Connecting the unconnected

Whatever be the outcome of the AGR verdict on telcos, the government must deliver on its promise towards the other India

NOT FOR PROFIT

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

The more than 150-page Supreme Court verdict on what constitutes adjusted gross revenue (AGR) disrupting the telecom industry hinges on the link between the right of the government over all communication services, why telcos must share their revenue with the Centre and the National Telecom Policy objective of providing connectivity to the rural, far, hilly and remote corners of the country. While the right of the government over communication services and its claim over companies' revenues as part of a contract cannot be faulted, the promise to connect the unconnected and the underserved is far from delivered. And that's a weak link in the AGR piece as the government argument is that the revenue-share from telcos is meant to enable it to connect the unconnected.

Even 20 years after the New Telecom Policy (NTP) in 1999, which set phased goals to connect all, the rural teledensity (number of telephone connections per 100 individuals in rural India) was pegged at 56.61 as of August 31, 2019, according to the latest subscriber data issued by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai). In other words, at least more than 40 individuals out of 100 in any rural or remote part of the country are without any phone connection. Not only that, the Trai numbers also show that rural teledensity declined from 56.67 as of July 31, 2019. The share of urban and rural wireless subscribers in the total mobile phone universe was 56.6 and 43.4 per cent respectively end of August.

The court judgment cites the National Telecom Policy 1999 to say that it ushered in a new regime, giving an option to the licensees to migrate from fixed licence fee to revenue sharing fee. Through NTP 99, the objective of the government was to achieve social and economic goals to provide the service to all uncovered areas including rural, remote, hilly and tribal areas and to create an efficient infrastructure thereby propelling India into an IT superpower and to increase teledensity from 0.4 to 4 by the year 2010 and to provide internet access to all district headquarters by the year 2000. Those numbers were of course met, but connectivity still remained a challenge.

The total wireless subscribers increased from 1.16 billion at the end of July 2019 to 1.17 billion as of August 31, 2019, recording a monthly growth rate of 0.23 per cent. While wireless subscription in urban areas increased from 659.87 million in July-end to 662.74 million in August-end, rural areas showed a drop from 508.45 million at the end of July to 508.25 million on August 31. On a yearly basis, fixed phone subscribers dropped by as much as 6.17 per cent across all circles in August 2019, from the corresponding period last year. Wireless subscribers grew by only 0.35 per cent.

In fact, since 2015, rural teledensity has grown only from 48.64 to 56.61, while urban teledensity is up from 151.09 to 161.54. The overall teledensity between August 2015 and 2019 has moved up from 80.44 to 90.34.

The overall teledensity graph is interesting — 80.44 in August 2015 to 82.54 in 2016 to as much as 93.71 in 2017. It dipped to 91.11 in 2018 and then to 90.34 in August 2019. As for rural teledensity, it was 48.64 in August 2015, 50.95 in 2016, 56.80 in 2017, 58.61 in 2018 and down to 56.61 in 2019. Urban teledensity inched up from 151.09 in 2015 to 152 in 2016, and then zoomed to 174.01 in 2017 before dropping to 161.07 in 2018. In August 2019, urban teledensity gained a bit to reach 161.54.

Between 2015 and 2019, the rural market share in mobile telephony grew from 41.7 per cent in 2015 to 42.43 per cent in 2016. In August 2017, the rural market share was down to 41.52 per cent and then was up at 43.92 per cent in 2018. In August 2019, it dipped again to 43.4 per cent.

The SC judgment states that a "bare perusal of sub-section (1) of Section 4 of the Telegraph Act shows that the Central Government has the exclusive privilege of establishing, maintaining, and working telegraphs. This would mean that only the Central Government, and no other person, has the right to carry on telecommunication activities." However, the Act enables the government to part with "this exclusive privilege in favour of any other person by granting a licence in his favour on such conditions and in consideration of such payments as it thinks fit". It then goes on to say that such a licence is in the nature of a contract between the Central Government and the licensee and therefore the terms and conditions of the licence, including the definition of AGR, are part of a contract between the licensor and the licensee. Soon after, it refers to the telecom policy objectives of reaching out to the remote, tribal and hilly areas.

Whatever may be the outcome of the AGR verdict on telcos, the government must revisit its goal of connecting the unconnected more aggressively to power the Other India.

Coping with resurgent nationalism

In the first of a two-part series, the author talks about the form of nationalism that is being attempted to be dismantled by the Hindu nationalists

PRANAB BARDHAN

Einstein had called nationalism "an infantile disease, the measles of mankind". Many contemporary cosmopolitan liberals are similarly sceptical, contemptuous or dismissive, as its current epidemic rages all around the world particularly in the form of right-wing extremist or populist movements. While I understand the liberal attitude, I think it'll be irresponsible of us to let the illiberals meanwhile, hijack the idea of nationalism for their nefarious purpose. Nationalism is too passionate and historically explosive an issue to be left to their tender mercies. It is important to fight the virulent forms of the disease with an appropriate antidote and try to vaccinate as many as possible particularly in the younger generations.

Populists advocate a culturally narrow, narcissistic, nostalgic, xenophobic form of ethnic nationalism — from the Christian nationalism of evangelicals in the United States or the Catholics in Poland or the Slavic Orthodox-church followers in Russia to the Islamic nationalism in Turkey or Indonesia to the Hindu nationalism in India. The alternative, more inclusive, form of nationalism often counterposed to this is some variant of what is called "civic" nationalism.

But first a brief historical note. As a form of community bonding on the basis of some tribal or ethnic-territorial roots proto-nationalisms of different kinds have been quite old and durable in different societies. But as Ernest Gellner, one of the foremost theorists of nationalism, pointed out, nationalism in the form as we know it is of relatively recent origin. Of course, historical memories and myths (mythology is often blurred into historical facts and legends), symbols and traditions are constantly invoked in the name of ethnic nationalism, even though, as the distinguished historian, Eric Hobsbawm famously pointed out, many of the so-called traditions are actually of recent "invention". The influential 19th-century French scholar, Ernest Renan had pointed out how "historical error" is used in the creation of a nation. Gellner even points to cases of nationalism based on not a great deal of history: "The Estonians created nationalism out of thin air in the course of the 19th century".

But it is often overlooked that there is a clear distinction between nationalism based on some social bonding principle and the nation-state that became a predominant political unit, at least in Europe since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). The former refers to a sociological community based on some homogeneous binding element like religion, language, ethnicity or culture, whereas the latter is a political community that need not contain a singular sociological nationality.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

Yet the European idea of the nation-state where the sociological and the political communities are congruent has become the basis of the predominant idea on nationalism, and both Gellner and Hobsbawm essentially adhere to this idea. But what about multi-national societies? Even in western Europe, Switzerland, Spain or Belgium are examples of nation-states with diverse linguistic-sociological communities, where the singular principle of national binding does not work.

Let us now take possibly the largest such multi-national society in the world, India. Here Indian social thinkers had made contributions more than a hundred years back that have been under-appreciated in the western theories of nationalism. I have particularly in mind the thoughts of Gandhi and Tagore on nationalism expressed in various forms (essays and lectures by both, and in the case of Tagore, also in literature with several poems and at least three novels — one of which later was the basis of a widely-known Satyajit Ray movie, The Home and the World) in the first three decades of the 20th century. They were, of course, both anti-imperialists, thus sharing in the popular movements of nationalism against colonial rulers, but they wanted to go beyond this to think about a more positive basis of nationalism when the colonial rulers were to leave. Both of them found the nation-state of European history, with a singular social homogenising principle and militarised borders and jingoistic mobilisation against supposed enemy states, unacceptable and unsuitable for India's diverse heterogeneous society. Instead they both drew upon the long folk-syncretic tradition of Indian society (which grew out of the layers of sediments formed by the successive waves of social reform and rebellion, called the Bhakti movements, against the dominance of the rigid Hindu Brahminical system, over many centuries in different parts of India, as well as the Sufi sects of Islam) extolling inter-faith tolerance and pluralism, and wanted to make that the constructive basis of Indian nationalism.

Gandhi, who had described himself as an "enlightened anarchist" was not favourably disposed to the modern state. Tagore was less averse to modernity, but he was trenchant in his criticism of the western idea of the nation-state, "with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns... its mock thunders of patriotic bragging", and of how it stokes a national conceit that makes society lose its moral balance. Nehru, who was personally close to Gandhi but ideologically closer to Tagore, saw that the modern state is essential, for providing a unifying structure in a divided society and for unleashing the forces of planned economic development, in a world of economic and military competition.

By the time the Indian constitution was framed both Gandhi and Tagore were dead. Nehru (along with Ambedkar) in leading the way drew upon the society-centric pluralistic idea of nationalism of Gandhi and Tagore and gave it legal-juridical form in the Indian constitution. The Nehru-Ambedkar idea of nationalism, forged and refined through the elaborate deliberations of the Constituent Assembly, gave India the basis of its civic nationalism that prevailed for many decades. It is this inclusive idea of civic nationalism that is now being attempted to be dismantled by the Hindu nationalists. Even at the time of the framing of the constitution RSS, their main ideological base organisation, had opposed the constitution as "Western", even though in their earlier history many of their leaders used to admire the ethnic basis of nationalism in Germany (their revered leaders like Savarkar and Golwalkar had expressed open admiration for the efficient Nazi system of mobilising and organising the German nation). Earlier the Japanese nation-state had also been inspired by German history. It is not surprising that Tagore's lectures in Japan as early as 1916 against the aggrandising nation-state did not make him popular with the Japanese.

(The second part will appear on Friday)

The article was first published on 3 Quarks Daily. The writer is professor of Graduate School at University of California, Berkeley

CHINESE WHISPERS

A meditational visit

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi *(pictured)* is on a "meditational visit" abroad and is likely to return shortly, party sources said on Wednesday. Responding to speculation on the former Congress president's absence was Congress Chief Spokesperson Randeep Surjewala. Sources in the party added that Gandhi is possibly in Indonesia and will be back home soon. Surjewala said the party's 10-day agitation was formalised at a meeting in which Gandhi participated but neither he nor Sonia Gandhi would be participating in the state and district-level programmes. The Congress has planned a country-wide agitation from November 5 to 15 to highlight the issues of economic slowdown, farm distress, rising unemployment and job losses and the consequences of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership trade agreement. "This entire programme was drafted as per his direction and in consultation with him (Rahul Gandhi). He guided the party on to the various steps and issues that were to be taken," Surjewala said.

Image management

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath has realised the importance of having a 360-degree media team for cultivating a positive image of his government ahead of the crucial 2022 elections. Recently, the state dispensation had appointed four senior cabinet ministers as official spokespersons of the government to the existing league of two ministers, thus increasing the bench strength to six. Now, the state has appointed two senior journalists as media advisors to the state information department. Each scribe will be mandated to cater to the print and electronic media respectively. Interestingly, the CM already has a long standing media advisor, who was appointed soon after the Bharatiya Janata Party had come to power in March 2017.

Power dynamics in MP

After winning the Jhabua Assembly by-elections, Kantilal Bhuria of the Congress party has emerged as the fourth power centre in Madhya Pradesh after Chief Minister Kamal Nath, former chief minister Digvijaya Singh and party General Secretary Jyotiraditya Scindia. So much so that talks have already started floating over him being made the next PCC chief, a post that is currently held by Nath himself. Until now, Scindia was a front runner for the coveted post. However, PWD minister Sajjan Singh Verma has voiced his demand for the appointment of Bhuria as the PCC chief. "After 15 years, there is a Congress government in the state. We have 31 MLAs from the tribal reserved seats. Kantilal Bhuria is a big name. He has previously been PCC chief for three years," said Verma.

INSIGHT

How business travellers are being taken for a ride

VIJAY VERGHESE

Any labouring swain nervously awaiting his date for that hotel lobby assignation will have marvelled at the time-keeping skills of woman so adept at making their man hang on till that last point when — all energy, pride, confidence, irritation and hope drained — he looks up to see her glide in, the picture of innocent radiance. Gone are the admonitions. Out come the drooping flowers. "Oh, have you been waiting? Just 45 minutes! That's not too late is it?" Well, that's the question. How late is late? Men are dismal with timings as well. They are called slobs. Executives who are habitually late are later referred to as "unemployed". Women sail through unscathed.

What about aeroplanes? As any frequent business traveller would have noticed, timings are being incessantly put back. You may be on a one hour, 50 minutes flight from Hong Kong to Manila that departs 40 minutes late yet miraculously arrives early, a mathematical impossibility. This is the marvel of technology or maybe it's these new-fangled jets. I suspect it's because we travellers refer to planes in the feminine gender.

Thirty years ago, an on-time flight was one that took off or landed within 15 minutes of its scheduled time, plain and simple. Airline accountants — and nerds — might have preferred the chocks-off time as the aircraft was pushed back. Fast turnarounds are the lifeblood of regional airlines that need to maximise an aircraft's in-air time. An idle plane equals the revenue lost.

Padded flight times are neither smart nor workable and point to growing acceptance of sloppy standards as airlines get comfortable with flight schedule quackery.

So why are planes flying later and later these days while the technology to ensure fast turnarounds, quicker embarkation and deplaning and baggage handling, has grown exponentially?

In China, the issue is straightforward. A paltry 30 per cent of the airspace is available for commercial planes whereas in America by comparison, as much as 80 per cent might be free (enabling several flight corridors at any given time for commercial and private jets). Much of Chinese airspace is controlled by the military. As a result, aircraft can be inordinately delayed in cities like Beijing and Shanghai with a serious knock-on effect on connecting flights at hub airports like Hong Kong.

Our skies are getting crowded and airports are running out of landing and take-off slots. Yet even with the huge pressure on runways and congestion in the skies, airlines like India's IndiGo manage on-time performance (OTP) rates of 80 per cent or higher. The Official Airline Guide (OAG) regularly ranks the Japanese carriers Japan Airlines (JAL) and All Nippon Airways (ANA) as top performers, perhaps unsurprising in a country where watches can be set by the arrival or departure of a shinkansen bullet train.

A 2019 OAG report "Defining Late" looks at the validity of the unofficial 15-minute punctuality rule. It notes, some feel "... a move to a longer standard for OTP — perhaps 30 minutes — may feel appropriate," though it cautions that this fails to cater for connecting flights.

While it is true that departure delays on long-haul flights often do not translate into late arrivals, as aircraft make up time en route, this is not true of shorter regional flights where a small delay will compound as the airline continues its later and later turnarounds through the day. This brings OAG's focus to the "first wave of flights" or the morning departures, whose on-time performance hugely impacts following services. Perhaps punctuality standards could be set higher for these flights?

Yet, there are other players involved – ubercool travellers who swan into the airport 45 minutes before their flight leaving no wiggle room for immigration and customs; crowded airports struggling with their passenger flow charts, labour strikes and inclement weather; and of course the airlines themselves, which have varying standards of regulation and professionalism. Late connecting flights are problematic as airlines often hold back departures to gather traffic if loads are lean. And politics can enter into it too as when Qatar is denied access to UAE airspace or Pakistan blocks Indian overflights necessitating longer flight times.

A growing issue, however, is the "institutionalisation" of endemic delays with hugely padded flight times. Just check the in-fight magazine's route timings with your own ticket stub and you'll spot the discrepancy.

Padded flight times are neither smart nor workable and their usage points to a growing acceptance of sloppy standards with the result that airports stop striving to get things back on track while airlines get comfortable with flight schedule quackery. The travel industry must reclaim and set professional standards. Passengers — especially frequent flyers enlisted with loyalty programmes — must manifest their disapproval with airline legerdemain that freely substitutes "flight time" for "waiting time" Passengers cannot be penalised for airline and airport inefficiency.

On several near-monopoly routes demand is inelastic regardless of delays as passengers are unwilling to give up the "convenience" of a preferred carrier. And travellers have to get from A to B. Yet, in many instances, passengers can vote with their wallets. Airlines know this. So make your voice heard. Gone are the insouciant days when in countries like India flights, like buses, set off as soon as seats were filled. Shocked latecomers were simply told, "Sorry sir, your flight was preponed." Pacific island hopping flights often do the same. Imagine that happening with a legacy airline today. But you might fancy your on-time chances flying JAL or ANA (both rigorously punctual) to an airport like Tokyo's Haneda (ranked no. 1 among worldwide mega airports by OAG in 2018) with an 86.75 per cent on-time record. If flights across Japan's crowded skies can be on time so can flights across Asia.

It makes no sense for airports to squeeze in ever more flights (and bigger aircraft) without extra runways and terminal capacity and then wring their hands at the unmanageable mess they've created. If irate passengers aim their ire at airports it is often because many of these architectural icons have far exceeded their capacity.

Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport has a passenger capacity of 45 million but already handles 60 million and could be stretched to 100 million over the next decade. The superefficient Hong Kong International Airport handles over 72 million passengers annually. These vastly overstretched airports as with others across Asia are ramping up expansions. Singapore seems to have got it right with its four terminals and more planned.

It is time for airlines and airports to end endemic inefficiency, fix the issues, and stop pulling wool over customers' eyes. And it is time for passengers to say "enough".

The author is a Hong Kong-based journalist and the editor of AsianConversations.com and SmartTravelAsia.com

LETTERS

Not business as usual

With reference to the article "Tread warily on privatisation" (October 29), here are a few points. The proverbial remark that "business is not government's business" is nothing but exaggeration as the slowdown in economy does not look manageable. The government cannot shed its financial as well as social responsibilities through such comments. It is not considered prudent to overrule any predefined policy framework. In this context, if Air India's outright sale, after absorbing its sizeable debts, fetches market-driven valuation, will eliminate further infusion of high cost bearing capital in future. From the utilisation point of view, how the proceeds of this non-tax revenue through disinvestment exercise is finalised is also a matter that again needs a well-devised policy framework.

Vivek P Nagpur

Remove restrictions

The criticism emanating from the Opposition parties over the visit of 23 members of European Union to Jammu and Kashmir is not without any rationale. Barring a few leaders, no other leader from the Opposition camp has been allowed to visit J&K since August 5. It is time the government lifts restrictions imposed on the people and restore fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution to them without any delay. Absence or lack of efforts to address the growing apprehensions from international community over human rights violations in J&K would only erode the support it enjoyed at present over its decision to abrogate Article 370 on the ground.

M Jeyaram Tamil Nadu

Focus on revenue

This refers to "Deep discounting isn't part of ease of doing biz, govt tells e-tailers" (October 29). Big discounts continue to rule on e-commerce websites thereby affecting the GST revenue. The customers are going online because of the unbelievable discounts compared to the offline market. The government is not taking any serious decisions except for few actions against discounts.

Some retailers are complaining that the new FDI rules have not helped in decreasing the sales of e-commerce firms. If this continues then the retailers in the online market will get less income. The government needs to focus on increasing the revenue on GST and help the retailers achieve a good margin.

Sudhakar Yadav Bathinda

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No real plan for exports

Advisory report on trade promotion misses the mark

Last year, the Union ministry of commerce and industry set up a High-Level Advisory Group to recommend ways in which India could improve its export performance. This report has now been made public, and provides a useful indicator of the thinking in government circles about trade policy. From that point of view, it makes for worrying reading. While it accepts that much has gone wrong with India's export performance, its recommendations are simply not up to the job. The report correctly points out that Indian exports are in severe trouble. This is not something that can be blamed upon deglobalisation or larger problems with world trade. The fact is that, as the report points out, India's "relative trade performance has worsened precisely at the time that absolute levels of world trade growth have collapsed". In other words, there are India-specific problems that are plaguing its exports performance. These are what need to be addressed. Unfortunately, the report, while including some useful recommendations, does not go far enough in answering the question on how exports can be enhanced. In fact, in some ways — such as in its approach to trade — it suggests moving backwards. For example, when it comes to the textiles and apparel sector, it suggests that India needs to examine the dangers of free trade with Bangladesh. Is that really the problem? The issue is that Bangladeshi textile and apparel production is globally competitive in a way that the domestic sector is not. The question surely should be how to ensure that Indian garment exporters can take global market share away from producers in Bangladesh and Southeast Asia, not ways in which they deserve further protection.

On the macro side, the suggestions of the report are in line with concerns expressed elsewhere about constraints on investment, including poor transmission of monetary policy, thanks to the existence of small savings schemes. On trade promotion specifically, the report's recommendations are infected by a bureaucratic mindset and insufficiently ambitious. For example, it suggests that the current investment promotion agency should be empowered to grant incentives, and that a trade promotion agency be created. None of this answers the central problem, which is that trade negotiation and management in India is crippled by being under line ministries rather than directly under the chief executive, the prime minister. In the United States, for example, the president is often granted fast-track authority to free negotiations from legislative oversight (but not approval) and the office of the United States Trade Representative reports directly to the White House.

The report also suffers in at least one case from too much optimism: It seems to believe that an export strategy can come from "big data analytics" from a "reputed institution outside the ministry". This may be good news for think tanks or IT consultancies, but it is hardly likely that it will improve policy-making, and merely create another set of inputs that can be ignored. The central problem is and will remain one of competitiveness of domestic industry. It needs cheaper and more reliable inputs, flexible factor markets, and less red tape as well as lower taxes. This is not rocket science. It merely needs political will.

Unsatisfactory progress

Air quality in the capital remains unhealthy

The Delhi government's contention that air pollution during this Diwali was the lowest in the past five years, though backed by credible data, provides only cold comfort. An analysis of the Air Quality Index (AQI) numbers for recent years indeed shows that the air's content of PM 2.5 (the most harmful tiny pollutants) averaged around 289 on the Diwali day this year, against 958 in 2016, 497 in 2017, and 482 in 2018. Besides, the AQI bulletin of the Central Pollution Control Board also did not list Delhi among the country's top 10 most polluted cities. In fact, the metropolis is placed only at number 13, with its satellite towns like Noida and Ghaziabad figuring among the top five. This could have been a matter of satisfaction but for the fact that the air quality still fell in the "very poor" to "severe" category with the concentration of pollutants being 16 to 18 times higher than the safe limits, at different times of the day. Thus, the fight against air pollution is still a work-in-progress and there is no room for any laxity.

While both the Centre and the state government are doing their bit to restrain pollution, the role of the people cannot be disregarded. The awareness of this issue, especially among schoolchildren, seems to have grown substantially. This was reflected in the reduction in bursting of crackers, as also the pollution caused by them, in many parts of the city in the pre- and post-Diwali period. But, on the Diwali day, even the apex court's order of using only less polluting, or green crackers between 8 pm and 10 pm was brazenly flouted in many areas.

The torching of paddy residues in the neighbouring states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh is routinely blamed for vitiating Delhi's atmosphere. This is true but only partly. The notable point is that stubble burning is a seasonal factor, lasting only three to four weeks, while pollution persists the year-round. This year, the incidence of agricultural fires has surged because the paddy harvesting period has shrunk due to extended monsoon-driven delay in crop maturity. Moreover, a favourable wind direction (northwesterly) has helped the smoke to drift towards the capital, mix with local pollutants and form low-hanging smog. Therefore, while curbing straw flaming is essential, this alone will not rid Delhi of its pollution menace. Enduring results cannot be obtained without taming the local factors, such as vehicular emissions, burning of wastes, dust from construction sites, polluting industries, thermal power plants, diesel-operated power generators and brick kilns. Worthwhile action on this front is woefully inadequate.

Some significant anti-pollution measures that have contributed to gradual reduction in pollution levels over the years include building of eastern and western peripheral highways to reduce the number of vehicles entering Delhi, leapfrogging from the Bharat Stage (BS) IV to BS-VI vehicular fuel and incentives for electric vehicles. A few other steps that have been initiated but need to be pursued with greater vigour are closure of polluting industries and power plants in and around Delhi and introduction of improved technology in the brick kilns. Result-oriented action on all these fronts is vital to make Delhi's air breathable. Merely grumbling about external factors like farm fires would not serve the purpose.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Don't bet on BSNL, MTNL's revival

The four-point turnaround plan for the public sector telcos is a set of necessary steps but is far from sufficient

The government just announced a "revival plan" for the ailing public sector telcos, BSNL and MTNL. The four-point plan comprises: Raising cash through issue of sovereign bonds (₹15,000 crore) allocating 4G spectrum (at government cost) to create a new revenue stream; monetising assets (mainly land) to mobilise ₹38,000 crore; and reducing employee strength through an attractive voluntary retirement scheme (VRS). The announcement should be welcomed: The government has finally decided to act.

First, some history. MTNL has been in serious distress for over a decade — grossly overstaffed, dwindling customers and revenues, and no internal resources for investment. In contrast, BSNL was profitable and financially healthy a decade ago. Two events shaped their economic fortunes.

RAHUL KHULLAR

The 3G auction in 2010 irreparably damaged their finances. BSNL and MTNL were compelled to purchase 3G and Broadband Wireless Access (BWA) spectrum. MTNL was already in trouble and its entry into 3G was clearly inadvisable. BSNL at least had a fighting chance with 3G; it had built up surpluses. But the BWA spectrum was simply foisted on them; neither wanted it. BSNL and MTNL were "commanded" by an imperious Ministry of Finance (MoF) to cough up. In short, the MoF raided the companies' reserves to fill a budgetary hole. Worse yet, it created a permanent recurring liability to service a useless asset (the BWA spectrum). BSNL was stripped of cash it could have used to invest, compelling it to borrow. MTNL was saddled with 3G spectrum it could not possibly utilise optimally.

The second significant event was the entry of the private sector in the telecom sector. In all of a few years, the huge technical staff of the Department of Telecom (DoT) was rendered superfluous. Services hitherto provided departmentally now had new providers. Suddenly, there were qualified telecom engineers with little to do; and, linemen and staff from a different tech era were rendered redundant. The DoT moved the "surplus" staff to BSNL and MTNL. The staff was "absorbed" by the telcos (and guaranteed a government pension). The wage bill of BSNL and MTNL ballooned; no surprise, then, that the wage cost-to-revenue ratio is 77 per cent for BSNL and 87 per cent for MTNL.

Prima facie, the plan appears eminently sensible: Augment revenues, cut costs and sell assets to generate resources for the core business. But don't bet on it just yet. Here's why.

The VRS solution has been attempted before, unsuccessfully. MTNL staff (16,000) is predominantly old (and many unskilled in terms of modern needs). Yet, they have held on steadfastly, rebuffing VRS offers. BSNL has 170,000 employees with a more balanced age-profile; but, most have not been willing to leave. The job market is really tight right now. Prospects for telecom engineers and other tech staff are bleak. And, do not underestimate the "social" value of being employed as against being unemployed. So, much depends on the perceived sweetness of the VRS handshake. Lastly, overstaffing is across all age-groups. Can the VRS address this problem?

It is important to get a fix on the magnitude of the financial turnaround required. The combined earnings before interest, taxation, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) margin for both companies was (-)20 per cent in 2018-19. The math is simple. A 40 per cent reduction in employees (74,000 employees opting for VRS — a tall order) would yield a 31 per cent reduction in the wage bill-to-revenue ratio. If all that went straight to the bottom line, the EBITDA would rise to 11 per cent, which is not enough. Even with debt at ₹45,000 crore, the minimum EBITDA needed to book a profit is 35 per cent. A turnaround, therefore, hinges on large cost savings and a solid revenue boost.

Monetising assets takes time and is not easy in the public sector context. Asset sales, specially land, invariably invite allegations of graft. Decision-making in public sector units (PSUs) is tardy, cautious and driven by risk-aversion. This has worsened in a time when the Enforcement Directorate , the Central Bureau of Investigation and other enforcement arms of the government are in full cry. The experience with disinvestment in the past five years is not particularly encouraging. It would be optimistic to believe that resources from assets will become easily available.

Infusing capital through sovereign bonds provides immediate succour. But, like recapitalisation of banks, it is far from sufficient. BSNL's track record is not inspiring. Its management is not renowned for commercial prowess or success. If management practices and the organisational culture do not change, the bottom line will not either. More on this anon.

Press reports mention that the plan envisages an investment of ₹10,000 crore to operationalise 4G services. That is a gross underestimate. It took Jio over five years and a lot of money to deliver quality 4G services. True, BSNL has infrastructure and an extensive network. However, it is both naïve and rash to expect that a new revenue stream will materialise quickly and that too with so small an investment. Resources for the huge investment will not come quickly (the asset sale problem). Finally, in the cutthroat world of telecom, does BSNL, given its management, have a fighting chance to survive the competition?

The plan is a set of necessary steps but is far from sufficient. The VRS "carrot" will need a veiled "stick" for suasion. Without that, VRS will not take off. Faster flow of resources to fund investment will be inescapable; else by the time BSNL gets to 4G, the rest of the sector would have moved on to 5G. And, without management reform all this amounts to nothing. The revival plan, as the phrase goes, is on a wing and a prayer.

The writer is former chairman, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

China and India's neighbourhood

China's economic power has enabled it to build up its presence on India's northern and eastern borders by cultivating good relations with Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar. China's long-term strengthening of ties and its connectivity with these countries have been especially obvious over the last six months. The enhanced tie with Nepal was marked by President Xi Jinping's recent visit to Kathmandu, immediately after he left New Delhi in mid-October. Earlier, in July, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid an official visit to Beijing. In April, Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi signed agreements on trade and technology when she attended the Belt and Road (BRI) meeting in Beijing.

ANITA INDER SINGH

All three countries are India's friendly neighbours. But do they have stronger ties with a more prosperous China? Unlike India, all three have joined China's BRI, which aims to advance Beijing's economic and strategic interests. China is also the largest investor in all three countries. Two of them — Bangladesh and Myanmar — are among China's top three arms buyers. Myanmar buys 60 per cent of its weapons from China, Bangladesh 70 per cent. All are strategically important to China: Bangladesh and Myanmar can increase its access to the Bay of Bengal, from where it could challenge India's traditional clout.

The BRI stems from China's progress over the last 40 years. The reality is that Beijing has been able to build trade and investment ties with Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar to a degree that New Delhi has not been able to because India is an economic slowcoach. China has gained ground by investing in important sectors for which these countries have failed to get comparable funding from India.

Mr Xi was the first Chinese president to visit Nepal in more than two decades. During his visit several agreements were signed. One of the most important accords seeks to promote connectivity by railway between China's Tibet and Nepal through the Himalayas. Mr Xi assured Nepal that the rail project would transform it from a land-locked country to a land-linked one.

Nepal and China also signed security agreements expanding cooperation between the police, intelligence, border management and law enforcement agencies. Beijing has helped Nepal to build and upgrade highways, airports and power plants. Following Mr Xi's visit, it was announced that China will give the Nepalese army about $21 million in unspecified "disaster relief materials" over the next three years.

Further to India's east the amicable tie between China and Bangladesh became visible last July when Ms Hasina and Mr Xi signed a slew of agreements which overcame the hesitations of history. In 1971, India created Bangladesh by breaking up Pakistan. But China supported Pakistan in the Bangladesh Liberation War, vetoed its admission to the United Nations and recognised the new state only in 1976.

History, though, is about change. As South Asia's fastest-growing economy, Bangladesh has welcomed China's investment of $38 billion. That is China's largest investment in South Asia, after Pakistan, where it has invested $46 billion. Moreover, China has established itself as the largest trading partner of Bangladesh. The total volume of trade between the two countries was $12.4 billion in 2017-18. Trade between India and Bangladesh amounted to $9.5 billion in the same year. Twenty-two per cent of Bangladesh's imports come from China and only 1.3 per cent from India; a mere 1.7 per cent of its exports come to India, and 2.3 per cent to China.

China's ties with Myanmar tell an analogous story about its roles as a trading partner and developer of infrastructure and ports. A third of Myanmar's imports come from China, a mere 5.2 per cent from India. China buys 33 per cent of its exports, India 3. 5 per cent.

China has made a huge investment in building a deep-water port in Kyaukpyu, at the western tip of Myanmar. Strategically important Kyaukpyu is the terminus of oil and natural gas pipelines running to China's Yunnan province. That will help China to receive its energy supplies from the Middle East by avoiding the overcrowded Strait of Malacca. China is also developing an economic zone in Kyaukpyu.

Beijing has shown flexibility when corruption and the BRI "debt trap" have threatened projects. Last year Bangladesh threw out a Chinese road project to develop the 226-kilometre Dhaka-Sylhet road following allegations of bribery by state-owned China Harbour Engineering Company, which was awarded the contract to widen the highway. Bangladesh also complained about the cost of the project. It will now finance the road-building itself at a reduced cost.

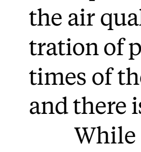
Meanwhile, Myanmar scaled back plans for Kyaukpyu port , sharply trimming the cost of the project. At Myanmar's request the initial $7.3 billion demanded by China was lowered to $1.3 billion.

India's inability to be the financier of choice for these three strategically important neighbours is compounded by its red tape and poor record of implementing projects. Common problems in India itself, they also slow down the implementation of its Act East policy.

New Delhi must contend with these realities. If India wants to enhance its influence it must accelerate and sustain its economic progress. It must also keep the promises it makes to its neighbours. Until then, China is likely to retain its economic and strategic vantage point in Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The writer is founding professor of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, New Delhi.

Tomorrow's people



BOOK REVIEW

VIKRAM JOHRI

In his latest collection of profiles that were either published elsewhere or written exclusively for this book, Vir Sanghvi chronicles the lives of 10 game changers, men and women who he thinks have shaped Indian society and opinions of it over the past decade or so.

The list is fairly uneven, comprising two chefs, a Bollywood personality and a bevy of businesspersons. The profiles of the more famous among these — such as Nandan Nilekani and Kiran Mazumdar Shaw — offer little that is not already known.

But first, the chefs. Mr Sanghvi goes deep into the background of both Asma Khan and Gaggan Anand as he charts the story of their rise into globally recognised purveyors of south Asian cuisine. These profiles are intimate, if at times too focused on indelicate details of their personal lives. It is possible that the profiles were shaped by Mr Sanghvi's interest in the subject (he has been a long-time writer on food and drink), yet two gastronomy profiles out of 10 seem a tad lot.

From Bollywood, Mr Sanghvi profiles Karan Johar, freely acknowledging that he borrows from the film director's memoir *An Unsuitable Boy* in drawing his portrait. The profile, which only cursorily discusses Mr Johar's film and TV career, is an extended meditation on Mr Johar's sexuality. Here too, Mr Sanghvi's aim to portray Mr Johar as an evangelist for a franker public discussion of sexuality is muddied by an excessive interest in the private. It is one thing for Mr Johar to speak about his inexperience with sex; quite another for Mr Sanghvi to build a profile on that foundation.

Some profiles fare better. The one on Ameera Shah, the managing director of Metropolis Healthcare, touches upon the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and melds that into a narrative about business triumph. The profile is also a nice counterpoint to the ones of Mr Nilekani and Ms Shaw. Yet, the question of how Mr Sanghvi chose his subjects is not answered satisfactorily. Why, for instance, Ms Shah and not another female entrepreneur?

The profile on Arnab Goswami is apposite in that the newsman has reshaped English news television. As with most other profiles in the collection, the writer takes the reader through the early stages of Mr Goswami's life and his work at NDTV before he set up Times Now. The profile is even-handed, bucking the trend of other senior journalists criticising Mr Goswami for his politics or the way he conducts news.

In the chapter on Shashi Tharoor, Mr Sanghvi credits the politician-writer with showing a young generation the difference between Hinduism and Hindutva. While Mr Sanghvi does not criticise the BJP, he presents Mr Tharoor as a viable antidote to what he describes as the ideological moorings of the party, naming the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and other Hindu organisations. He adds that it was confounding to many that despite Mr Tharoor's anti-RSS book doing well, the BJP still returned for a second term.

Mr Sanghvi's analyses— while acknowledging the rapid rise of non-English languages — focus largely on the English-speaking world and the game changers that emerge from it

The chapter on Mr Tharoor, thus, says more about the writer than the subject of the profile. One, that the political circles he moves in lean a certain direction ideologically, a direction that may not be restricted to one party but which has some common features. Two, Mr Sanghvi's analyses— while acknowledging the rapid rise of non-English languages in, say, social media — focus largely on the English-speaking world and the game changers that emerge from it. I was surprised that Mr Sanghvi sought to make a connection between the success of a book and the way the wind was blowing politically.

There are other commonalities in how Mr Sanghvi captures the men and women he profiles. He is attuned to their background, especially to their financial status before they became famous. So, we learn that Mr Johar's family was "comfortably off in an upper middle class, Malabar Hill sort of way, but they were not rich" or that Paytm's Vijay Shekhar Sharma came from such a poor background that "if he had to go to a wedding, he was made to wear his school uniform because those were the only nice clothes he had."

While appropriate biographically, such details do not necessarily say much of real significance about those profiled. If anything, a comfortable financial background takes the sheen off the success of some of those Mr Sanghvi writes about (not to mention that bald — but largely meaningless — gap between Malabar Hill comfortable and rich). The focus on business also leaves out game changers from other fields such as sustainable energy and innovation, fields that are arguably more important to a rising economy than, say, cheffing.

Mr Sanghvi writes in the beginning of his desire to profile those who will remain relevant 10 years from now. That is a tall order for a nation on the move, but it is likely that some of the rising stars in this list will continue to make news. All of them are ambitious, driven and eminently newsworthy. Whether they are game changers is not as neatly settled as that.

THE GAME CHANGERS: Transforming India
Vir Sanghvi
Westland Books; ₹199, 130 pages

Opinion

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2019

INTERNAL MATTERS

Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala

India's time tested policy over last 72 years is that Kashmir is our internal issue and we will accept no interference or third party mediation of any nature from any government or group of people

SHOBHANA SUBRAMANIAN
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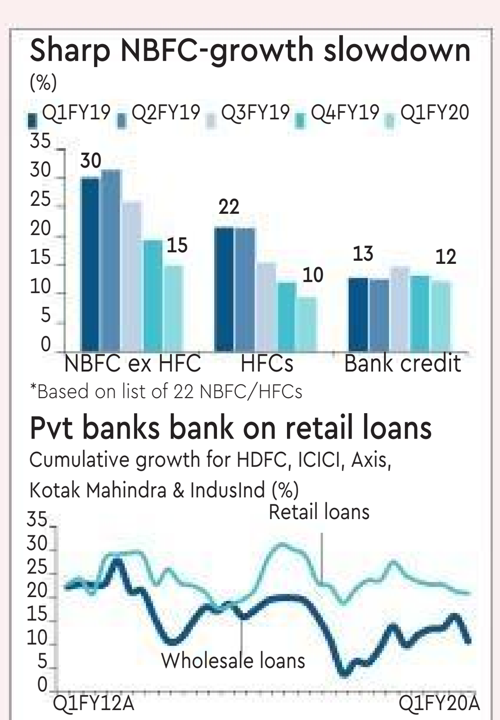
Fix NBFC crisis to get growth back

As the crisis worsens & banks stare at larger losses, credit-growth is collapsing. Getting PSBs to take them over is a good solution

MORE THAN A year after the defaults at IL&FS, not too many Non Banking Financial Companies (NBFC) and Housing Finance Companies (HFCs) can be said to be in good health. With access to credit constrained, a couple of them have defaulted, and some remain vulnerable to a default. Given this, it is surprising that an asset quality review, much like it was done for banks by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in the last quarter of 2015, has not been done for NBFCs.

Between them, they owe banks a packet—about 50% of their loans are sourced from banks—so, it is important they stay solvent. The ones more vulnerable to a default are those that have big exposures to real estate developers; the financial condition of India's tier II builders is no secret. Most NBFCs appear to be adequately capitalised, but credit quality apart, there are instances of fraud and violations, which make it harder for the banks to recover their money. Resolution has evaded lenders to DHFL for almost a year now, and, with an SFIO probe into the diversion of funds being considered, it is anyone's guess how soon banks will see their ₹38,000 crore.

What has done in non-bank lenders is the lack of liquidity support. This is probably hurting as much as the poor exposures. Altico Capital, for instance, wasn't very highly leveraged when it found it wasn't able to meet some of its obligations. In the absence of access to short-term liquidity from mutual funds, NBFCs and HFCs today are seriously constrained for cash. While it is nobody's case that these lenders should be bailed out—they shouldn't because it would create a moral hazard—RBI and government need to step in and find a way out. Let the government support stronger state-owned lenders—with capital in the form of bonds perhaps—to help them take over the NBFCs and HFCs. Should private sector lenders want to buy out the businesses, the process should be speeded up. Some quick consolidation is needed, else, even the good loans on their books could go bad, and the capital would be wasted. CRISIL wrote on October 24 that NPAs in the wholesale loan books of non-banks are tipped to rise in the near to medium term as the moratoria lapse. The wholesale book of non-banks is close to ₹4 lakh crore. Even if half of this goes bad, the system will get a big shock. This warning must be heeded. As as we have seen with DHFL and HDIL, recovering the loans will not be easy.



Simultaneously, there needs to be a lot more urgency in putting stressed real estate projects into the hands of stronger builders so that these can be completed; homebuyers who make a nuisance of themselves need to be dealt with firmly. The turnaround in the real estate sector is the key to the revival of the economy, and the sooner the staggering four or five lakh units of inventory are disposed of, the better. The government's scheme to support projects that are 60% complete and are non-NPAs needs to be tweaked. The stressed projects need to be supported and handed over to stronger builders.

An analysis by *Jefferies* reveals that the commercial real-estate segment exposure of 36 banks to developers fell 8% y-o-y in FY19 over FY18 while the last four-year CAGR has been a mere 6.6% y-o-y. That's good news, but the exposure at the end of March 2019, was nonetheless close to ₹3.4 lakh crore—not be sneezed at. To be sure, not every developer is a potential defaulter, but large-scale default cannot be ruled out, and neither can action by the investigative agencies.

The fact is banks, especially state-owned banks, aren't out of the woods given the NPA cycle doesn't seem to be ending anytime soon. Sectors such as power, telecom, and real estate continue to be pain points, apart from MSMEs and agriculture. While they may have some capital, the rising number of corporate defaults suggests they are going to need much more than they had probably. Without capital, it is going to be difficult to lend.

Already, loan growth at banks has been decelerating sharply over the past couple of months, when it was 14-15% y-o-y, and went below 9% y-o-y in the fortnight to October 11 because banks become so risk averse. They are choosing to lend only to top tier firms, and this has resulted in the spread of AAA bonds over the G-Sec narrowing. Meanwhile, the spread of the lowest-investment grade bonds over the AAA-rated bonds has now widened almost to levels last seen in 2008-09.

It is going to be hard, if not altogether impossible, to revive growth without freer flow of credit. Already, we seem to be getting into a vicious cycle where slowing loan growth—as seen in Q2FY20—could exacerbate the pain in industry, making lenders even more risk averse than they are today. SBI's corporate book grew just 2% y-o-y in the September quarter. The government can persuade the state-owned banks to lend to the mid-micro-mini corporates, but their appetite will be limited; unless they are forced to, which of course is possible, it is unlikely they will risk exposure to weaker entities. And, if they take some hits on NBFC or HFC loans, they would end up short of capital, too. The DHFL resolution has taken way too much time, and threatens to remain elusive. There can't be another DHFL.

Pushing CONTRACEPTION

WHO and *Lancet* studies show how big the threat from unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions are

A RECENT WHO study in 36 countries finds that two-thirds of the sexually active women who wanted to avoid fertilisation didn't opt for any method of contraception. This was mainly due to concerns over side-effects, "underestimation" of such methods where the women didn't feel confident in a contraception route available, and other health concerns. The poor use of contraceptives has led to one in four pregnancies being unintended. Globally, 74 million women belonging to low- and middle-income households have unintended pregnancies annually, which results in 25 million unsafe abortions and 47,000 maternal deaths. WHO highlights unintended pregnancy as a major cause for miscarriage, malnutrition, illness, abuse, neglect, and deaths. The shocking figures underscore the need for making access to safe, modern family planning techniques easier, if maternal and child health is to be improved.

A 2018 *Lancet* study found that of 15.6 million abortions in India in 2015—the rate of abortion was 47 per 1,000 women aged 15-49 years—22% were in health facilities, 73% abortions were through medications outside of health facilities, while 5% were outside of health facilities and without medications. With a bulk of the women opting for abortion having pregnancy terminated outside health facilities, the Centre must consider bringing abortions under its health insurance programme, Ayushman Bharat, to improve institutional care for abortions and curb avoidable maternal deaths. While bringing abortions under a government programme will help get rid of the stigma attached, the latter will also need constant awareness efforts. The government must also work on increasing the awareness levels amongst frontline health workers to help push up use of contraception and bring down incidence of unsafe abortions. More important, efforts have to be made to get men to share the burden of contraception, else, the reproductive health and rights of women will be shortchanged.

TARIFF WARS

FROM TRADE TO CURRENCY, THE REAL PROBLEM WITH THE PHASE ONE ACCORD IS THAT IT PRESCRIBES BILATERAL REMEDIES FOR MULTILATERAL PROBLEMS

No art to the US-China trade deal

STEPHEN S ROACH
Faculty member, Yale University
Views are personal

DEALMAKERS ALWAYS KNOW when to cut their losses. And, so it is with the self-proclaimed greatest dealmaker of them all: US President Donald Trump. Having promised a Grand Deal with China, the 13th round of bilateral trade negotiations ended on October 11 with barely a whimper, yielding a watered-down partial agreement: the "phase one" accord.

This wasn't supposed to happen. The Trump administration's three-pronged negotiating strategy has long featured a major reduction in the bilateral trade deficit, a conflict-resolution framework to address problems ranging from alleged intellectual-property theft and forced technology transfer to services reforms and so-called non-tariff barriers, along with a tough enforcement mechanism. According to one of the lead US negotiators, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, the Grand Deal was about 90% done in June, before it all unravelled in a contentious blame game, and a further escalation of tit-for-tat tariffs.

But, hope springs eternal. As both economies started to show visible signs of distress, there was new optimism that reason would finally prevail, even in the face of an escalating weaponisation of policy by the United States: threatened capital controls, rumoured delisting of Chinese companies whose shares trade on American stock exchanges, new visa restrictions, a sharp expansion of black-listed Chinese firms on the dreaded Entity List, and talk of congressional passage of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019. Financial markets looked the other way and soared in anticipation in the days leading up to the October 11 announcement.

And yet, the phase one deal, announced with great fanfare, is a huge disappointment. For starters, there is no codified agreement or clarity on enforcement. There is only a vague promise to clarify, in the coming weeks, Chinese intentions to purchase about $40-50 billion worth of US agricultural products, a nod in the direction of a relatively meaningless agreement on currency manipulation, and some hints of initiatives on IP protection and financial-sector liberalisation. And, for that, the Chinese get a major concession: a second reprieve on a new round of tariffs on exports to the US worth some $250 billion that was initially supposed to take effect on October 1.

Far from a breakthrough, these loose commitments, like comparable earlier promises, offer little of substance. For years, China has embraced the "fat-wallet" approach when it comes to defusing trade tensions with the US. In the past, that meant boosting imports of American aircraft; today, it means buying more soybeans. Of course, it has an even longer shopping list of US-made products, especially those tied to telecommunications equipment maker Huawei's technology supply chain.

But, China's open wallet won't solve America's far deeper economic problems. The $879 billion US merchandise trade deficit in 2018 (running at $919 billion in the second quarter of 2019) reflects trade imbalances with 102 countries. This is a multilateral problem, not the China-centric bilateral problem that politicians insist must be addressed in order to assuage all that ails American manufacturers and workers. Yet, without resolving the macroeconomic imbalances that underpin this multilateral trade deficit—namely, a chronic shortfall of domestic saving—all a China fix could accomplish would be a diversion of trade to higher-cost foreign producers, which would be the functional equivalent of a tax hike on US consumers.

Promises of a currency agreement are equally suspicious. This is an easy, but unnecessary add-on to any deal. While the renminbi's exchange rate against the US dollar has fallen by 11% since the trade war commenced in March 2018, it is up 46% in inflation-adjusted terms against a broad constellation of China's trading partners since the end of 2004. Like trade, currencies must be assessed from a multilateral perspective to judge whether a country is manipulating its exchange rate to gain an unfair competitive advantage.

That assessment makes it quite clear that China does not meet the widely accepted criteria for currency manipulation. Its once-outsize current-account surplus has all but disappeared, and there is no evidence of any overt official intervention in foreign-exchange markets. In August, the International Monetary Fund reaffirmed that very conclusion in its so-called Article IV review of China. Although the US Treasury recently deemed China guilty of currency manipulation, this verdict was at odds with the Treasury's own criteria, and Mnuchin is now hinting that it may be reversed. Far from essential, a new currency agreement is nothing more than a feeble grab for political bragging rights.

Multilateral problems require solutions aimed at the macroeconomic imbalances on which they rest. That could mean a reciprocal market-opening framework

The real problem with the phase one accord is the basic structure of the deal into which it presumably fits. From trade to currency, the approach is the same—prescribing bilateral remedies for multilateral problems. That won't work. Multilateral problems require solutions aimed at the macroeconomic imbalances on which they rest. That could mean a reciprocal market-opening framework like a bilateral investment treaty, or a rebalancing of saving disparities between the two countries that occupy the extremes on the saving spectrum.

The saving issue is especially critical for the US. America's net domestic saving rate of just 2.2% of national income in the second quarter of 2019 is far short of the 6.3% average in the final three decades of the twentieth century. Boosting saving—precisely the opposite of what the US is doing in light of the ominous trajectory of its budget deficit—would be the most effective means, by far, to reduce America's multilateral trade imbalance with China, and 101 other countries. Doing so would also take the misdirected focus off a bilateral assessment of the dollar in a multilateral world.

A macro perspective is always tough for politicians. That is especially true today in the US, because it doesn't fit neatly with xenophobic bilateral fixations like China-bashing. With new signs of Chinese resistance now surfacing, the phase one accord may never see the light of day. But, if it does, it will hurt more than it helps in addressing one of the world's toughest current economic problems.

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Leveraging RCEP & the FTA with USA

Decisions to conclude RCEP, and working out a trade deal with the US are examples of India making trade a decisive instrument, for both, economic and foreign policy goals

AMITENDU PALIT
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Views are personal

THE RCEP NEGOTIATIONS are likely to be concluded at the 35th ASEAN Summit in Thailand during October 31 to November 4, 2019. Along with the RCEP, India is also moving close to signing a trade agreement with the US. Both are major developments for India in signaling deep and comprehensive external engagement with major and middle powers, and key regional forums like ASEAN. They are also significant in India's decision to go ahead, notwithstanding stubborn domestic resistance.

For quite some time, conflicting impressions have gone out regarding India's seriousness in engaging with the rest of the world. The strongest of these struck at Davos in January 2018. Addressing the gathering at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, prime minister Modi highlighted three 'greatest threats to civilisation': climate change, terrorism, and backlash against globalisation. On the third, he alluded to 'forces of protectionism ... raising their heads against globalisation' for 'reversing' the process—a trend reflective of countries becoming 'more and more focused on themselves', with the impact of such mindsets being no 'less dangerous than climate change or terrorism'.

The emphasis on protectionism dragging future progress of the world would have rekindled hopes among some of India—traditionally a hesitant and slow trade liberaliser—converting itself to be a new champion of economic globalisation. The hopes were consistent with the robust character of Indian foreign policy witnessed since prime minister Modi's assuming of office in May 2014. The hopes were dashed when, within a few days of the prime minister's speech, India's Union Budget went all-out in raising customs duties on several imports for providing 'adequate protection to domestic industry'. More contradictions between foreign and trade policies were variously evidenced before and after, particularly India's studious reluctance to engage in FTAs.

The eventual decisions to conclude RCEP, and working out a trade deal with the US are examples of India making trade a decisive instrument for both, economic and foreign policy goals. The bold attitude of the government is, in spite of domestic economic groups (e.g., the RSS-affiliated Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) that organised a nationwide protest against joining RCEP), domestic industry, and even major government departments and ministries, remaining viciously opposed to India's joining FTAs and lowering trade barriers. These defensive mindsets are not expected to change. But, what is interesting is the government's decision to go ahead on two large trade deals in spite of the knowledge that it might end up antagonising several constituencies and stakeholders. However surprising it might seem, the decision reflects an executive mindset that has been seen before in India on implementing politically difficult economic reforms.

The commitment to RCEP and a trade deal with the US come at a time when the Indian economy is not in the best of health. Since returning to office for a second term, the Modi government has been saddled with the challenges of reviving an economy whose GDP growth is slowing and several major sectors moving into a sluggish mode. Over the last three months, the government, led by the finance ministry, has announced a slew of measures for kick-starting growth, and reviving investment. These include those taken specifically for encouraging exports. Exports appear to have become a priority for the government with the realisation that, reviving external demand is essential for lifting overall demand. Exports can increase significantly if India is able to attract export-oriented FDI from the US, and major RCEP members. Such FDI, apart from triggering fresh economic activity at the ground level, including new jobs, would push Indian products deeper in foreign markets, enabling them to overcome the problem of stagnant domestic demand. The late, but much-needed focus on exports, along with the emphasis on attracting export-stimulating investments, fit well with the goals of joining RCEP, and getting a FTA with the US. Moreover, a generous corporate income tax cut, and a few other notable improvements in doing business indicators, should contribute to greater competitiveness of Indian exports, enabling them to take advantage of these trade agreements.

Nothing comes free though. Both RCEP and the India-US trade deal would irk multiple domestic constituencies. Notable among these are dairy producers, the steel and chemicals industry, and the large number of constituencies opposed to India's broader trade and investment relations with China and the US on geopolitical and ideological grounds. The current context of economic slowdown, however, offers the government the right opportunity of pushing through the trade deals. This is similar to what past governments have done in identical situations. The history of India's economic reforms over the last three decades has several examples of the politically 'difficult' external sector reforms being implemented during episodes of economic slowdown. Beginning from policies taken by the Narasimha Rao government during the balance of payments crisis in 1991, and those during the later years of the Vajpayee government when GDP growth dropped below 4%, similar context and response were noted during the Manmohan Singh government in September 2012, following stagnating industrial growth and prospects of downgrade in global credit rating.

Crisis produces opportunities. RCEP and India-US trade might be the latest beneficiaries of such opportunities given India's proclivity of using difficult economic conditions to overlook domestic opposition in pursuing contentious reforms. Ironically, they might not have happened had the Indian economy not got stuck.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Virtually legal, stable coin

The virtual currency market remains highly volatile as international acceptance of Altcoins is speculative, even though experienced traders predict a huge demand on account of lowering supply, and owners promise compliance with regulations in the near future. Excessive selling pressure, and bearish investor sentiment persist. The potential cons of terror funding, round tripping, money laundering, information security breach, and non-compliance with tax norms outweigh the benefits of ease of use, cost savings, and financial-inclusion. Of late, global-concerns indicate a rising need to address the wide array of regulatory challenges clouding virtual currencies. Increased scrutiny of leading e-commerce & social-media platforms highlights the need to monitor political advertising, adopt a collaborative approach, and improve promoter goodwill. Legacy players and potential entrants viz. e-commerce firms, online retailers, and social media platforms must be subject to uniform regulations. Misuse of the existing vast outreach by platforms to create inroads in the uncertain asset class, and leverage the avenues to increase exposure threatens to jeopardise the interests of novice investors. At present, a limited availability of secure advanced networks and infrastructure impedes the application of digital currencies as a viable alternative for peer-to-peer payments/fund-transfers. To attain monetary stability, it is important to expedite the launch of an alternative crypto-format, which is transparent, and adheres to global financial standards. A well-regulated digital instrument, with crystal clear norms on ownership, categorisation, valuation, taxation and end-use, can facilitate market-accessibility, and optimal utilisation of the underlying block-chain technology.

— Girish Lalwani, Delhi

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TRADE CHURN

Who will milk the benefits?

Before entering into global trade agreement like RCEP, India must take note of the dairy sector's huge contribution to the economy

INDIA'S LIVESTOCK SECTOR ensures food security, provides employment, which leads to a reduction poverty and, more importantly, rural inequity. This is also evident from the increasing dependence of Indian farmers on livestock. Share of livestock sector to Gross Value Added (GVA) increased from 4% in 2011 to 4.6% in 2016. While share of agriculture and allied sector to gross value added consistently declined from 18.5% to 17.9%, during this period share of livestock in agricultural and allied gross value added increased from 22% to 26%. Among the livestock products, milk and milk product consist the highest share (67%) in the value of output from the livestock sector. Besides, this sector has been growing 11%, compounded annually, whereas the agricultural and allied sectors have grown 9% over this period. In recent years, milk and milk products are the largest agricultural commodity generating 32% more output than combined output of paddy and wheat.

According to the Agriculture Skill Council of India report, around 8.4 million small and marginal dairy farmers' directly and indirectly depend on dairy sector for their livelihood, out of which 71% are women. Moreover, of total workforce engaged in dairy activities, 92% are from rural areas. Further, around 69% of dairy workers belong to socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

Another critical aspect is that while the crop production employs rural workforce for 90-120 days in a year, the dairy sector plays an important role in providing alternative employment opportunities.

According to the situation assessment survey of Agricultural Household's report, 2013, the average monthly receipts per agricultural household was ₹5,542 for those engaged in cultivation activity and ₹2,604 for households engaged in animal farming. Moreover, 69% average monthly receipts were derived from production of milk. Marginal and small agricultural households holding less than 0.01 hectares of land reported a higher share (78.3%) of income from the production of milk compared to the all-India average (69%).

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation 2017, India is the largest milk producer in the world which contributes 21% to the world milk production followed by the United States (12%), Pakistan (5.3%), China (4.2%), Brazil (4%), Germany (3.9%), Russia (3.7%), New Zealand (2.5%), Netherlands (1.7%) and Australia (1%). In terms of numbers of dairy farmers, India is followed by Pakistan (7 million), the United States (0.038 million), China (0.013 million), New Zealand (0.012 million) and Australia (0.005 million).

India has around 73 million dairy farmers mostly holding one or two milch animal per farmer. Also, in India, farmers share in the retail price of milk is around 60%, the highest amongst other countries (International Farm Comparison Network, Dairy Report, 2018). Whereas, in the case of New Zealand and Australia, where average holding is 430 and 263 milch animals per farmer, respectively, price share is only 23% and 24%. Similar is the situation in the United States, Germany, France, and Denmark, where farmers receive only 43%, 45%, 34% and 43% of consumers' price on milk and milk products, respectively.

Milk yield, though, is highest in the US followed by Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, India and Pakistan. In terms of farmer milk price as a percentage of world market price, all countries' milk prices are above the world market price except New Zealand and Australia. The cost of producing milk in India is lower than Russian, Canada, Japan, the United States, Italy, and China but above Germany, New Zealand, and Australia. Still, India is more comfortably placed in terms of milk production, that too, at cheaper rate. It would, thus, be unfair to compare India's small holder dairy farming system with that of developed countries'.

India's milk production is expected to increase to around 330 million metric tonnes in 2033-34 as per NITI Aayog working group report 2018 from the current level of 176 million metric tonne (2018-19). India has enough potential market to utilise surplus milk and also increase the trade balance in dairy products. Countries like New Zealand, Denmark, Netherlands Australia, France, Germany, and the USA have milk self-sufficiency of more than 823%, 202%, 192%, 117%, 116%, 111%, and 105%, respectively. These countries, particularly New Zealand and Australia, are looking to push their surplus milk and milk products to India through Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade negotiation.

India should look at import duty structure of other countries such as Canada, Japan, Pakistan and South Africa. Canada imposes a 208% protection duty on dairy products

According to the industry estimates the market share of Indian value-added milk products is expected to be around 0.5 million metric tonne. If we allow imports of all value-added dairy products from New Zealand that is equivalent to 5% of their total export and volume of 0.133 million metric tonne, New Zealand alone will capture almost one-third of domestic market. This will not only adversely affect Indian economy, but also affect the socio-economic condition of millions of rural small, marginal and landless farmers particularly and economically disadvantaged communities.

Indian government should look at import duty structure of other countries such as Canada, Japan, Pakistan and South Africa. Canada imposes 208% protection on dairy products, which are the highest trade protection among the countries followed by Japan (101%), Pakistan (100%), South Africa (92.3%) and Australia (4%). Further, Australia, South Africa, Mexico, Venezuela, and Chile do not import dairy products from India.

Thus, the county needs to take a guarded approach in terms of joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Dairy is the backbone of the rural economy, any move to allow unrestricted imports of dairy products would spell disaster for the farmers.

Dairy sector contribution to the Indian economy

Year	Paddy & wheat output (₹ cr)	Milk output (₹ cr)	Milk/paddy & wheat production (%)	Milk as % of live-stock output	Agri to GVA (%)	Livestock to total GVA (%)	Livestock as % of Agriculture GVA
2011	2,88,663	3,27,767	11.9	67.2	18.5	4.0	21.8
2012	3,29,976	3,72,228	11.4	65.9	18.2	4.0	22.0
2013	3,63,196	4,23,150	14.2	65.5	18.6	4.1	21.9
2014	3,55,655	4,95,835	28.3	66.8	18.2	4.4	24.4
2015	3,74,018	5,60,777	33.3	67.1	17.7	4.6	26.2
2016	4,19,206	6,14,387	31.8	66.9	17.9	4.6	25.8

Note: Author calculation, Source: National Account Statistics.

Farmers' share on consumers' price and average final bound duties on dairy product

Country	Farmers' share on consumers' price@	Self-sufficiency in milk (%) @	Farmer milk price as % of world market price @	Avg final bound duties on dairy product (%)#	Milk yield per cow in kg in 2018	No. of dairy farmers (million) 2018*
India	60	100	15.6+	63.8	1,715	73.08
Russia	47	80	27.4+	15.1	3,855	3.091
Canada	46	99	83.4+	208.5	10,491	0.011
Germany	45	111	7.5+	$	8,063	0.063
Japan	45	73	153+	101	8,604	0.018
US	43	105	16.6+	19.2	10,500	0.038
Denmark	43	202	11.3+	$	9,982	0.003
Belgium	37	100	4.7+	$	7,928	0.010
South Africa	36	102	1.1+	92.3	5,863	0.001
Brazil	35	97	10.6+	48.8	2,202	0.962
France	34	116	11.2+	$	7,054	0.063
Pakistan	33	99	3.9+	100	1,276	6.984
Netherlands	30	192	13.7+	$	8,687	0.012
Italy	27	80	31.4+	$	7,500	0.028
Australia	24	117	6.8-	4.3	6,197	0.005
New Zealand	23	823	10.0-	10.0	4,437	0.012
China	20	76	68.1+	12.2	2,383	0.013

Profiles 2019. + denotes above world market price above - below the world market price and *-The world dairy situation 2019.$ denotes not available but follows EU tariff rate (44.8%)

Going green

UC DOSI

Chief General Manager (Operations), Jindal Aluminium Limited

Aluminium's role in green applications for sustainable development

TODAY, WORLD ECONOMIES are growing rapidly, and the need for sustainable development is far more pertinent than ever before. The on-going dialogue for sustainable living has inspired and encouraged governments, businesses as well as individuals to ensure that the current development demands do not hamper the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

While countries have collectively made progress at meeting the United Nations goals, situation is grim. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018, economic losses were worth $300 billion in 2017, three in 10 people in developing countries lack access to safe drinking water, four in 10 lack access to clean cooking fuels and technologies, world hunger is on the rise again, and 4.2 million people died from air pollution in 2016. Sustainable development is, thus, a need of the hour.

Large businesses across industries are constantly on the lookout for greener alternatives that can aid the implementation of sustainable business models. Since aluminium is the third most abundant material on earth after oxygen and silicon, making up 8% of the earth's crust, it has successfully filled this gap by providing greener options to industries like construction, automobile, electrical and packaging. While aluminium is not as cost-effective as plastic and steel, it is 100% recyclable, durable, and energy-efficient; it also has the smallest total carbon footprint among competing materials.

Aluminium has been at the helm of green applications in the last decade. To achieve lower carbon footprints, countries are extensively using aluminium for the following:

Green Buildings: Green buildings have gained popularity over the last five years, and this revolution is heavily backed by aluminium. Aluminium's strength makes it the first choice for structural frameworks, while its reflectivity makes the buildings more energy efficient. The recycling rate for aluminium in the construction industry is 95%, making it a key component of LEED-certified buildings. It also enhances the solar efficiency and minimises air leakage through aluminium fenestration. It is an excellent alternative to metals like steel in the manufacturing of green buildings.

As it is empowering and driving sustainable initiatives, the demand for aluminium across different sectors is expected to grow by 8% CAGR in the next five years

Electric Vehicles: Aluminium is expected to accelerate worldwide adoption of electric vehicles, making it one of the most sought-after metals in the automobile industry, as it is crash absorbent, durable, corrosion-resistant, easily formable and infinitely recyclable. By virtue of being lightweight, aluminium reduces the mass weight of a vehicle, thereby making it more fuel-efficient. It plays an instrumental role in reducing the CO2 emissions from electric vehicles and thereby improving the air quality. Furthermore, the thermal and anti-corrosion properties of aluminium make it an ideal component for battery frames. These lightweighted vehicles are also expected to meet the safety requirements given its structural strength and can be fully recycled while emitting 1.5 tonnes fewer greenhouse gases over its lifecycle.

Aluminium Packaging: Aluminium's ability to be extruded or rolled into any shape, and its insulating properties, make it a versatile choice of metal for packaging. This non-toxic green metal can be rolled up to eight times thinner than a banknote! With the recent ban on single-use plastic in India, aluminium is increasingly being used for packaging, like foils, packaging, etc. It also reduces shipping costs and carbon emissions for beverage makers. Alloys of series 1xxx, 3xxx, and 8xxxx are the most common forms found in packaging that have a shelf-life exceeding 12 months.

With the advent of energy-efficient technology, countries like India need to adopt a green-mindset. India currently exudes 5.7% of the total global emissions and is progressing towards lowering that number. The use of aluminium presents the excellent potential for increasing the sustainable use of energy. As it is empowering and driving sustainable initiatives, the demand for aluminium across different sectors is expected to grow by 8% CAGR in the next five years.

Testing India's mettle in metals

India needs to develop a Shanghai like structure for a robust metal market

V SHUNMUGAM
& RAVI BHUSHAN

Shunmugam is head, Bhushan an analyst, Research, MCX, India. Views are personal

METAL MARKETS TODAY are convinced of the dependence of global metal prices on the health of China's economy. China is the world's biggest metal consumer with a third of global trade in manufactured goods (World Bank 2018). No wonder, metal markets keenly await the data on Chinese manufacturing and economy to appropriately price most metals. Such an influence is also backed by the existence of robust ecosystem

In 1999, metal trading started on Shanghai Futures Exchange (ShFE), beginning with Copper and Aluminium. To match the mettle of London Metal Exchange (LME), ShFE began discovering prices that reflect the Chinese market fundamentals.

The success of ShFE derivatives market accelerated the practice of warranting in the physical market leading to healthy development of trade financing with the warranted inventory being used as the collateral. During the last decade, copper and aluminium inventory in ShFE warehouses have expanded by three times. Development of ShFE-led warranting raised the bar of trust built around warehouse receipts.

State policies supported this development. China Nonferrous Metals Industrial Association (CNIA) emerged as the state-recognised nodal body for promoting compliance with national policies. Besides, the National Nonferrous Metals Standardisation Technical Committee periodically evaluates the need of revision in standards based upon the industry requirement in conformity with the global standards. The entry of international players for warehousing and warranting under ShFE framework indicates the steady integration of the global and Chinese standards.

With China being the world's largest metals consumer, prices discovered on the ShFE platform are today a key indicator of the local fundamentals.

With its aim of being a 'price-maker' been achieved, ShFE is setting itself to compete with LME to be the global benchmark exchange. As per 2018 FIA annual report, ShFE traded 1,119 million tonnes of major non-ferrous metals, about a third of 3,932 million tonnes on LME. The proposed opening up of ShFE to foreign investors will further help Chinese market.

Indian metal markets are in the same state today as the Chinese were at the start of 21st century. The primary and secondary (scrap) Indian physical metal markets are in a highly unorganised and fragmented state amidst lack of quality standards and storage infrastructure with poorly developed forward curve. Despite being one of the largest consumers, Indian markets largely benchmark their deals on LME discovered prices.

Lack of development of regulated warehousing ecosystem for metals has not only crippled development market for financing of inventories but also restricted most major deals to a month's horizon in an effort to lock their margins. As the first step towards development of regulated warehousing sector, primary and secondary (scrap) metal markets need synchronized standards

A significant development has been taking place in Indian metal markets with the launch of India-benchmarked MCX deliverable metal futures contracts. All five base metals futures contracts on MCX: Aluminium, Zinc, Lead, Nickel and Copper have recently been made delivery-based. The new deliverable contracts have been readily welcomed by the market participants and about 24,971 tonnes of base metals have been delivered through MCX's delivery mechanism in the half year ending September 2019. In addition to this, an average daily Open Interest (signalling long-term interest) stood at around 80,000 MT in September 2019 and the current stocks of around 18,000 MT in the exchange-accredited warehouses. The India-benchmarked deliverable futures contracts have aided the transparent discovery of the India premiums. While, the product design of base metals still largely follows LME brands/standards, but it is expected to lead to the alignment of domestic standards.

If India's metal futures markets were to recreate Shanghai's success, it is essential that its price discovery process is backed by robustness of participation, financialisation of the metal markets ecosystem, standards and testing mechanism matching that of global markets, and the frequency/efficacy of relevant economic and market data collection and dissemination. It warrants that there is a policy unleash in India around standards and testing, financing of metal stocks, regulated warehousing and warranting, economic/market information collection and dissemination, etc.

The Bureau of Indian Standards, which prescribes standards, should provide for purity based standards for metals in alignment with global market needs, besides setting up sampling\testing protocol and accreditation for testing laboratories, matching international standards in an effort to connect the Indian markets with global counterparts. Further, bringing storage of metals under the Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority will enable issuance of e-NWRs providing for the safety of financial institutions leading to development of forward curve across tenures. Allowing banks and financial institutions to finance such e-NWRs would not only ease the working capital needs of the user/producer industries but also make value chain develop storage to effectively cushion price fluctuations and thereby sustainably supporting the 'Make in India' policy aspirations. Healthy stocks and transparent information about the same will make markets further more efficient. Finally, existence of a nodal ministry for metals similar to that of steel with a mandated responsibility of the sustainable development of non-ferrous metals ecosystem will bring coherent policy actions aimed at making India a competitive manufacturing base for global consumers and to bring its share of global trade to 5%.

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FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

RISING SEAS IN INDIA & WORLD: THREAT FRESHLY ASSESSED, WHAT CHANGES

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, OCTOBER 30

THE NUMBER of people in India threatened by rising sea-levels is at least seven times more than previously estimated, a new research has revealed. The research, published in *Nature Communications*, has found large areas on the eastern as well as western coastlines under threat of rising sea levels, including Mumbai on the west and Kolkata on the east.

It says 36 million people along the Indian coastlines currently live on land that will fall below the annual flood level by 2050, exposing them to risks of flooding, damage to infrastructure, loss of livelihood, or permanent displacement. The previous estimate was of five million people in these areas being exposed to these risks.

How the study was done

Researchers Scott Kulp and Benjamin Strauss of Climate Central, an independent organisation of climate scientists, have reported that they have developed a new tool that measures elevation of land from mean sea levels with much greater accuracy than earlier models. Their study claims that previous methods to measure land elevation suffered from large errors in most of the world apart from the US, Australia and parts of Europe. Land elevation data in most of these other areas came from satellite measurements done by a NASA project called Shuttle Radar Topography Mission, or SRTM.

The study says the error in the measurements came from the fact that often the tops of trees or buildings were taken to be the protrusions of earth. Thus, SRTM measurements even in the coastal cities of the US often overestimated land elevations by as much as 15.5 feet on an average. Their new tool, called CoastalDEM (or Coastal Digital Elevation Model), which uses artificial intelligence and machine learning on 51 million data samples, brought down this error to less than 2.5 inches on an average, it says.

The threat projection

The study claims to remove over-estimations in the assessment of land elevations in coastal areas. As a result, it finds that much larger areas of land were threatened by rising sea levels because of climate change. Consequently, a significantly higher population group was at risk.

The study found that 300 million people, and not 80 million as estimated earlier, across the globe were currently living in areas that were below the annual coastal flood line. By the turn of this century, land that is now home to 200 million of these people would be permanently below the high tide line.

Almost 80 per cent of these 300 million people live in China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. China alone accounted for 43 million.

Old projection for 2050

New projection for 2050

A map of Mumbai based on the new study, and prepared by *The New York Times*, shows a much higher threat projection than earlier. *NYT*

Vulnerable areas in India

The new tool has found that in particular, the western coastline near Bhuj, Jamnagar, Porbandar, Surat, Bharuch and Mumbai are much more susceptible to rising sea levels than earlier assessments. On the eastern side, almost the entire coastline of West Bengal and Odisha have been found under threat. Except for some areas near Kakinada, the threats to the coastlines of the southern states have not been affected by the new measurements.

The study has serious prediction for India for 2050. "By that year, projected sea level rise could push average annual floods above land currently home to some 36 million people. West Bengal and coastal Odisha are projected to be particularly vulnerable, as is the eastern city of Kolkata," it says.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

J&K state to 2 UTs: today, later

Bifurcation comes into effect on October 31, with immediate events including LGs, top bureaucrats, police chiefs taking charge. But reorganisation is a long process; a look at what more will remain to be done.

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 30

THE STATE of Jammu and Kashmir will be officially bifurcated into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh on Thursday, October 31. This was the date chosen after the bifurcation was announced in Parliament on August 5. Beyond the symbolic importance — October 31 is the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel — the day will mark the beginning of the functioning of the two UTs at a bureaucratic level. The period between August 5 and October 31 has been used by the state administration and the Home Ministry to put a basic bureaucratic structure in place to implement the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act.

What happens on October 31?

In terms of events, the Lieutenant Governors of the two UTs will take oath of office along with the Chief Justice of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court. Last week, the Union government appointed serving IAS officer of Gujarat cadre Girish Chandra Murmu as the LG of Jammu and Kashmir, and retired bureaucrat of Tripura cadre Radha Krishna Mathur as LG of Ladakh.

On the ground, the two UTs will get their own Chief Secretaries and other top bureaucrats, their own police chiefs and key supervisory officers. While Dilbagh Singh will continue to be DG of J&K police, an IG-level officer will head the police in Ladakh. Both forces will remain part of the J&K cadre which will eventually merge with the Union Territory cadre.

For full-fledged bifurcation, the Reorganisation Act gives a period of one year. Reorganisation of states is a slow process that at times can take years; issues relating to reorganisation of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, which was bifurcated into Andhra and Telangana in 2013, are still being brought to the Union Home Ministry for resolution.

What will happen to other officers already posted in the undivided state?

An apportionment of posts in both Union Territories has been done. While the bureaucratic structures are in place, the staff of the state administration are yet to be divided. The government had asked all staff to send in applications for their preferred posting between the two UTs. This process is still on. The basic idea is to have minimum shifting between the two UTs, sources in the state administration said, with preference being given to regional affinities. "We would like to give people the posting of their choice between the two UTs. Those from Ladakh prefer being posted in the region and those from Kashmir and Jammu want to stay put. The only issue is there aren't enough Ladakhi staff to fill in all posts there. So some people from Jammu and Kashmir may have to go there. All of that is being worked out. It will take some time," a state administration official said.

As of now, the Home Ministry has issued an interim order to maintain the station of all staff in the lower bureaucracy as it is. "This is to ensure that the two UTs keep on functioning without any hiccups beginning October 31," said the official.

What happens to the laws that governed the state of Jammu & Kashmir?

Legislative restructuring is a work in progress, with a lot remaining to be done. While 153 state laws are to be repealed, 166 have been retained. Then there is the cosmetic exercise of repealing Acts that mention "applicable to all of India but not the state of Jammu and Kashmir".

As of now, the state administration has implemented all that is mentioned in the Reorganisation Act as it is. But it is also saddled with the massive legislative exercise of arriving at and making state-specific insertions into the 108 central laws that would now be applicable to the two Union Territories.

For example, the state used to have its own Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) which would now be replaced by the central CrPC. Unlike the Ranbir Penal Code, which is practically a replica of the Indian Penal Code, Kashmir's CrPC has many provisions different from the Central CrPC. "It will have to be seen if any modification needs to be done to suit the state. But a final decision in all these aspects would be taken by Delhi," an official said.

"Similarly, there are state-specific insertions that may be done in laws relating to the protection of women and children that have been replaced by the POCSO Act of the Centre. Same is the case with the Juvenile Justice Act. Then there is the law relating to reservations in the state which has been retained. While the quota for economically weaker sections has already been added through an amendment, the Centre may want to make some insertions drawing from central Acts," another state administration official said.


Villagers of Katrasoo in Kulgam on Wednesday, a day after militants shot dead five labourers from West Bengal. *Shuaib Masoodi*

LEGAL ISSUES TO WORK OUT

JUVENILE JUSTICE ACT
Central Act takes those above the age of 16 as adults, existing J&K Act's age limit is 18.

RESERVATION
Current laws in J&K state do not recognise reservation according to caste, have provisions for region-wise reservation.

OTHER LAWS
Land issues may need to be looked into, business rules have to be framed for both UTs, Civil Services Decentralisation Act may require changes.

Which are the laws that may require state-specific insertions?

A major bone of contention with regard to the Juvenile Justice Acts of the Centre and the state is the age limit. While the central Act takes those above the age of 16 as adults, the state Act's age limit is 18. The argument has been that given the special situation in Kashmir where teenagers are often found to be part of violent protests, the central Act could jeopardise the future of many.

As far as the state's reservation laws are concerned, they do not recognise reservation according to caste. The state has provision for region-wise reservation such as quota for those living near the LoC and the International Border and a quota for backward regions. While the state population includes 8% SCs and 10% STs, there are regional differences such as Ladakh having no SC population but a high tribal population.

"Then there are laws relating to land which may need to be looked into. There are issues relating to business rules which have to be framed for both Union Territories. There are also issues relating to employment as anyone can now apply for a job here. The Civil Services Decentralisation Act may require changes," the official said.

Section 96 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act facilitates this: "For the purpose of facilitating the application in relation to the successor Union Territories, of any law made before the appointed day, as detailed in Fifth Schedule, the Central Government may, before the expiration of one year from that day, by order, make such adaptations and modification of the law, whether by way of repeal or amendment, as may be necessary or expedient, and thereupon every such law shall have effect subject to the adaptations and modifications so made until altered, repealed or amended by a competent Legislature or other competent authority."

Sources said though all central laws have been extended to Ladakh, regulations have to be framed.

The Act also provides for an increase of seats in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly to 114. Given that the Act also provides for delimitation, the process for which has not yet begun, this may take more time.

How will assets be shared?

On September 9, the government constituted a three-member advisory committee under the chairmanship of former Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra to divide the assets and liabilities of the state between the two Union Territories. The committee is yet to submit its report.

Three more committees — on personnel, finance and administrative matters — were constituted at the state level for the purpose of reorganisation. The three committees are learnt to have completed their work but their recommendations have not been made public yet.

A far more complicated task than sharing of assets is financial restructuring. "Because of the decision coming in August, the administration is saddled with a middle-of-the-year financial restructuring which is proving to be a massive bureaucratic exercise. It is going to take some. more time to fully put things in place," an official said.

Notably, while the total budget for Union Territories is Rs 7,500 crore, the budget for Jammu and Kashmir is in excess of Rs 90,000 crore. This could also necessitate continuance of the Kashmir division in the Home Ministry, sources said.

Who are Kerala's Maoists, how they differ from their comrades elsewhere

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, OCTOBER 30

THUNDERBOLT commandos of the Kerala Police killed four alleged Maoists in back-to-back encounters over Monday and Tuesday in the Attappadi forests of the state's Palakkad district. The four individuals, including a woman, belonged to Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, police said.

This was the third encounter between police and Maoists in Kerala in almost three years. In March this year, police shot dead a Maoist activist who had allegedly gone to extort money at a resort in Wayanad district. In November 2016, two Maoists were killed in an encounter in the Nilambur forests in Malappuram district.

Over the last decade or so, Kerala has seen overt and covert Maoist activities in the northern districts of Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Palakkad, and Malappuram. In 2018, Wayanad, Malappuram, and Palakkad joined the Centre's list of 90 leftwing extremism (LWE) affected districts across the country.

Beginnings of Naxalism

The ripples of the Naxalbari uprising in North Bengal in the late 1960s reached Kerala as well. North Kerala, including Wayanad, was a hotbed of the ultra-Left movement, and A Varghese, a CPM leader who turned to Naxalism, and K Ajitha, who is now a prominent feminist activist, inspired a series of revolts against landlords. The so-called 'Spring Thunder', however, suffered a blow when Varghese, who had won the hearts of tribals, was killed in an encounter — which was subsequently revealed to have been fake — in 1970.

Leaflets and addresses

The nature of Maoist operations in Kerala is different from that in other LWE-affected states. They have never targeted civilians or caused human casualties, and use the trijunction of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka — where a seamless forest cover and difficult terrain hamper policing — as a safe organisational and transit hub. Forest patches in Palakkad, Malappuram, and Wayanad are part of this trijunction.

Over the past several years, the Maoists set up three squads (dalams) in this area — the Kabani, Nadukani, and Bhavani dalams — and added a fourth, the Varahini dalam, in 2017. They typically enter villages or tribal hamlets bordering forests, address the local people, and distribute leaflets in an attempt to drive home the argument for an armed struggle against the state.

They have not, however, had any significant success in winning over youths in the tribal hamlets, for which several factors are responsible: the socio-economic profile and standard of living of tribals in Kerala is far better than elsewhere, and improved policing and greater socialisation of tribal youths make recruitment difficult.


After the encounter in Attappadi forest of Palakkad district. *Express*

The Maoists mostly return to the jungles after collecting provisions from the villages.

Some stray activities

There have been stray cases of Maoist attacks on resorts and stone quarrying units alleged to be operating illegally or encroaching on lands of tribals. Forest outposts too, have been occasionally targeted. Police sometimes register cases against identifiable Maoists, based on complaints from local people.

In 2014, Maoists strayed from the villages and forest fringes to attack a KFC outlet in Palakkad. That same year, the Kochi corporate office of Nitta Gelatin India Limited (NGIL), a prominent Indo-Japanese industrial venture, was vandalised. After playing cat and mouse for several years, Maoists and the Kerala Police exchanged fire in December 2014 in a reserve forest in Wayanad. The deaths in the encounters over the last three years have not deterred the Maoists, who have been spotted at several places in North Kerala.

Big Maoist names

A prominent leader is R Roopesh, 50, of Thrissur district. At the time of his arrest in Tamil Nadu in 2015, Roopesh had been heading the Western Ghats Zone of the Maoist movement for several years, and faced some 30 cases in Kerala. His wife P A Shyna, who worked alongside him, was arrested, too. Shyna has been released on bail; Roopesh remains in judicial custody.

Murali Kannampilly, now 67, was arrested by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad in 2015. The son of Kannampilly Karunakara Menon, a former diplomat who served as India's High Commissioner and Ambassador to several countries, Murali Kannampilly was for long a key figure in the Maoist movement in Kerala. He was recently released on bail from jail in Pune.

The Cherukara Palli family of Pandikkadu in Malappuram is one of Kerala's prominent Maoist families. C P Jaleel, who was killed in Wayanad in March this year, belonged to this family. Jaleel's brother, C P Ismail, had been arrested in Pune along with Murali Kannampilly. A third brother, C P Moitheen, operates in forests in Kerala, while a fourth, C P Rasheed, is a human rights activist associated with the Maoist front Porattam.

The brothers started out on an activist path with issues concerning Dalits and the environment, and subsequently embraced Maoism.

The lone target of the second of this week's double encounter in Palakkad, Manivasakam, was also a senior Maoist leader, and a member of the CPI(Maoist) Tamil Nadu State Committee. Manivasakam had been allegedly leading the Attappadi camp since the 2016 encounter in Malappuram, in which Kuppu Devaraj alias Ravanna, a member of the CPI(Maoist) central committee, was killed.

In Kerala from other states

According intelligence sources, most of the Maoists operating in Kerala belong to other states. There may be some three dozen of them in number, along with a handful from Kerala. Several top Maoists from other states, such as Vikram Gowda, have been spotted in the state. Six of the seven Maoists killed in the last three years (including in this week's encounters) were from other states. The presence of these Maoists is usually attributed to the intensified police action in other LWE states, which drives them to seek refuge in Kerala.

Sympathy and support

As Maoists have not shed civilian blood in Kerala, their movement enjoys significant support. Kerala Maoists get logistic and ideological backing from organisations such as Porattam and Ayyankalipada, as well as from human rights activists. Police killings of alleged Maoists and cases against them are invariably questioned, and human rights activists often conduct a parallel probe into encounter killings.

The CPI, an ally of the ruling CPI(M), has always questioned police action against Maoists. Senior CPI leaders attended the wedding of the daughter of Roopesh and Shyna. In 2015, Kerala High Court said that being a Maoist is not a crime, and no one could be arrested merely for being one. After this week's killings, CPI state secretary Kanam Rajendran took strong exception to the police action, and retired HC judge Kemal Pasha said the police might have been trying to divert attention from other issues. Human rights activists marched in protest in Kozhikode on Tuesday, and were arrested.

WORDLY WISE

AND IF YOU SELL YOUR WORK — WHAT IS IT BUT SELLING YOUR OWN SELF?

— JOSEPH CONRAD

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

TASK IN THE VALLEY

As J&K map is redrawn, need to lift curbs on people, leaders grows more urgent. Till then, no new beginning is possible

AS THE DECISION to divide Jammu & Kashmir into two Union Territories takes effect, much remains to be done. The work of dividing the manpower and material resources of the state is far from over even as the two newly-created territories of the state which will now pass into history as the "erstwhile state of J&K" set off on different paths. Most importantly, there is no papering over the stark ground reality that the government is yet to allow the people of the Valley to speak out, and be heard, on decisions that affect them the most. In various domestic and international forums, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and a host of other senior government functionaries have described and defended the August 5 decisions as necessitated by the need to "develop" a state that had ostensibly lagged behind the rest of the country on economic and social fronts due to its special status. The government's plans to bring J&K up to speed are not yet known. But clearly, any efforts in this direction would, crucially, need the participation of the people for whom this development is meant. Sooner rather than later, the government needs to free the political leaders and workers who have been detained, and allow people to freely express their views in the Valley.

The Block Development Council election has shown that wiping the slate clean and creating a new leadership is difficult, if not impossible, in situations as fraught as those that exist in the Valley. The BDC is elected indirectly, that is, elected panchs and sarpanchs of a particular block of villages vote to elect one among them as the head of that block council. But almost a year after the last round of J&K panchayat polls, many of these representatives of the people at the bottom-most tier of electoral democracy continue to seek refuge in a hotel in uptown Srinagar, away from their villages. The persistence of fear has only underlined the questions of legitimacy about an electoral exercise at the end of which many seats of panch and sapanch in the Valley lay vacant, and most of those elected were elected unopposed.

It remains to be seen whether and how the conversion of a state into two Union Territories resolves the 70-year-long troubled relationship between Kashmir and the rest of India, and between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. The killing of five migrant workers in Kulgam on Tuesday, the targeting of the most vulnerable in the Valley, coming on the heels of several other deadly attacks on non-residents, shows that peace may remain elusive even after the momentous changes bring the state directly under the control of the Union Home Ministry. It is easy to lose sight of this in the din and rhetoric on Kashmir, but the first step towards resolving a problem is to acknowledge it. Political alienation that has spread and deepened over generations is a large part of the crisis in Kashmir. Unless it is addressed politically, it will persist and continue to impose a heavy toll in the Valley, and the country.

THE RISING INSECURITY

Not enough jobs are being created. Those created are of questionable quality

THERE ARE SEVERAL pointers to the jobs crisis in India: One, the number of workers in the age-group of 18-30 employed under the MGNREGA rose to 7.07 million in 2018-19, up from 5.8 million in 2017-18 — signaling the lack of employment opportunities. Two, a study commissioned by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister says that even in the organised sector in India there was a preference in favour of "non-contractual" jobs between 2011-12 and 2017-18. Thus, not only are enough employment opportunities not being created for the millions entering the labour market and for those shifting out of agriculture, but even the jobs that are being added are of the "non-contractual" kind, calling into question the quality of jobs created.

Much of the labour force shifting out of agriculture between 2004-05 and 2011-12 found its way into the construction sector. But with the sector in the midst of a multi-year slowdown, employment opportunities are likely to have severely diminished. It is thus possible that the slowdown in economic activity, especially in the non-farm labour intensive sectors in both rural and urban areas, coupled with the terms of trade shifting against agriculture, would have pushed workers to seek employment under the employment guarantee scheme. The NSSO PLFS report also shows that youth unemployment (age group of 15 to 29) surged from 6.1 per cent in 2011-12 to 17.8 per cent in 2017-18, indicating that not enough employment opportunities exist. This slack in the labour market also reflects in the subdued wage growth. On the other hand, the jobs report indicates a shift towards informalisation of work relations even in the organised sector during this period. And as these "non-contractual" jobs are unlikely to provide any form of social security benefits, it raises questions over the quality of these jobs.

The Mudra programme was meant to help tackle the jobs crisis in India. As reported in this paper, Rs 5.71 lakh crore was sanctioned during the first three years of this programme through 12.27 crore loan accounts. Yet, only 1.12 crore additional jobs were created during this period, implying that every new loan did not create an additional employment opportunity. This inability to create enough quality jobs will have long-term repercussions for the Indian economy. India is in the midst of a demographic transition, but the data so far suggests that it has not been able to take advantage of it.

PINK BALL CRICKET

A new game is here. It must be played and consumed in moderation

ON NOVEMBER 22 at the Eden Gardens, Indian cricket will step into the unknown. The Test against Bangladesh will see the country embrace Test cricket under the floodlights, that many think is a cure for poor turnouts. Eden's spectacular backdrop will come in handy to those tasked with re-advertising the game's oldest format. With the sun slipping into the clouds, and as the Kolkata fans throng the stands, Eden will be the place to be.

The day and night format, many including the newly coronated Indian cricket board president Sourav Ganguly believe, is the way forward. Certainly, the afternoon start will be more convenient to the fans — students needn't bunk schools and office-goers needn't think of excuses to watch some of the game. Yet the move could hold some of the game's intrinsic charm hostage. It also throws up an important question: Does cricket have room for a fourth format, another mutant wherein the tactics and strategies are vastly different? For instance, there would be less of the fabled first-hour intrigue and more of twilight mystery. It's at dusk that the pink ball is said to begin showing its true nature. It's the time when the floodlights merge with the twilight sun, forming a spectrum that begins to play tricks with the batsmen's vision. Besides, the pink ball, with its extra lacquer, could assist more swing, and even on the subcontinent, batting first would not be the obvious choice for captains winning the toss. With batting becoming difficult, matches wouldn't last till the fifth day. The joy of watching the ball exploding off the cracks or fleet-footed batsmen dousing them with supremely soft hands and cool heads might be a thing of the past.

For the sake of cricket's heterogeneity and tradition, pink-ball cricket is best consumed in moderation. It shouldn't be the staple — rather, the odd night out. While cricket officials must be concerned about dwindling Test crowds, and they need to devise counter-measures, the intrinsic joys of the game must be protected. The future of Test cricket shouldn't call for an erasing of its past.

It's credibility, stupid

On the Indian economy, no one knows what to believe. This makes the uncertainty of our moment more endemic

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

DESPITE THE PANTOMIME optimism that government functionaries and the media have to display, it is becoming impossible to disguise the sense of gloom surrounding the Indian economy. All agencies, from the Economist Intelligence Unit to the IMF are downwardly revising growth figures; the RBI's consumer confidence index is at a new low. There are learned debates about whether this slowdown is structural or cyclical. There are debates over demand side or supply side solutions. There is general global uncertainty: The global economy is slowing, the possibility of geopolitical and trade shocks is still high. But there is one obvious fact we are paying less attention to: The pervasive loss of credibility in the Indian system.

UPA 2 undoubtedly left a mess. This government has tried a few things, some even laudable. But at the end of the day, it has to take responsibility for the fact that it has sustained an economy whose numbers are more of a mystery, whose critical sectors (real estate, banking and telecom) are in crisis, where tax cuts are confused with tax reforms, where the pressures on the fiscal deficit are immense, where reform is a knee-jerk handout to one constituency or the other, where regulatory capture is still a possibility, where no one quite knows what the systemic effects of corporate malfeasance are, where income growth is near stagnant for most people, where there are uncertainties about what trade and RCEP might mean for India, and you don't have much of a mystery for why India is not growing.

But our credibility is not undermined by the crisis, as it is by the systemic denial this government has produced. It does not help when economic titans like Mukesh Ambani want us to take a bet on what they call "the leadership accelerator". It is the case that the more you need to trust a leader, the less likely you trust other institutions. But this metaphor is doubly odd. It does not contemplate the possibility that a leader can accelerate a car and crash it into a wall, or if the car is stuck in quicksand, can suck it in even further. Privately, almost no one believes our growth is more than two to three per cent. Any society with a gap between what people, and even professionals, say about the economy in private and what they are willing to say in public, will face a credibility crisis. Part of the problem with the Indian economy is that no one knows what to believe. This makes the uncertainty of our moment, more endemic and self-fulfilling.

> At the moment when everyone agrees that rural India bore the brunt of demonetisation, when the fiscal deficit and inequality are both high, corporate tax cuts and tax cuts for upper income brackets more generally are a crazy idea. If the structural diagnosis of our malaise made by Rathin Roy is correct, that this is a system largely geared to the consumption and investment needs of a hundred million, leaving the rest of the billion in the lurch, then all measures that reinforce the privilege at the top will be counter-productive. The other unintended consequence of undue tax cuts for the rich is that the political pressure for populist compensations increases rather than decreases as a result.

The second credibility gap is baked in our political economy. Because the ideological mystification is so deep it has to be said over and over again. If Indian capitalism is stalling, it is not because the government gives in to populist pressures from below — you can always cite this or that relief for farmers or consumers as examples. But the impact of that pales into insignificance with the undue power exercised by the rich and the powerful to distort the system. As Adam Smith always pointed out, the biggest challenge is not saving the market from the state, it is saving the state's credibility from being decimated by the privileged.

The credibility-undermining influence of the privileged can be seen in many ways. The rich can disproportionately claim exemptions from the state. At the moment when everyone agrees that rural India bore the brunt of demonetisation, when the fiscal deficit and inequality are both high, corporate tax cuts and tax cuts for upper income brackets more generally are a crazy idea. If the structural diagnosis of our malaise made by Rathin Roy is correct, that this is a system largely geared to the consumption and investment needs of a hundred million, leaving the rest of the billion in the lurch, then all measures that reinforce the privilege at the top will be counter-productive. The other unintended consequence of undue tax cuts for the rich is that the political pressure for populist compensations increases rather than decreases as a result. The fiscal deficit will be harder to contain. In short, if you are a country whose political economy is going to oscillate between bowing to blackmail from the rich, and indiscriminate populist spending to compensate, you are not on a sustainable path. Your credibility will be low.

The second baleful influence of the privileged is over the regulatory system. India is now in a peculiar situation, where two opposed trends are creating a credibility crisis simultaneously. On the one hand, there have been attempts to "clean up the system" as it were and in some cases, create mechanisms for an orderly exit. Some of the uncertainty is the result of this process, whether it is in banking, real estate or the creation of the bankruptcy process. But the confidence is diminishing whether the government has the bandwidth to create a legal and regulatory culture that can bring this process to fruition. Or will we end up in half measures, where the poison is revealed but no mechanisms to absorb it? More than economists, what the government needs is to train a critical mass of people across all institutions of economic governance — legal drafting, taxation, regulatory bodies, banking — who can create a credible regulatory culture. On the other hand, there is a perception that the system as whole is moving in a direction where a couple of groups will exercise disproportionate influence on the political system. We are at the risk of moving from decentralised to centralised and concentrated cronyism (centralised both in terms of givers and recipients of benefits). The combination of half-done clean-up of the old, and new cronyism at the top is not a recipe for credibility.

The third credibility gap is the private sector itself. We can rail against the government all we want, but the fact is that episodes like Ranbaxy, IL&FS, DHFL, shake the credibility of the entire system. The issue is not the number of companies that might have engaged in creative accounting; maybe that number is still small. But can you now tell what is kosher and what is not? What these episodes exposed was the fragility of accountability systems in the private sector: Whether it is the reputation of the big accounting firms, who are still getting off lightly, or of corporate governance. Failures in many of these firms have systemic consequences. So, risk aversion will increase and no one will bet on the future. Economies, as Keynes knew, turn on structures of credibility. We are frittering that away at every level, even in economics.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

A NEW KIND OF GOVERNMENT

Niti Aayog's Aspirational Districts Programme is a laboratory for governance reform

ALOK KUMAR AND RONALD ABRAHAM

THE ASPIRATIONAL Districts Programme (ADP) is one of the largest experiments on outcomes-focused governance in the world. Spread across 112 of India's socio-economically challenged districts, the ADP is Niti Aayog's flagship initiative to improve health, nutrition, education, and economic outcomes. Initial evidence suggests that the ADP has already contributed towards improving lakhs of lives. If successful, the ADP can present a new template for governance. It is therefore critical to try and get it right.

The ADP's theory of change rests on three pillars: Competition, convergence, and collaboration. Competition fosters accountability on district governments for final outcomes (instead of inputs) using high-quality data. Convergence creatively brings together the horizontal and vertical tiers of the government. Collaboration enables impactful partnerships between government, philanthropy and civil society. Of the Aspirational Districts, Niti Aayog plays a mentoring role in 27 districts in eight states, home to about 60 million people. Twelve central government ministries have similarly adopted the remaining districts.

Health outcomes in the mentored districts reveal significant improvements between the first and second third-party household surveys (in June-August 2018 and January-March 2019). We see increases in registering pregnant women into the health system (from 73 per cent to 86 per cent), institutional delivery of babies (66 per cent to 74 per cent), and anti-diarrheal treatment via ORS (51 per cent to 67 per cent) and zinc (34 per cent to 53 per cent). These rates are significantly faster than the usual trajectory for these indicators.

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While a deeper mixed-methods analysis is required to clearly understand what explains these results, we hypothesise the following four factors play a role. One, pioneering state and district-level initiatives in both the ADP and non-ADP districts in areas prioritised under the programme. Two, spurred by competition on outcomes, local governments target their efforts and improve programme implementation and design. Three, the focus on outcomes enables local experimentation based on a firm appreciation of ground realities. Four, partnerships between various philanthropic and civil society organisations with district governments augment local capacity.

While the initial evidence on the ADP's impact has been encouraging, as is true of any programme of this scale and scope, there is always room for supplementing our efforts.

As our colleague Karthik Muralidharan has argued, "High-performing organisations are characterised by autonomy to front-level officials on [processes], combined with accountability for outcomes." The ADP is built precisely on this mantra, and the district-ranking index can be improved further to fully reflect this. Some process-level indicators, such as on-time delivery of textbooks in schools, are part of the ranking index, based on which districts' socio-economic performance is assessed. Textbook delivery may or may not be a problem in districts, and its role in improving learning outcomes may be tenuous.

A simplified ranking index — with few but carefully chosen output and outcome measures — will more clearly signal national development targets, while providing autonomy to local governments.

High quality administrative data is critical to improve programme implementation and design at the local level. The poor quality of administrative data is usually due to capacity issues at the ground level as well as incentives to inflate performance. To help improve data quality, we use independent surveys to validate administrative data. Building each district's internal capacity to produce reliable and actionable data, and promoting a culture of data use, can be made a priority for the ADP.

ADP is a laboratory of various cutting-edge governance reforms. First and foremost, the programme has shifted focus away from inputs and budgets to outcomes, such as learning and malnutrition, at the highest echelons of the government. It has also introduced non-financial incentives to encourage government officials to deliver results and actively encourages forging partnerships with philanthropies and civil society to create better impact using the same amount of budgetary spends. The programme has also developed a lean data infrastructure that smartly exploits complementary strengths of administrative and survey data.

Each of these initiatives is a radical shift from the status quo in governance today. Therefore, it is critical to carefully document and learn from the ADP's experiences.

Kumar (IAS) is Health and Education Advisor at NITI Aayog. Abraham is Partner and India lead at IDinsight, a knowledge partner for the ADP. Views are personal

INDIAN EXPRESS

Banarasi Das all set to revolt against Lok Dal leadership

UK to ban entry of Asian husbands

OCTOBER 31, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

BANARASI REVOLT

CHIEF MINISTER BANARSI Das is virtually raising a banner of revolt against the Lok Dal leadership and preparing for a showdown on the issue of the dissolution of the UP Assembly to which he is totally opposed. As the organisational wing mounted pressure for the dissolution and simultaneous poll to the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha, the chief minister abstained from the meeting of the party functionaries, which was addressed, amongst others, by Raj Narain, working president of the Lok Dal. To ensure his majority in the cabinet in the event of the CFD ministers pulling out of the government, the Das was busy trying to win over the wavering ministers of the Lok Dal to his side and defeat the move in the cabinet.

SOVIET BORDER BASE

EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN intelligence agencies have reported that the Soviet Union has built an army base near Farah, 65 miles from the Iranian frontier, and expanded the Afghan air base at Shindand, 75 miles from the Iranian frontier. The agencies believe that the Russians want to build positions from which they can apply military pressure on Iran. Under the 1921 Soviet-Iranian treaty, the Russians have the right to intervene in Iran should internal developments appear to them as a threat to Soviet interests.

NO ASIAN HUSBANDS

HUSBANDS AND FIANCES of those not born in Britain will not be allowed to settle here even though they may be British citizens, according to a new proposed legislation. The exact nature of the legislation is not yet known. But the home secretary has privately told a group of Tory MPs that the proposed measure would not only considerably reduce the number of Asian men and women automatically allowed entry into Britain, but it would also, in part, fulfil the pledge contained in the Conservative Party's election manifesto. Last year, 10,000 Asians from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were allowed to settle in the UK they married British citizens.

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THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

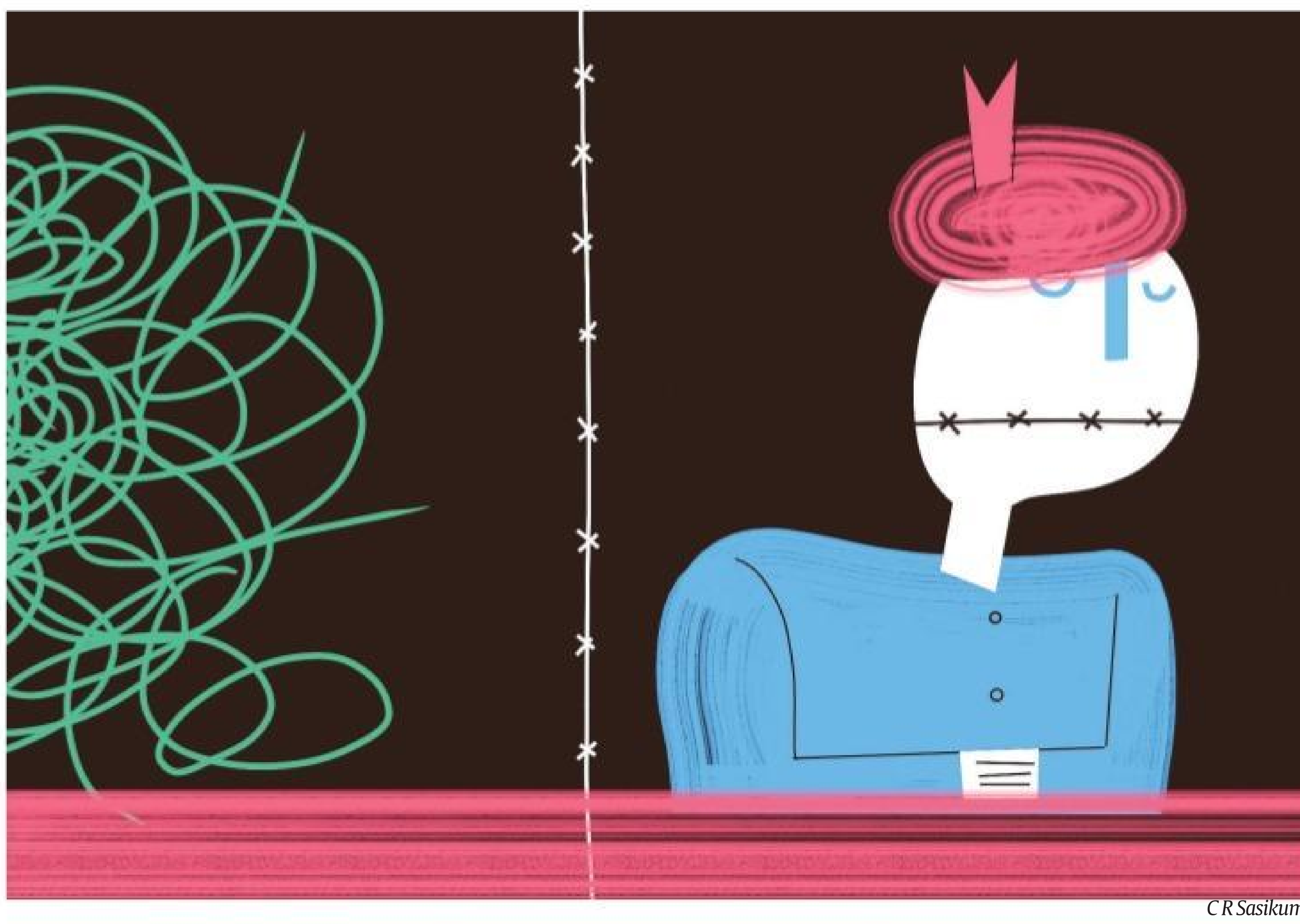
"The prime minister (Boris Johnson)has tried to manipulate opinion to give the impression that this election is for the benefit of the people, rather than for the benefit of himself and his party."

— THE GUARDIAN

Neighbour's duty

The current juncture in Pakistan is a good moment for India to speak up on Pakistan's internal developments. Demanding humane treatment for Sharif and Zardari is the least Delhi can do

C RAJA MOHAN



C R Sasikumar

AS HE RATTLES the Pakistani establishment with a big march on Islamabad this week, the Deobandi leader, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, has been accused of fronting for India. Branding political opponents as "agents" of the other county is quite common in Pakistan and India. What is more significant, though, is Delhi's apparent reluctance to exercise India's natural leverage in Pakistan's domestic politics. Could, or should, that change?

But first to Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who heads the dominant faction of the Jamiat ulema-e-Islam in Pakistan. For more than three decades, the Maulana has lent some colour to the drab Pakistani politics. Even more important, he has survived in a political environment where longevity is not assured.

The Maulana is accusing Prime Minister Imran Khan of abject failure on all fronts. He is demanding that the PM resign forthwith and make room for fresh elections. The "deep state" or the military establishment (the miltablishment) was quick to caution him against the march. The Maulana has persisted for now and the big rally in Islamabad is scheduled for Thursday.

The deep state questions the timing of the anti-government protests by pointing to Pakistan's troubled external environment. In the east, Pakistan confronts the surprising Indian decision to change the constitutional status of Kashmir and in the west, Islamabad hopes to shape the political transition in Afghanistan and install the Taliban in power.

The call for political restraint has not had much appeal amid the worsening economic situation, especially after the implementation of the IMF regimen that Pakistan had accepted earlier this year. Meanwhile, the international Financial Action Task Force has warned of additional measures against Pakistan if it does not clean up its act on terror financing over the next few months.

Rehman probably did not intend it this way, but his march has coincided with the rapid deterioration in the health of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who has been in prison since last year. The three-time prime minister has endured some unbelievably harsh punishment meted out to him by the Pakistan government. If the miltablishment wanted to make a horrible example of Sharif, who had dared to challenge the writ of the army, Imran Khan has been willing to wield the hatchet.

Sharif was convicted by a judge who had been blackmailed into pronouncing the former PM guilty, denying him decent medical care, and preventing him from seeing his wife when she was on the deathbed in London. The government locked up Sharif's daughter and heir-apparent, Maryam, as she sought to mobilise the people against the army. For good measure, the deep state also detained Maryam's husband. Beyond the Sharif family, another leader of the Pakistan Muslim League and former prime minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, is also behind bars.

None of this is really remarkable for Pakistan, where falling foul of the army is a crime in itself. Pakistan's deep state has the distinction of hanging one prime minister (Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto) and is widely suspected of organising and covering up the assassination of another (Bhutto's daughter, Benazir).

But the danger that Sharif might die in detention appears to have created a bit of a political panic. He has suddenly been given bail and admitted to hospital. Whether Nawaz Sharif survives or not, his sinking physical condition appears to have galvanised part of the political Opposition. The Pakistan People's Party, whose leader and former President Asif Ali Zardari is also in jail without any trial, is backing the march to Islamabad.

Delhi's official silence, amidst the deepening political and economic crisis next door, seems strange. It is not just the government, none of the main political parties are paying any attention to the unfolding brutalisation of Pakistan's politics or reflecting on its consequences for India.

Three broad reasons might be offered for India's silence on Pakistan's domestic politics. One is India's natural tendency towards self-absorption. Second is the unfortunate current temptation in India to see Pakistan as a black box. The intensification of tensions with Islamabad in recent years appears to have eroded Delhi's ability to differentiate between Pakistan's multiple institutions and political formations.

Third is the argument in Delhi that the dominance of the Pakistan army over its polity is immutable and therefore it is pointless for India to raise its voice against Rawalpindi's domestic transgressions. Associated with this is the proposition that if India wants any settlement with Pakistan, it has no choice but to deal with the army.

India, however, needs to question all the three propositions. On the first, India can't afford to turn its back on the domestic developments in any of its neighbouring countries. What happens inside Pakistan should always concern Delhi. Second, in treating Pakistan as a black box, Delhi limits its own policy choices. Delhi can't ignore the fact that even minor shifts in the correlation of Pakistan's domestic forces open at least some tactical space for India's policy.

Third, while the army's dominance over Pakistan's polity is real and unlikely to break down in the near future, India can't abandon all hope of internal change in Pakistan. Rather, Delhi must continuously strive to do what it can to encourage that change. Instead of insisting that the Pakistan army is the only credible interlocutor, Delhi must find ways to engage with all forces in Pakistan. It must keep channels of communication open with whoever in Pakistan is willing to talk.

The main policy question for Delhi is not about having formal talks with Islamabad. It is about leveraging the fact that India looms large over Pakistan's domestic politics. The current juncture in Pakistan is as good a moment as any for India to speak up on Pakistan's internal developments.

Demanding humane treatment for Sharif and Zardari is the least Delhi can do. Delhi certainly owes it to them. Both leaders had made genuine efforts to improve relations with India when they were in power. They had often talked of putting trade and people-to-people relations above the Kashmir dispute. That they were open to a positive relationship with India is among the reasons that Rawalpindi punishes them today.

Beyond the personal and ethical, it is in Delhi's interest to continuously remind itself and the world that India's problem is with the Pakistan army and not its political leaders. Having gotten nowhere with its efforts to engage the army in recent years, Delhi must do what little it can to strengthen the civilian and democratic forces in Pakistan.

> Delhi certainly owes it to Nawaz Sharif and Zardari. Both leaders had made genuine efforts to improve relations with India when they were in power. They had often talked of putting trade and people-to-people relations above the Kashmir dispute. That they were open to a positive relationship with India is among the reasons that Rawalpindi punishes them today.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

New turn in the Valley

J&K's transition calls for a break from past political strategies, closer integration of people

J S SANDHU

JAMMU AND KASHMIR is passing through a major disruptive transition. The waves of change are being felt by those who were in power, and hence their unease is understandable. A major factor in Kashmir is the security situation, considering Pakistan's unabated support to anti-national elements. While in Srinagar, as the Chinar Corps Commander, I saw that the political class was falling short in countering the alienation, containing the growing radicalisation, and was not adequately addressing youth anger and consequent street violence. The "physicians" were unable, unwilling, complicit or negligent in treating the cancer. Invariably, the line of treatment involved Central rule, and this was resorted to periodically. But, the mindset was not being treated, and the cancer remained, curbed at times by potent therapy (security forces' actions). So, the treatment method has been surgically altered.

Was the existing structure adequate to control the increasing anti-Indian voices? In the last two decades, the National Conference and the PDP maintained control over Kashmir, whereas Jammu and Ladakh often tilted towards the national parties. The national parties continue to retain the loyalty of their votebanks in Jammu and Ladakh, with no substantive disillusionment. In Kashmir, election boycott calls of the separatists resulted in low voter turnouts, mainly by party cadres, indirectly facilitating the Abdullahs and the Muftis to retain power. The people's mandate, hence, remained unclear.

Additionally, major faultlines had developed between Kashmir and Jammu - Ladakh. The Jammu region always felt aggrieved due to the Kashmir-centric flow of state resources. And, the special status facilitated Kashmiri patronage-based political controls. Whether the growing radicalisation, unchecked anti-national influences, the security connotation, regional mainstream political hold and dynastic control warranted a "constitutional surgical strike" is worth analysing. My take is that we couldn't have let the cancer grow.

The political space in Kashmir is now being contested by new entrants. Dislodging existing political players is extremely difficult, and there are rare success stories. Sajjad Lone's People's Conference tried to be a viable political alternative, but could only make inroads in the Kupwara-Handwara area. Presently, the political base of NC and PDP is under pressure, due to various reasons. First, they did not contest the panchayat elections openly, hence most sarpanchs/panchs and associated grass root workers have newer affiliations. Second, their governance deficit is understood by Kashmiris fully, and the *awaam* is looking for alternatives. Third, the administrative machinery is playing to the Centre's tune, and their patrons within the state bureaucracy stand diluted. The dilution of bias and networks with older politicians of the state bureaucracy should enable newer players to expand their following.

What are the likely prospects of these new players? Their major drawback is the lack of a united front. There are several youth brigade leaders, but many of them don't wish to work with other such aspirants. The lack of trust is evident among them — they don't wish to share the same platform even. So, like the proverbial "bundle of twigs" vs "separate twigs", these new entrants may become marginal players. They may merely dilute or denude the Assembly presence of the existing mainstream parties.

And interestingly, herein lies the political opportunity: The marginal presence of new and independent faces from Kashmir, including the People's Conference, can combine with the Jammu region's electoral winner(s) — probably a national party — to form the government. A delimitation exercise is also underway in J&K, and we may see a balance of power emerge between Jammu and Kashmir, in terms of representational mathematics as well. We may finally witness political power shifting to the south of Pir Panjal, for the first time in J&K. Notably, the Jammu region is better integrated with the nation and is largely nationalist, whereas the Kashmir region has nurtured an anti-India stance.

Political power in the erstwhile state rested in the Valley. The shift of political power to the south of Pir Panjal is advantageous to the country, as flow of industry and trade to the new Union Territory would be easier. Better integration would occur and national social welfare schemes can be drawn into J&K smoothly. At the strategic level, Jammu-based political power facilitates better integration of Jammu and Kashmir with the Indian nation.

But this has serious dangers too. Greater alienation would develop in Kashmir, adding fuel to the fear of Kashmiris — of being swamped by "outsiders". The turbulence in Kashmir would possibly aggravate, as they realise that their political power has reduced. It is, therefore, necessary to strike an optimal political balance between the Jammu and Kashmir regions, with sagacious leadership and deft handholding in the coming years. The Kashmiri Pandits (now based near Jammu) can be the bridge between the Kashmiris and the Dogra community of Jammu. It is imperative that existing mistrust between these two regions is assuaged. Possibly, the "people connect" can be developed through trade relationships, student exchange programmes and re-energising Kashmir's famed Sufi outlook. A thorny path, we will have to tread with care, maturity and by nurturing bonds.

The writer was General officer Commanding of the Indian Army's Chinar Corps in Kashmir. Views are personal

ISIS after Baghdadi

The killing of its 'Caliph' does not reduce the threat from the terror organisation

ANJU GUPTA

ON OCTOBER 26, during a raid by US Special Forces in a small compound in Barisha village in northwestern Syria, the top leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), Abu Bakr-al-Baghdadi blew himself in a dead-end tunnel. While the "reality and success" of the operation are being hailed as well as disputed by countries with boots on the ground in Syria — and the ISIS is yet to react — it is almost certain that Baghdadi is dead. As a "leader on the run" for more than five years, Baghdadi was more of a symbol for a (virtual) Caliphate. Yet, his killing will only be a short-term setback for the network.

Since the ISIS core had been preparing for this eventuality even while fighting to save the Caliphate, Baghdadi's killing is not going to make a difference to the threats posed by ISIS. Soon enough, the ISIS core will anoint a new Caliph, to whom all the wilayas (branches) and extremists and supporters will readily offer allegiance (bayat) to, while paying rich tribute to the "fallen hero". The ISIS network will also make serious efforts to mount "signature" attacks on chosen targets to prove its resilience, while local networks may mount smaller attacks, including lone-wolf attacks.

Within 18 months of the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in December 2011, the al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) captured large territories across Iraq and Syria and morphed itself into ISIS. On June 29, 2014, the group declared a Caliphate — a long cherished dream of global jihadis and anointed a "descendant" of the Prophet, a doctorate holder, former prisoner at Camp Bucca and leader of AQI, Abu Bakr Baghdadi as the Caliph. Using slick propaganda on social media, the Caliphate attracted thousands of foreign fighters, including over 5,000 from the West.

Soon enough, riding high on bayats of extremists and terrorists from across the globe, ISIS announced "decentralised" wilayas and asked their supporters to join them if they could not travel to the Caliphate. This modus operandi paid rich dividends and has continued to keep the network going despite their losses. The US-led coalition launched Operation Inherent Resolve in October 2014 and cleared the last pocket of the Caliphate in Baghouz, Syria, on March 23.

Within less than a month, the ISIS claimed attacks in Sri Lanka — arguably the deadliest attacks after 9/11. On April 29, ISIS released the second video of Baghdadi. He hailed the revenge for Baghouz by "brothers in Sri Lanka". The rare video of Baghdadi was released to assure the cadres that it could hit their enemies anywhere at will.

Over 25-30,000 ISIS cadres have survived and many foreign fighters have escaped the Iraq-Syria theatre. Thousands of fighters and family members are being held in the Kurdish areas of Syria. ISIS sleeper cells across Syria and Iraq have mounted hundreds of attacks this year. The decentralised wilayas, including in West Africa, the Philippiness, Egypt (Sinai), Yemen, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Libya have become more active and are showcasing successes on social media daily. The open propaganda forums have been replaced by "invitation only" links on social media, making detection much harder.

The ISIS core may or may not take time in hailing the "martyrdom" of Caliph I and anointing Caliph II — invoking the Islamic history of martyrdom of Caliphs by "traitors and enemies". This will be much like the Afghan Taliban, which has been anointing their successive supreme leaders as the Amir-ul - Mominin. Since July-Aug 2019, the pro-ISIS social media has been circulating the name of a former Iraqi officer of the Baathist party, Al-Haj Abdullah Qardash, as in charge of day-to-day operations. He may well die or get captured. But it showed long-term planning by ISIS for its cadres. Given that ISIS boasted of Baghdadi's lineage from the Prophet to build his aura, it is quite possible that the group may name a Caliph with similar credentials.

The situation in Syria has become far more complicated with the US changing its rules of engagement to only "guarding" oil fields from ISIS and chasing its counter-terror targets in Syria. The weakening of Syrian Democratic Force's position vis a vis Turkey and the Assad regime will deplete its resources, hindering the capability to defeat ISIS. Coupled with sectarian faultlines, public protests in Iraq and Lebanon, US/Saudi-Iran tensions, the region offers fresh opportunity for recruitment to both the ISIS and al Qaeda networks, which are deeply entrenched.

The ISIS has attracted foreign fighters from South Asia, mainly Pakistanis, Afghans, Maldivians and Bangladeshis. Though not many were known to have gone from Sri Lanka, the Easter attacks showed potential of violence even by a small group of committed cadres with support of the ISIS network. In Bangladesh three years ago, ISIS did create an effective but small network, with active support of western nationals of Bangladeshi origin. The security apparatus has broken up the network, but Bangladesh remains vulnerable.

Though less than 100-200 Indians are believed to have traveled to Syria and Iraq and much less to Afghanistan to join ISIS, this creates potential for more recruitment as well as aiding attacks on Indian soil or interests. The fresh round of radicalisation and recruitment that ISIS will surely embark on under its new leader, will pose further threats to India as well as to South Asia. A few weeks ago, ISIS propaganda has called for jihad pegged on sentiments around Kashmir and has specifically called for attacks on Indian interests in the Arabian Peninsula.

The writer is an IPS officer. Views are personal

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

UNFAIR BAN

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Shakib Al Hasan suspended for two years' (IE, October 30). The ICC's decision to ban Bangladesh's Test and T20 captain for two years from international cricket seems wrong. Al Hasan has been charged rightly for breaching the Article 2.4.4 of the ICC Anti-Corruption Code. But to ban a player for two years just for failing to report to the ICC that he had been approached by a bookie is unfair.

Tushar Anand, *Patna*

SECURITY BREACH

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Five West Bengal labourers killed in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam' (IE, October 30). That militants could kill five labourers despite the deployment of heavy security belies the claim of government that all is well in the Valley. It is inconceivable what the fate of the people will be once the security in scaled down. The government is busy in taking cosmetic measures such as inviting EU parliamentarians to gloss over it's failures. Until it restores the basic fundamental rights of people, the optics management shall serve no good.

Deepak Singhal, *Chennai*

ONE-SIDED DECISION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A visit, a diversion' (IE, October 30). In the past, the government has resisted attempts to internationalise the Kashmir dispute. This impromptu decision is a major departure in foreign policy. The government could be intending to showcase its success but seems oblivious to the downside of internationalisation.

L R Murmu, *Delhi*

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.

CORRIDOR OF AMITY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Journey to a beginning' (IE ,October 30). The Kartarpur corridor can help end animosity in Indo-Pak relations if both countries follow Guru Nanak's message. However, religious landmarks alone cannot lead to trust between the two countries. A thaw in relations between Pakistan and India seems optimistic when the Punjab government, the SGPC and Akali groups could not find a common ground to celebrate this occasion.

Tarsem Singh, *Mahilpur*

epaper.indianexpress.com

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
वर्ष 12 अंक 218

निर्यात योजना का अभाव

गत वर्ष केंद्रीय उद्योग एवं वाणिज्य मंत्रालय ने एक उच्चस्तरीय सलाहकार समूह का गठन किया था। समूह को ऐसे तरीके सुझाने थे जिनकी सहायता से देश के निर्यात में सुधार किया जा सके। अब यह रिपोर्ट सार्वजनिक की जा चुकी है और यह व्यापार नीति को लेकर सरकारी हलकों की सोच का उपयोगी संकेतक है। उस नजरिये से देखें तो निकलने वाले संकेत चिंतित करते हैं। इसमें स्वीकार किया गया है कि निर्यात के क्षेत्र में देश का प्रदर्शन काफी गड़बड़ रहा है लेकिन इसकी अनुशंसाएं भी खरी नहीं उतरतीं। रिपोर्ट में बिल्कुल सही कहा गया है कि भारतीय निर्यात गहरे संकट में है। इसके लिए वैश्वीकरण के खात्मे या विश्व व्यापार की व्यापक समस्याओं को उत्तरदायी नहीं ठहराया जा सकता। जैसा कि रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है इसका कारण यह है कि जिस समय वैश्विक व्यापार वृद्धि का स्तर लगभग ढह गया है, उसी दौरान भारत का कारोबारी प्रदर्शन भी बिगड़ा है। दूसरे शब्दों में कहा जाए तो भारत के निर्यात प्रदर्शन में गिरावट की कुछ नितांत घरेलू वजह भी हैं। इन्हें हल करना आवश्यक है। खेद की बात है कि कुछ उपयोगी अनुशंसाओं वाली यह रिपोर्ट इस सवाल का जवाब नहीं देती कि निर्यात में कैसे इजाफा किया जाए। हकीकत यह है कि कुछ मायनों में यह पुराने रास्ते अपनाने की सलाह देती है। उदाहरण के लिए जब बात कपड़ा एवं वस्त्र क्षेत्र की आती है तो यह सुझाती है कि भारत को बांग्लादेश के साथ मुक्त व्यापार के खतरों का आकलन करना चाहिए। क्या वाकई यह हमारी समस्या है? मुद्दा यह है कि बांग्लादेश का कपड़ा एवं वस्त्र निर्यात वैश्विक स्तर पर प्रतिस्पर्धी है जबकि हमारा नहीं। ऐसे में सवाल यह होना चाहिए कि आखिर भारतीय वस्त्र निर्यातक बांग्लादेश और दक्षिण पूर्वी एशियाई देशों की वैश्विक हिस्सेदारी में अपना हिस्सा कैसे सुनिश्चित करें। यहां संरक्षणवादी उपायों का तो कोई प्रश्न ही नहीं है।

वृहद पक्ष देखें तो रिपोर्ट में दिए गए सुझाव बाधित निवेश, मौद्रिक नीति के कमजोर पारेषण आदि को लेकर अन्य स्थानों पर जताई जा रही चिंता के अनुरूप ही हैं। व्यापार संवर्द्धन नीति की बात करें तो रिपोर्ट की अनुशंसाएं अफसरशाही मानसिकता से ग्रस्त हैं और ये पर्याप्त महत्त्वाकांक्षी भी नहीं दिखतीं। उदाहरण के लिए इसमें सुझाव दिया गया है कि मौजूदा निवेश संवर्द्धन एजेंसी को प्रोत्साहन देने का अधिकार दिया जाना चाहिए और एक व्यापार संवर्द्धन एजेंसी अलग से गठित की जानी चाहिए। ये सारे उपाय मूल समस्या को हल नहीं करते। असल समस्या यह है कि देश में व्यापार वार्ता और प्रबंधन ध्वस्त हो चुके हैं। ऐसा इसलिए क्योंकि प्रधानमंत्री के अधीन होने के बजाय ये विभिन्न मंत्रालयों के अधीन हैं। अमेरिका में राष्ट्रपति अक्सर ऐसी वार्ताओं को विधायिका की निगरानी से मुक्त करने के लिए अनुमति देता है और अमेरिकी व्यापार प्रतिनिधि कार्यालय सीधे राष्ट्रपति के अधीन होता है।

कम से कम एक मोर्चे पर रिपोर्ट अत्यधिक आशावाद की शिकार नजर आती है। रिपोर्ट में स्वीकार किया गया है कि मंत्रालय के बाहर किसी प्रतिष्ठित संस्थान द्वारा बड़े आंकड़ों के विश्लेषण से निर्यात नीति तैयार की जा सकती है। यह थिंक टैंकों या आईटी सलाहकारों के लिए अच्छी खबर हो सकती है लेकिन इससे नीति निर्माण में सुधार होता नहीं दिखता। मूल समस्या है घरेलू उद्योग का प्रतिस्पर्धी न होना और यह समस्या आगे भी बनी रहेगी। जरूरत यह है कि घरेलू बाजार सस्ता और भरोसेमंद हो, कारक बाजार लचीले हों, कर दर कम हो और लालफीताशाही का प्रभाव भी कम हो। यह कोई रॉकेट विज्ञान नहीं है। इसके लिए केवल राजनीतिक इच्छाशक्ति की आवश्यकता है।

अजय मोहंती

वृद्धि, आय, गरीबी और नोबेल पुरस्कार

नियंत्रण वाले बेतरतीब परीक्षण के नतीजों को हर जगह-हर समय लागू करने को लेकर सतर्कता बरतनी होगी। इस विषय पर विस्तार से प्रकाश डाल रहे हैं **आलोक शील**

वर्ष 2019 के लिए अर्थशास्त्र का नोबेल पुरस्कार अभिजित बनर्जी, एस्टर डफ्लो और माइकल क्रेमर को संयुक्त रूप से दिया गया है। उन्हें यह पुरस्कार 'ऐसे नियंत्रित बेतरतीब परीक्षण के प्रयोगात्मक कार्य के लिए दिया गया जिसने दुनिया भर में गरीबी से लड़ने में अहम सहायता की है। महज दो दशक में इस नए प्रयोग पर आधारित रुख ने विकासात्मक अर्थशास्त्र में काफी बदलाव उत्पन्न किया है और यह अब शोध के क्षेत्र में काफी फल फूल रहा है।'

उनके काम के केंद्र में कम लागत वाले हस्तक्षेप हैं जो ऐसे प्रायोगिक शोध से निकले हैं जो बताता है कि किस तरह का हस्तक्षेप कारगर है और कैसा नहीं। दालों का मुफ्त वितरण बाल टीकाकरण केंद्रों पर बच्चों की आवक सुधारता है या नहीं अथवा नि:शुल्क मच्छरदानी वितरण से मलेरिया के मामलों में कमी आती है या उन्हें रियायती दर पर बांटने से ऐसा होता है, आदि इस शोध के उदाहरण हैं।

उनका काम गरीबों की सहायता और उन पर केंद्रित सरकारी योजनाओं पर व्यय होने वाली राशि को अधिक उपयोगी बनाने वाला है लेकिन इस दावे पर करीबी नजर डालनी होगी कि उनके काम ने विकास अर्थशास्त्र में आमूलचूल बदलाव उत्पन्न किया है। इसकी तीन मोर्चों पर परख आवश्यक है।

पहला, 2015 में अर्थशास्त्र का नोबेल एंगस डीटन को इसी काम के लिए दिया गया था। उनका अध्ययन भी गरीबी, खपत और लोक कल्याण पर था। यह बात भी स्पष्ट नहीं है कि प्रायोगिक नियंत्रित बेतरतीब परीक्षण डीटन के तरीके से बेहतर है या नहीं। डीटन का काम विस्तृत विश्लेषण पर आधारित था।

दूसरा, प्राकृतिक विज्ञान में आजमाए जाने वाले वैज्ञानिक तौर तरीकों को सामाजिक विज्ञान में अपनाए जाने की पर्याप्त वजह है। भौतिक जगत जिस तरह प्राकृतिक कानूनों का अनुगामी होता है, मानव विज्ञान के साथ ऐसा नहीं है। एक सेब के माध्यम से गुरुत्व का सिद्धांत खारिज हो सकता है लेकिन इंसानी मामलों में लोग अलग-अलग घटनाओं पर अलग प्रतिक्रिया देंगे।

बनर्जी, डफ्लो और क्रेमर की शोध प्रवृत्ति तथा व्यवहारात्मक अर्थशास्त्री कास संस्टेन, रिचर्ड थालेर और स्टीवन लेविट के तरीकों में काफी समानता है। उन्होंने भी ऐसा ही प्रयोगात्मक रुख अपनाया जो औषधीय मनोविज्ञान पर आधारित था जिसमें लोगों के वांछित व्यवहार का अध्ययन किया गया। मसलन स्कूल के बाहर वाहन धीमे करना, पुरुषों के शौचालय में यत्र-तत्र पेशाब छलकाना। बहरहाल व्यवहार अर्थशास्त्र राजकोषीय गुणक सुधारने में नाकाम रहा। रिचर्ड थालेर को 2017 में नोबेल मिला। उन्होंने कर कटौती भुगतान की मदद से आय में स्थायी वृद्धि का भ्रम रचने की बात की थी। परंतु सांस्कृतिक अंतर के कारण आय वृद्धि का लोगों पर अलग असर हो सकता है। विभिन्न प्रकार के हस्तक्षेप पर भी भिन्न-भिन्न स्थान और समय पर उनकी प्रतिक्रिया भी अलग-अलग हो सकती है। जाहिर है ऐसे में यह बात काफी महत्त्वपूर्ण हो जाती है कि आखिर बेतरतीब परीक्षण कहां और कब किए गए। इसके बाद ही उन्हें सफलतापूर्वक आजमाया जा सकता है।

तीसरी बात, वृहद स्तर पर गरीबी उन्मूलन का सबसे तेज तरीका अब भी उच्च वृद्धि, निवेश और उत्पादक रोजगार है। विश्व बैंक के आंकड़ों के अनुसार बीते दो दशक में अत्यधिक गरीबी में भारी कमी आई और यह करीब 30 फीसदी से घटकर 10 फीसदी के आसपास रह गई। यह ऐसी अवधि भी रही जब उभरते और विकासशील देशों में जहां सबसे अधिक गरीब रहते थे वहां विकास में तेजी आई। सन 1999 से 2015 के बीच में गरीबी में कमी की गति सन 1981 से 1999 की तुलना में कहीं तेज थी। चीन, भारत और सब-सहारा अफ्रीका में गरीबी में आई कमी के अंतर को वृद्धि दर में अंतर से समझा जा सकता है। ऐसे में ट्रिकल डाउन के सिद्धांत की चाहे जितनी आलोचना की गई हो, वह यहां सही प्रतीत होता है।

इसे प्रति व्यक्ति आय और अत्यधिक गरीबी के बीच के आपसी संबंध से अच्छी तरह समझा जा सकता है। सन 2015 में कम आय वर्ग में अत्यधिक गरीबी 43.9 फीसदी, निम्न मध्य वर्ग में 13.9 फीसदी और उच्च मध्य तथा उच्च वर्ग में क्रमश: 1.7 फीसदी और 0.7 फीसदी थी। हालांकि संकेत यह भी है कि ट्रिकल डाउन का असर उच्च और उच्च मध्य आय वर्ग वाले देशों में कहीं बेहतर है जबकि निम्न मध्य आय और निम्न आय वाले देशों में कम। हालांकि वियतनाम और भारत प्रति व्यक्ति आय के मामले में बहुत अलग नहीं हैं लेकिन वियतनाम में प्रति व्यक्ति आय न केवल काफी कम है बल्कि वह उच्च मध्य आय वर्ग वाले देश ब्राजील से भी कम है। यहां तक कि अत्यधिक गरीबी के मामले में नेपाल भी भारत से बेहतर स्थिति में है।

अत्यधिक गरीबी को लेकर ऐसे अलग अनुभव बताते हैं कि वृद्धि और प्रति व्यक्ति आय तथा अत्यधिक गरीबी के बीच का रिश्ता निम्न मध्य आय और अल्प आय वाले देशों में कारगर नहीं है। नोबेल विजेताओं द्वारा किए गए हस्तक्षेप जैसे नीतिगत हस्तक्षेप इन देशों में बड़ा अंतर पैदा कर सकते हैं।

उच्च आय और उच्च मध्य आय वाले देशों में ध्यान अत्यधिक गरीबी से सामाजिक गरीबी और असमानता की ओर स्थानांतरित हो गया है। वैश्विक स्तर पर अत्यधिक गरीबी सन 1990 के 35.9 फीसदी से घटकर 2015 में 10 फीसदी रह गई, सामाजिक गरीबी (विश्व बैंक के अनुसार प्रति व्यक्ति 5.5 डॉलर) 67 फीसदी से घटकर केवल 46 फीसदी पर आई। इस तरह देखें तो आधी दुनिया गरीब है। वृद्धि ने सुधार तो किया लेकिन असमान। चूंकि अत्यधिक गरीबी के मानक नीचे हैं इसलिए इसमें तेजी से गिरावट आई। तेज वृद्धि के कारण असमानता में भी तेज गति से इजाफा होता है। चूंकि ऐसे देशों में सामाजिक गरीबी और असमानता कम करने के लिए लक्षित नीतिगत हस्तक्षेप की आवश्यकता होती है तो क्या यहां नियंत्रित बेतरतीब परीक्षण का प्रयोग किया जा सकता है? हमने ऊपर जिन तीन बिंदुओं की चर्चा की वे किसी तरह बनर्जी, डफ्लो या क्रेमर के महत्त्वपूर्ण काम को सीमित करने का प्रयास नहीं है। नोबेल समिति द्वारा उनका चयन ही उनके काम को रेखांकित करने के लिए पर्याप्त है। हमने जिन बिंदुओं की बात की, इन शोधकर्ताओं ने प्रत्यक्ष या परोक्ष रूप से इन्हें स्वीकार भी किया है। ऐसे हस्तक्षेप सर्वाधिक गरीबों के जीवन में सुधार कर सकते हैं और सामाजिक गरीबों के मामले में भी ऐसी दलील का इस्तेमाल किया जा सकता है। परंतु ऐसी कोई जादू की छड़ी नहीं है जिससे गरीबी एक झटके में दूर हो जाए। हमें उक्त परीक्षण के नतीजों को लागू करते समय सावधानी बरतनी होगी और वृहद स्तर की नीति से जुड़े हस्तक्षेप पर लगातार ध्यान देना होगा। ऐसा करके ही तेज वृद्धि, निवेश और उत्पादक रोजगार का समुचित माहौल तैयार किया जा सकेगा।

(लेखक इक्रियर में मैक्रोइकनॉमिक्स के आरबीआई चेयर प्रोफेसर हैं।)

पेट्रोलियम उत्पादों की खुदरा बिक्री पर बड़ा फैसला

दिल्ली डायरी

ए के भट्टाचार्य

दीवाली से कुछ दिन पहले केंद्र सरकार ने पेट्रोलियम उत्पादों के खुदरा विपणन पर अपनी नीति को उदार बनाने के लिए एक बड़ा कदम उठाया। यह पिछले 17 वर्षों में इस क्षेत्र में लिया गया सबसे बड़ा फैसला है। वर्ष 2002 में पेट्रोलियम उत्पादों की खुदरा बिक्री को निजी क्षेत्र के लिए खोला गया था लेकिन इसके लिए आवेदक को पेट्रोलियम क्षेत्र में कम से कम 2,000 करोड़ रुपये निवेश करने की शर्त जुड़ी थी। पिछले सप्ताह लिए गए फैसले के तहत 250 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक हैसियत वाली कोई भी कंपनी पेट्रोलियम उत्पादों की खुदरा बिक्री के क्षेत्र में उतर सकती है।

उम्मीद है कि गैर-पेट्रोलियम क्षेत्र की कई कंपनियों की पेट्रोल और डीजल की खुदरा बिक्री में दिलचस्पी होगी। टोटाल और सऊदी अरामको जैसी दिग्गज अंतरराष्ट्रीय कंपनियां भारतीय बाजार में उतर सकती हैं। खुदरा क्षेत्र की बड़ी कंपनियां भी पेट्रोल पंप खोलने पर विचार कर सकती हैं। ऐसा इसलिए है क्योंकि पेट्रोलियम उत्पादों की खुदरा बिक्री के क्षेत्र में उतरने वाली कंपनी के लिए पेट्रोलियम क्षेत्र में निवेश करने की शर्त को खत्म कर दिया गया है। लेकिन नीति को उदार बनाने की यह पहल कितनी सफल होगी?

स्पष्ट है कि 2002 में जब खुदरा नीति को उदार बनाया गया था तो उसके वांछित परिणाम नहीं आए। वर्ष 2002 में पेट्रोल और डीजल के खुदरा विपणन में सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र की तेल कंपनियों का दबदबा था। तब देश में 18,924 पेट्रोल पंप थे। पिछले 17 वर्षों में इन कंपनियों ने 39,000 पेट्रोल पंप जोड़े और उनके पेट्रोल पंपों की संख्या 57,924 पहुंच गई। इसके विपरीत 2002 में नीतिगत उदारीकरण के बावजूद पेट्रोल पंप खोलने के मामले में निजी क्षेत्र का प्रदर्शन बहुत खराब रहा है। इन 17 वर्षों में निजी क्षेत्र ने केवल 6,700 पेट्रोल पंप खोले। इनमें नयारा एनर्जी लिमिटेड (पहले एस्सार ऑयल) ने 5,128, रिलायंस पेट्रो ने 1,400 और शेल इंडिया ने 145 पेट्रोल पंप खोले हैं। इस अवधि के दौरान कई उत्पादों के लिए बाजार से जुड़ी मूल्य व्यवस्था नहीं होने के कारण निजी क्षेत्र ने इसे ज्यादा भाव नहीं दिया।

ऐसे में पेट्रोल पंपों की अधिकांश मांग को सरकारी तेल विपणन कंपनियों ने पूरा किया। पिछले 17 वर्षों में पेट्रोल और डीजल की बिक्री 6 फीसदी की सालाना चक्रवृद्धि दर (सीएजीआर) से बढ़ने का अनुमान है। इस दौरान पेट्रोल पंपों की सीएजीआर 7.5 फीसदी रही। काफी हद तक इस वृद्धि को बनाए रखने में सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के पेट्रोल पंपों का योगदान रहा।

पिछले सप्ताह के फैसले से पहले सरकार ने एक विशेषज्ञ समिति की सिफारिशों को स्वीकार किया। इस समिति को 2002 के नीतिगत उदारीकरण के प्रभावों की समीक्षा करने का काम सौंपा गया था। समिति का कहना था कि सरकार को तेल विपणन क्षेत्र में नई कंपनियों को प्रवेश देने का अधिकार अपने पास रखना चाहिए और बाकी नियमों में ढील देनी चाहिए। समिति ने साथ ही सुझाव दिया था कि 250 करोड़ रुपये की हैसियत रखने वाली किसी भी कंपनी को देश के पेट्रोल पंप स्थापित करने की अनुमति दी जानी चाहिए। समिति ने साथ ही यह सिफारिश भी की थी कि सरकार को यह शर्त रखनी चाहिए कि नई कंपनियों को अपने कम से कम 5 फीसदी पेट्रोल पंप दूरदराज के अधिसूचित इलाकों के खोलने होंगे। उन्हें पेट्रोल खोलने की अनुमति मिलने के पांच साल के भीतर ऐसा करना होगा। हालांकि नई नीति कितनी कारगर होगी, इस पर कई सवाल उठ रहे हैं। नई कंपनियां दूरदराज के अधिसूचित इलाकों में 5 फीसदी पेट्रोल पंप खोलने की शर्त कैसे पूरी करती हैं, इसकी निगरानी से विवेक का मसला खड़ा होगा। इससे समस्या खड़ी हो सकती है और मुद्दे का राजनीतिकरण हो सकता है। इस तरह के सशर्त नीतिगत प्रोत्साहनों के दुरुपयोग की संभावना बहुत अधिक रहती है। इसमें पूर्व के उदाहरणों को नहीं भुलाया जाना चाहिए। निर्यात दायित्वों से जुड़ी आयात रियायतों की योजना का कैसे दुरुपयोग किया गया था और खराब निगरानी की गई थी।

इसी तरह नई नीति को और उदार बनाए जाने की गुंजाइश है। इस बात की कोई वजह नहीं है कि नई कंपनियों को विभिन्न तेलशोधक संयंत्रों से प्राप्त पेट्रोलियम उत्पादों को एक ही पेट्रोल पंप से बेचने की अनुमति क्यों नहीं दी जा सकती है। अगर नए पेट्रोल पंप पारदर्शिता बनाए रखते हैं और इस बात का खुलासा करते हैं कि खरीदार किस तेलशोधक संयंत्र का तेल खरीद रहे हैं, तो इस बात का कोई कारण नहीं है कि उनके लिए विभिन्न तेलशोधक संयंत्रों से खरीदे गए ईंधन को अलग-अलग पेट्रोल पंपों के जरिये बेचना अनिवार्य बनाया जाए।

ज्यादा परेशान करने वाला सवाल यह है कि अगर नीति को उदार बनाने का मकसद तेल विपणन में ज्यादा प्रतिस्पर्द्धा का दौर शुरू करना है तो सरकार को यह सुनिश्चित करना चाहिए कि सार्वजनिक तेलशोधक संयंत्र पेट्रोलियम उत्पादों के मूल्य निर्धारण में पारदर्शिता लाएं। कारगर प्रतिस्पर्द्धा तभी शुरू होगी जब नई कंपनियां वास्तव में मौजूदा तेलशोधक संयंत्रों से तेल खरीद पाएंगी। अभी उनके पास अपने तेलशोधक कारखाने नहीं हैं। तेलशोधक संयंत्रों में पारदर्शी मूल्य व्यवस्था के अभाव में इस तरह की खरीद मुश्किल होगी।

पेट्रोल पंप के क्षेत्र में उतरने वाली नई कंपनियां पेट्रोल और डीजल का आयात कर सकती हैं और उन्हें ऐसे दाम पर बेच सकती हैं जिससे सार्वजनिक तेलशोधक संयंत्रों को प्रतिस्पर्द्धा का सामना करना पड़ सकता है। लेकिन देश के सार्वजनिक तेलशोधक संयंत्र खुदरा तेल के मूल्य में ज्यादा सुधार लाने के लिए इस अवसर का उपयोग क्यों न करें। इस तरह की पारदर्शिता से सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के तेलशोधक संयंत्रों के बीच उस अंतिम मूल्य के लिए प्रतिस्पर्द्धा होगी जिस पर पेट्रोल पंपों के जरिये पेट्रोलियम उत्पाद बेचे जाएंगे। इस तरह के सुधार लागू होने के बाद नई कंपनियों को पेट्रोल पंप लगाने की अनुमति देने के सरकार के कदम की प्रभावशीलता में काफी सुधार होगा।

कानाफूसी

सरकार की नजर तेल क्षेत्र पर

सरकार तेल क्षेत्र की कुछ कंपनियों में विनिवेश की योजना बना रही है। इस बीच पेट्रोलियम एवं प्राकृतिक गैस विभाग से संबंद्ध संसद की स्थायी समिति ने पेट्रोलियम क्षेत्र में विनिवेश, विलय और अधिग्रहण विषय का अध्ययन करने का निश्चय किया है। ये विषय उन 15 विषयों में शामिल होंगे जिन पर वर्ष 2019-20 में विभाग की नजर रहेगी। वह खुदरा आउटलेट और एलपीजी वितरण एजेंसियों पर अपनी रिपोर्ट पेश करेगी। इसके अलावा वह मूल्य निर्धारण, पेट्रोलियम उत्पादों के वितरण और आपूर्ति, सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र की तेल विपणन कंपनियों से जुड़े कानूनी मसले, अनुबंधित प्रबंधन और सरकारी तेल विपणन कंपनियों की खरीद प्रक्रिया में पारदर्शिता कैसे आएगी जैसे विषयों पर अपनी बात कहेगी।

बेतुकी दलील

उत्तर प्रदेश विधानसभा उपचुनाव में करारी शिकस्त के बाद बहुजन समाज पार्टी की प्रमुख मायावती हार के कारण बताने में बेतुकी दलीलें दे रही हैं। गत सप्ताह जिन 11 सीट के नतीजे आए उनमें से समाजवादी पार्टी को तीन सीट पर जीत मिली जबकि बसपा एक भी सीट नहीं जीत सकी, बल्कि उसे अपनी एक सीट सपा के हाथ गंवानी पड़ी। सन 2019 के लोकसभा चुनाव के बाद सपा-बसपा गठबंधन खत्म करने के बाद अब मायावती ने सत्ताधारी भारतीय जनता पार्टी पर आरोप लगाया है कि उसने सपा की मदद की। मायावती ने कहा कि सन 2022 के विधानसभा चुनाव के पहले भाजपा ने सपा को कुछ सीट इसलिए जिताईं ताकि बसपा कार्यकर्ताओं का मनोबल तोड़ा जा सके। उन्होंने जोर देकर कहा कि उनकी पार्टी भाजपा के इरादे कामयाब नहीं होने देगी।

आपका पक्ष

मानव तस्करी खत्म करने की जरूरत

मानव तस्करी की जड़ें गहरी होती जा रही हैं। पाकिस्तान, भारत, अफगानिस्तान, नेपाल, श्रीलंका, बांग्लादेश सहित कई एशियाई देशों से लड़कियों और बच्चों की तस्करी कर पश्चिमी और दक्षिणी यूरोप के कई हिस्सों में बेचा-खरीदा जा रहा है। जांच एजेंसियां, सुरक्षा कानून और मानव तस्करी रोधी संस्थाओं की कोशिशों के बाद भी मानव तस्करी पर रोक नहीं लग सकी है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र की एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भारत सहित कई एशियाई देशों से बच्चों की तस्करी कर यूरोप के कई हिस्सों में जिस्मफरोशी में धकेल दिया जाता है। दुनिया भर में नशीली दवाओं और अपराध की निगरानी करने वाली संयुक्त राष्ट्र की संस्था यूएएन ऑफिस ऑन ड्रग्स ऐंड क्राइम (यूएनओडीसी) की ग्लोबल रिपोर्ट ऑन ट्रैफिकिंग इन पर्सन-2018 के मुताबिक 142 देशों से जुटाई गई रिपोर्ट में मानव तस्करी के तौर-तरीकों की पड़ताल की गई है। इस रिपोर्ट में बताया गया है कि पीड़ितों के साथ हो रहे यौन शोषण के साथ ही मानव तस्करी अब भयानक रूप ले चुकी है। तस्करी के शिकार लोगों में 30 फीसदी बच्चे हैं। इनमें लड़कियों की संख्या अधिक है। कमोबेश सभी देशों ने अपनी सीमाओं के भीतर तस्करी रोकने के लिए कड़े कानून बनाए हैं। कई संस्थाएं और सुरक्षा जांच एजेंसियां भी मानव तस्करी पर निगाह रखती हैं। फिर भी मानव तस्करी पर रोक लगाने और आंकड़ों में कमी आने के बजाय उक्त रिपोर्ट तस्करी के भयावह रूप का खुलासा करती है। लिहाजा, पीड़ित देशों की सरकार, मानव तस्करी रोधी संस्थाएं और सुरक्षा जांच एजेंसियों को अपनी परंपरागत कार्यप्रणाली को खत्म करना होगा। नई तकनीक और साधन संपन्न देशों की मदद से मानव तस्करी पर शिकंजा कसने की जरूरत है जिससे मानव तस्करी के कारोबार की जड़ें खोदी जा सकें। साथ ही भविष्य में कोई भी परिवार अपने बच्चों को नहीं खो सके और उनकी सुरक्षा की उम्मीदें बनी रहें।

पवन कुमार मौर्य, नई दिल्ली

मानव तस्करी रोकने के लिए सभी देशों की सरकारों को मिलकर काम करना होगा

वैश्विक सूचकांक में पिछड़ता भारत

किसी भी देश का असल विकास, गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, जीवन स्तर, सामाजिक समानता, महिला शक्तीकरण आदि आधार पर तय किया जाता है। इसलिए आजादी के बाद सामाजिक-आर्थिक समानता लाने की कोशिश की गई। लेकिन सामाजिक-आर्थिक वैश्विक सूचकांक की रिपोर्ट में भारत का प्रदर्शन खराब रहता है। हर साल यूएनडीपी मानव विकास सूचकांक जारी करता है। वर्ष 2018 की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भारत को 189 देशों में 130वां स्थान मिला था। वर्ष 2019 की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भारत को 156 देशों में 140वां स्थान मिला है। वैश्विक भूख सूचकांक में भारत को 117 देशों में 102वां स्थान मिला जबकि सामाजिक एवं आर्थिक विषमता में भारत को 157 देशों में 147वां स्थान मिला। राष्ट्रीय अपराध रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो (एनसीआरबी) की 2017-18 की रिपोर्ट में महिलाओं के खिलाफ अपराध में उत्तर प्रदेश शीर्ष पर रहा। यह सभी सूचकांकों के नतीजे दर्शाते हैं कि सरकार द्वारा उठाए जा रहे कदम ठीक से लागू नहीं हो रहे हैं। अत: सरकार को इन सूचकांकों को गंभीरता से लेकर तंत्र में मौजूद खामियों को दूर कर सही रणनीति के आधार पर विकासवादी दृष्टिकोण अपनाना जरूरी है।

निशांत महेश त्रिपाठी, नागपुर

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

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यूरोपीय सांसदों का दौरा

यह समय ही बताएगा कि कश्मीर पहुंचे यूरोपीय संघ के सांसदों का नजरिया भारत के इस हिस्से के बारे में विश्व समुदाय के रुख-रवैये को प्रभावित करने में कितना सहायक होगा, लेकिन इसमें दोराय नहीं कि यह घाटी के हालात पर भी निर्भर करेगा। यूरोपीय देशों के सांसदों के श्रीनगर पहुंचते ही आतंकियों ने जिस तरह पश्चिम बंगाल के मजदूरों को निशाना बनाया उससे यह स्पष्ट है कि कश्मीर के हालात ठीक करने में अभी समय लगेगा। निःसंदेह इसमें सफलता तब मिलेगी जब आतंकियों को छिपने-भागने के लिए विवश किया जाएगा। यदि आम कश्मीरी जनता कश्मीर को बदनाम करने और वहां दहशत फैलाने में जुटे आतंकियों के खिलाफ मुखर हो सके तो माहौल कहीं आसानी से बदला जा सकता है। हालांकि कश्मीर में पहले भी बाहरी लोगों को निशाना बनाया जाता रहा है, लेकिन बीते कुछ दिनों में घाटी के बाहर के लोगों को जिस तरह चुन-चुनकर मारा गया उससे न केवल यह स्पष्ट है कि पाकिस्तानपरस्त आतंकी गैर कश्मीरियों में खौफ पैदा करने पर आमादा हैं, बल्कि यह भी कि उनकी तथाकथित लड़ाई का राजनीतिक अधिकारों से कोई लेना-देना नहीं। सच तो यही है कि कश्मीर में अधिकारों के नाम पर आतंक का कारोबार जारी है और इसीलिए उन निर्दोष-निहत्थे लोगों को भी मारा जा रहा जो कश्मीर की भलाई के लिए वहां मेहनत-मजदूरी कर रहे हैं।

यूरोपीय देशों के सांसदों के साथ विश्व समुदाय इसकी अनदेखी नहीं कर सकता कि कश्मीर गए ट्रक ड्राइवरों और वहां प्रवास कर रहे मजदूरों पर किए गए आतंकी हमलों में एक दर्जन लोगों को जान गंवानी पड़ी है। चूंकि ये आतंकी हमले पाकिस्तान के इशारे पर ही हो रहे हैं इसलिए इससे एक सीमा तक ही संतुष्ट हुआ जा सकता है कि यूरोपीय देशों के सांसदों ने कश्मीर में आतंक के लिए पाकिस्तान पर निशाना साधा और आतंकवाद के खिलाफ लड़ाई में भारत का साथ देने की हामी भरी। आखिर पाकिस्तान को जवाबदेह कब बनाया जाएगा? इससे भी जरूरी सवाल यह है कि उसे आतंकवाद को खाद-पानी देने के लिए दंडित कब किया जाएगा? इन सवालों के बीच यह अच्छा नहीं हुआ कि यूरोपीय देशों के सांसदों के कश्मीर दौरे को लेकर विवाद खड़ा कर दिया गया। इससे बचा जाना चाहिए था। इन सांसदों के कश्मीर दौरे को लेकर उठाए गए विपक्ष के सभी सवालों को निराधार नहीं कहा जा सकता, क्योंकि इस मांग में वजन है कि आखिर इन सांसदों को कश्मीर आमंत्रित करने के पहले विपक्षी नेताओं को वहां क्यों नहीं भेजा गया? इस जायज सवाल के बावजूद यह भी सही है कि विपक्षी नेताओं के कश्मीर दौरे को विश्व समुदाय में कोई अहमियत मिलने वाली नहीं थी।

भागीदारी से बचेगी सांस

पटाखे कम फूटने के बाद भी बिहार में पटना की हवा मानक से 11 गुना ज्यादा जहरीली रही। कम आतिशबाजी के बाद भी दिवाली की आधी रात के बाद राजधानी की वायु गुणवत्ता में पार्टिकुलेट मैटर 2.5 का स्तर 697 माइक्रोग्राम प्रति घनमीटर तक बढ़ गया, जो सामान्यतः 60 होना चाहिए। वैसे यह मात्रा 2018 की दिवाली से कम है, लेकिन संतोषजनक नहीं है। हमें हर कीमत पर प्रदूषण को नियंत्रित करना होगा। इस बात का इंतजार छोड़ना होगा कि सरकार कुछ नियमन कर रोक लगाएगी। अक्सर लोगों के मुंह से सुना जाता है कि पटाखे पर सरकार रोक क्यों नहीं लगाती है? ग्रीन पटाखा क्यों नहीं उपलब्ध हो रहा है? ग्रीन पटाखा व्यावहारिक तौर पर इतना कीमती होगा कि उसे बाजार में सर्वसुलभ करना आसान नहीं है। कानून के माध्यम से पटाखे पर रोक न तो व्यावहारिक है और न ही संभव है। कानून जरूर लागू हों, लेकिन इससे ज्यादा जरूरी है कि लोगों की काउंसिलिंग की जाए। लोगों को जागरूक किया जाए। बच्चों के पाठ्यक्रम का बड़ा हिस्सा वायु प्रदूषण के दुष्प्रभाव को समर्पित किया जाए। केवल दिवाली के समय प्रदूषण की चिंता न की जाए। साल भर स्कूल-कॉलेज और समाज में इस पर चर्चा हो, तभी कोई सार्थक नतीजा सामने आएगा। मुख्यमंत्री नीतीश कुमार और उप मुख्यमंत्री सुशील मोदी, दोनों ही बिजली से चार्ज होने वाली कार का इस्तेमाल करने लगे हैं। सरकार का यह निर्णय भी है कि अधिक से अधिक सीएनजी के केंद्र खोले जाएं और डीजल-पेट्रोल वाले वाहनों की संख्या कम की जाए। इसका असर दिखने भी लगा है। बिहार के छोटे शहरों में भी ई-रिक्शा का प्रचलन बहुत तेजी से बढ़ा है। प्रदूषण की हालत यह है कि डॉक्टर सुबह की सैर तक न करने की सलाह दे रहे हैं। इस हालत को समझना होगा। जहरीली हवा बच्चे और उम्रदराज लोगों के लिए और भी जानलेवा है। पीएम (पार्टिकुलेट मैटर)-2.5 और इससे छोटे कण फेफड़े के जरिये रक्त में पहुंच जाते हैं। इस वजह से धमनियों में ब्लॉकेज की आशंका रहती है। अच्छी बात है कि पटना में कुछ नई जगहों पर भी डिस्प्ले बोर्ड लगाए जा रहे हैं ताकि लोग और भी जागरूक होकर प्रदूषण की वास्तविक चिंता करें।

बच्चों के पाठ्यक्रम का बड़ा हिस्सा वायु प्रदूषण के दुष्प्रभाव को समर्पित किया जाए। केवल दिवाली के समय प्रदूषण की चिंता न की जाए

नई चुनौतियों से जूझती भाजपा

प्रदीप सिंह

भाजपा के राजनीतिक विस्तार के रास्ते की बाधा केवल सामाजिक संतुलन को साधने और उसे मजबूत बनाने की ही नहीं है, कुछ सहयोगी भी हैं

महाराष्ट्र और हरियाणा के चुनाव नतीजों ने क्या मोदी के अपराजेय होने के मिथक को तोड़ दिया है? राजनीतिक विश्लेषकों का एक वर्ग इसे इसी रूप में देखता है। लेफ्ट लिबरल बिरादरी ऐसा फतवा जारी करने की बहुत जल्दी में है। ऐसे विश्लेषकों के मुताबिक महाराष्ट्र में भाजपा-शिवसेना के गठबंधन को बहुमत मिलना और हरियाणा में भाजपा का एक बार फिर सबसे बड़ी पार्टी बनना, लेकिन बहुमत से कुछ दूर रह जाना, मोदी की हार है। हार-जीत के खेल में कोई हारता है तो कोई जीतता भी है। यदि मोदी हार गए तो जीता कौन? 54 सीटें पाने वाले शरद पवार या 31 सीटें पाने वाले भूपेंद्र सिंह हुड्डा? जाहिर है कि तथ्यों से मतलब नहीं। बस कह दिया कि मोदी की हार हो गई या मोदी को हराया जा सकता है तो बात खत्म।

किसी भी घटना का विश्लेषण संदर्भ से काटकर नहीं किया जा सकता। सवाल है कि इन दो राज्यों के विधानसभा चुनाव नतीजों का संदर्भ क्या है? संदर्भ यह है कि साल 2014 से पहले महाराष्ट्र में भाजपा चौथे और हरियाणा में तीसरे नंबर की पार्टी थी। मोदी लहर और महाराष्ट्र की 15 साल, हरियाणा की 10 साल और केंद्र सरकार की 10 साल के जबरदस्त सत्ता विरोधी रुझान के बूते दोनों राज्यों में वह पहले नंबर की पार्टी बन पाई। इस चुनाव में पांच साल का सत्ता विरोधी रुझान भाजपा के खिलाफ था। उसके सामने सबसे बड़ी चुनौती नंबर एक की स्थिति बरकरार रखने और सत्ता में वापसी की थी। पार्टी ने दोनों लक्ष्य हासिल कर लिया। दूसरी ओर पांच साल के सत्ता विरोधी रुझान के बाद भी विपक्ष उसे पहले नंबर से हटा नहीं पाया। यही नहीं हरियाणा में भाजपा के वोट में तीन फीसद की बढ़ोतरी हुई है। महाराष्ट्र में जरूर दो फीसद वोट की कमी आई, लेकिन पार्टी इस बार सौ सीटें कम पर लड़ी थी। यदि यह विपक्ष की जीत और मोदी-शाह की हार है तो ऐसा सोचने वालों की समझ की बलिहारी। ये ऐसे लोग हैं जो अपनों की गर्दन कटने का शोक मनाने के बजाय विरोधी की अंगुली कटने का जश्न मनाने में यकीन करते हैं। यह भी ध्यान रहे कि इन पांच वर्षों में दोनों राज्यों में तीन बड़े आंदोलन हुए। इन दोनों राज्यों के चुनाव नतीजों को मोदी की हार और विपक्ष की जीत के रूप में पेश किया जाना राजनीतिक विश्लेषण का नया तरीका है। इसका सिलसिला गुजरात विधानसभा चुनाव के समय से शुरू हुआ था। जब स्पष्ट बहुमत से जीतने वाली भाजपा को इसलिए पराजित घोषित कर दिया गया कि उसकी सीटें कुछ कम हो गईं और पिछले करीब तीन दशक से सत्ता तक न पहुंच पाने वाली कांग्रेस को विजेता के रूप में पेश किया गया।

जनसंघ से भाजपा के राजनीतिक सफर में पार्टी जिस भी राज्य में पहली बार सत्ता में आई वह अगले चुनाव में वापसी नहीं कर सकी। वह चाहे 1977 में मध्य प्रदेश, राजस्थान, दिल्ली और हिमाचल प्रदेश हो या फिर 1991 में उत्तर प्रदेश या 2008 में कर्नाटक हो। गुजरात इस मामले में अब तक एकमात्र अपवाद था। उत्तराखंड और छत्तीसगढ़ का जिक्र इसलिए नहीं कि ये दोनों राज्य उत्तर प्रदेश और मध्य प्रदेश का हिस्सा रह चुके हैं। इतना ही नहीं भाजपा संगठन की दृष्टि से भी इन राज्यों की महाराष्ट्र और हरियाणा से तुलना नहीं की जा सकती। तो क्या इन दोनों राज्यों में भाजपा में कोई समस्या नहीं है। ऐसा कहना सच्चाई से भागना होगा। दरअसल समस्या पुरानी है, लेकिन वह मोदी-शाह के युग में भी कम नहीं हो रही है। भाजपा का एक विशेष गुण है। सत्ता में आते ही उसकी सरकार के मंत्री पहले अपने कार्यकर्ताओं को नाराज करते हैं, फिर आम जनता को। इसके बाद चुनाव आते-आते दोनों मिलकर पार्टी को हराते हैं। मोदी-शाह के युग में फर्क इतना हुआ है कि यह नुकसान अब मंत्रियों तक सीमित हो गया है। दोनों राज्यों में हारने वाले मंत्रियों की संख्या और पार्टी की कम हुई सीटों की संख्या गिन लीजिए तो बात समझ में आ जाएगी। मतलब यह कि जितने मंत्री, लगभग उतनी सीटें हारना तो तय है। यह नतीजा है उस सोच का जो मानती है मोदी नाम केवलम यानी हम मंत्री बन गए तो अब जनता ठेंगे पर। मोदी जी तो चुनाव जिताने के लिए हैं ही।

जब यह सोच 15 साल (मध्य प्रदेश और छत्तीसगढ़) से चल रही हो तो मोदी-शाह के लिए भी कठिन हो जाता है। इसी तरह यदि पांच साल में लुटिया डुबोने वाली वसुंधरा राजे सिंधिया हों तो मोदी-शाह के लिए रफू करना और कठिन हो जाता है। मतदाता ने ऐसे नेताओं को संदेश दिया है कि भरोसा मोदी-शाह पर है, आप पर नहीं। ऐसे में देवेंद्र फड़नवीस और मनोहर लाल खट्टर की जीत की अहमियत और बढ़ जाती है। पार्टी के लिए भी संदेश है कि मंत्री काम करने के लिए होते हैं, ऐशो आराम के लिए नहीं। भाजपा के लिए इन दो राज्यों के जनादेश का यह भी संदेश है कि जब बात मोदी की हो तो मतदाता मुकाबले में खड़े किसी नेता पर भरोसा नहीं करता, पर जब मनोहर लाल खट्टर के सामने भूपेंद्र सिंह हुड्डा हों और देवेंद्र फड़नवीस के सामने शरद पवार हों तो मुकाबला वैसा एकतरफा नहीं रहता। यह मोदी पर भरोसे का ही नतीजा है कि पवार और हुड्डा सारी ताकत लगाकर भी जीत के करीब भी नहीं पहुंच पाए। भाजपा के राजनीतिक विस्तार के रास्ते की बाधा केवल सामाजिक संतुलन को साधने और उसे मजबूत बनाने की ही नहीं है। कुछ सहयोगी भी हैं। इसमें शिवसेना का नाम सबसे ऊपर है।

शिवसेना एक ऐसी पार्टी है जो सत्तारूढ़ और विरोधी दल की भूमिका एक साथ चाहती है। वह भीख भी मांगती है और गाली भी देती है। उसे जो मिलता है उससे वह कभी संतुष्ट नहीं होती। चुनाव में अपने खराब प्रदर्शन से वह परेशान नहीं होती। उसके वोट भाजपा से ज्यादा घटे और उसकी स्ट्राइक रेट भी भाजपा से खराब है। शिवसेना को भाजपा से लगभग आधी सीटें मिली हैं, फिर भी उसे ढाई साल के लिए मुख्यमंत्री पद चाहिए। उसकी समस्या यह है कि लंबे समय तक देने वाली पार्टी से अब वह मांगने वाली पार्टी हो गई है। यह बात उसे हजम नहीं हो रही है।

शिवसेना के साथ गठबंधन में विधानसभा चुनाव लड़ना भाजपा की रणनीतिक भूल थी जिसका खामियाजा वह भुगत रही है। अब देखना यह है कि भाजपा 2014 की तरह अपने रुख पर कायम रहती है या शिवसेना की ब्लैकमेलिंग के आगे झुक जाती है? महाराष्ट्र के बाद अगला मोर्चा बिहार में खुलेगा। भाजपा शिवसेना के आगे झुकी तो उसे बिहार में जनता दल यूनाइटेड के सामने भी झुकना पड़ेगा। आखिर जब शिवसेना पांच महीने में ही भूल गई कि लोकसभा में उसे जो सीटें मिलीं वे उद्धव ठाकरे के नहीं मोदी के नाम पर मिली हैं तो जनता दल यूनाइटेड क्यों याद रखेगा?

(लेखक राजनीतिक विश्लेषक एवं वरिष्ठ स्तंभकार हैं)
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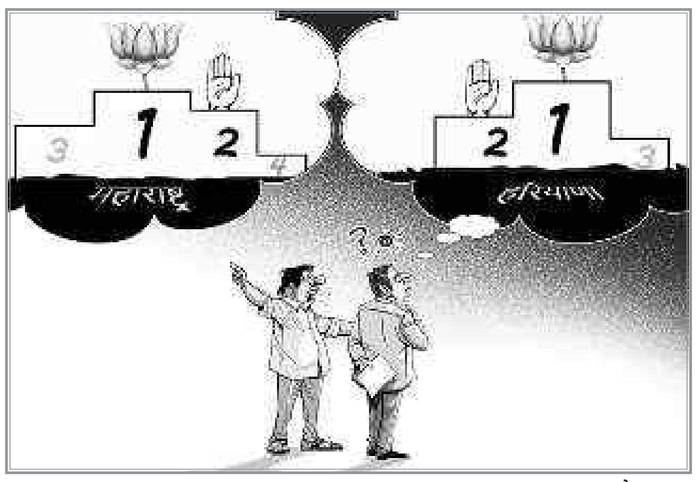


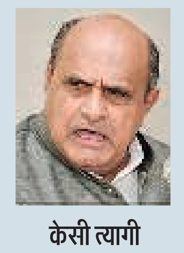
अवधेश राजपूत

भारत को एक करने वाले सरदार

सरदार वल्लभ भाई पटेल की 144वीं जयंती इसलिए विशेष है, क्योंकि उनके स्मरण में 31 अक्टूबर को जम्मू-कश्मीर को आधिकारिक रूप से दो भागों में विभाजित करने के काम को अंजाम दिया जा रहा है। इसके पहले गृह मंत्रालय की ओर से यह घोषणा की गई थी कि पुलिस एवं सभी अर्द्धसैनिक बलों के कार्यालयों में उनका चित्र अवश्य इस्तेमाल किया जाए। इससे यही स्पष्ट होता है कि वर्तमान सरकार के लिए महात्मा गांधी के बाद लौह पुरुष सरदार पटेल सर्वाधिक सम्मानित शख्सियत हैं। कांग्रेस सरकार ने तो उन्हें भारत रत्न से सम्मानित करने में लगभग 40 वर्ष लगा दिए थे। यह सर्वविदित है कि कैसे सरदार पटेल अपनी अनुशासनात्मक क्षमता और मजबूत नेतृत्व के बल पर 565 प्रांतों को भारत के साथ जोड़ने में कामयाब हुए थे। सरदार पटेल के इस योगदान के लिए पिछले वर्ष प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने उनकी 182 मीटर लंबी विश्व की सबसे बड़ी मूर्ति 'स्टैच्यू ऑफ यूनिटी' का अनावरण किया था। यह मूर्ति स्थल आज पर्यटन का बड़ा केंद्र बन गया है। यह सच है कि सरदार पटेल न होते तो आज भारत का भौगोलिक नक्शा शायद भिन्न होता। जूनागढ़, जोधपुर और खासतौर पर हैदराबाद तथा जम्मू-कश्मीर को भारत के साथ जोड़े रखने में उनकी साम, दाम, दंड एवं भेद की नीतियां आज भी उन्हें इतिहास के पन्नों पर सजीव और प्रासंगिक बनाए हुए हैं।

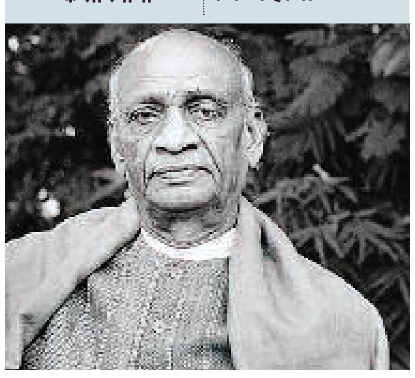
जब पाकिस्तान का बनना तय हो गया था तब देश के सामने कई गंभीर चुनौतियां थीं। 1946 के कैबिनेट मिशन की प्रस्तावित योजना के अनुसार बंगाल, पंजाब और असम पाकिस्तान का हिस्सा बनने जा रहे थे। तब दूरदर्शी सरदार पटेल द्वारा इस योजना का कड़े शब्दों में विरोध किया गया। उन्होंने कहा, 'यह प्रस्ताव तो पाकिस्तान बनाने के प्रस्ताव से भी ज्यादा खराब है।' बाद में सरदार पटेल ने पंजाब और बंगाल के विभाजन का प्रस्ताव पेश कर दिया और पूरा का पूरा असम भारत का हिस्सा बना लिया गया। यह ध्यान रहे कि तब असम एक तरह से पूरा पूर्वोत्तर था। देश के एकीकरण के अपने प्रयासों के दौरान सरदार पटेल ने समय की मांग को बखूबी समझने और उसके अनुरूप चलने का काम किया। हैदराबाद और जूनागढ़ के नबाव के खिलाफ उन्होंने बल और विवेक, दोनों का इस्तेमाल किया।

सरदार पटेल दबे-कुचले, मजदूरों, गरीबों एवं किसानों की भी मजबूत आवाज थे। आजादी के आंदोलनों में



केसी त्यागी

यदि दृढ़ निश्चयी सरदार पटेल न होते तो शायद आज भारत का भौगोलिक नक्शा भिन्न होता



मुख्य भूमिका निभाने के साथ ही वे उन सभी सामाजिक वर्गों का भी नेतृत्व कर रहे थे जो आर्थिक एवं सामाजिक रूप से शोषित हो रहे थे। जनवरी 1928 में में अंग्रेजी हुकूमत ने एक तालुका के समूचे किसानों का भूमि कर लगभग 22 प्रतिशत बढ़ा दिया, जो लगभग दोगुने के करीब था। उसी तालुका के अंतर्गत बारदोली भी आता था। जहां के आश्रमों के संघ अध्यक्ष के पद पर पटेल आसीन थे। इस मुद्दे को पटेल ने चुनौती के रूप में लिया। किसानों को एकजुट कर उन्होंने बारदोली आंदोलन किया। पटेल ने किसानों से अंग्रेजों के आदेश के खिलाफ जाकर भू-कर नहीं देने का आह्वान किया। उन्हें बारदोली की महिलाओं, पुरुषों एवं युवाओं का भरपूर सहयोग प्राप्त हुआ। महात्मा गांधी के साथ खेड़ा किसान आंदोलन का अनुभव भी सरदार पटेल के इस आंदोलन के मार्गदर्शन में सहायक रहा। उनके सफल नेतृत्व और किसानों की एकता के फलस्वरूप अंग्रेजों को घुटने टेकने पड़े। भू-कर में संशोधन किया गया, किसानों को रियायत दी गई, जबरन हड़पी गई जमीनें तथा पालतू जानवर वापस किए गए। इससे किसानों में विश्वास, संतोष और साहस का संचार हुआ। अंग्रेजी नीतियों के खिलाफ जन समर्थन जुटाने के अलावा उन्होंने समाज को सशक्त करने का काम भी किया। उनके अनुयायियों ने गांव के सभी समुदायों के लोगों को चरखा चलाना तथा सूत कातना सिखाया। किसानों के बीच पटेल की सकारात्मक पैठ को देखते हुए स्वयं महात्मा गांधी ने उन्हें 'सरदार' की उपाधि से नवाजा। यह पटेल की पहली सफलता नहीं थी। खेड़ा के प्रसिद्ध किसान आंदोलन में भी महात्मा गांधी के साथ उनकी भूमिका अहम रही थी। उस आंदोलन की भी शुरुआत भूमि कर के लिए ही हुई थी। 1918 में गुजरात का यह क्षेत्र भीषण अकाल की मार झेल रहा था। किसान भूमि कर देने में लाचार एवं असहाय हो चुके थे। किसानों की समस्याओं की अनदेखी करते हुए अंग्रेजों ने कर में बढ़ोतरी कर दी थी। इसके विरोध में महात्मा गांधी ने खेड़ा आंदोलन का मोर्चा संभाला जिसमें सरदार पटेल उनके मुख्य सिपहसालार की भूमिका में थे। आंदोलन इतना सशक्त हो चुका था कि अंततः ब्रिटिश शासन को द्विपक्षीय समझौते के लिए मजबूर होना पड़ा, जिसके तहत कर माफी पर विचार, बढ़ाए गए कर में कटौती और जबरन हड़पी गई जमीनें एवं वस्तुओं की वापसी पर सहमति बनी।

सरदार पटेल के निर्णय दूरगामी एवं अनुशासित प्रवृत्ति के होते थे। उन पर गांधी जी का बड़ा प्रभाव था। धर्मनिरपेक्षता उन्हें गांधी जी से दीक्षा में प्राप्त हुई थी। गांधी जी के कारण ही उन्होंने खादी के प्रति अपनी आस्था जागृत की थी। गांधी जी के संपर्क में आने से पहले वह पश्चिमी वेशभूषा से प्रभावित थे। उन्होंने गांधी जी के कदमों पर चलकर 'विदेशी सामग्री जलाओ' नामक कई विरोध प्रदर्शनों को भी अंजाम देने का कार्य किया। दांडी मार्च के दौरान स्वयं महात्मा गांधी ने यह बात कही थी कि खेड़ा सत्याग्रह में मुझे सरदार पटेल की वजह से ही सफलता मिली और आज इन्हीं की वजह से मैं यहां दांडी में भी हूं। सरदार पटेल जिन्हें गांधी जी अपनी सफलता का कारण मानते थे, आज भी प्रासंगिक हैं। चाहे वह किसानों का सवाल हो या फिर जवानों का। धर्मनिरपेक्षता उनकी दूसरी मजबूत कड़ी थी। इसके जरिये ही वे मजबूत और अखंड भारत का सपना देखते थे। आज यह कहीं आवश्यक है कि हम सरदार पटेल के आदर्शों और मार्गों का अनुसरण कर उनके सपनों के भारत के निर्माण में अपना योगदान दें। यही उनकी जयंती पर सबसे बड़ी श्रद्धांजलि होगी।

(लेखक जदयू के राष्ट्रीय प्रवक्ता हैं)
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ऊर्जा

संतोष धर्म

चाणक्य कहते हैं, 'शांति के समान कोई तप नहीं, संतोष से बढ़कर कोई धर्म नहीं।' सुख के लिए विश्व में सभी जगह चाहत है, पर सुख उसी को मिलता है, जिसे संतोष करना आता है। एक जिज्ञासा उठती है कि संतोष है क्या? संतोष का अभिप्राय है, इच्छाओं का त्याग। सभी इच्छाओं का त्याग करके अपनी स्थिति पर संतोष करना ही सुख को प्राप्त कर लेना है। जीवन के साथ इच्छाएं, कामनाएं एवं आकांक्षाएं रहती ही हैं, लेकिन यह भी सत्य है कि सुखी जीवन के लिए हमारी इच्छा शक्ति पर कहीं तो विराम होना चाहिए। इच्छा के वेग में विराम को ही संतोष की संज्ञा दे सकते हैं। आचार्य गोरेलाल जी का मत है, 'संतोष मन की वह अवस्था है, जिसमें मनुष्य पूर्ण तृप्ति या प्रसन्नता का अनुभव करता है, अर्थात इच्छा रह ही नहीं पाती।' जीवन की गति के साथ संपत्ति और समृद्धि की दौड़ से वह सुख नहीं मिलता, जो संतोष रूपी वृक्ष की शीतल छांव में अनायास मिल जाता है। हमें चाहिए कि हम प्रयत्न और परिश्रम के फलस्वरूप प्राप्त होने वाली प्रसन्नता पर संतोष करना सीखें। निष्काम कर्मयोग, इच्छाओं का दमन, लोभ का त्याग अथवा इंद्रियों पर अधिकार-ये सभी उपदेश संतोष की ओर ले जाने वाले सोपान ही तो हैं।

सच है, संतोष प्राकृतिक संपदा है, ऐश्वर्य कृत्रिम गरीबी। संतोष का आदर्श यही है कि हम इच्छाओं को सीमित रखकर सत्य एवं ईमानदारी से भरा श्रम करें और फल की चिंता न करते हुए उसे परमात्मा और परिस्थितियों पर छोड़ दें। हमें इस तथ्य का भली प्रकार बोध होना चाहिए कि सुखी होने का भाव है-दूसरों को सुखी बनाना। मन, वाणी और कर्म से शुद्ध व्यक्तित्व ही सच्चे सुख की रसधार में सदैव स्नान करता है। आत्मा में सुख-सौंदर्य की विपुल वर्षा के लिए संतोष एक सजीला मेघ है। सुख और संतोष प्रायः साथ चलते हैं। संतोष मेघ है और सुख उससे बरसने वाला जल। संतोष सुख का सबसे बड़ा साधन है, जो मस्तिष्क के झुकाव पर निर्भर करता है। यदि मन से सुख मान लिया तो विपुल व्याधियां भी क्षण भर में उड़ जाती हैं।

श्रीमती रमन त्रिपाठी

महिला सुरक्षा के चिंतनीय हालात

मीनाक्षी भटनागर

हाल ही में आए राष्ट्रीय अपराध रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो (एनसीआरबी) के ताजा आंकड़े महिलाओं की सुरक्षा की चिंताजनक तस्वीर पेश कर रहे हैं। रिपोर्ट बताती है कि देश में आधी आबादी के खिलाफ अपराध में करीब छह प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई है। वर्ष 2017 में पूरे देश में महिलाओं के खिलाफ अपराधों के 359849 मामले दर्ज किए गए, जबकि 2016 में 338954 मामले दर्ज किए गए थे। घर के भीतर अपनों का दुर्व्यवहार हो या नाबालिग बच्चियों के शोषण के मामले, हर उम्र, हर वर्ग की महिलाओं के साथ आपराधिक घटनाएं हुई हैं। महिलाओं के खिलाफ सबसे ज्यादा अपराध के मामले उत्तर प्रदेश से सामने आए हैं। उत्तर प्रदेश में 56011 मामले दर्ज किए गए। यह आंकड़ा पूरे देश में हुए अपराधों का 15.6 फीसद है। महिलाओं के खिलाफ सबसे असुरक्षित पांच राज्यों की फेहरिस्त में दूसरे स्थान पर महाराष्ट्र, तीसरे पायदान पर बंगाल, चौथे स्थान पर मध्य प्रदेश और पांचवें पायदान पर राजस्थान है। अफसोस कि देश के बड़े राज्यों में महिला सुरक्षा के मोर्चे पर हालात चिंतनीय हैं। वहीं सबसे ज्यादा सुरक्षित पांच राज्यों में लक्षद्वीप, दादर-नगर हवेली, दमन-दीव, नगालैंड और पुदुचेरी जैसे छोटे प्रांत हैं।

दुख की बात है कि कानूनी सख्ती भी आधी आबादी के खिलाफ होने वाले अपराधों पर लगाम नहीं लगा पा रही है

एनसीआरबी के आंकड़े यह भी बताते हैं कि देश में बहुत सी महिलाएं अपने पति या रिश्तेदारों की क्रूरता का भी शिकार बन रही हैं। अपनों की बर्बरता के बंगाल से 16800, उत्तर प्रदेश से 12653, राजस्थान से 11508, असम से 9782 और तेलंगाना से 7838 मामले सामने आए हैं। ये पांच राज्य महिलाओं को घर में मिलने वाली अपनों की प्रताड़ना में सबसे आगे हैं। गौरतलब है कि एनसीआरबी वही आंकड़े सामने रखता है, जो पुलिस से मिलते हैं। जाहिर है महिला अपराधों से जुड़े वास्तविक आंकड़े इनसे कहीं ज्यादा ही होंगे। चिंतनीय है कि कानूनी सख्ती भी महिलाओं के प्रति होने वाले अपराधों पर लगाम नहीं लगा पा रही है। नाबालिग बच्चियों के साथ दुष्कर्म जैसे अपराध के लिए आरोपी को फांसी की सजा देने का प्रावधान भी किया गया है। कई राज्यों ने ऐसे अपराधों को रोकने के लिए कठोर नियम भी बनाए हैं। बावजूद इसके समाज में महिलाओं के प्रति आपराधिक प्रवृत्ति रखने वालों के बढ़ते दुस्साहस और नकारात्मक सोच की बदौलत सामने आए ये आंकड़े भयभीत करने वाले हैं।

देखा जाए तो बीते कुछ वर्षों में समाज की संरचना काफी हद तक बदल गई है। बेटियां अब पढ़-लिख कर आत्मनिर्भर बन रही हैं। कामकाजी स्त्रियां दोहरी जिम्मेदारी उठा रही हैं। वे विज्ञान की दुनिया से लेकर घर की देहरी तक अपनी भूमिका का निर्वहन पूरे मनोयोग से कर रही हैं। साथ ही वे समाज और परिवार में संस्कार, सरोकार और जिम्मेदारी के भाव की बुनियाद भी पुख्ता कर रही हैं। ऐसे में जरूरी है कि उनके जीवन से भी असुरक्षा का अंधकार मिटे। अपनी पहचान बनाने और सपने पूरे करने की राह पर भय नहीं, बल्कि सम्मान और समानता का भाव उनके हिस्से आए।

(लेखिका स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

मेलबाक्स

सही कूटनीति

कूटनीति को नई धार देता भारत शीर्षक से लिखे अपने आलेख में ब्रिगेडियर आरपी सिंह ने अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंचों पर पाकिस्तान के नए खेवनहार बने तुर्की और मलेशिया की भौगोलिक-कूटनीतिक स्थिति की सटीक समीक्षा की है। तुर्की के राष्ट्रपति रेसेप तैयप एर्दोगन, जो लंबे समय से वहां की सत्ता पर काबिज हैं, ने एक मुहिम चलाकर वहां के धर्मनिरपेक्ष स्वरूप को नष्ट करने का काम किया है। उन्होंने तुर्की में कुर्दिश राष्ट्रीयता की पहचान के लिए लड़ रही कुर्दिस्तान वर्कर्स पार्टी (पीकेके) को कठोरता से दबाने की कोशिश की है। इसके अलावा अब सीरिया से लगी सीमा पर कुर्दों के खिलाफ हमला बोल दिया है। यह तो अंतरराष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार का खुला उल्लंघन है। भारत ने उचित ही तुर्की की इस एकतरफा कार्रवाई का विरोध किया है। उसके पास यह विकल्प है कि जरूरत पड़ने पर वह इन कुर्दों को रणनीतिक-कूटनीतिक सहायता देने पर विचार कर सकता है। भारत ने पहले ही ग्रीस, साइप्रस और आर्मेनिया जैसे देशों, जिनके तुर्की के साथ गंभीर सीमा विवाद हैं, की क्षेत्रीय अखंडता और संप्रभुता का सम्मान करने की बात कही है। बात करें मलेशिया की तो उसे साधने के लिए भारत सरकार ने वहां से पाम ऑयल के आयात को बंद करने के संकेत दिए हैं। इससे उसकी अकड़ कम होती है तो ठीक वर्ना भारत को चाहिए कि वह दक्षिण चीन सागर क्षेत्र में सिंगापुर और इंडोनेशिया से उसके सीमाई विवादों में उन देशों का साथ दे। मलेशिया ने पूर्व में हुए जोहोर समझौते का उल्लंघन कर किया है, जिससे सिंगापुर काफी चिंतित है। इसके अलावा पेड्रा ब्रांका क्षेत्र पर सिंगापुर दावा कर रहा है और जो इस समय मलेशिया के नियंत्रण में है। भारत अपनी तरकश में रखे इस तीर का भी इस्तेमाल कर सकता है। एक बार ब्रिटेन के पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री लॉर्ड पाल्मर्सटन ने कहा था कि अंतरराष्ट्रीय कूटनीति में केवल हमारे हित स्थाई होते हैं, दोस्त या दुश्मन नहीं। निःसंदेह मोदी सरकार ने राष्ट्र हित में इस सोच पर आगे बढ़ने का हौसला दिखाया है।

चंदन कुमार, देवघर

आस्था का महापर्व

छठ कभी पूर्वांचल क्षेत्र तक ही सीमित था, लेकिन अब इसे देश के विभिन्न भागों के साथ ही विदेशों में भी मनाया जा रहा है। इसका कारण बिहार व पूर्वी उत्तर प्रदेश के लोगों का रोजगार की तलाश में बाहर निकलना है। वे जहां भी गए वहीं पर इसे शुरू कर दिया और दूसरे लोगों ने भी इसकी महत्ता को समझा। इसी वजह से बहुत से दूसरे इलाके के लोग भी इस पूजा में भाग लेने लगे हैं। यह महापर्व भाईचारा एवं एकता को दर्शाता है। कई जगह मुस्लिम महिलाएं भी छठ व्रत करती हैं। दुनिया में सबसे पवित्र पर्व में छठ पर्व के गिनती होती है, इसके साथ ही यह दुनिया का पहला ऐसा महापर्व है जिसमें डूबते एवं उगते दोनों अवस्थाओं में सूरज को अर्घ्य दिया जाता है। छठ महापर्व स्वच्छता एवं पर्यावरण का संदेश देता है। इस महापर्व में सफाई का ध्यान एवं प्रकृति से जुड़ी हुई ज्यादातर वस्तुओं का प्रयोग किया जाता है।

जय किशोर तिवारी, शिक्षक, नई दिल्ली

युवाओं को मिले रोजगार

आज भारत जनसंख्या के मामले में विश्व में दूसरे स्थान पर है। उससे लगता है कि भारत जनसंख्या में विश्व में पहले स्थान पर आ जाएगा। जनसंख्या वृद्धि का सबसे ज्यादा असर रोजगार पर पड़ रहा है। देश में मेडिकल व इंजीनियरिंग के तमाम कॉलेज हैं और वहां से हर साल बड़ी मात्रा में बच्चे पढ़कर निकलते हैं, लेकिन सबको रोजगार नहीं मिल पाता है। इनमें से कुछ बच्चे रोजगार के अभाव में अपराध का रास्ता अपना लेते हैं, जिससे एक शिक्षित व्यक्ति अपराधी बन जाता है। सरकार ऐसी शिक्षा व्यवस्था लागू करे, जिससे हर शिक्षित को रोजगार मिल सके।

मो. जमील, नई दिल्ली

सोच बदलने की जरूरत

हमें स्वस्थ बेटा तो चाहिए पर जो बेटी उस पुत्र को जन्म देगी उसके स्वास्थ्य, लालन-पालन व शिक्षा के प्रति घोर उदासीनता बरती जाती है। हमें यह क्यों समझ नहीं आता कि अस्वस्थ बेटियां क्या स्वस्थ बेटा पैदा कर सकती हैं? कभी नहीं। हमें बेटियों के प्रति अपनी इस पुरानी घटिया सोच को तुरंत तिलांजलि देकर उनके जन्म और उनके लालन पालन को एक उत्सव के रूप में अपनाना होगा तभी हमारी अगली पीढ़ियां बलशाली होंगी ।

सतीश त्यागी काकड़ा, इंदिरापुरम, गाजियाबाद

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

निवेश के रास्ते

भारत ने सऊदी अरब की कंपनियों को ऊर्जा क्षेत्र में निवेश करने और नए उद्योगों (स्टार्टअप) में पूंजी लगाने का जो न्योता दिया है, वह निश्चित रूप से दोनों देशों के बीच बढ़ते आर्थिक और कूटनीतिक रिश्तों का संकेत है। अगर इस तरह की पहल कामयाब होती है और सऊदी अरब की कंपनियां भारत में निवेश करती हैं तो भारत के ऊर्जा क्षेत्र का विकास होगा और अर्थव्यवस्था भी जोर पकड़ेगी। इन दिनों सऊदी अरब की राजधानी रियाद में चल रहे निवेशक सम्मेलन में दुनियाभर के निवेशक पहुंचे हैं। भारत में पिछले कई महीनों से अर्थव्यवस्था में मंदी का जो माहौल बना हुआ है, उसका एक बड़ा कारण निवेश नहीं आना भी रहा है। ऐसे में बाहर से निवेश का आना अर्थव्यवस्था की बड़ी जरूरत भी है। सऊदी अरब ने भारत में सौ अरब डॉलर के निवेश के संकेत भी दिए हैं। इसके अलावा भारतीय कंपनियां भी सऊदी अरब की कई बड़ी परियोजनाओं में अपनी भागीदारी बढ़ा रही हैं। दोनों देशों के बीच सालाना कारोबार साढ़े सत्ताईस अरब डॉलर से ज्यादा पहुंच गया है। इस लिहाज से भी भारत के लिए सऊदी अरब एक बड़े व्यापारिक साझीदार के रूप में सामने आया है।

अब तक माना जाता था कि सऊदी अरब के संबंध भारत के मुकाबले पाकिस्तान के साथ ज्यादा मजबूत हैं और वक्त पड़ने पर वह पाकिस्तान का साथ देता रहा है। इस्लामिक देशों के संगठन ओआइसी में भी सऊदी अरब का दबदबा है। लेकिन पिछले कुछ सालों में हालात बदले हैं और सऊदी अरब ने दुनिया में भारत के बढ़ते प्रभाव का लोहा माना है। भारत ने 2008 में 'लुक ईस्ट' की जो नीति शुरू की थी, उसका असर अब साफ दिख रहा है। इसी का नतीजा है कि दोनों देशों के बीच कारोबारी रिश्तों के साथ-साथ कूटनीतिक रिश्तों का भी दौर शुरू हुआ। मुसलिम देशों के बीच भारत की पैठ बनाने में सऊदी अरब की बड़ी भूमिका रही। सऊदी अरब इस बात को अच्छी तरह जानता-समझता है कि भारत लंबे समय से आतंकवाद की मार झेल रहा है और इसमें उसके पड़ोसी देश पाकिस्तान की क्या भूमिका है। इसलिए भारत और सऊदी अरब दोनों ने ही समय-समय पर आतंकवाद के खिलाफ आवाज उठाई है और इस समस्या से मिल कर लड़ने और सुरक्षा सहयोग बढ़ाने के लिए समझौते किए, जिनमें आतंक के खिलाफ सूचनाओं के आदान-प्रदान जैसे समझौते भी शामिल हैं। बड़ी बात यह है कि कश्मीर के मुद्दे पर सऊदी अरब ने कभी भी पाकिस्तान का समर्थन नहीं किया है। ऐसे में सऊदी अरब और भारत के बीच अगर कारोबारी रिश्तों को नया आयाम और विस्तार मिलता है तो यह दोनों देशों के लिए स्वर्णिम मौका होगा।

अरब जगत में सऊदी अरब ऐसा देश है जहां लाखों भारतीय कामगार हैं और ये न सिर्फ सऊदी अरब के विकास की रीढ़ साबित हुए हैं, बल्कि भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था में भी बड़ा योगदान दे रहे हैं। इनसे भारत को ग्यारह अरब डॉलर सालाना से ज्यादा की विदेशी मुद्रा मिलती है। भारत सऊदी अरब से बाईस अरब डॉलर सालाना के पेट्रोलियम उत्पाद खरीदता है। भारत के लिए सऊदी अरब इसलिए भी अहम है कि इराक के बाद सबसे ज्यादा कच्चा तेल उसी से मिलता है। ऐसे में सऊदी कंपनियों के लिए भारत निवेश का बड़ा ठिकाना बन सकता है। नए उद्योगों को भी निवेशकों की दरकार है। हालांकि निवेश करने वाली कंपनियां संबंधित देश से अपने लिए अच्छे कारोबारी माहौल और कर रियायतों की उम्मीदें करती हैं। पिछले कुछ समय में कारोबारी सुगमता के मामले में भी भारत की वैश्विक रैंकिंग सुधरी है। इससे भी निवेशकों में भारत के प्रति भरोसा पैदा होगा।

लापरवाही का प्रदूषण

जिस समय समूचे देश और खासकर राजधानी दिल्ली में जहरीली होती हवा एक गहरी चिंता का विषय है, उसमें अगर कचरे के पहाड़ से फैलते प्रदूषण की खबरें आती हैं तो स्वाभाविक रूप से यह सवाल उठता है कि क्या सरकार इस समस्या से निपटने के प्रति ईमानदार है! गौरतलब है कि पिछले काफी दिनों से दिल्ली के भलस्वा डेरी इलाके में कचरे के पहाड़ से फैलते प्रदूषण को लेकर चिंता जताई जा रही है। फिर ओखला और गाजीपुर में भी हालत इससे अलग नहीं है। लेकिन इस ओर सरकार को ध्यान देना शायद जरूरी नहीं लग रहा है। नतीजतन, पहले ही धुएं और धुंध की चादर में लिपटी दिल्ली में दम घुटने की स्थिति पैदा हो रही है। भलस्वा डेरी में मौजूद कचरे के पहाड़ से उपजी समस्या कोई नई नहीं है। हालत यह है कि इसमें कई बार लगी आग की वजह से आसपास के इलाकों में लोगों का सहजता से सांस लेना तक दूभर होता रहा है। जब भी समस्या गहरा कर किसी तरह सुर्खियों में आ जाती है तब सरकार की ओर से इस तरह के आश्वासन जारी किए जाते हैं कि जल्दी ही कचरे के ढेर से निपटान के इंतजाम किए जाएंगे। लेकिन कुछ दिनों बाद फिर सभी आश्वासनों को शायद भुला दिया जाता है।

सरकार और संबंधित महकमों की ऐसी ही लापरवाही और अनदेखी का नतीजा है कि कचरे के ये पहाड़ आज राजधानी की बड़ी समस्या बन चुके हैं। अंदाजा इससे लगाया जा सकता है कि भलस्वा डेरी के पास करीब सत्तर एकड़ में कचरा और मलबा डालने के जारी क्रम की वजह से इसकी ऊंचाई आज सतह से बासठ मीटर ऊपर हो चुकी है। करीब अस्सी लाख टन कूड़े का बोझ बन चुके इस पहाड़ पर सड़ते हुए कचरे से जिस तरह का प्रदूषण फैल रहा है, उसके प्रति आंखें मूंद लेने के रवैये ने आज हालत यह कर दी है कि उस समूचे इलाके में स्थित कई कॉलोनियों में रहने वाले लोगों में सांस फूलने, टीबी, एलर्जी, दूषित पानी की वजह से पेट के रोगों सहित कई गंभीर बीमारियां जड़ पकड़ रही हैं। सवाल है कि प्रदूषण से लड़ने के लिए ऑड-इवन सहित दूसरे तमाम इंतजामों की घोषणा करती सरकार की नजर में क्या कचरे के पहाड़ से फैलते प्रदूषण से उपजी समस्या की कोई जगह है? मुश्किल यह है कि कई बार अदालती निर्देशों के बावजूद इसके हल के लिए कोई ठोस पहलकदमी अब तक नहीं हो सकी है।

सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने पिछले साल दिल्ली में ठोस कचरे को बेहद गंभीर समस्या बताया था और यहां के उपराज्यपाल को इससे निपटने के लिए विशेषज्ञों, सिविल सोसायटी के सदस्यों और आवासीय संगठनों के प्रतिनिधियों को शामिल करके एक समिति बनाने के लिए कहा था। इसके अलावा, करीब एक सौ अस्सी करोड़ रुपए खर्च कर भलस्वा कचरा पट्टी को दक्षिण कोरिया के सियोल स्थित नजीदों कचरा पट्टी की तर्ज पर संवारने की योजना है। लेकिन आज दिल्ली में प्रदूषण के गंभीर हालत में पहुंच जाने के बाद यह कहना मुश्किल है कि अदालत के निर्देशों सहित बाकी योजनाओं पर कितना अमल हुआ। विशेषज्ञों का कहना है कि उचित निपटान की व्यवस्था हो तो पचास फीसद कचरे को कम्पोस्ट खाद में बदला जा सकता है। इसके अलावा, तीस फीसद कचरे का पुनर्चक्रण भी किया जा सकता है। इसका मतलब यह हुआ कि कचरा निपटान केंद्रों तक केवल बीस फीसद कचरा पहुंचेगा। सवाल है कि राजधानी में भलस्वा, ओखला और गाजीपुर में कचरे के पहाड़ की ऊंचाई के लगातार बढ़ने के क्रम में इस तरह के उपायों पर कितना गौर किया गया?

कल्पमेधा

अगर सूरज की तरह चमकना है तो सूरज की तरह तपना भी पड़ेगा।
-एपीजे अब्दुल कलाम

आर्थिक भेदभाव से जूझता समाज

ज्योति सिडाना

यह एक दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण स्थिति ही है कि भारत एक कल्याणकारी राज्य की छवि के बावजूद निर्धन जनसंख्या को न्यूनतम आवश्यकता की पूर्ति के लिए संसाधन उपलब्ध नहीं करा पा रहा है। इस कारण अगर अनेक परिवार जीविका, स्वास्थ्य, भुखमरी, कुपोषण से संघर्ष करने में असफल हो रहे हैं तो उनके सामने सामूहिक आत्महत्या, हत्या अथवा अन्य अपराध जैसे विकल्प उभर कर आ सकते हैं।

मनुष्य को जीवन संचालन के लिए कई प्रकार के संसाधनों की आवश्यकता पड़ती है। इन संसाधनों की अनुपलब्धता या कमी निर्धनता को व्यक्त करती है। कुछ समाज विज्ञानी केवल भौतिक संसाधनों की कमी को निर्धनता का आधार मानते हैं, जबकि कुछ शैक्षणिक अवसरों की अनुपलब्धता, कार्य स्थितियों में कमी, शक्तिहीनता और सामाजिक बहिष्कार को भी निर्धनता के साथ जोड़ कर देखते हैं। ये वे पक्ष हैं जो समाज की इकाइयों को अनेक गतिविधियों में सहभागिता न करने के लिए बाध्य करते हैं। वैश्वीकरण की प्रक्रिया के उपरांत तो निर्धनता की दर में तेजी से वृद्धि हुई है। ब्रिटिश समाज विज्ञानी राल्फ मिलिबेंड तर्क देते हैं कि निर्धनता को असमानता की संरचना के साथ देखे जाने की जरूरत है। जैसे-जैसे निर्धनता का विस्तार होता है, समाज में असमानता और अधिक जटिल होती जाती है।

हाल में भुखमरी का सामना कर रहे एक सौ सत्रह देशों के संदर्भ में वैश्विक भुखमरी सूचकांक की रिपोर्ट आई है। इस सूची में भारत का स्थान एक सौ दो वां है, जबकि पाकिस्तान चौरानबेवें, बांग्लादेश अट्ठासीवें, नेपाल तिहत्तरवें और श्रीलंका छियासठवें स्थान पर है। वर्ष 2017 में भारत एक सौ उन्नीस देशों की सूची में सौवें स्थान पर था और 2018 में एक सौ तीनवें स्थान पर। यदि 2014 के आंकड़ों से तुलना करें तो तब भारत पचपनवें स्थान पर था। इन आंकड़ों के आधार पर कहा जा सकता है कि देश में भुखमरी की स्थिति में कोई सुधार नहीं हुआ है, अपितु भारत अपने पड़ोसी देशों से भी खराब स्थिति में आ गया है। केंद्रीय स्वास्थ्य और परिवार कल्याण मंत्रालय के पहले राष्ट्रीय पोषण सर्वे के अनुसार देश में दस से उन्नीस साल आयु वर्ग के चार बच्चों में से एक बच्चा कुपोषित है।

महात्मा गांधी ने राष्ट्र के विकास में प्रत्येक निर्धन इकाई की सहभागिता को पर्याप्त महत्त्व दिया था, ताकि वह निर्धनता, बेकारी और भुखमरी से मुकाबला करने के तरीके खुद खोज सके। परंतु वर्तमान उपभोक्तावादी और नव-उदारवादी समाज में धनाढ्य और निर्धन वर्ग में बढ़ती खाई ने अनेक समस्यामूलक स्थितियों को उत्पन्न कर दिया है, जिसने निम्न एवं मध्य वर्ग के समक्ष अस्तित्व की निरंतरता को एक चुनौती के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया है। यह एक दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण स्थिति ही है कि भारत एक कल्याणकारी राज्य की छवि के बावजूद निर्धन जनसंख्या को न्यूनतम आवश्यकता की पूर्ति के लिए संसाधन उपलब्ध नहीं करा पा रहा है। इस कारण अगर अनेक परिवार जीविका, स्वास्थ्य, भुखमरी, कुपोषण से संघर्ष करने में असफल हो रहे हैं तो उनके सामने सामूहिक आत्महत्या, हत्या अथवा अन्य अपराध जैसे विकल्प उभर कर आ सकते हैं।

गरीबी के पैमाने का निर्धारण करने के लिए रंगराजन कमेटी ने अपनी रिपोर्ट में ग्रामीण और शहरी निर्धनता के लिए क्रमशः बत्तीस और सैंतालीस रुपए प्रतिदिन व्यय का मानक तय किया था। जबकि अर्जुन सेनगुप्ता कमेटी ने यह राशि बीस रुपए प्रतिदिन तय की थी। ये रिपोर्टें चाहे कितनी ही विवादास्पद हों, पर इस तथ्य को स्थापित करती हैं कि देश की जनसंख्या का लगभग पैंतीस फीसद भाग गरीबी की सीमा रेखा के नीचे जीवनयापन करने के लिए मजबूर हैं। वैश्वीकरण के फलस्वरूप विस्तार ले रही निर्धनता इस समय सर्वाधिक महत्त्वपूर्ण सवाल है। इस पैंतीस फीसद आबादी और फिर निर्धनता की सीमा के इर्दगिर्द वाली आबादी से संबद्ध युवा लगभग सभी बुनियादी सुविधाओं से वंचित हैं। परिणामस्वरूप विकास प्रक्रिया में इस आबादी की सहभागिता का सवाल हाशिये पर चला जाता है। यह आर्थिक विषमता अनेक बुनियादी सवालों को जन्म देती है।

वैश्विक भुखमरी सूचकांक में कुपोषण, पांच वर्ष से कम आयु के बच्चों की लंबाई औसत से कम होना, पांच वर्ष से कम आयु के बच्चों का वजन औसत से कम होना और पांच वर्ष से कम आयु के बच्चों की मृत्यु होना जैसे चार प्रमुख संकेतकों को आधार बनाया गया है। इन चार संकेतकों में से बच्चों का कम वजन होना भारत का सूची में निम्न स्थान पर आने का एक सर्वाधिक महत्त्वपूर्ण कारण माना गया है। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भारत में पांच वर्ष से कम आयु के बच्चों का वजन औसत से बहुत कम निकला है, जो चिंता का विषय है क्योंकि बच्चे देश का भविष्य हैं जो स्वयं स्वस्थ नहीं रहेंगे एक स्वस्थ देश का निर्माण कैसे कर पाएंगे?

विश्व आर्थिक मंच (वर्ल्ड इकॉनोमिक फोरम) द्वारा हाल में जारी वैश्विक प्रतिस्पर्धा सूचकांक में भारत को इस साल एक सौ इकतालीस देशों की सूची में अड़सठवें पायदान पर रखा गया है। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भारत सूचना एवं प्रौद्योगिकी को अपनाने में सुस्त रहने, स्वास्थ्य चिकित्सा क्षेत्र में खराब स्थिति होने और स्वस्थ जीवन की खराब संभावनाओं के कारण पिछड़ गया। यहां तक कि स्वस्थ जीवन की संभावना में तो भारत का स्थान एक सौ नौ वां रहा, लैंगिक असमानता में भारत एक सौ अट्ठाईस वें स्थान पर रहा और सबसे बड़ी बात तो ये कि विश्व शांति सूचकांक (ग्लोबल पीस इंडेक्स) में पिछले वर्ष की तुलना में भारत पांच स्थान नीचे गिर कर एक सौ इकतालीसवें स्थान पर आ गया। आज आवश्यकता है इन सब आंकड़ों को ध्यान में रख कर चिंतन करने की, ताकि समय रहते विकास के समावेशी प्रारूप को मूर्त रूप दिया जा सके।

इस बात से भी इंकार नहीं किया जा सकता कि चिकित्सा सेवाएं भारत वर्ष में कारपोरेट बाजार का हिस्सा बनती जा रही हैं। स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं के व्यवसायीकरण ने डॉक्टर-रोगी के मध्य सबंधों पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव डाला है। अधिकांशतः ऐसा देखा जाता है कि सरकारी अस्पतालों में जांच उपकरण खराब पड़े होने या आधुनिक उपकरण न होने के कारण रोगी को संबंधित जांच प्राइवेट केंद्रों पर करवाने के लिए बाध्य होना पड़ता है और निर्धनता की वजह से वे स्वास्थ्य लाभ से वंचित रह जाते हैं। अधिकांश निर्धन महिलाओं के प्रसव तो अस्पतालों के बाहर या बीच सड़क पर ही हो जाते हैं। ऐसे में मातृ मृत्यु दर और बाल मृत्यु दर के औसत से अधिक होने की संभावना से कैसे इंकार किया जा सकता है?

इसे विरोधाभास ही कहा जाएगा कि एक तरफ आबादी का एक हिस्सा अपनी झूठी प्रतिष्ठा के लिए वैवाहिक समारोहों एवं अन्य समारोहों में खाने की बर्बादी करता है, वहीं दूसरी तरफ भारत कुपोषण, एनीमिया, भुखमरी के कारण दुनिया के पैमाने पर शर्मनाक स्थिति में है। यह विकास की कैसी तस्वीर है जो एक तरफ यह स्थापित करती है कि भारत तेजी से विकसित होने वाली अर्थव्यवस्थाओं में उच्च स्थान पर पहुंच गया है और दूसरी तरफ गरीबी, भुखमरी, कुपोषण, खुशहाली, बेरोजगारी और मानसिक स्वास्थ्य की दृष्टि से निम्न स्थान पर खड़ा नजर आता है। एक तरफ ऐसा वर्ग है जो धनाढ्यों के क्रम में सर्वोच्च स्थान पाने, सर्वाधिक शक्तिशाली बनने और लोकप्रिय होने जैसी आकांक्षाओं से घिरा है और दूसरी तरफ एक ऐसा वर्ग भी है जिसके सामने अस्तित्व बचाने का संकट गहराता जा रहा है।

कहते हैं कि स्वस्थ शरीर में स्वस्थ मस्तिष्क निवास करता है, तो फिर अगर किसी देश के अधिकांश नागरिकों का मानसिक और शारीरिक स्वास्थ्य ही संकट का सामना कर रहा हो या चुनौती प्राप्त कर रहा हो तो उस देश का विकास संदेहास्पद हो जाता है। ऐसा नहीं है कि विकास नहीं हुआ या नहीं हो रहा है, अपितु सवाल यह है कि यह किस तरह का विकास है जो एक ही देश में एक ही समय में सकारात्मक और नकारात्मक दोनों तस्वीरों को एक साथ दिखा रहा है। जबकि विकास का वास्तविक अर्थ संसाधनों का तर्कसंगत विभाजन और विस्तार है, ताकि नागरिक अपनी आवश्यकताओं को पूरा कर सकें।

जीवन की खातिर

हेमंत कुमार पारीक

दुनिया मेरे आगे

दिल्ली में मेट्रो चली तो उसका जोरशोर से स्वागत हुआ था। इसलिए भी कि दिल्ली की जनसंख्या दिनोंदिन बढ़ती जा रही है और नतीजतन, आवागमन के साधन अपर्याप्त हो गए थे। शहर की जरूरत के मुताबिक सार्वजनिक परिवहन की काफी कमी थी। दिल्ली परिवहन निगम की बसें जनसंख्या का बोझ नहीं उठा पा रही थीं। आज देश के दूसरे शहरों और यहां तक कि राज्यों की राजधानियों का भी यही हाल है। रोजगार की तलाश में लोग हर रोज गांवों से पलायन कर शहर की तरफ आ रहे हैं। जनसंख्या का दबाव बढ़ता जा रहा है। इसी वजह से आवागमन के नए-नए साधनों के विकास पर सरकार का ध्यान जा रहा है। लेकिन इसी क्रम में हरे-भरे पेड़ों को बेदर्दी से काटा जा रहा है। जनहित की आड़ में घने जंगलों की बलि दी जा रही है और जंगल मैदानों में तब्दील हो रहे हैं।

मुंबई की लोकल ट्रेन कई सालों से आबादी के इस बोझ से जूझ रही है। इसी प्रकार, कोलकाता की ट्रामें भी सालों से अपना कार्य सुचारु रूप से कर रही हैं। लेकिन जब दिल्ली की मेट्रो राजनीति के गलियारों में 'दूध देती गाय' नजर आई, तभी से बिना सोचे समझे, पर्यावरण की हानि का जायजा लिए बगैर मेट्रो प्रोजेक्ट को देश के दूसरे राज्यों, शहरों और राज्यों की राजधानियों में हरी झंडी दिखाई जाने लगी है। इसी के चलते जयपुर और लखनऊ में मेट्रो का पदार्पण हुआ। मुंबई में मेट्रो परियोजना काम कर रही है। इसी परियोजना के चलते आरे कॉलोनी सुर्खियों में आई। वहां करीब दो-तीन हजार पेड़ों की बलि दी जाने वाली थी। लेकिन वहां की पर्यावरण प्रेमी जागरूक जनता को समझ में आया तो चारों तरफ से आवाज उठने लगी। कई समाजसेवी संस्थाएं और फिल्मी हस्तियां आगे आईं और विरोध में उठ खड़ी हुईं। एक जागरूक समाज अपने वर्तमान के साथ-साथ अपने भविष्य के लिए भी जतन करता है।

हाल ही में स्वीडन की एक लड़की ग्रेटा थनबर्ग की ऐसी ही आवाज दुनिया की संसद में सुनाई दी है। उसने दुनिया भर के बड़े-बड़े राजनेताओं को चेतावनी दे डाली। पर्यावरण प्रेमी एक लड़की की आवाज पूरी दुनिया ने सुनी।

कुछ ही दिनों पहले पर्यावरण को प्रभावित करने वाली दो बड़ी घटनाएं हुई हैं। पहली, अमेजन के जंगलों में लगी आग और दूसरी अंटार्कटिका के पिघलते हिमखंड। इन दोनों घटनाओं ने दुनिया का ध्यान खींचा है। अमेजन के जंगलों को 'कार्बन सिंक' कहा जाता है। ये जंगल बहुत घने हैं। विभिन्न प्रकार के जीव-जंतु यहां पाए जाते हैं और दुनिया भर की उत्सर्जित कार्बन डाइऑक्साइड को ये वन सोख लेते हैं। यानी एक तरह से ये ओजोन परत को कार्बन डाइऑक्साइड से बचाने का महत्त्वपूर्ण काम करते हैं। इस कारण दुनियाभर के देशों के राजनीतिकों के माथे पर चिंता की लकीरें खिंच गई हैं। चूंकि अमेजन के जंगलों में लगी आग समूची दुनिया पर असर डालने वाली घटना है, इसीलिए सभी ने मिल कर आग पर काबू पाने के लिए अपने-अपने प्रस्ताव रखे। यह चिंता सकारात्मक है और पृथ्वी को बचाने के लिहाज से जरूरी है।

पर्यावरण से जुड़ी दूसरी घटना है दक्षिणी ध्रुव के बर्फीले अंटार्कटिका में एक विशाल हिमखंड का टूट जाना। पिछले पचास वर्षों में पहली बार ऐसा हुआ है। हालांकि वैज्ञानिक 'लूज-टूथ' नाम के हिमखंड के पिघलने की चेतावनी पिछले कई सालों से दे रहे थे, पर यह दूसरा हिस्सा था, जिसकी कल्पना किसी ने नहीं की थी। यह छोटा-मोटा हिमखंड नहीं था, बल्कि इतना विशाल था कि इसमें पूरी दिल्ली समा जाती। यही नहीं, इसके आकार के लिहाज से देखें तो इसमें दिल्ली से सटे गाजियाबाद और मथुरा भी निपट जाते। ये चेतावनियां हैं प्रकृति की, दुनिया में बढ़ते तापमान के लिए। अगर हम अब भी नहीं संभले और इसी गति से हिमखंड पिघलते रहे तो अंदाजा लगाया जा सकता है कि फिर क्या होगा? इसका सीधा असर समुद्र के जलस्तर पर पड़ेगा। जलस्तर बढ़ेगा और फिर बड़े-बड़े भूखंड देखते ही देखते समुद्र में विलीन हो जाएंगे।

इस वर्ष इतनी बारिश हमारे देश में हुई कि उसने पिछले सौ वर्षों में हुई बारिश के रिकार्ड तोड़ दिए। मानसून आया, पर जाने का नाम नहीं ले रहा था, जबकि इसकी अवधि कब की समाप्त हो चुकी थी। बाढ़ ने उग्र रूप दिखाया, नतीजतन पटना जैसे शहर जलमग्न रहे। लोग हाल-बेहाल हुए। जन-जीवन अस्त-व्यस्त हो गया। घर और बाजारों में नदी-नाले बह निकले। सड़कों पर नावें चलने लगीं। ऐसे में स्वीडन की उस लड़की ग्रेटा की चेतावनी पर ध्यान देने की जरूरत है। हर आदमी को पर्यावरण के विषय में सोचने की जरूरत है। जागरूक होने का वक्त है। जिस तरह आरे कॉलोनी के लिए आम लोगों के साथ-साथ बॉलीवुड के सितारे पर्यावरण बचाने के पक्ष में सड़कों पर उतर आए थे, हमें भी पर्यावरण के संबंध में ग्रेटा के साथ खड़ा होना चाहिए, वरना आने वाली पीढ़ियां हमें कभी माफ नहीं करेंगी।

गांधी का रास्ता

प्रधानमंत्री ने आह्वान किया है कि गांधीजी के विचारों के प्रचार-प्रसार के लिए सिने जगत आगे आए और उसे गांधीजी के विचारों पर आधारित फिल्में बनानी चाहिए। हमारा मानना है कि आम जनता को गांधीजी के विचारों को समझने से ज्यादा जरूरी है कि राजनीति से जुड़े लोग गांधीजी के विचारों समझें और उनका अनुसरण करें। इस संदर्भ में गांधीजी का जो विचार सबसे ज्यादा प्रासंगिक है वह है 'राजनीति का अध्यात्मीकरण'।

वर्तमान राजनीतिक व्यवस्था में फैली बुराइयों को समाप्त करने का सबसे प्रभावी गांधीवादी विचार है- राजनीति का अध्यात्मीकरण। वर्तमान राजनीति की बुराइयों जैसे भ्रष्टाचार, जातिवाद, क्षेत्रवाद, भाषावाद, सांप्रदायिकता, अवसरवाद आदि को समाप्त करके उनके स्थान पर राष्ट्रवाद, धर्मनिरपेक्षता, सर्वोदय, सत्य, अहिंसा, नैतिकता, परोपकार, सादगी, समर्पण, सेवाभाव, त्याग और बलिदान जैसे मूल्यों को राजनीति में शामिल करना ही राजनीति का अध्यात्मीकरण है।

प्राचीन भारतीय राजनीतिक विचारक कौटिल्य राजनीति को धर्म और नैतिकता से अलग करके देखते थे। उनका कहना था कि राष्ट्रीय उद्देश्यों को प्राप्त करने के लिए साम दाम दंड भेद किसी भी नीति का अनुसरण किया जा सकता है। अर्थात हमारा साध्य शुभ है तो साधनों की परवाह नहीं करनी चाहिए। कौटिल्य ने अपने अखंड भारत के सपने को साकार करने के लिए इसी मार्ग का अनुसरण किया। पाश्चात्य राजनीति में इन विचारों का प्रणेता मैकियावली को माना जाता है इसीलिए कौटिल्य को भारत का मैकियावली कहा जाता है।

लेकिन आधुनिक भारतीय चिंतक गांधीजी कौटिल्य और मैकियावली के विचारों के विपरीत विचार रखते हैं। गांधीजी का मानना था कि न केवल साध्य पवित्र होना चाहिए बल्कि साधन भी पवित्र होना चाहिए। इसीलिए गांधीजी ने स्वतंत्रता के लिए हिंसक मार्ग का समर्थन न करके सत्याग्रह, असहयोग, सविनय अवज्ञा, सत्य और अहिंसा के मार्ग पर चल कर आजादी प्राप्त करने की राह देशवासियों को दिखाई। गांधीजी के इन्हीं विचारों को राजनीति का अध्यात्मीकरण कहते हैं।

राज्य पृथ्वी पर ईश्वर का प्रतिनिधि है। राज्य को केवल ईश्वर की इच्छा का क्रियान्वयन करना चाहिए अर्थात कोई भी कानून बनाते समय विधायिका को इस बात पर विचार करना चाहिए कि क्या यह ईश्वर की इच्छा के अनुरूप है? यदि है, तो उसे कानून का रूप देना उचित होगा अन्यथा उसे पारित होने से विधायकों को रोकना होगा। इसी प्रकार कार्यपालिका के सदस्यों को ईश्वर के एजेंट के रूप में कार्य करना चाहिए। उनको सदैव इस बात पर विचार करते रहना होगा कि मेरी जगह यदि ईश्वर स्वयं होते तो वे क्या करते और अंतःप्रज्ञा की आवाज के अनुसार कार्य करना चाहिए क्योंकि अंतःप्रज्ञा की आवाज ईश्वर की आवाज मानी जाती है। इसी प्रकार न्यायपालिका को भी विधिक न्याय के स्थान पर सामाजिक एवं प्राकृतिक न्याय के सिद्धांतों का पालन करते हुए न्याय करना चाहिए।

● *अरविंद सिंह, नई दिल्ली*

चौपाल

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

दर्द से बेखबर

महाराष्ट्र सहकारी बैंक घोटाले के कारण उसके ग्राहकों को न केवल भारी परेशानी उठानी पड़ रही है, बल्कि तीन ग्राहकों की सदमे के कारण मौत भी हो चुकी है। किसी भी लोकतंत्र में जनता का दर्द सरकार का दर्द होता है क्योंकि जनता के वोटों से ही सरकार बनती है। लेकिन हमारे लोकतंत्र का क्रूर मजाक है कि वोट लेने के बाद जनप्रतिनिधि जनता के दर्द को समझने के बजाय उसकी अनदेखी करते रहते हैं। उन्हें जनता के दर्द को अपना दर्द समझना होगा। जनता के हित में ऐसे सभी उपाय करने होंगे जो उसे मौत के मुंह में न ले जाएं।

● *हेमा हरि उपाध्याय अक्षत, खाचरोद, उज्जैन*

आतंक के खिलाफ

संपादकीय 'बगदादी का अंत' (29 अक्तूबर) पढ़ा। एक बड़े आतंकवादी के मरने पर आम तौर पर पूरी दुनिया यह मन लेती है की हमें आतंक के खिलाफ जंग में एक बड़ी कामयाबी मिल गई और यह लड़ाई एक निर्णायक दौर में पहुंच गई। मगर ऐसा होता नहीं है। आइएसआइएस के सरगना अबु बकर अल-बगदादी की मौत आतंकवाद के खिलाफ लड़ाई में एक बड़ी उपलब्धि जरूर है मगर बगदादी के मरने से वैश्विक आतंकवाद के काम होने की कोई संभावना नहीं है। इतिहास गवाह है कि उसामा बिन लादेन की मौत के बाद भी न आतंकवाद कम हुआ न आतंकी संगठन कमजोर पड़े। उलटे बगदादी और आइएसआइएस उसामा और अल कायदा से ज्यादा खतरनाक साबित हुए। इससे लगता है कि भविष्य का आतंकवाद और क्रूर और खतरनाक होगा क्योंकि इसका दायरा साल दर साल बढ़ता जा रहा है।

ज्यादातर वैश्विक आतंकी संगठनों को अलग-अलग देशों ने अपने-अपने फायदे के लिए पाला-पोसा और इन्हें अत्याधुनिक हथियार और तकनीकें मुहैया कराईं। दरअसल, आतंकी सरगनाओं को मारने से कहीं ज्यादा जरूरी है आतंकवाद को स्थायी रूप से खत्म करना, और यह तभी होगा जब तमाम देश आतंकवादियों और उनके संगठनों को तकनीकी, आर्थिक और राजनीतिक मदद बंद कर देंगे।

● *बृजेश माथुर, बृज विहार, गाजियाबाद*

पराली और प्रदूषण

आखिर जिस बात का डर था वही हुआ। सरकार के कई कदम उठाने के बावजूद किसानों ने पराली जलाने से कोई परहेज नहीं किया। इसका नतीजा हम वायु प्रदूषण सूचकांक में देख सकते हैं जिसमें मंडी गोबिंदगढ़, जालंधर और लुधियाना जैसे शहरों की हवा सबसे प्रदूषित पाई गई है। इस हालत के लिए जिम्मेदार सिर्फ सरकार नहीं है क्योंकि उसने तो किसानों को बेहद सख्त तरीके से समझाया पर किसान हैं कि माने नहीं। यह जानकर भी कि पराली जलाने का असर हमारे पर्यावरण पर पड़ेगा, वे नहीं रुके और अपनी जिद पर अड़े रहे। अब सरकार की प्रदूषित वायु को शुद्ध करने की चिंता दीवाली के पटाखों पर रुकेगी। पर क्या सिर्फ पटाखों को रोकने या उन्हें फोड़ने का समय तय कर देने भर से वायु को साफ किया जा सकता है? 365 दिन की समस्या को सिर्फ एक दिन के प्रतिबंध से काबू नहीं किया जा सकता है इसलिए सरकार को ऐसा हल ढूंढ़ना चाहिए जो लंबे सफर का साथी हो।

● *जानवी बिट्ठल, जालंधर*