

Lessons from RCEP negotiations

The conflicting viewpoints on RCEP bring out the need for evidence-based policy-making and information sharing



ANIRUDH SHINGAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced India's decision to opt out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations recently, adding the agreement would not serve the country's interests. The RCEP agreement was being negotiated amongst ASEAN+6, that is, the 10 member countries of ASEAN plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea since 2013. The 16 RCEP countries account for nearly 40 per cent of global GDP, almost half the world's population and a third of the global trade in goods and services. Even without India, RCEP would be a mega-regional trade agree-

ment, second only to the EU-US trade agreement (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership or TTIIP), if that were ever negotiated.

Media reports suggest that the absence of a safeguard mechanism against a surge in imports from China, inadequate coverage of India's interests in services and unsatisfactory treatment of NTMs (non-tariff measures) in the agreement being negotiated were among the main reasons for India to pull out of the negotiations. While these may be legitimate grounds, policy-makers, regulators, negotiators and the people of India would all be better served if there were comprehensive impact assessment studies and analysis of the costs and benefits to the country from negotiating trade agreements like the RCEP and if this information were shared publicly.

Unfortunately, there is little in the public domain that suggests that such meaningful analyses were undertaken. Large segments of India's manufacturing and agriculture sectors have consistently spoken against joining the agreement arguing that import competition emanating from the tariff liberalisation under RCEP would affect them adversely. Have there been rigorous impact

assessment studies or anecdotal information from stakeholder consultations documenting such effects? If yes, why have these not been shared with the public or made available online? This absence of information-sharing is among the most confounding aspects of all trade agreements, including the RCEP. Each member government claims that such agreements enhance the economic welfare of its citizens. Still, citizens are deprived of the opportunity to independently assess the costs and benefits of these agreements.

The uncomfortable truth is that trade negotiations are held in complete secrecy and India's terms of engagement in these agreements remain unknown. An objective assessment of the claims made by India's farmers and industry has thus become extremely difficult, especially in the absence of quality impact assessment studies. Let alone experts of Indian-origin abroad, there is no dearth of expertise on the subject even within the country — the many think-tanks, academic/policy institutes and universities house scholars and researchers adept at the skillset required — to undertake such studies. Then why was such work not commissioned or the findings kept under wraps?

Successful trade negotiations require in-depth knowledge and information. The new trade agreements are not just about tariff liberalisation but also cover a host of non-tariff issues like services regulation, standards, investment, government procurement, competition policy, intellectual property and safeguard mechanisms, to name a few. The European Commission routinely engages in sustainability impact assessments (SIAs) of all major trade agreements that it seeks to negotiate. These studies assess the economic, social and environmental costs and benefits to the EU from the likely agreement, based on rigorous quantitative and qualitative analysis as well as feedback received from stakeholders, and covers both tariff and non-tariff issues in great detail. The reports are available online and inform public debates and policy-making.

India needs to go down this route of evidence-based policy-making and information sharing. There have been enough statements in the media about the increase in India's trade deficit following our agreements with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea. What we need are state-of-the-art SIA studies that can objectively examine such blanket statements. Recently, the EU has begun to

analyse data on the utilisation of tariff preferences to examine which of its agreements are effective and to address the challenges in the ineffective agreements. India's agreements with its partners in East Asia have generated enough data to examine the effectiveness of these agreements and to learn from past mistakes, if any, to both inform subsequent trade negotiations with other partners and to address challenges at home that prevent India's exporting firms from utilising negotiated preferences. The government must organise studies to analyse this data and make findings from such work public.

While the fear of import competition may be genuine, all sectors of the Indian economy are inherently uncompetitive for domestic political-economy reasons. Economic theory tells us that preferential tariff liberalisation leads to trade creation, wherein efficient partner country suppliers displace inefficient home country suppliers; and preferential deep integration, that is, addressing non-tariff issues, leads to both home and partner countries gaining unambiguously. While there may be costs from joining the RCEP and India may not be ready yet, there are also gains to be had, especially in the low-growth and protectionist economic scenario at home and abroad. The government needs to do its homework before deciding which path to take and most importantly, keep people informed.

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CHINESE WHISPERS

Regimes change, disease stays

A viral video clip has left the Congress-led Madhya Pradesh government red-faced. In this video, Dewas Municipal Corporation Commissioner Sanjana Jain could be seen touching the feet of state Public Works Department and Environment Minister Sajjan Singh Verma as he visited a gurdwara in Dewas on the occasion of Gurupurab. Sharing the clip, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state Vice-President Vijesh Lunawat tweeted: "This is the new Madhya Pradesh. Bureaucracy at the feet of the minister." This is not the first time an MP bureaucrat has been caught in a storm. In 2018, then Mandla collector Sufiya Faruqi had carried the *sharan paduka* (footwear) of saint Adi Shankaracharya as part of the Shankaracharya Ekamta Yatra. The BJP, then in power in the state, had tweeted her photos and the opposition Congress had said she was being used as a "tool" in a "political event".

Development irregularities

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Shashank Prasad Maurya, once considered a frontrunner to become chief minister in 2017, has written to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, alleging large-scale irregularities in the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA). As UP housing and urban planning minister, Adityanath is the head of the development authorities, including the LDA. In his letter, Maurya has alleged a nexus between the LDA and private builders and contractors pertaining to key housing and infrastructure projects in the city. Adityanath has spoken about weeding out corruption from the bureaucracy.

On a sticky wicket



Even after sealing seat distribution with its alliance partners for the upcoming Assembly elections in Jharkhand with relative ease, the

state unit of the Congress is struggling to get its act together. Allegations of factionalism aren't letting state unit president Rameshwar Oraon (pictured) breathe easy. On Thursday, former state unit president Pradeep Kumar Balmucho joined the All Jharkhand Students Union and has been assured of a ticket. That makes Balmucho the third of Oraon's predecessors to contest from rival parties. Ajoy Kumar will be an Aam Aadmi Party candidate and Sukhdeo Bhagat has been given the Bharatiya Janata Party ticket. Earlier on Wednesday, some party workers protested the selection of candidates for two of the three urban seats in Ranchi, accusing the leadership of favouring outsiders. If the party was hoping that Oraon's appointment was going to help arrest factionalism, ears close to the ground say it has only intensified the problem.

Water transport: Still missing the link

It holds out great promise for improving India's logistics and therefore needs to be pushed aggressively



INFRA TALK

VINAYAK CHATTERJEE

In January this year, Union Minister for Shipping, Nitin Gadkari, along with railways minister Piyush Goyal, flagged off Container Corporation of India's (Concor) coastal freight shipping service from Kandla port to Tuticorin via Mangalore and Kochi. What was important was the symbolism — Concor is an Indian railways company, explicitly venturing into coastal shipping. Also important was the fact that the two Union ministers (who between them decide policy on all the major transport infrastructure sectors) were together at the event highlighting the importance of the interconnection between different modes of transport.

Since then Concor has gone further — in September it opened a freight

shipping service from Krishnapatnam port in Andhra Pradesh to the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh. This followed the broadening of the Inland Water Transit and Trade protocol between the two countries in 2018 to cover more ports.

These moves, small in themselves, are critical components in the much broader plan of inducing what logistics professionals call the 'modal shift'. Enabling freight to be transported through modes other than roads and railways is key to reducing costs and making Indian goods more competitive in global markets. Waterways has till now been the missing link.

The cost of freight movement by road is ₹2.58 per ton-kilometre, compared with ₹1.41 per ton-km for rail and ₹1.06 per ton-km for waterways. Yet, it is the high cost option, road transport which accounts for the bulk of Indian freight transport — close to 60 per cent. Coastal shipping and inland waterways account for barely 7 per cent of freight transport in India, compared with 24 per cent in China and 11 per cent in Germany. The over-reliance on roads has meant that the cost of logistics as a share of the price of final goods is around 18 per cent in India, compared with just 9-10 per cent in developed countries. Water transport is obviously also less polluting as com-



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pared to road transport.

The need for such a shift has long been recognised by the government. In 2015 it launched the ambitious Sagarmala project to develop water freight transport. The project involved developing new ports, enhancing port connectivity and port linked industrialization. Augmenting inter-modal connectivity is especially important. Much of the cost advantages of waterways get lost if shippers find themselves bogged down at terminals waiting for freight to be moved from truck or rail to ship.

Since the launch of Sagarmala, a

slew of other reforms have followed. Amendments passed to the Central Road Fund Act in 2017 aimed to use 2.5 per cent of the funds collected for waterways development (India currently has 14,500 km of navigable inland waterways). Early last year, the Indian government eased cabotage rules to enable foreign flagged container ships to ply freight on local coastal routes. The government has also put in motion the Jal Marg Vikas project to enhance commercial navigation of vessels of size 1,500-2,000 deadweight tons on National Waterway-I between Haldia and Varanasi at a cost of ₹5,369 crore. The project is expected to be completed by 2023. A landmark for the project was reached just a couple of months before Concor's venture into coastal shipping kicked off, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the MV Rabintranath Tagore at Varanasi. The ship had moved 16 truckloads of freight belonging to beverages giant Pepsi from Kolkata.

Progress on Sagarmala too, four years on, has been encouraging. The government claims that as of September, 125 projects have been completed under the programme, at a total cost of ₹31,447 crore. These include LNG terminals at Ennore and Mundra port, each at the cost of over ₹5,000 crore, and modernisation of

JNPT port for a total of ₹6,600 crore. But it's early days yet — a whopping ₹5.7 trillion of projects (1,314 projects in total) is in the pipeline.

Over the next few years, around ₹90,000 crore is required to be invested in the water transport sector, according to an estimate by Jagannarayan Padmanabhan of Crisil and Sudipta Saha in an article last year. The authors call for tax subsidies to incentivise transport by water over road, and for efficient handling of cargo at inland terminals. Incentivising industries adjacent to national waterways to use water transport is also an option. At the other end, governments could also impose heavier taxes for long-haul road transport of coal and inflammable material and 'nudge' transporters to shift to waterways for long-haul carriage (where the efficiencies of water transport kick in).

For a long time, the focus was on encouraging shippers to move from roads to railways. But with investments in Sagarmala taking off and other enabling policy changes getting the go-ahead, it looks like it will actually be waterways, hitherto a much-neglected sector, finally getting the attention it deserves. But this effort needs to be pushed harder.

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INSIGHT

Filling up the lacuna in corporate lending

Criminalising the lender and the defaulter shifts the focus away from the inefficiencies in the corporate lending process



DEEP NARAYAN MUKHERJEE

Various reasons have been attributed to the current corporate NPA crisis. That includes legal events, commodity cycle bust and most prominently, errant promoter — and at times senior banker — behaviour. One may conclude that banks have successfully externalised the problem with the message that had it not been for errant promoters and the alleged white collar corruption — India's bad debt problem would not have arisen. It is becoming a regular practice for lenders to ask for forensic audit in the event of a big-ticket default. But is everything okay in the banking sector's corporate risk management practices? Take the trend of doubting the quality of the borrower's financial statement post default even though the bank had been assessing those same balance sheets for decades. Then these companies had been getting enhanced credit amounts regularly. Time to raise questions on the effectiveness and competency of the corporate lending process itself.

Post the huge corporate lending losses, very few lenders have meaningfully rehailed their lending processes.

In most cases, there have been minor tinkering only. The lending decisions, which were subjective to begin with, have swung to one of extreme risk aversion, creating an illusion of stringent credit standards but arguably with no improvement in the quality of the credit decisions. Currently, even good businesses are getting starved for credit and even honest businessman are being looked at with suspicion.

This is very different from what happened in the aftermath of India's retail credit blow-up of 2007-08. That time, the shortcomings of the existing processes were acknowledged. As a result, the systems and processes were redesigned. Judgmental design-making was replaced by data- and analysis-supported decision making. The result: the retail lending story has been running successfully for a decade. Corporate lending needs to go through a similar transformation. The time has come to make the process more objective and efficient with better governance.

The scope of model-driven automated decision-making in corporate credit on the lines of a retail loan is currently limited. Corporate lending is underwritten on a case-by-case basis. Of course, there are credit policy rules but often they are quite broad and subject to wide interpretation. In addition, the decision-making structures allow for veto rights to credit committee chairpersons, who sometimes use it without well-articulated reasons. In

cases where a bespoke quantitative model exists, it is found that the model inputs give high weight to entirely subjective elements such a "quality of management". The cumulative impact is inconsistency credit underwriting decisions. While one credit profile may be rejected in a branch, a comparable profile may get a credit from another. Worse, the whole decision-making process sways under bouts of aggression followed by risk-aversion.

A bare minimum requirement is creating exhaustive benchmarks with more focus on cash-based ratios rather than the current accrual-based ones.

Policy rules need more granularity and need to be regularly analysed and back-tested for their risk efficacy. More advanced banks may start with statistical models to support decision-making and move out of the throes of untested 'expert' models.

The corporate lending decision-making process is inefficient, taking anywhere between 30 to 120 days. The most palpable manifestation of the quality of decision is the credit memo. The memo embodies the needle-in-a-haystack syndrome. Even for mid-sized companies pages are filled with undifferentiated industry outlook and economic commentary. Quantitative analysis on how the company behaved in different economic or industry situations is given a miss. Likewise, the approaches to the projection of balance sheet are ad hoc and at times amateur-

ish. Such exercises are prone to manipulation. Sometimes the decision flow requires circuitous routing of the credit memo with limited value-addition. This increases the workload of a already overburdened credit team leading to either errors or herd-mentality in decision-making. The result is a credit call which ultimately has limited defensibility and tractability.

More focus is needed on structuring the credit committee with nuanced understanding of the incentives for committee members. Overloading the committees with credit or risk representatives after NPA blow-ups is as ineffective as allowing the business to run on the unfettered veto power of relationship managers during credit up-cycles. More governance is required around the decision-making process but that does not mean more documentation. In several instances, credit calls are collectively taken without detailed minutes being produced which captures the views and voting patterns as well as the rationale of the veto if exercised. What is required is objective decision-making. That is different from the current practice of stating that the committee was 'comfortable' with the credit and to create an illusion of detail orientation, an unwieldy credit memo is attached.

It is critical to redesign the corporate lending process to support the next round of growth. Criminalising the lender and the defaulter shifts the focus away from the lack of rigour and inefficiencies in the corporate lending process.

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LETTERS

Lessons from Maha

Apropos "Political circus" (November 14), it's no surprise that the Centre has used its power to get a longer window to manipulate a majority. It is a shame that while the BJP and the Shiv Sena fought elections together and got the required mandate to run the government, voters have been left in limbo as the two are fighting and don't want to share power as agreed before the elections. It is obvious that the BJP, having got more seats than the Shiv Sena, is attempting to arm-twist the latter to expand its base. What is happening in Maharashtra is a warning signal for other regional parties and in particular, dynasties. The AIADMK in Tamil Nadu should understand that if the BJP can attempt to junk its oldest ideological partner for the sake of power, it can do the same to regional parties and that it will no longer be a "Congress-mukt" but a "vipaksh-mukt" Bharat before 2024.

N Nagarajan Secunderabad

Need of the hour

This refers to "Screening test for independent directors" (November 11). Independent directors (IDs) have a significant role in improving corporate governance. They are expected to objectively participate in the decision making process at the board level. They are obliged to put their domain knowledge and rich experi-

ence to good use and help the board to take unbiased decisions for company's growth. Therefore, the mandatory condition of qualifying the online self-assessment proficiency test to get a place in the data bank for IDs seems a sensible move by the government. However, more than well qualified, the IDs should be objective in their assessment and not merely toe the management line. For corporate governance to improve, the IDs need to play a meaningful role.

Here are a few suggestions. First, minority shareholders should have a substantial say in appointment of IDs, thereby discouraging the promoters to pick their favourites for the job. Second, IDs must have direct interactive and feedback sessions with senior and middle level management of the company. Third, in the annual report, the IDs' views should find a place in the directors' report section. Forth, statutory auditors should consult IDs to get their point of views on important matters. Finally, the audit committee of a board should include at least one of the IDs as member.

As corporate governance is the need of the hour, IDs should feel empowered to deliver.

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HAMBONE



USTR, made in India

India needs an apex body for trade negotiations

India's decision to stay away from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), at least for now, has raised serious concerns among economists and policy analysts. While the talking heads of the government are calling it a bold decision, the fact is that Indian exports to RCEP countries will suffer because of higher tariffs. Protecting domestic businesses from competition and raising tariffs will not help. India tried this for decades with disastrous consequences before the start of liberalisation in the 1990s. It can be argued without any doubt that similar policies are unlikely to yield different results now. India is now looking for closer ties with the West, but neither the US nor the European Union will enter into any trade agreement solely on India's terms. In any case, India's decision to withdraw from the RCEP has reduced its bargaining power considerably.

Therefore, the Indian policy establishment needs to work with an overarching view and not look at issues in isolation. In this context, the government would do well to pay attention to some of the suggestions made by experts in terms of reforming India's trade and policy administration. Trade economist and former NITI Aayog vice-chairman Arvind Panagariya, for instance, in a recent interview to *The Indian Express* suggested the country needed a separate body such as the office of United States Trade Representative (USTR) for trade negotiations as part of the Prime Minister's Office or the ministry of external affairs. It could be headed by a political person and manned by professionals. Mr Panagariya further noted that the commerce ministry, historically, has been very protectionist. So it is very difficult that any liberalising reform will end up originating in that ministry. This is a serious constraint for India and should be addressed. Besides, in the absence of trade barriers on its imports, India would have had an opportunity to integrate itself into regional and global value-chains, where its participation has been low.

Similar suggestions have also been put forward by former economic advisor to commerce ministry Jayanta Roy. In an article published in this newspaper, he suggested creating an apex entity, which has a clear mandate from the prime minister to consult all stakeholders and develop the trade strategy. This will make sure all agencies, including the state government and line ministries, know what they are expected to do. All this will help streamline India's trade strategy and allow the government to make interventions at appropriate levels.

At a broader level, it is important to acknowledge that avoiding trade challenges is no longer an option for India because it directly affects investment, economic growth, and job creation. India should use trade opportunities to push reforms in the domestic market and increase competitiveness. Countries from where India's imports have increased significantly in recent years, irrespective of a trade agreement, are competitive economies. Therefore, apart from reforming trade administration, India needs to improve competitiveness by pushing structural reforms and reorienting investments. The country will need export growth to attain higher sustainable economic growth and create jobs for its rising workforce. By staying away from the RCEP, India has lost an opportunity to grow its market by forcing domestic industry to compete with the best.

Edible oils deficiency

Farmers need stable policy environment for investment

The commerce ministry's plea to the agriculture ministry to work out a plan for self-sufficiency in edible oils is based on sound economic reasoning and, therefore, merits urgent action. Purchases from abroad account for 65-70 per cent of the domestic requirements for cooking oil, making it the largest import item after crude oil and gold. Pricing policies and tariffs have turned oilseeds cultivation uneconomical vis-à-vis imports. They have also imperilled the viability of the domestic oilseeds-processing industry. A sizable part of the local vegetable oils-crushing capacity is lying idle or underutilised. Oil-meal exports, too, have been adversely hit.

It is, indeed, not for the first time that attention has been drawn to the need to shed such critical dependence on shipments from abroad for a mass-consumed essential item like a cooking medium. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, too, had called for attaining self-reliance in oilseeds in her Budget speech earlier this year. She had cited the example of pulses, where such a feat has recently been achieved. However, what is often not realised is that pulses and oilseeds are wholly different things, facing different challenges and requiring different strategies for breakthrough in production. Though both have been victims of imprudent policy regimes and misguided market interventions, their response to these irritants has been dissimilar. This is chiefly because of external factors, notably availability and price trends in the international market. While the domestic prices of pulses were not affected much by the frequent changes in import duties due to limited supplies in the global market, those of the abundantly available oilseeds tended to get depressed. This has served as the biggest disincentive for the farmers to raise oilseeds production.

Thankfully, the technology (read high-yielding crop varieties and improved agronomic techniques) to step up oilseeds output already exists. The huge gap in yields recorded at the research farms and the farmers' fields is clear evidence of that. However, oilseeds growers are wary of investing in this technology because of uncertainties about the returns under the present pro-consumer but anti-producer policy regime. That the key to self-sufficiency in cooking oils is the remunerative prices for the produce was appreciated even in the past when high prices had transformed India from the world's largest vegetable oil importers into a net exporter in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The trigger for what was then hailed as the "yellow revolution" was the setting up of the Oilseed Technology Mission in 1986 with unbridled freedom to formulate and implement policies concerning the import, export, and domestic pricing of oilseeds. The Mission allowed oilseeds and edible oil prices to fluctuate freely within a stipulated band that guarded the interests of both producers and consumers. Market interventions were carried out only when the prices tended to breach the set limits. Unfortunately, this Mission was allowed to gradually degenerate by curbing its autonomy and expanding its workload in the mid-1990s, squandering the gains and pushing the country back to the cooking oil-deficit era. An avatar of the original technology mission, with the same kind of powers and following a similar remunerative prices-based strategy, is needed again to resurrect the yellow revolution and achieve self-sufficiency in edible oils.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



The problem with demonising Jinnah

It has shrunk the political space for Muslims in India

The demonisation of M A Jinnah has allowed India to avoid a discussion on power-sharing in democracy. Partition is explained away in our textbooks and in the common understanding as the doing of one evil man. Indeed, Pakistan itself is still portrayed in 2019 as a source of constant mischief in the public imagination and the embodiment of evil. Bangladesh is the producer of parasites ("termites" in the words of our home minister) and not much good for anything else. We would be happier if neither existed or if we had different neighbours.

The fact that India was divided because the Hindus, represented by the Congress party, were unable to agree on sharing power with Muslims is not the way Indians understand Pakistan. It is seen instead as an act of malice which dismembered our beloved Bharat Mata.

Across the border, there is less demonisation of Gandhi and Nehru than there is of Jinnah on our side. Partition in Pakistan is primarily about the denial of rights to Muslims under a permanently Hindu majority. That is how the Pakistani middle class views it. Yes, there is an aspect to partition that is linked to an Islamic utopia, such as dreamed up by Mohd Iqbal and then Maududi, but it is marginal. The groups pushing for this have never been powerful in the popular realm, meaning democratic politics. Their importance was latterly inflated because of support to their militias from the state. Another aspect is Pakistan's bullying of minorities, a disappointingly common theme in

the subcontinent. This has helped Indians adjust to the brutalisation of their own minorities.

However, it has become clear that Muslims will have to occupy some political space through uniting because India has pretty comprehensively shed its pretence of pluralism. The polity has become nastily majoritarian to popular applause. The justice system is complicit. Our actions in Kashmir, Assam, Ayodhya, and on issues ranging from beef to citizenship leave no room for ambiguity.

Hindutva under a messianic leader has captured the imagination of voters: In two consecutive Lok Sabha elections we have had minimal representation of Muslims. This is not unusual and there has never been a time in India's entire electoral history going back to 1952 that Muslims have had the 10 per cent or more representation that is their due. This compares abysmally with how any large group is represented whether through language or caste.

The number of Muslims in the Lok Sabha now stands at 27. It was 23 in the previous Lok Sabha and all of them represent Muslim majority constituencies, meaning that they would not have been there if their own community had not dominated. The fallout of poor representation has been an assault on the rights and dignity of Muslims.

Rafiq Zakaria in his work *Sardar Patel and India Muslims* pointed out that Muslims themselves took away their right to reserved seats and separate electorates in the Constituent Assembly. They felt that



AAKAR PATEL

India's role in Asia after RCEP

Where does India stand in Asia? Has its position changed after its rejection of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which has been on Asean's agenda since 2012? India's absence from the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) rules it out from influencing the blocs that will define Asia's economic future. To the dismay of India's friends, including Japan, that absence also leaves the field open for China to dominate the RCEP and to wield economic power over Asia.

India's "no" to RCEP reflects one of the many opportunities it has missed to become a solid global manufacturing base. Since economics and strategy are linked, how many Asian countries will now share New Delhi's image of India as a world power? New Delhi has said that Asean has centrality in the Indo-Pacific. But it simultaneously seems to have subscribed to US President Donald Trump's vague Indo-Pacific concept because it has interpreted the idea as signifying the extension of India's economic and security profile, beyond the Indian Ocean into the western Pacific. This appears to be a pipe-dream. For India is a no-show in any economic group that includes Southeast and East Asian countries.

Washington itself has done little to clear the air about its Indo-Pacific concept. Trump's National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2017 underlined that "Indo-Pacific" was about a strategy to counter China's economic and military rise.

Mr Trump himself announced the concept at the meeting of APEC CEOs in Da Nang, Vietnam, in November 2017. He then hailed Vietnam as being in the very heart of the Indo-Pacific (note, India is not a member of APEC). The NSS described APEC and Asean as "centerpieces" of the Indo-Pacific. Washington had not placed India at the centre of its Indo-Pacific, even if it continues to see India as

playing an important role in the area.

Moreover, the uncomfortable reality is that Asean countries — with which India wishes to strengthen ties under its Act East policy — dislike Mr Trump's Indo-Pacific. To them, the absence of the word Asia from the concept ignores the centrality of Asean and its consent to any strategy that affects its member-states.

Last June, Asean presented its own outlook on the Indo-Pacific, which highlights the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions through a wide-angle economic lens. Since the end of World War II, Asia-Pacific has had a historical meaning for the Southeast Asian and East Asian countries, which became America's friends and allies. Asean's outlook does not mention India. In fact, the US and its Asian friends have since long perceived India as a South Asian country.

Even America's strongest Asian allies, Japan and South Korea — are divided over Washington's Indo-Pacific. It was Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who coined the term. But against the history of Japan's annexation of Korea between 1910 and 1945 — and this year's Japan-South Korea trade war — Seoul distrusts Japan and sees little benefit in backing a Japanese initiative to link Japan with the US, Australia, and India. With China as its foremost trading partner, and as the country which has the most leverage over North Korea, South Korea treads a difficult tightrope between the US and China.

True, Asean countries are fearful of China's territorial expansionism but are dependent on it for trade and investment. So they do not want to be forced to choose between the US and China. Not an American ally, India itself must balance its wish for a strong partnership with the US and the need to stabilise ties with China.

Economics comprises the outstanding compo-



ANITA INDER SINGH

after Partition, this was no longer appropriate. But it has long been the case that they regret doing this. Gandhi was able to blackmail Ambedkar into giving up separate electorates for Dalits, and they regret this also. The data shows us that they are right to regret it and wrong to have put their faith in the goodwill of the majority.

It was the responsibility of Hindus to accommodate them in the power structure, and we have shown no enthusiasm or willingness to do so. This has happened through the denial of tickets to Muslim candidates at the level of the party. At the level of the voter, India's tribal voting instincts have put paid to any expectations of broad accommodation.

The man who speaks nationally for Muslims is Asaduddin Owaisi of the Majlis e Ittehadul Muslimeen. The word *ittehad* (unity) should tell us what the party seeks to achieve. Owaisi rejected the ruling on the Babri issue, saying, quite correctly, that the Supreme Court is not infallible. He also asked that the court not patronise Muslims by offering them twice the land that was taken away from them. He said: "I speak for my party, we do not want this 'khairat' (charity). Our fight was for a legal right, for a Babri Masjid. Our fight was not to get this piece of land. Why did we have this patience so long? If it was a piece of land, we could have accepted it somewhere else."

He continued: "Attempts are being made to make Muslims second class citizens in India. Keep watching. Political disempowerment is happening. Nobody can deny this... with the NRC, the Citizenship Amendment Bill, what message are you sending? My regret is that all secular parties, their mouths are shut."

To me what Owaisi says is absolutely unexceptionable. It is appalling for a great nation to do this to its own people. However, no Hindu politician, whether secular, liberal, urbane or whatever other category exists outside the majoritarian fold, can speak in such direct and honest terms. Because the fact is that the non-Muslim parties will make the calculation and crunch the numbers and be unable to take sides, lest their position be referred to as "appeasement" (a particularly cruel use of the word given the reality).

Muslims must stand up for themselves and fight for their rights, by uniting, because nobody else is going to do it for them. There is no other way that they will be heard.

The demonisation of Jinnah has long helped us avoid an honest discussion on the issue of both our major communities being stakeholders in our democracy. India's Muslims must unite and demand that this change.

ment of India's ties with Southeast and East Asia. In these regions India has strengthened security relationships with Japan, Australia, several Asean countries — and the US, which remains Asia's primary power. But have all these relationships made India a Pacific power? Hardly. China is the strongest Asian military power and the largest trading partner of Asean countries. China's GDP is nearly \$15 trillion; India's \$ 3 trillion. China's defence spending is around \$250 billion. India's \$66 billion. China's trade with Asean stands at \$288 billion; India's at \$142 billion. Unlike Asean member-states, India has stayed out of China's transcontinental Belt and Road Initiative. This fact alone explains why India and Asean countries disagree on handling China — and a China-backed RCEP.

At another level, the intertwining of economics and military power signify that India is unable to expand its military influence in the Pacific in a manner analogous to the way in which China has increased its economic and military clout in the Indian Ocean. As China increases its presence in the Indian Ocean and in India's neighbourhood, India's economic and naval power simply does not match that of China.

India's decision to stay out of the RCEP, the world's largest trade pact, will not stop the advocates of the partnership from going ahead with it. Actually, New Delhi's fear that lowering of tariffs will result in China dumping goods on India only highlights its failure to tackle India's economic weakness. This stems in part from its protectionism and continual failure to untangle red tape. Can protectionist India, with a lower GDP per capita than most Asean countries, Japan and South Korea, display convincing credentials as a strong Asian power? And since economic and military power are intertwined, can India really be perceived as a counterpoise to a rising China in Asia? New Delhi must answer those tough questions.

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A fortune from binge-watching



BOOK REVIEW

DHRUV MUNJAL

It's terribly easy to forget that Netflix was founded way back in 1997, a time when terms such as binge-watch and streaming wars were completely unheard of. The world was a simple place back then: If you wanted to watch a film at home, all you needed to do was to head to your nearest video store and rent a VHS tape, those clunky relics from that antiquated era.

Just that Marc Randolph wanted to make everything even simpler. He was a restless entrepreneur always seeking the

next big thing, tireless in his obsession of taking an idea and turning into something that would revolutionise an entire industry. Before he came up with Netflix, Mr Randolph considered selling customised versions of dog food, baseball bats and shampoo over the internet, all seemingly ludicrous suggestions that were shot down by Reed Hastings, whose software company had acquired a start-up that the former had co-founded. Mr Hastings was the man with the cash, and a shrewd businessman who reserved little room for sentiment when it came to business.

Despite their many disagreements, the two were certain about one thing — their new venture just had to involve the internet. They had just seen Jeff Bezos take books — solely a property of physical stores in those days — and put them out online, and were impressed by the rapid progress that Amazon had made.

Both flirted with the idea of allowing customers to rent videocassettes online, but the plan was shelved after some initial promise — tardy postal services, high procurement and shipping costs, and the uncertainty of getting the tapes back meant that the economics never quite worked out. Instead, they decided to try their luck with DVDs, a new technology that was launched in Japan the previous year and was slowly making its way to the US. Neither had ever watched a film on DVD, nor were there many people with DVD players at home, but they were somehow convinced that the idea had potential.

That Will Never Work: The Birth of Netflix and the Amazing Life of an Idea is the story of how Mr Randolph, the company's first CEO, and Mr Hastings, the current chairman and CEO, took that very potential and transformed it into a streaming service with over 150 million

subscribers; of how they were able to take on ubiquitous brick-and-mortar stores, survive the dot-com crash and even resist the temptation to sell the company to Amazon when business seemed destined for collapse soon after they had launched.

In the process, Netflix also bought movie rights from studios, before coming up with their own originals. Now, of course, Netflix is such a media behemoth that it's even challenging the might of multiplexes. Martin Scorsese's *The Irishman*, for instance, a big-ticket film starring the likes of Al Pacino, Robert De Niro and Joe Pesci, only had a limited theatrical release on November 1. It will be available on Netflix as early as November 27.

Mr Randolph's book is not so much about Netflix's recent heady success as it is about how it began on shaky ground, with few backers and catastrophe lurking at every difficult moment. He writes about how the deals he managed to strike with Toshiba and Sony — ones that would direct new owners of DVD players straight

to Netflix — almost never happened, and that the subscription model was a desperate move to keep business afloat after initial DVD sales tapered off. "If you had asked me on launch day to describe what Netflix would eventually look like, I never would have come up with a monthly subscription service," he says.

Mr Randolph's honesty is precisely what makes this book tick. When deciding on the name Netflix — it was initially NetFlix.com — Mr Randolph confesses that he thought the name wasn't perfect and sounded a little "porn-y". On the decline of the DVD rental business, he unhesitatingly claims that his advisors, including Mr Hastings, were right in the first place — that the technology was just a flash in the pan and no one was going to adopt it long-term.

Such candour makes *That Will Never Work* a brilliantly entertaining read filled with tales of luck, risk and doggedness. While most of it is written like a memoir, a part of the book also features management lessons, "Randolph's Rules for Success", which offer quite a handy

glimpse into what goes into running a giant like Netflix.

Mr Randolph is no longer associated with Netflix — he left the company in 2003, soon after it went public. He still holds some shares — mainly for sentimental reasons — but buys a monthly subscription like anyone else. In another display of brute honesty, he claims that his skill-set was always more suited to running a start-up than managing the success of a large corporation. Thankfully for him and millions of binge watchers around the world, despite him leaving, his idea is not only working but is already perhaps the biggest disruptor the entertainment industry has ever seen.

THAT WILL NEVER WORK: The Birth Of Netflix And The Amazing Life Of An Idea

Marc Randolph
Hachette India
₹699, 312 pages

Opinion

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2019

Judiciary takes a step towards transparency

SC allowing CJI to come under RTI a welcome step, but the conditions set must not stonewall queries

THE SUPREME COURT'S (SC's) decision to bring the office of the chief justice of India (CJI) under the purview of the RTI Act, albeit with certain conditions applying, would seem a watershed moment in the judiciary's history given how it has resisted public scrutiny. Coming under the RTI lens will push what has been a notoriously opaque system to share insights into its functioning. That said, the conditions that the judgment sets lend themselves to the apex court stonewalling efforts to dig out particulars that may be of public interest. The verdict leans heavily on the judges' right to privacy, and the independence of the judiciary as touchstones for allowing RTI queries. Justice NV Ramana, a member of the bench that delivered the verdict on Wednesday, also cautions against the RTI becoming a "tool of surveillance" against the court in his separate but concurring judgment in the matter. All this means taking the RTI route to get the CJI's office to give information could prove a Sisyphean task if the SC wills it so. While citizens are allowed to ask for information on appointment and transfer of judges, the reasons behind the decisions may not be shared since these will be based on intelligence inputs by agencies that are exempt from RTI.

The division bench of the SC that heard the appeal against a 2010 Delhi High Court ruling—which had upheld the Central Information Commission's 2009 decision to bring the CJI's office under the purview of RTI—had decided the same year that the matter should be heard by a Constitution bench. Eight years, and nine CJIs later, the bench got constituted last year by CJI Ranjan Gogoi. This itself should be illustrative of the judiciary's lack of appetite for transparency. Indeed, the judiciary has largely refused to explain its decisions on appointments to its upper echelons—recommendation of candidates remains the exclusive turf of the judiciary—even as the government makes public the reasons for not accepting the judiciary's recommendations. Under former CJI Dipak Misra, the reasons explaining the SC collegium's recommendations of appointments were put up on the apex court's website. Under CJI Gogoi, the practice has been dropped. It is hardly a surprise then that controversies, like the one over the transfer of Madras High Court judge Justice VK Tahilaramani that ended with Tahilaramani resigning, dog the judiciary. Against this backdrop, the RTI becomes the instrument that the public turns to force the judiciary to be more transparent. Indeed, as Justice DY Chandrachud, another member of the Constitution Bench that delivered the landmark verdict, writes in his separate but concurring judgment, "Bereft of information pertaining to both the criteria governing the selection and appointment of judges to the higher judiciary and the application of those criteria in individual cases, citizens have engaged the constitutional right to information, facilitated by the RTI Act."

If the CJI's office, and, indeed, the judiciary, is to become meaningfully transparent, the guiding principle has to be what Justice Chandrachud writes in his judgment: "Failure to bring about accountability reforms would erode trust in the courts' impartiality, harming core judicial functions... Transparency and the right to information are crucially linked to the rule of law itself."

In plain English...

...Andhra is right in making govt schools English-medium

THE ANDHRA PRADESH government's proposal to make English the language of instruction in government schools is an idea other states, too, would do well to seriously consider. The move has received flak from nearly all opposition parties in the state, including TDP, which had proposed a similar move, though on a pilot basis, in one district, when it was in power. Even vice-president Venkaiah Naidu, whose mother tongue is Telugu, has weighed in on the side of the critics. However, as chief minister YS Jagan Reddy has argued, making English the language of instruction from the primary level itself will improve the employability of government school students, largely from poor families, given English proficiency is crucial for a large number of jobs.

Reddy's poser to critics—on the language of instruction at the schools where their children and grandchildren were enrolled—may have been rhetorical, but it reveals how much premium is placed on English skills in the job market. Given that English remains the medium of instruction in higher education across India, an early foundation in the language will vastly improve the chances of a student completing their education. With most textbooks and reference material being published exclusively in English—higher education in popular destinations like the US or the UK also calls for demonstrated competence in the language—delaying mainlining of the language in government schools makes the poor even more vulnerable as it skews opportunities in favour of students educated in English-medium schools. Data from the ASER 2017 shows that nearly a quarter of the 14-18 year-olds—over 98% of whom had completed elementary education (school education up to the VIII standard)—surveyed in the state (Srikakulam district) couldn't read an easy sentence in English. ASER 2016 data shows that nearly 30% of Class VIII students in the state who were surveyed couldn't read simple English sentences and, worse, 20% of those who could read couldn't tell the meaning of the sentences. Thus, an early foundation in English would perhaps help improve the lot of students who get left behind because of poor comprehension of the language.

The fear of the critics that a switch to English will mean that the regional languages that are now the medium of instruction—Telugu and Urdu—will get neglected is addressed by the fact that, as the state government has clarified, it will be compulsory for students in government schools to learn either of the two languages. Many experts argue that learning outcomes are likely to be better if early learning is conducted in the student's mother tongue. However, that can't come at the cost of English learning. The government can come up with regional-language reference texts and teaching aids that help the child have a better grasp on classroom teaching, or even have computer-aided learning aids that the students can be trained to use to negotiate English instruction better. But, keeping English away from the bogeys the critics of the Andhra government are raising will be a retrograde move.

Doomed FUTURE

Failure to act on climate will mean debilitating health consequences for children born today

THE WORLD, OVER the last few years, has seen devastating consequences of climate change unravel. With various reports sounding the alarm on consequences—indeed, some warn we might have vastly underestimated them so far—climate action couldn't have seen more urgent ever. Now, a report by The Lancet on the public health impacts of rising temperatures and air pollution provides a set of equally compelling reasons. The report points to several threats, including increased incidence of infectious and vector-borne diseases like dengue, rising food insecurity, undernutrition, and more frequent extreme weather events, it notes that the size of India's population and the stark inequalities in healthcare in the country expose it to the risk of losing the public health gains of the last two decades. India, along with China, is expected to face an increased burden of climate change effects, the worst of which, the report emphasises, will be borne by children being born today. "A child born today," the report states, "will experience a world that is more than four degrees warmer than the pre-industrial average, with climate change impacting human health from infancy and adolescence to adulthood and old age." Infants would be more vulnerable to malnutrition—already responsible for two-thirds of under-five deaths—and rising food prices. With worsening air pollution and PM 2.5 already having contributed to 5,29,500 premature deaths in 2016, future adolescents are expected to suffer damage to their hearts, lungs, and other vital organs. Extreme weather events, including exposure to wildfires—the exposure of daily population to which the report estimates to be 2.1 million between 2001 and 2014—is expected to severely limit labour capacity. The writing has been on the wall for quite some time now—Greta Thunberg is right. A failure to act now will doom future generations.



FLIGHT OF FANCY

Union home minister Amit Shah

Now, it has been proved that disruption of Parliament over #Rafale was a sham... After today's rebuke from SC, Congress and its leader, for whom politics is above national interest must apologise to the nation

RIGHT DEAL

THE CAG'S OBSERVATIONS, IN ITS AUDIT REPORT ON CAPITAL ACQUISITION BY IAF, SHOULD HAVE BEEN INTEGRATED IN THE DEFENCE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Defence procurement delays hurt national interest

PRIME MINISTER MODI'S second stint has raised many expectations. The relentless encouragement, and enabling policy environment provided by the NDA's earlier regime through a series of reforms gave an impetus to ease of doing business, and ease of living and creating national infrastructure to build a new India. A cost-effective procurement process, along with development of indigenous capabilities, products, and technologies would give our armed forces a decisive edge in defending India's national security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty.

India's armed forces have been facing enormous challenges. Spelling out India's defence operational requirements, and finding solutions to the problems therein would serve as a testimony to the Modi 2.0's commitment. It is time for India's defence minister, Rajnath Singh, to lay down an appropriate policy framework to empower the armed forces to discharge their responsibilities. Valuable lessons can be learnt from the Comptroller and Auditor General of India's (CAG's) performance audit of capital acquisition in the Indian Air Force (IAF), placed before Parliament in February, 2019, to resolve some chronic bottlenecks in the IAF's defence procurement process.

The CAG report examined 11 contracts of capital acquisition signed between 2012-13 and 2017-18, with a total value of approximately ₹95,000 crore. It highlights systemic issues in the acquisition process and gives recommendations to rectify deficiencies in the procurement process. The acquisition process begins with the formulation of user requirements, known as the Air Staff Qualitative Requirements (ASQR). The formulation of ASQRs critical to the defence acquisition process because it determines quality, price, and competition. In a 2007 report, CAG had

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Views are personal



recommended that ASQRs be stated in terms of measurable functional parameters. However, IAF did not implement this, and made the ASQRs exhaustive with technical details. This led to serious, avoidable consequences—all vendors failed to meet the ASQRs. Moreover, IAF changed ASQRs repeatedly during the procurement process. The nation's supreme audit institution, mandated by the Constitution to help enforce public accountability, effective service delivery, transparency, and good governance, had no option but to repeat its 2007 recommendation that ASQRs should be stated in terms of functional parameters. Further, CAG recommended that technical experts with knowledge of the systems be involved in the acquisition process.

As required, offers are sought from varied vendors by issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP). Vendors respond to the RFP by giving technical and commercial bids. CAG found that there was limited competition as the number of vendors who responded to the RFP was less than that of those invited to bid. Reasons for this include delays in the acquisition process, and inappropriately defined ASQRs. CAG recommended that the defence ministry consider open, competitive tendering in case of non-strategic items, like basic trainer aircraft and weather radar.

CAG observed a lack of consistency in technical evaluation across procurement cases: In some cases, such as doppler weather radars and attack heli-

copters, technical bids were rejected when vendors failed to meet all the ASQR parameters; but, in the case of medium multi-role combat aircraft (MMRCA) and heavy lift helicopters, bids were technically qualified even when they did not meet critical ASQRs.

A Contract Negotiation Committee was constituted to evaluate the price bid, and negotiate the final contract. The committee was required to estimate the benchmark price to assess the various bids before opening the price bid. CAG found that in eight procurement cases, the benchmark price was significantly different from the bid price. The report opined that repeated off-market pricing evidenced inability to estimate the market price.

The central auditor pointed out that delays in acquisition were essentially due to a complex, multi-level approval process; to be precise, each procurement case has to go through 11 stages, from initiation to contract-signing. The current acquisition system is, therefore, unlikely to support IAF's operational preparedness. CAG recommended that the defence ministry structurally reform the entire procurement process to facilitate expeditious acquisition. CAG examined the procurement

process for MMRCA. It remarked that IAF had discarded its original August 2000 proposal to acquire 126 Mirage 2000 II aircraft in 2004, and, in 2007, it decided to acquire 126 Rafale aircraft from Dassault Aviation. However, the commercial negotiations with Dassault were not concluded, and in 2015, the decision was altered to procure only 36 Rafale aircraft through an inter-governmental agreement with France. Comparing these two deals, CAG concluded that the price of the 2015 deal was less than that of the 2007 one by 2.86%. The latter included a bank guarantee from the French government to safeguard the national interest in case of default, making the vendor—the French government—liable to provide payment. However, the 2015 deal excluded a bank guarantee.

The government's defence procurement policies have been subjected to criticism. Enormous delays in the procurement process thwart the urgency in defence procurement. CAG's observations should have been integrated in the defence procurement process. The unwarranted

delay, and complex procedures and decision-making process seem to be cost-ineffective. More importantly, it could damage national interest and lead to the acquisition of technologically inferior armaments. India must get value for the public money it spends. It is high time the government, under Modi 2.0, took stock of things with new policy directions on all defence and security related matters, and implement them effectively, optimising the scarce public resources.

The unwarranted delay, complex procedures and decision-making processes are cost-ineffective. It can lead to the acquisition of technologically inferior armaments

IEA's new energy outlook comforts no one

That the World Energy Outlook report has become a battleground speaks to the urgency of dealing with climate change spreading beyond think-tanks

LIAM DENNING
Bloomberg

THE INTERNATIONAL ENERGY Agency would like you to know it is not in the business of making predictions: The WEO (World Energy Outlook) analyses the choices that will shape our energy use, our environment, and our wellbeing. It is not, and has never been, a forecast of where the energy world will end up.

That the IEA feels the need to put that high in the foreword to its latest long-term energy outlook gets at the problem: To a large degree, it doesn't matter that it isn't prophesying. Because of the IEA's stature, and the fact that not many institutions have the inclination or funding to maintain detailed models of global energy supply and demand—plus our species' preference to just reach for ready-made statistics—the World Energy Outlook tends to be treated as a reference work rather than a mere thinking aid. That isn't the IEA's fault; it is just what happens.

Hence, back in April, a group of investment funds, scientific institutions, and think tanks wrote a letter to the IEA demanding the WEO more explicitly map out scenarios consistent with the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting the rise in temperature associated with climate change. The IEA has met them partway. The old central scenario called "New Policies" has been renamed "Stated Policies," capturing the impact of policy makers' plans rather than assumed improvements. The more ambitious "Sustainable Development Scenario," or SDS, gets more weightage in this edition, while the "Current Policies Scenario"—the embrace-the-fires-and-floods scenario—gets demoted.

The central criticism of the WEO is that it doesn't make a scenario with a good chance of limiting the world's temperature increase from pre-industrial levels to 1.5° celsius (2.7° fahrenheit) its central case. The secondary SDS, which the IEA characterises as being in line with the Paris Agreement, comes much closer than the Stated Policies case. However, while it is consistent with modelled pathways that limit warming below 2°

celsius, it still implies overshooting the 1.5° target. Avoiding that would mean getting to net-zero emissions by 2050, according to last year's special report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The SDS, instead, effectively relies on the deployment of carbon sequestration beyond 2050 to correct the overshoot, with the IEA pointing out that many of the pathways surveyed by the IPCC do the same thing. As for getting to net-zero emissions by 2050 without relying on sequestration, the IEA's language is sceptical, to say the least:

The additional changes involved would pose challenges that would be very difficult and very expensive to surmount. This is not something that is within the power of the energy sector alone to deliver. It would be a task for society as a whole, and likely involve widespread behavioural changes.

The IEA is correct: Getting to a net-zero energy system without sucking enormous quantities of carbon dioxide out of the air within the next 30 years is a gargantuan task. Given this, however, surely it would be worthwhile spelling that out in detail rather than condensing it into a qualitative statement?

As I wrote, we should reframe the way we think about dealing with climate change, away from pure "cost" toward a holistic view of investments and rewards—just as we do, in a flawed way, with our current energy systems. After all, the Stated Policies—and, especially, the Current Policies—scenarios would come with enormous costs of their own, in the form of a degraded environment. And, both the IEA and the IPCC acknowledge that carbon sequestration technologies are, at scale, both unproven and potentially unsustainable in their own ways in terms of, for example, land requirements. Scenarios

are, as the IEA reminds us upfront, just that, so showing one that may seem unrealistic in a different way from the lack of realism informing our current path couldn't hurt.

It is tempting to view the WEO as a comfort blanket for fossil-fuel interests, but it would be shallow indeed for energy's incumbents to see it that way. Yes, the Stated Policies Scenario foresees continued dominance by fossil fuels through 2040 at least. However, SDS effectively upends the current growth-driven economic model of the coal and oil businesses in the 2020s, and does the same to the natural gas business in the 2030s. Investment in oil and gas production stalls almost immediately and then declines, kicking away the central pillar for a broad-based recovery from the crash.

And this, after all, isn't even the more drastic scenario demanded by the IEA's critics. It shouldn't be lost on today's energy incumbents that the latest edition of the WEO represents a shift prompted by demands from a wide range of institutions, including those representing capital markets, to map out more-rapid pathways to slash carbon emissions.

Even if it leaves some unsatisfied, the very fact that this document, of all things, has become a battleground speaks to the urgency of dealing with climate change, and the way in which that sense of urgency is spreading beyond the confines of think tanks and laboratories—with all the potential that holds for sudden, disruptive changes in policy. As a metaphor for where we're at on dealing with climate change, an 800-odd-page report filled with tables populated by data nerds doesn't seem the obvious choice, but I'll take it.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

One state, multiple elections

Instead of mocking the high chair, political parties must focus on a constructive agenda to attain a common ideological ground, and work hand in glove to render stability to the state. It has become imperative for parties to follow the code of conduct round the year, and not just during the poll process, in order to attract public cheer, and preserve goodwill. An intent to address state issues and maintain a decisive stance on key matters is usually found wanting. Limiting undue expenditures and enforcing discipline is prudent to utilise taxpayer money in an efficient manner. Regulators and the Election Commission must redefine their visibility to combat challenges and maintain decorum and integrity in the political system by demonstrating exceptional skills. Since vested interests of regional parties often conflict with larger goals, multiple elections in a state cannot be ruled out as a possibility in the long term, especially when pre/post-poll alliances are fickle. It is essential to make sure that ideals widely preached are also practised on the ground. Berating peers, disrespecting the larger mandate, questioning the decision making by higher ranks, challenging the credibility and integrity of neutral authorities and expending effort towards non-constructive tasks have emerged as the new norms. Low-benchmarks of performance, seeking attention through ambiguous or bizarre statements, focus on short-term gains and opportunistic alliances cannot be encouraged in the name of a democratic federal structure. To prioritise state interest, instill public-confidence, and accomplish socio-economic objectives viably, a stringent regulatory framework must be established to promote collective accountability within parties. — Girish Lalwani, Delhi

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



ILLUSTRATION: SHYAM KUMAR PRASAD

Resolving bilateral tax disputes

JAYESH SANGHVI

Tax Partner, EY India.
Views are personal



OECD lays down a roadmap for India to make bilateral taxation efficient

TAX TREATIES PROVIDE for the mutual agreement procedure (MAP) through which the competent authorities (CAs) of the contracting states may resolve differences or difficulties regarding the interpretation or application of the tax treaty on a mutually-agreed basis. In recent times, MAP has emerged as a preferred option for resolving transfer pricing (TP) controversies and other double taxation issues as it minimises risks of uncertainty and provides an effective and timely resolution.

On October 24, OECD released the sixth batch of peer review reports (the Report), for eight countries including India, relating to the implementation of the BEPS minimum standard under Action 14 (making dispute resolution mechanisms more effective). The peer review process assesses a member's legal and administrative framework to determine how its MAP regime performs relative to the four key areas: (i) preventing disputes; (ii) availability and access to MAP; (iii) resolution of MAP cases; and (iv) implementation of MAP agreements.

The report provides interesting insights into the positions adopted by the Indian CA while granting MAP access. India provides access to MAP in all TP cases and cases concerning application of treaty anti-abuse provisions. However, it does not provide access to MAP for issues that do not give rise to double taxation, cases involving advance tax rulings and settlement commission. Further, for cases concerning the domestic anti-abuse provision, discussions during the MAP will focus on elimination of double taxation.

The Report indicates that the experiences of the peers in handling and resolving MAP cases with India is generally positive and affirms India's commitment to make dispute resolution under tax treaties an effective and efficient process. A few peers note the difficulties in resolving case, particularly the long time it takes to reach an agreement.

The peers attribute this to the lack of resources on the Indian side. It is noted in the report that MAP cases in India were not closed within 24 months (which is the pursued average for resolving MAP cases received on or after January 1, 2016). The peers recommend that India should hire additional personnel to ensure that MAP cases are resolved in a timely and efficient manner.

The OECD recommends that India should without further delay introduce clear and comprehensive MAP guidance. Further, it also recommends that India should change its policy to effectively allow access to MAP for issues concerning the question of whether the application of a domestic law anti-abuse provision is in conflict with the provisions of a tax treaty and on matters where there is no double taxation but there is taxation that is not in accordance with the provisions of a tax treaty.

In a post-BEPS world, MNCs face tremendous pressures and scrutiny from tax authorities. In the Indian context, given the challenges with the domestic tax law appeal process, MAP would continue to be a preferred option for resolving TP disputes. The Report reinforces India's commitment to make dispute resolution an effective and efficient process. Considering the recommendations of the OECD, the Indian Tax Administration should issue detailed MAP guidance providing information on India's approach to key issues in MAP and corresponding expectations of treaty partners. Further, the Indian Tax Administration would need to strengthen the teams overseeing MAP/advance pricing agreement (APA) cases by providing additional resources for the efficacy of MAP/APA programme. These measures will strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of MAP and taxpayers would find the forum more attractive. Peer reports must be reviewed to get a sense of the policy considerations and country positions while developing their MAP and APA strategy for effective dispute resolutions.

With inputs from
Shweta Pai, senior tax professional, EY India.

RAJIV NATH

Forum coordinator, Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AIMED)



MEDICAL DEVICES

Rx: Rationalise trade margins

Importers have been lobbying to be kept outside the purview of trade margin rationalisation. By accepting their demand, the government would be doing a great disservice to the domestic device manufacturing industry

on the procurement cost by a hospital, thus, spiralling prices of medical devices leads to an artificial inflation.

Importers have been lobbying to be kept outside the purview of trade margin rationalisation. By accepting their demand, the government would be doing a great disservice to the domestic device manufacturing industry. There is a need to tread the line carefully between boosting domestic manufacturing and promoting 'Make in India' or encouraging more imports and promoting 'Make Outside India'. Unless, the anomaly between importers and domestic manufacturers is corrected, Indian manufacturing will remain at a strategic disadvantage and India will remain dominantly import dependent.

When it comes to trade margin rationalisation, importers of medical devices should also be included. Aren't MNC importers traders too? How can we have importers having irrational 200% margin as was indicated in NPPA report analysing trade margins on catheters and guide wires, while the rest of supply chain have only 35-50% margin as was being recommended by MNC importers' lobby?

Medical devices usually go through 4-7 change of hands along the supply chain from a distributor to a wholesaler to a retailer and a hospital before they reach a consumer. Each point in supply chain incurs various costs such as freight, inventory carrying costs, rental, salaries, marketing and sales overheads and service and statutory expenses of compliance, and then there is also a need of net profit by a reseller. Everyone in a supply chain has intermediate costs and value addition. It needs to be ascertained what value addition, if any, importers do and what's a rational margin for them. Importers in order to avoid customs duty, argue that intermediate costs like R&D and clinical evaluation are not part of the import-landed price. However they also induce hospitals with higher MRP and higher trade margins. This tactical marketing warfare is highly unethical and has cost the consumers dearly as well as adversely impacted domestic manufacturers.

For sake of parity and level playing field, the policy needs to equate an overseas manufacturers' first point of sale at which their goods enter the Indian Union on CIF (Cost, Insurance & Freight) import price basis with the ex-factory price of the Indian Manufacturers. GST is applied for the first time on the first point of sale for both India and overseas manufacturers.

The Government may consider to cap trade margins along entire supply chain of specific devices to a maximum of 85%.

This will help in reducing MRP of many medical devices to less than half of current prices while not being unreasonably detrimental to traders and hospitals. Additionally, manufacturers will be encouraged to attract clients on competitive features, and hospitals will start buying on evaluating cost of purchase & quality, instead of considering margins to be made on higher MRP.

Based on evidence of successful price caps of stents, the Government must proactively make cohesive, industry-friendly policy giving at least a level playing field, if not a strategic advantage to domestic manufacturers while safeguarding consumers. Devices are not Drugs though both are medical products but differ in approach in marketing - any move to bring in Trade Margin Rationalization that's based on PTS (Price to Stockist) instead of first point of sales (when goods enter India), may not meet objectives "to boost domestic manufacturing, end exploitative MRP & unethical Marketing"

Government should define following:
a) First Point of sale for Manufacturer is Price on which GST is charged first time. On an overseas manufacturer GST is charged on Import CIF landed price in bill of entry, whereas on an indigenous manufacturer GST is levied on the ex-factory price post discounts

b) Indigenous manufacturer should be equated with overseas Manufacturer and not with importers.

Imports controls can be done in a calibrated manner through,
● 0.5 - 1% GST Cess on MRP as a tax-based disincentive;
● Capping trade margins; &
● Price caps on few priority devices.

There is an urgent need for the government to move towards ending over 80% import dependence, expedite steps for patients' protection, stronger quality & safety regulations, judicious price controls to make medical devices and quality treatment accessible and affordable and promote indigenous manufacturing.

Also, there is a need to counter attempts to spread mis-information *vis-à-vis* any kind of government policy to control prices of medical devices. When MRP prices or trade margins are capped the manufacturers margins are not impacted, so fear mongering regarding detrimental impact on quality and innovations in medical devices on account of price control policy stipulations will not be in the interest of consumers or domestic manufacturers. Such misinformation by any particular lobby should be discouraged and countered effectively.

India is ranked 145 among 190 nations, lower than even Bangladesh, Sudan and Equatorial Guinea by the 2018 Global Healthcare Access and Quality Index. To change this landscape, we need to provide quality and affordable healthcare and reasonably priced medical devices. In recent times, exorbitantly priced medical devices and medical treatment has caused distrust in the healthcare industry, adversely impacting healthcare business environment. In this context, the government needs to protect consumers' interest as well as allow domestic industry to flourish, while also creating a level-playing field with multinationals. Excessive pricing is stifling India's manufacturing growth story. In the absence of fair competition, reasonable price controls are desirable. One possible solution for ensuring reasonable MRP (maximum retail

price) is keeping trade margin at a rational level along the supply chain.

The trade margin is the difference between the price at which the manufacturers (indigenous/others) sell to trade and the final price to patients.

The main aim of rationalisation of trade margins in medical devices should be not only to help consumers, but also allow rationalised and reasonable profits for traders, importers, distributors, and wholesalers & retailers, and create a level-playing field for domestic industry *vis-à-vis* foreign manufacturers. There should be clear objectives for any policy intervention to provide quality and affordability and avoid distress (to consumers), distrust (in industry) and disruption (to market). The market place is, unfortunately, skewed where suppliers induce hospitals to buy and push their brands based on profit margins and not on basic of cost savings

WOMEN & EMPOWERMENT

A PATH-BREAKING 2010 McKinsey study, "Women Matter", found out that companies with a higher proportion of women in leadership positions posted about 41% higher returns on equity, and 56% better operating results. This revelation is yet to make an impact on the Indian ecosystem, where the ground realities are quite different. As per the 2018 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE), only 11% of businesses in India are owned by women. Additionally, the index specifically identifies India as a country where the opportunities available to women to become business leaders or professionals, are the least. Out of the 57 markets which were evaluated, India ranked a dismal 52 in the MIWE. VC funding for women-led enterprises has been one of the biggest challenges, both globally and even more so in India, with less than 20% of all the VC investments across the globe directed towards women-led startups. Besides, all-male startups are 4x more likely to get funding.

Systematic engagement and involvement of women in enterprise can be a key strategy in helping India realise its larger economic aspirations. However, for this to be effectively approached, the challenges of the Indian landscape need to be addressed without falling into the 'business-as-usual' trap. Gender inequality goes beyond the sphere of enterprise and is deeply

Breaking the glass ceiling

Systematic engagement of women in enterprise is the key to achieve the \$5 tn target

ANNA ROY

Senior advisor, NITI Aayog



entrenched in India's traditional socio-economic power structures. Some of the common challenges faced by women are social barriers delimited by patriarchy (such as lack of family support), lower access to finance and networks, safety concerns, and resultant lower confidence. Additional deterrents to female participation include the absence of successful precedents, lack of education, and unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities (women are expected to be the primary homemakers and caregivers). Women are not only denied access to financial capital and networks with potential partners, but are also subjected to the reality of unsafe work environments and discriminatory

industry practices. These conditions directly inhibit the participation of women in entrepreneurship and as per studies also result in the low labour workforce participation.

In the larger scheme of things, India's \$5 trillion economy vision will be possible only when women are actively brought into the fold. This will require the glass ceiling to be broken, and will necessitate its complete dismantling. The challenges can be addressed with a careful, conscientious and diligent review of the existing conditions. While some of these challenges are inter-generational and improvements will require larger societal behavioural change over time, others can be implemented in a short span.



Gender gaps in economic participation and missed opportunities can be addressed with strategic policies and programmes, curated to address the existing inadequacies. There are efforts underway to better understand these factors through initiatives, NITI Aayog's Women's Index for Socio-Economic Opportunities, which will be used to develop actionable policy interventions, at the state and central levels. For women entrepreneurs, who are able to overcome the typical social challenges, the barrier to entry still remains high. Besides the government efforts, there are numerous initiatives by private sector aimed at promoting women entrepreneurship, including corporates,

PSUs, financial institutions, civil societies, international organisations.

Despite the substantial government and private initiatives, women who actually need these services are not able to benefit due to information asymmetry. Thus several of these initiatives and programs often remain under-subscribed, as beneficiaries can't access information timely and methodically. At the same time, women entrepreneurs continue to face business-compliance issues without the correct information or access to services that makes enterprise seem unnecessarily prohibitive even though these are easily addressed by making the right information

available. Women entrepreneurs often miss out on the right kind of mentoring support in addition to other challenges.

Women Entrepreneurship Platform, a flagship initiative NITI Aayog was announced by Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog at the conclusion of Global Entrepreneurship Summit in 2017, and was launched on March 8, 2018 as an aggregator platform that brings together all relevant information required by existing or prospective entrepreneurs in their quest to establish and promote their enterprise. WEP adopts a multi-pronged approach to address critical needs of a woman entrepreneur, such as access to networks, information, learning resources, services and mentoring by sharing information seamlessly. The gap of not showcasing effectively women role models is also being addressed through efforts made to recognise the efforts and achievements of women entrepreneurs through awards such as the Women Transforming India Awards.

Indian society is at the cusp of change, and the role of women is one that is steadily changing. There has been a slow but rapid rise of women's agency and autonomy, and as a result there has been all round positive change. But the most impactful changes are yet to come, as women slowly take up their rightful place in building India's economy. Programs and initiatives like WEP can champion the cause of women, thus taking the lead in ushering in a new India.



THE COW AND THE HORSES STOOD ON THEIR HEADS;
THE GUESTS ALL BOUNDED FROM THEIR BEDS.
— J R R TOLKIN

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

India needs a new story

Rising India narrative is suffering due to re-hyphenation with Pak, slowing growth, retreat from RCEP, Trumpism



SANJAYA BARU

RBI'S CHOICE

Monetary Policy Committee must address growth slowdown even as inflation rises. It should frontload rate cuts in December

THE MONETARY POLICY Committee of the Reserve Bank of India is scheduled to meet in the first week of December. With various economic indicators indicating that growth has slowed down considerably over the past few months, the consensus so far has been that the MPC will cut the benchmark repo rate for the sixth straight time in December, bringing it below 5 per cent. It was expected that this accommodative stance would continue in the next year as well until there was firm evidence of a broad-based pick-up in growth. But the sharper than expected spike in headline retail inflation in October has complicated the policy choices before the MPC. Data from the National Statistics Office shows that headline retail inflation edged up to 4.62 per cent in October, up from 3.99 per cent in September, largely on the back of higher food inflation. This upswing, which is unlikely to reverse in the coming months, has created uncertainty over the future course of monetary policy.

The inflation data shows that food inflation has jumped to 7.89 per cent in October, up from 5.11 per cent in the previous month, driven by a surge in vegetables prices, especially of onion and tomatoes. This surge is unlikely to subside. Food inflation is likely to remain elevated over the coming months, driving up headline retail inflation. Core inflation, which is essentially inflation excluding food and fuel, has moderated further, however, signaling continued weakness in demand. In its last policy review, the RBI had lowered its estimate for growth this year to 6.1 per cent, down from its earlier assessment of 6.9 per cent. This estimate was based on growth coming in at 5.3 per cent in the second quarter, and ranging between 6.6-7.2 per cent in the second half of the financial year. But there is little possibility of the RBI's projections materialising as various high frequency indicators suggest that growth is likely to fall below 5 per cent in the second quarter. Thus, the MPC finds itself in a peculiar position of having to address the growth slowdown while inflation rises.

Going by current trends, with little possibility of a meaningful recovery in the near term, the situation warrants further monetary accommodation. So, while the MPC should carefully assess the trajectory of food inflation, its primary concern should be to arrest the slowdown. It should frontload the rate cuts in its December policy, though the magnitude of the cut will depend on the extent to which growth deviates from the RBI's own projection. The shift to external benchmarking should lead to a quicker transmission of the cuts to the broader economy.

WHOSE FOREIGN POLICY?

Impeachment proceedings against Donald Trump may or may not unseat him. But they send out disturbing signals

THE FIRST HEARING of the impeachment inquiry being conducted by the Intelligence Committee of the US House of Representatives did not go well for President Donald Trump. Two bi-partisan career diplomats — the acting US ambassador to Ukraine, William Taylor, and the deputy assistant secretary for European and Eurasian affairs, George Kent — confirmed that Trump used the authority of his office to further his personal political agenda. In addition, Taylor presented new facts — a staffer from his office witnessed a phone call between Trump and the US ambassador to the EU, Gordon Sondland, where the former inquired about the progress of Ukraine's investigation into alleged corruption by the former vice president and Democratic presidential hopeful, Joe Biden, and his son.

Both de jure and de facto, the impeachment proceedings are political: They are carried out by the legislature, and in fact, are unlikely to lead to the president being removed from office, given that Republicans enjoy a majority in the upper House, the senate, which has the final say. After a whistle-blower revealed earlier this year that the US president asked his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, to investigate Biden on charges of corruption in return for aid in its conflict with Russia, Trump's political rivals seem eager to use impeachment proceedings to embarrass the president ahead of an election year. The efficacy of the tactic, though, is questionable. While opinion polls have indicated that there is growing support for impeachment among Americans, they also suggest that there are a larger number of people who are broadly unhappy with Trump's leadership but do not support impeachment. Will the revelations and the constant attention on alleged misuse of power over the next few months shore up Trump's base and allow him to play the victim vis a vis the "deep state"? Or will they swing those on the fence towards the Democrats? So far, since his campaign in 2016, Trump seems to have been strengthened by scandals, whether over alleged racism, tax evasion or sexual harassment.

There is little doubt that the impeachment proceedings will be at the centre of the public conversation in the US till the 2020 elections. But beyond the implications for partisan politics, the hearing this week signalled a disturbing trend: US foreign policy objectives under Trump, it seems, can be all too easily influenced by domestic political vendettas. In the medium and long term, for its own strategic interests as well as stability in international relations, it is important for the US foreign policy establishment to change that perception.

JUST SAY MOO

Because, let's face it, some hostels have it easier

FRESHLY CHURNED MILK. Check. Revenue generation. Check. Space management. Check. Subsidised hostel accommodation. Check. The genius of the Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog (National Commission for Cows) might, in one fell swoop, sort out some of the woes of urban living, with their proposal to set up cow hostels in 10 to 15 specially designated areas in cities and urban centres across the country. The newly constituted Aayog, whose mandate is to ensure the sustainable development of cows, has reportedly cited the success of the rural "Gujarat model" as motivation for the coming together of private and public enterprises in this initiative and has also dangled the carrot of monetising the venture by putting to commercial use the milk, cow dung and urine. Not one to do things by halves, the Aayog has even requested the Urban Development Ministry to devise a guideline for the setting up of these cow hostels so that they can be incorporated in urban planning frameworks.

One has to admire the deep consideration of the apex advisory body, headed by Vallabhbai Kathiria, here. Not only does the proposal take into account the unfulfilled wish of those citizens who have always wanted to nurture the *gau mata* in the city but were intimidated by a lack of infrastructure and support system, it has also kept in mind some of the key issues facing the nation at the moment — a slump in the economy, the state of public education and urban planning — from the perspective of its chief beneficiary. It is, truth be told, a win-win situation.

Perhaps, there is a lesson or two here for the good people in the Human Resource Development Ministry, whose decision to hike hostel fees and other stipulations at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi met with massive protests this week. A partial rollback has been announced but one does wonder what it takes to make a case for judicious use of resources to ensure that India's public education system remains robust and equitable. A loud and vociferous "moo", perhaps?

THREE DEVELOPMENTS DEFINED the narrative of "Rising India" over the past quarter century. First, India's economic rise; second, as a consequence of that rise, India's globalisation and integration into a "Rising Asia"; and third, a growing recognition that India was liberating itself from the historical baggage of its neighbourhood. Events in the recent past have cast a shadow on each of these elements and are beginning to question, if not yet challenge, the narrative of a Rising India.

The turn of the century was when a new narrative about independent India began to strike root globally. India had not only come out of a serious economic crisis, in 1991-92, but had landed on its feet in the new post-Cold War world, switching sides from an imploding Soviet Union and building bridges with a rising Asia. Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's sagacious leadership of major economic and foreign policy changes helped improve the performance of the economy and raised India's global profile. Improved government finances and a growing confidence in the Indian economy allowed Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to declare India a nuclear weapons power. Thanks to the economy's new robustness, India overcame the impact of the economic sanctions imposed by the United States, Japan and several European nations in response to the nuclear tests of 1998.

Trade liberalisation, industrial delicensing and decontrol and fiscal stabilisation contributed to an increase in the share of foreign trade and manufacturing output in national income, rather than hurt growth. This boosted investor confidence in the economy's growth potential. New firms began to come up and so did new industries. Years of quiet investment in the teaching of computer sciences had created an army of technicians that the world needed in making the transition from the 20th century to the 21st. It was called the Y2K problem and Indians were equipped to solve it. The internet was entering homes and an Indian called Sabeer Bhatia had invented Hotmail.com and allowed the worldwide Indian diaspora to re-connect and mobilise. Indian companies were quoting on the New York stock exchange and new

sectors of a protected economy were opening up.

Taken together, all these factors made American strategic analyst, Condoleezza Rice, later to become President George W Bush Jr's secretary of state, write an essay in the highly regarded journal, *Foreign Affairs*, in early 2000, urging the US political leadership not to think of India as a neighbour of Pakistan but as a neighbour of China. While China would emerge as a "strategic competitor", said Rice, India could be the US's "strategic partner". While President Bill Clinton gave China an easy entry into the World Trade Organisation in 2000, President Bush decided to get tough and, as he told this writer once, he chose "to break a lot of China (sic) to make sure India got the nuke deal."

Two unrelated developments around that time also contributed to the positive narrative about India. First, the manner in which India responded to Pakistan's incursions into Kashmir, near Kargil, and the fact that terrorists attacking the US in September 2001 had a Pakistan connection. By 2005, when President Bush spent five days in India and five hours in Pakistan, the "de-hyphenation" of the South Asian adversaries had been completed.

Consider the events of the more recent past. For months on end in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, terrorism and Pakistan were on prime time news every single day. While the last major terror attack in India staged by Pakistan was in November 2008, the attacks across the border at Uri and Pathankot became the focal points of a sustained political campaign. Keeping terrorism in the news even when terrorist attacks are down has proved counter-productive and contributed to the re-hyphenation with Pakistan. This was only further facilitated by the decision to repeal Article 370 of the Constitution and alter the status of Jammu and Kashmir.

This in itself could have been managed if the Indian economy had been chugging along, but that was not to be. The slowing down of the economy, be it cyclical or structural, has been compounded by confused handling and mixed signals. Investors remain risk averse and consumers remain

bearish, despite bold policy moves. The widely welcomed fiscal reform has had the adverse effect of reducing the government's fiscal space, further choking off investment even in infrastructure.

Against this background, the prime minister's decision to retreat from the Asian Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations has added to a sense of siege. If India delinks itself from the Rising Asia train, would its own Rising India strategy not get derailed? Questions are beginning to be raised not just about India's growth potential and the government's fiscal capacity but also the competitiveness of the agricultural, manufacturing and even services sectors.

In the quarter century from 1991 to 2016, the US emerged as a strategic partner willing to aid India's rise. In the three years since President Donald Trump came to office, the US has signaled a change of gears, if not a change of course. While he has launched a strategy for the geo-economic containment of China, he has not taken his eye off India's trade policies nor has he been re-assuring on all of India's security concerns, with Pakistan regaining diplomatic ground lost in the aftermath of 9/11. On top of it all, global economic growth does not as yet offer much hope for India. One silver lining remains in subdued energy prices that would offer the government much needed fiscal relief.

Taken together, domestic economic management, recent political and geopolitical choices made at home, the regional and global consequences of Trump and Trumpism, the geo-economics and geopolitics of China's rise, are all beginning to pose a challenge to the extant Rising India narrative. The old narrative is taking a beating. A new narrative can only be built on the foundations of improved economic performance and better management of domestic political challenges. A return to the earlier growth path is predicated upon altering recent perceptions about India's economic prospects and policies, the political choices made and geopolitical options explored.

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AN OFFICER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

For PS Krishnan, welfare of Dalits, Adivasis, trumped ideological considerations



GURU PRAKASH

THE COUNTRY lost two of its most prominent bureaucrats on Sunday. Much has been written and discussed about the former Chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan, but little was said on the passing away of an equally important officer, PS Krishnan. Krishnan, like Seshan, was an institution builder. He was instrumental in making the government architecture more inclusive and accessible for Dalit and tribal communities.

His monumental contributions touched the lives of millions of Dalits and Adivasis across the country. For someone who was born in Kerala and served in Andhra Pradesh, his reputation preceded him. His following among the activists committed to the cause of social justice was spread across the ideological spectrum. He will be remembered for a number of landmark initiatives like the 65th constitutional amendment that gave constitutional status to the National Commission of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the conception of separate financial allocation for SCs and STs through special component plans among others.

While delivering the first Ambedkar memorial lecture at the Indian Institute of Public Administration in New Delhi in 2006, he said, quoting from the observations of the working group on the development of the Scheduled Castes, "They constitute, in the main, the bedrock on which our society and economy rest. Rarely has any section of a nation con-

tributed so much for so long, in return for so little. Indian society owes the Scheduled Castes a heavy moral and material debt".

For him, social justice and national integration were two sides of the same coin. The caste-based social order was a "civilisational faultline of India" according to Krishnan. However, he rarely advocated a revolution. He remained a dedicated constitutionalist throughout his life and believed in the power of consensus building through discussion and debate. He was influenced by thinkers ranging from Ambedkar, Periyar, Gandhi to Narayana Guru and Swami Vivekananda. His wealth of experience in both activism and academia came from wide ranging interactions with relevant stakeholders from within and outside the community.

One of his most significant contributions to the Dalit movement was towards ending ideological unreachability. Throughout his public life, he shared the stage with both ardent nationalists and communists with equal aplomb if it was for the cause. For Krishnan, the cause was supreme. Many of the emerging Dalit activists and intellectuals can take this inspiration from his life. As Dalit activists, we often fall into the trap of ideological polarisation. This is a great disservice to the interests of the community. Krishnan often used to say that we must persuasively engage with people holding positions of power, influence and authority.

One of his most significant contribution to the Dalit movement was towards ending ideological unreachability. Throughout his public life, he shared the stage with both ardent nationalists and communists with equal aplomb if it was for the cause. For Krishnan, the cause was supreme.

It has almost become fashionable in the contemporary Dalit narrative to be derisive of the upper castes, particularly the Brahmins. There are problems with the existing social order and it must undergo a transformation. Ambedkar always maintained that his struggle and resistance was not against the Brahmins, but against the idea of Brahminism that is indicative of privileged entitlements on the basis of birth. Ambedkar was financially supported by the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad in not only his education but also in his initial employment. Krishnan too was born in an upper caste family in Kerala and his life is a testament to the idea of social integration. There are innumerable examples when non-Dalits have taken up the cause of Dalits. In his departure, Krishnan will surely inspire the next generation of Dalit activists to have a more accommodative approach in the interest of the community.

There will always be fissures in the movement. But we must remember that a single individual or institution cannot claim the sole custodianship of Dalit interests. A real tribute to Krishnan would be to make the conversation around the Dalit discourse more consultative and less confrontational in the interests of the community.

The writer is assistant professor at Patna University and adviser to the Dalit Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry

NOVEMBER 15, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

PRESIDENT'S RULE
CENTRAL RULE WAS imposed on Manipur by a presidential order issued under Article 356 of the Constitution. The Manipur Legislative Assembly was also dissolved simultaneously.

The decision to impose presidential rule was taken by the Centre after the Union Cabinet considered at its meeting the report of the governor which detailed the breakdown of the law and order situation and also gross maladministration, favouritism and nepotism by the state government. Elections to the Manipur assembly, which had outlived its five-year tenure, is likely to be held along with the Lok Sabha elections. Over the years, politics in Manipur has been volatile, resulting in long periods of president's rule and fre-

quent changes of government.

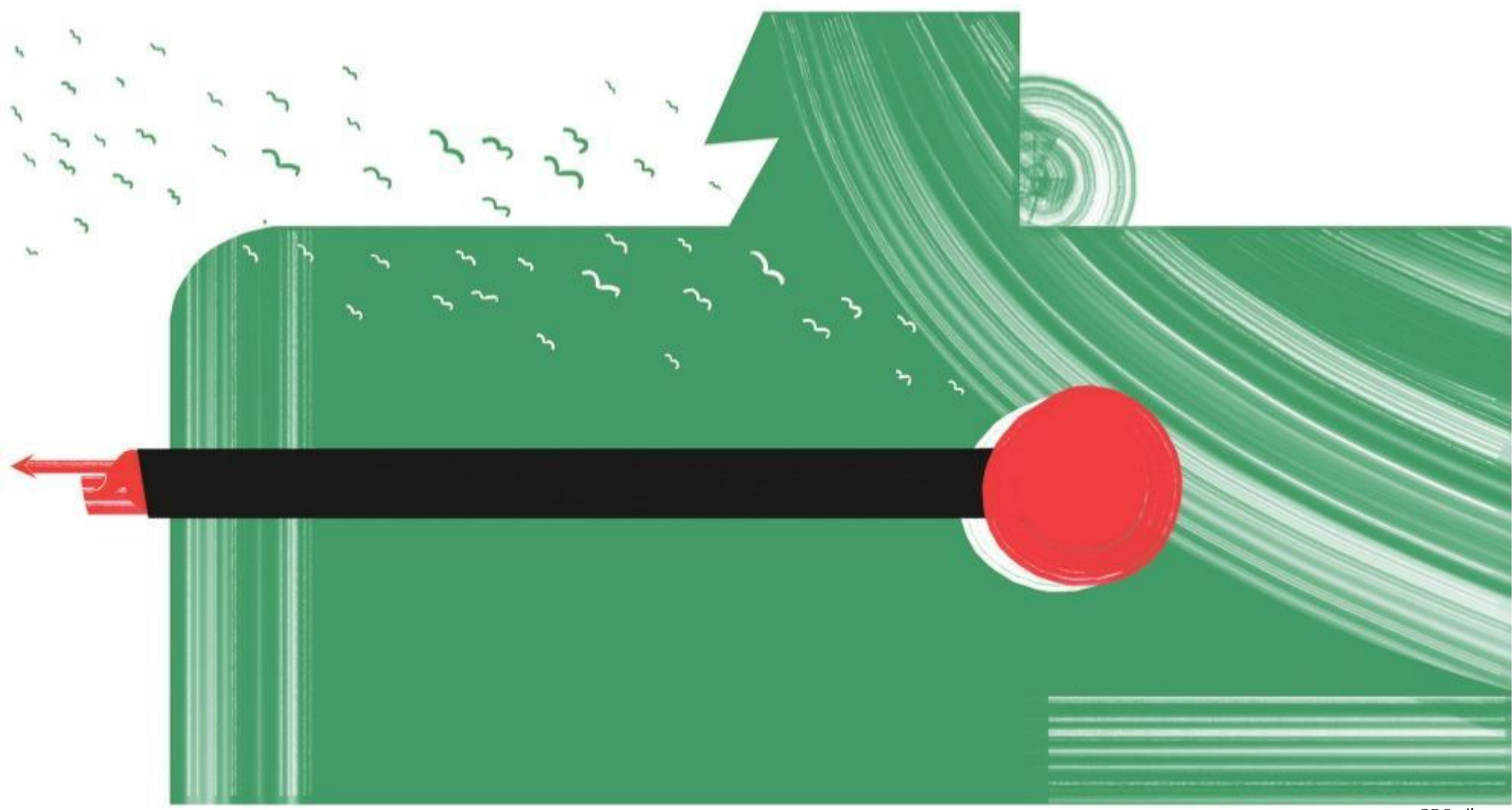
BAHUGUNA MOVES
SHORT OF ANNOUNCING it formally, the CFD leader, H N Bahuguna, made it clear at a news conference that he was joining Congress (I). Indira Gandhi had visited Bahuguna's house in the morning where both had talks for 33 minutes in the presence of Kamalapati Tripathi, senior Congress (I) leader. Bahuguna was scheduled to meet Mrs Gandhi again in the night. Earlier, both the leaders had a "chance meeting" at the Shantivana where they had gone to pay homage to Jawaharlal Nehru on his 90th birthday. During their talks, Mrs Gandhi invited Bahuguna to join the Congress (I) "so that we should work to-

gether to give the country a government that should work within the Gandhi-Nehru framework".

IRAN ASSET FREEZE
US PRESIDENT JIMMY Carter swiftly froze all Iranian government assets in America, estimated to total \$13 billion. This followed the Iranian decision to try to take the assets out of the US. The Carter order even grounds Iranian airways planes that may now be in the US until they get a licence from the treasury to depart. Carter's action was approved by congressional leaders. The Iranian finance ministry has been instructed to withdraw all Iranian deposits from US banks, the acting foreign minister, Abol Bani Sadr said.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE



CR Sasikumar

Unhappy echoes in Dhaka

Modi government's policies in J&K and Northeast will have repercussions in the neighbourhood. In Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina could find it hard to contain anti-India voices



JOSEPH ALLCHIN

IT IS AN extraordinary image. Prime Minister Narendra Modi posing, no less, holding hands with Henry Kissinger, surrounded by a bevy of grinning former world leaders. For many with a memory, or an interest in Bangladesh, it also conjured a muffled, 1970s recording from the White House in which Kissinger is heard talking about India with his then boss, Richard Nixon. The pair can be heard calling Indians "b*****s" and wishing a famine on the country. This racist tirade, in which the astute Henry seems to encourage his vain boss's stale whims, erupted at a time when India was supporting the emergence of an independent, secular Bangladesh. Today, Modi's policies are arguably doing exactly as Nixon and Kissinger's attempted back in 1971 — driving religious and communal division.

Kissinger and Nixon were, of course, ardent supporters of Pakistan's military, as it and its Bengali proxies committed genocide, in erstwhile East Bengal, and in particular of its Hindus. While Pakistan split, a vindictive attitude towards India in American policy did not necessarily diminish; within only a few years, Bangladesh's independence hero, Sheikh Mujib was killed in 1975, and a pro-West/Pakistan/Chinese government took over in a coup supported by American intelligence. In American cables from that era, anti-Indian attitudes reach obsessive, paranoid levels. Military-run Dhaka immediately ramped up arms spending, from the West and from China — as the embassy and General Ziaur Rahman earnestly prepared for a fantasy Indian invasion, like schoolboys moving model soldiers about an imaginary battlefield.

Today, Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina is in power in Dhaka. However, there are two mutually hostile forces which she has had to try and assuage through her long years in office: the communal/religious-right internally and New Delhi. This has not been

straightforward.

Before the Muslim Rohingya refugees crossed into Bangladesh, fleeing genocide in 2016-17, Bangladesh's borders were apparently "sealed". This long-marginalised Burmese community was not Hasina's problem, she said. However, official policy was no medicine for the sheer desperation that flooded into Bangladesh on those brutalised Burmese shoulders. "Sealed" meant little either to members of Bangladesh's security services, who were, probably, both unwilling and unable to enforce the integrity of the border.

However, Hasina's position towards the community changed, not only when her government clearly lacked the ability to physically stop the influx but also when she saw how once fierce critics of her government, the religious right, saw in this tragedy a reason to project their anger outwards. Suddenly, a strange bonhomie existed between the Islamist Muftis in Dhaka and elsewhere, and her Awami League. The enemy was no longer "Lady Hitler" as Hasina is often described by her Islamist adversaries; instead someone else, someone distant and external was. Like a feuding couple suddenly turning their ire towards the neighbours, instead of one another.

This was never Hasina's plan. She never wanted one million new residents, but as the permutations of ethnic cleansing progressed, she played it well. And, just as in Pakistan, the "out group enemy", Myanmar's supposedly Buddhist rulers, drew the brunt of the Islamists' anger — who for years tentatively accused Hasina of being part of an "anti-Islam" conspiracy.

Indeed, this dynamic is crucial to Pakistani policy making and the Lashkar-e-Taiba owes its patronage and existence to it. It was then not surprising when Pakistani politicians started referencing the Ghazwa-e-Hind prophecy — found in the Hadiths — in response to Modi's draconian policy lurches on Jammu and Kashmir.

This prophecy was also harked to in one of Bangladesh's worst terrorist attacks — on Dhaka's Holy restaurant in 2016. The ISIS cell termed their killing spree, "Operation Ghazwa-e-Hind". The attack claimed the lives of some two-dozen hostages, including an Indian national, Tarishi Jain. Women were especially targeted with unspeakable brutality by a group of young Bangladeshis

— who months prior had mainly been regular students — some from extremely privileged backgrounds.

This attack was not dissimilar to LeT's 2008 attack on Mumbai — an *inghimasi* attack where the assailants try to cause maximum damage over an extended period of time, with no intention of survival. Both aspired to draw a wedge between the Muslims and non-Muslims. Both viewed confrontation not only as prophesied and therefore, inherently blessed, but also targeted establishments which for them embodied secular progress or aspiration.

The merging of conspiracy, prophecy and geopolitics is arguably pursued even more effectively by al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent — the other major transnational jihadist group that has found adherents in Bangladesh. It emerged in 2014 and their Egyptian leader, Ayman Al Zawahiri seems plugged in to conspiratorial obsessions of Bangladesh's right-wing, as well as those of Modi.

"The events in Bangladesh enjoy the blessings of both India and America, since their interests in fighting Islam overlap," he claimed. He also seems able to share obsessions with Modi. In 2014, Zawahiri claimed that, "the events in Bangladesh and Burma are not too distant from the oppression and killings of Muslims in Kashmir or the racial cleansing in Assam, Gujarat and Ahmadabad either."

In 1971, Modi's friend Henry was, instead, holding hands with the Pakistani generals, as they facilitated his then secret (and ultimately futile) rapprochement with China. Hasina will not be able to contain extremist, anti-India voices in Bangladesh for ever, especially as the Modi government's anti-Muslim agenda ramps up.

The threat of yet more desperate people fleeing into Bangladesh, means Hasina may well have to project understandable anger in Bangladesh outwards, for her government's integrity. Unlike her father, however, she has friends in China, with unmatched economic muscle. And the more Modi alienates Bangladeshis, the more the smile will grow from Beijing to the Brahmaputra.

Allchin, a journalist and writer, is the author of *Many Rivers One Sea: Bangladesh and the Challenge of Islamist Militancy*

A verdict, a test

Ayodhya ruling frames a question: What is the true idea of Bharat?



RAJIV TULI

THE VERDICT IN THE long-standing Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri dispute is finally out. Much to everyone's relief, the unanimous decision taken by the five-judge Supreme Court bench has been received well by the society at large. A section of intellectuals, though, have not been able to digest this unanimous decision.

This is the same group of self-proclaimed gatekeepers of Indian conscience who had failed to read the people's mood before the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls and were predicting the defeat of the nationalist forces. Now, there is a concerted attempt to create a ruckus over the unanimous decision of the apex court.

The majority of our nation has always viewed the Babri structure as a symbol of invasion by an intruder. The nation felt, and rightly so, that the Babri structure was built only with an objective to show and prove that the Mughals now had control on every

aspect of the lives of Bharatiyas, including their gods and their temples.

The judgment given by the Supreme Court has considered all the documentary and oral evidence put before it. It says that "the oral and documentary evidence shows that the Hindu devotees of Lord Ram hold a genuine, long-standing and profound belief in the religious merit attained by offering prayer to Lord at the site they believe to be his birth place. Evidence has been led by the plaintiffs in suit 5 to show a long practice of Hindu worship to Lord Ram at the disputed site." It further says: "The ASI report does find the existence of pre-existing structure. The report concludes on the basis of the architectural fragments formed at the site and the nature of the structure that it was of a Hindu religious origin."

For Hindus, a temple at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi is not an issue of mere bricks and mortar. It is an issue of the cultural resur-

gence and national identity, where Shri Ram, as "maryada purushottam", has a prime place of importance. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement is an expression of the collective consciousness of the Hindu ethos.

The real issue is how the present-day Muslims view the Babri structure. Do they consider it as their holy place? If the answer is yes, then they end up owning the barbarism of Babar and others like him. The right way for Muslims is to distance themselves from such vandalism.

Hindus have asked for a peaceful return, through the judiciary and negotiations, of only three of their holy sites (Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi) that were vandalised. Hindus are not asking for the thousands of other temples that were plundered, looted, destroyed and mosques were built thereupon. Hindus are not even asking for any sort of compensation or restitution. Any interpretation of the Babri structure, other

than that of it being viewed as a monument of our slavery, will clearly indicate that Hindus are being asked to live with a feeling of humiliation.

The apex court's decision needs to be viewed, thus, beyond the mandir-masjid or Hindu-Muslim issue. It is about the idea of Bharat. Do we want a Bharat which represents the legacy of Babar, Ghazni and Ghoris or do we want a Bharat where the legacy of the nation is represented by Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Dara Shikoh, Kabir and APJ Abdul Kalam? The call has to be taken by Muslims in Bharat and the ball is in their court now.

The Supreme Court's decision is surely a formidable test for the judiciary, legislature and executive of the nation. But more than that, it is going to test the resilience of our social fabric.

The writer is member of the state executive of the Delhi RSS

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"India can continue its brutal approach in the region for another 100 days but the result is unlikely to be different, as Kashmiris will not start treating their oppressors as their benefactors." —DAWN

Beyond the mandate

Finance Commission is tasked with distribution of tax proceeds between Union and states. Recent amendments threaten to subvert it



V BHASKAR

TWO RECENT AMENDMENTS to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the 15th Finance Commission (FFC) are examined here. The first requires the FFC to examine "whether a separate mechanism for funding of defence and internal security ought to be set up and if so, how such a mechanism should be operationalised". The second arises from Section 83 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019 (J&K Act), which came into effect when Jammu and Kashmir became a Union Territory on October 31. It requires the President to "make a reference to the 15th Finance Commission to include the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in its Terms of Reference and make award for the successor Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir." Both these amendments are perfunctorily worded, raising constitutional and interpretational issues which the FFC may find challenging. They also work to the detriment of the states.

The use of the words "separate mechanism" points to creating a mechanism distinct from the existing one. The Constitution requires that estimates relating to voted expenditure in the Annual Financial Statement be submitted in the form of demands for grants to the Lok Sabha every year. The Government of India (GoI) submits demands for grants to the Lok Sabha under the defence and home ministries for defence and deployment of armed forces in states as an aid to civil power. The separate mechanism envisaged could be the creation of a defence and internal security fund in the public account to which their annual budgetary allocations could be credited and then spent over a multi-year time-frame without the threat of lapse. Such an arrangement already exists for a number of funds in the public account, like the National Disaster Relief Fund.

The budget provision for 2019-20 for defence and the police grant of the home ministry is about Rs 5,30,000 crore. It will be inappropriate to squirrel away one-fifth of the GoI's budget allocations into the public account for five reasons. First, escrowing such a large amount from its resources will constrain the GoI's budgetary management. Second, similar demands could arise from other critical ministries like infrastructure and health, which if agreed to, will further emasculate budgetary flexibility. Third, it will lead to lazy budgeting by the beneficiary ministries. Fourth, it violates the Government Accounting Rules 1990 (GAR), which allow for creating a fund in the public account only for the implementation of specified schemes of ministries and not for entire budgetary alloca-

tions of departments. Fifth, and most important, it violates the fundamental canons of annual budgeting mandated in the Constitution — providing for lapse of moneys budgeted but unspent during a year, and obtaining Parliament's approval every year for the Annual Financial Statement.

The use of the words "internal security" creates ambiguity. Internal security means maintaining public order and peace by tackling internal threats and upholding the law. Public order and police are part of the state's responsibility. Internal security is, therefore, as much a concern of states as it is of the GoI. The FFC will face a further challenge if such a fund is created in the GoI's public account, since it will have to decide how it will be shared with states.

The amendment relating to Jammu and Kashmir is equally troublesome. The phrase "include Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir in its Terms of Reference" is indeterminate. The ToR of the FFC has 15 clauses. In which clause and where should it be included? The names of no state or Union Territory find place in any of these 15 clauses.

It can be argued that this amendment requires the FFC to treat the UT of Jammu and Kashmir as a state for the purposes of its award. The FFC will submit its report on November 30. J&K ceased to be a state on October 31. It will no longer find a place in list of the states in the Constitution, but appear in the list of UT. The Constitution requires the Finance Commission to recommend the "distribution between the Union and states of the net proceed of taxes". No Finance Commission has ever made an award for any UT. It is not clear how the FFC can now make an award treating the UT of J&K as a state. It is noteworthy that the J&K Act simultaneously requires that the Union Territory of Ladakh be treated on par with the other UT. No case has been made for treating J&K on a different footing. Further, how can the claims of the two other UTs with a legislature — Delhi and Puducherry — which also have been demanding, for a number of years, that FCs award a share of the divisible pool to them, be ignored?

States argue that the impact of such a provision would increase the number of claimants to the divisible pool and thus reduce their individual share. It is further argued that the GoI, which derived political benefits from its decision to convert J&K into a UT should not pass on the financial fallouts of such a decision to the states. The GoI should treat the requirements of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir within the demand of the Union Home Ministry.

The FFC has been burdened with an onerous and a challenging ToR. Some state governments have complained about its perceived inequities to the President. These two amendments unnecessarily raise more challenges for the FFC. Perhaps, it should ignore these amendments and confine itself to its constitutional mandate.

The writer was joint secretary, 13th Finance Commission and a former finance secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KEEP TALKING

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Listen, Mister Muslim' (IE, November 14). The reason behind the ignorance of Indians — not just Muslims — and their reliance on ulemas, pandits and political leaders is because they do not understand faith well. Superficial knowledge of their own faith and their near ignorance of the other's faith make many Indians vulnerable to manipulation by people with vested interests. The need of the hour is communication between communities — not hasty conclusions.

Afshien Rizvi, Lucknow

RTI'S AMBIT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Letting in Light' (IE, November 14). The Supreme Court's verdict that places the Chief Justice under the RTI Act is a welcome acknowledgment of the fact that accountability and transparency are not inimical to the judiciary's independence. Let's hope this verdict is a significant step in strengthening the RTI and creates an empowered citizenry.

Divya Singla, Patiala

SPEEDY JUSTICE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The speed of justice' (IE, November 14). One of the reasons for people settling their disputes out of court is the inordinate delay in our judicial system. Victims of sexual violence are not only asked embarrassing questions but there is delay in delivering justice. This prevents other victims from approaching the courts. One of the solutions to this problem is

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.

to set up small fast track courts which will dispose off minor crimes. Setting up good law colleges especially in rural areas and encouraging students to take up this profession goes a long way in speedy justice.

Veena Shenoy, Thane

JAGAN'S FAILURES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Failure to launch' (IE, November 14). When a young political leader fails to live up to expectations, it is disastrous for our democracy. A leader who wins with a massive margin can not afford to let down the voters. Some of the decisions taken up by Andhra Pradesh's last chief minister Chandrababu Naidu need to be revoked. But annulling all Naidu-era project is not justified and shows Jagan Mohan Reddy in very poor light.

Bal Govind, Noida

SIMPLY PUT **QUESTION & ANSWER**

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

Review pending, scope widened

SC has deferred its decision on review of 2018 Sabarimala verdict until a larger Bench examines broader issues such as essentiality of religious practices and constitutional morality. This is what the judges said

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 14

IN THURSDAY'S 3:2 Supreme Court ruling on the Sabarimala case, which deferred a decision on reviewing the 2018 verdict until a larger Bench can settle key points of law relating to the right to freedom of religion, the majority verdict was written by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi for himself and Justices A M Khanwilkar and Indu Malhotra.

What does the majority verdict say?

The 2018 verdict had held unconstitutional the practice of barring women of menstruating age from entering the temple. Thursday's majority verdict has not decided the petitions seeking a review of that verdict, and has kept these pending until a larger Bench decides on a gamut of issues around religion, essentiality of religious practices, and constitutional provisions relating to freedom of religion. Given the volume of cases that the Supreme Court handles, setting up a Bench of five or more judges is often delayed.

What issues were included for review?

"Concededly, the debate about the constitutional validity of practices entailing into restriction of entry of women generally in the place of worship is not limited to this case, but also arises in respect of entry of Muslim women in a Dargah/Mosque as also in relation to Parsi women married to a non-Parsi into the holy fireplace of an Agyari," the judgment said.

"There is yet another seminal issue pending for consideration in this Court regarding the powers of the constitutional courts to tread on question as to whether a particular practice is essential to religion or is an integral of the religion, in respect of female genital mutilation in Dawoodi Bohra community," the court added, saying it is of the "considered view" that issues arising in these cases "may be overlapping and covered by the judgment under review".

The CJ has the administrative power to club similar cases together. It is, however, rare for the court to pass a judicial order clubbing cases that are not listed with one it is hearing. The case concerning entry of Muslim women into mosques is listed before a two-judge Bench headed by Justice S A Bobde, while the cases relating to female genital mutilation (*Sunita Tiwari v Union of India & Ors*) and Parsi women's rights have already been referred to Constitution Benches that are yet to be set up.

Additionally, the court framed seven issues that could be considered by the larger Bench. They range from balancing the freedom of religion under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution with other fundamental rights, particularly the right to equality, to recalibrating judicial decisions on constitutional morality and essential religious practices.

What did the court say about recalibrating such decisions?

CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY: The court said 'morality' or 'constitutional morality' has not been defined in the Constitution. "Is it overarching morality in reference to preamble or limited to religious beliefs or faith? There is need to delineate the contours of that expression, lest it becomes subjective."

In the 2018 Sabarimala verdict, the majority opinion authored by then CJ Dipak Misra defined 'morality' in Article 25 to mean constitutional morality. Article 25 reads, "Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion".

Referring to Article 25(1), the 2018 judgment said: "We must remember that when there is a violation of the fundamental rights, the term 'morality' naturally implies constitutional morality and any view that is ultimately taken by the Constitutional Courts



Devotees at the Sabarimala temple in 2016. This was before the Supreme Court lifted a ban on women of menstruating age from entering the temple. *P11*



Illustrations: Suvajit Dey

must be in conformity with the principles and basic tenets of the concept of this constitutional morality."

In the verdict decriminalising homosexuality, also in 2018, Justice Misra gave an expansive definition of constitutional morality: "... The magnitude and sweep of constitutional morality is not confined to the provisions and literal text which a Constitution contains, rather it embraces within itself virtues of a wide magnitude such as that of ushering a pluralistic and inclusive society, while... adhering to the other principles of constitutionalism."

ESSENTIAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICES: "The extent to which the court can enquire into the issue of a particular practice is an integral part of the religion or religious practice of a particular religious denomination or should that be left exclusively to be determined by the head of the section of the religious group," is an aspect the court wants a larger Bench to settle.

According to the essential religious practices doctrine evolved by the court in the 1950s, practices and beliefs considered integral by a religious community are to be regarded as "essential", and protected under Article 25.

In the 2018 Sabarimala judgment, the majority opinion held that barring certain women from entering the temple owing to the celibate nature of Lord Ayyappa was not an essential religious practice. Justice R F Nariman, in his concurring opinion, had observed that when there is internal dissent on a practice, its essentiality to the religion becomes questionable.

For a reconsideration of this doctrine, a long line of case laws will have to be examined. For

example, to determine whether the Swami Narayan Satsangis could bar non-Satsangi Harijans from entering their temples, a civil court examined evidence whether the Satsang constituted a religious denomination. In *Ismail Faruqui v Union of India* (1994), the court determined that offering prayers in a mosque was not an essential religious practice of Islam and upheld the law under which the Centre acquired the disputed land in Ayodhya.

What about issues directly relating to the Sabarimala case?

One such question is whether the courts can allow public interest litigation "in matters calling into question religious practices of a denomination or a section thereof at the instance of persons who do not belong to such religious denomination?" Justice Malhotra, in her dissent in the 2018 verdict, had questioned the standing of an NGO that filed the PIL. Thursday's majority opinion said it would overlook the preliminary question of locus since the case was already before a Constitution Bench.

Another question linked to Sabarimala is whether the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965 governs this temple at all.

What is the takeaway from the verdict?

The court has allowed the 2018 Sabarimala verdict to continue until the larger Bench is set up and decides the case conclusively. Based on what that Bench decides, the review can be dismissed or the 2018 order can be modified. For now, the court has sown the seeds of a complex legal debate.

HOW MAJORITY VIEW ECHOES DISSENT OF 2018

'FAR-REACHING RAMIFICATIONS'

IN SEPTEMBER 2018, Justice Indu Malhotra said that issues in the case would have "far reaching ramifications... for all places of worship of various religions, which have their own... practices... which may be considered... exclusionary".

ON THURSDAY, the majority observed that the question of the constitutional validity of restricting entry of women in a place of worship also arises in respect of a Dargah/mosque and Agyari.

ARTICLE 14 VS ARTICLE 25

LAST YEAR, Justice Malhotra had held that the equality doctrine under Article 14 did not override the fundamental right guaranteed by Article 25 to freely practise faith.

ON THURSDAY, the court said the larger Bench will have to examine the "interplay between the freedom of religion under Articles 25 and 26... and other provisions..., particularly Article 14".

CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY

JUSTICE MALHOTRA had said that constitutional morality implies harmonisation of fundamental rights, which include right of every individual or religious denomination to practise their faith in accordance with the tenets of their religion, irrespective of whether the practice is rational or logical.

ON THURSDAY, the majority said: "... Morality' or 'constitutional morality' has not been defined in the Constitution. Is it overarching morality in reference to preamble or limited to religious beliefs or faith? There is need to delineate the contours of that expression..."

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M

When judges decide questions of religion: Problems with test of 'essential practices'

How review verdict differs with SC's Ayodhya order, takes court to the domain of theology



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

IN ADELAIDE Co. of Jehovah's Witnesses Inc. v Commonwealth (1943), Australia's High Court observed: "What is religion to one is superstition to another". The Supreme Court has once again taken up the task of defining "essential religious practices".

The Sabarimala review has been referred to a seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court. The minority judges have correctly quoted the law on the limited scope of review to hold that neither has an error in the 2018 judgment been pointed out, nor has any new fact been discovered after the judgment. Those who are planning to seek a review of the court's Babri judgment (November 9) must read the minority judgment in the Sabarimala review.

The two minority judges also disagreed with the Chief Justice of India on clubbing with the Sabarimala review the issues of female genital mutilation among Bohras, entry of women into mosques, and Parsi women married to non-Parsi visiting the Agyari. The minority judges are right — this case was limited to only the review of the Sabarimala judgment, and no arguments were heard on other issues.

The law and state cannot and should not tell us what is essential or non-essential in a religion. The judiciary is not supposed to take over the role of the clergy. It was only on Saturday that the court in the Babri judgment observed that it cannot scrutinise anyone's religious beliefs. The Sabarimala reference order is inconsistent with the Babri judgment — the five judges in that case, while accepting the Hindu belief of the birth of Lord Ram at the disputed site, did not ask whether the belief about Lord Ram's birth under the central dome of the Babri mosque was an essential practice of the Hindu religion.

No one asked whether one could remain a Hindu despite not having such a belief. The minority of Justices Nariman and Chandrachud, while rejecting the extreme plea of Sabarimala not being a Hindu temple as people of other faiths too worship there, have observed that a church remains a church despite people of different faiths visiting it. The primary reason to deny possession to the Sunni Waqf Board was its failure to prove that Muslims were exclusively praying in the inner courtyard of the Babri Masjid from 1528 to 1856. Going by Thursday's order, even assuming that Muslims were not exclusively praying in the inner courtyard, and that sometimes Hindus too prayed there, ought not to have changed the character of the mosque.

Our Constitution combines the freedom of religion with a mandate to the state to intervene in religious affairs if social welfare so demands. The state does have the power to regulate secular activities associated with religious practice. The question is, how to decide whether an activity is religious or secular? This is important — because if it is religious, it cannot be regulated by the state.

In the *Shirur Mutt* (1954) case, the court held that "religion" in Article 25 covers all rituals and practices that are "integral" to a religion. It thus took upon itself the responsibility to determine what is integral or essential; and impliedly rejected the 'assertion test' of the United States under which a plaintiff could just assert that a particular practice was a religious practice, and courts would not probe any further.

This test of arriving at the definition of religion was called the essential practices test. But the exercise of determining essential practices of a religion took judges into a domain beyond their expertise. The majority of the CJ and Justices Khanwilkar and Malhotra in the Sabarimala reference has held that the correctness of this approach is to be examined by a larger Bench. However, the majority has also said that it's the duty of the court to decide this issue in view of the obligations imposed upon it by the Constitution.

The essentiality test was crystallized in the temple entry case (1958). The court dealt with the question of whether untouchability, manifested in restrictions on temple entry, was an essential part of the Hindu religion. The court after examining select Hindu texts came to the conclusion

that untouchability was not an essential Hindu practice. In the *Sabarimala* (2018) judgment, Justice Chandrachud said that ban on the entry of women in Sabarimala is a kind of untouchability, and thus violative of Article 17. Indeed, the temple was 'purified' after three women made a symbolic entry last year.

Over the years, courts have been inconsistent in their application of the essentiality doctrine. Consider:

■ In *Gram Sabha Battis Shirala* (2014), a particular sect claimed that capturing and worshipping a live cobra on Nag Panchami is an essential part of their religion. They placed reliance on the *Shrinath Lilamrut*; however, the Bombay High Court relied on the more general Dharmashastra text to reject their contention, without dealing with the question that the specific religious text of the villagers prescribed such a practice. In *Sabarimala*, the court overlooked the particular practice of Ayyappa devotees and relied on the general Hindu practice, refusing to recognise them as a separate Hindu sect.

■ When a Muslim police officer challenged in Kerala High Court a regulation that did not permit him to grow a beard, the court rejected the plea by simply relying on the fact that certain Muslim dignitaries did not sport beards, and that the petitioner did not have a beard in his previous years of service. The court looked at empirical evidence of the practice, rather than at religious texts. However, despite empirical evidence to the contrary, courts have refused protection to animal sacrifice among Hindus, terming the practice as barbaric.

■ In the *Tandava dance* case, the apex court relied on the doctrine of precedent to hold that *tandava* dance was not an essential practice of the Ananda Marga faith. It also said that the faith had come into existence in 1955, while the *tandava* was adopted only in 1966 — therefore, as the faith had existed without the practice, the practice could not be accepted as an essential feature of the faith. This was a strange argument that suggested that to be essential, religious practices must remain frozen in time, with no evolution.

■ In *Ismail Faruqui* (1994), the Supreme Court dealt with the issue of the state acquiring the land over which the Babri Masjid had stood. Instead of settling the question in favour of the Centre on the principle of eminent domain, the court went into the question of whether praying in a mosque is an essential practice in Islam — and ruled that while praying is an essential practice, the offering of such prayers in a mosque is, unless the place has a particular religious significance in itself.

It is well known that congregational prayer is central to Islam and that mosques are essential means to achieve this objective. In 2018, the court rejected a plea to review this absurd judgment. However, in the case of Sabarimala, it has agreed that the essentiality test does require a review.

The Supreme Court has itself acknowledged that "every person has a fundamental right to entertain such religious beliefs as may be approved by his judgment or conscience". Thus, it is an individual right not a group right. The essential practices test is antithetical to the individualistic conception of rights. Under the test, the court privileges certain religious practices over others, when it does not have the expertise to decide which practice/ritual of a religion is essential/non-essential. These are purely theological questions.

The cases above suggest that the judiciary has styled itself as a reformer of religions with its own idea of rationality and morality. The Supreme Court's insistence on applying the essential practices test strikes at the very foundation of religious freedom in India. Practices of Hinduism (and its denominations) have been targeted by reformist judges who consider them to be based on superstition, while practices central to Islam have been targeted either because of the sentiments of the majority community or due to misplaced understanding of Islamic practices.

The concept of providing constitutional protection only to those elements of religion, which courts consider "essential" is problematic. Such an approach assumes that one element or practice of religion is independent of the others; also that while some practices are central to a religion, others are merely incidental.

(Prof Faizan Mustafa is Vice-Chancellor of NALSAR University of Law, and an expert of constitutional law)

Issues not before this court: 2 who differ

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 14

WHILE THE 3:2 majority opinion on pleas seeking a review of the Sabarimala judgment referred key issues to a larger Bench, the dissent, authored by Justice R F Nariman on behalf of himself and Justice D Y Chandrachud, simply dismissed the review petitions.

What does the dissenting opinion say?

Justice Nariman and Justice Chandrachud differed with the majority opinion that certain legal issues needed to be considered by a larger Bench. The judges said there is no occasion for the court to recalibrate judicial decisions on legal issues such as the essential religious practice test.

"What this Court has before it is review petitions arising out of this Court's judgment in *Indian Young Lawyers Association and Ors v State of Kerala WP (C) No. 373 of 2006*, which was delivered on 28 September, 2018, with regard to the Sabarimala temple dedicated to Lord Ayyappa. What a future constitution bench or larger bench, if constituted by the learned Chief Justice of India, may or may not do when considering the other issues pending



before this Court is, strictly speaking, not before this Court at all," the minority view said. "Consequently, this judgment will dispose of the said review petitions and writ petitions keeping the parameters of judicial intervention in such cases in mind."

DISSIDENTING VIEW

Why did the minority opinion focus only on deciding the Sabarimala review?

A petition filed seeking a review of a judgment is filed under Article 137 of the Constitution, read with Order XLVII of the Supreme Court Rules, 2013.

Quoting a previous ruling, the minority judges said: "A review is entertained on narrow grounds when there is a discovery of

new and important matter or evidence which, after the exercise of due diligence, was not within knowledge of the petitioner or could not be produced by him; mistake or error apparent on the face of the record and any other sufficient reason". The minority also said that "a review is by no means an appeal in disguise whereby an erroneous decision is reheard and corrected but lies only for patent error".

"The mere possibility of two views on the subject cannot be a ground for review. The error apparent on the face of the record should not be an error which has to be fished out and searched," the minority said, citing a 2013 SC ruling in *Union of India v Sandur Manganes & Iron Ores Ltd.*

The minority opinion referred to the grounds raised by the review petitioners as a mere "rehash of arguments" and "re-argument of the arguments heard and considered earlier" while dismissing them. The dissenting judges said that when the process of adjudicating a case is complete and a decision is pronounced, the decision of the Supreme Court and binds everyone. "Compliance is not a matter of option," the judges said.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 231

खाद्य तेल की कमी

उद्योग एवं वाणिज्य मंत्रालय ने कृषि मंत्रालय से आग्रह किया है कि वह खाद्य तेल के मामले में आत्मनिर्भरता हासिल करने के लिए एक योजना तैयार करे। यह अनुरोध आर्थिक दृष्टि से तार्किक प्रतीत होता है और इस पर तत्काल कदम उठाए जाने की आवश्यकता है। खाद्य तेल की जरूरत पूरी करने के लिए आयात पर हमारी निर्भरता

बढ़ कर 65 से 70 फीसदी तक हो गई है। कच्चे तेल और सोने के बाद खाद्य तेल देश का सर्वाधिक आयात किया जाने वाला उत्पाद है। मूल्य निर्धारण नीतियों और टैरिफ में तिलहन उत्पादन को आर्थिक रूप से अव्यवहार्य बना दिया। इसने घरेलू तिलहन प्रसंस्करण उद्योग को भी नुकसान पहुंचाया। स्थानीय स्तर पर तिलहन पैराई क्षमता का

बड़ा हिस्सा या तो बेकार है या फिर उसका क्षमता से कम इस्तेमाल हो रहा है। खली निर्यात पर भी नकारात्मक असर हुआ है।

यह पहला अवसर नहीं है जब व्यापक इस्तेमाल की ऐसी अनिवार्य वस्तु के लिए हमारी आयात निर्भरता पर ध्यान आकृष्ट किया गया हो। वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण ने भी इस वर्ष के आरंभ में अपने बजट भाषण में तिलहन के क्षेत्र में आत्म निर्भरता प्राप्त करने की बात कही थी। उन्होंने दलहन का उदाहरण दिया था जहां हम यह उपलब्धि हासिल कर चुके हैं। बहरहाल, एक बात अक्सर भुला दी जाती है कि तिलहन और दलहन दो अलग-अलग चीजें हैं। इनकी चुनौतियां अलग हैं और इनका उत्पादन बढ़ाने के लिए अलग रुख अपनाने की आवश्यकता

है। यह सही है कि दोनों नीतिगत खामियों और गलत बाजार हस्तक्षेप के शिकार हैं। इन्हें लेकर प्रतिक्रियाएं भी अलग-अलग रही हैं। ऐसा मोटे तौर पर इसलिए हुआ क्योंकि बाहरी कारक जिम्मेदार रहे। खासतौर पर उपलब्धता और अंतरराष्ट्रीय बाजार में मूल्य रूझान। दालों की घरेलू कीमतें आयात शुल्क में नियमित बदलाव के बावजूद अप्रभावित रहीं क्योंकि वैश्विक बाजार में उनकी आपूर्ति सीमित थी। यह बात तिलहन पर लागू नहीं होती क्योंकि उसकी उपलब्धता प्रचुर है। यही कारण है कि किसान तिलहन उत्पादन बढ़ाने को लेकर बहुत उत्साहित नहीं दिखते। अच्छी बात है कि तिलहन उत्पादन बढ़ाने वाली तकनीक मौजूद है। शोध क्षेत्र और आम किसान के खेत में होने वाले

उत्पादन में भारी अंतर इसका स्पष्ट प्रमाण है। बहरहाल, तिलहन उत्पादक इस तकनीक में निवेश करना नहीं चाहते क्योंकि मौजूदा उपभोक्ता-मुक्ति और उत्पादक विरोधी नीति में उन्हें पर्याप्त प्रतिफल को लेकर अनिश्चितता नजर आती है। खाद्य तेल में आत्म निर्भरता हासिल करने के लिए उपज का आकर्षक मूल्य आवश्यक है। सन 1980 के आखिर और सन 1990 के शुरुआती वर्षों में उच्च कीमतों की बदौलत भारत दुनिया के सबसे बड़े खाद्य तेल आयातक से शुद्ध निर्यातक तक का सफर तय करने में कामयाब रहा था।

सन 1986 में इसे पीली क्रांति का नाम देते हुए तिलहन के आयात, निर्यात और घरेलू मूल्य निर्धारण से संबंधित नीतियां बनाई

गई थीं। इस मिशन के तहत तिलहन और खाद्य तेल कीमतों को एक तय दायरे में ऊपर-नीचे होने दिया गया। इस दौरान उपभोक्ताओं और उत्पादकों दोनों के हितों का ख्याल रखा गया। बाजार हस्तक्षेप केवल तभी किया गया जब कीमत तय दायरे से बाहर गई। खेद की बात है कि इस मिशन की स्वायत्तता धीरे-धीरे समाप्त कर दी गई और सन 1990 के दशक के मध्य के बाद देश एक बार फिर खाद्य तेल के मामले में आयात पर निर्भर होने लगा। मूल तकनीक मिशन और उसी तरह की शक्तियों के प्रयोग तथा मूल्य निर्धारण नीति की सहायता से पीली क्रांति को एक बार फिर अंजाम दिया जा सकता है। ऐसा करके हम एक बार फिर खाद्य तेल के क्षेत्र में आत्मनिर्भर हो सकते हैं।



अजय मोहंती

एनबीएफसी सुधार से जुड़ी ग्रामीण भारत की तकदीर

देश के गांवों की हालत में तब तक सुधार नहीं होगा जब तक कि गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनियों की स्थिति बेहतर नहीं होती है। इस विषय पर प्रकाश डालता प्रांजल भंडारी का लेख।

देश की अर्थव्यवस्था को तगड़ा झटका लगा है और आर्थिक वृद्धि दर एक वर्ष पहले के 8 फीसदी से गिरकर 5 फीसदी पर आ गई है। इसका असर खपत से लेकर विनिर्माण तक हर तरह की गतिविधि पर पड़ा है। परंतु यह मंदी इतनी जल्दी कैसे आ गई और इतनी व्यापक कैसे हो गई? हमारा मानना है कि इसके लिए काफी हद तक उन क्षेत्रों को दोष दिया जाना चाहिए जो प्रथम दृष्टया उससे असंबद्ध नजर आते हैं।

हमारा विश्लेषण दर्शाता है कि विनिर्माण क्षेत्र की समस्याओं के चलते देश का मौजूदा ग्रामीण संकट बढ़ा है। हम जानते हैं कि विनिर्माण क्षेत्र की दिक्कतों में बैंकिंग क्षेत्र की समस्याओं का योगदान है। गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनियों पिछले दिनों तमाम गलत कारणों से सुखियों में रहीं। ऐसे तमाम गलत हैं जो देश की अर्थव्यवस्था का बड़ा हिस्सा हैं। विश्लेषण बताता है कि संकटग्रस्त एनबीएफसी क्षेत्र व्यापक तौर पर दिक्कतों की वजह बना हुआ है। देश की ग्रामीण अर्थव्यवस्था सन 2018 के आरंभ से ही केंद्र में रही है। यह वह दौर रहा जब ग्रामीण इलाकों में वेतन-भत्तों में कमी आने लगी, बेरोजगारी में इजाफा हुआ और इसके चलते ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों का व्यय बुरी तरह प्रभावित

हुआ। ग्रामीण खपत के दो आम संकेतक हैं दोपहिया वाहनों की बिक्री और गैर टिकाऊ उपभोक्ता वस्तुओं का उत्पादन। इन दोनों में गिरावट देखने को मिली।

अधिकांश विश्लेषक मानते हैं कि घटती खानदान कीमतों के कारण किसानों की स्थिति बिगड़ी। परंतु उनकी आय में कमी आने की यह इकलौती वजह नहीं है। ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में रहने वाले भारतीयों ने बहुत बड़ी तादाद में कृषि कार्य से दूरी बनाई है और वे विनिर्माण क्षेत्रों, खासतौर पर शहरी क्षेत्रों में होने वाले निर्माण कार्यों में संलग्न हुए हैं। इस बात ने भी ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों के संकट में इजाफा किया है।

ग्रामीण भारत के रोजगार की स्थिति का गहराई से आकलन करने पर पता चलता है कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों के कुल रोजगार में कृषि आधारित रोजगार में पुरुषों की हिस्सेदारी जो वित्त वर्ष 2000 में 71.4 फीसदी थी वह 2018 में घटकर 55 फीसदी रह गई। समान अर्धधि में विनिर्माण आधारित रोजगारों पर निर्भरता में तेजी से इजाफा हुआ और वे 4.5 फीसदी से बढ़कर 14.5 फीसदी हो गए।

शुरुआत में ग्रामीण कामगार शहरी विनिर्माण परियोजनाओं की ओर इसलिए आकर्षित हुए क्योंकि यहां मेहनताना बेहतर था। परंतु जब शहरों में विनिर्माण गतिविधियों

में ठहराव आया तो ये श्रमिक वापस अपने गांव लौटने लगे। इससे ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में दिए जाने वाले मेहनताने पर और अधिक दबाव बना। लेकिन शहरों में निर्माण गतिविधियों में ठहराव क्यों आया?

विनिर्माण गतिविधियां इसलिए प्रभावित हुईं क्योंकि इस पर फिलहाल संकट से जुझ रहे अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र का दबदबा है। मोटे तौर पर बात की जाए तो 70 फीसदी विनिर्माण गतिविधियां आवासीय और वाणिज्यिक अचल संपत्ति से ताल्लुक रखती हैं। शेष 30 फीसदी का संबंध बुनियादी ढांचे से है।

अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र की बात करें तो गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनियों यानी एनबीएफसी तथा आवास वित्त कंपनियों पर निर्भरता के चलते उसकी हालत बेहद खराब हो चली है। अचल संपत्ति डेवलपमेंट के नजरिये से देखें तो एनबीएफसी की फंडिंग पर निर्भरता बीते कुछ वर्षों में नाटकीय तेजी से बढ़ी है। वित्त वर्ष 2018 अचल संपत्ति डेवलपमेंट के ऋण में हुई 100 फीसदी वृद्धि एनबीएफसी से आई जबकि पांच वर्ष पहले यह 50 फीसदी था।

गत वर्ष भारी डिफॉल्ट के बाद जब एनबीएफसी उद्योग हिल उठा और अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र के ऋण का स्रोत बंद हो गया

तो जाहिर है इस क्षेत्र पर भी गहरा असर हुआ। इसका प्रभाव विनिर्माण क्षेत्र पर पड़ना तय था लेकिन साथ ही साथ इसने ग्रामीण क्षेत्र के रोजगार और आय को भी प्रभावित किया।

क्या भारत के प्रमुख बैंक इसके बचाव के लिए आगे आएंगे? सैद्धांतिक रूप से तो हां लेकिन व्यवहार में यह इतना आसान नहीं है। बैंक तगड़ी नियामकीय सीमाओं के अधीन काम करते हैं। इसके अधीन वे अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र को दिए जाने वाले ऋण में तेजी से विस्तार नहीं कर सकते। जून 2019 में समाप्त तिमाही में अचल संपत्ति डेवलपमेंटों का कुल ऋण घट गया क्योंकि बैंक ऋण एनबीएफसी के ऋण में आई कमी की भरपाई नहीं कर सका।

यदि एनबीएफसी में नकदी की किल्लत बनी रही तो अचल संपत्ति डेवलपमेंटों को होने वाली फंडिंग अनिश्चित बनी रहेगी और विनिर्माण क्षेत्र में कोई उल्लेखनीय सुधार देखने को नहीं मिलेगा। इन तमाम संबंधों को समझते हुए आश्चर्य नहीं कि एनबीएफसी और अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र में गिरावट के बाद 2018 के अंत में ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में मेहनतानों में भी गिरावट आई। कुल मिलाकर कहा जा सकता है कि जब तक एनबीएफसी द्वारा ऋण प्रदान करने की शुरुआत नहीं होती है तब तक विनिर्माण जोर नहीं पकड़ेगा और ग्रामीण मेहनताना भी शायद तेजी से नहीं सुधरे।

यहां पर यह सवाल पूछना लाजिमी हो जाता है कि आखिर सरकार इस मंदी का आगे प्रसार रोकने के लिए क्या कर सकती है? सरकार ने लंबित पड़ी आवासीय परियोजनाओं को दोबारा शुरू करने के लिए एक प्रोत्साहन पैकेज की घोषणा की है जो अहम कदम है। इससे अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र का नकदी संकट कुछ हद तक कम हो सकता है। कम से कम उन परियोजनाओं में ऐसा हो सकता है जो अन्यथा मजबूत हैं लेकिन फिलहाल फंड की कमी से जुझ रही हैं।

इसके अतिरिक्त दूसरे कदम की भी आवश्यकता पड़ सकती है। शेष अर्थव्यवस्था से यह अंतर्संबंधों के चलते कुछ एनबीएफसी और अचल संपत्ति डेवलपमेंटों को प्रत्यक्ष बचाव की आवश्यकता पड़ सकती है। उदाहरण के लिए सरकार या मालिकों की मदद से उनका पुनर्पूँजीकरण कर सकते हैं। इसके साथ-साथ यह भी सुनिश्चित किया जा सकता है कि निजी अंशधारक नुकसान को बांटें। ऐसा करने से उन स्थितियों में ऋणशोधन की समस्या से निजात पाने में मदद मिलेगी जहां कंपनियों के शुद्ध मूल्य पर सवालिया निशान हों।

चाहे जो भी हो लेकिन हम मानते हैं कि मौजूदा मंदी को थामने के लिए भारत ने जीवन्त क्षेत्रों के बीच के उन अंतर्संबंधों का अध्ययन करना चाहिए जिनकी प्रायः अनदेखी कर दी जाती है। अध्ययन के साथ-साथ सरकार को पूरी ताकत से हस्तक्षेप भी करना चाहिए।

लेखिका एचएसबीसी सिक्वोर्टीज एंड कैपिटल मार्केट्स (इंडिया) में मुख्य भारत अर्थशास्त्री हैं।

स्वाभाविक है मकानों की कीमतों में कमी आना

यह राहत की बात है कि केंद्र सरकार यह स्वीकार करती दिख रही है कि देश की अर्थव्यवस्था में तेजी से गिरावट आ रही है। यह गिरावट तमाम क्षेत्रों में आ रही है। इसके लिए तमाम चक्र्रीय और ढांचगत कारक मौजूद हैं। दिक्कत यह है कि समस्या को गलत समझा जा रहा है और समस्या के बारे में हमारी समझ भी कम है। इसके लिए उच्च स्तर पर आर्थिक विशेषज्ञता की कमी उत्तरदायी है। इससे हुआ यह कि ढेर सारे निर्णय गलत दिशा में उठाए गए।

केंद्रीय मंत्रिमंडल के 7 नवंबर के उस निर्णय को देखिए जिसमें उसने 25,000 करोड़ रुपये का वैकल्पिक निवेश फंड (एआईएफ) बनाने की बात कही है ताकि अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र की लंबित परियोजनाओं को आगे बढ़ाया जा सके। यहाँ मसला एकदम स्पष्ट है। इस क्षेत्र में 1,500 से अधिक लंबित परियोजनाएँ हैं। इसके चलते करीब 5 लाख आवासीय इकाइयाँ प्रभावित हो रही हैं। इनमें से दो तिहाई से अधिक ग्रेटर मुंबई और राष्ट्रीय राजधानी क्षेत्र में हैं। इन परियोजनाओं के डेवलपमेंटों ने परियोजना विकास के लिए ऋण ले रखा है। वे पैसे के अभाव में परियोजना को पूरा नहीं कर सकते। बैंक पहले ही फंसे कर्ज की पैसा फंसा से दो चार हैं। वे और पैसा फंसा नहीं चाहते। एआईएफ के माध्यम से इस गतिरोध को तोड़ने का प्रयास है ताकि कुछ परियोजनाएँ पूरी हो सकें और बाजार अपना सामान्य कामकाज शुरू कर सके। इसके कुछ सकारात्मक पहलू हैं। पहली बात, निजी पूँजी में तनावग्रस्त परिसंपत्ति को लेकर उस स्थिति में लगाव नजर आ रहा है जबकि सरकार इतमें स्पष्ट साझेदार है। दूसरा, एआईएफ अपेक्षाकृत अधिक लागत वाली योजनाओं में रुचि लेगा जिनके कारण यह क्षेत्र अवरुद्ध है। मुंबई और दिल्ली में ऐसे आवास क्रमशः दो करोड़ रुपये और 1.5 करोड़ रुपये के हैं। धारणा यह है कि यह चक्र्रीय मुद्दा है जिससे प्रति चक्र्रीय नीति से निपटा जा सकता है। अमेरिका में अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र को दिए प्रोत्साहन से तुलना की जा रही है।

परंतु कुछ सवालों के जवाब जरूरी हैं। सबसे बुनियादी सवाल



नीति नियम मिहिर शर्मा

यह है कि क्या 25,000 करोड़ रुपये पर्याप्त होंगे? यह राशि बमुरिश्कल 16 फीसदी लंबित परियोजनाओं के लिए पर्याप्त रहेगी। बाजार में विश्वास बहाली के लिए बहुत बड़े पैमाने पर राशि की जरूरत होगी। नकदी की किल्लत झेल रही सरकार इतना पैसा नहीं जुटा पाएगी। उम्मीद है कि जीवन बीमा निगम, राष्ट्रीयकृत बैंकों और निजी पूँजी आदि की मदद से यह काम आगे बढ़ेगा।

दूसरा सवाल यह है कि क्या निजी पूँजी इस कार्यक्रम में पैसा लगाना सुरक्षित समझेगी? एआईएफ को ऐसे बनाया गया है कि उसमें वे परियोजनाएँ भी शामिल हों जो राष्ट्रीय कंपनी लॉ पंचाट में जा सकती हैं। परंतु हाल में हमने देखा कि ऐसे मामले किसी न किसी कानूनी चुनौती के शिकार हो सकते हैं। वित्तीय जगत में ऐसी प्रक्रिया में शामिल होने की अनिच्छा नजर आती है जहां तमाम कानूनी पहलू हल न हुए हों।

ज्यादा व्यापक तौर पर देखें तो यह सवाल पूछना चाहिए कि क्या समस्या को सही पहचान की गई है? सरकार का कहना है कि निवेश प्रबंधक चाहें तो परियोजना के डेवलपमेंटों को बदलने पर विचार कर सकते हैं। परंतु ऐसा तो ज्यादातर मामलों में आवश्यक होगा। इसके बावजूद यदि प्रवर्तकों को बदला जाता है तो बने हुए आवासों के निर्माण और वितरण का काम कौन करेगा? एआईएफ या ऋणदाता? या फिर क्या सरकार को एक ऐसा संकलन बनाने पर विचार करना चाहिए जो ऐसे बने हुए मकानों की नीलामी की इजाजत दे ताकि सही मूल्य सामने आ सके? दिक्कत यह है कि इनमें से बहुत कम परियोजनाएँ उस मूल्य तक पहुंचेंगी जो शुरुआत में इनके लिए तय की गई थी। ऐसा अर्थव्यवस्था में मांग में कमी आने

के कारण हुआ है। इसकी एक वजह यह भी है कि बीते एक दशक में अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र ने कीमतों में कमी करने से लगातार इनकार किया है। बड़े शहरों में मांग 4 से 5 फीसदी की दर से बढ़ रही है जबकि आपूर्ति में इजाफा दो अंकों में बल्कि 20 फीसदी के आसपास की गति से हो रहा है। करीब 10 लाख मकान अनबिके पड़े हैं। जब मामला इतना विसंगतिपूर्ण हो तो कीमतों में गिरावट के अलावा कोई विकल्प नहीं बचता है। परंतु कीमतों में कमी से प्रवर्तक और ऋणदाता दोनों प्रभावित हो सकते हैं जो कोई नहीं चाहता। सरकार को इस समस्या को हल करना होगा। वह मांग में इजाफा नहीं कर सकती। परंतु वह ऋणदाताओं को प्रोत्साहित कर सकती है कि वे स्पष्ट बताएं कि कीमत कम होने और बाजार के सुचारु रूप से काम करने पर उन्हें क्या नुकसान होगा? हमें ऋणदाताओं, परियोजनाओं, मकान मालिकों और डेवलपमेंट के मुताबिक सोचने के बजाय यह देखा जाना चाहिए कि आवास बाजार की स्थिति कैसे ठीक की जाए?

पूरी अर्थव्यवस्था में सफाई की जरूरत है लेकिन यह तमाम वजह से तलतीरी रही और निवेश तथा वृद्धि अपने स्वाभाविक स्तर तक वापस नहीं आ सके। अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र पूरी समस्या का केवल एक उदाहरण मात्र है। सरकार को यह स्वीकार करना होगा कि उसे एक स्पष्ट ढांचगत सुधार की आवश्यकता है, बजाय कि इसे चक्र्रीय समस्या के रूप में देखने की। इसके साथ ही यह सोच भी त्यागनी होगी कि बतौर चक्र्रीय समस्या इसे अपेक्षाकृत कम धन खर्च करके निपटारा जा सकेगा।

व्यापक अर्थव्यवस्था में अचल संपत्ति क्षेत्र की अहम भूमिका है। केवल इसलिए नहीं कि इससे सीमेंट और इस्पात समेत तमाम क्षेत्र जुड़े हुए हैं। बल्कि इसलिए भी क्योंकि यह अनुकूल श्रमिकों का बहुत बड़ा निकाल है और मध्य वर्ग के लिए एक निवेश परिसंपत्ति है। दुनिया के तमाम अन्य मध्यवर्ग की तरह भारतीय मध्य वर्ग को यह सीखना होगा कि आवास निर्माण में गिरावट आ सकती है। आवास किसी व्यक्ति के लिए निवेश परिसंपत्ति नहीं है। इन्हें रहने के लिए खरीदा जाता है।

कानाफूसी

चुनावी माहौल

झारखंड कांग्रेस के पूर्व प्रमुख सुखदेव भागत ने कुछ समय पहले भारतीय जनता पार्टी की सदस्यता ले ली थी। उन्होंने पिछले दिनों विधानसभा चुनाव के लिए अपना नामांकन भर दिया। भगत लोहरदगा से वर्तमान विधायक हैं और भाजपा ने उन्हें रामेश्वर उरांव के खिलाफ उतारा है। उरांव भारतीय पुलिस सेवा के पूर्व अधिकारी और कांग्रेस को झारखंड इकाई के मौजूदा अध्यक्ष हैं। उरांव को अजय कुमार के स्थान पर प्रदेश कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष बनाया है। कुमार लोकसभा चुनाव में पार्टी को हार के बाद आम आदमी पार्टी में शामिल हो गए थे। भगत तथा कांग्रेस के तीन अन्य विधायक पिछले महीने भाजपा में शामिल हो गए। भाजपा ने इन सभी नेताओं को उनकी मौजूदा सीट से ही उतारा है। 81 विधानसभा सीटों वाली झारखंड विधानसभा के चुनाव 20 दिसंबर को खत्म होंगे और मतगणना 23 सितंबर को की जाएगी।

सजग अखिलेश

समाजवादी पार्टी के अध्यक्ष अखिलेश यादव किसी भी मुद्दे पर योगी आदित्यनाथ सरकार को घेरने का कोई मुद्दा कभी हाथ से जाने नहीं देते। खासकर पर अगर मामला भ्रष्टाचार या किसी अनियमितता का हो तब तो बिल्कुल नहीं। यादव जिन्हें लोग स्नेह से टीपू कहकर बुलाते हैं, वह डीएचएफएल विवाद को लेकर खासे सजग हैं। इस विवाद में यूपी पावर कंपनी के अधिकारियों ने मानकों का उल्लंघन करके घोटाले की शिकार गैर बैंकिंग वित्तीय कंपनी डीएचएफएल में निवेश किया। यह निवेश मार्च 2017 से दिसंबर 2018 के बीच किया गया। निवेश की शुरुआत उस समय हुई जब प्रदेश में सत्ता का हस्तांतरण हो रहा था। उस वक्त यूपी पावर कॉर्पोरेशन लिमिटेड के प्रबंध निदेशक ए पी मिश्रा पद पर थे। 2012 से 2017 तक सपा के कार्यकाल में मिश्रा को सत्ताधारी दल का भरोसा हासिल था और उन्हें कई बार सेवा विस्तार दिया गया था। इन दिनों वह उत्तर प्रदेश आर्थिक अपराध शाखा की हिरासत में हैं।



आपका पक्ष

देश की अर्थव्यवस्था का बुरा दौर

देश के दो बड़े बैंकों ने सितंबर में औद्योगिक उत्पादन उम्मीद से ज्यादा गिरने और सार्थक सुधार की संभावना कम होने के चलते मौजूदा वित्त वर्ष में जीडीपी वृद्धि दर घट कर 5 प्रतिशत तक आने का अनुमान जातया है। इसके अलावा औद्योगिक उत्पादन में भारी गिरावट दर्ज की गई है, सितंबर में उत्पादन दर 4.3 प्रतिशत घटी है। हाल ही में नोटबंदी के तीन वर्ष पूरे हुए हैं। इसके बाद से भारत की जीडीपी वृद्धि दर वर्ष 2016-17, 2017-2018, 2018-2019 में क्रमशः 8.2 प्रतिशत, 7.2 प्रतिशत, 6.8 प्रतिशत रही। सरकार ने वर्ष 2019-2020 में अनुमानित जीडीपी दर 7 प्रतिशत रखी है जो फिलहाल असंभव लगता है। हालांकि वैश्विक सुस्ती का असर भी भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था पर दिख रहा है जो वर्ष 2018 में 3 प्रतिशत पर स्थिर है। अगर सरकार अर्थव्यवस्था के मामले में सतर्क रहती और नोटबंदी जैसे फैसले नहीं लेती तो आज हालात इतने गंभीर



नहीं होते क्योंकि वर्ष 2015 एवं 2016 में भारत की जीडीपी दर 8 एवं 8.2 प्रतिशत थी। सरकार ने जीएसटी लागू करने के समय दावा किया था कि इसके लागू होने से वस्तुओं के दाम में कमी आएगी। लेकिन जीएसटी की दर काफी अधिक है। इससे सरकार के राजस्व में बढ़ोतरी तो हुई है लेकिन जीएसटी रिटर्न भरने वालों की

सरकार को अर्थव्यवस्था में सुधार और रोजगार सृजन पर पूरा ध्यान देना चाहिए

संख्या में कमी आई है। वर्तमान में देश की वित्तीय व्यवस्था कमजोर हो रही है और पीएमसी बैंक जैसे घोटालों से जनता का भरोसा वित्तीय संस्थाओं से उठ रहा है। नतीजतन

देश की अर्थव्यवस्था चौतरफा समस्याओं से घिरी है। हालांकि देश की अर्थव्यवस्था पहले भी बुरी अवस्थाओं से गुजर चुकी है। लेकिन समय-समय पर सुधारवादी कदम उठाकर इसे दुरुस्त भी किया गया है। अतः सरकार को अर्थव्यवस्था में सुधार और रोजगार सृजन पर पूरा ध्यान केंद्रित करना जरूरी है ताकि भविष्य में देश की अर्थव्यवस्था आर्थिक सुस्ती से मंदी के चक्र में नहीं फंसे।

निशांत त्रिपाठी, ईमेल से

दिल्ली में कम नहीं हो रहा प्रदूषण

देश की राजधानी दिल्ली में प्रदूषण का स्तर कम नहीं हो रहा है। पड़ोसी राज्यों में पराली जलाने से प्रदूषण के स्तर में रोजाना इजाफा हो रहा है। प्रदूषण के कई कारक हैं जिसमें पड़ोसी राज्यों में किसानों द्वारा पराली जलाने का बड़ा योगदान है। दिल्ली में प्रदूषण का स्तर 500 के आसपास है जो बेहद खतरनाक स्तर है। दिल्ली सरकार ने प्रदूषण को देखते हुए सम-विषम योजना लागू भी की है जिससे सड़कों पर वाहनों की संख्या कम हो सके। लेकिन इसके बावजूद प्रदूषण का स्तर कम नहीं हो रहा है। दिल्ली में प्रदूषण को लेकर केंद्र सरकार, दिल्ली सरकार, अदालत तथा एनजीओ सख्त रवैया अपना रही है लेकिन यह जमीनी स्तर पर दिख नहीं रहा है। दिल्ली-एनसीआर में प्रदूषण के कारण स्कूलों की छुट्टी की जा रही है। लोग सम-विषम योजना के कारण अपने वाहनों को नहीं निकाल पा रहे हैं जिससे व्यक्तिगत अधिकार का हनन हो रहा है। दिल्ली में प्रदूषण का कारण कोई भी हो लेकिन यहां के लोगों को अपना अधिकार से वंचित होना पड़ रहा है तथा प्रदूषण की मार झेलनी पड़ रही है। अतः सरकार को प्रदूषण खत्म करने के लिए हर उपाय पर उचित क्रियान्वयन करना चाहिए।

अर्वातिका कुमारी, नई दिल्ली

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

विचार



दैनिक जागरण

पाप मूलत : ईश्वर से विमुख होना है

झूठ की राजनीति बेनकाब

राफेल सौदे की जांच की मांग करने वाली पुनर्विचार आयोगका खारिज कर उच्चतम न्यायालय ने इस सौदे में बोफोर्स सौदे जैसा कुछ खोज निकालने के शातिर इरादों पर तो पानी फेरा ही, छल-कपट की राजनीति को भी बेनकाब किया। यदि उच्चतम न्यायालय ने इस सौदे में संदेह करने का कोई कारण नहीं पाया तो इसका मतलब यही है कि जो लोग इस सौदे को संदिग्ध बताने पर तुले थे वे सरकार को बदनाम करने का सुनिश्चित अभियान चला रहे थे। हालांकि इस अभियान के अगुआ रहलु गांधी और उनके साथियों के पास राफेल सौदे में गड़बड़ी का कोई प्रमाण नहीं था, फिर भी वे प्रधानमंत्री को चोर बताने में लगे हुए थे। रहलु गांधी की ओर से उछाला गया चौकीदार चोर है का नारा महज खिसियाहट भरी अभद्र राजनीति का ही परिचायक नहीं था, बल्कि इसका भी प्रमाण था कि संकीर्ण राजनीतिक स्वार्थों के लिए कोई किस हद तक जा सकता है। रहलु गांधी ने केवल प्रधानमंत्री के खिलाफ ही अमर्यादित भाषा का इस्तेमाल नहीं किया, बल्कि फ्रांस के साथ राजनयिक संबंधों को भी चोट पहुंचाई। क्या इससे गैर जिम्मेदारना राजनीति और कोई हो सकती है? रहलु गांधी खुद को सही साबित करने के लिए किस तरह छल का सहारा लेने में लगे हुए थे, इसका पता इससे चलता है कि वह यह प्रचारित करने में भी जुटे थे कि उच्चतम न्यायालय यह कह रहा है कि प्रधानमंत्री ने चोरी की है। भले ही इस सियासी शरारत के लिए उच्चतम न्यायालय ने उनके खिलाफ कोई कार्रवाई करने की जरूरत न समझी हो, लेकिन आखिर वह उस जनता का सामना कैसे करेंगे जिसके समक्ष वह राफेल सौदे में गड़बड़ी के हास्यास्पद और मिथ्या दावे किया करते थे?

यह लज्जाजनक है कि राफेल सौदे पर सस्ती और एक तरह से देशघाती राजनीति तब की गई जब संप्रग सरकार के नाकारापन के कारण भारतीय वायु सेना युद्धक विमानों के अभाव से बुरी तरह जूझ रही थी। आखिर किन संकीर्ण स्वार्थों के लिए राष्ट्रीय हितों की जानबूझकर अनदेखी की गई? यह आपराधिक किस्म की राजनीति थी। ऐसी ही हरकतों से राजनीति बदनाम होती है। अफसोस केवल यह नहीं कि बिना किसी सुबूत रहलु गांधी झूठ का पहाड़ खड़ा करने में लगे हुए थे, बल्कि इस पर भी है कि प्रशांत भूषण, यशवंत सिन्हा और अरुण शौरी ने उनकी झूठ की राजनीति में सहभागी बनना बेहतर समझा। समझना कठिन है कि जब उनके पास ऐसे कोई तथ्य थे ही नहीं जो राफेल सौदे में गड़बड़ी को इंगित करते तब फिर वे क्या हासिल करने के लिए एक जरूरी रक्षा सौदे को संदिग्ध बता रहे थे? आखिर इससे उन्हें अपयश के अलावा और क्या मिला?

डेंगू पर सियासत

पिछले कुछ माह में बंगाल और खासकर कोलकाता एवं आसपास के क्षेत्रों में डेंगू से लोगों की लगातार मौत होने की खबरें आ रही हैं। हजारों की संख्या में लोग डेंगू से पीड़ित हैं। इन सबके बीच दो दिन पहले कलकता हाईकोर्ट ने राज्य प्रशासन से डेंगू पर रिपोर्ट तलब किया है। इन सबके बीच भाजपा ने कोलकाता नगर निगम अभियान के जरिए डेंगू को सियासी मुद्दा बना कर सत्तारूढ़ तुणुमूल कांग्रेस को घेरने के प्रयास में है। इस अभियान के दौरान भाजपा नेताओं, कार्यकर्ताओं एवं समर्थकों का पुलिस के साथ जमकर हथापाई हुई। पुलिस ने पानी के बोझर के साथ-साथ लाठीचार्ज भी किया जिसमें कई भाजपा समर्थकों को चोट भी लगी। दर्जनों को पुलिस ने गिरफ्तार भी किया जिन्हें बाद में रिहा कर दिया गया, परंतु इस अभियान को लेकर भाजपा एवं तुणुमूल के बीच सियासत भी खूब होने लगी। कोलकाता नगर निगम के मेयर एवं शहरी विकास मंत्री फिख्द हकमी ने भाजपा के इस अभियान को लेकर कहा कि असल में डेंगू भाजपा नेताओं के दिमाग में हो गया है। वहीं भाजपा नेता भी पीछे नहीं रहे और जमकर हल्ला बोला। यही नहीं भाजपा कार्यकर्ताओं ने मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी का पुतला भी फूँका। भाजपा का आरोप है कि शांतिपूर्ण तरीके से ‘कोलकाता कॉरपोरेशन चलो’ अभियान चल रहा था, लेकिन पुलिस ने क्रूरता से बल प्रयोग किया। कार्यकर्ताओं को खटेड़ कर पीटा गया। भाजपा का कहना है कि महानगर की सिर्फ डेंगू समस्या नहीं है, बल्कि गंदगी, तारों के मकड़जाल, अवैध पार्किंग बड़ी परेशानी है। असल में भाजपा ने यह अभियान आगामी वर्ष होने वाले निकाय चुनाव को ध्यान में रखकर किया था। माना जा रहा है कि आने वाले समय में इस तरह का कई और आंदोलन हो सकता है। डेंगू तो सिर्फ सियासत के लिए बहाना है। हालांकि भाजपा नेता मुकुल रॉय ने पार्टी कार्यालताओं पर लाठीचार्ज को शर्मनाक करार दिया। उन्होंने पुलिस पर सत्तारूढ़ दल के कार्यकर्ताओं की तरह बर्ताव करने का आरोप लगाया है। साथ ही उन्होंने कहा कि जब पुलिसकर्मी तुणुमूल कार्यकर्ताओं की तरह बर्ताव करते हैं तो वे तुणुमूल का झंडा क्यों नहीं उठा लेते हैं? विरोध जुलूस में शामिल भाजपा नेत्री रिमझिम मित्रा ने पुरुष पुलिस पर महिला कार्यकर्ताओं के साथ बदसलूकी करने का आरोप लगाया है। उन्होंने कहा कि पार्टी के पास इस कार्यक्रम को पहले से अनुमति थी। शांतिपूर्ण तरीके से विरोध-प्रदर्शन चल रहा था। हालांकि पुलिस ने आरोप को खारिज कर दिया है, परंतु एक सवाल यह उठता है कि क्या विरोध प्रदर्शन से डेंगू पर लगाम लग जाएगा? इसके लिए आवश्यक है कि सभी लोग मिलकर डेंगू रोकने के लिए प्रयास करें।

सुरक्षित बचपन का सपना

देवेंद्रराज सुशार

भारत में आज लाखों बच्चे बाल मजदूरी में संलग्न हैं। देश की सड़कों पर आए दिन कोई न कोई बच्चा फटे कपड़ों में भीख मांगता, 26 जनवरी एवं 15 अगस्त जैसे राष्ट्रीय पर्वों पर झड़े बेचता और ट्रैफिक सिग्नल पर सलाम करता मिल ही जाएगा। यूनिसेफ ने तो इन

बच्चों को स्ट्रीट चिल्ड्रेन के नाम पर दो भागों में वर्गीकृत किया है। एक तो वे बच्चे जो सड़कों पर भीख मांगते हैं और दूसरे वे जो सामान बेचते हैं। मानवाधिकार आयोग की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक लगाम एक करोड़ बच्चे सड़कों पर रहते हैं और काम करते हैं।

ऐसे में जिस देश के बच्चे पढ़ नहीं पा रहे हैं, उस देश के विकसित होने का सपना देखना बेमानी ही होगा। हालांकि देश में सर्वशिक्षा अभियान के तहत हर बच्चे को शिक्षा देने का दावा सरकार करती है, लेकिन सरकारी शिक्षा की गुणवत्ता न के बराबर है। यही कारण है कि सरकारी स्कूल के बच्चों एवं निजी स्कूलों के बच्चों की शिक्षा के स्तर में रात-दिन का अंतर नजर आता है। सरकारी स्कूलों में प्रवेश के लिए मिड-डे मील,

जिस देश के बच्चे वर्तमान में

जितने महफूज एवं सुविधा-

संपन्न होंगे, जाहिर है कि उस

देश का भविष्य भी उतना ही

उज्वल होगा

नि:शुल्क किताबें एवं कम फीस का ऑफर देकर सरकार केवल खानापूति ही कर रही है। यह भी सच है कि आज संपन्न अभिभावक तो अपने बच्चों को निजी स्कूलों में पढ़ने के लिए भेज ही रहे हैं, साथ ही आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर अभिभावक भी अपने बच्चों के बेहतर भविष्य के लिए उनका दाखिला निजी स्कूलों में करवा रहे हैं, फिर भले ही इसके लिए उन्हें रात को भूखा ही क्यों न सोना पड़े। वहीं दूसरी ओर देश में हर दिन किसी न किसी बच्चे को यौन शोषण का शिकार होना पड़ रहा है। रिपोर्ट तो यह कहती है कि हर तीन घंटे में एक बच्चे को बाल यौन शोषण का शिकार होना पड़ता है। सच्चाई यह भी है कि बच्चों को अपनी हवस का शिकार बनाने वाले अधिकतर इनके जानने वाले ही होते हैं।



अद्वैता काला

अयोध्या फैसले को विभिन्न पक्षों ने

जिस मर्यादा के साथ स्वीकार किया वह

लोकतांत्रिक और संवैधानिक मूल्यों में

उनकी अगाध आस्था को ही दर्शाता है

अयोध्या पर आए निर्णय को न्यायिक नीतिशास्त्र के उच्च प्रतिमान की उपमा दी जा सकती है, मगर वास्तव में यह उससे भी कहीं बढ़कर है। दिसंबर 1992 की घटना के बाद राम जन्मभूमि विवाद में देश की एक पूरी पीढ़ी जवान हो गई। इस दौरान विमर्श की दुनिया में वामपंथियों का दबदबा रहा। उन्होंने आस्था पर सवाल उठाए और समुदायों को एक-दूसरे के खिलाफ भड़काकर अपना हित साधते रहे। लंबे समय से यह आशंका जताई जा रही थी कि इस मुश्किल मुद्दे पर समाधान की दिशा में बढ़ने पर कोई हिंसक प्रतिक्रिया हो सकती है, किंतु अयोध्या पर आए फैसले को विभिन्न पक्षों ने जिस विमर्शता एवं मर्यादा के साथ स्वीकार किया वह हमारे लोकतांत्रिक और संवैधानिक मूल्यों में अगाध आस्था एवं उनकी सफलता को ही दर्शाता है।

अयोध्या फैसले के बाद प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने राष्ट्र के नाम अपने संबोधन में उचित ही कहा कि यह बर्लिन की दीवार गिरने जैसा है। यह उल्लेखनीय है कि भारत में दो समुदायों के बीच लंबे अरसे से बनो यह दीवार उनके कार्यकाल में ही ध्वस्त हुई। भविष्य में इसे उनकी सबसे महान उपलब्धियों में गिना जाएगा। मुस्लिम समुदाय ने जिस सम्मान भाव के साथ इन निर्णय को स्वीकारा उससे उन निहित स्वार्थी तत्वों को गहरा आघात लगा है जो इसे लेकर तमाम तरह की आशंकाओं से उन्हें भयाक्रांत करने में जुटे थे। साक्ष्यों

के आधार पर उच्चतम न्यायालय ने यह सिद्ध किया कि किसी भी दावे का निपटारा विशुद्ध रूप से तथ्यों के आधार पर ही किया जाना चाहिए। इसका निर्धारण कुछ निहित स्वार्थी तत्वों द्वारा थोपी गई सांप्रदायिकता या बहुसंख्यक भावनाओं से नहीं होता। वास्तव में यह भारत की जनता और संविधान की शुचित के लिए एक बहुत बड़ी जीत है।

अयोध्या स्थित राम जन्म स्थान सदियों से हिंदुओं के लिए सबसे पवित्र स्थलों में से एक रहा है। अयोध्या में और भी मस्जिदें हैं। यहाँ हिंदू और मुस्लिम शांति एवं सद्भाव के साथ रहते आए हैं, मगर विवाद केवल एक स्थान-राम जन्म स्थान को लेकर ही था। शीर्ष अदालत ने अपने निर्णय में भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण यानी एएसआइ द्वारा किए गए उखनन का भी संज्ञान लिया। फैसले के अनुसार एएसआइ के उखनन से मिले साक्ष्यों से स्थापित होता है कि विवादित ढांचे के नीचे हिंदू मंदिर से जुड़े तमाम प्रतीक चिन्ह प्राप्त हुए। वामपंथी इतिहासकारों और मौडिया के एक बड़े हिस्से ने उखनन के इन निष्कर्षों को खारिज करने का प्रयास किया। एक वरिष्ठ पत्रकार ने इससे जुड़ा एक वाक्या याद किया। उन्होंने वर्ष 2003 में इन साक्ष्यों पर आधारित एक आलेख लिखा था। इसके छपने के बाद उनकी लानत-मलानत के लिए एक मुहिम चलाई गई। यह स्थिति तब थी जब आलेख में उन्होंने सिर्फ तथ्यों का उल्लेख किया था। उसमें उनकी अपनी कोई टिप्पणी

मंदिर आंदोलन के अहम सूत्रधार

श्री

रामजन्मभूमि मुक्ति आंदोलन का इतिहास अशोक सिंहल के स्मरण के बिना अधूरा है। अशोक जी भले ही परंपरागत रूप से संत न हों, लेकिन उनका जीवन किसी मायने में संत से कम नहीं। एक ऐसा संत जिसके जीवन का एकमात्र उद्देश्य था अयोध्या में रामजन्मभूमि पर रामलला का भव्य मंदिर निर्माण करना। इसके लिए उन्होंने अपना जीवन न्योछावर कर दिया। समागत धर्म में उनकी आस्था शंकराचार्य की तरह और दुनिया भर में हिंदू धर्म का प्रचार-प्रसार करने की उनकी मंशा स्वामी विवेकानंद जैसी थी। हिंदू समाज को सशक्त और सामर्थ्यवान बनाने तथा एकजुट रखने के लिए वह जीवनपर्यंत सक्रिय रहे। इसके लिए वह अनगिनत मठों, मंदिरों और आश्रमों में गए। उन्होंने केवल देश ही नहीं, बल्कि दुनिया भर में घूम-घूमकर हिंदुत्व को एक नई पहचान दी और उसका गौरव जगाया। अपने नाम को सार्थक करने वाले अशोक जी काशी हिंदू विश्वविद्यालय से इंजीनियरिंग की डिग्री लेने के बाद नौकरी के फेर में नहीं पड़े। काशी के बाबा विश्वनाथ के आशीर्वाद स्वरूप शायद उनके हृत्थों से भगवान श्रीराम का वह अद्भुत कार्य होना था जो इतिहास में अमिट रूप से दर्ज हो गया। इसका माध्यम बना राष्ट्रीय स्वयंसेवक संघ जिसके आजीवन पूर्णकालिक प्रचारक बनकर उन्होंने समाज सेवा का व्रत लिया। उन्होंने लाखों लोगों को रामजन्मभूमि आंदोलन से जोड़ा जो राष्ट्रीय भावनाओं के प्रकटीकरण का भी साक्षी बना।

इंदिरा गांधी के निरंकुश आपातकाल के विरुद्ध संघर्ष करने वाले अशोक सिंहल जी 1981 में डॉ. कर्ण सिंह के नेतृत्व में होने वाले विराट हिंदू सम्मेलन के सूत्रधार भी थे। इसके उपरांत राष्ट्रीय स्वयंसेवक संघ ने उन्हें विश्व हिंदू परिषद के कार्य में लगा दिया। 1984 में दिल्ली के विज्ञान भवन में धर्म संसद का आयोजन हुआ। अशोक जी उसके संचालक थे। यहीं से रामजन्मभूमि आंदोलन का श्रीगणेश हुआ। जो भी व्यक्ति इस आंदोलन से जुड़ा वह रामजन्मभूमि के इतिहास का एक स्वर्णिम पन्ना बन गया। इस आंदोलन के दौरान उनकी सभाओं में हिंदुत्व को जगाने वाली उनकी सिंह सरीखी आवाज जिसके कानों में पड़ती उसके पेर वहाँ ठहर जाती। उनकी अगुआई में लाखों कारसेवकों ने देश की तमाम पवित्र नदियों के तटों पर राम मंदिर की स्थापना के लिए शपथ ली। उनके एक आह्वान पर लाखों लोग हुंकार भरने के लिए तैयार हो जाते थे। अशोक जी करीब 20 वर्षों तक विश्व हिंदू परिषद



केशव प्रसाद मोर्य



के अंतरराष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष रहे। यह कहने में हर्ज नहीं कि उन्होंने अपनी सोच से देश की सामाजिक और राजनीतिक दिशा ही बदल दी। यह उनकी जीवतता की एक अनोखी मिसाल थी कि 1984 के बाद रामजन्मभूमि को लेकर उनके सतत प्रयासों के कारण ही केवल दो साल बाद 1986 में रामजन्मभूमि का ताला खोलने का आदेश हो गया। इसी के साथ वहां निर्वाध रूप से दर्शन-पूजन होने लगा। इसके बाद 1989 में पूज्य देवरहा बाबा की मौजूदगी में शिलान्यास पूजन का निर्णय लिया गया और लाखों कारसेवक अयोध्या की ओर कूच कर गए। उसी वर्ष 9 नवंबर को राम मंदिर का शिलान्यास हुआ। इसके साथ ही एलान हुआ कि 30 अक्टूबर 1990 को जन्मभूमि की मुक्ति के लिए कारसेवा होगी, लेकिन तब अयोध्या को उत्तर प्रदेश के तत्कालीन मुख्यमंत्री मुलायम सिंह यादव ने छाननी में तब्दील कर दिया। मुलायम सिंह ने यह एलान भी कर दिया कि अयोध्या में परिंद भी पर नहीं मार सकता, लेकिन अशोक जी वहां पहुंचकर ही माने। उनके साथ लाखों लोग भी पहुंचे। इसके दिन दो बाद मुख्मंत्री मुलायम सिंह यादव ने निहत्थे कारसेवकों पर गोली चलाये



अयोधेश राजगुट

या विचार नहीं थे। आप समझ सकते हैं कि विमर्श की धारा को किस किस्म के लोगों ने बंधक बनाया हुआ था। उखनन के निष्कर्षों को उन्होंने सार्वजनिक दायरे में नहीं आने दिया और उसकी रिपोर्टिंग करने वाले पत्रकारों को निशाना बनाया। इतना ही नहीं उखनन प्रक्रिया से जुड़े एएसआइ के केके मुहम्मद जैसे अधिकारी पर अनावश्यक दबाव डाला गया। उनकी प्रतिष्ठा तार-तार करने के प्रयास हुए और उन्हें धमकियां भी दी गईं। इसके पीछे आखिर क्या मंशा थी? इसके पीछे इसी बात का डर था कि किसी भी मजहब का कोई भी समझदार व्यक्ति उखनन से मिले साक्ष्यों से यही समझगा कि बाबर द्वारा हिंदुओं के अधिकारों का दमन करके एक ढांचे को खड़ा कराया गया। यह केवल हिंदुओं का उत्पीड़न ही नहीं, बल्कि खाली जमीन पर नहीं, अपितु जबरन कब्जा करके बनाई गई।

अयोध्या में उखनन से मिले साक्ष्य वैज्ञानिक भी थे और पुष्ट होने के साथ ही सभी

तरह के संदेह का निवारण करने वाले भी, फिर भी उन्हें महत्व देने और समाधान तक पहुंचने से बचा गया। सभी पंथों के अनुयायी यह तो समझेंगे ही कि जन्म स्थान से कोई समझौता नहीं किया जा सकता। जब मक्का और बेथलहम में ऐसा नहीं हो सकता तो अयोध्या में कैसे हो सकता है? इसके बाद भी समाधान में बाधाएं खड़ी की गईं। इसके चलते दोनों समुदाय नकारात्मकता के बंधक में बंध गए। यह विवाद लंबा खिंचा। अयोध्या फैसले के पहले सभी ने सुप्रीम कोर्ट के निर्णय को स्वीकार करने की बात कही। फैसले वाले दिन मैंने साग दिन एक टीवी चैनल पर एक मौलाना बहलब और पंडित जी के साथ बहस में व्यतीत किया जिनके साथ पहले भी अयोध्या मसले और अन्य मुद्दों पर जोरदार बहस कर चुकी हूं। उस दिन उनके बीच फैसले के पहले भी और बाद में भी सद्भाव दिखा। उन्हें इस तरह देखना सुखद भी था और यहतकारी भी। ख़ास बात यह थी कि दोनों एक-दूसरे को सुन रहे थे। दिन भर की बहस के बाद जब मैंने मौलाना सहब से

का हुक्म दे दिया। पुलिस लाठी चार्ज में अशोक जी भी घायल हुए, लेकिन उनका संकल्प नहीं टूटा। उल्टे इस घटना ने उनमें और उत्साह भर दिया। इस घटना के बाद उनके नेतृत्व में 4 अप्रैल, 1991 को दिल्ली के बोट क्लब पर आजादी के बाद अब तक की सबसे विशाल रैली हुई जिसमें तकरीबन 25 लाख लोग जुटे। अशोक जी की यह क्षमता देखकर देश की राजनीति में भूचाल सा आ गया। इसका एक परिणाम यह हुआ कि मुलायम सिंह सरकार घुटनों के बल आ गई और अशोक जी देश के मानस पटल पर छा गए। वह देश की राजनीति को प्रभावित करने लगे, जबकि वह सक्रिय राजनीति में नहीं थे।

अशोक जी के पहले हिंदू समाज ने संतों और राजाओं के नेतृत्व में रामजन्मभूमि की मुक्ति के लिए कई बार संघर्ष और आंदोलन किया, लेकिन वे सफल नहीं हो सके। अशोक जी ने उनके सफल न होने के कारणों का बारीकी से अध्ययन किया। वह सबसे पहले हिंदू समाज को एक धारा में लाए। उन्होंने संतों और महात्माओं का आशीर्वाद लिया और धर्म संसद का आयोजन किया। उन्होंने अपनी व्यूह रचना से एक अर्धसंघ कार्य को संभव करके दिखा दिया। अयोध्या में विवादित ढांचा ढहने के बाद उन्होंने रामजन्मभूमि स्थल पर रामलला का भव्य मंदिर का नक्शा बनवाया जो प्रस्तावित राम मंदिर का मॉडल है। इसके साथ ही उन्होंने राम मंदिर निर्माण के लिए श्री रामजन्मभूमि न्यास का गठन भी कराया। संतों और महात्मा की नजरों में अशोक जी स्वयं संत हो गए थे।

अशोक जी अत्यंत दूरदर्शी थे। वह समय की आहट को बखूबी पहचान लेते थे। अपने जीवन के अंतिम क्षण तक वह राम मंदिर के लिए प्रतिबद्ध रहे। 2013 में प्रयाग कुंभ की धर्म संसद में उन्होंने घोषणा की थी कि जब नरेंद्र मोदी के देश के प्रधानमंत्री बनेंगे तभी अयोध्या में राम जन्म स्थान पर मंदिर निर्माण का कार्य प्रारंभ होगा। जब मई 2014 में नरेंद्र मोदी प्रधानमंत्री बने तो अशोक जी ने कहा था कि 800 साल बाद कोई हिंदू शासक आया है और अब कोई ताकत राम मंदिर के निर्माण को रोक नहीं सकती, मगर 17 नवंबर 2015 को उनका देहवासना हो गया। उनकी स्मृति हम सबसे मानस पटल पर अटल है जो हरक पल उनकी जीवंतता और उत्प्रेर्यति का अहसास कराती है। उनकी यह स्मृति राम मंदिर के प्रति हमारे संकल्प का भी स्मरण कराती है।

(लेखक उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार में उपमुख्यमंत्री हैं)

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प्रभावी उद्बोधन

भले ईंसान बनने, मूल्यवान जीवन जीने, परपीड़ा नहीं करने, सदाचारी बनने आदि के उपदेश प्रायः एक दूसरे को दिए जा रहे हैं। माता-पिता संतानों को इस तरह के उपदेश दे रहे हैं, शिक्षक छात्र को दे रहे हैं, वक्ता श्रोताओं को दे रहे हैं, कागलियों में उच्च पदस्थ अधीनस्थों से ईमानदारी की अपेक्षा कर रहे हैं। शासकवर्ग जनता को आदर्श समाज बनाने का उद्बोधन करते रहते हैं। चाहे तर्ह इस तरह के उपदेश देने और उसके सुनते लोग दिखाई पड़ रहे हैं, लेकिन उपदेश देने वाले की वाणी में ओज का अभाव दिख रहा है। ज्यादातर उपदेशक अपना छाप छिपाने के लिए उपदेश देने वालों के सिर पर टीकार फोड़ते हैं और प्रतिक्रिया देते हैं कि ‘अब बात मानने वाले पहले जैसे लोग नहीं रह गए।’ जबकि हकीकत तो यह है कि वक्ता जब खुद आदर्शयुक्त जीवन नहीं जीएगा तो उसकी जिह्वा से निकले शब्दों में प्रभाव डालने की क्षमता नहीं रहेगी।

महिला अपने पुत्र को लेकर गांधी जी के पास गईं और शिकायत की कि उनका बेटा गुड़ बहुत खाता है। गांधी जी ने उसे चार दिन बाद बुलाया और बेटे से कहा-ज्यादा गुड़ मत खाया करो। महिला बोली-चापू, सिर्फ यही कहना था तो पहले ही दिन क्यों नहीं कह दिया? गांधी जी बोले-उस दिन तक मैं भी गुड़ बहुत खाता था। चार दिन से गुड़ खाना कम कर दिया। जो बुरी आदतें मुझ में रहींगी, उसका असर दूसरे पर नहीं पड़ता, इसलिए पहले जब खुद मैंने गुड़ खाना कम किया तब बेटे से कहना उचित समझा।

इससे स्पष्ट है कि जब उपदेश देने वाले के जीवन में दृढ़ होगा तो उसका अर्थव्यवस्था नहीं पड़ेगी। अंतर्मन से आदर्श व्यक्ति की वाणी ही नहीं, उसकी दृष्टि, उसके सभों तक में वह क्षमता रहती है कि वह किसी के मनोभावों को बदल दे। अतः व्यक्ति यह चाहता ही कि वह जैसा चाहे पर, परिवार, समाज, सफरत तदनुकूल रहे तो उसे खुद अपने तेज को विकसित करना होगा। नकारात्मकता को छोड़ना पड़ेगा, क्योंकि इससे व्यक्ति के तेज, आभामंडल का हास होता है।

सलिल पांडेय

मेलवाक्स

पास पैसा है वे न चाहते हुए भी दो कार रखना चाहेंगे। ये करें भले ही सड़क पर न उतरें, लेकिन पार्किंग वगैरह की समस्या तो पैदा करेगी ही। सरकार को चाहिए कि यातायात के साधनों को रोकने के बजाय जनता को जागरूक करें, जिससे नौकरी पेशा लोग मिलजुलकर वाहनों का प्रयोग करें। सरकार सरकारी यातायात के साधनों की संख्या में इजाफा करे। मेट्रो और लोकल रेल यातायात को बढ़ावा दे। ट्रैफिक के नियम कड़ाई से लागू किए जाएं और अधिक पुराने वाहनों को सड़क से हटया जाए। धुआं फैलाने वाले ट्रक और यातायात के नियमों का पालन नहीं करने वाले वाहनों पर प्रतिबंध लगाया होगा और सड़क पर चलाने पर कानूनी कर्तव्य करनी होगी। एक से अधिक कारों की खरीद पर प्रत्येक परिवार पर कर लगाया चाहिए।

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पाराली पर अछी सलाह

हरियाणा में हाल में ही बनी भाजपा-जजपा सरकार पाराली के अवशेषों को जलाने से बचाकर और उनका सदुपयोग करने के लिए जो सलाह दे रही है, उससे किसानों को तो फायदा होगा ही, साथ में वातावरण भी प्रदूषित हवाओं से बच जाएगा। सरकार की सलाह के अनुसार काम करने पर किसान को आमदनी में बढ़ोतरी होगी, साथ ही प्रदूषण को रोकने में भी मदद मिलेगी। किसानों को इसे बड़-बूढ़कर अपनाना चाहिए। योजना के मुताबिक पाराली एवं गैहू के फाने का रिफाइन्डरी में एथनॉल बनाने में उपयोग होगा, जो पर्यावरण हितैषी ईंधन के रूप में विकसित होगा। कृषक वर्ग को चाहिए कि खेद पाराली प्रबंधन की प्रोत्साहन राशि के लिए

पूछा आप कब निकल रहे हैं तो उन्होंने पंडित जी से मुखावित होते हुए यही सवाल उनसे भी किया। यह अद्भुत क्षण था। क्या वह एक नई शुरुआत थी?

अयोध्या फैसला 490 साल पुराने विवाद का शांतिपूर्ण समाधान करने वाला रहा। उच्चतम न्यायालय ने 1992 में विवादित ढांचे के ध्वंस को माना और सुन्नी वक्फ बोर्ड को पांच एकड़ जमीन देने को कहा, जिसने फैसले को चुनौती न देने की बात कही। हिंदू पक्ष ने हिंदुओं के लिए पाबन समझे जाने वाले जन्म स्थान को हासिल किया। उनका विश्वास है कि यहीं पर जन्में राम तुमक-तुमक चले और फिर अयोध्या नरेश बने। अयोध्या जाने वाले लोग राम लला को वनावास जैसी स्थिति में देखकर दुखी होते थे। इसका कारण यही था कि निम्षक और वैज्ञानिक तरीके से खोजे गए सत्य की अनदेखी की गई और उसे दबाया गया। इस मौके पर हमें सेक्युलरिज्म की उस परिभाषा को भी देखना-समझना होगा जिसके तहत संकीर्ण स्वार्थों के चलते एक जायज मांग को सांप्रदायिक कहा गया और वह भी इसलिए कि उसे हिंदुओं ने उठाय़ा। इस रवैये ने लोगों में नकारात्मकता और विभाजनकारी भावना फैलाई। अब जब देश की सबसे बड़ी अदालत ने साक्ष्यों का परीक्षण कर यह पाया कि अयोध्या की जमीन पर हिंदुओं का दावा वैध था तब फिर समझदारी इसी में है कि इस मसले को तथ्यों की निगाह से देखा जाए, न कि हिंदू विरोधी वामपंथियों की नजर से। हिंदू ट्रेपी होना सेक्युलरिज्म नहीं है। वास्तव में यह एक समुदाय के नाम पर दूसरे समुदाय की भावनाओं को खतरनाक अनदेखी है। अब समय इसी बात का है कि आम भारतीय सामंजस्य की भावना को बल दें।

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रफाल की गुत्थी

लड़ाकू विमान रफाल की खरीद को लेकर उठे विवाद का एक तरह से पटाक्षेप हो गया। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने अपने फैसले में कहा है कि रफाल मामले में जांच की कोई जरूरत नहीं है। इसकी खरीद में अनियमितता का आरोप था। इस मामले को कांग्रेस ने जम कर भुनाया था। पिछले लोकसभा चुनावों में उसने रफाल खरीद में हुई अनियमितता को मुख्य मुद्दा बनाया था। इसके तत्कालीन अध्यक्ष राहुल गांधी ने देश भर के मंचों से रफाल खरीद में घोटाले का आरोप लगाते हुए प्रधानमंत्री को अपने निशाने पर रखा था। प्रधानमंत्री के खिलाफ निराधार जुमला उछालने पर उनके खिलाफ मामला भी दर्ज कराया गया था। तब राहुल गांधी ने अपने जुमले उछालने के लिए माफी मांगी थी। इन दोनों मामलों पर सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने अपना फैसला सुना दिया। राहुल गांधी की माफी को पर्याप्त मानते हुए उन्हें दुबारा ऐसा न करने की हिदायत भी दी। इस तरह रफाल मामले से जुड़े अनियमितता के आरोप निराधार साबित हुए हैं।

रफाल की खरीद भारतीय वायुसेना के लिए अहम फैसला था। वायुसेना के पास अत्याधुनिक हथियारों से लैस विमानों की कमी लंबे समय से महसूस की जा रही थी। इसी के मद्देनजर अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी सरकार के समय रफाल की खरीद का प्रस्ताव लाया गया था। फिर यूपीए सरकार के समय काफी जांच-परख के बाद रफाल को उपयुक्त विमान माना गया था। मगर सौदा अंतिम रूप नहीं ले पाया था। तब एक सौ छब्बीस रफाल विमान खरीदे जाने थे। फिर भाजपा की अगुआई वाली सरकार बनी तो प्रधानमंत्री ने फ्रांस दौरे के वक्त छत्तीस रफाल विमानों की खरीद का सौदा पक्का कर लिया था। यह वायुसेना का मनोबल बढ़ाने वाला कदम था। मगर इस सौदे की प्रकृति को देखते हुए कुछ लोगों ने इसमें गड़बड़ी की आशंका जाहिर की थी। फ्रांस सरकार की तरफ से भी कुछ प्रतिकूल बयान आ गए थे, जिससे विपक्षी दलों को सरकार को घेरने का मौका हाथ लगा था। वे मांग करने लगे कि रफाल सौदे का ब्योरा सार्वजनिक किया जाए। मगर चूंकि यह प्रतिरक्षा से जुड़ा मामला था, इसलिए इसके बारे में कोई भी गोपनीय सूचना सार्वजनिक करना उचित नहीं था। फिर कई सवाल उठने शुरू हो गए थे। पहली बात यह कि जब सौदा हुआ, तो उसमें लंबे समय की अनुभवी सरकारी विमानन कंपनी हिंदुस्तान एरोनॉटिक्स लिमिटेड को सहभागी बनाने के बजाय कुछ ही दिनों पहले बनी और विमानन के क्षेत्र में कोई अनुभव न रखने वाली एक नई निजी कंपनी को साझेदार क्यों बनाया गया। फिर यह कि जब जरूरत एक सौ छब्बीस विमानों की थी, तो सिर्फ छत्तीस विमान, वह भी पहले के सौदे से कहीं अधिक कीमत पर खरीदने की क्या तुक थी?

रक्षा सौदों में दलाली वगैरह के आरोप नए नहीं हैं, इसलिए रफाल की खरीद में भी अनियमितता को लेकर लोगों के मन में शंका बनी हुई थी। सामान्य लोगों को लड़ाकू विमानों के तकनीकी पहलुओं को जानकारी न होने के कारण उन्हें यह समझाना कठिन होता है कि एक सामान्य विमान और अत्याधुनिक सैन्य साजो-सामान से लैस विमान की कीमत में कैसे अंतर आ जाता है। सरकार भी इस मामले में सार्वजनिक रूप से ब्योरेवार सफाई नहीं दे सकती थी, क्योंकि यह सुरक्षा से जुड़ा मामला था। ऐसे में सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने भी ब्योरेवार टिप्पणी करने के बजाय सपाट तरीके से मामले पर पुनर्विचार की जरूरत को खारिज कर दिया। इस तरह सरकार भी बेदाग साबित हुई।

बेकाबू महंगाई

अर्थव्यवस्था को मजबूती प्रदान करने के दावे पेश करती सरकार के लिए महंगाई के ताजा आंकड़े झटका देने वाले हैं। आम लोगों की रोजमर्रा की जरूरतें पूरी करना भी एक बड़ी चुनौती साबित होने लगा है। खुद सरकार की तरफ से जारी आंकड़ों के मुताबिक खुदरा महंगाई की दर 4.62 फीसद तक पहुंच चुकी है। यह पिछले सोलह महीने के दौरान सबसे ऊंचे स्तर पर पहुंची महंगाई है। यह सवाल उठाना स्वाभाविक है कि बीते कुछ सालों से केवल आर्थिक चकाचौंध के दावों के बीच साधारण लोगों के सामने ये हालात क्यों आए कि बाजार उनकी पहुंच से दूर होने लगा है। खासतौर पर खाद्य पदार्थों की कीमतों में जिस तेजी के साथ बढ़ोतरी हुई है, उसका सीधा असर आम घरों की थाली पर पड़ेगा। सिर्फ इतने से यह समझा जा सकता है कि जब लोगों के सामने खाने-पीने की वस्तुएं खरीदना ही चुनौती बनना जा रहा है तो वे बाजार से दूसरी चीजें खरीदने के बारे में कैसे सोचें!

गौरतलब है कि रिजर्व बैंक ने अनुमान लगाया था कि खुदरा महंगाई की दर चार फीसद तक पहुंच सकती है। लेकिन इस अनुमान को पार करते हुए ताजा आंकड़ों में महंगाई का स्तर 4.62 फीसद तक पहुंच गया, वहीं खाद्य पदार्थों के मामले में यह 7.9 फीसद तक पहुंच गई, जो पिछले उन्तालीस महीनों का उच्च स्तर है। खासतौर पर सब्जियों, चावल, दाल और अन्य खाद्य उत्पाद, फल, मांस-मछली, अंडा आदि की कीमतों में जिस तेजी से बढ़ोतरी हुई है, उसका असर बाजार में लगभग सभी वस्तुओं की सामान्य खरीदारी पर पड़ना तय है। हालांकि यह एक आम हकीकत है कि बाजार में अगर किसी वस्तु की मांग कम होती है, तो उसकी कीमतें भी घटती हैं। इस लिहाज से देखें तो यह सवाल लाजिमी है कि क्या अनिवार्य खरीदारी वाले खाद्य पदार्थों के मामले में व्यवस्थागत मोचें पर अनदेखी की जा रही है और इन वस्तुओं की महंगाई अब बेलागम होने लगी है? यही नहीं, आर्थिक मामलों के विशेषज्ञों ने आने वाले महीनों में महंगाई की दर में और बढ़ोतरी की आशंका जताई है और अगर यह जारी रहा, तो इसका असर रिजर्व बैंक के रेपो रेट के निर्धारण पर भी पड़ सकता है।

दरअसल, सब्जियों की कीमतों के आसमान छूने की एक वजह यह हो सकती है कि इन महीनों के दौरान जो फसल तैयार हो जाती थी, उसमें इस बार कुछ देरी हो गई है। इसके बावजूद सब्जियों सहित अन्य खाद्य वस्तुओं के बाजार में पहुंचने से लेकर थोक बिक्री और फिर खुदरा कीमतों के मामले में निगरानी की अनदेखी और अव्यवस्था से इनकार नहीं किया जा सकता है। यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है कि पेट्रोल और डीजल की कीमतें कहां पहुंच गई हैं और इसका सीधा असर वस्तुओं की दुलाई पर आने वाले खर्च पर पड़ता है। इसलिए केवल फसलों के तैयार होने में देरी के पहलु पर जोर देना कई वास्तविक कारणों को ढकने की तरह ही है। यह ध्यान रखने की जरूरत है कि एक ओर खाद्य वस्तुओं की कीमतें आम लोगों की पहुंच से दूर हो रही हैं तो दूसरी ओर औद्योगिक उत्पादन में लगातार गिरावट चिंता का विषय बनी हुई है। रोजगार और लोगों की आमदनी के मोचें से भी बेहद निराशाजनक खबरें आ रही हैं। बाजार में अगर यह प्रवृत्ति जारी रही तो केवल बढ़-चढ़ कर किए गए दावों से देश की अर्थव्यवस्था पांच ट्रिलियन के आंकड़े तक नहीं पहुंच सकती!

कल्पमेधा

प्रशंसा के भूखे यह प्रमाणित करते हैं कि वे योग्यता में कंगले हैं।

–प्लूटार्क

कब थमेगी खेतिहर की खुदकुशी

महाराष्ट्र लगातार पहले स्थान पर बना हुआ है। 2016 में खेतिहर मजदूरों, भूस्वामियों और काशतकारों द्वारा की गई 11,379 आत्महत्याओं में से 3,661 आत्महत्याएं महाराष्ट्र में हुई थीं। इससे पहले 2014 में यहां 4,004 और 2015 में 4,291 किसानों ने आत्महत्या की थी।

एक ऐसा देश जो दुनिया की सातवीं बड़ी अर्थव्यवस्था है, वहां हजारों की संख्या में किसानों का हर साल मरना बेहद अफसोसनाक है। ये आंकड़े तब और भीयावह लगते हैं जब पता चलता है कि औसतन हर 46 मिनट में हमारे देश में कहीं न कहीं एक किसान आत्महत्या करता है। सवाल है कि सरकार की कृषि क्षेत्र की गुलाबी तस्वीर पेश करने की तमाम कोशिशों के बावजूद किसानों की खुदकुशी रुकने का नाम क्यों नहीं ले रही है? किसान-आत्महत्या की यह तस्वीर कहीं सरकार की दोषपूर्ण नीतियों का नतीजा तो नहीं?

कहने की जरूरत नहीं कि किसानों की आत्महत्याओं का सिलसिला हमारे नीति-निर्माताओं की दोषपूर्ण आर्थिक नीतियों का ही नतीजा है। ऐसी नीतियां जिनसे गरीब और गरीब हो रहे हैं और अमीर और अमीर। खास तौर से कृषि को व्यवस्थित तौर पर आर्थिक रूप से अलाभप्रद बनाया गया है जिसके कारण किसान कर्ज के जाल में फंसते चले जाते हैं। इसी का नतीजा है कि आजादी के समय जहां सकल घरेलू उत्पाद में कृषि का योगदान पचास फीसद से ज्यादा था वहीं मौजूदा दौर में यह बीस फीसद भी नहीं रहा है।

केंद्र सरकार के कृषि विकास व किसानों की आमदनी दो गुना करने के तमाम दावों के बावजूद किसानों की आत्महत्याओं का सिलसिला थमने का नाम नहीं ले रहा है।

नेशनल क्राइम रिकार्ड ब्यूरो (एनसीआरबी) की ताजा रिपोर्ट ने एक बार फिर निराशाजनक आंकड़े पेश किए हैं। इसके मुताबिक 2016 में 11,379 किसानों ने खुदकुशी की है हालांकि ‘एक्सीडेंटल डेथ एंड सुसाइड इन इंडिया’ शीर्षक से प्रकाशित इस रिपोर्ट में 2015 में 12,602 आत्महत्याओं के मुकाबले 2016 में खुदकुशी के कुल मामलों में कमी आई है। 2015 में प्रति एक लाख आबादी पर आत्महत्या की दर 10.6 थी जो 2016 में घटकर 10.3 प्रति एक लाख आबादी पर आ गई। हालांकि राष्ट्रीय दर 10.3 के मुकाबले 2016 में शहरों में खुदकुशी की दर 13.0 दर्ज की गई। रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक औसत निकालने पर पता चलता है कि हर दिन 31 से ज्यादा किसानों ने आत्महत्या की। किसान आत्महत्या के मामले में

अशोक कुमार

भाषा किसी भी समाज का जीवन होती है। वह जितनी समृद्ध होती है, भावों और विचारों की अभिव्यक्ति और उसका प्रवाह उतना सहज होता है। अलग-अलग देश नहीं, बल्कि हर कुछ दूर पर भाषा एक ‘डे’ और भावनाओं से जोड़ कर देखा जाने लाफी है कि समय-समय पर भिन्न समुदायों ने अपनी अभिव्यक्ति के लिए अपनी मौजूदा भाषा को समृद्ध किया है, उसे परिष्कृत किया है या फिर किसी अलग भाषा को अपने संवाद का जरिया बनाया है। भारत ऐसा देश है, जिसे किसी एक भाषा से नहीं बांध सकते, फिर भी एक बड़े इलाके की सामान्य भाषा होने के नाते हिंदी के लिए खास जगह तो है ही। अब इसे देश और भावनाओं से जोड़ कर देखा जाने लगा है तो यह बहुत अस्वाभाविक नहीं है। लेकिन यह ध्यान रखने की जरूरत है कि देश में बहुत सारी अन्य भाषाएं हैं और वे भी देश के लिए ताकत का ही काम करती हैं। हिंदी के साथ समस्या ये है कि देश से जोड़ कर देखे जाने के क्रम में इसके लिए एक विशेष दिवस तय किया गया और आमतौर पर हर साल ‘हिंदी दिवस’ के रूप में हम सब इससे गुजरते हैं।

समझौते से दूर

एशिया के सोलह प्रमुख देशों के साथ सबसे बड़े व्यापारिक समझौते क्षेत्रीय व्यापक आर्थिक भागीदारी यानी रीजनल कॉम्प्रिहेंसिव इकनॉमिक पार्टनरशिप (आरसीईपी) से भारत पीछे हट गया है। प्रधानमंत्री का कहना है कि ‘जब मैं आरसीईपी समझौते को सभी भारतीयों के हितों से जोड़कर देखा हूं, तो सरकारात्मक जवाब नहीं मिलता। ऐसे में न तो गांधीजी का कोई जंतर और न ही मेरी अंतरात्मा आरसीईपी में शामिल होने की अनुमति देती है।’

दरअसल, भारत ने इस समझौते से पहले कई मुद्दे और चिंताएं सामने रखी थीं पर उनका ठोस समाधान नहीं निकला। भारत की पहली और सबसे बड़ी चिंता तो यही है कि चीन समेत इन देशों के साथ पहले से ही बड़ा व्यापार घाटा है। इस समझौते के बाद आयात और निर्यात पर लगने वाला कर या तो बिल्कुल नहीं भरना पड़ता या बहुत कम भरना पड़ता। भारत ने स्वतंत्रता के बाद से ही अपनी अर्थव्यवस्था को आत्मनिर्भर बनाने की कोशिश की है और धीरे-धीरे सुधार अपना कर अर्थव्यवस्था काफी मजबूत भी हुई है। लेकिन क्षेत्रीय असमानता के चलते देश अब भी समावेशी विकास से काफी दूर है।

गांधीजी का मानना था कि जब गांव पूरी तरह से विकसित होंगे तभी देश असल माथने में विकसित होगा। लेकिन जब तक देश की कृषि व्यवस्था में आमूल सुधार नहीं लाए जाएंगे तब तक देश में क्षेत्रीय असंतुलन मौजूद रहेगा। हमारे यहां कृषि क्षेत्र के बाद सबसे ज्यादा रोजगार मध्यम और लघु उद्योग देते हैं और कुल निर्यात में चालीस प्रतिशत योगदान इसी क्षेत्र का है। लेकिन वर्ष

जनसत्ता

कब थमेगी खेतिहर की खुदकुशी

महाराष्ट्र लगातार पहले स्थान पर बना हुआ है। 2016 में खेतिहर मजदूरों, भूस्वामियों और काशतकारों द्वारा की गई 11,379 आत्महत्याओं में से 3,661 आत्महत्याएं महाराष्ट्र में हुई थीं। इससे पहले 2014 में यहां 4,004 और 2015 में 4,291 किसानों ने आत्महत्या की थी।

एक ऐसा देश जो दुनिया की सातवीं बड़ी अर्थव्यवस्था है, वहां हजारों की संख्या में किसानों का हर साल मरना बेहद अफसोसनाक है। ये आंकड़े तब और भीयावह लगते हैं जब पता चलता है कि औसतन हर 46 मिनट में हमारे देश में कहीं न कहीं एक किसान आत्महत्या करता है। सवाल है कि सरकार की कृषि क्षेत्र की गुलाबी तस्वीर पेश करने की तमाम कोशिशों के बावजूद किसानों की खुदकुशी रुकने का नाम क्यों नहीं ले रही है? किसान-आत्महत्या की यह तस्वीर कहीं सरकार की दोषपूर्ण नीतियों का नतीजा तो नहीं?

कहने की जरूरत नहीं कि किसानों की आत्महत्याओं का सिलसिला हमारे नीति-निर्माताओं की दोषपूर्ण आर्थिक नीतियों का ही नतीजा है। ऐसी नीतियां जिनसे गरीब और गरीब हो रहे हैं और अमीर और अमीर। खास तौर से कृषि को व्यवस्थित तौर पर आर्थिक रूप से अलाभप्रद बनाया गया है जिसके कारण किसान कर्ज के जाल में फंसते चले जाते हैं। इसी का नतीजा है कि आजादी के समय जहां सकल घरेलू उत्पाद में कृषि का योगदान पचास फीसद से ज्यादा था वहीं मौजूदा दौर में यह बीस फीसद भी नहीं रहा है। जरा सोचिए, क्या कारण है कि एक किसान मंडी में टमाटर 50 पैसे प्रति किलोग्राम बेचने जाता है, लेकिन खरीदार 25 पैसे प्रति किलोग्राम देने के लिए कहता है और वह किसान एक ट्रैक्टर टमाटर को जमीन पर रौंद कर चला जाता है? उस किसान को 25 पैसे प्रति किलोग्राम बेचने के बजाय टमाटर को जमीन पर फेंकना बेहतर लगता है।

हालांकि इस साल एनसीआरबी ने किसानों की आत्महत्या के कारणों का जिक्र अपनी रिपोर्ट में नहीं किया है लेकिन 2015 की रिपोर्ट का हवाला दे तो सबसे ज्यादा आत्महत्या कर्ज में डूबने के कारण ही हुई थीं और वे कर्ज सरकारी बैंकों के थे न कि साहूकारों के। 2015 की रिपोर्ट ने बताया कि 2014 के 1,163 आत्महत्याओं के मुकाबले 2015 में तीन हजार 97 किसानों की आत्महत्याओं का कारण ऋणग्रस्तता रही थी। यानी एक ही साल में इस संकेत में तीन गुना वृद्धि हुई। कृषि-उपज से संबंधित आत्महत्या के आंकड़े भी चौंकाने वाले थे। फसलों के बर्बाद होने से जहां 2014 में 969 किसानों ने आत्महत्या की वहीं 2015 में एक हजार 562 ने। ये आंकड़े चौंकाने वाले इसलिए हैं कि सरकार ने प्रधानमंत्री फसल बीमा

योजना और किसानों की आय दो गुनी करने की सिर्फ घोषणा ही नहीं की बल्कि इसका फायदा किसानों को मिल रहा है इसका दावा भी किया जा रहा है। लेकिन आत्महत्या की प्रवृत्ति में वृद्धि ने इस सरकारी दावा को धता बता दिया है। इतना ही नहीं, राज्य सरकार ने तो महाराष्ट्र के किसानों की आय दो गुनी होने के आंकड़े भी जारी कर दिए थे जबकि एनसीआरबी ने सबसे ज्यादा आत्महत्या की घटनाओं को महाराष्ट्र से ही उजागर किया है। रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक वर्ष 2015 में जिन 4,291 किसानों ने महाराष्ट्र भर में अपनी जान गंवाई उनमें से एक हजार 293 मामले तो ऋणग्रस्तता के थे।

इसी क्रम में राज्यवार आंकड़ों पर गौर करें तो महाराष्ट्र के बाद कर्नाटक दूसरे और मध्यप्रदेश तीसरे स्थान पर है। यह रिपोर्ट कुछ राज्यों के लिए राहत भरी खबर लेकर भी आई है। बिहार, झारखंड, पश्चिम बंगाल आदि कुछ ऐसे खुशाकिस्मत राज्य हैं जहां किसान आत्महत्या का एक भी मामला दर्ज नहीं हुआ



जबकि इनमें बिहार और झारखंड गरीब राज्यों की श्रेणी में आते हैं। इतना ही नहीं, बिहार प्रति व्यक्ति आय में सबसे निचले पायदान पर है। इसलिए यह पता लगाना बेहद जरूरी है कि ऐसे कौन से कारक हैं जिन्होंने यहां के किसानों के सन्न का बांध टूटने नहीं दिया!

गरीबी और बीमारी भी किसानों की आत्महत्या की अहम वजह हैं। ये दोनों ही कारण घटती आय से सीधे जुड़ते हैं। गरीबी के कारण लोग इलाज के लिए ऋण लेते हैं और निम्न आय के कारण ऋण चुका नहीं पाते। नतीजतन, ब्याज बढ़ते रहने के कारण कर्ज एक पहाड़ की मानिंद बढ़ता रहता है जिसके बोझ को किसान सह नहीं पाते। खाद्यान्न उत्पादन में सबसे अग्रणी राज्य पंजाब की बात करें तो एक अध्ययन के अनुसार वहां के करीब 95 प्रतिशत ग्रामीण परिवार कर्ज में डूबे हैं जबकि 96 प्रतिशत ग्रामीण परिवारों की आय खर्च की तुलना में कम है। सवाल है कि यह कौन सी ऐसी आर्थिक नीति है जिसमें

भाषा का जीवन

इस दिन हिंदी को समृद्धि के लिए खूब गुण गाए जाते हैं, संकल्प लिया जाता है। लेकिन इसके बाद पूरे साल हिंदी कहां और किस हाल में रहती है, इससे शायद ही किसी को मतलब होता है।

दरअसल, अमूमन जो बात हमारे जीवन में या तो न के बराबर होती है या लुप्त होती जा रही होती है, उसे अपने को याद दिलाते रहने के लिए लोग एक ‘डे’ यानी ‘दिवस’ मुकर्रर कर लेते हैं। थोड़ा स्पष्ट कहें तो ज्यादातर समाजों में जिन-जिन की अहमियत घटती जाती है, उन सबका ‘दिवस’ मनाया जाने लगता है। मसलन, ‘मदर्स डे’, ‘फादर्स डे’, ‘टीचर्स डे’, ‘वर्कर्स डे’, ‘वीमेस डे’ आदि। शायद उसी भावना के चलते ‘हिंदी दिवस’ मानाने की प्रथा भी चल पड़ी हो। लेकिन हिंदी तो जीवित है, रोजाना की भाषा है और शोर यह है कि दुनिया की तीसरी सबसे ज्यादा इस्तेमाल की जाने वाली भाषा है। हमारे देश में सबसे ज्यादा लोगों द्वारा बोली जाने वाली भाषा है। यह सब है। लेकिन तब ये ‘दिवस’ या ‘डे’ की जरूरत क्यों? इन बातों में उलझने के बजाय हिंदी की दशा और दिशा पर गौर किया जा सकता है।

टीवी में आजकल एंकर या प्रस्तोता बनने के लिए

परदे पर किसी अदाकार की तरह स्टाइल से बात करने और अपने आप को पेश करने करने की योग्यता जरूरी लगती है। भाषायी और दिमागी सक्षमता की इसमें कोई आवश्यकता नजर नहीं आती। इसलिए आप देखेंगे कि मराठी शब्द ‘ताबडतोब’ को टीवी एंकरों ने ‘ताबड़तोड़’ करके अपनी हिंदी में जगह दे दी है। बात-बात में ‘कुल मिला कर’ तकिया कलाम की तरह हो चुका है और उर्दू का शब्द ‘खुलासा’, जिसका लफ्जी मतलब ‘जिस्ट’ होता है, वह ‘एक्सपोजे’ की तरह इस्तेमाल में तबियत से लाया जा रहा है।

फिल्मों में ‘आप जाएंगे’ की जगह ‘आप जाओगे’, ‘कहिए क्या बात है’ की जगह ‘कहें क्या बात है’ का चलन आम है। फिल्मों के दर्शकों को इससे कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता है। उर्दू गजल में अगर बहर, रदीफ, काफिया, जहन का व्यापार है तो हिंदी कविता में भी छंद मीटर, लय आदि का अपना खुसूसी व्याकरण है। हिंदी में कविता के नाम पर ज्यादातर अतुकत लिखा जा रहा है। हालांकि इसका मतलब यह नहीं कि उसमें सार नहीं है। छंदों में जो गीत लिखे जा रहे हैं, वे ज्यादातर कवि सम्मेलनों में तरन्नुम से वाहवाही लूटने वाली प्रवृत्ति से ताल्लुक

अगर ऐसा ही रहा तो हम पांच खरब की अर्थव्यवस्था के लक्ष्य तक कैसे पहुंचेंगे? कहीं यह सपना ही न रह जाए! औद्योगिक उत्पादन की दर 4.3 प्रतिशत तक नीचे पहुंच गई है। कहीं ऐसा न हो कि दूसरे सुधारों के चक्कर में अपनी अर्थव्यवस्था को बिगाड़ लें। वैसे मंदी से निपटने के प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं मगर वे नाकाफी हैं। मंदी से उबरने के लिए प्रभावी कदम शीघ्र ही उठाने होंगे।

- साजिद अली, चंदन नगर, इंदौर, मध्यप्रदेश**

जलवायु की चिंता
इन दिनों लगभग पूरा विश्व जलवायु परिवर्तन के संकेत का

इसमें दो राय नहीं कि हम तेजी से विकास कर रहे हैं। कुछ काम तो ऐसे हो रहे हैं जो सालों से नहीं हुए थे। मगर इस समय जो मंदी आई है उससे हर कोई परेशान है। उद्योग-व्यापार बुरे दौर से गुजर रहे हैं। पहले ही हमारे यहां बेरोजगारी चरम पर है और कर्मचारियों की छंटनी छह वर्षों के अधिकांश स्तर पर है। 75 फीसद रोजगार देने वाले चारों सेक्टर खराब दौर से गुजर रहे हैं। यहां तक कहा जा रहा है कि सतर वर्षों में वित्तीय क्षेत्र की ऐसी हालत कभी नहीं रही है। रिजर्व बैंक से रुपए लेने पड़े हैं।

किसी स्थान विशेष की लगभग पूरी ही आबादी इस प्रकार का दयनीय जीवन व्यतीत करने को विवश है? यह भविष्य के किसी भयावह तूफान की आहट तो नहीं?

कृषि की बदतर हालत के कारण किसान अपने बच्चों को खेती के बजाय कोई नौकरी करने की सलाह देते हैं और यही कारण है कि एक बड़ी आबादी गांवों से शहर की ओर लगातार पलायन कर रही है। यह तस्वीर भाव के भविष्य के लिए खतरे की घंटी है, क्योंकि जब हमारे अन्नदाता ही नहीं होंगे तो हम खाएंगे क्या? दूसरी ओर देखें तो किसानों की आत्महत्याओं से शासन को एक राजनीतिक संदेश जाता है, लेकिन बदकिस्मती से हमारे नेता इन पर सिर्फ सहानुभूति प्रकट करते आए हैं और उन्होंने ऐसी नीतियां बनाई हैं जिनसे आर्थिक मुश्किलें ही पैदा हुई हैं। आखिर प्रधानमंत्री फसल बीमा योजना, डीडी किसान चैनल, मृदा स्वास्थ्य कार्ड योजना आदि किस काम के हैं जब आत्महत्या का सिलसिला रुकने का नाम ही नहीं ले रहा है? स्वाभाविक है कि सभी योजनाएं सिर्फ कागजों तक सीमित हैं, इसलिए अनेक योजनाओं को शुरू करने के बजाय मौजूदा योजनाओं को ही धरातल पर क्रियान्वित करने की आवश्यकता है। पिछले दो दशकों में तीन लाख से ज्यादा किसानों ने मौत को गले लगाया है। कारण साफ है कि इस दौरान की सरकारें हमारे अन्नदाताओं की समस्याओं को दूर करने में नाकाम रही हैं। इसके मद्देनजर किसानों की मनोवैज्ञानिक काउंसलिंग पर जोर देने की जरूरत है। इसके पीछे विचार यह है कि संकट की घड़ी में किसान को यह महसूस न होने दिया जाए कि वह बिल्कुल अकेला है।

अक्सर सुनने को मिलता है कि किसान कौटनाशक खाकर आत्महत्या कर लेते हैं। ब्रिटेन में ऐसी नीति मौजूद है जिसके तहत वहां खतरनाक कौटनाशकों पर प्रतिबंध लगाया गया है और बंदूक को पहुंच से बाहर कर दिया गया है। चीन में छोटे और सीमांत किसानों को ब्याजमुक्त या निम्न ब्याज दरों पर कर्ज दिया जाता है। श्रीलंका में भी एक बेहद अच्छी नीति अपनाई गई है जहां कृषि कर्ज का उपयोग केवल कृषि में किया जाता है। किसान उस पैसे का प्रयोग शादी वगैरह में नहीं कर सकते। इसके अलावा, देश में अनुबंध कृषि को प्रोत्साहन देने की जरूरत है। अनुबंध कृषि में कई खेतों को मिला कर खेती की जाती है जिससे जोत का आकार बढ़ जाता है। इससे न केवल अनुबंध खेती करने वाली कंपनी बल्कि किसानों को भी अच्छा मुनाफा होता है। समझना होगा कि जोत का छोटा आकार भी खेती में घाटे की बड़ी वजह है। बहरहाल, सरकार को खेती-किसानी के मामले में निरंतर गंभीर रहने की जरूरत है, केवल दिखावटी और छिटपुट प्रयास से हालात नहीं बदलने वाले।

जलवायु परिवर्तन

रखते हैं। कुछ दिनों से फिल्मों में कुछ नए और उदार या ‘लिबरल’ शब्द चल पड़े हैं, मसलन, ‘बैंड बज गैंग’ और इसी भाव के कुछ दूसरे शब्द, जिनके अर्थ निश्चित ही असुविधाजनक हैं, लेकिन उनका प्रयोग आम होता जा रहा है। चूंकि ऐसे शब्दों को बोलते हुए लोकप्रिय सितारों को सिखाया जाता है, इसलिए ये शब्द आम लोगों में भी सामान्य हो चुके हैं। एक जमाना गुलशर, जब हिंदी वाले अपने ‘अंक’ तो अंग्रेजी में तब्दील कर ही चुके हैं और हिंदी अब आमतौर पर विज्ञापन बेचने की भाषा हो गई है, जिसकी लिपि ज्यादातर अंग्रेजी है। इसमें कोई शक नहीं कि हिंदी बढ़ रही है। हिंदी हमारी भाषा है। यही एक भाषा है जो हम सबको एक दूसरे से जोड़ने में सक्षम है, लेकिन इसके स्तर, मूल्य और प्रारूप पर जो प्रहार हो रहा है, उसे भी पहचानने की जरूरत है। चूंकि हिंदी एक बीमार स्थिति में पहुंच गई है और अंग्रेजी के मुकाबले फैशन में नहीं रही है, शायद यही वजह है कि इसके लिए एक दिवस मुकर्रर करके निबट जाने का नाम हिंदी दिवस रख दिया गया है। हिंदी अगर हमारी भाषा और संस्कृति है तो हमें इस पर गर्व भी होना चाहिए और इसके गिरते स्तर को फिर से उठाने का प्रयास भी करना चाहिए।

परिवर्तन रोकने के लिए 100 अरब डालर जुटाए जाएंगे। भारत ने भी अप्रैल 2016 में औपचारिक रूप से इस समझौते पर हस्ताक्षर किए थे।

यहां गौरतलब है कि चीन (27 फीसद) के बाद अमेरिका (15 फीसद) ग्रीन हाउस गैसों का उत्सर्जन करने वाला विश्व में दूसरा सबसे बड़ा देश है। अमेरिका के पेरिस समझौते से अलग होने का सबसे बड़ा प्रभाव जलवायु परिवर्तन को नियंत्रित करने के लिए प्राप्त होने वाले वित्तीय संसाधनों पर पड़ेगा। लिहाजा, उसकी अनुपरिस्थिति में समझौते के लक्ष्यों पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव पड़ सकता है। अमेरिका के इससे अलग होने पर अन्य देशों पर अत्यधिक वित्तीय भार बढ़ सकता है। ऐसा करने से अमेरिका की अंतरराष्ट्रीय छवि पर भी आंच अएगी क्योंकि इससे वह चीन और यूरोपीय संघ को वैश्विक नेतृत्व का मौका देगा।

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भीड़ की हिंसा
बीते कुछ वर्षों में जिस तरह भीड़-हिंसा बढ़ी है, वह जाने-अनजाने समाज के प्रत्येक व्यक्ति को अपनी जद में ले रही है। किसी अजनबी को बच्चा चोर बताकर, किसी मानसिक रोगी स्त्री को डायन बताकर, प्रेमी जोड़ों को समाज के विरुद्ध बता कर सजा देने का प्रयास करना भीड़ हिंसा है। दिल्ली की अदालत में पार्किंग विवाद के बाद कई जगह हिंसा फैली वह भी भीड़ हिंसा का ही भाग है, जिसने कानून की समझ रखने वाले वकीलों और पुलिस को अपनी जद में ले लिया और देखते-देखते यह विवाद अन्य शहरों तक चला गया। पुलिस और वकील समाज का वह तबका है जो कानूनी समझ और प्रक्रिया के माध्यम से जनता को व्यंग्य दिलाता है, पर जब वह भी इस तरह भीड़ हिंसा का हथियार बन जाएगा तो अन्य लोगों से क्या अपेक्षा की जा सकती है?

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