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Startling parallels between Tiffany, Flipkart

The two got new owners at an identical deal size. But the similarity ends there...

NOT FOR PROFIT

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

What's common between the 182-year-old New York jewellery major Tiffany and a little over-a-decade-old Bengaluru-headquartered Flipkart? Nothing at all, you would say, but think again. If Tiffany was acquired in the largest luxury deal of the world earlier this week, Flipkart got a new owner last year. And, what's striking is the identical size of the two deals — $16 billion.

Made famous by Audrey Hepburn-starrer *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, perhaps more than by the diamond it sells to the rich and the famous, the chain with its flagship store in Fifth Avenue has a similarity with Flipkart's origin too. The destination store for top-end jewellery had started out as a stationery outlet almost two centuries ago. Needless to say that Flipkart had begun its start-up journey from a two-bedroom Koramangala flat in Bengaluru as an online book store.

If Tiffany & Co was founded by two 20-something entrepreneurs, Charles Lewis Tiffany and John B Young, it was the same at Flipkart — co-founded by Sachin Bansal and Binny Bansal. In both the cases the founders became friends as students. And if Flipkart entered into a trans-national deal with American retail giant Walmart, so did Tiffany to strike a cross-border transaction with French major LVMH or Louis Vuitton.

Beyond that, Flipkart and Tiffany hardly converge. Tiffany, with more than 300 stores across the world and $4.2 billion in annual revenue, is treated as a heritage brand in America, looked up to by stars and politicians alike. Its iconic engagement rings and the blue boxes are a reference point in the deal documents with LVMH. Flipkart, though a posterboy of Indian e-commerce, is just an online marketplace hosting thousands of vendors who in turn sell products — electronic goods to furniture, grocery to apparel — to pin codes spread across the country. Why then are Tiffany and Flipkart being acquired at the same price, barely one year apart from each other?

When Walmart bought a 77 per cent stake at $16 billion last year, valuing Flipkart at around $20 billion, its shareholders had reacted with anger. But one year later, in the recent earnings call, Walmart sounded pleased with Flipkart operations. "We're excited about what's happening at Flipkart and PhonePe," said Doug McMillon, president and CEO of Walmart.

Walmart, having failed to start its multi-brand business in the country because of regulatory issues after waiting for long, possibly saw Flipkart as a gateway to the increasing buying power of the Indian middle class. With that, the Bentonville (Arkansas)-headquartered retailer also opened a front to compete with its American rival Amazon in a new battleground — India.

In that context, $16 billion was a price Walmart was ready to pay for the opportunity it was getting. With e-commerce still having a single-digit market share in the overall retail universe of the country, $16 billion was perhaps the world's largest retailer's bet on the future of shopping.

In the case of Tiffany, which caught the imagination of many generations, LVMH wants it as part of its 75- plus brands including Dior, Vuitton, Fendi, Celine, Dom Pérignon, Tag Heuer, Sephora, Moët & Chandon, spanning categories such as fashion, watches, jewellery, wine, spirits, retail, beauty and hospitality. In fact, in 2017, the French fashion house had acquired Dior in a deal worth $13.1 billion. In that sense, Tiffany, not really in high spirits due to falling tourist demand in the current economic slowdown, may not immediately add to LVMH's bottom line. In fact, the effort will be to revive and re-invent the Tiffany brand, which is not as popular with the millennials looking for deals and may be less expensive engagement rings. Reports show that lab-grown diamond, believed to be cheaper, is gaining in popularity with the younger lot. Tiffany hasn't offered that option yet.

Bernard Arnault, founder, chairman and the largest shareholder of LVMH and one of the richest in the world, may attempt to change that to attract high-earning-but-not-rich-yet millennials to Tiffany. Depending on whether or not he's able to revive the fortunes of a brand made memorable through Hollywood, the $16-billion deal may find a new meaning.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Onion protests

As onion prices touched ₹100 a kg in some parts of the country, an MLA of the Opposition RJD in Bihar turned up in the Assembly wearing a garland of onion bulbs on Wednesday. Raja Pakar (Vaishali) MLA Shiv Chandra Ram raised slogans and attacked Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for his "empty promises" of setting up stalls where onions were supposed to be sold at ₹35 per kg. He said his protest was aimed to "compel the CM to take some serious action". Earlier this month, some of his Congress counterparts in Delhi had worn onion garlands as a mark of protest against the state government over the issue of increasing onion prices. They were protesting in front of the state secretariat.

Turmoil continues

The turmoil in the Uttar Pradesh unit of the Congress party refuses to die down. Now Raebareli MLA Aditi Singh (*pictured)* is in the line of fire. The party moved a petition in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly seeking her disqualification. She had been served a show-cause notice after she defied the party whip and attended the special session of the Vidhan Sabha on October 2. But she failed to offer a response, said Congress Legislature Party leader Aradhana Misra. Earlier on Sunday, the party expelled 10 senior leaders for opposing the state unit leadership at a public forum and "tarnishing the party's image".

Philippines can wait

Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister Dinesh Sharma (*pictured*), who was scheduled to visit the Philippines during November 25–28, has had to shelve his travel plans after the foreign ministry failed to clear his tour. Although the UP deputy CM had applied for permission three days before his scheduled departure, the approval could not come on time. Such applications are routed from the Union home ministry to the foreign ministry; the requisite nod in this case could not be processed as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar dashed off to Colombo on an unscheduled visit last week ahead of his of trip to Japan.

Getting station redevelopment on track

After 15 years of unsuccessfully trying to attract the private sector, the public sector seems to have taken the lead in developing the mega-programme

SHINE JACOB

TAKE TWO
ANALYSIS BEHIND THE HEADLINES

It was way back in 2004-05 that the Indian Railways first thought about the redevelopment of a railway station. Old timers in the Railway Board still believe the masterplan for the New Delhi station submitted in 2006 by Terry Farrell and Partners, a Hong Kong-based architectural firm, including a project of 16 commercial towers extending up to Connaught Place from the Paharganj side of the station, would have transformed Lutyens' Delhi.

On February 8, 2008, at least 35 companies — including Reliance Energy, GMR, DLF and Videocon Industries — had expressed interest in modernising the station too. The project, which was seen as a showpiece ahead of the Commonwealth Games in 2010, was dropped after objections from the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) over the proximity of the project to Connaught Place.

The government is now planning to commission upgraded versions of the Habibganj and Gandhinagar stations by March 2020. If this deadline is met, it would mark the realisation of an ambition that has been a non-starter for the past 15 years. "A major reason the New Delhi project did not take of was the lack of co-ordination between various government agencies, including the DDA. Concerns among industry players over the real estate revenue potential may be another prime reason for its slow pace," said R Sivadasan, former finance commissioner with the Railways.

These uncertainties remained when the Railways launched the first phase of station redevelopment programme covering the commercial development of 23 stations for ₹9,000 crore in February 2017. This plan to revamp the appearance of stations by providing digital signage, escalators, self-ticketing counters, executive lounges, restaurants, malls and movie halls attracted scant industry interest. No matter, the project was later extended to a ₹1 trillion project covering 400 stations. But the interest remained tepid. "Following demands from real estate players, the government extended the lease period from 45 years to 99 years but the risks of investing in a new venture and doubts over rates of return persisted," said Vijay Dutt, former additional member of the Railways.

Many point to the case of the commercial complex at the state transport bus station in Thiruvananthapuram to highlight the lack of potential in Indian transport hubs. The Kerala Transport Development Finance Corporation (KTDFC) had to invite as many as 11 tenders, after it remained a "ghost building" for several years. Initially, ideas were floated for the Railways too to join the project, but it did not go ahead citing viability issues. "A major concern for developers was the accessibility to stations as most of the approach roads were congested, a problem that we faced in stations like Jaipur. So the government will have to ensure there are access roads or elevated roads to approach these selected station," Sivadasan pointed out.

In October 2019, the slow pace of station redevelopment again came to limelight when it invited criticism from NITI Aayog Chief Executive Officer Amitabh Kant. In a letter to the Railway Board, Kant said despite the commitment to take up 400 stations for last several years, "actual implementation has not happened except for a few isolated cases in which a few stations have been taken up through EPC mode." The isolated cases that Kant mentioned were those of Habibganj and Gandhinagar. For Habibganj, the ₹400-crore project was allotted to the Bansal group in June 2016 and is expected to be on track by February 2019. Close to 80 per cent civil work is completed so far. On the other hand, the Rs 4,000 crore Gandhinagar hub project, taken up by Kunal Structure in January 2017, is to be commissioned by March. Kant asked the Railways to take up at least 50 stations on a priority basis.

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Kant also suggested a solution for the lack of co-ordination between the railway ministry and the urban development ministry over land lease clauses at Bijwasan and Anand Vihar in Delhi, that led to cancellation of tenders of those stations. He asked to set up an Empowered Group of Secretaries comprising the NITI Aayog CEO, Railway Board chairman, Secretaries of Department of Economic Affairs and Urban and Housing Affairs.

"What lies deep among all these issues is slow pace of real estate growth in the country for the past few years. The government can compensate with more attractive proposals for land usage, as it did by allotting 30 per cent for housing," said Prateek Kumar, an analyst with Antique Stock Broking.

As things stand, the state will now bear the burden of modernising India's stations. Some experts indicate that the government may have to consider charging the passengers for a dedicated station redevelopment fund, so that the Railways can take up the project on its own. Indian Railway Stations Development Corporation (IRSDC), the nodal agency for station redevelopment, is in talks with Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) and the World Bank for funding of station projects. These includes Anand Vihar, Bijwasan and Chandigarh. Apart from that, private equity players and pension funds have also been invited for partnerships to fund redevelopment for at least 10 high-potential stations.

To speed up the process of redeveloping another 39 stations, five public sector undertakings — NPCC, Engineering Projects, MECON, RITES, Bridges & Roof Co — have also been roped in. The companies are cushioned by the commitment that if the contract is not awarded in three years, they will be paid an 8 per cent return on expenditure.

For the time being, the iconic station redevelopment plan is still a work in progress after 15 years.

INSIGHT

Why trust laws need a makeover

J N GUPTA

Among the other issues that trusts face its corpus, tax status and withdrawal are also open to interpretation.

The Free Dictionary describes the term corpus as "the capital or principal amount, as of an estate or trust". In the normal course, the corpus of a trust is sacrosanct and cannot be touched unless the settlors have given directions to the contrary. Therefore, if settlors make any contribution in the form of shares and the income arising out of these shares is intended to be used for charitable objectives, the trustees cannot liquidate this investment and the law should not override such stipulations unless there are cogent reasons for doing so. Therefore, if Tata Trusts are holding on to shares they are doing so at the express wish of the settlors. This practice could still be a case of a technical violation of law, but it does not pass the litmus test of rationality.

Tax exemption: It appears that the trusts could not treat dividend income as exempt following the amendment of the IT Act in October 2014 (effective April 2015) relating to general exemption provisions applicable to trusts and cancellation of registration of trusts in case of non-compliance.

The Tata Trusts deriving the major chunk of their income from dividend were hit badly. And it is at this stage that the trusts made their biggest mistake of The The second part of an analysis of the laws governing trusts shows how the current imbroglio is the problem child of an amendment to the IT Actsecond part of an analysis of the laws governing trusts shows how the current imbroglio is the problem child of an amendment to the IT ActseekThe second part of an analysis of the laws governing trusts shows how the current imbroglio is the problem child of an amendment to the IT Acting cancellation rather than questioning the logic of amendment. The amendment begs the question: Was this intentional or unintentional? Logical or illogical? Nothing could be more illogical than the proposed amendment. Why?

While the trust does not pay any tax on its income derived in form of interest, which is not taxed at any stage, it would be required to pay tax on dividend income, which is already taxed twice in form of corporate tax and dividend distribution tax! Keeping in mind the public good that trusts are serving, this change was not at all in consonance with objective of exemptions given to trusts. Therefore, the trusts should have sought clarification and requested exemption because it appears that the provision was not well thought out -- unless the objective was to ensure that trust would only invest in government securities. Could this have been done? Probably not, since it would amount to a situation that government was using tax provisions to force trusts to invest in its securities. In such cases, would dividend received from public sector companies be taxed or exempt?

Voluntary withdrawal: In a knee-jerk reaction to tax changes, finding that a trust would be a loser from all sides if the status quo continued, trusts decided to voluntarily surrender their exemptions and registration in early 2015, rather than fight and test waters with the authorities and later possibly with the courts.

The present imbroglio is the problem child of tax amendments and the trusts' decision to voluntarily surrender its exemption. Without going into detail, suffice it to say that if exemption and registration are treated as a favour by the tax authorities, the law cannot force anyone to avail of the favour.

Thus, the argument of the trusts that they surrendered their registration and exemption, and such surrender be recognised as complete from the day the application was made has merit. There can't be even an issue that application was incomplete, because the application was to surrender a notional benefit and not to seek something new. It is not prepayment of a term loan, which needs the lenders' approval. The authorities also cannot make the case that they have fundamental and unquestionable right to delay taking a decision and the burden of delay is to be borne by the applicant.

The way forward: Having come to this stage, unless the tax authorities take a suo motu decision to review the tax laws and its inconsistency with objectives, a legal remedy is the only option. And in times like this that the trusts would be missing a legal luminary such as the late Nani A Palkhivala.

A relook at the laws related to trusts is vital because the laws are archaic, without any justifiable rationale, are not contemporary and are hurting the objective of public good. Those violations that occur must be addressed and punished adequately, with individuals at fault penalised rather than the trusts, unless there is a doubt about the charitable activities of the trusts. While the jury is still out, very few Indians would doubt the charitable intentions and activities of the Tata Trusts. (**Concluded**)

The first part appeared on Wednesday

The author is founder and managing director of Stakeholders Empowerment Services

LETTERS

Act responsibly

This refers to the editorial, "Get down to business", dated November 27, 2019. That politicians make strange bedfellows was visibly evident from the emergence and subsequent coming together of regional satraps with divergent views and conflicting ideologies in the aftermath of the 2019 Assembly elections in Maharashtra. It was not surprising to see bitter relations among various traditional rivals turn cordial and demagogues finding commonality in their views on secularism, social justice, agrarian crisis, and governance to "save democracy". Each faction was led by an overly ambitious political leader who tried to flame regional passions for more political space. The incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party dispensation was projected as arrogant, anti-development and anti-minority that could only be defeated by a "pro-poor" and "secular" alliance.

It is unfortunate, however, that despite the BJP-Shiv Sena combine being rewarded with the mandate to form government, the two parties could not iron out their differences. The BJP's nocturnal capture of power and the governor intervening in a partisan manner was an equally reprehensible and dispiriting episode in Indian democracy. Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, when faced with a floor test in Parliament, made an oblique reference to Sharad Pawar and very cogently said, "If power comes in my hand by breaking the party and forming a new alliance for power, I would not like to even touch such power with a pair of tongs." It is time the central government refrained from indulging in political misadventurism by attempting to install a government either run or backed by defectors. Toppling popularly elected state governments and then resuscitating them by offering outside support in. It is imperative for all stakeholders to act as guardians of the constitutional order rather than as collaborators in a clandestine, political schemes.

Shreyans Jain New Delhi

There's many a slip...

The BJP's ignominious attempt to grab power in Maharashtra, illegally and illegitimately, has come to an end, at least for now, with the resignation of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis (*pictured*) on Tuesday evening. Fadnavis had no option but to quit after Ajit Pawar of the NCP, who had promised to the BJP the support of the Sharad Pawar-led party, and had been made the deputy chief minister, resigned in the wake of the Supreme Court directive to hold a floor test on Wednesday. The court did well to order the early test, though the BJP wanted two weeks' time to prove its strength in the Assembly, which itself was a sure sign of lack of majority in the House. The court could have issued the order for an immediate trial of strength as soon as the matter came before it, because the issues to be decided were clear and simple even then. Unfortunately, and unnecessarily, the issue got prolonged and perhaps more complicated. It may be assumed that the stage has now been set for the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress combination to come to power, but there may also be more surprises to unfold.

Tarique Anwar Karnataka

A vicious cycle

With central GST collections going down, states have begun to feel the pinch. States with less than 14 per cent per annum tax revenue growth are to be compensated by the centre. At least five states claim overdue transfers of up to ₹40,000 crore. This needs timely attention. The decline in growth is at a seven-year low at 5 per cent. The erosion in the economy is wide ranging -- banks, businesses, exports and hence job creation. The unemployment rate is the highest in decades and investment — government and private — has dipped; the manufacturing index has gone negative. Against the estimate of revenue collection at ₹24.5 trillion, the April-September inflow is at just Rs 9.3 trillion. By its very construct, GST disadvantages manufacture-oriented states and should these now be denied equalising central transfer, our manufacturing base itself gets destabilised. A vicious cycle then follows.

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HAMBONE

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The Mudra problem

Directed lending always builds up bad loans in banks

On Tuesday, Reserve Bank of India Deputy Governor M K Jain highlighted a dangerous trend: The rising levels of bad debt in the small-scale loans being handed out under the government's Mudra scheme. The location where he made this remark is significant: He was speaking at a microfinance conference organised by the Small Industries Development Bank of India, which is the underwriter and the owner of the risk management protocols for the Mudra loans. Mr Jain said that banks would have to do both a better job of establishing the capability to repay when the potential loan is being evaluated, and also "monitor the loans through the life cycle much more closely". Although Mudra loans are typically relatively small in size, a large number of them has been handed out and they are generally free of collateral, making them a significant point of vulnerability for banks that are just beginning to emerge from an existing crisis. It is not surprising, therefore, that the banking regulator is worried — even the Governor, Shaktikanta Das, has raised concerns about this in the past.

These concerns are entirely warranted. When collateral-free loans were first suggested, it was foreseen by many that the consequences would be a worrisome increase in bad debt. The question is certainly one of capacity, as the regulator seemed to argue. The number of Mudra loans is so large that the capacity to both evaluate and monitor is significantly constrained, especially at the level at which these loans are being handed out. Yet even beyond capacity, there are problems of intent that must be taken on board. The simple fact is that the government has made it very clear that handing out money through Mudra loans is a political priority. Senior politicians in the ruling party have consistently mentioned the amount and number of Mudra loans as an achievement, and tied it to claims about entrepreneurship and even job creation. Given these clear political signals, it would be futile to expect any change in how the programme is being implemented on the ground. No banker in the state sector is likely to defy a clearly stated government preference.

This combination of directed lending and a high presence for the state in the banking sector is a recipe for disaster. Government orders to the banking sector, whether sectoral or of the sort that the Mudra programme is, are detrimental to the due diligence work that is integral to a healthy financial sector. Loans where there is a government mandate are always going to be scrutinised differently than those where the bank's own concerns are at stake. The constraints put on the loan are substantially different. If the government wishes to retain a large stake in the banking sector, then it must realise that it simply cannot hand out directives. As in any bureaucracy, there will be a rush to comply with orders but such a rush is fatal to the health of the banking sector. Directed lending in a system like India's leaves the banking sector susceptible to crises.

The right blend

The present biofuel policy is invitation to ecological disaster

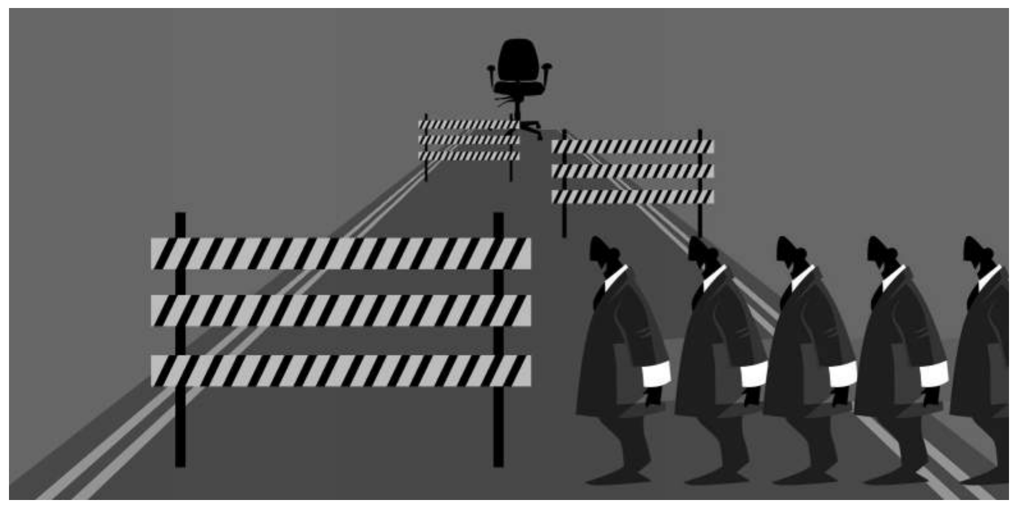
Given the huge gap in the availability and requirement of ethanol for blending with petrol, the need to step up its production is indisputable. But the same cannot be said about some of the measures mooted by the government to achieve this objective. The most debatable among these is the permission granted to ethanol manufacturers — mostly sugar mills that produce it from their byproduct molasses — to convert sugarcane juice directly into alcohol and also use surplus sugar and foodgrains, such as wheat, rice and corn, for this purpose. Going a step further, the government has chosen to incentivise the use of these questionable raw materials by fixing relatively higher prices for the ethanol produced from them.

This move would, obviously, open the doors for the sugar factories to buy sugarcane — and for the farmers to grow it — just for producing biofuel rather than for making sugar from it. Considering that sugarcane, wheat and rice are water guzzlers, besides being input-intensive crops, their use for biofuel production is virtually an invitation to ecological disaster. The true value of the scarce water that goes into the cultivation of these crops cannot be measured in economic terms alone. The social cost of such water use may be far higher than the economic gains from ethanol doping of petrol. Moreover, a land-stressed country like India — where land is hard to find even for infrastructure, industries and other purposes — can ill-afford to use it exclusively for growing biofuel crops.

Where foodgrains are concerned, though the present glut may give the impression that part of the surplus stocks can safely be diverted to biofuel production, given the rampant malnutrition and hidden hunger in the country, it may be difficult to justify it. In fact, many of the land-rich and industrialised countries, which have gone far ahead in admixing crops-based biofuels with gasoline, are also revising their policies. Studies have revealed that this has distorted the cropping patterns and spiked food prices in those countries. The advisability of clearing forests to grow biofuel crops, as has been happening in Brazil and some other land-surplus nations, has also begun to be challenged by environmentalists.

Another fact that needs to be kept in view is that India has substantial potential to produce ethanol and other types of biofuels from non-sugarcane and non-food sources that are currently under-exploited, if not wholly untapped. The National Biofuel Policy of 2009, amended in 2018, lists rural and urban garbage, cellulosic and lingo-cellulosic biomass (agricultural dry matter), and crop residues like wheat and rice stubble amongst the suitable raw material for making ethanol. Though such second generation (2G) ethanol turns out to be slightly more expensive than the molasses-based alcohol, it recompenses the additional cost by mitigating the dreadful environmental pollution due to burning of urban wastes and farm residues, including crop stubble. Fortunately, oil marketing companies have reacted favourably to this idea and are already in the process of setting up a dozen 2G ethanol refineries in 11 states. This trend needs further impetus. Promising results have also emerged from the ongoing research and development work on producing ethanol from a non-food and fast-growing bio-source like algae. Such novel technologies hold the key to augmenting supplies of environment-friendly biofuels without any adverse effect on ecology or food security.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Competition versus reservations

Reservations have eroded human capital in the Indian government, regulatory and public sector institutions

JAIMINI BHAGWATI

The promise of India endures yet in Delhi and several urban areas in the country where we have been inhaling toxic air particularly during winter months. The June 2013 television images of buildings in Uttarakhand collapsing into swirling waters, annual floods in Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, disruptions during the monsoons in Mumbai add to a sense of outrage. Not everyone is that concerned though since the affluent counter pollution with imported air-filters. In such circles, the commentary is about escaping to alternative homes in the hills, flying off to stay with relatives abroad or emigrating for good.

A couple of days back while clearing out old papers I chanced upon letters I had written to my future wife in the mid-1970s. A letter dated April 27, 1977, when I was stationed in Jalandhar district training as a recent recruit to the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), refers to my meetings with the deputy commissioner and commissioner. When asked neither of them was willing to talk about why an under-trial prisoner accused of petty theft was tortured to death in a jail located in the heart of Jalandhar. That was 42 years ago and perhaps there is greater accountability now. However, the rape and murder in Badaun (Uttar Pradesh) of two minor girls in May 2014 and the rape of another girl and killing of her relatives in Unnao (UP) during 2017-19 paints a picture of despair about India's justice system.

As for the opportunity costs of the ongoing slowdown in India's economic growth and consequent frustrations caused by burgeoning underemployment, there is little left to say. To add insult to injury, we are subjected to inane homilies by central-state government officials/ministers about why it is someone else's responsibility. Glaring examples of personal interest driven politics, as was amply evident in Maharashtra on November 23, 2019, have become all too common. All this and more are the sad realities that Indians are witness to with regularity.

The environmental degradation, worrisome internal security situation and economic slowdown are not merely due to insensitive officials, inadequate domestic savings, doubts about corporate creditworthiness inhibiting fresh lending, overvalued rupee and so on and on. It is also about the significant erosion of human capital in government, regulatory and educational circles that has contributed to distortions in competent and impartial decision-making.

As of now, at least 49.5 per cent of vacancies are mandatorily reserved for Dalits, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in most states and the central government. Tamil Nadu has passed legislation for a higher level of 69 per cent reservation in that state. There is talk about reservations of jobs in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra for those who are deemed indigenous to those states.

On January 12, 2019, the central government notified an additional 10 per cent reservation for "the advancement of any economically weaker sections (EWSs) of citizens". This reservation would be for families with income below ₹8 lakh per annum. This amendment of Articles 15 &16 of the Constitution thus raising total reservations to 59.5 per cent is inconsistent with a 1992 Supreme Court ceiling of 50 per cent for all reservations put together. In September 2017, the maximum family income for three consecutive years, to be eligible for OBC reservations, was raised to ₹8 lakh per annum. It is unclear how this maximum permissible annual family income of ₹8 lakh is estimated on a reliable and consistent basis across the country.

There have been numerous debates in the Constituent Assembly, in state Assemblies and the national Parliament about the need to correct past injustices by enabling weaker sections to obtain employment and entry to institutions set up by government. The consequent reservation policies have served India well. At the same time, over the decades, human capital has been diluted due to a progressive increase in reservation quotas and reductions in minimum educational qualifying standards. Further, caste and OBC reservations have unintentionally created privileged categories among the disadvantaged. For instance, reservations have not helped an overwhelming majority of those who are deprived because of their lower educational levels compared to the better off among the quota eligible communities. In any case, job quotas within the organised sector cannot address widespread Indian underemployment since about 77 per cent of the country's workforce is self-employed or casual labour.

The most valuable "capital" in any country has to be its stock of public-spirited non-partisan specialists, accomplished professionals and academics. Currently, many in crucial official, regulatory and specialised positions, including some who were selected on the basis of quotas, do not meet basic standards of domain knowledge. This tends to lower standards in non-official circles too. An important step towards better governance would be to mandate that all government, regulatory and public sector positions are staffed by those who have been selected through competitive processes. More than 70 years after independence, it is high time we started ending all forms of reservations including informal religious affiliation-based quotas. A reasonable approach would be to halve reservations by 2024 and drop these altogether by 2029.

Media reports suggest that to increase their vote share the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) parties led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made a pitch for the support of the majority Hindu community in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The same strategy combined with an additional 10 per cent reservation for the EWSs probably contributed to an even larger number of seats for the BJP in the general elections of May 2019. Religion-based politics was a key element in the electoral strategies of most Indian parties from 1971 onwards and has proved to be divisive. Similarly, the political self-interest driven support for reservations has resulted in resentments within and across communities. One way to stem this inexorable slide towards mediocrity, and worse in matters that impact India's overall development, is for a new political party to represent the 50.5 per cent of the population who are currently excluded from reservations.

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Wanted: The woke corporation

SWOT

KANIKA DATTA

The reputation of corporate India has not stood up to scrutiny in the run-up to — and the Indian government's subsequent rejection of — the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Indian businesses apparently believe they will not be able to compete with Chinese enterprise over a 25-year framework, the adjustment period that RCEP negotiators had worked out. Then again, the pusillanimity of Indian business leaders when it comes to standing up to the government has long been its worst-kept secret — the rare CEO who voices even mild criticism publicly always makes headlines. Now it appears India Inc remains pretty regressive when it comes to its hiring policies too.

No, this is not an impending outburst against the lack of gender diversity in corporate India (though there's that too) but the readings from a recent eyebrow-raising survey on "Diversity and Inclusion" conducted by the jobs portal TimesJobs, owned by the Bennett Coleman media conglomerate. The biggest takeaway from the survey is that India Inc remains innately homophobic. More than 77 per cent of the 1,137 professionals surveyed across diverse companies said they have no LGBTQ colleagues and more than 83 per cent said they had no one with alternate sexual orientation in senior leadership positions.

The question to ask, of course, is how the employees in the survey above thought they could judge their colleagues' and leaders' sexual preferences to answer the surveyor's question. It is inconceivable that there are no gays working in Indian corporations but obviously, the subject remains taboo enough in the workplace for those of alternate sexual orientation to feel safer remaining in the closet.

This perception should not be surprising, judging from the loud silence from corporate boardrooms when the Supreme Court read down section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, effectively decriminalising homosexuality. The issue of LGTBTQ rights is not seen as a cause worthy of the public relations energies that are poured into CSR programmes for building toilets and dispensing midday meals to poor schoolchildren.

It is also striking that some 65 per cent of employees say they have not seen any change in policies after section 377 was read down — though the survey does not reveal what kind of changes were effected in corporations employing the 35 per cent of respondents who presumably say they have seen some change.

What kind of policy changes should be expected? Extending benefits to same sex/common law spouses (since same sex marriage hasn't yet been enabled by the law) and their children is the most basic of them. A handful of companies have made some changes in their HR policies — the Godrej group and Infosys, for instance, extend such benefits to the "partner" without specifying the gender and OYO's group insurance policy covers a "significant other".

A big part of the problem is that the Indian banking and insurance industries are yet to change their policies to enable account-holders to nominate non-relatives as beneficiaries. Multinationals get around the problem by buying insurance policies from global service providers that do offer such facilities, but they employ a minuscule proportion of India's white and blue-collar workforce. These initiatives are but progressive drops in an ocean of homophobia on which corporate India floats. No surprise, then, that 54 per cent of the respondents say their companies will never hire any LGBTQ professionals.

There is much more disheartening information in the survey about corporate hiring policies towards specially-abled professionals, and women, most of which are so well known that people have stopped commenting on them. That private sector promoters remain distressingly communal, too, was highlighted by the Sachar committee report long ago. But one small finding offered an interesting insight into the kind of culture that typifies most Indian corporations. Some 40 per cent of respondents said "physical appearance" — ethnicity and personal likes and preferences — were the principal factors on which they were judged in the workplace. That's human nature, of course, but surely managements operating in competitive environments should force themselves to give some importance to ability and talent. For those who wonder why work culture in 21st century Indian corporations is mired in the early 20th century, the answer could lie in micro-findings such as this.

Financialisation and its discontents

BOOK REVIEW

PRAVEEN CHAKRAVARTY

Amazon recently acquired a large office in the HITEC City office campus in Hyderabad. It is very likely that you have heard of Amazon, the world's largest e-commerce company. HITEC City is a project developed by Larsen & Toubro (L&T). It is very likely that you know of L&T too, the business conglomerate that also develops commercial real estate. This transaction between Amazon and L&T was brokered by Colliers International. It is perhaps unlikely that you have ever heard of Colliers International, a real estate agent.

Amazon and L&T are real businesses that contribute to the economy, create thousands of jobs and add immense value to the economy. Colliers is an intermediary that enabled a smooth transaction, which is a valuable service but perhaps not as vital to the economy. So, logically, companies like Amazon and L&T will be better known, attract better talent and its employees will typically earn more than those working in Colliers.

Let's now assume that Amazon also needed fresh capital to expand. Capital is available with investors such as mutual funds, pension funds or wealthy individuals. For Amazon to get access to the available capital, it typically hires an intermediary such as a JP Morgan to broker this transaction, similar to how Colliers brokered a property transaction for Amazon. But in this case, JP Morgan, the intermediary, is more powerful, more valuable, deemed more systemically important to the economy and attracts better talent with vastly higher pay than Amazon.

What is it about the world of finance and capital, that the intermediary agent is more valuable and powerful than the principals? How have things come to such a pass where firms that add much lower value to the larger economy are valued higher? What does this mean for society at large? These are the kind of questions that the book *Rise of Finance. Causes, Consequences and Cures* attempts to answer. When I received the request to review this book, my eyes lit up because the deleterious impact of "excessive financialisation" in modern economies is an issue on which I hold strong views. Further, one of the authors of the book is a fine scholar with extensive domain experience in financial services, which made it even more interesting for me to review.

THE RISE OF FINANCE: Causes, Consequences And Cures

Author: V Anantha Nageswaran & Gulzar Natarajan

Publisher: Cambridge

Price: ₹750

The book is expectedly erudite and scholarly. It even has an evocative start, quoting an ethicist as "a pill-dependent smoker who, on the way to his divorce lawyer, crashes his oversized car into a school bus because he is texting about an impending derivatives trade". Such a description beautifully captures everything that is wrong with the world of finance, albeit with some moral judgements. The debauchery and sins of rapacious finance professionals have been well documented and even portrayed through mainstream cinema.

What is less understood is the larger social ramifications of how have we reached a stage where finance professionals that add so little value to larger society have appropriated so much wealth, wield enormous influence and perpetuate a vicious cycle of "tails they win, heads we lose". The book's Introduction chapter promises to shine the spotlight on these exact issues and recommend solutions in an "easy and accessible" read.

The book is a masterful collection of charts, data, research references, important personalities, theoretical constructs and historical events. It delves deep into the causes of excessive financialisation in today's economy and lays the blame primarily on loose monetary policy that fuelled the addiction to debt and the US dollar's primacy as the global reserve currency. These points are argued cogently backed by copious empirical evidence. The authors also have strong words for former Federal Reserve Chairmen, Alan Greenspan and Ben Bernanke for their complicity in exacerbating financialisation. While three-quarters of the book is devoted to global events and trends, there is an entire chapter on "Finance in India". The authors conclude that financialisation is not yet a big problem for India since Indian finance is dominated by banking and banking is dominated by public sector banking. In a somewhat contrarian way, the authors even highlight the benefits of the 1969 bank nationalisation programme, citing evidence from another book.

Financialisation is a big social malaise, not just an economic one like the way the book treats it. The best brains in society are drifting to jobs that merely move money rather than solving real problems of health, education and livelihoods. The best brains are lured to these inane pursuits of predicting future stock prices due to the potential to earn vast sums of money by doing so. Betting on future stock price predictions pays a lot more money than say building satellites because of excessive financialisation of the economy. Such enormous wealth earned relatively easily is being used to shape a nation's democracy through control of political funding. With control of politics, heads of hedge funds, investment banks and stock exchanges exercise clout and mould tax and other policies to suit their interests, which perpetuates this vicious cycle. This is the real social problem of financialisation.

The book is a valuable addition to university libraries and students. But it will perhaps not add much to the issue of excessive financialisation, similar to the issue of income inequality.

The reviewer is a political economist and a former scholar in a think tank

Opinion

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2019

WAR ON TERROR

Union defence minister Rajnath Singh

Terror incidents have been taking place in Jammu and Kashmir for the last 30-35 years. But I must compliment the forces. Terror incidents have now come down to almost nil (*lag bhag na ke barabar*)

US, China must act, or the world will fry

Latest UN report shows emissions growing, warming to hit 3.2ºC by 2100 with current action

THE UN HAS been repeating its climate crisis warnings *ad nauseam*, but top global economies hardly seem to care. Its latest *Emissions Gap Report* states that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have risen 1.5% per year in the last decade, stabilising only briefly between 2014 and 2016. Total GHG emissions, including from land-use change, stood at the historical high of 55.3 giga tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO2e) in 2018. This means more drastic cuts will need to be taken with each year of delay—at the current rate, emissions will need to fall by 25% and 55% from the 2018 level if the world is to stick to the least-cost path to limit global warming to >2ºC and >1.5ºC, respectively. Indeed, global GHG emissions must fall by 7.6% each year between 2020 and 2030 if the world is to keep to the 1.5ºC pathway. The report also makes clear how abjectly inadequate the current action is; with current unconditional nationally determined contributions (NDCs), there is a 66% chance that warming will reach 3.2ºC, if not more, by 2100.

The UN couldn't have stated it more squarely: "The summary findings are bleak... Countries collectively failed to stop the growth in global GHG emissions, meaning that deeper and faster cuts are now required." And, the highest degree of responsibility to act is that of the top global economies. But, the participation of G20 members at the Climate Action Summit held in September in New York is a sign of the climate betrayal playing out—the US, the host, didn't even speak at the summit. The latest UN report clearly names the US and China as the top emitters. While G20 economies being on track to meet their limited Cancun track should seem like good news—they account for 78% of the global GHG emissions—the US is one of the seven G20 countries that are currently projected to miss their Cancun Pledges or not achieve them with great certainty. Six, including China and India—India will overshoot its reduction target by more than 15%—are projected to meet their NDC reduction targets with current policies. But, the UN interprets this as a lack of ambition in targeting. Amongst the seven G20 members requiring additional policies and/or stricter enforcement of existing policies, the US has the largest gap to close, for both unconditional and conditional NDCs.

China emits 26% of the global GHG—the largest absolute emitter—and despite contributing significantly to the slowdown in emissions between 2014 and 2016, has seen emissions rise 1.6% in 2018. The US, the largest per capita emitter, saw a gradual decline in emissions of 0.1% per year in the last decade; but, in 2018, its emissions grew by 2.5%. While the US is quick to blame other nations, particularly, India and China—India contributes 7% of total GHG emissions, with a growth of 3.7% per year over the last decade—the fact is that the US and other developed nations, thanks to emissions over their respective histories of industrialisation, have shrunk the room for countries like India and China to grow without having to worry too much about the impact on climate. While the US's NDC target under the Paris Agreement was to reduce emissions by 26-28% from 2005 levels by 2025, its climate-denier president, Donald Trump, is leading it in "the opposite direction", having walked out of the Paris deal. The Clean Power Plan (CPP) of the Obama administration would have reduced power sector emissions by 32%; Trump's Affordable Clean Energy plan that replaced the CPP will more or less maintain the sans-CPP levels of emissions. The Trump administration's decisions on vehicle emissions and fuel economy standards will increase emissions from the transportation sector by 28-83 million tCO2e. It is true that 25 states in the US have joined the US Climate Alliance, a coalition committed to reducing emissions in line with the Paris Agreement, but unless there is commitment to act by the entire country—along with China, Canada, Russia and other economies that are failing to take ambitious action—the future seems quite bleak.

Staring down union blackmail

Telangana CM does well to hold his own on the TSRTC strike

GOVERNMENTS HAVE TYPICALLY yielded when held to ransom by trade unions. It hasn't been too different for the present dispensation at the Centre—be it in the matter of EPFO, where unions stonewalled the plan to allow provident fund subscribers to switch to NPS, or the coal sector employees' delaying entry of private sector in commercial mining. Given how trade unions have slowed the reforms process—as governments put political and electoral considerations before sound policy—it is refreshing that the Telangana government, led by K Chandrashekar Rao, didn't blink as employees of the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) went on a strike demanding, among other things, that the loss-making TSRTC be taken over by the state transport department and they be given pay hikes. The state government had made it clear early on that it wouldn't allow such blackmail—indeed, Rao had given the employees an ultimatum, to join work before November 5 or face dismissal—and took swift action to deflate the unions' threat. So, even though this meant only a small fraction of the 10,000 TSRTC buses was plying the streets during the strike, and this was during the festival season, the Telangana government dismissed the striking employees when the deadline to join passed; instead, it ordered quick hiring of replacement staff, and even hiring of private operators to run TSRTC's fleet operations.

To be sure, the strike has exacted a large cost from the public, which has found transport options greatly shrunken, and some TSRTC employees even committed suicide in protest. But, at a time when the protest by Honda employees has caused a production loss of 70,000 units, such an unbending stand was perhaps necessary. This is not to paint the Telangana government as blameless; indeed, the TSRTC's losses are of its own making. Apart from forcing TSRTC to subsidise transport—subsidies totalled ₹526 crore in 2015-16—it even made transport free for certain categories of commuters. As losses built, the corporation was stranded for funds to upgrade infrastructure, with the state government looking the other way. A report on finances of state road transport corporations from 2015-16 shows that TSRTC, despite being one of the better performing road transport corporations, had employee costs that were 50% of its total revenue. With a staff per bus ratio lower than most states, this would suggest that TSRTC employees are perhaps also paid better than peers in other states. Rao, there is no denying, did right by not allowing the TSRTC employees to prod him into taking economically irresponsible decisions and throw good money after bad, but it would have been even better if his government had taken timely decisions on, say, fare hikes and infrastructure upgrades.

TRANSgression

The new law that was supposed to guarantee the rights of transgender persons actually undermines these

WHILE THE SUPREME Court's (SC's) judgment in *National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs Union of India* is considered a landmark for its progressive stance towards transgender persons, the Centre seems to have undone its gains by clearing the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019 in its current form. Instead of guaranteeing the right to self-determination of gender—this was guaranteed by SC in the *NALSA* case—the Bill vests the power to assign a person transgender status with the government. As per the provisions of the Bill, while a person can still self-identify to apply for a certificate, the actual granting of the certificate shall require an assessment by the district magistrate. In case the person undergoes a surgery, the DM will again examine the correctness of the medical certificate issued by the medical superintendent or chief medical officer. The humiliation of being denied legal status as a transgender person—likely for those who haven't 'transitioned' surgically—will have grave effects on the mental health of persons who already face social and economic ostracism, and sexual exploitation.

Not only this, the Bill's recognition of sexual abuse of transgender persons is also coloured. The legislation prescribes penalties for sexual abuse, and does not provide similar penalties for rape as those prescribed in cases where the survivor is a woman. The punishment, from six months to to two years, is also milder than that prescribed for sexual abuse of a woman under Section 354 of the IPC. Unless the government changes its approach, the new rules shall only impinge on the rights of transgender persons, not guarantee them.

INVESTOR ANXIETY

DIFFICULT TO GAUGE IF IT WILL SURVIVE THE RECENT DEMAND SHOCK, THE SEVERITY OF THE DEMAND FALL HAS DEPRESSED SENTIMENTS

Private investment in the doldrums

RENU KOHLI

New Delhi based macroeconomist

Views are personal

INDIA'S PREOCCUPATION WITH reviving investment goes back to over five years now. Since 2014, much fiscal-monetary ammunition, structural and other efforts have been expended to breathe some life into it. Yet, the share of gross fixed assets creation that sank 1.5 percentage points in FY13 to 32.6% of GDP (new series) is yet to get restored to even that lowered level. Last year, it reached 32.3%, inching 1.6 points in four years, from a 30.7% trough in FY16; this, too, mostly reflects public capex stimulus. When will private investment spring back? Why has all the hard work failed to achieve the intended objective?

In 2013, when aggregate investment sank –3.7%, it represented swelling uncertainty, besides deteriorated, unstable macroeconomic settings. *Inter alia*, sudden regulatory changes, retrospective tax legislation, a dysfunctional government delaying or jamming projects, other governance issues, and supply bottlenecks were major sources. Business confidence steadily fell after FY11. News coverage turned extensively negative, reporting these developments. Disentangling India's investment slowdown, the IMF employed a *Policy Uncertainty* Index based on news coverage, inflation, and budget deficit, finding that heightened uncertainty about the future course of broader economic policies and deteriorating business confidence played a significant role. Uncertainty, thus, mattered for investment.

Post-2014, inflation lowered, budget deficits restrained—at least officially (the CAG's revelation of significant build-up of hidden, off-budget liabilities came only last year)—and macro conditions stabilised. Stalled projects were cleared; hidden NPAs recognised with lagged resolution and recapitalisation; structural reforms like inflation targeting, GST, IBC, and RERA happened; business conduct was eased, along with other initiatives. These advancements were universally welcomed and endorsed. News coverage has been positive. Put differently, an update to the *Policy Uncertainty* Index would show it much lowered.

Then, why has investment not reacted to the improvement, the reduced uncertainty? Why does it remain unmoved in committing fresh capital? Why have structural reforms not worked?

One reason is the damaged balance sheets of banks and corporates, dating back to pre-2014 days; these are yet to mend, regain vigour. Meanwhile, the pace of resolution has infected other balance sheets, i.e., initial delay in addressing bad loans was compounded by asymmetric recognition and recapitalisation, wherein inadequate capital support slowed recovery of banks, who, in turn, restrained lending. Substitution through scaled-up lending by healthier non-banks to replace the bank credit deficit proved costly: Balance sheets here stretched too far, too quickly in taking on the banks' role. Non-banks raised outsized short-term funds to finance long duration loans, ending with asset-liability mismatches. Contagion has enhanced risk-aversion, credit deficit, and costs in other parts of the financial system, and for more participants.

Debt stress has also engulfed newer borrowers, viz. agriculture, small-medium businesses, and households that are burdened by falling incomes, and increased liabilities contracted at high real interest rates. Demonetisation, and a poorly designed and implemented GST, aggravated this situation. Borrowings-financed public capex spilled outside the budget, crowding out investment, and invalidating both fiscal and monetary stimulation; joined with low inflation, debt burden increased.

When responding agents are not in good shape, they are unlikely to react to supportive policy cues, and fresh openings from relative price changes induced by structural reforms. Reports of ICICI's closure of its project finance division earlier this month betrays the persisting risk-aversion to enduring exposure, and a possible demand deficit for long-term investments.

Other than balance sheet weaknesses, there are intangible or soft reasons for investor anxiety. Despite positive news coverage and macroeconomic betterment, there are layers of uncertainty, originating from perceptions of private businesses, about structural changes, disappointments over unmet expectations, lack of clarity and unease about the direction of economic policies.

In the financial sector, capital support for public banks has been universally assessed to be deficient to cover provisioning and growth. Hidden bad loans and unethical lending uncovered at private Indian banks exposed governance problems akin to public sector banks, perpetuating mistrust. Banking reforms, too, have either fallen short or are reverse of expectations, e.g., consolidation instead of privatisation; no indications on the future role/direction of public banking; procyclical regulatory changes antithetical to recovery and repair, sometimes amended or even withdrawn, contribute a layer of uncertainty in the financial sector. The NBFC crisis, its persistence, and continuing defaults add another coat of uncertainty. These have hardly imparted confidence to the private sector about how to proceed.

> **The NBFC crisis, its persistence, and continuing defaults... have hardly imparted confidence to the private sector about how to proceed**

The IBC is considered a huge positive step. But, it seems to raise uncertainty due to unanticipated and long-drawn legal tangles, constant amendments to refine the law, delayed timelines, and doubted outcomes. Unresolved problems in the power sector, fresh troubles and insolvencies in aviation and telecom, and fragilities in real estate, housing and infrastructure are another stratum of hidden, unspoken uncertainty. Tax terrorism is another layer. Uncertainty about the future course of policies towards public and private sectors also seems to have gained ground with more centralisation, the favouring and prioritisation of public over private sector. Key structural reforms missed out on—land, labour market, etc—dejected private ardour, too. Changes in rules, norms, regulation without adequate feedback or studying ripple effects added another film of uncertainty, as in the automobile segment.

Last, but crucial, is uncertainty about demand conditions. This is not merely statistical, the large gap in robust growth portrayed by new GDP data and high-frequency volume indicators, or the contested unemployment-consumption estimates. Conflicting signs from multiple sources have created confusion amongst private agents about actual demand. For any firm planning production or capacity addition, future demand, especially consumption, is a crucial input for volume, revenue and cost projections.

The inability to anticipate policies with precision or clarity sows doubts in business's mind, which is then likely to question a bet on committing money. The private sector perceives uncertainty as it sees collective policies and preferences in a longer timeframe.

Possibly, the plunge in business confidence in RBI's April-June survey may reflect these intangibles, besides the June budget shock that alone could not have triggered a drop comparable to the global financial crisis (2009) and the dotcom (2001) shocks.

The policy environment has turned since then. Unpleasant tax proposals were reversed, and replaced by supportive fiscal actions, notably business tax cuts. Further reforms, e.g., relaxing labour regulations, have happened; more are likely to come. Fresh expectations of investment revival are in the air. The uncertainty about demand conditions has evaporated—most information sources, including GDP, lead indicators, and corporate performance are converging to show universally steep declines in economic activity. Should we, then, expect investment to finally get restored?

Ironically, the disappearance of demand uncertainty or the sureness about demand, its all-round confirmation and the severity of its fall, has widely depressed sentiments and confidence in matching proportion. For now, the demand outlook is assessed to be grim. Importantly, there are doubts about what lies ahead: No one is sure if growth will further decelerate, recover to 7%, or languish at low levels. This scenario suggests that fresh changes, reforms must wait to yield results as agents await clarity. Very steep demand declines often require a substantial uplift to restore beliefs about future economic prospects, to which is linked the mood to invest. India would be fortunate if this comes about.

CHINA'S $-BOND SALE

The limits of the trade war

The US and China might differ on issues of trade and human rights, but the latter's sale of $6 billion of dollar bonds shows they are nowhere near being "in the foothills of a cold war"

BRIAN CHAPPATTA

Bloomberg

THOSE WHO FEAR an impending cold war between the US and China need only look to the bond market to see evidence of a potential thaw.

In the midst of a holiday-shortened week for American markets, China easily sold a record $6 billion of dollar-denominated bonds, accumulating $20 billion of investor orders that allowed it to tighten yield spreads for a lower borrowing cost, *Bloomberg News* reported. While hardly unexpected—this is the third straight time the country has borrowed in the US currency around this time of year—it nevertheless sends a clear signal to global investors that the ongoing trade dispute with the US isn't going to stop China from integrating itself and local issuers into worldwide financial markets. And, it likely suggests a limit to how far any sort of lasting tensions between the two largest economies can go.

China's Ministry of Finance has said one goal of its dollar-debt sales is to help build a benchmark yield curve for Chinese issuers. That would serve two functions: It would allow its multinational firms to raise funds in the US currency more easily, while simultaneously giving Chinese banks a local option to allocate dollar deposits. Thanks to this week's deal, which had portions due from three years to 20 years, China will have now have dollar debt that matures from 2022 all the way to a small portion in 2096.

It is important to remember that China doesn't need to do this. It has all the access to the greenback it would likely ever need in the form of its $1.1 trillion of US Treasury holdings. Selling a sliver of its treasuries would effectively serve the same purpose as a dollar-bond sale, only it would somewhat weaken the link between the two countries. Creating the foundation for a more robust dollar-debt market in China, on the other hand, does the opposite. Already, that market exceeds $740 billion, with sales in 2019 on pace to reach an all-time high.

Even at this massive size, Chinese dollar bonds (and those from other countries, too) are still ultimately subject to the whims of US officials. Earlier this year, the Trump administration was reportedly discussing ways to limit US investors' portfolio flows into China, such as by delisting Chinese companies from US stock exchanges and limiting Americans' exposure to China's market through government pension funds. They cited Beijing's restrictions on the release of some financial information and unusual influence over private companies.

Many investors view such a move by the US as mostly self-destructive, similar to how they react to any fear-mongering over China dumping its treasuries and causing a sharp spike in yields. The vastly integrated financial markets, in other words, are seen as the red line that neither country will want to cross in a long-lasting standoff.

China's further foray into dollar bonds only strengthens that thesis. For as much as the country throws its weight around, its financial system is simply nowhere near that of the US. The yuan is not a major foreign currency. Its bond market is comparatively underdeveloped and opaque, and, on top of that, S&P Global Markets predicts that onshore corporate-debt defaults will reach a record high in 2020. Relative to other developed-market economies, China lacks large institutional investors such as insurance companies and pension funds.

For those reasons, it is questionable to conclude that the US and China are truly in the "foothills of a cold war" that could morph into something worse than World War I, as Henry Kissinger described it earlier this month. For as far apart as the countries may seem on a range of issues, from trade to intellectual property and human rights, they are pretty much as close as ever in the financial markets. It is never a bad idea to follow the money.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Maha-politics

The denouement of the political drama in Maharashtra with more than the conventional five acts with each Act comprising a few scenes, watched in suspended disbelief, has given those of us who are opposed to BJP for what it represents and does in the guise of nationalism. Don't remind us that Shiva Sena too is essentially a Hindutva party, for it is relatively a small fry in the national canvas and it is willing to tone down its Hindutva stridency, and has agreed to go by what is called a common minimum programme. Further, any internal rift or internecine feuds within the Hindutva-oriented right wing makes it that much easier for the left-liberal forces to fight the divided Hindu right. The differences between BJP and Shiv Sena over power sharing and greater political space proved to be a blessing in disguise. BJP's failure 'to manufacture' a majority is a tribute to the moral strength shown by the MLAs of Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress. The incoming Uddhav Thackeray government goes to demonstrate that Narendra Modi-Amit Shah duo cannot have their way and satiate their greed for power all the time. The failed attempt at the usurpation of power must make them realize that Indian democracy is too big for them to bend it to their will and dissuade them from grabbing power by unfair means. It isn't enough to say that the Constitution is the Holy Book; one must live by it in letter and spirit.

— G David Milton, Maruthancode

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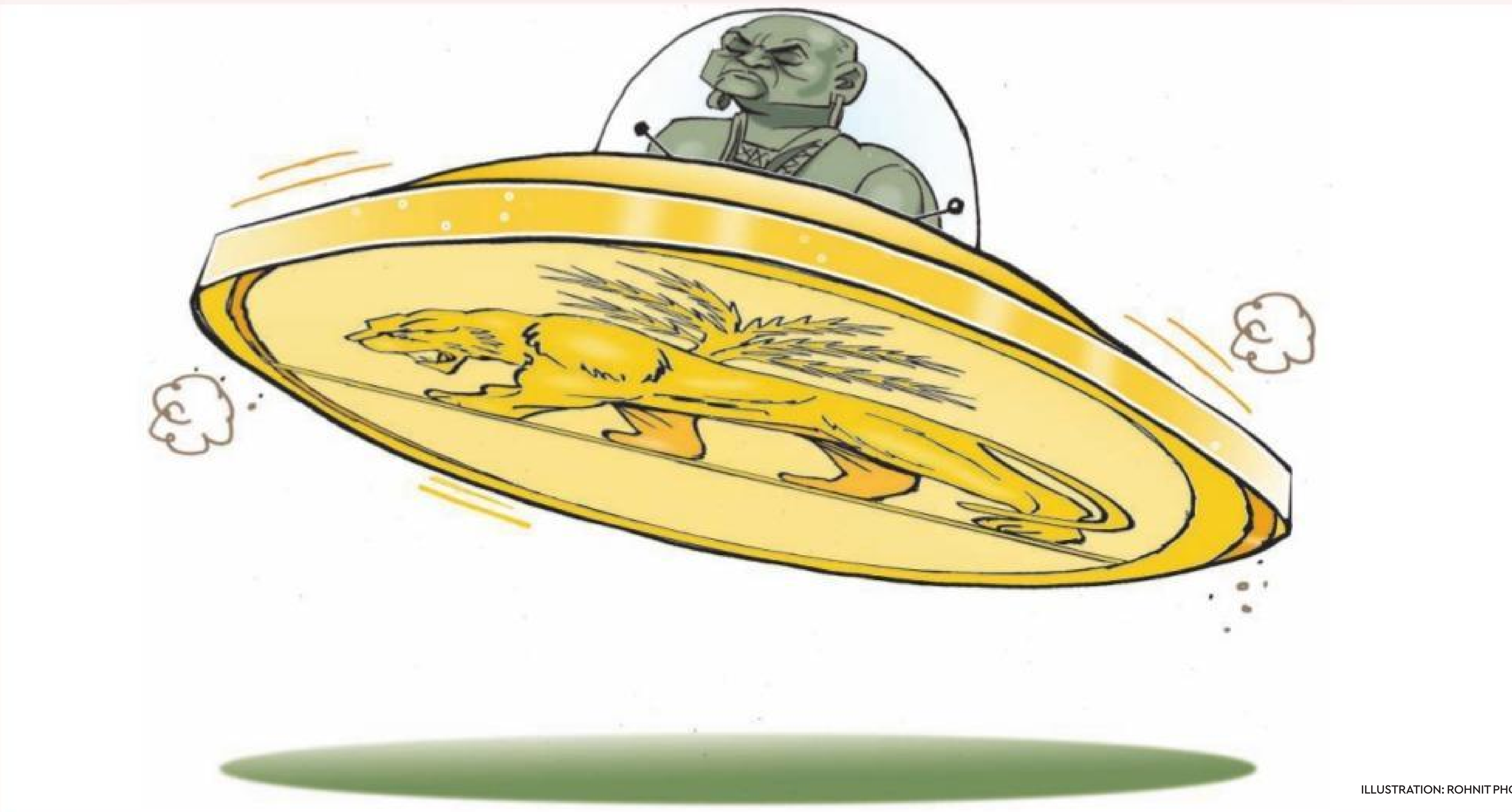

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Rethinking RBI's monetary easing policy

Instead of further rate cuts, RBI's focus needs to shift towards improving transmission efficiency and enacting broader banking-sector reforms—which facilitate greater competition amongst banks to ultimately move towards a repo-linked deposit and lending regime

THE LATEST INDEX of Industrial Production (IIP) and Consumer Price Index (CPI) numbers are likely to pose a serious dilemma for the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), when it reviews key policy rates in its upcoming meeting on December 3-5. Based on credible signals of an economic slowdown, and RBI's stated position of an accommodative monetary policy stance in October, many analysts believe a further (repo) rate cut to be a foregone conclusion. The latest retail inflation numbers are likely to make it tricky.

The IIP numbers, released by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), showed that factory output declined sharply by 4.3% in September 2019—recording its worst performance in almost eight years, whether computed in the new (base year 2011-12) or the old (base year 2004-05) series. In the April-September period, the cumulative growth in industrial output was only 1.3%, compared to 5.2% in the same period a year ago. The latest decline is broad-based—with a substantial fall in the production of capital goods and consumer durables, and a slump in construction/infrastructure growth.

On the other hand, latest data from the National Statistical Office (NSO) showed that year-on-year CPI inflation was at a 16-month high of 4.62% in October, breaching RBI's medium-term target of 4% retail inflation. Notably, CPI inflation serves as the nominal anchor in the conduct of monetary policy under the current flexible inflation-targeting (FIT) framework of RBI.

Much will, of course, depend on second-quarter growth numbers, to be released on November 29. Estimates provided by the Japanese brokerage firm Nomura and SBI's Ecowrap report both project FY20 Q2 GDP growth at 4.2%, substantially lower than the officially reported Q1 GDP growth of 5% in the same fiscal.

The above numbers suggest that we are not only amidst an economic slowdown, but a full-fledged *stagflation* may potentially be on the horizon. This calls for a careful reflection on what might constitute an appropriate policy mix, including the monetary policy stance, under such circumstances.

In response to a significant economic slowdown, RBI has reduced repo rates five times on a trot—from 6.5% in December 2018 to 5.15% in October 2019—expecting that its transmission to lower interest rates will buttress credit uptake by firms, and kick-start an investment-driven growth cycle in the economy. While central banks in many countries have enacted monetary easing policy in response to the slowdown in domestic and global growth and uncertainties arising out of geopolitical tensions and trade wars, with a 135 bps reduction in repo rates over the past 10 months, RBI's stance has been the most aggressive among all.

However, in the emerging scenario of rising retail inflation in India, RBI's monetary easing policy requires a pause. Here's why.

The latest headline inflation numbers suggest that much of the rise in overall inflation has emanated from food price shocks, with substantial inflation observed in vegetable and pulses (26% and 11.7%, respectively) in October. Measured on a year-on-year basis, vegetable price inflation in urban and rural areas has been 35.4% and 21%, respectively. As surplus rainfall during August and September has severely damaged kharif crops across the key producing states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka, high food inflation is likely to persist.

The impact of such a supply shock is likely to feed into long-term inflation expectations, with the possibility of core inflation (currently at 3.47%) reverting to (the levels of) headline inflation. An IMF research* shows that, historically, the *pass-through* from headline to core inflation in India has been rapid—the gap reducing by three-fourths within one year due to significant second-round effects. The share of food in household consumption expenditure continues to be high (30% in 2017-18 as per the NSO). Research shows that high food inflation plays a critical role in informing both inflation expectations and wage-setting in India.

Currently, headline inflation has already breached RBI's medium-term target. RBI's September Households' Inflation Expectations Survey shows three-months and one-year ahead median inflation expectations have hardened to 8% and 8.1%, respectively. This implies that the central bank can ill-afford to lose sight of its core objective of maintaining price stability, a critical element of which entails anchoring long-run inflation expectations. Failure to do so can severely damage the credibility of the central bank, and question its commitment towards the FIT framework.

> A weak supply-side and fiscal policy response to the slowdown has disproportionately raised the stakes for monetary policy to lose sight of its core objective of inflation management

In addition, it is now clear that despite policy rate cuts, there has been a limited transmission to borrowing rates of corporates. Deposits constitute about four-fifths of total funds of banks, compelling them to offer high deposit rates, thus resulting in a low margin between deposit and lending rates. A reduction in repo rate does little to help the banks' overall costs of funds, leading to stickiness in lending rates. RBI's nudge to link retail loans to external benchmarks instead of internal ones based on marginal cost of funds can help improve this situation, but adoption by commercial banks has been predictably slow. In such a scenario, instead of further rate cuts, RBI's focus needs to shift towards improving transmission efficiency and enacting broader banking-sector reforms—which facilitate greater competition amongst banks to ultimately move towards a repo-linked deposit and lending regime.

The aggressive monetary easing policy of RBI is unlikely to boost investment demand in the economy unless aggregate consumption picks up. With the possibility of stagflation on the horizon, a right mix of fiscal, monetary and supply-side policies is required at this juncture. While the government needs to prioritise job creation and adopt expansionary fiscal policies to trigger a consumption-driven virtuous cycle of growth, RBI needs to focus on price stability. So far, a weak supply-side and fiscal policy response to the current slowdown has disproportionately raised the stakes for monetary policy to lose sight of its core objective of inflation management.

*'Food Inflation in India: The Role for Monetary Policy', *by Rahul Anand, Ding Ding and Volodymyr Tulin*

DIVIDEND DISTRIBUTION TAX

Abolishing DDT is a bad idea

SHSHANK SAURAV

The author is a chartered accountant

It will not only impact tax collection, but will also affect investment cycle

IN SEPTEMBER, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a major tax cut for corporates, for which the estimated revenue loss is ₹1.45 trillion. Data released by the CBDT based on tax collection till September 2019 (after second instalment due date for advance tax) shows that income tax receipts increased by a mere 4.7% as against 17.5% projected in the Budget. This is worrying, because it doesn't include the impact of tax cuts that were announced after due date for paying second instalment of advance tax. There is a similar trend in indirect tax collection, where tax mobilisation has slowed down due to decline in consumption. The government is struggling to meet fiscal deficit targets amid growth slowdown, and cannot expect tax buoyancy in the coming period to improve the situation.

Indian corporates are now demanding to abolish the dividend distribution tax (DDT or CDT) on the pretext of double taxation. DDT is paid by a domestic company that declares dividend. It is necessary to understand the mechanism of taxation and the rationale behind imposing DDT before concluding it as double taxation for the taxpayer.

Section 115-O of the Income-tax Act, 1961, which casts an obligation on companies to pay DDT, has been amended, and provisions have been made beneficial to assesses. When DDT was introduced in the 1997 Budget, Section 10(34)—Section 10(33) at that time—was also inserted in the Act; it provided that dividend received by a person shall be exempt from taxation. DDT ensured due taxes are collected at source stage, notwithstanding the tax status of the person receiving such dividend. Taxability of dividend has changed; in the 2008 Budget, the government allowed domestic firms to offset the amount of dividend got from subsidiaries while computing DDT liability. The 2016 Budget took away some benefits enjoyed by taxpayers, and Section 10(34) of the Act was amended and the new Section 115BBDA inserted. From 2016, dividend income over ₹10 lakh is taxable at the rate of 10%. Few years ago, the government introduced tax on buyback of securities, when companies started taking share buyback route to avoid DDT.

> The govt provided major relief to the corporates by reducing tax rates; now, industry must respond positively

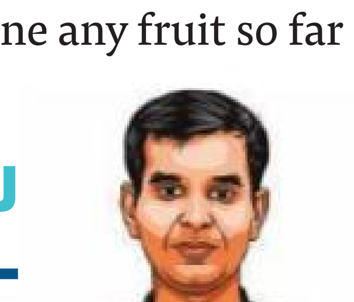
DDT was introduced to plough back the profit for investment and expansion. Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) as percentage of GDP has declined from 34.1% in 2011-12 to 29% in 2017-18. There is a steep decline in gross capital formation (GCF) ratio also. The private sector has not announced any major investment after the recent corporate tax cut and, therefore, abolishing DDT at this point of time may prove to be counter-effective. Up to a certain extent, DDT restrains companies from distributing the retained surplus by way of taxation at the level of company itself, and undistributed profit is used by companies for expansion purpose. Abolishing DDT will not only impact tax collection, but will also affect investment cycle and, therefore, it makes no economic sense for such a move in the current scenario.

So far as double taxation is concerned, it must be appreciated that dividend income in the hands of small taxpayers is exempt from tax. Dividend income over ₹10 lakh in a year is taxed at a concessional rate of 10%. It may be argued that retained surplus belongs to shareholders of the company, and for all practical purposes DDT is in the nature of tax on shareholder's income that is withheld at source by the payer. The element of double taxation has been taken care of by allowing offset of dividend received from a subsidiary while determining DDT liability of parent entity. If there is double taxation in the entire chain, then it is on the person (other than company, charitable trust) who receives dividend over ₹10 lakh in a year. DDT ensures a shareholder having a large stake in a company doesn't go untaxed, and the threshold of ₹10 lakh covers only those people who have large portfolios.

The government has already provided major relief to the corporates by reducing tax rates, and now it is time for industry to respond positively and revive the investment cycle. Usually, public expenditure is increased in case of economic slowdown and, therefore, asking for another relief is unjustified, given that industry is yet to respond positively on the concessions that were given a few months ago.

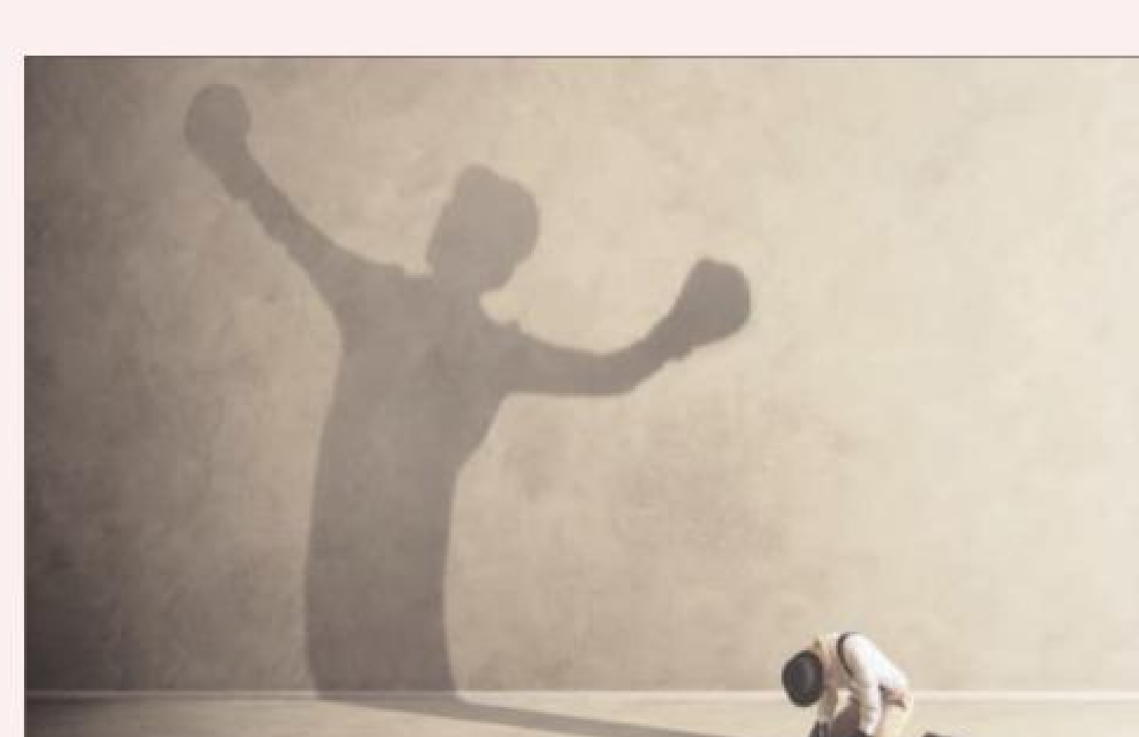
India's idling growth engine

Measures announced by the government in recent months to jump-start the economy have not borne any fruit so far



ANUJ AGARWAL

The author is an economist. Views are personal



THE WORLD OF automobiles is ditching the internal combustion engine and is obsessing over electric powertrains. However, the analogy of an internal combustion engine and the Indian economy still remains very relevant. With growth faltering, it begs the question, which of the cylinders are firing that can keep the growth engine running?

The growth for the first quarter of fiscal 2020 came in at 5%. Private consumption—the most important cylinder of growth—took the biggest hit, and the high frequency data doesn't really give the confidence of consumption reviving soon. The NBFC crisis, which also dented private consumption, with financing companies less willing to lend, isn't likely to get resolved any time soon. A slew of corporate crisis further eats into the economic output and weakens the consumer confidence in terms of creating uncertainty about future economic prospects. The case in point being instances like the failure of PMC Bank and Jet Airways, and the critical condition in which India's leading telecom operators currently are. This puts jobs and incomes at risk. RBI's September 2019 survey shows that consumer confidence is at a six-year low, as sentiments around employment, income and discretionary spending declined.

Hopes are set on consumer demand to revive with RBI's easy money policy. But transmission of policy rate cuts at the retail level can do only so much to revive demand in an environment where sentiments remain weak. Even if the cost of money goes down, the consumer is unlikely to borrow and increase consumption, if future prospects of income and employment are not too comforting. A big push to rural demand is not really in sight. Income boost to farmers under PM-KISAN remains minimal. Moreover, much of the money allocated under the scheme remains unspent. Many states are yet to prepare and submit their database of farmers to make them eligible for the benefits. MSPs have witnessed a moderate increase this year. For many of the crops, *mandi* prices have remained even below the MSP. The recent untimely rains have further adversely affected farm output and incomes.

The investment cylinder looks weak as ever, and the expectations of capex revival just keep getting postponed with every forecast. Capacity utilisation levels remain low and below the optimal utilisation rates. In such a scenario, any new private investment is unlikely. Lower interest rates might only serve to encourage corporates to restructure their debts to reduce their debt servicing costs. Surveys have pointed to the fact that savings from reduction in corporate taxes aren't as huge as government estimates these to be, and there is no guarantee that these savings will translate into investment spending or increased payouts for employees. No business has an incentive to invest unless there is a visibility of increased demand and capacity utilisation. The CMIE Capex data, read as new and revived investments net of dropped, has remained mostly in the negative territory since the second quarter of fiscal 2018, barring a couple of marginally positive readings. Much of the onus of reviving investment, then, lies with the government, which remains constrained by fiscal considerations despite RBI's surplus reserve transfer, due to weak tax collections.

India has been long betting on exports to be its growth driver. The Make in India campaign is in the same spirit, without much success. In the current global scenario with rising protectionist sentiments and weak economic growth, even this cylinder fails to propel growth. Challenges on the external front have an adverse impact not just on India's exports, but also business sentiments and investments. While the IMF expects global economic growth to rise to 3.4% in 2020 from 3% in 2019, countries contributing to this acceleration remain fragile with greater downside risks.

The ongoing US-China trade war is having a detrimental impact on global economic growth and trade flows. Theoretically, the US-China trade war opens export opportunities for India via trade diversion. A recent UNCTAD study puts the trade diversion effects of the US-China trade war for the first half of 2019 at about $21 billion. India was able to capture only 3.6% of this. Competitiveness of Indian exports has always been questioned on account of inherent nature of our businesses and structure of supply chains, and government policies. India's decision to move away from the RCEP further isolates Indian businesses from the opportunity to be a part of the global value chain.

Growth revival remains crucially hinged on demand to pick up which, in turn, is linked to sentiments. In a situation of weak sentiments, even a policy intervention like helicopter money can fail, where people might actually be inclined to hoard cash rather than spend it. Too much negative news flow further weakens the spirits. Emotional well-being and confidence is what drives discretionary spending—sentiments play the key role.

What will keep the growth revving at above 6% levels is difficult to say. A slew of measures announced by the government over the course of recent months to jump-start the economy have not borne any fruit so far, and will likely come into play only in the next fiscal. With recent economic data releases, analysts are pessimistic about the second quarter growth. SBI expects it to be 4.2%, and Nomura too is around the same levels. Both the banks are now expecting growth for the fiscal 2020 to be closer to 5%. One would wish for the economy to be similar to an electric vehicle, where you can get all the torque at once and pick up pace. Since it is not the case, it is time for the government to work its gears, send out the right signals, and get its growth cylinders firing.

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TELLING NUMBERS

QS Rankings: 8 India universities in Asia top 100, IIT Bombay 34th

INDIA TOP 20 (ASIA RANKS)

	2020	2019	INSTITUTION/UNIVERSITY
▼	34	33	IIT Bombay
▼	43	40	IIT Delhi
▼	50	48	IIT Madras
▼	51	50	IISc Bengaluru
▼	56	53	IIT Kharagpur
▼	65	61	IIT Kanpur
▼	67	62	University Of Delhi
▼	90	86	IIT Roorkee
▼	112	107	IIT Guwahati
▼	114	106	University Of Hyderabad
▲	136	137	Jadavpur University
▼	139	134	University Of Calcutta
▲	152	167	Institute Of Chemical Technology, Mumbai
–	169	169	Anna University
▲	175	180	Birla Institute Of Technology And Science
▼	177	156	Banaras Hindu University
▲	177	187	University Of Mumbai
▲	188	241	IIT Indore
▲	191	237	Savitribai Phule Pune University
▼	192	177	Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

IN THE latest QS World University Rankings for Asia, 96 Indian institutions rank among 550 for the continent. Of the 96 Indian universities ranked, 20 are brand-new entries. Only Mainland China is more represented than India, with 118 featured universities. While Mainland China has four in the top 10 this year, India does not yet have a university among the top 30. The 96 Indian universities featured in the rankings include eight among the top 100, and 31 among the top 250. Of these 31, 18 dropped compared to last year, 12 gained ground and one remained stable.

The best performing institution from India is IIT Bombay, which drops one place to 34th position. It is followed by IIT Delhi at 43rd place and IIT Madras at 50th.

The QS Rankings use a methodology based on 11 metrics. IIT Bombay is the best Indian university in the 'Academic Reputation' indicator, which utilises the insights of over 94,000 academics regarding university quality. It ranks 32nd in Asia in this dimension. IIT Delhi (34th) and the University of Delhi (50th) are next.

In the 'Employer Reputation' indicator, which utilises the insights of over 44,000 employers regarding the quality of a university's graduates, IIT Bombay ranks 21st in Asia. There are four other Indian universities among the top 50 (IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, University of Delhi and IIT Kharagpur).

India dominates the 'Staff with PhD' indicator with seven institutions achieving the perfect 100.00 score and raking No. 1 tied in this metric. All seven are IITs — Madras, Kharagpur, Kanpur, Bhubaneswar, Indore, Patna, and Ropar.

In the research indicators, India boasts five universities among the top 50 in the 'Citations per Paper' metric, and six among the top 50 in the 'Papers per Faculty' metric.

ASIA TOP 10

1. National University of Singapore
2. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
3. University of Hong Kong
4. Tsinghua University, China (Mainland)
5. Peking University, China (Mainland)
6. Zhejiang University, China (Mainland)
7. Fudan University, China (Mainland)
8. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
9. KAIST — Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology
10. The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The National University of Singapore is ranked Asia's best for the second consecutive year. It is followed by Nanyang Technological University, which has risen from 3rd to 2nd; and the University of Hong Kong.

Ben Sowter, Director of Research at QS, said in a statement: "The Indian higher education system has grown exponentially over the past decade. The number of universities has nearly doubled, and the number of colleges has grown by 50 per cent. The sheer scale of this development is awe-inspiring. Nevertheless, the domestic demand for tertiary education of its young population — which is estimated to become the world's largest by 2030 — is growing more rapidly than the expanded provision."

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why Russia faces sports ban

World Anti-Doping Agency panel has recommended a 4-year ban, including from Olympics, over alleged doping programme. How was the programme run, and what new revelations have led to the suggestion?

MIHIR VASAVDA
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 27

A WORLD Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) panel has suggested that Russia be banned for four years from competing in international events, including next year's Tokyo Olympics. The move stems from new revelations in a doping programme that Russia has been accused of. A look at what the alleged programme is about:

How did these allegations unfold?

Over the last five years, whistleblowers and investigators have accused Russia of running a doping programme so sophisticated that it forced international federations to stop its athletes from competing in major events. In September 2018, after multiple investigations, WADA lifted the sanctions on the condition that Russia hand over athlete data to doping regulators from its Moscow laboratory, which would help identify hundreds of athletes who may have cheated across various sports.

Now, Russia has been accused of manipulating that database. This is what led to the WADA panel suggesting the four-year ban.

What was Russia originally accused of?

In 2014, 800m runner Yulia Stepanova and her husband Vitaly — a former employee of the Russian Anti-Doping Agency, RUSADA — appeared in a German documentary and lifted the lid on what was later described as one of the most "sophisticated doping programmes" in sports history.

Two years later, another whistleblower — Grigory Rodchenkov, a former head of the RUSADA — told *The New York Times* that Russia ran a carefully planned, state-sponsored doping scheme. Rodchenkov's claims were more damning. He accused a wider conspiracy, in which the country's anti-doping and members of intelligence services substituted urine samples of the athletes through a hidden hole in the wall at the agency's laboratory during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. The lab, according to investigations, was guarded by members of Russia's state security services.

Subsequently, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), WADA and other global federations launched a series of investigations.

A Moscow building that houses a WADA-accredited laboratory; Russia's former anti-doping lab chief-turned-whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov. *Reuters, NYT*

What did these investigations look at?

WADA launched an independent investigation led by Canadian lawyer Richard McLaren to look into the functioning of the Moscow lab. The IOC commissioned two inquiries — one of which looked into the evidence of manipulation of samples at the Sochi Games, and the other to find out the involvement of the Russian state.

The McLaren report laid out evidence of state-sponsored doping during the Sochi Olympics. One IOC commission, too, found dozens of Russian athletes guilty of being involved in anti-doping rule violations at those Games. The other IOC investigation confirmed that Russian authorities had developed a system that allowed the Moscow-based laboratory to change the test results and tamper with the samples collected during that event.

What happened then?

Immediately after the allegations surfaced, the accreditation of Russia's anti-doping lab was suspended in 2015. After the preliminary investigations, the IOC removed 111 athletes, including the entire track and field team, from Russia's 389-member contingent for the Rio Olympics. Following a deeper inquiry, the IOC suggested a complete ban on Russia's participation at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Ultimately, 168 athletes participated through special dispensations from the international federations. But the Russian Olympic Committee was barred from attending the event and the country's flag was not officially displayed at any of the venues. Russian athletes, too, were forced to wear neutral uniforms with "Olympic Athlete From Russia" printed on them.

Why did WADA lift the sanctions later?

That was an unexpected decision in September 2018, taken despite an outcry from athletes and anti-doping officials from the world over after negotiations between Russian officials and leaders of international sports organisations. Initially, in an agreement with WADA, Russia was supposed to admit to the wrongdoings and turn over data and samples before it was reinstated. Later, however, WADA backed off on the demand and, according to *The New York Times*, "accept(ed) the less harsh findings on the government's role" as evidenced by an IOC commission. WADA president Craig Reedie, however, said the reinstatement came with 'strict conditions', that included WADA getting access to the Moscow laboratory that held athlete data.

Did Russia give access to and submit the athlete data?

In January 2019, a three-member WADA team retrieved the 2,262 samples from the Moscow laboratory through its "various servers, instruments, computers and other electronic equipment", according to a WADA statement. The data were transported out of Russia for authentication and detailed analysis by the WADA.

In July, WADA said its investigators were examining "some differences" between the data retrieved from the Moscow lab and a separate database provided to it by a whistleblower in 2017, thus raising questions about the validity of data Russia submitted.

Will there be a new punishment imposed on Russian athletes?

The WADA panel on Monday recommended that Russia face a four-year ban from global sports, including the Tokyo Olympics. The proposed sanctions include:

- Forcing Russian athletes to compete at a second straight Olympics in neutral uniforms. If they win medals, the country's flag won't be raised and national anthem won't be played.
- Russian athletes be allowed to compete in major events only if they demonstrate that they are clean and meet a number of other strict conditions.
- Preventing Russia from bidding for new championships, and moving the tournaments the country was set to host during this period to other nations.
- Barring Russian government officials and representatives from attending major events or from serving on the board of any organisation that has signed the global anti-doping code.

What happens next?

Russia has denied all allegations. The IOC, in a statement on Tuesday, called for "toughest sanctions" for those responsible for "manipulating the data" and demanded "the Russian authorities deliver the raw data on which this case is based".

On December 9, WADA's executive committee will meet to discuss these recommendations. If these are accepted, a formal notice will be sent to RUSADA. In case Russia rejects the panel's suggestion, the matter will be referred to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). If CAS upholds the recommendations, they will be binding and must be enforced by all international federations.

How Sebi's new default disclosure norm works

SHAJI VIKRAMAN
CHENNAI, NOVEMBER 27

SECURITIES MARKET regulator Sebi last week asked listed companies to publicly disclose any default in repayment of principal or interest on loans from banks and financial institutions beyond 30 days. "Such disclosure shall be made promptly, but not later than 24 hours from the 30th day of such default," Sebi said in its circular of November 21.

On August 4, 2017, Sebi had issued a similar circular, requiring all listed entities to make such "disclosures within one working day from the date of default at the first instance of default", but had deferred the implementation of that rule hours before it was to kick in on October 1 of that year.

The new default rule will come into force on January 1, 2020.

Why the new rule

Sebi says the change was necessary to address information asymmetry — or a gap in the availability of information to different classes of investors — on defaults on loans by listed companies. Investors come to know of such defaults much later — whereas a similar default on repayment of a bond or a similar instrument issued by a company has to be disclosed immediately, in line with Sebi's regulations.

An early disclosure can act as an early warning system, which can help investors make considered decisions on whether to stay on or sell the stock and exit, cutting their losses. In the current scenario, a meltdown such as those at IL&FS, DHFL, or PMC Bank, can leave many investors flatfooted. It is also expected that the move will lead to greater credit discipline in the banking industry.

How change came

The mountain of bad loans especially with state-owned banks, and their non-disclosure, nudged regulators towards addressing the root cause rather than merely the symptom. In July 2015, the Reserve Bank of India launched Asset Quality Review (AQR) to assess the true state of bank loans. Many lenders — including large private banks — were in the habit of "evergreening" loans, i.e., providing fresh funds to borrowers just before the repayment date in order to ensure that loans were not classified as bad.

For Sebi, the concern was the grant of frequent waivers on its own rules to government-owned banks when they raised money from institutional investors through Qualified Institutional Placements or QIPs. These weren't genuine placements of securities to investors — rather, it was the LIC or the government putting in money, as many investors remained unaware of the real state of the banks. And there was little incentive for the banks or the government to correct this.

From a day to 30 days

Sebi's August 4, 2017 circular made it mandatory for listed corporates to disclose default within a day of the event. It can be argued that had the circular been implemented, investors would have been made aware of the troubled state of some of India's top corporate groups and firms, which were referred to the insolvency court in 2018. The pushback by powerful groups led to the regulator jettisoning the rule without giving reasons. In internal discussions before the original circular was issued, some Sebi officials had pointed out that 30 days was the norm for corporate bonds.

The other argument in favour of 30 days could be uniformity in regulatory rules. In its famous circular of February 12, 2018, the RBI had directed banks to start the process of resolution or restructuring of a loan even if the default was for only a day. After the April 2, 2019 ruling of the Supreme Court striking down the circular, the RBI revised its rule in June — offering a 30-day window to classify an account as a Non Performing Account.

Sebi's November 21 circular could be seen either as a sign of regulatory synergy with the RBI, or as a nod to a more pragmatic approach.

The challenge now

In 2017, Sebi backed off at the last minute on implementing the disclosure norms on default. However, 2018 and 2019 have seen the collapse of several storied corporates. Much of what was known before they went into bankruptcy was based on anecdotal evidence with credit rating agencies way behind the curve.

The erosion of faith could be detrimental to fuelling fresh investment. In India, the tightening of rules often happens in the aftermath of a scam or under public pressure, after investors have been short-changed. Last time, the regulator blinked; this time the challenge for both Sebi and the government is to hold firm. If they do that, they will at least be able to tell investors and other stakeholders from January next year that they had been forewarned.

Punjab groundwater crisis: what it will take to move from paddy to maize

ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA
JALANDHAR, NOVEMBER 27

AS THE discussion around Punjab's massive groundwater crisis becomes more urgent, there is an increasingly stronger accent on diversification of crops, and a move away from water-guzzling paddy.

At a meeting over the weekend, Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, decided to strengthen maize — the most important alternative to rice — by working towards narrowing the gap in economic returns between the two crops. The idea is to nudge farmers towards increasing the area under maize.

Over 70% of blocks in Punjab are in the dark zone on underground water stocks, according to central government estimates. At current rates of depletion, Punjab's entire subsurface water resource could be exhausted in a little over two decades.

To conserve the resource, the Punjab government brought a law in 2009 to mandatorily delay transplantation of paddy beyond June 10, when the most severe phase of evapotranspiration is over. This law has been blamed for creating the bad air crisis of North India — especially Delhi — by delaying harvesting to end-October and early November, when atmospheric and wind conditions cause particulate matter and gases from burning paddy stubble to hang close to the surface.

So how area is under maize cultivation?

Of the 42-odd lakh hectares under cultivation in Punjab, maize was grown on 1.60 lakh hectares this year — just 3.8%. Since 2000, the area under maize has varied between 1.09 lakh and 1.63 lakh hectares every year.

The area under maize in Punjab is only 1.6% of the total area under the crop in India (98 lakh hectares). Nearly 46% of India's maize area is in the pensinsular states of Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra too, have large areas under maize.

In Punjab, maize can be grown in three seasons — spring (March-June), rabi (December-April) and kharif (June-October). Kharif is the state's main maize season. There is need to increase the area under kharif maize, which is also the paddy season. Spring maize is grown on around 25,000 hectares, but the crop is not promoted due to its long duration, and because it consumes water during the hot summer days.

CM Amarinder Singh looks at maize exhibits at PAU, Ludhiana. *Gurmeet Singh*

And what is the minimum that must be brought under maize if Punjab wants to effectively diversify from paddy?

Experts say the area under non-*basmati* paddy must be cut by at least 12 lakh hectares, and maize, basmati, and cotton must be grown on this land — besides increasing the area under agro-forestry and vegetables. Non-basmati paddy is currently grown on 23-26 lakh hectares.

At least 5.50 lakh hectares should pass under maize, the experts say — an addition of about 4 lakh hectares. Under its New Diversification Policy launched in the 2013 kharif season, the SAD-BJP government had, in fact, aimed to bring around 5.50 lakh hectares under maize by 2017-18. However, data from the agriculture department show that the area under the crop has remained largely stagnant. Fluctuating prices of maize have been a disincentive for farmers.

Will the strengthening of PAU's maize programme help in diversification?

Sixteen PAU-recommended high-yield varieties are already sown in Punjab. Long-duration varieties take 95-100 days, and short-duration ones 80-85 days. Farmers also grow several hybrid varieties developed by various companies.

"All these varieties give high yields of around 25 quintals per acre in the kharif season. More high-yield varieties can be developed, but that won't guarantee an increase in area under maize unless government policy supports the marketing of the crop," a senior PAU scientist said.

Unlike paddy and wheat, which are procured by the government, maize is sold in the open market and is subject to the actions of private players. Maize is one of 24 crops for which the government fixes a minimum support price, but procurement is not its responsibility; this is because maize is primarily a "feed" crop — of the 28 million tonnes produced in India, only 13% is consumed as food.

What can the government do in this situation?

Agricultural scientists strongly feel that along with developing more high-yield and good varieties of maize for which there is a demand in the market, the government must stop free power for paddy in order to disincentivise its cultivation and check the overexploitation of underground aquifers. A very large number of tubewells (more than 14 lakh in 2015-16) running on free power pump out virtually endless amounts of water across the state.

According to the scientists, the government could also earmark a portion of the MSP budget for maize, so that a fund is created from which farmers can be compensated in case the price of maize falls below what has been fixed by the centre government. "Making such a policy is not a big deal for the government," a senior scientist said. "The budget will remain the same, it will only be apportioned better."

Agricultural economist Sardara Singh Johl, however, argued for creating conditions for farmers to move voluntarily away from paddy rather than the government making policy. "The government does not need to make any policy for diversification if it gets a market for low water-consuming crops, and a good price for such crops. Farmers will themselves go for such crops without the government's efforts," Dr Johl said. Efforts to fix area for diversification have failed in the past, he said.

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

DON'T WAKE ME FOR THE END OF THE WORLD UNLESS IT HAS VERY GOOD SPECIAL EFFECTS.

— ROGER ZELAZNY

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

FROM SENA TO PARTY

Shiv Sena comes to power with a lot of unsavoury baggage. Being in power presents it with an opportunity

UDDHAV THACKERAY'S ASCENT to the chief minister's office in the most extraordinary of circumstances marks a moment of rupture in Maharashtra's political history. The mandate in the October election was, arguably, for the Hindutva alliance comprising the BJP and the Sena. However, the two ideological and political allies for over a quarter century could not agree on government formation and the events thereafter forced a realignment of political forces. The contingencies of managing a coalition that includes the NCP and Congress, long-standing foes of the Sena, have propelled its chief, who has no prior legislative or administrative experience, to chief ministership. The Thackeray family has controlled the levers of government in 1995-99 and 2014-19 from the outside. Interestingly, that power this time seems to be vested, most of all, in Sharad Pawar, the architect of the Sena-NCP-Congress government in Mumbai. His presence will loom large over the alliance the Sena leads, a situation the party is not used to. Moreover, as leader of the coalition, the Sena may also have to recalibrate its politics and accommodate the interests of its allies if the government is to last the full term.

It is an irony of the current situation in Maharashtra that the Sena, infamous for using unconstitutional and strong-arm methods, has been seen to speak for the Constitution and its principles in the past few weeks, even as its former partner, the BJP disregarded constitutional propriety in its pursuit of power. Yet, even in this moment and especially in this moment, the Sena's inglorious past cannot be glossed over. Since Bal Thackeray founded it in 1966, it has come to symbolise some of the worst tendencies in Indian politics, including regional chauvinism and anti-minorityism. In its early years, the Sena was seen as a lumpen outfit that championed ethnic pride and targeted the Left trade unions in Bombay. As it grew and Bombay ceased to have an organised working class movement, the party came closer to the BJP, embraced the Hindutva ideology and joined the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. The virulent anti-Muslim edge of its mobilisations and the vanguard role it played in the 1992 Bombay riots, documented extensively in the Justice Srikrishna Commission report, transformed the Sena from being a regional chauvinist outfit to a majoritarian and communal group.

The Sena under Uddhav seems conscious that its nativist agenda is losing its appeal among even its traditional voters and that the Hindutva space is now fully occupied by the BJP. Whether or not it feels compelled to refashion and reinvent itself as a ruling party, it can be said that it now has the opportunity. Both the Sena and its chief will be watched closely for how they use, or misuse, it.

A BLEAK WARNING

UNEP Emissions Gap report is a serious indictment of how little has been done to combat and contain climate change

THE 10TH UN Environment Programme Emissions Gap report, released on Tuesday, is blunt: "The summary findings are bleak", it says. The annual report compares the direction in which global greenhouse gas emissions are headed vis-a-vis where they ideally need to be if the world is to avoid the worst scenarios. Alarmingly, global emissions have been increasing by approximately 1.5 per cent per year for the past decade, the report notes. That means temperature increases of nearly 4°C by 2100 or "wide-ranging and destructive climate impacts". Even if all emissions promises by countries are met, the world will still be warmer by more than double the 1.5 degree-target by 2100.

Many countries across the world can testify to the bleakness that has set in on the issue. Just this month, the regional council in Italy's Veneto region, which includes Venice, reportedly rejected policy amendments that were being introduced to tackle climate change. The same day, the council's chamber was inundated by flood waters, a member, Andrea Zanoni, revealed in a Facebook post. The symbolism would not be lost on countries across the world. California and Australia were ravaged by major wildfires and bushfires a few months ago: Such massive fires have become so rampant that, internationally, countries have started competing for plane and helicopter contracts to douse domestic fires. The EU has developed a reserve fund this year for firefighting aircraft with contracts that allow deployments across international borders. Last month, a study published in Nature warned that the number of people inhabiting low-lying regions that will flood annually — as the world heats up and ocean levels rise — is three times higher than was previously thought: Approximately 300 million people worldwide will be at risk by 2050.

In this backdrop, the findings of the emissions report are yet another stark warning and a serious indictment of how little has been done to contain climate change. Fifteen of the 20 wealthiest nations have no timeline for net zero target GHG emissions. Just three nations — India, Russia and Turkey — are on track to achieving their emissions plans. However, the report notes, this is because the targets they set for themselves under the Paris Agreement were too low to begin with. The role of the US, particularly, assumes significance: It has started the process to pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement, while, reportedly, its energy-related carbon dioxide emissions have seen a sharp spike in 2018 under President Trump. This is after previous years of gradual decline. One silver lining, as the report notes: Climate protests by young people, who are making it an issue beyond politics, in their efforts to secure a better future for all.

PLAYING TO WIN

Even as Russia confronts allegations of doping, the world of sports must know the menace goes deeper and wider

A WORLD ANTI-DOPING Agency committee has recommended suspending Russia from international sporting competitions, including next year's Olympics, over manipulations in an athlete doping probe which started after accusations of Russian state-sponsored doping were first exposed at Sochi Winter Games in 2014. With patience fast running out, the WADA committee has called for a four-year suspension of Russia from international competition and a decision is likely on December 9.

The continuing ban on Russian track and field since 2015 has started wearying down its defiance in the face of damning evidence. Legends like Yelena Isinbayeva have lamented that "there are more honest and clean athletes than lying and irresponsible ones... so why is it that we still can't seem to separate these two groups — the honest from the deceitful?" While Russia hurtles towards a reckoning, global sport is fighting for its credibility with viewer interest dipping as more revelations of cheating get outed and existing sanctions fail to deter Russia. However, no one is deluded into thinking Russia are the only offenders. All the top sporting nations have had their brushes with dope cheats.

The most diabolical one involves investigation into Nike and a programme run by its celebrated coach, Salazar, who guided Mo Farah to multiple Olympic victories. Kenya, a track and field giant, is also under a cloud. Russia can't be faulted for thinking it is also being targeted for unrelated geopolitical grouses, including those related to alleged interference in elections of other countries. But clean bodies are the bedrock of sporting credibility, and that's why WADA is trying desperately to contain the apparent Russian menace.

New look BJP, old Congress

Maharashtra shows the BJP is fast becoming that which it claimed to stand in opposition to

GIRISH KUBER

THE PAST FEW weeks of political upheaval in Maharashtra have two important take-aways. First, that the BJP leadership, which kept projecting itself as an "outsider" to Delhi, has perfectly adapted to the Delhi culture and, second, the BJP's rapid Congressisation.

First, about the BJP's Delhi-centric handling of various states. It was in 1978 that Sharad Pawar broke away from the Congress's Vasantdada Patil government in the state to become chief minister at the age of 37. Pawar, then, belonged to Congress (Urs) which was formed by veteran Congressmen like Yashwantrao Chavan and Devaraj Urs, then Karnataka chief minister, who had left Indira Gandhi after her debacle in the post-Emergency elections. A senior minister in the Patil ministry, Pawar sensed the opportunity and grabbed power with the help of the Janata Party that also had the Jan Sangh — the earlier avatar of the BJP — and socialists together.

Unlike the Janata Party experiment, Sharad Pawar had offered a stable and efficient government in Maharashtra. However, the Janata Party experiment was a failure and Indira Gandhi was back in the 1980 elections as prime minister. The first thing she did was to dismiss the Pawar government in Maharashtra. She couldn't tolerate the young regional leader's challenge to her. That was Pawar's first brush with the Centre.

The second was when Sushilkumar Shinde, Vilasrao Deshmukh and others rebelled against him after Pawar's not-so-strong victory in the 1990 state assembly election. The revolt had the tacit support of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who wanted to clip Pawar's wings. It served the purpose. Pawar was weakened. The third and final point of friction that Pawar had with the Congress's central leadership was in 1991, as he took a shot at the prime ministership after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Narasimha Rao, more experienced in understanding the Delhi dynamics, out-manoeuvered Pawar.

> The saffron party's approach in handling both parties, first the Shiv Sena and then the NCP, was like that of the Congress and its methods were not just unwise but politically incorrect too. The BJP didn't even realise that being dismissive of these outfits has, in fact, resulted in the party blinding itself and offers limited elbow room, necessary in a tightly-strung political atmosphere. This put the process of Congressisation of the BJP on the fast track. The only difference between the two, however, is that while it took the Congress over 60 years to earn the hatred of almost every political outfit in the country, the BJP seems to be reaching there in just around six years.

In all this, Maharashtra always had a grudge against Delhi — that it tramples upon regional sentiments and ignores, or humiliates, regional leaders. For the Congress, it soon became the template, which was evident in the way it handled various state satraps, be it NT Rama Rao of Andhra Pradesh, Ramakrishna Hegde of Karnataka, Devi Lal of Haryana or Yashwantrao Chavan of Maharashtra. In fact, it was this insensitive, Big Brotherly attitude of the Congress that gave rise to many regional parties all over India.

The BJP's behaviour over the past 5-6 years is the same as that of the Congress of the Eighties and Nineties. The saffron party's approach in handling both parties, first the Shiv Sena and then the NCP, was like that of the Congress and its methods were not just unwise but politically incorrect too. The BJP didn't even realise that being dismissive of these outfits has, in fact, resulted in the party blinding itself and offers limited elbow room, necessary in a tightly-strung political atmosphere.

This put the process of Congressisation of the BJP on the fast track, the second take-away of the just concluded saga. The only difference between the two, however, is that while it took the Congress over 60 years to earn the hatred of almost every political outfit in the country, the BJP seems to be reaching there in just around six years.

The self-goal the BJP scored in Mumbai is nothing short of spectacular. Ahead of the recent assembly elections, the BJP seemed comfortably on its way to a second term. Devendra Fadnavis was certain, it appeared, to retain his grip on the saddle. The stage was set for the continuation of saffron rule in India's richest state. But BJP leaders' Delhi-centric vision changed its fortune.

It began with a slew of mindless defections, a la Congress style, ahead of elections. The BJP imported a number of discredited leaders from parties hitherto labeled by it as corrupt. Most of the leaders were either from the Congress or the NCP. And some like Ajit Pawar, whom former Chief Minister Fadnavis had relentlessly targeted as someone who deserved to be in jail. Ajit Pawar was at the centre of the BJP's attacks in this campaign. Incidentally, it was the same Ajit Pawar with whom Fadnavis later tried to form the government, displaying all the signs of hubris and brazenness reminiscent of the Congress.

Also coming into question, as of now, though in hushed tones, is the BJP's style of functioning. The Congress had its high-command and powers to take a final decision always rested with its First Family. The BJP may not have either but there are very few individuals — probably less than a handful — involved in the final decision-making. Peeved by the seemingly unstoppable defections into the party, one very senior party functionary, clueless about the goings-on in the party recently, felt so helpless that he thought of staying away from elections.

Another common factor between the new-look BJP and the old Congress is its complete disregard towards the party's local units. Many in the state BJP were averse to some of the things that eventually turned out to be the party's nemesis in the current assembly elections, for example, importing various leaders from other parties or engineering defections in the NCP. But there was no one to take note of these local leaders as the Delhi leadership was busy plotting a power grab through any means possible.

This could be a paradox of our democracy. On the one hand, we have our own GOP in the Congress which is caught in a time warp and on the other is the BJP, which tries harder and harder to look different from the Congress but ends up looking more and more like it.

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IN GOTABAYA'S LANKA

Many fear the rise of majoritarian sentiment

AHILAN KADIRGAMAR

LESS THAN A fortnight after Sri Lanka's November 16 presidential elections, the country is faced with two realities. One, a new regime buoyed by its triumphant support base and eager to consolidate an iron political grip. Second, a political opposition in utter disarray, with some citizens consumed by anxiety.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ascent to the presidency has made his supporters euphoric that the country is finally on the path of security, development and prosperity. On the other hand, the UNP, whose candidate Sajith Premadasa lost with over 42 per cent of the votes, is in shambles. Instead of mounting a strong oppositional force, the party has descended to infighting over leadership.

These dynamics of power consolidation and political disarray in the two main political camps and unbridled triumphalism and widespread fear across the voter divide are threatening the significant democratic space gained over the last five years.

In this scenario, critics of the Rajapaksas and more broadly, Sri Lanka's Muslim and Tamil minorities that voted overwhelmingly against Gotabaya, are paralysed by fear, as the majoritarian rule they dreaded is before them.

Following the presidential election, an interim government with a new cabinet of ministers is in place, with the president's brother Mahinda as the prime minister. But it is the upcoming parliamentary elections that will determine the balance of power to rule the country over the next five years. The regime will eye a two-thirds majority in parliament, necessary for major constitutional changes.

At immediate risk after the parliamentary elections are the 13th and 19th amendments to the Constitution — for power-sharing and democratic checks on executive power. Both amendments were rushed into existence for political expediency, and both are broadly seen to be incomplete.

> As the country's economic troubles aggravate amidst a global downturn, will the new government learn from previous failures? Or, will they opt to address long-festering political and economic woes by consolidating authoritarian populist power?

However, any change to them by the Rajapaksa regime are likely to be deemed regressive.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's political economic trajectory is shifting gears, but without considering the many lost opportunities in the post-war decade. And as the country's economic troubles aggravate amidst a global downturn, will the new government learn from previous failures? Or, will they opt to address long-festering political and economic woes by consolidating authoritarian populist power?

In this context, the months ahead are crucial not only for strengthening parliamentary opposition, but also checking the military's role in civilian life and ensuring the independence of the judiciary and media. It is also the time to bolster dissent that can withstand the authoritarian juggernaut.

While a decisive election victory might make a leader seem invincible, much of the strength and stability of his new government will depend on how it addresses the economic crisis. Since the Easter terror attacks, state revenues have dropped drastically, prompting austerity measures and across-the-board cuts on state investment. Sri Lanka's trickling economic growth, rising foreign debt, disregard for domestic production and neglect of the rural economy, are going to be major challenges. Neither the president's technocratic champions nor the prime minister's populist measures are going to solve these problems.

How, then, will the new government consolidate power? It will be a combination of the president's authoritarian moves, veiled in the promise of technocratic efficiency and seeming aloofness from politics, and the prime minister's hard-nosed political moves in parliament, with populist manoeuvring. The dual power centre will try to discipline and disable the judiciary, media and people's movements. They will seek validation from their long-nurtured nationalist social base, may re-activate the security apparatus for surveillance and crackdowns, and lean on the most forthcoming external actors for financial support — be it India, China, the US or the capital markets.

Therefore, the need of the hour is dissent — in parliament, in the public sphere, and within communities. If polarising and dividing form the mechanics of consolidating power, it is through bridging divides and uniting people — across ethnic and religious groups — that resistance can hold.

Ideologically, the first wall of defence should be against the Islamophobic forces that have gained traction among the majority population. Politically, dissident parliamentarians should find the wherewithal to protect the hard-won liberal freedoms. Organisationally, trade unions and movements should prepare to struggle against the neo-liberal transmutation of their social and economic life.

In Sri Lanka, with the longest history of universal suffrage in Asia, every election excites the nation, and that will be the case with the upcoming parliamentary polls. Turning the democratic clock back may not work for even the craftiest authoritarian populist regimes, but that also depends on the reconfiguration of oppositional parliamentary forces and more importantly, galvanising resistance.

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INDIAN EXPRESS

Brahmananda Reddi,

NOVEMBER 28, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

QUITTING CONGRESS

UNION INDUSTRIES MINISTER K Brahmananda Reddy quit the Congress Party as well as the caretaker government. Reddy, who presided over the Congress at the time of the 1978 split which occurred because of sharp differences with Indira Gandhi's group in the organisation, is likely to join the Congress (I) in the next few days. Ankineedu Prasad Rao, minister of state for civil aviation, and a staunch supporter of Reddy, also resigned from the party and the government later in the same evening. President N Sanjeeva Reddy accepted the resignations of both Reddy and Rao on the advice of the prime minister.

GODAVARI SHARING

MAHARASHTRA HAS BEEN allowed the use of all the waters of the Godavari up to the Paithan Dam site under the award of the Godavari Waters Tribunal. The tribunal's report was submitted to the government, ending the long-standing dispute of the basin states — Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa — over sharing of the waters of the largest river of the South. Maharashtra's share would include Pravara sub-basin and waters up to certain specified dam sites in the other river system in the Maharashtra area. In addition, Maharashtra has been allotted 215 tmc in the various sub-basins for other projects and minor irrigation schemes. Karnataka has been allocated 17.77 tmc.

US HOSTAGES IN IRAN

AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI declared that the 49 American hostages will be put on trial for spying in the US embassy in Teheran, where they have been kept for the past 24 days. In a statement broadcast by the state radio, Khomeini said Iran would reject any decision reached by the UN Security Council as dictated by the United States. The Iranian leader's statement came a few hours before the Council was due to meet in New York, to consider the deepening US-Iran crisis.

THE IDEAS PAGE

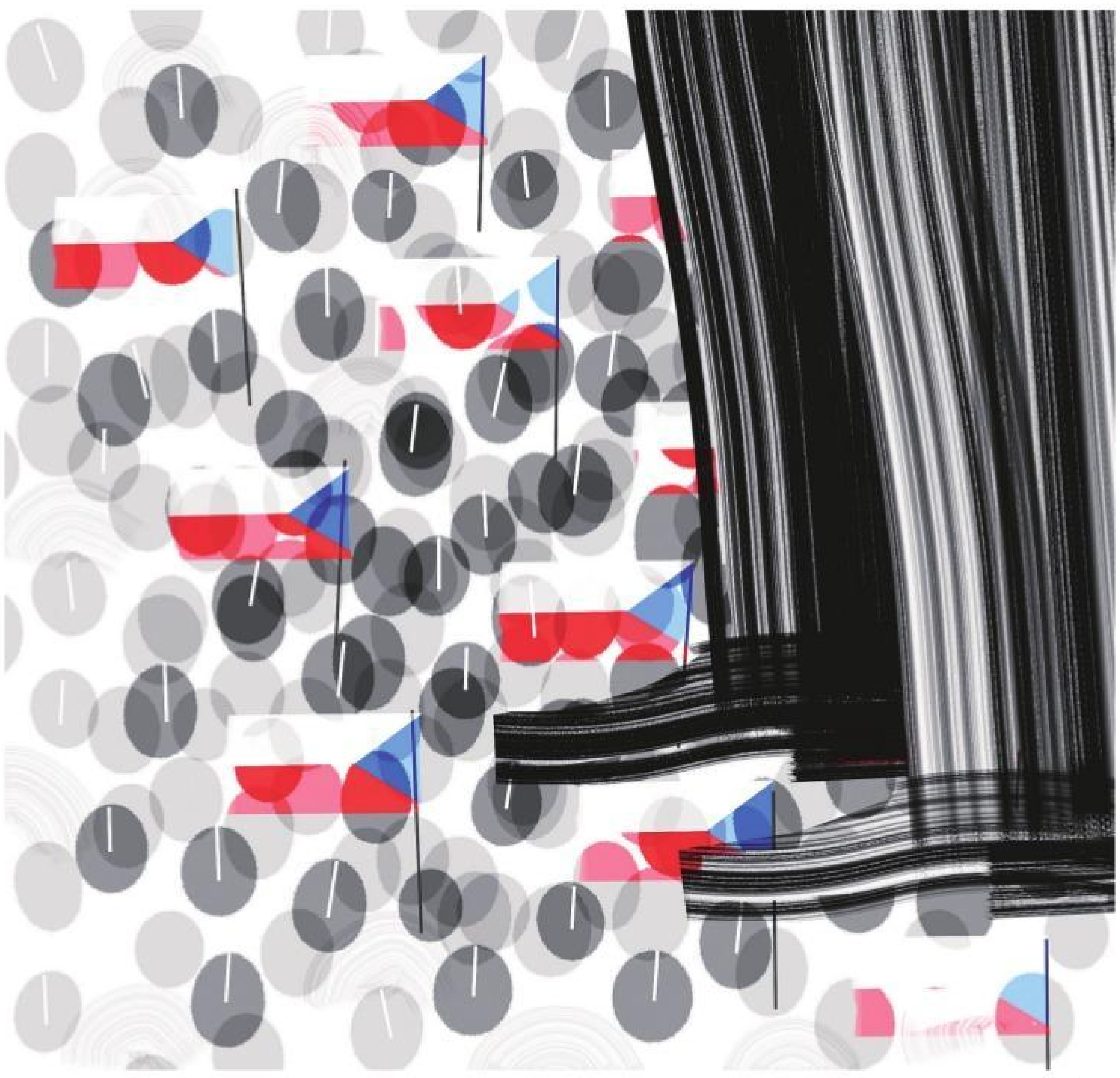
WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"How can a government (in Pakistan) that loses no chance to portray itself as a champion of ordinary citizens rush to Musharraf's defence?" —DAWN

The moral promise of 1989

Velvet Revolution embraced the Gandhian ethics of responsibility and commitment to human dignity. It had far-reaching consequences

RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO



C R Sasikumar

NOVEMBER 17 MARKED the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution organised by the Czech Civic Forum and the Slovak public against one of the last Soviet-orbit regimes. The Velvet Revolution (sametová revoluce) was a non-violent transition of power in what was then Czechoslovakia. The Czech and Polish experiences of democracy have shown that democratisation in Eastern Europe took place less within the framework of the existing state systems than at the level of civil societies. When the Czech and Polish dissidents of the 1980s were struggling against their communist authoritarian regimes, they returned to the concept of civil society. What Eastern European intellectuals and civic actors understood by civil society was not just the 18th century concept of the rule of law, but also the notion of horizontal self-organised groups and institutions in the public sphere that could limit the power of the state by constructing a democratic space separate from state and its ideological institutions.

Before 1989 and the rise of liberal values in Eastern Europe, many observers argued about the weakness of the civil societies in the region. This perspective forgot two things. First, the sheer ruthlessness of communist regimes that refused civic dissent any room to manoeuvre: No free trade unions, no real opposition, no free press, no tolerance of even a hint of dissidence. Second, the miracle that stubborn civil societies did persist in countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia — even after decades of Stalinist rule, students, intellectuals and artists continued their work and helped to lay the ground for the democratic revolt.

Moreover, the Czech experience showed us that even within a totalitarian system, a basis for "civic pluralism" can be created. Although other forms of civility existed in East European societies, this civic pluralism — with roots in a philosophical reading of pluralism, in opposition to ideological "monism" — offered a rich model for those dissidents seeking to make democratic change sustainable. Not surprisingly, dissidents like Adam Michnik in Poland and Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia opened spaces for new civil and democratic politics in Eastern Europe. Charter 77, the Czechoslovak manifesto for human rights, issued in January 1977 by Havel, Jan Patocka and Jiri Hájek, paved the way to the events of the "Velvet Revolution" of November 17, 1989. Havel's political philosophy was marked by notions such as "truth", "conscience", "responsibility" and "civility". His emphasis on the acknowledgment of truth as an essential value arose from his concern with what he called "living in truth" in a post-totalitarian state. Havel insisted in his writings that, "Individuals need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it." So, the problem for Havel was to confront political power by inviting people to live in truth and justice, and for decency.

As such, Havel showed brilliantly how the system successfully captures the lived experience of individuals in a post-totalitarian state by giving them the illusion of being part of a silent contract. That is why, for Havel, not becoming a player in the game of a post-totalitarian state was an embryonic act of dissent. What was important was defending one's dignity and regaining one's sense of responsibility. This was clearly a moral act, which was defined by Havel as "living within truth". Havel analysed the essence of living within truth while examining the various dimensions of what he called "the power of the powerless". He affirmed: "When I speak of living within truth, I naturally do not have in mind only products of conceptual thought, such as a protest or a letter written by a group of intellectuals. It can be any means by which a person or a group revolts against manipulation: Anything from a letter by intellectuals to a workers' strike, from a rock concert to a student demonstration, from refusing to vote in the farcical elections, to making an open speech at some official congress, or even a hunger strike."

In thinking about the Velvet Revolution of 1989, one wonders whether existing paradigms are even adequate, or if new ones are required to make sense of this landmark event. Thirty years later, we still need to ask about the nature of its vision and the scope of its demands. Was it reformist or revolutionary, or perhaps "refolutionary" as Timothy Garton Ash had suggested. The truth is that Havel and all those involved in the movement of 1989 did not aim to neutralise communist power with a new autocratic power but absorbed the violence of the regime, and then redirected that energy against it.

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The Czech protestors of 1989 resuscitated the technique of "political jiu-jitsu", a gentle art of subtleness, which was first popularised by Gene Sharp, an American theorist of non-violent activism, who was influenced by the Gandhian satyagraha. Regardless of whether Havel got this tactic from Sharp or directly from the Asian martial art, or invented it on his own, he was very creative in his use of a new grammar of politics.

Let us not forget that the strategies of non-violent resistance, dissent and non-cooperation suggested by Havel were presented by him as different ontological modes of living within truth. They became successful in 1989 by echoing an ethical dimension of politics in all of Eastern Europe. Havel's call to concepts such as conscience and civility, attributed a more ethical foundation to the civic humanist movement of 1989. Though very European in essence, it is undeniable that the democratic movement envisaged by Havel and the members of Charter 77 was born out of a Gandhian grammar of "ethicalisation of politics".

The Velvet Revolution of 1989 embraced the Gandhian ethics of responsibility and his commitment to human dignity, while insisting on the inherent fragility of human existence and the frailty of the human political condition. Therein lies the originality of the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the work of its moral leaders, both in confronting the realism of political power and speaking the truth beyond the national and the cultural frontiers by picking the right moral and political alternative.

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Misreading the new elite

Tavleen Singh gets it wrong. Prime Minister Modi did not create the parivartan. He is a product of it

ABHINAV PRAKASH SINGH

IN HER SUNDAY column ('India's new elite', IE, November 24), Tavleen Singh raised a pertinent point about the country's elite. But her column descended into rhetoric, betraying the pre-conceived notions of the author and her disconnect with society. The elite that has dominated India over the last century was a product of the colonial era, derived largely from the upper echelons of the society. This elite did not just retain power after Independence — its influence, in fact, was perpetuated during Congress rule. The Congress raj was the hegemony of the urban upper-castes, ruling in alliance with feudal elements in the countryside that belonged to the local dominant castes.

The "failure" to substantially alter agrarian relations, despite both social and economic reality demanding such a change, and instead settling for half-hearted tenancy reforms passed off as land reforms, was aimed at preserving the status quo. On the other hand, five-year plans reinforced the economic and social distance between the lower and upper castes, the latter leapfrogged into the modern economy due to higher social and educational capital.

The focus on heavy industrialisation instead of mass manufacturing and the "failure" to promote mass education made the five-year plans, plans of the elites, by the elites, and for the elites. These "temples of modern India" stood as islands amidst the sea of masses surrounding them, even as the temples of old India were thrown open to them. They had neither the education nor the skills for those industries as the focus was on building elite enclaves of IITs and not mass education. In Nehruvian India, the difference between the upper castes and lower castes was increasingly overlaid with the divide between a highly-productive modern sector and a low-productive traditional sector of the economy.

Nehruvian India thrived by blocking socio-economic mobility of the masses, except in matters of token representation like reservations. It was violent, with agrarian elites running amok enforcing *begar*, grabbing land and capturing booths during elections. Caste violence and discrimination was so endemic that it wasn't even taken seriously except for the occasional political posturing. The urban elites discussed the great questions of the day like "Can the subaltern speak?" while remaining oblivious to the cries of misery surrounding them. All the while perpetuating the same policies and structures that denied India its tryst with destiny.

It was only after the economic reforms in the 1990s that the situation began to change. A new class of people emerged from smaller cities and towns which was not part of the old landed agrarian elite nor of the bureaucratic and political patronage system of "Lutyens". Tens of millions, especially Dalits and Shudras, fled from the villages to the burgeoning urban centres in what was one of the greatest migrations in human history and, simultaneously, an act of liberation. Some of them have done well for themselves and it is not uncommon today to see social diversity in urban spaces, from apartment complexes to offices. This is what is driving the great social flux we see today. This new urban middle class is what Tavleen Singh mistakenly calls the new elites "entirely made of lower origins and caste". And yes, this class is nationalistic because it is not cut-off from its roots. It belongs to "somewhere" and not "anywhere" and thus naturally tilts towards the "Desh and Dharma". There is now an assertion of the pride in religious identity that comes with economic and material progress.

But trapped in the echo chambers of Twitter, Singh derides them as regressive, as those who rage against people who speak English, even though English is the most sought after language by them. She accuses them of rejecting "books that come from foreign lands" when even a cursory glance at the "Hindu nationalist" Twitter reveals that they extensively quote from the Japanese, German and Chinese scholars and not just from the Anglosphere. She accuses them of wanting Hindu supremacy when they are busy celebrating "chhath puja", enjoying the open expression of public religiosity after centuries without fear, and at worst, asking for the same constitutional rights/exemptions accorded to minority religions. That she accuses them of disdain for eating meat and drinking wine only shows further social disconnect.

Singh blames them for being blind supporters of Narendra Modi when they are amongst the first to erupt in outrage against the government on policy and ideological issues. The prime minister didn't create this "parivartan", as she calls it. Instead, he is a product of the "parivartan" that created this class — economic transformation, democratic deepening and social assertion. But, his policies of universal provision of health, electricity, and social security will certainly end up creating the foundations for the rise of this new class from among those who are still at the margins. And there is no reason why it would subscribe to the values and aesthetics of the "good old India".

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Smarter than Aadhaar

Viable solutions to PDS portability are being ignored in the push for Aadhaar

REETIKA KHERA

MIGRANTS' WOES ARE often invoked in making a case for portability of benefits in the public distribution system (PDS). Most recently, an article ('A hundred small steps', IE, September 26) did just that. However, in many cases of short-term seasonal migration (a dominant form in India), only one or two of the household members migrate, leaving the ration card behind for the rest of the family to use. What proportion of migrants would prefer to draw their ration at the place of work rather than in their village is a key piece of the puzzle in understanding the extent to which portability of PDS benefits is valued by migrants.

If the food security of migrants is the motivating concern, this need is probably better met by other initiatives such as Tamil Nadu's Amma canteens or Karnataka's Indira canteens, which provide heavily subsidised meals. Such community kitchens have quietly become popular across the country — Jharkhand's dal-bhaat kendras, Delhi's Jan Aahaar kiosks, and others in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh are such initiatives. Of course, protecting migrants from exploitation through stricter enforcement of their rights as labourers will go much further.

Currently, PDS entitlements are tied to the recipient's place of residence. You can only draw PDS rations from the PDS outlet to which you are allocated. Thus, while a single-member household may be forced to forego her rations if she migrates, others would be able to claim benefits through those family members who stay back. A portable PDS would be a great facility for those who would like to draw their rations at the place of migration.

The promoters of portability make it seem as if it cannot be achieved without integrating Aadhaar with PDS. In 2012, the food department in Chhattisgarh took up the challenge of designing a portable PDS and launched "CORE PDS". Step one was to rejig the supply logistics. The norm today is for each PDS outlet to receive food supplies once a month according to the (fixed) number of ration cards attached to it. In a portable system, where the number of people who draw their grain at a PDS outlet fluctuates from month to month, the government needs to put in place a flexible supply system. The fix was simple: Chhattisgarh allowed more than one delivery of grain in a month. Since end-to-end computerisation had been achieved, stocks could be monitored. An automated system sent a message to the ration dealer as soon as the digitised records showed that his stocks had fallen below a certain level, asking the dealer if he would like another delivery.

Step two was to give the ration card holders a smart card (like ATM cards) that could be used to draw rations at any CORE PDS outlet using a "point of sale" (POS) machine. Once the POS machine authenticates the smart card, sale can proceed. Offline sales were possible if server or connectivity issues arose. One-fifth of the transactions used the portability option, mostly within the ward. Convenience was the prime reason for switching shops — distance to the PDS, tenants who had moved residence, supplies running out. To cut a long story short, portability was achieved without Aadhaar.

CORE PDS was being gradually scaled up until Aadhaar came along and disrupted the process, even though smart cards are more reliable than fingerprint authentication. Chhattisgarh's CORE-PDS was more promising than the Aadhaar-Based Biometric Authentication (ABBA) that has left behind a trail of hardship, exclusion, even deaths since its integration with the PDS.

In 'A hundred small steps', the authors carefully sidestep the fact that Santoshi's death in Jharkhand was primarily the result of disruption that resulted from Aadhaar's integration with the PDS, as well as the fact that smart cards (tested in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry among other places) provide a better technology solution for the last mile authentication than Aadhaar. Readers must ask why that is the case.

One of the authors of the article worked with a minister in the UPA-2 government in the rural development ministry that pushed against repeated warnings — warnings that were later vindicated — the use of Aadhaar in NREGA and social security pensions. Before that, he had worked with the World Bank and Monitor Deloitte. After that, he joined Dalberg and is now with Omidyar Network. Omidyar Network's interest in the PDS and Aadhaar — it has funded research worth lakhs of rupees — should also arouse people's curiosity.

Independent research has raised troubling questions. The sugar and tobacco industry have gained notoriety for having done this in the past: Funding friendly research that cultivated doubts in people's minds about independent research that highlighted the harmful health effects of sugar and tobacco.

The writer is associate professor (economics and public systems group), Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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.

MAHA DRAMA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A saving grace' (IE, November 27).The rash attempt by Devendra Fadnavis to form the government by relying on the support of 54 NCP MLAs offered by Ajit Pawar and the consequent drama displays his political immaturity. Although the attempt was bound to fail, the alternative grouping of Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress does not present a better scenario. It is an unholy alliance of arch rivals. It is a classic example of opportunism where the only aim of rivals joining hands is to deprive the BJP from forming the government.This is political chicanery with the people of Maharashtra.

Ram Mathur, *Ghaziabad*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A saving grace' (IE, November 27). While it is fair to apportion the maximum blame on the BJP in the entire episode, being the largest national party and ruling party at the Centre, one must not forget that the voters of Maharashtra had voted for the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance. It was Shiv Sena's unfair insistence (with about half as many seats as the BJP) on CM-ship that led to the collapse of BJP-Shiv Sena alliance. The Shiv Sena then sought to get support from parties opposed to its own ideology, solely with an eye on the CM's post.

Anoop Srivastava, *Greater Noida*

SAVING DEMOCRACY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Checkmated by the Constitution' (IE, November 27). Political parties should stay true to the principles that uphold the Constitution while making any move in the process of government formation. Misuse of constitutional positions like that of the governor was evident in this Maharashtra drama by the BJP. The fabric of Indian democracy must not be shattered.

Pranali Kulkarni, *via email*

SEBI MUST-DOS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Seize the scam' (IE, November 27). Karvy Stock Broking is a 36-year-old stock broking firm. And when it is found engaged in practices such as siphoning off a client's fund to its real estate business, then it creates a huge trust deficit amongst retail stock investors. What SEBI needs to do is differentiate between a trader and investor — the latter would certainly be invested in the process for a longer period of time, and people should not be asked to give power of attorney rights to their brokers. SEBI must also ensure that investors get their money back at the earliest.

Bal Govind, *Noida*

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
वर्ष 12 अंक 242

क्लाइंट के धन का दुरुपयोग

भारतीय प्रतिभूति एवं विनिमय बोर्ड (सेबी) ने कार्वी समूह के खिलाफ जो कार्रवाई की है उसे लेकर शेयर ब्रोकिंग उद्योग के भीतर कुछ आशंकाएं उत्पन्न हो गई हैं। बाजार नियामक ने कार्वी को नए क्लाइंट लेने से रोका है और तमाम ब्रोकरेज हाउस से कहा है कि वे क्लाइंट के खाते को ब्रोकर के निजी खाते से अलग करने के लिए कड़े नियम अपनाएं। इसका लक्ष्य है क्लाइंट की परिसंपत्तियों का दुरुपयोग रोकना। परंतु इससे कई ब्रोकर प्रभावित भी हो सकते हैं। प्रभावित पोजीशन को जबरन तेजी से समेटने के कारण बड़े नुकसान और डिफॉल्ट की स्थिति बन सकती है। कार्वी समूह पर यह आरोप है कि उसने अपने क्लाइंट के खातों से प्रतिभूति और फंड को समूह की अन्य कंपनियों में स्थानांतरित किया। इसमें उसकी खुद की रियल एस्टेट कंपनी भी शामिल है। इसके अलावा इन परिसंपत्तियों का इस्तेमाल शेयर बाजार की प्रतिबद्धताएं पूरी करने में किया गया। हो सकता है यह शुरुआत हो और तमाम अन्य ब्रोकरेज हाउस ऐसा कर रहे हों। तमाम रिटेल ब्रोकरेज में क्लाइंट की परिसंपत्ति का दुरुपयोग करना आम बात है। ऐसा करना आसान है: ब्रोकर क्लाइंट से पावर ऑफ अटॉर्नी लेकर काम करते हैं। इससे उन्हें डीमैट शेयरों का शीघ्र स्थानांतरण करने में मदद मिलती है। पावर ऑफ अटॉर्नी की व्यवस्था वैध भी है और अनिवार्य भी। अगर यह नहीं हुई तो हर लेनदेन के लिए संबंधित पक्षों को भौतिक दस्तावेजीकरण करना होगा। इससे प्रक्रिया धीमी और असुविधापूर्ण होगी।

परंतु पावर ऑफ अटॉर्नी की वजह से ब्रोकरेज हाउस को सीधे क्लाइंट का खाता चलाने की अनुमति मिल जाती है। इसमें कई तरह की जटिल परिस्थितियां निर्मित हो सकती हैं। उदाहरण के लिए एक ब्रोकरेज हाउस क्लाइंट की ओर से मार्जिन पर शेयर खरीद सकता है और बाद में इन शेयरों को वह बिन चुकता बता कर अपने खाते में शामिल कर सकता है। ऐसी खबरें भी आई हैं कि क्लाइंट द्वारा मार्जिन के रूप में लिए गए शेयरों का अपने कारोबार में इस्तेमाल किया गया हो। कार्वी मामला तथा ऐसे अन्य मामले तब प्रकाश में आए जब नैशनल स्टॉक एक्सचेंज में अंकेक्षण हुआ। आगे और जांच होने पर ही इस विषय में विस्तृत जानकारी मिल सकेगी। क्लाइंट के खाते का इस्तेमाल निश्चित रूप से अनैतिक है। इससे ब्रोकर को यह अवसर मिलता है कि वह उन परिसंपत्तियों के इस्तेमाल से कारोबार कर सके जो दरअसल उसकी नहीं हैं। इससे वह अनुमति से अधिक कारोबार करने में सक्षम होता है। कार्वी मामला और खराब हो सकता है अगर परिसंपत्तियों का इस्तेमाल समूह की अचल संपत्ति शाखा द्वारा जमानत के रूप में किया गया। क्लाइंट के खातों का इस्तेमाल आम है और इसकी लंबे समय से अनदेखी की जाती रही है। सेबी ने इस विषय में निर्देश जारी किए हैं और क्लाइंट खातों को ब्रोकर के खातों से अलग करने को कहा है।

नैतिक पहलू को छोड़ दें तो इसके कई खतरे भी हैं। यदि एक ब्रोकरेज जो क्लाइंट की परिसंपत्तियों का दुरुपयोग कर रहा है, वह घाटे में चला जाता है तो डिफॉल्ट कर सकता है। इससे ऐसी स्थिति निर्मित होती है जहां शायद अन्य ब्रोकर भी इसी प्रकार क्लाइंट की परिसंपत्तियों का दुरुपयोग कर रहे हों। ऐसे डिफॉल्ट निवेशकों को बहुत बुरी तरह प्रभावित कर सकते हैं। ऐसा बड़े पैमाने पर हो सकता है। इसका असर बाजार पर होगा। नियामक को ऐसी स्थिति से निपटने में सावधानी बरतनी होगी। आशंका यह भी है कि कड़े कदम निवेशकों को भयभीत कर सकते हैं और वे बिकवाली कर सकते हैं। सेबी को शेयर बाजारों के साथ तालमेल के साथ निवेशकों को आश्वस्त करना चाहिए और यह सुनिश्चित करना चाहिए कि हालात पूरी तरह व्यवस्थित हो जाएं। उसे गलती करने वाले ब्रोकरों के खिलाफ कार्रवाई करनी चाहिए लेकिन साथ ही सुनिश्चित करना चाहिए कि सामान्य निवेशक प्रभावित न हों।

अजय मोहंती

श्रम आय बढ़ने पर ही तेज आर्थिक वृद्धि

वर्तमान समय में लोगों के लिए नहीं, पूंजी के मालिकों के लिए कल्याणकारी राज्य चल रहा है। सरकार श्रम आय बढ़ाने के बजाय कंपनियों को सौगात दे रही है। बता रहे हैं **नितिन देसाई**

प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने गत जुलाई में भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था का आकार पांच लाख डॉलर करने के लक्ष्य पर सवाल उठाने वालों को पेशेवर निराशावादी बताते हुए खारिज कर दिया था। बजट से भी आर्थिक सुस्ती के बारे में बहुत अंदाजा नहीं मिला। लेकिन जब यह सुस्ती साफ नजर आने लगी तो नीति-निर्माताओं में घबराहट देखी जाने लगी और वे कॉर्पोरेट कर में कटौती जैसे प्रस्ताव लेकर सामने आ गए। उन्होंने यह भी नहीं सोचा कि क्या इस कदम से फौरी नतीजे आ पाएंगे? वृद्धि बहाली के लिए सरकार की नीतियां विश्लेषण के बजाय झुकाव पर आधारित लगती हैं। घरेलू उपभोग में गिरावट जैसे असुविधाजनक आंकड़ों को दबाने और रोजगार रिपोर्ट की सटीकता स्वीकार करने से इनकार की भी कोशिश हुई हैं।

ऐसे परिवेश में एक वैकल्पिक योजना के लिए काट-छांटकर पेश किए गए सरकारी आंकड़ों पर यकीन करना मुश्किल है। लिहाजा इस लेख में काफी हद तक विश्वसनीय गैर-सरकारी आंकड़ों का इस्तेमाल किया गया है। इनमें बेहद समृद्ध एवं भरोसेमंद स्रोत कैपिटल, लेबर, एनर्जी, मैटेरियल्स ऐंड सर्विसेज (क्लेम्स) के आंकड़े भी शामिल हैं।

क्लेम्स डेटाबेस भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक से प्रायोजित है और उन आंकड़ों को दिल्ली स्कूल ऑफ इकनॉमिक्स के शोधकर्ताओं की टीम तैयार करती है। पेशेवर स्वतंत्रता होने से क्लेम्स के आंकड़ों को भरोसेमंद माना जा सकता है। यह डेटाबेस सकल आउटपुट समेत कुल कारक उत्पादकता गणना, सकल मूल्य वर्द्धन (जीवीए), ऊर्जा, सामग्री एवं सेवाओं में मध्यवर्ती आगत, रोजगार, श्रम गुणवत्ता सूचकांक, श्रम आय और पूंजी आय के लिए तैयार किया गया है। अर्थव्यवस्था और उसके 27 अहम क्षेत्रों के आंकड़ों के आधार पर तैयार यह डेटाबेस क्षेत्र-आधारित आंकड़ों से पूरी तरह मेल खाते हैं। आर्थिक वृद्धि संबंधी गणनाओं के लिए मैं इसे अधिक विश्वसनीय स्रोत मानूंगा।

अब मैं केंद्रीय सांख्यिकी कार्यालय (सीएसओ) की बैककास्टिंग (मनचाहा परिणाम हासिल करने के लिए अपनाई गई नीति एवं पद्धति) कवायद से निकले जीवीए वृद्धि दर अनुमान और क्लेम्स डेटाबेस के आंकड़े के बीच तुलनात्मक अध्ययन करूंगा। क्लेम्स के आंकड़े अधिक विश्वसनीय एवं सुसंगत हैं।

इस तुलना से यह पता चलता है कि सीएसओ संयुक्त प्रगतिशील गठबंधन (संप्रग) शासन के दौरान वृद्धि दर को कमतर आंकता रहा जबकि राष्ट्रीय जनतांत्रिक गठबंधन (राजग) सरकार के दौरान उसके अनुमान अधिक ही रहे।

कंपनियों के पास अधिक पैसे होने से निवेश बढ़ने एवं वृद्धि तेज होने को लेकर सरकार का विश्वास गलत है। कंपनियां उसी स्थिति में निवेश करती हैं जब उन्हें मांग बढ़ने की संभावना दिखती है। लेकिन अब यह पूरी तरह साफ हो चुका है कि मांग वृद्धि सुस्त पड़ चुकी है। रथिन रॉय ने प्रभावी ढंग से दलील दी है कि इस सुस्ती की कुछ वजह संरचनात्मक है क्योंकि वाहनों एवं टिकाऊ उपभोक्ता उत्पादों के मामले में 'एस' आकार वाला वृद्धि वक्र अपने उच्च पथ से आगे निकलते हुए संतृप्त स्थिति में जा रहा है। दरअसल मध्यम-आय समूह में प्रवेश करने वाले उपभोक्ताओं की संख्या उतनी तेजी से नहीं बढ़ रही है।

लेकिन इस लेख में प्रस्तुत तर्क संबद्ध होते हुए भी अलग हैं। मुझे लगता है कि वृद्धि के लिए प्रमुख मांग आय वितरण के निचले आधे हिस्से से ही आती है। रोजमर्रा के उत्पाद (एफएमसीजी) की वृद्धि पर नजर डालें तो वर्ष 2004 से लेकर 2010 तक के उत्कर्ष काल में इस क्षेत्र की वृद्धि दर उच्च रही, 2012 में उसमें तीव्र गिरावट आई, 2017 में हल्का सुधार देखा गया और उसके बाद से लगातार गिरावट का दौर चल रहा है।

एफएमसीजी मांग मुख्य रूप से ग्रामीण उपभोक्ताओं और शहरी क्षेत्र के मजदूरी-आश्रित एवं वेतनभोगियों से आती है। ऐसे में सुस्ती का यही मतलब है कि उनकी आय के जरूरी दर से नहीं बढ़ी है। पहले ग्रामीण उपभोक्ताओं पर विचार करते हैं। कृषि क्षेत्र में कार्यरत पुरुष श्रमिकों की औसत वृद्धि दर 2007-08 और 2014-15 के दौरान 16 फीसदी थी। लेकिन 2015-16 और 2017-18 में यह गिरकर पांच फीसदी पर आ गई। किसानों के लिए कारोबार की स्थितियां 2004-2010 के दौरान 85 से बढ़कर 100 से ऊपर जा पहुंची थी। उसके बाद से वे गिरती चली गई हैं। पिछले साल ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में देखी गई अत्यधिक अशांति शायद मौसम से संबंधित थी और इस साल हालात पलट सकते हैं। लेकिन मार्केटिंग सुधारों से जुड़ी गहरी समस्याएं, मसलन न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य (एमएसपी) एवं सार्वजनिक खाद्यान्न खरीद के ठीक होने में लंबा वक्त लगेगा।

शहरी क्षेत्रों में ज्यादा अहमियत रोजगार एवं मेहनताने में वृद्धि की है। वर्ष 2004-10 की अवधि के क्लेम्स आंकड़ों के मुताबिक, विनिर्माण क्षेत्र में रोजगार की वृद्धि दर 2.46 फीसदी थी और सेवा क्षेत्र में यह 2.8 फीसदी थी। वर्ष 2011 से 2017 के दौरान विनिर्माण में वृद्धि दर गिरकर 1.40 फीसदी और सेवा क्षेत्र में 2 फीसदी रह गई। जहां तक श्रम आय का सवाल है तो वहां पर समान पैटर्न नजर आता है। पहले दौर में उच्च वृद्धि थी लेकिन दूसरे दौर में यह नीचे आ गई। विनिर्माण रोजगार आय में भी वृद्धि दर 8.13 फीसदी से गिरकर 5.38 फीसदी पर आ गई। वहीं सेवा रोजगार आय में वृद्धि दर 7.18 फीसदी से घटकर 6.09 फीसदी रही।

नियतकालिक श्रम-शक्ति सर्वेक्षण (पीएलएफएस) 2017-18 पर सवाल उठाने की कोशिशों के बावजूद रोजगार वृद्धि की सुस्ती को ठीक से समझा गया है। औद्योगिक उत्पादन सूचकांक में वृद्धि की दर 2010-11 के बाद धीमी हो गई। श्रम-बहुल उद्योगों में औद्योगिक उत्पादन 2004-10 के छह वर्षों में 5.7 फीसदी से बड़ी गिरावट के साथ 2011 के बाद के छह वर्षों में महज 0.1 फीसदी पर आ गया। पूंजी की अधिकता वाले क्षेत्रों में भी औद्योगिक उत्पादन 10.6 फीसदी से गिरकर 4.60 फीसदी पर आ गया।

पाठकों के समक्ष ये सारे आंकड़े पेश करने का मकसद यह बताना है कि भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था की प्रमुख समस्या श्रम आय की अपर्याप्तता है। विनिर्माण मूल्य-वर्द्धित में श्रम आय की हिस्सेदारी 1060 के दशक के मध्य से ही नीचे जा रही है और 1990-91 के बाद से तो इसमें काफी तेजी आई है। अब यह 30 फीसदी पर है। सेवा क्षेत्र में यह हिस्सेदारी 52 फीसदी है।

श्रम नीति के केंद्र में सिर्फ यही रह गया है कि कामगारों को मिली सुरक्षा में कटौती हो और ऐसे कदम उठाए जाएं जिनसे पूंजी के मालिकों को काम पर रखने एवं हटाने में आसानी हो। इसके साक्ष्य बहुत कम हैं कि कंपनियों को कागजी प्रावधानों के चलते अपने श्रमशक्ति में कटौती के लिए मजबूर होना पड़ा हो। हम भूल जाते हैं कि नियमित मजदूरी-आश्रित एवं वेतनभोगियों में से 71 फीसदी के पास कोई लिखित अनुबंध नहीं है और नियमित रोजगार की जगह अस्थायी एवं अनुबंधित श्रम ले रहा है।

वास्तविकता यह है कि अपने लोगों के लिए एक कल्याणकारी राज्य चलाने के बजाय हम पूंजी के मालिकों के लिए कल्याणकारी राज्य चला रहे हैं और उन्हें गलत फैसलों से बचा रहे हैं। मसलन, कॉर्पोरेट कर कटौती से सरकार को राजस्व में एक लाख करोड़ रुपये से अधिक का नुकसान होगा लेकिन इस उम्मीद में यह कदम उठाया गया है कि इससे निवेश एवं वृद्धि को मजबूती मिलेगी। उस राजस्व क्षति की भरपाई के लिए सरकार अपने सबसे लाभपरक उपक्रमों को बेचने की योजना बना रही है। अगर कंपनी जगत और शेयर बाजार के अटकलबाजों को दी गई बड़ी सौगात का इस्तेमाल देश में न्यूनतम आय का कानून लागू करने और मनरेगा के तहत अधिक रोजगार देने में किया गया रहता तो हमें अब तक उसका नतीजा देखने को मिल जाता।

निवेश बुनियादी रूप से मांग वृद्धि की अपेक्षाओं से प्रेरित होता है। मौजूदा संदर्भ में ऐसा करने का सबसे भरोसेमंद तरीका श्रम आय को बढ़ाना है।

'प्रसुप्त जीवंतता' से सुधरेगी आपात चिकित्सा की स्थिति

तकनीकी तंत्र

देवांग्शु दत्ता

प्रसुप्त जीवंतता (सस्पेंडेड एनीमेशन) विज्ञान की गल्प कथाओं का पुराना रूपक है। इसके पीछे एक जिंदा शख्स का शरीर फ्रीज करने के साथ ही उसके सभी प्रमुख अंगों को अस्थायी तौर पर निष्क्रिय करने की सोच है। शरीर को एक जीवाणु-रहित परिवेश में रखा जाता है ताकि उसे यथावत रखा जाए और फिर बाद में उसमें जान फूंक दी जाती है। तमाम कहानियों में इस काल्पनिक तकनीक का इस्तेमाल लंबी दूरी की अंतरिक्ष यात्राओं और किसी लाइलाज बीमारी की चपेट में आए शख्स को उपचार मिलने तक सुरक्षित रखने के लिए किया जाता है।

चिकित्सा शोधकर्ताओं ने इस संकल्पना पर अधिक व्यावहारिक नजरिये से देखना शुरू कर दिया है। जानलेवा चोटों के शिकार एक रोगी को आपातकालीन कक्ष में निर्जीव-प्राय स्थिति में रखा जा सकता है ताकि डॉक्टरों को उसके इलाज के लिए अधिक वक्त मिल सके। चोटिल व्यक्ति को निर्जीव-प्राय स्थिति में ले जाने के लिए एक आपातकालीन परिरक्षण एवं पुनर्जीवीकरण (ईपीआर) प्रक्रिया अपनाई जाएगी।

शरीर को फ्रीज करने के असामान्य प्रभाव सदियों से ज्ञात हैं। सामान्य शरीर तापमान (37 डिग्री सेल्सियस) पर अगर हृदय से रक्तसंचार में ऑक्सीजन का प्रवाह नहीं हो रहा हो तो कोशिकाएं नष्ट होने लगती हैं। अगर मस्तिष्क को पांच मिनट के लिए भी ऑक्सीजन न मिले तो मस्तिष्क की अपूरणीय क्षति हो जाती है। हालांकि बर्फीले पानी में गिरने वाले लोगों को धड़कन थमने के 30 मिनट बाद भी बचाया गया है। इसकी वजह यह है कि बहुत कम तापमान होने पर कोशिका धीमी गति से काम करने लगती है और लगभग बंद हो जाती है। ऐसा होने पर शरीर को ऑक्सीजन की जरूरत भी बेहद कम हो जाती है। दिल एवं दिमाग की सर्जरी के दौरान शरीर को बेहद ठंडा करने के लिए बर्फ की पट्टियों का इस्तेमाल किया जा सकता है जबकि रक्त को ठंडा होने के लिए कृत्रिम संचरण प्रणाली के जरिये दूसरी तरफ भेज दिया जाता है। यह प्रक्रिया डॉक्टरों को जटिल सर्जरी करने के लिए अधिक वक्त दे देती है लेकिन यह एक धीमी प्रक्रिया है।

अगर दिल नहीं धड़क रहा है तो फिर मरीज के पास चंद मिनट ही बचे होते हैं। बड़े पैमाने पर होने वाले रक्तस्राव के लिए भी यह बात सही है। ऐसे में ईपीआर काफी काम आ सकता है। ईपीआर की प्रेरणा वियतनाम युद्ध के दौरान किए गए अध्ययन तक जाती है। सेना के सर्जनों ने देखा कि सैनिकों की मौत का बड़ा कारण गहरी चोट लगने के बाद के शुरुआती 5-20 मिनटों में होने वाला रक्तस्राव है।

नई सदी की शुरुआत में एरिजोना यूनिवर्सिटी के शोधकर्ताओं ने सूअरों पर परीक्षण शुरू किए। सूअर को गंभीर चोट पहुंचाने के बाद उसके खून की जगह ठंडा सेलाइन द्रव डाल देते थे। डॉक्टरों को यह पता चला कि जानवरों को धड़कन बंद होने के तीन घंटे बाद भी जिंदा किया जा सकता है और उनमें इलाज के बाद कोई बुरा असर भी नहीं दिखता है।

अब मैरीलैंड यूनिवर्सिटी के स्कूल ऑफ मेडिसिन ने जिंदा बचने की बहुत कम संभावना वाले रोगियों पर ईपीआर तकनीकें आजमाने की अनुमति हासिल कर ली है। कम-से-कम एक रोगी पर ईपीआर तकनीक का इस्तेमाल किया भी जा चुका है।

ईपीआर प्रक्रिया में शरीर के भीतर खून को हटाकर बर्फ की मानिंद ठंडा सेलाइन द्रव पहुंचाया जाता है। शरीर के तापमान को 10 डिग्री सेल्सियस तक पहुंचाने में करीब 15 मिनट लगते हैं। उस स्थिति में शरीर के भीतर खून की एक बूंद भी नहीं रह जाती है, सांस नहीं चलती है और मस्तिष्क भी काम करना बंद कर चुका होता है। नैदानिक (क्लिनिक) तौर पर मर चुके इस मरीज को फिर मशीन से अलग किया जाता है ताकि उसकी सर्जरी एवं अन्य आपात इलाज किए जा सकें। उसके बाद सेलाइन को निकालकर शरीर में दोबारा रक्त प्रवाहित कर दिया जाता है जो शरीर को फिर से गर्माहट देने लगता है। शोधकर्ताओं का अनुमान है कि ईपीआर प्रक्रिया से डॉक्टरों को इलाज के लिए करीब दो घंटे का समय मिल जाता है जबकि बेहद खतरनाक चोटों के मामले में यह वक्त महज कुछ मिनटों का ही होता है। यह साफ नहीं है कि मरीज को कितनी देर तक ईपीआर प्रक्रिया से गुजारा जा सकता है ताकि उसे कोई स्थायी क्षति भी न हो। इसी तरह रीबूट के मानदंड भी साफ नहीं हैं। वार्मअप होने के दौरान कोशिका के स्तर पर रासायनिक प्रतिक्रिया दोबारा शुरू हो जाती है। यह नुकसान का सबब बन सकता है। फिर से ऑक्सीजन मिलना शुरू होने पर कोशिकाओं को 'रिपर्फ्यूजन' चोट लगने का डर होता है। रिपर्फ्यूजन प्रक्रिया को पूरी तरह समझा नहीं गया है और इस क्षति को न्यूनतम करने के लिए दवाइयां भी विकसित की जा सकती हैं ताकि लंबे समय तक ईपीआर पर रखा जा सके।

बाल्टीमोर में होने वाले ईपीआर परीक्षणों के दौरान शुरुआत में 10 ईपीआर विषय एवं 10 नियंत्रण होंगे। दुर्घटनाओं में जानलेवा चोटों के शिकार लोगों को मैरीलैंड यूनिवर्सिटी हॉस्पिटल के आपात कक्ष में लाया जाएगा। कानूनी तौर पर यह अटपटा है क्योंकि गंभीर हालत में अस्पताल लाए जाने वाले मरीज ईपीआर के लिए सहमति देने में सक्षम नहीं होंगे। अमेरिकी खाद्य एवं औषधि प्रशासन विभाग ने इस महत्त्वपूर्ण प्रयोग के लिए सहमति की अनिवार्यता से छूट दे दी है। यह प्रक्रिया उन बेहद गंभीर चोटिल लोगों पर ही अपनाई जाएगी जिनके इलाज का कोई विकल्प नहीं रह गया है और उनके जिंदा बचने के मौके बेहद कम हैं।

ईपीआर तकनीक पहले 10 लोगों पर आजमाई जाएगी और उसके नतीजों की तुलना निगरानी में रखे गए 10 मरीजों से की जाएगी। फिर तकनीक में सुधार किया जाएगा और 10 अन्य घायलों पर उसे आजमाया जाएगा। परीक्षणों का यह दौर 2020 तक जारी रहेगा। व्यावहारिक स्तर पर यह तकनीक आपातकालीन चिकित्सा में काफी कारगर हो सकती है।

कानाफूसी

गलती से बहिष्कार

भाजपा सांसद खगेन मुर्मू मंगलवार को गलती से विरोधी दलों के एक प्रदर्शन में शामिल हो गए। दरअसल कांग्रेस, तृणमूल कांग्रेस तथा अन्य विपक्षी दलों के सांसदों ने संसद के केंद्रीय कक्ष में 70वें संविधान दिवस के कार्यक्रम का बहिष्कार करने का निर्णय लिया। इसके बजाय उन्होंने संसद परिसर में संविधान निर्माता डॉ. बी आर आंबेडकर की मूर्ति के पास लोकतंत्र की हत्या के खिलाफ प्रदर्शन करने का निर्णय किया। कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष सोनिया गांधी के नेतृत्व में जब सांसद नारे लगाते हुए वहां पहुंचे तो मुर्मू भी उनके साथ हो लिए। उन्हें लगा कि सांसद वहां आंबेडकर को श्रद्धांजलि देने के लिए एकत्रित हुए हैं। बाद में उन्हें गलती का अहसास हुआ और वह वहां से चले गए। मुर्मू लोकसभा चुनाव के ऐन पहले भाजपा में शामिल हुए और जीतने में कामयाब रहे। वहीं तृणमूल सांसद नुसरत जहां केंद्रीय कक्ष के समारोह में शामिल हुई जबकि उनकी पार्टी के सांसदों ने इसका बहिष्कार किया।

प्रासंगिकता का प्रश्न

सन 2019 के आम चुनाव के पहले भारतीय जनता पार्टी से नाता तोड़कर कांग्रेस में शामिल होने वाली सावित्री बाई फुले का नई पार्टी के कामकाज से भी मोहभंग होता प्रतीत हो रहा है। कांग्रेस ने उन्हें उत्तर प्रदेश की बहराइच सीट से लोकसभा चुनाव मैदान में उतारा था लेकिन वह भाजपा के प्रत्याशी से पार नहीं पा सकीं और अपनी सीट गंवा बैठीं। अब जबकि कांग्रेस प्रदेश इकाई को दुरुस्त कर रही है और उसने 10 वरिष्ठ नेताओं को पार्टी से बाहर निकाल दिया है, तो इस दलित नेता के लिए भी करने को कुछ खास नहीं रह गया है। ऐसे में वह अपने आपको राजनीतिक रूप से प्रासंगिक बनाए रखने का प्रयास कर रही हैं। फुले ने अब आरक्षण और इलेक्ट्रॉनिक वोटिंग मशीन को लेकर विरोध प्रदर्शन करने की घोषणा की है।

आपका पक्ष

मध्य प्रदेश में किसानों की बात

मध्य प्रदेश में विभिन्न पुलिस थानों में दर्ज किसानों के करीब 45,000 मामले वापस लिए गए हैं। राज्य सरकार का यह कदम किसानों के हितों की रक्षा करता है। आज भी देश के किसान विभिन्न समस्याओं से जूझ रहे हैं। फसल उत्पादन से लेकर बिक्री तक में किसान ही घाटे में रहते हैं। मध्य प्रदेश की कांग्रेस सरकार का कहना है कि वर्ष 2017 में किसानों ने आंदोलन किया था। इस दौरान पुलिस की गोलीबारी में छह किसानों की मौत हो गई थी। इसके बाद राज्य में उग्र प्रदर्शन हुएथे। उनको लेकर तत्कालीन भाजपा सरकार के आदेश पर कई मामले दर्ज किए गए थे। इसके अलावा किसानों पर बिजली चोरी के आरोप तथा अन्य आरोप में मामले भी दर्ज किए गए थे। फिलहाल राज्य सरकार ने किसानों पर दर्ज मामले वापस लेकर किसानों को राहत प्रदान की है। लेकिन सिर्फ मामले वापस लिए जाने से किसानों की स्थिति में सुधार संभव नहीं है। सरकार अगर मानती है कि किसानों पर अत्याचार हुआ है और बेकसूर किसानों को जबरन जेल में बंद किया गया तो उन्हें मुआवजा भी मिलना चाहिए। सरकार को यह भी ध्यान रखना चाहिए कि आंदोलन के दौरान आगजनी, तोड़फोड़ से जो नुकसान हुआ है या फिर किसी निजी व्यक्ति के संपत्ति का जो नुकसान हुआ है उसे भी मुआवजा मिलना चाहिए। वहीं अगर इस प्रकरण में कोई असामाजिक तत्त्वों का काम है तो उसे सरकार सजा दिलाए।

कुंदन कुमार, भोपाल

मध्य प्रदेश सरकार ने पुलिस थानों में दर्ज किसानों के 45 हजार मामले वापस लिए

बोरवेल की जगह कुएं का प्रचलन हो

देश में भूजल का स्तर दिन प्रतिदिन कम होता जा रहा है। गिरते भूजल स्तर को रोकने के लिए सरकार को कड़े कदम उठाने होंगे। इसके लिए देश में बोरवेल पर पूरी तरह से रोक लगाने की जरूरत है। डीप बोरिंग की पहचान कर पहले इसे बंद करने की जरूरत है। बोरवेल के कारण कई बच्चों की जान भी चली गई है। बोरवेल के बजाय कुएं को प्रचलन में लाने की जरूरत है। कुआं काफी गहरा नहीं होता है तथा इसमें साल भर पानी भी रहता है। वहीं बारिश में कुएं के भर जाने से भूजल स्तर में सुधार भी संभव है। देश की राजधानी दिल्ली में एनजीटी के आदेश के बाद बोरवेल को सील करने के लिए 52 टीमों का गठन किया गया है। दिल्ली के साथ-साथ देश के सभी राज्यों में बोरवेल पर रोक लगाने की जरूरत है। केंद्र सरकार की हर घर में पानी पहुंचाने की योजना पहले से ही चल रही है। इस योजना के तहत हर घर में जब पानी पहुंच जाएगा तो बोरवेल की जरूरत ही नहीं पड़ेगी। कुछ लोग बोरवेल से पानी निकाल कर उसे फिल्टर करके बेचते हैं। इसपर भी लगाम लगाने की जरूरत है। शहरों तथा कस्बों में बोरवेल से पानी निकाल कर फिल्टर कर आरओ पानी के नाम पर बड़े पैमाने पर बेचा जा रहा है। राज्य सरकारों को बोरवेल से पानी निकालकर बेचने वालों के खिलाफ सख्त कार्रवाई करनी चाहिए। देश में मनरेगा के तहत तालाब खुदवाए जाते हैं। यह भी भूजल स्तर को बनाए रखने में मदद करता है। हर मोहल्ले में पार्क के साथ-साथ छोटे तालाब खुदवाए जाने चाहिए। इससे पानी की कमी को पूरा किया जा सकेगा तथा यह वाटर हार्वेस्टिंग का भी काम करेगा। इसके अलावा मोहल्ले में स्विमिंग पूल जैसा भी काम करेगा।

मनीष कुमार, नई दिल्ली

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

दैनिक जागरण

हर समस्या अपने समाधान के साथ ही उत्पन्न होती है

अवसरवादी अघाड़ी

महाराष्ट्र में शिवसेना, कांग्रेस और राष्ट्रवादी कांग्रेस पार्टी ने भले ही अपने साझा मोर्चे को महा विकास अघाड़ी का नाम देना पसंद किया हो, लेकिन इसमें संदेह है कि यह सरकार विकास के प्रति समर्पित हो सकेगी। शिवसेना नेताओं ने सरकार गठन के पहले ही जिस तरह बुलेट ट्रेन के साथ मेट्रो ट्रेन संबंधी परियोजनाओं पर सवाल उठाने शुरू कर दिए हैं उससे यह नहीं लगता कि राज्य का समुचित विकास इस मोर्चे की प्राथमिकता बन पाएगा। वैसे भी महा विकास अघाड़ी के जरिये फिलहाल परिवारवाद की राजनीति का ही विकास होता दिख रहा है। यह किसी से छिपा नहीं कि शिवसेना ने भाजपा से इसीलिए नाता तोड़ा, क्योंकि उद्धव ठाकरे अपने बेटे आदित्य ठाकरे को मुख्यमंत्री बनाने पर आमादा थे। हालांकि उनका यह सपना पूरा नहीं हो पा रहा है, क्योंकि कांग्रेस और राष्ट्रवादी कांग्रेस पार्टी ने अनुभवहीन आदित्य ठाकरे के नेतृत्व में सरकार का गठन करने से इन्कार किया। इसके बावजूद शिवसेना को परिवारवाद की राजनीति को पोषित करने का मौका तो मिल ही रहा है। ऐसा ही मौका शरद पवार को भी मिल रहा है। वह केवल पर्दे के पीछे से सरकार ही नहीं चलाएंगे, बल्कि परिवारवाद को भी पोषित करेंगे। यदि कुछ घंटों के लिए शरद पवार से छिटककर भाजपा से जा मिले अजीत पवार फिर से नेता विधायक दल बनने के साथ उद्धव ठाकरे की सरकार में मंत्री भी बन जाएं तो हैरत नहीं। जो भी हो, अजीत पवार को माफ कर उनकी घर वापसी का जैसा स्वागत हो रहा है उससे यह साफ है कि भाजपा ने एक तो उन पर जरूरत से ज्यादा भरोसा किया और दूसरे, इसकी परवाह नहीं की कि अगर वह अपने वादे पर खरे नहीं उतरे तो क्या होगा?

अजीत पवार की ओर से किया गया यह दावा भाजपा के लिए एक छलावा ही साबित हुआ कि वही राष्ट्रवादी कांग्रेस पार्टी हैं। कहां तो वह राष्ट्रवादी कांग्रेस पार्टी के सभी विधायकों को अपने साथ बता रहे थे और कहां दस विधायक भी उनके साथ खड़े नहीं दिखे। सवाल केवल यह नहीं है कि भाजपा ने उन पर भरोसा क्यों किया, बल्कि यह भी है कि उन पर भरोसा करने की जरूरत ही क्या थी? आखिर भाजपा ने इतनी आसानी से यह कैसे भुला दिया कि अजीत पवार पर भ्रष्टाचार के गंभीर आरोप हैं और इन आरोपों का उल्लेख खुद उसके नेताओं की ओर से किया जाता था? इसका कोई मतलब नहीं कि सरकार गंवाने और साथ ही बदनामी मोल लेने के बाद अजीत पवार से समर्थन लेने पर अफसोस जताया जा रहा है। भाजपा को अफसोस करने से ज्यादा अपनी गलतियों पर गंभीरता से गौर करना चाहिए।

गांव का विकास

उत्तराखंड में त्रिस्तरीय पंचायत चुनाव के बाद अब नवनिर्वाचित पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों के शपथ ग्रहण के साथ ही उनके कार्यभार संभालने का क्रम शुरू हो गया है। इस कड़ी में ग्राम पंचायतों की पहली बैठक गुरुवार को होने जा रही है। जाहिर है कि नवनिर्वाचित पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों पर गांवों के विकास की बड़ी जिम्मेदारी है। वजह यह कि राज्य में गांव ही पिछड़ेपन का सबसे अधिक दंश झेल रहे हैं। असल में विषम भूगोल वाले उत्तराखंड में गांवों की दशा किसी से छिपी नहीं है। शिक्षा एवं रोजगार समेत मूलभूत सुविधाओं के अभाव के कारण बेहतर भविष्य की तलाश में वहां से पलायन का सिलसिला बदस्तूर जारी है। अंदाजा इसी से लगाया जा सकता है कि राज्य गठन से लेकर अब तक 1702 गांव जनशून्य हो चुके हैं, जबकि बड़ी तादाद में ऐसे गांव भी हैं जहां लोगों को अंगुलियों पर गिना जा सकता है। खुद पलायन आयोग की रिपोर्ट इसकी तस्दीक करती है। आयोग की ओर से सरकार को यह सुझाव दिया गया है कि अगले पांच साल तक गांवों के विकास पर ही मुख्य रूप से ध्यान केंद्रित किया जाए। इस परिदृश्य में नवनिर्वाचित पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों की जिम्मेदारी सबसे अधिक बढ़ गई है। अब उन्हें ही तय करना है कि वे गांव का कैसा विकास चाहते हैं। यानी, यह उनकी गांव के चहुंमुखी विकास के प्रति सोच प्रदर्शित करने के साथ ही इसके लिए कदम बढ़ाने के कौशल का परिचायक भी होगा। सभी को साथ लेकर उन्हें गांव के विकास की योजनाओं का खाका खींचकर अंतिम व्यक्ति तक इनका लाभ पहुंचाने के लिए कमर कसनी है। वर्तमान में इसके लिए परिस्थितियां भी अनुकूल हैं। कारण यह कि राज्य सरकार के साथ ही केंद्र सरकार का फोकस भी गांवों के विकास पर है। केंद्र सरकार का महत्वाकांक्षी ग्राम पंचायत विकास कार्यक्रम (जीपीडीपी) इसमें अहम भूमिका निभाएगा, जिसके आधार पर गांव के विकास की योजनाएं तैयार होंगी। ये योजनाएं ग्राम पंचायतों को ही तय करनी हैं और फिर इनके जीपीडीपी पोर्टल में अपलोड होने पर सरकारें बजट का आवंटन करेंगी। लिहाजा, पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों को इस मोर्चे पर अपना कौशल दिखाना होगा, ताकि ज्यादा से ज्यादा योजनाएं वे अपने-अपने गांवों के लिए जुटा सकें। साथ ही राज्य सरकार के समक्ष गांव के विकास का खाका रखना होगा। तभी अपेक्षित परिणाम हासिल हो पाएंगे।

पलायन का दंश झेल रहे गांवों के विकास के लिए अब नवनिर्वाचित पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों पर दारोमदार है। उन्हें यह दायित्व पूर्ण मनोयोग से निभाना होगा

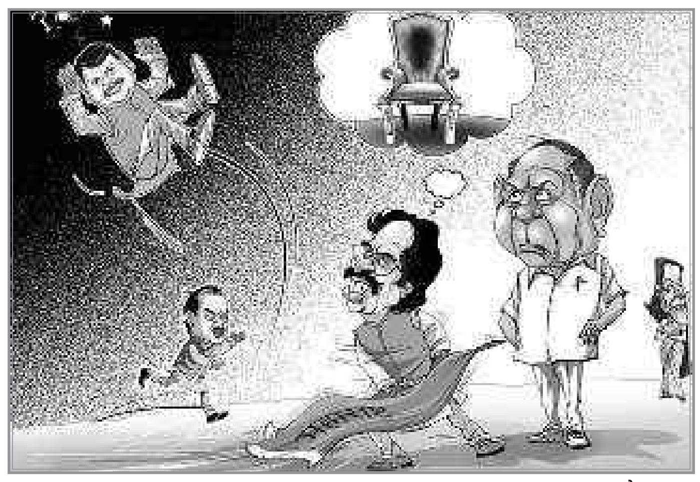
सत्ता के साथ साख भी गई

प्रदीप सिंह

यह साफ है कि भाजपा ने अजीत पवार की ताकत का तो गलत अंदाजा लगाया ही, शरद पवार को भी बहुत हल्के में ले लिया

आजमाई हुई कहावत है-सहज पके सो मीठा होय। महाराष्ट्र में सत्ता के उतावलेपन में भाजपा ने इस कहावत से जुड़ी सीख को अनदेखा किया। इसका नतीजा यह हुआ कि साफ-सुथरी और ईमानदार छवि वाले उसके युवा नेता देवेंद्र फड़नवीस बलि का बकरा बन गए। महाराष्ट्र में जो हुआ उसके लिए सिर्फ फड़नवीस ही दोषी नहीं हैं। पिछले डेढ़ साल में भाजपा ने दूसरी बार मुंह की खाई है। भाजपा ने कर्नाटक की गलती से कोई सबक नहीं सीखा और गलत घोड़े पर दांव लगाकर औंधे मुंह गिर गई। वह भूल गई कि उसका मुकाबला राजनीति के धुरंधर शरद पवार से था। शरद पवार ने फड़नवीस को अभिमन्यु की तरह चक्रव्यूह में घेर कर ढेर किया। 80 घंटे, जी हां सिर्फ 80 घंटे में भाजपा ने महाराष्ट्र में चुनाव बाद अर्जित की हुई सारी सद्भावना गंवा दी। महाराष्ट्र में जनादेश भाजपा-शिवसेना गठबंधन को मिला था, लेकिन नतीजे के बाद शिवसेना नेता उद्धव ठाकरे की महत्वाकांक्षा कुलांचे मारने लगी। आखिरकार उन्होंने भाजपा से नाता तोड़ लिया। बीते शनिवार की सुबह लोग सोकर ही उठे होंगे तो पता चला कि महाराष्ट्र में फड़नवीस मुख्यमंत्री और राकांपा के अजीत पवार उपमुख्यमंत्री बन गए हैं। राजनीतिक हलकों में इसे भाजपा का मास्टर स्ट्रोक कहा गया। राज्यपाल और प्रधानमंत्री के इस कदम की आलोचना हुई तो भाजपा की ओर से पूछा गया कि क्या कोई गैर संवैधानिक काम हुआ है? इसके पहले जब फड़नवीस ने राज्यपाल को सूचित किया था कि शिवसेना के अलग हो जाने के बाद वह सरकार बनाने की स्थिति में नहीं हैं तब वह नायक और शिवसेना खलनायक नजर आ रही थी।

राजनीति में महत्वाकांक्षा कोई बुरी बात नहीं है, परंतु उसमें जमीनी हकीकत के साथ कोई मेल तो होना चाहिए। सार्वजनिक जीवन में लोकलाज भी कोई चीज होती है। कोई पूछ सकता है कि लोकलाज की अपेक्षा हमेशा भाजपा से ही क्यों? वाजिब सवाल है। भाजपा से यह सवाल इसलिए, क्योंकि वह राजनीति में सबसे अलग होने का दावा करती है। जिस दिन भाजपा ऐसा दावा करना छोड़ देगी, लोग भी पूछना छोड़ देंगे। भाजपा ने जो किया उसे गुनाह बेलज्जत कहते हैं। भ्रष्टाचार के खिलाफ जीरो टॉलरेंस यानी उसे बिल्कुल भी बर्दाश्त न करने की बात और भ्रष्टाचार के आरोप में आकंठ डूबे अजीत पवार के साथ मिलकर सरकार बनाने की बात किसके गले उतरती? इसका यह भी मतलब है कि भाजपा अपने नए मतदाताओं के मिजाज को या तो समझ नहीं रही या उसकी परवाह नहीं करती। जो नए और युवा लोग भाजपा से जुड़े हैं वे एक हद तक नैतिकतावादी हैं। वे टैक्स चोरी करने वाली जमात जैसे नहीं हैं। ईमानदारी से टैक्स देने और देश के बारे में शिद्दत से सोचने वाले लोग हैं। यह विरोधाभास उनके गले नहीं उतरेगा।



अवधेश राजपूत

इससे इन्कार नहीं कि व्यावहारिक राजनीति में समझौते करने पड़ते हैं, लेकिन आखिर आप कोई लक्ष्मण रेखा खींचेंगे या नहीं? जो दूसरों ने किया या जो कर रहे हैं वही आप भी करेंगे तो फर्क क्या रह जाएगा? सवाल यह भी है कि आपने अपनी पहली गलती (कर्नाटक) से कोई सबक सीखा क्या? जिस काम से आपने प्रधानमंत्री और राष्ट्रपति की प्रतिष्ठा जोड़ दी उसमें ऐसा कच्चा खेल खेले ही क्यों? जो नेता अपनी पार्टी के विधायकों के दस्तखत का गलत इस्तेमाल कर रहा हो उस पर भरोसा क्यों कर लिया? कोई प्लान बी क्यों नहीं था? ये ऐसे सवाल हैं जिनका जवाब पार्टी को देर-सबेर देना पड़ेगा।

भाजपा ने इस पूरे प्रकरण में अजीत पवार की ताकत का तो गलत अंदाजा लगाया ही, शरद पवार को भी बहुत हल्के में ले लिया। भाजपा की रणनीतिक गलतियों का सिलसिला विधानसभा चुनाव से ही शुरू हुआ। पहली गलती शिवसेना से चुनावी गठबंधन करना। ऐसी पार्टी से गठबंधन किया जो पांच साल तक प्रदेश नेतृत्व से लेकर प्रधानमंत्री तक को गरियाती रही। दूसरी गलती शरद पवार को ईडी का नोटिस भेजकर एक खुले दरवाजे को बंद कर दिया। वह भूल गई कि 2014 में भाजपा की सरकार को सदन में पवार की राकांपा ने ही बचाया था। तीसरी बड़ी गलती, सत्ता का उतावलापन। उसे चुपचाप किनारे बैठकर तीनों पार्टियों का सत्ता का खेल देखना चाहिए था। तीन पार्टियों की सरकार अपने अंतर्विरोधों के बोझ तले स्वयं ही दब जाती। भाजपा ने उतावलेपन में इन तीनों पार्टियों की केमिस्ट्री और मजबूत कर दी। इस तरह भाजपा ने सत्ता और साख, दोनों गंवाई।

महाराष्ट्र में सरकार गठन के लिए एक महीने चले इस प्रकरण के कई सबक हैं। सबसे बड़ा सबक भाजपा के लिए है। चुनाव में भी जीतेंगे और चुनाव के बाद भी जीतेंगे, यह अपवाद हो सकता है, नियम नहीं। पार्टी के पुराने नेताओं को हाशिये पर धकेलने और दूसरे दलों से लोगों को लाने का अनुपात तय होना चाहिए। प्रदेश में किसी एक नेता का नेतृत्व स्थापित करने के लिए पुराने नेताओं को दूध की मक्खी की तरह निकालना नुकसानदेह हो सकता है। महाराष्ट्र और हरियाणा इसके ताजा उदाहरण हैं। ये बातें उस समय दिखाई नहीं देतीं जब आप लगातार जीत रहे हों। जीत आपको मुगालते में रखती है। उस समय सब अच्छा ही अच्छा दिखता है। पराजय रुककर सोचने, संभलने का मौका देती है। यह सोचने का भी कि कहां क्या गलती हुई और उसे ठीक करने के लिए क्या किया जाए?

उद्धव ठाकरे की महत्वाकांक्षा को शरद पवार के पर लगे तो वह मुख्यमंत्री के पद तक पहुंच गए। अब आगे का रास्ता उन्हें खुद ही तय करना पड़ेगा। गठबंधन सरकार चलाना और वह भी परस्पर विरोधी विचारधारा वाली पार्टियों की, बहुत कठिन काम है। फिर ठाकरे को कोई प्रशासनिक अनुभव भी नहीं है। उद्धव की यही कमजोर नस शरद पवार की ताकत बढ़ाएगी। इस पूरे प्रकरण में शरद पवार पहले से अधिक ताकतवर होकर उभरे हैं। सरकार का रिमोट कंट्रोल पवार के हाथ में होगा। यह इस सरकार की ताकत भी है और कमजोरी भी। 80 घंटे की सरकार बनाकर भाजपा ने राष्ट्रीय राजनीति में शरद पवार का कद बढ़ा दिया है। उन्होंने विधानसभा चुनाव में ईडी का नोटिस मिलने के बाद और फिर वैकल्पिक सरकार बनवाकर अपनी ताकत का अहसास करा दिया। पवार के राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर विपक्षी एकता की धुरी बनने का रास्ता खुल गया है। पवार और विपक्ष को यह मौका भाजपा की एक गलती ने दिया है। क्रिकेट की भाषा में कहें तो यह अनुभवी बल्लेबाज को जीवनदान देने जैसा है। अब पवार और बाकी विपक्षी दलों पर निर्भर है कि वे इसका फायदा उठा पाते हैं या नहीं?

(लेखक राजनीतिक विश्लेषक एवं वरिष्ठ स्तंभकार हैं)

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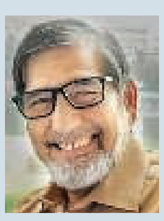
सवाल खड़े करती आंकड़ों की पहरेदारी

नेशनल सैंपल सर्वे ऑफिस यानी एनएसएसओ के उपभोग आंकड़ों को लेकर सरकार पर सवाल खड़े हो रहे हैं। विभिन्न क्षेत्रों से जुड़े विशेषज्ञ सरकार पर इन आंकड़ों को जारी करने का दबाव बना रहे हैं। कहा जा रहा है कि ये आंकड़े औसत भारतीय उपभोक्ता द्वारा व्यय में कमी की पुष्टि करते हैं। इसी कारण सरकार इन्हें जारी करने के बजाय उन पर कुंडली मारकर बैठ गई है ताकि उसकी किरकिरी होने से बच जाए। इस बीच कुछ लोग इन आंकड़ों की प्रासंगिकता पर भी प्रश्न उठा रहे हैं। यह सही है कि एनएसएसओ के आंकड़े तैयार करने में कभी-कभार इतना समय लग जाता है कि उनकी सामयिकता एवं उपयोगिता ही संदिग्ध हो जाती है, फिर भी उनसे तमाम रुझानों की दशा-दिशा मिल जाती है। चूंकि आंकड़े सरकार को असहज कर सकते हैं तो इसी कारण वह इन्हें सार्वजनिक करने से कतरा रही है।



डॉ. अरविंद चतुर्वेदी

सही सूचनाओं के जनता तक पहुंचाने के मार्ग में अवरोध खड़े करने से कुछ हासिल होने वाला नहीं है

देश में प्रमुख आंकड़ों का संग्रह, विश्लेषण एवं प्रकाशन सांख्यिकी एवं कार्यक्रम कार्यान्वयन मंत्रालय के अधीन संस्थाएं करती हैं। इनमें एनएसएसओ और केंद्रीय सांख्यिकी कार्यालय प्रमुख संस्थाएं हैं। हाल में दोनों का विलय करके राष्ट्रीय सांख्यिकी कार्यालय बना दिया गया है। प्रत्येक पांच वर्ष बाद यह विभाग उपभोक्ता खर्च के आंकड़ों का एक व्यापक सर्वेक्षण करता है। उसमें देश भर के गांव, कस्बों और शहरों से आंकड़े इकट्ठा किए जाते हैं। फिर इनका राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर आकलन किया जाता है। इससे पता लगता है कि भारतीय लोग किस मद में कितना खर्च कर रहे हैं? इसके साथ ही यह भी मालूम पड़ता है कि पहले की तुलना में खर्च घटा है या बढ़ा है? इससे भारतीयों की आय-व्यय क्षमता में उतार-चढ़ाव का अंदाजा लगता है।

ऐसे आंकड़ों के सहारे ही सरकार राज्यवार गरीबों की संख्या, गरीबी उन्मूलन कार्यक्रम, कुल सकल घरेलू आय, उपभोक्ता व्यय में परिवर्तन की दिशा आदि तय करती है। सरकार की योजना निर्माण में इन आंकड़ों की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका होती है। वर्ष 2004-05 के बाद एक सर्वेक्षण 2009-10 में किया गया था। जब इन आंकड़ों के चलते गरीबी रेखा की सीमा को लेकर विवाद छिड़ा तो उक्त आंकड़े संदिग्ध मानकर वापस ले लिए गए। इसके बाद सरकार ने भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक के पूर्व गवर्नर सी रंगराजन की अध्यक्षता में एक समिति बनाई। उस समिति ने दोबारा आंकड़े जुटाकर गरीबी रेखा की नई परिभाषा निर्धारित की थी। फिर 2011-12 के बाद उपभोक्ता व्यय का कोई राष्ट्रव्यापी सर्वेक्षण नहीं हुआ। इसीलिए 2017-18 के आंकड़ों की लंबे समय से प्रतीक्षा की जा रही थी ताकि पता लग सके कि संप्रग सरकार की तुलना में राजग सरकार के दौरान उपभोक्ता व्यय में क्या बदलाव आया है? वैसे इन आंकड़ों की उपयोगिता यहीं तक सीमित नहीं थी। इनके आधार पर गरीबी रेखा का आकलन, गरीबों की संख्या, गरीबी उन्मूलन योजनाओं की समीक्षा और उनमें भविष्य की राह तैयार करने की रणनीति भी तैयार की जानी थी। हमारे देश में सकल राष्ट्रीय आय की गणना करने के लिए दो तरीके अपनाए जाते हैं। एक तरीका तो माइक्रो लेवल पर आंकड़े इकट्ठे करने से जुड़ा है। राष्ट्रीय लेखा सांख्यिकी द्वारा इसकी गणना होती है। दूसरा तरीका उपभोक्ता व्यय से जुड़ा है। उपभोक्ता व्यय की तस्वीर से स्पष्ट हो जाता है कि सकल राष्ट्रीय आय का वास्तविक स्तर क्या है। इसमें कोई भी कमी किसी सरकार के प्रदर्शन का एक अहम पैमाना मानी जाती है।

2017-18 के सर्वेक्षण के कुछ आंकड़े बाहर आ गए हैं। इनके मुताबिक 2017-18 में उपभोक्ता व्यय 2011-12 की तुलना में 3.7 प्रतिशत कम हुआ है। इन आंकड़ों के अनुसार प्रति व्यक्ति मासिक उपभोक्ता व्यय जो छह वर्ष पहले 1501 रुपये था, 2017-18 में घट कर 1446 रुपये हो गया। इस गिरावट को नोटबंदी से भी जोड़ा जा रहा है। इससे एक निष्कर्ष यह भी निकाला जा सकता है कि नोटबंदी के कारण लोगों की क्रय-व्यय क्षमता में कमी आई। यह सरकार के लिए एक बड़ा झटका होगा। सरकार नहीं चाहेगी कि उपभोक्ता व्यय में आई कमी के तार नोटबंदी के साथ जोड़े जाएं। इससे उसके आलोचकों को बैठे-बिठाए एक मौका मिल जाएगा।

वैसे देश में ऐसा पहली बार नहीं हो रहा है। आंकड़े छिपाने या उनमें हेराफेरी के आरोप पिछली सरकारों पर भी लगते रहे हैं। पहले भी राष्ट्रीय सकल आय की गणना के संबंध में विवाद हुए हैं। राष्ट्रीय सांख्यिकी आयोग के अध्यक्ष व अन्य सदस्यों ने इस विवाद के कारण इस्तीफे भी दिए थे। खुद मोदी सरकार में मुख्य आर्थिक सलाहकार रह चुके अरविंद सुब्रमण्यन ने अपने पद से हटने के बाद आंकड़ों की विश्वसनीयता पर सवाल उठाए। श्रम शक्ति और रोजगार संबंधी आंकड़ों पर भी पिछले महीनों में सवाल उठाए गए। उस समय भी सरकार ने आंकड़े जारी नहीं किए थे।

हालांकि पिछले कई वर्षों के दौरान केंद्र सरकार राष्ट्रीय सर्वेक्षणों के तौर-तरीकों, विश्लेषण और तकनीक में सुधार की बातें करती रही हैं, मगर जमीनी हकीकत इससे उलट है। आंकड़ों की विश्वसनीयता, शुद्धता, गुणवत्ता एवं सामयिकता को लेकर भारत का रिकॉर्ड अच्छा नहीं है। इसमें काफी सुधार की आवश्यकता है। इसके लिए राष्ट्रीय सांख्यिकी आयोग का पुनर्गठन करना होगा। उसे न्यायिक अधिकार देकर सशक्त बनाने के प्रयास करने होंगे। साथ ही नई तकनीक का प्रयोग भी इस दिशा में खासा उपयोगी साबित हो सकता है। भले ही 2017-18 के आंकड़ों से सरकार की कुछ मोर्चों पर कमजोरी उजागर होती, लेकिन उनके आधार पर नई नीतियों का खाका तो तैयार होता। इन आंकड़ों को 2009-10 की तरह अमान्य घोषित करके 2011-12 की तरह नए सर्वेक्षणों के परिणाम की प्रतीक्षा की जा सकती थी। अब नया सर्वेक्षण 2020-21 में होगा। तब तक हमारे पास प्रतीक्षा करने के अलावा और कोई विकल्प नहीं होगा। इससे तमाम योजनाओं के लिए सही सूचनाएं एवं जानकारियां नहीं मिल पाएंगी। इसे किसी दृष्टि से उचित नहीं कहा जा सकता। सही सूचनाओं के जनता तक पहुंचाने के मार्ग में अवरोध खड़े करने से सरकार की साख पर आंच आना स्वाभाविक है। ऐसी स्थिति से बचा जाना चाहिए था।

(लेखक इंटरनेशनल मैनेजमेंट इंस्टीट्यूट, दिल्ली में सांख्यिकी विभाग के डीन रहे हैं)

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ऊर्जा

संवाद की महत्ता

सामाजिक होने के क्रम में मनुष्य द्वारा संवाद स्थापित करने की भूमिका महत्वपूर्ण होती है। संवाद के माध्यम से दो व्यक्तियों में विचारों का आदान-प्रदान होता है। मनुष्य के विचारों में असहमति सामान्य है, किंतु स्वस्थ वैचारिक संप्रेषण में असहमति के प्रति पूरी सहमति होनी चाहिए। इस बात को हम बेहतर समझते हैं कि प्रत्येक मनुष्य का वैचारिक स्तर और सोचने की दृष्टि भिन्न होती है। इन्हीं आधारों पर वह किसी तथ्य के प्रति समर्थन अथवा विरोध करता है। संभव है कि उसके विचारों से सहमत न हुआ जाए, किंतु उसके विचार प्रकट करने के अधिकार का सम्मान किया जाना चाहिए।

सहमति और असहमति स्वस्थ संवाद की अनिवार्य आवश्यकता है। इसमें समस्या तब पैदा होती है जब वैचारिक मतभिन्नता के चलते मतभेद, मनभेद का रूप धारण कर लेते हैं। इस स्थिति में मनुष्य संवाद स्थापित करने से कतराने लगता है वह भी सिर्फ इस आधार पर कि विचार भिन्न हैं। संवादहीनता से दोनों को क्षति होती है। आज के दौर में मनुष्य अपनी प्रशंसा का इतना आदी हो चुका है कि वह अपने विचारों के प्रति असहमति को स्वीकार नहीं कर सकता। ऐसी सोच वाले मनुष्य के सम्मुख अन्य व्यक्ति अपने विचारों का खुलकर प्रदर्शन करने से संकोच करने लगते हैं। यह अवस्था उसे संवाद रिक्तता की स्थिति में ला खड़ा करती है।

घर-परिवार, दोस्तों में हमें अक्सर यह सुनने को मिलता है कि वह मुझसे बात नहीं करता तो मैं उससे बात क्यों करूं! जब यह सोच मनुष्य के मस्तिष्क में अपना घर बना लेती है तो इससे दो लोगों के बीच की दूरियां बढ़ जाती हैं। ऐसे में यदि हम स्वयं उस व्यक्ति विशेष के साथ चर्चा की पहल करें तो बात बन सकती है। एक पहल द्वारा दूरियों को निकटता में बदला जा सकता है। संवाद तमाम गलतफहमियां दूर करता है। संवाद की आवश्यकता सिर्फ व्यक्ति या परिवार में ही नहीं, बल्कि संस्था और समुदाय में भी होती है। जरूरी है कि संवाद सदैव द्विपक्षीय हो ताकि विचारों का आदान-प्रदान चलता रहे।

सौरभ जैन

मिलावट की मार से त्रस्त

कपिल अग्रवाल

खराब गुणवत्ता वाले दुग्ध उत्पाद सेहत के लिए खतरे के साथ ही वैश्विक बाजार में भी साख गिराने का काम कर रहे हैं

भारतीय खाद्य संरक्षण व मानक ब्यूरो (एफएसएसएआइ) द्वारा में दूध की शुद्धता व गुणवत्ता को लेकर किए गए राष्ट्रव्यापी सर्वेक्षण में 40 फीसद से ज्यादा नमूने खरे नहीं उतर पाए। इनमें खुले में बिकने वाले दूध के साथ ही कई दिग्गज कंपनियों के पैकेटबंद उत्पाद भी शामिल थे। सभी में कीटनाशकों, प्रिजरवेटिव्स व अफ्लाटोक्सिन-एम जैसे हानिकारक तत्वों की मात्रा निर्धारित मानकों से ज्यादा पाई गई। इससे तमाम नई बीमारियां फैलने की आशंका बढ़ गई है। केवल दूध ही नहीं, लगभग सभी प्रकार के फास्ट फूड व शीतल पेय समेत अधिकांश खाद्य पदार्थों के मामले में कमोबेश यही कहानी है। टमाटर, सेब, अमरूद, आलू आदि तमाम खानपान की वस्तुएं अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर अपनी पहचान खोती जा रही हैं और रूस, ब्राजील, चीन, ऑस्ट्रेलिया, श्रीलंका, बांग्लादेश जैसे अनेक छोटे-बड़े देश वैश्विक उपस्थिति दर्ज कराते जा रहे हैं।

भारत सरकार विभिन्न खाद्य पदार्थों की शुद्धता जांच पर करोड़ों रुपये खर्च करती है। भारतीय खाद्य सुरक्षा और मानक प्राधिकरण जैसी आठ से भी ज्यादा सरकारी एजेंसियां इस काम में लगी हैं। फिर भी इसके संतोषजनक नतीजे नहीं मिल रहे।

वास्तव में यह मुनाफाखोरी की बीमारी है जो लोगों की सेहत से खिलवाड़ कर रही है। घरों में गाय या भैंस पालने वाले यह बखूबी जानते हैं कि गर्मी में दूध को बिना उबाले अगर दो-तीन घंटे भी बाहर छोड़ दें तो वह खराब हो जाता है। दूसरी ओर थैलियों में बंद रसायनयुक्त दूध कई-कई दिनों तक इस्तेमाल में लाया जा सकता है। कई जगहों पर दूध प्रदूषित चारे से पोषित पशुओं को हानिकारक इंजेक्शन लगाकर निकाला जाता है। इससे मानव शरीर में स्नायुतंत्र पर विपरीत प्रभाव पड़ता है। इससे मस्तिष्क में थक्का (क्लॉटिंग) बनने की बीमारी हो जाती है। इंजेक्शन लगाने से पशु प्रारंभ में बहुत जल्दी और ज्यादा दूध देते हैं, लेकिन धीरे-धीरे उनकी दूध देने की क्षमता कम हो जाती है। देश में इनकी रोकथाम व निरीक्षण के लिए कृषि मंत्रालय की देखरेख में भारतीय कृषि अनुसंधान संस्थान, कृषि प्रयोगशालाएं, तमाम संस्थानों के अलावा स्वास्थ्य मंत्रालय, पर्यावरण मंत्रालय तथा रसायन व उर्वरक मंत्रालय के परीक्षण केंद्रों समेत वैज्ञानिकों की लंबी चौड़ी फौज है। इस संबंध में प्रत्येक वर्ष एक बड़ी धनराशि भी खर्च की जाती है, लेकिन शायद उनकी कार्यप्रणाली दुरुस्त न होने के कारण जनता को उसका पूरा फायदा नहीं मिल पाता।

देश को इससे तीन तरह का नुकसान हो रहा है। पहला, कीटनाशकों के बेजा इस्तेमाल से पर्यावरण दूषित होता है। दूसरा आम लोगों को विषाक्त खाद्य पदार्थ मिलते हैं जिससे उनके स्वास्थ्य पर विपरीत प्रभाव पड़ता है और तीसरा खराब गुणवत्ता के कारण निर्यात के अवसरों से हाथ गंवाना पड़ रहा है। यही कारण है कि भारत के दुग्ध उत्पादों का निर्यात लगभग नगण्य है। इसकी तुलना में ब्राजील, सऊदी अरब, आयरलैंड और बेलारूस जैसे कई छोटे-बड़े देश इस मामले से भारत के मीलों आगे हैं।

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

अवसरवादी राजनीति का दौर

राजनीतिक नैतिकता का बेसुरा राग शीर्षक लेख के तहत राजीव सचान ने महाराष्ट्र में सरकार बनाने के लिए जो राजनीतिक दलों में नाटकबाजी चली उसे लोकतंत्र की जड़ों को कमजोर करने वाला बताया। देश में राजनीतिक नैतिकता अब रह कहां गई है। गठबंधन की राजनीति में विभिन्न विचारधाराओं का समावेश होता है। ये आपसी कलह को जन्म देती हैं। इसकी चपेट में राष्ट्रीय स्थिरता कभी भी खतरे में आ सकती है। देश में कोई भी राजनीतिक पार्टी ऐसी नजर नहीं आती जिसमें अवसरवादी नेता न हों। आज भारत की राजनीति साम, दाम, दंड और भेद की राजनीति की परंपरा का भी रुख कर चुकी है। हां, इनमें से अभी दंड का कोई अनुसरण नहीं करता, लेकिन लोकतंत्र में इस परंपरा का एक भी भाग शामिल नहीं होना चाहिए। महाराष्ट्र में लगभग तीन दशक पुराने भाजपा-शिवसेना के गठबंधन का टूटना दोनों ही राजनीतिक दलों के लिए शुभ संकेत नहीं है, क्योंकि महाराष्ट्र का मतदाता यह जानता है कि यह दोनों एक सिक्के के दो पहलू हैं। शिवसेना ने अपनी विचारधारा के विपरीत कांग्रेस और राकांपा से हाथ मिलाने की कोशिश में भी यह दर्शाने की कोशिश की है कि उसे हर हाल में मुख्यमंत्री की कुर्सी चाहिए। महाराष्ट्र के विधानसभा चुनाव परिणाम से भाजपा को भी सबक लेना चाहिए और उसे क्षेत्रीय दलों के बहुत ज्यादा भरोसे नहीं बैठना चाहिए।

राजेश कुमार चौहान, जालंधर

प्याज को लेकर कदम उठाए सरकार

प्याज ने आम जनता के आंसू निकाल दिए हैं। कहीं-कहीं प्याज 100 किलो बिक रहा है। भाव में 3 दिनों में 20 से 30 रुपये की बढ़ोतरी हुई है और यह भी अनुमान है कि 15 दिसंबर से पहले प्याज की कीमतों में कमी नहीं आ सकती है। कर्नाटक, महाराष्ट्र व गुजरात में लगातार बारिश के कारण प्याज की फसल खराब हुई है। इससे दाम लगातार बढ़ रहे हैं। प्याज आयात का फैसला तो किया गया है, लेकिन उससे पहले भी कुछ राहत के उपाय करने होंगे।

विजय किशोर तिवारी, शिक्षक, नई दिल्ली

मेलबाक्स

जनादेश का अपमान

आखिरकार महाराष्ट्र में उद्धव ठाकरे की जिद पूरी हो गई। भले ही इसके लिए ऐसी पार्टियों से गठजोड़ करना पड़ा, जिनके खिलाफ वह चुनाव लड़े थे। कायदे से राज्य में भाजपा-शिवसेना सरकार बननी चाहिए थी, क्योंकि जनादेश इन दोनों के गठबंधन को मिला था, लेकिन मुख्यमंत्री पद की लड़ाई में दोनों ही दल अलग दिशा में चल दिए। यह एक तरह से जनादेश का अपमान है।

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पवार का कद बढ़ा

राजनीतिक धोखा कहें या भाजपा का अति-आत्मविश्वास या फिर राजनीति की तिकड़मबाजी, लेकिन इस अनैतिक राजनीतिक रस्साकशी में 105 विधायकों वाली सबसे बड़ी भारतीय जनता पार्टी को सत्ता की डोर से दूर कर दिया गया। इससे राष्ट्रवादी कांग्रेस पार्टी के सर्वेसर्वा शरद पवार का महाराष्ट्र व केंद्रीय राजनीति में कद बढ़ गया है। तीन धुरविरोधी दलों के मिलन से बना महाविकास अघाड़ी महाराष्ट्र के विकास, जनकल्याणकारी योजनाओं आदि को आगे किस दिशा में ले जाएगा, यह तो भविष्य के गर्भ में है। भाजपा द्वारा सरकार बनाना एक बड़ी व ऐतिहासिक भूल मानी जाएगी, जोकि शायद शरद पवार की राजनीति का शिकार हो गई।

दीपक गौतम, सोनीपत

सिद्धांतविहीन राजनीति

महाराष्ट्र की राजनीति से एक बात स्पष्ट हो चुकी है कि राजनीतिक दलों में विचारधारा का महत्व नगण्य हो चुका है। दूसरी तरफ अपनी निजी महत्वाकांक्षाओं को पूरा करने में नेतागण जनमत का अपमान करने से भी नहीं चूकते। हालांकि एक राजनीतिक दल का उद्देश्य सत्ता का उपार्जन, परिरक्षण और प्रसार होता है, किंतु सिद्धांतविहीन राजनीति कतई उचित नहीं है। ऐसे उदाहरण भारतीय लोकतंत्र को स्थिरता व मजबूती तो प्रदान नहीं करते, अपितु इसके उलट संवैधानिक मूल्यों की नित बलि देते प्रतीत होते हैं। इस प्रश्न पर विचार करने की आवश्यकता है कि बहुमत न मिलने की स्थिति में जनमत की स्वाभाविक अभिव्यक्ति शासन में किस प्रकार से हो।

अंजन मिश्रा, दिल्ली

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

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

भ्रष्टाचार के खिलाफ

इस साल पांचवीं बार सख्त कदम उठाते हुए केंद्र सरकार ने इक्कीस और आयकर अधिकारियों की नौकरी से छुट्टी कर दी। इससे यह साफ हो गया है कि भ्रष्ट अफसरों की अब खैर नहीं है। सरकारी विभागों को भ्रष्टाचार मुक्त बनाने की कवायद में अब तक पिच्यासी अधिकारियों की सेवा खत्म की जा चुकी है, जिनमें चौंसठ अधिकारी कर विभाग के हैं। ये सारे अधिकारी वे हैं जिनके खिलाफ घूसखोरी, जबरिया वसूली, पद के दुरुपयोग, आय से अधिक संपत्ति अर्जित करने सहित भ्रष्टाचार के दूसरे संगीन मामले दर्ज हैं। यों तो सरकार का शायद ही कोई ऐसा महकमा होगा जहां भ्रष्टाचार न हो, लेकिन कर विभाग में भ्रष्टाचार सीधे-सीधे आम लोगों से जुड़ा है और कर संग्रह का जिम्मा संभालने वाले अधिकारी किस कदर लोगों को धमकाते हुए लूटते हैं, यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है। खासतौर से कारोबार करने वाले व्यापारी आयकर विभाग की लूट से आतंकित रहते हैं। इसीलिए प्रधानमंत्री ने स्वतंत्रता दिवस के मौके पर लालकिले से अपने भाषण में कहा भी था कि कर विभाग में कुछ काली भेड़ें हैं जो अपनी ताकत का गलत इस्तेमाल करके ईमानदार करदाताओं को परेशान करती हैं। घूसखोर अधिकारी आयकरदाताओं को इस हद तक परेशान कर देते हैं कि कई बार तो लोग मौत को गला लेते हैं। पांच महीने पहले कॉफी डे के मालिक वीजी सिद्धार्थ ने भी आयकर विभाग की प्रताड़ना से परेशान होकर खुदकुशी कर ली थी।

सरकार भ्रष्टाचार के खिलाफ भले कितने अभियान चला ले, लेकिन इसे जड़ से खत्म कर पाना बहुत ही दुष्कर काम है। ऐसा इसलिए है कि हमने भ्रष्टाचार को एक तरह से आत्मसात कर लिया है और मान बैठे हैं कि यह हमारे समाज, प्रशासन और सरकारों का अभिन्न हिस्सा बन चुका है। ट्रांसपेरेंसी इंटरनेशनल इंडिया ने इस साल भारत में भ्रष्टाचार को लेकर बड़ा सर्वे कराया था। इस सर्वे के नतीजे बताते हैं कि साल भर में इक्यावन फीसद लोगों ने घूस देकर अपने काम करवाए। सबसे ज्यादा यानी छब्बीस फीसद लोगों को संपत्ति और भूमि संबंधी कामों के लिए घूस देनी पड़ी। बीस फीसद लोगों को पुलिस में पैसे खिलाने पड़े। इसी तरह नगर निगम, बिजली विभाग, जल विभाग, आरटीओ दफ्तर और अस्पताल ऐसे ठिकाने हैं जहां बिना लेन-देन के काम करा पाना संभव नहीं है और इन महकमों से आमजन का सीधा साबका पड़ता है। इससे अंदाजा लगाया जा सकता है कि देश में निचले स्तर पर किस कदर भ्रष्टाचार पसरा है और लोग पैसे देकर काम कराने को मजबूर होते हैं।

कहने को ज्यादातर सेवाएं ऑनलाइन कर दी गई हैं और इसका मकसद भी यह है कि लोगों को भ्रष्टाचार से मुक्ति मिल सके। लेकिन व्यावहारिक रूप से यह संभव नहीं हो पा रहा है। बड़ी समस्या यह है कि घूसखोरी और भ्रष्टाचार से संबंधित शिकायतों के लिए हमारे पास पुख्ता तंत्र का अभाव है। ज्यादातर लोगों को यह पता नहीं होता कि ऐसे मामलों की शिकायतें कहां की जाएं। जहां जांच होती भी है, वहां इसकी प्रक्रिया इतनी लंबी और जटिल है कि शिकायतकर्ता को इस तरह का कदम उठाना महंगा पड़ जाता है। सरकारी दफ्तरों के चक्कर न काटने पड़ें और काम न रुके, इस डर के मारे लोग भी छोटे-मोटे कामों के लिए घूस देकर पिंड छुड़ाना बेहतर समझते हैं। पुलिस थाने और अदालतों में भ्रष्टाचार के किस्से कौन नहीं जानता? भ्रष्टाचार से लड़ने के लिए सरकार को तो अपने स्तर पर कड़े कदम उठाने ही होंगे, साथ ही समाज को भी जागरूक बनने की जरूरत है।

पानी पर घमासान

महानगरों में पानी की गुणवत्ता को लेकर शिकायतें आम हैं। खासकर दिल्ली में जल बोर्ड के पानी पर लंबे समय से अंगुलियां उठती रही हैं। पिछले कुछ दिनों से फिर दिल्ली में विपक्षी भाजपा पानी की गुणवत्ता को लेकर अरविंद केजरीवाल सरकार पर हमलावर है। कुछ दिनों पहले कुछ एजेंसियों ने दिल्ली और मुंबई में पानी की गुणवत्ता जांची थी, जिसमें मुंबई में पानी की गुणवत्ता बेहतर थी, जबकि दिल्ली में पानी के सभी नमूने निम्न स्तर के निकले। इसे लेकर भाजपा ने दिल्ली सरकार पर निशाना साधना शुरू कर दिया। चूंकि दिल्ली विधानसभा के चुनाव नजदीक हैं, इसलिए भी यह मामला कुछ अधिक तूल पकड़ रहा है। भाजपा की आलोचना पर दिल्ली सरकार ने सफाई दी कि जिन जगहों से पानी के नमूने लिए गए थे, वहां पानी लंबे समय से जमा था। इस पर भाजपा ने उसे चुनौती दी कि दिल्ली सरकार खुद बताए कि किन इलाकों में जल बोर्ड का पानी साफ है, वहीं के नमूने जांचे जाएंगे। फिर दिल्ली प्रदेश भाजपा अध्यक्ष ने विभिन्न इलाकों से दुबारा पानी के नमूने इकट्ठे किए और जांच कराई, जिसके वीडियो भी बनाए गए। उन वीडियो को लेकर भाजपा लगातार आम लोगों के बीच पानी के मुद्दे पर केजरीवाल सरकार की आलोचना कर रही है। चूंकि दिल्ली सरकार खुद विज्ञापनों के जरिए प्रचार करती रही है कि जल बोर्ड का पानी बिल्कुल साफ है, दूसरे स्रोतों से पानी लेकर न पीएं, इसलिए इस पर उसे सफाई देना मुश्किल हो रहा है।

दिल्ली में पेयजल की आपूर्ति मुख्य रूप से यमुना के पानी पर निर्भर है। कुछ हिस्सा गंगा के पानी से पूरा किया जाता है। इन दोनों नदियों की हालत किसी से छिपी नहीं है। जलशोधन और पेयजल आपूर्ति संयंत्रों में अक्सर गड़बड़ी आ जाने से पेयजल की गुणवत्ता प्रभावित होती है। इसके अलावा, ज्यादातर इलाकों में पेयजल आपूर्ति के लिए बिछाए गए पाइप और सीवर लाइनें साथ हैं। कई जगह पानी के पाइप गंदे नालों के किनारे से होकर गुजरते हैं। इसकी वजह से जब पानी के पाइपों में कहीं टूट-फूट हो जाती है, तो सीवर या फिर गंदे नालों का पानी पेयजल में मिलना शुरू हो जाता है। ऐसे अनेक उदाहरण मौजूद हैं, जब रिहाइशी कॉलोनियों में गंदे और बदबूदार पानी मिलने की शिकायत की गई, तो ऐसी गड़बड़ियां उजागर हुईं। बहुत सारी जगहों पर पानी की पाइप लाइनें काफी पुरानी हो चुकी हैं, जो पानी का दबाव पड़ते ही अक्सर फट जाती हैं। इसलिए जल बोर्ड के पानी को पूरी तरह पीने लायक होने का दावा नहीं किया जा सकता।

यों भी दिल्ली में सभी के लिए जरूरत भर का पानी उपलब्ध कराना चुनौती है। उस पर पानी की गुणवत्ता ठीक न होने के कारण ज्यादातर लोग आरओ यानी पानी साफ करने वाले संयंत्र पर निर्भर होते गए हैं। यह भी किसी से छिपी बात नहीं है कि बहुत सारे इलाकों में पानी की आपूर्ति न हो पाने के कारण वहां के लोगों को भूजल पर निर्भर रहना पड़ता है, जो कई बार नहाने-धोने लायक भी नहीं होता। यह ठीक है कि दिल्ली सरकार ने लोगों को पानी मुफ्त देना शुरू कर दिया है, पर इसका यह अर्थ नहीं कि वह पेयजल की गुणवत्ता संबंधी गड़बड़ियों को नजरअंदाज कर दे। अगर जांच में कहीं गुणवत्ता ठीक नहीं पाई गई है, तो उसे ठीक करने का संकल्प दोहराना चाहिए, न कि राजनीतिक रंग देना चाहिए।

कल्पमेधा

आचरण रहित विचार कितने ही अच्छे क्यों न हों, उन्हें खोटे मोती की तरह समझना चाहिए।

– महात्मा गांधी

मुकदमों के बोझ में दबता न्याय

जाहिद खान

न्यायिक सुधार की राह में धन की कमी हमेशा प्रमुख बाधा रही है। देश में न्यायिक सेवा की मद में बजटीय आवंटन जीडीपी के आधा फीसद से भी कम होता है। दुनिया के विकसित देशों मसलन- आस्ट्रेलिया में प्रति दस लाख की आबादी पर जजों की संख्या बयालीस, कनाडा में पचहत्तर, ब्रिटेन में इक्यावन और अमेरिका में एक सौ सात है। इसके बरक्स हमारे यहां प्रति दस लाख की आबादी पर सिर्फ ग्यारह जज हैं।

त्वरित और किफायती न्याय का नागरिक अधिकार किसी भी लोकतांत्रिक शासन व्यवस्था की बुनियादी शर्त है। दुनिया के सबसे बड़े लोकतंत्र यानी हमारे देश में यह बात सैद्धांतिक तौर पर भले ही बार-बार दोहराई जाती हो, लेकिन अफसोस की बात यह है कि अदालतों से इंसाफ पाने के लिए ही लोगों को सबसे ज्यादा पापड़ बेलने पड़ते हैं। अदालतों के सैकड़ों चक्कर लगाने के बाद ही उन्हें इंसाफ मिल पाता है। आज आलम यह है कि देश भर में विविध स्तरों पर अदालतों में करीब साढ़े तीन करोड़ से अधिक मुकदमे लंबित हैं। इसमें भी तकरीबन साठ हजार मामले तो अकेले सुप्रीम कोर्ट में लंबित हैं। हाल में लोकसभा में सरकार ने बताया कि देश की निचली और जिला अदालतों में तीन करोड़ चौदह लाख मामले लंबित हैं। इसमें से चौदह फीसद मामले दस साल या उससे भी ज्यादा पुराने हैं। उच्च न्यायालयों की यदि बात करें, तो यहां करीब पैंतालीस लाख मामले न्याय की प्रतीक्षा कर रहे हैं। जाहिर है, अदालतों पर काम का अत्यधिक बोझ है। उसके समक्ष आने वाले मुकदमों का प्रवाह अनियंत्रित है। अब भी इस हालात का यदि गंभीरता से मुकाबला नहीं किया गया, तो न्यायिक व्यवस्था के चरमराने का खतरा सामने है। न्यायिक व्यवस्था में लोगों का यकीन बना रहे, इसके लिए जरूरी है कि उन्हें सही समय पर इंसाफ मिले।

देश के कानून मंत्री ने सभी उच्च न्यायालयों के मुख्य न्यायाधीशों से आग्रह किया गया है कि वे अपने यहां की अदालतों में लंबित पड़े दस साल या इससे पुराने मामलों का त्वरित निपटारा सुनिश्चित करें। जाहिर है, सलाह महत्त्वपूर्ण है। यदि इस पर अमल किया जाए, तो न्यायिक परिदृश्य में कुछ तो बदलाव आएगा। जो मामले अदालतों में बरसों से लटके हैं, उनका समय-सीमा में निपटारा हो पाएगा। अदालतों में काम का जो बोझ है, उसमें भी कमी आएगी। सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने अपने कई आदेशों में न्याय प्रणाली को दुरुस्त करने के लिए निचली अदालतों को सलाह दी है कि भ्रष्टाचार, दहेज मौत, घरेलू हिंसा, यौन उत्पीड़न और साइबर अपराध जैसे मामलों में मुकदमा त्वरित गति से चलाया जाना चाहिए। बेहतर हो कि तय समय के भीतर फैसला भी हो जाए और यह समय, अधिकतम तीन साल हो सकता है।

अदालतों को मुकदमों के ढेर से निजात दिलाने के लिए केंद्र सरकार ने कुछ साल पहले राष्ट्रीय मुकदमा नीति बनाने की बात की थी। इस नीति के अंतर्गत प्रमुख लंबित मुकदमों की औसत अवधि पंद्रह साल से कम करके तीन साल करना, अदालती समय का ज्यादा से ज्यादा सदुपयोग करने के लिए सभी अदालतों में कोर्ट प्रबंधकों की नियुक्ति करने जैसी अहम बातें शामिल थीं। लेकिन यह मामला आगे नहीं बढ़ा। यदि इस तरह की नीति बन जाती, तो न सिर्फ अदालतों पर लंबित मुकदमों का अंबार कम होता, बल्कि प्राथमिक औपचारिकताएं पूरी होने के बाद ही मामले सुनवाई के लिए सूचीबद्ध होते और दायर करने की तारीख के हिसाब से सुनवाई की प्राथमिकता भी तय होती।

ज्यादातर मुकदमे छोटे-छोटे झगड़ों और आपसी अहं की लड़ाइयों के नतीजे होते हैं। इनमें बहुत सारे मुकदमे ऐसे हैं जिन्हें अदालती गलियारों में सालों-साल भटकाने की जगह घंटों की बातचीत में आसानी से निपटाया जा सकता है। खासतौर से पारिवारिक और वैवाहिक विवादों के मामले तो मध्यस्थता के जरिए बेहतर तरीके से कम समय में ही सुलझ सकते हैं। ज्यादातर मुकदमे यातायात से संबंधित अपराधों, चैक बाउंस जैसी शिकायतों के होते हैं, जिन्हें दोनों पक्षकारों से बातचीत कर आसानी से सुलझाया जा सकता है। लोक अदालतों के जरिए समय-समय पर इस तरह के मुकदमों का निपटारा किया जाता रहा है। अदालतों से मुकदमों का बोझ कम हो सके, इसके लिए जरूरी है कि देश में लोक अदालतों की संख्या बढ़ाई जाए, याचिकाकर्ताओं को मध्यस्थता जैसी प्रक्रिया का सहारा लेने के लिए प्रेरित किया जाए। जनाक्रोश के दबाव में दिल्ली में यौन हिंसा के मामलों की सुनवाई के लिए त्वरित अदालतें गठित करने का फैसला किया गया। लेकिन त्वरित अदालतें पूरे देश में होनी जरूरी हैं।

मुकदमों का शीघ्र निपटारा न हो पाने के पीछे एक बड़ी वजह सरकारी वकीलों और जांच अधिकारियों की ढिलाई और अयोग्यता भी है। आपराधिक मामलों की छानबीन में पुलिस की लापरवाही, तथ्यों को सही ढंग से पेश न कर पाना, भ्रष्टाचार और सरकारी वकीलों का आरोपियों के दबाव में आकर सबूतों और गवाहों को ठीक से पेश न करने जैसी कई बातें किसी से छिपी नहीं हैं। इसके चलते अक्सर पीड़ित पक्ष को इंसाफ नहीं मिल पाता। पुलिस सुधारों के बारे में कई समितियों ने अपनी रिपोर्टें दीं, बड़ी-बड़ी बातें हुईं, लेकिन इस दिशा में अभी तक कोई सार्थक पहल नहीं हो पाई है। यहां तक कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने भी वर्ष 2006 में पुलिस सुधार के लिए अपनी ओर से कई महत्त्वपूर्ण निर्देश दिए थे। लेकिन अफसोस की बात यह है कि इन निर्देशों को लेकर अभी तक भी कुछ नहीं हुआ है। सोराबजी समिति ने अपनी रिपोर्ट में भारतीय पुलिस में बुनियादी सुधार के लिए कई सिफारिशें सुझाई थीं, लेकिन ज्यादातर राज्य सरकारें इन सिफारिशों को लागू करने के लिए रजामंद नहीं हैं। पुलिस महकमे को सियासी हस्तक्षेप से आजाद रखने के सुझाने के साथ ही कमेटी की दो ऐसी सिफारिशें हैं जो इंसाफ की नजर से काफी अहम हैं। पहली, पुलिस में जनता की शिकायतों के निपटारे के लिए विभिन्न स्तरों पर आयोग कायम किए जाएं। दूसरे, आपराधिक मामले की जांच की जिम्मेदारी पुलिस पर न हो। यानी, इसके लिए कोई स्वायत्त एजेंसी कायम की जाए।

पुलिस सुधार के अलावा बड़े पैमाने पर न्यायिक सुधार सबसे बड़ी जरूरत है। न्यायिक सुधार से ही मौजूदा न्याय व्यवस्था सुधारी जा सकती है। हमारे यहां न्यायिक सुधार कई सालों से लंबित है। विधि आयोग समय-समय पर अपनी रिपोर्टों में सरकारों को इस बारे में लगातार आगाह करता रहा है। जजों की संख्या बढ़ाने की वकालत से लेकर मुकदमों के निपटारे की समय-सीमा तय करने को लेकर कई बार सिफारिशें की गई हैं। आज न्यायपालिका जिस हालात में है, उसमें समयबद्ध फैसले की कल्पना करना उतना आसान नहीं है। देश में आबादी के अनुपात में अदालतों और न्यायाधीशों की संख्या कम होने की वजह से मुकदमों का निपटारा सही समय पर नहीं हो पाता। न्यायिक सुधार की राह में धन की कमी हमेशा प्रमुख बाधा रही है। देश में न्यायिक सेवा की मद में बजटीय आवंटन जीडीपी के आधा फीसद से भी कम होता है। दुनिया के विकसित देशों मसलन- आस्ट्रेलिया में प्रति दस लाख की आबादी पर जजों की संख्या बयालीस, कनाडा में पचहत्तर, ब्रिटेन में इक्यावन और अमेरिका में एक सौ सात है। इसके बरक्स हमारे यहां प्रति दस लाख की आबादी पर सिर्फ ग्यारह जज हैं। पर्याप्त बजट आवंटन के अलावा न्याय तंत्र को आधुनिक तकनीकी सुविधाओं से भी लैस करने की आवश्यकता है। आंकड़े इकट्ठे करने, अदालती कार्यवाही में देरी पर नजर रखने, एक तरह के मामलों को समायोजित कर उनकी तादाद बढ़ने से रोकने से अनेक लाभ हो सकते हैं। लेकिन न्याय के तकाजे को सिर्फ अदालतों के भरोसे नहीं छोड़ा जा सकता। न्यायपालिका पर लोगों का खोया यकीन कैसे बहाल हो, यह सरकार की प्राथमिकता में शामिल होना चाहिए। तभी न्यायिक सुधार की पहल कारगर हो सकेगी।

दुश्चक्र में बाजार

संगीता कुमारी

दुनिया मेरे आगे

शहर के हों या कस्बे के दुकानदार, सभी अपनी रोजी-रोटी को लेकर सचेत रहते हैं। लेकिन हाल के दिनों में जिस तरह की सच्ची तस्वीरें देखने को मिल रही हैं, उसे देख कर जाने क्यों दिल सोचने पर मजबूर हो जाता है। उनके दर्द को कौन समझेगा, जब समूचे बाजार और उसे संचालित करने वाले तंत्र और आम लोगों के बीच वे पिसते रहते हैं।

एक ओर गुलाबी सर्दी की आहट को खुशनुमा मौसम की दस्तक के तौर पर देखा-जाना जाता है, दूसरी ओर यही मौसम कइयों के लिए चिंता की वजह होता है। हम सभी गरम कपड़ों को निकाल धूप दिखाना शुरू कर देते हैं या फिर जरूरत के सामानों की खरीदारी करने लगते हैं। हाल में मैंने भी बाजार से कुछ सामान लिए, जो जाड़े का वक्त निकाल दे। दुकानदार ने कुछ कवर दिए और अगले हफ्ते दूसरे नाप का कवर ले जाने को कह कर अपना दुख बताना लगा। दरअसल, उसने जो सामान दिखाया था, वह उतना अच्छा नहीं लग रहा था। तो जब मैंने लेने से मना किया तब उसने कहा- 'यह दिखने में बेशक सुंदर नहीं है, मगर इसमें गरमाहट बहुत ज्यादा है। आप मेरी बात मान कर एक बार यह ले जाइए। आप इसका उपयोग करने के बाद आप कहेंगी कि मैंने आपको अच्छी चीज दी है। आजकल हमारा काम पहले जैसा नहीं चल रहा है। उस पर ये ऑनलाइन खरीदारी ने हमारी दुकानदारी मार डाली है। ऑनलाइन वाले सामान तो बेहद कम गुणवत्ता वाला देते हैं, लेकिन लोग उसे लेना आसान समझते हैं। खुद मेरे बेटे ने ऑनलाइन खरीदारी के जरिए कम्बल मंगा लिया था, जिसे ओढ़ते ही मुझे खुजली शुरू हो गई थी। कपड़ा भी ठीक नहीं था।'

यह सुन कर मैंने पूछा- 'आपको क्या जरूरत है बाहर से खरीदारी करने की, आपकी तो अपनी दुकान है!' दुकानदार ने बुझे हुए और बहुत दुखी मन से कहा कि आजकल बाहर पढ़ने वाले बच्चे मां-पिता की सुनते कहां हैं? शहर में रह कर बच्चों की तरह देखादेखी काम करते हैं। 'चाहे घर में चीज पड़ी हो, फिर भी पैसों की परवाह किए बगैर अपने दोस्तों के साथ होड़ करते हैं। मेरे बेटे ने अपने दोस्तों की बातों में आकर मंगा ली थी मुझे तोहफे के तौर पर देने के लिए। मैंने उसे मना किया था, लेकिन वह नहीं माना था। बेटे का कहना है कि कुछ सामानों को छोड़ कर जरूरत के सामान ऑनलाइन ही मंगाऊंगा। अब उस मूर्ख को कौन समझाए कि उसके पिता की तरह ही लाखों दुकानदारों की रोजी-रोटी का सवाल है। पता नहीं ये आजकल के बच्चों को क्या हो गया है? घर बैठे बासी खाना ऑर्डर करके मंगाते रहेंगे। फोन भी घर पर ही मंगाते हैं। मैं तो उसे कहता हूं कि जरा कमरे से निकल कर दुकान में जाकर देखभाल कर चीज खरीदा करे। मेरे ऐसे कहने पर उल्टा वह मुझे कहता है- 'आप आउटडेटेड हैं... दुनिया कहां से कहां निकल गई है और आप अभी भी उसी खोली में घुसे हुए हैं।' अभी नया-नया कॉलेज में गया है तो नई हवा लगी है। मुझे तो लगता है कि कुछ समय के बाद मेरी यह पुश्तैनी दुकान ऑनलाइन निगल जाएंगे।' मैं उसकी तकलीफ को समझने का प्रयास कर ही रही थी कि तब तक उसका नौकर खुदरा पैसे ले आया था, जिसे लेकर मैं चुपचाप बढ़ गई। लेकिन इस समूचे प्रसंग पर सोचने पर मजबूर हुई।

आज हमें घर बैठे अनेक सुविधाएं मिल रही हैं, जिसका अगर लाभ है तो नुकसान भी है। हमारा विशाल देश क्या इस सुविधा से उपजी आर्थिक तंगी को झेल पाएगा? आज कॉलेज में पढ़ने वाले अधिकतर बच्चे ऑनलाइन खाना मंगा कर अपना पेट भरते हैं और खुश होते हैं। मां की चिंता अपने बच्चों की सेहत को लेकर दिनोंदिन बढ़ती जा रही है। सामान खरीदा जा रहा है, मगर वह पैसा कैसे और कहां जा रहा है, यह नए बाजारवाद की नई व्यवस्था है। स्मार्ट फोन हाथ में होने का मतलब यह कतई नहीं है कि सभी लोग स्मार्ट हो गए हैं। देश का बहुत बड़ा वर्ग एक अंधेरी-सी गली की तरफ बिना विचार किए भागा जा रहा है। उन्हें कौन भगा रहा है, यह समझ नहीं आ रहा है।

हमें यह समझना होगा कि हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था अनेक रूप में बंटी हुई है। यहां छोटे, बहुत छोटे, निम्न, मध्य, उच्च मध्यवर्गीय, छोटे, बड़े और बहुत बड़े व्यापारी भरे पड़े हैं। उन पर करोड़ों की आबादी निर्भर करती है। एक दूसरे की जरूरतों के लिए एक दूसरे से माल खरीदते हुए आपस में लेन-देनदारी करते हैं। अगर ऐसे में उनके बीच कोई बहुत बड़ा बाजार ऑनलाइन के रूप में आ जाएगा तो हमें समझना होगा कि क्या वे सभी इस आर्थिक बोझ को झेल पाएंगे! वैसे भी इस बार पिछले कुछ समय से बाजारों में जो सूनापन छाया हुआ है, उससे त्योहारों की चमक भी फीकी पड़ी है। हो सकता है कि कोई व्यक्ति फिलहाल इसके नफे-नुकसान को नहीं समझ पा रहा हो, लेकिन आने वाले दिनों में उसे भी इस खमियाजे का हिस्सा बनना पड़ेगा।

चम्पा का जीवन

आसपास के वातावरण के प्रति उदासीनता पहली नजर में लोगों को सामान्य लगती है लेकिन पर्यावरणीय उदासीनता का परिणाम कितना घातक हो सकता है, इसका सहज अंदाजा लगाना भी मुश्किल होता है। न केवल पर्यावरण का विनाश बल्कि सभ्यता संस्कृति तक का विनाश हो जाता है। इसी का एक ज्वलंत उदाहरण है ऐतिहासिक अंग प्रदेश की चंपा नगरी में बहने वाली चंपा नदी। बिहार में चांदन नदी की मुख्यधारा से निर्मित होने वाली चंपा नदी की स्थिति यह आ गई है कि जहां चार दशक पहले तक उसमें नावें चला करती थीं, वह नदी आज नाली के रूप में बदल गई है। प्रत्यक्षदर्शी बताते हैं कि सन 1980 ईस्वी तक यहां पर नावें चला करती थीं।

लेकिन आज तीन चार दशक बाद नदी को नाला का स्वरूप देकर न केवल कूड़े-कचरे के स्वरूप में तब्दील कर दिया गया है, बल्कि एक ऐतिहासिक सांस्कृतिक सभ्यता को भी जमींदोज कर दिया गया है। एक ओर बालू माफिया ने नदी की हरियाली बहुत ज्यादा कर मुहाने को ही बंद कर दिया तो दूसरी ओर जगह-जगह पर चंपा नदी को भर कर अतिक्रमित कर उसे नाले का रूप दे दिया गया है। लोगों अपने स्वार्थ और सुख-सुविधा की खातिर प्राकृतिक संसाधनों की लूट-खसोट कर प्रकृति को कितना दर्द दे रहे हैं, उन्हें खुद अभी पता नहीं है। अगर कुछ न किया गया तो आने वाली पीढ़ी इस इतिहास को कहानी के रूप में समझ कर संतोष कर लेंगे। अभी भी सरकार को चाहिए कि जिस तरह की नदी घाटी अंग्रेज छोड़ कर गए थे, कम से कम वैसी ही स्थिति आज आम जनता को लौटाई जाए। आजादी के समय जैसी नदियों की लंबाई-चौड़ाई की नपाई कर इसे संरक्षित करें तो इस क्षेत्र की एक सभ्यता को नष्ट-भ्रष्ट करने से बचाया जा सकता है। नहीं तो यही माना जाएगा कि सरकार की लचर नीति न केवल पर्यावरण प्रदूषण के लिए जिम्मेवार है, बल्कि नदी घाटी सभ्यता संस्कृति बर्बाद करने के लिए भी समाज और सरकार की उदासीनता ही जिम्मेवार होती है। इस संदर्भ में समाज के सभी लोगों को अपनी सभ्यता-संस्कृति बचाने के लिए साहस दिखाने की जरूरत है, वहीं सरकार को ठोस नीति बना कर अपनी प्रकृति को संभालने और कम से कम उस रूप तक संरक्षित करने की आवश्यकता है, जैसा अंग्रेज इसे को छोड़ कर गए थे।

● मिथिलेश कुमार, भागलपुर, बिहार

विकास की धुरी

हम बस या केवल पढ़ते ही हैं कि भारत एक कृषि प्रधान देश है। जबकि मौजूदा दौर में किसानों की स्थिति दयनीय है, किसान और कर्ज एक दूसरे के पर्याय बन गए हैं। यही कारण है कि हताश किसान मौत को गले लगा ले रहे हैं। देश की लगभग सत्तर फीसद जनसंख्या गांवों में रहती है और खेती ही उनका मुख्य धंधा है, लेकिन मौसम में अचानक बदलाव आने से अन्नदाताओं की सारी मेहनत पर चंद मिनटों में पानी फिर जाता है। कृषि घाटे का सौदा न रहे, इसके लिए सरकारों द्वारा गंभीर प्रयास करने होंगे, क्योंकि किसानों की खुशहाली में ही देश की खुशहाली है। याद रहे कि किसान विकास की धुरी है। अगर किसानों ने अपने हल रख दिए तो विकास का चक्का पूरी तरह से जाम हो जाएगा।

● कपिल एम वडियार, पाली, राजस्थान

शिक्षा की बदहाली

वर्तमान समय में देश की शिक्षा व्यवस्था चरमराई हुई है। प्राथमिक विद्यालय स्तर से लेकर विश्वविद्यालय स्तर तक के शिक्षण व्यवस्था में जो खामियां हैं, उनसे पिंड पाना मुश्किलों भरा काम हो गया है। 24 नवंबर, 2019 के अंक में छपा प्रेमपाल शर्मा का लेख भारतीय शिक्षण व्यवस्था पर गंभीर सवाल खड़ा करता है। बच्चों को जन्म से ही अंग्रेजी रटाने से हमें क्या हासिल हो रहा है? क्या हम उन्हें अपनी मातृभाषा में शिक्षा नहीं दे सकते हैं? अपने घर से प्रत्येक दिन तीस-चालीस किलोमीटर दूर भेज कर किस प्रकार की शिक्षा हम उन्हें दिलवा रहे हैं? एक के बाद एक ट्यूशन लगाने से क्या हम उन्हें वास्तविक विषय के ज्ञान से अवगत करा पा रहे हैं? अगर इसी तरह की प्रक्रिया से सब कुछ सहज है तो सवाल है कि बच्चों में चुनौतियों का सामना करने की शक्ति क्यों नहीं पैदा हो पा रही है? यही वजह है कि बच्चों में लगातार बढ़ रही आत्महत्या की प्रवृत्ति एक भयानक समस्या का रूप धारण कर चुकी है। इस पर समय रहते सचेत होने की जरूरत है। अगर सत्ता और सियासत का खेल इसी तरह से जारी रहा तो ज्ञान-विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में हम बहुत पीछे रह जाएंगे। डर इस बात का है कि बच्चों के भविष्य को जितना हम साधारण तरीके से देख रहे हैं, वह आगे चलकर कहीं असाधारण न बन जाए।

● रणजीत कुमार झा, दिल्ली विवि, दिल्ली

इसरो की कामयाबी

भारतीय अंतरिक्ष अनुसंधान संगठन (इसरो) के तेजी से आसमान की ओर बढ़ते कदमों और चांद को छूने के प्रयासों को देखकर सारी दुनिया दांतों तले अंगुली दबा रही होगी। भारत के लिए बहुत गर्व की बात है कि इसरो ने एक बार फिर अंतरिक्ष में अपने कामयाबी के झंडे गाड़ दिए हैं। इसरो ने धरती पर नजर रखने वाले हमारे अपने देश के उपग्रह कार्टोसैट-3 और अमेरिका के तेरह नैनो उपग्रह पीएसएलवी-सी47 के जरिए अंतरिक्ष में सफलतापूर्वक भेजे हैं। इसरो की कामयाबी से यह जाहिर हो रहा है कि हमारा देश विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में भी खूब तरक्की कर रहा है। देश को उम्मीद है कि हमारे वैज्ञानिक अंतरिक्ष पर फतह करने के साथ ही ऐसे नए अविष्कार करेंगे, जो सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी, संचार के साथ और दूसरे हर क्षेत्रों के लिए फायदेमंद साबित होंगे। कार्टोसैट-3 की शानदार सफलता ने यह साबित किया है कि भारत के वैज्ञानिक दूसरे देशों के वैज्ञानिकों से कम नहीं हैं। अगर सरकारें विज्ञान की पढ़ाई को देश में दुरुस्त करने के लिए गंभीरता दिखाएं तो हमारा देश विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में दुनिया के सभी देशों को पीछे छोड़ सकता है।

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