

## The interests of the Revenue



TICKER

MIHIR SHARMA

The tragic passing away of V G Siddhartha, the founder of the Cafe Coffee Day empire — and a lot else besides — has led to much discussion on whether India and the Indian state is growing less friendly to entrepreneurs, industrialists and business. Siddhartha mentioned, in what appears to be a note he left behind, that he was facing harassment from the income tax authorities. The I-T office has strongly denied this, but this is not being generally believed. Many see their decision to block Siddhartha's access to his Mindtree shares at a time he needed to sell them as targeted harassment.

But the concern being expressed today goes beyond the specifics of this case. It feeds into a general fear that was born at the time of the government's anti-black money rhetoric, which then blossomed into a draconian law. In the last Union Budget, the finance minister announced that the super-rich would pay more in tax. This is in general not a problem for many people. But, again, the messaging around the tax increase — a return to the noises made by the Centre's faux-socialists in the Indira Gandhi era — was disturbing. Put that together with other measures in the Budget and since. For example, companies now will be vulnerable to criminal prosecution if they fail to spend 2 per cent of their profits on corporate social responsibility. How is a mandatory payment out of profits anything less than a tax? And why is the government levying a tax on companies for the benefit of NGOs? This is merely a way to direct more cash to the ideological affiliates of the ruling party, and to siphon away shareholder money to build up a Hindutva-vadi establishment in parallel to the state.

The Budget also included increased powers for some tax officials — men of the Customs, for example, are now given the power to detain individuals if they perceive a threat to the "interests of the Revenue". Some things have definitely gotten better over the past few years — there has been a concerted attempt to reduce the initial human-to-human interaction in the tax process for example. But it is also true that there is a widespread sense that the government intends to wring business for every paisa it can. High officials of the government and senior members of the ruling party have been complicit in creating that impression.

The simple truth is that India can ill afford this sort of atmosphere at the moment. We are going through a years-long crisis of investment from which we have yet to recover. Unless private investment increases, India will not return to the high-growth path that is necessary to create jobs and prosperity. But private investment will not recover if you choose to scare away investors. Do we want to create a system like China's, where the government lives in fear of capital flight on a massive scale? Already the government has extended criminal provisions of the black money law to include non-resident Indians, presumably because it feels that too many people are leaving the country and think they are doing so to evade prosecution. This is a clear misdiagnosis of what is going on. Even if individuals themselves are not leaving the country, they are seeking to diversify their interests and sources of income geographically. Some years ago, the scion of a well-known business house — when I asked him about their future business strategy — said that all he was interested in was ensuring that a majority of the group income came from overseas. This, he said, was purely a play to minimise political risk. If Indians themselves are chary of investing in India for fear of harassment, why would any foreigners do so?

The government is so short of money — thanks to the failure of its implementation of the goods and services tax — that it is both concealing the true state of the fisc and looking around for soft targets that it can bully for more money. In India, business is always a soft target. It feeds into a larger sentiment, that has been growing since the anti-corruption movement and that was kicked into high gear by demonetisation, that the rich have been protected for too long and that the Narendra Modi government will be able to kick them into shape. Nobody can deny that India has a problem with inequality. But it also has a problem with state arbitrariness and a lack of understanding of property and individual rights. We can only solve the inequality and growth problems if we allow the private sector a sense of security that will permit them to mobilise investment. Until then, India will continue to slide, under Modi, further back towards the dark days of the 1970s.

Much is made today about "the interest of the Revenue". But the true interests of revenue lies in growing the economy. And for that the private sector must be a partner of the Revenue, not an enemy.

## General Ershad was not unlike Rajiv Gandhi

Both men were political innocents. In a sense, they were softies



WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K. DATTA-RAY

General Ershad, who died the other day, is unforgettable for me for a reason he would never have guessed. For all the vilification, he was an innocent, not unlike Rajiv Gandhi. That was confirmed some time in 1988 or 1989 the Bangladesh deputy high commissioner in Calcutta called on me to say he had been transferred to Sydney. Chatting over coffee, he let slip his President had wanted him to invite me to Dhaka but he had ignored the instruction. Hosting the editor of a national Indian daily might have meant additional publicity for Ershad.

I guessed his sympathies lay with the Awami League. I also realised he could afford to flout his President and still prosper in his

career: Being consul-general in Australia's busiest city was preferable to an Indian posting. In fact, it was precisely this aspect of Ershad's persona — call it his weakness if you will — that was endearing in so far as anything about a head of state can be endearing. I couldn't imagine the tragically murdered Ziaur Rahman with whom I had had one disastrously explosive meeting ever being so indulgent to a subordinate.

Bangladeshis didn't appreciate the allowance I was prepared to make for Ershad on account of his humaneness. A rich Dhaka businessman whom I had first met at the home of Ershad's high commissioner in New Delhi with whom he was on the friendliest terms was holding forth once at a dinner party in London on the military dictatorship at home. He flew into a rage when I interjected that while it was true Ershad was a military man, if his mild rule was a dictatorship it was a vegetarian dictatorship. The Bangladeshi at once exploded that jealous Indians resented the progress Bangladesh had made despite being denied democracy.

Apart from press conferences, I met Ershad only once. My wife and I were visiting Dhaka at the end of 1985 — making an excuse of the launch of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation — when he invited us home to tea after the captains and kings had departed. He lived in a modest bungalow in the cantonment area

and the simplicity of his lifestyle matched the unimpressive architecture. Yet, everything about Ershad seemed to provoke criticism. Bangladeshis said he lived in the cantonment for reasons of security. They said the little boy toddling about the living room wasn't really his son but adopted. Some suspected him on account of the time he had spent in India. It was widely claimed that the homely Mrs Ershad had been formally declared First Lady so that she could have her own office to receive businessmen without having to share her cut with middlemen. She was compared with Indonesia's Tien Suharto who was popularly called "Madame Ten Per Cent".

Ironically, Suharto was someone Ershad admired. He told us that evening he was discussing with the Indonesian strongman some constitutional means of permanently involving the army, his country's most efficient institution, in Bangladesh's governance. He needed a prime minister, he said, to receive and see off visiting VIPs: Being busier than the US president he didn't have time for airport duties. He spoke of Islam not as a believer but as someone who acknowledged the most important unifying and driving force for his people. Apologising to my wife for

sounding anti-feminist, he argued that Hasina Wazed could never become president because only a man could lead a Muslim nation at prayer.

Perhaps this was wishful thinking. Kamal Hossain put it down to ignorance. "He's never heard of Razia Sultan!" was the latter's dry comment when I told him afterwards. Whatever the reason, it was a gross miscalculation. Ershad also believed he had scored hugely over Bangladesh's "India lobby" (meaning Hasina) by extracting Rajiv Gandhi's promise to involve Nepal in tripartite talks on sharing the Ganga-Padma waters. It was another miscalculation. When it didn't happen, a senior Bangladeshi diplomat explained that India couldn't afford to face Bangladesh and Nepal at the same time because it claimed upper riparian rights with the former, and lower riparian rights with the latter. Ershad could never have anticipated that an Indian high commissioner who translated his poems would oppose tripartite river talks tooth and nail and work relentlessly on Rajiv to renege on his commitment.

Both men were political innocents. In a sense, they were softies. But despite tales of violence, human rights abuses, corruption and womanising, Ershad was luckier than Gandhi. He died peacefully in his bed in the fullness of years.

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COFFEE WITH BS ► MANU S PILLAI | AUTHOR & HISTORIAN

## Placing history in context

Pillai tells Uttaran Das Gupta how he is trying to find balance in the conflicted landscape of history

History is a battlefield — not only for those fighting in these battles, but also for those chronicling it, that is, the historians. A few years back, I reviewed a book, *The Ivory Throne*, about the House of Travancore in Kerala and its extraordinary regent Sethu Lakshmi Bayi. The tome ran well into 700 pages and it took me a while to read it, but the intricate narrative blew my mind. The author, Manu S Pillai, went on to win the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar the next year. He followed it up with *Rebel Sultans*, a history of the Deccan Sultanate. As if two thick books in three years were not enough, he has published a third one this year, *The Courtesans, The Mahatma and the Italian Brahmin*.

So when I meet him in Delhi, I am compelled to ask what many of his readers and admirers have been wondering: How does he write so many books so quickly? "The first book took me about six years to write," he says. "So it was a long-drawn process. The second one took about two years — and it was published two years after the first one. This book, the third one, comprises essays I have written over the past three or three-and-a-half years for my weekly column ("Medium Rare" in *The Mint*)." He adds that he practically lives in the archives and libraries. "It is pretty much my 24x7 job now," he says, "which also means I want to keep producing this work."

We are at Perch, a chic café at Vasant Vihar, in south Delhi. Pillai suggests we order a Vietnamese-style pour-over coffee and a cheese platter. I ask for a meat platter as well.

Unfortunately, for my purposes, it was not the ideal location, what

with the ambient music and the large turnout. The reason why it is so popular becomes obvious when our order is served.

"I have been out since morning recording another podcast," Pillai says, "and will be going to Khan Market for a book signing after this." Being a famous author is hard work, isn't it?

I have read Pillai's latest book cover to cover, and have deciphered its enigmatic title, but I also want to hear it from him. "The title represents some major interests I have in my research," he says, before embarking on an explanation. The *Courtesans* refers to any one of the six courtesans in the book. "In 2019, why are we still thinking of history as if it's only

about kings and battles and empires," he says. "Why is there no history through the eyes of women?" *Courtesans* are a wonderful way to look at history, since they were often highly educated, refined and great contributors to society. One of the courtesans in Pillai's book is Begum Samru, who begins her career as a dancing girl in Delhi and goes on to become a military leader with her private army, often protecting the vulnerable late Mughal emperors.

"The Mahatma does not refer to Mahatma Gandhi, as some might think," says Pillai. "It refers to Mahatma Phule, who — long before Gandhiji turned up at Buckingham Palace in a loincloth to scandalise everyone — arrived at a banquet for the grandson of Queen Victoria in Pune in a torn shawl to show the mirror to colonial rulers." Pillai asserts that Phule has been garlanded and enshrined as a social reformer, but this sort of veneration sanitises his rather radical polemic. "He lived in Pune,

which was a seat of Brahminical orthodoxy. Brahmins claimed that they were superior, being born from the head of the cosmic creator. Phule asked: 'Does this mean the cosmic creator menstruates through his mouth?'. Similar questions were asked by Kabir or Basava — both of whom feature among the dramatis personae in Pillai's book. "Indian history is as much about asking questions as it is about sanctified thought," he adds.

In the introduction to his book, Pillai writes: "We live in times when history is polarising. It has become to some an instrument of vengeance, of grievances, imagined or real. Others remind us to draw wisdom from the past, not fury and rage, seeing in its chronicles a mosaic of experience to nourish our minds and recall, without veneration, the confident glories of our ancestors." I ask him where he sees himself in this rather conflicted landscape. "I am trying to regain that elusive thing called balance," he replies, smiling. "History is neither on the extreme left, nor on the extreme right — it is somewhere in the middle. It is necessary to reclaim that middle ground, especially in our contemporary world where everything seems to be so black and white." He asserts that the contemporary polarisation over historical narratives tells us more about our insecurities and anxieties than about history.

Perhaps, a consequence of this anxiety is a spurt in popular history writing in India — Pillai is arguably the biggest success story of this phenomenon. (His first two books were bestsellers, and this one is well on its way to becoming one.) At the same time, there seems to be a conflict of sorts between popular history and tra-

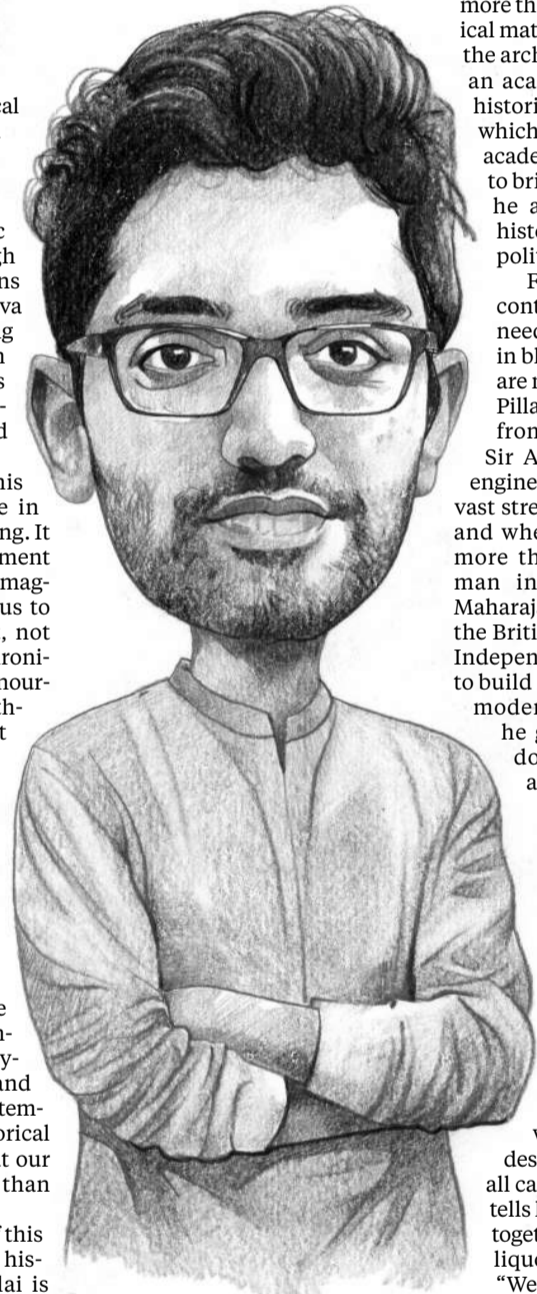


ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

ditional or academic history. "Where do you see yourself in this?" I ask him. "I see myself as a bridge between the two," he replies. "I bring academic rigour to my writing. *The Ivory Throne* had

more than a hundred pages of critical material. All my work involves the archives. But I don't write like an academic." Pillai says many historians are doing great work, which often remains confined to academic circles. "It is essential to bring it to a wider audience," he adds, "because everyday history is being mutilated for political purposes."

For politicians, he says, context is a bad thing. "They need grand narratives, things in black and white — but there are no dichotomies in history," Pillai says, providing examples from his book. For instance, Sir Arthur Cotton, a military engineer responsible to irrigating vast stretches of Andhra Pradesh, and where even today, there are more than 3,000 statues of the man in two districts. Or, the Maharaja of Jaipur who stood with the British during the First War of Independence in 1857 but went on to build hospitals and bridges and modernising his kingdom. "Is he good or is he bad? What do you focus on?" Pillai asks. "As I said, context is very important."

He also narrates the story of Shahuji Bhonsle, the nephew of Maratha ruler Shivaji, who ruled Thanjavur from 1684 to 1712, and was also a poet and playwright of some talent. In his play, *Sati Dana Suramu*, he parodies social conventions with a Brahmin besotted with a "untouchable" woman. Overcome with desire, the Brahmin abandons all caste traditions. The woman tells him why they cannot sleep together: "We eat beef, we drink liquor." The Brahmin replies: "We drink cow's milk but you eat the whole cow. You must be more pure." Pillai asks: "Can you imagine a contemporary playwright writing this?"

Perhaps that's the reason why history has become even more poignant now.

## Jal Chaupals in the city



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

Recent reports have calculated that the almost a quarter of all groundwater extracted globally is extracted in India. India beats even China and US in groundwater extraction, which is perhaps why the rate of groundwater depletion in the country has increased by 23 per cent between 2000 and 2010. Many people react to such news with a shrug — after all, isolated individual efforts would be little more than drops in the ocean. But a recent experience of a Jal Chaupal, water budgeting meeting, in Mahuee, a village in UP's Banda district, made me realise that every drop counts after all.

As the monsoon clouds rumbled ominously overhead, a group of 50-odd people

gathered in a government school classroom where Sadashiv and Prashansa Gupta of Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Sewa Sansthan were waiting to kick off the meeting. Using a tool developed by WaterAid, they asked the group to estimate their individual water usage by activity — bathing, laundry, toilet, kitchen, livestock and more. Amid good-natured ribbing and a lot of laughter, the group collectively estimated exactly how many buckets of water they used daily for different tasks while Sadashiv painstakingly entered the figures on a water consumption table on the wall.

By now, the entire group was involved in the water budgeting exercise. Everyone wanted to speak in the next part of the activity — water availability. They enumerated every single water source in Mahuee while the facilitators estimated how much water each is capable of providing, highlighting the gap between the demand for water and its actual availability. Then the group collectively estimated groundwater depletion in their village by comparing the depth of new and old wells and tube wells. Using the example of a bank account which would run out of money if there are more withdrawals than deposits, the two facilitators ended the meeting by driving home the importance of recharging groundwater aquifers to ensure continued availability of water.

As the numbers kept adding up on the table, many in the room started looking visibly uneasy. For Munni Devi, as for others in the group, the meeting was eye-opening. "It has made me realise that even though we are drought-stricken every summer, we use so much water," exclaimed Munni Devi, 40 years old and heavily veiled. A young was sitting behind her declared that the best way for him to help save water was to bathe once in 10 days. Everyone laughed but seriousness returned when an older man in the group pointed out that earlier, when their village pond had water, they'd bathe their animals there. "Since the pond dried up about three years ago, we've been using fresh tube well water for this purpose," she said. "The Jal Chaupal has made me realise that even people like me who live in a state of acute water shortage can cut down on water usage by becoming more conscious about it."

As the meeting ended, I realised that collectively making their own water budget had perhaps brought home the urgency of the water crisis that's looming over us all today. Back in Delhi where my neighbours were having their driveway hosed down with as much fresh water as Munni Devi uses in a day, it struck me that perhaps what we need is Jal Chaupals in our water-greedy cities too — not just in villages like Mahuee.

## Being AWOL isn't much fun



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

We are all, as you read this, AWOL, a spontaneous family rebellion against the crippling claustrophobia and corporate babudom of office. All but my son, that is, who refused to join in the clan protest because, as he said plaintively, "I don't have any more leave left, Dad, not even a half-day, or a few hours, so if it's all right, I'll go attend office. Besides," he pointed out, "some of us still need to bring a salary home." He is, at heart, an office-bee, but please don't tell him this because he is sensitive about such matters. The one day he decided he wanted to be as impulsive as the rest of us, he declared he

would go late to work — and he did. By all of 15 minutes.

This morning, his wife decided to join the kinfolk at their sit-in, by sitting it out. I'm not sure whether she's part of our dissent group or not because she left at her usual office hour, saying she was "visiting". Maybe she's only humouring us and has gone to work, or maybe she has genuine errands to run. Eventually the truth will be out. She's partial to whisky, you see, and I plan on having a conversation with her when she's on her second tot this evening.

At first I was alone so being AWOL didn't feel like much fun. There were piles of books to read, so I did that over a couple of days while bingeing on Netflix intermittently. But these are guilty pleasures and less fun when you can do them legitimately, on your own time. So I brooded a bit, nagged the cook, told off the maali, poured myself a couple of G&Ts, pottered around the study, OD'd on caffeine, smooched around for unhealthy things to eat and was bored by the third day.

Which is when I pestered my daughter to skip office on the spur-of-the-moment, which she did with a text to her supervisor. But being the conscientious type, she's been

wracked by remorse since. Worse, being an organised person, she doesn't know what to do with the free time that's come her way out of the blue. So she's mooning around the house while being critical of its upkeep and maintenance instead of catching a movie, or heading to the mall for some retail therapy. It seems she enjoys these things only when she's under pressure, so it might be better if she returned to work, but it's a weekend now so her joylessness will cast a gloom over the next days.

My wife decided to go AWOL too, even though she works out of home, fleeing to Pune for a one-day event that is next week. When someone — I think it was me — pointed out that perhaps she didn't need to go so many days early, my wife pretended she'd mixed up her dates, and what with non-cancellable flights and cab bookings, it was all fait accompli, so she'd try and make the most of it even though she hated leaving us alone. It sounded like a well-executed getaway, leading me to think my daughter and I should have planned our absences better. Meanwhile, there's still the matter of my daughter-in-law to clear up — if she's AWOL, why isn't she as miserable as us?

WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

Security...for citizens

The "suicide note" purportedly sent out by V G Siddhartha mentions aggravations that have earned him much posthumous sympathy. Among the aggravations, almost inevitably, is harassment by tax officials. In response, the income-tax department has put out a detailed note, with the assertion that the late "coffee king" had confessed to an unreported income of about ₹350 crore. However, someone presumably informed on the subject has contended that tax officials acted prematurely in seizing shares held by Siddhartha. The full facts will emerge in due course. It is possible that this case, like many others, will testify to the Jekyll-and-Hyde worlds in which many of our businessmen (feel they have to) function.

The charge of tax harassment has struck a responsive chord in the business community and the broader public. The finance minister is well aware of the issue. In her Budget speech, she used picturesque imagery from classical Sangam literature to say that if the elephant enters the paddy field it will trample far more paddy than it can eat. It is also worth recalling what an earlier finance minister, Jaswant Singh, said in his Budget speech 16 years ago: "Let us, to start with, readily acknowledge that the essential entrepreneurial character and the creative genius of our citizens is our greatest asset." Later in the speech, he talked of moving "away from a suspicion-ridden, harassment-generating, coercion-inclined regime to a trust-based, 'green channel' system. I do this entirely on the basis of my faith in my countrymen and women."

Mr Singh stood tall at the time for emphasising that taxpayers must be treated with respect. So it is worth recalling what he committed to: "First, hereafter, stocks found during the course of a search and seizure operation will not be seized under any circumstances. Second, no confession shall be obtained during such search and seizure operations. Third, no survey operation will be authorized by an officer below the rank of Joint Commissioner of Income Tax. Finally, books of account impounded during survey will not be retained beyond ten days, without the prior approval of the Chief Commissioner."

Businessmen who have been subjected to tax surveys or search and seizure operations will be able to confirm whether these promises have been kept. Meanwhile, on the positive side, the use of digital technology has made tax dealings simpler and safer for the average taxpayer. Most importantly, it has helped to obviate the need for direct personal contact between the taxpayer and assessing officials, removing much of the harassment and (mostly) petty bribery that had been rampant. In addition, immediately after the new Modi government took office, more than two dozen senior tax officials were sent packing — reportedly because of corruption charges. One presumes that sent a powerful message down the line.

But if power tends to corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely (as Lord Acton famously said), it is notable that there is a fairly consistent pattern to recent tax and other raids: They have tended to focus on those opposed to or critical of the government. Meanwhile, the government has been busy getting parliamentary approval for legislation that arms officials in multiple departments with extra powers to prosecute, arrest, sequester, brand as terrorists, and so on — with fewer safeguards, and with greater concentration of power in the hands of the central government, at the expense of states.

Now, it is possible to make the case for prison terms for traffic offences like speeding. Other countries too provide for it, limiting extreme penalties to extreme cases. And the home minister has assured that the government's many new powers will not be misused. But can even the most powerful and best-intentioned minister guarantee that in a country where everyone knows that the abuse of power is routine? Wouldn't it make more sense, then, to opt for a lighter touch, and the Jaswant Singh approach?

Particularly after the scandalous sequence of events at Unnao, what people have been made conscious of is the need for statutory protections that ordinary citizens can be assured of without having to appeal 25 times to the police, and institutional safeguards that buttress them, even as they fret about the danger of disproportionate penalties.

3 defectors, 6 murders, 3 rapes, 1 party

The stories of Kuldeep Singh Sengar, Sanjay Sinh and Sakshi Maharaj and what they tell us about our politics, policing, justice system, and the BJP

Two-and-a-half champion serial defectors have been in our political headlines lately. The first, and the most familiar, is Kuldeep Singh Sengar of Unnao rape-murder infamy.

The second is former Amethi 'Raja', ex-MP and ex-minister Sanjay Sinh, who has just jumped the Congress party's sinking ship.

And the third is Sakshi Maharaj, the BJP's recently elected Unnao MP. We count him as half because he hasn't done anything particularly political or criminal lately. He only earned what we might call a mention in despatches, or collateral infamy, for having called on Sengar in jail to thank him for supporting him in the Lok Sabha election in his domain.

All three are serial defectors. There are about six (at last count) fully or partly unresolved murder cases they are, or have been, linked to. And, at least three rapes which remain unresolved, just like the murders.

Further, all three remain in persistent demand. They own the votes of their caste and pocket boroughs, they know their ways around the law, and they have that one attribute all political parties weigh above everything else: Competence, honesty and of course morality. It is the blessing of winnability.

It just so happens that all three have ended up in the BJP. Until 48 hours ago, when Sengar was finally expelled.

We are so fixated on his life as an alleged criminal and a don, or 'Bahubali', as they are called in the Hindi heartland, that we risk overlooking his equally varied and colourful public life. In 2002, the local 'daddu' became an honourable MLA for the first time, winning Unnao on the BSP ticket.

Next, he defected to the Samajwadi Party (SP), and won from the neighbouring Bangermau and Bhagwant Nagar constituencies in 2007 and 2012, respectively. This is when it had become fashionable, and widely accepted that the SP was patronising criminal mafias, especially those of the Yadavs and Rajputs in Uttar Pradesh. In 2017, sensing the wind, he moved to the BJP and became an MLA.

It was the same year, in fact just about three months after his election as BJP MLA, that the unfortunate teenager came to her MLA seeking help for a job and complained that he "raped her" instead, and, after doing so, "wiped my tears and offered to help me find a job".

Sanjay Sinh has changed so many parties that I can't even feel confident giving you a definitive

chronology for fear of being fact-checked. He was linked to a famous murder, although discharged.

It was the "supari" killing in Lucknow of then national badminton champion Syed Modi (July 28, 1988). He was a prime suspect, but was let off for want of evidence as both Uttar Pradesh Police and the CBI failed to find much against him. So, innocent until proven guilty, we all must accept. Just that it was another of those heartland murders where the hired guns were convicted but nobody found out who hired them. Bhagwati Singh, one of the two hired guns, was convicted. The other, Amar Bahadur, was murdered during the trial. Sounds familiar?

After the murder, Sanjay Sinh married Syed Modi's wife, then Ameeta Modi (nee Kulkarni). Around the time the CBI was handling this murder case, much in the headlines then, V P Singh — Sanjay Sinh's distant uncle through his first wife Garima's family — had rebelled against the

Congress and became prime minister. Time for Sanjay Sinh to move from the Congress to the "uncle" too.

A decade later, he joined the BJP, won Amethi on its ticket, defeating Capt Satish Sharma in 1998, but that Parliament was short-lived as the Vajpayee government lost by one vote in the Lok Sabha.

In the 1999 election he contested against Sonia Gandhi, his friend and mentor Rajiv Gandhi's wife, in Amethi on the BJP ticket. This is when Sonia had chosen a second constituency in the south, Bellary, just to be safe. I spent a bit of time in Amethi then, followed Sinh's campaign, and his slogan was so catchy that it still rings in my ears: *Sanjay Sinh ke dar ki maari, Sonia bhaag gayi Bellary* (Sonia is so terrified of Sanjay Sinh that she fled to Bellary). Of course, Sonia won both.

As the "hawa" shifted, he returned to the Congress in 2003. In 2009, he was elected on the Congress ticket from Sultanpur, next to Rae Bareilly and Amethi. As his term ended, anticipating a rout in Uttar Pradesh, he managed a Rajya Sabha nomination from Assam from the Congress. That term ends now, the Gandhi family is finished now, so he has found new "uncles" in the BJP yet again.

Now, the half. Better or worse, you decide. Sakshi Maharaj, born Sachchidanand Hari Sakshi, has been a shining star of his backward Lodh community (Kalyan Singh, former BJP chief minister, iz from the same caste, and Sakshi Maharaj's patron). In 1991 and 1996, he won the



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

Getting your facts right



VIEWPOINT  
DEVANGSHU DATTA

The fact checking website, Altnews, recently launched a mobile app. This can be used on an android device to request a fact-check of any given content, be it a verbose WhatsApp forward, or a digital image. All that's required is "long-press" and Share. The website will revert within 72 hours with verification.

The time frame may seem long. But quite apart from sheer volume, fact-checking any given item often requires tedious "digital legwork". Social media content mixes fact, fiction, opinion and

garbage to create misleading narratives. What is amazing is that well-educated people often swallow nonsense without any application of thought or judgement. This is especially true when there is some religious element to the narrative.

My school WhatsApp group contains a bunch of very smart people, (present company excepted). We recently received a forward alluding to the "fact" that many Indian places of worship, dating back many centuries, had been built in a "straight line" running 2,383 km, North to South.

Much was made of the fact that these aforementioned places of worship predated "the creation of imaginary lines on Earth by the British scientist about 100 years ago". Somehow the builders had known how to put these all in a straight line before GPS was invented. The edifices in question are all placed between Longitude 79.06 East and 79.91 East according to the forward. Several people on my school group went "Ooh! Aah! The glorious Wisdom of the Ancients!"

Assume for arguments' sake that this forward is fact-checked for rigour. The basic hygiene start with checking that

the places mentioned actually have the stated coordinates. These do seem to be approximately correct according to GPS, which was probably used by the creator of the forward.

Now, we could check the rest of the content for veracity. We use map grids, of latitude and longitude, to define the coordinates of any place. According to the forward, longitude and latitude — imaginary lines — were invented by "a British scientist, about 100 years ago".

This is rubbish. Gridded maps have been in use for at least 2,300 years. Greek sailors used them. Eratosthenes—the first chap known to have made an accurate guess about the Earth's dimensions — proposed gridded maps, more than 300 years Before the Common Era (300 BCE). It is safe to assume that the Mauryans, who had extensive contacts with the Greeks, also used gridded maps.

Since the places of worship mentioned are of more recent provenance than 300 BCE, it is highly possible the architects did know how to put things in a straight line, by using gridded maps, sextants, and their knowledge of trigonometry.

Now let's come to misleading content. A cursory look at a map tells you that the straight "line" in question is not a line as defined by that wise ancient,

Euclid. It has both length and breadth. The distance between 79.06E and 79.90E (the Western-most and the Eastern-most places mentioned) is around 100-105 Km along a 2,383 kms stretch, North to South. So the forward is referring to a rhombus, 2,383 km long and 100-odd km in width. That's about 2.4 lakh square km. Given any arbitrary area of that size, one can undertake to find places of worship, police stations, houses of ill repute, liquor vends and petrol pumps in any desired orientation whatsoever.

So how does the fact-checker deal with that forward? Can it be dismissed it as absolute garbage? It is not. There are glaring errors of fact such as the historical provenance of latitude and longitude, for example. But the places mentioned have the right coordinates.

The really misleading information is that they are not a straight line by any definition of the term. It probably took the creator of that forward about 15 minutes to put it together. It would take a fact-checker several hours to check all the details and even then, in the interest of "balance", he would have to say it was misleading rather than absolutely false.

AltNews deals with more sophisticated and pernicious versions of such rubbish, day in and day out. Kudos to them for maintaining their sanity and rigour.

The social trigger

EYE CULTURE

ADRIJA SHUKLA

When was the last time you saw a post on a social media platform and it triggered emotions? Happiness, sadness, pride, fear or anger? If you observe carefully, it happens quite a lot. To an extent that we tend to simply ignore it, thinking it is normal.

Social media and tech firms revolutionised the way people communicate. But with the passage of time, these firms transformed into giants and their platforms became capable of doing something, perhaps, no one ever thought of — hacking human emotions. How? The biggest hack in the history of social media gives a glimpse.

"How did the dream of a connected world tear us apart?"

Netflix recently released a documentary, *The Great Hack*, sets out to seek an answer to one of the most difficult questions, staring at the face of democracy and human society in the age of information technology: Right-wing parties are coming to power, across the world, and people are more polarised now than ever. Do social media and tech giants have any role to play in it?

The documentary, directed by Karim Amer and Jahane Noujaim, investigates the Cambridge Analytica (CA) scandal, along with the people involved in it. The firm was accused of manipulating voter behaviour in 2016 US presidential elections and the Brexit vote, among others. In March 2018, a whistle-blower, Christopher Wiley (a former CA research director) came out with shocking revelations about how the information of nearly 87 million US Facebook users was sold to the firm. But Facebook called it an information leak.

When David Carroll, a professor of media design, got to know about the hack, he demanded the British firm to share the data it had on him. "As I dug deeper, I found that these traces of ourselves are being mined into a trillion dollar a year industry. We are now the commodity," said Mr Carroll. "The question I kept asking myself was, who was feeding us fears? And how?"

Project Alamo, which was collecting digital voter database for Donald Trump's campaign was spending \$1 million a day on Facebook ads. CA was working on it, too. To send people personalised messages, the firm had 5,000 data points on every American (who had a Facebook account). Of course, these people had no information that their data was being used for political advertising. The firm, through the bombardment of personalised advertisements, persuaded people (the identified persuadables) to vote for

Lok Sabha election on the BJP ticket. As an accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case, he seemed to have ideological purity.

His ideological commitment, however, couldn't survive the BJP's denial of the ticket to him. He joined the SP, where Mulayam Singh Yadav welcomed him gleefully. Sakshi Maharaj said the BJP's policies were now anti-poor. But you know why he was denied the ticket despite his winnability? He had been accused of murdering Brahm Dutt Dwivedi, a close associate of then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

In 2000, Mulayam sent him to the Rajya Sabha. In the course of time, the murder case "faded". Not to miss out, he got involved in some more "action" soon enough, accused, along with his two nephews, of the gang-rape of a college principal. The holy man spent about a month in Tihar jail, but was discharged for want of evidence, as he was in the Dwivedi murder. Disappearance of evidence for murder and rape, a familiar UP story, you see. Just that you have to ensure you are on the winning side. Always.

By 2002, he knew the Samajwadi Party wasn't getting anywhere, so he left it, accusing Mulayam of a host of awful things, ranging from casteism, to dictatorship, to, and you might like it, capitalism. He now informally joined then BJP rebel Kalyan Singh's local Rashtriya Kranti Party, essentially a Lodh party.

The Sakshi saga continues. In 2009, the government charged him with setting up a fictitious NGO and collecting ₹25 lakh illegally. Sujata Verma, his follower and a former principal of the college he owned (Maharani Avanti Bai College), was named an accomplice. In 2012, he rejoined the BJP. Soon enough, she was shot dead while returning from his ashram. Sakshi and his associates were accused of murder.

He promptly went underground, and then surrendered and was freed on bail. His efforts to get the FIR quashed in the Allahabad High Court in 2013 failed. The next year, he was sworn in as a Lok Sabha member of the BJP. His "honour" was restored. And with such an illustrious career, we are now complaining that he went to Sitapur jail to thank Sengar?

What's common between these three diverse lives, and what does it tell us about Indian politics? First, that winnability is now the only morality that parties seek. Criminality, multiple rapes, and murders do not matter. After all, why would you take the stress of politics if you didn't need some such distractions to resolve.

The formula then, at least in the heartland, is to build a local vote bank. It can be based on caste, mafia power, and, ideally, a combination of both. Then you either become winnable personally, or hold the key to others' victory or defeat.

Then, all parties would vie for you. You can happily choose the winning side, always, and take anything, murders, rape, robbery, rioting, cheating, embezzlement in your stride. Until a feisty teenager, struggling for breath through a ventilator, her father and most of her family murdered, ruin it all for you.

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Who will be BJP's Mahalanobis?



LINE AND LENGTH  
T C A SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

A few days ago, Puja Mehra, an accomplished economic journalist, wrote an article asking who, if anyone, was Narendra Modi's A N Varna or Montek Ahluwalia or Bimal Jalan or Y V Reddy or Vijay Kelkar, bureaucrats who had helped former prime ministers. Even Indira Gandhi, who, like Mr Modi, was wary of intellect, turned to P N Haksar, who gave economic shape to her political imperatives.

What Ms Mehra meant to ask was from where Mr Modi gets his economic advice. This question has been puzzling observers of the Indian economy for the last five years. No satisfactory answer has emerged.

That said, the question, though necessary, is not sufficient. The more com-

plete question would be: Who will be Mr Modi's Mahalanobis?

P C Mahalanobis was the econometrician-economist who guided Jawaharlal Nehru's economic thinking. It was he who developed the economic model for the Second Five-Year plan, which, growth-wise, was a great success.

And there hangs a tale. It is worth recounting because it is so very apposite for India's economic vexations today.

In the four years after Nehru won the first general election so overwhelmingly, there had been very little visible economic progress. Primarily, not enough jobs had been generated.

Also, the inflation rate was climbing. Forex was running out. The savings rate was a mere 5 per cent. The Budgets had no headroom because revenues were stagnant. The private sector had thrown in its hand, saying "we don't have the money to invest". The banks were refusing to lend except to a few.

Politically, Nehru reigned supreme after defeating his critics in the party. But members were quietly starting to grumble. As with Mr Modi, everyone was getting very impatient.

It was in that overall context that the Congress passed the all-important resolution at Avadi in 1955. It said the government would lead the way in the economy.

But the deeper problem remained:

What to do next and whatever it was that was to be done, where to get the money for it?

Nehru turned to Mahalanobis for the first question and for the second, to T T Krishnamachari (TTK) — a businessman — whom he appointed finance minister. Mahalanobis prepared the blueprint for growth and TTK raised the money for it. The Second Plan was born. It delivered good growth.

Modi's muse

Who will do all this for NDA II? While Nirmala Sitharaman is the perfect fit for the TTK-type revenue-raising role, you can't expect her to do a Mahalanobis as well. She is completely honest and totally single-minded in doing whatever is required of her. She will be effective and unpopular, which is just what you need of a good finance minister.

But it would be idiotic to blame her — or any finance minister — for not being able to produce investment because investment depends on far too many things for a mere finance minister to handle. Indeed, it depends primarily on the prime minister.

Always, for investment to restart, a new economic view and a completely fresh perspective is needed. Two periods — 1958-65 and 1992-96 — bear testimony to that. Basically, such a view puts dis-

# Opinion

SATURDAY, AUGUST 3, 2019

## Rational Expectations

**SUNIL JAIN**

 sunil.jain@expressindia.com  
 @thesuniljain


## Tax department needs big overhaul

From ongoing GST-mess to raising direct tax demands that can't be collected, various CAG reports paint worrying picture

**E**VEN AS THE controversy over whether the taxman hounded Café Coffee Day founder VG Siddhartha to death—his suicide note spoke of the taxman's pressure—continues to simmer, a series of reports from the CAG point to the need for a big overhaul of the tax department; and though the CAG doesn't use the term tax-terror, there is enough in its report to suggest this remains an issue. First, since prime minister Narendra Modi came to power, there has been a 50% rise in disputed taxes, mostly due to high-pitched assessments by the taxman. Tax disputes, for direct taxes, rose from ₹410,523 crore in FY14 to ₹623,539 crore in FY18; and this is after the government is supposed to have come up with a series of measures to reduce such litigation.

According to the CAG, while there were 3 lakh pending cases at the CIT (Appeals) in FY18, ₹5.2 lakh crore was locked up in them; it was ₹4.4 lakh crore in 0.8 lakh cases at higher levels. While the CAG's data on arrears is quite different from those in the budget, what is important is that the taxman has told the CAG that 98.2% of these are "difficult to recover", making you wonder why the disputes are being raised then. While the budget says the amounts under dispute were ₹7.8 lakh crore in FY18, the CAG report cites a somewhat similar number—₹7.4 lakh crore—as "arrears of earlier year's demand" and then adds another ₹3.8 lakh crore as "arrears of current year's demand", taking the total arrears to ₹11.1 lakh crore in FY18 and, of this, ₹10.9 lakh crore is said to be "difficult to recover".

While the latest CAG report on direct taxes doesn't have data on how many cases the taxman loses after making large tax demands, an earlier indirect-tax report said the success ratio of the tax department's appeal against adjudication orders fell from 33% in FY14 to 27% in FY16; it fell from 34% to 18% in the high courts and from 19% to 11% in the Supreme Court.

The CAG details where the taxman got it wrong in several cases; in agricultural income exemptions, for instance, the CAG found that in 22.5% of the cases, exemptions were allowed without adequate documentation and verification of supporting documents. But more than this, the report shows just how badly the system is broke. The fact that direct tax refunds equaled to around 15% of total collections in FY18 suggests the taxman is forcing corporates to pay higher taxes to meet targets, and refunding it later. An earlier CAG report had documented an "illusory demand" of ₹10,109 crore on SBI on March 30; this was duly paid and then refunded on April 2. Similar demands were made even the year before this, on SBI as well as other banks; such tricks, the CAG recorded, resulted in "inflated collection of revenue of ₹14,185.74 crore" in FY16 or around 10% of the Mumbai region's corporate tax collections for the year.

And while the taxman does several search and seizures, it detected just ₹25,547 crore from 13,487 such operations in FY18; considering ₹10 lakh crore of direct taxes were collected that year, banning such seizures/searches should be considered. It would vastly improve the taxman's image while not affecting collections as much. And while it is a good thing that 83% of direct taxes collected in FY18 were based on TDS and self-declarations by assesses—another 9% was collected by way of surcharges and cesses—the fact that assessment of returns added just 8% to collections also suggests the taxman's ability to catch tax theft is poor.

The picture gets worse in GST where, in FY19, the centre's share of collections fell short of the target by a whopping 22%; ₹5.8 lakh crore were collected vs the ₹7.4 lakh crore target. And, in FY18, total indirect tax collections grew just 5.8% vs 21% in FY17 or the pre-GST year. Given very little of the original GST plan has been implemented so far, the CAG says GST "has remained a system still in the making even after nearly two years of roll out with the entire return mechanism undergoing major changes". Apart from huge problems in implementation from the vendor's side, the CAG points out that while the GST Council was told the tax could be rolled out from July 1, 2017, the final rules and forms were notified on 19 June, leaving little time for software development and testing of the system.

In July 2018, the CAG points out, or one year after the introduction of GSTR-3B—GSTRs 2 and 3 were put on hold—the GST Council announced that a new simplified return mechanism would be implemented from 1 January, 2019. "The new return mechanism is yet to be finally rolled out (June 2019), which is two years after introduction of GSTR-3B as a temporary measure." As a result of various ad hoc changes, like delinking of the filing of GSTR-1—detailed invoices of items sold by firms—and the payment of GST dues, just 65% of the required returns were filed in December 18. Apart from this being a poor record, given that GSTR-1 data is used to auto-populate GSTR-3B, this means taxes paid based on this will also be incorrect; and input tax credits will be delayed since a third of GSTR-1s have not been filed. In other words, major defects in GST still need to be ironed out, apart from the problems arising from there being too many rates. All told, the CAG reports on both direct and indirect taxes point to the need for a major overhaul of how the tax department functions.

## Shahbano 2 SHAYARABANO

Abolishing Triple Talaq a big victory for Muslim women, critical to ensure the practice doesn't flourish illegally

**I**F THE RAJIV Gandhi government reversing the Shahbano judgment was a big setback for Muslim women, the Supreme Court ruling against triple talaq—one of the petitioners was a Muslim woman Shayarabano—was a big boost. And while the Opposition ganged up against the legislation in the Rajya Sabha, the government has to be congratulated for splitting their ranks and finally getting it through. While several leaders of Opposition parties opposed the Bill in an attempt to buy favour with the Muslim clergy, what they didn't seem to have kept in mind is that 21 Islamic nations, including neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh have outlawed triple talaq. Sadly, neither the courts nor the government sought to address the issue of other forms of divorce—*talaq-e-ahsan* and *talaq-e-hasan* that rob Muslim women of the same rights women from other religions get.

While the law on triple talaq was still a victory, there is a big difference in legislating something and actually affecting change on the ground. There is little doubt the clergy and orthodox members of society—the All India Muslim Personal Law Board had said the judgment was an interference in Muslim Personal Law—will try and ensure that at least the poorer Muslim women continue to accept the practice; it is only when there is a complaint about a Muslim man giving his wife a triple talaq that some action can be taken against him by the police, but poorer women will, traditionally, have less access to the police or other such avenues to complain about triple talaq. In which case, for the new law to be truly meaningful, NGOs and other social welfare groups will have to educate Muslim women about their rights under it and be prepared to provide legal and whatever financial support is required to help them get justice when their husbands try to use the triple talaq route.

SOONER INDIA ENGAGES IN FOREIGN CURRENCY BORROWING, THE QUICKER IT CAN PROFIT FROM THIS MARKET IMPERFECTION, SHOWS CROSS-COUNTRY EVIDENCE FOR THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

## NO PROOF REQUIRED

# Borrow abroad and profit

**SURJIT S BHALLA**

 Contributing editor, Financial Express  
 Twitter: @surjitbhall  
 Views are personal


**B**UDGET SPEECH 2019 contained a new policy statement—GOI was planning to issue 10-year bonds denominated in foreign currency. This proposal has generated a controversy unlike most others. Every budget has good, bad, and ugly components. And critics are free to choose and comment on what they like, or hate. There are very few, if any, analysts who believe that the Budget 2019 income-tax proposals have any merit to them. Likewise, there are very few experts who believe that issuance of foreign currency bonds is a good idea. Indeed, the list of eminent experts who think it is an ugly idea is near endless.

Former RBI governor and distinguished economist Raghuram Rajan states as following (*Times of India*, July 2019): "Foreign bankers often meet finance ministry officials, trying to persuade India to issue a foreign bond. In my experience, they usually started by saying that such borrowing would be cheaper because dollar or yen interest rates are lower than rupee interest rates. This argument is bogus—usually the lower dollar interest rate is offset in the longer run by higher principal repayments as the rupee depreciates against the dollar." He has been joined by my ex-PMEAC colleague and good friend Rathin Roy who went a step further and stated: "Show me one country after world war which has done a foreign currency sovereign bond and not paid dearly for it." Further, "I would pay very careful attention to what several governors of the Reserve Bank are saying, that these are sovereign liabilities in perpetuity. I think there are serious issues regarding loss of sovereignty, which need to be addressed. I do not think that the argument that it is cheaper is a good one, I think it doesn't even hold if you add hedging costs and I don't buy the simple argument that if something is cheaper, it is good." (*Business Standard*, July 23, 2019). In addition, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) is on record as stating that issuance of foreign denominated bonds is anti-patriotic, that it would lead to a loss of sovereignty, and would lead to currency depreciation. To my knowledge, this is the first time esteemed economists and SJM are on the same side of an economic argument—can both be right, or are both wrong?

The above is just a brief taste of the comments and condemnation the foreign bond issue has received. The only eminent person (known for his balanced views) to publicly favour a sovereign for-

eign bond (SFB) is former RBI governor Bimal Jalan who stated "At the moment, we are in a fortunate position. Our debt-to-GDP ratio is not very high, exchange rate is stable, and foreign exchange reserves are high. So foreign borrowing, if its long term, which it would be, is not a problem." Former RBI governor YV Reddy had a more nuanced comment, stating that if foreign bond issuance was accompanied by a move towards greater capital account convertibility, then it may be worth pursuing.

The key issue in this debate, as nearly always, is empirical, and has to do with currency depreciation. Show me the money (evidence) and win the argument. Simple accounting math about foreign borrowings is as follows. All examples are with respect to dollar borrowings, but the same set of arguments apply to borrowing in the other three currencies—yen, euro, and the British pound. A country pays a country premium for borrowing in dollars; currently the US 10-year bond is trading at 2% and Indonesia just borrowed in June 2019 at around 3.6%; at the time it borrowed, it paid close to a 1.5% premium. A complex set of factors determine the country premium, but magnitude of reserves and foreign currency debt are important attributes. About 40% of Indonesia's debt is denominated in foreign currency; in India it is less than 5%. India should be able to borrow at a somewhat lower premium than 150 bp, possibly 130 bp.

India can borrow abroad in dollars at 3.3% or borrow foreign money in rupees (a *masala* bond) at a 3% higher premium, or 6.3% (the current government

10-year bond is trading at 6.35%). The difference between 3.3% and 6.3% is the depreciation premium that emerging countries pay.

This is what the market "demands" and it is unlikely that this premium has shifted too much for emerging markets over the last 20 years. Over a 10 year period, the 3% annual depreciation assumption means an economy pays 35% more with a *masala* bond than with an FCB. If the cumulative depreciation at the end of 10 years is more than 35%, the borrowing country loses; if less, than the borrowing country gains. The entire argument against foreign bonds (except the patriotic one) is whether this depreciation has been (and is expected to be) more than 35% over a 10 year period.

Data on 10 year currency depreciations are reported for several countries for the period 2009 to 2019. This assumes that each country started borrowing in 1999, one year after the East Asian crisis. Respected scholars (and respected policy makers) hark back to the Asian crisis for clues about what will happen to India's exchange rates over the next decade. Do these esteemed scholars recognise (let alone appreciate) that the rupee/dollar exchange rate was ₹42 in 1998 (Asian crisis) and ₹40 ten years later in 2007? This, despite Indian inflation rates averaging 3% higher, per year, than the USA during this period.

In the sample of countries chosen, I have included three countries from Latin America (Chile, Brazil, and Mexico) to satisfy the critics assumption that if India were to borrow \$10 billion, or even \$30 billion, or even \$50 billion, we would face

Average 10 year depreciation between 2009 and 2019

Country	Dollar	Yen	Euro	Pound	Average
India	26	37	33	13	27
Indonesia	23	34	30	10	24
Thailand	-17	-5	-10	-30	-16
Brazil	12	24	19	-1	14
Chile	0.3	12	7	-13	2
Mexico	36	47	43	23	37
South Africa	35	46	41	21	36
Emerging economies	31	42	37	18	32
Advanced economies	-6	5	0	-20	-5

Note: Only non-oil and economies with population > 10 million included  
 Source: IMF WEO data

## USA's China tariffs will hurt consumers

American households haven't yet felt the impact of the US-China tensions. Following Trump's promise to add a 10% levy on the remaining goods trade between the two countries, that is about to change

**DAVID FICKLING**

Bloomberg

**A**MERICANS READING GLOOMY headlines about the trade war with China could be forgiven for wondering what all the fuss is about. *Bloomberg's* consumer comfort index, a weekly phone survey conducted since 1985, is running at its highest levels since 2000. Similar gauges of the household sector, such as the University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index and the Conference Board's various consumer confidence surveys, are posting the best results since the eve of the early 2000s recession.

That's a stark contrast to what's happening in industry. The ISM Manufacturing Index eased to its lowest level since President Donald Trump's election, and the Markit Manufacturing PMI is flirting with outright contraction with its weakest reading since September 2009 in July. Measures of industrial production are barely growing and the Conference Board's leading index in June fell at the fastest pace since early 2016.

One explanation for what's happening is that households haven't yet felt the impact of US-China tensions. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer has been careful to spare them by exempting most retail products from the 25% tariffs he's imposed on \$250 billion of goods so far. With Trump's promise Thursday to add a 10% levy on the remaining goods trade between the two countries from September 1, that is about to change.

There's a range of popular consumer

products for which America is still deeply dependent on Chinese imports. As my colleague Shira Ovide notes, Apple Inc could be one of the biggest victims: Telephones (mostly mobile handsets like the iPhone) and computers are the two biggest categories of US imports from China.

Other goods where China accounts for more than half of the US imports include toys and games; computer accessories; shoes; televisions; drapery and linen; and leather goods and luggage. That large share of the total is important, because one of the best ways of minimising the risk of higher prices for consumers is for imports to diversify to other countries such as Mexico and Vietnam. When China makes up more than 50% of the import market, rejigging supply chains becomes extraordinarily challenging.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell could take some of the edge off the pain by further cutting interest rates, after lowering them this week for the first time in a decade. Three-month overnight interest swaps are trading at 2.05%, indicating that traders expect a further quarter-point cut before Thanksgiving.

Still, it would be a mistake to think the impact of such a move would be straightforward. Powell's initial shift away from raising rates helped spark a fall in the Chinese yuan against the dollar of about 3.9% between mid-April and mid-May

as currency traders bet on a relative strengthening of the US economy. The renminbi is now just a fraction above its weakest levels in a decade. But that's still not enough to offset a 10% tariff, and most of the effects of exchange-rate movements aren't passed through to consumer goods anyway.

After the trade-related shocks of the past year, the ebullient state of the American consumer is potent testimony to the resilience of the US economy. But even that has limits. A one-tenth hike in the price of regularly purchased items like clothing, toys and consumer electronics risks exhausting households' patience, especially as the decade-long fall in unemployment rates starts to bottom out.

There's likely to be feedback effects, too. To the extent that industrial conditions are still mildly positive at the moment, that probably owes a great deal to the fact that consumers are in an extremely good mood. By threatening to bring the trade turmoil to US households, Trump risks upsetting that delicate balance.

Equity markets are still in a bullish state, but beneath the surface the American economy has been disappointing expectations for the past six months. Further imposts on the consumer aren't going to help it turn that corner.

*This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners*

## ON BUSINESS FAILURES

Finance Minister of India, Nirmala Sitharaman

Business failures in this country should not be tabooed, or looked down. On the contrary, we should give an honourable exit or resolution to the problem in letter and spirit of the IBC



a Latin American crisis. Serious economists have invoked this "threat" in their arguments, so it is prudent to account for it. Note that the period chosen is a fairly long period (20 years) and involves close to 90 countries.

What do the results show? Unambiguously, that it pays for a country to borrow abroad!

Let us take the case of India first. Against the US dollar, the average 10 year depreciation since 2009 for India (or average annual depreciation since 1999) is 26%. Which means that India would have made a profit of close to 10% for each 10-year bond that it floated. Recall what Rajan said about this possibility. He called it bogus. The two worst-performers are Mexico and South Africa, and even these two economies break even! Even an average emerging economy makes a profit of 5 bp on every FCB bond it has floated over the last 20 years. This puts into question Rathin Roy's conclusion that every country has paid dearly for FCBs; empirically, the result is the opposite—since the East Asian crisis, most countries have profited handsomely. I don't know the veracity of his conclusion post WWII; maybe the few who borrowed abroad (particularly in Latin America) paid dearly between 1945 and 1998. But, for each Latin American disaster, there is an Asian success story. So which continent does Roy (and others) believe India is comparable to?

Indian inflation has moved structurally downward over the last three years and, thankfully, the post Patel-Acharya MPC realises this fact. However, in the six months prior to Das's first rate cut in early February 2019, inflation had averaged 3.7% and the real repo rate had averaged 2.8% (defined the RBI/MPC way of current repo rate minus two month earlier inflation). In the six months since (February 2019 to July 2019), two-month lagged inflation has averaged 1.10 bp lower at 2.6% i.e., despite 75 bp of repo rate cuts, the average real repo rate has moved higher to an average of 3.4%, an increase of 60 bp.

All the empirical evidence (past and expected future) suggests that the MoF idea of floating FCB's is a terribly good idea, an idea whose time has definitely come. It will also help to significantly lower the real repo rate to respectable levels. No country, has grown at "trend" rates with a real repo rate around 3.4%, not even 2.4% and not even 2%. So please, MoF, borrow abroad; and please, RBI/MPC, smell the real rate before deciding on monetary policy.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Sengar's expulsion

After a tight slap from the Supreme Court (SC) BJP President—cum Home Minister Amit Shah told the party UP unit to go ahead the expulsion Uttar Pradesh BJP a four-time lawmaker Kuldeep Singh Sengar, who is accused of raping a woman in Unnao. Who knows Amit Shah's nine years back memory may spark, (when he was an accused in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh encounter case, and the SC directs Mr. Shah: Stay out of Gujarat), prompt him to take action. Because the way a SC bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi (comprising Justices Deepak Gupta and Aniruddha Bose) made it clear that it will transfer all five cases related to the rape case involving Kuldeep Singh out of Unnao to Delhi, and orders CBI to complete probe in a week. It also ordered that the trials in all five cases should be completed in 45 days thereafter on day to day basis. The only pillar of democracy and the *aam admi's* last hope SC's stiffness; surely get justice to the victim and her family. One has to agree that Amit Shah even the PM Narendra Modi remain lenient from rape to murderous accident in the name of legal action—a ploy that BJP played well in many other cases. But damage already done, due to delayed action. Kudos To SC for its prompt action after the '*Jan lewa hamla*' (murderous attack) and give exemplary punishment to show that the lawmakers are not above the law

— Bidyut K Chatterjee, Faridabad

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

# North Korea walks diplomatic tightrope

North Korea is seemingly being wooed by two great powers, but in reality is caught in the middle. Between a social-media savvy President Trump manoeuvring his presidential re-election campaign 2020, and the expiry of the North Korea-China Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (1961) in 2021, a lot can happen

**ANURAG VISWANATH**

The author is a Singapore-based Sinologist, and adjunct fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi. Views are personal



**NOT THE** very eventful days of 2019, then the summer of 2019 was a spate of dramatic developments. Elections in India (South Asia) and Hong Kong's turmoil aside (East Asia), Northeast Asia witnessed several critical developments, including North Korea's recent second weapons test in a week, testing short-range missiles from its eastern shores, around Wonsan, into the Sea of Japan. This also included the much-talked about flying visit to North Korea by US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. North Korea is seemingly being wooed by two great powers, but in reality is caught in the middle, between the two. As the last frontier of the Cold War, the US and China portend different scenarios for North Korea's 25 million people—a toss between economic assurance and security from China, or economic benefit and security umbrella from the US. Either way, North Korea sits precariously—stuck between an unfortunate past and an unportunate future.

One of the key developments in Northeast Asia was the brief but symbolic and significant visit by the US President to North Korea in June. President Trump made history as the first sitting US President to cross the demarcation line into North Korea—an obvious outcome and success of back-room diplomacy, but unconventionally articulated through President Trump's tweet: "...if Chairman Kim of North Korea sees this, I would meet him at the Border/DMZ just to shake his hand and say Hello(!)!"

This materialised as the third meet between the leaders since Singapore (June 2018) and Hanoi (February 2019). The visit "...a great day for the world," as President Trump said, marked a break with the old US approach of 'maximum pressure'. It is apparent that President Trump has made (nuclear) diplomacy with North Korea his pet "signature foreign policy project."

But no less significant was President Xi Jinping's visit to North Korea days earlier, where he was greeted by cherubic children singing a song laden that meant: 'I love you, China'. President Xi became the first Chinese President in 14 years (Hu Jintao visited in 2005) to visit North Korea. This was the fifth meet between the leaders since March 2018.

On one hand, Chairman Kim Jong-un spoke of China-North Korea bilateral relations going strength to strength against the backdrop of 'serious' and 'complicated' international affairs—a backhanded reference to the ongoing US-China trade war. Chairman Kim called friendship with China 'invincible' and 'unchanging'. On the other hand, Kim lauded the 'excellent relationship' with the US, articulating the need to "eliminate the unfortunate past and open a new future." Even the reticent North Korea Agency (KCNA), the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), called President Trump's visit "an amazing event."

To the observers, perhaps in the US, North Korea continues to confound. In reality, television bytes of diplomatic overtures aside, North Korea continues to languish under 'maximum pressure'—



ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

the weight of international sanctions, economic contraction, falling harvest and food shortages. Yet there has been little let-up in North Korea's military ambitions because of its own hybrid political Darwinism, where it must nurture military ambitions (nuclear deterrence) to survive between the great powers and in Northeast Asia—what observers call "siege mentality."

The Bank of Korea (Seoul) indicates that the North Korean economy shrank 4.1% in 2018, the worst since 1997. This was the second consecutive year of

decline, following a 3.5% decline in 2017. International trade fell to an all-time low in 30 years, falling 48.4% in value in 2018. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has estimated food crop production at 4.9 million metric tonnes (2018-19), the worst in 10 years, with a deficit of 1.36 million metric tonnes. An estimated 10 million people are expected to face food shortages. The International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) has already warned of the rising incidence of malnutrition.

While North Korea did not reap

immediate economic dividends from President Trump's visit, President Xi's visit has led to China's renewed support for the stalled Hwanggumpyong Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and investment for road/bridge connection into North Korea for speedy completion of the North Korea River Bridge that connects China (Dandong) and North Korea (Sinuiju) over the Yalu river. Going forward, China's gradual transition from socialism to "socialism with Chinese characteristics" beginning with SEZs may be a viable role model for North Korea.

But even China, North Korea's sole economic lifeline, finds it hard to predict the latter's flip-flops. President Xi's visit, it was believed, not only honed the importance of a political settlement, but also sought to secure denuclearisation commitments. That China wants to play the critical arbiter in the peninsula goes unsaid. But President Trump's direct 'one-on-one' channel with Chairman Kim marginalises China in the endgame.

Just weeks after the landmark visits concluded, North Korea tested the short-range missiles and reports emerged that it has built a new submarine. The US has downplayed this, responding that they did not posit a threat to the US or its allies, and that they fell into the sea.

What is obscured is that the continued militarisation of the peninsula is North Korea's nightmare, as it is for other stakeholders. Seen from a North Korean perspective, the immediate provocation is the slated joint military exercise between the US and South Korea, which North Korea has called as much as a "rehearsal of war." North Korea views this development as retracting and renegeing on the commitment given by President Trump in Singapore to stop military exercises with South Korea—which is also in the process of acquiring F-35s from the US, to bring the tally up of F-35s to 40 by 2021.

Despite these historic visits, on ground real progress is lackadaisical. US-North Korea are scheduled to have working-level talks. For the US, there is little doubt that President Trump has elevated diplomacy in North Korea—the thaw in North Korea very likely one of his biggest political triumphs. Tellingly, President Trump has said that he is "not looking for speed (but) looking to get it right." For President Xi, too, the trip is pregnant with promise.

Where does North Korea go, standing between two competing visions of economic rise? Between a social-media savvy President Trump manoeuvring his presidential re-election campaign 2020, and the expiry of the North Korea-China Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (1961) in 2021, a lot can happen.

For North Korea, stakes are high as President Trump has opened a window of opportunity, a political risk that no other US President has done or will ever take. North Korea will have to find a way to 'keep face' with minimum deterrence (so as not to become Libya) and have US successfully claim (almost) denuclearisation, so that sanctions are lifted and even better, Japan opens its cash tabs.

**DATA DRIVE**

## Bank credit, consumption blues continue

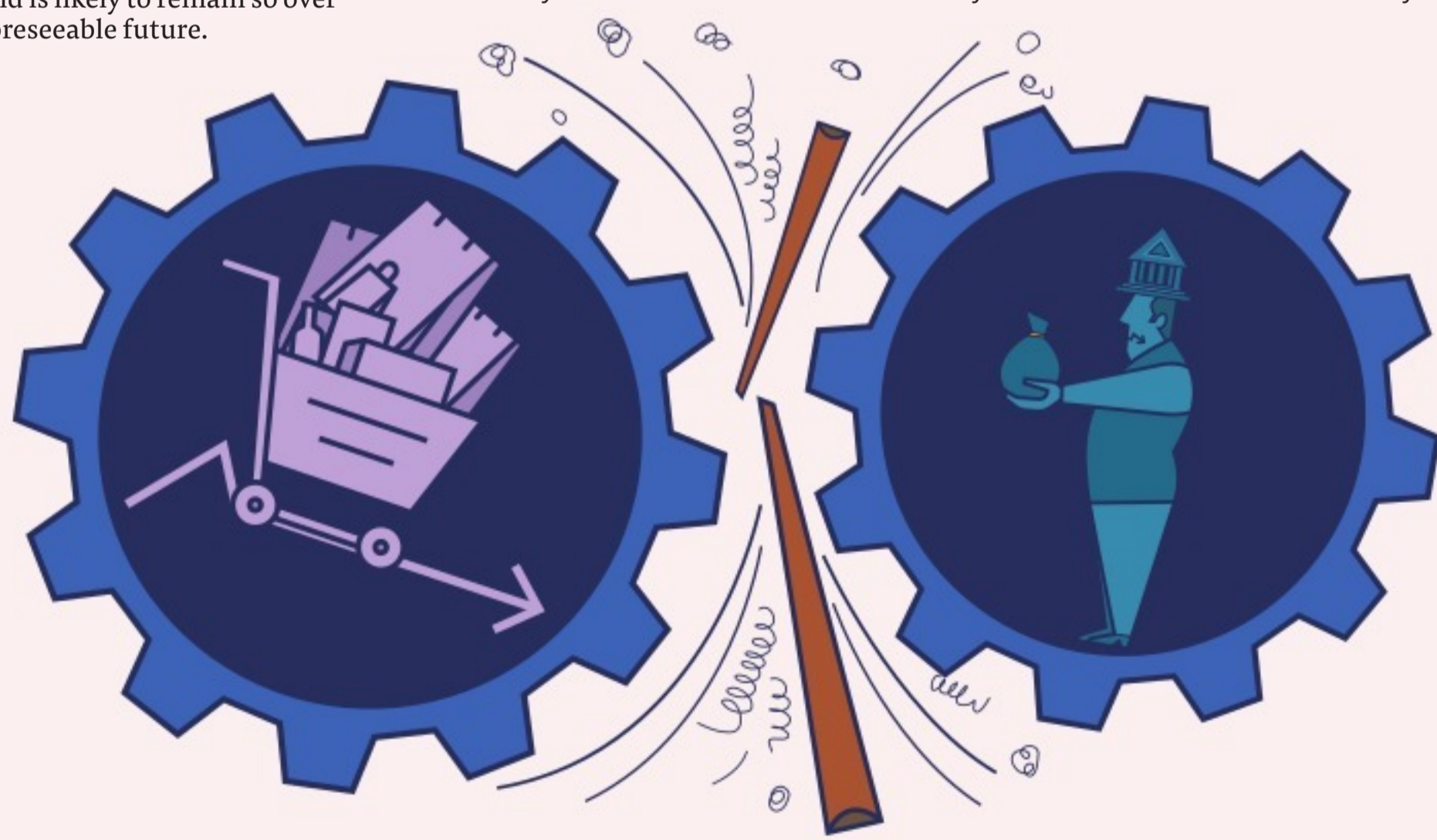
**WHILE BANK CREDIT** was rising at the beginning of the year, it has begun to slow down since March because of demand and supply issues. Credit from non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) has also slowed down since September last year, especially after the default of IL&FS.

A report by HSBC says the 'money multiplier', i.e. the ratio between broad money and reserve money that the central bank creates, after rising sharply for a few months at the start of the year, has slowed down since April. In FY18, the main concern was the slowing deposit growth that was hurting the banking sector. However, that is no longer a problem as deposit growth has risen.

The report points out that the fallout in the NBFC sector at end of 2018 led to a fall in consumer credit, and further weakness in urban employment seems to be a double whammy for urban consumption. Labour market conditions have been soft for the past three years in urban areas.

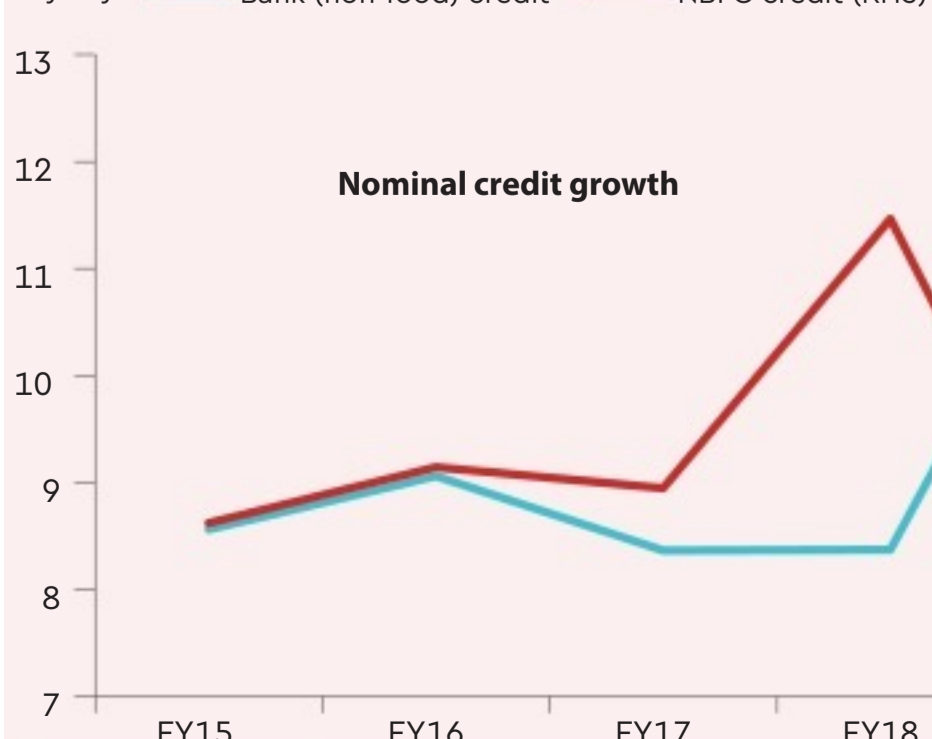
In rural areas, both agriculture and non-agriculture wages have been

falling, and unemployment is on the rise. Poor monsoon rains will further put pressure on rural growth. However, inflation is well under the 4% target and is likely to remain so over foreseeable future.

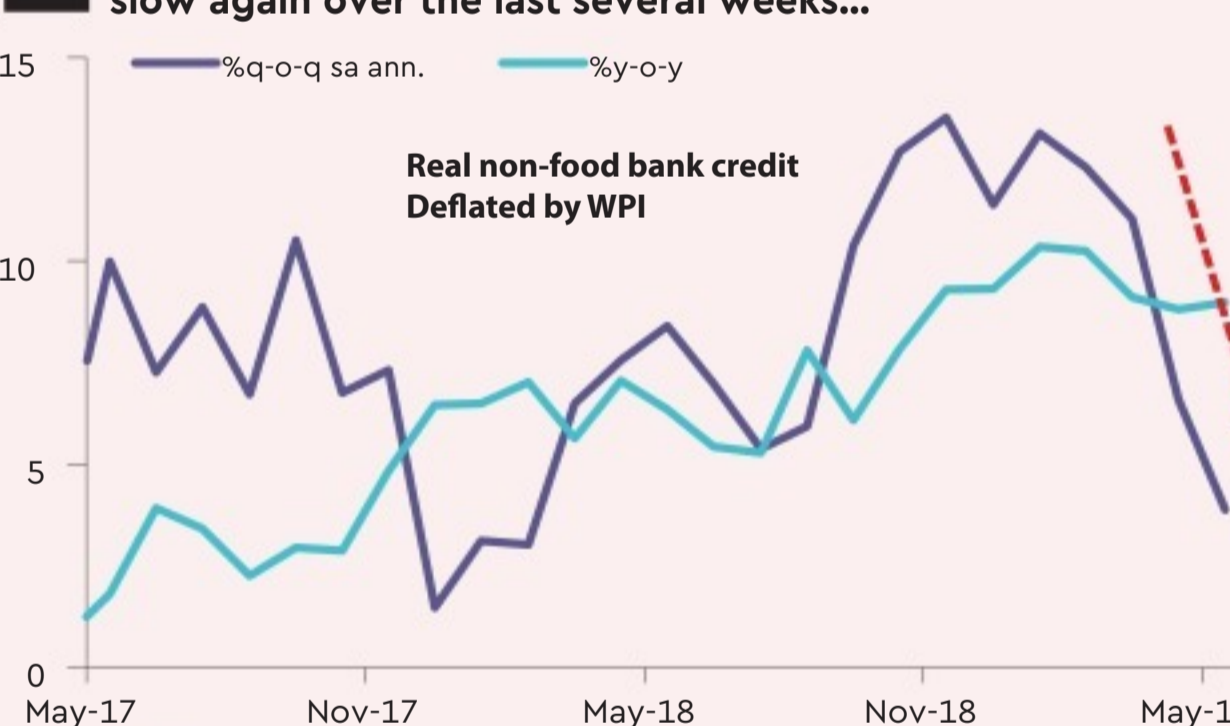


**1 NBFC credit has slowed, but bank credit picked up in the year ending March 2019**

% y-o-y Bank (non-food) credit NBFC credit (RHS)

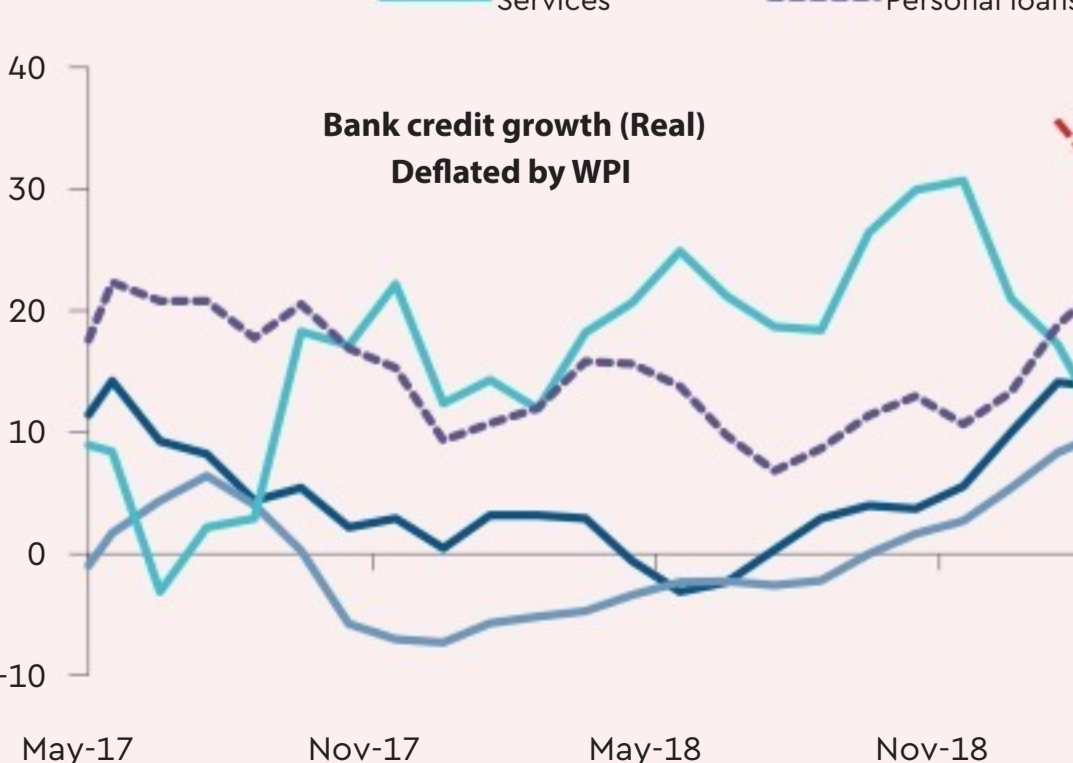


**2 Bank credit has begun to slow again over the last several weeks...**

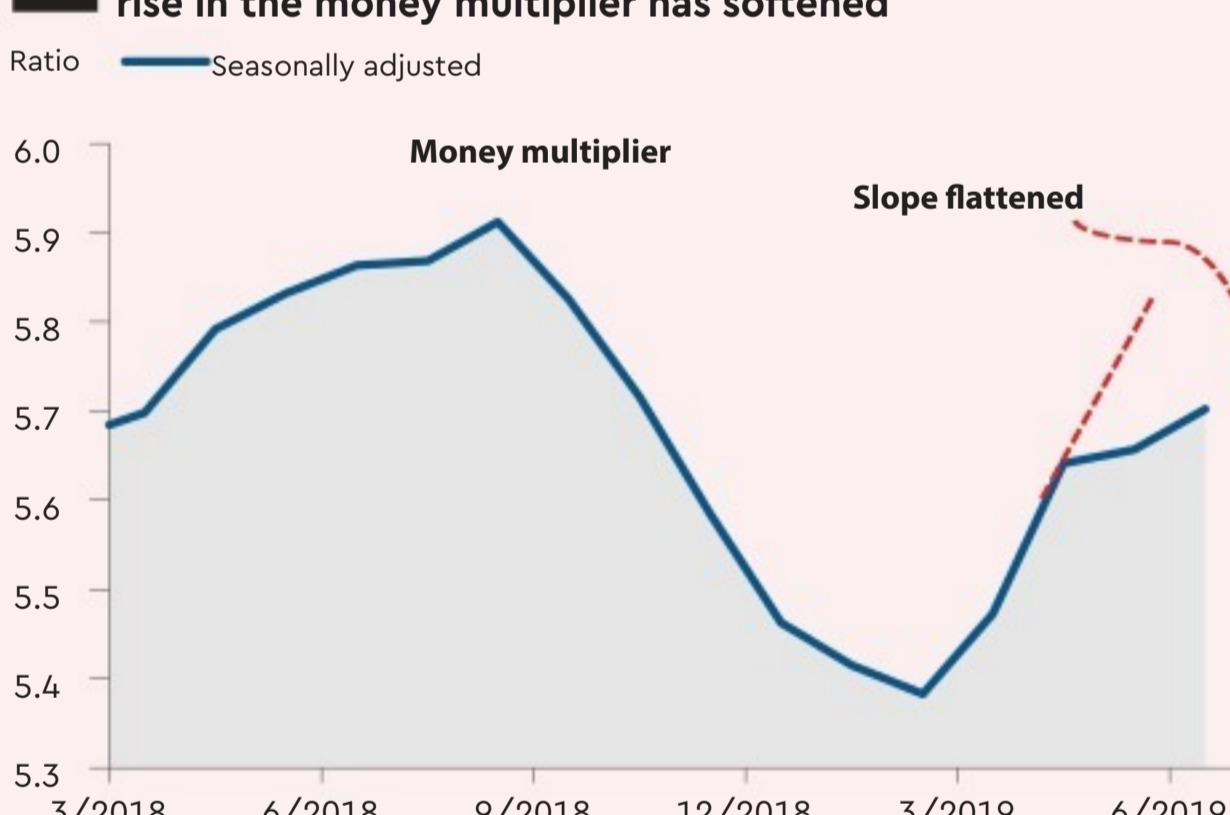


**3 ...and the slowdown is across sectors**

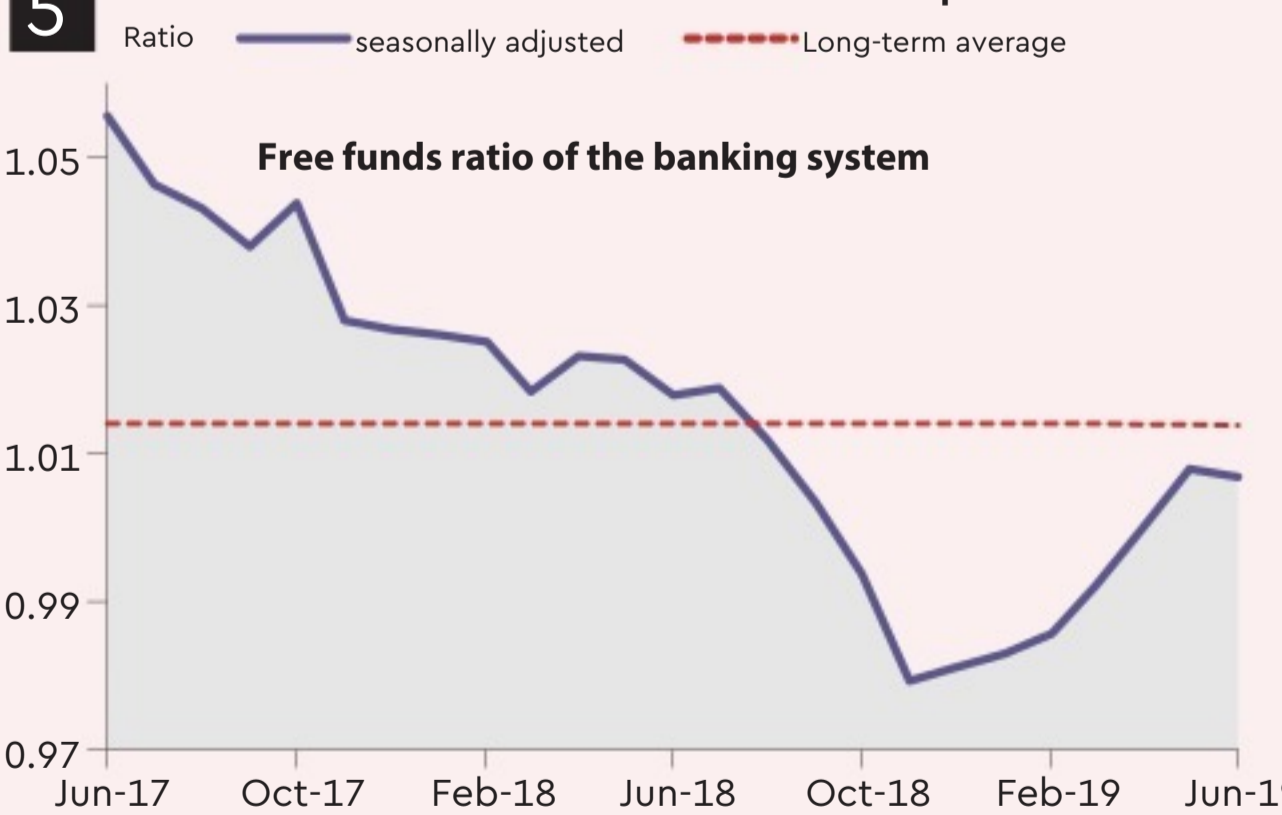
% q-o-q sa ann. Agriculture Industry Services Personal loans



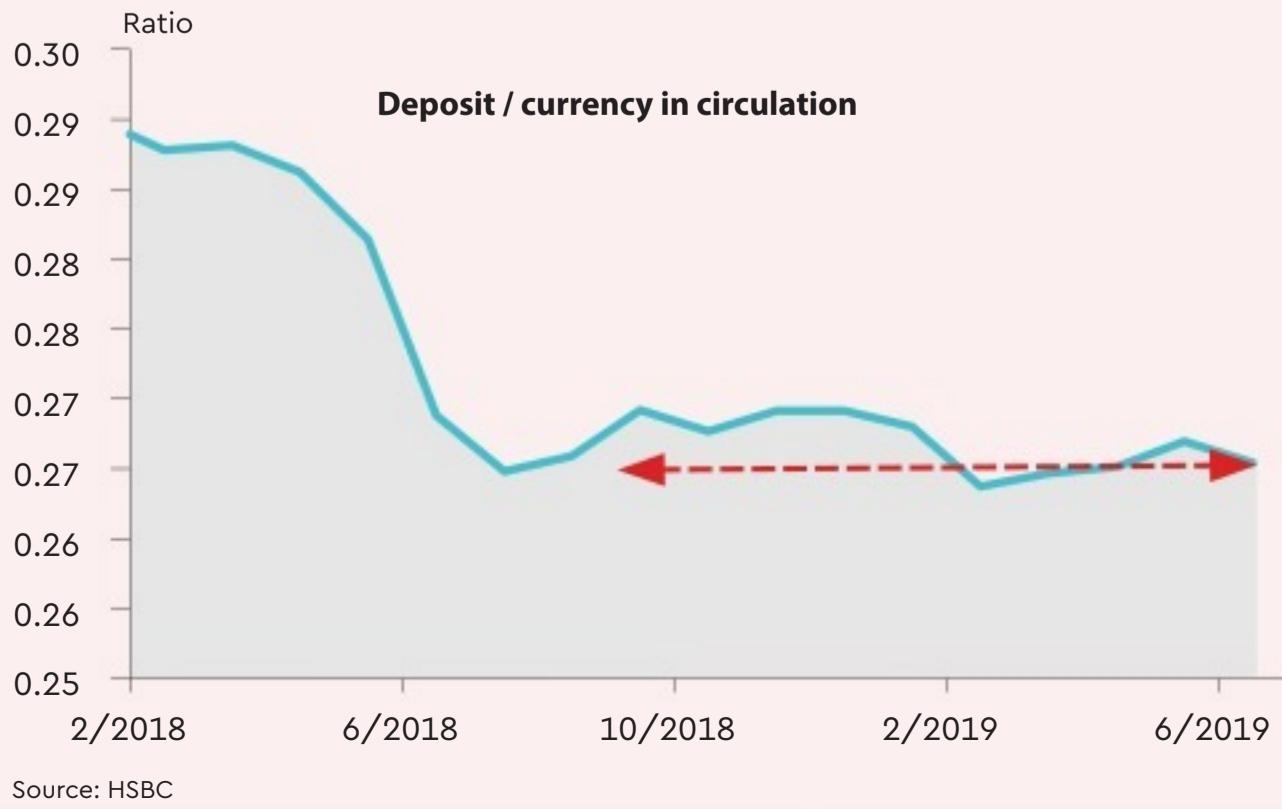
**4 After rising for a few months, the rise in the money multiplier has softened**



**5 Free funds available at banks have ticked up...**



**6 ...and the deposit-to-currency ratio within M3 has stopped falling**



Source: HSBC

# 13 BODY & MIND

## SHORT COURSE

### [0-20 YEARS]

#### Living near oil, gas wells tied to heart defects in babies

**RESEARCHERS WRITING** in *Environment International* reported on 3,324 infants born in Colorado from 2005 to 2011, comparing 536 babies with heart defects to 2,860 controls matched for sex, maternal smoking, race and ethnicity. They correlated maternal addresses with locations of oil and gas wells and estimated intensity of maternal exposure (drilling, well completion, production) from three months prior to conception through the second month of pregnancy. Compared to the one third with the lowest intensity of exposure, the one third with the highest were 70 per cent more likely to have a baby with a heart defect. The association was more prominent in rural than urban areas, perhaps because other sources of pollution in cities may mask potential harms from drilling sites. The study is observational. Still, there are plausible reasons for the association. "The greatest suspect is hazardous air pollutants emitted during production of oil and gas," said lead author, Lisa M McKenzie, assistant research professor at the Colorado School of Public Health. **NYT**

### [20-50 YEARS]

#### An apple carries about 100 million bacteria: Study

**BESIDES CONTAINING** fibre and vitamins, an apple carries about 100 million bacteria, and whether these microbes are good or bad for health may depend on how the fruit was grown, according to a study. The study, published in *Frontiers in Microbiology*, shows that organic apples harbour a more diverse and balanced bacterial community — which could make them healthier and tastier than conventional apples. "The bacteria, fungi and viruses in our food transiently colonise our gut," said Professor Gabriele Berg, of Graz University of Technology, Austria. "Cooking kills most of these, so raw fruit and vegetables are particularly important sources of gut microbes," Berg said. To help us choose our colonic colonists wisely, the team analysed the microbiome of one of the world's favourite fruits: the apple. "Freshly harvested, organically managed apples harbour a significantly more diverse, more even and distinct bacterial community, compared to conventional ones," said Berg. **PTI**

### [50+ YEARS]

#### Vitamin A intake linked to lower skin cancer risk: Study

**INTAKE OF vitamin A** may be associated with a lower risk of a common type of skin cancer, a study claims. The study of about 125,000 Americans found that people with the highest intake of vitamin A lowered their risk of squamous cell skin cancer by around 15 per cent. Most of the vitamin A they consumed came from foods, according to the study published in *JAMA Dermatology*. "These findings just add another reason to have a healthy diet with fruits and vegetables. Vitamin A from plant sources is safe," said Eunyoung Cho, associate professor at Brown University in the US. Sources of vitamin A include sweet potato, cantaloupe, carrots, black-eyed peas, broccoli, spinach, fish and meat. **PTI**



Gracia Lam/NYT

## For a torn ligament, considering repair rather than replacement

Repair may be especially helpful for children, who are more likely than older patients to reinjure a reconstructed anterior cruciate ligament, a pioneer of the surgery says

JANE EBRODY

MY SON Erik, then 23, was playing basketball when an opponent stepped on his foot and the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee ruptured with an audible pop. This critically important ligament, best known as the ACL, is a ropelike structure that connects the femur (thigh bone) to the tibia (shin bone), stabilising the knee joint. A torn ACL is an all-too-common injury that typically results in complex surgery and prolonged rehabilitation. It can spell the demise of a promising athletic career and limit an amateur's ability or willingness to participate in sports like tennis, basketball, soccer, football, skiing and gymnastics that involve quick twists and turns or pounding stress on the knee.

But Erik was lucky. His ACL tore about a quarter of the way down the ligament, and the orthopaedic surgeon he consulted immediately after the injury was a maverick decades ahead of his time. Ignoring longstanding professional practice that still calls for removing and reconstructing the torn ligament with a tendon from elsewhere in the leg, Erik's surgeon simply stapled the longer piece of the torn ACL to his femur.

Twenty-seven years and countless hours of tennis and basketball later, Erik's repaired knee is still intact, stable and pain-free. He recently learned that, despite continuing orthopaedic orthodoxy that insists on reconstruction, many others with a torn ACL — perhaps as many as 40 per cent with this injury — could benefit from a modern version of the simplified procedure and more rapid recovery Erik experienced.

One of the pioneers in modernising simpler ACL surgery is Dr Gregory S DiFelice, who has done ACL repairs, instead of reconstructions, on about 250 patients during the last decade at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. DiFelice maintains

that repair rather than reconstruction is especially helpful for children 18 and younger who are more likely than older patients to reinjure a reconstructed ACL. Overall, he said in an interview, the risk of reinjury with the repair method has been no greater than that following reconstruction.

Reconstruction involves removing the torn ligament and replacing it with a graft — a tendon surgically removed from the patient's hamstring, quadriceps or kneecap, or sometimes taken from a cadaver — and attaching it with screws or buttons through tunnels drilled into the femur and tibia. As it heals, the grafted tendon develops scar tissue that results in a firm, reliable knee joint with an overall failure rate of about 5 or 10 per cent.

But DiFelice said that when the damaged ACL is removed, the patient loses the nerve endings within it that send signals to the brain about what the knee is doing. Also, range of motion may be compromised, and during the lengthy recovery that can take six to eight months or longer for the graft to be strong, thigh muscles atrophy and must be rebuilt before the patient can safely return to demanding activity.

Thus, DiFelice said he wants to encourage other practitioners and their patients to pursue the lesser surgery and shorter rehab whenever circumstances permit, especially when the full length of the ACL tears directly off the bone. However, he explained that even when the torn ligament is not quite long enough to reach the bone, he's developed an augmentation procedure to add a

small strut to make it reach. Using this method, he said, he now has to resort to the standard reconstruction surgery for less than a third of the patients he sees.

There are at least two important caveats to this story:

1) Unlike the introduction of new prescription drugs, new surgical procedures are not subject to government approval and typically are not tested in controlled clinical trials, at least not until they have been used for years. So patients must rely on what surgeons tell them about the effectiveness of their procedures, supplemented perhaps by reports from patients.

2) Training and practice are required before a surgeon attempts what DiFelice does, and thus far there are not many already adept at the technique. Changes in medical practice can sometimes proceed at a glacial pace, and it may be up to patients to pressure doctors to depart from accepted procedures. Also, it may require pressure on medical insurers to cover the costs of a new operation.

Another surgeon in the New York area now doing ACL repairs in lieu of reconstruction is Dr Howard J Luks, at Westchester Medical Center. He reports that the loss of nerve connections to the brain following ACL reconstruction may explain why such knees sometimes feel unstable.

However, Luks emphasised that "current repair techniques only allow us to consider tears which occur high in the ACL near the femur insertion" and that "the tear can-

not be too old. If the tear is old, then the ligament will degenerate, and it may not be able to be brought back to the part of the bone it needs to be repaired to".

Keep in mind, too, that there are risks associated with any surgery, including infection, stiffness, pain, blood clots and with the ACL, ligament failure. For children who are still growing, there is a risk of damaging growth plates during the surgery.

Those with an ACL injury should also know that surgery is not their only option. My brother, in his 50s when he tore his ACL while skiing, opted not to have surgery. Instead he did extensive physical therapy, and by wearing a leg brace for added support, was able to ski and play tennis despite his damaged ligament.

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons suggests that non-surgical management may be appropriate for those with partial tears and no symptoms of instability; those with complete tears without instability during low-demand sports who are willing to give up high-demand sports; people who do only light manual work or are sedentary; and children whose growth plates are still open.

The academy says that a person's activity level, not older age, should be a considered when deciding on surgery. "Active adult patients involved in sports or jobs that require pivoting, turning or hard-cutting as well as heavy manual work are encouraged to consider surgical treatment", including older patients once excluded from surgical consideration, the academy wrote.

Whether repair or reconstruction is done, postoperative physical therapy starting right after the operation is vital to a successful outcome. The academy cautions that patients should return to sports only after pain and swelling are gone and full range of motion, muscle strength, endurance and leg function are restored. **NYT**



**Whether repair or reconstruction is done, postoperative physical therapy starting right after the operation is vital to a successful outcome**

## DIET DIARY

### It's time to become sugar wise

Not all sugars are equal, so knowing the properties of each is key to making prudent choices



BY ISHI KHOSLA

UNTIL ABOUT two decades ago, becoming 'sugar wise' was only for diabetics. But now it has become a red flag for everyone, including our children. Going zero sugar is a popular trend as sugar as become the new tobacco. But are all sugars the same and do we treat them equal?

The answer is no and it would be helpful to know one from the other to make prudent choices. The sweet tooth needs to be tamed for sure, but a lifelong ban is unlikely to sustain and may be unwarranted.

**WHITE SUGAR:** White sugar, which is called sucrose in chemical nomenclature, is the most commonly produced sugar made from heating sugarcane juice using a Double Sulphitation process. It is rather white in colour and the most common form of sugar consumed.

**REFINED SUGAR:** It is the purest and most refined form of sugar. It is sulphurless as it does not go through sulphurisation during processing. The ultra white and shiny sugar is devoid of any minerals and uses phosphoric acid to get the desired properties. Its use has increased in the last few years.

**RAW SUGAR:** It is a less pure form of sugar, like brown sugar, and produced in India as a precursor to refined sugar and is mostly sulphurless. It is not easily available to consumers as it is used by industry or exported.

**MOLASSES:** Cane molasses is an important by-product in the manufacture of cane sugar. It is dark-coloured, viscous and syrupy. In India, molasses is obtained during the production of raw sugar which does not involve sulphurisation. This means our molasses contains no sulphur. It also is rich in magnesium, zinc, potassium, iron, calcium and potassium.

**GUR:** Gur is prepared by heating clarified juice of sugarcane. It is generally prepared in the form of solid lumps that are golden yellow to light brown in colour. Gur contains minerals and antioxidants like manganese, magnesium, chromium, iron and zinc. It is also sulphurless. Shakkari is a powdered version of gur and may be slightly more refined to lighten colour.

**MISRI AND BURA SUGAR:** Misri and Bura are made from white sugar which has sulphur. Sucrose content of both Misri and Bura sugar is more or less similar to white sugar. Misri is in large crystalline form while Bura is powdery.

Author is a clinical nutritionist and founder of [www.theweightmonitor.com](http://www.theweightmonitor.com) and Whole Foods India

## Morning exercise may offer the most weight loss benefits

GRETCHEN REYNOLDS

PEOPLE WHO exercise in the morning seem to lose more weight than people completing the same workouts later in the day, according to a new study of workouts and waistlines. The findings help shed light on the vexing issue of why some people shed considerable weight with exercise and others almost none, and the study adds to the growing body of science suggesting that the timing of various activities, including exercise, could affect how those activities affect us.

The relationship between exercise and body weight is somewhat befuddling. Multiple past studies show that a majority of people who take up exercise to lose weight drop fewer pounds than would be expected, given how many calories they are burning during their workouts. Some gain weight.

But a few respond quite well, shedding

pound after pound with the same exercise regimen that prompts others to add inches.

This variability interests and puzzles Erik Willis, a data analyst with Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at the University of North Carolina. For almost a decade, he and colleagues at the University of Kansas, University of Colorado Denver and other institutions have overseen Midwest Exercise Trial 2, an extensive examination of how regular, supervised exercise influences body weight.

In that study, about 100 overweight, previously inactive young men and women worked out five times a week at a physiology lab, jogging or otherwise sweating until they had burned up to 600 calories per session. After 10 months of this regimen, almost everyone had dropped pounds. But the extent of their losses fluctuated wildly, even though everyone was doing the same, supervised workouts.

When, for a 2015 study, the researchers tried to tease out what had distinguished the

biggest losers from those who had lost less, they turned up surprisingly few differences. In line with other recent studies, they found that some participants, especially men, had begun eating more than before the study, but only by about 100 calories or so a day.

Flummoxed, Willis and one of his collaborators, Seth Creasy, a professor of exercise physiology at the University of Colorado Denver's Anschutz campus, started brainstorming other possible, perhaps unexpected contributors to the enormous variability to weight loss.

They hit upon activity timing. The science of chronobiology, which studies the ways in which when we do something alters how our bodies respond, is of great interest now. Many recent studies have looked at how meal timing, for instance, affects weight control, including whether exercising before or after breakfast matters. But far less has been known about whether the timing of exercise, by itself, influences whether people lose



Multiple past studies show that majority of people who take up exercise to lose weight drop fewer pounds than would be expected

weight with workouts.

So, for the new study, published in July in *The International Journal of Obesity*, Willis and his colleagues sifted through their data again, this time looking at when people in the Midwest trial had shown up at the university lab.

In that study, participants could visit the gym whenever they wished between 7 am and 7 pm, signing in each time, so researchers had plenty of precise information about their schedules. The scientists also had tracked everyone's calorie intakes and daily movement habits throughout the 10 months, using activity trackers and liquid energy tracers. They knew, too, whether and by how much people's weights had changed.

Now, they checked weight change against exercise schedules and quickly noticed a consistent pattern. Those people who usually worked out before noon had lost more weight, on average, than the men and women who typically exercised after 3 pm (For unknown reasons, very few people went to the gym between noon and 3.)

The researchers uncovered a few other, possibly relevant differences between the morning and late-day exercisers. The early-exercise group tended to be slightly more active throughout the day, taking more steps in total than those who worked out later. They also ate

a bit less, although the difference amounted to barely 100 calories per day on average. Over all, such differences were barely discernible.

Yet, they may cumulatively have contributed to the striking differences in how many pounds people lost, Willis says.

Of course, this study was not large or designed from the start to delve into the chronobiology of exercise and weight. The researchers had not randomly assigned people to work out at particular times, so the links between exercise timing and weight loss they saw now in their re-analysis could be odd accidents related to individual participants' preferences and schedules with little relevance for the rest of us.

Still, the statistical associations were strong, Willis says. "Based on this data, I would say that the timing of exercise might — just might — play a role" in whether and to what extent people drop pounds with exercise, he says.

But he also points out that most of those who worked out later in the day did lose weight, even if not as much as the larkish exercisers, and almost certainly became healthier.

"I would not want anyone to think that it's not worth exercising if you can't do it first thing in the morning," he says. "Any exercise, at any time of day, is going to be better than none."

NYT



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# The name is dollar bond

Government's proposal is the right way forward but it's an idea whose time has yet to come



DUVVURI SUBBARAO

## IT'S THE SLOWDOWN

Government should use its political capital to push through difficult reforms, instead of tightening CSR norms

ON TUESDAY, PARLIAMENT passed amendments to the Companies Act to tighten the norms pertaining to corporate social responsibility (CSR). Failure to comply with these new norms — for an activity that should ideally be voluntary — will not only attract fines but could also lead to imprisonment. Provisions such as these, which pave the way for the exercise of greater bureaucratic discretion, are unlikely to go down well with India Inc. More disquietingly, rather than revive animal spirits, these moves, which go against this government's stated belief in minimum government, will only further dampen sentiment, and distract even more from the pressing need to address the slowdown in economic activity.

Multiple indicators suggest that, despite various initiatives of the government, the Indian economy is the midst of a structural slowdown. With income growth slowing down, households have been dipping into savings and borrowing to finance their consumption. This is unsustainable. As it is, demand in both rural and urban areas is falling, as most high frequency indicators such as car and two-wheeler sales suggest. In such a situation, the temptation to squeeze the rich for short-term revenue considerations should have been avoided. Exports continue to remain subdued and are unlikely to perk up as global growth and trade are expected to moderate. The corporate sector, which is in the midst of deleveraging, is unlikely to ramp up investments quickly. The earnings season so far has been lacklustre. The issues in the NBFC segment are yet to be contained. The government's tax revenues in the first quarter of the current financial year provide a clear indication of how deep the slowdown is. Growth forecasts for the current financial year are already being pared down.

At this juncture, a business as usual approach will not suffice. With tax revenues growing at less than nominal GDP, the space for counter cyclical policy seems to be exhausted. Instead, the government may end up cutting its expenditure. Monetary policy has little capacity to reverse this decline in growth in the short term. With the limits of state-led growth being realised, it underscores the need to carry out deeper structural reforms. The hard-won political capital is better spent on pushing through contentious but necessary factor market reforms rather than expending it on misguided policies such as tightening CSR norms. An ambitious reform agenda is needed to create conditions conducive for a revival of private demand, investments and exports. Failure to course correct will undoubtedly dampen the hopes of achieving the \$5 trillion target.

THE FINANCE MINISTER'S budget announcement that out of its total borrowing requirement, the government will raise a modest amount in foreign currency in foreign markets has become quite contentious with many critics panning the decision as needless adventurism. It's not as if the government does not borrow from foreign parties; foreign portfolio investors are allowed, albeit within some limits, to buy the government's onshore rupee bonds. The difference now will be that the bonds will be offshore, denominated in hard currencies, and the government, rather than the investor, will bear the exchange risk.

For a country that has often showed off its abstinence from sovereign foreign currency exposure, even under great temptation, as a badge of honour, this is a surprising move. It has triggered two broad questions. Why this foray into uncharted waters? And why now?

The budget proposal responds to these questions in typically parsimonious language. The statement claims that at 5 per cent, the ratio of India's external debt to GDP is among the lowest in the world, thereby implying that the government can raise cheap money by tapping opportunistically into the global savings glut at a time when interest rates are at historic lows.

The other rationale advanced by the government is that by moving a part of its borrowing offshore, it will vacate space in the domestic capital market for corporates and thereby stimulate much needed private investment. This could have been a substantive motivation. An egregious consequence of our fiscal responsibility law has been for the government to keep its on-budget borrowing within the prescribed limits by pushing a significant amount of borrowing off-budget. Indeed, India's total public sector borrowing today, on and off budget, not only gobbles up the entire financial savings of households but also eats into corporate sav-

ings. The government's intent, perhaps, is to repair this damage.

It's not as if the proposal is outrageous, as painted by some critics. From a purely objective point of view, a persuasive case can be made for the dollar bonds. By far the biggest benefit will be the intangible impact of the government signalling its confidence about opening up the economy. For a country that has an unsavoury reputation of being excessively cautious in liberalising its external sector, the positive externalities of this unexpectedly bold decision can be significant. We will attract not just larger foreign portfolio flows but, in time, also larger foreign direct investment.

It is true, as the critics have argued, that the cost of borrowing in external markets will not be any cheaper than borrowing in rupees in the domestic market. The lower coupon rate will be offset by the cost of hedging against the foreign exchange risk. But if we view this not just from the narrow perspective of the government but from the larger perspective of the overall economy, there will in fact be cost savings. This is because the sovereign will command a lower interest rate than any other entity. If the proposed foreign borrowing just means the government displacing external commercial borrowing within the same overall debt ceiling, there will be net welfare gains for the economy.

The policy shift will also pave the way for Indian bonds entering global indices which will draw in index-tracking funds and reduce yields overall. Further, a dollar bond will enable India's risk premium to be more accurately estimated, potentially leading to a rating upgrade.

As against these putative benefits, there are formidable concerns. The biggest fear is that this adventurism will make India hostage to the wild swings of global sentiment. Investors are, after all, fair weather friends;

they lend liberally when the going is good, but swiftly back out at the slightest hint of trouble, exposing the country to volatile exchange rates and ruthless market turmoil. For a country that had a devastating external payments crisis in 1991 and came close to another one during the taper tantrums of 2013, these are dire warnings.

Critics have also contended that issuing debt in foreign currencies is a route followed by countries which are unable to issue debt in their own currency. India is certainly not in that category. If the idea is to attract more foreign inflows, it could be done by raising the ceiling for foreigners into onshore rupee bonds.

Moreover, the proposed dollar bonds may not raise overall foreign funding. Many investors who are now buying rupee bonds in the domestic market will happily pass on the currency risk to the government and switch to dollar bonds in the external market.

By far the biggest and possibly clinching argument against moving forward is the peril of the "original sin" which has brought many emerging markets to grief. Experience shows that governments start off believing that they will remain prudent, open their doors wider, and soon become so addicted to foreign money they wouldn't stop until a crisis hits them. To believe that markets can discipline governments is a stretch. The stories of Argentina and Turkey are telling examples.

There is no guarantee that India will not succumb to this temptation. Given our still fragile fiscal and financial sector situation, the costs of irresponsibility can be intolerably heavy. The government's proposal is the right way forward but it's an idea whose time has yet to come.

The writer is a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India

## HOMELESS IN ASSAM

The battle over NRC data pits government against Supreme Court, could open new faultlines

THE NATIONAL REGISTER for Citizens (NRC) process in Assam seems to be spinning out of control with the state government refusing to toe the line set by the Supreme Court. On Thursday, a senior BJP minister in the Assam government, Chandra Mohan Patowary, revealed the district-wise break-up of the NRC inclusion and exclusion data (from the draft report published in July last year). The Court had instructed the NRC coordinator, Prateek Hajela, to submit this sensitive data in a sealed cover. The minister's act is in defiance of the spirit of the Court order, therefore, and it may trigger new divides in the state. The move comes in the backdrop of the Court refusing to entertain the government's plea for a 20 per cent re-verification of the data in districts bordering Bangladesh. The Court also noted that Hajela had submitted that NRC officials re-verified 27 per cent of the data when it adjudicated on the citizenship claims.

The intent behind the state government's move to reveal the NRC data at this juncture is, clearly, political. The BJP government in Assam considers the NRC an instrument to isolate those who it sees as people who came from Bangladesh after March, 1971. It has been argued that districts bordering Bangladesh are prone to high levels of illegal immigration. However, the NRC has altered the picture and threatens to subvert the narrative on illegal migration. According to the figures revealed by Patowary in the state assembly, maximum exclusion from the NRC has been reported from districts not on the border but in Hojai and Darrang in central Assam. And, ironically, a large percentage of the people who have failed to prove their citizenship claims are members of indigenous tribes and Bengali-speaking Hindus. The anachronism is hardly surprising since the sort of documentation demanded of people by the NRC is not readily available or easy to produce, especially in non-urban and tribal areas with low penetration of the government. The government is apprehensive that the exclusions may trigger a backlash. It should have anticipated this situation since these concerns were flagged by civil society groups at the very outset.

Both the Supreme Court and the government need to be sensitive to the enormous impact the NRC will have on the people. An estimated four million persons may lose citizenship rights and would be forced to relocate to camps as non-citizens or doubtful voters. The enormity of the crisis on hand seems to have escaped the authorities — the SC frames the NRC as a legalistic exercise while the government views it through an ideological lens. Neither approach is helpful to resolving the human tragedy unfolding in Assam.

## CONSTITUTION GIRL

The video of a Russian teenager laying down the law to riot police has gone viral. For Putin, this isn't good news

VLADIMIR PUTIN MAY have shrugged off accusations that his enemies have been meeting their deaths in suspicious circumstances. And he had a good laugh at the expense of the international press when he was asked about Russia hacking the US election. But he may find it much harder to shake off the shadow of a 17-year-old Russian girl who knows her rights, has read the Russian Constitution and persistently read it out to Putin's riot police, who had been called out to quell a street protest in Moscow. Especially the part which guarantees the right to peaceful assembly.

Olga Misik, 17, joins the ranks of iconic young protesters of our times, who have been captured on film wherever government is tyrannical and protest is brutally repressed. The wave is presumed to have begun with flower power, when a young man was photographed sticking carnations into the rifle muzzles of military police during the March on the Pentagon in 1967, which called for an end to the Vietnam war. However, there were images from behind the Iron Curtain, too, of guns and bayonets versus flowers and babies. And the icon of 20th century protest is Tank Man, who halted heavy armour in Tiananmen Square simply by getting in the way.

Olga Misik is perhaps the first such protester who has spoken freely about her motives. The agitation objected to the banning of opposition politicians from forthcoming elections to the Moscow Duma, but she took a longer view — today, the Duma, tomorrow, a province. And she herself wanted to remind the police that the protesters were there "with peaceful purposes and without weapons." The Mahatma would have been delighted to learn of such a fearless pupil in Moscow.



KHALED AHMED

SOME RETIRED GENERALS regularly appearing on TV in Pakistan — the army chief is on record saying they are not briefed by the army — have been recommending the "mainstreaming" of religious elements, dubbed "terrorist" at the UN. They presume that the "mainstream" is "normal" and "harmless". Some mainstreaming was visible during the last election which brought Imran Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf to office. The "parties" fronting such madrassas, as the terrorist-declared Lashkar-e-Taiba, did rather well by cutting into the votebank of the rightwing Pakistan Muslim League, which lost the election and was pilloried for "corruption".

Notwithstanding the FATF ban on some madrassa-based non-state actors, the madrassa is powerful in Pakistan. Because of the decades of "jihad" in Afghanistan, they became well-funded because their graduates brought home "power" along with the money from "outside". One madrassa became so powerful that it took on the state, General Pervez Musharraf in fact. He took on the Lal Masjid madrassa of Islamabad which was visited often by "messengers" from the army of Osama bin Laden.

In 2007, after Lal Masjid attacked message parlours in Islamabad for being "un-Islamic", Musharraf decided to "correct" the madrassa, only to have his commandos killed by the "mujahideen". His Operation Silence destroyed the seminary, killed the brother of Maulana Abdul Aziz, the head of the madrassa, while the "Islamised" people of Islamabad disliked the Operation. The commando unit that carried out the operation was attacked by a suicide-bomber at its Haripur headquarters, killing 15 soldiers. Al Qaeda declared the foundation of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in response to Operation Silence.

## MADRASSA AS MAINSTREAM

Religious seminaries have made literacy toxic in Pakistan

Pakistan's basic education sector is broken. Azmat Abbas in his book, 'Madrassa Mirage: A Contemporary History of Islamic Schools in Pakistan' says the 3,03,446 schools that cater to 1.7 million children are taught by teachers who can hardly impart the kind of education the children coming from poor homes need. The teachers simply reinforce the religious content prescribed in the provinces. This is the 'mainstream' that Pakistan thinks is 'safe'.

The madrassa was actually "mainstream"; General Musharraf and his army were not. After nearly a decade, Musharraf went into exile while Maulana Abdul Aziz stayed put, amply rewarded by a Supreme Court compensatory verdict. In 2017, on the eve of the election that was to replace the government of Nawaz Sharif, Abdul Aziz threatened to observe the Martyrs' Day for "900 innocent girl seminarians" killed by Musharraf. Backed by the Taliban, he was the most powerful person in Pakistan. When Islamabad tried to talk "peace" with the Taliban, the latter chose Maulana Abdul Aziz and Imran Khan as their "vakils" (lawyers).

Azmat Abbas in his book, *Madrassa Mirage: A Contemporary History of Islamic Schools in Pakistan* says the 303,446 schools that cater to 1.7 million children are taught by teachers who can hardly impart the kind of education the children coming from poor homes need. The teachers simply reinforce the religious content prescribed in the provinces. This is the "mainstream" that Pakistan thinks is "safe".

According to Abbas, the madrassas are getting ready to "mainstream" Pakistan instead in the ways of extremist faith. After "mainstreaming" was suggested on TV, the madrassas responded by a remarkable proliferation. It is not easy to set up a functioning madrassa with facilities that state schools can only dream of. Abbas writes: "Recent statistics show that the number of madrassas was less than 14,000 in 2013-14. By the end of 2016, however, they increased to 32,272, marking a growth of over 50 per cent."

One can't ignore the fact that most of the organisations declared terrorist abroad or seen as violent by Pakistanis are madrassa-based. This pattern has grown out of the

practice of using "non-state actors" by the state. "Given the information available," Abbas argues, "most of the militant sectarian and jihadi organisations either originated at madarassas or were established by those who studied at Islamic religious schools. For instance, Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah-e-Jafaria was formed by Mufti Jafar Hussain, a student of Madaris in Lucknow and Hauza Imam-e-Najaf, Iraq; Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, a student of Darul Ulum Eidgah Kabirwala, established the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan; Maulana Masood Azhar, a student of Jamia Ulum Al-Islamia, Banuri Town, Karachi, established the Jaish-e-Muhammad; Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, a graduate of Jamia Ulum Al-Islamia, Banuri Town, Karachi, founded Harkatul Mujahideen, and later Harkat-e-Jihad-e-Islami and so on."

In Pakistan, early education is heavily ideological. Scholars like Javed Ahmed Ghamidi who recommend that early education be non-ideological can no longer live in the country. Literacy, therefore, has become toxic, broken in part only if you send your children to an English-medium school. But under the current government, this stream of education is under threat. English-medium schools are seen as creating "two nations" instead of the "single" one desired by their reading of the constitution. A Supreme Court chief justice, now thankfully retired, took punitive action against them — before going to England to see his son being educated in a university which is "English-medium".

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan



## AUGUST 3, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

VAJPAYEE ON RSS ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE'S open criticism of the role of the RSS has prompted some rethinking in the socialist camp and brightened the prospects of George Fernandes' break-away group rejoining the Janata Party. In a letter to Vajpayee, Fernandes wrote: "Just a line to say that I appreciated your article in 'The Indian Express' today. The question is now to carry to the logical end the issues you have raised in the article, particularly on the RSS and its role. I am willing to sit with you and work out a solution, if you think it is possible to do it." In his article, Vajpayee wrote: "The RSS, claiming to be a social and cultural organisation, should have taken greater pains

to demonstrate that they did not seek a political role." Vajpayee had said it was possible that some people felt genuinely apprehensive about the RSS. Calling for a "clear enunciation by the RSS that by 'Hindu Rashtra' it means the Indian nation, which includes non-Hindus as members," Vajpayee said the RSS should, alternatively function "only as a Hindu religious-cum-social cultural organisation".

JUSTICE KHANNA QUILTS UNION LAW MINISTER Justice H R Khanna resigned from the Cabinet. In his resignation letter to Prime Minister Charan Singh, Khanna is believed to have stated that he is

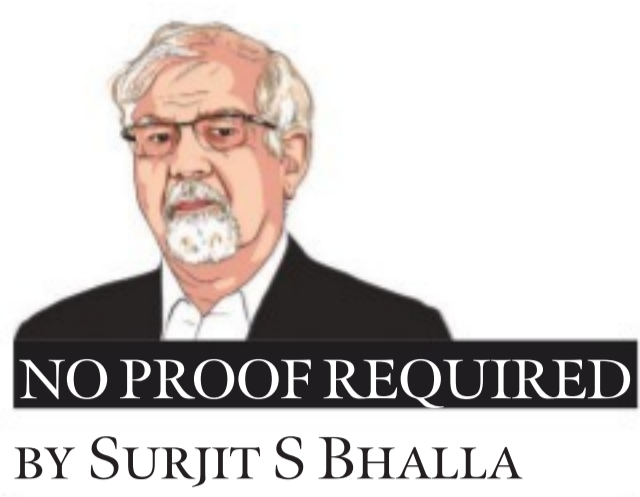
not cut out for politics. Many of Khanna's friends in the bench and the bar are believed to have told him that they were surprised to see him in the government, which was in the saddle because of Mrs Gandhi's support.

HIDAYATULLAH FOR VP POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE agreed to adopt former Chief Justice of India, M Hidayatullah, as candidate for vice-presidency. Hidayatullah, 74, has been leading a retired life after serving the judiciary. Hidayatullah served a brief stint as Acting President after then vice-president V V Giri resigned from the post to contest for presidency in 1969 following Zakir Hussain's death.

# 15 THE IDEAS PAGE

## Borrow abroad and profit

Cross-country evidence supports the conclusion that the sooner India engages in foreign currency borrowing, the quicker it can profit from this market imperfection



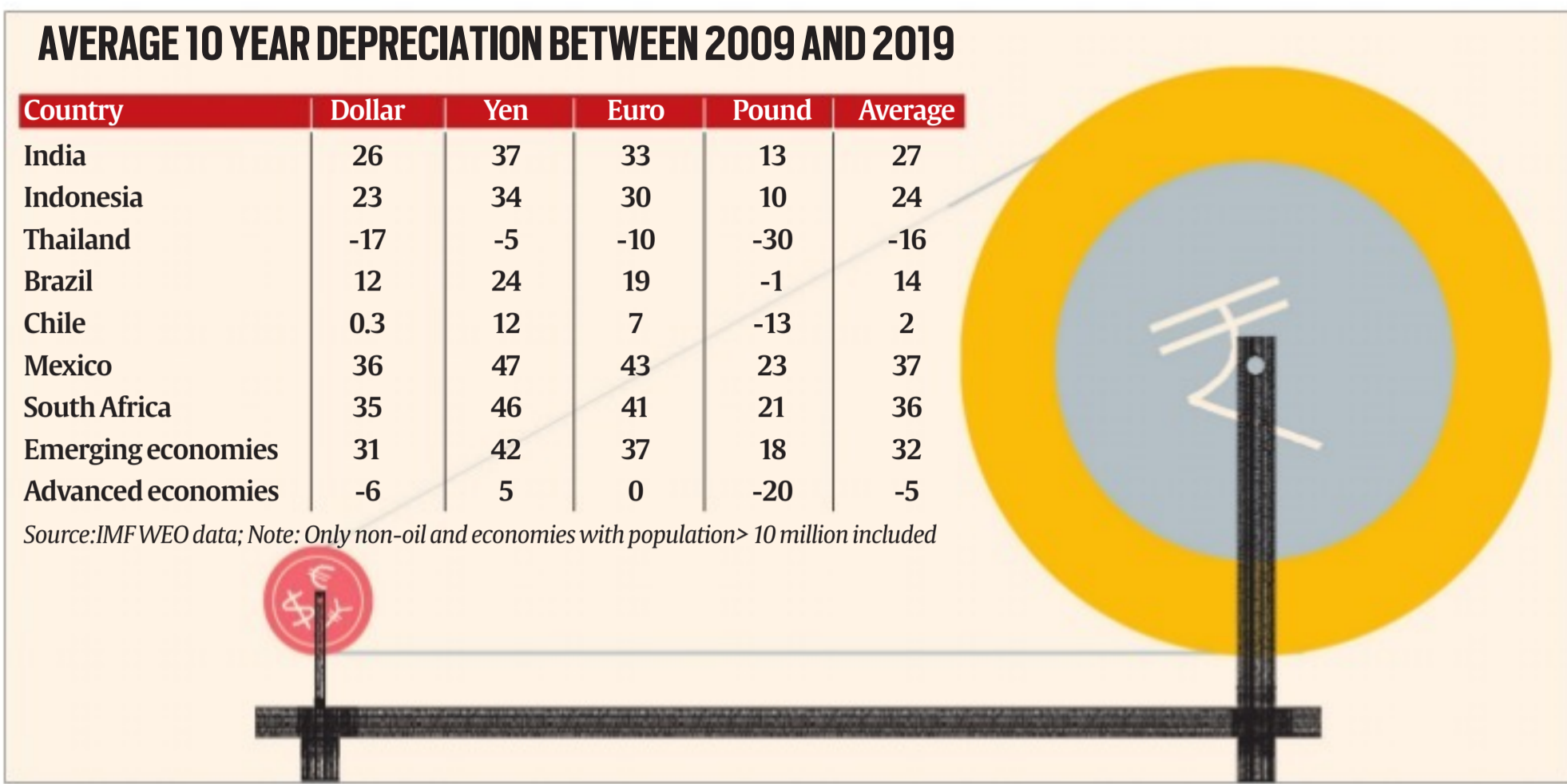
THE FINANCE MINISTER'S budget speech contained a new policy statement — GOI was planning to issue 10 year bonds denominated in foreign currency. This proposal has generated a controversy, unlike most others. Every budget has good, bad, and ugly components. And critics are free to choose and comment on what they like, or hate. There are very few, if any, analysts who believe that the income-tax proposals in Budget 2019 have any merit. Likewise, there are very few experts who believe that issuance of foreign currency bonds is a good idea. Indeed, the list of eminent experts who think it is an ugly idea is near endless.

Former RBI governor and distinguished economist Raghuram Rajan states the following in a recent *Times of India* article: "Foreign bankers often meet finance ministry officials, trying to persuade India to issue a foreign bond. In my experience, they usually started by saying that such borrowing would be cheaper because dollar or yen interest rates are lower than rupee interest rates. This argument is bogus — usually the lower dollar interest rate is offset in the longer run by higher principal repayments as the rupee depreciates against the dollar." He has been joined by my ex-PMEAC colleague and good friend Rathin Roy who went a step further and stated: "Show me one country after world war which has done a foreign currency sovereign bond and not paid dearly for it." Further: "I would pay very careful attention to what several governors of the Reserve Bank are saying, that these are sovereign liabilities in perpetuity. I think there are serious issues regarding loss of sovereignty, which need to be addressed. I do not think that the argument that it is cheaper is a good one, I think it doesn't even hold if you add hedging costs and I don't buy the simple argument that if something is cheaper, it is good." (*Business Standard*, July 23, 2019).

In addition, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) has stated that the issuance of foreign denominated bonds is anti-patriotic, that it would lead to a loss of sovereignty, and would lead to currency depreciation. To my knowledge, this is the first time esteemed economists and SJM are on the same side of an economic argument — can both be right, or are both wrong?

The only eminent person (known for his balanced views) to publicly favour a sovereign foreign bond (SFB) is former RBI governor Bimal Jalan who stated "At the moment we are in a fortunate position. Our debt to GDP ratio is not very high, exchange rate is stable, and foreign exchange reserves are high. So foreign borrowing, if its long term, which it would be, is not a problem." Former RBI governor YV Reddy had a more nuanced comment stating that if foreign bond issuance was accompanied by a move towards greater capital account convertibility then it may be worth pursuing.

The key issue in this debate, as nearly always, is empirical, and has to do with currency depreciation. Show me the money (evidence) and win the argument. Simple accounting math about foreign borrowings is as follows. All examples are with respect to dollar bor-



rowings, but the same set of arguments apply to borrowing in the other three currencies — yen, euro, and the British pound. A country pays a country premium for borrowing in dollars; currently the US 10-year bond is trading at 2 per cent and Indonesia just borrowed in June 2019 at around 3.6 per cent; at the time it borrowed, it paid close to a 1.5 per cent premium. A complex set of factors determine the country premium, but the magnitude of reserves and foreign currency debt are important attributes. About 40 per cent of Indonesia's debt is denominated in foreign currency; in India it is less than 5 per cent. India should be able to borrow at a somewhat lower premium than 150 bp, possibly 130bp.

India can borrow abroad in dollars at 3.3 per cent or borrow foreign money in rupees (a masala bond) at a 3 per cent higher premium, or at 6.3 per cent (the current government 10 year bond is trading at 6.35 per cent). The difference between 3.3 and 6.3 per cent is the depreciation premium that emerging countries pay.

This is what the market "demands" and it is unlikely that this premium has shifted too much for emerging markets over the last 20 years. Over a 10 year period, the 3 per cent annual depreciation assumption means an economy pays 35 per cent more with a masala bond than with an FCB. If the cumulative depreciation at the end of 10 years is more than 35 per cent, the borrowing country loses; if less, than the borrowing country gains. The entire argument against foreign bonds (except the patriotic one) is whether this depreciation has been (and is expected to be) more than 35 per cent over a 10-year period.

Data on 10 year currency depreciations are reported for several countries for the period 2009 to 2019. This assumes that each country started borrowing in 1999, one year after the East Asian crisis. Respected scholars (and policymakers) hark back to the Asian crisis for clues about what will happen to India's exchange rates over the next decade. Do these esteemed scholars recognise (let alone appreciate) that the rupee/dollar exchange rate was Rs 42 in 1998 (Asian crisis) and Rs 40 10 years later in 2007? This despite Indian inflation rates averaging 3 per cent higher, per year, than the USA during this period.

In the sample of countries chosen, I have included three countries from Latin America (Chile, Brazil, and Mexico) to satisfy the critics' assumption that if India were to borrow \$10 billion, or \$30 billion, even \$50 billion, we would face a Latin American crisis. Serious economists have invoked this "threat" in their

arguments, so it is prudent to account for it. Note that the period chosen is a fairly long one (20 years) and involves close to 90 countries. What do the results show? Unambiguously, that it pays for a country to borrow abroad. Let us take the case of India first. Against the US dollar, the average 10-year depreciation since 2009 for India (or average annual depreciation since 1999) is 26 per cent. Which means that India would have made a profit of close to 10 per cent for each 10-year bond that it floated.

Recall what Rajan said about this possibility. He called it bogus. The two worst-performers are Mexico and South Africa, and even these two economies break even. Even an average emerging economy makes a profit of 5 bp on every FCB bond it has floated over the last 20 years. This puts into question Rathin Roy's conclusion that every country has paid dearly for FCBs; empirically, the result is the opposite — since the East Asian crisis, most countries have profited handsomely. I don't know the veracity of his conclusion post WWII; maybe the few who borrowed abroad (particularly in Latin America) paid dearly between 1945 and 1998. But for each Latin American disaster, there is an Asian success story. So which continent does Roy (and others) believe that India is comparable too?

Indian inflation has moved structurally downward over the last three years and thankfully the post Patel-Acharya MPC realises this fact. However, in the six months prior to Das's first rate cut in early February 2019, inflation had averaged 3.7 per cent and the real repo rate had averaged 2.8 per cent (defined the RBI/MPC way of current repo rate minus two month earlier inflation). In the six months since (February 2019 to July 2019), two-month lagged inflation has averaged 110 bp lower at 2.6 per cent that is, despite 75 bp of repo rate cuts, the average real repo rate has moved higher to an average of 3.4 per cent, an increase of 60 bp.

All the empirical evidence (past and expected future) suggests that the finance minister's idea of floating FCB's is a terribly good idea — one whose time has definitely come. It will also help to significantly lower the real repo rate to respectable levels. No country, has grown at "trend" rates with a real repo rate around 3.4 per cent, not even 2.4 per cent and not even 2 per cent. So please MoF borrow abroad; and please RBI/MPC, smell the real rate before deciding on monetary policy.

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The writer is Contributing Editor, Indian Express. Views are personal

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The time is right to take up US President Donald Trump's offer of mediation between Pakistan and India, specifically focusing on Kashmir." — DAWN

## Two plus one

Imran-Trump talks in Washington have some significant messages for Delhi on Afghanistan and Kashmir. The dynamic has changed again



NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

THE GROUND BENEATH India-Pakistan relations has moved once again, and all it took was the coming together of two maverick celebrities-turned-heads of state in a distant capital jamming about Afghanistan and Kashmir.

Five months ago, India celebrated what Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP described in election speeches as a victory over Pakistan. Others more circumspect demurred from describing the IAF strike in Balakot, carried out after the Pulwama bombing, in victory-defeat terms. After all, India had lost one aircraft to Pakistani fire with the pilot captured; another aircraft with six IAF personnel plus a civilian on the ground to friendly fire; and could put up no hard evidence, at least in the public domain, to back the claim that the IAF airstrikes had killed terrorists in a Jaish-e-Mohammed training camp. Still, there was no denying that despite the nuclear overhang, India had found the space to carry out a conventional military response to a terrorist attack claimed by a Pakistan-based group.

The seeming international isolation of Pakistan at that time and the pressure on it to return the pilot captured when the IAF plane was downed, were seen as a success of PM Modi's diplomacy in the world. The UN designation of Jem head Masood Azhar was the icing on the cake. It all came together nicely for India then, not to speak of how it was milked for the election. Later, there was euphoria that Pakistan had been kept out of the guest list for the new government's inauguration. The FATF's threat to blacklist Pakistan by October was received in Delhi with a sense of vindication.

What India forgot, or ignored, was that, for the US, when it came to Pakistan, it was always going to be about Afghanistan. Pakistan is no longer looking isolated. Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Washington has shown that US need to engage with Pakistan on Afghanistan is greater than its need to isolate it. It has shown three other things — Delhi cannot push its own ties with Pakistan into a freezer and forget about them, and expect the world to forget about them too; two, with Trump ready to make deals with Pakistan, the government cannot be as gung-ho about the BJP's ideological projects in Kashmir as statements by senior ministers suggest; and three, it is Delhi that is looking isolated on Afghanistan.

Riding on its credentials as the facilitator of the Afghan peace talks, Pakistan looked very much at home in Washington. And Imran Khan, who was being exorcised by opponents back home for a below average one year in office, returned home on the anniversary of his election victory, as he said, not as a PM coming back from a visit to the US, but like a cricket captain coming home with the World Cup.

What did Pakistan get out of the visit? Nothing tangible yet — military aid that the US suspended in January 2018 remains sus-

pending; the \$125 million announced days after Imran Khan's visit is for end-use monitoring of Pakistan's F 16s and was likely unrelated to the visit.

But never since 2001 has Pakistan heard so much praise and gratitude from the US. For the first time in nearly two decades, here is a US President who has not asked Pakistan to "do more", and is focussed instead on how to "extricate ourselves" from that country. The Pakistan Army's key role in bringing the Taliban to the table has pushed to the far recesses of Trump's transactional mind his outbursts against "lying" "deceitful" Pakistan. In gratitude, he played Pakistan's song by offering to mediate on the Kashmir issue.

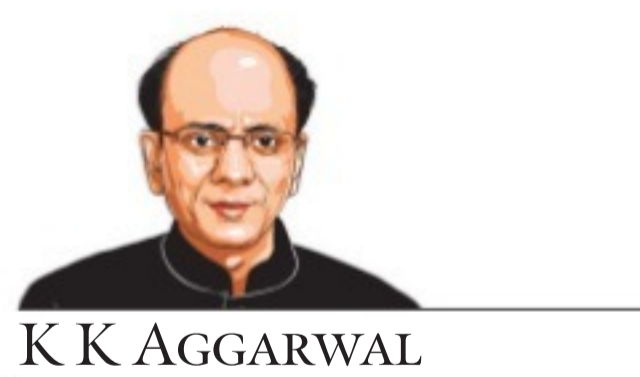
India dissed Trump's remark that PM Modi asked him to play the role of mediator in Kashmir as untrue, but that did not prevent the US President from making the same offer once again, a week later. There was another India reference at the Khan-Trump meeting, recorded in the transcript: "But we will be talking about India; a very big part of our conversation today. And I think maybe if we can help intercede and do whatever we have to do. But I think it's something that can be brought back together. And we'll also be talking about Afghanistan... we will be talking about India and Afghanistan very much so," President Trump said.

No joint statement was issued after the Imran-Trump meeting, which mostly means there was nothing spectacular to say. But while the Trump Administration may not have materially shifted its position on Pakistan, in the coming weeks and months expect Pakistan to milk Trump's change of heart for what it is worth before it changes again, a real possibility if the Rawalpindi lot fail to deliver on their commitments in Afghanistan — getting the Taliban to agree to a ceasefire, and to talk to the Afghan government. For starters, Pakistan must be eyeing the looming October deadline set by the FATF. The FATF is a US baby.

India has also just conceded, while dismissing Trump's offer of mediation on Kashmir and asserting that all outstanding issues with Pakistan will be settled bilaterally, that Kashmir is a bilateral issue. So, contrary to what the Modi government has maintained all along, there is something to be discussed with Pakistan on Kashmir. But if India and Pakistan cannot resolve Kashmir bilaterally, others are going to want to help them do that, especially if they have to step in from time to time to separate the two during fights. For now, Trump's repeated offers of mediation make it difficult, if not impossible, for the BJP to ram through its dream constitutional changes in J&K, even though the manner in which senior members of the government have been rattling the Kashmir cage indicates otherwise.

What the government should be obsessing about more than its ideological project in J&K right now, is how the Afghan deal in the making, in which Pakistan has emerged as the main player and India has no role to play, could impact the situation in Kashmir, and further, how to begin an engagement with Pakistan, if not outright dialogue, that would help Delhi extricate itself from a self-painted corner and prevent outsiders from rushing in with offers of help.

nirupama.subramanian@expressindia.com



K K AGGARWAL

## Losing the golden hour

What does it say about health care if even celebrities don't get critical first aid?

WILL WE GET timely healthcare when we need it is a question often asked by people in India. The answer, unfortunately, is no. Cardiac arrest revival needs to be done within four minutes, angioplasty in a heart attack needs to be conducted within 90 minutes and a road traffic accident victim needs to be provided on the spot first aid within 10 minutes and the victim's vital parameters should stabilise in an hour. Advanced ambulance care needs to reach the victim within four minutes. But even in Delhi, a patient cannot get such care.

The right to health and right to timely medical care is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. But are we getting timely medical care? The December 16, 2012 rape victim, for example, was transferred from Munirka to Safdarjung Hospital — a distance of 6.2 km allegedly covered in 45 minutes — without any help.

The then NDMC chairman, Imtiaz Khan, died on April 23, 1998, at his office in the building which housed the health department. Were advanced resuscitation measures administered to him?

Congress leader, Rajesh Pilot died in 2000 in a car accident in Dausa less than 100 km from Jaipur. He was in a coma when he was admitted to the Sawai Man Singh Hospital, Jaipur. The situation could have been different if he was carried in an advanced ACLS

ambulance? The golden hour was lost.

Former president, Giani Zail Singh, died in Chandigarh on December 25, 1994 after receiving multiple injuries in an accident on November 29 that year. The accident happened near Kiratpur Sahib in Ropar district. He was shifted to Chandigarh, 45-km away. Was he shifted in ACLS ambulance or provided a golden hour first aid in Ropar?

Former Delhi chief minister, Sahib Singh Varma, died on June 30, 2007, when his car collided with a truck on the Jaipur-Delhi highway (NH-8). He was taken to the Shahjapur Civil Hospital, 13 km away from the accident site. Obviously no ACLS care was available for so short a distance.

Gopinath Munde, then the Union Minister for Rural Development, met with an accident at Prithviraj Road-Tughlak Road roundabout in Delhi at 6 am on June 3, 2014. He was brought to the AIIMS by his driver and assistant. The doctors said that Munde was not breathing when he was brought. Why was he shifted to the hospital? The ambulance should have come to him. Did the ACLS ambulance reach the spot?

One report of the death of former president A P J Abdul Kalam quotes his secretary, Srijan Pal Singh. Singh apparently heard a long pause from the former president when he was two minutes into his speech at IIM-Shillong. Singh's account is a class descrip-

tion of an impending heart attack. Kalam's eye's were three-quarters closed as he collapsed, according to his former secretary. When there was a doctor at the site, why did the former president's secretary attempt to revive him?

Singh's recollection that Kalam's hands were clenched, his face was still and his eyes motionless, is a classic representation of cardiac arrest caused by ventricular fibrillation. As per Singh's statement, he was brought to the nearest hospital within five minutes of the cardiac arrest. There are three phases of cardiac arrest. The electrical phase comprises the first four to five minutes and requires immediate defibrillation. The hemodynamic phase lasts about four to 10 minutes following a sudden cardiac arrest (SCA). Patients in the hemodynamic phase benefit from excellent chest compressions to generate adequate cerebral and coronary perfusion and immediate defibrillation. The metabolic phase occurs following approximately 10 minutes of loss of pulse. Few patients who reach this phase survive.

In the first 10 minutes, there are high chances of revival using hands only CPR followed with DC electric shock.

A study in *The Lancet* has shown that about 15 per cent of patients who survived needed at least 30 minutes of resuscitation. Why was not advanced CPR given to Kalam

for the full period?

Former minister of state for external affairs, E Ahmed died on February 1, 2017. He suffered a cardiac problem while the President was addressing Parliament. There were over 30 doctors amongst the MPs at that time. No one was approached. He was shifted to Ram Manohar Lohia hospital, where he died. Why can't the President's speech be stopped for such emergencies?

Former Delhi CM, Sheila Dikshit, died on July 20, 2019 at the Escorts Heart Institute. She experienced breathlessness at her home in Nizamuddin and was shifted to Escorts in Sarita Vihar in a car — a distance of six km, which takes up to 24 minutes as per the Google map. She had a cardiac arrest on the way. Why was she not provided an ACLS ambulance at her home?

Amitabh Bachchan was saved because of timely local first aid. On August 2, 1982, on the sets of the film *Coolie*, he had a near-fatal accident and was shifted to nearby hospital. He was shifted to Mumbai later. The early treatment helped in saving his life.

We have a fundamental right to receive point of care advanced first aid within four minutes. But people in need don't always get it.

The writer is President Elect Confederation of Medical Associations of Asia and Oceania

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### ARCHAIC LAWS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Power not justice' (IE, August 1). Since criminal punishment for a civil wrong is against the basic principles of criminal jurisprudence, why has the dichotomy in Muslim personal law regarding polygamy not addressed? It is coercive to uphold archaic practices in the personal law. Criminalisation of talaq-e-biddat should be the first step towards a secular and a non-discriminatory uniform civil code.

Karan Dhawan via e-mail

### HOPE FOR CURE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Healthcare is ailing' (IE, August 2). The health sector has been ignored by successive governments. People have lots of hope from the Narendra Modi government as regards the health sector. One of the main reasons for the poor state of affairs in healthcare is the paucity of good hospitals for the poor. The medical profession has become akin to commercial business. Funds should be allocated for medical research.

Veena Shenoy, Thane

### FOOD UNITES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Eat, pray, love' (IE, August 2). The Unani describes food as god. Any food item is composed of ingredients which come from agricultural lands which have been worked upon by several workers. It is quite likely that all such

### LETTER OF THE WEEK

#### GETTING HOT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Cool Down' (IE, July 30). The editorial is smart and funny. But the ability of Indians to adapt to heatwaves could only be a boon in the short term. We should be focussing on controlling global warming and climate change. Because I'm afraid that after some time, even dhotis and gamchas will not serve any purpose.

Diyam Khandelwal, Jaipur

people do not have a single religious belief. To a hungry or thirsty man, food is greater than religion. Sujata's food was precious for Gautama. Who was Sujata? That would be a foolish question.

Tapomoy Ghosh, Kolkata

### LESSONS NOT LEARNT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Bleak math' (IE, August 2). The economic slowdown is becoming more serious by the day because the NDA government continues to extol its policies like demotisation instead of learning a lesson from them. Its talk of a \$5-trillion economy is nothing but hyperbole.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur



## Valley of flaws

New Delhi will have to engage with all stakeholders in finding a solution in Kashmir

The Jammu and Kashmir State government's decision to abruptly end the Amarnath pilgrimage, at least a fortnight ahead of schedule, citing terror threats, is intriguing. The announcement came close on the heels of an unexplained troop surge in the State, already one of the most militarised regions of the world. Governments usually tend to be miserly with information, and on questions related to national security they are more stridently so. By the very nature of the security apparatus, it is impossible for Parliament, the media or the general public to access information that is not voluntarily provided by the executive. Hence, it is imperative to accept the State government's position that the decision on curtailment of the yatra season was taken "keeping in view the latest intelligence inputs of terror threats, with specific targeting of the yatra, and given the prevailing security situation in the Kashmir Valley". There could be valid professional and tactical reasons for the limited transparency in security management. But the Narendra Modi government has stretched this principle to intolerance to request for transparency in general, often questioning the patriotism of those seeking meaningful information.

This government has been unequivocal and outspoken about its intentions to push forward with annulling the special status that Jammu and Kashmir is accorded in the Constitution through Articles 370 and 35A. The government is clear that there is nothing to negotiate with anyone in the Valley or about the Valley with anyone. An interlocutor appointed by the Centre is defunct. The BJP and the Centre have also been pursuing a policy of undermining the mainstream political parties in the State through administrative measures and political rhetoric. True, the governance track record of the Peoples Democratic Party and the National Conference falls far short of inspiring; nevertheless, these parties have been integral to the ways in which New Delhi engaged with the Valley. Pakistan may be puppeteering the separatist Hurriyat, but New Delhi will have to engage with all stakeholders in resolving the conflict in the Valley. Unfortunately, the first BJP government with a majority of its own in the Lok Sabha has instead upended the policy of the first Vajpayee-led BJP government which sought to strengthen the regional parties, engage the separatists and Pakistan to make progress towards peace. In recent years, the situation in the Valley has worsened and tensions between India and Pakistan have become aggravated. New Delhi quite rightly rebuffed U.S. President Donald Trump who, evidently in search of an arena for peacemaking after failing to make headway with North Korea, offered to mediate. But while dealing directly with the challenge in Kashmir, it must realise any misstep can be costly.

## At a crossroads

India's transport sector needs reform; changes to the Motor Vehicles Act are a start

India's Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 has remained in hibernation, unable to meet the needs of a large economy that is witnessing rising travel demand, fast-paced motorisation, major shifts in technology and deteriorating road safety. The amendments to the Act voted by Parliament seek to address some of these challenges, notably in forming a National Transportation Policy and a National Road Safety Board, providing for stiffer penalties for violation of rules, and orderly operation of new-generation mobility services that use mobile phone applications. Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has countered the charge that the changes are anti-federal in character – the proposed amendments were reviewed by 18 State Transport Ministers, and the Bill reflects the modifications they suggested. Also, the Rajya Sabha introduced last-minute changes, making concurrence of, rather than consultation with States necessary when issuing fresh schemes for national, multimodal, and inter-State transport. This new provision also includes last mile connectivity, accessibility, mobility as a whole and rural transport. There is a dire need for reform in these areas, and State governments have tended to ignore these aspects. During the previous NDA government, Mr. Gadkari blamed obstruction by a 'corrupt' Regional Transport Office system for the delay in amending the MV Act. An amendment in the Rajya Sabha allows for RTOs to visit dealerships to register vehicles. This is not much of a change over the practice of dealers taking vehicles to RTO offices. The onus is on States to show that the purchaser will not have to pay a bribe.

Going forward, the Centre must deliver on its promise that the amended Act will help reduce dependence on personal vehicles, and present its National Transport Policy without delay. States must be incentivised to provide clean, comfortable and affordable services for all users, including people with disabilities. It is relevant to point out that the National Urban Transport Policy of the UPA failed to achieve this. Mr. Gadkari's emphasis is on structural reform and an upgrade to subsidised electric buses for low-cost air-conditioned travel. But State Transport Corporations must adopt modern management practices. New regulation can certainly shake up the status quo, facilitating transparent investment by any intending operator and removing vested interests, particularly in inter-State and multi-State coach services. But some of the other amendments are less promising. A sharp increase in fines has little chance of improving safety. Studies show that sustained, zero tolerance enforcement of even small fines reduces violations, while stringent penalties are either not enforced or lead to more bribery.

# Explaining the Asian rate cuts wave

Policy makers across Asia should ensure enough ammunition to manage a prolonged economic downturn



RAMKISHAN S. RAJAN

The latest International Monetary Fund (IMF)-World Economic Outlook update in July 2019 has confirmed a growing belief that global growth has decelerated and dark clouds seem to be looming in the near term. Specifically, the IMF has downgraded global growth multiple times since October 2018 and now projects it to be 3.2% compared to 3.6% in 2018.

### The China factor

While the deceleration in economic activity is broad-based among both the advanced and developing economies, particular attention should be paid to China. The country has faced strong headwinds to growth both because of the ongoing supply-side reforms, including dealing with financial risks (reining in of shadow banking and hidden debt of local governments), as well as the negative effects of escalating tariffs and their consequent impact on its exports and investment. It is noteworthy that China is one of the few major economies that is expected to continue to decelerate into 2020 (along with Japan which is faced with acutely unfavourable demographics and seems unable to escape persistent deflationary pressures).

As corporates look to reconfigure their China-centric supply chains (both in response to the ongoing policy uncertainties and rising protectionist sentiments), many export-dependent Asian economies that are a part of the intricate production networks have also inevitably been hard hit. While there have been some short-term beneficiaries of the export and trade diversion from China to

countries such as Vietnam, the global external demand slowdown has more than outweighed these gains. For instance, given Singapore's small size and acute openness, it has often acted as a recession barometer for the rest of Asia. Latest data show that exports from the city state have collapsed and the Singapore economy is expected to face stagnation in 2019 on the back of a sharp slowdown in the manufacturing sector. This does not bode well for other trade-dependent economies in the region.

### Asian banks to the rescue?

In response to the global economic slowdown as well as generally subdued inflationary pressures, many Asian central banks (India, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea) have begun to ease monetary policy. However, this generalised loosening has happened largely following the recent signals from the U.S. Fed that it is set to embark on a new round of rate cuts in response to the slowdown in the United States and the rest of the world. In fact, in his congressional testimony on July 10, 2019, chairman Jerome Powell emphasised the slowing in global growth as the main reason for the Fed moving towards a more accommodative stance, leading some to suggest that he has become the "world's central banker".

The recent wave of rate cuts in Asia is consistent with research which suggests that emerging economies tend to be cautious about lowering interest rates when the base country (usually the U.S.) does not do so as they are concerned about potential capital flight and sharp currency depreciations which in turn could have negative repercussions on domestic firms and other entities with unhedged external borrowings in foreign currencies. However, when interest rates in the base country decline, while emerging



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economies may experience massive surges in capital inflows if they stand pat on interest rates, they can maintain monetary policy autonomy via a combination of sterilised foreign exchange intervention (leading to sustained reserve accumulation) as well as tightening of capital controls and/or use of macro prudential policies (MaPs).

Alternatively, if the emerging economies are themselves faced with an economic slowdown, they are comfortable lowering their interest rates along with the base country, as is the case currently in Asia. This said, it is wise for Asian policy makers to ensure that they have enough ammunition to manage a prolonged downturn given that 2020 is "precarious" with many downside risks, as the IMF's chief economist, Gita Gopinath, put it.

### RBI's monetary policy stance

Where does all of this leave India? On the one hand, since India has not been well-integrated with the Asian and global supply chains, it has not been as impacted directly by the China-U.S. trade war. On the other hand, given existing acute domestic bottlenecks, policy missteps and ongoing structural challenges, India has not been able to reap significant benefits as an alternative production and export platform to China.

On the back of a prolonged downturn in the capex cycle, the IMF has downgraded projected growth for India to 7% in 2019.

# The taproot of conservation justice

Cutting down the Forests Right Act will only weaken the conservation regime and affect the rights of forest dwellers



RAVI CHELLAM

I have had the good fortune to work in, visit and learn about protected areas and wildlife habitats across India since 1980. Beginning in the late 1980s, I have written and spoken about the ecology and conservation of Indian wildlife to numerous and varied audiences. One question that is invariably asked by foreigners is how India has managed to conserve such a diversity of wildlife given its large population and development challenges. To me it has always been clear that the tolerance and, in many cases, the reverence that local communities have for Nature has been absolutely vital for the sustained success of the conservation efforts of the government and other agencies. Not to forget the widespread and long conservation track record of the local communities; the state of sacred groves is a very good example.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) is a

piece of social legislation which aims to address the historical injustice that our forest dwelling communities have had to face for nearly 150 years by providing them with security of tenure over land for cultivation and habitation through individual rights. It also provides access to a variety of resources through more than a dozen types of community forest rights. The FRA also empowers forest dwelling communities to protect, regenerate, conserve and manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use. It has the provision for creating critical wildlife habitats within protected areas which currently is the strongest conservation provision among existing laws of the country.

### Legal challenges

It is extremely unfortunate that the very constitutionality of the FRA was challenged in the Supreme Court in 2008 by about half a dozen conservation organisations. The court has tagged many other cases including from several High Courts which are currently being heard jointly. The court's order of February 13, 2019 since put in abeyance by its order dated Fe-



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bruary 28, 2019 highlights the very tardy implementation of the FRA by the State governments.

One of the key arguments of the petitioners has been that it is beyond the legislative competence of Parliament to enact the FRA as 'land' is a state subject. Tenuous as this is, if this argument of the petitioners is accepted, the Wildlife Protection Act and the entire architecture of forest laws will have to be dismantled as *ultra vires* as all of them deal with 'land', including the Indian Forest Act and the Forest (Conservation) Act.

The February 13 order of the Supreme Court directs the eviction of lakhs of forest dwellers whose claims have been rejected under the FRA. With recent media reports showing that many State governments have admitted to the Supreme Court that their implementation of the FRA has been incomplete and flawed – with due

This is broadly in line with the fore-casted range by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). While this growth is admirable relative to other major countries, it is well below the country's likely potential growth of 7.5% and 8%.

In view of this "growth recession" and subdued inflation, along with a lack of fiscal space, and with the government having been distracted by the general election, the RBI moved much earlier than most of its Asian counterparts in taking steps to lower interest rates, having cut rate multiple times by 25 basis points since October 2018 to a nine-year low in nominal terms. The concerns here however have been threefold.

One, despite the rapid interest rate cuts, India's real interest rates are still higher than most other countries, though it remains unclear what the neutral real interest rate consistent with India's potential output actually is. The statement by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das following the June 2019 interest rate cut that the RBI's policy stance "has again changed... from 'neutral' to 'accommodative'" presumably suggests that he views current real interest rates to be below equilibrium. This is rather odd in view of the fact that real rates have actually risen in recent times.

Two, more than most other countries in the region, an ongoing concern for India is that interest rate policy transmission to bank rates tends to be rather slow and limited. This is likely due to a combination of factors: the banking system has been faced with a deterioration in asset quality and remains saddled with bad debts; there has been and anaemic deposit growth; and there is limited scope to reduce deposit rates.

Three, despite the interest rate cuts, India's real effective exchange rate (REER) has actually appreciated somewhat (around 7%) since October 2018, consistent with the fact that real interest rates have not declined. This lack of

price competitiveness boost is especially of concern given that external demand is expected to remain subdued and uncertain and other regional currencies may themselves face depreciations pressures following the dovish policy stances by their central banks which could possibly translate to further REER appreciation in the rupee.

### Sovereign bond issue

Going forward, if India is to succeed in its ambition of becoming a \$5-trillion economy by 2024-25, there can be no substitute for undertaking the necessary structural reforms needed to jump-start private investments and longer-term growth. However, in the short term, in all likelihood, monetary policy will have to remain accommodative (more so than what it is currently) and much greater attention will be needed to be paid on how to revive public capex without raising the cost of capital further.

In the face of constraints in raising revenues in a slowing economy, the government's preferred solution seems to be to issue overseas sovereign bonds rather than streamline subsidies and revenue expenditures. The proposed \$10 billion sovereign issuance is manageable *vis-à-vis* the countries stock of forex reserves, while India's sovereign external debt (as share of GDP) is modest at present. However, increases in external borrowings add an additional element of risk to the economy. Such a move also likely complicates monetary policy further, as any adverse exchange rate movements will lead to a ballooning of interest payments on government debt which is already eating up around a quarter of budgetary spending. It is not clear that the current policy mix is ideal for India.

Ramkishan S. Rajan is a Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore

process not having been followed especially while rejecting claims – the misguided and unmeritorious nature of this whole legal challenge becomes very clear.

### What the FRA is

The FRA has been savagely criticised as a land distribution legislation, which it is not. The FRA very clearly states that forest dwellers who are either Scheduled Tribes or Other Traditional Forest Dwellers are only entitled to claim both individual and community forest rights through a clear process of submitting a claim and after its verification and subsequent approval or rejection. For the rejection cases, an appeal process has been outlined. The FRA aims to only confirm tenure and access rights which in some sense the forest dwellers have been exercising de facto but under severe restrictions and control especially by the forest department. In fact, it is the failure of the state to settle pre-existing rights under existing forest and conservation laws that created the situation of historical injustice.

The FRA does not sanction any fresh clearance of forest, as individual rights over land will only be granted if the forest dweller was in possession of that parcel of land

on December 13, 2005. It also limits the extent of land that can be granted to the area that was occupied on December 13, 2005 and places an upper limit of four hectares per claimant for individual rights. These provisions are often overlooked or deliberately suppressed by those who criticise FRA.

The FRA, by design, has tremendous potential to strengthen the conservation regime across India by recognising rights of forest dwellers over land and community forest resources, a key factor for conservation to succeed as shown both by research and practice in many countries. By democratising forest governance and conservation through the provision of rights and authority to local communities and gram sabhas for conservation and management of forests, the FRA will empower gram sabhas of the forest dwelling communities to halt the destruction of forests, as especially highlighted in the Niyamgiri case. Implementing the FRA in letter and spirit with empathy for forest dwellers will be a decisive step by India to achieve conservation justice.

Ravi Chellam is the CEO, Metastring Foundation

## 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.

### Late intervention

The Supreme Court has finally intervened, but only after the Unnao survivor almost lost her life due to an 'accident' (Front page, "SC transfers Unnao cases to Delhi court," August 2). The Yogi Adityanath government failed miserably to bring justice to the girl and erred by not distancing itself from the accused MLA. The girl's situation reflects the helplessness and vulnerability of those who dare to wage a legal battle against the mighty. The Centre, meanwhile, seems to have no time to reprimand the State government. The Mahatma's statement that India would have achieved Independence only when women "can walk freely on the roads at night" seems wishful thinking more than seven decades after Independence. India has

not just failed the 19-year-old rape survivor but all its women as laws have not taken effect.

G.B. SIVANANDAM,  
Coimbatore

### More troops in Kashmir

The Centre's decision to deploy more troops in Kashmir reflects its insecurity and will only alienate the Valley's people more (Front page, "25,000 more troops being deployed in J&K," August 2). The pluralistic ethos of Jammu and Kashmir has been harmed not just by the ineffectiveness of successive State governments but also by the overbearing authority of the Centre. It is no coincidence that the new Unlawful Activities Prevention Act has been passed at a time when discontent among the Kashmiris is at a high. Neither guns nor ballots

will work in this scenario and the need of the hour is to create a forum where lives can be discussed instead of bodies.

MADHUR MOHAN SHARMA,  
Jammu

### Tipu's legacy

The writer has laid out her case with honesty and persuasion (Editorial page, "Marking Tipu's legacy to foster historical temper," August 2). It has been amply documented in relation to the actions of many kings, emperors and chieftains of the past that political opportunism and economic considerations had a bigger part to play than pure bigotry. Even the plunder of Somnath temple was more due to its wealth than its idolatry. As the writer says, understanding multiple perspectives and narratives of the past and learning from them would be a more intelligent way of

making peace with history than waging a perennial war with the era gone by.

ANILKUMAR KURUP,  
Thiruvananthapuram

The writer has rightly called for an unruffled discourse in the wake of misperceptions and misinterpretations of our very own past. This would help people understand the historical figures in a comprehensive manner and allow them to come to conclusion by themselves, rather than get guided by the premature judgments. Such historical temper will help everyone see the circumstances in which our forefathers acted. The principle of natural justice, *audi alteram partem*, will thus be respected as buried historical icons will be given a chance to present their arguments before us.

BITRA RAGHUVERR,  
Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh

Haider Ali, who wrested power of the Mysore kingdom from the Wodeyars and later offered strong resistance to the British forces, was a harsh dictator but was secular by temperament and mindful of the Kannadiga Hindu majority, its tradition and culture. His son Tipu, on the other hand, alienated the majority by his imposition of Persian language and Islamic culture. His finance regulations were in favour of Muslims and his officials were corrupt, extracting their pound of flesh from the poor. As for the treatment of women he forcibly brought into captivity, the less said the better. In the end, it was his tyranny and bigotry that led to his downfall.

NAGESH HAVANUR,  
Bengaluru

### IOC's threat

The Indian Olympic Association's threat to

boycott the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, to protest against the exclusion of shooting events, is a blunder and should be reconsidered. Such a decision will ruin the career of many budding/young sports personalities. Petty ideological differences, which led to some countries boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics and 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, had a negative impact on the career of many sporting legends. India's decision not to send its Cricket teams to the 2010 and 2014 Asian Games also affected its medals tally. Being the biggest Commonwealth country, India should pressure the federation to change its decision rather than make the hasty move of withdrawal.

VASISHT M.C.,  
Kozhikode

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# The registry test of citizenship

The chaos surrounding the National Register of Citizens is yet another example of Assam's long and difficult relationship with migrants. **Rahul Karmakar** reports on the many fault lines in the State that complicate the process

The sword did not get Ayesha 36 years ago but the judicial pen that launched the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise just might. Ayesha was five months old on February 18, 1983, when hundreds of people armed with machetes, spears, and guns descended on her village, Matiparbat, an hour after midnight. Matiparbat was the last of 14 villages, beginning with Nellie on National Highway 37, that a mob had laid siege to that night. Official records say the 1983 Nellie massacre claimed the lives of 2,191 people, mostly women and children. Survivors claim the figure would be no less than 6,000.

Matiparbat is about 8 km north-west of Nellie, now almost a small town 70 km east of Guwahati. Nellie, earlier in Nagaon district, is now in Morigaon district. "They set fire to the houses and chased our people with all kinds of weapons. I had nowhere to run but escaped by pretending to be dead. I smeared blood from the body of a woman and lay still next to it," says Iman Ali, 65.

The screams stopped two hours later and Ali mustered the courage to look around for survivors. He found his wife Manowara Begum and daughter, Ayesha, emerging from Basundhari Beel, a 2 km-long wetland beside which Matiparbat is located. Five other members of his extended family and a few neighbours lay dead, some with their heads smashed, some with their throats slit, some with bullet marks.

"The mob did not spare those who hid amid the water hyacinths in the beel. My wife had her nostrils above the water level while holding our baby's face up just enough to let her breathe. She controlled her urge to scream but it was a miracle that the baby did not cry as some members of the mob kept spearing the beel and slashing the water hyacinths around them," Ali says.

Ali believes Ayesha, a mother now, will need more than a miracle to be included in the final list of the Supreme Court-monitored NRC with an August 31 deadline for publication. "Convincing the authorities about the citizenship documents we possess is tougher than appeasing God," he says. Ayesha is one of the six members in Ali's family belonging to the list of 40.07 lakh people excluded from the draft NRC published on July 30, 2018. Ali's younger daughter Hazara Bibi too is among the excluded. A barely literate farmer, Ali fails to understand why the same set of documents that established his citizenship did not work for his daughters.

At Basundhari, another of the 14 villages attacked on that fateful day, Azeemuddin lost seven members of his family, including his wife, sister, and daughter. On June 26, when an additional list of 1.02 lakh people found ineligible for inclusion in the NRC was published, he felt history was repeating itself with a non-violent but a "deadlier" twist. Azeemuddin, now 64, relocated to Nellie soon after the carnage although Nellie is closer to where the assailants had allegedly come from — the hills across NH37. Most of his kin stayed back to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. "We are a large family of 93. Just seven of us were included in the draft NRC only to be put in the new reject list. This is as if the clock has turned back to those horrific days. This time, not to kill us but erase our existence as Indians."

## 'Already a dead man'

There is no debate over why the Nellie bloodbath happened. The violence was seen as the fallout of the government's decision to hold the election to the 126-member State Assembly in 1983 during the peak of the Assam Agitation seeking the ejection of illegal immigrants. Organisations such as the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) that spearheaded the agitation saw the "forced election" as then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's bid to legitimise "millions of immigrants from Bangladesh" as voters.

The turnout at the controversial election was 32% and most of the voters were believed to have been Bengal-origin Muslims, usually referred to by the pejorative 'Miya' for distinguishing them from the "acceptable" Assamese Muslims. Another set of migrants, the Bengal-origin Hindus, living within a 10 km radius of Nellie, did not feel the heat in 1983. "We knew something bad was going to happen when, ahead of the 1983 election, groups of people kept visiting our area telling us not to vote. Given the situation, we thought it best to stay away from the polling booths," says 83-year-old Pradip Das of Ganesh Valley.

The Hindus-only Ganesh Valley was established in 1951 to settle 80 families who had fled present-day Bangladesh in August 1947. The colony now has about 170 houses, the increase attributed to the descendants of the refugees. Ganesh Valley is about 2 km beyond the Nellie market on the southern flank of NH37, almost opposite Shilchang Ward No. 1 on the highway's northern flank from where the Muslim areas start along a road — much of it submerged under waist-deep water — arcing westward to Matiparbat. Houses of a dozen Gorkha



"The agitation, some say, may continue in a different form if the National Register of Citizens turns out to be flawed." NRC officials verify documents as security personnel stand guard at a NRC centre in Morigaon district of Assam on August 2, 2019. (Below): Girin Biswas of Soru Matiparbat with his family. Biswas is among four in a family of six to have been excluded from the NRC. •RITU RAJ KONWAR / RAHUL KARMAKAR



am not a suspected foreigner. In 2018, the High Court cleared my case but my family and I were excluded from the NRC. This was all because my name Surja Lal Das was entered as Surja Kumar Das in the voters' list of 1995 and I have been voting since with 'Kumar' as my middle name," he says. A fortnight ago, Das, his wife, and daughter spent a week in the Morigaon district jail allegedly for trying to cheat his way through to the NRC. "People say I will have to spend a longer time in jail after August 31. I will probably not survive there, but then I am already a dead man," he says.

## No house unaffected

The family of Jadhav Biswas is among the fortunate in Ganesh Valley to be included in the NRC. More than 40% of people in his area have missed out; they might be re-included or continue to be excluded after the exercise to update the list is concluded, says Biswas.

"One understands that everything boils down to the possession of documents, although some admissible documents have not passed the test mainly because of the attitude of some NRC officials. How else do you explain the fact that there's at least one member in almost every family in villages of Bengal-origin Hindus and Muslims in the rejection list?" says Suleiman Ahmed Kasimi, the Maulana of Nellie's Masjid-e-Umar.

In Matiparbat village, a person or two in each of some 700 houses are not on the draft NRC besides the families of 40 people who have been marked as D-voters or suspected foreigners. Between the Hindu villages of Soru Matiparbat and Borkhal, 27 families have little hope of making it to the NRC because of cases pending in the Foreigners' Tribunal 1 in the district headquarters, Morigaon. There are an average of two persons in each of the 420 houses in these two villages on the NRC rejection list.

Soru Matiparbat's Girin Biswas is among four in a family of six to have been excluded from the NRC. He had received a notice from the Foreigners' Tribunal on October 13, 2016, asking him to appear before it to prove his citizen-

ship. It was then that the marginal farmer began digging up documents, most of which were shredded by rats. A certified copy signed by A.C. Bhuyan, the Electoral Registration Officer of Nagaon district (from which Morigaon was carved out in 1989), says Biswas's grandfather Meghla Biswas figured in the voters' list of 1965. The problem, he discovered, was in the name of his father who was listed as Kristo in the voters' list, Kisto in the NRC legacy data he had downloaded from a service centre for application, and Krishna in the notice that the Foreigners' Tribunal had served him. Even his name in the notice was Girindra, not Girin. "My lawyer says we had a favourable judgment four months ago. But we have not received the copy," he says.

Ganesh Biswas, a 30-year-old assistant teacher at the State-run Borkhal Anushchita Jati Prathamik Vidyalaya (SC primary school), is the only one excluded from the NRC in his family. All other members, who drew their lineage from his grandfather Ganga Charan Namasudra, were included, but he was not. "My father Dhiren Biswas was the youngest of four siblings. The others sailed through because they had voted before 1971, but I was stuck. I got tired of explaining that Namasudra is the name of a lower caste to which the Biswases belong. I hope my claim is accepted," he says.

The NRC updating process is that of enlisting the names of people or descendants of people whose names appear in any of the electoral rolls up to 1971, the NRC of 1951 or any of the other stipulated documents such as land and tenancy records, citizenship certificate, refugee registration certificate, and permanent residential certificate. The exercise is being done as per the Assam Accord of 1985 that ended the Assam Agitation of 1979-85. The accord prescribes the midnight of March 24, 1971, as the cut-off date for detecting foreigners or illegal immigrants.

"We want an error-free NRC. But it appears only people of Bengal origin, Hindus or Muslims, are being targeted and there is an attempt to disregard

documents in a bid to convey that most of them have entered Assam after 1971. And there seems to be a policy to target people who came between 1966 and 1971 too," says Utpal Dey, a leader of the All Assam Bengali Youth Students' Federation. The All Assam Minority Students' Union agrees, but feels the Muslims would be worse off if the Bharatiya Janata Party pushes the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill to let non-Muslim immigrants who entered India till December 31, 2014, to stay.

Dey says the Bill is a sham, and if it materialises, will require a beneficiary to first declare himself/herself as a foreigner and then get proof that he/she has been a victim of religious persecution in the country escaped from. Former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, who was president of the AASU during the Assam Agitation, says a global campaign has been on to malign the Assamese people by painting the Bengali-speaking people in the State as victims of some kind of purge programme.

"I had suggested to the government that verification of citizenship is necessary only in the case of those who speak Bengali because Assam has borne the brunt of several waves of migration from present-day Bangladesh, first because of the British who brought them for agriculture, clerical jobs and petty trade. Partition of India and developments leading to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 brought more people to put pressure on the land," he said after the draft NRC was published in 2018.

There was no logical reason to verify the people who speak Hindi or variants and the people from Nepal and Bhutan who are fewer in number than those from Bangladesh and who are bound by treaties with India, Mahanta says. Two cases in point are that of BJP leaders — Rajasthan-origin Pawan Kumar Rath and Gujarat-origin Shantanu Naik, both of southern Assam's Silchar — who have been excluded from the NRC.

A majority of those in the two NRC-excluded lists speak Bengali. Many are Nepali-speaking, some originally from the Hindi-speaking States and a few belong to indigenous communities who are expected to get in by virtue of being 'original inhabitants', a category many have contested by arguing that Assam has become home for several streams of migrants over time. One such community comprise the tea plantation workers or 'tea tribes' that the Supreme Court recognised as 'original inhabitants'.

## Colonial legacy

The perception of the outsider as a cultural threat and a usurper of land and its resources began in Assam towards the end of the 19th century when people from other parts of British India, specifically Bengal, came in waves to work in the paddy fields, tea plantations and the timber industry. In 1920, the British rulers introduced the Line System to segregate the indigenous people from settlers taking up shrinking tracts of vacant or

The NRC appears to be an unfinished business of the Assam agitation. It is just that the proverbial pen has taken over the job of the sword — to be a mightier eliminator of foreigners.

SULEIMAN AHMED KASIMI  
Maulana of Nellie's Masjid-e-Umar

forest lands. But what fuelled the fears that the indigenous communities would be marginalised by the settlers was British civil servant C.S. Mullan's observation in 1931. "Probably the most important event in the province during the last 25 years, likely to alter permanently the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilisation, has been the invasion of a vast horde of land-hungry Bengali immigrants, mostly Muslims from the districts of eastern Bengal," he wrote after conducting the 1931 census. Inadvertently, or otherwise, he gave a religious identity to the migrant threat.

Assam's former Director General of Police Harekrishna Deka, also a poet, blames the British for sowing the seeds of distrust between the Assamese and Bengali people. "Apart from encouraging continuous migration of people from Bengal, they added Sylhet, a populous district of undivided Bengal, to Assam in 1874. This led to the Bengalis becoming the majority until Partition," he says. Sylhet went to Pakistan in 1947, but its addition to Assam increased the insecurity that the Assamese felt when the British introduced Bengali as the language of official correspondence, in court and for education, until the Baptist missionaries intervened to give Assamese its rightful place in 1873. If that were not enough, Basanta Kumar Das, an elected leader from the Bengali-dominated Barak Valley, demanded a change in Assam's name in the 1930s. The distrust of Bengalis, Deka points out, coincided with the friction between Muslim migrants from eastern Bengal and nationalist Assamese, particularly after the Muslim League had in the 1940s made serious efforts to include Assam in Pakistan.

Large-scale migrations into Assam, as indicated by the Census of 1961 and 1971, worked on the psyche of the indigenous people culminating in the anti-foreigners agitation. "The NRC appears to be an unfinished business of the sword — to be a mightier eliminator of foreigners," Maulana Kasimi says.

Current AASU general secretary Lurinjyoti Gogoi says "vested interests" are trying to derail the NRC process. "All we want is an error-free NRC," he says. The agitation, some say, may continue in a different form if the NRC turns out to be flawed. This is a possibility given the fact that politics in Assam revolves around the issue of immigrants, illegal or otherwise, who usually call the shots during elections.



"I have virtually lost everything fighting a legal battle four times to prove I

## बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 144

### नागरिक सुरक्षा

**वी जी** सिद्धार्थ के लिखे कथित 'सुइसाइड नोट' (आत्महत्या के पूर्व लिखी बातें) में ऐसी परेशानियों का जिक्र है जिनके कारण उन्हें मरणोपरान्त सहानुभूति मिल रही है। उन्होंने जिन समस्याओं का जिक्र किया है उनमें कर अधिकारियों द्वारा परेशान किए जाने का उल्लेख है। इसके बाद आय कर विभाग ने एक विस्तृत नोट जारी किया जिसमें कहा गया है कि अब हमारे बीच नहीं रहे 'कोफी किंग' ने 350 करोड़ रुपये की अधोषिक्त आय होने की बात स्वीकार की थी। हालांकि मामले की जानकारी रखने

वाले एक व्यक्ति का कहना है कि कर अधिकारियों ने सिद्धार्थ की हिस्सेदारी वाले शेयर जब्त कर जल्दबाजी दिखाई थी। सारे तथ्य धीरे-धीरे सामने आएंगे। संभव है कि यह मामला भी तमाम अन्य मामलों की तरह दोहराए जा सके। हमारे कई कारोबारियों को ऐसे ही काम करना पड़ता है। कर प्रशासन द्वारा परेशान करने के आरोप के बाद कारोबारी समुदाय और आम जनता से प्रतिक्रिया मिल रही है। वित्त मंत्री इस मुद्दे से भलीभांति अवगत हैं। अपने बजट भाषण

में उन्होंने प्राचीन संगम साहित्य का उल्लेख करते हुए कहा कि अगर हाथी धान के खेत में घुस जाए तो वह जितना खाए, उससे कहीं बहुत ज्यादा रौंदकर नुकसान पहुंचाएगा। लगभग 15 वर्ष पहले वित्त मंत्री रहे जसवंत सिंह ने अपने बजट भाषण में कहा था, 'हमें यह स्वीकार करना होगा कि हमारे नागरिकों का अनिवाय उद्यमी चरित्र और उनकी रचनात्मकता हमारी सबसे बड़ी पूंजी है।' उन्होंने कहा कि वह आशंका से ग्रस्त, शोषण करने वाली व्यवस्था के बजाय आपसी विश्वास पर आधारित व्यवस्था लागू करना चाहते हैं। उन्होंने यह भी कहा था कि वह अपने देश के नागरिकों के भरोसे पर ऐसा कर रहे हैं। सिंह ने यह कहकर अपना कद ऊंचा कर लिया था कि करदाताओं के साथ अदब से पेश आना चाहिए। यह याद करना बेहतर होगा कि उन्होंने क्या करने की बात कही थी, 'पहला, किसी जांच या जब्ती अभियान के दौरान मिलने वाले शेषों

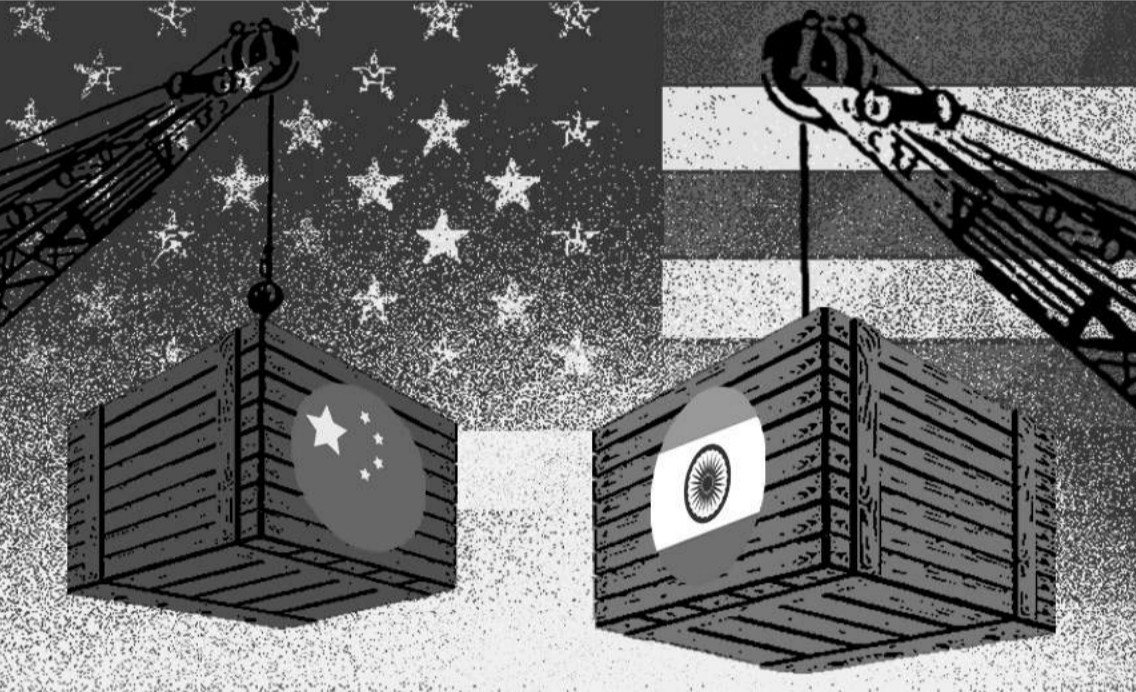
को किसी भी हालत में जब्त नहीं किया जाएगा। दूसरा, ऐसी जांच या जब्ती अभियान के दौरान कोई स्विकारोक्ति नहीं ली जाएगी। तीसरा, संयुक्त आयकर आयुक्त के दर्जे के नीचे किसी भी अधिकारी को सर्वे अभियान की अनुमति देने का अधिकार नहीं होगा। आखिर में, सर्वे में मिले बहीखातों को बिना मुख्य आयुक्त की पूर्ण मंजूरी के 10 दिन से अधिक जब्त नहीं रखा जाएगा।'

जिन कारोबारियों के यहां ऐसी कर जांच या जब्ती हुई है वे इस बात की पुष्टि कर सकते हैं कि इन वादों को पूरा किया गया या नहीं। सकारात्मक पहलुओं पर बात करें तो डिजिटल तकनीक के इस्तेमाल ने औसत करदाताओं के लिए प्रक्रिया को सहज और सुरक्षित बनाया है। इसमें करदाताओं और कर आकलन करने वाले अधिकारियों के सीधे संपर्क की जरूरत समाप्त कर दी है। इस बात ने भी काफी हद

तक शोषण और रिश्वत पर लगातार लगाई है। इसके अतिरिक्त मोदी सरकार के दूसरे कार्यकाल की शुरुआत के साथ ही दो दर्जन से अधिक कर अधिकारियों को भ्रष्टाचार के आरोप में अपना सामान समेटना पड़ा। माना जा रहा है कि इससे नीचे कड़ा संदेश गया होगा। लॉर्ड एक्टन की कहावत याद करें तो सत्ता में भ्रष्ट करने की प्रवृत्ति होती है और पूर्ण सत्ता पूरी तरह भ्रष्ट कर देती है। ऐसे में देखें तो मौजूद कर एवं अन्य छापों में एक खास रुख नजर आता है: इस दौरान सरकार के विरोधियों या आलोचकों पर कार्रवाई की गई। इस बीच सरकार उन विधानों को सरकारी मंजूरी दिलाने में लगी रही जो कई विभागों में अधिकारियों को कई प्रकार से मजबूत बनाते हैं। जबकि बचाव के तरीके बहुत कम हैं। इस दौरान अधिकारों को बहुत हद तक केंद्र सरकार के

पास केंद्रीकृत रखा गया है। अब संभव है कि तेज वाहन चलाने जैसे यातायात नियमों का उल्लंघन करने वालों को जेल हो सके। अन्य देशों में ऐसे अत्यधिक विशिष्ट मामलों में भी बड़ा जुमाना लगाया जाता है। गृह मंत्री ने आश्वस्त किया है कि सरकार के कई नए अधिकारों का दुरुपयोग नहीं किया जाएगा। लेकिन क्या सबसे शक्तिशाली और तेज नजर आने वाले मंत्री भी ऐसे देश में यह गारंटी दे सकते हैं जहां हर व्यक्ति जानता है कि ताकत का दुरुपयोग आम बात है। क्या यह ज्यादा बेहतर नहीं होगा कि जसवंत सिंह के तर्ज पर नरमी बरती जाए?

खासकर उन्नाव जैसे घटनाक्रम के बाद, जब लोगों को लगने लगा है कि पुलिस से 25 बार अनुरोध करने के बाद भी आम नागरिकों को जरूरी सांविधिक संरक्षण नहीं मिल पा रहा। हालांकि वे असंगत तरीके से लगाए जाने वाले जुमानों के खतरों से भी खौब में रहते हैं।



अजय मोहंती

# क्या चीन के नुकसान में छिपा है भारत का लाभ ?

### व्यापारिक युद्ध के साथ जुड़ी घटनाओं के आकलन के क्रम में अमेरिका से भारत और चीन में आयातित होने वाली वस्तुओं के आंकड़ों पर ध्यान केंद्रित करना होगा। जानकारी दे रहे हैं अजय शाह

राष्ट्रपति डॉनल्ड ट्रंप ने अपने देश अमेरिका को चीन के साथ कारोबारी जंग में उलझा दिया है। शुरुआती प्रमाण तो यही सुझा रहे हैं कि भारत को इसका फायदा मिल सकता है। बहरहाल, समय बीतने के साथ वैश्विक कंपनियों के एफडीआई संबंधी फैसलों से कहीं अधिक बड़े लाभ हमारे सामने होंगे। भारत की बात करें तो हालात का फायदा उठाने के लिए हमें और अधिक परिपक्व बाजार अर्थव्यवस्था बनना होगा तथा वैश्वीकरण के नियमों के मुताबिक चलना होगा।

भारत और चीन की तुलना करें तो चीन की अर्थव्यवस्था काफी बड़ी है और चीन का नीतिगत प्रतिष्ठान अधिक सक्षम है। चीन कंप्यूटर उपकरणों जैसे गुणवत्तापूर्ण सामान बनाने लगा है जो भारत नहीं बनाता। हमारा देश अब तक केवल ऐसी वस्तुओं का निर्यात करता है जो उच्चतम स्तर से मेल खाती हैं। यही कारण है कि हम मान सकते हैं कि शापद अमेरिका और चीन की कारोबारी जंग भारत के लिए उतने फायदे न लाए। व्यापार युद्ध से जुड़ी घटनाओं का आकलन करने के क्रम में हमें इस बात पर भी ध्यान देना होगा कि ये दोनों देश अमेरिका से किन वस्तुओं का आयात करते हैं। भारत अमेरिका को सेवा निर्यात करता

है लेकिन हम उसे विश्लेषण से बाहर रखें क्योंकि चीन और अमेरिका की कारोबारी जंग प्रमुख रूप से वस्तुओं से संबंधित है। ताजा आंकड़े मई 2019 के हैं। ये बताते हैं कि भारत ने अमेरिका को 560 करोड़ डॉलर मूल्य का निर्यात किया। वहीं चीन ने 3,930 करोड़ डॉलर का निर्यात किया। इस प्रकार अमेरिका ने कुल 22,080 करोड़ डॉलर का आयात किया। जाहिर है इसमें भारत की हिस्सेदारी चीन से काफी कम रही।

सवाल यह है कि इन दोनों देशों का निर्यात आखिर अमेरिका और चीन के व्यापार युद्ध से किस प्रकार बदल रहा है? अमेरिकी आयात में चीन की सबसे अधिक हिस्सेदारी सितंबर 2015 में 23.87 फीसदी थी। परंतु मई 2019 के ताजा आंकड़ों में यह घटकर 17.78 फीसदी रह गई। इससे एक वर्ष पहले मई 2018 में यह 21.5 फीसदी के स्तर पर था। सितंबर 2015 के उच्चतम स्तर से मई 2019 तक अमेरिकी आयात में चीन की हिस्सेदारी 6.09 फीसदी कम हुई है। यह बड़ा बदलाव है। इस अवधि में अमेरिकी आयात में भारत की हिस्सेदारी 1.92 फीसदी से बढ़कर 2.54 फीसदी हो गई। यह बढ़ोतरी 0.62 फीसदी की है। यानी चीन ने जो हिस्सा गंवाया, उसका दसवां हिस्सा भारत ने बढ़ाया।

सवाल यह है कि ये हालिया कारोबारी जंग से इस बदलाव का कितना ताल्लुक है और लंबी अवधि में इसका क्या असर होने वाला है? आंकड़े बताते हैं कि अमेरिका को चीन का वस्तु निर्यात सन 1980 के दशक में भारत से अमेरिका को होने वाले वस्तु निर्यात का दो से चार गुना था लेकिन 2007 तक यह 16 गुना हो गया।

बीते दशक के दौरान भारत की दृष्टि से यह अनुपात सुधरा है। इस लंबी अवधि की प्रक्रिया से इतर हालिया आंकड़ों से भी ऐसा लगता है कि अमेरिका और चीन के व्यापारिक युद्ध का लाभ भारत को मिला है।

भारत दोनों देशों के इस विवाद से कैसे लाभान्वित हो सकता है? पहली बात तो यह कि अधिकांश कारोबारी वार्ताएं बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनियों के बीच ही होती हैं। जब बॉलमार्ट भारत में गहराई तक जड़ें जमा रही है तो वह भारत से अधिक निर्यात भी करेगी। निर्यात में भारत का प्रदर्शन बेहतर रहे, इसके लिए यह आवश्यक है कि वैश्विक कंपनियां भारत आएँ और बड़े पैमाने पर काम करें। इसके अलावा भारतीय बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनियों के विकास की भी आवश्यकता है।

निश्चित रूप से इन बातों का प्रभाव धीमी गति से नजर आएगा। जब अमेरिका और चीन का व्यापारिक युद्ध उभरा तो

वैश्विक कंपनियों ने अल्प काल में अपनी रणनीति में कोई बदलाव नहीं किया लेकिन मध्यम अवधि में वे ऐसे देशों की तलाश कर रही हैं जहां वे कारोबार कर सकें और जहां कारोबारी दृष्टि से बेहतर आर्थिक माहौल हो।

हमें इन कंपनियों के बोर्ड के मन में स्थान बनाना होगा, जो चीन के प्रति अत्यधिक खुलेपन के कारण दिक्कतों का सामना कर रही हैं। हम उनके लिए अधिक आकर्षक बनने के क्रम में क्या कर सकते हैं?

एफडीआई के केंद्र के रूप में भारत को आकर्षक बनाने के लिए हमें श्रम कानूनों, बुनियादी ढांचे और कराधान में संशोधन करने होंगे। इनमें कराधान ही सबसे बड़ी समस्या रहा है। कर नीति और कर प्रशासन वैश्विक कारोबार में बड़ी चिंता का विषय है। भारत को वैश्विक आपूर्ति श्रृंखला के साथ बेहतर ढंग से जोड़ने के लिए देश में वस्तुओं की अबाध आवाजाही और उनका पुनर्निर्यात सुनिश्चित करना होगा। इसके लिए तमाम सीमा शुल्क समाप्त करने होंगे, आयात पर वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) लागू करना होगा और निर्यात की दर शून्य करनी होगी। इसके लिए हमें व्यवस्थित प्रक्रियाओं और सुविचारित कर प्रशासन की भी आवश्यकता होगी। छापों और जेल का डर निजी कारोबारियों को भारत में कारोबार करने से रोकता है।

कंपनियों पर आय कर के मामले में भारत दुनिया में सर्वाधिक दर वाला देश है। यहां स्रोत आधारित कर प्रणाली है। इसके बजाय हमें रजिडेंस आधारित कर प्रणाली अपनानी होगी और सभी कंपनियों पर लगने वाली कर दर को 20 फीसदी करना होगा।

नीतिगत जोखिम के चलते भारत को कारोबार करने की दृष्टि से कठिन जगह माना जाता है। सीमा शुल्क में अचानक बदलाव का भी खतरा रहता है। इसके लिए नीतिगत प्रक्रियाओं में गहन सुधार की आवश्यकता है। कानून और नियम बनाने की प्रक्रिया में गहरा सलाह-मशिविरे, लागत-लाभ विश्लेषण और भविष्य की तिथियों से नियम बदलाव की व्यवस्था होनी चाहिए।

हमें इस सोच पर लगातार लगानी होगी कि चीन का नुकसान, भारत का फायदा है। नियमों से चलने वाली वैश्वीकरण की दुनिया में भारत भी काफी कुछ गंवा सकता है। हमें सेवा निर्यात से हर तिमाही 6 लाख करोड़ रुपये की आय मिलती है।

वैश्वीकृत दुनिया में हमारा काफी कुछ दांव पर लगा हुआ है। भविष्य पर नजर डालें तो संभव है कि देश में होने वाले नीतिगत सुधार के कारण निर्यात में सुधार देखने को मिले। जाहिर है भविष्य में भी काफी कुछ दांव पर लगा होगा।

अगर ट्रंप जो कर रहे हैं वह नव सामान्य बना गया तो भविष्य में हमें भी इसकी कोमल चुकानी ही होगी। ऐसे में अंतरराष्ट्रीय संबंधों में भारत के रुख में खुली सीमाओं वाली नियम आधारित दुनिया पर जोर होना चाहिए। ऐसी दुनिया जहां नई बाधाओं का जोखिम कम हो।

# सिनेमा स्क्रीन का समेकन देगा मल्टीप्लेक्स को जान

**अब हमारे सामने एक ऐसा उद्योग है जहां समेकन अच्छे हालात लाने का सबब बना है। मार्च 2019 में समाप्त वित्त वर्ष में भारत की तीन प्रमुख मल्टीप्लेक्स श्रृंखला-पीवीआर सिनेमाज, आइनाक्स लीजर और सिनेपोलिस में बिकने वाले टिकटों की कुल संख्या एक साल पहले की तुलना में 23 फीसदी बढ़कर 20 करोड़ से भी अधिक रही। पिछले कई वर्षों से लोगों में सिनेमाघर जाकर फिल्म देखने की आदत में गिरावट देखी जाती रही है। ऐसे में बैंक्स ऑफिस पर होने वाली कमाई में बढ़ोतरी के जो आंकड़े हम देखते हैं, वे असल में टिकटों की कोमल बढ़ने के कारण हैं। एक अनुमान के मुताबिक भारतीय फिल्मों के करीब एक अरब टिकट आंकड़े के अभाव में इन तीनों मल्टीप्लेक्स श्रृंखलाओं द्वारा बेचे गए टिकट एक अच्छा नमूना साबित होते हैं। इसके साथ कुछ पुराने साक्ष्य भी हैं। देश भर में इकटौते स्क्रीन वाले सिनेमाघरों और छोटे मल्टीप्लेक्स श्रृंखलाओं की टिकट बिक्री 2018-19 में 20-40 फीसदी तक बढ़ी। यह बढ़ोतरी इस बात का सबसे बड़ा संकेत है कि सिनेमाघरों की संख्या एवं कारोबार करने की दृष्टि से बदल माना जाता है। सीमा शुल्क में अचानक बदलाव का भी खतरा रहता है। इसके लिए नीतिगत प्रक्रियाओं में गहन सुधार की आवश्यकता है। कानून और नियम बनाने की प्रक्रिया में गहरा सलाह-मशिविरे, लागत-लाभ विश्लेषण और भविष्य की तिथियों से नियम बदलाव की व्यवस्था होनी चाहिए।**



मीडिया मंत्र

वनिता कोहली-खांडेकर

बिक्री नहीं बढ़ रही थी। लेकिन अब ऐसा हो रहा है। चीन में वर्ष 2011 में स्क्रीन की संख्या 9,000 थी लेकिन आज इनकी संख्या छलांग लगाते हुए 60,000 हो चुकी है। इसके चलते आज के समय में चीन अमेरिका-कनाडा के बाद दूसरा बड़ा सिनेमा बाजार हो चुका है। भारत में नए स्क्रीन आने का असर टिकट बिक्री पर भी पड़ रहा है।

तीसरा, नेटफ्लिक्स या वूट जैसे स्ट्रीमिंग वीडियो ऐप आ जाने से दर्शकों को अलग-अलग तरह का सिनेमा अपने मोबाइल फोन पर ही देखने को मिलने लगा है जिससे उनके भीतर कुछ और देखने की चाहत पैदा हो रही है और उससे खिंचकर वे सिनेमाघरों तक पहुंच रहे हैं। इन तीनों कारणों का आकार करीब सात गुना बढ़ चुका है, निवेश पर मिलने वाला प्रतिफल बेहतर हुआ है और सबसे बड़ी बात, फिल्मों में जबदस्त विविधता देखने को मिल रही है।

करीब 3,119 करोड़ रुपये वाले पीवीआर, निजी स्वामित्व वाले सिनेपोलिस और 1,692 करोड़ रुपये वाले आइनाक्स की सम्मिलित हिस्सेदारी भारत के कुल 2500 मल्टीप्लेक्स स्क्रीन में से तीन-चौथाई है। देश में मौजूद कुल 9,000 स्क्रीन में से मल्टीप्लेक्स के 2,500 स्क्रीन ही बैंक्स ऑफिस पर 5,000 करोड़ रुपये का राजस्व जुटा रहे हैं। वर्ष 2018 में भारतीय फिल्म उद्योग के 17,500 करोड़ रुपये के कारोबार में बैंक्स ऑफिस का हिस्सा लगभग दो-तिहाई था।

इसे देखकर यह लग सकता है कि बैंक्स ऑफिस की कमाई में मल्टीप्लेक्स का इतना बड़ा हिस्सा गैर-आनुपातिक है। लेकिन एक विभाजित, टूटे हुए कारोबारी मांडल से अलग होते हुए प्रक्रिया, संख्या एवं पारदर्शिता को ले आना इस समेकन के बौर नहीं संभव हुआ रहता। अगर ऐसा था तो बाकी 6,500 स्क्रीन को भी अधिक राजस्व अर्जन के दायरे में लाना चाहिए।

सिनेमाघर पहुंचने वाले दर्शकों के बीच बढ़ने का असर समेकन के लाभ के रूप में देखने को मिला है। यह भारत के 1.67 लाख करोड़ रुपये के मीडिया एवं मनोरंजन कारोबार के बड़े वर्गों में एक बेहद जरूरी ताकत है। फिल्म प्रदर्शन एक बढ़िया उदाहरण है।

नई सदी की शुरुआत के समय भारत में करीब 12,000 सिनेमा स्क्रीन थे और उनमें से हरेक का मालिक अलग था। इस वजह से किसी फिल्म को रिलीज एवं मार्केटिंग करना किसी दुःस्वप्न से कम नहीं था। डिजिटल प्रिंट से पहले के उस दौर में किसी फिल्म निर्माता को देश भर में अपनी फिल्म रिलीज करने के लिए 60,000 रुपये प्रति कॉपी वाले 12,000 प्रिंट की जरूरत पड़ती थी। लेकिन कोई भी इसका खर्च नहीं उठा सकता था। बड़ी फिल्में भी 400-700 प्रिंट के ही साथ रिलीज होती थीं। टिकट बिक्री काफी बिखरा हुआ काम था जिससे पता ही नहीं चल पाता था

गंभीर है। लेकिन अब इन दो कानून को कड़ाई से क्रियान्वयन करने की जिम्मेदारी सरकार एवं संबंधित प्रशासन को निभानी होगी। अक्सर देखा गया है कि लचर क्रियान्वयन होने की वजह से कानून का असर धरातल पर दिखाई नहीं देता है। सामाजिक बंधन एवं परंपराओं के चलते पीड़ित परिवार बलात्कार जैसी बातों को सामने लाने से घबराते हैं। इस वजह से भी कड़े कानून होने के बावजूद कानून महत्वहीन साबित हो जाता है। कई मामलों में पीड़ित को न्याय मिलने में वर्षों लग जाता है। सरकार को इस महत्वपूर्ण कानून को आम जनता तक पहुंचाने लिए उचित प्रबंध करना चाहिए।

*निशांत महेश त्रिपाठी, नागपुर*

### कानाफूसी

**रसूख का प्रयोग** केंद्रीय सामाजिक न्याय मंत्री थावरचंद गहलोत जहां राज्य सभा में सदन के नेता हैं, वहीं गृहमंत्री अमित शाह वह नेता हैं जिनके सदन में मौजूदा होने पर भाजपा के तमाम मंत्री और रणनीतिकार सलाह लेने उनके पास पहुंचते हैं। गुरुवार को गहलोत को अपनी स्थिति मजबूत करने का अवसर मिला। जब राज्य सभा में राष्ट्रीय चिकित्सा आयोग विधेयक पर बहस शुरू हुई तो विपक्ष ने विरोध करते हुए कहा कि न तो स्वास्थ्य मंत्री हर्षवर्धन और न ही उनके कनिष्ठ मंत्री अश्विनी कुमार चौबे सदन में मौजूद हैं। सदन के उपसभापति हरिवंश ने 10 मिनट के लिए सदन स्थगित किया। जब दोनों मंत्री भागत हुए सदन में पहुंचे तो गहलोत ने उनकी आलोचना करते हुए कहा कि आपने यह क्या तमाशा लगा रखा है? आप दोनों नहीं थे इसलिए सदन स्थगित करना पड़ा।



**हिंदी बनाम अंग्रेजी** मरुमालारची द्रविड़ मुन्नेत्र कषगम के नेता और राज्य सभा सदस्य वाइको ने गुरुवार को सप्ताह के लेकर विपक्ष तक सबको आड़े हाथों लिया। यहां तक कि उन्होंने सहयोगी दल द्रमुक को भी नहीं बखशा। केंद्रीय स्वास्थ्य मंत्री हर्षवर्धन ने जब राष्ट्रीय चिकित्सा आयोग विधेयक पर अपनी बात रखनी शुरू की तो वाइको ने मंत्री से मांग की कि वह हिंदी के बजाय अंग्रेजी में बोलें क्योंकि यह मुद्दा राष्ट्रीय महत्व का है। तब आसंदी से कहा गया कि अनुवाद की सुविधा उपलब्ध है। इस बीच भाजपा और जदयू के सांसद वाइको की आलोचना करते हुए मंत्री से हिंदी में बोलने की मांग करने लगे। इस पर अंग्रेजी में बोलना शुरू कर चुके हर्षवर्धन दोबारा हिंदी में बोलने लगे। वाइको ने दोबारा विरोध किया और समझाने आए कांग्रेस के जयराम रमेश और द्रमुक के तिरुशी शिवा की भी किनारे कर दिया। हर्षवर्धन ने गृहमंत्री अमित शाह से कहा कि वह समझ नहीं पा रहे कि किस भाषा में बोलें। गौरतलब है कि वाइको तमिलनाडु में हिंदी विरोधी आंदोलन चला चुके हैं। राज्य सभा में नरेबजी के दौरान भी वह हिंदी नारों में साथ नहीं देते।

### आपका पक्ष

**तीन तलाक संबंधी विधेयक पारित** संसद के मॉनसून सत्र में दो महत्वपूर्ण विधेयक पारित हुए हैं। पहला विधेयक महिलाओं की सुरक्षा से संबंधित तीन तलाक विधेयक है। दूसरा बच्चों के संरक्षण तथा हिंसा से बचाव करने वाला पोक्सो विधेयक में संशोधन है। इन दोनों विधेयकों को राष्ट्रपति ने भी अपनी स्वीकृति दे दी है। तीन तलाक विधेयक पारित होने से मुस्लिम महिलाओं को उनके खिलाफ हो रहे अत्याचार में न्याय मिलेगा। वे न्यायालय में अपने अधिकार के लिए आवाज उठा सकेंगी। विधेयक पारित होने से पहले कई वर्षों से पति तन बार तलाक कहकर अपनी पत्नी को तलाक देकर अलग हो जाते थे। उसके बाद एक तलाकशुदा महिला को सामाजिक, आर्थिक एवं मानसिक यातनाओं का सामना



**तीन तलाक कानून बनने के बाद मुस्लिम महिलाओं ने खुशी जाहिर की** करना पड़ता था। लेकिन इस कानून के तहत अपराध सिद्ध होने पर तीन साल की जेल का प्रावधान है। वहीं पोक्सो कानून के तहत बच्चों का यौन शोषण करने वाले अपराधियों को फांसी की सजा दी जाएगी एवं बच्चों के खिलाफ अन्य अपराध करने पर भी कड़ी सजा का प्रावधान है। सरकार इन दो विधेयकों के पारित होने के बाद महिला अधिकार एवं सुरक्षा के प्रति

**पूर्वांतर राज्यों को जोड़ने की जरूरत** देश के पूर्वांतर राज्य पहले से ही उपेक्षा के शिकार रहे हैं। लेकिन सरकार अब पूर्वांतर राज्यों की सुध ले रही है। सरकार ने पूर्वांतर के लिए 1,232 करोड़ रुपये लागत की 49 विकास परियोजनाओं को मंजूरी प्रदान की है। इसमें सड़क, पुल और पर्यटन स्थलों का उन्नयन, निर्माण और नवनीकरण किया जाएगा। देश के अन्य राज्यों से पूर्वांतर कटा हुआ लगता है। उचित परिवहन की कमी के कारण देश के दूसरे राज्यों के लोग वहां नहीं जा पाते हैं। सबसे पहले पूर्वांतर राज्यों की देश की राजधानी तक पहुंच कर आसान बनानी होगी। वहीं पूर्वांतर को भी बढ़ावा देने की जरूरत है जिससे लोग वहां जाएं तथा पहले से बनी अपनी अवधारणा को बदल सकें।

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



## गंगा का जीवन

**गंगा** का पानी प्रदूषित होने के मसले पर जब से चिंताएं सामने आने लगीं, तब से अब तक उसे प्रदूषण मुक्त बनाने के नाम पर हजारों करोड़ रुपए बहा दिए गए हैं। लेकिन पिछले तीन दशक से ज्यादा समय से यह क्रम लगातार जारी रहने के बाद भी हालत यह है कि कुछ अंतराल के बाद इस समस्या के और ज्यादा गहराने की ही खबरें आती रहती हैं। गंगा की न केवल सफाई का सवाल आज भी मुंह बाए खड़ा है, बल्कि उसके लिए बहाए जाने वाले इतने पैसे कहां और कैसे खर्च किए गए और उसका क्या नतीजा सामने आया, इसके बारे में शायद कोई हिसाब भी नहीं है। अंदाजा इसी से लगाया जा सकता है कि आज भी केंद्रीय प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड (सीपीसीबी) को इस मसले पर निर्देश जारी करने पड़ रहे हैं। शुक्रवार को गंगा में अपशिष्ट और औद्योगिक कचरा प्रवाहित होने पर कड़ा संज्ञान लेते हुए सीपीसीबी ने चार राज्यों के प्रदूषण बोर्डों को निर्देश दिया है कि वे पर्यावरणीय मानदंडों का पालन नहीं करने वाली इकाइयों के खिलाफ सख्त कार्रवाई करें और जरूरत पड़ने पर उन्हें बंद भी करें। सीपीसीबी ने उत्तराखंड, उत्तर प्रदेश, पश्चिम बंगाल और बिहार के प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड के अध्यक्षों को पंद्रह दिनों के भीतर निरीक्षण की रिपोर्ट पेश करने को कहा है।

जाहिर है, गंगा को स्वच्छ बनाने के मकसद से शुरू की गई ‘नमामि गंगे’ से लेकर अतीत की तमाम योजनाओं का हासिल अब भी यही है कि इस नदी में प्रदूषण फैलाने वालों पर पूरी तरह काबू नहीं पाया जा सका है। सवाल है कि जिस नदी को देश के जनजीवन और पर्यावरण के लिए इतना जरूरी घोषित किया गया है, उसे स्वच्छ रखने के प्रति समाज से लेकर सरकारी महकमों तक की लापरवाही को निर्बाध क्यों छोड़ दिया गया था! बुरी तरह प्रदूषित हो गई गंगा की सफाई के लिए चलाए गए अभियानों की हकीकत भी तब सामने आती रहती है, जब सुप्रीम कोर्ट की ओर से सरकार को फटकार लगाई जाती है या फिर प्रदूषण नियंत्रण एजेंसियां राज्य सरकारों को इस दिशा में ठोस कदम उठाने का निर्देश देती हैं। आखिर किन वजहों से आज भी शहरों के नालों के जरिए अपशिष्ट बहाए जाते हैं या फिर औद्योगिक इकाइयों को गंगा में कचरा प्रवाहित करने की अधोषिप्त छूट मिली हुई है? क्या इस स्थिति के बने रहते हुए यह उम्मीद की जा सकती है कि गंगा का पानी प्रदूषित होते जाने को रोक़ा जा सकेगा?

खुद सीपीसीबी के हाल के एक अध्ययन के मुताबिक उत्तर प्रदेश से लेकर पश्चिम बंगाल तक गिनती की कुछ जगहों को छोड़ दिया जाए तो गंगा नदी का पानी पीने लायक तो दूर, नहाने लायक भी नहीं रह गया है। नदी में ‘कोलोफॉर्म’ जीवाणु का स्तर इतना बढ़ गया है कि वह मनुष्य की सेहत के लिए खतरनाक साबित हो सकता है। यह हालत तब है जब गंगा की सफाई पर पहले की योजनाओं में खर्च राशि के बाद 2014 से 2018 तक इसी मद में साढ़े पांच हजार करोड़ रुपए से ज्यादा की रकम जारी की गई और उसमें लगभग चार हजार करोड़ रुपए खर्च किए जा चुके हैं। इस मसले पर राष्ट्रीय हरित पंचाट से लेकर अलग-अलग अदालतों ने समय-समय पर सरकार और संबंधित महकमों की लापरवाही पर सवाल उठाया है। लेकिन यह सवालना मुश्किल है कि जिस गंगा की शुद्धता और पवित्रता के हवाले से राजनीति भी की जाती रही है, उसे स्वच्छ बनाने के तमाम अभियानों की हकीकत इस कदर अफसोसनाक क्यों है! गंगा को स्वच्छ बनाने का दम भरने वाली सरकारों के दावों के बरखस उनकी इच्छाशक्ति इतनी कमजोर क्यों दिखती है!

## सेवा और सवाल

अगर जनता को बिजली, पानी, चिकित्सा और शिक्षा जैसी बुनियादी सेवाएं मुफ्त में मिलने लंगं तो उसके लिए राहत और खुशी की इससे बड़ी क्या बात हो सकती है! एक कल्याणकारी राज्य और उसमें सरकार की यह जिम्मेदारी भी बनती है कि वह अपने नागरिकों को बुनियादी जरूरत वाली चीजों और सेवाओं को निशुल्क या मामूली दाम पर उपलब्ध कराए। वरना कल्याणकारी सरकार होने का मतलब ही क्या रह जाता है! ऐसे में अगर कोई सरकार इस दिशा में पहल करती है तो क्यों नहीं उसका स्वागत होना चाहिए, भले यह चुनावी पैतरा ही क्यों न हो! ऐसा ही करिश्मा दिल्ली की अरविंद केजरीवाल सरकार ने किया है। दिल्ली सरकार ने एक बड़ा फैसला करते हुए दो सौ यूनिट तक खपत पर बिजली बिल माफ कर दिया है। यानी दो सौ यूनिट बिजली दिल्ली सरकार मुफ्त देगी। यह फैसला तत्काल प्रभाव से लागू कर दिया गया है। इससे पहले दिल्ली सरकार ने पिछले साल बीस हजार लीटर पानी मुफ्त देने की पहल की थी, जिस पर बाद में दिल्ली हाईकोर्ट ने सवाल उठाए थे।

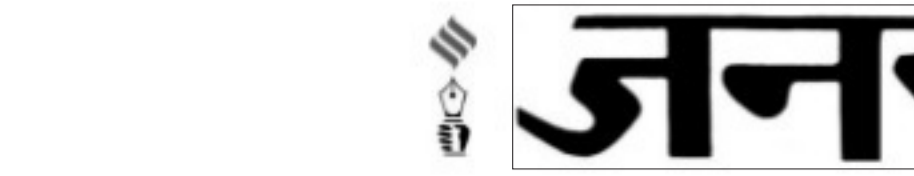
दिल्ली सरकार ने दो सौ यूनिट बिजली तो मुफ्त देने का एलान किया है। इसके अलावा, दो सौ से चार सौ यूनिट तक खर्च करने वालों को बिल में पचास फीसद की सबसिडी मिलेगी। यानी आधा खर्च सरकारी पैसे से भरा जाएगा। इससे दिल्ली सरकार पर छह सौ करोड़ रुपए सालाना का बोझ पड़ेगा। सरकार का दावा है कि दो सौ यूनिट तक मुफ्त बिजली के फैसले से तैंतीस लाख लोगों को फायदा होगा। एक मोटे अनुमान के मुताबिक पैंतीस फीसद उपभोक्ता ऐसे हैं जो दो सौ यूनिट से भी कम बिजली खर्च करते हैं। इनमें समाज के कमजोर और गरीब तबके के परिवार ही हैं। ऐसे में दिल्ली की आबादी के एक बड़े हिस्से के लिए केजरीवाल सरकार का यह कदम राहत भरा है। मुफ्त बिजली-पानी के लिए मुख्यमंत्री हमेशा से यह तर्क भी देते आए हैं कि जब देश के नेताओं, मंत्रियों, सांसदों, विधायकों के लिए बिजली मुफ्त हो सकती है तो गरीब जनता के लिए क्यों नहीं!

इसमें कोई दो राय नहीं कि दो सौ यूनिट मुफ्त बिजली दिल्ली सरकार का विशुद्ध रूप से चुनावी कदम है। सरकार अगर गरीबों को वाकई राहत देना चाहती थी तो पिछले चार साल में उसने यह फैसला क्यों नहीं किया? अब चुनाव करीब आते ही सरकार को गरीबों का खयाल आया है। दिल्ली की चुनावी राजनीति में बिजली बड़ा मुद्दा रहा है। आम आदमी पार्टी ने 2013 से ही बिजली के बढ़े दामों को मुद्दा बनाया था और इसे लेकर अरविंद केजरीवाल ने पंद्रह दिन का अनशन भी किया था। इस मुद्दे ने आम आदमी पार्टी को भारी बहुमत दिलाने में बड़ी भूमिका निभाई। उनकी पार्टी ने राजधानी की जनता से वादा भी किया था कि सत्ता में आते ही सस्ती बिजली दी जाएगी। दिल्ली से सटे राज्यों हरियाणा और उत्तर प्रदेश में बिजली काफी महंगी है। दो सौ यूनिट तक के लिए गुडगांव में नौ सौ रुपए से ज्यादा और नोएडा में तेरह सौ रुपए चुकाने पड़ने हैं। हालांकि चुनाव से ठीक पहले जनता को अपने पक्ष में करने के मकसद से सरकारें ऐसे कदम उठाती रही हैं, दिल्ली सरकार ने इससे पहले मेट्रो में महिलाओं के लिए मुफ्त यात्रा का कार्ड चला था, लेकिन इस बात का ध्यान रखा जाना चाहिए कि मुफ्त की सेवाएं और सुविधाएं सिर्फ जरूरतमंदों को मिलें। ऐसे खर्चों का बोझ अंतिम तौर पर सरकारी खजाने पर पड़ता है और उसका खमियाजा अलग शक्ल में आम जनता को ही उठाना पड़ता है।

## कल्पमेधा

**आप हर इंसान का चरित्र बता सकते हैं, यदि आप देखें कि वह प्रशंसा से कैसा प्रभावित होता है।**

**-सेनेका**



*—संयुक्त राष्ट्र—*

## सनीषा सिंह

**बदलती सामाजिक व्यवस्था के कारण और घरों के सिकुड़ने से जहां परिवार छोटे हुए हैं, वहीं परिवारों में बुजुर्गों की भूमिका भी कम हुई है। पहले बुजुर्ग परिवार का महत्वपूर्ण अंग होते थे। नई पीढ़ी उनसे सामाजिक मूल्यों की विरासत का पाठ पढ़ती-सीखती थी। लेकिन अब बच्चे मोबाइल या टीवी में उलझे रहते हैं। उनके पास बुजुर्गों से बात करने का समय नहीं होता। बड़े शहरों में परिवार चलाने के लिए अगर पति-पत्नी दोनों कामकाजी होते हैं, तो घर के बुजुर्गों से बात किए हफ्तों भी बीत जाते हैं।**

बढ़ती आबादी समस्या है या इसे मानव पूंजी अथवा संसाधन के रूप में देखा जाए, इस बहस का जवाब शायद ही कभी मिले। यह बहस खासतौर से इसलिए उठी है कि आबादी से जुड़ी जो गंभीर समस्याएं सामने आ रही हैं, उनका कोई युक्तिसंगत समाधान फिलहाल विशेषज्ञों को भी नहीं सूझ रहा है। कुछ समय पहले संयुक्त राष्ट्र के जनसांख्यिकी विशेषज्ञों ने सामाजिक परिप्रेक्ष्य में एक चेतावनी बूढ़ी होती आबादी को लेकर दी है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र की इस रिपोर्ट में तुलनात्मक आंकड़े देकर बताया गया है कि दुनिया में यह पहला अवसर है जब बूढ़े लोगों की आबादी पांच साल से कम उम्र के बच्चों के मुकाबले ज्यादा हो गई है। इस आंकड़े के अनुसार वर्ष 2018 के अंत में पैंसठ साल से ज्यादा उम्र के बुजुर्गों की आबादी सत्तर करोड़ से ज्यादा थी, जबकि चार साल के बच्चों की तादाद अड़सठ करोड़ है। मोटे तौर पर कह सकते हैं कि दुनिया एक ऐसे मुहाने पर है जहां

सनीषा सिंह, 35 वर्ष की आयु में, 'असंतुलन' के तैयारी के दौरान 2018 में बच्चे को गोद ले रही हैं।

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*—संयुक्त राष्ट्र—*

### अतुल चतुर्वेदी

कबी कालिदास ने एक पूरा काव्य ‘मेघदूत’ प्रकृति को आलंबन बना कर समर्पित कर दिया था और उनकी पीड़ा को स्वर देते हुए मोहन राकेश ने ‘आषाढ़ का एक दिन’ जैसे कालजयी नाटक की रचना की। लेकिन क्या आज हमारे साहित्य और दैनिक जीवन में प्रकृति की यह मौजूदगी उतनी ही शिद्धत से महसूस की जा रही है? क्या हमारे आज के जीवन और प्रकृति का यह रिश्ता उतना ही मजबूत रह गया है? रीतिकालीन कविता को लेकर हम कितना भी नाक-भौंसिकोड़ लें, लेकिन सैन्यपति, देव और यहां तक कि मतिराम में भी प्रकृति के दर्शन सुलभ हो ही जाते हैं। छायावादी कवियों की रचनाओं में जयशंकर प्रसाद, सुमित्रानंदन पंत, महादेवी वर्मा और सूर्यकांत त्रिपाठी निराला की रचनाओं में भी वर्षा ऋतु, सावन के मेघ आदि का वर्णन प्रचुरता में मिलता है। पंत की कविता-‘झम-झम झम-झम मेघ बरसते हैं सावन के, छम-छम छम गिरती बूंदें तरुओं से छन के’ न केवल घनमि बिंब खड़े करती है, बल्कि चाक्षुष बिंबों के माध्यम से हम में सावन का आनंद और ताजगी उत्पन्न कर देती है।

निराला की ‘बादल राग’ कविता से कौन परिचित नहीं होगा। बादल के माध्यम से नए क्रांति के स्वर फूंकने और

सनीषा सिंह, 35 वर्ष की आयु में, 'असंतुलन' के तैयारी के दौरान 2018 में बच्चे को गोद ले रही हैं।

### संकट के बादल

पश्चिम राजस्थान सहित प्रदेश के कई भागों को अब तक अच्छी बारिश का इंतजार है। यहां सूखी धरती भीगी जरूर है, लेकिन उसकी प्यास अभी अधूरी है। बरसात के इंतजार में किसानों के माथे पर बल पड़ गए हैं। पशुपालक चिंता में डूबे हुए हैं लेकिन सबसे अहम समस्या है कि बरसात के मौसम में भी पानी संकट बना हुआ है। भरपूर बारिश से सभी समस्याओं का एक साथ समाधान संभव है, लेकिन यह सब भगवान भरोसे है। कुल मिलाकर सौ मर्ज की एक दवा बरसात है।

जून माह से किसान और पशुपालक भरपूर बरसात की राह देख रहे हैं। अब जुलाई महीना भी बीत गया है लेकिन तरबतर करने वाली बारिश का इंतजार खत्म नहीं हुआ है। अब तक जो थोड़ी-बहुत बरसात हुई है उससे हल्की-सी नव अंकुरित घास का स्वाद भेड़-बकरियों के मुंह में जाने लायक हुआ था पर बरसात के अभाव में यह घास भी जलने के कगार पर है। बड़े पशुओं, खासकर गायों के खाने के लायक घास कहीं नहीं है। फिलहाल संकट के बादल आम जन और खेती के साथ-साथ पशुधन पर भी मंडरा रहे हैं। बरसात नहीं होने के कारण इस बार टांकों-नाडियों पुरातन जलस्रोतों में पानी की आवक नहीं के बराबर है।

नतीजतन, पानी की जरूरत के लिए जलदाय विभाग के स्रोतों पर ही सभी की निर्भरता बनी हुई है। हालात यह है कि बरसात के मौसम में भी जलसंकट से जूड़ रहे हैं। इस बिगड़ते संतुलन को देखते हुए सरकार और नागरिकों को चाहिए कि वर्षा ऋतु में अधिक से अधिक वृक्षारोपण करें व उनका संरक्षण करें। वर्षा जल के संरक्षण व समुचित संग्रह के लिए आवश्यक कदम उठा कर जल संकट से

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## बुजुर्ग आबादी और चुनौतियां

पोते-पोतियों के मुकाबले दादा-दादी या नाना-नानी की संख्या ज्यादा हो गई है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र का यह आकलन भी है कि अगर बदलाव की मौजूदा दर जारी रहती है, तो वर्ष 2050 में शून्य से चार साल के हर बच्चे पर दो बुजुर्ग होंगे यानी बुजुर्गों की आबादी बच्चों के मुकाबले दोगुनी होगी।

ये बदलाव दो मुख्य वजहों से हुए हैं। पहली बात यह है कि बढ़ती स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं से जीवन प्रत्याशा भी बढ़ी है, जिससे बुजुर्ग आबादी में इजाफा हो रहा है। कई विकसित देशों में सेवानिवृत्ति के बाद बुजुर्गों की देखभाल के विशेष सामाजिक सुरक्षा प्रबंध किए गए हैं, जिससे उन्हें जीवन-यापन के लिए किसी पर निर्भर नहीं रहना पड़ता। इस तरह स्वास्थ्य और आर्थिक समस्याओं से चिंतामुक्त जीवन के कारण बुजुर्ग लंबा जीवन जीने लगे हैं। यह एक सार्थक बदलाव है। लेकिन इसके समांतर दूसरी उल्लेखनीय बात यह है कि कामकाज और नौकरियों के बढ़ते दबाव और तनाव के कारण युवा कम बच्चे पैदा कर रहे हैं। चीन के अलावा यह भले ही किसी देश की घोषित नीति न हो, लेकिन अब ज्यादातर देशों में एकल बच्चे के परिवार का चलन बढ़ रहा है। ऐसा परिवर्तन ब्रिटेन जैसे देश में भी हो रहा है जहां मध्यवर्गीय परिवार संतान के लालन-पालन में लगने वाले संसाधनों के अभाव की वजह से एक से ज्यादा बच्चे को प्राथमिकता नहीं दे रहे हैं। इसके पीछे बच्चों की परवरिश में लगने वाले समय और खर्च की समस्या भी है, जिस कारण युवा दंपति अब ज्यादा बच्चे पैदा नहीं कर रहे हैं। इससे बुजुर्गों और बच्चों के अनुपात में असंतुलन आ रहा है। लेकिन यह असंतुलन असल में एक बड़े खतरे का संकेत भी है। खतरा उल्टे पिरामिड जैसी सामाजिक संरचना वाले देशों की भरमार हो जाने का है, जिसमें बुजुर्ग ज्यादा और बच्चे कम होंगे।

वाशिंगटन यूनिवर्सिटी में जनसांख्यिकी मामलों के विशेषज्ञ क्रिस्टोफर मर्रे ने एक शोध में बताया है कि जब दुनिया में बच्चे कम और बुजुर्ग ज्यादा होंगे, तो ऐसे वक्त में वैश्विक समाज को बचाए रखना मुश्किल होगा। खास बात यह है कि दुनिया के करीब आधे देशों में अभी ही आबादी के मौजूदा आकार को संरक्षन रखने के लिए पर्याप्त बच्चे नहीं हैं। विश्व बैंक ने भी इस हकीकत को स्वीकार किया है। विश्व बैंक के अनुसार 1960 में दुनिया में महिलाओं की प्रजनन दर पांच बच्चों की थी, जो छह दशक बाद आधे से भी कम यानी 2.4 रह

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## बरसात का राग

किसान की पीड़ा को उठेहने अद्भुत अमर स्वर दिए हैं। दिनकर ने तो वर्षा को ऋतुओं की रानी कहा है। केदारनाथ अग्रवाल और नागार्जुन आदि कवियों के यहां भी प्रकृति लुप्त नहीं हुई है, भले ही उसकी व्यंजना और संदंभ बदल गए हों। लेकिन आज हमारा रिश्ता प्रकृति से लगातार टूटता चला जा रहा है। खासकर उ्तर भारत में ज्यादा उदासीनता दिखती है। घर के आंगन में तुलसी और आंवले जैसे उपयोगी पौधों की कविताएं भी लुप्त-सी हो गई हैं।

न्यायियों का स्थान अब गमलों के स्टैंड ने ले लिया है। अव्वल तो प्लैट संस्कृति ने घरों में सामान के लिए ही जगह नहीं छोड़ी है, उस पर हमारी मानसिकता भी अर्थान्मुख अधिक हो गई है। हम घर की क्यारी तोड़ कर दुकान या एक कमरा बनवाना पसंद करते हैं, लेकिन पेड़ लगाना नहीं। हमारी पाटय-पुस्तकों से प्रकृति प्रेमों की कविताएं भी लुप्त-सी हो गई हैं।

आज पाटयक्रम सरकारों के राजनीतिक एजेंडों की पूर्ति के साधन अधिक हो गए हैं। विद्यार्थियों के व्यक्तित्व के चंद्रमुखी विकास से उनका कोई सरोकार नहीं। नतीजतन, विद्यार्थियों में पेड़-पौधों और जीव जंतुओं के प्रति संवेदनाओं और दायित्वों का अभाव हो गया है जबकि दक्षिण भारत में आज भी प्रकृति लोगों के जीवन का अंग है यही कारण है कि कम तापमान और

उबरा जा सकता है। जरूरत है, समय रहते कदम उठाने व उनके क्रियान्वयन करने की।
● ***रावत गर्ग ऊण्डू, राजबेरा, बाइमेर, राजस्थान***

### मुफ्त का जाल

दिल्ली में आम आदमी पार्टी की सरकार ने 200 यूनिट तक खपत वाले उपभोक्ताओं के बिजली बिल माफ करने का एलान किया है। विधानसभा चुनाव के पूर्व इस प्रकार की घोषणा मतदाताओं को रिझाने का प्रयास है। वैसे इन दिनों सभी दल मतदाताओं की अपने पाले में खींचने के लिए अपने-अपने तरीके से चुनावों से पहले ‘मुफ्त’ का जाल डालते रहते हैं।

जून माह से किसान और पशुपालक भरपूर बरसात की राह देख रहे हैं। अब जुलाई महीना भी बीत गया है लेकिन तरबतर करने वाली बारिश का इंतजार खत्म नहीं हुआ है। अब तक जो थोड़ी-बहुत बरसात हुई है उससे हल्की-सी नव अंकुरित घास का स्वाद भेड़-बकरियों के मुंह में जाने लायक हुआ था पर बरसात के अभाव में यह घास भी जलने के कगार पर है। बड़े पशुओं, खासकर गायों के खाने के लायक घास कहीं नहीं है। फिलहाल संकट के बादल आम जन और खेती के साथ-साथ पशुधन पर भी मंडरा रहे हैं। बरसात नहीं होने के कारण इस बार टांकों-नाडियों पुरातन जलस्रोतों में पानी की आवक नहीं के बराबर है।

नतीजतन, पानी की जरूरत के लिए जलदाय विभाग के स्रोतों पर ही सभी की निर्भरता बनी हुई है। हालात यह है कि बरसात के मौसम में भी जलसंकट से जूड़ रहे हैं। इस बिगड़ते संतुलन को देखते हुए सरकार और नागरिकों को चाहिए कि वर्षा ऋतु में अधिक से अधिक वृक्षारोपण करें व उनका संरक्षण करें। वर्षा जल के संरक्षण व समुचित संग्रह के लिए आवश्यक कदम उठा कर जल संकट से

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पिछले दिनों हिंदी के वरिष्ठ साहित्यकार मंगलेश डबराल ने फेसबुक पर एक स्टेटस लिखा कि 'हिंदी में कविता, कहानी, उपन्यास बहुत लिखे जा रहे हैं, लेकिन सच यह है कि इन सबकी मृत्यु हो चुकी है। हालांकि ऐसी घोषणा नहीं हुई है और शायद होगी भी नहीं, क्योंकि उन्हें खूब लिखा जा रहा है। लेकिन हिंदी अब सिर्फ 'जय श्रीराम' और 'वंदे मातरम' तथा 'मुसलमान का एक ही स्थान- पाकिस्तान या कब्रिस्तान' जैसी चीजें जीवित हैं। इस भाषा में लिखने की मुझे बहुत ग्लानि है। काश इस भाषा में न जन्मा होता!' इस बयान पर खूब विवाद हो रहा है। एक पक्ष इसे मंगलेश डबराल की निराशा की अभिव्यक्ति कह रहा है, तो दूसरा पक्ष उन्हें कुंठित हिंदी विरोधी की संज्ञा दे रहा है। बहरहाल, यह बहस अगर तर्कों और संवेदनाओं के साथ आगे बढ़े, तो हिंदी लोकवृत्त को आगे ले जाने में सहायक हो सकता है। इसे संकीर्ण खांचों में बंद जाने और अमर्यादित होने से भी बचाया जाना चाहिए। वर्तमान हिंदी परिदृश्य के इस प्रासंगिक विवाद के कुछ प्रतिनिधि स्वरो के साथ यह विशेष प्रस्तुति...



## कोई भी भाषा किसी एक व्यक्ति का टूल नहीं होती

मंगलेश डबराल के विवादित बयान को राजनीतिक चरम के बरक्स में उनकी उकताहट या गुस्से के तौर पर देखा जा है, यह कुछ ऐसा ही है कि हम जिस घर में जन्मे हो, उसमें अचानक अप्रिय और अमानवीय घटनाएं होने लगे और हमारा अपना ही उसमें शामिल हो, तब हम इसी तरह का अफसोस जाहिर करेंगे। मंगलेश अपने संपूर्ण जीवन में हिंदी की ही साधना करते रहे हैं, तो यह मानना गलत नहीं होगा कि वे हिंदी को अपने जन्मदाताओं के बराबर ही प्रेम और सम्मान देते होंगे। साथ ही मुझे यह भी लगता है कि तमाम



शैलेश भारतवासी  
प्रकाशक, हिंद युग प्रकाशन

हिंदी प्रेमियों ने मंगलेश डबराल के बयान को बहुत ज्यादा ही महत्त्व दे दिया। यह बात हमें कभी नहीं भूलनी चाहिए कि कोई भी भाषा किसी एक व्यक्ति का टूल नहीं होती। वह तो एक पूरे समय, एक भूगोल और एक व्यापक जिंदा समाज की संपत्ति होती है। मंगलेश जी ने अभी लिखे जा रहे लेखकों या उनकी रचनाओं पर जिस तरह के आरोप लगाये हैं, उनके जवाब में मेरी राय यही है कि भाषा जितनी अभी लिख रहे लेखकों की है, उतनी ही उनकी भी है। वे इस टूल का सही इस्तेमाल कर तथाकथित रूप से लिखी जा रही चीजों के खिलाफ एक बड़ा और मजबूत संसार खड़ा कर सकते हैं और हिंदी को बचा सकते हैं। तत्कालीन सत्ता तमाम हथियारों का अपने अनुरूप इस्तेमाल करती ही है। हमेशा से यही होता आया है। ऐसे में सच्चा लेखक अपनी भाषा को ही विरोधरूपी हथियार भी बनाता है। इसलिए मंगलेश जी जैसे लेखकों को हिंदी भाषा का लेखक होने की खाँस के बरक्स अपने रचनाकर्म से इसका जवाब प्रस्तुत करना चाहिए।

हिंदी को धिक्कारना एक तरह से गंदे पानी के साथ किसी शिशु को फेंकने को बरतारथ करना होगा। हमें हिंदी से नहीं, उन हिंदी बौद्धिकों से बौद्धिक घुटभेड़ करनी होगी, जो प्रेमचंद, राहुल सांकृत्यायन, नारायण, यशपाल, मुक्तिबोध के सृजन से समृद्ध हुई हिंदी की प्रातिश्रील और परिवर्तनकारी परंपरा को झुलता रहे हैं।

वीरेंद्र यादव, आलोचक

# विवादों के घरे में मंगलेश डबराल

## क्या हिंदी अब हत्यारों की भाषा है?



कृपा कल्पित  
वरिष्ठ कवि

हिंदी कवि और अनुवादक मंगलेश डबराल के बयान को सही मानें, तो फिर कबीर, प्रेमचंद और निराला की भाषा क्या है? मुक्तिबोध, नागार्जुन और विष्णु खरे की भाषा क्या है? क्या अंग्रेजी शेक्सपियर की नहीं साम्राज्यवादियों, व्यापारियों और लुटेरों की भाषा है? क्या स्टेलियन इतालो काल्विनो की नहीं, सिर्फ माफिया-गिरोहों की भाषा है? क्या जर्मन गेटे की नहीं, गोएबल्स की भाषा है? क्या संस्कृत कालिदास और भर्तृहरि की नहीं, ब्राह्मणवादियों की भाषा है? क्या उर्दू गालिब और मीर की नहीं, आतंकवादियों की भाषा है? भाषा समाज सापेक्ष होती है। जिस भाषा में कवि कविता लिखता है, वह उसी समय हत्यारों की भाषा भी होती है। भाषा

पवित्र या अपवित्र नहीं होती। इसलिए प्रश्न है कि आखिर मंगलेश की मंशा क्या है? पहले तो वे कहते हैं कि हिंदी में कविता, कहानी, उपन्यास यानी साहित्य की मृत्यु हो चुकी है। फूको के हवाले से हिंदी के हास्यालोचक सुधीश

पचीरी इनके अंत की घोषणा बहुत पहले कर चुके हैं। इस थिसी-पिटी बात के बाद डबराल कहते हैं कि हिंदी अब सिर्फ लिचिंग-गिरोहों की भाषा है, जिसमें अब कुछ भी सर्जनात्मक लिखना संभव नहीं, तो यहां वे अपनी अक्षमता भाषा पर थोप रहे हैं। जब भीतर कुछ बचा नहीं, तो सिर्फ भाषा आपको पाबंदो नेरुदा कैसे बना देगी? मंगलेश डबराल हिंदी में जन्म लेकर शर्मिदा हैं। यह बात वेदना के साथ कही जाती तो अलग बात थी, लेकिन यहां तो अपनी भाषा के प्रति हिकारत और घृणा नजर आती है, जबकि अपने एक साक्षात्कार में वे स्वीकार कर चुके हैं कि हिंदी ने मुझे बहुत कुछ दिया। मंगलेश ने जिस कारण यह पोस्ट लिखी थी, वह पूरा हुआ। इस पर जिस तरह की अच्छी-बुरी और मूर्खतापूर्ण टिप्पणियाँ आ रही हैं, वे यही चाहते थे। जब कविताओं से कुछ नहीं हो रहा, तो यही सही दरअसल, उनकी रचनात्मकता चुक गयी है और वे इन-दिनों अपनी ही कविताओं के अनुवाद करने का काम चला रहे हैं। इंधर उनको सद्बुद्धि दे दें। उन्हें विश्वास दिलाता हूँ कि उनके बिना हिंदी-भाषा और हिंदी-कविता का कुछ नहीं बिगड़ेगा।

## एक कवि को हक है निराश होने का

मंगलेश डबराल जी के जिस एक स्टेटस से इनाम बवाल मचा, उससे असहमति कोई बड़ी बात नहीं थी, लेकिन उसके बहाने उनके खिलाफ घुणित तरीके से अभियान चलाया गया। उस कथन के दो हिस्से हैं। पहला है- हिंदी में कविता, कहानी, उपन्यास बहुत लिखे जा रहे हैं, लेकिन सच यह है कि इन सबकी मृत्यु हो चुकी है। हालांकि ऐसी घोषणा नहीं हुई है और शायद होगी भी नहीं क्योंकि उन्हें खूब लिखा जा रहा है। लेकिन हिंदी में अब सिर्फ 'जय श्रीराम' और 'वंदे मातरम' और 'मुसलमान का एक ही स्थान, पाकिस्तान या कब्रिस्तान' जैसी चीजें जीवित हैं- यह आपको फूको के 'एंड ऑफ हिस्ट्री' के विस्तारों के सदृश लग सकता है। लेकिन यह अपने उद्देश्यों में बिलकुल अलग है। अब यह बताइए कि पिछले दस सालों में लिखी कौन सी कविता, कहानी या कौन सा उपन्यास है, जिसने हिंदी समाज पर कोई गहरा असर डाला या जिसको इंज कब देने से समाज थोड़ा



अशोक कुमार पांडेय  
लेखक

कंगाल हो जायेगा? इनमें खुद मंगलेश की लिखी कविताओं को भी शामिल कर लीजिए और इसके बरक्स उन नारों के प्रभाव को समाज पर देखिये, जिसका जिक्र किया गया है। दूसरा हिस्सा निजी जैसा होते हुए सिर्फ निजी नहीं है- इस भाषा में लिखने की मुझे ग्लानि है। काश! मैं इस भाषा में न जन्मा होता- इसका पहला हिस्सा उस असफलता से जन्मा है, समाज में प्रभाव न डाल पाने की ग्लानि। वह सहज है। जो न हो किसी के भीतर और वह अपनी पुरस्कार-चर्चा-प्रकाशन जैसी उपलब्धियों से फूला-फूला घूम, तो गर्व नहीं शर्म का बायस है। दूसरा हिस्सा थोड़ा समस्यामूलक है। उस ग्लानि का अताकिक विस्तार, पलायन। लेकिन एक व्योवृद्ध कवि को हक है निराश होने का। असहमति हो सकती थी, लेकिन जब 'जिस थाली में खाना उसमें छेद करना' और 'हिंदी पर गर्व है' जैसे जवाब आने लगे, तो समझिये चोला कोई हो आत्मा सीधे नागपुर से टेलीपैथी में है। सरकार/मालिक की रोटी खाओ तो सरकार/मालिक की बजाओ! ट्रेड यूनियन मुर्दाबाद, गर्व से कहा हम हिंदी हैं के भीतर छिपा हिंदू, यानी जो हिंदी भाषी नहीं हुए, उनको गर्व का हक नहीं, और कहीं वे भी गर्व में हैं, तो जय श्रीराम कहकर टूट पड़ने का विकल्प है ही!

## खबरें सिटी की

### ब्रीफ न्यूज



### राज्यपाल से मिले यूको बैंक के डीडी

रांची. राज्यपाल त्रीपठी मुर्मू से शुक्रवार को यूको बैंक के डीडी चरण सिंह ने राजभवन में मुलाकात की। यह उनकी शिष्टाचार भेंट थी। इस दौरान श्री सिंह ने बैंक की योजनाओं व कार्यों के बारे में जानकारी दी।

### बीएसएनएल के पास वेतन देने के पैसे नहीं

रांची. भारत संचार निगम लिमिटेड (बीएसएनएल) लगातार वित्तीय संकट से जूझ रहा है। पैसे की कमी के कारण पेशानों को रही है। रांची समेत पूरे झारखंड में इसका असर देखने को मिल रहा है। एक बार फिर जुलाई का वेतन अधिकारियों व कर्मचारियों को नहीं मिल पाया है। सामान्य दिनों में माह के अंतिम दिन या अगले माह के पहली तारीख तक वेतन मिल जाता था। इसके पूर्व भी पैसे की कमी के कारण फरवरी का वेतन समय पर नहीं मिल पाया था। पैसे की कमी के कारण 4जी उपकरण भी बंदरगाह पर फंसा हुआ था। झारखंड सहित पूर्वी क्षेत्र के कई राज्यों के 4जी उपकरण पैसे की कमी के लिए फंसे हुए थे। बीएसएनएल, झारखंड सर्किल के सीजीएम केके ठाकुर ने कहा कि हाल के दिनों में कंपनी के पास फंड की कमी हुई है। इस कारण कई प्रकार की पेशाना ही रही है। अधिकारियों व कर्मचारियों को जल्द ही वेतन खतमें पहुंच जायेगा।

### फुटपाथ दुकानदारों ने मानव श्रृंखला बनायी

रांची. पुरलिया रोड के फुटपाथ दुकानदारों ने वॉर्डिंग जोन होने के बावजूद वहां दुकान लगाने पर लोअर बाजार पुलिस द्वारा प्रताड़ित करने का आरोप लगाते हुए मानव श्रृंखला बनायी। रांची फुटपाथ दुकानदार हॉकर संघ की उपाध्यक्ष शर्मिला नेवार, राजकुमार चौरसिया, सोहन महली, उदय शंकर और अन्य ने कहा कि केंद्रीय कानून 2014 के तहत टाउन वॉर्डिंग कमेटी का गठन किया गया है। इस कमेटी में नगर आयुक्त से लेकर पुलिस विभाग के तमाम बड़े पदाधिकारी शामिल हैं। इसके द्वारा ही तमाम वॉर्डिंग जोन चिह्नित किये गये हैं। इसमें थाना की कोई भूमिका नहीं रहती, फिर भी इसके द्वारा बार-बार प्रताड़ित किया जाता है। फुटपाथ दुकानदारों ने क्रमबद्ध आंदोलन की चेतावनी दी है।

### यमन के भारतीय दूतावास प्रभारी आये विकास भारती

रांची. अफ्रीकी देश जिबूती स्थित भारतीय दूतावास में द्वितीय सचिव चांसीरी प्रमुख और यमन देश के भारतीय दूतावास के प्रभारी सुजन शांडिल्य शुक्रवार को विकास भारती विशुनपुर के रांची कार्यालय पहुंचे। इस मौके पर श्री शांडिल्य ने आरोग्य भवन परिसर में पौधरोपण किया। इस मौके पर विकास भारती के सचिव पद्मश्री अशोक भगत व सुमित मिश्र भी मौजूद थे।

### आरटी पेटेड के लिए एनसीसी कैडेटों को प्रशिक्षण

रांची. मेगा स्पार्ट्स कॉम्प्लेक्स, खेलगांव में झारखंड बटालियन एनसीसी ने वार्षिक प्रशिक्षण शिविर लगाया है। इसमें कैडेट्स (बॉयज एंड गर्ल्स) भाग ले रहे हैं। कैप में मुख्य रूप से रिपब्लिक डे परेड (आरटी पेटेड) दिल्ली में भाग लेने के लिए कैडेटों को तैयार किया जा रहा है। शिविर 31 जुलाई से शुरू हुआ है, जो नौ अगस्त तक चलेगा। कैप कमांडेंट नरेश चंद ने बताया कि प्रशिक्षण शिविर में एनसीसी कैडेटों को भारतीय सेना में होने वाले प्रशिक्षण से परिचित कराया जाता है। एनसीसी कैडेट्स प्रशिक्षण के माध्यम से यह सीखते हैं कि विभिन्न परिस्थितियों में कैसे साथ रहकर कार्य किया जाता है।

## उपायुक्त ने कंपनी को काली सूची में डालने की अनुशंसा की

# 2.25 लाख किसानों की बीमा का था लक्ष्य अब तक एक लाख आवेदन ही जमा हो पाये

संवाददाता > रांची

प्रधानमंत्री किसान बीमा योजना के तहत रांची जिले में 31 जुलाई तक एक लाख किसानों ने आवेदन जमा किये हैं, जो लक्ष्य के आधे से भी कम है। योजना के तहत लगभग 2.25 लाख किसानों को किसान बीमा का लाभ देने का लक्ष्य रखा गया है। बार-बार निर्देश के बावजूद अब तक फॉर्म जमा नहीं किया जा सका है। इसे लेकर प्रखंड स्तर के अधिकारी भी अपनी चिंता जाहिर कर चुके हैं।

किसान बीमा का आवेदन देने का जिम्मा एचडीएफसी एरगो को सौंपा गया है। लेकिन, अब तक किसानों को फॉर्म ही उपलब्ध नहीं कराया गया है। इस वजह से बड़ी संख्या में किसान तय समय तक फसल बीमा का आवेदन जमा करने से वंचित रह गये। शुक्रवार को किसान फसल बीमा योजना की बैठक में कई प्रखंडों के बीडीओ ने इसकी शिकायत की। इसे गंभीरता से लेते हुए उपायुक्त

## एचडीएफसी एरगो को दिया गया है बीमा का आवेदन देने का जिम्मा

- किसानों को अब तक फॉर्म ही उपलब्ध नहीं कराया गया
- बैठक में कई प्रखंड विकास पदाधिकारियों ने रखी अपनी शिकायत

**पीछे रहने की क्या है वजह**  
बैठक के दौरान प्रखंड सहकारिता पदाधिकारियों ने बताया कि फॉर्म जमा करानेवालों को प्रति फॉर्म 10 रुपये दिये जायेंगे, लेकिन इसका भुगतान नहीं किया गया। लैम्पस के पदाधिकारियों द्वारा प्रखंडों में फॉर्म जमा कराने का कार्य किया जा रहा है, लेकिन अब वे मानदेय के अभाव में इस कार्य में दिलचस्पी नहीं दिखा रहे हैं। पदाधिकारियों ने बताया कि मुखिया की उदारसूना भी वजह है। पदाधिकारियों ने मैन पावर की समस्याओं को भी रखा।

प्रखंड	निर्धारित लक्ष्य	प्राप्त लक्ष्य	प्रखंड	निर्धारित लक्ष्य	प्राप्त लक्ष्य
ओरमांझी	9612	6567	बेड़ो	9078	6419
कांके	17088	4800	मांडर	10146	3200
नगड़ी	6942	5600	बुढ़मू	7476	5300
इटकी	4806	2900	बुण्डू	5874	4680
खलारी	5340	2100	तमाड़	12282	14900
नामकुम	12282	5750	राहे	4806	2900
चन्हो	9076	4800	सोनाहातू	7476	4412
लापुंग	5874	5500	अनगाड़ा	11214	3700
रातू	9612	4700	सिल्ली	10680	7510

### व्हाट्सएप के जरिये होगी मॉनिटरिंग

राय महिमापत्र ने एचडीएफसी एरगो कंपनी को ब्लैक लिस्टेड करने की

अनुशंसा कर दी है। इस संबंध में कृषि पशुपालन एवं सहकारिता विभाग के

सचिव को पत्र भेज दिया है। साथ ही इस मामले में विशेष दिशानिर्देश भी

दिये गये हैं। बैठक में इस मामले में कई अन्य निर्देश भी दिये गये।

## सिर्फ होर्डिंग में दिखता है विकास

- झाविमो का मिलन समारोह सह सदस्यता अभियान किया गया आयोजित

संवाददाता > रांची

झारखंड विकास मोर्चा (प्र) ने कांटोदोली स्थित कनाया बैंकवेट हॉल में शुक्रवार को मिलन समारोह सह राज्यस्तरीय सदस्यता अभियान आयोजित किया, जिसमें पूर्व सीएम व झाविमो सुग्रीमो बाबूलाल मरांडी ने कहा कि राज्य में कानून का राज खत्म हो गया है। चारों तरफ भयानकता है। मांव लिचिंग जैसी घटनाओं ने राज्य को बदनाम किया है। चारों तरफ भ्रष्टाचार का आलम है। गरीब अच्छी शिक्षा और चिकित्सा पाने में असमर्थ है। विकास सिर्फ होर्डिंग और विज्ञापनों में दिखता है। किसानों की आत्महत्या



झाविमो के सम्मेलन को संबोधित करते बाबूलाल मरांडी।

का सिलसिला जारी है। लोग भूख से मर रहे हैं, पर सरकार चोट बैंक की राजनीति में मशगूल है। राज्य में बिजली और उद्योग की हालत खस्ता है। राज्यभर में पार्टी के सदस्यता अभियान वर्मा में किया। समारोह में महानगर अध्यक्ष सुनील गुप्ता, शुचिता सिंह, आदित्य मानु, राम मनोज साहू, मो अकबर कुंशी, मुन्ना बड़ाइक, शरीफ अंसारी, महावीर नायक और अन्य थे।

सुस्तफा शेख, रुस्तम अंसारी सहित विभिन्न क्षेत्रों के सैकड़ों सामाजिक व राजनीतिक कार्यकर्ताओं ने पार्टी का दमन थापा। कार्यक्रम की अध्यक्षता मुजीब कुंशी व मंच संचालन जितेंद्र वर्मा ने किया। समारोह में महानगर अध्यक्ष सुनील गुप्ता, शुचिता सिंह, आदित्य मानु, राम मनोज साहू, मो अकबर कुंशी, मुन्ना बड़ाइक, शरीफ अंसारी, महावीर नायक और अन्य थे।

## कई सेक्टरों की हालत हो गयी खराब : चेंबर

रांची. हाल के दिनों में व्यापारिक मंदी पर झारखंड को बुरा प्रभाव पड़ा है। इसे लेकर चेंबर अध्यक्ष ने मुख्यमंत्री को पत्र लिखा है। उन्होंने कहा है कि वर्तमान में उद्योगों की हालत खराब है। इस पर लगातार खबर मिल रही है। खबरों के अनुसार, जमशेदपुर-आदित्यपुर कलस्टर एवं उसके आसपास स्थित और मैन्यूफैक्चरिंग में भी यही स्थिति है। इस कारण कंपनियां निराश हैं। इसने छोटे और मझोले उद्योगियों को भी परेशान किया है, क्योंकि उनकी सहन क्षमता काफी कम है। यह स्थिति निश्चित रूप से प्रधानमंत्री के पांच ट्रिलियन डॉलर की अर्थव्यवस्था के सपने को पूरा करने में योगदान देनेवाली नहीं है। सिंगल विंडो सिस्टम कारगर नहीं है।

## आदिवासी दिवस की रैली में नेता-अफसर भी लें भाग

संवाददाता > रांची

जय आदिवासी केंद्रीय परिषद, झारखंड प्रदेश आदिवासी गोंड महासभा, राष्ट्रीय आदिवासी एकता परिषद और समर्थक संगठनों ने विश्व आदिवासी दिवस कार्यक्रम के मद्देनजर गोंडवाना भवन चिरयौदी में शशि प्रधान की अध्यक्षता में बैठक की। इसमें पक्ष-विपक्ष के तमाम आदिवासी विधायक, मंत्री, सांसद, सरकारी उच्चाधिकारी और कर्मचारियों से कहा गया कि वह भी इस दिन मोटरसाइकिल रैली और शोभायात्रा में शामिल होकर अपनी सहभागिता दिखायें। पुलिस- प्रशासन से मांग की गयी कि नौ अगस्त को राजधानी की प्रमुख सड़कों पर लोगों

- विभिन्न आदिवासी संगठनों ने बैठक कर की अपील

की बड़ी भीड़ जुटेंगी, जिसे देखते हुए सुरक्षा व यातायात की पुख्ता व्यवस्था की जाये। राजेंद्र चौक, अलबर्ट एक्का चौक, कन्हरी व अन्य मार्गों पर पेयजल, चलत शौचालय व चलत चिकित्सा सुविधा उपलब्ध करायी जाये। विश्व आदिवासी दिवस के उपलक्ष्य में एक दिन का सरकारी अवकाश घोषित किया जाये। बैठक को मुन्ना टोप्यो, चंदन हलदर पाहन, अनुज बेसरा, प्रदीप मुंडा, एतवा उरांव, पंकज बेसरा, रिमिंड्यु लोहार, बंसेत टोप्यो व वासुदेव भगत ने भी संबोधित किया।