Ending independence

TICKER

MIHIR SHARMA

What does it mean to have independent institutions, and how do they work? We in India may have forgotten what they look like, but the sight of the UK Supreme Court effectively telling the British prime minister that his only plan to stay in power and deliver Brexit over the wishes of Parliament was illegal. We saw impeachment proceedings begin in the United States against President Donald Trump, following an official whistleblower complaint by a government official against him. Think about this: Not only was there a bureaucrat — according to *The New York Times*, an intelligence official — outraged enough by Trump's behaviour that she wished to make an official complaint, but there was also a process by which she could secretly register this complaint, and make it generally known.

In each of these occasions, the executive has been shown to be restrained and constrained by other forces, not directly accountable to the people: in Britain, by the court and in America, by the bureaucracy. Such restraints are central to liberal democracy — but anathema to elected populists, who claim to be the only and purest expression of the will of the people. But such institutions can also work only if at least some directly elected officials do their job of supporting them. In the US, the Republican Party has lined up solidly behind the President, making it unlikely that any impeachment in the lower house of the US Congress will be confirmed by the Republican-controlled Senate. But even the Republicans in the Senate have moved to support the independence of institutions, with the Senate unanimously demanding that, given its role as the body overseeing intelligence, it should have access to the whistleblower's complaint. And in the UK, the ruling Conservative Party has effectively split, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson has lost his majority, because not all of its members are comfortable with his subversion of the institutional process to enable a no-deal Brexit.

The crucial difference perhaps between countries where such institutions work and what India has now become is perhaps incentives. What are the rewards to the people within these independent institutions for them to do their job? And what are the rewards for politicians who speak up to protect them? These may not be direct, careerist benefits of the sort that can be easily modelled by economists. For example, many of the Conservative MPs who defied Johnson will leave politics and almost all of them might be forced out of Parliament. However, they will receive the support and approbation of their peers, and a significant section of the public and the media. With the possible exception of the US whistleblower, who has been threatened by the President, they will not be in physical or legal danger.

That is perhaps the most stark difference from India. Here the incentives for doing your job in an independent institution, or for speaking up in support of institutions, have been consistently undermined not just by government action but by public and media hostility.

Consider the fact that a former finance minister has been languishing in jail, without bail, for weeks. We do not need to have opinions one way or the other about the strength of the case against P Chidambaram to object to the fact that he has been denied bail when bail is, after all, the default that should be applied. Worse, Chidambaram is a senior member of the bar but there have been few voices within that nominally indepedent group of professionals to speak up in support of his rights. This is the consequence of the weakening of that institution, and of the independence of the legal system. And it will, in turn, further erode independence, as senior legal professionals note the consequences of opposition to the executive, the silence of their peers, and draw the obvious conclusion. Even in the chaos that is Pakistan, a lawyers' movement once removed a military dictator. In India, lawyers cannot bring themselves to object to the actions of a powerful elected government.

Or consider the news that the only dissenting member of the Election Commission, Ashok Lavasa, is being harassed indirectly by the income tax office. Lavasa objected at least five times to actions of the Prime Minister and the current home minister during the election campaign earlier this year. His was the sole dissent on the Election Commission. Now, in what appears to be almost comical overkill, his sister, wife and son are all being investigated by the income tax office for different transactions. We do not have to have an opinion, again, about the content of the probes to recognise that this is another clear signal about what the incentives will be for maintaining the independence of an institution once you are in it. Once those incentives have been changed permanently, and there is clearly defined danger attached to maintaining independence — with no support from your peers, the media, or the broader public — then independence will remain only on paper, even if the institution itself appears to survive. That is the very definition of a banana republic.

The magic bonding between Ireland and India

Is it about the anti-British sentiment? Or about the politicians, historians and travellers?

WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K DATTA-RAY

When India was starving, hungry Ireland sent her food. Some said the magic bonding was anti-British sentiment. "We've suffered the same," a taxi-driver once told me. "The British set one religion against the other, partitioned the country, and walked away!"

Did I hear that in Dublin or Belfast, Cork or Waterford? I have forgotten just as I have forgotten whether Frederick Forsyth set his short story *There are no Snakes in Ireland*, about a Punjabi medical student's complex revenge on his racially abusive boss, in the North or South. But sworn enemies though they might have been through decades of turbulence, Northern Ireland, the six Protestant-majority British-held counties of Ulster, and the mainly Roman Catholic republic of Ireland have one thing in common. Both boast the world's most politically sensitive and knowledgeably communicative cabbies.

They were a great help in the 1960s when I visited regularly to cover the murderous violence called the "Troubles". Belfast was split into Protestant and Catholic ghettoes, taxi-drivers from one community travelling only so far into the other's territory. But there was no reticence when it came to holding forth on politics. There wasn't last week either as we cruised from one port to another. A Dublin taxi-driver chuckled deep and long when I told him as we passed the metal tower that replaced the Nelson Column the Irish blew up that Kolkata had saved the cost and trouble of destruction and reconstruction by merely renaming the Ochterlony Monument. He thought it a great idea that millions of young Bengalis don't even know the Shahid Minar was built to honour a British general.

I learnt from him that Ireland's prime minister, Leo Varadkar, sounds Irish except for a rare sound that might be Indian. That wasn't surprising for Varadkar completed his medical training at Mumbai's KEM Hospital and has apparently visited India several times. But nary a word did the cabbie say about Varadkar being openly gay or being named by Queerty, the online magazine, one of the Pride50 "trailblazing individuals who actively ensure society remains moving towards equality, acceptance and dignity for all queer people". The honour marked the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots when LGBTQ activists responded with violence to police raids in distant New York. Varadkar is casual about his sexuality. "It's not something that defines me," he says. "I'm not a half-Indian politician, or a doctor politician or a gay politician for that matter. It's just part of who I am, it doesn't define me, it is part of my character I suppose." But he was a prominent advocate of the same-sex marriage referendum which established Catholic Ireland as one of Western Europe's most liberal nations.

The driver also said with a touch of pride that the richest Irishman is Indian. According to Forbes, the ageing builder, Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry, is worth more than $20 billion. Mistry, whose son-in-law Noel Tata is Ratan Tata's half-brother, lives on Malabar Hill but has been an Irish citizen since 2003. He owns a 200-acre stud farm in Ireland.

At a more sublime level, the connection reaches beyond V V Giri and the Easter Rebellion or Rabindranath Tagore's Nobel Prize to little-known Mohini Mohun Chatterjee and W B Yeats. "There was one period in [Yeats's] early life", writes his biographer C L Wrenn, "when his imagination was captivated and stimulated by India" and he experimented with "many pathways" to find his true poetic subject and voice. Chatterjee went to Dublin in 1885 for the Theosophical Society but moved beyond the "contemporary" eclecticism of theosophy to the philosophia perennis of Vedanta and the ageless perceptions of human existence enshrined in the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and the works of the eighth-century seer Sankara. When I first read Yeats' ode to Chatterjee, *The Brahmin*, I asked his family about the connection. They knew nothing. Tragically, Indians seldom keep records.

But the historical past that was opened up may have explained the warmth with which I was received on my first visit to Ireland. I was a 20-year-old reporter engaged by the dancer Ram Gopal to organise the publicity for his performance at Dublin's Olympia theatre. The three local dailies, the Irish Times, Independent and Press, went to town with features, interviews and gossip. The hall was sold out long before opening night. Rave reviews followed. I felt then the truth of Wrenn's claim of a mystic connection between Ireland and India, "not the India of politicians, or historians or travellers, but an India of pure romance, which bears some subtle yet obvious relation to old romantic Ireland".

TÊTE-À-TÊTE WITH BS ▸ KALLI PURIE | VICE-CHAIRPERSON | THE INDIA TODAY GROUP

Getting ready for the future

Purie talks to **Vanita Kohli-Khandekar** about the transformation of the India Today Group into one of the largest digital publishers in India

Kalli Purie is resplendent in a red shawl over her black dress. Like many senior managers, the 46-year-old vice-chairperson of The India Today Group has a table that you stand at and work. It takes time for me to settle down on the accompanying high chairs; she remains standing even as we chat nineteen to the dozen. It is late afternoon and the P Chidambaram arrest saga is playing out on screens across the building housing the group in Filmcity, Noida.

There is an impatience, an undercurrent of excitement around the office. Before I can ask Purie tells me the reason. The online version of *Aaj Tak*, the group's biggest revenue generator and India's largest news channel has just hit over 20 million subscribers on YouTube putting it ahead of *BBC* and *Al Jazeera*. There is a little party in the main lobby downstairs. I am urged to stay back for it. There is the promise of *dosas* and *medu-vadas*. I settle for a cup of hot water.

However the digital buzz around the over ₹1,000 crore (top line) India Today Group is what interests me. In July this year, it reached a mammoth 118 million people (unique visitors) every month across all its properties, going by comScore data. This puts it, along with the Times Group and Express, among the top five digital publishers in India. It also makes *India Today*, the brand her dad and chairman Aroon Purie created in the seventies, one of the rare magazine publishers to have combined its print, broadcast TV and now digital arms with some degree of success.

Purie can't stop talking about it. "Digital is changing things and that is where the ruling party made a difference. The (general) elections (in May) have been amazing. The tentpole interviews happened not on TV but with digital. We were number three on comScore during election!" she exults.

Some years back I shared a podium with Purie and have met her at the odd industry do. But this involved, animated avatar at work is a revelation. But then she has always been a curious, restless mind.

Purie read politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford before working as a copywriter with Contract Advertising for about three years in the early nineties. She then joined Living Media India, the firm that runs the Group's magazine business. Among other things she travelled all over the country with *India Today* photographer Bandeep Singh for a feature on 50 years of Independence. A few weeks after it appeared, in October 1997, Purie got married and went off to London.

Then she shifted around a bit, from London to Hong Kong and then back to London. It was while working for a Hong Kong-based trade magazine that she was asked to deal with the website too. Purie decided to do a deep dive and learn coding at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. By the time she shifted to London again, she was enjoying the early flirting between tech and content triggered by the dot-com boom. A stint with one of the hottest tech publishers then, Ziff Davis (PC Week, CompuServe, ZDNet.com et al) followed.

Back home in India in 2000-01, she was put in charge of digital along with erstwhile *Business Today* editor, Anand P Raman. Among other things they launched an online paper called *The Newspaper Today* before she took a break to have kids. She joined the group again in 2009. Did she have a choice? Did she want to do something other than join her dad's business? "If you give me a choice I want to be in the news pit, deciding the perfect cover, the perfect home page, my joy is there," says she.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

Being a journalist or a coder is not the same as being the business head for a clutch of brands across media. Globally, some of the best publishers' struggle with integration with print, TV, digital or other arms. What worked for *India Today*? Physical proximity and the realisation that "there is something called over-synergy, everybody can't be everywhere. Some of them can't be trained for everything. This office was delayed by two years because we wanted everybody in the same building. But we still have journalists who have nothing to do with the PC (P Chidambaram) story. The online sensibilities are very different," she reckons.

For that there is the Tak ecosystem. These are 20 digital first, omni-platform channels that package news for millennials. News Tak, Sports Tak, Bharat Tak, UP Tak and other Taks offer short news pieces that are optimised for the mobile screen and can be watched on mute. The Lallantop, a popular youth channel which uses hard, on-the-ground reporting is also part of this ecosystem.

But would the digital take-off have been possible without the leg-up from *Aaj Tak* and *India Today*. Isn't *Aaj Tak* still the biggest revenue generator? "TV is the biggest part but it is difficult to separate the two. Because you continue watching on digital. Online makes money but the benefit is an interdependent space. It gives you the ability to spread costs and monetise. Also this way you are genuinely platform agnostic, otherwise you are constantly protecting the other media," says Purie. She points to the successful transfer of the India Today print brand onto digital and TV especially the change of the group's English news channel *Headlines Today* to *India Today TV* in 2015. "The chairman was wary about giving the print brand for TV," says she.

That brings me to a tricky question — what are the pros and cons of being Aroon Purie's daughter? "That depends on what your relationship with him is. We get along really well. We have different skills but think alike. Very often Vivek (Malhotra, group chief marketing officer for the group), gets the same question from AP (Aroon Purie) and me separately. AP genuinely thinks that I am the best person to do this job because of the ability to traverse the platform, marketing and edit," says she.

A heartbeat later she adds, "A lot of time inheritors don't get credit for doing what they do. From being the only Hindi news channel when it launched (in 2000) to more than 100 Hindi news channels now, *Aaj Tak* has remained number one. There are a different set of challenges. Keeping *Aaj Tak* number one year-on-year week after week is tough. The Tak ecosystem then allows reporters and the team to step out of it," says she.

It is also tough because mainstream broadcast news, the Group's core market, is an embattled space. More than 400 channels, about half of them owned by real estate companies, local politicians or cable affiliates, fight for eyeballs in a roughly ₹3,000 crore market. In this heavily politicised, ad-dependent world ethics, standards and journalism have gone down the tube. "I don't think news channels is an embattled space. People check their phone for content 20 times or more during the day. Who can create content 20 times a day, who can satisfy that urge? If your space is media then it is not an embattled space. There is a crazy digital revolution going on and there are no dry news days. We keep going from news event to news event," says Purie. That sounds exhausting.

But Purie is far from tired. As we head downstairs for the celebration she continues talking, stopping on the way to show me all the trophies the group, especially the Taks, has bagged. My last thought on the way out is, this is one indefatigable media CEO. If nothing, her energy will keep the group going.

Of Anganwadis & working moms

PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

Across the world, the lack of good childcare prevents many women from seeking employment. This is often exacerbated in India, when economic necessity forces women to work even when they have no good place to leave their children. Most women end up in a maintenance mode, barely managing to go about their lives let alone think about others. But recently, I met someone who has refused to do so.

When R Sundari of Sriperumbudur in Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu gave birth to her first daughter, her husband and she were elated. However, it became hard for her to work as there were few childcare options available to her; her in-laws were deceased and her own mother lived a 100-odd kilometers away in Puducherry. When her second daughter was born a couple of years later, Sundari and her husband were in a fix. "My husband's income wasn't going to be enough to support our growing household," she recounted. "I had to work, but had no safe place to leave my girls." Eventually, the couple had to send their daughters to live with Sundari's mother in Puducherry for the next five years. "I started working in an office," she said adding, "but I missed them so much."

Sundari brought her daughters back when they're old enought. But it made her think. "I'd had the option of sending my children to my mother," she said. "But countless other women didn't have such option." Eventually in 2012, Sundari started working for the local *Anganwadi* in her town.

Today she opens the gates of the *Anganwadi* at 8:30 am, but six children come to her house much earlier. "Their mothers work under the MGNREGA scheme and have to leave early," she said. "This makes it easier for their mothers." The *Anganwadi* closes at 5:30 pm but her duties don't end there. "Some parents can't come to pick their child at that time," she added. "So I drop each child home before calling it a day." During the day, Sundari preps the young children in her care for primary school. She also holds bi-monthly meetings with parents where she gives them tips on health and nutrition. "I also identify malnourished children and give individual attention to them," she said. Much of her energy is directed at ensuring that her community members are able to avail of all applicable government schemes and health care facilities.

What keeps her going is the enthusiasm of the children. "Many of them say they want to become just like me when they grow up," she smiled. "I might have missed my own daughters' childhood, but taking care of little children has somewhat eased my mind..." For going above and beyond the call of her duty, Sundari was recently accorded the Best *Anganwadi* Worker award at Plan India's Impact Awards 2019. "Providing quality childcare is the best way I can give young mothers the freedom to work," she said. "In fact, I feel that to empower working mothers like me, the government must improve the services offered by *Anganwadis* across the country." And Sundari has shown exactly how it can be done.

The week that was

PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

On Monday, my wife threw a hissy fit. "I don't want your stupid car, I don't want your stupid driver, I don't want your stupid money," she said, even though I hadn't offered her any. But long years of being married have taught me to read between the lines, so I went to an ATM, withdrew cash, gave it to the driver in an envelope to hand over to my wife, and took an Uber to work.

On Tuesday, my wife was in a better mood. "Can I take a lift with you?" she asked. "I can be dressed in no time at all." I said she was very welcome so long as she did not delay me. "I'll be ready in a jiffy," she promised. And proceeded to strew the bed with the contents of her wardrobe, which she abandoned for a spot of gardening, to leave it to poke around the kitchen shelves, only to decide she preferred a spot of darning in the morning light, before opting to wash her hair with mineral water, by which time it was very late, so I took an Uber to work on the second subsequent day.

On Wednesday, I said I needed the chauffeur as I had appointments in town, and my wife said she didn't mind getting dropped off en route, she was lonely by herself at home. I gave her my credit card and told her to go indulge herself at some mall, but in the evening she was in a terrible mood because all the dresses she'd liked weren't in her size. And instead of sleeping that night, she pittered and pattered about the bedroom, because of which I woke with my eyes puffy from lack of sleep.

That Thursday, my wife wanted the driver to make some deliveries. At first, she couldn't find the packages, then she couldn't locate the addresses, then she couldn't square the timings, so finally she decided it might be better if she accompanied him and made the deliveries herself. Except there was a transport strike, so I had to cadge a lift with a colleague in the morning, and most of the day at work was spent trying to organise one back so I would not have to walk home.

On Friday, she had some friends over, and they had lunch, and when I got back, my wife said she was depressed, her friends were mean, and I didn't love her else she wouldn't have to sit around mooning at home. So we went out for dinner, and she told the waiter she made better guacamole at home, the cooking oil was off, and were they really going to charge for the oriental chicken because there was nothing oriental about it. I took two Tylenols and went to bed.

As you read this, I will be at work instead of helping my wife cook for a bunch of people coming home for dinner. She's made her displeasure known — but absenting myself from work isn't an option — so, this evening, my wife will ignore me in front of our guests, but be cheerful and chatty with them. And everybody will think me an unpleasant sod with such a nice wife that I don't deserve. It hasn't been a nice week at all.

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WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

What about markets overseas?

When domestic demand is slack, competitive economies look to export markets. Indeed, every country that has grown rapidly has been a successful exporter. One of the fundamental reasons for the slowdown in India in recent years has been the failure to generate export momentum, especially merchandise exports. So exports have fallen significantly in relation to GDP. The economy cannot work its way out of the current slump without reversing these trends and achieving an export boost. Yet, almost all the talk is about import substitution (which is fine if done efficiently) and raising tariffs (which suggests it is not).

Sceptics say an export thrust is difficult when global trade is not doing well. But the garment trade, too, is stagnant. Yet Vietnam, Indonesia, and Cambodia have recorded rapid export growth, and Bangladesh has continued to pull ahead of India. The reason is that they have stepped into China's shoes. Beijing used to export $20 billion worth of garments every month; that is down to $12 billion (a figure that India takes nearly nine months to achieve). The slack has been taken up mostly by East Asia and Bangladesh, and to a relatively minor degree by India. Bangladesh used to export only 60 per cent of what India did; now it exports twice as much. Vietnam too has overtaken India and is now comfortably ahead. The irony is that Bangladesh sources cotton, yarn, and fabrics from India!

Garment exports offer a solution to complex problems, beyond helping to narrow the trade deficit. It is more employment-intensive than any other large industry, by a long shot — 10-fold or more when compared to the automobile/engineering sector, and perhaps 100-fold when it comes to chemicals and petrochemicals. Much of the industry's sales turnover therefore goes towards wages — which boosts domestic consumption demand (an important consideration just now). Further, most employees in the industry are women — whose reduced participation in the labour force has become a matter of concern. Since the textiles/garments sector already accounts for about a third of total manufacturing employment, promoting garment exports could provide the single-greatest boost to jobs in manufacturing.

The opportunity is still there, because Chinese exporters face the threat of US tariff hikes (not yet applied to garments), rising costs, and wafer-thin margins. India's handicap is an unlevel playing field; Bangladesh as a "least-developed country" enjoys duty-free access to markets in Europe, Canada, and Japan. Vietnam and Sri Lanka do the same with Europe because of free-trade agreements (FTA). Bangladesh's tariff-free access to Europe expires in 2024, but it too might sign an FTA. In a thin-margin business, a 10 per cent tariff handicap is a killer. India has balanced trade flows with the European Union, but continues to hold back from an FTA — partly because of lobbying by Japanese car companies in India.

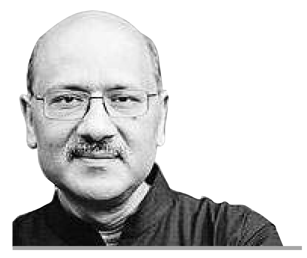
In recent years the government has helped by introducing flexible labour rules and contributing to provident fund accounts (thus partially closing the wage gap with Bangladesh). Its latest offer, of a 17 per cent tax rate to new manufacturing outfits, closes another gap. But exporters have to run other gauntlets, like poor infrastructure and time-consuming port processes. Equally important is correction of the rupee's over-valuation.

Piyush Goyal, the minister for commerce, said in an interview the other day that he could not understand how a cheaper rupee would help when the country had a large trade deficit. For an answer, he should look at how trade numbers evolved after the 1966 rupee devaluation. Exports grew with a time lag, while imports contracted. A massive trade gap was reduced by over 80 per cent in four years. Similarly, the five-year average trade deficit before the 1991 devaluation was 40 per cent of exports, but fell off after the devaluation and then stayed relatively low for more than a decade. Sharp devaluations are not possible today, since the US monitors countries that it considers to be currency manipulators, but there is more than one way to skin the cat. A correction of the rupee's bloated value is not only feasible, it is urgently required if rapid export growth is to return.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

Kashmir: Internal yet internationalised

The world now accepts the Aug 5 changes as India's internal affair, and yet Kashmir is now internationalised



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

Does the world care about Kashmir? They know that it is part of the subcontinent, over which India and Pakistan keep trading blows, mostly at a level inconsequential to the rest, and only occasionally ratcheting it up to the nuclear-threat level so everybody has to go scampering searching for an atlas. Each significant nation, by now, has its own equivalent of what might be a spiral-bound primer of Kashmir FAQs.

Donald Trump might not be the best example. Not when he is supposed to have famously asked what is "Button" and "Nipple" (for Bhutan and Nepal) in the course of a briefing on the subcontinent. Still, his comment at his July press conference with Imran Khan, where he described Kashmir as this most beautiful place where bombs were going off all over the place, was significant.

He has a mind uncluttered with detail, and institutional memory and his GK aren't exactly the UPSC level. In that comment, therefore, he made it evident that the first time Kashmir figured "bigly" on his mind was when Pulwama happened in February. That, if you check back the records, was the only bomb of some size to have gone off in Kashmir for almost his entire tenure yet.

What does this tell us? That from India's best strategic and political interest, no news on Kashmir is good news. In the 30 years since this round of insurgency began in Kashmir, the only time the issue caught the world's conscience was in 1991-94, when P V Narasimha Rao launched that unforgiving counter-insurgency, and got every international human rights organisation and the first Clinton administration furious.

He put down that trouble and then made some amends, essentially to assuage global opinion by opening up Kashmir to international media, and setting up his own National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in 1993.

Since then, his effort was to let Kashmir slide to the back-burner.

Otherwise, he played down Kashmir as a strategy. In a published interview with me, to a question on what he foresaw in Kashmir, he simply said, "*Bhai*, they will do something, we will do something, what emerges will be the net of it." He said it, weaving his finger in the air as if writing an arithmetic sum, including the two parallel lines at the bottom and indicating the "net" between them. That's only as far as he would go.

Over the decades after the Simla Accord, Indian prime ministers, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, pursued a strategy of playing down Kashmir. All questions about Pakistan, including during the near-war situations (Kargil, Op Parakram), were limited to terrorism. Kashmir was never allowed to become the issue.

For a long time, this had worked neatly. Even when the Pakistani "Miltablishment" got its mojo back after 9/11 as the Americans returned to pamper them, there was no talk of Kashmir. If at all, the US and allies counselled calm on Pakistan even if it got restless. They didn't want the distraction. On the other hand, India mostly used the new situation deftly: Keep your spoilt child in control, or don't blame us if we ruin your plans which entirely depend on Pakistan.

Three consequences emerged. First, the world started to believe that the two countries had found their strategic balance, and troubles will remain at the tactical level.

Second, that Pakistan, with its doddering economy, and India, with a booming one, had both acquired a new vested interest in the status quo.

And third, that the two countries were progressing towards accepting the Line of Control as the real border. A formal settlement, to borrow the words Deng Xiao Ping famously spoke to Rajiv Gandhi, could be left to a wiser generation. In fact, among the most significant lines I had heard in the course of my coverage of the Kashmir crisis of the early 1990s had come from Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Robin Raphel, who was seen here as hostile. Soon after her remark questioning the Instrument of Accession had caused a storm, she had said somewhat philosophically, "Kashmir is only India's to lose."

India under the Modi government has made a departure from his predecessors' serendipitous Kashmir strategy and broken the status quo.

It follows, that the onus now is on Pakistan to threaten war. Which it did for some time, but gave up. It saw its military limitations, and nobody in the world was amused. Please check out that video clip of Imran Khan's press conference in New York, where he asks in exasperation: So what else can we do besides what we are doing? We can't attack India.

So far so good. Then, complications begin. Accept it or not, the Kashmir issue has become internationalised after nearly half a century. India, not Pakistan, has done so pro-actively. If you take a partisan view, it is encouraging for India that no country barring China and Turkey has contested its position that the August 5 changes were its internal affair or demanded a return to the pre-August 5 status. But the picture is far from perfect.

Enough countries, including the US, are concerned about what happens in Kashmir next. Nobody believes Imran Khan when he says there is a genocide going on. Neither does anyone take much comfort in drone pictures of Srinagar showing "normalcy". The Valley is seen as being under a draconian lock-down and thousands detained without charges or trial, and global patience with this will soon run out.

The UN week is over. There will be celebrations of "diplomatic victories" and how Pakistan was isolated. On balance, Narendra Modi will return from New York with more positives than negatives. India's old "Kashmir is our internal affair" line has by and large gone unchallenged. Mr Trump, even in the White House readout of his meeting with Mr Modi, asked him only to restore normalcy and fulfil his promises to the Kashmiri people, not put the clock back to August 5. But rather than isolate it further, the new turn in Kashmir has given Pakistan a chance to return to global attention, playing victim and underdog.

If Kashmir being acknowledged as India's internal affair is a diplomatic achievement at the end of this particularly acrimonious version of the annual India-Pakistan *tu-tu/main-main* in New York, the key to its future and India's supreme national interest also lies here. In a week, it will be two months since the communication lock-down.

It has already gone on for too many weeks too long. The delay in opening up is increasing the Kashmiri anger. The longer it takes, the graver will be the danger of a blow-out, violence, and bloodshed. Such situations can often go out of control.

The world is not reacting to Kashmir, but it is now sensitised. To that extent, the issue has been internationalised. In 2016, at least 40 persons were killed in the week following Burhan Wani's killing. Now just one death, of teenager Asrar Wani, is a matter of contention. The global limelight is now on Kashmir. It will be perilous to take the post-August 5 lockdown to be the new normal or the new status quo.

By special arrangement with ThePrint

The cryptocurrency risk

VIEWPOINT

DEVANGSHU DATTA

Facebook's cryptocurrency initiative, Libra, is facing major resistance from regulators and central banks. The social media network has put together an independent foundation that includes some of the most respected names in the global finance industry. But regulators and central banks remain sceptical.

One of the big selling points for the original crypto, Bitcoin, was that it was based on the innovative concept of blockchain. This is an electronic ledger which can be viewed and validated by many people, while being very difficult to "hack", and offers high levels of anonymity.

Libra also proposes to use a blockchain to validate transactions, albeit one that is only open to foundation members. Unlike Bitcoin, Libra would be a "stable coin" backed by a pool of assets, including fiat currencies and precious metals. It would be run like a currency board, with new Libra, issued against that asset pool at an agreed exchange rate. The Libra could also be redeemed against that pool.

The foundation's members believe that this cryptocurrency would be more efficient than fiat, allowing it to provide services like cross border transfers at lower costs than the existing systems. Facebook's huge user base has the potential to give scale of circulation.

All this may be true and it is indeed possible that Libra would be a beneficial disruptor of the global remittance market. But monumental frauds have been perpetrated by cryptocurrencies that promised similar advantages. Perhaps the most egregious of all crypto frauds is the Bulgarian OneCoin.

OneCoin was launched by a team fronted by the glamourous Dr Ruja Ignatova in 2014. She employed her brother, Konstantin as her PA and he gradually took over a larger role. It's unclear if Ignatova actually has a PhD (or medical degree). She did perpetrate a fraud in Germany as a teenager in tandem with her dad. After receiving a suspended prison sentence, she returned to her native Bulgaria, where she worked with McKinsey for some time. In 2014, she received a national business woman of the year award.

OneCoin claimed it ran on a private blockchain with a "mining" system similar to Bitcoin (only more efficient). It ran an exchange, which let investors convert fiat currencies to OneCoin and back. While the exchange accepted many currencies and issued OneCoin, it only offered euro in exchange for OneCoin (Bulgaria is an EU nation).

Investors were persuaded to enter OneCoin through a variety of marketing ploys. Ignatova evangelised across the world at glittering investor meets. OneCoin sold "educational kits" for fiat currency payments. The kits explained how cryptos, including OneCoin "worked". Those kits included tokens that could be exchanged for mined OneCoin. Investors received commissions (mostly in OneCoin tokens) for selling kits, and this was a multi-level commission system. Circular trades on this closed system pushed up the exchange rate from €0.5 to €38.

One of the big selling points for the original crypto, Bitcoin, was that it was based on the innovative concept of blockchain. This is an electronic ledger which can be viewed and validated by many people, while being very difficult to "hack", and offers high levels of anonymity

There was no private blockchain in reality. The top layer of the OneCoin pyramid issued OneCoin when they felt like it. This clever hybrid of a crypto-Ponzi scheme is believed to have milked $3.7 billion off investors across many countries before it started to attract serious attention from the police and regulators. It continued to operate and garner revenues even after the exchange stopped operating. Hence, there was no exit option. Moreover, owners of OneCoin were reluctant to talk to authorities even when they realised they had been defrauded. After all, they were complicit in the Ponzi.

Ignatova disappeared in 2017 when Konstantin became the public face of the company. He was arrested in the US in March 2019. Several other founders have also been arrested. Authorities in many countries have recovered millions, with China recovering $300 million equivalent. Indian authorities have been investigating the OneCoin since mid-2017 and claim around ₹75 crore was received by OneCoin in India. But most of that $3.7 billion is not easy to trace.

This case illustrates the dangers of investing in an unregulated cryptocurrency. Cryptos work because investors believe these have value. That trust is based on the hack proof nature of the blockchain. But what if the blockchain doesn't exist? It still works so long as investors believe in its existence!

Climate curriculum for India

EYE CULTURE

RAJESH KASTURIRANGAN

The impact of climate change is being felt everywhere. From more erratic monsoons to the oceans eating our coastlines, we are seeing changes that need urgent response. India will suffer more than most — life and work will become unbearable if the summers are a few degrees hotter and monsoon fail.

Young people are rising to the challenge. The September climate strikes were the largest mass climate action ever, though like climate change itself the strikes are only going to get bigger and bigger. The youth-led climate movement is justifiably worried that we are leaving them with a mess, not of their making. To paraphrase Greta Thunberg's now famous speech at the UN climate summit: They are watching us.

The question arises as to what today's adults can do to help tomorrow's adults (and us) live and flourish. As parents and educators, we have the responsibility to work with our children to create the tools to stay resilient in uncertain times. There is a need for training that will provide content to students in a form that is experiential, and innovative, and offers room for debate. The overall aim is to support students to develop psychological and social courage, resilience, community-building skills, organising and leadership.

Those principles are the basis for a climate curriculum that needs to be created and deployed swiftly.

Starting from imagining different values, relationships and lifestyles that form the basis for resilience and sustainability, the curriculum should aim to create learning experiences that start the journey into both the hard practical skills (such as handling extreme weather, repair, gardening and food conservation) and soft human skills so that outer transformation can be led from a place of inner transformation.

We have to offer practical methods and tools to build the capacity to listen, to create conditions for generative dialogue and true innovation that integrates all voices and acts from a sense of awareness of self and the whole. In short, we should engage children and adults at three levels:

- **Skills:** Teaching them specific capacities, such as growing food with much less water and working collaboratively with others in their communities.
- **Knowledge:** The basic facts and theories relevant to climate change and its impact on communities worldwide.
- **Imagination:** Helping children and adults imagine their life in a climate-changed world and pathways to thriving in such a world.

Easier said than done. We are aware that young people have many demands on their time and attention, so we have to be creative with both the content and the style of learning experiences. Further, children should be co-creators in this process rather than being passive recipients of adult wisdom. The climate curriculum is an opportunity to help them become leaders who teach and learn from their peers. Their felt sense of community will be an important ingredient of their wellbeing.

The climate curriculum is also the first stage in a much-needed reimagination of how Indian society will surmount the challenges of the future. After independence, India invested in an educational system that enshrined the importance of the State and, subsequently, market-led industrial development. It goes without saying that fossil fuel use and carbon emissions are central to this developmental model. This model also emphasises individual achievement, which isn't surprising because jobs in the carbon economy have been gated by the admissions in good colleges. Each step in that involves fierce competition.

In contrast, flourishing in a climate changed world will need close collaboration with others, across caste, communal and gender lines that aren't crossed today.

How will we do that?

We can't go back to a pre-modern past. At the same time, we can't continue accepting values of the current system. Instead, we have to learn how to grow crops using less groundwater, extracted using renewable energy, and processed and marketed in ways that farmers reap much of the benefit. Instead of creating a rift between farming and industrial society in which the farmer is seen as an inferior mind, we need a new system that will build upon the deep understanding of farmers with new integrated ecological, economic and engineering sensibility to help society thrive as a whole.

Is it possible that our children will work together to create such a society? The first decade after independence saw enormous optimism about creating a new India. Can we rekindle that optimism at a time when the world looks increasingly bleak? The hope lies in the future and there will be many twists in the road before we get to our destination. We need to unlock the energies of a young nation so that a million experiments in a sustainable future are tried out in all corners and shared openly so that others can benefit from the knowledge.

The climate curriculum is a first and necessary step in this process.

The writer is a professor at MIT and a co-founder of Socrates

The decline of a great institution

LINE AND LENGTH

T C A SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Manmohan Singh turned 87 a few days ago. Inevitably thoughts turned to the only real exposure I had to him, which was 49 years ago at the Delhi School of Economics (DSE). He taught our class international trade. For all of four months, I think.

Inevitably, thoughts also turned to how so many of those who taught there at the end of the 1960s went on to great things — none more so than Dr Singh and Amartya Sen — while how, as an institution, its reputation declined.

As Jean Dreze pointed out in an essay published in the book about DSchool back in 1995, it simply failed to achieve its true potential, which could well have been comparable to many international institutions that specialise in economics.

I have often wondered why this happened. Between the early 1970s and now, the shortage of staff increased due to unfilled teaching posts but the capability of the few who are there now is not in doubt. To be sure the classes have become much bigger. But there has not been any dilution in the level and rigour of teaching. The standard of examination has also not been diluted.

Wages of cussedness

So what went wrong? Why has DSchool fallen off the charts?

When you peel the onion of explanations, the real reason eventually emerges: The university is squarely responsible. There has been near-zero cooperation from it for close to 40 years.

And that points to a more serious problem in our system. Universities give research a lower priority. They focus, as they must, on expanding teaching.

It is now evident that DSchool made its biggest mistake in the latter half the 1950s, when it gave up its autonomy and became a department of the University of Delhi. The Indian Statistical Institute, in contrast, refused to do that and has maintained its reputation for excellence. As Jean pointed out in his essay, it has retained its "monastic" quality. Its focus has been on research. In DSchool it's been the opposite because it's part of the University of Delhi.

But it's not just between the two stools of teaching and research that DSchool has fallen. I have another theory about this.

This is that it has been unable to choose between two contrasting intellectual traditions in economics, one British-European and the other American. The former emphasised analytics while the latter emphasises empirics.

When VKRV Rao set it up, India was a bastion of the Oxbridge-LSE ways of thinking about economics. That continued till the end of the 1970s. Its only genuflection in the direction of the US was the sudden and wild swing towards the use of advanced mathematics, which Paul Samuelson had introduced into the discipline at the end of the 1940s.

Basically, before the 1980s, an economic theory had to be proved by the use of mathematical techniques of proof. Although this method drove lesser mortals up the wall, it had one huge merit: It forced great intellectual clarity in analysing economic issues. This level of clarity just could not and cannot be substituted by non-mathematical techniques. There was and is no room for waffle.

Enter the Yanks

The American way, in contrast, is to demand a proper bang for the buck. This has meant proof by data rather than by mathematics.

That's fine because the corrective was much-needed in the face of excesses by theorists. But it created a peculiar problem in India.

In the absence of proper data, economists at DSchool, research-wise, were left high and dry. Publications got reduced to a trickle. Soon personal as well as institutional reputation began to suffer.

Many professional economists left the country altogether. Others joined professions where deep research was not required. A third lot had to make do with whatever was there — the think-tanks.

This, in my (possibly wrong) opinion, has caused a dilemma at DSchool. They don't know what to emphasise in their teaching: The old European/Oxbridge way or the new American data way.

Which leads to the question: Should DSchool seek autonomy and focus on research, leaving behind its identity as the department of economics which the university can keep?

Indeed, this question must be faced by not just DSchool but all universities: Should they delink teaching and research? I believe they should. And this should happen not only in economics but in all disciplines.

Otherwise we can expect the remaining centres of excellence also to go the DSchool way, not knowing whether they are fish or fowl. Even worse, having to face the caprices of politically appointed and politically oriented vice-chancellors who confuse status with the power to act arbitrarily.

There are far too many of them now reminding one of the saying in Hindi: *Bandaron ke haath mein heeron ka haar.*

Opinion

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2019

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

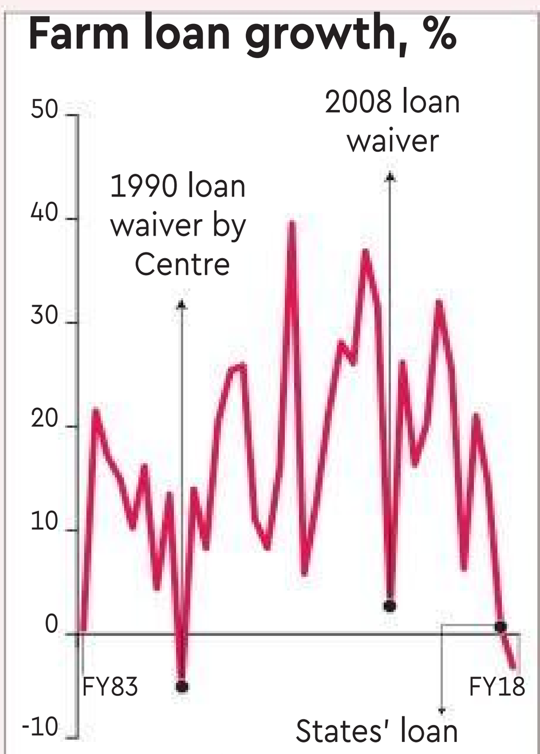
Don't try to fix onion prices, recall that it is govt policy that is hitting cotton exports; farm credit is falling for the same reason

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 cover (till ₹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.

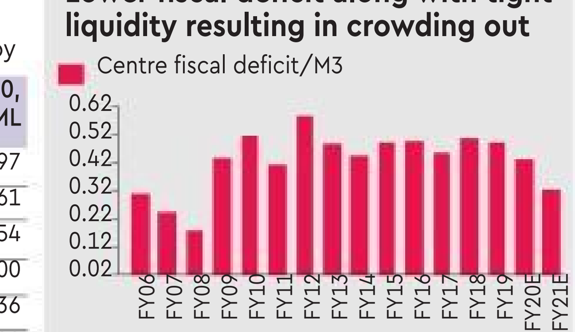
Edited excerpts from BofAML's 'How to fund the unexpected fiscal stimulus?' report (Sept 25, 2019)

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

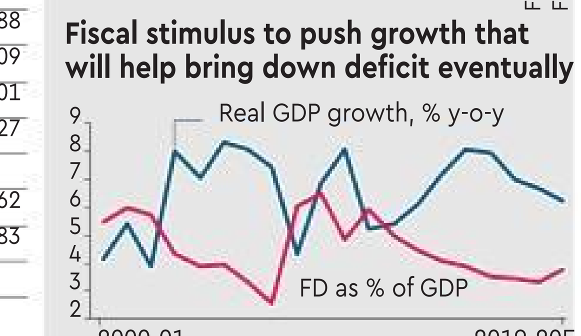
%, yoy

(₹ 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.

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

WHAT A SAD ERA WHEN IT IS EASIER TO SMASH AN ATOM THAN A PREJUDICE.

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE NRC SPECTRE

BJP leaders are not serving any national interest by spreading panic that NRC will soon be implemented across India

THE PANIC SPARKED off by the spectre of NRC (National Register of Citizens) should serve a warning to politicians who have been talking about its implementation across the country soon. Across West Bengal, queues are lengthening outside government offices with people seeking the documents necessary for inclusion in the NRC; there have even been reports of suicide, reportedly due to "panic" and "depression" for want of papers. With the Assam experience fresh, where nearly 19 lakh people are out of the NRC and uncertain about their future, people in West Bengal are taking no chances. No assurance from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee seems to convince a worried population, many of them having crossed over from East Pakistan and Bangladesh during Partition in 1947 and after the 1971 war, that the state has no intention to introduce an NRC.

Public anxiety is not surprising since senior functionaries of the BJP have been insisting that the NRC is a given. BJP President and Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently said: "The people of the country took a decision in 2019. We are here to bring the NRC, and those who are excluded will be sent out of the country after due legal process." Ahead of the general election, Shah infamously referred to illegal migrants as termites and said a BJP government would pick up infiltrators and throw them into the sea. The BJP functionaries have also introduced a communal angle in the citizenship debate by insisting that Hindus excluded from the NRC would be protected. Earlier this week, the BJP general secretary in charge of the party in West Bengal, Kailash Vijayvargiya said: "As national general secretary of BJP, I want to assure all of you that NRC will be implemented but not a single Hindu will have to leave the country. Each and every Hindu will be given citizenship." RSS supremo Mohan Bhagwat too has reportedly said that the RSS will stand by Hindus not listed in the final NRC in Assam and that Hindus anywhere in India need not worry. The Delhi BJP has turned shrill in its demand for NRC, following in the footsteps of the chief ministers of Haryana and UP.

The NRC was proposed for Assam in 1951 in the backdrop of the extraordinary political history of the region before Partition: The national in NRC does not indicate any national intent. And the idea of citizenship envisaged by the Indian Constitution does not discriminate on the basis of religion. The founding fathers of the republic also did not envisage that this country should close its borders to people fleeing political and economic turmoil. The BJP leadership is surely not serving national interest by erasing this history and whipping up anxieties over questions that can cause deep cleavages in the society.

ON THE ROAD

Thomas Cook went under, but the old school travel agency model might yet survive

WHEN A 178-YEAR-OLD travel agency says, as it did in its slogan, "Don't just book it, Thomas Cook it", a particular confidence shines through. That consumer faith can be transposed onto an entity which understands your travel interests with a higher degree of perception. That was before the World Wide Web disrupted the tourism landscape. Thomas Cook did do its best over the years. But the old travel firm, Thomas Cook UK, which catered to approximately 19 million travellers a year across 16 countries, entered compulsory liquidation earlier this week. The company reportedly was $2.1 billion in debt.

Factors such as Brexit have been stated as reasons compounding the firm's financial woes. However, the inability of the firm to adapt digitally is being highlighted as an example of how brick-and-mortar travel stores may lose relevance. Thomas Cook had upwards of 600 physical outlets — called "high street" stores in the UK for their prime location. That's a staggering amount of overhead expenditure, when a digital presence is almost free in comparison. The firm's overall approach stood at odds with an industry where Online Travel Agents (OTAs) and User-Generated Content (UGC) are crucial information sources. A 2018 World Bank report notes how, in 2017, TripAdvisor bookings alone made up US$546 billion of global tourism spend. Online travel reviews on TripAdvisor, the report noted, "have grown to 660 million in 2018... A study by OTA Expedia and Comscore... found that in 2016, US travelers alone spent 8.7 billion minutes consuming digital travel content, a 41 per cent increase year-on-year."

Does this mean curtains for the travel agent as we have known? Yes and no. While high rentals and cost overheads make physical presence non-competitive vis a vis online portals, the information overload online and the yearning for an assuring human hand to sift through the data and make it simple may help trusted firms stay in business. For instance, a 2017-18 study by MMGY Global said 33 per cent of millennials in the US would prefer to hire travel agents in the next two years. Breaking down a 2019 industry report, TTG Asia, a leading Asia-Pacific travel-trade group, states how 42 per cent of travellers find the lack of human interaction frustrating, up from 38 per cent in 2018. At an international travel forum in May, Deloitte's lead partner travel, Alistair Pritchard, reportedly said a combination of factors, especially information overload, is going to ensure "the return of the travel expert". If not Thomas Cook, someone else might continue to Cook it.

EIGENFACE CHIC

In the battle for privacy, war paint is proving to be the most efficient means of confusing facial recognition

AS PRIVACY CONCERNS grow over the rampant use of facial recognition technology on the street, and in shops and private spaces, the anti-face movement is catching up. It is a technology problem, and the solution was expected to be technological. What you would have expected the perfect hack to arrive in the guise of fashion? This week, as London Fashion Week closed, the Dazzle Club took a walk in London's King's Cross, wearing war paint that anonymised them in plain sight in the heart of the world's most camera-dense city.

The name is obviously a grateful nod to the technologist and artist Adam Harvey's CV Dazzle project, which exploits weaknesses in the OpenCV library for real-time computer vision. Facial recognition depends on Eigenfaces, the set of vector maps used in facial recognition, which are sensitive to factors like the distance between the eyes, and their relation to the corners of the mouth. With present technology, covering part of the face or wearing shades does not help. OpenCV simply works with what it can see, and ignores your pathetic attempts at concealment.

But weird makeup and hairdos which distort the apparent proportions of the face work. CV Dazzle is a set of blazes, patterns and cosmetics worn on the face to confuse cameras. But designers aren't satisfied with just thwarting facial recognition. They are culture jamming, too, choking the system with junk data and noise. The raddest strategy is clothes printed with the faces of celebrities, which divert the cameras from your face. They see Barack Obama, Janis Joplin, Che Guevara, even Elvis himself. They see everyone except you. As cameras become pervasive in India, we need local flavour. The nation where political workers wear the face of their leader also deserve camouflage gear. We'll take the Netaji T-shirt, thank you.

Look east, act fast

India should join RCEP, but negotiate a better deal to safeguard its interests

V S SESHADRI

THE RCEP NEGOTIATIONS have entered the final phase. A ministerial level meeting earlier this month in Bangkok, following similar consultations last month in Beijing and a trade negotiating committee meeting currently in progress in Vietnam, all signal a quickening pace. Within India too, intensive stakeholder consultations have taken place. A track 1.5 consultation among RCEP countries held in Delhi on September 13 also saw many of the RCEP lead negotiators and their back-up think tanks interacting with their counterparts in India and industry bodies. Will the deal be finalised in time for the ASEAN summit meetings in Bangkok in November? And will India remain a part of it? Mixed signals continue.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently said that while the government would strive to protect the interests of a majority of industries, the overall discussion cannot be hijacked by one or two sectors. This is widely seen as declaring an intention to remain in RCEP and make it work for us. RCEP negotiations have been underway since 2013. Its significance for regional integration, even if most of the participating countries are already connected by bilateral FTAs, cannot be understated. At a time when global trade and the global economy are facing huge uncertainties, it could be a booster shot.

But will it work for India? That depends on what has already been negotiated and what can be achieved in the remaining time. But some essential points merit mention. And since India will bring significant additionality to RCEP, it should negotiate hard.

On the export front, India's export capacities and competitiveness in relation to the RCEP region are presently limited. Where they exist, duty reductions by partners require front-loading. This includes textiles, gems and jewellery, pharma, autos, some engineering and chemical items and certain agricultural and marine products. Export consolidation in them can take place in RCEP markets not covered by FTAs now. Even with existing FTA partners, if we can improve market access with deeper concessions such as in cotton yarn with Korea or on easier rules of origin with Japan for shrimps or for cut and polished diamonds, these would help.

More important will be the easing of non-tariff barriers. Side letters assuring fast track consideration for evaluation and access for our generics, already having approvals from USFDA or EMA, on the lines we have with Singapore, would be extremely important. While our exports of pharma items worldwide were $13.28 billion in 2018-19, bulk of it were to advanced markets like the US (39 per cent) and EU (13 per cent). Exports to RCEP countries like Korea (0.1 per cent), Japan (0.4 per cent) and China (0.4 per cent) were paltry. If RCEP is promoting regional integration, these should rapidly rise.

> Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently said that while the government would strive to protect the interests of a majority of industries, the overall discussion cannot be hijacked by one or two sectors. This is widely seen as declaring an intention to remain in RCEP and make it work for us. RCEP negotiations have been underway since 2013. Its significance for regional integration, even if most of the participating countries are already connected by bilateral FTAs, cannot be understated. At a time when global trade and the global economy are facing huge uncertainties, it could be a booster shot.

It would be critical to seek time bound approvals on safety for auto and other engineering items and certification of farm products on sanitary and phytosanitary grounds without delay. Here again, the wide divergence between acceptance of our products in other advanced markets and East Asia stands out. It is also essential to have an institutional consultative process on NTBs. An aggrieved member should be able to get NTB issues faced by it in any market peer reviewed and have the opportunity to persuade the RCEP collegium.

On imports, there is an unease about RCEP among several segments of Indian industry. They need time to face more intense competition. China has market dominance in several sectors even without an FTA. Tariff phase-outs for imports, therefore, need to be longer than in the earlier FTAs and be extended to 15-20 years. Back-loading reductions would also be needed in certain areas. Strategic sectors like steel or non-ferrous metals, where RCEP countries like China have significant over-capacity, need to be carefully handled. Agriculture, sheltered in earlier FTAs, needs calibrated opening through use of tariff rate quotas on sensitive products as several RCEP countries are strong agricultural exporters.

A reassuring safeguard mechanism in RCEP against import surges will be crucial. To be effective, it would be necessary to have tailored safeguard measures; one for agriculture, second for strategic sectors like ferrous and non-ferrous products having over-capacity and third for the remaining. Several FTAs globally do have separate safeguards including for autos and farm items.

It can be asked, why enter RCEP with so many caveats? If we are not ready, why not stay out? First, an initiative like RCEP which offers us the opportunity to economically integrate more closely with this dynamic region happens rarely and may not wait for us indefinitely. Even if quickly concluded, legal scrubbing and ratifications may lead to RCEP not being operational before 2021.

Second, the rest of RCEP (barring perhaps CLM countries) is relatively more integrated than India. Only through such closer association can mechanisms like mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) in professional services or equivalence of product standards can be developed.

Third, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently said that on the export front, the government is willing to take bold decisions and a trillion dollar of exports in the next five years is eminently doable. He added that this was essential if the target of a $5-trillion economy has to be reached by 2025. If so, India needs easier market access that can be provided by FTAs like RCEP.

Fourth, when a country signs a major FTA, more suitors line up not wanting to disadvantage their exports. If India can use this FTA dynamics to get candidates like the EU to show more flexibility, it should be welcome.

Fifth, domestic export capacities alone will not be adequate even as they require scaling up to double our exports. Foreign investments, including in value chains will be needed and those relocating from China may show interest. Investors will be more persuaded if India has a wider FTA portfolio. World trade is increasingly routed through preferential arrangements.

Foreign investors also look for ease of doing business and a predictable and stable environment. Otherwise, they will go and invest in other RCEP countries and target their exports to India. The recent drastic reduction effected in corporate tax rates, particularly for new manufacturing units, is a very timely and huge step. These need to be supplemented with other domestic reforms, particularly to facilitate labour intensive manufacturing. We should not be looking to alight from the RCEP bus, but to negotiate hard for a comfortable seat.

The writer is former Indian ambassador to Myanmar

THE MORBIDITY OF JIHAD

Pakistan has compromised its internal sovereignty by supporting non-state actors

KHALED AHMED

TARIQ RAHMAN, DEAN at the School of the Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at the Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, has written the most comprehensive book on jihad, the religious war of Islam, exercising the minds of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. *Interpretations of Jihad in South Asia: An Intellectual History* (OUP) begins with the erstwhile but now ignored thinkers like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Maulvi Chiragh Ali who thought jihad was defensive war and not conquest to collect more jizya (poll-tax on non-Muslims).

This book looks at the lack of scholarly consensus on what jihad means, especially in the hands of radical organisations such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State. It takes 323 pages of the most absorbing scholarship to understand the radical jihad, springing mostly from the authority of Ibn Taymiyya (1262-1328) and culminating in the disputed hadith about Ghazwa-e-Hind, legalising and prompting an uprising against India in Kashmir.

The book rivets attention on the details of the phenomenon of extremism among Muslims that has ended up in jihad, killing more Muslims than non-believers. Pakistan has been the testing ground of theories of jihad that, some say, have been ordained in the Quran, which also lays down qital (killing) as an injunction. Pakistan has been the victim of the covert war which was supposed to be directed at the infidels. This should be instructive, given the aimless bloodshed, unless Pakistan doesn't care about it.

In terms of governance, the jihadi state has to surrender internal sovereignty because private jihadi organisations have to be located in civil society and have to be exempted from municipal law in respect of their use of weapons and training. States can tolerate the diminution of external sovereignty — mostly owing to economic weakness — but they cannot survive the surrender of internal sovereignty. There can be no governance when the state is not sovereign, even internally. The problem of "extraterritoriality" has been the most pressing problem in Pakistan's governance under the doctrine of jihad.

> Any discussion of law and order in Pakistan in the past has run headlong into the state's policy of (proxy) jihad. Because jihad was fought with mercenary troops, there was a sharing of the sovereignty of the state with jihadi leaders, reminiscent of the Italian city-states in the Middle Ages.

More than 50 per cent of its territory was outside the municipal jurisdiction of the state since Pakistan had failed to bring the whole of Balochistan under the normal writ of the state and had preserved till 2018 the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) as a relic of the British Raj's "buffer" territory. Jihad created an extended "extraterritoriality" or "no-go areas" that assaulted the big cities of Pakistan. In the smaller cities, the entire administration may have been run by non-state actors, as happened in Toba Tek Singh when the champion of Pakistani jihad, Lashkar-e-Toiba, was the most powerful militia in the country.

Any discussion of law and order in Pakistan in the past has run headlong into the state's policy of (proxy) jihad. Because jihad was fought with mercenary troops, there was a sharing of the sovereignty of the state with jihadi leaders. There is resistance among politicians to the post-9/11 perceived policy of giving up jihad because the world increasingly equates jihad to terrorism through the FATF. There is apparently no realisation that jihad militates against governance above all.

Rahman wonders at the book's conclusion: "This study has concerned itself only with ideas about jihad. Perhaps the crucial question, not addressed here, is whether people are really influenced by these ideas? In short, is it because there are radical interpretations in circulation on the internet, among role models of the peer group, among friends and relatives, that people get radicalised? Or is it that they join for other reasons such as poverty, lack of education, mental illness, sexual frustration, or money?"

Rahman takes note of Suhail Abbas, a Pakistani psychologist who examined 517 men in jail "for having attempted to go to Afghanistan to fight US troops". His conclusion was that all "jihadis" suffered from "psychological morbidity".

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

SEPTEMBER 28, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIAN EXPRESS

CMs divided on new law against economic offences

Massive power cut for second day

Protests over Hindu Succession Bill

ECONOMIC OFFENCES

THE CHIEF MINISTERS' conference was divided on the question of the Central and state governments assuming fresh legislative powers to deal with economic offences, as suggested by Prime Minister Charan Singh, in his inaugural speech. Although some states like UP and Karnataka felt that a fresh legislation was called for, most others either opposed the suggestion or were reticent about it. It is possible that having sounded the chief ministers on the need for fresh legislation, the Centre might consider it as a fulfilment of its obligation and go ahead with its proposal for some kind of preventive detention law to curb economic offences.

ONE-DAY POLLS

THE CONSENSUS AT the chief ministers' conference in New Delhi was against a one-day poll for the Lok Sabha election. The question will, however, be further discussed by the chief election commissioner at a meeting with the state chief secretaries before he takes a final decision. While the CEC has been insisting that polling be completed across the country in a single day, a large number of state governments have felt that it would not be possible for them to make arrangements for a one-day poll. The reason for this is the constraints of resources, particularly of law and order enforcement machinery.

HINDU SUCCESSION ACT

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS WOMEN and lawyers have come out strongly against the Haryana Bill amending the Hindu Succession Act to debar Hindu women from inheriting property from their parents. The Bill which was passed unanimously by the Assembly, however, has to go to the President for his assent. Lawyers, particularly women lawyers, when questioned on the subject were unanimous in terming the bill as a "retrogressive step," which amounted to discriminating on the basis of sex. Kapila Hingorani, a Supreme Court lawyer, pointed out that the most terrible repercussion of the Bill would be to strengthen the custom of dowry.

The Ideas Page

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Some Americans see China as a threat. Such mind-set has hindered the development of the bilateral relationship and caused substantial harm to the two sides' national interests."

—GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

The making of history

Modi Econ 2.0 has started with a big bang — the largest corporate tax cut in world history for new manufacturing firms. Surely this is just the beginning

NO PROOF REQUIRED

BY SURJIT S. BHALLA AND KARAN BHASIN

C R Sasikumar

ON SEPTEMBER 20, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced one of the largest corporate tax cuts in world history. For all companies that don't avail exemptions or incentives, the new corporate tax rate was set at 22 per cent while for new manufacturing firms established after October 1 (and who start production before 2023), the corporate tax rate was set at 15 per cent. The prevailing corporate rate — 30 per cent. The relevant tax rate is with surcharges and cesses — this has been reduced from 35 per cent to 25 per cent (all firms) and from 35 per cent to 17 per cent (new manufacturing firms).

Analysts, commentators and economists have looked at these large, historical, tax cuts and debated whether they will have any impact on demand or GDP growth. A dominant belief is that this is a supply-side intervention and even if it were to have an effect on demand, it will be only after a considerable lag. Some are even opining that this is neither a supply nor a demand side intervention but instead a "gift" to the corporate sector; others believe that what is needed to revive demand and GDP growth are long-term structural reforms. According to them, only structural changes that kindle animal spirits, agriculture, quality of education, improved healthcare, etc. matter for growth acceleration. (Add a structural change in weather as well).

These Godot experts believe India's time will come but only when Godot arrives — after much needed structural reforms. By definition, structural reforms mean policies that have not been in place, to date. Godot needs to answer as to how, and why, India managed to grow at 7+ per cent for more than a decade without structural change?

We believe that a large part of the recent Indian growth decline to 5 per cent is cyclical, caused by both global (trade wars) and domestic factors. A major contributor to India's growth sluggishness (and decline) are distorted domestic policies, particularly corporate tax rates (highest in the world) and real policy rates (highest in the world).

We go into details below, but we do want to make an Econ 000 point — cutting the corporate tax rates is both a supply and a demand intervention. Even the supply effect will likely not take long to materialise. On the demand side, there is the wealth effect, due to higher asset prices. Assume for a moment that the stock market rise is at least 15 per cent for the fiscal year from the close of trade on September 19 (Sensex at 36,000 and Nifty at 10,700). In one week, the stock market is up more than 8 per cent. We realise this maybe noise but the estimate of only an additional 7 per cent rise over the next six months is conservative. Each 1 per cent rise in market cap is approximately Rs 1.4 lc (lakh crore). A 15 per cent rise translates into an additional Rs 21 lc. Global estimates of wealth effect on consumption vary but a magnitude of .05 is reasonable, that is, the wealth effect can be expected to yield an additional [(.05*21) or 1.05 lc or] Rs 1,05,000 crore of consumption. [Note that we have completely ignored the wealth effect emanating from the likely stabilisation, and increase, in house prices]

An important additional demand effect is via additional investment. The sceptics (Godot fans?) will say that since there is excess capacity there will be no additional investment until demand magically reappears. Of course, this argument is close to tautological and as close to "Ganga gaye to Gangadas aur jamuna gaye to jamunadas". With this view, there is no wealth effect and no investment effect and no growth effect — at whatever time we are, we are at a standstill. This logic defies logic. There is bound to be an additional effect on investment.

We will report on cross-country results at a later date, but we do expect a 2.5 percentage point rise in real investment over the next two years. This will take real investment close to 35.5 per cent of GDP or less than 1.5 percentage points away from the peak of 36.8 per cent reached in 2011Q3. Needless to say, this is additional demand, and additional GDP in the economy. And needless to add, but this investment increase is unlikely to occur if the RBI/MPC persist with the highest real rates in the world. Just like woman does not live on bread alone, investment is strongly affected by both tax rates and the cost of credit. The other policy shoe needs to fall for acche din to happen.

We can all speculate, and disagree, but there are some incontrovertible facts pertaining to FM Sitharaman's announcement of September 20. Indian (and world) history was made on that date. A reduction of 10 ppt reduction in the corporate tax rate (CTR) is only exceeded by Germany's 15.8 ppt reduction in 2001 and the US's 14 ppt reduction in 2018 (from 35 to 21 per cent). However, for new firms, the reduction of the CTR to 17 per cent (CTR of 15 per cent and surcharges, etc, of 2.2 per cent), an 18 ppt reduction, is the largest on record since 2000 (OECD database). Very likely, such a big reduction is the biggest reduction in the world, ever.

> We can all speculate, and disagree, but there are some incontrovertible facts pertaining to FM Sitharaman's announcement of September 20. Indian (and world) history was made on that date. A reduction of 10 ppt reduction in the corporate tax rate (CTR) is only exceeded by Germany's 15.8 per cent reduction in 2001 and the US's 14 ppt reduction in 2018 (from 35 to 21 per cent). However, for new firms, the reduction of the CTR to 17 per cent (CTR of 15 per cent and surcharges, etc, of 2.2 per cent), an 18 ppt reduction, is the largest on record since 2000 (OECD database). Very likely, such a big reduction is the biggest reduction in the world, ever.

Some Indian economists have asked for a reduction in the CTR for a long, long, time. I say so with some expertise because in none of the traditional economists' pre-Budget consultative meetings over the last 22 years has the argument been made to cut the CTR. The discussion, argument, has always been to raise tax rates to keep the fiscal deficit down (this for more than 99 per cent of the participants). Earlier this year, only two economists argued for a cut in CTR — the same two also argued for a cut in the real policy rates. The rest said don't tinker, worry about the fiscal deficit, etc. And yes, some experts said the real policy problem pertaining to Indian GDP growth was that the exchange rate was overvalued. Note that these expert views were made at the time of the lowest real (and nominal) GDP growth in decades.

Hence, when the announcement was made on September 20, there were some who thought this was fake news! That is how much history was in the making.

A real perspective on history is provided via the OECD corporate tax database for close to 60 countries (since 2000). The data has 1,155 observations on CTR and 1,057 country-year observations on change in CTR. For countries with a population above 5 million (682 observations), there are only 161 observations of any change in the tax rate. Of these, 126 show a decline; only 34 show a decline of more than 3 ppt and only 14 countries cut taxes in any year by more than 5 per cent (Germany did it twice 15.8 ppt in 2001 and 10.6 ppt in 2008). Other countries in the club of a 10 per cent cut in CTR are France (2018), Hungary (2017) and Paraguay and Turkey (both in 2006).

India now joins this club of bold tax policy-makers — just 2 per cent of the total changes made in the 21st century. As we said earlier, while data are not easily available, this is possibly in all history, since tax increases, like death, have been a certainty. And large tax cuts have been rarer than the sighting of the blue whale. That is how historic is the decision made in Modi 2.0 and FM NS 1.0. The nation owes a strong debt of gratitude to these two masters of India's economic fate.

We want to end with a speculation. We believe that there is a strong possibility of a final corporate tax cut with the adoption of the direct tax code (DTC). The latter has to happen, and the most likely date is February 2020. The FM has left us with two corporate tax rates — 15 per cent (new manufacturing firms) and 22 per cent (all firms). Maybe the DTC compromise will be somewhere in-between — say 18 per cent for all firms?

Bhalla is contributing editor, The Indian Express. *Bhasin is a New Delhi-based policy researcher. Views are personal*

Making crime less dark

Crime data in India is short on information on victims and witnesses. Victimisation surveys can help

G S BAJPAI

THE TRUE EXTENT of crime in a society is seldom known. In times when evidence-based policing and data-driven policies are being advocated, the absence of exact data on crime could pose serious problems. In India, crime is under-reported and under-registered. The official picture with respect to crime in India is difficult to believe for several reasons. While popular perception associates many cities and states in India with crime, going by official statistics, the country has one of the lowest incidence of crime in the world. India's crime rate is 379.3 per 1,00,000 persons. Cases of dacoity, attempt to murder, robbery, rape and riot have gone down by 36.11 per cent, 16.26 per cent, 20.15 per cent, 0.78 per cent and 54 per cent respectively in 2018 as compared to the year before. Who will buy these statistics?

A major source of the problem lies in the manner in which crime data are collected and compiled. Crime data in India are collected and published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The data reported in this publication is based on the crime reported to local police stations. Police stations getting information about crime is one thing and such incidents being recorded as an FIR is another. This is in addition to all kinds of pressures and obstacles on a complainant, especially when the nature of crime is that of sexual assault, domestic violence or when it involves family members, relatives or powerful people. The resistance put up by the police station personnel in registering such crimes or reducing the seriousness of incident is well documented.

The NCRB data fall short of expectations in many respects. For instance, it is short on information about crime victims and witnesses. The official statistics miss out on several key areas: The profile of victims, their personal characteristics, victim-offender relationship, FIR registration experiences, experiences of interacting with police, number of days and time taken in getting FIR registered, instances of intimidation, pressure experienced from the accused or associates including police, nature of injury, medical assistance, information about legal aid, compensation.

A victimisation survey is often seen as a solution to such shortcomings. While many countries have conducted victimisation surveys to supplement their official crime data, India has yet to make a start. Such surveys reveal details that are missed out by the local police. They describe how crime has impacted the lives of victims and conevy their safety concerns.

These surveys gather information through personal or telephonic interviews with a set of people who represent the geographical and social correlates of a city or state over a period of time. The information thus collected may detail the victimisation suffered by a person but not recorded by the police for a variety of reasons. The other data which are generally collected in these surveys entail risk and vulnerability, perceptions about the local police and the views of people about the criminal justice system.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) measures the amount of crime by asking people about their experiences as crime victims. In the US, the National Crime Victimisation Survey (NCVS) presents data that is collected from a nationally-representative sample of about 2,40,000 interviews on criminal victimisation, involving 1,60,000 persons in about 95,000 households. The data generated by such surveys are considered more reliable than the official statistics on crime and this is frequently used for various policy objectives. Such surveys are conducted by professionally-competent organisations and the state funds the processes involved in the generation of data. The European Crime and Safety Survey (EU ICS) is the most comprehensive analysis of crime, security and safety in the European Union. In 1987, the United Nations Inter-regional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) launched the International Crime Victimisation Survey (ICVS), which produces more comparable data across nations. These data are available in the public domain. The public in general is encouraged in all these countries by the state to participate in these surveys with an assurance about the confidentiality of the information they provide.

The data generated by the state in India, in contrast, doesn't inspire public confidence. There are enough reasons to demystify crime and the people's response to it in India. India-specific yardsticks, which the NCRB does not cover, could be evolved. However, there could be several challenges to such surveys. For example, people might not reveal more than what they have divulged to the police. Even then, it is still an endeavour worth attempting. Today, there are several methodological innovations to overcome the bottlenecks.

The government is expected to embark on the country's first victimisation survey soon. The complexity of this endeavour demands that it be assigned to an institution that specialises in criminology, victimology and criminal justice administration. Such a survey is not simply about data collection, it involves nuanced understanding of the facets of crime and victimisation and presupposes specialist knowledge. I hope the home ministry is listening.

The writer is professor and chairperson, Centre for Criminology & Victimology at National Law University Delhi and vice president of Victim Support Asia

Of sour grapes

The move to quit Commonwealth Games on flimsy grounds is unfair to athletes

SHIVANI NAIK

IT NEEDED A Shah Rukh Khan film (*Chak De! India*, 2007) to put the focus on Suraj Lata Devi and Mamta Kharab — five years after India's 2002 Commonwealth Games (CWG) gold in women's hockey. India had beaten England for the CWG gold then, defeating Australia in the semifinals, and it wasn't a lightweight achievement.

Except, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) boss, Narinder Batra, now calls the Commonwealth Games a "waste of time" because "the level of competition isn't high". His grouse is that India wins anything between 70 and 100 medals at the CWG, but just two at the Olympics — so the conversion is abysmal. India won 57 medals at the Asiad before the 2016 Rio Olympics, but no one talks of dumping that one.

The Indian men's hockey team h as never won a CWG gold. Because, as Batra will notice, Australia tends to be very high competition. The event is not a waste if it has unearthed gems like Ashish Kumar and Dipa Karmakar in gymnastics. Saina Nehwal, Jwala Gutta and Ashwini Ponappa's first flush of finals' success also came at the CWG, followed by the World Championship and Olympic medals. Manika Batra, with her twin gold performance in table tennis, was a revelation at the CWG Gold Coast. Clearly, the gains — if not squandered — can convert to Olympic success, if everyone concerned maintains perspective.

Here is where Batra's views are coming from: Sports like shooting, wrestling, weightlifting, and even badminton and table tennis, are low-hanging fruit at the CWG. They rake in a bunch of medals for India, though the player still has to make the effort of actually plucking that fruit. What needs to be painfully pointed out to the IOA, is that India has had little success to show in what are acknowledged as the Big 3 of sports — track & field, swimming and gymnastics. Hockey has repeatedly exposed India's weaknesses against high competition and a boxing medal isn't exactly a cakewalk. India chooses to stay blind to team sports like netball, basketball, beach volleyball and Rugby sevens. But that points to their blinkers, not the low competition available.

India goes medal-grabbing against low competition at the Asian Games too, hoarding gold medals by the dozen there, especially in athletics, and then zero at the Olympics. The takeaway can't be that we stop competing, especially when — except in badminton and tennis — Indian athletes are competition-shy throughout the year, and will even avoid trials if they can. Kabaddi used to be India's stomping ground against low competition, until Iran decided they'll have a mighty chuckle last year: It'll be foolish to say India should stop going to Asiad.

At the heart of this outrageous idea of junking CWG altogether is the 2022 Birmingham CWG's decision to drop shooting from the programme, and India throwing a fit — offended that it'll drop down in the medals tally. "Colonial things" like having no Indian on 13 CWG committees are being mooted as possible reasons to evict a sport that does tend to be clunky and expensive with its infrastructure and, frankly, not quite a darling of television.

Glasgow, where Andy Murray was born, dropped tennis from its 2014 CWG programme, though it is the host nation's prerogative to pick their sports.

But it is in India's completely cynical reaction to shooting being dropped — attributing racism and colonialism to the decision — that the debate got really muddied. It might still be some brinkmanship ahead of the Commonwealth Games Federation chief's India visit in November, but it appears a plan is being made to basically sit at home with a mighty sulk.

Great sporting nations don't sulk. They get cracking on the new rules of the game, and prove a point on the sports field. This might be a good opportunity to make up for all the years of lagging behind in swimming, gymnastics and athletics — where high standards are available at the CWG; start building teams in more mainstream and popular sports; and, not remain myopic and hung up on medals that won't come this time around from shooting.

For non-Olympic squash players like Dipika Pallikal, Joshna Chinappa and Saurav Ghosal, the CWG is as big as it gets. And, the IOA might want to leave it to the likes of Rani Rampaul and Lalremsiami in hockey and cricketers like Harmanpreet Kaur, Jemimah Rodrigues to get on with their unfinished business with England. The hockey players have high standards — set 20 years ago by Suraj Lata's team — to match. And the cricketers (Women's T20 is set to debut at Birmingham) would want a shot at the inaugural CWG title, beating England in the finals hopefully. If Batra would only notice, India's men and women tend to be good at "colonial things" like settling scores on the field: Parupalli Kashyap was playing out of his skin against England's Rajeev Ouseph in the semifinals at Glasgow in 2014, before going on to win the finals. The IOA, meanwhile, was famously trying to secure the release of some reckless Indian officials who were caught by Scotland police authorities for some allegedly embarrassing activities. CWG is for the athletes.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THOSE WHO INSPIRE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'You can't shop for teachers' (IE, September 26). The regimental approach of mass recruitment for teaching positions in any university might not be the best of ideas. Teaching as a profession should attract self-motivated individuals with not just the prescribed minimum qualification but inner passion. It requires individuals who can inspire their pupils and help in carving out a liberal space for learning and intellectual discourses. Part-time teachers who have the necessary qualifications should be considered for permanent absorption within the ranks over a period of time.

Sudip Kumar Dey, *Kolkata*

COMPROMISED COPS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Cop out' (IE, September 27). The UP police has been blatantly shameless in shielding Swami Chinmayanand from the rape charges levelled against him. Its efforts at diluting the case again reinforces the view about the police does the bidding of its political masters. Whether it is conducting allegedly staged encounters or protecting people in power, the conduct of the UP police leaves a lot to be desired.

Vijai Pant *Hempur*

RIGHTS OF ACCUSED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Exorcising third-degree'(IE, September 27). It is correct that we need an anti-torture law to prevent atrocities committed by police during the course of investigation. It is equally important to train the local police station personnel about scientific ways to extract information from the accused. The SHOs should be made accountable for the health of the accused. This would discourage them from taking recourse to violence and save innocents from getting tortured. Remember, the right to not be tortured is a part of the constitutional Right to Life.

Shishir Singh, *Prayagraj*

LETTER OF THE WEEK

THE ROOT CAUSE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Vapourised' (IE, September 20). E-cigarettes are addictive and come with health hazards. As a measure to prevent health-related risks, banning nicotine products is not problematic. And to give the government the benefit of doubt, let's even assume that its intentions behind the move to ban e-cigarettes were genuine. But why not attack the root rather than the secondary cause? All cigarettes are injurious to health; the ones more injurious can stay, others must be banned.

Srishti Mathur, *Ujjain*

STATE AND TRUST

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Why property rights matter' (IE, 27th Sept 19). The authors have gone to the nub of many ills of the country's economy and polity. They rightly point out that institutions engaged in governance must earn the trust of citizens.

Vinod Dhall, *Gurgaon*

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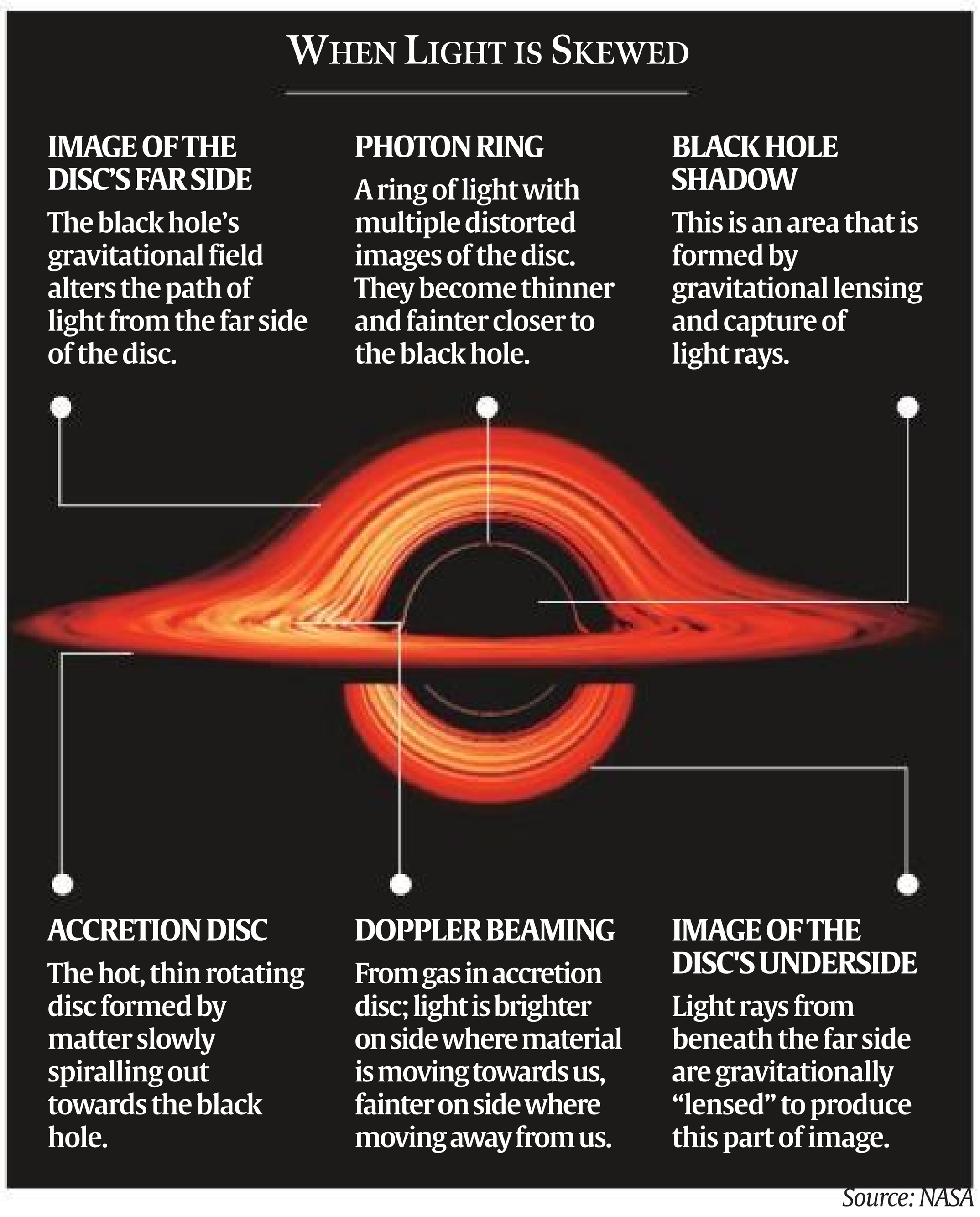
#ExpressExplained
If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

HOW GRAVITY DISTORTS OUR VIEW OF A BLACK HOLE



Source: NASA

A NEW visualisation of a black hole, released by NASA, illustrates how its gravity distorts our view by warping its surroundings. The visualisation simulates the appearance of a black hole where infalling matter has collected into a thin, hot structure called an accretion disc (*see illustration*). The black hole's extreme gravity skews light emitted by different regions of the disc, producing the misshapen appearance, NASA explained in the release.

As magnetic fields twist through the churning gas, bright knots form and dissipate in the disc. In the area closest to the black hole, the gas orbits at close to the speed of light. The outer portions spin a bit more slowly. This difference stretches and shears the bright knots, producing light and dark lanes in the disk.

"Seen nearly edgewise, the turbulent disc of gas churning around a black hole takes on a crazy double-humped appearance," NASA said. The black hole's extreme gravity alters the paths of light coming from different parts of the disc, producing the warped image. Exactly what we see depends on our viewing angle; the greatest distortion occurs when viewing the system nearly edgewise.

"Viewed from the side, the disc looks brighter on the left than it does on the right," NASA added. Glowing gas on the left side moves toward us so fast that the effects of Einstein's relativity give it a boost in brightness. On the right side, gas moving away becomes slightly dimmer. This asymmetry disappears when we see the disc exactly face on because, from that perspective, none of the material is moving along our line of sight.

THIS WORD MEANS

GOLDSCHMIDTITE

A new mineral from the Earth's mantle, found inside a diamond in South Africa. How important can it be?

A NEW, curious mineral has been discovered inside a diamond unearthed from a mine in South Africa. The mineral has been named goldschmidtite, after Victor Moritz Goldschmidt, the Norwegian scientist acknowledged as the founder of modern geochemistry. It has been described in the journal *American Mineralogist*.

Goldschmidtite has an unusual chemical signature for a mineral from Earth's mantle, according to the University of Alberta, a student of which discovered it. While the mantle is dominated by elements such as magnesium and iron, goldschmidtite has high concentrations of niobium, potassium and the rare earth elements lanthanum and cerium.

PhD student Nicole Meyer found a single grain of the mineral in the diamond, unearthed in Koffiefontein, South Africa. The university described it as dark green and opaque.

Though the mantle makes up about 80 per cent of the Earth's volume, very little is known about it. Reaching the mantle is not easy; it is about 2,900 km thick and no attempt to drill into it has been successful. Diamonds hold clues as they are found up to 160 km beneath the surface, in the upper mantle. Diamonds that are unearthed were brought up closer to the surface, probably as a result of violent volcanic eruptions when the Earth was hotter, according to the *Smithsonian Magazine*.

Tiny sample found inside diamond.
Nicole Meyer/University of Alberta

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why latest IPCC report matters

This one is on oceans, released this week. It adds to evidence in previous IPCC and other reports that call for urgent action to reduce emissions. A look at what various reports have said, and their significance

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, SEPTEMBER 27

A NEW report on oceans by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released on Wednesday, has given further strength to growing demands for more aggressive climate action from world leaders, especially those representing the big emitters. The report has come close on the heels of a special climate change 'action' summit organised by UN Secretary General António Guterres in New York at the beginning of the annual UN General Assembly session, and has added to mounting evidence calling for urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Wednesday's news conference in Monaco, where the IPCC presented the special report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate Context. *Reuters*

What are all these reports about?

The latest report, on Ocean and Cryosphere, is the last in a series of three that the IPCC had been asked to produce to assess the impacts of climate change on specific themes. The first of these, examining the feasibility of restricting global rise in temperatures to within 1.5°C from pre-industrial times, was submitted in October last year. It was followed in August this year by a report on how land systems contribute to and are impacted by climate change.

In between, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), a IPCC-like scientific body that examines scientific literature on biodiversity, came up with a first-of-its-kind report on the state of nature and how it was being affected by climate change.

There have been other reports as well. The World Meteorological Organization produced a report this month that said that the period 2015-19 was the warmest five-year period on record, and that July this year was the hottest month on record globally.

On May 11 this year, global concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was measured to have crossed the 415 parts per million (ppm) mark for the first time ever. This concentration varies from day to day, month to month and season to season, and has come down from that peak now.

What does all this mean?

There is already a lot of irrefutable scientific evidence to suggest that human activities have been altering climate in a way that would have disastrous consequences for the planet. But the action being taken by the countries have been assessed to be woefully inadequate. These new reports seek to underline the enormity of the problem, and the urgency required to deal with it. At the same time, each of them emphasises that if proportionate action is initiated immediately, the most catastrophic impacts can still be avoided.

The IPCC special report on the 1.5°C goal, for example, said it was possible to keep the rise in temperature to within 1.5°C, but for that the world would need to bring down its greenhouse gas emissions to half of its 2010 levels by 2030, and to net zero by 2050. Net-zero is achieved when the total emissions is balanced by the amount of absorption of carbon dioxide through natural sinks like forests, or removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through technological interventions.

Following this report, pressure has been building up on countries to commit to a net-zero target by 2050. Some countries have already announced their intention to achieve this target, but the most prominent emitters — China, US, India — have so far not done so.

The land report released in August said the various kinds of uses that land was being put to — forestry, agriculture, industries, urbanisation — had contributed about 5.2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide every year between 2007 and 2016. During the same time, trees and forests absorbed almost 11.2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide every year from the atmosphere. The sum total of these two processes meant that land, and the vegetation on it, was removing about 6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere annually.

It also pointed out that the global food system, which would include activities such as agriculture, cattle-rearing, food processing industry, energy consumed in these processes, and transportation of food items, could account for as much as a third of all greenhouse gases. It said nearly 25 per cent of all food produced globally was either lost or wasted. And even the decomposition of waste food released emissions.

The new ocean report noted that the global mean sea level had risen by 16 cm between 1902 and 2015, and that the rate of increase had doubled in the last one decade. The sea levels were rising because of thermal expansion of ocean waters due to rising temperatures as well as due to melting of glaciers and polar ice. It says that between 2006 and 2015, the Greenland ice sheet lost ice-mass at an average rate of 278 billion tonnes every year, while the Antarctic ice sheet lost a mass of 155 billion tonnes on an average every year. Snow over areas outside of these two regions, like the glaciers in the Himalayas, together lost an average of 220 billion tonnes of ice every year.

Why so many reports now?

It is not unusual to see the conversation around climate change picking up during this time of the year, in the run-up to the annual two-week climate change conference that takes place in November or December. But there are also other reasons for the sudden rise in attention to the climate debate this year. Last year's IPCC report on 1.5°C mentioned that humanity had barely 12 years to keep alive the hopes of restricting global temperature rise to within 1.5°C from pre-industrial times. This was contingent not just on immediate aggressive action from countries, but also on development of technologies that could remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This report has instilled a new sense of urgency in climate conversations.

Next year, 2020, happens to be the transition year for the international climate regime, from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement. The Kyoto regime has been a major underachiever in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement, in so far as it makes it mandatory for every country to initiate actions and not just rich and developed nations as under the Kyoto Protocol, is expected to deliver much better results. As required by the Paris Agreement, every country had already finalised and submitted a climate action plan, called Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs, in 2015. The NDCs currently submitted have targets or action plans for 2025 or 2030. The assessment of several NDCs has concluded that these actions were not adequate to achieve the global goal of keeping temperature rise within 2°C from pre-industrial times. But the NDCs have to be updated every five years, and the countries are scheduled to do it next year.

Those concerned about climate change are hoping that in the light of these reports, and growing fresh evidence, countries will show greater ambition when they update their NDCs next year. The Paris Agreement also provides for a review of all climate actions in 2023 to assess whether the individual actions of countries were adding up to what was required to achieve the goal. Countries can then decide what more needed to be done.

However, it is being argued now that 2023 might be too late for such an exercise. Therefore, a momentum is being built to nudge the countries to announce more ambitious actions before that. The move to get countries to commit to a net-zero target by 2050 is a part of these efforts.

Soot found in placenta: is foetus at risk?

MEHR GILL
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 27

IN A recent study that raises concerns about the effects of air pollution on babies even before they are born, scientists have reported that particles of black carbon — commonly known as soot — have been found in the placenta of women, who had breathed these in during their pregnancies. The study, conducted by a team of Belgian researchers, has been published in the journal *Nature Communications*.

The finding

The placenta is an organ attached to the wall of the uterus. It allows life-sustaining oxygen and nutrients to pass from the mother to the foetus. It lies on either end of the umbilical cord and has two sides, the maternal and foetal side. The study found tiny particles of black carbon accumulating on the side of the placenta that faces the foetus.

The particles were embedded in the placentas, implying that this had happened before the babies were born.

"We ruled out that our findings were just confounded by soot particles of the air which were on the surface of the placenta after birth," environmental scientist Tim Nawhort of Hasselt University, Belgium, told *The Indian Express* in an email.

Black carbon particles are a key part of particulate matter. It is one of the byproducts from the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, petrol and wood. Because of their small size, particulate matter, including black carbon particles, can be easily inhaled and can pass through the throat and into the rest of the body.

Previous studies have established a connection between prenatal exposure to ambient air pollution and impaired birth outcomes. None of the previous studies, however, had established that nanoparticles could cross the placental barrier as a result of inhalation in real-life settings.

How the study was conducted

The researchers chose 20 women in Northeast Belgium, 10 of whom were living in areas of high black carbon exposure and 10 in areas where exposure to black carbon was low. All the women were non-smokers. Additionally, five samples were taken from mothers who suffered miscarriages between 12 and 31 weeks of pregnancy.

For the first set of 20 women, the placentas were taken 10 minutes after the babies were born, and biopsies were carried out on both the maternal and the foetal sides. While black carbon particles were found in all samples, the amount varied by residential address — an average 9,500 particles per cubic mm for low-exposure areas and about 20,000 particles per cubic mm for high-exposure areas.

Why it is a concern

The placenta is the sole point of contact between the mother and the foetus, carrying oxygen and nutrients from the mother's blood supply to the foetus. Essentially, it is a temporary organ that keeps separate the mother's and the baby's blood supply, while also being a link between the two. The finding is a signal of the health effects that air pollution could have even before birth.

"Because the particles are at the foetal side of the placenta and this side interacts directly with the foetal blood flow, it is very reasonable to assume that the foetus is directly exposed," Nawhort said. He added that soot particles may cause DNA damage and air pollution in general can impact cellular ageing, cognitive development and can lead to lower birth weight.

Lower exposure to air pollution is the only way that the foetus can be protected, he said.

Ranitidine under scanner: what is this drug, and should Indian users worry?

PRABHA RAGHAVAN
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 27

INDIA'S DRUG regulator this week began looking into concerns of potential cancer-causing substances contaminating popular acidity drug ranitidine. The move came over a week after the US Food and Drug Administration flagged the issue to American patients, some companies have suspended sales of the product worldwide, and some other countries have ordered recalls of the product.

What is ranitidine, and how widespread is its use in India?

Ranitidine, popularly known through brand names like Aciloc, Zinetac, Rantac and Rantac-OD, R-Loc and Ranitin, is an over-the-counter, prescription antacid used in the treatment of acid reflux and peptic ulcer diseases. It is commonly used to relieve acid-related indigestion and heartburn by decreasing stomach acid production. While other medicines like pantoprazole and omeprazole too treat these symptoms and are more commonly prescribed today, ranitidine is still widely used in India.

"Ranitidine is a much older medication, but it was always thought to be a very safe drug because it has less side effects than the other drugs that patients use nowadays to treat these symptoms," said Dr S Chatterjee, senior consultant-internal medicine at Delhi's Indraprastha Apollo Hospital.

In the 12 months ended August 2019, the ranitidine molecule alone (excluding combinations it was part of) made nearly Rs 690 crore in sales, according to pharmaceutical market research firm AIOCD Awacs PharmaTrac.

What is the problem?

On September 13, the US FDA stated in a release that it had learned that some ranitidine medicines contained "low levels" of a substance called N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA). An environmental contaminant found in water and foods, NDMA has been classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as probably carcinogenic to humans, which means it has the potential to cause cancer. This is the same impurity that the US FDA had investigated in blood pressure drugs valsartan and losartan over the last year.

TOP 5 RANITIDINE BRANDS IN INDIA

Brand	Company	Market Size*
Aciloc	Cadila Pharmaceuticals	Rs 244.70 cr
Zinetac	GSK	Rs 209.10 cr
Rantac	JB Chemicals	Rs 153.10 cr
R-Loc	Zydus Cadila	Rs 28.40 cr
Ranitin	Torrent Pharmaceuticals	Rs 12.40 cr

**Moving annual turnover for the 12 months ended August 2019*
Source: AIOCD Awacs PharmaTrac

How has India's drug regulator responded?

India's top drug regulator Monday wrote to state regulators asking them to direct ranitidine active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) manufacturers to "verify their products and take appropriate measures to ensure patient safety". Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) V G Somani, in his letter, asked states to inform him of action taken in this matter "at the earliest". So far, the DCGI has not called for any halting of supplies, which means the ranitidine brands marketed in the country can continue to be sold until further notice.

APIs are the ingredients that give a medicine its therapeutic effect. According to industry sources, most of the world's supply of the ranitidine API comes from two Indian firms — Saraca Laboratories and SMS Lifesciences.

Should consumers be worried?

The DCGI has not clarified whether doctors and consumers in India should use ranitidine with caution, nor has the US FDA called for individuals to stop taking the drug at this time.

"Although NDMA may cause harm in large amounts, the levels the FDA is finding in ranitidine from preliminary tests barely exceed amounts you might expect to find in common foods," stated the US FDA, adding it was evaluating whether these levels of the substance posed a risk to patients.

How have companies selling ranitidine in India responded?

At least two of the companies marketing top ranitidine brands here have decided to take precautionary measures like halting sales while investigations into their safety are in progress. This includes GSK, which publicly announced a voluntary recall of its Zinetac brand on Wednesday.

Torrent Pharmaceuticals, too, has "stopped the sales of this product" till it concludes a "detailed assessment" of its Ranitin. JB Chemicals, testing its Rantac and Rantac-OD, plans to take a final call on sales of products "once the results are out", according to the company's president, Pranabh Mody.

SMS is evaluating its ranitidine API to ensure it is "void of this NDMA impurity or are within permissible limits" and that it foresees "business as usual" until then.

According to GSK, the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines (EDQM) has suspended Saraca Laboratories' certificate of suitability for its ranitidine API "with immediate effect." It is unclear what action Saraca is taking.

It is not clear at this stage either what Cadila Pharmaceuticals, which markets top-selling brand Aciloc in India, and Zydus Cadila, which markets 'R-Loc', are planning to do.

How have other countries responded?

While India and the US are still looking into the issue, regulators of around 15 countries have issued or are learnt to have called for recalls of ranitidine sold in their markets. These include Singapore, Canada, Italy, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Switzerland and Pakistan.

Singapore's Health Sciences Authority has said the potential risk of nitrosamines like NDMA is associated with "long term exposure" and patients prescribed the drug for short term use "may continue with their medicine".

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
वर्ष 12 अंक 191

निर्यात और विदेशी बाजार

घरेलू मांग में कमी आने पर प्रतिस्पर्धी अर्थव्यवस्थाएं निर्यात बाजारों की ओर रुख करती हैं। तेज गति से विकास करने वाला हर देश सफल निर्यातक होता है। हाल के वर्षों में देश में जो मंदी आई है उसकी बुनियादी वजहों में से एक है निर्यात को गति प्रदान करने में नाकामी। जीडीपी के संदर्भ में निर्यात में तेजी से गिरावट आई है। निर्यात को गति दिए बिना अर्थव्यवस्था मंदी से नहीं उबर सकती। सारी बातचीत आयात प्रतिस्थापन और शुल्क दरों में इजाफा करने के इर्दगिर्द केंद्रित है।

शंकालुओं का कहना है कि वैश्विक स्तर पर कारोबार मंदा है, ऐसे में निर्यात के प्रति जोश जगाना मुश्किल है। परंतु हमारे देश में वस्त्र व्यापार भी स्थिर है। जबकि वियतनाम, इंडोनेशिया और कंबोडिया में तेज निर्यात वृद्धि देखने को मिली है। बांग्लादेश भी भारत से आगे है। इसकी वजह यह है कि ये देश चीन की कमी पूरी कर रहे हैं। चीन हर महीने 20 अरब डॉलर मूल्य के वस्त्र निर्यात करता था जो अब घटकर 12 अरब डॉलर रह गया है (भारत को यह आंकड़ा पाने में नौ महीने लगते)। इस कमी को पूर्वी एशिया के देश और बांग्लादेश पूरा कर रहे हैं। भारत के पास इसका बहुत मामूली हिस्सा आया है। बांग्लादेश का निर्यात भारत के निर्यात का 60 फीसदी हुआ करता था लेकिन अब यह उलट कर दोगुना हो चुका है। वियतनाम भी हमसे काफी आगे हो गया है। विडंबना यह है कि बांग्लादेश कपास, धागा और कपड़ा भारत से आयात करता है। वस्त्र निर्यात, व्यापार घाटे को कम करता है, साथ ही कई जटिल समस्याओं को भी हल करता है। किसी भी अन्य बड़े औद्योगिक क्षेत्र की तुलना में यह रोजगार को अधिक बढ़ावा देता है। वाहन या इंजीनियरिंग क्षेत्र की तुलना में यह 10 गुना तक और रसायन तथा पेट्रोकेमिकल क्षेत्र की तुलना में 100 गुना अधिक रोजगार प्रदान करता है। इस उद्योग की बिक्री का काफी हिस्सा वेतन-भत्तों में जाता है जो घरेलू खपत की मांग को बढ़ावा देता है। इस क्षेत्र के अधिकांश कर्मी महिलाएं हैं जिनकी श्रम शक्ति में कम होती भागीदारी चिंता का विषय बन चुकी है। चूंकि कपड़ा एवं वस्त्र क्षेत्र पहले ही कुल विनिर्माण रोजगार के एक तिहाई के बराबर है इसलिए वस्त्र निर्यात को बढ़ावा देने मात्र से विनिर्माण को जबरदस्त गति मिलेगी। अभी भी अवसर समाप्त नहीं हुआ है क्योंकि चीन के निर्यातकों को अमेरिकी शुल्क वृद्धि (अभी वस्त्र क्षेत्र पर लागू नहीं) के खतरे के अलावा बढ़ती लागत और घटते मार्जिन से जूझना पड़ रहा है। भारत की सबसे बड़ी दिक्कत समुचित परिस्थितियों का अभाव है। बांग्लादेश अत्यंत कम विकसित देश है और उसे यूरोप, कनाडा और जापान के बाजारों में शुल्क मुक्त पहुंच हासिल है। वियतनाम और श्रीलंका को भी मुक्त व्यापार समझौतों के तहत यूरोप में ऐसी पहुंच प्राप्त है। यूरोप में बांग्लादेश की शुल्क मुक्त पहुंच 2024 में समाप्त हो जाएगी लेकिन वह मुक्त व्यापार समझौते पर हस्ताक्षर कर सकता है। अत्यंत कम मार्जिन वाले कारोबार में शुल्क दर में 10 फीसदी की बाधा से बहुत बड़ी दिक्कत हो सकती है। भारत ने यूरोपीय संघ के साथ व्यापार को संतुलित किया है लेकिन जापानी कार कंपनियों की लॉबीइंग के चलते भारत मुक्त व्यापार समझौता नहीं कर सका है। सरकार ने श्रम कानूनों में बदलाव किया है और भविष्य निधि खातों में योगदान के जरिये भी उसने बांग्लादेश के साथ वेतन का अंतर कम किया है। नई विनिर्माण इकाइयों के लिए 17 फीसदी की कर दर की पेशकश के साथ यह अंतर और कम हुआ है। परंतु निर्यातकों को कमजोर बुनियादी सुविधाओं और बंदरगाहों पर समय खपाऊ प्रक्रिया से भी गुजरना पड़ रहा है। रुपये के अधिमूल्यन में सुधार भी उतना ही अहम है।

साप्ताहिक मंथन
टी. एन. नाइनन

वाणिज्य मंत्री पीयूष गोयल ने एक साक्षात्कार में कहा है कि वह यह नहीं समझ पा रहे कि सस्ता रुपया कैसे मददगार होगा जबकि देश का व्यापार घाटा खासा बढ़ा हुआ है। उन्हें यह भी देखना चाहिए कि सन 1996 में रुपये के अवमूल्यन के बाद व्यापार के आंकड़ों में समय के साथ सुधार आया जबकि आयात कम हुआ। चार वर्ष में भारी भरकम व्यापार घाटा 80 फीसदी तक पूरा हो गया था। सन 1991 के अवमूल्यन के पहले पांच वर्ष का औसत व्यापार घाटा निर्यात का 40 फीसदी था लेकिन अवमूल्यन के बाद इसमें गिरावट आई और तकरीबन दशक भर तक यह काफी कम बना रहा। आज उतनी तीव्र गिरावट संभव नहीं है क्योंकि अमेरिका उन देशों पर नजर रखता है जिनके बारे में उसे लगता है कि वे मुद्रा दर के साथ छेड़छाड़ करते हैं। परंतु इससे निपटने के और भी तरीके हैं। निर्यात वृद्धि जल्द हासिल करने के लिए रुपये का तत्काल अवमूल्यन आवश्यक है।

अजय मोहंती

राहत के कदमों से लौटेगी अर्थव्यवस्था में जान!

मौद्रिक कदम के साथ राजकोषीय उपाय भी किए जाने से आर्थिक वृद्धि एवं कंपनियों के लाभ में तेजी आने की संभावना बढ़ी है। हालात की पड़ताल कर रहे हैं **आकाश प्रकाश**

वित्त मंत्री ने गत सप्ताह शुक्रवार को कॉर्पोरेट कर में कटौती की घोषणा कर सबको अचरज में डाल दिया। सरकार ने सभी घरेलू कंपनियों की दर में 10 फीसदी तक की कटौती कर उसे 25 फीसदी के स्तर पर लाने का फैसला किया है। वहीं नई विनिर्माण इकाइयां अगर 31 मार्च, 2023 तक चालू हो जाती हैं तो उन्हें 17 फीसदी की प्रभावी दर से ही कर देना होगा। इसके पहले सरकार शेयर पुनर्खरीद कार्यक्रम में बदलाव और शेयरों की खरीद एवं बिक्री पर होने वाले पूंजीगत लाभ पर देय अधिभार खत्म करने की भी घोषणाएं कर चुकी है। इन कर रियायतों पर कुल 1.45 लाख करोड़ रुपये की लागत आने का अनुमान है। कॉर्पोरेट कर राहत की मात्रा एवं रफ्तार भारत के लिए अप्रत्याशित है। रातोरात हम एशिया के अधिकांश देशों की बराबरी में पहुंच गए हैं। निश्चित तौर पर यह एक अप्रत्याशित कदम था और शेयर बाजारों ने भी पांच फीसदी से अधिक तेजी हासिल कर इसका जश्न मनाया। भावी परिप्रेक्ष्य में यह साफ हो जाता है कि यह ऐलान एक बड़ा नीतिगत कदम है। निवेशकों को दीर्घकालिक असर के हिसाब से सोचना है और यह केवल कॉर्पोरेट आय बढ़ोतरी का ही मामला नहीं है। इस मुद्दे पर मेरे मन में उठने वाले कुछ सवाल इस तरह हैं:

1. सरकार ने आखिरकार कांग्रेस के 'सूट-बूट की सरकार' वाले तंज से अपना पीछा छुड़ा लिया है। अब यह उद्योग जगत को लुभाने की कोशिश करते हुए दिखने से डरती नहीं है। अगर नैतिक तरीके से पैसे कमाए जाएं तो इसका जश्न होना चाहिए, न कि लानत-मलानत। यह उस धारणा को दुरुस्त करने की दिशा में उठाया गया बड़ा कदम है कि सरकार कुछ ज्यादा वामपंथी हो चली थी और कारोबार-अनुकूल नहीं रह गई थी।

इस कर राहत के निशाने पर भारतीय कंपनी जगत है और कंपनियों का भरोसा बढ़ाना इसका लक्ष्य है। सरकार ने माना है कि कॉर्पोरेट दिग्गजों के बीच जोखिम से बचने की प्रवृत्ति हावी है। कंपनी अधिनियम में वर्णित कुछ खास अपकृत्यों को अपराध की श्रेणी से बाहर करना भी इसी का हिस्सा है। ब्याज दरों में कितनी भी कटौती कर ली जाए, अगर कंपनी प्रमुखों के मन में भरोसा नहीं है तो निवेश नहीं बढ़ सकेगा।

इन कदमों से भारत कारोबार शुरू करने और चलाने के लिए अधिक आकर्षक स्थान बनेगा। वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) की दरों में राहत देने से उपभोग को बढ़ावा मिलता लेकिन वित्त मंत्री ने इस उम्मीद में कंपनियों की आय एवं नकदी प्रवाह बढ़ाने की पहल की है कि कंपनियों का भरोसा बढ़ेगा और वे निवेश से नए रोजगार सृजित करेंगी। भारत में कारोबार चलाने से जुड़े गतिरोधों को दूर करने के लिए अभी बहुत कुछ करने की जरूरत है फिर भी यह एक बड़ा कदम है। अब कर की दरें भारत में निवेश न करने की वजह नहीं रह जाएंगी। कंपनी जगत को अब शिकायती तेवर छोड़कर आगे बढ़ना चाहिए और अर्थव्यवस्था एवं इसकी वृद्धि पर दांव लगाना चाहिए। कंपनी जगत के प्रति सरकार की मंशा को लेकर संदेह जताने का वक्त खत्म हो चला है। उम्मीद है कि कंपनियां इस आकस्मिक लाभ का उपयोग भविष्य- लोग, कीमत, तकनीक, ब्रांड निर्माण, संयंत्र या मशीनरी के लिए निवेश में करेंगी। आखिर, घरेलू निवेश को ही अर्थव्यवस्था को चलाना चाहिए, विदेशी निवेश तो केवल सोने पर सुहागा है।

2. वृद्धि पर बहुत बड़ा दांव लगा है। हम निश्चित रूप से इस साल के राजकोषीय लक्ष्य से चूक जाएंगे लेकिन इस कदम का औचित्य तभी साबित हो सकेगा जब वृद्धि पटरी पर आ जाए। प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी को अपने सामाजिक कार्यक्रम चलाने के लिए पैसों की जरूरत है। नई दरें लागू होने के बाद अगर वृद्धि में तेजी नहीं आती है तो फिर उनके पास सामाजिक योजनाओं के लिए फंड नहीं रह जाएगा। इन कर कटौतियों के बाद आर्थिक वृद्धि को लेकर सरकार की चिंताओं के बारे में सारे संदेह दूर हो जाने चाहिए। हर कोई इस पर एकजुट है कि तीव्र आर्थिक वृद्धि आज की अनिवार्यता है। बेहतर बात यह है कि राजकोषीय एवं मौद्रिक प्राधिकारी दोनों ही आखिर एक तरफ हैं।

3. मंदी की बात करने वाले राजकोषीय स्थिति को लेकर चिंतित हैं। यह सच है कि इस वित्त वर्ष में राजकोषीय घाटा 3.7-3.8 फीसदी तक जा सकता है। हालांकि एक इक्विटी निवेशक के तौर पर मुझे इससे कोई एतराज नहीं होगा अगर वृद्धि तेज हो और आय बढ़े। मैं शून्य मुद्रास्फीति और कमजोर वृद्धि के दौर में राजकोषीय घाटा 3.3 फीसदी रहने के बजाय मजबूत जीडीपी और आय वृद्धि के साथ बढ़े राजकोषीय घाटे को तरजीह दूंगा। राजकोषीय घाटा बढ़ने से सरकार पर परिसंपत्तियों की तीव्र एवं रणनीतिक बिक्री का दबाव भी बढ़ेगा। रणनीतिक विनिवेश फिर से चर्चा में लौटेगा। और वह पहले की तुलना में अधिक आक्रामक होगा। हम खाद्य एवं उर्वरक सब्सिडी के मामले में प्रत्यक्ष लाभ अंतरण (डीबीटी) का तीव्र क्रियान्वयन देख सकते हैं क्योंकि व्यय पर लाभ बढ़ाने का दबाव बढ़ेगा।

4. हम सूचीबद्ध कंपनियों के कर-पश्चात लाभ में 8-10 फीसदी की उछाल देखेंगे। शुरुआती लाभ कम होगा क्योंकि कुछ कंपनियां नई व्यवस्था का हिस्सा नहीं बनेंगी और दूसरी कंपनियों को विलंबित कर संपत्तियां चिह्नित करनी होंगी। नई कर प्रणाली से इक्विटी पर मिलने वाला सामान्य प्रतिफल बढ़ेगा और कंपनियों के पास अधिक नकद प्रवाह होगा। ये लाभ चिरस्थायी होंगे और इससे बाजार का सैद्धांतिक ढांचा बढ़ेगा।

5. इन कदमों से कंपनी जगत में जारी मजबूती की प्रक्रिया और तेज होगी। मजबूत कंपनी और अधिक मजबूत होगी जबकि कमजोर कंपनी बाहर होती जाएगी। आखिर, अधिकतम दर से कर देने वाली कंपनियां ही इन कदमों का सर्वाधिक लाभ लेंगी। लाभ में नहीं चल रही अशक्त कंपनियों को इस व्यवस्था से फायदा नहीं होगा। कमजोर परिचालन या खस्ता बहीखाते वाली कंपनियां लुप्त होती जा रही हैं जिससे बेहतर संचालित कंपनियों को बाजार हिस्सेदारी बढ़ाने का मौका मिल रहा है। इन कटौतियों के बाद भारतीय कंपनी जगत में सफाई का दौर तेज होगा।

6. संक्षिप्त अवधि में अर्थव्यवस्था कमजोर बनी रहेगी। दूसरी तिमाही में कंपनियों की आय के आंकड़े डराएंगे, उपभोग मांग दुरुस्त होने में वक्त लगेगा, एनबीएफसी संकट अभी खत्म नहीं हुआ है, निवेश में फौरी तेजी नहीं दिखेगी और रोजगार वृद्धि कमजोर बनी रहेगी। ऐसी स्थिति में लोग यह सवाल उठाने लगेंगे कि सरकार के इन राहत उपायों का कोई असर नहीं हुआ है और आयकर एवं जीएसटी की दरों में कटौती करना कहीं बेहतर होता। कुछ लोग कहेंगे कि कंपनियां इन लाभों को दबाकर बैठ जाएंगी।

वैसे मेरी राय में धारणा बदल गई है। ऐसा ही बाजारों के साथ हुआ है। सरकार ने दिखाया है कि वह सुनने को तैयार है और उसके लिए अर्थव्यवस्था एवं कंपनी जगत मायने रखते हैं। आर्थिक नीतियों के निर्माण में खाली जगह भर दी गई है। सरकार ने आर्थिक मोर्चे पर बड़े दांव लगाने की मंशा भी दिखाई है। निवेशकों को लगा था कि मौद्रिक नीति ही अर्थव्यवस्था में जान डालने का इकलौता जरिया है। लेकिन हम गलत थे। किसी ने भी इतनी बड़ी राहत की उम्मीद नहीं की थी। अब मौद्रिक एवं राजकोषीय दोनों उपायों को एक साथ आजमाया जा रहा है। अगले 18 महीनों में जीडीपी एवं कंपनी मुनाफा दोनों में तेजी की उम्मीद की जाए। शायद हम दोनों मामलों में निचले स्तर पर पहुंच चुके हैं।

(लेखक फंड प्रबंधन फर्म अमांसा कैपिटल के साथ जुड़े हैं)

ओटीटी प्लेटफॉर्म से भारतीय कहानियों को मिल रहा विस्तार

मीडिया मंत्र
वनिता कोहली-खांडेकर

क्या भारतीय कहानियों को दुनिया में अपना मुकाम मिल गया है? पिछले हफ्ते दो भारतीय शो और एक फिल्म को चार अंतरराष्ट्रीय एमी पुरस्कारों के लिए नामित किया गया। (ये पुरस्कार हाल ही में घोषित एमी पुरस्कारों से अलग हैं।) भारत से सेक्रेड गेम्स-1 (ड्रामा सीरीज), लस्ट स्टोरीज (टीवी मूवी/मिनी सीरीज), राधिका आप्टे (सर्वश्रेष्ठ अभिनेत्री, लस्ट सीरीज) और द रीमिक्स-इंडिया (नॉन-स्क्रिप्ट मनोरंजन) नामित हुए हैं। विजेताओं के नाम की घोषणा 25 नवंबर को की जाएगी।

क्या हम आखिरकार भारतीय परिवेश में बुनी गई भारतीय कहानियों को वैश्विक दर्शकों की स्वीकृति मिलते हुए देख रहे हैं? क्या क्रॉसओवर कंटेंट की तलाश खत्म हो गई है?

पिछले साल 6 जुलाई को मराठी एवं पंजाबी के घालमेल वाला हिंदी शो सेक्रेड गेम्स एक साथ 190 देशों में मौजूद 12.5 करोड़ ग्राहकों के मोबाइल फोन पर स्ट्रीम होना शुरू हुआ था। इस ऑनलाइन शो की समीक्षा दुनिया के हरेक बड़े समाचार संस्थान ने की थी, चाहे वह द गार्डियन हो या द न्यूयॉर्क टाइम्स। इसके पहले किसी भी भारतीय टीवी शो या फिल्म को इस तरह की वैश्विक रिलीज नहीं मिली थी। यह ओवर-द-टॉप (ओटीटी) प्लेटफॉर्म नेटफ्लिक्स पर दिखाया जाने वाला पहला मौलिक भारतीय शो था और यह देखते ही देखते जबरदस्त लोकप्रिय हुआ। लस्ट स्टोरीज को लेकर इतनी चर्चा नहीं हुई लेकिन इसे भी नेटफ्लिक्स पर इसी तरह की रिलीज मिली थी।

मुंबई स्थित प्रोडक्शन हाउस ग्रेमैटर एंटरटेनमेंट का बनाया शो द रीमिक्स 10 टीमों की मौजूदगी वाला एक फॉर्मेट शो है जिसमें हरेक टीम में एक डीजे, गायक, प्रोड्यूसर और डांसर होते हैं। सभी टीमें अगले 10-15 हफ्तों तक एक-दूसरे से मुकाबला करती रहीं। इस शो को वियतनाम, चीन, इंडोनेशिया और हाल ही में दक्षिण अफ्रीका में भी व्यापक लोकप्रियता मिली है। द रीमिक्स-इंडिया एमेजॉन प्राइम वीडियो पर पिछले साल एक साथ 200 देशों में स्ट्रीम हुआ था।

इन ऑनलाइन शो को उस तरह की रिलीज मिली जिसके लिए भारतीय फिल्म स्टूडियो वर्षों तक तरसते रहे हैं। लेकिन उनके पास न तो उस तरह का कंटेंट था और न ही इतने बड़े पैमाने पर रिलीज के लिए विपणन एवं वितरण की ताकत ही थी। लेकिन अब यह एक मानक बन चुका है। एमेजॉन प्राइम पर हाल ही में रिलीज हुए शो द फैमिली मैन का प्रीमियर लॉस एंजलिस में हुआ। इंटरनैशनल एमी अवॉर्ड के लिए तीन भारतीय शो और अभिनेत्री राधिका का नामित होना और दर्शक जुटाने एवं पुरस्कार के लिए ब्राजील एवं ब्रिटिश कार्यक्रमों से मुकाबला करना भारतीय कंटेंट की काबिलियत के बारे में भरोसा जगाने वाली बात है।

सत्यजीत रे की मशहूर फिल्म पथेर पांचाली (1955) न्यूयॉर्क के फिफ्थ एवेन्यू इलाके में स्थित प्लेहाउस सिनेमाघर में लगातार 226 दिनों तक प्रदर्शित हुई थी। इसने अमेरिका में किसी विदेशी फिल्म के सबसे लंबे समय तक प्रदर्शन का 30 साल पुराना रिकॉर्ड तोड़ा था। बाद में राज कपूर की फिल्मों ने रूस के लोगों को खूब लुभाया था। नब्बे के दशक में सूरज बड़जात्या ने हम आपके हैं कौन (1994) फिल्म से ब्रिटेन एवं अमेरिका में रहने वाले प्रवासी भारतीयों के दिल को छू लिया था। उसके अगले ही साल आई आदित्य चोपड़ा की फिल्म 'दिलवाले दुल्हनिया ले जाएंगे' और करण जौहर की फिल्मों 'कुछ कुछ होता है' (1998) और 'कभी खुशी कभी गम' (2001) ने प्रवासी भारतीयों के बीच भारतीय फिल्मों को और मजबूती दी। इसका नतीजा यह हुआ कि विदेशी बाजार भी भारतीय फिल्मों की बिक्री का एक क्षेत्र बन गए। जर्मनी या पेरू जैसे देशों में शाहरुख खान की फिल्में पसंद करने वाले कुछ स्थानीय लोग भी होते थे लेकिन मुख्य रूप से यह प्रवासी भारतीयों का ही बाजार था। विदेशी बाजारों में मुख्यधारा वाली फिल्मों के प्रदर्शन और दर्शकों के बीच किसी तरह का क्रॉसओवर नहीं था।

हालांकि 2006-07 तक कॉर्पोरेट अंदाज ने भारतीय फिल्म कारोबार को बदल दिया था। बड़े स्टूडियो दस्तक दे चुके थे और घरेलू फिल्म बाजार भी अधिक स्क्रीन एवं टेलीविजन के प्रसार के चलते काफी व्यापक हो चुका था। इस स्थिति में भारतीय सिनेमा की गुणवत्ता भी सुधरी और ओमकारा या रंग दे बसंती (2006) जैसी फिल्मों ने काफी अच्छा प्रदर्शन किया। लेकिन गुजरे दौर को सुनहरा मानने वाले विदेशी बाजार को इस तरह की असलियत के करीब लगने वाली फिल्में अधिक पसंद नहीं आईं और यह बाजार सिकुड़ने लगा।

फिर तीन ऐसी फिल्में आईं जिन्होंने भारतीय कहानियों के लिए बाजार मौजूद होने की धारणा पुख्ता कर दी। इनमें सबसे पहले 2008 में प्रदर्शित डैनी बॉएल की फिल्म स्लमडॉग मिलियनेयर थी। भले ही यह फिल्म भारतीय नहीं थी लेकिन यह भारत के ही बारे में थी। राजकुमार हिरानी की फिल्म 3ईडियट्स (2009) और नितेश तिवारी की फिल्म दंगल (2016) पूरी तरह भारतीय मिजाज और भारतीय अंदाज में परोसी गई कहानियां थीं। इन दोनों ही फिल्मों ने चीन में खूब पैसे कमाए जो भारतीय फिल्म कारोबार के लिहाज से एकदम अनूठी बात थी। बाद में बजरंगी भाईजान (2015) और सीक्रेट सुपरस्टार (2017) भी चीन में खूब सफल रहीं। भारतीय फिल्मों को लेकर विदेशी बाजारों के रवैये में आए इस बदलाव को हॉलीवुड और वहां के बड़े स्टूडियो ने भी संज्ञान में लिया। वर्ष 2016 में इंटरनेट डेटा की दरें सस्ती होने तक भारत का रचनात्मक परिवेश अगली छलांग लगाने के लिए तैयार हो चुका था। ओरिजिनल कंटेंट के लिए 35 ओटीटी प्लेटफॉर्मों के बीच जंग छिड़ चुकी थी जो भारतीय कंटेंट तैयार करने वाले निर्माताओं के लिए जश्न मनाने वाली बात थी। ओरिजिनल कंटेंट की मांग तेज होने का अर्थ है कि लेखकों, फिल्मकारों, तकनीकी कामों में कुशल लोगों की विशाल फौज रखने वाला भारत आखिरकार रचनाधर्मी पहलू पर काम करने लगा है जबकि नेटफ्लिक्स और एमेजॉन प्राइम जैसे प्लेटफॉर्म इन कहानियों को दुनिया भर में पहुंचा रहे हैं।

कानाफूसी

होगी घर वापसी?

क्या समाजवादी पार्टी (सपा) और प्रगतिशील समाजवादी पार्टी लोहिया (पीएसपीएल) अपने मतभेद समाप्त करने को तैयार हैं? सपा प्रमुख अखिलेश यादव ने ऐसा संकेत दिया है। उन्होंने हाल ही में कहा कि सभी पार्टी नेता और परिवार के सभी सदस्य जो पार्टी से दूरी बना चुके हैं, उन सबका वापस स्वागत है। पीएसपीएल का गठन अखिलेश यादव के चाचा शिवपाल सिंह यादव ने किया था। इस पार्टी ने 2019 का लोकसभा चुनाव लड़ा। इस दौरान इन दोनों दलों ने एक दूसरे को नुकसान ही पहुंचाया। हालांकि घर वापसी की चर्चा में पार्टी का सपा में विलय करना भी शामिल है लेकिन पीएसपीएल ने शिवपाल की घर वापसी की किसी भी संभावना से इनकार किया है। बहरहाल अखिलेश के बयान के बाद अटकलों का बाजार गर्म हो गया है।

हिज्जों की चूक

यह सही है कि सत्ताधारी भारतीय जनता पार्टी (भाजपा) के कुछ नेता संवाद की प्राथमिक भाषा के रूप में हिंदी के प्रयोग को लोकप्रिय करने के लिए कड़ी मेहनत कर रहे हैं लेकिन सच यह भी है कि कई भाजपा शासित राज्यों में ही चीजें सही ढंग से नहीं चल रही हैं। लखनऊ में उत्तर प्रदेश हिंदी संस्थान ने एक कार्यक्रम आयोजित किया जिसमें मुख्यमंत्री योगी आदित्यनाथ और केंद्रीय मानव संसाधन विकास मंत्री रमेश पोखरियाल निशंक भी शामिल थे। कार्यक्रम में बैनर में युग प्रवर्तक शब्द ही गलत लिखा हुआ था। यह कार्यक्रम महायोगी गोरखनाथ पर आयोजित तीन दिवसीय सम्मेलन था। गोरखनाथ की शिक्षाओं पर ही नाथ संप्रदाय आधारित है। योगी आदित्यनाथ गोरखनाथ मंदिर के मुखिया भी हैं।

आपका पक्ष

कीनिया से सबक लेने की जरूरत

भारत प्लास्टिक का बहुत ज्यादा इस्तेमाल करने वाला देश नहीं है फिर भी वह इसके इस्तेमाल के खिलाफ जन आंदोलन तैयार कर रहा है। इससे वह एक पर्यावरण हितैषी और चिंतक के रूप में विश्व पटल पर उभर रहा है। आज जिस तरह आम जनजीवन में प्लास्टिक का 80 प्रतिशत इस्तेमाल हो चुका है वहां इस पर रोक लगाना मुश्किल है। लेकिन यह समय के साथ असंभव नहीं है। हमें इस बात पर ध्यान देने की जरूरत है कि एकल इस्तेमाल वाले प्लास्टिक के खिलाफ लड़ाई लड़नी है। रोजाना हम प्लास्टिक का एक बार ही इस्तेमाल करके उसे फेंक देते हैं। इससे वह नालियों के जरिये नदी में फिर समुद्र में पहुंच जाता है। आज समुद्र कचरे का डंप यार्ड बनता जा रहा है। हमें कीनिया जैसे छोटे देश

से सीख लेनी होगी जहां वर्ष 2002 में ही प्लास्टिक पर पूरी तरह रोक लगा दी गई है। एकल इस्तेमाल वाले प्लास्टिक पर रोक लगाने के लिए कुछ कार्य किए जा सकते हैं। इसमें दूध, बिस्कुट, नमकीन आदि को प्लास्टिक की पैकिंग के बजाय इसका विकल्प खोजना चाहिए।

एकल इस्तेमाल वाले प्लास्टिक पर रोक लगाने के लिए जन आंदोलन की जरूरत है

प्लास्टिक के कप, कटोरी, प्लेट, चम्मच, बर्तन आदि पर पूरी तरह से रोक लगाने की जरूरत है। प्लास्टिक प्रबंधन के लिए उचित नियम बनाए जाने चाहिए। कंपनियां जो प्लास्टिक के उत्पाद बनाती हैं उन्हें वापस लेने का उचित प्रबंध करना चाहिए। लोगों को प्लास्टिक के बदले जूट या कपड़े की थैली का इस्तेमाल करना चाहिए।

शिव द्विवेदी, बक्सर

गोरखपुर में भी बढ़ने लगा प्रदूषण

राजधानी दिल्ली में प्रदूषण बढ़ने के कारण हालत गंभीर होती जा रही है। इसी तरह गोरखपुर में भी प्रदूषण का स्तर बढ़ता जा रहा है। इससे लोगों की सेहत पर काफी बुरा असर पड़ रहा है। प्रदूषण के बढ़ते स्तर के कारण गोरखपुर भी दिल्ली के समान होता जा रहा है। आने वाले दिनों में पर्व-त्योहार मनाए जाएंगे। दशहरा, दीवाली, छठ पूजा, एकादशी व्रत आदि त्योहारों को ध्यान में रखते हुए गोरखपुर में प्रदूषण नियंत्रण का खास ख्याल रखने की जरूरत है। यहां कचरे का सही निपटान नहीं होने के कारण सड़क के किनारे कचरे का टीला दिखाई देने लगा है। इससे प्रदूषण बढ़ता जा रहा है और बीमारियां पैदा होने लगी हैं। इस समस्या को दूर करने के लिए नगरपालिका को जगह-जगह साफ सफाई एवं कचरा प्रबंधन पर ध्यान देना चाहिए। इसके अलावा मूर्ति विसर्जन नदी तालाबों में नहीं करना चाहिए। पटाखों की बिक्री पर भी नियंत्रण होना चाहिए क्योंकि इनसे वायु तथा ध्वनि प्रदूषण अधिक होता है। लोगों को प्रदूषण कम करने में सहयोग करना चाहिए।

राजू, गोरखपुर

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।

महंगाई की मार

अभी तक तो पेट्रोल और डीजल के दाम ही महंगाई बढ़ा रहे थे, लेकिन अब प्याज के दाम भी आमजन के आंसू निकाल रहे हैं। शायद ही कोई साल ऐसा गुजरता है जब दीपावली के महीने-डेढ़ पहले प्याज के दाम आसमान न छूने लगते हों। आमतौर पर पंद्रह से बीस रुपए किलो बिकने वाला प्याज अब अस्सी-नब्बे रुपए तक बिक रहा है। देश के ज्यादातर राज्यों में यही हालत है। यह चिंता और परेशानी की बात ज्यादा इसलिए है कि प्याज रोजमर्रा के इस्तेमाल की चीज है, लेकिन सरकारें बेफिक्र हैं। लग रहा है उन्हें प्याज के दाम बढ़ने से कोई मतलब नहीं है। हालत यह है कि इस बार प्याज के दाम पिछले चार साल में सबसे ज्यादा चढ़े हैं। सरकारें जानती हैं कि हर साल सितंबर-अक्तूबर में प्याज के दाम बढ़ते हैं, लेकिन एहतियात के तौर पर कोई कदम नहीं उठाए गए। वरना आज लोग जिस तरह से परेशान हो रहे हैं, वे नहीं होते। राजधानी दिल्ली में वर्ष 2015 के बाद का यह पहला मौका है जब प्याज के दाम सबसे ऊंचे स्तर पर हैं। एशिया की सबसे बड़ी प्याज मंडी लासलगांव (महाराष्ट्र) में भी प्याज साठ रुपए किलो बिक रहा है। नाशिक में यही भाव चल रहा है। इससे अंदाज लगाया जा सकता है कि देश के दूसरे हिस्सों में क्या हाल होगा।

प्याज महंगा होने के पीछे सबके अपने-अपने तर्क हैं। कारोबारी कह रहे हैं कि देश में प्याज का स्टॉक काफी कम है, जिसके कारण मंडियों में आवक कम हो रही है। ऐसे में खपत के मुकाबले अगर मंडियों में आवक कम होगी तो दाम बढ़ने स्वाभाविक हैं। मंडियों में प्याज नहीं पहुंच पाने की वजह यह है कि दक्षिण भारत के राज्यों में भारी बारिश के कारण बड़े पैमाने पर प्याज की फसल चौपट हो गई। नई फसल आने में अभी वक्त है। इससे भी संकट गहराया है। हालांकि यह चक्र हर साल का है। अक्तूबर-नवंबर में नई फसल आने से पहले प्याज का स्टॉक कम ही रहता है। ऐसे में इसका सबसे ज्यादा फायदा जमाखोर उठाते हैं। सरकारें भी इस बात को अच्छी तरह समझती हैं, लेकिन जमाखोरी और कालाबाजारी करने वालों के खिलाफ कोई कार्रवाई नहीं होती। हालांकि सरकारें प्याज का पर्याप्त भंडार होने का दावा करती रहती हैं, फिर भी बाजार में किल्लत बनी रहती है। सरकारी दुकानों और भंडारों से रियायती दामों पर प्याज बेचने की योजनाएं भी चलाई जाती हैं। पर यहां भी जमाखोर और कालाबाजारी करने वाले पीछा नहीं छोड़ते और सस्ता प्याज लेकर महंगा बेचने का खेल करते रहते हैं।

बाजार में प्याज की किल्लत न हो और रियायती दाम पर लोगों को प्याज मिले, इसके लिए राज्य सरकारें अपने-अपने स्तर पर प्रयास तो करती हैं, लेकिन प्याज गरीब की पहुंच से दूर ही है। भारत से कई देशों को प्याज का बड़े पैमाने पर निर्यात होता है। इसलिए पहला कदम यह उठाया गया है कि प्याज का निर्यात कम किया जाए और देश में पर्याप्त आपूर्ति बनाई रखी जाए। इस साल जून में भी जब प्याज के दाम में इजाफा हुआ था, तब सरकार ने निर्यात पर नियंत्रण के मकसद से प्याज निर्यात पर दी जाने वाली दस फीसद की सबसिडी वापस ले ली थी। निर्यात बढ़ने से प्याज का स्टाक कम हो जाता है और इसका असर घरेलू मांग पर पड़ता है। सवाल इस बात का है कि जब पता है कि एक खास मौसम में यह संकट होता है तो आपूर्ति सामान्य बनाए रखने के लिए क्यों नहीं पहले से तैयारी की जाती?

दोहरेपन की हद

हाल में पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री इम्रान खान ने आतंकवाद को शह देने में अपने यहां की कुछ एजेंसियों की भूमिका को जिस तरह खुलेआम दुनिया के सामने स्वीकार किया था और उसे गलत बताया था, उससे यह उम्मीद बंधी थी कि अब वे अपने देश के लिए नए रास्ते की खोज कर रहे हैं। लेकिन अफसोस की बात यह है कि यह खामखयाली कुछ दिन भी बनी नहीं रह सकी। कुछ समय पहले ही संयुक्त राष्ट्र सुरक्षा परिषद में हाफिज सईद को वैश्विक आतंकी घोषित किया गया था और उसी वजह से उस पर आर्थिक प्रतिबंध लगे थे। इसी से बने दबाव के बाद बीती जुलाई में पाकिस्तान सरकार ने भी हाफिज सईद को गिरफ्तार करके जेल में डाल दिया था और उसके सभी बैंक खातों पर पाबंदी लगा थी। लेकिन ऐसा कर-के तारीफ हासिल करने के अभी तीन महीने भी नहीं बीते हैं कि पाकिस्तान ने सुरक्षा परिषद में यह गुहार लगाई कि हाफिज सईद का परिवार संकट से जूझ रहा है, इसके मद्देनजर उसे खर्चे के लिए बैंक खाते को दोबारा इस्तेमाल करने की इजाजत दी जाए। अफसोस यह है कि सुरक्षा परिषद ने अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर आतंकवाद फैलाने में हाफिज सईद की भूमिका जगजाहिर होने के बावजूद पाकिस्तान की यह मांग मंजूर कर ली।

हो सकता है कि पाकिस्तान के अनुरोध को स्वीकार किए जाने का मुख्य कारण हाफिज सईद के परिवार की स्थिति और मानवाधिकारों से जुड़े तकाजे हों। लेकिन सवाल है कि अगर किसी को हाफिज सईद के परिवार की तकलीफों से सहानुभूति है तो अनिवार्य होने पर क्या वह उसके लिए अलग से मदद की व्यवस्था नहीं करा सकता था? जो व्यक्ति दुनिया भर में आतंक फैलाने का सूत्रधार हो और जिसे खुद संयुक्त राष्ट्र सुरक्षा परिषद ने वैश्विक आतंकवादी घोषित कर रखा हो, उसे बैंक खाते पैसे निकालने की इजाजत का औचित्य समझना मुश्किल है। महज करीब ढाई महीने पहले दुनिया के सामने हाफिज सईद को गिरफ्तार करके वाहवाही हासिल करने वाली पाकिस्तान सरकार के सामने आखिर वह कौनसी मजबूरी पैदा हो गई कि उसे उसी के लिए सुविधा की फरियाद करनी पड़ी? हाल में आतंकवाद के खिलाफ अपनी भूमिका को लेकर दुनिया को आश्वस्त करने के बाद पाकिस्तान सरकार के इस आधिकारिक रुख की आखिर क्या वजहें हो सकती हैं? गौरतलब है कि हाफिज सईद 2008 के मुंबई हमले का मुख्य आरोपी रहा है। 2006 में मुंबई में ट्रेन धमाकों और 2001 में संसद पर हमले में इसका हाथ माना जाता रहा है। करीब छह महीने पहले पाकिस्तान सरकार ने हाफिज के संगठनों जमात-उद-दावा और फलाह-ए-इंसानियत पर पाबंदी लगा दी थी।

दरअसल, ऐसा दोहरापन शायद पाकिस्तान के स्वभाव में घुल चुका है कि वह अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंचों पर कुछ और कहता है और जब उस पर अमल का सवाल आता है तो अक्सर उसके उलट बर्ताव करता है। पिछले कुछ दिनों के दौरान कश्मीर के मसले पर पाकिस्तान ने जिस तरह अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर भारत के खिलाफ प्रचार अभियान चलाया है, वह अपने आप में यह बताने के लिए काफी है कि भारत से संबंधों में सुधार की कोशिश करने के उसके दावे कितने खोखले हैं। यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है कि भारत को जिस पैमाने के आतंकवाद की समस्या से दो-चार होना पड़ा है, उसमें पाकिस्तान की भूमिका क्या रही है। इस तरह के तथ्य बार-बार सामने आते रहे हैं कि लश्कर-ए-तैयबा और जैश-ए-मोहम्मद जैसे आतंकी संगठन पाकिस्तान स्थित ठिकानों से भारत के खिलाफ अपनी गतिविधियां संचालित करते रहे हैं। ऐसी स्थिति में पाकिस्तान को यह साफ करने की जरूरत है कि वह आतंकवादियों के लिए अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंचों से मदद की गुहार लगा कर आतंकवाद के खिलाफ किस तरह की लड़ाई लड़ रहा है!

कल्पमेधा

न उधार दो, न उधार लो, क्योंकि उधार देने से अक्सर धन और मित्र, दोनों खो जाते हैं। उधार लेने से मितव्ययिता कुंठित हो जाती है।

– शेक्सपियर

हमले से उपजते संकट

विकेश कुमार बडोला

सउदी अरब के अरामको सहित अनेक तेल उत्खनन प्रतिष्ठानों की चार दशक पहले अमेरिकी सहयोग से जो प्रगति हुई और जिस आधार पर वैश्विक तेल व्यापार सबसे उन्नत हुआ, वह अमेरिका-सउदी अरब के लिए अति लाभकारी सिद्ध हुआ। रूस, चीन और ईरान को इससे बड़ा झटका लगा था। वैश्विक प्रतिबंधों के बाद भी ईरान का गुप्त परमाणु हथियार परीक्षण कार्यक्रम इसी घटना की प्रतिक्रिया है।

सउदी अरब की तेल कंपनी अरामको पर ड्रोन हमलों ने वैश्विक बाजार में पेट्रो पदार्थों के मूल्यों में भारी वृद्धि कर दी है। इराक के बाद भारत दूसरा देश है, जो सउदी अरब से सबसे ज्यादा अपना अस्सी फीसद तेल आयात करता है। रूस और अमेरिका भी सउदी अरब के दो बड़े तेल ग्राहक हैं। ऐसे में महत्त्वपूर्ण देशों को तेल की आपूर्ति रुक जाने से वैश्विक तेल बाजार में अस्थिरता, अर्थव्यवस्था में मंदी और अनेक दूसरे दुष्प्रभाव पड़ने शुरू हो सकते हैं। हालांकि अमेरिका ने सउदी अरब को भरोसा दिया है कि वह जल्द ही अरब से तेल की आपूर्ति के काम को सामान्य बनाने के लिए उसकी सहायता करेगा। सउदी अरब पर कच्चे, प्रसंस्करित और अन्य प्रकार के तेलों और पेट्रो उत्पादों पर निर्भर रहने वाले देशों के लिए अचानक यह एक प्रमुख चिंता बन चुकी है।

इस साल अप्रैल में अरामको ने दक्षिण कोरियाई तेल रिफाइनरी हुंडई ऑयल बैंक में तेरह फीसद की हिस्सेदारी अर्जित करने के लिए सवा अरब अमेरिकी डॉलर देकर एक अनुबंध पर हस्ताक्षर किए थे। इस दिशा में आगे बढ़ते हुए अरामको ने पालैंड की प्रमुख तेल रिफाइनरी पीकेएन ऑर्लेन के साथ उसे अरबी कच्चे तेल की आपूर्ति करने के एक अनुबंध पर हस्ताक्षर किए। इतना ही नहीं, अरामको तेल एवं प्राकृतिक गैस उत्पादन के नए-नए कीर्तिमान स्थापित करती रही है। इसी क्रम में वह अब विश्व के सबसे प्रमुख तरलीकृत प्राकृतिक गैस उत्पाद बनाने की योजना भी बना रही है। अरामको एलएनजी बाजार में छा जाने का अपना लक्ष्य हासिल करने के लिए क्षमतावान संयुक्त उद्यमों और साझीदारों की खोज में है। संभवतः यही कारण थे, जो अरब केंद्रित और ईरान-यमन-जॉर्डन आधारित तेल एवं प्राकृतिक गैस उत्पादों के मध्य गलकाट प्रतिस्पर्धा बढ़ाने के प्रमुख कारक रहे हैं।

तुलनात्मक दृष्टि से देखें तो सउदी अरब अरामको जैसे उत्कृष्ट तेल उत्खनन प्रतिष्ठान के नेतृत्व में तेल एवं प्राकृतिक गैस के कारोबार में एकाधिकार की स्थिति में आ चुका है। लेकिन ईरान में सरकार के समानांतर जो असंतुष्ट, विद्रोही और अराजक धनसंपन्न सत्ता-वर्ग पिछले पांच-छह दशकों में तैयार हुआ। वह ईरानी सरकार के गुप्त संरक्षण में ईरान के लिए चुनौती बने सउदी अरब के तेल प्रतिष्ठानों को हानि पहुंचाने का जोखिम उठाने लगा है। इसका ताजा उदाहरण है अरामको पर हुआ ड्रोन हमला है। एक प्रकार से यह ईरान की सउदी अरब और अमेरिकी कारोबारी मित्रता से चिढ़-कुढ़ कर किया गया सामरिक प्रतिवाद है। इसे सउदी अरब और अमेरिका आसानी से भुला नहीं पाएंगे। हालांकि दोनों देशों का पहला दायित्व विश्व के देशों को सउदी अरब से होने वाली तेल की आपूर्ति को पूर्ववत स्थिति में लाना है, लेकिन ईरान और उसके सहयोगी इस्लामी देशों के संरक्षण में तेल प्रतिष्ठान पर ड्रोन से धावा करने वालों के प्रति अमेरिका शांत नहीं बैठेगा। सउदी अरब भी यही चाहेगा कि उसके विरोध में मध्य-पूर्वी एशियाई देशों से उठने वाली विद्रोही लहर को येन-केन-प्रकारेण थाम लिया जाए।

अरामको जिसका आधिकारिक नाम साउबी अरबियन ऑयल कंपनी है और जो पहले (अरबियन-अमेरिकन ऑयल कंपनी) के रूप में नामांकित हो चुकी है, वह सउदी अरब की राष्ट्रीय पेट्रोलियम एवं प्राकृतिक गैस कंपनी है। यह देहरान, सउदी अरब में स्थित है। पिछले साल इसका कुल राजस्व 355.9 अरब अमेरिकी डॉलर रहा था और कुल आय 111.1 अरब अमेरिकी डॉलर थी। कंपनी का सौ फीसद स्वामित्व सरकार के पास है। इसमें बासठ हजार से ज्यादा कर्मचारी हैं। यह दुनिया की सबसे ज्यादा मुनाफा कमाने वाली तेल कंपनी है। अरामको विश्व के एकमात्र दीर्घ हाइड्रोकॉर्बन नेटवर्क का संचालन करती है। कंपनी सउदी अरब में सौ से ज्यादा तेल एवं गैस क्षेत्रों का प्रबंधन करती है, इनमें विश्व का सबसे बड़ा तटवर्ती तेल क्षेत्र घावर फील्ड और विश्व का सबसे बड़ा अपतटीय तेल क्षेत्र सफानिया फील्ड भी शामिल है।

सउदी अरब के अरामको सहित अनेक तेल उत्खनन प्रतिष्ठानों की चार दशक पहले अमेरिकी सहयोग से जो प्रगति हुई और जिस आधार पर वैश्विक तेल व्यापार सबसे उन्नत हुआ, वह अमेरिका-सउदी अरब के लिए अति लाभकारी सिद्ध हुआ। रूस, चीन और ईरान को इससे बड़ा झटका लगा था। वैश्विक प्रतिबंधों के बाद भी ईरान का गुप्त परमाणु हथियार परीक्षण कार्यक्रम इसी घटना की प्रतिक्रिया है। भले रूस के राष्ट्रपति ब्लादिमीर पुतिन अरामको तेल उत्खनन प्रतिष्ठान पर हुए ड्रोन हमले के लिए ईरान को निर्दोष बता रहे हैं और अमेरिकी विदेशी मंत्री माइक पोम्पियो हमले का दोषारोपण ईरान पर किए जाने को अप्रामाणिक बता रहे हों, पर इस संदर्भ में भारत का आत्ममंथन यदि स्वतंत्र होगा तो उससे पूर्णतः यही सिद्ध होगा कि सउदी अरब द्वारा तेल एवं प्राकृतिक गैस के क्षेत्र में की गई प्रगति पर ईरान जैसे मुसलिम देशों की दृष्टि अनुकूल तो कम से कम नहीं ही है।

सउदी अरब और ईरान मूलतः मुसलिम देश होकर भी शिया और सुन्नी में विभाजित हैं। इसी आधार पर उनके सामाजिक और व्यापारिक मतभेद पनपते रहे हैं। रूस, ईरान के पक्ष में इसलिए बोल रहा है क्योंकि उसकी सामरिक और वैज्ञानिक प्रगति के उत्पाद खरीदने के लिए ईरान और उसके पिछलग्गू मुसलिम देश भी बड़े ग्राहक हैं। फिर रूस मध्य-पूर्वी मुसलिम देशों के बल पर अपनी वैश्विक कूटनीति का प्रसार करने का परंपरागत अवसर भी नहीं चूकना चाहता। यह भी हो सकता है कि विश्व के विकसित देशों के गुटतंत्र में उपेक्षित छूट जाने के अपमान का बदला रूस ने ईरान, अफगानिस्तान, पाकिस्तान और चीन की उन नीतियों का समर्थन करके किया है जो उसके संज्ञान में उसके मित्र राष्ट्र भारत सहित कई दक्षिण एशियाई राष्ट्रों के लिए आत्मघाती हैं। उसे चूंकि विश्व के शक्तिशाली राष्ट्र के रूप में जैसे-तैसे अपनी पहचान बनाए रखनी है, इसलिए अब अरामको पर हमले के संदर्भ में ईरान की प्रत्यक्ष-अप्रत्यक्ष अथवा चाही-अनचाही हर प्रकार की भूमिका पर वह परदा डालना चाहता है।

ईरान के समर्थन में खड़े यमन के हूती विद्रोही अरब केंद्रित मुसलिमों से शिया-सुन्नी आधार पर धार्मिक मतभेद रखते आए हैं। सउदी अरब की उन्नति उनकी दृष्टि में हमेशा खटकती रही है। वे अरब को सदैव कोई न कोई हानि पहुंचाने का प्रयास करते रहे हैं। पिछले महीने ही ओमान की खाड़ी में तेल के दो टैंकरों को विस्फोट कर उड़ाया गया था। जांच और प्रमाण के बाद यही सिद्ध हुआ कि ईरान के गुप्त संकेत पर यमन के हूती विद्रोहियों और समुद्री लुटेरों ने विस्फोट किया। हालांकि अपने आरक्यू-4 ग्लोबल हॉक सर्विलांस ड्रोन की सहायता से अमेरिका ने विस्फोट के बाद घटनास्थल की सघन जांच करनी चाही, परंतु ईरान ने अमेरिकी ड्रोन हवा में ही नष्ट कर दिए थे। तब से ईरान और अमेरिका के बीच कटुता पहले से ज्यादा बढ़ गई है।

ईरान पर अमेरिकी प्रतिबंध लगा हुआ है। अमेरिकी आदेश के अनुसार वह भारत सहित कई देशों को अपने तेल की आपूर्ति नहीं कर सकता। इससे उसका व्यापार प्रभावित हो रहा है। परमाणु संधि के संबंध में अमेरिका, ईरान से पहले ही खफा है। किसी तरह ट्रंप ईरान से परमाणु संधि पर बात करने को राजी हुए थे, परंतु अरामको पर दो दिन पहले हुए ड्रोन हमले अब संधि पर चर्चा का दरवाजा बंद कर चुके हैं। हमले के बाद अरामको से तेल आपूर्ति ठप हो चुकी है। ऐसे में अंतरराष्ट्रीय बाजार में तेल मूल्यों में वृद्धि होना स्वाभाविक है। इसका दुष्प्रभाव भारत पर भी अवश्य पड़ेगा। ईरान से पहले ही तेल की आपूर्ति बंद है। ऐसे में अरामको संयंत्र पर हमला नई वैश्विक ऊर्जा समस्या उत्पन्न कर चुका है।

पर्यावरण के हक में

दुनिया मेरे आगे

राकेश सोहम्

एक साहित्यिक विमर्श के दौरान इस बात पर चर्चा हुई कि सड़क के किनारे पन्नी खाती गाय को देख कर ख्यात व्यंग्यकार हरिशंकर परसाई ने उसे अपने व्यंग्य में उकेरा है। वह स्थिति आज भी उतनी ही गंभीर बनी हुई है। पन्नियां घटी नहीं, बल्कि बढ़ती ही गईं और आए दिन शहरों में न जाने कितनी ही गायें पन्नियों को खाकर बीमार होती हैं या फिर मर जाती है। आज इसके खिलाफ की जाने वाली तमाम बातों के बावजूद हालत में कितना बदलाव आया है। मेरे दिवंगत पिता पशु चिकित्सक थे। मुझे याद है कि उन्होंने कितनी ही गायों का ऑपरेशन करके पेट से पन्नियों का ढेर निकाले जाने की चर्चा की थी। आश्चर्य है कि गाय को लेकर आम लोग कई बार हमलावर होने की हद तक संवेदनशील होते हैं, लेकिन पन्नी खाकर उनके मरने को लेकर उन्हें कोई फिक्र नहीं होती। अधिकतर लोग बाजार से खरीदारी करने के बाद सामान के लिए पन्नियों का ही उपयोग करते हैं। हर रोज शाम को हाथ हिलाते हुए बिचरने जाते हैं और लौटते वक्त दोनों हाथों की पांचों अंगुलियों में सब्जियों से भरी पन्नियों की थैलियां घर लाते हैं।

हमारी परंपरा में चीजों के बारंबार उपयोग में विश्वास है। अक्सर 'यूज एंड थ्रो' यानी 'इस्तेमाल करो और फेंक दो' वाली चीजों का भी हम बार-बार उपयोग करने से नहीं चूकते हैं। प्लास्टिक की थैलियां, बोतलें और डिब्बे अधिकतर घरों में बार-बार धोकर उपयोग में लाए जाते हैं। देश में पॉलिथीन की थैलियों का प्रयोग बढ़ता ही जा रहा है। थोड़ी-सी सुविधा के चलते लोग कपड़े से बने थैलों की अपेक्षा पॉलिथीन की थैलियों को ज्यादा उपयोगी समझ रहे हैं और धड़ल्ले से इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं। पूरे विश्व में प्रति मिनट कितना प्लास्टिक कचरा इकट्ठा होता है, इसकी कल्पना भी नहीं की जा सकती। यह तकनीकी जानकारी भी देना उचित नहीं लगता कि कितने माइक्रोन की पॉलिथीन का उपयोग करना चाहिए। दरअसल, उपयोगकर्ता चाहे कितना ही पढ़ा-लिखा क्यों न हो, इतनी निपुणता नहीं रखता कि वह नियत माइक्रोन की पॉलिथीन की बनी थैलियों को चुनाव कर सके। इसलिए प्लास्टिक को पूरी तरह 'न' कहा जाए, इस बात पर जोर दिया जाना ज्यादा जरूरी है। अब इसके व्यापक नुकसानों और पर्यावरण पर घातक असर को देखते हुए राजनीतिकों की ओर से भी इस पर पाबंदी की बातें की जाने लगी हैं, लेकिन सच यह है कि पर्यावरणविद लंबे समय से इस बारे में देश और समाज को चेतावनी देते रहे हैं। अगर वक्त रहते देश के राजनीतिक वर्ग और समाज ने इसके प्रति कोई ठोस संकल्प नहीं लिया, तो आने वाले वक्त में इसका भयावह खमियाजा उठाना पड़ सकता है।

कुछ समय पहले एक खबर आई थी कि कचरे के ढेर से अपनी भूख मिटाती गायें अचानक बीमार पड़ गईं। खाना-पीना बंद कर दिया था, उनके पेट बुरी तरह फूल गए थे और फिर कई गायों की तड़प-तड़प कर मौत हो गई थी। गायों का जब पोस्टमार्टम किया गया तो पता चला कि उनकी आहार नलिका पॉलिथीन की थैलियों से बुरी तरह अवरुद्ध हो गई थी। ऑपरेशन से जो थैलियों का कचरा आंत से निकाला गया, उनमें से अधिकतर थैलियों में घरों से फेंका गया अतिरिक्त खाना अब भी सुरक्षित था। ऐसा केवल इसलिए हुआ कि लोग घर लाई गई पॉलिथीन की थैलियों को फेंकने के पहले उनमें घर की अतिरिक्त खाद्य सामग्री, फलों या सब्जियों के छिलके आदि को भर कर रख देते हैं। फिर इसको पोटलीनुमा बना कर फेंक देते हैं। कचरे के ढेर से अपनी भूख मिटाते जानवर इन पोटलियों को साबुत निकल जाते हैं।

भारत तीज-त्योहार और उत्सवों का देश है। जगह-जगह मंदिर निर्मित किए गए हैं। इनमें पूजन प्रसाद का वितरण प्लास्टिक की थैलियों, कटोरिया और ग्लासों में किया जाता है। भक्त और दर्शनार्थी इस प्रसाद को श्रद्धापूर्वक ले तो लेते हैं, लेकिन प्रसाद को खाने के बाद लापरवाही से सड़क पर फेंक देते हैं। इनमें बचा हुआ प्रसाद जानवरों को आकर्षित करता है और वे उसे निगल लेते हैं। कमोबेश सभी पर्यटन स्थलों की स्थिति भी ठीक नहीं है। मैं पांच साल मुंबई में पदस्थ था। एक सपना लेकर गया था कि गेटवे ऑफ इंडिया से खूबसूरत नीले समुद्र को निहारूंगा। लेकिन वहां की हालत देख कर सारे सपने टूट गए। मुंबई के अधिकतर समुद्र तट पानी की खाली प्लास्टिक के बोतलों से अटे पड़े थे। ज्यादातर पर्यटक लापरवाही से खाली बोतलें समुद्र में उछाल देते हैं।

मुझे किसी फिल्म का एक वीभत्स दृश्य याद आता है, जिसमें एक व्यक्ति दूसरे व्यक्ति के सिर पर पॉलिथीन की थैली इस तरह पहना देता है कि उसकी सांस अवरुद्ध हो जाती है। उखड़ती सांसों के साथ फूलती-पिचकती पॉलिथीन देख कर जी दहल जाता है। तो क्या हम मनुष्यों का जीवन भी इसी तरह प्लास्टिक की पन्नियों के अंधाधुंध प्रयोग से अवरुद्ध हो जाएगा? क्या अब चेतने का समय नहीं आ गया है?

नई पीढ़ी का दम

आज पूरी दुनिया में ग्रेटा थनबर्ग की चर्चा है, जिसने जलवायु परिवर्तन पर संयुक्त राष्ट्र के कार्यक्रम में वैश्विक नेताओं पर ग्रीन हाउस गैसों के उत्सर्जन से निपटने में नाकाम रहने और अपनी पीढ़ी से विश्वाघात करने का आरोप लगाया। थनबर्ग ने जोर देकर कहा कि जब विश्व गंभीर पर्यावरण संकट से गुजर रहा है और दुनिया के नेता पैसे के बारे में और आर्थिक विकास की काल्पनिक कथाओं के बारे में बात कर रहे हैं। उसने वैश्विक नेताओं से पूछा- ऐसा करने की आपकी हिम्मत कैसे हुई? इस सवाल पर सभी निरुत्तर थे। इस सोलह वर्षीय लड़की का गुस्सा इसलिए भी फूटा क्योंकि ट्रंप ने जलवायु सम्मेलन के बजाय एक धार्मिक कार्यक्रम में शामिल होने की प्राथमिकता दी थी। यह वाकई प्रतिरोध का विषय है। भारत में भी युवा मन और युवा शक्ति चाहे तो देश की बिगड़ी हुई तस्वीर-तकदीर बदल सकती है, उसे संवार सकती है, लेकिन ऐसा कम हो रहा है। शायद इसलिए भारत बीते सत्तर बरसों से विकासशील है। आज का युवा देश की आवाज है, लेकिन बेरोजगारी के कारण राजनीतिक पार्टियां अपने निजी फायदे लिए उन्हें गुमराह कर रही हैं। सच्चे राजनीतिक लोगों की जगह सत्ता और धनलोलुप लोगो ने ले ली है। नौजवानों को चाहिए कि वह अपनी सोच को नई दिशा दें। हर नई शुरुआत का आगाज नए खून से ही होता है। हम केवल इसलिए पिछड़ रहे हैं, क्योंकि हमने अपने जोश का सकारात्मक उपयोग नहीं किया है। निराश, हताश, असमंजस में खड़ा युवा कैसे विकास पथ पर बढ़े, देश को बढ़ाए, हमें इस पर गहराई से मंथन करना होगा।

● *संतोष कुमार, बेगूसराय*

गलत फैसला

ब्रिटिश सुप्रीम कोर्ट के आदेश से प्रधानमंत्री बोरिस जॉनसन की कलई खुल गई है। अब वे न घर के रहे, न घाट के। अपनी राष्ट्रवादी राजनीति से उन्होंने महारानी एलिजाबेथ को भी कलंकित कर दिया है। एक अनपढ़ बच्चा भी यही कहेगा कि पांच हफ्तों के लिए संसद को स्थगित कराना, ब्रेग्जिट के मुद्दे पर मुश्किल बहसों से खुद को बचाना ही था। अब प्रश्न उठता है कि क्या ब्रिटेन इस समय संवैधानिक संकट में फंस गया है? लेकिन ऐसा नहीं है, क्योंकि वहां लिखित संविधान ही नहीं है। इसलिए वह प्रधानमंत्री के गैरकानूनी कदम का दर्द झेल रहा है। जिन बावन फीसद अंग्रेजों ने ब्रेग्जिट की रायशुमारी में यूरोपियन यूनियन से अलग होने की हामी भरी थी, उन्हें अपने फैसले पर पछतावा हो रहा होगा। अब तीन रास्ते दिख रहे हैं। यूरोपियन संघ से और मोहलत मांग कर फिर से रायशुमारी कराई जाए या देश को मध्यावधि चुनाव में धकेला जाए।

● *भूपेंद्र सिंह रंगा, पानीपत*

बदहाल बैंक

पंजाब एंड महाराष्ट्र कोऑपरेटिव (पीएमसी) बैंक के कामकाज पर पाबंदी लगा दी गई है। ग्राहकों का पैसा बैंक में फंस गया है। अभी कोई भी ग्राहक छह महीने में सिर्फ दस हजार रुपए ही निकाल पाएगा। यह वाकई गंभी संकट की स्थिति है। इस घटना ने लोगों को एक बार फिर से नोटबंदी के दिनों की याद दिला दी। घोटाले में फंसे पीएमसी बैंक की घटना हमारे बैंकिंग तंत्र की कलई खोलती है। लोगों के पैसे पर ताला लगा कर रिजर्व बैंक ने जो कदम उठाया है उससे तो लोगों का बैंकों पर से विश्वास उठ गया है। अब लोग बैंकों में अपने पैसे रखने में असुरक्षित महसूस कर रहे हैं। इस श्रेणी में सरकारी, अर्धसरकारी सभी बैंक निशाने पर हैं। ऐसे फैसले भी देश की अर्थव्यवस्था व्यवस्था को मंदी की ओर ले धकेलने वाले साबित हुए हैं। जनता भले ही कुछ न कह रही हो, मगर वह अपने आप को ठगा महसूस कर रही है।

● *मोहम्मद आसिफ, जामिया नगर दिल्ली*

बेलगाम मंच

सोशल मीडिया का दुरुपयोग आज गंभीर संकट बन गया है। इस समस्या को देखते हुए सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने सोशल मीडिया पर लगाम कसने की जरूरत बताई है। शीर्ष अदालत ने सोशल मीडिया के बढ़ते दुरुपयोग को रोकने के लिए केंद्र सरकार से कहा है कि वह इस समस्या से निपटने के लिए तत्काल दिशानिर्देश तैयार करे। अदालत ने यह भी कहा है कि सोशल मीडिया पर संदेश सामग्री उपलब्ध करवाने वाले का पता लगाना एक गंभीर मुद्दा है। आजकल शहरों, प्रदेशों और देश में अफवाहें और झूठी खबरें फैलाने में सोशल मीडिया का ही सबसे ज्यादा इस्तेमाल हो रहा है। इस माध्यम से लोगों को निजी रूप से हानि भी पहुंचाई जा रही है। किसी को गाली दे देना धमकी देना या अभद्र शब्द का प्रयोग करना आम बात हो गई है। भीड़ हिंसा के मामले भी सोशल मीडिया के दुरुपयोग से बढ़े हैं। समाज के एक वर्ग को दूसरे वर्ग से लड़ाने का काम किया जा रहा है। फेक न्यूज भी इसी के जरिए फैलाई जाती है। अगर वाकई में सोशल मीडिया के दुरुपयोग के खिलाफ ठोस कदम नहीं उठाया गया तो देश में हिंसक घटनाएं तेजी से बढ़ने लगेंगी।

● *राजू, गोरखपुर*

संकट का तापमान

न्यूयार्क में जलवायु संकट पर संयुक्त राष्ट्र शिखर सम्मेलन से पहले वैज्ञानिकों ने चेतावनी दी है कि पृथ्वी का तापमान तेजी से बढ़ रहा है। विश्व मौसम विज्ञान संगठन (डब्ल्यूएमओ) की एक रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि पिछले पांच साल अब तक के इतिहास में दर्ज सबसे गर्म साल रहे हैं। कार्बन डाइऑक्साइड के उत्सर्जन में भारी बढ़ोतरी होने से समुद्री जलस्तर बढ़ रहा है। डब्ल्यूएमओ ने आगाह किया है कि कार्बन उत्सर्जन रोकने के लिए तत्काल प्रयास किए जाने की जरूरत है। संस्था की रिपोर्ट में बढ़ती गर्मी के प्रभावों और कारणों पर हाल के वर्षों में नवीनतम जानकारियों का एक संकलन पेश किया गया है। मानवजनित कारणों से भी धरती का तापमान बढ़ रहा है जिससे गर्मी, लू और जंगलों में आग जैसी घटनाएं बढ़ रही हैं। अगर हम जलवायु परिवर्तन पर अब भी ध्यान नहीं देंगे और पेरिस समझौते में निर्धारित लक्ष्यों को हासिल नहीं करते तो यह भविष्य के लिए और भी खतरनाक होगा। धरती का तापमान औद्योगिक क्रांति के वक्त के स्तर से दो डिग्री सेल्सियस से अधिक न बढ़े, इसके लिए प्रयासों में तीन गुना तेजी लाने की आवश्यकता है।

● *निवेदिता मलिक, मोदीनगर*

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