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Understanding the process of ageing

Can we reverse the effects of ageing to extend potential lifespan?

QUANTUM LEAP

DEVANGSHU DATTA

There have been many stunning advances in the biosciences but the process of ageing remains mysterious. Life expectancy has increased in most places due to better nutrition, improved hygiene and healthcare, buttressed by new medicines and genetic research that tackles previously incurable diseases and conditions.

The average person can expect to live longer, and maintain better health than in any previous era. But can the longevity of the species itself increase?

Every historical era has produced the odd individual who lived 80-90 years, or longer, in times when average life expectancy was less than 40.

We can certainly hope that more people will attain longer lifespans. Life expectancy across the EU exceeds 80 years, and Japan, Singapore and Switzerland are 85-plus. (India is 69). But is it possible to extend lifespans to say, 120 years, or longer? Some people think so.

There are therefore, two related but different goals, for researchers and policymakers. One is to create a policy environment where more people live longer, and remain healthier. The other, more ambitious goal is to understand ageing, and reverse its effects to extend potential lifespan.

There are around 500,000 people aged 100–plus at the moment. This number will roughly double in every future decade. A statistical analysis in Sciencejournal (The Plateau of Human Mortality *https://science.sciencemag.org/content/360/6396/1459*) suggests there may be no obvious limit to lifespan.

Italian demographers Elisabetta Barbi and Francesco Lagona, and the Italian National Institute of Statistics, looked at the records of 3,836 people, aged 105 or older in Italy, between 2009 and 2015. As we know, intuitively, as well as statistically, the risk of dying increases for every adult. That is, a 21-year-old is slightly more likely to die in the next 12 months, than a 20-year-old, and that risk continues to rise with every year.

Oddly, this study indicates that the risk "plateaus" after 105 – the risk of dying in any given 12 month period seems to stay at around 50 per cent after the age of 105. This could be a statistical, or methodological quirk, or it could indicate some biological phenomenon where cell-repair processes balance off ageing effects.

The XPRIZE Foundation, which has supported space research and robotics, among other things, recently became interested in longevity research. One of the XPRIZE Board members, Sergey Young, has raised $100 million for a Longevity Vision Fund. This will invest in biotech startups, researching longevity-related areas.

Young believes lifespans can be increased to 200 years and that the technologies to enable this can be made available to over 1 billion people. X-PRIZE founder, Peter Diamandis is more measured but upbeat in saying, "Adding 20 to 30 healthy years on a person's life is likely to be the largest market opportunity on Earth. The convergence of genome sequencing, AI and cellular medicine will enable breakthroughs that will make 100 years old, the new 60."

XPRIZE recently held a longevity conference and released a road map, which listed 12 areas, where breakthroughs or improvements could promote better health and increased life expectancy. According to The Lancet, over 70 per cent of deaths are due to chronic age-related diseases. The list includes cancer, Alzheimer's, heart disease, liver disease, etc.

The 12 listed breakthrough areas include creating big databases that collect real-time ageing data from individuals, creating a list of universally accepted biological markers as a global benchmark for ageing research, replicating and fine-tuning studies that indicate calorific restriction could prolong life, tools or tests to provide early warnings of at least three ageing-related diseases, any cycle of rejuvenation that works with animals, postponing the emergence of at least three ageing-related diseases with broad-spectrum treatments, analysis and insight into the capacity to process nutrients, a quantified "theory of ageing" that ties all the mechanisms of ageing together, and easy exercise systems, or biomedical systems that replicate the positive effects of exercise.

These are ambitious but understandable areas for study. The three "science fiction" objectives are: First, "arresting ageing by completely stopping the ageing process for at least one year". This would have to be demonstrated first on mammals and then on humans. The second is creating a model of the human body which is detailed and accurate enough to replace experimentation with human subjects. This could circumvent current restrictions on research, which could be of potential benefit but likely to be dangerous to the subject. The third is "ageing circumvented: A method to move the brain — with or without the entire head — of one person to the body of another, or to a non-human vessel, for over a year, while maintaining conscious thought or (in the case of cryonics) demonstrating that consciousness can be recovered after a time".

Achieving this would effectively mean immortality.

CHINESE WHISPERS

BMS takes on government

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh affiliated trade union, has upped the ante against the Narendra Modi government in the last couple of weeks. On Thursday, the BMS offered support to the strike by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) employees against privatisation of airports. It said it opposes the Centre's announcement to privatise profit making airports of Varanasi, Raipur, Indore, Bhubaneswar, Amritsar and Trichy. It called upon the government "to stop the process of handing over Trivandrum, Guwahati and Jaipur airports and restrain" from privatising the rest. The BMS said it believed further privatisation of airports "may lead to declare AAI as a sick PSU". The union also rejected the new amendment to the Employees' Provident Fund law to convert Employees Pension scheme, or EPS, to the National Pension Scheme (NPS) at a consultation meeting with the union labour ministry. It said NPS is a "risky market linked" scheme and return in EPS is much more than NPS according to the study of EPFO and has more benefits to family members of employees.

Spelling mistake

While some leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party are working hard to popularise the use of Hindi as a primary language of official communication, things might not be moving in the right direction in some of the BJP–ruled states. During a function in Lucknow organised by the Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, which was being attended by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Union HRD Minister Ramesh Pokriyal 'Nishank', the very first word (*yugpravartak*) on a banner that formed a backdrop for the speakers on the dais had a glaring spelling mistake. The event in question was a three–day national conference on "Mahayogi Gorakhnath", whose teachings form a key part of the canons of the Nath community. Adityanath is also the chief priest of the Gorakhnath temple.

Shivpal to return?

Are the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party Lohia (PSPL) ready to bury the hatchet? SP President Akhilesh Yadav hinted as much when he said in a recent meet that all party leaders and family members who had parted ways were welcome back. The SP and the PSPL, floated by Yadav's estranged uncle Shivpal, had fought the 2019 Lok Sabha polls separately, but ended up doing each other more harm than good. Although the PSPL has denied rumours of Shivpal's "ghar wapsi" — which might also entail disbanding his outfit — attributing them to those who were responsible for causing the spilt in the family, it has caused a flutter among senior leaders of the two units.

Growing crisis of the educated unemployed

When you put the reports by HRD ministry and CMIE survey together, you are looking at a simmering volcano

YOGENDRA YADAV

While Indians were busy celebrating the country's global triumph and commiserating about its terrestrial adventures, two important reports went almost unnoticed. The eighth annual All India Survey on Higher Education 2018-19 was released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development last week. It coincided with the release of four-monthly report "Unemployment in India — A Statistical Profile" for May-August 2019 by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy.

Put together, both these surveys point to a simmering volcano of educated unemployment. This could be the visible face of the economic slowdown and could well become a political challenge to the regime.

Strange as it might look, the quality of statistics available for our higher education institutions has been much poorer than our statistics on school education. Sensing this gap, the central government instituted AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) in 2011-12. We now have official (self-reported and unverified) statistics on the number and nature of higher education institutions, student enrollment, and pass-out figures along with the numbers for teaching and non-teaching staff. Sadly, this official survey does not tell us much about the quality of teaching, learning or research. There is no equivalent of Pratham's ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) survey or the NCERT's All India School Education Survey.

Degree holders without skills

The recent AISHE 2018-19 survey flatters to deceive. It tells us that the number of universities in the country is now 993, more than 50 per cent up from the 642 universities the country had in 2011-12. The fine print brings bad news: the increase is fuelled primarily by mushrooming of private universities. Of the 351 universities added in the last eight years, 199 were private universities approved by state governments. The report tells us little about the quality of education in these private universities. As someone who sat on the University Grants Commission (UGC) for a while, I can say that many of these are low-grade teaching shops that only bring disrepute to the idea of education. Their growth is not good news.

In terms of enrollment, we now have 37.4 million students doing something or the other in higher education; the number stands at 33.4 million if we consider only those who are pursuing proper, regular courses and not the joke that happens in the name of distant learning. This might look impressive unless we remember that this is only 26 per cent of our population aged between 18 and 23. So, about three-fourths of those who should be in higher education are still not there. Our higher equation system awards a little less than one crore degrees (9.092 million to be precise) every year.

Most of these (about 6.5 million) are students who get an undergraduate degree. Most of the students with such degrees learn very little in terms of knowledge, life-skills or any other skills relevant to employability. For a country of our size, we produce less than two lakh MPhil/PhD degree holders annually who presumably have some research skills. Our higher education faces both a quantitative and a qualitative challenge.

One good feature of the report is that it gives social breakup of students and teachers. At least in quantitative terms, women have nearly bridged the gender gap: nearly 49 per cent of students enrolled in higher education are women. In terms of overall enrolment, the real crisis is not among the Scheduled Castes (14.9 per cent of students, compared to 16 per cent share in population) or even Scheduled Tribes (5.5 per cent, compared to 8 per cent share in population), both slightly below their population share, but among Muslims (5.2 per cent) the share in higher education is about one-third of what it should be as per their share in the population (14.2 per cent as per last Census). The same situation prevails among the teachers too, where even the SCs (8.5 per cent) and STs (2.3 per cent) continue to be seriously under-represented despite legally mandated reservations. We also have the challenge of equity in educational opportunities.

Educated but unemployed

Now match this information with the latest estimates generated by the CMIE survey on unemployment. The latest report for May-August 2019 points to a steady increase in the unemployment rate, which has risen from 7.03 per cent in May to 8.19 per cent at the end of August. (The methodology adopted by CMIE is a little different from that adopted by the official National Sample Survey Office, hence the estimates tend to vary). This is much above the current global average of 4.95 per cent as estimated by the International Labour Organisation.

What is most striking here is that unemployment levels rise rapidly with a rise in education level. Unemployment is negligible among the uneducated and those who did not go beyond primary school, mainly because they cannot afford to remain unemployed. The unemployment level jumps to 15 per cent, roughly double the national average, among those who are graduates and above.

This level of educated unemployment in India is alarming by any standards. The CMIE tells us that there are a little over 100 million graduates in the country, and of them 63 million are in the "labour force", that is,. willing and available for work. Of these, 53.5 million have some kind of employment. That leaves nearly one crore (9.4 million to be precise) persons, mostly youth, with graduate or higher degree who do not have any job whatsoever. The same survey also tells us that while more women are getting education, the rate of unemployment among women is 17.6 per cent, more than double the rate for men (6.1 per cent). So, more women in higher education could soon become bad news.

A ticking time bomb

Now put both the reports together and you are looking at a perfect explosion. Nearly one-sixth of highly educated youth are unemployed. To this pool of about one crore educated unemployed, we add another one crore every year — those who pass out with degrees from higher education institutions. This pool has more women than ever before. Consider the fact that most of these graduates are not just unemployed, they are also unemployable as they bring little knowledge or skills to the market. Add economic slowdown to this equation and you know why this could be a ticking time bomb. Far from taking in new recruits, companies are retrenching their existing employees. So, these fresh degree-holders with aspirations but without skills are being pushed into a market that is not ready to receive any more.

This is exactly the kind of situation that has led to social unrest and street riots in many parts of the world. Instead of any serious attempt to address this brewing crisis, we get all kinds of distractions. We are concerned about triple talaq, Kashmir's integration, Chandrayaan landing and Howdy, Modi! Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is busy managing headlines and pleasing the corporates. But we hear very little about any serious initiative to tackle the growing crisis of the educated unemployed. Are we waiting for the crisis to erupt? Or, is it time to say 'Howdy' to our youth?

(By special arrangement with ThePrint)

The author is national president, Swaraj India. Views are personal

INSIGHT

Loan *mela* comeback: Missed history lessons

AMOL AGRAWAL

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that public sector banks will put up *shamianas* (colourful tents) in 400 districts to provide loans to retail, agriculture and SMEs. The policy was initiated to fight the slowdown but has brought back memories of similar loan *melas* from 1980s. These *melas* not just got Indian banks in serious trouble but also created a highly reckless credit culture in India whose effects continue till date.

In 1982, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi appointed Janardhan Poojary as Minister of Finance for state. The PM had nationalised 20 banks but was unhappy with their progress in rural India and asked Poojary to look into the matter. *RBI History* volume 4 (1981-97) notes that the trickle-down theory was not working and there was a need to target and prioritise credit to the vulnerable sections for a more just distribution.

Poojary narrates how he decided to tour bank branches in disguise (*https://janardhanapoojary.com/loan-mela-a-revolution/*). He observed that the poor were ignored not just for bank services but also for loans. On being asked why, the bankers gave the age old reply that the poor did not pay back loans. The minister argued that it was large corporates that were behind most of the unpaid loans and the poor had a better track record for paying back loans.

Poojary then developed the idea of loan *melas* (which he called "revolutionary") where the banks were pushed into giving uncollateralised loans up to ₹5,000. He ordered all the bank chairpersons to be present at the *melas* across the country. His phone calls had to be answered by the bankers, irrespective of the time of the call.

The loan *mela* met with a lot of criticism (and threats) from not just bank unions but also sections of media and rival politicians. M V Kamath wrote (*Indian Post*, December 30, 1987) that "loan *melas* threatened to cripple the Indian banking system" and the lavish public expenditure was gross abuse of trusteeship of banks. Karnataka's Janata Party president, M P Prakash asked the PM and the RBI to postpone the proposed loan *mela* in Bengaluru, or face a massive confrontation (*The Patriot*, December 3, 1987, Patriot). In another case, the Tripura CPI (M) deemed loan *melas* as bribing voters ahead of the legislative assembly elections (*The Telegraph*, December 24, 1987). An *Economic and Political Weekly* piece (July 1987) noted that (then) PM Rajiv Gandhi could not stop the loan *mela* spree, as he himself inaugurated the first loan *mela* before becoming the PM!

Kamath (and other critics) were proven right. RBI's *Currency and Finance Report* (2006-08) points the return on assets of nationalised banks declined from 0.56 per cent in 1980 to just 0.15 per cent in 1990. Most of the other banking indicators indicated a crisis. There were other factors apart from loan *melas* such as administered interest rate regime, other directed credit programmes etc, that played a role in the crisis.

One cannot justify irresponsible loans to lower income people based on the assumption that it is large industries that do not repay loans. Two wrongs do not make a right! These policy interventions abuse the market discipline in a much larger way over time. The *RBI History* points that these targeted programmes "generated a feeling among borrowers that they did not need to worry about discharging their debt" and loans were given to those with political backing and waived-off "especially on the eve of elections".

The teething problems of the industry finally merged with the 1991 crisis and ushered in the subsequent reforms in the overall economy including the banking sector. Having said that, despite 25 years of reforms, some of the banking legacies of the earlier era continue even today such as debt waivers before elections, politicisation of the banking system, role of small borrowers versus big borrowers in NPAs and so on.

It is not clear why the government has taken a leaf from the loan *mela* book of the 1980s when banks are already suffering from high NPAs. Moreover, the government wants to signal that it is cleaning up the banking system but this move indicates just the opposite.

I want to end with some banking history. Poojary hailed from South Canara region which saw the emergence of five banks (Canara, Corporation, Syndicate, Vijaya and Karnataka). These banks showed one can provide loans to the poor without any push from the state and yet grow into large and profitable banks. Yet, the government first nationalised these banks and has now reduced them to just two in the recent spate of bank mergers. The history of Indian banking could have been very different if our politicians had heeded lessons from the South Canara banks. But we continue to look at history of a different kind.

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LETTERS

Services inflation

This refers to "Walking a tightrope" (September 24). "Low inflation and low growth environment is the new normal": This might be true for the developed countries, but in the Indian context, there is low growth but not low inflation. First, while calculating inflation, we are not considering fuel inflation that has increased substantially. Food inflation has also been up and down, albeit seasonally, but it affects the purchasing power of the common man. Second, till now we are calculating only goods inflation; we have to calculate services inflation as well. No one is calculating that. Recently, after GST implementation, services costs have increased drastically. The minimum increase in services inflation may be to the extent of 18-28 per cent with the GST rates. Everybody is feeling the heat and the services inflation might be one of the reasons for the current slowdown.

Anand Deshpande Pune

B Prasanna responds:

Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation, which is used as the current measure for retail inflation, proxies for fuel inflation through the petrol and diesel prices, unsubsidised LPG, among other components. Recently, global crude prices have been coming down since their peak in October 2018 and this is reflecting in headline inflation. While food prices are volatile, driven by fruits and vegetables, food surplus in the last few years and buffer stock management by the government has reduced the risk of substantial overheating in food prices.

Core inflation (excluding food and fuel) includes services as well. Services inflation has a weight of approximately 28 per cent in CPI and while it includes some goods, it does cover a big component of services including transport, health, education and personal care. These components have also been showing low inflation for the past several months, which is in line with the continued slack in the economy.

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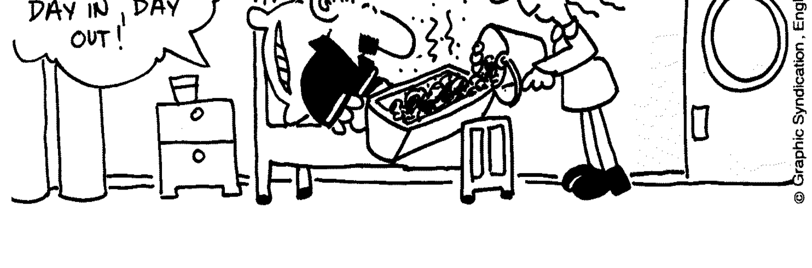

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Slow but steady start

PMJAY has not yet made a dent where it's most needed

It has now been a year since the ambitious health care scheme known as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) was launched. In that period, it has racked up some impressive numbers: Most importantly, there were about 4.5 million cases of hospital treatment under the scheme. This is a large figure until the number of possible cases in the country is considered. Indeed, the relative smallness of this number points to an issue yet to be addressed: Public awareness and access. The PMJAY has spread across practically the entire country, with 33 states and Union territories having some form of the scheme — the only big hold-outs are some Opposition-ruled states including Delhi, West Bengal, and Telangana. But the number of claims is considerably higher in the richer states. Gujarat has by far the highest number of claims, about 650,000, followed by Tamil Nadu with around 400,000. In other words, just these two rich states account for 1 million of that 4.5 million. Another million or so is accounted for by Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. As with many other all-India schemes, states with better resources are managing to implement it better.

While the slow scale-up of the scheme is a problem, it does mean that its fiscal impact has not yet been fully felt. It is possible that the fear of the fiscal impact is why some poorer states have not expanded it as much as they should have. Cost control is going to require more attention. The PMJAY authorities will, first, have to take pro-active measures to reduce costs, such as by collective bargaining with pharmaceutical companies or the makers of medical equipment. What will certainly be the cause of friction in the future are package rates for private providers. The government is optimistic that there will be a sharp expansion in the number of for-profit private hospitals empanelled under the scheme from the current 9,000, which is only a whisker more than the number of public hospitals so registered. But unless there is a clear understanding about package costs, this might not pan out as expected. With the expansion of for-profit hospitals, questions will also begin to be asked about widespread fraud. This is visible even in the first year of the PMJAY, with sharply high rates of hysterectomies — almost certainly unnecessary — in places like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The PMJAY highlights its data-based intervention to identify such possibilities of fraud. But in the end, disputes will have to be settled by old-fashioned human intervention. The fact is that there is simply no capacity yet planned for in the Union government or in the states to manage such disputes.

While the PMJAY has multiple different models in different states, the common requirement for the success of any of these models will be the expansion of state capacity, whether in terms of regulation, dispute settlement, or in the public sector hospitals themselves. It is impossible to build universal health care on the cheap. While the PMJAY has so far not been a fiscal drain, if it is to succeed, it will certainly require more resources — many of which will have to be diverted to support the poorer states.

Another ID card?

One nation, one card proposal raises many questions

Barely has the dust settled on the massive unique identification project, otherwise known as Aadhaar, than Union Home Minister Amit Shah raised another source of anxiety of Indians with his proposal to introduce a "one nation, one card" plan. This new card, he said at an event of the Registrar General of India (which conducts the 10-year census), would "link all utilities like Aadhaar, passport, bank account, driving licence, voter card". The data for this exercise would be part of the National Population Register (NPR) exercise, to be collected alongside the 2021 census, which collects all data on "usual residents" of India (that is, who have resided in a local area for the past six months and intend to reside there for the next six months).

The NPR exercise — which began in 2011 at a cost of ₹10,000 crore under P Chidambaram and famously clashed with the Aadhaar authority on whose database would prevail (the latter won out) — would collect the Aadhaar number, the Permanent Account Number, the voter ID, and passport information. Sharing the Aadhaar number would be voluntary in view of the Supreme Court's judgment last year. All this data will not be in the public domain but accessible to a citizen through a password-protected protocol.

On paper, the one nation, one card and NPR proposals, which may or may not be linked (the home ministry did not clarify), have the logic of simplicity. It will relieve the Indian citizen of being loaded with multiple cards that act as identity documents — most middle-class Indians have at least four. But the initiative raises more questions. First, it is unclear why the government would feel the need to subject India's citizenry to another identification drive when over 90 per cent of them are covered by Aadhaar, which was an elaborate, time-consuming exercise. Second, the census does not cover the entire population, which leaves unanswered the questions of the status of those citizens who are not visited by a census officer. Third, where does this leave migrant labour, who may well be citizens but would not qualify as "usual residents"? Fourth, the old apprehensions about data privacy apply here too. The Supreme Court's Aadhaar judgement a year ago had directed the government to introduce a "robust" data privacy law even as it upheld the constitutional validity of the exercise. This is nowhere in evidence, and remains a concern. The issue is: When there is a single card that holds all vital details, what happens when the system is compromised? There are also very few solutions in the event of data breaches, and the one card idea magnifies this danger.

Fifth, in March this year, the prime minister launched a "one card, one nation" mobility card — which also had its origins in the United Progressive Alliance — via the RuPay platform for making payments across all transport segments including metro, bus, suburban railways, smart cities and retail shopping, for paying at toll plazas and for parking. This National Common Mobility Card, which certainly has greater utility than an all-inclusive citizenship card, has been adopted by some local transport networks (in Mumbai and Telangana), but it has been stymied by the lack of all-India connectivity. The "one nation, one card" plan could well suffer from similar infirmities.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

The puzzling lure of financial globalisation

The intellectual hold of financial globalisation on policymakers is still strong, despite its history of failure

ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN & DANI RODRIK

After holding off for decades, China has finally embraced financial globalisation, announcing recently that it would eliminate capital controls to allow unfettered short-term foreign inflows (so-called hot money). By contrast, after decades of boom-bust cycles, Argentina is facing another macroeconomic crisis, and has finally imposed capital controls to prevent a catastrophic decline in its currency.

Both of these episodes reveal the intellectual hold that financial globalisation still has on policymakers, despite its history of failure. Why, after all, would China abandon capital controls now, and what took Argentina so long to adopt such obviously necessary measures?

The Chinese economic miracle has many sources. In addition to the turn to markets, China has benefited from exports and foreign investment, internal migration, and the Maoist legacy of a public education and health system. It is also the civilisational heir to a strong, effective state with an enlightened, albeit ruthless, leadership. Its people collectively crave stability. But an important factor in China's rise was the decision not to open the economy to capital flows.

Consider the following counterfactual history. In the late 1990s, when China's economic miracle was becoming evident, it could easily have succumbed to the prevailing orthodoxy on financial globalisation. Had it done so, the likely outcome would have been a surge in foreign capital chasing high Chinese returns, rapid appreciation of the renminbi, slower export growth, and lost dynamism. China's export machine would not have become the juggernaut that it is, and its economy may well have suffered through much more volatility as a result of the fickleness of foreign capital. In fact, Argentina — with its periodic macroeconomic volatility and recurring financial crises — offers a perfect illustration of these downsides.

Nearly every major emerging-market financial crisis of the past few decades has been preceded or accompanied by surges in capital inflows. That was true of Latin America in the 1980s, India in 1991, Mexico in 1994, and East Asia and Russia in the late 1990s. It was also true of Brazil, Turkey, and Argentina in the early 2000s; the Baltics, Iceland, Greece, and Spain in the late 2000s and early 2010s; and the "Fragile Five" emerging-market economies (Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey) in 2013. And it is true of Argentina today.

To be sure, capital flows have often reflected deeper policy problems or imbalances within a given emerging market. But they are also usually the necessary transmission mechanism for crises, and thus have magnified the eventual costs to those economies. Although most tenets of the neoliberal consensus — privatisation, deregulation, trade integration, immigration, fiscal discipline, and the primacy of growth over distribution — are now being challenged or outright rejected, financial globalisation remains a glaring exception.

The preponderance of evidence suggests that financial globalisation — especially unrestricted hot money — aggravates macroeconomic instability, creates the conditions for financial crises, and dampens long-run growth by making the tradable sector less competitive. Few economists would list financial globalisation as an essential prerequisite for sustained long-term development or macroeconomic stability. And arguments made in its favour presume that every country has already met highly demanding regulatory requirements. Most have not and probably cannot, except over the long run.

While the International Monetary Fund has begun to make some allowance for restrictions on capital flows, albeit only as a temporary last resort for weathering cyclical surges, the dogma of financial globalisation remains intact. One reason, perhaps, is that development economics has not shed its resource/savings fundamentalism, which attributed underdevelopment to a lack of domestic savings. The implication was that developing and emerging economies should attract resources in the form of foreign aid or, after scepticism about aid became widespread, foreign private capital.

Alternatively, the orthodoxy may owe its resilience to the power of entrenched financial interests that have stood in the way of new controls on cross-border capital flows. Wealthy elites in several countries — especially in Latin America and South Africa — embraced financial globalisation early on because they saw it as offering a useful escape route for their wealth. In these cases, policy inertia and possible reputational costs made it difficult suddenly to start advocating a reversal. Global financial elites had long relied on a narrative that equates capital controls with expropriation, and responsible policymakers did not want to be seen as violating property rights.

More recently, restrictions on financial flows have become less anathema, because several developing countries have managed to overcome the "original sin" of borrowing in a foreign currency. In the now-accepted hierarchy, financial flows denominated in the local currency rank higher than dollar-denominated flows because they do not result in exploding debt burdens whenever the exchange rate weakens by too much. Forms of borrowing that avoid these balance-sheet effects are understandably regarded as less problematic.

Nonetheless, in the current context of chronic anemic growth and persistently low — or even negative — long-term interest rates in advanced economies ("Japanification"), there is a danger that developing countries will be tempted to pursue increased foreign borrowing. That path will lead only to more volatility, more frequent crises, and less overall dynamism. But more countries are choosing it nonetheless, and the proponents of the new intellectual revisionism appear to have tamely acquiesced.

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Beijing's message on an iconic anniversary

CLAUDE SMADJA

The celebration of the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China was meant to mark the achievements of the Communist Party in ensuring the "great rejuvenation" of China and its return to a role and position "close to the centre of the global stage". It was also planned to illustrate the role of President Xi Jinping as the undisputed leader and, even more, as the "lingxiu", a word used only for highly revered leaders, and until now reserved for Mao.

However, as fate would have it, this 70th anniversary is taking place in a context particularly difficult for China. At home the leadership is confronted with an economy growing at its slowest pace in 20 years, partly due to the impact of the trade war initiated by the US but more importantly because of the need to fight the financial risk created by shadow banking, which went out of control in the last few years, and structural issues such as the trend of diminishing returns on investment in many state-owned enterprises, the private sector not being able to play its full role as a booster of activity because it is cash-starved, and the worrying trend of rising unemployment among the young graduates. Add to that the pig crisis. An epidemic of swine fever has forced the culling of millions of pigs, multiplying by three the price of this crucial staple for Chinese households. The government is desperately increasing imports and tapping into reserves to fend off popular discontent.

At the same time, the Hong Kong demonstrations, now in their 14th week and becoming increasingly violent, represent the gravest and most spectacular challenge to the authority of the Communist Party since the events of June 1989. As the unrest escalates, the leadership finds itself confronted with a lose-lose situation. It cannot be seen as capitulating to the protesters' demands, as the political nature of these demands is a direct challenge to the authority of the government; at the same time, violent repression, using the anti-riot units of the People's Liberation Army stationed in Hong Kong would create an international crisis that China would truly want to avoid in the present economic and geopolitical situation.

On the international front too, the clouds have kept gathering. There is, of course, the confrontation with the US which, beyond the trade issues, is a contest for technological and strategic prominence. Although many indications point to the fact that Beijing might be able to sustain a trade war with Washington better than its opponent, this war is nevertheless taking its toll on the Chinese economy. In addition to that, the shift of attitude towards the rise of China, not only in the US but also in Europe is a serious concern for Beijing, making the country's technology catch-up process more arduous. Last but not least, the Belt and Road project, a strategic signature initiative of Xi Jinping, has now hit serious bumps with a backlash from many recipient countries against over-priced projects generating a very heavy debt load that might prove to be unsustainable, and increasing suspicion about Beijing's ultimate strategic motives. After having highlighted the Belt and Road and the "Made in China 2025" initiatives so much as hallmarks of the Xi Jinping era, the official propaganda is now quite silent about them, and government officials are wary to mention them.

Does that mean that China has renounced the ambitions to create its own sphere of economic and geopolitical influence through the Belt and Road initiative or its objective of achieving a prominent position in the new technologies defining the 21st century economy? Definitely not. On the contrary, the clampdown on technology exchanges and transfer to China implemented from the US will end up accelerating Beijing's drive towards technological self-sufficiency. And President Xi jinping will not renounce achieving the grand design of the Belt and Road Initiative. But this is a time for a pause or recalibration for the leadership, as it grapples with the three immediate challenges of sustaining economic growth at a socially and politically acceptable level, of dealing with the Trump administration and of Hong Kong.

The military parade planned for October 1, slated to be the most impressive parade ever in China which will showcase some new advanced weaponry for the first time, will aim at sending two very strong messages: To the international audience, and especially the US, that China is now a major military power not to be trampled with and that Mr Trump's bullying will not work. It will also remind Asian neighbours — if that was needed — the mighty power they have next door if ever they had to choose between Beijing and Washington on issues such as Taiwan or the South China Sea. For the domestic audience, all the fanfare around the 70th anniversary is meant to illustrate how, under the leadership of the Communist Party, China is now a powerful player in the world. This will feed national pride and highlight not only the remarkable achievements of the last 40 years but also the international stature that the assertiveness of Xi Jinping has gained for the country

That political control has never been so tight since the peak of the Mao era and that the regime has elevated security precautions to an almost paranoid level does not mean that the leadership feels any immediate threat to its grip on power or that there is any challenge to the authority of President Xi Jinping. Every challenging phase in China's modern history has translated into tighter control. What we have is rather a regime leaving nothing to chance and using an iconic anniversary date to show, inside and outside China, that it will not be daunted by the domestic or international headwinds that have come its way.

The writer is president of Smadja & Smadja, a strategic advisory firm; @ClaudeSmadja

Israel's complex first PM

BOOK REVIEW

FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN

On the eve of the establishment of the state of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, who had worked tirelessly toward this goal, suddenly sought to postpone independence. He knew neighbouring Arab countries were poised to invade and he feared his underground army wasn't prepared to fight; so, at a nighttime meeting with Lord Chancellor Sir William Jowitt, Ben-Gurion proposed that the British remain in charge of Palestine for another five to 10 years while working to increase Jewish immigration. Nothing came of this proposal and, on November 29, 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. Full-scale fighting broke out six months later.

Ben-Gurion's 11th-hour meeting is one of the little-known facts revealed by the Israeli historian Tom Segev in his deeply researched, engrossing and, in some respects, controversial biography, *A State at Any Cost*. Mr Segev has written several books on Israel, and he joins other noted experts who have mined newly released archival sources to re-examine the life and legacy of the country's first prime minister. The timing makes sense: As Israel has transformed itself from a small, struggling society into a high-tech player on the global stage, its people have become increasingly interested in the ideals that first guided it and the roots of problems that still confound it. And, like America's founding fathers, David Ben-Gurion was the embodiment of his nation's complicated beginnings.

Born David Yosef Gruen in the Polish town of Plonsk in 1886, Ben-Gurion said he knew by the age of three that his home would be in the land of Israel. Hyperbolic as this sounds, his claim helps explain his lifelong mission to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. It also reflects the atmosphere in his home, where Ben-Gurion's father was one of the town's first Zionist activists. Even so, as a young man he felt directionless: He moved to Warsaw, was rejected by a technological college there, and eventually became so despondent that he wrote a friend, "I can't find any interest in living anymore."

Ben-Gurion found himself after arriving in Palestine in 1906 at the age of 20. He would later recall this period with pride, despite having realised fairly quickly that he was not cut out for the field work he was doing on a farm. Politics soon became his métier and the road to fulfilling his Zionist aspirations.

To prepare himself, Ben-Gurion travelled to Turkey to study law along with his friend Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who later became Israel's second president. After their studies were cut short by World War I, they eventually headed to New York City, where Ben-Gurion met and married Pauline (Paula) Moonweis. Their union was not without its problems — Ben-Gurion had several lengthy affairs and was a distant father to their three children — but the two remained together for 50 years.

By the late 1930s, Ben-Gurion and his socialist labour party had gained power not only in Palestine, but over the worldwide Zionist movement as well. Their goal was to establish a state with a Jewish majority in the biblical land of Israel. But in 1937, when the British Peel Commission recommended dividing Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, Ben-Gurion responded with "burning enthusiasm," despite the tiny area allotted to the Jews. As he told colleagues, the fact of having a state was more important than its borders; besides, "borders are not forever." The Peel plan fell through, but 10 years later Ben-Gurion accepted the partition resolution from the United Nations.

Although he made attempts at peace with the Palestinian Arabs, Ben-Gurion was pessimistic about ever achieving it. Long before the state existed, he met with a respected Muslim jurist, Musa al-Alami, whom he assured that the Zionists had come to develop Palestine for all its inhabitants. Alami said he preferred to leave the land poor and desolate for another century until the Arabs could develop it themselves. Ben-Gurion repeated this story again and again as proof of the futility of seeking agreement. At most, Mr Segev writes, Ben-Gurion believed the conflict "could be managed," not resolved.

Where *A State at Any Cost* falls short is when the author injects his own ideology into the events of Ben-Gurion's life. Mr Segev has been associated with revisionist historians, known in the past as "new historians," who challenge Israel's founding narratives.

For example: Ben-Gurion and comrades who arrived in Palestine in the early 1900s embraced the idea of "Hebrew labour." The term is widely understood to refer to manual work by Jews, rejecting centuries of work Jews did in the Diaspora as merchants and shopkeepers. However, Mr Segev defines "Hebrew labour" as a means for Jews to displace Arab workers and control the labour market. He also makes a questionable connection between "Hebrew labour" and the flight of Arabs from their villages during the 1948 war. The exodus of the Arabs from the designated Jewish state — the origin of the Palestinian refugee problem — is a hotly debated subject. Scholars disagree about how many villagers left of their own accord and how many were expelled by Israeli commanders. There is no evidence that Ben-Gurion gave a central order to evacuate them all. He seemed surprised at first by the emptying villages, only later regarding the Arab flight as a boon to the military.

In 1963, David Ben-Gurion retired as prime minister. Through the drama of his life, and despite his failings — both personal and political — Ben-Gurion emerges in Mr Segev's book as a man of vision and integrity. These are qualities that Israelis, like the rest of us, long for in today's leaders.

A STATE AT ANY COST: The Life of David Ben-Gurion
Tom Segev
Farrar, Straus & Giroux
$40, 816 pages

Opinion

FUEL FOR FIRE

Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi

"Since we are not a member of the NSG, we do not really have the ability to get the fuel for producing nuclear energy. If we were to get that opportunity, we could perhaps be a model in this area"

RationalExpectations

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Onion tears again, to make farmers cry

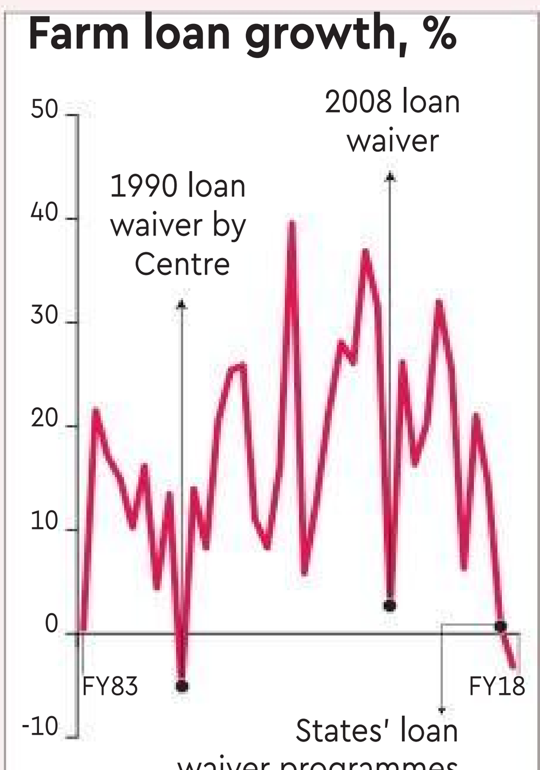
Don't try to fix onion prices, recall that it is govt policy that is hitting cotton exports; farm credit is falling for the same reason

IT WILL BE unfortunate if the government, as a response to the spurt in onion prices, imposes stocking limits on onion traders; it would make clear that like all past governments, the Narendra Modi-led one, too, is driven by short-term considerations, with little or no understanding of their long-term impact. Onion prices, like those of most agriculture products, have sharp ups and downs, primarily due to inadequate storage and processing; having large retailers, including overseas ones, is the best way to fix this since only the presence of large buyers will trigger the creation of the necessary infrastructure, but that is a separate story.

What is relevant here is that each time such curbs are imposed, they end up hurting farmers more. A higher price for rice in export markets, for instance, will benefit farmers, but putting a cap on how much can be exported, as has happened in the past, or even an outright ban would end up hurting them. And, if price caps are so important to keep inflation in check, why not put a cap on how much house or car prices can go up by? In this case, while the argument is that traders' hoarding of onions is driving up prices, anyone with even an elementary understanding of economics would know that the shortfall in output—excess rains have meant crop arrivals in wholesale *mandis* are around 40-50% lower than last year—is the main culprit.

Ironically, when a committee of chief ministers was formed to examine how agriculture could be given a boost, one of the proposals mooted was to ease, if not altogether eliminate, any restrictions on agriculture. Within just a month or two of that discussion, the government plans to put restrictions on onion supplies! While onion costs form a minuscule part of the household budget, if the government wanted to insulate them, it would have been better served by giving a cash dole to vulnerable sections; the large Aadhaar-cum-PDS database makes it much easier to do these direct cash transfers.

Farm loan growth, %



Two other news stories over this week are equally disturbing. A *Reuters* report talks of traders struggling to sign export contracts for cotton as local prices are higher than those prevailing in export markets; in FY19, India exported raw cotton worth $2.1 bn, cotton yarn worth $3.9 bn, fabric and made-ups worth $5.9 bn, and readymade garments worth $8.7 bn. That this should happen, though, can hardly be a surprise since, when Minimum Support Prices (MSP) were raised by a whopping 28% last year, this newspaper had pointed out that Indian prices would become higher than global ones. The MSPs of other crops were hiked as well, as part of the double-farm-income target, but if independent sources of demand, such as exports, get hit, the only way for farmers to gain requires the government to buy up all the farm output. But, it doesn't have the money to be able to do that.

It gets worse. While agriculture credit continues to grow, as it should, given the law mandates 18% of bank lending be directed to this sector, there has been a dramatic contraction in loans in certain states. In the case of Uttar Pradesh, an RTI inquiry by *The Indian Express* showed, agriculture credit fell to ₹91,628 crore in FY19, from ₹97,707 crore in the previous year. For Karnataka, the numbers contracted to ₹78,517 crore from ₹90,195 crore, and for Punjab, to ₹66,766 crore from ₹72,020 crore. All states, the *Express* posits, were those that had loan waivers in the past, and this made bankers reduce credit levels.

Of course, the correlation isn't quite as straightforward as is made out since, while Maharashtra also had large loan waivers—at ₹34,000 crore, it was just marginally lower than Uttar Pradesh's ₹36,400 crore waiver—agriculture credit in the state actually rose in FY19. So, while the mandatory 18% rule ensures that farm loans can't contract on a sustained basis, banks try to shift the loans to states where there isn't a loan waiver. Nor does this always happen, though, and that's why Maharashtra's farm loans grew despite the loan waivers. But, at a broad level, an RBI internal working group on agricultural credit found 'a deceleration in agriculture credit outstanding and decline in agriculture credit disbursements in the years of loan waiver programmes' (*see graphic*). While the mandated lending rule ensures that credit levels can't fall in the medium term, in the short-term, these do fall as beneficiary farmers aren't able to get fresh loans till the loan-waiver program is fully implemented.

The study also found that 'NPA level increased for all states that have announced farm loan waiver programme in 2017-18 and 2018-19' while there was almost no change in states that didn't have such schemes; 'taken together', the RBI working group report says, 'this could be indicative of the presence of moral hazard, with borrowers defaulting strategically in anticipation of loan waiver'.

An additional problem relates to the fact that loan waivers are funded through state budgets, and that, in turn, leaves less money with the state governments for agricultural capex-spend; given that capex levels in the sector are falling, and that the impact of capex is far greater in terms of what it does for output, this deals a double blow to the sector. None of this week's news—on cotton exports or agriculture credit—should come as a surprise, but, hopefully, this should underscore the adverse impact of unthinking policies that are meant to help farmers. The way to hell, the saw goes, is paved with good intentions.

DataGAINS

India can benefit a lot from data and gig economy

THE MCKINSEY GLOBAL INSTITUTE'S (MGI) new report, *Digital India: Technology to transform a connected nation*, shows Indians consumed 100 times more data in 2018 than they did four years ago, with average per capita consumption at 8.3GB per month. Monthly prices fell to 0.1% of GDP, as compared to 6.1% in 2014. More importantly, the report says the data economy can contribute $150 billion to the GDP—if its full potential is realised—by 2025. In logistics, automation can save 15-25% of the costs—India spends 14% of its GDP on this, higher than China and other comparator economies. The data economy is projected to result in a net addition of 20-25 million jobs.

While the report highlights the role of the government and Aadhaar in advancing this objective, the government needs to realise that digital innovations have worked because of a conducive regulatory ecosystem. The UPI instance is instructive in this matter. The government did well to introduce the technology, and ensure fast-paced progress, but had it not been for Google Pay, PayTM, PhonePe, etc, adopting it readily, the service might never have hit nearly a trillion transactions. If India is to make any meaningful progress, it needs to avoid over-regulation. Control and flow of data would be necessary for the next wave of start-ups, and enterprises to work efficiently. With many more gig economy operations emerging, and the likes of Google making a push for more, data can mean stellar growth, provided the government capitalises on it, and lets the private sector do the same.

● TAX-CUT IMPLICATIONS

THE CENTRE NEEDS TO RAISE BORROWING BY 0.4% OF GDP TO FUND THE CORPORATE TAX RATE CUT. RBI SHOULD ISSUE AN OMO CALENDAR TO COMFORT THE G-SEC MARKET

How to fund the fiscal stimulus

AASTHA GUDWANI & INDRANIL SEN GUPTA

Sen Gupta is Chief India economist, & Gudwani is India economist, BofA Merill Lynch. *Views are personal*

IN AN UNEXPECTED move, the finance minister announced steep cuts in corporate tax rates to support growth. This comes as a follow-up to a slew of other measures that were announced recently, with the same objective. This fiscal push will cost the government $20 bn (0.7% of GDP), and should be apportioned in a 58:42 ratio between the Centre and the states. While the growth impact of this move is likely to come over a period of time, funding it is an immediate task. In our view, if funding this stimulus results in a higher resetting of G-Sec yields, and, thus, lending rates, then the intended push to growth through this move may not fructify in its entirety. We, thus, suggest that a large part of this additional borrowing (by the Centre) can be absorbed through higher OMO purchases by RBI, or using the additional dividend transferred by RBI, or through drawing down the surplus balances the Centre has with RBI, etc. We await the October-March government borrowing calendar to get more clarity.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement centred on:

■ Effective corporate tax rates for existing domestic companies being cut to 25.17% from 34.94%. In effect, the corporate tax rate will be 22% for domestic companies, if they do not avail of any incentive or concession. They will also no longer be liable to pay any minimum alternate tax (MAT).

■ Corporate tax rate being cut to 17.01% from 29.12% for new domestic companies, which will be incorporated after October 1, 2019. They are required to start production by March 2023.

■ Companies availing the lowered corporate tax rates after expiry of tax holidays/concessions they avail of now.

We have always argued for a counter-cyclical fiscal policy. We expect growth to go up by a cumulative 65-200bp over 2-3 years on the corporate tax cut. Most studies place the fiscal multiplier between 0.9-2.5x, depending on the degree of investment.

Experience suggests that there is little point in cutting the fiscal deficit without normalising liquidity. Lower fiscal deficits have recently been offset by liquidity tightening. As a result, crowding out (i.e., fiscal deficit/incremental M3) is actually rising (see graphic).

Also, a higher fiscal deficit can hardly be inflationary given excess capacity. After all, the Centre's fiscal deficit, at 3.8% of GDP, is still below the medium-term average of 4.5%. Just as importantly, growth drives fiscal deficits, rather than the other way around. High/low growth drives up/down tax collections, and pushes up/down the fiscal deficit.

With the reduction in corporate tax being apportioned between the Centre and states in a 58:42 ratio, as recommended by the Reddy 14th Finance Commission, the former's fiscal deficit will likely rise by ₹841 bn/$12bn/0.4% of GDP (see graphic). This will likely be funded by higher borrowing that should show up in the Centre's October-March borrowing calendar, to be released shortly. States will see a drop of ₹610 bn/$8.6bn/0.3% of GDP in transfers from the Centre. This will likely be offset by a drawdown of states' investments in T-Bills (currently, ₹950 bn) that will cut down the Centre's surplus cash balances with RBI (₹1,227 bn, as of March 31, 2019).

Another option is to further utilise RBI's surplus reserves. Former RBI Governor Bimal Jalan recently told the media that RBI's revaluation reserves can still be transferred to the fisc, if needed. A 20% appreciation (taking it from ₹57/$) will release ₹1.7 trn/$20+ bn, which could take care of PSU bank capitalisation for 10 years.

In our view, the RBI OMO purchases can play an important role in absorbing a large part of this additional borrowing. RBI will likely have to step up durable liquidity through higher OMO ($30+ bn in FY20, $7.5 bn FYTD), and drawdown of the Centre's surplus with RBI to clear the G-Sec market. An easy way to comfort the market is to issue an RBI OMO calendar as Governor Shaktikanta Das did in early 2019. Note ₹1 of RBI liquidity will typically take six months to multiply into ₹6.8 of money supply. This, in turn, will push up bank liquidity, step up bank demand for G-Secs, and reduce the need for durable liquidity in H2FY21.

The fiscal stimulus has pushed markets to bring down their terminal repo rate expectations. We, on the other hand, expect the RBI MPC to cut 35bp on October 4, with Governor Das characterising the FM's corporate tax cut as a "bold measure". The nudge to growth intended via this corporate tax rate cut can be difficult to come by if G-Sec, and, thus, lending rates reset higher (or their downward trajectory is hindered). To avoid such an unintended counterproductive impact, we think the MPC will continue with its easing bias. Our base case has the MPC cutting 35bp on October 4, and 15bp in December, pausing as inflation rises on base effects.

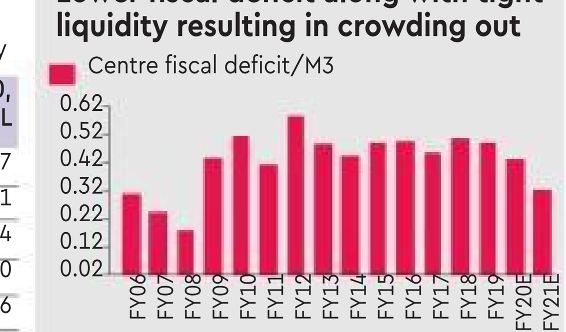
Edited excerpts from BofAML's 'How to fund the unexpected fiscal stimulus?' report (Sept 25, 2019)

Fiscal stimulus to add 40bps to the deficit target, pushing it to 3.8% of GDP

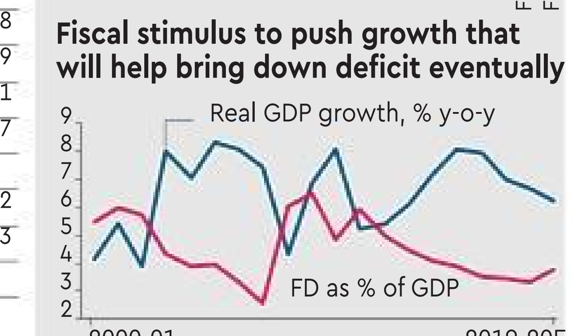
%, yoy

(₹ billion)	FY18 Actuals	FY19 BE	FY19 RE	FY19 Prov	FY20 BE	FY20 BofAML	FY20 yoy, %	FY20, BofAML
Revenue receipts	14,352	17,257	17,297	15,631	19,627	16,408	13.47	4.97
Tax revenue	12,425	14,806	14,844	13,169	16,495	13,908	11.12	5.61
Non-tax revenue	1,927	2,451	2,453	2,462	3,131	2,500	27.64	1.54
Capital receipts	1,156	922	932	1,028	1,198	1,100	28.54	7.00
Recovery of loans	156	122	132	178	148	200	12.12	12.36
Other receipts	1,000	800	800	850	1,050	900	31.25	5.88
Total receipts	15,508	18,179	18,229	16,660	20,825	17,508	14.24	5.09
Revenue expenditure	18,788	21,418	21,406	20,084	24,479	22,496	14.36	12.01
of which, int payments	5,290	5,758	5,758	5,826	6,604	5,900	14.69	1.27
of which: Oil subsidy	275	249		244	249	400	2.05	
Capital expenditure	2,631	3,004	3,166	3,030	3,385	2,890	6.92	-4.62
Total expenditure	21,420	24,422	24,572	23,114	27,864	25,386	13.40	9.83
Gross fiscal deficit	5,911	6,243	6,344	6,453	7,037	7,878		
Gross fiscal deficit % of GDP	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.8		

Lower fiscal deficit along with tight liquidity resulting in crowding out



Fiscal stimulus to push growth that will help bring down deficit eventually



Source: BofA Merrill Lynch Global Research estimates, Ministry of Finance, RBI

India needs the RCEP

The grand aspiration of India having a prominent voice in regional affairs cannot be realised by distancing itself from trade

AMITENDU PALIT

Research Lead, Trade and Economic Policy, Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS

INDIA SEEMS CLOSE to agreeing to conclude the RCEP after more than seven years of prolonged negotiations. While this will bring relief to some quarters, it is likely to disappoint several more, particularly those who feel India should have stayed away from RCEP.

Many arguing that India should not join RCEP are also of the view that India should not be part of trade agreements—regional or bilateral. Some of these views argue that only the WTO is worth joining, and no other trade agreement is worth the effort. Others suggesting that India should back off from RCEP are generally anti-trade. There's no denying that between the WTO's rules-based global trade order, of which India has been a member since the beginning, and any other FTA, however large in scope, the former is the superior choice. Global rules are always preferable to selective regional rules. However, the two are not mutually exclusive. Belonging to the WTO doesn't mean disengaging from FTAs, particularly since WTO itself encourages these FTAs, if they can obtain greater trade liberalisation. The latter can be significant for a large FTA, like RCEP, which includes some of the world's largest economies. Thus, commitment to WTO can't be a reason for not joining RCEP. However, if engaging in trade itself is considered a wrong priority, then, rather than backing out of RCEP, India should, ideally, quit WTO, of which it is a founding member.

One of the most trenchant criticisms of the RCEP is the adverse effect it will have on India's domestic markets through a deluge of imports. India's FTAs with SE Asia, Japan, and Korea are cited as examples for driving home the point. These criticisms fail to note a simple point: why would imports be necessary if the products were available at home at the same prices? Even if they were available at slightly higher prices, imports would've been much less required. India needs to import bulk consumer goods, and intermediates because of their insufficient availability, and higher prices. Even after tariffs, these imports remain competitive *vis-à-vis* domestic products. This is because of the inherently high costs of domestic production in India. Such costs make imports necessary, both for producers and consumers. In many cases, producers find intermediate inputs costlier at home than abroad, and are forced to import the same. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that imports have been high, particularly from SE Asia and Asia-Pacific, as these regions enjoy greater competitiveness in manufacturing.

Is India's lack of success in bringing down costs of production a good enough reason for not engaging in trade, and running away from RCEP? In the entire tirade over RCEP, while a lot has been written and spoken on the deluge of imports, there has hardly been much mention of the gains that RCEP can bring for Indian exports. Exporters themselves, ironically, have been reticent to RCEP. Perhaps, as producers, they continue to suffer from high costs, and harbour the fear of not being able to penetrate other markets, notwithstanding preferential tariffs. The fear is genuine, but not a good enough reason for avoiding RCEP. More so, at a time when the government is trying to incentivise exporters through various measures, the most notable being reduction in corporate tax rates, which puts tax liabilities of Indian businesses on par with those in the region.

The most unfortunate part about the negative discourse on RCEP in India has been the fact that India's inefficiencies, and limitations have been taken as grounds for avoiding RCEP. If manufacturer-exporters had lobbied with the government for a positive agenda in RCEP, with the precondition of obtaining incentives through lower taxes and access to credit, India could have looked at RCEP differently. It is sad that no such efforts were made by industry. It is equally sad that state governments in India have also refrained from looking positively at RCEP. Indeed, several states, particularly India's coastal states, should have been at the forefront of negotiations on RCEP through positive efforts. On the contrary, they have been conspicuously quiet.

India's trade engagement has traditionally suffered from absence of 'pro-trade' constituencies. This is unfortunate. Trade doesn't simultaneously benefit everybody. But, eventually, open trade, facilitated by enabling trade agreements, brings numerous benefits that are difficult to visualise at one go. Apart from getting cheap imports for both consumers, and producer-exporters, trade deals are great facilitators for investment. Coming at a time when the trade war is ripe, supply chains are fragmenting to scatter across the Asia-Pacific, and India is looking to revive export demand for coming out of an economic slump, RCEP can be a great instrument for attracting trade-inducing investments. Recent Indian policies, like liberalising sourcing norms in single-brand retail, backed by RCEP, create right conditions for drawing more manufacturer-retailer investments to India, like Apple and Samsung. Much of these investments would also be export-oriented, particularly to the rest of South Asia, as well as West Asia. The grand aspiration of India being a global player, with a prominent voice in regional affairs, cannot be realised by distancing itself from trade. Trade is a great confidence and strategic trust builder, a fact that India—shifting from non-alignment to multi-alignment—can ignore only at its own peril.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump's South Asian interference

The statement made by the US President Donald Trump, that the leaders of both India and Pakistan must allow him to mediate to solve the Kashmir problem, is nothing but direct interference in the internal matter of two sovereigns. India does not need his help, which is nothing but electioneering. Trump met prime minister Narendra Modi for a bilateral meeting on Tuesday on the sidelines of the UNGA for 40 minutes, and, a day earlier, he met Pakistan PM Imran Khan. On one hand, he wants a peaceful solution to Kashmir, and on the other, is helping Pakistan with weapons. Trump has repeatedly offered to mediate between India and Pakistan for fear of defeat in the forthcoming US elections, and is making Modi his campaigner to get the Indians vote there. The Indian PM must not get trapped, and brainwashed by the selfish and opportunistic Trump.
— Bhagwan Thadani, on email

Greta Thunberg

At a school going age, Greta Thunberg, took the world by storm with her vociferous protests demanding accountability from the international community for its failure to tackle climate change. It all started when she skipped school to sit in protest before Sweden's Parliament. The indomitable spirit with which she is fighting all odds to position herself as a spirited campaigner for climate action are inspirational for youngsters globally. The international community needs to pay heed to saner voices like Thunberg's, and demonstrate exemplary resolve to combat climate change with the seriousness it truly deserves.
— M Jeyaram, Sholavandan

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

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To drive investment in farming...

...fix the lack of economic incentives and promote technology adoption in farming and food processing to curb wastage and generate jobs

INVESTMENT HAS A multiplier effect in strengthening incomes and living conditions of people in a developing economy. As resources are limited, driving public investment from borrowings would crowd out private investors. Experience, over the years, points out that only public spending has a limited impact on farmers. Hence, private investment is the key to resolve the deeply entrenched agrarian problems in a more inclusive manner.

As per the Economic Survey 2019, the share of private investment in gross capital formation in agriculture and allied sectors has declined from 88% in 2013-14 to 82.67% in 2016-17. Of the total private investment, 79.1% is by farmers, and private corporate investment accounts for only 2.3% of total investments. A bulk of private investments goes to other sectors of the economy even though agriculture continues to be the largest employer. Slow growth in private investment is due to poor economic incentives and low opportunity cost of factors employed, often fuelled by volatile markets. Almost 85% of our farmers have landholdings smaller than two hectares, and this makes attracting private corporate investments all the more challenging.

Tipping points

Over the last several decades, the government has made significant investments to push the growth of agriculture and its sub-sectors with high budgetary outlays. But agrarian distress remains. The high-powered committee on transforming agriculture has also highlighted the importance of private investment in agriculture. Hence, efforts must be made for consolidation and streaming investment measures to tap in private players.

First, consolidation has to happen with savings and borrowings, which constitute more than two-thirds of investment in agriculture. Enhancement of farm savings requires better market price and margins, which would only happen with fairly deliverable markets, and this is a herculean task. The Agriculture Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index proposed by the NITI Aayog has the potential to improve competitiveness, efficiency and transparency in agricultural markets. The index also captures reforms like liberalisation of land lease and freedom to farmers for felling and transit of trees grown on private land.

Investments through credit may be enhanced to the needy and hard-working farmers/enterprises through an alliance system comprising key stakeholders. For instance, in African nations, government-supported AGRA system (Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa) is working in tandem to address the issue of credit access and low-cost finance to small farmers, input suppliers, farm cooperatives, agro-processing units and value-chain operators.

Second, there are abysmally low CSR funds in the agricultural systems in India. The concept of smart/precision farming, climate smart villages, organic villages can be platforms for companies to showcase their CSR spending. Tax sops to companies investing in agricultural R&D would help attract private investment. Further, the scope of CSR may also be extended to MNCs to help take up precision agriculture, carbon sequestration and agro-forestry on farmlands.

Third, farm research system in India is one of the world's largest in terms of scientific and supporting staff. Possibilities of coordinated public and private spending for initiatives necessary to feed 1.6 billion people by 2050 need to be explored. Farm management systems can be established where agricultural scientists from public research institutions and universities can provide free advisory services. Companies can raise funds to manage privately-held farmlands. For instance, in South America, privately-held farmland management companies raise funds and manage farmland holdings for investors that include wealthy family groups and financial institutions. Indeed, export-oriented agriculture requires large investments for establishing global value chains, which only big agri-business enterprises can bring in so as to realise the dream as envisaged in the Agriculture Export policy 2019.

These measures will push private sector investments in new areas from the traditional tractors and farm equipment. Investments are needed in food processing, warehouses, cold storages and supply chain management. Horticulture is another sector with a potential of additional 4 million hectares that can create 8 million additional jobs. Infusion of technology and investments can help reduce the huge post-harvest losses, estimated to be almost 25-30% of the production, and result in returns for investors as also higher incomes for farmers.

As per Census 2011, every day 2,000 farmers give up farming. Attracting youth to agriculture with policy support and fiscal incentives would bring innovative ideas to address the looming agrarian distress and ecological crisis. Today, many professionals and young entrepreneurs are taking interest in farming and agricultural start-ups. There is a need to incentivise agri-based start-ups by providing tax and fiscal benefits.

Fourth, in India, favourable seasons, dietary habits and consumption patterns of people make them use less processed food products as against perishables, but urbanisation and price volatility has the potential to push demand for processed food. In India, mere 10% of food produced is processed into value-added products. Compare this to the US and China that process 65% and 23% of their produce, respectively. Diet-conscious urban population can create demand for investments in food fortification and processed food, thereby reducing food wastage and generate employment. Policy nudge to this sector would yield attractive returns to new ventures and investors. With a CAGR of 20%, the food processing industry will be the new growth engine and will insulate farmers from risks like price crashes, distress sale and associated farm suicides.

Lastly, the link between investment in new technology adoption and conservation of indigenous technologies needs to be clearly ensured. Private players' investment in technology can ensure this as most of the small and marginal farmers neither have the resources nor are keen to adopt superior and new technologies. This requires a policy push that incentivises strategies for adoption of technology while preserving traditional wisdom and knowledge.

Opportunities ahead

According to the International Fund for Agricultural and Development (IFAD), two out of three youth in developing countries live in areas of potential agriculture growth. This shows the way for tackling the challenge of unemployment with the participation of the private sector. Trickle-down effect of private investment would help enhance farmers' incomes and emancipate people from poverty and hunger.

Most advanced economies have acute labour shortage in the agricultural sector. Indian farmers have already made a mark in countries such as Canada, the US and Australia. This is another area where the private sector can invest in, by taking agricultural farms on contract the world over and manage them with Indian farmers. It can not only provide jobs for our youth, but also has the potential of building a brand, just like the IT industry did in the late 1990s.

Thus, promoting private investment in agriculture can be win-win for all.

UN CLIMATE SUMMIT

Much talk, and a little action

Steps to fight climate change announced, but much remains to be done

THOSE CONCERNED ABOUT global warming change had a clear message for the leaders attending the United Nations Climate Action Summit on September 23. Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old activist, led protests in New York imploring politicians to act now to limit rising temperatures, and warned leaders at the summit: "The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us I say we will never forgive you." Instructions from the UN's secretary-general were more specific. In the run-up to the summit, António Guterres had urged governments to present plans in areas such as carbon pricing and reforestation, with the goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. "I don't pretend that I rule the world," Mr Guterres acknowledged. "My role is to tell the world what the world needs to do."

The summit concluded with a torrent of new announcements. These included the commitment by 66 countries, 93 companies and more than 100 cities to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Germany and Slovakia were among those to join an alliance to halt construction of coal plants; in total 32 countries are members. Companies and industry groups announced measures to reduce emissions from shipping, buildings and more. Narendra Modi, the PM of India, set a new 450-gigawatt target for renewable energy capacity by 2030, more than five times the current level. Mr Guterres highlighted its successes. "Today, in this hall, the world saw clear ambition and concrete initiatives," he said.

Some were promises of future announcements—59 countries said they would be unveiling more ambitious commitments under the Paris agreement, which aims to keep global temperatures well below 2°C above those in pre-industrial times. "These are useful steps," says Nathaniel Keohane of the Environmental Defense Fund, an advocacy group. "However, they are useful only to the extent that they are built upon and turned into action."

> US, China India—the three biggest emitters—were not among those to set targets for reaching net-zero emissions

Even if all the pledges are acted on, though, the gap between what the summit promised and what needs to be done remains a chasm. America, China and India, the world's three biggest emitters, were not among those to set targets for reaching net-zero emissions. At the same time as India invests in renewables, its state-backed banks are propping up its coal sector. Russia at last announced that it is ratifying the Paris agreement, but the targets for action which it has set itself are very low. President Donald Trump, who announced that America was withdrawing from that agreement shortly after his election, made a brief appearance at the summit but did not speak.

Activists remain deeply unsatisfied. Ms Thunberg and other children filed a complaint charging that five countries had violated their human rights by failing to halt the climate crisis. They filed their petition against Germany, France, Brazil, Argentina and Turkey—five countries that allow such complaints to be brought against them under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international treaty.

As the Climate Action Summit wound down at the UN, nowhere was the gap between stated intention and present reality more apparent than in a gathering that afternoon of oil & gas companies across town. Chief executives of world's supermajors sat in the Morgan Library for a forum organised by the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative, their joint effort to invest in technologies that will help mitigate climate change. For more than two hours, the bosses of companies including ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and BP defended their record as partners in the fight against rising temperatures.

They vowed to limit methane emissions and highlighted their support for research into new technologies, such as carbon capture and sequestration. But they also explained their decision to continue investing in new extraction projects; no supermajor has yet said it will reduce emissions from its products on an absolute basis. "As frustrating as it may be for some people who would like to see us declare that we intend to go out of business," said Mike Wirth, the chief executive of Chevron, "we are meeting a demand for a product that makes the quality of life in the world better." The protests on September 20 will not be the last.

THE ECONOMIST

Managing diabetes during pregnancy

UP's poor pregnant women are at risk as the state cannot finalise the tender for glucose pouches costing ₹10 each

VIVIAN FERNANDES

The author blogs at smartindianagriculture.com

THE PROGRAMME FOR the prevention and control of diabetes during pregnancy has suffered a setback in Uttar Pradesh because the government has been unable to finalise, for months, a tender for 75gm glucose pouches that a previous vendor was supplying for ₹9.9 each, a person associated with it said. This not only puts at risk the lives of expectant mothers with diabetes and their babies, but they are also likely to develop health complications later in life. We spoke to Usha Gangwar, general manager (Maternal Health), National Health Mission, UP, and sent her email queries on September 17, but got no response despite reminders.

Recognising that gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) is a risk factor, universal screening for it was made part of the NHM. In 2014, the government issued technical and operational guidelines. These required pregnant women to be administered oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT) at their first contact with a primary health centre, a community health centre or a district hospital. They were to be given 75gm of glucose dissolved in 300ml of water, and after two hours their blood sugar level was to be gauged. If it was at or above 140mg/dl of blood, they were to be diagnosed as having GDM. If not, the test was to be repeated between the 24th and 28th week of pregnancy. (Since placental hormones stimulate insulin resistance as pregnancy advances, the test cannot be done too early. If done too late, after 28 weeks, harm would have been done to the foetus). Those with GDM were required to exercise and put on a diet that would bring blood sugar levels down to normal within two weeks, while meeting their requirement of energy and body weight (300-400gm per week, up to 10-12kg during pregnancy). If this did not do the trick, they were to be put on metformin, a drug, or insulin.

The threshold level above which blood sugar levels are considered abnormal is lower in pregnancy. Men and non-expectant women are regarded as having diabetes if their blood glucose level is above 199mg/dl. If it is in the 139-199mg/dl range, they are in the pre-diabetes stage. Pregnant women are considered pre-diabetic or having gestational glucose intolerance (GGI) if their blood sugar level is between 119mg/dl and 139mg/dl.

Chennai-based V Seshiah, who was a member of the expert group that wrote the GDM guidelines for NHM, says the foetus' renal glucose threshold level is 110mg/dl. So a mother's post-meal blood glucose levels should be in the 110-120mg/dl range.

GDM poses higher risk of babies dying in womb in the 28th week of pregnancy or after (stillbirth). It aggravates chances of a newborn dying within 28 days or birth (neonatal death). In a 2018 study, doctors found that of 12,784 pregnancies with GDM in UP, 406 (3.17%) had ended in stillbirths. In another 191 (1.49%) cases, babies had died within 28 days of birth. For comparison, another group of 7,287 pregnant women who did not have GDM were studied. They had a much lower incidence of stillbirths and neonatal deaths: 92 and 47, respectively. The study was done between October 2014 and September 2016 in districts covered by the gestational diabetes prevention and control project. In all, 5,15,532 pregnant women were given OGTT at 828 healthcare centres between 16th and 20th week of pregnancy. If tested negative, they were tested again between the 24th and 28th week.

Rajesh Jain, the manager of the project, conducted the study with three doctors. Jain is also the president of the Implementation Committee of the Diabetes in Pregnancy Study Group India (DIPSI), whose recommendations form the basis for the national GDM screening guidelines.

India has a high prevalence of GDM. A study (between January and December 2016) by Prof Vinita Das and three of her colleagues at the department of gynaecology and obstetrics, King George's Medical University (KGMU) at the Queen Mary's Hospital in Lucknow, found a GDM prevalence rate of 13.9%. In all, 5,855 pregnant women who reported at the hospital's ante-natal outpatient department were given OGTT as per national guidelines.

In another study of 57,018 pregnant women between October 2012 and September 2014 in Kanpur Nagar district, a similar GDM prevalence rate was found. Of the women tested, 7,641 (13.4%) were found to have GDM. The rate was higher in urban areas (16%), lower in rural (9.8%).

Nationally, the GDM prevalence rate is estimated at 10-14%, says Dinesh Baswal, deputy commissioner (Maternal Health) in the health ministry.

Diabetes and impaired glucose intolerance is more prevalent among pregnant women than among people in general. A population-based study of 14 states and one UT (Chandigarh) published in 2017 noted the prevalence of diabetes at 7.3%—varying from 4.3% in Bihar to 10% in Punjab. People in urban areas were more at risk. The prevalence of pre-diabetes was 10.3%—ranging from 6% in Mizoram to 14.7% in Tripura. The results of the survey in UP, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and a few other states will be published next year. It is being conducted by the ICMR and the INdia DIABetes study group.

Indian women have a 11-fold risk of developing glucose intolerance during pregnancy compared to Caucasians, says SV Madhu of University College of Medical Sciences at GTB Hospital, Delhi, in an article in an Indian diabetes journal. Complications for mother include greater need for C-section. It can cause large babies and congenital malformations in them. Women with GDM have a seven-fold risk of developing Type-2 diabetes. This risk increases steeply five years after delivery. They also have a higher prevalence of metabolic syndrome and increased risk of cardiovascular diseases. Children of GDM mothers have a higher risk of obesity and diabetes. About one-third of children born of diabetic pregnancies develop glucose intolerance before the age of 17.

"You are what your mother ate," says Seshiah. "It's nearly impossible to do anything about diseases that have a foetal origin." The focus should on "primordial prevention." Risk factors that cause diabetes should be tackled early so that there is no need for treatment that is "horribly expensive." Seshiah believes "the government is not beating the drumbeat (sic) properly" on diabetes. On HIV and TB, it has done a far better job of creating awareness. This is the reason why universal screening for diabetes in the target groups is still patchy.

According to Baswal, six states—UP, Delhi, Bihar, MP, Odisha and Tamil Nadu—have sought funds for GDM screening from the Centre. He was unable to say whether all of them have rolled out GDM screening and, if so, how many of their districts have been covered. In UP, which has high infant and maternal mortality rates, 36 of 75 districts are covered by the GDM prevention and control project, which requires universal screening of pregnant women. In another 14 districts, public healthcare professionals—doctors, nurses, auxiliary nurse midwives—are being trained. The state's healthcare spending is low, but it compares with that of other states. At 4.8% of aggregate government expenditure, it is aligned to the national average. But it is the quality of spending that matters. Tamil Nadu's share is 4.5%, but it has a very good public healthcare system and an efficient centralised medical supplies procurement mechanism. UP should do a much better job of screening. A lot of pregnant women at risk of diabetes are slipping through the cracks at a huge cost to themselves and the state. The inability of the state to ensure uninterrupted supplies of glucose pouches is a poor comment on its sense of responsibility.

WORDLY WISE

WE DESERVE A SAFE FUTURE. AND WE DEMAND A SAFE FUTURE. IS THAT REALLY TOO MUCH TO ASK?

— GRETA THUNBERG

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

WHO PAYS?

RBI action on PMC amounts to penalising depositors. Regulatory framework governing cooperative banking needs relook

ON TUESDAY, THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) imposed curbs on the activities of the Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank (PMC) for a period of six months. The decision came after the central bank discovered certain irregularities in the bank, including the under-reporting of non-performing assets (NPAs). The RBI had initially allowed depositors to withdraw only Rs 1,000 over a six-month period. But, on Thursday, following public outcry and panic responses, it revised this limit upwards to Rs 10,000, observing that with this relaxation, more than 60 per cent of depositors would be able to withdraw their entire account balance. While the restrictions imposed by the regulator, under section 35A of the banking Regulation Act, are aimed at safeguarding depositors interest, and preventing a run on the bank, such moves, which are seen as penalising depositors, can end up having the opposite effect, denting trust in cooperative banks and increasing the risk of a contagion.

Reportedly, the crux of the problem is the bank's exposure to a real estate firm, which itself is currently undergoing insolvency proceedings. But, the bank's financials for the year ended March 2019 do not provide any indication of financial stress. On its part, the regulator has appointed J B Bhoria, a retired senior RBI official, as administrator of the bank. A forensic audit could shed light on its asset-liability mismatch. It could reveal the true extent of the problem — whether it's a question of just one account or whether there are larger concerns over the bank's financial position or its governance structure, as is the case in many of these banks. If the review suggests that the bank is better health than what is believed, it could open the window for the RBI to further ease the withdrawal limits. Alternatively, the RBI could also explore the option of merging PMC with another healthy cooperative bank to avoid any instability, as it has done so in the past.

This episode, once again, raises questions on not only the governance structures at these cooperative banks, but also on their supervision. Cooperative banks are under joint supervision of the RBI and states. And while the RBI has signed MoUs with state governments, unless state governments cooperate in effecting regulations, supervision is likely to be ineffective. Clearly, there were no early warning signs of trouble in this case. Instances such as these are likely to raise calls for reviewing this regulatory framework and giving more powers to the RBI to oversee these entities. These need to be attended to. The RBI should also examine the long-term feasibility of their business models in light of the rapid technological changes in the financial sector. But the larger question over the absence of a framework for timely resolution of financial firms remains.

COP OUT

UP police's conduct in Swami Chinmayanand case raises serious questions. It will be watched

ON WEDNESDAY, A Supreme Court-mandated Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Uttar Pradesh police arrested the law student who accused former Union minister and BJP leader Swami Chinmayanand of repeatedly assaulting her over a period of one year. The arrest is based on an allegation of extortion by Chinmayanand's lawyer, and the charge itself emerged only after the accusations of rape and assault were made by the student on social media. The SIT has also acknowledged to the court that it has no record of any money being exchanged between the politician-turned-education entrepreneur and the victim. The UP police's conduct in such a high-profile case thus far raises disturbing questions of procedure and propriety.

The allegations against Chinmayanand were made on August 24, but it was only when a bench of the Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of the matter a week later and ordered the UP government to set up an SIT that the investigation commenced. Why did the state police need a direction from the apex court to take action on a matter that is well within its provenance? The victim had also demanded that Chinmayanand, who heads the trust of the college where she studies, be charged with rape — the SIT has charged him with "misusing authority for sexual intercourse" or "sexual intercourse not amounting to rape", which carry a lesser sentence than a rape charge. The arrest on the basis of the accusation made by Chinmayanand's counsel also raises questions over the prosecutorial viability of the original rape case. Her father and brother have alleged that they are being pressured and intimidated to stop pursuing the case against Chinmayanand.

On Tuesday, a day before the student was arrested, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had spoken of women's rights and welfare while interacting with women who had been victims of triple talaq. He also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for "honouring the dignity of women". Indeed, "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" has been a slogan of the ruling party that has resonated across the country. The UP police, which has a controversial record of being high-handed — it has been accused of staging encounters — must live up to that slogan. The way it handles the case against Chinmayanand, as well as how it proceeds against the young woman who accused him, will be closely watched.

BEING GRETA

Accolades to Greta Thunberg recognise moral authority of her generation. But will she be another icon appropriated?

THE MORE THINGS change, the more they remain the same in climate change parleys. In the past 30 years, the world has had two treaties to check global warming, the tribe of climate deniers seems to have shrunk — the US president notwithstanding — and GHG is almost universally accepted as a bad word. Yet, there is a sameness to global climate negotiations. Almost every year, at UNFCCC meets, negotiators run into overtime. But every IPCC report testifies to an increase in the direness quotient. It has taken a 16-year-old to call a spade a spade. "You have stolen my dreams and childhood with your empty words," the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg excoriated the high-level audience gathered for the UN Climate Action Summit in New York.

It's in the fitness of things that the inertia in environmental diplomacy has been called out by a representative of the generation that is likely to be worst affected if the world heats up more than 2°C of its current temperature. "You come to us young people for hope. How dare you?" Thunberg said. And though she was addressing the who's who of world politics, the "you" in her speech seemed to be directed at the generation that had failed her's while the association between "us" and her peers was unmistakeable.

Thunberg is not the only young protestor. From Mexico City to Djakarta, Nairobi to Seattle and Kampala to Dhaka, children and teenagers have missed classes and taken to the streets to demand that the global leaders do more to avert climate change. In March, more than a million children went on strike against the international community's weak response to global warming. And last week, the ranks of protestors had swelled to nearly 4 million. The world has recognised the moral authority of Thunberg's generation by awarding the Swedish teenager the Right to Livelihood Award. A caveat though: Modern society has an uncanny knack to appropriate iconic dissenters while going on with business-as-usual.

Why property rights matter

Economic growth requires protection from expropriation of property by individuals, State

MUDIT KAPOOR AND SHAMIKA RAVI

IN LIGHT OF the economic slowdown, it is important to note that long-term economic growth is a consequence of individual rights to private property, and its protection from expropriation from other individuals as well as the most powerful entity, the state itself. Nationalisation policies have held India back from her true economic potential and robbed hundreds of millions of people of the prosperity they deserved long ago. Nationalisation created a complex bureaucracy — a tyranny without a tyrant — eventually leading to an unparalleled economic crisis in the 1990s, compelling us to undertake courageous economic reforms.

Reform was mostly the reduction of bureaucratic red tape of "licence raj", making it easier for private players to enter and exit markets. This led to unprecedented economic growth, the creation of a middle class, and significant poverty reduction. These reforms got a further shot in the arm under Atal Bihari Vajpayee with the disinvestment drive. For example, the telecom and energy sectors that were plagued by shortages for decades were partially privatised and very soon turned a surplus, boosting the economy and laying the foundation for a "digital economy" in modern India. This was evidence that nationalisation and socialism were not the answers to India's poverty and social problems.

The spectre of socialism and nationalisation, however, rose once again in 2012-13 when the then finance minister amended the Income Tax Act of 1961 with retrospective effect to undo the Supreme Court judgement in the Vodafone tax case. The FM articulated in an interview that the Supreme Court did this primarily due to their concern for its effect on foreign direct investment. The former FM, however, missed an important point: The primary issue was not whether FDI would be discouraged but, more fundamentally, whether private property is protected from expropriation by the state.

In a mature democracy, rights of an individual vis-à-vis the state are protected by an independent judiciary. This act of undoing a Supreme Court judgment was an assault on the individual right to private property. The Vodafone tax case went through the entire judicial process that is available to an ordinary citizen of the country. In its final verdict, the Court agreed that tax planning by the firm was legitimate and within the framework of the law. The Court, while making a distinction between tax avoidance and tax evasion, made the following observation: "Every person is entitled so to arrange his affairs as to avoid taxation, but the arrangement must be real and genuine and not a sham or make-believe." Even though it became evident that the existing Income tax Act of 1961 had a lacuna which needed to be fixed, and the sovereign had the right to do so, but to fix it retrospectively was deeply problematic. Applying the law prospectively would have been a reform but applying it retrospectively was to undermine the Court and was a blow to the independence of institutions that check the power of the state.

> The spectre of socialism and nationalisation, however, rose once again in 2012-13 when the then finance minister amended the Income Tax Act of 1961 with retrospective effect to undo the Supreme Court judgement in the Vodafone tax case. The FM articulated in an interview that the Supreme Court did this primarily due to their concern for its effect on foreign direct investment. The former FM, however, missed an important point: The primary issue was not whether FDI would be discouraged but, more fundamentally, whether private property is protected from expropriation by the state.

The second assault on private property came in quick succession in 2014, ironically from the Supreme Court itself, when it cancelled all the coal block allocations to the private sector from 1993 to 2012. In 2014, a public interest litigation was filed, questioning the arbitrary nature of coal block allocations to private players by the government. The Court accepted the petitioner's plea and in one stroke cancelled all the coal block allocations from 1993 to 2012.

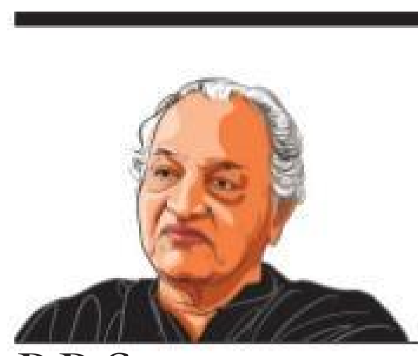
Unfortunately, the highest court did not take into consideration the property rights of various stake holders, such as creditors, investors, and shareholders of these companies for whom it would have been impossible to know whether the government's coal allocations were arbitrary and therefore illegal. It is also important to remember that the share of the power sector in bank credit to industry was less than 1 per cent in 1998 and by 2014, it had grown to 20 per cent at more than Rs 5 lakh crore. It was evident that other stakeholders had significant exposure to this sector. Once again, the message was loud and clear that property rights of individuals are not well protected in India.

The coal allocation issue was not black and white, each case merited careful consideration by the Court in terms of its impact on various stakeholders who were not guilty of the crime committed by others. Perhaps, former US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia was right when he wrote that "In the grand scheme of things, whether the right party won was secondary. Famous old cases are famous, you see, not because they come out right, but because the rule of law they announced was the intelligent one. Common-law courts performed two functions: One was to apply the law to the facts, but the second function, and the more important one, was to make the law." The law that got made that day was that individual property rights are not well protected in India.

There are important lessons to be learnt. In the last five years, several fiscal and monetary policy measures have been taken to arrest the decline in private investments. Long-term economic growth requires fundamental assurance to individuals that their private property is protected from expropriation by other individuals, the government and also the courts themselves. Large parts of the Indian economy remain informal — not due to tax rates or high cost of formalisation — but because of mistrust in institutions and fear of expropriation by them. Democracy is expected to give us an edge over autocratic China in terms of privatisation and long-term growth. The enigma of our times is that China, with no tradition of free and fair elections and independent judiciary, has managed to provide economic freedom and protection to private property leading to unprecedented economic prosperity.

Kapoor is associate professor ISI Delhi, Ravi is research director, Brookings India

THE TRUTH ABOUT J&K



Abrogation of Article 370 is illegal, the ongoing lockdown unsustainable

P B SAWANT

DEAR COMPATRIOTS,

Hoping that by this time, the fever of the so-called victory over the alleged abrogation of Article 370 created by the government has subsided at least by some degrees, I venture to draw your attention to the other side of the picture which is the truth and reality.

At the very outset, let me make it clear that neither Pakistan nor any other country has any right to meddle in this matter. Pakistan has not even a moral right to do so, since it has forcibly occupied a sizeable part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This is a matter strictly between the Kashmiris and the rest of Indians.

The J&K state was never a part of this country, before Maharaja Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession on March 17, 1948, which gave this country a legal access to that state for the first time. This Instrument of Accession was conditional and was given a constitutional status by incorporating it with the conditions, in Article 370 of our Constitution, when the Constitution was in the making. What is more, sub-clause 3 of the Article 370 makes it abundantly clear that the provisions of the said Article will not cease to be operative or modified without the previous recommendation of the Constituent Assembly of the J&K state. This process of amendment of Article 370 is special to the said Article, and hence prevails over Article 368 of the Constitution, which is the general power of amendment of the Constitution. The non-obstante clause with which the Article begins also makes that clear. It should, therefore, be clear to all that when the present government and Parliament purported to declare that the said Article shall not be operative, they did not follow the procedure laid down in Article 370. Hence, the said Article remains in our Constitution intact without any harm to it. The propaganda carried out by the government that the said Article has been repealed is, therefore, obviously misleading.

Much irresponsible comment is being made on the temporary status of Article 370, without realising that the Article is changeable, unlike other provisions of the Constitution, on the previous recommendation of the Constitution Assembly of J&K state, acted upon by the President of India.

Those who clamour for the abrogation of Article 370 unilaterally by this government, forget the elementary fact that this country got legal right to enter the state only because of the conditional political pact of accession. If the Article is abrogated unilaterally, assuming the action is valid, the legal right of this country to remain in J&K will be jeopardised. It is unfortunate that this government, for reasons best known to it, has indulged in the present misadventure which is bound to boomerang. We should realise that with all the leaders of the Kashmiris under house arrest, the communications closed, seething discontent of the people fermenting every hour, the people of Kashmir cannot be suppressed with force for long. Both history and common sense dictate against it.

There is still a scope for an amicable political settlement, by which the affection of the Kashmiris can be won. For this, however, our government has to shed its macho image and come out with realistic measures to win the confidence and trust of the Kashmiris.

> To our brothers and sisters in Kashmir, we should appeal not to mistake the government for the people of this country. They should believe in our goodwill and fraternity for them, notwithstanding the damage done to it by the present misadventure of our government. Our Kashmiri friends should remember that their destiny lies with this country, which has proved its democratic credentials, by and large.

To our brothers and sisters in Kashmir, we should appeal not to mistake the government for the people of this country. They should believe in our goodwill and fraternity for them, notwithstanding the damage done to it by the present misadventure of our government. Our Kashmiri friends should remember that their destiny lies with this country, which has proved its democratic credentials, by and large. They will be safe within our fold. There is no other option for them. Complete independence without the protection of this country, will invite forcible occupation by other countries as has already been experienced by them. A merger with Pakistan will land them under military dictatorship from which the Pakistanis themselves have been suffering, from the country's inception.

We consider Kashmiris as our integral part. Their life and culture are a precious jewel in the crown of our cosmopolitan culture. There are strong affinities between us, and we love and respect them as our brothers and sisters. They have nothing to fear or lose, and everything to gain being with us. Let bygones be bygones, and let us start a new chapter in our relationship which should be permanent and ineffaceable.

The writer is a former judge of the Supreme Court of India and former chairperson, Press Council of India

SEPTEMBER 27, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

LOK DAL FORMED

THE JANATA (S), the Socialist Party (Limaye group) and the Orissa Janata Party formally merged into a new party called "Lok Dal". Charan Singh was elected its president and Raj Narain working president". The birth of the new party was, however, marked by a setback when H N Bahuguna, leader of the CFD faction, decided to keep out of it. His group had earlier decided to join the new party and had submitted to Charan Singh a 31-point programme for inclusion in its manifesto. It is learnt that Charan Singh was cool to Bahuguna's programme. This morning when the convention began, the CFD delegates were conspicuous by their absence. So were many others, including Madhu Limaye, Karpoori Thakur, Biju Patnaik and S N Mishra, who, it turned out later, were busy persuading Bahuguna to join the convention.

ANTI-DEFECTION LAW

THE KASHMIR ASSEMBLY has passed the officially-sponsored Anti-Defection Bill. As soon as the Bill was passed, the entire Opposition staged a walk-out in protest. The Bill, which provides for an amendment in the Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, seeks to disqualify a member from membership of the Legislative Assembly or the Legislative Council if he voluntarily gives up the membership of the political party which had set him up as a candidate in an election. The Bill also provides for disqualifying a member if he votes or abstains from voting in the legislature contrary to a whip issued by such a political party.

CARTER ON CUBA

US PRESIDENT JIMMY Carter called Cuba a "puppet" of the Soviet Union and said that despite Soviet claims to the contrary, the Russian troops in Cuba were combat forces. Carter noted that Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko had tacitly denied that the Soviets in Cuba were combat forces. Carter also that if the status quo in Cuba does not change, he will take "appropriate action".

THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Unless international efforts are made to convince Myanmar's leadership that prolonging the Rohingya crisis will create multidimensional threats whose effects will not be contained within the borders of Bangladesh only."

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Exorcising third-degree

Torture is an endemic characteristic of Indian policing. A commitment to eradicating it requires the police force as a whole to have zero tolerance for the practice besides a specific anti-torture law

MAJA DARUWALA

C R Sasikumar

THE HOME MINISTER'S recent pronouncement that the days of third-degree torture are gone is extraordinarily welcome. His announcement is as much a signal to the security forces to lay off this practice as it is an acknowledgment about something that everyone from the Supreme Court to the subaltern knows — that torture is an endemic characteristic of Indian policing.

Its presence is known, tolerated and even appreciated. Common Cause's recent large national-level survey on the Status of Policing in India affirms the force's easy camaraderie with violent means: Three out of five personnel believe there is nothing wrong with beating up criminals and four out of five think it's okay to bash them up to extract a confession. One in five even believes that killing dangerous criminals is better than a legal trial. These widely held attitudes show up how flimsy the orientation to working within the law is at training; how deep is the sub-culture of ferocious machismo; and how high the tolerance for illegality within the supervisory cadre is.

Most of all, these results show up how confident torturers are that no consequences will flow from even extreme acts of cruelty. For too long, supervisory officers within the security establishment have turned a blind eye to this everyday criminality within. It is hard to understand what esprit de corps or institutional interest is served by siding with criminality within, but all too often when instances of torture become known, a pocketful of ready excuses is pulled out to defend the indefensible — necessity, poor working conditions, no other means, mental tension, and pressure from within and without which the moral fibre of the police seems unable to resist. In fairness, there are voices from within that have spoken out against these practices, but they are voices in the wind.

True it is that the conditions in which policing is done are very under par and true it is that people who come into the police net are not always lovely people. They can be cruel, vicious and cunning and oftentimes, well-connected. But their criminality is not for the police to punish. Their limited brief is to bring alleged criminals before the courts, however slow and ponderous their process.

That is the law. Yet, given the years of acceptance, encouragement and practice, it is very likely that several generations of active policemen don't know that any assault and victimisation of anyone that is not entirely in self-defence is prohibited by law.

The home minister has suggested there may be amendments made to the criminal justice code. But he has not elaborated on these. At present, only a few sections of the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Penal Code criminalise torture and custodial deaths. Experts and advocates feel that a few amendments tucked away in a large code are unlikely to have the visibility or effect that a comprehensive standalone law would. Governments of all hues have stoutly resisted doing this. India took its time to sign on the 1984 UN Convention Against Torture and signed on only in 1997 even though the absolute prohibition against the use of torture has long been established as a worldwide code or *jus cogens* that all countries have agreed to abide by. Signing means the country has, in principle, agreed to move forward to ensure that the practice of torture is entirely eliminated in its country. But ratification, the next step, obligates countries to pass laws at home that reflect the articles in the UN law. For 22 years, ratification has been left pending. In 2017, when it came to India's turn to be peer reviewed under the Universal Periodic Review process no less than 29 countries made 37 recommendations that India take urgent steps to stop torture.

The few sporadic attempts to pass a brand new law have come to naught. In 2010, a weak and much criticised Prevention of Torture Bill lapsed. In 2016, the Law Commission drafted its own even more diluted version. Meanwhile, the NHRC has consulted with civil society to make its own suggestions to the home ministry and there the matter lies — and has lain for a long time. In the meantime, Parliament has heard that for 2019, the NHRC has registered over 400 cases of alleged deaths in police custody and over 5,000 cases pertaining to deaths in judicial custody. For the past three years alone, these have regularly clocked in at over a thousand a year.

A specific anti-torture law needs to be detailed, comprehensive and conform to international standards. It will need to have a broad descriptive definition of torture that includes mental torture; make it easier to prove as has been done in the case of custodial rape; fix responsibility not only on the perpetrator but on those who allow it to happen under their watch; make punishment more stringent especially where there has been sexual violence and ensure the state compensates and cares for its victims. It must also bypass the hurdles of Section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code which requires permission before public servants can be prosecuted for actions done in the course of his duty. The Supreme Court has repeatedly made it clear that torture is no part of anyone's duty but still prosecution and convictions continue to be difficult.

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New legislation is only a beginning. Actualisation will take much more. Exhortations will not stop torture. Having policies, practices and performance in place to demonstrate implementation, will. It needs changes within and spurring from without. It needs old hands in the force to be reoriented, investigators to be skilled up with modern techniques of detection and forensic capacities across the country to be ramped up. At present, the national infrastructure is sorely wanting. It needs long-delayed human rights courts to be set up with specially trained judges in place. It needs agencies like local legal aid authorities to have clear guidelines to assist where there are allegations of torture and be proactive and not continue with bureaucratic procedures that delay service. It requires overseeing bodies like the many human rights commissions and police complaints authorities to do the same. It is not as some may imagine a mammoth task but rather one of making changes systematically down the line.

A commitment to eradicating torture also requires the police force as a whole to have zero tolerance for the practice and reinvent its purpose — not as an oppressive force at the beck and call of the powerful but as a service whose main work is the protection of the lives and liberties of each of us.

The Common Cause survey of 12,000 personnel at police stations uncovers the truth we all know — that political interference in investigation is near omnipresent. It subverts all. From this root all evil grows, yet it is also the most stubborn area to dislodge. It has made the police the handmaiden of whoever is momentarily powerful, and it is this compact of convenience that has probably prevented any strong initiatives to take illegality in policing off the table once and for all. Changing this is in the hands of the police leadership, but much more in the hands of the political leadership. The home minister's hand is on this tiller. Where the ship goes will depend on how he steers it — on to the rocks of continued torture or away from it.

The writer is board member and senior advisor, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

The Kohinoor in Bombay's crown

For decades, Boman Kohinoor ran one of Mumbai's iconic institutions — Britannia, which served patrons Parsi and Irani cuisine

AVANTI G DIVAN

JUNE, 2014: "KATE, William, George" he says, his wrinkled hands pointing to the laminated photograph. His eyes twinkle behind his square-framed glasses as he discloses that Kate is pregnant again, flashing a smile that reveals several missing teeth. "What?!" He nods knowingly, "I received inside information last week."

You'd think that Kate is his daughter, or niece, or perhaps his brother's wife's or nephew's sister. But I look down at the photograph in his shaking hands and it's the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, beaming in baby blue. Prince George, their first born and the future King of England, is swaddled in their arms. I look up, and there they are again, a waving Kate and William, this time, in cardboard-cut-out form. Perched against a mezzanine, they are the first displays in a priceless exhibition of hand-painted signs: "Debit and Credit Card Not Accepted." "Please do not argue with management." "Management has got right to check any article or Individual on suspicion". "Customers are requested to take of their belongings". "Right to admission is reserved. "Only at Britannia & Co. est. 1923, Wakefield House, 16 Ballard Estate, Bombay."

December, 2016: Every day, as the lunch hour nears, lawyers, college students, office workers and tourists throng to Britannia, a city institution, that has been serving its patrons "exotic Parsi and Iranian cuisine" for as long as India has been independent. Here, customers feast on *patra ni macchi*, *sali boti* and *dhansak*. Of course, the queen of them all, is the delectable berry pulao, a chicken dish of speckled white and yellow rice, that is garnished with cashews, caramelised onions and crimson barberries imported from Iran. I am sipping on my Pallonji's (est. 1885) Raspberry soda, when I glance down at the words on the menu before me: "There is no love greater than the love of eating." Tell me about it.

June 2017: The pista green paint is peeling off the café walls, and the whirring of prehistoric ceiling fans alternates with the scraping of forks against plates licked clean. He is shuffling about the restaurant now, stopping by tables to show and tell. Out comes the folder of his prized possessions: The laminated, xerox-copied, dog-eared documents. When the German lady is ready, he begins, "I seldom go out when someone from the Taj Mahal Hotel called on me and said their highnesses want that I should meet them." A pause, and a pursing of lips later, "I was very honoured to meet the charming prince and the beautiful princess." His audience is gripped. The next story: "See this, Her Majesty the Queen had written this letter to me." "Japan! A Japanese man came here, now see this article he wrote."

December 2018: Boman Kohinoor — Irani, nonagenarian, seasoned raconteur and the Queen's Guard in Bombay — is the proprietor of Britannia Restaurant, and one of my favourite people in the world. Although 90, he is a permanent fixture at the establishment his father set up as a continental restaurant in 1923. Mr Kohinoor is an Irani — a descendant of the small community of Zoroastrians, who fleeing religious persecution in Iran, made India their home in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Mr Kohinoor tells me that Britannia's *berry pulao* is but a spicier version of the Persian *zereshk polow*, which his late wife adapted to suit the Indian palate. He also talks of his grandfather, a 19th century immigrant from Yazd, who lived to be "114 - one, one four." He tells me he's planning to beat his record. "When I die, you see that rascal at the counter," he points past me, "behind the counter, he is my son, he will take over." I look back, and spot the rascal, a middle-aged gentleman. Beside him, on the counter is a snoozing cat. I wonder if the animal is a nod to the Persian heritage. Next to it, a sign reads, "Do not disturb".

Mr Kohinoor urges me to live until 120. He then says, "God bless you," and "Please give my regards to Madame Hillary Clinton, and no regards to Mr Trump." I laugh. The cat stirs and stretches, its eyes glinting towards the wall across.

On the flaking pista wall, hang three national flags, one below the other: The Indian tricolour, the Union Jack, and the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Within a metre's distance, is a portrait of Zarathustra, the Zoroastrian prophet, and his maxims, "Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds." Two other persons provide Zoroaster company. To his left, is a smiling Gandhi, wrapped in khadi. To his right, is Queen Elizabeth II, a crown atop her head, a sceptre clasped in her hand. I wonder what they think.

The writer, a Mumbaikar, studies history and Persian at Princeton University

Lifting the sentiment

Last week's big bang reforms will remove obstacles in efficient use of capital

RASHESH SHAH

SEVEN YEARS AGO, the President of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi famously declared that ECB will do "whatever it takes" to preserve the Euro. The reverberation of those utterances resound till date.

A similar event happened last week in India. Only this time, it was even more powerful, accompanied as it was by one of the biggest economic events in India's recent history. By announcing a large corporate tax rate cut across the entire corporate sector and a much lower rate for new manufacturing companies, the government has clearly shown that it will do whatever it takes to get the economy back on track, and on target for the $-5 trillion GDP goal. This bold announcement comes on the back of several small but significant reforms in the last few weeks.

As the economy had been facing headwinds, there has been a demand for major structural reforms. Drastic reforms are hard to undertake for many reasons; First of all, in a democracy, it requires a "real" crisis - like the one in 1991, when the country did not have enough reserves to pay for imports. Though current issues with the Indian economy are worrying, they may not be in the same category. However, such high risk, high return actions can have an impact beyond the intended realm, often changing the entire perception about the country — Lee Kuan Yew's reforms in Singapore and Deng Xiaoping's reforms in China are good examples.

The easing of FDI norms across some sectors, tax relief for foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) and start-ups, reprieve for the automobile sector, an upfront support of Rs 70,000 crore to public sector banks with an aim to revive demand and improve liquidity and the merger of PSU banks will have a long-term beneficial impact on our economy.

The opening up of FDI in several sectors is especially timely as in this era of trade wars, India can be a beneficiary. Foreign investment is a key source of economic growth as well as non-debt finance for the country. Hence, a sustained investor-friendly policy is vital to attract foreign funds. Thus the announcement on single brand retail is very important as it gives major flexibility and ease of operations for potential investors. The government has shown enough adaptability to make the crucial local sourcing rules more flexible, which will send out a very positive signal to foreign investors, who have expressed concerns over these norms.

In fact, flexibility along with agility is the hallmark of any good government; some of the other measures, including the removal of FPI surcharge and the angel tax for MSMEs demonstrate the government's ability to respond quickly to remove obstacles for the ease of doing business.

The merger of PSBs is also an idea whose time had come. From the global experience, it is clear that fewer, stronger banks increase productivity, lessen asset quality pressure, boost liquidity and credit flow, improve overall operating efficiency and corporate governance. It would help create banks that can play a global role (a la Chinese banks). Besides, the government has been grappling with poor asset quality in the banking sector. Hence this is a step towards long-term economic growth by removing obstacles in the efficient use of capital. Having too many weak PSBs meant a drain on resources.

However, we were still lacking the one big shot in the arm. This came with the corporate tax rate cut. Since the announcement, several people have asked how the measure will impact the ground realities. I think there are three factors that are very important at this stage: Fundamentals, sentiment and liquidity. With this bold step, the government has taken the bull by the horns to address the sentiment issue. A negative sentiment had built in the industry, the economy and investors. This push turns around the sentiment in a big way.

While several measures have been taken to address liquidity including an easier monetary policy and infusion of liquidity to banks, which will further lend to NBFC's, and the liquidity injection into housing finance companies, there is still considerable risk aversion in banks and mutual funds to lend to NBFCs. The severe credit crunch in the last 12 months has choked the credit pipeline , or what I call liquidity cholesterol, which has been dampening demand and consumption.

So there is a willingness from corporates to kick start the capex cycle and eagerness from foreign investors to invest in India. But all this will happen if the liquidity crunch eases and demand picks up.

For those arguing that the recent big bang reforms will cause a fiscal slippage, I would argue that while maintaining fiscal deficit targets is important, India, as an important investment destination has much more to lose if it lost favour in the global arena. The current scenario is unlike anything in the past. So, it is important that the government actively tackles the low sentiment in the system by sending positive signals domestically and to the world that "we are willing to walk the extra mile" to realise the India growth story. And they have done exactly that.

Reforms, whether big bang or small continuous ones, need good implementation. Execution has been a focus area for the government and I do hope to see this continue going forward.

The writer is chairman and CEO of the Edelweiss Group

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TEACHERS MATTER

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'You can't shop for teachers' (IE, September 26). One reason for the poor condition of the Indian education system is the lack of committed teachers. India does not have a single university that is ranked among the top 200 of the world's institutions of higher education. A teacher helps a student imbibe values as well as various other good qualities. We should develop an education system where leadership qualities, entrepreneurship and rational thinking are encouraged from the school level itself. To encourage more people to take up teaching as a profession, the government should set up institutes for them on the lines of the IIMs.

Veena Shenoy, *Thane*

LET'S TALK

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Peekaboo, guess who?' (IE, September 26) Social media platforms are proliferating faster than was expected even some time ago. Such platforms are, of course, modes of communication par excellence. But they can also be sources of misinformation, fake news and trolling. It is also true that the government generally makes social media the scapegoat for many of its failures. It needs to be even-handed while dealing with infractions that occur online. Social media regulation can be a complex matter but the issue can be resolved by involving all the stakeholders.

Deepak Singhal, *Chennai*

JUST RECOGNITION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Always Big B' (IE, September 25). The editorial is correct in saying that Big B set the mood for the Hindi film industry, remaining larger than life almost for his entire career. Amitabh Bachchan's fan following transcends generations, includes men and women across the social spectrum. Conferring him with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award is a recognition of his vast repertoire of roles and contribution to cinema.

Sonit Kumar Goswami *via e-mail*

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

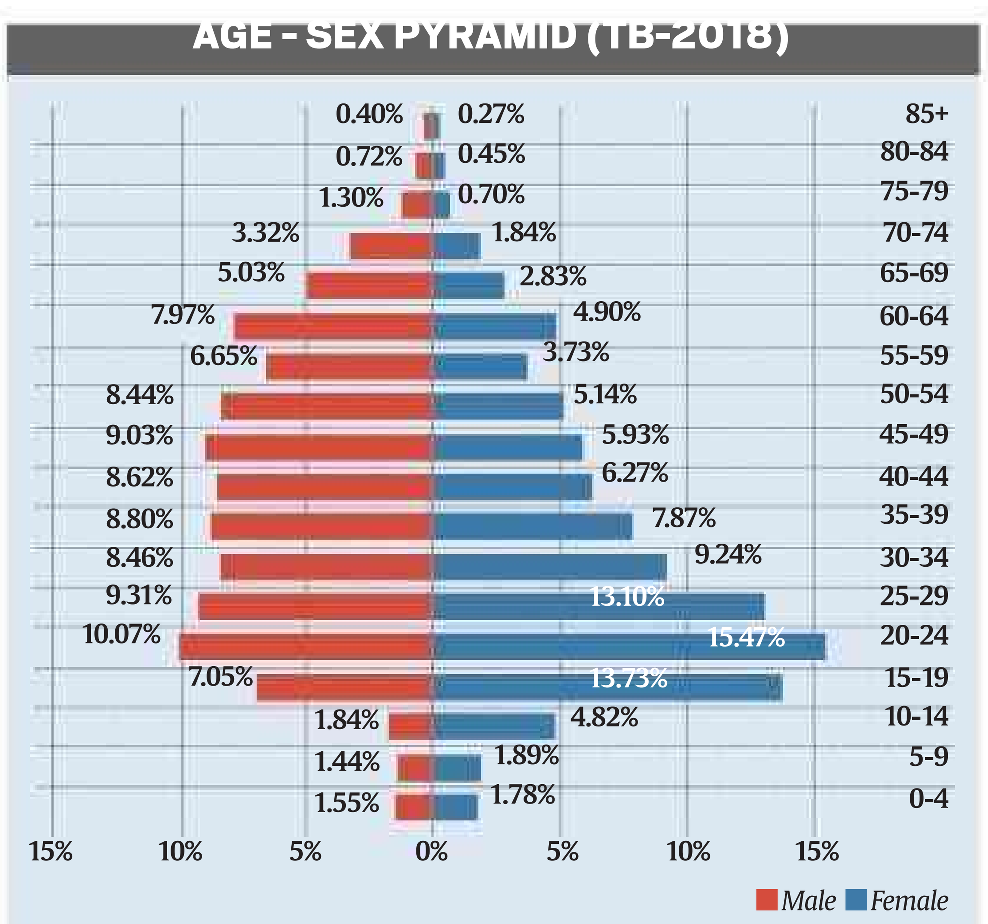
STEP UP THE FIGHT

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Raise the bar' (IE, September 25). The Indian government's promotion of electric vehicles and renewable sources of energy are good steps in the fight against climate change and global warming. The civil society too has a role to play in protecting the environment and preventing climate change. The Global Climate Strike, of which Greta Thunberg has become the symbol and her speech at United Nations' General Assmebly as well as that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlight the chilling effects of climate change. The fight must be stepped up.

Sauro Dasgupta, *Kolkata*

TELLING NUMBERS

Rise in notified TB cases: breakup by state, age, gender



ON WEDNESDAY, the Centre released the India TB Report 2019, which showed a 16% increase in the number of cases in 2018 as compared to the previous year. The report said 21.5 lakh TB cases were notified to the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP) in 2018; India accounted for a quarter of the Global TB burden with an estimated 27 lakh new cases in the year. Of the total notifications, 25% (5.4 lakh) cases were from the private sector; a 40% increase over last year. Among the notified, treatment was initiated for about 19.1 lakh cases (90%) across both public and private sectors. The majority of the affected individuals (89%) were in the age group 15-69 *(see chart)*.

State by state

Uttar Pradesh, with 17% of the population of the country, reported 4.2 lakh cases, accounting for 20% of all notifications (187 cases/lakh population).

Between 2017 and 2018, Haryana saw a large increase in the number of cases, data from the report show (see table). Cases increased significantly in Rajasthan and UP, as well as Delhi.

On the other hand, Odisha witnessed a decline in the number of notified cases from over 67,000 in 2017 to 50,244 in 2018, or about 25%. Odisha was the only such state; the Union Territories of Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands too witnessed a drop.

The two UTs of Delhi and Chandigarh had the highest number of notified patients per lakh population, at 417 and 468, respectively. Their rates of notification are higher because people from many other parts of India get notified from these UTs, the report said.

NOTIFIED TB CASES, THEN AND NOW

State	Cases in 2017*	Cases in 2018
Haryana	41,561	66,734
Rajasthan	107,312	160,244
Sikkim	973	1,444
UP	2,87,373	4,25,451
Delhi	63,670	89,449
Nagaland	3,137	4,297
Tripura	1,959	2,660
Meghalaya	3,553	4,690
Punjab	41,829	55,152
Uttarakhand	17,115	21,931
MP	1,31,791	1,61,285
Telangana	44,644	52,139
Maharashtra	1,81,897	2,08,177

* 2017 figures here are the totals of the notified cases in public and private sectors, listed separately in the report

Source: India TB Report 2019

TB & HIV

TB is the leading cause of morbidity and mortality among people living with HIV, and HIV co-infection rates among incident TB patients is estimated to be 3% — 86,000 HIV-associated TB patients are emerging annually. The mortality in this group is very high, and 11,000 people with HIV die every year due to TB, the report said.

India is the third highest HIV-burden country in the world, with an adult prevalence of 0.22%. The report said people living with HIV are at 21 times higher risk of developing TB. Nearly 25% of all deaths among people living with HIV are estimated to be due to TB.

ENS, WITH PTI

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Listing India's residents, citizens

Government has revived National Population Register project at a time when National Register of Citizens has been published in Assam. How are the two different? What kind of data will be collected, and why?

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY & KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 26

IN THE backdrop of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam excluding 19 lakh among the 3.3 crore who had applied, the resurrection of the National Population Register (NPR) project has added to the uncertainty around the idea of citizenship in the country. Even as issues of privacy associated with Aadhaar continue to be debated in the country, the NPR is on a drive to collect detailed data on residents of India. What has added to the conversation is Home Minister Amit Shah floating the idea of "one nation, one card" and asserting that the NRC would be implemented across the country.


Census information being collected in Delhi in 2011. *Ravi Kanojia/Express Archive*

What is the NPR?

The NPR is a list of "usual residents of the country". According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, a "usual resident of the country" is one who has been residing in a local area for at least the last six months, or intends to stay in a particular location for the next six months. Unlike the NRC, the NPR is not a citizenship enumeration drive, as it would record even a foreigner staying in a locality for more than six months.

The NPR is being prepared under provisions of the Citizenship Act 1955 and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003. It is mandatory for every "usual resident of India" to register in the NPR.

It will be conducted in conjunction with the houselisting phase, the first phase of the Census, by the Office of the Registrar General of India (RGI) under the Home Ministry for Census 2021. Only Assam will not be included, given the recently completed NRC.

The NPR exercise is conducted at the local, sub-district, district, state and national levels. The RGI has already begun a pilot project in over 1,200 villages and 40 towns and cities through 5,218 enumeration blocks, where it is collecting various data from people. The final enumeration will begin in April 2020 and end in September 2020.

What is the controversy around it?

It comes in the backdrop of the NRC excluding 19 lakh people in Assam. With the government insisting that the NRC would be implemented across the country, the NPR has raised anxieties around the idea of citizenship in the country. Even as a debate continues on Aadhaar and privacy, the NPR intends to collect a much larger amount of personal data on residents of India.

The idea of conducting a nationwide NRC would only happen on the basis of the upcoming NPR. After a list of residents is created, a nationwide NRC could go about verifying the citizens from that list.

The NPR is also amongst a host of identity databases such as Aadhaar, voter card, passport and more that Amit Shah said he would like to see combined into one card. "We will have to end all these separate exercises," Shah said at the foundation stone laying ceremony for the new Office of Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner on Tuesday. "If we do a digital census well, then all cards can come into one card. Government has not made this plan yet, but I want to put the potential in front of you to show that a successful digital census is your work and for the benefit of the public," Shah said.

Is the NPR a new idea?

No. The idea actually dates back to the UPA regime and was put in motion by then Home Minister P Chidambaram in 2009. In fact, at that time it had clashed with Aadhaar (UIDAI) over which project would be best suited for transferring government benefits to citizens. The Home Ministry had then pushed the idea of the NPR being a better vehicle because it connected every NPR-recorded resident to a household through the Census. Back then, the Home Ministry push had even put the UIDAI project on the backburner.

The data for the NPR were first collected in 2010 along with the houselisting phase of Census 2011. In 2015, this data was further updated by conducting a door-to-door survey.

However, with the current government picking out Aadhaar as the key vehicle for transfer of government benefits in 2016 and putting its weight behind it, the NPR took a backseat. Through a notification on August 3 by the RGI, however, the idea has now been revived. The exercise to update the 2015 NPR with additional data has begun and will be completed in 2020. Digitisation of the updated information has been completed.

What kind of data will NPR collect?

The NPR will collect both demographic data and biometric data. There are 15 different categories of demographic data, ranging from name and place of birth to education and occupation, that the RGI is supposed collect in the NPR. For biometric data it will depend on Aadhaar, for which it will seek Aadhaar details of the residents.

Apart from this, in a test run going on across the country, the RGI is seeking details of mobile number, Aadhaar, PAN card, Driving Licence, Voter ID card and passport (in case the resident is Indian). It is also working to update the Civil Registration System of birth and death certificates.

In the 2010 exercise, the RGI had collected only demographic details. In 2015, it updated the data further with the mobile, Aadhaar and ration card numbers of residents. In the 2020 exercise, it has dropped the ration card number but added other categories.

According to Home Ministry sources, while registering with the NPR is mandatory, furnishing of additional data such as PAN, Aadhaar, driving licence and voter ID is voluntary. "Making it mandatory will invite unnecessary litigation. As of now there is no proposal to make it mandatory. We are also reposing trust in citizens. No document is being asked for or being verified against the details provided. The pilot project has shown that almost all the people are willing to share this data. Only in certain urban pockets such as in Delhi have we faced some resistance," a Home Ministry official said.

The Ministry has also floated the option of residents updating details in the NPR online.

Why does the government want so much data?

While there are concerns around privacy, the government position on collection of so much data is twofold. The first is the assertion that every country must have a comprehensive identity database of its residents with relevant demographic details. It says it will help the government formulate its policies better and also aid national security.

The second, largely to justify the collection of data such as driving licence, voter ID and PAN numbers, is that it will will only ease the life of those residing in India by cutting red tape. "Not only will it help target government beneficiaries in a better way, but also further cut down paperwork and red tape in a similar manner that Aadhaar has done," a Home Ministry official said.

According to the official, it will streamline data of residents across various platforms. "It is common to find different date of birth of a person on different government documents. NPR will help eliminate that. With NPR data, residents will not have to furnish various proofs of age, address and other details in official work. It would also eliminate duplication in voter lists, government insists."

Officials also insist, however, that NPR information is private and confidential, meaning it will not be shared with third parties. There is as yet no clarity on the mechanism for protection of this vast amount of data.

After 2 in 2 years, an annual interstellar visit now?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 26

IN OCTOBER 2017, astronomers spotted the first interstellar object known to pass through the Solar System, and named it 'Oumuamua. It gave rise to initial speculation that it was an alien spaceship, but scientists have since concluded that 'Oumuamua likely has properties similar to a comet.

This summer came a new object, dubbed 2I/Borisov. Researchers will have about a year to observe the object with telescopes.

After centuries of never having had a known interstellar visitor, Earth has had two in two years. Astronomers Gregory Laughlin and Malena Rice, however, were not exactly surprised, Yale University said in a statement.


'Oumuamua came calling in 2017.

The astronomers have just completed a study that suggests these strange visitors are going to keep coming. A few large objects can be expected to show up every year, they say, and smaller objects entering the Solar System could reach into the hundreds each year. The study has been accepted for publication in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*, Yale said.

"There should be a lot of this material floating around. So much more data will be coming out soon, thanks to new telescopes coming online. We won't have to speculate," Rice, the first author, said in the statement.

The research proposes that interstellar objects could be material ejected from large, newborn planets, orbiting farther away from their suns. They suggest that these have carved out pronounced gaps in the protoplanetary disks — cosmic platters of gas and dust.

To test their theory, Rice and Laughlin looked at three protoplanetary disks from the Disk Substructures at High Angular Resolution Project (DSHARP), a survey conducted by a consortium of astronomers. DSHARP focuses on images of 20 nearby, bright and large protoplanetary disks.

"We were looking for disks in which it was pretty clear a planet was there. If a disk has clear gaps in it, like several of the DSHARP disks do, it's possible to extrapolate what type of planet would be there. Then, we can simulate the systems to see how much material should be ejected over time," Rice said.

"This idea nicely explains the high density of these objects drifting in interstellar space, and it shows that we should be finding up to hundreds of these objects with upcoming surveys coming online next year," Laughlin said.

Why fears and uncertainty shroud tomorrow's Afghan election

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
MUMBAI, SEPTEMBER 26

PRESIDENT ASHRAF Ghani is seeking a second term in Afghanistan's presidential election scheduled for September 28. But with just two days to go, it is still not certain that the election will ultimately be held.

Why the uncertainty?

Sections of the Afghan political class believe it is meaningless to hold elections before a peace deal is concluded with the Taliban. The Taliban have denounced the election, violence has increased in the last few weeks, and fear of bombings and suicide attacks may keep voters indoors.

Also, the elections of both 2009 and 2014 were mired in allegations of fraud, and questions will likely be raised on this election as well. As in the past, the results will likely be contested, and the exercise will be divisive, the critics say.

In an interview to the Associated Press, former President Hamid Karzai likened holding an election now to "asking a heart patient to run a marathon". Karzai, who remains an influential voice in his country, has called for cancellation of the election and resumption of talks with the Taliban — if not between the United States and the Taliban, which President Donald Trump called off this month, then between the Afghan people and the Taliban.

On Wednesday, the head of Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) Hawa Alam Nuristani said the IEC was "fully ready" to conduct election on Saturday, and asked all eligible Afghans to cast their votes. There are 9.6 million voters on the rolls in a population of about 35 million.

This will be Afghanistan's fourth presidential election since 2004, when the current Constitution came into force. Elections have always been held with US financial assistance; ominously last week, the US withdrew $100 million in aid for Afghanistan's anti-corruption body, saying it was "incapable of being a partner".

So who wants the election?

President Ashraf Ghani, who was excluded from the US-Taliban talks on the latter's say-so, has pushed forcefully for the election to be held. The Taliban say they don't recognise the Afghan government because it is a US puppet. A section of Afghan opinion believes that the proposed US-Taliban deal — which was primarily about the withdrawal of US troops in return for the Taliban agreeing to not let the al-Qaeda and ISIS establish themselves in the country — would have given the upper hand to the Taliban and destroyed hard-won gains of the nearly two-decade-long process of democratisation, which has brought certain freedoms and the rights to Afghans, including to its minority populations. The Taliban have given no indication that they believe in elections, and have been clear that they want power — or at least a share in power — without having to ask for votes.

In the shadow of the gun, President Ashraf Ghani is seeking re-election. *AP*

When Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, announced this month that the deal with the Taliban now required only Trump's green light, it appeared that the next step would be the setting up of an interim government in which the Taliban would play a big role. The understanding seemed to be that this interim government would thereafter work out further steps, including a ceasefire and talks between the Taliban and the Afghan people. It carried the implication that the election scheduled for September 28 would not be held.

The cancellation of the talks by Trump changed the situation. Ghani and his running mate for vice-president, Abdullah Saleh, have long argued that "intra-Afghan talks" should be held only after a new government is elected, that they should be between the Taliban and the representatives of the Afghan people, and that the Taliban should call a ceasefire before such talks.

And who's running against Ghani?

Two of the 18 candidates who filed nominations have since suspended their campaign, one of them in favour of Ghani.

Among those who remain, the best known and strongest candidate is Abdullah Abdullah, a Pashtun-Tajik who was once adviser to Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance who was killed by al-Qaeda two days before the 9/11 attacks. Abdullah, who became the first foreign minister of Afghanistan soon after the US invasion of 2001, is deputy leader in Ghani's government, designated as Chief Executive.

Abdullah came in second behind President Hamid Karzai in the 2009 election, and was deadlocked with Ghani after a second round run-off in 2015. With neither Abdullah nor Ghani willing to give in, then US Secretary of State John Kerry worked for months to cobble together a power-sharing deal. Abdullah's party is called National Coalition of Afghanistan.

Then there is Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Pashtun leader of the Hezb-e-Islami. He is a former warlord and an ISI-trained, CIA-funded mujahideen commander who played a leading role in the anti-Soviet insurgency, and in the violence that tore Afghanistan apart as mujahideen factions fought each other for power for six years after the Red Army exited. In 2001, he based himself in Pakistan from where he orchestrated armed attacks on the Afghan government, until his return in 2016 after a peace agreement with Ghani's government.

The former Afghan ambassador to India, Shaida Abdali, is also contesting.

How has the campaign been?

There has been very little open campaigning due to the intense violence of the last few weeks — the Taliban first tried to grab as much territory as they could in the run-up to what seemed like a deal in the bag with the Americans; they were then angry that the talks were cancelled and the elections were happening. Dozens have been killed in Taliban suicide attacks over the last 10 days. For security reasons, Ghani has campaigned mostly via videoconferencing, and sought a mandate to strengthen his hands in any future talks with the Taliban.

What about security on voting day?

The IEC said last month that for security reasons, 2,431 of the 7,366 polling centres would be closed. Hundreds of these polling stations are in Taliban-controlled territory. The deployment of some 72,000 security personnel has not eased fears of largescale violence and use of unfair means. The IEC plans to use a new biometric system to identify voters and prevent fraud.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
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धीमी लेकिन सधी शुरुआत

केंद्र की महत्त्वाकांक्षी स्वास्थ्य सेवा योजना प्रधानमंत्री जन आरोग्य योजना (पीएमजेएवाई) की शुरुआत को एक वर्ष बीत गया है। इस अवधि में योजना ने कुछ प्रभावित करने वाले आंकड़े हासिल किए हैं। सबसे अहम यह कि इस योजना के तहत करीब 50 लाख लोगों को अस्पतालों में उपचार मिला। यदि देश भर के ऐसे संभावित मामलों को ध्यान में न रखें तो यह आंकड़ा बहुत बड़ा है। यह सच है कि समग्र रूप से देखा जाए तो यह आंकड़ा बहुत ज्यादा नहीं है और यह बात इस ओर इशारा करती है कि इस विषय में जन जागरूकता और पहुंच दोनों में सुधार लाना होगा। यह योजना 33 राज्यों और केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों समेत देश भर में लागू है। दिल्ली, पश्चिम बंगाल और तेलंगाना जैसे कुछ ही विपक्ष शासित राज्य ऐसे हैं जहां यह योजना लागू नहीं है। एक बात यह भी है कि अपेक्षाकृत अमीर राज्यों में दावों की संख्या भी बहुत ज्यादा है। गुजरात में अब तक पीएमजेएवाई योजना के अंतर्गत सबसे अधिक 6.50 लाख दावे हासिल हुए हैं। इसके बाद तमिलनाडु का क्रम आता है जहां ऐसे 4 लाख मामले हैं। दूसरे शब्दों में कहें तो कुल 45 लाख दावों में से 10 लाख केवल इन्हीं दो राज्यों से हैं। कर्नाटक, आंध्र प्रदेश और महाराष्ट्र से भी कुल मिलाकर लगभग 10 लाख दावे प्राप्त हुए। तमाम अन्य अखिल भारतीय योजनाओं की तरह यहां भी बेहतर संसाधन से लैस राज्य बेहतर ढंग से प्रबंधन कर रहे हैं।

धीमा क्रियान्वयन जहां समस्या की वजह है, वहीं इसका एक अर्थ यह भी है कि इसका राजकोषीय प्रभाव अभी पूरी तरह सामने नहीं आया है। यकीनन यह संभव है कि राजकोषीय प्रभाव के कारण ही कमजोर आर्थिक स्थिति वाले राज्यों ने शायद इसका उतना प्रसार नहीं किया जितना करना चाहिए था। आगे चलकर लागत नियंत्रण पर ध्यान देना होगा। पीएमजेएवाई के प्राधिकारियों को पहले लागत कम करने के लिए सक्रियता दिखानी होगी। उदाहरण के लिए औषधि कंपनियों और चिकित्सकीय उपकरण बनाने वालों के साथ मोलभाव करना।

भविष्य में निजी सेवा प्रदाताओं के पैकेज की दर भी विवाद का विषय बन सकती है। सरकार को उम्मीद है कि योजना में पंजीकृत निजी अस्पतालों की तादाद भविष्य में काफी बढ़ेगी। फिलहाल इसमें 9,000 अस्पताल पंजीकृत हैं जो इसमें शामिल शासकीय अस्पतालों की तुलना में कुछ भी नहीं। परंतु जब तक पैकेज की लागत को लेकर सही समझ नहीं बनती चीजें उम्मीद के मुताबिक नहीं घटेंगी। निजी अस्पतालों के विस्तार के साथ व्यापक धोखाधड़ी की आशंका भी बढ़ेगी। योजना के पहले ही वर्ष में छत्तीसगढ़ और झारखंड में अनावश्यक रूप से महिलाओं के गर्भाशय निकालने के मामले सामने आए हैं।

योजना के डेटा आधारित होने के कारण धोखाधड़ी की ऐसी घटनाएं सामने आ जाएंगी लेकिन आखिरकार विवाद का निस्तारण तो पुराने तौर तरीकों से ही करना होगा। हकीकत यह है कि केंद्र सरकार या राज्यों के स्तर पर ऐसे विवादों से निपटने की कोई व्यवस्था अब तक नहीं है।

अलग-अलग राज्यों में यह योजना अलग-अलग मॉडल के साथ लागू की गई है लेकिन ऐसे किसी भी मॉडल की सफलता के लिए बुनियादी बात यह है कि राज्य की क्षमताओं में विस्तार हो। फिर चाहे यह नियमन की बात हो, विवाद निस्तारण की या सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के अस्पतालों की। कम लागत में सार्वभौमिक स्वास्थ्य योजना बनाना नामुमकिन है। यह योजना अब तक राजकोषीय दबाव वाली साबित नहीं हुई है। अगर भविष्य में इसे सफल होना है तो बड़ी तादाद में संसाधनों की आवश्यकता होगी। तमाम संसाधन गरीब राज्यों को भी देने होंगे ताकि वे इसे सही ढंग से लागू कर सकें।

अजय मोहंती

उच्च वृद्धि की नीति से जुड़े हैं ताजा कदम

केंद्र सरकार के वृद्धि को गति देने वाले ताजा कदम के बाद निजी कारोबारियों के प्रतिफल और जोखिम के अनुपात पर नजर रखनी होगी। इस विषय पर विस्तार से प्रकाश डाल रहे हैं **अजय शाह**

देश की वृहद आर्थिक स्थिति से जुड़ी सबसे अहम समस्या है निजी निवेश में गिरावट का आना। निजी व्यक्तियों के निर्णय निवेश से मिलने वाले लाभ या उससे जुड़े जोखिम से संबद्ध होते हैं। जब किसी कारोबार को कर पूर्व 100 रुपये का मुनाफा होता है तो कुछ विशिष्ट परिस्थितियों में अंशधारक को 43 रुपये की नकद राशि मिलती। अब कॉर्पोरेट आयकर की दर में कमी के बाद यह बढ़कर 48 रुपये हो गई है। यह कदम सही दिशा में है और अभी काफी कुछ किया जाना है। ऐसा करके ही निजी क्षेत्र के लोगों में जोखिम/इनाम की अवधारणा को बदला जा सकेगा। सबसे बड़ा राजकोषीय जोखिम निम्न आर्थिक वृद्धि से उत्पन्न होता है।

समेकित मांग का जो हिस्सा देश की वृहद आर्थिकी को सबसे अधिक संचालित करता है, वह है कॉर्पोरेट निवेश। हाल के दशकों में दो बार तेजी देखी गई। वर्ष 1994-95 और 2007-08। सन 1990 के दशक में तथा हाल के वर्षों में गिरावट भी देखने को मिली। वृद्धि दर बढ़ाने के लिए मजबूत निजी निवेश हासिल करना अनिवार्य है।

निजी व्यक्ति (देसी या विदेशी) निवेश का निर्णय कैसे लेते हैं। वे या तो किसी मौजूदा फर्म में निवेश करते हैं या फिर किसी नई फर्म में। इस दौरान वे मुनाफे और जोखिम के अनुपात पर नजर डालते हैं। उनकी दृष्टि अंतिम अंशधारक को मिलने वाली नकद राशि पर रहती है। मान लेते हैं किसी कंपनी को कर पूर्व 100 रुपये का लाभ होता है। इससे मालिक की खपत पर क्या असर होगा? जब इन 100 रुपयों में से विभिन्न हिस्से निकलेंगे तो इससे मालिकों के लाभ पर असर होगा और साथ ही इनाम और जोखिम के अनुपात पर भी असर होगा।

कारोबारी उत्तरदायित्व (सीएसआर) के वास्तविक मूल्य, कॉर्पोरेट आयकर, लाभांश वितरण कर और मालिक द्वारा चुकाए जाने वाले व्यक्तिगत आयकर के बारे में वास्तविक आकलन करने के बाद हमारा अनुमान है कि शुक्रवार की घोषणा के पहले 100 रुपये के कर पूर्वलाभ में से मालिक को 43 रुपये मिलते थे जो घोषणा के बाद बढ़कर 48 रुपये हो जाएंगे। इस घोषणा ने पांच प्रतिशत का लाभ दिया है जो अपने आप में उपयोगी प्रगति है।

जब यह अंशधारक इन 48 रुपयों का इस्तेमाल वस्तु एवं सेवाओं की खरीद में करेगा तो सरकार जीएसटी के माध्यम से इसमें अपना हिस्सा ले लेगी। इसके अलावा एक सवाल जोखिम का भी है। यह तीन हिस्सों में आता है। सभी निवेशकों को सामान्य कारोबारी जोखिम का सामना करना पड़ता है और यह सर्वथा उचित भी है। इसके अलावा भारतीय परिदृश्य में जोखिम के दो अतिरिक्त घटक भी हैं। कंपनियों को नीतिगत जोखिम भी होता है जो उनके कारोबारी मॉडल को प्रभावित कर सकता है। उदाहरण के लिए सर्वोच्च न्यायालय में आधार के मामले में आधार का इस्तेमाल करके व्यवस्था बनाई थी, उन्हें बुनियादी ढांचे के इस्तेमाल से रोक दिया गया। इसी प्रकार जिन कंपनियों ने क्रेडिट ब्यूरो की जानकारी जुटाकर काम किया था, उन्हें भी सूचना तक पहुंच बनाने से रोक दिया गया।

जोखिम का तीसरा घटक एजेंसियों से आता है। देश की न्याय व्यवस्था में तमाम एजेंसियां हैं। इनके पास उच्च जांच शक्ति है। इनके जरिये जेल की सजा होने तक का जोखिम है। जेल जाने की नौबत न भी आए तो भी वकीलों का खर्च भी मायने रखता है। 100 करोड़ रुपये के कारोबार और 5 करोड़ रुपये के शुद्ध मुनाफे वाली कंपनी अगर वकीलों को साल में एक करोड़ रुपये का भुगतान करे तो यह राशि मायने रखती है। अगर किसी कंपनी का राजस्व 1,000 करोड़ रुपये हो जाए तभी वह कानूनी गतिविधियों पर इतना खर्च कर सकती है।

निजी क्षेत्र से कहा जाना चाहिए कि वह सामान्य कारोबारी जोखिम उठाए और नवाचार के माध्यम से और कारोबारी जोखिम के माध्यम से कारोबार खड़ा करे। जहां तक उनकी मेहनत के फल के सरकार और वकीलों तक जाने की बात और नीतिगत जोखिम तथा एजेंसियों की बात है तो यह यकीनन निवेश को बाधित करता है। नीति निर्माता कर दर और नीतिगत जोखिम घटाकर तथा एजेंसियों का खतरा कम करना तथा विधिक व्यवस्था में सुधार करके इनाम और जोखिम के अनुपात में सुधार लाया जा सकता है।

अब तक हमने निजी लोगों की निवेश की इच्छा पर ध्यान केंद्रित किया है। एक बार निजी लोगों के इनाम और जोखिम की दिक्कत दूर हो जाए तो निवेश के नए विचार सामने आएंगे। अगली समस्या उस वित्तीय तंत्र की है जो निवेश परियोजनाओं को फंड करता है। देश की वित्तीय व्यवस्था के दोनों इंजन यानी बैंक और वित्तीय बाजार फिलहाल खस्ताहाल हैं। उच्च वृद्धि की नीति में वित्तीय तंत्र की सेहत दुरुस्त करना आवश्यक है।

उच्च वृद्धि की नीति में इनाम और जोखिम के अनुपात में बदलाव के साथ-साथ वित्तीय तंत्र को बेहतर बनाना शामिल है। पिछले दिनों उठाया गया कदम इसका केवल एक पहलू है।

कर दरों में कमी के साथ राजकोषीय जोखिम जुड़ा हुआ है। हमें इस एक निर्णय के अल्पकालिक प्रभाव से आगे निकलकर देखना होगा। देश की वृहद नीति में राजकोषीय स्थिरता का माहौल बनाने के लिए, दो ही विकल्प हैं। उच्च वृद्धि और शिथिल राजकोषीय नीति के साथ राजकोषीय स्थिरता हासिल की जा सकती है। दूसरा विकल्प कम वृद्धि और सख्त राजकोषीय नीति के माध्यम से इसे हासिल करना भी है।

हमें यह देखना होगा कि इन दोनों में से कौन सी स्थितियां बेहतर हैं? भारत में पारंपरिक उत्तर शिथिल राजकोषीय नीति और उच्च वृद्धि दर की रही है। पिछले दिनों उठाया गया कदम भी उच्च वृद्धि की नीति की ओर ले जाने वाला है।

कर दरों में कमी का अल्पावधि का बजट प्रभाव भी जितना नजर आ रहा है उससे कम रहेगा। कर दर से जुड़ी विसंगति उसके साथ ही बढ़ती या घटती है। जब कर दर कम होती है तो अर्थव्यवस्था पर इसका असर कम होता है और वृद्धि को बल मिलता है। इसी तरह कर दर कम होने पर निजी निवेशकों में कर वंचना की प्रवृत्ति भी कम होती है। परंतु कर दर कम होने के साथ ही कर प्रशासन की शक्तियां भी कम होती हैं।

इन तमाम वजहों से कर दरों में बदलाव के वक्त सहज अनुपात कभी नहीं मिल पाता। जब भी कर दर बढ़ाई जाती है तो हासिल होने वाला कर राजस्व हमेशा निराश करता है। जब कर दर में कमी की जाती है तब राजस्व में होने वाली कमी अनुमान से कम ही होती है। इससे यह आशा उत्पन्न होती है कि राजकोषीय मजबूती को यह शायद उस कदर प्रभावित न करे।

मानसिक बीमारियों को लेकर बढ़े जागरूकता और उपचार

इंसानी पहलू

श्यामल मजूमदार

अगर लोग मानसिक बीमारियों को आशंका की दृष्टि से देखते रहेंगे तो मानसिक बीमारियों से पीड़ित लोगों को जरूरी सहायता मिलने में भी मुश्किल आती रहेगी

हाल ही में पुलित्जर पुरस्कार विजेता लेखक और जानेमाने चिकित्सक सिद्धार्थ मुखर्जी ने मानसिक स्वास्थ्य के मसले पर एक अहम बात उठाई। उन्होंने याद दिलाया कि कैसे सन 1950 के दशक में कैंसर को कलंक माना जाता था। उन्होंने कहा कि आज वही स्थिति मानसिक स्वास्थ्य की है। उन्होंने कहा कि उन दिनों कैंसर के मरीजों को अस्पतालों में पीछे की ओर ठूंस दिया जाता था। बाद में जागरूकता बढ़ी और इस बीमारी के साथ जुड़ा कलंक भी मिट गया। उन्होंने अपने वक्तव्य में कहा कि तीन ऐसी शक्तियां हैं जिन्हें मानसिक स्वास्थ्य की दिशा में मिलकर काम करना होगा। पहली शक्ति है राजनीतिक शक्ति और इसके तहत मानसिक स्वास्थ्य को जन स्वास्थ्य संकट के रूप में चिह्नित करना होगा। राजनीतिक क्षेत्र के सभी लोगों को साथ आकर राष्ट्रीय मानसिक स्वास्थ्य संस्थान गठित करने की दिशा में काम करना चाहिए।

दूसरी शक्ति है सामाजिक शक्ति। मानसिक स्वास्थ्य के साथ जुड़े पूर्वाग्रह को खत्म करने की दिशा में काम करना चाहिए। कैंसर के मामले में रोज कुशनेर, बेट्टी फोर्ड और हैप्पी रॉकफेलर जैसी महिलाओं ने अहम भूमिका निभाई थी और लोग कैंसर के मरीजों के साथ समानुभूति रखने लगे, उनके इलाज और ठीक होने की राह यहीं से निकली। कोलंबिया विश्वविद्यालय के मेडिकल सेंटर में मेडिसन विभाग के प्रोफेसर मुखर्जी ने कहा कि मानसिक स्वास्थ्य को भी ऐसे ही हिमायत करने वालों की आवश्यकता है।

तीसरी शक्ति जीवविज्ञान से जुड़ी है जिसे जेनेटिक या औषधि क्षेत्र से समझा जा सकता है। इसमें प्रयास करने और विभिन्न प्रकार के शोध करना भी शामिल है। ऐसा करके यह समझ विकसित की जा सकती है कि मानसिक स्वास्थ्य की समस्याओं से जूझ रहे लोगों का उत्पीड़न न हो।

वह इन बातों को अपने अनुभव से समझते होंगे क्योंकि उनके दो करीबी रिश्तेदार सीजोफ्रेनिया और बायपोलर डिसऑर्डर से पीड़ित थे। उनका रिश्ते का एक भाई भी सीजोफ्रेनिया से पीड़ित था और उसे भर्ती कराना पड़ा था। मुखर्जी शुरुआत में इस बीमारी की चर्चाओं से दूर रहते थे और आंशिक रूप से इस बीमारी को इसलिए समझना नहीं चाहते थे क्योंकि उनके मन में ढेर सारी आशंकाएं थीं। आखिरकार उन्होंने साहस जुटाया और एक किताब लिखी: द जीन: एन इंटीमेट हिस्ट्री।

उनका यह कहना सही है कि दुनिया के कई अन्य हिस्सों की तरह भारत में भी मानसिक बीमारियों के पीड़ित और उनके परिवार पहले-पहल इन बीमारियों को नकारने की कोशिश करते हैं। उनमें से अधिकांश चिकित्सक को यह समझाने का प्रयास करते हैं कि उससे बीमारी का पता लगाने में चूक हुई है या उनकी बिगड़ी मनोदशा अपने आप ठीक हो जाएगी। ऐसा इसलिए होता है क्योंकि लोगों में जागरूकता की कमी है और उन्हें नहीं पता कि समय पर पता चल जाने पर इन बीमारियों का पूरा इलाज संभव है। इसकी एक अहम वजह यह है कि देश में मानसिक स्वास्थ्य सलाहकारों की भारी कमी है। विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन के अनुसार देश में मानसिक बीमारियों के शिकार प्रत्येक एक लाख लोगों पर 0.301 मनोचिकित्सक और 0.047 मनोविज्ञानी हैं। मानसिक स्वास्थ्य के क्षेत्र में काम करने वालों की कमी कोई नया मुद्दा नहीं है। सन 1982 में सरकार ने राष्ट्रीय मानसिक स्वास्थ्य कार्यक्रम का क्रियान्वयन आरंभ किया था। इसका लक्ष्य था मानसिक स्वास्थ्य की देखभाल को सामान्य स्वास्थ्य से जोड़ना। परंतु इसमें अपेक्षित तेजी नहीं आई। वर्ष 2015 तक यानी कार्यक्रम की शुरुआत के तीन दशक बाद तक यह देश के केवल 27 प्रतिशत जिलों में लागू था। हाल ही में संपन्न राष्ट्रीय मानसिक स्वास्थ्य सर्वेक्षण बताता है कि देश में किसी भी मानसिक अस्वस्थता में उपचार में अंतर की दर 83 फीसदी तक है। यह भी कहा गया कि देश में करीब 15 करोड़ लोगों को उनके मानसिक स्वास्थ्य के लिए देखभाल की आवश्यकता है। देश के कारोबारी जगत को भी इसे गंभीरता से लेने की आवश्यकता है। एक चेतावनी भरा तथ्य यह है कि निजी क्षेत्र में काम करने वाले 42.5 फीसदी कर्मचारी अवसाद या तनाव जैसी मानसिक समस्याओं से जूझ रहे हैं। विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन का अनुमान है कि सन 2012 से 2030 के बीच भारत को मानसिक स्वास्थ्य संबंधी दिक्कतों के कारण 1.03 लाख करोड़ डॉलर का आर्थिक नुकसान होगा। गरीब समुदाय मानसिक बीमारी की अनदेखी करते हैं क्योंकि ये बीमारियां अपंग नहीं बनातीं, इन बीमारियों से विरले ही किसी की मौत होती है और अपनी आजीविका के लिए संघर्ष करने वाले ऐसे परिवारों को मानसिक बीमारियों पर पैसा खर्च करना ठीक नहीं लगता।

वर्ष 2018 में मानसिक स्वास्थ्य को लेकर जागरूकता फैलाने का काम करने वाले परोपकारी संगठन लाइव लव लाफ फाउंडेशन ने एक अध्ययन किया जिसमें यह पता लगाया गया कि देश के लोग मानसिक स्वास्थ्य के बारे में क्या सोचते हैं। यह अध्ययन देश के आठ शहरों में किया गया। अध्ययन में शामिल लोगों में से 87 फीसदी को मानसिक बीमारियों के बारे में कुछ जानकारी थी, 71 फीसदी ने इससे जुड़े पूर्वाग्रहों की बात भी की। एक चौथाई से ज्यादा लोगों ने यह माना वे मानसिक बीमारियों से ग्रस्त लोगों के साथ तटस्थ रहेंगे।

इन दिक्कतों को तत्काल दूर किए जाने की आवश्यकता है। यदि लोग मानसिक बीमारियों को आशंका की दृष्टि से देखते रहेंगे तो मानसिक बीमारियों से पीड़ित लोगों को जरूरी सहायता मिलने में भी मुश्किल आती रहेगी। ऐसे में सरकार के संस्थागत सहयोग की भूमिका बहुत अहम हो जाती है।

कानाफूसी

बचाव की तैयारी

उत्तर प्रदेश में कांग्रेस का संगठनात्मक ढांचा कमजोर है और वहां पार्टी खुले तौर पर गुटबाजी की शिकार है। यही वजह है कि प्रदेश कांग्रेस के तमाम वरिष्ठ नेता भी अगले महीने होने वाले 11 सीटों के विधानसभा उपचुनाव में पार्टी के प्रदर्शन को लेकर बहुत अधिक आशान्वित नहीं हैं। दिलचस्प बात यह है कि कांग्रेस के वरिष्ठ नेताओं ने पहले ही पूर्वी उत्तर प्रदेश की प्रभारी और पार्टी महासचिव प्रियंका गांधी के बचाव की घेरेबंदी शुरू कर दी है ताकि चुनाव परिणाम विपरीत होने पर उन्हें किसी भी तरह के नकारात्मक प्रचार से बचाया जा सके। इन नेताओं ने इस संभावना को भी नकार दिया है कि प्रियंका गांधी इन उपचुनावों में प्रचार का काम करेंगी। उनका कहना है कि राष्ट्रीय स्तर के नेता स्थानीय चुनावों के लिए प्रचार का काम नहीं करेंगे। हालांकि यह बात प्रियंका के व्यवहार से ही मेल नहीं खाती है। सोनभद्र में हुए हत्याकांड के बाद वह अत्यधिक सक्रिय थीं और उन्होंने कहा था कि वह योगी आदित्यनाथ की गरीब विरोधी और जन विरोधी सरकार के खिलाफ जनता के मुद्दों को उठाना जारी रखेंगी।

आपका पक्ष

अर्थव्यवस्था को पटरी पर लाएं

देश की अर्थव्यवस्था विगत कुछ समय से गंभीर चुनौतियों का सामना कर रही है। इसके लिए सरकार ने महत्त्वपूर्ण कदम उठाए हैं जिनमें सार्वजनिक बैंकों का विलय, जीएसटी दर में कटौती, बैंकों का पुनर्पूंजीकरण शामिल हैं। सरकार ने आर्थिक विकास, निवेश और रोजगार सृजन को बढ़ावा देने के उद्देश्य से कॉरपोरेट कर की दर में कटौती की है जो बजट के बाद सुधार में सबसे बड़ी घोषणा है। देश की विकास दर छह वर्षों में न्यूनतम स्तर पर है। कृषि से लेकर विनिर्माण उद्योग तक विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में आर्थिक मंदी की छाई हुई है। इस कटौती का अर्थव्यवस्था में दूरगामी और सकारात्मकता प्रभाव पड़ेगा। यह निवेशकों और उद्योगपतियों का उत्साह तथा मनोबल बढ़ाएगा जिससे राजस्व एवं आर्थिक वृद्धि को बढ़ावा मिलेगा। निजी निवेश आकर्षित होगा जिससे प्रतिस्पर्द्धा और रोजगार के अवसर सृजित होंगे।

साथ ही मेक इन इंडिया, स्टार्टअप में वृद्धि होगी। अमेरिका-चीन के मध्य व्यापार युद्ध से प्रभावित कंपनियां भारत की तरफ रुख कर सकती हैं जो भारत को दक्षिण और दक्षिण-पूर्व एशिया के देशों के साथ प्रतिस्पर्द्धी बनाएगी। सरकार की इस पहल का उपभोक्ता वस्तु क्षेत्र में सकारात्मक असर पड़ सकता है। शेयर बाजार के

अर्थव्यवस्था को पटरी पर लाने के लिए सरकार को रोजगार सृजन पर भी जोर देना चाहिए

निवेशक सकारात्मक रूप से प्रभावित हो सकते हैं। कर में बचत से कंपनियां होने वाले लाभ का फायदा अपने निवेशकों को देंगी जिससे बाजार में तेजी आएगी। लेकिन कुछ चिंताएं भी हैं जैसे राजस्व में 1.45 लाख करोड़ रुपये राजकोषीय घाटे की स्थिति खराब हो सकती है। इससे केंद्र से राज्यों को मिलने वाले कर में कटौती आएगी। इससे राज्यों का राजकोषीय घाटा नकारात्मक रूप से प्रभावित हो सकता है। अत: इस सुधार प्रक्रिया को मजबूत और प्रभावी बनाने के लिए मांग को बढ़ाने, सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में निवेश, अवसंरचनात्मक सुधार, कौशल विकास, श्रम सुधार और औद्योगिक विवाद निवारण प्रक्रिया में सुधार आदि कदम उठाने होंगे।

सुजीत कुमार, बिलासपुर

अपनी आदत बदलने की जरूरत

प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने स्वतंत्रता दिवस के अवसर पर लाल किले से देशवासियों को एकल इस्तेमाल वाले प्लास्टिक का इस्तेमाल नहीं करने की अपील की थी। एकल इस्तेमाल वाले प्लास्टिक से पर्यावरण प्रदूषण के साथ-साथ पशु पक्षियों और जलीय जीवों की मृत्यु का कारण बन रहा है। अक्सर हम एकल इस्तेमाल वाले प्लास्टिक खरीदते हैं और उपयोग के बाद फेंक देते हैं। इस प्लास्टिक के विघटन होने में करीब 450 वर्ष लग जाते हैं। अत: हमें अतिरिक्त रुपये ही क्यों न खर्च करने पड़ें, प्लास्टिक का विकल्प तलाशना होगा और इसका इस्तेमाल बंद करना होगा। इसके लिए मिट्टी के बर्तन, कपड़े के थैले, लकड़ी के मर्तबान, बोतल, चम्मच व खिलौने आदि को फैशन बनाने की जरूरत है जिसे लोग अपने दैनिक जीवन में इसका अधिक से अधिक इस्तेमाल करने लगें। अगर हम ऐसा करना शुरू करेंगे तो हमें देख समाज के अन्य लोग भी इसी राह पर चलने लगेंगे। हमें बस अपना नजरिया और अपनी आदत बदलने की जरूरत है।

जितेंद्र साहू, शहडोल

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

दैनिक जागरण

व्यवहार व्यक्ति के चरित्र का दर्पण होता है

फैसले की घड़ी

अयोध्या मामले की सुनवाई कर रही सुप्रीम कोर्ट की पांच सदस्यीय संविधान पीठ ने जिस तरह यह स्पष्ट किया कि 18 अक्टूबर के बाद सभी पक्षकारों को जिरह के लिए एक दिन भी अतिरिक्त समय नहीं मिलेगा उससे यही प्रकट होता है कि वह राष्ट्रीय महत्व के इस मसले पर अपना फैसला देने के लिए प्रतिबद्ध है। इस प्रतिबद्धता के साथ ही उसने यह भी रेखांकित किया कि 18 अक्टूबर तक दलीलें पूरी होने पर ही चार सप्ताह में फैसला देने की उम्मीद की जा सकती है। चार सप्ताह का जिक्र इसीलिए हुआ, क्योंकि इस संविधान पीठ में शामिल सुप्रीम कोर्ट के प्रधान न्यायाधीश रंजन गोगोई 17 नवंबर को सेवानिवृत हो रहे हैं। यदि किन्हीं कारणों से उनकी सेवानिवृत्ति के पहले अयोध्या मसले पर फैसला नहीं आ पाता तो फिर मामले की सुनवाई नए सिरे से करनी होगी। यदि किन्हीं कारणों से ऐसा होता है तो यह गहन निराशा का कारण बनेगा। इसकी नौबत नहीं आने देनी चाहिए। इसलिए और भी नहीं, क्योंकि सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने फैसले की उम्मीद जगा दी है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट को इसके लिए साधुवाद कि उसने इस मामले की अहमियत को समझा और फैसला करने की ठानी। अयोध्या मामले की नियमित सुनवाई के पहले उसने आपसी बातचीत के जरिये इस विवाद को सुलझाने की पहल की, लेकिन वह नाकाम रही। हालांकि मध्यस्थता की पहल नए सिरे से शुरू हुई है, लेकिन इसकी उम्मीद कम है कि वह किसी नतीजे पर पहुंच सकेगी। इसका एक बड़ा कारण यही है कि दोनों पक्षों से एक-एक सदस्य ही नए सिरे से मध्यस्थता के लिए आगे आए हैं।

यह स्वागतयोग्य है कि सभी पक्षकार और उनके वकील सुप्रीम कोर्ट की ओर से तय की गई 18 अक्टूबर की समय सीमा का पालन करने यानी इस तिथि तक अपनी दलीलें पूरी करने के प्रति सहमति व्यक्त कर रहे हैं। इस सहमति के बाद यह आवश्यक हो जाता है कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट 17 नवंबर के पहले फैसला देना सुनिश्चित करे। इसके लिए आवश्यक हो तो अवकाश के दिनों में कुछ कटौती की जा सकती है। आखिर जब प्रतिदिन सुनवाई की जा सकती है तो फिर अवकाश में कटौती भी की जा सकती है। चूंकि अयोध्या मामले में फैसले की घड़ी करीब आती दिखने लगी है इसलिए सभी की कोशिश यही होनी चाहिए कि वह टले नहीं। अपेक्षित समय सीमा में फैसला देना केवल इसलिए सुनिश्चित नहीं किया जाना चाहिए कि सदियों पुराने इस विवाद के समाधान की प्रतीक्षा बहुत बेसब्री से की जा रही है, बल्कि इसलिए भी किया जाना चाहिए कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने इस पर अच्छा-खासा समय और संसाधन खपाया है। यह जाया हो, इसका कोई मतलब नहीं।

असंगठित क्षेत्र को संरक्षण

झारखंड में असंगठित क्षेत्र के मजदूरों को संबल-संरक्षण प्रदान करने के इरादे से झारखंड में शुरू किए गए श्रमशक्ति अभियान का स्वागत किया जाना चाहिए। इसे सफल बनाने के लिए हर स्तर पर पहल करने की आवश्यकता है। यह सही है कि अर्थव्यवस्था को मजबूती प्रदान करने में असंगठित क्षेत्र के मजदूर दिन-रात लगे रहते हैं। कई स्थानों पर तो इनके बूते ही कार्य का संपादन संभव हो पाता है। अफसोस की बात है कि ऐसे श्रमिकों को उनका वाजिब हक नहीं मिल पाता। ऐसा इसलिए, क्योंकि इनके हक को मजबूती से उठाने वालों की हर जगह कमी रहती है। इनके लिए लड़नेवाले आगे आने से परहेज करते हैं, जबकि संगठित क्षेत्र के मजदूरों की आवाज बनने की होड़ रहती है। इसलिए झारखंड से इनके कल्याण के लिए नई पहल दूसरों के लिए नजीर है। मुख्यमंत्री ने यह सही कहा है कि असंगठित क्षेत्र के मजदूरों की लड़ाई लड़ने वाला कोई नहीं है इसलिए सरकार खुद आगे आई है। विभिन्न कल्याणकारी योजनाओं को लागू कर सरकार इस काम को अंजाम देना चाहती है। इसकी शुरुआत सप्ताहव्यापी अभियान से की गई है। 25 सितंबर से दो अक्टूबर तक राज्य के सभी प्रखंडों में असंगठित क्षेत्र के मजदूरों का निबंधन किया जाना है ताकि पता चल सके कि राज्य में ऐसे श्रमिकों की संख्या कहां और कितनी है। किसी भी योजना को फलदायी बनाने के लिए यह जरूरी होता है कि उसे शुरू करने से पहले यह पता हो कि उसके लाभुकों की संख्या कितनी होगी। उसी हिसाब से जरूरी संसाधनों का इंतजाम किया जाता है। अब राज्य के सभी जिम्मेदार तबके की यह जिम्मेदारी है कि इस अभियान को सफल बनाने में अपने स्तर से हरसंभव प्रयास करे। सबसे बड़ी बात यह कि इन श्रमिकों तक सरकार की नीति एवं नीयत की जानकारी सही तरीके से पहुंचाने की व्यवस्था की जानी चाहिए। सरकारी मशीनरी के साथ गांव की सरकार समेत दूसरे जन प्रतिनिधियों की इसमें सक्रिय भागीदारी होनी चाहिए। सियासी दलों एवं स्वयंसेवी संगठनों के अलावा कंपनियों एवं दूसरे तमाम प्रतिष्ठानों के संचालकों को भी इस अभियान को सफल बनाने में आगे आना होगा। तभी इस नेक सोच के अपेक्षित फलाफल की आस की जा सकेगी।

दो अक्टूबर तक झारखंड में असंगठित क्षेत्र के मजदूरों का निबंधन होना है ताकि पता चले कि राज्य में ऐसे श्रमिकों की संख्या कितनी है

अमेरिका से दोस्ती के साथ मतभेद भी

सी. उदयभास्कर

हाउडी मोदी में भले ही जश्न का माहौल रहा हो, लेकिन मोदी-ट्रंप की द्विपक्षीय वार्ता में बहुप्रतीक्षित व्यापार समझौते पर सहमति न बन पाना चिंताजनक है

अवधेश राजपूत

संयुक्त राष्ट्र महासभा की वार्षिक बैठक और इससे इतर अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति के साथ द्विपक्षीय वार्ता के लिए पीएम मोदी के अमेरिकी दौरे का पहला पड़ाव बना 'हाउडी मोदी' कार्यक्रम। मोदी के दौरे में सबसे ज्यादा चर्चा टेक्सास के ह्यूस्टन शहर में 22 सितंबर को आयोजित इसी कार्यक्रम की रही। अमेरिकी मानकों के लिहाज से यह भारी-भरकम भीड़ वाला जलसा था जिसमें करीब 50,000 लोग शामिल हुए जिनमें ज्यादातर भारतवंशी ही थे। भले ही अधिकांश अमेरिकी नागरिक थे, लेकिन उन्हें विदेशों में बसे मोदी समर्थक भी कहा जा सकता है जो भारतीय प्रधानमंत्री का स्वागत करने के लिए जुटे थे। अप्रत्याशित रूप से अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप भी उसमें मौजूद रहे। कई रिपब्लिकन एवं डेमोक्रेट सांसदों ने भी इसमें शिरकत की। दोनों दलों के प्रतिनिधियों की मौजूदगी से कार्यक्रम का स्वरूप व्यापक हो गया।

ह्यूस्टन में दोनों नेताओं ने एक-दूसरे की मुक्त कंठ से प्रशंसा की। चाहे वह व्यापार का मसला हो, सुरक्षा या राजनीतिक रुझान का, एकबारगी यही लगा कि विश्व के सबसे पुराने और सबसे बड़े लोकतांत्रिक देशों के नेता मानों एक सुर में बोल रहे हों। इससे यही संकेत मिले कि सभी विवादित द्विपक्षीय मुद्दों पर सार्थक चर्चा होगी और उनका जल्द से जल्द समाधान निकाला जाएगा। इससे पहले भारत में ट्रंप को लेकर कुछ असहजता का भाव था। इसमें एक तो उनके उस बयान की भूमिका थी जिसमें उन्होंने कहा था कि प्रधानमंत्री मोदी ने उनसे कथित रूप से कश्मीर मसले पर मध्यस्थता करने के लिए कहा था। इसके बाद जम्मू-कश्मीर में अनुच्छेद 370 हटाने को लेकर नई दिल्ली को यह आशंका सता रही थी कि कहीं इस मसले पर पाकिस्तान को वाशिंगटन का साथ न मिल जाए। मोदी-ट्रंप मुलाकात से ये आशंकाएं निर्मूल साबित हुईं। ट्रंप ने जहां भारतीय प्रधानमंत्री को खास दोस्त और महान नेता बताया वहीं मोदी ने भी ऐसा ही किया। उन्होंने 'अबकी बार, ट्रंप सरकार' का नारा भी उछाला। इससे बचा जाना चाहिए था, लेकिन मोदी की यही सियासी शैली है। ह्यूस्टन की गुलाबी तस्वीर कुछ समय के लिए ही टिक पाई। इसके चंद दिन बाद पाकिस्तानी प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान और उसके अगले रोज प्रधानमंत्री मोदी के साथ ट्रंप की द्विपक्षीय वार्ता में हकीकत से सामना हुआ। मोदी-ट्रंप वार्ता में भारत-अमेरिकी द्विपक्षीय रिश्तों की स्थाई प्रकृति और अवरोध भी स्पष्ट हुए।

यह धारणा सही नहीं कि भारत और अमेरिका लंबे समय से साझा हितों को पोषित करते आए हैं। दोनों देशों के रिश्तों में सुधार हालिया दौर की बात है। तकरीबन 34 वर्षों तक दोनों देश सुरक्षा एवं सामरिक हितों जैसे तमाम मुद्दों पर एक-दूसरे से काफी इतर रहे। रिश्तों में यह बर्फ एक दशक पहले ही पिघलनी शुरू हुई। इस दिशा में सक्रियता का आगाज 2008 के अंत में बुश-मनमोहन सिंह के कार्यकाल में हुआ। ह्यूस्टन में भले ही जश्न का माहौल रहा हो, लेकिन 24 सितंबर को जब दोनों नेता द्विपक्षीय मसलों पर बातचीत के लिए बैठे तो उसमें बहुप्रतीक्षित व्यापार समझौते पर सहमति नहीं बन पाई। भारत को अमेरिका से अच्छा-खासा व्यापार लाभ मिलता है। इसमें भारत को लगभग 24 अरब डॉलर का व्यापार अधिशेष हासिल है। ऐसे में भारत ट्रंप की उन देशों की सूची में शामिल है जो अनुचित व्यापार नीतियां चला रहे हैं। ट्रंप ने इसे सुधारने का वादा किया है। इसके चलते अमेरिका ने भारतीय कंपनियों को मिला जीएसपी दर्जा जून में वापस ले लिया। उम्मीद थी कि मोदी-ट्रंप द्विपक्षीय वार्ता में इन मुद्दों को सुलझा लिया जाएगा। यह अनुमान भी लगाया गया कि भारत भी अमेरिका से अधिक हाइड्रोकार्बन आयात की घोषणा करेगा, पर कोई द्विपक्षीय व्यापारिक करार नहीं हो सका। यह वैश्विक व्यापार परिदृश्य की जटिलताओं को दर्शाता है जो ट्रंप की औचक नीतियों और चीन के साथ व्यापार युद्ध के चलते लगातार अनिश्चित एवं अस्थिर बनता जा रहा है।

व्यापार अधिशेष वाले देश के साथ परस्पर स्वीकार्य करार पर सहमति न बन पाने की नई दिल्ली की नाकामी वैश्विक परिदृश्य में कोई अच्छा संकेत नहीं है। फिलहाल भारत अमेरिका के साथ नहीं, बल्कि क्षेत्रीय व्यापक आर्थिक भागीदारी यानी आरसीईपी देशों के साथ समझौते पर काम कर रहा है जिनमें चीन और अधिकांश पूर्वी एशियाई देश शामिल हैं। इन ज्यादातर देशों के साथ भारत को भारी व्यापार घाटा हो रहा है। भारत की बेचैनी इससे और गहरी हो जाती है कि घरेलू विनिर्माताओं की कीमत पर चीनी वस्तुओं का बोलबाला बढ़ सकता है। प्रमुख व्यापारिक देशों या समूहों के साथ किसी स्वीकार्य व्यापार समझौते को मूर्त रूप देने में नई दिल्ली की नाकामी की जड़ें वैश्विक निर्यात बाजार में भारत की कमजोरियों में छिपी हैं। भारत को अभी भी प्रतिस्पर्धी एवं गुणवत्तापरक विनिर्माता का दर्जा हासिल करना शेष है जो वैश्विक आपूर्ति शृंखला से जुड़ा हो।

व्यापार को किनारे कर दें तो सुरक्षा और आतंकवाद के मसले पर भी द्विपक्षीय वार्ता के दौरान मोदी और ट्रंप के बीच असहमति नजर आई। ह्यूस्टन में प्रधानमंत्री मोदी का पूरा जोर जहां वैश्विक आतंकवाद खासतौर से पाकिस्तान में फैली जिहाद की विषबेल पर था, लेकिन ट्रंप के लिए प्राथमिकताएं अलग थीं। इमरान खान के साथ संवाददाता सम्मेलन में जब ट्रंप से पूछा गया कि क्या वह पीएम मोदी के आकलन से सहमत हैं कि पाक आतंकवाद की धुरी बना हुआ है? ट्रंप ने गोलमोल जवाब देते हुए कहा, 'मेरा इशारा ईरान की ओर अधिक है। वह देश सच में आतंकी है।'

पाकिस्तानी आतंकवाद और ईरान के बारे में धारणा को लेकर नई दिल्ली और वाशिंगटन में यह मतभेद दशकों पुराना है और ह्यूस्टन में बने माहौल के बावजूद इसमें बदलाव के आसार नहीं हैं। व्यापार और आतंकवाद के मसले पर ऐसे रुख का अर्थ यह बिल्कुल नहीं है कि रक्षा क्षेत्र में सहयोग की जरा भी गुंजाइश नहीं। अमेरिका भारत के सैन्य साजोसामान के सबसे बड़े आपूर्तिकर्ता के रूप में उभरा है और दोनों देशों के सैन्य बलों के बीच सक्रियता भी समय के साथ बढ़ी है। प्रशांत महासागर में इन दिनों भारत, अमेरिका और जापान के बीच त्रिपक्षीय मालाबार नौसैन्य अभ्यास जारी है। इस अभ्यास पर चीन की निगाह लगी होगी। यह भारत के लिए बड़ी चुनौती की ओर इशारा करता है। यह चुनौती पाकिस्तान नहीं, बल्कि चीन है। भारत इस चुनौती से कैसे निपटता है, यह मसला दीर्घावधि में भारत की सुरक्षा एवं समृद्धि के लिए अहम बना रहेगा। भारत के लिए बेहतर यही होगा कि वह अपने राष्ट्रीय हितों से समझौता किए बिना अमेरिका और चीन, दोनों के साथ सौहार्दपूर्ण रिश्ते कायम करे। इस लिहाज से अक्टूबर की शुरुआत में मोदी और चीनी राष्ट्रपति शी चिनफिंग के बीच तमिलनाडु में प्रस्तावित अनौपचारिक वार्ता खासी अहम होगी। यह नई दिल्ली को यह दिखाएगी कि वह बीजिंग और वाशिंगटन के साथ रिश्तों को कैसे साध सकती है।

(लेखक सामरिक मामलों के विश्लेषक हैं)

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प्लास्टिक के खिलाफ जरूरी पहल

डॉ. सूर्यकांत

प्लास्टिक की उन तमाम वस्तुओं के विकल्प तलाशने जरूरी हैं जिनका इस्तेमाल बड़े पैमाने पर होता है

प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी की ओर से सिंगल यूज यानी एक बार प्रयोग में लाए जाने वाले प्लास्टिक का उपयोग बंद करने का आह्वान किए जाने के बाद से देश में उसके खिलाफ माहौल बनना शुरू हुआ है। आगामी दो अक्टूबर से सिंगल यूज प्लास्टिक का इस्तेमाल बंद करने की तैयारी की जा रही है। आंकड़ों के अनुसार आज भारत में औसत व्यक्ति प्रतिवर्ष 11 किलो प्लास्टिक की वस्तुओं का उपयोग किया जा रहा है, जबकि विश्व में यह 28 किलो प्रति व्यक्ति प्रतिवर्ष है। इसके बावजूद प्लास्टिक का उपयोग इसलिए चिंताजनक है, क्योंकि हमारे यहां उसके निस्तारण की सही व्यवस्था नहीं बन सकी है। एक प्लास्टिक बैग अपने वजन से कई गुना ज्यादा वजन उठा सकता है। इसके कारण बहुत से लोग जब कुछ खरीदने जाते हैं तो कपड़े या जूट का थैला नहीं लेकर जाते। सामान बेचने वाले विक्रेता उन्हें पॉलीथिन के थैले में सामान दे देते हैं। इसके कारण ही सिंगल यूज प्लास्टिक का उपयोग बहुत बढ़ गया है। इससे ऐसे जहरीले पदार्थ निकलते हैं जो मानव स्वास्थ्य को खराब कर रहे हैं।

प्लास्टिक आज जल प्रदूषण का बड़ा कारण बन रहा है, इसकी वजह इस पर बढ़ती हमारी निर्भरता है। जैसे पानी पीने की बोतल, प्लास्टिक के चम्मच, टूथब्रश, थाली, कप, गिलास, बैग आदि। एक समय इनमें से अनेक वस्तुएं प्लास्टिक की नहीं होती थीं। दरअसल सहूलियत के कारण प्लास्टिक का अधिक उपयोग बढ़ा है। आज तमाम वस्तुओं की पैकिंग के लिए भी प्लास्टिक का उपयोग किया जाता है। यहां तक कि बच्चों के खेलने के लिए भी प्लास्टिक के खिलौने बनाए जाने लगे हैं। प्लास्टिक की ज्यादातर वस्तुएं एक बार और कभी-कभी कई बार उपयोग के बाद फेंक दी जाती हैं। ये इधर-उधर जमा होती रहती हैं और जब बारिश होती है तो ये पानी के साथ बहकर नदियों और नालों में चली जाती हैं। उसके बाद समुद्र में चली जाती हैं। कई बार तो इन प्लास्टिक की थैलियों के कारण नदी-नालों का बहाव रुक जाता है। प्लास्टिक की वस्तुएं हजारों वर्षों तक समुद्र में पड़ी रहती हैं। इनसे धीरे-धीरे जहरीले पदार्थ निकलते हैं, जो जल को प्रदूषित करते रहते हैं। कई बार समुद्री जीव प्लास्टिक को खाना समझकर खा लेते हैं। इसके कारण उनके फेफड़ों या फिर श्वास नली में यह प्लास्टिक फंस जाता है और उनकी मृत्यु हो जाती है। यूनेस्को के अनुसार दुनिया में प्लास्टिक के दुष्प्रभाव से लगभग 10 करोड़ समुद्री जीव-जंतु प्रति वर्ष मर रहे हैं। प्लास्टिक की विघटन प्रक्रिया में 400 से ज्यादा साल लग जाते हैं। इस दौरान वे जहरीली गैसें छोड़ते रहते हैं, जिसके कारण भूमि बंजर हो जाती है। प्लास्टिक के कचरे को सही तरह निस्तारित करने के बजाय कई लोग उसे जला देते हैं। लोग समझते हैं कि जलाने से उसे नष्ट किया जा सकता है और प्रदूषण से भी बचा जा सकता है, लेकिन होता बिल्कुल उलट है। जब प्लास्टिक बनाया जाता है तो उसमें बहुत सारे घातक रसायनों का इस्तेमाल किया जाता है। जब उसे जलाया जाता है तो ये सारे रसायन हवा में फैल जाते हैं और वायु प्रदूषण का कारण बनते हैं। प्लास्टिक को जलाए जाने के कारण जो धुआं उत्पन्न होता है उसमें ज्यादा देर तक सांस ली जाए तो कई बीमारियां हो सकती हैं। चूंकि प्लास्टिक का उपयोग दैनिक जीवन में खूब होने लगा है इसलिए लोगों पर उसका दुष्प्रभाव भी बढ़ रहा है। कहा जाता है कि मानव अपने पूरे जीवन में सबसे ज्यादा प्लास्टिक से ही घिरा रहता है और उसी का सबसे ज्यादा उपयोग करता है। लोगों को दैनिक जीवन में जिन वस्तुओं की आवश्यकता पड़ती है उन सभी में प्लास्टिक जहर घोल देता है। इसके चलते अनेक भयंकर बीमारियां उत्पन्न हो रही हैं।

मानव के अतिरिक्त पशु, पक्षी एवं वातावरण को भी इससे भयानक नुकसान हो रहा है। प्लास्टिक के दुष्प्रभाव को रोकने के लिए इससे बनी वस्तुओं का बहिष्कार आवश्यक है। दुनिया के अनेक देशों में ऐसा पहले से ही हो रहा है। बतौर उदाहरण कई लोग प्लास्टिक से बने टूथब्रश का इस्तेमाल छोड़ रहे हैं और पीने के पानी के लिए प्लास्टिक के बजाय स्टील की बोतल का इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं। कई लोग इस्तेमाल योग्य प्लास्टिक के बैग और बोतल तब तक प्रयोग कर रहे हैं जब तक वे खराब नहीं हो जाते। इसी तरह प्लास्टिक से बनी हुई ऐसी वस्तुओं के इस्तेमाल से बच रहे हैं जिनका एक बार इस्तेमाल करने के बाद फेंक दिया जाता है।

यह अच्छी बात है कि प्लास्टिक के दुष्प्रभाव का प्रचार-प्रसार शुरू हो गया है, लेकिन आवश्यकता इसकी है कि प्लास्टिक की उन वस्तुओं के विकल्प तलाशे जाएं जिनका इस्तेमाल बड़े पैमाने पर होता है। कुछ वस्तुओं के विकल्प तो उपलब्ध हैं या फिर आसानी से उपलब्ध हो सकते हैं, लेकिन प्लास्टिक की सभी वस्तुओं का विकल्प खोजने में समय लग सकता है। जब तक ऐसा नहीं होता तब तक आम लोगों को यथासंभव प्लास्टिक की वस्तुओं के इस्तेमाल से बचना चाहिए। प्लास्टिक के नुकसान से छात्रों को भी परिचित कराया जाना चाहिए ताकि वे बचपन से ही प्लास्टिक दुष्प्रभाव के बारे में जानें। प्लास्टिक के उचित निस्तारण के तरीके भी खोजे जाने चाहिए। इस सिलसिले में प्रो. राजगोपालन वासुदेवन ने प्लास्टिक की समस्या का बहुत ही लाजवाब हल निकाला है। उन्होंने प्लास्टिक के जरिये सड़क बनाने की तकनीक की खोज की है। उनके शोध से पता चला है कि एक मजबूत सड़क बनाने में यह बहुत मददगार है। इस कार्य के लिए उन्हें पद्मश्री से भी नवाजा जा चुका है। कई देशों ने इस तकनीक को अपनाना भी शुरू कर दिया है। इसमें ब्रिटेन एवं नीदरलैंड सबसे ऊपर हैं। इससे निजात पाने के लिए कुछ देशों ने प्लास्टिक बैग पर आंशिक तो कुछ देशों ने पूर्ण प्रतिबंध लगाया है। कुछ देश ऐसे प्लास्टिक की खोज के प्रयासों को बढ़ावा दे रहे हैं जिसका क्षरण जल्द हो जाए और जो इस प्रक्रिया में जल, जमीन या हवा को नुकसान न पहुंचाए। जब तक ऐसा प्लास्टिक नहीं मिलता तब तक सिंगल यूज प्लास्टिक का उपयोग बंद कर हम न केवल पर्यावरण की रक्षा करने में मददगार बनेंगे, बल्कि स्वस्थ समाज की दिशा में भी आगे बढ़ेंगे।

(लेखक इंडियन कॉलेज ऑफ एलर्जी एंड एप्लाइड इम्यूनोलॉजी के अध्यक्ष हैं)

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ऊर्जा

मोक्ष का मार्ग

मानव जीवन में दो मार्ग हैं-एक बंधन का मार्ग और दूसरा मोक्ष का मार्ग। ज्यादातर लोग यह समझते हैं कि मृत्यु के बाद जब शरीर रूपी बंधन से मुक्ति मिलती है, तब मोक्ष मिलता है, पर सच्चाई यह है कि मनुष्य जीवित रहते हुए भी मोक्ष प्राप्त कर सकता है। महाभारत में श्रीकृष्ण, अर्जुन से कहते हैं, 'कर्म करते हुए और उन कर्मों को मन से परम सत्ता को अर्पण करते हुए यदि कोई पुरुषार्थ करता है तो वह इसी जीवन में मोक्ष पा लेता है।' कर्म करते हुए व्यक्ति को अनेकों अनेक बंधनों को काटना पड़ता है, जिनमें लोभ, मोह और अहं प्रमुख हैं। चूंकि बंधन हमेशा दुष्प्रवृत्तियों के ही होते हैं, इसलिए उनसे छुटकारा पा लेना ही मोक्ष है। यदि यह दुरदर्शिता हमारे अंदर आ जाए तो मोक्ष का तत्व ज्ञान समझते हुए हम जीवन की सफलता की चरम सीमा तक पहुंचा सकते हैं। हमें मानव जीवन मिला ही इसलिए है कि हम अपने इस परम पुरुषार्थ के लिए कर्म करें एवं परम तत्व की प्राप्ति के लिए इस प्रयोग को सार्थक बनाएं।

बंधन और मोक्ष में फर्क सिर्फ इतना-सा है कि जब आसुरी संपदा हमारे पास बढ़ेगी तो हम बंधन की ओर बढ़ जाएंगे, लेकिन जब दैवीय संपदा हमारे पास बढ़ेगी तो हम मोक्ष की तरफ बढ़ जाएंगे। बंधन का मकड़जाल हमें जकड़े रहता है, लेकिन इससे छुटकारा पाना हर व्यक्ति के लिए जरूरी है, क्योंकि हर व्यक्ति के लिए मोक्ष जरूरी है। व्यक्ति जो कुछ भी करता है, उसमें क्रोध, मोह नहीं होना चाहिए, बल्कि उसका निर्णय समाज के हित में होना चाहिए। महाभारत का युद्ध हुआ, लेकिन इसके लिए श्रीकृष्ण ने पांडवों के मन में द्वेष नहीं, बल्कि अखंड भारत के कल्याण की भावना जगाई और एक संस्कारी राजा का आदर्श रखते हुए देश के लिए कर्म करने की भावना जगाकर युद्ध करने को कहा। इसलिए, मोक्ष प्राप्ति के लिए किए जाने वाले कर्म को जीवन जीने की कला कहा जाए तो अतिशयोक्ति नहीं होगी। मोक्ष प्राप्ति के लिए हमें अपनी वाणी पर संयम रखना चाहिए, सुनने और मनन की क्षमता को बढ़ाना चाहिए और निरंतर अध्ययन करते रहना चाहिए।

आचार्य अनिल वत्स

सोशल मीडिया पर नियंत्रण जरूरी

अंशुमाली रस्तोगी

सोशल मीडिया की शुरुआत लोगों को नजदीक लाने के लिहाज से की गई थी, न कि किसी के खिलाफ दुष्प्रचार करने के लिए

सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने केंद्र सरकार से सोशल मीडिया पर नकेल कसने को कहा है। अब वाकई समय आ गया है, जब केंद्र सरकार सोशल मीडिया के खिलाफ कोई सख्त निर्णय ले। माना कि सोशल मीडिया स्वतंत्र अभिव्यक्ति का एक बड़ा माध्यम है। यहां कोई भी अपनी बात खुलकर कह-लिख सकता है। दोस्त बना सकता है, लेकिन यहां ट्रोल करने या अभद्र भाषा का प्रयोग करने का हक किसी को नहीं है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट की चिंता भी यही है।

ट्रोलिंग सोशल मीडिया का सबसे घृणित पक्ष है। आप सरकार या किसी व्यक्ति के विरुद्ध असहमति जता दीजिए, फिर देखिए आपको यहां कैसे और किस हद तक ट्रोल किया जाता है। ट्रोलिंग में अभद्र भाषा का जिस तरह प्रयोग किया जाता है, उसे किसी भी सूरत में उचित नहीं कहा-माना जा सकता। अभी हाल ही में मशहूर अभिनेत्री सोनाक्षी सिन्हा को, केबीसी में एक सवाल का उत्तर सही न दे पाने के कारण, जिस तरह फेसबुक और ट्विटर पर ट्रोल किया गया, वह बहुत ही दुखद था। कोई जरूरी तो नहीं कि सबको हर विषय का ज्ञान हो ही। कभी-कभी बहुत ही साधारण से सवाल पर हम भी चूक जाते हैं। कभी-कभी तो सोशल मीडिया 'बंदर के हाथ में उस्तरा' जैसा आभास देता है। किसी की भी गर्दन पर वार करने को तैयार।

वैसे सोशल मीडिया (खासकर फेसबुक और ट्विटर) को आधार से जोड़ने का प्रस्ताव भी बुरा नहीं। इससे कुछ हद तक तो लगाम लगेगी ही। फेक एकाउंट्स और खबरों में भी थोड़ी कमी आएगी। वरना तो होता यह है कि कैसी भी उल्टी खबर को सही बनाकर वायरल कर दिया जाता है। यह कहना गलत न होगा कि सोशल मीडिया पर 80 फीसद खबरें फेक ही होती हैं। समाज में कितने ही फसाद फेक न्यूज के कारण भड़के हैं। पिछले दिनों भीड़ द्वारा हिंसा में जो बढ़ोतरी हुई उसमें फेक न्यूज का बहुत बड़ा हाथ है। कुछ ही मिनट में किसी भी खबर का वायरल हो जाना, चिंता का सबब बनता जा रहा है। सही और गलत की पहचान होना जरूरी है। नहीं तो बेकसूर लोग बेवजह ही मारे जाते रहेंगे।

इस सबके बावजूद कुछ लोगों ने समझदारी और धैर्य से काम लेते हुए खुद को सोशल मीडिया से दूर भी किया है, निरंतर कर भी रहे हैं। धीरे-धीरे वापस अपनी सामान्य जिंदगी में लौटने लगे हैं। खाली समय किताबों के साथ गुजारने लगे हैं। आपसी रिश्तों-संबंधों को मजबूत कर रहे हैं। न फेक न्यूज पर विश्वास करते हैं, न ही उसे शेयर करते हैं। यह सब जरूरी है। नहीं तो हम ट्रोलिंग, फेक न्यूज, अभद्र भाषा आदि के अंधे कुएं में ही धंसे डूबते चले जाएंगे। बेहतर तो यही रहेगा कि केंद्र सरकार जितना जल्दी हो सके सोशल मीडिया के खिलाफ सख्त कानून बनाए, ताकि हर बात पर इसका दुरुपयोग करने वालों पर अच्छे से लगाम कसी जा सके। सोशल मीडिया की शुरुआत अपनों को नजदीक लाने, अनजान लोगों से मित्रता बढ़ने के लिहाज से की गई थी, न कि किसी को ट्रोल करने या किसी के खिलाफ दुष्प्रचार करने के लिए। इसके लिए हमें खुद को भी सुधारना ही होगा।

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

मोदी सरकार पर बढ़ता भरोसा

'अपेक्षाएं पूरी करने की चुनौती' शीर्षक से लिखे अपने लेख में जगमोहन सिंह राजपूत ने प्रधानमंत्री के रूप में नरेंद्र मोदी के नेतृत्व में हो रहे विकासात्मक कार्यों का सूक्ष्मता से विश्लेषण किया है और उसके प्रभावस्वरूप बदल रही आम जनता की मानसिकता तथा अपेक्षाओं का भी उद्घाटन किया है। निश्चित रूप से वर्ष 2014 के बाद नए भारत के रूप में देश की छवि सामने आ रही है। सामान्य व्यक्ति भी इस कार्य में स्वयं को भागीदार पा रहा है। स्वच्छता, गैस, शौचालय, बैंक खाते, आयुष्मान योजना, उज्ज्वला, सौभाग्य, किसान कल्याणकारी योजनाएं, नारी सशक्तीकरण एवं सम्मान आदि अनेक ऐसे पहलू हैं जिन पर प्रधानमंत्री मोदी के नेतृत्व में ऐतिहासिक कार्य हुए हैं। ये सारे वही मुद्दे हैं जो लगभग स्वतंत्रता के बाद से निरंतर बने हुए थे। यह सत्य है कि जो ठीक दिशा में काम करता है जनता की अपेक्षाएं उसी से ही रहती हैं। निश्चित रूप से आज सुरक्षा, रोजगार, शिक्षा, न्याय व्यवस्था, चिकित्सा क्षेत्र, कुपोषण, प्रदूषण, जल संरक्षण आदि अनेक ऐसे मुद्दे हैं जो अभी भी चुनौतियों के रूप में सामने खड़े हैं। राष्ट्रीय तथा अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर आतंकवाद तथा आर्थिक चुनौतियां भी कम नहीं हैं। पांच ट्रिलियन डॉलर की इकोनॉमी बनाने का एक बड़ा लक्ष्य देश के सामने रखा गया है। निश्चित रूप से सबका साथ, सबका विकास, सबका विश्वास के सूत्र पर चलते हुए इन चुनौतियों से पार पाने का प्रयास किया जाना चाहिए। उम्मीद है कि मोदी सरकार इन अपेक्षाओं पर भी खरी उतरेगी।

डॉ. वेदप्रकाश, हंसराज कॉलेज, दिल्ली

पाक की तिलमिलाहट

दैनिक जागरण के 26 सितंबर के अंक में शंकर शरण का लेख, अपनी ही नजरों में गिरता पाकिस्तान, में सही लिखा है कि उन्होंने अपनी मूल धरती, उसकी गौरवशाली संस्कृति, इतिहास, धर्म, साहित्य और समाज से घृणा करने को ही अपना स्वभाव बना लिया। पाकिस्तान कर्ज में डूबा है, महंगाई चरम पर है। जनता भूख से बेहाल है, लेकिन पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री कश्मीर का बेसुरा राग अलाप कर अपनी जनता का पेट भरने की जुगत लगा रहे हैं। पाकिस्तान की भूखी जनता को रोटी चाहिए, परमाणु बम की धौंस दिखाने से जनता का पेट नहीं भरेगा। इसी मानसिकता के कारण पाकिस्तान भारत से चार युद्ध लड़ चुका है और चारों में उसे शर्मनाक पराजय का सामना करना पड़ा। कारगिल युद्ध के समय पाकिस्तान ने परमाणु हमले की धमकी दी थी, तब भारत के तत्कालीन प्रधानमंत्री अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी ने कहा था कि यदि पाकिस्तान ने ऐसी मूर्खता की तो पाकिस्तान कल का सूरज नहीं देखेगा। वर्ष 1971 के युद्ध में तो पाकिस्तान दो टुकड़ों में बंट गया था, लेकिन वह फिर भी अपनी हरकतों से बाज नहीं आ रहा। भारत के विरुद्ध कोई भी कदम उठाने से पहले पाकिस्तान को अपनी आंतरिक परिस्थितियों का आकलन कर लेना चाहिए। पाकिस्तान के कुछ राज्यों में ही विरोध के स्वर उठ रहे हैं। असल में पूरे विश्व में भारत को मिल रहे सम्मान से पाकिस्तान तिलमिला गया है। इमरान खान को यह समझ लेना चाहिए कि युद्ध से उन्हें मांगने से नहीं मिलती, उसके कमानी पड़ती है। जिस दिन इमरान खान यह बात समझ जाएंगे सारी समस्या हल हो जाएगी।

रणजीत वर्मा, फरीदाबाद

मेलबाक्स

चूहों की बढ़ती संख्या

एक अनुमान के मुताबिक देश में 240 करोड़ से ज्यादा चूहे हैं। ये हर साल 40 करोड़ लोगों की भूख मिटाने लायक अनाज खा जाते हैं। चूहों की बढ़ती तादाद व अनाज का इतना खा जाना चिंताजनक है। हम सबको इस समस्या पर भी चिंता करनी होगी, क्योंकि देश के कई लोगों को पर्याप्त मात्रा में दो जून का भोजन नसीब नहीं होता है। दरअसल प्रकृति ने जीव जंतुओं में संतुलन बनाने के लिए कई ऐसे जीव जंतु पैदा किए जो अपना आहार बनाकर संतुलन कायम रखते हैं। चूहा, सांप व बिल्ली का पसंदीदा आहार है, लेकिन धरा से सांपों के कम होने से चूहों की फौज बढ़ी है। धीरे-धीरे सांप खत्म हो रहे हैं, क्योंकि इनकी खाल की तस्करी होती है। इस कारण इनको मारा जाता है। बिल्ली का भी चूहा पसंदीदा आहार है, लेकिन अब बिल्लियां भी बहुत कम दिखाई देती हैं। हम सबको मिलकर ऐसे सभी जीव जंतुओं के संरक्षण के उपाय ढूंढने होंगे, अन्यथा चूहों की फौज भी बढ़ती जनसंख्या के सामान आने वाले समय में सिरदर्द साबित होगी।

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

अपने पत्र इस पते पर भेजें : दैनिक जागरण, राष्ट्रीय संस्करण, डी-210-211, सेक्टर-63, नोएडा ई-मेल: mailbox@jagran.com

संस्थापक-स्व. पूर्णचन्द्र गुप्त, पूर्व प्रधान संपादक-स्व. नरेन्द्र मोहन, संपादकीय निदेशक-महेन्द्र मोहन गुप्त, प्रधान संपादक-संजय गुप्त, जागरण प्रकाशन लि. के लिए: नीतेन्द्र श्रीवास्तव द्वारा 501, आई.एन.एस. बिल्डिंग, रफी मार्ग, नई दिल्ली से प्रकाशित और उन्हीं के द्वारा डी-210, 211, सेक्टर-63 नोएडा से मुद्रित, संपादक (राष्ट्रीय संस्करण) - विष्णु प्रकाश त्रिपाठी* दूरभाष : नई दिल्ली कार्यालय : 011-43166300, नोएडा कार्यालय : 0120-4615800, E-mail: delhi@nda.jagran.com, R.N.I. No. DELHI/2017/74721 * इस अंक में प्रकाशित समस्त समाचारों के चयन एवं संपादन हेतु पी.आर.बी. एक्ट के अंतर्गत उत्तरदायी। समस्त विवाद दिल्ली न्यायालय के अधीन ही होंगे। हवाई शुल्क अतिरिक्त।

जनसत्ता

निवेश को न्योता

प्रधानमंत्री ने अपनी अमेरिका यात्रा के दौरान ब्लूमबर्ग में ग्लोबल बिजनेस फोरम को संबोधित करते हुए वहां के कारोबारियों को भारत में निवेश का न्योता दिया। उन्होंने भारत को कारोबार के लिहाज से उपयुक्त जगह बताते हुए व्यावसायिक संभावनाओं को रेखांकित किया। सरकार पहले ही कारपोरेट कर की दरों को दस फीसद तक घटा चुकी है। इस तरह भारत विश्व की कराधान श्रेणी में पहुंच चुका है। इसके अलावा श्रम कानूनों को काफी लचीला बना दिया गया है, कारोबारी सुगमता के लिए करीब पचास कानूनों को निरस्त कर दिया गया है। फिर आधारभूत ढांचे का विकास, शहरों के आधुनिकीकरण आदि में तेजी आई है। प्रधानमंत्री ने विदेशी कारोबारियों के सामने आधारभूत ढांचे, रक्षा, शहरीकरण, स्टार्टअप आदि क्षेत्रों में निवेश की अपार संभावनाओं को रेखांकित करते हुए विश्वास दिलाया कि उनकी सरकार कारोबारियों की सबसे बड़ी हितैषी है और वह व्यवसायियों को अधिक सुविधाएं उपलब्ध कराने के मकसद से और बेहतर कदम उठाने वाली है। देखना है, प्रधानमंत्री के इस आह्वान पर कितने विदेशी कारोबारी भारत में निवेश को आगे आते हैं।

इस बार प्रधानमंत्री की अमेरिका यात्रा में कई उल्लेखनीय उपलब्धियां रहीं। विश्व स्तर पर उनकी इस यात्रा का असर दिखा है। इसलिए कारोबार जगत पर भी कुछ सकारात्मक असर की उम्मीद स्वाभाविक है। सरकार का लक्ष्य अर्थव्यवस्था को पांच हजार अरब डॉलर तक पहुंचाना है। इसके लिए विशेष समूह भी गठित किए गए हैं, तमाम संभावित बिंदुओं पर ध्यान दिया जा रहा है, पर जब तक प्रत्यक्ष विदेशी निवेश नहीं आता, इस दिशा में गति मिलना चुनौती ही रहेगा। इसलिए प्रधानमंत्री का अमेरिका में कारोबारियों को निवेश के लिए न्योता देना स्वाभाविक है। हालांकि पिछली सरकार के समय भी प्रत्यक्ष विदेशी निवेश को आकर्षित करने पर काफी जोर दिया गया था। प्रधानमंत्री ने विभिन्न देशों की यात्राएं कीं और वे जहां भी गए, वहां के कारोबारियों को निवेश का न्योता दिया। जरूरत के मुताबिक नियम-कायदों में बदलाव किए गए, जरूरी सुविधाएं बढ़ाई गईं, पर अपेक्षित नतीजे नहीं आ पाए। इसलिए ताजा यात्रा में प्रधानमंत्री के आह्वान से कारोबारियों का कितना उत्साह बढ़ेगा, कहना मुश्किल है।

प्रत्यक्ष विदेशी निवेशकों के आकर्षित होने की कुछ स्थितियां जाहिर हैं। पहली स्थिति तो यह है कि जिस देश की अर्थव्यवस्था अधिक मजबूत होती है और तेजी से बढ़ रही होती है, वहां निवेशकों को अधिक सुरक्षित वातावरण नजर आता है। इसके लिए अंतरराष्ट्रीय रेटिंग एजेंसियां अपना आकलन पेश करती रहती हैं। इसके अलावा जहां बाजार बड़ा हो, नए बाजार की संभावनाएं अधिक हों, वहां निवेशक आकर्षित होते हैं। बड़े बाजार का अर्थ है जहां खरीदार अधिक हों। जहां अर्थव्यवस्था मजबूत होती है, वहां आमतौर पर खरीदार भी अधिक होते हैं। इस तरह उन देशों में कारोबारियों को निवेश में जोखिम कम होता है। इस लिहाज से भारत में फिलहाल काफी कुछ करने की जरूरत है। यहां फिलहाल अर्थव्यवस्था कमजोर स्थिति में है, रोजगार के नए अवसर पैदा नहीं हो पा रहे, इसलिए लोगों की क्रयशक्ति काफी घट गई है। ऐसे में सिर्फ कारोबार संबंधी कानूनों को लचीला बनाने, कारपोरेट करों में कटौती करने या फिर व्यावसायिक इकाइयों पर कारखाने वगैरह लगाने की जगहें सुलभ करा देने से प्रत्यक्ष विदेशी निवेश की उम्मीद करना कठिन है। विदेशी कारोबारियों को आकर्षित करने के लिए जरूरी है कि पहले अर्थव्यवस्था के स्तर पर गतिशीलता लाई जाए। इसके लिए घरेलू बाजार का आकार बढ़ाने के अलावा बाहर के बाजार में अपनी पैठ बनाना भी जरूरी है।

अभाव की मार

मध्यप्रदेश में शिवपुरी जिले के गांव भावखेड़ी में बुधवार को दो बच्चों की हत्या का जैसा मामला सामने आया, वह कानून-व्यवस्था की लचर हालत के साथ-साथ यह भी दर्शाता है कि एक समाज के स्तर पर हमारे सामने कैसी चुनौतियां खड़ी हैं। इक्कीसवीं सदी के भारत में एकबारगी यह विश्वास करना मुश्किल हो जाता है कि बारह और दस साल के दो बच्चों को सिर्फ इसलिए पीट-पीट कर मार डाला गया कि वे किसी जगह खुले में शौच कर रहे थे। लेकिन यह घटना आज की हकीकत है कि जिस परिवार के पास ठीक से रहने तक के लिए घर नहीं था, उसके बच्चे शौचालय के अभाव में बाहर शौच करने चले गए और कुछ लोगों ने सिर्फ इतने के लिए उनकी हत्या कर दी। क्या खुले में शौच एक ऐसा अपराध बना दिया गया है, जिसमें किसी को मार डाले जाने की छूट मिल गई है? लाठियों से पीट कर बच्चों की हत्या कर देने वाले व्यक्ति के भीतर आखिर यह निष्ठुरता कहां से आई कि खुले में शौच करने वाले पर इस तरह हमला कर देना सही है?

गौरतलब है कि दो अक्तूबर यानी गांधी जयंती के दिन प्रधानमंत्री 'स्वच्छ भारत' अभियान के तहत देश को पूरी तरह खुले में शौच से मुक्त हो जाने की घोषणा करने वाले हैं। उसके कुछ दिन पहले इस तरह की घटना से यह सवाल उठा है कि अगर किसी परिवार के पास जमीन के अभाव की वजह से शौचालय नहीं बन सका है तो क्या उनके साथ देश और समाज इस तरह का बर्ताव करेगा? जिन बच्चों को पीट-पीट कर मार डाला गया, उनके परिवार का कहना है कि उनके घर पर शौचालय बनाने के लिए पंचायत का पैसा भी आ गया था, लेकिन आरोपियों ने उसे बनने नहीं दिया। यही नहीं, हत्या के आरोपियों की वजह से गांव में उनके परिवार के साथ बदसलूकी की जाती थी। अगर ये आरोप सही हैं तो सवाल है कि जिन लोगों को बच्चों के खुले में शौच करने से दिक्कत थी, उन्होंने उनके घर पर शौचालय क्यों नहीं बनने दिया? क्या ऐसा इसलिए संभव हुआ कि पीड़ित परिवार के लोग समाज के सबसे कमजोर दलित तबके से आते हैं? अगर समाज का कोई हिस्सा कमजोर है, तो मजबूत लोगों को अपनी ओर से मदद करके उसकी स्थिति में सुधार करना चाहिए या फिर उनके खिलाफ हिंसक बर्ताव करके और कमजोर करना चाहिए?

इसमें कोई शक नहीं है कि 'स्वच्छ भारत' समूचे देश को एक नया चेहरा देने वाला कार्यक्रम है और इससे अच्छी बात और क्या होगी कि सभी परिवारों के लिए अलग और साफ-सुथरा शौचालय हो। पिछले कुछ सालों के दौरान इस दिशा में काफी काम हुए हैं और इसका असर भी देखने में आया है कि ज्यादातर परिवारों ने शौचालय बनवा लिए हैं, खुले में शौच और उससे होने वाली समस्याएं कम हुई हैं। मगर यह एक तल्ख हकीकत है कि आज भी ऐसे तमाम परिवार हैं, जिनके पास शौचालय की सुविधा नहीं है और इसकी मुख्य वजह उनके पास आवास तक के लिए पर्याप्त जमीन का नहीं होना है। हालांकि इस अभियान की अनिवार्यता की वजह से बहुत सारे लोगों ने किसी तरह जमीन का टुकड़ा निकाल कर शौचालय बनवाया है। इसके बावजूद अगर कुछ लोग इस दायरे से बाहर रह गए हैं और उनके सामने शौच के लिए खुले में जाने के अलावा दूसरा विकल्प नहीं है तो वे क्या करें?

कल्पमेधा

व्यक्ति सुबह से शाम तक काम करके इतना नहीं थकता, जितना क्रोध या चिंता करके एक घंटे में।

– जेम्स एलन

हिंसा की संस्कृति और गांधी

ज्योति सिडाना

> असल में हिंसा, कायरता का दूसरा रूप है जिसका परिचय हम लोग सदैव देते रहे हैं। यह एक तथ्य है कि एक तार्किक, निडर, साहसी और मानवीय मूल्यों में विश्वास करने वाला व्यक्ति कभी भी हिंसा का प्रयोग नहीं करेगा। संभवतः गांधी इसलिए अहिंसावादी थे। ऐसे अवसरों पर पुलिस, प्रशासन की भूमिका और राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप जैसे पक्ष अनेक सवालों को जन्म देते हैं।

भारत महात्मा गांधी की एक सौ पचासवीं जन्मशती मना रहा है। इस संदर्भ में विद्यालय, महाविद्यालय और विश्वविद्यालय स्तर पर व्याख्यान, गोष्ठियां और सम्मेलन आयोजित किए जा रहे हैं ताकि इनके माध्यम से समाज को अहिंसा का पाठ पढ़ाया जा सके और समाज में मूर्त रूप लेती हिंसा, क्रोध और आक्रामकता की संस्कृति को रोका जा सके। लंबे समय से भारतीय समाज में कुछ ऐसा घटित हो रहा है जो प्रत्येक सजग और चेतनावान नागरिक को असहज बनाता है। उदाहरण के लिए, पिछले दिनों देश के विभिन्न हिस्सों में कुछ ऐसी घटनाएं घटी हैं जिनसे आक्रामकता और हिंसा की संस्कृति समाज में मूर्त रूप लेती नजर आई है।

मसलन, पिछले कुछ महीनों में बच्चा चोरी करने या गौहत्या के संदेह में महाराष्ट्र, त्रिपुरा, गुजरात, छत्तीसगढ़, उत्तर प्रदेश, पश्चिम बंगाल, असम, आंध्र प्रदेश, कर्नाटक, तेलंगाना, तमिलनाडु आदि स्थानों पर लगभग बाईस लोग भीड़ की हिंसा में मारे गए। पीट-पीट कर मार डालने की बढ़ती हिंसा ने समाज में विभाजन को तीव्र किया है। कभी डायन के नाम पर, कभी बच्चा चोरी करने के नाम पर, तो कभी गौहत्या का संदेह होने पर, तो कभी जादू-टोना करने के नाम पर अकारण ही किसी को पीटना या फिर महिलाओं को निर्वस्त्र करके गांव में घुमाना और स्वयं को शक्तिशाली दिखाने का प्रयास करना, समाज में 'हिंसा की संस्कृति' की वैधता या मान्यता प्रदान करता दिखाई देता है। इन घटनाओं के मद्देनजर कहा जा सकता है कि अब देश में अहिंसा के पुजारी महात्मा गांधी के संदेशों का खयाल नहीं रखा जा रहा है।

दुख की बात यह है कि अनेक संस्थाओं की कार्यप्रणाली ने जनता के सम्मुख विधायिका, कार्यपालिका और न्यायपालिका के प्रति अविश्वास की स्थिति को उत्पन्न किया है जो इस तरह की हिंसा को उत्पन्न करने का एक बड़ा कारण है। आज नागरिक किसी को भी अपराधी मानने और उसे दंडित करने के लिए स्वयं को सक्षम मानने लगा है और आश्चर्य की बात यह है कि इन घटनाओं में शिकार होने वाले सभी लोग शोषित, असहाय और गरीब तबके के हैं जो पहले से ही वंचितों की आबादी का बड़ा हिस्सा हैं। ये ऐसी घटनाएं हैं जो हमें सोचने को मजबूर करती हैं कि क्या हमें हिंसक एवं आक्रामक होने की शिक्षा जन्म से दी जाती है? ऐसी घटनाओं के होने पर महात्मा गांधी की याद आना स्वाभाविक है, जिन्होंने अहिंसा को एक जीवन मूल्य के रूप में अपने व्यक्तित्व का न केवल हिस्सा बनाया, बल्कि स्वाधीनता संघर्ष में एक हथियार के रूप में उसका प्रयोग भी किया।

सांप्रदायिक घटनाएं होने पर हिंसक लोगों के बीच अकेले खड़े हो जाना गांधी को शक्तिशाली बनाता है, पर हम ऐसा नहीं कर पाते। क्यों? इन घटनाओं में होती वृद्धि यह दर्शाती है कि हमारे भीतर मानवीय मूल्यों का अभाव है। हालांकि हमारी संस्कृति मानवीय होने का सदियों से दावा करती रही है। असल में हिंसा, कायरता का दूसरा रूप है जिसका परिचय हम लोग सदैव देते रहे हैं। यह एक तथ्य है कि एक तार्किक, निडर, साहसी और मानवीय मूल्यों में विश्वास करने वाला व्यक्ति कभी भी हिंसा का प्रयोग नहीं करेगा। संभवतः गांधी इसलिए अहिंसावादी थे। ऐसे अवसरों पर पुलिस, प्रशासन की भूमिका और राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप जैसे पक्ष अनेक सवालों को जन्म देते हैं।

हाल ही में एक सर्वे में यह बात सामने आई कि देश के अधिकतर युवा गांधी को अपना प्रेरणास्रोत मान रहे हैं। यह आश्चर्य की बात है कि जहां एक तरफ बीयर और पब संस्कृति वाली नौजवान पीढ़ी पश्चिमी जीवनशैली को आत्मसात कर रही है, वहीं दूसरी तरफ वह गांधी को अपना आदर्श बताने से भी नहीं हिचकती। लेकिन सही मायने में वे गांधी के रास्ते पर हैं नहीं। अगर ये पीढ़ी वास्तव में गांधी को अपना आदर्श मानती तो हिंसा को अपने व्यक्तित्व का हिस्सा नहीं बनाती। भारत के नौजवान गांधी के आदर्शों और सिद्धांतों के विपरीत हिंसा, आक्रामकता, व्यक्ति केंद्रित विचारों का समर्थन करते हैं, लेकिन गांधी को अपना आदर्श वे इसलिए बताते हैं क्योंकि गांधी का नाम उनके लिए एक ब्रांड की तरह है, इससे दूसरों पर अच्छा प्रभाव पड़ता है।

आज समाचार माध्यमों में रोजाना जिस तरह से हिंसा की खबरों की भरमार रहती है, उससे तो यह लगता है कि हम क्रोध, भय और अनिश्चितता के भंवर में फंस चुके हैं। जहां विद्यार्थी के सामने रोजगार मिलने की अनिश्चितता है, वहीं वंचित वर्ग के सामने संसाधनों तक पहुंचने की अनिश्चितता है, निर्धन वर्ग के सामने शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य जैसी बुनियादी सुविधाओं का संकट है, महिला वर्ग के सामने पुरुष समाज में समानता, स्वतंत्रता और सुरक्षा पाने की अनिश्चितता है, अल्पसंख्यक समूह के सामने नागरिकता छिन जाने का भय है।

इन सबका नतीजा यह हुआ है कि मनुष्यों में क्रोध और आक्रामकता इतनी बढ़ गई है कि भीड़ द्वारा कानून को हाथ में ले लेना, घर में घुस कर विपरीत विचारधारा या सोच के लोगों को मार डालना, सांप्रदायिकता फैलाना, सोशल मीडिया पर आधी-अधूरी जानकारी फैला कर किसी को बदनाम करने के प्रयास करने जैसी घटनाएं तेजी से मूर्त रूप लेने लगी हैं। समाज में व्यक्तिवादी मूल्य इतना हावी हो गया है कि 'सामूहिकता की समाप्ति' की घोषणा की जाने लगी है।

गांधीजी कहते थे कि अगर आप बदलाव देखना चाहते हैं तो पहले अपने आप को बदलिए। हमें सभी के लिए प्यार और दया की भावना रखनी चाहिए। ऐसा करने से ही हमारे जीवन में अद्भुत बदलाव आएगा। अगर हमें दुनिया में प्यार और दया देखनी है तो पहले हमें अपने आप को प्यार और दया से भरना होगा। इस बात से इनकार नहीं किया जा सकता कि जब मनुष्य 'मैं' के स्थान पर 'हम' को महत्त्व देता है, तभी समाज और राष्ट्र विकास के मार्ग पर आगे बढ़ता है। गांधी जहां सत्य की शक्ति पर बल देते हैं, वहीं आज 'पोस्ट ट्रुथ' युग (उत्तर सत्य समाज) में झूठ की ताकत हावी होती जा रही है। यानी झूठ को इतना फैलाओ कि वही सच लगने लगे। इसलिए इस बात से भी इनकार नहीं किया जा सकता कि वैश्वीकरण की प्रक्रिया और पूंजीवाद के विस्तार ने विकासशील देशों में मुख्य रूप से राज्य को उसके कल्याणकारी दायित्वों से पृथक किया है और यह पृथक्करण विकास और लोकतंत्र दोनों के लिए एक महत्त्वपूर्ण चुनौती है।

आवश्यकता इस बात की भी है कि अनिश्चितता की शिकार पीढ़ी को गांधी द्वारा प्रस्तुत 'आत्मबल' का मूल्य समझाया जाए। गांधी कहते हैं कि व्यक्ति अक्सर यह बन जाता है जो वह होने में यकीन करता है। अगर मैं खुद से यह कहता रहूं कि मैं फलां चीज नहीं कर सकता, तो यह संभव है कि मैं शायद सचमुच उसे करने में असमर्थ हो जाऊं। इसके विपरीत, अगर मैं यह यकीन करूं कि मैं यह कर सकता हूं तो मैं निश्चित रूप से उसे करने की क्षमता पा लूंगा, भले ही शुरू में मेरे पास यह क्षमता न रही हो। इसलिए मेरा मानना है कि गांधी को समाज विज्ञान में न केवल स्थापित करने की आवश्यकता है, बल्कि उन्हें एक सक्रिय समाज-वैज्ञानिक के रूप में भी पढ़ाए जाने की भी आवश्यकता है। केवल उनकी जन्मशती मनाने से या उन पर गोष्ठियां या चर्चाएं आयोजित करने से एक सभ्य और कल्याणकारी लोकतांत्रिक समाज की स्थापना करना संभव नहीं है, बल्कि उनके दर्शन को हर व्यक्तित्व का हिस्सा बनाने के प्रयास करने होंगे। तभी वास्तविक लोकतंत्र मूर्त रूप ले सकेगा।

कठिन जीवन के बरक्स

अंशुमाली रस्तोगी

दुनिया मेरे आगे

जीवन कभी किसी दौर में आसान नहीं रहा है। जब सोशल मीडिया और इंटरनेट नहीं था, न तब का दौर आसान था, न अब, जब सोशल मीडिया और इंटरनेट जीवन का महत्त्वपूर्ण हिस्सा हैं। जीवन को आसान मान या समझ लेना, हमारी खामख्याली है। जीवन का ऐसा कोई मोड़ नहीं, जहां संघर्ष न हो। कठिनाइयां न हों। और ऐसा भी नहीं है कि जिसने इन संघर्षों और कठिनाइयों से पार पा लिया, उसने जीवन को जीत लिया हो। हां, आत्मसंतोष के लिए इसे जीता हुआ माना जा सकता है।

अक्सर लोगों को कहते सुनता हूं कि आज का समय, जबकि सोशल मीडिया ने सब कुछ को काफी नजदीक ला दिया है, बड़ा आसान है। झट से चीजें यहां से वहां चली जाती हैं। आपस में बातें करना कितना सरल हो गया है। कहीं आने-जाने की जरूरत ही नहीं, बस जहां हैं, वहीं से बैठे-बैठे कुछ भी खरीद या बेच लिया जाए। कहना न होगा कि सोशल मीडिया के चलन और इंटरनेट के प्रभाव ने जीवन को आरामतलबी वाला बना दिया है। यही आरामतलबी अब हमारे लिए नासूर बनती जा रही है। पहले दो घड़ी बैठ कर जीवन और संबंधों के बारे में सोच-विचार भी लेते थे, मगर अब ऐसा नहीं है। अब तो हर जगह से संबंधों को सीमित करने का रिवाज-सा चल पड़ा है। हर कोई अपने समय न मिलने की समस्या बता देता है। जबकि समय सबके पास होता है, लेकिन देना उसे कोई नहीं चाहता।

जीवन को हमने एक ऐसे मोड़ पर लाकर खड़ा कर दिया है, जहां दूर-दूर तक रास्ते ही नजर आते हैं, लेकिन मंजिल कहीं नहीं मिलती। जहां मंजिलें नजर आती भी हैं, उनके सौदे हो चुके होते हैं। जो जिस राह चल रहा है, चलने दें, टोके नहीं उसे। मुझे तो अपने आसपास बे-गर्दन लोग ही दिखाई देते हैं! क्या करें, सबकी गर्दनें तो अपने-अपने मोबाइल फोन में घुसी रहती हैं! जो भी बात कहनी-सुननी होती हैं, टच-स्क्रीन पर अंगुलियां ही कहती-सुनती हैं। हालांकि इर्द-गिर्द शोर तो बहुत है, पर यह इंसानों से ज्यादा गाड़ियों का है।

किस्से-कहानियां सुनाने वाली पीढ़ी चला-चली के दौर में है। जो हैं भी, उन्हें देने के लिए हमारे पास वक्त नहीं। पुरानी पीढ़ी के किस्से भी क्या खूब किस्से हुआ करते थे, सीधे लोगों के जीवन से निकले। जहां जीवन को जाकर खोजना नहीं पड़ता था, वह साक्षात आपके सामने खड़ा रहता था। तरह-तरह के अनुभव देकर जाता था। साहित्य ऐसी कहानियों से बिखरा पड़ा है। कभी-कभी सोच में पड़ जाता हूं कि हमारी पीढ़ी के पास आने वाली पीढ़ी को देने के लिए क्या है! कितने किस्से-कहानियां हैं, कितने जीवन के टेढ़े-मेढ़े अनुभव हैं, कितनी बातें हैं! सब कुछ को तो हमने एक डिब्बे यानी मोबाइल में बंद किया हुआ है। उससे बाहर कुछ भी जाने ही नहीं देना चाहते। मन में एक डर-सा लगा रहता है कि किस्से बाहर आ गए तो क्या होगा? यह डर ही तो हमारे जीवन को कष्टदायक बना रहा है।

रिश्तों में अजीब-सा खिंचाव आ गया है। जिन रिश्तों को कभी करीबी माना जाता था, उनमें दूरियां बढ़ गई हैं। हम संबंधों-रिश्तों की परिभाषाएं फेसबुक पर गढ़ने लगे हैं। यहां वह आदमी खुद को बड़ा सौभाग्यशाली मानता है, जिसके फेसबुक पर हजारों की संख्या में मित्र होते हैं। जिसके लिखे को हजारों लोग 'लाइक' करते और टिप्पणी देते हैं। मन में हर समय यह चाह पलती रहती है कि इसमें अभी और इजाफा होना चाहिए। वहां हमने अपना कुछ भी निजी नहीं रहने दिया है। सब कुछ सार्वजनिक कर डाला है। अब सामने वाले को यह तक पता होता है कि आप कब क्या खा रहे हैं और कितने बजे सोने जा रहे हैं। कहां-कहां घूम-फिर आए हैं।

कुछ लोग इसी लफ्फाजी में जीवन का सुख तलाशते हैं। उनके लिए सब कुछ अब यही है। जमीन से निरंतर कटते जा रहे हैं लोग। जब देखिए तो हर शख्स किसी गफलत में डूबा-सा नजर आता है। बेचैन रहता है पर जताता ऐसे है मानो दुनिया का सबसे सुखी आदमी वही है। अपनों से कट कर आभासी संसार में जीवन का सुख और आराम खोजने वाले कभी खुश नहीं रह सकते। उनके चेहरों पर जिस खुशी को आप देख रहे हैं, दरअसल वह खुशी नहीं, उनकी हार है।

जीवन कितनी आसानी से हमारे ही सामने लुटता जा रहा है और हम हैं कि खड़े-खड़े तमाशा देख रहे हैं। खुद में ही इतने उलझ कर रह गए हैं कि सामने वाले की पीड़ा हमें अब दिखाई नहीं देती। मदद को उठाने वाले हाथ भी 'कुछ अपेक्षा' की दरकार रखते हैं। क्या इतने ही असंवेदनशील थे हम? ये लोग, ये जीवन। कभी ऐसा तो नहीं था! सब कुछ कितना बदलता जा रहा है! यों बदलाव बुरे नहीं होते, लेकिन हमने तो बदलावों को अपने ही विरुद्ध खड़ा कर लिया है। जीवन आगे जाकर सरल नहीं और कठिन ही होना है। तब तो हम-आप और हमारे संबंध और रिश्ते और भी कठिनतर हो जाएंगे। फिर क्या कोई ऐसा भी होगा हमारे पास, जिसे हम अपना कह पुकार पाएंगे!

हाशिये पर जनता

हमारा देश दुनिया का सबसे बड़ा लोकतंत्र है, लेकिन अक्सर हर चुनाव के समय आमजन को यह भी कहते सुना जा सकता है कि हम किसी को भी अपना कीमती वोट क्यों दें! जो भी सत्ता में आएगा, उसे हमारी समस्याओं की अनदेखा ही करनी है। यह हकीकत भी है। आज लगभग सारे राजनेता सत्ता में जाकर आमजन को भूल जाते है और अगले किसी चुनाव तक आमजन को अपनी शक्ल तक नहीं दिखाते। फिर जब कोई चुनाव आता है तो किसी बरसाती जीव की तरह आमजन के सामने आ जाते हैं। लोकतंत्र में हर सत्ताधारी की नैतिक जिम्मेदारी बनती है कि वह हर वक्त आमजन को सारी मूलभूत सुविधाएं मुहैया कराने और अन्य समस्याओं का हल निकालने के लिए तत्पर रहे। लेकिन अफसोस कि ऐसा हमारे देश में होता नहीं। जब कोई व्यक्ति सरकारी या निजी कंपनी में नौकरी शुरू करता है, चाहे वह चपरासी पद हो या फिर किसी अफसर पद पर, उसकी ड्यूटी का समय निर्धारित किया जाता है।

देश में ऐसी शायद कोई व्यवस्था नहीं है कि आम लोगों द्वारा चुनाव के जरिए चुने गए सत्ताधारियों के लिए आमजन के काम करने के ड्यूटी का समय निर्धारित है। कुछ स्थानीय निकाय के सत्ताधारी तो ऐसे भी मिल जाएंगे, जो अपनी कोई दुकान या कारोबार करते होंगे और इसी में व्यस्त रहते होंगे। ऐसे लोग कैसे और कब आमजन की समस्याओं की तरफ ध्यान देते होंगे? लेकिन यहां गलती आम लोगों की भी है, जो बार-बार अपना कीमती मत का प्रयोग ऐसे उम्मीदवार को जिताने के लिए करते हैं, जो चुनाव जीत जाने के बाद आमजन के बीच उनकी समस्याओं के बारे जानने के लिए नहीं आते। देश के मतदाता राजनीतिक तौर पर जागरूक नहीं हो जाते, तब तक निकम्मे और स्वार्थी लोग ही सत्ता में आते रहेंगे।

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अपराध के पांव

एक ओर तो हम चांद पर पहुंच कर विज्ञान की दिशा में अपनी प्रगति पर गौरवान्वित हो रहे हैं, वहीं मानवीय दृष्टि से हम कितने पिछड़े हुए है, यह सबको बता रहे हैं। स्वच्छता अभियान का असर इस रूप में सामने आएगा, किसी ने सोचा भी नहीं होगा। मध्य प्रदेश के शिवपुरी क्षेत्र में दो अनुसूचित जाति के नाबलिगों को खुले में शौच करने के कारण जान से मार डालना भयावह घटना है- मानवता की दृष्टि से और कानून के लिहाज से भी।

लोकतंत्र के समांतर अपराध तंत्र का इतना निर्भीक रूप से और बेखौफ चलना आम जनता में कानून व्यवस्था के डर के समाप्त हो जाने की पुष्टि करता है। अभी पिछले सप्ताह ही दिल्ली के चितरंजन पार्क जैसे पॉश इलाके में दो मोटरसाइकिल सवार युवकों ने ऑटो रिक्शा में यात्रा कर रही एक युवती का मोबाइल और पर्स छीनने की कोशिश की। उस बहादुर युवती ने अपने मोबाइल आदि की रक्षा में उनसे कड़ा संघर्ष किया। उसे बहुत चोटें आईं।

इस प्रकार की घटनाओं के फलने-फूलने के लिए हम सभी लोगों के अंदर इनके प्रति सक्रिय विरोध की कमी प्रतीत होती है। देखा जाए तो आम नागरिकों की सुरक्षा देश या राज्य के विकास में सर्वोपरि होता है। सुरक्षा जनता का मौलिक अधिकार है, लेकिन सरकारी स्तर भी इस संबंध में कुछ संतोषप्रद नहीं होता। राजनीतिक दल अपने राजनीतिक लाभ के लिए इस प्रकार की घटनाओं को उठाते हैं, उनका आम जनता से विशेष सरोकार नहीं रहता है। इसलिए जनता के लिए यह आवश्यक हो जाता है कि लोग अपने समाज में होने वाले इन प्रकार की घटनाओं के प्रति सचेत रहें और समय पर विरोध दर्ज करें। इनके विरोध में होने वाली कानूनी कार्रवाई पर नजर रखे।

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चकाचौंध के बीच

अमेरिका के ह्यूस्टन से बहुचर्चित हाउदी मोदी के आयोजन में प्रवासी भारतीयों की संख्या पचास हजार के पार थी। उस भीड़ के बीच मंच से प्रधानमंत्री का संबोधन चर्चा में है। देश से दूर किसी अन्य देश में बैठे लोगों के भीतर देश के प्रति एक अलग एहसास होता है। व्यक्ति भावुक हो जाता है। प्रधानमंत्री ने देश के अनेक मुद्दों की चर्चा वहां रह रहे भारतीयों से की। उसमें एक अहम मुद्दा जम्मू-कश्मीर से धारा 370 हटाने पर था। प्रधानमंत्री ने अपने संबोधन में कहा- 'देश में सब ठीक है'! मगर इस बात कितनी सच्चाई है, यह कश्मीर में रह रहे लोगों से ही मालूम हो सकता है। लगभग 50 दिन के बाद भी वहां जन-जीवन सामान्य नहीं हो सका है।

साथ ही हाउडी मोदी आयोजन में मंच से अगले साल अमेरिका में होने वाले चुनाव में खुले तौर पर यह कहना कि 'अबकी बार ट्रंप सरकार' शायद विदेशी कूटनीति के हक में अच्छा साबित न हो। इस पर कई सवाल खड़े हैं कि अगर ट्रंप सरकार वापस नहीं आती है तो भारत के रिश्ते दूसरी सरकार से कैसे रहेंगे! विदेश नीति के मोर्चे पर देखें तो हम नेपाल को भी अपने साथ जोड़ने में विफल रहे हैं। यह दिशा हमें कहां लेकर जाएगी?

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

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

गरीबी का दंश

मध्य प्रदेश में दो दलित बच्चों को सिर्फ इसलिए पीट-पीट कर मार डाला गया कि वे पंचायत भवन के सामने खुले में शौच कर रहे थे। यह घटना दिल दहला देने वाली है। खुले में शौच करना क्या इतनी बड़ी गलती हो सकती है कि जिसके कारण दो बच्चों की जान ले ली जाए? वह भी तब, जब देश को खुले में शौच मुक्त करने का सरकार की ओर से प्रचार किया जा रहा हो। उस गांव में इकलौते उसी दलित परिवार के पास शौचालय नहीं था तो इसकी जवाबदेही किसकी होगी? क्या सरकारी तंत्र उसका जिम्मेदार नहीं है? और अगर है तो क्या इस घटना पर वे भी जांच और सजा के दायरे में आएंगे? शायद नहीं। क्योंकि इस दुनिया में गरीब होना ही सबसे बड़ा पाप है। गरीब का कोई नहीं।

'वसुधैव कुटुंबकम' का पाठ दुनिया को पढ़ाने वाले देश का समाज अधोपतन की ओर इतनी जल्दी चला जाएगा, इसकी कल्पना हमारे महापुरुषों और देश के लिए एकजुट होकर लड़ने वाले स्वतंत्रता सेनानियों ने भी नहीं की होगी। हम कौन-सा समाज बनाने की ओर उन्मुख हैं, समझ में नहीं आ रहा। हम दुनिया पर राज करने के सपने देख रहे हैं और हमारे नीचे गिरने की सीमा का अंत ही नहीं हो रहा। कभी बच्चा चोरी के नाम पर, कभी गोकशी के नाम पर, कभी जाति के नाम पर तो कभी धर्म के नाम पर किसी गरीब को मार कर हम कौन-सा भारत बनाने जा रहे हैं और वह भी तब, जब देश में ऐसी विचारधारा की सरकार है जो संस्कृति और सभ्यता के स्वयंभू ठेकेदार हैं! क्या मध्य प्रदेश की यह घटना उन्हें भी झकझोरेगी?

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