

Opinion

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IT IS A CRIME
Woman & child development minister Smriti Irani
What he has done is condemnable, using issues of crime against women for politics. Women will give him a reply but I want to ask the men here - is every man in India a rapist, according to Rahul Gandhi

RationalExpectations

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UTI and the govt's very limited writ

If even four PSU banks/FIs can't be made to obey Sebi's rules, what does it say for the government's ability to get things done?

THESE ARE SEVERAL strands to US asset management firm T Rowe Price's—T Rowe Price has \$1.12 trillion of assets under management—running dispute with the Indian government over control of UTI mutual fund, but two are especially relevant right now.

First, in the context of the government wanting to lower its stake in various PSUs to less than 51%, the UTI case makes it clear this doesn't make an iota of a difference. Second, the fact that the market-regulator Sebi hasn't been able to enforce its writ on four government-owned banks/financial institutions makes it clear that regulation doesn't mean much when the government decides it doesn't want to adhere to them. Neither is good news from the point of view of restoring investor confidence in the economy. There is, in addition, a recent CAG report that points to event the Union Cabinet having a limited writ when it comes to making the system perform—that includes the bureaucrats, the regulators, the courts etc—but this is something we will come to later.

Let's first deal with why the government reducing its stake to below the controlling level of 51% is irrelevant. While this is being contemplated to reduce the government's control over them which, in turn, will allow these PSUs to operate freely, the government has no direct stake in UTI, and yet it controls it absolutely! While T Rowe Price owns 26% of UTI, three banks—SBI, PNB and Bank of Baroda—and LIC own 18.25% each; this gives the government effective control even though UTI is not even a PSU. In 2011, barely a year after the government sold a stake in UTI to T Rowe Price to professionalise the mutual fund, the finance ministry was trying to foist its nominee—the brother of the advisor to the then finance minister (*bit.ly/36t7cLO*) who had no experience in the financial sector—as the head of UTI. It was T Rowe Price's 26% shareholding—this is a critical level in Indian company law as it allows the stakeholder to block certain actions by the board—and a professional board of UTI's trustee company that allowed this to be beaten off. The battle, though, took its toll as UTI remained headless for around two years as a result.

After the US-64 fiasco, when UTI was divided into 'good UTI' and 'bad UTI', the four PSUs were asked to buy a stake in the UTI mutual fund. Since Sebi rules don't allow anyone who runs a mutual fund—a 'sponsor' in jargon—to run another mutual fund, and all four have their own funds, they were allowed a special exemption. Sebi, however, came out with guidelines on "avoiding conflict of interest between UTIMF and the sponsors"; so, for instance, sponsors were not allowed to "nominate any employee working with them on the Board of the AMC and the trustee company or any committee of the UTI Mutual Fund".

It is this professionalising that the government used to convince T Rowe Price that UTI would be run as a board-managed firm; T Rowe Price's 26% stake came from the four PSUs diluting their stakes accordingly. Despite the government's assurances and Sebi's guidelines, the four PSUs continued to try and interfere in UTI's running; eventually, in March 2018, Sebi said the four PSUs would have to reduce their stakes in UTI to 10% within a year, in keeping with the rules for all other sponsors with more than one asset management company (AMC). The shadow boxing, however, continued and, at different points in time, both SBI and PNB attempted to wrest control of UTI leading to, in August last year, T Rowe Price filing a case in the Bombay High Court against the government; T Rowe Price asked it to prevent the four PSUs from scuttling UTI's IPO.

The IPO was critical since it would allow the four PSUs to dilute their stake to the Sebi-mandated 10% at a market-determined price and, since T Rowe Price had also agreed to, under certain circumstances, cut its stake to below 26%, it would pave the way for a genuinely board-managed UTI where no single shareholder controlled the board; though the fact that the four PSUs acted as one—and took orders from the government—made it always likely the government would call the shots if T Rowe Price's stake fell below 26%. Indeed, ahead of the IPO, the finance ministry tried to push for a small IPO—of, say, 5-10% of the equity, contributed equally by all five shareholders—ostensibly to test the waters. What this would do, however, was to reduce T Rowe Price's stake to below 26% and, with the majority voting rights with PSUs, the government could then again try and foist its nominee as the UTI chief!

While a supposedly independent Sebi didn't enforce its rules in March 2019, it has now extended this deadline to December 2020; whether more extensions will be given is unclear, but it shows how limited Sebi's writ is when it comes to the government or PSUs. Given this, now that talks of an IPO have once again gathered steam, what is the guarantee that the four PSUs will not act in concert—at the behest of the government—even when their individual stakes are at 10% or below? With no permanent CEO since Leo Puri left last year in August, and the chances of a truly independent UTI still bleak, it is possible the IPO will get impacted. Till UTI is genuinely board-managed, it is unlikely T Rowe Price which has \$1.12 trillion in assets under management will ever raise money from its investors for UTI to manage; the big advantage of getting T Rowe Price as a sponsor, amazingly, has never been tapped due to the PSUs trying to muscle it out.

The CAG report on PSUs is even more worrying as it confirms the government is quite blasé when it comes to following rules. The chapter on disinvestment notes that, for several years now, the government has been meeting its targets, but this has come with very poor retail participation and with little genuine strategic sales. In FY18, the CAG points out, the cabinet approved 24 PSUs for strategic sale; all were to be completed by June 2018, but only one could take place, and that too was one PSU (ONGC) buying another (HPCL), for ₹36,915 crore.

While Sebi had mandated, in 2015, that all listed firms must have a public float of 25%, by August 2017, PSUs were given an extra year for some reason—but 17 PSUs have still not complied. The finance ministry—not Sebi—has now extended this to August 2020. And, more than a decade ago, in October 2009, the cabinet said that all unlisted, but profitable PSUs would be listed; but only 59 of 90 PSUs that satisfy the criterion are listed. Apart from the fact that large amounts of public funds could get freed up via listing, this shows that even the cabinet's writ is limited. To talk of sweeping economic reforms in such a situation seems a bit of a bad joke.

SoundDECISION

Delhi is looking to rigorously implement the Noise Pollution Rules 2000. States should take a cue from it

WHEN APPLE LAUNCHED a feature to track noise via its watch, not many had imagined that it would have an application in a developing country like India. India does have rules to track noise levels, but these are observed more in their flouting. Delhi, however, is looking to change that. According to a *Times of India* report, it has asked all DMs and police to ensure that Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 are followed in spirit. After the NGT order in August this year, the government will be asking for installation of sound limiter devices at private functions. The device shall monitor the decibel level, and if the audio system exceeds a pre-set level of volume, for say, 10 seconds, it shall cut off the power supply. Religious processions or marriages won't be able to blast their music in residential areas. The government will also enforce the ₹10,000 fine along with the seizure of loudspeaker, and ₹1 lakh for the use of DG set.

While the rules mandate a 55dBA limit for the day and 45dBA at night for residential areas, the problem is implementation. A sound limiter may be helpful, but the chances of people gaming the system are high. A helpline number and a website also exist to report such incidences, which indeed is a good start, but it all depends on enforcement. Given how increased incidence of hyperacusis, a hearing and neural disorder, is being linked to exposure to noise pollution, Delhi showing intent to implement the Rules is welcome, others should follow.

ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN

WITH BOTH FISCAL AND MONETARY POLICY AT THE END OF THE ROAD, THERE IS LITTLE THAT CAN BE DONE IN THE SHORT RUN. PVT SECTOR CAN'T PULL ALL THE WEIGHT EITHER

A long road to recovery

MADAN SABNAVIS

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Views are personal



bonuses and variable pay come in. Any pause here can have serious consequences for the system.

The economy is in the classic state of liquidity trap which was highlighted by Keynes during the time of the Depression, when lowering of interest rates ceases to affect demand for funds. This has happened in Japan and the euro region too, where interest rates have lost their relevance. The rudimentary theory of demand, supply and prices does not work as the underlying assumption of *ceteris paribus* no longer holds in the present context. Credit risk perception is high and banks do not want to lend money to all and sundry given the NPA overhang.

With both fiscal and monetary policy at the end of the road, there is little that can be done in the short run. Increasing the spending of the government by say ₹2 lakh crore is an option which looks unlikely, as it sends wrong signals to the market. Therefore, the ball is back in the court of the private sector.

The private sector would rather not get into infrastructure given the challenges of finance. Usually, these projects would not have a good rating to be able to command funds from the debt market. Further, with several large companies waiting for the IBC to resolve the debt issue, possible investors may prefer to purchase them in the market rather than start afresh. Add to this the fact that consumption has slowed down and it means that there is surplus capacity in most industries which has made further investment non-viable right now.

Therefore, the path to recovery is going to be a slow one. Three ingredients are required which have to fall in place and will do so only over a period of time.

First, the financial sector has to get out of the labyrinth. It started with the AQR affecting the PSBs and later the private banks. Subsequently, the NBFC crisis has dealt a blow to infra finance, real estate and SMEs, thus choking the financial system. This piece has to be set right, and the news of possibly more hidden NPAs on bank's books could prolong the recovery process. It has literally been a case of survival of the fittest in the financial world. This is within the control of the government, and RBI has to be expedited.

Second, the rural economy still holds the clue to the recovery process and in a way is a necessary condition, though not a sufficient one. It is critical as it is independent of what happens in the industrial world, and hence, the optimal output and price are the key determinants to demand recovery. Any disruption, as has been the case with the vegetables and pulses crops this year, would upset the applecart as there are inflationary implications that make monetary policy even more difficult to conduct. Clearly, everything is not within the control of any entity, and here, the states hold the key. The focus has to be on making farming more attractive and should be run as commercial ventures rather than a sector to be sympathised with through loan waivers and cash transfers. Policy has to aim at increasing productivity of land and providing end-to-end solution till the marketing stage. State farming has

to be seriously considered.

Third, job creation is necessary to generate sustainable income that will generate demand. Employment unfortunately gets linked with growth and normally follows the latter and cannot be created unilaterally. Unless there are more households with spending capacity, consumption won't increase. As corporates cannot employ persons and keep them on the bench (given that they have already lost pricing power in the last three years), the emphasis must be more on gig workers who are able to generate income by working on a contractual basis as consultants. In the medium term, the education system should bring in courses that suit the

needs of the day—specific engineering requirements or handling of back-office jobs, so that the human race does not head towards the standard courses of medicine, engineering and management. Demand will grow for such skill-sets, and short-term courses of 3-6 months which address these requirements will be appropriate.

Evidently, there are no quick solutions here, and it can be said that most

alternatives have already been explored by the government with limited success. Removing administrative bottlenecks is a must; and retaining processes merely because there are legacy issues in various government organisations has brought impediments to entrepreneurship. This environment of doing business at the micro-level has to improve, and the federal structure involving multiple clearances and permissions needs to be done away with (just like what the GST has done) to smoothen the process. Getting in marginal improvements to break the World Bank Doing Business Code does not work except for getting in newspaper headlines. There has to be a deeper commitment.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

On CAB's impact

The passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), 2019, by Parliament marks a turning point in the country's history. If a Partition was imposed on it in 1947, it has now done it on itself. The CAB is a law that technically and legally only purports to give citizenship to those who have come fleeing neighbouring countries, but whose effect, by its deliberate exclusion of some of these migrants on the basis of religion, is to reflect the same segregation on its citizens internally. Though no separate space and territory has been earmarked for Muslims, the Bill has sent out the message that they are lesser citizens, and the country is for Hindus only. The entire North-East, which will be directly and immediately affected by the Bill, has risen in protest against it, though the government tried to buy them off with some exceptions and concessions. It is for the entire country to resist the Bill, and to ensure that the secular core of the Constitution and the republic, founded on the equal protection and equality before the law of all within its territory, survives this assault on it. — Ansari Tarique, Bengaluru

Assam protests

Two people were killed and several injured in police firing as the situation in Assam, which witnessed violent protests against the Centre's Citizenship (Amendment) Bill on Wednesday. It is an extremely terrible news for the common masses. All common people and major opposition parties are opposing the Bill as being unconstitutional in spirit, and violative of the Constitution. I think that the government is playing with constitutional values and morality. With the passage of the CAB, the BJP has exposed the full face of its majoritarian agenda. — T Anwar, Karnataka

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Economic slowdown: Crisis or blip?

For India to tackle its economic slowdown, it needs to reverse its impulses for centralisation, needs to be more open, and must create a robust infrastructure for digital communications

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THE YEAR 2019 has been a momentous one for India. On the political and societal front, one has seen a centralisation of political power, accompanied by measures to homogenise Indian society in ways that seem to be at odds with the country's recent history and ideals. My view is that these efforts have also affected the economy, both by taking away attention from core economic issues but also by shrinking the set of perspectives on economic policy that are valued within the corridors of power.

The Indian economy has been in the grip of a worrying slowdown, one which policymakers have been slow to acknowledge and to come to grips with. One can argue that the problems are short term ones, the result of a conventional macroeconomic slowdown, global economic uncertainties, and perhaps some specific structural reforms which have been initially disruptive, but will soon bear fruit. In this perspective, the slowdown is a blip that will disappear.

But, there is an alternative view that has been recently expressed very forcefully by Ashoka Mody, now at Princeton University, who has written in the past on India's demographic dividend, as well as its industrial dynamics. His latest analysis, in the form of an OpEd, has a title that makes his position clear: How India's growth bubble fizzled out. Mody views the growth experience of India since the 1991 reforms as being driven by finance, real estate and construction, and argues that this is the bubble that has now popped. He emphasises the lack of investment in urban infrastructure and human capital, and the erosion of Indian manufacturing, and says that it will take a generation to catch up on those fronts, which are critical for sustained future growth. From this perspective, India is in a crisis.

There are strong elements of truth in

Mody's analysis, but one should not underestimate the changes that were wrought in the last three decades, to the point where five percent growth is considered a barely acceptable floor, rather than an aspirational rate of growth. There have been improvements in tax policy, in infrastructure, in financial systems, and in attitudes, though all of these are now under stress. But, where Mody concludes that there are "no easy fixes", I would argue that there is a way forward that can begin to turn around the economy relatively quickly.

First, the central government has to reverse its impulses for centralisation of everything. The terms of reference of the 15th Finance Commission seem to me to reflect those impulses, looking for ways to reverse the greater share of tax revenues, awarded to the states by the previous commission, along with somewhat greater flexibility. Instead, the Centre needs to allow the states more room and ability to spend money, perhaps with nudges towards priorities such as education and urban infrastructure. If the centre needs to discipline the states' spending, it should invest in strengthening their fiscal management and accounting systems, all the way down to cities and towns, rather than trying to punish or reward them based on meeting fiscal deficit targets.

Second, the Centre needs to be more open. There are many dimensions of openness. The only one that seems to have received attention is measures to attract foreign investment, by liberalising restrictions. But, everything else the Centre has done has worked against openness. There has been hostility to trade measures that might support the integration of Indian manufacturing into regional production networks. The lack of progress on this front, precisely at a time when it was both needed and pos-

sible, has been shocking. Second, opening up higher education to domestic and foreign entrants would go a long way to addressing human capital gaps at the upper end of the educational spectrum. At a time when the global higher education sector is in turmoil, and flexibility is becoming the norm, Indian higher education policy has lagged badly. A vital component of policy in this case would be creating an institutional and social environment where faculty from other countries (including those of Indian origin) want to spend substantial periods of time in India. Instead, the government's political and societal impulses have had the opposite impact. A third dimension of openness is being willing to gather inputs on economic policy from a wide range of people with appropriate expertise. Here, too, the current government appears to have regressed.

A third area where concerted government action can have rapid payoffs is in the creation of a robust infrastructure for digital communications. This implies tackling the continued deficiencies of the electric power sector—perhaps the one place where pressure on the states is needed for further reform. But, the approach to building and improving the communication networks has to change. Currently, there are two inefficient government-owned firms, and a dominant, almost predatory private sector behemoth. This is not a recipe for long-run growth. India is large enough to support more competition in telecoms, and there is enough potential for growth to make it attractive for new entrants, if the playing field is level. Public-private partnerships for investment in the needed infrastructure may work here. Policies will need to be carefully designed, but can yield benefits to industry, education, finance, and almost every part of the economy.





ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

COMPUTER SECURITY

Spooky

Offering software for snooping to governments is a booming business. A flurry of lawsuits has drawn attention to a growing part of the cyber-security industry

ON OCTOBER 2, 2018 Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist and critic of the kingdom's government, visited its consulate in Istanbul in order to secure documents needed for his upcoming marriage. He did not come out alive. After initially denying responsibility, the Saudi government admitted that Khashoggi was killed in a "rogue operation".

Two months later Omar Abdulaziz, another Saudi dissident, filed a lawsuit in Israel against NSO Group, an Israeli software company. Abdulaziz alleges that the NSO Group had licensed Pegasus, a piece of spyware that snoops on smartphones, to the Saudi government, which used it to spy on him—and, through him, Khashoggi. NSO Group denies that its software was used against Khashoggi. In October WhatsApp, an encrypted-messaging firm owned by Facebook, also sued the firm, saying its software had been used to hack roughly 1,400 of its users.

WhatsApp says it has urged America's Department of Justice to open an investigation. nso Group disputes WhatsApp's allegations "in the strongest possible terms". On November 26 a number of NSO Group's workers filed a lawsuit against Facebook, claiming that the social-media giant has unfairly blocked

their private accounts.

The flurry of lawsuits has drawn attention to a little-known corner of the cyber-security industry. Most cyber-security firms focus on defending clients from hackers and malware. But some, including NSO Group, as well as Gamma Group (an Anglo-German firm) and Hacking Team (an Italian one which in April merged with another company to create Memento Labs), sell software to help governments access online data on persons of interest. Business appears to be brisk.

The opaque nature of the market for "intrusion software" means the job of trying to compile figures falls mostly to academics and NGOs. NSO Group, which is unusually candid, says its revenue in 2018 was \$250 million. In February Novalpina Capital, a British private-equity firm, bought a majority stake in the firm. The valuation implied by the transaction reportedly placed the firm in the "unicorn" club of startups worth over \$1 billion. Most of NSO Group's competitors are much smaller, says John Scott-Railton, a researcher at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Government. Danna Ingleton of Amnesty International, a human-rights group, reckons that the market is worth at least several billion dollars.

The firms are understandably coy about revealing their clients' identities. But in 2015 a widely reported data breach appeared to reveal a list of Hacking Team's

clients. The list included a Saudi spy agency and the Sudanese government of Omar al-Bashir, as well as the FBI, Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission and the state government of Bayelsa, a province of Nigeria. Memento Labs did not respond to requests for comment.

The industry has been around for a while, but Scott-Railton says that documents leaked in 2013 by Edward Snowden, an American spy—which lifted the lid on America's electronic-surveillance capabilities—gave it a big boost. "Other states said 'how do we get hold of something like that?'" The leaks also pushed Western technology firms to encrypt more web traffic and instant messages, making existing forms of eavesdropping harder. Some private firms now offer governments that do not have the expertise to breach such defences themselves the tools to do so. Many are staffed by former Western spooks. According to a leaked personnel roster obtained by the *New York Times*, DarkMatter, based in the United Arab Emirates, has hired several people who used to work for the National Security Agency, America's main signals-intelligence organisation. DarkMatter did not reply to requests for comment.

Trench coats and grey hats

Most of the companies say they assist law enforcement in fighting terrorism, drug smuggling or other misdeeds. At a conference in November Shiri Dolev, nso Group's president, complained about the coverage of her firm. She argued that services such as WhatsApp are used by some "as a vehicle for terrorism and crime", and that software such as Pegasus is vital. The firm insists its products are "not a tool to be weaponised against human-rights activists or dissidents". In September it announced a new human-rights policy, based on un guidelines; it reckons it is the first firm in the industry to do so. Even before that, says a spokeswoman, the firm had turned down around \$100 million of business on ethical grounds in the past three years.

In theory the export of hacking software is controlled by the same laws that regulate the sale of weapons. In practice most observers think such restrictions have little bite. David Kaye, the un's special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, has described the market for spyware as "out of control" and "unaccountable". State use of the industry's products to target political opponents, journalists and others seems common, says Ingleton.

Previous lawsuits have foundered, she adds, in part owing to their high-tech, international nature. Courts first need to be convinced that plaintiffs have suffered an injury, that the injury could be traced back to the defendant, and that the court can redress it. Even if this "standing" can be established, it is hard to procure evidence. "And even then it can be hard for some judges to understand what is being presented," she says. In a recent case in America "Mr Kidane", a pseudonymous American with links to Ethiopia, alleged that the Ethiopian government had been spying on him and his family using Fin-Spy, one of the Gamma Group's products. A judge threw out the case on the grounds that the alleged spying did not occur entirely within America's borders. The Gamma Group did not respond to requests for comment.

All the recent publicity has nonetheless increased pressure on the companies. In November Ron Wyden, an American senator, called for an investigation into whether NSO Group's products had been used against American citizens. Mr Kaye wants a moratorium on exports until stricter laws can be drawn up. And the WhatsApp lawsuits marks an escalation by the big technology companies, which want to safeguard their users' data.

A serious crackdown remains unlikely, thinks Edin Omanovic at Privacy International, another NGO, owing partly to the official background of many employees at such firms. "Enforcement has always been a problem within the arms industry," he says. Until that changes, purveyors of snooping software can expect to thrive.

THE ECONOMIST

NEW EDUCATION POLICY

Towards Industry 4.0

ANINDYA MALICK

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Institutions and faculty should have the autonomy to innovate

THE ADVENT OF the fourth industrial revolution places us in the midst of continuous disruption by digital technologies. This revolution is expected to transform economies, jobs, and the society itself through new technologies and processes. With education being the key component in shaping the future workforce, the academic system needs transformation.

The Indian education system will need to focus on creativity and lifelong learning, essential for a career with continuous disruptions. It is envisaged that 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that don't yet exist. Accordingly, it is important to imbibe a culture of knowledge seeking and lifelong learning during the formative years.

The Draft National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 seems to have been primarily developed based on the above premise.

A key highlight of NEP 2019 in the area of school education is the proposed structuring of school education as Foundational (comprising 3 years of pre-school & grades 1-2); Preparatory (comprising grades 3-5); Middle (comprising grades 6-8) and High (comprising grades 9-12 in 2 phases of grades 9& 10 and 11& 12). The structure takes cognisance of a child's developmental journey and ensure s critical characteristics like knowledge seeking, logical thinking, social skills like communication, teamwork, etc are imbibed. This also transitions away from the current culture of rote learning.

The proposed transformation will require changes in pedagogy; teachers will, thus, need capacity development. Teaching and learning approaches are expected to be more interactive through discovery, discussion and analysis-based learning.

Teachers will need to be provided career progression plans, greater autonomy & responsibility. NEP 2019 discusses the courses for teachers' training including shorter duration courses for skill & expertise upgradation.

The initiative to move the higher education system to large multidisciplinary universities, colleges, and higher education institution (HEI) cluster is a key highlight of the NEP 2019, with institutes proposed to be categorised as "research oriented" or "teaching oriented".

Institutions and faculty should have the autonomy to

innovate on matters of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment—informed by a broad overall framework of higher educational qualifications that ensures consistency across institutions and equivalence across programmes, both in Open & Distance Learning (ODL) and the traditional 'in-class' learning.

NEP 2019 proposes multidisciplinary learning which entails integrating humanities and arts streams with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics). Integration of multidisciplinary courses is expected to result in increased creativity and innovation, critical thinking and higher-order thinking capacities, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, communication skills, deeper learning and mastery of curricula across fields, and increases in social and moral awareness.

A motivated faculty having the required experience and expertise is the single most critical factor for providing an efficient and productive Higher Education ecosystem. NEP 2019 proposes measures to be adopted for improving faculty effectiveness and responsiveness through increased & diversified faculty, reduced student-teacher ratios, flexibility and autonomy in curriculum design and pedagogical approaches which are likely to also help keep the faculty motivated and invested.

The National Education Policy, 2019 aims to bring the higher education sector in India on par with the international standards and contemporary practices. It has clearly articulated the intentions in striving forward with a retrospective analysis of the traditions of India. The policy also endeavours inclusivity, and accessibility for all the socio-economic classes of the society with the agenda of 'Development for All' and creating the future workforce for India and the world.

AFTER THE NCP, the Congress party and the Shiv Sena announced their alliance, certain voters moved the Supreme Court to stop the 'unholy alliance' (as termed by them), since it defeats electoral mandates. In recent times, as mandates are getting more and more fractured, post-poll alliances have become inevitable in electoral politics. In the last assembly election in Maharashtra, the BJP formed a post-poll alliance with the Shiv Sena; in Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP allied with the PDP post-elections; and in Haryana, the BJP got Dushyant Chautala into its crew after the results. These have been instances where post-poll alliances have been entered into by parties who initially drew swords against each other. For a long time, it has been debated that the abject immorality of alliances between parties who fought elections against each other must be scrutinised and demotivated. Now the question before the Supreme Court is, whether these alliances are permissible under the constitutional scheme and are they not contrary to democratic ethos? While allowing coalition governments, did the framers of the Constitution anticipated and intended such coalitions?

It is pertinent to note that the Tenth Schedule was incorporated in our Consti-

A coalition of convenience

India must evolve a legal framework to curb unethical post-poll alliances

BHASKAR KUMAR

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tution to prevent unethical defections and horse-trading. Hence, it is need of the hour that the definition of a party under anti-defection and the Constitution must be construed in a broad manner, so that the objective of the Tenth Schedule gets accomplished. To make informed choices, voters should know who they are voting for, and in cases of post-poll alliances this very foundational aspect of democratic politics is compromised. In the *Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachillhu* case, the Supreme Court elaborated the objective behind anti-defection law. It observed that the law seeks to recognise the practical need to place the proprieties of polit-

ical and personal conduct (whose awkward erosion and grotesque manifestations have been the bane of the times) above certain theoretical assumptions, which, in reality, have fallen into a morass of personal and political degradation. The Supreme Court further held that the objective of the Tenth Schedule is to curb the evil of political defections motivated by the lure of office or other similar considerations that endanger the foundations of our democracy. The remedy proposed is to disqualify the Member of either House of Parliament or of the State Legislature, who is found to have defected, from continuing as a Member



NCP CHIEF SHARAD PAWAR, SHIV SENA CHIEF UDDHAV THACKERAY AND MAHARASHTRA CONGRESS PRESIDENT BALASAHEB THORAT

of the House. The Supreme Court emphasised that the provisions are salutary and are intended to strengthen the fabric of Indian parliamentary democracy by curbing unprincipled and unethical political defections.

A political party functions on the strength of shared beliefs. Any freedom of its members to vote as they please independently of the party's declared policies will not only embarrass its public image and popularity, but also undermine public confidence in it, which, in the ultimate analysis, is its source of sustenance—nay, indeed, its very survival. The cases of post-poll alliances have now become equally

unprincipled and unethical, since parties with diametrical ideologies and policy objectives come together, thus undermining public confidence.

To curb the menace, there is a need to expand the ambit of the Tenth Schedule by adding a provision that prevents post-poll alliances between parties who fiercely contested against each other in the first place. The Election Commission must be directed to broadly classify parties on the basis of their ideology, policy objectives, beliefs and ideals, so that their specific commitments are recognisable. Only selective post-poll alliances should be permitted, maybe where parties share a considerable extent

of beliefs, ideologies and policy objectives. Since pre-poll alliances represent themselves as a single unit with a shared agenda agreed upon by both parties, voters have the option to form informed choices. A common feature between a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional democracy is that both acknowledge that the government rests upon the consent of the governed, given by means of elections based on universal and equal suffrage.

To address this concern, parties must be mandatorily directed to announce certain fundamental ideals and values including the broad policy objective that would not be compromised even after elections. And if and only if two parties entering into a post-poll alliance satisfactorily show that their broad values and ideals are not mutually conflicting, should they be allowed to form an alliance. This will ensure that the voter's primacy in a parliamentary democracy remains intact. It must be understood that Indian parliamentary democracy is legislator – constituent-centric model, which means a subordination of the interest of parties over the relationship between a legislator and his constituents. Hence, when interpreting the Tenth Schedule in its entirety, the Court must resort to that interpretation which expands the scope of the schedule in favour of voters.

The IndianEXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Democratic subversion



ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

A fusion of law and exclusivist ideology is in the making.
Brute arithmetic is being used for majoritarian ends

AT GREAT COST

New citizenship law is taking a toll on ties with Dhaka. Beyond Bangladesh, India's reputation is taking a big hit

AS POPULAR OPPOSITION to the new law amending the Indian Citizenship Act intensifies within the country, the external costs are also coming into view. To be sure, the postponement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's annual summit meeting with the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, that was to take place in Guwahati, might only be a temporary setback. It will almost certainly be rescheduled to some other city, or in Guwahati, when the situation returns to normal. But the story on other diplomatic fronts is a lot less reassuring. The biggest negative impact is on India's relations with Bangladesh, which has, in recent years, become one of Delhi's most productive partners. Beyond Bangladesh, India's long-standing reputation as a constitutional democracy is taking a big hit and the loss of goodwill and admiration is not easy to estimate.

The question of illegal immigration has always been a deeply divisive issue between India and Bangladesh. Managing this bitter legacy of Partition and the subsequent movement of people across the long border has been an enduring foreign policy challenge for Delhi. In recent years, Delhi and Dhaka were learning to limit the salience of the issue by deepening their partnership and resolving long-standing issues like the boundary dispute and cross-border terrorism. But in framing religious persecution of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh as one of the motivations for the amendment and repeatedly affirming that Muslim migrants from Bangladesh will be "thrown out", as Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said, Delhi was inviting trouble from Dhaka. Although it deeply resented Shah's statements that put the Sheikh Hasina government in a spot at home, Dhaka has been willing to believe private assurances from Delhi that the issue of the amendment to the citizenship law and the National Register of Citizens were purely domestic issues with no bearing on bilateral relations. Until now, Dhaka's forbearance has finally snapped. That it chose to cancel the visits of two of its ministers to India suggests that Dhaka can no longer keep quiet and will be under increasing pressure to stand up to Delhi.

If the citizenship amendment law and the NRC have pushed India's best partnership in the neighbourhood onto a slippery slope, they have also begun to create problems for India's most important international partnership with the United States. The State Department's reaction, urging Delhi to respect religious freedom and stay with India's constitutional values, was articulated in a polite manner. But US and Western criticism could get a lot tougher as Shah rolls out his plans for an NRC across the nation. The idea of India as a thriving democracy, and its strong commitment to civic nationalism as well as religious pluralism, have been important pillars on which India's strategic partnerships with the US and the West have been built in the last two decades. The government may be seriously underestimating the weight of India's shared political values with the West and the many real and intangible benefits it brings. The costs of that miscalculation could be quite serious and could be evident a lot sooner than Delhi thinks.

A BAND-AID

Raising prices of essential drugs will help ease shortage. Urgency of investing more in R&D remains

LAST WEEK, INDIA'S drug regulator, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), used the public interest provision of the Drugs Prices Control Order 2013 to allow manufacturers to increase prices of 21 essential drugs by as much as 50 per cent. Most of these drugs are used to treat critical diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and leprosy and are crucial to the country's public health programme. The increase in their prices is, therefore, bound to raise concerns. But the decision of the regulatory authority — usually known to slash prices of life-saving drugs — was precipitated by an extraordinary situation. For nearly two years, drug manufacturers have been claiming inability to keep up with the country's healthcare demands due to increasing costs of production. Easing the price ceiling could help the healthcare system tide over the current crisis. It may, as the NPPA has reasoned, "pre-empt a situation where the public is forced to switch to costlier alternatives". But the drug regulator and the Department of Pharmaceuticals need to do much more to address the root cause for the shortage of critical drugs.

India's pharma industry imports more than 60 per cent of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) or bulk drugs — ingredients that give medicine its therapeutic value — from China. But in 2017, Chinese regulators cracked down on bulk drug manufacturing units for their failure to comply with the country's environmental regulations. The revamped Chinese API industry has raised prices, leading to spin-off effects in India. For instance, the cost of making Vitamin C pills has gone up by more than 250 per cent since 2017. This has reportedly led to a 25-30 per cent shortage of this drug in India. Last month, the pharma major, Abbot, applied to the NPPA to discontinue production of the leprosy drug, Hansepran. The company pointed out that increasing costs of API imports had made the production of Hansepran unviable in India.

The importance of making medicines more accessible to those who need them cannot be overstated. However, drug price control measures in India have not always achieved this objective. The ceiling on prices of 74 bulk drugs in 1995, for example, forced many companies to opt out of API production. The Draft Pharmaceutical Policy 2017 did propose correctives. These included giving preference to drugs produced from indigenously produced APIs in government procurement and taking them out of price control for five years. More importantly, the draft talked about creating research and development facilities for API production. However, the policy has not gone beyond the draft stage. It needs to be revisited in light of the country's current medicine shortage.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



RIGHT SINCE 1945, up until recently, few democratic polities moved from inclusion to exclusion in their citizenship practices and laws. The big exceptions were mostly authoritarian, the Chinese treatment of Uighurs being the most recent. Some democratic polities might have remained as exclusionary as before, but, by and large, when change came about, democratic polities edged towards larger inclusion. And when new exclusions were proposed, as in Trump's America or in the Le Pen version of France, political battles have been launched by the forces opposed to such curtailments.

By its bi-focal citizenship move — one, excluding Muslim immigrants as citizens while accepting all other communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh on grounds of persecution, and two, promising to introduce a national register of citizens, which will render stateless all those Muslims who don't have the documents to prove their Indian ancestry, even if they were born in India and have lived in the country for decades — Delhi is taking two of the darkest steps in the history of democratic citizenship since the European excesses of the 1940s.

The implications are so profound that one should pause to take a larger comparative and historical look. India's strengths and weaknesses are often better understood that way.

Citizenship is basically a legal code for the kind of political community a society is, or would like to be. It says who can be a member of the community — and with what bundle of rights. Since the American and French Revolutions of the late 18th century and the German Unification of 1871, the idea of citizenship has witnessed two models: Birth in a territory (jus solis) and blood-based inheritance (jus sanguinis). Ignoring ethnicity, race or religion, the former is often, if not always, built around the ideals of a society. The latter hooks citizenship to ethnicity or race, sometimes also to religion, especially in societies where religion is not viewed as a matter of choice, but as a blood line, functioning almost like race or ethnicity. India is moving from the former model to the latter.

The voluminous literature on citizenship — and its cousin, nationhood — identifies the US and France as exemplars of the territorial model, and Germany and Japan as the epitome of blood-based citizenship. The consensus is that a community based on ideals is

The recent exclusionary steps can only bring India's international image down. India under Nehru was lauded worldwide for its constitutionally enshrined inclusive citizenship. If America's constitutive ideals were freedom and equality, India's founding values were equality, including religious equality, diversity and tolerance. Later, riots would often hurt religious minorities more, sometimes damningly so, but in the eyes of the law, there was no distinction between a Hindu or a Muslim. Even if politics deviated from the basic constitutional principles, the law did not follow suit.

more inclusive — and harder to build — than one based on bloodlines.

Of course, even inclusive polities have their infirmities. The US is the best known. Formally embracing the ideals of freedom and equality in 1789, it kept Black slaves, who were neither free nor equal, and after the 1880s, it excluded Asians from its immigrant pool. It took the US until the 1860s to end slavery — and till the 1960s to de-link citizenship from ethnicity. Similarly, in France, questions about the loyalty of Jews existed right until the 1910s, and controversy has also marked the status of Muslims after the 1970s. But exclusions are challenged in such polities.

The blood-based models work differently. At the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian-speaking ethnic Germans, Soviet citizens until then, simply became citizens of Germany, once they demonstrated German ancestry. Non-ethnic members do exist in such polities, but they receive lesser citizenship, or an inferior bundle of rights. For some time, millions of Turks in Germany were "guest workers", and naturalisation of even Germany-born Turks was notoriously hard. But after becoming a member of the European Union, Germany also eventually moved in a more inclusive direction. Japan remains a great exception.

Where did independent India fit in? It was undoubtedly closer to the territorial model. In contrast, Pakistan was conceptualised as a Muslim homeland, where non-Muslims could be citizens, but would have fewer rights. India was never envisioned by Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar as a Hindu homeland. Furthermore, Indians in South and East Africa, or Southeast Asia, were not allowed to acquire automatic Indian citizenship. They were citizens of their adopted lands. In those foundational days, even Muslims returning from Pakistan could reclaim Indian citizenship.

The recent exclusionary steps can only bring India's international image down. India under Nehru was lauded worldwide for its constitutionally enshrined inclusive citizenship. If America's constitutive ideals were freedom and equality, India's founding values were equality, including religious equality, diversity and tolerance. Later, riots would often hurt religious minorities more, sometimes damningly so, but in the eyes of the law, there was no distinction between a Hindu or a Muslim. Even if politics deviated from the ba-

sic constitutional principles, the law did not follow suit.

Now, a fusion of law and an exclusivist political ideology is in the making. The government's claim that a modern polity must inevitably draw a distinction between sharanarthi (refugees) and ghushpaithiye (infiltrators) is mendacious. For, it is patently clear that if the existing Muslim citizens of India are unable to produce documents of Indian ancestry, the national register later, using citizenship amendments, can easily call them "infiltrators", making them an object of internment or expulsion. In contrast, if the Hindus have a similar documentary deficit, they would neither be interned nor expelled. They can claim they are welcome only in a Hindu homeland, not elsewhere in South Asia, and thus acquire Indian citizenship. Assam is already burning, partly for this reason.

The government's second claim that the citizenship amendment is not anti-Muslim — for it will give refugee status not only to Hindus, but also to Christians and Parsis — is also political sophistry. Why should the refugee status, and therefore the possibility of citizenship, be reserved only for those persecuted in three Muslim-majority neighbours, not in the Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka or Myanmar? Both are India's neighbours and have a record of persecuting minorities. And what about the Ahmediyas, whom the Pakistani state, since the mid 1970s, has declared non-Muslim and oppressed? Is Delhi's heart really bleeding for the persecuted minorities?

After Kashmir, Delhi has yet again used brute parliamentary arithmetic for majoritarian ends. Democracy now urgently requires the judiciary and the streets. The Supreme Court may, or may not, act in a resolute manner — hence, protests are also necessary. Non-BJP state governments can exercise the option of non-cooperation, too. Most of the machinery for implementation of laws is, after all, with state governments. The threat of electorally and legally enabled exclusionary horrors is knocking at the door.

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REALISTATION, NOT REFORM

There is no restriction on women offering prayers in mosques in Islam



ZEHRA NAQVI

THE SUPREME COURT has referred the Sabarimala case to a larger constitutional bench and also brought under its ambit issues of gender equality from other religions, including the issue of women being "allowed" to enter mosques.

That the right of women to enter mosques should be a matter for the courts to decide upon is ironic, given that there are no Islamic restrictions on women's entry to mosques. The biggest living proof of this is the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca within which stands the Kaaba, the holiest site of prayer for Muslims. Thousands of women pray within the halls of the mosque five times every day — similar to Masjid an-Nabawi in Medina, the second holiest mosque, the premises of which also hold the tomb of Prophet Mohammad.

In countries that have a majority Muslim population, almost every mosque has dedicated sections for women *namazis*. As a practicing Muslim woman, I have had the opportunity to offer *namaz* in numerous mosques in Malaysia, Jordan, Iran and Iraq. In the latter two countries, the grand domed structures constructed around the tombs of the Imams revered by Shia Muslims also serve as mosques from where the call for prayer is made and the faithful congregate to offer *namaz*. Women are present in multitudes every bit as much as the men.

In India as well, we can find numerous in-

IN GOOD FAITH

Questions have also been raised about women having a separate designated area to offer *namaz*, which is presented as a discriminatory act. In fact, every fraction of space within the mosque holds equal value in terms of worship.

stances of women offering prayers in mosques. Perhaps far less so than the aforementioned countries, but the reasons for this are decidedly cultural rather than religious. It also has to do with lack of awareness among women about the fact that they can indeed pray in mosques if they wish to.

Writer and historian Rana Safvi has publicly spoken about and posted on social media her accounts of praying in mosques across the country, from Kashmir to Kolata, Sonapat to Shimla, Bijapur to Barielly. Safvi recounts an experience from a small village in Zafrabad near Jaunpur, at a 13th century Jama Masjid, where she asked the Imam for permission to pray (given that there was no separate area for ladies). The Imam exclaimed that this was the "house of Allah" and where else would she pray if not here?

Asiya Ahmed Khan, a naturalist from Hyderabad, has had similar experiences of praying in congregations at mosques in Hyderabad, including on Fridays, of praying at the Delhi Jama Masjid, the mosque at Connaught Place, at the Bada Imambada in Lucknow, mosques in Mysore and so on. In fact her list includes mosques in Singapore, Thailand, Turkey and even Russia. Sheba Naqvi, a serving magistrate in the UP government — who also happens to be my mother — has prayed in mosques not just in Delhi and Noida, but also in small towns such as Agra,

Nainital, Muzaffarnagar, Bulandshahr and Aligarh.

Questions have also been raised about women having a separate designated area to offer *namaz*, which is presented as a discriminatory act. In fact, every fraction of space within the mosque holds equal value in terms of worship — there is no sanctum sanctorum. The pulpit from where the muezzin gives the call for prayer is merely a designated spot for giving the *azaan*, built so that the voice may carry farther. The tenets of Islam stress that the divine presence envelops and encompasses the worshiper, without any particular physical space being the focus of worship.

Perhaps far more than a judgment from the Supreme Court, what is required is the spread of awareness in the remotest corners of the country, should such mosques exist that bar the entry of women.

In fact, to call it "reform" or "transformation" would not be suitable either, for such a practice finds no space among the tenets of Islam. A more apt word would be "realisation" and "course correction". And it is important to note that course corrections cannot be foisted from above, but are manifested when the realisation emanates from deep within, through heightened knowledge and conciseness.

The writer is a freelance journalist

DECEMBER 9, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



INDO-BANGLA TALKS
BANGLADESH IS QUESTIONING the broad framework of the boundary agreement the two countries signed in 1974. The divergent positions the two countries have adopted on the agreement hampered to a great extent the progress of the current Indo-Bangladesh talks. The dispute over 44 acres of land in Muhuri Char area near Belonia on the Tripura-Bangladesh border, it appears, is not posing much of a problem. The delegations from the two countries are likely to come out with a statement providing for an interim arrangement for the disputed stretch of land.

SHAH IN PANAMA
THE DEPOSED SHAH of Iran arrived at Howard Air Force base in Panama from Texas, US, and left shortly before noon by helicopter for an undisclosed destination, a US southern command spokesman said. "He is a guest of the Panamanian government, and we will have nothing more to say on the matter until the Panamanians make an announcement", the spokesman said. A Panamanian government spokesman, Pedro Ureta Jr, said the government had known of the deposed monarch's arrival for two days and that he was likely to stay in a hotel. Teheran has been demanding the extradition of Shah.

1980 OIL IMPORTS
THE UNION PETROLEUM ministry hopes to finalise the arrangements for import of crude and petroleum products during 1980 by the end of next week. An official delegation headed by the petroleum secretary, B B Vohra, is leaving for the Soviet Union. The same delegation will visit Iran and Iraq to complete the oil import deals for the coming year. Official sources say a major portion of the country's crude import requirements during 1980 have already been more or less "tied up". Of the 18 million tonnes of crude import needed, suppliers have agreed to send as much as 14 million tonnes.



An unneighbourly act

CAB and NRC threaten to undo the important strides that Bangladesh and India have together taken in the recent past



ASHIKUR RAHMAN

IT IS UNCLEAR why any nation — where its political leadership has the right mindset — will risk jeopardising an international bilateral partnership that is rooted in both historic sanctity and strategic value. Yet, the actions and the political philosophy of the ruling NDA government in India — manifested in the recently passed Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) — are increasingly threatening the country's friendship with Bangladesh that emerged out of troubled waters.

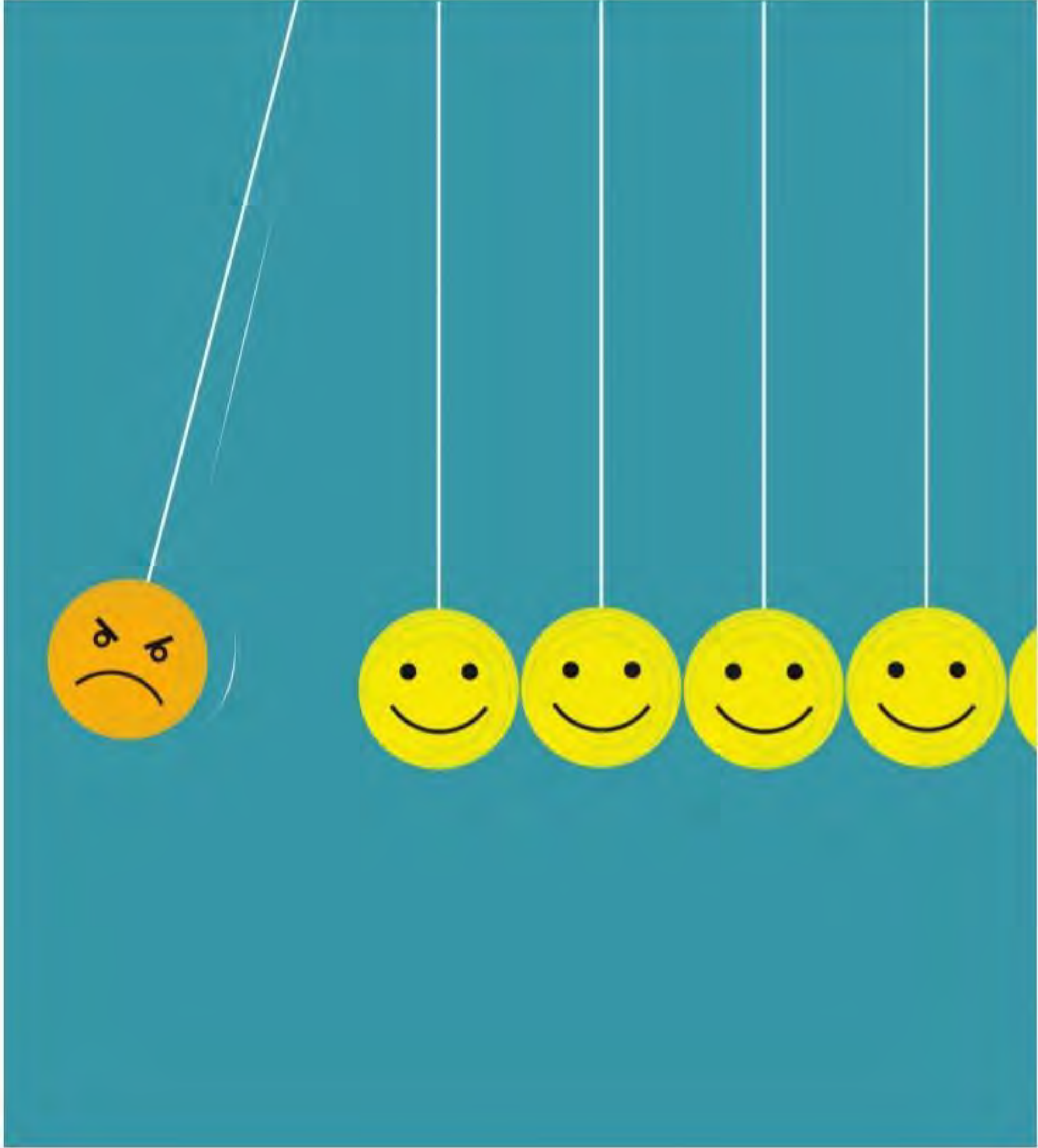
Bangladesh and India's nearly five-decade old bilateral relationship has been anything but steady. The few early years of positive engagement after 1971, when Bangladesh was being salvaged from its war-torn state under the stewardship of its founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, saw a dramatic reversal with the assassination of Mujib in 1975.

In fact, the resurrection of military leaders and anti-Indian political and Islamic forces within the politics of Bangladesh after 1975 meant that India and Bangladesh could not form an alliance rooted in trust. And this precarious relationship reached rock bottom when the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami's coalition government sponsored insurgency activities against the north-eastern states of India between 2001 and 2006 by allowing separatist leaders to use Bangladesh's sovereign territories for their terrorist operations.

It is only under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership — after the electoral victory of the Awami League-led alliance in 2008 — that Bangladesh made a complete U-turn in its approach to India. Further, there is little debate today that the Bangladesh-India partnership has greatly benefited from Hasina's patronage of goodwill-generating initiatives. Bangladesh has also shown an unfettered commitment to India's national security by showing zero-tolerance for all forms of terrorism.

However, recent political developments within India could threaten the friendship that Bangladesh has nurtured, maintained and remains committed to. More specifically, the Government of India's decision to go ahead with the passing of the CAB will now aid the political implementation of the NRC as it gives special status to Hindus and people belonging to other religions but not to Muslims. And while the passage of the CAB was immediately followed by the cancellation of official visits by Bangladesh's home minister and foreign minister, both sides still officially maintain that the NRC is India's internal issue. This is so even though the political rhetoric in India is advocating the expulsion of "Muslim infiltrators" from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, which contradicts Delhi's official position with Bangladesh.

This is precisely why many in Bangladesh believe that the NRC is blatantly disrespectful and risks undermining the only successful example of the "neighbourhood first policy" that the NDA government coined when they were elected to office in 2014. There are two available strategies the NDA government might opt to pursue in how to deal with the million-plus Muslims in Assam who are now considered infiltrators. These people can either be kept in secured camps or the Indian government can start pushing them back into Bangladesh. And while the first strategy



CR Sasikumar

might create an international uproar, the second is likely to completely destabilise the relationship that underpins cooperation between the two neighbours.

But this is not the only front to which the implications of the NRC will be restricted. The CAB and the NRC are instruments that try to facilitate the reconfiguration of India's social fabric into two broad identities — Hindus and the rest — which serves only the narrow interests of the ruling coalition in Delhi, especially because it relies on religious identity-based jingoism as a political tool. Hence, the CAB and the NRC will deepen the communal divide that remains ever-present within the social fabric of South Asia.

It is also essential to underscore that in no civilised country can religion be the basis of citizenship, specifically if the founding principles of such nation states championed secular ideals and equality before the law. In that respect, the political and legal argument of the NDA government that categorises India as the natural homeland for Hindus but not for Muslims is not only an ideological regression, but it champions a philosophy that is inherently anti-Indian. And as this process plays out, it will open the window for new sources of destabilisation in both Bangladesh and India.

After all, if India's right-wing Hindu forces find it justifiable to propagate a second-class citizenship for Indian Muslims and send controversially created "infiltrators" to Bangladesh, then what will stop Jamaat-e-Islami and other right-wing Islamic forces in

The CAB and the NRC are instruments that try to facilitate the reconfiguration of India's social fabric into two broad identities — Hindus and the rest — which serves only the narrow interests of the ruling coalition in Delhi, especially because it relies on religious identity-based jingoism to as a political tool. Hence, the CAB and the NRC will deepen the communal divide that remains ever-present within the social fabric of South Asia.

Bangladesh from proposing similar standards for more than 10 million Bangladeshi Hindus? And how will secular and liberal forces in Bangladesh navigate this communal tension, with its root cause in the systematic persecution of minorities in India? Most importantly, how will any well-intentioned government in Bangladesh build a lasting partnership with India if the population at large becomes deeply distrusting and sceptical of such a partnership?

There is little doubt that one cannot ensure geopolitical stability, security and social harmony by legitimising a political strategy that aims to turn a democracy into a communal, majoritarian political order, particularly when the Subcontinent has navigated a deeply divisive past, culminating in a profound distrust for one's neighbour.

Bilateral ties that overcame such strong historic impediments deserve respect, as they were created with hard work, meticulous political strategies, good intent and visionary leadership. Any political strategy that undermines such accomplishments merits reconsideration. Ties with Bangladesh, in particular, need careful consideration. Any crossing of the Rubicon while executing the NRC will undo the important strides that Bangladesh and India have together taken in the recent past. India, in this context, must prove that it is a respectful bilateral partner.

The writer is a senior economist at the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, Dhaka

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Does the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), one wonders, herald the end of a pluralistic and secular India, and the fulfilment of the dream of the RSS and its founders like Savarkar?"

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Shifting corridors of power

What image should Rajpath reflect? What should be the shape of a new Parliament House? Major architectural changes demand transparency



GAUTAM BHATIA

IN 1913, EDWIN Lutyens stood on the crest of Raisina Hill, and in the yellow summer light gazed eastwards, across low scrub and kikar trees, down the long plain that would become the setting for his last major work. He stood long enough to envision the grand scheme that he would undertake over the next few decades, a scheme that would become — for the future inhabitants of his great enterprise — the most sacred ground of the Indian capital.

Almost a century on, a new plan has been unveiled to modify Lutyens's grand design of this sandstone acropolis — the axial assembly of North and South Block, the crowning Viceroy's House, the flanking circular Parliament building, the long ceremonial lawn and roadway that ends at India Gate. With radical changes planned, the obvious question is whether they should be altered from their original intent to suit the demands of the 21st century; whether, in fact, Lutyens's time bears any resemblance to Narendra Modi's India.

In reality, very little.

To begin with, the Viceroy's House was designed as a monumental English country house, by an architect specialising in English country houses. Its extensive wings accommodate bedroom suites, interior courts, a grand ballroom, library, state dining halls, a cinema theatre, and quarters for a staff of stewards, valets, housekeepers, barber, tailor, and painter. Not to mention an extensive base floor for the storage of linen, china, glass, carpets and furniture. The architecture reflects the overwhelming formalism of an English country estate and the heightened domesticity of a Mughal palace. Only a minuscule of its formidable space and services are now used by the President. Should then the remaining building be converted into a museum of imperialism?

Flanking its entrance, South and North Block were made as symbolic reminders of the support of the civil service. Structures of no great importance, their architect Baker called them "buildings of dignity that avoided the dreadful Hindoo stuff". Today, the vast stone offices have the air of an abandoned ruin. Built at a time when space was cheap and cooling was done with high ventilators, the structures are barely adequate for an overgrown bureaucracy, and serve more as a convenient home to local pigeons and monkeys. The proposed design scheme suggests their new use as museums of the Indian republic — a convenient play that relegates any and all historic structures to galleries or heritage hotels.

Issues about building inadequacies have been raised by the government primarily because of Parliament House. Yet in the ensemble, this is the only building that continues to serve its function admirably. Other than the niggling demands for security, me-

dia, and greater levels of communication, the chambers of both Houses are well equipped and easily accessible, with a wide reach of spillover space for informal discussions and meetings. Verandahs, courtyards, and wide galleries are all in keeping with the view that political decisions happen in "the corridors of power". What then is all the fuss about? Citing lack of space as the main reason, the old building will become another museum, this time to democracy. And an altogether new structure will be constructed alongside to accommodate the rising number of MPs.

The primary change is in the ceremonial space of Rajpath itself. Designed with long reflecting pools and a spread of flanking trees, the linear space was meant to be a symbolic appropriation of public space for no reason other than the expression of power. It furthered the cause of monumentalism, and made the pink architecture on Raisina Hill grander, more authoritarian. Lutyens never imagined that a century later the place would become a messy daily bazaar, filled with vendors, ice-cream carts, informal boating — a fair ground for all purposes, his beloved India Gate, a noisy playground.

Yet, in the overall structure of public space, Rajpath still remains an arena of great urban significance, equal to the Mall in Washington, DC and the Champs Elyses in Paris. In the 100-year history of the site, since its original conception, there have been many additions, as would be expected of any important public arena in the capital of a newly-independent country. Most of the other ministry structures built along the adjacent flanks date back to the 1950s and 1960s. Without exception, each is a poor cousin of its antecedent on Raisina Hill, each a step away from the grand tradition of design, quality and construction workmanship set up by Lutyens.

What image should then Rajpath reflect? What should be the new shape of the Parliament House? The answers will emerge soon enough, now that the work has of design has been awarded. In other parts of the world, any major architectural change is carefully considered, opened for discussion, and formulated after a consensus. In France, every civic intervention is selected after an open design competition, as is so in most democracies. Sadly, in a place where transparency is only a vague concept, critical national decisions are still made behind closed doors.

Does architecture — and Lutyens — deserve a place in Indian history? Why should we care about architects who strayed from "the dreadful Hindoo stuff", but still erected a magnificent sandstone stage set? Perhaps for the same reason that we continue to revere and protect the Purana Qila, the Konarak Sun Temple and the Gateway of India. It is unlikely that such structures can ever be conceived again, let alone, built.

But another school of thought is emerging — one that treats these old buildings like history books, rewritten with fresh untested knowledge. Sometimes it is easier to rewrite or rebuild history, than save it, or learn from it.

Bhatia is a Delhi-based architect and writer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FARMERS' AID

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'How e-NAM has become an 'inam' for farmers' (IE, December 12). The writer has identified many benefits of e-NAM which can help the government achieve the target of doubling farmers' income by 2022, but many farmers are still unaware or not confident about this platform. The Union government needs to propagate the portal like corporates and should take the support of state governments.

Ravdeep Singh Hundal, Ferozepur

GET INTO THE ACT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'An encounter with injustice' (IE, December 13). People applauding encounters by police is a symptom of justice being delayed. It seems that the public wants results and is not interested in procedures. Its high time there are reforms in judicial process.

Nishant Arun, Bikaner

FRAUGHT MOVE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A constitutional obligation' (IE, December 13). The purpose of NRC was to expel the illegal migrants from the country as its resources are limited. The CAB in contrast bestows citizenship to migrants from six religious communities from the specific countries. How is it beneficial for a country like India which is already suffering from mass poverty and unemployment? Moreover, the move is particularly

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.

fraught in a country where religion-based discrimination is on the rise.

Hala Quamar, New Delhi

HURTING FARMERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'In the farmer's name' (IE, December 13). MSPs have been detrimental to crop diversity. Thanks to it we have only three major food crops — rice, wheat and sugarcane. No doubt India is the diabetic capital of world. Oats and cornflakes have replaced poha, suji, jawar and bajra from the Indian market. The loss of crop diversity has been accompanied by deteriorating water table, bad cropping practices and skewed markets. Private investments in agriculture have fallen.

Kanishka Vishal, Bettiah

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

INDIA DISAPPOINTS

USUALLY, AT LEAST in recent times, the English-language press in Bangladesh has avoided being overtly critical of India. Even as the NRC process unfolded in Assam, both *The Daily Star* and *Dhaka Tribune* had, while expressing reservations, continued to state that it is a matter internal to India, and would likely not affect ties between India and Bangladesh. With the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), there is a decisive change in that tone.

The December 12 editorial in *The Daily Star* opens with a question, which is also a powerful rebuke to the Narendra Modi government: "Coming on the heels of the controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) policy in Assam, does the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), one wonders, herald the end of a pluralistic and secular India, and the fulfilment of the dream of the RSS and its founders like Savarkar?"

The editorial argues that the CAB strikes at the foundation of the Indian republic. And that it will "validate" communal politics, something which the BJP "has no pretensions" about championing. It even addresses the point that as an elected government, the Modi-led dispensation is merely fulfilling its

mandate: "Elected leaders do have the right to implement policies which in their wisdom they see as beneficial to the country and its people. But the popular mandate does not allow for the kind of politics where brute majority in parliament is exploited for partisan politics that strikes at the basic ethos of a nation... What we see as even more worrisome is that the CAB directly encourages migration of Hindus from Bangladesh."

"India's soul," says the editorial, "is being jaundiced". And more's the pity, because there was a time when the largest country in South Asia served as an example. "Because, India was cited, not only by Bangladesh but also the world, as an example of a pluralistic, inclusive nation with a syncretic culture and eclectic society. What we see now is the retrogression of a nation which once exemplified 'unity in diversity' to an exclusively Hindu state where only one religion will prevail."

The editorial in *Dawn* on December 11, understandably, grandstands rather eloquently on the end of secularism in India: "Under Narendra Modi's watch, there is little doubt that the country is being transformed into a Hindu rashtra, where minority communities are relegated to the margins of society, if accepted at all."

Dawn calls for international condemnation of the CAB as a conclusion to its editorial: "It seems the RSS ideologues that are running India, who are huge fans of Israel and whose ideological forefathers were smitten by Europe's 20th-century fascists, are now employing the 'best practices' of both influences to do away with India's Muslims. These condemnable actions should be noted by countries around the world. There have always been forces in India struggling to remove the veneer of secularism that previous dispensations there sought to promote. With the BJP's rise to power, it seems that the communal beast has been set free."

A BASIC MISTAKE

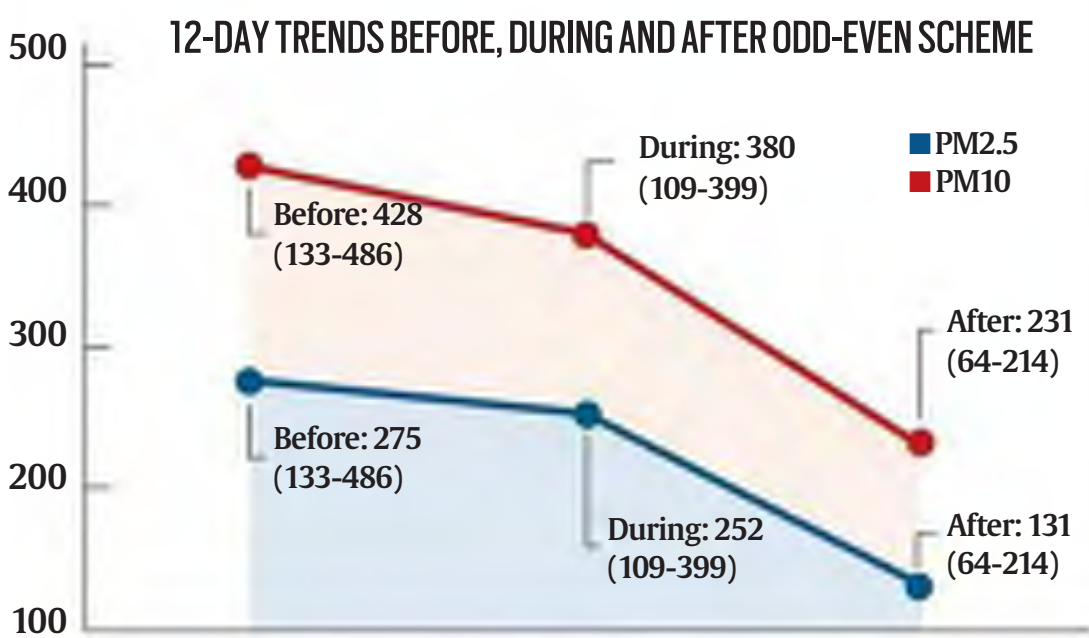
AN ARTICLE BY Saleem Ahmed in *Dhaka Tribune* on December 11 takes issue with Rajnath Singh and other members of the Indian government and ruling party characterising Bangladesh (along with Pakistan and Afghanistan) as "theocratic Islamic states" where minorities "are facing harassment" and "the state religion is Islam". The article responds to what it sees as calumny by the defence minister of India. "The top official of the Indian government must have understood that the state constitution is still

secular. Since 2009, Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League and her government strictly believes in a secular polity. Therefore, it should have been difficult for Rajnath Singh to misread Sheikh Hasina's government's pluralist polity. We are not denying that the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Adivasis (indigenous people), and also Ahmadiyya Muslims are sporadically attacked by religious zealots, who often slam the minorities for blasphemy. The AL government promptly took action against the perpetrators."

The article makes clear that the NRC, along with the CAB and the rhetoric being employed by the government and ruling party in India will have an adverse effect on bilateral relations: "Bangladesh's government was assured time and again that the controversial NRC, specially made for identification of illegal Muslims from Bangladesh residing in Assam state, would not jeopardise bilateral relations between the two neighbouring countries. The race to table and pass the Non-Muslim Citizenship Bill or Citizenship Amendment Bill by the Indian parliament, allegedly to make a demographic shift, seems to migration experts to be an issue for Bangladesh to be embarrassed about."

TELLING NUMBERS

Drop in Delhi particulate matter in days following odd-even



Odd-even period: November 4 -15, 2019
Figures in micrograms/cubic metre
Figures in brackets signify maximum and minimum concentrations during the period
Source: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

FOR 12 days between November 4 and November 15, the Delhi government rolled out an odd-even scheme, based on licence plate numbers, to restrict the number of vehicles on the roads and reduce pollution. Figures tabled by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change recently, in response to a question in Parliament, showed 12-day trends for air pollution before, during and after the scheme.

The average concentration of PM2.5 fell from 275 micrograms per cubic metre before the scheme (October 23-November 3) to 131 micrograms/cu.m. In the 12 days immediately following the scheme (November 16-27). During the scheme the average concentration was 252 micrograms/cu.m. The range of PM2.5 varied between a low of 133 and a high of 486 before the scheme, between 109 and 399 during the scheme, and

between 64 and 214 after the scheme. For PM10, the average concentration fell from 428 micrograms/cu.m. (maximum 289, minimum 592) before the scheme to 380 micrograms/cu.m. (220-582) during October 23-November 27, and then 231 micrograms/cu.m. (127-3622) after the scheme.

The average concentration of sulphur dioxide remained the same before and during the scheme, at 14 micrograms/cu.m, and fell slightly to 13 after the scheme. Nitrogen dioxide concentration dropped from 58 micrograms/cu.m. to 57 to 55.

The Ministry said that according to recent studies, the main contributors to PM2.5 and PM10 for Delhi are transport, industries, agriculture burning, residential and dust (soil, road and construction) along with meteorological conditions such as wind speed, temperature etc.

THIS WORD MEANS

THE CROWN ACT

In US states, law against discrimination over hair colour

IN JULY this year, California became the first state in the US to make discrimination over natural hair illegal. New York followed suit and now New Jersey has become the latest US state to pass such a legislation, called Creating a Respectful and Open Workplace for Women (CROWN) Act.

CROWN aims to protect people of colour from being discriminated against for their natural hair, especially at the workplace. The legislation takes into account discrimination because of traits that are historically associated with a particular race, "based on hair texture and style". It also takes into account the historical norms and societal norms that equated "blackness" and its associated physical traits such as dark skin, kinky

and curly hair "to a badge of inferiority, sometimes subject to separate and unequal treatment", the California version of the law states. One of the reasons for such legislation is to separate "professionalism" from features and mannerisms, thereby getting rid of workplace grooming or dress code policies that would deter black people from applying.

A study conducted recently by Unilever-owned brand Dove concluded that black women were 80% more likely to change their natural hair in order to meet social norms or expectations at work. It also said that black women are 50% more likely to be sent home or to know of another black woman who has been sent home from the workplace because of her hair.

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 15

AHEAD OF next July's Tokyo Olympics, Japan is gearing up to put on its roads thousands of vehicles based on a hydrogen cell technology, also known as 'fuel cells'. Japan's lead in the practical application of the hydrogen fuel cycle, and the ongoing research in this field at the International Research Center for Hydrogen Energy at Kyushu University, are being studied closely by the Indian government as it readies a hydrogen-fuelled blueprint. This comes in the backdrop of the Supreme Court directing the government on November 13 to look into the feasibility of introducing such technology to deal with air pollution in the National Capital Region.

How does the hydrogen fuel cell work?

At the heart of the fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEV) is a device that uses a source of fuel, such as hydrogen, and an oxidant to create electricity by an electrochemical process. Put simply, the fuel cell combines hydrogen and oxygen to generate an electric current, water being the only byproduct. Like conventional batteries under the bonnets of automobiles, hydrogen fuel cells too convert chemical energy into electrical energy. From a long-term viability perspective, FCEVs are billed as vehicles of the future, given that hydrogen is the most abundant resource in the universe.

So is an FCEV a conventional vehicle or an electric vehicle (EV)?

While the fuel cells generate electricity through an electrochemical process, unlike a battery-electricity vehicle, it does not store energy and, instead, relies on a constant supply of fuel and oxygen — in the same way that an internal combustion engine relies on a constant supply of petrol or diesel, and oxygen. In that sense, it may be seen as being similar to a conventional internal combustion engine.

But unlike the combustion engine cars, there are no moving parts in the fuel cell, so they are more efficient and reliable by comparison. Also, there is no combustion on-board, in the conventional sense.

Globally, EVs are bracketed under three broad categories:

■ BEVs such as the Nissan Leaf or Tesla Model S, which have no internal combustion engine or fuel tank, and run on a fully electric drivetrain powered by rechargeable batteries.

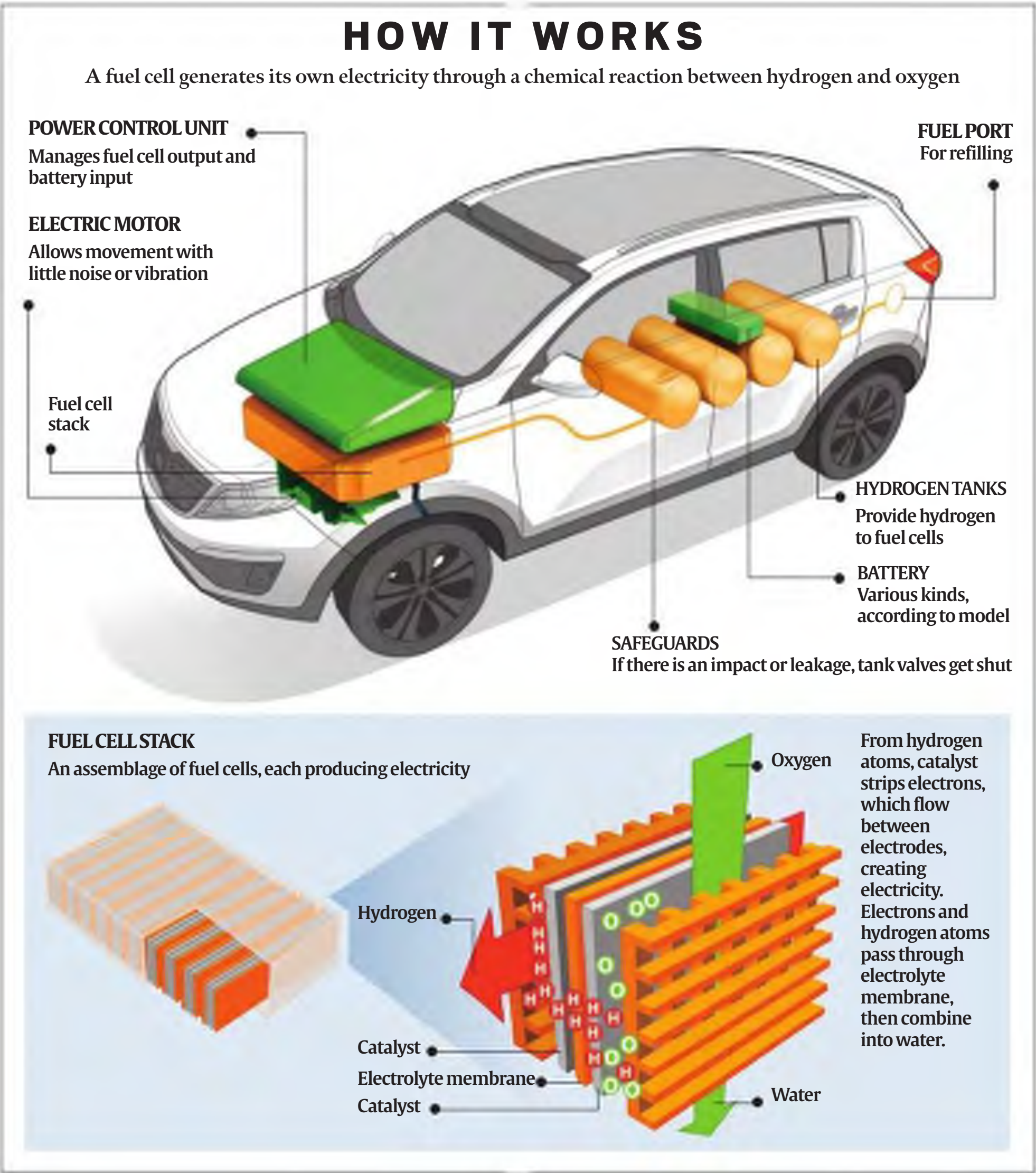
■ Conventional hybrid electric vehicles or HEVs such as the Toyota Camry sold in the country combine a conventional internal combustion engine system with an electric propulsion system, resulting in a hybrid vehicle drivetrain that substantially reduces fuel use. The onboard battery in a conventional hybrid is charged when the IC engine is powering the drivetrain.

■ Plug-in hybrid vehicles or PHEVs, such as the Chevrolet Volt, too have a hybrid drivetrain that uses both an internal combustion engine and electric power for motive power, backed by rechargeable batteries that can be plugged into a power source.

■ FCEVs are widely considered to be the next frontier in EV technology. FCEVs such as Toyota's Mirai and Honda's Clarity use hydrogen to power an onboard electric motor. Since they are powered entirely by electricity, FCEVs are considered EVs — but unlike BEVs, their range and refuelling processes are comparable to conventional cars and trucks.

To what uses can the technology be put?

The hydrogen fuel cell vehicle market is dominated by Japan's Toyota and Honda, alongside South Korea's Hyundai. While the successful development of hydrogen would provide energy for transportation and electric power, an advantage is the wide avail-



ability of resources for producing hydrogen.

Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) published a 'Strategic Roadmap for Hydrogen and Fuel Cells' in 2014, with a revised update in March 2016, with a goal to achieve a hydrogen society. Stationary fuel cells — the largest, most powerful fuel cells — are being designed to provide a cleaner, reliable source of on-site power to hospitals, banks, airports and homes. A fuel cell continues to produce energy as long as fuel and oxidant are supplied. Portable fuel cells could find other applications beyond vehicles.

Roger Hertenberg, CEO of Uno-X Hydrogen, which develops hydrogen stations in Norway, the world leader in green vehicle technology, told *The Indian Express*: "Fuel cell electric vehicles are the most user-friendly zero-emission solution in Norway. Our goal is to provide the necessary infrastructure, securing our customers several zero emission-alternatives to choose from, and to meet the demand for H2 fuel in a convenient way at the lowest possible cost for the consumer."

What are the advantages and disadvantages of fuel cells?

Fuel cells have strong advantages over conventional combustion-based technologies currently used in many power plants and cars, given that they produce much smaller quantities of greenhouse gases and

none of the air pollutants that cause health problems. Also, if pure hydrogen is used, fuel cells emit only heat and water as a byproduct. Such cells are also far more energy efficient than traditional combustion technologies.

Unlike battery-powered electric vehicles, fuel cell vehicles do not need to be plugged in, and most models exceed 300 km of range on a full tank. They are filled up with a nozzle, just like in a petrol or diesel station.

But there are problems. While FCEVs do not generate gases that contribute to global warming, the process of making hydrogen needs energy — often from fossil fuel sources. That has raised questions over hydrogen's green credentials.

Also, there are questions of safety — hydrogen is more explosive than petrol. Opponents of the technology cite the case of the hydrogen-filled Hindenburg airship in 1937. But Japanese auto industry players *The Indian Express* spoke to argued that a comparison was misplaced because most of the fire was attributed to diesel fuel for the airship's engines and a flammable lacquer coating on the outside.

Hydrogen fuel tanks in FCEVs such as the Mirai are made from highly durable carbon fibre, whose strength is assessed in crash tests, and also trials where bullets are fired at it. The Mirai and Clarity have a triple-layer hydrogen tanks made of woven carbon fibre, which the manufacturers claim is completely safe.

The other major hurdle is that the vehicles are expensive, and fuel dispensing pumps are scarce. But this should get better as scale and distribution improves.

Japan is going full steam ahead. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared in Davos this year that Japan "aims to reduce the production cost of hydrogen by at least 90 per cent by the year 2050, to make it cheaper than natural gas".

What is the progress in India?

In India, so far, the definition of EV only covers BEVs; the government has lowered taxes to 12%. At 43%, hybrid electric vehicles and hydrogen FCEVs attract the same tax as IC vehicles.

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, under its Research, Development and Demonstration (RD&D) programme, has been supporting various such projects in academic institutions, research and development organisations and industry for development. Fourteen RD&D projects on hydrogen and fuel cells are currently under implementation with the support of the Ministry. Between 2016-17 and 2018-19, eight projects were sanctioned and 18 completed.

The Ministry of Science and Technology has supported two networked centres on hydrogen storage led by IIT Bombay and Nonferrous Materials Technology Development Centre, Hyderabad. These involve 10 institutions, including IITs, and IISc, Bangalore.

What poll result means for Brexit, Scotland, and Johnson's Britain

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 15

LAST WEEK, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson swept an election that left various takeaways, the most important of which is the likelihood of Brexit being put on the fast track. Other takeaways and landmarks include the biggest defeat of the Labour Party since 1935, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's decision not to lead the party in future elections, a sweep of Scotland's seats by the Scottish National Party, and its implications on the possibility of independence.

Johnson's Conservative Party won 365 seats in the 650-member Parliament. The Labour Party won 203, and the Scottish National Party 48.

Why is it being said that the election was about Brexit?

Because that was the narrative that drove the election. It is too simplistic, however, to read the result as a message that most voters in Britain are in favour of Brexit. With Brexit inevitable, it was a question

about how the process should unfold. On this, Johnson's Conservative Party had a more clear plan than the Labour Party.

While campaigning, Johnson not only promised to resolve the long-pending issue but also projected the opposition as likely to keep delaying a resolution. Labour's stance, in fact, did appear to be contradictory. Corbyn is personally inclined towards Brexit, but many in the Labour coalition oppose it. The Labour campaign talked about a revised Brexit plan, but proposed to take that through yet another national referendum.

More than Brexit, it was the prospect of closure that appears to have decided the election. The Conservatives broke votes away from the pro-Brexit section of Labour's base.

So, how will Brexit proceed?

So far, no plan offered in Parliament had won majority support. Now, because of the sheer size of the victory, Johnson's plan is more likely to find support, in spite of the many factions created by opinions on Brexit. Besides, the vote can potentially be interpreted as public endorsement for Johnson's plan, although that is not really the case.



PM Boris Johnson outside 10 Downing Street after his victory. Reuters

With Parliament due to sit next Friday, it is expected to try and pass Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement Bill this month itself. After that, Britain has to negotiate the

terms of a treaty, including its time-frame, with the European Union. "Brexit day" is on January 31, but the process of implementation will continue long after that.

How does one read the performance of the Scottish National Party?

First, it would be too much to expect that the SNP's performance will eventually lead to Scottish independence. Nevertheless, the SNP's sweep of Scotland is immensely significant, shutting out both Labour and Conservative parties.

In a referendum in 2014, Scotland had rejected independence. But opinion polls have also shown that the Scottish population is by and large in favour of remaining in the European Union. Will Brexit, therefore, lead to calls for independence? Although the SNP is against Brexit, the vote does not necessarily mean a referendum for Scottish independence. It may simply be that the SNP is more popular with Scottish voters than the Labour or Conservative Party.

Even if Brexit, when it happens, revives pro-independence sentiment (which would help the SNP further), independence is a long road with many procedural hurdles.

What does the result mean for Britain, beyond Brexit?

The size of the victory sets the stage for

a Britain of Johnson's ideological vision — nationalism, with tougher laws on immigration. Britain will also have to deal with Brexit's effect on its economy. This includes the long process of new bilateral trade agreements with many other countries.

What does it mean for Labour, and Corbyn in particular?

For the party, it is the smallest share of Parliament since 1935: even its minority during the Margaret Thatcher regime was larger. However, the vote is being seen more as a loss of Corbyn than for the party.

While national ratings show Corbyn as being highly unpopular among voters, he led a party whose stand on various non-Brexit issues are popular. The fact that Corbyn failed to capitalise on this indicates that the elections are his defeat. One possible reason, according to analyses in various news publications, is that voters trusted Johnson more than Corbyn in terms of carrying out their respective promises, even though Labour's policies were more popular with dedicated Labour voters. Corbyn is seen as pro-Brexit while Labour voters are largely against it.



व्यावहारिकता के नाम पर आदर्शों की बलि देना अनुचित है

संविधान की फर्जी आड़ में हिंसा

संविधान, कानून और लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों की फर्जी आड़ लेकर नागरिकता कानून का जैसा हिंसक विरोध हो रहा है उससे यही पता चल रहा कि अराजक तत्व उत्पात पर आमादा हैं। सरकारी एवं निजी संपत्ति को आग के हवाले करने और सड़क एवं रेल मार्ग को बाधित करने वाले इन उपद्रवी तत्वों का दुस्साहस इसीलिए चरम पर है, क्योंकि कुछ राजनीतिक दल उन्हें उकसाने में लगे हुए हैं। पश्चिम बंगाल के बारे में तो यह लगभग पूरी तौर पर साफ है कि ममता बनर्जी सरकार नागरिकता कानून के विरोध में सड़कों पर उतरे अराजक तत्वों को प्रोशक तौर पर शह देने में लगी हुई है। यही कारण है कि वहां मालदा, हावड़ा और मुर्शिदाबाद में व्यापक पैमाने पर हिंसा और आगजनी देखने को मिलती। यदि उपद्रवी तत्वों के खिलाफ सख्ती का परिचय दिया जा रहा होता तो यह संभव ही नहीं था कि बंगाल में लगातार दूसरे दिन भी हिंसा देखने को मिलती। यह मानने के अच्छे-भले कारण हैं कि संकीर्ण राजनीतिक कारणों से बंगाल में हिंसा को भड़काया जा रहा है। केंद्र सरकार के लिए यह आवश्यक ही नहीं, अनिवार्य है कि वह बंगाल में मचाए जा रहे उत्पात के लिए ममता सरकार को जवाबदेह बनाए।

चूँकि नागरिकता कानून विरोधी हिंसा ने दिल्ली में भी अपने पैर पसार लिए हैं इसलिए केंद्र सरकार को अतिरिक्त सतर्कता बरतने के साथ ही सख्ती का भी परिचय देना होगा। विरोध का मतलब नम्र अराजकता नहीं हो सकता। दिल्ली में अराजक भीड़ ने जिस तरह दिन-दहाड़े कई बसों और दोपहिया वाहनों को आग के हवाले किया उससे तो यही लगता है कि सुनियोजित तरीके से नागरिकता कानून विरोधी हिंसा को हवा दी जा रही है। चिंताजनक यह है कि यह खतरनाक काम देश के अन्य हिस्सों में हो रहा है। कई राजनीतिक दल इसके लिए अतिरिक्त मेहनत करते भी दिख रहे हैं। दुष्प्रचार में लिए ऐसे दलों की केवल आलोचना ही पर्याप्त नहीं है। उन्हें बेनकाब भी किया जाना चाहिए। इसके साथ ही मानवतावादी होने का मुखौटा लगाए उत्पाती तत्वों को यह सख्त संदेश भी देना होगा कि किसी भी सूरत में हिंसा को बर्दाश्त नहीं किया जा सकता। निःसंदेह किसी के लिए भी यह समझना कठिन है कि दिल्ली में जाभिया मिलिया विश्वविद्यालय अथवा उत्तर प्रदेश में अलीगढ़ मुस्लिम विश्वविद्यालय के छात्रों को नागरिकता कानून का विरोध करने की जरूरत क्यों पड़ रही है? आखिर जब यह स्पष्ट है कि इस कानून का भारतीय मुसलमानों से कहीं कोई लेना-देना नहीं तब फिर उसके विरोध का क्या औचित्य? उत्पात का पर्याय बन गए इस उन्माद भरे हिंसक विरोध से कड़ाई से निपटना इसलिए आवश्यक है, क्योंकि कानून के शासन की हेटी हो रही है।

टकराव अशुभ

ममता बनर्जी सरकार के साथ राज्यपाल जगदीप धनखड़ का टकराव रुकने का नाम नहीं ले रहा है। हालांकि बंगाल में सरकार के साथ राजभवन की खींचतान कोई नई बात नहीं है। इसके पहले केसरीनाथ त्रिपाठी के साथ भी मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी का टकराव हुआ था। त्रिपाठी के साथ जितनी तीव्र गति से टकराव पैदा हुआ था उतनी जल्द ही मतभेद दूर भी कर लिया गया। हिंसा के एक मामले में पूर्व राज्यपाल केसरीनाथ त्रिपाठी ने जब मुख्यमंत्री को फोन कर स्पष्टीकरण मांगा तो वह बिफर गईं। सीएम ने त्रिपाठी पर धमकी देने का आरोप लगाया और इससे खुद को एक सीएम के रूप में अपमानित होने की बात कही। कुछ दिनों तक त्रिपाठी और मुख्यमंत्री के बीच खींचतान चली, लेकिन अचानक रक्षाबंधन के मौके पर मुख्यमंत्री ने खुद राजभवन जाकर त्रिपाठी को राखी बांधी और उसके बाद स्थिति सामान्य हो गई। वाममोर्चा के लंबे शासन में तो वामपंथी नेताओं ने राज्यपाल को कभी महत्व ही नहीं दिया। सिंगुर और नंदीग्राम आंदोलन के समय तत्कालीन राज्यपाल गोपालकृष्ण गांधी ममता बनर्जी की बातों को गंभीरता से लेते थे। इस पर वाममोर्चा के नेताओं ने गोपालकृष्ण गांधी के विरुद्ध मोर्चा खोल दिया था, लेकिन वर्तमान राज्यपाल जगदीप धनखड़ के साथ सरकार का टकराव जिस हद तक चला गया है वह लोकतंत्र के लिए शुभ संकेत नहीं है। मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी ने एकाधिक बार धनखड़ पर समानांतर सरकार चलाने का आरोप लगा चुकी है। खैर मामला अगर आरोप प्रत्यारोप तक हो तो भी चल सकता है, लेकिन राज्यपाल की अनुमति नहीं मिलने से यदि कोई बिल सदन में पेश नहीं किया जा सके और इस कारण स्पीकर को दो दिनों तक सदन स्थगित कर देना पड़े तो यह गंभीर मामला बनता है। सरकार और राजभवन के बीच इसी तरह खींचतान चलती रही तो राज्य में संवैधानिक संकट की स्थिति पैदा हो सकती है। इसमें कोई दो राय नहीं कि बंगाल में एक पूर्ण बहुमत की निर्वाचित सरकार है, लेकिन राज्यपाल भी राज्य के संवैधानिक प्रमुख हैं। इस नाते उन्हें कुछ संवैधानिक अधिकार प्राप्त हैं, जिसका सम्मान किया जाना चाहिए। पिछले दिनों जो दो घटनाएं घटीं वह लोकतांत्रिक सरकार के लिए शोभा नहीं देती हैं। पहले राज्यपाल कलकत्ता विश्वविद्यालय गए तो वीसी नहीं थे। दूसरे दिन राज्यपाल विधानसभा गए तो गेट पर ताला लगा था। इतना कुछ होने के बावजूद राज्यपाल ने मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी के साथ सारे मुद्दों पर बातचीत करने की इच्छा जताई है तो वार्ता के लिए उन्हें तैयार होना चाहिए। बातचीत से किसी भी समस्या का समाधान संभव है।



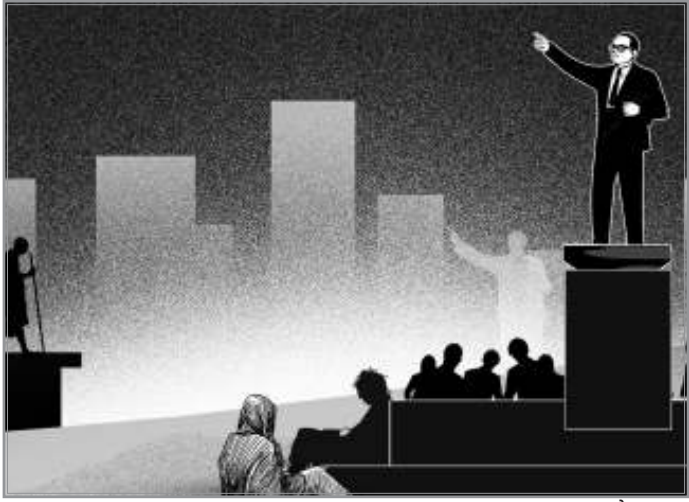
बदी नारायण

यदि अपने नायकों की विरासत पर दावा करने वाले दलों के पास भाजपा के प्रभावी विमर्श की सही काट नहीं तो तो देर-सबेर उन्हें ये प्रतीक भी गंवाने ही पड़ेंगे

राजनीतिक महानायकों की स्मृतियों का प्रभावी होना इस बात पर निर्भर करता है कि उनके विचारों को आगे बढ़ाने वाली राजनीतिक धारा की शक्ति कितनी प्रभावी है। साथ ही यह भी उतना ही महत्वपूर्ण होता है कि उक्त राजनीतिक धारा को उस नायक की स्मृति एवं विरासत की उस वक्त कितनी जरूरत है। अक्सर यह देखने को भी मिलता है कि कोई राजनीतिक नायक अपने जीवनकाल में जितना महत्वपूर्ण नहीं होता, वह बाद में कई गुना प्रभावी हो जाता है। बाबा साहब डॉ. भीमराव आंबेडकर के मामले में ऐसा ही हुआ है। अपने जीवन काल में वह एक यथार्थ बने रहे और उसके उपरांत एक मिथक में तब्दील हो गए जो उनके यथार्थ वाले प्रभाव को बढ़ाता गया। जीवनपर्यंत किए कार्यों के कारण ही कालांतर में वह दलित मुक्ति के प्रतीक में परिवर्तित होते गए। ऐसा इसलिए भी हुआ, क्योंकि महाराष्ट्र और देश के अन्य भागों में उनके जीवनकाल में ही लामबंद समर्थकों एवं अनुयायियों का एक वर्ग तो तैयार हो ही गया था। उनके निधन के पश्चात भी दलित समर्थक राजनीतिक दल रिपब्लिकन पार्टी ऑफ इंडिया यानी आरपीआइ उनके विचारों को आगे बढ़ाती रही। हालांकि इस दौरान आरपीआइ का आधार खिसकता गया। इसकी भरपाई आजादी के बाद उभरे दलितों के शिक्षित वर्ग से हुई जो लोग शिक्षा प्राप्ति एवं अपने अधिकारों के लिए आंबेडकर के प्रतीक से अपने संघर्ष की प्रेरणा पाने लगे। इस प्रकार आंबेडकर के

प्रतीक को नई ऊर्जा, नई शक्ति एवं नया जीवन मिला। उत्तर भारत विशेषकर उत्तर प्रदेश में कांशीराम के नेतृत्व में उभरे बहुजन दलित आंदोलन, जिसने आगे चलकर बहुजन समाज पार्टी यानी बसपा का रूप अख्तियार किया, ने आंबेडकर के प्रतीक को और शक्तिशाली बनाया। कांशीराम और मायावती के नेतृत्व में पिछली सदी के नौवें दशक में उभरे बहुजन दलित आंदोलन के तहत दलितों की राजनीतिक गोलबंदी की गति तेज हुई। फलतः उत्तर भारत विशेषकर उत्तर प्रदेश में आंबेडकर का प्रतीक और ताकतवर बनकर उभरा। इस व्यापक उभार में इस तथ्य की अनदेखी नहीं की जा सकती कि उत्तर भारत खासतौर से उत्तर प्रदेश में बहुजन सामाजिक एवं राजनीतिक नायकों के नायकत्व का विकास उनकी विचारधारा के प्रतिनिधियों की राजनीतिक शक्ति एवं संबंधित विमर्श में उन्हें दी जाने वाली जगह पर निर्भर करता है।

डॉ. राममनोहर लोहिया, पंडित नेहरू के बाद दूसरे राजनीतिक नायक थे। उनका नायकत्व तो उभरा, किंतु भारतीय समाज में पिछड़े वर्ग के समूहों के राजनीतिक सशक्तीकरण, भागीदारी और विकास के लिए किए गए अनेक कार्यों के बावजूद वह आंबेडकर जैसा मुकाम हासिल नहीं कर पाए। इसका मूल कारण यह



अवैशे राजपूत

है कि समाजवादी आंदोलन से उभरे सामाजिक समूहों एवं राजनीतिक दलों ने अपने विमर्श को इस प्रकार आकार नहीं दिया जिसमें लोहिया का नायकत्व विकसित हो पाए। यह ठीक है समाजवादी सरकारों ने तमाम संस्थाओं-स्थानों को लोहिया का नाम दिया, परंतु उन्होंने इस प्रतीक को और शक्तिशाली बनाने के पर्याप्त प्रयास नहीं किए। कहने का अर्थ है कि समाजवादी विचारधारा से उभरे दलों ने सत्ता और ताकत हासिल करने के बावजूद अपने विमर्श को इस प्रकार नियोजित नहीं किया जिससे समाजवादी विचारधारा का महिमामंडन होने के साथ ही लोहिया का नायकत्व भी उभर सके। अगर तुलना करें तो आंबेडकर ने दलितों के लिए जो किया, बिल्कुल वही काम लोहिया ने पिछड़ों को सशक्त बनाने के लिए किया। कुछ ऐसा ही जयप्रकाश नारायण के साथ हुआ। जेपी आंदोलन से निकलकर तमाम नेता राजनीति के आकाश पर तो खूब चमके, लेकिन उन्होंने जेपी को वैचारिक स्मृति का प्रेरक तत्व

समानांतर खड़ा करने का प्रयास कर राजनीतिक प्रतीकवाद के मोर्चे पर अपनी शक्ति का दायरा बढ़ा लिया। चूंकि भाजपा के पास अपने ज्यादा प्रतीक नहीं थे, लिहाजा उसने अपने हिसाब से आजादी की लड़ाई के कुछ कांग्रेसी नायकों को अपनाया। हालांकि इसमें भी उसने यह खयाल जरूर रखा कि ये प्रतीक उसकी वैचारिकी के खांचे में भी फिट हो सकें। मिसाल के तौर पर मालवीय को ही लें। वह कांग्रेस में हिंदू पक्षधर राजनीति के समर्थक थे। इसी तरह सरदार पटेल और नेहरू के प्रतीकों में क ऐसे अंतर्विरोध थे जिन्हें आगे लाकर भाजपा ने अपना राजनीतिक विमर्श बढ़ा। कांग्रेस अपने ही प्रतीकों के भाजपा के पाले में जाने से रोकने के लिए कोई प्रतिरोधी विमर्श खड़ा करने में नाकाम रही। परिणामस्वरूप कांग्रेस अपनी प्रतीक शक्ति के कई तत्वों को गंवाती गई। इस तरह सत्ता के साथ-साथ ये प्रतीक भी उसके हाथ से फिसलते रहे।

इस तरह यह स्पष्ट है कि राजनीतिक नायकों की प्रतीकात्मक शक्ति का विकास इस बात पर निर्भर करता है कि उनके वैचारिक प्रतिनिधि भविष्य में उन्हें किस प्रकार प्रस्तुत करते हैं। उनका विचारों से प्रभावित राजनीतिक पक्ष अपने विमर्श में उन्हें कैसे, कहां और किस तरह स्थान देते हैं। भाजपा ने हाल में तमाम ऐसे प्रतीकों को अपने खेमे से जोड़कर बड़ी शक्ति अर्जित कर ली है। इस प्रकार वह आंबेडकर, मालवीय, सरदार पटेल और विवेकानंद को अपने पक्ष में भुना सकती है। यही नहीं, लोहिया को कांग्रेस विरोध से जोड़कर वह उन्हें भी अपने पाले में लाने के प्रयास करती रही है। अगर इन नायकों की विरासत पर दावा करने वाले दलों के पास ऐसे प्रभावी विमर्श की सही काट नहीं है तो देर-सबेर उन्हें ये प्रतीक भी गंवाने ही पड़ेंगे।

(लेखक गोविंद बल्लभ पंत सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान, प्रयागराज के निदेशक हैं) response@jagran.com

अपने अस्तित्व को सार्थक करता बांग्लादेश

आज से ठीक 48 साल पहले दुनिया के मानचित्र पर एक नए राष्ट्र बांग्लादेश का उदय हुआ था। पश्चिमी पाकिस्तान का हिस्सा

रहा यह मुलक एक लंबे हिंसक संघर्ष के बाद स्वतंत्र देश के रूप में अस्तित्व में आया। भारत ने भी इस नए देश के जन्म में सार्थक और सहयोगी भूमिका निभाई। इससे पहले बांग्लादेश पूर्वी पाकिस्तान के नाम से जाना जाता था। तब पूर्वी पाकिस्तान और पश्चिमी पाकिस्तान के बीच राजनीतिक एवं आर्थिक मोर्चे पर होने वाले टकराव के बीच भाषा आंदोलन के दौरान ही पड़ गए थे। देश के राजकाज में पूर्वी पाकिस्तान की नहीं चलती थी। इसलिए वहां के बाशिंदों में नाराजगी स्वाभाविक थी। वर्ष 1948 में यह तल्खी तब और बढ़ गई जब पाकिस्तान के तत्कालीन प्रधानमंत्री लिाकत अली खान ने एलान किया कि देश की राष्ट्रभाषा उर्दू होगी। इस पर पहले से ही नाराज चल रहे पूर्वी पाकिस्तान के बांग्लाभाषियों का आक्रोश उल्ल पड़ा। इसके बाद संघर्ष लगातार बढ़ता गया। 1958 से 1962 के बीच तथा 1969 से 1971 के बीच पूर्वी पाकिस्तान माथोल लॉ के अधीन रहा। 1970-71 में पाकिस्तान के संसदीय चुनावों में पूर्वी पाकिस्तान की अवाभी लीग ने बड़ी संख्या में सीटें जीतीं और सरकार बनाने का दावा किया, लेकिन पाकिस्तान पीपुल्स पार्टी के जुल्फिकार अली भुट्टो को वह बात नागवार गुजरी। पूर्वी पाकिस्तान से निकली लोकतांत्रिक आकांक्षाओं को पश्चिमी पाकिस्तान के हुकूमतानों ने सैनिक अत्याचार से कुचलना शुरू कर दिया। तब वही बलिदानी चेतना सशस्त्र मुक्ति संग्राम के रूप में प्रकट हुई। इस प्रकार 26 मार्च 1971 को बांग्लादेश की स्वतंत्रता की घोषणा के साथ ही मुक्ति युद्ध प्रारंभ हो गया। पाकिस्तानी सेना के दमन के खिलाफ भारत ने बांग्लादेश मुक्ति संग्राम का समर्थन किया था। पश्चिमी पाकिस्तान की सेना का नेतृत्व कर रहे जनरल एके नियाजी ने आखिरकार हार स्वीकार करते हुए अपने 93 हजार सैनिकों के साथ भारतीय सेना के कमांडर लेफ्टिनेंट जनरल जगजीत सिंह अरोड़ा के समक्ष आत्मसमर्पण कर दिया। इसे इतिहास में सबसे बड़ा सैन्य आत्मसमर्पण भी माना जाता है। इस प्रकार 16 दिसंबर 1971 को पश्चिमी पाकिस्तान के नापाक मंसूवों के नाकाम होने के उपलक्ष्य में यह दिन हर साल विजय दिवस के रूप में मनाया जाता है।

बवहाल भारत के सहयोग से एक नए देश के रूप में बांग्लादेश का उदय तो हो गया, किंतु एन देश के नवनिर्माण की बड़ी और कड़ी चुनौती सामने थी। बड़े



नंदिनी सिन्हा

16 दिसंबर को विजय दिवस हमें बांग्लादेश निर्माण का स्मरण कराता है जिसने कई मुश्किलों के बावजूद एक मिसाल पेश की है



पैमाने पर गरीबी, मानव संसाधन की कमी, सीमित प्राकृतिक संसाधन, अकाल, चक्रवात और बाढ़ जैसी प्राकृतिक चुनौतियां भी बेहद आम थीं। इन सबके बावजूद मुक्ति संग्राम सेनानियों ने बांग्लादेश को 'सोने का देश' बनाने का सपना देखा। खैरनाथ टैगोर के गीत 'आमार सोनार बांग्ला' को जब बांग्लादेश का राष्ट्रगान बनाया गया तो इसके पीछे देश की प्राप्ति ही राष्ट्रनिर्माताओं के जेहन में थी। तमाम प्रतिकूल परिस्थितियों के बावजूद आज बांग्लादेश ने अपने विकास से दुनिया के सामने एक मिसाल पेश की है। इस देश ने गरीबी में कमी, कम वजन वाले बच्चों की संख्या को घटाने, प्राथमिक विद्यालयों में नामांकन बढ़ाने, शिशु मृत्यु दर और जननी मृत्यु दर को कम करने में महती सफलता अर्जित की है। पिछले वर्ष बांग्लादेश ने अपना पहला भू-स्थिर उपग्रह, बंगब्यू-1 या बीडी लॉन्चर लॉन्च किया।

विश्व आर्थिक मंच यानी डब्ल्यूईएफ द्वारा प्रस्तुत वैश्विक लैंगिक अंतर सूचकांक में बांग्लादेशी सभी दक्षिण एशियाई देशों से बेहतर स्थिति में है। ऐसे सूचकांक की गणना आमतौर पर स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा, अर्थव्यवस्था और

राजनीति सहित चार मापदंडों के आधार पर की जाती है ताकि किसी देश में लैंगिक समानता की स्थिति का पता लगाया जा सके। वर्ष 2018 में स्त्री-पुरुष समानता के मामले में बांग्लादेश 48वें स्थान पर रहा जबकि भारत 108वें स्थान पर था। मौजूदा प्रधानमंत्री शेख हसीना और पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री एवं प्रमुख विपक्षी नेता खालिदा जिया के रूप में देश की दोनों शोष नेता महिलाएं ही हैं। बांग्लादेश ने महिलाओं के रोजगार के साथ आर्थिक और सामाजिक रूप से सशक्तीकरण पर बहुत ध्यान दिया। इसीलिए यहां कामकाजी वर्ग में महिलाओं की हिस्सेदारी 35 प्रतिशत है, जबकि भारत में मात्र 28 प्रतिशत।

घरेलू उद्योगों की बढ़ती क्षमता के कारण बांग्लादेश का निर्यात 2018 के 6.7 फीसदी से बढ़कर 2019 में 10.1 प्रतिशत पहुंच गया। उसके कुल निर्यात में कपड़ा निर्यात का योगदान 84.2 फीसद है। रेडीमेड कपड़ा उद्योग में उसने खासी तरक्की की है। अमेरिका जैसे विकसित बाजारों में बांग्लादेशी कपड़ों की अच्छी मांग है। अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर बांग्लादेश ने एक उद्यमी देश के रूप में अपनी खास पहचान बनाई है। बांग्लादेश विकास के इस स्तर पर पहुंच गया है कि वह न केवल भारत में निवेश की क्षमता रखता है, बल्कि भारतीय कंपनियों को अपने यहां निवेश के लिए आमंत्रित भी कर रहा है। कुछ महीने पहले बांग्लादेश की प्रधानमंत्री शेख हसीना इकोनॉमिक फोरम द्वारा आयोजित इंडिया इकोनॉमिक समिट में मुख्य अतिथि के रूप में आई थीं। वहां उन्होंने भारतीय कंपनियों को अपने देश में निवेश का न्योता दिया। इस वक्त चीन की तमाम कंपनियां बांग्लादेश को अपना ठिकाना बना रही हैं। विश्व बैंक की एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार इस साल बांग्लादेश की आर्थिक विकास दर के अन्य दक्षिण एशियाई देशों से ज्यादा रहने की संभावना है। 1990 के बाद से बांग्लादेश की अर्थव्यवस्था चार-पांच प्रतिशत की दर से बढ़ी है। क्रय शक्ति भारिता यानी पीपीपी के संदर्भ में बांग्लादेश की प्रति व्यक्ति आय 1991 में 890 डॉलर प्रति व्यक्ति से बढ़कर 2011 में 2,780 डॉलर प्रति व्यक्ति हो गई। कहना न होगा कि कोई भी देश न तो अपने बड़े क्षेत्रफल से ताकतवर होता है न ही अपनी बड़ी जनसंख्या से, बल्कि उसके अर्थिक की गति हो उसकी ताकत को बयां करती है। बांग्लादेश वही उदाहरण पेश कर रहा है।

(लेखिका बांग्लादेश मामलों की शोध अध्येता हैं) response@jagran.com



जीवन का उद्देश्य

प्रसिद्ध दार्शनिक सुकरात से मिलने एक बार उनका एक अनुयायी उनके घर पर आया। दरवाजे पर दस्तक के बाद जब सुकरात अपने घर से बाहर निकले तो शिष्य ने बड़ी विनम्रतापूर्वक उनसे आग्रह किया, मैं सुकरात के विचारों और व्यक्तित्व से प्रभावित होकर बहुत दूर से उनसे मिलने आया हूं। क्या मुझे उनके दर्शन हो सकते हैं? सुकरात थोड़ी देर के लिए शांत रहे और फिर बोले, सुकरात? आप किस सुकरात की बात कर रहे हैं? आज तक तो मैं खुद सुकरात को नहीं पहचान पाया हूं। माफ कीजिए मैं आपको उनके दर्शन नहीं करा सकता हूं। सुकरात के दर्शन का मुरीद बेचारा याचक बड़ी निराशा के साथ वापस लौट गया। सुकरात का उत्तर आसान था, किंतु उसके निहितार्थ काफी सारगर्भित हैं। कभी अपने दिल पर हाथ रखकर गंभीरता से इस प्रश्न के उत्तर की तलाश करें कि क्या हम खुद को पहचान पाते हैं? प्रसिद्ध श्रीमती लेखक मार्क ट्वेन ने कहा था, मानव जीवन में केवल दो ही दिन महत्वपूर्ण होते हैं। पहला दिन जब उनका जन्म होता है और दूसरा जब वह यह जान लेता है कि आखिर उसके जन्म का उद्देश्य क्या है, किंतु दुर्भाग्यवश जीवन धारण करने के बाद हम अपने जन्म के पवित्र उद्देश्यों को पूरी तरह से भूल जाते हैं और अमोल मानव जीवन को व्यर्थ गवां देते हैं। यहां पर एक अहम प्रश्न यह उठता है कि आखिर हम कौन हैं और हमारे जीवन का उद्देश्य क्या है?

भौतिक सुख-सुविधाओं और वेशुमार धन-संपत्ति को बटोरने की ओंछी चाहत में हम मानवता के दुख और उसके आसू पीछे नहीं पाते हैं। लोभ, तुष्णा, अहिंसा, असत्य वचन सरीखे अमानवीय कृत्यों में जीवन के जो अनमोल क्षण व्यर्थ होते हैं, वे जीवन को सच्चे उद्देश्यों से भटकते हैं। दुखी और असह्य मानव के दुख और दर्द के आसू पीछरकर उनके चेहरे पर खुशियां लाने की कोशिश ही सच्ची मानवता है। जीवन का सच्चा उद्देश्य है। इसे समझने के लिए हमें सबसे पहले स्वयं और अपने जीवन के अर्थ पर विचार करना होगा।

श्रीप्रकाश शर्मा

खतरनाक होता सेल्फी का शौक

सुधीर कुमार

यूं तो सेल्फी का इतिहास करीबन पौने दो सौ साल पुराना है, लेकिन 21वीं सदी के मौजूदा दशक में इसकी लोकप्रियता चरम पर पहुंच गई है। माना जाता है कि दुनिया की पहली सेल्फी 1839 में अमेरिका के रॉबर्ट कोर्नेलियस नामक एक व्यक्ति ने ली थी। उन्होंने यह सेल्फी अपने कैमरे से ली थी और उस सेल्फी को लेने में उन्हें तीन मिनट लगे थे। आज स्मार्टफोन के जरिये चंद सेकेंड में सेल्फी लेना मुमकिन हो गया है। हालांकि संवेदनशील, खतरनाक और विपरीत परिस्थितियों में सेल्फी लेने का शौक एक नई मुसीबत बन कर सामने आई है।

दरअसल रोमांचक और विस्मयकारी सेल्फी लेने के लिए लोग कई तरह के बेवकूफी भरे प्रयोग करते रहते हैं। इससे सब का सब दुर्घटनाएं और मौत को असमय आमंत्रण मिल जाता है। आभासी दुनिया में लोकप्रियता हासिल करने का यह तरीका बहुत घातक साबित होता जा रहा है। चलती ट्रेन, झरना या डैम के किनारे, नदी या समुद्र में नहते समय, चिड़ियाघर या सड़क पर सेल्फी लेने का शौक नासूर बन चुका है। सेल्फी लेते समय व्यक्ति का सारा

दुनियाभर में 2011 से 2017 तक 259 लोग सेल्फी लेने के चक्कर में अपनी जान गंवा बैठे हैं। इसमें भारत सबसे आगे है

ध्यान फोन पर केंद्रित हो जाता है और अच्छी से अच्छी सेल्फी लेने के चक्कर में लोग मौत की दहलीज पर पहुंच जाते हैं। इंडिया जर्नल ऑफ फैमिली मेडिसीन एंड प्राइमरी केयर की एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक दुनियाभर में 2011 से 2017 तक 259 लोग सेल्फी लेने के चक्कर में अपनी जान गंवा बैठे हैं। इसमें 159 लोगों की मौत के आंकड़े के साथ भारत सबसे आगे है। इसी अवधि में अमेरिका में 23, रूस में 16, जबकि पाकिस्तान में केवल 11 लोगों की मौत हुई। सेल्फी के लिए मौत के मुंह में जानबूझकर जाना लापरवाही, आत्ममुग्धता और आभासी दुनिया के प्रति अतिरेक प्रेम की निशानी है। यह एक घातक प्रवृत्ति है, जिसे रोकना बेहद जरूरी हो गया है।

इंटरनेशनल जर्नल ऑफ मेंटल हेल्थ एंड एडिक्शन में प्रकाशित एक शोध में कहा गया

है कि अगर किसी को दिनभर में तीन से ज्यादा सेल्फी लिए बिना मन नहीं भरता है तो वह एक डिस्ऑर्डर का शिकार है, जिसे मनोवैज्ञानिक भाषा में 'सेल्फाइटिस' कहा जाता है। अध्ययन के मुताबिक सेल्फाइटिस बीमारी के तीन स्तर होते हैं। पहला, दिन में 3 सेल्फी लेने की आदत होना, लेकिन सेल्फी सोशल मीडिया पर पोस्ट न करना। दूसरा, सेल्फी सोशल मीडिया में शेयर करना शुरू कर देना। तीसरा, हर समय अपनी सेल्फी सोशल मीडिया पर पोस्ट करने की कोशिश करना। ऐसे लोग दिन में कम से कम छह फोटो पोस्ट करते हैं। सेल्फी की लत के शिकार लोग किसी भी परिस्थिति में सेल्फी लेने का प्रयास करते हैं, जिससे कई बार उन्हें पेशानी का सामना करना पड़ता है।

सेल्फी लेना सामान्य स्थिति है, परंतु यह ध्यान रहे कि अनुकूल परिस्थितियों में ही स्वयं की तस्वीरें ली जाएं। जिन स्थानों पर नो सेल्फी जोन का बोर्ड टंगा हो, वहां सेल्फी लेने का प्रयास नहीं करना चाहिए। खुद को मुसीबत में डालकर सेल्फी लेना अच्छी बात नहीं है। जीवन बहुत अनमोल है। इसकी महत्ता हमें समझनी होगी।

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

विद्रोह का रुख

नागरिकता संशोधन विधेयक के संसद के दोनों सदनों में पारित हो जाने और राष्ट्रपति की भी स्वीकृति मिल जाने के बाद पूर्वोत्तर में विद्रोह की लपटें तेज हो गई हैं। विपक्षी दल तो शुरू से इस विधेयक का विरोध कर रहे थे, धीरे-धीरे राज्य सरकारों ने इसे लागू करने से मना करना शुरू कर दिया है। पहले पश्चिम बंगाल, पंजाब और केरल ने कह दिया था कि वे अपने यहां इस कानून को लागू नहीं करेंगे। अब मध्यप्रदेश, छत्तीसगढ़ और महाराष्ट्र ने भी इसे स्वीकार करने से इनकार कर दिया है। मगर केंद्र सरकार कह रही है कि इस कानून को लागू करना उनकी संवैधानिक बाध्यता है। उधर कुछ लोगों ने अदालत में इस कानून को चुनौती दी है। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय का फैसला आना है। इस कानून को लेकर बहुत सारे समाजसेवी, बुद्धिजीवी विरोध में खड़े हैं। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय के एक अवकाश प्राप्त न्यायाधीश ने भी इसके विरोध में हस्ताक्षर किया है। मगर सरकार का तर्क है कि यह कानून मुसलिम समुदाय के लोगों के विरोध में नहीं है, इसलिए उनकी सुरक्षा को लेकर चिंताएं निर्मूल हैं। मगर हकीकत यही है कि सरकार इस कानून को लेकर चौतरफा घिरी नजर आ रही है।

नागरिकता (संशोधन) विधेयक में, जो अब कानून का रूप ले चुका है, स्पष्ट रूप से कहा गया है कि पाकिस्तान, बांग्लादेश और अफगानिस्तान में धार्मिक आधार पर प्रताड़ित हिंदू, सिख, बौद्ध, सिख, ईसाई और पारसी समुदाय के लोगों को नागरिकता प्रदान की जाएगी। इसमें मुसलिम समुदाय के लोगों को बाहर रखा गया है। फिर श्रीलंका में धर्म के आधार पर प्रताड़ित हिंदुओं को इसमें शामिल नहीं किया गया है। इसके अलावा रोहिंग्या और अहमदिया जैसे समुदाय के लोग भी धर्म के आधार पर प्रताड़ित हैं, उनकी कोई सुध नहीं ली गई है। इसी को लेकर विरोध हो रहा है। इस कानून को संविधान की मूल भावना के विरुद्ध बताया जा रहा है। संविधान नागरिकता के मामले में सेक््युलर व्यवस्था देता है, उसमें किसी भी समुदाय के प्रति धर्म के अधार पर भेदभाव को गैरकानूनी करार दिया गया है। फिर यह भी संकल्प है कि संविधान की इस भावना के विरुद्ध कोई भी बदलाव नहीं किया जा सकता। इसलिए कई लोग आशान्वित हैं कि सर्वोच्च न्यायालय इस कानून को अवैध करार दे देगा। इस पर अदालत का क्या रुख होता है, देखने के बात है। पर नागरिकों के विद्रोह से निपटना फिलहाल सरकार के लिए बड़ी चुनौती है।

पूर्वोत्तर में हिंदू और मुसलमान का मामला नहीं है। वहां कई जनजातीय समुदाय हैं, जो अपनी पहचान के लिए लंबे समय से संघर्ष करते रहे हैं। असम समझौते में वहां के जनजातीय समुदाय के नागरिकों की पहचान सुरक्षित रखने का प्रावधान किया गया। अब नागरिकता (संशोधन) कानून लागू होने से पुराने प्रावधान अप्रभावी हो जाएंगे। दूसरे प्रदेशों और देशों के लोगों को वहां जाकर बसने की गुंजाइश बनेगी। इससे पूर्वोत्तर के लोगों का जीवन प्रभावित होगा। हालांकि वहां सरकार ने इनर लाइन परमिट लागू किया है, यानी वहां वही जा सकता है, जिसे परमिट हासिल है, पर वह आंशिक रूप से ही प्रभावी है। इसी को लेकर वहां नाराजगी फट पड़ी है। कर्पूर के बावजूद हजारों की संख्या में लोग सड़कों पर उतर रहे हैं। यह गुस्सा धीरे-धीरे दूसरे राज्यों में भी फैल रहा है। ऐसे में सरकार के लिए इस कानून को लागू करवा पाना आसान नहीं होगा। उसे इस पर पुनर्विचार कर व्यावहारिक रूप देने की जरूरत है।

बोरिस की वापसी

ब्रिटेन के आम चुनाव में कंजर्वेटिव पार्टी को भारी बहुमत से जिता कर देश की जनता ने ब्रेकिजट पर अपनी मुहर लगा दी है। बोरिस जॉनसन फिर से प्रधानमंत्री बन सत्ता में पहुंचे हैं और अब उनका पहला काम देश की जनता से किए अपने सबसे बड़े वादे यानी ब्रिटेन को यूरोपीय संघ से अलग करना है। तीन साल पहले ब्रेकिजट को लेकर ब्रिटेन में हुए जनमत संग्रह में बावन फीसद लोगों ने इसके पक्ष में वोट डाले थे। लेकिन ब्रेकिजट की यात्रा आसान नहीं रही। पिछले साल ब्रेकिजट से अलग होने के तरीके को लेकर सरकार में ही विवाद गहरा गए थे और प्रधानमंत्री थेरेजा मे की सरकार से एक साथ तीन मंत्रियों ने इस्तीफा देकर राजनीतिक संकट खड़ा कर दिया था। अब बोरिस जॉनसन के सामने सबसे बड़ी चुनौती 31 जनवरी, 2020 तक ब्रिटेन को यूरोपीय संघ से अलग कर लेने की है। बोरिस जॉनसन ने इस साल मई में सत्ता संभाली थी और 31 अक्टूबर तक ब्रिटेन को यूरोपीय संघ से अलग कर लेने का वादा किया था, लेकिन हाउस ऑफ़ लार्ड्स (उच्च सदन) में प्रस्ताव गिर गया और यह कवायद नाकाम हो गई। इसके बाद उन्होंने इस्तीफा दे दिया था। ऐसे में अब बोरिस जॉनसन कैसे इस दिशा में आगे बढ़ते हैं, यह देखने की बात है।

ब्रिटेन में पिछले पांच साल में तीन बार चुनाव हुए हैं और देश ने चार प्रधानमंत्री देखे हैं। इन चुनावों का सबसे बड़ा मुद्दा ब्रेकिजट ही रहा है। कंजर्वेटिव पार्टी पिछली बार के मुकाबले सैंतालीस सीटें ज्यादा कर कर तीन सौ पैंसठ पर पहुंच गई है। इससे पहले 1987 में मार्गरेट थैचर के नेतृत्व में इस पार्टी को तीन सौ सैंतानबे सीटें मिली थीं। दूसरी ओर, लेबर पार्टी सहित जिन सात दलों ने दोबारा जनमत संग्रह कराने और ब्रेकिजट रद्द करने का वादा किया था, उन्हें उन्हें दो सौ सत्तर सीटें ही मिलीं। जाहिर है, ब्रिटेन की जनता अब फैसला कर चुकी है कि उसे यूरोपीय संघ से अलग होना है और इसके लिए भले कितनी अड़चनें आएँ, कितना वक्त लगे, इसकी चिंता नहीं। दूसरे विश्वयुद्ध के बाद यूरोपीय देशों के बीच व्यापार और आर्थिक सहयोग को लेकर ही यूरोपीय संघ बना था और ब्रिटेन इसमें 1975 में शामिल हुआ था, लेकिन तबसे उसकी इस संघ में कोई ज्यादा अहमियत नहीं रही। उसे यूरोपीय संघ की उन शर्तों को मानने के लिए मजबूर होना पड़ रहा था, जो ब्रिटेन के हितों के खिलाफ थीं। इसलिए अब ब्रिटेन की नई पीढ़ी देश को हर मामले में स्वतंत्र देखना चाहती है, चाहे व्यापार, रोजगार, आर्थिक हितों के मुद्दे हों या सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक मुद्दे। यूरोपीय संघ से अलग होने पर सबसे बड़ा खतरा ब्रिटेन की अर्थव्यवस्था और संघ के दूसरे देशों के साथ व्यापार को लेकर है। ऐसे में ब्रिटेन यूरोपीय संघ की शर्तों के आगे कितना झुक पाएगा, यह बड़ा सवाल है। हालांकि यूरोपीय संघ से पूरी तरह नाता तोड़ने के बाद देश को जिन चुनौतियाँ का सामना करना पड़ेगा, उससे बोरिस जॉनसन भी अच्छी तरह समझ रहे हैं।

बोरिस जॉनसन का सत्ता में ओर ताकतवर होकर लौटना भारत के लिए भी अच्छा संकेत हैं। वे भारत के पक्के समर्थक रहे हैं। हाल के महीनों में ब्रिटेन के प्रमुख विपक्षी दल लेबर पार्टी ने जिस तरह से भारत विरोधी रवैया अख्तियार किया था, उससे भारत असहज महसूस कर रहा था। अब बोरिस जॉनसन के सत्ता में वापसी से भारत-ब्रिटेन के बीच हर तरह के व्यापक सहयोग के रास्ते बनने की उम्मीद बनी है।

कल्पमेधा

वह सभ्यता, जिसके पास आधुनिक तकनीकी ज्ञान नहीं है, कुछ नहीं कर सकती।
– एपीजे अब्दुल कलाम

सुविज्ञा जैन

सुविज्ञा जैन

सुविज्ञा जैन

कृषि का योगदान भले ही कम हो, लेकिन आबादी के लिहाज से वह देश का सबसे बड़ा त्यवसाय आज भी है। देश की आधी आबादी कृषि से रोजगार पाती है। पर अब कृषि क्षेत्र उसमें लगे व्यक्तियों को अपनी रोजमर्रा की जरूरतें पूरा करने लायक मुनाफा भी नहीं दे पा रहा है। जाहिर है, ग्रामीण अर्थव्यवस्था की बदहाली का असर देश के बाजार पर पड़ने लगा है।

सुविज्ञा जैन

पिछली छह तिमाहियों से देश की माली हालत चिंता में डाले हुए है। इस साल की दूसरी तिमाही में आर्थिक वृद्धि दर ने गिरते-गिरते पिछली छब्बीस तिमाहियों का रेकार्ड तोड़ दिया। वृद्धि दर अब सिर्फ साढ़े चार फीसद बची है। यानी इस साल की पहली छमाही का आंकड़ा पौने पांच फीसद बैठ रहा है। हाल फिलहाल देश की माली हालत के सुधरने के आसार भी नहीं दिख रहे। इसीलिए देश की जीडीपी का अनुमान लगाने वाली तमाम एजेंसियां इस साल पांच सवा पांच फीसद से ज्यादा का अंदाजा नहीं लगा रही हैं। बेशक ये आंकड़े चिंताजनक हैं।

वैसे वृद्धि दर में उतार-चढ़ाव कोई अपूर्व घटना नहीं है। स्थिति को सामान्य बताने वाले विशेषज्ञ इस हालत को चक्रीय घटना बताते हुए दिलासा दे रहे हैं। लेकिन आमतौर पर यह नहीं बताया जा पा रहा है कि इस दुश्चक्र से बचाव कैसे किया जाए? जो

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पोंआर को एक अनुपयोगी पौधा भी कह सकते हैं। पता नहीं कब उसमें आई फलियां सूख कर झड़ती हैं और उनके बीच बिखर जाते हैं। बारिश आते ही गांव में यह पौधा चारों तरफ लहराने लगता था। पीले-पीले फूल होते हैं उसके और एक खास तरह की गंध आती है। उस वक्त पीले-पीले फूलों पर न जाने कहां से छोटे आकार की पीली तितलियां मंडराने लगती थीं। यहां से वहां तक एक फसल-सी खड़ी दिखती थी। ‘न काहू से दोस्ती और न काहू से बैर’ वाली उक्ति चरित्राथ करता था वह पौधा। उसे कोई जानवर भी नहीं खाता था। सरसों की तरह पीले-पीले फूलों वाला वह पौधा यहां से वहां तक नजर आने लगता था। एक खास गंध होने के बावजूद न तो उसमें गुलाब-सी आकर्षक महक होती है और न कांटे।

पिछले कुछ सालों से कहीं दिखाई नहीं पड़ी, जबकि एक समय गांव में चारों तरफ उसका साम्राज्य हुआ करता था और पीली तितलियों को पकड़ने बच्चों का झुंड यहां से वहां तक उनके बीच मटराशती करता नजर आता था। इस बार बारिश की अवधि कुछ कम पड़ी, जो कभी आंतरिक शांति और सौहार्द के लिए जाना था, ऐसा लगता है कि उस पर आज कुछ बुरी शक्तियां हावी हो चुकी हैं। 1947 में विभाजन के दौरान धर्म विशेष के आधार पर पड़ोसी राष्ट्र पाकिस्तान का गठन हुआ। जबकि भारतीय संविधान सभा में सभी धर्मों और वर्गों को समानता देने की पुरजोर वकालत की गई और अनुच्छेद-14 में सभी लोगों को समानता का मौलिक अधिकार प्रदान किया गया और धार्मिक अल्पसंख्यकों और पिछड़े वर्गों के उत्थान के लिए विशिष्ट उपबंध किए गए। यही कारण है कि हमारा संविधान विश्व का सबसे सुंदर संविधान है।

पिछले कुछ वर्षों से सरकार ने अपनी नाकामी को छिपाने के लिए अनेक प्रयत्न किए, चाहे उसमें लव-जिहाद, घर वापसी, नोटबंदी, करों में वृद्धि, अनुच्छेद 370, एनआरसी हो या सीएए। सरकार किसी देश को विकसित करने वाले तथ्यों पर ध्यान नहीं देना चाहती, जिसका परिणाम हमें बेरोजगारी, गरीबी, महंगाई, शिक्षा का अभाव आदि कारकों के रूप में देखने को मिलता है। सरकार की मंशा देश में खुशहाली और शांति स्थापित करने के बजाय देश में अस्थिरता फैलाने की लगती है, क्योंकि आमजन के मन में द्वेष फैलाना, बेरोजगारी में वृद्धि होना, जीडीपी का दिनोंदिन गिरना, एडीबी द्वारा विकास दर कम करना और सैकड़ों औद्योगिक उपक्रमों का बंद होना सरकार की मंशा और नाकामी को साफ जाहिर करता है।

● *मोहम्मद शायान, विधि छात्र, कैराना*

बहुमत का हथियार

भारत का आदर्श वाक्य- ‘वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्’, यानी पूरी दुनिया हमारा परिवार है। लेकिन अब अफगानिस्तान, बांग्लादेश, पाकिस्तान के

जनसत्ता

संकट में ग्रामीण अर्थव्यवस्था

कुछ किया जा रहा है, वह नाकाफी साबित हुआ है। बेशक अर्थव्यवस्था में उतार-चढ़ाव आते जाते रहते हैं, लेकिन चिंता तब जरूर होती है जब वृद्धि दर में गिरावट लंबे समय तक बनी रहे। तब चिंता और भी बढ़ती है जब कोई उपाय, हालात को संभाल ना पा रहा हो। पिछले तीन-चार महीने से अर्थव्यवस्था को संभालने के भारी-भरकम सरकारी खर्च वाले उपाय किए गए। उद्योग जगत और बैंकों को बड़ी-बड़ी आर्थिक मदद दी गई। इसका तर्क यह कि औद्योगिक उत्पादन घटने की खबरें कई तिमाहियों से बढ़ रही थीं। इसलिए राहत पैकेज उसी क्षेत्र को दिए गए जिन्हें उत्पादन बढ़ाने वाला माना जाता है। उद्योग जगत की मदद के लिए कॉरपोरेट कर में भारी कटौती की गई। सोचा और कहा गया कि कॉरपोरेट कर कम करने से उद्योग जगत के पास पैसा बचेगा और वह पैसा औद्योगिक गतिविधियां बढ़ाने में काम आएगा। रियल एस्टेट क्षेत्र को भी पैकेज दिया गया। इसका मकसद अधूरी पड़ी आवास परियोजनाएं पूरी करना है। मौद्रिक उपाय भी करके देख लिए गए। इसी तरह अलग-अलग क्षेत्रों को मदद देकर उद्योग क्षेत्र में फिर से जान फूंकने की कोशिश की गई। इसके बाद भी अगर बात उतनी बनती दिख नहीं रही है तो सवाल उठना लाजिमी है कि क्या सही क्षेत्रों पर ध्यान लगाया गया?

गौरतलब है कि अर्थव्यवस्था की तीन क्षेत्रों की उत्पादक गतिविधियां तय करती हैं। ये तीन क्षेत्र हैं विनिर्माण, सेवा और कृषि। गौर करें तो पिछले तीन महीनों में विनिर्माण और सेवा क्षेत्र यानी कॉरपोरेट को ऊपर उठाने की कोशिश ज्यादा हुई। लेकिन पिछले तीन महीने के उपायों में कृषि क्षेत्र पर उतना ध्यान नहीं गया। इसलिए इस पहलू की चर्चा होनी जरूरी है।

इस बात से कोई इनकार नहीं करता कि देश में इस समय समस्या कम औद्योगिक उत्पादन की है। इसका सीधा-सा मतलब है कि उत्पाद की मांग घटी है। अगर मांग होती और फिर भी उत्पादन कम हो रहा होता तो इस समय महंगाई पिछले सारे रेकार्डों तोड़ चुकी होती। अर्थशास्त्र के बड़े विशेषज्ञ चाहें तो निष्कर्ष निकाल कर बता सकते हैं कि इस समय देश में उत्पादन नहीं बल्कि उत्पाद की मांग घट रही है। हालांकि कुछ गैरसरकारी विशेषज्ञ बता भी रहे हैं कि समस्या उपभोक्ता के कमजोर पड़ जाने की है। इसे वे क्रय-शक्ति का कम होना कहते हैं। इस अवस्था को आर्थिक सुस्ती कहा जाता है और आम बोलचाल की भाषा में कहा जाने लगता है कि लोगों की जेब

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ज्यादा ही लंबी हो गई थी। कई राज्यों में यह बाढ़ के प्रकोप का कारण रही। कभी मेरे शहर में पोंआर की उपस्थिति नगण्य थी। पर इस वर्ष कहीं-कहीं फसल जैसी दिखाई पड़ी, लेकिन वे पीली तितलियां कहीं नजर नहीं आईं, जिन्हें पोंआर के पीले फूल आकर्षित करते हैं। वरना बारिश के दिनों दीगर रंग की तितलियां भी दिखती थीं। अलग-अलग तरह की खूबसूरती लिए हुए। लेकिन पोंआर के पीले फूलों पर तो पीली तितली ही मिलती-जुलती लगती है। कभी-कभी हरे रंग की भी नजर आती है। बगीचों में तो जैसे इसके भिन्न प्रकार दिख जाते हैं। इस वर्ष थोड़ी मात्रा में सही, लहराती पोंआर को शहर में देख मैं खुश तो हुआ था, लेकिन पीली तितलियों की अनुपस्थिति खल गई। सूखे शंट पोंआर के पौधा पर पीले फूल तो थे।

कभी की लौड़ती-भागती दुनिया में जहां लोगों को मोबाइल, ट्रिक्टर, इंस्टाग्राम और सोशल मीडिया में बने रहने के कारण फुर्सत नहीं है। मोबाइल के होते बेटा अपने पिता को नजदीक से नहीं जान पा रहा और पत्नी पति को। तो फिर किसी का ध्यान क्यों इन बेकार की बातों पर जाए? पर विषय गंभीर है। इस तरह तितलियों का ओझाल हो जाना किसी बड़े संकट की चेतावनी जरूर है। अब ये छोटे-छोटे

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में पैसा नहीं है। बाजार की भाषा में यह बाजार में ग्राहकी का न होना है। अगर मौजूदा हालात को ग्राहक या उपभोक्ताओं की माली हालत के नजरिए से देखें तो आज की आर्थिक सुस्ती से निपटने के लिए उपभोक्ताओं को मजबूत करने के उपाय होने चाहिए। फिर सवाल यह उठेगा कि ज्यादा से ज्यादा ग्राहकों यानी अधिक से अधिक उपभोक्ताओं को मजबूत कैसे किया जाए?

अपना देश एक सौ पैंतीस करोड़ आबादी का देश है। देश के औसत नागरिक पर सूर्य टिकाना चाहें तो वह निम्न मध्य आय वर्ग पर जाकर टिकेगी, यानी मध्यवर्ग से नीचे का वर्ग। इस वर्ग की रिहाइश का पता करने निकलें तो ऐसे सबसे ज्यादा उपभोक्ता गांव में रहते हैं। कहने की जरूरत नहीं कि देश की आधी से ज्यादा आबादी गांव में बसती है। इसीलिए औद्योगिक उत्पाद का एक बहुत बड़ा उपभोक्ता

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अर्थव्यवस्था का भारी असर पड़ा। इस तरह गांव, किसान या कृषि क्षेत्र की बदहाली सीधे-सीधे कॉरपोरेट से जुड़ी मानी जानी चाहिए। कॉरपोरेट को कर में छूट देकर उसे कितनी भी राहत पहुंचा ली जाए आखिर में बात वही जाकर अटकेगी कि कॉरपोरेट के माल बिकने की स्थितियां खराब तो नहीं हो रही हैं। यानी कारपोरेट की सेहत तब ज्यादा सुधरेगी जब ग्रामीणों की जेब में पैसा होगा।

बहुत से अर्थशास्त्री अच्छी तरह से समझते हैं कि किसान की जेब में पैसा होने का एक संकेतक कृषि विकास दर का बढ़ना है। लेकिन इन दिनों जब भी जीडीपी के नए आंकड़े आए, तब सबका ध्यान सिर्फ औद्योगिक विकास दर की कमी पर खींचा गया। ऑटोमोबाइल, टेक्सटाइल, सीमेंट, रियल एस्टेट आदि क्षेत्रों में गिरावट आई और उन्हीं पर चर्चा होती रही। लेकिन कृषि क्षेत्र पर किसी का ध्यान नहीं गया।

कृषि क्षेत्र की वृद्धि दर पिछले साल की दूसरी तिमाही के 4.9 फीसद से घट कर इस साल की दूसरी तिमाही में सिर्फ 2.1 फीसद रह गई। यह एक बहुत बड़ा सूचक है कि इस समय गरीबी और गांव वालों की जेब की क्या हालत है।

हमें भूलना नहीं चाहिए कि कभी हम कृषि को भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था की रीढ़ कहते थे। छह दशक पहले जीडीपी में कृषि का योगदान 56.5 फीसद था। लेकिन जीडीपी में उद्योग क्षेत्र का योगदान बढ़ता गया और कृषि का योगदान घटता गया। हालांकि कृषि का योगदान कम दिखने का कारण भी ढूंढ़ा जाना चाहिए। विश्लेषण यह हो सकता है कि जीडीपी का आकलन तीनों क्षेत्रों के उत्पादित माल के दाम से बनता है और ये एक उजागर हकीकत है कि कृषि उत्पाद का दाम उस हिसाब से नहीं बढ़ा जिस हिसाब से उद्योग के माल के दाम बढ़े। इस तथ्य पर भी गौर होना

चाहिए कि तेजी से बढ़ती अर्थव्यवस्थाओं की दौड़ में उद्योग क्षेत्र वृद्धि दर के लिए ज्यादा मुनाफे का था। इसलिए कृषि कि अनदेखी कभी देश में मुख्य चर्चा का विषय बनी भी नहीं। कृषि का योगदान भले ही कम हो, लेकिन आबादी के लिहाज से वह देश का सबसे बड़ा व्यवसाय आज भी है। देश की आधी आबादी कृषि से रोजगार पाती है। पर अब कृषि क्षेत्र उसमें लगे व्यक्तियों को अपनी रोजमर्रा की जरूरतें पूरा करने लायक मुनाफा भी नहीं दे पा रहा है। जाहिर है, ग्रामीण अर्थव्यवस्था की बदहाली का असर देश के बाजार पर पड़ने लगा है। ऐसे में देश की आबादी के सबसे बड़े हिस्से की जेब में पैसे पहुंचाए बिना थमे हुए बाजारों का चक्का दोबारा चलाना बड़ा मुश्किल होगा।

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