Big and bigger

Some of the biggest names in Indian business are shedding their reticence and letting in global firms into their parlours

ACROSS THE BOARD

SHAILESH DOBHAL

Call it the season of big-bang partnerships. The country's biggest firm by revenue, Reliance Industries (RIL) sold a fifth of its oil-to-chemical division to soon-to-be the world's biggest firm Saudi Aramco for a whopping $15 billion. It also announced the hunt for strategic partners for its telecom and retail ventures. Well, given the stress in both the sectors and the scale of RIL's ambitions, potential partners can only be deep-pocketed foreign firms.

Bharti Airtel recently sought permission to up the foreign investment limit for itself to 100 per cent, with reports that long-time partner Singtel is upping its stake in the country's second-biggest telco's holding firm Bharti Telecom to over 50 per cent. Though denied by the firm, there were other reports that said Japanese investment behemoth SoftBank too may be looking at some kind of partnership with Bharti Airtel.

Then there is the country's original retail king, Kishore Biyani, letting world's biggest etailer Amazon get a toehold into his sanctum sanctorum. Amazon is subscribing to a sliver of quasi-equity in one of Biyani's core firms, Future Coupons, which holds the strings to his listed retail business. And paying top dollars, double the current market valuation of the group's flagship Future Retail.

After gobbling the country's biggest ecommerce company Flipkart for $16 billion last year, the world's largest retailer Walmart has reportedly opened talks with the $110-billion salt-to-software Tata Group for collaborating with it in big box retail. After bringing in an 11 per cent financial partner in American Invesco Oppenheimer Developing Markets Fund, Zee Group is on the lookout for a strategic partner, with speculation focusing on global names like Comcast and Sony doing the rounds.

It seems nothing pressures the corporate mind like a debt overhang. In order to become net-debt free in the next two-years and improve returns for millions of its shareholders, the traditionally insular RIL is now openly serenading global biggies in its core business — refining and petrochemicals — and sunrise areas — retailing and telecom. Though Chairman Mukesh Ambani had articulated a partner-driven approach a few years ago too, but barring the now decade-old BP deal for oil and gas exploration, RIL had remained a solo player, even choosing to incubate new businesses in retail and telecom all alone. It is only now that the firm is walking that famous "new Reliance" talk by Ambani at the annual meeting of the firm's shareholders a few years back.

The case is very different for television biggie Zee, which is saddled with over ₹11,000 crore debt, and bringing in a partner is an existential necessity for both the firm and promoter Subhash Chandra. The firm started out as global media Moghul Rupert Murdoch's India partner, split from it and became one of the biggest in the business in India. Its size in that sense rules out most Indian firms as potential collaborators, and willy-nilly only a foreign firm can come to its rescue.

That the march of foreigners is happening across sectors, and that the most successful Indian firms are setting the trend, make the current partnerships qualitatively different from earlier times. Unlike the rent seeking partnership of the yore, where the foreigner needed the Indian player to navigate the treacherous regulatory, political and bureaucratic labyrinth in India or a technology-starved Indian firm needed the foreigner's patent crumbs to survive, the current partnerships are between near-equals, leaders in their respective geography or segment. In that sense, these "big bang" tie-ups are reflective of the coming of age of Indian industry, which for long was buffeted by a closed economy and learned to face global competition only in the last two decades or so. True that some of these partnerships may very well turn sour, others may result in the foreigner taking over the Indian one or it may unravel in other ways, but this paring of Goliaths is a trend that is likely to endure.

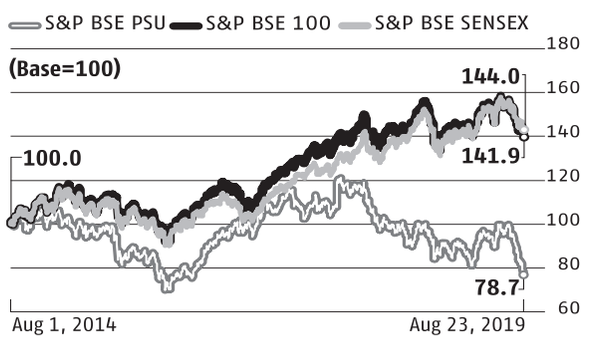
Selling less while raising more

Clearer commercial focus and tighter financial discipline may yield a steady stream of dividends

OCCASIONAL ASIDE

AMIT TANDON

EXHIBIT 1: BSE PSU VS SENSEX VS BSE 100



Source: BSE, up to July 31

EXHIBIT 2: PSU ETF RETURNS

	1-Month	3-Month	1-Year	3-Year
S&P BSE Bharat 22 TRI	-12.32	-8.39	-4.24	-
Category returns	-7.02	-5.4	-2.93	-
Rank within category	107	102	70	-
Number of funds in category	107	107	94	-
CPSE ETF	-3.85	-17.17	-14.34	-14.1
Category returns	-1.95	-12.09	-8.14	10.26
Rank within category	3	3	3	3
Number of funds in category	3	3	3	3

Data as on August 2, 2019

Raising money from sale of public sector undertakings (PSUs) is now a critical item in meeting fiscal targets. This government has raised ₹2.71 trillion or 84.3 per cent of the targeted ₹3.21 trillion since 2014-15, meeting its divestment targets in the last two years. The tenacity with which the government is pursuing this one number is admirable.

During this period, no route to raise money has been off the table; the government has used buybacks (Oil India, National Hydroelectric Power, IRCON etc.), offers for sale (NALCO, National Fertiliser, Neyveli Lignite etc), piggybacking on PSU IPOs (Cochin Shipyard, GIC, New India etc), off-market transactions (HPCL-ONGC), strategic divestment (PFC-REC, Dredging Corporation), sale of SUUTI shares, sale through ETF's (CPSE ETF and Bharat 22) and even sale of enemy shares. Nor is any amount too small; the Dredging Corporation of India employees brought in ₹9.3 million through an OFS.

Despite the impressive amounts gathered from their sale, there are infirmities that ail the public sector. These come in the way of a more robust fund-raise. Some alternate sets of data point to this.

One, the trailing BSE PSU Index (Exhibit 1). ₹100 invested in the PSU index five years ago in August 2014 would return ₹88.0 today. A similar amount invested in the BSE Sensex would have returned ₹146.7 and in the BSE100 ₹147.0.

Two, this is reflected in the price performance of PSU ETFs. The CPSE ETF, which tracks 11 central PSUs, has raised ₹48,500 crore. And Bharat-22, its dizygotic twin, with 19 public sector companies and three SUUTI shares — Axis Bank, ITC and Larson & Toubro, has garnered ₹26,400 crore. Their performance lags as seen in Exhibit 2.

Three, governance is no longer an amorphous idea; it can now be measured on the IFC-BSE-IiAS Corporate Governance Scorecard. Excluding banks there are 16 PSUs in the BSE-100 index. Their average and median score out of 100 is 52.3. Our research shows companies that scored above 60 had a median return of 39 per cent over two years, (7 per cent over one), while those with lower scores, generated a 3 per cent return (negative 16 per cent). This is a pointer that poor governance lies at the heart of middling performance.

If the government wants to continue to mobilise resources from divestments, it needs to ask itself three questions: First, if there is clarity regarding the objectives in running PSUs. Second, is the current ministry-PSU linkage the best structure to ensure PSUs function efficiently, and three, is the divestment giving the government most bang for its bucks.

There is limited clarity regarding the objectives and purpose. Oscillating between achieving the greatest good for the greatest number versus running a profitable business muddles decision-making at the PSU level and confuses investors. It is perfectly legitimate to have national political-level objectives (development of a backward region), but these should be separated from those that control national resources (ONGC, Coal India), or building national champions (SBI). The government is better served pursuing just one goal. With clearer commercial focus and tighter financial discipline, the treasury can hope for a steady stream of dividends and of realising a fair price from the sale of shares and even entire businesses. This money is then available for its broader (social) objectives. The alternative of running a febrile business which consistently needs funds to be injected, does not serve the divestment agenda.

Oversight of a PSU is a small part of a ministry's responsibilities. Shortish tenures leave bureaucrats insufficient time to read the industry trends, let alone understand business nuances. An added downside is a very short institutional memory. Responsibilities towards the company give the appearance of being chores and need safe decisions: Why else will PSU boards be dominated by former bureaucrats — which compound the problem of limited skills and to a less robust board oversight. Then there is the mistaken belief in Delhi that Sebi's rules apply only to the private sector. Consequently, PSUs generally weigh in favour of their parent ministry; conversely market discipline is frequently breached. And while market discipline may not ensure business success, but its absence will ensure failure. Suffice to say, the ministries have exhibited extremely uninspiring stewardship over our PSUs.

Finally, divestment is a specialised job. Deciding between IPOs, offers for sales, follow-on offerings, bulk deals, QIPs is not an easy task. Add to this the complexity of deciding which company is ripe for sale. Will selling HPCL to ONGC be more value accretive than merging the two and then selling the combined entity? Should the general insurance companies be merged, and shares in the holding company be sold or should one sell shares in the operating business? Different market cycles will give a different answer. Unfortunately, the decision is likely to be driven by the fear of the Central Bureau of Investigation or the Vigilance Commissioner, rather than what markets dictate.

There are ownership models that address the challenges that plague Indian PSUs. They address governance issues and structures, a path towards gradual disengagement from non-core investments, beneficial asset monetisation and generating returns for the state. Temasek (Singapore), Khazanah (Malaysia), Solidium (Finland), Forsta AP-fonden (Sweden), ADIA and Mubadala (Abu Dhabi, UAE), are some successful models. All of them involve at the core, putting in place a governance structure where ownership shifts from individual ministries to a government holding company or a fund and furthering their governments agenda. Parenthetically, the report of the Committee to Review Governance of Boards of Banks in India aka the PJ Nayak Committee had a similar recommendation for government owned banks. Such structures will bring the desired focus, accountability, specialisation and sense of ownership to the task at hand. These are some examples of successful transitions and structures importantly within the 'state', that we should consider emulating.

This shift, even if begun today, will bear fruit in the medium to long term. Meanwhile there is undoubted fiscal pressure to raise funds. There are assets including Balco and Hindustan Zinc, that can be sold immediately — to Vedanta or even the public. Shareholding with SUUTI can also be monetised relatively quickly. These and other such ideas will serve for the short term. For the long term, unless we bring about transformative change, the pipes will choke.

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CHINESE WHISPERS

Tharoor takes on critics

The Kerala unit of the Congress had issued a show-cause notice to the party's Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor for his laudatory comments on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but soon discovered that the parliamentarian had turned the tables on them. Last week, Tharoor had joined party colleagues Jairam Ramesh and Abhishek Manu Singhvi to state that Modi should be praised for doing the "right things". In his reply, Tharoor took on his critics. He said he had intervened more than 50 times in Parliament and had spoken against 17 Bills with "courage and conviction". "Can any of my critics from Kerala say they have done so?" Tharoor said. Party leaders Ramesh Chennithala, K Muraleedharan, Benny Behannan, and T N Pratapan were among those who had criticised Tharoor. A three-time MP from Thiruvananthapuram, Tharoor thanked Indian Union Muslim League leader and former minister M K Muneer and Muslim Youth League President Sayyid Munavvar Ali Shihab Thangal for their support. However, a rumour campaign has started in the Congress that some of its leaders could switch to the Bharatiya Janata Party because the Modi government is thought to be facing a talent crunch.

Happy birthday everyone

Kakra village in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri district is unique in a way. Almost all the residents of this village have the same birthday, January 1, on their Aadhaar cards. Kakra is a tribal-dominated village and most residents don't have any documents they can present as proof of age. So officials tasked with enrolling Aadhaar aspirants gave them the same date and month of birth. According to the Unique Identification Authority of India guidelines, if an individual is unable to produce proof of birth at the time of registration, he/she can still register for it without documents. If they are able to furnish proof at some point, they can get the date of birth added to their Aadhaar data. The authorities say that despite the option to update, there has hardly been any instance of someone visiting an Aadhaar centre to avail of it.

Aadhaar for food

The Aadhaar has made lives easy for people in many ways. It has also helped the Pashupatinath temple administrators in Mandsaur district, Madhya Pradesh, to separate local devotees from outsiders. The temple administration provides free meals to devotees and was struggling to cope with the flow of visitors. The meal facility is for people who arrive from other cities and not for locals. The temple administration has made it mandatory for visitors to declare their Aadhaar number to avail of free food. The temple committee manager, Rahul Runwal, said the number of devotees who wanted to eat had come down by 50 per cent since the new system was introduced.

INSIGHT

The science of ambient marketing

AMBI PARAMESWARAN

When you get back from an international trip and step out of the airport, the first thing to assault you is probably the unique odour that seems to permeate any public space in India. Is it the lack of toilets or is it the fact that our toilets are badly maintained or should we lay the blame on the lack of water in our toilets? But I am seeing or should I say smelling that this is slowly changing. The rapid growth of products aimed at masking the smell of our toilets has been astounding to say the least. In the years gone by, the only brand that used to be seen in Indian toilets was the Odonil bar. And they used to have a peculiar smell of their own. In the last five years, there has been a rapid growth in the adoption of air purifying brands and products. Odonil itself has been transformed. There have been numerous new brands, Indian and International, such as Ambi Pur and Godrej Aer that have managed to create smaller-sized products tailor-made for smaller spaces such as toilets and elevators.

If we are seeing innovative products at the middle or the bottom end of the market, we are also seeing the introduction of curated products labelled "home fragrances". These are often packaged in exquisitely styled dispenser systems including reed diffusers and oil vaporisers. An ad extolls the virtues thus: "The rejuvenating scents of tangerine, lavender and coral blue are sure to leave your home with a tranquil charm".

Riding the odour bandwagon are other miscellaneous products such as a "scented" vest that is skin friendly and anti-bacterial. Microbiologist Christopher Callewaert of Ghent University has even made it his mission to understand the various types of body odours, as reported in *The Week* magazine. He and his colleagues have studied thousands of consumers and have categorised the body odour into specific typologies such as Fishy, Faecal-like, Oniony, Floral and even a bit Soapy. Callewaert says, "... triggers that cause the corynebacterial to flourish include... wearing certain clothes that have their own microbiome and their own bacterial community". So may be the "scented vest" has a future.

Getting back to the odour that hits us as we enter a premise, it has been an area of concern for real estate companies. In an article published in *Financial Times* (June 16, 2018), the writer observes that today, there is the new art of blending custom fragrances for buildings and this has become a delicate science that can bring subtle benefits to the sellers. Smell has for long been a powerful tool for selling property. In what is called "Open Days" when prospective visitors are welcome to take the tour of a home, it is customary to do some fresh baking before the prospective buyers walk in. A freshly baked cookie smell is expected to trigger the saliva glands of a visitor and help him reach for his cheque book that much faster.

This is now getting a little more evolved. In developed countries, builders are employing specialist perfume designers to create curated smells for a building, so that what reached the nostrils of the prospective buyer is not the smell of cement and sawdust but those of something more interesting, may be sandalwood or lime or more exotic lavender and musk. These are dispersed innocuously through dispenser systems and candles.

London developers have made this into a fine art to the extent that upper-end home owners are curating their own fragrance, to suit their home environment. Floral for one if their home has a floral theme. More animalistic or musk if the home has a stronger masculine flavour. Or lime and lemon, if the home has a lot of indoor plants and such like. I wonder if this is a trend that is waiting to be tapped in India.

In an *HBR* article (March 2015), *Science of Sensory Marketing,* the authors point out that many industries are missing out on the opportunities to connect with the customers' senses. The focus till now has been on building expertise on what is obvious such as shape, colour, touch. New research is emerging to suggest that even the ambient temperature can have an influence on consumer behaviour. A wine glass may change the perception about the wine that is poured into it. The smell of cinnamon can make a café that much more welcoming. University of Michigan's Aradhana Krishna in her book, *Customer Sense: How the 5 Senses Influence Buying Behavior* calls out industries still focused on visual attributes giving little thought to the other sensory effects. For example, will a bank feel that much more solid if it had aromas of wood and leather? Will a boutique feel that much more welcoming if it smelt of lavender and jasmine?

The good news is that we are seeing the emergence of ambient fragrance marketing in India too. And as our toilets start losing their bad odour, hopefully our shops and showrooms will start developing their own unique ambient fragrances.

Smell well to sell well.

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LETTERS

Get down to business

It is not for the first time that someone in the government was announcing hiring large numbers in government jobs. Satya Pal Malik (*pictured*), governor of Jammu & Kashmir, has announced that 50,000 vacant government posts in the state would be filled in the next three months. Well before the 2014 general elections, Narendra Modi had announced that if elected, his government would create 20 million jobs for the youth of the country. Instead, there has been rampant unemployment during his regime owing to the economic slowdown. Take the automobile sector: Nearly, 2 lakh jobs have been cut in the past three months because of the slowdown and this process is being followed in other sectors like aviation, garments, foods — the list is endless. Instead of hollow slogans, the governor should make an effort to bring stability and peace while ensuring that civil liberties are in place in the state as people there are crying for it. The biggest punishment for the people of Jammu & Kashmir is that they don't have the means to communicate with the outside world.

S K Khosla Chandigarh

Provocative comments

The comment by the J&K governor Satya Pal Malik in his maiden official media interaction since August 5 that the longer politicians stay in jail, the higher the political dividends for them is disgraceful. Such a comment trivialises the prolonged detention of political leaders and betrays his disdain for the liberty of an individual guaranteed under the Constitution. Equally outrageous is his belief that mobile phones and internet are essentially weapons of terrorists, and ordinary citizens have little use of them. If so, why not extend such restrictions to the rest of the country? The governor also displayed scant regard for decorum by predicting that people would beat up Congress leaders with shoes for their stand on the changes in Kashmir. This is highly provocative and unbecoming of a person of his stature.

S K Choudhury Bengaluru

A game changer

Close on the heels of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement of measures to perk up the country's sagging economy, the Union cabinet's move towards increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country could prove to be a game-changer. In a fresh round of FDI reforms, the government relaxed FDI rules in single-brand retail, approved 26 per cent FDI in digital media and offered 100 per cent FDI under the automatic route in coal mining and contract manufacturing. The big stimulus could also help to considerably ease trade tensions between India and the US which has been simmering for some time now.

N J Ravi Chander Bengaluru

Execution will be key

The announcement allowing 100 per cent foreign direct investment in commercial coal mining sounds good. Its translation to execution will be crucial. The government failed to open the industry to competition, despite liberalisation of the economy years ago, because of bureaucratic indecision. The Union cabinet had also approved policies opening coal mining to private miners and partially removing restrictions on the sale of coal produced at the so-called captive mines but these too have not been implemented. It is a paradox that with the world's fifth-largest reserves of the fuel, we imported over 40 per cent more coal during January to April this year compared to last year. That the dip in global price of coal should dictate the pace of our self sufficiency in a vital sector as coal is but a fig leaf over goal clarity.

R Narayanan Navi Mumbai

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HAMBONE

Business Standard
Volume XXIV Number 14
MUMBAI | FRIDAY, 30 AUGUST 2019

An exceptional year

Govt needs to reduce dependence on RBI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released its Annual Report for 2018-19, which explains its actions over the past year and outlines expectations for the broader economy. The Annual Report comes shortly after reports that the RBI will transfer a considerable amount, over ₹1.7 trillion, to the government's coffers this year. This is thanks to a much larger surplus of ₹1.23 trillion, with excess provisioning making up the remainder. This followed the recommendations of a high-level committee led by former RBI governor Bimal Jalan. The surplus is high partly due to an acceleration in open market operations (OMOs) by the RBI, particularly in the second half of the year, which saw ₹2.5 trillion worth of OMOs. Nevertheless, the Annual Report noted that liquidity remained tight and "system liquidity experienced shortages despite injection in durable liquidity of the order of ₹3 trillion, the highest in any year so far". Some observers believe that liquidity in the banking system is comfortable. India Ratings argues that this is because the net liquidity injection under the liquidity adjustment facility continued in FY19 and the credit offtake remains weak.

Future views on liquidity in the system are crucial as to whether the higher transfer from the RBI will be a one-time event or sustained under the new framework. As to why the RBI felt the need for liquidity injections on a larger scale, the Annual Report was quite clear on the motives: It was largely because of foreign exchange operations and large currency expansion.

The RBI also felt that the last vestiges of remonetisation were dealt within 2018-19, taking the currency-GDP ratio from 10.7 per cent to 11.2 per cent. That meant that system liquidity shifted from surplus to deficit during the year. Therefore, the RBI blamed capital outflows and the expansion in currency in circulation for strong action on liquidity. The government, thus, cannot depend upon a permanently higher level of transfers from the RBI and must reduce its dependence thereon.

It is important to note that the RBI, through the Annual Report, signals its continued vigilance about the need for ample precautionary buffers against external crises. These are more important than even in the "taper tantrum" episode of 2013, because the sensitivity of portfolio flows to global spillovers has increased significantly.

In other respects, the Annual Report might be considered to be surprisingly sanguine, such as on the matter of the growth of the general government deficit. While it highlights the lack of growth impulses domestically and the downside risks from the global economy, it also says that India is going through a "soft patch mutating into a cyclical slowdown" rather than facing a structural problem, though it has highlighted structural issues in areas such as labour, agricultural marketing, and land, and they need to be addressed.

The RBI has also reiterated its stand that reviving consumption demand and private investment is priority in the current year. This means that since inflation is likely to remain under control in the foreseeable future, the central bank will be in a position to bring down the policy rates further.

A positive move

FDI policy should be supplemented with wider reforms

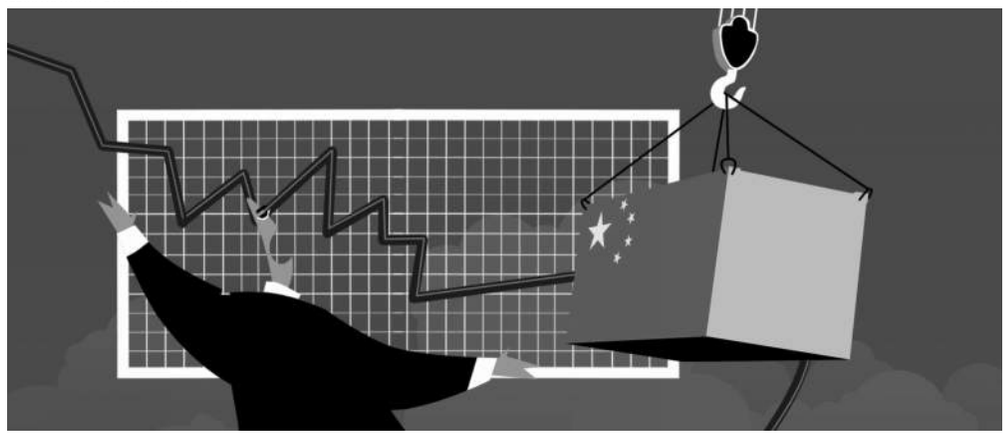
The Union Cabinet on Wednesday liberalised foreign direct investment (FDI) norms in areas such as single-brand retail, contract manufacturing, and the coal sector. Of course, the most-awaited change was in sourcing norms for single-brand retail companies. While the government has not removed the 30 per cent sourcing requirement, compliance has indeed been made easier. For instance, local sourcing can now be met as an average of the first five years. This will give retailers more flexibility in the initial years. Further, goods procured for exports by single-brand retailers will be factored in while calculating the percentage of local sourcing.

Given the possibilities in the retail sector, increasing flexibility should help bring more foreign investment. For instance, a recent report by Deloitte showed that the retail market is likely to grow to $1.2 trillion by 2021, compared to its size of $795 billion in 2017. The share of organised retail, excluding e-commerce, is likely to double from 9 per cent in 2017 to 18 per cent by 2021. Further, the penetration of the internet will help improve the share of online retail. In this context, the government has also changed the e-commerce norms for single-brand retailers. They have been allowed to sell online on condition that they open physical stores within two years of starting online sales. With the easing of norms for single-brand foreign retail, the government should now consider allowing FDI in multi-brand retail. This will not only help bring in a significant amount of investment but will also improve supply chains, and the agriculture sector could become a big beneficiary.

While the decision to allow 100 per cent FDI in commercial coal mining and related investment (earlier it was allowed for captive consumption only) is expected to give a boost to private miners and introduce competition for Coal India, it remains to be seen if global companies would be interested in the sector. The other significant decision was allowing 100 per cent FDI under the automatic route in contract manufacturing. The idea is that it will help India integrate into the global value chain. Since a number of companies are moving out of China because of rising trade tensions with the US, some of them can look at India as an option to relocate. This will also allow foreign retailers to procure goods more easily and meet the local sourcing norm.

While these are welcome developments, FDI policy is only the first step. If India intends to be an important part of the global value chain, it has to think beyond the idea of import substitution and ease trade restriction. Frequent changes in tariffs, as has been the case in recent years, create friction and uncertainty. Global companies may not be willing to work with suppliers located in a country with an unpredictable and unfavourable tariff structure. Further, the other big obstacle in attracting investment in manufacturing is India's inflexible land and labour market. The government should address these issues to incentivise both global and domestic investment, because the absence of wider policy reforms can restrict actual gains.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Could a US recession end the trade war?

In recent downturns, the US has been more willing than normal to cooperate with China in order to try to spur recovery

The recent inversion of the yield curve in the United States — with the interest rate on 10-year US government bonds currently lower than that on short-term bonds — has raised fears of a possible US recession later this year or in 2020. Yet, paradoxically, a downturn in America could help to improve bilateral economic relations with China and cool the two countries' escalating trade dispute.

Recent history offers grounds for such predictions. True, by reducing import demand, US recessions normally have a negative impact on economies with a high trade-to-GDP ratio, including China. However, in recent downturns, the US also has been more willing than normal to cooperate with China in order to try to spur recovery.

SHANG-JIN WEI

During the last major US recession in 2008-10, for example, China appeared to be the only major economy able and willing to boost global demand. Partly as a result of this, Sino-American ties improved, and the US even advocated giving China a greater voice in international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the G20.

Similarly, US-China relations were at a low ebb in mid-2001, following a mid-air collision of a US reconnaissance plane and a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea, which resulted in the death of the Chinese pilot and the capture of the American crew. But after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks suddenly darkened the US economic outlook, US-China economic ties improved.

Unlike its predecessors, US President Donald Trump's administration may not have international cooperation in its DNA. But, tellingly, Trump initiated the current tariff war when the US economy was somewhat overheated, partly as a result of the aggressive tax cut that he pushed through Congress in late 2017. Frictions with America's trading partners, which many economists believe are damaging both the US and the global economy, may in fact be helping to cool down the US economy. But Trump's stance on China may soften, should a recession materialise.

Two factors could derail this possibility. First, China may be unable or unwilling to provide economic stimulus. The Chinese government's debt-to-GDP ratio is higher today than it was a decade ago, when the authorities rolled out an aggressive stimulus package to offset weakening export demand in the wake of the global financial crisis. That fact would seem to limit the government's capacity to pursue an expansionary fiscal policy in the event of a US recession.

Even so, China's debt-to-GDP ratio is still much lower than that of most other large economies, giving the government some room for additional fiscal stimulus in an economic emergency. Moreover, although the People's Bank of China is more cautious about injecting liquidity at will, the relatively high reserve ratio the PBOC imposes on commercial banks suggests that it would have significant firepower should the need arise.

The second risk factor is the 2017 US corporate tax cut, which enlarges America's trade deficit with China, further damaging bilateral relations.

America's overall trade deficit reflects a shortage of US national savings relative to investment. By causing US government debt to increase by an additional $1-2 trillion over the next decade, the 2017 tax cut will make the government's savings rate substantially more negative. Because it is unlikely to be offset by a decrease in national investment or a large enough increase in private-sector savings, the tax cut has contributed to a higher US trade deficit. The overall deficit this year is projected to be larger than in 2017 or 2018, and this trend is set to continue.

This strongly suggests that the US trade deficit with China will increase. With US politicians and much of the media evidently failing to recognise the connection between Trump's tax cut and the growing US trade deficit, they will most probably think the Chinese are doing something pernicious. For this reason, I have long argued that the US tax cut is a significant structural impediment to reducing America's trade deficit with China (and with many other trading partners), and therefore a likely source of tension over the next few years.

Nonetheless, the US trade deficit (as a share of GDP) typically decreases as the American economy weakens, because import demand tends to fall as well. A US recession may, therefore, somewhat moderate the negative impact of the Trump tax cut on the trade deficit.

More important, the Chinese government has itself cut taxes aggressively since the end of 2018, reducing value-added tax (from 17 per cent to 16 per cent and then to 13 per cent), lowering the corporate income-tax rate, and decreasing the social-security contribution rate for employers.

Because these recent tax cuts are unlikely to be offset by lower investment or a sufficiently large increase in private savings, China's national savings rate will most probably decrease. As a result, the country's overall trade surplus — which reflects its excess of savings over investment —probably will be far smaller in 2020, and may even slide into deficit in one or two quarters. Although China will almost certainly still run a bilateral trade surplus with America next year because of the effect of the US tax cut, the imbalance will be much smaller than otherwise would have been the case.

While a US recession would be bad news for the global economy in terms of a direct demand channel, it could help to normalise the troubled relations between America and China. If the world's two largest economies get along better, businesses and investors everywhere will breathe a sigh of relief. This may turn out to be a silver lining in the next US recession.

The writer is a former Chief Economist of the Asian Development Bank, and Professor of Finance and Economics at Columbia University and a visiting professor at the Australian National University;©Project Syndicate

Rebuilding ordnance factories

In a bold move, the government has floated a proposal to corporatise the Kolkata-headquartered Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), under which there are 41 factories with a combined manpower strength of over 82,000. The government's decision has not gone down well with trade unions. They went on a 30-day strike from August 20, relenting only after several rounds of discussion with senior defence ministry officials. The possibility of another strike can't be ruled out as the proposal under consideration threatens the very governance structure of the organisation.

Should the government back down or stay on course with its decision? The balance of evidence suggests that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) needs to stay firm on its decision as corporatisation is not only in OFB's interest and important for its long-term survival, but also for the country's defence preparedness and self-reliance.

LAXMAN KUMAR BEHERA

OFB, which traces its origin to 1802 during the British Raj, is the oldest and one of the largest departmentally-run commercial organisation of the government of India. With a turnover of over ₹12,800 crore, it has historically enjoyed a monopoly over a wide variety of products ranging from tanks and armoured vehicles to small arms, ammunition, and various troop comfort items. However, owing to a number of factors, the organisation has performed below its optimum level.

Being a government department, the OFB is prohibited from making profits from sales to the armed forces. This has taken away from it a major incentive to improve the organisational and production efficiency. Moreover, it is frequently allowed to pass on all costs of production to customers. This cost-plus approach to production, which is widely discarded as inefficient, adds extra cost to the MoD's budget.

The biggest problem for the OFB has, however, been its limited decision-making power. As a subordinate department of the MoD, OFB's major decisions pertaining to finance, human resources, research and development (R&D), modernisation of factories, and formation of joint ventures and subsidiaries, are taken outside the organisation. The bureaucratic nature of the decision-making of the external agencies and their inclination towards rules and regulations rather than outcomes have left little incentive for the OFB to stand on its own and assume accountability for its functioning. OFB's woes have further been compounded by its distant location, far away from the Delhi's power corridors, and frequent change in key leadership. In the past 10 years alone, the organisation has seen 15 chairmen. With such a rapid turnover at the top, the organisation has been left with little strategic vision and direction.

The OFB, on its part, has also done little to improve its performance that could match its rich history of over 200 years and vast asset base. The organisation can hardly boast of any worthwhile product of its own. Nearly 80 per cent of its turnover comes from imported technologies.

The lack of focus on innovation, along with delayed execution of orders, low labour productivity, and meagre exports, has frustrated its key stakeholders, especially the Indian Army, which accounts for nearly 80 per cent of its supplies. The Indian Army is also concerned about the poor quality of OFB products. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India had once observed that some of the OFB products were passed on to customers with defects that could be visible to the naked eye. Being frustrated with the repeated performance shortfalls, the MoD has, in recent years, tried to move away from procuring products from the OFB. It has already declared 275-odd items produced by the OFB as non-core items, effectively demolishing the organisation's monopoly over these products.

The below-optimal performance of the OFB has also led the organisation to forgo it pivotal position in Indian defence production. Indian private sector companies having defence industrial licences are now producing more than the OFB. The growth of the private sector, which is likely to be accelerated under the Make in Indian initiative, will further push the OFB on the margins of defence production unless reformative steps are taken at the earliest.

The idea of corporatisation of the OFB has been under consideration for a long time. It was first suggested by the Nair Committee in 2000. It was reiterated by the Kelkar Committee in 2005, which had made a strong pitch for corporatisation of the organisation. However, successive governments lacked the political will and/or courage to implement this vital piece of reform measure.

The corporatisation of the OFB will turn it into a defence public sector undertaking (DPSU) under the administrative control of the MoD. This is far from privatisation of the organisation as rumours suggest. As a DPSU and with 100 per cent equity stake by the central government, the OFB will have far greater autonomy in decision-making. It will be managed by its own board of directors. Subject to broad guidelines of the government, it can make its own financial/investment plans, form joint ventures/subsidiaries and articulate R&D road map without much interference from external agencies. More importantly, as a corporate entity with a stable leadership, it will be in a far better position to respond to market dynamics and face competition, especially from the private sector, effectively.

Lastly, with its existing turnover, the corporatised OFB would easily qualify for a Navratna status, which will provide even greater flexibility in financial decision-making. Corporatisation is the only way the OFB can reclaim its lost glory and rebuild itself as a strong force in defence manufacturing.

The writer is a defence economist and a research fellow at Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

The angst of a liberal Muslim

BOOK REVIEW

ARCHIS MOHAN

In *Who Killed Liberal Islam*, Hasan Suroor argues that left-wing Muslim intellectuals paraded as the liberal heart of the community, the Muslims who write op-ed pieces and appear on TV to denounce Sharia, have "done more damage to the cause of Muslim liberalism than good."

The book is a lament at the near-absence of liberal Islam. It is also a story of the author's personal awakening to the fact that the voice of Muslim liberals, as endangered a species as they are, counts for so little among their co-religionists. One has to wonder why this should be the case — but then, Hindu liberals suffer similar delusions.

Mr Suroor argues while Islam is not resistant to reform, it has to be gradual. To imagine Islam will ever be secular is, however, a fantasy. He points to the failures of the secularisation projects in Turkey and Iran and the continued attraction of Wahhabism.

Islam is ubiquitous and a majority Islamic nation is unable to appreciate tolerance and pluralism, he writes. The author also says historical facts do not support the construct that Islam is, or ever was, a religion of peace.

If the author expresses hope in Islam's ability to reform in the beginning of the book, by the end of it, he sounds despondent that the religion, despite being the fastest-growing in the world, is beyond redemption. He says the Islamic world has not contributed anything of note in science or literature in the past several decades.

He says Muslim communities in non-Islamic countries like Britain and India remain the most backward educationally and economically. As the author argues, the reason for it in India could be the discrimination that Muslims face, as the Rajinder Sachar committee documented in 2006.

But how is it, Mr Suroor wonders, that Hindus do better in the face of similar discrimination than Muslims in Britain? He says victimhood, perceived or otherwise, of Muslims only partially explains this, the truth being that they cocoon themselves from the outside world because plural societies challenge Muslim beliefs at every turn.

The author bemoans that a religion, once considered modern, has lost its ability to question. He says in the Arab world, its glitzy malls sell everything else under the sun but books, which is ironic since Islam lays great stress on reading and acquiring knowledge, "even if it means going to China".

He complains that Indian Muslims have refused to learn from their mistakes, particularly in reforming Sharia. While many Islamic countries have reformed Sharia explicitly in relation to women's rights, Indian Muslims see any suggestion as a conspiracy to meddle in their religious affairs. "Keep your hands off until the initiative comes from within the community, but 70 years after independence there is no sign of it from the community," Mr Suroor writes.

Neither do Indian Muslims make common cause with minorities in Islamic countries to protest evil deeds done to them, says the author and points to the example of Asia Bibi. A Pakistani Christian, she was sentenced to death in 2010 on blasphemy charges. In 2018, a court exonerated her after a long legal battle, but lynch mobs were at her doorstep threatening to kill her again. Mr Suroor regrets there was not a word from Indian Muslims when, as victims of majoritarian prejudices, the least they could do was to show solidarity.

Mr Suroor, a former journalist, describes himself as a liberal Muslim who once was a part of the "cabal of self-styled modernisers" among Indian Muslims. He says he eventually realised how "delusional" he had been in believing that a deeply religious and socially conservative community would embrace a faith-baiting liberal.

The author says that poet Javed Akhtar and actor Naseeruddin Shah, two of the names to which the media gives space on Muslim issues, can never hope to become the voice of Indian Muslims. He says Indian Muslims need scholars like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Zakir Hussain, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the Ali brothers — Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali — who wore their beards and prayer caps with pride, but brought about gradual reforms. He appeals to liberals among Muslims and secular Hindus to look for and encourage such voices.

Although Mr Suroor argues his case convincingly, he writes with the empathy of an outsider, and the book is likely to find more readership among the kind of liberal Muslims whom he painstakingly berates, and among Sangh Parivar intellectuals who can sharpen their Muslim-baiting arguments. However, the author offers lessons, quite unwittingly, to the liberals among Hindus whose predicament is similar to that of their Muslim counterparts.

The continued political success of the Sangh Parivar is threatening to make the voice of Hindu liberals redundant at least in the electoral space. Among Hindu liberals, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken to call the "Khan Market gang", there is still no honest introspection to explain the political success of the Sangh.

Alleged rigging of EVMs, and large sections of Hindus turning rabidly intolerant of Muslims, are the two preferred theories to explain the post 2014-election results. Few, if any, Indian liberals, who either occupy leadership roles in the Congress and some opposition parties, are willing to concede that the problem could lie closer home. That their ilk, in politics as also other spheres of India's social life, are unable to "communicate" with the common people of this country. That they are too urbane to counter the perceived earthiness of a Narendra Modi.

WHO KILLED LIBERAL ISLAM
Hasan Suroor
Rupa, ₹595, 234 pages

Opinion

FRIDAY, AUGUST 30, 2019

MONEY MONSTER
Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee

"The central government is either threatening opposition leaders or buying them out with money. It is after Bengal now, as we are opposing its policies and divisive politics. But Bengal is not so cheap"

Now to deliver on FDI in commercial-coal-mining

Local firms can already commercially mine coal but did not get any mines; vital to see this doesn't happen to FDI

GIVEN HOW, IN 2000 itself, the NDA had brought in a Bill to amend the coal nationalisation law to allow commercial mining, it was always a surprise that, even when the NDA came to power for the second time in 2014, it didn't push for this. Indeed, even after the BJP announced a new policy on mines—after the Supreme Court cancelling coal mining licences forced it to come out with a new plan—it changed the law to allow for this, but it never took the necessary steps to ensure commercial mining of coal; while it auctioned several coal blocks, none of this was for commercial mining. Last year, *The Indian Express* reported on a note prepared by the coal ministry which said that since the unions of Coal India and its subsidiaries were against commercial mining, this "does not make it conducive at present for the auction of coal mines for the sale of coal". In which case, while the government decision to allow 100% FDI in commercial mining—under the automatic route—has to be welcomed, it has to be seen whether the government is able to implement it; after all, if local firms have not been able to commercially mine coal despite being allowed to, it is not going to be easy for foreigners to be able to do this.

Allowing commercial mining of coal is critical since, with India importing over $26bn of coal, it is crucial to find ways to boost coal output; indeed, since imported coal costs a lot more, many users, like power plants, don't even import coal as this prices them out of the market. The sharp increase in Australia's reserves as compared to India's is the best example of why India needs to get global firms of repute to explore for minerals; mineral imports comprise 55% of India's overall import bill, and it is a high 25% even when oil is excluded. Interestingly, while PSUs have been given some of India's best reserves, as a general rule, private firms have been a lot more successful, whether you compare Cairn with ONGC, Tata Steel or JSW with SAIL, NMDC with Sesa Goa, etc. A Niti Aayog strategy paper had pointed out that while India's prospective geology is very similar to that of Western Australia, only 10% of it has been explored, as compared to 95% for Australia, and an even smaller 1.5% is being mined right now; according to Niti, even doubling the area being explored could create an additional 5 million jobs by 2022-23.

Apart from ensuring that enough mines—and of reasonable sizes—are put on auction for commercial mining, the government needs to reduce India's levies; as compared to 7-15% in Australia and 0.5-4% in China, India's royalty rates are 30-35% (the value of the cess varies according to the quality of coal), and corporate tax rates are also much higher. There is, then, the issue of forest and environmental clearances. Australian mining giant Rio Tinto found a lot more diamond-bearing formations in Madhya Pradesh in just a few years than PSUs had over decades, but had to finally leave when it wasn't allowed to mine as the area was part of a tiger reserve. And, Vedanta's sad history in Niyamgiri is well documented. So, while the government did well to allow 100% FDI in commercial coal mining as part of its measures to stimulate investment, delivering on this is going to be far tougher.

Media's Bombay Club

Not clear why FDI levels are restricted in the media space

ON THE FACE of things, the government has done well to permit up to 26% FDI for digital media in the 'news & current affairs' space, as the official press release says, 'on the lines of print media'. But, the question really is, why have any caps and why make this subject to government approval? The reason, never stated upfront, is probably that the government—the current one and all previous ones—believes that foreigners can't be trusted to give unbiased news/views and so, it is best to restrict their spread. That's also the reason why, when FDI was allowed in print media, restrictions were put to ensure all top positions, like that of the editor, were held by Indian citizens; over the years, a few editors have been asked to leave as they were not Indian citizens.

But, even if you buy this argument, and also believe readers/viewers are too stupid to figure this out, all foreign TV channels can be viewed in India and all foreign newspapers can be bought here, and, thanks to online media, be read for next-to-nothing or even free. So, if 100% FDI is allowed in the real sense, why not legalise it? And, if foreign ownership needs to be restricted because it is bad, why are 49% levels allowed in TV news which, most would agree, has a greater reach/penetration than newspapers? Also, in these days of convergence, what is print, digital or television? Is a newspaper with an online presence to be viewed as digital, and what of a digital platform that provides news/views in both text and video—is this digital or television? Depending on what view the government takes, the entity can get more FDI or may have to reduce it. Are the likes of Google to be considered newspapers or aggregators; if they are the former, does the India operation need to find a 74% local partner? It is not just Google, several entities that provide news/views in text/video form have 100% FDI today; will they have to lower this now? Nor is it clear why the government has made a distinction between up-linking and uploading/streaming when it comes to FDI limits. It is obviously true that TV channels do 'uplinking' while websites do uploading/streaming, but if the end result is subscribers getting to watch content instantaneously or near-instantaneously, aren't they the same thing?

While the media has been at the forefront of the clamour to open up the economy and liberalise it by lowering import duties and allowing more FDI, unfortunately, the more influential news organisations have never been in favour of this in the media space. After all, if smaller newspapers got FDI and used this to expand their growth, it would hit the larger players, which may not provide news/views of the same standard. Some established editors, anxious to protect their jobs, then convinced the government to ensure only Indians could become editors; imagine the furore if a rule said no CEO of a hotel or an airline operating in India could be a foreigner! Such Bombay Club-type restrictions have no place in a modern India.

HicHicHURRAY?

Delhi excise department puts out a bizarre policy to counter adulteration of liquor at bar counters

CALL IT A case of cutting off the nose to spite the face. The Delhi department of excise, entertainment & luxury tax, in a bizarre order, wants bar counters, whether at hotels/restaurants or bars attached to liquor shops, to dispose of the alcohol lying on their shelves un-exhausted or un-served within 3-8 days, depending on the type and price of the drink. The excise department believes that this would help solve the problem of adulteration/re-filling that can happen when bar counters don't follow the "first in, first out" principle, and older, half-empty bottles are used for selling duplicate liquor under premium branding. However, the excise department has failed to see the extremely arbitrary nature of its order. For instance, if, as per the order, the bar counter must sell beer/wine bottles or their content within three days of the bottle hitting the shelf, or be forced to destroy it within seven days of the expiry of the 'bar-life', then there can be two possible scenarios. Either the restaurants/hotels or bars buy lesser of these, hitting both their margins and consumers, or limit offering to only those brands that see a high rate of sales, hitting consumer choice and diversity at the producer end. Alternatively, they must announce ludicrously attractive schemes to finish off the bottles, in which case, the order will mean nothing short of encouraging copious alcohol consumption. Apart from the law & order issues this could, potentially, create, the ramifications for public health are considerable.

The order states that IMFL and foreign liquor, whose MRP is up to ₹1,500, will be deemed to have been consumed within five days of receipt from the liquor store, and IMFL and foreign liquor priced between ₹1,500 and ₹6,000 will have a 'bar-life' of eight days. Curiously, IMFL/FL priced above ₹6,000 have been exempted. The business losses and the potential health/law & order ramifications may perhaps help the excise department sober up. Else, expect a boom for the rehab business or for bootleggers.

TAX REFORM

THE EXCLUSION OF CAT III AIFs FROM THE ROLLBACK OF SURCHARGE ON FPIs LEAVES INDIAN FUNDS AT A FUNDAMENTAL DISADVANTAGE IN INDIA COMPARED WITH FPIs

Need to relook anti-Indian tax laws

TV MOHANDAS PAI & SIDDARTH M PAI
Mohandas Pai is Chairman, Aarin Capital & Siddarth Pai is Founding partner, 3one4 Capital
Views are personal

WE LIVE IN an age of protectionism, where local industries are being protected against global players. The glut of globalisation from the 1990s faces a resurgent spirit of nationalism; policies that previously promoted free trade are being met with protective measures, such as tariffs and trade barriers. The US, the bastion of free trade and capitalism, has started a brutal trade war with China, and has gone so far as to create checks on foreign acquisitions of US companies via the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States—all to promote local industries under the "America First" policy.

In this protectionist era, instead of giving Indian investors an advantage for investing in India, our tax laws have handicapped Indian investors in their own country!

The 2019 Budget saw the introduction of a 37% surcharge on incomes above ₹5 crore earned in India; the fine print saw this surcharge being applied to trusts as well as individuals. Many foreign and domestic institutional investors are incorporated as trusts since it gives them the greatest flexibility to manage their investments. This surprise surcharge caused panic in the markets and blood on the street. July witnessed a haemorrhage of over ₹14 lakh crore in market value, with FPIs pulling out over ₹22,000 crores. The finance minister took cognisance of this after the consequences became too much to bear, and vowed to introduce mitigative measures. Last Friday, she announced a series of measures to bring relief to the market and the economy. The chief amongst these measures was a rollback of the higher surcharges for FPIs.

While the foreign investors were celebrating this, Indian investors were left aghast at being left in the lurch and being subject to the same surcharge from which their foreign counterparts were exempt. But, this discrimination is nothing new—Indian investors have consistently been treated as subordinate to foreign investors, beginning from how our laws are drafted.

For investors in Indian markets, there always existed an ambiguity in taxation regarding whether the gains they make are capital gains—having a more favourable tax regime—or should be considered as business income. There are innumerable cases on this subject involving inspections of the business model, different demat accounts, investor intention, etc, yielding a lot of ambiguity. In 2014, then-FM Shri Arun Jaitley spoke about the "uncertainty in taxation on account of characterisation of income" faced by FPIs, causing him to amend the definition of a "capital asset" to include any securities held by an FPI—ending this debate for FPIs.

Yet, Indian investors didn't receive the same courtesy on the issue.

In all fairness, in February 2016, the CBDT did issue a circular stating that it will accept the stance of investors on the issue of whether securities are stock-in-trade or capital assets if they're held for longer than 12 months. But, in terms of assets held for less than 12 months, the ambiguity for Indian investors continues whereas their foreign counterparts stand relieved.

This issue is especially acute in Category III AIFs, who will be the worst hit by the increased surcharge. Out of the three categories of Alternative Investment Funds in India, Category III AIFs are those "which employ diverse or complex trading strategies", investing into listed or unlisted securities. But, they lack the pass-through structure afforded to other AIFs in India and suffer taxation at the maximum marginal rate. Worse off, due to our tax codes, if they choose to employ derivatives in the form of futures and options, their income will be taxed at the maximum marginal rate as business income, which is now 42.7%. The FPIs, who do the same, do not suffer from this rate since they're exempt from the surcharge, and their derivatives are capital assets.

The lack of pass-through status for CAT III AIFs flies in the face of logic when the other two categories are afforded this. These funds are all pooling vehicles—an accumulation of funds from various investors for common investments under common management. The just form of taxation is to ascribe tax rates to the individual investor on the income generated by the fund. Taxing income at the maximum marginal rate due to the common vehicle is absurd. To put things in perspective, this is akin to taxing the savings bank interest of a person with a net income of ₹10 lakhs and a person with a net income of ₹10 crore at the same rate just because they both use the same bank! The law cannot turn a blind eye to the end beneficiary, and assume that all investors belong to the highest tax slab, regardless of their actual income. To each his own rate.

How can India become an investment destination when its laws are categorically loaded against its domestic funds?

For all fund managers, this begs the question of whether the choice, for a given strategy and structure, should be to create an Indian vehicle—which suffers from the deficiencies of higher taxes, ambiguity over the classification of gains, and characterisation of derivative gains as business income—or float a foreign fund, register as an FPI, and rid oneself of these issues? *Ceterus paribus*, if a change in geography yields such benefits, why would anyone create an Indian fund to invest in India?

This is one of the reasons why foreign investors are reluctant to invest in Indian investment vehicles. India's CAT III AIFs (including hedge funds) have a corpus of only ₹40,000 crore ($5.52 billion). To put things in perspective, the largest hedge fund in the world has assets under management of $6.3 trillion and the 10th largest has over $34.3 billion. How can India become an investment destination when its laws are categorically loaded against its domestic funds? This discrimination is especially puzzling to foreign investors, who are looking to back Indian fund managers in India; instead, they're found in either Mauritius or Singapore.

Even in the unlisted space, discrimination exists in the form of 'Angel Tax' or Section 56(2)(vii) (b)—which taxes the premium of Indian investments into private companies as income if such premia exceed the fair market value. It is pertinent to note that this applies only to Indian investors, and not to money received from foreign investors. This is one of the reasons why rupee participation in the Indian startup story is under 10% of the total capital raised by them.

It must be noted that the reports being circulated that Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman created this disparity in taxation are thoroughly untrue. Such disparity has existed for a long time. It is a tragedy that Indian investors are discriminated against in this manner in their own country. In spite of this discrimination, since the budget speech in 2019, domestic investors have been net buyers to the tune of ₹38,000 crore while foreign investors were net sellers. Domestic participation in the market has been higher than ever before, and the government should recognise this. We need our elected representatives to correct this discrimination in our laws. We need prime minister Modi to unleash the animal spirits of the Indian investor by ending this discrimination. Allow for securities held by CAT III AIFs to be classified as "capital assets" and extend the same benefit to them as was extended to FPIs. Did we gain independence from the British only to still be discriminated against in our own country?

Indian fund managers look forward to the day when the gateway to Indian equities is Mumbai—not Mauritius.

A confession of human harm

Naming the current epoch Anthropocene after humans is not an act of arrogance, but a testament to the mess we will leave behind

FAYE FLAM
Bloomberg

SOME SCIENTISTS ARE trying to name our current geologic epoch after us—calling it the Anthropocene. That's no brag, because most of the changes we're making to our planet are embarrassing.

We've caused huge shifts in the plants and animals sharing the planet with us, driven many species to extinction, left a layer of radioactive fallout from exploding nuclear bombs, accidentally changed the composition of our atmosphere, and left a layer of plastic that will, in all likelihood, still be around in a million years.

Long after time and erosion have turned all our feats of art and engineering to dust, our mess will remain. Naming this era after ourselves is more of a confession. That acknowledgement is a first step toward strategies for minimising our damaging influence.

A fascinating feature in Nature this month describes the search for what scientists call a golden spike—a marker somewhere on the planet displaying a clear, sharp signature of significant change that would mark the dawn of the Anthropocene. What makes the process interesting isn't what they settle on as a starting point, but what it is revealing about the way humans have become an earth-changing force, and how long human-wrought changes will persist. With that understanding could come strategies for minimising our damaging influence.

These scientists are coming to favor atomic bomb blasts of the 1950s, which are leaving a long-lasting layer of isotopes in lake beds and deposits of ice. People have also considered the advent of widespread chicken farming, which leaves behind the bones of almost 60 billion birds each year.

There is a subjectivity to this process, said planetary scientist David Grinspoon, whose book "Earth in Human Hands" makes a case for the Anthropocene. A person exploring Earth 50 million years from now may not find any obvious signs that we were here, he said, but if they were trained archaeologists and did some digging, they would see that something extraordinary happened.

Naysayers argue that we don't warrant our own geologic era because we are too short-lived a species. We've only been around 200,000 years, and for most of this time we did nothing to cause lasting change. It wasn't until 50,000 years ago that people started to spread around the globe, leaving in our wake a wave of extinctions of the animals we liked to eat. And it was only in the last century—insignificant in geologic time—that we've really started adding new materials, such as plastics, to the geologic strata. Geologic time is long, and our existence short, at least so far.

But, we can already know that our influence on the planet will last into geologic time. The nuclear remnants of our bomb blasts will last for hundreds of thousands of years, and so will traces of those mountains of plastic we've been throwing away, some of which is already forming a new kind of stone, dubbed plastiglomerate. Scientists estimate that human-generated changes in the chemistry and temperature of our oceans will persist for thousands of years after we learn how to stop burning fossil fuel.

In Greenland's ice cap, layers dating back to the Roman era show contamination with industrial lead. Leaded gasoline from the 20th century will leave an even bigger layer that also includes cadmium, arsenic and chemical changes that took place when the ozone layer sprung a hole. (While the edges of the ice are melting fast, the cap itself, and buried traces of our pollution, could last another million years.)

Even more profound will be the change in the fossil record of life. The United Nations recently estimated that, globally, human activity is likely to cause a million species to go extinct. We don't really know how many species exist now; biologists have catalogued about two million but estimate a total of around 10 million.

Another recent study showed that we've already radically changed the populations of living things—destroying 83% of all wild animals and half of wild plants. Currently, researchers estimate, 96% of mammals today are humans or livestock, and only 4% are wild animals.

To make the Anthropocene official, a committee called the Anthropocene Working Group will need to agree on a golden spike and create a proposal, which would eventually come up for approval from the International Union of Geological Sciences. But even without official sanction, the idea is catching on in the popular imagination.

Back in the 20th century, when I wrote about the predictions that greenhouse gases were warming the globe, people accused me of being arrogant for even thinking human beings could affect this vast planet. But the earth is not, as long believed, too vast to be changed by humans, and with a population of seven billion and climbing, we are not too small to leave an indelible mark.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

No Parliament, that's for halloween

The regime is expected to set in motion the suspension of the UK Parliament—thus, implying that members would have much less time to debate Brexit, as an unduly longer recess than usual, right before the deadline, is being criticised. The move threatens to have severe repercussions on the economy, as risks of an uncontrolled-inflation and limited market-access, cannot be ruled out. A vote of no-confidence in the government and proposal of a general election. The lop-sided cabinet-structure, in the name of sovereign-unity, has been over-dominated by 'Brexiteers', as select senior/experienced members in key-roles were fired without rhyme or reason. The political instability has only aggravated, as multiple push-backs and attempts to build consensus on a viable deal, failed to deliver the desired outcome, on every occasion. Uncertainty within the EU council and rising levels of public-anxiety, prevail - despite the change of guard. Entities were expected to implement a favourable-deal in a cohesive, timely and professional manner, to fulfil the key objective, known for over three years now. Instead of closing the chapter for good and concentrating on larger socio-economic issues to prioritise public-welfare. Institutional investors and market-participants are reluctant to explore new avenues, as valuations are on the decline and the real-estate market is in a phase of price-correction. Besides an ordinary track-record of the incumbent government, it is the absence of crystal-clear exit-terms and prevailing geo-political turbulence—which is more than likely to further affect the business-environment and investor-confidence.
— Girish Lalwani, Delhi

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R.N.I. Reg. No. 6188/61 Printed for the proprietors, The Indian Express (P) Ltd by Vaidehi Chintaman Thakar at The Indian Express (P) Ltd Press, Plot No. EL-208, TTC Industrial Area, Mahape, Navi Mumbai-400 710 and published from Express Towers, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400 021. Editorial & Administrative Offices: Express Towers, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400 021. Phone: 22022627/67440000. Fax: 022-22856323.
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The growth economics of artificial intelligence

As India is moving on the trajectory of digital transformation, the growing penetration of digital technologies in the lives of Indians and the generation of huge volumes of data at every interaction point projects a germane use-case for an AI-driven economy

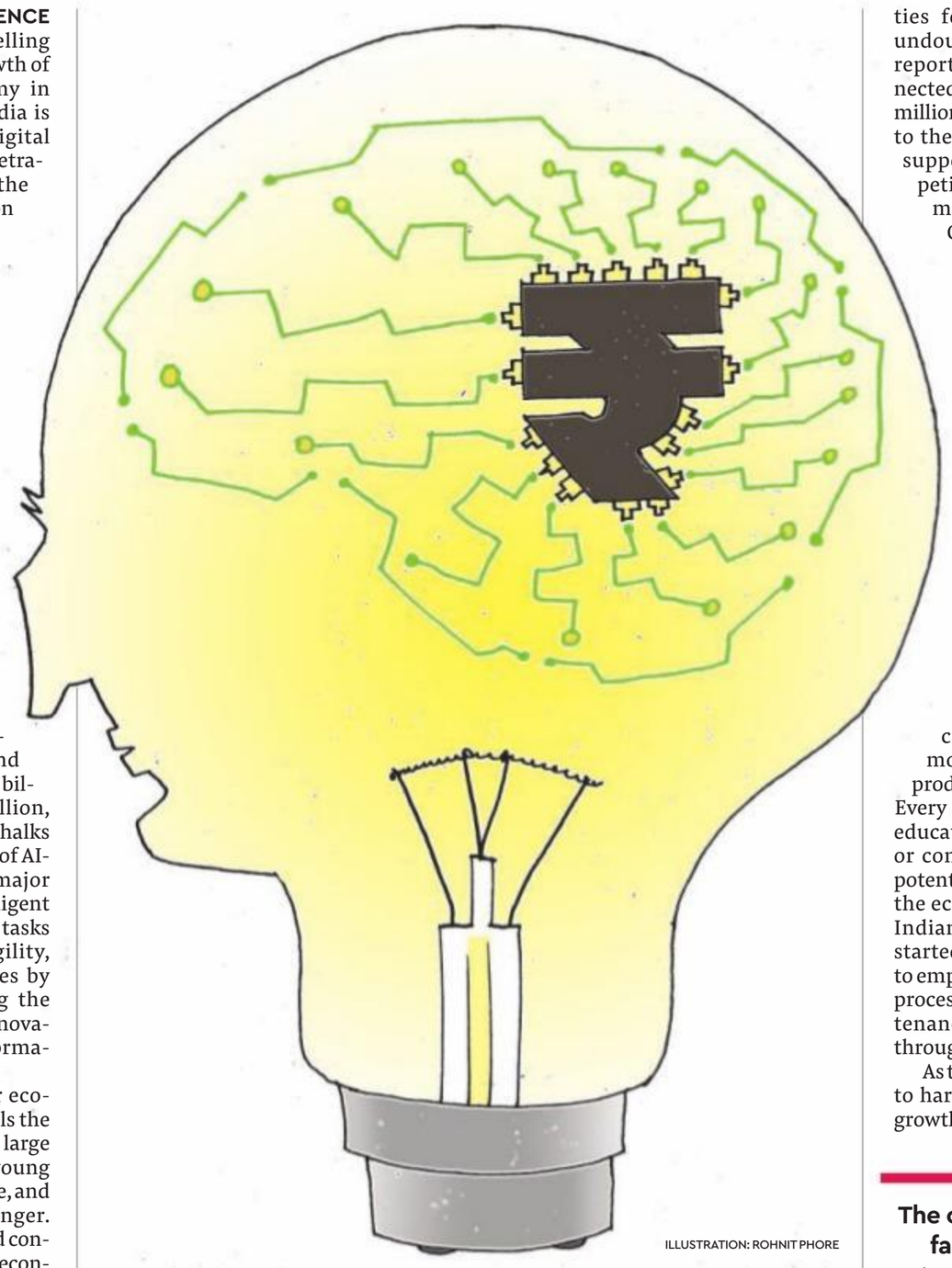

ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

OMKAR RAI

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) promises impelling potential for the growth of society and economy in today's times. As India is moving on the trajectory of digital transformation, the growing penetration of digital technologies in the lives of Indians and the generation of huge volumes of data at every interaction point projects a germane use-case for an AI-driven economy. However, for making the ocean of data points work in synergy to transform India as the AI leader, we require the power of AI to address the complex challenges that the country is facing across its demographic diversity.

According to an Accenture report published in December 2017, AI alone can add $957 billion, or 15% of the current gross value added, to the Indian economy by 2035. The economic value can be unlocked primarily through three ways: augmentation delivered through human and machine collaboration, intelligent automation and productivity that comprise $597 billion, $83 billion and $277 billion, respectively. The report further chalks out the transformative potential of AI-driven opportunities in three major areas, including mobilising intelligent automation for complex physical tasks requiring adaptability and agility, empowering existing workforces by complementing and enhancing the skills and abilities, and driving innovation for broad structural transformation of the economy.

The role of AI in the broader economic perspectives of India entails the participation of the government, large enterprises, MSMEs, start-ups, young entrepreneurs and society at large, and this can make AI a game changer. According to a PwC report, AI could contribute $15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030, of which $6.6 trillion is likely to come from increased productivity and the rest $9.1 trillion would be generated from consumption-driven economy. Similarly, a Gartner report suggests that, globally, AI-derived business value will reach $2.9 trillion by 2021 from the projected $1.9 trillion in 2019. Another report by McKinsey suggests that AI could provide additional economic output of around $13 trillion by 2030, boosting global GDP by about 1.2% a year.

The economic opportunities through AI that India can achieve are huge. Innovation in AI can help us lead to numerous solutions to address societal issues. For example, India's linguistic diversity is a major opportunity for developing AI solutions to unify communication across various digital platforms. AI has a potential to address the challenges of demographic diversity of India. A billion-plus population, and hundreds of languages and dialects open up enormous opportunities for AI-powered solutions in the areas of language, vision, translation, speech, machine reading and comprehension. Localisation of technologies using AI can play a critical role in not only unifying a billion-plus people in resolving social challenges, but will also add value to the economic growth of the country. For instance, intelligent digital assistants like Alexa, Google Assistant, Siri and Cortana are enabling people to use local languages and fetch the desired online services without any hassles. AI can play a major role here as a codec for seamless communication across language diversity.

Today, the agricultural and allied sector contributes around 18% to the $2.97-trillion Indian economy. With 50% of India's working age population employed in agriculture, it's pertinent to modernise agricultural workforce to improve their productivity and ameliorate farmers' incomes. The opportunities for AI in the farm sector are undoubtedly massive. According to a report by Accenture, digital and connected farm services can empower 70 million Indian farmers to add $9 billion to their income by 2020. AI can also support SMEs and make them competitive at a time when the government is planning to increase the GDP share of the manufacturing sector to 25% by 2022. According to the World Economic Forum, AI can build additional value up to $3.7 trillion through Industry 4.0 technologies by 2025.

While the opportunities for AI in India are vast, leveraging these opportunities is the key to transform India as a global leader in AI. Indian information technology (IT) services industries are ferrying exceptionally well in executing R&D projects of global technology companies, but the R&D for own products is not equally impressive. The Indian IT industry can leverage collaborative R&D to produce more home-grown technology products for domestic consumption. Every sector in India, be it agriculture, education, healthcare, transportation or communication, has tremendous potential for AI applications to improve the ecosystem and economic output. Indian IT behemoths have already started delivering AI-based platforms to empower clients transform business processes, automate technology maintenance and execute mundane tasks through AI bots.

As the entire world is looking forward to harness the potential of AI for the growth of the industry and for the betterment of society, India has already taken steps to leverage the potential of AI in all walks of life. To foster AI-led growth across all the sections of the society, the government is taking steps to promote Indian tech talent and skills to achieve national goals. With a unique vision of "AI for All", India can enhance and empower human capabilities to address the challenges of accessibility, affordability and quality of skilled expertise, which, in turn, can help develop scalable solutions for emerging technologies by leveraging collaborations and partnerships among various stakeholders including industry, industry associations, academia, and state and central governments. Besides collaborations, this segment requires a lot of incentivisation and funding support from various stakeholders. As this technology requires massive R&D and innovation, and a highly-skilled manpower for the creation of world-class products, hence sufficient funding is necessary to exploit this technology to its fullest extent.

The opportunities for AI in the farm sector are massive. According to an Accenture report, digital & connected farm services can empower 70 million farmers to add $9 billion to their income by 2020

Pivoted to the visible success of the IT services industry in India, the legacy of technology prowess can further propel the adoption of emerging technologies in various sectors to boost efficiencies, competitiveness, productivity and quality. The adoption of AI across sectors and industries will not only drive competitive edge and operational excellence, but will also considerably improve the quality of life and ensure prosperity for all. Clearly, AI can bring enormous economic and social benefits to citizens across demographics and also help in transforming the country into an economic superpower.

Making our buildings green

KALA S SRIDHAR & S MANASI

Authors are faculty members at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru. Views are personal

ACCORDING TO A recent media report, this year marks the extreme of both droughts and floods in India. This could be largely due to 'climate change' and carbon emissions, but what is little known is the fact that buildings are responsible for at least 40% of energy usage, contributing to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as per the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Also, the Industry Institute Partnership Cell has estimated that, by 2050, buildings are projected to emit 3,800 mega tonnes of carbon. And the United Nations Environment Programme reports that nearly one-third of the total GHG emissions are from buildings.

Cities are a concentration of built-up area, so green buildings are a sustainable way of reducing the likelihood of cities becoming storehouses of GHG. It is estimated the Indian building stock would reach 100 billion square feet by 2030, so buildings must be a target for city-level sustainability.

Green buildings rely on renewable resources such as the sun, water and wind, minimise demand on non-renewable resources, and maximise utilisation efficiency through reuse and recycling. Green buildings have plenty of natural light and ventilation, reduce the need for electricity, and use recyclable materials. One of the earliest modern green/intelligent building is the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, whose exteriors are designed such that they are cleaned every time it rains. The IPCC reports that energy-efficient buildings and utility systems reduce energy demands by as much as 40%.

So, what does it take to have green buildings in our cities? Globally, green buildings are certified by an independent body, the US Green Building Council (USGBC), through its LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, which focuses on sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy performance, use of recyclable materials and indoor environmental quality. GRIHA (Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment) is India's rating system that assesses buildings in a three-tier process—pre-construction building planning, construction & building, and operations & maintenance. Buildings that adhere to the Energy Conservation Building Code of the government are expected to have energy savings of 40-60%.

If 'green' concepts are incorporated early on in design, a green building may cost no more than a conventional building

Also, contrary to perception, green buildings are not costly—if 'green' concepts are incorporated early on in the design process, a certified green building may cost no more than a conventional building. The cost, over time, is expected to get lesser with the development of the green building industry. Those living in green buildings consume less water—90 litres per capita daily (LPCD)—as compared to conventional building residents (150 LPCD). Buildings specifically designed to produce less waste reduce construction waste by 50%. Waste generation is reduced right from construction stage, where recyclable material is used in construction, and waste is also sent to recycling units.

But despite their advantages, there are several challenges, including limited awareness about benefits, misconceptions about costs, the lack of required training to contractors, their own limited knowledge about appropriate building materials, or energy-efficient appliances, the lack of required local suitable material such as stone of varied kinds, leaf material, or bamboo ... and all of these need to be addressed urgently.

Here, electricity distribution agencies have a role to play. The Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) has been promoting energy-efficient buildings. The number of solar water heating systems installed by BESCOM increased from 6,187 in 2008-09 to 72,749 in 2014-15. Bengaluru is the first city in India to have introduced an incentive mechanism by providing a rebate of 50 paise per unit of electricity consumed for residents who have rooftop thermal systems installed. These systems have been made mandatory for all new structures, with residents opting for such solar installations being given a subsidy of 5% on their power bills. When users see the benefits, the idea tends to spread faster.

It is not a well-known fact that India has the highest number of green buildings in the world, which is the outcome of its traditional knowledge. India was also ranked second amongst the list of top-ten countries by the USGBC for LEED outside the US. Hence, India should use its abundant natural resources such as the sun and wind to protect its built environment, cut costs, and promote sustainable cities.

Mining sector can create lakhs of jobs

As per 12th Five Year Plan, for every 1% increase in economic growth, the mining sector creates 13 times more employment than agriculture and six times more than manufacturing

RK SHARMA

Secretary general, Federation of Indian Mineral Industries

MINING IS A labour-intensive industry and has a huge potential for employment generation; it can play a pivotal role in creating more avenues for job opportunities, particularly in the hinterland and backward areas, which have limited potential for other economic activities. Given the current unemployment crisis, it is believed that employment-intensive growth is the key to utilising India's demographic dividend and ensuring a remarkable growth story. In addition, it acts as a significant variable towards achieving a sustainable and inclusive growth.

The mining sector has emerged as the third-largest employment-generation sector. Of the eight core sectors of the economy, five—i.e. coal, steel, cement, electricity and fertilisers—are primarily dependent on raw material supplies from mines. Currently, the mining sector is passing through a sluggish growth and is suppressed. Addressing the unemployment issue in such a situation, both in rural and urban India, is a challenge.

As per the PLFS (Periodic Labour Force Survey) report, unemployment in India during 2017-18 was 6% (7.8% in urban areas and 5.3% rural areas), which makes it a 45-year low for jobs in India. According to a CMIE report, the rural unemployed in May 2019 were nearly 44% higher than their count in May 2018. On the other hand, the country's working age population, or those above the age of 15, is expanding by 1.3 crore a month. The average urban unemployment rate during the first five months of 2019 was 8%, as compared to 6.1% in the corresponding months of 2018.

On increasing unemployment rate, we have always believed that India is reining under the syndrome of opportunities lost within the country.

It is known that creating jobs is not easy for the government sector, and the private sector must play, and has always played, a significant role. The private sector has also supported towards enhancing skill development programmes for the youth to encourage self-employment. The mining sector alone has the potential to absorb such trained manpower, particularly from the rural sector. But this can happen only if the sector itself is on a growing path.

The five sectors dependent on raw material from mining are already under pressure to buy much costlier raw material through imports. Even though India has the required raw materials in abundance, the lack of exploration, non-simplified policies and delayed approvals have resulted in decline in extraction of minerals and this has led to the sluggish growth in mining. Even the sustenance of some of these sectors that are dependent on raw material from mining is being threatened.

The growth in the mining sector has always benefited employment generation in relatively backward states that have low per capita income than national averages. These are Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, which constituted about 54% of India's mining sector's GDP and about 37% of sectoral employment in 2011-12.

Mining employed about 23 lakh people in 2011-12 across the organised and unorganised sectors. Since the ratio of direct to indirect employment in the mining sector is 1:10, it is estimated that around 2.3 crore people gained employment through the mining sector in 2011-12. This also included employment generated in secondary and ancillary sectors.

The potential and scope of mining towards employment generation is immense. As per the 12th Five Year Plan, for every 1% increase in economic growth, the mining sector creates 13 times more employment than agriculture and six times more than manufacturing.

With the right kind of government support and reforms, by 2025 the mining sector has the potential to provide employment opportunities to about 50 lakh people directly and create overall employment opportunities for about 5 crore people.

India would need significantly higher contribution by the mining sector in the GDP if the country wants to become a $5-trillion economy and achieve 8% GDP growth. But, as of now, the trend in the mining sector is negative; its contribution to GDP is decreasing. The value of mineral production in India increased from ₹1.77 lakh crore in 2012-13 to ₹1.99 lakh crore in 2017-18, and the country's GDP growth also increased from 5% in 2012-13 to 7% in 2017-18. But, on the other side, the mineral sector (excluding petroleum and natural gas) contribution to GDP went down from 1.93% in 2012-13 to 1.53% in 2017-18.

With a view to put the mining sector back on the growth path, it is imperative to facilitate a regulatory regime and build a conducive framework for the ease of doing business. For India to achieve its aim of becoming a $5-trillion economy in the next five years and a $10-trillion economy in 8-10 years, it has to fast-track the growth of the mining and minerals sector.

Economic development generates employment opportunities; thus, all the sectors that have the potential to contribute immensely to economic development must be provided equal opportunities for growth and be assessed eventually.

WORDLY WISE

GIVE ME THE LIBERTY TO KNOW, TO UTTER, AND TO ARGUE FREELY ACCORDING TO CONSCIENCE, ABOVE ALL LIBERTIES.— JOHN MILTON

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

OPENING THE DOOR

Government does well to relax rules for foreign investment in single-brand retail, contract manufacturing and coal mining

ON WEDNESDAY, THE NDA government announced a slew of measures aimed at facilitating greater foreign investment in the country. Under the new rules, it has provided for a relaxation of the contentious sourcing norms which have been a major deterrent for foreign investment in single-brand retail. Now, firms can adjust their entire procurement from India, be it for their domestic operations or for global markets, against their local sourcing requirements. Further, local sourcing norms need not be met annually, but as an average of the first five years. Sourcing, even through group companies or indirectly through third parties such as contract manufacturers, will now be counted towards their domestic sourcing obligations. Single brand retailers have also been allowed the option of setting up their online retail platforms before putting in place a brick and mortar presence. Further, the government has allowed 100 per cent FDI in contract manufacturing and in coal mining and related activities such as washery, handling and separation. This easing of restrictions on foreign investment, which sends a positive signal to the international community, should be seen as a continuation of the measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman last week to prop up the economy.

With the trade war between the US and China showing no signs of resolving, foreign companies are increasingly reassessing their operations. For instance, technology major Google is reportedly shifting the production of its Pixel smartphone out of China to Vietnam. So far, India has not been able to take advantage of this ongoing relocation of production facilities out of China. But, these changes in the rules should gradually facilitate foreign firms setting up manufacturing bases in India, providing a boost to both employment and exports. Allowing 100 per cent FDI in contract manufacturing through the automatic route will also attract global players looking to set up alternate manufacturing hubs — diversifying away from China. Adding exports to the local sourcing norms is also likely to encourage the building of larger production facilities, providing a much needed fillip to the country's subdued exports. Sectors such as electronics, mobiles, apparel and pharma are likely to benefit the most from these measures. And with India's electronics imports exceeding $50 billion in 2018-19 — it was the biggest driver of the trade deficit after oil — over time, these measures could also help contain India's current account deficit.

These initiatives are an attempt to create a manufacturing ecosystem, establishing value chains with both upstream and downstream linkages. But they need to be accompanied by reforms, especially factor market reforms, that address the structural issues plaguing the economy. The continuing overvaluation of the rupee also needs to be attended to. In the coming weeks, the government is likely to announce more measures to tackle the slowdown. These should be at the top of its agenda.

PLOT HOLES

Bhima-Koregaon arrests had invited questions about police action. They remain unanswered

THE PROCEEDINGS IN the Bombay High Court regarding the bail plea of Vernon Gonsalves, an activist facing charges under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for his alleged links with the CPI (Maoist), are a pointer to all that seems questionable about the police action that followed the Bhima-Koregaon incident in January 2018. Gonsalves was arrested by Pune Police on August 28 last year and has been in prison since. Police has provided a list of CDs, documents and books that were allegedly seized during a search at Gonsalves' home to the court to oppose his bail — including Anand Patwardhan's acclaimed film, *Jai Bhim Comrade*, and the online library Marxist Archives. The exchanges in court reveal the callous and shoddy manner in which the police have apparently proceeded in this case: On Wednesday, Judge Sarang Kotwal pulled up the prosecution for not listing the contents of the seized CDs in the chargesheet. As Justice Kotwal said, the police "have to show that the material that it has is incriminating evidence". It is a travesty of justice to hold a person in judicial custody for a year when the prosecution seems to rest its case on pieces of literature and music.

In fact, the Bhima-Koregaon case has the markings of a laboured attempt by the state to paint a subaltern political gathering as a violent uprising. The Bhima-Koregaon event (it resulted in caste violence and the death of one person) on January 1, 2018 and the Elgar Parishad in Pune that preceded it, were public events organised after securing the necessary permissions from the state. The police, wary of the political implications of targeting a celebration of Dalit pride, has sought to read a Maoist conspiracy into it and target activists, who are lawyers, civil rights activists and so on. Along with Gonsalves, the police had arrested and charged trade leader and lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj, poet Varavara Rao and activist Arun Ferreira for alleged Maoist links. Even before it moved against Gonsalves and others, Pune Police arrested Dalit activist Sudhir Dhawale, Nagpur academic Shoma Sen, activists Mahesh Raut and Rona Wilson on similar charges. Family members and supporters of the persons detained have accused the government of using them as an instrument to stifle potential dissent.

The onus is on the police to prove that it has a case against these individuals, and it must do so in reasonable time. As for bail, it is the right of every citizen and should be denied only in exceptional situations. The judiciary, hopefully, will recognise the injustice in the continued incarceration of those arrested after Bhima-Koregaon and order corrective steps.

GLASS HALF FULL

A study has found that optimists live longer. Pessimists are asking: What for?

YET ANOTHER STUDY, this time by Lewina Lee of the Boston University School of Medicine published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, has found that the "psychological asset" of optimism leads to a longer and happier life. Lee and her colleagues have found that people who look at the brighter side of things have a greater chance of living beyond 85 years. Optimists, the proverbial half-glass-full types, probably see the silver-lining of being around to have a chance at completing a centenary. But their more gloomy counterparts are unlikely to be jealous.

The first thing pessimists might do is question the premises of the study itself, and ask if it isn't begging the question: If a person has managed to live till 85 and is still lucid enough to participate in rigorous scientific endeavour, they have probably enjoyed good health to begin with (another factor, according to the study, that leads to longevity), have purpose in life ("retirement is the biggest killer") and have a community of friends and family. Is it a surprise, then, that such octogenarians can see the silver lining in a rainstorm?

It is far too easy to deride those with a bit of *joie de vivre* as, well, a little dumb. It is easy to cite the climate change apocalypse, the rise of bigotry, the increasing stupidity of popular culture and the sheer boredom of existence to say: Who wants to be around for that long anyway. It's easy to pretend that cynicism is the same as wisdom. This might, of course, be a case of sour grapes, since optimism is as difficult to manufacture as longevity. In the final analysis, the question is: Is it better to have a short, miserable life or a long and happy one?

Seize the slowdown

Large disinvestments could help bridge fiscal shortfall and maintain government spending growth

NEELKANTH MISHRA

THE ECONOMY HAS slowed. Now that there is a consensus on that, the debate has moved to how severe it is, how long it can last, and where the intervention needs to be. Like a snowball that grows bigger as it rolls on, economic momentum builds in a certain direction till a force (intervention) is applied. The later the response, the stronger the necessary intervention.

This amplification of the prevailing trend plays out on several fronts. Let us start with financial conditions. Once financing conditions tightened after the default by a large financial firm about a year back, the resultant economic weakness pushed more firms into default. For a few quarters, private financial firms that had the potential to grow took advantage of the lack of competition and grew their loan-books profitably. But now, as the underlying issues stayed unresolved and growth has weakened further, afraid of new bad loans, even they are slowing down credit disbursement. This is now likely to cause the next round of weakness.

Similarly, supply chains sometimes act like bull-whips: The handle of the whip moves slowly, but the end of the whip can move at the speed of a few hundred kilometres an hour. Relatively small fluctuations in end demand can get amplified further up in the supply chain: A retailer sees a 2 per cent drop in demand, and decides to shed some inventory too; now the wholesaler supplying the retailer sees a 5 per cent drop in demand. By the time it reaches the manufacturer, the apparent demand could be down by 10 per cent. They then cut output and component suppliers, further upstream, send contract workers on leave.

What is happening in the auto supply chains currently is a good example: Car registrations last month were down 11 per cent, but sales by manufacturers were down more than 30 per cent. The resultant production slowdown leads to income losses in the economy, particularly if there are many temporary workers (recall that less than 20 per cent of Indian workers work with a salary slip), and that further weakens end-demand. For autos, the situation has likely been exacerbated by the technology transition scheduled for next year, which is a disincentive for the supply chain to hold much inventory, particularly when financial conditions are tight. But this is visible even in soaps and shampoos. Lack of credit is also driving inventory liquidation in real estate, as "investors" (that is, people who bought apartments as investments), partly in need of cash, and partly in fear of further price declines, stampede out of the market. This slows down cash flows to developers and intensifies their distress.

Supply chains sometimes act like bull-whips: The handle of the whip moves slowly, but the end of the whip can move at the speed of a few hundred kilometres an hour. Relatively small fluctuations in end demand can get amplified further up in the supply chain: A retailer sees a 2 per cent drop in demand, and decides to shed some inventory too; now the wholesaler supplying the retailer sees a 5 per cent drop in demand. By the time it reaches the manufacturer, the apparent demand could be down by 10 per cent. They then cut output and component suppliers, further upstream, send contract workers on leave.

The third front is fiscal. Government revenues weaken with economic activity. In particular, destocking in the economy hurts GST collection (a large part of the GST on a product is paid when it leaves the manufacturer). In the first three months the government's expenditure grew at just 2 per cent, against the full year budgeted target of 21 per cent. Given the slippages on taxes, it is unlikely that the government will be able to increase its pace of expenditure. This worsens the slowdown: Fixed annual fiscal deficit targets are inherently pro-cyclical in nature. In a slowing economy, they intensify the weakness, and in an accelerating economy, they provide even more fiscal room for the government to spend.

It is tempting to ignore this, or just hope that the economy self-corrects. As one can expect, in a complex economy like India, where hard data is limited, perceptions of the slowdown run at a different pace from ground reality. With millions of people viewing the economy through different prisms, sometimes the collective conscious chooses to ignore signs of weakness, and at other times the sense of panic overshoots reality. Sales of smartphones, some consumer appliances, paints, and plastics, for example, were healthy in the last quarter. However, as discussed above, the weakness has worsened in recent months, and even these sectors may then start to follow the broader trend.

One should also not dismiss the groupthink, as it too matters, affecting individual decisions on consumption and investment that add up to the economic activity measured as GDP. Dented confidence of consumers and companies, if not nipped in the bud, can by itself cause economic weakness. A significant pickup in monsoon activity (from a 19 per cent deficit a month back to a 1 per cent surplus now) should help sentiment incrementally, but the weakening global macroeconomic backdrop is a growing challenge.

So, then, what may be the interventions that can stop, if not reverse, this downward momentum? Significantly lower interest rates or a faster pace of base money injection by the RBI are likely to help, but they may no longer be sufficient to drive a recovery. As discussed in these columns earlier ('How to use the mandate', May 31), the government needs to take a decisive approach on the financial architecture in India: It needs to take an axe to the system, as a scalpel will no longer suffice. For the economy to grow at 12 per cent, given the objective of increasing formalisation, total formal credit needs to grow at well over 15 per cent, and the current ecosystem does not appear capable of providing that.

Many, including this writer, have recommended large disinvestments to bridge the fiscal shortfall and maintain government spending growth, particularly on infrastructure; it would also serve the dual purpose of signaling the reform intent of the government to economic participants, in addition to, over time, improving productivity of those assets. The likely dent to the political capital of the government may be offset by the resultant change in economic sentiment. It is important to remember that a three trillion dollar economy needs steady structural reforms to maintain its growth momentum.

The government's first response shows a desire to intervene to rectify problems; more may be on the way and necessary. Governments, globally, respond with progressively greater force as they calibrate the intensity of the intervention, the dose of the medicine. Milton Friedman, a Nobel laureate in economics, once wrote: "Only a crisis — actual or perceived — produces real change. When that crisis occurs. the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable."

The bull-whip works both ways: When supply chains have already shed their inventory and demand suddenly picks up, the positive side of the cycle can be as exciting as the negative side is depressing. Other cyclical factors can then also turn supportive. But changing the momentum is the challenge, and one hopes that the right interventions come sooner rather than later.

The writer is the co-head of Asia Pacific Strategy and India Strategist for Credit Suisse

A FINER NET

Marine Fisheries Bill addresses a regulatory void. It needs cooperative federalism

JOHN KURIEN

A MARINE FISHERIES Regulation and Management (MFRM) Bill 2019 is in the public domain for discussion. Comprehending the Bill's rationale requires understanding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982 and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements under which India has obligations to frame laws. The MFRM Bill 2019 is one such piece of legislation.

Under UNCLOS, which India ratified in 1995, the sea and resources in the water and the seabed are classified into three zones — the internal waters (IW), the territorial sea (TS) and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The IW is on the landward side of the baseline — it includes gulfs and small bays. Coastal states treat IW like land. The TS extends outwards to 12 nautical miles from the baseline — coastal nations enjoy sovereignty over airspace, sea, seabed and subsoil and all living and non-living resources therein. The EEZ extends outwards to 200 nautical miles from the baseline. Coastal nations have sovereign rights for exploration, exploiting, conserving and managing all the natural resources therein.

Since fisheries is a state subject, fishing in the IW and TS come within the purview of the states concerned. Other activities in the TS and activities, including fishing beyond the TS up to the limit of the EEZ, are in the Union list. No Central government, so far, has framed laws covering the entire EEZ. The Bill attempts to

The Bill is also a response to discussions on fisheries subsidies at the WTO since the Doha Round of 2001. India has been defending the rights of developing nations for special and differential treatment. Developed countries contend that nations without laws to manage fisheries in their respective EEZs are not serious about unregulated fishing in these areas. The MFRM Bill is India's response to such sentiments.

make up for this. The annual fishery potential of the country's EEZ is about 5 million tonnes. Utilising it judiciously is an important priority of the government that was underscored by the formation of a new fisheries ministry.

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The Bill prohibits fishing by foreign fishing vessels, thus nationalising our EEZ. An Indian fishing vessel desirous of fishing in the EEZ, outside the TS, must obtain a permit. This requirement has been contested by the fishing industry — particularly small-scale operators.

There is a faulty assumption in the Bill that only large-scale vessels fish outside the TS. Actually, thousands of small-scale fishing crafts regularly venture into such areas. Their freedom to access fish outside the TS will cease if the Bill becomes law. A few exemption clauses to safeguard their livelihoods should be incorporated in the Bill.

Bigger vessels, particularly trawlers, registered and licenced under state departments, will need a permit to fish. This is a welcome measure to manage the fishing sector.

The Bill lacks congruence with important regional fishery agreements. It is incomplete compared to the regulations in other coastal nations. However, it is necessary for the sustainable future of the marine fishing industry. The Bill respects the jurisdiction of our coastal states over the TS. It proposes social security for fish workers and calls for protection of life at sea during severe weather events. State governments, fisher associations and the fishing industry representatives should not blindly oppose the entire Bill on the basis of their fears of the fishing permit. They should argue for greater "cooperative federalism".

Fish cannot be bound by territoriality diktats of the Centre or states. Cooperative governance between them over different territories (IW, TS and EEZ) is key to the sustainable management of marine fisheries, which should now ideally go into the Concurrent List . Small-scale fish workers should demand making the entire IW and TS completely free of trawling using the FAO/UN Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines to support their arguments. This will raise their incomes, ensure a steady supply to consumers, heal the coastal areas and curb the bane of destructive fishing.

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INDIAN EXPRESS

Bhanwari Das Gurr survives two-cycle/three-wheeler test by 22 votes

ENGLISH ELECTRIC

AUGUST 30, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

UP GOVERNMENT SAFE

153 MEMBERS OF the Raj Mangal Pandey-led Janata Party, 43 Congress (I) members and the lone Socialist Party member voted for the no-confidence motion. On the Uttar Pradesh government side, 199 members of the Banarasi Das-led Janata Party, nine members of the CPI, six members of the Congress, one member of the CPM, and four Independents voted against the motion. The no-confidence motion moved by Raj Mangal Pandey, new Leader of the Opposition, was debated for seven hours in an atmosphere full of suspense because of the horse trading which continued until the last moment.

URANIUM ORDERED

EVEN AS THE US Nuclear Regulatory commission is still dragging its feet on authorising shipment of 19.8 tonnes of enriched uranium for the Tarapur Atomic Power Station, New Delhi has applied for another shipment. Under the new US Non Proliferation Act, the last date for the NRC to entertain applications from countries that are not signatories to the Non Proliferation Treaty or who have not accepted fullscope safeguard of all their nuclear facilities is September 10. The last date for authorising shipments is March 10.

BRANDED AND BEATEN

RAM SINGH, A 14-year-old Harijan boy was severely beaten with lathis and a blunt instrument, then tied to a mulberry tree with ropes and branded with hot iron pincers on his face, genitals and thigh. More than 50 residents of the narrow alley where he lived stood by, watching this gruesome act. The parents, Phul Singh and Shanti, were held back by some men so that they could not come to their son's rescue. The next morning, the parents went to the police post to register a case and heard an unsympathetic policeman inform them: "For what your son did he should have been shot." The police visited the locality more than a day later. According to the Singhs, no statement has been taken from them, nor have any arrests been made.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Hong Kong has many more available legal resources, and activating and mobilizing them will not only have an effect, but also help maintain the consistent logic of Hong Kong's existing legal system, and make the anti-riot measures strictly follow the rule of law." —GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

A more precarious citizenship

India is unlikely to deport to Bangladesh people who fail NRC test. But the millions who will become non-citizens will have fewer rights

SANJIB BARUAH

C R Sasikumar

THE PHRASE "INDIA'S internal matter" has featured prominently in the country's diplomacy in recent days. It cropped up repeatedly in the government's responses to the international fallout of the moves on Jammu and Kashmir: To scrap Article 370 and downgrade the state to a Union Territory. The country's diplomats have pointed to the Simla Agreement of 1972 and the Lahore resolution of 1999 to assert India's jurisdictional competence to take those actions.

"Every new agreement overtakes the past," says India's ambassador to the UN regarding the international commitments made in an earlier era. But whether the Centre's unilateral action— and the communication blockade and security crackdown imposed on the people most affected by it — is consistent with the commitment to resolution of differences through peaceful and bilateral means is quite another matter.

Last week, the "internal matter" formulation also surfaced in a somewhat novel context. In statements made in Dhaka, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar described the process of the identification of citizens and non-citizens in Assam as India's internal matter.

The use of the phrase in the case of Kashmir is quite familiar: To make a jurisdictional assertion of India's power to act on matters affecting that area. The claim is that Kashmir comes under India's "domestic jurisdiction" in the sense of Article 2(7) of the UN Charter, which excludes UN intervention in matters that are "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state". But there are no jurisdictional challenges to the process of citizenship documentation in Assam. The citizenship practices of states and the power to define the rules of entry into a country are widely seen as matters of sovereign discretion.

Jaishankar's statement in Dhaka was clearly intended for a different purpose: To ease Bangladesh's fears. It was a promise that the fallout of the citizenship documentation process in Assam will be contained; it will not extend to Bangladesh. Home Minister Amit Shah had previously raised India's concerns about unauthorised immigration with his Bangladeshi counterpart. The news of the NRC — and that millions of suspected Bangladeshi unauthorised immigrants may be excluded — has received wide media coverage causing significant consternation and confusion in Bangladesh.

Not surprisingly, the media there made a point of putting Jaishankar's comments in that context. According to the *Daily Star*, when the minister was "asked about concerns that some four million Bangla-speaking people are at the risk of losing Indian citizenship as they were left out of the National Register of Citizens in Assam," he said, "This is an internal matter of India". Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abul Kalam Abdul Momen was quoted as telling reporters that when he pointed out that his country was "already in serious trouble with 1.1 million Rohingyas," Jaishankar replied, referring specifically to the NRC, "you don't worry at all about it".

Of course, Article 370 featured prominently on Jaishankar's agenda in Bangladesh. His comment that the Kashmir decisions were India's internal affair was the focus of newspaper headlines in Bangladesh. The country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed his country's support for that position: "Bangladesh maintains that the abrogation of Article 370 by the Indian government is an internal issue of India."

But what does it mean to suggest that the NRC and related efforts to harden the Indo-Bangladesh border and to curb unauthorised immigration will not impact Bangladesh? At least the Indian Supreme Court order that re-energised the NRC process does not support such a reading. The NRC was only one element of that 2014 ruling. The Court, acting on the far-reaching powers given to it by Article 142 of the Constitution, gave a number of directions including one on the "mechanism of deportation of declared illegal migrants". By no stretch of imagination can this instruction be construed as a matter of domestic policy.

"While taking note of the existing mechanism/procedure for deportation keeping in view the requirements of international protocol," said the order, "we direct the Union of India to enter into necessary discussions with the Government of Bangladesh to streamline the procedure of deportation". The issue, however, has taken a backseat during the Court's monitoring of the implementation of its directions. The updating of the NRC—India's largest ever judiciary-led bureaucratic operation — has taken most of its energy and attention.

India's efforts to tighten border enforcement and curb irregular migration parallel similar moves by a few other countries. The impact of these actions on regional neighbours has rarely been benign. In the most extreme case, the Donald Trump Administration's clampdown on unauthorised immigrants has had profound effects on countries south of the US border. The single most important factor negatively impacting Central American countries like Honduras and El Salvador has been the return of deportees.

Understandably, one message that Jaishankar tried to convey to Dhaka was that no matter what, Indian policies will not include deportation— at least not to any noteworthy extent. This won't come as a surprise to many. That India does not have large-scale deportations in mind has been quite evident for a while.

> Given the ruling party's ideological predilections, it is clear that the aborted citizenship amendment bill will be reintroduced in the near future, and it is likely to get Parliament's approval quite easily. What will then effectively become a faith-based selective amnesty will radically change the meaning of being excluded from the NRC.

India's diplomatic priorities vis-à-vis Bangladesh are simply much too high to risk alienating that country by deporting its nationals. The Modi government has clearly made a decision that the question of unauthorised immigrants is best left as India's internal matter. Many would welcome the fact that deportation is now off the agenda. But the full implications of this shift will not be apparent for a while.

Viewed in comparative terms, regularisation or legalisation is one obvious alternative. Irregular migration is to a significant extent a component of labour migration. Faced with a choice between ignoring tax evasion in the underground economy that frequently employs irregular migrants, or exercising control over it, governments have sometimes found regularising the status of unauthorised migrants to be an attractive policy option. Amnesty is its synonym. But lately it has become a controversial word, at least in the US.

There are no signs that a general amnesty will be among the options that India will consider. But defining hundreds and thousands of people living in the country as non-citizens will create a new form of precarious citizenship — people with fewer rights and entitlements. This is an uncharted and potentially dangerous territory for a democracy. The growing talk of detention camps and the rapid normalisation of the idea does not bode well.

However, given the ruling party's ideological predilections, it is clear that the aborted citizenship amendment bill will be reintroduced in the near future, and it is likely to get Parliament's approval quite easily. What will then effectively become a faith-based selective amnesty will radically change the meaning of being excluded from the NRC.

Given this outlook, those who once supported the Assam Movement will be hard-pressed to claim that the completion of the NRC will mark the successful achievement of their goals. Whatever one thinks of the movement's famous demands for the "three Ds, detection, deletion and deportation," the future of Assam will be very different from what supporters of the movement had imagined.

Popular protest movements — like revolutions — it seems, can also end by devouring their own children.

The writer is professor political studies, Bard College, New York

Fewer human sightings

For tigers to regain some dominion over the jungles, it is essential that their habitat remain as wild as possible

STEPHEN ALTER

WHAT DO WE mean by the word "wild"? How do we define and preserve wild places? How many tigers and other creatures actually still "live in the wild"? Though there is no clear, precise answer to any of these questions, our future depends upon ensuring that a significant portion of our planet remains wild.

Earlier this year, my wife and I visited the Pench and Tadoba Tiger Reserves, on either side of the state border dividing Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Late in the afternoon, driving along a forest track, we were fortunate to see a large tigress, visibly pregnant. She was lying in the shade, camouflaged amidst the foliage, about 100 metres from an artificial waterhole. A few minutes after our jeep pulled up and our guide pointed out the tigress, approximately 20 other vehicles congregated at the same spot.

We watched the predator for half an hour before she eventually got on her feet and slowly made her way directly in front of us to a concrete-lined tank of water, filled by a solar-powered pump. Lowering her hindquarters into the pool, until half her body was submerged, the tigress emitted a soft moaning sound, as if she was in distress. Perhaps the cubs inside her womb were getting restless or the jeeps had disturbed her; possibly the high temperature that day added to her unease. But the cool water seemed to soothe the tigress's discomfort.

Though this "tiger sighting" was one of the highlights of our visit to the parks and allowed me to get a good photograph, the conditions under which we observed the tigress made me wonder about the underlying purpose of tiger reserves. Our noisy convoy of "jeep safaris", engines revving, as they took up a position near the waterhole and the impatient crowd of visitors, including an obnoxious woman who shouted abuses at the other drivers for blocking her view, could just as easily have been a traffic jam in the nearby city of Nagpur.

On July 29, 2019 — the "International Tiger Day" — the Prime Minister of India released encouraging figures from the country's most recent tiger census. Officially, India now has 2,967 tigers in the wild, their numbers doubling from an all time low of 1,411 in 2006, when poachers and the illicit demands of Chinese medicine seemed close to wiping them out. A wildlife census is a notoriously difficult project. But, with camera trap technology and trained scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India conducting the recent survey, it seems that the current numbers are relatively accurate, though there is always a margin of error.

Nevertheless, a healthy debate over this census has already begun and one of the world's foremost experts on tigers, K Ullas Karanth, Director of the Centre for Wildlife Studies in Bengaluru has written, "When tiger recovery efforts began 50 years ago we had about 2,000 tigers. If after all this effort and expenditures we are satisfied with just 3,000 tigers, it points at a serious management problem." Karanth's research leads him to believe that India's forests have the "carrying capacity" of 10,000-15,000 tigers, which means we still have a long way to go.

In order to allow tigers to regain some dominion over the jungles of India, it is essential that their habitat remain as wild as possible. Paradoxically, we might argue that the true definition of a wild environment is one that does not require the protection of human beings, where nature preserves and sustains itself. Of course, with population pressures and the chanted mantras of development, that isn't feasible. But, in essence, human beings need to be excluded from the limited percentage of forested land that has been designated for wildlife preservation. Most of India's conservationists have long recognised that forest-dependent communities must be part of the solution. However, while that goal may be achieved through designated areas of "mixed-use forest", humane and generous relocation packages, as well as dialogue, education and ecologically-sensitive job opportunities, it still comes down to providing wildlife with enough space and biodiversity to survive.

Some years ago, Madhusudan Katti, a professor of vertebrate ecology, wrote an insightful and provocative essay entitled, "Are leaf warblers more important than tigers?" The essential point he makes is that wild forests are complex, interdependent ecosystems in which a tiger's survival depends as much on tiny birds eating swarms of insects that devour the foliage and denude the jungle, as on the preservation of prey species or the deterrence of poaching. Wild places need much more than just the simple mathematics of a wildlife census.

As we watched the pregnant tigress rise from the waterhole and vanish silently into the jungle, I couldn't honestly say that I had observed a tiger "in the wild". The intrusive presence of our jeep safari seemed to negate that phrase. Perhaps, like graziers or woodcutters who are relocated outside the perimeters of tiger reserves, we too need to be excluded so that the litter of cubs the tigress bore might grow up with fewer "human sightings."

Alter is the author of Wild Himalaya

An unfair comparison

Unlike the Emergency, Article 370 was abrogated to undo an historic wrong

HITESH JAIN

"THE PRESIDENT HAS proclaimed Emergency. There is nothing to panic about." These words of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on June, 26, 1975, created a scene of total bedlam across the country. The President's proclamation of Emergency came within a fortnight of the Allahabad High Court's order that found Indira Gandhi guilty of using government machinery and officials for her 1971 poll campaign. Further, she was disqualified from membership of Parliament for six years.

Subsequent to the proclamation of Emergency, the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was amended through a presidential ordinance. Simply put, after the amendment, carried out on June 30, 1975, any individual considered as a political threat or who gave a stimulus to the voice of the Opposition could be arrested under MISA without a trial. In view of this, several petitions were filed in various high courts challenging the detentions, which were in violation of the fundamental rights of the detainees. The respective high courts had ruled in favour of the detainees, compelling the Indira Gandhi government to approach the Supreme Court (SC) on this matter, known as *Additional District Magistrate Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla* or the habeas corpus case.

The SC's ruling on 1976 came to be known as the darkest hour for India's judiciary. The Court held that with the declaration of Emergency, no person had the locus standi to move a habeas corpus writ petition before a high court to challenge the legality of an order of detention. However, in 2017, the SC, declared that the suspension of the right to life and liberty during the Emergency was not good law and such an interpretation is seriously flawed.

It is important to understand this timeline in light of several articles in various newspapers that have compared the habeas corpus case to the situation in Kashmir following the abrogation of Article 370. With the SC referring all the petitions filed regarding Article 370 to a five-judge Constitution bench, these are brazen attempts to browbeat the judiciary.

The sole purpose of proclaiming the Emergency was for Indira Gandhi to retain her position as prime minister. Article 370 was abrogated to address the gross injustice concerning the rights of women, tribal communities and backward classes of society. For example, a woman from Jammu and Kashmir who married outside of the state would lose her status as a state subject as per the erstwhile state law. It is also saddening that the present and future generations of backward classes who were initially brought to J&K in 1957 by the state government have been compelled to remain as sweepers in the state. This was because they were not given the Permanent Resident Certificate. Prior to the amendment, non-Kashmiri Indians, manufacturing firms or multinational corporations were not permitted to invest in land or property. This is all set to change. Explaining each advantage this abrogation brings to the table would require a lot of space. Article 370 being scrapped was in the interest of the public at large, unlike promulgation of the Emergency, which was to suit the private interest of an individual.

Secondly, the Emergency was undoubtedly arbitrary in nature. It was proclaimed without the consent of any of the cabinet ministers and was devoid of any reasoning. After the imposition of the Emergency, the government amended the MISA through the 39th Amendment, yet again in an arbitrary manner, when most parliamentarians were jailed. In stark contrast lies the abrogation of Article 370. Comparing the abrogation to draconian acts such as MISA and the proclamation is a mismatch of epic proportions. It is to be noted that Article 370 itself was supposed to be temporary; it was under Part XXI of the Constitution, which is titled "Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions". Moreover, only after both houses of Parliament voted in favour of the resolution after an informed debate, was Article 370 abrogated.

Lastly, given the manner in which MISA was amended, it was of no surprise that the government led by Indira Gandhi arrested over 900 individuals under the Act between 1975-77. These arrests were undertaken without any reasoning, violating inviolable Fundamental Rights such as those provided by Articles 14, 19 and 21. In sharp contrast, the precautionary measures taken in J&K are for the larger interest of the public to maintain public order, which is the responsibility of the elected government. Moreover, a section of society have claimed these actions to be a violation of human rights. However, such an argument is misplaced as these actions have been undertaken in accordance with Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

The essence and rationale of Emergency was summarised aptly by Jayaprakash Narayan in the foreword of renowned jurist M C Chagla's autobiography: "I never thought that the daughter of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru would dare or stoop to snuff out the lamp of liberty to serve her personal and dynastic ends." Unlike the Emergency, Article 370 was abrogated to undo a historic wrong.

The writer is a Mumbai-based senior lawyer and managing partner, Parinam

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEED FOR A CHURN

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Join the debate' (IE, August 29). Even before a healthy discussion on the unnecessary demonisation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi could take place in the public domain, the Congress in Kerala has given a show cause notice to its MP, Shashi Tharoor. The party needs to reinvent itself by incorporating new and young leaders, who are open to suggestions and not afraid to embrace change. The old order must go. An improvement in the quality of debate will keep the government on its toes and make the nation take notice of the Opposition's contribution. But negativism has become the order of the day.

Anupama Goswami, *Mumbai*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Join the debate' (IE, August 29). The Congress has to realise the root cause of its defeat in the 2019 general elections. There seems to be much confusion within the party, which reflects in divergent views of the party leaders on Article 370 or PM Narendra Modi. Only criticising the PM will not work. This should be accompanied by putting forward ideas for development.

Vihaan Gupta, *Ujjain*

FREEBIES AGAIN

THIS REFERS TO editorial, 'Cost of water' (IE, August 29). Low prices of water do not create a milieu for the judicious use of this scarce resource. The Delhi government's arrears-waiver scheme will be inimical to water conservation. The AAP government's admission that the water billing system is faulty could become an alibi for defaulters. Freebies by governments before the elections have nothing to do with rational policy.

Deepak Singhal, *Noida*

FIRE IN AMAZON

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Writ in flame' (IE, August 28). It is very unfortunate that the lungs of the world are burning and the President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, has been blaming the country's environmental NGO's for the blaze. Bolsonaro seems to be in a hurry to prove himself as a disciple of US President Donald Trump. The Amazon fires are an alarming event as the forest is a great repository of flora and fauna. It is also home to more than 400 indigenous tribes, who have been living there for centuries.

Vivek Kumar, *Patiala*

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

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TELLING NUMBERS

How police relate Muslims and migrants with crime

Release of Status of Policing in India Report 2019, *Prem Nath Pandey*

'WHICH GROUPS ARE NATURALLY PRONE TO CRIME?' HOW POLICE PERSONNEL RESPONDED

Community	Very much	Somewhat	Rarely	Not at all
Upper-caste Hindus	6	27	32	24
OBCs	5	28	34	23
Dalits	7	28	30	24
Adivasis/tribals	5	26	31	27
Muslims	14	36	25	17

IN THE 'Status of Policing in India Report 2019' prepared by Common cause and Lokniti-CSDS, aspects of which were reported in *The Indian Express* on August 28 and 29, one key finding was about bias among police personnel in relating Muslims with crime. About half the police personnel surveyed responded that Muslims are likely to be naturally prone towards committing crime ("very much" and "somewhat" combined).

The question asked was: "In your opinion, to what extent are — a. Upper-caste Hindus, b. OBC people, c. Dalits, d. Tribals, e. Muslims — naturally prone towards committing crimes..." The options were "very much", "somewhat", "rarely" and "not at all".

With 14 per cent responding "very much" and 36 per cent responding "somewhat", the total of 50 per cent for Muslims was far higher than it was for any other community. For upper-caste Hindus, OBCs, Dalits and tribals, the total for "very much" and "somewhat" responses ranged between 30 and 35 per cent.

Some states, such as Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Bihar, had about two-third or more police personnel who held the opinion that the Muslim community is likely ("very much" and "somewhat" combined) to be naturally prone to commit crime. In Uttarakhand, four out of five police personnel had this opinion, the report said.

'ARE MUSLIMS NATURALLY PRONE TO CRIME?'

Police respondents	Very much	Some what
Uttarakhand	19	60
Chhattisgarh	14	53
Jharkhand	22	44
Maharashtra	12	53
Bihar	16	48

'ARE MIGRANTS NATURALLY PRONE TO CRIME?'

Police respondents	Very much	Some what
All India	24	36
Andhra	42	46
Chhattisgarh	51	33
Maharashtra	38	43
Uttarakhand	35	46

Police view of migrants

The report refers to the update of the National Register of Citizens of India (NRC) in Assam, then goes on to note that anti-migrant sentiment is not restricted to migrants from other countries but also includes migrants from various states within the country. It says police are often partisan in the harassment of these communities, and sets out to quantify this bias on the basis of responses.

Three in every five police personnel perceived migrants as being naturally prone towards committing crimes. This is the total of the responses of "very much" (24 per cent) and "somewhat" (36 per cent). Significantly, in Assam, this bias appered less pronounced than the national average. The total of the "very much" and "somewhat" responses, as compared to 60 per cent nationally, was 49 per cent in Assam, with only 1 per cent responding "very likely" and 48 per cent responding "somewhat".

The bias against migrants was pronounced in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand, where at least four in every five police personnel believe that migrants from other states are likely to be naturally prone towards committing crimes ("very much" and "somewhat" combined). In Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, about three in four believed so.

Source for all data and tables: Status of Policing in India Report 2019

SIMPLY PUT

Pak economy: a reality check

Pakistan's recent bluster is in stark contrast to the precarious state of its economy — a GDP less than a tenth India's, and buried under a mountain of international debt. This is what macroeconomic indicators show

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 29

EVER SINCE Parliament revoked the special status enjoyed by Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan and his colleagues in government have warned of a potential military conflict, even nuclear war, with India.

On Thursday evening, the Ministry of External Affairs condemned the "highly irresponsible statements made by the Pakistani leadership on matters internal to India... (including) references to jihad and to incite violence in India".

Early Thursday morning, Pakistan had tested its surface-to-surface ballistic missile Ghaznavi, which is capable of delivering multiple types of warheads upto 290 km, after having shut down, the previous day, the three air routes above Karachi until August 31.

On Tuesday, Pakistan's Science and Technology Minister Fawad Chaudhry, a close aide of Imran's, had posted on Twitter that his Prime Minister was "considering a complete closure of airspace to India, a complete ban on use of Pakistan land routes for Indian trade to Afghanistan", and boasted that "Modi has started, we'll finish!"

If Pakistan does close down its airspace to India completely, flights to/from airports in the Gulf, Europe and the United States from/to India could get longer by perhaps 70-80 minutes. When Pakistan took this step from February 26 to July 16 in the wake of the Balakot airstrikes, Indian carriers lost around Rs 700 crore. However, Pakistan itself suffered more — losing around $50 million in revenues, which was roughly five times the cost to India.

Pakistan's bluster and threats of hurting India financially come at a time when its own economy is in a perilous state, teetering on the brink of collapse, with no room for losing any revenue.

India, Pakistan compared

According to the World Bank, Pakistan's gross domestic product or GDP stood at $254 billion at the end of 2018; for India, the figure was $2.84 trillion *(see chart 1)*.

To put this in perspective: not only was the Indian economy more than 11 times Pakistan's last year, if India grows at 7% in 2019, it would add almost $200 billion in just one financial year — or almost 80% of Pakistan's 2018 GDP.

Another way to compare: India's GDP was at the level where Pakistan's is today 44 years ago — in 1975.

Caveat: aggregate variables like the GDP often do paper over more granular details. For instance, thanks to the wide gap in total population, India's GDP per capita overtook Pakistan's only in 1999.

State of Pak economy now

Pakistan's economy has had several fluctuations but on the whole it has grown at an average of 4.3% — a rate similar to the so-called Hindu rate of growth — between 2000 and 2015.

But its economic momentum is fast slipping *(see chart 3)*; Pakistan is expected to grow at less than 3% in both 2019 and 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). To make matters worse for the average Pakistani, slower growth hasn't abated the sharp rise in retail inflation *(see chart 4)*, which was close to 9% in May 2019.

Also, Pakistan is facing a dire financial situation. As chart 5 shows, the government's fiscal balance — akin to the fiscal deficit in India and representing the overall level of borrowing by the government — has been rising. According to a Bloomberg report published this week, it is already at 8.9% of the GDP — reportedly the highest in almost three decades.

Owing to the weak state of the economy, Pakistan's exchange rate has continued to plummet — from levels of 140 to the US dollar in the middle of May, it has fallen to nearly 157 this week. *(see chart 6)*

Drowning in debt

Pakistan has a dubious record of borrowing money to sustain itself. As chart 7 shows, as of March 2019, the country's outstanding debt was more than $85 billion (approximately 6 lakh crore in Indian rupees). It has taken loans from a very large number of countries in Western Europe and the Middle East. Its largest creditor is China.

Apart from individual countries, Pakistan has also taken substantial loans from a whole host of international institutions. In May this year, Pakistan reached out to the IMF for the 23rd time in its existence, seeking a $6 billion bailout. The Pakistan government's revenues must go up by a whopping 40% in this financial year to meet the IMF's loan conditionalities.

What ails Pak's economy

In its July report on the country, the IMF was scathing: "Pakistan's economy is at a critical juncture. The legacy of misaligned economic policies, including large fiscal deficits, loose monetary policy, and defence of an overvalued exchange rate, fueled consumption and short-term growth in recent years, but steadily eroded macroeconomic buffers, increased external and public debt, and depleted international reserves".

It also underlined some structural weaknesses that have never been addressed — these included a "chronically weak tax administration, a difficult business environment, inefficient and loss making SOEs (state-owned enterprises), amid a large informal economy".

The IMF warned that "without urgent policy action, economic and financial stability could be at risk, and growth prospects will be insufficient to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population".

But, as several Pakistani analysts contend, the fundamental reason for Pakistan's broken economy is its dysfunctional political system which still runs on rent-seeking and patronage, and is largely devoid of transparency and dispersed institutional autonomy.

STATE OF PAKISTAN'S ECONOMY

PUBLIC EXTERNAL LIABILITIES #

Source	Outstanding debt (in $ million)
Paris Club*	11,261
Non-Paris Club **	23,769
Multilateral***	27,991
Commercial (70 % from China)	9,370
Bonds	7,300
IMF	5,791
TOTAL	85,482

** 17 countries including France,Japan, and Germany in Europe and the US*
*** China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Libya, and Kuwait*
****Includes loans from Islamic Development Bank, ADB, AIIB, ECO Trade Bank, IBRD, IDA, International Fund for Agriculture, Nordic Development Fund, OPEC Fund, EIB*
#As of end-March 2019.

Source: IMF

What a skull tells us about human evolution

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 29

A 3.8-MILLION-YEAR-OLD skull could help rewrite our knowledge of human evolution. Two new studies published on the specimen could clarify the origins of Lucy, the well-known ancestor of modern humans.

While 3.2-million-year-old Lucy belonged to a species of hominins (which include humans and their ancestors) called *Australopithecus afarensis*, the newly investigated skull belongs to the older species *Australopithecus anamensis*. Previously, it was thought that the two species never coexisted, and that the older species gradually morphed into Lucy's species. The new research indicates that they did coexist, for some 100,000 years.

The skull and the facial reconstruction.
Cleveland Museum of Natural History

The skull that was studied was in the form of a nearly complete cranium (the portion that encloses the brain). It was discovered at a palaeontological site in Ethiopia in 2016. Researchers named it MRD-VP-1/1, or MRD for short. The research, published in *Nature*, was conducted by scientists from institutions including the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.

Besides identifying the species as *Australopithecus anamensis*, they determined the age of the fossil to be 3.8 million years by dating minerals in layers of volcanic rocks near the site. They also combined field observations with analysis of microscopic biological remains to reconstruct the landscape, vegetation, and hydrology in the area where MRD died, the Cleveland Museum said in a statement.

The dating suggests that MRD's species could have coexisted with Lucy's because of a "speciation event". It is possible that a small group of MRD's species became genetically isolated from the rest of the population and evolved into Lucy's species, whose population eventually out-bred MRD's species. The finding also helps bridge a big gap between the earliest-known human ancestors (about 6 million years old) and species like Lucy (2-3 million years old). MRD's anatomy may also help solve a puzzle — the identity of a 3.9-million-year-old bone found in Ethiopia in 1981. If it belongs to Lucy's species, it would mean that this species existed at a time even before the time when MRD has been dated.

Additionally, the new research has suggested what MRD's species may have looked like. So far, the species was known only from jaws and teeth. In MRD's case, the cranium was so complete that scientists have reconstructed his facial features. The Max Planck Institute described him as "a mix of primitive and derived facial and cranial features". Some characteristics were shared with later species, while others had more in common with those of even older and more primitive early human ancestor groups.

E-cigarette ban: the science behind proposal, and industry counter-view

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 29

WHEN THE NDA government completes 100 days of its second term on September 7, the Health Ministry will hope to have in place an ordinance banning the manufacture, sale and marketing of e-cigarettes. One of the three 100-day goals the ministry has set for itself, The Prohibition of E-cigarettes Ordinance 2019 is being sent to a Group of Ministers as directed by the Prime Minister's Office.

What are e-cigarettes?

An e-cigarette, short for electronic cigarette, is a battery-operated device. One of a large variety of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), an e-cigarette emits vaporised nicotine, or non-nicotine solutions. The user inhales it looking for a sensation similar to inhaling tobacco smoke, but without the smoke.

The pros and cons of e-cigarettes are hotly debated, with the industry refuting scientific evidence about the product being harmful, and users urging the government to legalise it. India's market for e-cigarettes, while nascent today, is projected to grow annually at more than 25 per cent in the next five years.

The draft ordinance

The draft ordinance was necessitated by the fact that an earlier order by the Centre asking the states to crack down against e-cigarettes could not stand judicial scrutiny. However, a recent order, in which the High Court threw out a petition asking for protection from an ordinance against e-cigarettes, has emboldened the Health Ministry, which now seeks legal backing for a ban (rather than just an advisory) in the form of an ordinance. The ordinance makes any violation of its provisions punishable by imprisonment of one to three years, and a fine of Rs 1-5 lakh.

Some states, including Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh,

Getty Images

Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Mizoram, have already banned use and sale of e-cigarettes, vape and e-hookah.

In August last year, the ministry had written to states asking them to stop sale (including online), manufacture, distribution, trade, import and advertisements of e-cigarettes. Under the Constitution, health is a state subject, so any move to ban manufacture and sale of a product on health grounds needs to come from the state government.

In February, the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation had written to all state drug controllers, saying they should not allow sale, online sale, manufacture, distribution, trade, import or advertisement of ENDS. The Delhi High Court stayed the Centre's circular banning sale and manufacture of ENDS like e-cigarettes and e-hookah with nicotine flavour, saying as the products were not a "drug".

The scientific position

In a white paper in May, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) wrote: "The use of ENDS or e-cigarettes adversely affects almost all the human body systems with impact across the life course, from the womb to tomb. The cartridges used in ENDS or e-cigarettes are filled with liquid nicotine, flavouring agents and other chemicals. A typical cartridge contains about as much nicotine as a pack of 20 regular cigarettes and can act as a potential source for nicotine addiction."

Published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, the ICMR white paper added: "Studies on these nicotine solvents had shown a varied degree of release of potential carcinogens... depending on the battery output voltage. The liquid-vaporizing solutions also contain toxic chemicals and metals that have been demonstrated to be responsible for several adverse health effects, including cancers and diseases of the heart, lungs and brain."

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a recent statement: "As of 5:00 pm, August 22, 193 potential cases of severe lung illness associated with e-cigarette product use had been reported by 22 states...CDC is providing consultation to state health departments about a cluster of pulmonary illnesses possibly related to e-cigarette product use, or 'vaping', primarily among adolescents and young adults."

Patients have presented with symptoms such as cough, chest pain, shortness of breath, fever, fatigue, nausea and headache. These are sometimes accompanied by anorexia, diarrhoea and weight loss.

The industry's opposition

In a reply to the Drug Controller General of India dated August 28, the Trade Representatives of ENDS in India (TRENDS), has questioned the scientific documents that the government has cited in favour of a crackdown on e-cigarettes: "...It is ironical that it has been acknowledged by the ICMR itself that it has proffered no research or study to support the claims made in the white paper and that it is merely a compendium of available reports in the international medical field. By the same token, may we humbly suggest that an equal number of studies are available in the medical world that argue against the conclusions derived by ICMR."

Complaining that its letters to the ministry and to the minister have gone unanswered, TRENDS has sought an appointment with CDSCO officials to "place before you scientific evidence that refutes all the claims made in the ICMR report about the dangers of ENDS as a product category".

Law and opinion

The apex court should decide on Kashmir without being swayed by popular mood

The Supreme Court's decision to form a five-member Constitution Bench to examine the validity of the abrogation of the special status given to Jammu and Kashmir puts an end to apprehensions that its response to the Centre's legal measures since August 5 will only be one of quiet acquiescence. The court appeared reluctant to intervene in the immediate aftermath of the decisions when the restrictions imposed on political activity, communications and movement of the people were challenged. Instead, it chose to give enough time to the Centre to stabilise the situation. It seemed to afford wide latitude to the executive to decide the extent to which fundamental rights, including the freedom of the media, would be restricted in the name of achieving greater integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India and preparing for its development. In some habeas corpus matters, the court is yet to examine the legality of the detention of the persons concerned. True relief in such cases lies in ascertaining the whereabouts of a detenu and determining the lawfulness of the detention, but in a couple of matters, the court has only "allowed" the petitioners to travel to Kashmir and meet the detenus. Lawyers and activists have begun drawing parallels with the court's infamous approbation of the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus during the Emergency in the *ADM Jabalpur* case.

The petitions before the court cite many grounds for challenging the President's August 5 Order, by which the Order of 1954, which set out the constitutional provisions applicable to J&K, was superseded. A substantial question is on the validity of the substitution of the concurrence of the Governor for that of the government while under President's Rule; in effect, the Centre is taking its own consent to alter the status of the State. The replacement of the term 'Constituent Assembly' (of J&K) found in Article 370 with the term 'Legislative Assembly' is also under challenge. Another question that looms large is whether a federal unit can be downgraded from the status of a State to that of a Union Territory, a move for which there is no precedent. The constitutional morality of the rest of the country deciding the destiny of a State without the consent or participation of its citizens is also a serious issue the court cannot ignore. It does appear that there is widespread popular support for the government's decision to declare Article 370 inoperative and to divide the State into two Union Territories. Yet, the court is duty-bound to examine the legality of the measures taken by the President and Parliament on August 5 and 6. The challenge before the court is to give a reasoned verdict on these questions of constitutional importance, with far-reaching implications for democracy and federalism, without being swayed by the popular mood in J&K or the rest of India.

Tinkering for optics

The latest FDI rule changes may not be enough to draw a rush of investments

On the face of it, the Centre's announcement on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) norms on Wednesday appears to be one more push to make India a more attractive destination to overseas investors, especially those keen on entering the market for the long haul. From extending the available 100% FDI under the automatic route in the coal mining sector (till now permitted only for captive consumption) to include those companies seeking to commercially sell the commodity, to distinctly including contract manufacturing under the automatic 100% route and easing local sourcing norms for overseas investors in the Single Brand Retail Trading (SBRT) business, the changes in investment guidelines approved by the Cabinet have been touted as "FDI policy reform". The government, clearly concerned by the economic slowdown and persistently weak investment activity, has sought to provide a policy fillip to attract more foreign capital into sectors that it sees as having a multiplier effect particularly in terms of job creation. One must also consider the pressing contexts. Earlier this month, the RBI pointed out that net FDI flows had moderated to $6.8 billion over the first two months of the current fiscal year, from $7.9 billion in April-May 2018. And with Prime Minister Narendra Modi having set a goal of ensuring India becomes a $5 trillion economy within the next five years, the overall consumptive capacity needs to be raised manifold to undergird demand growth. To that end, the act of widening reforms in coal mining, manufacturing and retail is completely understandable.

A closer examination, however, raises several concerns about the ultimate attractiveness of these changes. For instance, the tweaks to investment norms on coal appear at first flush to be a win-win for both the economy at large and the coal industry, the environmental costs of focusing on one of the most polluting fossil fuels notwithstanding. This is predicated on the prospect of seeing an influx of both capital and modern technology into mining and processing, as well as raising domestic supply of the key raw material for power, steel and cement production thereby cutting costly and burgeoning imports. But for foreign mining companies to make a beeline to pitheads, several related regulatory and market challenges will have to be addressed post-haste. Large miners will need economies of scale and so require access to large contiguous fields with minimal bureaucratic constraints on operations. While domestic thermal power plants have had to rely on increased imports in recent times, many of the electricity producers themselves are in financial stress. How much additional investments may actually accrue is not clear.

On dilution, bifurcation and 'special status'

J&K's perceived loss and New Delhi's real gains over the Centre's Article 370 decision need to be objectively assessed

FAIZAN MUSTAFA

The jubilation in parts of the country following the supposed abrogation of Article 370 was in contrast to the gloom in the Kashmir Valley. It was ignored by both sides that New Delhi did not make any substantial gain in terms of powers; neither did Srinagar suffer any major loss. Later, in what could be construed as a setback to the Centre, the Supreme Court referred all the petitions on Article 370 to a Constitution Bench, which will hear the matter in the first week of October.

Amidst these developments, some points require deeper scrutiny. First, the apex court could possibly strike down as 'unconstitutional' the Centre's move to amend Article 370 by invoking the very same article. Second, the bifurcation of a State which is under President's rule into two Union Territories is possibly against federalism. And third, Article 370, as it stood on August 4, was a special power available not to Kashmir, but to the Centre.

First, Article 370 has not been abrogated. It still very much remains part of the Constitution. Instead, the government, in an innovative and constitutionally suspect manner, invoked the Article to amend Article 367. On August 5, the President inserted a new clause to say that the 'Constituent Assembly' of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) shall mean 'Legislative Assembly' of the State, and 'State government' shall mean 'Governor acting on the advice of Council of Ministers'. With this interpretation, Article 370 presented an entirely different picture. Since the erstwhile State was already under President's rule, the Parliament, by exercising 'powers' of the Legislative Assembly, gave its concurrence to the aggressive surgery of Article 370 that has killed the spirit as well as the text of the provision.

Bona-fide exercise of power?

True, during President's rule, Parliament can certainly exercise 'powers' of the State Assembly; but whether the aforesaid 'concurrence' can be termed as a legitimate and bona-fide exercise of power is a moot question for various reasons.

One, a Legislative Assembly that was in itself a creation of the Constituent Assembly cannot take the place of the latter. Two, the August 5 order defined the 'State government' to mean 'Governor acting on the advice of Council of Ministers'. And since there was no Council of Ministers, the validity of the Governor's concurrence mentioned in the presidential order was questionable.

Finally, Article 370(1)(d), which on August 5 was used for the purpose of diluting the Article itself, was meant to be deployed to apply 'other provisions of Constitution' to Jammu and Kashmir, not to modify or repeal Article 370 itself. The expression 'other provisions' here means provisions other than 'Article 1', 'Article 238' (now repealed) and 'Article 370'.

Four points are to be kept in mind here. First, one constitutional provision cannot be used to nullify another. Second, an interpretation clause is to be used only when there is ambiguity in the Constitution. Here, the 'Constituent Assembly' Article 370 talked about was clearly identifiable – it first met on October 31, 1951 and was dissolved on January 26, 1957, and hence there was no ambiguity. Third, even when there are two contradictory provisions, the 'doctrine of harmonious construction' is to be invoked so that both the provisions are given effect to.

"The constitutional validity of J&K's bifurcation into two Union Territories is doubtful." Residents in Srinagar earlier this month. ▪ REUTERS

A mala-fide presidential action under Article 356 can be struck down. If the apex court upholds the Centre's suspension of Article 3, it will be the end of Indian federalism as States will become a plaything in the Centre's hands. It needs to be recalled here that prior to the Reorganisation Act of 1956, States were given the opportunity to express their views. Andhra Pradesh Assembly too was given this opportunity in 2014 prior to the creation of Telangana. Since the J&K Assembly stood dissolved and there had been no election announced, it was denied its right to express its view.

When a State is under President's rule, Parliament can act as nothing more than a 'night watchman'. It certainly cannot pass a resolution to bifurcate the State.

No major departure

Let us now objectively assess New Delhi's gains in sounding the death knell for Article 370. Since almost the entire Constitution of India had been already applicable to J&K, constitutionally speaking, heavens have not fallen for Srinagar. Entry 76 of the Union List, which deals with audit, was extended to J&K in 1958. The Election Commission of India was given powers to conduct elections from 1959 by the First Amendment to the J&K Constitution. A total of 94 out of the 97 items in the Union List had already been made applicable to J&K when the Centre made its move and hence Parliament had all the powers.

Out of the 395 Articles in the Indian Constitution, 260 Articles had already been extended to J&K through successive Presidential Orders. As regards the rest of the Articles, J&K Constitution had identical provisions. Moreover, more than 250 Central laws had already been extended and most of J&K's State laws were identical to Central laws.

In reality, the 'special status' Article 370 conferred was not to J&K but to the Central government. The Centre could deny certain provisions while extending unilaterally some other amendments. For instance, following the 44th Amendment, unlike in the rest of the country, national emergency in J&K could still be imposed on the grounds of 'internal emergency'. Similarly, while for the rest of the country, freedom of speech could be curtailed only through 'reasonable restrictions', in J&K, it could be controlled through restrictions that "appropriate legislature considered reasonable".

Yes, we do live in a post-truth world but we need to objectively assess J&K's loss and New Delhi's real gains when it comes to the dilution of Article 370. Further, whether the apex court will allow India to become a 'unitary state' remains to be seen.

Faizan Mustafa is Vice-Chancellor, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. Views expressed are personal

Govt. needs to be prudent in using RBI's transfer

The fund transfer provides some much-needed relief and manoeuvrability to the beleaguered Centre

M. GOVINDA RAO

With the acceptance of the Bimal Jalan committee's report by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the stand-off between the RBI and the Ministry of Finance seems to have ended for now. The report has also helped to clarify the volume of reserves required for risk provisioning to counter a financial stability crisis if it were to arise.

Though the RBI belongs entirely to the government, the integrity of its balance sheet is important to ensure financial stability and to combat market risks. The committee made its recommendations after taking into account the role of RBI in financial salience; cross-country practices; statutory requirements; and impact of its public policy mandate and operating environment. Based on these factors, it decided on the volume of reserves required to support the financial system in times of crisis and concluded that the provisioning has to be more stringent than in developed countries to ensure the perception of safety, particularly as India has low sovereign rating and the Indian rupee does not have reserve currency status.

The revised economic capital framework recommended by the committee makes a distinction in the economic capital of the RBI between 'revaluation reserves' and 'realised equity'. Revaluation reserves, it held, are a risk buffer against market risks and not available for transfer. The committee used the Expected Shortfall (ES) method to measure the market risk and adopted a more stringent confidence level of 99.5% as against the practice by other central banks at 99%.

Economic capital range

The revised framework would allow the economic capital to be in the range of 24.5% to 20% of the balance sheet. As regards realised equity, the committee recommended the required range to be between 6.5 to 5.5% of the balance sheet.

The RBI Board in its meeting on August 26 accepted these recommendations and decided to transfer ₹1,76,051 crore to the government. As the economic capital of the RBI, at 23.3% in June 2019, was within the prescribed range, it decided to transfer the entire surplus of ₹1,23,414 crore earned during 2018-19. As the RBI had already transferred ₹28,000 crore as interim dividend in February 2019, the remaining amount will be transferred in the current fiscal. The government will get an amount of ₹58,081 crore over the budgeted dividend of ₹90,000 crore for the current fiscal. The large surplus in 2018-2019 was mainly due to the revenues earned from open market operations, amounting to ₹3 lakh crore, to shore up liquidity and therefore, the coming years may not see such large dividends.

The additional fund transfer from the RBI provides much-needed relief and manoeuvrability to the beleaguered government. An analysis of the budget presented in July shows that the tax revenue projections are far too optimistic. In fact, the actual net tax revenue collection of the centre in 2018-2019 was ₹15.9 lakh crore and to achieve the budgeted target of ₹19.78 lakh crore in 2019-2020, the net tax revenue will have to increase by almost 25% and correspondingly, gross tax revenue will have to grow by 26.5%. The expected shortfall in tax revenue for the Central government, if the past trend is taken (after devolution to the States), is likely to be about ₹70,000 crore.

Achieving fiscal deficit target

With the economy slowing down and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) not kicking in the expected buoyancy, the shortfall may even be higher. The infusion of additional funds, thus, will help the government to substantially overcome this shortfall and achieve the fiscal deficit target without having to axe allocations to social sector and poverty alleviation.

However, while the Central government will overcome the shortfall in tax collections, the States will have to suffer the consequence of lower-than-budgeted revenue realisations. They have presented their budgets taking into account the tax devolution based on Central budget forecast and shortfall in collections will adversely impact their expenditure allocations to various sectors.

If, on the other hand, the tax revenue growth picks up, then the government can use the additional money to clear the dues of the Food Corporation of India and fertiliser companies to minimise spillover of deficits to the next year. The additional funds can also be used to spend on much-needed capital expenditure.

The decision of the RBI Board must be welcomed as it has not come a day sooner and should help the government in combating the economic slowdown and to conform to the fiscal targets. It is hoped that the government will be prudent in using these funds.

The author is Adviser, Centre for Public Policy, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. Views are personal

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.

The judiciary hears

The Supreme Court has done the right thing in deciding to admit and hear a batch of petitions challenging the abrogation of special status to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 (Front page, "5-judge SC Bench to hear pleas on withdrawal of Article 370," Aug. 29). Thankfully, it has set in motion the process to decide on the constitutional validity of stripping the erstwhile State of whatever autonomy it had. However, in cautioning the apex court against passing any order or making any observation that can weigh with the UN against India, the Central government has shot itself in the foot. The ruling dispensation in New Delhi should know that invoking 'national interest' in a bid to gag or dictate to the country's top court to suit or serve its political interest can eventually prove to be self-defeating. It is only fair to say that whatever a democratic government does should stand the scrutiny of the independent judiciary. The judiciary cannot be expected to play second fiddle to the government. Meanwhile, it is very baffling and disconcerting that the Supreme Court has not taken a serious view of the continuing lockdown in the Valley and done little for the people to regain their liberties.

G. DAVID MILTON,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

Disgraceful comment

By flippantly commenting in his maiden official media interaction since August 5 that the longer politicians stay in jail, the higher the political dividends for them, Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik has brought disgrace to the office. The comment trivialises the prolonged detention of political leaders and betrays his disdain for the liberty of an individual guaranteed under the Constitution. Equally outrageous is his belief that mobile phones and Internet are essentially weapons of terrorists, and ordinary citizens have little use for them. If so, why not extend such restrictions to the rest of the country? The Governor also displayed his scant regard for decency by predicting that people will beat Congress leaders with shoes ("Front page, 50,000 govt. posts will be filled: Malik," Aug. 29).

S.K. CHOUDHURY,
Bengaluru

Lifting the economy

This is with reference to the article "Hardly the brick and mortar of a revival" by Jayati Ghosh (Editorial page, Aug. 29). The author is right in saying that the transfer of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) surplus is only a stop-gap measure which will not address the key problems of lack of demand. The present precarious state of Indian economy is visible in the crises experienced by sectors like automobiles, real estate and consumer goods. Badly managed policy measures like demonetisation and improper implementation of GST had caused body blows to the informal economy, which is now having an effect on the formal sector.

T.S.N. RAO,
Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh

RBI's income

During the course of a recent television panel discussion on the transfer of ₹1.76 lakh crore from the reserves of the RBI to Central government, an eminent panel member said the RBI's main income derived from the issue of currency notes. As an example, he stated that the cost of printing a 2,000-rupee currency note comes to about ₹3.50 and the difference between the face value and the cost of its printing is RBI's main income. This is utterly incorrect. While the cost of printing banknotes is taken as an item of expenditure in RBI's balance sheet, no income is recorded on account of issue of notes. The wrong notion of the panel member was not countered by other panellists or the anchor. The main income of RBI comes from interest earned on loans and advances to commercial banks, ways and means advances to State and Central governments, investment in Central government securities and foreign currency assets, etc.

M.O. SEBASTIAN,
Kochi

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>The last paragraph of "Chandrayaan-2 nears Moon" (Aug. 29, 2019) read: "Launched on July 22, Chandrayaan-2 has been in lunar orbits since August 20. *It* is due to land on the moon's surface in the early hours of September 7, 48 days after *it* was launched from Sriharikota." It should be recast to say: "Launched on July 22, Chandrayaan-2... *The lander riding on it* is due to land on the moon's surface in the early hours of September 7, 48 days after its launch from Sriharikota."

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बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
वर्ष 12 अंक 166

कम हो आरबीआई पर निर्भरता

भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक (आरबीआई) ने वर्ष 2018-19 की वार्षिक रिपोर्ट जारी कर दी है। यह रिपोर्ट बीते वर्ष के दौरान उसके कदमों को स्पष्ट तो करती ही है, वह व्यापक अर्थव्यवस्था की आगे की दिशा के अनुमानों को भी रेखांकित करती है। यह सालाना रिपोर्ट उस वक्त आई है जब चंद रोज पहले ही यह खबर सामने आई कि आरबीआई 1.7 लाख करोड़ रुपये की राशि सरकार को हस्तांतरित करेगा। इसमें से 1.23 लाख करोड़ रुपये की राशि अधिशेष से आई है जबकि शेष राशि अतिरिक्त प्रावधान से प्राप्त की गई है। आरबीआई के पूर्व गवर्नर विमल जालान के नेतृत्व वाली एक उच्च अधिकार प्राप्त समिति ने इसकी अनुशंसा की थी। अधिशेष की राशि की अधिकता के लिए आरबीआई द्वारा खुले बाजार में परिचालन में इजाफा भी एक वजह है। यह तेजी वर्ष की दूसरी छमाही में खास तौर पर देखी गई। इस अवधि में खुले बाजार में परिचालन से 2.5 लाख करोड़ रुपये की राशि हासिल हुई। बहरहाल, वार्षिक रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि नकदी की कमी बनी हुई है और 3 लाख करोड़ रुपये मूल्य की भारी भरकम नकदी बाजार में डाले जाने के बावजूद इसकी कमी बरकरार है। कुछ पर्यवेक्षकों का मानना है कि बैंकिंग तंत्र में नकदी की स्थिति सहज है। हालांकि इंडिया रेटिंग्स के मुताबिक ऐसा इसलिए हुआ क्योंकि वित्त वर्ष 2019 में नकदी समायोजन व्यवस्था के तहत नकदी डालने का सिलसिला जारी रहा और ऋण की स्थिति कमजोर बनी रही।

व्यवस्था में नकदी को लेकर भविष्य का परिदृश्य अहम है। देखना होगा कि आरबीआई से नकदी का हस्तांतरण एक बार के लिए हुआ है या ऐसा बार-बार होता रहेगा। आरबीआई को इतने बड़े पैमाने पर नकदी का हस्तांतरण क्यों करना पड़ा, इसे लेकर रिपोर्ट एकदम स्पष्ट है। ऐसा मोटे तौर पर विदेशी मुद्रा से जुड़ी गतिविधियों और व्यापक मुद्रा विस्तार को ध्यान में रखकर किया गया।

आरबीआई को यह भी लगता है कि व्यवस्था में नकदी डालने का प्रभाव 2018-19 में निपट चुका है जब मुद्रा और जीडीपी अनुपात 10.7 से 11.2 हो गया। इसका अर्थ यह हुआ कि वर्ष के दौरान तंत्र में नकदी की स्थिति अधिशेष से घाटे की हो गई। इसके अतिरिक्त आरबीआई ने पूंजी के बहिर्गमन और प्रचलित मुद्रा में विस्तार को भी नकदी की स्थिति के लिए वजह बताया। जाहिर है सरकार आरबीआई से इतने अधिक हस्तांतरण पर स्थायी रूप से निर्भर नहीं रह सकती है और उसे अपनी निर्भरता कम करनी होगी।

यह बात ध्यान देने लायक है कि आरबीआई ने अपनी वार्षिक रिपोर्ट से यह संकेत दिया है कि बाहरी संकट से बचाव के लिए सतर्कता की आवश्यकता है और वह लगातार इस पर निगाह रख रहा है। यह वर्ष 2013 में अमेरिकी बाजारों में हुई प्रतिक्रिया से भी अधिक महत्त्वपूर्ण है क्योंकि तब से अब तक पोर्टफोलियो प्रवाह की संवेदनशीलता में काफी इजाफा हुआ है।

वार्षिक रिपोर्ट को भले ही आश्चर्यजनक रूप से आशावादी माना जा रहा हो, मिसाल के तौर पर सरकारी घाटे की वृद्धि के विषय पर, लेकिन एक ओर जहां यह घरेलू वृद्धि को रेखांकित करती है और वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था के नुकसान से जुड़े जोखिमों की भी बात करती है। वहीं दूसरी ओर इसमें यह भी कहा गया है कि भारत ढांचागत समस्याओं के बजाय चक्रीय मंदी की ओर बढ़ रहा है। हालांकि इसमें श्रम, कृषि विपणन, भूमि जैसे ढांचागत मुद्दों का भी उल्लेख है जिन्हें हल करने की आवश्यकता है।

आरबीआई ने दोहराया है कि वह खपत की मांग बढ़ाने को प्रतिबद्ध है और निजी निवेश चालू वर्ष में उसकी शीर्ष प्राथमिकता है। इसका अर्थ यह हुआ कि चूंकि मुद्रास्फीति निकट भविष्य में नियंत्रण में रहेगी इसलिए आरबीआई भविष्य में नीतिगत दरों में और कटौती करने की स्थिति में रहेगा।

अजय मोहंती

दूरसंचार विभाग के जागने का वक्त

छोटी कंपनियों का कारोबार से बाहर होना, आरकॉम का दिवालिया होना, बढ़ता कर्ज तथा बैंक परिसंपत्तियों पर दबाव जैसे लक्षण बता रहे हैं कि अब चेतने का वक्त आ चुका है। विस्तार से बता रहे हैं **राहुल खुल्लर**

दूरसंचार क्षेत्र पिछले काफी समय से संकट से दोचार है। इससे जुड़ी चेतावनी स्पष्ट रूप से हमारे सामने रही है। छोटी कंपनियों का कारोबार से बाहर होना, आरकॉम का दिवालिया होना, बाजार में पहले से काम कर रही कंपनियों को भारी नुकसान और बढ़ता कर्ज तथा बैंक परिसंपत्तियों पर तनाव देखने को मिलता रहा है। इन बातों के बीच सरकार की निष्क्रियता और लापरवाही तमाम दलीलों से परे है।

औद्योगिक स्तर का तर्क अपनाएं तो राजस्व में सालाना 5 से 9 फीसदी की दर से वृद्धि होती रही है। बीते चार वर्ष में उद्योग जगत का राजस्व 20 फीसदी गिरा। दूरसंचार कंपनियों की बात करें तो टावर कारोबार को छोड़कर उनका बाकी कर्ज तीन गुना हो चुका है और अब इसकी राशि 4.3 लाख करोड़ रुपये हो चुकी है। अब यह कर्ज सालाना राजस्व का 2.6 गुना हो चुका है। सरकार का राजस्व (लाइसेंस और स्पेक्ट्रम शुल्क) 36 फीसदी गिरा है।

इससे इतर अगर निजी क्षेत्र पर नजर डालें तो टाटा टेली सर्विसेज, आरकॉम, एयरसेल, टेलीनॉर और वीडियोकॉन कारोबार से बाहर हो चुकी हैं। चार वर्ष में कर्ज करीब चार गुना हो चुका है और इसमें 2.8 लाख करोड़ रुपये का इजाफा हुआ है। आइडिया-वोडाफोन और जियो, प्रत्येक पर 1.5 लाख करोड़ रुपये का कर्ज है। वर्ष 2018-19 में कर्ज, सालाना राजस्व का तीन गुना था। दो बड़ी कंपनियों ने बीते तीन वर्ष में घाटा होने की बात कही है। वर्ष 2015-16 में जब कर्ज का स्तर अपेक्षाकृत कम था, तीन बड़ी कंपनियों का कर एवं ब्याज पूर्व मार्जिन 34 फीसदी था। वर्ष 2018-19 में यह मार्जिन घटकर 25 फीसदी रह गया। एक कंपनी के लिए तो यह मात्र 13 फीसदी रहा।

सरकारी क्षेत्र की तस्वीर और निराश करने वाली है। बीते चार वर्ष में बीएसएनएल का राजस्व 40 फीसदी और एमटीएनएल का राजस्व 30 फीसदी गिरा। बीएसएनएल और एमटीएनएल 2013-14 से लगातार परिचालन घाटा दर्शा रही हैं। 2018-19 में बीएसएनएल का घाटा 14,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक था। समेकित घाटा 90,000 करोड़ रुपये था। एमटीएनएल का घाटा उसके राजस्व से अधिक है और उसका कर्ज राजस्व का नौ गुना हो चुका है। सरकार इस दिशा में कुछ खास नहीं कर सकी है।

बाजार में ढेर सारी कंपनियां थीं और ऐसे में एक झटका जरूरी था। निकासी और दिवालिया ही विकल्प रह गए थे। इतना ही नहीं जियो का प्रवेश उठापटक वाला होना ही था। सफलता का इकलौता रास्ता यही था। शून्य कीमत पर सेवा देना इसकी मांग की सबसे बड़ी वजह बना। इसके कारण कीमतों की जो जंग छिड़ी उसने कंपनियों की वित्तीय हालत खराब कर दी।

परंतु यहां सबके लिए समान अवसर नहीं थे। नियामकीय कदम आर्थिक तकदीर तय करने का नया माध्यम बन गए। भारतीय दूरसंचार नियामक प्राधिकरण (ट्राई) ने आंखें मूंदे रखीं और निःशुल्क सेवा जारी रहने दी। समापन शुल्क संबंधी उसके आदेश ने जियो की लागत कम की और उसके प्रतिद्वंद्वियों का राजस्व कम किया। इसके बाद आक्रामक कीमतों से संबंधित ट्राई का अत्यंत बुरा आदेश आया। जियो लागत से कम मूल्य पर सेवा देने में सक्षम था क्योंकि वह दूसरों पर हमला करने वाला नहीं था। अन्य कंपनियां परभक्षी की ऐसी श्रेणी में थीं क्योंकि उनके पास पहले से बाजार हिस्सेदारी थी। इस आदेश में अन्य प्रतिस्पर्धा विरोधी प्रावधान थे। दूरसंचार विवाद निस्तारण एवं अपील पंचाट ने 18 महीने बाद आदेश के प्रावधानों को खारिज कर दिया लेकिन तब तक नुकसान हो चुका था। दूरसंचार विभाग के जिस सचिव ने सरकार और उद्योग जगत के गिरते राजस्व की ओर ध्यान आकृष्ट कराया था, उनका जल्द ही तबादला कर दिया गया।

इस गहन वित्तीय तनाव ने सरकारी बैंकों के लिए फंसे हुए कर्ज की छाया का विस्तार किया। इससे भी अहम बात यह है कि इसने दीर्घावधि की वाणिज्यिक व्यवहार्यता पर सवाल खड़े कर दिए। गणित लगाकर देखिए। अगर कर्ज और राजस्व का अनुपात 2.5 है तो ऋण की लागत को 8 फीसदी मानें तो केवल कर्ज की भरपाई के लिए ही 20 फीसदी राजस्व की आवश्यकता होगी। इसके स्पेक्ट्रम की लागत के क्षरण और अवमूल्यन को इसमें और जोड़ दीजिए। जिन दो कंपनियों के आंकड़े उपलब्ध हैं उनका अवमूल्यन और क्षरण क्रमशः राजस्व का 20 फीसदी और 11 फीसदी है।

यह उद्योग पूंजी आधारित है लेकिन इसकी विशिष्टता है तकनीक का तेजी से पिछड़ना। 3जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी 2010 में हुई थी। सन 2012 में 3जी स्पेक्ट्रम का इस्तेमाल शुरू हुआ। 2019 में उसके बंद होने की खबर आ रही है। इससे पूंजी, उपकरण और नेटवर्क तीनों की क्षति होती है। जाहिर है 5जी को लेकर इस आपाधापी में थोड़ा ठहरकर हमें सोचना चाहिए कि आखिर 4जी में लगी कितनी पूंजी का इससे नुकसान होने वाला है? 4.3 लाख करोड़ रुपये के बकाया कर्ज का क्या होगा? अगर नीलामी होती है तो क्या घरेलू बैंकिंग उद्योग जरूरत पूरी कर पाएगा? कहीं ऐसा तो नहीं कि केवल भारी पूंजी वालों को लाभ होगा और यह उद्योग एकाधिकार की ओर बढ़ने लगे।

स्पेक्ट्रम की अनापशनाप कीमतें कर्ज में इजाफे की प्रमुख वजह हैं। स्पेक्ट्रम की कम उपलब्धता के कारण कीमतें बहुत बढ़ गईं। देश में प्रति मेगाहर्ट्ज स्पेक्ट्रम के 86 लाख उपभोक्ता हैं। जर्मनी में 1.70 लाख, जापान में 2.62 लाख, कोरिया में 1.37 लाख और अमेरिका में ये 5.89 लाख हैं। देश में प्रति ऑपरेटर औसत धारिता 31 है जबकि यूरोप में यह 61 और एशिया में 49 है। सरकार को स्पेक्ट्रम जारी करने के पहले उचित अध्ययन कर लेना चाहिए, इसके बाद ही उसे स्पेक्ट्रम जारी करना चाहिए। ऐसा न करने से ऊंची कीमतों की समस्या बनी रहेगी।

न्यूनतम शुल्क में सुविधा देने की होड़ समाप्त होनी चाहिए। यहां तक कि मुनाफा कमा रही एकमात्र कंपनी जियो भी पैसे नहीं कमा रही। अगर कंपनियों के पास आंतरिक संसाधन नहीं हों तो भविष्य का निवेश प्रभावित होता है।

शंपटर के रचनात्मक विध्वंस के सिद्धांत में नवाचार और प्रतिस्पर्धी बाजारों का जिक्र था। प्रतिस्पर्धा निष्पक्ष नहीं रही है। नियामकीय प्रभुत्व के बारे में खुलकर चर्चा की गई है। दूरसंचार एक ध्वंसात्मक रचना रही। जरूरत इस बात की है कि नियामकीय निर्णयों में संतुलन और निष्पक्षता लाई जाए। फिर चाहे वह नियामक ट्राई हो या दूरसंचार विभाग। उद्योग जगत के नियमन का उद्देश्य था सेवा प्रदाताओं के हितों का बचाव करना और दूरसंचार क्षेत्र की व्यवस्थित वृद्धि सुनिश्चित करना। दुख की बात है कि इसे भुला दिया गया है। अब वक्त आ गया है कि दूरसंचार विभाग जाग जाए।

(लेखक ट्राई के पूर्व चेयरमैन हैं)

नाभिकीय ऊर्जा से चालित मिसाइल से गंभीर खतरा

तकनीकी तंत्र

देवांग्शु दत्ता

रूस के नाइनोक्सा मिसाइल परीक्षण रेंज में 8 अगस्त को हुई दुर्घटना ने आधुनिक हथियारों के विकास से जुड़े भयावह पहलुओं की तरफ ध्यान आकृष्ट किया है। रूसी परमाणु ऊर्जा आयोग 'रोसेटम' का कहना है कि नाभिकीय ऊर्जा-चालित तरल ईंधन वाले जेट प्रोपल्शन सिस्टम के परीक्षण में कुछ गड़बड़ी हो गई थी। इस हादसे में पांच तकनीकी कर्मचारियों की मौत हो गई और स्थानीय इलाके में रेडियोधर्मिता का स्तर 16 गुना तक बढ़ जाने के बाद स्थानीय निवासियों को सुरक्षित जगह पर ले जाना पड़ा। वैसे चेर्नोबिल हादसे की तुलना में यह दुर्घटना उतनी खतरनाक नहीं है। चेर्नोबिल हादसे के बाद रेडियोधर्मिता सामान्य स्तर से 7,000 गुना हो गई थी।

नाभिकीय ऊर्जा-चालित उड़ान के बारे में शोध 1950 के दशक में शुरू हो गया था। शीतयुद्ध के दौरान अमेरिका और पूर्व सोवियत संघ दोनों को लगता था कि हथियारों के विकास में नाभिकीय ऊर्जा पर निर्भर उड़ान अहम हो सकती है। लेकिन 1960 का दशक शुरू होने तक दोनों देशों ने ही इस शोध को रोक दिया। दरअसल परमाणु ऊर्जा पर आश्रित मिसाइल के विकास में जुड़ी इंजीनियरिंग समस्याएं काफी गंभीर किस्म की थीं।

चेर्नोबिल, थ्री माइल आइलैंड, फुकूशिमा के परमाणु संयंत्रों में हुए हादसों और कुर्स्क परमाणु पनडुब्बी के डूबने से रिएक्टरों के शुरुआती डिजाइनों की खामी सामने आ चुकी थी। इसके बावजूद नाभिकीय ऊर्जा वाले जहाजों एवं बिजली संयंत्रों के लिए रिएक्टर डिजाइन करना अपेक्षाकृत आसान है। लेकिन उड़ान से संबंधित प्रोपल्शन सिस्टम को ताकत एवं वजन के बीच बढ़िया अनुपात चाहिए होता है ताकि उसे अधिक ताकत मिले और वजन कम रहे।

परमाणु ऊर्जा संयंत्रों के साथ समस्या यह है कि वे वजन में भारी होते हैं। इंसानों को ले जाते समय जानलेवा विकिरण से बचाव के लिए सघन सुरक्षा कवच की जरूरत होती है। इसके अलावा उष्मा के ऊंचे स्तर पर काबू पाने की भी समस्या होती है। साठ के दशक तक अमेरिका एवं सोवियत संघ दोनों ने ही ऐसे जेट इंजन बनाने की इंजीनियरिंग क्षमता हासिल कर ली थी जिनकी ताकत एवं वजन अनुपात परमाणु संयंत्रों से अधिक था। परंपरागत रॉकेट भी भार के अनुपात में अधिक ताकत निकाल लेते हैं।

मार्च 2018 में रूसी राष्ट्रपति व्लादीमिर पुतिन ने कई नए हथियारों के विकास की घोषणा की थी। फरवरी 2019 में बुरेवेस्तनिक मिसाइल के मद्देनजर विकसित छोटे परमाणु संयंत्र का परीक्षण सफल रहने की घोषणा की गई। क्रूज मिसाइलें धरती की सतह के बेहद करीब से उड़ान भरती हैं जिससे वे रडार की पकड़ में भी आने से बच जाती हैं। कम रफ्तार से उड़ान भरने से इन्हें अधिक ताकत की जरूरत नहीं होती है, लिहाजा नाभिकीय इंजन काफी छोटा भी हो सकता है।

एक नाभिकीय संयंत्र का फायदा यह है कि बहुत लंबे वक्त तक दोबारा ईंधन डालने की जरूरत नहीं पड़ती है। परमाणु ऊर्जा से लैस मिसाइल में अगर कुछ किलोग्राम नाभिकीय ईंधन भी हो तो वह वर्षों तक तैनात रह सकती है जिससे उसकी मारक क्षमता असीमित हो जाती है। मिसाइल में एक स्मार्ट कंप्यूटर लगाकर उसका उड़ान पथ बदलने की प्रोग्रामिंग की जा सकती है जिससे उसे पकड़ पाना और मार गिराना लगभग नामुमकिन हो जाएगा। हालांकि इस उड़ान प्रणाली का असली डिजाइन गोपनीय है। लेकिन पुराने प्रयोगों से यही लगता है कि किसी भी इंजन को परंपरागत तरीके से शुरू करने के बाद नाभिकीय ईंधन पर स्थानांतरित किया जा सकता है। मिसाइल इस नाभिकीय ऊर्जा का इस्तेमाल कई तरह से कर सकती है। रेडियोधर्मी ह्रास से पैदा होने वाली ऊष्मा को सीधे बिजली में तब्दील किया जा सकता है। नासा ने अपने क्यूरिऑसिटी रोवर में यही तरीका अपनाया है। दूसरा तरीका रेडियोधर्मी ताप का इस्तेमाल परंपरागत तरल ईंधन वाले रॉकेट को प्रज्वलित करने का है।

हालांकि सबसे अधिक मुमकिन डिजाइन काफी हद तक परमाणु चालित रैमजेट जैसा होगा। एक रैमजेट टर्बोचार्जर की तरह होता है जो तेज रफ्तार पर चल रहे वाहन में ही काम कर सकता है। तेज गति से चलने के दौरान ही इंजन के चैंबर में हवा जमा होती है और फिर वह गर्म हो जाती है। इस गर्म हवा को बाहर निकाल दिया जाता है जिससे एक धक्का पैदा होता है। लेकिन हवा को गर्म करने के लिए रेडियोधर्मी ऊष्मा का इस्तेमाल करें तो एक नाभिकीय रैमजेट सिद्धांत रूप में वर्षों तक उड़ता रह सकता है। सिद्धांत रूप में इसके मैक-10 की अविश्वसनीय रफ्तार हासिल कर लेने की भी संभावना है।

इससे जुड़ी इंजीनियरिंग समस्याएं भी हैं। नाभिकीय प्रक्रिया के दौरान पैदा होने वाली ऊष्मा बहुत अधिक होती है और उतने ऊंचे तापमान पर टिक पाने वाली हल्के वजन की सामग्री लगा पाना मुश्किल है। वजन संबंधी सीमाओं के चलते रेडियोधर्मी आवरण भी मुश्किल हो जाता है। ऐसे में उड़ान पथ के दौरान बाहर निकलने वाली उष्मा भी रेडियोधर्मिता फैलाती जाएगी। इसका मतलब है कि एक बार छोड़ दिए जाने के बाद परमाणु ऊर्जा-चालित मिसाइल में परमाणु बम नहीं लगा होने पर भी कुछ मात्रा में रेडियोधर्मी अवशेष निकलता रहेगा।

इस दिशा में शोध कार्य रोके जाने के पीछे यही कारण रहे हैं। शीतयुद्ध के झंडाबरदारों ने भी रेडियोधर्मी अवशिष्ट निकालने वाली मिसाइलों के विचार को त्याग दिया था। लेकिन इस दिशा में शोध कार्य एक बार फिर से शुरू हो गए हैं। पुतिन ने साफ कहा है कि रूस को मिसाइल-रोधी आवरण से बच सकने वाले हथियारों की जरूरत है। नई सामग्री एवं कृत्रिम मेधा से इस दिशा में कुछ इंजीनियरिंग सीमाओं को तो दूर किया जा सकता है लेकिन उनसे भी रेडियोधर्मी अवशिष्ट का खतरा कम नहीं हो सकता है। इक्कीसवीं सदी में मिसाइल डिजाइन का नया दौर शीतयुद्ध की तुलना में कहीं अधिक डरावने हालात पैदा कर सकता है।

कानाफूसी

फिसल गई जुबान

केंद्रीय मंत्री और भाजपा के वरिष्ठ नेता प्रकाश जावड़ेकर पिछले दिनों एक संवाददाता सम्मेलन में शब्दों की कमी से जूझते नजर आए। उन्होंने कांग्रेस नेता राहुल गांधी पर हमला बोलते हुए कहा कि उनकी कश्मीर से संबंधित टिप्पणियों ने देश का अपमान किया है और पाकिस्तान को मौका दिया है कि वह संयुक्त राष्ट्र में भारत को निशाना बना सके। राहुल ने ट्वीट करके कहा था कि कश्मीर में हिंसा के कारण लोगों की जान जा रही है। पाकिस्तान ने इस ट्वीट को संयुक्त राष्ट्र में भारत के खिलाफ अपनी याचिका में शामिल किया। जावड़ेकर ने मांग की कि राहुल गांधी इस गैर जिम्मेदाराना हरकत के लिए क्षमा मांगें। जावड़ेकर ने कहा कि राहुल ने बाद में लोगों की नाराजगी देखकर पाकिस्तान पर हमला करते हुए और कश्मीर को भारत का आंतरिक मसला बताते हुए ट्वीट किए। जावड़ेकर ने यह भी कहा कि संसदीय क्षेत्र बदल जाने के कारण राहुल की मानसिकता में भी बदलाव आ गया है। जब उनसे पूछा गया कि वह राहुल के संसदीय क्षेत्र बदलने के बारे में क्या कहना चाहते हैं तो जावड़ेकर लड़खड़ा गए। गौरतलब है कि राहुल इस लोकसभा में केरल के वायनाड का प्रतिनिधित्व कर रहे हैं। वह 2004 से 2014 तक 10 साल उत्तर प्रदेश के अमेठी संसदीय क्षेत्र का प्रतिनिधित्व कर चुके हैं।

आपका पक्ष

दिल्ली में चले इलेक्ट्रिक बसें

दिल्ली में फिलहाल सार्वजनिक परिवहन सेवा में सीएनजी बसें चलती हैं। ये बसें दिल्ली परिवहन निगम की हैं। राष्ट्रीय हरित अधिकरण में दिल्ली में प्रदूषण से संबंधित एक मामला आया था तब मामले की सुनवाई के दौरान सीएनजी बसों से भी प्रदूषण से इनकार नहीं किया गया था। ऐसे में दिल्ली में चल रही डीटीसी बसों को भी इलेक्ट्रिक बसों में बदलने पर विचार करने की जरूरत है। दिल्ली में डीटीसी की 5,000 से अधिक बसें चलती हैं। अगर इन 5,000 बसों को इलेक्ट्रिक बसों में बदल दिया जाए तो दिल्ली की आबोहवा कुछ हद तक शुद्ध हो सकती है। सरकार ने वर्ष 2020 से बीएस-6 मानक वाले वाहनों को शुरू करने का लक्ष्य रखा है। वर्तमान में बीएस-4 मानक वाले वाहन चल रहे हैं। इसके अलावा इलेक्ट्रिक वाहन लाने की तैयारी चल रही है। अगर सरकार इस योजना को सफल

तमिलनाडु के मुख्यमंत्री ने सोमवार को चेन्नई में ई-बस का शुभारंभ किया था *-पीटीआई*

बनाना चाहती है तो पहले सरकारी स्तर पर इस कदम की शुरुआत होनी चाहिए। दिल्ली के अलावा दूसरे राज्यों में सार्वजनिक परिवहन सेवा में सबसे पहले इलेक्ट्रिक बसों का परिचालन करना चाहिए। इससे पर्यावरण के संरक्षण में कुछ हद तक सुधार संभव हो सकेगा। राज्यों में इलेक्ट्रिक बसों के परिचालन के लिए सरकार को वित्तीय मदद करने की भी जरूरत है। दिल्ली में डीटीसी सभी सीएनजी बसों को इलेक्ट्रिक बसों में तब्दील करने में सक्षम नहीं है। ऐसे में दिल्ली सरकार को एक बार डीटीसी को वित्तीय पोषण करना चाहिए। इससे दिल्ली में 5,000 से अधिक सीएनजी बसों से होने वाला प्रदूषण खत्म हो जाएगा।

मोहित कुमार, नई दिल्ली

कुपोषण में झारखंड, मध्य प्रदेश शीर्ष पर

झारखंड और मध्य प्रदेश बच्चों की कुशलता मापने वाले सूचकांक में खराब पोषण तथा शिशुओं के जीने की कम दर के कारण निचले पायदान पर हैं। इस सूचकांक का आकलन बच्चों के स्वास्थ्य संबंधी विकास, सकारात्मक संबंध और संरक्षण संबंधी विषयों के आधार पर किया जाता है। खबरों के अनुसार बच्चों के स्वास्थ्य, पोषण तथा शिक्षण सुविधाओं के कारण केरल शीर्ष स्थान पर है। वर्ष 2000 में बिहार के अलग होने के बाद झारखंड में विकास की दर काफी धीमी रही है। अस्थिर राजनीतिक कारणों से भी यहां विकास कार्य प्रभावित हुआ है। खनिज भंडार की प्रचुरता के बावजूद झारखंड विकास नहीं कर पाया तथा यहां के शिशु कुपोषण के शिकार होते चले गए। राज्य सरकार को बच्चों के पोषण के लिए ग्रामीण स्तर पर अभियान चलाने की जरूरत है। गांव के विकास से ही राज्य संपन्नता की ओर बढ़ सकता है। राज्य में अशिक्षा, बेरोजगारी के कारण लोगों को दो वक्त का समय नहीं मिल पाता है। अगर भोजन मिल भी जाता है तो उसमें पोषक तत्त्वों की कमी रह जाती है। राज्य के खनन क्षेत्र की स्थिति और भी चिंताजनक है। पश्चिम सिंहभूम में लौह अयस्क का भंडार है लेकिन यह जिला देश के सबसे पिछड़े तथा गरीब जिलों में आते हैं। जिले के किरीबुरू से लौह अयस्क निकलता है। लेकिन यहां के स्थानीय लोगों की माली हालत दयनीय है। अतः सरकार को उचित कदम उठाने की जरूरत है।

देवेंद्र शर्मा, पश्चिम सिंहभूम

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

दैनिक जागरण

माया से मुक्ति ही मोक्ष का द्वार खोलती है

पाकिस्तान का प्रलाप

कश्मीर को लेकर पाकिस्तान के रोने-धोने और साथ ही उसके धमकाने एवं उकसाने वाले रवैये पर भारत ने यह कहकर एक तरह से उसकी अनदेखी ही की कि वह गैर जिम्मेदारी का परिचय देकर माहौल खराब करने का काम कर रहा है। जम्मू-कश्मीर के मामले में भारत सरकार के ऐतिहासिक फैसले के बाद पाकिस्तान जिस तरह अपनी बौखलाहट का अभद्र प्रदर्शन कर रहा है उससे उसकी जगहंसाई ही हो रही है। हैरानी यह है कि वह इस सच्चाई को स्वीकार करने के लिए तैयार नहीं कि चीन को छोड़कर अन्य कोई प्रमुख देश उसका रुदन सुनने को तैयार नहीं। कम से कम अब तो पाकिस्तान को यह आभास हो ही जाना चाहिए कि वह इस छलावे में जी रहा था कि कश्मीर उसका है और एक दिन उसे हासिल करके रहेगा। इस छलावे के चलते ही उसने अपनी सेना को अपने पर हावी होने दिया। चूंकि पाकिस्तान ने इस सच का सामना करने से जानबूझकर इन्कार किया कि कश्मीर पर उसका अधिकार नहीं बनता और वह उसे छल-बल से हासिल नहीं कर सकता इसीलिए अब उसे समझ नहीं आ रहा है कि वह करे तो क्या करे? इसी बौखलाहट में वह कभी भारत को सबक सिखाने की धमकी दे रहा है तो कभी दुनिया को कोस रहा है। बेहतर हो कि आम पाकिस्तानी अपनी सरकार और साथ ही अपनी सेना से यह साधारण सा सवाल पूछें कि क्या जम्मू-कश्मीर संबंधी अनुच्छेद 370 उनसे पूछकर या फिर उनकी सलाह से बनाया गया था? इसे तो भारत ने विशेष परिस्थितियों में अपने स्तर पर बनाया था और जब यह देखा कि उससे नुकसान ज्यादा और फायदा कम है तो हटा लिया। आखिर इस पर पाकिस्तान अथवा अन्य किसी देश को हाय-तौबा क्यों मचाना चाहिए?

जम्मू-कश्मीर से अनुच्छेद 370 हटाने के बाद पाकिस्तान जिस तरह आसमान सिर पर उठाए हुए है उससे तो यही साबित होता है कि यह अनुच्छेद जाने-अनजाने उसके हितों की ही पूर्ति अधिक कर रहा था। यह सही है कि पाकिस्तानी प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान अपनी सेना की कठपुतली अधिक हैं, लेकिन उनमें इतनी समझ तो होनी ही चाहिए कि वह भारत को धमकाकर कुछ हासिल नहीं कर सकते। भारत को झुकाने-डराने का ख्याली पुलाव पकाने के पहले उन्हें पाकिस्तान की छवि और साथ ही दयनीय आर्थिक दशा पर भी गौर करना चाहिए। चूंकि अपने सैन्य अफसरों के मुकाबले इमरान खान भारत से कहीं भली तरह परिचित हैं इसलिए वह इस हकीकत से भी दो-चार होंगे कि आज का भारत हर मामले में पाकिस्तान से बीस है। वह और उनके फौजी जनरल यह समझें तो बेहतर कि पाकिस्तान का हित भारत से संबंध सुधारने और उससे मिलकर चलने में है।

मुकदमों का बोझ

इस समय पटना हाईकोर्ट में केवल आपराधिक मामलों की संख्या एक लाख से अधिक है। साठ हजार के करीब सिविल वाद हैं। जाहिर है कि हाईकोर्ट तक मामला जिला न्यायालयों से गुजर कर आता है। इससे इस बात का आकलन हो सकता है कि जिला कोर्ट में भी लंबित मामलों की सूची कितनी लंबी होगी? जिला स्तर पर हाईकोर्ट का यह निर्देश रहता है कि मध्यस्थता केंद्र में वैसे मामले भेजे जाएं जो सुलह योग्य हैं, लेकिन इसकी गति धीमी है। काउंसिलिंग सेंटर में भी 12 सदस्यों की समिति है जो दोनों पक्षों को समझाने का प्रयास करती है। इस कड़ी में विधिक सेवा प्राधिकार की भूमिका पहचानकर इसका गठन किया गया है। इसके तहत काउंसिलिंग सेंटर, मध्यस्थता केंद्र, निरंतर लोक अदालत और स्थायी लोक अदालत के गठन का प्रावधान है। जिन जिलों में इनकी सक्रियता है, वहां लंबित मामले कम हैं। स्थायी लोक अदालत आदेश तक पारित कर सकती है। निरंतर लोक अदालत भी समझौता कराकर मामले को निष्पादित कर सकती है। लगभग पूरे देश में ऐसी व्यवस्था है। न्यायिक व्यवस्था से जुड़े लोगों को इस पर और बल देना चाहिए। यह स्वागत योग्य है कि पटना हाईकोर्ट के मुख्य न्यायाधीश एपी शाही ने स्वयं पहल कर बहुत पुराने मुकदमों के निपटारे की चिंता की है। अभी दैनिक जागरण में एक ऐसे ही पुराने मामले का जिक्र छपा है। पटना हाईकोर्ट के 12वें मुख्य न्यायाधीश बी. रामास्वामी के कार्यकाल में दर्ज हुए भोजपुर के भूमि विवाद की सुनवाई 42वें मुख्य न्यायाधीश एपी शाही अभी कर रहे हैं। महज पांच एकड़ भूमि के मालिकाना हक को लेकर 1964 से अदालत में लंबित इस मामले के निपटारे की पहल स्वयं मुख्य न्यायाधीश ने की है। रोचक है कि अपीलार्थी के वकील अनीशचंद्र सिन्हा से पहले उनके पिता दिवंगत जेसी सिन्हा इस मामले में पैरवी कर रहे थे। 1976 में उनकी मृत्यु के बाद इस समय अनीशचंद्र इस मामले को देख रहे हैं। केवल न्यायालय के भरोसे यह बोझ कम नहीं होगा। गांव, गांव की पंचायत, ग्राम कचहरी सबको अपनी भूमिका में आना होगा। आम आदमी को समझना होगा कि बहुत जरूरी न हो तो अदालत का समय न बर्बाद किया जाए। यह भी जरूरी है कि कोर्ट में जजों की संख्या बढ़ाई जाए। जो पद खाली हैं, उनको भरा जाए। बढ़ती आबादी के सापेक्ष जजों की संख्या में अपेक्षित विस्तार भी आवश्यक है।

चीन का चिंतित करने वाला रवैया

ब्रह्मा चेलानी

यदि भारत चीन की उकसाने वाली गतिविधियों की अनदेखी करता रहा तो उसके साथ वार्ता में भारतीय पक्ष खुद को कमजोर ही महसूस करेगा

अवधेश राजपूत

मोदी सरकार द्वारा जम्मू-कश्मीर का पूर्ण राज्य का दर्जा और उसे मिले संवैधानिक विशेषाधिकार समाप्त करना भारत के लिए ऐतिहासिक पड़ाव है। मोदी सरकार ने यह कदम केवल घरेलू कारकों को देखकर ही नहीं, बल्कि अंतरराष्ट्रीय पहलुओं को ध्यान में रखकर भी उठाया। इनमें अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप द्वारा कश्मीर में मध्यस्थता के शिगूफे से लेकर पाकिस्तान की शह वाले अफगान तालिबान से अमेरिका की सौदेबाजी जैसे पहलू भी शामिल रहे। अनुच्छेद 370 खत्म होने के बाद चीन ने जम्मू-कश्मीर मुद्दे के अंतरराष्ट्रीयकरण की पहल की। इसके लिए उसने संयुक्त राष्ट्र सुरक्षा परिषद की एक विशेष, लेकिन अनौपचारिक बैठक बुलाई। उसने बहुत निर्लज्ज ढंग से इस विवाद में अपनी भूमिका पर पर्दा डाल दिया, जबकि वह जम्मू-कश्मीर के 20 प्रतिशत भूभाग पर अवैध रूप से कब्जा किए बैठा है। उसने इस मसले को केवल भारत-पाकिस्तान के मुद्दे के रूप में पेश किया। यह मानना पूरी तरह गलत होगा कि सुरक्षा परिषद में चीन की इस कवायद से कुछ हासिल नहीं हुआ। इस दावपेंच से पाकिस्तान और उसके पिट्ठुओं का हौसला बढ़ेगा। चीन की शरारत से जम्मू-कश्मीर में अलगाववादियों को भी मदद मिली।

भले ही सुरक्षा परिषद की बैठक का कोई ठोस नतीजा न निकला हो, लेकिन इस बैठक ने भारत की जम्मू-कश्मीर नीति को अंतरराष्ट्रीय चर्चा में ला दिया। बंद कमरे में हुई बैठक में इस तथ्य की अनदेखी नहीं की जा सकती कि 1971 में पाकिस्तान के साथ हुए युद्ध के बाद पहली बार सुरक्षा परिषद में कश्मीर पर चर्चा हुई। चीनी षड्यंत्र भारत को यही स्मरण कराता है कि जम्मू-कश्मीर के मामलों में उसका दखल और बढ़ेगा। चीन की रणनीति ही यह है कि वह भारत की दुखती रग छेड़कर गतिरोध को चरम पर ले जाए। बीजिंग जम्मू-कश्मीर को भारत की बड़ी कमजोरी के रूप में देखता है। इसके उलट जम्मू-कश्मीर में संवैधानिक बदलाव से भारत को जम्मू, कश्मीर एवं लद्दाख में चीन-पाकिस्तान की साठगांठ से निपटने में मदद मिलेगी। जम्मू-कश्मीर और लद्दाख को दो केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों में विभाजित कर भारत ने जम्मू-कश्मीर से जुड़े अपने सीमा विवाद को भी पाकिस्तान एवं चीन के साथ अलग-अलग हिस्सों में बांट दिया।

अनुच्छेद 370 के चलते पाकिस्तान का रवैया यही रहा कि भारत जम्मू-कश्मीर को विवादित क्षेत्र मानता है। चूंकि केवल स्थाई नागरिकों को ही राज्य में जमीन खरीदने की इजाजत थी इसलिए कश्मीर घाटी में इस्लामी कट्टरपंथी हावी हो गए। वहां से कश्मीरी पंडितों को जबरन भगा दिया गया। अपनी विविधता भरी नस्लीय एवं धार्मिक पहचान के साथ जम्मू-कश्मीर बहुलतावादी भारत का एक उम्दा प्रतीक था, मगर उसकी समन्वयकारी संस्कृति और परंपराओं पर जिहादी आघात से पूरा परिदृश्य बदल गया। 1989 के बाद नई दिल्ली में सत्तारूढ़ सरकारें इस रुझान को रोकने में असहाय रहीं। परिणामस्वरूप कश्मीर की विविधता भरी परंपराओं पर वहाबी और सलाफी रीति-रिवाज हावी होते गए। अनुच्छेद 370 की समाप्ति से भले ही कश्मीर घाटी में इस्लाम का अरबीकरण न रुके, लेकिन इससे भारतीय संघ में जम्मू-कश्मीर के वास्तविक रूप से एकीकरण की समस्या जरूर सुलझेगी। वास्तव में इस परिवर्तन से जम्मू-कश्मीर में सुरक्षा संबंधी फैसलों पर केंद्र सरकार और मजबूती के साथ निर्णय कर सकेगी।

जम्मू-कश्मीर में उठाए गए कदमों के आलोक में भारत ने अंतरराष्ट्रीय मोर्चे पर स्थिति को बहुत अच्छे से संभाला, मगर अब उसे आंतरिक सुरक्षा और क्षेत्रीय चुनौतियों पर ध्यान देना होगा। सरकार द्वारा आवाजाही और संचार के स्तर पर जो प्रतिबंध लगाए गए हैं उससे संविधानप्रदत्त मूल अधिकार प्रभावित हो रहे हैं। सुरक्षा के मोर्चे पर जोखिम को देखते हुए ये प्रतिबंध चरणबद्ध ढंग से हटाए जा सकते हैं।

जहां हांगकांग की जनता लोकतंत्र के लिए शांतिपूर्वक प्रदर्शन कर रही है, वहीं कश्मीर के हथियारबंद जिहादियों का लोकतंत्र में कोई विश्वास नहीं और वे खलीफा का शासन स्थापित करना चाहते हैं। ऐसे में प्रशासन को घाटी के अस्थिर जिलों में एक विकेंद्रित और सुनियोजित रणनीति के तहत इस तरह प्रतिबंध लगाने चाहिए जिससे स्थानीय स्तर पर शांति स्थापित हो। इसके लिए पुरस्कृत और साथ ही दंडित करने वाला रवैया अपनाया जाना चाहिए।

चीन-पाकिस्तान की गहरी होती साठगांठ भारत की सबसे बड़ी चुनौती है। चीन के संरक्षण में पाकिस्तान भारत के खिलाफ लगातार जिहादी आतंक का इस्तेमाल करता रहेगा। भारत को पाकिस्तान के पिट्ठू आतंकियों पर कार्रवाई के बजाय उनके असली आका यानी फौजी हुक्मरानों पर शिकंजा कसना होगा। 2016 में उड़ी हमले के बाद सर्जिकल स्ट्राइक हो या फरवरी में बालाकोट हमला, ये दोनों कार्रवाइयां आतंकी ठिकानों पर हुईं। इनसे उन फौजी हुक्मरानों का कुछ नहीं बिगड़ा जो भारत को हजार घाव देने की रणनीति को धार देने में जुटे हैं। पाकिस्तान के पीछे असल ताकत चीन है, जिसके खिलाफ भारत आवाज बुलंद करने में भी हिचकता है। वास्तव में भारत के खिलाफ भारी व्यापार अधिशेष का इस्तेमाल कर चीन अपनी सैन्य क्षमताएं बढ़ा रहा है। वह एक गोली दागे बिना ही अपने आक्रामक हित साध रहा है। भारत एक तरह से खुद अपने नियंत्रण के साधन मुहैया करा रहा है। भारत के दूरसंचार क्षेत्र में चीन का पहले ही वर्चस्व कायम हो चुका है और हुआवे पर भारत में 5जी परीक्षण के लिए प्रतिबंध लगाने के बजाय भारत कोई बीच का रास्ता तलाश रहा है।

अप्रैल 2018 में वुहान की खुमारी हफ्ते भर तक नहीं टिक पाई। फिर भी चीन के हालिया उकसावे के बावजूद वुहान जैसी वार्ता के लिए चीनी राष्ट्रपति अक्टूबर में भारत आएंगे जो शायद वाराणसी में होगी। इससे पहले चीन भारत को सीमा विवाद से जुड़ी वार्ताओं में उलझाने की मंशा दिखा रहा है। आर्थिक मोर्चे पर भारत कम से कम इतना तो कर सकता है कि वह प्रमुख क्षेत्रों में चीन की राह रोके। अगर भारत लगातार चीन की उकसाने वाली गतिविधियों की अनदेखी करता रहेगा तो अगले महीने जब मोदी चीनी राष्ट्रपति के साथ वार्ता के लिए बैठेंगे तो भारतीय पक्ष कमजोर महसूस करेगा। यही बात अजीत डोभाल पर भी लागू होगी जब वह सीमा वार्ता के लिए चीनी राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा सलाहकार से मिलेंगे।

जम्मू-कश्मीर भारत के लिए एक सेक्युलर पहचान और राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा से जुड़ा मूलभूत मुद्दा है। कुछ समय के लिए कश्मीर घाटी में हालात खराब होते दिख सकते हैं जिससे भारत पर देसी-विदेशी आलोचकों के साथ ही मानवाधिकारवादियों का दबाव बढ़ सकता है। हालांकि दीर्घ अवधि में भारत के साथ व्यापक जुड़ाव और विकास की गतिविधियां कश्मीर घाटी में हालात सामान्य बनाने में योगदान देंगी। भारत को बड़ा फायदा हासिल करने के लिए इस क्षणिक दुख को झेलना ही होगा।

(लेखक सामरिक मामलों के विश्लेषक हैं)

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सुशील कुमार मोदी

वह जेटली ही थे जिन्होंने जीएसटी के विचार को वास्तविकता में बदला एवं उसे जमीन पर उतारा

आधुनिक भारत के संभवतः सबसे बड़े कन्सेंसस बिल्डर यानी आम सहमति का निर्माण करने वाले पूर्व वित्त मंत्री अरुण जेटली ने भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था के संदर्भ में वह काम किया जो सरदार पटेल ने भारत के राजनीतिक एकीकरण के लिए किया था। यह कहना अतिशयोक्ति नहीं होगा कि यदि अरुण जेटली न होते तो शायद भारत में जीएसटी लागू करना कठिन होता। भारत सरीखे संघीय गणराज्य में जीएसटी लागू किया जाना दुनिया के किसी भी अन्य देश से कठिन काम था। इसका मुझे प्रत्यक्ष अनुभव तब हुआ जब राज्यों के वित्त मंत्रियों की प्राधिकृत समिति का नेतृत्व करते हुए हम लोगों ने यूरोप, कनाडा एवं ऑस्ट्रेलिया में जीएसटी के अमल की व्यवस्था देखी। कनाडा को छोड़कर सभी देशों में केंद्र सरकार जीएसटी संग्रह करती है और उसे केंद्र और राज्य के बीच वितरित करती है, परंतु भारत की संवैधानिक व्यवस्था के अंतर्गत केंद्र और राज्यों, दोनों को जीएसटी संग्रह करने का अधिकार दिया गया। इस कारण यहां दोहरा जीएसटी लागू करना और कठिन काम था। भारत जैसे विविधता वाले देश में जीएसटी लागू करने के लिए दूरदृष्टि, अथक परिश्रम, विषयवस्तु पर गहरी पकड़ और सभी पक्षों को एक साथ लेकर चलने की क्षमता आवश्यक थी। संयोग से ये सभी गुण अरुण जी में भरे पड़े थे।

अरुण जेटली के वित्त मंत्री बनने से पहले जीएसटी की चर्चा लगभग एक दशक से चल रही थी, परंतु इसमें कोई विशेष प्रगति इसलिए नहीं दिख रही थी, क्योंकि राज्यों को केंद्र सरकार पर भरोसा ही नहीं हो पा रहा था। केंद्रीय बिक्री कर की दर घटाए जाने के कारण राज्यों को हुए नुकसान की भरपाई के लिए केंद्रीय बजट में घोषणा भी की गई, परंतु केंद्र के आश्वासन के बावजूद क्षतिपूर्ति किसी को नहीं मिली। केंद्र के इस रवैये से सभी राज्य सशंकित थे कि जीएसटी अमल से होने वाली क्षति की भरपाई होगी भी या नहीं? वित्त मंत्री का प्रभार लेने के बाद अरुण जेटली ने सर्वप्रथम पूर्व सरकार द्वारा दिए गए आश्वासन को पूरा किया एवं राज्यों को इस मामले में क्षतिपूर्ति प्रदान की। इस एक कदम से राज्यों का भरोसा बढ़ा। इससे जीएसटी पर चर्चा का सिलसिला आगे बढ़ाना आसान हुआ। अरुण जी ने संविधान संशोधन का जो प्रारूप रखा उसमें राज्यों को जीएसटी के कारण हुई क्षति को पांच वर्षों तक 14 प्रतिशत की निश्चित वृद्धि से पूरा किए जाने का प्रस्ताव शामिल किया। इस निर्णय ने जीएसटी के प्रति राज्यों की प्रमुख चिंता का निवारण कर दिया। इसका परिणाम यह हुआ कि राज्य जीएसटी पर सार्थक चर्चा करने में दिलचस्पी लेने लगे।

केंद्र और राज्यों के बीच कुछ अहम मुद्दों पर असहमति के कारण 2014 तक कोई विशेष प्रगति नहीं हो पाई थी। राज्यों की चिंता से सीधे जुड़े हुए मुद्दे जैसे-प्रवेश कर और पेट्रो उत्पादों को जीएसटी में समाहित करने को लेकर अरुण जी ने दिसंबर 2014 में राज्यों के वित्त मंत्रियों के एक समूह से अलग से बैठक करते हुए इन मुद्दों को सुलझाया और नए संविधान संशोधन विधेयक का खाका तैयार किया। इस नए प्रारूप पर सभी की आम सहमति हासिल करने के लिए उन्होंने राज्यों के वित्त मंत्रियों की प्राधिकृत समिति की बैठक में भाग लिया और लंबे विचार-विमर्श के बाद उस पर आम सहमति बनाने में सफल हुए। इसी कारण नया संविधान संशोधन विधेयक संसद में सर्वसम्मति से पारित हुआ एवं राज्यों ने भी इसका समर्थन किया। जीएसटी लागू करने के लिए यह पहला आवश्यक, निर्णायक एवं महत्वपूर्ण कदम था, जिसके फलस्वरूप जीएसटी परिषद का गठन हो सका।

परिषद की शुरुआती बैठकों में व्यवसायियों पर केंद्र एवं राज्यों के दोहरे नियंत्रण और जीएसटी के अधीन कर दरों के बारे में व्यापक चर्चा के बाद ही ऐसी व्यवस्था का निर्माण अरुण जी के नेतृत्व में संभव हो सका जो सबको स्वीकार्य हो। इन चर्चाओं में उन्होंने बड़े-से-बड़े एवं छोटे-से-छोटे राज्य की हर बात को ध्यान से सुना, सभी से राय ली और जीएसटी परिषद द्वारा निर्णय लिए जाने की प्रक्रिया को अंजाम दिया। परिषद की बैठक के पूर्व केंद्र एवं सभी राज्यों के अधिकारियों की बैठक की व्यवस्था भी उनके द्वारा बनाई गई। इन बैठकों से छन कर विचार परिषद में आते थे, जिससे परिषद द्वारा निर्णय लिए जाने में काफी आसानी होती थी। इसी के साथ ज्यादा-से-ज्यादा मुद्दों पर चर्चा और निर्णय भी संभव हो पाता था।

कुछ विवादित मामलों में आमतौर पर अरुण जी मंत्री समूह बना देते थे, जिसमें हर विचारधारा के मंत्री शामिल होते थे। इस प्रकार के एक दर्जन से अधिक समूह बने थे और उनकी बैठकों में विवाद के सभी पहलुओं पर सांगोपांग विचार-विमर्श होता था। इससे एक मान्य निष्कर्ष भी निकल आता था जिसे परिषद द्वारा बहुधा स्वीकार कर लिया जाता था। इसके अलावा अरुण जी कई बार विवादित मामलों को अगली बैठक तक के लिए स्थगित करवा देते थे और राज्यों को नए सिरे से उन मामलों पर विचार करने का आग्रह किया करते थे। लॉटरी पर दोहरी कर दर की व्यवस्था, सरकार को प्रदान की गई सेवाओं, रेस्टोरेंट, ब्रांडेड खाद्य पदार्थों पर टैक्स की दरों के साथ टीसीएस/टीडीएस, ई-वे बिल जैसे जटिल मुद्दों को अरुण जी ने आसानी से सुलझा दिया, जबकि इसकी उम्मीद कम ही दिखती थी। इन सभी मामलों में उनकी सूझ-बूझ, मामले की समग्र समझ, उनके विधि के ज्ञान, सबको साथ लेकर चलने की उनकी प्रवृत्ति और दृढ़ इच्छाशक्ति कारगर सिद्ध हुई।

मैं बिना किसी हिचकिचाहट से यह कह सकता हूं कि वह अरुण जेटली ही थे जिन्होंने जीएसटी के विचार को वास्तविकता में बदला एवं उसे जमीन पर उतारा। यह कार्य उस दौर में और भी कठिन था जब जीएसटी परिषद में भाजपा शासित राज्यों की संख्या अपेक्षाकृत कम थी। केंद्र सरकार, 29 राज्यों और सात केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों के मिले-जुले स्वरूप में गठित जीएसटी परिषद में किसी मुद्दे पर मत विभाजन नहीं हुआ तो यह केवल और केवल अरुण जी की सबको साथ लेकर चलने की प्रवृत्ति के कारण संभव हो पाया। अरुण जी ने कांग्रेस, माकपा से लेकर तृणमूल तक के वित्त मंत्रियों का विश्वास हासिल किया। इसी का परिणाम था कि असंभव सा दिखने वाले जीएसटी को उन्होंने क्रियान्वित कर दिखाया।

(लेखक बिहार के उपमुख्यमंत्री हैं)

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ऊर्जा

प्रसन्नता

प्रसन्नता मनुष्य के जीवन की सबसे अमूल्य निधि है। यह स्नेह, भाईचारे, प्रेम-सद्भाव और त्याग की प्रवृत्ति से मिलती है। हमारे जितने आराध्य देव महापुरुष हुए सबने यही उदाहरण प्रस्तुत किया। भगवान श्रीराम ने तो राजपाट त्याग जंगल जाना पसंद किया। यही कारण है कि भगवान श्रीराम के 14 वर्ष के वनवास पर ग्रंथ लिखे गए। वनवास के बारे में सब जानते हैं, जबकि उनके राजकाज के बारे में बहुधा कम लोग जानते हैं। योगेश्वर श्री कृष्ण के कंस-वध और महाभारत की कथा से सब परिचित हैं और इसका खूब गुणगान भी होता है। वहीं शिवजी का परम भक्त रावण था, लेकिन उसे हेय दृष्टि से देखा जाता है, क्योंकि वह दूसरों के सुख, संपत्ति, यश-वैभव का अपहरण करता था। इसलिए जो दूसरों को कष्ट, यातना अपने सुखोपभोग के लिए देता है, वह अंततः कष्ट पाता है।

इसी तरह का उदाहरण कलियुग के साथ भी है। उसे अपने राज्य में घुसते देख परीक्षित ने रोका और कहा कि तुम शक्ल-सूरत से अत्यंत कुरूप हो, आखिर तुम कौन हो? कलियुग ने परिचय दिया और कहा कि हमें ज्यादा नहीं कुछ ही स्थान दे दीजिए। उसके अनुनय विनय पर परीक्षित ने स्वर्ण, जुआ (द्युत क्रीड़ा), छल और झूठ में स्थान की अनुमति दे दी। मौका पाकर कलियुग परीक्षित के स्वर्ण मुकुट में प्रवेश कर गया। इस प्रकार जब मस्तिष्क में विकार घुस जाते हैं तो प्रसन्नता गायब हो जाती है। अतः मस्तिष्क में श्रेष्ठ महापुरुषों के चिंतन-मनन को स्थान देना चाहिए ताकि जीवन में प्रसन्नता बनी रहे। इसके लिए अच्छे-अच्छे ग्रंथों का अध्ययन करना चाहिए और उसे जीवन में अपनाना भी चाहिए, क्योंकि महापुरुषों ने कहा भी है कि मन भर ज्ञान से तोला भर आचरण श्रेष्ठ होता है।

इसके उलट वर्तमान दौर में प्रायः लोग भौतिक वैभव को प्रसन्नता का कारण मानते हैं। इसके चलते सारे आदर्श और सिद्धांत को तिलांजलि दे देते हैं। तनाव से अर्जित भौतिक साधन अंततः तनाव ही देगा। इसलिए इस पर भी ध्यान देने की जरूरत है।

सलिल पांडेय

खेल संस्कृति का अभाव

अमृत कुमार

किसी देश की एकता के लिए जरूरी प्रेम और मैत्री की भावना भी खेलों से विकसित की जा सकती है

अमेरिका में सभी छात्रों के लिए खेल अनिवार्य है। हर साल वहां हजारों मेधावी खिलाड़ी चुने जाते हैं और उन्हें अलग-अलग केंद्रों में निखारा जाता है। चीन में खेल स्कूली पाठ्यक्रम का हिस्सा हैं। वहां पांच लाख से अधिक खेल विद्यालय हैं जहां गांवों, कस्बों से लाकर मेधावी खिलाड़ियों को अंतरराष्ट्रीय प्रतियोगिताओं के लिए तैयार किया जाता है। जबकि भारत में खेल विद्यालयों का अभाव तो है ही, स्कूलों में खेल भी अनिवार्य नहीं है। इससे खिलाड़ियों की प्रतिभा का ह्रास हो रहा है।

निश्चित ही भारत जैसे युवा देश के लिए यह चिंता का विषय है। देखा जाए तो इसके कई कारण हैं। दरअसल हाल के दिनों में स्मार्ट फोन जैसे इलेक्ट्रॉनिक उपकरणों के उपयोग में तेज वृद्धि आई है। छोटी उम्र में बच्चों के हाथों में मोबाइल आने के बाद वे अपना सारा समय इसमें ही गंवा दे रहे हैं। दूसरा कारण मैदानों की निरंतर कमी होना है। गांवों में तो आज भी खुली जगह बच्चों को खेलने के लिए आमंत्रण देती है, लेकिन शहर की घुटन भरी जिंदगी में निकटवर्ती कोई मैदान बच्चों के खेलने के लिए सुरक्षित नहीं रहा है। जिसके कारण बच्चे खाली समय में अनायास ही मोबाइल और कंप्यूटर के खेलों के शिकार हो जाते हैं। तीसरा कारण है खेलों को लेकर हमारे समाज की नकारात्मक सोच, जिसके तहत कहा जाता है कि खेलोगे कूदोगे तो बनोगे खराब और पढ़ोगे लिखोगे तो बनोगे नवाब। चौथा कारण है अभिभावकों के पास समय का अभाव होना। रोजमर्रा की जिंदगी में धनार्जन करने की प्रवृत्ति ने हर किसी को व्यस्त कर दिया है। ऐसे में आज के मासूमों को कौन डिब्बा स्पाइस, सतोलिया, लुका छिपी, लगंड़ी, कबड्डी, खो-खो इत्यादि बचपन के इन खेलों के बारे में बताएगा? जिससे मासूम मन में इन खेलों के प्रति खेलने की जिज्ञासा उत्पन्न हो सके।

जाहिर है आज हमें ऐसी नीतियों का निर्माण करने की जरूरत है, जिससे देश में खेलों को सम्मानित मुकाम हासिल हो सके। खेल केवल मनोरंजन तक ही सीमित न हों, बल्कि यह एक करियर के तौर पर भी अपनाया जाए। इसके लिए हमें खेलों को स्कूली पाठ्यक्रम में शामिल करना होगा। और उसके विकास के लिए लगातार प्रयास करने होंगे। इसके लिए सरकार को निजी, गैर सरकारी, सामुदायिक संगठनों के साथ मिलकर काम करने की जरूरत है। निजी संस्थाओं द्वारा शोध और शैक्षणिक गतिविधियों के लिए छात्रवृत्ति एवं वित्तीय सहायता प्रदान की जाती है, ठीक उसी प्रकार क्या हम भी खिलाड़ियों को आर्थिक मदद और प्रोत्साहन उपलब्ध नहीं करा सकते?

आज जरूरत है कि खेलों के प्रति युवा पीढ़ी का ध्यान आकर्षित किया जाए। उन्हें बताया जाए कि मोबाइल और कंप्यूटर पर क्रिकेट खेलने से कहीं अधिक मजा मैदान में जाकर क्रिकेट खेलने में है। आज बच्चों में खेलों के प्रति रुचि पैदा करने की जरूरत है। क्योंकि देश की एकता को बरकरार रखने के लिए भाईचारे, प्रेम और मैत्री की भावना इन्हीं खेलों से विकसित की जा सकती है। इसलिए देश में खेल संस्कृति को जीवित करने की जरूरत है।

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

स्वस्थ रहने का माध्यम हैं खेल

खेल संस्कृति विकसित करने का मंत्र शीर्षक से लिखे अपने लेख में तरुण गुप्त ने देश में खेल संस्कृति को बढ़ावा दिए जाने पर बल दिया है। राष्ट्रीय खेल दिवस हमारे लिए आकलन और संकल्प का दिवस होना चाहिए ताकि हम आकलन कर विश्लेषण करें कि खेल के स्तर पर हम कहां खड़े हैं और निष्कर्ष स्वरूप हमें कहां खड़ा होना चाहिए। ओलंपिक खेलों में भारत का दयनीय प्रदर्शन हमें आईना दिखाता है। आज भारत युवा शक्ति के रूप में उभर रहा है। खेलों में भी यदि हम महाशक्ति बनने का संकल्प लें तो उस संकल्प को पूरा करना कोई असंभव बात नहीं है, लेकिन उसके लिए सर्वप्रथम सरकार को ग्राम से लेकर ब्लॉक स्तर, ब्लॉक स्तर से जनपद स्तर, जनपद से मंडल और मंडल से प्रदेश स्तर तक खेलों से संबंधित संसाधनों को जुटाना होगा, खेल के मैदान विकसित करने होंगे, क्योंकि बढ़ती आबादी से खेल के मैदान समाप्त हो रहे हैं। इसके साथ ही देश में कोचों की कमी भी एक बड़ी समस्या है। सरकार को देश में स्तरीय कोच तैयार करने पर बल देना होगा, ताकि तेजी से आ रहीं खेल प्रतिभाओं को संभाला जा सके। जाहिर है हमें खेल संस्कृति विकसित करने के साथ-साथ संसाधन भी जुटाने होंगे।

सर्वजीत आर्या, कन्नौज

सुधरेंगी स्वास्थ्य सेवाएं

सरकार ने देश में 75 मेडिकल कॉलेज खोलने की घोषणा की है। इस फैसले से आने वाले दिनों में एमबीबीएस की 15,700 सीटें बढ़ेंगी। इस तरह देश में डॉक्टर की संख्या बढ़ेगी और देश में स्वास्थ्य संबंधी सेवाओं में सुधार होगा। 75 मेडिकल कॉलेज के लिए 24 हजार 375 करोड़ रुपये का बजट जारी कर दिया गया है। लेकिन सिर्फ इससे बात नहीं बन सकती है। एक अनुमान के अनुसार देश में एक लाख मेडिकल सीटों की जरूरत है। फिट इंडिया अभियान को बढ़ाने तथा आयुष्मान योजना को आगे बढ़ाने में इन मेडिकल कॉलेजों की भूमिका काफी अहम हो सकती है।

विजय किशोर तिवारी, नई दिल्ली

मेलबाक्स

कुल्हड़ वाली चाय

चाय की खुशबू और जायका ढूंढते लोगों के लिए कुल्हड़ वाली महक एक अलग अहसास देती है। विलुप्त होते इस बेमिसाल विरासत की खातिर लालू यादव के तत्कालीन रेल मंत्रालय ने चाय के बहाने कुल्हड़ को वापस लाने का प्रयास किया था। मगर मरणासन्न कुल्हड़ उद्योग में जान फूकने की यह कोशिश नाकाफी साबित हुई है। हाल ही में केंद्रीय मंत्री नितिन गडकरी ने रेल मंत्रालय को पत्र लिख कर रेल, एयरपोर्ट, बस अड्डे और मॉल जैसे सार्वजनिक जगहों पर कुल्हड़ वाली चाय अनिवार्य करने की राय दी है। पर्यावरण और स्वास्थ्य को लक्ष्य मान कर लिखी गई चिट्ठी, मिट्टी उद्योग सहित परंपरागत कुल्हड़ चाय की परिपाटी को प्रोत्साहित करने में अवश्य सहायक होगी। शायद कुल्हड़ फिर से चाक से चौपाल तक नजर आए। मिट्टी से बनी कुल्हड़ हमारे सामाजिक जीवन की धरोहर है।

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इमरान के हथकंडे फेल

अनुच्छेद 370 हटने का सीधा अर्थ कश्मीर में पाकिस्तानी दखलंदाजी बंद होना है। इसी वजह से पाक छटपटा रहा है। पाक के पीएम इमरान खान रोज नए-नए हथकंडे प्रयोग कर रहे हैं, लेकिन लगता है कि उनकी किस्मत उल्टी चल रही है और इनके सभी दांव फेल होते जा रहे हैं। स्थिति यह हो गई है कि पाकिस्तान, जम्मू कश्मीर को भूल अपने कब्जे वाले गुलाम कश्मीर को बचाने में लग गया है।

नीरज कुमार पाठक, नोएडा

सस्ती हो चिकित्सा शिक्षा

दैनिक जागरण के 28 अगस्त के उप्र संस्करण में संपादकीय डॉक्टरों का असंतोष पढ़ा। सरकार डॉक्टरों से 70 साल की उम्र तक काम तो कराना चाहती है पर समीक्षा कर यह नहीं देखना चाहती कि उन्हें मिल रही सुख सुविधाएं व पारिश्रमिक पर्याप्त हैं या नहीं। ऐसी स्थिति में सरकार कब तक जबरन डॉक्टरों को सरकारी अस्पतालों में रोक कर रख सकती है? सरकार को चाहिए कि वो उनकी सुख सुविधाओं को काम के अनुसार बढ़ाए, साथ ही साथ चिकित्सा की शिक्षा को निजी हाथों में कम से कम सौंपे। सरकारी स्तर पर ही चिकित्सा शिक्षा की सस्ती व्यवस्था हो।

सतीश त्यागी काकड़ा, इंदिरापुरम

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

अपने पत्र इस पते पर भेजें :

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जनसत्ता

फैसले और उम्मीदें

भारत में विदेशी पूंजी लाने के मकसद से सरकार ने एफडीआइ नियमों को और उदार बनाने की दिशा में जो कदम बढ़ाया है वह निश्चित रूप से अर्थव्यवस्था को पटरी पर लाने में मददगार होगा। बुधवार को कैबिनेट की बैठक में जो बड़े फैसले किए गए उनसे साफ है कि देश को मंदी के माहौल से उबारने के लिए इस तरह के आर्थिक उपाय करने जरूरी हो गए हैं। पिछले एक हफ्ते में यह तीसरा मौका है जब अर्थव्यवस्था को सुधारने की लिए तीसरा बड़ा फैसला किया गया है। भारत में इस वक्त निवेश, मांग और खपत तीनों सुस्त हैं और अर्थव्यवस्था के ये तीनों ही कारक मंदी का कारण बने हुए हैं। ऐसे में विदेशी निवेश लाने के लिए एफडीआइ नियमों में ढील देना वक्त की जरूरत बन गई है। सबसे बड़ा फैसला तो यह हुआ है कि एकल ब्रांड खुदरा क्षेत्र के लिए नियमों को आसान बनाया गया है। इस क्षेत्र में तीस फीसद घरेलू खरीद के नियम के दायरे को व्यापक बनाया गया है। इससे एकल ब्रांड कंपनियां अब ऑनलाइन और ऑफलाइन स्टोर साथ-साथ खोल सकेंगी। अब पहले ऑफलाइन स्टोर खोलने की अनिवार्यता खत्म हो जाने से भारत में विदेशी कंपनियों के आने का रास्ता आसान हो जाएगा और उम्मीद की जानी चाहिए कि कई बड़ी कंपनियां भारतीय बाजार में दस्तक देंगी।

आज दुनिया में खुली अर्थव्यवस्था है। ऐसे में कारोबारी नियम भी उदार ही होने चाहिए, बशर्ते राष्ट्र के हितों पर प्रतिकूल असर न पड़ता हो। सरकार ने कोयला क्षेत्र के विकास को रफ्तार देने के लिए कोयला खनन और ठेका विनिर्माण में सौ फीसद विदेशी निवेश का रास्ता साफ कर दिया है। हालांकि कोयला क्षेत्र को लेकर अभी संदेह इसलिए बना हुआ है कि विदेशी कंपनियां इसमें पैसा लगाने से बच सकती हैं। इस वक्त दुनिया की बड़ी कंपनियों की दिलचस्पी हरित ऊर्जा वाली परियोजनाओं को लेकर ज्यादा है। लेकिन ठेका विनिर्माण क्षेत्र में सौ फीसद एफडीआइ अर्थव्यवस्था को गति देने में बड़ी भूमिका निभा सकता है। माना जा रहा है कि इससे विदेशी कंपनियां भारत में अब दूसरी कंपनियों को ठेके देकर अपने उत्पाद भी बनवाएंगी। यही कंपनियां फिर भारत से निर्यात करेंगी तो इससे भारत को दोहरा फायदा होगा। इससे देश में विनिर्माण क्षेत्र में रोजगार के अवसर पैदा होंगे। एक मोटा अनुमान यह लगाया गया है कि ठेका विनिर्माण क्षेत्र में सौ फीसद एफडीआइ के फैसले से 2022 तक देश की जीडीपी में विनिर्माण क्षेत्र का योगदान बढ़ कर पच्चीस फीसद तक हो सकता है जो अभी सोलह-सत्रह फीसद है।

इसके अलावा कैबिनेट ने देश भर में पचहत्तर नए मेडिकल कालेज खोलने का जो बड़ा फैसला किया है, वह निश्चित रूप से वक्त की जरूरत है। आज देश में ज्यादातर जिले खासतौर से ग्रामीण इलाके बुनियादी स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं से वंचित हैं। इसकी वजह यह रही है कि आजादी के बाद स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र का बुनियादी ढांचा विकसित नहीं हो पाया है। देश में डॉक्टरों और अन्य चिकित्सा कर्मचारियों की भारी कमी है। ऐसे में अगर बड़ी संख्या में मेडिकल कालेज खुलते हैं तो निश्चित रूप से अस्पतालों में डॉक्टरों की कमी दूर होगी और जिला स्तर पर स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं का दायरा बढ़ाया जा सकेगा। सबसे ज्यादा फायदा ग्रामीण आबादी को होगा। भारत में चिकित्सा क्षेत्र को नया रूप देने के मकसद से सरकार का यह फैसला मील का पत्थर साबित हो सकता है। सबसे बड़ी जरूरत तो इस बात की है कि इन योजनाओं पर काम पुख्ता तरीके से हो।

दोहरी प्रताड़ना

पंचायती राज व्यवस्था को इसलिए मजबूत बनाने पर जोर दिया गया था कि स्थानीय लोग भाई-चारे के साथ अपने मामलों का निपटारा खुद कर लिया करेंगे, अपनी समस्याओं का खुद समाधान तलाशेंगे और नौकरशाही के बेवजह दखल से मुक्त रह सकेंगे। मगर पंचायतें किस कदर पक्षपाती और अन्यायी होती गई हैं, इसके ढेर उदाहरण मौजूद हैं। पंचायतों पर काबिज लोग सरकारी धन की लूट तो करते ही हैं, जाति, धर्म, समुदाय के आधार पर नाइंसाफी भी करते हैं। इसका ताजा उदाहरण बिहार के गया जिले में एक ग्राम पंचायत का बलात्कार पीड़िता का सिर मुंड़वा कर गांव में घुमाना है। जब पीड़िता और उसके परिजन बलात्कार की शिकायत लेकर पंचायत के पास पहुंचे तो उसके सदस्यों ने उल्टा लड़की को ही दोषी ठहरा दिया कि वह गलत आरोप लगा रही है। इसके दंड स्वरूप लड़की का सिर मुंड़वा कर उसे गांव में घुमाया गया। इस मामले की सूचना मिलने पर स्थानीय थाने ने संबंधित लोगों के खिलाफ प्राथमिकी दर्ज की है। विचित्र है कि जिसे पीड़ित को न्याय दिलाना चाहिए, वह खुद अन्याय करता है।

हालांकि बिहार में यह अकेली घटना नहीं है, जिसमें किसी पंचायत ने दोषियों के खिलाफ खड़े होने के बजाय पीड़िता को दंडित करना न्यायसंगत समझा। कई घटनाओं में कुछ महिलाओं को खौलते तेल में हाथ डाल कर अपनी बेगुनाही साबित करने, सामूहिक पिटाई सहने, पत्थर मारे जाने जैसी दंड सुनाए जा चुके हैं। इन तमाम घटनाओं का बारीकी से अध्ययन करें तो लगभग सभी महिलाएं समाज के कमजोर तबके से रही हैं। छिपी बात नहीं है कि देश की तमाम पंचायतों पर ऊंची कही जाने वाली जातियों के दबंग लोग काबिज हैं। जिन सीटों पर आरक्षण की वजह से समाज के कमजोर और नीची कही जाने वाली जातियों के लोग सरपंच हैं, वे भी गांव के दबंग लोगों के मुताबिक ही काम करते देखे जाते हैं। इस तरह उनमें से भी ज्यादातर का कार्यव्यवहार ताकतवर लोगों के अनुसार होता है। फिर गांवों में नीची कही जाने वाली जातियों और आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर वर्गों की महिलाओं को किस कदर प्रताड़ना का शिकार होना पड़ता है, यह भी कोई छिपी बात नहीं है। जाहिर है, गया की ग्राम पंचायत ने भी इसी सामंती सोच के चलते पीड़िता को दोहरी प्रताड़ना से गुजरने को मजबूर किया।

ज्यादातर ग्राम पंचायतों में जातिवादी सोच गहरे तक जड़ जमाए हुए है। यही वजह है कि गांवों के विकास से जुड़ी योजनाओं का अधिकतर लाभ सरपंच अपनी जाति से जुड़े लोगों को पहुंचाते देखे जाते हैं। अपनी जाति के लोगों पर अगर किसी तरह का आरोप लगता है, तो सरपंच अक्सर उसे बचाने के लिए किसी भी हद तक जाते देखे जाते हैं। गया की पंचायत में भी पीड़िता चूंकि समाज के कमजोर तबके से थी और पंचायत में दबंग लोगों का कब्जा है, उन्होंने यह सोच कर ही एकतरफा फैसला किया कि वह उनके फैसले को चुनौती नहीं दे सकती। उसका परिवार पंचायत के फैसले को चुपचाप मान और चुप्पी साध लेगा। यह भी छिपी बात नहीं है कि गांवों के दबंग लोग किस तरह गरीब और कमजोर तबके की महिलाओं के साथ बदसलूकी करते हैं। ऐसे में जिन लोगों पर लड़की ने बलात्कार का आरोप लगाया, वे ताकतवर लोग रहे होंगे, छिपी बात नहीं है। जाहिर है, पंचायत ने उन्हें बचाने का प्रयास किया। पंचायतों के ऐसे रवैए के चलते ही पंचायती राज व्यवस्था की साख गिरी है।

कल्पमेधा

अत्याचार करने वाला उतना दोषी नहीं है, जितना उसे सहन करने वाला।
-बाल गंगाधर तिलक

कैंसर का कहर

मनीष वैद्य

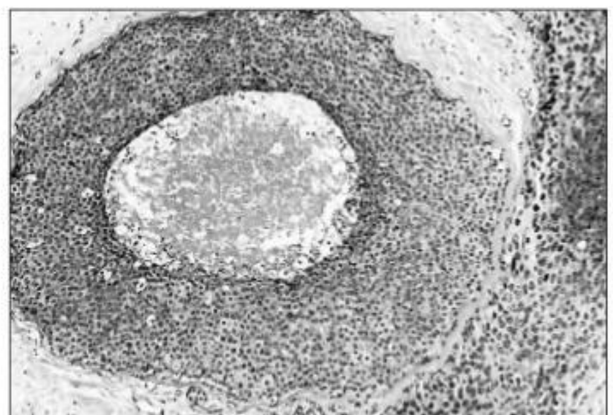
बीते कई सालों से पर्यावरणविद और कृषि वैज्ञानिक चेतावनी दे रहे हैं कि जल्दी ही रासायनिक खाद और दवाओं को हटा कर जैविक खेती को नहीं अपनाया गया तो हालात गंभीर हो सकते हैं। फिर भी अब तक जैविक खेती को लेकर सिर्फ नारेबाजी ही हो रही है। हमारे यहां जैविक खेती की अवधारणा नई नहीं है, परंपरा से हमारे पूर्वज इसे करते रहे हैं। आसन्न चुनौतियों से निपटने का एकमात्र विकल्प है-अपनी जड़ों की ओर लौटना।

रासायनिक खादों और कीटनाशकों के इस्तेमाल ने पूरी दुनिया की धरती में खेती के उत्पादन, खाद्य सुरक्षा और मनुष्य की सेहत के लिए गंभीर खतरे खड़े कर दिए हैं। यहां तक कि शिशु के लिए अब अपनी मां का दूध भी सुरक्षित नहीं रह गया है। दूषित पेय और खाद्य पदार्थों के कारण मां का दूध भी प्रदूषित हो जाता है। यह बात विश्व खाद्य एवं कृषि संगठन की एक रिपोर्ट में कही गई है। भारत में भी हरित क्रांति के बाद उत्पादन बढ़ाने के नाम पर किसानों को परंपरागत खेती छोड़ कर कीटनाशकों और रासायनिक खादों की सलाह दी गई। इसका अंधाधुंध इस्तेमाल हुआ और जोरदार पैदावार से किसान मालामाल भी हुए, परंतु तब इसके दूरगामी दुष्परिणामों पर गौर नहीं किया गया था। पंजाब को इसकी प्रयोगशाला की तरह देखा गया लेकिन खेतों में रासायनिक खाद और कीटनाशकों ने यहां के पानी, हवा और जमीन को बुरी तरह प्रदूषित कर दिया और किसानों को कैंसर की बीमारी तोहफे में दे दी। पंजाब के बठिंडा से बीकानेर जाने वाली ट्रेन को कैंसर ट्रेन के नाम से जाना जाता है। इससे हर दिन दो सौ से ज़्यादा कैंसर के मरीज बीकानेर के कैंसर अस्पताल पहुंचते हैं। बीस स्टेशनों से गुजरते हुए यह हर दिन सवा तीन सौ किलोमीटर का सफर तय कर कैंसर मरीजों की बुझी हुई उम्मीदों को जिंदा करने की कोशिश करती है।

पंजाब के बाद देश के कुछ और हिस्से भी अब तेजी से कैंसर की चपेट आते जा रहे हैं। सबसे बड़ा खतरा उत्तर प्रदेश, उत्तराखंड, मध्यप्रदेश, छत्तीसगढ़, बिहार, झारखंड, ओड़िशा और राजस्थान को है। देश में अब तक कैंसर मरीजों का आंकड़ा साढ़े बाईस लाख का है जो अगले बीस सालों यानी 2040 तक दुगना हो जाने की आशंका जताई जा रही है। कीटनाशकों के प्रयोग में ये राज्य देश के सर्वाधिक उपयोगकर्ताओं में शामिल हैं और यही कारण है कि अब इन राज्यों में कैंसर मरीजों का आंकड़ा तेजी से बढ़ रहा है। कैंसर से बीते साल सात लाख चौरासी हजार लोगों की मौत हो गई और साढ़े ग्यारह लाख नए मामले सामने आए थे।

कभी अपनी खास तरह की समृद्ध खेती-बाड़ी और प्राकृतिक सुंदरता के लिए पहचाने जाने वाले इन आठ राज्यों में लोग अब कैंसर के खौफनाक कहर से रूबरू हो रहे हैं। ग्रामीण इलाकों में तो यह जानलेवा बीमारी तेजी से पांव पसाररही है। तंबाकू और बीड़ी पीने वालों को यह बीमारी आम है लेकिन यहां कई ऐसे लोग भी इस लाइलाज बीमारी के चंगुल में फंस चुके हैं जिन्होंने कभी तंबाकू का इस्तेमाल नहीं किया। विशेषज्ञों के मुताबिक इसका बड़ा कारण खेतों में इस्तेमाल होने वाले कीटनाशक हैं। मध्यप्रदेश में इंदौर के पास घने जंगलों और हरे-भरे खेतों के बीच बसा गांव हरसोला आलू और सब्जियों की पैदावार के लिए मशहूर है। यहां के कम स्टार्च वाले आलू की विदेशों सहित देशभर में मांग रहती है और इस आलू का उपयोग चिप्स बनाने वाली कंपनियां ज्यादा करती हैं। लेकिन चौंकाने वाला तथ्य यह है कि बीते सालों में यहां कैंसर के पैंतीस से ज्यादा मरीज चिन्हित हुए थे, जिनमें से पंद्रह की मौत हो चुकी है। यह साफ है कि इस गांव के ज्यादातर लोग किसान हैं और अपने खेतों में काम करते हैं। विशेषज्ञों का कहना है कि खेतों का कीटनाशक बारिश के पानी के साथ जमीन में पहुंचता है और जमीन के साथ जमीनी पानी के भंडार को भी प्रदूषित करता है। खेती-बाड़ी वाले गांवों में बीते चालीस सालों में रासायनिक खादों और कीटनाशकों का इस्तेमाल करीब चार से पांच गुना तक बढ़ा है। इसी ने हमारे परिवेश में जहर और हवा में कड़वाहट घोल दी है। ये बीमारियां इन्हीं की देन हैं।

कुछ सालों पहले तक पैंतालीस साल या इससे अधिक उम्र की महिलाओं में ही स्तन कैंसर की आशंका होती थी लेकिन अब पच्चीस से पैंतीस साल की महिलाओं में यह बीमारी अधिक देखने में आ रही है। भारत में हर आठ में से एक महिला को स्तन कैंसर की आशंका रहती है। स्तन कैंसर सायलेंट किलर है और इसका पता लगने में थोड़ी-सी भी देर हो जाए तो इसके ठीक होने की संभावना कम हो जाती है। यही वजह है कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में इससे मौतें ज्यादा होती हैं, क्योंकि वहां तक जांच व निदान की तकनीक और संसाधन अब तक सुलभ नहीं हो पाए हैं। इस बीमारी के फैलने का सबसे बड़ा कारण बदलता खानपान, प्रदूषण, जीवन शैली में बदलाव, नशा और अनुवांशिकी के साथ-साथ पानी, सब्जियों और अनाज में कीटनाशकों के अंश का पहुंचना है। संसाधनों और डाक्टरों की कमी, गरीबी और कुपोषण ने इस संकट को और बढ़ा दिया है।



रासायनिक खाद के इस्तेमाल में भी भारत पीछे नहीं है। बीते साठ सालों में यूरिया का बेतहाशा इस्तेमाल किया गया। 1960 में जहां नाइट्रोजन फर्टिलाइजर में यूरिया का अंश महज दस फीसदी था, जो अब बढ़ कर बयासी फीसद से ज़्यादा हो चुका है। फर्टिलाइजर एसोसिएशन ऑफ इंडिया के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक भारत हर साल एक सौ अड़तालीस लाख टन यूरिया की खपत करता है। हैरत की बात यह है कि अधिकांश खेतों की मिट्टी की जांच ही नहीं हुई है। ऐसे में बिना किसी आकलन के किसान अपनी मर्जी से यूरिया का इस्तेमाल करते हैं। उन्हें लगता है कि अब जमीन को यूरिया की आदत बन गई है और यदि वे यूरिया नहीं डालेंगे तो पैदावार काफी घट जाएगी। देश में सबसे ज्यादा यूरिया की खपत उत्तर प्रदेश, उत्तराखंड, पंजाब, हरियाणा, राजस्थान, गुजरात, महाराष्ट्र, बिहार और झारखंड हैं। पहले नंबर पर उत्तर प्रदेश है जो क्षेत्रफल की दृष्टि से काफी बड़ा है। लेकिन छत्तीसगढ़, उत्तराखंड और झारखंड का क्षेत्रफल काफी कम होने पर भी यूरिया की खपत काफी तेजी से बढ़ी है और इसमें हर साल बीस फीसद बढ़ोतरी हो रही है। यूरिया का तीस फीसद हिस्सा ही पौधों को बढ़ाता है, जबकि सत्तर फीसद नाइट्रोजन में बदल कर बारिश के पानी के साथ धरती में चला जाता है और भूजल भंडार और मिट्टी के साथ नदी-नालों में समा कर उन्हें प्रदूषित करता है। ऐसा पानी फसलों को नुकसान पहुंचाता है। यह पानी और इससे उगने वाला अन्न दोनों ही मनुष्य में गंभीर बीमारियों का कारण बनते हैं।

बीते कई सालों से पर्यावरणविद और कृषि वैज्ञानिक चेतावनी दे रहे हैं कि जल्दी ही रासायनिक खाद और दवाओं को हटा कर जैविक खेती को नहीं अपनाया गया तो हालात गंभीर हो सकते हैं। फिर भी अब तक जैविक खेती को लेकर सिर्फ नारेबाजी ही हो रही है। हमारे यहां जैविक खेती की अवधारणा नई नहीं है, परंपरा से हमारे पूर्वज इसे करते रहे हैं। आसन्न चुनौतियों से निपटने का एकमात्र विकल्प है-अपनी जड़ों की ओर लौटना। दुर्भाग्य से जिन गांवों के कोठार कभी अन्न के दानों से भरे रहते थे, आज वहां दवाइयां हैं, जहां के खेत सोना उगलते थे, आज वहां की हवा में दुर्गंध है। जहां कभी फसलें आने पर लोक गीत गूंजते थे, आज वहां भयावह खौफ और मौत का सन्नाटा है। जहां के लोग हाड़-तोड़ मेहनत करने के बाद भी हृष्ट-पुष्ट बने रहते थे, आज वे कंकाल की तरह नजर आते हैं और निराशा इतनी कि हर दिन अपनी मौत की घड़ियां गिनते रहते हैं। बीते तीस-चालीस सालों में हमने खेती की उपज बढ़ाने के नाम पर किन यमदूतों को हमारी खेती में शामिल कर लिया कि हमारी जान पर ही बन आई। भला ऐसी समृद्धि किस काम की जो मौत का तोहफा देती हो।

पूर्वाग्रहों के पाठ

अमित चमड़िया

दुनिया मेरे आगे

कक्षा तीन में एक शिक्षक ने दिवाली पर निबंध लिखवाया। उस निबंध की पहली पंक्ति कुछ इस प्रकार थी- 'दिवाली भारत देश का एक प्रमुख पर्व है।' यों यह पंक्ति हिंदी निबंध की किताबों में आमतौर पर लिखी हुई मिल जाती है, लेकिन जब ईद या गुरुपर्व पर निबंध लिखवाए जाते हैं तो पंक्ति कुछ इस प्रकार होती है- 'ईद मुसलिम समुदाय का प्रमुख त्योहार है या गुरुपर्व सिख धर्म को मानने वाले लोगों द्वारा मनाया जाता है।' मुझे भी अपने स्कूल में इन त्योहारों के बारे कुछ इसी तरह की बात सिखाई गई थी। आज भी लाखों बच्चे इसी तरह के निबंधों की किताब पढ़ रहे हैं या उनकी कक्षा में उनके शिक्षक द्वारा इसी तरह की पंक्तियां इन त्योहारों के बारे लिखवाई जा रही हैं। कक्षा तीन के बच्चों के लिए इसमें कुछ भी असामान्य जैसा नहीं है, पर हम 'स्वाभाविक तरीके' से या 'सहजता' से बहुत कुछ बच्चों को गलत बातें बता देते हैं। त्योहारों के बारे में इस तरह की बातें कुछ इसी तरह की हैं।

भारत बहुलतावादी संस्कृति का परिचायक है। जब हम दिवाली को भारत देश का प्रमुख पर्व बताते हैं तो हम ईद और गुरुपर्व को भी क्यों नहीं भारत के एक प्रमुख त्योहार के रूप स्वीकार करते हैं। अगर हम एक पर्व को किसी खास धर्म से जोड़ते हैं तो फिर यही काम दिवाली पर निबंध लिखते समय क्यों नहीं होता है! इस पर्व के संदर्भ पर हम यह नहीं लिखते हैं कि दिवाली हिंदुओं का एक प्रमुख त्योहार है। यह भी तथ्य है कि समूचे देश में हर जगह दिवाली नहीं मनाई जाती है। हमारे स्कूल की किताबें कई बार हमें प्रत्यक्ष या फिर परोक्ष रूप से भेदभाव करना सिखाती हैं। आदिवासी समुदाय के पर्व, जैसे- सरहुल, भगोरिया आदि के बारे में जब हम पढ़ते हैं तो यह क्यों नहीं बताया जाता है कि ये उत्सव भी भारत देश के प्रमुख त्योहार हैं? क्यों इस पर्व को केवल आदिवासी समुदाय का पर्व बताया जाता है? इस बात से किसी को इनकार नहीं होगा कि भारत देश केवल हिंदू धर्म को मानने वालों का ही नहीं है, बल्कि तमाम दूसरे धर्मों और समुदायों का भी है। आदिवासी बच्चे या गैर-हिंदू बच्चों की मनःस्थिति के बारे में सोचने की जरूरत है कि जब उनकी ही कक्षा में उनके त्योहार को देश का त्योहार नहीं बताया जाता है और किसी खास त्योहार को देश का त्योहार बताया जाता है तो उन्हें कैसा महसूस होता होगा।

एक निजी स्कूल की कक्षा आठ में पढ़ने वाले एक छात्र से मैंने पूछा कि तुम्हारा स्कूल क्यों बंद है, तो उसका जवाब था-'मुझे नहीं मालूम।' मेरे बहुत जोर देने पर उसने कहा कि मुसलिम समुदाय का कोई त्योहार है, इसलिए बंद है। प्रसंगवश यह बताना जरूरी है कि स्कूल ईद के अवसर पर बंद था। अब इस तरह के निबंध को बच्चे पढ़ेंगे तो उस छात्र की तरह अन्य को भी स्कूल के बंद होने का कारण नहीं पता होगा।

मामला केवल किताबों तक ही सीमित नहीं है। हाल ही में झारखंड की राजधानी रांची के एक पुलिस थाने में मेरा जाना हुआ। वहां पता चला कि थाने में अभी-अभी पूर्णिमा का हवन समाप्त हुआ है। कैसे हम सरकारी प्रतिष्ठानों में किसी खास धर्म को इस तरह से मनाने की इजाजत देते हैं। जबकि भारत के संविधान में यह बात स्पष्ट रूप से दर्ज है कि राज्य का अपना कोई धर्म नहीं होगा। तो किसी खास धर्म की पहचान को मुख्य बना कर पेश करना क्या संविधान का उल्लंघन नहीं है? संविधान के उल्लंघन पर किस-किस तरह के कानूनी प्रावधान लागू होते हैं?

हम अक्सर इस बात को टेलीविजन पर देखते हैं कि शिलान्यास आदि के मौके पर या कार्यक्रमों में सरकारी अधिकारी या नेता हिंदू रीति-रिवाज से पूजा करते हैं। दूसरी ओर, वही सभी स्तंभों की ओर से धर्मनिरपेक्ष होने का दावा भी किया जाता है। क्या ऐसी स्थिति में अन्य धर्मों के प्रति समान स्तर पर सम्मान की भावना और व्यवहार की उम्मीद की जा सकती है? निजी मान्यताओं से कुछ भी बाधित नहीं होना चाहिए। एक उदाहरण दिल्ली के पटेल चौक मेट्रो स्टेशन पर देखा जा सकता है, जहां 'भगवद्गीता' किताब को लोगों के देखने के लिए रखा गया है। क्या सरकार और उसकी किसी एजेंसी के द्वारा एक खास धर्म के प्रति इस तरह के सार्वजनिक व्यवहार अन्य समुदायों के बीच बहिष्करण का अहसास नहीं करेंगे? जब इस तरह की सामग्रियां हम बचपन में ही पढ़ने लगते हैं तो बड़े होने पर वही भेदभाव रोजमर्रा की जिंदगी में शामिल होना स्वभाविक है। हमारे स्कूल की किताबों में बड़े बदलाव की जरूरत है और यह बात बच्चों को बतानी होगी कि क्यों निबंधों में इस तरह की पंक्तियां उचित नहीं हैं। तभी शायद हम सही शिक्षा बच्चों को दे पाएंगे और सही अर्थों में एक मजबूत भारत का पाठ तैयार कर पाएंगे।

संकीर्ण सोच

हाल में जम्मू-कश्मीर पर सरकार के फैसले के बाद भारत के एक बड़े वर्ग की अजीबोगरीब प्रतिक्रिया देखने को मिली। न केवल आम लोग बल्कि नेताओं ने भी ऐसी प्रतिक्रियाएं दीं। मसलन, एक मुख्यमंत्री ने कहा कि अब शादी के लिए लड़कियां बिहार के बदले जम्मू-कश्मीर से मंगा ली जाएंगी। एक भाजपा विधायक ने कहा कि देश के मुसलमानों को खुश होना चाहिए कि अब उन्हें शादी के लिए आसानी से गोरी लड़कियां कश्मीर से मिल जाएंगी। लोगों के एक वर्ग ने कहा कि अब कश्मीर में जमीन लेकर वहां के संपत्ति पर कब्जा करेंगे। कश्मीर में फोन लाइन और मोबाइल नेटवर्क बंद होने के कारण होने वाली समस्या पर उन्मादी लोगों ने कहा कि कश्मीर के लोग तो बैलट पेपर पर चुनाव कराना चाहते थे तो मोबाइल फोन बंद होने पर खत का उपयोग क्यों नही कर रहे। ये सारी बातें काफी चटकारे लेकर सुनाई और प्रचारित की जाती रहीं और इसे मजाक कहा गया।

इस तरह की घटनाएं और प्रतिक्रियाएं समाज में और देश में सिर्फ वैमनस्य ही पैदा करती हैं और देश का माहौल खराब होता है। जो लोग इस तरह के अनर्गल और आपत्तिजनक बयान दे रहे हैं या सोशल मीडिया पर इस तरह का प्रचार कर रहे हैं उन्हें जरा विवेक से काम लेना चाहिए। अगर अपने ही देश में रहने वालों के खिलाफ हम इस तरह की बातें करेंगे तो इससे गलत संदेशा जाएगा। हमें यह समझना होगा कि कश्मीर के लोग भी हमारे हैं, केवल भूभाग पर अधिकार से अपनत्व नहीं आता और इतिहास इसका साक्षी है।

● *विश्वामित्र राज, राजगीर (बिहार)*

मदद और सवाल

भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक के चौरासी साल के इतिहास में पहली बार अपने आरक्षित कोष से एक लाख छिहत्तर हजार करोड़ रुपए निकाल कर केंद्र सरकार को देने का फैसला किया है, ताकि देश की डगमगाती आर्थिक स्थिति को दुरस्त किया जा सके। हालांकि सरकार रिजर्व बैंक से पैसे लेने के लिए लंबे समय से दबाव बना रही थी। देश के कुछ बड़े अर्थशास्त्रियों का मानना है कि इस तरह के कदम से भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक की साख पर बहुत बुरा असर पड़ेगा। सवाल तो यह है कि इस बात की क्या गारंटी है कि पिछले पांच साल में भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था जिस तरह से तहस-नहस हुई है, वह इस तरह की मदद से पटरी पर आ जाएगी। इस आशंका से इंकार नहीं किया जा सकता कि कहीं भारत भी दूसरा अर्जेंटीना न बन जाए।

● *निर्मल कुमार शर्मा, गाजियाबाद*

सही फैसला

फिलहाल अर्थव्यवस्था मंदी के दौर से गुजर रही है। इसलिए रिजर्व बैंक की ओर से वित्तीय रूप से सरकार के हाथ मजबूत करने की पहल को उपयुक्त समय पर उठाया गया कदम ही कहा जाएगा। यदि अर्थव्यवस्था की सुस्ती और गहराने के बाद रिजर्व बैंक की ओर से सरकार को 1,76,051 करोड़ रुपए हस्तांतरित करने का फैसला किया जाता तो शायद अनुकूल नतीजे हासिल करने में मुश्किल होती। रिजर्व बैंक के इस फैसले के बाद देश के कारोबार जगत के साथ-साथ आम जनता के बीच तो एक अच्छा संदेश जाएगा ही, वैश्विक निवेशकों को भी इसका एहसास होगा कि भारत ने आर्थिक सुस्ती को दूर भगाने के लिए कमर कस ली है। रिजर्व बैंक से उम्मीद से अधिक राशि मिलने से केंद्र सरकार को केवल खर्च बढ़ाने में ही मदद नहीं मिलेगी, बल्कि चालू वित्त वर्ष के शेष समय में बुनियादी ढांचे से लेकर सामाजिक क्षेत्र तक में खर्च बढ़ा कर मांग को बल देने में भी सहायता मिलेगी।

● *हेमंत कुमार, गोराडीह (भागलपुर)*

वाणी पर संयम बरतें नेता

जागरूक मीडिया के युग में अब राजनेताओं को जरा संभल कर काम करने और सतर्क होकर बात करने की आदत डाल लेनी चाहिए। किसी भी मामले में उतावलेपन और उत्तेजित होने से बचना चाहिए। कहीं ऐसा न हो कि जुबान ही लड़खड़ा जाए और अपना आपा खो बैठें। मजाक या ठिठोली आपस में वे भले ही व्यक्तिगत रूप से कर लें लेकिन सार्वजनिक रूप से उन्हें इन सब बातों से परहेज रखना चाहिए। एक बात और है। दीवारों के भी कान ही नहीं आंख-नाक सब होते हैं। मीडिया में व्यक्ति न सिर्फ सुनता और देखता है बल्कि हर बारीकी को मोबाइल कैमरे से कैद कर लेता हैं। राजनीतिज्ञ किसी भी दल के क्यों न हों आखिर वे हैं तो राजनेता। फिर कम से कम जवाबदार नेता, मंत्री, शासक, प्रशासक को तो बहुत ही सूझ-बूझ से काम लेना चाहिए। यह इसलिए कहने में आ रहा है कि पिछले काफी समय से देखने, सुनने और पढ़ने में आ रहा है कि नेताओं के बोल और व्यवहार दोनों ही कभी-कभी इतने निम्नस्तरीय हो जाते हैं कि उन्हें न तो बयां किया जा सकता है और न ही प्रकाशित और प्रसारित। सरकार और अन्य पार्टी प्रमुखों को ही ये सब बातें संज्ञान में लेनी पड़ेंगी और कठोर कदम उठाने पड़ेंगे, तभी उनकी गिरती छवि को रोका जा सकता है।

● *शकुंतला महेश नेनावा, इंदौर*

कुछ तो सबक लें

प्रज्ञा ठाकुर राजनीति के लिए नहीं बनी हैं। पिछली जिंदगी को लेकर उनकी मजबूरी और आदतें न तो उन्हें संयमी सांसद बनने दे रही हैं, न ही साध्वी रहने दे रही हैं। वे न घर की रहीं न घाट की। जब भी वे बोलेंगी, अपने और पार्टी दोनों के लिए संकट खड़ा करती रहेंगी। प्रत्येक दल में ऐसे लोग हैं जो पार्टी लाइन की परवाह किए बिना विवेक विचार आचरण कर संकट खड़ा करते रहते हैं और पार्टी नेतृत्व जैसे-तैसे सफाई देता रहता है। ऐसे माहौल में यदि आप किसी एक पर उंगली उठाते हैं तो चार आपके अपने पर उठती नजर आती हैं।

● *राधेश्याम तांबट, इंदौर*

किसी भी मुद्दे या लेख पर अपनी राय हमें भेजें। हमारा पता है : ए-8, सेक्टर-7, नोएडा 201301, जिला : गौतमबुद्धनगर, उत्तर प्रदेश

आप चाहें तो अपनी बात ईमेल के जरिए भी हम तक पहुंचा सकते हैं। आइडी है : chaupal.jansatta@expressindia.com