

Curious case of deep discounts

It's time to look beyond vote bank and focus on ease of doing business



NOT FOR PROFIT

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

Deep discounting, which made e-commerce famous in India and in many other parts of the world, has returned to haunt the sector. As fresh round of dialogues begins between the government and the industry on what should be the defining points in the first comprehensive e-commerce policy, there are indications that deep discounting in prices of products

sold online won't be tolerated. That may be good optics to make a point on *desi* versus *videsi* and physical trade versus online. But, nothing more than that. Even if there's a real clampdown on deep discounting by e-commerce players, what will be the definition of "deep discount"? If at all a definition is pieced together, who will monitor the cases of deep discount? When there's a dispute related to the matter, and that is bound to happen in such a competitive space, which court will handle the cases with expertise? More than anything else, what happens to fair play while an authority sits on judgement over e-commerce companies selling products cheaper than normal market rates? For instance, it will be tough to allow a bricks and mortar retailer to offer freebies and discounts while preventing an online player from doing so. It will be even more complex when a physical retailer has presence in an online marketplace and when an e-commerce company sells in

a high street store or elsewhere. With boundaries collapsing between the physical and the virtual, it may be a waste of time to draft rules that would apply to one world and not to the other. Discounts are a medium-neutral phenomenon and should stay that way. That's not all. Comparisons with other industries and sectors will show deep discounts are not just about e-commerce or retail trade. Telecom, a mature business now with private mobile telephony being around for more than 20 years already, is a case in point. After Reliance Jio's disruptive tariffs, every other telco followed that route, in the process eroding their revenue and profit. Neither the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India nor the government came out with any diktat clamping down on the deep discounts being dished out to the consumers, however damaging it may have been for the industry. And when the incumbents or the existing telecom operators complained about low tariffs by the

new player hurting their business, they didn't get much of a hearing. In e-commerce, the centrepiece of the government directive against deep discounting is foreign investment. Last December, the government had restricted flash sales and deep discounts offered by e-commerce players, something that officials are reiterating now after the diktat couldn't get translated into much action. Hitting e-commerce, most of it funded by foreign investors, with a rulebook that's illogical may upset the story of unicorns (billion dollar valuations) in the country. Indian businesses and local traders have in the past knocked on the doors of the Competition Commission of India (CCI), raising concerns over heavy discounts being offered by e-commerce players. But CCI, after studying the matter, had said the big-billion discounts (the deep discount sales offered by e-commerce players) were not a competition issue. It's a case for CCI only when a dominant player indulges in preda-

tory pricing to exclude others. Share of e-commerce, irrespective of whether it's with foreign investment or otherwise, is still in single digits when it comes to percentage of the total retail pie in India. That rules out bringing e-commerce deep discounts under the CCI ambit. Even after the foreign direct investment (FDI) rule tweaks were announced last year for e-commerce, big companies including Flipkart (now owned by Walmart) and Amazon had gone about their seasonal sales offering discounts up to 75 per cent. That shouldn't change despite the Indian versus foreign rift. Domestic traders, who continue to fear adverse impact of foreign investment on their business, will raise issues such as deep discounts by e-commerce companies. It was for the same reason they had protested against FDI in multi-brand retail and that category has remained stalled for years. With e-commerce being a bigger disruption than FDI in multi-brand retail, traders' concern may have reason. But now that the Lok Sabha election is over, it's time for the government to look beyond vote bank and focus on ease of doing business — something that has been its goal for five years.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Stay clear of the Budget

As the Union government prepares to present the Budget, industry, which is usually vocal before the Budget, is quiet. Facing subdued sales, the automobile industry is worried about recent government regulations such as shifting to electric vehicles. Unlike every year, most chief executive officers of auto companies have neither any wish-list, nor any suggestion. Why? Because "the government will do what it has to" and the companies do not wish to "waste time watching the Budget".

Quote misquote



On Wednesday afternoon, in his reply in the Rajya Sabha to the motion of thanks on the President's address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi (pictured) quoted an Urdu

couplet that he attributed to the 19th century poet Mirza Ghalib. Replying to Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad's charge that the promise of PM's *sabka vishwas* was blurred, Modi said it was Azad who suffered from a blurred vision and viewed everything from a political lens. Modi went on to recite the following couplet: "*ta umr Ghalib ye bhool karta raha, dhool chehre par thi aur aaina saaf karta raha*." Soon, several on social media, including poet Javed Akhtar pointed out that the couplet was not Ghalib's. "The *sher* (couplet) that the prime minister *sahab* has quoted in his Rajya Sabha speech is wrongly attributed to Ghalib in the social media. Actually, both the lines are not even in the proper meter," Akhtar said. That was, however, not the only "mistake" the PM made. At the beginning of his speech, as the PM took names of those members who participated in the discussion, he referred to Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien as Derek "Oberoi".

Much ado about voting

Late-night special hearing, polling amid tight security, allegations of bogus voting, attempts to influence the judges — these happened during the election to the South Indian Artists Association aka Nadigar Sangam, which represents the Tamil film industry. Representatives of this industry such as M G Ramachandran, M Karunanidhi and J Jayalalithaa have been chief minister of Tamil Nadu and, together, they have held the office for more than 30 years. A single-judge Bench of the Madras High Court once observed there was more noise over this election than the Lok Sabha or the assembly polls. More than 3,000 television and stage actors were there to elect the president, two vice-presidents, the general secretary, the treasurer and the 24-member executive committee of the 70-year-old association. Justice N Anand Venkatesh of the Madras High Court had to rush to Chennai from Vellore after the case on the election was put up for an urgent hearing. He also initiated contempt proceedings against some people for trying to influence him to delay the election. The election was held on June 23. However, the court directed the association not to announce the results until further orders.

NHAI vs Ssangyong: A fast-track solution

In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court streamlined the arbitration awards process by emphasising the limited grounds for appeal

JYOTI MUKUL

Contractual disputes with government entities, whether public sector units (PSUs) or government bodies like the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), often drag on because arbitration awards are challenged in the law courts. A principal reason for this is that not only do all losing parties to an arbitration file appeal in courts, but with PSUs, the option of *not* filing an appeal is generally not open for fear of corruption allegations and vigilance enquiries. With a large number of PSU contracts providing for arbitration as the mode of dispute resolution, there has been a steady increase in arbitration-related court proceedings, clogging the courts and slowing project implementation.

Last month, the Supreme Court sought to reduce this appeals overkill by setting out six grounds on which courts can appeal in arbitration cases. These criteria were based on past jurisprudence and in accordance with a 2015 amendment to the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, which had aimed to limit the number of arbitration awards that go in appeal. The apex court's May ruling came in a case involving Ssangyong Engineering and NHAI. The court observed that NHAI had unilaterally altered the contract and foisted the new terms of the contract upon Ssangyong without its consent. The arbitration award passed by a 2:1 majority had

upheld the conduct of NHAI and allowed for the alteration to the contract, but the Supreme Court rejected this approach and observed that the majority award has in fact created a new contract for the parties. "The court concluded that the majority award was contrary to the most basic and fundamental principles of justice and, therefore, liable to be set aside. It also found that the award ought to be set aside under section 34 (2) (a) (iii) as Ssangyong was not unable to present its case," explained Naresh Thacker, partner, Economic Laws Practice.

This decision was significant because, in effect, the apex court had clarified that court intervention could be done only when: (a) an award was contrary to the fundamental policy of Indian law; (b) violated basic notions of justice or morality; (c) involved a patent illegality of facts on record; (d) lack of evidence; (e) militated against fair mind or reasonableness; (d) involved error of jurisdiction, or (f) if it warrants a review of the merits of dispute.

"Although the Supreme Court has addressed the grounds to set aside an arbitral award under section 34 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 on several occasions, this decision exhaustively reflects on the jurisprudence pre- and post the 2015 amendment," Thacker said.

Section 34 of the Act deals with filing of application in courts for setting aside an arbitration award. The 2015 amendment added an explanation to



ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

section 34, which stated that an award is in conflict with the public policy of India, only "if the making of the award was induced or affected by fraud or corruption" or in contravention with the fundamental policy of Indian law or in conflict with the most basic notions of morality or justice. The amendment also said an arbitral award arising out of arbitrations other than international commercial arbitrations would be set aside by the court, if the court finds that the award is vitiated by patent illegality, provided that an award will not be set aside merely on the ground of an erroneous application of the law or by re-appreciation of evidence. In Thacker's view, the Supreme Court consciously clarified that the Ssangyong award shook the conscience of the court, and the ground that an award contravenes public policy of India as it violates the "most basic notions of justice" can only be applied in "exceptional circumstances".

"The Supreme Court has forewarned that "under no circumstances can any court interfere with an arbitral award on the ground that justice has not been done" as such interference would be an entry into the merits of the dispute which is against the tenets of section 34," Thacker added. Usually in line with the pro-arbitration spirit, courts are careful while applying grounds to set aside an award. The NHAI case is a welcome exception as it sets precedent that PSUs cannot act unilaterally and to the disadvantage of parties with lower bargaining power. At the same time, since court interventions delay remedies through arbitration, Thacker says courts are wary of frivolous applications under section 34 of the Act and have even imposed costs on parties filing such applications. "When applicants have failed to make a case under section 34 of the Act, courts have dismissed applications. The intent of the courts to further speedy

resolution of disputes has come through in Ssangyong as well — it upheld the minority award instead of referring the matter for fresh arbitration." Ramesh K Vaidyanathan, managing partner, Advaya Legal pointed out that the judgement does not in any way set out a new interpretation of the grounds on which judicial review of arbitration awards can take places. It deals more with the applicability of the 2015 amendments to cases where the arbitration began before the amendment came into effect but court proceedings started later. The 2015 amendments had, in fact, minimised the grounds of challenge of arbitral awards. Under the new law, there is no scope to re-appreciate merits unless the award attracts one of the grounds mentioned in the amended section 34. "In other words, unless special circumstances exist, the courts would ordinarily uphold the arbitral award," said Vaidyanathan.

INNOCOLUMN

We need more business institutions, not just companies

There is an art that 'shapers of institutions' deploy compared to 'leaders of companies'



R GOPALAKRISHNAN

My father arranged a thread ceremony for me when I was 11-year-old. I felt important as I diligently followed the elders' instructions to follow the priest all the time. During the ceremony, my juvenile eyes spotted a few beads of summer sweat trickle down the rotund belly of the bare-chested priest, a bit like a skier would come down the mountain slope. The sweat tickled his belly into a quivering motion, causing him to swipe his belly in one swift movement. Despite having no sweat drops nor a belly, I mechanically repeated his action, causing great laughter all around. I wondered why my diligent action caused smirks. Something similar occurs when companies mechanically emulate successful companies. Columnist Kanika Datta wrote in *Business Standard* about how great companies seem to fall no sooner they are declared to be high and mighty by referring to Sumantra Ghosal's book some 15 years ago about India's world-class companies. There are other eponymous books about the most innovative, the most admirable and the best-led

companies. Indeed, the pink paper awards given to corporate leaders have the same effect — the awarded CEO runs into performance or governance issues soon after being recognised. Often, best practices are captured in a formulaic way, a bit like the ingredients that make a dish. By just mixing the right ingredients, a parvenu cannot prepare a tasty dish. A menu is like an art, it is also required. In companies too, the art of emergence must be deployed — it is an art that shapers of institutions deploy to create institutions rather than just companies. A recent Korn Ferry study reports that, in the view of investors, barely a fourth of Indian business leaders are ready to lead their organisations into the future. In this context, "future" does not mean forever, but for several years ahead. So, what is an institution and what do shapers do? A recent book refers to shapers as "wise advocates". (*The Wise Advocate: The Inner Voice of Strategic Leadership* by Art Kleiner, Jeffrey Schwartz, and Josie Thomson, CBS, 2019). Institutions and shapers need to be better understood, they are important for India's growth; the subject is currently a research project at SPJIMR Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai. Companies may adopt a system or a nature approach. In the system approach, efficiency and repeatability are prized, whereas in a nature approach, effectiveness and creativity are prized. Competent leaders seek to become efficient and predictable. Institutional shapers seek to become effective and creative. Shapers must be



leaders, but the converse is not true. Companies, business and entrepreneurship as institutions Great institutions are more than engineered processes and ingredients, they are live organisms with emergent factors at play, which, in fact, bring an institution alive. Driving a group of companies to higher levels of productivity and competitive efficiency is a valuable skill, called management. Indeed, that constitutes the basis of MBA teaching and research. Such pedagogy and practice produce competent business leaders; society needs spades of such people and rewards them handsomely. Most managers in companies endeavour to become a competent business leader. Occasionally, shapers come with a personal motivation that is dramatically different. These business folks break the mold of prevalent thinking, setting an organisation on a new trajectory. Shapers appear to operate with the "rainforest" rules, which are quite different from the "cultivated agriculture" rules. In the cultivated agriculture model, you attempt to control and guide the factors of environment to maximise efficiency and replicability. In the rainforest, you accept your envi-

ronment and from that environment, you seek effectiveness and novelty. For this article, I don't comment on both the centurions (Tata Group, HUL and Godrej Group) as well as the puppies (post 2000s startups). I consider a cohort group of companies that "grew up or dramatically reshaped" from about the mid-1980s. HDFC group, TCS, L&T are amongst the elder siblings, while Wipro, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Marico and Biocon are among the younger siblings of this cohort group. In just a few decades, these seven companies have made huge impact, maintaining a high reputation. There would be more companies, but I mention these as seven institutions for the future. In a few decades, these seven institutions have created over a million and a half direct jobs, another 20 million allied jobs and a market value of \$300 billion. Each of these institutions has been shaped by remarkable individuals. India needs more institutions and shapers for its undoubted bright future. The author is a corporate advisor and distinguished professor of IIT Kharagpur. During his career, he was a director of Tata Sons and a vice chairman of Hindustan Unilever. Email: rgopal@themindworks.me.

LETTERS

A win-win for the BJP

India's chances of securing the extradition of fugitive diamond merchant Mehul Choksi from Antigua has received a shot in the arm with the Caribbean nation planning to rescind his citizenship. Choksi, however, will be entitled to approach the courts there and exhaust his legal remedies before being brought to India. The extradition of the duo and liquor baron Vijay Mallya could see the Bharatiya Janata Party's stakes soar high. **N J Ravi Chander** Bengaluru

Prudent action

This refers to "Oversight, price correction behind Nalanda's U-turn" (June 26). Nalanda Capital has been right in exiting Mindtree. Even if their decision is based on a correct assessment of the price scenario and how it is likely to move in future, this key institutional investor also seems to have realised that the fight of original promoters and minority shareholders was unreasonable, illogical and pointless. Their passionate attachment to the company perhaps made them overlook the ground reality that they didn't have a chance to keep L&T out. The accusation of acting in concert may also have been a trigger in their decision to offload the Mindtree stake. Either way, they have acted prudently. Going by its track record, L&T will in all probability add great value to the company. With synergies, Mindtree or the

merged entity should emerge as a bigger global powerhouse for IT solutions. No one will forget the pioneering work done by the founder promoters. There's a time to let go and every entrepreneur should be able to make that call rather than drag their feet.

Krishan Kalra Gurugram

Conflicting interests

While auditors have an accountability to ensure that firms address non-conformances to mitigate risks of delinquency, safeguard interests of novice-investors, generate value for stakeholders and improve transparency — the buck also stops at clients to preserve market-goodwill and attain business-continuity. Proposals to develop a rule-based, intelligent and robust framework to overcome incidents of data-security breach and default-risks is a prudent step to facilitate a business culture where teething troubles are suppressed at source. The last thing that markets need is a defensive approach towards subprime-lending, lapse in information-security, redundant corporate actions and trade-malpractices. **Girish Lalwani** New Delhi

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HAMBONE



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Repairing NBFCs

RBI can't allow liquidity crisis to lead to solvency issues for the sector

Recently released data from the Finance Industry Development Council (FIDC) delineates the extent of the slowdown in the non-banking finance companies (NBFC). According to the data, when housing finance companies were excluded, the quantity of loans sanctioned by NBFCs fell by 31 per cent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2018-19, between January and March of this year. This came after a 17 per cent year-on-year decline in the third quarter of the same financial year, between October and December of 2018. This was the period in which defaults by entities associated with Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services or IL&FS, reported last September, rocked the NBFC market and severely affected investor confidence. The liquidity crunch in the sector had become a cause of concern, as the shortage of funds for NBFCs was negatively impacting the broader economy and reducing growth potential. There is little reason to believe that things have gotten better for the NBFC sector in the first quarter of 2019-20, which is now coming to a close.

A more granular analysis of the data from FIDC reveals that the biggest problem in sanctions comes in long-term lending by NBFCs, which fell 77 per cent year-on-year in the January to March quarter. This is not surprising as the question of maturity mismatch — lending long to projects while borrowing short from banks — was central to the concerns around IL&FS and other NBFCs. This has major implications for growth and employment. The smooth flow of project finance is central to ensuring that growth reaches a new and higher plateau, and that employment generation continues apace. Unskilled workers are particularly dependent upon a thriving infrastructure and construction industry. The slow-motion bank crisis caused by excessively burdened balance sheets in public sector banks had meant that NBFCs had stepped in as intermediaries for lending to infrastructure in particular. But the troubles in the sector meant that bank finance to NBFCs dried up. Mutual fund investors also soured on the sector.

Now, although banks are showing signs of recovery, they have not yet stepped up to replace NBFCs, nor have they resumed lending to NBFCs. Repayment concerns have pushed funding costs at NBFCs to multi-year highs. Spreads on top-rated five-year bonds of NBFCs have risen 70 basis points in the past year. This is why NBFCs had argued with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) that a separate credit line was necessary. There are good reasons why the central bank was unwilling to set up such a window. Moral hazard must be avoided, and a gradual clean-up of the NBFC sector, which had expanded unsustainably, should be incentivised. Some economists have suggested there is a lack of information about NBFC health that can be remedied perhaps through an asset quality review (AQR), as was undertaken for banks. This might aid in restoring investor confidence in "good" NBFCs without opening the tap of government aid to "bad" NBFCs. While all these arguments have merit, the point to note is that the RBI should not allow the liquidity crisis to lead to solvency issues for the entire sector. To assume that there is no systemic risk and the crisis is limited to just a few bad apples can be a mistake as inter-linkages do play an important role in the financial system. What is essential is for the RBI to frame a comprehensive turnaround plan and find a solution that restores the sector to health.

Glacier meltdown

The Himalayas are losing 8 billion tonnes of frozen water annually

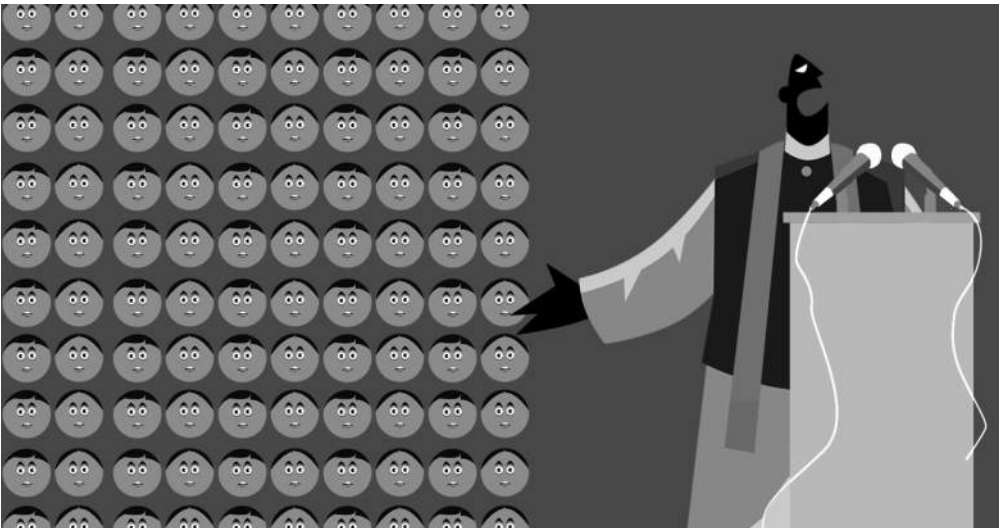
That the Himalayan glaciers are melting rapidly is known. But what is unnerving is that the rate of their erosion has doubled in recent years. This latest revelation calls for focused strategies to tackle its causes and consequences. The Himalayan snow deposits, the lifeline of the rivers emanating from this mountain chain, are critical to meet the water needs of millions of people in India and other Asian countries, particularly during the pre-monsoon summer months. A recent satellite data-based study of around 650 glaciers across the 2,000-km Himalayan range estimates that the rate of decline in the snow cover, which averaged around 22 cm between 1975 and 2000, has accelerated to over 43 cm between 2000 and 2016. Going by this reckoning, published in the journal, *Science Advances*, the Himalayas are losing nearly 8 billion tonnes of frozen water every year, which is not recompensed through snowfall.

Though this study holds global warming as the most dominant cause for snow decay, it does not discount the conclusion of an earlier study, released in February, that the rampant environmental pollution in the plains along the Himalayan hills also contributes to it. The air pollutants, such as black soot (carbon) and dust, which find their way to the glacial ice, absorb heat from the sun and hasten snow melting. The scariest takeaway from these studies is that even if the Paris agreement's goal of capping global temperature rise to 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial levels is met — which seems unlikely — the Himalayas could still lose over a third of their ice cover by the end of this century.

Glacier meltdown of this scale has varied repercussions for the water flows in the 10 major rivers and countless rivulets and other water streams originating from these hills. The main fear is that the water flows in these channels would turn uncertain, irregular and, more so, unpredictable. In the shorter run, the increased snow melting may swell their water stocks, heightening the risk of floods. But in the longer run, with the perceptible contraction of the snow cover by around, say, the 2050s, the flows would tend to taper off, causing frequent water shortages downstream. Experts believe that the mighty rivers like the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, which get sizable water inflows from the monsoon-fed tributaries, would also witness considerable variations in water availability because the pre-monsoon flows may dwindle.

The need, therefore, is to expand the water storage capacity to hold surplus rainwater during the monsoon season. The bulk of this water now runs off wastefully to the seas, eroding precious soil in the process. Though the scope for the construction of large reservoirs is rather limited for various reasons, including land submergence and its attendant population displacement-related issues, small and medium projects can easily be taken up in large numbers. Also, thousands of old ponds, reservoirs and other water bodies, which are lying in disuse, can be revived to store water. Guiding the runoff water into the underground aquifers through rainwater harvesting structures is the best and the safest method of water preservation. This aside, the efforts to curb air pollution in areas adjoining the Himalayas also need to redouble to reduce snow melting. Otherwise, there is little hope for a water-secure future.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Elitism, populism, meritocracy...

Decoding the angst-ridden discourse of the day

Not a day passes without encountering some serious thinker venting his/her angst on this subject. It could be an editorial or a column in a newspaper, magazine or website, or an interpersonal exchange at work or a comment by a friend one is having a drink with.

Let's quickly run over the vocabulary of this angst-ridden discourse. "Khan Market Gang" (believed to have been created to describe a group of young Members of Parliament from entitled backgrounds who ate at upscale restaurants at Delhi's Khan Market during their lunch break at Parliament but now applied to anyone from an economically or socially privileged background), "Populist" (to imply that the leader concerned is a supporter of give-aways in cash or in kind to win over a large group of the not-so-privileged), "Secularist" (to describe a person who views the rights of minority religious groups as important) "Pseudo-secularist" (to mean a person who supports positions to win favour with minority religious groups), "Meritocrat" (one who believes in applying merit-based criteria to match people and positions, be it in university admissions or in promotions), "Reservationist" (one who supports applying other-than-merit based criteria to match people and positions). The list is long.

One does not have to be a scholar to deduce that all these terms are used pejoratively, i.e. if you refer to someone as a Khan Market gang member, you see yourself as being different from that person and, similarly, if you refer to someone as a member of



AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

the elite, you see yourself as not being a member of that elite.

Or, is it possible that the time has come for us to introspect whether our society, even a half-century after Independence, reserves the top spots in politics, administration and the corporate world to sons and daughters of families who have always occupied such positions? And that early life in elite English medium schools (Campion in Mumbai, DPS in Delhi...) and colleges (St Xavier's in Bombay, St

Stephen's in Delhi...) in metro cities puts you in the fast lane to such top spots in life? Conversely, if you are born in and grew up in a village and attended the local non-English medium school, your chances of making it in life in India are bleak?

If this kind of name calling was just in India and that too in an election year, we could have easily turned our mind to other things by saying that people don't always mean all that they say during a heated election and once the season changes, sanity and a co-operative culture will return. After all, caring for the world at large and that too for people who are less economically well-off from you is, well, large-heartedness, and need not be pejoratively called populism. And if you see someone hang out all the time in expensive eateries, you only smile indulgently and tell yourself he is one of the idle rich, not really a member of "the elite".

Observers trying to understand the reasons for Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US Presidential Election point out that his vote came mainly from working-class white people, both men and women,

ratio of female employees.

Any visitor to Vietnam's lively and pristine cities — also cited as a major plus factor compared with the shambolic chaos and grime of India's urban spaces — will be struck by the number of well-maintained government schools, the result of a compulsory education programme launched in 2001, eight years ahead of India's variably implemented Right to Education Act.

At a time when India's ruling regime appears determined to make Hindi the sole national language, Vietnam teaches English as its first foreign language and Chinese as one of its four second languages. In other words, the average young Vietnamese can communicate in both languages with investors from the US (their preferred investor community) and Chinese (whose economic model they emulate).

In the context of the downgrading of English in India's education curriculum, the author's frank observation about our famed multi-culturalism is worth quoting in full: "People in different states in

India speaking different languages contributes to different cultures, which makes business management a headache.... Moreover, the 14 official Indian languages [actually 22] make it almost close to impossible for Indians from different states to communicate. If they don't speak English, ...it's very unlikely that they can find ways to understand each other."

As for female participation in the workforce, the writer has not explained why it is such a critical element in an investor's decision-making. Perhaps high female participation ensures a larger labour force for gargantuan China-style factories or maybe they take it as a sign of a progressive, inclusive soci-



SWOT

KANIKA DATTA

Given India's size, the country has been ideally positioned to reap the gains. Instead, India's suitability is being sized up against far smaller Asian economies and it appears to come up short. "India or Vietnam: Who's the New China?" is the heading of an advisory written by a Chinese supply chain consultant in January on the two countries' potential as alternative investment decisions after Donald Trump unleashed his trade war. At the end of a corporate-style, bullet-pointed exposition, the author concludes that the country whose economy is a 10th of India's size was preferable. Worse, he concludes India will never be the next China in the medium term.

This is a sobering assessment as the commerce ministry reportedly prepares plans, including tax breaks, to induce companies and investors to redirect their attentions to India as a result of the trade war.

The big surprise in this paper was revelations that Vietnam's comparative superiority is not because it is, as conventionally believed, winning the traditional race to the bottom in terms of labour costs. On the contrary, Vietnam had begun to overtake India in terms of average wage rate in manufacturing in 2015. The two key reasons Vietnam scored over India are basic education levels and

particularly ones without college education, living in rural America, and their reason for voting for him was that they felt overlooked by "the establishment" and "the elite". In Britain, the surprising majority vote in the 2016 referendum wanting Britain to leave the European Union is widely seen to be also a vote against the British elite; voters expressed the view that British politicians, business leaders, and intellectuals had lost their right to control the system and that this elite had contempt for ordinary persons values and their interests. And political leaders riding on anti-elitist platforms now lead governments in Italy, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

Some observers see this wave of anti-elitism/pro-populism as a pushback against the ideology of globalisation that has reigned since the end of World War II, and which has created institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization. The current anti-elitist movements believe that such institutions undermine local decision-making by empowering large corporations that use these institutions to support their own corporate and financial interests to do business across borders, extract natural resources while paying minimal local taxes and so on.

In the Indian context, getting a job in one of the entities created by this globalisation mantra has meant meeting its standards of meritocracy, which means entrance tests (CAT, JEE Advanced, GRE... etc.) that we believe ensure that young people, irrespective of their social and economic background, get an equal chance to enter our top educational institutions — whether the IIMs, the IITs, the National Law schools or the public Medical colleges. We have fervently believed that such entrance processes and such public institutions would ensure that entry to the major professions of our times would be available to children from all kinds of social and economic backgrounds and not just for children whose parents are from elite backgrounds. But, increasingly, researchers are pointing out that scores in these apparently objective exams reflect the socio-economic status of the parents — both because educated and affluent parents not only ensure good quality schooling but also pay for the expensive tutorial classes that seem to have become essential to do well in such exams. Add to this that most entrance processes — whether for one of these prized national educational institutions or for a job — have an interview/group discussion which requires a degree of fluency in English that disadvantages all those who haven't had an English-medium school education.

In this context, could it be that what looks like a populist wave is really a vote to change a system, which, in the name of meritocracy, is essentially fixed to benefit a narrow minority?

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ety. Though economists have found no single explanation for India's dismally low participation of women in the workforce, the writer ascribes it to social mores: "Even though women who have received higher education and have a decent job after graduation will choose to be full-time moms as this is how the tradition works" (*sic*).

In both Vietnam and China (and indeed in most of South East Asia), it is hard to miss the proliferation of women in the workforce. At 73.21 per cent, Vietnam has an appreciably higher workforce participation rate among women over 15 years than China at 60.87. India's falling metric — from 36.7 per cent in 2005 to 26 per cent in 2018 — is unlikely to inspire confidence.

That Vietnam is already ahead in the race is clear. In Q1 of 2019, foreign investment in Vietnam rose 86.2 per cent, to \$10.8 billion (Chinese investment accounts for about half that). Where Foxconn struggled for four years just to find an optimum-sized manufacturing base to assemble Apple iPhones in India, Intel, Samsung and LG have poured money into a country that endured over 30 years of war, decimating its landscape and claiming over 3 million lives.

Now, as investors and executives relocating to that tiny country are discovering, Vietnam's ability to absorb this deluge of investment is limited. All the undesirable symptoms of economic growth are manifesting themselves: Urban traffic jams, rising real estate prices, low skill sets of Vietnamese workers relative to their Chinese counterparts, bottlenecks at ports, and a shortage of workers — Vietnam has fewer workers than China's Guangdong and cannot count on masses of migrants to make good the shortfall.

An opportunity for India? It should have been. Instead, investors are eyeing ... the Indonesian island of Batam. A free-trade zone that links Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore and an hour's ferry ride from Singapore, it is now the cynosure of all eyes.

poll by BritainThinks, a leading think-tank, reveals what it describes as "an astonishing lack of faith in the political system" among British voters with fewer than six per cent saying they think politicians understand them. As many as 75 per cent said that UK politics was "broken" and not fit for purpose. According to analysts, the mood has never been "more despairing". And that can be said of the prevailing mood in most democracies around the world.

Rethinking Democracy is the latest addition to the growing literature on the future of democracy, and though it may not have anything terribly original to say, its value lies in bringing together the various strands of the debate in one place and helping lay readers make sense of a complex crisis.

RETHINKING DEMOCRACY
Edited by Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright
Wiley, €14.99, 172 pages

What ails democratic politics?



BOOK REVIEW

HASAN SUROOR

There was a time when western political pundits were obsessed with the idea of the imminent death of communism, and for many it became a full-time occupation to write its obituary. And when the "God" eventually did die, we were told the future henceforth belonged to western-style liberal democracy.

Remember Francis Fukuyama's triumphal prediction that the collapse of Soviet communism was "not just ... the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such."

the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government"?

Fast forward, and as American academic Alan Wolfe noted in a recent article, Mr Fukuyama's thesis "appears to have been written for another planet".

"Far from avowing the triumph of liberal democracy, in 2019 many believe we will be lucky to hold on to the dwindling number of liberal democracies we have," he wrote in *The New Republic*, echoing growing fears over the future of liberal democracy as the democratic world appears to drown in a tide of populism from America to Europe and Asia, including India.

Mr Fukuyama himself has readjusted his rose-tinted vision of democracy, claiming that his end-of-history thesis was "more of a question than an assertion". His original essay apparently had a question

mark in the title that was dropped when it was published as a book.

The book under review — a collection of essays by 11 prominent academics — leaves no room for ambiguity as to where it stands vis-a-vis the state of Western liberal democracy. The political system is facing an existential crisis, and there appears to be no obvious way out of it short of rethinking the very idea of democracy as it is conventionally understood.

"It faces challenges it seems unable to meet while authoritarian nationalists and assorted populists trade on its difficulties," write its editors Andrew Gamble of Cambridge University and Tony Wright, a former Labour MP and currently professor at University College, London.

This is a common thread that runs through the book, and though contributors come to it from different angles, the underlying consensus is that much of the world has fallen out of love with liberal

Parched Chennai wasted conservation potential

It didn’t move on rainwater harvesting, reclaiming wastewater; other cities must learn from the crisis

CHENNAI'S WATER CRISIS perhaps signals the start of a new normal—abject water-deprivation in parts of India. Indeed, a 2018 report by NITI Aayog speaks of 21 Indian cities, including Bengaluru, Delhi, and Hyderabad, running out of groundwater by 2020; Chennai is the worst-affected among 400 cities across the world studied for water scarcity—four Indian cities are in the top-20 most affected—using data gathered by The Nature Conservancy and the World Wide Fund for Nature. India's water-crisis—600 million people already face high-to-extreme water stress every year—is rooted in the fact that it has just 4% of the world's freshwater resources while supporting 16% of its population. Scarcity is compounded by poor quality—with nearly 70% of water contaminated, 200,000 die every year due to inadequate access to safe water. A business-as-usual scenario means, by 2050, India's GDP could see a 6% loss.

Inadequate storage—annual precipitation is 15 times, and the volume eventually available for utilisation four times the country's reservoir capacity—and abuse of scant resources, thanks to poor agricultural policy among other reasons, are not the only problem. For a country looking at high-levels of water-stress in the future—clashes over water are happening not just between states, but also within—India doesn't really focus on recycle and reuse or better household/building level harvesting. About 80% of the water that reaches households is lost as wastewater that is never reclaimed. Contrast this with Singapore, which imported 55% of its water requirement from Malaysia in 1965 and yet, has managed to provide 100% access to clean water over the last three decades. Key to its success is its reclamation of wastewater. The Singapore Public Utilities Board, since 2000, has been treating wastewater using microfiltration, reverse osmosis and UV treatment, in addition to the usual water treatment processes, and has delivered potable water that is purer than even the WHO standards. Today, NEWater, the reclaimed water, meets 40% of Singapore's water needs while desalination plants, started in 2005, meet another 10%. To be sure, Delhi has announced plans to emulate the NEWater model, but the fact is, cities are failing at even simpler solutions. In Bengaluru, the tanker mafia is flourishing as the government has failed to meet demand—with the tankers extracting groundwater from areas adjacent to the city, water deficiency is spreading. The city draws 1,350 million litres externally per day, and yet it squanders 3,000 million litres of the daily average rainfall it receives. The Mumbai Metropolitan region has been battling for a linking of the Damanganga and Pinjal rivers—at significant environmental costs, experts say—but it fails to harvest the 2,400 mm of rainfall it receives, and won't reclaim wastewater. Tamil Nadu, in 2003, promulgated a landmark ordinance on compulsory rainwater harvesting by all buildings. Chennai has 12.5 lakh buildings, including government ones, and a 2015 government-mandated audit by Rain Centre, an NGO, found that government buildings in the greater Chennai region were the worst violators of the harvesting rule. Now, when Tamil Nadu rainfall deficit has reached 41%, the city is virtually shutting down in distress.

The complete neglect of wetlands, lakes, waterbodies and flood-plains and the concretisation/metalling march in cities has come at the cost of water percolation and silting of rivers. Once water-surplus, Chennai sacrificed nearly 75% of its waterbodies from a little over three decades ago to urban development. A study by Anna University shows Chennai lost 33% of its wetlands between 2006 and 2016 and 24% of its agricultural land (crucial for groundwater replenishment). Concurrently, barren land and area under settlement increased by 15% and 13%, respectively. Unsustainable urbanisation, and apathy for water reclamation and harvest brought Chennai to its knees. Other cities must learn from the crisis—given the climate crisis's impact on monsoon, time for action is running out.

The grey in the black

Estimates of black economy vary from 7-120% of official GDP!

THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT, and the BJP, has spent an inordinate amount of time obsessing about the size of the black economy—the demonetisation exercise in 2016 was meant to be a direct assault on this—the reality is that there is no clarity on just how big the black economy is. The latest report of the Standing Committee on Finance collates the studies done by three leading research institutes—NIPFP, NCAER and NIFM—and comes up with numbers that vary widely and, in many cases, are not even that large in relative terms. In terms of the total black money, the revenue secretary told the committee that the estimates varied from 7% to 120% of the reported GDP. And, as for the money held overseas, NIPFP put it at 0.2% to 7.4% of GDP between 1997-2009, NCAER at \$384-490bn between 1980-2010 (that's around 3% of GDP in that period) and NIFM even lower at \$216bn.

While that still seems a lot of money in absolute terms, the fact is that amnesty schemes haven't really worked in the past and, in any case, given the way GDP is growing, the government would do well to concentrate on closing loopholes for present tax evasion. While VDIS netted ₹9,700 crore in 1997, the IDS netted ₹28,000 crore in 2016—the latter, however, is less than 0.2% of that year's GDP. Given that tax-to-GDP was 8.7% in FY01 and rose to 12.1% in FY08, it is clear that there is a lot more to be made from tightening the tax noose on current income. This 12.1% number fell to 10.1% in FY14, the year before the BJP came to power, and then rose to 11.2% in FY18, before falling to 10.9% in FY19; what is important is to stop tax compliance from falling, and to try to keep raising it.

The first step, of course, would be to plug all loopholes in the tax framework so as to minimise the leakage; too many exemptions and rebates will ultimately allow assesses to fudge their accounts. As the economy gets more formalised, and the GST system becomes more effective with invoices being matched regularly, it should become harder for businesses to evade taxes. The authorities must, at the same time, mine all the information they are able to access on incomes, revenues, most important, expenditures. Operation Insight, for instance, which is a linking of several databases on purchases of jewellery, automobiles, property, credit card payments, airline tickets, etc, can be a big source of data, with which to track down evaders. Moreover, with every bank account now mandatorily linked to PAN numbers, banks can be asked to furnish lists of cash withdrawals by individuals above a certain threshold. To make this work, though, banks must quickly weed out fake PANs by matching them with the customers' Aadhaar numbers. Given much of the unaccounted wealth in the country is in the form of property, the amendments to the Benami Property Act and the crack-down on lakhs of shell companies—used to avoid taxes—will also help.

Offroading Education

Doing away with the minimum-education criterion for drivers is a bad idea

LAST WEEK, THE ministry of road transport and highways decided to do away with the requirement of a minimum educational qualification for driving a commercial vehicle. An amendment Bill aims at removing Rule 8 of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, which states that a driver needs to be educated up till class 8th for driving a transport vehicle. The reason given by the ministry for this amendment is that many people from backward regions of India depend on low-income livelihoods, such as driving—but the rule on the minimum educational level becomes a hurdle since many don't meet it. In such a scenario, the ministry felt that the mandatory rule for being able to drive transport vehicles should not depend on one's education level, but on the skill-set associated with driving. Also, the ministry feels that this decision will help tackle the shortage of 22 lakh drivers in the transport sector. It proposes to substitute the education criterion with strict skill testing of drivers. While that may seem alright in the short-term, doing away with basic education as a requirement for any job, especially when the government is providing elementary education for free, is a bad step in the long run.

Future jobs, including driving, will need basic education for skill deployment. With the digitisation of the transport sector unfolding at its current pace—from GPS-based navigation to text/picture-based interface with transport apps—acquiring the necessary skills will require basic education. In any case, automated vehicles may even make drivers redundant—basic education can prove a redeemer if it opens up opportunities for a second career. India may plunge further in the Human Development Index if it disincentivises the pursuit of education. Educational attainment of children shows a high correlation with that of parents—the move may lead to low education attainment for generations to come.

● **CHLOROPHILE**

GOVERNMENT'S LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY ON GM CROPS IS DRIVING FARMERS TO COMMIT ILLEGALITY, AND RISK MONETARY FINES & PRISON SENTENCES

Satyagraha for GM technology

ON SATURDAY, JUNE 23, Laxmikant Kauthakar, 35, called to say that he would plant illegal genetically-modified (GM) herbicide-tolerant (HT) cottonseed stacked with the bollworm-killing Bt trait the next day. He had stopped growing cotton in 2014, unable to afford manual weeding and pesticides, and switched to sugarcane and pigeon pea (tur) instead.

When reminded of the stiff penal provisions of the Environment Protection Act, 1986, Kauthakar said, "It is not about me. There are no jobs. Business is competitive. Our children don't want to do agriculture. They are rushing to the cities." He said there was a shortage of labour and costs of manual weeding were high. "Whatever technology is there in the world should be available to us. This is our right."

On Sunday, Kauthakar planted HTBt cottonseed at his farm in Adgaon Buzurg village, in Akola district's Telhara tehsil. He and 10 others, including Lalit Patil Bahale, were booked under the Seed Act, the Environment Protection Act and sections 143 (unlawful assembly), 180 (refusal to sign statement), 188 (disobedience of public servant's order) and 420 (cheating) of the Indian Penal Code. Akola District Collector, Jitendra Papalkar, said the government had no issues with HTBt cotton, if approved. The seeds sown had no labels. A sample had been sent for testing to the Central Institute of Cotton Research, Nagpur. "Who will bear responsibility if farmers suffer losses?" he asked.

Wilful planting of illegal HTBt cotton began on a 3-acre slice of Bahale's 38-acre farm at Akoli Jahangir village, in Akola district's Akot tehsil on June 10. The Shetkari Sanghatana, which believes in free markets and free access to agricultural biotechnology, is organising the protest planting. Bahale is a microbiologist. He had stopped growing cotton about two decades ago, after persistently losing the cotton crop to bollworms. That was before the GM Bt cotton trait was approved for cultivation in 2002. Bahale has switched to high-value horticulture.

The movement has gained traction. As of Monday, June 24, 19 farmers had lent their farms for the protest planting, including Mahadeo Khamkar of Anandwadi village in Ahmednagar's Shrigonda tehsil, Madhusudan Hame of Shegaon (Kund) in Wardha's Hinganghat tehsil, Nilesh Nemade of Adgaon in Akot tehsil, Baburao Appaji Golde of Revgaon in Jalna

VIVIAN FERNANDES

The author blogs at smartindianagriculture.in
Views are personal

district, Akshay Mahajan of Bori village in Ralegaon tehsil of Yavatmal district, and Radheyshyam Wable of Umbra village in Hingoli.

The slogans explain why: *Chor Bt nahin, halkache Bt* (Not by stealth, Bt by right) *Tantragyan swatantra amchya hakkachi, nahin kunyacha bapache* (Technology freedom is our right, not anybody's patrimony).

Chor Bt nahin, lmandaar Bt (Honest Bt, not stolen Bt). "Why do we have to go by hook or crook?" asks Anil Ghanvat, President of the Sanghatana. An agricultural science graduate, he practices farming in Ahmednagar. "This government has compelled us to be smugglers." The Field Inspection and Scientific Evaluation Committee, set by the Department of Biotechnology in 2017 to ascertain the spread of illegal HT cotton, estimated the area covered by illegal HT cotton at 15-17% of the total. It advised that the crop be destroyed. Not wishing to risk farmers' anger, states like Andhra Pradesh banned the sale of the herbicide Glyphosate, which spares HT cotton, but kills weeds, when sprayed.

Illegality cannot be condoned. But, what is driving farmers in droves to commit illegality, and risk monetary fines and prison sentences? The nub of the issue is the government's lack of accountability on GM crops. If a developer has spent time and money complying with a procedure established by law, can ministers deny or stall approval merely because they do not agree with the science or it doesn't suit their political interests? Who is responsible for losses caused to research companies, which acted in good faith, when their GM seeds are not approved for cultivation despite passing bio-safety trials and being approved by regulatory committees? Who will compensate farmers for losses or extra costs arising from being denied such technology? Shouldn't there be a time-frame for granting of approvals? And, if public sensitivity is the issue, shouldn't it be addressed with devices like labelling?



In February 2010, environment minister Jairam Ramesh arbitrarily imposed an indefinite moratorium on the release of Bt brinjal for cultivation. He invented a procedure not prescribed by law till then—public hearings in various cities, where shrill activists opposed to GM technology fanned fears about Bt brinjal, providing the minister an excuse to act in the "public interest." He converted the apex Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) into an appraisal committee. In fairness, the changes should have had prospective effect, but were applied retroactively.

In doing so, Ramesh ignored the vote of 16 members of GEAC and heeded the veto of just two of them, one of whom, the late Pushpa Bhargava, was a known GM crop technology baiter and the other was a scientist in his institute. He dismissed the view of a high-level GEAC committee that had studied the objections of anti-GM activists and found them to be without merit. He ignored the long history of safe use of Bt protein in various countries. He ignored the GEAC committee's view that stomach acids degrade the Bt protein in 30 seconds, that it breaks down upon cooking and was not detectable even in short-term digestibility studies.

Yet a series of environment ministers after him—Jayanti Natarajan, Veerappa Moily, Prakash Javadekar, Anil Madhav Dave and Harsh Vardhan—allowed the moratorium to continue. The brinjal fruit and plant spiked with Bt protein is deadly to the fruit and shoot borer; instead, farmers have been forced to douse brinjal with pesticides, which are ineffective once the borer prevents contact with them by lodging itself inside the brinjal fruit and stem. Bt technology has been used in Bangladesh for the past three years on the basis of bio-safety trials conducted in India. The number of Bangladeshi farmers growing it has risen from 20 to 27,000 and there have been no reports of any harm. Yet, Indian

ON JHARKHAND LYNCHING

President of INC, Rahul Gandhi

The brutal lynching of this young man by a mob in Jharkhand is a blot on humanity. The cruelty of the police who held this dying boy in custody for 4 days is shocking as is the silence of powerful voices

Who will compensate farmers for losses or extra costs arising from being denied such technology?

farmers are denied the technology and Indian consumers have to eat pesticide-laced brinjal.

Another example is the GM mustard hybrid, DMH-11, developed by a team of Delhi University scientists with (public) funding from the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and the Department of Biotechnology. The GM technology deployed in it, to first induce male sterility and restore fertility after cross pollination, allows the efficient development of high-yielding hybrids in mustard, which is self-pollinating.

The research was first published in an international journal in 2001. Field trials began in 2002. After 15 years, in May 2017, the GEAC recommended release for cultivation. Environment minister Anil Madhav Dave passed away before he could approve it, within days of the recommendation. His replacement, Harsh Vardhan, sat on the file, reportedly, because the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, one of 36 organisations affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is opposed to GM technology.

In the case of HT cotton, pollen-flow studies began in 2006. Between 2008 and 2012, two levels of bio-safety research studies were conducted and the dossier was presented to GEAC in 2013. But in August 2016, the developer, Mahyco, withdrew the application for commercial release of the cottonseed because agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh had upended India's intellectual property rights regime with curbs on retail prices and royalty payments that favoured seed companies more than farmers. Mahyco reckoned that even if HT cottonseed, combined with the insect-resistant Bt trait, were released, it would not profit from it.

"We don't want price controls or limits on royalty," says Ajit Narde, who heads Shetkari Sanghatana's technology cell. Ghanvat says farmers don't mind paying royalty for proprietary traits and market prices for seed so long as they get more than proportionate returns.

The Shetkari Sanghatana does not agree with Gandhi's vision of self-contained villages or his disapproval of modern technology, but like him, it wants farmers to be self-reliant. It draws inspiration from his Satyagraha technique. "We see Gandhiji's spectacles everywhere but not his vision," said Pradnya Bapat, the Sanghatana's leader tartly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM Modi's speech

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's no-holds-barred vituperative attack on the Gandhis is nothing new. However, it is not clear why he considered them central to his articulations in the Parliament. While Modi never tires of reminding us of the Congress party's dependence on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, he deems it unnecessary to acknowledge the umbilical cord existing between RSS and BJP. Evidently, BJP is the political arm of RSS. That Modi is larger than life does not mean that RSS does not pull the strings. Conveniently Modi, an erstwhile RSS *pracharak* omitted to mention that RSS extended support to the Emergency. What is more, he forgot to refer to blots on India's democracy other than the Emergency. Hate crimes have increased manifold during his rule. As for Modi's call for fulfilling the dream of an inclusive nation, it is doubtful that a leader who refused to wear a skull cap and compared victims of communal violence to puppies possesses the moral authority to act as a unifier. One wishes that Prime Minister Narendra Modi shows the strength of personality to repudiate his description of himself as a Hindu nationalist (which he did in a BBC interview in the run-up to 2014 general election) and re-christen himself as an Indian nationalist to do justice to the Constitution and the exalted office that he holds.

— G.David Milton, Maruthancode

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CITIES AT CROSSROADS

Saving
India's water

What is needed is a political compact between the Centre and the states to jointly address the challenges of saving India's water, while actively involving local governments and engaging with the communities of water users. It is a tall order, but there is no alternative than to begin

CHENNAI HAS BEEN MUCH in the news recently for its water crisis. Scuffles and suffering have been reported from different parts of the city. Water crimes in Ranchi have also hit the headlines. Cities in Madhya Pradesh have seen stabbings and killings over water, and the police have been called upon to guard water tankers and water sources. Cape Town in South Africa was the first major city in the modern era to face the threat of running out of drinking water, as reported by the BBC in February 2018. The BBC listed another 11 cities most likely to run out of water. This list included Bengaluru.

The 2030 Water Resources Group on *Charting Our Water Future*, set up by the erstwhile Planning Commission in 2009, had projected that if the current demand pattern for water continues, by 2030 the available water will meet only about half of India's demand for water. Ten years later, in 2019, the water crisis is here and it is taking its toll on rural as well as urban areas of India. We are staring at a train wreck in slow motion and we need to act fast and act boldly to avoid the crash.

Water scarcity in India has come about not so much from insufficient supply of water as from the way in which we manage the water we have. Agriculture

uses 78% of India's water, and uses it very inefficiently (agricultural water-use efficiency is 30% for surface water and 55% for groundwater in India, compared with 77% in Israel). Notwithstanding the large investments in irrigation networks, about two-thirds of water used for irrigation comes from groundwater. Two factors—the huge electricity subsidies for farmers to pump groundwater and the fact that groundwater is largely unregulated—have led to a steady explosion in its use through tube wells for irrigation over the past several decades. About 80% of rural demand for drinking water is also met by groundwater.

Urban India's inefficiency in water use arises from inadequate, old and dilapidated distribution networks, inefficient operations, inadequate metering, incomplete billing and collection, and a general state of poor governance. Another source of inefficiency comes from not treating wastewater and using the recycled water for specialised uses such as horticulture and also for flushing toilets. Underpricing of urban water also contributes to wasteful use of water. If something is underpriced, users will use more of it.

Most of us living in cities expect to have access to drinking water from taps in our homes. This requires a distribution network of pipes that can bring water

from the basic source of bulk supply to our homes. However, access to treated tap water is available to only 62% of urban households (Census 2011). Those who are unconnected to the piped network, and include mostly but not only the poor, have to rely on buying water from tankers at exorbitant rates. This leads to increasing but unaccounted use of groundwater by extensive digging of borewells to meet the demand deficit of water.

There is clearly a need to expand coverage to the "unconnected" population. This will call for expansion and renovation of the infrastructure of the distribution network. It will also call for additional supplies of water, especially because the groundwater that is currently being used to supply this population is expected to dry up. The NITI Aayog has projected that ground water for 21 cities will run out by 2020 (i.e. next year), and the cities include Bengaluru, Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad.

Financing the expansion in urban water supply will be a problem. Even if the capital cost of the infrastructure is made available either through national missions or public-private partnership, the operation and maintenance cost of running the system (and in the case of PPP, a large part of the capital cost) will have to be recovered through user charges. Pricing water is important both for demand management and for economic viability of water-delivery systems.

We also need to mobilise more supply of water from basic natural sources. Only then can greater connectivity result in piped water delivery to all in urban areas. The mobilisation of additional supplies of water poses a major challenge, since the natural recharge zones are increasingly eroded because of unplanned urbanisation.

In addition, we need to deal with the supply constraints arising from the neglect of rivers, lakes, ponds and other waterbodies in and around our cities, which feed the reservoirs that are the bulk sources of water. These waterbodies need to be protected from encroachment so that our catchment area for water storage and rainwater harvesting is not reduced. This requires strict vigilance on land-use planning and building permissions in our cities. It may even warrant removal of existing encroachments. An important role has to be played by the concerned state governments including ensuring compliance with environmental guidelines laid

down by the ministry of environment, forest and climate change, and also the National Green Tribunal. Above all, increased water-use efficiency in agriculture is critical to release water supply from agriculture for other uses.

The quality of water issue is also very significant for public health. Only about 30% of the municipal wastewater or sewage is treated, and the rest is released untreated into rivers and/or the ground. Because of density and concentration in urban areas, contamination from wastewater happens much faster. It is also important to ensure that untreated sewage is not dumped into open storm

water drains through which it is carried and discharged into waterbodies. Surveys of groundwater in recent years show higher and higher levels of microbiological contamination. It is essential to ensure that the wastewater is treated before it finds its way back into our basic source of water and contaminates it.

Water is even more important than food for survival. No wonder, water governance is intimately linked to politics. It reminds me of the Pakistani play *Kala Mainda Bhes* (Black is My Attire), which I saw in Delhi some 20 years ago. In the play, the owner of the only well in the village, *Khoaoq Shah* (literally meaning the Lord of the Well), reigned supreme and his rule was called "*Khoaoq Shah di Sarkar*" which was subordinate only to what was called *Vaddi Sarkar*, i.e. the Almighty. Cities in Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh certainly have no *Khoaoq Shah* yet, but the crisis of water supply seems just as acute.

It is clear that management of water requires a holistic approach taking account of the multiple aspects that have been spelt out above. In a way, setting up of the ministry of jal shakti is recognition of this, except that jal shakti deals with rural water needs only. We cannot split urban water from rural. Water will flow from rural to urban and vice versa, and has always done so. Besides, reshaping water governance will require state governments and local governments to take coordinated action in a federal system. What is needed is a political compact between the Centre and the states to jointly address the challenges of saving India's water, while actively involving local governments and engaging with the communities of water users. It is a tall order, but there is no alternative than to begin.

UNION BUDGET

Bringing the
economy
back on trackFRANK
D'SOUZA

Partner and Leader, Corporate & International Tax, PwC India



Sluggish economic growth, addressing collection targets are areas to target

THE UNION BUDGET 2019 is scheduled at a time where reviving a relatively—by recent standards—sluggish economic growth and addressing collection targets are the most important areas for the government as it starts the journey into its second term. Therefore, in an effort towards pushing consumer spending by leaving more disposal income in the hands of the middle class and mobilising private investment without compromising on tax revenue collections, which fund public spending, the Union Budget 2019 could be walking a tightrope for the government.

On the personal tax front, increasing the basic exemption limit may not align with the government's objective of widening the tax base and, thus, reduction in slab rates could be an alternate that may be considered to reduce the tax burden on the middle class. Although given the sops provided in the Interim Budget in February 2019, this appears unlikely. Also, to channelise individual savings into infrastructure spending of the government, reintroduction of infrastructure bonds with tax incentives may be on the cards.

At the beginning of the first term of the NDA government, corporate tax rate was proposed to be gradually reduced to 25% by the end of the five-year term, from the 30% rate applicable to the corporates. But in the Union Budget 2018, which was the last full Budget of the government, the corporate tax rate was reduced to 25% only for MSMEs with turnover/gross receipts less than ₹250 crore. With other major economies like the US bringing in tax rate cuts to attract investments, India would not want to be seen as an outlier with higher tax rates amongst major economies. Conversely, fiscal prudence may not permit the government to provide a corporate tax rate cut. However, coverage of corporates within this lower tax bracket may be broadened by increasing the threshold of turnover of ₹250 crore.

Employment data has been an area of concern in the recent times. To further promote the start-up initiative and MSME growth, tax incentives like exemptions on income from funding activities for the first few years may be provided to the investor community/angel investors. This could help mobilise private investment, generate employment, increase consumer spending, and revive the growth rate.

From the perspective of incentivising sustainable growth through large-scale manufacturing and adoption of electric vehicles, it would not be surprising to see some incentives and tax holidays for manufacturers of electric vehicles and batteries or providers of charging infrastructure being introduced in the Union Budget 2019. The incentives may also be extended to the consumers of electric vehicles to take care of the additional cost burden due to higher costs of these vehicles—more importantly, with subsidies that existed in FAME being withdrawn under FAME-II.

Towards addressing the challenges around generation of black money, the government may consider imposition of taxes in the range of 3–5% on cash withdrawal of more than ₹10 lakh in a year. It is believed that paying ₹30,000–50,000 on value of ₹10 lakh can be perceived as a loss by the common man, and this will push the economy towards complete digitisation and keep a tab on the generation of black money.

For the international community, the draft rules released for public comments last month, dealing with allocation of appropriate profits of MNCs doing business in India for taxation in India, may be introduced either in the Union Budget 2019 or around that time. This will have significant implications on many of the MNCs doing business in India, physically or through digital medium.

One will also wait to see how the new finance minister deals with the introduction of the new direct taxes code and what announcements are made in this regard.

We need to deal with the supply constraints arising from the neglect of rivers, lakes, ponds in and around our cities, which feed the reservoirs that are the bulk sources of water

There could be efforts towards pushing consumer spending by leaving more disposal income in the hands of the middle class and mobilising private investment

DEAR PRIME MINISTER, YOU have been voted back to power at the Centre for a second innings of five years with a thumping majority. It happened because you connected meaningfully with the masses, and especially with the urban and rural poor (includes small/marginal farmers, landless labourers), by announcing and executing (to some extent) a plethora of schemes (Jan Dhan, life insurance at ₹1 per day, Ujjwala, Swachh Bharat, Saubhagya, Ayushman Bharat, Mudra loans, PM Fasal Bima Yojana, PM-Kisan, etc), benefiting them in one way or the other. These schemes resonated so well with the masses that even important issues—such as a slowing economy, high unemployment rate, demonetisation, implementation of GST, farmers' distress and the Rafale controversy—did not matter to the poor voter as much as 'Pulwama' and 'Balakot', which demonstrated your strong, decisive and stable leadership to the people in the absence of any easily-acceptable alternative.

Having said that, my purpose here is not to analyse the reasons of your victory in the parliamentary elections, but to emphasise that now is the time for introspection and pondering as to what is to be done in the next five years. I say this because the poor of the country are still poor and facing untold miseries, and we should not forget that they voted for

Need anti-drought
measures, Mr PM

Droughts occur in India at frequent intervals and a permanent solution needs to be found

PP
SANGAL

The author is a former ISS and UN consultant



Modi with some good hopes in the near future. It needs to be stressed here that achievements under various programmes of the government during the last five years (2014–19) can only be said to have small but without any significant impact on the quality of social and economic aspects of life. Added to all this, now we are facing the big challenge of impending drought this year, and my objective here is to focus on the various issues concerning drought and, sir, what your government needs to do about it. To my mind, there are four main factors that appear to be contributing to drought. These are as under:

First, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD), the pre-monsoon

rain (March–June, 2019) have fallen short by 25%—the second-driest pre-monsoon season in the last 65 years (it fell short by 31% in 2012). Here, it would be interesting to note that one of India's wettest places, Agumbe in Karnataka's Western Ghats, received 158% less pre-monsoon rains this year. Now, due to the occurrence of weak El Nino weather phenomenon over the Equatorial Pacific Ocean region, monsoon rains (June–September, 2019) are expected to be less than normal (which is 96–104% of long period average)—and even though IMD is somewhat changing its predictions recently, only time will tell and we should not be caught unawares.

Second, only about 35% of the culti-



vated area has proper irrigation facilities (which are also being adversely impacted by melting glaciers due to global warming) and the rest 65% is rain-dependent. Further, groundwater is getting scarce by the day due to overexploitation in some regions/states due to wrong choice of crops being grown. Punjab stares at a parched future because 96% of the 35.78 billion cubic metres (bcm) of groundwater extracted is used by paddy growers, and it is estimated that the state would empty all its subsoil water within 22 years if the current rate of fall of 51 cm per year in its level continues, thus turning the country's food bowl into a desert. A similar glaring example is that of Maharashtra, where growing of sugarcane is consuming 60–65% of irrigation water. What a grim scenario and a great environmental concern, too.

Third, water scarcity leading to drought is being created, as out of a total annual precipitation of 4,000 bcm, only 1,100 bcm of water is eventually used either because of losses (2,900 bcm) due to evaporation or due to constraints like water harvesting and lack of storage capacity, which is barely 270 bcm today.

The situation is being worsened by the fact that a large number of anti-drought projects (7.9 lakh, costing ₹417 crore) related to water harvesting and micro-irrigation taken up in many states under MGNREGA are incomplete or have been abandoned due to inadequate fund allocation, and only 27,000 works have been completed so far. Karnataka, Maharashtra (Vidarbha region) and Andhra Pradesh (Amaravati) are some cases in point where a large number of drought-proofing works are incomplete.

Fourth, water availability in the reservoirs of 91 dams in the country was about 31.65 bcm as on May 30, 2019, which is about 20% of the total storage capacity of these reservoirs, according to the Central Water Commission (CWC). The states worst affected and having storage much less than last year in the corresponding period are Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (of a total live storage capacity of 51.59 bcm, reservoirs have live storage availability of

5.19 bcm) in the south, and Maharashtra and Gujarat (total live storage capacity is 31.26 bcm and availability is only 3.53 bcm) in the west. Other affected states are Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal and in the east, and Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in central India.

It must be mentioned that of the 634 districts, 393 are not drought-ready and only 241 districts (40%) are drought-resilient. Thus, the situation is very grave and farmers' distress is going to increase manifold. This would adversely impact India's GDP growth and lower the achievements under UN Sustainable Development Goals, in which we are already lagging behind targets. Droughts occur in India at frequent short intervals and a permanent solution needs to be found out by taking correct policy decisions, which have been eluding us so far.

To conclude, although many state governments like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan have declared many districts as drought-hit, the central government is yet to declare drought formally. I hope the meeting of the Governing Council of the NITI Aayog under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, held on June 15, would have taken a serious note of threatening drought and water management in drought-hit areas with the same urgency as shown in the appointment of the two PM-led panels on struggling growth and job creation.



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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

How the states scored in NITI Health Index: top and bottom 3 in key indicators

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

LARGER STATES (TOP 3 & BOTTOM 3 IN BOTH REPORTS)

| STATE | SCORE | | RANK | | CHANGE |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| | 2015-16 | 2017-18 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | |
| Kerala | 76.55 | 74.01 | 1 | 1 | — |
| Andhra | 60.16 | 65.13 | 8 | 2 | ▲ |
| Maharashtra | 61.07 | 63.99 | 6 | 3 | ▲ |
| Punjab | 65.21 | 63.01 | 2 | 5 | ▼ |
| Tamil Nadu | 63.38 | 60.41 | 3 | 9 | ▼ |
| Rajasthan | 36.79 | 43.10 | 20 | 16 | ▲ |
| Odisha | 39.43 | 35.97 | 18 | 19 | ▼ |
| Bihar | 38.46 | 32.11 | 19 | 20 | ▼ |
| UP | 33.69 | 28.61 | 21 | 21 | — |

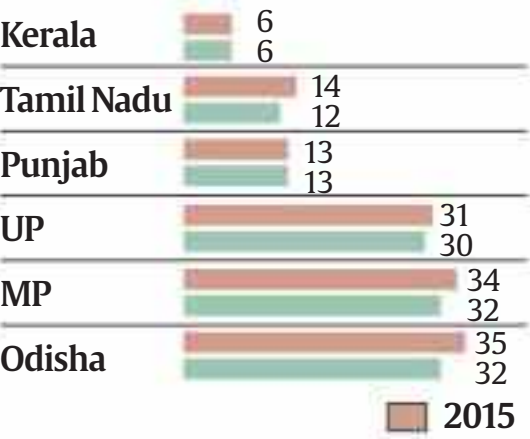
Smaller states: Mizoram (1), Manipur (2), Meghalaya (3), bottom Nagaland (8).

UTs: Delhi ranks 5 among 7. Top Chandigarh, bottom Daman & Diu (7).

Source for all data: NITI Aayog report

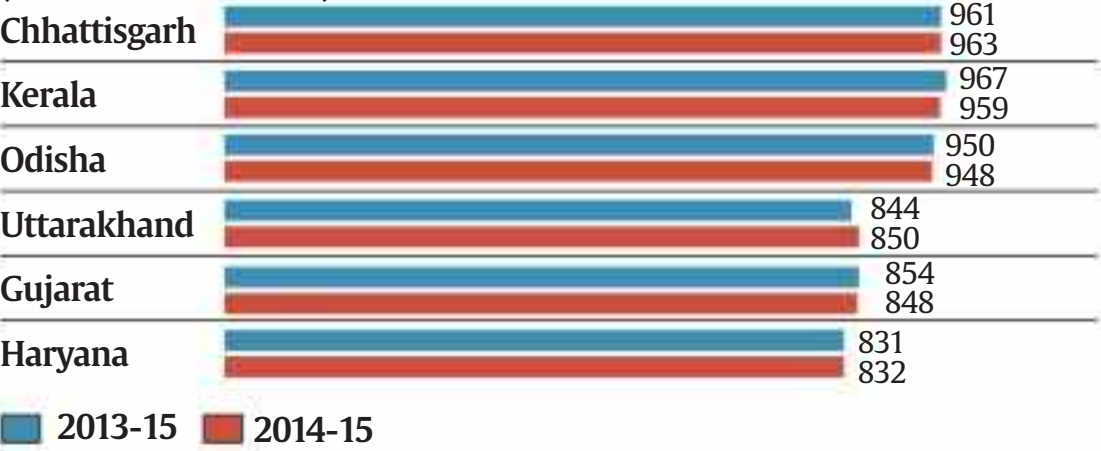
IN THE second edition of the NITI Aayog health index report card (*The Indian Express*, June 26), Kerala was once again ranked the best among the states while Uttar Pradesh was at the bottom. The “Healthy States, Progressive India” rankings. These rankings are on the basis of a Health Index, which is a composite score incorporating 23 indicators covering key aspects of performance in the health sector. These include several indicators relating to health outcomes (such as neonatal mortality rate, under-five mortality rate, low birth weight among newborns), indicators relating to governance and information (such as integrity of data) and inputs/processes (such as positions vacant at hospitals). The graphics show the performers of the top three and bottom three in some of the major indicators relating to health outcomes.

NEONATAL MORTALITY RATE (DEATHS PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS)



SEX RATIO AT BIRTH

(FEMALES PER 1,000 MALES)



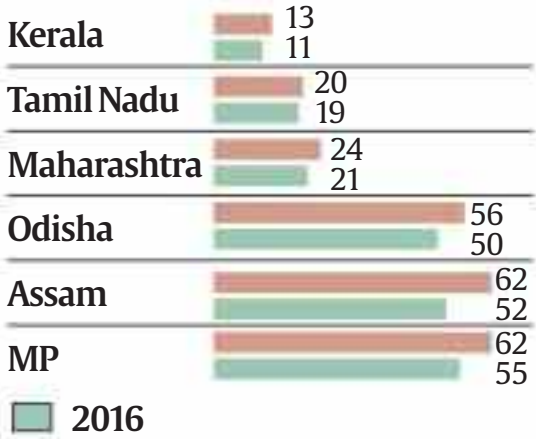
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE

| State | 2015 | 2016 |
|------------|------|------|
| W Bengal | 1.6 | 1.6 |
| Tamil Nadu | 1.6 | 1.6 |
| Punjab | 1.7 | 1.7 |
| MP | 2.8 | 2.8 |
| UP | 3.1 | 3.1 |
| Bihar | 3.2 | 3.3 |

LOW BIRTH WEIGHT (%)

| State | 2015 | 2016 |
|------------|------|------|
| J&K | 5.9 | 5.5 |
| Andhra | 6.7 | 5.6 |
| Jharkhand | 7.4 | 7.1 |
| Tamil Nadu | 13.0 | 15.5 |
| W Bengal | 16.4 | 16.4 |
| Odisha | 19.2 | 18.2 |

UNDER-5 MORTALITY RATE (DEATHS PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS)



Rain check: large area, low amount

The delayed monsoon has finally picked up and covered large parts of the country, but rainfall is still 36% short of normal for this time. What factors held it back, what is the forecast for the rest of the season?

ANJALI MARAN

PUNE, JUNE 26

AFTER A two-week delay, the monsoon is finally progressing northwards, and has covered most parts of southern, central and eastern India. The monsoon has reached Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and most of Madhya Pradesh.

However, it is still bringing less than expected rainfall. For the month of June so far, the rainfall over the country as a whole has been deficient by 36% compared to what is normal until this stage. This deficit is unlikely to be made up in any substantial manner in the remaining days of the month. But the India Meteorological Department has predicted good rains in July and August.

Delayed arrival

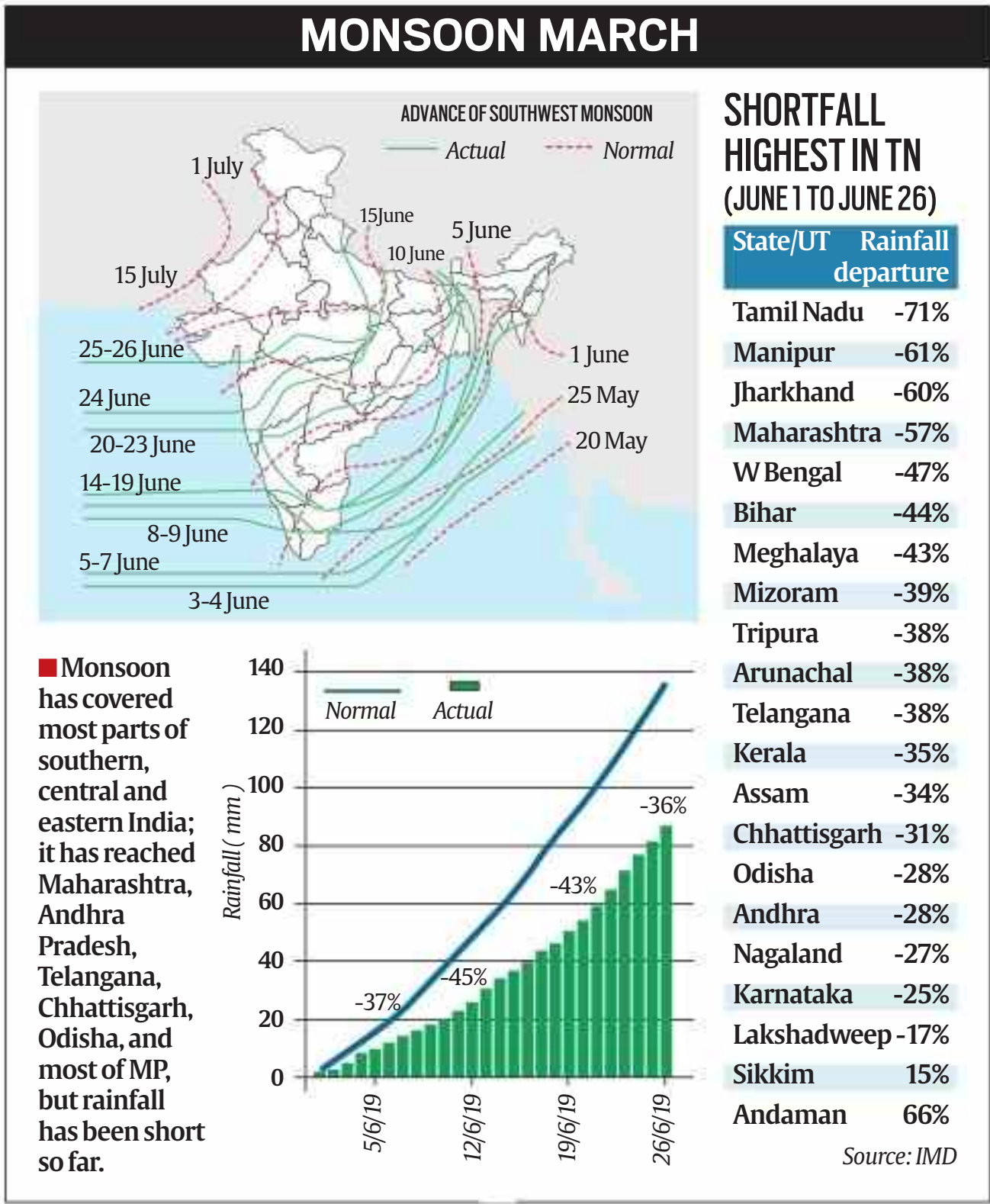
During the onset phase over the Indian mainland, the monsoon currents were severely oppressed by the prevailing mid-latitude regime, forcing these currents to take longer to establish. Since the winter of 2018, there were strong and frequent western disturbances passing through much of the southern latitudes and altogether delaying the onset over Kerala. The continuous flow of strong western disturbances, too, made it difficult for the already weak monsoon currents to penetrate. As a result, the onset over the Kerala coast happened on June 8 instead of the normal date of June 1.

After that, the monsoon has progressed much slower along its western arm than along the eastern arm. This has been due to a number of reasons.

East-West mismatch

Soon after its onset over Kerala, the very severe cyclonic storm Vayu was formed in the Arabian Sea. As it progressed northwards, it hindered the advance of the monsoon which lay centred over Kerala for nearly a week. This, because the system attracted significant amounts of moisture from the southern peninsular regions and also from parts of Maharashtra, thereby slowing down the pace during the initial advancement of the monsoon.

Last winter, an Arctic burst had resulted in severe cold including sub-zero temperatures across the globe. The Indian southwest monsoon appears to be affected by some of its remnants, even in June. Meteorologists ob-



served extra-tropical circulation prevailing over much lower latitudes over the Indian subcontinent and adjoining north Indian Seas (Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal) until a few days ago — even after the onset of the monsoon over the Indian mainland. This resulted in conditions that were not supportive enough for the smooth inflow of monsoon currents blowing from the Arabian Sea, A K Srivastava, head, climate research division at IMD, Pune, told *The Indian Express*.

Under normal atmospheric conditions, warmer northwestern regions and a relatively cooler equatorial belt facilitate and pull over the monsoon currents from southern hemisphere across the Arabian Sea along the western coast towards the land. However, this year, extra-tropical anomalies over the

extreme northwestern region and the neighborhood left the entire region cooler, acting as a deterrent to the incoming monsoon winds. Besides, there was no low pressure system formed over the Arabian Sea that could have alternatively aided the monsoon progress along the west coast.

These, according to IMD officials, led to slower-than-expected progress of the western branch of the Southwest monsoon. Consequently, it did not bring significant amounts of rainfall over regions along the west coast. The otherwise heavy rainfall-experiencing areas including Kerala and Konkan-Goa remain rainfall-deficient by 35% and 54%, respectively, until June 26.

Contrarily, the situation with respect to the eastern branch of monsoon progressed

THIS WORD MEANS: NON-PERMANENT MEMBER, UNSC

India seat endorsed: how are countries elected?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

MUMBAI, JUNE 26

INDIA'S CANDIDATURE for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council has been endorsed unanimously by the Asia Pacific group, which comprises 55 countries, including Pakistan. “A unanimous step. Asia-Pacific Group @UN unanimously endorses India's candidature for a non-permanent seat of the Security Council for a 2-year term in 2021/22,” India's permanent representative at the UN, Syed Akbaruddin tweeted.

10 countries, 5 seats

The endorsement means that India has a “clean slate” candidature — that is there is no other contestant from the group — for the elections that will be held for five non-permanent members next year, for the 2021-22 term.

Each year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members out of a total of 10, for a two-year term. These 10 seats are distributed among the regions thus: five for African and Asian countries; one for Eastern European countries; two for Latin American and Caribbean countries; two for Western European and other countries.

Of the five seats for Africa and Asia, three are for Africa and two for Asia; there is an informal understanding between the two groups to reserve one for an Arab country. The Africa and Asia Pacific group takes turns every two years to put up an Arab candidate.

Elections for terms beginning in even-numbered years select two African members, and one each within Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Terms beginning in odd-numbered years consist of two Western European and Other members, and one each from Asia-Pacific,

Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Asian contests

Unlike Africa, which has formalised a system of rotation of its three seats according to the region, the Asia-Pacific grouping often seen contests. Last year, there was a contest between Maldives and Indonesia.

Irrespective of whether a country is a “clean slate” candidate and has been endorsed by its group, it needs to secure the votes of two-thirds of the members present and voting at the General Assembly session (a minimum of 129 votes if all 193 member states participate). Formal balloting takes place at elections to all the main UN bodies.

When contested, the elections for non-permanent seats can be fraught and can go on for several rounds. In 1975, there was a contest between India and Pakistan, which went to eight rounds. Pakistan won the seat

that year. In 1996, India lost a contest to Japan.

India has been a non-permanent member of the Security Council eight time previously: 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, 1991-92 and 2011-12. For the 2011-12 term, India won 187 of 190 votes after Kazakhstan stood down from its candidacy.

The 55 countries that comprise the Asia-Pacific group are: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, North Korea, South Korea, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, UAE, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Vietnam, and Yemen.

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

Did high methane level indicate life on Mars? The science and the setback

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

LAST WEEK, NASA's Curiosity rover discovered high amounts of methane in the air on Mars, leading to excitement whether this was an indication of life on the Red Planet, or beneath its surface (*The New York Times* report published in *The Indian Express*, June 24). But on Monday, NASA reported that the methane had fallen back to usual levels. The setback means the question of life remains unanswered. What were scientists hoping to find, and what does methane signify?

What is methane?

On Earth, methane (CH₄) is a naturally occurring gas. Most of the methane on Earth is produced in industrial processes — some of it by microbes, and some occurring as underground natural gas that had been formed by earlier generations of microbial life. Many of these methane-pro-

ducing microbes live in the digestive systems of animals, especially cows.

However, methane can also be produced by abiotic processes (those that do not involve living organisms). It has been found to occur in formations such as rocks, springs and aquifers, and studies have concluded that it was formed there by chemical reactions between carbon and hydrogen atoms at low temperature.

Once it is released into the atmospheres of either Earth or Mars, methane is relatively short-lived. Since the time the gas was first detected on Mars, it has been considered a potential biomarker. The first time was in 2003 by the Mars Express, a European Space Agency orbiter. Since then, there has been further evidence of the gas in Mars' atmosphere.

So what's new?

In most previous observations, the concentration of methane in the Martian air has been low. Then in 2013, Curiosity — which had landed on Mars in 2012 — de-



Curiosity Rover, which has detected high methane level. NASA

tected methane in a concentration of seven parts per billion by volume. Now, methane concentrations on Earth are

much higher — the global mean is over 1,800 parts per million — but the Mars measurement caused excitement because

it was much higher than previous readings. This concentration continued for about a couple of months, then ebbed away before scientists could establish where the methane came from.

Last week's readings were an unprecedented 21 parts per billion. On Earth, it created excitement to the extent that scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory cancelled Curiosity's original schedule for the weekend, so that it could repeat the experiment. They were hoping to detect the source of the gas, and in the process clues that might point to the existence of life on the Red Planet.

What now

On Wednesday, NASA reported that the second reading had fallen back to less than 1 part per billion..

This suggests that last week's methane detection was a transient methane plume, which has been observed in the past, NASA explained on its website. While scientists have observed the background levels rise and

No MOBOCRACY

PM Modi has expressed anguish at Jharkhand lynching. His message must be urgently heeded — and enforced

ELEVEN MEN HAVE been arrested and two policemen suspended for the murder of Tabrez Ansari, who died on Saturday, four days after a mob grievously assaulted him for suspected theft in Jharkhand. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in the Rajya Sabha that the lynching in Jharkhand has “pained” him. “Doshiyon ko kadi se kadi saza milnee chahiye (the guilty should be punished severely)”, he said. On coming back to power with an enhanced mandate, PM Modi had added “sabka vishwas” to his pledge of “sabka saath, sabka vikas”. Recent reports that have come in from some states of mobs forcing Muslim men to chant “Jai Shri Ram” and “Jai Hanuman”, and the murder of Ansari, who, too, was forced to do so by the mob that tied him to an electric pole and attacked him, have drawn attention to the urgent need for the PM’s message to be heeded — and enforced.

The incident in Jharkhand adds to a grim tally: At least 18 persons have been reportedly targeted and killed by a mob in the state since March 2016. There have been few convictions in these cases. Shockingly, in one instance, men convicted in a lynching incident at Ramgarh were later honoured by Jharkhand BJP leaders, including then Union minister Jayant Sinha. Mob violence is not confined to Jharkhand, nor is it a feature only of BJP-ruled states. However, the impression that the party in power condones mob justice, or looks the other way, especially if it targets individuals of the minority community, seems to have empowered vigilante groups in BJP-ruled states. It has also added a communal dimension to mob violence in these states. Shaken by these incidents, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court headed by then Chief Justice of India, Dipak Misra, ruled in July last year that Parliament must “create a separate offence for lynching and provide adequate punishment for the same”. The Court said “a special law in this field would instil a sense of fear for law amongst the people who involve themselves in such kinds of activities”. A Group of Ministers was set up to look into the matter. There has been no visible progress on the matter since.

The fact is that existing laws are sufficient to tackle mob violence and vigilantism — if the executive has the political will to do so. The Raghubar Das government in Ranchi has done well to arrest those suspected of lynching Ansari. But its work is not yet done. It needs to ensure that due process is taken to its just conclusion, the culprits are punished and help is provided to the victim’s family. A stern message needs to be sent out that any attempt to subvert the law and due process will be punished quickly and firmly.

SMALL STEPS FORWARD

A new report suggests measures to ease woes of small businesses. Its recommendations are well-judged

THE COMMITTEE SET up to undertake a comprehensive review of the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector, which has submitted its report to the RBI, has examined issues such as access to finance and infrastructure bottlenecks that continue to plague the sector. Broadly, its suggestions are well-judged.

Lack of access to finance continues to be an impediment to the sector’s growth. Bank lending continues to be disproportionately geared towards large entities, leaving a huge funding gap for MSMEs. The committee traces this skew to two factors — high level of non-performing assets (NPAs), and high cost to servicing. Typically, banks tend to restrict credit flow to MSMEs, discouraged by the high level of bad loans, which range between 8 to 11 per cent. A major reason for these bad loans is delay in buyer payments. MSMEs struggle to recover their dues from both the private and the public sector. To address this problem, the committee has suggested that public sector procurement from MSMEs be routed through the GeM portal to bring transparency in procurement and to quicken payments. This, if monitored closely, could help shorten the payment cycle considerably. There is also the suggestion that the MSME development act be amended to ensure that all MSMEs mandatorily upload their invoices to an information utility, which will display names of defaulting buyers. This, it hopes, could “act as a moral suasion on buyers”, ensure timely payment, and thus minimise NPAs. But this is easier said than done. Big companies, with greater bargaining power, are likely to continue to stretch out the credit cycle. There is also the issue of documentation. Banks are wary of lending in the absence of detailed financial information as it makes assessing credit worthiness difficult. The problem is compounded by lack of collateral. To address this issue, the committee proposes a novel approach. Rather than relying on the traditional balance-sheet based funding route, it has proposed shifting to a cash flow based lending model. This not only provides greater clarity on the payment capacity of firms, but can also help in determining the repayment schedule.

The committee has also suggested doubling the collateral free loan limit to Rs 20 lakh, up from the current limit of Rs 10 lakh. While the move could address the sector’s cash flow issues considerably, coming at a time when concerns are being voiced about the true extent of bad loans under Mudra, this could be a risky proposition.

GIFTING A SLOGAN

By banning a barb against Imran Khan, Pakistan’s deputy speaker may have handed Opposition a rallying cry

QASIM KHAN SURI, deputy speaker of Pakistan’s National Assembly (its central legislature), should have stuck to the tried-and-tested “sticks and stones” defence. Instead, he let a word get to him. When the House echoed for over an hour with chants of Imran Khan being a “selected” prime minister, Suri banned the use of the word. To make sure the implication of the Opposition’s taunt is made clear to everyone who learns about the incident through the media, Suri added: “This is a House of elected representatives!”

Even a passing glance at the proceedings of Pakistan’s Parliament and provincial legislatures is enough to register, among Indians, a sense of familiarity. The same raucousness, sense of manufactured outrage, trading of insults — and yes, genuine debate — can be seen in snatches in Pakistan. But, and this is important, its legislative office-bearers seem not to have realised exactly how to balance the neutrality of their office and the loyalty to their political formations. And in using the former to please the latter, one is likely to do more harm than good. Already, a motion has been filed in the Punjab Provincial Assembly condemning the ban, and the Opposition seems to be realising that the word carries enough meaning to be a rallying cry against PM Khan.

After all, “selected prime minister” begs the question: Selected by whom? The Pakistan “deep state” — army, intelligence networks, etc — of course. By banning the use of the word in the assembly, the deputy speaker has ensured its implication is widely discussed outside. What he should have done was leave the trading of barbs to those who are still officially partisan legislators. Or he could have taken a cue from his counterparts in India, where Speakers maintain at least the appearance of being non-partisan. A ban, after all, could turn a barb — which could have been responded to by the treasury benches in kind — into a slogan.



SUJATHA RAO

AS PER MEDIA reports, 172 children have died in the space of three weeks in Muzaffarpur, Bihar. This is higher than the 122 deaths recorded in the 2014 outbreak. Clearly, no lessons seem to have been learnt. This is unacceptable and the media outrage is justified.

A similar tragedy occurred at Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh in 2017, when over 600 children reportedly died of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES). Now, in Muzaffarpur, AES is once again in focus. The *Lancet Global*, a leading and authoritative medical journal, published a study analysing the 2014 deaths in Muzaffarpur.

The findings were disturbing: The case fatality rate was 31 per cent; 55 per cent of the sick children were boys with three quarters of them below four years age; the case patients’ measurements showed that 16 per cent of them were “wasted” and 65 per cent “stunted” (due to chronic hunger). Drawing from the detailed examination of the case records, blood tests, socioeconomic profiling, etc, the experts concluded that the plausible — not necessarily sufficient — causal pathway to deaths could have been litchi consumption on an empty stomach, causing hypoglycemia, requiring treatment. The study concluded that three steps need to be taken to prevent such deaths: Reduce litchi consumption by children during the peak season; ensure consumption of the evening meal; and in suspected cases requiring treatment, ensure a rapid glucose correction.

The *Lancet* study, along with the evidence of AES around Muzaffarpur, brings out three unacceptable factors: One, the continued lack of clarity on the direct and distal causal factors that should and could have been addressed on priority, enabling the formulation and enforcement of protocols for prevention and treatment. This is particularly saddening since within a space of five years, we have had at least four outbreaks of child deaths in Bihar and UP — 2014, 2016, 2017 and now 2019 accounting for over 1,700 children dying needlessly.

Two, the children who died were all from poor families whose poverty status was multidimensional — unclean habitation,



P D T ACHARY

THE 10TH SCHEDULE of the Constitution, commonly referred to as the anti-defection law, is facing the most serious challenge yet in its 34 years of existence. The challenge is not judicial, but political. Legislators show a tendency to ignore the law and defect to the parties in power. Earlier this month, 12 out of the 16 members of the Congress Legislature Party in Telangana “merged” with the TRS, the ruling party in Telangana. Close on the heels of this defection, four members of the Rajya Sabha, from the Telugu Desam Party “merged” with the BJP and became members of the legislature party of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha. Quite surprisingly, the media in general has approved of this act of defection as a valid exercise in accordance with the law — that if two-thirds of the legislators of a party merge with another party, it would be a legally valid merger. This is a wrong interpretation of the law.

The 10th Schedule was enacted to put an end to the scourge of defection. The political class viewed defection as such a serious menace to the stability of the democratic system that the anti-defection law was made a constitutional law. Constitutional authorities such as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and the Speaker of Lok Sabha, who act as tribunals in defection cases, have scrupulously followed the spirit of the law in deciding the cases under the 10th Schedule.

The spate of defections taking place now

Let’s politicise health

It is time the political leadership adopted a zero-tolerance policy to laxity in healthcare

poor housing, overcrowding, hunger and illiteracy. The recent case has two more important points to be noted. Eating litchis *per se* is not the cause: Eating unripe, rotten litchis, from the ground and partially consumed ones, followed by no meal are. It does not require much imagination to understand the typology of the children who eat such type of litchis and “skip” evening meals. One article suggested that the enquiry showed that some of the deceased children had no food for three days. So, the causal factor is clearly poverty-associated hunger and dietary practices.

The third factor is the collapse of the primary healthcare system. Bihar does have a legacy issue. Healthcare in general and primary care in particular has been severely neglected in the past. The 52nd Round of the NSSO had clearly shown that 22 of the 33 million people impoverished due to health expenses were from the four northern states of rural UP, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. This was the justification for the NRHM initiative. The improvements in rural healthcare resulted in Bihar reducing its IMR from 60 per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 38 and maternal mortality is 165 per 1,00,000 births in 2016. Even as the agenda of revitalising a moribund primary healthcare system is unfinished, policy attention shifted to non-communicable disease control and hospital insurance. These are misplaced priorities as the disease burden of Bihar, as per the ICMR study of 2015, shows that communicable diseases alone account for 43 per cent of the disease burden — others being non-communicable and chronic diseases which too can be largely prevented and require to be diagnosed early and managed in primary healthcare settings. Significantly, 70 per cent of deaths are premature, with almost 30 per cent of them among children under 14 years, while the top four causal factors of mortality are malnutrition, air pollution, contaminated water, poor sanitation and poor diet — high levels of anemia.

These risk factors which provide a home to virus and bacteria, again require to be addressed at the household/community levels by primary healthcare workers.

GREENER PASTURES

The anti-defection law is routinely misinterpreted

have brought back the focus to this law once again. Does any provision of this law actually allow any legislator to move out of his party and join another party without any legal hitch? This question has assumed great importance in the context of the Telangana Congress MLAs merging in the TRS and the TDP MPs of Rajya Sabha merging with the BJP. They seem to assume that having two-third of the total number of members of their respective parties means they can merge with the other parties, without incurring disqualification.

Para 2(1)(a) of the 7th Schedule disqualifies a legislator, however, if he voluntarily gives up the membership of his party. So any MLA or MP is liable to be disqualified if he leaves his party voluntarily. But Para 4 is in the nature of an exception. It exempts such legislators from disqualification upon fulfilling two conditions: One, his original political party has merged with the other party; two, two-thirds of the legislators of that party have agreed to such a merger. The Speaker can exempt them from disqualification only on the fulfilment of these two conditions. This makes it clear that any merger mentioned is between the original political party and the other party. But a mere merger between two parties is not enough for invoking the protection of Para 4.

After all, the entire 10th Schedule relates to the defection of legislators. Therefore, their role

Preventive measures and simple treatments like providing glucose correction can be done in PHCs and community centres at the block level. Thus, while the condition of district hospitals — without basic equipment and adequate skills is unacceptable and require to be improved without delay — adding 1,500 beds is not the answer. As the Ebola experience of Sierra leone and Liberia conclusively demonstrated, constructing big hospitals at great expense was not what contained the epidemic, strengthening community health did.

The nation-wide anger of the junior doctors and of people in Muzaffarpur is a wake up call for country’s political leadership to go beyond rhetoric. Infectious diseases know no boundaries and are unafraid even of the powerful. Containment of these diseases requires waging a war against their underlying social determinants — clean air, water, sanitation and nutrition and access to primary healthcare.

This is not a choice but an imperative and a fundamental pre-requisite for development. Economists advising governments on achieving growth need to appreciate this factor, one that several other countries have long understood. Growth needs to be measured not in GDP terms nor on ease of business, but on longevity of life, ease of living, productivity, well-being and innovation. To drive home this point, that countries like India continue to deny, the World Bank developed the Human Capital Index showing that the drivers of growth are education and health: A fact that the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health chaired by Jeffrey Sachs noted in 2000. Under the HCI, India ranks 115 out of 157 countries.

Health is a political question. It is time that the political leadership collectively agrees to set aside partisan acrimony and adopts a zero-tolerance policy to any laxity on matters related to health. It is time that leaders decisively demonstrate that they care and that every life counts.

Rao is former Health Secretary, Government of India and author of Do We Care? India’s Health System

in the merger process is very crucial. Thus, this Para says, that for the purpose of exempting a defecting legislator, the merger shall be deemed to have taken place only if two-thirds of the legislators have agreed to such a merger. If the legislators have not agreed to the merger, there is no merger under Para 4. The lawmakers have used words very carefully. The words “two-thirds of the Members. have agreed to such merger”, used in Para 4(2), make it abundantly clear that the merger takes place between two parties and the requisite number of legislators of that party must agree to such merger. Thereafter, the speaker exempts those legislators from disqualification. It may be noted here that the legislators do not merge, they only agree to the merger done by their original political party. Thus, a merger between the political parties concerned has to take place first. Only then can the legislators “agree to such merger”.

In all the cases mentioned above, the legislators have acted on the assumption that all that is required to do is for them to “merge” with the other party and the merger of their original political party is not necessary.

This is a misreading of the law. The sooner they realise it, the better for them as well as for the democratic system.

The writer is a former secretary general of the Lok Sabha

JUNE 27, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

BOEING’S RACISM

THE BOEING AIRCRAFT Company and Lloyds of London have stated in a Washington court that since an average Indian earns only a dollar a day, his life is cheaper than an American’s. Consequently, any financial damages given to an Indian passenger, who died aboard Air India’s 147 flight 855, on January 1, 1978, should not be computed on Californian living standards. In making this racial and arbitrarily comparative observation on human life, the Boeing company has refrained from adding that the price of its aircraft do not differ when sold to poor or wealthy nations. Also the grief at the loss of a family member is the same universally, and

cannot be weighed in dollars and cents. The multi-million dollar case on behalf of the 213 people who died off the Bombay coast has been intensifying gradually.

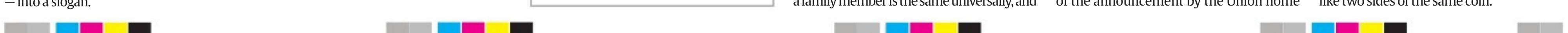
CRP DISMISSALS

ABOUT 441 CENTRAL Reserve Police personnel in Trivandrum were dismissed from service. The dismissal was ordered for their participation in the strike that began on June 21, said an official spokesman. Action against some more would be taken soon. However, they would be given time to explain their position, the spokesman said. The action against the CRP personnel came in the wake of the announcement by the Union home

minister, H M Patel, that four battalions, including two stationed near Trivandrum, would be disbanded.

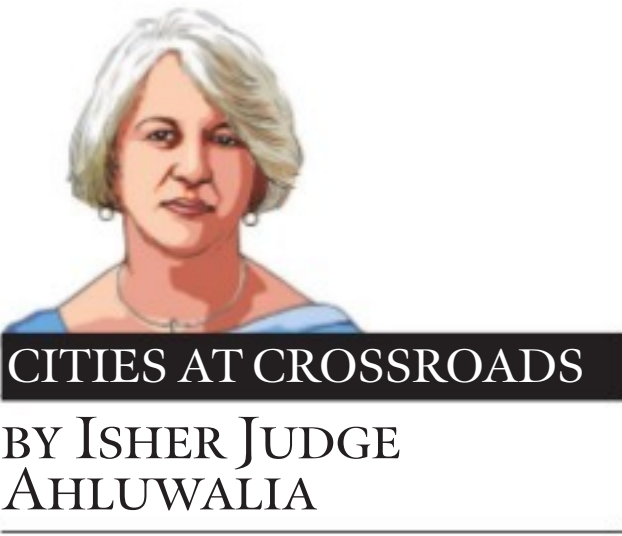
KARNATAKA CONG PLAN

THE GENERAL BODY of the newly formed Karnataka Congress party called upon its rank and file to safeguard political stability and economic development in the state. The chief minister, Devaraj Urs, was elected leader of the break-away majority of the Karnataka Congress Legislature Party. The economic resolution adopted by the general body noted that in Karnataka, economic development and political stability have been like two sides of the same coin.



Not just pipes and tankers

A compact between the Centre and states is necessary to address India’s water-related challenges. This should involve local governments and communities of water users



CHENNAI HAS BEEN in the news recently for its water crisis. Scuffles and suffering have been reported from different parts of the city. Water crimes in Ranchi have also hit the headlines. Cities in Madhya Pradesh have seen stabbings and killings over water, and the police has been called upon to guard water tankers and water sources. Cape Town in South Africa was the first major city in the modern era to face the threat of running out of drinking water, as reported by the BBC in February 2018. The BBC listed another 11 cities most likely to run out of water. This list included Bengaluru.

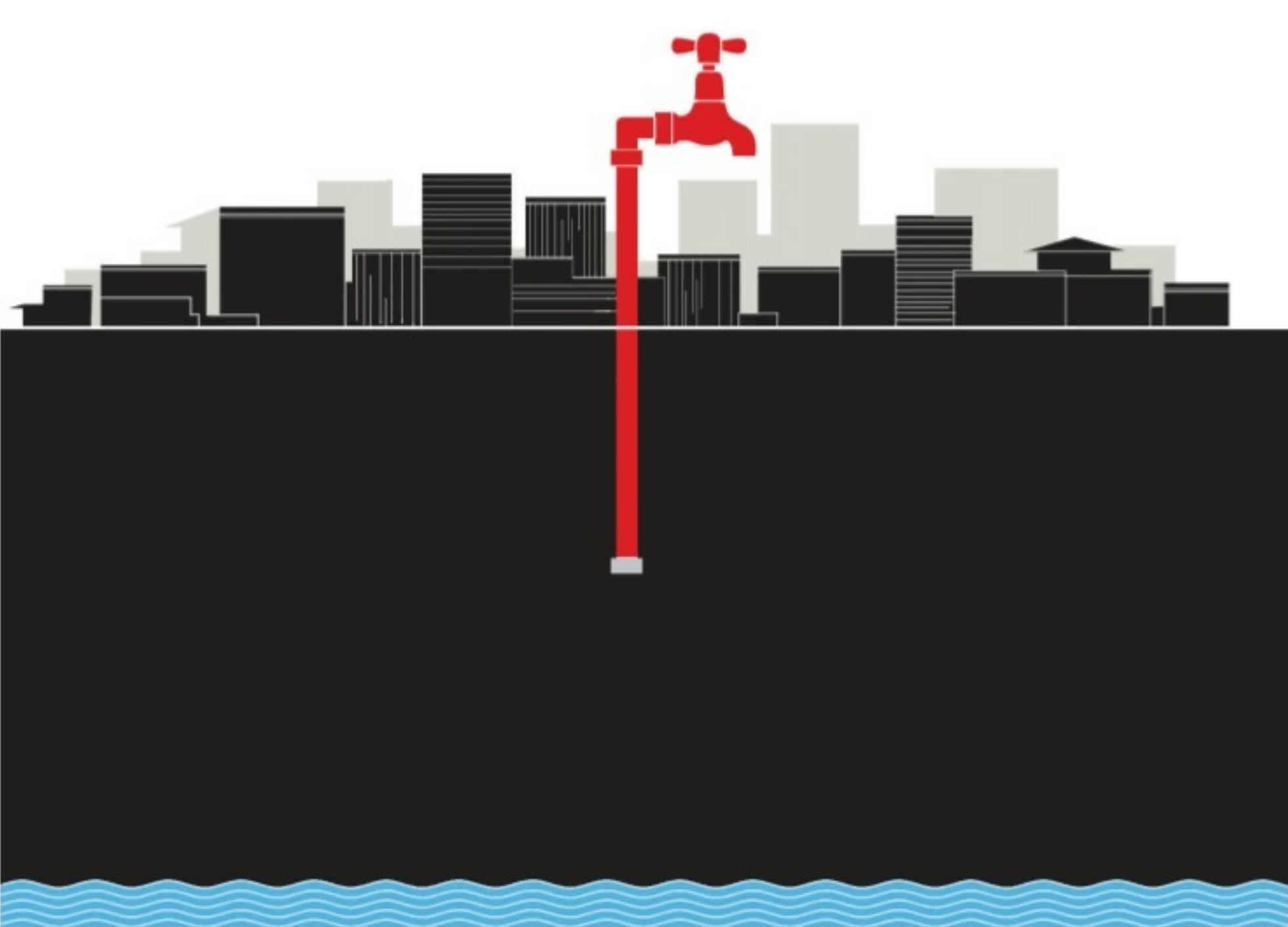
The 2030 Water Resources Group on “Charting Our Water Futures” set up by the erstwhile Planning Commission in 2009 had projected that if the current demand pattern for water continues, by 2030, the available water will meet only about half of India’s demand for water. Ten years later, in 2019, the water crisis is here and it is taking its toll in rural as well as urban areas of India. We are staring at a train wreck in slow motion and we need to act fast and act boldly to avoid the crash.

Water scarcity in India has come about not so much from insufficient supply as from the way in which we manage the water we have. Agriculture uses 78 per cent of India’s water, and uses it very inefficiently (agricultural water use efficiency is 30 per cent for surface water and 55 per cent for groundwater in India, compared with 77 per cent in Israel). Notwithstanding the large investments in irrigation networks, about two-thirds of water used for irrigation comes from groundwater. Two factors — the huge electricity subsidies for farmers to pump groundwater and the fact that groundwater is largely unregulated — have led to a steady explosion in groundwater use through tube-wells for irrigation over the past several decades. About 80 per cent of the rural demand for drinking water is also met by groundwater.

Urban India’s inefficiency in water use arises from inadequate, old and dilapidated distribution networks, inefficient operations, inadequate metering, incomplete billing and collection, and a general state of poor governance. Another source of inefficiency comes from not treating wastewater and using the recycled water for specialised uses such as horticulture, and also for flushing toilets. Under-pricing of urban water also contributes to wasteful use. If something is under-priced, users will use more of it.

Most of us living in cities expect to have access to drinking water from taps in our homes. This requires a distribution network of pipes which can bring water from the basic source of bulk supply to our homes. However, access to treated tap water is available to only 62 per cent of urban households (Census 2011). Those who are unconnected to the piped network and include mostly, but not only, the poor, have to rely on buying water from tankers at exorbitant rates. This leads to increasing but unaccounted use of groundwater by extensive digging of borewells to meet the demand deficit.

There is clearly a need to expand coverage to the “unconnected” population. This will call for the expansion and renovation of the



Suvajit Dey

infrastructure of the distribution network. It will also call for additional supplies of water, especially because the groundwater that is currently being used to supply this population is expected to dry up. The Niti Aayog has projected that the groundwater of 21 cities will run out by 2020 (that is, next year) and the cities include Bengaluru, Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad.

Financing the expansion in urban water supply will be a problem. Even if the capital cost of the infrastructure is made available either through National Missions or public-private partnership, the operation and maintenance cost of running the system (and in the case of PPP, a large part of the capital cost) will have to be recovered through user charges. Pricing water is important both for demand management and for economic viability of water delivery systems.

We also need to mobilise more supply of water from basic natural sources. Only then can greater connectivity result in piped water delivery to all in urban areas. The mobilisation of additional supplies poses a major challenge since the natural recharge zones are increasingly eroded because of unplanned urbanisation.

We also need to deal with the supply constraints arising from the neglect of the rivers, lakes, ponds and other waterbodies in and around our cities that feed the reservoirs which are the bulk sources of water. These water bodies need to be protected from encroachment so that our catchment area for water storage and rainwater harvesting is not reduced. This requires strict vigilance on land-use planning and building permissions in our cities. It may even warrant removal of existing encroachments. An important role has to be played by the state governments concerned, including ensuring compliance with the environmental guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and the National Green Tribunal. Above all, increased water-use efficiency in agriculture is critical to release water supply from agriculture for other uses.

The quality of water issue is also very significant because of its serious implications for public health. Only about 30 per cent of

Most of us living in cities expect to have access to drinking water from taps in our homes. This requires a distribution network of pipes which can bring water from the basic source of bulk supply to our homes. However, access to treated tap water is available to only 62 per cent of urban households (Census 2011). Those who are unconnected to the piped network and include mostly, but not only, the poor, have to rely on buying water from tankers at exorbitant rates. This leads to increasing but unaccounted use of groundwater by extensive digging of borewells to meet the demand deficit of water.

the municipal waste water or sewage is treated and the rest is released untreated into the rivers and/or the ground. Because of the density and concentration in urban areas, contamination from wastewater happens much faster. It is also important to ensure that untreated sewage is not dumped into open stormwater drains through which it is carried and discharged into water bodies. Surveys of groundwater in recent years show higher and higher levels of microbiological contamination. It is essential to ensure that the wastewater is treated before it finds its way back into our basic source of water and contaminates it.

Water is even more important than food for survival. No wonder that water governance is intimately linked to politics. It reminds me of the Pakistani play *Kaala Maunda Bhes* (*Black is My Attire*), which I saw in Delhi some 20 years ago. In the play, the owner of the only well in the village, Khoosay Shah (literally, the Lord of the well), reigned supreme and his rule was called “Khoosay Shah di Sarkar” which was subordinate only to what was called the Vaddi Sarkar, that is, the Almighty. Cities in Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh certainly have no *Khoosay Shah* yet, but the crisis of water supply seems just as acute.

It is clear that management of water requires a holistic approach, taking account of the multiple aspects that have been spelt out above. In a way, setting up of the Ministry of Jal Shakti is a recognition of this, except that the ministry deals with rural water needs only. We cannot split urban water from rural. Water will flow from rural to urban and vice-versa, and has always done so. Besides, reshaping water governance will require state governments and local governments to take coordinated action in a federal system. What is needed is a political compact between the Centre and states to jointly address the challenges of saving India’s water, while actively involving local governments and engaging with the communities of water users. It is a tall order but there is no alternative but to begin.

The writer is chairperson, ICRIER, Delhi, and former chairperson of the high-powered expert committee on urban infrastructure and services

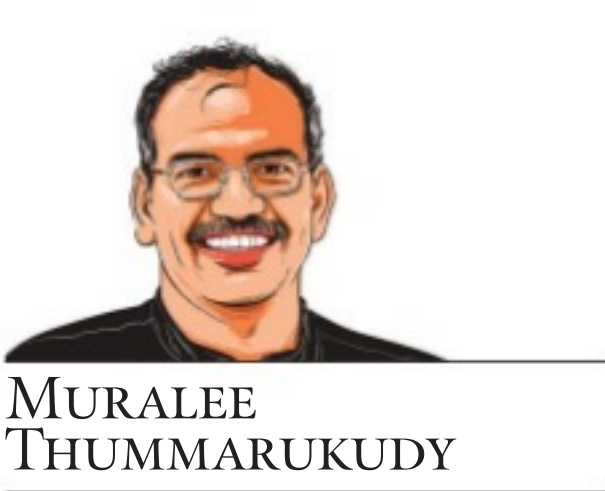
WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The demolition job on the Obama climate legacy continues: the rules limiting methane emissions from oil and gas wells, the climate agreement in Paris, now the clean energy plan. Next on the hit list? Probably Mr. Obama’s fuel economy standards.”

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

Speaking in many tongues

Emphasis of New Education Policy on teaching multiple languages is welcome. But do we have enough skilled teachers?



THE DRAFT New Education Policy (NEP) places great emphasis on language education. It identifies the benefits of children being multilingual, states how the knowledge of and fluency in English creates an elite group within the country and how knowledge of foreign languages can be beneficial to employability. This considerable attention and importance to language education in the draft policy goes all the way from primary education to the doctoral level.

The policy proposes that children from class 1 (age 6) onwards are taught three languages simultaneously. There is a proposal that one of the Indian classical languages (Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, etc) is taught between class 6 and 8. An additional compulsory course is the “Languages of India” for all students at the upper primary level (class 6-8), which will cover all the major languages of India — a few phrases, their history, heritage and structure. At the secondary level (class 9-12), children will be able to choose one or more foreign languages. The new higher education policy envisages a liberal arts approach, which means that the continued learning of language will be possible (and, in fact, encouraged) throughout the degree programmes whether in science, engineering or medicine. Finally, those pursuing doctoral research will have to study how to communicate scientific aspects of their work in a local language so as to promote their ability to communicate outside their professional domain in an Indian language.

Research around the world has concluded that children are enthusiastic about learning new languages. Many European countries already teach up to three languages to their children at the primary level and it is understood that being multilingual has advantages not only for employment but also for intellectual development. If the NEP is implemented unchanged, Indian students will have the record of being prepared with the maximum number of languages when they leave school education. The question is: How well can such a policy be implemented in all parts of the country within a short span of time? The educational policy document has not delved into the question of how to translate the policy in the field. Good intentions alone cannot deliver the desired educational outcome.

Take the question of three languages being taught in primary school as an example. India has about 1.4 million schools imparting elementary education. Currently,

they mostly impart education only in their mother tongue with a very small percentage that teach English at the elementary level. Assuming that one will need at least one teacher per school to teach one language, it will take at least one million English teachers and another one million teachers in other languages to have this policy implemented. While English language teachers could still be found locally, where will the teachers for the third language come from?

If 2,21,000 elementary schools in Uttar Pradesh need to teach a language in addition to English and Hindi, one would need 2,21,000 teachers of Malayalam, Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati, etc, to be available in UP. While it is true that children are enthusiastic and able to study many languages when they are young, the research also presumes that the teaching of such languages is also competent. Considering that our country still has 92,000 single teacher schools, will the single teacher then end up teaching English as well as another language? Can such teaching be efficient and competent? The net result could be that only students in urban areas and elite schools will be able to afford the full implementation of the policy.

The same holds true for foreign languages. As the curriculum provides option for learning a foreign language, urban and elite schools will soon have French, Spanish, German, Chinese, etc. in their curriculum. How soon can that be scaled across 1,35,000 secondary schools and 1,09,000 senior secondary schools? Do we have so many foreign language teachers in India? Will this proposal further widen the rural-urban, rich-poor divide in educational outcomes?

These apprehensions notwithstanding, I am very enthusiastic about the potential of the NEP on many aspects, including languages. If the government truly apply its mind, there are many ways to bridge this gap. For example, retired English teachers and English graduates can be mobilised in a nation-wide campaign to ensure that every child in India has access to English language. Undergraduate students from across the country can be given basic pedagogic training and “teach for India” scholarships to go and stay in another state and teach their language. India could offer 1,00,000 scholarships to foreign nationals to come and teach their native languages (including English). All these will not only improve our language education but also broaden our perspective.

Technology, in many ways, is eliminating or at least reducing the importance of language learning. But in the interim, we can leverage technology to teach languages as well as improve the standard of language teachers.

The writer is Operations Manager, United Nations Environment Programme. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily that of the United Nations

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RESPECT DISSENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Ease the tension’ (IE, June 26). The resignation of RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya was expected. He had fallen out of favour with the government with his dissent. However, creative tensions amongst the various policy makers are a good sign and augurs well for a democracy. The resignations in the RBI should serve as an eye-opener for the government and push it towards becoming more accommodating of divergent points of view.

Deepak Singhal, Noida

BSP’S CHALLENGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Family firm’ (IE, June 26). By giving important posts to her brother and nephew, the BSP supremo Mayawati is walking the path of dynastic politics, without sensing the political churn in the country. Moreover, the tendency of Dalits to vote as a community has undergone a change. As the results of the 2019 elections show, Dalits do not follow the herd mentality. The BSP is on the wane and the induction of Mayawati’s family members will do nothing but hasten the party’s downfall.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

POOR DECISION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Nature vs nuptials’ (IE, June 26). It is difficult to understand why the Uttarakhand government allowed the mega wedding at Auli, considering that it had all the makings of an environmental disaster.

Sangeeta Kampani, Delhi

The writer is assistant professor, Department of Psychology, Ashoka University



Naive like a puppy

It’s time humans stop expecting cats to relate to them as dogs

THE EDITORIAL, ‘Puppy eyes’ (IE, June 19) claims that dogs have evolved to manipulate human emotions, based on a finding by a research group at the University of Portsmouth. The cited study finds that there is a specialised muscle found above the eye sockets of dogs that allows them to modulate their facial expressions, and specifically assume the fabled “puppy eyed” look to which we hapless humans find ourselves jelly-legged with love and adoration. The research is a legit find, having made its way into one of the world’s foremost scientific journals with extremely wide readership. But even then the study — and the editorial — left me a bit baffled with its (almost puppy-like) naiveté.

The idea that humans react fondly to facial features that reflect those of babies of our own species has been the leading theory in this field since being proposed in 1943 by Konrad Lorenz, whose work in instinctive behaviour instills a gospel-like reverence, despite his Nazi politics. Since that time, there has been an abundance of evidence that indeed, humans do respond to the young of most vertebrate and mammalian species because of the similarity of facial and bodily

features in human babies — a flat head, chubby cheeks, round big eyes, a small pudgy nose, rotund bodies and short extremities. In that sense, almost all species have evolved, including our own, to invoke feelings of love that ensure protection, nourishment, shelter instead of cruel treatment or harm. The evidence in the University of Portsmouth study is at best a missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle trying to understand the biological changes that underlie the process of domestication and bifurcation of the canine species from the wolves. However, as for whether dogs are capable of emotional bonding, there is so much scientific evidence in its favour, that it is not a question anymore, actually. Dogs and wolves share 99.9 per cent of their genomes but in chromosome six, at a few loci, our canine friends differ in the expression of few genes that influence social interactions, suggesting they are hard wired

DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

A fortnightly column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of ‘The Indian Express’

to interact favourably with our species.

The erstwhile cat parent in me takes offence at the bad rap that is in the share of cats, including in the editorial. Cats are not manipulative: We just don’t understand as much about their behaviour as we do for dogs. Even genetically, the difference between domesticated cats and their feral counterparts are not as stark as

the difference between dogs and wolves. Further, research suggests that while dogs recognise us as a separate species and their endearing behaviours are reserved for human interactions, a dog is likely never to behave with a fellow canine as he might react with a human. A cat, in contrast, treats us just as physically bigger cats. All their behaviour towards humans, hissing, purring, kneading, rubbing their bodies, raising their tails are behaviors they routinely conduct with other cats. This does

not make them manipulative, it is just our lack of understanding the feline world.

But what tickled the funny bone in me was the obviousness of the research — and at points, the editorial too. Before the existence of this muscle was known, no one knew their dogs had them wrapped around their little finger-err-paw? It is almost similar to the analogy of the clinical trial testing on whether jumping without a parachute increases the chances of death in pilots. Of course, biological features in all domesticated animals evolved to evoke feelings in humans that would be of evolutionary advantage to such animals. The jump from evolution to manipulative is so abrupt, I am reminded of the Bengali litterateur Sandipan Chattopadhyay, who while once critiquing the love of jargon in leftist theoreticians had remarked, it is but a pity that the frog is not aware of its own scientific name.

Turns out, not only dog owners, the poor canines are equally ignorant about their own manipulative abilities.

The writer is assistant professor, Department of Psychology, Ashoka University



Scoring on health

States, now with greater resources at their command, must upgrade primary health care

The Health Index 2019 released by NITI Aayog makes the important point that some States and Union Territories are doing better on health and well-being even with a lower economic output, while others are not improving upon high standards. Some are actually slipping in their performance. In the assessment during 2017-18, a few large States present a dismal picture, reflecting the low priority their governments have accorded to health and human development since the Aayog produced its first ranking for 2015-16. The disparities are stark. Populous and politically important Uttar Pradesh brings up the rear on the overall Health Index with a low score of 28.61, while the national leader, Kerala, has scored 74.01. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra join Kerala as the other top performers, with the additional distinction of making incremental progress from the base year. The NITI Aayog Index is a composite based on 23 indicators, covering such aspects as neonatal and infant mortality rates, fertility rate, low birth weight, immunisation coverage and progress in treating tuberculosis and HIV. States are also assessed on improvements to administrative capability and public health infrastructure. For a leading State like Tamil Nadu, the order of merit in the report should serve as a sobering reminder to stop resting on its oars: it has slipped from third to ninth rank on parameters such as low birth weight, functioning public health centres and community health centre grading.

For the Health Index concept to spur States into action, public health must become part of mainstream politics. While the Centre has devoted greater attention to tertiary care and reduction of out-of-pocket expenses through financial risk protection initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, several States remain laggards when it comes to creating a primary health care system with well-equipped PHCs as the unit. This was first recommended in 1946 by the Bhole Committee. The neglect of such a reliable primary care approach even after so many decades affects States such as Bihar, where much work needs to be done to reduce infant and neonatal mortality and low birth weight, and create specialist departments at district hospitals. Special attention is needed to shore up standards of primary care in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Assam and Jharkhand, which are at the bottom of the scale, as per the NITI Aayog assessment. The Health Index does not capture other related dimensions, such as non-communicable diseases, infectious diseases and mental health. It also does not get uniformly reliable data, especially from the growing private sector. What is clear is that State governments now have greater resources at their command under the new scheme of financial devolution, and, in partnership with the Centre, they must use the funds to transform primary health care.

RCEP next steps

India cannot afford to fall out of the free trade agreement negotiations

Leaders of the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations have resoundingly committed to conclude negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership free trade agreement by the end of 2019. Some like the Malaysian Prime Minister went a step further, suggesting that countries not ready to join the RCEP, notably India but also Australia and New Zealand, could join at a later date, allowing a truncated 13-member RCEP to go ahead. Others insist that all 16 members must agree on the final RCEP document. It is clear that ASEAN, which first promoted the RCEP idea in 2012, is putting pressure on all stakeholders to complete the last-mile negotiations. The ASEAN summit, which ended in Bangkok on Sunday, agreed to send a three-member delegation to New Delhi to take forward the talks. RCEP includes ASEAN's FTA partners – India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand – and the FTA would encompass 40% of all global trade among economies that make up a third of global GDP. India has been keen to join. But six years into negotiations, its concerns remain: opening its markets for cheaper goods from countries like China and South Korea; and ensuring that RCEP countries open their markets for Indian manpower (services).

India has a trade deficit with as many as 11 of the RCEP countries, and it is the only one among them that isn't negotiating a bilateral or multilateral free trade agreement with China at present. As a result, although negotiators have agreed to New Delhi's demand for differential tariffs for its trade with China *vis-à-vis* the others, India has also made tagging the "Country of Origin" on all products a sticking point in RCEP negotiations. Despite its misgivings, however, the government has reiterated that it is committed to making RCEP work, and any attempt to cut India out of the agreement was "extremely premature". In the next few months, India will be expected to keep up intense negotiations, and most important, give a clear indication both internally and to the world that it is joining RCEP. To that end, the Commerce Ministry has begun consultations with stakeholders from industries that are most worried about RCEP, including steel and aluminium, copper, textile and pharmaceuticals, and has engaged think tanks and management institutes to develop a consensus in favour of signing the regional agreement. Giving up the chance to join RCEP would mean India would not just miss out on regional trade, but also lose the ability to frame the rules as well as investment standards for the grouping. Above all, at a time of global uncertainties and challenges to multilateralism and the international economic order, a negative message on RCEP would undermine India's plans for economic growth.

Negotiating the forks in the road of diplomacy

India needs a substantive and defined account of its own objectives to steer its strategic course in these stormy times



SUHASINI HAIDAR

Seldom in the recent past has the impact of one month meant more in Indian foreign policy than the present one. And rarely have meetings on the sidelines around one summit carried as much import on India's future policies as the G-20 summit in Osaka (June 28-29), where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold bilateral meetings with at least eight world leaders (most notably U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin), and participate in two parallel trilaterals, the Russia-India-China (RIC) and Japan-U.S.-India (JAI). Two weeks ago, in June, he also held a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Bishkek.

In a few months, he will meet the three world leaders again for more substantive meetings: with a visit to Vladivostok (the Eastern Economic Forum in September), a possible dash to Washington during the UN General Assembly, again in September, and the Wuhan return-visit by Mr. Xi to India in October. Between these two sets of meetings, Mr. Modi has his work cut out on a number of issues, each of which represents a fork in the road, depending on India's decision on them: a fork where the U.S. holds one prong and the Russia-China axis holds the other.

Trade concerns

On trade, the tussle is evident. Many in India had rejoiced when the U.S. first declared a trade war on China, given India's long-standing concerns about China's unfair

trade practices. However, as Mr. Trump trained his guns on India next, the joy evaporated, and choices for the Modi government changed. At Osaka, Mr. Modi will meet Mr. Trump in an effort to give trade issues another try, but he also plans to attend the RIC trilateral as well as a meeting with leaders of BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa), both of which will focus on countering the U.S.'s "unilateralism" on trade. In the months ahead, New Delhi must make another choice, on whether to sign up for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a trade grouping that has taken centre stage after the U.S. walked out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. If trade issues with the U.S., India's largest trading partner, remain intractable, it is not hard to see that the RCEP bloc, with China in it, will become more prominent in India's trade book.

Energy and communications

The choice on energy, and in particular on Iran, comes next. When the Trump administration pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement in May 2018, but granted India and a few other countries a waiver to continue oil imports (as well as one for Chabahar trade), the government had assumed it could muddle through the Iran-U.S. confrontation. Instead, it has lost on both principle and profit. After accepting U.S. sanctions on oil imports, India's intake of cheaper, better Iranian crude will dip from about 23.5 million tonnes in 2018-19 to zero in 2019-20. The waiver for Chabahar turned out to be a red herring as banks, shipping and insurance companies have declined to support India-Afghan trade through the Iranian port for fear of sanctions affecting their other businesses. What follows now will be more difficult for New Delhi, as the U.S. has sanctioned the top rungs of Iran's government and the Is-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

lamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Having meekly submitted to U.S. sanctions, will India now also abjure contact with the Iranian leadership or reject the U.S.'s demand? And where will India's investments and its dreams of larger connectivity via Chabahar and the Russian-led International North-South Transport Corridor go, in the event of a full-scale confrontation between the U.S. and Iran? Willy-nilly, the forks in the road are presenting themselves and choices must be made.

Another choice New Delhi will be forced to make in the next few months is on telecommunications and building its 5G network, for which trials are due to begin in September. The U.S. has made it clear that it expects the Modi government to exclude the Chinese telecom company, Huawei, over security concerns, and threatens to withhold intelligence and security cooperation if India allows this company to control its 5G networks. China has made it equally clear that India must make an "unbiased" choice and will oppose any move to cut Huawei out of the trials. On the Russian S-400 missile system deal too, its a black-or-white decision for the government to make as the U.S. makes it clear that going ahead with the deal won't just invoke sanctions but will close the door to American high-tech and advanced aircraft deals.

Taking firm steps to emancipation

The 2019 election mandate should make the Muslim community ponder over its future



MARKANDEY KATJU

The results of the elections to the 17th Lok Sabha and the scale of the mandate for the Bharatiya Janata Party have made many Muslims in India despondent. But perhaps it is a blessing in disguise.

Since Independence, Muslims have been treated as a vote bank by the Indian National Congress and other so-called secular parties; the community has only been used by the political class with very little having been done for them.

As the Justice Rajinder Sachar Commission has reported, most Muslims in India are still relatively poor and backward. They have been in the grip of reactionary maulanas and crafty politicians with their own vested interests in mind and who have propagated the idea that no government at the Centre and in many States could be formed without their help. This

illusion has now been shattered by the result of the 2019 general election. The recent interview by Karan Thapar with former Union Minister Arif Mohammed Khan illustrates this.

The number of seats won by Muslims in this election could now force the community to ponder over their welfare, how to remedy the situation and improve their lives.

The main cause of their sorry plight is their backwardness, which in turn is due to the reactionary and feudal mindsets of some leaders who claim to represent them both from the clergy and the political class.

Path to progress

In order to change this, the community will have to take three radical steps. The first is demanding a uniform civil code for all Indian religious communities. This, by implication, means an abolition of the outdated feudal Sharia law. The law is a reflection of social conditions at a particular historical stage of a society's development. So as society changes, the law too must change. How can a medieval law be applicable in the 21st century? The abolition of Sha-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

ria will not mean the abolition of Islam. Almost the entire old non-statutory Hindu law was abolished by the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 – but Hinduism has not been abolished by that.

Sharia treats women as inferior. It permits talaq (verbal) only to Muslim men, not women, and is thus a Damocles sword over the latter. It gives only half as much to daughters as to sons in inheritance. It sanctifies the backward-looking rule of nikah halala. All this has helped keep the community backward; when women who constitute half the Muslim population are not treated as equals, it obviously and adversely affects the

entire community.

The second is a demand to abolish the burqa as it constricts the freedom of women. However, many have said it should be the women's choice whether to wear a burqa or not. But, surely, no such choice should be given as it constitutes a 'negative' freedom. There should be no freedom to continue backward feudal practices and they should be suppressed if the country (including Muslims) is to progress, as was done in Turkey by the leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. A heavy fine should be imposed on women wearing the burqa, as has been done in parts of Europe.

The third is a demand to abolish the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), a non-statutory body set up in 1973 in the time of Indira Gandhi, whose eye was on the Muslim vote bank. The AIMPLB comprises reactionary clerics and other people most of whom have reactionary mindsets whose aim is to protect and continue the outdated feudal reactionary Sharia law, which in fact harms Muslims. The AIMPLB strongly opposed the progressive and humanitarian Shah Bano judgment (1985), which granted maintenance to divorced Muslim women,

and which led to the Rajiv Gandhi government getting the judgment legislatively annulled. Recently, the AIMPLB took another reactionary step by advocating the setting up of Sharia courts in every district.

A note for youth

Atrocities on Muslims such as lynching or hate speeches, or framing of false charges should be condemned. But there can be no support for backward practices, whether among Muslims or Hindus (such as the caste system or looking down on Dalits). It is time now for Muslims, particularly the youth, to rise and demand putting an end to feudal reactionary practices which are the biggest cause of backwardness in the community. This is the only means to their salvation. As Maulana Azad said to Muslims in 1947 at the Jama Masjid: "Nobody can drown you unless you drown yourself. Nobody can defeat you unless you defeat yourself. The moment you realise this, you develop the confidence that this country is ours, along with others."

Justice Markandey Katju is a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India

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.

Word of caution

The report that the Chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) has written to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, cautioning him about the growing view that the Trump administration appears to be coercing India on various fronts rather than negotiating with it is a welcome development (June 26). There is perhaps a realisation that this could have grave repercussions for U.S. diplomacy. India, Russia and China could make common cause with each other, which could be detrimental to the U.S. interests. Given that the HFAC has oversight responsibilities over the U.S. State Department, one hopes that the visiting U.S. Secretary of State will heed the words of wisdom.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Indian prisons

The rot in India's prison system cannot be glossed over (Editorial page, "The state of Indian prisons", June 26). In addition to this, the subject of the 'New Prison Manual 2016' is important. It includes provisions such as access to free legal services, additional provisions for women prisoners, rights of prisoners sentenced to death, inspection of prisoners and modernisation of prisons. Whether the prison authorities are following the manual or not is the moot point. If the answer is negative, then this too is another violation of the basic rights of prisoners.

SUSHANT DHEKALE, Kolhapur, Maharashtra

■ The data on prisoners reflect the scant interest evinced by many governments in dealing with the issue. It would be no

exaggeration to say that undertrials are caged like birds for years due to poor legal options and the penurious condition of inmates. That there is ignorance of legal privileges such as Section 436 A of the Code of Criminal Procedure is unacceptable.

N. VIJAI, Coimbatore

■ Vary rarely does the system help rehabilitate a prisoner for the period he or she was incarcerated even when acquitted. There is stigma attached to the person which can affect his or her ability to make a new life. Quick trials and humane treatment within the system can do much more than reforms that exist on paper.

ARYA S.T., Ashti, Wardha, Maharashtra

Hate crimes

The murder in Jharkhand is distressing, but even worse is the indifference shown by

the custodians of the law (Editorial, "Lynching redux", June 26). Such incidents happen time and again as the perpetrators have political backing. Though such incidents come to light, one is sceptical whether the victims get justice. One waits for the day when the spirit of brotherhood is rekindled.

LEELA KALLARACKAL, Chennai

■ It is India's image that gets affected as the foreign media sifts through such deplorable episodes, portraying India in a bad light and insinuating political patronage. These perpetrators need to be given exemplary punishment. Also the religious chanting in Parliament is unwanted. Our lawmakers have been given the mandate to legislate and govern the country and not to portray themselves as the champions of any religion.

DEEPAK SINGHAL, Noida

■ Why is the Prime Minister failing to find the time to consistently condemn mob lynching? Doesn't his idea of an inclusive India include the minorities? Silence is the greatest enemy of justice. Tolerance and cultural relativism have always been India's virtues but it looks as if these are being eclipsed. The government cannot abdicate its constitutional responsibility to uphold human rights especially when the world is watching.

MEENA YADEM, Hyderabad

Water management

The water scarcity in Chennai is a good example of

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Late correction: The report, "Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is Congress Lok Sabha leader" (June 19, 2019), erroneously described Mr. Chowdhury as a Member of Parliament representing *Murshidabad*. Actually, he represents *Baharampur*.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

INTERVIEW | K. KASTURIRANGAN

‘The education system needs change, not fine-tuning’

The Chairman of the committee which finalised the draft National Education Policy, 2019, on Board exams, teacher training and improving the quality of research

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The K. Kasturirangan Committee, which submitted the draft National Education Policy to the Ministry of Human Resource Development in May, has invited comments on the document till June 30. Mr. Kasturirangan, chairman of the committee and former head of the Indian Space Research Organisation, talks about the features of the policy. Edited excerpts:

How was the committee constituted?

■ The work on the present policy started in Smriti Irani's time [when she was Union Minister of HRD]. After eliciting opinions from a cross-section of society, the T.S.R. Subramanian committee was set up. In parallel, there was a report from the MHRD. I was called by Prakash Javadekar, who was the [HRD] Minister then. There were some issues with the Subramanian report which we were asked to revisit. We also had the MHRD report. We were asked to use all this and come up with a report which did not have issues and which could withstand the next 20 or even 30 years of India's development. But when we studied it, we felt that what was needed was not a fine-tuning of the existing policy but a re-look. So, we started with a clean slate.

While the idea of school complexes sounds good in urban and semi-urban areas, what about areas where access to schools is a problem?

■ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan had put forth [the idea] that within a specified distance there should be a school. Schools have come up, but there are many schools which have only six students or only one teacher. This is not the idea of school education. There is no playground, there is no idea of a societal interface with the child. Wherever we have a cluster of schools, we can move to this concept of school complexes a little faster. School complexes will grow

fast in some places. And that will give us information on how to operate in the more complex systems. We are not talking about overnight change. We can't do that in a country with such diversity. Geographically if the schools are not easily connected, we have to provide facilities like cycles [to students].

You mentioned India's complexity. There are several iniquities which cannot be ignored. Given this, why does the policy have just half a page on the education of Dalits and OBCs?

■ At different places we have touched upon the education of underprivileged classes, including setting up special education scholarships for them and selecting teachers from amongst them for local requirement. Don't just read the title of Dalit or underprivileged and see the paragraph under that. Read the whole document and you will see in several places we revisit this question with respect to that area. If you take the sum total of that, you will see the whole picture of what we are saying.

The typical problems faced by Dalit children are different from those faced by economically backward children from a different caste. Do you address this?

■ If you bring solutions for Dalit students into the educational process, it may be a tall order for education to deal with it. This is a societal problem. What we have tried to do is make sure that Dalits do not suffer for want of op-



SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

portunities. What opportunities? Access to education – you can go to nearby places and study as well as others. Second, Dalits will get 100% scholarship. Many small concessions given by the government will be retained and, if necessary, upgraded.

The policy suggests several Board exams each semester for eight semesters. Isn't the load a lot more than it is now?

■ Students can take the Board exams as soon as they are thorough with a particular subject. In case they are not happy with the outcome of that exam, they can take it again in another six months. There is nothing sacrosanct about writing the exam at a particular time and doing well. [It is not as if] their future is ruined if they don't perform well in the exam.

Once exams are completely digitised, the student can give the exam. And if he finds he has scored well, he has completed the exam. Another aspect is that as he gets more and more credits as he passes more exams, these credits can be carried forward. So we think this system provides minimal pressure. And we do away with rote learning; it is a formative test.

Can this not be achieved within the existing system?

■ The existing system has intrinsic issues. There are several thousand schools with merely six or eight students. Or only one teacher. What kind of satisfactory model can you develop around this for school education?

The school exam system has to be changed. The exam system is difficult because youngsters are stressed by the rote learning approach. Teachers have to be re-trained or new teachers have to be brought in because the pedagogy is going to be very different. The whole system has to undergo a change, so fine-tuning the existing system to achieve the level of aspiration projected here doesn't seem to be feasible.

The draft policy advocates an extreme degree of centralisation. Even though education is in the Concurrent List now, State autonomy is not really considered in this.

■ We are aware that education is in the Concurrent List. States have a major responsibility. They have the school. Every State will have its regulatory body set up by the school. Accreditation will be separated from regulation,

Schools have come up, but there are many which have only six students or only one teacher. This is not the idea of school education.

but the accreditation process will lead to some aspects of regulation.

Whereas the national frame-setting will provide the guidelines for framing the curriculum, and a pedagogy for that, it is up to the State to decide what will be the curriculum and pedagogy. Similarly, like the national accreditation authority, you have the State accreditation authority. This policy will enable the State to considerably innovate, bring in new ideas, and try to create dynamic changes. There is always a consultation process that is available with the Centre with respect to the four or five bodies which will control education. But that in no way will put direct control on what is happening at the State level.

You are talking about public education. But there is an advisory to shut down standalone teacher education institutions across the country as soon as possible. Your comments?

■ Teacher education institutes have mushroomed in the thousands. I don't want to talk about how they have operated, what kind of degrees have been given and what the outcomes have been. School teachers are going to build the youth of tomorrow. We think school teachers should come from higher education institutions. Transfer them to higher education institutions, give them a four-year B.Ed. They can be given liberal education for two years followed by areas in which they will be teaching. They have to be given comprehensive knowledge, learn pedagogy and communication skills. And make sure that they can frame curriculum.

What is the time period over which this transformation can happen?

■ Existing Anganwadi teachers can be trained in six months. Those with two-year education degrees can be transformed in a year. And for the future you have a four-year course. So, within four years we should be able to get people. But we also need a throughput – it is a large number. We think we need to put this on a priority.

There is extreme centralisation of research in higher education.

■ I think centralisation and decentralisation have meaning when there is a scale in which they operate. In India, research is 0.69% of the GDP. Compare this with the U.S. where it is 2.4% or 2.5% of the GDP. So, centralisation has no meaning when you are talking about this kind of money. There is no question of any "isation". Currently, if you look at the outcome in terms of papers, it is just improving because of the university support being given by the Department of

Science and Technology (DST). If you look at the number of patents, it is 30,000 or 40,000 compared to 6,00,000 and 7,00,000 in the U.S. and even more in China. Even in this, about 70% of the patents come from NRIs. So, if you look at the overall scenario of industrial outcomes, social outcomes, strategic outcomes, and the kind of money that is going into this, and the number of papers, patents and such parameters, India is not at all in a happy situation.

One of the reasons is that nearly 93% of university students go to state universities which are pathetic in terms of research quality. Second, the research itself, though well supported, is mostly given to institutions where there is some capability. So you get more funding for institutions like the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research or a CSIR lab, or a DRDO lab, or ISRO. Some of the Central universities and IITs do get some funds, but it is not sufficient. I think one needs to improve considerably the money and along with it the infrastructure and the number of researchers who will contribute.

We always talk about the percentage of GDP going into research. When are we going to talk about the research going into GDP?

How do you propose to achieve this?

■ So, we thought there should be a [national] research foundation. It should be all encompassing, including science, engineering, social sciences and humanities. First of all, the competitive grant from DST and other institutions... we will [have a] similar thing with respect to the university system, primarily. But it does not stop other institutions from asking for money, and it will be done on a competitive basis. The second is seed capa-

bilities in a university system so that they can start undertaking research. Seeding can be in any area depending on what the universities' interests are and what the local demands are. There are many scientists who are retired. They can go and mentor the universities. They will be given a remuneration, they can research, produce papers, even take students for the first five or 10 years. The place gets operational.

The research foundation will enable research grants from government institutions. This is the third element.

There are industrialists. They always say we are ready to give money, but we don't get any output. So, create a tighter system of monitoring. The government will help with this kind of monitoring, evaluation and mid-term correction. This can improve the confidence of industry. This will create a new generation of researchers who will teach the next generation of learners. With this nexus between teachers and learners, the university will have a different kind of atmosphere.

What does the policy say about reservations?

■ We have no authority to tamper with that. But what we have done is, there are people who need to be supported because financially or otherwise they are underprivileged. We need to make sure that this is strictly enforced. And that there is no room for misuse of that kind of thing by institutions. And suggest if there are any inadequacies in the implementation that need correction. Beyond that I can't say anything more. But it will be in favour of the fact that we need to ensure that the underprivileged are not condemned to be there.

A longer version of the interview is available on www.thehindu.com

SINGLE FILE

Cinema as education

‘Virus’ is a reminder of the role of cinema in spreading social good

KUNAL RAY



Aashiq Abu's recently released Malayalam film, *Virus*, is captivating. The film is a chilling document of the deadly Nipah virus outbreak that affected parts of Kerala last year and how the State machinery mounted an impressive defence to tackle the grave situation. It records in laborious detail the meticulous planning undertaken by many individuals to solve the crisis, saving many lives that could have been further endangered. This is a prime example of cinema that is educative. I am no lover of socio-realist films which can sometimes be pedantic and preachy, but *Virus* is an important moment in the history of contemporary Indian cinema, which is increasingly assailed with propaganda films. To me, this film is a reminder of the role of cinema in spreading social good.

Fiction films on medicine and public health are rare in India. Cinema has often been used to critique the lack of medical facilities, poor healthcare, infrastructure and illustrate people's suffering. Most of these films only present the problem without offering any solutions or follow-up to the crisis. While these issues cannot be marginalised, *Virus* shows how to deal with adversity using public knowledge and the workforce. It also depicts the positive role played by the local media in preventing panic and effectively disseminating information. Cinema is a documentation of our times and the knowledge that this film has archived will be available to a large populace for future action if needed. Furthermore, it makes no attempt to glorify the powers that govern the state or peddle any ideology that, for example, the filmmaker might favour. It is a lesson in objective storytelling.

Besides, the film involves several key members of the Women in Cinema Collective, which has attracted much consternation since its formation in a heavily male-dominated industry. I am hopeful that the film will further bolster their position as purveyors of content-driven and socially relevant cinema. *Virus* places women at the core of its narrative. The film is unimaginable without them because women were the key players under the leadership of the remarkable K. K. Shailaja, Kerala's Minister of Health and Social Welfare.

But how does contemporary Malayalam cinema manage to do this? Here is an example of a rare mainstream film practice that merges excellent storytelling with riveting performances. The distinctions between art-house cinema and commercial cinema dissipate. The film shows patients suffering, with concerned families by their side. It eschews melodrama completely without foregoing its humanism. At the end of the day, cinema ought to help us recognise characters as fellow human beings with their vulnerabilities. *Virus* does that. It is the triumph of good storytelling coupled with the right intent.

The writer teaches literary and cultural studies at Flame University, Pune



DATA POINT

Dry run

Close to 72.5% of the country's districts received less than normal* rainfall in the first 24 days of the ongoing monsoon season. In six States, more than 50% of districts received largely deficient rainfall. Parts of Rajasthan, Karnataka, Odisha and J&K are exceptions to this trend. By Siddarth Rao T. & Vignesh Radhakrishnan

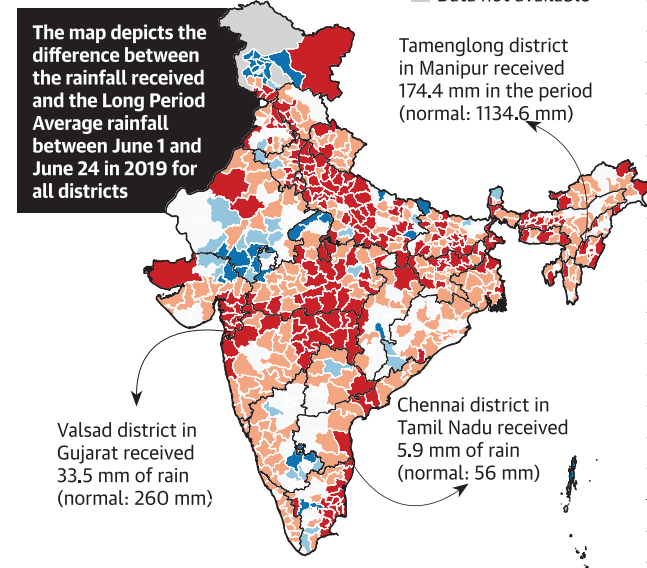


Table shows the % of districts in each State across rainfall categories
■ **LD: Largely deficient** (-60% to -99% of Long Period Average rainfall)
■ **D: Deficient** (-20% to -59% of LPA)
□ **N: Normal rainfall** (-19% to +19% of LPA)
■ **E: Excess** (+20% to +59% of LPA)
■ **LE: Large excess** (>59% of LPA)
■ Data not available

| STATE/ U.T. | LD | D | N | E | LE |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Delhi | 88.89 | 11.11 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Manipur | 66.67 | 33.33 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Haryana | 57.14 | 33.33 | 0 | 9.52 | 0 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 56 | 21.33 | 8 | 2.67 | 2.67 |
| Maharashtra | 52.78 | 44.44 | 2.78 | 0 | 0 |
| Jharkhand | 50 | 41.67 | 8.33 | 0 | 0 |
| W.B. | 42.11 | 57.89 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bihar | 42.11 | 36.84 | 15.79 | 2.63 | 2.63 |
| Himachal | 41.67 | 41.67 | 16.67 | 0 | 0 |
| M.P. | 41.18 | 39.22 | 7.84 | 3.92 | 7.84 |
| T.N. | 40.63 | 21.88 | 18.75 | 6.25 | 6.25 |
| Meghalaya | 37.5 | 50 | 12.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Assam | 34.62 | 46.15 | 19.23 | 0 | 0 |
| Gujarat | 33.33 | 36.36 | 12.12 | 12.12 | 6.06 |
| Overall | 32.89 | 39.62 | 15.94 | 5.12 | 4.53 |
| Arunanchal | 31.25 | 50 | 18.75 | 0 | 0 |
| Punjab | 30 | 35 | 30 | 5 | 0 |
| Tripura | 25 | 50 | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| Sikkim | 25 | 50 | 0 | 25 | 0 |
| Uttarakhand | 23.08 | 76.92 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| J&K | 22.73 | 9.09 | 0 | 9.09 | 50 |
| A.P. | 13.95 | 60.47 | 23.26 | 2.33 | 0 |
| Mizoram | 11.11 | 66.67 | 11.11 | 0 | 0 |
| Chhattisgarh | 11.11 | 44.44 | 33.33 | 7.41 | 3.7 |
| Nagaland | 9.09 | 54.55 | 36.36 | 0 | 0 |
| Rajasthan | 6.06 | 30.3 | 27.27 | 21.21 | 15.15 |
| Odisha | 3.33 | 43.33 | 46.67 | 6.67 | 0 |
| Goa | 0 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Kerala | 0 | 80 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| Karnataka | 0 | 46.67 | 33.33 | 13.33 | 6.67 |

Source: India Meteorological Department

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 27, 1969

New types of sounding rocket

Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, told Pressmen here (Trivandrum) to-day [June 26] that a three-stage Centaure rocket, capable of reaching an altitude of 350 kms, would be fabricated in India by the end of this year. This completely Indian-made rocket would be an "improved version" of the two-stage French Centaure rocket, which could carry payloads only to heights of about 160 km. The two-stage Centaure rocket is already being made in India under an agreement with Sud-Aviation, France, the entire rocket hardware being manufactured at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay. The rocket has been used at the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station for measurement of electron density in the upper atmosphere.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 27, 1919.

Death Sentences in the Punjab.

(From an Editorial)

We cannot but profoundly regret the decision of the authorities not to postpone the carrying out of the death sentence passed on several accused tried by Martial Law tribunals in the Punjab pending appeal to the Privy Council. The prisoners should be given every opportunity of establishing their innocence and it passes our understanding why they should be denied this elementary right. There are also other very weighty considerations why, in bare justice to the condemned men, this request, preferred by various public bodies and distinguished Indians, should be acceded to without any hesitation or delay. The proclamation of Martial Law, the measures of repression taken under that authority and the sentences passed against the alleged offenders have caused as great, if not greater, horror as the circumstances which, in view of the authorities, necessitated such drastic action.

CONCEPTUAL

Motivated tactician

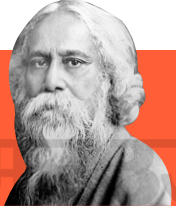
PSYCHOLOGY

This refers to an individual who alternates between sloppy thinking and more careful analytical thinking depending on his level of motivation. The idea of the motivated tactician has been used as a model in social psychology to better understand common social behaviour. In some cases, it might make sense for an individual to use cognitive short-cuts to arrive at important decisions. For instance, individuals may often employ stereotypes as a tool to help them economise time and effort while dealing with a collective of strangers. In other cases, like when dealing with an individual member within a collective, proper analytical thinking may be employed.

MORE ON THE WEB

Video | Explained: the cause of Bihar AES deaths

<http://bit.ly/aesbihar>



उत्तर

आप दो और लोगों का अस्पताल में इलाज चल रहा है। जिस परिवार के साथ यह हादसा हुआ है, वे उसी समय एक शादी समारोह से लौटकर घर आए थे। देख लेने की धमकी देने के बाद अपने साथियों के साथ लौटकर अपराध को अंजाम देना यही बताता है कि दबंगों को शायद किसी का डर नहीं है। यह घटना दलितों की सुरक्षा पर भी टिप्पणी है। यह हालत तब है, जब इसी महीने कानून-व्यवस्था की समीक्षा करते हुए मुख्यमंत्री योगी

आदित्यनाथ ने कहा था कि दलितों, अल्पसंख्यकों और महिलाओं के खिलाफ अपराध न होने पाएं, इसका खास ध्यान रखा जाना चाहिए। लेकिन परिजनों के बयान और सोशल मीडिया पर इस घटना का वीडियो वायरल हो जाने के बाद भी पुलिस इस घटना को जिस तरह सड़क दुर्घटना बताती रही, वह उसके कामकाज के तरीके के बारे में बताने के लिए काफी है। ग्रामीणों के विरोध प्रदर्शन और कई घंटों तक हाइवे जाम करने के बाद पुलिस ने हत्या, अपहरण की कोशिश, छेड़छाड़ और एससी/एसटी ऐक्ट की धाराओं के तहत मामला दर्ज किया और मुख्य आरोपी को गिरफ्तार किया। इस महीने अलीगढ़ के टपल में ढाई साल की एक बच्ची की हत्या के मामले में भी प्रारंभ में पुलिस की ऐसी ही काहिली सामने आई थी, जब बच्ची के गायब होने की रिपोर्ट दर्ज करने से

उसने इनकार कर दिया था। जाहिर है कि उस सुबे के लिए यह अच्छी स्थिति नहीं है, जो अपनी लचर कानून-व्यवस्था के कारण ही ज्यादा जाना जाता रहा है। मौजूदा सरकार अपराधियों में भय पैदा होने का दावा करने के साथ इनकाउंटर को अपनी उपलब्धि बताती है, जबकि पुलिस हिरासत में हुई एकाधिक मौतों पर मानवाधिकार आयोग ने सवाल उठाए हैं। बुलंदशहर के उस दबंग को सख्त सजा मिलेगी, और पीड़ित परिवार को मुआवजा भी मिल जाएगा। लेकिन पुलिस-प्रशासन बिना किसी पक्षपात के काम करे, अपराधों का तुरंत संज्ञान लिया जाए और अपराधियों में कानून-व्यवस्था का भय हो, इस दिशा में कदम उठाने की जरूरत कहीं ज्यादा है। तभी उत्तर प्रदेश कानून-व्यवस्था के मामले में देश का आदर्श राज्य बन जाएगा।

लक्ष्य करे सवाल तो क्या जवाब दें

भा

रत की कहानी सवालों और जवाबों में उलझकर रह गई है। धारणा को मंदी के जोखिम से चुनौती मिल रही है। पिछले हफ्तों के दौरान 2019-20 में जीडीपी की विकास दर को कम कर सात फीसदी रहने का अनुमान व्यवक्त किए जाने के बीच दीर्घकाल में विकास दर के सात फीसदी से अधिक रहने का वादा कायम है।

राजनीतिक नेतृत्व वह सब कह रहा है, जो आकांक्षी भारत उससे सुनना चाहता है। लेकिन क्या नीति तंत्र वह सब कर रहा है, जिसकी जरूरत है? तथ्य यह है कि अर्थव्यवस्था आवश्यकता और अनुकूल परिस्थितियों के संधि स्थल पर खड़ी है।

जनसांख्यिकी में अंतर्निहित विकास के अवसर- और कच्चे तेल की कम कीमत या फिर अमेरिकी फेडरल रिजर्व की नीतियों की मेहरबानी से आसान रिटर्न जैसे अवसर का लाभ उठाने के लिए अनुकूल परिस्थितियों की जरूरत है।

पिछले हफ्ते भारत ने 2024 तक जीडीपी के पचास खरब डॉलर हो जाने का लक्ष्य रखा है, यह 28 खरब डॉलर की अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए वाकई बहुत बड़ा कदम होगा। क्या इसे हासिल किया जा सकता है? इसका जवाब नजरिये पर निर्भर करता है। सभी विकास अनिवार्य रूप से भिन्न तरह की कहानियों का योग होते हैं— भारत की जीडीपी राज्यों के उत्पादन का योग है। अमेरिकी राज्य कैलिफोर्निया की जीडीपी 27 खरब डॉलर की है, जबकि टेक्सास की 17 खरब डॉलर। भारतीय राज्यों में देखें, तो मुश्किल से पांच राज्य ही 200 अरब डॉलर को पार कर सके हैं, जिनमें चार सी अरब डॉलर के साथ महाराष्ट्र शीर्ष पर है। विकास में तेजी और



राजनीतिक नेतृत्व वह सब कह रहा है, जो आकांक्षी भारत उससे सुनना चाहता है। लेकिन क्या नीति तंत्र वह सब कर रहा है, जिसकी जरूरत है? पचास खरब डॉलर का लक्ष्य वाकई बड़ा कदम है।

शंकर अय्यर, वरिष्ठ पत्रकार



अर्थव्यवस्था के विस्तार में स्थानीय नीतिगत सुधार उत्प्रेरक बनते हैं। क्या राज्य राजनीतिक बयानों के अनुरूप नीतिगत कार्रवाई कर रहे हैं? विकास के लिए जरूरी हर बड़ा सुधार अब राज्यों की दहलीज पर है।

2019 में भाजपा को 300 से भी अधिक सीटों के साथ ऐतिहासिक जनादेश मिला है और एक दर्जन से अधिक राज्यों में भी उसकी सत्ता होने के कारण उसके पास राजनीतिक सत्ता को

बदलने का असाधारण अवसर है। इनमें महाराष्ट्र और गुजरात जैसे अमीर राज्य, झारखंड जैसा संसाधन संपन्न राज्य और सर्वाधिक आबादी वाले राज्य उत्तर प्रदेश और बिहार शामिल हैं।

अर्थव्यवस्था को नई कक्षा में भेजने के लिए मानव पूंजी यानी स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा और कौशल से जुड़ी नीतियों में बदलाव लाने की जरूरत है।

बेशक, सार्वजनिक वित्त पोषित स्वास्थ्य बीमा योजना आयुष्मान भारत मौजूद है, लेकिन इसकी

भूमिका सीमित है, क्योंकि यह बीमार होने की स्थिति में ही काम करता है। एहतियाती और निवारक स्वास्थ्य सुरक्षा का क्या होगा?

बिहार में 150 से अधिक बच्चों की मौतों ने स्मरण कराया है कि जन स्वास्थ्य सुरक्षा प्रणाली में निवेश की जरूरत है। आंकड़े उपेक्षा की कहानी बताते हैं। नीति आयोग का अध्ययन दिखाता है कि 2017-18 में केरल ने स्वास्थ्य के लिए 6,882 करोड़ रुपये आवंटित किए थे, वहीं उससे तीन गुना अधिक आबादी वाले बिहार ने सिर्फ 6,668 करोड़ रुपये का बजटीय आवंटन रखा।

जन स्वास्थ्य सुरक्षा प्रणाली की खराब स्थिति कचरा प्रबंधन पर जन नीति की अपराधिक उपेक्षा के कारण और बदतर हुई है, जिससे गरीबों और मध्य वर्ग की अरक्षितता और बढ़ रही है। खराब नीति का मुजाहिरा राष्ट्रीय राजधानी दिल्ली के पूर्वी हिस्से में स्थित गाजीपुर में किया जा सकता है, जहां कूड़े का सबसे बड़ा ढेर जमा है, जिसकी ऊंचाई करीब 65 मीटर है और इसने फुटबॉल के चार सी मैदान जितनी जगह घेर रखी है। वहां रोजाना दो हजार टन कचरा उड़ेल जा रहा है और इसकी ऊंचाई 75 मीटर को छू सकती है, यानी ताजमहल से भी ऊंचा जिसकी ऊंचाई 73 मीटर है।

शिक्षा की बदतर स्थिति किसी से छिपी नहीं है, खासतौर से सरकारी स्कूलों में दी जाने वाली शिक्षा की गुणवत्ता। अभी गर्मियों में कुछ दिन पहले उत्तर प्रदेश की सरकार ने डाटा जारी कर बताया था कि यूपी बोर्ड की हाई स्कूल परीक्षा में 31.9 लाख बच्चे सम्मिलित हुए। मातृभाषा हिंदी की परीक्षा देने वाले 29.5 लाख बच्चों में से 5.74 लाख के करीब बच्चे इसमें फेल हो गए।

और जो लोग पास हो रहे हैं क्या उनके लिए नौकरियां हैं? हाँ और नहीं दोनों। पूरे देश में राज्य

सरकारों ने पिछले पांच वर्षों से 22 लाख से अधिक सरकारी नौकरियों को खाली छोड़ रखा है। यह सुनने में भले अच्छा न लगे, लेकिन राजनीति में लोकलुभावन घोषणाओं का चुनावी लाभार्थ स्थायी समाधान पर भारी पड़ रहा है। क्या जो लोग पास हुए हैं उनमें रोजगार हासिल करने लायक कौशल है? कड़वा सच यह है कि उन लोगों के कौशल और शिक्षा का कोई मानचित्रण नहीं है, जो स्कूलों और कॉलेजों से बाहर निकलकर नौकरी के बाजार में प्रवेश करते हैं। यहां तक कि केंद्रीय स्तर पर भी डाटा सिर्फ पंजीयन को दर्शाता है मायने यह रखता है कि किस विषय में कितने स्नातक हैं। मैकेंजी का अध्ययन बताता है कि 1.2 करोड़ महिलाएं और 4.4 करोड़ पुरुष स्वचालन के कारण नौकरियां खो सकते हैं। क्या राज्यों के पास इससे निपटने की कोई योजना है? उत्पादकता, जमीन, श्रम और पूंजी जैसे कारकों पर गौर कीजिए। जमीन और श्रम सुधार राज्यों पर निर्भर हैं। कृषि जगत की हताशा न सिर्फ केंद्रीकृत नारों की मांग करती है, बल्कि राज्य सरकारों को सुव्यवस्थित समाधान तलाशकर उन पर अमल करना चाहिए। श्रम कानून संहिता का मसौदा 2016 से राज्यों के पास लिखित पड़ा है। इसी तरह से कॉटेक्ट फार्मिंग से संबंधित आदर्श कानून राज्यों की राजधानियों में धूल खा रहा है।

हां, पूंजी की कमी है और वित्तीय बाजार के संकट ने विकास और निवेश को गति देने वाली विधायी गतिविधियों और खपत को अवरुद्ध कर रखा है। कम ब्याज वाली व्यवस्था आवश्यक है, लेकिन पर्याप्त नहीं है। रिजर्व बैंक और सरकार के फिल्मी अंदाज में मैं हूं न कहने से काम नहीं चलेंगा। पचास खरब डॉलर की आकांक्षा के लिए जरूरी होगा कि सत्तारूढ़ दल अपने शब्दों का मुद्रीकरण करे और चुनावी नारों पर अमल करे।

विवादों से परे भी संस्कृत को देखिए

उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार द्वारा संस्कृत में भी प्रेस रिलीज जारी करने के फैसले पर उठने वाले सवाल हमारी उसी सोच को प्रतिबिंबित करते हैं, जिसके मुताबिक हर प्राचीन भारतीय चीज हमारे पिछड़ेपन की निशानी है।



उमेश चतुर्वेदी

मुताबिक भारतीय शिक्षा में अंग्रेजी के प्रयोग की शुरुआत 1860 में तब हो पाई, जब 1857 का प्रथम स्वाधीनता संग्राम नाकाम रहा। उससे पहले अपने देश में करीब पांच लाख स्कूल थे, जो समाज आश्रित थे, जहां या तो उर्दू-फारसी माध्यम से पढ़ाई होती थी या फिर अंग्रेजी माध्यम से। भारतीय विचारक धर्मपाल ने अपनी पुस्तक *द ब्यूटीफुल ट्री* में अंग्रेज सरकार के दस्तावेजों के हवाले से यह आंकड़ा पेश किया है। तब तक संस्कृत हमारी परंपरा की वाहक थी। उसके बाद हम संस्कृत ही क्यों, हर उस भारतीय चीज से पीछा छुड़ाते चले गए, जो कभी हमारे गर्व का जरिया थी। संस्कृत साहित्य की महानता के प्रति हम आग्रही तब हुए, जब जर्मन

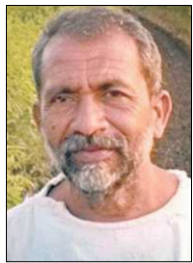
विद्वान मैक्समूलर ने उसकी तरफ दुनिया का ध्यान आकर्षित किया। अपनी पारंपरिक आयुर्वेदिक चिकित्सा पद्धति के प्रति भी हमारा प्यार तभी बढ़ा, जब पश्चिम ने उसका लोहा माना। संस्कृत पर सवाल यह है कि जब कोई संस्कृत पढ़ता नहीं, संस्कृत में कोई मीडिया नहीं है, तो फिर उसमें प्रेस रिलीज भला क्यों जारी होनी चाहिए। अगर इस सवाल को जायज माना जाएगा, तो फिर दुनिया भर के विश्वविद्यालयों में हो रही संस्कृत की पढ़ाई पर सवाल उठाना पड़ेगा, संविधान की आठवीं अनुसूची पर भी सवाल उठाना होगा, जिसकी 22 भाषाओं में से एक संस्कृत भी है। जन्म, मृत्यु और दूसरे कर्मकांडों की प्रक्रिया पर भी सवाल उठाना होगा, जिनके मंत्र संस्कृत में ही हैं।

हमें नहीं भूलना चाहिए कि भाषाएं राजनीतिक ताकत का जरिया और उसे हासिल करने का औजार भी होती हैं। भाषाएं अपने साथ एक पूरी संस्कृति को ढोती हैं। इसलिए उनको बचाए रखना राजनीति के साथ ही समाज की भी जिम्मेदारी होता है। राज्याश्रय भाषाओं को नई ताकत देना है, समाज उसे बढ़ाता है और अगली पीढ़ी को सौंपता है। इसके जरिये भाषा जिंदा रहती है और विकसित भी होती है। उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार का यह कदम उसी श्रेणी में आता है। इस कदम के जरिये कुछ लोगों को रोजगार भी मिलेगा।

मंजिलें और भी हैं
>> डॉ. रविंद्र कौल्हे

मेलघाट में कोई किसान अब आत्महत्या नहीं करता

उस समय मैं नागपुर मेडिकल कॉलेज से एमबीबीएस की पढ़ाई कर रहा था। महात्मा गांधी और विनोबा भावे के विचारों से प्रेरित होकर मैंने संकल्प ले लिया कि अपने हुनर का इस्तेमाल पैसों के लिए नहीं बल्कि जरूरतमंदों की मदद के लिए करूंगा। पर शुरुआत कहां से की जाए, यह समझ में नहीं आ रहा था। फिर मैंने निश्चय किया कि अपनी सेवाएं ऐसी जगह दूंगा, जहां स्वास्थ्य सुविधाएं नगण्य हैं। इसके लिए मैंने मेलघाट के बैरागढ़ को चुना। मैंने सुदूर इलाके में काम करने वाले किसी भी डॉक्टर के लिए जरूरी चीजें सीखी और बैरागढ़ चला गया। पर जल्द ही मुझे समझ आ गया कि सिर्फ डिग्री से मैं लोगों की समस्याएं हल नहीं कर सकता। इसके बाद मैंने एमडी किया और अपनी थीसिस मेलघाट में व्याप्त कुपोषण पर की। मैंने मेलघाट लौटने का फैसला किया। साथ ही डॉ. रिमता से मैंने विवाह कर लिया। बैरागढ़ के लोग मुझ पर तो भरोसा करते थे लेकिन रिमता को, जिन्होंने आते ही औरतों के हक के लिए लड़ना शुरू कर दिया था, स्वीकार नहीं कर पा रहे थे। लेकिन जब रिमता पहली बार मां बनने वाली थीं, मैंने निश्चय किया कि उनका प्रसव खुद करूंगा जैसा कि गांव वालों का होता है। पर किसी कारणवश बच्चे को कई बीमारियां हो गईं। लोगों ने कहा कि मां और बच्चे को अकोला के बड़े अस्पताल में ले जाया जाए। जब रिमता ने मेरे निर्णय पर सहमति दी, तो गांव वालों की नजर में उनकी इज्जत और बढ़ गई। सभी जानते थे कि मेलघाट के बच्चे कुपोषण से मर रहे थे, और लोग निर्मानिया, मलेरिया से।



लंबी लड़ाई के बाद, अब मेलघाट में अच्छी सड़कें हैं, बिजली है व 12 प्राथमिक स्वास्थ्य केंद्र हैं।

उन्हें लगा कि हमारे पास हर चीज का इलाज है। अब वे अपने बीमार मवेशियों को भी इलाज के लिए लाने लगे। तब मैंने अपने एक पशु चिकित्सक मित्र से जानवरों की शारीरिक संरचना के बारे में पढ़ा और पंजाब राव कृषि विद्यापीठ अकोला से कृषि की पढ़ाई की। काफी मेहनत के बाद मैंने एक एक ऐसा बीज विकसित किया, जिस पर फंगस नहीं लगता। पर कोई इसे पहली बार इस्तेमाल नहीं करना चाहता था, इसलिए मैंने खुद ही खेती और जागरूकता शिविरों का आयोजन शुरू किया जिससे खेती की नई तकनीकों के बारे में लोगों को जानकारी दी जा सके, पर्यावरण की रक्षा हो और वे सरकार द्वारा दी जाने वाली सुविधाओं का लाभ उठा सकें। मेरा संदेश साफ था कि प्रगति के लिए खेती बहुत जरूरी है और युवाओं के खेती में आने से ही विकास होगा। मेरा बड़ा बेटा किसान बन गया। लाभ आधारित मॉडल के तहत हमने सोयाबीन की खेती शुरू की, जो महाराष्ट्र में कहीं नहीं होती थी। इसके अलावा किसानों को मिश्रित खेती करने के लिए प्रेरित किया और वे चीजें उगानी शुरू की, जो उनकी मूलभूत जरूरत थी। हमने पीडीएस (सार्वजनिक वितरण प्रणाली) को भी सही किया, ताकि बरसात के समय भी हर किसी को भोजन मिल सके। मेलघाट में अब कोई किसान आत्महत्या नहीं करता। अगर हम किसी को एक दिन का खाना देते हैं तो उसकी बस एक ही दिन की भूख मिटती है, पर अगर हम उसे कमाना सिखाते हैं तो हम उसे जिंदगी भर का खाना दे देते हैं। मैं पैसे नहीं लेता, बस हर जरूरतमंद को सरकारी अस्पताल ले जाकर स्वास्थ्य सुविधाएं दिलाता हूँ।

- विभिन्न साक्षात्कारों पर आधारित।

हरियाली और रास्ता

रिची, जूडो टीचर और जीत

यह कहानी उस लड़के है, जिसने हाथ खोने के बावजूद जीत हासिल की।



स्कूल से घर लौटते हुए रिची ने देखा कि एक बुजुर्ग महिला सड़क पार कर रही थी और पीछे से एक बस आ रही थी। रिची ने कई बार आवाज लगाई, पर महिला को सुनाई नहीं पड़ा। अंततः रिची ने बस के आगे कूदकर महिला की जान बचा ली, पर रिची धायल हो गया। अस्पताल में रिची का बायां हाथ काटना पड़ा। एक जूडो टीचर उस हादसे का चरमदीद था। उसने रिची को जूडो सिखाने का फैसला किया। रिची के अस्पताल से छूटने के बाद से ही वह लोग उसके घर जाने लगा। शुरू में रिची इसके लिए तैयार नहीं हुआ, पर परिवार वालों ने उसे मना लिया। टीचर ने रिची को सिखाना शुरू कर दिया। पर वह रोज उसे सिर्फ एक ही दांव सिखाते थे। इस कारण कभी-कभी रिची को गुस्सा आ जाता था। यह रिवलसिला दो साल तक चला। फिर एक दिन जूडो मुकाबले की घोषणा हुई। जूडो टीचर ने उसे इस मुकाबले में जगह दिलवा दी। पहले मैच में रिची को काफी धुलाई हुई। पर अंत में टीचर द्वारा सिखाए गए दांव से उसने अपने प्रतिद्वंद्वी को चित कर दिया। इसी एक दांव से वह एक के बाद एक मैच जीतकर फाइनल तक पहुंच गया। फाइनल में फिर रिची की धुलाई हुई। ऐसा लग रहा था कि प्रतिद्वंद्वी उसे बेदम कर देगा। रेफरी सीटी बजाने जा ही रहा था कि जूडो टीचर ने उसे रोक लिया, क्योंकि अभी थोड़ा समय बचा था। रिची के प्रतिद्वंद्वी ने क्षण भर के लिए अपना गर्द नीचे क्या किया कि रिची ने वही दांव चला और प्रतिद्वंद्वी ढेर हो गया। रिची ने मुकाबला जीत लिया। बाद में रिची ने टीचर से पूछा, आपने मुझे केवल एक ही दांव सिखाया, फिर भी मैं कैसे जीत गया? टीचर बोले, तुमने एक दांव पर ही अपना ध्यान केंद्रित किया। इस दांव का एक ही तोड़ है कि कोई तुम्हारा बायां हाथ पकड़ कर घुमा दे। पर तुम्हारा बायां हाथ है ही नहीं।

कभी-कभी अपनी कमजोरी ही सबसे बड़ी ताकत बन जाती है।

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 112

एनबीएफसी में सुधार

वित्त उद्योग विकास परिषद (एफआईडीसी) के ताजातरीन आंकड़े गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय क्षेत्र (एनबीएफसी) में मंदी के स्तर की रूपरेखा प्रस्तुत करते हैं। आंकड़ों के मुताबिक अगर आवास वित्त कंपनियों को अलग कर दिया जाए तो एनबीएफसी द्वारा वित्त वर्ष 2018–19 की चौथी तिमाही में मंजूर ऋण में सालाना आधार पर 31 फीसदी की गिरावट आई है।

समान वर्ष की तीसरी तिमाही में इसमें सालाना आधार पर 17 फीसदी की गिरावट देखने को मिली थी। यह वह अवधि है जिस दौरान इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर लीजिंग एंड फाइनेँशियल सर्विसेज यानी आईएलएँडएफएस तथा उससे जुड़ी संस्थाओं के डिफॉल्ट की खबरें आने के बाद एनबीएफसी बाजार हिला हुआ था और निवेशकों का विश्वास डोला हुआ था। इस क्षेत्र

में नकदी का संकट चिंता का विषय बन गया था क्योंकि एनबीएफसी को फंड की कमी अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए नकारात्मक थी और वृद्धि की संभावनाओं को धक्का पहुंचा रही थी। यह मानने की कोई खास वजह नहीं है कि वित्त वर्ष 2019–20 की पहली तिमाही में एनबीएफसी के लिए हालात बेहतर हुए होंगे। एफआईडीसी के आंकड़ों का और बारीक अध्ययन बताता है कि सबसे बड़ी दिक्कत एनबीएफसी द्वारा लंबी अवधि के ऋण देने में आ रही है। जनवरी से मार्च तिमाही के बीच इसमें सालाना आधार पर 77 फीसदी की गिरावट आई। इसमें चकित होने वाली बात नहीं है क्योंकि परिपक्वता अवधि में अंतर यानी बैंकों से अल्पावधि का ऋण लेकर लंबी अवधि की परियोजना को फंड करना,

आईएलएँडएफएस तथा अन्य एनबीएफसी के समक्ष बड़ा संकट बना हुआ था। इसका वृद्धि और रोजगार की स्थिति पर बड़ा असर होना लाजिमी है। वृद्धि में सतत बढ़ोतरी के लिए यह आवश्यक है कि परियोजनाओं को सुगमता से वित्तीय सहायता हासिल होती रहे तथा रोजगार निर्माण की गति बरकरार रहे। अकुशल श्रमिक बुनियादी ढांचा और विनिर्माण उद्योग पर खासतौर पर निर्भर रहते हैं। सरकारी बैंकों की अत्यधिक जोखिम वाली बैलेंस शीट के कारण एनबीएफसी बुनियादी परियोजनाओं को ऋण देने वाली बिचौलिया संस्थाओं के रूप में सामने आई। परंतु इस क्षेत्र में व्याप्त संकट ने इसके संसाधन सोख लिए। म्यूचुअल फंड के निवेशकों ने भी इससे दूरी बना ली।

अब, भले ही बैंकों में सुधार के संकेत नजर

आ रहे हैं लेकिन वे अभी तक एनबीएफसी का स्थान नहीं ले सके हैं। न ही उन्होंने एनबीएफसी को कर्ज देना शुरू किया है। पुनर्भुगतान की चिंता के कारण एनबीएफसी को फंडिंग की लागत कई वर्षों के उच्चतम स्तर पर पहुंच गई है। एनबीएफसी के चतुर्थ वर्ष के शीर्ष बॉन्ड की लागत गत वर्ष 70 आधार अंक बढ़ गई। यही कारण है कि एनबीएफसी ने रिजर्व बैंक से कहा था कि उनके लिए एक अलग ऋण व्यवस्था आवश्यक है। हालांकि रिजर्व बैंक इसका इच्छुक नहीं दिखा और उसके पास इसकी जायज वजह भी हैं। असहज तरीके से विस्तार कर चुके एनबीएफसी क्षेत्र की साफ-सफाई आवश्यक है। इसे प्रोत्साहन दिया जाना चाहिए। कई लोग मानते हैं कि यह संकट व्यवस्थित नहीं है और केवल कुछ ही

एनबीएफसी ने अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र को यूँ गड़बड़ी करके ऋण दिया है और केवल उनकी ही हालत खराब है। कुछ अर्थशास्त्रियों का सुझाव है कि एनबीएफसी की हालत के बारे में सूचनाओं का अभाव है और शायद परिसंपत्ति गुणवत्ता समीक्षा से भी इनकी हालत सुधर सकती है। बैंकों के साथ ऐसा किया जा चुका है। बहुत संभव है कि ऐसा करने से अच्छी एनबीएफसी में निवेशकों का यकीन बहाल हो जाए और खराब एनबीएफसी को उनके हाल पर छोड़ दिया जाए। इसके अलावा आरबीआई को एक व्यापक कार्य योजना पेश करनी चाहिए। आरबीआई के लिए जरूरी यह है कि वह ऐसा तरीका खोजे जो इस क्षेत्र की सेहत दुरुस्त करने के अलावा बड़ी एनबीएफसी के नियमन में भी कड़ाई ला सके।



अजय मोहंती

बाल विकास सुधारों की रफ्तार बढ़ाने की दरकार

भारत बच्चों की स्थिति सुधारने में प्रगति कर रहा है, लेकिन कुछ संकेतक स्थिर बने हुए हैं। भारत को वैश्विक रैंकिंग सुधारने के लिए तेजी से सुधार लाना होगा। बता रहे हैं पार्थसारथि शोम

दुनियाभर में करीब 70 करोड़ बच्चे बचपन का अनुभव लेने या इसके खत्म होने से पहले ही वयस्क हो जाते हैं। बाल अधिकारों के लिए काम करने वाले एक गैर-लाभकारी संगठन- सेव दै चाइल्ड ने अपनी 2019 की रिपोर्ट जारी की है। संगठन ने विश्व बैंक, यूनेस्को, वैश्विक आबादी के लिए संयुक्त राष्ट्र के अन्य कार्यालयों, विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन आदि से आंकड़े जुटाए हैं। इसने देश भर बच्चों की स्थिति को लेकर बहस छेड़ दी है।

समय से पहले बचपन खत्म होने के आकलन के मापदंड में आठ संकेतक शामिल हैं। ये संकेतक पांच साल से पहले मृत्यु (प्रति 1,000 जीवित जन्म), कुपोषण से कम लंबाई (0 से 59 महीनों के बच्चों का प्रतिशत), प्राथमिक और माध्यमिक शिक्षा से वंचित होना (5 से 17 साल की आयु के बच्चों का प्रतिशत), बाल श्रमिकों के वयस्कों के काम करना (5 से 17 साल की आयु का प्रतिशत), प्रति 1,000 लड़कियों पर विवाहित लड़कियां या किशोरावस्था मां बनना (दोनों 15 से 19 वर्ष की लड़कियों के लिए) और हिंसा से विस्थापन या नरसंहार के शिकार (0 से 19 वर्ष की आयु में प्रति एक लाख पर मृत्यु) हैं।

हम भारत के प्रदर्शन का आकलन करने के लिए आठ तुलना करने लायक देशों का इस्तेमाल करते हैं। इसके लिए हमने दो सवाल रखे हैं- 1. वर्तमान स्कोर क्या है ? 2. स्कोर में कितना सुधार हुआ है ? सारणी 1 कुछ अच्छी खबरों से शुरू होती है। अधिकतम 1,000 के स्कोर में भारत का 2019 में स्कोर 769 रहा। यह बांग्लादेश, नेपाल और पाकिस्तान से अधिक था, लेकिन चीन, ब्राजील, इंडोनेशिया और श्रीलंका से कम था। केवल चीन और श्रीलंका का स्कोर ही 900 से अधिक रहा। इस स्कोर के निर्धारण को व्यापक रूप में देखने की जरूरत है। आठ संकेतकों में से हरेक को अलग-अलग तरीके से मापा गया है, इसलिए इसे ‘सामान्य’ बनाया जाना चाहिए या इसका एक मापक तय किया जाना चाहिए। इस तरह एक सामान्यीकृत संकेतक मूल्य एक्सएन (एक्स – एल)/(एच – एल) के बराबर है। यहां एक्स किसी देश

का उस संकेतक2 के लिए वास्तविक मूल्य है, एल (सबसे खराब) सभी देशों में संकेतक के लिए सबसे ज्यादा देखे जाने वाला मूल्य है और एच (सबसे बेहतर) सूचकांक के लिए सबसे कम देखे जाने वाला मूल्य है। किसी देश के कुल स्कोर का आकलन सभी आठ संकेतकों के एक्सएन को जोड़कर, इस योग को आठ से विभाजित कर और फिर 1,000 से गुणा करके किया जाता है ताकि आंकड़े 0 से 1000 के बीच प्राप्त हों।

भारत का वर्तमान स्कोर वर्ष 2000–2019 के दौरान 137 अंकों के सुधार को दर्शाता है, जो 632 से बढ़कर 769 पर पहुंच गया। यह सुधार बांग्लादेश और नेपाल के सुधार से कम रहा। हालांकि वे भारत के स्कोर तक नहीं पहुंच पाए। चीन और श्रीलंका का स्कोर पहले ही काफी ऊपर है, इसलिए वे निस्संदेह बहुत अधिक सुधार दर्ज नहीं कर पाए। ब्राजील का सुधार भी तुलनात्मक रूप से कम रहा। इंडोनेशिया और पाकिस्तान में भी सुधार कमजोर रहा। विभिन्न देशों को मिले इन स्कोरों से उन्हें क्रमबद्ध किया जा सकता है। वर्ष 2019 के लिए भारत की रैंकिंग 176 देशों में 113वीं रही।

सारणी 2 पूरी तस्वीर को चुनिंदा संकेतक घटकों में तोड़ती है। इस तरह भारत में 2015–2017 के दौरान बाल मृत्यु की दर में गिरावट दर्ज की गई, जो नमूने में शामिल अन्य देशों के समान थी। लेकिन लंबी अवधि 2011–18 के दौरान भारत गंभीर कुपोषण (कम लंबाई) को कम करने में कोई सुधार दर्ज नहीं कर सका, जबकि इस पैमाने पर श्रीलंका और पाकिस्तान में हालात और बिगड़े हैं। विशेष रूप से श्रीलंका में हालात बदतर होना आश्चर्यजनक है। साफ तौर पर स्कूल न जाने वाले बच्चों का भारत का संकेतक 2011 से 2018 के दौरान बदतर हुआ है। यह इसलिए बहुत स्क्रोन दक्षिणेश्वर, सोनागाछी और हजारा क्रॉसिंग जैसी जगहों पर लगाई गई हैं जहां कम आय वर्ग वाले लोग अधिक संख्या में रहते हैं। यह तृणमूल कांग्रेस का पारंपरिक वोट बैंक भी है। दरअसल भाजपा ने इन क्षेत्रों में पार्टी के वोट बैंक में जमकर संंध लगाई है।

सारणी 3 उस चीज पर केंद्रित है, जिसे मैं ‘बाल-वयस्क’ संकेतक कहना चाहूंगा। भारत में बाल श्रम को घटाने में कोई सुधार नहीं हुआ। बांग्लादेश और इंडोनेशिया में भी बाल

| देश | रैंक 2019 (176 देशों में) | स्कोर (1-1000) | स्कोर में बदलाव (2000-19) | |
|------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-----|
| | | 2000 | 2019 | |
| चीन | 36 | 861 | 941 | 80 |
| बांग्लादेश | 127 | 575 | 728 | 153 |
| ब्राजील | 99 | 785 | 806 | 21 |
| भारत | 113 | 632 | 769 | 137 |
| इंडोनेशिया | 107 | 721 | 792 | 71 |
| नेपाल | 134 | 543 | 685 | 142 |
| पाकिस्तान | 149 | 540 | 626 | 86 |
| श्रीलंका | 56 | 867 | 915 | 48 |

स्रोत: ग्लोबल वाइल्डड्ड रिपोर्ट, 2017 और 2019, सेव द चिल्ड्रन

| देश | बाल मृत्यु दर 2015 | गंभीर कुपोषण 2017 | गंभीर कुपोषण 2011 | स्कूल से बाहर 2013 | स्कूल से बाहर 2011 | स्कूल से बाहर 2013 |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | | | -16 | -18 | -16 | -18 |
| चीन | 10.7 | 9.3 | 9.4 | 8.1 | 11.6 | 7.6 |
| बांग्लादेश | 37.6 | 32.4 | 36.1 | 36.1 | 28.0 | 17.4 |
| ब्राजील | 16.4 | 14.8 | 7.1 | 7.1 | 7.3 | 7.2 |
| भारत | 47.7 | 39.4 | 38.7 | 38.4 | 18.6 | 20.2 |
| इंडोनेशिया | 27.2 | 25.4 | 36.4 | 36.4 | 14.3 | 14.2 |
| नेपाल | 35.8 | 33.7 | 37.4 | 35.8 | 13.4 | 13.8 |
| पाकिस्तान | 81.1 | 74.9 | 45.0 | 47.2 | 42.9 | 40.8 |
| श्रीलंका | 9.8 | 8.8 | 14.7 | 17.3 | 10.1 | 6.4 |
| विश्व | 42.5 | 39.1 | 23.2 | 22.2 | 17.8 | 17.6 |

स्रोत: ग्लोबल वाइल्डड्ड रिपोर्ट, 2017 और 2019, सेव द चिल्ड्रन

| देश | कामकाजी जीवन शुरु 2011 | कामकाजी जीवन 2013 | शारी बन्नी 2011 | अत्यधिक हिंसा बधियां 2013 | कें शिकार 2016 | कें शिकार 2016 |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | -16 | -18 | -16 | -18 | | |
| चीन | | | 3.1 | 3.1 | 6.5 | 0.6 |
| बांग्लादेश | 4.3 | 4.3 | 44.2 | 32.4 | 84.4 | 1.5 |
| ब्राजील | 8.1 | 6.6 | 3.9 | 15.1 | 62.7 | 17.7 |
| भारत | 11.8 | 11.8 | 21.1 | 15.2 | 24.5 | 1.3 |
| इंडोनेशिया | 6.9 | 6.9 | 12.8 | 12.8 | 48.0 | 2.8 |
| नेपाल | 37.4 | 37.4 | 24.2 | 27.1 | 62.1 | 1.5 |
| पाकिस्तान | | | 13.1 | 13.5 | 37.7 | 6.5 |
| श्रीलंका | 2.5 | 1.0 | 9.0 | 6.0 | 14.8 | 0.8 |
| विश्व | 12.6 | 12.6 | 14.4 | 16.0 | 50.4 | 3.3 |

श्रम को घटाने के स्तर पर कोई प्रगति नहीं हुई। हालांकि ब्राजील और श्रीलंका ने सुधार दर्ज किया है।

भारत ने 2011–18 के दौरान चीज क्षेत्र में शानदार प्रगति की है, वह बाल विवाह है। हालांकि अन्य देशों की तस्वीर मिलीजुली है। इस स्तर पर बांग्लादेश और श्रीलंका में सुधार हुआ है। इस मामले में चीन और पूर्ववत स्तर पर हैं। हालांकि चीन इस पैमाने पर पहले ही काफी ऊपर है। वहीं नेपाल, पाकिस्तान और ब्राजील में बाल विवाह के पैमाने पर हालात बदतर हुए हैं। वास्तव में ब्राजील की इस पैमाने पर स्थिति खराब होना आश्चर्यजनक है। संभवतया यह गलती की वजह से हो सकता है। किशोरावस्था में मां बनने के पैमाने पर भारत का 2016 का स्कोर चीन और श्रीलंका को छोड़कर नमूने में शामिल अन्य देशों से काफी बेहतर रहा है। भारत की यह उल्लेख्य गौर करने लायक है।

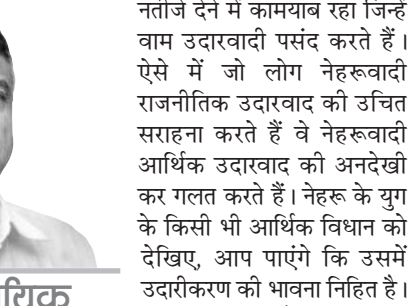
अंतिम संकेतक बाल मृत्यु दर से संबंधित है। भारत इस पैमाने पर चीन और श्रीलंका के ठीक पीछे है। यह गरीबी के बावजूद अच्छा स्कोर है। इस स्तर पर ब्राजील की हालत काफी खराब है। कुल मिलाकर भारत बच्चों की स्थिति सुधारने में प्रगति कर रहा है, लेकिन कुछ संकेतक स्थिर बने हुए हैं। भारत को अपनी वैश्विक रैंकिंग सुधारने के लिए तेजी से सुधार लाना होगा। एक अन्य निष्कर्ष यह है कि हिंसाप्रस्त क्षेत्र के रूप में ब्राजील की छवि सही साबित होती नजर आती है। मैं फिर इस बात पर जोर दूंगा कि शुद्ध आर्थिक संकेतक तब तक निरर्थक हैं, जब तक उनमें सामाजिक-आर्थिक संकेतकों को शामिल नहीं किया जाता है। यह भारत से अधिक प्रासंगिक और कहीं नहीं हो सकता।

राजनीतिक रूप से उदार आर्थिक रूप से अनुदार

चंद रोज पहले चेन्नई से प्रकाशित होने वाले और देश के शीर्षस्थ समाचार पत्रों में स्थान रखने वाले एक अखबार में भारत के भविष्य को लेकर एक निराशावादी आलेख प्रकाशित हुआ। उस आलेख में जताए गए अनुमान अत्यंत भयानक थे। उसे लिखा था हर्ष मंदर सिंह ने, जो कभी प्रशासनिक अधिकारी हुआ करते थे लेकिन अब पूर्णकालिक सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता बन चुके हैं। वह हमेशा से सरकार के कटु आलोचक रहे हैं, भले ही किसी भी राजनीतिक दल की सत्ता रही हो। अपनी इस आलोचना में वह अक्सर नैतिक और व्यावहारिक आधार पर सही भी होते हैं।

बहरहाल, उनका यह आलेख इस बात का सटीक उदाहरण है कि कैसे 2019 के आम चुनाव में भारतीय जनता पार्टी की जबरदस्त विजय के बाद नेहरूवादी उदारवादियों के मन में निराशा घर कर गई है। उनके लिए तो मानो दुनिया खत्म हो ही गई है। बहुत अजीब संयोग है कि लगभग उसी समय कराची से प्रकाशित होने वाले समाचार पत्र डॉन में भी एक आलेख प्रकाशित हुआ जिसे लिखा था जाने माने पाकिस्तानी अर्थशास्त्री अंजुम अल्टाफ ने। भारतीय लेखक की तरह उन्होंने भी भारतीय उदारवादियों की निराशा को ही प्रकट किया। वह कहते हैं कि नेहरूवादी योजना एक बुर्जुआ योजना थी जिसमें काले अंग्रेजों का एक छोटा सा समूह भारत पर ब्रिटिश राजनीतिक मूल्य थोपने का प्रयास कर रहा था। वह बेस्ट सेलर पुस्तक आइडिया ऑफ इंडिया के लेखक सुनील खिलनानी को उद्धृत करते हैं।

खिलनानी ने लिखा था कि सन 1947 में अधिकांश भारतीयों को यह पता ही नहीं था कि उन्हें क्या सौंपा गया है। इसलिए नेहरू अल्टाफ ने उनके वंशजों ने बड़ी मशक्कत करके उन्हें समझाया कि धार्मिक सहिष्णुता, उदार मूल्य और राष्ट्रीय मामलों के संचालन का उच्च वर्गीय लेकिन उदार अंग्रेजी दां माहौल ही वे चीजें हैं जो उन्हें विरासत में मिलीं। अल्टाफ कहते हैं कि यह सब इतिहास की बात हो चुकी है क्योंकि धर्मनिरपेक्षता और तमाम लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों के परदे के पीछे भारतीय मूलतः असहिष्णु और अलोकतांत्रिक हैं।



सम सामदिक

टीसीए श्रीनिवास-राघवण

राजनीति को हां, अर्थशास्त्र को ना?

ऐसे विचार प्रकट करने वाले विद्वानों, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं और अन्य लोगों की पूरी की पूरी जमात है। अर्मित्य सेन जैसे लोग भी इसमें शामिल हैं, जिनकी विद्वता पर किसी को संदेह नहीं है लेकिन उनकी आशंकाएं और उनके द्वारा की जा रही व्याख्याएं यकीनन संदेह के घेरे में हैं। कहने का तात्पर्य यह है कि कोई भी विचार अच्छा है या बुरा, इसका निर्धारण इस बात से नहीं होता है कि उक्त विचार किसने प्रकट किया है। ऐसे में यह दुखद है कि अधिकांश उदारवादी लोग ऐसे ही सोचते हैं। मैं ऐसे तमाम लोगों से एक सवाल पूछना चाहता हूँ: राजनीतिक उदारवाद, आर्थिक उदारवाद के साथ किस तरह सुसंगत है ? मैं यहां यह कहना चाहूंगा कि सन 1950 के बाद से संविधान के अनुच्छेद 19(जी) का बहुत हद तक मर्दन हुआ है। यह हर नागरिक को अपनी पसंद का रोजगार जैसे चाहे वैसे करने की स्वतंत्रता देता है।

वाम उदारवादियों का उत्तर हमेशा यही रहा है कि अगर आर्थिक उदारीकरण का अर्थ राज्य की प्रत्यक्ष भागीदारी और आर्थिक गतिविधि में निरंतर हस्तक्षेप से है तो यह आवश्यक है कि इसके माध्यम से समतावादी आर्थिक लक्ष्यों और गरीबी उन्मूलन जैसे लक्ष्यों को हासिल किया जाए। क्या वाकई?

ऐसी स्थिति में क्या हमें इसका उलट सवाल नहीं पूछना चाहिए ? मसलन क्या राजनीतिक उदारवाद को अर्थव्यवस्था के समतावादी निष्कर्षों के साथ असंगत होना चाहिए। आखिर कार तमाम दक्षिण पूर्वी एशियाई देशों से भी पहले चीन का राजनीतिक उदारवाद ऐसे समतावादी आर्थिक

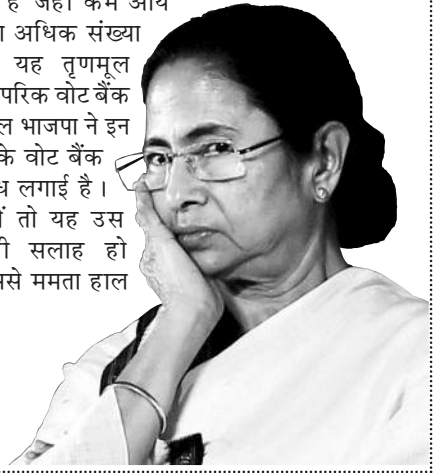
कानाफूसी

बाबा की मांगें

मध्य प्रदेश के स्वयंभू बाबा नामदेव दास त्यागी उर्फ कैप्टूर बाबा एक बार फिर सुर्खियों में हैं। कुछ अरसा पहले मध्य प्रदेश सरकार द्वारा नर्मदा नदी न्यास का अध्यक्ष बनाए जाने के बाद बाबा ने सरकार से एक हेलीकॉप्टर की मांग की थी ताकि वह नर्मदा नदी के तटवर्ती इलाकों में हो रही गतिविधियों पर नजर रख सकें। उनकी इस मांग से पहले तो सरकार हक्कीबक्की रह गई लेकिन बाद में इसे ठुकरा दिया गया। अब बाबा एक नई मांग के साथ सामने आए हैं। उन्होंने कहा है कि उन्हें मंत्रालय में एक कक्ष के साथ-साथ एक ड्रोन कैमरा मुहैया कराया जाए ताकि वह नर्मदा तथा अन्य नदियों में अवैध रेत खनन पर नजर रख सकें। इस बार उनकी दलील है कि प्रदेश की नदियों को बचाए रखने के लिए उन्हें आधुनिक अस्त्र-शस्त्र की आवश्यकता है।

वोट बैंक की जुगत

भारतीय जनता पार्टी और तृणमूल कांग्रेस के बीच, खासतौर पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी और पश्चिम बंगाल की मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी के बीच की कड़वाहट कम होने का नाम ही नहीं ले रही है। इस बीच तृणमूल कांग्रेस के एक कदम से आग और भड़कने का खतरा उत्पन्न हो गया है। जानकारी के मुताबिक कोलकाता के कुछ प्रमुख चौराहों और सार्वजनिक स्थानों पर ममता के भाषणों का प्रसारण शुरू किया गया है जिनमें वह मोदी की आलोचना करती नजर आती हैं। ऐसी स्क्रोन दक्षिणेश्वर, सोनागाछी और हजारा क्रॉसिंग जैसी जगहों पर लगाई गई हैं जहां कम आय वर्ग वाले लोग अधिक संख्या में रहते हैं। यह तृणमूल कांग्रेस का पारंपरिक वोट बैंक भी है। दरअसल भाजपा ने इन क्षेत्रों में पार्टी के वोट बैंक में जमकर संंध लगाई है। सूत्रों की मानें तो यह उस विश्लेषक की सलाह हो सकती है जिससे ममता हाल ही में मिलीं।



आपका पक्ष

स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र में खराब प्रदर्शन

नीति आयोग ने हाल ही में स्वास्थ्य सूचकांक जारी किया है जिसमें उत्तर प्रदेश ने लगातार दूसरी बार सबसे खराब प्रदर्शन किया है। साल 2017 की रैंकिंग में भी उत्तर प्रदेश सबसे निचले स्थान पर था और इस बार भी वह सबसे निचले पायदान पर रहा है। आखिर उत्तर प्रदेश में स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं में सुधार क्यों नहीं हो रहा है ? केंद्र सरकार स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र में कई योजनाएं चला रही है लेकिन लगता है राज्य के स्वास्थ्य पर इसका कोई असर नहीं हो रहा। रिपोर्ट बताती है कि उत्तर प्रदेश में जन्म के समय कम वजन, टीबी के इलाज की सफलता दर और जन्म के समय पंजीकरण का स्तर रैंकिंग में गिरावट के मुख्य कारण रहे। हालांकि बिहार की स्थिति भी काफी खराब है। प्राथमिक स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं के चलते इन्सेफेलाइटिस वायरस से कई बच्चों की मौत होने वाले राज्य बिहार की रैंकिंग में स्थिति इस बार भी नहीं बदली और रैंकिंग में नीचे



से दूसरा स्थान मिला है। यह दोनों राज्यों के लिए अच्छी स्थिति बिल्कुल नहीं कही जा सकती। इस सूचकांक की अहमियत इसलिए बढ़ जाती है क्योंकि स्वास्थ्य

मंत्रालय ने राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन (एनएचएम) के लिए जारी की जाने वाली राशि का एक हिस्सा इस सूचकांक में राज्यों के प्रदर्शन से जोड़ने का निर्णय लिया है। हालांकि

नीति आयोग की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार उग्र में स्वास्थ्य सुविधाएं बदहाल स्थिति में हैं

कुछ राज्यों ने अपने प्रदर्शन में काफी सुधार किया है। हरियाणा, राजस्थान और झारखंड इन्क्रीमेंटल परफॉर्मेंस (प्रदर्शन सुधारने की दर) के आधार पर शीर्ष तीन राज्यों की

सूची में रहे। यह सूचकांक ऐसे समय में आया है जब बिहार में चमकी बुखार से कई सौ बच्चों की मौत हो गई है और प्रशासन के लापरवाही साफ दिखाई दे रही है। राज्यों को इस समस्या के बारे में गंभीरता से सोचना होगा। अगर स्वास्थ्य सुविधाएं बेहतर नहीं होंगी तो राज्य में श्रम बल की कमी होगी और आर्थिक नुकसान भी होगा। आम जनता के स्वास्थ्य को बेहतर करने के लिए राज्य सरकारों को ठोस कदम उठाने होंगे।

तमना सिंह, लखनऊ

बैंकों के एनपीए में राहत का अनुमान

रेटिंग एजेंसी क्रिसिल की एक रिपोर्ट में बताया गया है कि देश में बैंकों के एनपीए में गिरावट आ सकती है। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार चालू वित्त वर्ष के अंत तक एनपीए 350

आधार अंकों की गिरावट के साथ 8 प्रतिशत पर आ सकता है। इससे पहले बैंकों में सकल एनपीए का स्तर मार्च 2018 में बकाया कर्ज के 11.5 फीसदी था जो मार्च 2019 में घटकर 9.3 फीसदी पर आ गया। एजेंसी के अनुसार सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के बैंकों का सकल एनपीए 2018 के 14.6 फीसदी के स्तर से 4 फीसदी कम होकर मार्च 2020 तक 10.6 फीसदी पर आ जाने का अनुमान है। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि फंसे कर्ज के मामलों में कमी पिछले वित्त वर्ष से देखी जा रही है। ताजा एनपीए वित्त वर्ष 2018–19 में आधा होकर 3.7 फीसदी पर आ गया जो इससे पूर्व वित्त वर्ष में 7.4 फीसदी था। वहीं वित्त वर्ष 2019–20 में इसके 3.2 फीसदी पर आ जाने का अनुमान है। सालों से बैंकों के सामने एनपीए बड़ी समस्या रही है। केंद्रीय बैंक आरबीआई लगातार इसपर नजर बनाए हुए है और कई ठोस कदम उठा रहा है। एनपीए में गिरावट को बैंकों के लिए सकारात्मक कदम के तौर पर देखा जा सकता है।

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।

