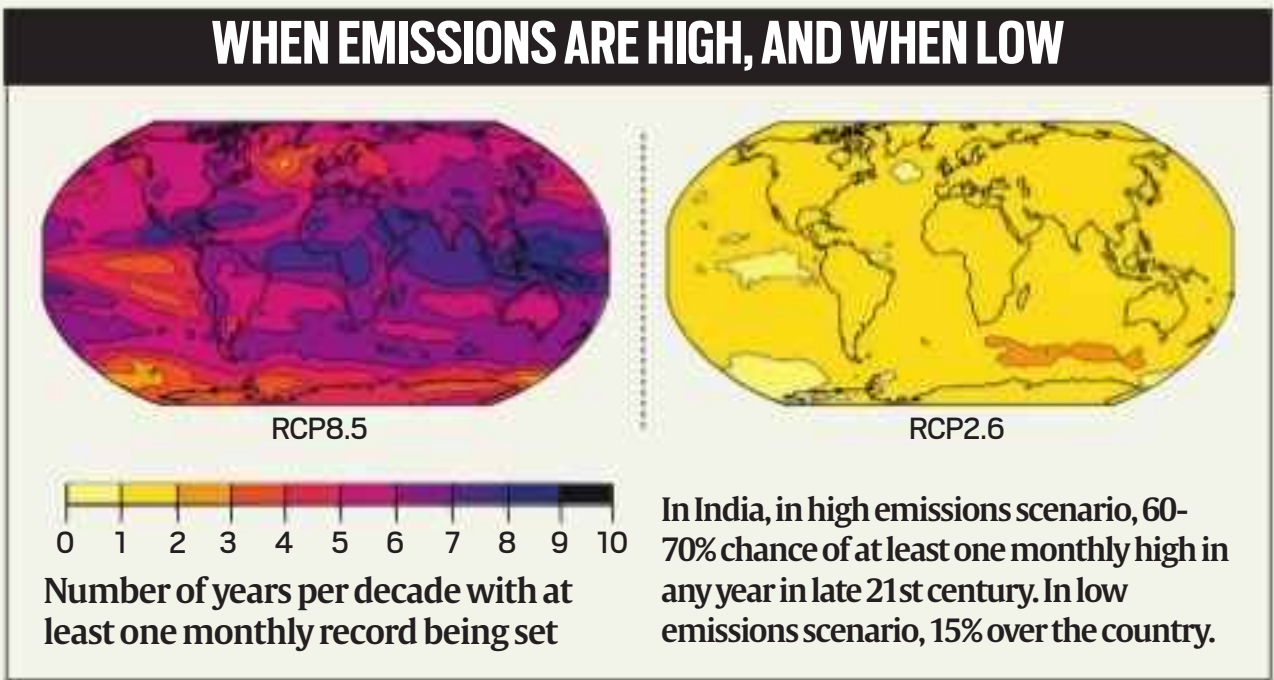
A new study has projected that the record-setting trend will continue for at least the next 20 years, and for longer unless measures are taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

From the findings, it can be inferred that India too is projected to experience the frequent occurrence of unprecedented high temperatures over the next 20 years, study author Scott Power of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology told *The Indian Express* by email. Power and colleague Francois Delage have reported their findings in the journal *Nature Climate Change*.

The big picture

Using 22 climate models from the world’s leading climate research centres, the new study projects temperature trends in two possible scenarios — high greenhouse gas emissions (called RCP8.5) and substantially reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 (RCP2.6).

If the high-emissions scenario were to continue, the study found that by the end of the century, 58% of the Earth’s surface



will likely witness at least one new monthly record temperature every year. In the low-emissions scenario, however, the likelihood would drop to 14%.

Source: Power & Delage/Nature Climate Change

Projections for India

In the high-emissions scenario, the likelihood of setting at least one high monthly record in any given year varies regionally

from 60% to 70% in the late 21st century, which is larger than the global average of 58%, Power said. In the low-emissions scenario, the likelihood of setting at least one high monthly record drops to approximately 15% over the whole country.

And if the projection is for frequent record temperatures over the next 20 years, “after this, the frequency will increase if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise or the frequency will fall if large and sustained cuts are made to global greenhouse gas emissions”, Power said.

Why 20 years?

Although the study looks at the benefits of reducing global greenhouse emissions by the end of the 21st century, these benefits take more than 20 years to become clear, Power said. “The likelihood of setting extreme temperature records is projected to remain at high levels for the next two decades.”



Clouds of war

The United States needs to dial down on its 'maximum pressure' tactics with Iran

U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to pull back from air strikes on Iran, after the latter shot down an American drone near the Strait of Hormuz, was a rare moment of restraint amid otherwise escalating tensions between the two countries. The rationale behind the pull-back, according to Mr. Trump, was that he did not want to cause any loss of Iranian lives as no American lives were hurt by the Iranians. Clearly, Mr. Trump, who had campaigned against the costly wars of the U.S. overseas, does not seem to be in favour of launching an open conflict with Iran. A war with Iran could be prolonged and disastrous. Iran has ballistic missiles, proxy militias and a relatively vibrant navy. And the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-third of the world's seaborne oil shipments move, is within its range. Mr. Trump does not want to take a risk unless there are provocations from Iran targeting American lives. While this approach is better than that of Mr. Trump's National Security Adviser, John Bolton, who has threatened Iran with war several times, what the U.S. President overlooks is that the current state of tensions is a product of his "maximum pressure" tactic. A year ago Mr. Trump pulled the U.S. out of a nuclear deal with which Iran was fully compliant, setting off the escalation. His plan was to squeeze the Iranian economy and force Tehran back to the table to renegotiate the nuclear issue as well as Iran's missile programme and regional activism, for a "better deal". A year later, the U.S. and Iran are on the brink of a war.

The problem with Mr. Trump's "maximum pressure" approach is that he doesn't seem to have a plan between the sanctions-driven pressure tactics and a potential military conflict. Iran, on the other hand, is ready to take limited risks, as its actions such as the threat to breach the uranium enrichment limits set by the nuclear deal and the downing of the American drone suggest, to break the stranglehold of the sanctions. As a result, Mr. Trump has a situation where maximum pressure is not producing the desired result, and both countries are edging towards a war he doesn't want. This is a strategic dilemma that warrants a recalibration of policy. Mr. Trump's decision to call off the strike and the new red line he set for Iran could create an opportunity for such a recalibration. He could seize the moment to assure Iran that his primary goal is engagement, not conflict. What Iran wants the most is relief from the sanctions. Instead of sticking to a policy that has proved to be counter-productive and risky, Mr. Trump could offer Tehran some reprieve in return for its remaining in the nuclear deal, which could be followed up by a fresh diplomatic opening. If he continues with the pressure tactics, tensions will stay high, the Strait of Hormuz would be on the brink, and further provocations by either side, or even an accident, could trigger a full-scale conflict. That is a dangerous slope.

Lacklustre meet

GST Council has missed the chance to send positive signals to boost consumer demand

The Goods and Services Tax Council's first meeting under the new government did not deliver any big surprises. Apart from some minor changes to the existing structure and procedures under the GST, the council's meeting on Friday, under Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, was largely a lacklustre event. There was some expectation that the council would consider a significant cut in tax rates across the board in order to help spur consumer demand that has been sagging in recent quarters. But none of that happened. The meeting ended with some changes in procedure that are expected to tackle tax evasion and make GST filing easier. In particular, Aadhaar has been approved as sufficient proof to obtain GST registration. Even the expectation that there would be a cut in the tax imposed on electric vehicles, from 12% to 5%, was not met. The government may be worried about the revenue implications of any significant across-the-board tax cut. Although GST collections have been encouraging in the past couple of months, monthly tax collections have largely been modest since the introduction of the tax regime in mid-2017, failing to meet the government's own targets most of the time. But such caution may not help the larger cause of the economy, which urgently needs a boost in some form. A significant cut in rates could have sent out the strong signal that the NDA government is serious about pushing through serious pro-growth reforms during its second term in office.

Another notable decision taken by the council was the one to extend the tenure of the National Anti-Profiteering Authority by two years, till November 2021. Further, the council increased the quantum of penalty that could be imposed by the authority on profiteering companies, from the current maximum of ₹25,000 to an additional 10% of the profiteered amount. Given that the government has increased the powers of the anti-profiteering body, it would not be surprising if the body becomes a permanent feature under GST. This does not send a promising message to the business community ahead of the Union Budget, scheduled to be presented in Parliament on July 5. The anti-profiteering clause assumes that government action is absolutely necessary in order to pass on the benefit of tax cuts to consumers, or else tax cuts may simply end up adding to the profits of businesses. This is wrong. While businesses naturally try to profit from lower taxes, the forces of competition make sure their profit margins are driven back down to normal. The alternative of having a bureaucracy to deal with the issue makes profit look like a bad word, and encourages rent-seeking by corrupt authorities.

Reimagining the NITI Aayog

The institution can play an important role in refreshing India's fiscal federalism



VIJAY KELKAR & ABHAY PETHE

India's Constitution-makers thought of India as a union of States with a centripetal bias, done, advisedly, to preserve the unity and integrity of a newly fledged nation. Since then, the Indian economy, polity, demography and society have undergone many changes. The new aspirational India is now firmly on a growth turnpike. It is in this context that we revisit India's fiscal federalism and propose redesigning it around its four pillars.

Typically, federations (including the Indian one) face vertical and horizontal imbalances. A vertical imbalance arises because the tax systems are designed in a manner that yields much greater tax revenues to the Central government when compared to the State or provincial governments; the Constitution mandates relatively greater responsibilities to the State governments. For example, in India, post the advent of Goods and Services Tax (GST), the share of States in the public expenditure is 60% while it is 40% for the Centre to perform their constitutionally mandated duties.

The horizontal imbalances arise because of differing levels of attainment by the States due to differential growth rates and their developmental status in terms of the state of social or infrastructure capital. Traditionally, Finance Commissions have dealt with

these imbalances in a stellar manner, and they should continue to be the first pillar of the new fiscal federal structure of India.

Understanding the imbalance However, in India, the phenomenon of horizontal imbalance needs to be understood in a more nuanced fashion. It involves two types of imbalances. Type I is to do with the adequate provision of basic public goods and services, while the second, Type II, is due to growth accelerating infrastructure or the transformational capital deficits. The latter are known to be historically conditioned or path dependent. Removing these two imbalances clearly comprises two distinct policy goals and calls for following the Tinbergen assignment principle, which are two different policy instruments. It is here that we believe that NITI Aayog 2.0 must create a niche, assume the role of another policy instrument and become the second pillar of the new fiscal federal structure.

In the past, the Planning Commission used to give grants to the States as conditional transfers using the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula. Now with the Planning Commission disbanded, there is a vacuum especially as the NITI Aayog is primarily a think tank with no resources to dispense, which renders it toothless to undertake a "transformational" intervention. On the other hand, it is too much to expect the Union Finance Commission to do the dual job. In other words, there is an urgent need for an optimal arrangement. It is best that the Union Finance Commission be confined to focussing on the removal of the horizontal im-



balance across States of the Type I: i.e. the basic public goods imbalance. We need another institution to tackle the horizontal imbalance of the Type II; for this the NITI Aayog is the most appropriate institution. It can be argued that the Finance Ministry is the other alternative to deliver the goods in this regard but it is ill-suited to do this; its primary duty is to concern itself with the country's macro-economic stability and the proper functioning of the financial system rather than be an instrument of growth at the sub-national level.

Towards this task of cooperative federalism, NITI Aayog 2.0 should receive significant resources (say 1% to 2% of the GDP) to promote accelerated growth in States that are lagging, and overcome their historically conditioned infrastructure deficit, thus reducing the developmental imbalance. In short, the NITI Aayog should be engaged with the allocation of "transformational" capital in a formulaic manner, complete with incentive-compatible conditionalities. The variables or parameters used in this formulaic transfer will be very different from those traditionally used by the Finance Commission.

NITI Aayog 2.0 should also be

Walking a diplomatic tightrope

For India and the U.S., managing bilateral ties is linked to balancing nationalist, cultural and economic agendas



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

Is the die already cast for U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's forthcoming visit to India? Mr. Pompeo, and his Indian counterpart, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, are the trusted lieutenants of their leaders, U.S. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, respectively, and largely aligned with their politics. But Mr. Pompeo and Mr. Jaishankar are also the links between the disruptive politics of their chief executives and the conventional strategic approach of professionals who work under them, and the legacy ecosystems in their respective countries. They have the tough task of managing a bilateral relationship that they both know is critical, without appearing to be undermining the nationalist, cultural and economic agendas of their leaders, which mirror each other, and hence create a situation of likes repelling each other.

A general presumption informing scholarship on international relations is that there is a non-negotiable and unchanging precept of national interest that determines the conduct of nations. Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump are two leaders who are rewriting the notion of national interest itself – for instance, secularism was considered

to be India's national interest until recently; immigration and trade were considered to be in America's national interest.

Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi are guided by nationalisms that have cultural and economic components. In both, their views converge in some aspects and conflict in some others. For instance, on the cultural front, they could cooperate on global Islamism. But the growing presence of Indians in America is a source of conflict – Mr. Modi's politics involves boosting the global Hindu; but Indian Americans are cultural aliens to Mr. Trump's supporters, besides being seen to be their economic adversaries. The sustained squeeze on Indian guest workers entering the U.S., particularly through the H-1B visa programme, is a case in point.

Country-specific perspectives

What does Mr. Modi want for India from abroad? He wants investment, technology, arms, but does not want finished products (other than arms) or foreign ideas – Christianity, an open global market, the right to self-determination, human rights, Western strands of democracy coming through missionaries, international bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This has been expressed through higher tariffs on imports and restrictions on global NGOs. This list does not entirely correspond to what Mr. Trump wants to sell – he wants to sell only finished products at lower tariffs, and keep technology and capital within the borders of



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America protected.

From an Indian perspective, Mr. Trump has upended American strategy in two fundamental aspects. His approach to international ties gives precedence for commerce over the strategic, and workers over corporations. Professional strategists conventionally understood the U.S.'s international ties from the perspective of its multinational corporations. These corporations wanted cheap manufacturing in China and Southeast Asia and U.S. policy enabled that pursuit. Corporations wanted cheap labour from India by outsourcing work and importing workers into the U.S. But Mr. Trump does not want American work coming to India, or Indian workers going to America; Mr. Modi wants both. Mr. Trump's disinterest in strategic matters and obsession with selling meet Mr. Modi's desire for arms acquisition, however. Given a choice, Mr. Trump would be willing to sell arms to India without regard for issues such as regional stability that preoccupy professionals in the State Department.

India's trade surplus is tiny relative to the size of the American economy and its trade volumes. Presidents before Mr. Trump al-

mandated to create an independent evaluation office which will monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the utilisation of such grants. In doing so, it should not commit the mistake of micro-management or conflicts with line departments. It must be also accorded a place at the high table of decision-making as it will need to objectively buy-in the cooperation of the richer States as their resources are transferred to the poorer ones.

Ushering in decentralisation

The same perspective will have to be translated below the States to the third tier of government. This is crucial because intra-State regional imbalances are likely to be even greater import than inter-State ones. Decentralisation, in letter and spirit, has to be the third pillar of the new fiscal federal architecture. De jure and de facto seriousness has to be accorded to the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. For this, the missing local public finance must be birthed. One of the ways for this is through the creation of an urban local body/panchayati raj institutions consolidated fund. This would mean that Articles 266/268/243H/243X of our Constitution will need to be amended to ensure that relevant monies directly flow into this consolidated fund of the third tier.

Through such constitutional amendments, the Centre and States should contribute an equal proportion of their Central GST (CGST) and State GST (SGST) collections and send the money to the consolidated fund of the third tier. For instance, one-sixth sharing of the CGST and SGST with the third tier can generate more than

1% of the GDP every year for the financing of public goods by urban-level bodies. Such an arrangement will be the third pillar of fiscal federalism. Further, the State Finance Commissions should be accorded the same status as the Finance Commission and the 3Fs of democratic decentralisation (funds, functions and functionaries) vigorously implemented. This will strengthen and deepen our foundational democratic framework.

Fine-tuning the GST

The fourth pillar – and in a sense what is central and binding – is the "flawless" or model GST. It is to the credit of our democratic maturity that the GST Bill was passed unanimously by Parliament; but in its present form, it is far from flawless. It needs further simplification and extended coverage. We need to quickly achieve the goal of a single rate GST with suitable surcharges on "sin goods," zero rating of exports and reforming the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) and the e-way bill. The GST Council should adopt transparency in its working, and create its own secretariat with independent experts also as its staff. This will enable it to undertake further reforms in an informed and transparent manner. Thus, India will be able to truly actualise the "grand bargain" and see the GST as an enduring glue holding the four pillars together by creating the new fiscal federal architecture and strengthening India's unique cooperative federalism.

Vijay Kelkar and Abhay Pethe are the Vice-President and Founder Member, respectively, of the Pune International Centre

ways privileged the strategic components of America's global ties over trade and commercial issues. India benefitted from that approach. When commerce becomes the only lens that the U.S. sees the world through, India and China look similar – trying to extract benefits from it. Mr. Trump thinks – he has said it several times – that India and China took his predecessors for a ride. Mr. Modi thinks his predecessors were weak leaders who were taken advantage of by the world, and he also wants to show how strong he is.

When Mr. Trump sees India and China as two similar countries that are taking advantage of America with protectionism, weak intellectual property protection, and higher emissions under the climate treaty, the strategic reason for India-U.S. alignment, which is the menacing rise of China, gets weakened. In fact, the Wuhan summit, that marked a new thaw between India and China, had as its backdrop Mr. Trump's tirade against both countries on these issues.

The terror fight

One war that Mr. Trump wants to end (in Afghanistan) and another war that he appears to be itching to begin (with Iran) have major implications for India and its ties with the U.S. India wants America's continued engagement in Afghanistan and peace with Iran. Just as the U.S. was campaigning hard to have Masood Azhar designated as a global terrorist, it was also seeking Pakistan's help to persuade the Taliban for a deal in Af-

ghanistan. The point being that India-U.S. cooperation on terrorism has several components to be factored in and the Indian euphoria surrounding Mr. Trump's relentless bluster against Pakistan needs to be tempered with some realism.

The Hindutva nationalists in India have a deep suspicion of China and its intention and they consider the U.S. as an ally and a partner, but the tactical nature of that approach is not hidden or unstated. The cultural suspicion of the U.S. itself is an additional factor.

A speech by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat to a gathering of the organisation on June 16 in Nagpur is instructive: "We are progressing and we will continue to progress. When India advances, when our Hindu society advances... the implication of that is that the selfishness that dominates the world is bound to come to an end... Countries that dominate the world using their money power and military power with the facade of grandiloquence. Therefore, there are many out there who do not want India's progress. I don't take names, but you understand. Many countries in the world are forced to support us because we have now become stronger. That is for advancing their interests. If we let them take advantage of our internal differences, our new beginning after 70 years will be eclipsed before it fully blossoms and bears fruit."

Mr. Pompeo and Mr. Jaishankar have the task of navigating a bumpy ride.

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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.

Religious freedom

Articles 25 to 28 of the Constitution grant the freedom of religion but one wonders whether they are restricted to the text alone (Page 1, "BJP slams U.S. for 'bias' against the PM", June 23). With instances of communal violence and mob-lynching on the rise, we have to ask ourselves whether we have this freedom. The current government seems to slam critics instead of looking into the wrong that is being done. There have been constant statements about the need to make India a "Hindu Rashtra". Instead of slamming the criticism, the government should take corrective measures. It must remember the Prime Minister's words, "If there is no criticism, democracy will be at a loss. One should

not be saddened by criticism."

ISHAN FUZZDAR,
Bengaluru

■ Top leaders of the ruling party condemn acts of violence and hatred against the minorities in a ritualistic manner more out of compulsion than conviction. The failure to prevent hate crimes, protection to the perpetrators of these crimes and weak law enforcement are facts that cannot be refuted. Crimes against the minorities cannot be delinked from the emergence of the ruling party as the country's principal political force.

G. DAVID MILTON,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

■ The present government is known not to accept its failures and the truth with grace. The same government

asserted that demonetisation was a success though the central bank said that most of the banned denomination notes were returned. There is also data on low GDP growth and a high unemployment rate which are contrary to the government's claim that the country is on the path to development. When the government cannot accept authentic data, no one expects it to agree with the U.S.'s assessment of India's "religious freedom".

KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO,
Hyderabad

History and progress

The absence of Jawaharlal Nehru's name in the President's address to both Houses of Parliament must lead to contemplation. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India, keeps being ignored under the

current political dispensation not because the Congress is not in power but because our history's palimpsest is sought to be overwritten by the politics of the day. But this cannot negate the reality that the Nehruvian era was ahead of its times and which is what enabled us to sustain both democracy and economic progress at fair levels. The first of the famed IITs was established ahead of our first general election of independent India – a foresight to ensure that the right to education goes hand-in-hand with the right to vote and technological and research institutes go to form the bulwark of our macro-economics. There is a lesson for any progressive nation; history is not for selective reading, and it matters less as to where we started but more how we intend hence onwards to

progress quickly and inclusively.

R. NARAYANAN,
Navi Mumbai

Afghan jolt

In Saturday's nail-biting encounter between India and Afghanistan, it was Mohammed Shami who ensured our victory. Afghanistan put up a brave fight till the last over. The collapse of India's middle order is cause for concern ('Sport' page, "Shami's hat-trick seals it for India in a sensational finish", June 23).

SRAVANA RAMACHANDRAN,
Chennai

■ On a slow track at the Hampshire Bowl, Southampton, it turned out to be a game of fine margins. While the earlier victories against bigger teams were relatively easy, the Men in Blue were thoroughly tested

before the business end of the tournament. Sometimes tough wins inject more confidence than the easy ones, and the win against Afghanistan was one such. Full marks to Afghanistan for playing tough cricket against a top team.

R. SIVAKUMAR,
Chennai

■ India won only because of some brilliant pace bowling from an ever consistent Bumrah and Shami. The shock that Afghanistan was close to giving us should make the Indian team managers ponder over the brittle middle order batting An over-reliance on the openers and Kohli does not augur well for India's smooth progress.

DEVADAS V.,
Kannur, Kerala

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A dialogue of civilisations

China is actively promoting the idea of confluence of civilisations. Why is India so inactive?



Is the 21st century going to be marked by a fruitful conversation among civilisations or marred by a frightening conflict of civilisations? This is one of the most vigorously debated questions in our times.

In the closing decade of the last century, Samuel Huntington, a noted American political scientist, put forward the thesis of 'The Clash of Civilisations'. He claimed that the future trend of world politics would be defined by the conflict between Western and non-Western civilisations. His belief: the West's superior civilisation would triumph in this clash. Many in America and Europe lapped up his thesis, since it had appeared soon after the end of the Cold War, which saw the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the U.S. as the sole superpower.

Since then, numerous public figures around the world have countered Huntington's theory. Notable among them was Mohammad Khatami, Iran's President from 1997 to 2005. To its abiding credit, the United Nations endorsed his counter-concept and proclaimed 2001 as the "UN Year of Dialogue among Civilisations".

A new Cold War?

The U.S. has become a diminished power in the past three decades. Nevertheless, it appears that Huntington's argument still has backers in the Donald Trump administration. One of its high-ranking officials has sought to paint the current U.S.-China trade war on the canvas of a 'clash of civilisations'.

In a recent speech, State Department Policy Planning Director Kiron Skinner alerted Americans to the "long-term threat" posed by China, and said that countering this threat is "a fight with a really different civilisation". She described the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union as "a fight within the Western family". In contrast, she said, "It's the first time that we will have a great power competitor that is not Cauca-



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sian." In addition to arrogantly proclaiming civilisational superiority, her remark was plainly racist. Many around the world are today wondering: is Washington planning a new Cold War? Will the world have to pay a heavy price once again?

It is against this backdrop that we should see the significance of a new initiative by Chinese President Xi Jinping. In recent years, no leader has been championing the need for inter-civilisational dialogue for world peace and common prosperity more forcefully and consistently than Mr. Xi. He is also the only contemporary global leader proposing such dialogue as a path to reach a much loftier goal, of "building a community of common future for mankind", which he expounded at the UN's 70th anniversary summit in 2015.

In the debate on whether there will be a conflict or confluence of civilisations, three questions become pertinent. Are all civilisations equal? Can dialogue really help in addressing the big challenges before the world today? And how should nations learn from one another? Mr. Xi has answered these squarely.

In his speech at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 2014, Mr. Xi had said: "All civilisations are equal, and such equality has made exchanges and mutual learning among civilisations possible. All human civilisations are equal in terms of value. They all have their respective strengths and shortcomings. There is no perfect civilisation in the world. Nor is there a civilisation that is devoid of any merit. No one civilisation can be judged superior to another."

Speaking at the 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in Oc-

tober 2017, he highlighted the relevance of this debate to the newest, and one of the most pressing, problems facing the entire planetary population: climate change. He said the world needs to make a transition from "industrial civilisation" to "ecological civilisation", and learn to create "harmony between man and nature", a noble teaching embedded in all the world's civilisations, cultures and religions.

Dialogue of civilisations

He continued his advocacy by hosting a major 'Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilisations' in Beijing last month, in which I participated as a non-governmental delegate. Over 2,000 participants representing the 48 Asian countries, and also many distinguished personalities from other continents, attended the event. In his keynote, Mr. Xi stressed the importance of Asia, a continental "cradle of civilisations" that "covers a third of the earth's land mass and has two-thirds of the world's population". Explaining the purpose of the conference, he said, "The world today is moving toward greater multipolarity, economic globalisation and cultural diversity, and is becoming increasingly information-oriented. All this points to promising prospects for the future. Meanwhile, instability and uncertainties are mounting and the global challenges faced by humanity are becoming ever more daunting, calling for joint responses from countries around the world." His prescription: "to meet our common challenges and create a better future for all, we look to culture and civilisation to play their role, which is as important as the role played by

economy, science and technology."

In an indirect reference to the protectionist and supremacist stance being adopted by the U.S., Mr. Xi cautioned: "Civilisations don't have to clash with each other; what is needed are eyes to see the beauty in all civilisations... If countries choose to close their doors and hide behind them, human civilisations would be cut off from each other and lose all vitality. We Asian people hope that all countries will reject self-exclusion, embrace integration, uphold openness and promote policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity."

History is witness to how civilisations decline and die when they become exclusivist. Mr. Xi put it well: "We need to stay open and inclusive and draw on each other's strengths. All living organisms in the human body must renew themselves through metabolism; otherwise, life would come to an end. The same is true for civilisations. Long-term self-isolation will cause a civilisation to decline, while exchanges and mutual learning will sustain its development."

Why was India absent?

As an Indian, I was happy when Mr. Xi in his speech made a special reference to India's contribution to the richness of Asian civilisations by mentioning the Rigveda, Ganga and Indus rivers, and, above all, the priceless gift of Buddhism. However, again as an Indian, I was assailed by a disturbing thought: when China is taking the lead in spiritedly championing inter-civilisational dialogue within Asia and around the world, why is India, inheritor to one of the richest and oldest civilisations, so inactive at the governmental level? Also, why didn't India send an official delegation to the conference?

An official delegate could have presented a picture of India-China civilisational solidarity, which is best described by this poem by Rabindranath Tagore, who is as highly respected in China as in our own country: "Once I went to the land of China,/ Those whom I had not met/ Put the mark of friendship on my forehead/ Calling me their own".

Sudheendra Kulkarni, an aide to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is founder of the 'Forum for a New South Asia - Powered by India-China-Pakistan Cooperation'

Confronting news avoidance

Initiatives such as slow news, seen as effective antidotes to breaking news, offer hope at a time of information overload



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

One is rarely reminded of literature when reading an exhaustive domain survey. The 2019 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, which covered 38 markets globally across six continents, documented an increasing phenomenon - news avoidance. It pointed out that improved technology increases access to news but also makes it easier to avoid it.

Reading this section of the survey, I was reminded of Toni Morrison's insightful observation about "our own rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging". On receipt of the 2008 PEN/Borders Literary Service Award, the Nobel laureate said: "Certain kinds of trauma visited on people are so deep, so cruel that unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice and rights, or the goodwill of others, only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning, sharpening the moral imagination. A writer's life and work are not a gift to mankind; they are its necessity." What she said about writing in general applies to journalism too.

There are multiple reasons for news avoidance. According to the Reuters Institute study, polarisation, misinformation, and low trust may not be the only issues facing the news industry. In its data this year, it found that almost a third (32%) of its respondents said that they actively avoid news - three percentage points more than in 2017. This, according to the study, may be because the world has become a more depressing place or because media coverage tends to be relentlessly negative - or a mix of the two. News avoidance figure reached a staggering 11% even in Japan where reading the news is often seen as a duty.

Uneven fallout

Ruth Palmer and Benjamin Toff, in their prediction for journalism in 2019 for the Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard University, pointed out that for a growing number of people, navigating the stresses of daily life involves opting out of following the news. Their biggest concern was that the news avoidance will most probably play out unevenly, and hence it may increase existing inequalities. For instance, they rightly pointed out that a gender gap in news avoidance is cause for alarm because, "if women, and lower-income women in particular, are less informed about political affairs than other

groups, they may be poorly positioned to advocate for themselves politically." It is important here to recollect the response of a woman in 24-35 age group in the U.K.: "News is a major negative and has a huge impact on everyone who watches it. There is never any positive or happy news."

Mr. Toff argued that for news avoiders, the high costs of consuming news in terms of time or emotional resources are not offset by the perceived benefits because the value of political information as social currency may be low. A study by the Pew Research revealed that seven out of 10 Americans have news fatigue. In this study, it was clear that feeling overwhelmed by the news is more common among those who follow the news less closely than among those who are avid consumers. Hence, journalists may not be the best judges to understand the growing distance between citizens and news.



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Joshua Benton, director of the Nieman Journalism Lab, collated some of the comments for a short article on news avoidance by Isabelle Roughol, senior editor-at-large at LinkedIn, to understand the range of factors that has contributed to news fatigue. He found out that by focussing too much on trust factor and the polarising voices on Twitter, news managers are missing the larger group that just doesn't like the meal news media have been serving: "The ones who find the news we produce disempowering, stress-inducing, and, frankly, not worth the time and effort."

The increased access, the unending news cycle where news is breaking every second, and the proliferation of platforms that offer news have led to a form of news overload. In this context, initiatives such as slow news, seen as antidotes to the debilitating effect of breaking news, offer hope. The proponents of this model are looking to respond with more meaningful, inclusive, and less relentlessly negative coverage - often developed in closer collaboration with audiences. The Reuters study revealed that explanatory journalism is resonating well with the younger readers. To paraphrase Toni Morrison, we need a language that helps restore a sense of belonging.

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SINGLE FILE

Creating sanctuaries of hope for migrant workers

Promises like 'Housing for All by 2022' fail to address the needs of migrants

MADHURIKA SANKAR



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There is a wilderness within our borders. It's so vast that it covers an entire nation, with around 100 million inhabitants, one-fifth of our labour force. The total earnings of these seasonal wanderers, India's internal migrant workers, are around \$170 billion per annum, i.e. around 6% of India's GDP. Sadly, this wilderness, comprising the residents hidden away in industrial complexes, in soot-ridden kitchens of hotels and in dusty construction sites, is invisible to the naked eye.

Shambhu Ghatak, from the Inclusive Media for Change Project, says the migrant population in India is riddled with the issues of inadequate housing; low-paid, insecure or hazardous work; extreme vulnerability of women and children to trafficking and sex exploitation; exclusion from state services such as health and education; and discrimination based on ethnicity. Furthermore, there are mental health issues, not to mention the darkness of debt-ridden, bonded labour. But, herein lies an irony: a treasure-trove of close to \$3 billion, levied as cess on builders under two migrant workers acts, lies grossly underutilised. Access to the money eludes migrant workers as they need to provide proof of address, which is difficult due to the fluidity of their lives. Further, ration cards, Voter IDs and Aadhaar cards are also not easy to obtain.

Trade unions are the best way for the workers to benefit from government welfare schemes but employers often prefer hiring unregistered migrants over their registered counterparts, further distancing the migrants' access. There is also the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act (1979), enacted to prevent migrant workers from being exploited, but it is rarely invoked and the penalty is minimal.

However, there are rays of hope, stemming from civil society organisations like the Aajeevika Bureau, Hunnarshala Foundation and C13; some Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives; forward-thinking government schemes like that for affordable, migrant housing in Bhuj; and from these resolute workers themselves (the women toilet-masons of Assam are a story of positive irony, for a change).

We need something more than the promise of 'Housing for All by 2022', which fails to address the needs of accommodation for such workers. There need to be multi-level reforms, with an emphasis on sustainable, inclusive construction practices; affordable temporary housing schemes; and inclusive urbanisation at the top. These should be peppered with legally binding implementation protocols. We need to accommodate the wilderness within, so as to help morph this open cage, in which migrant workers live, into a sanctuary of inclusive hope.

The writer is based in Chennai



DATA POINT

Mortality malady

In 1997, out of every 1,000 live births in India, 71 infants died before turning one. In 1997-2008, the figure reduced to 53 (-18), and between 2008 and 2017, it dropped to 33 (-20). The rate of reduction in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)* has not improved much and the rural-urban gap too remains high across these two time periods in some States. By Siddarth Rao T and Vignesh Radhakrishnan

State	IMR 2017	IMR '97 - IMR '08	IMR '08 - IMR '17	IMR urban-rural ('97)	IMR urban-rural ('08)	IMR urban-rural ('17)
Goa	9	-9	-1	-	-	-
Kerala	10	0	-2	4	-2	1
Manipur	12	-16	-2	7	-8	-4
Sikkim	12	-18	-21	-10	-16	-4
Mizoram	15	18	-22	-7	-21	-13
Delhi	16	0	-19	-	-	-
T.N.	16	-22	-15	-18	-6	-5
Maharashtra	19	-14	-14	-25	-17	-9
Punjab	21	-10	-20	-16	-12	-3
Himachal	22	-19	-22	-26	-18	-8
W.B.	24	-20	-11	-15	-8	-2
Karnataka	25	-8	-20	-39	-17	-5
Tripura	29	-17	-5	-14	-10	4
Gujarat	30	-12	-20	-23	-23	-14
Haryana	30	-14	-24	-11	-15	-7
A.P.	32	-11	-20	-33	-22	-13
Bihar	35	-15	-21	-20	-15	-5
Rajasthan	38	-22	-25	-28	-31	-14
Meghalaya	39	4	-19	-4	-17	-16
Odisha	41	-27	-28	-35	-22	-10
U.P.	41	-18	-26	-23	-21	-11
Arunachal	42	-15	10	-32	-15	-10
Assam	44	-12	-20	-42	-27	-25
M.P.	47	-24	-23	-42	-27	-19
India	33	-18	-20	-32	-22	-14

- The first three columns show IMR in 2017 and the reduction of IMR across two time periods. For instance, Odisha's 2017 IMR is relatively high compared to others and the change across the two periods has remained similar
- The next three columns show the urban-rural gap across time spans. States like Assam and Madhya Pradesh have a higher divide
- Shades of red indicate lower levels of improvement, while green shades indicate progress

Union territories were not considered. Some States did not have sufficient data

* Number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births

Source: Sample Registration System

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 24, 1969

RBI help sought to serve State Bank clients

The assistance of the Reserve Bank of India has been sought for the provision of funds to the hardpressed clients of the State Bank of India, badly hit by the indefinite strike by the bank's supervisory staff, it is learnt. The Reserve Bank is understood to be considering the possibility of providing funds to the Government departments, public sector corporations and the private sector firms which are in need of cash. Telegrams are reported to be pouring in from the clients of the State Bank all over the country desperately seeking such assistance from the Reserve Bank. There is yet no indication of the Centre intervening in the dispute between the management and the striking staff of the State Bank of India. It is learnt that the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai, is very firm about not intervening in the dispute unless the supervisory staff called off the strike.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 24, 1919

Relief Scheme. Bombay Corporation's Proposal.

Some time back the Bombay Municipal Corporation instructed its medical relief committee to prepare a scheme for the future working of volunteers and voluntary organisations in conjunction with the health department on occasions of outbreaks of epidemic in the city. The following is the outline of the scheme proposed after a prolonged and careful deliberation. The city should be divided into 50 units, each unit consisting of about 20,000 population. Each unit should have a committee consisting of a chairman and not more than two members. Each committee should have an organisation consisting of a doctor, two nurses and not less than 10 volunteers. As far as possible one of the members of the committee should be a member of the Corporation. The committee should be organised with the assistance of such voluntary bodies as may be willing to co-operate.

CONCEPTUAL Continental axis hypothesis

GEOGRAPHY

Also known as the 'continental orientation hypothesis', this refers to a hypothesis on why certain regions of the world throughout history experienced more economic development than others. It states that regions of the earth that are spread across a large latitudinal area, that is east-west, are more likely to witness greater development than regions that extend longitudinally, that is north-south. This is because temperatures are largely similar across latitudes, which helps technology and ideas to spread among a larger population. It was first proposed by American geographer Jared Diamond in his popular 1997 book Guns, Germs, and Steel.

MORE ON THE WEB

Nadigar Sangam elections: a star-studded affair

http://bit.ly/nadigarsangam



कविता हमारे भीतर की देवतुल्य मौजूदगी के प्रति एक संकेत है

कविता की असाधारणता का कारण बहुत स्पष्ट है। कविता उस मूल शब्द का वंशज है, जिसे हमारे संतों ने सृष्टि की उत्पत्ति का कारक माना है। कविता अपने उच्चांक पर सृष्टि की सर्जनात्मक शक्ति को अपने भीतर जीवित रखती है। वे सभी चीजें, जिनके पास आकार होता है, जो परिवर्तित होती हैं, जो अपने कार्यांतरण कर लेती हैं - कविता उन सभी चीजों का सशरीर अवतार है। शब्द का वजन कौन माप सकता है, भले एक पलड़े में आप सत्य का हल्का पंख रख दें, दूसरे में शब्द - क्या वैसा संभव है? फिर भी हृदय के भीतर शब्दों का कितना वजन होता है, हमारी क ल् प ना ओं , स्वप्नों में, युगों-युगों से चली आ रही अनुगुंजों में, उतने ही टिकाऊ जितने कि

पिरामिड। हवा से भी हल्के होते हैं शब्द, फिर भी उतने ही हृदयमयी तरीके से विरस्थायी, जितना कि जिया गया जीवन। कविता हमारे भीतर की देवतुल्य मौजूदगी के प्रति एक संकेत है और हमें अस्तित्व के उच्चतम स्थानों तक ले जा एक गुंज में बदल जाने का कारण बनती है। कवि आपसे कुछ नहीं चाहते, सिवाय इसके कि आप अपने आत्म की गहनतम ध्वनि को सुनें। वे राजनेताओं की तरह आपसे वोट नहीं मांगते। सच्चे कवि सिर्फ यही चाहते हैं कि आप इस पूरी सृष्टि के साथ किए गए उस अनुबंध का सम्मान करें, जो आपने इसकी वायु के अदृश्य जादू से अपनी पहली सांस खींचते समय किया था। कविता हमें, हमारे एकसापन के अचंचल की ओर ले आती है। यह हमारे भीतर विलीन हो चुके उस बोध को फिर से जगा देती है कि अंततः हम सब एक अनंत परिवार के ही हिस्से हैं और उन अनुभूतियों को एक-दूसरे से साझा कर रहे हैं, जो नितांत हमारे लिए अद्वितीय हैं, और उन अनुभूतियों को भी, जो सिर्फ हमारी नहीं, हर किसी की हैं। जब तक कविता हमारी बुद्धि को सवालों के दायरे में भेजती रहेगी, हमारी मुलायम मनुष्यता को गहरे से छूती रहेगी।

-नाहजीरियाई कवि और उपन्यासकार

हरियाली और रास्ता

खरगोश, दोस्त और शिकारी कुत्ते

एक खरगोश की कहानी, जिसके संकट के समय में एक भी दोस्त काम नहीं आया।



जंगल में एक गाय, एक बकरी, एक घोड़ा और एक गधा मिल-जुलकर रहते थे। कभी-कभी हीथी और तोता भी आ जाया करते थे। पास ही एक पेड़ के नीचे एक खरगोश रहता था। एक दिन वह उनके पास गया और बोला, तुम लोग मुझे भी अपना मित्र बना लो। जानवरों ने कोई आपत्ति नहीं की। अब खरगोश रोज उनके पास आकर बैठ जाता और कहानियां सुनकर अपना मन बहलाया करता था। एक दिन वह बैठ कहानियां सुन रहा था कि अचानक शिकारी कुत्तों की आवाज सुनाई दी। खरगोश डर गया। पर उसने सोचा, आज तो ये कुत्ते मेरा कुछ नहीं बिगाड़ सकते। मेरे इतने सारे दोस्त जो मेरे साथ हैं। वह गाय से बोला, माता, तुम मुझे पीठ पर बिठा लो। जब शिकारी कुत्ते आए, तो उन्हें अपनी सींगों से मारकर भगा देना। गाय बोली, मेरे घर लौटने का समय हो गया है। मैं अब नहीं रुक सकती। खरगोश घोड़े से बोला, बड़े भाई, तुम मुझे पीठ पर बिठा लो। तुम तो एक दुलती मारोगे, तो कुत्ते दूर जाकर गिरेंगे। घोड़ा बोला, पर तुम मेरे ऊपर चढ़ोगे कैसे? मुझे बैठना नहीं आता। मैं तो सोता भी खड़े-खड़े ही हूँ। ऊपर से मेरे पांव भी दुख रहे हैं। तुम किसी और से बात कर लो। खरगोश गधे के पास जाकर बोला, मित्र, तुम मुझे अपनी पीठ पर बिठाकर शिकारी कुत्तों से बचा लो। गधा बोला, मैं तुम्हें जरूर बचाता, पर मुझे अभी घर जाना है। अगर मैं समय पर न लौटा, तो मालिक डंडे मार-मारकर मेरा कचूमर निकाल देगा। खरगोश मदद की उम्मीद में बकरी की तरफ चला। बकरी ने उसे मना करते हुए कहा, भैया, इधर मत आना। मुझे शिकारी कुत्तों से डर लगता है। कहीं तुम्हारे साथ मैं भी न मारी जाऊँ। तभी पीछे से कुत्ते आ गए और बेचारा खरगोश दोस्ती के चक्कर में मारा गया।

जरूरत के समय ही पता चलता है कि सच्चा दोस्त कौन है और कौन नहीं।

ट्रंप द्वारा ईरान पर हमले का फैसला वापस ले लेने के बावजूद खाड़ी क्षेत्र में तनाव कम होने की फिलहाल उम्मीद नहीं है। दरअसल ईरान के आक्रामक तेवर भी तनाव बढ़ाने का काम कर रहे हैं।

तनाव से बढ़ती आशंकाएं

होर्मुज

जलडमरूमध्य के पास ओमान की खाड़ी में तेल टैंकरों पर हुए हमले के लिए ईरान को जिम्मेदार ठहराए जाने, और उसके बाद तेहरान द्वारा अपनी सीमा में बताकर अमेरिकी ड्रोन को मार गिराए जाने के बाद दोनों देशों के बीच तनाव जिस तरह चरम पर पहुंच गया है, वह पूरी दुनिया के लिए चिंताजनक है। इस बीच डोनाल्ड ट्रंप ने ईरान पर हमले का आदेश देने के बाद आखिरी वक़्त पर जिस तरह उसे वापस लिया, उससे सामान्य स्थिति की बहाली की एक झीनी-सी उम्मीद जरूर जगी। तब तो और भी, जब उसके बाद ट्रंप ने ईरान के साथ बेहतर रिश्ते की बात भी कही। लेकिन शुरू से ही ईरान के खिलाफ बेहद आक्रामक रुख अपनाने के कारण ट्रंप प्रशासन का तेहरान के प्रति

अपना रवैया बदलने की उम्मीद नहीं है। मुश्किल यह है कि खुद ईरान का भी इस मामले में रुख बहुत सख्त है। उसने ट्रंप को चेतावनी दी है कि अगर उन्होंने हमले की भूल की, तो वह पश्चिम एशिया को युद्ध की आग में झोंक देगा, जिससे अमेरिकी हितों को गंभीर नुकसान होगा। हद है कि आर्थिक रूप से बर्बाद हो जाने के बावजूद ईरान अपने आक्रामक तेवर जारी रखे हुए है। जबकि वह जानता है कि अमेरिका हमला न करके भी उसे और जर्जर कर देने की दिशा में कदम उठा सकता है। ट्रंप ने न केवल ईरान पर और सख्त प्रतिबंध लगाने की बात कही है, बल्कि ईरान की उस हथियार प्रणाली पर साइबर हमले का भी दावा किया है, जो रॉकेट और मिसाइल लॉचर को नियंत्रित करती है। विडंबना सिर्फ यही नहीं है कि अमेरिका और ईरान के बीच की तनातनी में वे यूरोपीय देश

नेपथ्य में हैं, जिन्होंने बराक ओबामा के दौर में ईरान के साथ बेहद महत्वाकांक्षी समझौता किया था, बल्कि ट्रंप प्रशासन पश्चिम एशिया के मामले में उस सजुदी अरब पर अतिशय निर्भर है, जो ईरान का दुश्मन है। जाहिर है, खाड़ी क्षेत्र में तनाव कम करने के लिए ईरान के अलावा सजुदी अरब और क्षेत्र के दूसरे देशों की भी वार्ता की मेज पर बैठना होगा, जिसकी संभावना फिलहाल तो नहीं दिखती। जहां तक भारत का सवाल है, तो अमेरिका-ईरान तनाव का खामियाजा पहले ही उसे ईरान से तेल आयात बंद कर भुगतना पड़ा है। अब ईरान के ऊपर से हवाई सेवा स्थगित करने का आर्थिक नुकसान तो होगा ही, कच्चे तेल की कीमत में भी तेजी आएगी। लेकिन भारत की सबसे बड़ी चिंता खाड़ी क्षेत्र में काम कर रहे लगभग अस्सी लाख भारतीयों के सुरक्षा से जुड़ी है।

मतभेद दूर करने का अवसर



अमेरिकी विदेश मंत्री माइक पोम्पियो की भारत यात्रा दुनिया के सबसे पुराने और विश्व के सबसे विशाल लोकतांत्रिक देशों के बीच बेहतर रिश्ते का अवसर होना चाहिए।



सुरेंद्र कुमार

चाहिए, जो मोदी हमेशा कहते हैं, कि सबसे अच्छा सौदा वह होता है, जिसमें दोनों ही पक्ष विजेता होने का दावा कर सकें।

भारत-अमेरिकी संबंधों की समस्याओं का समाधान असंभव नहीं है, लेकिन इन्हें व्यावसायिक लेन-देन के संकीर्ण चरम से देखने के बजाय व्यापक रणनीतिक दृष्टि और समग्र द्विपक्षीय संबंधों को ध्यान में रखते हुए परिपक्वता और संवेदनशीलता के साथ निपटना चाहिए। मामूली

समस्याओं के रचनात्मक समाधान से न केवल क्षेत्रीय, बल्कि वैश्विक स्तर पर भी सकारात्मक असर पड़ेगा। वह कितना अच्छा दिन होगा, जब भारत और अमेरिका के लोग कह सकेंगे कि ट्रंप और मोदी हैं, तो सब कुछ मुमकिन है! सार्वजनिक धारणा के विपरीत बहुस्तरीय और बहुआयामी भारत-अमेरिकी संबंध कभी बहुत अच्छे नहीं रहे, लेकिन अब इसका कायाकल्प हो गया है। वर्ष 2018 में वस्तु एवं सेवाओं का

द्विपक्षीय व्यापार 141 अरब डॉलर को पार कर गया। पिछले सात वर्षों में भारत में अमेरिका का रखा निर्यात काफी बढ़ा है। 300 से ज्यादा संयुक्त सैन्याभ्यास हुए हैं, तो अंतरिक्ष अनुसंधान से लेकर मानसून की भविष्यवाणी तक और कृषि से लेकर शिक्षा तक हर प्रासंगिक क्षेत्र को कवर करने वाले 50 से ज्यादा द्विपक्षीय समझौतों पर हस्ताक्षर हुए हैं। हिंद-प्रशांत क्षेत्र को लेकर दोनों के दृष्टिकोण में तालमेल है, दोनों के बीच 2+ 2 रणनीतिक एवं व्यावसायिक वार्ता हुई है, अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति और भारतीय प्रधानमंत्री के बीच बातचीत होती रहती है। ट्रंप अक्सर कहते हैं कि हर्लैंड डेविडसन पर आयात शुल्क को कम क्यों नहीं किया जाता। अमेरिकी बादाम और अखरोट का स्वाद लेने वाले भारतीयों की संख्या हर्लैंड का उपयोग करने वालों की तुलना में बहुत ज्यादा है। मोटरसाइकिल पर चलने वाले लाखों भारतीय हर्लैंड नहीं खरीदते। इसलिए हर्लैंड भारतीय बाजारों में नहीं छा सकती। हमें कृषि क्षेत्र को छोड़कर अन्य क्षेत्रों के उत्पादों पर शुल्क घटाना चाहिए, क्योंकि किसानों का संकट भारत की वास्तविक समस्या है।

एक देश जो महाशक्ति बनने की आकांक्षा रखता है, उसे विदेशी प्रतिस्पर्धा के विरुद्ध अपने उद्योग का अत्यधिक संरक्षण नहीं करना चाहिए। भारत में दूरसंचार और ऑटोमोबाइल क्षेत्र में विदेशी प्रतिस्पर्धा ने जो चमत्कार किए हैं, वह एक स्पष्ट सबक होना चाहिए। आय में भारी असमानता को देखते हुए, भारत में स्टैंट, घुटने का कवर और आम लोगों द्वारा इस्तेमाल की जाने वाली कई जेनेरिक दवाओं जैसी मेडिकेयर वस्तुओं की कीमतों पर से नियंत्रण हटाना नहीं जा सकता, क्योंकि इससे इनके दाम बढ़ जाएंगे। तरजीही राष्ट्रीय की श्रेणी वाली सुविधाओं (सीएसपी) की फिर से बहाली के लिए हमें अमेरिका के सामने गिड़गिड़ाना नहीं चाहिए, क्योंकि भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था आज

वह नहीं है, जो 1975 में थी। इसके बजाय हमें उन चीनी उत्पादों की आपूर्ति की संभावनाएं तलाशनी चाहिए, जो 25 फीसदी अमेरिकी शुल्क के कारण महंगे हो गए हैं। अकेले वालमार्ट हर वर्ष 15 अरब डॉलर की चीनी वस्तुओं का आयात करता है। कुछ अमेरिकी कंपनियां चीन से अपने विनिर्माण संयंत्रों को बाहर ले जाना चाहती हैं, अगर हम उन्हें व्यवसाय अनुकूल माहौल प्रदान करने में सक्षम होते हैं, तो वे भारत में अपने संयंत्र लगा सकती हैं। दोनों देश अतीत के संकोच से बाहर निकल आए हैं। भारत और अमेरिका ने विभिन्न अवसरों पर एक-दूसरे की मदद की है और भागीदारी बढ़ाई है, जो दोनों देशों के नेतृत्व के आपसी विश्वास और भरोसे को दर्शाता है। जिम्मेदार साझेदार के रूप में उन्हें एक दूसरे की सीमाओं का ध्यान रखना चाहिए। भारत की ऊर्जा सुरक्षा के लिए ईरान का तेल महत्वपूर्ण है। भारत और ईरान के बीच अन्य मामलों में भी गहरे संबंध हैं। रूस का एस-400 विमान भारत की राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा के लिए जरूरी है। भारत को एक विकसित देश में बदलने के मोदी के दृष्टिकोण की सफलता के लिए अमेरिका के साथ निकट संबंध आवश्यक है। इससे भारत की वैश्विक महत्वाकांक्षाओं को भी बल मिल सकता है। लेकिन क्या भारत को अपनी रणनीतिक स्वायत्तता खो देने चाहिए और रक्षा जरूरतों के लिए अपनी अन्य जरूरतों को भुला देना चाहिए? ऐसा करना बुद्धिमानी नहीं होगा। अमेरिका और चीन के बीच वैश्विक चर्चवृत्त के छद्म युद्ध में भारत को चुप बैठना चाहिए, ताकि दोनों उसे अपने पाले में खींचें। भारत ट्रंप के अपारंपरिक तरीके से कैसे तालमेल बिठाता है, यह हमारे नवनिर्वाचित विदेश मंत्री की परीक्षा है।

-लेखक इंडो-अमेरिकन फ्रेंडशिप एसोसिएशन के संस्थापक अध्यक्ष हैं।

दर्द भरा यथार्थ

मुजफ्फरपुर की दुखद घटना के कारण सिर्फ बिहार के मुख्यमंत्री बदनाम नहीं हुए हैं, भारत भी बदनाम हुआ है। प्रधानमंत्री नए भारत के सपने को साकार करना चाहते हैं, तो स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं में सुधार उनकी प्राथमिकताओं में होना चाहिए।



तवलीन सिंह

मोदी भी हुए हैं, बदनाम भारत भी हुआ है। इस तरह की घटनाएं हमेशा विदेशी अखबारों की सुर्खियों में रहती हैं। इसलिए रहती हैं, क्योंकि विकसित देशों में अगर किसी बीमारी में इतनी बड़ी संख्या में बच्चे मरते, जो लाइलाज नहीं है, तो सरकारें गिर जाती हैं। हमारे देश में ऐसा नहीं होता, क्योंकि अभी तक गरीबों के बच्चे ही मरते आए हैं। लेकिन अब गरीब माता-पिता भी जान गए हैं कि पिछले क़रीब सत्र साल से उनके साथ अन्याय होता आया है। अब इस अन्याय को वे बदलित करने को तैयार नहीं हैं।

प्रधानमंत्री नए भारत के सपने को साकार करना चाहते हैं, तो स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं में सुधार उनकी प्राथमिकताओं की सूची में होना चाहिए। कई किस्म

बी ता सप्ताह अजीब-सा रहा। एक तरफ राष्ट्रपति रामनाथ कोविंद का संसद में भाषण था, जिसमें नए भारत का सुनहरा चित्र उन्होंने अपने शब्दों से खींचा। समृद्ध, सुरक्षित, स्वच्छ, सुंदर और शक्तिशाली नया भारत, सितारों से आगे जाकर अंतरिक्ष में कदम रखने वाला नया भारत। दूसरी तरफ वर्तमान भारत का दर्द भरा यथार्थ देखने को मिला। मैं उस यथार्थ की बात कर रही हूँ, जो हमें बिहार के एक सरकारी अस्पताल में देखने को मिला। छोटे बच्चों का तड़प-तड़प कर मर जाने वाला अस्पताल। मुजफ्फरपुर के उस बेहाल अस्पताल श्रीकृष्ण मेडिकल कॉलेज ऐंड हॉस्पिटल का यथार्थ। इतना बेहाल था वह सरकारी अस्पताल कि पीने का पानी तक उपलब्ध नहीं था। न पर्याप्त बिस्तर थे, न डॉक्टर, न बीमार बच्चों के लिए आईसीयू की सुविधाएं। बुनियादी सुविधाओं का इतना अभाव अगर न होता, तो शायद इतने बच्चे न मरते।

केंद्रीय स्वास्थ्य मंत्री जब उस अस्पताल में अपनी संवेदना दिखाने पहुंचे, तो मृत बच्चों के मां-बाप ने उन पर अपना रोष निकाला। क्यों न निकालते? जब चार साल पहले उसी अस्पताल में इसी मंत्री ने जाकर आधुनिकीकरण के बड़े-बड़े वादे किए थे? उसके बाद न केंद्रीय स्वास्थ्य मंत्री ने कभी वापस लौटकर देखने का प्रयास किया कि उनके वादे पूरे हुए हैं या नहीं और न ही बिहार के मुख्यमंत्री ने, जिन्हें न जाने क्यों, सुशासन बाबू होने का खिताब दिया गया है।

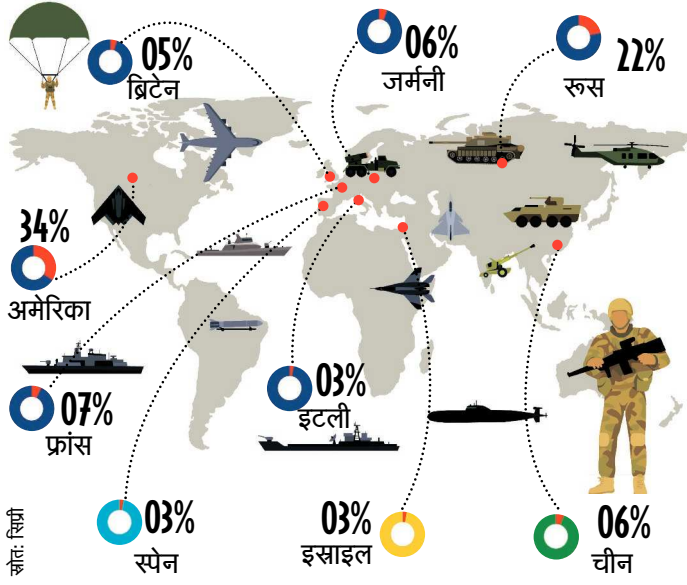
मुजफ्फरपुर की उस दुखद घटना के कारण सिर्फ बिहार के मुख्यमंत्री बदनाम नहीं हुए हैं, बदनाम नरेंद्र



खुली खिड़की

हथियारों का निर्यात

लगातार बढ़ते सामरिक गतिरोधों के बीच दुनिया के विभिन्न देश अपनी सेना को अत्याधुनिक हथियारों से तैस कर रहे हैं। एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक 2014-18 के बीच हथियार निर्यात के मामले में अमेरिका पहले स्थान पर रहा है।



मंजिलें और भी हैं

>> गेनाभाई द्याभाई पटेल

मजाक उड़ाने वालों ने भी शुरू की अनार की खेती

मेरा जन्म गुजरात के बनासकांठा जिले के सरकारी गोलिया गांव में हुआ। बचपन से ही मेरे दोनों पांव पोलियो से ग्रस्त हैं। मेरे पिताजी पारंपरिक किसान थे। बचपन में मेरे भाई खेतों में पिताजी का हाथ बंटाते थे। लेकिन मेरे पिताजी को लगता था कि मैं खेती में उनकी मदद नहीं कर सकता, इसलिए वह चाहते थे कि मैं अपनी पढ़ाई पूरी करूँ। बहुत कम उम्र में ही मुझे गांव से 30 किलोमीटर दूर एक हॉस्टल में भेज दिया गया, जहां से मैं अपने तिपहिया साइकिल से स्कूल जा सकता था। मैंने 12वीं तक पढ़ाई की। लेकिन माता-पिता अनपढ़ थे, तो उन्हें समझ नहीं आया कि मुझे आगे की पढ़ाई के लिए कहाँ और कैसे भेजा जाए। नतीजतन मुझे लौटकर गांव आना पड़ा।

गांव आने पर मैं अपने पिता और भाई के साथ खेतों पर जाने लगा। फिर मैंने ट्रैक्टर चलाना सीखा। मेरे पिता गेहूँ, बाजरा जैसी फसलें उगाया करते थे। उस समय बोरेवेल की मदद से सिंचाई करके खेती होती थी, जिसमें पानी की बहुत बर्बादी होती थी। चूंकि मुझे भी अब खेती करनी थी, इसलिए मैं ऐसी फसल की खोज में जुट गया, जिसे दिवांग होने के बावजूद मैं आसानी उगा सकूँ और एक बार बोने के बाद लंबे समय तक उससे उपज मिल सके। इस क्रम में मैंने कई फसलों पर हाथ आजमाया। फिर अन्य विकल्प की तलाश में मैं स्थानीय कृषि अधिकारी से मिला, कृषि विश्वविद्यालयों का दौरा किया और कृषि मेले में भी गया। क़रीब तीन महीने तक गुजरात, महाराष्ट्र और राजस्थान में घूमता रहा। मैंने महाराष्ट्र के किसानों को अनार की खेती करते देखा। महाराष्ट्र का मौसम गुजरात की तरह का ही होता है। अनार में पूरे साल फूल आते हैं और इसे ज्यादा देखभाल की भी जरूरत नहीं होती है। वर्ष 2004 में मैंने महाराष्ट्र से अनार के क़रीब 18 हजार पौधे लाकर अपने भाइयों की मदद से खेतों में लगाया। गांव के दूसरे किसान कहते थे कि मेरा दिमाग फिर गया। लेकिन मुझे यकीन था कि मेरी जमीन पर अनार उग सकती है। मेरे भाई और भतीजों ने मुझ पर भरोसा किया और इस काम में पूरा सहयोग दिया। वर्ष 2007 में अनार में फल आने लगे। लेकिन इन फलों को बेचना मुझे चुनौती था, क्योंकि पूरे राज्य में अनार का बाजार नहीं था। मैंने अनार उगाने वाले अन्य किसानों को संगठित किया और ट्रकों में अनार लादकर जयपुर, दिल्ली के बाजारों में उन्हें बेचने की व्यवस्था की। हालांकि यह ज्यादा दिन नहीं चल पाया। हम सीधे उपज खरीदने वाले व्यापारियों की तलाश में थे। लेकिन व्यापारी हमसे तभी फल खरीदते, जब उन्हें यह भरोसा होता कि हमारे पास फल पर्याप्त मात्रा में है। इसलिए हमने एक योजना के तहत हरेक किसान को अलग-अलग खेतों में बैठने के लिए कहा और व्यापारियों को एक ही खेत कई बार दिखाया। व्यापारियों को लगा कि हमारे पास काफी मात्रा है और इस तरह हमें हमारा पहला ऑर्डर मिला। अपनी लागत के मुकाबले मुझे दस लाख रुपये से अधिक का मुनाफा हुआ। मेरी सफलता देखकर और भी किसान पारंपरिक खेती छोड़कर बागवानी करने लगे। मैंने किसानों के लिए वर्कशॉप का भी आयोजन करवाया, जिसमें कई कृषि वैज्ञानिक और जानकार आए थे। अब हमारे जिले से दुर्बई, श्रीलंका और बांग्लादेश में अनारों का निर्यात होता है। पदमश्री मिलना मेरे लिए किसी सपने से कम नहीं था। मेरा मानना है कि जिंदगी चुनौतियों के बिना कुछ नहीं है। जहां लोग रुक जाते हैं, मैं वहीं से शुरुआत करता हूँ। मुझे कभी नहीं लगा कि जो काम दूसरे कर सकते हैं, वह मैं नहीं कर सकता।

अब बनासकांठा जिले से श्रीलंका और बांग्लादेश सहित कई देशों में अनारों का निर्यात होता है।

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सकते हैं। मेरे भाई और भतीजों ने मुझ पर भरोसा किया और इस काम में पूरा सहयोग दिया। वर्ष 2007 में अनार में फल आने लगे। लेकिन इन फलों को बेचना मुझे चुनौती था, क्योंकि पूरे राज्य में अनार का बाजार नहीं था। मैंने अनार उगाने वाले अन्य किसानों को संगठित किया और ट्रकों में अनार लादकर जयपुर, दिल्ली के बाजारों में उन्हें बेचने की व्यवस्था की। हालांकि यह ज्यादा दिन नहीं चल पाया। हम सीधे उपज खरीदने वाले व्यापारियों की तलाश में थे। लेकिन व्यापारी हमसे तभी फल खरीदते, जब उन्हें यह भरोसा होता कि हमारे पास फल पर्याप्त मात्रा में है। इसलिए हमने एक योजना के तहत हरेक किसान को अलग-अलग खेतों में बैठने के लिए कहा और व्यापारियों को एक ही खेत कई बार दिखाया। व्यापारियों को लगा कि हमारे पास काफी मात्रा है और इस तरह हमें हमारा पहला ऑर्डर मिला। अपनी लागत के मुकाबले मुझे दस लाख रुपये से अधिक का मुनाफा हुआ। मेरी सफलता देखकर और भी किसान पारंपरिक खेती छोड़कर बागवानी करने लगे। मैंने किसानों के लिए वर्कशॉप का भी आयोजन करवाया, जिसमें कई कृषि वैज्ञानिक और जानकार आए थे। अब हमारे जिले से दुर्बई, श्रीलंका और बांग्लादेश में अनारों का निर्यात होता है। पदमश्री मिलना मेरे लिए किसी सपने से कम नहीं था। मेरा मानना है कि जिंदगी चुनौतियों के बिना कुछ नहीं है। जहां लोग रुक जाते हैं, मैं वहीं से शुरुआत करता हूँ। मुझे कभी नहीं लगा कि जो काम दूसरे कर सकते हैं, वह मैं नहीं कर सकता।

विभिन्न साक्षात्कारों पर आधारित

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 109

जरूरत से ज्यादा कड़ाई

वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण की अध्यक्षता में आयोजित वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) परिषद की पहली बैठक में सलाह मशविरे के आधार पर चर्चा करने की पहले से चली आ रही स्वस्थ परंपरा को जारी रखा गया। शुक्रवार को आयोजित इस बैठक में परिषद ने दरों के पुनर्गठन पर कोई निर्णय नहीं लिया और कर वंचना के मामलों पर निगरानी के मानकों को

कड़ा करने पर ध्यान केंद्रित किया। इलेक्ट्रिक व्हीकल और चार्जरों पर कर दरों में कमी के प्रस्तावों को निर्धारण समिति को सौंप दिया गया और लॉटरी पर एकसमान जीएसटी दर के विवादित मुद्दे को महान्यायवादी के पास भेज दिया गया।

परिषद ने करदाताओं को भी यह संदेश दिया कि वह उनकी आशंकाओं को लेकर

सचेत है। इस क्रम में उसने वर्ष 2017-18 का वार्षिक जीएसटी रिटर्न भरने की अवधि को दो माह बढ़ाकर अगस्त के अंत तक कर दिया। साथ ही यह घोषणा भी की गई कि अगले वर्ष एक जनवरी से एक फॉर्म वाली नई रिटर्न फाइलिंग व्यवस्था लागू की जाएगी। कारोबार से कारोबार को होने वाले लेनदेन के लिए इलेक्ट्रॉनिक इनवॉइस की व्यवस्था को सैद्धांतिक मंजूरी दे दी गई। इसे आधिकारिक पोर्टल के माध्यम से अंजाम दिया जाएगा। यह भी एक अच्छा कदम है। हालांकि यही बात उस निर्णय के बारे में नहीं कही जा सकती है जिसके तहत कंपनियों द्वारा तथाकथित रूप से मुनाफाखोरी करने पर भारी भरकम जुर्माना लगाए जाने की बात कही गई।

बदले हुए नियमों के तहत अगर कर दरों

में कटौती से होने वाले लाभ को ग्राहकों को देने के बजाय अपनी जेब में डालने वाली कंपनियां 30 दिन के भीतर उक्त राशि लौटाती नहीं हैं तो उन्हें मुनाफे में कमाई गई राशि का 10 फीसदी जुर्माने के रूप में चुकाना होगा। इसके अतिरिक्त मुनाफे में अर्जित राशि उपभोक्ता को अथवा उपभोक्ता कल्याण बोर्ड को लौटानी होगी। यह अतिरिक्त जुर्माना कारोबारी जगत को भारी पड़ेगा। खासतौर पर तब जबकि मुनाफाखोरी को स्पष्ट रूप से परिभाषित करने वाले नियमों और निर्देशों का अभाव है। कानून स्पष्ट रूप से यह नहीं बताता है कि लाभ का हस्तांतरण कारोबारी संस्था के स्तर पर होगा या उत्पाद श्रेणी के स्तर पर अथवा शेयर धारक स्तर पर। इसके चलते पहले ही कई बड़ी कंपनियों के बीच विवादों की शुरुआत

हो चुकी है। जीएसटी को अपनाने वाले अन्य देशों मसलन ऑस्ट्रेलिया आदि की बात करें तो वहां यह स्पष्ट है कि कैसे समकक्ष प्राधिकार को किसी खास उत्पाद के विशुद्ध मार्जिन की जांच करनी चाहिए।

भारत में केवल प्रक्रिया के बारे में ही जानकारी दी गई है। यह बिचित्र है कि जीएसटी परिषद ने जीएसटी व्यवस्था लागू होने दो वर्ष बाद भी नियम तो नहीं बनाए लेकिन कंपनियों के खिलाफ उसने कड़े प्रावधान अवश्य लागू कर दिए। राष्ट्रीय मुनाफाखोरी रोधी प्राधिकार (एनएए) की कार्याविधि में दो वर्ष का विस्तार भी सवाल उठाने लायक है। इस प्राधिकार का कार्यकाल पहले दो वर्ष का माना जा रहा था। यह अपने मूल विचार में ही सही नहीं था और क्रियाव्ययन की चूकों से इसका स्तर और गिर

गया। कंपनियों को यह स्वतंत्रता होनी चाहिए कि वे कर बदलाव पर अपनी प्रतिक्रिया दे सकें। खासतौर पर जीएसटी जैसे जटिल करो के मामले में, जिसकी विविधता का उनकी लागत पर असर पड़ता है। यह उनके प्रतिस्पर्धी और वाणिज्यिक हितों को प्रभावित करता है। अगर प्रतिस्पर्धात्मक स्थिति कमजोर है और कर दरों का उचित पारेषण नहीं होने दिया जा रहा है तो यह प्रतिस्पर्धा आयोग का विषय है। यह मानना अनुचित है कि प्रतिस्पर्धा के कारण कम दर होने पर भी लागत कम नहीं होगी। जीएसटी का उद्देश्य यही था कि उपभोक्ता पर कम से कम प्रभाव पड़े। ऐसे में अगर एक अस्थायी प्राधिकार की आवश्यकता ही थी तो भी एनएए को तय अवधि में बंद कर दिया जाना था।



विनय सिन्हा

संकटग्रस्त कंपनियों को स्थिर बनाना

औपचारिक दिवालिया प्रक्रिया तनावग्रस्त कंपनियों को स्थिर बनाती है और कर्जदाताओं की ऊर्जा को सही दिशा प्रदान करती है। इस बारे में विस्तार से बता रहे हैं **अजय शाह**

एक बार जब किसी कंपनी पर बहुत अधिक कर्ज हो जाए तो उधार करना रोजमर्रा का काम हो जाता है। पुराने कर्ज को चुकाने के लिए नियमित तौर पर नया कर्ज लिया जाता है। जब कर्जदारों को संदेह होने लगता है तो उधारी को इस आवक पर रोक लग जाती है और तनाव उत्पन्न होने लगता है। तब तनावग्रस्त कंपनियों को कर्ज चुकाने के लिए नकदी की आवश्यकता होती है। सभी कर्जदाता या कम से कम अधिकांश आगे बढ़कर अपना पैसा वापस मांगते हैं। औपचारिक निस्तारण प्रक्रिया के अभाव में प्रबंधन के पास यह क्षमता होती है कि वह तय करे कि किसका भुगतान किया जाना है। औपचारिक निस्तारण प्रक्रिया का एक लाभ यह है कि प्राथमिकता का क्रम कानूनन तय है। इससे स्थिरता बढ़ती है।

कई बार कंपनियां यदाकदा उधार लेती हैं। उन्हें इस बात को लेकर चिंतित होना होगा कि कर्जदार उनके बारे में केवल उस वक्त सोचते हैं जब उन्हें नया कर्ज लेना होता है। अन्य फर्म भारी भरकम कर्ज ले लेती हैं। जब उधार बहुत ज्यादा हो जाता है तो पुराना कर्ज चुकाने का सामान्य तरीका यही है कि नया कर्ज ले लिया जाए। कुल मिलाकर उधारी अब कंपनी को चलाते रहने

का अहम जरिया बन जाती है। हर महीने या दो महीने में कंपनी को कर्जदारों से संपर्क कर नया कर्ज मांगना पड़ता है।

जो कंपनी लगातार उधारी लेती है वह एक तरह से तनी हुई रस्सी पर चलती है। किसी भी समय अगर कर्जदारों की ऋण की गुणवत्ता प्रभावित होती है तो उस तक पहुंच भी कमजोर पड़ती है। इसके परिणामस्वरूप हमें कुछ कंपनियां असहज हालत में मिलती हैं। इन कंपनियों में पुनर्भुगतान बाकी होता है और नए ऋण बाजार तक पहुंच नहीं बन पाती। पहले आदर्श स्थिति की बात करते हैं: कंपनी के पास नकदीकृत परिसंपत्तियां थीं। इस मामले में यह संभव है कि कंपनी को कायदे से नकदीकृत कर दिया जाए। एक एक कर फर्म अपनी परिसंपत्तियों को बेचती है और नकदी की मदद से पुनर्भुगतान करती है।

आज हमारे देश की वित्तीय स्थिति 10

या 20 साल पहले की तुलना में बेहतर है। अब समुचित समय में ऐसी परिसंपत्ति का निपटारा करना और बेहतर मूल्य हासिल करना आसान है। ऐसा करके उन मामलों से निपटा जा सकता है जहां कर्जदाता एक मजबूत कंपनी से रुख फेर चुके हों। परिसंपत्ति का नकदीकरण अच्छी कीमत पर होता है और ऋण भुगतान भी समय पर होता है।

ऐसा ही होना चाहिए। मान लीजिए कंपनी के पास नकदीकृत करने के लिए परिसंपत्ति है। नकदी की तलाश में वह अच्छी परिसंपत्ति को सस्ती दर पर बेच सकती है। ऐसे नुकसान की भरपाई शेयर पूंजी से हो सकती है। दूसरी ओर मान लेते हैं कि कंपनी का परिसंपत्ति मूल्य इतना नहीं कि सारी देनदारी चुकाई जा सके।

इन हालात में परिसंपत्तियों की बिक्री कंपनी को गिरावट के चक्र में डाल देती है। हर परिसंपत्ति की बिक्री के साथ उसकी हालत बिगड़ती चली जाती है। उदाहरण के लिए मान लेते हैं कि 100 रुपये की एक बैलेंस शीट है जिसमें 20 रुपये की इक्विटी और 80 रुपये का ऋण है। हड़बड़ी में की गई बिक्री में 50 रुपये की परिसंपत्ति 30 रुपये में बिकती है। इन 30 रुपये का इस्तेमाल ऋण चुकाने में किया जाता है और

वित्तीय क्षेत्र विधायी सुधार आयोग (एफएसएलआरसी) द्वारा तैयार डिजाइन में दो तत्त्व शामिल हैं। सामान्य वित्तीय फर्म के लिए और दूसरा व्यवस्थागत रूप से महत्वपूर्ण वित्तीय फर्म के लिए दिवालिया प्रक्रिया जो निस्तारण निगम के माध्यम से काम करेगी। यह वित्तीय निस्तारण एवं जमा बीमा (एफआरडीआई) में निहित है। तमाम अन्य फर्म के लिए हमें आईबीसी चाहिए। दिवालिया कानून सुधार समिति की दृष्टि भी कुछ ऐसी ही थी। हम इस बात पर जोर दे सकते हैं कि यह भेद सामान्य वित्तीय बनाम गैर वित्तीय फर्म का भेद नहीं है। बल्कि दो हिस्सों में बंटी इस मशीनरी को क्रियान्वित करना होगा।

हमारे यहां एक और बड़ी कमी है समुचित बॉन्ड बाजार का अभाव। जब ऋण का जोखिम ऊपर जाता है तो उसे महंगी उधारी से जोड़ा जाना चाहिए न कि ऋण बाजार में गिरावट से। बॉन्ड बाजार पहुंच कर यह गिरावट मौजूदा माहौल के लिए सबसे बड़ी वजह है। यही वर्तमान में विभिन्न फर्म को अस्थिर कर रही। इसे हल करने के लिए बॉन्ड बाजार सुधार की आवश्यकता है।

(लेखक नई दिल्ली स्थित नैशनल इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ पब्लिक फाइनेंस एंड पॉलिसी में प्रोफेसर हैं।)

‘घर से काम’ को माना जाए सुविधा न कि अधिकार

प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने केंद्रीय मंत्रिपरिषद के अपने सहयोगियों को सलाह दी है कि उन्हें 'समय पर कार्यालय पहुंचना चाहिए और घर से काम करने से बचना चाहिए ताकि वे दूसरों के लिए उदाहरण कायम कर सकें।' इस सलाह से मंत्री चौंके नहीं होंगे क्योंकि मोदी को हमेशा से सख्त मुखिया माना जाता है। उन्होंने वर्ष 2014 में प्रधानमंत्री बनने के बाद अपनी पहली बैठक में ही अपने सहयोगियों को रोजाना 18 घंटे काम करने के लिए कह दिया था।

मोदी ने घर से काम करने के पक्ष में नहीं होने की कई वजह बताई हैं। वह चाहते हैं कि वरिष्ठ मंत्री नए मंत्रियों का मार्गदर्शन करें ताकि फाइलों को जल्द मंजूरी दी जा सके। कैबिनेट मंत्री और उनके कनिष्ठ सहयोगियों दोनों को मिलकर प्रस्तावों आदि को मंजूरी देनी चाहिए, लेकिन घर से काम करने की स्थिति में यह संभव नहीं होगा।

मोदी की सलाह उस दुनिया में पूरी तरह अनुपयुक्त लग सकती है, जहां कंप्यूटर से घर बैठे काम करना जीवन जीने का

एक स्वीकृत तरीका है और कर्मचारी इसे काम एवं जीवन में संतुलन बनाए रखने का एक तरीका मानते हैं। यह कोई नहीं जानता कि उनके मंत्री इसे किस तरह देख रहे हैं, लेकिन प्रधानमंत्री के नजरिये के कंपनी जगत में कुछ समर्थक मिल सकते हैं। विश्व की सबसे बड़ी कंपनियों में से कम से कम दो ने नकारात्मक प्रभावों को देखते हुए घर से काम करने की व्यवस्था बंद कर दी। बहुत से प्रबंधक बड़ी तादाद में घर से काम करने की मंजूरी देने को लेकर संदेह रखते हैं। इसकी वजह कुछ कर्मचारियों का व्यवहार है, जो इसकी 'कामचोरी' के रूप में व्याख्या करते हैं।

ये कंपनियां मैसाच्युसेट्स इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ टेक्नोलॉजी के प्रोफेसर थॉमस एलेन का उदाहरण देते हैं। उन्होंने दिखाया है कि अगर लोग 150 फुट से अधिक दूर होते हैं तो उनके बार-बार संवाद करने की संभावना कम हो जाती है। इससे पता चलता है कि स्काइप या



इंसानी पहलू

श्यामल मजूमदार

अत्यंत सस्ती ब्रॉडबैंड सेवाएं एक जगह मिलने की जरूरत की भरपाई नहीं कर सकती।

शोध में यह भी सामने आया है कि घर से काम करना टीम की एकजुटता और नवोन्मेष के लिए अच्छा नहीं है। वर्ष 2013 में याहू की पूर्व मुख्य कार्याधिकारी मरिसा मेयर ने घर से काम करने पर रोक लगा दी थी। उन्होंने कहा कि काम के लिए सबसे बेहतर जगह बनने की खातिर संवाद एवं सहयोग महत्वपूर्ण होगा, इसलिए हमें एक साथ मिलकर काम करना होगा। इसीलिए उन्होंने कहा कि 'यह बेहद जरूरी है कि हम हमारे कार्यालयों में मौजूद रहें।' मेयर की बात के खिलाफ कई तर्क दिए जा सकते हैं, लेकिन असल तथ्य यह है कि सहयोग, नवोन्मेष और संबंध एवं नेटवर्क के विकास के अवसरों को चिन्हित करने के लिए आमने-सामने संवाद होना आवश्यक है।

मेयर की अपने फैसले के लिए कड़ी आलोचना की गई। ऐसा लगता है कि हर कोई इस बात से खफा है कि कैसे गुगल की एक पूर्व कर्मचारी (मेयर गुगल में पहले उत्पाध्यक्ष थीं और वहां उन्होंने एक दशक से अधिक समय तक काम किया) कर्मचारियों के प्रतिकूल नीति अपना सकती हैं। लेकिन उस समय इस आलोचना की धार कुंद पड़ गई, जब उनकी नीति आने के कुछ दिनों बाद ही गुगल के शीर्ष कार्याधिकारियों में से एक ने एक टॉक शो में कहा कि एकांत में काम के 'जादुई क्षण' सृजित नहीं किए जा सकते। यहां तक कि गुगल भी यह सुनिश्चित करती है कि कम से कम कर्मचारी घर से काम करने का विकल्प चुनें क्योंकि बहुत से

कर्मचारियों ने इतना अकेलापन महसूस किया कि उन्होंने हमेशा घर से काम करने का अपना विचार ही बदल लिया।

आईबीएम ऐसी कंपनी है, जिसने दशकों तक घर से काम करने की नीति अपनाई है। कंपनी ने वर्ष 2017 में घर से काम करने की नीति रद्द कर दी। उस समय कंपनी ने अमेरिका में अपने 2,600 लोगों के मार्केटिंग बद्दल लिया। स्थान पर लाने का फैसला किया ताकि सभी टीम कंधे से कंधा मिलाकर काम करें। इसका मतलब है कि जो कर्मचारी पहले घर से काम कर रहे थे, उन्हें भी कार्यालय आना पड़ेगा।

आईबीएम ने अपने फैसले के बचाव में कहा था कि उसका लक्ष्य कंपनी को और अधिक तेज बनाना है, जहां अधिकारियों का कर्मचारियों के साथ मौजूद रहना और कर्मचारियों का एक स्थान पर मौजूद होना जरूरी है। आईबीएम के इस कदम ने बहुत से लोगों को चौंकाया था क्योंकि आईबीएम घर बैठे काम करने की नीति को अपनाने वाली शुरुआती कंपनियों में से एक थी। वर्ष 2009 में जब घर बैठे काम करना महज एक फैशन था, तब आईबीएम के दुनियाभर के 386,000 कर्मचारियों में से 40 फीसदी घर से काम कर रहे थे।

साफ तौर पर घर से काम करने के कुछ सकारात्मक पहलू हैं क्योंकि इससे कार्यालय आने-जाने का समय बचता है और उससे जुड़ी थकान से भी बचा जा सकता है। ऐसा कोई नहीं मान रहा है कि घर से काम करना गलत विचार है और हर कोई इसे खत्म कर देगा। इसके बजाय इससे नौकरी को लेकर ज्यादा संतुष्टि मिलती है और आम तौर पर प्रतिभाशाली कर्मचारियों को कंपनी से जोड़े रखने के लिए कम पैसा चुकाना पड़ता है। लेकिन यह तभी सफल होगा कि हर संबंधीत व्यक्ति इस बात से सहमत होगा कि यह अधिकार नहीं बल्कि सुविधा मिली हुई है। अगर प्रबंधक को यह लगता है कि कर्मचारी इस सुविधा का दुरुपयोग कर रहे हैं तो वह इस सुविधा को वापस लेने का अधिकार रखता है।

कानाफूसी

दोस्त या दुश्मन?

लोकसभा चुनाव तक तेलंगाना के मुख्यमंत्री और टीआरएस प्रमुख के चंद्रशेखर राव को लगता था कि भारतीय जनता पार्टी के साथ उनकी लड़ाई दोस्ताना है। परंतु लोकसभा चुनाव में भाजपा प्रत्याशी ने निजामाबाद से सांसद रहें उनकी बेटी कविता को और करीमनगर में उनके करीबी सहयोगी बी बिनोद कुमार को हरा दिया। पिछले सप्ताह हैदराबाद में पार्टी के नवनिर्वाचित सांसदों को संबोधित करते हुए उन्होंने कहा कि उनकी पार्टी न तो भाजपा की दोस्त है और न ही दुश्मन। उन्होंने कहा कि लोकसभा में भाजपा के पास बहुमत है और उसे उनके समर्थन की आवश्यकता नहीं। ऐसे में यही माना जा सकता है कि सत्ताधारी दल उनकी पार्टी की मांगों को लेकर भी ठंडा रुख ही अपनाएगा। उधर भाजपा की तेलंगाना इकाई के अध्यक्ष के लक्ष्मण ने दोनो दलों के बीच बढ़ती दूरी को और बढ़ा दिया है। पिछले दिनों राजधानी नई दिल्ली में अमित शाह से मुलाकात के बाद लक्ष्मण ने कहा कि सन 2023 में भाजपा तेलंगाना में सत्ता में अवश्य आएगी। उन्होंने कहा कि अब पार्टी का पूरा ध्यान राज्य में सत्ता हासिल करने पर है। टीआरएस से सत्ता हासिल करने का हर प्रयास किया जाएगा। केसीआर ने भी कलेश्वरम सिंचाई परियोजना के उद्घाटन के लिए प्रधानमंत्री को आमंत्रित किया था लेकिन प्रधानमंत्री कार्यालय ने कहा कि उनके पास केसीआर से मुलाकात करने का वक्त नहीं है। इससे नाराज केसीआर ने नीति आयोग की बैठक तक में शिरकत नहीं की।



आपका पक्ष

महिला सशक्तीकरण पर सरकार का जोर

राष्ट्रपति रामनाथ कोविंद ने संसद के संयुक्त सत्र को संबोधित किया और सरकार के दूसरे कार्यकाल का एजेंडा रखा। उन्होंने तीन तलाक और हलाला को खत्म करने के लिए विपक्षी दलों से सहयोग की अपील की। उन्होंने अपने भाषण में 18 बार महिलाओं का जिक्र किया। आज देश प्राति के पत्र पर है और धीरे-धीरे हर क्षेत्र में दुनिया के सामने अपनी प्रतिभा को लोहा मनवा रहा है। एशिया में भी कई देश भारत से सहयोग की उम्मीद रखते हैं क्योंकि भारत में समस्याओं के समाधान खोजने की काबिलियत है। लेकिन जब महिलाओं के सशक्तीकरण की बात आती है तो इस मामले में भारत काफी पीछे है। हाल में जारी वैश्विक लैंगिक समानता सूचकांक में भारत 129 देशों में 95वें स्थान पर है तथा डेनमार्क शीर्ष पर है। यह सूचकांक गरीबी, स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा, साक्षरता, राजनीतिक प्रतिनिधित्व व कार्य स्थल पर समानता के मद्देनजर बनाया जाता



है। ऐसा नहीं है कि देश में महिलाओं को बिलकुल अवसर नहीं दिया जाता है। देश में अरुणिमा सिन्हा, पीवी सिंधु, अविन चतुर्वेदी और देश की सबसे युवा सांसद चंद्राणी मुर्मू आगे बड़ी हैं। लेकिन सामान्य और गरीब महिलाओं को समानता प्रदान करने तथा उनकी सुरक्षा के लिए सरकार को जरूरी कदम उठाने चाहिए। इस बार

लोकसभा में महिला सांसदों की संख्या 78 है। इसमें 14.6 प्रतिशत का इजाफा हुआ है। संसद में आज भी महिला आरक्षण का मुद्दा ठंडे बस्ते में है। वर्ष 2011 के जनसंख्या

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।

आंकड़ों के हिसाब से महिलाओं की साक्षरता दर केवल 65.46 प्रतिशत है और स्कूल में बुनियादी सुविधाएं नहीं होने से आज भी लड़कियां पढ़ाई छोड़ देती हैं। महिलाओं को असंगठित क्षेत्रों में पुरुषों के मुकाबले कम वेतन दिया जाता है। ग्रामीण महिलाओं में कुशलता नहीं होने से वे नए अवसरों से वंचित रह जाती हैं।

निशांत महेश त्रिपाठी, नागपुर

देश में दवाओं की कीमतें हों कम

सरकार ने पिछले दिनों कहा कि गरीब तबके के मरीजों को राहत देते हुए महंगी दवाओं की कीमत को कम किया गया है। इससे 1,032 आवश्यक दवाओं की कीमत को नियंत्रण के दायरे में लाया गया है। सरकार ने कहा कि दवाओं की कीमत में 90 प्रतिशत तक की कमी

की गई है। लेकिन अब भी बाजार में 80 प्रतिशत दवाएं महंगी बिक रही हैं और इन्हें आवश्यक दवाओं की सूची से बाहर रखा गया है। सरकारी आंकड़े को देखें तो पता चलता है कि बाजार में बिकने वाली 20 प्रतिशत दवाओं को ही आवश्यक सूची में रखा गया है तथा इसकी कीमत घटाई गई है। वहीं 80 प्रतिशत दवाएं आवश्यक सूची से बाहर है। आवश्यक सूची स्वास्थ्य मंत्रालय बनाता है तथा इसमें व्यापक इस्तेमाल होने वाली दवाओं को शामिल किया जाता है। देश में अधिकतरक रोग अल्पकालिक होते हैं जैसे सर्दी, खांसी, बुखार आदि। ऐसी बीमारी की दवाएं अधिक बिकती हैं और शायद ऐसी दवाओं को आवश्यक सूची में डाली गई है। लेकिन गंभीर रोग के मरीज कम होते हैं तथा उनकी दवाएं कम बिकती हैं। ऐसी दवाएं अगर महंगी होंगी तो गरीब तबका कैसे इलाज करा पाएगा। सरकार को गरीबों को ध्यान में रखते हुए गंभीर रोग के दवाओं के दामों को भी नियंत्रित करना चाहिए।

पाकिस्तान का पेच

पाकिस्तान करतारपुर गलियारा खोलने पर राजी हुआ, तो उम्मीद बनी थी कि गुरुद्वारा दरबार साहिब के दर्शन करने जाने वाले भारतीय नागरिकों को काफी सुविधा हो जाएगी। मगर अब पाकिस्तान जिस तरह उसमें अड़चनों पैदा कर रहा है, उससे इसकी उम्मीद धुंधली ही बनी हुई है। गुरद्वारा दरबार साहिब, करतारपुर पंजाब की सीमा से लगभग सट्टा हुआ है, मगर बगैर वीजा के जाने की इजाजत न होने की वजह से बहुत सारे लोग वहां नहीं जा पाते। जो जाते भी हैं, उन्हें लंबा रास्ता तय करना पड़ता है। इसलिए भारत सरकार लंबे समय से मांग कर रही थी कि करतारपुर गलियारा खोल दिया जाए। इमरान खान की सरकार बनी, तो वे इसके लिए राजी हो गए। मगर भारत की तरफ से जो प्रस्ताव रखे गए हैं, उन्हें पाकिस्तान मानने को तैयार नहीं है या फिर कई प्रस्तावों पर खामोश है। भारत की तरफ से प्रस्ताव है कि हर रोज पांच हजार दर्शनार्थियों को जाने की इजाजत दी जाए। विशेष दिनों में यह संख्या दस हजार तक बढ़ी दी जाए। दर्शनार्थियों में भारतीय नागरिकों के अलावा दूसरे देशों में रह रहे उन लोगों को भी इस रास्ते से जाने की इजाजत हो, जिनके पास भारत की नागरिकता है। फिर दर्शनार्थियों को जत्थे के रूप में भी जाने की इजाजत मिले।

मगर पाकिस्तान ने इन सभी मांगों को मानने से इनकार कर दिया है। उसका कहना है कि हर दिन सिर्फ सात सौ दर्शनार्थियों को जाने की इजाजत होगी, वह भी विशेष परमिट पर। दूसरे देशों में रह रहे भारतीय नागरिकों को परमिट पर जाने की इजाजत नहीं होगी। पंद्रह से अधिक लोग समूह में नहीं जा सकते। इससे करतारपुर गलियारा खोलने का मकसद पूरा नहीं होता दिख रहा। इन कड़ी शर्तों के पीछे पाकिस्तान का तर्क है कि अधिक संख्या में श्रद्धालुओं को जाने की इजाजत देने से आतंकवादी गतिविधियों पर नजर रखने में दिक्कत आएगी। समूह में जाने की खुली छूट देने से पहचान करना मुश्किल होगा कि वास्तव में सभी लोग दर्शन के लिए ही जा रहे हैं या उनमें कुछ शरारती तत्व भी शामिल हैं। भारत में रह रहे नागरिकों की पहचान और विशेष स्थितियों में उन पर नजर रखना आसान होगा, जबकि दूसरे देशों में रह रहे भारतीय नागरिकों पर नजर रखना कई तरह की मुश्किलें पैदा करेगा। पाकिस्तान के इस तर्क में बहुत दम नजर नहीं आता।

यह ठीक है कि दोनों देश दहशतवादी का दंश झेल रहे हैं और तमाम कड़ाइयों के बावजूद आतंकवादी घुसपैठ पर काबू पाना चुनौती बना हुआ है, मगर करतारपुर गलियारे को खोलने से इस समस्या से पार पाने में कोई दिक्कत नहीं आएगी। भारत सीमा से करतारपुर का रास्ता बहुत लंबा नहीं है। इतने छोटे रास्ते से होकर गुजरने वाले श्रद्धालुओं पर नजर रखना बड़ी बात नहीं है। फिर हर श्रद्धालु का पंजीकरण होगा, तो उसकी पहचान करना और यह जानना कि कितने लोग दर्शन के लिए गए और कितने लोग वापस लौटे, कोई पेचीदा काम नहीं है। चाहे वे समूह में जाएं या अकेले। भारत में अमरनाथ गुफा और मानसरोवर यात्रा के समय यी यात्रियों की सुरक्षा के मद्देनजर ऐसे ही इंतजाम किए जाते हैं। करतारपुर जाने वाले यात्रियों पर सुरक्षा की दृष्टि से भारत की भी नजर होगी, इसलिए पाकिस्तान को कोई मुश्किल पेश नहीं आएगी। मगर उसकी आदत है भारत के साथ संबंध बेहतर बनाने का दिखावा करने और फिर अड़ैगंबाजी करते रहने की, सो करतारपुर गलियारा मामले में भी वह वही कर रहा है।

शांति का संकट

ईरान पर हमले करने से अमेरिका भले पीछे हट गया हो, लेकिन इस बात से इंकार नहीं किया जा सकता कि आने वाले दिनों में यह खतरा और बढ़ेगा। फारस की खाड़ी में जिस तरह की मोर्चाबंदी हो चुकी है, अत्याधुनिक परमाणु मिसाइलों से सुसज्जित विशालकाय अमेरिकी नौसेना के बेड़े खाड़ी में खड़े हैं, लड़ाकू जहाज आकाश में चौबीसों घंटे मंडरा रहे हैं, तो यह दुनिया को गंभीर संकट की ओर धकेलने का संकेत है। युद्ध भले न हो, लेकिन यह तनाव युद्ध से ज्यादा विनाशक तत्त्वीर पेश कर रहा है। हाल में मामला तब गरमाया जब अमेरिका का एक ड्रोन विमान मार गिराया गया। किसने गिराया, यह अलग और विवाद का विषय है। इस पर परस्पर विरोधी दावे किए जा रहे हैं। इसकी तोहमत अमेरिका ने ईरान पर मढ़ी है, जबकि ईरान लगातार इसका खंडन कर रहा है। ईरान पर हमले का फैसला ट्रंप ने इसी घटना के बाद किया। लेकिन ईरान पर हमला शुरू होने के ठीक दस मिनट पहले ट्रंप ने अचानक जिस तरह हमला नहीं करने का फैसला कर का डाला, उससे सफ है कि अमेरिका अपने को इस संकट में ईरान के मुकाबले कहीं ज्यादा घिरा हुआ पा रहा है और नफे–नुकसान के आकलन में लगा है। इस बीच, ईरान पहले ही यूरेनियम संवर्धन का काम तेज करने की बात कह चुका है। जाहिर है, राष्ट्र की सुरक्षा के लिए परमाणु हथियार बनाने की दिशा में उसके कदम और तेजी से बढ़ेंगे। तब कैसे शांति के बारे में सोचा जा सकता है?

दोनों देशों के बीच तनातनी तभी से ज्यादा बड़ी है जब अमेरिका ने ईरान के साथ किए परमाणु समझौते से अपने को अलग कर लिया था। अमेरिका के सहयोगी राष्ट्र भी इसे ट्रंप की हठधर्मिता ही बताते रहे हैं। जाहिर है, अमेरिका ईरान को परमाणु हथियार बनाने की आड़ में विवाद में फंसा कर उस पर हमला करने की तैयारी में लंबे समय से है। ठीक ऐसा ही उसने इराक के साथ किया था। इराक पर जैविक हथियार बनाने का आरोप लगा कर उस पर हमला किया गया, लेकिन बाद में इराक के पास जैविक हथियार जैसा कुछ नहीं मिला था। अमेरिका इराक की तरह ही ईरान के तेल पर भी कब्जा करना चाहता है। लेकिन जिस तरह से रूस ईरान के साथ खड़ा है और चीन भी अमेरिका के खिलाफ है, उस सूत्र में ईरान पर हमला आसान नहीं है। पिछले डेढ़ महीने में ओमान की खाड़ी से गुजरने वाले तेल टैंकरों पर हमले की घटनाएं तो महज युद्ध का कारण बनाने के लिए हैं। दुनिया में सबसे ज्यादा तेल टैंकर इसी खाड़ी मार्ग से गुजरते हैं, इस लिहाज से भी यह दुनिया का सबसे संवेदनशील इलाका है। ऐसे में अगर युद्ध छिड़ा तो सबसे बड़ा और पहला संकट अंतरराष्ट्रीय तेल कारोबार पर आएगा। इसे अमेरिका भी बखूबी समझ रहा है और इसीलिए दुनिया के कई देशों ने उस पर युद्ध टालने के दबाव भी डाला।

ट्रंप अगले साल राष्ट्रपति चुनाव में फिर मैदान में होंगे। फ्लोरिडा में तीन दिन पहले उन्होंने प्रचार अभियान की शुरुआत भी कर दी। इसलिए वे ईरान के मुद्दे को अभी जिंदा रखेंगे, ताकि अमेरिका जनता को पहले की तरह ही यह भरोसा दिला सकें कि ईरान जैसे देश से निपटने की ताकत उन्हीं में है। इस बात को ट्रंप भी जानते हैं और दुनिया के सारे ताकतवर देश भी कि आज परमाणु हथियारों के युग में युद्ध किसी भी समस्या का समाधान नहीं है। युद्ध का मतलब है– मानव जाति का विनाश। ऐसे में युद्ध टालने और शांति के उपाय खोजने में ही मानव कल्याण है।

कल्पमेधा

स्वतंत्रता यानी दायित्व, इसलिए अधिकांश लोग इससे डरते हैं।
—बर्नार्ड शॉ

आलोक मेहता

भारत के ग्रामीण मतदाता भी अब बहुत समझदार हो चुके हैं। वे हित-अहित समझते हैं। वे विकास कार्यों को निरंतर जारी रखना चाहते हैं। अस्थिर सरकारों के नतीजे वे देख चुके हैं। फिर केंद्र और राज्यों की सरकारों में टकराव से दिल्ली ही नहीं, पश्चिम बंगाल, आंध्र प्रदेश जैसे राज्य की जनता विकास तथा कल्याण कार्यों के गड़बड़ाने से परेशान रहती है। संघीय ढांचे से लाभ भी तो होना चाहिए।

केंद्र और राज्यों की सरकारों में टकराव से दिल्ली ही नहीं, पश्चिम बंगाल, आंध्र प्रदेश जैसे राज्य की जनता विकास तथा कल्याण कार्यों के गड़बड़ाने से परेशान रहती है। संघीय ढांचे से लाभ भी तो होना चाहिए।

केंद्र गिल की ऊंची हिम श्रृंखलाओं पर या साठ डिग्री की आग जैसे रेगिस्तान में तैनात सिपाही क्या किसी भय से सुरक्षा की मांग करते हैं? गुद्रे, लीवर या दिल् का अति संवेदनशील आपरेशन करने वाले अनुभवी डॉक्टर के हाथ क्या भय से कांपते हैं? हजारों फीट ऊंचाई पर विमान उड़ाने वाले क्या हवा-पानी, बादल के झटकों से घबराते हैं? विशालकाय पुल बनाने वाले इंजीनियर पुल के गिर सकने की संभावनाएं सोचकर क्या काम बंद कर देते हैं? नहीं, कभी नहीं। फिर सार्वजनिक जीवन में अपने कर्म–वचन पर भरोसा कर सकने वाले कई नेताओं की दुनिया के आदर्श लोकतांत्रिक भारत में लोकसभा और विधान सभाओं के चुनाव एक साथ होने के प्रस्ताव मात्र पर घबराहट क्यों हो रही है? संविधान निर्माताओं में अग्रणी डा. भीमराव आंबेडकर, जेबी कृपलानी, डा. राममनोहर लोहिया, पंडित दीनदयाल उपाध्याय, पंडित जवाहरलाल नेहरू, इंदिरा गांधी, चंद्रशेखर, कामरेड होमी दाजी, ज्योति बसु जैसे शीर्षस्थ नेताओं की तरह विभिन्न राजनीतिक दलों

भारत के ग्रामीण मतदाता भी अब बहुत समझदार हो चुके हैं। वे हित-अहित समझते हैं। वे विकास कार्यों को निरंतर जारी रखना चाहते हैं। अस्थिर सरकारों के नतीजे वे देख चुके हैं। फिर केंद्र और राज्यों की सरकारों में टकराव से दिल्ली ही नहीं, पश्चिम बंगाल, आंध्र प्रदेश जैसे राज्य की जनता विकास तथा कल्याण कार्यों के गड़बड़ाने से परेशान रहती है। संघीय ढांचे से लाभ भी तो होना चाहिए।

मनीष वैद्य

हम खेतों में सिंचाई के लिए पानी का अंधाधुंध उपयोग करते हैं। साठ फीसदी भू–जल का उपयोग सिर्फ सिंचाई के लिए हो रहा है। साथ ही बिजली या डीजल की बड़ी मात्रा खपत करते हैं, लेकिन आदिवासी समाज ऐसी युक्ति का इस्तेमाल करते हैं जो उनके पूर्वजों ने बिना किसी पढ़ाई के परंपरा और अर्जित अनुभव से विकसित की थी। यह आज भी देखने को मिलती है और इसका अब भी कोई सानी नहीं। लगता है कि इनसे हमें अभी बहुत कुछ सीखने की जरूरत है।

पश्चिम मध्यप्रदेश का निमाड़ इलाका सतपुड़ा पर्वत श्रृंखला की ऊंची–नीची पहाड़ियों की ऊसर जमीन का पठारी क्षेत्र है। इंदौर शहर से पौने दो सौ किमी दूर बडवानी का पाटी करवा एक छोटे पठार पर बसा है। इससे आगे छोटे–बड़े पहाड़ों का सिलसिला और उन पर बसे छोटे आदिवासी गांव फलिए का सफर पैदल ही तय करना पड़ता है। इसमें खासी मशकत की वजह से हांफते–हांफते जान निकलने लगती है। पूरे रास्ते पहाड़ वीथान और उसर पड़े हैं। न पेड़ है और न कोई बड़ी नदी। नर्मदा बहुत पहले ही छूट जाती है।

मौत और सवाल

बिहार में चमकी बुखार से मरने वाले बच्चों की संख्या बढ़ती जा रही है। प्रदेश के दूसरे हिस्सों में भी यह बुखार फैल रहा है। मीडिया की सक्रियता से यह मामला प्रकाश में आया और सरकार चेती, वरना किसी की भी नजर इस ओर नहीं जाती। किसी पूंजीपति, उद्योगपति, मंत्री, नेता या नौकरशाह का बच्चा किसी अस्पताल की लापरवाही में अगर मर जाता तो सभी अस्पतालों के लिए नए निम्न बना दिए जाते, उस अस्पताल की मान्यता रद्द करके डॉक्टर को जेल भिजवा दिया जाता। लेकिन दुर्भाग्य यह है कि मुजफ्फरपुर में मरने वाले बच्चों में कोई बच्चा ऐसे अमीर और ताकतवर लोगों का नहीं है। मरने वाले बच्चे सामाजिक, आर्थिक और शैक्षिक रूप से पिछड़े हैं। इसीलिए यहां कोई कानून लाना नहीं है। देश–प्रदेश की सरकार जश्न मनाने में व्यस्त हैं। कुछ सांसदों ने लोकसभा में यह मुद्दा उठाया है। आम लोगों और विपक्षी नेताओं को चाहिए कि वे ऐसे मुद्दे पर सड़क से सदन तक संघर्ष कर इसे राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर उठाएं। मीडियाकर्मियों और नेताओं को भी चाहिए कि वे डाक्टरों के काम में बाधा न डालें और सत्ता से सवाल करने की हिम्मत दिखाएं।

- मंजर आलम, रामपुर डेहक, मधेपुरा*

लाइलाज बीमारी

देश में कोई भी कानून बनाया जाता है तो उसके पीछे जनहित का तर्क दिया जाता है दूसरी ओर मानव हमारा सबसे बड़ा संसाधन है। इससे हम अपने राष्ट्रीय संसाधन में वृद्धि करते हैं। लेकिन अगर मानव संसाधन का ही ह्रास होने लगे तो राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर भी इसका नुकसान देखने को मिलता है। आज जीने के लिए संघर्ष प्राकृतिक

जनसत्ता

चुनाव सुधार और आशंकाएं

के नेताओं ने 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967 में लोकसभा और विधान सभाओं के चुनाव में हार–जीत की परवाह किए बिना चुनाव लड़े। विजय से सत्ता मिली या पराजय से फिर संघर्ष और सफलता के अनुभव मिले। लेकिन किसी ने कभी कोई आपत्ति नहीं की। फिर अब ‘एक देश, एक चुनाव’ के लिए व्यापक सहमति और चुनाव व्यवस्था में आवश्यक सुधार–संशोधन पर आशंकाएं–आपत्तियां क्यों उठनी चाहिए? राष्ट्रपति ने संसद की संयुक्त बैठक को संबोधित करते हुए खर्चीली और लगातार चुनावी तूफान की व्यवस्था से निजात पाकर एक साथ चुनाव के प्रस्ताव पर विस्तृत विचार–विमर्श और निर्णय की सलाह दी।

फिर भी कांग्रेस, समाजवादी पार्टी, बहुजन समाज पार्टी, तृणमूल कांग्रेस, द्रमुक और कम्युनिस्ट पार्टियों के नेताओं के साथ प्रगतिशील कहलाने वाले गैर–राजनीतिक वर्ग ने भी गंभीर आशंकाएं और आपत्तियां व्यक्त की हैं। बहस में शामिल होकर सकारात्मक सुझाव–सिफारिशें रखने के बजाय वे ऐसे किसी लोकतांत्रिक कदम से संविधान की मूल संघीय भावना, क्षेत्रीय स्वायत्तता और अस्तित्व के खत्म होने, दो–तीन दलीय व्यवस्था या एक दलीय और एक नेतृत्व वाली तानाशाही तक के खतरे बताने लगे हैं। यह क्या उनकी विचारधारा, सुविधा या कमजोरी है? राष्ट्रीय राजनीतिक दल हों अथवा क्षेत्रीय पार्टियां, क्या बार–बार के चुनाव के लिए हजारों करोड़ रुपए बहाने में सुख और संतोष का अनुभव करती हैं? पिछले चुनाव इस बात के प्रमाण हैं कि सरकारी खजाने से चुनाव आयोग के लगभग दस हजार करोड़ रुपए के अधिकृत खर्च के अलावा राजनीतिक पार्टियां और उम्मीदवार चुनावों में कुल मिला कर दो से पांच लाख करोड़ रुपए तक खर्च कर देते हैं। कुछ पार्टियों में तो केवल उम्मीदवार बनने के लिए बीस से पचास करोड़ रुपए वसूल लिए जाते हैं, फिर भले ही वह चुनाव हार जाए। इससे पार्टी के शीर्ष नेताओं का खजाना अवश्य भर जाता है। राजनीतिक दल सत्ता में हों या विपक्ष में, उनके कार्यकर्ताओं, पदाधिकारियों को पूरे साल किसी न किसी प्रदेश के चुनाव के लिए भागते–दौड़ते रहना पड़ता है। केंद्र या प्रदेशों के मंत्री पार्टी नेतृत्व के आदेशानुसार चुनावों के लिए अधिक सक्रिय रह कर अपने मंत्रालयों और विभागों के कामकाज पर कम समय दे पाते हैं। अर्धसैनिक बल तो निरंतर चुनावी ड्यूटी में लगे रहते हैं।

असली समस्या आचार संहिता की है। चुनाव से करीब तीन महीने पहले आचार संहिता लागू हो जाती



और निर्णय राज्यों से लेकर केंद्र सरकार तक में अट–के रहे। सरकार को सेवा देने वाले गैर सरकारी संस्थानों, छोटे उद्यमियों द्वारा दी गई सेवाओं के भुगतान महीनों के लिए लटक गए। इससे उनकी ही नहीं, अर्थ व्यवस्था की गाड़ी भी अटक गई।

राजनीतिक दलों की एक चिंता समय से पहले लोकसभा और विधान सभा में बहुमत नहीं रहने, बड़े दलबदल और सरकारें गिरने के बाद की स्थिति को लेकर है। इसका उत्तर यह है कि कार्यकाल निश्चित होगा। यदि सांसद या विधायक स्वयं दुबारा चुनाव थोपेंगे, तो बचे हुए कार्यकाल के लिए चुनाव होंगे। वैसे इस संभावना को देखकर स्थिरता बने रहने के स्थिति अधिक रहेगी। इसमें कोई शक नहीं कि ‘एक देश एक चुनाव’ के नए बदलाव के साथ चुनाव सुधार के कुछ

अन्य महत्त्वपूर्ण प्रस्तावों पर भी संसद व सुप्रीम कोर्ट से स्वीकृति ले ली जाए, ताकि अपराधी तत्वों और भारी चुनावी खर्चों पर भी अंकुश लग सके।

एक देश एक चुनाव के आलोचकों का एक तर्क पश्चिमी देशों के लोकतंत्र और संघीय ढांचे को लेकर है। जब वे अमेरिका का नाम लेते हैं, जहां राज्यों के चुनाव अलग–अलग होते हैं, तब उन्हें यह मानना चाहिए कि वहां प्रमुख राजनीतिक दल दो ही हैं। वे भारत में पचीसों राजनीतिक दलों की आवश्यकता बताते हैं। वे यह नहीं समझते कि वहां दलों, उम्मीदवारों और राष्ट्रपति तक के चुनावी खर्च की पारदर्शिता होती है। वहां औसतन मतदाता समान आय वर्ग के होते हैं। यदि वे यूरोपीय देशों की बात करें, तो जर्मनी, ब्रिटेन और फ्रांस में भी राजनीतिक दलों की संख्या सीमित है। जहां तक क्षेत्रीय दलों की बात है, जर्मनी के बवेरिया जैसे राज्यों में दशकों तक क्षेत्रीय दल का अस्तित्व भी बना रहा और राष्ट्रीय

पार्टियों का महत्त्व बरकरार रहा। भारत के हाल के चुनावों ने भी साबित किया कि ओड़िशा, तमिलनाडु, केरल, पश्चिम बंगाल, मध्यप्रदेश, छत्तीसगढ़, राजस्थान और पूर्वोत्तर क्षेत्र के राज्यों में मतदाताओं ने विधान सभाओं और लोकसभा में अलग–अलग दलों को वोट दिए। क्षेत्रीय हितां की रक्षा यदि राष्ट्रीय राजनीतिक दल करते रहें और प्रादेशिक क्षेत्रों का महत्त्व बनाए रखें, तो उनकी महत्ता बनी रह सकती है।

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- मनीषा, कुशीनगर*

नई दिल्ली

