

No holds barred

Sushma Swaraj's connect with the media despite frequent disagreements over policies holds relevance in the current times



NOT FOR PROFIT
NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

She was indeed a powerful orator and a people's leader but what added to Sushma Swaraj's charm and set her apart from most other ministers — past and present — was her connect with the media despite frequent disagreements over policies. It is this connect that holds relevance in the current times when media believes its access to the gov-

ernment has been curtailed.

Some of her trendsetting media outreach was seen during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, when she held portfolios ranging from telecom to health and parliamentary affairs to information & broadcasting (I&B). As I&B minister from September 2000 to January 2003, she met the beat reporters every Friday in her office to discuss relevant issues. Quite often, hard core political correspondents also dropped in because Swaraj was an important leader with insights into developments in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as well as the highest circles in the government including the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

One recalls how the weekly meetings, which journalists used to jokingly call Sushma's *darbar*, were far from one-way statements from the minister. Whoever had a question got the chance to ask. Unlike some current

arrangements, nobody was required to send questions beforehand. Swaraj answered them all. Those were changing times for broadcasting, both in terms of technology and investments from big businesses within India and overseas, and Swaraj conveyed the government message through media quite effectively.

Control and censorship across television and cinema often turned out to be among the contentious issues. But that did not result in a media ban or restricted access to officials. While the weekly *darbar*, always over *dhokla*, *samosa*, *gulab jamun* and tea, was meant for an overview of the ministry's workings, reporters were free to meet officials for their exclusive stories. In fact, officers who Swaraj trusted had a free hand in giving out information to the media. On some occasions when she was busy and she realised that media needed her voice in their reports, Swaraj's trusted aides

were allowed to give quotes on behalf of the minister.

Swaraj also made it a point to return calls from journalists. So if you called her and didn't get to speak, it was a good idea to sleep with a notebook and pen close by. She was sure to call back the following morning, mostly between 7 and 8 am. Not many other ministers did the same at that point, and certainly not many do it now.

There was no social media in those days, but Swaraj bonded with the media, calling reporters by their names. It's another matter that many years later, she took to social media as external affairs minister in the Narendra Modi government, using Twitter as a diplomacy tool.

Way back in 2003, she was among the key people to encourage Vajpayee to invite all women journalists to the PM's residence on Women's Day. 7, Race Course Road (now Lok Kalyan Marg) would come alive with hundreds of women journalists enjoying high tea and photo ops with the PM. That was Swaraj's way of media diplomacy.

Tired of being chased everywhere by media, she once told this writer after a meeting at the Parliament

Annexe, "you should leave me alone sometimes". Even so, she rolled the car window down and stopped to speak. She didn't forget to smile before leaving.

All those who tracked the media sector during Swaraj's tenure as I&B minister would remember all the controversy as well. Conditional access system (CAS) was one such. While passing of the CAS Bill in 2002 was counted among her achievements, it boiled down to a mess because of poor preparation in switching to a "pay for what you watch" model. Pay TV was an alien concept for Indians and the PMO had to be ushered in subsequently to douse the CAS fire the I&B ministry had failed to control. Her showdown with international businesses like Fashion TV was another controversy then. She had summoned the chief of FTV from France as she thought the channel's content was in conflict with Indian culture.

Through all the policy ups and downs, Swaraj kept in touch with media in an endearingly informal way. She never felt the need to install coffee machines for media in any of the ministries she was in charge of. She preferred to call reporters in for a chat. Snacks and tea were sure to follow.

India misses the bus on iron ore exports

By failing to extend the zero export duty benefit on higher grade ore, Indian miners could not cash in on supply shocks and rising Chinese demand

KUNAL BOSE

What could be this if not self-harming? Driven by supply shrinkages from accident-struck Brazil and Australia and more than expected demand from Chinese steel mills, world iron ore prices are at a five-year high. But New Delhi continues to drag its feet over rejigging the export duty structure. At present, zero export duty is available on iron ore with iron (fe) content of up to 58 per cent. Local miners have asked that this duty benefit be extended to iron ore with fe content of up to 62 per cent. Without this, India remains outpriced in the global market just as the world is losing appetite for low grades of ore, because their use is damaging to the environment.

Because Indian miners are denied the benefit of nil export tax on medium grades of ore, the cut-off point being 62 per cent fe-bearing ore, that their Australian and Brazilian peers have, India could not cash in on the surge in the mineral price since the end of January, which coincided with the rupture of a tailings dam linked to the Brazilian Vale-owned Brumadinho iron ore mine that killed more than 300 people. Yet another disruption in iron ore shipments was soon to occur when tropical cyclone lashed the Pilbara region of Western Australia leading to port closures and slowed mine operations.

The contraction in shipments from

Brazil and Australia is a major factor but not the only one to have caused major rallies in iron ore futures for September delivery on China's Dalian Commodity Exchange (DCE). In a quarterly report last year, the Australian government's department of industry said Chinese steel production would top out at 886 million tonnes (mt) in 2018 and then tail off in the next two years. Quite a few consultancies at that point shared Canberra's assessment of China steel outlook. Even as late as last month, China's Iron and Steel Association (CISA) advised steelmakers to "rationally increase output" in the second half of 2019 as steel demand growth will wane in sectors such as property, automobile and energy.

In reality, however, more and more stimulus from Beijing to grease the country's economic wheels continues to support steel demand, particularly from housing and infrastructure. What is to follow is the nearly 10 per cent rise in Chinese steel production in the first half of 2019 at 492.169 mt against 447.825 mt in the same period last year. China's steel capacity use is approaching a high of 75 per cent. Buoyancy in steel demand is ensuring a fall in stocks with dealers. One disturbing feature of China production upsurge is the minnows of steel industry taking advantage of the uneven enforcement of environmental laws continue to ramp up output. Describing the scene, a consultancy

says the Chinese steel production and demand are a surprise on the upside and the level of iron ore supply shortfall is a shock on the downside.

According to S&P Global Market Intelligence, the global seaborne iron ore trade this year will be in a 54 mt deficit and it will take three years for the balance to be back. Earlier another consultancy, RBC, estimated a deficit of 83 mt in ore in 2019 caused by an unexpected Chinese demand rise on the back of dislocation in mine operation in the two major producing nations. No wonder, then, in early July the benchmark 62 per cent fe ore for China delivery rallied to a five-year high at \$126.50 a tonne. The spot market has somewhat cooled since on reports of production improvement at Australian iron ore majors. That the ore commanded a price of \$191.90 a tonne in February 2011 or \$160 during the last big rally seven years ago is no relief for steelmakers.

Bloomberg Intelligence estimates that the present iron ore cost alone accounts for about a third of the revenue Chinese steelmakers can hope to get from hot-rolled coil. Add to this the high cost of coking coal and scrap, the margins of steel producers are down to 5.3 per cent. In a situation like this, says Bloomberg, "any steel mills bearing heavy debt loads will be flirting with losses". Remember, steel and coal are among the most indebted sectors in China.

What happens on the DCE futures market is taken as a price benchmark. This is because of the size of Chinese steel industry, which has more than half the share of world steel production and



at the same time accounts for over two-thirds of 1.5 billion tonne (bt) seaborne trade in the steelmaking ingredient. The clean environment campaign by Beijing is the reason Chinese steelmakers are showing increasing import preference for better grades of ore. HSBC says in a report that the inevitable fallout in the face of growing demand for quality ore is the continuing shrinkage of extraction in China where the fe content is now unacceptably low. No wonder China's iron ore production is down 40 per cent compared to the 2017 level. "Unfortunately, we could not seize the opportunity available in China because of export tax factor," laments an Indian producer-exporter.

The spot price of a commodity is usually below that of a futures contract, which captures price expectation at a future point. In the present case, this is borne out by several contracts for September delivery being done at about \$135 a tonne on DCE. More recently, futures action has shifted to DCE January delivery where trades are

recorded at close to \$110 a tonne. Commodity price forecasting is a tricky business where analysts' reputation is always at risk.

After a fairly long bull run, many in the price-anticipation business have started wondering if the news of Australian mines having started putting behind weather-related production disruptions, output and shipments at Vale improving, albeit at a slow pace, and China's port inventories, which are down to 115 mt from the year-high of around 149 mt in early April, growing once again are indicative of ore prices have peaked. What may also put a lid on prices are Chinese steelmakers openly airing their unhappiness about the strong rally in the commodity and their telling the government to look into the role of "non-market factors" in DCE deals. In response, market regulators have promised tightening of supervision of money flows in DCE. However, some analysts still believe that iron ore still has some way to go, riding on Chinese hunger for the commodity.

INSIGHT

The 'invisible' foreign hand

Every time it appears the country will finally produce a successful international airline, a chain of events ensures it doesn't happen



ANJALI BHARGAVA

Despite having a significant and ever growing volume of traffic, one of the disappointing aspects of India's aviation history remains the fact that India is yet to produce a successful international carrier out of the country. Indian traffic has been cornered by airlines like Emirates, Singapore Airlines and a host of other international players, making this one of the biggest failures of India's aviation sector.

In the 1930s, Air India started out with an impeccable service and was well poised to become the first successful carrier out of India. So well run was Air India back then that it is said to have inspired what became Singapore Airlines in 1972. In 1953, Air India was nationalised but the airline was doing well right up to the late 1970s. It is after JRD Tata stepped down as the airline's chairman — and a series of events post this — that the airline began to falter for one reason or the other. The merger of Air India and Indian Airlines was, many argue, the final nail in its coffin and the rest as they say is history.

In 2005, India's premier private airline Jet Airways started international operations. Again, with an

excellent product on offer, the airline was well poised for global success. Had the airline's founder Naresh Goyal not been paranoid about competition at home and taken a series of wrong calls to ward it off, he could have made Jet Airways the first successful international airline originating from India. But it was not to be.

Although it has refrained from a formal announcement, it is well known that IndiGo, the country's largest private airline, had intentions of offering long haul routes on its network. In May 2018, news reports said that the airline would soon be adding wide-bodied aircraft (which were expected to be ordered in July 2018) to its fleet and flying to various European cities including France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the UK, among others. It hasn't yet happened. Even at the time, it wasn't clear what kind of service the airline would offer on board. Would the flights to France and the UK be a no frills, joyless rides with passengers purchasing food while jostling for leg-room?

To my mind, the airline has made at least one decision straying from its original path — always a dangerous step as far as low-frills airlines go. Eighteen ATRs have been added to its stable and it no longer remains a single fleet operator. 1,027 flights on ATRs are already being offered weekly to 27 destinations in India.

Jet's closure presents an almost irresistible opportunity to fill the gap by going international. Although so far, international routes have been added using its A320s, it is quite possible that it will add other wide-bodied aircraft to its stable at some stage. In other words, the model will get

more and more complicated.

What made IndiGo what it is today — a single fleet, no frills airline — is a partnership that worked perfectly. The American partner Rakesh Gangwal brought into the company his years of experience in aviation, valuable global contacts and a strategic worldview that Rahul Bhatia did not have. Bhatia brought to the table everything Gangwal could not: the team to manage operations at home and the ability to deal with the unique Indian operating environment — be it the aviation ministry or the DGCA.

That's why I believe the spat between the two promoters could not have come at a worse time. Besides the fact that the two owners are too distracted to make its international foray a success — while ensuring the ATR and narrow body operations run smoothly too — the airline would need the strategic inputs that Gangwal brought to the table now more than ever before. Running a good, efficient and profitable airline domestically and running a good, efficient and profitable airline globally are two very different things. The passion, commitment, vision, understanding and drive that the two founders brought to the table may be hard to replicate with hired managers.

I'm not saying it can't still be done but it will be even more of a challenge. The loss is not just for the carrier and its shareholders but the country as a whole. Just when IndiGo looked poised to be the first successful global carrier of Indian origin, a set of circumstances have come in the way. If I was superstitious or an Indian civil servant, I'd say it's the invisible "foreign hand" at play.

LETTERS

All-round development

This refers to "Hope, ambition for India Inc in J&K" (August 7). In addition to the prevailing political and social euphoria over the integration of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) with the rest of the nation, a string of economic benefits are noteworthy. Restrictive legislations like Article 370 and 35A preventing ownership of property in J&K as also prohibiting employment to "outsiders" (referring to the rest of India) has for long hampered smooth economic movement and social development in the state. Manpower and human skills within J&K have not been effectively tapped as is apparent from its poor economic development. The state is rich in economic resources. However, apart from tourism, its rich natural resources have not been adequately tapped. Investment is now expected to flow in; the retail segment is also expected to grow. Overall there will be improvement in marketing, increase in the inflow of income and employment opportunities. These will, in turn, benefit the state and raise the standard of living of its people.

Scrapping Article 370 and 35A will only improve the "ease of doing business". There will be freedom to acquire land and invest in commercial ventures. Similarly, the abundance of raw material will also encourage development of small and medium industries, promoting self employment. The prevailing political scenario has to stabilise to strengthen investor confidence to revive a dormant economy.

C Gopinath Nair Kochi

A great gamble

This refers to the editorial "J&K and its discontents" (August 7). The decision of abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution marks the end of an era in the post-independence history of India. Till now, the problems in Jammu and Kashmir were considered a historical legacy. In hindsight, it was convenient to condemn and criticise actions



of political predecessors, more particularly, the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Now on, the onus of whatever happens in the two newly constituted Union Territories will fall squarely on the present political dispensation at the Centre.

The task of restoring peace and normalcy as well as facilitating faster economic growth in the region is fraught with uncertainties. Display of political wisdom and pacifying disturbed minds is necessary. As rightly argued in the editorial, building of confidence and trust to ensure people's participation in the democratic process is a prerequisite for conducting free and fair elections and for establishing a duly elected government.

Finally, it is thought that the decision suffers from ideological oversimplification and the widely held illusion

CHINESE WHISPERS

Amma's legacy in the US



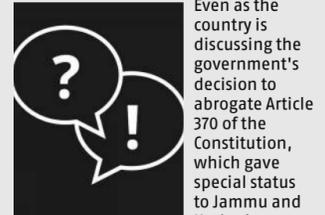
Remember the Amma *Unavagams* (canteens), an initiative by the late J Jayalalithaa, or Amma (mother), to offer quality food at affordable prices? What she did as chief minister of Tamil Nadu is being revived by a Tamilian in the United States. Popular in social media as Dinesh (pictured), the hotel management graduate has started his first hotel in New Jersey and named it Amma's Kitchen. Jayalalithaa's pictures are displayed prominently both outside and inside the outlet. Amma's Kitchen offers a plate of idli for a dollar. "I am indebted to Amma," he says in a video circulated on social media.

The password is 'sorry'



The Madhya Pradesh unit of the Congress has decided to give rebels a chance to return to the party. But not without a precondition. According to party sources, those who want a second chance have to give a written apology. Only then will the party consider their re-induction. There is a long list of leaders and workers who left the party just before the Assembly elections in 2018. So the leadership is expecting a neat pile of apology letters in the next few days.

Looking at the fun side



Even as the country is discussing the government's decision to abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, some denizens on social media have decided to focus on the lighter side of it. A user asked: If someone wanted to buy a houseboat in Kashmir, would he be entitled to a housing loan or a vehicle loan? While a tax consultant on the platform replied that the matter had been settled in Kerala, another with an interest in banking said it would be a housing loan with a "floating" interest rate.

that removal of Article 370 will pave way for resolving the vexed Kashmir issue. I presume that the apprehension is misplaced. If the BJP succeeds in its endeavour, Prime Minister Narendra Modi would undoubtedly be hailed as a great leader. However, failure would attract unprecedented condemnation. This a great gamble; wishing good luck to our PM.

Pramod Patil Nashik

Same difference

This refers to the Chinese Whispers item "Bye bye to 'sinking ship'" (August 6). The MLAs and MPs of opposition parties who are legally or illegally under investigation by investigation agencies are an easy target for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for defection. Such instances of our law makers shifting loyalty when convenient and the standing ovation accorded to them by their new political masters are tantamount to mockery of democracy and exemplify the sharp decline in ethics and moral values in politics. At this rate, the party "with a difference" will also become a motley conglomeration not different from other parties that believe that it is the end that justifies the means.

Tarsem Singh Hoshiarpur

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

HAMBONE



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Break with convention

There are limits to what monetary policy can achieve

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday surprised many market participants by reducing the policy repo rate by 35 basis points, making it the fourth reduction in a row. The central bank also lowered its growth forecast for the current year to 6.9 per cent from 7 per cent. The MPC doesn't expect inflation based on the consumer price index to cross 4 per cent at least until the first quarter of the next financial year.

The central bank's idea of breaking with the convention of adjusting rates by 25 basis points, or in its multiples, can be traced to a speech delivered by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das in Washington DC earlier this year, when he had noted: "... in a situation in which the central bank prefers to be accommodative but not overly so, it could announce a cut in the policy rate by 35 basis points if it has judged that the standard 25 basis points is too little, but its multiple, i.e. 50 basis points is too much."

The MPC's decision was explained by similar reasoning. However, the move needs to be debated. For instance, would the action of the central bank not become more unpredictable, and how will anyone benefit from this? Also, it is not clear how an additional 15-basis-point rate reduction would have been excessive, given that the economy is showing clear signs of weakness, inflation is expected to remain muted until at least the first quarter of the next financial year, and when "[A]ddressing growth concerns by boosting aggregate demand, especially private investment, assumes the highest priority..." for the central bank.

Aside from cutting the policy rate, the central bank has sought to free up banks' capital by easing norms that will allow them to lend more to non-banking financial companies. This would not only help these firms but will also improve the flow of credit in the system. However, the big question is: To what extent will the break with convention help revive growth? It is likely that growth in the current year would be significantly lower than the RBI's projection. The global outlook has worsened in recent days with increasing trade tension between the US and China. The ensuing uncertainty will further dampen the outlook for global growth.

Besides global headwinds, internal drivers of the economy are also not indicating a quick revival. The central bank is doing its part by progressively reducing the cost of money. However, it will not be enough simply because there are limits to what monetary policy alone can achieve. Also, the economy is not fully benefiting from lower policy rates because slow transmission remains an issue, partly owing to excessive borrowing by the public sector. The government seems to be on the same page on this and has advised public-sector banks to commensurately transmit rate cut benefits in lending. But the government obviously has to play a larger role. It is important at this stage that policies in the area of fiscal management, trade and exchange rate management are reassessed. Further, a flexible land and labour market remains elusive. The global environment is undoubtedly challenging, but India can only improve its standing by enhancing competitiveness.

Managing India's dams

The proposed national agency should get more teeth

After several vain bids since 2010 to enact Central legislation to ensure that dams are properly maintained, the government has finally managed to get the Dam Safety Bill, 2019, passed by the Lok Sabha. This Bill, yet to be approved by the Rajya Sabha, provides for an elaborate institutional and procedural mechanism for regular inspections, repairs, and other maintenance work to avert disasters related to dam breaches. However, it does not go beyond the structural security to also ensure operational efficiency and judiciously managing water discharges to minimise the threat to the survival of the dams.

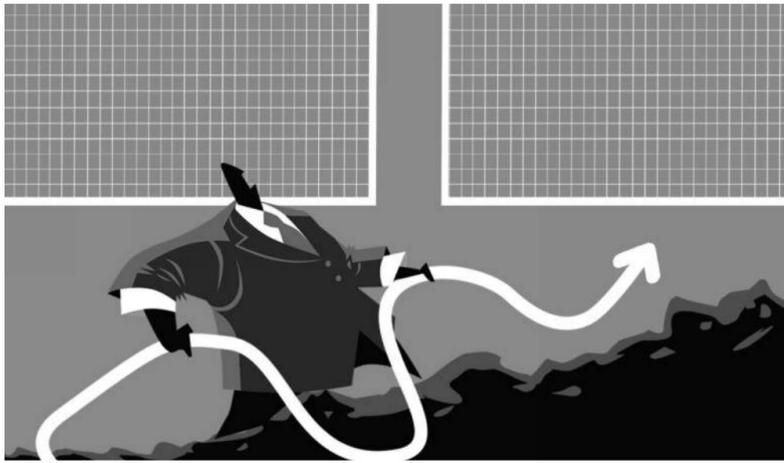
The new law seeks to set up a National Dam Safety Authority with states' representatives and specialists as members to prepare safety manuals and schedules for regular monitoring, emergency action plans, periodic safety reviews, and other related issues. This apex body would also serve as a regulator for this sector. The onus of the upkeep of the dams has been put on their owners.

Though India has the world's third-largest tally of dams, next only to the US and China, it does not have any statutory framework to ensure their safety. The task has been left to the states, which lack the wherewithal to do full justice to the task. The physical health of most dams have been steadily deteriorating due to aging and poor care. Close to 300 of the 5,600-odd large dams are more than 100 years old and over 1,000 others are above 50 years old. Many of the aged dams are earthen structures, made chiefly of locally available material, and, therefore, are vulnerable. Besides, their designs and safety aspects fall woefully short of modern norms. There have already been 37 major dam failures, the latest being that of the Tiware dam in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. It caved in last month, sweeping away an entire village and killing 23 people, besides causing other damage.

However, regardless of their inability to provide protection to dams, many states have been opposing a legally mandated Central role in this field on the plea that water is a state subject and the Centre cannot be allowed to usurp their right to manage it. This contention, though technically sound, is not fully tenable in this case. Over 90 per cent of the dams are on inter-state rivers with multiple riparian states as stakeholders. In some cases, a dam located in one state is owned by another one. Tamil Nadu is a typical case in point. Four of the dams owned by it are located in Kerala and are mired in litigation over their upkeep and operation. The law on the anvil seeks to resolve this issue by making the proposed dam safety Authority responsible for protecting such dams. This Authority can be trusted to uphold the legitimate interests of all stake-holding states.

Since this Bill is still in transition to becoming a law, there is an opportunity to amend it to give the Authority a say in the management and release of water from different dams located in the same river basins. This provision would be particularly helpful in coordinating water releases from different dams with an eye on moderating floods of the kind which devastated Kerala last year.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA



How fast is India growing?

With corporate earnings not meeting expectations and automobile sales plunging in July 2019, the story could get uglier

The title above repeats the one for my article in this newspaper of April 9, 2015, nearly four-and-a-half years ago, written a couple of months after the Central Statistics Office (CSO) brought out estimates of national income and output based on the new 2011-12 base. Some of the doubts and issues I raised then, along with other analysts and even the Economic Survey for 2014-15, were:

- The sharp upward revision of gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2013-14 to 6.9 per cent, implying a 2-percentage point acceleration in the GDP growth rate amid prevalent "policy paralysis", a mini balance of payments (BoP) crisis and a 300-basis point hike in the policy interest rate;
- The high average growth rate of 7 per cent for 2013-14 and 2014-15, which correlated poorly with weak performance of high frequency indicators (HFI) such as the Index of Industrial Production, corporate earnings, bank credit, tax revenues, and investment and exports;
- The major revisions of sectoral shares of manufacturing (upwards) and wholesale/retail trade (downwards) for 2011-12 and 2012-13, along with remarkably high growth of these two sectors in 2013-14 and 2014-15, despite lacklustre trends in HFI;
- Problems emerging with the new MCA-21 database on company accounts;
- The absence of a back-cast series on the 2011-12 base.

With the passage of time, new data releases (and associated anomalies like the peak GDP growth estimate of 8.2 per cent for the year of demonetisation, 2016-17), the publication of two alternative back-cast series last year (one under the auspices of the National Statistical Commission and the other by the CSO) and numerous commentaries on the new

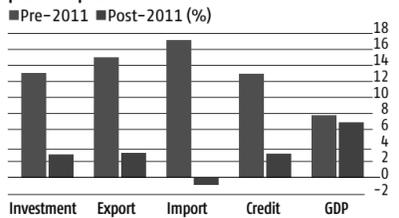
series, the controversy has rumbled on. It rose to a crescendo last month in the two-day annual India Policy Forum conference organised by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the (American) National Bureau of Economic Research. Two full sessions and much of an evening lecture were devoted to the subject. The contributions by stalwarts such as Arvind Subramanian, Sudipto Mundle, N R Bhanumurthy, R Nagaraj, Pranab Bardhan and Sebastian Morris can be readily perused on the NCAER website. Much of the critical questioning of the 2011-12 series and its sources and methods is valid. Particularly compelling is the paper by former chief economic adviser Subramanian (2014-2018). Let me give its flavour.

Subramanian's paper is a follow-up of his June 2019 Harvard working paper and includes pretty convincing rebuttals to criticisms of that paper levelled by some analysts, including official sources. He divides India's growth performance (according to the official 2011-12 base series) into two periods: pre-2011, meaning 2002/3-2010/11, and post-2011, meaning 2012/13-2016/17. The cut-off is 2011-12 because that is when the new base started. He, then, focuses on comparing the trend in the growth of output (GDP) to trends in the growth of key aggregate demand variables, notably investment, exports and credit; less persuasively, he also throws in imports.

The comparison between growth trends in these variables over the pre-2011 and post-2011 variables is shown in the figure and is striking. Pre-2011 is the boom period when GDP was growing at nearly 8 per cent, driven by similar buoyancy in real (inflation-adjusted) investment (13 per cent), real exports (15 per cent) and real credit (17 per cent). Everything is hunky-dory. Then

THE TRAJECTORY

Growth in macro-indicators and GDP, pre- and post-2011



Source: "Validating India's GDP Growth Estimates" by Arvind Subramanian, July 2019

come a series of negative shocks: A stalling of global trade after 2011, the UPA government's policy paralysis in 2012-2014, the associated mini-BoP crisis of 2013, the growing twin balance sheet crisis, the droughts of 2014 and 2015, and demonetisation in 2016. These far outweigh the only positive windfall, the oil price decline after 2014 (since partially reversed). As expected, the growth of macro demand indicators collapsed post-2011. Investment, exports and credit plummeted to 3 per cent growth from the high double-digit levels of pre-2011. One would have expected GDP growth post-2011 to have also fallen sharply. It didn't! Subramanian's "central puzzle" is that GDP growth only dipped 0.8 percentage point, from 7.7 per cent to 6.9 per cent.

Subramanian rightly infers that there is something wrong with the GDP growth estimates post-2011, as measured by the new 2011-12 base. He goes on to show that in no country has periods of 7 per cent economic growth been accompanied by such low growth of investment, exports and credit as we have experienced in the post-2011 period. Conversely, he marshals the international experience to show that when these macro demand indicators are as sluggish as they have been in India post-2011, no country has grown faster than 5.5 per cent, only four have grown at 4.5-5.5 per cent, 13 at 3.5-4.5 and 33 at below 3.5 per cent. There is much more in his paper and in the others presented in the conference. All raise serious doubts about GDP growth estimates post-2011 and call for a major reassessment of national income estimates by the NSO. Among the possible reasons suggested for the systematic and significant upward bias in the current official estimates of GDP growth post-2011 are problems with the MCA-21 database on companies and the choice of price deflators used by the current GDP estimates.

So how fast is the Indian economy growing? Clearly, significantly below the rates shown by the official series. How much below? The truth is one can only make educated guesses based on the kind of detailed analysis carried out by Subramanian in his two recent papers. His papers indicate a "discount" of at least 2.5 percentage points. That is, if official estimates indicate 7 per cent growth, then the "real" growth is likely to be 4.5 per cent or less. My own more conservative guess at the discount would be a trifle less, in the range of 1-2 percentage points. So, if the most recent official estimates (for Q4 of 2018-19) show that India is growing at 5.8 per cent — let's say rounded up to 6 per cent — then the "real" growth rate is more likely to be in the range of 4-5 per cent. Not a pretty story. But with what we know of 2019/2020Q1 developments in HFI and with automobile sales plunging 30 per cent in July 2019, the story could get uglier.

The author is Honorary Professor at ICRIER and former chief economic adviser to the Government of India. Views are personal



A PIECE OF MY MIND

SHANKAR ACHARYA



SWOT

KANIKA DATTA

J&K: India Inc's premature exuberance

India Inc is seeking to match the warp speed displayed by Narendra Modi and Amit Shah over developments in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), with the Confederation of Indian Industry planning its first-ever investor summit in the state-turned-Union Territory this October. Irrational exuberance or misplaced optimism? Premature exuberance may describe it better.

The big picture of business prospects in J&K, as presented by the industry lobby, certainly looks enticing: sans land and labour major constraints in the pre-Article 370 days, dealerships, food-processing units, small and medium manufacturing and expanded tourism will all transform a state that suffers chronic high unemployment and low development. As a state, J&K has a low internal Ease of Doing Business ranking for obvious reasons. But surprisingly, it outperformed nine others in terms of Human Development Indicators — among them West Bengal and Rajasthan — which suggests there is a reasonably educated and healthy workforce to be tapped.

Still, there are compelling reasons for industry to have followed what Indians are wont to call the "wait and watch approach" — and, no surprise, most businesspeople when asked about their J&K proposals said they planned to do exactly this. An investor summit in J&K may do much to improve the optics for a political initiative that has been deemed so good for the people of J&K that its cit-

izenry needs to be kept under lockdown for the foreseeable future. But such summits themselves are of dubious practical value. They have been in vogue for over a decade, the trend set by Mr Modi as chief minister of Gujarat, though no state has quite matched the rock-concert character of those events.

The Gujarat summits set the pattern. A bunch of potential high-profile investors is invited to attend a jamboree at which the chief minister concerned (and sometimes the bureaucrats) outline the various (mostly illusory) virtues of investing in the state. This includes enticements in the form of tax breaks (greatly restricted post-GST) and assurances of solutions to land and labour issues that routinely bedevil most manufacturing in India. Then some prominent industrialists — Gujarat and West Bengal have been able to mobilise no less than Mukesh Ambani — will make speeches about the (again, mostly imaginary) virtues of the state concerned.

Some level of discussion takes place behind the scenes between business people and the bureaucracy. Finally, the state's PR machinery gets into action and announces promised investment commitments (called memorandums of understanding) worth stupendous crores of rupees. Little of this translates into even a shovel in the ground for a variety of familiar reasons.

It is possible that J&K may buck this trend and

see a long queue of serious investors actually putting hard cash behind their intentions and transforming the country's newest Union Territory into a developmental paradise. Every Indian — including the curfewed Kashmiris — would be delighted if this were to happen. The problem is this: reading down a constitutional provision may well have corrected a historical mistake; whether it will change the situation on the ground is another matter. J&K's lack of development has less to do with the limitations on land ownership and employment and more to do with the fact that between them, the Central and state leadership has managed the relationship with Pakistan so badly that it has condemned J&K to a state of permanent unrest. Those externalities are unlikely to change anytime soon.

Since investment demands political and social stability, the Centre needs to offer investors something beyond heavy troop concentration and police presence as the sole guarantors of the ease of doing business. Israel, which is often cited as an example of a country that has attained an economic miracle under constant siege, is scarcely the kind of model India should emulate if it is serious about integrating its minorities. Some sort of enlightened plan to counter Pakistan and China's territorial ambitions is a vital part of this exercise. This is not yet in evidence. It is unlikely that those investors who attend the summit in October, one of the best times of the year in that beautiful region, are unaware of these obvious hurdles. No matter, at least they will bump up the embattled state's waning tourism industry for a couple of days.

Saving the world from AI?



BOOK REVIEW

AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

If you are one of those people who jump awake in the middle of a night and tear your hair worrying about a future in which red-eyed robot humanoids march through the world enslaving humans, this book is for you.

It is structured as an account of the work of an American group in the Silicon Valley, California, who call themselves "Rationalists", led by "the strange, irascible and brilliant" Eliezer Yudkowsky, whose

mission is to save mankind from the wrong kind of Artificial Intelligence.

This book also opened my eyes to the existence of the many well-funded institutions throughout the world with names such as The Future of Life Institute (at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Future of Humanity Institute (at Oxford University), The Center for Applied Rationality and The Machine Intelligence Research Institute (both in Berkeley, California). That is a lot of talent and money being thrown at securing mankind's future!

The biggest fear that this group has is best phrased by Mr Yudkowsky himself: "The AI does not hate you, nor does it love you, but you are made of atoms which it can use for something else." That also, incidentally, is where the author found the title of this book.

The big-picture view of what the Rationalists stand for is their belief that the real danger from machines with Artificial Intelligence is not that they take the shape

of destructive humanoid robots but from the various "cognitive biases" that they may be programmed into them, unknowingly, by the scientists who created them. In this sense, this book serves as an excellent recounting of these "biases".

A cognitive bias is a systematic error in how we think, the author reminds us. If, for instance, a person living in Britain today is asked what is more likely to kill him: A terrorist attack or having a bath? Our cognitive bias may pick a terrorist attack, but statistics show in the past 10 years, 50 people in Britain have died from terrorist attacks (most in 2017 at the Manchester concert) whereas the average annual death rate from drowning in a bath in Britain is 29! Researchers cite this as an example of systemic bias called "the availability heuristic". We think of terrorism when asked that question simply because information about terrorist attacks in more "available" to our mind: Most terrorist acts in the world are reported in headlines

whereas deaths by drowning in bathtubs don't make that many headlines.

The author walks us through the many such "cognitive biases" that we as humans have, and which people like the Rationalists believe will be unknowingly programmed into the Artificial Intelligence computer programs that run the robots.

Using this kind of thinking, the Rationalists believe that today's research and innovations in Artificial Intelligence poses a far greater threat to mankind, than, hold your breath, Climate Warming!

This book is also an eye-opening tour of the contemporary method of opinion-formation as used by the Rationalists. In the early 2000s, they made postings on the Internet Relay Chat, a precursor to today's blogs and social media groups. The blog Slate Star Codex ("a blog about science, medicine, philosophy, politics, and futurism") is an example of a blog that they use. Another blog they frequent is "moreRightLessWrong". The author points out the common links between the Rationalists and the alt-right movement in the United States. The author also draws our attention to another contemporary

phenomenon called the "one percent rule" — that a hyperactive 1 per cent in any internet community does all the posts (Wikipedia edits, YouTube videos, message board posts). Astonishingly, all these blog sites share common posters and readers.

This book has a pretty well-researched history of the attempts to create Artificial Intelligence. It started immediately after World War II when Alan Turing, who achieved fame and repute by leading a US/British team to crack German coded military communication, joined Dartmouth College. Their efforts were funded by the Ford Foundation. Early attempts to prove the legitimacy of their (and others') efforts often centered on their machines matching the skills of champions in board games. Thus, Deep Blue beat the reigning world chess champion Garry Kasparov was greeted by much acclaim in the media. Such efforts to prove that the machines they create are "human-level" continue to this day: The computer AlphaGo created by the Google-owned AI company, DeepMind, has enthralled media by engaging in a series of contests with world ranking champions of the

Chinese/Korean game "Go". Go is a board game many orders-of-magnitude more complex than chess. Yet, DeepMind's tool beat Lee Sedol, a South Korean who is considered the undisputed world champion.

The most revealing part of the book to me was the lengthy end-section, which examines whether the Rationalist movement is a cult. He reminds us that a "cult" normally means "a charismatic figurehead and other high-status inner-circle members... unorthodox sexual practices, a message of impending apocalypse, a promise of eternal life, and a way to donate money to avoid the apocalypse and achieve paradise". His account of the Rationalists and their leader Eliezer Yudkowsky and "his wife and girlfriends" makes you wonder what the anti-Artificial Intelligence movement is truly all about.

THE AI DOES NOT HATE YOU: Superintelligence, Rationality and the Race to Save the World

By Tom Chivers
W&N
Pages: 304; Price: ₹599

Opinion

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 2019



ONE OF A KIND

Prime minister of India, Narendra Modi

India grieves the demise of a remarkable leader who devoted her life to public service and bettering lives of the poor. Sushma Swarajji was one of her kind, who was a source of inspiration for crores of people

RBI is doing its bit, over to government now

Central bank has cut repo & ensured adequate liquidity; govt needs to do its bit with a fresh burst of reforms

WITHIN HOURS OF RBI governor Shaktikanta Das' unconventional 35 basis points repo rate cut, SBI had dropped the interest rate for fresh loans by 15 bps. That is speedy transmission for sure. However, the fact is there's a fair bit of catching up left for all lenders since the cumulative repo cuts of 75 basis points till June resulted in a fall of just 29 bps in loan rates. Governor Das' efforts to revive credit growth are to be lauded but, unfortunately, merely lowering interest rates may not be enough to stimulate appetite for credit. At this point, when there is a fair bit of surplus capacity and visibility on demand—both locally and overseas—is somewhat poor, the private sector has no real incentive to invest. That would require big reforms in labour, land, regulation and agriculture. As SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar had said a few days ago, it is the demand that is missing.

But the central bank can do only so much. Indeed, it is doing more than its best to create a conducive lending environment for banks; liquidity has been more than ample for two months now—a surplus of around ₹2 lakh crore—and on Wednesday, there was assurance of more if needed. Easing the norms for bank lending to NBFCs is helpful; loans to a single NBFC can now be 20% of Tier One capital compared with 15% earlier. Moreover, banks can route some of their priority sector lending—agriculture investment loans, affordable home loans—through NBFCs. Unfortunately, the addressable opportunity may not be large since the top-quality NBFCs don't really have too more trouble raising money in the bond markets and banks will choose to stay away from the weaker players post the IL&FS and DHFL crises. As Das rightly observed during his interaction with reporters, the central bank cannot compel banks to lend to any particular sector or customers; those decisions are dependent on ratings and are entirely at their discretion. Relaxing the lending norms for consumer credit by lowering the risk weights (except for credit cards) should help banks push through more loans to this space, though most of them already have big retail exposures.

Many have observed that the RBI's revised GDP forecast of 6.9% for 2019-20, with a downward bias, is optimistic. That may be so, but Das has done well to articulate RBI's concern on growth without any alarmist commentary. Das said the slowdown was cyclical, whereas most economists believe a good part of it is structural. Nonetheless, he seems to be working towards his priority to boost aggregate demand. Das has done the right thing in not pressuring banks to link their loan rates to external benchmarks at a time when they are struggling with NPAs and slow deposit growth. Also, he has reassured the markets, saying the RBI would make sure no systemically important NBFC collapses. Given how inflation is expected to remain benign for at least another year—RBI now forecasts Q1 2020-21 inflation at 3.6%—there is room for another rate cut. That could come in early October, but at the risk of sounding repetitive, rate cuts are little use without meaningful transmission.

Efficient, warm, charming

Sushma Swaraj was on top of her job and won many hearts

IT IS NEVER easy competing with a prime minister, particularly one as hyperactive as Narendra Modi when it comes to foreign policy, but it is to Sushma Swaraj's credit that she persevered—she wasn't even Modi's first choice, given her allegiance to LK Advani—and came up with an entirely new style of functioning. Taking to Twitter like a duck to water, it was a style that made the hitherto distant external affairs ministry accessible to every Indian, anywhere in the world, at any time of the day—recall her 3am tweet on one occasion—with just a 280-character message; perhaps too accessible given that, on one occasion, Swaraj was tagged on a tweet desperately asking for help to get a refrigerator repaired. While Swaraj's role in getting justice for Kulbhushan Yadav and hiring Harish Salve, for one rupee, got a lot of attention, what won the hearts of ordinary Indians was the backroom work she did to get hearing- and speech-impaired Geeta back from Pakistan, in helping those with passport and visa issues, and organising mass evacuations from areas like Iraq and Yemen while, all the time being there to comfort and provide solace to the families of victims or those in trouble. Her last act, before her unfortunate passing away, was to tweet a congratulatory message to Modi after Article 370 was revoked.

Known for her excellent oratory, in both English and Hindi, Swaraj was one of India's more efficient ministers, quick to grasp the issues at stake and willing to do what needed to be done to get the job done. In external affairs, that meant preparing the groundwork for Modi's high-profile visits and giving a powerful speech at the UN General Assembly; in telecom, in the Vajpayee Cabinet, this meant doing the homework for a rescue package for the telecom sector that not just rescued beleaguered telcos but also paved the way for the subsequent boom in India's telephony. If she wasn't able to complete the job, it was because her party needed her to step in as Delhi's chief minister as the incumbent was very unpopular due to spiralling onion prices; his unpopularity was too much for Swaraj to reverse, but she was always ready to fight a battle for her party's sake. So, she took on Sonia Gandhi in Bellary, and even learned Kannada to be able to campaign effectively; she lost, but by just 60,000 votes and, later on, Bellary went on to become a BJP stronghold. A staunch conservative, something her Karva Chauth fasts and deep *sindoor* bore very public testimony to, Swaraj was quick to criticise vigilante groups like the Sri Ram Sene that was attacking women going to pubs; she spoke of how her daughter went to pubs as well. By and large, though, at least in public, she toed the party line on most issues.

In a world where politics is increasingly becoming bitter and adversarial, where party loyalties matter more than friendships, Swaraj represented the Vajpayee-era style of politicians who had endearing friendships across party groups. It helped that, though her father was associated with the RSS, she began her career as a minister in Devi Lal's cabinet; that is why, even when she got a lot of flak for helping fugitive Lalit Modi get travel documents, the Opposition never asked for her resignation. A dying breed of politicians, literally.

CrashCURBS

The Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill proposes steeper fines to check accidents, but will these work?

EVERY YEAR, AROUND 1.5 lakh people die in India due to road accidents. Now, as a member of the United Nations, India wishes to halve the number of road accidents. Given road accidents cost most countries around 3% of annual GDP, there is a strong economic imperative for this too. The Centre seems to believe that steeper penalties for traffic violations will fix part of the problem. So, the Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill raises the minimum fine for those to ₹500 from ₹100—under the draft law, driving drunk will attract a hefty ₹10,000 fine and driving without the seat-belt on will attract a ₹1,000 fine. Rash driving will incur a fine of ₹5,000. While steeper fines may seem a deterrent, research shows it is, in fact, the implementation of laws and fines that proves a deterrent. India has strict provisions against speeding and driving under influence, but their enforcement scores a lowly 3 and 4, respectively, on a scale of 10—only 30% of the drivers and <10% of the pillion riders mandated to wear helmets do so while a whopping 60% of drivers and 89% of front-seat passengers mandated to wear seat-belts do so. Without the deployment of technology to monitor violations continually, higher fines may only encourage present graft practices to continue.

The Bill also seeks to fix responsibility of contractors for faulty road design and poor maintenance causing accidents—this should put pressure on them to adhere to all safety obligations during construction. But, it is tough to ascribe responsibility in a scenario where the government itself puts a premium on the least cost in road project contracts. Also, with poor and unreliable data on factors other than construction quality that affect road infrastructure—weather, traffic additions over the long term, etc—holding the contractor responsible may not work out. The Bill gets it right on immediate, cashless transfers for victims' treatment within the "golden hour" and increased compensation to road accident victims.

KEEPING THE PROMISE

A REDUCTION IN CORPORATE TAX FOR ALL COMPANIES TO 25%, AND NOT JUST FOR MSMES, WILL ENABLE LARGE COMPANIES TO COMPETE GLOBALLY, AND INCREASE GROWTH

Reduce corporate tax to achieve \$5trn economy

TV MOHANDAS PAI S KRISHNAN

Pai is Chairman, Aarin Capital & Krishnan is Tax consultant
Views are personal



IT IS FIVE years since the NDA began its first innings, and it's time to evaluate India's competitiveness on the direct tax front. Arun Jaitley, in his 2015 Budget speech, announced, "We are considered as having a high Corporate Tax (CT) regime but we do not get that tax due to excessive exemptions. I propose to reduce the rate of Corporate Tax from 30% to 25% over the next four years. This process of reduction has to be necessarily accompanied by rationalisation and removal of various kinds of tax exemptions and incentives for corporate taxpayers, which incidentally account for a large number of tax disputes."

He started the process of tax reduction in FY17, with a small reduction of 1% for companies whose turnover was less than ₹5 crore, and announcing a CT of 25% for new manufacturing companies who do not avail of any exemption. In his last 2018 Budget proposal, he extended the 25% rate reduction to MSME's with annual turnover up to ₹250 crore.

There was high expectation that the new FM, Nirmala Sitharaman, in her maiden budget, would fulfil the earlier promise of reducing CT to 25% for all companies by 2019. She said, in her maiden budget speech, "So far as CT is concerned, we continue with phased reduction in rates. Currently, the lower rate of 25% is only applicable to companies having annual turnover up to ₹250 crore. I propose to widen this to include all companies having annual turnover up to ₹400 crore. This will cover 99.3% of the companies. Now only 0.7% of companies will remain outside this rate". The FM forgot to mention that 0.7% of the companies in India contribute about 79% of the total CT.

The Receipt Budget 2019-20 reveals that a small number of companies, 373, with profits before taxes (PBT) of ₹500 crore and above, contributed 52% of CT in FY18 and 16.35% of CT was contributed by 1,236 companies with PBT of ₹100-500 crore. Two years after the CT reduction began, about 68.5% of the total CT was contributed by a miniscule 0.2% of all companies! What was promised by the FM in his 2015 budget speech remains unfulfilled.

The Effective Tax Rate (ETR) and the average statutory CT in FY18 is the highest in the past five years for all companies. The ETR is 29.49% for FY18, compared to 23.22% in FY14—an increase

of 27%. This ETR increase has contributed ₹1.11 lakh crore out of ₹5.24 lakh crore collected as CT. The Receipt Budget 2019-20 states that the impact of 2017 Budget proposal of 25% CT for companies having turnover up to ₹50 crore is minimal. The NDA government has thus phased out profit linked deductions without proportionately reducing the CT. Obviously, FM Jaitley has not kept his promise.

When the FM announced a rate reduction to 25% over four years, it was expected that this rate reduction would benefit all the companies. By providing CT reduction to MSME's, others have not benefited. Instead, they have been forced to pay more tax due to withdrawal of tax incentives and imposition of 2% additional surcharge from FY16. The ETR for large companies has consequently increased from 20.68% in FY14 to 26.3% in FY18, a 27% increase.

Large companies in the services sector are the biggest employers in India. They provide stable jobs at good remuneration. However, the services sector, which is more job oriented, has a 2.7% higher ETR at 30.55% in FY18 compared to 27.83% in the manufacturing

sector, which adopts capital intensive automation and enjoys tax incentives. India incentivises automation and taxes job creation more!

A reduction in the CT of all companies to 25%, and not just for MSMEs, will enable large companies to compete globally, increase their growth leading to higher employment, better quality jobs, and reduce the high cost of capital in India. This will support India becoming a \$5 trillion economy.

The accompanying graphic provides the revenue impact of top six incentives for CT payers during FY18 and FY19.

Budget 2016 reduced the maximum depreciation rate to 40%, with effect from FY18, and removed other deductions. A reduction in the maximum depreciation rates to 25%, and the general rate to 10% would enable the government to reduce the CT for large companies by about 2%. A reduction in the CT will reduce the cost of credit from the banking system over time and make the job-intensive services sector more competitive. A 2% CT reduction will enable banks to write back deferred taxes up to ₹10,000 crore and corporates will be

able to write back about ₹25,000 crore. By lowering the CT, the labour intensive industries will have more cash to grow faster and create more jobs, which is India's top priority.

Jaitley had also announced, in Budget 2015, his "vision of putting in place a direct tax regime which is internationally competitive on rates, is without exemptions, incentivises savings, and does not realise tax from intermediaries."

A study on the CT around the world in CY 2018 reveals that the worldwide average statutory CT to be 23.03%, measured across 208 tax jurisdictions. The average statutory CT is 21.86% among EU countries, 23.93% in OECD countries and 27.63% in the G7. The US has a combined statutory rate of 25.84%. The majority of the 208 separate jurisdictions surveyed have CT below 25% and 103 have rates between 20% and 30%. This study was conducted by Tax Foundation, a tax policy non-profit organisation based in the US.

India's average statutory CT at 34.4% in FY18 is higher by more than 10% compared to the worldwide average statutory CT. Instead of India being internationally competitive in tax rates, it has the highest CT among the large economies in CY18. It is in the ninth spot among the 20 countries with the highest CT in the world. This high CT in India is negatively impacting the competitiveness of Indian multinational companies, and India as a destination for investment. When overseas investors come to India with a much lower cost of capital, Indian entrepreneurs cannot compete with a much higher cost.

At the end of five years of NDA government, the CT reduction is not provided to all companies but only to MSMEs. Tax collection has increased hugely by reduction of depreciation rates and withdrawal of corporation tax breaks. India has the highest CT among large economies, making its direct tax regime most uncompetitive internationally. The quantum of tax litigation in India has gone up considerably at all levels too. While Our FMs have been lofty in making statements, they have not kept their promise.

It is very important for the present FM to first reduce the CT to 25% for all companies, incentivise labour-oriented service industries in India and keep the promise made to its citizens which will enable India to move to a \$5 trillion economy.

Trump's China shock

The Trump administration in its wisdom has managed to accuse the Chinese of the one economic crime of which they happen to be innocent—currency manipulation

PAUL KRUGMAN



NYT

I DIDN'T KNOW that the Dow was going to drop 750 points, so my latest column is El Paso-related. Probably the right choice anyway, because US-China is moving so fast that anything in the print paper would be out of date.

But it does look as if I should try to explain (a) what I think is happening (b) why the markets are going so nuts. By the way, given Mnuchin's declaration earlier this week that China is a currency manipulator, subsequent market action should be...interesting.

So here's the thing: neither Trump's tariff announcement last week nor, especially, the depreciation of China's currency earlier this week should objectively be that big a deal. Trump slapped 10% tariffs on \$200 billion of Chinese exports, which is a tax hike of 0.1% of US GDP and 0.15% of Chinese GDP.

In response, China let its currency drop by about 2%. For comparison, the British pound has dropped around 9% since May, when it became clear that a no-deal Brexit was likely.

So why are these smallish numbers such a big deal? Mostly because we've learned things about the protagonists in this trade conflict, things that make a bigger, longer trade war seem a lot more likely than it did even a few days ago.

First, Trump really is a Tariff Man. Some naive souls may still have been hoping that he would learn something

from the failure of his trade policy so far. More sensible people hoped that he might do what he did with NAFTA: reach a new deal basically the same as the old deal, proclaim that it was totally different, and claim a great victory.

But no: it is pretty clear now that he refuses to give up on his belief that trade wars are good, and easy to win; his plan is to continue the beatings until morale improves. What may have looked like temporary tariffs designed to win concessions now look like permanent features of the world economy, with the level of tariffs and the range of countries facing them likely to expand over time.

Second, China is clearly signalling that it's not Canada or Mexico: it's too big and too proud to submit to what it considers bullying. That slide in the renminbi wasn't a concrete policy measure as much as a way of saying to Trump, "talk to the hand" (no doubt there's a good Chinese expression along these lines.)

Incidentally—or maybe it's not so incidental—while there are many valid reasons to criticise Chinese policy, currency manipulation isn't one of them. China was a major currency

manipulator 7 or 8 years ago, but these days if anything it's supporting its currency above the level it would be at if it were freely floating.

And think for a minute about what would happen to a country with an unmanipulated currency, if one of its major export markets suddenly slapped major tariffs on many of its goods. You'd surely expect to see that country's currency depreciate, just as Britain's has with the prospect of lost market access due to Brexit.

In other words, the Trump administration in its wisdom has managed to accuse the Chinese of the one economic crime of which they happen to be innocent. Oh, and what are we going to do to punish them for this crime? Put tariffs on their exports? Um, we've already done that.

So how does this all end? More important, neither does anyone else. It looks to me as if both Trump and Xi have now staked their reputations on hanging tough. And the thing is, it is hard to see what would make either side give in (or even to know what giving in might mean.)

At this rate, we may have to wait for a new president to clean up this mess, if she can.

Both Trump and Xi have now staked their reputations on hanging tough...it is hard to see what would make either side give in

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A much-loved leader

Sushma Swaraj richly deserved all the encomiums heaped on her. A much-loved leader, her passing filled us with a sense of loss. She was a tall leader of considerable stature on India's political stage. Hers was an instantly recognisable face that exuded confidence, charm and character. Under the tutelage of stalwarts like AB Vajpayee and LK Advani, she blossomed into a capable leader. As a protégé of LK Advani, she climbed up the career ladder to become a prominent politician in her own right. At one time, she even looked like the prime minister-in-waiting. We differed with her ideologically, but admired her for her grace and affability. Her unassuming and unpretentious conduct endeared her to one and all. Even though she subscribed to Hindutva ideology and upheld party interest uncompromisingly, she was never regarded as a hardliner or as a rabble-rouser. In fact, she had the moral courage and humanity to rise above caste, colour and creed when it came to providing humanitarian assistance to anyone in need. She stayed away from jingoism. The nation will remember her with gratitude for her interventions to rescue the Indians in difficult or dangerous situations. She was essentially a fine human being, affectionate and consoling. She will go down in history as a much-loved leader.

— G David Milton, Maruthancode

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



PORTRAIT: SHYAM KUMAR PRASAD

SY
QURAISHI

Former Chief Election
Commissioner of India



IN MEMORIAM

A protege's tribute

Sushma Swaraj was a leader with the stature and backbone to withstand political pressures as a minister

MY ASSOCIATION WITH Sushma Swaraj goes back to 1977, when after the end of the Emergency, she became an MLA of the Janata Party and was made minister for cultural affairs by Chaudhary Devi Lal, becoming the youngest ever minister in the country at 25. I was the director in the ministry. She exuded warmth and trust and started addressing me affectionately by my first name Yaqoob, my being six years older than her notwithstanding.

I was newly married then and she became very affectionate towards my wife, a budding journalist, as well. She granted her an interview for the last page of a Sunday magazine—a first for both of them!

Her positivity and my enthusiasm ensured that we reached many landmarks in an otherwise lacklustre and nondescript department. A film star night by Sunil Dutt's troupe at Ambala for social causes was organised. Sushma ji decided that no one would be given free passes. The only two persons who complied were Sushma ji and I. I had to leave my three-month-old bride at home, which she probably begrudged me but never complained! A national award—Sangeet Martand—to Pandit Jasraj of Sirsa with a prize money of ₹1 lakh, a princely sum at that time, was another landmark. A Haryana *suwang* (a folk theatre form) workshop with Habib Tanvir and another with Balwant Gargi resulted in legendary productions which were sent to border areas to entertain our *jawans* for years thereafter.

Even after we moved on to different ministries, our association continued,

though there was increasing acrimony between my journalist wife and her. She never allowed my wife's hostile writings against her and her party to affect her relations with me. She always said we are different individuals and even defended my wife's freedom of expression.

In 2001, out of the blue, I got a call from Sushma ji saying that she wanted me to come to her ministry, Information and Broadcasting, as Director-General Door-darshan. I was then posted as principal secretary to the chief minister of Haryana, O.P. Chautala. The post considered the most powerful in the state. I thought it would be awkward to request him to relieve me of this job as he would consider me an ungrateful rascal. I therefore requested Sushma ji to speak to Chautala herself, which she promptly refused to do, saying, "Yaqoob, you know very well that your CM is hostile to me as I had opposed my party's alliance with his." On my persuasion, she kindly agreed to call him and the conversation I heard is best forgotten. I learnt quite a few original Haryanvi invectives. The politest refrain being "you want to ruin me by taking away my principal secretary".

A few days later she again called me asking if I could use some other influence to get my name forwarded to Delhi. Surely there were many in the CM's secretariat who would be happy to push me out. I used their "good" offices. And it worked.

When the news about my appointment as DG DD spread, she faced a barrage of attacks from BJP leaders, including very senior ones, for appointing a Muslim to such a sensitive post, one with an anti-BJP wife to boot. Only a leader of her stature and backbone could have withstood the pressure. The complimentary words of faith and trust she used for me have always moved me. It transpired that a regular on me and her defence was that attack on feature. She was so cultured that she didn't even mention these conversations to me and I got to hear of them from her staff.

At DD, she gave me a free hand, especially as I was the first direct recruit for Prasar Bharati and she extended her full support in all my initiatives. The introduction of DD Bharati, a unique channel for women, children and culture, within a month of my joining set the tone. DD India, narrowcasting (local broadcasting from our TV towers) and later setting up of DD Archives on the first Pravasi Bharati Divas were some of the other milestones possible with her support.

One not so fine day, she was abruptly moved out of I&B to the Ministry of Health because of party infighting. I was the next target. Many people suggested that I am being moved out for being a Muslim, which I did not countenance. My belief was that my being considered a protegee of Sushma Swaraj was the real reason. Being labelled a "protegee" of a great leader like her is a matter of pride for me.

Sushma ji was an original thinker and doer par excellence. One of her achievements I can never forget was to declare film production as an industry, a demand that had been rejected for decades. In the one stroke, she killed the phenomenon of the underworld financing in the film industry as it became bankable. Has any one ever heard the name Haji Mastan here since?

My last meeting with her was on June 13, when I went to her home to inquire about her health. Rumours were rife that she had been "dropped". I inquired why

she had chosen to withdraw from active electoral life. She said that ever since her kidney transplant, she was advised by her doctors to keep away from two things—dust and human physical contact. She said with a constituency which spread over 100 kilometres, and millions of constituents and friends, this was impossible. I had not seen her so happy in a long time. She was glowing. Who knew that this was the proverbial last flicker of a dying flame.

Ma'am, I love you.

ARTICLE 370

DEMOCRACY IS ALWAYS by the people, for the people, and of the people—it is always representative of the will of the people. In a constitutional parliamentary democracy, the most legitimate means of expression of this will is through elected representatives. The Indian Constitution gives Parliament the legitimate power to express this will, while expressing which, Parliament looks to the Preamble as the guiding light in enacting or amending laws. The principles of justice and equality are building blocks of the Preamble. Unfortunately, post-independence India committed two Constitutional irregularities, which were against the principles of justice and equality—Article 35A, and Article 370. These provisions for Jammu and Kashmir were utilised as "special" provisions by leaders of the valley, and their allies governing in Delhi. Insertion of constitutional amendment 35A through a presidential order was a move that had no constitutional precedent. The Constitution, under Article 368, gives Parliament power to amend it. Bypassing parliamentary powers, 35A, which disenfranchised people of J&K from basic constitutional rights, was inserted through executive means.

On marrying a non-Kashmiri, Kashmiri Muslim women lost their right to get government jobs, settle in Kashmir, or send their children to government schools. However, a

A win for democracy

The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019, portends a future of hope

PRADIP
BHANDARI

Founder, CEO, Editor & Chief, Jan Ki Baat



Kashmiri woman marrying a Pakistani retained the right to settle in J&K, and was eligible for a permanent resident certificate (PRC). This acute gender discrimination violated the spirit of the Constitution, and was also a threat to unity and integrity of people.

Article 35A also denied basic right to life to more than 4,000 families, who migrated from west Pakistan. They were not entitled to any land, and have been living as refugees for the past 60 years. Even the 200 Valmiki families who were brought from Punjab to J&K following a cabinet decision in 1957, to be specifically employed as *safai karamchari*, were not qualified for government promotion. Their children could not take

admission in government education institutions, nor were they eligible to apply for government jobs. In short, the son or daughter of a *safai karamchari* had no other option but to be one too. Political leaders who claimed represent the downtrodden would always look the other way at this denial of right to life to Dalits in the Valley.

More than one lakh Gorkhas, who historically serve in the Indian Army, suffer from social, economic and educational backwardness. Scrapping of 35A gives social and economic justice to the *suwang* of Kashmir.

The common narrative on J&K consciously overlooked the voice of Jammu, and Ladakh. Recently, when Mehbooba Mufti



State Legislature. Neither the spirit, nor the operatives of Article 370 indicate the necessity of consultation and concurrence from the J&K Legislative Assembly before making any constitutional changes.

By continuing with a temporary article perpetually, a constitutional irregularity was committed for political convenience. The Preamble speaks of "We, the people of India". It was unfathomable that a separate Constitution, flag, and proxy dual citizenship in the name of PRC would continue in the Valley for seven decades. In the name of preserving *Kashmiriyat*, Article 370 pulled away any investment opportunity in the Valley, leading the state to run the highest unemployment rate. Even J&K's share in new projects announced decreased to a historical low of .02%, as per CMIE data. With more than 40,000 lives lost in Kashmir, and countless soldiers martyred in the line of duty despite continuous talks with all possible stakeholders, there was no other option but to address the genesis of the turmoil. After all, *Kashmiriyat* needs to create progressive opportunities for all people of Kashmir—Muslims, Valmiki, Gorkhas, Bakarwals, Pandits—equally. By passing the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019, India has moved away from 70 years of turmoil to a future of hope and prosperity. The Bill upholds constitutional morality, and, for the first time, permits the application of the entire Preamble of India to the J&K region.

CUSHIONING COTTON

Measures to tap global potential

SHUNMUGAM

Author is Head-Research at MCX
Views are personal



Agencies should work towards enhancing the availability of adequate quantities of desired quality seeds at a subsidised rate

A THIRD OF THE global cotton growing area in India, hybridisation and increasing adoption of BT hybrid cotton varieties has turned India into a major exporter of cotton in the last decade. India was crowned the largest cotton producer in the world in the crop year (CY) 2015-16. In CY 2018-19, the cotton crop fared poorly due to a 20% rainfall deficit, with an estimated 14% reduction in production. Last years' production was also lower by 11% over decadal average cotton production of 352 lakh bales. As the farmers contributed to 'Cotton Revolution' of the last decade, mill consumption also expanded by over 30%. Increasing quality awareness and widespread use of hybrid seeds, led to India's cotton exports witnessing a growth until CY 2017-18, despite lower stocks. Lower crop estimates for 2018-19 pushed Indian cotton millers off the cliff to seek out their raw material requirements through imports. Though the production estimates of the significant trade body are being contested by the stakeholders, the proof of production numbers is already in the increasing trend of cotton imports estimated at 31 million bales—highest in the last decade on the back of lower exports. Added to the lower production, is also a low stock of 13 lakh bales, which is a third of the decadal closing stock of 38 lakh bales.

Production numbers reveal that after reaching the peak of 398 lakh bales during CY 13-14, production has been south-bound. Domestic consumption and augmented export demand had kept the mill consumption clock ticking annually in the last decade. Increasing exports and mill consumption led to stocks moving to a low of 5% of the consumption in CY 18-19. Given that Indian productivity estimated as 502 Kg/hectare is lower than 1,751 and 944 of China and USA, respectively, one needs to see as to what ails India's production.

Productivity levels seem to have hit a plateau and pulling the country and farmers out of the same would require multi-pronged efforts. First, and foremost issue, is ensuring the availability of adequate good quality seed with traits such as drought tolerance, pest resistance, etc. A major reason for the significant reduction in crop output witnessed during 2018-19 remain the drought conditions in major growing areas and attack of the pink bollworm. Second, the adoption of better agronomic practices such as high-density planting of short duration varieties. This has the potential to increase yields to about 29% via lower exposure to pest attack, efficient use of water and other inputs while also suppressing weeds. Also, management practices such as in-situ soil and water conservation with bunds, integrated pest management, soil fertility testing and management, drip irrigation, etc., can have a significant impact.

Growing cotton varieties of high staple length is an important step towards augmenting the production and making available desired length of cotton fibre in the country. Adoption of better harvesting and post-harvest management practices will eliminate contamination, ensuring production and recovery of good quality of cotton that meets the requirements of domestic consumption as well as exports. Use of commodity derivatives platforms either directly or through aggregators will help the farmers lock in their prices and create quality awareness. This will encourage the farmer to adopt better agronomic practices.

Both the private and public sector agencies should work towards enhancing the availability of adequate quantities of desired quality seeds for the farmers at a subsidised rate. With the sowing of the new crop due in the next few weeks, the performance of monsoon will be a key factor for the output. Amid concerns of end-stocks to fall to an alarmingly low level, there is an urgent need for remedial measures to be taken, to reclaim the coveted position of being the top producing nation.

Amid concerns of end-stocks to fall to an alarmingly low level, there is an urgent need for remedial measures to be taken, to reclaim the coveted position of being the top producing nation

TELLING NUMBERS

J&K: Key indicators



As a new chapter opens in the history of Jammu and Kashmir with the state being split into two Union Territories, there have been discussions around how it has fared compared to the rest of India. Some selected indicators; figures in square brackets are for All India.

POPULATION PROFILE

- * Life expectancy at birth: 73.5 (2012-16) [68.7]
- Sex ratio of total population (females per 1,000 males): 972 [991]
- Sex ratio at birth for children born in the last five years (females per 1,000 males): 921 [919]
- Households with electricity (%): 97.4 [88.2]
- Households with improved drinking water source (%): 89.2 [89.9]
- Households using improved sanitation facility (%): 52.5 [48.4]
- Households using clean fuel for cooking (%): 57.6 [43.8]

LITERACY LEVELS

- Literacy Rate (in per cent, 2011): 67.2 [73.0]
- Women who are literate (%): 69.0 [68.4]
- Men who are literate (%): 87.0 [85.7]
- Women with 10 or more years of schooling (%): 37.2 [35.7]
- * Gross Enrolment Ratio (in per cent, 2016-17, Provisional): 73.03 [93.55]

MARRIAGE & FERTILITY

- Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years (%): 8.7 [26.8]
- Women age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (%): 2.9 [7.9]
- Total fertility rate (children per woman): 2.0 [2.2]
- * Birth rate (per 1,000 population): 15.4 (2017) [20.2]

INFANT & CHILD MORTALITY

- Infant mortality rate (IMR) [32] [41]
- Under-five mortality rate (U5MR) [38] [50]

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- Currently married women who usually participate in household decisions (%): 84.0 [84.0]
- Women owning a house and/or land (alone or jointly with others) (%): 33.3 [38.4]
- Women having a bank or savings account that they themselves use (%): 60.3 [53.0]
- Women having a mobile phone that they themselves use (%): 54.2 [45.9]

EMPLOYMENT & POVERTY*

- Unemployment rate per 1,000 population (Usual status), Rural male: 22 (2011-12) [17]
- Unemployment rate per 1,000 population (Usual status), Rural female: 30 (2011-12) [17]
- Unemployment rate per 1,000 population (Usual status), Urban male: 41 (2011-12) [30]
- Unemployment rate per 1,000 population (Usual status), Urban female: 190 (2011-12) [52]
- Poverty rate (percentage, based on MRP consumption): 10.35 (2011-12) [21.92]

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16, except indicators marked with an asterisk (*). Data marked with an asterisk are from Economic Survey 2018-19 and RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian States, 2018-19, quoting Census, NITI Aayog, and NSSO data. NFHS-4 is the fourth in the NFHS series, which provides information on population, health and nutrition for India and each state and Union Territory.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why RBI's monetary policy matters

It influences the interest rate in the economy — which is the cost of money when you don't have it, and the reward for parting with it when you have it.

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

IN ITS monetary policy review Wednesday, the Monetary Policy Committee of the RBI decided to cut the repo rate by 35 basis points (bps). Repo rate is the rate at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks. 100 bps make a full percentage point. The RBI's repo rate has now fallen 110 basis points since February. The RBI also announced some measures to boost economic activity.

Why does monetary policy matter?

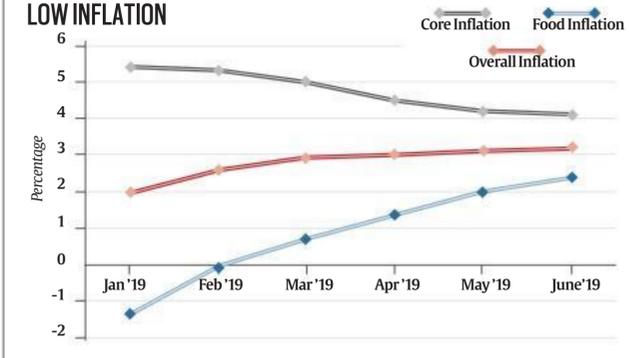
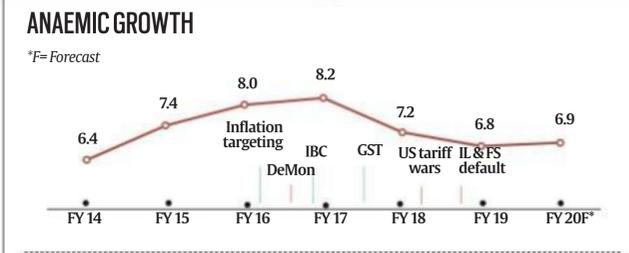
In any economy, economic activity, which is measured by gross domestic product or GDP, happens by one of four ways. One, private individuals and households spend money on consumption. Two, the government spends on its agenda. Three, private sector businesses "invest" in their productive capacity. And four, the net exports — which is the difference between what all of them spend on imports as against what they earn from exports. At the heart of any spending decision taken by any of these entities lies the question: What is the cost of money?

Monetary policy essentially answers that question. In every country, the central bank is mandated to decide the cost of money, which is more commonly known as the "interest rate" in the economy. While various factors make it difficult for a central bank to exactly dictate interest rates, as a thumb rule, RBI's decision on the repo rate sets the markers for the rest of the economy. In other words, the EMI for your car or home is determined by what the RBI decides.

What is the repo rate?

Repo and Reverse repo are short for repurchase agreements between the RBI and the commercial banks in the economy. In essence, the repo rate is the interest rate that the RBI charges a commercial bank when it borrows money from the RBI. As such, if the repo falls, all interest rates in the economy should fall. And that is why common people should be interested in the RBI's monetary policy.

But the interest rate for consumer loans has not reduced by 110 bps since February. Why?



HIGH REAL INTEREST RATE

	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19
Repo Rate (%)	8	7.5	6.75	6.25	6	6.25
CPI Inflation (% y-o-y)	9.4	6	4.9	4.5	3.6	3.4
Real Interest Rate (%)	-1.4	1.5	1.9	1.8	2.4	2.9

Source: National Statistics Office (NSO), CRISIL Research

In the real world, the "transmission" of an interest rate cut (or increase) is not a hundred per cent. And that is why, even though when the RBI cut by 35 bps on Wednesday, lay consumers may only receive a much lower reduction in the interest rate on their borrowings. This is due to a lot of factors — but primarily, it has to do with the health of the concerned commercial bank.

Over the past few years, almost all banks, especially the ones in the public sector, have

seen their profits plummet because many of their past loans have turned out to be non-performing assets (in other words, they are not getting repaid). To cover for these losses, the banks have to use their existing funds, which would have otherwise gone to common consumers for fresh loans.

There is another key element that affects the banks' decision. The reduced repo rate applies only to new borrowings of banks. The banks' cost of existing funds is higher. Of

course, funding costs would eventually come down — but this process would take time. This "lag" in monetary policy is a key variable in determining the efficacy of any rate cut by the RBI. It could take anywhere between 9 and 18 months for the full effect of an RBI decision to reflect in interest rates across the economy.

So, how does RBI decide the interest rate?

Any central bank has a few main concerns. The first is to ensure price stability in the economy. Think of how chaotic life would be if there was no predictability about the prices of everyday items. The interest rate anchors the prices in an economy. The RBI continuously maps prices, inflation (which is the rate of increase in prices), and expectations of inflation (of households) to decide if it should increase or decrease interest rates.

For instance, the RBI announced some years ago that it would like the inflation rate to be 4%. So, every time the retail inflation rate rises above the 4% mark, the RBI realises that there is too much cash chasing too few goods in the economy. To set the matter right, it raises the cost of money — that is, the interest rate. When it does that, some people find it more advisable to put the cash out of the market and into banks. This way, inflation falls. The reverse process applies when the inflation is below the 4% mark.

The other related concern for a central bank is to take care of economic growth. For instance, economic growth is anaemic at present (see charts), and partly as a consequence, the inflation rate has been below 4% for several months now. The RBI is, therefore, cutting interest rates to incentivise people to consume more and businesses to invest more.

Will the rate cut bring investments?

Investments depend essentially on the "real" interest rate. The real interest rate is the difference between the repo rate and retail inflation. When making an investment decision, it is this interest rate that matters. As a variable, it allows an investor to compare the attractiveness of different economies. As can be seen in the third chart, real interest rates in India have been rising, and that is one of the biggest reasons why investments are not happening. The RBI's move on Wednesday would reduce the real interest rate and hopefully attract more investment.

How Rajasthan, MP propose to check lynching

MILIND GHATWAI & HAMZA KHAN
BHOPAL, JAIPUR, AUGUST 7

ON MONDAY, the Rajasthan Assembly passed a new law against mob lynching. Another Congress government, in Madhya Pradesh, recently introduced a Bill that seeks to curb cow vigilantism. The State Law Commission in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, meanwhile, has drafted the UP Combating of Mob Lynching Bill, 2019, and submitted it to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

What is different

While the Rajasthan law and the UP draft are new, the proposed law in MP is an amendment to the existing Madhya Pradesh Govansh Vadh Pratishedh Act, 2004, which is against cow slaughter. The amendments propose a jail term and a fine for those who attack, or damage property of, people booked, or likely to be booked, for offences like slaughter of cow progeny, possession of beef or transporting

cow progeny for slaughter. These moves follow the Supreme Court's directions to Parliament last year, in the wake of a series of lynching incidents, to come up with a special law. The Bench directed the Centre and states to carry out its directions within four weeks. The Centre informed Lok Sabha that it had created a Group of Ministers and a high-level committee to "deliberate" and "make recommendations" for a separate penal provision for mob violence.

Rajasthan Bill

The Rajasthan Protection from Lynching Bill, 2019 makes mob lynching a cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable offence punishable with life imprisonment and a fine up to Rs 5 lakh. It defines lynching as "any act or series of acts of violence or aiding, abetting or attempting an act of violence, whether spontaneous or planned, by a mob on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation, ethnicity".

Offences will be investigated by a police officer of the rank of inspector and above, and the DGP will appoint an officer of the rank of IG or above as State Coordinator. In cases of "hurt" and "grievous hurt", the convict may get up to seven and 10 years in jail respectively; if it leads to death, the punishment is life imprisonment. The Bill also makes conspirators accountable.

Rajasthan had witnessed a number of lynchings in 2017, beginning with that of dairy farmer Pehlu Khan in April 2017.

Madhya Pradesh Bill

The Bill seeks to amend Sub-section (2) of Section 9 of the 2004 Act and propose a minimum jail term of six months that may be extended to one year. When the same offence is committed by members of illegal assembly (mob) the minimum term will increase to one year and the maximum to five years. The Bill proposes a lower term for those who abet and those who attempt to commit the crime. The punishment will dou-

ble in case of those convicted for an offence they were previously convicted of. The minimum fine is Rs 5,000 and the maximum Rs 50,000. The Bill seeks to insert Section 6D. While the rules are yet to be formed, these will specify who issues the transit permit of cow progeny, which will be pasted prominently on the vehicle. There is no provision in the 2004 legislation for issuing transit permit from other states.

What next in MP

Following the BJP's demand, the Assembly Speaker has agreed to refer the Bill to a Select Committee. The BJP has opposed the Bill, accusing the Congress of appeasement politics. The BJP says provisions already exist in the IPC to punish such offences. "Instead of bringing a separate law against mob lynching as recommended by the Supreme Court, the government has brought a law to protect those who slaughter cows," alleged former Home Minister Bhupendra Singh.

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

How forces are tackling Maoists in Chhattisgarh, what challenges remain



R K Vij

SEVEN MAOISTS were killed in an encounter with the Chhattisgarh Police on August 3; a week previously, on July 27, another seven had been killed in Machkot in Bastar. While security forces have made continuous inroads, the Central Committee of the CPI (Maoist) has repeatedly admitted in various reports and meetings that their base area has shrunk, fresh recruitment almost dried up, and desertions increased.

Traditionally, the monsoon has been considered a lean period in the conflict. What explains the recent police successes in Chhattisgarh?

Though anti-Maoist operations do get restricted by various seasonal factors, these

continue to be launched if there is actionable intelligence of Maoist movement. Further, security forces have learnt to overcome many impediments. Use of satellite technology helps in keeping track of jawans' movement from any location, and the target can be identified with more clarity. Therefore, irrespective of the monsoon in full swing at both Machkot and Sitagota-Sherpar jungles, the police with convincing intelligence were able to launch operational teams and emerge successful.

Of late, local police in the form of DRG (District Reserve Guard) have been more and more successful in countering Left Wing Extremism (LWE). What has made this possible?

State police, with the support of specialised training institutes (CTJW College, Kanker and four CIAT Schools), have built up capacity and raised specialised forces. The Centre, besides helping the state strengthen training capacity and capabilities, is also providing financial support to strengthen the specialised wings of STF (Special Task Force) and SIB (State Intelligence Bureau).

The two STF battalions are capable of

countering Maoists' 'main force' which chiefly consists of military Battalion No. 1 and is active in south Bastar. DRGs have been constituted in many districts with local policemen of affected areas. Their natural instincts have been supplemented with professional ethos from the Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School of Vairengte, Mizoram. While both STF and DRG played a pivotal role in the Machkot encounter, DRG of Rajnandgaon with able leadership led the August 3 operation.

The August 3 encounter was in the proposed 'MMC Zone', described in a 25-page Maoist document and reported by The Indian Express in 2017. What is the nature of the threat?

The CPI (Maoist), following a decision taken in the 2014 Central Regional Bureau (CRB) meeting, is trying to develop the new MMC Zone. This is where Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh meet. Maoists intend to create an entity like the Dandakaranya (DK) Special Zonal Committee in Bastar. This area is predominately tribal, forested and hilly and suitable for guerrilla warfare. It is also contiguous to the North

Gadchiroli Maoist Division of the DK. Except for a few, most of the cadres in the MMC Zone were transferred there from Bastar.

The state governments took proactive steps by deploying additional resources and are trying their best to check Maoists' expansion. In Chhattisgarh, many new police stations and security camps have been established. The SP, Kabirdham, organised a number of awareness campaigns in remote areas which are most vulnerable to Maoist influence. He made arrangements for villagers' training and facilitated government employment for hundreds. The administration has taken steps to expedite developmental work. Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra too have intensified anti-Maoist operations in these areas. Though the Maoists are yet to find their roots here, the efforts need to be continued. The Darrekasa Area Committee of the Gadchiroli-Rajnandgaon-Balaghat (GRB) Division of MMC was almost wiped out on August 3.

Despite the two recent successful encounters, don't Maoists retain the ability to strike back soon after suffering a major setback?

If we analyse the pattern, most such attacks have taken place during the 'Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign' (TCOC) period which generally extends from February-March to May-June each year. During this TCOC period, most of their field formations (political as well as military) join together to form area or division command and launch major attacks. The security forces therefore need to be extra vigilant during this TCOC period.

What is the best way to fight IEDs?

One way to avoid destruction and casualties caused by IEDs is to ensure that these are successfully detected through visual surveillance or using technical gadgets and defused in time. Second, a road opening party may dominate the surrounding area thoroughly enough to make certain that no suspicious elements are hiding around to trigger IEDs. Third, law-enforcement agencies can crack down on miscreants who supply explosive substances to the Maoists. Fourth, explosive substances and most importantly detonators can be made identifiable at the production stage using a unique number for identification. However, all

these measures have their limitations.

What is the way forward for security forces here on?

Though Maoists have weakened in DK, Odisha State Committee and other zones, and their expansionist policy is under check, security forces cannot afford to ignore their protracted war strategy. The mobile war (capability to attack at will in base areas and escape unscathed) has to be reversed and the areas of security vacuum (where there is no presence of the security forces) plugged. Better technologies are required to detect and defuse IEDs. Security forces also need to learn from previous tactical errors and adhere to time-proven SOPs. The information network should improve with better road and telecom connectivity in far-flung areas. Surrender and rehabilitation policies must be implemented.

R K Vij is Special DGP, Chhattisgarh. He was formerly the state's Additional DGP, anti-Maoist operations.

A more detailed explanation on www.indianexpress.com



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Now, win the peace

In Kashmir, there is a weariness with the old. If the new is rung in, Article 370 could become a fading memory



TAVLEEN SINGH

A DEAR LEADER

Sushma Swaraj played many roles and made them all her own, with dignity and grace

SUSHMA SWARAJ, WHO passed away on Tuesday, aged 67, was one of the most popular leaders of the BJP, who left a mark as both politician and administrator. She entered public life early — after working as a lawyer for socialist leader George Fernandes during the Emergency — and was pitchforked into a leadership role when she was just 25. When the Janata Party disintegrated in the late 1970s, the young minister in the Janata ministry in Haryana, preferred the BJP to the Janata variants of socialist and social justice politics. She rose to prominence quickly in the BJP thanks to her people-skills and powerful oratory, at a time when there were few women in the party leadership.

Mentored by BJP patriarchs, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani, she imbibed their finest qualities, including and especially tolerance and civility towards critics and political opponents. She followed the party discipline, always defending the party line to the best of her abilities and taking on responsibilities that the party entrusted her with, even against enormous odds. The BJP turned to her, for instance, to rescue a slipping government in Delhi in 1998 and to fight a losing battle against a resurgent Congress under Sheila Dikshit. She contested against Sonia Gandhi in 1999 from the Congress stronghold of Bellary. She lost both challenges, but she ensured that her party lost honourably. These contests and the frequent cross-country campaigns turned Swaraj into a national leader and a politician who rose above the office she occupied. She, arguably, had become the most prominent leader on the BJP's then famed second rung, before Narendra Modi made his presence felt on the national stage. Her tenure as foreign minister in the first Modi government was distinguished by her attempts to transform a ministry generally seen as haughty and aloof, into a friend of ordinary Indian citizens, especially the blue collar workers in the Gulf region. She recognised the influence of social media and used it remarkably well to distinguish herself as a minister, even as foreign policy increasingly became the preserve of the prime minister's office.

The ability to reinvent the roles assigned to her served Swaraj well in her political career. In a party of patriarchal features and conservative frameworks, she positioned herself as the Bharatiya naari who could also play a role in public life with confidence and ease. Indeed, her image helped her connect with a cross-section of people, including conservatives. It is a tribute to her poise and dignity that, in these polarised times, she will be missed and remembered by people across party lines and political divides.

CUT TO REFORM

RBI cuts interest rate. But monetary policy alone cannot arrest the economic slowdown

ON WEDNESDAY, THE Monetary Policy Committee of the RBI cut the benchmark repo rate by 35 basis points to 5.4 per cent. Since February, when the rate cut cycle began, the MPC has cut rates by a cumulative 110 bps — a clear indication of growing concerns over the slowdown in economic activity. Tellingly, the RBI has also cut its growth projections for the first half of the current year to 5.8-6.6 per cent, from its earlier projection of 6.4-6.7 per cent — signaling the uncertainty around the economy. For the full year, the RBI now expects the economy to grow at 6.9 per cent, down from its February forecast of 7.4 per cent. With retail inflation expected to remain well within the MPC's target over the coming 12 months, it creates the space for further bringing down real interest rates if growth disappoints.

So far, the lack of transmission of successive rate cuts to the broader economy has been a source of concern. As the MPC notes, banks have reduced their lending rates (weighted average) by 29 bps so far (February to June) in response to cuts of 75 bps during this period. But transmission is likely to improve in the coming quarters. A large portion of bank deposits are of short term maturity. As these deposits get re-priced, it will lower banks' cost of funds, making it easier to cut lending rates. Keeping liquidity in line with the monetary policy stance — ensuring substantial liquidity surplus — and lowering small savings rates will further aid transmission. But will risk averse banks step up lending? Will lower interest rates boost investment and private consumption? At the current juncture, there may be little incentive for corporates, who are currently in the midst of deleveraging, to embark on fresh investments. There is still slack in the system. And corporates may opt for brownfield projects currently going through the resolution process. Reviving investments may thus require a more coordinated policy approach.

Other measures announced by the RBI, such as lowering risk weightage for retail lending and increasing flow of funds to NBFCs, suggest a concerted effort to boost consumption. Recent measures to address NBFC issues will also help gradually bring down credit risk, improving credit flow to the larger economy. If the revised growth estimates are not met — achieving even the 6.9 per cent target may be difficult — it will open up space for further cuts. But monetary policy cannot alone do the heavy lifting. It needs to be supplemented with reforms aimed at spurring growth.

DEARLY BELOVED

Posterity will remember Toni Morrison as a polyphonic poet who wrote in prose

TONI MORRISON, the foremost literary voice of Black America, has died aged 88 in the Bronx. No, these metrics are inappropriate for such a writer, with a voice as seductive as lucid dreams and as electrifying as distant thunder. Let's try again: Toni Morrison, political novelist, essayist, literary editor, professor emeritus at Princeton, Nobel laureate, Pulitzer Prize winner and single parent of two sons, has died in New York after writing about a dozen novels, two plays and a libretto, five children's books and essays too numerous to list. That's the true account of a literary life well lived.

Morrison published her first book, *The Bluest Eye*, aged 39 in 1970, and wrote on stolen time for years, juggling her responsibilities as an editor and parent, until she gained critical and popular acclaim with *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981) and *Beloved* (1987). It is a rare achievement to score on both registers. Writers of enduring literary value do not generally populate the New York Times bestseller list for decades on end, or get to be a favourite on Oprah's show.

Morrison had hailed Bill Clinton as the first Black president of the US, despite the colour of his skin, because he was presumed guilty until proven innocent. The facts betrayed her in that messy matter, but undeterred, she attended the inauguration of Barack Obama, the first real African-American president, with childlike happiness. Now, Obama has paid tribute, calling her a "national treasure". Hillary Clinton remembers her as a "queen", and Morrison is being mourned the world over. Her work spoke of inequality everywhere, and readers worldwide will remember her not primarily as a Black writer, but as the poet singing of the despair and the wonder of everyday life in an unfair world, who happened to write in prose.

A PALL OF despair hung over Srinagar when I was there in May just days before the election results. It should have been high season with houseboats and hotels bursting with visitors, pleasure boats on the Dal Lake and shops filled with the noise of eager shoppers. Instead, on this perfect summer's day, the city was empty.

And, there was a tension. I felt it even before landing. For the first time in the many times that I have flown into Srinagar, I was ordered by a nervous Vistara flight attendant to pull the window shades down as we landed. She pulled them down for me but I had already seen why. From the air, the airport looks like a military base. Not even at the height of the militancy in the Nineties have I seen it so militarised. On the drive into the city, I noticed that shops on the airport road have been screened off by a thick metal net so they looked as if they were caged.

I drove through eerily empty streets to the hotel in which I was staying and found it almost empty. When I asked why, since this was high season, I was told by the hotel manager that people had stopped coming after the Pulwama attack. Before that, he said, there were so many tourists in Srinagar that it was hard to find an empty hotel room or houseboat. Later that day, I met friends and political leaders and everyone confirmed that it was the Pulwama attack and the Balakot strike that had driven visitors away. What saddened me most was that every taxi driver I hired asked if I could find his son a job. The story they told was the same. "I have spent whatever I earned on my son's computer course but there are no jobs. He sits at home all day with nothing to do." So, another lost season is something Srinagar can ill afford.

This was my first visit back since Burhan Wani was killed. The reason why I did not go back, frankly, was because I lost sympathy with Kashmiris when they fell under the thrall of a young man who was so openly a jihadist and whose cause was religious and not political. After Wani was killed, I watched carefully the recruitment videos he posted of himself in military fatigues with other young men in similar uniform carrying automatic weapons. In these videos, this commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen made it absolutely clear that the single purpose of his

armed struggle was to turn Kashmir into an Islamic state. I have no sympathy for religious causes. And so, stayed away from Srinagar in those long, horrible months when children and masked men took to the streets to throw stones at our security personnel.

If they had done this for a political cause, I would have gone back to understand it better. I sympathised so completely with the political reasons for Kashmiris to be angry with Delhi that I wrote a book on their struggle for basic democratic rights. It came out in 1995 and was called *Kashmir: a tragedy of errors*. The case that I made in this book was that the insurgency that became manifest with the kidnapping of Mehbooba Mufti's sister in December 1989 had nothing to do with the historical problem in Kashmir. The historical problem died, in my view, in the Seventies when Bangladesh was created and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto hanged. Pakistan lost its allure for most Kashmiris. The seal on the end of the historical problem was the peace pact that Indira Gandhi signed with Sheikh Abdullah in 1975. Sadly, it was Mrs Gandhi's crucial mistake in 1984 that created Kashmir's current political problem.

My first visit to Srinagar as a reporter was in the summer of 1981 when Sheikh Abdullah made his son Farooq his heir. It was the only time I met the old Sheikh. I did not get a chance to interview him but stood beside him on a hotel balcony in Lal Chowk from where he watched his son standing in an open truck in a procession so huge it seemed that all of Kashmir had come to Srinagar. The procession culminated in Iqbal Park, where the Sheikh declared to thunderous applause from the vast gathering that Farooq would be his heir. I still remember his words. "The crown I place on your head Farooq Abdullah is a crown of thorns."

Sheikh Abdullah died just months later and in 1983, I was sent to cover this election by M J Akbar who was then editor of *The Telegraph*. It was the first election I covered on my own so I made it a point to travel to every constituency except, for some reason, Uri. Everywhere, people said they were voting as Indians for the first time. And, voting for the National Conference. They seemed to believe they owed Sheikh Abdullah their vote. So Farooq won in a completely fair elec-

tion but this was not how it was reported in the national press.

The reporters who came from Delhi spent most of their time in the Congress Party office in Nedou's Hotel in Srinagar. If they traveled at all, they went to Congress meetings and the impression they created in the national newspapers was that Congress would do well. They fooled Mrs Gandhi. So she got rid of Farooq Abdullah's government in the summer of 1984.

Farooq became a hero. He would have won again easily if he had not been forced into an alliance with Congress in the election that came in 1987. The alliance was a mistake because the opposition space came to be occupied by the Muslim United Front whose candidates believed they lost unfairly. Many were secessionists. Now, they crossed into Pakistan for help and came back as armed insurgents. The militancy began and Delhi's mistakes continued. In the Eighties and Nineties, I went to Srinagar almost every month. I was there when the Pandits were driven out, when violent jihadists forced cinemas and bars to close and saw first hand how the movement for "azadi" became a jihad.

When Narendra Modi became prime minister in 2014, he could have started with a clean slate. But, he seemed undecided about whether to use the jackboot or turn to Atal Bihari Vajpayee's formula of 'insaniyat, jamhooriyat, kashmiriyat'. Now, it appears that he had a plan all along and it was to get rid of Kashmir's special status. Will this turn out to be yet another mistake? Personally, I believe that it could prevent Kashmir from becoming the Islamic state that the jihadist groups dream of. But, Modi will have to have a strategy ready to win the peace now that he seems to have won the war.

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When I was last in Srinagar, I noticed a real weariness with the jihadists. I noticed a real longing for peace and prosperity, and among young men, for jobs. If these things happen it will not be long before Kashmiris lose interest in Article 370. The special status that it supposedly guaranteed was in any case eroded long ago.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



KHALED AHMED

INDIA'S REVOKING OF Articles 370 and 35A to absorb the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir into the Union was not liked by anyone across the world. The most effective objection came from India's own secularists and liberals who took note of the rise of Hindutva under the BJP government as destructive of the very foundation of India. The main cause of worry for most writers was the possibility of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

Pakistan reacted passionately but much of this passion was "political" as the Opposition attacked the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan, rather than India. Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa said his army would stand by the government in power, and by the people of Kashmir. Imran Khan convened a joint session of parliament and made a bold statement telling India that if war was to ensue it would be a nuclear war and that "Pakistan was ready for it" — for the rights of the Kashmiris. But the Opposition, mainly the PML(N) of Nawaz Sharif and the PPP of Bilawal Bhutto, was not prepared to give him relief. They attacked him for coming late to the session — as if he didn't care that the Kashmiris were suffering — and castigated him for the absence of his foreign minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

PM Khan doesn't grace the parliament too often because of the bad blood between him and the Opposition leaders. When the pro-

SELF FLAGELLATION IN PAKISTAN

Abrogation of Articles 370, 35A has sparked passionate reaction across the border

ceedings started, everything the government benches did was rejected. Khan was uncomfortable and would have left the house, as is his wont, had the occasion not been serious in the eyes of his public following. He once threw up his hands and said, "What would you have me do, attack India?"

On the TV channels it was sheer national self-flagellation. Everyone in the streets who was asked to speak, simply wanted a war in which the Hindus were to be taught a lesson. The common man simply repeated the nationalist mantra of hatred — the same way the supporters of the BJP do in the streets of India. Opposition leaders appearing on TV were anti-government to the extreme. The PML(N) politicians, whose leader Nawaz Sharif had once welcomed the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Lahore and later welcomed Prime Minister Modi too, now cursed Khan for having welcomed Modi before he had even been elected.

Imran Khan had then said: "Perhaps if the BJP — a right-wing party — wins, some kind of settlement in Kashmir could be reached". Now the PML(N) was not ready to forgive him. Today, these words were held against him by politicians more interested in ousting the Pakistan government than ousting India from Kashmir. The world outside didn't like what transpired as expressed by *The New York Times* editorial: "The Indian govern-

ment's decision to revoke the semi-autonomous status of Kashmir, accompanied by a huge security clampdown, is dangerous and wrong". Outrageously, the "Arab friends" were unmoved.

Everyone cursed the government for not actively pursuing the UN Security Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation — as if all these organisations were actually groups of men sitting in a room with doors locked which the government of Pakistan was supposed to simply break down, and tell the shirkers to do the needful to teach India a lesson. Alas, Pakistan's non-state actors were nowhere to be seen, removed from the battlefield by an international opinion more worried about their global outreach than the Muslims of Kashmir. The outrage over the statement of the ambassador of the UAE, that it was an internal matter of India, was muffled because most of the remittances come from the Pakistanis working there. As realism slowly dawns, Prime Minister Khan should stick to his earlier perception that he could make a deal with the BJP and make that telephone call which was rebuffed earlier. Perhaps, this time, Prime Minister Modi will pick up.

The writer is consulting editor, *Newsweek Pakistan*



AUGUST 8, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

JANATA SEEKS SUPPORT
JANATA PARTY PRESIDENT Chandra Shekhar made a "special appeal" to the CPM, AIADMK and Akali Dal to revise their neutral stand and extend their "solid support" to his party. Describing these parties, which have a combined strength of 48 in the Lok Sabha, as "our allies", Chandra Shekhar said if necessary, he would write to the leaders of these parties and also meet them. Talking to reporters, Chandra Shekhar said these parties had solidly supported the Janata Party in the past. He was willing to sit with them and sort out any problem which came in the way of their renewal of support. Chandra Shekhar asserted that his party had nothing to do with

the RSS: He declared that the party would strictly enforce the decision taken by its national executive barring its members from joining any organisation which believed in the concept of a theocratic state.

POLICY CHANGE

THE CHARAN SINGH government is planning big changes in industrial policy. Restrictions will be removed and licensing procedures eased in an effort to boost production. In an interview, T A Pai, minister of petroleum and chemicals, told this correspondent, "The government must show that it means business." Pai said that the new policies would involve: Reduction of controls on

industrial production; removal of restrictions on the growth of large industrial houses; and withdrawal of the penalties on industrial production in excess of installed capacities.

NEW VICE-PRESIDENT

FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE, M Hidayatullah, will be the next vice-president, but a formal announcement will be made by the returning officer, S S Bhale Rao, at 3 p.m on August 9 when the deadline for withdrawal of candidates expires. Bhale Rao rejected the papers of the remaining 10 candidates as they were not in order. Hidayatullah, who will be the country's sixth vice-president, will assume office on August 31.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

A protege's tribute

Sushma Swaraj was a leader of courage and stature, an original thinker and doer



S Y QURAISHI

MY ASSOCIATION WITH Sushma Swaraj goes back to 1977, when after the end of the Emergency, she became an MLA of the Janata Party and was made minister for cultural affairs by Chaudhary Devi Lal, becoming the youngest ever minister in the country at 25. I was the director in the ministry. She exuded warmth and trust and started addressing me affectionately by my first name Yaqoob, my being six years older than her notwithstanding.

I was newly married then and she became very affectionate towards my wife, a budding journalist, as well. She granted her an interview for the last page of *Sunday* magazine — a first for both of them!

Her positivity and my enthusiasm ensured that an otherwise lacklustre and nondescript department performed exceptionally well. A film star night by Sunil Dutt's troupe at Ambala for social causes was organised. Sushmaji decided that no one would be given free passes. The only two persons who complied were Sushmaji and I. I had to leave my wife of three months at home, which she probably begrudged me but never complained! A national award — Sangeet Martand — to Pandit Jasraj of Sirsa with a prize money of Rs 1 lakh, a princely sum at that time, was another landmark. A Haryana *swang* (a folk theatre form) workshop with Habib Tanvir and another with Balwant Gargi resulted in legendary productions which were sent to border areas to entertain our jawans for years thereafter.

Even after we moved on to different ministries, our association continued though there was increasing acrimony between my wife and her. But she never allowed my wife's hostile writings against her and her party to affect her relations with me. She always said we are different individuals and even defended my wife's freedom of expression.

In 2001, out of the blue, I got a call from Sushmaji saying that she wanted me to come to her ministry, Information and Broadcasting, as Director-General Doordarshan. I was then posted as principal secretary to the chief minister of Haryana, O P Chautala. The post was considered the most powerful in the state. I thought it would be awkward to request him to relieve me of this job as he would consider me an ungrateful rascal. I therefore requested Sushmaji to speak to Chautala herself, which she promptly refused to do, saying, "Yaqoob, you know very well that your CM is hostile to me as I had opposed my party's alliance with his." On my persuasion, she kindly agreed to call him and the conversation I heard is best forgotten. I learnt quite a few original Haryanvi invectives. The politest refrain being "you want to ruin me by taking away my principal secretary".

A few days later she again called me asking if I could use some other influence to get my name forwarded to Delhi. Surely there were many in the CM's secretariat who would be happy to push me out. I decided to use their "good" offices. And it worked.

When the news about my appointment as DG DD spread, she faced a barrage of attacks from BJP leaders, including very senior ones, for appointing a Muslim to such a sensitive post, one with an anti-BJP wife to boot. Only a leader of her stature and backbone could have withstood the pressure. The complimentary words of faith and trust she used for me have always moved me. It transpired



CR Sasikumar

that the attack on me and her defence of me was a regular feature. She was so cultured that she didn't even mention these conversations to me and I got to hear of them from her staff.

At DD, she gave me a free hand especially as I was the first direct recruit for Prasar Bharati and she extended her full support to all my initiatives. The introduction of DD Bharati, a unique channel for women, children and culture, within a month of my joining set the tone. DD India, narrowcasting (local broadcasting from our TV towers) and later setting up of DD Archives on the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas were some of the other milestones possible with her support.

One not so fine day, she was abruptly moved out of I&B to the Ministry of Health because of party infighting. I was the next target. Many people suggested that I am being moved out for being a Muslim, which I did not countenance. My belief was that my being considered a protege of Sushma Swaraj was the real reason. Being labelled a "protege" of a great leader like her is a matter of pride for me.

Sushmaji was an original thinker and

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doer par excellence. One of her achievements I can never forget was to declare film production as an industry, a demand that had been rejected for decades. In one stroke, she killed the phenomenon of the underworld financing in the film industry as it became bankable. Has any one heard the name Haji Mastan ever since?

My last meeting with her was on June 13 when I went to her home to inquire about her health. Rumours were rife that she had been "dropped". I inquired why she had chosen to withdraw from active electoral life. She said that ever since her kidney transplant, she was advised by her doctors to keep away from two things — dust and human physical contact. She said with a constituency which spread over 100 kilometres, and millions of constituents and friends, this was impossible. I had not seen her so happy in a long time. She was glowing. Who knew that this was the proverbial last flicker of a dying flame.

Ma'am, I love you.

The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner of India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The BJP's reckless and dangerous move to revoke the special status of India-held Kashmir as enshrined in the Indian constitution has raised the threat of turmoil in the subcontinent to significant levels." — DAWN

Not by cuts alone

Repo rate cut will help lower borrowing costs, but growth revival will require a coordinated policy response



SAUGATA BHATTACHARYA

THE MONETARY POLICY Committee (MPC) surprised us by cutting the policy repo rate by a higher than expected 0.35 percentage points, taking the policy repo rate down to 5.40 per cent, the fourth cut since February. The decision to cut the repo rate was unanimous, but two of the six MPC members voted to cut the rate by a lower 0.25 percentage points. The accommodative stance was retained.

There are three questions on the effect of the rate cuts. First, how much more room now exists for further rate cuts? Commentaries highlight the need to close the "output gap" — current activity being considered weaker than the economy's potential. Addressing growth concerns "assumes the highest priority at this juncture," it has been pointed out.

The global environment is partially responsible for this. The current theme is of synchronised rate cuts by central banks in both developed and emerging markets. Trade-related uncertainties, slowing investment and weak sentiment is resulting in a steady global growth deceleration and progressive weakening of sentiment, one reinforcing the other. Inflation has remained steady and low, and diffusing out from developed economies. Even some emerging markets are indicating that policy actions are now required to support not just growth, but also inflation. Other than the US Federal Reserve, Brazil cut its policy rate by a non-standard 0.5 percentage points, followed by New Zealand and the Bank of Thailand.

The RBI cut its FY20 India growth forecast from the earlier 7 per cent to 6.9 per cent with slight "downside risks". The inflation forecast was kept more or less at the earlier level, averaging approximate 3.4-3.5 per cent for the year. Most monthly indicators of economic activity corroborate this, showing a deceleration across sectors. Capacity utilisation in the manufacturing segment in the January to March quarter of FY19, when seasonally adjusted, slipped from the earlier quarter. Early results of companies in the April-June quarter of FY20 show a slowdown in sales and profit growth. Of greater concern is a perceived weakness in both consumer and investment sentiment, with a changed perception of risk. For whatever reason, either employment uncertainty or a fall in disposable, discretionary incomes, consumption seems to be getting pushed back. MSMEs, an important job creation engine, have been adversely impacted by the loan squeeze from NBFCs — the second line of lenders which had increasingly become an important source of credit. MSMEs' ability to absorb shocks seem to have shrunk, and this is also impacting supply chains in some sectors.

A set of signals of future expectations is provided by responses to surveys of businesses and households, conducted by the RBI and other independent organisations. While the RBI Business Assessment Index improved marginally, production and order

books slowed. The Business Inflation Expectation Survey for June, conducted independently, reports that three-fourth of the respondents say that sales are "less than normal". Given this growth-inflation trade-off, the current real repo rate (that is repo rate minus inflation) still looks relatively high.

The second issue is the transmission of MPC repo rate cuts to lending rates and, that is, operationalisation of the monetary policy signals into lower borrowing costs, particularly for households and small businesses. The cumulative rate cuts, together with durable liquidity infusion by the RBI through open market operations and foreign exchange swaps, has already led to a progressive reduction in banks' benchmark lending rates (the MCLR) to which all bank loans — corporate, home, auto — are linked. This is likely to accelerate. Banking sector liquidity has been in surplus for the past month and funds for banks are likely to be less costly than in FY19.

However, adequate system liquidity in itself will not be enough to incentivise flows of funds to certain perceived vulnerable sectors of the economy, given risk perceptions and information asymmetry. The RBI and other regulators have initiated a series of measures to mitigate the credit squeeze, judiciously using relaxations of micro prudential norms to ease the bottlenecks. These include, among others, liquidity coverage ratio requirements, lower risk weights, exposure caps, asset securitisation restrictions, and liquidity backstops to the partial credit enhancement announced by the government. Gradually, these will get traction and is evident in the higher flow of bank credit to NBFCs in June.

The third aspect of the stimulus is the likely response of consumption and investment to the lower borrowing costs. The magnitude of this response will depend on the genesis and nature of the slowdown. While the proximate reasons are likely to be cyclical, influenced by the global economy, there are some underlying structural shifts. A combination of reforms and regulatory changes (actually much needed), overlaid with the effects of technological changes on consumer behaviour, seems to have adversely affected confidence. The median age of car buyers, for instance, seems to be rising. Rising sales of second-hand vehicles might be cannibalising new car sales.

If this hypothesis is correct (and certainly seems heuristically feasible), lower borrowing costs will have positive effects but are unlikely to provide a large boost to either consumption or investment. This means that reviving investor sentiment and thereby capital expenditure will require a broader, more coordinated approach to a stimulus package, combining fiscal, tax, industry, trade and other levers. Remedial measures have already been initiated by both the Centre and state governments. Sector specific impediment are being identified and sought to be mitigated. But it will take some time before their effects are evident.

The good news? Global environment will be conducive to India's policy efforts, the expected continuing weakness in economic activity keeping metals and commodities prices moderate. Going forward, monetary policy will probably be data and event dependent, with stable inflation creating more space for the RBI for further rate cuts.

The writer is senior vice president, business and economic research, Axis Bank. Views are personal



YOGINDER K ALAGH

Allocations are key

Economic policy needs to finetune its focus. It needs fewer lectures on reform

FOR THE UNION Budget, two priorities were important in the second quarter of the year. The first was to finance a credible package of relief and recovery after a bad monsoon from the angle of drinking water and sowing. The second was to revive investment. The Economic Survey and budget speech were expected, as in the past, to reflect thinking on critical issues and not score brownie points.

For example, the PM's Economic Advisory Council has rightly said that Arvind Subramanian's critique of changes in the GDP are silly, since estimating a relationship between GDP and some variables in the past misses the point that productivity is rising. But more serious critiques, like those of the expert group under Sudepto Mundle and past members of the Statistical Commission, have been ignored. An assurance from the JNU-trained finance minister that institutional integrity in the statistical and IMD systems will be respected would have been welcome. While everybody got something to latch on to, her views on the real priorities are awaited.

Rural distress is real. Drinking water, improving the efficiency of existing irrigation systems, rural finance — including temporary waiver of loan repayments — need funds, which the affected states don't have. The priorities stated in the Niti Aayog's council meeting are correct. But it doesn't have allocation powers. The budget was expected to provide funds and an assurance that the allocations would be rule based. This will have to come before the supplementary allocations in November.

Meanwhile, job creation will depend on the revival of industrial production, continuing growth of exports and an agricultural revival. But most policies have a lag of around four to six months. In the short run, more money will be needed for the MGNREGA. These allocations should have been in the FM's speech. The budget should concretely raise public investment to revive private investment to reverse the declining growth rate in every quarter.

The fiscal deficit is a real issue and leads to pressures on the bank rate and exchange rates. The suggestion is to raise resources by taxation and not to play to the gallery by not cutting consumption by the government and

non-government sectors. There are no free lunches and the FM knows that. She must send out that stern message. At least in the first post-election year, we have to be honest. There is little scope for the concessions demanded by industry groups, but a rationalisation of tax structures and reduction of slabs in GST are possible.

The clean up of the banking and NBFC sectors should be honest and that needs funds. These are outside the budget, but determine the fiscal deficit. So, the flow of funds in the budget papers must honestly reflect that.

The heart of economic policy in the short run is to give fewer lectures on reform but to raise government investment at the central, state and parastatal level. The economy is suffering from the decline in investment ratios, which explain the declining growth rate, which itself is below the potential of 8 per cent or so. This budget will be judged on that. Gujarat's experience conclusively shows that a high enough manufacturing physical output growth rate reduces the work force dependent on agriculture. Even with an employment elasticity of 0.25, with a 12 per cent growth in IIP, employment rises

by 3 per cent, which is double the work force growth rate.

The allocation for self help groups with a trust fund is a clear solution to an important problem. The wish is for the same clarity with everything else. And the pressure on the economy will only grow.

Many moons ago, in salubrious Bali, I was invited by Bank Indonesia, the World Bank and IMF to talk on the demographic dividend in Bharat Varsha, from where the Balinese got their non-vegetarian Hindu gods. India has a young population, I showed, and its retiree-worker ratio will be low. But will the young worker be a dividend? If she goes to college, marries late, the first child comes later, the last one earlier — the real dividend starts. But the last round of the NSS data shows she dropped out of school more than earlier. The budget did not go into it, but somebody should. We need to take girls in rath yatra to school. We did it in Gujarat. Why not elsewhere? We need some more money before November.

The writer, an economist, is a former Union minister

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RIP SUSHMA

THIS REFERS TO the obituary, 'Foreign Minister, most accessible' (IE, August 7). The youngest Cabinet Minister in Haryana at the age of 25 years, first woman chief minister of Delhi, first women spokesperson for any national party, first women Leader of Opposition in Parliament, Sushma Swaraj has many firsts to her credit. As Minister for External Affairs, she was always helpful to distressed Indians who reached out to her and even helped some Pakistanis who wanted to get medical treatment in India. She was instrumental in resolving the Doklam crisis with China. Swaraj was the most humane external affairs minister.

Bal Govind, Noida

BOLD AND BRAZEN

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Unlock the valley' (IE, August 7). Though the Centre has taken a bold step in reorganising Jammu and Kashmir through the bifurcation of the state, it has also resorted to a slew of authoritarian practices. Cutting phone lines, internet connections of the people of the state and putting leaders Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti and Sajjad Lone behind the bars are undemocratic steps. The right to freedom of speech must not be curtailed under any circumstances.

Sanjay Chawla, Amritsar

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.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

CHANGE FOR BETTER

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Un-belonging' (IE, August 7). There is indeed a drastic change in the mentality of the people of India. It is difficult to say if this is because of the "Narendra Modi effect" or something else but it has taken India towards positivity. Let's be a part of this wonderful journey.

Vihaan Gupta, Ujjain



Blackout

Dissent does not have to invite measures aimed at throttling information flow

Jammu and Kashmir remains entirely cut off, ironically, as part of the efforts at effecting its "complete integration" with the rest of the country. Rightly or wrongly, the BJP government at the Centre in its wisdom thought that annulling the special status accorded to J&K in the Constitution and demoting and dividing it into two Union Territories were essential steps towards national integration. Information flow to and from J&K has been restricted to almost nil, and media platforms reported on the momentous changes abruptly announced by the Centre without any independent account of the situation on the ground. That the world's largest democracy could clampdown on information to the public in such a cavalier manner may appear incomprehensible under ordinary circumstances. But then, muzzling voices from J&K was only a corollary to a far more consequential directing of discourse. People in J&K even missed the Prime Minister's tweet on how the new scheme of things would be helpful for them, as they were, and continue to be, snapped off the Internet. Reporting from conflict zones is not new to Indian media. Journalists have covered riots, insurgencies and wars for decades in the country, and governments have allowed them to do so. By and large, state agencies have even enabled reporting from conflict zones and sites of natural disasters with curfew passes and special communication facilities, though there have been exceptions. Accurate information is always the best counter to misinformation and treacherous rumours.

Information coming out of the State is sparse, costly and hard to gather. The announcement on the withdrawal of the special status of J&K was preceded by a flurry of reporting sourced to government officials that terror threats were the reason for additional troop deployment. The Amarnath yatra was discontinued and the Valley was emptied of tourists owing to these threats. Quite likely, irrespective of the nature of the threat alerts, these measures were linked to the Centre's decision on removal of the special status. Even before the clampdown on communication facilities, the government had been tight-fisted with information. The same attitude was evident subsequent to other critical decisions it made in recent years: official communication with the public has been strictly a one-way process, through press releases, radio monologues, and social media posts. Parliament, which ended a highly productive session in terms of business transacted, has been reduced to endorsing executive decisions with little meaningful discussions. While these are concerns that the government must address at the earliest, it must start with the immediate removal of all restrictions on movement of people and communication in J&K. Only security concerns under exceptional circumstances, and not aversion to democratic dissent in the normal course, can justify choking the information flow.

RBI's Goldilocks cut

The government must now unleash measures to boost growth

Faced with slowing GDP growth and encouraged by benign inflationary trends, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has delivered a Goldilocks cut of 35 basis points in the benchmark repo rate. Though a rate cut was a foregone conclusion ahead of the monetary policy announcement, the expectation was of either a 25 or 50 basis points one. Given the extent of the slowdown in the economy, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) deemed the former as too low but taking into account factors such as the turbulence in the global financial markets and the rupee's fall in the last few days, the latter was seen as too high. In the event, the MPC settled on a median and unconventional 35 basis point cut, which keeps the powder dry for further cuts this financial year. With this, the RBI has cut rates in four consecutive policy announcements beginning February this year, aggregating to a total of 110 basis points. But the transmission by banks to lenders has not been even a third of this. The central bank says that banks have passed on just 29 basis points which is poor indeed. One factor inhibiting transmission was the tight liquidity conditions until June when the RBI flooded the market – in fact, the last two months the central bank has had to absorb excess liquidity floating around. There is, therefore, reason to hope that transmission from here-on would be quicker.

The repo rate at 5.40% is now at a nine-year low and is headed lower in the next few months and could well settle at 5% or very close to that by the time this rate cutting cycle plays out. Supporting this theory is the fact that inflation is projected to be benign for the next one year. Growth, on the other hand, is expected to be weak and the MPC has revised downwards the projected GDP growth rate for this fiscal to 6.9% from 7% earlier, with downside risks. Even this appears optimistic given the current impulses in the economy and it is very likely that GDP growth this fiscal will be closer to 6.5%. With the latest cut, the RBI has signified that it is willing to do the heavy lifting. But this alone will not suffice as cost of capital is just one aspect that determines investment. The government has to play its part too in boosting growth. Arguably, the space for fiscal concessions is limited given the overall revenue scenario, but the government can certainly push for further reforms to incentivise investment without impacting its fiscal arithmetic. The slowdown now is part cyclical – which can be addressed by a rate cut – and part structural, for which reforms are an absolute necessity. Therefore, unless the government responds with its own measures, the RBI's efforts to support growth may go in vain.

The fragility of India's federalism

The government's Kashmir move exposes the contingent nature of India's asymmetric constitutional provisions



LOUISE TILLIN

The abrogation of Article 370 has exposed ambiguities that have long been evident in India's federal system. Asymmetric agreements have been negotiated in settlement of a number of regional conflicts in India. Kashmir's autonomous status was the oldest and – in original conception – the most far-reaching of these provisions. But in practice, there has been a contingency to autonomy provisions, leaving them open to revision by popular majorities at the all-India level.

An altered trajectory

The regionalisation of India's party system between 1989-2014 contributed to the appearance that deeper federalism and growing regional autonomy *vis-à-vis* the Central government was an almost inexorable process. However, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to national political dominance has altered that trajectory. By abrogating Article 370 and bifurcating Jammu and Kashmir State to create two Union Territories, the BJP has demonstrated the possibility of using the inherent flexibility in the federal order to centralise power and reshape the size, powers and stature of a constituent unit of the Indian Union – the only unit with a Muslim majority population.

The constitutionality of the abrogation of Article 370 will be carefully picked over in the months and years to come. But the government's ability to table and pass legislation with such important consequences for the fabric of federalism – while the elected assembly of Jammu and Kashmir is in abeyance – exposes the fragile set of compromises on which India's asymmetric federal system rests.

Asymmetric federalism involves the granting of differential rights to certain federal subunits, often in recognition of their distinctive ethnic identity. In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, the negotiation of Article 370 was a transitional and contingent constitutional arrangement agreed in the midst of a continuing conflict while the Indian Constitution was being finalised. Over time, this 'transitional' clause had become a semi-permanent institutional compromise, although this was ever an uneasy compromise. Kashmir's autonomy arrangements had been eroded under successive governments as tensions grew between the desire of Prime Ministers from Jawaharlal Nehru onwards to integrate the State more closely into the Indian Union and the desire of many Kashmiris to preserve a special status for their State. Since 1954, as many as 94 of 97 entries in the Union List and two thirds of constitutional articles have been extended to the State. This process has happened with the approval of the Supreme Court.

Subsequent asymmetric agreements were reached with the Nagas and the Mizos, which are enshrined in Article 371 in the Constitution. When the small State of Sikkim joined the Indian Union in the early 1970s, Article 371F was added to the Constitution. Article 371F allowed for laws that were in place before Sikkim's accession to remain in place unless amended or repealed by the legislature. Article 371 also contains measures that were intended to promote intra-State equity in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka.

Contesting asymmetry

Asymmetric constitutional provisions are a common feature of federalism in diverse societies. Many have argued that India sets an international example for how asymmetric features can help dampen secessionist conflicts by recognising multiple modes of belonging within the Union. Rather than encouraging secessionism,



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proponents of asymmetric arrangements argue that it is the denial of autonomy that can provide ground for secessionist claims to grow.

However, asymmetric arrangements are often contested by majority national communities and by other regions without special arrangements. The annulment of Article 370 has long been a *cause célèbre* for Hindu nationalism, but it was striking that it also received wide support from many regional parties in Parliament.

The rationale set out by the BJP this week drew on all the textbook critiques of asymmetric arrangements to attract the support of many regional parties to pass the legislation in the Rajya Sabha. These include the argument that asymmetric provisions are discriminatory, for instance, by placing prescriptions on who can own property in particular regions, or because they privilege certain kinds of 'special' identities over others. A Telugu Desam Party MP, from India's first linguistic State Andhra Pradesh, welcomed the fact that India would now be 'one nation with one flag and one constitution.' Alternatively, asymmetric status is presented as contributing to secessionist claims, hence the argument that Article 370 is the 'root cause of terrorism'. Autonomy arrangements are also presented as anti-egalitarian because they prevent the extension of rights in force elsewhere in a country. This last argument underscores the significance of the simultaneous emphasis on extending reservations for Scheduled

Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the new Union Territories alongside the abrogation of Article 370. As the Home Minister, Amit Shah, said in the Lok Sabha: "Those who support Article 370 are anti-Dalit, anti-tribal, anti-women."

A deliberate flexibility

By design, India's federal institutions place relatively weak checks on the power of a government with a parliamentary majority. As the political scientist, Alfred Stepan, identified, federal systems can be more or less 'demos-constraining'. In those at the more 'demos-constraining' end of the spectrum, federalism serves to undermine the consolidation of power by national majorities. For instance, the American theorist, William Riker, saw American federalism as a counter-weight to national populism since 'the populist ideal requires that rulers move swiftly and surely to embody in law the popular decision on an electoral platform'. By contrast, other federal systems, such as India's, are more 'demos-enabling'. This means that the design of federalism places fewer checks on the power of national majorities. For instance, the composition of the Rajya Sabha mirrors the composition of the Lok Sabha, rather than providing equal representation to States regardless of size, and the Rajya Sabha has weaker powers than the Lower House. Fewer powers are constitutionally allocated to federal subunits exclusively compared to more demos-constraining federations.

Placing this kind of flexibility in the hands of the Central government was deliberate and designed to enable decisive Central action to protect national integrity in the aftermath of Partition. In the Constituent Assembly, B.R. Ambedkar highlighted the difference between the 'tight mould' of other federal systems and the flexibility hard-wired into India's which would enable it to be both 'unitary as well as federal' according to the requirements of time and circumstances.

This constitutional permissiveness has been used to do things that have deepened federalism in the past under both Congress and BJP-led governments, such as the creation of new States in response to regional demands from the linguistic reorganisation of States in the 1950s onwards. By granting the Central government the power to create new States or alter State boundaries under Article 3, and not giving State governments a veto over bifurcation, the Constitution enabled the Central government to accommodate linguistic and ethnic diversities in a way that would have been much harder in a more rigid federal system. It also enabled the Central government to adopt asymmetrical measures in the first place without facing a backlash from other regions that might have resented the 'special' treatment of minority regions. Until the 2000s, most of these changes were done based on a slow process of consensus building within the regions concerned.

The unknown

By abrogating Article 370, bifurcating Jammu and Kashmir and downgrading the status of the successor units to Union Territories, the government has used the flexibility of the federal provisions of the Constitution to other ends. This is not the first time that a Central government has used its powers to bifurcate a State in the absence of local consensus. This was also seen with the creation of Telangana in 2014. As in the case of Telangana, the creation of the Union Territory of Ladakh does respond to a long-run demand in this region with a substantial Buddhist population. However, the decision to transform the remainder of J&K State into a Union Territory, at the same time as annulling Article 370, is a departure with profound and as yet unknown consequences in Kashmir, and wider implications for Indian federalism.

Louise Tillin is a Reader in Politics at King's College, London. She is the author of 'Indian Federalism' (2019)

Hong Kong adrift and China without an anchor

Beijing should realise that political reform rather than economic lures is what resonates in Hong Kong



THOMAS ABRAHAM

As Hong Kong's turbulent summer of protests continues unabated, China's patience with its restive southern city could be wearing thin, and it has hinted at using the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to quell the protests. That would be disastrous for both Hong Kong and China.

Angry and frustrated young Hong Kongers have confronted the city's government with a series of demands, including the withdrawal of a bill that would allow people to be extradited from Hong Kong to China. The government has said it will shelve the bill temporarily, but will not scrap plans to reintroduce it at a later stage.

The extradition bill is only the latest issue that has brought people out on the streets. In 2014, young people occupied the streets of central Hong Kong for several weeks demanding among other things universal suffrage rather than the current electoral college to choose the head of the Hong Kong government. Earlier, students had protested attempts to introduce what was described as patriotic education into the school curriculum.

The Chinese government is increasingly a target of the demonstrators, who recently attacked Beijing's liaison office in Hong Kong and defaced the Chinese national emblem. In China's view, this was a grave provocation, and appears to have triggered a threat to bring in the PLA to end the protests.

The Tiananmen shadow

In a rare public statement, the head of the PLA garrison in Hong Kong, Chen Daoxiang, warned that "violence should not be tolerated" and that the PLA "was determined to protect national sovereignty, stability and prosperity of Hong Kong." To drive home the message the PLA released a video of anti-riot drills showing heavily armed soldiers supported by helicopters quelling demonstrators.

If PLA troops and tanks rumble through Hong Kong's streets it would effectively end any pretence of Hong Kong's autonomy within China. It would spell the end of Hong Kong as a city open to the world, where freedom of expression and the rule of law prevailed.

For China, it would be a rerun of June 1989, when troops and tanks were used in Tiananmen Square in Beijing to crush students protesting for reforms. That action taken at the urging of Deng Xiaoping quelled the unrest, but threw China into a decade of international isolation at a time when it was



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desperately seeking to modernise its economy and emerge as a global power. The G7 refused to deal with China, World Bank loans were frozen, and many western countries imposed trade sanctions.

Potential global fallout

Any violence in Hong Kong with the Chinese military will produce a strong reaction from China's main trade partners. The United States is already engaged in a trade war with China, and the Trump administration has slapped additional import duties on Chinese goods to force it to end what it describes as predatory trade practices. Military action in Hong Kong will only strengthen support in the U.S. for tougher trade and economic sanctions. Similarly the European Union can be expected to react strongly to any action by the PLA in Hong Kong.

China's leader, Xi Jinping, is extremely conscious of the legacy he wants to create as the most consequential leader modern China has

had, alongside Mao and Deng Xiaoping. Sending tanks into Hong Kong is not going to help him achieve this. But neither can he allow his authority to be defied in Hong Kong in a way that would not be allowed anywhere else in China.

China does not understand what fuels the anger in Hong Kong. It has fallen back on the standard argument that governments confronted with popular protests tend to use: foreign forces are behind the unrest. Yang Jiechi, a PolitBuro member of the Communist Party of China, has said that the U.S. and other unnamed countries had been stirring up trouble in order to undermine Hong Kong.

But there is no evidence to show that these protests are anything but home grown, and the continuing tragedy is that the Chinese leadership is either unable or unwilling to understand the roots of the anger in Hong Kong.

A disconnect

The hard fact China has to face is that 22 years after the British withdrew and Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty, the former colony is drifting further and further away from China, rather than getting closer to the motherland.

The Hong Kongers who are at the forefront of the protests were all born shortly before or after Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty. They have only

known Hong Kong as a part of China. But their identity, outlook and worldview is not mainland Chinese, but distinctively Hong Kong. They speak Cantonese, not Mandarin. They look to Japan, Korea, Taiwan and the western world for their culture, not the mainland. When they travel on holiday, it is not to China but to other parts of the world. When they go abroad to study, it is not to China, but to the west. Like their parents who grew up under British rule, they have no desire to be integrated with the rest of China; they are suspicious of Chinese intentions.

China's leaders had thought that greater economic opportunities in a booming China would help bind Hong Kong to the motherland. The booming cities of the Pearl River delta have become closely economically integrated with Hong Kong, offering jobs in cutting edge industries to young Hong Kongers.

But these economic lures have not enticed them. Their desire is to preserve what they see as the Hong Kong way of life. And for that to happen, they demand their own elected government, not leaders appointed by the Chinese government. This is more than China is willing to concede, and therein lies the seed for future tragedy in Hong Kong.

Thomas Abraham is a former Editor of The South China Morning Post in Hong Kong

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.

Inspiring Minister

Former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj was a very affable personality and a popular face of the Bharatiya Janata Party (Inside pages, "A BJP stalwart with Socialist roots", August 7). In her stint as foreign Minister, her untiring efforts were what helped a number of Indians stranded abroad being brought back safely. An excellent orator, her speeches had a great impact.

V. HARIHARAN,
Chennai

■ Ms. Swaraj will be remembered as a model of

how an External Affairs Minister should function. She won the hearts of countless overseas Indians, particularly the NRI blue-collar worker in distress. She was an embodiment of compassion and a decent politician. At a time when the ruling dispensation is intent on implementing its agenda by hook or by crook, it is unfortunate that the country has lost a senior leader who was also a balanced thinker.

THARCUS S. FERNANDO,
Chennai

■ There is no doubt that Ms. Swaraj projected a very high image of India at the global level. There was a touch of

humanism in all her functions. She was a people's minister all through.

C.P. CHANDRA DAS,
Collerville, Tennessee, U.S.

■ Ms. Swaraj was an able administrator, stateswoman and an adept parliamentarian. Kerala will remember her efforts in 2014, in rescuing 46 nurses who were held captive by the Islamic State. Without her intervention the operation would not have been possible. Governments and ministers may change but Ms. Swaraj will live on in the hearts of every Indian.

GEORGI K. JEEMON,
Pallikara, Ernakulam, Kerala

■ Over and above her administrative acumen, Ms. Swaraj will be fondly remembered for her humaneness during her stint as Minister. She was not only instrumental in arranging for the homecoming of several stranded Indians but also displayed a mother's touch by facilitating medical visas for ailing Pakistanis.

S. VAITHIANATHAN,
Madurai

Kashmir road map

No one was in doubt this time around about the Prime Minister walking the talk on scrapping Article 370. But what came as a bolt from the blue was the decision to

unilaterally downgrade and split the State. This is anathema to federalism. Though there is an assurance of full statehood being restored, expecting normalcy to return any time soon would be too illusory given the gravity of such radical decisions.

S.K. CHOUDHURY,
Bengaluru

Mrs. YGP

The passing of educationist, and patron of the arts, Mrs.

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: In the report headlined "Bifurcation of Kashmir arbitrary: Opposition" (Aug. 7, 2019, some editions), there was a reference to DMK MP Murali Saran. It should have been Dayanidhi Maran.

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Downgraded at the stroke of a pen

The move to convert Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories could open a Pandora's Box



MALAVIKA PRASAD

The Indian government's decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) raises many constitutional questions. One important question is whether the President had the powers to make all the provisions of India's Constitution apply to the State. Another is whether the Indian government was authorised to do this in the face of its own obligations to J&K under Article 370. Even assuming for a moment that these questions did not arise, a further question that does crop up is: Did Parliament have the authority to bifurcate J&K into two Union Territories (UTs)?

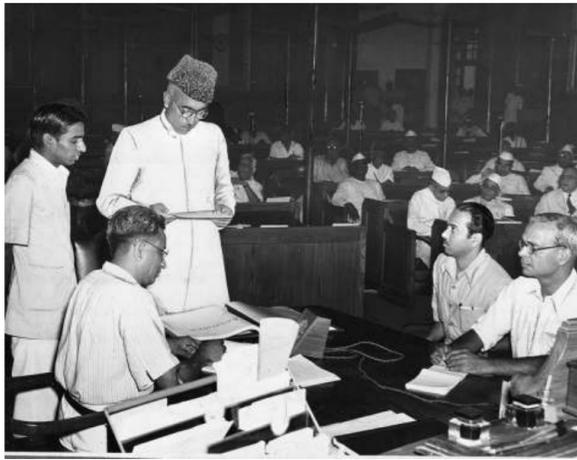
The last question assumes importance because the conversion of a State governed by an elected legislature into a UT/UTs adversely affects a people who had earlier enjoyed the freedom of full democratic participation. In the case of J&K, the centrally appointed administrator – called the Lieutenant Governor – will now have the power to make a wide range of decisions, as opposed to a regular State Governor, who must act typically on the aid and advice of the State's Council of Ministers.

Moreover, while the legislature of the UT of J&K – which the reorganisation law states will be akin to Puducherry's – will have the power to enact laws on matters in the State List and the Concurrent List of the Constitution, Parliament will retain the power to enact overriding laws. Consequently, the arenas open to decision-making by elected representatives will be diminished.

The Delhi parallel

The total reorganisation of a full-fledged State into two UTs is historically unprecedented in India. However, one example here that can be cited is that of Delhi.

When the Constitution of India was adopted, Delhi was a 'Part C' State administered by the President acting through a Chief Commissioner or Lieutenant Governor. From 1952 to 1956, Delhi had a Legislative Assembly empowered to make laws on



Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) acceded to India in 1947 on terms recorded in the Instrument of Accession. Picture shows J&K Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah taking oath as member of Constituent Assembly in June 1949. • THE HINDU

all matters in the State List excepting law and order; constitution and powers of municipal corporations and local authorities; and land and buildings in possession of the Central government situated in Delhi. However, in 1956, Delhi and all the other Part C States were divested of their legislative powers and converted into UTs that would now be administered by the President acting through an administrator appointed by her.

Within some years, the other UTs were given legislatures, and by 1987, the UTs of Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Goa were even made into States. Only the restoration of a Legislative Assembly in Delhi was stalled, out of concern that Delhi holding legislative powers over matters in the State List would compromise the Union government's ability to discharge its functions towards the nation in the national capital.

Even when Delhi received partial Statehood in 1992, with full legislative powers on subjects in the State List – except public order, police and land – the elected government in Delhi found its hands tied by the powers of a centrally appointed Lieutenant Governor. This tussle for democratic power in Delhi finally culminated in 2018, when the Supreme Court recognised that the Constitution has sought to create a democrat-

ic and representative form of government in Delhi. Only in the exceptional case that the elected government and the Lieutenant Governor differ on matters fundamental to Delhi's governance could the latter's decision override democratic will.

Accession after Independence

However, J&K's entry into the Indian Dominion is not comparable with Delhi's beginning as a 'Part C' State. Delhi was an integral part of the India during Independence and later, when the Constitution came into force. J&K on the other hand was a sovereign Princely State at the time of India's Independence and acceded to the Indian Dominion in 1947 on terms recorded in a treaty – the Instrument of Accession. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which accorded a special status to J&K in comparison with other States, was an embodiment of the treaty's terms.

However, J&K's special status was not a claim to sovereignty. This is apparent from Section 3 of the Constitution of the State of J&K, 1956, which recognises it as an integral part of India.

The special status merely meant that provisions of the Indian Constitution (other than Article 1 defining India as a Union of States; and Article 370 itself) were permitted to be applied to J&K differently from the way

they applied to regular States. Such a modified application allowed J&K a higher degree of autonomy.

For instance, while Parliament had exclusive powers to make laws pertaining to States, on all matters not in the State and Concurrent Lists, the residuary power rested with the State legislature in the case of J&K. With this autonomy, the people of J&K on paper had an even larger arena than regular States for enacting laws through democratic participation. Therefore, J&K's reorganisation into a UT amounts to a more severe curtailment of democratic rights than that of Delhi in 1956.

Not a constitutional amendment

Further, Delhi's conversion into a UT and the subsequent restoration of its Legislative Assembly were both carried out through constitutional amendments, which cannot easily be amended further. J&K's conversion into a UT, on the other hand, was effected through a regular law of Parliament, which can easily be amended at the behest of a majoritarian consensus from time to time.

Special status for States is not extraordinary in the Indian Constitution. Several States in India enjoy differential rights in their relationship to the Union by constitutional design, depending on their unique cultural, ethnic and geopolitical compositions. The thinking underlying this arrangement is that the interests of States with stronger intra-group ties or ethnic bases – like Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland – are better represented in the Constitution and the structure of the government, if we account for their subjective contexts.

The Constitution of India's chosen federal principle was to honour these subjective contexts to hold together the diverse Indian States in the Union, as B.R. Ambedkar stated in the Constituent Assembly. Therefore, the visceration of the right to full democratic participation of an entire section of people, as happened earlier this week in the case of J&K, should make us all wonder: what if more such laws are enacted, disregarding the subjective contexts of our other States and downgrading the States into Union Territories?

Malavika Prasad is a lawyer and doctoral fellow at the Nalsar University of Law

The big picture on tigers

While the number of wild cats has increased, infrastructure expansion plans have totally discounted their presence



NEHA SINHA

The tiger, which once sat crouching, is now roaring in India. Results of a once-in-four-years estimation of tiger numbers show us that India has about 3,000 of them. This is relevant not only nationally, but also globally – this is a majority of the world's wild tiger population, of around 4,000 tigers.

Each year, the tiger estimation increases its scope. Camera trap images, findings of foot surveys and other evidence on tigers and their prey species are collected. The latest estimate says that we have approximately 2,967 tigers in India, up from 2,226 as per the 2014 count. The scope of the effort was different this time: while the 2014 count included tigers that were over 1.5 years of age, this one included tigers as young as one-year old.

Yet, we must look at numbers, especially that on young tigers and cubs, as just one indicator in the tiger story. A couple of days before World Tiger Day (when the tiger report was released), a tigress was beaten to death in fields near the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve. Two days after the report's release, a tigress and her cub were found dead near Bandhavgarh in Madhya Pradesh. Shortly after, another cub was found dead in Umaria in the same State. Earlier in July, there were the poisoning-caused deaths of a tigress and her two cubs in Chandrapur, near the Tadoba Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra.

Widening of rail, road networks

It may seem that these are stray cases with no real pattern. But while tigers are reproducing in India, new state policies are working directly against them. Relaxations in norms to allow for a widening of highway and railway networks are the new threats, adding to the old ones of retaliatory poisoning and poaching.

A report on management effectiveness of tiger reserves was also released on World Tiger Day. The report rated Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh as the best in terms of good management practices. This is fairly commensurate with its tiger numbers. Central India is one of the best tiger nurseries in India. Of all States, Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers, over 500 of them.

Yet, tiger reserves cannot control what is around them; and the Pench tiger faces a

new threat. The National Highway 7 (NH7), which connects Pench and Kanha tiger reserves, has just been widened. Tigers, as well as the animals they prey on, find it hard to cross roads; for instance, a tiger died near Dehradun in 2016 after being hit by a speeding vehicle. It may have been from Rajaji Tiger Reserve, an area that needs more male tigers. After sustained pressure from citizens and protests from the Madhya Pradesh forest department, authorities built underpasses meant for wildlife through NH7. But go down the spanning new highway in Maharashtra, and it has barriers on the road. It isn't much of a surprise then that a tiger was recently seen climbing the barrier to cross the road.

To put this incident into perspective, most National Highways are slated for widening and upgradation, and most tiger reserves have State or National Highways around them. Each year, thousands of animals die on the road. Apart from highways, railway and irrigation projects are coming up in tiger reserves, and the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project will submerge 100 sq. km of Panna Tiger Reserve.

So, while the numbers are reason to cheer, they can hardly be the whole story. The story is beyond and around the reserve boundaries that tigers have to cross. The numbers should also give pause to the plans being made discounting the presence of tigers. This is a time for thoughtful growth. Highways and railways should not be expanded to encroach into tiger areas; irrigation projects should also avoid the areas. Cost-benefit analyses need to take into account the needs of wild animals. At the moment, highways are not even able to do away with barriers, and it is assumed that tigers can swim through dam-submerged areas. So, to live, tigers are being made to swim across dams, cross highways, dash across railway lines, not eat livestock, and avoid people.

Currently, a group of tigers stand not too far from Bhopal. They may have come from the Ratapani Tiger Reserve, but the question is: what fate awaits them – roadkill, electrocution or poisoning? The question is bleak, but the answer need not be. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that development and environment do not need to come at each other's cost. This is true. And while tigers do not vote, our mandate to save them has never been greater.

ing project will submerge 100 sq. km of Panna Tiger Reserve.



Neha Sinha is with the Bombay Natural History Society. Views expressed are personal

Social reforms at a snail's pace

To be seen as a statesman, the Saudi Prince needs to free political prisoners and end the Yemen war

STANLY JOHNY

In an interview in April 2018, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) hinted that the country's male guardianship laws, which leave the legal and personal affairs of women in the hands of their male relatives, would be changed. "Before 1979 [the year of Iranian revolution and the Siege of Mecca] there were societal guardianship customs, but no guardianship laws. It doesn't go back to the time of the Prophet... we want to move on," he told *The Atlantic* magazine.

Sixteen months later, Saudi Arabia has amended the guardianship system. Under the new laws, women of 21 years or above may obtain passports, which will allow them to travel without male consent. They will also be permitted to register marriages, divorces, births and deaths and to receive family records. This follows last year's landmark decision to allow women to drive.

MBS has rightly been credited for these initiatives. After he rose to the current position, he initiated several economic and social reform measures. His "Vision 2030" plan aims to lessen Saudi Arabia's near-total dependence on oil. It also promotes private enterprises, promises to raise women's participation in workforce, which is currently 22%, and to turn the country into a global investment favourite. Easing social restrictions has been an important part of this drive. While the goal is laudable, there are three fundamental problems with the model.

A complicated legacy

First, MBS is not the benign, visionary reformer that he's often presented as. His legacy is more complicated. The story of his rise to power is also a story of a brutal purge. He detained dozens of royals and businessmen in Riyadh's Ritz-Carlton hotel in November 2017 for weeks in the name of fighting corruption. The detentions lacked any legal basis and were inconsistent with the Saudi government's push to attract private investments. More worryingly, in recent years, the country has cracked down on both dissidents and rights campaigners. Political reform remains a taboo topic. Three promi-

nent women's rights activists – Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sada – who wanted the guardianship laws to be changed, are still under arrest.

Gender equality

Second, the social reforms are too little and too slow. True, women being allowed to drive and travel without male consent are big measures in the Wahhabi Kingdom, where the guardianship laws effectively make them second-class citizens. But from a universal rights perspective, Saudi Arabia has a long way to go before treating its women citizens equally. The guardianship system survives despite the latest laws. A Saudi woman still needs a guardian's permission to exit shelters (for abuse victims) or be freed from prison. She still needs a guardian's consent for marriage. A man can still divorce his wife without her consent.

Third, the incremental reforms might boost the Crown Prince's image at home, but his foreign policy record is awful. A UN investigation recently held the "Saudi state" (euphemism for MBS, the de facto ruler) directly responsible for the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, the Saudi dissident journalist who was killed inside the Kingdom's Istanbul consulate in October 2018. Saudi authorities still haven't disclosed what happened to his body, while Turkish prosecutors had claimed that the body was dismembered and disposed using acid. Besides, the war MBS launched in 2015 in Yemen has turned the country into a humanitarian catastrophe. It's difficult to overlook the argument that MBS is using the reform card to amass more powers at home and divert criticism of his ruthless interventions abroad. If he wants to change Saudi Arabia and remake himself as a reformer-statesman, he should perhaps step up the pace of social and political reforms, release the political prisoners and rights campaigners, and bring the war in Yemen to an end.

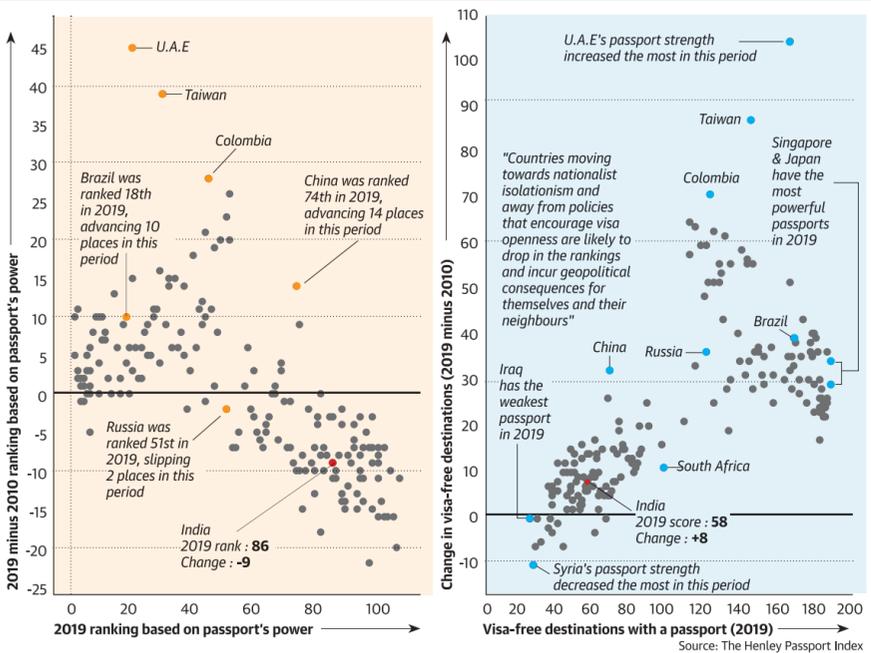
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DATA POINT

Passport power

The "strength" of the Indian passport – countries it has visa-free access to – has weakened in the last decade. The passport ranked 86 of 187 countries in 2019, while in 2010 it was ranked 77. Just 8 nations were added to its visa-free access list from 2010 to 2019 – lowest among BRICS nations. By **Varun B. Krishnan** and **Vignesh R.**



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 8, 1969

PM receives threats to her life

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi said here [New Delhi] to-night [August 7] that she had received some threats not only to dislodge her from the high post she was holding but her life as well. She did not explain how, when and who made these threats to her. Mrs. Gandhi was addressing a gathering of about 300 Government school teachers outside the gates of her residence in Safdarjung Road just after 9 p.m. The teachers, including several women, had come in drenching rain to congratulate her on bank nationalisation. The Prime Minister declared she would rather not deviate from "the good and right path" that she was following in the larger interests of the overwhelming majority of 95 per cent of people than continue to hold the high office. "They are welcome to take away this Prime Ministership from me but I want to tell them that the ultimate victory will certainly be ours," she said amidst cheers and shouts of "Long live Indira Gandhi." Mrs. Gandhi said that bank nationalisation was the second stage of the freedom movement, of making freedom a reality for crores of the depressed.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 8, 1919

Amalgamation of Banks.

Presiding over the annual meeting of the shareholders of the Bank of Bombay [in Bombay on August 7], Sir Jamsetji Jijibhoy announced that the question of amalgamation of three presidency banks was under consideration. Proposals were to be submitted in due course to the shareholders for approval and sanction. Following the precedent set by the past Chairman, Sir Jamsetji delivered a lengthy speech reviewing the financial and trade situation. After pointing out that India had enjoyed another prosperous year and that the balance of trade in her favour was 84 crores, he compared the figures of the last year with those of 1914. After showing what tremendous effect the war had on India's external trade, he said it remained to be seen whether the United Kingdom would make sufficient effort to divert it back in prewar channels. He drew attention to the critical currency situation in 1918 and to America's help to tide over the difficulties. Referring to the recent appointment of the Currency Committee he hoped as the fixing of the rates of exchange was of vital importance to the well being and happiness of India's millions the committee would take various conflicting interests into account before making their recommendations.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 148

मौद्रिक नीति की सीमाएं

भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक (आरबीआई) की मौद्रिक नीति समिति (एमपीसी) ने नीतिगत रीपो दर में 35 आधार अंक की कमी करके कई बाजार प्रतिभागियों को चौंका दिया। यह लगातार चौथा अवसर है जब दरों में कटौती की गई है। केंद्रीय बैंक ने चालू वर्ष के लिए वृद्धि के पूर्वानुमान को भी 7 फीसदी से कम करके 6.9 फीसदी कर दिया।

एमपीसी का मानना है कि खुदरा मूल्य सूचकांक आधारित मुद्रास्फीति 4 फीसदी का स्तर पर नहीं करेगी। कम से कम अगले वित्त वर्ष की पहली तिमाही तक तो कतई नहीं। केंद्रीय बैंक ने दरों को 25 आधार अंक या इसके गुणक में समायोजित करने की परंपरा भी तोड़ दी है। इसका सिरा आरबीआई गवर्नर शक्तिकांत दास द्वारा इस

वर्ष के आरंभ में वॉशिंगटन डीसी में दिए एक भाषण में तलाशा जा सकता है। उन्होंने कहा था, 'ऐसी स्थिति में जब केंद्रीय बैंक को लगे कि वह समायोजन कर सकता है लेकिन बहुत ज्यादा नहीं, तब वह 35 आधार अंक की कटौती कर सकता है। बशर्ते कि उसे लगे कि 25 आधार अंक को मानक कटौती बहुत कम होगी और 50 आधार अंक की कटौती बहुत अधिक।'।

एमपीसी के निर्णय के पीछे भी ऐसी ही दलील है। बहरहाल, इस कदम पर चर्चा की जरूरत है। उदाहरण के लिए क्या केंद्रीय बैंक के कदम और अधिक अप्रत्याशित नहीं होते जाएंगे और इनसे लाभ किसे होगा? यह भी स्पष्ट नहीं है कि 15 आधार अंक की और अतिरिक्त कटौती ज्यादा कैसे होती

क्योंकि अर्थव्यवस्था में कमजोरी के स्पष्ट संकेत नजर आ रहे हैं। इतना ही नहीं अगले वित्त वर्ष की पहली तिमाही तक मुद्रास्फीति के भी स्थिर रहने की आशा है और समेकित मांग को बढ़ावा देकर तथा निजी निवेश में उछाल के माध्यम से वृद्धि को गति देना केंद्रीय बैंक की शीर्ष प्राथमिकता है।

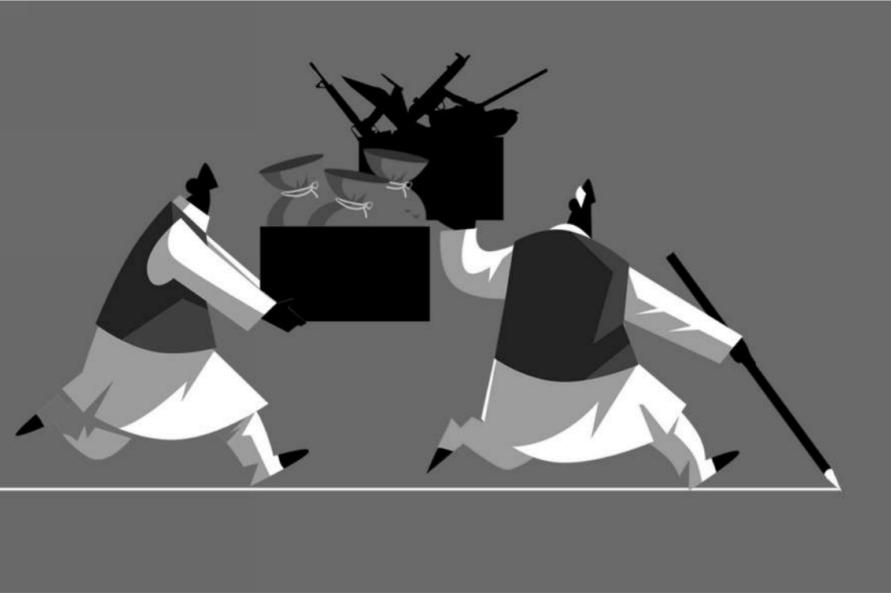
नीतिगत दर में कटौती के अलावा केंद्रीय बैंक ने मानकों को शिथिल कर बैंकों की पूंजी मुक्त करने का प्रयास किया है। इससे उन्हें गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनियों को अधिक ऋण देने की इजाजत मिल सकेगी। इससे न केवल इन कंपनियों को मदद मिलेगी बल्कि व्यवस्था में ऋण का प्रवाह भी सुनिश्चित हो सकेगा। बहरहाल, बड़ा सवाल यह है कि परंपरा को तोड़ने से वृद्धि में नई

जान फूंकने में किस हद तक मदद मिल सकेगी? संभव है कि चालू वर्ष में वृद्धि दर आरबीआई के अनुमानों की तुलना में काफी कम रहे। अमेरिका और चीन के बीच बढ़ते कारोबारी तनाव के बीच हाल के दिनों में वैश्विक पूर्वानुमान में काफी कमी आई है। यह अनिश्चितता आगे चलकर वैश्विक वृद्धि के पूर्वानुमान को भी नुकसान पहुंचाएगी।

वैश्विक स्तर पर प्रतिकूल हालात के अलावा अर्थव्यवस्था के आंतरिक कारक भी जल्द सुधार के संकेत नहीं दर्शा रहे। केंद्रीय बैंक मुद्रा की लागत कम करके अपनी भूमिका निभा रहा है। बहरहाल, केवल इतना करना पर्याप्त नहीं होगा क्योंकि अकेले मौद्रिक नीति के बल पर हासिल होने वाले लक्ष्यों की भी सीमा है। इतना ही

नहीं, अर्थव्यवस्था को कम नीतिगत दरों का भी पूरा लाभ नहीं मिल रहा है क्योंकि धीमी गति से पारेषण दिक्कत की वजह बना हुआ है। सरकारी क्षेत्र की भारी भरकम उधारी भी इसकी वजह है। सरकार ने सरकारी बैंकों को सज्जद दी है कि वे दरों में कटौती का लाभ आगे बढ़ाएं। परंतु सरकार को अपनी भूमिका भी बढ़ानी होगी।

इस स्तर पर यह अहम है कि राजकोषीय प्रबंधन की नीतियों व्यापार और विनिमय दर प्रबंधन आदि का नए सिरे से आकलन हो। इसके अतिरिक्त भूमि और श्रम सुधारों को लचीला बनाने की आवश्यकता है। वैश्विक माहौल चुनौतीपूर्ण है लेकिन भारत प्रतिस्पर्धा बढ़ाकर अपनी स्थिति बेहतर कर सकता है।



विनय शिन्हा

राजकोषीय संघर्ष के समक्ष खतरा

जोरिवम कम करने के लिए राष्ट्रपति 15वें वित्त आयोग की अनुशंसाओं पर राज्यों और केंद्र की प्रतिक्रिया मांग सकते हैं। इस संबंध में विस्तार से जानकारी प्रदान कर रहे हैं वाई वी रेड्डी

सरकार ने राष्ट्रपति के समक्ष यह प्रस्ताव रखा है कि 15वें वित्त आयोग का कार्यकाल एक माह बढ़ाया जाए और उससे रक्षा और आंतरिक सुरक्षा फंड के लिए ऐसा आवंटन करने का सुझाव देने को कहा जाए जो रद्द न हो। आयोग के विचारार्थ विषय के अंतर्गत रक्षा और आंतरिक सुरक्षा के लिए संसाधनों का सुनिश्चित आवंटन करने का प्रस्ताव रखा गया है। आधिकारिक वक्तव्य में कहा गया है, 'संशोधनों के मुताबिक 15वें वित्त आयोग को यह भी परीक्षण करना चाहिए कि क्या आंतरिक सुरक्षा और रक्षा के लिए धन की व्यवस्था करनी होगी और अगर ऐसा किया जाएगा तो ऐसी व्यवस्था का क्रियान्वयन किस प्रकार किया जाएगा।'

आयोग के प्रस्तावित अतिरिक्त विचारार्थ विषय कई सवाल खड़े करते हैं। पहला, यह संविधान के अनुरूप राजकोषीय संघर्ष, बजट एवं वित्तीय प्रबंधन की समग्र योजना में किस प्रकार उपयुक्त बैठती है? केंद्र सरकार द्वारा संग्रहीत कर को राज्यों के साझा करना होता है। इसे केंद्र और राज्यों के बीच बांटने के पहले राज्यों के संग्रह शुल्क की कटौती की जाती है। इन हिस्सों को केंद्र सरकार

के समावेशी फंड तथा राज्यों के फंड में शामिल किया जाता है। वित्त आयोग की अनुशंसा के अनुसार सहायता अनुदान को केंद्र सरकार के संसाधनों से इतर आवंटित किया जाता है इसमें केंद्र सरकार की कर हिस्सेदारी शामिल है। दूसरा, रक्षा क्षेत्र के लिए आवंटन पूरी तरह केंद्र की जवाबदेही है। दरअसल 14वें वित्त आयोग ने अतीत में अपर्याप्त आवंटन को रेखांकित करते हुए कहा भी है, 'इसी प्रकार इसके अनुमानों ने रक्षा राजस्व व्यय (वेतन समेत) में 2016-17 में 30 फीसदी बढ़ोतरी की बात कही। इसमें वेतन आयोग का प्रभाव शामिल है। इसके साथ ही शेष बचे वर्षों के दौरान 20 फीसदी की स्थिर वृद्धि की बात कही गई। (पैरा 6.35)'

'रक्षा मंत्रालय ने संसाधनों की जो मांग की है उसका काफी हिस्सा पूंजीगत व्यय की प्रकृति का है। यह हमारे आकलन के दायरे से बाहर है। उस राजस्व व्यय का पुनर्गठन आवश्यक है ताकि रक्षा तैयारी और रखरखाव समुचित ढंग से चल सकें। हमने रक्षा राजस्व व्यय-जीडीपी अनुपात को अनुमान की अवधि में स्थिर रखा, बजाय कि वृद्धि को धीमा होने देने के। यद्यपि अतीत में ऐसा हो चुका है। दूसरे

शब्दों में कहें तो रक्षा राजस्व व्यय की दर को जीडीपी की दर के अनुरूप ही बढ़ने दिया गया, यह रक्षा राजस्व व्यय की अतीत की वृद्धि से काफी ऊंची है। (पैरा 6.36)।' संविधान ने केंद्र सरकार को यह अधिकार दिया है कि वह रक्षा क्षेत्र को वास्तविक आवंटन करे। क्या वित्त आयोग जैसे संस्थान को ऐसे अहम क्षेत्र के लिए विशिष्ट आवंटन पर सुझाव देना उचित है? जबकि इसका असर व्यय आवंटन पर संसदीय नियंत्रण की भावना और सुरक्षा निहितार्थ की बदलती मांग पर भी होगी।

तीसरा, एक हद तक आंतरिक सुरक्षा राज्य सरकारों की भी जवाबदेही है क्योंकि कानून व्यवस्था उसका दायित्व है। हकीकत में जब केंद्रीय रिजर्व पुलिस बल अथवा सीमा सुरक्षा बल जैसी सेवाएं राज्य सरकारों द्वारा मांगी जाती हैं तो उनका भुगतान भी वे अपने बजट से करती हैं। इसके अलावा जब उनकी सेवाओं का इस्तेमाल राज्य सरकारें चुनाव आदि के लिए करती हैं तो भी उनका भुगतान उन्हें करना होता है। जब केंद्र और राज्य के चुनाव साथ-साथ हो रहे हों तो खर्च को केंद्र और राज्य मिलकर साझा करते हैं। संक्षेप में कहा जाए तो केंद्र और राज्य दोनों के रक्षा और आंतरिक

सुरक्षा की अपनी-अपनी तरह से आवश्यकता होती है। उम्मीद है कि 15वां वित्त आयोग परिचालन समस्याओं के अलावा इन बुनियादी मुद्दों पर भी विचार करेगा। चाहे जो भी हो वह हर विषय पर अनुशंसा देने के लिए बाध्य भी नहीं है। वित्त आयोग के विचारार्थ विषय को अंतिम रूप देने के लिए राज्यों के साथ चर्चा की प्रक्रिया में सरकारिया आयोग ने कहा, 'किसी भी मशरिफे के सार्थक होने के लिए आवश्यक है कि वह पर्याप्त हो।' इस खास विचारार्थ विषय का केंद्र-राज्य संबंधों पर गहरा असर होगा। क्या अतिरिक्त विचारार्थ विषयों से पहले राज्यों से मशरिफा किया गया या किया जाएगा?

संविधान सभा ने अपनी चर्चा में कहा कि अनुशंसाओं को स्वीकार करने का काम संसदीय मंजूरी पर नहीं छोड़ा जाना चाहिए क्योंकि अनुशंसाएं केंद्र और राज्य दोनों को प्रभावित करती हैं। चूंकि संविधान में हर अनुशंसा पर उठाए गए कदम के बारे में राष्ट्रपति की व्याख्या सदन में पेश करने का प्रावधान है इसलिए अनुमान है कि राष्ट्रपति अपने विशेषाधिकार का प्रयोग भारतीय गणराज्य के मुखिया के तौर पर करेंगे जिसमें केंद्र और राज्य दोनों शामिल हैं।

हालिया घटनाओं के अनुसार देखें तो वित्त आयोग की अनुशंसाओं को निर्णय लेने तक गोपनीय रखने और उठाए गए कदमों को संसद के समक्ष रखने के देश के राजकोषीय संघर्ष के लिए अपने निहितार्थ हैं। जोखिम को कम करने के लिए राष्ट्रपति 15वें वित्त आयोग की रिपोर्ट को सार्वजनिक करने पर विचार कर सकते हैं और राज्य सरकारों तथा केंद्र की प्रतिक्रिया ले कर अंतिम नजरिया पेश कर सकते हैं।

इस संदर्भ में एक मुख्यमंत्री के सन 2012 के गणतंत्र दिवस के भाषण का उल्लेख करना उपयोगी होगा:

'राजकोषीय क्षेत्रों में व्यापक रूप से संघीय ढांचे को नष्ट किया जा रहा है। लोकहित या जन अधिकार के नाम पर अधिक फंड दिल्ली के हवाले किए जा रहे हैं। वित्त आयोग ने राज्यों की हिस्सेदारी कम की है और अधिसंख्या हिस्सा केंद्र के पास रखा है। केंद्र सरकार ने लोकलुभावन योजनाओं को पास किया है लेकिन उनके क्रियान्वयन के लिए राज्यों को धन नहीं दिया जा रहा। विकास के लिए पर्याप्त धन हासिल करना हर राज्य का अधिकार है। केंद्र कोई उपकार नहीं कर रहा।'

'मैं आज जो चिंताएं प्रकट कर रहा हूँ, वे केवल बतौर मुख्यमंत्री नहीं बल्कि देश के आम नागरिक के रूप में भी हैं। ऐसा क्यों है कि तमाम राजनीतिक दलों के मुख्यमंत्री देश के संघीय ढांचे पर बार-बार हो रहे हमलों के प्रति अपनी चिंता एकजुट होकर प्रकट कर रहे? अब वक्त आ गया है कि केंद्र सरकार यह समझे कि राज्यों को समुचित फंड देने से केंद्र कमजोर नहीं होगा। राज्यों को भी केंद्र सरकार के साथ तालमेल करना चाहिए बजाय कि उसके अधीन बने रहने के। सहकारी संघर्ष ही देश में मानक होना चाहिए।'

(लेखक आरबीआई के पूर्व गवर्नर हैं)

वैधानिक रूप से तय कार्यकाल में बदलाव से आगामी असुरक्षा

लोक सेवकों के कार्यकाल की सुरक्षा अब हमले की चपेट में आ चुकी है। सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम, 2005 में संशोधन करने का विधेयक संसद के इस अधिवेशन में पारित में हो चुका है। इस कानून ने देश भर के सूचना आयुक्तों को मिले दो मूलभूत वैधानिक संरक्षणों को खत्म कर दिया है। पहला, सूचना आयुक्त का कार्यकाल निश्चित था और दूसरा, उनके पारिश्रमिक को कानूनी सुरक्षा मिली हुई थी।

लेकिन सूचना का अधिकार संबंधी संशोधित कानून लागू होने के बाद केंद्र एवं राज्य के स्तर पर सूचना आयुक्तों के कार्यकाल एवं पारिश्रमिक का निर्धारण करने का अधिकार अब केंद्र सरकार के ही पास रह जाएगा। संशोधन के पहले एक सूचना आयुक्त को कम-से-कम पांच साल या 65 वर्ष की उम्र होने तक कार्यकाल मिलता था। इसी तरह आयुक्तों का पारिश्रमिक चुनाव आयोग के सदस्यों के समान स्तर पर होता था। वहीं राज्यों में नियुक्त सूचना आयुक्तों को मुख्य सचिव के समान लाभ मिलते रहे हैं। लेकिन अब केंद्र सरकार ही आयुक्त का कार्यकाल एवं वेतन संबंधी शर्तों को केंद्र एवं राज्य दोनों ही स्तर पर तय करेगी। इस वजह से देश भर में सूचना आयुक्तों को नियुक्ति से संबंधित पूरा राजनीतिक लाभ केंद्र सरकार को ही मिलेगा। इस संदर्भ में मौजूदा सरकार का रुख ही यह तय करेगा कि नागरिकों को सूचना का अधिकार लागू कराने में अगली सरकारों किस तरह काम करेंगी।

किसी भी लोक सेवक का कार्यकाल तय करना असल में उसके सरकारी पद को सुरक्षित करने का मूल है। अगर कानून कार्यकाल के सुरक्षित होने की इजाजत देता है तो पद पर नियुक्त अधिकारी हटाए जाने के भय से मुक्त होकर काम कर सकता है। हमारा संविधान उच्चतर न्यायपालिका के न्यायाधीशों का कार्यकाल संरक्षित करता है जिसके पीछे मकसद न्यायाधीशों की स्वतंत्रता को सुनिश्चित करना ही है। दरअसल किसी न्यायाधीश को केवल महाभियोग प्रक्रिया के जरिये ही हटाया जा सकता है। न्यायाधीश का कार्यकाल संरक्षित होने के नाते ही न्यायिक नियुक्तियों में चयन का तरीका प्रमुख मुद्दा बन जाता है।

जब वर्ष 2017 में उच्चतम



बाअदब सोमशेखर सुंदरेशन

एक तय अवधि के लिए की गई नियामकीय नियुक्तियों को सरकारी विवेकाधिकार का इस्तेमाल करते हुए दूसरे कार्यकाल के लिए भी बढ़ा देने का एक बुरा चलन देखा जा रहा है

न्यायालय को यह पता चला था कि बावरी मस्जिद विध्वंस के आरोपियों की सुनवाई चौथाई सदी बीतने के बाद भी चल रही है तो उसने दो साल के भीतर सुनवाई पूरी करने का आदेश देते हुए कहा था कि यह कार्य पूरा होने तक न्यायाधीश को कहीं भी स्थानांतरित नहीं किया जा सकता है। गत महीने जब शीर्ष अदालत को पता चला कि सुनवाई कर रहे न्यायाधीश अहमद सुनवाई होने वाले हैं तो उसने उनका कार्यकाल बढ़ाने का आदेश दे दिया ताकि वह नौ महीनों में अपनी सुनवाई पूरी कर सकें। केंद्रित करें। इस समूचे प्रकरण के मूल में एक कनिष्ठ न्यायाधीश का कार्यकाल सुरक्षित करना था ताकि एक बेहद अहम सुनवाई को जल्द पूरा किया जा सके।

सेवानिवृत्त पुलिस अधिकारी प्रकाश सिंह को तरफ से दायर एक अनहित याचिका पर उच्चतम न्यायालय ने सभी पुलिस अधिकारियों को दो साल का तय कार्यकाल देने का फैसला सुनाया था। उसके बाद ही राज्य के पुलिस महानिदेशक से लेकर पुलिस थाना प्रभारी स्तर तक के अधिकारियों का कार्यकाल दो साल तय कर दिया गया। कई

राज्य सरकारों ने इस निर्देश का उल्लंघन करने के तरीके अपनाए की कोशिश की लेकिन उच्चतम न्यायालय ने अभी तक उन्हें कामयाब नहीं होने दिया है।

हालांकि कुछ राज्यों ने गलत तरीके अपनाते हुए अपने वफादार पुलिस अधिकारियों को उनकी सेवानिवृत्ति करीब आने पर उन्हें महानिदेशक नियुक्त करने का सिलसिला शुरू कर दिया ताकि उन अधिकारियों को दो साल तक तयशुदा नियुक्ति मिल सके। सरकारों और उनके मंत्रियों एवं अधिकारियों के बीच इन सुधारों का विरोध करने का जबरदस्त निहित स्वार्थ होता है।

नियामकीय एजेंसियों के अधिकारियों को भी सुनिश्चित कार्यकाल मिलता रहा है। सबसे स्वतंत्र नियामकों में शामिल भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक (आरबीआई) के गवर्नर की नियुक्ति से संबंधित कानून में भी उम्र संबंधी प्रावधानों का जिक्र नहीं है। यही वजह है कि नियुक्ति के समय सरकार द्वारा तय किया जाने वाला गवर्नर का कार्यकाल इस अहम पद पर सरकार का नियंत्रण नहीं तो उसका प्रभाव कायम करने का अहम जरिया जरूर बन जाता है। एक तय अवधि के लिए की गई नियामकीय नियुक्तियों को सरकारी विवेकाधिकार का इस्तेमाल करते हुए दूसरे कार्यकाल के लिए भी बढ़ा देने का एक बुरा चलन देखा जा रहा है। इस प्रवृत्ति के चलते किसी अहम पद पर बैठा व्यक्ति खास तौर पर अपने कार्यकाल के अंतिम दिनों में खुद को बंधा हुआ महसूस करता है।

केंद्रीय बैंक का शीर्ष नेतृत्व अक्सर यह कहता रहता है कि हल्की-फुल्की मुद्रास्फीति शुरुआती गर्भावस्था की तरह है। यह कहावत कानून-निर्माण के मामले में भी उतना ही सच है। कानून के किसी क्षेत्र में कोई विध्वंसक कदम उठाया जाता है तो वह धीरे-धीरे अन्य क्षेत्रों में भी अपनी जगह बनाने लगता है। सूचना आयुक्तों के सुरक्षित कार्यकाल में किसी भी तरह का ह्रास कैंसर पैदा करने वाली ऐसी कोशिका बन सकता है जो किसी अन्य वैधानिक या नियामकीय निकाय की ताकत को नुकसान पहुंचाने वाला तरीका साबित हो। (लेखक वरिष्ठ अधिवक्ता एवं स्वतंत्र परामर्शदाता हैं)

कानाफूसी

अध्यक्ष से राट राज्य सभा में दो इलेक्ट्रॉनिक स्क्रीन लगी हुई हैं, जिनमें उस सांसद का नाम नजर आता है जो उस वक्त बोल रहा होता है। इसके अलावा उन्हें आवंटित समय, लिया गया समय और गंवाया गया समय नजर आता है। वहीं लोकसभा में केवल बड़ी स्क्रीन थी जहाँ कार्यवाही का सीधा प्रसारण देखा जा सकता है। इस सप्ताह से इस स्क्रीन पर भी सांसदों के नाम व उन्हें आवंटित समय दर्शाया जाने लगा। मंगलवार को जम्मू एवं कश्मीर पुनर्गठन विधेयक पर चर्चा के दौरान जब अपना दल की अनुप्रीया पटेल को भाषण चार मिनट में समाप्त करने को कहा गया तो उन्होंने विरोध किया। पटेल ने अध्यक्ष ओम बिरला से कहा कि वह उनके साथ निष्पक्षता नहीं बरत रहे हैं और उनके पहले वक्ता सुखबीर सिंह बादल को आठ मिनट का समय दिया गया जबकि उनके भी दो ही सांसद हैं। बिरला ने कहा कि पटेल उनके निर्णय को चुनौती दे रही हैं। उन्होंने आगे से ऐसा नहीं करने को कहा।

प्रथम पंक्ति में स्थान

संसद के अगले सत्र के लिए राज्यसभा में नई बैठक व्यवस्था बनाने की प्रक्रिया चल रही है। रेल मंत्री पीयूष गोयल और वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण, दोनों राज्यसभा सदस्य हैं। लेकिन कैबिनेट मंत्री होने के बाद भी उन्हें सदन की शुरुआती पंक्ति में स्थान हासिल नहीं है। परंतु अगले सत्र से उन्हें वह स्थान मिल जाएगा। भारतीय जनता पार्टी के नेता सुरेश प्रभु को अब मंत्री नहीं हैं, वह प्रथम पंक्ति का स्थान छोड़ेंगे। इसके अलावा वाई एस चौधरी, जिन्होंने तेलुगु देशम पार्टी छोड़कर भारतीय जनता पार्टी का दामन थामा है वह भी शुरुआती पंक्ति में एक स्थान खाली करेंगे।



आपका पक्ष

प्रकृति संरक्षण के लिए लें संकल्प

नियमगिरि पहाड़ी की डोंगरिया कोंध जनजाति प्रकृति संरक्षण के मामले में विश्व में सर्वोत्कृष्ट मानी जाती है। पूरे देश में ऐसी अनेक जनजातियाँ हैं, जिन्होंने प्राकृतिक पारिस्थिकीय को नष्ट किए बिना अपने जीने के तरीके खोज रखे हैं। जंगल की सीमाओं में रहने वाले कुछ वंचित तबकों और छोटे किसानों के साथ ये जनजातियाँ ही भारत की जैव विविधता और खाद्य सुरक्षा की गारंटी दे सकती हैं। वर्तमान परिस्थितियों में प्रकृति अनेक प्रजातियों की विलुप्ति की आशंका से ग्रस्त है। ऐसे में वनवासियों और जनजातियों के महत्त्व को नकारा नहीं जा सकता, क्योंकि ये हमें आसन्न प्राकृतिक विकटता से निपटने का समाधान दे सकते हैं। इस समस्या ने संपूर्ण विश्व को अपनी चपेट में ले रखा है। इसका समाधान हमें स्थानीय स्तर पर ही खोजना होगा। हमारी उष्णकटिबंधीय जलवायु ने हमें



जैव विविधता से समृद्ध कर रहा है। लेकिन इससे होने वाले आर्थिक विकास, शहरीकरण, वनों की कटाई और अतिवृष्टि ने विश्व के कई अन्य स्थानों की तुलना में इसे अधिक खतरे में डाल दिया है। जाहिर है कि गहन खेती, वनों के दोहन और आवश्यकता से अधिक मत्स्य व्यापार ने भारत में जैव विविधता को असंतुलित

किया जाना चाहिए। इन स्थितियों में वनवासियों और जनजातियों को वनों से हटाने के बजाय उन्हें वहीं बसाकर प्रकृति का संरक्षण करने के लिए प्रेरित करना चाहिए। ओडिशा और पूर्वोत्तर भारत ने इस दिशा में कदम उठाते हुए स्थानीय समुदायों को इस प्रकार की जिम्मेदारी सौंप दी है। आंध्र प्रदेश और तेलंगाना के किसान जीरो बजट प्राकृतिक कृषि अपनाने का संदेश दे रहे हैं। हो सकता है कि इस क्षेत्र की कृषि का यह मॉडल पंजाब के लिए अनुकूल न हो, लेकिन वहाँ के किसानों के पास कोई न कोई स्थानीय समाधान जरूर होगा। हमारा अस्तित्व इस पर ही निर्भर करता है कि हम नष्ट हो रही प्रकृति का संरक्षण किस प्रकार करते हैं। अगर इनके प्रमुख संरक्षकों को ही उजाड़ देंगे तो हमारा डूबना निश्चित है।

संयुक्त राष्ट्र का सुझाव है कि इस मानव भूल की सुधार के लिए वनवासियों, मछुआरों और किसानों के प्रकृति संबंधी पारंपरिक ज्ञान का उपयोग

कर दिया है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र का सुझाव है कि इस मानव भूल की सुधार के लिए वनवासियों, मछुआरों और किसानों के प्रकृति संबंधी पारंपरिक ज्ञान का उपयोग

सड़क की जगह रेलवे को तरजीह

राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग निर्माण के लिए लाखों करोड़ों रुपये जुटाने का इंतजाम हो रहा है। लेकिन इतना बजट आवंटन या बाहरी निवेश रेलवे के नसीब में नहीं है। माल ढुलाई में किफायत और द्रुत गति में रेलवे का मुकाबला राजमार्ग शायद ही कर सके। राजमार्गों पर ईंधन खर्च होगा जबकि रेलवे के पास बिजली और सौर ऊर्जा दोनों विकल्प हैं। इसके अलावा जल प्रबंधन सभी राज्यों के लिए चिंता का विषय बना हुआ है। अतिवृष्टि तो कहीं सूखा पड़ रहा है। अतिवृष्टि वाले राज्य अनावृष्टि वाले राज्यों को रेल परिवहन द्वारा जलापूर्ति की संभावनाएं तलाश सकते हैं। राजमार्ग निर्माण में होने वाले खर्च की जगह क्या जल प्रबंधन को तरजीह नहीं दी जा सकती है। लिहाजा रेल मंत्रालय, जल शक्ति मंत्रालय, राजमार्ग मंत्रालय आदि मिलकर जल प्रबंधन का कौशल बढ़ा सकते हैं।

दैनिक जागरण

स्मृतियां अक्षुण्ण रहना ही अमरता है

बौखलाया पाकिस्तान

अनुच्छेद 370 को बेअसर करके जम्मू-कश्मीर को केंद्र शासित प्रदेश बनाने की भारत सरकार की ऐतिहासिक पहल पर पाकिस्तान जिस तरह भड़का हुआ था उसे देखते हुए यह तथ्य था कि वह कुछ न कुछ करेगा। तमाम गर्जन-तर्जन के बाद उसने जिस तरह भारत से राजनयिक संबंधों का दर्जा कम करने और व्यापारिक संबंध तोड़ने का फैसला किया उससे भारत को चिंतित होने की जरूरत नहीं। आखिर यह भारत ही था जिसने पुलवामा हमले के बाद व्यापार के मामले में पाकिस्तान का सबसे तरजोही गश्ट का दर्जा खत्म किया था। इसके बाद पाकिस्तान से होने वाले सीमा व्यापार को भी निलंबित कर दिया गया था, क्योंकि उसके जरिये मादक पदार्थों की तस्करी हो रही थी। चूंकि भारत के इन कदमों के बाद द्विपक्षीय व्यापार न के बराबर रह गया था इसलिए उसे खत्म करने की पाकिस्तान की घोषणा का कोई मतलब नहीं। जहां तक राजनयिक स्तर घटाने की बात है तो सच्चाई यह है कि सुरक्षा मामलों के भारतीय विशेषज्ञ एक अरसे से यह मांग कर रहे थे कि पाकिस्तान से राजनयिक संबंध घटाए जाने चाहिए। एक तरह से पाकिस्तान ने वह काम किया जिसके लिए भारत सरकार से अपील की जाती थी।

ऐसा लगता है कि बौखलाहट में आए पाकिस्तान को कुछ सूझा नहीं और इसलिए उसने फैसेल ले लिए जो उस पर ही भारी पड़ सकते हैं। इसकी अनदेखी नहीं की जा सकती कि बालाकोट हमले के बाद पाकिस्तान ने भारत को दबाव में लेने के इरादे से भारतीय यात्री विमानों के लिए अपना हवाई क्षेत्र लंबे समय तक बंद रखा और जब भारत सरकार इस पाबंदी से बेपरवाह रही तो उसने मजबूरी में अपने फैसेल को पलटा। पाकिस्तान द्विपक्षीय संबंधों की समीक्षा करने के साथ ही कश्मीर मामले को संयुक्त गश्ट सुरक्षा परिषद में उठाने की भी बात कर रहा है। वह जिस तरह द्विपक्षीय संबंधों की समीक्षा करने को स्वतंत्र है उसी तरह सुरक्षा परिषद का दरवाजा खटखटाने के लिए भी। वह शायद इस हकीकत से आंखें मूंदे रहना चाहता है कि कश्मीर पर संयुक्त गश्ट सुरक्षा परिषद का प्रस्ताव अब महज कागज का एक टुकड़ा भर रह गया है। उसे यह भी समझ आना चाहिए कि इस प्रस्ताव को निष्प्राण करने में सबसे बड़ी भूमिका उसी की रही है। पाकिस्तान ने न केवल कश्मीर का एक हिस्सा चीन को सौंप दिया, बल्कि इस जरूरी शर्त को भी पूरा करने से इन्कार किया कि जनमत संग्रह के लिए पहले उसे अपने कब्जे वाले इलाके से अपनी फौज हटानी होगी। पाकिस्तान के नीति-नियंता कुछ भी कहे, सच यही है कि उनके बौखलाहट भरे फैसेलों से भारत की सेहत पर कोई असर नहीं पड़ने वाला।

तंबाकू के दुष्परिणाम

शराब लोगों के स्वास्थ्य को लीलने के साथ ही उनके परिवार को मानसिक पीड़ा देती है। दो साल पहले शराब का निर्माण और इसके सेवन पर पूर्ण प्रतिबंध लगने के बाद बिहार को इस सामाजिक बुराई से लगभग निजात मिल चुकी है। शराबमुक्त बिहार के लिए राज्य सरकार के कड़े कानून को लागू कराने का जिम्मा बिहार पुलिस के कंधे पर ही है। अब उसे तंबाकू के खिलाफ भी सघन अभियान चलाने की जिम्मेदारी निभानी है। तंबाकू का सेवन शराब से ज्यादा परेशानी देता है। दरअसल इसका सेवन हर उम्र के लोग करते हैं। स्कूलों बच्चे ज्यादा शिकार हो रहे हैं। कोर्ट में समय-समय पर प्रशासन-पुलिस और सरकार को फटकार भी मिलती है, लेकिन समस्या का स्थायी समाधान नहीं हो पाता। तंबाकू से दमा, खांसी, टीबी आदि रोगों का होना आम है, अब यह लोगों को मुंह का कैंसर भी दे रही है। इसके सेवन से लोगों के स्वास्थ्य पर बुरा असर को देखते हुए केंद्र के कानून कोटपा के तहत नियंत्रण के अलावा राज्य सरकार ने गुटखा पर प्रतिबंध तक लगा रखा है, परंतु इसकी बिक्री रोकने के लिए जिम्मेदार महकमा कोई ठोस कार्रवाई नहीं कर पाया। नतीजतन चौक-चौराहों, मोहल्ले, स्टेशनों और बस स्टैंड के अलावा शिक्षा संस्थानों के निकट इसकी बिक्री धड़ल्ले से हो रही है। बहहाल एक कहावत है कि जब जागो, तब सवेरा, बिहार पुलिस भी निद्रा त्यागकर तंबाकू के खिलाफ सघन अभियान चलाने को सजग हुई है। एडीजी की अध्यक्षता में हुई एक बैठक में निर्णय लिया गया कि पुलिस यह सुनिश्चित करेगी कि स्कूलों के सौ गज की परिधि में तंबाकू उत्पादों की बिक्री न हो। अभियान को गति के लिए हर जिले में पुलिस उपाधीक्षक (मुख्यालय) को नोटल पदाधिकारी बनाया गया है। बैठक में पुलिस-जनकों को तंबाकू नियंत्रण के गुर भी सिखाए गए। उम्मीद की जाती चाहिए कि अपराध अनुसंधान विभाग, राज्य सरकार और सोशियो इकोनॉमिक एंड एजुकेशनल सोसाइटी (सीडूस) के संयुक्त तत्वावधान में हुई बैठक के सकारात्मक नतीजे जरूर सामने आएंगे। तंबाकू उद्योग का सबसे सॉफ्ट टारगेट बच्चे और युवा होते हैं। ये देश का भविष्य हैं। इन्हें बचाना आवश्यक है। लिहाजा नियंत्रण के लिए बने कानून कोटपा को सख्ती से लागू कराने की दिशा में पुलिस को हर जोग-जतन करना चाहिए जिससे देश में एक और बुराई को रोकने में बिहार अगुआ साबित हो।

सड़कों पर पशु-धन

डॉ. महेश परिमल

इन दिनों शायद ही ऐसा कोई शहर होगा, जो सड़कों के बीचों-बीच बेसहारा पशुओं से त्रस्त न हो, पर इस समस्या पर कोई कुछ भी बोलने को तैयार नहीं है। जिसे हम पूजते हैं, वही आज सड़कों पर लावारिस हालत में हैं। कौनकी इस स्थिति के लिए आखिर दोषी कौन है? गाय को विशेष पशु का दर्जा दिया जाए, इसके लिए गुजरात में आंदोलन चला था। उसमें एक की मौत हुई थी, कई घायल हुए थे, पर जब यही गौमाता सड़कों पर होती है तो कोई आंदोलन नहीं होता। सड़कों पर पसरें पशुओं के कारण होने वाली मौतों की हम कैसे अनदेखी कर सकते हैं? क्या पशुओं का दोहन करके उन्हें बेसहारा या लावारिस छोड़ने वाला पशु-मालिक अपराधी नहीं है? उसे भी अपराधी मानना ही होगा जो मूक, निरीह और हमारे लिए पूज्य पशुओं को सड़कों पर पसरने के लिए विवश करता है। ये वे पशु हैं, जो यातायात के तमाम नियमों की रोज ध्जिनयों उड़ते हैं। वे नगरपालिका, नगर-निगमों को चुनौती देते हैं। क्या ऐसा नहीं हो सकता कि कांजी हाऊस में पशुओं को एक या दो सप्ताह तक रखा जाए

जो व्यक्ति मूक और हमारे लिए पूज्य पशुओं को सड़कों पर पसरने के लिए विवश करता है उसे भी अपराधी माना जाए

और इसी बीच यदि पशु-पालक आ जाए तो उसे भारी जुर्माने और हिदायतों के बाद पशु सौंपा जाए। शेष पशुओं को शासन हस्तगत कर ले, उनके पालने की अलग व्यवस्था की जाए। उनके गोबर से खाद, गैस और बिजली का उत्पादन किया जाए तो इसमें कोई दो मत नहीं कि कई लोगों को रोजगार मिलेगा। खाद एवं खाना पकाने की गैस भी उपयोगी सिद्ध होगी। दूसरी ओर सड़कों में बेसहारा पशुओं का जमावड़ा खत्म होगा। सड़कों का ही नहीं, जिनगी का रास्ता भी आसान होगा।

कुछ भी करें, पर पशु-मालिक को केंद्र में अवश्य रखें। एक व्यक्ति या परिवार यदि

कश्मीर में शांति और सुरक्षा की चुनौती

राजीव मिश्रा

भारत सरकार को घाटी के विकास की चिंता करने के साथ ही वहां के लोगों को भरोसा दिलाने की भी पहल करनी होगी



जम्मू-कश्मीर को अनुच्छेद 370 और 35 ए से आजादी मिल गई, लेकिन दशकों की हिंसा ने प्रदेश में एक खाली स्थान पैदा किया है। इस खाली स्थान पर अलगवादिओं और पाकिस्तानपरस्त तत्वों ने कब्जा करने की कोशिश की है। उन्होंने यह कोशिश इसीलिए की, क्योंकि मुख्यधारा के राजनीतिक दल यह-ह कर उनकी ही भाषा बोलते रहे। स्पष्ट है कि इस खाली जगह को भरना प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी एवं गृह मंत्री अमित शाह के सामने एक बड़ी चुनौती होगी। इस क्रम में वहां एक ऐसा राजनीतिक विकल्प भी पैदा करना होगा जो अलगवादिओं से प्रेरित न हो और न ही उनके दबाव में आए। इसी तरह सुशासन और शांति स्थापित करने के साथ-साथ भारत सरकार को वहां के युवाओं के लिए नौकरियों का सृजन करने के अलावा स्थानीय लोगों के बीच प्रेमभाव का माहौल बनाने की दरकार होगी। इसके साथ ही राज्य में प्रत्यक्ष विदेशी निवेश आकर्षित करना और इसके लिए सब्सिडी के नए प्रावधान को विकसित करने की आवश्यकता होगी। भारत सरकार जम्मू-कश्मीर और लद्दाख के मामले में जिस तरह गंभीर और संवेदनशील नजर आ रही है उसे देखते हुए ऐसा लगता है कि अगले पांच वर्षों में कश्मीर में शांति और सुरक्षा से जुड़े मामले सुलझा लिए जाएंगे और संपूर्ण

क्षेत्र विकास के मार्ग पर अग्रसर होगा, लेकिन यह काम आसानी से तब होगा जब कश्मीर के लोगों को यह भरोसा दिलाने में सफलता मिलेगी कि जो कदम उठाए गए हैं वे उनकी भलाई के लिए हैं। इस मामले में शेष देश के लोगों को भी सतर्क और संवेदनशील रहना होगा। कश्मीरियों को यह संदेश देने की जरूरत है कि उनकी पहचान अनुच्छेद 370 और 35-ए से नहीं थी और न हो सकती है। उनकी पहचान तो उस कश्मीरियत से है जो भारतीयता का हिस्सा है। कश्मीरियों को यह संदेश देने की भी जरूरत है कि पाकिस्तान उनकी बर्बादी की जड़ है। यह संदेश देने में कुछ मुश्किलें आ सकती हैं, लेकिन इसे आसान बनाना ही होगा। यह अच्छा हुआ कि गृहमंत्री ने जम्मू-कश्मीर को केंद्र शासित प्रदेश बनाने की घोषणा के साथ यह भी आश्वासन दिया कि हलालत सुघरने पर उसे पूर्ण राज्य का दर्जा दे दिया जाएगा।

अनुच्छेद 370 और 35-ए को खत्म करने से पहले घरलू स्तर पर जितनी तैयारी की जास्ति थी उतनी ही कूटनीतिक मोर्चे पर भी ताकत अंतरराष्ट्रीय प्रतिक्रिया का रुख अनुकूल रहे। भारत के राजनयिक समय रहते दुनिया के प्रमुख देशों के राजदूतों और अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंचों पर सक्रिय हो गए थे। अब वह साफ है कि वे अनुच्छेद 370 और 35-ए के उन्मूलन के कारणों एवं परिस्थितियों पर विश्व समुदाय को सकारात्मक संदेश देने में सफल रहे। माना जाता है कि कोर्ट ने दोबारा सत्ता में आने के



अवधेश राजपूत

साथ ही कश्मीर की संवैधानिक स्थिति में बदलाव की तैयारी शुरू कर दी थी और अपने संभावित कदमों को लेकर वैश्विक समुदाय को टटोलना भी शुरू कर दिया था। शायद इसी कवायद के चलते विश्व समुदाय की प्रतिक्रियाएं सकारात्मक नजर आईं। यह और अधिक उल्लेखनीय है कि अमेरिका ने कश्मीर में परिवर्तन के भारत के कदम को उसका आंतरिक मामला करार दिया। यह इसलिए महत्वपूर्ण है, क्योंकि कुछ दिन पहले ही अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति ने मध्यस्थता की बात कर भारत को चिंतित और पाक का मनोबल बढ़ाने का काम किया था। कश्मीर पर अमेरिकी की प्रतिक्रिया पाक के लिए बड़े इश्टके से कम नहीं है। अमेरिका के अलावा संयुक्त अरब अमीरात की प्रतिक्रिया भी भारत का मनोबल बढ़ाने वाली है। इसमें संदेह है कि पाक को संयुक्त राष्ट्र में शोर मचाने से कुछ हासिल होगा, क्योंकि कश्मीर संबंधी उसका प्रस्ताव न जाने कब निष्पत्ती हो गया था। पाकिस्तान कुछ भी कहे, सच यही है कि कश्मीर भारत का आंतरिक मामला है। वैसे इस मामले पर पाकिस्तान की प्रतिक्रिया

क्या होगी, यह सर्वविदित थी, लेकिन उसके संभावित कदमों को लेकर सतर्क रहना होगा। वह बौखलाहट में आकर ऐसा कोई कदम उठा सकता है जो सीमा पर तनाव बढ़ाने वाले हो सकते हैं। यह सही है कि अफगानिस्तान से अपनी सेनाओं की वापसी के लिए अमेरिका को पाकिस्तान की जरूरत है, लेकिन पाकिस्तान की समस्या यह है कि अमेरिकी सेना की वापसी की शर्त पहले ही इमरान खान और डोनाल्ड ट्रंप के बीच तब हो चुकी है। यदि पाकिस्तान को यह लगता है कि वह अमेरिका के साथ कश्मीर बनाम अफगानिस्तान काई खेल सकता है तो शायद वह भ्रम में है। उसे यह समझ आना चाहिए कि अफगानिस्तान से निकलने की चाहत के बाद भी अमेरिका भारत के हितों की अनदेखी नहीं कर सकता। आमतौर पर विदेश नीति के मामले में पश्चिमी देशों का रुख अमेरिकी सोच से प्रेरित रहता है, लेकिन कुछ मामलों में वे अलग स्वर में भी बोलते हैं। कश्मीर के मामले में पश्चिमी देशों की प्रतिक्रिया सकारात्मक होगी, इसका अंदाजा उस तब लगा गया था जब बीते दिनों भारत सरकार द्वारा जारी दिशा-निर्देश के आधा पर

आकाशगंगा सी सुषमा स्वराज

जिसने भी सुना, यकीन नहीं कर पाया। बार-बार सोचता और शायद यही मानता कि खबर झूठी हो, लेकिन निमित्त को कुछ और स्वीकार था। सुषमा स्वराज का अचानक जाना भरी दुपहरी में अंधेरे का अहसास क्यों करा गया? कारण है सिर्फ उनका स्वभाव, उनकी विद्या और वाणी का सारस्वत प्रभाव, उनकी निरंहकाता। मुझे गत तीस वर्षों से उन्हें जानने, उनके साथ काम करने, उनका स्नेह पाने का सौभाग्य मिला था। पांचजन्य के प्रत्येक समारोह में सुषमा जी के घर की सरस्वती प्रतिमा का आना अनिवार्य था और उस सरस्वती प्रतिमा को वह आगह करके फिर वापस अपनी बैठक में ले भी आती थीं। लद्दाख में 1996-97 में जब मैंने सिंधु उत्सव और दर्शन योजना शुरू की तो उन्होंने दूरदर्शन को कहकर उस पर दस काड़ियों वाली सिंधु गाथा का वृत्तचित्र बनवाया। वह सबके लिए समान चिंता करती थीं। 15 वर्ष पूर्व वह बीमार हुईं। बहुत कष्ट था। कुछ मन में उदासी भी थी। मैं मिलने गया तो बोलीं, 'तरण जी कुछ नहीं कृप्योच्छा है- कृपण जी जैसा चाहे।' कुछ सप्ताह बाद ठीक हो गईं। फिर एक अंतराल के बाद केंद्रीय मंत्री बनीं। उसी संयम, शालीनता से बोलीं, तरण जी कृपण कृपा है। जैसा कृपण जी चाहें।

वह किसी का दुख नहीं देख सकती थीं, किसी को आहत नहीं कर सकती थीं। कभी किसी के लिए उनसे कटुवचन, अभद्र, अशालीन, आक्रामक शब्द प्रयोग न लिखे गए, न सुने गए। अभी कुछ दिन पहले, देश में घर्म जागरण की अलख जगाने वाले संत समान मांगेगण जी गंग को श्रद्धांजलि देने वाले उनके टवीट पर किसी ने एक पृष्ठित टवीट भेजा-उनकी मृत्यु की प्रतीक्षा का। उसका भी सुषमा जी ने इतना शालीन, भर उत्तर दिया कि सब तर्फ उसकी चर्चा हो गई। भद्रता बहुत दुर्लभ गुण है। तबी खूब आसान होगा, पर भद्र होना कठिन है। सुषमा स्वराज भद्रता का प्रतिरूप थीं और इसीलिए उन्हें अटल जी के समान अजातशत्रु कहा-माना गया।

आपाकाल में उन्होंने संघर्ष किया। जेपी आंदोलन में वह सबसे कम आयु की युवा नेता थीं। गश्ट सेविका समिति की सेविका के नाते शिविरों में जाना, समिति की अधिकारियों- शांता अक्का, प्रमिला ताई के साथ सतत संघर्ष, प्रखर हिंदू धर्म की ध्वजावाहिका, हर तीज त्योहार को राष्ट्रीय उत्सव की तरह मनाना। यह सब साधारण कार्यकर्ताओं, संघ-भाजपा से कभी न जुड़े नागरिकों के मन पर गहरे असर करते थे। कस्वा चौथ पर उनके वहां जो समागम और व्रत निभाते का उल्लास होता था वह भारतीय



तरुण विजय

सुषमा स्वराज भद्रता का प्रतिरूप थीं और इसीलिए उन्हें अटल जी के समान अजातशत्रु कहा-माना गया



परंपरा का शानदार समारोह माना जाता था। रक्षाबंधन पर एक बार मेरी बहन की राखी समय पर नहीं पहुंची। सुषमा जी को पता चला, तुरंत फोन किया-में हूं न, मैं बांधूंगी राखी। मैं जीवनों में उनके ये शब्द कभी भूल नहीं पाऊंगा। विदेश मंत्रालय का कार्यक्रम हो या व्यक्तिगत समारोह वह स्वयं बिना चूके, अपने अतिथियों को फोन करती थीं। आना है-भूलना मत। भला कौन ऐसा होगा जो इस फोन के बाद भी अनुपस्थित रहे। हर काम को मनोगेय से करना। किसी भी काम में किंचित काम भी भूल, लापरवाही, दूसरों पर निर्भरता उन्होंने सीखा ही नहीं था।

दुनिया में विदेश मंत्रालय, दूतावास अक्सर भारतीयों के प्रति रूखे, संवेदनहीन प्रकट होते थे। सुषमा जी ने विश्वव्यापी भारतीयों के लिए विदेश मंत्रालय को स्वदेश मंत्रालय में बदल दिया। कोई भी भारतीय, दुनिया के किसी भी कोने में हो, कुछ भी तकलीफ हो, वह किसी भी समय सुषमा जी को टवीट कर सकता था और उसका उत्तर भी मिलता-समाधान सहित। यह उतर पाकर अफ्रीका, रूस,

यूरोप, अरब, खाड़ी के देश, पाकिस्तान में बैठे भारतीयों की आंखों में आंसू आ जाते। सुषमा बहन, सुषमा दीदी। सुषमा मां... कैसे-कैसे आभारी कृतज्ञ भारतीय उन्हें दुआएं देती। ईसाई पादरी, मुस्लिम बहनें, बच्चियां, पाकिस्तान की गीता, जर्मनी में सरदारजी, अमेरिका गईं नई-नवेली बच्... अनंत कथा है सुषमा जी के विश्वव्यापी विदेश मंत्रालय की। कोई किसी भी पार्टी में हो, किसी भी जमात, महजब, संप्रदाय वाला हो, वह सुषमा जी से बात करना, कुछ कहना बहुत आसान और सहज मानता था, मांनों वह सुषमा जी से चिरपरिचित हो। बेंजामिन नेत-न्याह, पतिन, शी चिनफिंग, ओबामा, अरब देशों के शेख-सभी ने सुषमा स्वराज के शिक्षक को झुककर नमन किया और यह सुषमा जी का व्यक्तित्व था कि इन वैश्विक दिग्गज नेताओं के व्यवहार में सुषमा जी के समक्ष आते ही अद्भुत विनय और आदर का भाव प्रकट होता था। सूचना प्रसारण, स्वास्थ्य और विदेश जैसे तमाम महत्वपूर्ण मंत्रालय संभालते हुए हर जगह अपनी खास छाप, मेधा और रीति के चिन्ह छोड़े।

25 वर्ष की आयु में मंत्री पद पाई सुषमा जी 67 वर्ष की आयु तक यानी 42 वर्ष भारतीय राजनीति में अद्भुत गरिमा के साथ देदीयमान नक्षत्र जैसी रहीं। वह वस्तुतः ऐसी आकाशगंगा थी, जो बहुत ऊंचाई से भी सामान्यजन को शीतल, सुखद आत्मीयता का अहसास कराती थीं। उनकी गाथा सार्वजनिक जीवन जी रहे सभी लोगों के लिए एक बड़ा संदेश देती हैं। उंचाई किन्तनी भी पाओ, पर ध्यान रहे कि तुम्हारे साथ की छाया कभी लुप्त न हो। वाणी की मधुरता को निभाकर सुषमा स्वराज भारतीय राजनीति की सरस्वती पुत्री बन गईं। उनकी कोई तुलना नहीं, कोई विरोधी नहीं, निर्वैर निर्भीक, दृढ़। भाषा पर उनका अद्भुत अधिकार था। जब कर्नाटक गई तो आनन-फानन कन्नड़ सीखी। गुजरात में गुजराती। तमिल में ऐसी तमिल कि लोग चकित रह गए। मुझसे अक्सर कहतीं कि तुम तमिलनाडु में काम कर रहे हो, मुझे कुछ बतआया करो, तमिल संस्कृति बहुत विराट, महान है। पूर्वी एशिया पर उनका विशेष ध्यान था। लुक इस्ट पॉलिसी को एक्ट इस्ट पॉलिसी में बदलना उनकी ही योगदान था। देश विदेश, सर्व पथ समवाह, पर हिंदुत्व का गहरा अभिमान, महिला जाति, परंपराओं की लौक, भाषाई समृद्धि, भारत शत्रु के लिए रणचंडी, हर भारतीय के लिए मां का प्रतिरूप ऐसी सुषमा अब कहाँ ? (लेखक रण्यसभा के पूर्व सदस्य एवं स्तंभकार हैं)

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आज यदि हम अपने चारों ओर नजर घुमाए तो ऐसा लगता है जैसे हमारे पास या दूर का संसार केवल और केवल किसी द्वंद में उलझा हुआ सा है। इस विचार से मन भारी हो जाता है कि मानव की इतनी प्रगति के बावजूद समाज में विरोधाभास, असहमति, क्लेश बस यही सब जैसे थलथ गला पाया है। समाज की इकाई होने के नाते जब बात स्वयं पर आती है तो हम पाते हैं कि हमारे खुद के भीतर अथाह अंतर्द्वंद्व व्याप्त है। यही अंतर्द्वंद्व हमारे जीवन के बड़े एवं महत्वपूर्ण फैसलों पर हावी होने लगता है। यह अनिश्चयता की स्थिति हमारे व्यक्तित्व को अंदर ही अंदर ड्रॉक्ला करती जाती है।

यह द्रष्टात्मक रवैया आजकल बच्चों एवं युवाओं में भी खूब देखने को मिलता है। हर और एक विमूढ़, व्याकुल-सी पीढ़ी बनती जा रही है। हम अभिभावकों का कर्तव्य बनता है कि उनके व्याकुल मन में निर्णय, क्षमता को सुनिश्चित करने का निरंतर प्रयास करते रहें। इसके लिए हमें स्वयं को कटोराता से परखना होगा, क्योंकि अंतर्द्वंद्व किसी यह युद्ध से कम नहीं, जिसमें क्षति केवल अपनी ही होती है। अंतर्द्वंद्व की चपेट में जाए लोगों का दूसरे भी लाभ उठाने का प्रतिकूल प्रयास करते रहते हैं। अच्छा हो, हम अपने अंदर के अंतर्द्वंद्व को पहचानें और स्थितिगत समय से ही उससे बाहर निकलने का प्रयास करें।

छाया श्रीवास्तव

हटाने की जरूरत को समझ लेना चाहिए। अखंड भारत की पहचान दुनिया में मिशाल बनने इसके लिए हम सब को मिलकर काम करने की जरूरत है।

आचार्य राम कुमार बघेल शास्त्री, पलवल

सावधान रहना होगा

अनुच्छेद 370 समाप्त करने के बाद बौखलाया पाकिस्तान अब चुप नहीं बैठेगा। वह कश्मीर को हिंसा की आग में झुलसाने के लिए जी जान से जुट गया होगा। हमें पूरी तरह सावधान रहना होगा। बेहतर यही होगा कि अलगवादि किसी भी नेता को अभी कश्मीर में रिह न किया जाए। कश्मीर में अरब और चैन की बहली के लिए यह बेहद जरूरत है। यदि कोई आंदोलन करता है, हिंसा की कोशिश करता है या जन भावना को भड़काने की कोशिश करता है, उसे तुरंत गिरफ्तार कर लिए जाने की जरूरत है। दरअसल यह ताजा जख्म है जिसे भरने में समय लगेगा। जो कभी कश्मीर के बादशाह कहलाते थे आज वे अर्थ से फर्श पर आ गिरे हैं।

चंद्र प्रकाश शर्मा, रानी बाग, दिल्ली

इस स्तंभ में किसी भी विषय पर राय व्यक्त करने अथवा दैनिक जागरण के राष्ट्रीय संस्करण पर प्रतिक्रिया व्यक्त करने के लिए पाठक/लेखक सादर आमंत्रित हैं। आप हमें धन्य भेजने के साथ ई-मेल भी कर सकते हैं।
अपने पत्र इस पते पर भेजें:
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मेलबाक्स

उनकी बेटी मनुवेन की डायरी भी प्रकाशित हो चुकी है और उसमें भी अन्य कई पुष्टिकारक प्रमाण मिलते हैं।

अजय मित्तल, मेरठ

उचित नहीं विपक्ष का विरोध

देश के इतिहास में ऐसा देखने को मिला जिसकी कल्पना भी नहीं कि गई थी। आज भारत कश्मीर से लेकर कन्याकुमारी तक अखंड हिंदुस्तान बन गया है। अब एक संविधान, एक निशान (ध्वज) और एक हिंदुस्तान से पूरे भारत देश में अपार खुशी की लहर दौड़ रही है। ज्यादातर विपक्षी पार्टियों के बड़े-बड़े नेताओं को भी यह निर्णय और कार्य पसंद आया है। ऐसे में अब भी कुछ नेताओं का महज दिखावे के लिए विरोध करना उचित नहीं है। जिस विधेयक का विरोध किया जा रहा था उसके पक्ष में 370 मत पड़े और विपक्ष में मात्र 70 मत। इसमें भी क्या उनको इसकी जरूरत और महत्व को नहीं समझना चाहिए? यदि पूर्वजों से कोई गलती हुई तो क्या बच्चों को उसे सुधारने का प्रयास नहीं करना चाहिए था? नेताओं का आपसी द्वंद अवश्य हो सकता है, परंतु एक देश की एकता और अखंडता की बात आए सभी को एक साथ मिलकर कार्य करना जरूरी होता है। जनता अपनी तथा देश की रक्षा के लिए इन नेताओं को चुनकर सबसे बड़ी पंचायत में भेजती है। भारत सभी धर्मों का बराबर सम्मान करता है। हमारे संविधान ने हम सब को समान अधिकार दिए हैं। फिर कश्मीर में भी इसी संविधान की आवश्यकता थी। अब वहां सही मायने में चहुँमुखी विकास संभव है। कश्मीर हमारे देश का अभिन अंग था और भविष्य में भी रहेगा। अब विरोधियों को भी धीरे-धीरे अनुच्छेद 370

