

Waiting for some good news

Will the landing of Chandrayaan-2 lift the slowdown gloom?



NOT FOR PROFIT

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

The moon and stars have for long inspired poets, but these are different times. So when number-studded stimulus packages cannot lift the overwhelming gloom, perhaps the moon can. This Saturday, Chandrayaan-2 is set to create history by landing on the moon, and that may be the only piece of good news Indians have heard

in a while. Exactly 50 years after the Apollo 11 achievement, Indian lunar mission Chandrayaan-2 is going to moon's south polar region.

It will "boldly go where no country has ever gone before", Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) proudly splashes on its website. It explains that the aim is to improve the understanding of the moon and to make discoveries that will benefit India and humanity as a whole. Besides all the far-reaching scientific feat that Chandrayaan-2 is capable of, there's something else that it can deliver, but neither Isro nor any scientist manning the project may talk about it.

Chandrayaan-2 landing on September 7 is likely to give confidence to the people of this country like nothing else has been able to do. Not the rollback of tax surcharge on foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), not the bunch of measures announced to ease stress in non-

banking financial companies (NBFCs) or micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), not the Cabinet decisions to relax foreign investment conditions, not the steps to soothe the sentiments of a battered automobile industry, and not any bureaucratic reshuffle in a bid to reverse the downturn. The government has promised at least two more rounds of sops, including for the stressed real estate sector, but the markets are in no mood to cheer.

While a successful lunar mission may not exactly translate into a bull market or stop the job losses cutting across companies and sectors, it's likely to give us a reason to celebrate and possibly look for heroes as well as inspiration in a discipline where India has hardly been at the forefront. The last famous brush was in 1984, when Rakesh Sharma as a squadron leader in Air Force had flown aboard Soyuz T-11 to become the first Indian in space. Then Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi had asked Rakesh Sharma how India looked from outer space, to which he had replied, "Saare Jahan Se Achha", making that line go viral in a non-Twitter age.

Chandrayaan-2 is an unmanned mission and therefore no astronaut will be able to say how India looks from Moon or repeat Neil Armstrong's historic words — "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind". The mission, led by two women scientists Muthayya Vanitha and Ritu Karidhal, may not wipe out the slowdown blues or the pains of what some call a quasi recession, but it can turn out to be an inspiration for generations.

The build-up around the occasion has been somewhat subdued so far, perhaps because the government has been busy trying to set the economy right and roll back some of the proposals made in the Union Budget in July. Among few celebratory steps, a space quiz was organised to select school children who would watch the landmark event live with Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Isro's Bengaluru centre on Saturday.

If the withdrawal of special status in Jammu & Kashmir, through abrogation

of Article 370, had cheered many Indians, Chandrayaan-2 landing on the Moon should make us truly proud. If the so-called lipstick index is a measure for economic slowdown, the success of the Indian lunar mission may set another kind of benchmark on how to contain all-round pessimism.

In that context, it may be worthwhile to remember what Neil Armstrong, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, and Michael Collins had said in various interviews and statements after their flight to Moon 50 years ago. On looking down on earth, Collins had famously said, "I really believe that if the political leaders of the world could see their planet from a distance of, let's say 100,000 miles, their outlook would be fundamentally changed. The all-important border would be invisible, that noisy argument suddenly silenced." Besides Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" line, his other memorable words included, "there are great ideas undiscovered, breakthroughs available to those who can remove one of truth's protective layers. There are places to go beyond belief". And, Aldrin helped the world achieve the next impossible dream, by saying "No dream is too high".

CHINESE WHISPERS

Department becomes 'cell'



Congress president Sonia Gandhi (pictured) has reorganised the party's data analytics department. The department, headed by Praveen Chakravarty, had

led the Congress campaign on its minimum income guarantee promise in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, as also its membership drive. Its forecasts of the party on its way to get over 120 seats were proved incorrect. Knives were out within the party against Chakravarty, considered close to Rahul Gandhi. Now, Sonia Gandhi has demoted the standalone department to a "cell" within a department. In a letter dated Tuesday, party general secretary K C Venugopal stated that the department will now function as a "technology and data cell within the organisation department" of the party. Chakravarty would continue to head the cell, but will now need to take approvals from organisation department heads, instead of the party chief.

Old guard back in saddle

With Sonia Gandhi back as the Congress chief, the older guard has started to assert itself in the party. On Wednesday, senior leaders finally settled the leadership issue in the Haryana unit of the Congress. The party president named Kumari Selja as the state unit chief. She replaced youth leader Ashok Tanwar, considered close to Rahul Gandhi. Former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda was appointed Congress legislative party leader, which makes him the leader of the Opposition. He would also be the chairman of the election management committee of the party for the forthcoming Assembly polls. The Hooda camp had threatened to quit if the party failed to remove Tanwar. The decision has come about after several rounds of consultations between the Congress president, senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad and Hooda. The election schedule is likely to be announced later this month.

Rule applies to all

As she was concluding her keynote address during the inaugural session of a convention organised by the Indian Music Industry (IMI) in the national capital on Tuesday, Sumita Dawra, joint secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade, noted that no musical performance in such an event was a bit surprising. While this evoked laughter from the audience, someone quipped that the organisers did not schedule any because they did not have a licence for it. In a panel discussion held earlier, the participants emphasised the need for a better deal for music companies because broadcasters were raking in the moolah leveraging a product (read music) manufactured by them. The recording companies' representatives reasoned, even if in jest, that the convention itself fell in the private events category. So no question of a musical performance!

Equality-efficiency trade-off

In the second part of the series, the author says there is evidence that inequality has encouraged excessive risk-taking in the financial sector and might have been partly responsible for the 2007-08 financial crisis



PRANAB BARDHAN

The last few decades of advance in economic theory and empirical findings have raised questions about the general applicability of the very idea of equality-efficiency trade-off. In the rest of this essay, we shall enumerate and examine some of the relevant issues here.

When there is information asymmetry between the two sides in a given economic transaction, the above-mentioned trade-off may not hold. For example, creditors do not have enough information about the viability of a project brought to them by a potential borrower. You may have a project that you know is very much worthwhile from both private and social point of view, but the creditor may not be aware or convinced of it, and you do not have sufficient collateral to persuade the creditor to take the risk of lending to you. A rich man with an inferior project may get that loan, not you, because of the former's larger assets, and hence, collateral value. Thus, inequality here promotes the less efficient outcome. Similarly,

your low savings or collateral may not permit you to finance or borrow for investment in higher education for which you may otherwise have the talent and proficiency, whereas the less talented children of your rich neighbour go through college and university, while you drop out. This is a loss to society as well as yourself.

There is, of course, a great deal of socially unproductive risk-taking by the rich (with "collateral damage" for the poor), say, in financial or real-estate speculation. Even if we ignore this, it is important to keep in mind that not all dynamic innovations and productive risk-taking are by private fortune-seekers. In the US, much of the basic or foundational research and great innovations of recent times (like the internet, GPS, digital search engine, supercomputers, human genome project, magnetic resonance imaging, smart phone technology, hydraulic fracturing for shale gas, and a whole host of others) have been facilitated by or been the outcome of public investment funded to a large extent by taxpayer money. Scandinavian countries with a high-tax redistributive economy have not been lagging in innovations.

Even in the private sector assuring temporary monopoly and thus, great fortune for the innovator through the patent system has not been the only or the best way of encouraging innovations. Patents on a new technology often make things costly or obstructive for future innovators and thus may hamper further advances in technology. Open-source programmes are often more conducive to new developments of technology.

If inequality is generated by market power of big firms in product and labour markets, then there is a direct loss of efficiency (in output and employment) if that market power enables those firms in their attempt to maximise profits to restrict output (and labour hiring) below the amounts for a competitive firm.

Historically, the case where inequality and inefficiency have stubbornly persisted together relates to land, which is usually very unequally distributed. In traditional (and in some non-traditional) agriculture, the empirical evidence suggests that economies of scale in farm production are not inherently substantial (except in some plantation crops) and that the small farm is often the most efficient unit of production (if credit, insurance and marketing facilities are not inadequate). Yet the violent and tortuous history of land reform in many countries suggests that numerous road blocks on the way to a more efficient reallocation of land rights are put up by the powerful landed interests for many generations. Why don't the large landlords instead voluntarily lease out or sell their land to small farmers and grab in the bargaining process much of the surplus arising from this efficient reallocation?

There clearly has been some leasing out of land, but problems of monitoring the tenant's work and application of inputs, insecurity of tenure (discouraging long-term land improvements by the tenant), and the landlord's fear that the tenant will acquire occupancy rights on the land have limited efficiency gains and the extent of tenancy. The land sales market is often rather thin



(and in many developing countries the sales sometimes go the opposite way—from distressed small farmers to landlords and money-lenders). With low household savings and collaterals, the potentially more efficient small farmer is often incapable of affording the going market price of land.

Landlords on the other hand often resist land reforms particularly because the levelling effects reduce their social and political power and their ability to control and dominate even non-land transactions in the village. Large land holdings may give their owner special social status or political power in a lumpy way—for example, the status or political effect from owning 1,000 acres is larger than the combined status or political effect accruing to 50 new buyers owning 20 acres each. Thus the social or political rent of land ownership for the large landowner may not be compensated by the offer price of numerous small buyers. Under the circumstances, the former will not sell and inefficient (from the productivity point of view) land concentration persists.

Then there is the demand-side impact of inequality. There is a story of a Ford company executive in conversation with a union leader, pointing to the arrival of a bunch of robots in the factory and asking, "can you collect union dues from them?", to which the union leader replied, "can you get them to buy Ford cars?". Particularly, in times of

depressed aggregate demand and idle capacity, inequality may hurt macroeconomic performance by making it difficult to stimulate enough mass consumer spending. Recent research suggests that a long-term rise in inequality can push the economy into a deep recession. There is also some evidence that inequality has encouraged excessive risk-taking in the financial sector, and along with household indebtedness, may have been responsible for the financial crisis that originated in the US in 2007-08.

Under inequality not merely the aggregate consumer demand may be deficient, but the pattern of consumer spending may also get distorted. Certain types of consumer spending on status goods (houses, cars, and other easily visible conspicuous consumption items) can, in the context of inequality and community norms of emulation and the resultant "expenditure cascade", lead to a race to the bottom among neighbours and reference groups: clearly an inefficient outcome.

(To be concluded on Friday)

The writer is professor of Graduate School at University of California, Berkeley. His most recent two books are Awakening Giants, Feet of Clay: Assessing the Economic Rise of China and India, and Globalisation, Democracy and Corruption: An Indian Perspective; the article was first published in the international blog 3 Quarks Daily

INSIGHT

GST and dispute resolution



V S KRISHNAN

India's climb on the "Ease of Doing Business" ranking has been deservedly applauded. But equally important is the ease of paying taxes. Some research shows that improvement in the ease of paying tax can help improve compliance especially for lower tax segments. Notwithstanding these disputes do divert taxpayers' attention from more important productive tasks.

Broadly, any tax system must have the following five distinctive features. First, disputes must be clearly defined, and non-serious infringements should be kept out of the domain of disputes. Second, uniformity of practice in assessment must be ensured by facilitating those who draft the law to interpret it. Third, the system must ensure speedy adjudication of cases within definite time lines. Fourth, taxpayers should be encouraged to settle disputes without resorting to litigations. Finally, non-intrusive mechanisms of interaction must be created between the taxpayer and the tax department.

Translated on the ground what can the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs do immediately? The low-hanging fruit here is that there are a number of minor procedural cases which clog the dispute resolution system. These need to be listed and subject to administrative levies which may be capped. A similar amendment has recently been done on the corporate law side which can be replicated here. This suggestion would require the GST law to

be amended in which a list of minor penalties may be included and junior officers could be allowed to decide them.

A major pain point in the GST dispute resolution mechanism is the failure to make a conceptual distinction between "offence cases" and "assessment cases". Offence cases are periodic in nature and do not have any recurring implications whereas assessment cases relate to principles of classification, valuation and eligibility of input tax credit and therefore have recurring implications. The suggested course of action is that while field officers could be allowed to decide on offence cases on the basis of facts available, a centralised system of binding instructions should be put in place for field officers to follow in assessment matters. Such a provision was earlier available in pre GST. For this purpose, both the Centre and states can create a "technical secretariat" which could be empowered to issue such binding instruction on assessment matters to ensure uniformity of practice. At the central level, this could be located in the TRU where the tax laws are drafted and fittingly therefore those who draft the law must also interpret the law. The creation of a technical secretariat at the Centre and the states would facilitate discussion between tax officers at annual or biannual conferences. Such conferences/forums would forge the bond of fiscal friendship between the officers. Taxpayers would benefit from certainty in the assessment matters. This will be especially beneficial to the states in the area of service tax, for states would require some handholding (pre GST, service tax was levied and collected by the Centre).

The other important change is to do away with the distinction between "suppression" and "non-suppression" cases in the GST law and prescribe one uniform period of three years to complete adjudications. The suppression aspect could be addressed in the adjudication order on the basis of facts and a higher penalty could be imposed. Therefore, the penalty route may be a better way of

dealing with this distinction rather than through a time period difference. This amendment will considerably reduce litigation as many taxpayers are incensed by wrong invocation of the suppression period and, therefore, opt to litigate rather than pay the tax.

While the set of suggestions outlined would help to improve the dispute resolution system within the GST, there is also a need to have another institutional mechanism where trade and industry can air their implementation grievances to senior state and central officials. Many of these issues are non-policy issues and therefore would not warrant going to the GST Council. It is therefore suggested that the time is now ripe to create a new institution in the form of the GST Secretariat in each State. This should be a registered body just like the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers consisting of senior Central and State GST officials who will hear the problems of trade and industry. These grievances could feed into policymaking. This will address much of the discomfort presently experienced by the trade as they had the opportunity in the pre-GST era to separately meet central and state officials. This body could be created after a suitable resolution is passed by the GST Council and its terms of reference decided and thereafter the cabinet secretary could write to the chief secretaries of all the States to commence its creation.

Just as the GST Council (later avatar of the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers) designed and delivered the GST, the institutions of technical secretariat and GST Secretariat in the states could help to provide the institutional support post GST.

In many ways, the measures suggested above would ensure that the "rule of law" prevails over the "rule of thumb" and also prod the triumph of "principles" over "principals".

The author is a retired member CBIC and national leader, Tax and Economic Policy Group, EY India Views expressed are personal

LETTERS

A long way to go



This refers to "Madhya Pradesh to have happiness index" (September 2). Today, measuring prosperity of nations with indicators like GDP is clearly misleading. It probably further skews the distribution of wealth and accentuates income disparity. We have journeyed long from exploring creation of wealth to distribution of income to now Nobel prize winner Prof Angus Deaton's treatise on poverty. As newer economic theories get misapplied, attempts at political correction follow. Through all this, the common man feebly tries to leverage his only tool—democracy—that can reset the political paradigm temporarily. Strangely, it is seen that deeper the democratic mores, as it is in the US, the sharper has been the turn to the right wing ideology of wealth inequality. It may take ages for the socio-economists, much less the governments, to move away from a trite GDP to even grasp the concept of creation and distribution of happiness.

R Narayanan Navi Mumbai

Farming woes

This refers to "Agriculture's 'liquidity' problem" (September 4) by Ruchika Chitravanshi and Sanjeeb Mukherjee. The woes of the agriculture sector have been an ongoing one. The genesis of this can be traced to the muddled and short-sighted vision of our policy makers and their political mas-

ters. Water is the lubrication that keeps the agriculture clock ticking. We have about four months of monsoon rains which we need to utilise judiciously. Most of this water we receive goes waste as we have not yet designed effective water harvesting techniques. There are pockets of villages where water harvesting has been done effectively and these villages have access to water throughout the year to reap multiple crops. Sadly, in most of the neighbouring villages, water has not been harvested in the same manner, leaving those drought afflicted.

Cropping patterns also need to take into consideration soil and water intake. We have numerous examples of crops being sown in terrain not naturally suitable for these crops where they guzzle enormous quantities of water depleting the ground water level. This needs to be curtailed. Presently, this is happening as the pay-out is more profitable when compared to other crops. If incentives are discontinued or disincentives introduced, this practice can be nipped in the bud.

A steady supply of electricity is also said to be a problem hindering irrigation. Solar power usage has been making steady inroads into the hinterland. Instead of depending on the state to provide uninterrupted electricity, if solar power can be generated at the village or taluka level, it could be utilised at the villages.

We need to look at countries like Israel who have mastered the art of

judicious usage of resources to reap bumper harvests. Our policy makers should study such success stories. What is feasible from the success of Israel should be made known to our villagers and sought to be introduced after being customised to our reality.

K V Premraj Mumbai

Let's get real

This refers to the editorial "Disinvestment blues" (September 4). Transferring the government's stake in BPCL to Indian Oil may help the government meet "disinvestment targets" but, it is by no means a disinvestment. Merging one public sector undertaking with another, transferring stake from one pocket to a different one is a sort of game played by all successive governments—towards meeting disinvestment targets—year after year but such moves do not either amount to "privatisation" nor do they support the oft-repeated slogan "government has no business to be in business". Such mergers might help cost reductions by way of synergies in operations and may also create mega, global size, business entities, but, for heaven's sake, let's get real, call a spade a spade!

Krishnan Kalra Gurugram

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HAMBONE



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Gauging economic activity

Lag in official data results in delayed response

The slide in the gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the first quarter of the current fiscal year has surprised most analysts. Aside from influencing sentiment in financial markets, the 5 per cent growth in the April-June quarter has implications for both fiscal and monetary policy. But the lag in the release of official data often results in delayed policy response. In terms of fiscal policy, the level of economic activity determines the level of revenue the government can expect. In case the growth is expected to slow, the government can adjust its revenue projection and take a call whether the economy needs adjustment in spending, which can help smooth the economic cycle. Similarly, it would help if the central bank can adjust the monetary policy more proactively and doesn't always have to depend on official data.

Since monetary policy works with a lag of two to three quarters in India, depending on official data can delay the policy adjustment and exacerbate the problem. For instance, breaking with convention, the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to cut the policy repo rate by 35 basis points in August. It was reasoned that 25 basis points would have been inadequate and 50 basis points excessive. It can now be argued that if the extent of the slowdown was known, a cut of 50 basis points would not have looked excessive. Slower growth will also keep inflation at lower levels. Although the RBI acknowledged the weakness in high-frequency indicators, it reduced the growth projection for the current year by only 10 basis points to 6.9 per cent. Similarly, the Budget presented in July did precious little to fight the slowdown — though it was more of an acceptance than evidence problem.

At a broader level, both investors and policymakers would be better off if they have more timely means to track economic activity. For example, the Goods and Services Tax collection can become a good indicator of economic activity once the prevailing problems are addressed. Since there are genuine reasons for the lag in the official release of GDP data, the central bank can work on an aggregate indicator that would give an early sense of the state of the economy. Central banks, globally, track lead indicators to assess the economy and make the policy forward-looking. The RBI also tracks high-frequency indicators and, as the latest Annual Report shows, it has worked on a "Coincident Economic Indicator". This includes the production of consumer goods, auto sales, non-oil non-gold imports and rail freight.

However, recent record suggests that the RBI needs to work on its models to be able to predict both growth and inflation more accurately. Although some financial institutions do track high-frequency indicators for their clients, it would help the system if the central bank, which has the research capability, processes the available information and regularly puts out an aggregate indicator. It is important to note that this is not to undermine the official collection and release of data, but to improve the understanding of the market. The idea is worth trying since it will also help the central bank in making the policy more forward-looking.

A concession to Hong Kong

Extradition Bill withdrawal may not stop protests

In a concession to protesters who have repeatedly taken over the streets of Hong Kong, the territory's Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, has finally withdrawn the controversial legislation that sparked the protests. The Bill, which permitted extradition from Hong Kong to mainland China, was widely opposed because the city's residents feared that it would be used to trample upon their remaining political rights, and subject them to the capricious and authoritarian legal system of the People's Republic. Ms Lam had earlier "suspended" the Bill, but that was not enough for protesters who wanted it withdrawn completely — a concession that both Ms Lam and her masters in Beijing were unwilling to make. Indeed, the tone of Beijing's official statements was becoming increasingly strident with an official spokesman of the mainland's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office publicly warning Ms Lam earlier this week that "there is no middle ground, no hesitancy and no dithering, when it comes to stopping the violence and controlling riots in Hong Kong."

While the Hang Seng stock index showed some gains after the announcement, the fact remains that this is unlikely to defuse a crisis that has grown beyond the immediate provocation for protests. The protesters now have four other demands to which Beijing or Ms Lam have shown no signs of heeding. These include an independent investigation into the suppression of the protests by the police; a rhetorical shift, so officials stop calling the protests "riots"; an amnesty for arrested protesters; and, most crucially, restoration of political reform in the territory. The latter has been stalled for five years, but residents of Hong Kong clearly see their rights as constantly threatened unless they can directly elect their leaders. Currently, the city-state's Chief Executive is selected by an oligarchy of about 1,200 that is dominated by pro-Beijing business leaders. Pro-democracy politicians are usually considered ineligible. Elected pro-democracy members of the legislative council have also been disqualified, creating an acute crisis of representation that has fuelled the anger underlying the protests.

Many in relatively apolitical Hong Kong who were angry mainly at the lack of response from Ms Lam's administration might be appeased by this withdrawal of the extradition Bill. But the great mass of younger protesters — some of the protests have seen as many as two million participants, a quarter of the city's population — are unlikely to be satisfied, and will continue to press for the remaining four demands. It is not certain whether, however, their numbers and tactics can remain the same if there is a falling-off in support, thanks to this concession. Ms Lam's handlers are no doubt aware that, among the younger generation of the city's residents, the Chinese Communist Party and its government are far less popular than among those who lived in the city when it was still a British colony prior to 1997. Hong Kong's young people are fighting for identity, liberty, autonomy and their future and are unlikely to stop at anything less than universal suffrage. Xi Jinping has shown himself to be a hardliner in such matters, but Beijing should choose its battles. Even if the mainland has grown richer in recent decades, there is no replacement for the liberal, cosmopolitan and finance-friendly environment that Hong Kong provides. Making "one country, two systems" a political reality is a small price to pay.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Traffic rules, mindset and on-time payments

There's no alternative to following the rules and working together with discipline for our common interests

Payments have gained currency, pun unintended, with the sharp focus on consumer spending and the economy. The following anecdote from newspaper reports begins with a payment problem for a traffic infraction, which leads on to existential questions on behaviour and governance.

A motorcycle rider in Uttar Pradesh was booked for not wearing a helmet. Events spiralled quickly to arrive at the heart of the matter: The state of governance and our utter disregard for due process and the law. But let's not get ahead of the story.

The rider was an electrician on contract with the UP State Electricity Board. He pleaded with the police to be let off on the ₹500 fine, saying he earned only ₹6,000 a month, and hadn't been paid for four months. The police said it was the law, and issued a ticket. The electrician's superior interceded at his request, but couldn't convince the police to waive the fine. (It turned out that tickets had been issued to 70 policemen for traffic violations.)

The electrician checked on the electricity dues owed by the police station. Finding that they amounted to ₹662,463 over several years, he disconnected their power supply. When questioned, he said that this was as required by the law.

The power supply to the police station was soon restored, with the customary, vague assurance that the bill "would be paid soon". A positive outcome, however, was that the state electricity board then paid ₹17 crore of arrears for the month of May to 9627 contract workers, including the electrician. The remaining amount, they said, "would be paid soon".

Why were wages delayed? Apparently because consumers delayed payments, and the electricity board didn't have the money to pay. Employees were still owed back pay for three months. Meanwhile, a formal enquiry reportedly began on the episode.

Such incidents are not unusual. In August, there was an instance in Agra of unpaid sanitation workers responsible for the toilets at the Taj Mahal going on strike. In Noida near New Delhi, two major shopping malls, a hospital, and a school had their water and sewer lines shut off because of unpaid dues. There were apparently 107 defaulters who owed over ₹10 lakh each, with the highest being ₹46.35 crore.

It isn't as though citizens and the private sector are the sole culprits, with only stray government entities defaulting. A former Confederation of Indian Industry chairperson said in an interview on television recently that while hard data on government dues to the private sector are unavailable, informal estimates of the dues from central and state governments, state-owned companies such as electricity boards, and arbitration awards, ranged from ₹2 trillion to ₹5 trillion. Her observation was that if these dues were paid, it would provide the biggest boost for the economy, because it would result in much-needed capital formation and economic rejuvenation. As to where the funding could be found, given the government's finances, she replied that the same sources (for example, bonds) could be used that would fund whatever waivers or incentives the central and state governments were promising. Those funds could be channelled for productive



SHYAM PONAPPA

Strong government, weak reform

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is wildly popular with his supporters for his ability to take bold decisions. In the early days of his second term, for instance, he continued where he left off from his first with a surgical strike against Article 370 that altered the status of Jammu & Kashmir and divided it into two Union Territories. Odd, then, that his government is yet to demonstrate the same sense of chutzpah — or even urgency — when it comes to addressing the problems of the economy and unemployment.

That the economy is in the doldrums is self-evident, never mind if economists argue over whether the causes are cyclical or structural (even his economic advisory council cannot agree on this point). Or whether Mr Modi's "bold" first-term decisions of demonetisation and an advanced Goods and Services Tax deadline helped create what former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called a "man-made slowdown".

Whatever the cause, there's been general consensus across the ideological spectrum that Something Needs to be Done Now. Over several days in the last week of August, as it became clear that the Q1FY20 GDP numbers would be anaemic, the government manfully obliged. Those announcements ranged from correcting policy mis-steps, tinkering with the foreign direct investment rules, some efforts to revive the automobile sector, reorienting the public sector banking system and disinvestment.

Will this August story provide the elixir for India's languishing economy?

Let's take the August 24 tranche of announcements. The rollback of surcharge on foreign portfolio investors has done little to cheer the stock markets, which have been bleeding out ever since. To reverse the slide in automobiles, the state is stepping in as purchaser of first resort by lifting the ban on vehicle purchases by government departments, increased depreciation rates till March 2020. It has also deferred the rule for one-time registration fees to June 2020. All of these initiatives may bump up sales for a bit, but they do not address the dynamics of the automobile markets. The government stopped being the dominant buyer of automobiles more than two decades ago. The ordinary buyer's propensity to give dealer showrooms a miss these past three years is the most potent expression of a failure of consumer confidence, which is manifest across white goods and fast moving consumer goods.

Okay, so let's look at August 28, which eased foreign direct investment for single brand retail, coal mining, contract manufacturing and digital media. These announcements created considerable media excitement because they meant that Apple would be bringing their famed and much-awaited Apple Stores to India. But one Apple, assuming it enters India at lightning speed, cannot turn around an economy even if improved contract manufacturing laws means more iPhones may be Made in India. Also, the FDI policy is only the start. As Apple contract manufacturer Foxconn discovered, a commit-

ment from a state leader (Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis) need not translate into a shovel in the ground.

On August 31, hours before the dismal Q1 GDP numbers came the announcement that 10 state-owned banks would be merged into four. How, precisely, can this be classified as a reform? Perhaps because the government plans to create large banks with strong balance sheets. The problem is that several banks shortlisted for merger are what Percy Mistry called "zombie banks," overstuffed entities with almost no business. How their merger with healthier banks will help spur credit growth is a question that awaits answers. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman later clarified that not one single job will be lost as a result of these mergers, nor any branches closed. This defies business logic of mergers, which is to derive synergies. If no staff is to be cut or branches closed, then what's the point of merging?

Taken together with the circular disinvestment route — making one public sector entity buy the government's share in another — these so-called economic reforms reflect a failure of the imagination and/or an unwillingness to opt for deeper structural reform of land and labour rules and the reorienting of agricultural markets. It has been argued that these issues are in the hands of the states, so the Centre has little leeway to change much. This is a specious argument. In fact, the political situation has rarely been more propitious to align policies, with more than half the states ruled by the ruling party at the Centre in majority or in alliance. To put it another way, a strong government is in unique a position to go boldly where no government has gone before.

Mr Palat describes the prejudices of the British judiciary and the trial impeccably, but he stumbles in his conclusions by falling prey to the distinctively Malayali mindset of divine retribution (which was evident after the 2018 floods when many highly educated Malayalis attributed the natural disaster to the Sabarimala court case that they believed invoked the wrath of god). There was no connection between the case and the afterlives of those involved and invoked in it; yet Mr Palat goes on to attribute the deaths of Dyer, O'Dwyer and McCardie to the trial. The last parts attributing the deaths of people as divine revenge for the injustice meted to his great-grandfather suggest superstitious balderdash that would have riled Nair's intelligence had he read this part of his great-grandson's book.

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Opinion

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2019

SHOBHANA SUBRAMANIAN

shobhana.subramanian
@expressindia.com



Bank-merger good, now to fix them

Shedding flab critical, as is adopting technology; so this needs a change in work culture, PSBs not known for that

WHILE A LOT of us would like to see the weaker public sector banks—and there are many of them—being wound down, we know this is politically infeasible and, therefore, it is unreasonable of us to expect any government to do this. Let's face it, laying off tens of thousands of employees is simply not an option. Indeed, it is creditable the NDA has decided to go ahead with consolidation in the space because bringing down the number of PSU banks is a great idea. In fact, the remaining ones too should be amalgamated soon. Clearly, merging two weak banks with a somewhat-less-weak one doesn't help. Also, the merger process—off ten banks into four—is not going to result in any cost synergies because there is going to be no retrenchment. But the natural attrition should, over time, bring down the workforce and expenses.

While it is important to shed flab, the tougher task is to change the work culture. That is easier said than done, because years of incompetence, inefficiency and even insincerity cannot be undone overnight. While a private sector CEO will help, to be able to bring about a meaningful change to the work ethics, it is also important to have a top team that comprises some fresh blood. Without a complete overhaul of the mindset and the systems, it will become increasingly harder for public sector banks to compete at a time when banking is seeing a paradigm shift, and banks are morphing into fintechs.

Even before the technology platform assumed importance, they had been ceding share to their private sector competitors, both in the loans and deposits markets. That, together with their NPA woes, has left their revenues subdued; since the managements have no leeway to rein in employee expenses or other costs, the profits have suffered. The biggest roadblock has been the unions who clamour for annual raises of 10-15%, with no commensurate improvements in productivity.

The unfortunate fact is that the employee unions enjoy immense clout, and unless banks have the right to hire and fire—like their private sector peers do—their business models can't be viable. Expenses on technology are going to mount and banks need to hire talent in areas such as blockchain, AI, IoT and cyber-security. The government may continue to inject capital, but, this must be used to lend to the right set of customers. Customers—especially the younger lot—can be very demanding, and servicing them requires not just top-class technology and a range of products but also top-quality service levels. Already, NBFCs have acquired a meaningful market presence in several segments—the HDFCs and Bajaj Finances of the world have done extremely well for themselves. Despite their large branch networks, and strong deposit and customer base, PSU banks have lost out.

While they were heavily weighed down by the asset quality problem which cost them both capital and management time—nearly a dozen banks were put under the PCA framework where they were barred from growing risk-weighted assets beyond a point—they failed to make headway even in traditionally strong areas. So, while the deposits were coming in, thanks to their strong franchises, these were not really being put to work. Although the system's retail portfolios were growing rapidly, PSUs couldn't cash in on the trend partly because their procedures can be cumbersome and also because they did not have the products to showcase. Most of them were left doing little other than the mandatory priority sector lending, and today, are slowly becoming irrelevant in the loan market. The restructuring might bring in size and scale benefits but it is very unlikely to result in any meaningful improvement in profitability. Had they been merged with their stronger peers decades ago, their balance sheets would not have been in the sorry state that they are. But all that is now, water under the bridge. The government has talked of making life easier for state-run banks by giving their board and senior managements, additional powers. But, bankers are apprehensive of taking decisions and may not be convinced by the government's efforts to protect them from the 4Cs—CAG, CBI, CVC and the courts. Also, while the NDA must be applauded for initiating the amalgamation of ten banks into four entities, the timing is not sweet; the operational hassles could leave managements preoccupied at a time when they need to be focussed on lending to help the economy get back on its feet. The banking system today has surplus liquidity, but loan growth is slowing—non-food credit growth slowed to sub-12% year-on-year in the latest RBI reading, the slowest in many, many months. So, the ₹55,000 crore that the government proposes to infuse into these lenders may not be put to work just yet. This is unfortunate because the ten banks account for 23% of the total credit in the system. Nonetheless, it is a good start and the government must not give in to pressure from the unions and the process mustn't stall. It will not be easy, but there is, really no room now for soft options.

PayCHARGES

Govt must foot the MDR charges if banks are not willing

WHILE DIGITAL PAYMENTS have posted a stellar growth over the past year, cash is still going strong. The ratio of currency in circulation—8.8% in March 2017—jumped to 11.4% in March 2019. To arrest this and spur digital, the finance minister, in her maiden budget speech, had announced that the merchant discount rate (MDR) would be done away with for businesses with a turnover of more than ₹50 crore, and that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and banks would bear the cost. But, now, according to a *Hindu Business Line* report, the idea has not found resonance with banks, who have deferred implementation saying they are awaiting clarity on government rules.

The merchant discount rate is the rate charged to the merchant by the card-issuing bank, payment service, and the PoS provider. Although the government had eliminated MDR charges on transactions below ₹2,000 and had introduced differentiated rates for QR codes, the new move is a step forward to shift the cost of transactions on banks, so that merchants can transact more via digital. But, payment companies believe that banks may choose not to deploy more infrastructure in light of increasing charges. A recent report released by RBI highlights that the central bank is looking to improve the card acceptance infrastructure to 50 lakh by the end of 2021. There were 39.91 lakh PoS terminals in the country as of June 2019, and ₹56,973 crore worth of debit card transactions took place via these terminals. A better idea, thus, would be for the government to bear the costs of digital payment. More important, what the banks need to realise is that the cost of transactions in digital—even if it falls to them—is lower than the cost of transacting in cash. Given that banks spend ₹21,000 crore every year in currency management operations and the estimated MDR in 2016-17 was just ₹3,000 crore, adopting digital by footing the MDR bill would make more sense. Else, the shift to digital that India has seen over the last few years, will slow down, even if it isn't summarily threatened.

NEITHER JOHNSON NOR ANYONE ELSE CAN PREDICT HOW THINGS WILL UNFOLD. THOUGH, WHEN THE DUST SETTLES, BRITAIN'S CONSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE WILL NOT BE QUITE THE SAME AGAIN

THE BREXIT DEAL

How Brexit blew up Britain's constitution

AFTER WEEKS OF poking and jabbing, Boris Johnson finally looks close to getting the reaction from parliament he seems to have wanted all along. If lawmakers succeed in taking charge of the parliamentary time table Tuesday in order to pass legislation that would block the prime minister from pursuing a no-deal Brexit, he is expected to demand a snap election. A two-thirds majority of parliament would be required to approve a new vote.

It is a high-risk strategy befitting a politician who likes to roll the dice. Neither Johnson nor anyone else can predict how it will unfold. What can be said, though, is that when the dust settles, Britain's constitutional landscape will not be quite the same again.

Tussles between executive and legislature are common in US politics, where the branches are separate and their roles are enshrined in a written constitution. But in Britain, the majority party forms the executive and dictates the legislative schedule; the two branches are intertwined and the balance of power between them is largely governed by convention.

The existing order was flexible enough under a workable majority government. But it broke down after the 2017 election produced a hung parliament. MPs opposed to Theresa May's Brexit deal began breaking with convention, including to seize control of the timetable. Now they are trying to do so again, but this time, to thwart an executive that wants to circumvent parliament. The battle is now so totemic for both sides that winning takes precedence over preserving constitutional integrity. The question is how that will change the terms on which future political battles are waged.

Johnson's decision to suspend (or prorogue) parliament, argues constitutional scholar Paul Craig, is an abuse of the government's discretionary powers; it "diminishes parliamentary sovereignty as a foundational principle, and transforms the UK constitutional order such that the cards become stacked in the executive's favour."

Not everything that is undemocratic is unconstitutional, as my colleague Noah Feldman noted Monday. Most con-

THERESE RAPHAEL
Bloomberg



stitution-watchers expect legal challenges to Johnson's move to fail, but Craig's arguments suggest, it is perhaps more finely balanced and that the effects will be long-lasting at any rate. A ruling against Johnson would, of course, put the Queen in the awkward position of having approved an illegal prorogation.

Johnson's supporters see his actions as both necessary and proportionate; Remainers, they argue, started down this slippery slope under May's government. And, yet a fair distance has been travelled in constitutional terms. Leaving the European Union was officially about restoring parliamentary sovereignty by reclaiming legislative power that had been delegated to the European Union. Johnson has succeeded in making the central political debate about claiming popular sovereignty over a parliament that is dragging its feet over implementing the 2016 Brexit referendum.

His critics, even among conservatives, see a much more sinister shift afoot as Johnson repositions the Tory party (a shift I described recently here). "Fundamentalism to me is something new and radical and ideological that claims a kind of originalism and conservatism to it. And I think that's what's happening now," argues Carl Gardner, a former government lawyer who teaches constitutional law, speaking in a recent podcast debate with the Conservative journalist Toby Young.

There are myriad ways Johnson's plan could backfire. At present, his Conservative Party are leading in the polls. But Theresa May had a substantial lead when she called a snap election in 2017, which ended in disaster as her party lost its governing majority. (Of course, she was an abysmal campaigner, whereas a campaign would play to Johnson's strength.)

Still, the electoral math is dizzyingly complex now. There are four UK-wide parties, rather than two, which are

polling well. The rebellion of a number of Tory moderates (some of whom might be deselected by Johnson for voting against the government) and the possibility that other parties might strike up electoral alliances to stop a no-deal Brexit all make an election particularly hard to predict.

The biggest wild card is Nigel Farage's Brexit Party, which says it will field candidates in every constituency, including in Conservative strongholds, but has also said, it would make tactical concessions to Johnson if he promises to stay on the path to a "clean" Brexit. It also seems that Labour will not play along with early elections without attaching conditions.

Johnson's chief argument to more moderate voters in an election would be that he's closing in on a compromise agreement with the EU that would be destroyed if Brussels believes parliament can stop no deal anyhow. That's highly dubious, as numerous reports from Brussels and EU capitals suggest. The EU hasn't closed any doors, and there are no signs that the UK government has advanced new proposals that could replace the Irish backstop provision that Johnson wants scrapped.

His other electoral pitches may be more compelling. To conservative voters who are uncomfortable with a no-deal Brexit, Johnson will claim both parliament and the EU left him no choice. He will argue that anyone who thinks a no-deal Brexit poses economic risks hasn't met Jeremy Corbyn or read his socialist agenda. For Labour voters from leave-supporting constituencies, there is a raft of new spending promises on public services, making Corbyn's stale campaign

against Tory austerity look very 2012.

It may be that an electoral majority, if he could secure one, would allow normal parliamentary service to resume as well as Brexit to be delivered. And yet once conventions are broken and power is exercised, it becomes impossible to unlearn those strategies or leave such tools untouched. Should Johnson lose his gamble, another leader will likely seize on the precedents he has set. If he wins, we might as well refer to him as President Johnson. It is unlikely that Britain's constitutional balance will be what it was.

Johnson is a big-C Conservative, but these aren't the moves of one who seeks to preserve an existing order, or change it

through accepted process, which would be the hallmarks of true conservatism. He is, as Gardner has it, "aggressively asserting the power of central government over all other institutions—over parliament, over the courts, over the public itself."

Can a conservative be a revolutionary really? Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in his book *Diplomacy* that under the right conditions, the combination can be devastatingly effective, at least for a time:

What is a revolutionary? If the answer to that question were without ambiguity, few revolutionaries would ever succeed. For revolutionaries almost always start from a position of inferior strength. They prevail because the established order is unable to grasp its own vulnerability. This is especially true when the revolutionary challenge emerges not with a march on the Bastille, but in conservative garb. Few institutions have defenses against those who evoke the expectation that they will preserve them.

He was speaking of Otto von Bismarck—a figure much admired by Johnson's closest adviser, Dominic Cummings. But he might have been talking about Britain circa 2019.

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A silver lining

The Jalan panel was constituted quietly in the midst of the finance ministry-RBI maelstrom. It did its work, albeit with some public acrimony, but delivered what I believe are sound results

THE JALAN COMMITTEE'S recommendations on transferring a part of RBI's "excess" capital to the government represent a possible silver lining in the thunderstorm that has been pummeling India's economic growth. This is not only because it may assist the government in meeting this year's fiscal deficit target, but more pertinently because it represents the first public quasi-acknowledgement by the Modi government that having experts, who have significant domain knowledge and experience, determine policy frameworks can be of huge value.

One of the loudest failures of the government, from its first election to today, has been the cavalier attitude it has shown to knowledge and experience. Senior bureaucrats were—and continue to be—transferred to completely unrelated ministries, nullifying their years, perhaps decades, of experience. As a result, we have had some incomprehensible decisions hurriedly implemented—read demonetisation—and even some extremely sound policies implemented in a haphazard and not-thought-through manner—read GST.

Even today, with the economy deep in the danger zone, policies are being put forth without adequate planning. For instance, as argued very clearly in an op-ed in the *Economic Times*, the current proposal to immediately merge several public sector banks into one another, while sound in principle, reflects the worst possible timing, since at this time, banks need to focus primarily on sharpening—and increasing—their lending

(particularly given the generous government support), instead of which several bank managements will now need to spend huge amounts of time in managing the mergers.

What the government clearly doesn't realise is that the economy and markets are not swayed as easily as the electorate. Simply making triumphal pronouncements is not enough—the economy needs sound ideas, careful planning and meticulous implementation. The sum total impact of the government's economic policies over the past five years is there for all to see—a sharp and continuing decline of our GDP growth rate.

Between 2014 and today, of 14 large economies, only Turkey and the UK have seen GDP growth fall more sharply than India. To be sure, there has been a modest global slowdown, but half of the countries I looked at—Brazil, France, Indonesia, Japan, Poland, Russia and the US—are reporting higher GDP growth rates than in 2014, indicating that sensible, tailored policies can keep growth ticking over even in difficult times. The comparative story in Asia is even bleaker, with 7 of 11 Asian countries showing increased GDP growth; India's performance is by far the worst. Even Pakistan, often dismissed as a basket case, is growing faster than we are today. It is clearly disingenuous to claim global circumstances are the main reason for the government's failure on the economy.

It is significant that the two large countries that are faring worse than India are hobbled by negative sentiment—Turkey as a result of Erdogan's flailing around as his imperial reign appears to be ending, and the UK, of

course, because of Brexit and, now, Boris Johnson. Negative sentiment in India, too, has been spreading rapidly and is, without doubt, a significant force in the slowdown.

It is often said that acknowledging a problem is a necessary step to solving it, but, thus far at least, this government appears unable to admit failure in the smallest of issues, let alone ones as dramatic and apparently as close to its heart as economic development—remember, *acche din*, the target of a \$5 trillion economy by 2024, and so on.

Of course, there is no need for loud *mea culpa's*; the Jalan panel was constituted quietly in the midst of the finance ministry-RBI maelstrom. It did its work, albeit with some public acrimony, but delivered what I believe are sound results, both in terms of immediate impact as also, critically, in setting a framework for future operations.

It is another matter that the RBI board decided to push the limits of the recommendations, as one of the committee members pointed out; clearly, institutional capture, which is another structural reflection of the insecurity of the government, remains a strong agenda item.

Given that the global growth environment is also turning more difficult, the government needs to wake up and build on its lone expert-driven success. Otherwise, we may have to accept 5-5.5% as the upper bound of India's growth, which could lead—a la Erdogan and, even, Putin—to an electoral surprise in 2024.

This may turn out to be the real silver lining.

JAMAL MECKLAI

CEO, Mecklai Financial
Views are personal



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Amazon, fire stuck

Number of fires in the Amazon basin are on the rise, despite the imposition of a ban and a close surveillance by the authorities. While a drought could prevent fires going forward, it threatens to affect the survival and re-generation of species. Also, it is prudent to sustain damp conditions in the soil, to prevent the combustion of underlying fuel-layer, limit the impact to only dead-wood and increase the overall resistance to fire. Robust forest-monitoring is required to assess the impact of fire-scars. Proactive fire-management, improved early warning systems and greater political-will is required to overcome the chronic challenge, before it starts affecting the health and climatic conditions across the globe. Public education on management of fire-sensitive orchards/agroforestry systems, to produce high-income plantations, can facilitate the use of alternative land-management tools. A relatively negative perception could hamper asset-quality and prompt big international funds to disinvest, especially when asset managers, pension funds and companies have already issued warnings. As political-goodwill continues to degrade, the sovereign faces a risk of increased scrutiny and potential socio-economic crisis, with rising international concern over deforestation. A below-par administration has created headwinds to export-demand and investment inflows as lacking accountability and weak norms on environment-conservation, are found fueling the extractive activities, for the purpose of business expansion and development of large-scale infrastructure projects.

— Girish Lalwani, Delhi

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2019, seeks to combine 13 laws relating to factories, mines, dock workers, building and other construction workers, plantations labour, contract labour, interstate migrant workers, working journalist and other newspaper employees, motor transport workers, sales promotion employees, *beedi* and cigar workers, cine workers and cinema theatre workers. It, clearly, is an uneasy amalgam of laws that cover a wide variety of workers belonging to the organised (factory, dock, mines) and the unorganised (contract, construction workers) sectors.

Even though the government claims that it covers establishments employing 10 or more workers, as we read through the code we do find varying thresholds—say, for contract labour issues (20 workers), safety committee or officer (500 workers in factories and construction sites)—and this implies that the code dispenses with the universal coverage model that was extended to the wage and social security codes.

The occupational safety and health is not dealt with adequately, and even imaginatively, the issues concerning occupational safety and health. The Factories Act, 1948, lists the maximum permissible threshold limits of exposure of chemical and toxic substances in manufacturing processes in the Second Schedule, which could be expanded as per the advice of the experts, while the code inexplicably omits the Second Schedule and, in fact, leaves the enumeration of these to be decided by the state governments (Section 83).

Further, the Factories Act stipulates the compulsory constitution of a bipartite safety committee in every factory in which hazardous processes or substances are used. But the occupational safety code leaves the constitution of the safety committee to the notification process of the appropriate government (Section 22), and hence the Section 14 reads uncertain: The worker who apprehends serious health hazard shall represent it to the committee “if constituted by the employer.” What was earlier a workers’ right, now has been reduced to a “prospect” subject to the whims and fancies of the state governments.

On one hand, technological inventions and innovations pose considerable threats and challenges to the occupational safety and health issues in the organised sector, and potentially dangerous works are performed in the unorganised sector for securing subsistence wages such as rag picking. Hence, hazardous work needs a wider coverage to include those performed in the unorganised sector as well. It bears relevance to mention here the Chapter IV-A—that deals with several issues concerning occupational safety and health, and was inserted in the Factories Act in 1987 post the Bhopal gas tragedy—which has lent sinews to the regulations concerning it.

According to the Annual Survey of Industries, in 2016-17 less than 5% of the factories in operation employed more than 499 workers, while those employing 50 or more workers constituted 70.53% of total employment, which means the safety provisions have very limited coverage. Furthermore, the average size of a factory in the organised sector (i.e. workers employed per factory) has declined from 65.95 in 2010-11 to 2012-13, to 48.04 in 2014-



ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

KR SHYAM SUNDAR

The author is professor, XLRI-Xavier School of Management, Jamshedpur



Occupational Safety Code needs serious evaluation

Ironically, the Occupational Safety Code has not adequately dealt with issues concerning occupational safety and health, which is non-negotiable and even fit to be a fundamental human right, for this spills beyond the workplace and into larger spaces affecting people and the environment (case in point is the Bhopal gas tragedy)

THE PASSING OF the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2019, on August 1, 2019, and that of the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Bill, 2019, on July 18, 2019, are the first few firm steps in the long walk ahead of us in terms of making India an international arbitration hub. Complemented by the NITI Aayog’s ‘National Initiative towards Strengthening Arbitration and Enforcement in India’ and the central government’s ‘Make in India’ initiative, these reforms will help the country reach newer heights not only in terms of arbitration, but also in various allied business fields.

It has been seen quite often that foreign companies entering into business contracts with Indian companies prefer a foreign arbitration centre for dispute resolution, primarily due to lack of institutionalised arbitration in India. This newly passed Bill puts India, with the help of the to-be-established Arbitration Council of India (ACI), at a parallel footing with big arbitration hubs such as the London Court of International Arbitration (LCIA), the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) and the ICC International Centre for ADR (ICC).

The ACI is to be headed by a chairperson who must have been a judge of the Supreme Court or Chief Justice of a High Court or a judge of a High Court or an eminent person, having special knowledge and experience in the conduct or administration of arbitration, to be appointed by

Making India an arbitration hub

Recent legal reforms and judgments point towards India gradually developing into an arbitration-friendly regime

GUNITA PAHWA

The author is joint managing partner, Singh & Associates

the central government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India. Other members will include an eminent arbitration practitioner, an academician with experience in arbitration and various ex officio government appointees. There shall also be a chief operating officer of the ACI and a secretariat to the ACI to manage administration. In addition, the ACI has a multitude of functions including framing of policies to grade arbitral institutions and accredit arbitrators, make and maintain uniform professional standards for ADR matters, maintain a depository of awards, etc.

The Supreme Court, for international

commercial arbitrations, and the respective High Courts, for domestic arbitrations, may now designate arbitral institutions for appointment of arbitrators. An application for appointment of the arbitrator is to be disposed of within 30 days. Written submissions are to be filed within six months of the appointment of arbitrators. Further, Section 42A requires maintenance of confidentiality of arbitration proceedings. These new rules would invite more and more organisations to prefer an Indian arbitration centre as they make arbitrations easy, efficient, time-bound and hassle-free, bringing them in tune with global practices.

15 to 2016-17, and given the widespread impact of technological progress in production processes, especially in chemical and other potentially hazardous industries, occupational safety and health becomes a universal concern, and hence gradually cover more and more establishments. This is one of the reasons India has not ratified 12 of the 17 occupational safety and health convention of the International Labour Organisation. In fact, occupational safety and health should be non-negotiable and is fit to be enshrined as a fundamental human right, for this spills beyond the workplace and into larger spaces affecting people and the environment (the case in point is the Bhopal gas tragedy).

The occupational safety code requires the employers to seek prior consent from the workers to perform overtime (as also for night shift in case of women employees), which is a welcome move. But the individual worker may not, in reality, enforce this right in case of violation of this by the employer due to well-known reasons like absence of or weak supportive institutions like trade unions and labour inspection. Nonetheless, these uninspiring empirical realities need not discourage the lawmakers to drop this important labour right.

For the first time in the legislative history, the occupational safety code requires every employer to issue an appointment letter, but does not stipulate a remedy in case of non-compliance of it, save the general monetary penalties provided for violation for any clause of it. In China, if the employer fails to conclude a written contract within one year of employment of a worker, then the latter will be deemed to have been appointed in an open-ended contract.

While the Factories Act presently stipulates the hours of work, spread time and the overtime, the occupational safety code leaves these to the discretion of the appropriate government. This is a bad law-making process. When the states compete for fresh capital and retaining the existing ones, the employers can use of the threat of relocation or export needs (which legitimises any reform irrespective of their consequences to labour standards) to coerce the genuinely unwilling governments to stipulate unwelcome standards on these. Therefore, these will lead to a race to the bottom of labour standards.

Finally, Section 47(2), a new clause, allows labour supply contractors by allowing them to secure “renewable work-specific licence” to execute a specific work mentioned in it, even if they do not fulfil the requisite qualifications or criteria. This, at once, reaches the zenith of flexibility and plumbs to the depths of perversion. What must anger the working class is that despite the Supreme Court’s endorsing ruling on and the universally-agreed labour market norm of “equal work, equal pay,” the government is refusing to legislate the same, even though this exists in the Rules framed under the Contract Labour Act.

Codification is necessary to rationalise proximate labour laws, but this should not lead to bundling together of diverse and unique laws concerning disparately positioned categories of workers, which are yet to mature into meaningful pieces of legislation (for example, the law on building and construction workers) in their own right and hence need respective suitable amendments.

Global growth on a tightrope

ANIL K KANUNGO

The author is professor, LBSIM, Delhi, and former senior faculty, IIFT, Delhi



GLOBAL GROWTH IS currently shaky. According to the latest update by the WEO, IMF, in July the projection of global growth is under revision, moving to 3.2% in 2019 and 3.5% in 2020. The current revision reflects negative surprises for growth in emerging markets and developing economies; most emerging markets like BRICs have 30% of the world GDP and 17% share in the world trade.

Growth is projected to improve between the end of 2019 and 2020. Large increase in such growth closer to about 70% relies on an improvement in growth performance in stressed emerging markets and developing economies. With trade war between the US and China, Iran-US disturbances, high debt-to-GDP, large amounts of NPAs in India and the deadlock at WTO negotiations, emerging markets are not clear about the growth path or the direction of world economy.

Global growth is sluggish, but it may not have been this way, as some of the policies followed are self-inflicting or self-inflicted. Dynamism in the global economy is being weighed down due to prolonged policy uncertainty as trade tensions still rise without showing any signs of abating. The recent meeting of the G20 in Osaka, Japan, couldn’t even foster US-China trade truce. To add, tensions with respect to Huawei are threatening global technology supply chains, and the prospects of a no-deal Brexit have risen.

The negative consequences of policy uncertainty are visible in the diverging trends between the manufacturing and services sectors. Manufacturing investment continues to decline as business sentiment is worsening in spite of having a low interest rate. Disbursement of loan credit has been minimal across the world. Businesses hold off on investment in the face of uncertainty. Global trade growth, which moves closely with investment, slowed to 0.5% (year-on-year) in the first quarter of 2019—its slowest pace since 2012. On the other hand, the services sector is holding up and consumer sentiment is strong, as unemployment rates touch record lows and wage incomes rise in several countries.

In emerging markets and developing economies, growth is being revised down by 0.3 percentage points in 2019 to 4.1%, and by 0.1 percentage points for 2020 to 4.7%. The downward revisions for 2019 are across the board for major economies. In China, the slight revision downwards reflects due to higher tariffs imposed by the US in May 2019, while significant revisions in India and Brazil reflect weaker-than-expected domestic demand, export slowdown and spillover effects of NPAs. Even for commodity exporters, supply disruptions, such as in Russia and Chile, and sanctions on Iran, have led to downward revisions despite a near-term strengthening in oil prices.

Financial conditions in the US and the EU have eased, as the US Fed and the ECB adopted an accommodative monetary policy stance. Emerging markets have benefited from monetary easing in major economies, but have faced volatile risk sentiment tied to trade tensions. Low-income developing countries, which received stable FDI, now receive volatile portfolio flows, as the search for yield in a low-interest rate environment reaches frontier markets. The current downside risk to the world economy emanates from escalation of trade and technology tensions. Earlier high tariff imposition and future scare of tariff hike by the US and China will further trigger reduction in global output by 0.5% in 2020.

To support global growth, world leaders must prescribe to constructive policies such as making monetary policy accommodative especially where inflation is softening below target. But it needs to be accompanied by sound trade policies that would lift the outlook and reduce downside risks. Fiscal policy should balance growth, equity and sustainability concerns, including protecting the society’s most vulnerable. Countries with fiscal space should invest in physical and social infrastructure to raise potential growth. In the event of a severe downturn, a synchronised move towards more accommodative fiscal policies should complement monetary easing, subject to country-specific circumstances.

The need for greater global cooperation is urgent. In addition to resolving trade and technology tensions, countries must work together to address issues such as cybersecurity, corruption, climate change, international taxation, etc.

In addition to resolving trade and tech tensions, countries need to work together to address climate change, corruption, international taxation and cybersecurity



In the *Kandla Export vs Oci Export Corporation* case, the Supreme Court took a pro-arbitration stand and refused to intervene by holding that the appeals with respect of arbitration proceedings are exclusively governed by the Arbitration Act and thereby the appeal provision of the Commercial Courts Act, 2015, cannot be used to circumvent the provisions of the Arbitration Act if no appeal is provided under the provisions of the Arbitration Act. In the *Ravi Arya vs Palmview Investments Overseas* case, the Bombay High Court ruled that when remedies are available to the party seeking an injunction under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, an

anti-arbitration injunction cannot be obtained to circumvent provisions of the Act. In the *Ssanyong Engineering & Construction vs NHAI* case, the Delhi High Court opined that if a contract can be interpreted in two ways, it is not open for the court to interfere with an arbitral award, just because the court prefers the other view, and that a court cannot substitute its view over that of arbitrators.

These judgments affirm the fact that Indian courts have taken a pro-arbitration stance with a strict adherence to the principle of non-interference with arbitral awards, and have also taken proactive steps to ensure their speedy execution,

hence augmenting India’s credentials as an arbitration-friendly regime that includes minimal intervention by national courts and speedy resolution of arbitration proceedings.

The potential for arbitrations in India has also changed with the reform in third-party funding, making the country all set to present itself and compete with other international jurisdictions as an international arbitration hub. The Supreme Court, in the *Bar Council of India vs AK Balaji* case, has clarified that the third parties (i.e. non-lawyers) can fund the litigation and get repaid after the outcome. This is similarly applicable to arbitration, which would go a long way in making India an arbitration-friendly jurisdiction. The availability of third-party funding offers businesses an additional financial and risk management tool, while engaging in arbitration.

However, how these new laws and rules are implemented is yet to be seen. But thanks to these new amendments, India stands on a goldmine of opportunities with respect to international arbitrations. Not only can the country become an international arbitration hub, but it can also become the most sought after international arbitration hub. Hence, the next five years are very significant, especially in terms of policy formulation and execution. Paraphrasing Robert Frost, India has miles to go before it sleeps. However, the speed with which the country is progressing, there will be a paradigm shift in its favour, and sooner rather than later.

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER



At a press conference by protesters in Hong Kong on Wednesday evening. The protesters have not indicated a softening of their stand in response to the concession announced by Chief Executive Carrie Lam. Reuters

CHINA BACKS OFF IN HONG KONG. WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Extradition Bill withdrawn, question is whether protesters will relent on newer demands

AFTER THREE months of mass protests triggered the worst crisis in Hong Kong since it returned to Chinese control in 1997, the city's Beijing-backed Chief Executive announced on Wednesday the withdrawal of the proposed law at the heart of the people's anger.

While the sudden and unexpected concession met the number one demand of the protesters, it was not immediately clear whether this alone would return peace and orderliness to Hong Kong's streets.

This is because the protests that began this June over the Bill (now withdrawn) that would have allowed the extradition to China of suspects accused of certain crimes has, over the past several weeks, expanded to cover a wider spectrum of demands, including core political reforms and an inquiry into police brutality with protesters.

Is the contentious Bill really dead?

Quite soon after the protests began, Chief Executive Carrie Lam had said she would delay the Bill. But this was not seen as a firm commitment, and on June 16, some 2 million Hong Kongers protested in the streets. Had Lam announced a suspension — rather than a withdrawal — of the Bill from the agenda of the Legislative Council, she would have, under the rules, left open a window for its restoration, and thus reintroduction, after serving a notice of 12 days. However, now that she has withdrawn the Bill, reintroduction would mean going through a longer process.

So, are the protests likely to stop?

No media analysts or commentators expected them to on Wednesday evening. Online, protesters underlined that they had "five demands, not one less". Besides the formal withdrawal of the Bill, the other four were: an independent probe into police actions; amnesty for arrested protesters; direct elections for all lawmakers and Chief

Executive; and withdrawing the referendum to participants in a major protest on June 12 as "rioters".

A section of protesters has become extremely militant and violent, and analysts were waiting for the weekend — when the worst protests have been happening — for an idea of the mood among the general public. "It may ease anger a little, but it's definitely not going to get people out of the streets... It's too late; the focus of the protests is not on the Bill anymore," an explainer in *The New York Times* quoted Samson Yuen, a professor of political science at Lingnan University, as saying.

But why has Beijing backed off?

Beijing has claims to global leadership, but international headlines about China have not been flattering of late. The messy trade war with the United States continues, and the extended unrest in Hong Kong has not made attempts at a European outreach easy. The financial and psychological costs of the protests have been significant. Several economists have warned that Hong Kong, Asia's premier business hub, may be headed for a recession. Continued protests would likely keep tourists away for longer, and inflict lasting pain on retail businesses, especially the smaller scale ones.

Also, October 1, the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, looms, and China has planned a series of celebrations across China and among overseas Chinese communities. Bad news about violence and repression in Hong Kong would be avoidable at this time. 2019 is also the year of the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, when China used tanks to crush a massive pro-democracy movement in the heart of its capital. Beijing is already facing massive global criticism for its policies in the restive Xinjiang province.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Afghan deal all but done. Now?

Drafted last week, the agreement sets out a timeline for withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. It is not a peace deal, the onus for which lies with the Afghan government. What are the challenges it faces?

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
MUMBAI, SEPTEMBER 4

THE UNITED States and Taliban have reached a deal for American troops to withdraw from Afghanistan. Last weekend, US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad was in Kabul to present details of the deal to Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani.

What have they agreed on?

No details of the draft agreement have been made officially public but Khalilzad told the Afghan media organisation TOLO that the two sides have reached an agreement "in principle" that the United States would withdraw some 5,000 troops within 135 days or five months starting from the signing of the agreement. The top US diplomat, an Afghan American, who has led the talks which began in January this year, said US President Donald Trump had to sign off on the agreement.

The draft agreement, which was reached after nine rounds of talks between Khalilzad and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, is for the US troops to withdraw from five bases in this period. There appears to be no timeline yet for the withdrawal of the remaining 14,000 troops but a period of 14 months has been mentioned in the past. Trump said at one time that some 8,000 troops would remain.

In return for the withdrawal agreed upon, the Taliban are said to have committed to not allow "enemies of the US" — namely Daesh/ISIS and Al Qaeda — to set up base in Afghanistan. Khalilzad said in the TOLO interview that it will be the Taliban who will now fight against the "enemies of America" in Afghanistan. According to one version, the Taliban have agreed not to attack withdrawing troops.

Is this expected to usher in peace?

Earlier, it was expected that the US would get the Taliban to agree to a ceasefire. But that is not on the cards. Instead, the only expectation now is for a "reduction in violence" in some areas. In the interview to TOLO, Afghanistan's biggest media house, Khalilzad identified those areas as Parwan province, north of Kabul, where the Bagram air base is



US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad (left) with Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul on Monday. Afghanistan Chief Executive office via Reuters

located, and Kabul province. Afghanistan has 34 provinces in all.

The deal is, therefore, not a peace agreement. That was driven home by the August 31 Taliban attack on Kunduz, an important north Afghanistan city, which came as Khalilzad was briefing Afghan leaders in Kabul about the agreement. Afghan special forces pushed them back with the help of US airpower, but were not able to prevent the Taliban from attacking a second northern city, Pul I Kumri, where India has undertaken to build power transmission lines to Kabul as part of project to bring electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan.

On Monday night, towards the end of Khalilzad's live interview on TOLO channel, Kabul was rocked by a car bombing and gunfire, an attack that killed at least 16 people and was claimed by the Taliban.

Through the talks, which began in January this year, there has been a spike in attacks as Taliban leveraged violence to buttress their bargaining position at the talks, and tried to take control of as much territory as they could before the agreement with the US was finalised.

How then can a peace deal be struck with the Taliban?

It is now for the Afghan government to negotiate a peace agreement with the Taliban in what are referred to as "intra-Afghan talks". President Ashraf Ghani's government was not included in the US-Taliban talks. This was the Taliban precondition for the talks. The Taliban consider the elected Afghan government a "puppet" or "proxy" of the US. The irony is that for many in Afghanistan, the Taliban are a proxy of Pakistan's military establishment, and are seen as a creation of the ISI.

Even at this stage, the Afghan government remains sidelined. It has become something of an issue in Afghanistan that President Ghani was given a copy of the draft agreement to read at his meeting with Khalilzad, but it was taken away from him at the close of the meeting.

In his interview to TOLO, Khalilzad said the intra-Afghan talks would begin soon after the US-Taliban agreement. But it is unclear if the Taliban have committed to participate in these talks as part of their agreement with Khalilzad. The Norwegian capital of Oslo may

be the venue for these talks if they are held. Recalling the Bonn process of 2001, the intra-Afghan talks are expected to take up the question of a ceasefire and an "interim" set-up as a way of bringing the Taliban into a power sharing agreement.

What does it mean for the Afghan government politically?

The idea of an "interim" set-up almost certainly means that the September 28 presidential elections will not be held. An interim dispensation would do away with the need for elections. In any case, the Taliban have made it clear they do not believe in the electoral process and have said they would want to make changes to the Constitution. This could become the main challenge for the interim dispensation, apart from ensuring that the Taliban commit to a ceasefire and stick to it. The interim set-up has to be headed by an Afghan acceptable to the US, Taliban, Pakistan and the present Afghan government. Names are already being the rounds.

The Afghan government, meanwhile, is apprehensive that the US may have made commitments to the Taliban that will undermine even the modest achievements made by the country towards democracy and human rights over the last two decades. The references in the agreement to "IEA" or Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the preferred name of the Taliban for itself, and the name by which Afghanistan was known when the Taliban ruled the country from 1996 to 2001, has increased the concern.

That concern was expressed by Amrullah Saleh, a former head of the Afghan intelligence agency, a candidate in the election and who like the rest of his compatriots, but more so, is a strong anti-Taliban, anti-Pakistan voice in Afghanistan: "Clarification: The US talks with Taliban in Doha is about the fate of the Quetta Shura [the Pakistan headquarters of the Taliban], de-linking them with global terror networks, ISI, terror ideologies and prospects of re-integration in future. Doha isn't on fate of Afg. That will be decided in Kabul & through direct negotiations".

India has played no role in the US-Taliban talks, but hopes it may be able to influence some outcomes of the the intra-Afghan talks through its many friends in the Afghan polity who will participate in the talks.

How climate change can help or hurt bananas

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 4

BANANAS THRIVE in warmer climates, and India is the world's largest producer and consumer of the fruit crop. When the planet itself is warming, does it help or hamper production? A new study has found that climate change has benefited bananas over the last several decades but predicted that the trend will reverse, with climate change eventually causing a negative impact.

The findings

The study, led by Dr Dan Bebber from the University of Exeter and co-authored by research fellow Dr Varun Varma, has been published in *Nature Climate Change*. They have studied both the recent and future impact of climate change on the world's leading banana producers and exporters. They found that 27 countries — accounting for 86 per cent of the world's dessert banana production — have on average seen increased crop yield since 1961 — by 1.37 tonnes/hectare every year — due to the changing climate resulting in more

BANANA YIELD IN INDIA (TONNES/HECTARE)

2011-12	35.7
2012-13	34.2
2013-14	37.0
2014-15	35.5
2015-16	34.6
2016-17*	34.0

*Provisional
Source: National Horticulture Board

favourable growing conditions.

In India, data from the National Horticulture Board show broadly consistent yields in six years leading up to 2016-17, when the provisional yield was 34 tonnes/hectare.

The study says the gains in these 27 countries could be significantly reduced by 2050 — to 1.19-0.59 tonnes/hectare — or disappear completely, if climate change continues at its expected rate. The study predicts that 10 countries — including India and the fourth largest producer, Brazil — could see a signif-

icant decline in crop yields.

The study highlights, on the other hand, that some countries — including Ecuador (the largest exporter) and Honduras, as well as a number of African countries — may see an overall benefit in crop yields.

Why it matters

Bananas are recognised as the most important fruit crop, providing food, nutrition and income for millions in both rural and urban areas across the globe. In Britain, for ex-

ample, more than five billion bananas are purchased each year, and the United Kingdom accounts for seven per cent of the global export market, the University of Exeter said in a statement.

Such international trade can play a pivotal role to local and national economies in producing countries. For example, bananas and their derived products constitute the second largest agricultural export commodity of Ecuador and Costa Rica, the University statement said.

"We're very concerned about the impact of diseases like Fusarium Wilt on bananas, but the impacts of climate change have been largely ignored. There will be winners and losers in coming years, and our study may stimulate vulnerable countries to prepare through investment in technologies like irrigation," Dr Bebber said in the statement.

Dr Varma said: "An open exchange of ideas is going to be critical going forward. We believe practical solutions already exist, but these are scattered across banana producing countries. This knowledge exchange needs to start now to counteract predicted yield losses due to climate change."

Screening all children for leprosy, TB: India's disease burden, mission

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 4

IN INDIA, screening for disease is usually associated with non-communicable rather than communicable diseases. However, since last month, India has embarked on a large-scale plan to screen all children for leprosy and tuberculosis. An estimated 25 crore children below the age of 18 will be screened for the two infectious diseases, and if a person is suspected to have either of the two, s/he will be sent to a higher centre for confirmation. The existing Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) infrastructure will be used for the screening.

Why it is necessary

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*. It usually affects the skin and peripheral nerves, but has a wide range of clinical manifestations. The disease is characterised by a long incubation period that is generally 5-7 years. It is a leading cause of permanent physical disability. Timely diagnosis and treatment of cases, before nerve damage has occurred,

is the most effective way of preventing disability due to leprosy.

Tuberculosis infection, caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, is one of the most common communicable diseases in India, its transmission fuelled by unhygienic, crowded living conditions. It is said that most Indians carry the bacterium and the infection flares up when their immunity levels are low, like when they are malnourished or suffering from conditions like AIDS in which the body's immune system is compromised.

Both diseases are infectious and India has a substantial burden — its tuberculosis burden is the highest in the world. Children tend to be more prone to catching infectious diseases from their peers because of long hours in confined spaces and more bodily contact than in adults. Addressing the problem early would ensure that the infection cycle is broken.

In case of leprosy, it could mean prevention of disability. The programme would also give preventive medication to people who have come in contact with the confirmed cases.

For TB, India's malnutrition burden is an



An rally for awareness of leprosy in Chandigarh in 2014. Express Archive

additional risk factor. As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 (2015-16), 35.7 per cent children below age five are underweight, 38.4 per cent are stunted (low height for age) and 21 per cent are wasted

(low weight for height) in the country.

The burden in India

India eliminated leprosy in 2005 — WHO defines elimination as an incidence

rate of less than one case per 10,000 population. All states except Chhattisgarh and the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli have eliminated leprosy. However, 1.15 lakh to 1.2 lakh new leprosy cases are still detected every year, Health Ministry officials said.

TB kills an estimated 4,80,000 Indians every year — an average over 1,300 every day. India also has more than a million "missing" cases every year that are not notified. Most remain either undiagnosed or unaccountably and inadequately diagnosed and treated in the private sector. The problem in the latter case is that many of these patients do not complete the full course of the antibiotic, thus exposing the bacterium to the medicine without fully killing it. This is trigger enough for the bacterium to evolve into a version of itself that is resistant to that particular drug.

The mission focus

Launched in 2013 under the National Health Mission, RBSK is focused on preventing disease and disability in children. "Child Health Screening and Early Intervention Services" basically refer to early detection

and management of a set of 30 health conditions prevalent in children less than 18 years of age. These conditions are broadly defects at birth, diseases in children, deficiency conditions and developmental delays including disabilities, together described as 4Ds.

Until now, neither leprosy nor TB were a part of the programme.

In 2017, India had set a target of elimination of leprosy by 2018, going by the Budget speech that year. The deadline has passed but leprosy remains a challenge in a country that launched the National Leprosy Eradication Programme way back in 1955.

For tuberculosis, the global Sustainable Development Goal target is to end the disease by 2030. However, there is a new urgency in India's TB control efforts since last year, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi *suo motu* advanced the deadline for India to end TB to 2025. Speaking at the End TB summit in 2018, Modi had said: "A target has been set to end TB globally by 2030. I would like to announce that we have set aim to eradicate it from India five years ahead, by 2025."



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

LET IT SLIDE

RBI must not intervene to break the rupee's fall.
A weak currency will help exports

ON TUESDAY, THE rupee fell 1.36 per cent against the dollar, ending the day at a nearly 10-month low of 72.39. On Wednesday, it recovered marginally, closing at 72.12 against the dollar. Day-to-day fluctuations notwithstanding, the rupee has weakened considerably in the recent past, declining by around 4.7 per cent since July 31. Though the fall in the currency is not unique to India — currencies of most emerging markets have weakened after the Chinese authorities allowed the yuan to fall below the psychological mark of 7 per dollar — the rupee has weakened more than the others. This decline in the currency is likely to spur calls for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to step in to stem the decline.

A weak currency will push up the import bill. It will also be inflationary. But the RBI should resist from intervening in the currency market. It should allow the currency to slide. A weak currency has its advantages in that it makes exports more competitive. Moreover, the rupee's decline over the past month or so is driven by global as well as domestic factors. Globally, the greenback has strengthened. On Tuesday, the dollar index hit a two-year high, rising to 99.37, its highest level since May 2017. Domestically, foreign investors have continued to pull out money, even though the government has reversed its decision on the surcharge levied on foreign investors. A slowing economy will only exacerbate such outflows but there is no reason to panic. The evidence suggests that the rupee is overvalued. According to data from the RBI, the 36-currency export-based real effective exchange rate (REER) stood at 119.54 in July — indicating significant overvaluation. This overvaluation has affected the competitiveness of India's merchandise exports which have remained almost stagnant in the recent past, rising marginally to \$330 billion in 2018-19 from \$310 billion in 2014-15. In comparison, over the same period, exports of countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh have surged.

With China allowing its currency to slide, other countries, which compete with China in the export market are likely to follow suit. Competitive devaluation is a possibility. US President Donald Trump also wants a weak dollar. In such a situation, the RBI should let the currency slide. With private consumption collapsing, investment activity remaining subdued, and the capacity of the government to stimulate the economy by increasing its spending being limited, a weak currency, by improving the competitiveness of exports, could provide much needed fillip to growth. While the RBI's stated policy is that it does not target any particular level, the continued overvaluation of the rupee needs to be attended to. Alongside, the government must address the structural issues that bring down the competitiveness of India's exports.

GIVE AND TAKE

Law that sparked Hong Kong protests has been withdrawn,
opening up space for dialogue

IN JUNE, AS the protests in Hong Kong gathered momentum, the city's chief executive, Carrie Lam, suspended the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019. As of Wednesday, the Bill stands withdrawn. The proposed law, which would have allowed those accused of criminal activity in Hong Kong to be extradited to mainland China, was the tinder that sparked the protests which have challenged the authority of the Chinese state. Lam addressed another key demand of the protestors — the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into the use of force by the police against protestors. The question now is whether these steps are too little and have come too late.

Over three months, the protests have grown into an anti-China, pro-democracy movement. The extradition law was seen as an attack on the "one country, two systems" formula that has allowed Hong Kong to maintain its special status and autonomy since it acceded to China in 1997. While the protestors have attacked symbols of the Chinese state — its flag, emblem, etc — the police and Chinese authorities have called them rioters and accused them of showing "signs of terrorism". The authorities have also been accused of brutality by the protestors. Two of the major demands of the protestors — amnesty for those arrested during the protests and direct elections for the chief executive's office — remain bones of contention. What the current concessions by Lam, backed by the Chinese government, provide is an opportunity for the protestors to take their movement from the streets to the negotiating table.

Throughout the current protests, the spectre of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 has lurked in the background. Then, as now, the Chinese economy and party-state was in a period of transition, and a popular protest for democracy challenged the government and communist party's dominance. While Beijing has engaged in muscular rhetoric, it has also affirmed its commitment to "one country, two systems". For the Chinese government as well as the leadership of the protestors, it is important to realise the impact of the disruption of the last three months. According to IHS Markit Hong Kong, which tracks private business activity in the city, private sector activity is the lowest it has been since 2009, when the city was reeling from the effects of the global financial crisis. Beijing must now use the subtlety of state-craft, of listening and give and take, not speak the language of force. A sustained dialogue in and about Hong Kong is the only route to normalcy.

EXPELLIARMUS!

An obscure Tennessee cleric fondly hopes to disarm JK Rowling's magic by banning the Potter books from school libraries

TO THE AVERAGE tourist, Nashville, Tennessee, means rye whiskey, Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and a hundred other names from the hall of fame of American music — blues, country, folk, rock, the lot. To that august list, the occult tourist may now add the name of the hitherto obscure Rev Dan Reehill. On the advice of exorcists, this school priest in Nashville has banned librarians from issuing Harry Potter books to students, fearing that the young wizard's spells are genuine and can cause real manifestations in the space-time continuum. Such is the power of the internet, that it has transmitted his bizarre story far and wide in a single day.

Reehill could have done it much easier and saved everyone a load of bother by simply yelling Potter's most useful spell: "Expelliarmus!" There, we've gone and uttered it, the word that literally says "expel arms" in a fancy sort of way, disarming opponents. And it has had absolutely no effect on the ongoing arms race. No wonder Reehill didn't use it.

We're treading on eggshells here, but JK Rowling's spells are just dog Latin — classical-sounding constructions of English words, an engaging conceit that school students, bored to death of amo-amas-amat (concerning love) and leo-leonis (concerning lions), have used for generations to revenge themselves on their teachers. Outside the Potterverse, a good Latin declension like dominus-domini (concerning the boss) is more likely to reduce minds to pulp than plain expelliarmus. Declensions are nine words longer and have a hypnotic, chant-like quality. In the old days, Reehill and his exorcists would have been subjected to such things in the course of their education, and would have sought refuge in dog Latin. But now that Latin is really a dead language, they only have the fear of the unknown.

Bank for the buck

Question is not whether public sector banks should be big or small. It is: Do we need public sector banks?



DUVVURI SUBBARAO

THE FINANCE MINISTER'S announcement last week of the merger of public sector banks, coming in the wake of growth sinking to a six-year low, was meant to be seen as a big bang response to arresting the slowdown. On the contrary, it's a needless distraction.

In the short-term, the mergers will contribute nothing towards engineering a turnaround of the economy. Worse still, the administrative and logistic challenges of mergers will divert the mind space of bank managements away from their most pressing task at the moment — of managing the NPAs and aggressively looking for lending opportunities. Down the line, bank staff will be worrying, notwithstanding the finance minister's assurance, about their jobs and career prospects even as their morale will be sapped by the complexity of coping with a new banking culture and new practices at a time when they should be giving their undivided attention to scouting for borrowers and improving service delivery.

A follow-on question is this: Even if the short-term outcome is not promising, are mergers a net positive in the long term? That is not unambiguously clear. While organic mergers of banks motivated purely by business considerations lead to efficiency gains, whether arranged marriages of the type the government is organising are a good thing remains debatable.

On the positive side, large banks will entail cost advantages by way of economies of scale such as centralised back office processing, elimination of branch overlap, eliminating redundancies in administrative infrastructure, better manpower planning, optimum funds management, and savings in IT and other fixed costs. Large banks will also be able to finance large projects on their own even while staying within the prudential lending norms imposed by the regulator.

On the flip side, the biggest argument against big banks is that they can become too big to fail. The financial sector is all interconnected and a risk in any part of the system is a risk to the entire system. If a large bank were to fail, it could bring down the whole financial sector with it, as was evident from the near death experience following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, which triggered the global financial crisis. No country can therefore afford the failure of a big bank. The tacit knowledge that the sovereign will be forced to rescue it encourages irresponsible behaviour by big banks.

One of the important reforms in banking regulation following the crisis was to curb this moral hazard by requiring regulators to identify systemically important financial institutions and subject them to higher capital requirements and more stringent regulation. Indeed, the country's largest bank, State Bank of India, was categorised by the RBI as a systemically important bank whose failure can have big negative externalities. The proposed mergers will increase this "too big to fail risk".

It will be tempting to argue that all our public sector banks (PSBs), big or small, operate in any case under an implicit sovereign guarantee with a built-in moral hazard. There is no additional risk from merging many small banks into fewer large banks. On the other hand, there could be efficiency gains.

This point can be debated but I do not want to get into that. What I want to do instead is to use that to segue to a larger debate which is that as far as PSBs are concerned, the issue is not big or small, but whether or not.

Banks were nationalised 50 years ago in a different era, in a different context. In the event, PSBs rendered commendable service to the nation by deepening bank penetration into the hinterland and implementing a variety of anti-poverty programmes. PSB man-

agers, especially at the front end, were entrepreneurial, innovative and committed. There were many factors responsible for India moving from low income to low middle income, and financial intermediation by PSBs has to find a place in that list.

Even as it acknowledges the contribution of PSBs, the government needs to confront a stream of \$5 trillion questions. Do we still need PSBs? Isn't the financial sector wide enough and deep enough to take care of financial intermediation without the government at the steering wheel? Aren't there better uses for the government's mind space and its time?

There is wide consensus that today's economic slowdown is due both to cyclical and structural factors. By way of cyclical response, the RBI has cut rates and the government has announced a few measures like frontloading expenditures and slashing some taxes. Perhaps the RBI will ease further and the government will follow on with some more measures. The most these can do is to lift the growth rate to its potential.

But that will hardly make us a \$5-trillion economy. We will become a \$5-trillion economy not by growing at our current potential growth rate but by raising it. That requires structural reforms. The agenda for structural reforms is now a daily staple of our media discourse and there is no need to rehash that here.

Structural measures will take time to work their way through the system. But even the announcement effect of structural reforms can be stunning. If, for example, the government were to put out a roadmap for giving up its majority stake in PSBs, it will go a long way in shoring up sentiment and getting us off the block to a \$5-trillion economy. An idea whose time has come?

The writer is a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India

CAPTAIN COOL

Arun Jaitley will be remembered for the economic reforms he ushered in



VINOD DHALL

IT WAS a sad day when, travelling overseas, I heard the news of the death of Arun Jaitley. His multiple health issues had already debilitated him for the last few years, and these took his life. The country has lost a political and professional stalwart. Earlier, the government had lost a respected and sobering voice when he retired to his private home in south Delhi, in stark contrast to the many who cling to the post and its perks till their last breath.

I had worked with Jaitley when I was Secretary, Corporate Affairs and he was the Minister for Law and Corporate Affairs. He is one of the best ministers I worked with. Why do I say this? He was honest, both financially and intellectually — somewhat rare in politics. He never once asked me to do anything inappropriate, never even discussed any such thought or proposal.

His sharp mind instantly dived to the core of an issue — that may have led some people to feel frustrated with his "short attention span". He read people and their character insightfully. Earlier, he had early once discussed with me about the weaknesses of a senior officer in my team at the ministry. That officer's habits soon unraveled a few months into my tenure at the ministry, and on one occasion when he reached out to the PMO without permission, the minister and I were compelled to have him bundled out of the ministry.

Sometimes, there was a certain brusqueness to his behaviour which could be misunderstood as rudeness. Even I was appalled when two top partners of a global consultancy came to meet him and I had been asked to be present. He almost ignored the

presence of the number two whom Rajat Gupta had brought along, apparently because he had been a previous acquaintance of Jaitley.

One of the country's top lawyers, Jaitley was nothing short of brilliant on the floor of Parliament; his eloquence and fluency were in a class of their own. On the debating floor, he was a formidable adversary who could demolish in a few pithy, and sometimes sharp remarks, the opposite argument with consummate ease.

One of the pleasures of working with Jaitley was in the way he reposed trust in you and relied on your advice. There was this underlying comfort that if you were in the right, he was with you. He was willing to put his formidable influence and argumentation behind any reform or new idea. Politics never entered into the discussions about policies, though his passionate belief in his political ideas occasionally and momentarily surfaced in informal conversations.

He was the minister when the Competition Bill was introduced in Parliament. Years later, when he returned to the Governor of the Northeastern states L.P. Singh on September 4. Contrary to his earlier declaration, Borbora did not recommend the dissolution of the Assembly and holding of a midterm poll. Minutes after the Assembly, which was discussing the Opposition no-confidence motion against the Borbora Ministry, adjourned for the lunch recess, the chief minister, accompanied by the PWD Minister Dulal Chandra Barua, drove to the Circuit House, where the Governor is camp-

SEPTEMBER 5, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM CM QUILTS
PUSHED CLOSELY to defeat on the floor of the state assembly, Assam Chief Minister Golap Borbora tendered the resignation of his 541-day old Janata Ministry to the Governor of the Northeastern states L.P. Singh on September 4. Contrary to his earlier declaration, Borbora did not recommend the dissolution of the Assembly and holding of a midterm poll. Minutes after the Assembly, which was discussing the Opposition no-confidence motion against the Borbora Ministry, adjourned for the lunch recess, the chief minister, accompanied by the PWD Minister Dulal Chandra Barua, drove to the Circuit House, where the Governor is camp-

ing, and handed over the resignation letter.

JANATA (S) CONFIDENT
THE JANATA (S) chief, Raj Narain, that if his party came to power, "we will change the Constitution to remove the glaring political, economical and social disparities in the country". He told journalists he was optimistic of his party and the alliance getting a two-thirds majority in the coming poll. "If there are any obstructions in the way of implementing our programme, we will remove them." He said his party would not like to let down those who had given it the responsibility. "We changed the government, created a situation for the dissolution or the Lok Sabha

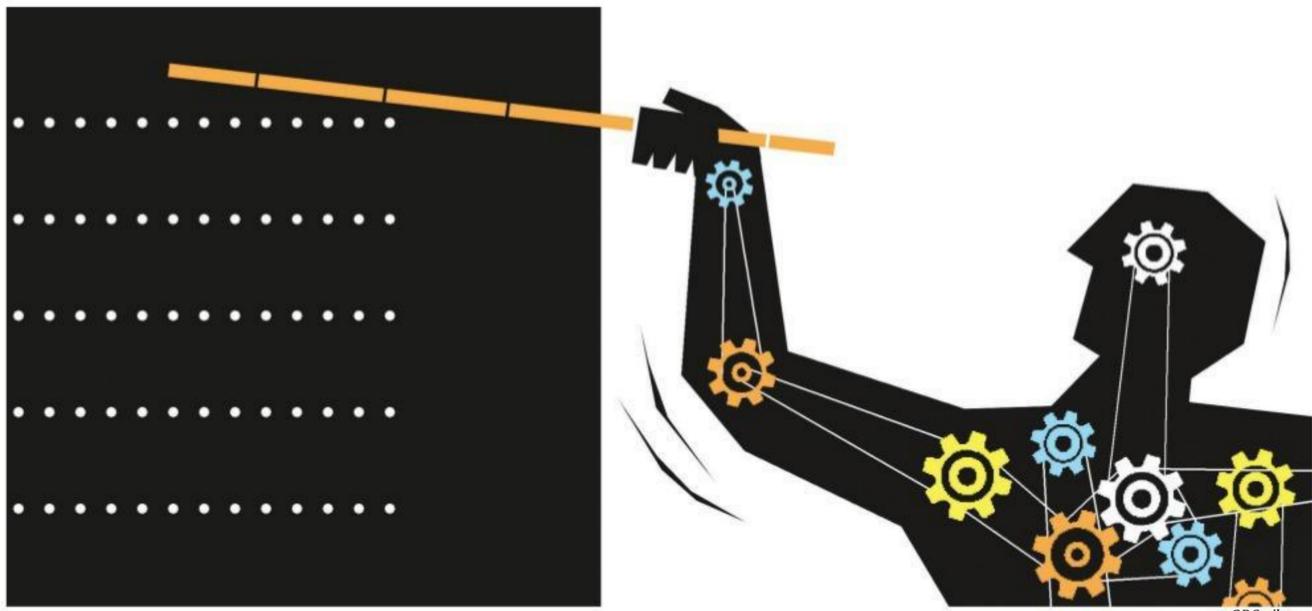
and a mid-term poll. We will now see that we give a good Government to people," he declared.

TIBET VISIT

FIVE REPRESENTATIVES OF the Dalai Lama, including his elder brother, have met with Chinese leaders and are expected to visit their Tibetan homeland this month. Diplomatic sources confirmed the official Tibetan visit, the first since the abortive Tibetan revolt against China in 1959. The Chinese Foreign Minister has had no comment on the visit. There has been speculation about a visit by the Dalai Lama himself, but it has not been confirmed.



15 THE IDEAS PAGE



CR Sasikumar

Teachers must have their day

They are not loyal soldiers, nor cogs in a bureaucratic machine. They must be free to be wanderers. And poets and philosophers



AVIJIT PATHAK

FROM YAJNAVALKYA CONVERSING with Maitreyi in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad to Rabindranath Tagore seeking to make a difference in a "poet's school", from MK Gandhi evolving with the children in Tolstoy Farm in South Africa to Paulo Freire nurturing the vision of a "dialogic" teacher: The great ideals and practices have always given a meaning to the vocation of teaching. However, ideals fall apart in the difficult times we live in.

Even though on Teachers' Day we will repeat the usual rhetoric ("teachers are our noblest gurus"), the fact is that as teachers we have lost almost everything that is positive about the vocation. Yes, some of us are coaching centre "gurus", or the traders of "knowledge capsules", selling the packages of "success". Some of us are mere "service providers", disseminating the bundles of job-oriented technical skills, and further promoting the commodification of education that transforms young learners into mere consumers. And some of us are just "subject experts", or routinised role-performers "covering" the syllabus, taking the exams and grading the students.

Let there be no illusion. Ours is a society that devalues the vocation of teaching; and no wonder, it also reproduces a system in which quite often wrong people join the vocation. Demotivated teachers, or teachers on election/census duty, or tired/exhausted teachers with poor salary, continually controlled by the principal or the school management — this is the harsh reality.

There could be many reasons for this sad state of affairs. However, I wish to stress on three factors. First, the dominant culture of learning in our educational institutions

negates the possibility of an intellectually enriched and ethically sensitive relationship between the teacher and the student. The recurrence of rote learning in over-crowded classrooms, the ritualisation of non-imaginative examinations and "summer projects", the sole emphasis on the quantification of performance, thereby negating the significance of all qualitative/non-measurable experiences — everything transforms the teacher into a mere mediator between the prescribed "texts" and the learners. Under this system, no flower can bloom, no Nachiketa can emerge, and the ideal of the teacher, as Sri Aurobindo would have imagined, as being a catalyst making the young mind aware of the possibilities implicit in him/her, would be considered as laughable.

Second, in an age that worships technocracy and market-driven solutions, teachers as philosophers, inspirers and life-transformative agents would not be appreciated. Techno-managers come with a discourse of education that privileges the cult of the "measurable outcome" (not the inexplicable ecstasy of the expansion of horizons), "efficiency" (not wonder, or the non-utilitarian quest for learning), and "relevance" as dictated by the market (not any deeper quest). It is, therefore, not surprising if the teacher is reduced to a supplier of "data" — the "outcome" of the courses taught, the identifiable "skills" learned by the student, and the "impact factor" of the papers he/she has published.

Imagine the absurdity. Is it possible to measure the "outcome" or "productivity" of a class in which a professor of literature invokes Saadat Hasan Manto, and recalls the traumatic memory of gendered violence implicit in the ideology of communalism? Is it possible to identify the "skills" a student learns in a history class in which the professor narrates the tales of Gandhi walking through the villages of Noakhali in 1946? It is sad that with the triumph of a techno-managerial orientation to education, teachers would lose the very meaning of their vocation.

Yes, in the coming years, like "disciplined"

The dominant culture of learning in our educational institutions negates the possibility of an intellectually enriched and ethically sensitive relationship between the teacher and the student. The recurrence of rote learning in over-crowded classrooms, the ritualisation of non-imaginative examinations and 'summer projects', the sole emphasis on the quantification of performance, thereby negating the significance of all qualitative/non-measurable experiences — everything transforms the teacher into a mere mediator between the prescribed 'texts' and the learners.

factory workers, they would wear special uniforms, get the structure of lectures approved by the "higher authority", subject themselves to the ever-expanding machineries of surveillance, and obey the instructions and commands emanating from the castle of bureaucrats. This dystopia may not be altogether unreal.

Third, a political culture that seems to be inclined towards a totalitarian discourse would not be conducive to the growth of critical consciousness, creative ideas, dissenting voices and self-reflexive journeys. There is an inherent anti-intellectualism in such politics. With "nationalism", "patriotism" and "cultural pride", we may be asked to be "loyal". Hence, as the message would be conveyed, it is not a good idea if a teacher encourages what Freire would have regarded as a "problem posing education", or if, for instance, she asks her students to write a paper on the social construction of a macho "saviour" through the 24x7 "patriotic" television news channels and instantaneity of Facebook and Twitter. Think of it. The vice-chancellor of a leading central university has already expressed his desire to install a military tank on campus to induce "patriotism" among students. Yet another vice-cancellor has argued in the Science Congress that "Kauravas were test-tube babies". As teachers, we work under the shadow of such "educationists". Who can stop our fall?

Yet, I believe, we have to resist, and with our rebellion as prayer, we have to strive for life-affirming education. We ought to renew faith in the very meaning of the vocation of teaching. No, we are not "loyal soldiers"; nor are we cogs in a bureaucratic machine. We are wanderers. We are explorers. We are poets, philosophers, thinkers, visionaries. And unless we begin to trust ourselves, none can save us, and heal the wound caused by an unholy alliance of techno-managers and practitioners of what Herbert Marcuse would have regarded as "one-dimensional" thought.

Can it be our pledge on Teachers' Day?

The writer is professor of sociology at JNU



SURAJIT NUNDY

No panacea

Law for new medical regulator persists with old tendency of centralisation

ON AUGUST 1, the Rajya Sabha passed the National Medical Commission Bill which seeks to replace the Medical Council of India Act, 1956. This Bill seeks to replace the selection process of the governors of the MCI — currently, by and large, medical practitioners elected by state-level peers — with governors who will mostly be medical practitioners nominated by the Central Government. In its opposition to this bill, the Indian Medical Association has said that "the autonomy of the medical profession and the watch-dog role it should play, will be lost. It will only lead to autocracy in these institutions." Many doctors have also risen up in protest against this Bill because a clause allows work by health professionals. But that is misguided opposition borne of the sense that doctors do special work and, therefore, should regulate themselves autonomously.

I am a doctor licensed and trained at US educational institutions like the Harvard Medical School who, returned to India in 2009 to contribute to his home country. I had started medical practice by volunteering amongst the underserved in rural Chhatisgarh and in Delhi and needed a licence, so I approached the Medical Council of India (MCI). The MCI was then embroiled in a scandal — a massive corruption had been unearthed at its very highest level and a new, temporary board of governors had been installed. I tried as best as I could and, even though I was lucky to be liv-

ing in Delhi, it took me four years and nearly 50 spirit-deadening visits to the MCI office to finally get my licence.

This physician self-regulation harms Indians. Starting with training, being a doctor in the US involved me having to stay up all night ensuring that everything relevant was done for the patient and documenting those activities. The reason was a system of accountability — I could easily get sued for not providing the best care. And crucially, this also ensured that my providing good care was the responsibility of other people. Medical errors are estimated to kill 250,000 people every year in the US, the third largest cause of death in the country. While there is no comparable data in India, it is likely that many more people die here because of the absence of accountability. When errors happen in the US, patients are empowered to seek redress from doctors. But in India, medical services are not under the Consumer Protection Act. This ensures that the patient and their kin can't have their say and the incentive to hold someone accountable dies away. As a result, while nearly 5,000 US doctors have a disciplinary procedure in different state boards every year, in India the centralised MCI reports that only 96 have been blacklisted in the last 60 years (none since 2014). This system of unaccountability has ensured that while there are some extremely good, dedicated doctors in India, most of those I come across act in a manner

more accountable to their own pockets than to the well-being of their patients.

Since Independence, goal-setting by a few at the Centre has hurt us by restricting the number of providers at the periphery. From the Bhoré Committee of 1946 to the "High Level Expert Group" of 2010, goals like a 75-bedded hospital per 20,000 people, or increasing spending for universal health coverage have seemed worthy but never implemented. After more than 70 years of Independence, we are still in a position where we have only 1 doctor per 1,700 Indians, far less than the WHO standard of 1 per 1,000 people. Even those doctors aren't where the diseases are (in some rural areas the ratio is less than 1 doctor per 80,000 people) and the vast majority of Indians therefore do not have adequate coverage. Many successive committees at the Centre have set other worthy goals while bemoaning the state of Indian health system but have not been held accountable to the implementation and achievement of those goals while people continue to suffer and die. In developed countries, many of the health regulators are not medical practitioners — health is not something special that only experts understand, power and accountability in health need to be devolved.

Healthcare in India is mostly practiced by non-physicians because we will never have enough physicians. Like other developing democracies, we have a shortfall of certified

providers. There is a clause in the NMC bill, strongly opposed by the IMA, that seeks to allow upto 3.5 lakh "community health providers" to carry out some "mid-level" healthcare functions but that number is too small since some surveys estimate that we have as many as 50 lakh uncertified providers, four to five times as many as doctors, that fill the need unmet by certified providers. Accepting this reality, we work to improve the quality of many of these "Bangali doctors" (it helps because I am Bengali and, technically, one too) and have found them to be dedicated to their patients, eager to improve their skills and, importantly, answerable to their patients and local elected representatives.

Ever since Independence, centralised self-regulation of health has resulted in power and the practice of medicine being concentrated in the hands of a certified few. The NMC Bill continues that unfortunate centralisation but has allowed a token few uncertified providers to practice. Some doctors are protesting against even this in misguided self-interest but there are many others who believe that in order to make healthcare work for us all, we must devolve health practice and its regulation to us all.

The writer is the founder of Raxa, an artificial intelligence platform to improve the quality of care in India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The prime minister (Boris Johnson) intuitively understands that hard-Brexit chaos will sustain his premiership. He must be stopped." — THE GUARDIAN

Escaping the Kashmir trap

India's abrogation of Article 370 is an opportunity for Pakistan to redefine its nationalism



TILAK DEVASHER

COUNTER-INTUITIVE AND strange it may seem, but the events of August 5, 2019, when the Narendra Modi government revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir provided by Article 370, could be a game changer for Pakistan. Whatever Pakistan may continue to claim, the fact is that the Indian Jammu and Kashmir is no longer a bilateral issue. As Pakistan gets used to the new reality, it could have a huge opportunity.

Kashmir has been the bedrock of Pak nationalism for decades with slogans such as "Kashmir banega Pakistan", "unfinished business of Partition", "Pakistan's jugular", "core issue with India", reminding Pakistanis of its centrality. Kashmir acquired greater salience after the creation of Bangladesh shredded the two-nation theory. Pakistan needed another crutch and that crutch became the "nazaria-i-Pakistan" (Ideology of Pakistan) of which Kashmir was an integral part. As L Ziring puts it: "All of Pakistan was made hostage to the Kashmir conundrum." The Kashmir card became, and continues to be, an industry in Pakistan and many have thrived on it, developing a vested interest in its continuation. It enabled the Pakistan army to dominate the polity, it allowed the politicians to burnish their nationalistic credentials, the religious lobby could fan anti-Hindu sentiments, and the hapless Pakistani got a break on the various "Kashmir Solidarity Days".

Perhaps the best explanation for Pakistan's obsession with Kashmir was provided by Z A Bhutto in his 'The Myth of Independence' (1969) when he wrote: "If a Muslim majority area can remain a part of India, the 'raison d'etre of Pakistan collapses. For the same reasons, Pakistan must continue unremittingly her struggle for the rights of self-determination." Though hanged by the army, Bhutto's enunciation became the foundation of Pakistan's Kashmir policy. Not surprisingly, Pakistan has spent the last seven decades in revanchist schemes like the "raiders" in 1947, "infiltrators" in 1965, and "freedom fighters" since 1989 and especially in Kargil, in 1999. All of these have borne no fruit except to inject a jihadi culture and radicalise society.

With its nationalist narrative built over decades having been shattered, Pakistan is hitting out in every direction using overt and covert means. Prime Minister Imran Khan's threatening speeches, his article in The New York Times, warning to explore all possible options, moves in the Security Council, re-activating terrorists are just samples.

However, once the dust settles and Pakistan realises that the events of August 5 are a fait accompli and not going to be reversed, it would have a considerable open-

ing to assess the implications of what has happened and reconsider its policies.

For one, its existence will no longer be hostage to the Kashmir issue. For another, there would be no justification for the army to dominate the security and foreign policy architecture or claim such a major chunk of scarce resources. Third, Pakistan would no longer need the jihadi terrorists and their support infrastructures and so eliminate the possibility of being black-listed by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) or be known internationally as a terrorist hub. Gradually, Pakistani society could even reclaim the moderate space that it has surrendered to jihadi elements.

Due to the centrality of the Kashmir issue in Pakistan for decades, the nature of the state itself has changed. From being a "development state" till the mid-1970s, Pakistan has become a "security state" subsequently. As a result, economic development ceased to be the primary agenda of the state. Thus, during the 1970s, the real rate of growth of development expenditure was 21 per cent per annum and the rate of growth of defence expenditure was 2 per cent. During the 1980s, the rate of growth of development expenditure crashed seven-fold to 3 per cent and the rate of growth of defence expenditure escalated almost five-fold to 9 per cent. As a percentage of GDP, development expenditure has been falling from 9 per cent in the 1970s to 7.3 per cent in the 1980s to 4.7 per cent in the 1990s and to 3.5 per cent in the first decade of the millennium to 1.8 per cent in 2018-19. Expenditure on education and health was a paltry 0.25 and 0.5 per cent of GDP respectively in 2018-19 and has further declined to 0.17 and 0.02 per cent for 2019-20.

That Pakistan's economy is on a slippery slope is well-known and documented. Just by freeing itself of the Kashmir obsession and the resultant financial commitments, Pakistan would be in a position to divert scarce resources to long-term critical development activities. One example would suffice. According to Pakistani experts, the country could become an absolute water scarce country by 2025 (six years from now) when the per capita availability of water will drop to below 500 m3 per annum. To tackle this looming catastrophe, Pakistan needs to provide at least 10 per cent of the federal Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) to the water sector, gradually increasing it to 20 per cent by 2030. The reality is, however, that due to lack of funds only 3.29 per cent of PSDP was provided for in 2018-19 for the water sector.

There is no doubt that for the Pakistani leadership, and especially the army, to reduce the salience of, let alone jettison, the Kashmir cause would be extremely difficult, unpopular and politically dangerous. It would require extraordinary courage, determination and leadership, qualities in short supply at present. Yet, the choice is stark. Without doing so, Pakistan would accelerate its march towards the abyss.

The writer is member, National Security Advisory Board

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MHA SPOKESPERSON RESPONDS

APROPOS THE article, 'On a Shaky Foundation' (IE, September 4) by Gopal Sankaranarayanan — a lawyer for one of the petitions challenging the dilution of Article 370, Soayib Querishi vs Union of India — the spokesperson, Ministry of Home Affairs, says: President's rule was applied under Article 356 on 19/12/18. Original provisions under Article 356 allow it to exist for six months from the date of the second of the resolutions approving the proclamation. The subsequent changes to Article 356 (4) through the 42nd and 44th Constitutional amendments were not made applicable to Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, the original provision of Article 356 (4) was applicable to Jammu and Kashmir. The proclamation dated 19th December 2019 was approved by Lok Sabha on 28th December 2018 and Rajya Sabha on 3rd January 2019. Therefore, the proclamation of the President's rule was due to expire on 3 July 2019, ie six months from 3rd July 2019. Lok Sabha on 28/6/19 and Rajya Sabha on 1/7/19 approved the continuance of the proclamation of the President's Rule for a further period of six more months beyond 3rd July 2019. Thus this proclamation was within the provisions of Article 356 as applicable to Jammu and Kashmir.

ONE-SIDED BILL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The healing touch' (IE, September 4). The draft bill put in the public domain by the Ministry of Health addresses the problem from the standpoint of the doctor.

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

But cases of medical negligence are not infrequent. Doctors often prescribe unnecessary tests. **Ajinkya Pawar, New Delhi**

WHAT ABOUT NAVY?

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The world's most happening place' (IE, September 4). The Indian Ocean is the theatre of a changed geopolitical situation. But is India ready to take advantage of this? A powerful navy is must to defend our borders and marine trade routes. Unfortunately the navy's budget this year was slashed by about 5 per cent. **Vasant Nalawade, Satara**

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 171

आर्थिक गतिविधि का आकलन

चालू वित्त वर्ष की पहली तिमाही में सकल घरेलू उत्पाद (जीडीपी) की वृद्धि दर में आई गिरावट ने अधिकांश विश्लेषकों को चकित किया है। अप्रैल-जून तिमाही में वृद्धि दर 5 फीसदी रह जाने का असर वित्तीय बाजारों के रुझानों पर तो होगा ही, साथ ही राजकोषीय और मौद्रिक नीति के लिए भी इसके गहरे निहितार्थ हैं। परंतु आधिकारिक आंकड़ों के

जारी होने में जो देरी होती है उसका असर नीतिगत प्रक्रिया पर भी पड़ता है। राजकोषीय नीति की बात करें तो आर्थिक गतिविधियों का स्तर यह निर्धारित करता है कि सरकार कितना राजस्व हासिल होने का अनुमान लगा सकती है। यदि वृद्धि दर के धीमी गति से बढ़ने का अनुमान रहता है तो सरकार अपने राजस्व अनुमान को संशोधित कर सकती है और यह

निर्णय ले सकती है कि आर्थिक व्यय में समायोजन की आवश्यकता है अथवा नहीं। यह व्यय भी आर्थिक चक्र को सुगम बना सकता है। इसी प्रकार यदि केंद्रीय बैंक मौद्रिक नीति समायोजन में अधिक सक्रियता दिखाए और हमेशा आधिकारिक आंकड़ों पर निर्भर नहीं रहे तो भी बेहतर होगा।

चूंकि मौद्रिक नीति दो या तीन तिमाहियों से पिछड़ी रहती है इसलिए आधिकारिक आंकड़ों पर निर्भरता नीतिगत समायोजन को और पीछे धकेल सकती है। इससे समस्या बढ़ेगी। उदाहरण के लिए मौद्रिक नीति समिति ने परंपरा को तोड़ते हुए अगस्त में नीतिगत रीपो दर में 35 आधार अंकों की कटौती करने की घोषणा की। दलील दी गई कि 25 आधार अंकों की कटौती बहुत कम होती और 50 आधार

अंकों की कटौती बहुत अधिक मानी जाती। अब यह दलील दी जा सकती है कि अगर मंदी के असर का अनुमान था तो 50 आधार अंकों की कटौती शायद बहुत अधिक नहीं मानी जाती। धीमी वृद्धि के कारण मुद्रास्फीति का स्तर भी कम बना रहेगा। हालांकि आरबीआई ने उच्च तीव्रता वाले संकेतकों की कमियों को स्वीकार किया और चालू वित्त वर्ष के लिए वृद्धि अनुमानों को 10 आधार अंक घटाकर 6.9 फीसदी कर दिया। इसी प्रकार जुलाई में प्रस्तुत बजट में भी मंदी से बचाव का कोई उपाय नजर नहीं आया। इसके प्रमाण मौजूद थे लेकिन शायद इसे स्वीकारने में हिचक हो रही थी। व्यापक स्तर पर देखें तो निवेशक और नीति निर्माता दोनों के लिए यही बेहतर होगा कि वे आर्थिक गतिविधियों का सटीक आकलन

कर सकें। उदाहरण के लिए यदि एक बार मौजूदा समस्याओं को हल कर लिया जाए तो वस्तु एवं सेवा कर संग्रह आर्थिक गतिविधियों का बेहतर संकेतक हो सकता है। चूंकि आधिकारिक जीडीपी आंकड़ों के जारी होने में वास्तविक देरी के कारण मौजूद हैं इसलिए केंद्रीय बैंक एक समेकित सूचकांक पर काम कर सकता है जो आर्थिक हालत का जल्द अंदाजा दे दे। दुनिया भर में केंद्रीय बैंक प्रमुख संकेतकों की सहायता से अर्थव्यवस्था की हालत का आकलन करते हैं और अग्रगामी नीतियां तैयार करते हैं। आरबीआई भी उच्च तीव्रता वाले संकेतकों की सहायता लेता है। इस दिशा में प्रयास वार्षिक रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि उसने देश के लिए एक सामयिक आर्थिक संकेतक पर काम किया है। इसमें उपभोक्ता

वस्तुओं का उत्पादन, वाहन बिक्री, गैर तेल, गैर स्वर्ण आयात और रेल भाड़ा शामिल हैं। बहरहाल, हालिया रिकॉर्ड बताते हैं कि आरबीआई की वृद्धि और मुद्रास्फीति के सटीक अनुमान लगाने के लिए अपने मांडलों पर काम करना होगा। हालांकि कुछ वित्तीय संस्थान अपने ग्राहकों के लिए उच्च तीव्रता वाले संस्थानों का प्रयोग करते हैं और अगर शोध क्षमताओं से लैस केंद्रीय बैंक ऐसी जानकारी का प्रयोग कर समेकित सूचकांक तैयार करे तो अच्छा रहेगा। ध्यान रहे इसका अर्थ आधिकारिक संग्रह और आंकड़े जारी करने को सीमित करना नहीं बल्कि बाजार की समझ को बेहतर करना है। इस दिशा में प्रयास किया जाना चाहिए क्योंकि इससे केंद्रीय बैंक को अधिक अग्रसूची नीति तैयार करने में भी सहायता मिलेगी।



अजय मोहंती

बाढ़ नियंत्रण के नजरिये में बदलाव जरूरी

भारत को पारिस्थितिकी सामंजस्य के अग्रदूतों से सीखने और हमारे अपने हालात के हिसाब से उन्हें ढालने की जरूरत है। बता रहे हैं मिहिर शाह

भारत में बाढ़ की आवृत्ति एवं तीव्रता बढ़ने के साथ ही इसका सारा दोष जलवायु परिवर्तन पर मढ़ने की कवायद शुरू हो चुकी है। लेकिन गत तीन दशकों में बारिश का वितरण एवं सघनता में बदलाव होने से नीति-निर्माताओं पर कहीं बड़ी जिम्मेदारी आन पड़ी है कि वे लंबे समय से लंबित सुधारों को लागू करें। केवल सुधारों के ही रास्ते हम अतिवृष्टि की घटनाओं के बुरे प्रभावों को कम कर सकते हैं और उससे बच सकेंगे हैं।

भारत में बाढ़ नीति का केंद्रबिंदु इंजीनियरिंग समाधानों पर रहा है। विशालकाय बांधों के अलावा भारत ने अपनी नदियों के डूब-क्षेत्र में 35,000 किलोमीटर लंबे तटबंध भी बनाए हैं। लेकिन गुजरते वक्त के साथ यह समस्या और भी गंभीर होती गई है। वर्ष 2008 में बिहार की कोसी नदी के एक ऊपरी इलाके में तटबंध टूटने से हजारों लोगों की मौत और 33 लाख लोगों को विस्थापित होना पड़ा था। हालात यह हैं कि उत्तर बिहार में बांध एवं तटबंध बनाए जाने के बावजूद आजादी के बाद से अब तक बाढ़-प्रभावित इलाका करीब 200 फीसदी बढ़ चुका है। इसका कारण शायद यह है कि तटीय इलाकों में बंधे बनाने से पानी की प्राकृतिक निकासी बाधित हो जाती है और नदी डेल्टा एवं डूब-क्षेत्र भी नहीं बन पाता है। कोसी नदी में तटबंधों के चलते तलछट नाटकीय रूप से बढ़ गई है। कोसी में तलछट बढ़ने की एक वजह यह भी है कि बहाव के ऊपरी इलाकों में मिट्टी का भारी

कटाव हुआ है। नतीजतन, कोसी का तल काफी ऊंचा हो गया है जिससे बरसात के समय पानी बहुत जल्द तटीय इलाकों में फैलने लगता है और बाढ़ विकराल रूप ले लेती है। पिछले वर्षों में नदी तट के आसपास रिहायशी बस्तियां बसने से भी लोग बाढ़ की चपेट में जल्द आने लगे हैं। बाढ़ प्रबंधन के बारे में हमारे नजरिये का मूल औपनिवेशिक काल से जोड़ा जा सकता है। पूर्वी भारत के डेल्टाई इलाकों में 1803 से लेकर 1956 के दौरान बाढ़ नियंत्रण को लेकर किए गए प्रयोगों का अध्ययन दर्शाता है कि यह इलाका बाढ़ पर आश्रित कृषि व्यवस्था से बाढ़-प्रभावित भूभाग में तब्दील हो गया। औपनिवेशिक शासक बाढ़ नियंत्रण का विचार अपनी संपत्तियों को बचाने और राजस्व संग्रह रणनीतियों को ध्यान में रखते हुए लेकर आए थे। सबसे पहले ओडिशा डेल्टा क्षेत्र में जमीन को डूबने से बचाने के लिए गंदी के तटीय आल्फाल्टों में छोटे बंधे बनाए गए थे। मशहूर इंजीनियर सर आर्थर कॉटन को 1858 में डेल्टाई इलाकों के सर्वे के लिए बुलाया गया था। उन्होंने यह क्लासिक संकल्पना पेश की थी कि 'सभी डेल्टाई इलाकों को बुनियादी तौर पर एक ही समाधान की जरूरत होती है।' इस सोच का मतलब है कि नदियों में पानी की अपरिवर्तनीय एवं सतत आपूर्ति बनाए रखने के लिए उन्हें नियंत्रित एवं विनियमित किए जाने की जरूरत है। यह धारणा दोषपूर्ण होते हुए भी भारत में आज भी जल नीति को रास्ता दिखाती है।

ऐसे में सवाल खड़ा होता है कि हम उपनिवेश काल की इस विरासत को किस तरह तिलांजलि देकर नए रास्ते तलाश सकते हैं? पहला, विज्ञान के बुनियादी उन्सूलों की तरफ लौटकर और जल चक्र में विभिन्न अवयवों की अंतर-संबद्धता को मान्यता देकर। इसी महीने केरल में आई भीषण बाढ़ के उदाहरण से हम इसे बखूबी समझ सकते हैं। लगातार तीसरे साल केरल में भीषण बाढ़ आई है। उत्तराखंड में 2013 में आई विनाशकारी बाढ़ की तरह केरल की बाढ़ भी जल-ग्रहण क्षेत्रों के अस्थिर स्थिति में होने की अहमियत पर बल देती है। हमें पानी इन जल-ग्रहण क्षेत्रों से ही मिलता है। हिमालय एवं पश्चिमी घाट के नाजुक परिवेश को अंधाधुंध एवं काफी हद तक गैरकानूनी निर्माण कार्य चलने से भूस्खलन का खतरा काफी बढ़ गया है। माधव गाईफल और कस्तूरिंगम समितियों पहले ही पश्चिमी घाटों की अनगिनत पारिस्थितिकी को अहमियत देने और उनके संरक्षण के अनुकूल विकास प्रतिमान तैयार करने की वकालत कर चुकी हैं। लेकिन इस सलाह को लगातार नजरअंदाज किए जाने से इन इलाकों में रहने वाले लोगों की मुसीबतें बदस्तूर जारी हैं।

इससे भी खराब बात यह है कि केरल के अधिकांश बांध पश्चिमी घाट में ही मौजूद हैं। बिजली उत्पादन की मांग और बाढ़ नियंत्रण की अनिवार्यता के बीच अनवरत संघर्ष होता है। दरअसल बिजली उत्पादन के लिए बांधों के जलाशयों में भरपूर पानी की जरूरत होती है जबकि बारिश का मौसम

शुरू होने के पहले इन बांधों के काफी हद तक खाली होने से बाढ़ काबू में रहेगी। किसी भी सूरत में हमारे अधिकांश बांध या तो सिंचाई या फिर बिजली उत्पादन के मकसद से बनाए गए हैं और बाढ़ नियंत्रण इसका दोयम लक्ष्य होता है। इसके बजाय पृथ्वी विज्ञान विभाग के केंद्रीय सचिव ने हाल ही में यह कहा है कि बांधों के जलाशयों के खराब प्रबंधन ने बाढ़ को और भी भयावह बनाने का काम किया है। मसलन, 2006 में सूरत, 2015 में चेन्नई और 2016 में बिहार में आई बाढ़ में इन जलाशयों की भूमिका रही थी। जलाशय प्रबंधन की वैकल्पिक रणनीति बनाई जा सकती है। केरल की 144 किलोमीटर लंबी चलकुडी नदी पर ही बने छह बड़े बांधों ने इस नदी की नैसर्गिक जलीय प्रणाली को पूरी तरह बदल दिया है। लेकिन इंजीनियरों एवं समाज वैज्ञानिकों के एक समूह ने इस नदी पर बने बांधों के जलाशयों की वैकल्पिक प्रबंधन रणनीति का खाका तैयार किया है और सघन सामाजिक लामबंदी के बाद नदी तट इलाके के सभी छह विधायकों ने भी उसे स्वीकृति दे दी है। ऐसी योजनाओं के सावधानीपूर्ण अध्ययन एवं देश भर में अनुसरण की जरूरत है।

खासकर शहरी इलाकों में नदी या समुद्र की तरफ जाने वाले पानी के प्राकृतिक मार्ग तबाह होने से भी बाढ़ की विभीषिका बढ़ी है। इन जलमार्गों को एक बार अवरूद्ध कर देने पर वह पानी हमारे घरों और दफ्तरों के सिवाय किधर जाएगा? वर्ष 2000 में हैदराबाद, 2001 में अहमदाबाद, 2003, 2009 एवं 2010 में दिल्ली, 2004, 2015 एवं 2017 में चेन्नई, 2007 में कोलकाता, 2014 में गुवाहाटी, कोच्चि एवं श्रीनगर और 2017 में तिरुवनंतपुरम की बाढ़ इसके उदाहरण हैं। शहरी क्षेत्रों में बाढ़ का यह सिलसिला अंतहीन है। हम यह भूल जाते हैं कि 1980 के दशक में चेन्नई में 600 से भी अधिक छोटे-बड़े जलस्रोत थे लेकिन आज यह संख्या एक-तिहाई भी नहीं रह गई है। हैदराबाद में भी गत 15 वर्षों में नमी से भरपूर 3,245 हेक्टेयर जमीन गुम हो चुकी है। बेंगलूरु में 1960 के दौर में 262 झीलें हुआ करती थीं लेकिन आज 10 झीलें में भी पानी नहीं रह गया है। पूर्व का वेनिस कहा जाने वाला अलप्पी भी अपनी खूबसूरत झीलों से गढ़ हटाने और उनकी सफाई की समस्या से जूझ रहा है। हम इन झीलों और तालाबों पर अतिक्रमण और उन्हें नजरअंदाज करने का अपराध कर चुके हैं जबकि इन जल निकायों का बाढ़ नियंत्रण में काफी योगदान होता है।

कोपनहेगन, लंदन, न्यू ऑर्लिंस, शिकागो, रॉटरडम, मेलबर्न और न्यूयॉर्क सभी शहरों में यह माना जा रहा है कि 21वीं सदी में बादल फटने की घटनाएं बढ़ने के बाद अर्थव्यवस्था को एक व्यापक पारिस्थितिकी का छोटा हिस्सा भर ही मानना उचित है। ये शहर कल्पित के साथ मिलकर निर्माण और नदी के लिए भी जगह वाला नजरिया लेकर चल रहे हैं। भारत भी पारिस्थितिकी के इन अग्रदूतों से सीख कर उनकी खासियत को अपने हालात के हिसाब से ढाल सकता है।

(लेखक शिव नाडर यूनिवर्सिटी में प्रोफेसर हैं और योजना आयोग के सदस्य रह चुके हैं)

आशावाद नहीं हकीकत समझने से ही सशक्त होगी अर्थव्यवस्था

आशावाद कोई पाप नहीं है लेकिन यह किसी देश की समृद्धि आर्थिक नीति की बुनियाद नहीं हो सकता। दुख की बात है कि हमारे देश में कुछ ऐसा ही होता नजर आ रहा है। जब तक देश की निर्णय प्रक्रिया में शामिल लोग अपने भविष्य के अनुमान में संशोधन नहीं करेंगे तब तक किसी भी प्रकार का आशावाद झूठा ही साबित होता रहेगा।



नीति नियम

मिहिर शर्मा

दिवक्त यह है कि हम काफी समय से यह मानते रहे हैं कि दीर्घावधि में देश की अर्थव्यवस्था में सुधार आएगा। कई ऐसी बातें हैं जो इस सोच को बढ़ावा देती हैं: युवा आबादी, मजबूत खपत मांग, बड़ा बाजार, श्रम को लागत से जुड़ा लाभ आदि। परंतु इन तमाम लाभों की बदीलत एक क्रिसम की आश्वस्त भी आई है, बल्कि इससे एक क्रिसम का दंभ उत्पन्न हुआ है। अर्थव्यवस्था में उच्च मध्य आय वर्ग के उदय के साथ अपनी क्रिसम में ऐसा भरोसा पैदा हुआ है जो किसी भी तरह के अपरिहार्य ढांचागत सुधारों की जरूरत पर पर्याप्त बल नहीं पड़ने देता।

धीरे-धीरे हमारी उपरोक्त बढ़त बाधाओं में तब्दील होती जा रही है। देश की आबादी अगर युवा हो और उसके पास रोजगार नहीं हो तो अर्थव्यवस्था को इसका कोई लाभ नहीं होता बल्कि वृद्धि के बजाय लोक कल्याण पर अधिक ध्यान देना पड़ता है। अगर सस्ता श्रम कोषाल युक्त न हो तो वह वैश्विक बाजारों में प्रतिस्पर्धा नहीं कर सकता। मजबूत खपत मांग स्वीकार्य जीडीपी वृद्धि के वर्षों को रेखांकित करती है। परंतु निरंतर और स्थायी वृद्धि के लिए हमें निवेश और उत्पादकता बढ़ाने की जरूरत होगी। खपत हमेशा वृद्धि को आगे नहीं ले जा सकती। हम यह मानते हैं कि हमारा घरेलू बाजार इतना बड़ा है कि हमें निर्यात की आवश्यकता ही नहीं। हम मानते हैं कि हमारा बाजार इतना आकर्षक है कि शेष विश्व से निवेश यहां आएगा ही आएगा, भले ही हमारे यहां माहौल निवेश के अनुकूल न हो। शायद हम यह भुला बैठे हैं कि चीन जैसा देश, जिसकी आबादी हमसे कहीं ज्यादा है, वह भी केवल विश्व बाजार में पहुंच बनाकर ही विकसित हो पा रहा है। हम केवल दुनिया के पांचवें हिस्से के बराबर आबादी के लिए उत्पादन कर पा रहे हैं जबकि चीन बाकी

पुरी दुनिया के लिए उत्पादन कर रहा है।

इस समय चक्रीय मंदी और ढांचागत बाधाएं, दोनों अर्थव्यवस्था को प्रभावित कर रही हैं। सरकार की बात करें तो अल्पावधि और दीर्घावधि के नीतिगत प्रभावों को लेकर प्रायः एक संतुलन की आवश्यकता रहती है। उदाहरण के लिए उच्च सरकारी व्यय अल्पावधि में मांग में सुधार कर सकता है लेकिन दीर्घावधि में इसका खराब असर भी देखने को मिल सकता है क्योंकि अधिक उत्पादक निजी क्षेत्र के बजाय सरकारी क्षेत्र बचत पर अपना दबदबा कायम रखता है। देश के बाहरी खाते को दीर्घावधि के दौरान सुरक्षित रखने के लिए हमें आयातित ईंधन पर निर्भरता को कम करना होगा। परंतु अल्पावधि में विद्युतीकरण और ईंधन किफायत के लिए उठाए जाने वाले कदम वाहन क्षेत्र को प्रभावित कर रहे हैं। ढांचागत तौर पर देखें तो कम किफायती सरकारी बैंकों को खत्म करना देश के हित में हो सकता है, लेकिन अगर असल चिंता अल्पावधि में ऋण सुधार करना है तो सरकार को किसी तरह उन्हें गति देनी होगी। लंबी अवधि की वृद्धि के लिए एक प्राथमिकता यह भी होनी चाहिए कि सरकार के वेतन भत्तों में इस प्रकार कमी की जाए कि हमें राजस्व का अधिक किफायती इस्तेमाल सुनिश्चित हो सके। परंतु यदि हमें अल्पावधि में खपत में सुधार सुनिश्चित करना हो तो इस मोर्चे पर कोई कदम नहीं उठाया जा सकता है। अगर आशावादी यकीन यह मानता है कि अल्पावधि की चीजों पर ध्यान देने की जरूरत है क्योंकि दीर्घावधि में हालात खुदबखुद सुधर जायेंगे तो जाहिर सी बात है कि ऐसे ढांचागत सुधारों को प्राथमिकता नहीं दी जाएगी। हम कहते आए हैं कि देश में सुधार केवल

आपातकालीन परिस्थितियों में किया जाता है।

जाहिर है ढांचागत सुधार के लिए अभी आपात परिस्थितियां नहीं हैं। निवेश में कमी की समस्या पर भी यही बात लागू होती है। माना जाता है मांग में सुधार करने से अतिरिक्त क्षमता को समस्या भी हल होगी। ऐसे में निवेश खुदबखुद वापस आएगा। परंतु अतिरिक्त क्षमता की समस्या को हल करना अनिवार्य रूप से निवेश में सुधार लाए यह आवश्यक नहीं। निवेश से जुड़े राजनीतिक जोखिम को कम करना और आवश्यक है। सरकार ने उद्योग जगत की चिंताओं पर ध्यान देना शुरू किया है। वह कर आतंक की आशंकाओं को भी हल कर रही है। कर प्रशासन में कुछ सुधारों का वादा किया गया है। परंतु राजनीतिक बातां से इतर सांस्थानिक और वैधानिक ढांचे में बदलाव के साथ ही यह हो पाएगा। वैधानिक क्षेत्र में भी क्षमता निर्माण जरूरी है। अंतरराष्ट्रीय मध्यस्थता के मामलों से सही तरीके से निपट्टा जा सके। द्विपक्षीय निवेश नीतियां ऐसी होनी चाहिए जो विदेशी निवेशकों की रक्षा करें। देश की अर्थव्यवस्था के भविष्य को लेकर देश में बहुत उम्मीदें हैं लेकिन विदेशी निवेशकों को यहाँ का माहौल नुकसान हो सकता है। उनकी चिंताओं को संस्थान सुधारों के माध्यम से हल करने के बजाय उन्हें देश में निवेश के बारे में भाषण दिए जा रहे हैं। एक पर्यवेक्षक की मानें तो चीन में निवेशकों का स्वागत लाल कालीन बिछाकर किया जाता है जबकि हमारे यहां लालफीताशाही उनका स्वागत करती है।

वृद्धि के कारक बदल चुके हैं। हमें प्रतिस्पर्धी रहने के साथ-साथ विश्व की बाजारों से परे जाकर भी उत्पादन करना होगा। तभी उत्पादकता में सुधार होगा। अगर हम केवल अपनी खपत के लिए उत्पादन करेंगे तो हम कम मूल्यवर्धन, कम वेतन के चक्र में उलझ जाएंगे। इस स्थिति में हम बाहरी जोखिम से भी लगातार प्रभावित होते रहेंगे क्योंकि निर्यात भविष्य में आयातित ईंधन पर हमारी निर्भरता कम नहीं होने वाली। हम इन सब बातों की अर्थव्यवस्था को गति (5 प्रतिशत) पिछले छह वर्षों में सबसे कम है। मौजूदा संकट से निपटने के लिए सिंह जैसे अनुभवी अर्थशास्त्री के कथनों पर अमल किया जाना चाहिए। सरकार को एक सही नीति पर विश्लेषण अवश्य करना चाहिए।

सौरभ शर्मा, महामुद्र

कानाफूसी

शोक सभा

मंगलवार को नई दिल्ली में दो-दो शोक सभाओं का आयोजन किया गया। एक सभा पूर्व वित्त मंत्री अरुण जेटली की याद में आयोजित की गई तो दूसरी कांग्रेस नेता जयपाल रेड्डी की स्मृति में। जेटली की स्मृति सभा तालकटोरा स्टेडियम में आयोजित की गई जबकि रेड्डी की शोक सभा का आयोजन ऑबेडकर इंटरनैशनल सेंटर में किया गया। दोनों राजनेताओं का निधन अगस्त में हुआ था। जेटली की शोकसभा में गृहमंत्री अमित शाह तथा अन्य भाजपा नेता शामिल हुए जबकि रेड्डी की शोक सभा में तमाम राजनीतिक दलों के नेता शामिल थे। इनमें पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री मनमोहन सिंह, वनम भाजपा नेता शर्मिलाल गुप्ता, दिल्ली के मुख्यमंत्री अरविंद केजरीवाल, भाकपा के डी राजा और पूर्व केंद्रीय मंत्री शरद यादव शामिल थे। रेड्डी के करीबी मित्र और जेटली के सहयोगी, देश के उपराष्ट्रपति एम वेंकैया नायडू दोनों जगह गए।



एक और गठबंधन

लोकलेखा, आकलन और सार्वजनिक उपक्रमों से संबंधित तीन संसदीय वित्तीय समितियों का गठन कर दिया है लेकिन 24 विभागीय स्थायी समितियों के गठन का काम अभी बाकी है। जबकि नई लोकसभा का गठन हुए तीन महीने से अधिक समय बीत चुका है। मार्क्सवादी कम्युनिस्ट पार्टी के महासचिव सीताराम येचुरी ने मंगलवार को कहा कि इन समितियों ने सरकार को सजग बनाए रखने का काम किया है। उनका कहना था कि सरकार की लोकसभा में जिस तरह का बहुमत हासिल है और राज्यसभा में वह जिस प्रकार बहुमत के करीब है उसके आधार पर कहा जा सकता है कि आने वाले सत्र में संसद की कार्यवाही खाली दिखावा बनकर रह जाएगी। येचुरी तथा विपक्ष के अन्य नेता आम लोकों की आजीविका से जुड़े सवाल उठाने के लिए एक जनमंच तैयार करने की संभावनाओं पर चर्चा कर रहे हैं। माना जा रहा है कि इस मंच में प्रमुख विपक्षी दलों के नेता शामिल होंगे।

आपका पक्ष

सरकारी स्कूलों में सुधार की जरूरत

भारत विशाल जनसंख्या वाला देश है। यहां की शिक्षा व्यवस्था को अन्य देशों की अपेक्षा और बेहतर बनाने की जरूरत है। सरकारी स्कूलों में पहले की तुलना में शिक्षा व्यवस्था नहीं रह गई है। इसमें सुधार की जरूरत है। कई अधिभावक अपने बच्चों को सरकारी स्कूल नहीं भेज रहे हैं। वहीं गैर सरकारी स्कूलों में बच्चों के दाखिले के लिए भीड़ लगी रहती है। बच्चों को शिक्षित करने में अध्यापक की भूमिका महत्वपूर्ण होती है। सरकार ने शिक्षा व्यवस्था में सुधार के लिए मानक तय किए हैं। शिक्षकों के कार्यों का मूल्यांकन तय किया गया है। लेकिन शिक्षक की नियुक्ति मानक के अनुसार नहीं होने से शिक्षण व्यवस्था में सुधार नहीं हो पा रहा है। सरकार ने मध्याह्न भोजन की व्यवस्था तो की है लेकिन तय मानकों पर बच्चों को भोजन उपलब्ध नहीं हो पा रहा है। ऐसे में सरकारी स्कूलों को बेहतर बनाने के लिए सरकार को निम्नानु करने



की जरूरत है। सरकार को मध्याह्न भोजन योजना का पैसा विद्यालयों के बजट बच्चों के बैंक खाते में भेजने का प्रावधान करना चाहिए। इससे इस योजना का दुर्हयोग नहीं होगा तथा बच्चों को इसका सीधा लाभ भी मिल सकेगा। जिस तरह से राशन की सब्सिडी कार्ड धारकों के बैंक खाते में भेजे जाते हैं उसी प्रकार मध्याह्न भोजन की राशि

सरकारी स्कूलों में शिक्षा व्यवस्था दुरुस्त करने के लिए कड़े नियम बनाने चाहिए

बच्चों के बैंक खाते में भेजे जा सकते हैं। निजी स्कूलों की फीस इतनी अधिक होती है जिसमें गरीब तथा मध्यम वर्ग परिवार के बच्चे पढ़ नहीं सकते हैं। सरकारी स्कूल की

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@bmail.in उस जगह का उल्लेख अवश्य करें, जहां से आप ईमेल कर रहे हैं।



भेंट करने का तरीका उपहार से ज्यादा मूल्यवान होता है

एक माह बाद कश्मीर

जम्मू-कश्मीर को भेदभाव भरे अनुच्छेद 370 से मुक्त हुए एक माह होने का रहे हैं। इस दौरान वहां और खासकर घाटी में हिंसा की कोई बड़ी वारदात न होना उल्लेखनीय है, लेकिन यह भी साफ है कि यह कड़वी चोकसी का नतीजा है। निःसंदेह चोकसी आगे भी बरतनी पड़ेगी, क्योंकि पाकिस्तान इस फिगरक में है कि कश्मीर में किसी तरह हिंसा और अराजकता का माहौल कायम हो। बावजूद इसके यह भी आवश्यक है कि कश्मीर में लगी पाबंदियों को धीरे-धीरे उठाना जाए। ऐसा करते हुए वहां के लोगों को यह संदेश भी देना होगा कि अनुच्छेद 370 अब एक इतिहास है। यह अच्छा हुआ कि गृह मंत्री अमित शाह ने दिल्ली आए कश्मीर के ग्राम प्रधानों और पंचायत सदस्यों के एक प्रतिनिधिमंडल को यह भरोसा दिया कि उन्हें पुलिस सुरक्षा के साथ ही दो लाख लाख रुपये का बीमा कवरेज भी मिलेगा। इससे भी महत्वपूर्ण उनका यह आश्वासन है कि अगले 15-20 दिनों में जम्मू-कश्मीर में मोबाइल फोन सेवाएं बहाल कर दी जाएंगी। ऐसा करने के दौरान यह भी सुनिश्चित करना होगा कि मोबाइल सेवाओं और इंटरनेट का दुरुपयोग न होने पाए। इसमें सफलता तभी मिलेगी जब आम कश्मीरी शांति व्यवस्था बनाए रखने में सहयोग दें और अराजक तत्वों को हतोत्साहित करने में मददगार भी बनेंगे। इसमें एक बड़ी भूमिका कश्मीर के नेताओं की भी होगी। उन्हें इस सच्चाई को स्वीकार करने के लिए तैयार रहना होगा कि समय चक्र को पीछे नहीं ले जाना जा सकता।

इसमें दौरा यह कि कश्मीर के हालात बिगाड़ने में पाकिस्तान का हाथ रहा है, लेकिन यह भी एक तथ्य है कि कश्मीर के नेताओं ने भी लोगों को बरगलाने का काम किया है। कायदे से कश्मीर में अब एक नया राजनीतिक नेतृत्व सामने आना चाहिए जो कश्मीरियत को भारतीयता का पर्याय बना सके और जो घाटी के लोगों को यह बुनियादी बात समझा सके कि उनका हित भारतीयता के रंग में रंगने में है, न कि उस पाकिस्तान की ओर देखने में जो दुनिया भर में बदनाम है। इस सबके साथ ही यह भी वक्त की जरूरत है कि घाटी के उन लोगों और खासकर दलितों, जनजातियों की समस्याओं को सामने लाया जाए जो अनुच्छेद 370 के चलते उपेक्षा का शिकार हो रहे थे। कश्मीर में लगी पाबंदियां उठाते हुए वहां के माहौल को शांत बनाए रखने में कामयाबी तभी मिलेगी जब दुष्प्रचार करने वालों पर भी लगातार लगाई जाएगी। चूंकि कश्मीर को लेकर बड़े पैमाने पर तुष्प्रचार राष्ट्रीय और साथ ही अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर हो रहा है इसलिए कहीं अधिक सतर्क और सक्रिय रहने की आवश्यकता है। इस आवश्यकता की पूर्ति करके ही कूटनीतिक प्रयासों को मजबूती दी जा सकती है।

मेट्रो पर आफत

वैसे तो बंगाल की राजधानी कोलकाता में देश की पहली मेट्रो ट्रेन 1984 में दौड़ी थी। इसके बाद कई मेट्रो परियोजनाओं की घोषणा हुई और इनका काम भी चल रहा है, लेकिन समस्या विलंब को लेकर है। दूसरी ओर ईस्ट-वेस्ट मेट्रो परियोजना पर आफत कम होने का नाम ही नहीं ले रही है। पहले राज्य एवं केंद्र सरकार की खींचतान में परियोजना फंसी। इसके बाद सांत्वलेक के दत्ताबाद से लेकर सेंट्रल, बहुबाजार में जमीन अधिग्रहण को लेकर पंच फंसा और जो परियोजना 2018 तक पूरी होने की बात थी वह शायद ही 2021 में भी पूरी हो सके। अब नई समस्या बहुबाजार में सुरंग की खुदाई के दौरान खड़ी हो गई है। क्योंकि सुरंग में पानी का रिसाव होने के बाद आसपास की इमारतें ढहने लगी हैं। कई इमारतों में दरारें आ गई हैं। 323 परिवारों को अन्यत्र हटना पड़ा है। इसके बाद अब कलकत्ता हाईकोर्ट ने बहुबाजार इलाके में सुरंग के निर्माण पर रोक लगा दी है। मुख्य न्यायाधीश टीडी गंधाकृष्णन की खंडपीठ ने 16 सितंबर तक मेट्रो रेल प्रबंधन से मामले पर रिपोर्ट मांगी है, जिसे देखने के बाद ही फिर से सुरंग की खुदाई की अनुमति दी जाएगी। अदालत ने मकानों के क्षतिग्रस्त होने की घटना को गंभीर बताया है। खुदाई के दौरान पानी के रिसाव के कारण कोलकाता मेट्रो रेल निगम लिमिटेड (केएमआरसीएल) ने खुद ही शनिवार से काम बंद कर दिया था। केएमआरसी की ओर से इस दिन अदालत को खुद भी इसकी जानकारी दी गई और कहा गया कि अदालत की मंजूरी मिलने के बाद ही फिर से काम शुरू किया जाएगा। केएमआरसीएल ने पांच मकानों को नुकसान पहुंचने की बात कही है। वहीं जानकारी का मानना है कि इस घटना की वजह से परियोजना का कार्य पूरा होने में और एक साल का वक्त लग सकता है। वैसे सांत्वलेक सेक्टर पांच से सांत्वलेक स्टैंडियम तक प्रथम चरण का कार्य पूरा हो चुका है और जिस पर आगामी कुछ दिनों में मेट्रो सेवा शुरू हो सकती है। परंतु हवाइयां मैदान तक मेट्रो सेवा शुरू होने में अभी काफी वक्त लग सकता है। क्योंकि सुरंग-बोरिंग वर्क के दौरान मशीन के एक्विपमेंट से टकराने के बाद से सुरंग में पानी भर गया है और कार्य पूरी तरह से रुक गया है। उस पर हाईकोर्ट ने भी रोक लगा दी है। इस बीच विदेशी विशेषज्ञों को बुलाया गया है जो इस समस्या से निपटने का रास्ता तलाश रहे हैं।

भारी पड़ती दिमाग की सेहत की अनदेखी

निरंकार सिंह

हाल के अध्ययनों में सामने आया है कि व्यक्ति का खानपान उसके मनोभावों को प्रभावित करता है। कुछ भोजन हैं, जो व्यक्ति में अवसाद का कारण बन सकते हैं। वहीं कुछ भोजन व्यक्ति को तरोताजा रखते हुए मन को शांत रखने में मददगार होते हैं। अमेरिका की कोलंबिया यूनिवर्सिटी के प्रोफेसर डॉ. ड्यू रामसे बताते हैं कि गलत खानपान इस समय महामारी की तरह फैल रहे अवसाद की बड़ी वजह बनकर सामने आया है। डॉ. रामसे के अनुसार अवसाद 15 से 44 साल की उम्र के अमेरिकियों में अक्षमता का बड़ा कारण है। ज्यादातर अमेरिकी भोजन में हेर शर्षा कैलोरी ले लेते हैं, फिर भी उन्हें दिमाग के लिए जरूरी पोषक तत्व नहीं मिल पाते। भोजन में फल-सब्जियों की पर्याप्त मात्रा नहीं होने के कारण उन्हें जरूरी पोषक तत्व नहीं मिलते हैं। 2017 में आई सेंटर फॉर डिजीज कंट्रोल एंड प्रिवेंशन की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार अमेरिका में 10 में से महज एक वयस्क ही पर्याप्त फल-सब्जी का सेवन करता है। अवसाद पर नियंत्रण के लिए दवाएं कारगर हैं, लेकिन अगर ताजा एवं

बहुत कम लोग हैं जो अपने दिमाग की सेहत का ध्यान रखते हैं, जबकि सबसे ज्यादा इसी को ऊर्जा की जरूरत होती है

पोषक खाद्य को भोजन में शामिल किया जाए तो समस्या से और बेहतर तरीके से लड़ा जा सकता है। वजन नियंत्रण, शुगर और दिल की सेहत को ध्यान में रखते हुए अक्सर लोग अपने खान-पान में बदलाव करते हैं, लेकिन अब भी ऐसे बहुत कम लोग हैं जो खानपान तब करते समय अपने दिमाग की सेहत का ध्यान रखते हैं, जबकि शरीर में दिमाग की संरचना सर्वाधिक जटिल है और इसे सबसे ज्यादा ऊर्जा की जरूरत होती है।

इस अध्ययन में यह पाया गया कि जिन लोगों ने अपने खानपान में फल-सब्जी की मात्रा बढ़ा दी थी, वे अन्य की तुलना में ज्यादा खुश और संतुष्ट थे। इसी तरह अमेरिका एवं न्यूजीलैंड के 422 युवाओं पर किए गए एक अध्ययन में भी ताजा फलों-सब्जियों और अच्छी दिमागी सेहत के बीच संबंध मिला था। इसमें यह भी सामने

आया कि दिमाग को ताजे फलों-सब्जियों से फायदा होता है, डिब्बाबंद फल या जूस आदि से लाभ नहीं होता। वैज्ञानिकों का कहना है कि कोई ऐसा खानपान नहीं है, जिसे हर परिवेश में हर व्यक्ति के लिए सही कहा जा सके। बावजूद इसके कुछ बातों का ध्यान सभी को रखना चाहिए। प्रोसेस्ड फूड एवं मांस का कम सेवन और सब्जियों एवं अनाज को भोजन में शामिल करना शरीर के साथ-साथ दिमाग की सेहत के लिए भी अच्छा है।

भोजन का हमारे नैतिक और आध्यात्मिक स्वभाव से भी गहरा संबंध है। जो भोजन हमारे शरीर को पुष्ट और संवर्द्धित करता है उसका हमारे मन पर भी प्रभाव पड़ता है। अतः हम जैसा भोजन करेंगे, मन उससे प्रभावित होगा। गीता में सात्विक, राजसिक और तामसिक प्रकृति के व्यक्तियों के लिए अलग-अलग प्रकार के भोज्य पदार्थ बताए गए हैं। हालांकि भोजन का प्रभाव केवल शरीर अथवा सतही मन की अपेक्षा और भी गहरा होता है। यहाँ बात आध्यात्मिक साधक के भोजन को लेकर है। सामान्यतः शाकाहारी भोजन आध्यात्मिक जीवन में अत्यंत सहायक होता है।

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

राजनीति की नई राह पर मायावती

प्रदीप सिंह

मायावती के एक कदम ने दलित-मुस्लिम राजनीति की धुरी बनाने के प्रयासों में पलीता लगा दिया, जबकि वह खुद इस संभावित धुरी के केंद्र में हो सकती थीं



देश और राजनीतिक दलों के इतिहास में कभी-कभी किसी बड़ी घटना के साथ होने वाली सामान्य सी घटना बड़े बदलाव की नींव रख देती है। संसद के दोनों सदनों में जम्मू-कश्मीर का पुनर्गठन करने और अनुच्छेद 370 को निष्प्रभावी बनाने के प्रस्तावों का बहुजन समाज पार्टी ने समर्थन किया। सुनने में यह बात बहुत सामान्य सी लगती है, क्योंकि कई अन्य विपक्षी दलों ने सरकार के प्रस्ताव का समर्थन किया, लेकिन मायावती के इस फैसले से देश की राजनीति को एक नई दिशा में ले जाने की विपक्षी दलों की कोशिश को बड़ा झटका लगा। वह दिशा है, देश में दलित-मुस्लिम समीकरण की नई राजनीति गढ़ने की। मायावती का दलित जनधार कितना भी कम हो गया हो, लेकिन वह आज भी देश में दलित समाज की सबसे बड़ी नेता हैं। कश्मीर मुद्दे पर रण्यसभा में सत्तारूढ़ दल को मिले इतने बड़े (दो तिहाई) समर्थन से विपक्षी दलों को जितना बड़ा झटका लगा उससे बड़ा धक्का मायावती के रुख से लगा।

मायावती वहीं नहीं रुकीं। उन्होंने बाकायदा इसे अपनी पार्टी की विचारधारा और बाबा साहब डॉ. भीमराव आंबेडकर के विचारों से जोड़कर व्यापक आयाम दिया। उन्होंने कहा कि बाबा साहब शुरू से ही अनुच्छेद 370 के खिलाफ थे। यह ऐतिहासिक तथ्य है कि बाबा साहब ने इस विशेष प्राधान्य का न केवल ड्राफ्ट तैयार करने से मन नकार दिया था, बल्कि जब अपने

राजनीतिक दल रिपब्लिकन पार्टी का गठन किया तो उसके घोषणा पत्र में अनुच्छेद 370 को खत्म किए जाने की बात लिखी। बहुत से लोगों को लग रहा है कि बसपा मुखिया आजकल कुछ बदली- बदली नजर आ रही हैं, लेकिन मायावती के रुख में आया बदलाव राजनीतिक संस्कृति के लिहाज से सुखद अनुभूति देने वाला है, क्योंकि आज राष्ट्रीय और सामाजिक हित को तरजीह देने की राजनीतिक संस्कृति विलुप्त सी होती जा रही है। मुद्दा अनुच्छेद 370 को निष्प्रभावी करने का हो, विपक्षी नेताओं के श्रीनगर जाने के विरोध का हो या दिल्ली में रविदास मंदिर पर हूए प्रदर्शन का समर्थन न करने का हो या फिर पार्टी मंच पर अपने परिवजनों को नहीं बैठाने का हो-इन सभी बातों से मायावती एक बदलाव का संकेत दे रही हैं। सवाल है कि इन इशकों के जरिये वह अपनी राजनीति को किस नई दिशा में ले जाना चाहती हैं? दिशा और दशा कोई भी हो, लेकिन उनका आत्मविश्वास गजब का है।

मायावती के पास इस बात का विकल्प था कि वह कश्मीर मुद्दे पर प्रमित करने वाला रुख अख्तियार कर लेतीं ताकि यह लगता कि वह समर्थन भी कर रही हैं और विरोध भी। सपा के अध्यक्ष अखिलेश यादव ने यही करने का प्रयास किया, लेकिन उन्हें न खुदा मिला और न ही मिसाले सनम। इस कदम से बसपा प्रमुख ने एक बार फिर बताया कि वह आंबेडकर



अवधेश राजपूत

और कांशीराम की उस परंपरा की वास्तविक वारिस हैं जिसमें मुद्दों पर साफगोई से कोई समझौता नहीं किया जाता। बाबा साहब हों या कांशीराम, दोनों ने कभी मुस्लिम तुष्टीकरण का प्रयास नहीं किया। देश में किसी पार्टी के किसी नेता ने सार्वजनिक मंच से जामा मस्जिद के इमाम अब्दुल्ला खुखारी के बारे में यह कहने का साहस नहीं किया कि 'खुखारी का बुखार तो मैं उतारूंगा।' कांशीराम ने लखनऊ के बेगम हजरत महल पार्क की जनसभा में यह तब कहा नारा दिया था। साल 2019 के चुनावों में भी अखिलेश यादव से लेकर कांग्रेस तक तमाम विपक्षी दलों ने इस राजनीतिक समीकरण को उभारने की कोशिश की। उन्हें लगता है कि हिंदू एकाता को तोड़ने और भाजपा को परास्त करने का यही सबसे कारगर औजार है। इसलिए चुनाव के दौरान इन पार्टियों और खासतौर से इनके समर्थक बुद्धिजीवियों की ओर से

विभिन्न गुण्यों और चुनाव क्षेत्रों में मतदाताओं के आंकड़े देते समय बताया जाता कि इतने हिंदू, इतने मुस्लिम और इतने दलित/आदिवासी मतदाता हैं। जैसे दलित, आदिवासी हिंदू धर्म के बजाय किसी और धर्म के अनुयायी हों। मायावती के एक कदम ने इस नई राजनीतिक धुरी बनाने के प्रयासों में पलीता लगा दिया। इस संभावित धुरी के केंद्र में मायावती ही हो सकती थीं। उनका एक बयान इस धुरी को हकीकत बनाने की दिशा में ले जा सकता था। हालांकि तुलना बेमानी है और यह निष्कर्ष निकालना जल्दबाजी होगी कि मायावती का यह भाव स्थाई रहेगा, लेकिन यदि उनके रुख में निरंतरता बनी रहती है तो कभी न कभी मायावती के इस रुख की तुलना बाबा साहब के हिंदू धर्म छोड़ करके इस्लाम या ईसाई धर्म न ग्रहण करने के कदम से होगी। दलित-मुस्लिम गठजोड़ की धुरी मायावती को राष्ट्रीय राजनीति के केंद्र में ला सकती थी, लेकिन यह दूसरी बार हो रहा है कि किसी दलित नेता ने हिंदू एकाता को तोड़ने के प्रयास से परहेज किया।

कुछ लोग कह सकते हैं कि मायावती यह सब मोदी सरकार के दबाव में कर रही हैं। ऐसे लोगों को याद दिलाना जरूरी है कि

अपेक्षाओं के दबाव से जूझते शिक्षक

भारतीय समाज में गुरु, अध्यापक, शिक्षक, उस्ताद और आचार्य की महिमा का बखान करतीं बहुत सी मिसालें प्रचलित हैं जो उसे सामाजिक प्रतिष्ठा के शिखर पर स्थापित करती हैं। यही नहीं, विभिन्न अवसरों पर अभी भी गुरु की पूजा के उदाहरण मिलते हैं। यह उस समाज में स्वाभाविक ही था जिसमें शिक्षा की संस्था एक अनिवार्य आवश्यकता के रूप में स्थापित थी। उसके केंद्र में गुरु था जो शिक्षण-प्रशिक्षण के साथ अपने सहज एवं निष्कण्ट आचरण द्वारा विद्यार्थियों में नैतिकता और मूल्यों के बीज बोता था। उसके सान्निध्य में विद्यार्थी को मानवीय सामर्थ्य के साथ नया जन्म मिलता था। गुरु और उसके गुरुकुल की व्यवस्था सामूहिक जिम्मेदारी के रूप में स्वीकार की गई थी और गुरु को दैनिक चिंताओं से मुक्त रखा जाता था। ज्ञान का प्रवाह बना रहे और सदगुरु संपन्न नागरिक हों, इसके लिए सुकरात ने तो प्ल्युटॉड भी स्वीकार किया था। कृष्ण, बुद्ध, शंकराचार्य और चणक्य जैसे गुरुओं की कथा सर्वविदित है। गुरु-शिष्य परंपरा की भी बहुतेरी कहानियां प्रचलित हैं। सिख धर्म में 'मनमुख' नहीं और 'गुरुमुख' होना ही हितकर माना गया है। गुरु की सामाजिक जीवन में केंद्रीय भूमिका रखी गई थी।

गुरु से अपेक्षा होती है कि वह छात्र को निखारेगा। गुरु कहने में वह पूरा ज्ञान भी शामिल हो जाता है जो गुरु द्वारा प्रतिपादित और संश्लेषित किया जाता है। विचार संप्रदाय का प्रतिनिधि होता है। गुरु को इस कार्य के लिए स्वायत्तता प्राप्त थी कि वह जिस ज्ञान को उचित समझता है उसे अपने छात्रों को उपलब्ध कराए। यह उसका दायित्व था कि वह यह निर्धारित करे कि उस ज्ञान और कौशल को वह किस तरह छात्र को सौंपेगा। गुरु की गरिमा इसमें होती है कि वह शिष्य को सुभात्र बनाए और समाज की सोच को दिशा दे। गुरु को अन्यायस ही महिमाहित नहीं किया गया। उससे अपेक्षा थी कि वह विश्वास और भरोसे के साथ छात्र का व्यक्तिगत निर्माण करेगा। अध्ययन-अध्यापन के प्रति संतक भाव से निर्माणात्मक, अहंकारमुक्त, और वत्सल भाव वाले गुरु-सदगुरु सीमित आवश्यकताओं के साथ जीने का अभ्यास करते थे और मूल्य की प्रतिष्ठा ही उनके ऋषिकल्प जीवन का केंद्र होता था, परंतु शिक्षा और शिष्यक की यह संवैधानिक धीरे-धीरे बदलती रही। उस पर आतताइयों के आक्रमण भी हुए और नालंदा जैसा विश्वस्तरीय विश्वविद्यालय नष्ट कर दिया गया। अंग्रेजों ने अपने हंग से शिक्षा को नया सांचा दिया और विषयवस्तु ने इस तरह बदला कि हम वह नहीं रह सके



गिरिशवर मिश्र

शिक्षा की संस्थागत परिपाटियों को सुधारने की जरूरत है, क्योंकि समर्पित शिक्षकों का कोई विकल्प नहीं है



जो थे। शिक्षा यदि समाज को प्रभावित करती है तो वह स्वयं भी देशकाल से प्रभावित होती है। वैश्वीकरण के इस दौर में व्यापक स्तर पर होने वाले सामाजिक-आर्थिक और तकनीकी परिवर्तनों का सीधा असर शिक्षा पर पड़ा है। समाज किस तरह की शिक्षा चाहता है, यह उसके रुझान से पता चलता है। समय के साथ शिक्षा के स्रोत और भूमिका में भी बदलाव आता रहा।

पहले साक्षरता कम थी और पढ़े-लिखे लोग ही शिक्षा के माध्यम थे। अब मीडिया के अथाह विस्तार के साथ सूचना और ज्ञान के साधन भी विकेंद्रित होकर सब तक पहुंच रहे हैं। अब विद्यालय ही एकमात्र शिक्षा का केंद्र नहीं रह गया है। धीरे-धीरे दूरस्थ शिक्षा प्रत्यक्ष शिक्षा के सहायक के रूप में ही नहीं, बल्कि विकल्प के रूप में भी उपस्थित हो रही है। अब शिक्षा के विभिन्न उपकरण विद्यार्थी को सीधे-से में सहूलियत दे रहे हैं। एक तरह से ये उपकरण मानव संबंधों की अहंमियत घटा रहे हैं।

इन सबके बीच औपचारिक शिक्षा की पूर्व प्रचलित व्यवस्था नाकामी और उबाउत होती जा रही है। नए जमाने के इन नवमेधावियों को ध्यान में रखकर शिक्षा और शिक्षक दोनों पर पुनर्विचार जरूरी होता जा रहा है। अब ज्ञान देने वाले तकनीकी गुरुओं के नए संस्करण भी आ रहे हैं, जो पूरी शिक्षा प्रक्रिया को नया आकार दे रहे हैं। इसका सीधा असर गुरु की परंपरागत भूमिका और

प्रासंगिकता पर पड़ रहा है। आज तमाम विषयों पर गूगल स्कॉलर, फेसबुक, टैड कॉफ्रिस और यू ट्यूब आदि के द्वारा प्रचुर मात्रा में पठनीय सामग्री सरलता से मिल जाती है। ई-माध्यमों पर उपस्थित सामग्री की सशक्त प्रस्तुतियां बड़ी ही लोकप्रिय हो रही हैं। यह प्रवृत्ति सूचना और संचार प्रौद्योगिकी के विस्तार के साथ गगर से लेकर गांव तक फैल रही है। शिक्षा के मानवीय आधार को तकनीकी उपाय विस्थापित करते जा रहे हैं। ये परिवर्तन शिक्षक की भूमिका को प्रश्नांकित कर रहे हैं। आज की बदलती परिस्थितियों में अध्यापन की दूसरे व्यवसायों की तरह एक व्यवसाय का रूप लेता जा रहा है। शिक्षक होना आज के युवा की पसंद में काफी नीचे स्थान पाता है, क्योंकि प्रभुत्व और आर्थिक दृष्टि से यह अधिक आकर्षक नहीं है। अब गुरु की प्रतिमा नए रंग ग्रहण कर रही है। अब शिक्षकों को लेकर आचरणगत आरोप-प्रत्यारोप भी किए जा रहे हैं। आज बाजार के बढ़ते प्रभाव ने शिक्षा की प्रक्रिया और शिक्षक दोनों को आर्थिक प्रलोभनों के दायरे में ले लिया है। अपने जीवन स्तर में सुधार की तमना लिए और समाज में नैतिक अस्पष्टता और मूल्यद्रोह को देख-देख शिक्षक भी विचलित हो रहे हैं। कई अध्यापक सामान्य कक्षा और विद्यालय जीवन की उपेक्षा कर अर्थोपार्जन के अन्य कार्यों में व्यस्त रहने लगे हैं।

आज चारों ओर अध्यापकों का टोटा है और शासन या तो उदास है या तटस्थ है या फिर राजनीतिक या कानूनी दायपंच को देखलेंदजी से शिक्षा जानत त्रस्ता-ष्ट हो निरुपाय हो रहा है। अध्यापक की गरिमा दिनोंदिन घट रही है। शायद निर्दोह शिक्षक के व्यवसाय के साथ जितनी छूट ली जा रही है वैसा उदाहरण दूसरे किसी और पेशे में नहीं मिलेगा। अध्यापकों के वेतन, सुविधाओं, सेवानिवृत्ति की आयु और दायित्वों में कोई तालमेल नहीं है। संवैधानिक दृष्टि से समवर्ती सूची में होने के कारण केंद्र और राज्य की शिक्षा संस्थाओं के बीच अनेक विसंगतियां बनी हुई हैं। शिक्षण कार्य की गुणवत्ता को सुनिश्चित करने के लिए प्रशिक्षण को महत्व दिया गया पर उसका भी अब दुरुपयोग शुरू हो गया, जिसके चलते उस पर लगाम लगानी पड़ी। अब शिक्षा की संस्थागत परिपाटियों को सुधारने की जरूरत है, क्योंकि चित्रित्रावन और समर्पित शिक्षकों का कोई विकल्प नहीं है।

(लेखक महत्त्वा गांधी अंतरराष्ट्रीय हिंदी विश्वविद्यालय, वर्धा के कुलपति रहे हैं)

response@jagran.com



सच्चा गुरु मंत्र

सुरप्रसिद्ध दार्शनिक सुकरात के जीवन से जुड़ी एक घटना है जिसके कथ्य अत्यंत प्रेरणादायी हैं। एक बार सुकरात के पास एक विद्वत् निराश और हाताश होकर आया। उसने बड़ी विनम्रता से उनसे प्रार्थना की, 'मैं अपने जीवन की असफलताओं से परेशान हो गया हूँ। मैंने अपने जीवन में जो भी सपने देखे, वे कभी साकार नहीं हुए? आपको बड़ी कृपा होगी यदि आप मुझे जीवन में सफल होने के लिए कोई गुरु मंत्र बता दें।' सुकरात उस व्यक्ति को एक नदी के किनारे लेकर आ गए। देखते-देखते वे दोनों नदी के मध्य में आ गए। हैरत तब हुई जब सुकरात उस व्यक्ति का सिर पकड़ कर नदी में डुबो देते। अंत में सुकरात उसे नदी के किनारे सांस लेने के लिए छटपटाते और अपना सिर पानी से बाहर निकालने की शिहत से कोशिशें करता, लेकिन हर कोशिश के साथ सुकरात उसका सिर उतनी ही तीव्रता से नदी में डुबो देते। अंत में सुकरात उसे नदी के किनारे ले आए। बाहर आकर याचक ने खुली हवा में राहत की सांस ली और क्रोशित होते हुए पूछा, 'आप यह क्या कर रहे थे? ऐसे तो मेरी जान जाती जाती। इसमें सफल होने का कौन-सा गुरु-मंत्र छुपा हुआ है?'

सुकरात ने उसे समझाया, 'जब नदी के मध्य में तुम्हारा सिर पानी में डुबो रहा था तो तुम्हें सबसे अधिक किसकी जरूरत महसूस हो रही थी?' 'सांस के लिए हवा की', व्यक्ति ने अंत में सुकरात से कहा। सुकरात और भी गंभीर होते हुए बोले, 'सफलता के लिए यही गुरु मंत्र है। जीवन में देखे गए सपने को साकार करने के लिए तुममें उसी प्रकार की बेचैनी होनी चाहिए जो नदी के मध्य में तुममें सांस को पाने के लिए थी। सफल होने के लिए यही छटपटाहट सफलता का कालजयी गुरु मंत्र है।' इस दुनिया में सफल होने का सपना कौन नहीं देखता है? लेकिन इसके लिए हममें त्याग, तपस्या और संयमता का आभाव होता है। जितना सफल होने के लिए जब आपको अपने लक्ष्य के अतिरिक्त कुछ भी दिखाई नहीं दे तो यह मानकर रहिए कि आप जीवन में सफलता के सोपान पर आरूढ़ हो गए हैं।

श्रीप्रकाश शर्मा

मेलबाक्स

देश का जनसांख्यिकी संतुलन बिगड़ है अपितु देश के संसाधनों पर भी अनावश्यक बोझ बढ़ा है। देश के शासन-तंत्र को इसे बहुत पहले ही दुरुस्त कर लेना चाहिए था, लेकिन नुष्टीकरण की विकृत राजनीति के चलते ऐसा संभव नहीं हो सका। अब वक्त की मांग है कि अवैध घुसपैठियों की पहचान सुनिश्चित करके भारत के अंदर फैल रही इस महामारी को समूल रूप से खत्म किया जाए।

pandeyp1960@gmail.com

समाज का वास्तुकार

पांच सितंबर को पूरे भारतवर्ष में उष्णकटिबंधीय एवं मध्यमकटिबंधीय क्षेत्रों में अनेक शहरों में शिवरात्रि का उत्सव मनाया जा रहा है। इसका विचार था कि देश में सबसे अच्छा मस्तिष्क शिक्षकों का होना चाहिए। इस तथ्य को कदापि झुटलाना नहीं जा सकता कि शिक्षक किसी भी समाज के वास्तविक वास्तुकार हैं, बिना इनके किसी भी समाज की प्रगति की कल्पना ही नहीं की जा सकती। आज वास्तव में दुनिया भर में भारत का जो वर्चस्व बना हुआ है उसे बनाने में शिक्षकों की अहम भूमिका रही है। आज हम सभी को प्रगतिशील और जिम्मेदार व्यक्ति बनाने में शिक्षकों के प्रयासों को स्वीकारना और सराहना ही होगा।

हेमंत सिंह (अध्यापक)

नए यातायात नियम

नए मोटर वाहन कानून में कड़े जुर्माने का प्रावधान किया गया है। इससे उन लोगों को परेशानी हो रही है, जो यातायात

नियमों का पालन नहीं करते हैं। लेकिन इसके काफी फायदे हैं। अगर लोग नियमों का पालन करने लगे तो रोज ही दुर्घटनाओं पर निश्चित रूप से रोक लगेगी। हालांकि इससे भ्रष्टाचार भी बढ़ सकता है। क्योंकि ज्यादा जुर्माना होने पर लोग पुलिस को कुछ पैसा देकर जुर्माने की राशि बचाना चाहेंगे। इस कानून को लागू करते समय पुलिस पर भी नजर रखने की जरूरत है। वैसे भी यातायात नियमों का पालन कोई आसानी से नहीं करने वाला है। इसके लिए सख्ती करनी ही होगी।

विजय कुमार धनिया, नई दिल्ली

नियमों की अवेहलान

गुरग्राम में एक व्यक्ति को बिना हेल्मेट के स्कूटर चलाते पकड़ा गया। उनके पास लाइसेंस भी नहीं था और कोई कागजात भी नहीं थे। ऐसी हालत में स्कूटर चलाने वाले पर जुर्माना ही नहीं, अपितु और भी कड़ी कार्रवाई की जानी चाहिए। जब तक ऐसे लोगों के खिलाफ कार्रवाई नहीं होगी, यातायात नियमों का पालन करना संभव नहीं होगा।

श्रीनिवास यादव, गाजियाबाद

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

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

हादसों के ठिकाने

औद्योगिक हादसों पर काबू पाने और कारखानों में काम करने वाले लोगों की सुरक्षा के पुख्ता उपाय करने की जरूरत लंबे समय से रेखांकित की जाती रही है मगर इस दिशा में अपेक्षित ध्यान अब तक नहीं दिया गया है। यही वजह है कि जब–तब कारखानों में आग लगने, रसायन और गैस आदि के रिसाव से बड़े हादसे हो जाते हैं। पिछले पांच दिनों में देश के विभिन्न हिस्सों में ऐसे तीन बड़े हादसे हो गए। महाराष्ट्र के धुले में एक रसायन कारखाने में रसायन के रिसाव से लगी आग में करीब पंद्रह लोगों की मौत हो गई। फिर देश की सबसे बड़ी तेल और प्राकृतिक गैस कंपनी ओएनजीसी की मुंबई इकाई में भीषण आग लग गई, जिसमें कई लोगों की जान चली गई। अभी ओएनजीसी की आग शांत भी नहीं पड़ी थी कि पंजाब में अमृतसर के पास एक पटाखा फैक्ट्री में आग लग गई, जिसमें करीब 18 लोगों के मारे जाने की खबर है। करीब पांच महीने पहले भी अमृतसर के पास इसी तरह एक पटाखा फैक्ट्री में आग लगी थी, जिसमें कई लोगों को अपनी जान से हाथ धोना पड़ा था। हैरानी की बात है कि ऐसे हादसों से न तो कारखाना मालिक कोई सबक लेते हैं और न सरकारी महकमे सुरक्षा नियमों की अनदेखी पर कड़े कदम उठाना जरूरी समझते हैं।

छोटी औद्योगिक इकाइयां चूँकि कम पूँजी से लगाईं और चलाई जाती हैं, उनमें आमतौर पर भवन निर्माण और सुरक्षा संबंधी उपायों पर पर्याप्त ध्यान नहीं दिया जाता। वे आग, रसायन और गैस आदि के रिसाव की स्थिति से बचने के लिए सुरक्षा उपकरणों आदि पर खर्च करने से बचती देखी जाती हैं। उनकी नियम–कायदों की अनदेखी में सरकारी महकमों के संबंधित अधिकारी भी मदद करते हैं। मगर ओएनजीसी जैसी बड़ी और सुव्यवस्थित इकाइयों में भी ऐसी घटनाएं हो जाती हैं, तो औद्योगिक सुरक्षा को लेकर स्वाभाविक रूप से सवाल गहरे होते हैं। ऐसे ही हादसों को देखते हुए परमाणु बिजलीघरों का विरोध होता रहा है कि अगर कभी किसी चूक से उनमें हादसे हुए तो महा विनाश हो सकता है। भारत में औद्योगिक हादसे का अब तक का सबसे बड़ा उदाहरण भोपाल गैस कांड है, जिसके नतीजे बरसों लोगों को भुगतने पड़े। इसलिए औद्योगिक सुरक्षा पर विशेष बल दिया जाता रहा है। मगर आज जब तमाम चीजें कंप्यूटर और अत्याधुनिक सूचना प्रणाली से संचालित होने लगी हैं, हैरानी की बात है कि समय रहते ओएनजीसी जैसे हादसों पर काबू पाना संभव नहीं हो पाया है।

औद्योगिक हादसों के दुष्परिणाम केवल कुछ लोगों की जान चली जाने तक सीमित नहीं होते। कई बार उनके बुरे प्रभाव बरसों तक बने रहते हैं। रासायनिक गैसों के रिसाव से होने वाले हादसे कारखानों से बाहरे बसे लोगों की भी सेहत पर बहुत बुरा प्रभाव डालते हैं। मगर हालत यह है कि बहुत सारी छोटी औद्योगिक इकाइयां अपने यहां काम करने वाले लोगों को जरूरी दस्ताने, हेलमेट, मास्क आदि उपलब्ध नहीं करातीं। वे हादसों से रोकथाम संबंधी उपकरण पर कितना ध्यान दे पाती होंगी, अंदाजा लगाया जा सकता है। पटाखा बनाने वाले कारखानों में बड़ी संख्या में बच्चे काम करते हैं। उनकी सांसें में गंधक घुलती रहती है और वे फेफड़े आदि संबंधी बीमारियों की गिरफ्त में आ जाते हैं। फिर आग से उनकी जान का जोखिम सदा बना रहता है। जब तक औद्योगिक सुरक्षा पर गंभीरता से ध्यान नहीं दिया जाएगा, ऐसे हादसों पर काबू पाना चुनौती बना रहेगा।

अपाचे की ताकत

बदलते दौर में जैसी गंभीर सामरिक चुनौतियां सामने आ रही हैं और लड़ाई के तौर–तरीके बदल रहे हैं, उसे देखते हुए अत्याधुनिक हथियारों और साधनों की जरूरत भी बढ़ी है। ऐसे में सेना के आधुनिकीकरण की महत्ता से इंकार नहीं किया जा सकता। भारतीय वायु सेना के इतिहास में मंगलवार को उस वक्त नया अस्थाय जुड़ गया जब उसने दुनिया के सबसे आधुनिक लड़ाकू हेलिकॉप्टर–अपाचे एएच–64 ई को अपने बेड़े में शामिल कर लिया। अमेरिका से खरीदे गए इन हेलिकप्टरों को फिलहाल पटानकोट के वायुमैिनिक अड्डे पर तैनात किया गया है। यह इलाका पाकिस्तान की सीमा के सबसे करीब है। फिलहाल भारत को आठ अपाचे मिले हैं। इन हेलिकॉप्टरों की खरीद के लिए भारत ने 2015 में अमेरिका के साथ करार किया था। हालांकि वायु सेना को इन हेलिकॉप्टरों की जरूरत कई सालों से थी। सेना के लिए जरूरी साजो–सामान खरीदने में इस तरह की देरी सेना को कमजोर ही करती है। आज मिस्र, ग्रीस, इंडोनेशिया, इजराइल, कुवैत, नीदरलैंड, कतर, सऊदी अरब, सिंगापुर सहित दुनिया के पंद्रह देशों के पास अपाचे हेलिकॉप्टर हैं। इन देशों के मुकाबले तो भारत की सामरिक जरूरतें कहीं ज्यादा बड़ी हैं।

भारत को सबसे बड़ी चुनौती अपने दो पड़ोसियों पाकिस्तान और चीन से है। हाल में पाकिस्तान ने भारत के खिलाफ जिस तरह का हमलावर रुख अपनाया हुआ है और बार–बार युद्ध की धमकियां दे रहा है, उसे देखते हुए जरूरी है कि हमारी वायु सेना अत्याधुनिक लड़ाकू विमानों और हेलिकॉप्टरों से सुसज्जित हो। हालांकि भारत अपनी ओर से युद्ध से बचने की नीति पर चलने वाला देश है, लेकिन दुश्मन के हमले का जवाब देने के लिए सेना का मजबूत होना जरूरी है। वायु सेना के बेड़े में अपाचे के शामिल होने से सेना की मारक क्षमता काफी बढ़ेगी। अपाचे दुश्मन को करारा जवाब देने के लिए काफी है। यह एक मिनट में एक सौ अट्टाईस लक्ष्यों पर निशाना साध सकता है। एक साथ सोलह टैंकरोधी मिसाइलें छोड़ने में सक्षम है। इसमें नीचे की ओर लगी राइफल में एक साथ बारह सौ गोलियां भरी जा सकती हैं। दो इंजनों वाले अपाचे की रफ्तार तो ज्यादा है ही, यह लगातार तीन घंटे उड़ान भर सकता है और कुछ ही मिनटों में दुश्मन के ठिकानों को तबाह कर सकता है। इसे किसी रडार पर भी नहीं पकड़ा जा सकता।

पिछले कुछ वर्षों में भारतीय वायु सेना के मिग विमान जिस तेजी से दुर्घटनाग्रस्त होते रहे हैं उससे यह सवाल उठना स्वाभाविक है कि आखिर कब तक हमारी सेना इन पुराने विमानों के सहारे दुश्मन से लोहा लेगी! ऊंचे और दुर्गम पहाड़ी इलाकों में सैनिकों को लाना–ले जाना, रसद और हथियार पहुंचाना वायु सेना के लिए अब तक मुश्किलों भरा काम था। इसके लिए वायु सेना ने चिन्नूक हेलिकाप्टर अपने बेड़े में शामिल किए हैं। लेकिन अब समस्या पाकिस्तान के साथ लगी सीमा पर घुसपैठियों को रोकने की है। अपाचे की मदद से घुसपैठियों को ढेर किया जा सकेगा। ये विमान अंधेरे में भी लक्ष्य को भेद सकते हैं। ऐसे में अपाचे सीमा की सुरक्षा में ज्यादा कारगर साबित होंगे। अब वायु सेना के अच्छे दिन आ गए हैं। इसी महीने देश फ्रांस से रफाल की पहली खेप भी मिलने वाली है। अगर देश के नीति–निर्माता सामरिक जरूरतों का समय से खयाल रखते हुए इसमें फैंसले लेने में देरी न करते तो सेना को संसाधनों की कमी से जूझना न पड़ता।

कल्पमेधा

जैसे–जैसे परोपकार के लिए रुपए की थैली खाली होती है, वैसे–वैसे हमारा दिल भरता जाता है।

–विक्टर ह्यूगो

जनसत्ता

योगेश कुमार गोयल

रैगिंग के नाम पर अमानवीय यातनाएं देने के ऐसे सैकड़ों मामले सामने आते रहे हैं। छात्रों को मुर्गा बनाना, निर्वस्त्र कर देना, बेरहमी से पीटना, बिजली के गर्म हीटर पर पेशाब कराने जैसी घटनाएं बताती हैं कि हम कैसा अमानवीय समाज बनाते जा रहे हैं। पढ़े–लिखे नौजवानों के मन में इस कदर हिंसा कूट–कूट कर भरी हो तो यह चिंता की बात है। यह एक कुंडित और बीमार होते समाज का संकेत है।

शिक्षण संस्थानों में रैगिंग रोकने के लिए सख्त अदालती दिशा–निर्देशों के बावजूद पिछले कुछ समय से देश के विभिन्न हिस्सों से कॉलेजों में रैगिंग के मामले सामने आ रहे हैं। सर्वोच्च अदालत के निर्देशों के बाद भी इस तरह की घटनाओं पर अंकुश नहीं लग पाना चिंताजनक है। कुछ दिन पहले ही उत्तर प्रदेश के इटावा में जिले के सैफई मेडिकल कालेज, जिसे मिनी पीजीआइ भी कहा जाता है, में सीनियर छात्रों ने रैगिंग के नाम पर डेढ़ सौ जूनियर छात्रों के सिर मुंडवा दिए। मुख्यमंत्री के आदेश पर इस मामले की अभी जांच चल ही रही थी कि एक–एक कर अलग–अलग स्थानों से कई और ऐसे ही मामले सामने आ गए। इससे पता चलता है कि सीनियर छात्रों को अपनी क्षणिक मस्ती, उद्वृंदता और रौब कायम करने के लिए अदालती आदेशों की कितनी परवाह है। उन्हें इस बात की भी चिंता नहीं होती कि रैगिंग में उनकी सल्लिप्तता

रैगिंग का रोग और सवाल

साबित होने पर उनके भविष्य का क्या ह्म्र होगा। हैरानी की बात यह है कि पहले रैगिंग में अधिकांशतः लड़के ही ज्यादा शामिल पाए जाते थे, किंतु अब इसमें लड़कियों की सल्लिप्तता भी कम नहीं है। पिछले महीने देहरादून के राजकीय दून मेडिकल कालेज के गर्ल्स हॉस्टल में सीनियर छात्राओं ने जूनियर छात्राओं की रात के समय करीब तीन घंटे तक रैगिंग करते हुए उनके बाल कटवा दिए। आरोप है कि 2017 बैच के छात्रों ने रैगिंग के नाम पर इस शर्मनाक हरकत को अंजाम दिया। ऐसा ही एक मामला हल्द्वानी राजकीय मेडिकल कालेज में भी सामने आया, जिसमें पीड़ित छात्रा की शिकायत को गंभीरता से लेते हुए यूनिवर्सिटी ने चिकित्सा शिक्षा विभाग के निदेशक को मामला जांच के लिए भेज दिया है। इसी तरह कानपुर के चंद्रशेखर आजाद कृषि एवं प्रौद्योगिकी विश्वविद्यालय में जूनियर छात्रों के छात्रावासों में धावा बोलते हुए करीब सौ सीनियर छात्रों ने सभी जूनियर छात्रों के कपड़े उतरवा कर उन्हें मुर्गा बनाया और पिटाई की। इतना ही नहीं, हर छात्र को कक्षा में बिना कपड़े आने को कहा गया।

वर्ष 2009 में हिमाचल के धर्मशाला में एक मेडिकल कालेज के छात्र अमन काचरू की रैगिंग से मौत के बाद सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने देश के सभी शिक्षण संस्थानों में रैगिंग विरोधी कानून सख्ती से लागू करने के आदेश दिए थे। इसके तहत दोषी पाए जाने पर ऐसे छात्र को तीन साल का सश्रम कारावास हो सकता है और उस पर आर्थिक दंड भी लगाया जा सकता है। रैगिंग करने का दोषी पाए जाने पर आरोपी छात्र को कालेज और हॉस्टल से निलंबित या खर्बास्त किया जा सकता है, उसकी छात्रवृत्ति और अन्य सुविधाओं पर रोक, परीक्षा देने या परीक्षा परिणाम घोषित करने पर प्रतिबंध लगाने के अलावा किसी अन्य संस्थान में उसके दाखिले पर भी रोक लगाई जा सकती है। इसके अलावा रैगिंग के मामले में कार्रवाई न करने अथवा मामले की अनदेखी करने पर कालेज के खिलाफ भी कार्रवाई हो सकती है, इसमें कालेज पर आर्थिक दंड लगाने के अलावा कालेज की मान्यता रद्द करने का भी प्रावधान है। अदालत के दिशा–निर्देशों के तहत किसी छात्र के रंग–रूप या उसके पहनावे पर टिप्पणी करना, उसके स्वाभिमान को ठेस पहुंचाना, उसकी क्षेत्रीयता, भाषा या जाति के आधार पर अपमान करना, उसकी नस्ल या पारिवारिक पृष्ठभूमि पर अभद्र टिप्पणी करना या उसकी मर्जी के बिना जबरन किसी

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प्रकार का अनावश्यक कार्य कराया जाना रैगिंग के दायरे में सम्मिलित किया गया है। उल्लेखनीय है कि आठ मार्च 2009 को हिमाचल में कांगड़ा के डा. राजेंद्र प्रसाद मेडिकल कालेज में रैगिंग के दौरान चार सीनियर छात्रों ने प्रथम वर्ष के छात्र अमन सत्य काचरू को इतनी बेरहमी से पीटा था कि उसकी मौत हो गई थी। अमन और उसके कुछ मित्रों ने रैगिंग की लिखित शिकायत कालेज के प्रिंसिपल और हॉस्टल अधिकारियों को की थी लेकिन कालेज प्रशासन ने कोई कदम नहीं उठाया था। इससे सीनियर छात्रों का हौंसला इस कदर बढ़ा कि उन्होंने शराब पीकर रैगिंग के नाम पर देर रात अमन को इस कदर पीटा कि उसकी मौत हो गई।

रैगिंग के नाम पर अमानवीय यातनाएं देने के ऐसे सैकड़ों मामले सामने आते रहे हैं। छात्रों को मुर्गा बनाना, निर्वस्त्र कर देना, बेरहमी से पीटना, बिजली के गर्म हीटर पर पेशाब कराने जैसी घटनाएं बताती हैं कि हम कैसा अमानवीय समाज बनाते जा रहे हैं।



किसी पढ़े–लिखे नौजवानों के मन में इस कदर हिंसा कूट–कूट के भरी हो तो यह चिंता की बात है। यह एक कुंडित और बीमार होते समाज का संकेत है। रैगिंग का मतलब नए छात्रों से परिचय, हल्का–फुल्का हंसी–मजाक होता है। लेकिन अमानवीयता की हदें पार कर जाने को क्या रैगिंग की स्वस्थ परंपरा कहा जाएगा? दक्षिण भारत के एक इंजीनियरिंग कालेज में सीनियर छात्रों ने एक जूनियर छात्र को बीच–पाटी में रैगिंग के दौरान समुद्र में प्रवेश करने का फरमान दिया। जब उस छात्र ने आनाकानी की तो वरिष्ठों ने उसे जबरन समुद्र में धकेल दिया और इस तरह एक भावी इंजीनियर सदा के लिए समुद्र में चला गया। क्या इसे रैगिंग कहा जाएगा?

सपनों से आगे

देवेश

उसने बारहवीं अच्छे नंबरों से पास कर ली है। बारहवीं से आगे पढ़ना कभी उसका सपना नहीं रहा। पहले कभी कहती थी कि बस बारहवीं तक ही पढ़ेगी। मगर अब इस मुकाम तक पहुंच कर इच्छाएं बढ़ गई हैं। उसका मन है कि अब और पढ़ना है। पर क्या पढ़ना है और कैसे, इसमें अब भी उलझन है। यों उसे बहुत कुछ नहीं पता, लेकिन वह इतना जरूर जानती है कि उसे शिक्षिका बनना है। यता नहीं, यह शिक्षिका बनने की इच्छा उसके भीतर क्यों और कैसे पनपी! जबकि वह आमतौर पर अपनी शिक्षिका की खूब बुराइयां करती है। इस लड़की का परिवार आर्थिक रूप से सशक्त परिवार है। वह पढ़ाई का खर्च आराम से उठा सकता है। मगर परिवार इसे पढ़ाना नहीं चाह रहा। असल में उसके परिवार का एक पुरुष सदस्य उसे रोक रहा है। विचित्र बात यह है कि इस परिवार में सबसे अधिक यही व्यक्ति पढ़ा–लिखा है। तब वह क्यों लड़की को पढ़ने से रोक रहा है? क्या वह शिक्षा के महत्त्व को नहीं जानता? क्या जेंडर के नजरिए से ही इस स्थिति को समझा जा सकता है?

शिक्षक की भूमिका

गुरु–शिष्य परंपरा भारत की संस्कृति का एक अहम और पवित्र हिस्सा है जिसके कई स्वर्णिम उदाहरण इतिहास में दर्ज हैं। शिक्षक उस माली के समान है जो एक बगीचे को अलग–अलग रूप–रंग के फूलों से सजाता है। जो छात्रों को कांटों पर भी हंजते हुए चलने के लिए हिम्मत देता है। वर्तमान परिप्रेक्ष्य में देखें तो गुरु–शिष्य की परंपरा कहीं न कहीं कर्लकित हो रही है। आज तमाम ऐसे शिक्षक भी हैं जो अपने ज्ञान की बोली लगाने लगे हैं। आदि दिन शिक्षकों द्वारा विद्यार्थियों और विद्यार्थियों द्वारा शिक्षकों के साथ दुर्व्यवहार की खबरें सुनने को मिलती हैं। इसे देखकर हमारी संस्कृति की अमूल्य गुरु–शिष्य परंपरा पर प्रश्नचिह्न लगता नजर आने लगा है। ऐसे में विद्यार्थियों और शिक्षकों दोनों का ही दायित्व है कि वे इस महान परंपरा को बेहतर ढंग से समझें और एक अच्छे समाज के निर्माण में अपना सहयोग प्रदान करें।

यह सर्वविदित है कि हमारे जीवन को संवारने में शिक्षक एक बड़ी और महत्त्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं। सफलता प्राप्ति के लिए वे हमारी कई तरह से मदद करते हैं। मसलन, वे हमारे ज्ञान–कौशल के स्तर और आत्मविश्वास आदि को बढ़ाते हैं, हमारे जीवन को सही आकार में ढालते हैं। इसलिए अपने निष्ठावान शिक्षकों के प्रति हमारी भी कुछ जिम्मेदारी बनती है। हमें एक आज्ञाकारी विद्यार्थी के रूप में अपने शिक्षकों का तहेदिल से अभिनंदन करने की जरूरत है। शिक्षक दिवस हम सभी के लिए ऐसे शिक्षकों को धन्यवाद देने का अवसर है जिन्होंने बिना किसी स्वार्थ के हमें काबिल बनाने की कोशिश की है।

- अमन सिंह, प्रेमनगर, बरेली, उत्तर प्रदेश*

यहां एक सवाल यह भी बनता है कि परिवार की महिलाएं इस बारे में क्या सोचती हैं। उनके नजरिए से लड़की को आगे पढ़ना चाहिए या नहीं? एक सवाल तो यह भी है कि परिवार में उनकी चलती कितनी है! खैर... यहां लड़की की मां एक अजीब उलझन में फंसी हुई है। वह लड़की को ‘तीसमार खां’ बनाना चाहती है, पर घर से बाहर नहीं निकलाने देना चाहती। परिवार की बाकी तीन स्त्रियों में से दो को कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता, फिर भी वे एक

दुनिया मेरे आगे

लड़की को जड़ काटने में लगी है। परिवार की यह राजनीति भी लड़की के भविष्य पर अपना प्रभाव छोड़ेगी। इस परिवार की ओरतों के दृष्टिकोण को समझने पर पता लगेगा कि यह असल में उनका दृष्टिकोण है ही नहीं। बस घर की इन महिलाओं में लड़की के प्रति संवेदनशीलता थोड़ी अधिक है। वह भी शायद इसलिए कि लड़की उनके साथ अधिक समय बिताती है। इस तरह कुल मिला कर यह लड़की एक समय के लिए परिवार के लिए चिंता का विषय बन जाती है।

ऐसी स्थिति में अक्सर लड़की को पढ़ाई छोड़वा दी जाती है, लेकिन दिल्ली में रहने वाले इस परिवार के रास्ते में दो बाधाएं और हैं। इसमें पहली बाधा है

खयाली पुलाव

जम्मू–कश्मीर से अनुच्छेद 370 हटाने के बाद पाकिस्तान जिस तरह आसमान सिर पर उठाए हुए है, उससे तो यही साबित होता है कि यह अनुच्छेद जाने–अनजाने उसके हितों की पूर्ति अधिक कर रहा था। यह सही है कि पाकिस्तानी प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान अपनी सेना की कटपुतली अधिक हैं, लेकिन उन्हें इतनी समझ तो होनी चाहिए कि वे भारत को धमका कर कुछ हासिल नहीं कर सकते। भारत को झुकाने–डराने का खयाली पुलाव पकाने से पहले उन्हें पाकिस्तान की छवि

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

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

और दयनीय आर्थिक दशा पर भी गौर करना चाहिए। चूँकि अपने सैन्य अफसरों के मुकाबले इमरान खान भारत से भली भाँति परिचित हैं, इसलिए वे इस हकीकत से भी दो–चार होंगे कि आज का भारत हर मामले में पाकिस्तान से बीस है। वे और उनके फौजी जनरल यह समझें तो बेहतर होगा कि पाकिस्तान का हित भारत से संबंध सुधारने और उससे मिलकर चलने में है।

- हेमंत कुमार, गोगाडीह, भागलपुर, बिहार*

नए नियम

यातायात के नए नियमों के तहत चालान की राशि व कानूनी सजा बढ़ाया जाना केंद्र सरकार का स्वागतयोग्य कदम है। इससे निश्चित ही सड़क

आस-पड़ोस से प्रतिस्पर्धा और दूसरी, एक मजबूरी खुद को आधुनिक दर्शाने की है। अब अगर लड़की को पढ़ाई छोड़वा दी गई तो लोग सवाल करेंगे और अगर पढ़ाई इसी तरह तरह जारी रखी गई तो हो सकता है कि लड़की खुद अपने अधिकारों के लिए सवाल करने लगेगी। अब ऐसी स्थिति में फंसा परिवार बीच का रास्ता निकलता है। वह लड़की को पढ़ाएगा, पर ‘ओपेन’ यानी पत्राचार से। ऐसे में

सवालों से भी बचा जाएगा और लड़की पर अपना आधिपत्य भी बना रहेगा।

लेकिन यह स्थिति केवल इतनी नहीं है। इसके पीछे परिवार के मनोविज्ञान की और भी कई परतें हैं।

‘कहीं लड़की सवाल न करने लगे’ एक बड़ा सवाल है। हालांकि इससे भी बड़े–बड़े डर परिवार पर छाए रहते हैं। पहला तो लड़की की सुरक्षा को लेकर। यह एक तद् तक जायज भी है। जायज इसलिए कि महिलाओं के विरुद्ध अपराधों में इजाफा होता गया है। लेकिन इससे बचने के लिए न तो परिवार लड़की को सुरक्षित रहने के तरीकों तक पहुंच बनाने में मदद करेगा और न ही अपने परिवार के लड़कों को यह सिखाएगा कि लड़कियों से कैसे सामान्य रूप से पेश आना चाहिए। पर बात इससे

आगे की है। परिवार को एक डर यह भी लगा रहता है कि लड़की कहीं प्रेम न कर बैठे। खासकर गैर–धर्म और गैर–जाति के लड़के से।

इससे अगला डर यह है कि कहीं लड़की कोई गलती न कर बैठे। यहां गलती का अर्थ वही है, जो आप समझ रहे हैं। अब भले ही वह ‘गलती’ इच्छा से ही क्यों न हुई हो, पर मानी गलती ही जाएगी। यानी सूई घूम कर लड़की की शुचिता पर आ ही जाती है। शुचिता के इस सवाल में लड़की की इच्छाएं, सपने, संभावनाएं, संघर्ष कुछ भी नहीं है। उसका संपूर्ण अस्तित्व केवल उसके शरीर पर आकर ठहर जाता है। परिवार खुद को गढ़े भय के माहौल में जीने लगता है। अब परिवार इन सवालों से डरते–डरते क्या चुनता है, यह उसी पर निर्भर करता है। पर यह बात सही मानी जा सकती है कि एक परिवार इन सभी सवालों से गुजर कर ही लड़की को पढ़ने भेजता है या पढ़ाई छोड़वा देता है।

खैर, इस लड़की ने पत्राचार में दाखिला ले लिया है। अब वह भी हप्ते में दो दिन दोपहर तक घर से बरी रहा करेगी। महीने के इन आठ दिनों में थोड़ी थोड़ी आजादी महसूस करेगी। इन्हीं दिनों में वस सपन देखा करेगी या जी भरके सोया करेगी। इन्हीं कुछ दिनों में वह प्रेम करेगी और अपनी दुनिया रचेगी।

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हमारे कुछ नेता और विचारक हमें जब–तब विश्वगुरु बनने का सपना दिखाते रहते हैं। विश्वगुरु बनने के लिए जरूरी है कि हम विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में आशातीत प्रगति करें। मेरे विचार से क्यों न हम ओलंपिक खेलों में अपनी उपलब्धियों पर चर्चा करें? आजादी के बाद 1948 के लंदन ओलंपिक में हमें एक स्वर्ण पदक मिला और फिर 1952 में हेलसिंकी ओलंपिक में एक स्वर्ण और एक कांस्य पदक मिला। 1984, 1988 और 1992 के ओलंपिक खेलों में हमारा खाता ही नहीं खुला। बहरहाल, 2008 के बीजिंग ओलंपिक खेलों में हमें एक स्वर्ण और दो कांस्य पदक मिले और हम पदक तालिका में दुनिया के देशों में 51वें नंबर पर थे। 2012 के लंदन ओलंपिक में हमें दो पदक और चार कांस्य पदक मिले और हम पदक तालिका में 55 वें स्थान पर रहे तो 2016 के ब्राजील में आयोजित रिओ ओलंपिक में हमें एक रजत और एक कांस्य पदक मिला और हम पदक तालिका में कुल 31 लाख की आबादी वाले देश मंगोलिया के साथ 67वें स्थान पर रहे। क्या इस रफ्तार से हम विश्वगुरु बन सकते हैं?

- सुभाष चंद्र लखड़ा, द्वारका, नई दिल्ली*