

# Wrapped in mystery

The modus operandi of Oyo Founder Ritesh Agarwal raising his stake in the company and the objective behind it have left the audience perplexed



## NOT FOR PROFIT

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

A WhatsApp message flashed on the mobile screen a few days ago. Another financial scam waiting to explode, it said. By then, social media had begun talking about an impending bubble burst. The chatter was prompted by Oyo Founder Ritesh Agarwal’s unusual step of pledging his shares to borrow more than \$2 billion to buy back more shares from

some of the investors in the firm. Let’s be clear. There’s no evidence, at this point, of any scam or bubble burst arising from the buy-back in the firm that aggregates hotel rooms in almost every nook and corner of the country as well as many other parts of the world. It’s the modus operandi of Agarwal raising his stake in the company and the objective behind it that has left the audience perplexed. The buy-back routed through Cayman Islands-registered entity only adds an extra layer of mystery, making industry watchers sit up. Last week, Agarwal had signed a deal to buy back shares worth nearly ₹13,770 crore (over \$2 billion) from early investors — Lightspeed Venture Partners and Sequoia India — through his Cayman islands-registered entity, RA Hospitality Holdings, to almost triple his stake in the company. Lightspeed and Sequoia were selling part of their holdings to help the

founder increase his stake while remaining invested significantly in the company’s long-term mission, Oyo said in a statement. Making things even more mysterious, Japanese financial groups Mizuho and Nomura Holdings reportedly financed Agarwal’s share buy-back. The loan has been given for three years against shares and the repayment has been timed with Oyo’s proposed initial public offering (IPO). Unravelling of the whys and hows of the buy-back could take time, perhaps a couple of years from now when Oyo goes for an IPO as planned. Or, maybe earlier. However, Oyo has been wrapped in mystery since its early days. From starting as an Indian avatar of San Francisco-based Airbnb to evolving its own business model and from being celebrated as the largest hotel chain in the country with hardly any physical assets to reaching dizzy valuations in record time, Oyo’s superfast rise has been a surprise and sometimes a cause

of worry in the fragile startup universe. More so because the man behind it all is still years away from turning 30. But the biggest mystery that Oyo was caught in for the longest time was related to acquisition of a similar budget hotel room aggregator called Zo Rooms. Reports towards end of 2015 suggested that Tiger Global-backed Zo Rooms was acquired by SoftBank-funded Oyo in an all-stock deal. Oyo kept things under wraps but later SoftBank, its lead investor, gave it away in an earnings call in 2016, opening a Pandora’s box. Then the news was out that the deal had fallen after Oyo said it didn’t see any value in the transaction. In the meantime, Zo Rooms had shut down. Eventually, the case landed up in the courts with allegations of data theft, cheating and breach of trust levelled against each other. While it seemed like an all-out war between the founders and top executives of the two start-ups, it was really

# Rail supply goes off track

Quantity and quality shortfalls from the public sector supplier derail the Railways’ track upgrade and expansion projects

SHINE JACOB

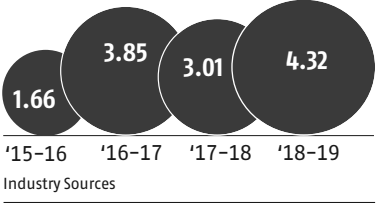
In the 2016-17 Railway Budget, the Narendra Modi government had lined up seven “missions” to transform the Indian Railways for the next decade. One key initiative was “Mission 25 Tonne”. This was a plan to increase the Railways’ revenue by augmenting carrying capacity; 70 per cent of the freight traffic would be transported on wagons with axle loads of 25 tonnes, against the current load of 22.9 tonnes. This target has, however, become the source of a bitter battle between two ministries — the railways and steel — and provoked serious arguments over the “Make in India” programme. The cause: A report by the Transportation Technology Transfer (TTT) team from the University of Illinois that the tensile strength of existing track was “not adequate” for the 25-axle load. It recommended raising the tensile strength from the current 880 mega pascal (MPa) to 1080 MPa. “Given the importance of rail as an asset from both a safety and reliability point of view for Indian Railways’ operation of both passenger and freight trains on the same infrastructure, TTT recommends the use of higher strength rails,” said the report of the team headed by Christopher Barkan.

The report, submitted just before the general elections, deals a blow to the state-run Steel Authority of India (SAIL), thus far the monopoly producer of rails for the Indian Railways. The TTT report has stated that SAIL’s rails are not suitable to run 25-tonne axle load wagons. Barkan and team were roped in after an initial study by the Railways’ research arm, the Research Designs and Standards Organisation, highlighted similar issues. Following this, the Railways asked SAIL to shift to 1080-MPa grade rail in the next two years. It is unclear whether the steel-maker has done so. A senior SAIL official merely said the company was producing rails to the Railways’ specifications and said he was unaware of the TTT report. These tensions over quality issues come after the Railways floated a global tender for rail procurement in October 2017, when SAIL failed to meet demand. These orders were to fulfill a massive track renewal project in response to a series of accidents between 2016 and 2017. SAIL, however, failed to meet the expanded demand for even the lower-axle load rails for four consecutive financial years starting 2015-16 (see table). This shortfall was compounded by the high rejection rate of around 15 per cent. After this failure, the Railways opted for a global tender to

meet its requirements in October 2017 — the first move of its kind in three decades. Though global majors such as Sumitomo Corporation, Angang Group International, Voestalpine Schienen, East Metals, CRM Hong Kong, British Steel, France Rail and Atlantic Steel participated, none of them made the cut in meeting Indian specifications. Even as the steel ministry complained that the global tender contradicted the spirit of the Make in India programme, the Railways turned to private sector manufacturers to make good the shortfall. In August 2018 and February 2019, the Railways placed — again, for the first time — two sets of orders for 100,000 tonne and 30,000 tonne of rail, respectively, worth around ₹650 crore on Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL). But this, says a Railways source, may not be enough considering the massive developmental requirements. It has lined up massive track renewal plans. Last fiscal the Railways achieved over 5,000 km and this fiscal the target is to reach 6,000 km. In short, the Railways may have to opt for another global tender. According to Vijay Dutt, former additional member of the Railways, the trouble over rail supplies is a ghost from the past. He recalls that in the 1970s, the affiliated engineering consultancy, RITES Ltd, was formed following a judicial enquiry over an accident that occurred over defective rails. But he thinks it would



OUT OF LINE  
SAIL’s shortfall in rail supply to the Railways  
(Figures in lakh tonne)



be better for domestic suppliers to step up to the plate in terms of quality and quantity rather than resorting to imports.

the investors, mainly Tiger Global and SoftBank, who were the main protagonists in the Zo-Oyo goings on. From the time the Oyo-Zo deal talk began, the valuation of Agarwal-headed business rose briskly — from around \$400 million in 2016 to an estimated \$5 billion early 2019. This time too it’s all about investor play and valuation game, rather than an initiative taken by Agarwal, 26, to increase his stake in the business through buy-back of shares after pledging shares. The latest estimated valuation of Oyo is \$10 billion, doubling up from the previous count. In an interview about three years ago to this newspaper, Agarwal had dismissed a question on his target date for becoming a unicorn (touch a \$1 billion valuation). This is what he had to say: “I have a long time before me. I don’t have a timeline for that (becoming a unicorn) and I really don’t care...What I can tell you is that we will execute our plans to be the largest and densest hotel brand of India by the end of this year. Valuation will go up if the markets are good...” This may be a good time for him to recall his own statement made three years ago, that he has a long time before him. There’s no hurry.

## CHINESE WHISPERS

### Waiting for ‘aadesh’

After the fall of the Congress-Janata Dal (Securities) government in Karnataka on Tuesday, things are moving fast in Madhya Pradesh. An exchange between Opposition leader Gopal Bhargava and Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Wednesday gave a glimpse of the manner in which things might unfold in the state. “*Hamare oopar wale number 1ya number 2 ka aadesh hua to 24 ghante bhi aapki sarkar nahi chalegi*,” (if our No. 1 or No. 2 gives us a go-ahead, your government will not last a day), Bhargava said in the Assembly. The chief minister said: “*Aapke oopar wale number 1 aur 2 samajhdar hain, isiliye aadesh nahi de rahe hain. Aap chahen to avishwas prastaav le aayen* (your No. 1 and 2 are wise, that’s why they haven’t given you such orders; if you wish, bring a no-confidence motion).” Bhargava refused to give in. “In Karnataka, it was a coalition-based on greed. I believe the situation in Madhya Pradesh is much worse,” he said.

### Irani’s admonition



It is rare to find a union minister object to a speech of his/her own party MP in Parliament. As the Rajya Sabha discussed the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment)

Bill on Wednesday, Union Minister of Women and Child Development Smriti Irani (pictured), who had moved the Bill, got up to object to the speech of the BJP’s Harnath Singh Yadav. Yadav, 78, a former Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh *pracharak*, blamed television, films and social media for the increase in crimes against women and children. He said film heroines sold condoms on television and a well-known actor could be seen giving tips on wooing women in the name of selling shampoo. Yadav ignored protests by Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan and continued with his own experience with a friend who recently told him about “porn”. “I asked him what porn is. I had only heard of popcorn,” Yadav said. “You are elderly. Women are sitting here. The entire country is watching. You can express your concerns in a more dignified language,” Irani said.

### Owaisi targets Cong, Trump

During a debate on the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, AIMIM’s Asaduddin Owaisi riled the Congress MPs and somewhat warmed the hearts of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members. “I blame the Congress party for bringing this law. They are the main culprits,” Owaisi said. Adding that he has been a victim of the law, Owaisi said, the Congress would realise what they had done only if their top leaders spent some time in prison. This led to protests by the Congress MPs, who demanded the remarks be expunged. As Home Minister Amit Shah watched, BJP MPs objected to any expunging of the remarks. With controversy over US President Donald Trump’s comments on Kashmir still fresh, the BJP MPs were all smiles when Owaisi compared the American president with a Disney cartoon character. The remarks had not been expunged till Wednesday evening.

## INSIGHT

# The buck stops with the electorate

Laws can’t stop Indian politicians from defecting. But people can



YOGENDRA YADAV

The scandalous collapse of the Karnataka government has reinforced an old demand for tightening of the anti-defection law. Sadly, the cure is worse than the disease. On the face of it, the demand is understandable. The manner in which the government led by H D Kumaraswamy (pictured) was brought down is a national shame. Not because this government was anything to be proud of. Conceived in bad faith and lived through mutual suspicion and everyday drama, the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) coalition government was a farce. But the way it has been toppled is worse. It confirmed the belief that money, backed by powers-that-be in Delhi, can buy anything, reducing the citizens into helpless or gleeful spectators. Hence, the moral outrage. There is no doubt that this was a mockery of the anti-defection provisions inserted into the Constitution. The first reflex, therefore, is to demand more stringent provisions to prevent defection. The trouble is that the existing provisions are already quite stringent, if not draconian. The current law allows a political party to order its representatives to vote in a specified way on any kind of motion. This includes not just the trust vote, but any vote that the party leadership chooses to issue a

“whip” on. Non-compliance invites disqualification from the membership of the concerned legislature. The only exception is to allow for a genuine split in the party. Earlier, the threshold of recognising a split was set at one-half of the strength of a party. It was made tougher and the bar was raised to two-thirds in 2003. This is as stringent as it gets, or should get.

### Loopholes in existing law

Any rule has loopholes. The current anti-defection rules allow two-thirds members of a legislative party to officially break from the parent party. Congress MLAs in Goa used this provision to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and their counterparts in Telangana used it to join the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS). Now, the only way to tighten the provisions further would be to raise the bar to 100 per cent, in other words, make it illegal for any elected MLA or MP to leave their party under any condition. The other loophole was invented by the BJP in Karnataka during the first Operation Kamal after the 2008 assembly election. The MLAs could resign from the legislature, switch sides, re-contest under a new symbol and come back to the assembly from a different party. This time too, the BJP has used this route. There is no pretension of an ideological or political split. It is defection, plain and simple, engineered through the resignation route. There is no doubt that big money has changed hands. There is no doubt that the by-elections that follow will be anything but fair. The only way to legally prevent this would be by making it illegal to resign. Those who resign could be disqualified from contesting elections for a certain period. This is what reformers want now. This reformist temptation must be



resisted. We should perhaps tweak the existing law a bit to put some restrictions. For example, a legislator who resigns and is re-elected can be prevented from holding any ministerial berth or any public office for one year since re-election. But any other “strengthening” of the anti-defection provisions won’t achieve the purpose. It could lead to worse problems and complications.

### Can’t prevent defection

There are no fool-proof remedies against defection. No degree of tightening of the loopholes can prevent a willing legislator from switching sides. A more stringent law can only increase the cost of defection. That leads to a corresponding increase in the price expected and demanded to switch sides. If the law were to be amended to disallow any split in the party under any condition, it would mean that every defector would take the resignation route. If every resignation is punished with disqualification, the defectors will start demanding higher price to compensate them for the loss. All this would no doubt discourage defection, but cannot prevent it altogether. Even if we succeed, there is a heavy price that we would pay for this success. Late Madhu Limaye, a veteran socialist, was perhaps the lone voice to warn us against the dangers of anti-defection

legislation. He had said the law would mean the end of intra-party democracy and a legislator’s independence. History has proved him right. Anti-defection law and its subsequent tightening have led to party leaderships tightening their stranglehold over elected representatives. Parliamentary proceedings are a single-command performance. The clique or the family that controls the party letterhead controls the lives of MLAs and MPs. If they fall out of favour of the party bosses, elected representatives count for nothing. Those who elected them also count for nothing.

### Electors can show the way

Today, the dissenters within a party have two options: Rebel or resign. If the law were to be amended to disallow even two-thirds of a party’s MLAs or MPs from parting ways, it would lead to a ridiculous situation where the entire legislature party could be made to do what no one wishes to. And if the law were to be amended to punish those who resign, the last option available to a dissenter would be closed. We would shut the doors for defection, but by shutting the doors on whatever remains of intra-party democracy, we would fight the evil by creating a bigger evil. What, then, is the real solution? I am afraid the only solution to such problems in a democracy is to go back to the people. Naming and shaming is more powerful than any legal remedy. The only way to prevent defection altogether is to get the voters to punish the defector. No political leader wants an early termination of his or her career. So, if s/he knows that switching sides would make it impossible for him/her to go back to the electorate and get re-elected, s/he would not contemplate it. As long as the defectors of Karnataka can hope to get re-elected by the people, you cannot prevent defection. You cannot insulate a democracy from the people. In politics, search for fool-proof remedies is a fatal temptation. (By special arrangement with ThePrint)

The author is the national president of Swaraj India. Views are personal.

## LETTERS

### A great breakthrough

Your front page report “India set to breach top 50 in Global Innovation Index” by Subhayan Chakraborty (July 24) is heartwarming news. That we have climbed from rank 81 in 2015 to, hopefully, less than 50 in 2019 speaks volumes about the glorious work being done by our scientists, engineers, brilliant young innovators and also the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) leading the effort by “making innovation a key objective in policy”. That the index is developed jointly by World Intellectual Property Organization and great universities like Cornell and an equally distinguished business school like INSEAD makes the recognition credible and beyond any political manoeuvring. It is a true measure of all the 80 indicators that go into making this index. That it “provides long term tools that assist countries in tailoring public policies to promote long term growth, productivity and jobs through innovation” makes it a very powerful index. Here’s wishing all strength to DPIIT Secretary Ramesh Abhishek to reach the lofty aim of reaching “the top 10 in all the global indices”. However high and improbable the aim seems as of now, one has to start by dreaming big and then working assiduously towards achieving the same. Our ranking as “the most innovative country in the Central and South Asian region every year since 2011” further strengthens the credibility of our work

in this direction. “Consistently outperforming on innovation relative to GDP” is a wonderful recognition of the great work being done by all those concerned — public and private sectors — in this direction.

Krishan Kalra Gurugram

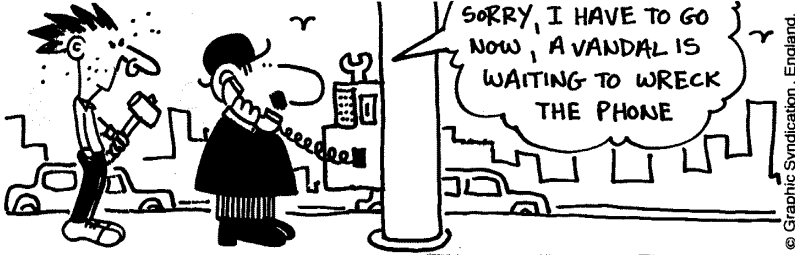
### Ominous times ahead

This refers “Boris and Brexit” (July 24). The era of Boris Johnson is here. Brexit just started as a political teaser or a trial balloon. No one expected it to turn menacingly real and burst on a disillusioned populace. Soon enough, the UK not only tied itself into knots over Brexit but thrust many nations as well into chaos. The appointment of Johnson as the UK’s new flag bearer after three confused but educative years under Theresa May is ominous. Johnson, much like Trump, comes with a colourful personal history, wearing up his sleeve solutions to everything and sports a free tongue. Both revel in riding the opportunistic vehicle of hollow nationalism. While Trump has managed to traverse thus far armed with the might of his dollar and an ardent fan club, Johnson may well succeed in dragging down both the pound and Britain’s stature in global politics, trade and finance.

R Narayanan Navi Mumbai

Letters can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to: The Editor, Business Standard, Nehru House, 4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002. Fax: (011) 23720201. E-mail: letters@bsmail.in. All letters must have a postal address and telephone number.

## HAMBONE



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## Untangling labour laws

Govt has made a good start, but glitches remain

The government has hit the ground running on reforming India's complex labour law system, often seen as a major hurdle in attracting investment in the country. By bringing two key sets of legislation — Code on Wages Bill, 2019, and Code on Occupational Safety Health and Working Conditions, 2019 — within two months of taking charge in its second term, the government has taken determined steps to untangle the cobweb of labour laws. The two Bills put together will lead to a sharp decline in the total number of provisions in labour laws from 747 to 203, as 17 labour laws will be combined into these codes.

One key proposal towards ease of compliance is the plan for single registration, single licence, and single return for establishments (for both industry and the services sector) hiring at least 10 workers anywhere in the country. This will bolster India's ranking in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business, as setting up a business will become easier. Presently, an establishment has to be registered under eight labour laws, obtain separate licences under four Acts, and file returns for 17 laws.

According to another proposal in the Occupational Safety Health and Working Conditions Bill, companies will be required to acquire single licence for executing multiple projects, involving contract workers for a period of five years. Currently, companies have to obtain separate licences for different projects leading to delays. However, it would be advisable to revisit the proposed clause asking companies to state the number of contract workers they might require over five years. Asking companies to re-apply for the licence for hiring even a single additional worker will defeat the idea of easing compliance.

The fresh draft of the Code on Wages Bill is a welcome move, as the one introduced in 2017 intended to cover the entire workforce under the minimum wage law. The government has addressed fears of state governments by doing away with the proposal to fix separate national minimum wages for different states. Instead, it will fix a mandatory floor for states "based on minimum basic needs of workers." This will allow states to fix their own minimum wage levels, while adhering to a floor. The next logical step would be to keep the floor at a reasonable level so that all the states are able to comply without losing competitiveness.

Where the Code has gone wrong is the proposal that the minimum wage will be fixed "primarily" based on skills or geography, or both. Prescribing a minimum wage level for skilled workers would obstruct efficient functioning of markets, as wages must be market-linked beyond a minimum level. Also, while Kerala has 10 different types of minimum wages based on skills, Chandigarh has nine, Bihar and Delhi have six. The Bill may lead to a number of minimum wage variants in a particular state.

Going forward, the real test will be the Code on Industrial Relations Bill, which will be important for giving businesses more flexibility to retrench workers or shut shop. Greater flexibility to hire more workers and attain economies of scale will help improve India's competitiveness in the global markets.

## Embracing innovation

Blanket ban on cryptocurrency isn't a good idea

India is open to the use of blockchain technology but not private cryptocurrencies. If the recommendations of the inter-ministerial panel headed by Finance Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg — which submitted its report on Monday — are accepted and the proposed Bill is passed, India will not only shut its door to cryptocurrencies, such as bitcoin, but will also make dealing in such instruments an offence with imprisonment of up to 10 years.

The idea of putting a blanket ban on cryptocurrencies is premature for multiple reasons. For one, these are still early days for cryptocurrencies and tradeoffs are not fully understood. A complete ban might insulate India from technological developments in the area, which can be useful in many ways. For instance, the committee itself has recommended the use of distributed ledger technology (DLT), the underlying technology for bitcoin. Second, it will be extremely difficult to administer and enforce the ban. It is possible that the trade will move underground and cryptocurrencies will be used for unlawful activities.

To be fair, cryptocurrencies are risky instruments. For instance, they can be extremely volatile and owning them without understanding the associated risks may result in losses. It can also create regulatory challenges, as capital can move seamlessly across borders. Money created by private entities can increase complications for central banks as well. However, the penetration is still too low to cause any systemic threat. Therefore, rather than banning cryptocurrencies, what is needed at this stage is to educate and inform people about the associated risks.

Nonetheless, the panel has done well to recognise the importance of DLT. For example, it can significantly increase efficiency in trade finance by making transactions more transparent. Further, it can considerably reduce paperwork for know-your-customer requirements by enabling verification through a decentralised ledger. DLT can also help improve the quality of land records, which will allow both farmers and small businesses to access credit on favourable terms. The committee has also advised keeping an open mind regarding the possibility of introducing central bank digital currency in India. Again, this is an area that is not fully understood. Several central banks have started work in this direction. The Bank for International Settlements is also working with central banks interested in issuing digital currencies. There are plenty of issues that need to be settled before central banks can start issuing digital currencies. For instance, it is important to understand the implications of direct access to the central bank's liability, and how it will affect the banking system and financial intermediation. Although an interest-bearing digital currency can perhaps improve monetary policy transmission in an economy like India, it can create significant disruption in the banking system and could become a risk for financial stability. Among other things, the introduction of digital currency might also require changes in the payment system.

It is encouraging that the inter-ministerial panel has shown marked openness to technological innovation and ideas in terms of encouraging greater adoption of DLT, and exploring the possibility of central bank digital currency. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said in the context of existing cryptocurrencies.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



## India's dilemmas in Afghanistan

New Delhi should become more proactively involved in the peace process and not shy away from drawing its own red-lines

Even as talks of reconciliation gather momentum in Afghanistan, violence too has surged, underscoring the high stakes for all sides. US Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad is aiming to reach an agreement with the insurgents by September 1 on a road map to end the 18 year conflict, which the American public wants to end and was one of the main election planks of the US President Donald Trump.

Seven rounds of direct talks have been held between the US and the Taliban since October last year, which are primarily aimed at ensuring a safe exit for the US in return of the insurgents guaranteeing that Afghan territory won't be used by foreign militants and won't pose a security threat to the rest of the world. The latest round of talks in Doha was considered to be "most productive" and there is a new momentum in these negotiations after months of stalemate. Washington continues to insist that it is seeking a "comprehensive peace agreement, not a withdrawal agreement", though there are few takers for this sentiment.

Earlier this month, the US issued a joint statement with China, Russia and Pakistan, urging the Taliban to agree to a ceasefire and begin talks with the elected government in Kabul to usher in an era of peace and stability in the war-ravaged country. More significantly, these powers "welcomed" the involvement of Pakistan, the main sponsor of the Taliban, signifying a dramatic shift in American position from one of isolating Pakistan to that of getting Pakistan on board. Meanwhile, Pakistan has been keen to regain some traction with the Trump

Administration with which its ties had been in a state of deep freeze. It is hoping that by cooperating with the US in putting pressure on the Taliban to strike a peace deal in Afghanistan, it can mend fences with an increasingly adversarial Trump Administration. Pakistan's role has once again emerged as central in the unfolding dynamic in Afghanistan. Washington's long-awaited invitation to Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan to visit the US should also be seen in this light.

India has been observing these developments with a sense of wariness as it has not been brought into the loop so far by Washington. It is only recently that the US officials started briefing India after New Delhi made its reservations clear. India's position of not having anything to do with the Taliban had become untenable. It was only in November last year that New Delhi decided to send two former Indian diplomats "at a non-official level" to participate in Moscow round of talks with the Taliban. More recently, New Delhi has articulated certain conditions that it feels need to be met if the negotiations with the Taliban were to succeed.

Given India's stakes in the incumbent government in Kabul, it has called for all initiatives and processes to include "all sections of the Afghan society, including the legitimately elected government." New Delhi's fears that marginalisation of the Ghani government would signal the end of almost two decades of hard work by the international community in bringing some semblance of democratic normalcy to the conflict-prone nation. This also allows



HARSH V PANT

## Progress by indices

Global indices are increasingly becoming the yardstick by which countries — especially developing countries struggling for foreign direct investment — seek to judge themselves on the world stage. Can they be considered accurate signals of a nation's progress? India's variable performance on a range of indicators suggest there is room for doubt — lots of it.

There is, for instance, considerable excitement now that India has jumped five places up the rankings in the latest Global Innovation Index, from 57 to 52 out of 126 economies. As with India's rapid promotion up the World Bank's Doing Business rankings, which saw India jump 23 spots from 100 to 77 in 2018 among 190 countries, this promotion, too, is the result of some energetic action on the part of the Modi government. For the Doing Business rank, the government created a task force that adopted a laser focus on critical metrics that helped India gain 65 positions in the last four years, a commerce ministry press release proudly informs us.

At the release of the Global Innovation Index in New Delhi — the first time the report has been released in a developing economy — Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal exultantly spoke of "a new approach and engagement has become a new hallmark of India as we move towards a more prosperous country."

Stirring words, but they surely overstate the position. The IITs and Indian Institute of Science are among the handful of world class institutions we have and India is justly proud of its global IT and engineering prowess. Yet, consider that the

Indian telecom industry (like its global counterparts) is currently split between choosing technology provided by Chinese, Korean and American companies for 5G services.

Indian corporate R&D spending, even accounting for the relatively high-spending pharma sector, is famously low, and rarely a week goes by without some commentator or other pointing to China's impending global tech prowess (the Asian superpower's R&D spends per head are eight times India's).

That said, there is little doubt that this regime has a genuine interest in promoting the cause of innovation, and the World Intellectual Property Organisation commended the improvement in the policy environment and the reduction in the time taken to examine and award intellectual property rights.

The broader problem is this: Merely focusing on specific mar- que indices alone cannot ensure a desired outcome. Just as the promotion in the Doing Business ranks made no appreciable difference to FDI inflows (in fact, they have slowed), a bump up the Innovation Index won't accelerate India's journey to world tech championship because such achievements do not occur in isolation.

A look at any of the leaders on any of the indices that proliferate these days will reveal a pattern: The US, Scandinavia, Germany, China, Taiwan, Singapore tend to inhabit the top rungs. Crucially, these countries do not just lead on hard metrics such as Doing Business, Innovation and so on but also in terms of Human Development Indicators



SWOT

KANIKA DATTA

India to formally engage with the Taliban.

New Delhi has also underlined that "any process should respect the constitutional legacy and political mandate." This is important as the Taliban remain reluctant to commit themselves to broader democratic processes and key aspects such as women's rights even as they remain committed to their own interpretation of the Sharia law. Finally, it is vital for India that any process in Afghanistan "should not lead to any ungoverned spaces where terrorists and their proxies can relocate." Last time when the US had departed from Afghanistan, giving Pakistan a free hand, Indian security interests were severely compromised, as a rising tide of extremism and terrorism in Kashmir made India extremely vulnerable.

It is not entirely clear how many of these objectives India would be able to secure as Washington is seeking a quick departure from Afghanistan. India's significant economic and cultural investment would come to naught if it does not do a quick course correction. Earlier this month, the Modi government while allocating around \$58 million as development aid to Afghanistan also cut its allocation to Iran's Chabahar Port to \$6.5 million from \$1.5 billion. This was a recognition of the changing ground realities in Afghanistan where future Indian role looks uncertain.

Many in India will find in these developments a reason to blame the Trump Administration. But that's a trope New Delhi should avoid. Washington has its own interests in Afghanistan that it is trying to protect. In fact, it is likely that in the process, it would safeguard some Indian equities in Afghanistan as well, as — with or without Afghanistan — the US needs India to maintain a favourable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. But India's approach towards Afghanistan has, from the very beginning, been too dependent on the benevolence of others. New Delhi continued to insist that it wants to invest only its soft power in Afghanistan but the fact that it succeeded was due to the American security umbrella. India has done some great work in Afghanistan — in being one of the largest aid givers, in being a major source of cultural influence, in building capacities in various sectors of an emerging democratic polity and in training security forces. But when it came to the crunch, it had to rely on others for hard power projection, even when its own civilians were targeted.

For a nation that is looking to be recognised as a leading global power, that's not a very comfortable position to be in. Being too risk-averse in foreign policy has its own set of costs. There is too much at stake and New Delhi should become more proactively involved in the peace process and not be shy of drawing its own red-lines. After all, India too can play the role of a disruptor if its interests are ignored. This is important to underline not only because Indian interests are involved, but also because the hopes and aspirations of ordinary Afghans cannot be cannot be dealt a mortal blow to satisfy the whims of any single power. New Delhi should make it clear that nice guys need not always finish last!

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and other quality-of-life metrics.

On Human Development Indicators alone, India has lagged with depressing consistency. In 2018, India climbed just one spot to 130 out of 189 countries, and in several critical aspects it scores worse than Pakistan, Bangladesh and sub-Saharan Africa. On the Corruption Perceptions Index, it improved its position only marginally to 78 out of 180 countries in 2018 from 81 in 2017. Also worth noting is that the country dropped two notches in the latest Global Press Freedom Index to 140 out of 180 countries.

When we get into the more wacky indices that are in vogue these days, India's performance doesn't get much better. Take the World Happiness Index. According to this, the Finns are the happiest people on earth. Why they should be so happy when they don't see the sun for half the year and eat terrible food beats me. But Incredible India, with 365 days of sunshine, Bollywood, and the world's best cuisines, fell seven spots to 140 in the latest World Happiness Report, behind Bhutan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Our corporations don't figure too well either. There is something called an Empathy Index that ranks companies (listed ones) according to the internal culture, CEO performance, ethics and social media presence. Empathy, you understand, is the favoured management-speak term in these hard times. No Indian company figured in the top 20 most empathetic corporations. Eight figure in the 20 least empathetic of the first index.

It's going to take a lot more than focussed task forces, however well-meaning, to improve India's ranking on these variables. But without them, progress up the other "hard" indices will be tough to achieve.

tions when they intend to share it to the cloud. Nor can you pass your own copy of a Kindle book on to a loved one, or pass it down to another student.

Still, not all is lost. I still find myself unable to write in the margins of books, but it appears that this severe training doesn't stop me when I'm reading documents or books on the iPad. Give me a PDF of an economics paper and an Apple Pencil, and I'm a happy man, making nasty remarks about the writer's choice of variables in various shades of red. Some of those I certainly won't be sharing to the cloud. Nor will any hypothetical descendants ever see it. Margin-writing is now a private act — like e-mails, and lists made in Evernote, and all the other electronic detritus of one's life, it will never be added to an archive in a university presuming any of us ever become famous enough to deserve one. Future historians trying to deduce what today's readers think of books they bought will just have to look up their GoodReads reviews. Somehow that seems far less romantic.

## Marginal analysis



PAGE DOWN

MIHIR SHARMA

Growing up in the city then called Calcutta, in the 1980s, you grew accustomed to second-hand and hand-me-down books. Textbooks, in particular, would often be handed over from those being promoted out of a class to those coming in. Occasionally, these textbooks would be a thing of beauty — a decade old, featuring the

doodles and comments, of varying quality and comprehensibility, of all the schoolboys who had spent hours in class being bored, pen and paper their only escape.

One was supposed to do one's best to avoid partaking in this harmless entertainment, of course. We were all told, growing up, that books were precious and one shouldn't put marks in them, even if it was a decade-old *Radiant Reader*. And, truly, that has seeped so into my soul that I hesitate even to write a note in books I'm giving as a gift. We were never encouraged to follow the example of Edgar Allan Poe, who titled his own reflections *Marginalia*. He was quite firm on "In getting my books, I have always been solicitous of an ample margin; this is not so much through any love of the thing in itself, however agreeable, as for the facility it affords me of pencilling

in suggested thoughts, agreements, and differences of opinion, or brief critical comments in general."

Poe was part of a great tradition. Things scribbled in books are an art form of their own, and one as old as reading itself. Medieval monks — individuals who had a fairly similar lifestyle and outlook to 1980s Calcuttan schoolboys — were indefatigable writers in the margins, and not all of their glosses were respectable. Even centuries-old receipts and bills are treasure troves for doodle-hunting historians: the earliest use of anti-Semitic tropes that became tragically common in medieval Europe is a cartoon scrawled on a tax receipt in depicting Jewish businessmen with long noses and surrounded by gold, dating from the English king's exchequer in the 13th century. Sometimes a particular bit of marginalia can become immortal, spawning books and entire

careers. Consider the afterlife of Pierre de Fermat's little note in the margin of his copy of *Diophantus' Arithmetica*: "I have a truly marvellous demonstration of this proposition which this margin is too narrow to contain." He may have been wrong about having found a proof

of his famous "last theorem", but imagine if he had never written that reminder to himself at all. (It was only discovered and publicised by his son, after Fermat himself had died without writing down his supposed proof in full.)

Less consequential and more personal history is also revealed in the margins of old books. Many of us own books that once belonged to grandpar- ents or great-grandparents, and the occasional note in the margins, a pas- sage or two underlined, is a sometimes

surprising window into the opinions of people we did not always know that well growing up.

One of the tragedies, perhaps, of the growth of e-readers is that we will leave no such archive behind. This is not, perhaps, for want of trying on the part of the large American corporations that now run the documents and books trade, who as we know have only our best interests at heart. Books on the Kindle, for example, offer the option in some cases — if your Kindle is connected to the internet — of seeing what other readers have underlined or commented. I'm not sure if it's a reflection on our times,

or on the general uselessness of social media, that one tends to turn this functionality off. People seem to highlight the most uninteresting or obvious sec-



## Even a 7% growth looks a bit of a stretch now

Private consumption & investment are flagging, govt alone can’t revive growth; need a big reforms push for that

THE IMF ON Tuesday lowered its growth forecast for India in FY20 to 7%. But, given how private sector capex has been sluggish for nearly four years now and consumption demand has slowed sharply over the past year, most economists expect GDP to grow at just 6.7-6.8% or even more slowly. There are, however, no quick-fixes; sustainable growth comes from big, game-changing reforms, not populist measures. Simply lowering interest rates does not mean businesses will start borrowing. The current slowdown must be viewed against the backdrop of the twin-balance sheet crisis, never easy to recover from in the best of times. The revival is all the more difficult because industry is still grappling with GST and the disruption from demonetisation. While consumption demand has held up the economy in the last few years, having fallen off now, it is unlikely to revive meaningfully without investment picking up. The slowdown in consumption spends are being attributed to stagnant or falling farm incomes, the lack of new jobs and large job losses in industry. Spends are also subdued because consumers aren’t seeing any significant rise in their incomes. ACMA said, on Wednesday, ten lakh jobs were in jeopardy in the auto components sector. In fact, the higher surcharge imposed on high net worth individuals could dampen demand for housing, a key sector for the economy, and one that could have catalysed growth.

The government has not increased the allocation for capital expenditure meaningfully, hamstrung as it is by high revenue expenditure and deficits. The FY20 allocation is ₹3.4 lakh crore, up 12% over FY19, but the total capex, together with PSUs, is smaller than in 2018-19. Also, the government’s share of total capex has been falling over the years and, with several PSUs unable to generate adequate internal accruals, there has been a tendency to resort to extra-budgetary borrowings, which are pressuring their balance sheets. At the end of the day, though, the government’s investment accounts for a relatively small proportion of India’s investment, it is the private sector that needs to invest, and the key to encouraging more private sector investment lies in reforms in the areas of land, labour, regulation, enforcement of contracts, taxation and FDI. It must be recognised that much of the private sector remains over-leveraged and, as the corporate results show, cash flows are weakening. Those industrialists that have the ability to leverage have used this to buy stressed assets via the IBC route. To be sure, routine capex will continue, but given that there is adequate capacity across most sectors, there is no real urgency to create more. Indeed, as R Shankar Raman, CFO at Larsen & Toubro observed, a revival in private sector capex is a good 12-18 months away. As he pointed out, it is as hard to raise money in the capital markets as it is in the debt markets unless companies are highly rated. While the reckless lending by NBFCs needed to be curbed, it has reduced the available liquidity in the system especially for the second- and third-tier borrowers. At the same time, banks have become risk averse, not surprising since the NPA cycle doesn’t seem to have ended yet. Even as it eases regulation for labour and land, the government must worry about credit flow to weaker companies. Without that, a recovery could take years.

## Auditors must answer

Sebi proposals will bring transparency, boost investor confidence

IN THE WAKE of IL&FS auditors, Deloitte Haskins & Sells and BSR & Associates, facing regulatory action after the company started defaulting on its debt—IL&FS has a total debt of ₹106,000 crore—and it was found that the auditors didn’t red-flag the problems in time, there have been a spate of resignations by auditors from a host of companies where the ability to service borrowings has come under cloud. Auditors have walked out abruptly from their contracts with Reliance Capital, Manpasand Beverages, Fortis, and Bhushan Steel, among others, recently. While, in many cases, auditors have cited preoccupation with other work, primarily, as the reason for this, it does seem as if the resignations are related to the authorities turning up the heat on auditors. In some cases, it is true, auditors have flagged entries in the books that don’t look *kosher* or even cited the hindrances in accessing relevant information to audit the financial statements of a company. But, largely, auditors haven’t been forthcoming about the real reason for resigning, and this has left investors in the lurch.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has done well to propose a regime in which auditors can’t resign without spelling out the real reasons for such a decision. Sebi, in a consultation paper, recommends that if an auditor of a listed company wishes to resign, and has completed the audit for all quarters of a financial year except the last, then the auditor will have to finalise the audit report for the entire financial year before walking out. In case the auditor wants to walk out during any quarter other than the last, a limited audit for that quarter has to be submitted. These provisions will also hold for any unlisted subsidiary of the listed entity. And, if the auditor is resigning because the entity isn’t providing the required information, the auditor must provide a disclaimer in the report and, more important, give details of what information was sought—in which case, investors will have a better idea of just how bad things are in the organisation. The auditor also has to give detailed reasons for resignation and state that there are no material reasons other than those provided. Sebi has done well to bring the company’s audit committee into the process; so, if an auditor is not getting information, this has to be brought to the attention of the audit committee.

The financial jugglery that firms with dodgy accounting indulge in, it is true, makes gleaming of facts extremely difficult—a recent report by REDD details how such hard-to-detect masking has been done in some cases—but, the role of the auditors is to uncover this and report it; and, if that is not possible, then at least to flag potential problem areas. That said, meaningful action against corporate fraud will also need the regulators to up their surveillance game and also to bring to book lapses in corporate governance of the kind that happened at IL&FS; the company’s risk-management committee, for instance, met just once in four years (the consolidated debt around doubled during this period). Not allowing the auditor to evade its responsibility is welcome, but more needs to be done to prevent another IL&FS. In that matter, both RBI and Sebi were caught napping.

## WastedLIVES

Sewer workers continue to work under dangerous and dehumanising, even illegal, conditions

ACCORDING TO DATA from the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK), as many as 50 sewer workers, a subset of manual scavengers who almost exclusively belong to the Scheduled Caste, have died between January and June 2019. Being based on reports submitted by only eight states and UTs, this number is a gross underestimation. Further, based on data reported by 20 states and UTs, 814 deaths related to manual scavenging have occurred since 1993 when the central government outlawed the practice nation-wide by enacting The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 found that 1,80,657 Indian households are involved in manual scavenging, despite legal sanctions against it.

Sewer workers in India, more often than not, receive no gear for personal protection, making their working conditions dehumanising and dangerous. Worse, marginalised castes are forced to undertake sewer work despite the availability of machines that perform the same function more efficiently and the majority of sewer workers are employed indirectly by state government agencies and urban local bodies. This employment is not strictly illegal since the law allows *safai karamcharis* to work only if they have proper protective gear, but how many actually have these? Sanitation being a state subject, the blame for the deplorable working conditions of sewer workers lies squarely with state governments. Except, maybe, for Delhi, not many states have moved to equip sanitation workers with mechanised/safer/more sanitary cleaning tools. Even if not complicit, the Centre, too, is to blame—at the very least, for its complacency, when it comes to protecting the lives of one of India’s most marginalised groups.

### AILING HEALTHCARE

THE FAULT LINES OF THE INDIAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF OUR UNDERSTAFFED AND UNDER-SKILLED HEALTH WORKFORCE, ARE IN URGENT NEED OF REPAIR

# Health needs more healing hands

K SRINATH REDDY

President, Public Health Foundation of India  
*Views are personal*



higher investment in a larger global health workforce, as a potent stimulus for economic growth.

If only qualified health workers are counted, based on appropriate educational qualifications, India has 16 health workers per 1,000 population according to a recent analysis of data from the National Sample Survey of 2016. Qualified allopathic doctors are overall 4.5 per 10,000 population, but only 1 per 11,000 in the public sector. While we are short of both basic and specialist doctors, the number of nurses is even lower than needed. The ratio of nurses and midwives to doctors is 1.7, while it should be at least 3:1. Midwifery has been subsumed under general nursing, after independence. While it has been estimated that India needs 2.5 million midwives, there are a total of only 1.3 million nurses overall, with many of them lacking adequate midwifery skills.

How do we overcome these challenges? The reconstituted Medical Council of India, with a nominated Board of Governors, is doing a commendable job in reforming a moribund regulatory system of medical education. While doing so, it has recently increased the number of medical undergraduate seats by 15,000 to reach 75,000. Since it has been estimated that we need 100,000 undergraduate seats, it proposes now to permit consortia of large private institutions of repute to start medical colleges or even partner with existing medical colleges to train more under-

graduate students. Many such hospitals already run postgraduate medical courses affiliated to the National Board of Examinations (NBE).

Even this may not solve the problem of maldistribution, where several states have few medical colleges and not many large hospitals. It is necessary to upgrade district hospitals in these states and make them robust training facilities for undergraduate and postgraduate medical and nursing education as well as allied health professional training. New medical colleges can be started in linkage with such district hospitals for undergraduate training, and postgraduate training can be affiliated to the NBE. The National Health Mission should consider recruiting fresh medical graduates into a 3-year short service commission to provide for flexibility in posting to underserved states and areas.

There is a need to revive midwifery training programmes while continuing to develop the strength of nursing to full potential by enhancing scale, skills, scope, social status and salaries. Nurse practitioners can become the heart and hands of comprehensive primary healthcare in both rural and urban settings. Digital technology, with decision support systems, management algorithms and tele-consult-

ing, can greatly amplify their effectiveness. Along with community health workers, nurses and other categories of mid-level healthcare providers will be the main service delivery resources in primary care, especially in areas where doctors are scarce. People will not need to travel far to distant hospitals, if primary care needs are met closer to home.

Advanced clinical nursing, needed for multiple specialities, can be developed by starting diplomas and fellowships affiliated to the NBE which already has a wide array of such programmes for sub-speciality training in postgraduate medical disciplines. This will ensure that teamwork, whether in intensive care or surgical theatres, is nurtured through connected and complementary training programmes in common clinical settings. Nurse researchers too must emerge through public health and clinical nursing programmes.

These measures will generate jobs in the many categories of the health workforce, for millions of young persons yearning for productive employment. From the current 6.75 million, the workforce

can expand to 11.4 million by 2025. Each year, nearly 3 million youth pass the 12th standard exam in the science stream. A sizeable segment of that group can be channelled into a skilled health workforce. As the numbers swell and the country’s health system needs are saturated, the surplus may also invigorate the global health workforce as countries with ageing populations and shrinking workforce stretch their hands to seek support from India’s demographic bounty. But till then, India and Bihar first!

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Trump mediation row

It is widely known that the incumbent US President Donald Trump is given to uttering barefaced lies, falsehoods and half-truths. But then the perception of Donald Trump as a habitual and pathological liar alone does not suffice to dismiss his startling revelation that PM Narendra Modi implored him to mediate on the Kashmir issue. It now lies with PM Modi to clarify that the request for mediation was never made. Since it was a ‘confidential’ discussion in a one-to-one meeting at Osaka, it is only proper and right that PM Modi himself puts the record straight and establish that the so-called most powerful man on the planet lied. Those who ask him to clarify and nail Trump’s lie are not ‘Pakistani proxies’. Nevertheless, it is intriguing that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not deem it necessary to divulge that the Kashmir issue figured in his talks with Donald Trump. Or it did not crop up at all. It is possible that Trump made the ‘false’ claim to project himself as a big leader and massage his ego. Nevertheless, Trump’s claim and India’s refutation should not be allowed to mar the ‘personal chemistry’ between the two world leaders. Looked at the row at another level, it can be asked why a shift in New Delhi’s Kashmir policy from ‘bilateral engagement only’ top external mediation if the intention and goal is to bring peace to the sub-continent. If Narendra Modi is ‘personally convinced’ that the US can play a mediator or arbitrator to resolve the dispute, he can, given the political capital invested in him, easily convince his compatriots of its rightness. One fifth of humanity cannot live in hostility for all time to come. An amicable settlement of the intractable and thorny Kashmir problem could fetch Narendra Modi the Nobel Prize for Peace despite his chequered political career. — G David Milton, Maruthancode

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

## Is it time to impose a carbon tax?

The tax can be an effective policy instrument for realising India’s Paris commitments and can substitute the current Clean Environment Cess

IN THE RECENT Union Budget, a major initiative has been taken by the government to promote e-vehicles. However, the initiative is only a small step to curb pollution effectively and give pace to the emissions reduction targets announced in the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) during the Paris Climate meet. Other measures, such as a carbon tax, could have been instrumental in this regard.

Local pollutants, particularly particulate matter, cause many health-related problems such as breathing, wheezing, asthma, and aggravation of existing respiratory and cardiac conditions. It has been found recently that air pollution may lead to hypertension risk, particularly in women in India. Further, life expectancy, due to this, has reduced by 2.6 years. Worldwide, more deaths per year are linked to air contamination, particularly from the industrial and transport sectors. The situation is getting worse, particularly in megacities, including Delhi.

As per statistics, India is the world’s fourth-largest emitter of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) though per capita emission is low due to a large population. Rapid economic growth with little concern for the environment makes this a serious threat. India’s total GHG emissions are more than 3,200 million metric tonnes, which constitute around 7% of the world’s total GHG emissions, with an average growth of 6.3% in 2018. The energy sector has a major role in this and contributes 68.7% of total emissions. Over a span of 24 years from 1990, this emission has increased by 180%.

The growing energy demand and consumption have led to an emergent need to put a price on emissions, directly reducing the exploitation of natural resources and pollution. Putting a price on carbon and taxing it directly is considered far better than deciding the limit of emissions through the ‘cap and trade’ system, under which maximum emis-

sion limits are decided for the firms. Firms are required to buy permits if they pollute more than the prescribed limit. Similarly, firms can sell their permits to others if they pollute less than the limit. Obviously, the carbon tax system has advantages over the ‘cap and trade’ system due to its simplicity, affordability, revenue recycling and predictability of carbon prices. Further, the tax has price certainty, transparency and focuses on direct response as it checks unintended incidence of certain taxes on labour and capital, leading to employment generation, increased output and productivity.

Clearly, the carbon tax has three benefits. It—a) reduces emissions; b) stimulates innovations; and c) raises government revenue. In fact, a carbon tax is the most basic economic instrument which can be used to price carbon and combat CO2 emissions, and correct negative externalities. It works on the principle of ‘the polluter pays’.

The principle has been adapted globally and many countries have successfully introduced a carbon tax. In Europe, a large number of countries, such as Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK, had already imposed the tax in the nineties. Among them, Scandinavian countries were the first. Finland initiated this in 1990, followed by Sweden in the subsequent year. Sweden and Norway imposed a comparatively higher rate of a carbon tax at \$27 and \$15 per ton of CO2, respectively. Data shows that these countries generate revenue up to \$1.7 billion annually from the tax. Carbon tax in Finland is based on the energy content of fuels and CO2 emissions. Great Britain, which introduced the tax in 2001, used the revenue on energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy support program. In other countries, it is used to finance public expenditure.

In the case of the United States of America, there is no nationwide tax,

MONIKA GUPTA & VN ALOK

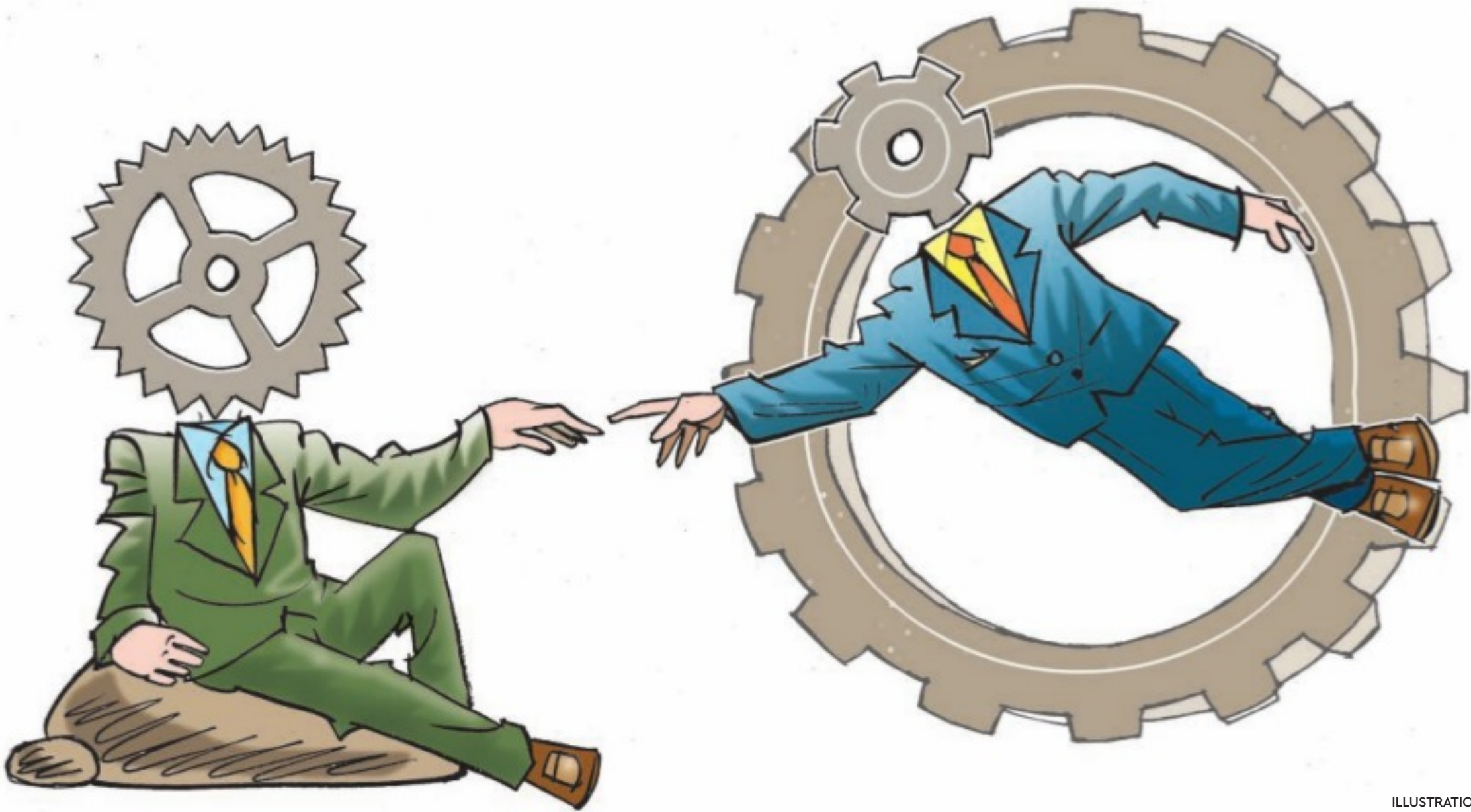
Gupta is assistant professor, BITS-Pilani & Alok is assistant professor, IIPA  
*Views are personal*

but few states—California, Colorado, Maryland and New York—use a carbon tax as an integral part of their strategies to reduce emissions. In Canada, Quebec and British Columbia are two popular provinces which impose the carbon tax. British Columbia’s carbon tax model is considered as a benchmark for many countries. It is estimated that from 2007 to 2015, CO2 emissions reduced by 4.7% and real GDP grew more than 17%. Early this year, Singapore imposed a carbon tax of \$5 per ton of GHG emissions and is planning to increase the rate in the range of \$10 to \$15 per ton of emissions by 2030. Among the developing countries, South Africa has planned to introduce the tax in this year.

It can be argued that a carbon tax can easily be an effective policy instrument in reducing different local pollutants and achieving INDC targets for India. Moreover, the tax can substitute the current Clean Environment Cess, which serves little to no purpose as the it is subsumed under GST. Tax proceeds may be used to a) subsidise clean fuels and fuels used in the agriculture sector, b) promote electric vehicles through subsidy, c) improve public transport, and d) build infrastructure.

The primary aim of the tax is to discourage environment unfriendly production and consumer practices by making the polluting sources costlier without any negative effect on overall employment and output levels. The imposition of a carbon tax with revenue recycling, in terms of earmarking the revenue for related purposes, will help develop synergies and win-win situations. The revenue so generated will also contribute to the dwindling tax revenue, and reduce the fiscal deficit, which is targeted at 3.3% for 2019-20. Time has come when India has to become a pioneer among emerging economies and impose an explicit carbon tax, and let the *polluters pay*.





VK SARASWAT, PRACHI PRIYA & ANIRUDDHA GHOSH

Saraswat is member, NITI Aayog, Priya is a Mumbai-based economist, and Ghosh is a PhD candidate at Johns Hopkins, US

# Manufacturing sector's RCEP inhibitions

While our negotiators bargain hard for an inclusive and balanced RCEP, we must focus on eliminating the niggling problems our manufacturing sector and exports are facing. India's plans for the manufacturing sector need support in the form of a new industrial policy that creates incentives for key sectors

WITH A STABLE and full majority government back to power at the Centre, the Prime Minister has already hit the ground running by setting up two key Cabinet panels on growth & investment and employment & skill development. The focus on the manufacturing sector is critical for sustainable economic growth. Manufacturing not only creates strong positive backward and forward linkages in the economy, but, according to estimates, every job created in manufacturing has a multiplier effect of 2-3x additional jobs in other sectors. Industrial revolutions don't happen overnight. They require careful planning, policy interventions, regular upgrades, and innovations and investments at every stage of development.

The contribution of the manufacturing sector to India's GDP has remained stagnant at around 17% since the 1990s, and the sector needs a big push in order to drive potential GDP growth. In the current context of rising trade war tensions and slowing global growth, most countries are cushioning their domestic industry from trade diversion. According to WTO data, trade protectionism has been on the rise both in terms of the number of global trade-restrictive initiatives and import coverage of these measures. In the current scenario, a two-pronged strategy of raising

domestic competitiveness (via a carefully-planned and targeted Industrial Policy) and cushioning the industry from surge in imports due to trade diversion (via carefully-negotiated FTAs) is the need of the hour.

In this regard, India needs to take a cautious approach towards FTAs. A NITI Aayog note ('A Note on Free Trade Agreements and Their Costs', Dr Saraswat, Priya, Ghosh 2018) had earlier highlighted that India's combined trade deficit with FTA partners like the ASEAN, Japan and South Korea has almost doubled in the last eight years. India's trade deficit with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) bloc of over \$100 billion is almost 64% of its total trade deficit, of which China alone accounts for over 60% of the deficit. The report also highlighted that the quality of trade has deteriorated under the ASEAN-India FTA. As per UN's Harmonised System of product classification, products can be grouped into 99 chapters and further into 21 sections like textiles, chemicals, vegetable products, base metals, gems and jewellery, etc (similar to sector classification). The analysis shows that trade balance has worsened (deficit increased or surplus reduced) for 13 out of 21 sectors. This also includes value-added sectors like chemicals and allied, plastics and rubber, minerals, leather, textiles, gems and jewellery, metals, vehicles, medical instruments, and miscellaneous manufactured items. Sectors where trade deficit has worsened

account for about 75% of India's exports to the ASEAN.

Having said that, the RCEP—the 16-country mega Asian FTA—has been viewed with caution by Indian policymakers. Commerce minister Piyush Goyal has held industry consultations over the last few days to ensure all industry issues are considered before the deal is sealed. It should be realised that reciprocity is the key to FTAs. The biggest driver for trading partner countries to sign an FTA with India is the access to a big and booming consumer market. So it's quite logical for India also to assess what it gets in return. That's probably the reason why India has received a lot of backlash at various rounds of RCEP negotiations from other trading partners. As per media reports, in the latest meeting in Bangkok, India's proposal for strict rules of origin requirements was not welcomed by other FTA partner countries. Rules of origin are critical as they determine the source of a product for it to qualify for preferential treatment. India has been demanding a stricter rule of origin criteria for its domestic industry (40-60% of value-added) as it fears that China can easily misuse lax rules of origin, like the 35% value-added rule in order to dump goods into India. The fear is not unwarranted as rerouting of Chinese goods into Indian markets via India's FTA partner countries is quite common. Previously, too, under the India-Sri Lanka FTA, Sri Lanka had started exporting copper to India by under-invoicing of imported scrap in order to show higher value-addition for its goods to qualify for preferential rates under the FTA. Thus, rules of origin norms can easily be circumvented by simple accounting manipulation.

Moreover, the domestic industry has been vocal about its discomfort with respect to opening up of the domestic market to Chinese exports. This is understandable given the massive Chinese overcapacity in key manufacturing industries, and major support programmes in the form of financial, non-financial and trade measures for the domestic industry that give an edge to Chinese producers over other trade partners. China's manufacturing surplus and dumping of goods across the world is well known. China is the recipient of the highest number of anti-dumping duty (ADD) measures in the world, with 926 ADD measures against it (1995-2017), which amounts to almost a quarter of all ADD measures globally.

Policymakers should also be cognisant of the use of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) by China. As per reports, even though China has agreed to open almost 92% of their tariff lines, expecting India to reciprocate in the same manner, India's concerns over China's NTBs merit

serious attention. China's usage of NTBs like complex product certification process, labelling standards, customs clearance, pre-shipment inspection and import licensing have hindered India's access to their markets. Dealing with NTBs is costly and, therefore, we must factor in this associated barrier before we move ahead with trade pacts, the RCEP in particular. Thus, in terms of reciprocity in an FTA, India's exports access to Chinese markets will be limited given China's overcapacity, use of NTBs, and significant financial and non-financial support available to its domestic industry.

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

Given the current state of Indian industry, phased elimination of tariffs is necessary, especially with respect to some key manufacturing industries that have long gestation periods until they start running on full capacity. An example of this kind of negotiation was the India-Japan FTA where India negotiated for most of its tariff lines under sensitive track (almost 63% under sensitive track, 14% under exclusion). This was in contrast to the ASEAN-India FTA wherein 76% of tariff lines were opened up for complete duty elimination. Therefore, at least a 15-25 years' tariff elimination schedule should be negotiated for key sectors like chemicals, metals, automobiles, machinery, food products and textiles, which individually contribute more than 5% to India's manufacturing GDP and employment. Thus, as suggested, phased elimination of few key manufacturing industries is absolutely essential with respect to China, and last but not the least, a rules of origin criteria that ensures a fair amount of value-addition to determine the source of a product.

While our negotiators bargain hard for an inclusive and balanced RCEP, domestically we must fiercely focus on eliminating the niggles our manufacturing sector and exports are facing. India's transformational plans for the manufacturing sector will require support in the form of a new industrial policy that creates the necessary incentives for key sectors to be an active part of this process. These are necessary complements for ensuring maximum leverage out of our trade deals, and especially the RCEP.

Dealing with NTBs is costly and, therefore, we must factor in this associated barrier before we move ahead with trade pacts, the RCEP in particular

## Taxes should not be taxing

JAGVIR SINGH

The author is founding partner, Jupiter Law Partners

(Ir)rationale of tax on buyback and dividend distribution

THESE ARE TWO ways of return of money to shareholders by a company as a going concern—dividend and buyback—and both use tax paid profits of a company. So, it's important to understand the mechanism of arriving at the taxable profit of a company. A quick glance at the P&L account of a company will reveal that income of a company is used to meet the legitimate dues to several stakeholders, in a set hierarchy, before profits can be said to have been generated.

First, the operating cost is met, which involves remuneration to employees, payment to third-party vendors for purchase of goods and services, and indirect tax on goods or services sold. Then comes the financial cost—the payment of interest to lenders. Then come depreciation and amortisation, which, though not payouts, yet are treated as expenses in the profit computation process. What remains thereafter is the profit. This residual income should be the rightful share of its shareholders, and none else, after tax incidence has been met, because they remain the only stakeholders who still have their indulgence in the company unrewarded. The company law permits the return of this cash to shareholders in the shape of dividends and as consideration for shareholders' shares if the company offers to buy the same.

A similar, but not identical, hierarchy of priorities is prescribed in a liquidation event when shareholders statutorily participate in the distribution of whatever is left of liquidation proceeds after meeting the dues to different stakeholders. But tax treatment of the two sets of shareholders' receipts ends this similarity. Post-liquidation, asset sales proceeds are not subject to tax in the hands of the company, but only to a capital gains tax from the receiving shareholder. However, the company pays the dividend distribution tax (DDT) on proceeds out of the free reserves (read, accumulated tax paid profits) distributed amongst shareholders.

If we remove all other stakeholders from reckoning, after dues to them are met, shareholders are almost akin to owners of remaining profit (both current and free reserves) and liquidation proceeds, respectively. By this logic, they should be taxed only once, either at company's hands or the shareholders. DDT on the already tax paid (dividend) amount is essentially double taxation and should not be imposed, though India is not the only major country succumbing to the lure of augmenting her tax revenue by resorting to such onerous impositions. Similarly, the tax on buyback amount, extended to listed companies as well in an otherwise forward-looking Budget, is a dampener.

Taxing is tempting, as they say. This government's intent to usher in brisk economic growth is indubitable. It wants investors, both foreign and domestic, to invest heavily in its Make-in-India initiative and boosting infrastructure development. However, if more than 40% of their hard-earned profits are likely to be evaporated owing to the swindling double tax, it daunts the otherwise fervent investors eyeing to harvest a reasonable fortune from a giant economy buoyed by recent reforms and a large demography.

Despite a leap in the ease of doing business, also recognised by the World Bank, a complex federal structure in India resulting in copious rules still has a labyrinthine and difficult-to-navigate business regulatory system, especially to a foreign investor. In an era when nations compete for global investments, investors need to be offered something differentially rewarding that offsets the impact of an intricate legal system. Amidst the China-US trade tensions and due to geopolitical reasons, foreign capital, especially Japanese and Korean, is flying out of China, but has not been landing in India. East Asian nations like Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia have attracted the bulk of it. The government may do an assessment of the contribution of DDT and tax on buyback to total direct tax collection. If it is not that significant, it will be ingenious of the government to do away with these unsavoury fiscal millstones. It does not take a clairvoyant to predict an imminent surge in inflows of foreign capital only on this count and also a stop to Indian capital's flight to foreign lands. This will help India stand out as an attractive investment destination and help it in garnering the capital it requires for infrastructure development and Make-in-India, which should, in turn, generate employment for the millions entering the workforce every year.

DDT on the already tax paid (dividend) amount is essentially double taxation and should not be imposed

THE 'CARE ECONOMY' is statistically invisible. No effective macro policy coherence is there to ensure and support care economy in India. More often, women as primary caregivers leave the job market to perform the responsibilities, at the peak of their career. This, in turn, can affect economic growth of the country due to productivity loss, emanating from the loss of insights and talent they did bring on board. This also affects the 'potential output' of a country.

Unemployment rate in India reached a 45-year high of 6.1% in 2017-18, as per the recent NSS estimates. The IMF has also highlighted the widening gender gap in labour force participation rates in India. We must explore reasons why the female labour force participation is in India is one of the lowest in the world. The lack of a comprehensive care economy policy is the single-most significant reason for the falling rate of female labour force participation. If we want to reap the demographic dividend before it vanishes, designing a comprehensive care economy policy in India should be the policy mantra.

If the objective of public policy is 'leaving no one behind' as an economy progresses, then designing an intelligent care economy policy should be the first charge on the exchequer. This policy is relevant from an 'efficiency and equity' perspective and also from 'human rights' perspective.

If India is unable to fully attract the talented educated women to the job market

## India needs a 'care economy' policy

A comprehensive care economy infrastructure can support women to participate in economic activity

LEKHA CHAKRABORTY

The author is professor, NIPFP, Delhi, and visiting professor, American University, Washington, DC



by ensuring the care economy infrastructure, then will the next best policy be to provide universal basic income (UBI) to the primary caregivers in the economy? UBI to a primary caregiver can enhance their dignity, remove their 'unfreedom', and can ensure social justice to their contribution to the economic growth by supporting the care economy. However, all what I want to highlight here is that UBI to a primary caregiver should not be a tradeoff to designing a comprehensive care economy infrastructure that can support women to participate in economic activity. Here, the basic norm is to give the freedom of choice to a woman 'to work' or 'not to work', but

she should not be constrained to work.

The point we miss often is why care economy is core to macroeconomic policy frameworks. The macro policy decisions—say, fiscal austerity measures—impact men and women differently. For instance, if the fiscal austerity is by reducing the health spending in a country, the reduction in hospitalisation days or in-patient days can directly impact women as they are the primary caregivers in a household. Women, thus, bear the brunt of macroeconomic policy decisions. At the same time, more often, macro policy is not designed to integrate household caregiver's perspectives, which otherwise needs an enormous



attention as we cannot take the support from the care economy system as infinite. If public expenditure compression is the path to achieve fiscal austerity, it can lead to 'humanitarian crisis' through cutbacks in spending on employment, pensions and social security support.

India has designed a fully-paid childcare leave policy for two years—a leading example of such policies in the world. But a 'comprehensive care economy policy' is absent in India. India should be leading the world in designing a comprehensive care economy policy by taking into account all the elements of care. We need innovative statistics like time-use survey to capture

the extent of care economy, which is otherwise absent in the existing Employment-Unemployment Survey rounds.

In Canada, a 'compassionate care leave' policy has been introduced to take care of one's ailing relative, up to six months in discrete or in continuum. Such policies can help the primary caregivers, often women, not to leave workforce when their parent or spouse or a close relative falls ill. If public policy takes it for granted (increasing trend of women leaving the labour market), they are missing the big picture.

Women face huge challenges to earn a living and live peacefully during retirement years. In India, especially when social

security benefits are not well-designed, the permanent or temporary exit of a woman from the job market to take care of a small child or an elderly parent enormously reduces her earning potential and her savings for retirement. To add, if the woman is a single parent or divorced, unless the public policy addresses this vulnerability, as a country we are missing the big picture of how the loss of such human capital can affect the economic growth. Kerala is almost there to design a care economy support structure by the government, which can provide highly-efficient caregivers to the households. This authentic care economy support by the government can increase economic growth.

It is interesting to recall the documentary 'The Swedish Theory of Love', which encapsulates the public policy revolution in Sweden, when policymakers decided 'autonomous individual' (not the 'household') as the unit of analysis of a public policy. The Swedish theory emphasises that when an individual is not dependent on another individual for existence, true love happens, and public policy has a role to ensure this. But when we design a comprehensive care economy policy, country 'context' matters. India has begun designing such policies based on the notion of 'autonomous individual' by providing job guarantee or financial inclusion or cash transfers to an 'individual' rather than a 'household'. However, a public finance revolution in India to support a comprehensive care economy policy is what is needed.





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## TELLING NUMBERS

## Statewise estimated incidence of cancer cases in India

UTTAR PRADESH and Maharashtra, the country's most and second-most populous states, also recorded the highest incidence of cancer by absolute numbers in the three years between 2016 and 2018, the government informed Lok Sabha last week, quoting figures estimated by an Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) report.

The estimated incidence of cancer cases (for both men and women) in Uttar Pradesh were 2,45,231; 2,57,353; and 2,70,053 for the years 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The corresponding numbers for Maharashtra were 1,32,726; 1,38,271; and 1,44,032. Among the lowest estimated incidence was seen in Haryana and Assam, the smaller among the major states.

The projected cancer cases were computed using projected incidence rates and population (person-years), said a note to the table annexed by the government to its reply.

The absolute numbers suggested the fastest year-on-year increase in the incidence of cancer was estimated for Bihar (5.38% from 2016 to 2017, and 5.37% from 2017 to 2018), the country's third most populous state



as per the 2011 Census. The Health Ministry's reply said the central government was "implementing Strengthening of Tertiary Care Cancer facilities scheme to support setting up of State Cancer Institutes (SCI) and Tertiary Care Cancer Centres (TCCC) in different parts of the country".

## PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN ESTIMATED INCIDENCE OF CANCER (For selected major states, based on absolute estimates in ICMR report)

State	2016-2017	2017-18
Bihar	5.38	5.37
Madhya Pradesh	4.97	4.96
Maharashtra	4.18	4.17
Uttar Pradesh	4.94	4.93
West Bengal	4.23	4.23

## THIS WORD MEANS

## PANSEXUAL

How some celebrities describe themselves

IN AN interview to the ABC show *Good Morning America* this week, American actor Bella Thorne (*right*) described herself as "pansexual" — not bisexual, as she had said earlier. Thorne is among several celebrities who have declared that they do not conform to binary labels while defining sexual orientation.

"I'm actually a pansexual, and I didn't know that," Thorne was reported to have said. "Doesn't have to be a girl, or a guy, or a he, a she, a this, or that. It's literally, you like personality, like you, just like a being."

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, pansexuality relates to, or is characterized by "sexual desire or attraction that is not limited to people of a particular gender identity or sexual orientation". The word has also come to mean an attraction that is uninhibited by gender.

Stonewall, the LGBT rights charity in the United Kingdom, defines pansexual as "a person whose romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by sex or gender". In the spectrum of gender identities, there is only a small proportion of people who identify themselves as being pansexual.

The term itself is not new, however — having been coined in the early 1900s. It comes from the Greek prefix 'pan', meaning 'all'. The other word for pansexual is omnisexual — derived from the Latin



word 'omni', which means 'all'.

Interest in pansexuality — both the word and the idea — has surged every time a celebrity has come out being as one. In August 2015, Google searches spiked after actor-singer Miley Cyrus described herself as pansexual. More recently, in April 2018, singer-songwriter Janelle Mon e told *Rolling Stone* magazine that she was pansexual.

LEELA MURALI



CHAKSHU ROY

THE POLITICAL crisis that began in Karnataka with the resignation of 15 MLAs on July 6, and ended on Tuesday with H D Kumaraswamy being defeated in a motion of confidence that took five days and multiple missed deadlines to be put to vote, underscored the tortuous working of India's anti-defection law — and threw up a range of associated legal and constitutional questions.

This is how the law — the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, inserted by The Constitution (52nd Amendment) Act, 1985, when Rajiv Gandhi's government was in power — came to be, and how it evolved over the three decades that followed.

## The 1967 elections

The legislative journey of the anti-defection law is long and chequered. It involves the institution of Parliament that designed it, the office of the Speaker of Legislatures that implements it, and the judiciary that interprets the law. MPs, MLAs, and their political parties are the principal stakeholders who are impacted by the anti-defection law. It is a law whose unintended consequences outweigh its purpose — and its journey after its passage in 1985 mirrors the continuing political instability in the country.

The seeds of the anti-defection law were sown after the general elections in 1967. The results of those elections were a mixed bag for the Congress. It formed the government at the Centre, but its strength in Lok Sabha fell from 361 to 283. During the year it lost control of seven state governments as MLAs shifted their political allegiance.

In this backdrop, P Venkatasubbaiah, a Congress MP in Lok Sabha who served in the Cabinets of both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, proposed the setting up of a high-level committee to make recommendations to tackle the "problem of legislators changing their allegiance from one party to another".

The proposal saw a spirited debate in Lok Sabha. Opposition members suggested renaming the proposal to "save Congress", while the ruling party accused the opposition of inducing MLAs to defect.

## The Y B Chavan panel

Despite the acrimony, the Lok Sabha agreed to the setting up of a committee to examine the problem of political defections. The then Home Minister, Y B Chavan, headed the committee. The panel defined defection — and an exception for genuine defectors. According to the committee, defection was the voluntary giving up of allegiance of a political party on whose symbol a legislator was elected, except when such action was the result of the decision of the party.

In its report, the committee noted "that the lure of office played a dominant part in decisions of legislators to defect". It pointed out that out of 210 defecting legislators in seven states, 116 were given ministerial berths in governments which they helped form by their defections.

To combat this, the committee recommended a bar on defecting legislators from holding ministerial positions for a year — or until the time they got themselves re-elected. It also suggested a smaller Council of Ministers both at the levels of the Centre and the states.

## AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

## The limits of anti-defection

The prolonged political crisis in Karnataka has demonstrated the ways in which the nearly 35-year-old anti-defection law can be used and abused. Here's how the law was enacted, and how it has performed.



Former Karnataka Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy in the Assembly on Tuesday. Kumaraswamy lost trust vote 99-105. PTI

The committee was in favour of political parties working together to help evolve a code of conduct to effectively tackle disruptions.

## Early attempts at a law

Following the report of the Y B Chavan committee, two separate legislative attempts, both unsuccessful, were made to find a solution to defections. The first one was made by Indira's Home Minister Uma Shankar Dikshit in 1973; the second, in 1978, by Shanti Bhushan, Minister for Law and Justice in the Janata Party government of Morarji Desai. The third attempt — which was successful — was made in 1985, after the Congress won more than 400 seats in Lok Sabha in the aftermath of Indira's assassination.

## The Tenth Schedule

The Bill to amend the Constitution was introduced by Rajiv Gandhi's Law Minister Ashoke Kumar Sen, the veteran barrister and politician who had also served in the Cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru. The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill said: "The evil of political defections has been a matter of national concern. If it is not combated, it is likely to undermine the very foundations of our democracy and the principles which sustain it."

The amendment by which the Tenth Schedule was inserted in the Constitution, did three broad things.

■ One, it made legislators liable to be penalised for their conduct both inside (voting against the whip of the party) and outside (making speeches, etc.) the legislature — the penalty being the loss of their seats in Parliament or the state legislatures.

■ Two, it protected legislators from disqualification in cases where there was a split (with 1/3rd of members splitting) or merger (with 2/3rds of members merging) of a legislature party with another political party.

■ Three, it made the Presiding Officer of the concerned legislature the sole arbiter of defection proceedings.

## Criticism and passage

worsen, sovereign bonds denominated in domestic currency are preferable.

## So, why is India borrowing in external markets in external currency?

There are many reasons why. Possibly the biggest of these is that the Indian government's domestic borrowing is crowding out private investment and preventing the interest rates from falling even when inflation has cooled off and the RBI is cutting policy rates. If the government was to borrow some of its loans from outside India, there will be investable money left for private companies to borrow; not to mention that interest rates could start coming down. In fact, the significant decline in 10-year G-sec yields in the recent past is partially a result of this announcement.

Moreover, at less than 5%, India's sovereign external debt to GDP is among the lowest globally. In other words, there is scope for the Indian government to raise funds this way without worrying too much about the possible negative effects.

Thirdly, a sovereign bond issue will provide a yield curve — a benchmark — for Indian corporates who wish to raise loans in foreign markets. This will help Indian busi-

nesses that have increasingly looked towards foreign economies to borrow money. Lastly, the timing is great. Globally, and especially in the advanced economies where the government is likely to go to borrow, the interest rates are low and, thanks to the easy monetary policies of foreign central banks, there are a lot of surplus funds waiting for a product that pays more.

In an ideal scenario, it could be win-win for all: Indian government raises loans at interest rates much cheaper than domestic interest rates, while foreign investors get a much higher return than is available in their own markets.

## The immediate challenges

No sooner was the law put in place than political parties started to stress-test its boundaries. The issue of what constitutes a split in a political party rocked both the V P Singh and the Chandra Shekhar governments. The role of the Presiding Officers also became increasingly politicised. Lok Sabha Speaker Shivraj Patil said in 1992: "The Speaker is not expected to dabble in keeping the political parties week or strong or discipline the Parliamentarians for their party purposes."

The intervention of the higher judiciary was sought to decide questions such as what kinds of conduct outside the legislature would fall in the category of defection, and what was the extent of the Speaker's power in deciding defections. The Supreme Court, while upholding the supremacy of the Speaker in defection proceedings, also held that the Speaker's decisions were subject to judicial review.

## The 2003 Amendment

The last step in the legislative journey of the anti-defection law came in 2003. A Constitution Amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament by the government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to address some of the issues with the law. A committee headed by Pranab Mukherjee examined the Bill.

The committee observed: "The provision of split has been grossly misused to engineer multiple divisions in the party, as a result of which the evil of defection has not been checked in the right earnest. Further it is also observed that the lure of office of profit plays dominant part in the political horse-trading resulting in spate of defections and counter defections."

The one-third split provision which offered protection to defectors was deleted from the law on the committee's recommendation. The 2003 Amendment also incorporated the 1967 advice of the Y B Chavan committee in limiting the size of the Council of Ministers, and preventing defecting legislators from joining the Council of Ministers until their re-election. However, as events in the years and decades since have demonstrated, these amendments have had only limited impact.

## The (ab)use of the law

The removal of the split provision prompted political parties to engineer wholesale defections (to merge) instead of smaller 'retail' ones. Legislators started resigning from the membership of the House in order to escape disqualification from ministerial berths.

The ceiling on the size of the Council of Ministers meant an increase in the number of positions of parliamentary secretaries in states. The Speakers started taking an active interest in political matters, helping build and break governments. The anti-defection law does not specify a timeframe for Speakers to decide on defection proceedings. When the politics demanded, Speakers were either quick to pass judgment on defection proceedings or delayed acting on them for years on end.

The long drawn-out events in the Karnataka Vidhan Sabha have shown that even after three decades, the anti-defection law has not been able to stop political defections.

(Chakshu Roy is Head of Outreach at PRS Legislative Research)

## What are sovereign bonds, and what are their risks and rewards?

UDIT MISRA

NEW DELHI, JULY 24

IN HER maiden Budget speech earlier in the month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced something that no previous FM had done. She said that the Indian "government would start raising a part of its gross borrowing programme in external markets in external currencies". According to most reports, this type of borrowing is likely to start by October with the initial amount of \$10 billion. However, this idea has not gone down well with several top economists, such as former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, who have underscored the reasons why past governments have stayed away from raising loans overseas in foreign-denominated currencies.

The latest economist to caution the government is Rathin Roy, who is not only the director of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (a government think tank) but also a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. "I would pay very careful attention to what several Governors of the Reserve Bank are saying...", Roy said during a public event Monday.

## What exactly are sovereign bonds?

A bond is like an IOU. The issuer of a bond promises to pay back a fixed amount of money every year until the expiry of the term, at which point the issuer returns the principal amount to the buyer. When a government issues such a bond it is called a sovereign bond.

Typically, the more financially strong a country, the more well respected is its sovereign bond. Some of the best known sovereign bonds are the Treasuries (of the United States), the Gilt (of Britain), the OATS (of France), the Bundesanleihen or Bunds (of Germany) and the JGBs (of Japan).

## And what is the controversial part?

The current controversy relates to India's sovereign bonds that will be floated in foreign countries and will be denominated in foreign currencies. In other words, both the initial loan amount and the final payment will be in either US dollars or some other comparable currency. This would differentiate these proposed bonds from either government securities (or G-secs, wherein the Indian government raises loans within India and in Indian rupee) or Masala bonds (wherein Indian entities — not the

government — raise money overseas in rupee terms).

The difference between issuing a bond denominated in rupees and issuing it in a foreign currency (say US dollar) is the incidence of exchange rate risk. If the loan is in terms of dollars, and the rupee weakens against the dollar during the bond's tenure, the government would have to return more rupees to pay back the same amount of dollars. If, however, the initial loan is denominated in rupee terms, then the negative fall-out would be on the foreign investor.

For example, imagine two 10-year sovereign bond issues by India: one for \$100 in the US, and the other for Rs 7,000 in India. For the sake of simplicity, suppose the exchange rate is Rs 70 to a dollar. As such, at the time of issue, both values are the same. Now suppose the exchange rate worsens for India and falls to Rs 80 a dollar at the end of the tenure. In the first case, the Indian government would have to pay Rs 8,000 (instead of Rs 7,000 that it got initially) to meet its dollar-denominated obligation. In the second case, it would pay Rs 7,000 and the lender would be short-changed as these Rs 7,000 will be equal to just \$87.5 at the end of tenure. That is why, if the exchange rate is expected to







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# Much ado about something



MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

Absent any direct dealings with Pakistan, the US insidiously becomes our intermediary

## A DISMAL FRAME

Collapse of JD(S)-Congress government raises larger, uncomfortable questions about health of India’s Opposition

WITH THE FALL of the HD Kumaraswamy government following a trust vote on Tuesday, the BJP, the single largest party in the assembly, is expected to form the government. There is still no clarity, however, on the strength of the House, since the Speaker is yet to rule on the resignations of 16 MLAs; their party leaderships have sought their disqualification. It is likely that the Speaker’s action, whichever way he rules, may be challenged in court; the Supreme Court already has a bunch of pleas on the Karnataka crisis to decide. As political parties go through the motions in this bizarre tableau, citizens must endure the embarrassment of watching their representatives duck in and out of resorts and other hideaways.

Beyond the moral dimensions of the crisis and the questions it raises about a host of institutions, including the office of the Speaker and Governor, the events in Karnataka lay out a challenging political predicament, particularly for the Opposition. Karnataka has once again underlined that the BJP’s hunger for political domination is insatiable. Since 2014, the party has been expanding across the country, winning state after state. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, the party has come to believe that the winner takes all and has sought to form governments even in the states it failed to win. The Opposition has been slow and clueless in facing up, much less matching or countering, the BJP. In fact, Karnataka was an exception, where the Opposition outwitted the BJP to form a government 14 months ago. The Congress and the JD(S), which fought against each other and finished behind the BJP, joined hands to form government; the Congress’ decision to let the smaller party, the JD(S), occupy the chief minister’s office was perceived to be an indication of the Opposition’s readiness to set aside differences for a larger cause. In retrospect, neither party was willing to make this coalition of unnatural allies work. That it failed to deliver seats in the general election seems to have convinced the Congress that the limited investment it had made in the coalition was not worth it. The BJP’s will to form a government, the contradictions within the coalition and the ambitions of the latter’s legislators seem to have converged in this moment.

The failure of the JD(S)-Congress government to hold up raises larger questions about the Opposition’s capability to put up a united front against an expanding BJP. The glue that held the Opposition together in Karnataka was the fear of the BJP. That no longer seems effective as various Opposition parties, devastated by the May 23 verdict, have moved apart and now seem to act listlessly. Even as the BJP relishes the absence of competition, the unchecked emasculation of the Opposition does not augur well for a robust democracy.

## SHARE OF THE STATE

Centre needs to re-evaluate its spending priorities, encroach less on states’ space

LAST WEEK, THE Union cabinet passed an amendment to widen the terms of reference of the 15th Finance Commission. The Commission has now been asked to examine the possibility of setting up a mechanism for funding defence and internal security. As capital spending on defence continues to fall well short of what is required, it is difficult to contest the premise that it needs to be bolstered. But, as the creation of “secure and non-lapsable funds for defence and internal security” may end up reducing the divisible tax pool further, the move could face resistance from states, especially when several of them are arguing for a greater share in tax revenues. While the commission is yet to spell out its views on the subject, this request raises fundamental questions over the spending priorities of different levels of government and the framework that governs Centre-state fiscal relations.

The Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution specifies the separate as well as concurrent responsibilities of the Centre and state governments, with defence falling in the Union list. The inability of the Centre to ramp up its spending on defence indicates the limited fiscal space available to it. In large part, this is due to an increase in spending on items in the state and concurrent list, and a corresponding decline in spending on items in the Union list. In 2015-16 alone, the Centre spent 16 per cent of its revenue expenditure on items in the state list, and another 16.4 per cent on items in the concurrent list. Now, some of this spending on items in the state and concurrent list is necessary. In a federal structure, the Centre must address regional imbalances in the delivery of public services. But the bulk of this spending is routed through sector-specific transfers or centrally sponsored schemes that curb the autonomy of the states in deciding their own expenditure priorities. The added fiscal pressures on the Centre have, in turn, contributed to reduced fiscal space for states. Over the years, the Centre has begun to rely increasingly on taxes collected through cesses and surcharges to meet its expenditure priorities. But revenue from these sources does not form part of the divisible tax pool, it is not shared with states — squeezing them from both ends.

While the compulsions of the political economy have ensured greater central government spending on items in the state and concurrent lists, the current juncture may well be an opportune moment to rethink the spending priorities of different levels of the government. There is a need, particularly, to address legitimate concerns of states about increasing encroachment by the Centre.

## ANOTHER BLOND

The ascension of Boris, it is widely feared, signals the imminent end of the UK, and all that sort of thing

IN THE 20TH century, “Boris” signified the vodka-powered Yeltsin — “100 proof, 100 per cent in control”, as a cartoon of the era defined the bad-tempered child of perestroika. Exactly two decades after Yeltsin bowed out of office with approval ratings much lower than lunar gravity, allowing Vladimir Putin to become Russian president and prime minister (alternately) for life, “Boris” means Johnson. Of the persistently blond Johnson family, Britain’s answer to the clan Kardashians.

Tory and Whig, Unionist and Green, the gamut of the UK political leadership is secretly of one compact — that Boris grasping the sceptre of the Sceptred Isle at this juncture is simply dreadful. It is so bad that people are wistfully recalling Theresa May, who was being derided just weeks ago. So very bad that if Johnson persists in pushing through a painful no-deal Brexit when the deadline expires in October, his colleagues may pray QEII, to whom the sceptre actually belongs, requests Brussels for another extension. And in the melee, the Scots could finally make a successful bid for freedom.

Johnson’s track record is fairly awful. He was sacked within months of being hired by the *London Times*, for misquoting and getting his history wrong. His stint as Brussels correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* was remarkable only for sparking off a wave of nastily jocular Euroscepticism. The European commissioners he left behind in Brussels hold him in low esteem. But in an age of dangerous comedians (like the other blond across the Big Water) this is not a disqualification. Even his adversaries admit he has an innate capacity for lightening the air. And even his hordes of supporters admit that he fibs a lot. Boris is a fib too. Boris is not his first name. It’s Alexander.

WOULD DONALD TRUMP have really made it up? True, the man is a misguided missile but he has made it to president of the United States and you don’t get there unless you have something out of the ordinary about you. He prides himself on being a “deal-maker”. And he was making the defining deal of his presidency when Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan was visiting with him. The context was getting the US out of the Afghan imbroglio. That could only happen by inveigling the Taliban to the negotiating table. For that, Pakistan’s whole-hearted cooperation is required.

By turning up in Washington DC with both his army chief and his intelligence chief, Imran was signaling Pakistan’s readiness to render such whole-hearted cooperation, presaged by meeting a long-standing American demand — the release of the Pak-American doctor who had led the US to Osama bin Laden.

But what was Imran to get in return? Nothing more than what any Pak PM needs to cover his shame on returning home — something on Kashmir. Trump obliged. His bombshell had three bursts.

One, “I was with Prime Minister Modi two weeks ago, and we talked about the subject”. Talked about Kashmir?

Second, “And he actually said, ‘would you like to be a mediator or arbitrator, and I said, ‘where?’, and he said “Kashmir”. What?!

Third, Modi apparently gave his reason why — “because this has been going on for many, many years”. It has.

There was not one meeting but several between Trump and Modi at Osaka. One, of course, was the 40-minute formal meeting between the two sides at which armies of officials from both sides were present — clearly not the opportunity for “pillow talk”. Then, the two were seated side-by-side at dinner, but that conversation was monitored by a joint secretary who acts as a translator for Modi and keeps a summary record of what is said. Then, there were meetings in the lounge (but in other people’s hearing). And,

When Modi met Trump in Osaka he knew Trump would be seeing Imran within the next few weeks in Washington. It was also clear that the top priority for Trump was pulling his troops out of Afghanistan both to end two decades of a fruitless war the US is incapable of winning, as also to fulfill a major campaign pledge before running for re-election. That required Washington to assiduously appease Islamabad.



AMITABHA BHATTACHARYA

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, AFTER watching Satyajit Ray’s second film *Aparajito* (The Unvanquished, 1956), had famously turned to Ray to ask, “What happens to Apu now?” Watching *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu, 1959), the third of the celebrated Apu trilogy, 60 years after its release, one does not fail to understand what made his work so deep, pervasive and sustained in its appeal.

While his first film, *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Road, 1955) appeared magically refreshing in style and content, the next, *Aparajito*, though more prosaic and terse, was, in fact, not a great popular success. And Ray decided to make two more films belonging to different genres, *Parash Pathar* (The Philosopher’s Stone, 1958) and *Jalsaghar* (The Music Room, 1958), before embarking on *Apur Sansar*.

But the Apu trilogy, chronicling with great artistry the growth of Apu from childhood through adolescence to manhood — from a remote village of Bengal through Benaras to Calcutta in the early decades of the last century — struck a sympathetic chord with sensitive men and women across cultures. Discussing Ray’s work in the context of icons of international cinema, *Time* magazine (September 20, 1963) wondered, “Will Ray redeem his prodigious promise and become the Shakespeare of the screen?” What explains such critical and popular acclaim of Ray’s films?

Ray’s biographers from Marie Seton to Andrew Robinson, experts like Chidananda Dasgupta, Satish Bahadur or Robin Wood, renowned film-makers such as Lindsay Anderson, Akira Kurosawa, Martin Scorsese,

## A TIMELESS TALE

The enduring legacy and relevance of Satyajit Ray’s ‘Apur Sansar’

Shyam Benegal and Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and the legion who were impacted by Ray’s cinematic ideas in the Indian subcontinent and the West, have sought to explain the features that characterise the originality of this master story-teller, in elevating films to the level of art.

Two novels, by the renowned author Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, formed the basis of the Apu trilogy. The demands of the cinematic medium made Ray remould the material — selecting and arranging the characters and situations — while remaining truthful to the spirit of the literary text. Here lies a clue to his art creation.

One reason why *Apur Sansar* was both a critical and box-office success was not merely because Ray’s craft had matured more by then, or that the film showed the flowering of tender love between Apu and his friend’s sister whom he marries when the “arranged groom” is discovered to be insane. In the words of Ray, “I concentrated mainly on two aspects. One was the relationship between the struggling intellectual Apu and his unaffected, unlettered chance-wife Aparna brought up in affluence but inspired to adjust to poverty by her love for her husband. The second aspect was even more exciting. Aparna dies in childbirth. Bibhutibhusan, who often reached for the truth below the surface, makes Apu turn against the child — he reproaches him for having caused the mother’s death. The first meeting of father and son takes place after a lapse of several years. A scenarist could scarcely want more in the way of an expressive situation.”

[‘Should A Film-Maker Be Original?’, *Filmfare*, August 28, 1959].

It required the genius of a Ray to visualise the film in terms of these concerns and see the dramatic potential in the story, and, invest his work with poetic sequences and psychological inflections. An intense humanism and empathy for the characters caught in the vortex of life, an uncanny eye for detail and an ability to see the deeper truth beneath the surface of reality, are all evident in the film. A passion for life, an undercurrent of eroticism and the irony of our daily existence, especially when death is juxtaposed on it, have been reflected in its execution.

Merely remembering Ray as India’s great cultural icon after Rabindranath Tagore or as the world’s most decorated film director, would not enrich our mind. Seeing his films may do. His birth centenary in 2020-21 should provide that opportunity: Would the government, that had earlier helped the emergence of new Indian cinema, take some initiative and make Ray’s offerings accessible far and wide?

Finally, *Apur Sansar* may be full of human drama, but there is hardly any theatricality in the film. Ray tried to be “as expressive as possible through action, through objects, through details.” (*Satyajit Ray: A Film by Shyam Benegal*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1988). It remains an example of pure cinema and is a wholesome one that has not lost its relevance in the India of today. It carries all the prominent markers of a classic. By world standards.

The writer is a retired IAS officer

## JULY 25, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

### JANATA RSS TIES

WHATEVER LINK THE Janata Party has with the RSS will be cut off. Members of Parliament and state legislatures and office-bearers of the Janata Party will not be allowed to take part in RSS activities. This was announced by the party President, Chandra Shekhar, at a news conference, paving the way for the return of those who had deserted the ruling party in protest against the erstwhile Jana Sangh members’ continued connections with the RSS. This is also a bid to defuse the dual membership controversy which had led to the resignation of 100-odd members from the Janata Parliamentary Party and the fall of the Morarji Desai government.

### PAKISTAN’S ATOM BOMB

WESTERN SOURCES BELIEVE that Pakistan is within three or four years of the capability of producing an atom bomb despite denials in Pakistan and Prime Minister Morarji Desai’s public statements of doubt. Details are now coming in from London indicating a web of international intrigue which permitted a Pakistani physicist, Abdul Gadkar Khan, who worked for one of the joint nuclear projects of the West European governments in Holland, to order machinery for the development of a reprocessing plant in Pakistan. Such a plant could be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium, using the same method that was used in India to produce

India’s first nuclear device in 1974.

### SHEIKH DECLINES OFFER

THE JAMMU AND Kashmir chief minister, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, said today that he had declined the offer to become the Vice-President of India as he wanted to devote his full attention to the economic development of the state. Addressing National Conference workers, he described as “unfortunate” the prevailing state of uncertainty at the Centre. He said, “what we want is stability at the Centre”. He announced that “whichever party or group forms the government, it should be able to ensure a stable government to look after public welfare.”





# A formula for exclusion

The Citizenship Amendment Bill carries the danger of making discrimination a formal part of India's refugee policy



S IRUDAYA RAJAN, ISWARYA SUBBIAH

THE PROCESS OF updating the National Register for Citizens in Assam is a momentous exercise with huge implications for India's constitutional scheme, especially on issues pertaining to the question of citizenship. Citizenship in India is governed by the Constitution and the Citizenship Act, 1955. While both prescribe the means of acquiring citizenship, they do not define it. A person may be a citizen by birth, by descent or by naturalisation. However, citizenship goes beyond just the act of being a citizen — it conflates complex ideas of nationality and ethnicity. Thus, it would be remiss to talk of citizenship without understanding that it is rooted in exclusion.

The Partition was India's first test of citizenship, leading to large-scale movement of people across the newly-drawn borders, primarily for reasons of religion. India's geographical location, however, ensures that the movement of people are not isolated incidents. There has been a near constant influx of people into India from neighbouring countries.

The recent Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 seeks to make drastic changes to the existing immigration norms in India by making it easier for certain immigrants to seek citizenship. After the 2004 amendment, an undocumented migrant in India is defined as anyone entering the country without a valid passport, with forged documents, or one who overstays their visa term. The proposed amendment exempts "persons belonging to minority communities" — Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists and Christians — from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh from being treated as undocumented immigrants. In addition, anyone who fulfills these requirements will now only need six years of ordinary residency — as opposed to 11 previously — to claim citizenship by naturalisation.

Interestingly, the Bill refers to persons belonging to minority communities as "illegal immigrants", as they would technically be refugees if they are fleeing from persecution. These definitions are important, as conflating these terms would only hamper India's refugee policy.

While the idea behind this amendment might be noble, the Bill is noteworthy in its exclusions — rather than inclusions. The religious undertone of this exercise is problematic. By explicitly naming the religions getting exemptions, the Bill flouts the fundamental right to equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution.

All this is further complicated by the fact that India currently does not have a refugee law in place, it is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. However, India's stance on refugees has been, largely, consistent — it has been one of hospitality. It has also been steady since Jawaharlal Nehru said of the Tibetan refugees that they must return to their homeland, once the conflict has been resolved. The proposed law, however, goes against this long-practiced tenet by making the process of availing citizenship much easier.

The exclusion of persecuted Tamils from Sri Lanka is also perplexing. Refugees fleeing the civil war in Sri Lanka did so under the most trying circumstances, where going back was not an option for many. A significant portion of the refugees are Indian Tamils, or Hill Country Tamils. They are descendants of labourers taken from India to work on Sri Lankan plantations. In spite of assurances,



Suvajit Dey

these labourers got neither Indian nor Sri Lankan citizenship after the departure of the British. Thus, an Indian origin worker born in colonial Sri Lanka would have lived through the Independence and the birth of two nations but remained stateless at the end of it.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs justified this exclusion by claiming that Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu can avail long-term visas (LTVs). However, refugees do not often have the documents required to acquire a long-term visa. A long-term visa would enable an immigrant in the country to open a bank account, get an Aadhaar card, purchase property and move freely within the country. Sri Lankan refugees, however, lack the documentation required for them to be eligible to acquire an LTV.

Nowhere in India was this Bill more vehemently protested than in the Northeast. Assam, in particular, opposed the amendments introduced through this Bill. The Northeast is often seen as an easy point of entry for those wishing to settle in India. For Assam, the bill seems to be in direct contravention to the Assam Accord of 1985. The Accord specified that the names of foreigners who have entered Assam after January 1, 1966, and up to March 24, 1971, shall be struck off the electoral rolls and they would be required to register themselves under the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939. Any foreigner who has entered the country after March 24, 1971 shall be expelled.

The Bill also brings into question the process of updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). It will legitimise the citizenship of all those who would have been considered foreigners under the Assam Accord and the NRC.

Other Northeastern states have also registered their protest with respect to the Bill. Mizoram is apprehensive of the influx of Chakma refugees from Bangladesh. Most re-

India's stance on refugees has been, largely, consistent and hospitable. It has also been steady since Jawaharlal Nehru said of the Tibetan refugees that they must return to their homeland, once the conflict has been resolved. The proposed law, however, goes against this long-practiced tenet by making the process of availing citizenship much easier.

gional parties, including those from Tripura and Nagaland, have opposed the Bill. The general fear amongst these states is that regional identity will be diluted if this bill becomes an Act. The threat that they may end up being a minority in their own state combined with the anger that they will have to bear the brunt of an influx of refugees has led to protests all over the Northeast.

What is disregarded in this argument, however, is the exclusionary nature of citizenship determination processes like the NRC. Even if there are four million illegal immigrants presently residing in Assam, the State should ideally have formulated a framework for the inclusion of all those already in the country, while simultaneously preventing more refugee influx. The State's lack of transparency on its future plan of action is troubling. To even consider rendering this substantial populace stateless would go against every humanitarian principle India adheres to.

Though India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the country is bound by the international principles of humanitarianism. India's commitment to core international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, combined with its own constitutional ethics, means that the country cannot be exempt of her duty in protecting asylum seekers. This protection must be extended to all those seeking refuge.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill carries the danger of making discrimination a formal part of India's refugee policy — that would be a dangerous precedent indeed.

Rajan is professor at the Centre for Development Studies, Kerala and Subbiah is an advocate at Bombay High Court

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

The Conservative party has finally got a leader it deserves.

— THE GUARDIAN

# The BJP I knew

The party is veering away from the political philosophy and ethics it promised to uphold



JULIO RIBEIRO

BJP VETERAN leader Laxmi Kanta Chawla is a woman I greatly admire. I met her in Punjab during my stint of three-and-a-half years fighting Khalistani terrorism. She was always simply dressed in a sari and did not bother about her appearance; she was bothered much more about the country and Punjab.

My view of the RSS was tempered by my acquaintance with people like Chawla and also Hit Abhilashi, the BJP president of Punjab. Abhilashi was one of the finest human beings I have come across and I had the greatest respect for him, especially his ethical standards. When he was shot dead by terrorists, I was personally shattered.

The BJP always prided itself as a "party with a difference". With Chawla and my friend Abhilashi as models, I thought that a different type of politics would be presented to the Indian people. I admit that I never voted for the BJP because the general run of minority thinking is that the BJP is an exclusively Hindu party. My Hindu ancestors in Goa were converted by the Portuguese more than four centuries ago. Since then, we have become a minority in our own country and our vote goes to those who will protect our culture and identity.

But I have no quarrel with the party ideology as long as it confines itself to ethical and moral values — which the RSS, I always felt, represented. The Pune Brahmins, who I was familiar with during my years of service, were models of high thinking and simple living. They fashioned my kinder views of the party most of them supported.

I am now totally disenchanted with the "party with a difference". Its talk of inclusiveness, often spouted by our popular (with the masses) prime minister, is sadly, routinely, discarded when dealing with the single largest minority in the country.

In my own tiny state of Goa, I am disillusioned by the fact that the BJP has inducted 10 MLAs of the Congress party to crossover to their party in one fell swoop. If this is not unethical, I wonder what is. By inducing elected representatives to cross sides, the party has let itself down. The Christians in Goa got disillusioned with the BJP in the first term and they have been sadly let down by greedy MLAs.

I wonder what these turncoats will now do, or not do, in another party which their own voters have voted against. Take the case of Babush Monserrate, who has crossed sides many times in the past. It is hardly likely that the voters of Panaji would have voted for him if they knew that he was going to be won over by the lure of office! They wanted to vote out the BJP. If they knew that Monserrate, who lost his own home constituency in the

general election, was going to abandon their concerns, I doubt if they would have voted for him.

Moreover, people who crossover in this cavalier fashion are swashbucklers who have no ethical or moral values, and will not hesitate to change sides again if in future someone offers them something better. This was quite common during the time of Congress, and the people thought (wrongly, as now seen) that those days were behind us.

It is not only in Goa that the BJP, the "party with a difference", has joined the "mainstream" of Indian politics: They have succeeded halfway in West Bengal and are busy in Karnataka as well. How does it become a party with a difference? And will their new-found followers stop behaving like the followers of the parties which the BJP had sworn to erase from the political scene?

The new BJP lawmakers — poached from the Congress, the TMC and other regional parties, will bring with them their own cultural baggage. The former Congress MLAs from Goa were elected mainly from constituencies which had a majority or sizeable Christian vote. Those voters had a built-in prejudice against the BJP and they will not be amused with their elected representatives who have surrendered to the very party of which they were wary: The pattern of these crossovers will, therefore, be eventually defined by the unhappiness of the supporters at the selfish pursuits of such representatives.

Another development, which was to be expected, has been reported from Goa. Old, loyal BJP cadres are furious with their party leaders for admitting to the party fold a whole lot of politicians who had been the butt of their political attacks. The new entrants will hardly subscribe to the prescribed BJP ideology, and may prove to be a constant headache to those who single-mindedly pursue Hindutva.

This brand of politics which strives for a one-party, one-leader rule in the country is not much different from what we witnessed in Haryana during Mrs Gandhi's time. Over the years, a dimension has been added which is peculiar to India: It is the attempt by all the parties to protect their flock by ensuring for them a compulsory rest in five-star hotels in better climes.

I grieve for my country and its future if ethical and moral considerations are not brought to bear on political machinations. There may be machinations that are required in political life but they should have some connection to moral standards which will then be appreciated by people who think. Wholesale capitulation to Mammon is not what my friends Chawla and Abhilashi would have even dreamt of.

Incidentally, I still value my roots in Goa. My great-grandfather moved to Mumbai two hundred years ago but I still think of myself as a Goan, albeit a Mumbai Goan. And hence my anger with what has happened in my ancient land.

The writer, a retired IPS officer, was Mumbai police commissioner, DGP Gujarat and DGP Punjab

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### CRICKET AND WAR

THIS REFERS TO 'Cricketers in Arms' (IE, July 24). The article lists cricketers killed in the Second World War but has not mentioned the fatalities in World War I (1914-1918). Twelve Test cricketers lost their lives in action, notably England left arm spinner Colin Blythe, Australian fast bowler Tibby Carter and South African spinners Gordon White and Reggie Schwarz. Hundreds of first-class cricketers, mainly from England, also died in combat. The late Major General Joginder Singh Rao (1938-94), played one season of first-class cricket for the Services in the Ranji Trophy in 1963-64 in which he claimed a hat-trick on debut and two in one innings in his next match, a unique record for a cricketer in his first season. He saw action in two wars against Pakistan and received the Vishist Seva Medal for "distinguished service of an exceptional order".

Gulu Ezielkel, Delhi

### EFFETE MEDIATOR

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Sound and Fury' (IE, July 24). US president Donald Trump's claim that he can play the role of a mediator between India and Pakistan to solve the J&K dispute highlights his impulsiveness. The Middle East peace plan proposed in May 2019 fell flat with major US allies, Israel, Bahrain and the UAE, rejecting it. So much for the US ability to broker peace. The Kashmir dispute is more complex.

Pranay Kumar Shome, Kolkata

### FORCED SECULARISM

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Secularism is no spectacle' (IE, July 11) and 'Living Well Together' (IE, July 23). Secularism means respecting each other's custom

### LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

and allowing fellow citizens to practice their religion freely. Jawaharlal Nehru never wore a skullcap and Maulana Azad never sported a tilak but both these leaders were unimpeachably secular. We do not need the forced secularism of the adoption of customs of others.

S ZA Hussain, New Delhi

### WHY RTI MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The right to know' (IE, July 24). The amendment of the RTI Act 2005, is aimed at protecting either the bureaucracy or the political system. The move to create an RTI ministry must be thwarted in the Upper House.

SS Paul, Nadia

# Clinging to patriarchy

'Kabir Singh' reminds us that public spaces harbour violence against women



MITHILA BAGAI

FINALLY COMES a popular Bollywood movie that captures the cries and pains of the falling patriarchal structure of society. As Confucius once said, "A seed grows with no sound but a tree falls with huge noise. Destruction has noise but creation is quiet."

With women now demanding, and making, their rightful place in mainstream social life and coming into their own in sports, education and politics, patriarchy has been feeling the jitters. The rise of women has mostly been slow, and quiet, but the diminishing of male dominance has led to some amount of wailing. And, *Kabir Singh* is a perfect example of that. The utter impatience, obduracy, drugs, alcohol, cigarette smoking — not one but two at one go — over-possessiveness, insecurity, violence and self-destruction of the film's central character typify the desperation of men who want to hold on to their patriarchal privileges. Since women have become more confident and assertive about their own rights and space, cinema is a place

where men can fantasise about the benefits they used to once draw from patriarchy.

Director Sandeep Vanga Reddy showcases a loud and violent man who is paired with a silent woman; the execution of unequal authority thus becomes easy. Just wildly wondering, what if the movie had Kabir Singh and Mary Kom as the leading pair? But that would not have earned Rs 200 crore. Alas. But then, Bollywood scripts hardly have the finesse that can make a female-driven narrative enter the Rs 100-crore club.

Cinema's another significant function is to record, preserve and portray history. And, *Kabir Singh* did a good job in recording this story of male dominance in reel life. Perhaps later, the film can be used as a documentary to show our next generation, living in a much equal and fairer world, "hey, this is how stupid patriarchy was".

Vanga Reddy's choice of Shahid Kapoor as Kabir Singh was perfect. An actor who de-

livered stellar performances while essaying cynical characters in *Udta Punjab* and *Haider*, Kapoor was brilliant as the character who typifies male dominance and demands meekness from women. Yes, Kabir Singh is actually the villain of the movie. He is no hero. Combine high-octane music, loud mannerisms, high-action drama and the overdose of drugs and alcohol with a Bollywood star and a beautiful heroine, and voila, a villain becomes a hero in the eyes of the audience. Shahid Kapoor has himself admitted that this flawed character has become an adorable one for the audience.

Kabir Singh is unabashedly brute and rash. But dig a little deeper, the film actually shows that all is not well with women's empowerment — even within educational institutions that are considered safe for women. The increase in violence against women in the "modern and progressive" centres in a city, schools and colleges, is a telling reminder that the regressive forces in

society do not want women to build their own individuality and space.

Today, exploiters do not come in the form of village patriarchs who pass judgments about the lives of women. These neo-exploiters seem to be cultured, educated, English-speaking, with upmarket degrees — Kabir Singh is a surgeon — and drive luxurious cars and bikes. And a large number of women do forgive and forget. So, girls and parents, *Kabir Singh* is a warning — the film shines a spotlight on such neo-exploiters.

Cinema carries such an immense impact on the viewers that after the end of the movie someone from the audience remarked apprehensively, "Now everyone will be Kabir Singh". I smirked and retorted, "But not everybody will be Preeti Sikka".

The writer is assistant professor, Department of Political Science, Maitreyi College, University of Delhi





Wait, gain

The BJP stands to gain by not rushing in to fill the space vacated by a fractious coalition

The fall of the Congress-JD(S) coalition government in Karnataka, at the culmination of weeks of political skulduggery, hardly marks the end of uncertainty and the beginning of stability for the State. The crisis in the ruling coalition had crippled governance, even as allegations of bribing and kidnapping of legislators by the Opposition BJP emerged. The coalition tried every trick to hold its flock together, but to no avail. Howsoever delayed, the inevitable happened on Tuesday as the government led by H. D. Kumaraswamy lost a trust vote in the Assembly. In a House shrunk by the resignation of several coalition MLAs, the BJP, which had won 105 seats in the 2018 election, had a majority. Its protestations notwithstanding, the BJP has been instrumental in engineering the rebellion. Regardless of the claims of both sides, it would be difficult to concede that their slugfest had to do with any principles. The legislators who resigned from the Assembly have demonstrated a remarkable disregard for the people's mandate, and their excuses for doing so are shallow and dishonest. This drama must end, at least now.

Though it had not won a majority, the BJP, as the single largest party was invited to form a government after the 2018 election. The Supreme Court intervened to enforce an early trust vote that the BJP failed to win, paving the way for the government that has now collapsed. The BJP never ceased its machinations to drive a wedge in the coalition, and now wants to form a government. Seventeen coalition MLAs abstained from the voting, and most of them had resigned already. The status of their resignations and questions regarding their disqualification are now subjects of scrutiny by the Speaker and the Supreme Court. Many of the questions are without precedent and complicated, but they need to be settled urgently. Until then, it would be undesirable to form a new government. It would be facetious for the BJP to claim a majority in the House with its strength reduced by schemed absenteeism of members or vacant seats. Nothing in the statute prevents the BJP from staking claim, but it should not pursue that path. Instead, it should wait until fresh elections are held for all vacant seats. It is possible that the BJP could repeat its performance in the Lok Sabha election and win most of these seats. It needs at least eight more MLAs to cross the halfway mark in the House that has a strength of 224 elected members. No government with the support of fewer than half the total strength could be deemed to have a mandate. Waiting might be in the BJP's best interests. The party has an opportunity to demonstrate that it wants to form an alternative government not because of any desperation to wield power, but because it wants to ensure political stability and restore good governance.

Undermining RTI

Amendments should not downgrade the status of information panels

Any amendment to a law is bound to be viewed with suspicion if no fundamental need is seen for the changes it proposes. Amendments passed by the Lok Sabha to the Right to Information Act are so obviously unnecessary that naturally many see an ulterior motive. It is difficult not to concur with activists who contend that the amendments pose a threat to the freedom and autonomy of Information Commissions at the Central and State levels. The Central Information Commissioner, the corresponding authorities in the States (State Information Commissioners) and other Information Commissioners at both levels are statutory functionaries vested with the power to review the decisions of public information officers in government departments, institutions and bodies. The amendments propose to modify the status, tenure and conditions of appointment of these Commissioners and empower the Union government to set their tenure and remuneration. While the original law assured incumbents of a fixed five-year term, with 65 as the retirement age, the amendments say the Centre would decide their tenure. In one stroke, the security of tenure of an adjudicating authority, whose mandate is to intervene in favour of information-seekers against powerful regimes and bureaucrats, has been undermined. The original legislation says the salary and terms and conditions of service of the CIC are the same as those of the Chief Election Commissioner, equal in status to a Supreme Court judge. Similarly, the other Information Commissioners at the Central level have the same conditions of service as Election Commissioners. At the State level, the SIC has the same terms and conditions of service as Election Commissioners, while other Information Commissioners are equated with the Chief Secretary of a State.

The government claims its aim is to 'rationalise' the status of the authorities. It argues that while the Chief Election Commissioner is a constitutional functionary, the CIC is only a statutory authority. And while the CEC is equal in status to a Supreme Court judge, it would be incongruous for the CIC to enjoy the same status as the CIC's orders are subject to judicial review by the high courts. This is a fallacious argument as even the Election Commission's decisions can be reviewed by high courts. Protecting citizens' right to information is a cause important enough for adjudicating authorities to be vested with high status and security of tenure. Given the extent to which the RTI Act has empowered citizens and helped break the hold of vested interests over the administration, the law has always faced a threat from many in power. The RTI Act was a consensus law and a product of public consultation. The present amendments have not been put to any debate. The government would do well to drop the Bill or at least send it to a parliamentary select committee for deeper scrutiny.

Having the last word on 'population control'

There should be a clear understanding that offering choices and services rather than outright state control works best



JAGDISH RATTANANI

On July 11, World Population Day, a Union Minister expressed alarm, in a Tweet, over what he called the "population explosion" in the country, wanting all political parties to enact population control laws and annulling the voting rights of those having more than two children. Just a month earlier, a prominent businessman-yoga guru wanted the government to enact a law where "the third child should not be allowed to vote and enjoy facilities provided by the government". This, according to him, would ensure that people would not give birth to more children.

Both these demands are wayward and represent a warped thinking which has been rebutted rather well in the Economic Survey 2018-19. The Survey notes that India is set to witness a "sharp slowdown in population growth in the next two decades". The fact is that by the 2030s, some States will start transitioning to an ageing society as part of a well-studied process of "demographic transition" which sees nations slowly move toward a stable population as fertility rates fall with an improvement in social and economic development indices over time.

Dangerous imagery

The demand for state controls on the number of children a couple can have is not a new one. It feeds on the perception that a large and growing population is at the root of a nation's problems as more and

more people chase fewer and fewer resources. This image is so ingrained in the minds of people that it does not take much to whip up public sentiment which in turn can quickly degenerate into a deep class or religious conflict that pits the poor, the weak, the downtrodden and the minorities against the more privileged sections. From this point to naming, targeting and attacking is a dangerous and short slide. The implications of such an approach are deep and wide but not easily understood because the argument is couched in sterile numbers and a rule that, it would seem, applies to all sections equally. On the contrary, what is suggested is the ugliest kind of discrimination, worse than physical attacks or social prejudice because it breaks the poor and the weak bit by bit, and in a very insidious way.

Policy of choice

The fig leaf of population control allows for the outrageous argument to be made that a family will be virtually ostracised and a citizen will be denied his or her basic rights if he or she is born as the third child. This has of course never been public policy in India.

In fact, a far-sighted and forward-looking National Population Policy (NPP) was introduced in 2000 when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister. The essence of the policy was the government's commitment to "voluntary and informed choice and consent of citizens while availing of reproductive health care services" along with a "target free approach in administering family planning services". This is a position reiterated by various governments, including the present government on the floor of both Houses of Parliament. For example, in March 2017, the then Minister of State



(Health and Family Welfare), Anupriya Patel, in a written reply in the Lok Sabha noted that the "family Planning programme in India is target free and voluntary in nature and it is the prerogative of the clients to choose a family planning method best suited to them as per their reproductive right".

The then Health Minister, J.P. Nadda, has said pretty much the same thing. About a year ago, he articulated the "lifecycle framework" which looks to the health and nutrition needs of mother and child not merely during pregnancy and child birth but "right from the time of conception till the child grows... carrying on till the adolescent stage and further". This argument is not about denying services but about offering choices and a range of services to mother and child on the clear understanding that the demographic dividend can work to support growth and drive opportunity for ordinary people only when the population is healthy.

Crucial connections

Thus, family health, child survival and the number of children a woman has are closely tied to the levels of health and education of the parents, and in particular the woman; so the poorer the couple, the more the children they tend to

Shifting strategic concerns

What India needs to do as the U.S. and China get busier in the subcontinent



ZORAWAR DAULET SINGH

The U.S. President Donald Trump's latest gaffe has introduced another thorn in what is now clearly an unsettled India-U.S. relationship. His claim, on Monday, that India sought U.S. mediation in Kashmir will pinch the Narendra Modi government more because it strikes at a vital interest: India's territorial integrity. But if we had been more attuned to international shifts, we would have noticed that structural trends in South Asia have been changing over the past several years. While India's hand is not as strong as we sometimes believe it to be, there might be opportunities to leverage the international situation further down the road.

Perceived advantage

If we step back and evaluate the India-Pakistan equation over the past five years, what stands out is that both sides proceeded from a perception that each holds an advantageous position. India's confidence emanated from Mr. Modi's electoral victory in 2014 that yielded a strong Central government and expectations of stable ties with all the major powers. Mostly overlooked in India, Pakistani leaders too have displayed confi-

dence that the international environment was moving in a direction that opened options for Pakistan that were unavailable in the previous decade. This included the renewed patterns of Pakistan's ties with the U.S. and China, with the latter reassuring Pakistan and, most importantly, the Army on their respective strategic commitments and bilateral partnerships. In the U.S.'s case, this appears to have been undertaken discreetly to avoid ruffling India's feathers, with the result that the enduring aspects of U.S.-Pakistan ties remained obscure, but still very real. In the past few days, the resilience of that relationship has come out into the open. Let us not ever forget that this is a military alliance forged in the 1950s. Historically, U.S. policymakers have always sought to restore the alliance with Pakistan whenever Islamabad's ties with China became stronger. India has borne the brunt of this recurring geopolitical dynamic.

Much of Pakistan's contemporary leverage can of course also be traced to the ongoing phase of the Afghan conflict. It fended off the most dangerous phase when U.S. policy might have shifted in an adversarial direction, or instability in the tribal frontier areas might have completely exploded. Thus, the Pakistan Army perceives itself in a position of strength where Washington, Beijing, and even Moscow have recognised Pakistan's role in a future settlement on the conflict in Afghanistan. So, both India and



Pakistan perceive themselves to be in a comfortable strategic position. At any rate, the evolving roles and interests of third parties are becoming significant again, and how Delhi leverages the international environment will determine the success of its overall policy.

Pakistan's benefactors

Both the U.S. and China have overlapping interests in regional stability and avoidance of a major sub-continental conflict. While each maintains deep ties with Pakistan for different reasons, it is unclear to what extent their longer term interests coincide with India, which seeks a structural transformation in Pakistan's domestic politics and external behaviour. The U.S. and China appear content with, or probably prefer, a Pakistan with a strong Rawalpindi, along with competent civilian governance structures and an elite with a wider world view. A Pakistan that looks beyond South Asia could be a useful potential partner in burden sharing, ironically for both the U.S. and China. For Washington, the Pakistan Army is an in-

have. This is a relation that has little to do with religion and everything to do with opportunities, choices and services that are available to the people. The poor tend to have more children because child survival is low, son preference remains high, children lend a helping hand in economic activity for poorer households and so support the economic as well as emotional needs of the family. This is well known, well understood and well established.

As the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16) notes, women in the lowest wealth quintile have an average of 1.6 more children than women in the highest wealth quintile, translating to a total fertility rate of 3.2 children versus 1.5 children moving from the wealthiest to the poorest. Similarly, the number of children per woman declines with a woman's level of schooling. Women with no schooling have an average 3.1 children, compared with 1.7 children for women with 12 or more years of schooling. This reveals the depth of the connections between health, education and inequality, with those having little access to health and education being caught in a cycle of poverty, leading to more and more children, and the burden that state control on number of children could impose on the weakest. As the latest Economic Survey points out, States with high population growth are also the ones with the lowest per capita availability of hospital beds.

In fact, demographers are careful not to use the word "population control" or "excess population". The NPP 2000 uses the word "control" just thrice; in references to the National AIDS Control Organisation; to prevent and control communicable diseases, and control of childhood diar-

rhoea. This is the spirit in which India has looked at population so that it truly becomes a thriving resource; the life blood of a growing economy. Turning this into a problem that needs to be controlled is exactly the kind of phraseology, mindset and possibly action that will spell doom for the nation. It will undo all the good work that has been done and set the stage for a weaker and poorer health delivery system – exactly the opposite of what a scheme such as Ayushman Bharat seeks to achieve. Today, as many as 23 States and Union Territories, including all the States in the south region, already have fertility below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. So, support rather than control works.

Scars of the past

The damage done when mishandling issues of population growth is long lasting. Let us not forget that the scars of the Emergency are still with us. Men used to be part of the family planning initiatives then but after the excesses of forced sterilisations, they continue to remain completely out of family planning programmes even today. The government now mostly works with woman and child health programmes. Mistakes of the Emergency-kind are not what a new government with a robust electoral mandate might like to repeat. So it is time to ask some of the prejudiced voices within the government and ruling party not to venture into terrain they may not fully understand.

Jagdish Rattanani, is a faculty member at SPJIMR and co-author of the advocacy book, 'Population: Questions That Should Be More Frequently Asked' (Through The Billion Press)

surance card for persisting security challenges such as regime survival for U.S. client states in West Asia as well as for the containment of Iran. For China, a stable Pakistan can be a partner in the Belt and Road initiative and future continental industrial and energy corridors. As the writer Andrew Small underlines, Beijing's large economic investments "come with some clear expectations about the choices that Pakistan's political and military leadership make about their country's future".

In sum, both the U.S. and China seek a strong, stable and secure Pakistan that controls its destabilising behaviour because that undermines their wider regional interests. For the U.S., a revisionist Pakistan pulls India inward and away from potential India-U.S. cooperation on Asian geopolitics. For China, it undermines its industrial and connectivity projects in Pakistan, while negatively impacting India-China ties. Hence, evolving interests of the great powers in South Asia might not necessarily portend an adverse geopolitical setting for India in the medium term. This is even more plausible if the widening comprehensive national power gap between a rising India and an unstable Pakistan make the latter's traditional role as a balancer or spoiler unattractive in the eyes of the great powers. As Pakistani scholar Hussain Haqqani predicts, "You can try to leverage your strategic location as much as you like, but there will come a

time... when strategic concerns change."

So, while it is reasonable to forecast that both the U.S. and China benefit from a more normalised Pakistan, India's policymakers should also remain clear-eyed that neither country would be willing to expend much strategic capital in an ambitious policy to reorder the domestic scene or civil-military relations in Pakistan. In any case, Indian statecraft is essential to reorient perceptions of the great powers. Maintaining that India has the right and the capacity to adopt an active defence posture – that is, blocking the flow of cross-border terror by proactive operations on the Line of Control (LoC) along with reserving the option for more ambitious punitive strikes in response to major terrorist attacks on Indian military targets – would play an important part in shaping how third parties view Indian interests and thereby assume constructive roles in managing Pakistani behaviour.

If India ever asks third parties to assist in the region, it should be for a cessation of Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir, and, once an atmosphere of peace has been established, to persuade Pakistan to accept the LoC as part of a final territorial settlement similar to the offer by Indira Gandhi in the 1972 Shimla negotiations.

Zorawar Daulet Singh is a fellow at the Centre for Policy Research and author of 'Power and Diplomacy: India's Foreign Policies During the Cold War'

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.

Karnataka politics

The Congress-JD(S) coalition government in Karnataka fell under the weight of its contradictions (Page 1, "Kumaraswamy govt. loses trust vote", July 24). Nobody expected it to complete a full term of five years because a lack of trust and mutual understanding between the Congress and the JD(S) was palpably evident in its functioning. The BJP-'engineered' defections were only a catalyst. It appears naive to look for sinners and saints in an 'all is fair' no-holds-barred game of chasing political power. The Congress party needs to be reminded that it sowed the seeds of a political culture of political desertions by fence-sitters and other opportunists who sold their loyalty to the highest

bidder in the 1970s. It is pointless to catastrophise the political churn in Karnataka as the demise of democracy. We should be more worried about the real threats such as the criminalisation and plutocratisation of politics.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,  
Thiruvananthapuram

■ Elections will make no sense if a person who is elected on a party ticket resigns, joins another party and in the process topples the very party on whose ticket he was elected. This is a clear example of money power having its say. Instead, the seat should be declared vacant and fresh elections held within a month. Otherwise, the menace of floor-crossing will remain. Also, the law relating to anti-defection has not served

its purpose. In fact, it legitimises group defections. One would have thought that the BJP, with its massive electoral majority, will focus on governance. On the contrary, the ugly feature one is witnessing is other political parties that are in power in States not being allowed to govern. We are heading towards a totalitarian State. It is for the people to decide.

N.G.R. PRASAD,  
K.K. RAM SIDDHARTHA,  
Chennai

■ The felling of the coalition government in Karnataka through orchestrated resignations is nothing short of a murder of democracy. One wonders how much money might have been spent on these kinds of defections and from where such money comes from

even after demonetisation. It is time the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution is amended to make all kinds of defections illegal, including 'two-thirds mergers'. Elected members should understand that the people's mandate is not saleable property. After Karnataka, we could be in for more drama – in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

K. MUHAMMED ISMAYIL,  
Koduvally, Kerala

India-Pakistan ties

It is fine to be trying out a religion-based solution ("Editorial page, "A bridge across the India-Pakistan abyss", July 24). But nothing can move forward unless there is trust. Trust is the basic foundation which is completely absent in India-Pakistan ties.

VAISHALI MISHRA,  
Mumbai

Six runs to England

Expert opinion that the second run, in the ICC World Cup final, should have been disallowed because the fielder, Martin Guptill, had released (thrown) the ball even before the batsman had crossed each other in the process of taking that second run gains credence because of the deflection of the ball from the bat which resulted in a boundary for England ('Sport' page, "An error of judgment", July 22). The second run, even according to the rules of the game, would have been perfectly legal if the batsman was neither run out nor if there

was a bonus boundary because of the deflection. It was, admittedly, too much to expect the on-field umpire to check so many aspects in his decision-making process. But that did not prevent the third umpire from intervening after television replays and informing the on-field umpires about the 'mistake'. It is sad that technological aids were not used when it mattered most which makes it even more baffling to read that the umpire does not regret the error of judgment.

V. LAKSHMANAN,  
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:  
www.hindu.co.in/opinion/letters/

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The opening paragraph of the report headlined "Perfect launch for Chandrayaan-2" (July 23, 2019) had termed the launch as India's first-ever *interplanetary mission* to be spearheaded by two women. It should have been *moon mission*.

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# Making Chennai a water-wise city

There is a compelling need for a paradigm shift in the way the ongoing water crisis is being viewed



T. RAMAKRISHNAN

The public discourse on Chennai's ongoing water crisis has been along predictable lines. Source augmentation, deepening of waterbodies and giving rainwater harvesting a renewed emphasis are among the suggestions being made, apart from demand-side management. But these ideas, however well-meaning they may be, have their limitations. There is a compelling need for a paradigm shift in the way the water crisis is being viewed.

When it comes to source augmentation, in the last 40 years, a couple of major projects were taken up for Chennai to tap both fresh water and sea water.

The Krishna Water Supply Scheme or Telugu Ganga Project (1996) and the New Veeranam Project (2004) were implemented using two important inter-State rivers – the Krishna and the Cauvery, both of which depend on the southwest monsoon (June-September).

Though the Krishna Water Supply Scheme, if realised fully, can take care of at least half of the Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA)'s projected water demand of 1,721 million litres a day (MLD) for 2020, Tamil Nadu has not received the assured quantum from Andhra Pradesh even once in the last 20+ years. As regards the Cauvery project, the 'upper-riparian attitude' of Karnataka determines the flow to Tamil Nadu. In effect, realisation of water by Chennai hinges on nature and inter-State ties, both of which are, more often than not, unpredictable.

### Tapping stone quarries

Another source since 2017 for the city has been the abandoned stone quarries located on the outskirts, from where water is drawn for public water supply after treatment.

Further, two desalination plants of 100 MLD each were commissioned in 2010 and 2013. Work has begun on another desalination plant of 150 MLD while steps are on to set up another 400 MLD unit. However, given the costs and environmental



An operator filling his water tanker at a Metrowater station in Chennai in June. Even if there are bountiful monsoon years, it is unlikely that the southern metro will become a water-surplus city. • GETTY IMAGES

concerns, it is unlikely that Chennai can afford to stretch this option beyond a point.

Deepening of tanks and lakes, a popular option, is easier said than done. Issues such as the costs involved in removing and transporting the silt and inadequate disposal arrangements have bothered the authorities to such an extent that nothing much has been done.

As regards rainwater harvesting (RWH), it cannot be a panacea and site-specific requirements will have to be kept in mind while putting up RWH structures. The model of storing rainwater and reusing it may demonstrate the efficacy of RWH.

Many of the options being suggested to overcome the distress situation faced by Chennai have been tried out in the past. Yet, just one bad monsoon has pushed the city to yet another water crisis. This scenario may get repeated in the future too.

Even if there are bountiful monsoon years, the prospects of Chennai becoming a water-surplus city are remote. An official document prepared a few years ago estimated that the CMA, which covers not only Chennai Corporation but also nearby municipalities, town panchayats and village panchayats, will have a shortfall of 1,089 MLD in 2020. Even assuming that the southern peninsula experiences good southwest and north-east monsoons this year, the gap can

come down only by a maximum of 400 MLD.

A note available on the website of The Energy and Resources Institute states, quoting the Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation, that the average water supply in urban local bodies of the country is 69.25 litres per capita per day (LPCD) against the service level benchmark of 135 LPCD. For a metropolitan city like Chennai, the benchmark goes up to 150 LPCD. If one were to go by the admission of Chennai Metrowater, the service level achieved in March 2018 was 112 LPCD. This is why the need for a paradigm shift becomes all the more important.

### Waste-water recycling

Just as in many other Indian cities, the concept of waste-water recycling and re-use has not yet caught the imagination of either the authorities or the public in a big way. The demand-supply gap will be a permanent feature of urban India unless society realises the critical importance of recycling and re-use of water. It needs to be noted here that on an average, 85 litres of water goes waste for every 100 litres utilised.

There is also another reason why the concept ought to be popularised. According to information furnished by the Centre, while urban areas of the country generate 61,948 MLD of

sewage on a daily basis, the installed capacity of sewage treatment plants (STPs) is just 23,277 MLD. This means that only 37.5% of sewage generated can be treated. As per a conservative estimate, Chennai generates about 930 MLD of sewage, whereas its STPs can handle 727 MLD. With rapid urbanisation, the space for new plants is hardly available in peri-urban areas of Chennai, a scenario applicable to any other city in India. As a result, the city's rivers and canals have been reduced to carriers of raw sewage. Over and above these reasons, one of the targets set under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by UN member-countries in 2015, is to halve the proportion of untreated waste water.

### Non-consumptive use

There are numerous ways through which waste water can be treated at the point of generation. Several Information Technology companies, located outside the city limits, have adopted the concept as they have their own STPs and use the treated water for non-consumptive purposes such as gardening and flushing toilets. Some high-end residential apartments too have begun implementing the idea.

Realising the potential benefits, Chennai Metrowater has at last launched work on establishing two tertiary treated reverse osmosis plants of 45 MLD each. The process will involve sewage treatment in three stages and will use reverse osmosis system through which most of the dissolved solids and bacteria will be removed from the treated sewage.

Besides, projects are on to experiment with the idea of conjunctive use of fresh water and treated sewage – mixing treated sewage with fresh water by letting it into the lakes of Porur and Perungudi. These are only some modes of water treatment, the scope for which is enormous and still untapped.

All said, a wise society cannot allow itself to become complacent once the rainy season starts. The present debate needs to be taken forward so that waste water is reused and recycled in an imaginative and optimal way. This way, Chennai can take pride in being a water-wise society.

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# Contentious remedies for a clear, structural malady

The NEP's proposals will not ensure equity in health care



GEORGE THOMAS

The primary objective of medical education should be to provide a cadre of personnel to take care of the health needs of the country. In addition, any education policy in the modern world has to take into consideration social objectives, for example equity and justice in enrolment and access. That apart, certain fundamental questions need answering too. For instance, how many years of training are required for a medical professional? What should be the purpose of a basic degree in medicine? Is specialisation required? If so, how much and how is it to be done?

The draft New Education Policy (NEP) speaks about equity, inclusiveness and sustainable development at many points, starting from the preamble. However, it is by no means clear that its recommendations will fulfil these objectives, especially in the field of medical education. For example, on page 300, it states that fees in medical colleges, both public and private, will be left to be decided by the institutions themselves. However, just a few pages later, it asserts that the cost of education should be lowered.

At another point, the policy document states that all private institutions should be not-for-profit. It appears that the committee that drafted the report hoped that this recommendation, as well as the regulatory apparatus suggested by it, by itself will take care of the problem of profiteering. However, what gives it such confidence is hard to understand given that the present policy too is to consider higher education a not-for-profit enterprise but has become a very large driver of the black economy, according to several reports. Though the document states at several points that no student should be deprived of education due to lack of finances, the solution it suggests is scholarships.

### Confused thinking

The fact that on the one hand, the cost of education is sought to be lowered and on the other, fees are allowed to remain unregulated, betrays confused thinking. With the National Medical Commission Bill regulating fees only for 50% of seats in medical colleges, it looks like the commitment to equity is merely a pious homily.

At several points in the policy document, the need for a flexible education system has

been stressed. One part of this flexibility is in the possibility of multiple entry and exit points. One can understand having a National Entrance Examination for admission to undergraduate courses. However, it is absolutely clear that having a National Exit Examination for MBBS as the mode of entry to postgraduate courses is neither flexible nor fair. Can a student be expected to take the exit examination multiple times if the initial score is not good enough? Are all medical colleges across the country of the same standard to ensure a level-playing field? Sealing the student's fate once and for all through an exit examination is certainly not just.

### High level of centralisation

The objectives of autonomy and adaptation to local needs are contradicted by the high level of centralisation in medical education by the National Medical Commission. The document considers separation of the functions of regulation, funding, accreditation and standard setting as absolutely necessary. However, the National Medical Commission has sought to arrogate to itself many of these functions. Further, the recommendation that diploma courses should be expanded in order to provide "intermediate specialists" lacks focus. What are these intermediate specialists supposed to do?

Multiple postgraduate courses have been started without any clear rationale. The MBBS degree has been debased to such an extent that it is considered merely a necessary requirement for postgraduation. One of the main drivers of the thirst for a postgraduate degree is the lack of adequate respectable employment opportunities for an MBBS graduate. The overwhelming privatisation of health-care delivery in India has led to the concentration of personnel in those parts where the public has the capacity to pay. Having a postgraduate degree has a multiplier effect on employability, income and respectability for the doctor. How useful it is for the society is questionable.

The policy document does not recognise that the main driver of inequity in health care is the presence of a large, poorly-regulated, for-profit sector. Private interests have ensured regulatory capture in health-care policymaking. It appears that the National Education Policy has not escaped this capture, hence the clear disconnect between the repeated exhortations to ensure equity and quality and the recommendations which will achieve neither.

Dr. George Thomas is an orthopaedic surgeon at St. Isabel's Hospital, Chennai

# Island of hope in the midst of global measles resurgence

Sri Lanka has become free of the viral infection

R. PRASAD

On July 9, Sri Lanka became the fourth country in the Asian region – after Bhutan, The Maldives and Timor-Leste – to eliminate measles. Amidst an increase in the number of cases worldwide, especially in Europe, this came as an encouraging development. Measles is considered as eliminated when a country interrupts transmission of an indigenous virus for three years.

However, the viral infection has, since the beginning of 2018, seen a resurgence in 49 of the 53 countries in the World Health Organization (WHO)'s European Region. A total of 1,60,000 cases and more than 100 deaths were reported from these 49 countries between January 1, 2018 and May 30 this year.

The number of cases reported last year in the European Region, the highest in this decade, was thrice the number reported in 2017 and 15 times the number for 2016. With nearly 78,000 cases reported in the first five months of this year, indications are that the number will surpass last year's.

Ironically, the sharp increase in the region came despite vaccination coverage for the second dose being at a record-high of 91% in 2018. So what could have caused the spike? According to the WHO, the vaccination coverage has "not been uniform across the region nor high enough to ensure herd immunity" to break the transmission cycle.



While global coverage for the first dose of vaccine has remained stagnant at 85% and for the second dose, it is still at 67%, the coverage for Sri Lanka has been above 95% for both the first and second doses. The vaccine is provided to children under the routine national immunisation programme.

### Regular vaccination campaigns

The island nation, where measles is a notifiable infection, has also carried out periodical mass vaccination campaigns to reach the small pockets of unimmunised children. Sri Lanka also has strong surveillance in place.

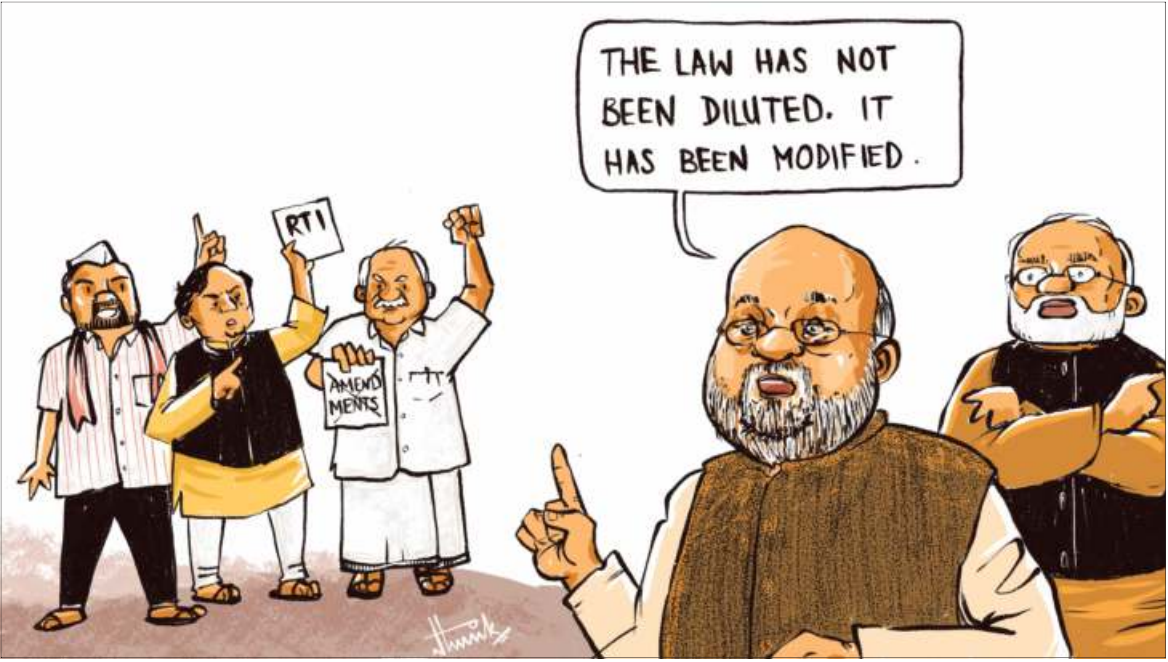
However, the country did encounter a few bumps in its path. In 1984, it introduced measles vaccine in the national immunisation programme and set the goal of eliminating the infection. Though local outbreaks were reported, the annual incidence declined till the year 1999.

During Sri Lanka's measles epidemic of 1999-2000, nearly 15,000 cases were reported following which a two-dose vaccine schedule was introduced, resulting in a sharp decline in incidence. The country reached an elimination target of less than five per one million people in 2011.

But in 2012, the measles immunisation schedule was changed following which babies no longer received measles vaccine at the age of nine months but a measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine on completing 12 months. Following this, in 2013, the country witnessed its last major measles epidemic. Besides other reasons, the change in immunisation schedule was seen as a possible cause.

The MMR vaccine schedule was again changed following a sero-survey data. Babies now began receiving the first dose at nine months and second dose at the age of three years. The country reported its last case of measles caused by an indigenous virus in May 2016.

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### DATA POINT

## Race to the South

Never before in history has a country even attempted to soft-land an object near the moon's South Pole. If all goes well, India's Chandrayaan-2 will achieve this feat on September 7, 2019. The South Pole is suspected to harbour reservoirs of ice, proof of which will have massive impact on future missions. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan

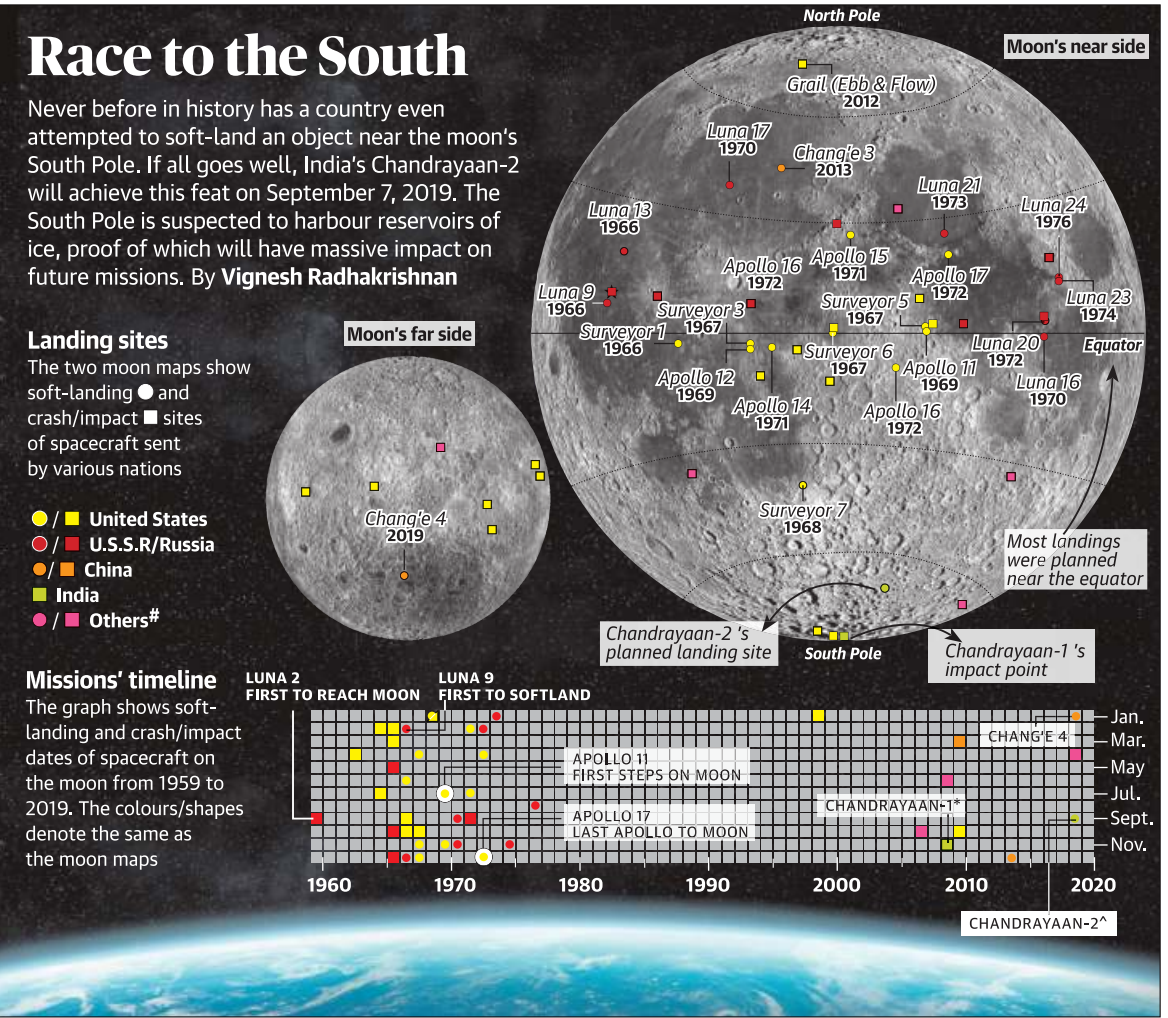
### Landing sites

The two moon maps show soft-landing and crash/impact sites of spacecraft sent by various nations

- United States
- U.S.S.R./Russia
- China
- India
- Others#

### Missions' timeline

The graph shows soft-landing and crash/impact dates of spacecraft on the moon from 1959 to 2019. The colours/shapes denote the same as the moon maps



\* VIA AN IMPACT PROBE; ^ PROPOSED; # EUROPE (ESA), JAPAN, ISRAEL, S. KOREA | DESIGNED BY L. BALAMURUGAN | SOURCE: NASA, REUTERS

## The FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 25, 1969

### Yahya yet to respond

The Pakistan President Gen. Yahya Khan has not yet sent a reply to Mrs. Indira Gandhi's letter sent through Mr. Kewal Singh, the External Affairs Secretary, who went to Islamabad recently to sign the Kutch Agreement. The Prime Minister had, in that letter, urged an early normalisation of Indo-Pakistan relations at least in the cultural sphere. General Yahya Khan made no comment even on her renewed proposal for the appointment of a joint Indo-Pakistan body at any level to consider all outstanding problems between the two countries. The Prime Minister's letter, dated June 22, was placed on the table of the Rajya Sabha to-day [July 24] by the Deputy Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Surendra Pal Singh, in reply to a question whether India proposed to enter into any meaningful discussions with Pakistan. Deploing the almost total lack of contact now between the peoples of India and Pakistan whose destinies were inextricably intertwined, Mrs. Gandhi suggested that it would help to remove misunderstandings and misconceptions if both countries eased the regulations for travel between the two countries, encourage greater cultural contact in the field of letters, art, music, science and sport.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 25, 1919.

### Leper problem in India.

The Rev. Frank Oldrieve, Secretary of the Mission to lepers in India, delivered an interesting and instructive lecture last evening [July 22] at the Regent's Park Hall [in Dacca] on "The Leper Problem and How to Solve it". The Lecture was illustrated by magic lantern pictures. His Excellency Lord Ronaldshay, who presided, in introducing the speaker made reference to the great service the mission has been rendering to humanity. His Excellency said that it was a matter for regret that very little attention was being devoted by the people to the disease of leprosy, whereas malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases had engaged so much of their attention. Out of a total of more than Rs. 44,00,000 of the annual expenditure, only a small fraction was received from the public. There was an exhibition of pictures showing the infectious character of the disease and the relief work that the mission has been carrying on in the different centres in India. The total number of lepers in India would be nearly 150,000. The Rev. Oldrieve said that the disease was not hereditary but according to expert opinion it was infectious.









## एक और एकतरफा चिट्ठी

असहमति की अनदेखी और भीड़ की हिंसा को लेकर 49 बुद्धिजीवियों ने प्रधानमंत्री को चिट्ठी लिखकर अपनी जो चिंता जाहिर की वह नई नहीं है। इस तरह की चिट्ठियाँ पहले भी लिखी जा चुकी हैं। इतना ही नहीं असहिष्णुता बढ़ने का शोर मचाते हुए पुरस्कार भी वापस किए गए हैं और जनता से यह आग्रह भी किया गया है कि भाजपा को वोट न दें । इस तरह की चिट्ठियाँ लिखने वाले खुद को लिबरल यानी उदारवादी बताते हैं, लेकिन शायद वे खुद नहीं जानते कि उदारवाद क्या है? चूँकि ऐसे बुद्धिजीवी चतुराई से चुनिंदा मामलों का उल्लेख करते हुए अपनी एकतरफा सोच ही सामने रखते हैं इसलिए उनकी अपीलों का कोई असर नहीं होता। इस नई चिट्ठी का भी असर नहीं पड़ने वाला, क्योंकि इसमें केवल दलितों और अल्पसंख्यकों को ही भीड़ की हिंसा का शिकार बताते हुए इस सच को जानबूझकर ओझल किया गया कि अन्य अनेक वर्गों के लोग भी भीड़ के उन्माद की चपेट में आ रहे हैं। आखिर अपने एजेंडे को आगे बढ़ाने के लिए सिक्के का एक ही पहलू दिखाना बौद्धिक बेईमानी नहीं तो और क्या है? वास्तव में इसी रवैये के कारण यह कहा जाने लगा है कि उदारवादी ही उदारवाद के सबसे बड़े शत्रु बन गए हैं।

49 प्रबुद्ध लोगों ने अपनी चिट्ठी में यह भी लिखा है कि जय श्रीराम नारे को एक भड़काऊ नारे में तब्दील कर दिया गया है और उसके नाम पर भीड़ हिंसा कर रही है। इससे इन्कार नहीं कि ऐसे एक-दो मामले सामने आए हैं, लेकिन क्या इस्का-दुक्का मामलों के आधार पर यह कहा जा सकता है कि जय श्रीराम नारे का इस्तेमाल दूसरों को डराने के लिए किया जा रहा है? क्या इस सच की अनदेखी कर दी जाए कि जय श्रीराम नारे के नाम पर कथित हिंसा के कई मामले फजी भी पाए गए हैं? आखिर इन फर्जी घटनाओं को कौन गढ़ रहा है? निःसंदेह भीड़ की हिंसा पर सख्ती से रोक लगाने की जरूरत है और इस जरूरत की पूर्ति प्राथमिकता के आधार पर होनी चाहिए, लेकिन यह साबित करने का कोई मतलब नहीं कि जय श्रीराम का नारा एक भड़काऊ नारा बन गया है। सदियों से राम का नाम अलग-अलग भाव में लिया जाता रहा है, जैसे सीताराम, सियाराम, राम-राम। इसी कड़ी में जय श्रीराम भी है। इस्का उपयोग भक्तिभाव प्रकट करने के साथ ही जोश जगाने या फिर गर्व का भाव व्यक्त करने के लिए होता चला आ रहा है। साफ है कि जय श्रीराम नारे को भड़काऊ करार देना एक किस्म की असहिष्णुता ही है।

## उद्योगों को बचाना जरूरी

बिजली बिल में वृद्धि से कोल्हान क्षेत्र की चार कंपनियों के बंद होने की स्थिति इस तथ्य को रेखांकित कर रही कि झारखंड में उद्योगों को बचाने-बढ़ाने के लिए सुनियोजित कार्ययोजना पर अमल करने की आवश्यकता है। उद्योगों के सामने यह समस्या सिर्फ कोल्हान में ही नहीं आई है। पूरे राज्य के छोटे-बड़े उद्योग बिजली दरों में हुए इजाफे से प्रभावित हैं। इसका असर दिखने भी लगा है। इसलिए समय रहते बिजली बिल की मार से उद्योगों को बचाने के लिए शासन के स्तर से ठोस पहल शीघ्र होनी चाहिए। ऐसा रस्ता तलाशा जाना चाहिए कि औद्योगिक विकास की गाड़ी बेपटरी न हो जाए। वैसे भी किसी उद्योग या कंपनी के बंद होने का प्रतिकूल असर चौतरफा होता है। कामगार एवं उनके परिवार तो सीधे तौर पर प्रभावित होते ही हैं, उद्योगों के आसपास के क्षेत्र की अर्थव्यवस्था भी चोट में आती है। राज्य की छवि पर भी नकारात्मक प्रभाव पड़ता है। हालांकि यह बात भी सही है कि केवल सिब्सिडी और मदद के जरिए किसी समस्या का स्थायी समाधान नहीं हो सकता है, लेकिन इसे भी नहीं नकारा जा सकता कि ऐसी मदद छोटे उद्योगों के लिए संजीवनी साबित होती है। राज्य के वैसे उद्योगों को यह रहत तत्काल मिलने की दरकार है जो बिजली का अधिकतम उपयोग करके संचालित होते हैं। झारखंड बिजली वितरण निगम (जेबीवीएनएल) के प्रस्ताव पर झारखंड राज्य विद्युत नियामक आयोग (जेएसईआरसी) ने वर्ष 2019-20 के दौरान बिजली की दरों में औसतन छह फीसद की वृद्धि की है, जबकि फर्नेस वाले उद्योगों के लिए यह वृद्धि 24 फीसद तक है। स्वाभाविक तौर पर उन उद्योगों को बिजली दर वृद्धि बहुत भारी पड़ रही। इसलिए इस प्रस्ताव पर समग्र विचार मंथन कर ऐसी नीति अंगीकार की जानी चाहिए जिसमें स्पष्ट रहे कि किस श्रेणी के उद्योग को किस तरह से सिब्सिडी दी जाएगी और कितने दिनों तक। इस क्रम में यह भी सुनिश्चित किया जाना चाहिए कि सिब्सिडी का बेजा फायदा उठाने की कोशिश न की जाए। बिजली चोरी करने या बिजली बिल का समय से भुगतान नहीं करने का रिकॉर्ड अपने नाम रखनेवाले उद्योगों को इस लाभ से हर हाल में वंचित रखने का भी इंतजाम होना चाहिए। तभी सही उद्योगों को सही तरीके से मदद मिल सकेगी और फर्जीवाड़ा करनेवाले उद्योगों को कार्रवाई का करंट लगेगा।

## विज्ञान की दुनिया में महिलाएँ

**डॉ. मोनिका शर्मा**

हाल ही में सफलतापूर्वक लांच किए गए चंद्रयान-2 अभियान में इसरो को दो महिला वैज्ञानिकों की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका थी। अपने देश के सपनों को आकार देने वाले चंद्रयान-2 प्रोजेक्ट में ऋतु करिधाल अभियान निदेशक और एम. वनिता परियोजना निदेशक हैं। सुखद है कि भारत का अंतरिक्ष में फतेह पाने का यह सिलसिला विज्ञान की दुनिया में देश की आधी आबादी की भूमिका भी पुष्टा कर रहा है।

यह सकारात्मक और संबल देने वाली बात है कि कभी महिलाओं का न के बराबर दखल वाले इस क्षेत्र में स्त्रियों का हर अभियान में बढ़-चढ़ योगदान देखने को मिल रहा है। विज्ञान क्षेत्र में महिलाओं की बढ़ती भागीदारी को रेखांकित करने के लिए अपेक्षित भी है कि महिला वैज्ञानिकों को ऐसे प्रोजेक्ट्स पर काम करने और खुद को साबित करने का अवसर मिले, ताकि राष्ट्र निर्माण से जुड़े एक अहम क्षेत्र में लैंगिक समानता लाने का माहौल बने। यकीनन इसरो का हर अभियान महिलाओं के विज्ञान, तकनीक और अनुसंधान की दुनिया में बढ़ते कदमों का मजबूत आधार तैयार कर रहा

**देश में विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में**

**स्त्रियों की बढ़ती भागीदारी**

**सामाजिक-पारिवारिक स्तर में**

**भी बढ़ा बदलाव ला सकती है**

है। इस बुनियाद पर आने वाले समय में देश की बेटियाँ विज्ञान और अनुसंधान जैसे चुनौतीपूर्ण क्षेत्रों में आगे बढ़ने की राह चुनेंगी। निःसंदेह महिला वैज्ञानिकों के यह भागीदारी इस क्षेत्र में युवतियों को मार्गदर्शन और प्रोत्साहन देने वाली है। फिलहाल यह संतोषजनक है कि देश के प्रमुख वैज्ञानिक अभियानों में शीर्ष स्तर से लेकर एक सफल टीम बनाने तक महिलाओं का प्रतिनिधित्व दिखने लगा है।

इसरो की 2018-2019 की वार्षिक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक इसमें 2069 महिलाएं विज्ञान संबंधी तथा तकनीकी श्रेणियों और 3285 महिलाएं प्रशासनिक क्षेत्र में कार्यरत हैं। सरकारी आंकड़ों के अनुसार अनुसंधान और विकास गतिविधियों में कार्यरत कुल 2.82 लाख लोगों में से 14 प्रतिशत महिलाएं हैं। समय के साथ इस हिस्सेदारी के आंकड़ों में हो रही बढ़ोतरी महिलाओं के जीवन

**हर्ष वी पंत**

**अगर ट्रंप के विचारों से तालमेल बैठाने में खुद उनके विदेश विभाग को कड़ी मशक्कत करनी पड़ती है तो समझा जा सकता है कि भारत के सामने यह कितनी बड़ी चुनौती है?**

जब अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप ने कश्मीर को लेकर भारत की परंपरागत नीति के उलट बयान दिया तो मानों भूचाल सा आ गया। पाकिस्तानी प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान की अमेरिका यात्रा के दौरान ट्रंप ने अनपेक्षित और उससे भी कहीं अधिक नाटकीय रूप से यह दावा किया कि भारत ने उनसे कश्मीर मामले में मध्यस्थता की पेशकश की। उनके इस बयान से भारत में राजनीतिक हलचल होनी स्वाभाविक थी। उनका यह बयान सुर्खियां बन गया। जापान के ओसाका में आयोजित जी-20 देशों के सम्मेलन के दौरान प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के साथ अपनी बातचीत का हवाला देते हुए ट्रंप ने बड़े विचित्र ढंग अपनी बात रखी। उन्होंने कहा, ‘दो सप्ताह पहले मैं प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के साथ था और हमने इस विषय पर चर्चा की और इस दौरान उन्होंने कहा कि क्या आप मध्यस्थ बनना चाहेंगे? मैंने पूछा कि कहाँ? उन्होंने जवाब दिया कश्मीर में। चूँकि यह मसला इतने वर्षों से उलझा हुआ है तो मुझे लगता है कि वे इसे सुलझाना चाहते हैं और आप (इमरान) भी इसका समाधान होते देखना चाहते हैं। अगर इसमें मैं कुछ मदद कर सकता हूँ तो ऐसा करते हुए मुझे बेहद खुशी होगी।’

भारत में तमाम लोगों के लिए यह किसी झटके से कम नहीं था। ऐसा इसलिए, क्योंकि यह अमेरिका की दशकों पुरानी उस नीति के उलट है जिसमें वह कश्मीर को एक द्विपक्षीय मुद्दा मानता आया है कि यह मसला भारत और पाकिस्तान को आपस में सुलझाना चाहिए। उसका यह रवैया

भारतीय भावनाओं के अनुरूप ही रहा। हालाँकि बराक ओबामा सहित तमाम अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति कश्मीर मसले पर मध्यस्थ बनने का मोह रोक नहीं पाए और यदाकदा ऐसी पेशकश करते रहे। हालाँकि अब वाशिंगटन को भलीभाँति समझ आ गया है कि अगर वह भारत के साथ अपने रिश्ते बेहतर और परिपक्व करना चाहता है तो फिर कश्मीर के मसले में टांग न ही अड़ाए तो बेहतर होगा। फिर भी आखिर ट्रंप को ऐसा कहने के लिए किसमे उकसाया होगा, इस पर भारत में अटकलों का बाजार गर्म है। ट्रंप की इस हालिया जुमलेबाजी की तह में जाने के लिए तमाम परतें उघाड़ी जा सकती है, लेकिन हकीकत यही है कि यह अनुमान लगाना बेहद मुश्किल है कि अहम भू-राजनीतिक मसलों पर टिप्पणी करते हुए ट्रंप की क्या मनोदशा रहती है? अगर ट्रंप के विचारों से तालमेल बैठाने में खुद उनके विदेश विभाग को कड़ी मशक्कत करनी पड़ती है तो समझा जा सकता है कि भारत के सामने यह कितनी बड़ी चुनौती है?

चूँकि यह मसला राजनीतिक रूप से बेहद संवेदनशील था तो भारतीय पक्ष ने भी त्वरित और कड़ी प्रतिक्रिया व्यक्त की। भारतीय विश्व मंत्रालय ने ट्वीट किया, ‘हमने अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति की टिप्पणी देखी कि यदि भारत और पाकिस्तान अनुरोध करते हैं तो वह कश्मीर पर मध्यस्थता के लिए तैयार हैं। प्रधानमंत्री मोदी ने अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति से ऐसा कोई निवेदन नहीं किया है। भारत का हवाशा से यही रुख रहा है कि पाकिस्तान के साथ सभी किस्म के मुद्दों पर केवल

# भाजपा के कांग्रेसीकरण का सवाल



प्रदीप सिंह

**भाजपा और कांग्रेस में एक बुनियादी फर्क है और वह शायद हमेशा रहेगा तथा भाजपा के कांग्रेसीकरण को रोकेंगा**



उनका बहुमत है। क्या गोवा भाजपा के लिए इतना बड़ा और अहम प्रदेश है कि उसके लिए पार्टी ऐसे समझौते करे? आंध्र के दार्गि नेता जिसे भाजपा राज्य का माल्या कहती थी, को इस आधार पर पार्टी में शामिल किया गया कि राज्यसभा में बहुमत जुटाने के लिए ऐसा करना मजबूरी थी।

कनटक का मामला थोड़ा अलग है। राज्य में भाजपा का मजबूत जनाधार है। राज्य की 28 में से 25 सीटों पर उसके सांसद हैं। कांग्रेस और जद-एस के बागी विधायकों में से ज्यादातर बिल्डर हैं। अगले कुछ दिन में ये भाजपा में शामिल होंगे ही। राज्य में अभी जो ख़लात हैं उनमें जब भी विधानसभा चुनाव होते तो पार्टी को बहुमत मिलने की प्रबल संभावना थी। फिर जोड़तोड़ की सरकार बनाने का फैसला क्यों किया गया? विपक्ष के जो बागी आएंगे उनकी कितनी मांगें पार्टी पूरी कर पाएंगी? क्या लगता है कि पार्टी नेतृत्व इन सवालों को महत्वहीन मानता है। अगरएसएस में आजकल

इन नवागंतुकों को नव नेकरवादी कहा जा रहा है। अभी तक कुछ अपवादों को छोड़कर नव नेकरवादियों को कोई महत्वपूर्ण पद नहीं मिला है। यही दूसरी धारा का संकेत है। दूसरी बार केंद्र में सरकार बनने के बाद मेनका गांधी, जयंत शिंदे, चौधरी वीरेंद्र सिंह, सत्यपाल सिंह, केजे अल्फॉंस और राम कृपाल यादव जैसे कई नव नेकरवादियों की छुट्टी कर दी गई। जो बचे वे केवल अपनी कार्यकुशलता की वजह से। इसके जरिये पार्टी ने एक संदेश दिया है कि उसकी नजर में विचारधारा गौण नहीं है। बांग्लादेशी घुसपैठियों, एनआरसी, अनुच्छेद 370, 35 ए, समान नागरिक संहिता और तीन तलाक के मुद्दे पर पार्टी कायम है। अमित शाह का गृहमंत्री बनना भाजपा की विचारधारा के लिहाज से सामान्य घटना नहीं है। जो काम पिछले पांच साल में नहीं हुआ वह अब होगा, ऐसे संकेत मिल रहे हैं। अमित शाह की कश्मीर यात्रा के दौरान जो नजारा देखने को मिला वह आने वाले दिनों का संकेत है। इस मोर्चे पर मोदी-शाह की जोड़ी ने एक और बड़ा और शायद सबसे अहम काम किया है और वह है वाजपेयी सरकार के दौरान हुई गलतियों से सबक सीखकर आरएसएस, पार्टी और सरकार में सांगोपांग समन्वय। कनटक के बीएल संतोष का संगठन महासचिव बनना इस रणनीति के अलावा एक और संदेश है कि वाजपेयी राज में जिस तरह संगठन की उपेक्षा हुई थी वैसा नहीं होगा। उस समय वाजपेयी, आडवाणी दोनों के सरकार में जाने के बाद ऐसा ही हुआ था। संगठन की दृष्टि से 2019 के लोकसभा चुनाव के बाद यह सबसे अहम बदलाव है।

भाजपा कांग्रेस तभी बन सकती है जब नव नेकरवादी दृष्ट में पानी के बजाय पानी में दूध की तरह हो जाएं। इसकी संभावना फिलहाल तो नजर नहीं आती यानी दोनों धाराओं का मिलन मुश्किल है। भाजपा और कांग्रेस में एक बुनियादी फर्क है, जो शायद हमेशा रहेगा। भाजपा में विचारधारा के प्रति समर्पित कार्यकर्ताओं की एक फौज हमेशा रहती है। ऐसे समर्पित कार्यकर्ताओं की स्पलाई लाइन संघ से सदा बनी रहती है। जब भाजपा विचारधारा से हटकर सत्ता के लिए ही सब कुछ करने की ओर बढ़ती है तो कार्यकर्ताओं की यह फौज पर बैठ जाती है। उसके बाद चुनाव में जो होता है उससे सत्ता का नशा उतर जाता है। कभी-कभी नेताओं को गलतफहमी हो जाती है कि कार्यकर्ताओं की निष्ठा विचारधारा से ज्यादा उनके प्रति है। बड़े-बड़े दिग्गज इसी मुगालते में हाशिये पर चले गए। कार्यकर्ताओं का यही निष्ठा भाव ही भाजपा को कांग्रेस नहीं बनने देगा।

(लेखक राजनीतिक विश्लेषक एवं स्तंभकार हैं)

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# नजरअंदाज करने लायक बयान



अवधेश राजगुट

द्विपक्षीय स्तर पर चर्चा की जाएगी। पाकिस्तान के साथ किसी भी तरह की सक्रियता से पहले जरूरी होगा कि वह अपने यहां आतंकी ढांचा खत्म करे। शिमला समझौते और लाहौर घोषणापत्र में वे सभी बिंदु हैं जिनके आधार पर सभी मुद्दे द्विपक्षीय स्तर पर सुलझाए जा सकते हैं।’

ट्रंप के बयान पर भारत की प्रतिक्रिया बहुत विस्तृत नहीं थी, लेकिन इसने यह जरूर स्पष्ट किया कि इस मसले पर अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति झूठ बोल रहे थे। इसके बाद विदेश मंत्री एस जयशंकर ने राज्यसभा में अश्वस्त किया कि प्रधानमंत्री मोदी ने ऐसा कोई प्रस्ताव नहीं दिया। नई दिल्ली की ओर से औपचारिक विरोध जताने के बाद अमेरिकी विदेश विभाग ने भी नुकसान की कुछ भरपाई की कोशिश के तहत यह रेखांकित किया कि कश्मीर भारत और पाकिस्तान के बीच एक द्विपक्षीय मुद्दा है और अगर दोनों देश बातचीत के लिए साथ आते हैं तो अमेरिका इसका स्वागत

करता है। उसने यह भी कहा कि आंतकवाद के खिलाफ पाकिस्तान ‘निरंतर और स्थायी’ कदम उठा रहा है जो भारत के साथ सार्थक वार्ता में अहम है।

कश्मीर एक संवेदनशील मुद्दा है और भारतीयों की अपने मित्र देशों से यह अपेक्षा सही है कि वे भारत के मूलभूत हितों के प्रति संवेदनशीलता दिखाएं, मगर ट्रंप जैसे अक्खड़ नेता से यह अपेक्षा बेमानी लगती है। वह बहुत ही अस्थिर मिजाज वाले राष्ट्रपति हैं और उनका रवैया भी गैरपरंपरागत है। अमेरिका के कुछ करीबी देशों के प्रति उनके विषयमन ने अमेरिकी कूटनीतिज्ञों के समक्ष चुनौती बढ़ा दी है। ऐसे में किसी निष्कर्ष पर पहुंचने के बजाय नई दिल्ली को कुछ प्रतीक्षा कर यह देखना चाहिए कि कश्मीर को लेकर ट्रंप के रवैये में आगे क्या रुझान देखने को मिलता है? अगर वह कश्मीर पर ऐसे ही हाव-भाव दिखाते हैं तो अमेरिका को नए सिरे से रणनीति

वैश्विक स्तर पर कश्मीर मुद्दे की गूंज वक्त के साथ कुछ कमजोर पड़ी है, लेकिन भारतीय राजनीति के कुछ हलकों में इसकी व्यापक संवेदनशीलता को देखते हुए यह मुद्दा वापस वैश्विक एजेंडे में आ सकता है। अतीत में जब भारत वैश्विक शक्ति अनुक्रम में अपेक्षकृत निचले पायदान पर था तब भी वह तमाम बड़ी शक्तियों को कश्मीर मामले में दखल देने से रोकने में सफल रहा था। उसकी तुलना में आज जगह हम पांच ट्रिलियन डॉलर अर्थव्यवस्था बनने की ओर अग्रसर हैं तब कश्मीर के मुद्दे और बेहतर तरीके से संभालने में सक्षम हैं। ट्रंप का अनर्गल बयान जिस लायक है उसे उसी लिहाज से नजरअंदाज करते हुए नई दिल्ली को अन्य महत्वपूर्ण मुद्दों पर ध्यान केंद्रित करना चाहिए।

(लेखक लंदन स्थित किंग्स कॉलेज में इंटरनेशनल रिलेशंस के प्रोफेसर हैं)

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**ऊर्जा**

## समस्या से मुक्ति

हर व्यक्ति समस्याग्रस्त है, उसके समाधान के लिए जरूरी है कि हम अपनी समस्या को समझें और फिर समाधान खोजें। मानसिक वल निषेधात्मक भावों द्वारा कमजोर होता है। आधुनिक चिकित्सा विज्ञान ने भी यह माना है कि जितने नकारात्मक भाव हैं, वे हमारी बीमारियाँ एवं समस्याओं से लड़ने की प्रणाली को कमजोर बनाते हैं। ईर्ष्या, भय, क्रोध, घृणा नकारात्मक भाव हैं। प्रायः यह कहा जाता रहा है कि ईर्ष्या मत करो, घृणा और द्वेष मत करो। इससे पाप कम का बोध होता है। एक धार्मिक के लिए यह महत्वपूर्ण निर्देश है, किंतु आज यह स्वास्थ्य की दृष्टि से भी महत्वपूर्ण बन गया है। विज्ञान ने यह प्रमाणित कर दिया है कि जो व्यक्ति स्वस्थ रहना चाहता है, उसे निषेधात्मक भावों से बचना चाहिए। बार-बार क्रोध करना, चिड़चिड़ापन आना, मूड का विगड़ते रहना-ये सारे भाव हमारी समस्याओं से लड़ने की शक्ति को कम करते हैं। वह जान जरूरत है कि हम अपनी समस्याओं के समाधान के लिए औरों के मोहताज न बनें। ऐसी कोई समस्या नहीं है जिसका समाधान हमारे भीतर से न मिले। भगवान महावीर का यह संदेश जन-जन के लिए सीख बने- 'पुरुष ! तू स्वयं अपना भाग्यविधाता है।' औरों के सहारे मुक़्त मत पहुँच भी गए तो क्या? इस तरह की मंजिलें स्थायी नहीं होतीं और न इस तरह का समाधान कारगर होता है। हमारे भीतर ऐसी शक्तियाँ हैं, जो हमें बचा सकती हैं। संकल्प की शक्ति बहुत बड़ी शक्ति है। संकल्पवान व्यक्ति अधिकार को चीरता हुआ स्वयं प्रकाश बन जाता है। चंचलता की अवस्था में संकल्प का प्रयोग उतना सफल नहीं होता जितना वह एकग्रता की अवस्था में होता है। हर व्यक्ति रात्रि के समय सोने से पहले एक संकल्प करे, उसे पांच-दस मिनेट तक दोहराए, मैं यह करना या होना चाहता हूँ, इस भावना से स्वयं को भावित करे, एक निश्चित भाषा बनाए और उसकी कसौटी पर अपनी समस्या से आवृत्ति करे, ऐसा करने से संकल्प बहुत शीघ्र सफल होता है। व्यक्ति में यह आत्मविश्वास पैदा हो जाए कि जो मुझे चाहिए वह मेरे भीतर है तो मानना चाहिए कि समस्या के समाधान का मार्ग मिल गया है। इस प्रक्रार ही आशा का बोध, जागरण की साधना और उसका सही दिशा में नियोजन, यदि इतना सा विवेक जाग जाए तो सफलता का स्रोत खुल जाएगा।

ललित गर्ग

को चाहिए कि इसी तरह आधुनिक हथियार भी बनाएँ, जिससे पश्चिमी देशों से हथियार खरीदने पर अधिक धनराशि खर्च न करनी पड़े।

डॉ. नूतन कुमार सी. पाटणी, नोएडा

## ट्रंप का अनुचित बयान

दुनिया के सबसे शक्तिशाली देश के राष्ट्रपति अगर झूठ बोलें तो सबके सामने उनकी छवि कैसी बनेगी? यह सोचने की बात है। ऐसा भी नहीं हो सकता है कि उन्हें सलमज नहीं है। हो सकता है कि किसी रणनीति के तहत ऐसे बयान हों। कश्मीर मसले पर उनके दो कारण हो सकते हैं। एक भारत का रूस से अत्याधुनिक हथियार खरीदना और दूसरा पाकिस्तान की मदद से तालिबान से वार्ता कर अफगानिस्तान से शांतिपूर्ण तरीके से अमेरिकी सेना को बाहर निकालना। लेकिन इस पूरे मामले पर प्रधानमंत्री से जवाब मांगना कतई उचित नहीं है। सरकार की तरफ से जो पक्ष रखा गया है, वह काफी है। अमेरिका खुद भी न तो इस बयान का समर्थन कर रहा है और न ही किसी रिकार्ड में रखा है। ऐसे में बेवजह का शोर शराबा करना गलत है।

दीपक गौतम, सोनीपत

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

**अपने पत्र इस पते पर भेजें :**  
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## संकट और सवाल

कर्नाटक में एचडी कुमारस्वामी के नेतृत्व वाली जद (सेकु)-कांग्रेस गठबंधन सरकार सदन में विश्वासमत हासिल नहीं कर पाई और आखिरकार गिर गई। अब नई सरकार का गठन भी हो जाएगा। लेकिन राज्य में पिछले साल मई में विधानसभा चुनाव के बाद से, खासतौर पर पिछले बीस-पच्चीस दिनों में जिस तरह का घटनाक्रम चला है, वह लोकतांत्रिक शासन व्यवस्था पर प्रश्नचिह्न तो है ही। गठबंधन सरकार में मंत्रियों की नाराजगी, विधायकों का बागी होना, मंत्री पद के लिए दबाव की राजनीति, मंत्रियों और विधायकों के इस्तीफे, मामले को फंसाए रखने के लिए अदालत का सहारा लेना और कानूनी दांवपेच के जरिए संकट को और बढ़ाने जैसे जितने भी घटनाक्रम देखने को मिले, उन सबसे यह सवाल उठना स्वाभाविक है कि जब हमारे जनप्रतिनिधि आपस में लड़ने और सिर्फ सत्ता हथियाने की जुगत में लगे रहेंगे तो सरकारें जनता के लिए काम क्या करेंगी, विकास संबंधी काम कैसे होंगे, सरकारें कैसे जन-आकांक्षाओं पर खरी उतरेंगी? इस तरह की उठापटक की राजनीति के बीच कर्नाटक में पिछले एक साल में सरकार ने क्या कोई ऐसा उल्लेखनीय काम किया जो सीधे जनता के हितों से सरोकार रखता हो? क्या यही स्वस्थ लोकतंत्र की निशानी है?

कर्नाटक में राजनीतिक संकट की नीव विधानसभा चुनाव नतीजों के साथ ही पड़ गई थी। यह तभी तय हो गया था कि जो भी सरकार होगी, वह जोड़-तोड़ के सहारे ही चलेगी। विधानसभा चुनाव में किसी भी दल को स्पष्ट बहुमत नहीं मिलने की वजह से ये स्थिति बनी थी। शुरू में भाजपा विधायक दल के नेता येदियुरप्पा मुख्यमंत्री तो बन गए थे लेकिन छह दिन बाद वे भी विश्वासमत हासिल नहीं कर पाए थे। उसके बाद कांग्रेस के समर्थन से जद(सेकु) के एचडी कुमारस्वामी मुख्यमंत्री बने। हाल में संकट तब खड़ा हुआ जब छह जुलाई को कांग्रेस के नौ और जद (सेकु) के तीन विधायक बागी हो गए और विधानसभा अध्यक्ष को इस्तीफे सौंप दिए। इसके दो दिन बाद सभी मंत्रियों ने भी अपने-अपने पार्टी नेताओं को इस्तीफे थमा दिए। मंत्री पद पर रहे दो निर्दलीय विधायकों ने भी इस्तीफा देकर भाजपा के साथ जाने का एलान कर दिया। संकट तब और गहरा गया जब सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने अंतरिम आदेश में यह कह दिया कि पंद्रह बागी विधायकों को सदन की कार्यवाही में हिस्सा लेने के लिए बाध्य नहीं किया जा सकता। ऐसे में सवाल यह खड़ा हो गया कि तब पार्टी व्हिप का क्या मतलब रह जाएगा! अगर कोई विधायक पार्टी व्हिप का उल्लंघन करता है तो क्या होगा?

कुमारस्वामी ने 18 जुलाई को विश्वासमत पेश किया था। राज्यपाल ने बहुमत साबित करने के लिए तीन बार समय सीमा तय की, लेकिन विश्वासमत नहीं हो पाया। मंगलवार शाम विश्वासमत पर हुए मतदान में कुमारस्वामी सरकार के समर्थन में नित्यानवेर और विरोध में एक सौ पांच वोट पड़े। सवाल है, अब आने वाले दिनों में क्या होगा? जैसे हालात हैं उसमें तो यही लग रहा है कि जिस संकट का सामना कुमारस्वामी की करना पड़ा, नए मुख्यमंत्री भी उससे बचे नहीं रहेंगे। अगली सरकार भी चुनिंदा विधायकों की मेहरबानी पर टिकी होगी। इस पूरे प्रकरण में सबसे गंभीर आरोप विधायकों की खरीद-फरोख्त को लेकर लगे हैं। सरकारें गिराने-बनाने के खेल में विधायकों की खरीद-फरोख्त कोई नई बात नहीं है। पैसे और पद के लालच में जनप्रतिनिधि किस तरह से अपने ‘अंतर्मन की आवाज’ पर फैसेले करते हैं और ‘नैतिकता’ की दुहाई देते हैं, यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है। लेकिन यह नहीं भूलना चाहिए कि उनके ‘अंतर्मन की आवाज’ मतदाता के साथ एक बड़ा विश्वासघात है। जनप्रतिनिधियों का ऐसा चरित्र जनादेश का अपमान होता है। कर्नाटक में यही हुआ है।

## उड़नपरी हिमा

प्रतिभा का रास्ता कांटों भरा हो सकता है, कुछ समय तक के लिए बाधित दिख सकता है, लेकिन उसे अपने मुकाम तक पहुंचने से स्थायी तौर पर रोका नहीं जा सकता। महज इक्कीस दिनों के भीतर हिमा दास ने अंतरराष्ट्रीय प्रतियोगिताओं में छह स्वर्ण पदक हासिल कर यह साबित कर दिया है कि देश में प्रतिभाओं और क्षमताओं की कमी नहीं है। बस उन्हें वक्त पर थोड़ी दिशा मिल जाए तो खेलों की दुनिया में देश का नाम सोने की तरह चमकते अक्षरों में दिखेगा। हाल में पोलैंड और चेक गणराज्य में आयोजित एथलेटिक्स प्रतियोगिताओं के तहत अलग-अलग दौड़ स्पर्धाओं में हिमा दास एक के बाद एक लगातार अव्वल नंबर पर आई और छह स्वर्ण पदक जीते। हिमा ने दो सौ और चार सौ मीटर की दौड़ स्पर्धा में नए कीर्तिमान बनाए। यों किसी भी खिलाड़ी के इस तरह लगातार अव्वल आने पर दुनिया का ध्यान जाना लाजिमी है। यह बेवजह नहीं है कि भारत में न केवल शीर्ष स्तर के नेताओं और खिलाड़ियों ने हिमा दास को शुभकामना दी, बल्कि बाकायदा राज्यसभा की ओर से उनकी उपलब्धियों के लिए बधाई दी गई और उन्हें पूरे देश के खिलाड़ियों के लिए प्रेरणा का स्रोत बताया गया।

यह ध्यान रखने की जरूरत है कि आज देश में एक प्रेरणा के रूप में देखे जाने और यहां तक के सफर से पहले महज उन्नीस साल की हिमा दास का सफर कोई आसान नहीं रहा है। एक दौर था जब उनका परिवार इस स्तर के अभाव से जूझ रहा था कि हिमा के पास दौड़ने के लिए जुते तक नहीं थे। वे अपने स्कूल के दिनों में लड़कों की टीम में फुटबॉल खेलती थीं और अपना भविष्य इसी खेल में देख रही थीं। लेकिन एक शिक्षक की सलाह पर उन्होंने दौड़ना शुरू किया और बाद में अपने कोच की मदद से वे पहली अंतर-जिला स्तर की दौड़ प्रतियोगिताओं में हवा में उड़ने की तरह सबसे आगे रही थीं और इतनी कम उम्र में अपनी प्रतिभा से सबको चौंका रही थीं। उसी दौरान वे ‘डिंग एक्सप्रेस’ के तौर पर मशहूर हो गईं। उसके बाद उन्होंने पीछे मुड़ कर नहीं देखा और अंतरराष्ट्रीय प्रतियोगिताओं में भी कुछ ही समय बाद अपनी धमक स्थापित कर दी। यह सही है कि अभी उन्हें लंबा सफर तय करना है, लेकिन आज वे दौड़ की दुनिया में एक सितारे की तरह चमक रही हैं तो बेशक यह उनकी मेहनत, लगन और क्षमताओं का हासिल है। लेकिन सच यह भी है कि उनके कोच निपणे ने उनकी प्रतिभा को वक्त पर पहचाना और जिद के तौर पर अपनी सीमा में उन्हें जरूरी प्रशिक्षण दिया।

हिमा के व्यक्तित्व की एक खूबसूरत खासियत यह है कि हाल में अपने प्रदर्शनों के बूते उन्हें जो आय हुई, उसका आधा उन्होंने अपने गृह-राज्य असम के बाढ़ पीड़ितों के लिए दे दिया। वे आज भी अपने पुराने अभाव के दिनों को याद करके भावुक हो जाती हैं। हमारे देश में यह विडंबना लंबे समय से बनी है कि दूरदराज के इलाकों में गरीब परिवारों के कई बच्चे अलग-अलग खेलों में अपनी बेहतरीन क्षमताओं के साथ स्थानीय स्तर पर तो किसी तरह उभर गए, लेकिन अवसरों और सुविधाओं के अभाव में उससे आगे नहीं बढ़ सके। लेकिन इसी बीच कई उदाहरण सामने आए, जिनमें जरा मौका हाथ आने पर उनमें से किसी ने दुनिया से अपना लोहा मनवा लिया। हिमा दास उन्हीं में से एक हैं, जिन्होंने बहुत कम वक्त के दौरान अपने दम से यह साबित कर दिया कि अगर वक्त पर प्रतिभाओं की पहचान हो, उन्हें मौका दिया जाए, थोड़ी सुविधा मिल जाए तो वे दुनिया भर में देश का नाम रोशन कर सकती हैं।

## कल्पमेधा

**प्रसिद्धि की भूख महान व्यक्तियों की अंतिम कमजोरी है तो छोटे व्यक्तियों की प्रथम कमजोरी है।**

**—जॉन ररिकन**

# जवानों के संकट से जूझती पुलिस

### संजय कुमार सिंह

**ऐसा नहीं कि सिर्फ निचले स्तर पर पुलिसकर्मियों का टोटा हो, देश का पुलिस तंत्र अधिकारियों की कमी से भी जूझ रहा है। देश में भारतीय पुलिस सेवा के अधिकारियों के कुल चार हजार आठ सौ तियालीस पद अधिकृत हैं, लेकिन इनमें भी नौ सौ से ज्यादा पद खाली हैं। यह वह सूचना है जो संसद में दी गई थी। कहने की जरूरत नहीं है कि इस मामले में अभियान चला कर सभी पदों को भरना पहली प्राथमिकता होनी चाहिए और देश में पुलिस की कमी तत्काल दूर करनी चाहिए।**

हाल में खबर आई कि देश में साढ़े पांच लाख से भी ज्यादा पुलिसकर्मियों के पद खाली पड़े हैं। यह आंकड़ा ब्यूरो ऑफ पुलिस रिसर्च एंड डवलपमेंट (बीपीआरडी) ने जारी किया है। यह वाकई चौंकाने वाली खबर है। इससे पता चलता है कि देश की कानून-व्यवस्था से लेकर आंतरिक सुरक्षा तक का जिम्मा संभालने वाला पुलिस महकमा किस दयनीय हालत में काम कर रहा होगा। इसीलिए ज्यादातर राज्यों में अपराधों का ग्राफ तेजी से ऊपर जा रहा है। सबसे ज्यादा पद उत्तर प्रदेश में खाली हैं और जब सबसे ज्यादा बदतर कानून-व्यवस्था वाले राज्यों की सूची बनती है तो उसमें भी उत्तर प्रदेश ही सबसे ऊपर आता है। उत्तर प्रदेश की जेलों में हत्याओं से लेकर गैंगवार और वसूली जैसे काम हो रहे हैं। ये घटनाएं प्रदेश की कानून-व्यवस्था की पोल खोलने के लिए काफी हैं। बिहार, झारखंड, पश्चिम बंगाल आदि राज्य भी इसी श्रेणी में आते हैं।

### कुलीना कुमारी

हाल ही में कुछ दिन एक ग्रामीण इलाके में रहने का अवसर मिला। मेरी वह अवधि मूसलाधार बारिश के बीच कटी। इसके बावजूद ग्रामीण इलाके में पर्व-त्योहार के नाम पर ऐसी एकजुटता देखी कि मैं दंग रह गई। लोग बारिश से बेपरवाह भांगते हुए भी उस समय मनाए जाने वाले उत्सव में हर स्तर पर अपनी भागीदारी कर रहे थे और आसपास मौजूद लोगों के साथ शामिल हो रहे थे। हां, बारिश की वजह से जो थोड़ी असुविधा हो सकती थी, वह हो रही थी। इससे इतना तो समझ आया कि अभी भी ग्रामीण इलाकों में रहने वाले लोगों के भीतर बहुत सरलता, निश्छलता और अपनापन है। लेकिन इनके बरक्स समाज में जो कुछ खुराफाती और अराजक लोग होते हैं, वे भोले-भाले या सीधे-सादे लोगों के निश्छल स्वभाव को गलत दिशा में मोड़ कर कभी-कभी दंगा-फसाद करा देते हैं।

इस सबके बावजूद प्राकृतिक रूप से अभी भी हमारे गांवों में मिट्टी, भोजन के आधार के रूप में किसानी और भारत की खुशबू नजर आती है। नए लोगों को देख कर वे ऐसे पूछते हैं जैसे उनके बारे में जानना, उनकी आवभगत करना और भटके राही

## प्रकृति के साथ

प्रसिद्ध अर्थशास्त्री थॉमस रॉबर्ट माल्थस ने लिखा था, ‘प्रकृति की मेज सीमित संख्या में अतिथियों के लिए सजाई गई है। जो बिन बुलाए आगये वे भूखों मरेंगे।’ इसका अर्थ हम दो रूपों में लगा सकते हैं। पहला, भोजन की आपूर्ति और दूसरा, प्राण वायु आक्सीजन की आपूर्ति। यह स्थिति बेहद चिंताजनक है। बढ़ती जनसंख्या के लिए सबसे ज्यादा जरूरी है भोजन की आपूर्ति और स्वच्छ वातावरण में जीवन, जो आज भी पूर्णरूप से सर्वत्र संभव नहीं है। लेकिन आने वाले समय में स्थिति और भी भयावह होने वाली है। इस संदर्भ में हाल ही में ‘मूडी एनालिटिक्स’ द्वारा वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था पर जलवायु परिवर्तन से होने वाले नुकसान का आकलन अत्यंत चिंताजनक है। इसके नतीजे रेखांकित करते हैं कि जलवायु परिवर्तन का सबसे बुरा असर कृषि आधारित अर्थव्यवस्था पर पड़ेगा। जलवायु परिवर्तन का मूल कारण है पर्यावरण प्रदूषण। प्रदूषण का बढ़ता स्तर ही मौसम की अनियमितता का प्रत्यक्ष या अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से कारक है। तापमान में वृद्धि का सबसे प्रतिकूल असर कृषि पैदावार पर पड़ेगा जिससे देश की गेहूं, मक्का व अन्य फसलों की कम पैदावार की मार झेलनी पड़ेगी।

दरअसल, अगर हम पर्यावरण को स्वच्छ रखना चाहते हैं तो न्यूनतम उपभोग के सिद्धांत को अपनाना होगा। हम दैनिक जीवन में सुबह से शाम तक तमाम ऐसी चीजों का उपभोग करते हैं जो अत्यावश्यक नहीं हैं। जिनके बिना भी हमारा जीवन सुचारू रूप से चल सकता है लेकिन अंशतः आदतन तो कभी-कभार दिखावे के लिए भी ऐसी चीजों का प्रयोग हम करते हैं जो पर्यावरण के लिए हानिकारक हैं। जैसे, आदतन बाहर निकलते ही पानी की बोतल खरीदना, जिसे हम घर से लेकर भी जा सकते हैं। हर छोटी चीज के लिए दुकानदार से प्लास्टिक की थैली की मांग करना, सार्वजनिक

राजधानी दिल्ली भी इस समस्या से अछूती नहीं है।

वैसे तो ज्यादातर सरकारी महकमों की हालत यही है कि कर्मचारियों के पद खाली पड़े हैं और कामकाज पर असर पड़ रहा है। लेकिन पुलिस वालों की कमी का सीधा असर कानून-व्यवस्था से लेकर यातायात, जान-माल की सुरक्षा और आमजन से जुड़ी सेवाओं पर पड़ता है। यही नहीं, सड़क दुर्घटना और विभिन्न अपराधों में घायल लोगों को समय पर इलाज के लिए अस्पताल पहुंचाने का काम और जिम्मेदारी भी पुलिस पर ही है। इसलिए दूसरे विभागों में कर्मचारियों की कमी से मुमकिन है काम न हो, पर पुलिस वालों की कमी का मतलब है कानून-व्यवस्था पर सीधा असर पड़ना। पुलिस के चुनौतीभरे काम और उसकी जरूरत के मद्देनजर देशभर में पुलिस वालों की संख्या स्वीकृत पदों के मुकाबले कम होना चिंताजनक है। एक जनवरी 2018 की स्थिति के अनुसार देश भर में पुलिसकर्मियों के पांच लाख तियालीस हजार पद खाली थे। इनमें सबसे ज्यादा एक लाख उन्तीस हजार पद उत्तर प्रदेश में खाली हैं। नगालैंड देश का अकेला ऐसा राज्य है, जहां पुलिस वालों की संख्या मानक से ज्यादा है। बीपीआरडी के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक, देशभर में पुलिस वालों के 24,84,170 पद घोषित हैं। एक जनवरी 2018 को इनमें से 19,41,473 पद भरे हुए थे।

पुलिस वालों के खाली पदों से संबंधित जो खबरें आई हैं, उनके मुताबिक एक जनवरी 2017 को पुलिस वालों के कुल पांच लाख अड़तीस हजार पद खाली थे और 2018 में यह संख्या बढ़ कर पांच लाख तियालीस हजार हो गई थी। 2016 में खाली पदों की संख्या सबसे ज्यादा साढ़े पांच लाख थी। कानून-व्यवस्था से लेकर यातायात संभालने के लिए जिम्मेदार पुलिस वालों की कमी देश भर में कई कारणों से है। पिछले साल एक जनवरी की स्थिति के अनुसार पुलिस वालों की कमी के मामले में उत्तर प्रदेश के बाद बिहार (50291), पश्चिम बंगाल (48981), तेलंगाना (30345) और महाराष्ट्र (26196) का नंबर आता है।

राज्यों की बात फिर भी अलग है। राजधानी दिल्ली में पुलिसकर्मियों की कमी होना ज्यादा गंभीर है। बेहतर कानून-व्यवस्था बनाए रखने के लिए प्रति व्यक्ति यहां पुलिस वालों की संख्या देश के दूसरे राज्यों के मुकाबले ज्यादा रखी गई है। लेकिन पद खाली हो तो मकसद ही पूरा नहीं होगा। जून 2018 में एक सवाल के जवाब में तत्कालीन गृहराज्य मंत्री ने कहा था कि दिल्ली पुलिस में (जून 2018 में)

बारह हजार से ज्यादा पद खाली हैं। दिलचस्प यह है कि दिल्ली में पुलिस वालों के जो पद खाली थे, उनमें संयुक्त पुलिस आयुक्त के भी तीन पद शामिल थे। राजधानी की पुलिस वैसे भी विशेष है और सीधे केंद्र सरकार को रिपोर्ट करती है। फिर भी इसमें हेड कांस्टेबल के तीन हजार दो सौ उनयासी और उपनिरीक्षक के डेढ़ हजार पद खाली हों तो यह चिंता का विषय बनता है। ऐसा नहीं कि सिर्फ निचले स्तर पर पुलिसकर्मियों का टोटा हो, देश का पुलिस तंत्र अधिकारियों की कमी से भी जूझ रहा है। देश में भारतीय पुलिस सेवा के अधिकारियों के कुल चार हजार आठ सौ तियालीस पद अधिकृत हैं, लेकिन इनमें भी नौ सौ से ज्यादा पद खाली हैं। यह वह सूचना है जो संसद में दी गई थी। कहने की जरूरत नहीं कि इस मामले में अभियान चला कर सभी पदों को भरना पहली प्राथमिकता होनी चाहिए और देश में पुलिस की कमी तत्काल दूर करनी चाहिए।

पुलिस, खासकर दिल्ली तथा महानगरों की



पुलिस का एक और जो महत्वपूर्ण व ज्यादा जोखिम भरा काम करना होता है, वह है आतंकी हमलों व अपराधियों से संबंधित खुफिया जानकारी पर कार्रवाई करना। कर्मचारी कम होंगे तो ऐसे मामलों में लापरवाही बरती जाएगी। यह तथ्य है कि जब भी आतंकी घटनाएं या सामूहिक अपराध या बलात्कार जैसी वारदातें होती हैं तो दिल्ली पुलिस में कर्मचारियों की संख्या बढ़ाने को लेकर चर्चा शुरू हो जाती है, लेकिन कुछ दिनों के बाद यह विषय सिर्फ चर्चा तक सीमित रह कर कहीं खो जाता है।

जब देश की राजधानी की यह हालत है तो बाकी राज्यों और दूर-दराज के शहरों की क्या बात की जाए! पुलिस बल की सबसे बड़ी समस्या कठिन और जोखिमपूर्ण हालात में काम करना है। पुलिस कर्मचारियों को छुट्टी नहीं मिलान, रहने और काम की मिल जाते हैं। मेरे वहां के लोगों से मिलने-जुलने के क्रम में पता चला कि हाल ही में उस गांव के एक चाचा ने रिश्ते में लगने वाली अपनी ही भतीजी के प्यार में पड़ कर आपसी सहमति से विवाह कर लिया। शुरुआत में इस खबर ने गांव भर में खलबली मचा दी थी। बेशक उस परिवार का गांव वालों ने शुरू में बहिष्कार कर दिया था, लेकिन उस प्रेमी जोड़े की जान नहीं ली। धीरे-धीरे सब सहज हो गया। यह सब गांव वालों के बीच बढ़ती प्रगतिशील सोच का प्रतीक है।

इसके बावजूद इस तथ्य की अनदेखी नहीं की जा सकती कि रोजी-रोटी की तलाश में बड़ी संख्या में लोग आज भी गांव से पलायन कर रहे हैं, क्योंकि शहरों जैसी फैक्ट्रियां या नौकरी करने की जगहें वहां नहीं हैं, जहां लोग काम सके और परिवार चला सके। इसीलिए कुछ बुजुर्गों के चेहरे पर उनके बेटे के प्रवासी होने की पीड़ा और दुख मौजूद था। शहरी कमाऊ बेटा साथ नहीं रह सकता तो न रहे, लेकिन पैसा तो भेजे हर महीने। यह कहना उन्हें अच्छा नहीं लग रहा था, लेकिन आखिर वे क्या करें! गांव के अंचल में रहने वाले पुत्र के सिवा शहरी बेटा-बहू उनको रखने या जिम्मेदारी लेने के लिए ही तैयार नहीं था।

खराब स्थिति की चर्चा होती रहती है। पुलिस वालों को मिलने वाली सुविधाओं की हालत यह है कि ज्यादातर राज्यों में तो उन्हें साप्ताहिक अवकाश नहीं मिलता है। हरियाणा से खबर थी कि थानों में पुलिस वालों की इतनी कमी है कि सरकार ने नई भर्तियों के साथ-साथ आइआरबी (इंडियन रिजर्व बटालियन) के जवानों को तैनात करने का फैसला किया गया था। हरियाणा के उस समय के पुलिस महानिदेशक ने इस आशय का प्रस्ताव दिया था जिसे सरकार ने मान लिया था। अब आइआरबी में डेढ़ दशक तक सेवाएं दे चुके पुलिस जवानों की हरियाणा के पुलिस थानों में तैनाती होगी। हरियाणा में लंबे समय से पुलिस कर्मचारियों की कमी चल रही है। राज्य की आबादी के लिहाज से करीब पच्चीस हजार पुलिसकर्मियों की जरूरत है। आइआरबी की मंजूरी केंद्र सरकार द्वारा दी जाती है। इसका खर्च भी केंद्र सरकार ही वहन करती है। बटालियन के गठन के लिए यह शर्त रहती है कि केंद्र सरकार जहां चाहे इस बटालियन का उपयोग कर सकती है। इस बल का गठन राज्यों में सीआरपीएफ या अन्य केंद्रीय बलों पर से निर्भरता खत्म करने के लिए किया जाता है। हरियाणा सरकार पहले ही धारला बटालियन की मांग केंद्र से कर चुकी है। भारत सरकार ने 1971 में भारतीय रिजर्व बटालियन योजना की शुरुआत की थी। अब तक विभिन्न राज्यों में एक सौ तिरपन आइआर बटालियनों के गठन की मंजूरी हो चुकी है। इनमें से एक सौ चवालीस बटालियनें गठित की जा चुकी हैं।

मध्यप्रदेश सरकार ने कुछ समय पहले पुलिसकर्मियों को साप्ताहिक अवकाश देने की दिशा में कदम उठाया। इसके अनुसार प्रदेश में फौलड में तैनात पुलिस वालों की संख्या इतनी ज्यादा (करीब छप्पन हजार) है कि रोजाना आठ हजार स्ट्राफ साप्ताहिक अवकाश पर रहेंगे। इसका मतलब हुआ कि साप्ताहिक अवकाश देने के लिए अकेले मध्यप्रदेश में आठ हजार अतिरिक्त पुलिसकर्मियों की व्यवस्था करनी होगी। राज्य सरकार ने इसके लिए एसएएफ, पीटीएस और होमागार्ड शाखा से आठ हजार कर्मी लेना तय किया है। इससे पहले भी पुलिस वालों को दो बार साप्ताहिक अवकाश देने की कवायद हुई थी पर उसे लागू नहीं किया जा सका। ऐसे में कल्पना की जा सकती है कि पुलिस में कर्मचारियों की कमी की समस्या कितनी गंभीर है और साप्ताहिक अवकाश देने जैसी बुनियादी जरूरत पूरी करना कितना मुश्किल है। फिर भी यह काम होना चाहिए इसमें कोई दो राय नहीं है।

# गांव की खुशबू

हों तो सही जगह तक पहुंचाना उनका विशेष कर्तव्य हो। इसी ग्रामीण इलाके में मेरी एक परिचित अनजान होने की वजह से गंतव्य से करीब तीन किलोमीटर पीछे उतर गई थी। लेकिन इस बीच उसने एक व्यक्ति से अपनी परेशानी क्या बताई, वह उसे घर तक छोड़ आया। ऐसी कितनी ही बातें शहरी लोगों को ग्रामीण इलाके में आने पर महसूस हुईं होगी जो उनके मिट्टी से जुड़े होने का अहसास करती हैं, शहरी लोगों के मुकाबले ज्यादा मानवीय होने का परिचय देती हैं।

सही है कि गांवों में शहरों जैसी तकनीक नहीं आई है, लेकिन आवश्यकता भर सुविधाएं यहां भी पहुंच गई हैं। लोग गांव में भी अब आमतौर पर गैस-चूल्हे का प्रयोग करते हैं। बहुत सारे घरों में पंखा भी दिख जाता है और बिजली रहने पर टेलीविजन का प्रयोग भी। कुछ जगहों को छोड़ कर अधिकतर जगह सड़क भी बन चुकी है और आवाजाही के साधन भी मिलने लगे हैं। हालांकि आज भी देश में ऐसे इलाके हैं, जहां के लोग इन सब सुविधाओं से वंचित हैं। इसके अलावा, आमतौर पर जड़ समाजों के रूप में देखे जाने वाले गांवों में भी अब कई लोग प्रगतिवादी सोच वाले

### प्रकृति के साथ

प्रसिद्ध अर्थशास्त्री थॉमस रॉबर्ट माल्थस ने लिखा था, ‘प्रकृति की मेज सीमित संख्या में अतिथियों के लिए सजाई गई है। जो बिन बुलाए आगये वे भूखों मरेंगे।’ इसका अर्थ हम दो रूपों में लगा सकते हैं। पहला, भोजन की आपूर्ति और दूसरा, प्राण वायु आक्सीजन की आपूर्ति। यह स्थिति बेहद चिंताजनक है। बढ़ती जनसंख्या के लिए सबसे ज्यादा जरूरी है भोजन की आपूर्ति और स्वच्छ वातावरण में जीवन, जो आज भी पूर्णरूप से सर्वत्र संभव नहीं है। लेकिन आने वाले समय में स्थिति और भी भयावह होने वाली है। इस संदर्भ में हाल ही में ‘मूडी एनालिटिक्स’ द्वारा वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था पर जलवायु परिवर्तन से होने वाले नुकसान का आकलन अत्यंत चिंताजनक है। इसके नतीजे रेखांकित करते हैं कि जलवायु परिवर्तन का सबसे बुरा असर कृषि आधारित अर्थव्यवस्था पर पड़ेगा। जलवायु परिवर्तन का मूल कारण है पर्यावरण प्रदूषण। प्रदूषण का बढ़ता स्तर ही मौसम की अनियमितता का प्रत्यक्ष या अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से कारक है। तापमान में वृद्धि का सबसे प्रतिकूल असर कृषि पैदावार पर पड़ेगा जिससे देश की गेहूं, मक्का व अन्य फसलों की कम पैदावार की मार झेलनी पड़ेगी।

दरअसल, अगर हम पर्यावरण को स्वच्छ रखना चाहते हैं तो न्यूनतम उपभोग के सिद्धांत को अपनाना होगा। हम दैनिक जीवन में सुबह से शाम तक तमाम ऐसी चीजों का उपभोग करते हैं जो अत्यावश्यक नहीं हैं। जिनके बिना भी हमारा जीवन सुचारू रूप से चल सकता है लेकिन अंशतः आदतन तो कभी-कभार दिखावे के लिए भी ऐसी चीजों का प्रयोग हम करते हैं जो पर्यावरण के लिए हानिकारक हैं। जैसे, आदतन बाहर निकलते ही पानी की बोतल खरीदना, जिसे हम घर से लेकर भी जा सकते हैं। हर छोटी चीज के लिए दुकानदार से प्लास्टिक की थैली की मांग करना, सार्वजनिक

अध्याय मंगलवार को संपन्न हुआ। मुख्यमंत्री एचडी कुमारस्वामी की अगुवाई वाला कांग्रेस-जेडीएस गठबंधन सदन में विश्वास मत हासिल करने में विफल रहा। निवर्तमान सरकार के पक्ष में 99 और विपक्ष में 105 मत पड़े। इसी के साथ कांग्रेस के हाथ से एक और राज्य छिटक गया। हाल ही में संपन्न हुए आम चुनावों में करारी किस्त के बाद से ही संगठनात्मक ढांचे में तालमेल और राष्ट्रीय नेतृत्व के अभाव से जुझ रही कांग्रेस के लिए यह घटनाक्रम किसी गंभीर आघात से कम नहीं है। साफ तौर पर कहें तो भारत की

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सबसे पुरानी पार्टी फिलहाल ‘रसतल’ में चली गई है, जहां से उसे ‘धरातल’ पर आने का रास्ता मालूम नहीं है। दूसरी ओर भाजपा के नजरिये से यह विश्वास मत देर आए दुरस्त आए कहावत के चरितार्थ होने जैसा है। गौरतलब है कि राज्य के 2018 विधानसभा चुनावों में भाजपा ही सबसे बड़ी पार्टी बनकर उभरी थी लेकिन तत्कालीन परिस्थितियों में खंडित जनादेश के अंतर्गत उपजे गठबंधन के चलते भाजपा राज्य में सरकार बनाने से चूक गई थी।

खैर, कर्नाटक में जो हुआ उससे लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों का व्यापक स्तर पर नैतिक पतन जरूर हुआ है जिसके चलते हमारी लोकतांत्रिक प्रणाली पर प्रश्नचिह्न जरूर लगा है। इस पूरे घटनाक्रम में दलों में आंतरिक लोकतंत्र का अभाव, खरीद-फरोख्त जैसे

सोचने वाली बात है कि कितनी भूख है शहर में कि वहां ईंसान ढेरों कंचनियों, फैक्ट्रियों और कमाई के साधन होने के बावजूद तृप्त ही नहीं हो रहा है। उसे और चाहिए। वह सिर्फ पाना चाहता है, लेकिन अपने मां-बाप के प्रति कर्तव्यच्युत होने से उसे परहेज नहीं। वह बांटना नहीं चाहता। ठीक है कि शहरीकरण ने व्यक्ति को आत्मकेंद्रित होना सिखाया है। उसी बीच प्रगति की रफ्तार बढ़ गई है। लोग अपने मन से जी पा रहे और स्वतंत्र अभिव्यक्ति कर पा रहे हैं। लेकिन जिन्होंने पैदा किया, जिनकी बदौलत खड़े हुए, उन्हें भुला कर जीवन जीना उचित तो नहीं

मैंने गौर किया है कि ईंसान कितना भी स्वाधीन क्यों नहीं हो, लेकिन अंतिम समय में जैसे उसे अहसास हो जाता है कि जीवन का असली मतलब अपनों के संग मिल कर जीना है। शहरी चकाचौंध में खुद को डुबो लेना या किसी चीज को पकड़े रहना क्या खराब नहीं है? जबकि होना यह चाहिए कि गांव की मिट्टी में पले लोग शहर से अच्छी चीज सीख कर गांव में लौटें और प्रयोग करें और गांव को भी उन्नत बनाने में सहयोग करें। यह इसलिए भी जरूरी है कि मनुष्य सांस जमीन पर लेता है तो जीते-जी उसे जन्मदाता को और अपनी मिट्टी को नहीं भूलना चाहिए।

अमेरिका द्वारा पाकिस्तान से द्विपक्षीय वार्ता व कश्मीर के संबंध में मनमाना बयान एक सोची-समझी साजिश लगती है। ट्रंप आगामी चुनाव को देखते हुए यह दांव खेल कर अपने प्रतिद्वंद्वियों पर भारी पड़ने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं। भारत द्वारा रूस से एस- 400 मिसाइल सुरक्षा प्रणाली का सौदा सम्पान न करना भी अमेरिका को चुभ रहा था जिसे लेकर उसने विदेश मंत्रालय को कई बार चेताया पर भारत सरकार के कठोर निर्णय के कारण उसकी दाल नहीं गली। भारत को सुरक्षित व संपन्न बनाने के लिए केंद्र सरकार ने अमेरिका की धमकियों की भी कोई चिंता नहीं की। यही कारण है कि कश्मीर मामले में एक नया राग अलाप कर अमेरिका पाकिस्तान के बहाने भारत पर तीर तान रहा है पर अब यह पैतरा काम नहीं आएगा।

भारत पर अब उसकी गीढ़डू भर्भकियों का कोई असर नहीं होगा। भारत सरकार ने तुरंत इस बयान के विरोध में संदेश भेजा कि कश्मीर भारत का आंतरिक मामला है। लिहाजा, इसमें कोई अन्य देश कोई हस्तक्षेप न करे। ऐसे बयान ट्रंप और अमेरिका की विश्वसनीयता के लिए गंभीर खतरा है। भारत के कड़े रुख व अंतरराष्ट्रीय दबाव के कारण ही अमेरिकी विदेश मंत्रालय ने व्हाइट हाउस के माध्यम से बताया कि कश्मीर भारत और पाकिस्तान के बीच का द्विपक्षीय मामला है और इसमें किसी तरह के हस्तक्षेप की कोई गुंजाइश नहीं। भारत के वैश्विक जनाधार के कारण ट्रंप का दांव उल्टा पड़ गया।

● *मंगलेश सोनी, मनावर, धार, मध्यप्रदेश*



