Separation of responsibilities

The compulsory retirement of over 60 tax officers suggests a deeper problem and requires a structural solution

RAISINA HILL

A K BHATTACHARYA

Last Friday, the government retired 15 senior tax officials from service. The number of senior tax officials, compulsorily retired in this manner, has now crossed 60. The decision on compulsory retirement has been taken under the provisions of Fundamental Rule (FR) 56-J that regulates the service conditions of government officers belonging to Group A, B and C.

What does FR 56-J say? It empowers the government to compulsorily retire any government servant after either giving three months' notice or paying her three months of pay and allowances, subject to three conditions. One, a decision on compulsory retirement can be taken if the government is of the opinion that it is in public interest. Two, if the officer belongs to Group A or B service, then she can be retired after she attains the age of 50 years, provided she entered service before attaining the age of 35 years. And three, the compulsory retirement for all other groups of services can be ordered only after the government servant attains the age of 55 years.

Note that the provisions under FR 56-J have been part of the government's service rules for several decades, but it has been used quite frequently only now. Indeed, a quick search of all the circulars issued by the department of personnel and training on premature retirement shows that from 1989 to 2014 — almost 25 years — the government did not consider it necessary to issue any notification to clarify the provisions under FR 56-J. There are about a dozen circulars issued between 1969 and 1989 to clarify the implications of a few Supreme Court judgments on the applicability of this provision. But since 2014, the government has issued as many as nine clarificatory circulars.

Equally important to note here is that the circular in 2014 was issued in March, a couple of months before Narendra Modi was sworn in as prime minister in May that year. The March 2014 circular is very significant also because it explained the two specific situations under which decisions on compulsory retirement could be taken. This circular stated that a review of the performance of the officers concerned should be undertaken at least six months before she attains the age of 50 or 55 years. It also reiterated that the government could compulsorily retire those officers under FR 56-J, whose integrity was doubtful or whose fitness or competence had not been up to the mark.

In the last five years, the Modi government has issued many circulars to set up committees and review the manner in which recommendations for compulsory retirement of officers could be implemented. However, action on the ground has been seen only in the last few months and so far this has been largely limited to the income-tax department of the Union finance ministry. It would, therefore, appear that the drive on compulsory retirement is essentially aimed at addressing the general concerns over complaints of harassment by dishonest tax officials. This does not seem to be part of an overall policy decision to get rid of all those officials in different departments of the government, whose fitness or integrity is a question mark.

A more relevant issue with regard to retiring tax officials is that the measure to clean up the taxation department cannot achieve the desired goals with just compulsory retirements. Compulsory retirement of tax officials with integrity issues would only address some of the immediate concerns. What about the systemic issues that create incentives for a tax official to become dishonest and harass a tax payer?

It is time the government embarked on a more comprehensive strategy to make the tax department friendlier. Increasing the digital interface is certainly one of the ways. But a more fundamental and effective measure would be to create a Chinese wall between those officers who undertake investigations and those who are responsible for tax collections. The investigation wing of the tax department should function on its own and not be subservient to the revenue collection goals of the government.

The current separation of responsibilities clearly has not yielded the desired results. If more than 60 commissioner-level tax officials were compulsorily retired in the span of a few months, surely the malaise is far deeper and requires a more fundamental organisational restructuring of the revenue department. Perhaps, the investigation wing should be taken out of the revenue department and made part of another department in the finance ministry.

How much, Mr Das: Rate cut of 40 or 25 bps?

Not inflation but the slowing growth in Asia's third largest economy, which wants to get into the $5 trillion club by 2025, is the primary concern of the RBI

BANKER'S TRUST

TAMAL BANDYOPADHYAY

The Indian central bank will surely cut the growth projection for the year and pare the policy rate yet again at the next bimonthly meeting of its monetary policy committee (MPC) that ends on October 4.

Since February, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reduced its policy rate by 110 basis points (bps) in four successive meetings of its policy making body, including a rather unconventional 35 bps, bringing it down to 5.4 per cent, its nine-year low. One bps is a hundredth of a percentage point.

As far as growth is concerned, at the August MPC meeting, the real GDP growth estimate for 2019-20 was pared from 7 per cent in June to 6.9 per cent. For the first half of the current fiscal, the projection has been in the range of 5.8-6.6 per cent and, for the second half, 7.3-7.5 per cent — with risks somewhat tilted towards the downside.

With the June quarter GDP growth dropping to a six-year low of 5 per cent, the RBI is left with very little choice but to revise its growth estimate downwards, once again. The question is by how much? Not many analysts are willing to bet even on a 6.25 per cent growth for the current year but the central bank probably will not be that bearish, particularly against the backdrop of the aggressive government actions to improve the investment climate and encourage consumption. We can expect the RBI to bring down its projection for the year to 6.5 per cent. It can also play safe and give a range of 6.4-6.6 per cent.

At this point, not inflation but the slowing growth in Asia's third largest economy, which wants to get into the $5 trillion club by 2025, is the primary concern of the RBI. This is why even though with every successive policy rate cut the marginal utility of the cut comes down, it may cut the rate again. Here too, the question is: How much? It could be 25 bps. Or, to complement the previous 35 bps rate cut, it could be a 40 bps cut to bring the policy rate down to 5 per cent. Why not 15 bps? That will be too small a dose and won't cut much ice with the market.

The MPC, at this juncture, is faced with a Hobson's choice: If it goes for a mild cut (15 bps), the market will shrug it off and, if there is a deep cut, it may create an impression that the RBI is done with the rate cut cycle. It needs to frontload the cut and, at the same time, dangle the carrot of at least one more cut in the near future. It could be between a 25 bps and 40 bps cut. My bias is towards 40 bps. The overnight indexed swap market is indicating an approximately 65 bps rate cut in India, bringing it down to 4.75 per cent, in phases.

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RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has recently said future rate cuts would depend on the incoming data with a caveat that India cannot have low interest rates like in the advanced economies. In the past few weeks, the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank, and the central banks of China, Indonesia and Philippines have cut rates. The Bank of England has maintained status quo and may continue to do so till the final Brexit outcome. Other three central banks to keep the rates unchanged are the Bank of Thailand, the Bank of Japan and the Swiss National Bank (maintaining a negative rate of -0.75 per cent). The only hawk in the dule of doves is Norway's central bank which has recently raised interest rates for the fourth time in the past year by 25 bps to 1.5 per cent.

For the record, India's retail inflation marginally rose to 3.2 per cent year-on-year in August from 3.15 per cent in July but continues to remain below the MPC's target (4 per cent with a band of plus/minus 2 per cent). While the food price inflation inched up to 3 per cent from 2.4 per cent in July, the so-called core inflation or non-food, non-fuel manufacturing inflation moderated to 4.2 per cent from 4.5 per cent in July. In August, the RBI projected retail inflation at 3.1 per cent for the second quarter and 3.5-3.7 per cent for the second half of 2020. There does not seem to be any major threat to this projection.

Monetary transmission

Till the August policy announcement when the RBI cut the rate by 35 bps, the transmission of the policy rate cut was a little over one-third — 29 bps against 75 bps rate cut since February. It seems to have improved marginally. We will see further improvement in monetary transmission with the banks being forced to link their floating rate retail and personal loans and loans given to micro and small enterprises to an external benchmark. The State Bank of India has already announced linking them to the repo rate (the policy rate at which RBI gives money to the banks) and others are likely to follow suit.

This is perplexing as banks are allowed to borrow just 25 bps of their net demand and time liabilities, a loose proxy for deposits, from the RBI's repo window at 5.4 per cent, offering government bonds as collateral. They can borrow more from the variable repo window (where the rate is higher — between 5.41 per cent and 5.64 per cent) but the access is capped at 75 bps for the industry. Essentially, not even 1 per cent of the banks' liabilities is linked to the repo rate.

How are they linking their loans to this external benchmark?

They can borrow from term repo windows where money is given for 14 days, twice a week, and at times even for a longer duration but the term repo market is still nascent. Banks can use different benchmarks for different loan products and, once fixed, the spread over the external benchmark cannot be changed for three years. It will be interesting to see how the new regime pans out. Incidentally, most large banks' average cost of deposit is less than the repo rate and large private banks enjoy as much as a 3.5-4.5 per cent net interest margin.

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CHINESE WHISPERS

Image conscious

Social media has become an integral part of our politicians' public relations exercise. Not only the leaders of the parties but even officials are getting increasingly conscious of the image they project on social media platforms. However, it seems the Uttar Pradesh administration has taken it a notch higher. In the last two and a half years of the current regime, as many as two agencies have come and gone with none able to meet the demanding requirement of the government. Sources said talks were on to replace the current (third one) agency with another one soon. However, four different agencies managing the social media footprint of an administration in less than three years make them vulnerable to goof-ups.

Head-on clash

The Jhabua assembly byelection in Madhya Pradesh has become a prestige issue for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress. In this crucial election, candidates fighting for other parties are not relevant ... or so it seems. It is being touted as a head-on contest between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Kamal Nath (*pictured*). In its campaign, the BJP is focusing on issues like the reading down of Article 370, the surgical strike on alleged terrorist bases in Pakistan earlier this year, and the international stature of Modi. On the other hand, the Congress, the ruling party in the state, is holding up the performance of the state government. The Congress announced five-time MP Kantilal Bhuria as its candidate on Thursday. With 114 MLAs, the party is two short of a majority. If it wins the bypoll from the seat held earlier by the BJP, its count will move closer to the majority mark. The BJP won the seat in 2018 but the seat fell vacant after MLA G S Damor was elected to the Lok Sabha.

Who's the most popular?

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and his predecessor Akhilesh Yadav have often run into spats over a gamut of topics, be it taking credit for development projects in the state or berating each other's regime as anarchic. However, the rout in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and flight of senior party leaders to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party have gradually taken the wind out of the Samajwadi Party's (SP's) sails. Nonetheless, micro-blogging site Twitter has provided some ammunition to the SP cadres, who are claiming an upper hand over Adityanath. The former chief minister's followers on Twitter have hit the figure of 10 million when compared to nearly 5.3 million of Adityanath's followers. Ever since, the SP cadres have been pro-actively calling Yadav "doubly popular" than Adityanath on the social media.

INSIGHT

Taking tourism to greater heights

The decision of the GST Council to slash tax on room rates for hotels across price-points is a sign of better things to come

ADITYA GHOSH

We are in the middle of a social revolution in many ways. Whether it is in hospitality, aviation, consumer technology or even space missions, affordability and access are the key to success. I have always maintained that low cost does not mean low quality.

It is not always critical to create a completely new business but more important is that we approach the same old legacy business in a completely different way with the objective of making the product or service more consistent, affordable and accessible to millions of consumers. The hospitality business is not new in India. It has been around for hundreds of years. And for the most part, it has operated in a more or less fixed manner for guests and operators alike.

With changes in technology and the arrival of the "dare to dream" generation, we have been able to make a lot of progress in the way many products and services, including traditional hospitality, are being conceived and delivered. I truly believe that technology needs to be used to solve fundamentally hard problems. And in India we have many — whether it is education or nutrition or travel or accommodation, these are fundamentally hard problems to solve in our country.

It is heartening to see how regulatory changes have been keeping pace to benefit consumers, who are at the heart of the industry. Right from the implementation of the goods and services tax (GST) in 2017 to the changes introduced for the hospitality sector more recently, we are seeing a promising trend. Today, hospitality and tourism are one of the biggest job creators and India is the seventh biggest tourism and travel economy in the world, poised to add 10 million jobs in this sector alone by 2028, taking the overall tally to 53 million jobs. With the Prime Minister's recent call to all Indians to travel to at least 15 tourist destinations within the country by 2022, there is huge promise in the days and years ahead for sustainable and inclusive growth of tourism in India.

In this light, the decision of the GST Council to slash tax on room rates for hotels across price-points is welcome and a sign of better things to come. I will let the numbers do the talking. Consider this: For hotels with tariffs above ₹7,500, a GST reduction to 18 per cent instead of the existing 28 per cent will mean an opportunity to not only increase seasonal and off-season occupancies but also make staying in India a competitive proposition even for foreign tourists.

The immediate term impact of this rate cut would be a rationalisation of tariffs, particularly in the upper-upscale and luxury segments as hotels adjust to lower rates, potentially stimulating higher demand and consequently occupancies. This, to a limited extent, will also narrow the GST rate differential between India and its neighbouring countries (which are at GST rates of 7-8 per cent) potentially drawing back large meeting, incentives, conference and exhibition (MICE) traffic that India was losing out on.

For hotels with tariffs between ₹1,001 and ₹7,500, the reduction in GST to 12 per cent means more room for growth of operators and customers in the midsegment. Today, the Indian middle class accounts for 19 per cent of our population and is predicted to rise to 70 per cent in the next three decades.

Further, the decision to waive GST for hotels with tariffs of less than ₹1,000 will bring about the same changes to hotels and accommodation options such as homestays and serviced apartments, as we have seen in the aviation and the telecom sectors over the past two decades, if we are able to guarantee predictable, quality hotel experiences at affordable prices. As the cost of access drops, the propensity to use the product or service is bound to increase exponentially.

It may be too early to predict but this step may also encourage more activity in the space of building new hotels and spaces in all categories. While streamlining guidelines across states as well as the adoption of enhanced digitisation in the hospitality industry are measures that can further help the sector, the GST changes are a step in the right direction. I have always believed that India is a supply-constrained market. Anything that brings costs down and makes supply more affordable for the burgeoning demand is a huge reason to cheer and that too just before the festive season.

The author is CEO, India & South Asia, OYO Hotels & Homes

LETTERS

Fascinating subject

This refers to "Understanding the process of ageing" by Devangshu Datta (September 27). The standards in modern medicine are allowing us to live longer than ever before. The interest is not in extending life by days or weeks, but by decades and even centuries. Mortality will then be optional.

The science of extending life has been a subject of fascination down the centuries including the biblical Methuselah. Old billionaires being cryogenically frozen is not a fantasy any longer with many options available now to freeze our bodies with the hope that some time in future, science will revive them. Some cynics express that they would rather be buried in a cemetery than in a refrigerator. The Silicon Valley billionaires, venture capitalists and investors including Jeff Bezos, PayPal Co-founder Peter Thiel, Larry Ellison of Oracle, Elon Musk of Tesla and Craig Venter are all interested and pouring money into the science of senolytics — an emerging anti-ageing medicine.

The idea of technologically enhancing our bodies is not new. Implants like prosthetics and stents have improved our lifespans and in future, may enhance our senses by merging man and machine. Science may then produce humans who have vastly increased intelligence, strength, and lifespan. Some drugs under evaluation are metformin, an old and established diabetes drug. It has become popular among life extensionists and is sometimes referred to as "the aspirin of anti-ageing." Another potential drug is rapamycin normally used to aid organ transplants and treat rare cancers. Many of the world's top gerontologists have demonstrated the possibilities in animals and are now beginning human clinical trials. Current recommendation till these pills are in use is a healthy diet by reducing the amount of animal protein one consumes. The association between low protein intake and longevity is well established. Ideally this protein should be from plants.

H N Ramakrishna Bengaluru

Nothing new

That United States President Donald Trump now faces the prospect of an impeachment inquiry for his alleged action of seeking his Ukrainian counterpart to investigate the business dealings of former vice-president Joe Biden's son Hunter in a bid to influence upcoming 2020 US presidential polls is hardly surprising. Ever since he donned the mantle of the US President, he has had no qualms in expressing his blatant disregard for principles, values and ethos defining American democracy. With a significant chunk of members of the House of Representatives and the Senate expressing their support for an impeachment inquiry, Trump may go down in the history of the US as the third president after Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton to be impeached by the US Congress.

M Jeyaram Tamil Nadu

Well begun is half done

The editorial "Slow but steady start" (September 27) does a great analysis of how has the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana panned out in its first year. We need regular 'stock taking' of all such public schemes launched by the government. This one is particularly important as it attempts to tackle a long pending need of the nation and the society.

"4.5 million cases of hospital treatment in the first year" is very impressive for a new scheme. It is a very large number by any standard, notwithstanding that it represents only a small percentage of the "number of possible cases in the country". Of course, the issue of scaling up needs to be addressed but that should not make us scoff at this achievement.

You have hit the nail on the head, when you conclude that common requirement for the success will be the expansion of state capacity; this is important when it comes to public sector hospitals. We have huge "non-performing assets" lying out there in the form of many public hospitals and district/primary health centres all over the country — mostly non-operational because of non-availability of doctors, nurse, para-medics and medicines, consumables etc. We have to leverage these assets soon to make the scheme a reality. Depending solely on 'partnerships with private sector service providers' is just not going to work. The government can't afford those costs.

Krishan Kalra Gurugram

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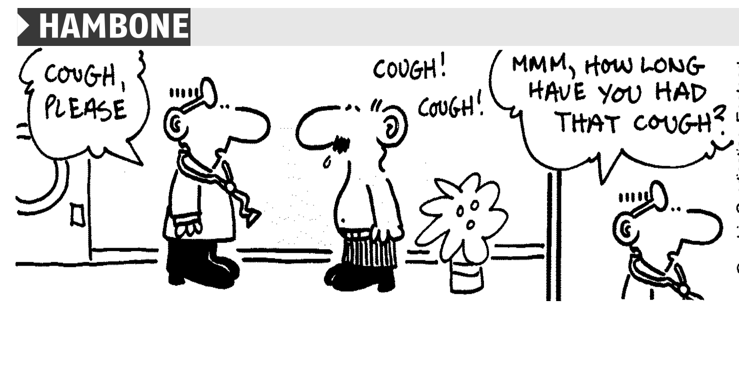
HAMBONE



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Failures of supervision

RBI needs to upgrade oversight capacity

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) took action last week on the ongoing crisis at Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank, one of the 10 largest co-operative banks in India. The central bank argued that an inspection of PMC Bank's books had uncovered problems; but, in fact, the co-operative bank's management had itself come to the RBI last week with its problems, pointing out that they had discovered long-standing bad loans, in particular to Housing Development & Infrastructure Ltd, and would need a resolution plan. The RBI needs to be commended for its swift action after the problem was revealed to it. But the larger issue should not be lost sight of: That, as a regulator, the RBI is not performing as it should.

Regulators should be able to detect early warnings of such problems, not have to take drastic action only after they are told of them. The RBI must introspect on the fact that its auditors failed to detect the problem that has been festering for many years. Nor is this the first such time that the RBI has failed in its supervisory task. It did not detect an ongoing fraud at Punjab National Bank, for example, which misused the SWIFT inter-bank transfer system among other facilities. The regulator failed for years to either detect the fraud, respond adequately to red flags in the banking system, or correct a breakdown of normal practices at the bank. The IL&FS imbroglio, which thrust the non-banking financial sector into a crisis from which it is yet to emerge, is another such recent oversight.

There is no alternative to raising the RBI's capabilities when it comes to banking oversight. In the last Union Budget, the RBI was given additional powers to regulate the NBFC sector and housing finance — when it has barely demonstrated the capacity for the oversight of the sectors over which it had full powers. While the RBI is right to argue that its powers to address wrongdoing at, say, public-sector banks are too limited, regulators need to focus on the quality and implementation of their regulations, and not just on their arbitrary powers for corrective action. Unfortunately, the latter has been the focus of the central bank far more than the former.

What sort of capacity increase within the RBI is required? First, form should follow function — and function should be clearly defined. Other central banks, such as the US Federal Reserve, have clear and public manuals on how it conducts banking supervision. The RBI should also expose its process to public scrutiny and discussion. When a final and acceptable process is arrived at, the RBI can structure its audit and enforcement capacity around that process. Similar rigour should be shown when it comes to drafting new regulations, which can currently be done by the central bank's staff arbitrarily and non-transparently. Instead, new regulations — which, after all, must be designed in tandem with the capacity to enforce them — must be made after input from outside experts, in response to a clearly stated or foreseen need, and with the approval of the RBI's board or a sub-committee thereof. Finally, the question of appeals to the RBI's decisions should be re-opened. The quality of supervision by the securities regulator has been greatly improved by the presence of a relevant appellate tribunal. What is clear, certainly, is that matters at the banking regulator cannot be allowed to continue the way they are.

Stimulating rural demand

Farm reform focus should shift to income generation

A good sequel to the recent bold steps to reverse the economic slowdown would be to prop up rural demand for goods and services through a well-judged stimulus package for agriculture and its allied fields. Market researchers like Nielsen hold slump in rural demand partly responsible for the sluggish performance of various industries. Though typically, spending on consumer goods in rural areas grows by three to five percentage points more than in the urban centres, this has not been the case in the recent past. The rural demand has actually decelerated at twice the rate in urban India. The ongoing income-oriented programmes, such as rural employment guarantee scheme, minimum support prices (MSP) for crops, the PM-Kisan scheme to hand out ₹6,000 annually to every farmer and similar others, seem to have failed to sustain rural spending. This issue needs to be addressed expeditiously.

The genesis of a cash crunch in rural areas, despite several consecutive good harvests, can be traced to the ill-advised and erratic policies related to agricultural pricing and external trade. These policies, guided largely by the concern for inflation management, are tilted towards consumers, undermining the interests of the producers. The bulk of the farmers do not get MSPs because of the paucity of procurement infrastructure. Wheat and rice are also traded at below the MSPs during the post-harvest peak marketing season in areas where official grain procurement agencies do not operate. The growers are seldom allowed to earn remunerative returns for their produce. Even a marginal uptrend in prices of farm products invites government intervention through measures like stockholding limits, curbs on exports and emergency imports. Onion is the latest case in point. The government lost little time in stalling outbound onion shipments by raising minimum export prices, disregarding the fact that the supply-driven price spike is only temporary as it is caused by seasonal factors. The fresh harvest is also not too far. Such moves are innately anti-grower.

The need, clearly, is to invigorate farm economy to generate disposable income in the rural areas, where two-thirds of Indians live. This can be done by shifting the focus of agriculture promotion programmes from production to income generation. The profitability of farming, which has been eroded drastically, needs to be restored. This will require nudging the states to speed up agri-market reforms to ensure free, fair and transparent trading in farm commodities. The prices should be allowed to be determined by demand-supply dynamics in local and international markets.

Moreover, stability in the domestic and external trade policies is vital to let the production respond to demand. This is being denied at present through knee-jerk responses to price movements. A reliable and stable export window is the key to provide a lucrative outlet for the surplus produce, which, otherwise, depresses local prices. With over 85 per cent of the country's landholdings being less than two hectares and, therefore, economically unviable, employment avenues need to be created in the non-farm rural sector to supplement farm incomes. Solo crop cultivation needs to give way to mixed farming and integrated agriculture involving allied activities like animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries, bee-keeping and others. This would help harness their synergies to optimise farm productivity and profits. Such holistic strategies are imperative to let rural demand contribute to economic growth.

ILLUSTRATION BY AJAY MOHANTY

Resolving India-US trade issues

High expectations of a trade deal were probably misplaced ab initio as there was no bilateral FTA or economic cooperation agreement under negotiation

AMITA BATRA

In a week that has seen India's diplomatic success with the United States attain new heights, India-US trade talks have been rather muted. This is not surprising, given that even the closest allies of the US have not been spared of President Donald Trump's hostile trade policy actions. In the last one year, India has been subjected to repeated criticism of its relatively high tariffs, restricted market access, and the general trade environment. While the tariff on imports of Harley Davidson motorbikes has been most often cited by the US President, more serious policy action has followed in terms of withdrawal by the US, earlier this year, of the long-standing preferential treatment accorded to India and some other countries under its Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme. In June, last year, the US had announced higher tariffs of 25 per cent and 10 per cent on imports of steel and aluminum, respectively, from which India had been unable to secure exemptions, unlike some countries such as Canada and Australia. For this, though India has registered a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute settlement body, the US inaction with regard to new appointments on the appellate body (among other things) has rendered the multilateral institutional mechanism weak. Timely outcomes of disputes registered may therefore be hard to achieve. India has now set in motion a retaliatory action by increasing tariffs on 29 commodity imports from the US.

While the extent of impact of all these policy decisions on India-US bilateral trade may not be high, they need to be viewed in terms of not just the immediate trade lost, but also the increased competition that domestic producers will potentially face as Indian exports get subjected to most favoured nation (MFN) tariffs, as well as loss of export market share and consumer welfare for some commodities that have been brought under higher retaliatory tariffs.

In recent years India-US bilateral trade has seen positive growth. After a decline in 2015-16, trade increased in 2016-17 and substantially so in the last two years. Growth in India's trade with the US was a little over 15 per cent in 2017-18 and around 18 per cent in 2018-19. After many years of being second to China, the US emerged as India's lead trading partner in 2018-19, with trade worth $87 billion. Growth in imports registered a jump from 19.29 per cent in 2017-18 to 33. 59 per cent in 2018-19. However, export growth declined from 13.42 per cent in 2017-18 to 9.46 per cent in 2018-19. Even in the eventful year, 2018-19, which has seen major adverse policy changes, the share of the US in India's trade increased marginally to 10.42 per cent from less than 10 per cent in the preceding three years.

The impact of GSP withdrawal is likely to be felt most in sectors like chemicals; plastics; machinery and mechanical appliances; electrical machinery; and photographic, optical, medical, and surgical precision instruments, that is, sectors in which the largest number of commodities are under GSP concessions. In all these sectors, which are also among India's top 20 export sectors, the US is the largest or the second-largest export market for India. In the last two years share of the US market in India's exports in these sectors ranged from 7 per cent in electrical machinery to 20 per cent in machinery and mechanical appliances. But, India's share in US imports in these sectors is very small, only 1 per cent or less, other than in chemicals, where India has a share of 4.6 per cent in US imports. After the withdrawal of the GSP, as Indian exports are subjected to MFN tariff, they will compete with products from China, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and other developed countries, which are leading exporters to the US in these sectors. In the face of stiff competition from these advanced economies, India may not be able to retain even its small share in the US market.

As regards steel exports, a decline of 34 per cent was registered in 2018-19 and in May this year, exports have fallen to their lowest in three years. This is on account of higher tariffs in the US as well as preventive/safeguard measures by other importing countries against potential import surge. The share of aluminum exports in our exports, which was 1.4 per cent in 2018-19, has also dropped to 1.1 per cent in 2019-20 (April-July).

Turning to India's retaliatory tariff hikes, the items with a substantial share in US exports are almonds (54 per cent), apples (15 per cent), phosphoric acid (33.7 per cent), and some iron or non-alloy steel products (29.7 per cent). However, while having a substantial share in US exports, these products simultaneously hold a significant share in India's imports of these commodities. In 2018-19, over 80 per cent of India's almond imports 47 per cent of both walnuts and fresh apple imports, and 41 per cent of stainless steel imports were from the US. A higher duty may, therefore, be equally detrimental for Indian importers and consumers in terms of higher prices. Retaliatory action by itself may, therefore, not achieve much, and may certainly not exert sufficient pressure on the US for restoration of GSP concessions to India.

Difficulties also apply to other demands of the US related to e-commerce, increased market access in agriculture, reduced duties on information and communications technology (ICT) products, and moderation in sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures in dairy products. These are not easily acceptable as they are among issues that India is yet grappling with even at the multilateral level and/or in some of its long-running bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations. Removal of price caps on certain medical devices, also a US demand, is difficult since providing affordable health care is a national priority in India.

High expectations and persistent references to a trade deal were probably misplaced ab initio, as there was no bilateral FTA or economic partnership agreement that was to be negotiated in this visit. Some reversal of unilateral ad hoc trade policy measures may have been all that was reasonable to expect. However, since trade policy has been used by Mr Trump as a major political instrument, even this may have been a hard bargain to achieve for the Indian side. Perhaps, a selective restoration of the GSP for some of India's major export products, in return for not so difficult and probably desirable reductions in import duties on almonds, walnuts, and apples (especially now, close to the festive season and peak demand period) may be a more feasible outcome to pursue as negotiations proceed in the next few days.

The writer is professor at School of International Studies, JNU

Tax cuts: Knee-jerk or part of a plan?

IRRATIONAL CHOICE

DEBASHIS BASU

The Union finance minister on Friday, September 20, announced dramatic cuts in corporate taxes, which will benefit big taxpayers like Asian Paints, Nestle, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finance, and HDFC Bank. They will also benefit new companies, which have the option of paying only 17.01 per cent tax. This announcement electrified the stock markets. The Sensex shot up by 5.3 per cent that day and 2.8 per cent the following Monday, making this one of the largest two-day gains in recent history. But the real impact has only been psychological.

Human beings love to extrapolate and so expectations are high. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi could take such a sudden, bold, and dramatic step, then a series of big-bang reforms are a child's play for him — this is the assumption. Since 2014, businessmen and investors have been waiting for this to happen. For five years, they fervently believed that the Bharatiya Janata Party government knew exactly what to do to accelerate growth. Like fans of filmstars or cricketers, they have shown abiding faith in Mr Modi, who is still seen as a doer with the right intent and strong will.

This belief was unshakeable despite the foolhardiness of demonetisation and shoddy implementation of the goods and services tax — two moves that wrecked the supply chain and hollowed out the economy. Even then, just before the Budget in July, the market hit an all-time high, as investors looked for a ground-breaking Budget. After all, Mr Modi had created history by winning a massive popular mandate for a second successive time and nothing stopped him from unleashing "big-bang reforms".

The reality was different. Over the past few months, every economic indicator is flashing red. Rising unemployment, poor export growth, punitive taxes, tax terrorism, an imploding public sector, collapse in the GDP growth rate to 5 per cent (3.5 per cent according to the old calculations) in the first quarter, auto sales at a 20-year low, no manufacturing growth, and crisis in financial services and banking. All these added up to an alarming situation, which even die-hard fans of the government could not ignore. But just when all seemed lost, the government announced huge tax cuts and the belief in Mr Modi was restored. We are now expectantly waiting for the next round of big-bang reforms.

Growth framework

What could these reforms be? Economic success stories from around the world clearly tell us what works. Balanced, continuous, and equitable growth flows from higher productivity of land, labour, and capital. Experience from around the world shows that higher productivity can be delivered by two important engines: One, a true market economy, which offers both incentives and competition to economic agents. This leads to low and steady prices, which, in turn, boost consumption and investment; two, a regulatory, governance and justice system that encourages good guys and penalises the bad buys. There is no other proven method of durable economic progress. The much-hailed liberalisation of the early 1990s failed to fire either of the two engines, which is why we had corruption, bad loans, and inflation, from which the economy took a decade to recover. The later regimes made it worse by adding large doses of crony capitalism.

If the recent tax cuts flowed from a well-articulated overarching framework described above, it would have been transformative. There is no such framework. For the engine of incentives and competition to fire, we need ease of entry and exit for all businesses. We don't have it. Dozens of permissions, some mindless, are required to start a business; running it involves large frictional costs, including bribes and extortion, and shutting it down is equally tough. Land acquisition remains a big thorny issue.

The governance, regulatory, and justice system is no better. The continuous failure of the central bank to supervise banks and finance companies, the bumbling of sectoral regulators across infrastructure, and the extortive attitude of revenue authorities are inimical to a market economy, leading to enormous waste of time and resources. The government is the largest litigant. Hidden from the public eye are ills of the tendering system for government projects, which leads to terrible productivity, enormous corruption, and decrepit public services.

Tax cuts did not flow from an overall plan to change this system. Welcome as they are, they are a knee-jerk action. The fact is, various markers of the economy today are worse than in late 2013, when a despondent India, tired of corruption, crony capitalism, and policy paralysis pinned its hopes and faith in Mr Modi. If the tax cuts were part of an economic philosophy, they would have been at least part of the last Budget. Indeed, the impact of the tax cuts, an afterthought, is so deep that it has turned the Budget upside down and there is no clarity on how it will boost demand through greater consumption.

The fact that the tax cuts were announced at the end of a series of six press conferences that started in late August, after the insipid and forgettable July Budget, shows that it was a panic reaction to the 3.5 per cent ... sorry, 5 per cent GDP growth. We can only hope that the government has finally "got it" and will stay focused on improving productivity, demand, and governance. If not, that extrapolation of the tax cuts to big-bang reforms will be a false expectation that will quickly peter out.

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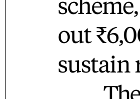
The coming crisis in international affairs



BOOK REVIEW

JAMES TRAUB

As secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice hung up in her office portraits of George C. Marshall and Dean Acheson, the predecessors who, more than anyone else, built the institutions that governed the international community after World War II. Rice and the president she served, George W. Bush, believed that with the invasion of Iraq, and the aggressive promotion of democracy across the Middle East, they could extend to the Arab world the liberal, democratic order that had sustained peace and prosperity in the West. They turned out to be dreadfully wrong, and neither the United States nor the Middle East has recovered from their reckless experiments.

Like Henry Kissinger, Rice is a scholar as well as a diplomat, and thus has additional means to influence the public and shape her own standing. A quarter of a century ago, she and Philip Zelikow, both of whom served as midlevel officials in President George H. W. Bush's National Security Council, described the virtuoso statecraft that brought the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion in *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed* — a kind of bookend to the world-ordering labors of Marshall and Acheson. In *To Build a Better World* they return to the subject, but with a new sense of urgency, for, as they write, the world seems to be "drifting toward another great systemic crisis." They would have us regard the end of the Cold War as a parable for our own beleaguered times.

Rice and Zelikow make a convincing case that the collapse of the Soviet Union constituted one of history's rare "catalytic episodes," when the existing order is convulsed by immense forces that statesmen can shape for good or ill. Had reckless leaders made self-aggrandising choices, the collapse of a great power could have led to chaos and war. This did not happen, in Rice and Zelikow's telling, because the chief actors of the drama — the elder President Bush, the German chancellor Helmut Kohl and the Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev — were rational, worldly, pragmatic heads of state. They shared a vision of a common Europe, even if Gorbachev imagined a Communist Soviet Union flourishing alongside the capitalist West. They believed in, and used, the chief institutions of the postwar world, whether NATO or the United Nations. They understood the political limits under which each operated. When he met Gorbachev in late 1989, Bush said: "I have conducted myself in ways not to complicate your life. That's why I have not jumped up and down on the Berlin Wall." Gorbachev, under great pressure from traditionalists to keep the Soviet sphere intact, responded that "he had noticed that and appreciated it."

Rice and Zelikow told many of the same stories in their earlier book. But when you read them now, you feel an almost unbearable nostalgia for a time when leaders took risks in the name of a common interest and publics embraced the core values of liberal democracy. Where are the wise men of yesteryear? That, implicitly, is the question Rice and Zelikow pose. But perhaps that's the wrong question.

In retrospect, the end of the Cold War gave birth to an extraordinary, and very brief, moment of consensus in which liberal values appeared to be universal and the institutions of the "liberal world order" seemed poised to operate as their founders had imagined. Peace and prosperity disposed citizens to defer to their leaders, who enjoyed the support needed to make tough decisions. That consensus is gone, along with the deference it fostered.

What happened? How did we lose faith in George H. W. Bush's optimistic vision of American global engagement and sink into the toxic brew of bellicosity and isolationism that Donald Trump now promotes and exploits? Rice and Zelikow blame the economic crisis of 2008 and, incredibly, the preoccupation of the left with "the diversity narrative" rather than with poverty and inequality — blithely skipping over George W. Bush's huge tax cuts for the rich. But that is hardly the chief omission. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 presented Bush and his national security team with their own "catalytic episode." They could have closed ranks with allies and worked closely with the United Nations, as the elder Bush and his team had done. They chose a different path, one that ultimately damaged America's standing in the world and soured the American public on engagement abroad.

At that critical juncture, our authors arguably did not practice what they now preach. Rice commissioned Zelikow to rewrite Bush's 2002 national security report after the State Department produced a version that sounded to her too much like the elder Bush. The Rice/Zelikow version bristled with threats of military action — unilateral, if need be — in the name of principles that are "right and true for every person, in every society." In the run-up to the war in Iraq, Rice ignored warnings from the same veterans of 1989 whom she praises so lavishly in To Build a Better World. And she and Zelikow refer only in passing to the Iraq war, observing with supreme understatement that the results "are still being debated today." What, one is forced to ask, should be made of a work that is so scrupulous in historical analysis yet so impoverished in critical self-reflection?

TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD: Choices to End the Cold War and Create a Global Commonwealth
Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice
Twelve
510 pages; $35

Opinion

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2019

BETTING ON BREXIT
Prime Minister of UK, Boris Johnson

It's time to get Brexit done and get on with delivering on Britain's priorities: safer streets, better hospitals and improved schools

RationalExpectations

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Change the law to set PSUs free

Parliament or Supreme Court must remove 'instrumentality of state' clause for PSUs that function in competitive markets

EVEN IF THE government was to embark on a massive privatisation drive—as opposed to today's PSU-buying-another-PSU—it is unlikely that more than a handful will get sold. Apart from the fact that just 10-12 PSUs were sold at even the height of the privatisation drive during the Vajpayee years, it is not certain there are that many buyers, especially among India's mostly cash-strapped industrialists.

And, even where there is a buyer, the unacceptably large, and heavily unionised workforce in these PSUs will probably be a big deterrent, especially where there are other alternatives available. If there are, by way of example, few takers for the more successful Jet Airways, which had a lot less debt, what are the chances there will be even that many for Air India, given the size of its workforce? And who would want to buy an MTNL or a BSNL when, due to their massive workforces and shrinking revenues, their salary bills—relative to their turnover—are 10-12 times those of the private sector?

With the caveat that the government is unlikely to be able to offload too many PSUs—there are around 340 central PSUs, and probably two to three times as many state-government PSUs—there can be little doubt the government needs to spend even more effort to fix their performance. A look at the market value of PSUs makes this very clear. Even while the government refuses to privatise, PSUs in areas like telecom, banking or steel—essentially, in all areas where they are not a monopoly—are losing market share. And, while doing so, they are also losing value; since Narendra Modi assumed office in May 2014, the share of PSUs in the country's overall market-capitalisation has fallen from 22.5% to 11.6% since, while overall BSE market capitalisation rose 61%, that of PSUs fell 17%. This means a notional loss in the value of PSUs of ₹15 lakh crore in the last 5+ years! If PSUs are losing their market share anyway, every day of delay in selling them off, or fixing their performance, means they are losing value.

Even more unfortunate, in most sectors in which PSUs have a monopoly, such as coal mining, or dominate, like oil, their performance is so poor that the country has to make huge imports to meet consumption needs. In which case, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that privatisation of PSUs will, over the medium term, lead to a lower import bill. Indeed, in a situation where imports are allowed freely, it is unlikely that privatising even a monopoly PSU will lead to a private sector monopoly; in fact, if privatisation leads to more production, as happened when the 'monopoly' HZL was privatised, the country benefits from this transaction.

> If Air India loses ₹5,000 cr a year—they rose 38% to ₹7,365 cr in FY19—the discounted value of 5-years' losses is ₹20,800 cr; paying a firm to take over AI may be a better idea

While most advocacy of privatisation, both within and outside the government, sees this as a revenue-generating exercise, this is completely the wrong way to go about it. The obsession with revenue-maximisation, it is fair to say, in fact, is what led to the destruction of the once-robust telecom sector. Obviously, the government can't have a one-size-fits-all approach, but an example or two should make this clear. If Air India's losses are ₹5,000 cr a year—they actually rose 38% to ₹7,365 cr in FY19, just a year before Jet Airways shut down—this means a loss of ₹25,000 crore over 5 years; if you discount that at, say, 10%, that's a net present value of ₹20,800 crore. In such circumstances, giving a bidder money to take over Air India is the optimal solution; in other words, the privatisation program must build in the possibility of negative bids. If, however, a profitable PSU like BPCL is to be sold, the government can expect a good value since it will take a long time for any private sector competitor to build up such a franchise of petrol pumps in the heart of most cities.

But, since the vast majority of PSUs can't be sold, the real productivity boost for the economy will come from fixing these PSUs. The first rule, or one of the first, has to be that the government cannot interfere in their running; setting up a Banks Board Bureau has ensured little government role in appointing senior officials in PSU banks, for instance. Another has to be to allow them the freedom to retrench staffers, and hire the best; nowhere does this apply more than in the case of banks, with most PSU banks being massively over-staffed, and with people who do not necessarily have the skills needed for modern banking. Even more important, is the issue of what is called *L-1-itis*, or the rule that requires PSUs to float tenders for almost anything. This ensures PSUs can never negotiate terms with suppliers, or potential partners since the losers can, legally, challenge any contract as being unfair—under the Constitution, PSUs are seen as an instrument of the state, and so, have to offer equal access/opportunity to everyone. ONGC's attempt to tie up with PSUs in Brazil and Norway, for deep sea drilling expertise, were scuttled on precisely these grounds.

The government, then, needs to either get Parliament to amend Article 12 of the Constitution, or approach the Supreme Court on this, to say that PSUs are not an 'instrumentality of state' under certain circumstances. The SC's rulings on this are not consistent. In *PB Ghayalod vs Maruti Udyog*, in 1991, it ruled that since there was a substantial foreign ownership, and the partner had various rights, the company was not an arm of the state. In *Mysore Paper Mills vs Mysore Paper Mills Officers' Association*, in 2002, it ruled that the PSU was to be considered an arm of the state. But, in *Pradeep Biswas vs Indian Institute of Chemical Biology*, in 2002, the SC said that for an entity to be an instrumentality of state 'it should have been entrusted with such functions as are governmental...by being of public importance or being fundamental to the life of people and hence governmental'. The simple rule the government must push for is that wherever the PSU is not a monopoly, and there are private competitors, the PSU will not be considered an 'instrumentality of state' since it is not fulfilling a 'governmental' role, as it were. If this is not fixed, no matter how much freedom the government gives PSUs, they will never really be free to operate.

PolicyCURE

Govt does well to talk of removing drugs using locally-manufactured API from price control

THE GOVERNMENT IS mulling over excluding medicines made from locally manufactured active pharmaceutical ingredient (API)—the key raw material for the production of a drug—from price control. The move, according to a Mint report, is aimed at pushing manufacture of APIs in India to reduce import dependence. The move, if implemented and to the desired effect, would be a boost for Indian pharma. In FY19, Indian pharma companies imported bulk drugs and intermediates worth $2.4 million from China. The irony is the government had all along known how price control was affecting domestic manufacture. Indeed, Indian manufacturers had gotten more and more export focused, with their offerings in India accounting for an increasingly smaller portion of their revenues over the years.

In the Draft Pharamaceuticals Policy 2017, the government had noted that PSUs were doing a good job of producing raw materials/intermediates in the 1950s-60s, and accepted that import dependence had grown because of its price controls—"the Drug Price (Display & Control) Order 1966 put 18 APIs (raw materials) under price control... from 1996...imported APIs and Intermediates started becoming hugely lucrative as a price cap on drugs forced the manufacturers...to obtain the cheapest raw material with the basic minimum efficacy/quality". And yet, it had called for price controls to stay citing high out-of-pocket costs for drugs. The government, in the draft policy, also rued the fact that pharma companies were more focused on generic formulations than R&D. It should have long realised that, unless price controls go summarily and companies' profits grow, investment in R&D will remain thin. If the government is serious about Make in India for APIs and boosting R&D spending by pharmaceutical companies, it must shun price controls as a policy measure. To keep medicines affordable for the masses, it must subsidise through bulk purchases for its Jan Aushadhi and other outlets.

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

GOVT NEEDS TO OVERHAUL THE APMC, SWITCH TO COLD STORAGE, AND PROMOTE USAGE OF DEHYDRATED ONIONS TO SUSTAINABLY TACKLE SEASONAL SPIKE IN PRICES

Market reforms will wipe away onion tears

ASHOK GULATI & HARSH WARDHAN
Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture, & Wardhan is Consultant, ICRIER.
Views are personal

ONIONS ARE ON the boil once again! With onion retail prices in Delhi crossing ₹40/kg in mid-September, and being even higher in Mumbai, the government swung into action. It imposed minimum export price (MEP) of $850/tonne, followed by a central team of bureaucrats visiting Lasalgaon, India's largest wholesale market of onions, to assess the situation. It won't be a surprise if they blame onion traders for speculation and recommend stocking limits. While the heightened concern of the government is justified, we disagree with the policy instruments being used. Here is our take on it.

The onion price-rise in September is not new. Prices rise in September almost every year due to seasonality, but every alternate year, there is an accelerated spike (see graphic) due to 'some other factors'. This shakes any political party in power. The standard response is imposition of MEP, stocking limits on traders, and sometimes, even income tax raids on onion traders! These crude measures don't give sustainable solutions.

While onion price spikes make the government hyperactive, how many people remember that even between January and May 2019, when much of the late kharif and rabi onions were sold, wholesale prices in Lasalgaon hovered between ₹4-10/kg, and on some days, even touched ₹2/kg. This is against a cost of ₹9-10/kg in Maharashtra, as estimated by the National Horticulture Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF). This means farmers incurred massive losses in 2019 from sales of onions, running into hundreds of crores of rupees. If the government was as hyperactive then to save the onion farmers from the price crash as it is to save the consumers today, perhaps these spikes would have been avoided. But, there is an inherent 'consumer bias' in our agri-price policies. Even more so, when MMTC imports onions and 'dumps' them at below their import parity prices to 'tame' domestic prices. This is likely to happen between late October and November, when the kharif crop will start arriving in the market and prices would nose-dive in any case.

It may be noted that both these policy instruments—restricting exports through high MEP, and dumping imported onions below cost—are not only anti-farmer but also anti-agri-exports, and go against the PM's vision of doubling farmers' incomes. This must be avoided at all costs.

The accompanying graphic shows that whenever high MEP, such as $850/tonne, which translates to roughly ₹60/kg, is imposed, exports drop sharply. The export parity price from October 2018 till date has remained below $300/tonne. So, this MEP of $850/tonne will deprive farmers of whatever little benefits they were getting from onion exports. India has emerged as the largest exporter of onions in the world, having exported about 2.4 million tonnes in 2018-19 out of a production of 23.5 million tonnes. Remember that it takes years to build export markets, but with such abrupt export restrictions, India becomes an unreliable exporter, which adversely hits its unit value of exports. This is a much bigger damage compared to short-term gains the government is eyeing.

So, what could be best possible solution? First, one needs to remember that price stabilisation does not come free. Nafed, which is entrusted with price stabilisation, should procure at least 2-3 lakh tonnes of onion at the rabi harvest time (April-May), ensuring that farmers get at least ₹12-15/kg, when they were previously getting ₹4-8/kg. This will save onion farmers from a price-crash, and give them reasonable profits, incentivising production, and exports. But, these stored onions will incur storage costs. Storage at the farm level suffers losses of about 20-25%, which can be brought down to 5-10% in modern cold storages. But, cold stores cost about ₹1.5/kg/month. These stored onions can, then, be released between August and first-half of October, before the kharif harvest starts arriving. If NAFED incurs, say, five months' storage cost at about ₹7.5/kg, and if the procurement is at ₹12-15/kg, they can still offload at, say, ₹20-23/kg, and retail price in September-October can be tamed below ₹30/kg.

Second, our analysis of onion value chains for three years' average, ending 2018-19, with season-wise weighted average of wholesale prices from major *mandis* in Maharashtra, MP, Gujarat, and Rajasthan catering to Delhi's onion demand, reveals that onion farmers get a mere 29% share of the consumer's rupee. The rest constitutes costs and margins of middlemen, with retailers apportioning the highest share. With the majority of onions traded through Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) markets, the auctioning procedure is controlled by powerful traders and commission agents, with much less bargaining power for farmers. Layers of *mandi* fees, and commissions escalate prices further, without much value addition, or benefit to farmers. Our field visits to major *mandis* (Azadpur, Lasalgaon, Pimpalgaon, Mahuva) revealed that actual commissions are way above the prescribed charges. Officially levied on buyers, ultimately farmers bear their burden. What all this indicates is that major overhauling of APMC reforms is overdue.

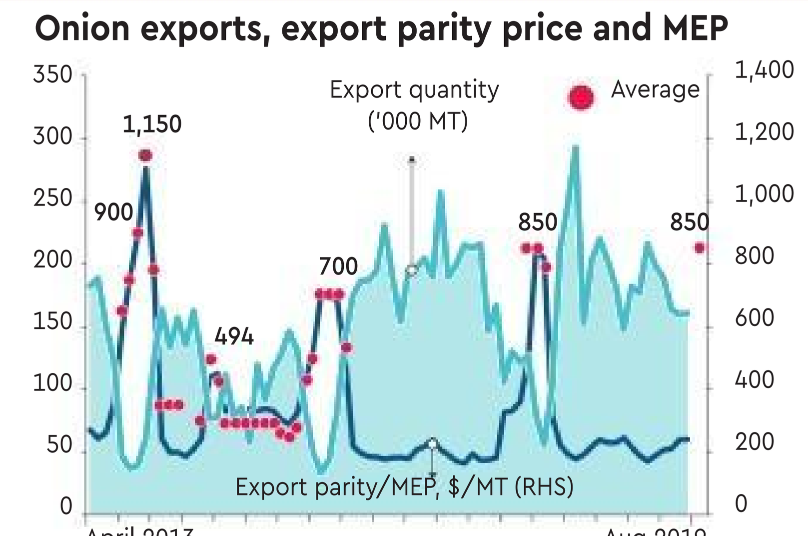
Third, the Ministry of Food Processing Industries should extensively promote the use of dehydrated onions (flakes, powder, granules) among domestic households, and institutions like the armed forces, hospitals, restaurants, and schools (mid-day meals). This will take the pressure off fresh onions during lean season. Currently, India exports 85% of its dehydrated onions, and is the largest exporter of these products in the world. Dehydrated products are more durable, much cheaper to store; they can help check the spikes in onion prices. This will reduce wastage, help farmers get a fair price, and allow consumers to switch to dehydrated onions in the lean season at affordable prices.

If the government could do this, it would know its onion, especially on growing farmers income.

Onion wholesale and retail price and WPI

Source: Agmarknet, Department of Consumer Affairs and Office of Economic Adviser, DPIIT

Onion exports, export parity price and MEP

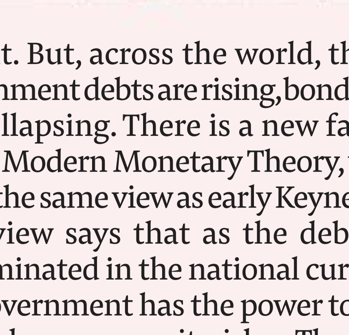


Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade

A policy for growth

Corporate tax cuts fulfill the BJP's promise, but to address the slowdown in growth rate, the breakdown of the non-banking credit market must be focused on

MEGHNAD DESAI
Prominent economist and labour peer
Views are personal



I AM NOT a friend of tax cuts. If you must be a Keynesian in your fiscal policy, it would be better to increase public spending to put purchasing power in the hands of a large part of the population, than to give a tax cut to businesses, which may or may not increase investment.

The deep cut in corporation tax does deliver on what Jaitley had promised. But, the record of corporation tax cuts as a stimulating device is mixed. Yes, there is a surge in equity prices for a short time. But, a stock market boom does not create wealth in a permanent way. Nor is wealth destroyed when stock prices fall. It is just a redistribution among the stock-owners.

Corporation tax cuts do not boost investment in a sustained fashion. Businessmen advocate them because it makes them richer. Stock markets exchange existing stock of equity. A very small percentage of new investment is financed by IPOs, or new equity floatation by existing corporations. This is true, universally, of all stock markets.

There are reasons why we are experiencing the slowdown in growth rate. The credit markets have become dysfunctional. The nationalisation of the banking system, fifty years ago, worsened the cost of borrowing for all but a few favoured cronies. Attempts by Modi 1.0 to reform PSU banks were overdue, but they seem to have stalled. At the same time, the non-banking credit market had a breakdown with the collapse of IL&FS.

There needs to be a serious policy intervention in this respect. The IB code was welcome, but once again, debtors have found ways of delaying repayments. The principal reason is the fractured nature of the Judiciary. At the apex level, the Judiciary is efficient, though somewhat overstretched. But, nationally, it is understaffed. Its procedures encourage delays. There seem to be no incentives to speed up proceedings in courts. Someone needs to ask whether the reward system for lawyers can be reformed. There is a shamefully large backlog of undecided cases. The cost of credit is high, largely due to the cost of recovery of debts with a dysfunctional judicial system. We need to examine the economic costs of the judicial system. Its ills will not be cured by asking active or retired judges to examine the issue. We need economists to look at this economic problem as a matter of urgency. It is in such matters that the answer to the issue of growth slowdown is to be sought.

Fears have been expressed that the FM's tax cuts will bust the deficit target. This deserves a short-run, and a long-run answer. In the short run, the government must re-examine whether its revenue projections for GST make sense given the many effective cuts in the rates paid either due to consolidation of categories, which is an effective tax rate cut as well as direct cuts in tax rates. Informal observations reveal that sellers invite the buyers to collude with them in evading tax by not insisting on a receipt. The *jugaad* economy is back in town.

But, the more important issue is to question the overwhelming importance given to deficit reduction. There is a global debate on fiscal constraint. During the years of Monetarism's dominance, and prevalence of high inflation rates, the issue of fiscal discipline became urgent. But, across the world, though government debts are rising, bond yields are collapsing. There is a new fashion called Modern Monetary Theory, which takes the same view as early Keynesians. This view says that as the debts are denominated in the national currency, the government has the power to print as much currency as it wishes. The aim of the government should be full employment, and not balancing budgets.

The high inflation of the 1970's and 1980's brought the debt-income ratio in fashion as a target, and the idea that governments are driven by short-term political gains rather than prudence. Hence, central banks had to be independent guardians of the currency, and a medium-run macroeconomic strategy was essential, which bore down on deficits. That world has, happily, gone. Though fiscal orthodoxy is still prevalent in financial circles, the inflation threat having gone, governments may be free to spend as they please. The USA is an interesting example of this dual attitude. Politicians swear by fiscal probity, and warn against saddling future generations with debt. But, year after year, the US government debt rises, budgets have been balanced in a maximum of ten years in the last seventy-four since 1945, and most of those came before 1960. The USA has prospered in the meantime.

India needs a debate on this question. Inflation needs to be controlled, but the issue is whether inflation is a monetary phenomenon or a supply-side problem, mainly in food items. Prudently used, deficits may be growth-enhancing. It would be a major change in economic policy, worth examining.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump's impeachment enquiry

A 'credible' complaint by a whistleblower has prompted the initiation of impeachment enquiry against the US President Donald Trump, who not only pressed his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, to undermine Democratic presidential frontrunner Joe Biden by investigating his son's business dealings but also held back aid to Ukraine, an ally of the US, for greater leverage. Donald Trump is now under the scanner for soliciting the 'interference' of a foreign leader to boost his chances of re-election. Trump 'betrayed his oath of office', and 'abused his position as President' for his 'personal gain'. The White House has now accused him of trying 'to hide the transcript' of the phone-call made by him. The inability to deny the redaction of the Ukraine call data has made the charge of a 'cover-up' stick. Trump's 'whistle-blower's source close to a spy' remark has provoked warnings against witness tampering and intimidation. Trump has not been wronged for him to credibly play the victim card against the impeachment enquiry, which has become indispensable in light of unarguable proof. Cross-party leaders have described Trump's conduct as 'not okay' and 'troubling in the extreme'. The American voters are unlikely to take kindly to the enlistment of a foreign leader for 'personal political benefit' and the attempt to bury evidence of wrongdoing. It is a tribute to the world's oldest democracy's democracy that it has in place 'checks and balances' that work and hold the holders of high offices to account.

— G David Milton, Maruthancode

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MEENAKSHI DATTA GHOSH

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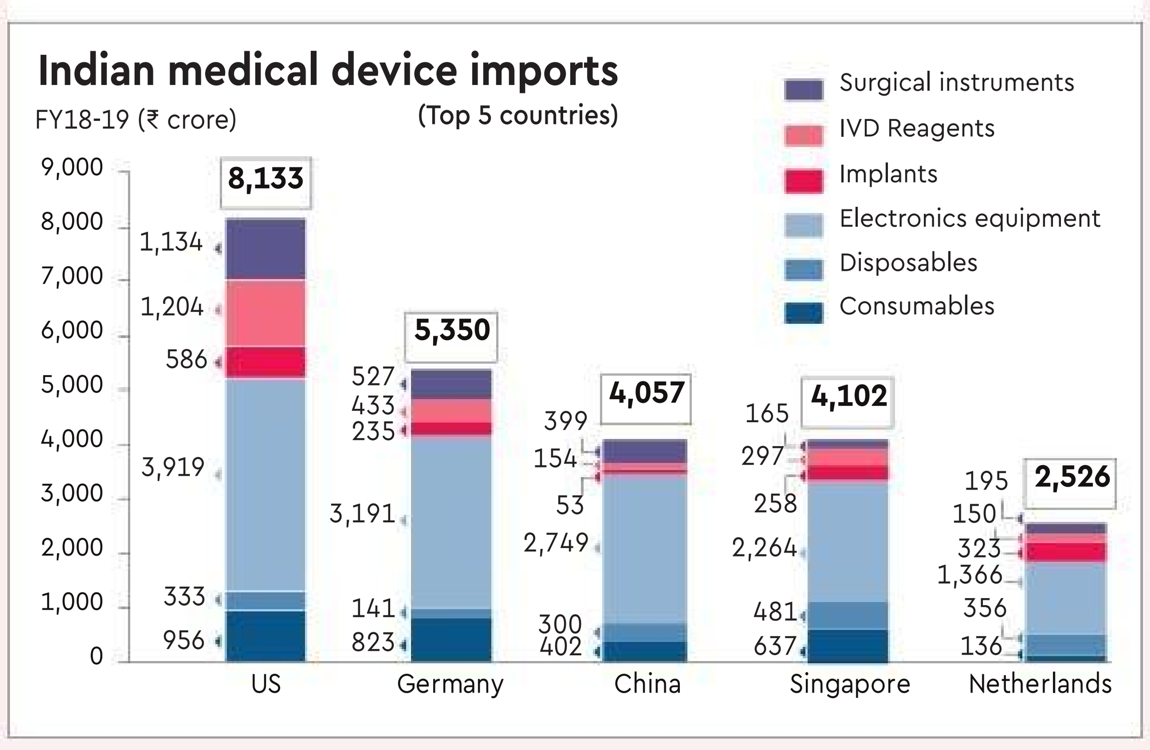
INDO-US TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

Moving forward on medical devices

Friction on trade matters would begin to dissipate if due consideration is paid to the reasonable need of both sides. An Indo-US 'limited' trade package is welcome so long as it is fair and even-handed



ON THE SIDELINES of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly in New York, a slew of meetings were scheduled purportedly to move forward the dialogue on trade. The Donald Trump administration appears to be breaking away the typical outcomes of trade negotiations yielded in the past: "broad, comprehensive agreements that would cover whole swathes of issues." President Trump is adopting a more transactional approach on striking trade deals. This gives him an opportunity to address different constituencies within the US, example pharmaceuticals, farmers, information technology and so on. There is some anticipation that this current and ongoing dialogue could lead to a limited Indo-US package on trade.

Trade-related tensions between India and the US peaked in May this year when the US withdrew the zero-duty benefits worth $5.6 billion, hitherto given to Indian exporters under the Generalized System of Preferences. India imposed retaliatory tariffs on 29 products imported from the US. The US, inter alia, argued that the price controls levied on medical devices in India discriminate against the import of high-technology products, and is forcing US producers to sell in India at a loss. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) of India had irrefutable evidence of profiteering in medical devices by American suppliers and manufacturers, through gross abuse and huge overcharging. India had little option but to place price caps on cardiac stents and knee implants, to make these affordable and, therefore, more widely accessible across the country for those in need.

While taking on board the primary concerns of the US, India could point out that it is not unreasonable to address irrationally high trade margins that have led to profiteering and abuse. On its part, India should agree to introducing amendments in the DPCO (Drugs Price Control Orders), to allow for trade margin rationalisation with respect to notified devices. This will not curtail the pricing of manufacturers in any way. Trade margins for medical devices could be capped to rational levels (as suggested by the NITI Aayog in 2018), and added to the selling price indicated by the domestic/overseas manufacturer at the first point of sale (i.e. at the import-landed price when they enter India, where GST becomes initially applicable). This would provide for sufficient flexibility to facilitate and enable differential pricing for innovative medical devices. Consumers/patient groups would feel reassured that rampant profiteering is being curbed. MRPs would be visibly more reasonable. Profits for traders and retailers would be rationalised. And there would emerge a level-playing field for domestic manufacturers vis-à-vis foreign manufacturers. The supply chain economics would remain viable, and more ethical marketing will prevail. If the US agrees, this would be a win-win situation for both sides.

However, these are negotiations, and India's standpoint is equally compelling.

One, the Indian medical devices market remains heavily dependent on imports. India imports close to 80% of the demand for medical devices, and of this the US has an estimated share of 30%. Within the Indian market, the US has already achieved a dominant supplier status. Statements about US corporates having limited access to this market may not be a reasonable grievance. On the contrary, the fact is that Indian manufacturers do not get reciprocal access to US markets on account of the non-trade barriers (NTB) imposed by the US administration. Would the US agree to meaningfully reduce these NTBs that continue to stymie our medical devices industry?

Meanwhile, within the government of India, there is a sharpened focus on medical devices as distinct from drugs, and very soon a new division dedicated exclusively to medical devices could become operational under the aegis of India's national regulatory authority, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation.

Two, during 2015, India's medical devices industry was opened up to 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) via the automatic route. The scope for investments, however, was restricted by the narrow definition of medical devices in the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. In 2018, India expanded the range of items defined as 'medical devices' in the FDI policy, and clarified that medical devices will no longer be defined by the Act. The domestic medical devices industry would benefit from the technology transfer as this opening up was intended to encourage 100% greenfield manufacturing units. On the ground, however, trading units and warehousing units have proliferated. There are some concerns here, and a course correction as part of the trade package would be in order. In contrast, FDI in the brownfield pharmaceuticals sector remains 'reserved' for approval, if it is over and above 74%.

Three, India is widely applauded for being the pharmacy of the world. Every third tablet sold globally originates from an Indian manufacturer. India's ability to supply affordable medical products (devices and medicines/drugs) is benefiting needy patients worldwide. Any trade package that compels India to withdraw these safeguards on public health, i.e. the price caps applied on the most frequently used medical devices like cardiac stents and knee caps to make these more accessible to the masses, will not be welcomed, because "any solution which is not affordable is no solution at all," said Dr Devi Prasad Shetty, chairman Narayana Health.

Four, since the US regulatory approval processes are challenging, stringent and very expensive, overall their market entry fees do not make it commercially viable for Indian manufacturers to export to the US, while the $15 billion Indian market is wide open for American companies. In India, import fees levied by the Drug Controller General (CDSCO) are very low in comparison. India should press for agreement on some parity in this matter by bringing the CDSCO import licence fees on a par with the fees encountered by Indian manufacturers.

Friction on trade matters would begin to dissipate if due consideration is paid to the reasonable need of both sides. An Indo-US 'limited' trade package is welcome so long as it is fair and even-handed.

The future of the office

Even if WeWork is in trouble the office is still being reinvented. It could lead to a two-tier system.

"FROM NINE TILL five, I have to spend my time at work," warbled Martha and the Muffins back in 1980. "My job is very boring, I'm an office clerk." Many of the hundreds of millions of people who trek into an office will feel as despondent at the prospect as Martha did. The office needs a revamp. But the crisis at WeWork, a trendy office-rental firm whose boss, Adam Neumann, stepped down this week after its attempt to float its shares turned into a debacle, shows that businesses are still struggling to come up with a new format.

The large office, like the factory, is an invention of the past two centuries. The factory arose because of powered machinery, which required workers to be gathered in one place. Big offices grew from the need to process lots of paperwork, and for managers to instruct clerks on what to do. But now the internet, personal computing and handheld devices mean that transactions can be dealt with on-screen and managers can instantly communicate with their workers, wherever they are. The need for staff to be in one place has been dramatically reduced.

A new model may take time to emerge—electric power was first harnessed in the 1880s but it was not until the 1920s that factories changed their layouts to make full use of it. The new model will have to balance three factors: the desire of many workers for a flexible schedule; the high cost for firms of maintaining office space; and the countervailing desire to gather skilled workers in one place, in the hope that this enhances collaboration.

People who work at home or in a Starbucks have no need for a stressful commute and can adjust their hours to suit their way of life. In turn, that flexibility lets companies cut down on space. Our analysis of 75 large listed services firms in America and Britain shows that annual rental costs per employee have dropped by 15% over the past 15 years, to $5,000. Many firms operate a hot-desking system where workers find a new seat every day. At the London offices of Deloitte, a consultancy, 12,500 people have access to the building but only 5,500 desks are available.

> Neumann's business plan is in tatters. But one of his insights is surely right: the office of the mid-21st century will be as different from today's as the high-tech factory is from the Victorian mill

But hot-desking can be alienating. Every night, workers must erase all trace of their existence, hiding away their possessions. When crammed into desks sited close together, workers wear headphones to shut out noisy neighbours. Studies suggests this leads to more emails and less face-to-face communication. So much for collaboration and camaraderie.

High-skilled workers can be repelled by these conditions. So the hot-desking drive has been accompanied by a countervailing trend, in which this elite get better facilities. Those who need to concentrate have quiet spaces. Better lighting and air conditioning aim to keep employees healthy. Apple's new headquarters has parks, a meadow and a 1,000-person auditorium. The hope is that when workers mingle or relax, that will spark ideas.

All this looks like a shift towards an airline-style world of work, with economy seating for the drones and business-class luxury for skilled workers, who enjoy some of the benefits once reserved for senior executives. But this is a hard trade-off to get right. WeWork offers a "premium economy" service in which a wider range of workers can get a few perks. But fears that its rental income may be insufficient to offset its $47bn of lease liabilities were one reason its IPO was delayed.

The office is bound to change further. Some firms may ask if it makes sense to have offices in city centres. In an era of remote collaboration, software and documents sit in the cloud and offices could disperse to cheaper places. Mr Neumann's business plan is in tatters. But one of his insights is surely right: the office of the mid-21st century will be as different from today's as the high-tech factory is from the Victorian mill.

The Economist

REGIONAL CAFE: KARNATAKA

A SaaS leader rises from Bengaluru

Capillary Technologies hopes to end this year with a $100-million turnover

SUSHILA RAVINDRANATH
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BENGALURU-BASED Capillary Technologies has emerged as a leader in providing Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions for the retail industry in Asia. It started when Aneesh Reddy, co-founder & CEO, and Krishna Mehra and Ajay Modani, all from IIT Kharagpur and in their 20s, decided to quit jobs after about a year at work and put their savings together to follow their dream. They were not propelled by the one big idea they shared; they had to look for one. After much research, they zeroed-in on the new growth areas—mobile and retail. The aspiring entrepreneurs combined both when they launched Capillary Technologies in 2008.

The biggest challenges consumer brands were facing then included an inability to capture customer data, identify consumers visiting their stores, and communicate effectively with them. This is where Capillary stepped in. Built on a big data platform, the Capillary CRM solution enabled brands to use their existing infrastructure to identify and understand each consumer, and directly communicate with them through mobile technology. Capillary made possible what was revolutionary for that time, i.e. card-less, mobile-first loyalty programme for the customer.

As it happened, the founders made the right choice as the cloud-based SaaS was emerging as the next big thing in India. According to trade body Nasscom, as software products move from on-premise to a cloud-based model, the SaaS market has seen a rapid evolution. Instant decision-making, cost-effectiveness, low risk, greater flexibility, combined with an increasing mobile workforce and customers is driving the adoption of SaaS.

Capillary's investors also thought as much. By 2012, Capillary had raised Rs 60 crore ($15.5 million) from venture capital firm Sequoia Capital, Norwest Venture Partners and the from existing investor Qualcomm Ventures.

Until then, the company was run on a shoestring budget. With this kind of money, the founders became overambitious. They were also still very young. "We opened 10 offices in 2012 in the US, the UK, Australia, South Africa, Hong Kong and New Zealand." Reddy says, adding that all the money was blown up in 18 months. His two partners were also exiting from the company for different reasons.

By 2014, it was time for the company to pull itself by the bootstraps. Reddy took the tough decision to shut down the loss-making foreign operations. As the company was still doing well in other markets where so much investment had not gone in, investors continued to help Capillary. "We are now focusing on four large geographies—India, West Asia, South East Asia and China," he says.

But how did Capillary enter new markets? Reddy says the existing customers opened up international markets. "Lee Wrangler, our client in India, asked us for solutions for their stores in South East Asia. This is how Capillary entered China three years ago. There was a big white space to be filled in retail-focused CRM products in China. We had to do a lot of localisation for the Chinese market," he adds.

The first step towards building the business was to understand China's digital ecosystem. China is a key market as retail is one of the most developed industries and consumers are also way more informed than their Indian contemporaries. They expect the same kind of experience on both the online platform as well as the offline store from a brand.

Capillary then had to work on localising their existing product. "It included two components: language and functionality," Reddy says. They chose Shanghai as the first base as they had won their first customer there. They also set up an office in Guangzhou in southern China. Capillary was able to quickly localise their product as per market needs. This includes WeChat integration, personalised CRM models, and integration with local platforms like TaoBao.com and JD.com to provide an online and offline customer behaviour analysis capability. It has been able to establish its product acceptance; most of the employees are local, with only three Indians operating out of China. The company has become the main competitor for most of China's CRM service providers.

West Asia is another big market for Capillary. It has recently signed a strategic joint venture agreement with Saudi-based Veda Holding to form Capillary Arabia. The JV will allow Capillary enhanced access to the Kingdom's rapidly growing retail, F&B and manufacturing sectors.

Capillary has been nimble on its feet, keeping up with fast-changing technology and customer needs. To cater to the growing e-commerce market, Capillary acquired e-commerce services and technology company Sellerworx in 2015. It was a year of acquisitions that included digital commerce solution provider MartJack and machine learning company Ruaha.

It has recently launched its first exclusive deals and coupons shopping app DealHunt. The app is a one-stop destination for best offers and deals across 20-plus categories. Consumers can choose from more than 1,000 trusted brands on both online and offline platforms, including fashion, beauty, food, health, travel, electronics and more.

Capillary has today emerged as one of Asia's leading SaaS product companies. Over 400 marquee brands across more than 30 countries, including Pizza Hut, VF Brands, Walmart, Madura Garments, Valiram, KFC, Starbucks and Samsung, come to Capillary to enable easy and seamless consumer experiences. It has over 300 million consumers and 30,000 stores on its platform. Over 700 Capillary associates across 11 global offices are working on new ways for brands to make their consumers' lives easier.

Reddy adds Capillary's growth has been higher this year. "We will turn profitable this year. We will get our P&L in shape and concentrate on internal accruals of 25-30%. Retail in Asia is still growing. Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Thailand remain big markets. We hope to end this year with a $100-million turnover."

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TELLING NUMBERS

Teachers in higher education: gender skew highest in Bihar

THE NUMBER of teachers in the country's higher education institutes was 14,16,299 in 2018-19, according to the All India Survey on Higher Education 2018-19. The survey, other aspects of which have been reported in The Indian Express, also looks at the gender and socio-religious breakup of the teaching community in these higher learning institutions.

Of the 14.16 lakh teachers, 57.85 per cent are male and 42.15 per cent are female. The skew is highest is recorded in Bihar, where the female-to-male ratio among teachers is 1:4, or about 21:79 in percentage terms. Jharkhand comes a close second with a ratio of roughly 30:70. In Uttar Pradesh, less than a third (32.3%) of teachers are female.

On the other hand, there are a few states such as Kerala, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Delhi and Goa, where the number of female teachers is more than that of male teachers.

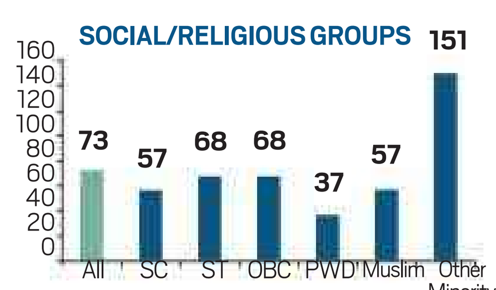
At an all-India level, teachers belonging to the general category represent more than half (56.7 per cent) of all teachers in India. OBCs follow with 32.1 per cent, with the rest being Scheduled Castes (8.8 per cent) and Scheduled Tribes (2.4 per cent). Again, 5.4 per cent of the teachers belong to the Muslim minority group, and 9.2 per cent to other minority groups. Among major states, those with the highest SC/ST proportions among teachers are Andhra Pradesh (13.83 per cent SCs and 1.6 per cent STs), Maharashtra (11.39 per cent SCs and 1.52 per cent STs) and Telangana (11.17 per cent SCs and 3.5 per cent STs).

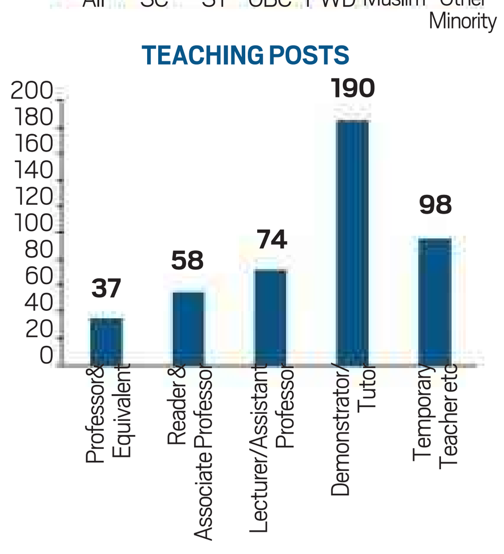
Another significant representation in terms of gender distribution is the number of female teachers per 100 male teachers. At an all-India level, there are 73 female teachers per 100 male teachers. This ratio is 57:100 among SCs, and 68:100 among both STs and OBCs. For Muslims, it is 57 female teachers per 100 male teachers; for other minorities, female teachers outnumber male teachers in the ratio 151:100.

In post-wise gender distribution, male teachers heavily outnumber female teachers in most senior positions. On the other hand, the ratio among demostrators and tutors is 190:100, meaning that there are nearly two females in such posts for every male counterpart. Among temporary teachers, the breakup is almost equal, at 98 females per 100 males.

Source for all data: AISHE 2018-19

GENDER RATIO IN TEACHERS (FEMALES PER 100 MALES)





THIS WORD MEANS

PORTAMENTO

A musical effect, now achieved with maths framework

IN MUSIC, we often hear a singer — or certain musical instruments — gliding seamlessly from one pitch or tone to another, with a smooth progression. Nearly all musicians know this as "portamento", a term that has been used for hundreds of years. Not everyone or everything can achieve it, however; this continuous varying of pitch is possible only for the trained human voice, besides string and some other instruments.

Now an MIT student has invented an algorithm that produces a portamento effect between any two audio signals in real-time. Trevor Henderson is now a graduate student in computer science, MIT said in a statement. In experiments, the algorithm seamlessly merged various audio clips, such as a piano note gliding into a human voice. His paper describing the algorithm won the "best student paper" award at the recent International Conference on Digital Audio Effects, MIT said.

The algorithm relies on "optimal transport", which is a centuries-old geometry-based framework that determines the most efficient ways to move objects — or data points — between various configurations. It has been applied to fluid dynamics, 3-D modelling, computer graphics, and more. Now, Henderson has applied optimal transport to interpolating audio signals, or blending one signal into another, MIT said.

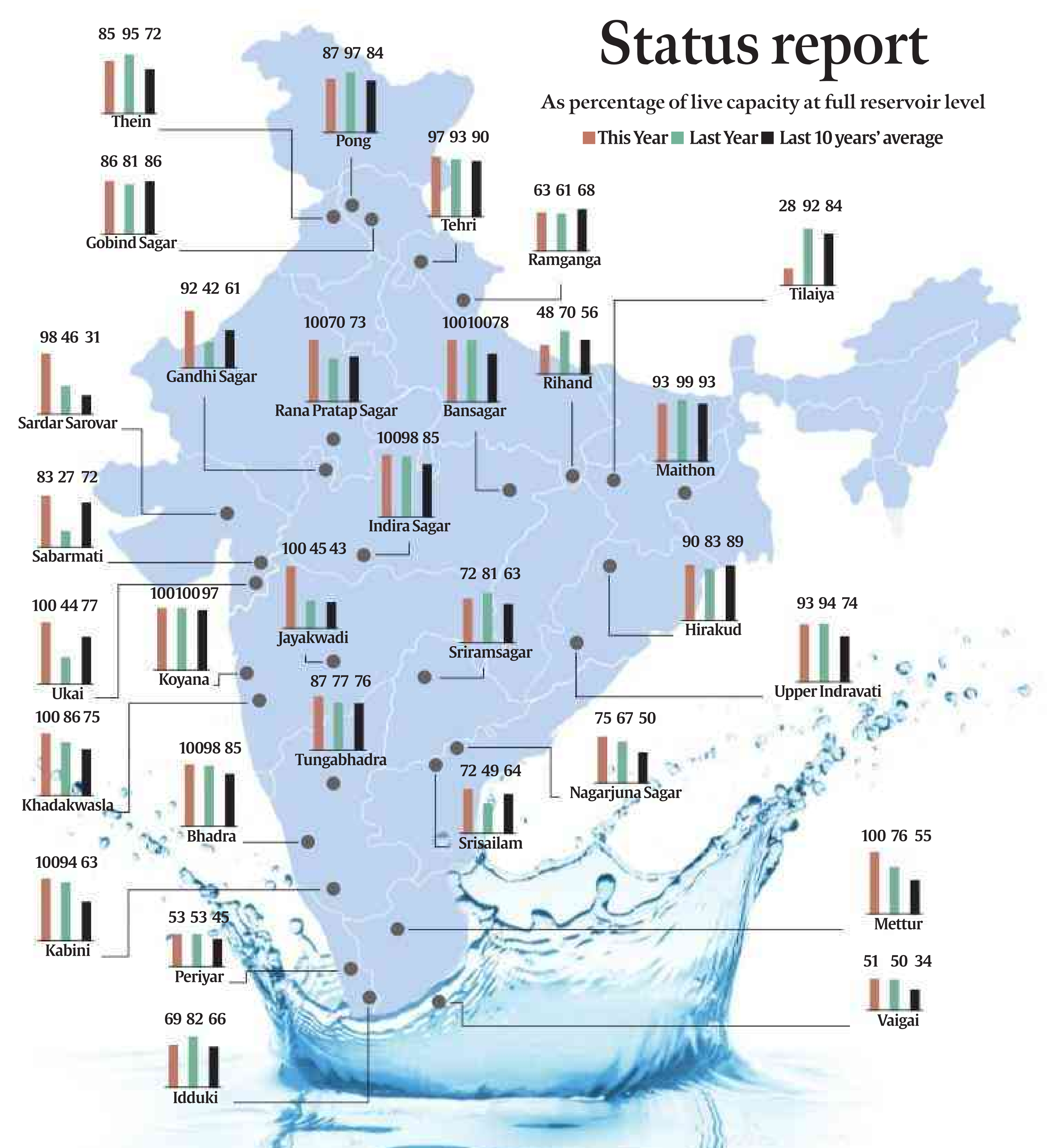
SIMPLY PUT

Season of plenty for reservoirs

June-September monsoon ends with reservoirs holding 21 per cent more water than 10-year average for this stage, 33 of 113 reservoirs at full capacity, and all river systems with higher storage than normal

Status report

As percentage of live capacity at full reservoir level



STORAGE STATUS

How full are reservoirs (percentage of capacity)

Region	Current	Last year	10-yr avg
NORTHERN REGION (Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan) 8 reservoirs	89	85	82
EASTERN REGION (Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura) 17 reservoirs	83	84	75
WESTERN REGION (Gujarat, Maharashtra) 39 reservoirs	91	61	68
CENTRAL REGION (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh) 16 reservoirs	86	79	75
SOUTHERN REGION (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu) 33 reservoirs	84	74	66
ALL INDIA 113 reservoirs	87	75	72

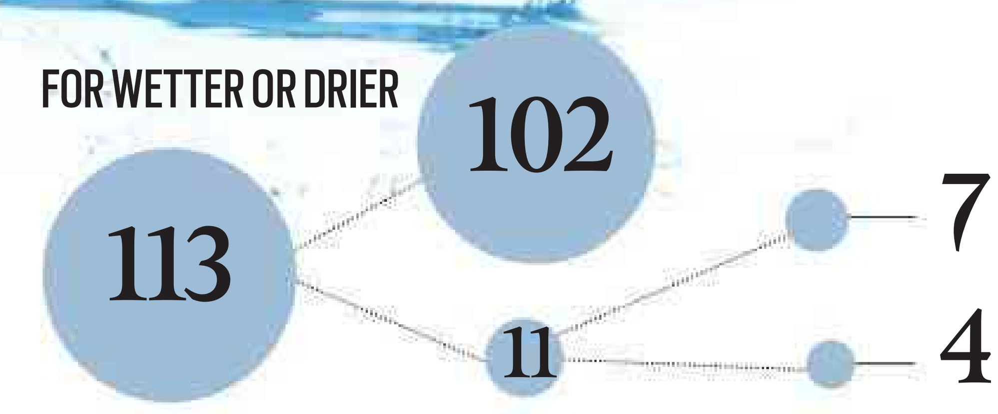
*Live storage as of September 26, 2019. Checks and crosses compare current figures with last year's & 10-yr average figures for corresponding period.

RIVER BASINS, TOP & BOTTOM 3

Percentage departure from 10-yr average

Cauvery & neighbourhood	69.68
Narmada	36.54
Tapi	32.21
Mahi	5.50
Mahanadi & neighbourhood	4.91
Indus	4.01

FOR WETTER OR DRIER



■ Out of the country's 113 reservoirs, the storage in 102 on September 26, 2019 was more than 80% of normal for this period
■ Among the 11 reservoirs with storage below 80% of normal for this period, 7 had storage over 50% of normal, with only 4 stocking under 50%

Source: CWC,

ANJALI MARAR
PUNE, SEPTEMBER 29

AT THE end of monsoon season this year, the water stored in the 113 reservoirs monitored by the Central Water Commission (CWC) is better than it was at this time last year and also better than the last 10 years' average, the CWC's latest reservoir storage bulletin shows.

The total live storage capacity of these 113 reservoirs is 168.77 billion cubic metres (BCM) and their live storage as of September 26 was 146.2 BCM, or 87 per cent of this capacity. At this stage last year, the live storage was 127.23 BCM (75 per cent), while the 10-year average for this period is 121.18 (72 per cent). Put another way, the live storage available in the 113 reservoirs was 115 per cent of that at this time last year, and 121 per cent of the average storage over the last 10 years.

In 33 reservoirs, water was at full reservoir level (FRL) on September 26. Levels ranged between 71 per cent and 99 per cent of FRL in 56 other reservoirs. Only in 10 reservoirs were levels at 40 per cent or below.

In nearly every region, the available storage was higher than last year's corresponding storage and the 10-year average. The only exception was in the Eastern region comprising Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura and Nagaland, where the available storage of 83 per cent (16.10 BCM) in 17 reservoirs was just below last year's 84 per cent, but way ahead of the 75 per cent average of the last 10 years.

The Western region has 39 reservoirs monitored by the CWC, in Maharashtra and Gujarat. These had 91 per cent storage (30.95 BCM), as compared to just 61 per cent at this stage last year, and a 10-year average of 68 per cent.

In the Northern region (Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan), the available storage in the eight CWC-monitored reservoirs was 17.13 BCM, or 89 per cent, as against the 10-year average of 82 per cent for the corresponding period. Last September, the available water storage here was 85 per cent.

In Central India, which has had excess rainfall during the last one month, the 16 reservoirs of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh held 37.6 BCM together, or 86 per cent of capacity. This time last year, the reserves were 79 per cent, while the 10-year average is 75 per cent.

In the Southern region (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu), where the CWC monitors 33 reservoirs, their stocks added up to 44.2 BCM, or 84 per cent of their total live capacity, up from 74 per cent at this stage last year, and much higher than the 10-year average of 66 per cent.

In Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jharkhand, West Bengal, UP, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Kerala and Chhattisgarh, the water in reservoirs was lower than the stocks at the same stage last year. In Rajasthan, Odisha, Nagaland, Gujarat, Maharashtra, MP, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, this year's storage exceeded last year's, owing to good rain throughout the season.

All river basins in the country have storage above normal this year.

EXPERTS EXPLAIN

Remembering VP Menon's role in accession of J&K and other states

ARGHYA SENGUPTA & JINALY DANI

MONDAY MARKS the 126th birth anniversary of V P Menon. Born on September 30, 1893, Menon was the Secretary in the Ministry of States which was established by the Government of India in 1947 to deal with the accession of princely states. While the nation rightly remembers Sardar Patel's herculean efforts in ensuring that over 500 princely states seamlessly joined the Union of India, few know that it was Menon working in the background, travelling across the country and persuading different Maharajas and Nawabs to accede.

Perhaps Menon's greatest contribution was coming up with the original policy on accession that required the princely states to accede only in the three matters of defence, external affairs and communications. Since these matters were fairly non-controversial, Menon believed they would be readily accepted by the rulers. In his book *Integration of the Indian States*, Menon recounts approaching Sardar and pointing out the advantages of this policy: "The basic unity of India would be achieved and, when the new constitution was framed, we could thrash out the necessary details."

It was Menon's policy piloted by Sardar Patel that was finally reflected in the Instrument of Accession (IoA) executed by the states becoming a part of the Union of India in 1947 and their seamless integration thereafter.

One of the states to which Menon travelled to secure its accession was Jammu and Kashmir. By October 25, 1947, an attack by Afridi tribesmen had reached the outskirts of Srinagar, forcing the Maharaja of J&K to escape the city and relocate to Jammu. On October 26, the Defence Committee of the Indian Government held a meeting to discuss the viability of a military intervention in J&K. Lord Mountbatten, who was part of this meeting, observed that since J&K had not acceded to either India or Pakistan, it was an independent country. According to Mountbatten, if the Maharaja acceded to India, troops could be sent to rescue the state. Subsequently, it was Menon who immediately flew to Jammu and secured the Maharaja's signature on the IoA.

Recounting that day in his book, Menon states: "The Maharajah was asleep; he had left Srinagar the previous evening and had been driving all night. I woke him up and told him of what had taken place at the Defence Committee meeting. He was ready to accede at once. Just as I was leaving, he told me that before he went to sleep, he had left instructions with his ADC that, if I came back from Delhi, he was not to be disturbed as it would mean that the Government of India had decided to come to his rescue and he should therefore be allowed to sleep in peace; but that if I failed to return, it meant that everything was lost and, in that case, his ADC was to shoot him in his sleep!" Menon returned to Delhi with the executed IoA which was then accepted by the Government of India.

V P Menon with Sardar Patel and the Maharaja of Cochin. *Wikimedia Commons*

With accession secured, the next challenge for Menon and his team in the Ministry of States was to ensure complete integration. While this was a legally complex but politically straightforward matter in respect of most princely states, negotiations between representatives of the Government of India and Sheikh Abdullah, the Prime Minister of J&K, in relation to J&K's status in India failed to produce a mutually acceptable result.

It was thus decided that the Constitution of India would reflect the position under the 1947 IoA. In a letter dated September 29, 1949, Menon writes to Sheikh Abdullah proposing an initial formula for the draft Article 370. He states: "The State of Jammu and Kashmir is an Acceding State and ordinarily the State would have been treated like other Part III States. In view, however, of the special problems arising in connection with this State it seems desirable that the constitutional relationship between the State of Jammu and Kashmir and the Union of India should, however, under the new constitution, approximate, for the present, to that subsisting under the Instrument of Accession, already executed by His Highness the Maharaja."

The final text of Article 370 introduced in the Constitution of India is based on this understanding. Sheikh Abdullah however had reservations regarding Menon's letter. He proposed an alternative formulation which simply stated that the Indian Parliament would be entitled to legislate only on defence, external affairs and communications. Seemingly making light of Abdullah's objection, in an internal correspondence between Vishnu Sahay, Secretary, Kashmir Affairs to V Shankar, PS to Sardar Patel, Menon asked that the following be conveyed to Shankar (and presumably Patel):

"Parts II (citizenship), III (fundamental rights) and IV (directive principles) of the Constitution would apply automatically to Kashmir unless the position is expressly saved... What is worrying Sheikh Abdullah and the Working Committee of the National Conference is that if these general provisions become applicable to Kashmir also, their legislation against other citizens of India in respect of acquisition etc. of property will become invalid. The Kashmiris are perhaps worried about the occupation of their country by the Punjabees!!"

Thus overriding the Sheikh's objections, but in deference to his principled disagreement, the Ministry of States sent a draft proclamation to the Yuvraj of Kashmir, Karan Singh, for signing. This was the final step towards complete integration in the Union of India by which all princely states that had acceded to India were required to accept the Constitution of India as their own through a public proclamation. It is significant to note that J&K's proclamation was worded differently from the others. This proclamation, issued on November 25, 1949, did not accept the Constitution of India as J&K's own. Instead, it stated that the Constitution of India, "in so far as it is applicable to [J&K]" would "govern the constitutional relationship between [J&K and the] Union of India". This was a reference to Article 370 of the Constitution of India. The rest, as they say, is history.

Arghya Sengupta is Research Director, and Jinaly Dani is Research Fellow, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy

WORDLY WISE

IT IS THE HABIT OF EVERY AGGRESSOR NATION TO CLAIM THAT IT IS ACTING ON THE DEFENSIVE.

— JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A WIN FOR DIPLOMACY

Political and security establishment has to turn things around in Kashmir to build on the gains of PM Modi's US visit

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's visit to New York to participate in the annual session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) had two important objectives. One was to convince the world of India's case on changing the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir and the other was to showcase PM's new and purposeful commitment to multilateralism. But the challenge was to keep the pursuit of the two diplomatic goals on separate tracks. Pakistan's premier, Imran Khan, also in New York to address the UNGA, kept up a relentless attack on Modi personally as well as the BJP-RSS on Kashmir. Pakistan's strategy was about getting the world to intervene in the contestation over Kashmir with India. The PM rightly refused to be drawn into a futile public argument with Pakistan. This is not easy for Indian diplomacy that in the past could not resist the temptation to wrestle in the mud with Pakistan. Modi concentrated, instead, on getting his own message across on the global issues of the day, including the dangers of violent extremism and the need to urgently combat climate change.

Under Modi, India's multilateralism has taken a distinctive character; the PM has turned it into an interest-driven exercise. Modi's mobilisation of global support against cross-border terrorism for succeeded in putting Pakistan in the dock before the Financial Action Task Force that seeks to choke off funding for terror groups worldwide. If the PM's campaign on terrorism was about aligning India's concerns with those of the world, Modi's commitment on combating climate change is about accepting national responsibility and demonstrating international leadership. Before Modi, India claimed that it had no reason to address the climate change that was caused by the industrial countries. Modi flipped that around into a policy that actively tilted India's energy mix towards renewables and unveiled the International Solar Alliance. This year, Modi invited UN member states to join a coalition to promote resilient infrastructure that can cope with climate change and disasters.

Taking the high global road does not mean the Kashmir question is going to disappear from the international discourse. Modi and external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar embarked on an intensive bilateral diplomacy on the margins of the UNGA to generate understanding of India's Kashmir move. Barring China and Turkey that extended open support for Pakistan, the rest of the international community seemed willing to give India the benefit of doubt. But the world is unlikely to hold its peace forever. If Delhi fails to quickly normalise the situation or if Imran Khan's promised "bloodbath" unfolds in Kashmir, India may find itself in an indefensible corner. At New York, diplomacy has won valuable political breathing space for Delhi on Kashmir. It won't last forever. It is now up to Delhi's political and security establishment to turn things around in the Valley.

MONSOON BOUNTY

Excess rain and the extended season may upset harvest predictions. Government must not artificially suppress prices

EVERY MONSOON IS different. This one's been even more so. In June, the country registered an average area-weighted rainfall deficiency of 32.8 per cent and it seemed this season would conform to the textbook case of an El Nino year, similar to 2002, 2004, 2009, 2015 and 2016. All those years had witnessed the abnormal warming of the equatorial eastern Pacific Ocean waters, known to impact rains in India during the monsoon season from June to September. With most global weather models predicting El Nino conditions, which had set in from roughly September 2018, to last at least till the first half of this monsoon season, a drought looked inevitable. And coming on top of an extended dry spell right from October through an excruciatingly hot summer, the return of food inflation appeared to present the re-elected Narendra Modi government with its first major challenge.

Then the tide turned. In July, the rainfall was 4.6 per cent higher than the historical long-period average. In August, the surplus was even higher at 15.3 per cent. And in the current month, not only has rainfall been a whopping 44.6 per cent above normal so far, but it may also end up being the wettest September in 102 years! The Meteorological Department, which had forecast a just-about "normal" monsoon while suggesting a 47 per cent probability of below normal/deficient rainfall even as late as on May 31, is now saying that its withdrawal phase may commence "only in the second week of October". Meanwhile, there are reports about large-scale damage to the standing kharif crop that is in late-maturity stage, if not ready for harvesting. Farmers, in other words, are suffering this time from too much rain. Worse, they aren't stopping when clear skies are what farmers would want at present. In all likelihood, the kharif harvest will be a less than a bumper one.

The big consolation, however, is the excess rains have helped substantially recharge the groundwater table and aquifers. Moreover, water levels in the country's 107 important reservoirs are 86.6 per cent of their full capacities, as against their 10-year average of 71.80 per cent at this time. So, even assuming some setback during kharif, a bumper winter-spring rabi crop is definitely in the offing. That would be great news, especially when there are indications of a price recovery in many crops from their lows. One hopes the government does not do things to artificially suppress prices, like the recent onion exports ban. Rather, this is the time to dismantle all controls on marketing, movement, stocking and exports of farm produce that are an anathema to liberalisation. There's no better antidote to the economic slowdown today than higher farm incomes.

Let the farmer earn

Government must not sacrifice rise in farm incomes at altar of short-term consumer interest or to save RCEP

HARISH DAMODARAN

"WHEN MONEY IS bad, people want it to be better. When it is good, they think of other things".

One needs to simply replace "money" with "onions" to appreciate how the above observation on inflation by John Kenneth Galbraith still rings true. When onion is today retailing at Rs 55-60 per kg, Twitter handles and WhatsApp forwards are littered with clichés about the bulb bringing tears, making people cry, and so on. But when growers were realising Rs 3/kg a year ago, the same concerned folks had "other things" to think of.

The public cannot be blamed, though. Contrary to the 1974 Kishore Kumar song, it does not know everything. The problem comes when governments, too, take the same shortsighted approach. The average modal price of onion from January 2016 to May 2019 at Maharashtra's Lasalgaon market was Rs 9.92/kg, which just about covered the basic cultivation cost of Rs 8 or so. That rate rose to Rs 12.22/kg in June, Rs 12.52 in July, Rs 18.80 in August and Rs 33.15 in September (till Friday). But in June itself, the Narendra Modi government withdrew a 10 per cent export incentive given on the free-on-board (FOB) value of shipments. And on September 13, it virtually banned exports by imposing a minimum FOB price of $850 per tonne (Rs 60/kg), below which onions cannot leave the country. In addition, the state-owned MMTC was asked to import, if necessary from Pakistan.

This policy — of doing little when producer prices are low for extended periods, but jumping into action at the slightest hint of consumer despair ("tears") that is often temporary — translates into a one-sided bet against the farmer. Last year, the three-acre Nashik grower who harvested 300 quintals of rabi onions in April, and stocked it in his low-cost kanda chawl storage structure for offloading through the summer and monsoon months, would have lost his shirt: Lasalgaon prices averaged just Rs 7.67/kg in September, hardly an increase over the Rs 6.70 in April. This time, there was a chance to make some money that comes, maybe, once in three years. That possibility has been scuppered by the government's actions and admonishments. Since September 19, Lasalgaon rates have already fallen from Rs 45 to Rs 36/kg.

The costs of government shortsightedness aren't small. India, in 2018-19, exported 21.83 lakh tonnes (lt) of onions, which was a tenth of its production and valued at Rs 3,467.36 crore. Bureaucrats and ministers have no idea what it takes to build export markets and the damage that a single Directorate General of Foreign Trade notification can do. Nor do they know what low retail food inflation — this has averaged 1.38 per cent year-on-year from September 2016 to August 2019, as compared to 3.50 per cent for overall consumer price inflation — means for producer incomes and incentives.

Unfortunately, it isn't onions alone. Even more dangerous is the proposed signing of a free trade agreement with the 16-country Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or RCEP bloc, which could open India's market to cheap milk powder and butter fat imports from New Zealand and Australia. Currently, India allows only up to 10,000 tonnes of powder imports annually at 15 per cent duty, with quantities beyond this limit attracting 60 per cent rate. There is talk of the Modi government not being averse to significantly raising the quota for imports at the concessional duty, while bringing down the rate itself from the existing 15 per cent. India apparently does not want to be seen as stalling the RCEP deal that is to be concluded by November.

> What will inclusion of dairy products under RCEP's purview do? India's yearly SMP production is 5-5.5 lt, of which 2-2.5 lt is used by dairies themselves for reconstitution into milk during the 'lean' summer months. If, say, one lt of powder from New Zealand were to come in, it would depress the market. Indeed, the very prospect of a deal is enough to create negative sentiment, when we are entering the 'flush' winter season.

One indication of the official mood is a presentation made at a stakeholder consultation meeting called by the commerce ministry on September 18, in which it was claimed that India's likely milk production of 170.93 million tonnes (mt) in 2020-21 would fall short of consumption at 204 mt. This, when the animal husbandry and dairying department's own output estimate for 2017-18 was 176.35 mt! Further, the gap between production (238.48 mt) and consumption (341 mt) was expected to widen by 2033-34, thereby strengthening the case for imports. These predictions were supposedly made using data from the National Dairy Development Board, which the latter has not only denied, but also gone on to cite a Niti Aayog report that had projected India's milk output of 330 mt in 2033 to exceed demand at 292 mt!

Again, the context matters. Last year at this time, dairies were selling skimmed milk powder (SMP) at around Rs 140/kg and ghee at Rs 320/kg. The gross revenue from processing 100 litres (103 kg) of cow milk containing 3.5 per cent fat (ghee) and 8.5 per cent solids-not-fat (SMP) would, then, have been roughly Rs 2,380. After deducting chilling, transport and processing costs of Rs 500-600, the maximum that farmers could be paid was Rs 1,800-1,900 or Rs 18-19 per litre. But today, SMP and ghee rates have recovered to Rs 280 and Rs 390/kg, respectively. As a result, farmers are getting Rs 29-30 per litre.

What will the inclusion of dairy products under RCEP's purview do? India's yearly SMP production is 5-5.5 lt, of which 2-2.5 lt is used by dairies themselves for reconstitution into milk during the "lean" summer months. If, say, 1 lt of powder from New Zealand were to come in, it would depress the market. Indeed, the very prospect of a deal is enough to create a negative sentiment, when we are entering the "flush" winter season. Milk producers, like onion growers, have suffered low prices for much of the last 3-4 years, forcing them to reduce herd sizes or underfeed their animals. It would be a tragedy if, just when prices are improving from lows, their interests have to be sacrificed at the altar of short-term consumer interest or saving a trade deal.

The Modi government should actually take heart from the price recovery now being seen in onion, milk or even maize, jowar, pulses and soyabean. With the surplus monsoon rains delivering a bumper harvest — if not in kharif, definitely in rabi — it is farm incomes that offer the best hope for an economic turnaround. The consumer's real friend is the producer. And we shall also keep our jobs if he starts earning and spending again.

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PRAMOD DA'S WAY

An ordinary person stood up to protect the university as a space of free expression

SOURAV ROY BARMAN

ONE OF 800 MILLION

A VOICE, UNDER 35

ANTI-NATIONALS, URBAN NAXALS — these epithets are recent additions to our public discourse, but the tendency to pigeonhole voices of dissent and resistance as "leftists" or "Maoists" predates the Narendra Modi government. Much before Babul Supriyo heaped scorn on the vice-chancellor of Jadavpur University, Mamata Banerjee had called my friend, a student of Presidency College, a "Maoist" on national television, for questioning her government's track record on women's safety.

The disdain for critical thinking coming out of our universities aside, such statements advance the notion of a society besieged by inimical forces, in desperate need of a decisive and strong leader to tackle the imagined adversary. The project to demonise students of public universities as rootless elites falters on one count though. It fails to factor in the capacity of seemingly ordinary individuals, an intrinsic part of those ecosystems, to pull off extraordinary acts. Like one Pramod Sain did, nearly eight years ago. This is his story.

Having been elevated to university status in 2010, Kolkata's Presidency College, founded in 1818, was then struggling to deal with the pangs of transition. The institution's students' union was dissolved during the upgradation, and the Trinamool government was in no hurry to hold fresh elections.

On January 29, 2012, the Kolkata edition of *The Hindu* carried on its front page the news that Pune's Symbiosis University has cancelled the screening of *Jashn-e-Azadi*, a documentary on Kashmir, bowing to threats from the ABVP. Then a second year student of Political Science at Presidency, I saw the story and immediately alerted my classmate Pratim Ghosal and Waled Aadnan, who was in the final year of BSc Economics. Driven by sheer impulse, we decided to screen the Sanjay Kak documentary on our campus.

But the challenges were many. If you think the news sparked protests, prompting students in crumpled kurtas, torn jeans, worn-out chappals to hit the streets with daflis, chanting the anthem of liberation -- azadi -- you must consign these assorted stereotypes to the nearest bin. Moreover, despite being intensely political, the three of us were somewhat disillusioned with the nature of campus politics prevailing then, featuring the CPM-backed SFI and the Independents' Consolidation, which is essentially a campus-born platform. To spread the word, we created an event page on Facebook announcing our resolve to "protest thought control" and arrest the country's "slide towards fundamentalism" and carried out a low-key signature campaign. Our objective was not to make a splash, but to register a small act of dissent.

> The vice-chancellor asked us to defer the screening by a week. Just when the institution of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, one of the principal forces behind the Bengal Renaissance, was beginning to fail us, Pramod Sain, simply Pramod-da for generations of Presidencians, stepped forward.

Upon approaching the authorities for a space to screen and projectors, we were greeted with a wave of rejections. The vice-chancellor asked us to defer the screening by a week. But we could not afford to wait as the campus would soon empty out with the annual exams little more than a month away

Just when the institution of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, one of the principal forces behind the Bengal Renaissance, was beginning to fail us, Pramod Sain, simply Pramod-da for generations of Presidencians, stepped forward. Sain, who ran the college canteen, had come to Presidency as a 13-year-old during the peak of the Naxal movement.

He unlocked the dingy anteroom of the canteen for us. On February 8, 2012, a hired projector played out the story of the Valley, its rage and sorrow, its endless twilight, in front of a group of around 50, seated on rickety benches. Meanwhile, Pramod-da was his usual self behind the counter, taking an occasional nap, updating himself with crucial campus gossip.

The next day, the event made it to the front pages of national dailies, complete with photographs, prompting the stunned authorities to issue show-cause notices to every single individual associated with it, including Pramod-da. The students defended their action on the ground of free speech, Article 19, the idea of university as a free space.

Pramod-da had a more compelling argument. Did the university not argue, when he was trying to install a cola vending machine, that he mustn't forget that he was running the canteen on lease? "Then why am I being held accountable for something that does not even come under my jurisdiction?" Point made, he coolly walked out. Perhaps even Pramod-da is a closet leftist. We never got to ask. The Right Honourable Minister Supriyo can shed some light, perhaps?

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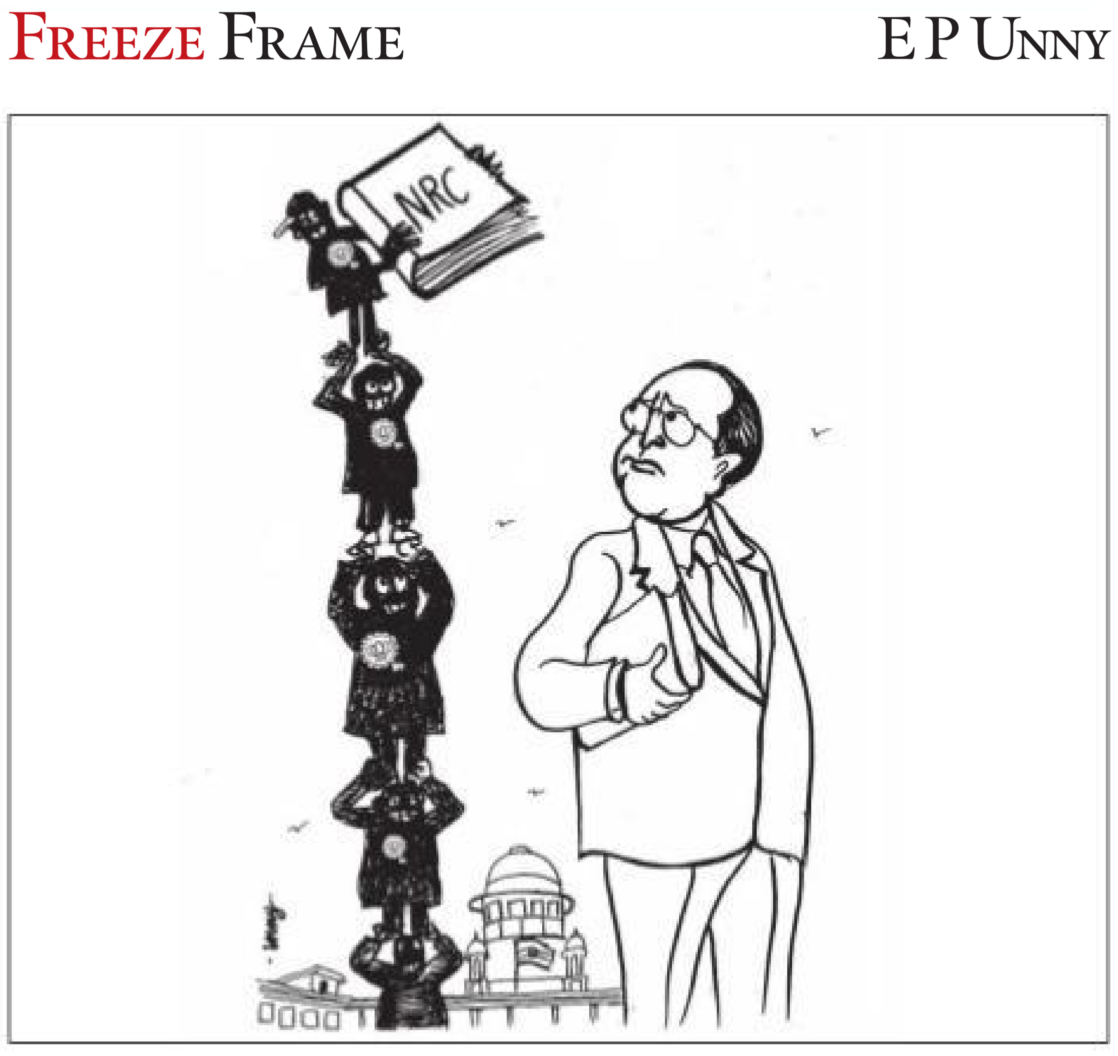
FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



SEPTEMBER 30, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO


Badal set to defy religious heads

STOPPING DEFECTIONS

SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH, chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, urged the Union government to promulgate an ordinance preventing political defections to provide political stability. Speaking to newsmen, the chief minister said the bane of Indian political life was the tendency of legislators to defect and re-defect to serve their short-term interests. The electorate had no control over their representatives. They had to be mute spectators. In this connection, he referred to the passage of a bill by Jammu and Kashmir Assembly preventing defections. The President should issue an ordinance on similar lines applicable to the country as a whole, he added.

NO COMMON SYMBOL

THE CONGRESS WORKING Committee decided that the party would fight the coming elections on a separate symbol. The CWC also decided that the party would have a common manifesto with the Lok Dal, the major partner in the Congress-Lok Dal alliance. Devaraj Urs said there were some legal difficulties about having a common symbol. One of them was "the possibility of losing our identity." Answering a question, he said the party did not have talks with the Lok Dal on the decision to fight on a separate symbol. But, he pointed out, the Lok Dal had also taken a symbol for itself without having any talks with the Congress.

BURMA NO TO NAM

BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER, Myint Maung, told the UN General Assembly that "Burma has ended her participation in the non-aligned movement" because the Havana conference ignored a motion he submitted. Speaking in the assembly's policy debate, he said, "Burma went to Havana with hopes that the principles which had inspired the founding of the movement could be preserved", but "what happened at the conference only disillusioned us". He said Burma's "urgent motion" would have had the conference name a drafting committee to define the "inviolable principles" of the movement and qualifications for membership.

THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The end of the INF nuclear treaty is a bad step that could be followed by a worse one."

— THE GUARDIAN

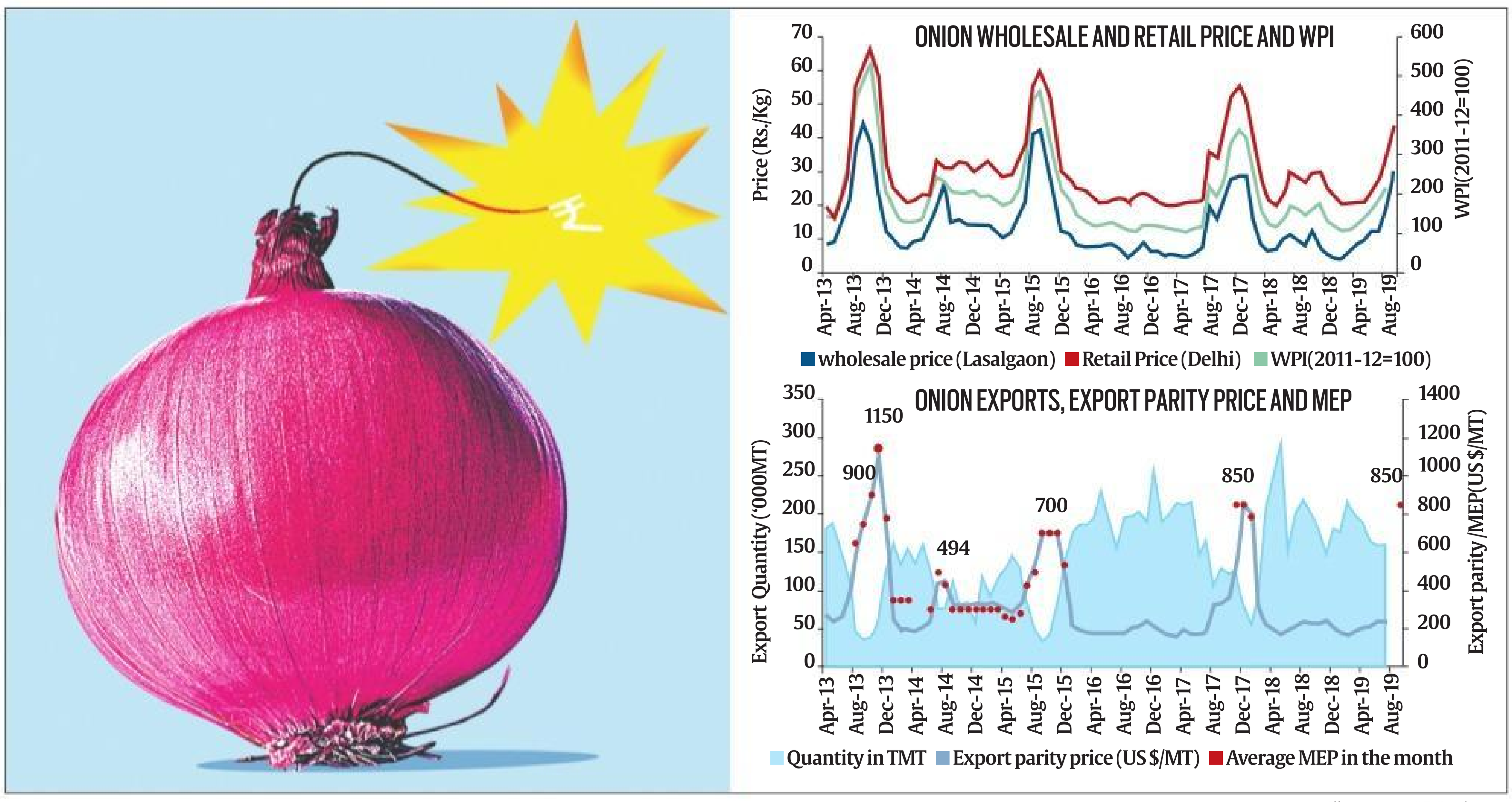


Illustration: C R Sasikumar

Wipe away the onion tears

The government's concern over spike in onion prices is justified. But the policy instruments it is using won't solve the problem

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

BY ASHOK GULATI AND HARSH WARDHAN

ONIONS ARE ON the boil, once again. With onion retail prices in Delhi crossing Rs 40/kg in mid-September, and even higher in Mumbai, the government swung into action. It imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of $850/tonne, followed by a central team of bureaucrats visiting Lasalgaon, India's largest wholesale market of onions, to assess the situation. It won't be a surprise if they come up blaming onion traders for speculation and recommend stocking limits. While the heightened concern of the government is justified, we disagree with the policy instruments being used. Here is our take on it.

Onion price rise in September is not new. Prices rise in September almost every year due to seasonality, but every alternate year there is an accelerated spike (*see* Figure 1) due to "some other factors". This shakes any political party in power. The standard response is imposition of MEP, stocking limits on traders, and sometimes even income tax raids on onion traders. These crude measures don't provide sustainable solutions.

While onion price spikes make the government hyperactive, how many people remember that even in January to May 2019, when much of the late kharif and rabi onions were sold, the wholesale prices in Lasalgaon hovered between Rs 4-10/kg (Figure 1), and on some days even touched Rs 2/kg? This is against a cost of Rs 9-10/kg in Maharashtra, as estimated by the National Horticulture Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF). This means farmers incurred massive losses in 2019 from sales of onions, running into hundreds of crores of rupees. If the government was as hyperactive at that time to save the onion farmers from the price crash as it is today to save the consumers, perhaps these spikes would have been avoided. But there is an inherent "consumer bias" in our agri-price policies. This would be even more so when MMTC imports onions and "dumps" at below their import parity prices to "tame" domestic prices. This is likely to happen in late October-November, when the kharif crop will start arriving in the market and prices would be nose-diving in any case.

It may be noted that both these policy instruments -- restricting exports through high MEP and dumping imported onions at below cost -- are not only anti-farmer, but also anti-agri-exports and contrary to the prime minister's vision of doubling farmers' incomes. This must be avoided at all costs.

Figure 2 shows that whenever high MEP is imposed, such as $850/tonne, which translates to roughly Rs 60/kg, exports dropped sharply. The export parity price from October 2018 till date has remained below $300/tonne (*see* Figure 2). So this MEP of $850/tonne will deprive farmers of whatever little benefits they were getting from onion exports. India has emerged as the largest exporter of onions in the world, having exported about 2.4 million tonnes in 2018-19 out of a production of 23.5 million tonnes. Remember, it takes years to build export markets but with such abrupt export restrictions, India becomes an unreliable exporter, which adversely hits its unit value of exports. This damage is far greater compared to the short-term gains the government is eyeing.

So, what could be the best possible solutions? First, one needs to remember that price stabilisation does not come free. NAFED, which is entrusted with price stabilisation, should procure at least 2-3 lakh tonnes at the rabi harvest time (April-May), ensuring that farmers get at least Rs 12-15/kg, when they were getting Rs 4-8/kg. This will save onion farmers from a price-crash and give them reasonable profits, incentivising production and exports. But these stored onions will incur storage costs. Storages at farm level suffer losses of about 20-25 per cent, which can be brought down to 5-10 per cent with modern cold storages. But cold stores will cost about Rs 1.5/kg/month. These stored onions can then be released during August through first half of October, before the kharif harvest starts arriving. If NAFED incurs, let us say, five months storage cost at about Rs 7.5/kg, and if the procurement is at Rs 12-15/kg, they can still offload at say Rs 20-23/kg, and the retail price in September-October can be tamed to below Rs 30/kg.

> Onion price rise in September is not new. Prices rise in September almost every year due to seasonality, but every alternate year there is an accelerated spike (*see* Figure 1) due to 'some other factors'. This shakes any political party in power. The standard response is imposition of MEP, stocking limits on traders, and sometimes even income tax raids on onion traders. These crude measures don't provide sustainable solutions.

Second, our analysis of onion value chains for three years average, ending 2018-19, with season-wise weighted average of wholesale prices from major mandis in Maharashtra, MP, Gujarat, and Rajasthan catering to Delhi's onion demand, reveals that onion farmers get a mere 29 per cent share of the consumer's rupee. The rest constitutes costs and margins of middlemen, with retailers apportioning the highest share. With the majority of onions traded through the APMC markets, the auctioning procedure is controlled by powerful traders and commission agents with much less bargaining power for farmers. Layers of mandi fees and commissions escalate prices further without much value addition or benefit to farmers. Our field visits to major mandis (Azadpur, Lasalgaon, Pimpalgaon, Mahuva) revealed that actual commissions are way above the prescribed charges. Officially levied on buyers, ultimately it is farmers that bear the burden. What all this indicates is that an overhaul of the APMCs is overdue.

Third, the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) should be at the forefront to extensively promote the use of dehydrated onions (flakes, powder, granules) among domestic households and institutions like the armed forces, hospitals, restaurants and schools (mid-day meals). This will take the pressure off fresh onions during the lean season. Currently, India exports 85 per cent of its dehydrated onions, and is the largest exporter of dehydrated onions in the world. Dehydrated products are much cheaper to store and are more durable. They can help check the spikes in onion prices. This will reduce wastage and help farmers get a fair price and consumers can switch to these dehydrated onions in the lean season at affordable prices.

If the government can take these steps, it will not only know its onions but also farmers.

Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture and Wardhan is consultant at ICRIER

Much ado about language

It is, after all, a mode of communication between people. Whether Hindi or any other tongue, there has to be a strong practical reason to learn it

M RAJIVLOCHAN

"ÑAN NINNE SNEHIKKUNNU", says the wife to her migrant husband who has remitted her some money. To know what this means you will have to look at the PhonePe advertisement that came out in 2018. It is still available on YouTube. What the advertisement does indicate is that north Indian, Hindi speakers, are just as adept at learning a language other than Hindi given the right incentive to do so. The wife in this advertisement probably learnt Malyalam on her own in order to communicate with her husband privately, even in the presence of her mother in-law.

Then there is the unseemly spectacle of the annual language war which starts on every Hindi Diwas. Soon it transforms into a discussion on the essential characteristics of nation and nationhood. Fortunately, nowadays, like a viral fever, the agitation dies down on its own after a few days.

It all starts with the department of Hindi in the Central government, which has been given the responsibility of spreading Hindi across the country. It recruits only those who have done an MA in Hindi. It is officially called "Rajbhasha Vibhag" and is under the control of the home ministry. You would recall that English too is a rajbhasha of India but there is no department to promote it. No effort is made to recruit MAs in English to help out in drafting laws, rules, regulations and directives from the government in a comprehensible language.

In the absence of an English rajbhasha vibhag, the language of the laws of India remains incomprehensible, even to those who draft it. The intention behind the law may be good but, frequently, it requires the wisdom of the honourable courts of justice to make sense of whatever was written in the law. The latest such example concerns the historic law, written in English, which the Parliament discussed in August, to partially modify Article 370. It was full of horrific spelling and grammatical mistakes. It took almost a month for the government to issue a corrected version of the law which Parliament had passed.

Central government offices, in non-Hindi areas, also have a "Hindi" officer, once again an MA in Hindi, whose sole task is to promote the Hindi language within that office. In many such offices, where the Hindi officer is a bit conscientious, there is also a Hindi board, alongside the one which announces the name, address and phone number of the officer to contact in case of corruption complaints. The corruption board is some sort of a quasi statutory thing because of directions from the Central Vigilance Commissioner. The Hindi board is more of a voluntary effort. The offices of the Panjab University, for example, have no such Hindi board.

The Rashtrabhasha department in the Central government initiates the process of promoting Hindi a few days before Hindi Diwas. No one notices its efforts and there is no visible consequence of its efforts or at least none that has been researched or documented. On Hindi Diwas that follows, someone makes what they consider an uplifting remark in the context of Hindi. This year it was the turn of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to make that remark. Earlier P Chidambaram, P V Narasimha Rao, R Venkataraman and other home ministers have made similar remarks. The only reason why they do so is that the department falls under their charge. Mostly, the remark is ignored by everyone, especially when the minister is a south Indian, connected with a Dravidian language.

Then there are times when the remark is followed by furore all over the country. In the mid-1960s, when Gulzarilal Nanda was the home minister, it even resulted in riots in many parts of the country when he announced, in 1965, the departure of the English language from government and the arrival of Hindi as the official language of governance in India. The opening scenes of the first film in which Amitabh Bachchan stars, *Saat Hindustani*, feature one such riot. The anti-Hindi riots in south Indian cities used to be paralleled by anti-English riots in the markets of Bihar, UP and Madhya Pradesh. The eagerness to burn property was common to both sets of rioters. There was no reported desire to learn any language.

Fortunately, nowadays the acrimony that Hindi Diwas generates is limited to some slogan shouting and once in a while, as it happened at Patiala, a few Hindi acolytes being asked to apologise for having heaped insults on non-Hindi languages. In the Patiala episode, it was said that Punjabi was insulted.

A few weeks later, everyone forgets about Hindi. Those who wish to use it, use it; those who wish to ignore it, ignore it. No one really cares one way or the other. A language, after all, is a device for communication between people. This is a point that we need to remember, always. As in the case of the Phonepe advertisement, and in the context of the annual war that erupts in India because someone in the government promises to impose Hindi on everyone else, the point is simply this: There has to be a strong reason to learn a language. Otherwise, no one other than the learned types are willing to waste time learning a new language. In the past, a common Indian was said to know at least three languages. Most Indians, even today, do. Mahatma Gandhi knew five. Narasimha Rao, knew as many as 10 languages.

As for the language of Bharat Sarkar, whether it uses Hindi or English, there is an urgent need for it to appoint a "Simple Language Commission". No rule, law, directive should be issued by the government unless it is written in a simple, commonsensical language with no convolutions and legalese, one that even a 10th-pass can comprehend, which by the way is 90 per cent of the all the workers in the organised and unorganised sector in India.

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VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

LEADER AND DIPLOMACY

MUNIR AKRAM, former Pakistan ambassador to the UN and columnist for *Dawn*, displays in his article on September 29 a growing trend across South Asia. He praises Imran Khan's speech and diplomacy at the UN General Assembly, in terms that could be described as sycophantic: "In the person of a bold, honest and dedicated leader, Pakistan has been offered a historic opportunity to address its multiple external challenges, play a constructive role in resolving regional disputes and promote critical global objectives."

Akram, a career diplomat, appears to believe that a "charismatic" leader offers a historic opportunity. This is how he describes Khan's speech and what he said about Kashmir: "India's unilateral and brutal attempt to annex occupied Jammu and Kashmir is what took the prime minister to the UN. His much-anticipated address to the UNGA was impassioned, eloquent and substantive, forcefully projecting the real nature of the BJP-RSS government, the grave human rights violations it is perpetrating in Kashmir, and the danger of a potentially catastrophic war between two nuclear-weapon states."

But the real question is whether the Pakistan PM's words yielded tangible diplomatic gains. On this, even Akram is unable to provide a clear answer — or at least one that can reconcile his high praise for Imran Khan with the lack of international opprobrium over India's "unilateral actions" and "gross human rights violations" in Kashmir: "Even though the conscience of the global champions of human rights appears to be dulled by the promised profits in India's large market, and most of the world's chancelleries have yet to publicly acknowledge the impending threat of genocide and war between Pakistan and India, most states are concerned and desire a peaceful resolution of the crisis created by India's actions."

Akram also describes how Khan addressed Pakistan's other diplomatic challenges — in Afghanistan, Iran, with the US, etc — and asks for the national and government to support the country's foreign policy establishment.

SLOWDOWN AND NEPAL

As a regional economic powerhouse, India's fortunes have a ripple effect beyond its borders, as highlighted by the September 26 editorial in the *Kathmandu Post*. The editorial expresses deep concern over the dependence and, so, negative effects in Nepal from the slowdown in India. "With the southern neighbour in the midst of an economic slowdown, Nepal can expect to experience far-reaching impacts. The reason is simple: Our trade is heavily dependent on India. We import everything — from agricultural products to fast-moving consumer goods—from the southern neighbour," it says.

Nepal is also going to be affected in terms of imports: "India also happens to be Nepal's largest export partner too. With the Indian economy hitting rock bottom, Nepal needs to diversify its export market and the market for services alike. Products like cardamom, polyester yarn, jute goods and so on are among the major exports from Nepal to India. What's more, many tourists come to Nepal with the purpose of visiting temples or getting respite from the scorching heat. Undeniably, India's ailing economy will impact Nepal's export and its economy too."

Frustrated, the editorial hints at less dependence on an unreliable neighbour.

NPAS IN BANGLADESH

The editorial in the *Daily Star* on September 28 expresses alarm at the recent IMF report that has found that the country's bad loan crisis is far worse than previously anticipated "According to a report published by the international money-lender, the amount of bad loans is actually double the figure presented by the Bangladesh government. This is in part the result of policies and practices that not only enable banks to mask their default loans as rescheduled loans and 'special mention' loans but also allow big loan defaulters to go about their business unfettered. The large borrowers have exploited the stay order by the court which has caused a large amount of this money to disappear from the CIB database, and the banks can also report them as non-classified."

Like has been reported in India, "what is even more alarming is the fact that most of these defaulters are well-connected and influential businessmen" who believe that they won't have to face any consequences.

The state is also sending capital mixed signals, according to the editorial: "Bangladesh Bank has issued NOCs to banks on a case-by-case basis to reschedule defaulted loans. This has sent a very wrong message to the defaulters. Moreover, the central bank's backtracking on the principle of imposing strict discipline on distressed borrowers is sending out the wrong signal to these unscrupulous businessmen—that the banks are rewarding financial malpractice, or at the very least, bad credit decisions are being encouraged."

The editorial asks the government to act on the recommendations of the IMF. Unscrupulous businessmen, it suggests, must not be allowed to derail the country's impressive growth record.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FAIR, UNFAIR

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Why property rights matter' (IE, September 27). Whenever development projects like the construction of national highways or a metro railway comes up, many people have to sacrifice their private property for the larger public good. But they are not adequately compensated. The amount given to them is most often not enough to buy similar property nearby.

Manish Tailor, *Jaipur*

LISTEN TO GRETA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Being Greta' (IE, September 27). A young girl has shaken our conscience. Her concern about climate change and its effects on her generation is noteworthy. We all owe it to our younger generation, we have done them wrong. In the name of technology, power and superficial goals, we've forgotten that what our children really need is a cleaner and healthier world to live in. Greta Thunberg's has raised valid points. If the politicians do not pay heed, individual citizens should rise to the occasion.

Samita Kaur *via e-mail*

TRUST MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Cop out' (IE, September 27). The case of alleged sexual exploitation of a student by the politically powerful Swami Chinmayanand needs foolproof investigation by the Special Investigation Team. A questionable verdict will shake the faith of the people in the justice delivery system. More worryingly, this investigation could be a reference point for future probes.

Tarsem Singh, *Mahilpur*

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

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बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
वर्ष 12 अंक 192

निगरानी में नाकामी

भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक (आरबीआई) ने गत सप्ताह देश के सबसे बड़े सहकारी बैंकों में से एक पंजाब ऐंड महाराष्ट्र कोऑपरेटिव (पीएमसी) बैंक में आसन्न संकट पर कदम उठाए। केंद्रीय बैंक ने कहा कि पीएमसी बैंक के बहीखातों की जांच से संकट का पता चला। परंतु सच तो यह है कि इस सहकारी बैंक का प्रबंधन स्वयं अपनी दिक्कतों के साथ आरबीआई के पास गया और उसे बताया कि उन्हें लंबे समय से बकाया फंसे हुए कर्ज का पता चला है। खासतौर पर हाउसिंग डेवलपमेंट ऐंड इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर लिमिटेड (एचडीआईएल) के ऋण। उन्होंने केंद्रीय बैंक से कहा कि उन्हें एक निस्तारण योजना की जरूरत है। समस्या सामने आने के बाद आरबीआई ने तेजी से कदम उठाए जिसके लिए उसकी सराहना की जानी चाहिए। परंतु यह कहना भी गलत नहीं होगा कि बतौर नियामक आरबीआई का प्रदर्शन सही नहीं है।

नियामकों को ऐसी समस्याएं शुरुआती संकेतों पर ही समझ जानी चाहिए। आरबीआई को इस बात पर आत्मावलोकन करना चाहिए कि उसके अंकेक्षक वर्षों से चली आ रही इस समस्या को पकड़ने में नाकाम क्यों रहे? यह पहला मौका नहीं है जब आरबीआई निगरानी के काम में नाकाम रहा। इससे पहले वह पंजाब नैशनल बैंक में चल रही धोखाधड़ी को पकड़ पाने में भी नाकाम रहा था। उस मामले में भी तमाम अन्य तकनीक के अलावा स्विफ्ट इंटर बैंकिंग ट्रांसफर सिस्टम का दुरुपयोग किया गया था। बैंकिंग नियामक वर्षों तक धोखाधड़ी का पता लगाने या वहां लगातार हो रही गड़बड़ियों को रोक पाने में नाकाम रहा। आईएलऐंडएफएस डिफॉल्ट ने गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनियों को ऐसे संकट में धकेल दिया जहां से उबरने में उन्हें अभी भी वक्त लगेगा।

बैंकिंग निगरानी के मामले में आरबीआई की क्षमताओं में इजाफा करने के अलावा कोई अन्य विकल्प ही नहीं है। पिछले आम बजट में आरबीआई को गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनियों तथा आवास वित्त कंपनियों की निगरानी के और अधिक अधिकार सौंपे गए थे। जबकि एनबीएफसी क्षेत्र की निगरानी के अधिकार होते हुए भी बैंक अपेक्षित प्रदर्शन नहीं कर पाया था। आरबीआई का यह कहना सही है कि गड़बड़ी करने वालों को रोकने के क्षेत्र में उसकी क्षमताएं बहुत सीमित हैं लेकिन उसे अपने नियमन की गुणवत्ता और क्रियान्वयन पर अवश्य दृष्टि डालनी चाहिए। उसे केवल सुधारात्मक कदम उठाने संबंधी अधिकारों पर तवज्जो नहीं देनी चाहिए। दुख की बात है कि हाल फिलहाल ऐसा ही देखने को मिला है।

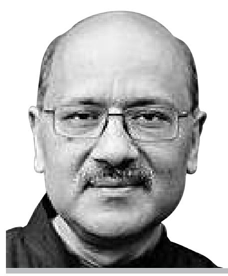
सवाल यह है कि आरबीआई की क्षमताओं में किस तरह के सुधार की आवश्यकता है? पहली बात तो यह कि उसके कदमों का स्पष्ट उल्लेख होना चाहिए। अन्य केंद्रीय बैंक मसलन अमेरिकी फेडरल रिजर्व आदि दिशानिर्देश सार्वजनिक हैं। इनसे जाना जा सकता है कि वे बैंकों की निगरानी किस प्रकार करते हैं। आरबीआई को सार्वजनिक जांच और परिचर्चा की अपनी प्रक्रिया भी सार्वजनिक करनी चाहिए। अंतिम और स्वीकार्य प्रक्रिया तक पहुंचने के बाद आरबीआई अपनी अंकेक्षण और प्रवर्तन क्षमता को इस प्रक्रिया के इर्दगिर्द तैयार कर सकता है। इसी प्रकार नए कानून तैयार करते वक्त भी कठोरता का परिचय देना चाहिए। अब तक इन्हें बनाने में मनमानी और अदूरदर्शिता का परिचय दिया जाता रहा है।

इसके बजाय नए नियम प्रवर्तन क्षमता को ध्यान में रखते हुए तैयार किए जाने चाहिए। इन्हें बनाने के पहले आरबीआई के बोर्ड या उप समिति की मंजूरी से बाहरी विशेषज्ञों से भी राय ली जानी चाहिए। आखिरी बात, आरबीआई के फैसलों के खिलाफ अपील की व्यवस्था चालू होनी चाहिए। प्रतिभूति नियामक के मामले में हमने देखा कि अपील पंचाट की स्थापना के बाद उसके प्रदर्शन में काफी सुधार हुआ। एक बात तो स्पष्ट है कि बैंकिंग नियामक के मामले में यथास्थिति बरकरार नहीं रहने दी जा सकती।

विनय सिन्हा

कश्मीर: आंतरिक होकर भी बना अंतरराष्ट्रीय मसला

कश्मीर में 5 अगस्त के बदलावों को आंतरिक मामला तो मान लिया गया है मगर इस मसले का अंतरराष्ट्रीयकरण भी हो गया है



राष्ट्र की बात

शेखर गुप्ता

क्या दुनिया को कश्मीर की फिक्र है? उन्हें पता है कि यह उप महाद्वीप का हिस्सा है, जिस पर भारत और कश्मीर झगड़ते रहते हैं, लेकिन कभी-कभार झगड़े में परमाणु हमले की धमकियां सुनाई देने लगती हैं, जिसके बाद लोग यह देखने के लिए दुनिया के नक्शे में सिर खपाते हैं कि कश्मीर आखिर है कहां। अब तक तो हरेक बड़े देश के पास कश्मीर समस्या की एक फाइल ही तैयार हो गई होगी।

डॉनल्ड ट्रंप शायद सबसे अच्छे उदाहरण पेश नहीं करते हैं। कम से कम तब तो नहीं, जब भारतीय उप महाद्वीप की बात पर वह पूछते हैं कि यह 'बटन' और 'निपल' (भूटान और नेपाल के लिए) क्या है। फिर भी जुलाई में इमरान खान के साथ प्रेस कॉन्फ्रेंस में जब उन्होंने कहा कि कश्मीर सबसे खूबसूरत जगह है, जहां हर तरफ बम फटते रहते हैं तो यह बात गौरतलब थी।

वह बारीकियों में नहीं पड़ते और उनका सामान्य ज्ञान 'यूपीएससी' पार करने के लायक नहीं है। इसीलिए उनके दिमाग ने पहली बार कश्मीर को 'बड़ी चीज' तब माना, जब फरवरी में पुलवामा हमला हुआ। वास्तव में उनके अब तक के कार्यकाल में कश्मीर में यही पहला बड़ा धमाका था।

इसका क्या मतलब है? मतलब यह है कि कश्मीर के बारे में कोई भी अच्छी खबर भारत के कूटनीतिक और राजनीतिक हित के लिए खबर नहीं है। कश्मीर में 30 वर्ष पहले आतंकवाद शुरू हुआ था और तब से केवल 1991 से 1994 के दरम्यान दुनिया का ध्यान कश्मीर समस्या पर गया था, जब पीवी नरसिंह राव ने आतंकवाद के खिलाफ अभियान शुरू कर दिया और हरेक अंतरराष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार संगठन तथा बिल क्लिंटन की पहली सरकार आपा खो बैठी। उन्होंने इस मुसीबत को कुचला और उसके बाद अंतरराष्ट्रीय मीडिया को कश्मीर में दाखिल होने की इजाजत देकर और 1993 में खुद भी राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग गठित कर भारत तथा कश्मीर के बारे में दुनिया के नजरिये को कुछ बेहतर बनाया। उसके बाद से उन्होंने कश्मीर को ठंडे बस्ते में ही डालने की कोशिश की। वरना उन्होंने कश्मीर को रणनीति के तौर पर ज्यादा तवज्जो नहीं दी। एक साक्षात्कार में जब मैंने राव से पूछा कि कश्मीर में उन्हें आगे क्या दिखता है तो उन्होंने कहा, 'भाई, वे कुछ करेंगे, हम कुछ करेंगे, आखिर में हिसाब बराबर हो जाएगा।' उन्होंने यह बात अपनी अंगुली हवा में कुछ इस तरह हिलाते हुए कही मानो दो समांतर रेखाएं बनाते हुए गणित का कोई सवाल हल कर रहे हैं और उनके बीच में 'बराबरी' दिखा रहे हैं। उनकी कोशिश यहीं तक रही।

शिमला समझौते के बाद के दशकों में अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी समेत विभिन्न प्रधानमंत्री कश्मीर मसले को कम महत्त्व देने की ही रणनीति पर ही चलते रहे। पाकिस्तान के बारे में तमाम सवाल, चाहे वे युद्ध के कगार पर पहुंचने (कारगिल, ऑपरेशन पराक्रम) के समय ही क्यों न पूछे गए हों, आतंकवाद तक ही सीमित रखे गए। कश्मीर को कभी मसला बनने ही नहीं दिया गया।

यह नीति लंबे अरसे तक कारगर रही। 11 सितंबर के बाद जब अमेरिका पाकिस्तान को पुचकारने में जुट गया और पाकिस्तान के 'सैन्य प्रशासन' के हौसले बढ़ गए, उस वक्त भी कश्मीर पर बात नहीं हुई। पाकिस्तान बेचैन हुआ तो अमेरिका और उसके साथियों ने उसे शांत रहने की राय दी। वे ध्यान बंटने नहीं देना चाहते थे। दूसरी ओर भारत ने नए हालात का चतुराई से इस्तेमाल किया: अपने बिगड़े बच्चे को काबू में रखो वरना अगर पूरी तरह पाकिस्तान के भरोसे बैठने के आपके मंसूबों पर हम पानी फेर दें तो शिकायत मत करना।

इसके तीन नतीजे हुए। पहला, दुनिया मानने लगी कि दोनों देशों ने सामरिक संतुलन बना लिया है, संकट छोटे स्तर पर ही रहेगा। दूसरा, खस्ता अर्थव्यवस्था वाले पाकिस्तान और फर्राटा भरती अर्थव्यवस्था वाले भारत को यथास्थिति बनाए रखने में ही हित दिखने लगा है। और तीसरा, कि दोनों देश नियंत्रण रेखा को ही वास्तविक सीमा मानने की दिशा में बढ़ रहे हैं। जैसा कि तंग श्याओ फिंग ने राजीव गांधी से कहा था, औपचारिक समाधान समझदार पीढ़ी के लिए छोड़ देना चाहिए।

वास्तव में 1990 के दशक में कश्मीर पर खबरें करते समय मैंने सबसे बढ़िया पंक्तियां दक्षिण एशिया के लिए अमेरिका की सहायक विदेश सचिव रॉबिन राफेल से सुनीं, जिन्हें यहां दोस्त के तौर पर नहीं देखा जाता था। कश्मीर को भारत में शामिल करने के समझौते पर सवाल उठाकर तूफान खड़ा करने के बाद उन्होंने दार्शनिक अंदाज में कहा, 'कश्मीर को रखना या खोना भारत के ही हाथों में है।'

मोदी सरकार में भारत ने पिछली सरकारों की कश्मीर रणनीति से हटते हुए यथास्थिति खत्म कर दी। पाकिस्तान ने युद्ध की धमकी दी मगर फिर पीछे हट गया। उसे दिख गया कि उसकी सेना की क्षमता काफी कम है और दुनिया में कोई भी उसके साथ नहीं है। न्यूयॉर्क में इमरान खान की प्रेस कॉन्फ्रेंस की वीडियो क्लिप देखिए, जिसमें वह बौखलाकर कह रहे हैं: हम जो कर रहे हैं, उसके अलावा और क्या कर सकते हैं? हम भारत पर हमला नहीं कर सकते।

यहां तक तो ठीक है। दिक्कत इसके बाद शुरू होती है। आप मानें या न मानें, करीब आधी सदी के बाद कश्मीर अंतरराष्ट्रीय मसला बन गया है। उसे अंतरराष्ट्रीय बनाने का काम पाकिस्तान नहीं भारत ने किया है। अगर आप पक्षपात करेंगे तो आपको यह स्थिति भारत के लिए, उत्साहजनक लगेगी क्योंकि चीन और तुर्की के अलावा किसी भी देश ने इस बात का विरोध नहीं किया है कि 5 अगस्त का बदलाव भारत का आंतरिक मामला है और किसी ने 5 अगस्त से पहले की यथास्थिति पर लौटने की मांग भी नहीं की है। लेकिन यह पूरी तस्वीर नहीं है।

अमेरिका समेत कई देशों को चिंता है कि कश्मीर में अब क्या होगा। जब इमरान कहते हैं कि नरसंहार हो रहा है तो कोई यकीन नहीं करता। श्रीनगर में 'सामान्य स्थिति' दिखाती ड्रोन की तस्वीरों से भी किसी को राहत नहीं मिलती। माना जा रहा है कि घाटी को बलपूर्वक ठप कर दिया गया है और हजारों लोगों को मुकदमे के बगैर ही बंद कर दिया गया है। इस मामले में दुनिया का सब्र जल्द ही खत्म हो जाएगा।

संयुक्त राष्ट्र का सप्ताह खत्म हो गया है। पाकिस्तान को अलग-थलग करने वाली 'कूटनीतिक जीत' पर जश्न मनाया जाएगा। नरेंद्र मोदी न्यूयॉर्क से नकारात्मक से ज्यादा सकारात्मक नतीजे लेकर लौट रहे हैं। 'कश्मीर हमारा आंतरिक मामला है' के भारत के पुराने जुमले पर किसी ने आपत्ति नहीं की। व्हाइट हाउस से जारी रिपोर्ट के अनुसार मोदी के साथ मुलाकात में ट्रंप ने उनसे सामान्य स्थिति बहाल करने और कश्मीर के लोगों से किए वायदे पूरे करने के लिए ही कहा, 5 अगस्त से पहले की स्थिति पर लौटने के लिए नहीं। लेकिन कश्मीर में नए हालात ने पाकिस्तान को और अलग-थलग करने के बजाय दुनिया का ध्यान खींचने में और खुद को पीड़ित के तौर पर पेश करने में उसकी मदद की है।

यदि न्यूयॉर्क में भारत-पाकिस्तान की सालाना तू-तू-मैं-मैं के इस बार के मुकाबले में कश्मीर को भारत का आंतरिक मामला स्वीकार किया जाना ही कूटनीति उपलब्धि है तो इसके भविष्य और भारत के सर्वोच्च राष्ट्रहित की कुंजी भी इसी में है। एक हफ्ता बीतेगा और संचार सेवाएं बंद किए दो महीने पूरे हो जाएंगे। संचार बंद हुए हफ्तों बीत चुके हैं। इसे बहाल करने में देर होने से कश्मीरियों का गुस्सा बढ़ रहा है। जितनी देर होगी, गुस्सा फूटने, हिंसा और खूनखराबे का खतरा उतना ही बढ़ जाएगा। ऐसे में हालात अक्सर बेकाबू हो सकते हैं।

दुनिया कश्मीर पर कुछ बोल नहीं रही है, लेकिन उसे फिक्र है। मामले का इतना अंतरराष्ट्रीयकरण तो हो ही गया है। 2016 में बुरहान वानी की मौत के बाद एक हफ्ते में कम से कम 40 लोग मारे गए थे। अब किशोर उम्र के असरार वानी की मौत से विवाद खड़ा हो गया है। दुनिया कश्मीर को देख रही है। 5 अगस्त से चल रही बंदी को आम बात या नई यथास्थिति मान लेना खतरनाक होगा।

व्यक्तिगत आयकर में भी समाप्त की जा सकती है रियायत?

दिल्ली डायरी

ए के भट्टाचार्य

वर्ष 1991 के आर्थिक सुधारों के बाद से अब तक देश की कॉर्पोरेशन कर दरों की प्रक्रिया धीमी और स्थिरता भरी रही है। पिछले दिनों एक अध्यादेश के जरिये इसे घटाकर 22 फीसदी कर दिया गया। बिना अधिभार या उपकर के इसे सन 1991 के 45 फीसदी से 2019 के 22 फीसदी तक लाने में 28 वर्ष लगे। यह कंपनियों के लिए कर दर में 51 फीसदी की गिरावट है।

यदि इसकी तुलना व्यक्तिगत आयकर दरों में कटौती से की जाए तो अलग तस्वीर नजर आती है। व्यक्तिगत आयकर की उच्चतम दर सन 1991 में 50 फीसदी से घटकर 1997 में 30 फीसदी हो गई। तब से अब तक उच्चतम दर में बदलाव नहीं आया है। जबकि इस अवधि में अधिभार और उपकर लगाए गए हैं इससे उच्चतम स्तर पर आयकर दाताओं पर बोझ बढ़ा ही है।

दो बातें ध्यान देने वाली हैं। पहली, हालांकि कॉर्पोरेशन कर दर में काफी कमी आई है लेकिन यह कमी लंबे समय में की गई। व्यक्तिगत आय कर में तेजी से कमी आई लेकिन उसके बाद वे लंबे समय से एक ही स्तर पर ठहरी हुई हैं। दूसरा, व्यक्तिगत आयकर पर अधिभार और उपकर कॉर्पोरेशन कर से ज्यादा लगा। इसके परिणामस्वरूप व्यक्तिगत आयकर की उच्चतम दर 42.7 फीसदी है जो मूल कर दर से 12 फीसदी अधिक है। जबकि कॉर्पोरेशन कर दर में अधिभार और उपकर जोड़ने पर भी यह 22 से 25 फीसदी हुई।

वर्ष 1991 से अब तक कॉर्पोरेशन कर दर के दायरे पर नजर डालें तो यह सफर आर्थिक सुधार के शुरुआती वर्षों में शुरू नहीं हुआ। जुलाई 1991 में अपने पहले बजट में तत्कालीन वित्त मंत्री मनमोहन सिंह ने इस कर दर को 40 फीसदी से बढ़ाकर 45 फीसदी कर दिया था। इसके पीछे उन्होंने कमजोर कर संग्रह को वजह बताया था।

छह वर्ष बाद सन 1997-98 में संयुक्त मोर्चा सरकार के वित्त मंत्री पी चिदंबरम ने अपने बजट में कहा कि कैसे बीते वर्षों के दौरान उन्होंने कॉर्पोरेशन कर दर पर अधिभार को आधा घटाकर 7.5 फीसदी कर दिया था और अब वह उसे पूरी तरह समाप्त कर रहे थे। तब लगा कि चिदंबरम को अधिभार में रुचि नहीं है क्योंकि उसे राज्यों के साथ साझा करना होता है। कर दर को घटाकर 35 फीसदी करने के पीछे उनका तर्क यह था कि कम दर होने से अनुपालन बढ़ेगा और नया निवेश आएगा।

करीब एक दशक बाद 2005-06 में जब चिदंबरम मनमोहन सिंह की सरकार में वित्त मंत्री थे, उन्होंने कॉर्पोरेशन कर में 5 फीसदी की और कटौती कर उसे 30 फीसदी कर दिया। परंतु उन्होंने 10 फीसदी अधिभार लगा दिया गया था। तब से अधिभार को लेकर सरकार की रुचि कम नहीं हुई।

वर्ष 2015-16 में कॉर्पोरेशन कर से जुड़ी बहस ने एक अलग रुख ले लिया। मोदी सरकार के तत्कालीन वित्त मंत्री अरुण जेटली ने उन रियायतों और प्रोत्साहन का मुद्दा उठाया जिन्होंने कर व्यवस्था को विसंगतिपूर्ण बनाया। उन्होंने यह भी माना कि 30 फीसदी की बुनियादी कॉर्पोरेशन दर अन्य एशियाई देशों की कर दरों से अधिक थी और देश के उद्यमी जगत को गैर प्रतिस्पर्धी बना रही थी। उन्होंने यह भी ध्यान दिलाया कि तमाम रियायतों के चलते कॉर्पोरेशन कर की प्रभावी दर केवल 23 फीसदी के करीब रह गई थी। जेटली के मुताबिक इसके दो नुकसान थे। एक तो कॉर्पोरेशन दर को बहुत अधिक माना जा रहा था, दूसरी ओर रियायतों के कारण पर्याप्त कर संग्रह भी नहीं हो रहा था। उन्होंने कहा कि रियायतों के कारण तमाम तरह के दबाव समूह बने और राजस्व की हानि हुई। जेटली ने घोषणा की कि चार साल में कॉर्पोरेशन कर दर को 30 फीसदी से घटाकर 25 फीसदी किया जाएगा। इसका मकसद भी निवेश और रोजगार बढ़ाना था। उन्होंने चरणबद्ध तरीके से रियायत खत्म करने की बात कही ताकि करदाताओं को अग्रिम सूचना मिल जाए। एक वर्ष बाद उन्होंने नई विनिर्माण कंपनियों को 25 फीसदी और अधिभार तथा उपकर के साथ कर लगाने का विकल्प दिया गया। शर्त यह थी कि इस स्थिति में वे मुनाफे या निवेश से जुड़ी रियायत नहीं चाहेंगे।

उन्होंने 5 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक के कारोबार वाली कंपनियों की कर दर भी घटाकर 29 फीसदी और अधिभार तथा उपकर के बराबर कर दी थी। वर्ष 2017-18 में जेटली ने 50 करोड़ रुपये से कम के कारोबार वाली सभी कंपनियों के लिए कर दर घटाकर 25 फीसदी कर दी। एक वर्ष बाद 25 फीसदी के कम कर लाभ के लिए आवश्यक कारोबार 250 करोड़ रुपये कर दिया गया। इसके बाद वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण ने अपने पहले बजट में इसे बढ़ाकर 400 करोड़ रुपये कर दिया। इस तरह करीब 99.3 फीसदी कंपनियां 25 फीसदी के न्यूनतम कर दायरे में आ गईं।

सीतारमण ने पिछले दिनों जो घोषणा की वह जेटली की कंपनियों के लिए रियायतमुक्त कराधान व्यवस्था की दिशा में ही एक कदम है। यह सही है कि अन्य एशियाई देशों को ध्यान में करते हुए कर दरें कम की गई हैं। परंतु कॉर्पोरेशन कर व्यवस्था में रियायत खत्म करने का संकेत एक बड़ा बदलाव था। न्यूनतम कर कंपनियों के लिए रियायत छोड़ने के प्रोत्साहन की तरह थी। जो कंपनियां न्यूनतम कर दर को अपनाएंगी वे वापस पुरानी व्यवस्था में नहीं जा सकतीं जहां कुछ ऊंची कर दर के साथ रियायतें थीं।

इस प्रक्रिया में कॉर्पोरेशन कर व्यवस्था भी पारदर्शी हुई है। अब यहां मनमानी या विवाद की गुंजाइश कम है। अगर यह निर्णय समूचे कॉर्पोरेशन क्षेत्र को रियायतों से दूर ले जाकर न्यूनतम कर व्यवस्था से जोड़ने में सफल रहता है तो कर सुधार की दिशा में सरकार की एक बड़ी सफलता होगी। ऐसे में सवाल यह है कि क्या सीतारमण व्यक्तिगत आयकर व्यवस्था में भी रियायतें समाप्त करके कर दर कम करने की व्यवस्था पर काम करेंगी?

कानाफूसी

मोदी की प्रशंसा

नरेंद्र मोदी सरकार की नीतियों की प्रशंसा करने वाले कांग्रेस नेताओं में छत्तीसगढ़ के मुख्यमंत्री भूपेश बघेल का नाम भी जुड़ गया है। बघेल ने कश्मीर मामले पर कांग्रेस पार्टी के रुख का हवाला देने वाले पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान के बयानों पर स्पष्टीकरण दिया। उन्होंने कहा, 'देश के भीतर हम नरेंद्र मोदी जी का पुरजोर विरोध करेंगे लेकिन देश के बाहर के मामलों पर केंद्र सरकार जो भी निर्णय लेती है, कांग्रेस हमेशा उसका समर्थन करेगी और देश के साथ खड़ी रहेगी।' यह ट्विटर पर वायरल हो गया। इससे कांग्रेस नेता मिलिंग देवड़ा को भी राहत मिली होगी जिन्होंने भारत-अमेरिका संबंधों में मुरली देवड़ा के योगदान की प्रधानमंत्री द्वारा प्रशंसा करने पर आभार व्यक्त किया था। इस समय कोई नहीं जानता कि आखिरकार कांग्रेस कहां जा रही है या क्या कर रही है।

आत्महत्या के पीछे का रहस्य

आंध्र प्रदेश में तेलुगूदेशम पार्टी के नेता 72 वर्षीय वरिष्ठ चिकित्सक कोडेला शिवप्रसाद राव की आत्महत्या के पीछे की पूरी कहानी कुछ इस तरह है। राव ने इस महीने की शुरूआत में आत्महत्या की थी। जब जगनमोहन रेड्डी सत्ता में आए तो उनकी सरकार ने कोडेला और उनके परिवार के सदस्यों के कथित भ्रष्टाचार के मामलों को खंगालने के लिए पुलिस विभाग में एक विशेष इकाई का गठन किया। आंध्र प्रदेश विधानसभा सचिवालय ने पाया कि अमरावती में नई इमारत के लिए खरीदा गया कुछ फर्नीचर गायब है और बाद में इसे कोडेला के यहां पाया गया। सचिवालय ने उनके खिलाफ आईपीसी की धारा 409 और 411 के तहत मुकदमा दर्ज कराया। हालांकि कोडेला ने सामान वापस करने और इसकी कीमत चुकाने का प्रस्ताव रखा लेकिन अधिकारियों ने उनके खिलाफ मुकदमा चलाने का विकल्प चुना। तेदेपा नेताओं का कहना है कि इससे वह अवसाद ग्रसित हो गए और आत्महत्या कर ली।

आपका पक्ष

अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंच पर ग्रेटा की अपील

जलवायु परिवर्तन के संदर्भ में स्वीडन की 16 वर्षीय किशोरी ग्रेटा का गुस्सा और चिंता जायज थी। संयुक्त राष्ट्र के पर्यावरणीय और बाल अधिकार सम्मेलन में ग्रेटा ने पर्यावरण से किए जा रहे खिलवाड़ और बढ़ते वैश्विक तापमान की चिंताओं की ओर सदस्यों का ध्यान आकृष्ट किया। यह पहली बार नहीं है कि ग्रेटा ने पर्यावरण के प्रति अपनी चिंता जताई है। पिछले एक वर्ष से ग्रेटा अपने स्कूल से छुट्टी लेकर पर्यावरणीय हितों के लिए काम कर रही है। इससे पहले भी वह ब्रिटेन, इटली और यूरोप के संसद में पर्यावरण सरंक्षण के लिए चिंता जाहिर कर चुकी है। विश्व के अनेक विकसित और विकासशील देश विकास की होड़ में पर्यावरण की चिंताओं को अनदेखी कर रहे हैं। जर्मनी, फ्रांस, ब्राजील, अर्जेंटीना और तुर्की ने अपने पर्यावरण के वादों को पूरा नहीं किया है। अमेरिका पहले ही पर्यावरण संबंधी पेरिस समझौते से अलग हो चुका है। जब ग्रेटा कहती है कि आपने अपनी खोखली बातों से उसके सपने और बचपन को छीन लिया है और लोग त्रस्त हैं तथा मर रहे हैं तो वह गलत नहीं है। आर्थिक विकास की दौड़ में हम अपनी प्रकृति को भूल चुके हैं। वह दिन दूर नहीं जब हम अपनी आने वाली पीढ़ी को एक बीमार पारिस्थितिक तंत्र सौप देंगे जिसका परिणाम मानव समाज के लिए भयावह होगा। ग्रेटा के दर्द और गुस्से से भरी अपील को संयुक्त राष्ट्र महासचिव समेत विश्व के सभी देशों के नेताओं ने सराहा है। ग्रेटा की इस भावपूर्ण अपील को विश्व के सर्वाधिक विकसित देश के मुखिया डॉनल्ड ट्रंप बचपना कहकर मजाक उड़ा सकते हैं लेकिन पर्यावरणीय हकीकत से मुंह मोड़ना उनके देश के लिए भी खतरनाक होगा। यह सिर्फ ग्रेटा की ही आवाज नहीं बल्कि आने वाली समस्त पीढ़ी की आवाज है जो अपने पूर्वजों से इस पारिस्थितिक तंत्र को बरबाद कर देने के लिए सवाल जरूर पूछेगी। विश्व के सभी देशों और उनके प्रमुखों को पर्यावरण के प्रति सचेत होना ही होगा और संपूर्ण विश्व के लिए इस खतरे से सुरक्षा प्रदान करने के लिए कठिन प्रतिबंध लगाने होंगे।

रवींद्र भटनागर, ईमेल से

संयुक्त राष्ट्र के पर्यावरणीय और बाल अधिकार सम्मेलन में ग्रेटा का बयान सराहनीय रहा

कंपनियों को छूट के बदले मिले काम

सरकार कंपनियों को कर में कई प्रकार की छूट देती है। लेकिन कर छूट का लाभ लोगों को नहीं मिल पाता है। हाल में वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण ने कॉरपोरेट कर में छूट प्रदान की है। इसके अलावा कंपनियां सीएसआर के माध्यम से भी कर छूट का लाभ लेती हैं। देश में एक लाख से भी अधिक कंपनियां हैं। अगर हर कंपनी को एक किलोमीटर नहर बनाने का कार्य सौंपा जाए तो हर साल एक लाख किलोमीटर नहर का निर्माण हो सकता है। इसमें कुछ कंपनियां तालाब का निर्माण भी कर सकती हैं और कुछ कंपनियां इन तालाबों को नहर के माध्यम से नदियों में जोड़ने का कार्य कर सकती हैं। इससे जल समस्या का समाधान हो सकेगा तथा खेतों में सिंचाई का काम भी किया जा सकेगा। इस तरह कंपनियों को दी जा रही छूट का फायदा सरकार के साथ देशवासियों को भी होगा। कंपनियां एक साल में एक किलोमीटर नहर का निर्माण तो आसानी से कर सकती हैं।

नंदकिशोर राठौर, कल्याण

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

दैनिक जागरण

यह संसार परिणामों का अभिलाषी है, प्रयत्नों का नहीं

प्याज का संकट

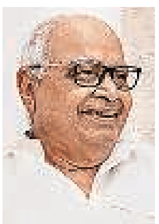
प्याज के निर्यात पर प्रतिबंध के फैसले के बाद यह उम्मीद की जा रही है कि उसके बढ़ते दामों पर लगाम लगेगी, लेकिन यह रातों-रात नहीं हो सकता। प्याज के निर्यात पर तत्काल प्रभाव से पाबंदी का निर्णय इसलिए लेना पड़ा, क्योंकि घरेलू बाजार में उसकी उपलब्धता बढ़ाने के लिए उठाए गए कदम प्रभावी नहीं साबित हो रहे थे। सच तो यह है कि प्याज की किल्लत बढ़ती ही जा रही थी। कहीं-कहीं तो उसके दाम 70-80 रुपये प्रति किलो तक पहुंच गए थे। ऐसा तब हुआ जब प्याज का न्यूनतम निर्यात मूल्य तय करने के साथ ही उसकी कालाबाजारी रोकने की कोशिश की जा रही थी। सरकार को यह पता होना चाहिए कि एक बार किसी आवश्यक वस्तु की किल्लत पैदा हो जाए तो फिर उसकी कालाबाजारी रोकना मुश्किल होता है। सरकार और खासकर खाद्य एवं सार्वजनिक वितरण और उपभोक्ता मामलों के मंत्रालय के अधिकारियों को यह भी सामान्य जानकारी होनी चाहिए कि बारिश में प्याज की आपूर्ति प्रभावित होती ही है। समझना कठिन है कि वे यह अनुमान क्यों नहीं लगा सके कि पिछले वर्षों की तरह इस वर्ष भी प्याज उत्पादक राज्यों में बारिश की वजह से उसकी आपूर्ति पर असर पड़ सकता है?

यह अच्छी बात नहीं कि केंद्र सरकार के पास प्याज का पर्याप्त भंडार होने के बावजूद उसके दाम बेलगाम हो गए। यह स्थिति यही बताती है कि हमारे नीति-नियंता किस तरह समय रहते सामान्य स्थितियों का अनुमान लगाने में नाकाम रहते हैं। इस नाकामी का कोई उपचार खोजा ही जाना चाहिए, क्योंकि यह पहली बार नहीं है जब प्याज के बढ़े दाम सरकार के लिए सिरदर्द साबित हुए हों। हाल के समय में एक नहीं अनेक बार यह देखने को मिला है कि प्याज अथवा अन्य किसी आवश्यक उपभोक्ता सामग्री की किल्लत के कारण सरकार को परेशानी उठाने के साथ ही अपयश का भी सामना करना पड़ा। कई बार तो उसे राजनीतिक नुकसान भी झेलना पड़ा है। यह आश्चर्यजनक है कि आवश्यक वस्तुओं की किल्लत से उपजी विपरीत परिस्थितियों से कई बार दो-चार होने के बावजूद सार्वजनिक वितरण प्रणाली से जुड़े नौकरशाह ऐसे उपाय नहीं कर पाए हैं जिससे वही कारण बार-बार समस्या न बनने पाएं जो पहले भी बनते रहे हैं। प्याज के संकट ने जिस तरह सिर उठाया और उसकी किल्लत एक राजनीतिक मसला बनी उससे यही पता चलता है कि अतीत के अनुभवों से कोई सीख नहीं ली जा रही है। यदि प्याज की आपूर्ति के मामले में संभावित स्थितियों का वक्त रहते अनुमान लगाकर आवश्यक उपाय कर लिए गए होते तो शायद उसके निर्यात पर रोक लगाने की जरूरत नहीं पड़ती और इतनी हाय-तौबा भी नहीं मचती।

नारद कांड में कार्रवाई

बंगाल में नारद स्टिंग ऑपरेशन कांड में पहली कार्रवाई आइपीएस अफसर एसएमएच मिर्जा पर हुई है। इसी के साथ सीबीआइ ने भाजपा नेता मुकुल रॉय को भी तलब कर लिया। पहली बार तो उन्होंने पूर्व निर्धारित कार्यक्रमों का हवाला देकर सीबीआइ के समक्ष हाजिर होने से इन्कार कर दिया था, लेकिन दूसरा नोटिस मिलने के बाद शनिवार को वे दोपहर करीब दो बजे पूछताछ के लिए सीबीआइ के सॉल्टलेक स्थित दफ्तर में हाजिर हुए। खबर है कि एसएमएच मिर्जा और मुकुल रॉय को आमने-सामने बैठाकर पूछताछ की गई। सीबीआइ ने गुरुवार को इस कांड की जांच के सिलसिले में एसएमएच मिर्जा को गिरफ्तार किया था। 2016 में नारद स्टिंग कांड के वीडियो टेप के सामने आने के बाद यह पहली गिरफ्तारी है। वीडियो फुटेज में तृणमूल के कई वरिष्ठ नेता एक फर्जी कंपनी के प्रतिनिधियों से मदद की एवज में रुपये लेते नजर आए थे। मुकुल रॉय नारद न्यूज पोर्टल के मुख्य कार्यकारी अधिकारी मैथ्यू सैमुअल से बातचीत करते देखे गए हैं। मुकुल रॉय उस वक्त तृणमूल कांग्रेस के महासचिव और राज्यसभा सदस्य थे। मैथ्यू सैमुअल ने ही 2014 में यह स्टिंग ऑपरेशन करने का दावा किया था और 2016 में बंगाल के विधानसभा चुनाव के दौरान इसका वीडियो सामने आया था। नारद कांड में मुकुल रॉय के अलावा कोलकाता के पूर्व मेयर शोभन चटर्जी भी तृणमूल छोड़कर भाजपा में शामिल हो चुके हैं। बार-बार सीबीआइ पर सवाल उठाया जाता रहा है कि नारद कांड हो या फिर सारधा चिटफंड घोटाला, सिर्फ विरोधी दलों के नेताओं को ही क्यों परेशान किया जा रहा है। अब नारद मामले में देखा जा रहा है कि पहली गिरफ्तारी के साथ ही सबसे पहले मुकुल रॉय को तलब किया गया। उनसे पूछताछ की गई। सीबीआइ दफ्तर से बाहर आने के बाद उन्होंने कहा कि वे जांच में हर तरह से सहयोग करेंगे। उन्होंने रुपये नहीं लिए हैं। स्टिंग के वीडियो में तृणमूल के मंत्री, सांसद एवं नेता रुपये लेते दिखाई दिए हैं, लेकिन मुकुल रॉय रुपये नहीं ले रहे हैं। हालांकि वे काम हो जाएगा और एसएमएच मिर्जा से मिलें कहते सुनाई दे रहे हैं। वहीं एक सवाल यह भी उठ रहा है कि एसएमएच मिर्जा की गिरफ्तारी के बाद और किसी की गिरफ्तारी होगी या नहीं, क्योंकि कांग्रेस एवं माकपा नेता सिर्फ तृणमूल पर ही नहीं, भाजपा पर भी निशाना साध रहे हैं। नारद स्टिंग कांड में फंसे दो नेता अभी भाजपा में हैं।

गांधी के स्मरण का सही तरीका



हृदयनारायण दीक्षित

पूरे जीवन नहीं तो क्या एक माह भी हम गांधी जैसे जी सकते हैं? इसी प्रश्न का उत्तर गांधी जयंती पर उनका सही स्मरण है जो हमारी कई मुश्किलों को हल कर सकता है

अव्याख्येय की व्याख्या असंभव। तब शब्द, उदाहरण, प्रतीक और प्रतिमान काम नहीं आते। इतिहास में साधारण से असाधारण हो जाने वाले व्यक्तित्वों की सूची बड़ी है, लेकिन साधारण से सर्वोत्तम साधारण होने का उदाहरण केवल गांधी जी हैं। गांधी विश्व इतिहास की सर्वोत्तम अभिव्यक्ति हैं। वह गृहस्थ थे। महात्मा थे। वेदांती थे। राजनीतिक कार्यकर्ता थे। आंदोलनकारी थे। सत्याग्रही थे। सत्य प्रयोग के अभ्यासी थे। दुनिया के सबसे बड़े साम्राज्य से टकरा रहे थे। ब्रिटिश सभ्यता और संस्कृति को उसके ही मैदान में ललकार रहे थे। उन्होंने ब्रिटिश संसद को वेश्या कहा। ब्रिटिश सत्ता बौखलाई थी। अब उसी ब्रिटिश संसद परिसर में गांधी जी की मूर्ति है। वह ईश्वरनिष्ठ थे, लेकिन ईश्वर को लेकर जिज्ञासु भी। भारतीय संस्कृति के शील आचार के अभ्यासी गांधी भारत के राष्ट्रपिता कहे गए। संयुक्त राष्ट्र ने 2007 में गांधी जयंती को अंतरराष्ट्रीय दिवस घोषित किया था। इस साल दो दिन बाद उनकी 150वीं जयंती पर भारत और विश्व में विशेष आयोजन हैं। मूलभूत प्रश्न है कि हम भारतीय उन्हें कैसे याद करें? क्या उनके व्यक्तित्व की शल्य परीक्षा करें? क्या उन पर व्याख्यान देकर अपने कर्तव्य की इतिश्री करें? करें तो क्या करें?

गांधी विश्व इतिहास का आश्चर्य हैं। विराट व्यक्तित्व के कारण वह भाषा और परिभाषा की पकड़ में नहीं आते। गांधी के जीवन और दर्शन पर तमाम अंतरराष्ट्रीय शोध हुए जो अनवरत जारी हैं। गांधी अफ्रीकी नेता नेल्सन मंडेला की प्रेरणा थे। युगांडा में नील नदी के उद्गम पर गांधी मूर्ति का दर्शन मैंने पांच दिन पूर्व ही किया है। पूर्व अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति ओबामा गांधी के प्रशंसक हैं। मार्टिन लूथर किंग गांधी के प्रशंसक थे। गांधी पुराण पुरुष जैसे हैं। उन्होंने सार्वजनिक जीवन की आकाश स्पर्शी मर्यादा रेखा खींची। कोई दूसरा महान नेता भी त्याग, सादगी और शील की उस मर्यादा तक नहीं पहुंच सका। उन्होंने 1909 में 'हिंद स्वराज' लिखी थी। पुस्तक अंतरराष्ट्रीय चर्चा में आई। धम्म पद बौद्धों का आस्था ग्रंथ है। तिब्बती नेता सामदोंग रिपोछे ने इसकी तुलना 'धम्म पद' से की। ईसा मसीह का पहाड़ पर दिया गया प्रवचन 'सरमन ऑन दि माउंट' कहा जाता है। अमेरिकी विद्वानों ने हिंद स्वराज को 'सरमन ऑन सी' कहा था। डरी ब्रिटिश सत्ता ने पुस्तक पर प्रतिबंध लगाया। जन-प्रतिक्रिया के बाद प्रतिबंध हटा। पुस्तक में पश्चिमी सभ्यता और संसद पर भी तीखी टिप्पणियां हैं।

गांधी सबकी समृद्धि चाहते थे। गरीबी आर्थिक होती है, मानसिक भी होती है। 'हिंद स्वराज' में 'स्वैच्छिक गरीबी' की चर्चा है, 'जैसे भोगवाद से संयम ब्रह्मचर्य है, वैसे ही उपभोक्तावाद से संयम स्वैच्छिक गरीबी का चयन है।' यहां गरीबी का अर्थ हिंसक उपभोक्तावाद से बचाव है। भौतिक साधन

स्टेटस सिंबल हैं, लेकिन उन्होंने आत्मसंयम को स्टेटस सिंबल बनाया। खादी चरखा और त्याग गांधी समर्थकों के स्टेटस सिंबल बन रहे थे। गांधी जी के ऐसे आग्रह पिछड़ेपन भी कहे गए, लेकिन गांधी गहरे अनुभूतिकर्ता थे। गीत-संगीत जैसी कला विधाएं आधुनिक उपलब्धियां हैं। गांधी जी ने लिखा था, 'हम पर संगीत का बहुत प्रभाव पड़ता है। वेदों की रचना संगीत के आधार पर हुई जान पड़ती है। मधुर संगीत आंतरिक उद्विग्नता को शांत करता है। संगीत की शुद्ध शिक्षा मिले तो बच्चों का समय बचे।' क्या यह पिछड़े सत्याग्रही का संगीत प्रेम है? सौंदर्यबोध विरलों को ही होता है। गांधी ने ब्रह्मपुत्र नदी का वर्णन किया, 'नदी की भव्य शांति मनोहर प्रतीत होती है। बादलों में छुपा चंद्र जल को प्रकाशित कर रहा है, लेकिन मेरा मन अशांत है।' दुनिया बदलने के इच्छुक व्यक्ति की चित्त अशांति स्वाभाविक है।

गांधी जी लक्ष्य और साधन दोनों की पवित्रता के पक्षधर थे। लिखा है कि साधन बीज है और साधन प्राप्त किए जाने का माध्यम पेड़ है। बीज और पेड़ के संबंध आत्मीय हैं, वैसे ही साध्य और साधन के संबंध हैं।' आत्मबल भारतीय सभ्यता का सार है। गांधी जी ने इसे सभ्यता की मस्ती और खुमारी कहा है। यहां भारतीय सभ्यता की गहन समझ का आनंद है। उन्होंने सभ्यताओं की तुलना में लिखा-'हिंदुस्तान की सभ्यता में नीति की मजबूती है, पश्चिमी सभ्यता का झुकाव अनीति को मजबूत करने पर है।' भारत और भारतीयता गर्व करने लायक है। गांधी जी ने इसके पक्ष में एचएस मेन, विलियम हंटर आदि कई पश्चिमी विद्वानों के उदाहरण भी दिए थे। गांधी जी के विचार और कर्म भारतीय सभ्यता का आधुनिक व्यवहार शास्त्र हैं। आधुनिक उपभोक्तावादी जीवन का संपूर्ण विकल्प भी हैं।

गांधी पंथिक अंधविश्वासी नहीं थे। उन्होंने 1894 में अपने प्रश्नों की सूची बनाई थी। जैसे 'आत्मा क्या है? क्या वह कर्त्ता है? क्या उस पर कर्म का प्रभाव होता है? ईश्वर क्या है? क्या जगत्कर्ता है? मोक्ष क्या है? क्या देह में रहते हुए वह जाना जा सकता है? आर्य धर्म क्या है? वेद किसने रचे? क्या अनादि हैं? अनादि का अर्थ क्या है? गीता किसने रची? ईसाइयों के अनुसार बाइबिल ईश्वर प्रेरित है? क्या ईशा ईश्वर के पुत्र थे? क्या अनीति का अंत होगा?' अंतिम प्रश्न 'अनीति' का खात्मा है। शेष प्रश्न वैज्ञानिक जिज्ञासा हैं। वह पूरी जिजीविषा के साथ अनीति से ही टकरा रहे थे। उन्होंने गीता पर किताब लिखी। पुस्तक में प्रकृति पर जोर है, लेकिन उन्होंने इस प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्म के सामने भी समर्पण नहीं किया। उन्होंने 1916 में अछूत समस्या पर कहा, 'मैं नहीं मानता कि यह कलंक अनादि काल से चला रहा है है। अस्पृश्यता का शर्मनाक भूत हमारे इतिहास में तब आया होगा जब हम कालगति में पतन की पराकाष्ठा पर थे।'

गांधी जी जीवित होते तो 150 वर्ष के होते। तब क्या होता? वह ब्रिटिश संसदीय पद्धति के विरोधी थे। उनका स्वप्न था कि 'सांसदों को संसद में भलाई के लिए जाना चाहिए। संसद को श्रेष्ठ काम करने चाहिए।' वह शिक्षा को श्रेष्ठ मनुष्य बनाने का उपकरण मानते थे। ऐसा प्रायः नहीं हुआ। कुछ विवेचक उनकी असफलताओं का उल्लेख करते हैं। वह खिलाफत आंदोलन में शामिल हुए। यह निर्णय गलत था। उन्होंने स्पष्ट किया कि वह स्वाधीनता आंदोलन में मुसलमानों का सहयोग चाहते थे। मई 1947 में अरुणा आसफ अली ने उनसे पूछा, 'क्या पाकिस्तान का कोई विकल्प है? गांधी जी ने कहा कि इसका विकल्प अखंड भारत ही है।' भारत बंटा, पाकिस्तान अब आतंकी छावनी है, लेकिन इसके दोषी गांधी नहीं, तत्कालीन नेतृत्व ही है। यही नेतृत्व भारत को अंग्रेजों द्वारा बनाया राष्ट्र मानता था। गांधी ने लिखा, 'यह धारणा अंग्रेजों की है। भारत अंग्रेजी राज के पहले भी राष्ट्र था।' गांधी ने लोकमत के लिए इंडियन ओपिनियन, हरिजन जैसे तमाम अखबार निकाले। गांधी का व्यक्तित्व आकाशस्पर्शी है। गांधी किसी पद के अभिलाषी नहीं थे। नाना रूप। विविध आयाम। कैसे करें उनका स्मरण? पूरे जीवन नहीं तो क्या एक माह भी हम गांधी जैसे जी सकते हैं? इसी प्रश्न का उत्तर गांधी जयंती पर उनका सही स्मरण है।

(लेखक उत्तर प्रदेश विधानसभा के अध्यक्ष हैं)

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पाकिस्तान को बड़ा झटका देने का वक्त

दिव्य कुमार सोती

पाक की छटपटाहट का इस्तेमाल भारत पीओके के ज्यादा से ज्यादा इलाकों को हासिल करने में कर सकता है

अनुच्छेद 370 हटाए जाने के बाद घाटी में जैसे उपद्रव की आशंका जताई जा रही थी, वैसा अब तक कुछ देखने को नहीं मिला है। यह सही है कि उपद्रवी पाकिस्तानपरस्त नेताओं का जेल में होना और इंटरनेट पर प्रतिबंध भी एक मुख्य कारण है। हालांकि वर्तमान स्थिति में यह पाकिस्तान के लिए निराशाजनक है, क्योंकि कश्मीर में उपद्रव पर ही उसकी सारी कूटनीति निर्भर है। जब-जब कश्मीर आंतरिक तौर पर स्थिर हुआ है तब-तब पाकिस्तान ने उसे अस्थिर करने की कोशिश की है। इसका सबसे बड़ा उदाहरण 5 अगस्त, 1965 को पाकिस्तान द्वारा कश्मीर में शुरू किया गया ऑपरेशन जिब्राल्टर था जिसके तहत जनरल अयूब खान ने पाक के कब्जे वाले कश्मीर यानी पीओके के लोगों को आतंकी प्रशिक्षण दिलवाकर पाक सैनिकों के साथ कश्मीर घाटी में भारतीय सुरक्षा बलों को निशाना बनाने के लिए भेजा था। अयूब खान की योजना यह थी कि पीओके से आने वाले आतंकी आसानी से आम जनता में घुलमिल जाएंगे और घाटी में भारत के विरुद्ध बड़े पैमाने पर विद्रोह भड़क जाएगा, जिसका फायदा उठाकर पाक फौज कश्मीर पर बड़ा हमला कर वहां अपना कब्जा जमा लेगी। हालांकि भारतीय सेना की सजगता के चलते पाकिस्तान की यह कोशिश तकरीबन नाकाम रही थी। यहां यह समझना आवश्यक है कि चाहे 1947 हो या 1965 या फिर 1999 का कारगिल युद्ध, पाकिस्तान ने कश्मीर में घुसपैठ कराकर कब्जा करने के फॉर्मूले को ही अलग-अलग तरह से इस्तेमाल किया है। इसका कारण यह है कि कश्मीर को कब्जाना पहले दिन से पाकिस्तान का मुख्य उद्देश्य रहा है और पाकिस्तान में हर स्तर पर पिछले 70 साल से इसे लेकर मंथन हो चुका है।

इमरान खान के अनाड़ी मंत्रियों और बिलावल भुट्टो जैसे अनुभवहीन विपक्षी नेताओं को अलग रख अगर पाक फौज की बात करें तो वह अच्छे से जानती है कि कश्मीर को लेकर ज्यादा से ज्यादा क्या किया जा सकता है और हमेशा से उसके विकल्प सीमित रहे हैं। 1965 में जब जनरल अयूब खान ने भारत के विरुद्ध युद्ध छेड़ा था तब भारत तीन साल पहले ही चीन से युद्ध हार चुका था, अमेरिका पाकिस्तान को भारी सैन्य मदद दे रहा था और चीन को पाकिस्तान ने 1963 में ही पीओके का एक हिस्सा दे दिया था। अयूब खान के शासन में पाकिस्तान में काफी विकास हुआ था, जबकि भारत की आर्थिक स्थिति खास अच्छी नहीं थी। आज स्थिति एकदम उलट है। पाकिस्तान

की आर्थिक स्थिति बेहद खराब है और आतंक को समर्थन देने के चलते अमेरिका ने पाक को मदद बंद कर दी है। अंतरराष्ट्रीय बिरादरी पाकिस्तान के शोरशराबे पर कोई खास ध्यान नहीं दे रही है। चीन जरूर पाकिस्तान के साथ है, पर वह अमेरिका के साथ ट्रेड वॉर में उलझा है और हांगकांग में चल रहे ऐतिहासिक प्रदर्शनों से जूझ रहा है। ऐसी स्थिति में वह पाकिस्तान के लिए भारत के साथ अपने व्यापक व्यापारिक हितों को दांव पर लगाने से बच रहा है। जम्मू-कश्मीर का भारत में पूर्ण एकीकरण और लद्दाख का केंद्रशासित प्रदेश बनना चीन के लिए भी बड़ा झटका है, क्योंकि वह भी पाकिस्तान की तरह कश्मीर और लद्दाख के इलाकों पर कब्जा जमाए है। साथ ही वह भारत के अब और तेजी से उभार को लेकर चिंतित है। फिलहाल वह भारत से सीधा टकराव भले न मोल ले, पर पाकिस्तान को भारत को जख्मी करने से रोकेगा, इसमें जरूर संदेह है।

इस सबसे अलग पाकिस्तान के शासकों की समस्या यह है कि उन्होंने 1947 से ही कश्मीर को हासिल करने का सपना जनता को दिखाया है और पाकिस्तानी समाज को जिहादी विचारधारा में लैस कर डाला है। पाकिस्तानी फौज हर एक युद्ध में हारने के बावजूद पाकिस्तानी जनता के सामने खुद को विजयी बताती आई है। ऐसे में भारत द्वारा जम्मू-कश्मीर का पूर्ण एकीकरण किए जाने के मौके पर पाक फौज हाथ पर हाथ धरे बैठी नहीं दिख सकती। इसलिए वह देर सवेर कुछ न कुछ जरूर करेगी। इसमें भारत में आतंकी हमले कराने से लेकर कश्मीर में 1965 जैसा कुछ करने का प्रयास शामिल हो सकता है। फिलहाल वह पीओके में रहने वाले कश्मीरियों का एक बार फिर से इस्तेमाल करने की कोशिश में है। 1965 में जब पाकिस्तान ने कश्मीर में घुसपैठ कराई थी तो भारत ने जवाबी कार्रवाई करते हुए नियंत्रण रेखा पार कर पीओके के सामरिक दृष्टि से अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण हाजी पीर दर्रे से पाक फौज को खदेड़ दिया था। हालांकि बाद में ताशकंद समझौते के तहत दुर्भाग्यवश यह जीता हुआ इलाका लौटा दिया था। आज तक पाक फौज कश्मीर में आतंकी घुसपैठ कराने के लिए इसी रास्ते का इस्तेमाल करती है, परंतु अब भारत अनुच्छेद 370 खत्म किए जाने के बाद की परिस्थिति में पैदा हुई पाकिस्तान की छटपटाहट और पाक फौज की कुछ कर दिखाने की मजबूरी का इस्तेमाल पीओके के ज्यादा से ज्यादा हिस्सों को हासिल करने में कर सकता है।

अब अंतरराष्ट्रीय समीकरण ऐसे बन गए हैं कि किसी भी पाकिस्तानी दुस्साहस की सूरत में पीओके में भारत की जवाबी कार्रवाई को पूरा अंतरराष्ट्रीय समर्थन मिलेगा। जैसा बालाकोट और 370 खत्म करने पर मिला। ऐसी स्थिति में जीते हुए इलाकों को लौटाने का भारत पर कोई दबाव भी नहीं होगा। डोनाल्ड ट्रंप द्वारा तालिबान के साथ लंबे समय से चल रही शांति वार्ता रद किए जाने के बाद फिलहाल पाकिस्तान के हाथ से आखिरी पत्ता भी निकल गया है। ट्रंप अगले चुनाव से पहले अमेरिकी सैनिकों को अफगानिस्तान से निकाल कर घर वापस लाना चाहते थे, ताकि अमेरिकी इतिहास के सबसे लंबे चलने वाले युद्ध को समाप्त करने का श्रेय ले सकें, पर आइएसआइ की चालबाजियों के चलते ऐसा नहीं हो सका। भारत को अमेरिकी नीतिकारों को समझाना होगा कि बिना बड़ा झटका खाए पाक फौज अफगानिस्तान में शांति का रास्ता नहीं खुलने देगी और गुलाम कश्मीर को खोना ही वह बड़ा झटका है। ऐसा होने पर चीन-पाक सामरिक गठजोड़ भी काफी हद तक अर्थहीन हो जाएगा जिससे हिंद-प्रशांत क्षेत्र में चीनी शक्ति का विस्तार भी रुक जाएगा, जो पीओके से होती हुई पाकिस्तान के जरिये अरब सागर, फारस की खाड़ी और अफगानिस्तान में फैलना चाहती है।

(लेखक काउंसिल फॉर स्ट्रैटेजिक अफेयर्स से संबद्ध सामरिक विश्लेषक हैं)

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ऊर्जा

दृष्टिकोण

डॉ. एपीजे अब्दुल कलाम का कहना था कि सपना वह नहीं है जो आप नींद में देखते हैं। यह तो एक ऐसी चीज है जो नींद ही नहीं आने देती। ऐसा नहीं है कि केवल महान हस्तियों पर ही यह बात लागू होती है। आज तो हमारे इर्दगिर्द अनेकों लोग ऐसे हैं जो इस बात को मानते हैं और कड़ी मेहनत कर अपनी किस्मत को अपने हाथों में कैद कर लेते हैं। किस्मत व्यक्ति खुद बनाता है। यह हमारे ऊपर निर्भर करता है कि हम गुलाबों की टहनियों पर कांटे देखते हैं अथवा कंटीली झाड़ियों पर गुलाब।

संकल्प के धनी व्यक्ति समस्याओं से ही अवसर उत्पन्न कर लेते हैं। ऐसे लोग परेशानियों को कभी अपने मार्ग की बाधा नहीं समझते। अपने सपनों को इतना बड़ा कर लेते हैं कि बाधाएं उनके पैरों में पंख लगा देती हैं। इन्हीं पंखों के माध्यम से वे धीरे-धीरे उड़ान भरते हैं और फिर स्वयं को इतना मजबूत बना लेते हैं कि एक समय दूसरों को पंख प्रदान करने में सक्षम हो जाते हैं। परिस्थितियां कभी भी किसी व्यक्ति के मार्ग में बेड़ियां नहीं डाल सकतीं, बशर्ते व्यक्ति के अंदर हौसला और उत्साह हो। जो व्यक्ति रचनात्मक और क्रियाशील होते हैं, वे अपने लिए कहीं से भी सीढ़ी उत्पन्न कर लेते हैं। धाविका हिमा दास ने यदि आज पूरे विश्व में अपनी योग्यता का लोहा मनवाया है तो इसलिए, क्योंकि उनके अंदर एक जुनून था और आगे बढ़ने की ललक थी। इसलिए कोई भी बेड़ी हिमा को देर तक नहीं जकड़ पाई। जब उनके पास दौड़ने के लिए जूते नहीं होते थे तो दौड़ने का एक नया तरीका निकाला और वह रेत में दौड़ने का अभ्यास करने लगीं। रेत पर दौड़ने के अभ्यास ने ही उन्हें सबसे अलग कर सर्वश्रेष्ठ धावकों में खड़ा कर दिया।

परिस्थितियां चाहे जैसी हों, पर यदि अंदरूनी क्षमता मजबूत है तो वह दूसरी जगह से अपने लिए कोई न कोई मार्ग अवश्य निकाल लेगा। बेशक आज आपके पास सुविधाएं न हों, मार्ग न हों, लेकिन यदि आप इसी समय से नए दृष्टिकोण के साथ एक नई राह को अपनाएंगे तो आपके मार्ग में बंद हर दृष्टिकोण खुल जाएंगे और आपको विश्व में एक महत्वपूर्ण स्थान दिलाएंगे।

रेनू सैनी

स्वच्छता के मोर्चे पर बड़ी उपलब्धि

सुधीर कुमार

शौचालय का सीधा संबंध स्वच्छता से होता है, जो मानव के स्वास्थ्य और उसकी उत्पादकता को प्रभावित करती है

दो अक्टूबर, 2014 को मोदी सरकार ने स्वच्छ भारत अभियान का आगाज करते हुए संपूर्ण देश को खुले में शौच कुप्रथा से मुक्ति दिलाने का आह्वान किया था। पेयजल और स्वच्छता मंत्रालय के मुताबिक यह लक्ष्य तय समय सीमा के भीतर पूरा हो चुका है। बीते पांच वर्षों में सरकार द्वारा दस करोड़ से भी अधिक शौचालयों का निर्माण कराया गया है। देश के प्रत्येक घर को शौचालय की सुविधा से जोड़ पाना निश्चय ही एक उल्लेखनीय उपलब्धि है। शौचालय प्रत्येक नागरिक की बुनियादी आवश्यकता है, परंतु आर्थिक विपन्नता तथा पुरातन मानसिकता की वजह से मुख्यतः ग्रामीण समाज के लोग इसे अपनाने से इन्कार करते थे, लेकिन सरकार द्वारा आर्थिक सहायता दिए जाने तथा जागरूकता के लिए चलाए जा रहे विभिन्न कार्यक्रमों की बदौलत ही इस स्थिति में बदलाव लाना संभव हो सका। 2011 की जनगणना के अनुसार देश की आधी से अधिक आबादी खुले में शौच जाने को विवश थी, जिसकी संख्या अब नगण्य है। प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने इस उपलब्धि को गांधी जी को समर्पित किया है।

शौचालय का सीधा संबंध स्वच्छता से होता है, जो मानव के स्वास्थ्य और उसकी उत्पादकता को प्रभावित करती है। शौचालय देश के विकास और महिला सशक्तीकरण की वैचारिकी से भी जुड़ा है। नियमित शौचालय का इस्तेमाल कई प्रकार के बीमारियों से भी हमें बचाता है। खुले में शौच जाने का साफ अर्थ है-दर्जनभर बीमारियों को स्वतः आमंत्रण देना। विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन की मानें तो विकासशील देशों में होने वाली 80 फीसद बीमारियों का एकमात्र कारण खुले में शौच जाना है। खुले में शौच जाने से न सिर्फ भूमिगत जल की गुणवत्ता का ह्रास होता है, अपितु यह मनुष्यों में उल्टी, डायरिया, हैजा और टाइफाइड जैसी जल-जनित बीमारियों को भी जन्म देता है। दूसरी तरफ खुले में मल-मूत्र का त्याग वातावरण को भी मैला करता है। कई बार मलों से निकलने वाली दुर्गंध सांस लेने में तकलीफ देती है और मन भी खराब करती है।

वैसे तो खुले में शौच जाने से हर कोई खुद को असहज महसूस करता ही है, लेकिन इस मामले में महिलाओं और बच्चियों को अपेक्षाकृत अधिक परेशानियों का सामना करना पड़ता है। एक सर्वे के मुताबिक खुले में शौच जाने वालों में से करीब 35 फीसद महिलाओं ने कभी-न-कभी यौन उत्पीड़न झेला है। प्रतिदिन दो से तीन बार शौच के लिए घर से बाहर खुले में जाना महिलाओं के लिए आसान नहीं होता, उन्हें हमेशा अनहोनी का डर सताता रहता है। वहीं स्कूलों में शौचालय न रहने से गांव-समाज की बेटियां भी स्कूल जाने से कतराती हैं, जिससे उनकी पढ़ाई बाधित होती है। यह सुखद है कि नवीन पीढ़ी शौचालय की महत्ता को समझ रही है। साक्षर तथा जागरूक होकर महिलाएं भी शौचालय निर्माण को लेकर मुखर हुई हैं, जिससे शौचालय निर्माण को बल मिला है। आज पूरा देश इस उपलब्धि पर गर्व महसूस कर रहा है।

(लेखक बीएचयू में अध्येता हैं)

मेलबाक्स

एक-दूसरे के पूरक हैं भारत और अमेरिका

'अमेरिका से दोस्ती के साथ मतभेद भी' शीर्षक से लिखे अपने लेख में सी. उदयभास्कर ने ह्यूस्टन के 'हाउडी मोदी' कार्यक्रम के बाद भारत-अमेरिकाके बीच उभरे मतभेद की जो चर्चा की है, उसका अस्तित्व व्यापारिक लाभ-हानि की सौदेबाजी तक ही सीमित है। हकीकत में मोदी की कार्यशैली और विश्वसनीयता का अमेरिका कायल है, क्योंकि वर्तमान में विश्वमंच पर मोदी का जो दबदबा है, अमेरिका उसकी अनदेखी नहीं कर सकता। वैसे भी व्यापार के साथ-साथ अन्य राजनयिक संबंधों में भारत और अमेरिका एक-दूसरे के पूरक हैं, इसका अहसास ह्यूस्टन में भारतीय मूल के लोगों के बीच आयोजित 'हाउडी मोदी' कार्यक्रम में अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति की उपस्थिति से दोनों देशों को बखूबी हुआ। वरना यह वही अमेरिका है जो स्वार्थवश हमेशा पाकिस्तान के कंधे पर रखकर बंदूक चलाता रहता था। अमेरिका की इस नीति का फायदा साम्राज्यवादी चीन ने खूब उठाया और गाहे-बगाहे वह भारतीय भू-भाग को दबाने की हिमाकत करता रहा, लेकिन शायद वह पहला अवसर था जब डोकलाम मुद्दे पर भारत की दृढ़ता ने चीन को पीछे हटने के लिए मजबूर कर दिया। अमेरिका सहित विश्व के अन्य देशों को चीन के विरुद्ध भारत की यह हेकड़ी अच्छी लगी। ऐसे में एशिया महाद्वीप के अंदर मोदी के नेतृत्व में उभरने वाले भारत से विश्व की अपेक्षाएं बढ़ती गईं। इस दृष्टि से इजरायल से लेकर फ्रांस, रूस, सऊदी अरब आदि देशों ने मोदी को हाथों-हाथ लिया। अमेरिका भी इसमें पीछे नहीं रहा और उसने ह्यूस्टन में भारतीय मूल के अमेरिकी नागरिकों के बीच मोदी का जो शानदार स्वागत किया, उसे देश-दुनिया ने देखा। यद्यपि इसमें अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति ट्रंप का स्वार्थ भी था, जिसे मोदी ने ट्रंप को दोबारा अमेरिका का राष्ट्रपति बनने की कामना के रूप में प्रकट भी कर दिया, लेकिन इससे हटकर दूसरी खास बात यह थी कि भारतीय मूल के इस कार्यक्रम में अमेरिका के विपक्षी प्रतिनिधियों ने भी बड़े उत्साह के साथ भाग लिया। इस दृष्टि से अमेरिकी शासन के पक्ष-विपक्ष के बीच उभरती भारतीय प्रधानमंत्री मोदी की लोकप्रियता यही संदेश दे रही है कि अब अमेरिका और भारत एक-दूसरे के पूरक बनते जा रहे हैं।

डॉ. वीपी पाण्डेय, अलीगढ़

राजनीतिक मर्यादा

पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री ने संयुक्त राष्ट्र महासभा में जिस तरह भारत के प्रति जहर उगला, उसकी जितनी भी भर्त्सना की जाए कम है। वहीं भारत के प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने मंच से विश्व को महात्मा बुद्ध और स्वामी विवेकानंद का संदेश दिया। इमरान खान पाकिस्तान में पल रहे आतंकवाद का औचित्य सिद्ध करते नजर आए। इतना ही नहीं, उन्होंने भारत के राष्ट्रीय स्वयं सेवक संघ को भी जमकर कोसा। भारत को कोसने से पहले इमरान खान को पाकिस्तान के हालात पर भी गौर करना चाहिए था। संयुक्त राष्ट्र द्वारा प्रतिबंधित 130 दुर्दांत आतंकी पाकिस्तान में शरण लिए बैठे हैं। अलकायदा और दूसरे आतंकी संगठन के आतंकी सरकारी सहायता पर पल रहे हैं। हाफिज सईद और मसूद अजहर जैसे आतंकी सरगना वहां बिना किसी बाधा के अपना एजेंडा चला रहे हैं। दूसरी ओर पाकिस्तान अपनी आंतरिक समस्याओं से बुरी तरह ग्रस्त है। पाक अधिकृत कश्मीर में पाकिस्तान से आजादी लेने की आवाज उठ रही है। निरंतर उपेक्षा और उत्पीड़न से त्रस्त बलूचिस्तान में भी विद्रोह के स्वर गूंज रहे हैं, किंतु इमरान खान को इसकी चिंता नहीं है। वे केवल आतंक को बढ़ावा देकर भारत को पस्त करना चाहते हैं। अब पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री ने वैश्विक मंच से फिर भारत को परमाणु युद्ध की धमकी दी है। पाकिस्तान उस पहलवान की तरह व्यवहार कर रहा है जो बार-बार हार कर भी जीते हुए को पहलवान को चुनौती देता है। इमरान खान को राजनीतिक मर्यादा का सलीका सीखना होगा, अन्यथा वह पाकिस्तान का बड़ा नुकसान कर देंगे।

रणजीत वर्मा, फरीदाबाद

हनीट्रैप में फंसे नेता

मध्य प्रदेश में जब से हनीट्रैप का मामला उजागर हुआ है तब से सत्ता पक्ष और विपक्ष में आरोप-प्रत्यारोप की झड़ी सी लग गई है। सब एक दूसरे के चिट्ठे खोलने में लगे हुए हैं। फिर चाहें मंत्री हों या सांसद, विधायक हों या प्रशासनिक अधिकारी कोई भी हनीट्रैप के आरोपों से बच नहीं पा रहा है। समाज को नई दिशा देने वालों का यह हाल है। आम लोग इनसे क्या सीख लेंगे?

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

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

महासभा के सामने

प्रधानमंत्री के संयुक्त राष्ट्र महासभा में संबोधन से एक बार फिर दुनिया के तमाम देशों को आतंकवाद के मुद्दे पर एकजुट होने की जरूरत रेखांकित हुई है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र महासभा में बोलते हुए प्रधानमंत्री ने कहा कि जब तक दुनिया इस मुद्दे पर बिखरी रहेगी, आतंकवाद से पार पाना मुश्किल बना रहेगा। उन्होंने इस मसले पर भारत के रुख को रेखांकित करते हुए कहा कि हम सदियों से शांति के पक्ष में रहे हैं, हमने कभी युद्ध को बढ़ावा नहीं दिया। हमने युद्ध नहीं, बुद्ध के विचारों को अपनाया है। प्रधानमंत्री ने अपने इस संबोधन में पाकिस्तान का नाम लिए बगैर संकेत कर दिया कि इस वक्त दुनिया में आतंकवाद की जड़ें कहां पर फैल रही हैं और वहां से दुनिया के लिए किस प्रकार के खतरे पैदा हो रहे हैं। आतंकवाद के मुद्दे पर दुनिया के देशों में बिखराव की बात कह कर उन्होंने यह भी संकेत दे दिया कि किस तरह चीन जैसे कुछ देश उसे अलग-थलग और हतोत्साहित करने के मामले में अपने व्यक्तिगत स्वार्थों को ऊपर रखते हैं। छिपी बात नहीं है कि जब भी आतंकवाद के मामले में पाकिस्तान पर नकेल कसने की बात उठी है, चीन उसका समर्थन करता रहा है।

कश्मीर को लेकर इन दिनों जिस तरह पाकिस्तान के हुक्मरान तल्ख हैं और दुनिया भर में घूम-घूम कर बताने का प्रयास कर रहे हैं कि भारत उसके साथ अन्याय कर रहा है, ऐसी स्थिति में भारतीय प्रधानमंत्री ने महासभा के अपने संबोधन में एक बार भी कश्मीर का नाम नहीं लिया। जबकि उसी मंच से पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री का लंबा भाषण हुआ और उन्होंने बार-बार कश्मीर समस्या का जिक्र किया। भारतीय प्रधानमंत्री ने कश्मीर और पाकिस्तान का नाम लिए बिना संकेत दे दिया कि आतंकवाद की जड़ें कहां हैं और युद्ध की बातें कौन करता है। छिपी बात नहीं है कि कश्मीर से अनुच्छेद तीन सौ सत्तर हटने के बाद पाकिस्तानी प्रधानमंत्री ने अनेक मौकों पर युद्ध की धमकी दी और अपनी परमाणु शक्ति का बखान किया। फिर उन्होंने यह भी स्वीकार कर लिया कि पाकिस्तान में तीस हजार आतंकवादी शरण पाए हुए हैं। यहां तक कि अमेरिका से अपेक्षित मदद न मिल पाने पर निराशा में उन्होंने यह भी बयान दे डाला कि उसामा बिन लादेन के मामले में अमेरिका की मदद करना पाकिस्तानी हुकूमत की बहुत बड़ी गलती थी। उन्होंने यह भी स्वीकार किया कि उसामा बिन लादेन के सैनिकों को पाकिस्तानी फौज प्रशिक्षण दे रही थी। इमरान खान के ये सारे बयान दुनिया के सामने प्रमाण हैं।

जब अमेरिका के वर्ल्ड ट्रेड सेंटर पर आतंकी हमला हुआ था, तो दुनिया के तमाम देशों ने आतंकवाद के विरुद्ध जंग का संकल्प लिया था। तब पाकिस्तान पर भी इसमें सहयोग का दबाव बना था, मगर हकीकत यह है कि वह ऊपरी तौर पर, दिखावे के लिए अपने यहां पल रहे आतंकी संगठनों के विरुद्ध कड़े कदम उठाता दिखने का प्रयास तो करता रहा, पर छिपे तौर पर वह उनकी मदद ही करता रहा है। फिर उसे चीन की आड़ मिलती रही है, जिसके चलते संयुक्त राष्ट्र में उसके यहां पनाह पाए दुर्दांत आतंकियों के खिलाफ कोई कड़ा कदम नहीं उठाया जा सका है। इस तरह संयुक्त राष्ट्र के भीतर ही एकजुटता नहीं बन पाई है। ऐसे में प्रधानमंत्री का यह संकेत कि आतंकवाद के मसले पर दुनिया के देशों का बिखराव अच्छा संकेत नहीं है, इसके सदस्य देशों को नए सिरे से सोचने को विवश करता है।

कार्रवाई और संदेश

पिछले चार महीने में यह चौथा मौका है जब सरकार ने भ्रष्ट अधिकारियों के खिलाफ कड़ी कार्रवाई करते हुए उन्हें बाहर का रास्ता दिखाया है। दो दिन पहले सरकार ने आयकर विभाग के पंद्रह और वरिष्ठ अधिकारियों की छुट्टी कर दी। प्रधानमंत्री ने इस बार पंद्रह अगस्त को लाल किले से अपने संबोधन में यह साफ कर दिया था कि भ्रष्ट अधिकारियों को किसी भी सूरत में बख्शा नहीं जाएगा। उन्होंने इसका संकेत भी यह कहते हुए दे दिया था कि कर विभाग में भी ऐसे लोग हो सकते हैं जो अपने अधिकारों का दुरुपयोग करते हैं। इसके दस दिन बाद यानी छब्बीस अगस्त को केंद्रीय प्रत्यक्ष कर बोर्ड (सीबीडीटी) के बाईस बड़े अफसरों को जबरन सेवानिवृत्त कर दिया गया था। अब तक जितने भी अधिकारियों के खिलाफ इस तरह की कार्रवाई की गई है, उन सभी पर घूस लेने, वसूली और अपने पद का दुरुपयोग करने के मामले चल रहे हैं। सरकार ने भ्रष्ट अधिकारियों के खिलाफ जिस तरह का कठोर रुख अख्तियार किया है, वह शासन को भ्रष्टाचार मुक्त बनाने की दिशा में बड़ा कदम है। इसी क्रम में जून में केंद्रीय अप्रत्यक्ष कर और सीमा शुल्क बोर्ड (सीबीआइसी) के कई अधिकारियों को नाप दिया गया था। हालांकि सरकार ने पिछले कार्यकाल में भी भ्रष्टाचार के खिलाफ अभियान छेड़ने की कोशिश तो की थी, लेकिन तब इसके अपेक्षित नतीजे सामने नहीं आए थे।

भ्रष्टाचार हमारे प्रशासनिक तंत्र का अभिन्न हिस्सा बन चुका है। इसकी जड़ें काफी गहरे तक पैठी हैं। छोटे से दफ्तर से लेकर ऊपर तक किसी न किसी रूप में भ्रष्टाचार पांव पसारे हुए है। छोटे-छोटे कामों के लिए लोगों को घूस देनी पड़ती है। चाहे राशन कार्ड या ड्राइविंग लाइसेंस जैसे जरूरी दस्तावेज बनवाने हों या फिर अस्पताल में इलाज कराने से लेकर अन्य काम हों, एक भी जगह ऐसी नहीं है जहां लोगों को घूस न देनी पड़ती हो। हैरानी की बात तो यह है कि आधार कार्ड बनाने जैसे काम में भी लोगों को जमकर लूटा गया, इसी तरह गरीबों के लिए मनरेगा जैसी योजनाएं तक भ्रष्टाचार से मुक्त नहीं रह पाईं। पुलिस थाने और अदालतें घूसखोरी और वसूली के अड्डों में तब्दील हो चुकी हैं, यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है। ऐसे में सवाल है कि आखिर आमजन को भ्रष्टाचार से कैसे मुक्ति मिले। इसलिए इस बार सरकार ने भ्रष्ट अधिकारियों के खिलाफ मुहिम उन महकमों से शुरू की है जहां करदाताओं का सबसे ज्यादा उत्पीड़न होता है।

ऐसा नहीं है कि भ्रष्टाचार से निपटना संभव नहीं है, घूसखोरों को सबक नहीं सिखाया जा सकता हो। बस, इसके लिए इच्छाशक्ति की जरूरत होती है, जो अभी तक किसी ने दिखाई नहीं थी। यह देश का दुर्भाग्य ही रहा है कि भारी भ्रष्टाचार करने वालों के खिलाफ कार्रवाई शुरू करने में भी पूर्व सरकारों ने कोई पहल नहीं की। इसी का परिणाम रहा कि भारत में भ्रष्टाचार सबसे बड़ी और लाइलाज बीमारी में तब्दील हो गया। बड़े स्तरों पर आज जो भ्रष्टाचार सामने आ रहा है, वह कोई एक दिन में नहीं पनपा है। आज जो हजारों-करोड़ रुपए के बैंक घोटाले सामने आए हैं, उससे पता चलता है कि भ्रष्टाचार से देश का आर्थिक तंत्र किस कदर चरमरा चुका है। हर मामले की जांच में सामने यही आया है कि बड़े अफसरों के भ्रष्टाचार से ही ऐसे घोटाले संभव हो पाए। इसलिए सरकार ने अब भ्रष्ट अफसरों को नौकरी से निकालने का जो कदम उठाया है, वह यह उम्मीद बंधाने वाला है कि बड़ी मछलियां भी नहीं बचेंगी।

कल्पमेधा

बल से जो शत्रु को जीतता है, वह सिर्फ आधा ही जीत पाता है।

-मिल्टन

कर सुधार से उम्मीदें

जयंतीलाल भंडारी

कॉरपोरेट कर में कमी से न केवल आर्थिक उछाल आएगा, बल्कि भारतीय उद्योग-कारोबार विश्व स्तर पर और प्रतिस्पर्धी बनेगा। कॉरपोरेट कर घटाने के कदम से विनिर्माण क्षेत्र सेक्टर को भी ताकत मिलने की उम्मीद है। साथ ही, मेक इन इंडिया मुहिम में भी नई जान फूंकी जा सकती है। अब कई विदेशी कंपनियां कम कर का फायदा उठाने के लिए भारत आ सकती हैं।

आर्थिक सुस्ती से बढ़ रही मुश्किलों से राहत के लिए प्रत्यक्ष कर सुधारों की अहमियत से इनकार नहीं किया जा सकता। हाल में वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण ने कॉरपोरेट कर की दरों को तीस से घटा कर बाईस फीसद कर दिया। इसके साथ ही भारत इस मामले में दुनिया में सबसे कम कॉरपोरेट कर वाले देशों की सूची में शामिल हो गया है। कॉरपोरेट कर का मौजूदा वैश्विक औसत 23.03 फीसद है। भारत में अब प्रभावी कॉरपोरेट कर 25.17 फीसद होगा। यह पहले की प्रभावी दर की तुलना में करीब दस फीसद कम है। वित्त मंत्री ने नई घोषणाओं के तहत विनिर्माण क्षेत्र में कदम रखने वाली नई कंपनियों को भी बड़ी राहत दी है। एक अक्तूबर, 2019 से शुरू होने वाली कंपनियों को पंद्रह फीसद कॉरपोरेट कर ही देना होगा। इनके लिए प्रभावी दर 17.01 फीसद होगी। साथ ही जो कंपनियां किसी तरह की छूट नहीं ले रही हैं, उन कंपनियों को न्यूनतम वैकल्पिक कर (मैट) चुकाने से भी राहत दे दी गई है। खास बात यह है कि कॉरपोरेट कर में कटौती का कदम दुनियाभर में वैश्वीकरण के बाद नए चलन को दर्शाता है।

दुनिया के कई प्रमुख देशों ने अर्थव्यवस्था को रफ्तार देने और एफडीआइ-एफआइई को बढ़ावा देने के लिए कॉरपोरेट कर में कटौती का बड़ा कदम उठाया गया है। आंकड़े बता रहे हैं कि 1980 में दुनिया के सभी देशों को मिलाकर औसत कॉरपोरेट कर की दर 38.84 फीसद थी। 2018 में यह घट कर 23.03 फीसद हो गई। यानी इन अड़तीस सालों में पंद्रह फीसद से ज्यादा की कटौती हुई है। इस लिहाज से भारत में भी कॉरपोरेट कर में बड़ी कमी विकास और निवेश के मद्देनजर महत्त्वपूर्ण कदम है। इस तरह के रेट कट से उत्पादों की कीमत भी कम होगी। प्रत्यक्ष कर का मतलब ऐसे कर से है, जो सीधा किसी कंपनी की आय, व्यक्ति की आय, संपत्ति व अन्य मदों पर लगाया जाता है। प्रत्यक्ष कर अन्य लोगों पर हस्तांतरित नहीं किया जा सकता है।

अर्थव्यवस्था को गति देने के लिए सरकार ने पिछले कुछ महीनों में कुछ बड़े निर्णायक कदम उठाए हैं। इनसे कॉरपोरेट क्षेत्र और भारत के शेयर बाजार में एक नई ऊर्जा का संचार होने की उम्मीद है। कॉरपोरेट कर में कमी से न केवल आर्थिक उछाल आएगा, बल्कि भारतीय उद्योग-कारोबार विश्व स्तर पर और प्रतिस्पर्धी बनेगा। कॉरपोरेट कर घटाने के कदम से विनिर्माण क्षेत्र सेक्टर को भी ताकत मिलने की उम्मीद है। साथ ही, मेक इन इंडिया मुहिम में भी नई जान फूंकी जा सकती है। अब कई विदेशी कंपनियां कम कर का फायदा उठाने के लिए भारत आ सकती हैं।

ऐसे में कॉरपोरेट कर घटाना देश के विनिर्माण क्षेत्र के लिए एक वरदान साबित हो सकता है। कॉरपोरेट कर की दर घटाने से चीन से कारोबार समेट रही अमेरिकी और अन्य देशों की कंपनियों के सामने भारत एक आकर्षक निवेश केंद्र के रूप में पहचान बना सकता है। अभी अमेरिका में कॉरपोरेट कर की दर सत्ताईस फीसद, कनाड़ा में साढ़े छब्बीस फीसद, ब्राजील में चौंतीस फीसद, फ्रांस में इकतीस फीसद, जर्मनी में तीस फीसद और चीन में पच्चीस फीसद है। ऐसे में जब भारत सबसे कम कॉरपोरेट कर की दरों वाले देशों में शामिल हो गया है तब भारत में विदेशी कंपनियों के निवेश की संभावनाएं प्रबल बनती हैं।

निश्चित रूप से कारपोरेट कर घटाने के बाद अब पूरा देश नए प्रत्यक्ष कर संहिता और नए आयकर कर कानून को जल्द ही नया रूप देने पर विचार कर रहा है। पिछले महीने नई प्रत्यक्ष कर संहिता (डीटीसी) का मसौदा तैयार करने के लिए गठित टास्क फोर्स के अध्यक्ष ने अपनी रिपोर्ट वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण को सौंप दी है। इस रिपोर्ट में प्रत्यक्ष कर कानूनों में व्यापक बदलाव और वर्तमान आयकर कानून को हटा कर नए सरल व प्रभावी आयकर कानून लागू करने की बात कही गई है। नए आयकर कानून में छोटे करदाताओं की सहूलियत के लिए कई प्रावधान सुझाए गए हैं। आकलन की प्रक्रिया सरल किए जाने और आयकर कानून के किसी प्रावधान को लेकर करदाता सीधे केंद्रीय प्रत्यक्ष कर बोर्ड से व्यवस्था ले सकेंगे। इसके अलावा कमाई पर दोहरे कर का बोझ भी खत्म करने की सिफारिश की गई है। इस रिपोर्ट में पांच लाख तक की आय पर मौजूदा आयकर छूट को आगे भी जारी रखने, पांच से दस लाख रुपए तक की वार्षिक आय पर मौजूदा बीस फीसद की दर को घटा कर दस फीसद करने जैसी सिफारिशें हैं। रिपोर्ट में कर विवादों के जल्द निपटारे के लिए भी अहम सुझाव दिए गए हैं। स्थिति यह है कि इस समय आयकर अपील ट्रिब्यूनल और उच्च अदालतों में एक लाख पंद्रह हजार करोड़ रुपए के मामले फंसे हैं। तीन लाख इकतालीस हजार मामले आयकर कानून आयुक्त (अपीलीय) के पास लंबित हैं, जिनकी राशि पांच लाख सत्तर करोड़ रुपए के लगभग है। वस्तुतः कर विवादों का बढ़ना और लंबे समय तक निपटारा न होना सरकार के लिए बड़ी चुनौती बनी हुई थी।

भारत में सरकार की आय में प्रत्यक्ष कर में आयकर सबसे प्रमुख कर है। यदि हम देश में आयकर का इतिहास देखें तो पाते हैं कि देश में अंग्रेजों ने सन 1922 में आयकर की शुरुआत की थी। प्रथम विश्वयुद्ध के बाद पटरी से उतरी देश की अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए राजस्व जुटाने के मद्देनजर आयकर अस्थायी रूप से लागू किया गया था। तब से ही आयकर सरकार की आय का महत्त्वपूर्ण आधार बना हुआ है। यद्यपि देश की आजादी के बाद वर्ष 1961 तक देश की प्रत्यक्ष कर नीति व आयकर कानून में कुछ सुधार किए गए। फिर 1961 में आयकर अधिनियम लागू किया गया। लेकिन इस अधिनयम में एक ओर कार्यान्वयन संबंधी जटिलताएं रहीं, वहीं दूसरी ओर विभिन्न रियायतों और अनेक छूटों के कारण कर अनुपालन में मुश्किलें बढ़ती गईं। चूंकि मौजूदा प्रत्यक्ष कर एवं आयकर कानून काफी जटिल हैं और बीते अट्ठावन साल के विभिन्न अदालतों के फैसलों के बाद यह कानून काफी अस्पष्ट और भ्रामक हो चुका है। पिछले एक दशक से आयकर कानून में परिवर्तन की बात आर्थिक एवं वित्तीय क्षेत्र से लगातार उठती रही है।

निसंदेह पिछले 58 साल से लागू प्रत्यक्ष कर व्यवस्था में आमूल-चूल परिवर्तन लाने के लिए कार्यबल के द्वारा प्रस्तुत आयकर एवं प्रत्यक्ष कर सुधारों से संबंधित सिफारिशें अहमियत रखती हैं। इन सिफारिशों के आधार पर नए कानून को अमली-जामा पहनाने के लिए कर प्रशासन को तत्काल अपनी क्रियान्वयन रणनीतियों और त्वरित संशोधनों की जरूरत पर ध्यान देना होगा। नए कानून से नए कारोबार और डिजिटल लेन-देन पर आयकर संबंधी स्पष्टता आएगी।

इस समय देश की अर्थव्यवस्था सुस्ती के दौर में है। ऐसे में कारपोरेट कर घटाए जाने के बाद सरकार के द्वारा उद्योग-कारोबार जगत को राहत देने के लिए ऐसी सरल और प्रभावी नई प्रत्यक्ष कर संहिता और नए आयकर कानून को शीघ्र आकार दिया जाना होगा, जिससे करदाताओं को सहूलियत होगी और कर संग्रह भी बढ़ेगा। नए आयकर कानून के आकार लेने के बाद बड़ी संख्या में नए आयकरदाता दिखाई देंगे और कर संबंधी मुकदमेबाजी कम करने में मदद मिलेगी। साथ ही इससे देश की अर्थव्यवस्था गतिशील भी हो सकेगी।

दौलत का आना-जाना

सूर्यप्रकाश चतुर्वेदी

दुनिया मेरे आगे

लोगों को पैसा बनाते हुए देख कर हैरानी होती है और पैसा खोते हुए देख कर भी। यह सही है या गलत, यह एक अलग मुद्दा है, पर यह हकीकत है कि अधिक धन संपन्न व्यक्ति को ही समाज में प्रतिष्ठा मिलती है। किस व्यक्ति ने पैसा कैसे इकट्ठा किया, इस ओर कोई ध्यान नहीं देता। कुछ लोग तो खानदानी रईस होते हैं। इसलिए उन्हें परिवार से ही अकूत धन मिल जाता है। पर अधिकतर लोग इधर-उधर घुसपैठ करके ही अनायास पैसा बटोर लेते हैं। नौकरी करके या बंधी आमदनी के साथ व्यापार करके और ईमानदारी से काम करते हुए, सरकारी टैक्स भरते हुए अनायास धन इकट्ठा नहीं हो सकता। हममें से बहुतों ने देखा होगा कि कल तक साधारण जीवन जीने वाले लोग रातों-रात अकस्मात धनाढ्य कैसे हो गए! इनमें नेता-अभिनेता, अफसर से लेकर छोटे कर्मचारी हैं तो कोई काम नहीं करते हुए भी केवल संपर्क और जुगाड़ के जरिए करोड़ों इकट्ठा कर लेने वाले भी।

मसालों के एक मशहूर ब्रांड के मालिक आजादी के पहले कभी दिल्ली में तांगा चलाते थे। एक दिन कोई मसाला पिसवाने वे चक्की पर गए और बोले कि हल्दी जरा जल्दी पीसना। चक्की वाला बोला कि अगर ऐसे नखरे हैं तो खुद अपनी चक्की लगा लो। बात उन्हें चुभ गई और उन्होंने मसाला पीसने की अपनी चक्की लगा ली और सभी मसाले पीसना शुरू कर दिया। इसके बाद उन्होंने कभी पीछे मुड़ कर नहीं देखा। वे आज मसालों के प्रमुख व्यापारी हैं और अपने मसालों का खुद नब्बे की उम्र में भी विज्ञापन करते हैं और प्रभाव छोड़ते हैं। इसी तरह कभी इंदौर में एक छोटी-सी पान की दुकान और घोड़ों की चंदी बेचने से शुरुआत करने वाले पहले एक, फिर दो होटलों के मालिक, फिर लॉज के मालिक बने। धीरे-धीरे उनकी पान की दुकान अपने पान और अपनी चाय के लिए मशहूर हो गई। फिर वह राजनीतिकों और पत्रकारों के मिलने और बातचीत का प्रमुख केंद्र बन कर मशहूर हो गई। उन्होंने पैसा कमाया और नाम भी। उनके साहित्यकारों से भी संबंध बने और वे शहर के समाजसेवियों में शुमार किए जाने लगे।

ऐसे अनेक उदाहरण हैं, जिनमें दूसरों की सोहबत करते-करते लोग खुद भी उसी काम में लग गए और खूब धन कमाया। उनमें अच्छे और बुरे, दोनों हैं। जिस तरह साहित्यकारों, विशेषकर कवियों और पत्रकारों के साथ रहने का लोगों को शौक होता है, वैसा ही शौक राजनेताओं के साथ रहने और उनके साथ फोटो खिंचवाने का भी होता है। इसीलिए कभी किसी भी पद पर न रहने वाले भी अनाप-शनाप पैसा जमा कर लेते हैं।

हम कह सकते हैं कि दूसरों के पास भी मौका था, वे ऐसा क्यों नहीं कर पाए। शायद इसलिए कि उनमें वह हिम्मत नहीं थी जो ऐसा-वैसा काम करने के लिए जरूरी होती है। बेशुमार धन का मालिक बनने का रास्ता अपराध की गलियों से ही निकलता है। अचानक पैसे वाला हो जाने का पढ़ाई-लिखाई और बुद्धिमानी से कोई संबंध नहीं है। पढ़ा-लिखा बुद्धिजीवी बेहद डरपोक होता है। वह नियम-कायदों, लोगों की निगाह और अपने जमीर से डरता है। उसे हमेशा यह भय बना रहता है कि कभी उससे कोई गलत काम न हो जाए। जबकि पैसा इकट्ठा करने वाले बेखौफ धन समेटते रहते हैं। ऐसे लोग दूसरों को नासमझ, कायर और डरपोक समझते हैं।

धन इकट्ठा करने वाले कामयाब लोग अगर फर्श से अर्श तक पहुंचे हैं तो ऐसे लोगों की भी कमी नहीं हैं जो अर्श से फर्श पर आ गए हैं। जीवन का चक्र इसी तरह ऊपर नीचे होता रहता है। ऐसे तमाम धनाढ्य लोग रहे हैं, जो एक समय धनपतियों की दुनिया में शीर्ष पर रहे, लेकिन आज उनमें से कई दयनीय जीवन जी रहे हैं तो कई संपत्ति विवाद में कचहरियों के चक्कर काट रहे हैं। कई धनाढ्य रहे लोगों की शान खो चुकी है और उनमें से कई साधारण जीवन जी रहे हैं। उतार-चढ़ाव एक सामान्य प्रक्रिया है और जो ऊपर है, वह नीचे आएगा और जो नीचे है, वह ऊपर जाएगा ही। यही हाल शिक्षा केंद्रों, अस्पतालों, अखबारों और आधुनिक साज-सज्जा से लैस विभिन्न केंद्रों का है जो खुद को नंबर एक और अन्य को पिछड़ा बताते हैं। विज्ञापन हर दिन एक-दूसरे के दावे को झुठलाता रहता है।

कम से कम समय में, बल्कि तत्काल सब कुछ पा लेने की हवस ही लोगों को हर कीमत पर आगे बढ़ने के लिए प्रेरित करती है। जायज-नाजायज का फर्क कोई मायने नहीं रखता। लेकिन आदर्श ऐसे ही लोग हो पाते हैं, जिन्होंने खुद से सब कुछ हासिल किया है। हम भूल जाते हैं कि ताबड़तोड़ पाई हुई समृद्धि अधिक दिनों तक नहीं टिकती। समय से और अपनी बारी में मिली समृद्धि ही टिकती है और सुकून भी देती है। अचानक धनवान हुए लोग न चैन से जी पाते हैं, न सो पाते है। उन्हें निरंतर असुरक्षा और अशांति घेरे रहती है। जब जीवन में उतार-चढ़ाव आना ही है तो संयम बरतने और सब्र रखने में क्या हर्ज है!

यही है हकीकत

आपके समाचार पत्र में मार्मिक संपादकीय 'अभाव की मार' को पढ़ कर मन क्षोभ से भर गया। इस बेहद वीभत्स ,शर्मनाक, अमानवीय और पैशाचिक घटना से मन-मस्तिष्क और हृदय कराह उठा और यह सोचने पर बाध्य होना पड़ रहा है कि आज यह किस तरह के भारत का 'नवनिर्माण' हो रहा है जिसमें मानवीयता, करुणा, दया आदि सभी मनुष्योचित गुण तिरोहित होकर उसकी जगह पशुता, हैवानियत, क्रूरता और वहशीपन आदि पशुता के स्वभाव सर्वत्र दिखाई देने लगे हैं और वह भी उस देश में जिसमें कथित धर्म गुरुओं और राजनीति के कर्णधारों द्वारा लगभग प्रतिदिन इस देश की अशिक्षित और धर्माभीरू जनता को विश्वगुरु, आध्यात्मिक गुरु और अहिंसा परमो धर्म जैसी बातों की रोज घुट्टी पिलाई जाती हो!

ताजा घटना मध्यप्रदेश राज्य के शिवपुरी जिले के भावखेड़ी गांव में एक झोपड़ी में रहने वाले अत्यंत गरीब और दलित परिवार के बच्चों के साथ हुई एक अत्यंत दारुण और लोमहर्षक घटना के बारे में है। जिनके घर में ठीक से दो वक्त खाना भी मुश्किल से मयस्सर हो पाता होगा, उस झोपड़ी में शौचालय होने की बात ही बेमानी है। खबरों के अनुसार उस दलित परिवार को ग्राम पंचायत की तरफ से शौचालय बनाने के लिए पैसा भी मिल गया था, लेकिन इसके बावजूद उन्हीं हत्यारोपियों ने जबर्दस्ती उनके यहां शौचालय नहीं बनने दिया था, इसलिए उस घर के दो बच्चे क्रमशः 10 साल का लड़का और बारह साल की लड़की शौच कर रहे थे। तभी दो लोगों ने लाठियों से हमला कर उन्हें मौत के घाट उतार दिया।

दूसरी ओर, इस घटना के वक्त अमेरिका में राष्टपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप भारत के प्रधानमंत्री को स्वच्छता मिशन की कथित सफलता पर 'ग्लोबल गोलकीपर अवार्ड' के पुरस्कार से सम्मानित कर रहे थे। सवाल तो यह है कि देश में दलितों और मुसलमानों के प्रति कथित सवर्णों में जब इतना मानसिक प्रदूषण है कि जगह-जगह लगभग प्रतिदिन जातिगत और धार्मिक घृणा के वशीभूत होकर उनकी जघन्य हत्या करने की घटनाएं प्रायः सामने आती ही रहतीं हैं और इसी देश में सीवरों में दलितों और गरीब लोगों के मरने की दुनिया में सर्वाधिक संख्या में दुखद घटनाएं हो रहीं हैं, इनको रोका कैसे जाए? स्वच्छता अभियान के 'नाटक' के बजाय इस देश की 'विकृत मानसिकता' को साफ करने की सबसे अधिक जरूरत है।

• निर्मल कुमार शर्मा, गाजियाबाद

मोहपाश का जाल

मध्यप्रदेश में जब से मोहपाश (हनीट्रैप) का मामला उजागर हुआ है तब से सत्ता पक्ष और विपक्ष में आरोप-प्रत्यारोपों की झड़ी लग गई है। सब एक-दूसरे के चिट्ठे खोलने में लग गए हैं। फिर चाहे मंत्री हो या सांसद, विधायक हो या प्रशासनिक अधिकारी, कोई भी मोहपाश के आरोपों से बच नहीं पा रहा है। हनीट्रैप का नेटवर्क चलाने वालों के खिलाफ प्रदेश का प्रशासन और कानून-व्यवस्था पूरी तरह लगी है। लेकिन प्रदेश की राजनीति गरमा रही है। बढ़ते आरोप-प्रत्यारोपों के बीच बढ़ती राजनीतिक गंदगी 'दूध के धुलों' पर भी कालिख पोतने में लगी है। इस पर कैसे काबू पाया जा सके, इस बारे में सबको गंभीरता से विचार करने की जरूरत है।

• महेश नेनावा, इंदौर

कुछ तो सोचे आरबीआइ

पंजाब एंड महाराष्ट्र कोऑपरेटिव (पीएमसी) बैंक पर आरबीआइ के प्रतिबंध लगा देने और ग्राहकों को छह महीने में केवल दस हजार की राशि निकालने की इजाजत देने की बात समझ से परे लग रही है। आखिर आम ग्राहक केवल दस हजार रुपए में कैसे छह महीने तक घर-परिवार चला पाएगा? कई रिहायशी सोसायटियों के खातेदार भी कैसे चौकीदार और अन्य रखरखाव का प्रबंध कर पाएंगे? व्यापारी, नौकरीपेशा, विद्यार्थी आदि कैसे अपनी व्यवस्था कर पाएंगे? गलतियां और घोटाले बैंक प्रबंधकों ने किए हैं उसकी सजा आखिर आम ग्राहक क्यों भुगते? एक ओर सभी विशेष पर्व नवरात्रि, दशहरा, दीपावली और शादियों का मौसम आने वाला है। आखिर जिसकी सारी कमाई और वित्तीय व्यवस्था बैंक में है, तब वह कैसे पर्व और शादियों के खर्च निपटाएगा? खुद का पैसा समय पर खुद के काम में न आए, तो बचत का क्या मतलब रह जाता है? जिन्होंने और जिन्हें ऋण दिया है और जो डिफाल्टर हैं, उन पर और उनके ऋण और जमा पर सख्त कार्रवाई तो उचित है, लेकिन आम ग्राहकों को परेशान करना उचित नहीं है। इसलिए आरबीआइ को इस मसले पर गंभीरता से सोचना चाहिए और ग्राहकों की परेशानी को ध्यान में रखते हुए उनके हित में तत्काल कदम उठाते हुए उन्हें राहत देनी चाहिए।

• पूजा साहू, पुणे (महाराष्ट्र)

बाढ़ से बेहाल

इस बार भारी बारिश ने विकास की पोल खोल कर रख दी है। टीवी चैनलों पर सुदूर गांव, कस्बों की तस्वीरें दिखाई जा रही हैं, जिनसे पता चलता है कि सड़कें, पुलिया न होने के कारण महिलाओं और बुजुर्गों को अस्पताल पहुंचने में कितनी मुश्किलों का सामना करना पड़ रहा है। स्कूल जाने वाले बच्चे जान जोखिम में डाल कर नदी नाले पार करते रहे। दाह संस्कार तक करने में कठिनाइयां आईं। इस तरह की खबरें देश का असली चेहरा दिखाती हैं। हर साल करोड़ों-अरबों का बजट खर्च होता है, विधायक और सांसद निधि खर्च होने के बाद भी देश की यह तस्वीर दिखाई देती है तो कैसे कह सकते हैं कि विकास हुआ है? केंद्र व राज्यों की सरकारों का पहला फर्ज यह बनता है कि इस बारिश में जिन-जिन इलाकों में लोगों को इस प्रकार की परेशानियां हुई हैं, उन क्षेत्रों में प्राथमिकता के आधार पर सड़कें और पुलियाओं का निर्माण करवाया जाए।

• हेमा हरि उपाध्याय, खाचरोद (उज्जैन)

चौपाल

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