

Why MNCs are changing their India tune

The reasons are myriad — maturing of markets, change in business strategy — but there is a clear indication that global firms are not willing to tolerate any more slack in India



ACROSS THE BOARD

SHAILESH DOBHAL

If you are someone who has watched multinational firms' India play in the heady days of the 1990s and

2000s, the current goings-on are a big let-down. Back then, for the globetrotting MNCs India was the last El Dorado, to be conquered and won at all cost. Though China, another big consumer market, also beckoned, it was considered "taken", by either government-led local firms or other MNC peers.

No wonder most played the Indian market much in the PGA Tour's *Together Anything's Possible* style, their ambition not constrained by money, men or material. The liberalisation and globalisation-led 90s and noughties was a time when western capital markets were infatuated with a strong emerging market play, and fortunes

were made or lost on mere mention of whether the firm was going in or out of India!

Global firms poured money into India as if there was no tomorrow, and often chased losing, thin on strategy ideas and projects that they would have been loath to back in most developed markets. It was clear that there was a huge error in estimating the true size of the addressable Indian market, and some correction in expectations did happen in the 2000s and later, but most kept the faith and the purse strings open.

Something has changed dramatically of late. Though in the past four-five years alone, there have been some flight out of the

country by MNCs — such as French retailer Carrefour closing down its cash-and-carry business in 2014 or Japanese drugmaker Daiichi Sankyo exiting India in 2015 — it is not so much a Quit India movement as yet. More like an expectation that India has to start behaving like any other market and stand up on its own and stop depending on the parent's largesse. The reasons are myriad. For some, it is the global strategy at play, but for most it is India-specific issues like regulatory overhang, underperformance of the market or the inability to compete in perhaps of the world's most complex market.

After pouring over ₹1 trillion in the last decade or so, British tel-

co Vodafone announced last week that it has finally closed the funding spigot to its gasping Indian subsidiary, and is ready to face... well... even exit from the country if it comes to that. One of the earliest MNC carmakers into India, American Ford Motors has agreed to take a junior role in a partnership with local automaker Mahindra & Mahindra for its struggling operations in India. Why, even General Motors is learned to be looking for buyers for its only remaining factory in India in Pune.

Though not as dramatic as a retreat from India, there is clear change of tack among many others across sectors. Time was when American beverages major Coca-Cola was gobbling bottlers in India, and writing down losses it had run up to fuel its aggressive take-markets-at-all-cost strategy. Now, the firm

is reportedly hawking those bottling plants to its franchise bottlers in order to generate cash.

Japanese investor SoftBank, after pouring in almost \$10 billion in Indian startups, including nine unicorns, is demanding all new funding to be linked to time-bound public exits or the chance to sell stake to any willing buyer. Singed by huge losses run up by its Vision Fund globally due to unprofitable bets on WeWork and Uber, SoftBank, according to venture capital tracing firm Tracxn, has not put even a single dollar in new investment in India this year! And after a bitter separation with its partner for half of the country, McDonald's has now reportedly put stricter rules for prospective new partners with no leeway to take the operations public and to hypothecate the operating company's shares to the parent.

Prime position for secondary steel

The steel scrap recycling policy has opened the door for large steelmakers to enter the recycling business and meet steel demand in a sustainable manner

KUNAL BOSE

Tata Steel made all its 16.81 million tonnes (mt) of crude steel in India last year through the primary blast furnace-basic oxygen furnace (BF-BOF) route. The company's production capacity at Kalinganagar in Odisha is being enhanced from 3 mt to 8 mt by way of installing a 5,800 cubic metre BF, to be the largest in the country. Its entire targeted capacity expansion to 30 mt by 2025 is likely to be produced via the BF-BOF channel. Even then, Tata Steel acknowledges the secondary sector that includes electric arc furnaces (EAFs) and induction furnaces (IFs) where ferrous scrap is the principal raw material will have an important role in meeting the country's growing demand for steel in a "sustainable manner."

Citing examples of many countries where "very efficient" relatively small plants in the secondary sector exist focusing on production of "very high quality special steels" in small lot sizes of "40 to 80 tonnes," Tata Steel CEO and Managing Director TV Narendran says: "We in India need to have a very strong secondary sector... There are roles that are specially cut out for the secondary sector like servicing customers who will be difficult to reach for the primary sector. I don't think the country's steel industry can prosper with just a few large steel plants. Ideally, the primary and secondary sectors should grow in parallel and both will have to be world class in efficiency, cost and product quality."

Though not the first to be off the block in steel recycling business — that

honour goes to a Mahindra and MSTC joint venture, which already has in operation two units in Greater Noida and Chennai — Tata Steel is making an entry into scrap recycling business to give a push to formalising the steel scrap generation industry for the benefit of secondary sector. The 500,000-tonne recycling plant that Tata Steel is building near Delhi on build, own and operate basis will be ready for commissioning during this financial year. Steel recycling is part of the company's attempt to generate 30 per cent revenue from non-core businesses. Many are seeing in Tata Steel's entry into recycling work the first step to build secondary mills in different

parts of India to tap markets far removed from Jamshedpur and Kalinganagar. Smaller mills will enable the company to make small parcels according to requirements of buyers.

The many recent pronouncements by steel minister Dharmendra Pradhan and steel secretary Binoy Kumar highlight the point that for the first time the central government will be closely working with the states to develop a steel hub covering Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal to address effectively industry issues concerning raw materials security, logistical hindrances, credit requirements and skills development. Attempts will be made to use the hub for production of high value added steel with the secondary sector playing a major role in the quest. The new initiative coincides with release of a "robust" steel scrap pol-

icy whose implementation will prove to be a "game changer" for steel's secondary sector, according to Kumar. In any case, the secondary sector already has a major presence in the industry, capacity-wise. During 2018-19, the combined production of crude steel by EAFs and IFs was 56.48 mt. This constituted 53 per cent of that year's total output of 106.56 mt, the remaining 50.08 mt coming from BF-BOF units. Considering the usefulness of EAFs and IFs in giving a boost to steel use by their sheer presence in proximity to present and potential market, the 2017 steel policy recommends for secondary sector a share of 35 to 40 per cent of India's targeted steelmaking capacity of 300 mt by 2030-31.

The country has 47 EAFs and 1,128 IFs and their combined capacity is around 75 mt. No one will doubt Indian entrepreneurial intelligence in seizing investment opportunities in the steel secondary sector provided of course there is some degree of raw material security — in the present case, it is about



steel scrap. After all, in the past, businessmen here, seeing the country's growing dependence on imports of metallurgical coal, built sponge iron capacity of 50 mt, the world's largest, based on local non-coking coal and gas? A case of turning a problem into an opportunity.

New Delhi is hopeful that the implementation of the newly announced steel scrap recycling policy will make the country self-reliant in ferrous scrap by 2030. Sufficient investments will be forthcoming in the secondary sector for capacity to rise, according to steel policy. At any point in what proportion EAFs and IFs will be using scrap and sponge iron will depend on their prices. The fact that the government is found rigorous in enforcing quality for most steel products will explain the growing industry preference for imported scrap. This is in spite of a 2.5 per cent import duty on foreign origin scrap.

India is spending around ₹24,500 crore a year for steel scrap imports, the shortfall in domestic supply vis a vis

demand being 7 mt. Now that the scrap-page policy, which has laid ground for promotion of collection, dismantling and processing of end-of-life vehicles, a major source of pollution in our cities, consumer durables and plant and machinery on scientific lines, secondary steelmakers can breathe easy. Steel is also aluminium and copper are infinitely recyclable and all these metals retain their inherent quality on their being repeatedly recycled. Tackling greenhouse gas emission (GHGE) in a major way when steel is made from scrap and resources conservation involving iron ore, coal and limestone are principal drivers for scrap recycling. But environmental sanctity is compromised if dismantling of vehicles and other machines is not done in a sufficiently large gated compound and the subsequent work of baling and shredding is carried out manually with workers exposed to grave health risk.

Secondary producers are making a reasonable demand that they should be able to procure high quality scrap locally to be able to produce steel for use by quality demanding sectors such as automobile and machine building. This will be fulfilled as likes of Tata Steel, Maruti-Toyota and Mahindra-MSTC emerge as major players in steel recycling. Leading steelmaking countries such as China, Japan and the US are relentless in their pursuit of using more and more scrap in producing the metal finding application in the more demanding sectors. Driven by growing restrictions on GHGE, Chinese mills in the first half of 2019 raised its steel scrap use by 20.7 per cent to 103.28 mt from 85.57 mt in the same period last year. India will have to catch up fast.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Chit or cheat?



The Lok Sabha on Monday took up a discussion on the Chit Funds (Amendment) Bill. Among Lok Sabha members who participated in the discussion, the YSR Congress Party's (YSRCP's) Raghu Ramakrishna Raju Kanumuru (pictured) demanded a change in the nomenclature of not just the Bill but also in the way these schemes were named. The MP from Andhra Pradesh's Narsapuram constituency said the word "chit" was being pronounced "cheat", which was reducing the importance of such schemes for people with no banking facilities. He said the name "chit fund" should be changed to "fraternity fund".

Gujral's centenary

The 100th birth anniversary of former prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral is on December 4. His son Naresh Gujral and the rest of his family will have a function at the India International Centre, New Delhi. Naresh Gujral is a Rajya Sabha member of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), an ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Gujral senior, who passed away in 2012, was in the Congress and then in the Janata Dal. For the function, those invited to speak are former president Pranab Mukherjee, former prime minister Manmohan Singh, former vice-president M Hamid Ansari, and Congress leader Karan Singh. Given Gujral senior's interest in diplomacy and his stints as India's ambassador to Moscow and as the country's external affairs minister, there will be a discussion on India's foreign policy titled "Continuity and Change". Four former foreign secretaries Shivshankar Menon, K Raghunath, Kanwal Sibal, and Shyam Saran will participate in the discussion.

Proposal drowned

Computer Baba, self-proclaimed godman and chairman of the river trust for the Narmada-Kshipra and the Mandakini, surprised many when he announced that he would deploy some 2,000 sadhus (monks) on the banks of rivers in Madhya Pradesh to stop illegal mining. He said: "We will surprise the sand mafia." The plan was to deploy four to eight groups of 250 to 300 sadhus each on the banks of the state's many rivers. His scheme was shot down by the government. Mining Minister Pradeep Jaiswal jettisoned the plan, saying, "Computer Baba is a religious figure and chairman of a trust but he has nothing to do with mines and the minerals department." Jaiswal said he should stick to "babagiri" and refrain from getting involved in the operations of government departments.

ON THE JOB

A triple whammy in November?



MAHESH WAS

From a growth perspective, an increasing labour participation is more important than a falling unemployment rate. It is important to increase the number of people willing to work. If fewer people are willing to work, a low unemployment rate is meaningless. This is because the unemployment rate is merely the proportion of those that are willing to work who cannot find jobs.

Compared to global standards, India has a very low labour participation rate and now, it also has a high unemployment rate. This is a classic double whammy. And to this, we can now add the misery of a rising inflation rate. Is there something called a triple whammy? In the world of medicine, the term is associated with renal failure.

This dispiriting opening para is inspired by the early signs of labour market stress in November 2019. Besides the worrisome rise of inflation and the elevated unemployment rate, we now also see a fall in the labour participation rate.

The first half of November 2019 saw a sharp fall in the labour participation rate (LPR). In August, September and October, labour participation rate was a little over 43 per cent. This was an improvement over the preceding six months.

In comparison, the labour participa-

tion rate in the weeks ended November 3, November 10 and November 17 was 41.6 per cent, 42.6 per cent and 41.8 per cent. The rate seems to be heading below 42 per cent in November.

In November 2018, the LPR was 42.8 per cent.

If the LPR ends below 42 per cent in November 2019, it would be the lowest LPR witnessed since 2016.

Weekly data is volatile and it is not wise to generalise from the dip seen in just one week as was seen in the week ended November 3. But the week ended November 17 has once again fallen to sub-42 per cent levels. This warrants some concern regarding the strength of the recovery in the LPR seen in the past few months.

The LPRs in August, September and October 2019 were systematically higher than the levels recorded in the corresponding months of 2018. This is the first time we have seen such a sustained year-on-year increase in the LPR. This was sufficient to start believing in a possible revival of the LPR after a long period of steady fall and then an equally long period of stagnation at low levels. Very early signs of November threaten this belief.

The fall in labour participation in the week ended November 3 was concentrated in rural India. Here, the LPR fell 204 basis points from 44.2 per cent in the week ended October 27 to 42.2 per cent in the week ended November 3. Rural LPR did recover in the week of November 10 to 43.3 per cent but, it fell again to 42.9 per cent in the week ended November 17.

In urban India, the LPR fell only marginally in the week ended November 3. But, it fell sharply in the week ended November 17. This fall was a steep 155 basis points from 41.1 per cent to 39.6 per cent.

Data of the first half of November 2019 also show a sharp fall in the employment rate. This implies that

there is either a shrinking of employment in the month or at least a slower growth in employment compared to the growth in working age population.

The average employment rate in the three weeks that ended in November 2019 was 38.8 per cent. If the month ends with an employment rate less than 39 per cent, it would be the lowest employment rate recorded since 2016 when we began measuring labour statistics.

The employment rate has fallen in rural and urban India. The fall in urban India appears to be more worrisome than the one in rural India.

Urban employment rate appeared to have bottomed out in August 2019 at 36.9 per cent. It inched up a bit to 37 per cent in September 2019 and then, it shot up to 37.4 per cent in October. Now, in the first half of November, it seems to have slipped again to less-than 37 per cent.

The long-term trend of the employment rate in urban India is one of steady decline. August and September 2019 had provided hopes of some respite from this. However, November 2019 could belie these implying a continuation of a long term trend of falling employment rates.

Unlike urban India, the country side has seen a somewhat volatile stabilisation of the employment rate in the past 14 months. The employment rate had declined steadily from 43 per cent in November 2017 to 40.8 per cent in August 2018. Thereafter, the employment rate has remained around this level with substantial month-to-month variations. It is possible to read the decline in rural employment rate in November as part of these monthly variations.

Nevertheless, early indications of a decline in overall labour participation and employment rates in November is worrisome.

The author is the MD & CEO of CMIE

LETTERS

Early detection crucial



This refers to "All you wanted to know about banking frauds" (November 18). At a time when the banking sector, particularly the government-owned banks, are hamstrung by the under-terred incidents of bad assets, controlling and addressing the credit-related frauds is crucial to protecting the banks from financial and credibility damages. Despite robust systems to ensure preventive vigilance, the banks fail to prevent the occurrence of frauds which indicates that the strong involvement of the staff nullifies the existing prevention measures. While loans and advances are more prone to frauds, banks should keep a watch on the activities of the concerned staff who are dealing with the borrowers of the bank.

Beginning from the receipt of an application for credit facilities to the liquidation of the loan, there are various phases which are vulnerable and that enables fraudsters to cheat the bank. The risk factors vary with the nature and type of loan, the economic activity of the borrower and the securities offered or available to the lender. As such, any flaws in the observation of the prescribed checks and balances defeat the due diligence and taking advantage of the situation and the loopholes, the fraudsters are cheating the banks. Despite the

importance of watching the early warning signals and accordingly red-flagging the loans, many a time these are wilfully or unintentionally ignored and cause losses to the bank.

Banks must scrupulously observe all the systems and procedures prescribed for the conduct of the banking activities. Violation of the norms by the functionaries have often jeopardised the interest of the bank and exacerbated the losses. Early detection and reporting the frauds to the banking regulator and to the investigating or enforcement agencies are imperative to curtail losses as well as to retain the confidence of all the stakeholders.

VSK Pillai Kottayam

Hydra-headed problem

This refers to the editorial "Saving the telecom sector" (November 18). Vodafone and Airtel posting mammoth losses aggregating ₹74,000 crore in Q2 of this year is a matter of deep concern. These two service providers also have to pay up cumulative licence fees and spectrum user charges around ₹1 trillion within a short period of time. This will likely result in these two companies folding up and the users will be facing a monopolistic situation. Monopolies resort to all sorts of anti-consumer actions like predatory pricing, restrictive practices, poor service etc with no other options for hapless consumer. If these two companies

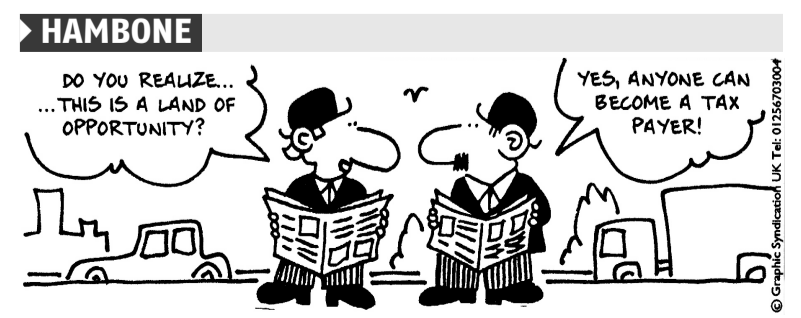
close down, it will badly impact the balance sheets of the banks who have lent to them. The financial system cannot afford another massive hit after the PSB saga, NBFC/HFC problems and urban cooperative bank fiasco. It will result in massive big job losses and hit associated businesses. The international image of the country will take a serious beating at a time when there is growth slump and high unemployment.

Reckless competition is also responsible for this situation. There is a need for the concerned regulatory body to examine whether unfair practices are being followed in the industry. Assets and businesses of these two companies which are unrelated to their core activities need to be hived off.

The government must allow for the payments of dues (by these telcos) to be staggered and penalties and interest need to be waived, if possible. It cannot allow the golden goose to be killed. The government has wisely decided to examine this issue. Something meaningful needs to be done quickly lest it will be like bolting the stable door after the horses have fled. unemployment.

Arun Pasricha New Delhi

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Beyond deposit insurance

Mechanism should be economically viable

The central board of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is expected to raise the deposit insurance limit from ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh. This should be welcomed as it will cover most retail depositors of banks. As reported by this newspaper, a new scheme is also likely to be considered to cover wholesale deposits up to ₹25 lakh. Besides, two other important proposals are expected to be examined. First, it could allow banks to obtain deposit insurance over and above the enhanced limit for both individual and institutional depositors. If implemented, it will help boost confidence, especially in the private sector banks, and help strengthen financial stability. Second, the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) will create a separate reserve to protect depositors of banks hit by frauds, such as in the Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank. However, it has been reported that the premium paid for deposit insurance will not be increased from the current level of 10 paise per ₹100 worth of deposits. The banking regulator should examine the proposal carefully and make sure the insurance mechanism remains economically viable.

It is reassuring that the central bank is looking for ways to protect the interests of depositors. However, it is also important to address other issues related to deposit insurance. The biggest beneficiaries of deposit insurance are cooperative banks, while over 90 per cent of the premium is paid by commercial banks. What this essentially means is commercial banks are paying for the failures of state governments in regulating cooperative banks. For instance, between 2009-10 and 2018-19, over 400 claims from cooperative banks were settled, compared with only one from commercial banks. Now with the increase in deposit insurance, the payout might go up significantly. It is also likely that a class of depositors would want to keep more money in cooperative banks because of higher interest rates.

Thus, it is important to review the regulatory architecture of cooperative banks. The present system of dual regulation by state governments and the central bank is not working. Also, it is worth reassessing whether the Indian financial system needs so many cooperative banks. They served a purpose in the past, but are perhaps not relevant anymore with the expansion of commercial banking and adoption of technology. In fact, with a lack of expertise and capital, it will become increasingly difficult for cooperative banks to compete and survive in the changing financial landscape. Therefore, the presence of cooperative banks must be reassessed and reforms should be implemented in an orderly fashion. Some of the better-run cooperative banks could be merged and converted into small finance or commercial banks.

The central bank must also strengthen its own regulatory and banking oversight capabilities, so that vulnerabilities in the banking system are addressed in time. For example, the fraud in PMC Bank remained undetected for years and was known only after the management itself wrote to the regulator. Therefore, to protect the interests of depositors, the government and the banking regulator need to do a lot more than just raising the deposit insurance limit.

Sri Lankan reset

Gotabaya's election presents challenges and opportunities

India's foreign-policy establishment is unlikely to have viewed with equanimity the election of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the feisty former wartime defence minister, to the Sri Lankan presidency. But the development is not entirely negative from India's point of view. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the first leaders to tweet his congratulations to the brother of a former president (Mahinda Rajapaksa) with whom he scarcely enjoyed warm relations, a strong signal that the Indian government was keen to reset relations with the island-nation's most powerful political family. Indeed, it is a little-known fact that as defence minister, the younger Rajapaksa enjoyed a positive engagement with the Indian establishment during the civil war against Tamil separatists. India also conspicuously chose to remain an observer in these polls, addressing a major grievance voiced by Mahinda Rajapaksa of poll interference in 2014. The opportunities to build on this relationship, then, are manifold, not least because of the natural personal affinities between two "strong" leaders and the fact that India's current foreign minister had wide experience in Sri Lanka during his Indian Foreign Service days.

For India, however, China is the biggest elephant in the Sri Lankan island. On Mahinda Rajapaksa's watch, the country became the biggest foreign investor in Sri Lanka. Through his successor, Maithripala Sirisena, sought to leaven that relationship — not least by signing an agreement with India and Japan to develop a deep-sea container terminal at Colombo port — he could do little to stem the tide. Under him, China took over the strategic Sri Lankan port of Hambantota, and has moved ahead with plans to develop an international financial centre near Colombo, which could eclipse Gandhinagar. Gotabaya Rajapaksa is reliably expected to augment this relationship. India can do little to alter these facts on the ground. By incrementally building on the strong ties between the two countries, New Delhi could usefully strengthen the relationship. For instance, one little-noticed fact is that air connectivity between the two countries has grown exponentially over the past few years — one in four tourists to the island nation is Indian — and there has been closer integration between India's southern states and Sri Lanka in terms of student exchanges and ferry services. India is also Sri Lanka's largest trading partner, and the opportunity to augment a Free Trade Agreement signed in 2000 with a wider Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement has the potential to bind the two countries beyond the trade in goods.

Apprehension also arises over Mr Rajapaksa's overt ethnic nationalism, evident from the fact that none of the Tamil-speaking areas of the north and Muslim-dominated east — the two groups that account for a fifth of the population — voted for him. It is also significant that Mr Rajapaksa chose to be sworn in at Anuradhapura, capital of an ancient Sinhala civilisation closely associated with Buddhism, and emphasised national security as a priority in his inaugural speech. His message was, no doubt, addressed to the IS terrorists who orchestrated attacks on tourists earlier this year but the optics for Tamil minorities would not have been reassuring. India has the opportunity to play a moderating hand. It has already played a role in building housing for war-displaced people in the north. In short, emphasising a positive agenda would go a long way in tackling the challenges embedded in the Indo-Sri Lankan relationship.

THE EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE

	2004-05	2011-12	2017-18
Unemployment rate (%)	2.3	2.2	6.1
Youth (15-29) unemployment rate (%)	5.4	6.1	17.8
Labour force participation rate (LFPR) (%)	63.7	55.9	49.8
Female LFPR (%)	42.7	31.2	23.3
Total employment (millions)	459	474	465
Youth (15-29) not in labour force, education/training (NLET) (millions)	70	84	100
Share of agriculture in employment (%)	58.3	48.8	44.1
Share of industry (including construction) in employment (%)	17.5	24.2	25.0
Share of regular salaried workers in employment (%)	14.4	17.9	22.8
Share of self-employed and casual labour in employment (%)	85.6	82.1	77.2
Percentage of regular salaried workers in non-agriculture with no written job contract	59.1	64.7	71.1

Note: All employment data are on Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status (UPSS) basis. Sources: PLFS (2017-18) and Santosh Mehrotra and Jajati Parida, "India's Employment Crisis: Rising Education Levels and Falling Non-agricultural Job Growth", Centre for Sustainable Employment Working Paper 2019-04, Azim Premji University.

The jobs crisis worsens

Economic slowdown is only partially to blame for the rise in unemployment. The principal reason is weak policies

India's large and growing working age population, currently numbering close to a billion, is her greatest potential resource for rapid and sustained economic development. Sixteen years ago, I had warned that this demographic dividend could be squandered in the absence of the right policies (*Business Standard*, November 25, 2003, "Can India grow without Bharat?", republished in 2007 by Academic Foundation in a book with the same title). Since then, successive governments have persisted with wrong or weak policies and programmes, including a poor public education and skilling system; an extremely complex and anti-job-creation maze of labour laws; trade and exchange rate policies that discourage labour-using exports and import-competing domestic production; poor infrastructure that undermines productivity and connectivity; a chronically weak edifice of public sector banks; and avoidable major policy shocks like demonetisation. The recently published (June 2019) Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2017-18 brings out the dismal consequences.

The table shows the serious worsening of India's employment situation in the 13 years between 2004-05 and 2017-18, according to nearly all key indicators, especially after 2011-12:

- The open unemployment rate has almost tripled since 2011-12 to 6.1 per cent. Since the poor can rarely afford to be unemployed, much of this increase reflects a surge in educated unemployed.
- The youth (15-29) unemployment rate has also tripled to an unprecedented 17.8 per cent in 2017-18, reflecting the growing paucity of jobs.

Interestingly, and as one would expect, the youth unemployment rate in 2017-18 rose steeply with the level of education, from 7.1 per cent for illiterates to 14.4 per cent for secondary school and further to a staggering 36 per cent for graduates and post-graduates. This data is fraught with potential for serious social and economic distress and discontent.

- Perhaps even more distressing than the trends in open unemployment are those in labour force participation rates (LFPR). This refers to the ratio of those employed or seeking employment to the working age population (above 15). The LFPR has fallen substantially, from 64 per cent in 2004-05 to just below 50 per cent in 2017-18. That means less than half of India's working age population have jobs or are seeking work!

- Unsurprisingly, total employment in India actually fell by a few million between 2011-12 and 2017-18, for the first time since 1972-73, when the official national sample surveys of employment conditions was first conducted.

- Much of the decline in the overall LFPR is because of a steep fall in the female LFPR, from 43 per cent in 2004-05 to a pathetic 23 per cent in 2017-18. This compares poorly with female LFPRs (in 2018) of 61 per cent in China, 52 per cent in Indonesia and 36 per cent in Bangladesh. Nor can this precipitous decline in female LFPR be explained away by higher rates of female enrolment in education, since the 20 percentage point drop in LFPR is observed among both the 30+ age group (down from 46 per cent to 27 per cent) and female



A PIECE OF MY MIND

SHANKAR ACHARYA

Bad news: What you say doesn't matter

All it took was "loud" allegations from a whistle-blower to knock 16 per cent off the Infosys market value in a single session just about a month ago. To date, the company says there is still no evidence of alleged wrongdoing by the CEO or others. Regardless, the damage to the company's reputation is done. The ₹53,000-crore hit in its market cap and the reputation of the firm and its leaders will take Infosys some years and a lot of outperformance to claw back.

Reputation has become the biggest driver of market and brand value today for investors and customers. For PE funds or mutual funds — reputation is increasingly the touchstone for investment decisions and a leading indicator of true market value.

A 2018 study by Reputation Institute, a global firm, estimated that corporate reputation is now directly responsible for an average of 38 per cent of market capitalisation across the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250; of that the CEO's brand accounted for about 40 per cent of the company's brand. Given the recent falls in some respectable names, one suspects that for the Sensex 30 or Nifty 50, the reputation weightage would be a few notches higher.

While consultants are busy selling fancy environmental, social and governance (ESG) frameworks as the new mantra for "responsible corporations", the reality is that in today's age of media polarisation, reputational damage often trumps a corporate's ESG score.

As ever, equity markets continue to pick up these cues on reputation damage far quicker than

lenders. The futures and cash prices of stocks crash long before the credit ratings start disappearing into the basement, the auditors quit, lenders begin to panic or before PILs are filed or investigators come calling at midnight. And once in the reputation glare, it is difficult for most firms and leaders to extinguish the flames before someone gets badly burnt.

Note the household names — Zee, Yes Bank, DHFL, Jet Airways — whose shares now litter the floors of the bourses, where once they were held in high esteem and rewarded with frenzied valuations. While the underlying causes may be economic and even circumstantial — excessive promoter leverage, ill-conceived expansions or just too much real estate exposure in a country with 0.7 million empty apartments — the reputational injuries suffered may be fatal, as far as customer trust and market valuations are concerned.

So where did blue-chip Infosys err? In her column, "Infosys Forgot Founder's Mantra: When In Doubt, Disclose", senior journalist Menaka Doshi says that the key point is not the allegations per se but the manner in which the company chose not to react or disclose immediately. It was only when two media reports forced their hand, followed by a sharp stock price fall that it merited more detailed explanations from its chairman.

Immediate response and disclosures as well as a rapid and calibrated resolution path are the only defence left for firms today. The other time-tested tactics, like timing the release of bad news after a



THE NUTGRAF

PRADIPTA BAGCHI

youth (down from 37 per cent to a heartbreakingly low 16 per cent). The current and future implications for overall female economic and social empowerment are deeply saddening.

- In their paper last month (see table for full reference), Santosh Mehrotra and Jajati Parida (henceforth MP) attribute the steep declines in India's LFPR to the phenomenon of discouraged workers (they call it "disheartened labour force"); that is job aspirants simply drop out of the labour force because of persistent failure to get jobs. Focusing on youth (15-29), they define this category as equal to the PLFS-based numbers on youth "Not in Labour Force, Education and Training (NLET)". This number has increased from 70 million in 2004-5 to 100 million in 2017-18. Taking their maximalist definition of disheartened labour force to its logical conclusion, and adding NLET both to the usually defined labour force and unemployment, we would have 125 million "unemployed" out of an "adjusted labour force" of about 240 million, giving an "adjusted youth unemployment rate" of 52 per cent in 2017-18! Even if only half the NLET were taken as "disheartened workers", one would get a youth unemployment rate of nearly 40 per cent.

- The trajectory of sectoral employment shares over time also shows distressingly slow shift of labour from low productivity agriculture to higher productivity industry and modern services. Even in 2017-2018, agriculture still accounted for 44 per cent of national employment, much higher than in all other G-20 countries. Worse, the share of industry (including construction) was stagnant between 2011-12 and 2017-18. Most disappointingly, the share of manufacturing stalled at a lowly 12 per cent between 2004-5 and 2017-18.

- The share of self-employed and casual labour in national employment still totals nearly 80 per cent. As Radhicka Kapoor points out ("Understanding India's Jobs Challenge", *www.TheIndiaForum.in*, September 6, 2019), this is worrying for several reasons. These categories are typically characterised by widespread work-sharing arrangements and associated underemployment. They also tend to have low average earnings, often well below recommended levels of the national minimum wage.

- On the plus side, the share of regular salaried workers in employment has risen from 14.4 per cent in 2004-05 to 22.8 per cent in 2017-18. However, the percentage of regular salaried workers in non-agriculture with no written job contract has risen from 59 per cent in 2004-05 to 71 per cent in 2017-18, reflecting rising insecurity even in this category.

- In sum, the jobs situation in India has worsened seriously over the past 15 years. Furthermore, today, in mid 2019-20, it is almost certainly worse than the numbers discussed above, since economic growth has slowed sharply in the 18 months since PLFS (2017-18).

What can be done to reverse the bleak trends outlined above? There is no silver bullet. In fact, there really is no viable alternative to tackling the policy and programme weaknesses sketched in the first paragraph of this column. Until we make serious progress along those lines, the rise in unemployment, underemployment, discouraged workers and job insecurity is likely to continue, with very adverse consequences for the nation's economic well-being and social cohesion.

The writer is honorary professor at ICRIER and former chief economic adviser to the Government of India. Views are personal.

'What happens when madness descends'



BOOK REVIEW

CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

Is the growing discourse around mental health yet another social media fad, or does it reflect that our society has got rid of the stigma attached to mental illness? It is difficult to come up with a pat answer because it can only be based on perception, feeling and conjecture. On the one hand, users of mental health services are openly talking about their diagnoses on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. On the other hand, there are frequent reports about suicide cases involving young people, particularly from marginalised communities.

What is going on?

Side Effects of Living: An Anthology of Voices on Mental Health edited by Jhilmil Breckenridge and Namarita Kathait is a book that you might want to pick up in order to explore these questions. Instead of privileging the expert opinion of academics or mental health practitioners, this anthology gives you direct access to the accounts of people who experience or have experienced mental health distress. There is a rawness to their narratives, which is presented lovingly by the editors who hatched a plan to create this book while speaking about their own journeys over a shared bowl of noodles and hot tea in paper cups after an open mic event on a winter evening in Delhi.

Ms Breckenridge had survived incarceration in a mental institution in the city, whereas Ms Kathait had grown up with a mother who had severe schizophrenia. Their personal histories

kindled a recognition of pain, and a desire to tell the stories they had kept hidden out of sheer shame. They set up a not-for-profit trust called Bhor Foundation, and began to scout for more submissions to this book. It is a moving compendium of writing by contributors from Kolkata, Srinagar, Meerut, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, Delhi, Tehran, and other places.

Ms Breckenridge writes, "Through the stories of survivors, writers, poets and artists, those who have suffered or those who have watched their loved ones suffer, we have tried to make sense of what happens when madness descends, why it descends and what we can do when it does. Is it the result of a chemical imbalance; is it a virus that attacks only a few? Why do some people seem more prone to depression, anxiety and other mental health distress? And can we do anything about it?"

This book challenges the idea of "normalcy" against which society measures individuals. Those who do not fit in are often seen as inconvenient or embarrassing. Many of them are bullied, abused, discarded and gaslighted. Others are treated with kid gloves, sent to shamans, or given unsolicited advice that has no connection with their condition.

Huzaifa Pandit writes about a *pir* in Srinagar who pronounced that his mental health issues could be traced back to a *pari* who was besotted with him. The baba started beating him with a plastic rod to drive away the *pari*. When that did not help, he began to pull Pandit's hair and also bore into his calf with a sharp instrument.

You might assume that people who visit psychologists for therapy or psychiatrists for medication are in a better place but the testimonies in this book show that the treatments prescribed by these professionals do not work for everyone. There are people who have benefited

immensely from their support but there are also multiple instances of expert knowledge being used to invalidate lived realities.

Bharti Manoj was diagnosed with severe depression and borderline personality disorder at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. She writes, "I was given a cocktail of psychiatric drugs. I think I became a guinea pig for them — they constantly experimented with my medication. Sometimes I felt better, sometimes worse." The person experiencing distress is pathologised, reduced to a label describing their condition, and is stripped of their autonomy and agency. What does recovery mean in a context in which the medical-industrial complex determines the fate of a person struggling with mental health issues?

This book questions the construct of recovery as a return to "normalcy". According to the editors, and several contributors, this ideal condition is nothing but a myth that is perpetuated by oppressive social structures. The individual who does not embody the norm is branded

an outlier while the real problem lies with families that cannot accept diversity. The distress these individuals experience might never go away because of the society they live in but they devise ways to manage or reduce their distress.

There are people who choose community care over therapy or medication. They wish to heal through immersion in activities such as writing, gardening, quilting, painting, cooking or hiking. They have the right to decide what to do with their lives, without being subjected to what Mr Breckenridge calls "the ablist lens of a capitalist society which decides on behalf of everyone else." That is the central point of this book. It is made with remarkable conviction and consistency.

SIDE EFFECTS OF LIVING: An Anthology Of Voices On Mental Health

Jhilmil Breckenridge and Namarita Kathait Speaking Tiger, 213 pages, ₹299

The writer is a communications professional

Opinion

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2019

DeMo bump over, taxman needs a new plan, quickly

Compliance levels aren't rising, the demonetisation bump is over, and direct tax buoyancy has fallen dramatically

WITH DIRECT TAX collections rising by just 5.2% in the first six months of FY20, buoyancy has probably fallen to levels last seen in the pre-demonetisation days, and just around 40-45% of the 1.7 or 1.8 that was assumed when the budget was formulated just a few months ago; it is true that, by using the wrong base numbers, the budget over-estimated the FY20 collections, but a below-unity buoyancy is poor by any yardstick. Part of this, of course, was to be expected since, in years when GDP slows, tax buoyancies fall, but a 2.5% growth in corporate taxes and 8.9% in personal income is very poor when you consider that nominal GDP growth in the first half of the year will probably be around 7.5%. Corporate tax buoyancy was around 0.5 in the run-up to demonetisation, jumped to 1.7 in FY18 (the first full year after demonetisation), and is now back to earlier levels. In the case of personal income taxes, buoyancy levels more than doubled to 2.3 in FY17, and are now back to pre-demonetisation levels.

The latest disaggregated data on tax filings for FY18, and slightly less disaggregated data for FY19, suggest that not much has changed in the year. The number of individuals declaring an annual income of over one crore rupees in FY18 was 97,689 according to the latest data; while this is a 20% increase over the number in the previous year, the number is less than a seventh of the total number of *crorepatis* in the country that Price estimated based on its all-India income survey. Of course, and a word of caution here for finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who increased the cess paid by those earning over one crore rupees in the budget, these individuals accounted for a little over 16% of the tax paid by all individuals in FY18; this is also roughly their share of total taxes paid by individuals in the previous year. So, while the need of the day is to get more rich individuals to come out and declare their incomes, and then pay tax on this, the budget's higher surcharge could well see the growth in the number of tax-filers in this category slowing dramatically. As it is, the data for FY19 shows a slowdown in the number of individuals filing returns as compared to the previous year; in terms of the number of returns filed—this includes revised returns for previous years—this actually contracted.

As in past years, most of the tax collected—well over 90%—seems to be coming from tax deduction at source, advance tax, and self-assessment. Less than a tenth—8% in FY19—came from the additions made by the taxman after the returns are assessed. At one level, that is a good thing since it shows the system has become more self-policing, but given the level of tax-evasion, this suggests the income tax department is not able to really go after a large number of tax-evaders despite all the information it is getting through, for instance, its Operation Insight, which combines various databases like credit card payments, foreign visits, etc. If the finance minister chooses to cut income tax rates in the budget, this may help increase tax buoyancy, but if the taxman is not able to send notices to tax-evaders, there may not be much of an improvement in tax collections.

Security and unCERTainty

India needs a central coordinator for its cybersecurity ops

GIVEN HOW THE government appeared to be lacking a clear response on the cybersecurity breach at the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, a central data security agency is an idea whose time has come. In 2017, when NITI Aayog's cybersecurity report was published, there were 36 bodies under different Union ministries, including the Computer Emergency Response Team India (CERT-IN). Each of these bodies has its own reporting structure and response protocol on managing cybersecurity. Now, each of the states has its own CERT, as had been recommended by NITI Aayog, and more cybersecurity cells have been added by central ministries. While the security infrastructure and reach seems to have become robust, a lack of coordination—the Kudankulam episode is proof of this—has left the system performing sub-par. The government, as per a report in *Hindustan Times*, is planning an umbrella organisation for all cybersecurity concerns, emulating the system in place in the UK, the US, and Singapore. To be sure, the government had already created the office of the National Cyber Security Coordinator. But, a central hub for coordination can perhaps ensure more effective action. For instance, in the case of an attack, the central command can immediately be alerted, and then other government agencies can ramp up defences to protect from a further breach. Had the Kudankulam attackers wanted, the breach could have easily crawled from the nuclear power plant to other utilities, shutting down the whole system.

While the Stuxnet attack by the US, affecting nuclear reactors in Iran, spelled out the necessity of cyber defence systems, most countries have since followed a need-based approach to cybersecurity. The Kudankulam attack exposes India's vulnerability. Although the National Cybersecurity Policy 2020—the last one was seven years ago—does address such issues, with more countries and terrorist groups developing cyber warfare tools, there is a need to be more proactive. Suggestions like the inclusion of cybersecurity course in schools and colleges do sound good, but none of them make sense if the government is not able to attract and retain top talent. More important, without cyber-awareness none of the government's initiatives can function correctly. In the absence of a national framework, cyber-awareness has been left to CERT, but the agency's record in pushing awareness has been dismal. In the case of the WhatsApp breach, CERT did inform about software upgrade; it is only when the issue came to light that people paid heed to their circular and advisory. CERT virtually has no presence on social media—and on the platforms it has an account, it activity has little to do with spreading awareness—on Facebook, it last updated its account in July, that too for the promoting a government programme. With the country looking at more connected infrastructure, courtesy the fourth industrial revolution and widespread use of the internet, cybersecurity needs can't be ignored, especially when more government services come to rely on the internet.

Absent CONCERN

MPs and other public officials missing the Parl panel meeting on Delhi pollution violated the trust of citizens

EAST DELHI MP Gautam Gambhir got called out for commentating at a cricket match—he claims the contract was signed much before he got elected—when he should have been attending a meeting called by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Urban Development. More so, since the meeting had been called to discuss the deadly pollution in the national capital region (NCR). But, Gambhir wasn't the only one who neglected his duty as a lawmaker; only four of the 29 MPs who are members of the committee attended the meeting, including Rajya Sabha member from Delhi Sanjay Singh. Crucially, three of the five commissioners of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, and even the Union environment, forests and climate change joint secretary were absent—the ministry had sent a deputy secretary since the joint secretary was expected at a court hearing involving the ministry.

The meeting would have taken up important questions. For instance, whether the government is planning a coherent car pooling policy or regulation in the national capital, if there are reports on how the money allocated by the government for tackling air pollution—₹1,500 crore in the last year alone—has been spent, whether the government has fixed and defined responsibilities for officials in the fight against pollution given the Supreme Court had ruled that officials across all levels will be held responsible for worsening AQI, etc. Given, in the campaign phase, politicians like Gambhir make tall promises on delivering good governance, including better health and a cleaner environment, the very least they can do is to discuss issues that afflict citizens. Such dereliction of duty only sends the signal that votes, not citizens, matter. The absentee lawmakers and officials need to keep in mind that acute respiratory infections accounted for nearly 70% of the morbidity last year.



TERROR TRAIL

Union defence minister Rajnath Singh

It is so much worse when terrorists are aided, abetted, armed, financed and sheltered by states... State-sponsored terrorism is not just a painful cancer, it is also the leading reason for unsustainable security

DIALLING REVIVAL

MINOR REDUCTION OF LEVIES AND/OR RELAXATION OF PAYMENT TERMS ARE ONLY MINOR PALLIATIVES, AND ARE NOT ADEQUATE TO RESTORE THE HEALTH OF THE SECTOR

Telecom needs another great migration

ONCE MORE UNTO the breach, dear friends, once more: Or close the wall up with our English dead... —William Shakespeare

So it is with Indian telecom, which has reeled into yet another major crisis, probably the fourth or fifth in its 25-year history. Once again, there is an urgent need to close the serious 'breach' in telecom. In the past, near-disasters were always averted, and the sector emerged stronger than ever before, rising to scale new peaks of achievement. This time around, the scale of the crisis is much larger, and the jury is still out on whether the sector will be able to repeat its past performance.

The sector was already economically unviable due to fragmented market, steep spectrum price, and heavy levies since long before the recent Supreme Court judgment—in fact, even before the entry of the new standalone 4G operator; therefore, some minor reduction of levies and/or a relaxation of the payment terms will, almost surely, not remedy the situation for even a medium-term. What is needed is a bold, comprehensive, and sustainable solution that fully addresses the basic causes of the deep-rooted malaise plaguing the sector.

Easy payment terms at NPV will keep the full liability on the books, and is just a postponement of the evil. Moreover, a multi-sided remedy is required since any one-sided relief package would inevitably be challenged in court. Judging by precedents in the telecom sector itself, there is a strong likelihood of powerful PILs being filed. A package which provides benefits to all major stakeholders—customers, the government, and the industry—is necessary to ensure it would be a sustainable solution. Industry is also disunited in the matter of relief. Hence, any solution needs to have the buy-in of both camps; otherwise, it could fall soon.

There are significant takeaways from the successful navigation of past crises. The crisis in 1997-1998, when the sector was on the verge of complete collapse, was solved not only through a brand new telecom policy but also, more impor-

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Views are personal



tantly, a brilliant multi-sided migration package to move existing operators to the New Telecom Policy, 1999 (NTP99). The architects of this were Brajesh Mishra, principal secretary, PMO, N K Singh, finance secretary, and Sudheendra Kulkarni, director, Communications & Research, PMO. At the time, PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee was directly in charge of the communications ministry. This was an epoch-making settlement where operators gave up their contractual duopoly rights as well as all their licence-related litigations in court in exchange for migration to NTP99. The results of this "great migration" are for the entire world to see. Mobile tariffs crashed to less than ₹4 per minute from the extremely high rates earlier, and explosive growth of the sector—the envy of many nations—followed.

Even to resolve the next major sectoral crisis, following the disruptive entry, in 2001, of wireless in local loop-limited mobility, the solution, in early 2003, was through a multi-sided settlement, negotiated out-of-court, that sustained. It is important to note that, in both migrations, all stakeholders were willing participants. For a successful resolution of the current crisis, we once again need to have a holistic, multi-sided settlement, and not any quick-fix palliatives. Some thoughts on the features of such a package are shared below.

Scrapping of the current system of licence fee (LF) as a percentage of AGR is a key requirement. A high LF% is a major anachronism. It was appropriate when licence was packaged with spectrum. But, this principle should have been scrapped in 2012 itself, when licence and spectrum were separated, and the latter only allocated through e-auctions. It is universally accepted that, without spec-

trum, licence is a mere piece of paper, not worth anything practically. With spectrum bought in an open and transparent manner, licence fee could be an annual fixed fee that just covers the cost of administration and regulation. This cost is a small figure—currently equal to about 0.1% of the present AGR.

The above-mentioned cost also includes the cost to the wireless planning and coordination department, and that of regulating spectrum. Hence, the current levy of spectrum usage charges as a percentage of AGR also needs to be scrapped.

Although e-auctions have been in vogue since 2010, their results haven't satisfactory for multiple reasons—i) high unsold spectrum (over 40% of the offered spectrum has remained unsold); ii) sold spectrum going only at clearing prices, or very close to reserve prices (RP), i.e., the real market value remains undiscovered. This is due to incorrect auction rules, extremely high RPs, most valuations of spectrum being done on a pro-rata or ad hoc basis instead of from basics by the stipulated methods, errors in calculations, etc. As a result, the auction clearing prices of spectrum have been extraordinarily high, and out of line with international values. Spectrum being the life-blood of telecommunications, these shortcomings need to be addressed to ensure the sector's health. This is probably the most important requirement.

It may be noted that even Dr Rajat Kathuria, chief executive, ICRIER, has opined publicly that spectrum auctions need to be reviewed and corrected.

With spectrum bought in an open, transparent manner, licence fee could be a fixed annual fee, covering just the cost of administration and regulation

The government is apparently already considering a 20-year payment with NPV protected. This is a welcome step, and we do hope it gets finalised. However, we wish to reiterate that while this would be an essential condition of the migration package, it would not be adequate to cure the sector's basic problems. These are minor palliatives that will not cure the intrinsic cancer.

Customers and the public must, above all others, secure a big win since it is they who would ultimately bear the stiff cost of a full-blooded resolution through taxes, etc.

Today, the customer is already enjoying one of the world's lowest retail tariffs for both voice and data. However, if one estimates the total cost of service here, factoring in the level of quality of service and experience, we are probably paying more. Our 4G speeds are, for example, only about one-fourth, or one-fifth of the global level. Our customer grievance handling processes and practices leave much to be desired. The relief package should include some commitments for measurable improvements in this regard. The customer should also get commitments regarding continuation of affordable user tariffs.

Last, but not the least, there could be other specific benefits for the economy and the government. The latter could seek specific commitments regarding on-the-ground contributions to national initiatives like Digital India, Smart Cities, and Rural Broadband. Specific contributions to and commitments regarding key customer-beneficial targets of the government could also be considered.

Telecom is the backbone for many other industries. A robust and competitive telecom sector is essential for the national economy, and big players cannot be allowed to fail. Lasting win-win solutions are possible and, if adopted soon, the sector can surely prosper and rise to higher orbits of excellence.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JNU students' protest

It is unfortunate that students of JNU were prevented from going on a march peacefully; from campus to the Parliament house to present their grievances. The government should have tried to handle the situation without arresting students and beating them up. In true democratic spirit student representatives could have been allowed to meet the PM or the HRD Minister to persuade him the rightness of their demand to roll back the steep fee hike. Now the HRD ministry and the university administration cannot be totally insensitive to their demands and succeed in imposing 'financial burdens' on students. Even ABVP, is up in arms with its demand over the fee hike. Two facts must be appreciated before trying to find fault with the students. If there is no roll-back of the fee as many as 40% of the students in JNU will have to drop out. The HRD ministry and the university administration must pause to think if it is right to deny the bright students from poor families their right to pursue higher education in a university like JNU set up to provide quality education to all. A democratic government is obliged to provide free or subsidised education to students from low income groups. A government so generous to corporates should show a semblance of generosity towards students too. Remember, most of the poor students belong to lower castes. Ideologically, JNU is not on BJP's wavelength; but it is not good enough reason to deny its students free or subsidised education. Unfortunately one prominent BJP leader has called for the shutdown of JNU, betraying his visceral hostility for ideological diversity. The government must seize the opportunity to show that it is indeed pro-poor by a complete roll-back of the fee hike.

— G David Milton, Maruthancode

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Essar ruling eases private equity fears

The judgment sets right the balance between secured and unsecured lenders, and will rekindle hope in the integrity of India's bankruptcy process

ANDY MUKHERJEE

Bloomberg



TWO-AND-A-HALF years after the Indian central bank took the highly unusual step of directing banks to put 12 large corporate debtors into bankruptcy, the most closely watched of the "distressed dozen" cases has finally been resolved.

With the Supreme Court in New Delhi clearing the decks for the sale of Essar Steel India Ltd., the Ruia family has accepted defeat. Control of the 10 million-tonnes-a-year integrated plant in western India will pass to ArcelorMittal, which will pay banks ₹420 billion (\$5.9 billion), or 90% of their claims.

This final episode of a drawn-out legal saga, in which the Ruias made multiple attempts to hold on to their prized asset, was a nail-biter. At the last moment, the bankruptcy tribunal's appellate authority had inexplicably jumped into the fray, and ordered that more of ArcelorMittal's money be given out to unsecured operational creditors and less to secured financial lenders.

India's \$200-billion-plus bad debt mess is starting to attract serious global capital from pension and sovereign funds. Had expected recovery rates of 90% shrivelled to 60%, private equity funds assembling this stock of patient money to take over secured lenders' exposure would have fled. Thankfully, the court restored the power of the creditors' committee to decide who gets what.

It has been a costly delay. When the Reserve Bank of India referred large cases to new bankruptcy tribunals, it was hoping to solve 25% of the country's bad-loan problem in 270 days. There was interest among potential buyers, particularly for steel plants, because global metals demand was

stabilising. But, with missed deadlines, lengthy litigation, and suspected fraud holding back asset sales, liquidation has emerged as the default option, with only 15% of closed insolvency cases ending in a resolution plan.

Alot has changed in India's corporate distress landscape between 2016, when India promulgated its bankruptcy law, and now. For one thing, global demand for steel—and steel assets—is starting to sag. That isn't all. With practically all sectors of India's economy facing a demand funk, there is trouble everywhere, from real estate and roads to power and telecom.

Each industry comes with its own unique challenges. In residential real estate, it is the homeowners' interest that makes creditor coordination difficult. In telecom, the difficulty comes from exorbitant government demands for spectrum fees. The danger of a voluntary bankruptcy filing by Vodafone Idea Ltd. has everyone from investors to the government worried. The mobile operator posted a \$7.1 billion quarterly loss, the worst in India's corporate history.

A new complexity is that creditor institutions themselves—from shadow lenders to small deposit-taking banks—are becoming insolvent, prompting India to extend the bankruptcy law to nonbank lenders as well. This quick fix would further weigh on a system creaking under its case load. A steel plant can preserve value through a lengthy in-

court bankruptcy by utilising its fixed capacity. A lender has to continuously make new loans to stay in business. Without the trust of the financial markets, its enterprise value very rapidly falls to zero. Early liquidation is the best possible outcome for an insolvent lender's creditors seeking to extract value, but it is also the scenario that poses the biggest risk to stability of the existing financial system.

The current law can't solve this dichotomy. Rather than overburdening it, India must keep the bankruptcy tribunal focused on what it can actually handle. A recent example of overreach is the start of an insolvency petition against Aviva Plc's local life insurance joint venture for not paying its landlord. Such things used to happen in Indonesia, where a Jakarta commercial court declared Canadian insurance firm Manulife Financial Corp.'s Indonesian unit bankrupt in 2002, and followed it up two years later by holding Prudential Plc's local business insolvent. A higher court had to reverse those rulings.

By setting right the balance between secured and unsecured lenders, the Essar judgment has scored a win, above all, for common sense. The verdict will rekindle hope in the integrity of India's bankruptcy process, but it will take a lot more work to allay concerns about its effectiveness.

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ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

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● RCEP

Redefining India's trade in services agenda

As India negotiates FTAs with the US, the EU, and explores its options for RCEP, a sound trade in services agenda that addresses both internal domestic regulatory reform and refines its market access expectation, is essential to achieve realistic outcomes

DESPITE THE POLITICAL posturing, the Joint Leaders' Statement on RCEP issued on November 4, leaves the question open on whether or not India will become a party to the RCEP agreement. That the 15 RCEP participating countries (RPCs) did not conclude the deal without India, signals the strategic importance of India being part of the agreement, and leaves open the opportunity for India to leverage that position.

There were several reasons why India has been disillusioned with the terms of the RCEP agreement, one of which is that the RCEP participating countries (RPCs) are not committing adequately to trade in services, especially in areas of India's interests involving the movement of professionals.

Services exports are a growing component of India's GDP. The WTO ranked India as amongst the top ten countries for services trade in 2017. Focusing on this area, therefore, is a good strategy in trade negotiations. Yet, India's trade in services agenda has been unduly focused on "Mode 4", which involves the presence of Indian professionals in another country (such as an Indian IT professional in the US, or an Indian doctor in Australia), engaged in the supply of services. This is the mode of supply which has been riddled with the maximum resistance in many countries, linked as it is with the concern that a foreign service supplier threatens the job of a national.

That Mode 4 is not about "immigration" into another country, but only refers to "temporary" presence restricted to the supply of a service, has had little value in allaying such concerns. The innumerable sensitivities associated with access of foreign professionals to shrinking employment markets, and the shirking of the WTO or any FTA to distinguish between "immigration" and the temporary nature Mode 4 market access, is perhaps why Mode 4 has not realised its potential. A 2009 background paper by the WTO Secretariat, notes that not only is Mode 4 characterised by 'shallow commitments' from WTO members, but also by the widest range of regulatory barriers, such as complex visa and work-permit related requirements and procedures, numerical quotas and economic needs testing (ENTs), high rejection rates for visas coupled with opaque and arbitrary procedures for visas and work permits. The paper cites a study which estimates that the worldwide costs of processing visa/work permit applications represent around 0.3% of the world GDP!

An example of a Mode 4 barrier is what is popularly referred to as the "50:50" rule under the US Immigration and Nationality Act, which imposes visa processing fees that is almost eight times higher in the event the organisation in the US seeking a foreign professional on a H1B or L1 visa, has 50 or more employees, and 50% of

such employees are foreign nationals on a similar visa! This is coupled with very high rejection rates for such visas; the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) has noted that between FY15 and FY18, the denial rate for new H-1B petitions quadrupled from 6% to 24%.

In the UK, higher salary thresholds are prescribed for foreign professionals. Brexit itself is rooted in the scepticism and resistance towards the 'foreign' worker, and closing of borders to the free movement of EU professionals. Singapore insists that the "core" of any Singapore business should comprise of "Singaporean" nationals, before "Employment Passes" can be issued to foreigners. In Australia, entry is limited to a list of "gazetted occupations", which is subject to a six-monthly review; means that Australia is unlikely to be able to make a firm Mode 4 commitment in an FTA for any specific profession.

Most new-age FTAs, including the CP-TPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership), have remained reticent in addressing Mode 4 issues, and feign it as a "pariah"—in a separate chapter that does not address market access related commitments.

The recent Report of a High-Level Advisory Group (HLAG Report) on India's trade agenda, acknowledges that "we need to recognise the futility of an over-bearing focus on the issue of Movement of Natural Persons and shift focus to other modes as well." Added to this is the fact that Mode 4 access is not simply a one-way traffic into developed country markets. With rising unemployment, India itself can ill-afford to open its markets to Mode 4 access to other countries.

Whether or not India decides to join the RCEP, India needs a careful strategy to calibrate its expectation on trade in services, and what it is prepared to offer to other countries. While India should seek strategic market access for skilled professionals such as IT, accountancy, architects, medical and nursing professions in countries of interest, it is crucial to move beyond this limited agenda.

A key area for consideration in this regard is how can we leverage "Mode 1" or "cross-border services" which occurs without movement of a service supplier or consumer, by delivery of services through means of information technology. IT-enabled services has been an area of comparative advantage for India. Clarity in law and policy to leverage India's Mode 1 strength is an immediate imperative. Central to Mode 1 trade, is the need for cross-border movement of data, which is an area where law and policy is evolving, with the accordion stretching between the need to assert 'data sovereignty' and localise all data generated in India within India, to a more nuanced and differentiated set of rules for "personal" data and "non-personal" data. Getting clarity on this, and investing in R&D to leverage India's traditional strength in "Mode 1" is of crucial importance.

Services using 3D technology represents a higher evolution of 'Mode 1' services. The WTO's World Trade Report for 2018 estimates that 3D printing may wipe out as much as 40% of world trade by 2040! This may, therefore, require a fundamental rethinking of the traditional rules of trade governing not only trade in services, but trade in goods as well. Getting India 3D ready, therefore, is an immediate imperative.

The HLAG Report identifies "Mode 2" services as another area of significant potential. Mode 2 or "consumption abroad" represents trade where a foreign service consumer travels to another country to avail of services, such as tourism or medical services. The key driver for this mode is not any specific market access commitment from a trading partner, but India's own sound and sensible policies to attract and retain the "Mode 2 consumer", be it a foreign tourist, or a foreign patient seeking medical services.

As India prepares the ground for negotiating FTAs with the US, the EU, and explores its options for RCEP, a sound trade in services agenda that addresses both internal domestic regulatory reform and refines its market access expectation in other countries, is essential to achieve realistic outcomes.

● BIT BY BIT

The PC sweet spot

NANDAGOPAL RAJAN

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Could laptops have hit an inflection point that could suddenly make them more relevant to younger buyers?

A LOT OF PEOPLE in my young team are constantly complaining about their laptops being slow and underpowered. These are punctuated by shouts of frustration from across the newsroom as one desktop or the other refuses to indulge the person using it. Even as we have more computing now on a smartphone than most of the first satellites, companies have struggled to make the basic computing experience pain-free. Of course, PCs can be very capable, provided you are paying for it.

But last week, I saw something that has me thinking that this could finally be changing. I finally got the feeling that laptop design, processing power and pricing might be hitting a sweet spot where friction-free computing could actually become the standard and no more a premium experience.

Asus, showcased a bunch of new laptops and gaming computers powered by AMD's Ryzen processors. What caught my attention was the fact that even the entry-level devices from the company were thin and not the spine-breakers we are used to seeing in the sub-₹30,000 segment.

There is more to this trend. It is becoming increasingly hard to convince millennials to use heavy laptops that slow up as you try and do more with it. Unless they are pushed by their places of work, these devices are not preferred by the younger users who have been spoiled by fast smartphones, where everything pretty much happens with a single tap. Jaipal Singh of IDC India explains that as consumers shift entertainment and content consumption to smartphones,

PCs are becoming a "conscious purchase in India". So, he says, "consumers are comfortable to wait for discounts and offers while looking to buy or upgrade their PCs."

This also means the customers need more choice so that they get to pick exactly what they want. AMD India's managing director of sales, Vinay Sinha, says the way the Indian market is evolving, the young millennials, who are very pronounced in their technology preferences, love this choice. This, he says, is where AMD "has a clear process technology leadership over competition" by "taking a leadership position with Asus in gaming and the thin category which is the fastest growing segment."

The gaming context here is interesting. Asus is confident that a lot of mobile gamers are within months thinking of purchasing a gaming laptop. And, given that gaming laptops no longer cost half a year's salary for them and don't weigh like a tonne of bricks, some of these users are preferring to buy these devices for work also.

This need to take PUBG from the mobile to a larger screen might be the reason why gaming devices are recording unprecedented growth in India. Arnold Su, Business Head, PC, Gaming & Commercial Products, ASUS India says the numbers of gaming laptop shipments have gone up 250,000 from just 40,000 two year ago. "Worldwide, these numbers grow maybe 5% year over year, but in India it doubles every year," he explains. And, this jump is one of the reasons why Asus has grown over 43% compared to last years and clocked its best numbers ever in India.

The availability of slim laptops that are powerful and affordable along with the rise in popularity of gaming devices might help push growth in the PC segment even more. After a long period of flat growth, the PC market in India finally saw some revival in Q3 2019, up 15.8% compared to the year before. Three millions units were shipped, thanks in part to at least one big institutional purchase. But companies are also preparing for the end of support for Windows 7 by upgrading to newer devices. And this is where the millennial crowd might end up dictating the kind of devices that get purchased. So could we see thin devices add to the weight of the laptop segment?

standard process, timelines and fixed accountabilities of the departments. Second, a detailed training program was launched in order to train the field staff of all departments and for resolving any of their queries related to the new process. Third, industrial organisations and their members were given demonstrations and trainings at the district level Udyog Bandhu meetings. Fourth, a helpline number was launched, which was manned by a trained dedicated team for providing support to the industrial grievances and to provide assistance in case any investor is facing any difficulty. Fifth, all grievances are monitored on a daily basis and quick response along with resolution to the problem is provided to all applicants.

Since its launch by the PM, Nivesh Mitra has granted over 50,000 NOC's/licenses within approved timelines to about 49,000 registered entrepreneurs who had applied; only 0.02% applications are pending beyond the allowed time limit. In its EoDB rankings 2017-18, Uttar Pradesh's 'Nivesh Mitra' was rated among the top 5 online single window systems by the DIPP. One major reform in pipeline is to create a single window agency backed by an Act, which will have the power to grant a single certificate instead of multiple departmental NOC, required for starting any business. Also, a sectoral analysis is currently under process to identify services, which are yet to be made online for example: getting industrial land exemptions from the Ceiling Act and many more.

A SPIRING FOR GROWTH is imperative for any nation, not only for its survival, but also to fulfill the creative and aspirational instincts of its population. Uttar Pradesh, if it were a country would (in terms of population) be the fifth largest country in the world.

India has been showing a constant upward trend in World Bank's "Doing Business" rankings and now stands at 77th position out of 190 countries; this upward trend was made possible because of standardised, competitive and phased implementation of the "Business Reform Action Plan" guidelines issued yearly by the Department of Industrial Promotion and Policy (DIPP), since 2015. Uttar Pradesh, which was at 14th spot in 2016, has moved two ranks up, to the 12th place in Ease of Doing Business rankings 2017-18 released by the DIPP. This upward trend can only be sustained by reducing "time to market" for any business activity and that can be ensured by a seamless, scalable, process re-engineered and technologically advanced online single window government clearance/licensing system, that is free from red-tapism and other bureaucratic inconsistencies.

To overcome these challenges, UP, among other things, needs a low-cost system for service delivery, which can provide the desired output by scaling up the capability of the existing manpower without actually increasing their numbers.

To make such a system work, one will

UPwards is the only way

Govt's online single window system is geared towards Ease Of Doing Business

SHASHI P GOYAL & AVINASH KUMAR

Goyal is Principal Secretary to CM Uttar Pradesh and Kumar is Special Secretary to CM Uttar Pradesh. Views are personal

have to understand the deep inconsistencies and inefficiencies that exist in the current licensing mechanism of any government department. Just to highlight the problem, an entrepreneur has to take clearances from minimum seven to eight departments, i.e., revenue, stamps and registration, labour, fire, local bodies, environment, electricity, public works, the housing or urban development before the unit could actually start. The time for application and follow-up with each department requires running from pillar to post, and sometimes obliging such authorities with corrupt practices. This vicious cycle leads to a loss in employment generation.

The challenges of implementing such a system in a state like UP were immense. In order to counter the challenges, a working

group headed by the principal secretary to the chief minister having members from all concerned line department was constituted (December, 2017) at the CM Office. The expert team analysed the BRAP guidelines and came up with an innovative principal methodology of "why you are doing, what you are doing" for validating the existing processes of departments and came out with the standardised service process guidelines. All identified services of departments were then taken online.

'Nivesh Mitra', the online single window system has been designed after performing a thorough stakeholder feedback to create a complete packaged solution for the industries and more importantly, the MSMEs. It supports all the 26 features as listed in the



BRAP guidelines.

- Application submission, online payment, tracking & monitoring of submitted applications, approvals, and approval certificates/NOCs are made completely online, without human interference.
- Consolidated payment for all submitted applications.
- Information wizard to suggest required pre-establishment & pre-operation applications.
- All information available at one place through the investor kit.
- List of NOCs/licenses/permits.
- Effective monitoring of application pendency at all levels via a unified dashboard.
- Faster redressal via ticket-based industrial

grievances mechanism

- Dedicated platform for industrial associations for providing feedback on industrial issues
- Facility for submitting suggestions / feedback on draft policies, other business regulations etc.
- Facility for third parties like banks/ other private & government institutions to verify NOCs/licenses online.
- 'Nivesh Mitra' currently encapsulates 118 services of 20 departments including the most important services like the pollution control board, electrical safety, fire safety, land allotment, land-use change, labour department clearances.
- 'Nivesh Mitra' was first backed with a detailed government order that legalised the



I SWEAR BY MY RELIGION. BUT IT IS MY PERSONAL AFFAIR. THE STATE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.
— MAHATMA GANDHI

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The politics of numbers

Government data always come with limitations.
Now, they have a political dimension



P C MOHANAN

CONGRESS & SAINIKS

By propping up Sena, Congress plays fast and loose with the mandate — and its projection of itself as secular and inclusive

AS THE CONGRESS moves towards sealing an alliance with the Shiv Sena, talks to it about a possible power-sharing arrangement in Maharashtra, along with Sharad Pawar's NCP, it is a significant moment in its career which sends out consequential signals. Regardless of its own several compromises with the principle and practice of secularism, notwithstanding its many flirtations even with the Sena in different forms and levels in the past, an alliance with the Sena to rule Maharashtra now would be the Congress's first major coalition with an openly saffron force. And the Sena is not just another party. Down the years, its politics has constructed the "Other" in belligerent ways, always picking on the vulnerable, the migrant now and then the minority. It has stood for a brand of politics that combines chauvinism, bigotry and intolerance with vigilantism and violence. By thinking of allying with the Sena, the Congress signals a willingness to be counted in the same frame with a political force it has, as a self-professedly inclusive party, defined itself in opposition to — after an electoral verdict, moreover, which relegated it to fourth place, and one, therefore, that scarcely gives it a mandate to rule.

Of course, the Congress might rationalise this moment by pointing to those same depleting numbers, and the realpolitik compulsion to keep the BJP out of power in a state that is home to the financial capital of the country. A government in Maharashtra in which the Congress participates with the Sena would not only twist the knife deeper between the Sena and BJP, but arguably also make an important dent in the BJP's winning streak. At the same time, it would hold out the promise of spoils of power for its own demoralised workers. Yet, the Congress needs to weigh the costs of cosyng with an outfit that has treaded a thin, grey edge in a polity governed by an inclusive constitution and the rule of law ever since it made attacks on South Indians and Communist cadres its calling card in the 1960s and '70s. Since then, it has been cited and indicted for its instigation of, and involvement in, communal violence by impartial probes, most notably in the conflagration that consumed hundreds of lives in December 1992-January 1993, its role in which was recorded by the Srikrishna Commission report. The Shiv Sena owned up to its role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. It has been known to dig up the cricket pitch to prevent the Pakistani team from playing in Mumbai. It has aggressively and brutishly targeted the media when it has been criticised, and shown no compunction in violently turning on its own, in case of disagreement or dissent.

It is no secret that the Congress is beset with a grave crisis in a BJP-dominated polity, in which it is called upon to redefine what it stands for. At a time like this, an alliance with the Shiv Sena, no matter what the common minimum programme may be, raises serious questions for political stability and governance in Maharashtra. It will also resonate beyond in other states where elections are due.

A NEW DATA-related controversy has erupted after the government aborted the publication of the report of the household consumer expenditure survey (CES) conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) during 2017-18. This survey is one of the oldest series of surveys — undertaken by NSSO since the 1950s — and is the precursor to the present Living Standard Measurement Surveys, highly favoured and supported by international agencies like the World Bank for estimating poverty. In India, the data from this survey has been the basis for estimating poverty numbers ever since the topic of poverty took centrestage in our political and economic discourse. Most Indian economists will be familiar with the CES data and its limitations. All along, there were also concerns about the potential under-reporting and reliability of the consumption data due to the increasing divergence between the household-level data and the corresponding consumption data provided by the national accounts. It appears from the government's press note that it has also checked the report with the actual production of goods and services. The late B S Minhas, who was chairman of the NSSO governing council, was the first to explore these divergences. His findings did show that the divergences were not entirely due to under-reporting in the surveys.

That the collection of data to arrive at the monthly household consumption expenditure estimate on all goods and services is not an easy task is well recognised. Economists and survey experts have spent considerable time to understand the data limitations and to improve the data collection procedures. In fact, the CES data and the survey methodology have generated a large amount of literature, some of which is documented in *The Great Indian Poverty Debate* edited by Angus Deaton and Valerie Kozel. The under-reporting of consumption due to a lapse in recall and the adoption of an appropriate recall period was also studied in great detail by NSSO. This writer was once part of a large pilot study where the respondents were provided with

containers to measure cereals, pulses and milk consumed by them and a notebook to write down the quantity consumed on a daily basis. Households were also given a packet of salt considering that salt consumption was invariant to income levels. The salt remaining at the end of the week was measured to get the most accurate estimate of salt consumption as a control variable. These were genuine efforts to understand the reporting limitations raised by data users that peaked after the 1999-2000 survey when the NSSO used two recall periods.

Now, fast-forward to the present. The CES report for the year 2017-18 has been kept pending since June 2019 for what now transpires to be an internal examination of the divergence with other sources. This examination has purportedly led to recommendations for several refinements in the survey methodology for implementation in future surveys. The ministry has, therefore, decided not to release the survey results pending these refinements. We now have to wait till possibly 2023 to know changes in the living standards since 2011-12.

The NSSO surveys are designed under the guidance of external and internal experts. The field work and data processing are done by professionals and the reports are prepared following well-established procedures for data checking and cleaning. If there were data quality issues, it would have been discovered long before the report was drafted. Even assuming severe inconsistencies in the data collected, the right course would have been to publish a report with the findings and the perceived limitations, which could have been of use to researchers.

The junking of the NSSO survey also raises another question. Usually, all regular NSSO surveys are repeated by the state/UT governments following identical survey instruments and survey designs, using their own resources. The idea is that, by using the combined pooled samples, we can get estimates at the district level. In this case, it is not clear if the surveys done by the states/UTs have also been junked. Hopefully,

some state governments will come out with their reports in due course.

Government statistics always come attached with conceptual limitations, data collection problems, sampling and non-sampling errors and issues of comparability with other sources. But, now, a political dimension has been added. We have become painfully aware of this extra dimension in recent times starting with the GDP data, the employment data and now the consumption data. The statistical and economic aspects of data that can be researched and debated openly are now being relegated to the background. Researchers are denied access to the data. We now see discussions aided by leaked reports and quick-fix social media comments in place of scientific data analysis. The once credible and open Indian statistical system is now turning away from objectivity and introspection. The institutions that were set up to safeguard its autonomy and independence are becoming insignificant.

The collection of data through surveys and census are publicly-funded exercises. Data collection costs and respondent fatigue, from intrusive data gathering, are on the rise. While the new census and surveys are announced with alarming ease, no proper statistical audits are ever done for these publicly-funded projects. Further, though we were an early votary of open government data, the types of data to be kept in the open remain the prerogative of the data collecting agency. We have seen no reports from the ongoing Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) since May.

These are challenging times for official statisticians. They are told that data is the new oil. But, the rising reluctance of respondents, a data guzzling media on a 24-hour watch, the data demands for international commitments like SDG monitoring, make the effort in digging for this new oil extremely difficult. That this oil should be acceptable to the government makes it a bigger challenge.

The writer is former acting head of the National Statistical Commission

OLD IN THE NEW

The Rajapaksas return to power in Colombo in a polarised election. A stable and united Sri Lanka is in India's interest

GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA'S ELECTION as President of Sri Lanka was foretold on Easter Sunday this year, when suicide bombers professing loyalty to the Islamic State blew themselves at churches and hotels killing hundreds of people. That horrific day rekindled Sri Lanka's collective memory of the years of terrorist violence by the LTTE, and the long military failure to defeat the Tamil insurgency — until in 2007, when then president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, gave his brother Gotabaya carte blanche against the Tigers. In two years, a freshly armed, retrained, and self-believing Sri Lankan Army, had crushed the LTTE. "Gota" was seen as the architect of that victory. Ten years later, when Sri Lanka faced another national security crisis, nostalgia for the Rajapaksas touched a new high, especially after it became clear that the "national unity government" that replaced the Rajapaksa regime in 2015 had failed to prevent the bombings.

Even before this, as the president and prime minister fought each other for supremacy, almost from the get-go and the work of governance ground to a halt, Rajapaksa's authoritarian ways began to be compared favourably. This was evident from his sweep of the local bodies elections in 2018. To be sure, there was no pan-country longing for the Rajapaksas. It was a majoritarian Sinhala-Buddhist sentiment, and this is clear from the election results too. Indeed, this is possibly the most ethnically polarised result in Sri Lanka over the last three decades, other than the Tamil boycott of the 2005 presidential contest enforced by the LTTE. Post-war Sri Lanka's failure to address allegations of war crimes against Tamils, blame for which was laid at Gotabaya's door, as well as the paralysis on constitutional reform, meant the Tamil community preferred to vote for the rival candidate, Sajith Premadasa of the United National Party. The new president's well-known and documented association with a Buddhist extremist organisation, which has been held responsible for fomenting violence against Muslims, meant that Muslims too did not vote for him.

There is little doubt that Gotabaya is the only new face for Rajapaksa family rule. India, whose relations with Sri Lanka went through a troubled patch during the Mahinda Rajapaksa presidency due to his proximity with China, now faces the challenge of rebuilding ties with the brothers. While doing so, Delhi should not lose sight of the reality that an ethnically divided and unstable Sri Lanka is not in India's interest.

MAKING THE BALL TALK

Mohammad Shami is that rare fast bowler who can surprise batsmen with speed, bounce and movement

THERE ARE FEW thrilling spectacles in cricket than the sight of a devilishly quick ball sneaking through the batsman's defence and cannoning onto the stumps. There may be more cerebral modes of deception, like making the batsman nick after an elaborate set-up or hustling him to top edge a pull. But nothing pumps the adrenaline like an inswinger rattling the stumps. It's like a slap on the batsman's technique, judgement, competence and ego. Few contemporary bowlers excel in this art like Mohammad Shami.

Shami can occasionally drift into obscurity on the field, sleep-walking through his delivery strides. But, without any forewarning, he could also make the ball seam at vicious pace, beat the batsman with speed and bounce. He may look ineffective on the first day morning of a Test match, when conditions supposedly help the fast bowlers, but he can scythe through the batting when the surface is expected to aid the spinners. It's this ability that makes him Virat Kohli's prized asset, as precious as Jasprit Bumrah. His third and fourth inning exploits have fashioned some famous wins for India in the past two years. For instance, the 5 for 28 in Johannesburg and the 5 for 34 in Vizag, both versus South Africa.

Shami's success owes to his ability to land the ball on the seam, a skill wizened fast bowlers say is difficult to master. It enables him to reverse, when the ball gets older and make the heavy ball skid. All this as the third or fourth change bowler, bowling with the wind or against it, up the slope or down, with the new ball or the old. And that disarming smile disguises a sharp cricketing brain. In all, Shami is a package that makes him as masterful a seam bowler as India ever had.



RUCHI GUPTA

MEDIUM CAN'T KILL THE MESSAGE

Banning political ads on social media is a technological solution to a political problem

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM at the heart of all electoral politics is the challenge of mass communication. Social media offers the ability to communicate with the masses with a hitherto impossible specificity. This has thrown up hotly-contested issues, especially after Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.

One issue is the organised dissemination of misinformation, either as "fake news" or as paid political ads with false information. While there is consensus on the need for action against fake news, there is an interesting divergence on political ads. Facebook has carved out an exception for paid political ads from its fact-checking programme on the grounds that it is not the role of Facebook to adjudicate political speech in a democracy. On the other hand, Twitter has declared that it will stop all political advertising arguing that "political message reach should be earned, not bought". Twitter's stand may seem like it has the moral high ground but some concerns bear discussion.

The position of the two companies neatly sets up the policy framework and the choices therein: To carry political ads or not; to regulate political ads or not. Banning political ads will increase barriers to entry for smaller/newer entities, who require support to cross the initial threshold for visibility. Paid targeted advertising offers a cost-effective way to jump over this primary barrier and its banning will hurt new entrants. Well-funded and organised political entities will simply substitute paid advertising through employ-

ees and influencers to increase their reach.

Moreover, what is or isn't political is subjective. Consumer companies are increasingly making political pitches as a marketing tactic: A clothing company advertising that it pays fair wages; a company promising not to outsource jobs; big tech companies promising to invest in local housing; newspapers promising to report the truth. Are these ads political or apolitical? If we restrict "political" to only those ads aimed at public office, then how would we view the response of various companies to Donald Trump's immigration ban? A citizens' group mobilising for a candidate? How will we distinguish between candidates and proxies? Twitter may have decided that the conflict associated with political ads is not worth the trouble but the determination of what is political is itself conflicted.

If banning political ads is not possible, then some argue that political ads be fact-checked to ensure that voters are not fed targeted misinformation. This is reasonable. However, we may end up ceding democratic space to private companies. Political rhetoric often relies on exaggeration and spin. When spin and/or exaggeration shades into falsehood, it is personal and cannot be supplanted, wholesale, by private companies. In a polarised environment, private adjudication is likely to be arbitrary or seen to be so and it is certain every ruling will be challenged irrespective of merit. The logic of fact-checking if extended to other mass media will quickly get out of hand. Would a television or radio station carrying a live political speech be ex-

pected to stop transmission the moment a falsehood is uttered?

The real issue with online political ads is the ability to deliver (mis)information to targeted groups allowing the political entity to escape public scrutiny. A political party could conceivably target Dalits promising them social justice while simultaneously mobilising upper caste Hindus against reservations. If politics is ultimately about the collective and commons, then an argument against micro-targeting could be made. However, governance by definition encompasses multiple issues and it is difficult to argue that voters with different concerns be fed the same message. Perhaps a viable way forward could be transparency on all political ads along with associated targeting. This would expose hypocrisy and allow the Opposition to counter politically, as expected in a democracy. Other measures include clear labelling of political ads and spending caps to ensure that the smaller guys are not drowned by opposition content.

The rise of right-wing populism and the organised use of misinformation are political problems. A technological solution will necessarily be rule-based or algorithm-based and it is difficult to see how that could possibly address the essentially dynamic nature of politics. While some regulation is indeed desirable, it is important to ensure that we do not cede control over our democratic processes to private platforms.

Gupta is AICC joint secretary in charge of Congress' Student Wing. Views are personal

NOVEMBER 19, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

WHO IS THE CIA SPY?

RAJ NARAIN, WORKING president of the Lok Dal, broadly hinted that Jagjivan Ram might have been the cabinet minister who leaked out secrets to the CIA during the Bangladesh war. Asked point-blank whether Ram was the cabinet minister in Mrs Indira Gandhi's cabinet who was alleged to be a CIA agent, he said: "Jagjivan Ram may be that cabinet minister." Narain said the identity of the minister who was leaking important decisions to the CIA was known only to two persons — Indira Gandhi and the then CIA chief. The only circumstantial evidence that Narain put forth to substantiate his allegation was that after India won the war in Bangladesh,

the then defence minister, Ram, was stripped of his portfolio.

CHARGE REFUTED

JANATA PARTY CHIEF Chandra Shekhar dismissed Raj Narain's "irresponsible charge" against Jagjivan Ram with "all the contempt it deserves", but the party general secretary, Surendra Mohan, suspected "a method in Raj Narain's madness". Asked for his reaction to the Lok Dal working president's allegation during a press conference at Lucknow that "Jagjivan Ram might have been the CIA agent" in Mrs Indira Gandhi's 1971 Cabinet, Shekhar said: "This type of irresponsible statement only deserves contempt. Does it

deserve any comment? Nobody takes Raj Narain seriously".

IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS

ISLAMIC MILITANTS OCCUPYING the US embassy in Tehran announced on Sunday that they would try their hostages as Iran put to sea some 40 warships after the start of American naval manoeuvres, AP reports. Reports by CBS News, and at least one other news agency, said the announcement about the trial was made at a news conference hours before the 12 hostages were to be freed. The CBS report said the militants planned to put "those who are spies" on trial.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

A disconcerting verdict

Supreme Court has always upheld and strengthened secularism — but its Ayodhya ruling is problematic on that score



MADHAV GODBOLE

INDIA'S SUPREME COURT is acclaimed as the most powerful among its counterparts in the world. It has rewritten the Constitution of the country on several major issues. It has even become the third chamber of Parliament. Its verdict in the Ayodhya case must be evaluated in this light.

The founding fathers of the Constitution gave us an enlightened, forward-looking basic law, which is not just a legal document but is aimed at bringing about socio-economic transformation in the country. Secularism is an important precept underlying the framework of fundamental rights. But, as in several other areas, there is considerable divergence between the precept and the reality. Significantly, the Constituent Assembly failed to agree on the definition of the word "secular". It also could not agree on calling the Constitution secular. It was only during the Emergency in 1976 that the word secular was introduced in the preamble to the Constitution by the highly controversial 42nd amendment. Secularism acquired a new status when the Supreme Court declared it as a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Whenever the concept of secularism is under threat, this injunction of the Court is invoked.

The Supreme Court gave a further boost to secularism by its rulings in cases pertaining to the governance of the country. Particular reference may be made to the decisions of the Court on Article 356 of the Constitution, which have totally stopped the widespread and continuous misuse of this article by successive central governments. After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, in the *Bommai* case (1993), mere apprehension that the BJP-ruled states in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan would not conduct themselves according to the dictates of secularism, was considered justification enough for their dismissal. The Court had gone to the extent of declaring that "in matters of state, religion has no place". It said: "No political party can simultaneously be a religious party. Politics and religion cannot be mixed. Any state government which pursues unsecular policies or unsecular course of action acts contrary to the constitutional mandate and renders itself amenable to action under Article 356."

Against this background of upholding and strengthening secularism, the Supreme Court's Ayodhya verdict is disconcerting. A question needs to be asked, and answered, whether the decision will go to even sustain, leave aside strengthen, secularism in the country. This is particularly important in the context of the majoritarian ethos increasingly evident in the last few years.

The court has held that clandestinely keeping Ram Lalla idols in the Babri Mosque on December 22, 1949 was wrong. It has also held that the wanton destruction of the mosque on December 6, 1992 was unlawful. Both these actions showed flagrant disregard for secularism; in fact, it was a total negation of secularism. Is giving five acres of alternate land to Muslims for construction of a mosque, as the court has done, then the most appropriate or adequate compensation? What about the psychological hurt caused to the Muslims by destruction of



CR Sasikumar

their place of worship? The Court should have at least asked the state and central government to rebuild the mosque. Narasimha Rao, who was prime minister when the mosque was demolished, had made such an announcement in Parliament. He later said that he stood by the statement and wanted it fulfilled. In recent years, several churches too have been damaged in communal violence. I have, therefore, been advocating that a law must be enacted to provide that when any place of worship is damaged or destroyed in communal violence, the government should take the responsibility of repairing, reconstructing and even rebuilding such places of worship. This will be one way of translating secularism into reality and creating a sense of confidence among the minorities.

Particularly disconcerting is the unanimity among the five judges in this decision of the apex court. Does it mean that the boundaries set by this judgment are the limits to secularism in India? The Supreme Court decision leaves one with an impression that even if the majority community takes the law into its hands and destroys and damages a place of worship of any minority community, it can be rewarded, and the state can just wither away! This is most unnerving. The affected minority community becoming dejected and despondent in such circumstances can have dangerous portents for the future.

In any civilised country, protecting the interests of minorities must be accepted as the

The Court should have at least asked the state and central government to rebuild the mosque. Narasimha Rao, who was prime minister when the mosque was demolished, had made such an announcement in Parliament. In recent years, several churches too have been damaged in communal violence. I have, therefore, been advocating that a law must be enacted to provide that when any place of worship is damaged or destroyed in communal violence, the government should take the responsibility of repairing, reconstructing and even rebuilding such places of worship.

special responsibility of the majority community. Communal riots in Mumbai in December 1992-January 1993, following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and the Gujarat riots in 2002 have shown this convincingly. The resultant sense of insecurity created among the minorities goes to increase their ghettoisation and strengthens the forces of identity politics.

Under the distribution of powers between the states and the Centre, all these matters fall within the purview of the state governments. But, there must be a national policy to address these vital concerns, which would lay down legal and institutional framework for the purpose. Unfortunately, in the name of federalism and safeguarding the rights of state governments, it is becoming increasingly difficult to address these concerns. Even the constitutional forum of the inter-state council, comprising the prime minister, concerned central ministers and state chief ministers, has fallen into disuse.

In spite of infirmities, the judgment must be accepted by all parties to end this longstanding, explosive dispute. But, the implications of the judgment will be debated for years to come. For, what is at stake is the stability and integrity of the country and communal peace and harmony.

The writer, a former Union home secretary, is the author of *The Babri Masjid Ram Mandir Dilemma: An Acid Test for India's Constitution*

Towards a Colombo reset

Delhi needs to engage with the Tamil question and Chinese interests in Sri Lanka with an open mind



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

EVEN BEFORE the new president of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was sworn in, the narrative about Colombo's renewed "tilt" towards China and against India had taken root. The headline, however, misrepresents the complex power play involving Beijing, Delhi and Colombo.

The Great Game in the Subcontinent is not limited to just India and China. It is quite easy to forget the considerable interests and influence of many other powers in the region, including the US, European Union, Japan and Russia. Meanwhile, the exclusive focus on major power rivalry, masks the agency of South Asian political elites and their capacity to manoeuvre among the major powers.

In coping with the fluid geopolitics around India, Delhi has no reason to be taken in by the media's definition of the Rajapaksa — Gotabaya and his brother Mahinda, who ruled Sri Lanka as a president during 2005-15 with a strong hand — as inherently "pro-China".

Although the Rajapaksa has blamed India for their defeat in the 2015 elections, they have sought to make up with Delhi in recent years. South Block too has rightly put aside its reservations about the Rajapaksa and has been engaging all the major political formations in Sri Lanka. The stage, then, is ready for a reset in the bilateral relations between the two strong governments in Delhi and Colombo.

That reset involves addressing the structural factors that have complicated the relationship between Delhi and Colombo. One of them is the China question. India is acutely aware that China's economic and strategic salience in the Subcontinent will continue to grow and is not tied to the regime leadership in its neighbourhood.

Consider the case of the outgoing coalition led by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe that proves the irrelevance of labelling governments in Colombo as "pro-China" or "pro-India". It came to power criticising the Chinese projects in Sri Lanka as financially unsustainable. Two years into power, the coalition extended full backing to the Chinese projects. It was this so-called "pro-India" regime that offered China a 99-year lease on the Hambantota project. To add insult to injury, the "pro-India" government stalled key projects of interest to Delhi.

In any case, Delhi can't expect its neighbours to shut down economic and commercial engagement with Beijing, notwithstanding the many questions about the terms of China's assistance on projects, including those under the Belt and Road Initiative. But Delhi will be right to ask Colombo not to take steps with Beijing that threaten India's security. Delhi and Colombo need a clear understanding on mutual red lines relating to national security and a political comfort level to discuss

cases that fall within the orange zone. That should help prevent the recurrence of the controversy over Chinese submarines in Colombo port that generated so much bad blood between the two nations in 2014.

On Monday, *The Indian Express* reported on the new Lankan leadership's eagerness to signal goodwill towards India. The report quoted sources close to the Rajapaksa as saying that China is a "trade partner" while India is a "close relative". That perhaps is as good a description as any. Other terms used to describe the new policy include "neutrality" and "non-alignment" between major powers.

As the world rediscovers the geopolitical value of Sri Lanka at the heart of the Indo-Pacific, Colombo has huge opportunities to leverage its location for national benefit. A prudent and important part of that strategy would be to avoid provoking India. Delhi too would be wise to be mindful of Colombo's security concerns and find ways to develop long-term strategic cooperation with Sri Lanka.

Delhi needs to invest some political capital in resolving problems such as the longstanding dispute over fisheries. Beyond its objection to China's BRI projects, Delhi, either alone or in partnership with like-minded countries like Japan, should offer sustainable terms for infrastructure development. Delhi also needs to contribute more to the development of Colombo's defence and counter-terror capabilities.

The second structural factor shaping India's relations with Sri Lanka is the Tamil question. India's involvement in Sri Lanka's tragic civil war has been far more consequential than the China factor in complicating Delhi's relations with Colombo. Delhi has certainly learnt the dangers of being drawn too deep into the domestic conflicts of neighbouring countries.

Successive coalition governments in Delhi from 1989 to 2014 struggled to balance the pulls and pressures from Chennai and Colombo. The strong mandate in 2014 had given Modi greater room to manage the competing imperatives on the Lanka policy.

But the Tamil question has not gone away. If the new government in Colombo can advance reconciliation with the Tamil minority, it will be easier for Modi to strengthen ties with the Gotabaya government. But the Tamil issue is no longer a bilateral one between Delhi and Colombo. The Western powers have expressed deep concerns about the war crimes in the military campaign against the LTTE and the need to bring those responsible to book.

The Rajapaksa have declared that they will not bend before foreign pressures. India knows that too much heat from the West will automatically increase China's leverage in Colombo. If the Tamil question continues to have a big impact on Sri Lanka's foreign policy, Delhi needs to look beyond old formulae to try and encourage reconciliation within Lanka and across the Palk Strait with Tamil Nadu. With a strong government in Sri Lanka, it is time for Delhi to think boldly about its relationship with Colombo.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUSINESS INTEREST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Steps to revival' (IE, November 18). A revamp of the telecom policy is long overdue. The government has doled out handsome VRS packages for BSNL employees. However, the question remains: Why are industries collapsing? The interests of companies need to be safeguarded. This could encourage foreign investors in bidding aggressively for BPCL and Air India. The government also needs to fast forward disinvestment.

Deepak Singhal, Chennai

BIGOTED VIEW

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Scholarship has no religion' (IE, November 18). It's unfortunate that students of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) have staged demonstrations over the appointment of a 29-year-old Muslim professor in the Sanskrit literature department. The idea behind the establishment of the university is to contribute in nation-building efforts by providing equal opportunity of study and teaching to all deserving people. A university cannot reject an application on the basis of caste or religion.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

TREAD CAUTIOUSLY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fraught course' (IE November 16). By asking a

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.

larger bench to review its 2018 verdict on the entry of women to Sabarimala, the Supreme Court has made the matter more complicated. The primary issue of review before the Court was only to seek a balance between the tradition of the temple trust to bar entry of women folk in the temple on religious grounds and the constitutional mandate of equality, freedom and right to practice one's faith. The Court has enlarged the scope of the enquiry beyond the narrow remit of the review. There is no doubting the apex court's intention but it should have refrained from enlarging the scope of review in a matter that pertains to religious sentiments.

Ravi Mathur, Ghaziabad



APOORVANAND

A betrayal in the offing

Congress should give a second thought to allying with Shiv Sena

VINAYAK DAMODAR Savarkar must be smiling. It can be said that the Congress has seemingly turned its back on the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi. The news of the party being close to sealing its pact with the Shiv Sena came on the eve of Nehru's birthday. It is the most cruel tribute the party could have paid him. This is also Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary. The Congress has shaken hands with the Shiv Sena, a party which demanded a Bharat Ratna for Savarkar, who is often seen as complicit in the conspiracy to assassinate Gandhi. Even if we ignore this, Savarkar certainly led the ideological opposition to the Gandhian idea of co-living and nation building. By considering aligning with his followers, the Congress has shown that his viewpoint can be accommodated.

The Congress party seems to have succumbed to the temptation to somehow keep the BJP out of power in Maharashtra, persuaded by the seasoned "negotiator" Sharad Pawar, by considering being the junior most-partner in a prospective three-party alliance with the Shiv Sena and NCP.

The Congress, despite its unparadigmatic ideological vacillations and its use of majoritarian sentiments many times for electoral purposes, could at least claim that it was the

one party which had never compromised either with the Jana Sangh or the BJP for power. After all, all other political parties, including the Left, have compromised with the Jana Sangh or the BJP. Tall leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia or Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) gave up their secular inhibitions to ally with the political wing of the RSS with the sole aim of wrecking the Congress system. Lohia had famously said that to do so, he was ready to shake hands with the devil. We have seen the devil sucking the life out of that school of politics and turn its actors into playthings. And the Congress kept accusing all of them for having forsaken the most sacred principle of secularism, foundational to the project of nation building.

Political analysts are applauding this "masterstroke". To deprive the BJP of a state, that too one flush with money, is being seen as a double gain. It is said that it would give a boost to the sagging morale of the party's workers, who were feeling lost after having remained out of power for so long. There was a fear that the victorious MLAs would break ranks with the party if it decided to sit in the Opposition for the next five years.

It is also being argued that allying with the Congress — with its inclusive nature — and the compulsions of holding on to power

will soften and mellow the Shiv Sena and force it to abandon its anti-migrant, anti-minority platform. The record of the Shiv Sena, however, provides no such reassurance.

JP was proven wrong by history. To those of his followers who were uncomfortable with his friendship with the RSS, he had said that he was on a mission to de-communalise the organisation. He died with his hopes shattered. But the RSS, with each such compromise, gained in strength and stature.

To see the Congress's compromise with the Shiv Sena, which was the first to have proudly claimed responsibility for the demolition of the Babri Masjid, was the last thing one could have imagined. By considering doing so, it has made it clear that the language of Hindutva will now be the common political language.

One might call it foolish sentimentalism but Nehru's words keep reminding us of the values for which Gandhi had died. The nation was going to the second general elections. Addressing the leaders and workers of the Congress, Nehru said that he was ready to lose election after election but he would never compromise with communal elements.

There was always a stream in the Congress Party — leaders like Govind Ballabh

Pant, Pandit Sampurnand, Purushottam Das Tandon — which harboured majoritarian tendencies. Nehru had threatened to resign when Tandon won the presidency of the party and the latter had to bow out. Nehru has been criticised for this "undemocratic" act but one must understand that he was not ready to run the government of a party which was, in terms of ideas and practice, against his values. It would have been much easier for Gandhi and Nehru to assuage "Hindu" feelings and be the unquestioned leaders of the majority. After all, both of them had battled against M A Jinnah in the last phase of the freedom struggle. But they knew that they were fighting for a vision of a nation where minorities could always feel wanted and welcome and live a full life.

Indira Gandhi in a letter from Lucknow had complained to Nehru in 1949 that the Congress was full of people with an RSS mindset. She said that she was feeling suffocated in such a party. I got a call from an old Congressman during the discussions about the alliance in Maharashtra. He sounded broken and said that he did not see a reason to be in politics anymore. One need not guess that he was a Muslim.

The writer teaches Hindi at Delhi University

TELLING NUMBERS

Pregnant, nursing women's health: Himachal best, UP worst in survey

A NEW survey, called the Jaccha-Baccha Survey (JABS), conducted in June in six states (Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh) to map the state of pregnant and nursing women has found that a high proportion of women do not eat enough during pregnancy.

The survey was conducted under the guidance of development economists Jean Dreze and Reetika Khera.

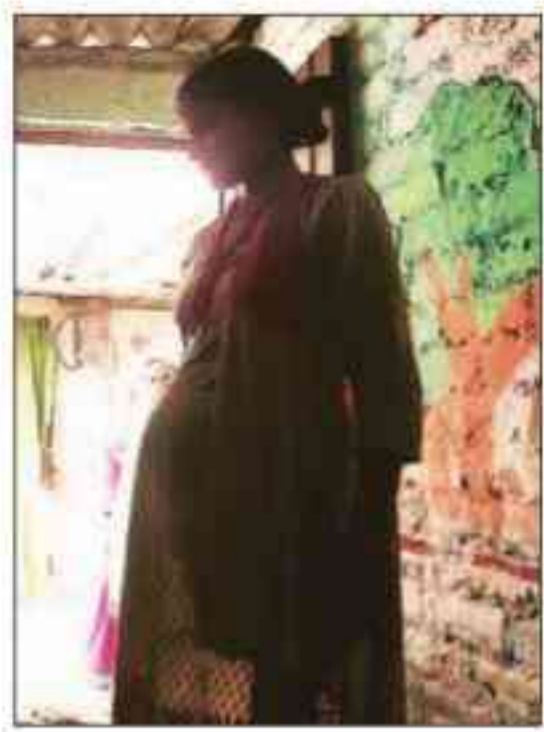
Within the six states, which the survey divided into laggard and leader states, Uttar Pradesh, which is India's most populous, performed the worst, while Himachal Pradesh, on average, performed the best.

UP also threw up the worst numbers on pregnant women not getting adequate rest — either because they had no one to help out at home, or because they had to actually go out and work on the farm in their condition.

The proportion of women who had to borrow or sell assets just to meet child delivery expenses too, was quite high, especially among the laggard states.

On access to basic healthcare facilities, the survey found that 36% women in UP did not get a single check-up at a primary health centre across different schemes.

The poor health of pregnant and nursing women, as well as inadequate healthcare infrastructure, lie at the heart of India's child nutrition crisis. The latest Global Hunger Index re-



Special needs of pregnant women were widely ignored, the survey found. Archive/For representation

leased in October pegged India at a lowly 102 out of a total of 117 countries. One of the key findings of GHI was that 'child wasting' (that is, children having low weight for their height) — which essentially shows the extent of acute malnutrition — had gone up over the past decade. At almost 21%, India's child wasting level is the highest in the world.

Combined with almost 38% of child stunting (that is, children who have low height for their age), India has the highest number of undernourished children in the world.

FORETELLING INDIA'S CHILD NUTRITION CRISIS

Parameters	Uttar Pradesh	Laggard states*	Leader states**	Himachal Pradesh
Proportion of respondents who were eating less during pregnancy (%)	74	59	35	21
Proportion of respondents who worked on family farms during pregnancy (%)	39	28	13	18
Proportion of respondents who had no one around to help with household work during pregnancy (%)	28	25	17	4
Proportion of households who had to borrow or sell assets to meet delivery expenses (%)	51	43	19	13
Proportion of respondents who received at least one health check-up at a PHC (%)	64	80	91	88

*Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh. **Chhattisgarh, Himachal, Odisha. Source: JBS 2019

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Understanding space Internet

SpaceX shot 60 satellites into orbit last week, and will keep doing so until it has a 12,000-strong constellation in place. In 2 years, it hopes to supply non-stop, low-cost Internet everywhere on Earth

SOHINI GHOSH & AMITABH SINHA
AHMEDABAD, PUNE, NOVEMBER 18

SPACE X, the world's leading private company in space technology, last week fired a spray of 60 satellites into orbit, the first operational batch of what is intended to eventually evolve into a constellation of nearly 12,000 satellites aimed at providing low-cost and reliable space-based Internet services to the world. The Starlink network, as the project is called, is one of several ongoing efforts to start beaming data signals from space, and also the most ambitious.

The first batch of Starlink satellites — also numbering 60, and similar in configuration to the ones launched on November 11 — went up on May 24, but they will not be part of the network. SpaceX announced the satellite Internet constellation in January 2015, and launched two test satellites in February 2018. Following last week's launch, the company has now deployed 122 satellites in orbit.

In October, SpaceX appeared ready to scale up its ambition, telling the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in filings through the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that it intends to deploy another 30,000 Starlink satellites in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in coming years.

The ITU is the United Nations specialised agency for information and communication technologies, with a membership of 193 member states, some 900 companies, universities, and international and regional organisations. The FCC is the statutory communications regulator of the US.

Why is it necessary to launch satellites in order to provide Internet services?

This is mainly to ensure that reliable and uninterrupted Internet services — now part of humanity's basic infrastructure and an important means of delivering a wide variety of public services to the world's peoples — are universally available in every part of the globe.

Currently, about 4 billion people, more than half the world's population, do not have access to reliable Internet networks. And that is because the traditional ways to deliver the Internet — fibre-optic cables or wireless networks — cannot take it everywhere on Earth. In many remote areas, or places with difficult terrain, it is not feasible or viable to set up cables or mobile towers.

Signals from satellites in space can over-



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with 60 mini satellites lifted off on November 11. AP

come this obstacle easily.

How old is this idea of space Internet?

Space-based Internet systems have, in fact, been in use for several years now — but only for a small number of users. Also, most of the existing systems use satellites in geostationary orbit. This orbit is located at a height of 35,786 km over the Earth's surface, directly above the Equator. Satellites in this orbit move at speeds of about 11,000 km per hour, and complete one revolution of the Earth in the same time that the earth rotates once on its axis. To the observer on the ground, therefore, a satellite in geostationary orbit appears stationary.

So how will placing satellites in lower orbits help?

One big advantage of beaming signals from geostationary orbit is that the satellite can cover a very large part of the Earth. Signals from one satellite can cover roughly a third of the planet — and three to four satellites would be enough to cover the entire Earth. Also, because they appear to be stationary, it is easier to link to them.

But satellites in geostationary orbit also have a major disadvantage. The Internet is all about transmission of data in (nearly) real time. However, there is a time lag — called latency — between a user seeking data, and the server sending that data. And because

data transfers cannot happen faster than the speed of light (in reality, they take place at significantly lower speeds), the longer the distance that needs to be covered the greater is the time lag, or latency.

In space-based networks, data requests travel from the user to the satellite, and are then directed to data centres on the ground. The results then make the same journey in the reverse direction. A transmission like this from a satellite in geostationary orbit has a latency of about 600 milliseconds. A satellite in the lower orbit, 200-2,000 km from the Earth's surface, can bring the lag down to 20-30 milliseconds, roughly the time it takes for terrestrial systems to transfer data.

The LEO extends up to 2,000 km above the Earth's surface. The Starlink satellites — the 12,000 for which SpaceX has permission, as well as the other 30,000 that it wants to launch — will be deployed in the altitude band of 350 km to 1,200 km.

But lower orbits have their own problem. Owing to their lower height, their signals cover a relatively small area. As a result, many more satellites are needed in order to reach signals to every part of the planet.

Additionally, satellites in these orbits travel at more than double the speed of satellites in geostationary orbit — about 27,000 km per hour — to balance the effects of gravity. Typically, they go around the Earth once every few hours. To compensate for the fact that

they cannot be seen from a terrestrial location for more than a few minutes, many more satellites are needed in the networks, so that there are no breaks in the transmission of data. That is the reason why the Starlink network is talking about 42,000 satellites.

By when will Starlink be able to provide its space-based Internet service?

Starlink aims to start service in the northern United States and Canada in 2020, and expand to cover the whole world by 2021. The current plan is to deploy satellites in two constellations of around 4,400 and 7,500. Launches — 60 satellites at a time — will take place at frequent intervals now onward. SpaceX says it can start services on a small scale once 400 satellites join the network.

Several other private companies too, have plans for space-based Internet services. These include Amazon, OneWeb and O3B (apparently named for the 'Other Three Billion'), each involving large constellations of satellites in lower and middle Earth orbits — but these projects are very small compared to Starlink.

Once operational, space-based Internet networks are expected to change the face of the Internet. Services such as autonomous car driving are expected to be revolutionised, and the Internet of Things (IoT) can be integrated into virtually every household, whether urban or rural.

Is there a downside to this projection?

Three issues have been flagged — increased space debris, increased risk of collisions, and the concern of astronomers that these constellations of space Internet satellites will make it difficult to observe other space objects, and to detect their signals.

To put things in perspective, there are fewer than 2,000 operational satellites at present, and fewer than 9,000 satellites have been launched into space since the beginning of the Space Age in 1957. Most of the operational satellites are located in the lower orbits. On September 2 this year, the European Space Agency (ESA) had to perform, for the first time ever, a "collision avoidance manoeuvre" to protect one of its live satellites from colliding with a "mega constellation".

Astronomers and scientists have also complained about increased "light-pollution", a reference to light reflected from the man-made satellites that can interfere with — and be mistaken for — light coming from other heavenly bodies.

THIS WORD MEANS

DEPOSIT INSURANCE

Rs 1 lakh is all that a depositor can expect in the unlikely event of her bank failing. But this could change

SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 18

WITH THE failure of the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank reigniting the debate on the low level of insurance for deposits held by customers in banks in India, the central government now plans to raise the cover. A legislation in this regard is likely in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.

Currently, in the (unlikely) event of a bank going bust in India, a depositor has claim to

a maximum of Rs 1 lakh per account as insurance cover — even if the deposit in their account far exceeds Rs 1 lakh. Depositors holding more than Rs 1 lakh in their account have no legal remedy in case of the collapse of the bank.

This amount is termed 'deposit insurance'. The cover of Rs 1 lakh per depositor is provided by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), a fully owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India. The Rs 1 lakh-cover is for deposits in commercial banks, regional rural banks (RRBs), local area banks (LABs), and coop-

erative banks.

Over the years, the level of insured deposits as a percentage of assessable deposits has declined from a high of 60.5% in 2007-08 to 28.1% in 2018-19, as per DICGC data.

At the end of March 2019, the number of registered insured banks with DICGC stood at 2,098 — comprising 103 commercial banks, 1,941 cooperative banks, 51 RRBs, and three LABs.

DICGC last revised the deposit insurance cover to Rs 1 lakh on May 1, 1993 — raising it from Rs 30,000, which had been the cover from 1980 onward.

DICGC charges 10 paise per Rs 100 of deposits held by a bank. The premium paid by the insured banks to the Corporation is required to be borne by the banks, and not be passed on to depositors. As per DICGC data, commercial banks paid a total premium of Rs 11,190 crore in 2018-19, while cooperative banks paid a premium of Rs 850 crore to cover deposits against the risk of default.

As for cooperative banks, only 44.5% of their assessable deposits were covered in 2018-19, while for commercial banks this ratio was 25.7%. Commercial banks account for the largest share of bank deposits in India.

Once 'king' of Karachi, he now wants asylum in India. Who is Altaf Hussain?

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 18

A TYPICAL Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) rally in Karachi in its heyday would be like this: party members and activists, both men and women, seated in disciplined rows awaiting the main speaker, the party leader, a balding, bespectacled man; his image emblazoned on banners on the stage and at other vantage points; the entire Rabita Committee (the MQM's central committee) lined up respectfully on stage next to a telephone.

At the appointed minute, one of the men on the stage would lift the receiver reverentially, and the voice of Altaf Hussain would crackle over the public address system from his home in Mill Hill, London, where he fled in 1992 after a violent internal feud in the party, and pre-empting a huge crackdown by the Pakistani military.

Hussain's appeal Sunday to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to give him and his colleagues asylum, makes him perhaps the first British citizen to seek refuge in India. Hussain is seeking to flee a country that acted blind to his presence for over two decades. But now he is due to stand trial under British anti-terrorism laws, for inciting largescale violence in Karachi on August 22, 2016, through one of his telephone speeches.

What happened that day

Two media houses were vandalised, and

there was fighting and arson on the streets of Karachi that left one person dead and several injured. The MQM leader had addressed his workers who had just ended a hunger strike to protest alleged disappearances of their colleagues in an operation by the Pakistan Rangers since 2013. It was an "anti-crime" operation — a veiled reference to the much feared MQM, with its thuggish street presence and mafia-like operations.

Hussain described Pakistan as a "cancer for the entire world", a "headache for the entire world". Pakistan, he said, "is the epicentre of terrorism for the entire world. Who says long live Pakistan... it's down with Pakistan." He then suggested that the protesters move on to two media houses.

"So you are moving to ARY and Samaa [TV channels] from here... right?" he asked. "So you go to Samaa and ARY today and then refresh [yourselves] tomorrow for the Rangers place. And tomorrow we will lock down the Sindh government building which is called Sindh Secretariat."

The violence brought the full force of the Pakistani state crashing on the MQM's head. The dreaded party office, Nine Zero, which was at one time rumoured to have underground torture chambers, was shut down by the Rangers. It was the beginning of the end of MQM, and of Hussain's four-decade-long political career.

The following day, the entire Karachi-based leadership of the MQM distanced itself from the words of the leader. But the party



MQM founder Altaf Hussain in London in 2016. Reuters

never recovered, and on the eve of the 2018 elections, a breakaway faction called Pakistan Sarzameen Party (PSP) put up its own candidates. Its ties to the Army were apparent.

The MQM won just seven seats, a historic low. It had won 18 seats in 2013, and 25 in 2008. The PSP did not win any seats. Meanwhile, acting on a complaint from the Pakistani government, Scotland Yard charged Hussain under British anti-terror laws for "encouraging terrorism" through the 2016 speech. He was arrested in June this year, and is currently out on bail.

The man and his party

Hussain entered Pakistan's political scene as a student leader heading the All

Pakistan Mohajir Students' Organisation in the mid-1970s. At a time when all democratic forces were rallying against the military dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq and behind the Pakistan People's Party, the APMSO grew rapidly to challenge the PPP's hold in Karachi, and other cities in Sindh province.

Among the APMSO's demands were that Karachi should be carved out of Sindh into a Mohajir subah. Mohajir is the term for Muslim migrants to Pakistan from UP, Delhi, and other parts of India. The MQM was in the beginning called the Mohajir Qaumi Movement.

Even though the MQM started out as a creature of the establishment, its independent-minded leadership, and the party's popularity among Karachi's Urdu-speaking mid-

dle class and youth, set alarm bells ringing in the military establishment and political parties. The PPP and MQM fought each other on the streets of Karachi. Through the 1990s, the MQM was targeted by the military, leading to violent crackdowns and bloodbaths.

During this period, the MQM was accused of being secessionist, and conspiring to break Karachi away from Pakistan at the behest of India's Research & Analysis Wing. The "Indian" ethnicity of MQM members and followers was used to taint them. Adding to the suspicion, some of its leaders had escaped to India during the military operations, and were suspected to have been in touch with the Indian intelligence agency.

The party's fortunes, however, changed dramatically in 1999 when General Pervez Musharraf, an Urdu speaker and Mohajir from Delhi, took power through a coup against Nawaz Sharif. Its elected representatives were key to Musharraf's plans. The party came out strongly against the lawyers' movement in 2007. Over 20 people were killed in clashes in Karachi after MQM cadres prevented the Chief Justice of Pakistan deposed by Musharraf from entering the city to address a meeting of the bar association.

It was during this time that the MQM fashioned itself as Pakistan's only secular party, and came out strongly against the "Talibanisation" of Karachi, which has a huge Pashtun population. Altaf Hussain travelled to Delhi for the first time, and was feted as an emissary of India-Pakistan peace. Syed

Mustafa Kamal, an MQM politician and the youngest mayor of Karachi, won praise in the West for his attempts to improve the city.

Luck over, clutching at straws

The MQM's fall began in 2010, two years after Musharraf's ignominious exit from the Pakistani political scene. Imran Farooq, a senior party leader, was killed outside his home in London. The investigation into the murder led British authorities to a huge stash of currency at Hussain's home and office, which set off a money laundering investigation. The BBC aired fresh allegations of Hussain's links with R&AV.

In Karachi, the Rangers, Army, and Pakistani intelligence agencies began another "anti-crime" operation, which the MQM alleged was intended to split the party and end its political dominance over the city.

The party did split many times over. Hussain mistakenly believed that he would be able to regain control, and the 2016 speech inciting violence was part of the plan.

Since then, Hussain's health is said to have deteriorated, and absent the control over Karachi, he and the MQM have run out of funding. He is desperate to avoid the UK trial.

This is not the first time he has appealed to Modi. In 2015, as his troubles mounted in the UK, and the Karachi crackdown entered its third year, he had asked Modi to speak up for Mohajirs. But even if India did find him useful at one time, it is unlikely that is still the case.

गहराती चुनौती

छत्तीसगढ़ के जंगलमहल और महाराष्ट्र के गढ़चिरोली सहित देश के तमाम माओवादी हिंसा से प्रभावित इलाकों में किस तरह की चुनौतियां खड़ी हैं, यह सभी जानते हैं। यह भी तथ्य है कि इन इलाकों में समस्या से निपटने से लेकर सुरक्षा बलों की निगरानी में कोई कोर-कसर नहीं छोड़ी जा रही है। लेकिन यह समझना मुश्किल है कि इसके बावजूद माओवादियों पर पूरी तरह काबू पाना कैसे संभव नहीं हो पा रहा है। रविवार को सामने आई एक खबर के मुताबिक बस्तर में माओवादी हिंसा से सबसे ज्यादा प्रभावित सुकमा जिले में कुछ समय पहले सीआरपीएफ के एक शिविर के ऊपर ड्रोन यानी मानवरहित यान मंडराता देखा गया। जैसे ही सीआरपीएफ के जवान सक्रिय हुए, वैसे ही वह गायब हो गया। यह इस बात का साफ संकेत है कि एक तो ड्रोन जैसे संवेदनशील साधन भी माओवादियों की पहुंच के दायरे में आ चुके हैं और दूसरे, व उनके जरिए अपने प्रभाव वाले इलाकों में सुरक्षा बलों की गतिविधियों पर निगरानी करने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं। जबकि अब तक इस उपकरण का उपयोग केवल सुरक्षा बल माओवादियों पर निगरानी के लिए करते रहे हैं। इस घटना के सामने आने के बाद सुरक्षा बलों को ड्रोन पर नजर पड़ते ही नष्ट करने के आदेश दिए गए हैं। लेकिन इससे यह साफ है कि माओवाद प्रभावित इलाकों में सुरक्षा बलों की चुनौतियां बढ़ सकती हैं।

निश्चित तौर पर यह गहरी चिंता की बात है और इसके बाद यह पता लगाने की जरूरत है कि माओवादी समूहों तक ड्रोन जैसे संवेदनशील उपकरण कैसे पहुंचे और इसका जरिया कौन है। फिलहाल इस मामले में शुरुआती जांच के दौरान खुफिया एजेंसियों को मुंबई के एक दुकानदार पर शक है कि उसने अज्ञात लोगों को ड्रोन बेचे थे। हालांकि यह कोई पहला मौका नहीं है जब माओवादियों के पास निगरानी रखने के लिए ड्रोन या दूसरे उपकरण होने के संकेत मिले हों। करीब साढ़े चार साल पहले खुद माओवादियों की एक चिट्ठी के जरिए हुए खुलासे के हवाले से यह खबर आई थी कि सुरक्षा बलों से मुकाबला करने के लिए वे ड्रोन और मोर्टार बनाना सीख रहे हैं। इसके अलावा, वे मोटरसाइकिल के इंजन को जोड़ कर ड्रोन और रिमोट के जरिए आइआइटी विस्फोट करने की तकनीक पर भी काम कर रहे हैं। यानी अब तक इस संदर्भ में जो व्योरे उपलब्ध हो सके हैं, उससे यही संदेह है कि माओवादी समूहों की पहुंच या तो ड्रोन मुहैया कराने वालों तक है या फिर वे इसे तैयार करने की क्षमता विकसित कर चुके हैं।

जाहिर है, दोनों ही स्थितियों में यह सुरक्षा बलों और सरकार के लिए एक बड़ी चुनौती है कि माओवादी समूहों की आधुनिक तकनीकी तक पहुंच का सामने कैसे किया जाए। विडंबना यह है कि एक ओर माओवाद प्रभावित इलाकों में समस्या पर काबू पाने का दावा किया जा रहा है और दूसरी ओर माओवादियों की क्षमता में बढ़ोतरी के संकेत मिल रहे हैं। यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है कि आए दिन माओवाद प्रभावित इलाकों में तैनात सीआरपीएफ के शिविर या काफिलों पर घात लगा कर हमला किया जाता है और उसमें नाहक ही जवानों की जान चली जाती है। दरअसल, बस्तर या गढ़चिरोली जैसे उन क्षेत्रों की जटिल भौगोलिक संरचना माओवादियों को अपने अनुकूल लगती है और वहां कई बार वे किसी हमले को अंजाम देने में कामयाब हो जाते हैं। हालांकि यह भी सच है कि सुरक्षा बलों ने भी अक्सर अभियान चला कर माओवादियों पर काबू पाने की हर मुमकिन कोशिश की है। लेकिन ड्रोन से सीआरपीएफ शिविर की निगरानी के ताजा मामले से साफ है कि सुरक्षा बलों को अब अतिरिक्त चौकसी बरतने की जरूरत है।

बदलाव के संकेत

पड़ोसी देश श्रीलंका में हुए राष्ट्रपति चुनाव में श्रीलंका फ्रीडम पार्टी (एसएफपी) के उम्मीदवार गोटबाया राजपक्षे की जीत ने एक बार फिर से देश की राजनीति की दिशा बदल दी है। राजपक्षे ने यूनाइटेड नेशनल पार्टी (यूपएपी) के उम्मीदवार सजित प्रेमदासा को तेरह लाख वोटों से हराते हुए यह साबित कर दिया है कि उनकी पार्टी एसएफपी और राजपक्षे परिवार का दबदबा अभी भी पहले की तरह ही कायम है। श्रीलंका में 2005 से 2015 तक एसएफपी सत्ता में रही थी और तब गोटबाया के बड़े भाई महिंदा राजपक्षे देश के राष्ट्रपति रहे थे और उनके शासनकाल में गोटबाया दो साल रक्षा मंत्री भी रहे थे। इस चुनाव में एसएफपी की जीत इसलिए भी महत्वपूर्ण मानी जा रही है कि श्रीलंका के सिंहल बहुल दक्षिणी हिस्से में राजपक्षे की पार्टी फिर से ताकतवर बन कर उभरी है। हालांकि देश के मुसलिम और तमिल बहुल इलाकों में श्रीलंका फ्रीडम पार्टी को खासी हार का सामना करना पड़ा। इससे यह भी साफ है कि देश में लंबे समय से तमिल समुदाय व अल्पसंख्यकों और सिंहलियों के बीच जो वैमनस्य चला आ रहा है, उसकी खाई अभी तक पटी नहीं है।

यह तो ठीक है कि महिंदा राजपक्षे के भाई के नाते श्रीलंका की राजनीति में गोटबाया का दबदबा बढ़ता गया, लेकिन इससे भी ज्यादा उन्हें जिस बात के लिए जाना जाता है वह है देश से मुक्ति चीतों का सफाया। राजपक्षे मूल रूप से फौजी अफसर रहे हैं और तमिल इलाकों से लिबरेशन टाइगरस ऑफ तमिल ईलम (एलटीटीई) के सफाए के अभियान को उन्होंने अंजाम तक पहुंचाया। इसलिए वे श्रीलंका में ‘टर्मिनेटर’ के नाम से भी विख्यात हैं। सिंहली बौद्ध समुदाय में वे महानायक के रूप में देखे जाते हैं तो तमिल समुदाय में उन्हें आज भी खलनायक के तौर पर ही देखा जाता है। यही वजह है कि तमिल बहुल इलाकों में श्रीलंका फ्रीडम पार्टी जीत का मुंह नहीं देख पाई। सवाल है कि क्या नई सरकार का तमिलों के प्रति पहले जैसा द्वेषपूर्ण रवैया रहेगा या फिर वक्त के साथ उसमें कुछ उदारता देखने को मिलेगी। श्रीलंका में सिंहलियों और मुसलमानों के बीच होते रहने वाले संघर्ष भी देश के लिए कम बड़ी चुनौती नहीं हैं। श्रीलंका में पिछले साल चर्च पर जिस तरह से आत्मघाती हमले हुए और इसके पीछे इस्लामी आतंकवाद का हाथ माना गया, उससे भी नई सरकार को निपटना है। सिंहलियों को लगता है कि गोटबाया राजपक्षे ने जिस तरह से एलटीटीई का सफाया किया, उसी तरह वे इस्लामी आतंकवाद से भी निपट पाने में सक्षम होंगे।

श्रीलंका का एकमात्र पड़ोसी देश भारत है। इसलिए गोटबाया का सत्ता में आना भारत के लिए हर तरह से महत्त्वपूर्ण है और इसके दूरगामी अर्थ भी हैं। भारत के लिए सबसे बड़ी चिंता की बात यह है कि श्रीलंका में एक बार फिर से चीन समर्थक सत्ता की वापसी हुई है। महिंदा राजपक्षे ने भी अपने दस साल के शासन में चीन के साथ गहरी दोस्ती निभाई थी और हंबनटोटा बंदरगाह का निर्माण कर हिंद महासागर में चीन की सैन्य गतिविधियों के लिए स्थायी रास्ता बना दिया था। अब भारत के दो पड़ोसी नेपाल और श्रीलंका में चीन समर्थक सरकारें हो गई हैं। नेपाल के प्रधानमंत्री केपी शर्मा ओली का चीन के प्रति प्रेम जाजहारि है। फिर, भारत श्रीलंका में रह रहे तमिलों के हितों की अनदेखी नहीं कर सकता। यही वजह है कि श्रीलंका की नीतियां सुरक्षा और सामरिक कारणों के अलावा भारत की अंदरूनी राजनीति को प्रभावित करती हैं। ऐसे में श्रीलंका की नई सरकार भारत के प्रति क्या रुख रखती है, यह आने वाला वक्त बताएगा।

कल्पमेधा

अपने अज्ञान का आभास होना ही ज्ञान की तरफ बढ़ा कदम है।

-डिजरायली

जनसत्ता

मूल्यपरक शिक्षा और सतत विकास लक्ष्य



‘रमेश पोखरियाल ‘निशंक’

मुझे लगता है कि हमें अपने छात्रों को यह सिखाना होगा कि स्थिरता केवल पर्यावरण के बारे में ही नहीं है, बल्कि हमें समग्र विकास के विषय में सोचना है। एक समाज के रूप में, एक राष्ट्र के रूप में हमारे कार्यों से प्रकृति के साथ सामंजस्य कैसे प्राप्त किया जा सकता है, इस बारे में प्रश्न का उत्तर ढूंढना है।

संक्षेप

संक्षेप में पुरानी भारतीय संस्कृति ने संपूर्ण विश्व को परिवार माना है। ‘अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघु चेतसाम, उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम।’ संपूर्ण दुनिया में वसुधैव कुटुंबकम का महान विचार लेकर भारत देश ने ‘सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः’ की परिकल्पना को स्वीकार करते हुए संपूर्ण मानवता के कल्याण की प्रार्थना की है। हमारा चिंतन, हमारे दर्शन और हमारे मूल्यों में एक ही भावना परिलक्षित होती है कि संसार में कोई कष्ट में न रहे। एकात्म मानववाद का चिंतन कर हमने समाज में अंतिम छोर के व्यक्ति तक पहुंचने का संकल्प लिया है।पिछड़े, दलित, उपेक्षित वर्ग तक पहुंचना हमारी सर्वोच्च प्राथमिकता है।

विश्व बंधुत्व, सामाजिक समरसता, सौहार्द, परोपकार, सहिष्णुता, प्रेम की भावना को हम शिक्षा के माध्यम से आगे बढ़ाने और पुष्पित पल्लवित करने में सक्षम हैं। शिक्षा ही वह माध्यम है जिससे हम समग्र विकास की परिकल्पना को साकार कर सकते हैं। विश्व

में शीघ्र पर रहने का श्रेय हमें शिक्षा के माध्यम से ही मिला। विश्व गुरु भारत पुरातन काल में ज्ञान और विज्ञान का नेतृत्व केवल इसलिए कर पाया क्योंकि उसकी शिक्षा सर्वोत्कृष्ट और मूल्यों पर आधारित थी। नालंदा, विक्रमशिला, वल्लभी विश्वविद्यालय दुनिया भर के छात्रों और विद्वानों के लिए आकर्षण का केंद्र रहे। सदैव से ही भारत अपनी मूल्यपरक शिक्षा द्वारा वैश्विक कल्याण के साझा उद्देश्यों को साकार करने के लिए अंतरराष्ट्रीय समुदाय के साथ एक सकारात्मक और रचनात्मक भूमिका निभाता रहा है। आज के चुनौतीपूर्ण वातावरण में भारत विश्व का तीसरा बड़ा शिक्षा तंत्र होने के नाते तैतीस करोड़ से ज्यादा विद्यार्थियों के उज्ज्वल भविष्य निर्माण के लिए कृत संकल्पित है। देश में एक हजार से ज्यादा विश्वविद्यालय और पैंतालीस हजार से ज्यादा डिग्री कालेज हैं।

सतत विकास के तीन स्तंभ आर्थिक विकास, सामाजिक विकास और पर्यावरण संरक्षण स्थिरता और विकास संतुलित करने पर केंद्रित है। मुझे लगता है कि हमें अपने छात्रों को यह सिखाना होगा कि स्थिरता केवल पर्यावरण के बारे में ही नहीं है, बल्कि हमें समग्र विकास के विषय में सोचना है। एक समाज के रूप में, एक राष्ट्र के रूप में हमारे कार्यों से प्रकृति के साथ सामंजस्य कैसे प्राप्त किया जा सकता है, इस बारे में प्रश्न का उत्तर ढूंढना है। ‘स्थिरता’ की परिभाषा से अपने विद्यार्थियों को अवगत कराना हमारी सर्वोच्च प्राथमिकता है। यही कारण था कि जहां हमने अपने परिसरों में सिंगल यूज प्लास्टिक पर प्रतिबंध लगाया है, वहीं ‘एक पेड़ एक छात्र’ अभियान चला कर अपने परिसरों को हरित परिसर बनाने का प्रयास किया है। हम शिक्षा, विज्ञान, पर्यावरण और संस्कृति के क्षेत्र में अंतयाष्ट्रीय सहयोग के माध्यम से शांति के निर्माण के अपने मूल जनादेश को आगे बढ़ाने के लिए कृत संकल्पित हैं। मुझे लगता है कि युगों-युगों से चली आ रही हमारी शिक्षा पद्धति हमारा दर्शन, हमारा चिंतन और हमारा भाव- सब कुछ मानवता के कल्याण के लिए केंद्रित रहता है। ‘असतो मा सद्गमयः’ असत्य से सत्य की ओर एवं ‘तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमयः’ अंधकार से प्रकाश की ओर प्राणी मात्र को ले जाने के लिए हम संकल्पित हैं।

हमारा लक्ष्य है कि प्रत्येक बच्चे और नागरिक को गुणवत्ता पूर्ण शिक्षा प्राप्त हो। हम समग्र शिक्षा के माध्यम से, शिक्षा के अधिकार अधिनियम 2009 को लागू कर समस्त भारत में बच्चों तक शिक्षा पहुंचाने का

प्रोग्राम’ के तहत भारत की सौ से ज्यादा सर्वोत्तम शिक्षण संस्थाएं विश्व भर में छात्रों के लिए आकर्षक शिक्षा केंद्र के रूप में उपलब्ध हैं।

शिक्षा के माध्यम से अपनी सांस्कृतिक विरासत को बढ़ावा देने और विश्व धरोहर स्थलों के संरक्षण के लिए विद्यार्थियों को जागरूक करना हमारी प्राथमिकता है। भाषा राष्ट्र की अभिव्यक्ति है और भाषा के बगैर राष्ट्र गुंगा है। भाषा के महत्त्व को समझते हुए नई नीति के माध्यम से हम देश को हिंदी, संस्कृत सहित सभी भारतीय भाषाओं को संरक्षित, पुष्पित एवं पल्लवित करने में जुटे हैं। भारत विज्ञान और प्रौद्योगिकी की मदद से संयुक्त राष्ट्र के सतत विकास लक्ष्यों को प्राप्त करने के लिए कटिबद्ध है। मानव सभ्यता हमारी आधुनिक जीवन शैली को बनाए रखने के लिए संसाधनों का उपयोग करती है। मानव इतिहास में अनगिनत उदाहरण हैं जहां सभ्यता ने विकास के लिए

पर्यावरण को नुकसान पहुंचाया है। हमें क्षति और विनाश से बचाते हुए इस बात को ध्यान में रखना है कि हम प्राकृतिक दुनिया के साथ कैसे तालमेल बिठा सकते हैं।

ब्रिटिश काल के दौरान शुरू हुई मूल्यों की गिरावट लंबे समय तक जारी रही। यह हमारा सौभाग्य रहा कि स्वामी विवेकानंद, महात्मा गांधी, सुभाष चंद्र बोस जैसे सिद्धांतों और मूल्य युक्त नेतृत्व ने हमारा मार्गदर्शन किया। उन्होंने सत्य और अहिंसा के अपने वक्तव्यशाली मूल्यों के साथ भारत को अपनी ताकत वापस पाने में मदद की। आजादी के सत्र वर्षों के बाद प्रभावी प्रबंधन और अस्तित्व के लिए इन मूल्यों पर वापस जाने की आवश्यकता है।

मानवता के लिए शिक्षा को संयुक्त रूप से बदलने के लिए अंतरराष्ट्रीय साझेदारी की अनूठी पहल को साकार करने के लिए एवं मानवता के

लिए शिक्षा को संयुक्त रूप से बदलने के लिए मैं वैश्विक साझेदारी की आशा करता हूं। आज हम परिवार के अंदर बंट गए हैं, खुद को कंप्यूटर तक सीमित कर लिया है और स्मार्टफोन को अपनी दुनिया बना लिया है। इन जंजीरों से निकलने में बापू के विचार हमारे लिए मददगार साबित हो सकते हैं।

आज के युग में भारत इस तरह की पहल शिक्षा, संस्कृति, विज्ञान, प्रौद्योगिकी, जल और स्वच्छता के क्षेत्र में अन्य देशों के साथ मिल कर करना चाहता है। मैं सभी सम्मानित देशों से अनुरोध करता हूं कि हम सब मिल कर के सतत विकास लक्ष्यों को पूरा करें।

(लेखक मानव संसाधन विकास मंत्री हैं। यह लेख यूनेस्को में दिए उनके भाषणा का अंश है।)

नशे के उत्सव

दुनिया मेरे आगे

खीर या फलों का प्रसाद पेट भरता है, लेकिन दूसरा प्रसाद चित्त प्रसन्न कर देता है और प्रिय सार्थी का संग हो तो बेहद आनंद मिलता है। पेट संतुष्टि से ज्यादा मन संतुष्टि मानी जाती है। साफ है कि इन आयोजनों में नशे को मनोरंजन के बहाने एक ‘लांच पेड़’ मिल जाता है। धार्मिक आयोजनों की तड़क-भड़क, डीजे का करारा छौंक, भांग और घोटे की सुलभ उपलब्धता युवा जीवन को अनुरागसन तोड़ने के लिए उकसाती है। क्या प्रसाद के नाम पर भांग, घोटा या ऐसा कुछ और नशे का खुला प्रचार नहीं है ? यह विडंबना है कि एक तरफ तो सरकार और संस्थाएं मिल कर भांग के पौधे उखाड़ने का अभियान चलाती हैं, लेकिन हर बरस फिर ही-भरी हो जाने वाली भांग ही अभियान को उखाड़ देती है। प्रसाद रूप में सर्वत्र उपलब्ध होकर, राजनेताओं के प्रश्रय में बंट कर फिर अपने बाहुपाश में बांधती है। यहीं विद्यार्थी जीवन में अनुशासन से छिटक कर जिंदगी, नशे के मनोरंजन की गर्त में धंसती जाती है।

हजारों युवाओं में जो मस्ती और मनोरंजन के लिए जुलूस में शामिल होते हैं, संभव है कि ऊर्जा बढ़ाने के शौकीनों के लिए चांदी से बनी चिलमों का प्रबंध भी किया। देवताओं की शादी के जउन में प्रसाद ग्रहण करना, बताते हैं एक हजार गुणा फल देता है !

विमर्श की जरूरत

दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय के पांच फीसद विद्यार्थियों के लिए ही हॉस्टल सुविधा उपलब्ध है तो छात्र चाहते हैं कि इस जमीन पर हॉस्टल बनाा चाहिए।

राजस्थान विश्वविद्यालय में साल-दर-साल परीक्षा फीस में बढ़ोतरी की जा रही है। छात्रों के विरोध प्रदर्शन के बावजूद विश्वविद्यालय प्रशासन फीस घटाने की कवायपद नहीं कर रहा। ऐसे में देश के सरकारी विश्वविद्यालों में शिक्षा के इस कदर होते व्यापारीकरण से आर्थिक तौर पर कमजोर विद्यार्थियों को बेहतर संस्थान में पढ़ने व उच्च शिक्षा प्राप्त से वंचित होना पड़ सकता है। वह भी तब जब दुनिया के शीर्ष 300 शिक्षण संस्थानों में

एक भी भारतीय विश्वविद्यालय शामिल नहीं। हमारे केवल 2.5 प्रतिशत कॉलेज पीएचडी करा पाने में सक्षम हैं। इसी के साथ केवल 0.5 फीसद छात्र शोध शिक्षा हासिल कर पाते हैं। हमारे उच्च शिक्षण संस्थान वैज्ञानिक सोच और शोध विकसित कर पाने में समर्थ नहीं हैं। यही कारण है कि आज देश में उच्च शिक्षा की सुलभता व सुगमता अति आवश्यक है। हर आम व वंचित छात्र से दूर जाती उच्च शिक्षा को बचाना जरूरी है। सस्ती शिक्षा के लिए छात्र-छात्राओं द्वारा किया जा रहा विरोध प्रदर्शन राजनीतिक प्रयुक्त की इच्छाशक्ति के लिए न होकर विश्वविद्यालयी शिक्षा को बचाए रखने के लिए है। अपनी मांगों व विषयों पर अक्सर प्रदर्शन कर विरोध जताने वाले विद्यार्थियों को प्रशासन से तार्किक विमर्श का मौका देना चाहिए।

- कृष्या जागिड़, राजस्थान विश्वविद्यालय***

की खाद से बढ़ता है। नशा बेचने वालों का तंत्र बहुत चतुर है। पुलिस सूचनाओं और खुफिया सूचनाओं के आधार पर अपने हिसाब से निरंतर काम करती है। लेकिन अधिकतर सूचनाएं लुप्त रह जाती हैं। कभी पुलिस छापे में 1.18 ग्राम स्मैक मिलती है तो कभी एक किलो चरस या काफी मात्रा में चिट्ठा। सरकार अनेक योजनाओं के अंतर्गत प्रयास करती है। स्कूल और सामाजिक संस्थाएं भी सेमिनार, जुलूस के माध्यम से

कोशिश करते हैं, लेकिन नशे की लत निरंतर लगाए रखने वाले भी कम नहीं होते। किसी जमाने में नशा करने वाले कफ सिरप गटकते थे, ब्रैड पर आयोडेक्स लगाकर खाते थे। अब तो तंबाकू, चरस, अफीम, गांजा, भुक्की, सुल्फा-कितना कुछ कितनी जगह आसानी से उपलब्ध है ! दवा दुकानों पर नशीली गोलियां भी बेची जा रही हैं, आम जनता और महिला मंडल संघर्षरत हैं, प्रदर्शन कर रहे हैं। नियम और कानून सख्त हैं, प्रशासन है, लेकिन कार्यान्वयन की संजीदगी गायब है।

पहले जीवन सादा, सरल था और युवा मेहनती। लेकिन विकास और संघ्रषण के अति विकसित होते साधनों ने नशे पर भी बहुत काम किया और जाल बिछाने में समय नष्ट नहीं हुआ। कहा जाता है कि युवा

सच के साथ

कुछ दिन पहले पाकिस्तान के इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया नियामक ने टीवी की बहसों या ‘टॉक शो’ के दौरान उद्घोषकों के विशेषज्ञ के रूप में राय देने पर प्रतिबंध लगा दिया। यह अच्छा कदम है। इन दिनों वैश्विक स्तर पर, विशेष रूप से भारत में, देखा जा रहा है कि मीडिया किसी भी मुद्दे पर स्वयं एक निर्णयदाता की शब्दावली का प्रयोग करते हुए तथ्यों को परोसने लगता है। वह खुद ही विशेषज्ञ बन जाता है। आज की भाग-दौड़ वाली जिंदगी में लोग खबरों की सत्यता तक पहुंचने की जहमत नहीं उठाना चाहते। जो

टीवी पर देखा वही मान लिया। यहां तक तो गनीमत है। दिक्कत तब खड़ी हो जाती है जब हम ‘तथाकथित सत्य’ को ‘ध्रुव सत्य’ मानकर प्रतिक्रिया देने लगते हैं। इससे जो पूर्वाग्रह निर्मित होता है वह हमारी एकता में बाधक है।

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विविधता का संरक्षण

बदलते वैश्विक परिवेश और जलवायु में होते परिवर्तन को देखते हुए मानव अस्तित्व के लिए जैव विविधता अति आवश्यक है। जीवन का हर रूप एक-दूसरे पर इतना निर्भर है कि किसी एक प्रजाति पर संकट आने से दूसरे में असंतुलन की स्थिति पैदा हो जाती है। यदि पौधों और प्राणियों की प्रजातियां संकट की स्थिति में होती हैं तो इससे पर्यावरण में गिरावट उत्पन्न होती है और अंततः मनुष्य का अस्तित्व भी खतरे में पड़ सकता है।