

Reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide

A descendant of CO₂-eating e coli could be modified to make organic carbon molecules



QUANTUM LEAP

DEVANGSHU DATTA

The reduction of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) is vital to combat Climate Change, since CO₂ contributes roughly half of all greenhouse gases. Research at Israel’s Weizmann Institute of Science indicates there could be a way to design bacteria to absorb atmospheric CO₂. The natural mechanism for removing atmospheric CO₂ is photosynthesis. Leaves contain chlorophyll, which uses energy from sunlight in a chemical reaction that creates sugars out of

atmospheric CO₂ and water. Sugars have a large number (“n”) of carbon atoms coupled to a large number of water molecules (H₂O) and formulae on the lines of Cn(H₂O)n. An important “waste product” in photosynthesis is excess oxygen, which is released by plants into the atmosphere. Plants and trees also absorb oxygen and release CO₂ during hours of darkness. But net-net, plants release more oxygen (O) and consume more CO₂. Photosynthetic cyanobacteria — aquatic microbes that produce oxygen — also use energy from light to fix CO₂ and turn it into sugars, proteins and fats. But natural photosynthesis is insufficient to deal with the excessive production of CO₂ by industrial processes. Now Israeli scientists claim they have found a way to engineer common bacteria to eat atmospheric CO₂. Right now, these bacteria release more CO₂ than they consume. But this is a transformation approach and it may lead to insights that help to fight Climate Change. Living organisms are either autotrophs (such as plants) that convert

CO₂ into biomass (wood), and heterotrophs that consume organic compounds (humans and other animals). The common bacteria Escherichia coli (E.coli) is found in the guts of many animals and it is heterotrophic. It is easy to genetically engineer, and its fast growth means changes through generations can be quickly tested and tweaked to optimise mutations. Normally it consumes sugars, and emits CO₂. However, in an experiment described in Cell magazine, ([https://www.cell.com/fulltext/S0092-8674\(16\)30668-7](https://www.cell.com/fulltext/S0092-8674(16)30668-7)), a Weizmann team described how they transformed the dietary habits of e coli. Lead author, Shmuel Gleizer said, “From a basic scientific perspective, we wanted to see if such a major transformation in the diet of bacteria — from dependence on sugar to the synthesis of all biomass from CO₂ — is possible. Beyond testing the feasibility of such a transformation in the lab, we wanted to know how extreme an adaptation is needed in terms of the changes to bacterial DNA.” The engineered strain of e coli first

harvested energy from formate (HCO₂), a chemical which can be produced electrochemically from renewable sources (or from formic acid, which is found in ants). Formate has only one carbon atom, and does not normally serve as a food source for e coli. In 2016, the Weizmann team created an e coli strain that ate CO₂, but it preferred sugars. Using genetic engineering they gave it genes that allow photosynthetic organisms to convert CO₂ into carbon. Photosynthesis isn’t possible in bacteria but they managed to insert a gene that lets the bacterium eat formate for energy. The scientists further modified the bacteria to inactivate key enzymes that made it heterotrophic and thus, more dependent on autotrophic methods. Eventually they succeeded in “building” a bacteria that consumed only CO₂. They confirmed this by labelling food sources with marker chemicals and detecting changes in the marker-levels. Then they cultured successive generations of the modified bacteria, with minute quantities of sugar, and CO₂ at

very high concentrations (about 250 times that in the atmosphere). After about 200 days, bacteria capable of using CO₂ as their only carbon source grew. After 300 days, these bacteria grew faster than those that could not consume CO₂. The autotrophic bacteria still prefer sugar. Also this is slow-growth. Normal e coli doubles in number every 20 minutes, while the autotrophic type divides every 18 hours in an atmosphere that is 10 per cent CO₂. They can’t survive at current atmospheric levels of CO₂ of about 0.0407 per cent (407 parts per million). The scientists are trying to make the bacteria grow faster and live on lower CO₂ levels. They are also trying to understand how changes in just 11 genes allowed the switch. Biotech companies use cell cultures living on corn syrup to produce chemicals. If such cells — yeast or bacteria — could live on CO₂ and renewable electricity, they could be weaned from corn syrup. They may be further adapted to take energy from a solar cell and store that energy for use as fuel in the form of carbon fixed in cells. Thus, a descendant of this CO₂-eating e coli could be modified to make organic carbon molecules to use as biofuels. Such products would have lower emissions and ideally, they could remove atmospheric CO₂.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Ready to bat
Surendra Singh ‘Shera’, independent MLA from the Burhanpur Assembly seat, is known for his rebellious nature. He supports the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh but is unhappy at not being offered a ministry. He is frequently in the headlines for his criticism of the state government. During a government event recently, Singh and Chief Minister Kamal Nath were in a discussion. When asked about his possible inclusion in the cabinet, Singh said: “Kamal Nath is my captain, whenever he asks me to bat, I will come to the crease and start hitting fours and sixes. I am waiting for my turn with my pads and gloves on.”

Storm gathers momentum
Even as the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh is trying to recover from the rebellious sit-in by party legislators in the Assembly to protest against alleged harassment by police and district officials, BJP MLA Nand Kishore Gurjar has demanded a probe into the properties of all politicians and bureaucrats. Gurjar was the first to raise the harassment issue in the Assembly on the inaugural day of the UP legislature on Tuesday and was later joined by other party legislators and members from the opposition benches. Gurjar said the graft probe should include spouses of political leaders and bureaucrats because several of them were running non-government organisations. The MLA lamented he was being targeted because he was trying to expose corrupt officials in his constituency, Loni.

Dealing with family businesses

Business partners should take care to understand the family in a family business or they may find family businesses too enigmatic to deal with

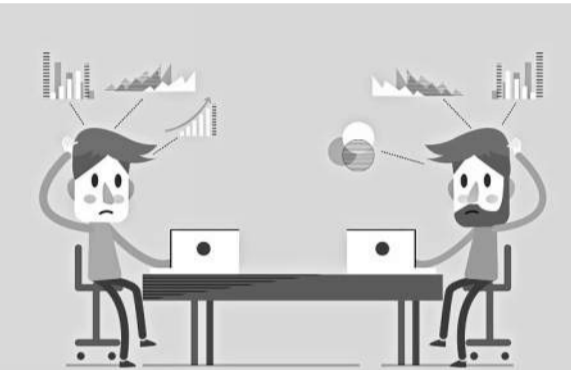


JANMEJAVA SINHA & VARUN GOVINDARAJ

Despite the importance of family businesses across the globe it is surprising that often their business partners do not know how to deal with them. Business partners — whether investors, private equity firms or joint venture partners — tend to focus on the business side of the family business. However, every family businesses combines two conflicting sides. On one side there is the business where profit, growth and shareholder returns are paramount. On the other side there is the family where emotions of love, fairness and trust reign supreme. Successful family businesses skillfully navigate these disparate perspectives to achieve both success and stability in their business. If a family business fails because it cannot reconcile the needs of the business with the wants of the family, its partners (who have invested time, capital and other resources) also lose a great deal. So one would expect that potential partners are alert to this conundrum

when they begin engaging with family businesses. Yet this is often not the case. Partners often treat family-owned businesses as they would any other company, which is a mistake. We believe potential partners should undertake a more comprehensive evaluation of the family before working with them. In particular, there are five areas worthy of deep investigation. ■ The reputation of the family: It is important to understand the family’s reputation. This can be done by examining their past behaviour or the behaviour of other companies owned by the promoter group. Have their joint ventures survived? Have promoter group companies defaulted on their loans? How have they used the judicial process? How close are they to certain political parties? It is crucial for potential partners to speak with other partners to understand their experience working with the family. With that said, it is also worth noting that family businesses with strong reputations cherish their reputations. They will go to great lengths not to stain the integrity associated with their names. Only in truly extreme situations will they default on their commitments. Typically their partners will trust them deeply because of the flawless reputation of the promoter family. ■ Identify the decision makers: In family businesses often the formal structure of the company does not reflect the underlying power dynamics of the company. While there may be a CEO or chairman

of the company, their actual autonomy might be limited. Their titles are often titular. So it is critical to identify the true decision maker. This may be a head of the family (such as a patriarch) or a group of elders that deeply influence business decisions despite holding no official titles. Potential partners must know them, understand their individual motivations and their vision for the family business and ensure these are in line with their own objectives before entering into a partnership. If partners find that there is a lack of alignment between different members of the family then they should be careful and recognise that decisions taken by the current incumbent may be stalled or even overturned later. Ignoring the underlying family dynamics is a big mistake which can turn out to be very time consuming and costly for potential partners. ■ Understand the influence of non-family top executives: The power that non-family executives have in a family business varies. Some long-term executives serving in a company may actually be very influential. Their advice is taken seriously and they know how to navigate the family’s dynamics. So their support counts for a lot more than that of a freshly installed CEO. In comparison many freshly hired CEOs may not last long in the company especially if they come to the family business from a different background (like an MNC) — simply because they will not understand the culture of the family and the company.



the financial ecosystem within which the family business operates. The ease with which partners can exit a family business will differ greatly across countries and this has implications on the safety of their investments. It would, for example, be much harder for a private equity investor to sell a stake in a family

business in an emerging economy without developed institutions. In the same vein, developed markets also allow family businesses more freedom to find alternative sources from where they can raise capital or manage family restructuring. All partners need to appreciate this. Given the critical position of family businesses in many economies, it is surprising that more work has not been done in helping partners create a work book on how to deal with them. Though there are many partners who have a good intuitive understanding of how to do business with family businesses — there are many that do not and flounder because their due diligence ignored the family dynamics of the promoter group. Business partners should take care to understand the family in a family business or they may find family businesses too enigmatic to deal with.

Sinha is chairman & Govindaraj is consultant, BCG India. Views personal



Gandhi in the time of CAA
Protests against the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act have now reached every part of the country. While government spokespersons and “people’s forums” continue to disseminate their own version of the events, the Press Information Bureau has been, since December 18, tweeting quotes by Mahatma Gandhi that do not have any connection with any specific date or event. “One should assimilate in oneself what is good in others and reject the bad,” reads one. “Lack of our awareness was a reason we became subjects of British rule,” reads another. Yet another reads: “Good deeds can only be accomplished with righteous methods; dishonest methods cannot yield good results.”

INSIGHT

The new face of environment activism

India needs to develop its own environment framework



JYOTI MUKUL

Rajeev Chaba, president and managing director, MG Motor India, walked in before guests with child actor Prachi Thakur as his company unveiled the ZS, an all-electric SUV, earlier this month. After being ushered into the car, Thakur waved at the audience at New Delhi’s Pullman Hotel from the car’s sunroof. During the show, the hall’s dome projected moving caricatures conveying the message that conventional vehicles cause pollution and going electric was the only way forward. It was not without reason that the Chinese company roped in Thakur to unveil its high-end EV, whose battery can be reused for power generation. Whether such high end models will make much of a difference to air pollution remains a subject of debate but children and young adults have been at the forefront of movements across the globe demanding critical action on environment from governments and decision makers. These actions could be in the public space or within the confines of the family.

the Paris agreement, it is the likes of Thakur and those slightly older who would define climate change movements going forward. Daily Intelligencer, a website of the New York magazine group, in a December 16 write-up called António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, a “Greta Thunberg’s alarmist equal” for saying at Madrid that “the point of no return is no longer on the horizon... it is in sight and hurtling towards us”. Though Intelligencer’s comment had more to do with the failure of COP25, it brings out the dichotomy of the times — that a 16-year-old girl is able to carry the message more forcefully while member countries failed to put an action plan in place. In September 2019, she addressed the UN Climate Action Summit in New York to warn about the world her generation would end up inheriting if nations failed to act now. Earlier in 2019, Thunberg spearheaded the School Strike for Climate (Skolstrejk för klimatet in Swedish), also called Fridays for Future (FFF). School students did not attend classes and instead took part in demonstrations to demand action to prevent further global warming and climate change. On March 15, more than one million were reported to have kept out of schools. This, however, went unnoticed in India except for some pockets in the major cities where students egged on by their schools held events to drive home the message of environment-friendly behaviour among urban citizens. Prime Minister Narendra Modi did try to wage a war on plastics but the government’s efforts at environment preservation have been peripheral, and is often confused with Swachh Bharat,

the flagship programme for clean toilets and sanitised living. There is another face of environmental activism that has emerged with the Extinction Rebellion. This movement has an India chapter as well. Though run by professionals and people much older than Thunberg, it practises civil disobedience and forces closure of what it perceives as environmentally harmful. Set up by Roger Hallam and Gail Bradbrook and other activists in the United Kingdom in May 2018, the Extinction Rebellion is also called XR. Many do not support the antics of XR sympathisers because they coerce people rather than convince them to shun environmentally harmful activities. Nonetheless, it is true that the lack of global leadership among policy makers and influencers has been the main reason behind the emergence of sub-national forces this year. Within India, getting those beyond a defined group to use less water or recycle waste or do less damage to environment in whatever small way they can is largely left to non-government agencies. This is despite the fact that damages caused due to climate change are more pronounced in smaller cities and villages simply because the infrastructure in both personal and public spaces is less disaster resilient. It is, therefore, important that the benefits of being environment friendly, having a smaller carbon footprint and being less of a burden on natural resources is built into public psyche. The first step is to shun complacency. For policy makers sitting in the national and state capitals, COP25’s failure should be no relief but a push for developing India’s own national environment framework with actionable triggers and urgent targets.

LETTERS

Think before you speak

At a time when parts of the country are on the boil over the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the Army Chief’s warning that the situation along the line of control can escalate any time and the Indian Army is always ready for an “escalatory matrix” is not only alarmist but unwise too. While it is true that ceasefire violations by Pakistan have witnessed a spurt since the abrogation of Article 370 in August, “escalatory matrix” is not an option particularly when our economy seems headed for the ICU, as opined by Arvind Subramanian, former chief economic advisor. The Army Chief needs to be more circumspect in his public utterances and consider their likely political ramifications. With a large number of leaders, including three former chief ministers, still under detention in Kashmir despite Union home minister’s claim of normalcy there, the Army Chief’s warning of a possible escalation of tensions along the LoC could well be used by the Centre as a ground to maintain the status quo in the valley. That would be unfortunate.

SK Choudhury Bengaluru

History repeats itself

The recent countrywide uprising by students and members of the civil society is unnerving. The implementation of CAA and the imminent operationalisation of the National Register of Citizens is a dangerous cocktail for our political economy that is already on the stretcher. It is widely thought that the enforcement of such laws will inflict the same amount of pain and damage to our social and political firmament as did demonetisation to our economy barely three years ago. The economy is paying a heavy price for that single step and the pain is not over yet. As the saying goes, history repeats itself; the second time as a farce. We are surely and



steadily converting the demographic dividend into a demographic curse. If not, then what is the point of forcing 25 per cent of our existing labour force to abjure work and queue up to prove their existence, nationality, citizenship, identity and so on?

Ganga Narayan Rath Hyderabad

Do your job

This refers to the well-timed piece, “All is not well with the media, says former President Pranab Mukherjee” (December 19). That a former president had to point out “orchestrated, out-of-context and motivated reporting for partisan agendas” and call for self-correcting measures to check such irregularities must truly awaken the conscience of all concerned. He has expressed his utter dismay at the blur-

ring of distinction between views and news and exhorted media organisations not to compromise on their basic role of behaving like ever-alert watchdogs of the society. He also thought it wise to provide a comprehensive list of dos and don’ts. It becomes incumbent upon those at the helm of affairs to meticulously follow them. It’s also time to bid adieu to paid and fake news. That would require a lot of determination and conviction, but that is the need of the hour.

SK Gupta New Delhi

Letters can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to: The Editor, Business Standard Nehru House, 4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg New Delhi 110 002 Fax: (011) 23720201 E-mail: letters@bsmail.in All letters must have a postal address and telephone number



Don't over-react on GST

Govt must be restrained on collection targets

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, the body which comprises Union and state finance ministers and oversees the indirect tax system, met for the 38th time on Wednesday. But this was a meeting with a difference. So far, the Council has been able to maintain a tradition of unanimity, with every member agreeing on changes. However, on this occasion, voting took place for the first time, and the rate on lotteries was increased to 28 per cent. This took place, reportedly, because the Kerala government maintained a resolute opposition to the proposal. While there may have been no alternative, this is not a good harbinger for the future. Indeed, GST in general is looking increasingly troubled. States are deeply concerned about their GST compensation not coming in time, which has stressed their own finances.

Yet GST itself continues to underperform. This takes on particular salience at a time when, following a drop in corporate income tax rates, the mop-up of corporation tax has actually gone down by over 5 per cent in the months between October and December 2019, as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. Personal income tax is not showing sufficiently robust growth to make up for it, an indication that an overall slowdown is also partially responsible. Thus, the low GST collection is stoking a fiscal crisis. The finance ministry has set a target of ₹1.1 trillion a month for GST collection, which is more than the collection in all but the first month of the current fiscal year. It appears that the belief has taken hold that the problem is essentially widespread evasion, and fraud relating to input tax credits.

Various measures are being proposed to address this issue. Several ways to limit the outgo in terms of input tax credit are also being proposed, such as the lowering of the amount that is provided before invoices are uploaded to 10 per cent of the amount from the current 20 per cent. But the government must be very careful in how it approaches anti-evasion mechanisms. In general, giving tax officials targets and enhanced powers to achieve those targets has proved to be massively counter-productive in India. Currently, the thinking appears to be that relaxation in penalties for late filing, alongside some extension in deadlines, might be tried. But it appears a consensus is developing for harsher measures, including enhanced penalties and more powers to block credits for tax officials. As usual, the possibility of arrest is also being thrown into the policy mix. But the government must take a holistic view of the problem.

The success of GST depends upon voluntary participation in the tax. Cracking down too harshly now will scoop up both the innocent and the guilty, and further depress business sentiment at a time when reviving animal spirits is crucial to get out of the current slowdown. What is needed is an overall review of GST's structure. Can it be simplified in such a way that compliance increases without the use of the metaphorical *lathi*? The Council must deliberate on the broad direction of the tax as well as specific rates.

Mixed signals

IUC extension is welcome, but Trai should take a holistic view

The decision by the telecom regulator to extend the current regime of 6 paise per minute termination charge or IUC (interconnect usage charge) for wireless calls ending on a different telco's network for another year is a welcome move. It would help improve the cash flow of the incumbent operators, which have been complaining that some of the decisions taken by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) have only helped the newest telecom operator. But the regulator needs to iron out some more creases. For example, while extending the current regime, Trai has announced that zero IUC or the BAK (bill and keep) regime will be implemented in January 2021. Although telcos will get a year to transition to the new system, setting a date for zero IUC without any review condition ahead of the rollout seems ill-planned.

Before its implementation, Trai must make sure that the timing is right for shifting to a zero IUC regime. One of the factors guiding Trai to fix termination charges is traffic symmetry, a term used to describe the ratio between outgoing and incoming calls. Following consultation with industry stakeholders, Trai believes that by the end of 2020, traffic symmetry will be achieved and, therefore, zero IUC would be feasible from January 2021. But at a time when the telecom industry is bleeding and, on top of that, has received an adverse court order to pay up adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues of around ₹1.4 trillion (with interests and penalties), the regulator should not be in a hurry to abolish the interconnect charges.

In fact, the Trai decision to extend the IUC must be seen in the context of comments by top companies. Vodafone Group Chief Executive Officer Nick Read had told reporters in a post-result discussion that the Indian venture was reaching a liquidation-like condition. Following that, Vodafone Idea Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla had said it might be the end of the road for the telecom venture if there was no help from the government. Even Bharti Enterprises Chairman Sunil Mittal said in recent interactions that these were the most difficult times for the telecom sector.

IUC has been a controversial subject ever since Reliance Jio launched its service with free calls three years ago. In 2017, Trai had cut the interconnect charge from 14 paise per minute to 6 paise per minute, a move that may have hit the industry by around ₹5,000 crore a year. Incumbents argued that the regulator's decision to slash IUC by more than half helped Jio subscribers make calls to those on other networks at a much lower price, while enabling the company to keep disrupting the market with predatory tariff. Another grudge that incumbents expressed against Trai's calculation of IUC was that some key components such as capex and spectrum charges were not considered. This is an opportunity for Trai to show its fairness. And, any change in the IUC regime should come after a proper assessment of the market. The point is that IUC is a cost, and hence it should be cost-based. That's the reason the regulator should be mindful of traffic symmetry so that the market does not get distorted.

The mind of a champion



BOOK REVIEW

DEVANGSHU DATTA

At 50, Viswanathan Anand's *curriculum vitae* runs to many pages. India's first grandmaster announced his arrival on the world stage in 1987 by winning the World Junior Championship. In 2018, he won the World Rapid Championship. In-between, he won multiple world titles, in different formats, alongside countless other successes.

Obviously Anand was born with an

extraordinary aptitude for this highly demanding sport. Equally obviously, he has a manic work ethic that helped him master the technical skills to maximise that talent. Less obviously, achieving such success and maintaining this consistency for over 30 years also requires intense introspection and self-examination. Anand has ruthlessly analysed his own flaws and weaknesses, and understood how to play to his strengths.

Such introspection is not unique to Anand — Roger Federer, Magnus Carlsen and Sachin Tendulkar to name three people, must have gone through similar processes. Anand is unusual in that he was already part of the world elite long before he received any formal coaching. He was, therefore, an absolute auto-

didact in terms of this internal journey of self-realisation.

He learnt to deal with self-doubt triggered by loss of form. He learnt how to bounce back after crippling defeat, and equally importantly, how to maintain equilibrium and retain motivation, after big wins. He taught himself the art of revving into super-gear in "must-win" games and learnt how to switch off completely in order to recharge mentally. He also taught himself how to use anger, discrimination and disappointment as motivational spurs.

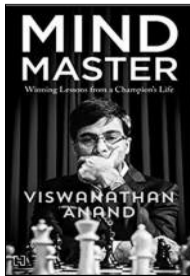
Remarkably, this book succeeds in verbalising some of that understanding in terms that will make sense to readers, who have never played chess, or indeed, any other sport. This is one of several things that raises this book well above the norm

in terms of sporting biographies.

There are other stellar qualities as well. The narrative dips in and out of Anand's life, pausing to take snapshots of key moments. Somehow, without going through the tedium of

chronological description, it gives a pretty complete picture of his life and career. There are some utterly fascinating descriptions of Anand's thought processes before, during and after a vital game, or match. (In chess parlance, a match is a series of games against one specific opponent). There are also great explanations of the relationships between a champion and his seconds and of the sport's transition to the digital era.

The book also introduces us to many



MIND MASTER: Winning Lessons From a Champion's Life
Author: Viswanathan Anand with Susan Ninan
Publisher: Hachette
Price: ₹599

details about Anand's relationships with his other great contemporaries.

Despite being a cut-throat sport, chess players are often friendly with rivals. Anand is on very good terms with several of his greatest rivals, while having a somewhat "transactional relationship" with Garry Kasparov. He has worked with Magnus Carlsen, who helped him prepare for a title match against Veselin Topalov. Even during two hard-fought world title matches when Carlsen beat Anand to

other characters on the chess circuit, and chess is full of fascinating characters. There are also subtle descriptions of some of the many shades of gamesmanship that occur. There are interesting

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become his successor, they were laughing onstage at the same jokes (both quote chunks of Monty Python).

The "insider" descriptions of the match against Veselin Topalov is epic. The match almost didn't happen: a volcanic explosion led to flights across Europe being cancelled. Anand had to ask for a timeout. He hired a van and his team drove for over 40 hours, from Germany to Bulgaria, to get to the venue. Then they drove up and down outside their hotel for an extra hour because they were watching the concluding part of the *Lord of the Rings*!

Anand's work-life balance has always been exemplary and that has contributed to his success. He takes wind-surfing holidays, bakes cakes with his son and pursues hobbies like astronomy, maths. His relationships with his mother Sushela, and with his wife, Aruna, are both touched upon, with love, delicacy, humour and honesty.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Natural partners, unnatural times

India-US defence ties remain strong despite discord over trade and human rights. New Delhi would do well not to put this to the test

On Wednesday night in Washington DC, after the second US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, in which US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defence Mark Esper co-hosted Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar, persistent questions from the US media about the continuing crack-down in Jammu & Kashmir and the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which discriminates against Muslim refugees in granting Indian citizenship, made it clear that these issues are now front and centre in the American perception of India.

Since the warming of US-India relations two decades ago, Washington and New Delhi have both talked up the "natural partners" rationale for partnership, with almost every US and India joint statement citing the "shared values" between the two "vibrant democracies". Indeed, Wednesday's joint press conference played that same tune. Lovers of realpolitik have tended to dismiss that as empty rhetoric, pointing to America's long and unlovely record of backing dictators — not least Nguyen Van Thieu in Vietnam and the Shah of Iran; and in more recent times the undemocratic leaders of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The cynics argue that expediency, not principle, dictates Washington's policy, and that even the post-Soviet expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has involved a strong element of holding one's nose. This argument, however, overlooks the fact that, while Washington happily makes tactical compromises with strongmen and their authoritarian regimes, its strongest and deepest partnerships — such as the Five Eyes alliance with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK — rest on the bedrock of shared values and worldviews.

Others argue that Donald Trump can hardly accuse New Delhi of discrimination against Muslims, given his own misogynistic racism and his shameful imposition in 2017 of a travel ban on citizens of specified Muslim countries. However, it should be remembered that his ban was repeatedly overturned by US courts, strongly opposed by the American media and by large

sections of US lawmakers. Trump is an aberration in the US polity and will cease to be president latest in January 2025, and perhaps even earlier in the unlikely event of the Senate echoing his impeachment on Wednesday by the House of Representatives.

The US administration has not so far meaningfully chastised New Delhi for discriminating against Muslims or its continuing detention of Kashmiri leaders. Pressed by the US media on whether Washington had brought up these issues in the 2+2 dialogue, Mr Pompeo trod carefully, noting that "we care deeply and always will about protecting minorities, protecting religious rights everywhere..." and the US will be consistent in the way that we respond to these issues, not only in India but all across the world"; but also saving Indian face by telling the questioner that "we honour Indian democracy as they have a robust debate inside of India on the issues that you raised."

However, it would be hard to dispute that the US administration faces a new element of embarrassment due to its India relationship, something that will inevitably corrode the solid bipartisan consensus in the US Congress on the India relationship. It would be prudent to anticipate that New Delhi's days of an unending free ride — when it needed to do little for the US and just being India was enough — are now coming to an end. The implications of this are significant.

It might become increasingly difficult to obtain waivers from US laws on issues like the import of S-400 air defence missiles from Russia. And India might now have to contribute more visibly and to take more visibly pro-US positions on certain issues, even where Indian interests would be better served by ambiguity. With India's moral power diminished in global perceptions, New Delhi might have to compensate with other, more overt, forms of influence.

The 2+2 dialogue itself yielded predictable diplomatic outcomes. Washington backed India's security positions in the Indo-Pacific, while New Delhi catered to Chinese sensitivities by backing an Indo-Pacific security architecture "based on the recognition of Asean centrality." The US side appreciated India's



BROADSWORD

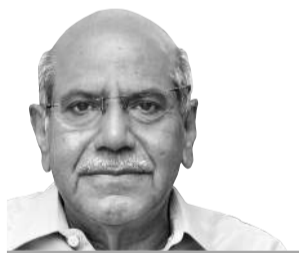
AJAI SHUKLA

Translating economic scale into financial heft

China is the second largest economy in the world with a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$14 trillion, about 18 per cent of global GDP, and may soon become No 1. It has been the world's biggest trading nation since 2013 and has a current export-import volume of more than \$4.5 trillion. China has the world's second largest equity and bond markets, respectively. Its bond market is worth \$13 trillion and constitutes 11 per cent of the global total. Similarly, its equity market by capitalisation is 12 per cent of the global volume. But its weight in the global economy is not reflected in its financial profile.

The use of renminbi (RMB) in trade settlement has fallen in recent years from a high of 25 per cent in 2013 to less than 15 per cent in 2018. Only 2 per cent of international payments is conducted in RMB. In 2016, the RMB was included in the trillion dollar Special Drawing Rights (SDR) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a reserve currency alongside the US dollar, the euro, Japanese yen and the British pound and given a weight of 10.86 per cent. Its inclusion in the foreign exchange reserves of IMF member countries could reach a maximum of \$1 trillion but is currently only \$194 billion. China has encouraged currency swap agreements with over 30 countries and this is valued at \$500 billion currently, but this has been used only marginally. The RMB has failed to achieve the same credibility as other reserve currencies. Its reluctance to give up control over capital flows and tolerate currency volatility, has stalled progress so far.

China has now shifted to a different strategy to achieve the eventual goal of internationalisation of the yuan. It is pursuing the systematic integration of its huge equity and bond markets into global financial markets using sheer scale to gain pre-eminence. Initially, China set up the Hong Kong-Shanghai and Hong Kong-Shenzhen Stock Connect to allow quota-based trading in Chinese shares, progressively liberalising the quota and allowing easy repatriation of funds. It began to develop its bond market by allowing the issuing of RMB-denominated bonds initially in Hong



SHYAM SARAN

Kong and then later in Singapore, Taiwan and London. It is now encouraging key global indices to include Chinese equities and bonds in their benchmarks. Chinese A-shares, which trade on the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges, have been included in the MSCI Emerging Market and MSCI All Country World Index. Chinese Government Bonds (CGB) have now been included in the Bloomberg Barclays Global Aggregate Index and may soon become part of the FTSE Russells Bond Index. Schroders, an investment firm, claims that the flow of funds from international institutional investors, who typically invest passively in indexed funds, would be \$200 billion annually in each category initially, going up to \$400 billion eventually. As the Chinese equity and bond markets expand and retail investors also begin to participate, we are looking at fund flows in trillions of dollars. It may be noted that only CGBs have been included so far. It is only a question of time before corporate bonds also get included. Standard and Poor's has been allowed to function as a rating agency inside China. Ratings of corporate bonds against international benchmarks will enable their inclusion in global indices and this will add to the volume of fund flow into the Chinese bond market. The setting up of a yuan-based oil futures exchange in Shanghai, leveraging the country's status as the world's largest oil importer is raising the currency's profile. Shanghai has emerged as the world's third largest oil futures market, overtaking Dubai this year.

China's UnionPay credit card is also helping raise the country's profile in international financial markets. UnionPay constitutes 58 per cent of all credit cards issued across the world and there are currently 7.6 billion UnionPay card holders. It is accepted in 174 countries. With Chinese making 150 million foreign trips each year and accounting for 20 per cent of tourism spending, acceptance of UnionPay has become indispensable for merchant establishments worldwide.

China set up its own international payment gate-

way, the Cross-border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) in 2015 on the lines of the Brussels-based SWIFT. Currently, CIPS is cooperating closely with SWIFT, but the ultimate aim is to emerge as an alternative global payment and settlement system. There are 31 participants, including 12 international banks, and 745 indirect participants associated with them, which take part in CIPS. In 2018, CIPS handled \$755 billion in cross-border yuan settlement business. This is minuscule compared to the SWIFT processing of \$6 trillion daily, but is rising rapidly. Its use is being helped by the US using SWIFT to exclude countries under its sanctions such as Russia and Iran. Russia has set up its own System for Transfer of Financial Messages, which operates among the Eurasian Economic Union countries and has Chinese banks as participants. It has been reported that India, China and Russia are discussing the setting up of a trilateral payments gateway independent of SWIFT in order to avoid being targeted by US sanctions.

Finally, China is moving towards the launch of a sovereign digital currency based on blockchain technology, though details are unclear. Since over 70 per cent of all transactions in China are already digital this is not a far-fetched idea. This is being linked to another parallel plan to create an "Asian Yuan". A Chinese economist Sun Mingqi spells out the strategy, "The short-term goal is to create the 'Greater China Renminbi' by internally integrating the Hong Kong dollar and the New Taiwan dollar. The medium-term goal is to build the Asian Yuan system in cooperation with the Japanese yen, the Republic of Korea won and other Asian currencies to establish a 'three-legged system' consisting of the US dollar, the euro and the Asian yuan under the global currency system. The ultimate goal is to establish an ideal, digital, decentralised or non-sovereign global currency based on each country's economic strength and trade value."

And if China is already off the mark with its digital currency, who will the future belong to when this ultimate goal is achieved? And where does all this leave India which is now reduced to gazing angrily at its turbulent navel?

The writer is a former foreign secretary and is senior fellow, CPR



The SC may overturn the NCLAT ruling, but the illegalities flagged by it show the Tatas in poor light

There is nothing to prevent Tata Sons from ignoring the court's observations altogether and continuing to operate in the same fashion as it has in the past; it is a large and powerful conglomerate. But, it would do well to take cognisance of the views and to reflect its actions because, even if the SC verdict goes in its favour—and there are several legal experts who believe it will—the reputation of its board has been severely damaged. To be sure, no one will say so, but the appeals court order paints a poor picture of the company's boardroom practices. Tata Sons will claim that it has always followed due procedure and has never once violated the law, and that is probably correct. However, it is the spirit behind the actions, and not the legal correctness that is being questioned. Indeed, the NCLAT's 10-page order would, and should, be read by other business groups. It is unfortunate that very few companies in India consider it necessary to maintain some standard of corporate governance; most, including those that are supposedly run by professionals, care little for ethics, with independent directors largely playing along with the rest of the board. But, the NCLAT ruling, even if it has overstepped its limits, should serve as a wake-up call. Mistry has done corporate India a service by fighting for his rights.

Fixing higher education & rapid urbanisation critical

Unemployment data from CMIE for May-August 2019 shows that unemployment is the highest for those with tertiary-level education. Either the bulk of those with tertiary-level education who are part of the workforce don't have the skills that the industry requires or don't match up to the standards. Policymakers must pay heed to the recommendations that Mohandas Pai and Nisha Holla make in *Human Capital Development India*, their report for Ficci. Pai-Holla advocate a greater role for the private sector in higher education through increased partnership with industry for infrastructure, teaching talent, and research. But, they argue, the government's spending capacity is central since higher education must also be affordable and accessible. Low urbanisation, thus a lack of diversity in skilling and employment opportunities, is also holding back human capital development. Pai and Holla recommend that higher education institutions in India's villages and semi-urban areas focus on programmes that will skill the youth for the needs of local and traditional industry. Consolidation also must happen in higher education space, as recommended by the draft National Education Policy, in which standalone institutions become part of multidisciplinary universities and colleges, to pool and optimise use of resources. Also, greater academic, financial, and administrative autonomy for higher education institutes will be key. The government hasn't fully committed to this, despite making the right noises.

PDS for proteinaceous foods is a bad idea; govt should go with cash transfers instead to push better nutritional uptake

FPRI and J-PAL South Asia studies found that cash transfers are not only less costly to implement but also encourage greater diet diversity. That Indians are moving toward “oily, fatty and spicy food” as opposed to diversifying to more nutritive options is, according to Iyayog’s Ramesh Chand, one of the major reasons why the proposal is being considered. It is surprising that the government think-tank should recommend an avenue—in-kind transfers—that research across the globe shows is guaranteed to fail to result in diet diversification. In addition, the battle against malnutrition must focus on social and behavior change communication. For instance, despite the impact that such campaigns have on health and nutrition, India has not seriously pursued any since the hugely successful 1980s campaign to promote egg consumption.

THE BRIEF PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY BEFORE IT BECOMES CLEAR IF CHINA WILL LIVE UP TO ITS END OF THE BARGAIN MEANS INDIA MUST URGENTLY BRING IN WTO-COMPLIANT EXPORT SCHEMES

Kher is former Commerce Secretary of India & Singh is former Deputy Director General of WTO. Views are personal.



Kher is former Commerce Secretary of India & Singh is former Deputy Director General of WTO. Views are personal.

For mobile phones, the top exporting economies, i.e., China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong (China), account for over 70% of the global market. India's global export share is about 0.6% at present, but the nation has high aspirations in this sector. India's National Policy on

Other countries such as Vietnam attract FDI due to their ease of doing business and by implementing an incentivising policy framework. These policies give FDI in Vietnam a commercial advantage of about 9–12% over India's mobile phone production. In this competitive situation, a WTO panel has found India's main export incentive schemes, like the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS), to be inconsistent with WTO provisions. India will have to phase out MEIS, and some of the other schemes found to be in violation of WTO provisions. Meanwhile, ironically, India has

only a small amount of time to make its processing decisions, and been able to do so for the past 18 months.

Indian policymakers have been aware of the need to implement policy support and incentives. Intense discussions and efforts have taken place in several government departments and institutions for some months now, to develop WTO-consistent policy alternatives that will encourage investment by major firms in India, particularly in areas with high technology and export potential. This process should now be concluded, and the relevant policies implemented in the near term, to encourage major investments and exports, especially for the priority areas for which US tariff increases have been postponed, i.e. products in List 4B mentioned above.

India has only a short period of time to conclude its intense process of policy consideration, which has been going on for the past several months

Impeachment vote is the single most significant action that the House can take in defence of the Constitution. It isn't enough. But, it is a start

Where the Constitution has been faltering is in the significant erosion of our informal, unwritten norms. These have constitutional weight even if they aren't identifiable as strict rules of constitutional law. They include things like the politicization of the department of justice and the FBI, and the subtle corruption of the presidency through Trump's continuing pursuit of his business inter-

Impeachment on its own is only part of what the legislative branch should do

The impeachment vote is the single most significant action that the House can take in defence of the Constitution. It isn't enough. But, it is a start.

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

Unity in diversity

the nationwide agitation by the people, irrespective of their religion, against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) enacted by the BJP government conveys one thing very clearly—the people of our nation cannot be divided in the name of religion. Though the CAA is alleged to be only anti-Muslims, the solidarity shown by Indian people of different hues seeking its cancellation is really amazing. We have witnessed the avowed principle of our nation, 'unity in diversity' in their spontaneous agitation against the Act. It is time the government understood the sentiment and wishes of the people and rescinded the Act, which appears to be against the principles of secularism engraved in the sacred Constitution of our country.

— Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

For the third time in history, the United States House of Representatives voted to impeach a President. The lower house of Congress voted to impeach Donald Trump for abuse of power. The Senate, the upper house, will now weigh in on the trial—and on account of it having a Republican majority, Trump, in all probability, will be acquitted. However, this is still being seen as a historic win for the Democrats, who initiated the impeachment enquiry against Trump, permanently marking the President's tenure. With this, the bid for a re-election for President Donald Trump looks doubtful and he may be rejected for lowering the image of the country.

— Bhaagwan Thadani, Mumbai

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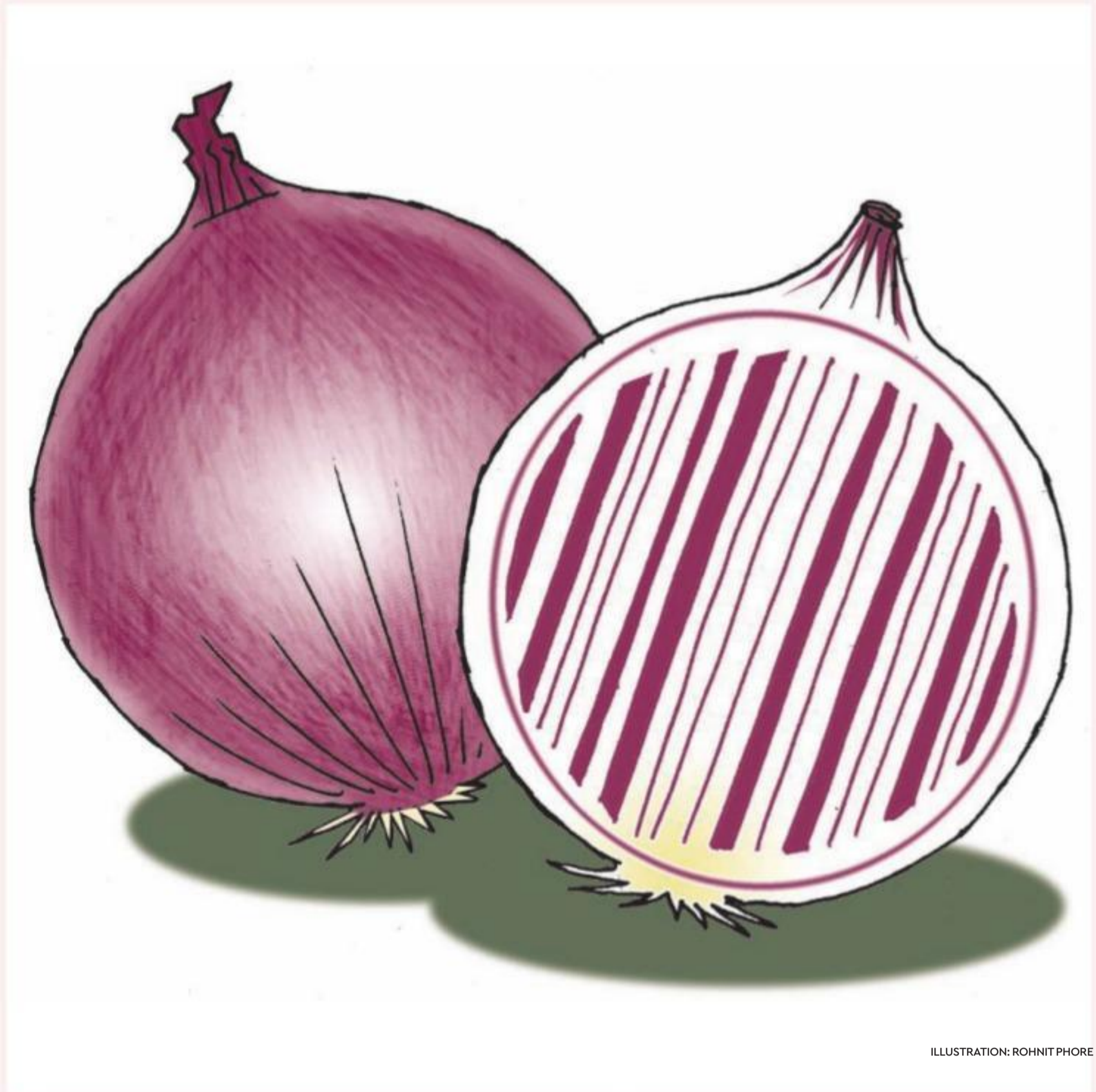


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● CHLOROPHILE

Mirzapur could wipe away India's onion tears

The sandy loam of the Indo-Gangetic Plain is just right for onions as it drains well. A drive, thus, to encourage production in this belt could check onion price fluctuations

DIVERSIFYING THE AREAS of production to northern India, adopting raised-bed planting practice along with drip irrigation and reducing losses with better storage technology can help avert episodes of price slumps and spikes that afflict the onion trade.

A majority of onion supply (60%) comes from the rabi crop which is planted in December and January, and

harvested from March to June. Farmers store onions on premise, in ventilated structures with asbestos or thatched roofing, for release till October, after which the kharif crop, planted in July-August enters the market. There is also a late kharif crop, planted in September-October and harvested between December and February. Kharif and late-kharif onions have a short shelf-life. They last for about a month after harvest. About a

quarter of the annual supply comes from the kharif crop, and 80% of it is from Maharashtra and Karnataka. Disruption of supply from these two states has a ripple effect across the country.

This year late onset of monsoon delayed the kharif planting season. The October report, of the agriculture ministry, said 7% less area was planted. Heavy and prolonged rain damaged the transplanted seedlings and also destroyed late kharif nurseries. Official reports highlighted production at 52 lakh tonnes during the two seasons was 26% less than last year. Besides, stored rabi onions were also damaged because of high humidity. Of the buffer stock of 77,000 tonnes created with the price stabilisation fund, about 39,000 tonnes had to be discarded because of spoilage. Farmers and traders suffered from such losses.

Spreading the production of onions across the country and close to the places of consumption can help avert such situations. Major Singh, director at the Directorate of Onion and Garlic Research at Rajgurunagar near Pune reports encouraging results from trials in eastern UP's Mirzapur district. He says the sandy loam of the Indo-Gangetic Plain is just right for onions as it drains well. Flooding is an issue for which he recommends raised-bed planting. In all, 140 farmers have participated in as many field demonstrations which the directorate has held since the monsoon season last year. Five farmers did very well. They swapped local varieties for improved ones like Bhima Dark Red and Bhima Super, and adopted better agronomic practices. Reported yields of 4,857 kg and 9,360 kg an acre, earned a profit of ₹2-2.5 lakh per acre, according to the Directorate, helped by the spike in onion prices. A drive, thus, to encourage production in this belt could check onion price fluctuations.

Better storages will also help. Currently, onions are stored at ambient temperature in raised floor structures with side slats (for ventilation) and asbestos roofs. These are low-cost storages, which the Maharashtra government subsidises. Yogesh Thorat, managing director, Maharashtra Farmers Producer Com-

pany (FPC), a state-level consortium of FPCs, says it wants to create large storages totalling 25,000 tonnes in 10 locations, but cannot home in on the right technology. In open ventilated storages, losses can be as high as 30-40% or even more, depending on the outside temperature and relative humidity. Onions last longer in cold storages, but sprout when kept in the open, unless irradiated. Singh says losses were found to be lower—10%—in bulbs stored for four months at 27 degrees celsius. The monthly running cost was 30-50 paise per kg, about five times less than that of cold storages. The 20-tonne prototype which the directorate has developed needs to be scaled up to a few hundred tonnes and validated for commercial use, for which Singh wants financing partners.

India has the largest area under onions (13 lakh hectares), but yield at 17 tonnes per hectare is less than China's 22 tonnes. Productivity in countries like Netherlands (51.8 tonnes/ha), Germany (46 tonnes/ha) and Iran (38.5 tonnes/ha) is higher, but their cultivation is limited to a few thousand hectares and, therefore, can give better attention.

India's production was almost flat between 1991-92 (47 lakh tonnes) and 2001-02 (53 lakh tonnes). It doubled to 108 lakh tonnes by 2006-07, and has doubled again since. Annual production currently is about 209 lakh tonnes, which exceeds the domestic demand. Exports have increased from 4.42 lakh tonnes valued at \$70.73 million in 2001-02 to 20.62 lakh tonnes worth \$470 million over the last few years.

Anil Khar, an onion breeder at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi, says yields can be increased with hybrids. Hybrid onions are of uniform size, shape, colour and maturity unlike open-pollinated varieties, which have a mix of A, B and C grades. Developing hybrids, he says, is a tedious process as onions are a highly cross-pollinated crop. India should sequence the onion genome, he says, to discover the genes responsible for particular traits. This can help in faster breeding through marker-assisted selection, an agri-biotechnology tool, for higher yields, longer shelf-life, processing quality (more solids, less water) and resistance to pests, diseases and climate stresses.

Singh says the directorate has hybrids, but has not been able to popularise them because they are not higher yielding than open pollinated varieties. He says the package of practices it has developed including planting on raised beds (ridges) and use of drip irrigation can improve yields. There are a set of farming practices to improve durability including lesser use of nitrogen, maintaining moisture during dry spells, and stopping irrigation a fortnight before harvesting. Shade curing for two weeks and disinfecting the storages to prevent fungal infections will also help keep rabi onions longer.

There is a lot of demand for onions from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Gulf countries. India has not been able to make a dent in the European and American markets, where bigger and less pungent onions are preferred. Singh says exporters do not take the trouble of obtaining certification for good agricultural practices. These countries are also strict about infections like black sooty mold.

Can processing help tide over episodes of scarcity? Jalgaon-based Jain Irrigation has about 5,000 farmers on contract who produce processing quality onions with less water (88%). But dehydrating them to 5-6% moisture costs about ₹25 a kg, says senior vice-president Kalyanrao Patil. A kg of dehydrated flakes is equal to 10 kg of fresh ones. The company supplies to the military and some pizza chains.

Dehydrated onion flakes retail for ₹197 per 450 grams in online stores. Red onion powder sold in combination with garlic powder retails for ₹299 per 150 grams. Onion flakes, powder or paste are unlikely to be popular like tomato puree. The farmers of eastern UP and Bihar can satisfy India's love of fresh onions without having to cry about prices, if they are assured of profits.

Surging ahead

AKHIL BANSAL

Author is Deputy CEO, KPMG in India. Views are personal



India is making strides but has more ground to cover

THE YEAR 2019 has been eventful. With two budgets being presented this year, India came out with decisive policies in the face of economic and trade uncertainty. Some key changes which were made by the ministry of finance have the potential to impact the country's future. These included the corporate tax cut and amendments to the IBC, aimed at streamlining the insolvency process and protecting last-mile funding. The Centre also announced a relief package of ₹25,000 crore to revive stalled housing projects. It also declared removal of all charges on digital payments to promote Digital India. Further, the Union Budget 2019 gave a boost to make electric vehicles affordable with a GST cut from 12% to 5%, and introduced a provision of additional income tax benefit of ₹1.5 lakh on loans taken to purchase electric vehicles.

The government has also laid emphasis on reducing the financial stress of farmers by offering them additional income opportunities. During the Interim Budget presented in February 2019, the government announced a ₹6,000 annual income support for marginal farmers, called the PM KISAN. The Union Budget, presented in July 2019, proposed innovative pilot programmes on 'zero-budget farming', scaling up of rural infrastructure under the PMGSY and incubators to develop 75,000 entrepreneurs in the agro-rural industry. Recognising the importance of capital for MSMEs, a 2% interest subvention on fresh and incremental loans was also announced along with a partial credit guarantee to public-sector banks (PSBs) for purchasing high-rated pooled assets of strong NBFCs.

In September, the finance ministry set up a task force to build a national brownfield and greenfield infrastructure project pipeline worth ₹100 lakh crore over the next five years. In the same month, the Union Cabinet approved 100% FDI, under automatic route, for contract manufacturing and commercial coal mining. The local sourcing conditions for single-brand retailers were also relaxed. Such norms are expected to

reinforce India's position as a potential global manufacturing hub, and reduce dependence on imports. The ministry of finance also announced a stimulus package with an upfront disbursement of ₹70,000 crore for state-run banks and merger of 10 state-owned banks to form four large banks. If implemented well, these moves can revitalise the banking sector and enable PSBs to compete more effectively.

In 2019, India climbed 14 places to become 63rd among 190 nations in the World Bank's ease of doing business ranking (up from 77th rank in 2018). The country also attracted FDI of \$27.2 billion during FY2019. India's economic engine, however, hit a snag as GDP growth slowed, corporate revenues moderated, unemployment increased, urban wages and farmer income stagnated and consumption declined.

While the government has taken several initiatives to steer the meandering economy to the fast-track lane, more work remains to be done on the policy front to shift India onto an accelerated growth trajectory. These reforms will have to include improvements to land and labour laws, a much more open trade regime and removing bottlenecks for accessing capital. The reforms could be supported with rationalisation of taxes with a GST 2.0, a stable regulatory regime and ensuring greater physical and digital connectivity across the country. Decentralisation of decision making by empowering states and creation of a coherent long-term vision could help guide the economy out of this slump.

Creating a conducive environment that will rebuild citizens' trust in the economy, improve investor confidence, stimulate investments and integrate India into global supply chains would need to be taken up on priority. Furthermore, providing universal healthcare, easy access to quality education and electricity, developing transport infrastructure and addressing sustainability issues will be the foundation for India's next stage of development. The country also faces immense pressure to create job opportunities for its large working-age population.

Despite uncertainties, the momentum of structural reforms is undoubtedly strong. The government has covered a broad gamut of trade and investment through its reforms. In many ways, 2019 has created the base for India's future growth. The key would, however, be effective implementation such that India meets its objective of a \$5 trillion.

In many ways, 2019 has created the base for India's future growth. The key would, however, be in implementation

GST

INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY Code (IBC) and Goods & Service Tax (GST) were major structural reforms during previous tenure of the Modi government. There are some delays in resolution of cases, but IBC has gained momentum and various important amendments have been made to address the operational issues raised by stakeholders. The Supreme Court judgment in the matter of Essar Steel has also settled various open issues and scope of litigation has reduced.

GST was biggest ever indirect tax reform. It was aimed to improve the ease of doing business by having a common set of law across the nation. It was also expected that GST will improve tax collections and curb evasions.

While GST is, indeed, a game-changer, it is important to understand that its implementation is dependent on an IT platform. This IT infrastructure is the interface between taxpayer and the government. A majority of problems, thus, stem from poor design of GST returns. That is one of the primary reasons that the due date for filing of annual return for FY 2017-18 has been extended many times. It would be better if entities are given exemption from filing of annual return for FY 2017-18. Matching the input tax credit was a key under GST to check the tax evasion and this functionality is not yet enabled in the way it was envis-

Time for an operational change

If the policymakers want to augment GST revenues they should focus on simplifying the operational part and work on improving the IT infrastructure to curb tax evasion

SHSHANK SAURAV

The author is a chartered accountant

aged. Considering the uneven trend in tax collection, the government recently changed the rules relating to input tax credit for cases where amounts claimed as input is not shown by seller in her return. However, these are only temporary fixes, and both the taxpayer and finance professionals need a long term solution.

GST has affected service providers more than manufacturers or traders. It has not only increased the tax rate for service providers, but compliance burden has also

increased exponentially. Manufacturers were required to file factory-wise monthly return under erstwhile central excise regime, but service providers were filing half yearly return for their entire operations in form ST3. Now, service providers have to file a state-wise monthly return, thereby increasing the compliance burden. Moreover, the service provider has to take care of assessments for each state separately, a divergence from the centralised system of filing followed earlier. The gov-



PM NIRMALA SITHARAMAN AND REVENUE SECRETARY AJAY BHUSHAN AT THE 38TH GST COUNCIL MEETING IN NEW DELHI

ernment must consider taking states on board for a single comprehensive return for service providers. A system of centralised assessment based on the principle place of business as applicable for Income Tax purposes needs to be established.

GST is often criticised for multi-tier tax structure and people demand rationalisation, but a multiple rate structure is needed for a country with large lower-middle class population. Besides, there are certain essential items which need to be taxed at concess-

ional rate or exempted fully from tax net. India is a vast country and having a single tax rate will not be in consideration of the social structure. Besides, an analysis of VAT rates in various European countries shows that there are multiple tax rates in place.

The government is facing an uphill task to meet the fiscal deficit target amid economic slowdown, as it requires public expenditure to go up. Union finance minister is in a tough situation given the fact that state governments are raising voice over

GST/VAT rates in major European countries in 2019

Country	Standard rate (%)	Reduced rate (%)*
UK	20	5
Sweden	25	12, 6
Spain	21	10, 4
Portugal	23	13, 6
Poland	23	8, 5
Germany	19	7
Norway	25	15, 12
Italy	22	10, 5, 2, 1
France	20	10, 5.5, 2.4
Hungary	27	18, 5

*Rates for small businesses and special schemes) Source: Ernst & Young (EY) report

delay in settlement of their share of cess collections. Considering the decline in demand, GST council has rightfully decided not to increase tax rate in the last meeting, held on Wednesday. Council has also given a major relief by waiving the penalty for non-filing of return, if these returns get filed by January 10, 2020. However, if the policymakers want to augment GST revenues they should focus on simplifying the operational part and work on improving the IT infrastructure to curb tax evasion.



The IndianEXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

WITHOUT FEAR

That was the place on the street across the country where women and men, citizens all, stepped out to be seen and heard

SO MANY OF the images and videos from the people's protests in cities across the country on Thursday, including and especially the national capital, are a reproach to the Narendra Modi government. They frame mostly young, mostly anonymous people who took to the streets mostly peacefully, to raise their voices against a citizenship law that seeks to recast and redefine citizenship of this country in majoritarian terms, faced with a grim and repressive state machinery in BJP-ruled states. They frame historian, Gandhi biographer and prominent public intellectual Ramachandra Guha being pulled and pushed and arrested by policemen in Bengaluru for no evident crime other than holding up a placard showing a picture of the father of India's Constitution, BR Ambedkar, and articulating his own disagreement with the regime's new law. They frame intellectuals and writers and activists being hauled away from protest venues in Delhi. They frame, essentially, a nervous and paranoid government that appears to have lost the ability to either listen to its intellectuals or its young, or to talk to them. A government that seems to respond to dissent only by suppressing it — by imposing Section 144, through arbitrary detention and by snapping voice, internet and sms services. That the world's fastest growing internet market is also now a global leader in cutting off access to small and large swathes of its population, that the internet clampdown as a way of blocking protests is becoming increasingly commonplace, and that in this, India is in the company of countries like Myanmar, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria and Venezuela, is a reason for deep embarrassment to all those who take pride in the argumentativeness of its democracy.

The summary attempt to crack down on dissent against the citizenship law takes place in a grey context. In the backdrop of the current moment is the revocation of Article 370 in Kashmir in August in a manner that has isolated and continues to isolate its people, the detention of thousands of its political workers and leaders, including 83-year-old former chief minister Farooq Abdullah — his incarceration was extended by three months a few days ago — and the longest ever continuous internet shutdown in the country. The scenes that played out in the national capital on Thursday have sent out the signal that the apparent obduracy and imperviousness of government is not limited to its treatment of a long-standing trouble spot. It is the reflexive response to all disagreement and discontent. This is a disquieting signal to the country.

There has also been violence and arson, as in Seelampur in the capital, in parts of Lucknow and Mangalore on Thursday. It is incumbent on the state governments and the entire political establishment, including the Opposition, to do whatever it takes to keep the peace. But in doing so, the world's largest democracy cannot look like it cannot accommodate its young who disagree, it cannot afford to signal that it is so ill at ease with itself. At any time, and especially when its economy is in slowdown, India risks a lot if it begins to be seen as a place where the dissenter's mind is not without fear.

RESET THE BOARDROOM

NCLAT ruling on Tata Sons case flags deeper questions of corporate governance that need to be addressed urgently

THREE YEARS AFTER being abruptly unseated, Cyrus Mistry appears on course to being reinstated as executive chairman of Tata Sons, the holding company of one of India's largest business conglomerates, with the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) ruling on Wednesday that his sacking in October 2016 and the subsequent appointment of N Chandrasekaran was illegal. This is an extraordinary development in the history of corporate battles in India. It could have a destabilising impact on not just the scores of companies in the over \$100 billion diversified group but also on markets and investors.

The tribunal has said that the manner in which Mistry was suddenly removed, the absence of any discussion at the board meeting on October 24, 2016, and his subsequent removal as a director in group companies, amounted to prejudicial and oppressive action. It has ordered that Mistry be reinstated as director of four Tata companies, while setting aside the decision to convert the company from a public to a private firm. The tribunal's verdict will become operational only after four weeks with a window being provided for the Tatas to appeal to the Supreme Court. But irrespective of the final verdict in this case, there are some larger issues which need to be addressed by corporate India.

These questions concern corporate democracy or democratic behaviour in listed corporate firms, be they promoter-driven companies or professionally managed companies and appropriate governance structures including independent boards. It is important in a public corporation to make a clear distinction between decisiveness and arbitrariness. While corporate governance in any country may be shaped by several factors, including the cultural backdrop, it is also about ethical values, integrity standards and following the spirit of the law. At a fraught time when many Indian companies are struggling to manage their balance sheets, one of the grave risks that the latest ruling poses is that of further deepening the distrust of corporates by many investors hurt already by events in many firms over the past few years. That could be a dampener for long-term investment in India and for companies and entrepreneurs looking to bet on projects here. Much will depend on how swiftly the Supreme Court ensures an early closure to this corporate feud, and the behavioural change in India's boardrooms over the next few years.

JUST IMAGINE

USDA has ended a free trade agreement with a fictional country created by Stan Lee. But are real countries for real?

T IRED OF BATTLING China, the United States has launched a trade war against the state of Wakanda, the world's only source of the metal vibranium, by taking it off the online list of nations with free trade agreements. That's as unbelievable as putting it on the list of the Department of Agriculture in the first place, since Wakanda is a fictional African nation which exists only within the Marvel universe, as the home of Black Panther. Imagine some unsung lower-rung bureaucrat, tired of death of moving files on alfalfa and Brussels sprouts, swerving to his monitor and with a rebellious but steady hand, injecting the database of the world's biggest economy with the fiction of Wakanda. This is fandom at its noblest.

Sadly, the imaginary country was quietly removed from the pages after a software engineer in New York discovered it on the list and alerted the Twitter community. All traces of Wakanda vanished, down to interesting details like tariffs on tobacco and booze, live animals and dairy products. What a pity, when the myth of the relatively stodgy Kailasa, allegedly established by fugitive rape accused godman Nithyananda, is allowed to linger, to offer succour to allegedly dispossessed Hindus from the world over, who have "lost the right to practise Hinduism authentically" in their countries.

On the other hand, maybe Wakanda and Kailasa are authentic, and those who doubt their existence aren't. The world is now full of people who wonder if they had been sleepwalking in the alternate histories of their countries, and have now woken up in the authorised version. But actually, it is we who make history. Tintin exists irrespective of whether Syldevia and Borduria exist, but these mythic nations can only exist in Tintin's world.



NAJEEB JUNG

THERE HAVE BEEN signs that anxiety was building up among the youth for some years now. The initial manifestation came with the agitation following the unfortunate suicide of Rohith Vemula in January 2016 in Hyderabad, which highlighted the callousness and insensitivity of university administrations towards Dalit students. At the same time, JNU was simmering: Its vice-chancellor had done enough to damage what is arguably the most outstanding university in India. Harsh actions against students and faculty, locking up of spaces to curb the movement of students within the campus, restrictions on speech caused umbrage in universities not just in India but across the academic world. There have been protests elsewhere too. Adding to this anger is the fact that there are few jobs available to students leaving universities.

Protests in Jamia Millia Islamia against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) provided the spark for an inferno to rage across the country. Jamia was established 100 years ago. Gandhiji (like Madan Mohan Malviya for BHU) travelled throughout India collecting funds to set it up. Jamnalal Bajaj became the university's first treasurer. Its founders participated in the freedom movement and none went to Pakistan. The university retains its tradition of nationalism and India's syncretic culture. Jamia's students have never participated in a protest of a communal nature. To give a communal colour to the recent protests betrays a lack of understanding. Today, students of Jamia are mobilising against the National Register for Citizenship (NRC) and CAA, which they believe are contrary to the secular values enshrined in the Constitution.

It is true that students at Jamia, AMU and some other universities have been increasingly concerned over the repeated challenges to their patriotism or nationalism. Many of these young boys and girls come from India's mofussil towns. They share the same dreams as the students who may follow other beliefs. To this end, they need confidence-building measures. Quite naturally, they have concerns about how they are, at times, viewed as the "other". This new legislation claims to help those fleeing persecution abroad but divides communities

Implementation of nation-wide NRC will put India in a state of conflict. Government must listen, step back

This week has seen the biggest display of opposition to the government since it assumed office. This is largely because it confirms the fears among many that the country's government is taking it on the trajectory of becoming a Hindu nation with minimal dissent allowed. Unease among many of us — Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and secular-minded people who believe in the principles of the Constitution — will remain. There will be more protests. In all probability, thousands will boycott the NRC process. States will decline the Centre's diktat, challenging the very core of our federal structure.

within. It underlines the fact that Muslim citizens are not intrinsically "Indian".

It is tragic that Jamia's authorities did not counsel the students towards restraint. The students had no senior leader to turn to. In fact, it is devastating that the Muslim community has no seasoned leadership to turn to. Its leadership has fallen into the hands of poorly educated, backward-looking, conservative maulanas. And, with palpable antagonism from the government, young Muslims have no one to turn to.

So far, most Muslim students in leading universities have been removed from negative influences. But anxieties and frustrations run high among them. Statements of ministers and ruling party spokespersons that the NRC will be implemented across India have only increased their anxiety. There have been reports of detention camps coming up in some states. The government is pushing increasingly provocative policies and using tactics like shutting down the internet to stifle dissent and free speech. The CAA was the final straw that broke the camel's back.

While the constitutionality of the CAA is for the Supreme Court to judge, the India-wide NRC is the immediate cause for concern. Originally meant only for Assam, it is intended to be extended to all of India. Such an exercise is understandably feared for its potential to disenfranchise millions of Indian Muslims.

The final register in Assam became a major source of embarrassment both for the Union and state governments. The majority of people excluded from it were reportedly non-Muslims, who would now have to go through the tedious and expensive process of appeal, and even then would not be certain of their inclusion. Thousands of non-Muslims in Assam were potentially in fear of losing their homes and being condemned to a life in camps. Faced with a major embarrassment, the government rushed in to pass the CAA to reassure the non-Muslims that their right to Indian citizenship is fully protected. Under the new law all others, barring Muslims, who having come into India (from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan) till 2014, are guaranteed citizenship. Simply put, only Muslims' citizenship is under threat and there will likely be thousands of them who

will not have the required documents.

The protests by students may quieten soon. But they will possibly recur with greater ferocity in the near future. Assam and many parts of the Northeast are seething. The uncertainty of the NRC process destroyed people emotionally — some committed suicide, unable to bear the anxiety. They are now burdened with the appeal process, having been excluded from the Register. Once the CAA comes in, there is fear of being swamped by non-Muslim refugees — that will challenge the ancient Assamese culture and burden Assam's scarce resources. There are similar concerns in other parts of the Northeast.

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Those of us with some administrative experience know the cost of usual work for conducting elections or carrying out the census exercise. Almost all routine work in field offices comes to a halt. School teachers, revenue officers, panchayat employees are all utilised, causing delays. Where will state governments get the manpower for this exercise? I need not add the beating India's image is taking in the international community.

The implementation of the NRC will put India in a state of conflict. It is up to the Union government to quickly step in, initiate dialogue with a range of people that should include political parties, Muslims, students and civil society, and come up with some understanding to restore the people's confidence urgently.

The writer is a former vice-chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia and was Lieutenant Governor of Delhi



KAUSTUBH DEKA

A WHOLE NEW generation in Assam has recently been introduced to curfews in their towns and army flag marches in their lanes — though, for the older generation, this means revisiting a trauma.

The current sense of dismay in Assam is primarily due to what they perceive as the BJP's backtracking on pre-poll stances like securing an "immigrant free Assam" and "protecting the indigenous" by putting the state under the purview of the Citizenship Amendment Act without any exemptions. This is precisely why the repeated assurances by the home minister about bringing "safeguards to the indigenous of Assam" in the context of the CAA has not found many takers in the state. While the government is promising to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, which promises protection to the cultural-economic identities of the Assamese, in the same breath, it seems to be denouncing the essence of the Accord by not respecting the cut-off year of 1971. The Accord also refrains from making religion a criterion of identification.

The present agitation is largely a reaction to the perceived breach of this political commitment, given by the government of India to Assam. At the base of this equation lies another cardinal political truth about Assam — that language has historically trumped religion as a primary marker of identity. This

ASSAM'S EDGE

Restiveness in the state has come full circle with the Citizenship Amendment Act

The present agitation is largely a reaction to the perceived breach of this political commitment once given by the government of India to Assam. At the base of this political equation lies another cardinal political truth of Assam, that language has historically trumped religion as a primary marker of identity in Assam.

foundation quickly lapses into the argument that with the "acceptance" of Bengali Hindu migrants, there appears a real possibility that the Assamese speakers and the other "indigenous" communities will be turned into absolute minorities, linguistically and politically. It is often pointed out that with consecutive census reports, the number of Assamese speakers has been coming down — to 47.8 per cent (2001) from 57.8 per cent (1991). During the same period, the share of Bengali speakers has gone up — to 27.5 per cent (2001) from 21.7 per cent (1991); number of Hindus declined to 64.9 per cent (2001) from 67.1 per cent (1991), and, further declined to 61.47 per cent (2011 census). During the same period, the number of Muslims went up by 2.4 per cent in 2001 — that number stood at 34.22 per cent in the 2011 census.

Evidently, during 1991-2001 the rise of Bengalis as a linguistic group seems to be due to the growth of both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis in Assam. The statistics do not support a linear relation between the growth of the "Muslims" alone (which the ruling party insists on projecting as a threat to "Assamese identity") and the decline in the number of Assamese speakers.

As different mass programmes have been announced jointly by multiple groups — political and otherwise — across districts in Assam, parallels are being drawn with the

Assam Movement of the Eighties. That was a social movement launched by an "apolitical-cultural front", spearheaded by students and backed by different segments of society through a complex alliance. It succeeded in overthrowing the Congress government in the state by forming a new regional party. As that regional party, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), once hailed as paragon of regionalism in Assam, finds itself the object of people's wrath today, many wonder if the final demise of the AGP will usher in the entry of a new regional force in the state.

A road near my house that is now tarred with the rubber of burnt tyres, ringing with the uneasy silence of curfew and patrolled by army trucks, still bears the sign, "Asian Highway 1". People look at it and wonder what sense notions like the "Act East" policy make when one is beneath the military boots? I thought of taking a picture of it recently to send it to a friend abroad, only to realise that internet services had been suspended. Perhaps "normalcy" will be restored in a few more days, but by then, India would have taken a few strides backwards when it comes to acquiring the good faith of smaller "nationalities" within the larger design of the nation state.

The writer is assistant professor, department of political science, Dibrugarh University

DECEMBER 20, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

GANDHI'S MISTAKES

TWO COSTLY MISTAKES of Mahatma Gandhi are responsible for the problems tormenting post-Independence India, according to Prime Minister Charan Singh. He said these mistakes were Gandhiji's support to the Khilafat movement in 1920 and his preference for Jawaharlal Nehru as the Congress president in 1945, ignoring the claim of Sardar Patel. According to Singh, the thief "mistake" bred communalism and led to Partition and the second led India down "the path of superficial westernisation."

US SANCTIONS POLICY

WASHINGTON HINTED THAT it might go as

far as to blockade Iran if the American hostages in Teheran are tried or investigated by a "grand jury" in Teheran. White House press secretary Jody Powell said that the Iranian authorities should be aware that they would bear "full responsibility for any ensuing consequences."

JANATA VS INDIRA

THE JANATA PARTY appealed to the Lok Dal and other parties to facilitate direct contest between its nominees and Mrs Indira Gandhi in Rae Bareilly and Medak. The party's general secretary, Surendra Mohan, wanted the Lok Dal leaders to realise that Mrs Gandhi's defeat "is in the interest of democracy."

Replying to questions, Mohan said the retirement of other candidates was necessary to defeat Mrs Gandhi in both constituencies.

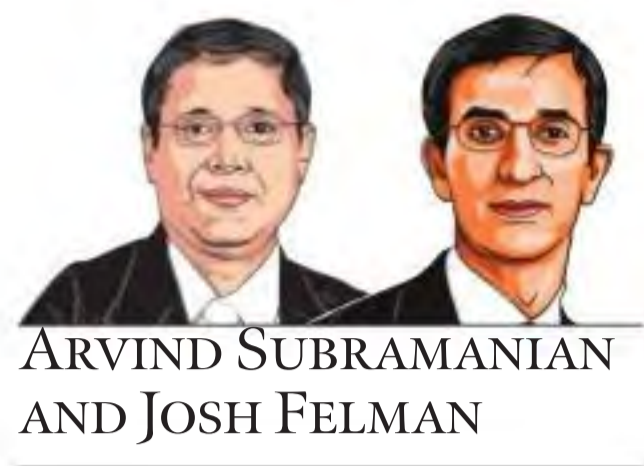
ASSAM ELECTIONS

ELECTIONS WILL BE held as scheduled in three Parliamentary constituencies of Assam — Karimganj, Silchar and autonomous districts. S L Shakhder, chief election commissioner, confirmed this. Doubts about elections cropped up in the light of a press report that K S Rao, chief electoral officer of Assam, had said that he had written to the Election Commission for the postponement of elections in these constituencies due to the law and order situation.



India's Great Slowdown

Standard remedies for getting out of the current predicament aren't working. Out-of-the-box solutions are needed to resolve the balance sheet problems



ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN AND JOSH FELMAN

SEEMINGLY SUDDENLY, INDIA'S economy has taken ill. The GDP numbers are worrying enough, but the disaggregated data are even more distressing. Production of consumer and investment goods is falling. Indicators of exports, imports, and real government revenues are in negative territory, or close to it. Clearly, this is not an ordinary slowdown. It is India's Great Slowdown.

The government and the RBI have been trying vigorously to bring the economy back to health. But the standard remedies for getting out of the current predicament aren't working. Monetary policy is stymied by a broken transmission mechanism, which impedes the pass-through of cuts in policy rates to lending rates. And the scope for fiscal stimulus is limited, since fiscal deficits are already close to double-digits (when properly measured) and larger bond issues will only further crowd out the private sector, by pushing up already-high interest rates.

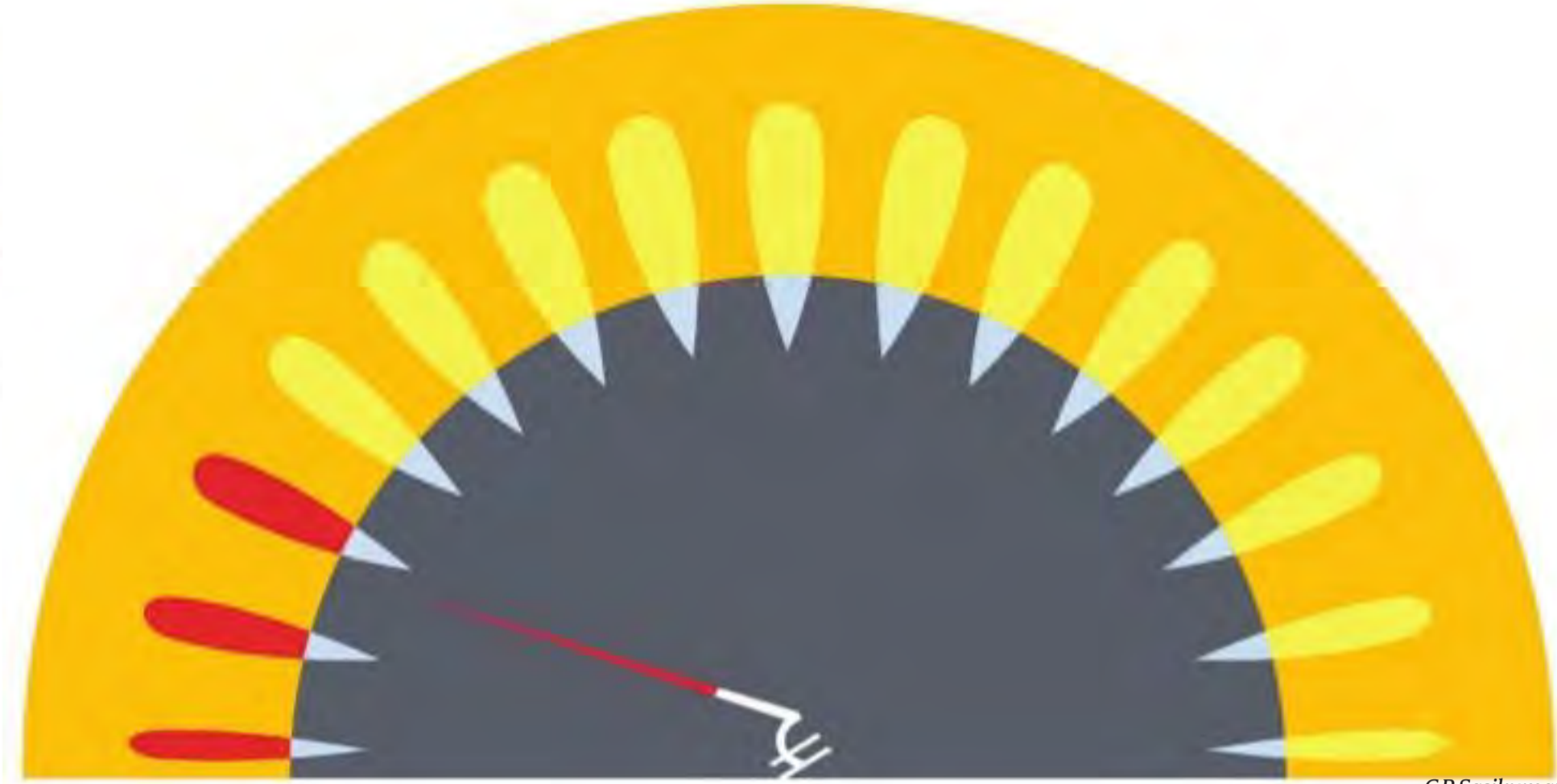
In a recent paper, we argued that the Great Slowdown stems from a balance sheet crisis that arrived in two waves. The first wave — the Twin Balance Sheet crisis, encompassing banks and infrastructure companies — arrived after the global financial crisis, when the world economy slowed and infrastructure projects started during India's investment boom of the mid-2000s, began to go sour. These problems were not addressed adequately, causing investment and exports, the two engines propelling rapid growth, to sputter.

The second wave came from the collapse of a credit boom, led by NBFCs, and centered on the real estate sector. The collapse owed to the recognition that the boom involved unsustainable financing of a rising inventory of unsold housing. As a result, the economy now confronts a Four Balance Sheet (FBS) problem — the original two sectors, plus NBFCs and real estate companies.

What then can be done to address the FBS? We propose a comprehensive plan in our paper, including a new asset quality review (AQR-2) to get a more honest recognition of the magnitude of stressed assets, and further strengthening the IBC. Here we focus on one idea, namely the creation of special resolution mechanisms for two sectors: Real estate and power.

These special mechanisms are needed because even a strengthened IBC will not be suitable for certain types of cases, notably those where social considerations are as important as commercial criteria, where public subsidies of one kind or another are inevitable, and where coordination across government is critical. The real estate and power sectors fulfill these criteria.

Consider first the real estate sector. In most residential cases, developers have funded their building partly through pre-selling, that is by requiring prospective owners to pay in advance for their promised flats. So when builders go bankrupt, prospective owners are left with neither money nor flats. It is obvious that the plight of these individuals cannot be ignored — a point underscored by the Supreme Court. But, it is equally obvious that



they will not be well served by the IBC. For a start, it is unclear how the prospective owners could be represented on the creditors' committee. And, even if a way could be found, it hardly seems acceptable to ask them to wait for years, only to receive a small fraction of the money that they paid, and perhaps even nothing at all. It would seem far better to provide them with a speedy settlement, with a guaranteed minimum fraction of the amount that they paid. But this will require a government mechanism, most likely with government subsidies, since recovery rates from builders are likely to be very low.

The stressed power-sector assets pose another major quandary. Unlike most assets, private power firms cannot be easily sold, since they are incurring heavy operational losses and their prospects are highly uncertain. Even the public sector power producers have been reluctant to take them. But neither can they be liquidated. Although, supply currently outstrips demand, and the plants are only operating at half capacity, eventually the gap will close. And, technologically and environmentally, these power plants are good assets, in many cases better than the fully-utilised plants.

The essence of the problem, the reason there cannot be a private sector led solution, is that the viability of power assets is inextricably entwined with government policies. For example, demand for power depends on whether the state electricity boards are financially strong enough to buy the power that the public is demanding. Similarly, demand for the stressed assets depends on the pace at which the government, Centre and states, phases out much older, environmentally inefficient public sector plants. As a result, the government would need to be heavily involved in any solution to this sector's problems.

Consider how a bad bank for the power sector might work. The first step would be to take these loans, exceeding Rs 2.5 trillion, off the books of the banks, for that would free up balance sheets and management attention, allowing banks to focus again on their core business of supporting economic growth.

Once removed, the assets will need to go somewhere. A few of the plants could probably be sold off, once their debts are reduced to manageable levels. But most of the plants would need to be 'warehoused' until they can be returned to the private sector. To do this, the government could create a holding company, which would purchase the assets and manage them.

Essentially, the holding company would operate like a public-sector asset rehabilita-

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tion agency (a "bad bank"). The holding company would buy power companies at prices based on the recommendations of independent parties, such as investment banks, which would take into account a special regulatory regime that the government would establish for these assets. Importantly, this regime would include pre-announced levels of subsidies.

Such an open, ruled-based procedure would allow the transaction to be seen as fair by all stakeholders: The holding company, banks, and perhaps most importantly, the public. In addition, fair prices would give the holding company some chance to make a profit in the long run as power demand increases. And, the prospect of profits, in turn, might induce private investors to provide some of the capital that the bad bank would need, thereby alleviating the upfront cost to the government.

One may then ask what the holding company would do with the assets. The ultimate objective would be to sell the plants back to the private sector. In fact, this objective should be built into the charter, which should state that the purpose of the holding company is to sell off the assets within five years, after which it would be dissolved. To realise this objective, the holding company should endeavour to reduce uncertainty, especially by securing long-term contractual arrangements for coal inputs to be supplied by Coal India and output to be purchased by state electricity boards. Once this is done, and as demand for electricity grows to the point where the plants can operate at somewhere close to full capacity, the appetite for these assets will gradually revive, at which point they could be sold.

Of course, bad banks are not magical solutions. They will take some time to establish, and will require difficult political choices, in particular about how to allocate the costs amongst creditors, promoters, home owners, and taxpayers. But, equally, something needs to be done: The nation cannot allow vital power plants to continue to deteriorate, operationally and financially. And, by now, all the alternatives have been tried, and found wanting.

The Great Slowdown is upon us. Two bad banks to resolve the Four Balance Sheet problem might be one critical element of the solution.

Subramanian is former Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India and Felman is former IMF Resident Representative to India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The verdict in the treason case against retired Gen Pervez Musharraf marks a seismic shift in Pakistan's history."
—DAWN

Philosopher of Marathi stage

For Shriram Lagoo, theatre was a serious art form and advancement of culture its function



RAMU RAMANATHAN

The date: December 9, 2006. The place: Chavan Natyagruha, Pune. The occasion: The third edition of the Roopvedh Pratishthan, a trust created by Deepa and Shriram Lagoo.

VIJAY TENDULKAR WAS to be bestowed the Tanveer Sanmaan. I was to be honoured with a youth fellowship, the Tanveer Abhyaasvrutti. The auditorium was jam-packed. The stage had a lot of heavyweight personalities, and there were many more in the audience. Grandiloquent speeches were being made and lofty dialectics were being bandied around. After the ceremony, a select few moved to a hall in a nearby hotel. More dialogue-baazi and a little bantering. It was well past midnight when I sauntered into the cloakroom, and said to myself in the mirror, a few minutes more, and then you can go home.

Just then the door opened. A dramatic entry. It was my host for the evening, Dr Lagoo. He said, "Budmaash!" A dramatic pause. He continued, "I've been keeping an eye on you throughout the evening. You escaped into the wings during the speeches, and during the party, you wandered off for a walk. Now, where will you escape?"

I mumbled my apology. Then we stood there and chatted for a long while. We spoke about his book, which demystified the science of voice through simple voice exercises for overworked stage actors, and how his practice as an ENT surgeon provided a scientific foundation. "If your pitch is Kali 2 (black 2), you must speak in Kali 2. Despite this, if you keep straining every nerve to reach Pandhari 4 (white 4), you will destroy your voice."

Then we spoke about his letter to Bhalbha Kelkar, who was the president of Progressive Dramatic Association (PDA). This public letter criticised Kelkar for his narrow-mindedness during the *Ghasiram Kotwal* imbroglio. Lagoo used to act in the PDA plays and Kelkar was his director. Lagoo's assessment: "Bhalba Kelkar was a Varkari of the Natya-Pandhari, a pilgrim on his way to the shrine of theatre. He worked till the end as devotedly as a pilgrim who sets out on a pilgrimage. But Bhalba's morality was puritanical. He didn't bother to intellectually analyse his work. That's why PDA, which was founded in 1951, ceased to be progressive, 10 years later."

It was a warning to my generation of theatrewallahs! Theatre is a serious art form and the advancement of culture is the function of the theatre movement.

Other than as a theatre theorist, my memory of Lagoo was that of a true theatre professional. A glowing example of this is how in a single day, he would perform the lead roles of three blockbuster plays that played to a full house: *Natasamrat* in the morning, *Himalaychi Savli* in the afternoon, and *Gidhade* in the night. It was an extraordinary testimony to his physical stamina and mental alertness — a true-blue athlete-cum-

philosopher.

For theatre *rasiks*, he was memorable as Sridhar Kulkarni in G P Deshpande's *Uddwashta Dharamshala* and then, Siddheswar Bhatji in Premchand Gajjee's *Kirwant*. Other than the politics of the play, he was able to capture the pathos of the Brahmin character whose hands were tied up in an unusual sort of mannerism. It was non-verbal acting at its best.

He staged *Antigone* during the most repressive phase of the Emergency. As the state police was overseeing the censorship, Lagoo went to meet the officer. No one (including the omnipotent state) had any idea about the focal point of *Antigone*. In fact, the group was approached by Doordarshan officials, and the play was telecast. Subsequently, the vexed political issues in the play were discussed on stage and off-stage. Lagoo said, "It's a mad, mad world, this realm of censorship." One more lesson for us, theatrewallahs. Never ever give up.

With Vijay Tendulkar's *Gidhade*, the censor board had spotted 150 highly objectionable bits and pieces. Lagoo and his team were nonplussed. Like all theatrewallahs, they had three options: One, to concede to the objections and delete the unsavoury bits from the play; two, cancel the show; or three, to carry on with the show in spite of the objections of the censor board. And that's what Lagoo did.

Lagoo told the board chief that they didn't accept the cuts that the board had suggested. The cuts were eventually reduced from 150 to 125, and then to 100. Who stood by the beleaguered theatrewallahs during this period? Interestingly it was the women: Kumud Mehta, Shanta Shelke, Sarojini Vaidya and Durga Bhagwat who would say, "The censor board is foolish! Continue to perform... you are doing a good job."

Gidhade played a big role in Lagoo's life. Ramakrishna Naik of the Goa Hindu Association attended a show of *Gidhade*. Now, Lagoo had criticised the Goa Hindu Association's *Raigadla Jemvha Jag Yete* in the periodical, *Rasaranga*. Ramakrishna Naik told Lagoo that V V Shirwadkar (Kusumagraj) had written a new play. This was *Natasamrat*.

Lagoo was ready to play Ganpatrao Belwalkar. *Natasamrat* was to be mounted in one month. Lagoo had a busy schedule. He attended the first rehearsal of *Natasamrat* after memorising all the lines in the play. He did this for the first time in his life. This was *Natasamrat*, play with the cult classic line, "*Nat mhanje bhavahak, lamaan*" (We actors are but a nomadic tribe that transports goods from one place to another).

In the case of Lagoo, besides transporting the goods, he travelled across his beloved Maharashtra to raise funds for the Samajik Krutagnayata Nidhi and supported Medha Patkar's Narmada Bachao Andolan and Narendra Dabholkar's Andhashradha Nirmoolan Samiti.

As we exited that cloakroom in the wee hours of the morning, Lagoo quoted Thoreau, "If a soldier is walking out of pace, he is probably hearing a different drummer. (*The famous Lagoo tremor here*). Try to be that soldier." Lagoo followed what he preached. He didn't hear the drumbeats that the rest of the society was dancing to. His drummer was different.

Ramanathan is Mumbai-based playwright

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STILL WE RISE

INDIA IS STANDING up. This government stands exposed and discredited. This is a day when love and solidarity face down bigotry and fascism. Everybody has joined in to protest against the unconstitutional CAB and NRC. We are Dalits, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Adivasis, Marxists, Ambedkarites, Farmers, Workers, Academics, Writers, Poets, Painters and most of all Students who are the future of this country. This time you will not stop us.

Arundhati Roy, via email

NRC WORRIES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'States stand up' (IE, December 19). It is not the CAA but rather the proposed nationwide NRC that is the cause for so much concern and opposition. The CAA is not against Indian Muslims; it will prevent only Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Afghan illegal Muslim immigrants from acquiring Indian citizenship. But, as far as the NRC is concerned, there are genuine fears surrounding documents to prove citizenship. Though such fears apply to all communities equally, but the fears are possibly more among Indian Muslims, as they may be dubbed as illegal immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh or Afghanistan in the event of their inability to produce the required documents to prove citizenship and

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.

parentage.

Anoop Srivastava, Greater Noida

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'States stand up' (IE, December 19). The difference between dictatorship and democracy is that there are multiple centres of power and checks and balances in the latter. The erosion of democratic institutions has been underway in India since they were first conceived. But every now and then, a few people emerge who help reinstate our faith in them. The resistance from chief ministers is the best example of Indian democracy thriving. Hopefully, the NRC is undone or the CAA doesn't apply to NRC results.

Safdar Ali, Kolkata



PRADEEP BHANDARI

A moral law

A misinformation campaign is underway to make Muslims fearful of CAA

THE PASSAGE OF Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) is not only historic but also upholds the democratic and moral values of Indian republic. It is not just the expression of the majority but an article of faith to protect the minorities. It is not a law which grants citizenship based on religion but one that grant's citizenship based on religious persecution. Religious persecution perse is against the minority by a majority in a non-secular state.

It is a fact that religion was a prominent factor in the partition of India and the Constituent Assembly even debated the demand for naturalised citizenship for communities that were forced into becoming minorities in countries in our neighbourhood. However, amidst the influx of refugees, it became impossible for rules and procedures to be drafted in this regard. But the Constitution left the window open to make laws for these minorities, who feared religious persecution, in Articles 6,7,10 and 11.

India has always stood for what is moral and just. It would have been unjust, immoral and unethical for the liberal and secular Indian democracy to look the other way when lakhs of people living in India, having fled from Pakistan after Independence, continue to remain without an identity or voice

despite their residence and ancestral linkages here. Not only has the Indian state given such people citizenship in the past on a case-by-case basis, leaders across the political spectrum from Jawaharlal Nehru to Jayaprakash Narayan and even Manmohan Singh have expressed the need to grant them citizenship.

India has given the right to a dignified life to its minorities and believes in the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. When secularism is under threat in the neighborhood, must a secular state not perform its Gandhian duty? Selective secularism goes against constitutional morality. Many have asked why the Bill did not include Muslims. The purpose of the Act is to address religious persecution, not economic migration. Human rights reports by the UN and countless media reports have the persecution of Jain, Sikhs, Christians and Hindus in these countries. How can a follower of Islam face persecution in a country where the state religion is Islam? Even if such exceptional cases arise, the doors for naturalised citizenship remain open.

Given that the CAA does not impinge on a single constitutional right of an Indian citizen, the protests against it on the pretext that it is anti-Muslim are dishonest and against the secular fabric of this great nation. The

truth is that the Constitution provides enough protection to minorities in case of discrimination. Morality teaches us to favour positive discrimination for minorities to bring them on a level-playing field. The CAA is based on the principle of positive discrimination for the minorities suffering from human rights' abuses in our neighbourhood. How can steps to protect minorities in India be termed secular, but steps to protect similar minorities in the neighbourhood be called communal? A global power cannot be silent when minorities are facing existential threats across its border.

Conscious fear-mongering over the CAA is not only against India's national interest but it also hurts the cause of informed dissent on the law. Informed dissent is legitimate, but violence has no place in a society governed by the rule of law. Those who think the law is unconstitutional should approach the Supreme Court and those who think that the anti-CAA protests reflect the mood of the people should make it a part of their political narrative. Anti-CAA protests must eschew radical, violent and communal thoughts and protesters must not vandalise public property. Police excesses should be investigated by the judiciary and, if found guilty, the perpetrators should be punished. However, the

principle of "innocent until proven guilty" must be applied equally, across the board. Neither law enforcement agencies nor protesters have the license to break the law. Students have right to dissent but they should be cautious of becoming tools for groups with vested interests.

Parliament is the most legitimate institution reflecting the will of the people. The CAA was passed with an absolute majority. What will a majority government do if not bring policies which were part of its manifesto? The parties supporting the anti-CAA protests need to test their belief against the popular will. The AAP government in Delhi should campaign on its anti-CAA stand, as should the RJD in Bihar and Congress in UP.

A misinformation campaign is being undertaken to make Indian Muslims fearful of the new Act. Why should the second-largest Muslim population in the world be threatened by an attempt to grant citizenship to a few lakh persecuted minorities in a fraternal democracy? No one is deporting Indian citizens; no one can deport an Indian citizen. Every right-minded citizen should spread facts, not fiction, about the CAA.

The writer is founder, Jan Ki Baat and hosts Lalkaar on Republic Bharat



TELLING NUMBERS

India had most deaths caused by pollution in 2017: new report

In 2017, pollution was responsible for 15% of all deaths globally, and 275 million Disability-Adjusted Life Years. India saw the most pollution deaths — about 2.3 million — a new report has found. The 2019 Pollution and Health Metrics: Global, Regional and Country Analysis report from the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP) updates findings from The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health, and provides a ranking of pollution deaths on global, regional and country levels. The report uses the most recent Global Burden of Disease data from the Institute of Health Metrics Evaluation.

The top 10 countries with the most pollution deaths include both the world's largest and wealthiest nations, and some of its poorer ones. India is followed by China in the number of pollution deaths, with about 1.8 million. The United States makes the top 10 list with 1,97,000 pollution-related deaths, while ranking 132nd in the number of deaths per 100,000 people.

The report includes three lists on pollution-induced deaths. India is the only country that features in the top 10 in all three lists (*right*).

In the list of top 10 countries with the most pollution-related deaths in proportion to their population, there are many smaller countries where the impact of pollution in relation population size is more intense. Chad tops this list with 287 deaths for every 1,00,000 people, whereas India is at number 10 with 174 deaths for every 1,00,000 people.

The list of top 10 countries with the most deaths related to air pollution, significantly, corresponds closely to the list of top 10 countries with the most pollution-related deaths. Air pollution — both ambient and indoor — is one of the largest and most obvious types of pollution affecting global health.

ANNUAL PREMATURE POLLUTION-RELATED DEATHS

1	India	23,26,771
2	China	18,65,566
3	Nigeria	2,79,318
4	Indonesia	2,32,974
5	Pakistan	2,23,836
6	Bangladesh	2,07,922
7	USA	1,96,930
8	Russian Federation	1,18,687
9	Ethiopia	1,10,787
10	Brazil	1,09,438

POLLUTION DEATHS PER 1,00,000 PEOPLE

1	Chad	287
2	Central African Republic	251
3	North Korea	202
4	Niger	192
5	Madagascar	183
6	Papua New Guinea	183
7	South Sudan	180
8	Somalia	179
9	Serbia	175
10	India	174

ANNUAL PREMATURE AIR POLLUTION-RELATED DEATHS

1	China	12,42,987
2	India	12,40,529
3	Pakistan	1,28,005
4	Indonesia	1,23,753
5	Bangladesh	1,22,734
6	Nigeria	1,14,115
7	USA	1,07,507
8	Russian Federation	99,392
9	Brazil	66,245
10	Philippines	64,386

Source: GAHP

THIS WORD MEANS

MERIT PTAH

Said to the first woman physician. Was she?

FOR DECADES, an ancient Egyptian has been celebrated as the first woman physician. Known by the name Merit Ptah, she



Merit Ptah

Kwiciński found that Ptah was first mentioned in the 1930s, when Kate Campbell Hurd-Mead, a medical historian, wrote a history of women in medicine. Her

book mentioned a picture of a woman named Merit Ptah on the site where a tomb in the Valley of Kings was excavated.

In 1929-30, an excavation in Giza uncovered a tomb of Akhetetep, an Old Kingdom courtier, which mentioned a woman called Peseshet as “Overseer of Healer Women”. Both Peseshet and Ptah came from the same period, and mentions to both were made in the tombs of their sons.

According to Kwiciński, Hurd-Mead confused Ptah with Peseshet, “and from a misunderstood case of an authentic Egyptian woman healer, Peseshet, a seemingly earlier Merit Ptah, ‘the first woman physician’ was born”.

APURVA VISHWANATH & SHRUTI DHAPOLA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 19

AS PROTESTERS against the Citizenship Amendment Act hit the streets in large numbers in several states on Thursday (December 19), state governments sought to tamp down on the demonstrations by issuing prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Code Of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973. On Wednesday, Section 144 was imposed in Bengaluru for three days, while the entire state of Uttar Pradesh remains under this provision.

What is Section 144?

Section 144 CrPC, a law retained from the colonial era, empowers a district magistrate, a sub-divisional magistrate or any other executive magistrate specially empowered by the state government in this behalf to issue orders to prevent and address urgent cases of apprehended danger or nuisance.

The magistrate has to pass a written order which may be directed against a particular individual, or to persons residing in a particular place or area, or to the public generally when frequenting or visiting a particular place or area. In emergency cases, the magistrate can pass these orders without prior notice to the individual against whom the order is directed.

What powers does the administration have under the provision?

The magistrate can direct any person to abstain from a certain act or to take a certain order with respect to certain property in his possession or under his management. This usually includes restrictions on movement, carrying arms and from assembling unlawfully. It is generally believed that assembly of three or more people is prohibited under Section 144. However, it can be used to restrict even a single individual. Such an order is passed when the magistrate considers that it is likely to prevent, or tends to prevent, obstruction, annoyance or injury to any person lawfully employed, or danger to human life, health or safety, or a disturbance of the public tranquility, or a riot, of an affray.

However, no order passed under Section 144 can remain in force for more than two months from the date of the order, unless the state government considers it necessary. Even then, the total period cannot extend to more than six months.

Why is the use of power under Section 144 criticised so often?

The criticism is that it is too broad and the

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, GUWAHATI, DECEMBER 19

ON MONDAY, Nagaland Governor R N Ravi was given additional charge of Meghalaya, whose Governor Tathagata Roy is learnt to have gone on leave. In the days leading up to the move, Roy had tweeted controversially on the Citizenship Amendment Act, and had also upset many in the state by not giving assent to amendments to The Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act, 2016. The amendments had been approved by the Meghalaya Cabinet by an Ordinance.

What is the Ordinance about?

The existing 2016 Act deals with registration and documentation of non-state residents living in Meghalaya. The Ordinance, cleared by the Cabinet in November, seeks to extend similar rules to cover all non-state residents visit-

Independent Directors, which is part of The Companies Act, 2013, says that one of their functions is to “safeguard the interests of all stakeholders, particularly the minority shareholders”.

The directive will give a boost to the Shapoorji Pallonji Group, which is owned by Mistry’s family and which, although a minority shareholder (18%), is still the biggest outside shareholder in Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata Group.

USE OF ARTICLE 75

The NCLAT has barred Tata Sons from taking any action against Mistry, Shapoorji Pallonji, Cyrus Investments, and other minority shareholders under Article 75 of the Articles of Association of the Tata Group. This provision grants Tata Sons the right to transfer the ‘ordinary shares’ of any shareholder, including those of the Mistrys’, by-passing a special resolution in the presence of nominated directors of Tata Trusts.

In doing so, the NCLAT has ensured that any decision taken by the Tata Group does not



Police lathicharge protesters in Lucknow on Thursday. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC have been clamped on Uttar Pradesh. Vishal Srivastav

words of the section are wide enough to give absolute power to a magistrate that may be exercised unjustifiably. The immediate remedy against such an order is a revision application to the magistrate himself. An aggrieved individual can approach the High Court by filing a writ petition if his fundamental rights are at stake. However, fears exist that before the High Court intervenes, the rights could already have been infringed.

Imposition of Section 144 to an entire state, as in UP, has also drawn criticism since the security situation differs from area to area.

How have courts ruled on Section 144?

In *Re: Ardeshir Phirozshaw ... vs Unknown* (1939), a British judge of the Bombay High Court censured the Chief Presidency Magistrate in Bombay for passing an illegal order under Section 144: “A Magistrate acting under Section 144 may no doubt restrict liberty. But he should only do so if the facts clearly make such restriction necessary in the public interest, and he should not impose any restriction which goes beyond the requirements of the case.” The judge criticised application of power under Section 144 for two months, “not only to the particular riot, but to any past riots and any future riots which may take place within the next two months are strong measures and; require cogent facts to justify them”.

The first major challenge to the law was made in 1961 in *Babulal Parate vs State of Maharashtra and Others*. A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court refused to strike down the law, saying it is “not correct to say that the remedy of a person aggrieved by an order under the section was illusory”.

What is the Meghalaya law held up by Gov?

ing or living in the state, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong said last month. “This Act is indicative only for those people who are interested in visiting our state as tourists, labourers or for education and business. With this Act in place, they will need to comply with guidelines to be prepared in the form of rules,” Tynsong had told *The Indian Express*.

What is the point of the amendment?

It came in the backdrop of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) process in Assam, which led to concerns among civil society and political leaders, including Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, that people excluded from the Assam NRC might try to enter Meghalaya. Besides, political parties and activists in Meghalaya had long been demanding replication of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) regime of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram, which has now been extended to Manipur following the passage of the Citizenship

Amendment Bill. While the ILP-regime states are exempt from the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), practically the whole of Meghalaya is exempt by virtue of special protections under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The Ordinance itself was not a fallout of the citizenship legislation, but a precautionary measure in view of the Assam NRC.

How would the registration take place?

Amid concerns that followed the Ordinance, the Meghalaya government clarified last month that the modalities for registration of visitors have not been finalised. The Director of the Tourism Department issued a statement on November 5: “The registration process will be designed keeping in mind the convenience of tourists who are visiting our state. It will be a simple process with both online and offline registration options and will be similar to the registration when you check into your hotel. There will be no need to stand or wait in queues when you enter the State. We understand that your time and resources are precious. Meghalaya welcomes all domestic and international travellers who wish to explore our landscapes and experience our culture and traditions. Make your plans and watch our official channels for further updates.”

his ouster. The company is likely to keep in abeyance major decisions until contentions such as those on the use of Article 75 of its Articles of Association, are decided by the Supreme Court.

Will Mistry return to Bombay House?

No, and yes.

Although the NCLAT passed an order restoring Mistry to the top position at Tata Sons, the execution of the order has been suspended for four weeks. This will allow the Tata Group to challenge the NCLAT decision before the Supreme Court.

However, barring the direction to reinstate Mistry, the NCLAT has not stayed the execution of any of its other directions. This means Mistry will be immediately restored to his position as Director on the boards of at least three Tata Group companies, including Tata Steel and Tata Chemicals.

He will, therefore, have to be invited to the board meetings of these companies, thus ensuring his return to Tata’s Bombay House headquarters, albeit as only a Director.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 261

जीएसटी पर प्रतिक्रिया

अप्रत्यक्ष कर व्यवस्था की निगरानी करने वाली वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) परिषद की 38वीं बैठक बुधवार को हुई। परंतु यह बैठक अन्य बैठकों से अलग थी।

इस परिषद में राज्यों और केंद्र के वित्त मंत्री शामिल हैं और अब तक परिषद की बैठक में सर्वस्वीकृति की परंपरा थी जहां किसी भी बदलाव पर सभी सहमत होते थे।

पहली बार, यहां मतदान के जरिये लांटरी पर लगने वाली कर दर को बढ़ाकर 28 प्रतिशत किया गया। ऐसा इसलिए हुआ क्योंकि केरल सरकार ने इस प्रस्ताव का विरोध जारी रखा।

संभव है कि कोई अन्य विकल्प नहीं रहा हो लेकिन यह भविष्य के लिए अच्छा संकेत नहीं है। निश्चित तौर पर जीएसटी

में दिक्कतें नजर आ रही हैं। राज्य भी जीएसटी से मिलने वाली क्षतिपूर्ति को लेकर काफी चिंतित हैं क्योंकि वह समय पर नहीं मिल रही है।

इससे उनकी वित्तीय स्थिति पर दबाव उत्पन्न हुआ है। इसके बावजूद जीएसटी का प्रदर्शन कमजोर बना हुआ है। यह बात इस वक्त इसलिए भी महत्वपूर्ण है क्योंकि कॉर्पोरेट आय कर में कमी आई है और कॉर्पोरेशन कर अक्टूबर से दिसंबर 2019 में पिछले वर्ष की समान अवधि की तुलना में 5 फीसदी तक कम हुआ है। व्यक्तिगत आय कर में पर्याप्त वृद्धि नजर नहीं आ रही है ताकि इसकी भरपाई हो सके।

इससे यह संकेत निकलता है कि इसके लिए मंदी भी आंशिक तौर पर उत्तरदायी

है। ऐसे में कम जीएसटी संग्रह राजकोषीय संकट पैदा कर रहा है।

वित्त मंत्रालय ने जीएसटी संग्रह के लिए 1.1 लाख करोड़ रुपये मासिक का लक्ष्य तय किया था। चालू वर्ष के पहले महीने को छोड़ दिया जाए तो अब तक इतनी राशि एकत्रित नहीं हो सकी। ऐसा प्रतीत हो रहा है कि व्यापक कर वंचना और इनपुट टैक्स क्रेडिट के मामलों में धोखाधड़ी की धारणा जोर पकड़ रही है।

इस मसले को हल करने के लिए तमाम उपाय किए जा रहे हैं। इनपुट टैक्स क्रेडिट के क्षेत्र में हो रहे नुकसान को रोकने के लिए कई तरीके भी प्रस्तावित हैं। मिसाल के तौर एक सुझाव यह है कि इनवॉइस अपलोड होने के पहले मुहैया कराई जाने

फूंकनी होगी। इन कदमों से कुल आर्थिक उत्पादकता बढ़ेगी जिससे एक प्रतिस्पर्द्धी एवं उत्पादक अर्थव्यवस्था बनाने में मदद मिलेगी।

संक्षिप्त एवं मध्यम अवधि के भुगतान से विदेश व्यापार नीतियों का दायरा कम होने से हमारा ध्यान उन नीतियों पर होना चाहिए जिन्होंने पिछले सात वर्षों से निर्यात को स्थिर रखने में बड़ी भूमिका निभाई है। इनमें चार नीतियां खास तौर पर अहम हैं। पहली, हमारी मुद्रा के मौजूदा अधिमूल्यन को दुरुस्त करना है क्योंकि यह निर्यात पर कर लगाने एवं आयात को सब्सिडी देने के बराबर है। आंकड़े बताते हैं कि इस दशक में रुपये की वास्तविक प्रभावी विनिमय दर खासी अधिक रही है। भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक के 36 देशों के सूचकांक से यह पता चलता है।

इस अधिमूल्यन में गिरावट आने से न केवल निर्यात को बढ़ावा मिलेगा बल्कि इससे तीन वर्षों से जारी आयात शुल्क संरक्षण को भी पलटने में मदद मिल सकती है। हमें इस बात को मानना होगा कि ऊंचे आयात शुल्क न केवल अक्षम एवं उच्च लागत वाले घरेलू उत्पादों को बढ़ावा देते हैं बल्कि उत्पादन में इस्तेमाल होने वाले कच्चे माल के महंगा होने से निर्यात भी हतोत्साहित होता है। कोई भी देश आयात शुल्क संरक्षण की राह पर चलते हुए उच्च निर्यात वृद्धि कायम नहीं रख सकता है। अगर हम तीव्र निर्यात वृद्धि बहाल करने को लेकर गंभीर हैं तो हमें हाल के वर्षों में की गई आयात शुल्क वृद्धि को वापस लेना होगा। और मुद्रा अधिमूल्यन की पृष्ठभूमि में ऐसा करना कहीं अधिक आसान होगा।

तीसरी, हमें यह समझना चाहिए कि गत दो दशकों में विश्व व्यापार वृद्धि का एक बड़ा हिस्सा वैश्विक (एवं क्षेत्रीय) मूल्य शृंखलाओं (जीवीसी) से चालित होता रहा है। यह महज संयोग नहीं है कि तीव्र निर्यात वृद्धि के अधिकांश प्रतिमान भारत की तुलना में जीवीसी में कहीं बेहतर ढंग से अंतर्निहित हैं। इसके अलावा वित्त मंत्री ने अपने बजट भाषण में भले ही जीवीसी की अहमियत स्वीकार की, लेकिन व्यापक एवं अप्रत्याशित आयात शुल्क की तरफ लौटना जीवीसी में सफल भागीदारी को कमतर बनाता है। जीवीसी में भागीदारी के लिए नगण्य या निम्न आयात शुल्क होना और उत्पादों की सरल एवं सीमापार आवाजाही जरूरी है। क्षेत्रीय व्यापक आर्थिक भागीदारी (आरसेप) समझौते का संस्थापक सदस्य बनने से हमारे इनकार का हमारे व्यापार एवं निर्यात संभावनाओं पर असर समय बीतने के साथ गंभीरता से महसूस किया जाएगा। अगर अब भी इस समझौते का हिस्सा बन पाना संभव है तो हमें आरसेप का हिस्सा बन जाना चाहिए। अन्यथा, समय बताएगा कि हमने व्यापार नीति में एक ऐतिहासिक भूल कर दी थी।

चौथी, जीएसटी लागू होने के बाद से ही निर्यातक इनपुट टैक्स क्रेडिट के अखूरे एवं विलंबित भुगतान की शिकायतें लगातार करते रहे हैं। हमें प्रक्रियागत सुधारों से इन समस्याओं को युद्धस्तर पर दूर करना होगा। जीएसटी प्रणाली में शून्य-दर वाले निर्यात का किताबी नियम व्यवहार में लाना होगा। निर्यात वृद्धि अधिक होने से आर्थिक सुस्ती दूर करने, नए रोजगार पैदा करने और हमारे बाह्य वित्त को मजबूत करने में मदद मिलेगी।

वित्त वर्ष 2020-21 का बजट व्यय के लिहाज से रह सकता है खास



दिल्ली डायरी

ए के भट्टाचार्य

कारण तो यह है कि चालू वित्त वर्ष के लिए राजस्व संग्रह का अनुमान काफी खुशनुमा है, लेकिन इसे प्राप्त करना सख्त नहीं लग रहा है। राजस्व संग्रह के वर्तमान आंकड़ों से तो यही लगता है कि राजकोषीय घाटा जीडीपी का 3.3 प्रतिशत तक रखने का लक्ष्य हासिल नहीं हो जाएगा। इस वर्ष के पहले आठ महीने में राजस्व संग्रह की अनुमानित दर महज 1.5 प्रतिशत रही है, जबकि लक्ष्य 18 प्रतिशत रखा गया है।

दूरसंचार कंपनियों को अतिरिक्त दूरसंचार शुल्क देने का सर्वोच्च न्यायालय का निर्देश और आरबीआई से एकबारगी लाभांश से सरकार को 1.3 लाख करोड़ रुपये राजस्व की प्राप्ति होगी। हालांकि अंतर तब भी रह जाएगा। वित्त वर्ष 2019-20 के लिए राजकोषीय घाटा 3.8 प्रतिशत स्तर तक रह सकता है। दूसरा कारण यह है कि 2020-21 के बजट में 15वें वित्त आयोग की सिफारिशें भी शामिल करनी होंगी। हालांकि इस महत्त्वपूर्ण प्रश्न का उत्तर 1 फरवरी को ही मिल जाएगा कि क्या राज्यों के साथ कर राजस्व के बंटवारे के लिए विभाज्य कोष से रक्षा एवं आंतरिक सुरक्षा पर व्यय होने वाली दरें करी करम के समतुल्य राशि अलग की जाएगी या नहीं। जीएसटी संग्रह की सुस्त गति से परेशान राज्यों के लिए यह दोहरी मार होगी और इससे उनका राजकोषीय घाटा भी बढ़ सकता है।

जीएसटी संग्रह में कमी के महेनजर जीएसटी परिषद के समक्ष कर दरों में अधिक कटौती की गुंजाइश नहीं रह जाती है। इसके उलट कच्चे माल की तुलना में तैयार उत्पादों पर दरें कम करने के नकारात्मक असर को दूर करने के लिए जीएसटी दरें अधिक तर्कसंगत बनाने की जरूरत है। तैयार उत्पादों पर दरें घटाने से कर

लोगों को गिरफ्तार करने की बात भी शामिल की जा रही है। बहरहाल, सरकार को समग्रता से विचार करके ही निर्णय लेना चाहिए।

जीएसटी की सफलता इस बात पर निर्भर है कि कर मामलों में लोग स्वीच्छिक हिस्सेदारी करें। ज्यादा कड़ी कार्रवाईकरने से मासूम और दोषी दोनों चपेट में आएंगे और ऐसे वक्त में देश का कारोबारी रूझान कमजोर होगा जब कारोबारी भावनाओं को जीवंत बनाना अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण है।

जरूरत यह है कि जीएसटी ढांचे पर समग्र दृष्टि डाली जाए। देखा जाए कि क्या इसे आसान बनाकर अनुपालन बढ़ाया जा सकता है? परिषद को कर और विशिष्ट दरों को लेकर भी व्यापक दिशा स्पष्ट करनी चाहिए।

वापसी में तेजी आई है, जिसका सीधा असर कर संग्रह पर हुआ है। कॉर्पोरेट टैक्स में पहले ही कमी की जा चुकी है। आरबीआई ने 1,500 कंपनियों का निवेश किया है, जिसके अनुसार नई क्षमता विकसित करने या पूंजी परिसंपत्तियों के सृजन के लिए इन कंपनियों द्वारा किए गए निवेश की दर में स्वागत योग्य बढ़ोतरी हुई है। आय कर दरों में कमी से लोगों के पास उपभोक्ताओं एवं निवेशकों के पास क्ताओं या बचत करने योग्य रकम बढ़ जाएगी। इससे देश में मांग में तेजी आने में मदद मिलनी चाहिए। वित्त मंत्रालय को प्रत्यक्ष कर समिति अपनी रिपोर्ट सौंप चुकी है, जिसमें कर रियायत तर्कसंगत बनाने एवं व्यक्तिगत आयकर में कमी करने की सिफारिश की गई है।

भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था में कई ढांचागत क्षेत्रों पर बड़े पैमाने पर व्यय की दरकार है। पिछले कुछ वर्षों में ढांचागत क्षेत्र पर व्यय घटा है और इसकी भरपाई के लिए बजट में संसाधन जुटाने की जरूरत है। अतिरिक्त संसाधन का प्रावधान करने की राह आसान नहीं होगी और इससे राजकोषीय मजबूती का निश्चय कमजोर पड़ सकता है। अगर सरकार ढांचागत क्षेत्र के निर्माण के लिए अतिरिक्त संसाधनों का उपयोग सूझ-बूझ के साथ करती है तो राजकोषीय मजबूती से भटकाव की भी उचित ठहराया जा सकता है। वैसे भी जब आर्थिक वृद्धि दर पिछले 18 महीने में आधी रह गई है तो अर्थव्यवस्था में जान डालने के लिए राजकोषीय घाटे में इजाफा नजरअंदाज किया जा सकता है।

बजट 2020 इस बात के लिए याद रखा जाएगा कि इसमें व्यय के मोर्चे पर क्या कदम उठाए जाते हैं। पिछले सप्ताह टी वी सोमनाथन को वित्त मंत्रालय में नया व्यय सचिव नियुक्त किया गया है।। सोमनाथन की नियुक्ति कोई सामान्य बात नहीं मानी जा सकती। वह 2015 से 2017 तक दो वर्षों के लिए प्रधानमंत्री कार्यालय में थे। इस दौरान उन्होंने आर्थिक नीतियों के क्रियान्वयन पर नजर रखी थी। इसके बाद अगले दो वर्षों तक उन्होंने तमिलनाडु के वित्त एवं वाणिज्यिक कर विभाग का कामकाज देखा था। अब वह केंद्र की व्यय योजना के लिए क्या करते हैं इस पर सबकी नजरें होंगी।

कानाफूसी

बिगड़ती बात

जब बात देश के अन्य राज्यों में चुनाव प्रचार करने की आती है तो उत्तर प्रदेश के मुख्यमंत्री आदित्यनाथ भारतीय जनता पार्टी के सबसे चहेते नेताओं में से एक नजर आते हैं। लेकिन इसके बावजूद वह प्रदेश में अपने खिलाफ पनप रहे असंतोष से निपटने में नाकाम रहे हैं। मंगलवार को जब भाजपा के विधायक पुलिस और जिला प्रशासन द्वारा प्रताड़ना के खिलाफ विधानसभा में ही धरने पर बैठ गए तो मोडिया में इसकी खबरें जमकर प्रकाशित हुईं। उधर पार्टी के एक अन्य विधायक श्याम प्रकाश ने सोशल मीडिया पर एक संदेश के जरिये यह सुझाव दिया कि विधायकों को भी कर्मचारी संगठन जैसा एक संघ गठित करना चाहिए। उन्होंने यह इल्जाम भी लगाया कि राज्य में मौजूदा सरकार के कार्यकाल में बहुत अधिक भ्रष्टाचार है और इन हालात में विधायक भी खुद को असाहाय पा रहे हैं। इन तमाम बातों पर ध्यान देते हुए ही मुख्यमंत्री आदित्यनाथ ने 40-40 विधायकों के समूह बनाकर उनसे मुलाकात करने का निश्चय किया है ताकि इन सभी समस्याओं को एकबारगी निपटया जा सके।



आपका पक्ष

देश से पलायन रोकने के हों उपाय

प्रतिभा संपन्न व्यक्ति ही किसी समाज या राष्ट्र की वास्तविक संपदा होती है। इन्हीं की दशा एवं दिशा पर देश का भविष्य निर्धारित होता है। अपने स्वर्णिम अतीत में देश इन्हीं की बहुलता के कारण स्वयं में समृद्ध एवं खुशहाल और ज्ञान-विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में विश्व का अग्रणी देश था। देश-विदेश के जिज्ञासु, विद्वान एवं प्रतिभा संपन्न लोग इसी कारण यहां खिंचे चले आते थे और अपने ज्ञान को समृद्ध कर लौट जाते थे। लेकिन आज स्थिति बदल गई है। दूसरे देशों में प्रतिभा का पलायन कोई नई समस्या नहीं है और न ही किसी एक देश तक सीमित है। यह समस्या दशकों पुरानी है और विश्व के अधिकतर विकासशील देश इससे पीड़ित हैं। लेकिन इससे सबसे अधिक नुकसान भारत का हो रहा है, क्योंकि प्रतिभा संपन्न लोगों के क्षेत्र में भारत विश्व का अग्रणी देश है तथा सबसे अधिक प्रतिभाओं का पलायन यहीं से हुआ है और हो रहा है। वैसे तो पहले भी



प्रतिभा का पलायन होता रहा है लेकिन इस समस्या को उदारीकरण ने और हवा दी है। करीब 60 से 90 के दशकों में ज्यादातर 20-25 वर्ष की आयु की युवा प्रतिभाएं ही देश से पलायन करते थे। प्रेशर होने के कारण इन्हें इस उम्र में दूसरे देश के वातावरण और कार्यशैली में ढलने में आसानी होती थी। दूसरा उस समय अधिकतर वैज्ञानिक,

देश की प्रतिभा का पलायन रोकने के लिए सरकार को उचित कदम उठाने चाहिए

डॉक्टर, इंजीनियर आदि ही अधिकतर जाते थे। भारत से कुशल और प्रशिक्षित व्यक्ति विदेश पलायन कर जाते हैं जिससे भारत

में उच्चस्तरीय प्रतिभाओं की कमी

पाठक अपनी राय हमें इस पते पर भेज सकते हैं : संपादक, बिजनेस स्टैंडर्ड, 4, बहादुर शाह जफर मार्ग, नई दिल्ली - 110002. आप हमें ईमेल भी कर सकते हैं : lettershindi@bsmail.in पत्र/ईमेल में अपना डाक पता और टेलीफोन नंबर अवश्य लिखें।

दैनिक जागरण

उचित योजना के अभाव में लक्ष्य प्राप्त करना लगभग असंभव है

राजनीति का शरारती रूप

अब इस पर कोई संशय नहीं कि नागरिकता संशोधन कानून के हिंसक विरोध के पीछे अज्ञानता भरें अंदेशे के साथ ही शरारत भरें राजनीतिक दुष्प्रचार की भी एक बड़ी भूमिका है। नागरिकता कानून में संशोधन के बाद विभिन्न विपक्षी राजनीतिक दलों और क्रिस्म-क्रिस्म के गैर राजनीतिक संगठनों ने एक ऐसा माहौल खड़ा कर दिया है, मानो सरकार ने अनर्थ कर दिया हो। हैयनी यह है कि ऐसा माहौल खड़ाकर अराजकता को हवा देने का काम वे दल भी कर रहे हैं जो एक समय नागरिकता कानून में वैसी ही व्यवस्था चाह रहे थे जैसे सरकार ने की और जिस पर संसद ने विधिवत मुहर भी लगाई। नागरिकता कानून के खिलाफ आज आग उगल रही कांग्रेस बड़ी चतुर्पाई से यह भूलना पसंद कर रही है कि वाजपेयी सरकार के समय राज्यसभा में बतौर नेता विपक्ष मनमोहन सिंह बांग्लादेश जैसे देशों के अल्पसंख्यकों को नागरिकता प्रदान करने में नरमी बरतने की जरूरत जता रहे थे। उन्होंने इन प्रताड़ित अल्पसंख्यकों को नागरिकता प्रदान करना देश की नैतिक जिम्मेदारी भी बताया था। अब जब मोदी सरकार ने इसी नैतिक जिम्मेदारी का निर्वाह कर दिया तो कांग्रेस समेत अन्य दल अराजकता का माहौल बनाने में जुटे हुए हैं। कायदे से तो मनमोहन सिंह को प्रधानमंत्री बनने पर इस नैतिक जिम्मेदारी का निर्वाह करना चाहिए था, लेकिन उन्होंने उससे पल्ला झाड़ना ही बेहतर समझा और वह भी तब जब असम से राज्यसभा सदस्य होने के नाते इससे भली तरह परिचित थे कि पूर्वोत्तर के विभिन्न इलाकों में पड़ोस से आए अल्पसंख्यक कितनी दयनीय दशा में रह रहे हैं।

यह तथ्य भी उल्लेखनीय है कि मनमोहन सिंह के प्रधानमंत्री रहते समय माकपा नेता प्रकाश करार ने उन्हें चिट्ठी लिखकर नागरिकता कानून को इस तरह संशोधित करने की मांग की थी कि बांग्लादेश से आए और परेशान हो रहे अल्पसंख्यकों को भारत की नागरिकता मिल सके। इस चिट्ठी में उन्होंने मनमोहन सिंह को उनके उस संयोग्य की याद भी दिलाई थी जो उन्होंने राज्यसभा में दिया था। आज माकपा और अन्य दल बिना शर्म-संकोच नागरिकता कानून को काला कानून में बताने में लगे हुए हैं। वास्तव में इसी शरारतपूर्ण राजनीति के कारण नागरिकता कानून का हिंसक विरोध हो रहा है। यह भी एक क्रिस्म की शरारत ही है कि शांतिपूर्ण विरोध के बहाने आशांति और अराजकता फैलाने का काम किया जा रहा है। बंगाल, दिल्ली और उत्तर प्रदेश की हिंसक घटनाएं यही रेखांकित कर रही हैं कि अराजकता और उन्माद फैलाने का काम किस सुनियोजित तरीके से किया जा रहा है। राजनीतिक फ्पयदे के लिए हमारे नेता किस हद तक गिरने को तैयार हैं, इसका ही शर्मनाक उदाहरण है ममता बनर्जी की जनमत संग्रह संबंधी मांग।

नशे के खिलाफ मुहिम

हिमाचल प्रदेश में नशीले पदार्थों की बरामदगी बढ़ना चिंतनीय है। हर रोज नशीले पदार्थ बरामद हो रहे हैं।। प्रदेश के कई जिलों के सीमावर्ती क्षेत्रों में नशा माफिया ने जाल बिछाया है। कई युवाओं का नशे की गत में फँसना चिंतनीय है। जिस उम्र में युवा करियर चमकाने के लिए संघर्ष करते दिखने चाहिए, उस दौरान उनका नशे की ओर झुकाव सही नहीं है। हालांकि सरकारी स्तर पर नशीले पदार्थों की तस्करी को रोकने के लिए प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं, मगर जरूरत उम्रमें तेजी लाए जाने की है। जरूरत इस बात की है कि नशा माफिया पर लगाम कसी जाए। अक्सर देखा जाता है कि ज़्यादातर मामलों में वही लोग पकड़े जाते हैं जिन्हें नशीले पदार्थों को एक स्थान से दूसरे स्थान तक ले जाने के लिए थोड़े से पैसों का लालच दिया जाता है। ऐसे मामलों में मुख्य सरगना कम ही

पकड़ में आते हैं। इसलिए नशीले पदार्थों की तस्करी के मामलों में मुख्य सरगना को दबोचने के प्रयास किए जाने चाहिए। लोगों को समझना चाहिए कि चंद पैसों के लिए तस्करी में शामिल होना सही नहीं है। ऐसे मामलों में पकड़े जाने पर सजा के अलावा लोगों को सामाजिक रूप से भी तिरस्कार सहना पड़ता है। उनके परिवार को भी इसका खामियाजा भुगतना पड़ता है। असल में नशा नाश की जड़ है। इसलिए समझदारी इसी में है कि नशे से दूरी बनाकर रखी जाए। युवाओं को चाहिए कि वे नशे से दूर रहकर अपना करियर संवारे। अभिभावकों का भी फर्ज है कि यदि उनका बच्चा नशे के चंगुल में फँस गया है तो उसे डाँटे, नहीं बल्कि उसका उपचार करवाएँ। प्रशासन की ओर से नशे के खिलाफ लोगों को जागरूक करने के अभियान को और तेज किया जाना चाहिए। विशेषकर शिक्षण संस्थानों में विद्यार्थियों और युवाओं को नशे के दुष्प्रभावों से अवगत करवाया जाना चाहिए। नशीले पदार्थों का खात्मा एकजुटता के साथ ही किया जा सकता है। इस दिशा में सुखद खबर यह है कि उत्तर भारत के राज्य अब नशे के काले कारोबार के खिलाफ सामूहिक वार करेंगे। इस दिशा में शिमला में सात राज्यों के पुलिस अधिकारियों की समन्वय बैठक हुई है। इस बैठक में तस्करो के खिलाफ और सख्ती से निपटने की पुछ्ठा रणनीति बनाने के अलावा कार्ययोजना तैयार की गई है। इस समन्वय से सूचना और सूचना से सजा तक का रास्ता आसान होने की उम्मीद बंधी है।

असामाजिक होता सोशल मीडिया

अंशुमाली रस्तोगी

हमारा देश आखिर किस दिशा में जा रहा है? हिंसा और अविश्वास का भाव हावी है। परस्पर प्रेम और भाईचारे का तानाबाना टूटता जा रहा है। यह अब कैसे और किस तरीके से जुड़ेगा, यह कोई नहीं जानता। सोशल मीडिया को भी इसके लिए कुछ तक हद दोषी माना जा सकता है जहां अफवाहों को तूल दिया जा रहा है। देश में बोलने-लिखने की आजादी है तो क्या उसका इस तरह बेजा फायदा उठाया जाएगा। हमें इसका विवेकपूर्ण उपयोग करना होगा।

क्या सोशल मीडिया पर हम सब यही करने के लिए आए थे? यह मंच हिंसा और भावनाएं भड़काने के लिए तो नहीं था! इसके रूप में हमें एक जरिया मिला था अपने से जुड़े रहने का। दुनिया को खुद से जोड़े रखने का। दूरियों को कम करने का। अपनी बात को अपने तक ही सीमित न रख, पूरी दुनिया में फैलाने का। न् रिश्ते कायम कर उन्हें नया नाम, नई पहचान देने का। अपने विचारों को लिखने और दूसरे के विचारों को पढ़ने का। तर्कपूर्ण बहस करने का। कुछ अच्छा पढ़ने का, किंतु हमने तो इस खूबसूरत माध्यम को अपनी कुत्सित राजनीति

अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता का अर्थ यह नहीं कि अनाप–शनाप लिखकर सामाजिक समरसता को बिगाड़ने का काम करें

और सांप्रदायिक सोच से नष्ट कर डाला। जो सोशल मीडिया पर व्याप्त इन मूर्खताओं को बर्दाश्त नहीं कर पाए, उन्होंने इसे त्याग दिया और कुछ ऐसा करने की तैयारी में हैं। उनके पास आखिर क्या विकल्प है?

कोई भी संवेदनशील व्यक्ति किसी भी तरह की हिंसा और उपद्रव को सहन और उसका समर्थन नहीं करेगा। अपने ही देश, समाज और नागरिकों को उपद्रव की आग में जलते देखना किसे अच्छा लगेगा। सांप्रदायिक सौहार्द बिगाड़ने से पहले हमें इंसायित की नहीं भूलना चाहिए। साथ ही अपने उन हमदर्दों की हकीकत भी समझें जो अपने हितों के लिए अक्सर हमारा इस्तेमाल करते हैं।

हर मसले को ‘राजनीतिक रंग’ देने की हमने कितनी खराब आदत बना ली है। नेताओं का तो काम ही राजनीति करना है, लेकिन हमें तो

कम से कम उनके हाथों की कठपुतली बनने से बचना चाहिए। नेता तो राजनीतिक दांव खेलकर अपने हित साधकर निकल जाएंगे, मगर हम और आप कभी धर्म तो कभी जाति की दीवारों में बंदते बने जाऐंगे। हमें यह नहीं भूलना होगा कि हमारी पहचान गांधी और विवेकानंद से होती है, हिटलर या मुसोलिनी से नहीं। हमें उन क्रांतिकारियों और सत्याग्रहियों के पुरुषार्थ को व्यर्थ नहीं करना चाहिए जिन्होंने हमारी स्वतंत्रता के लिए इतने यत्न किए। ऐसे में हमारा दायित्व है कि अपने देश में ऐसा कुछ भी गलत न होने दें कि पड़ोसी मुल्क हम पर हंसे। हमें बदनाम करें। हालांकि हम ऐसा कुछ भी देश के संग कभी होने नहीं देंगे। निरंतर फैल रही हिंसा को हमें ही रोकना होगा। बड़े लोकतांत्रिक देशों में हमारा नाम आता है, कम से कम उसी की लाज रख लें। यह मुस्क हम सब की है। सबकी साझा विरासत है। इस विरासत को बचाना होगा। हमें अपनी बुद्धि का सही इस्तेमाल करना होगा। इसके लिए हम सभी को सोशल जिम्मेदारी समझनी होगी। कम से कम सोशल मीडिया के सार्थक उपयोग से हम सौहार्द की बुनियाद तो रख ही सकते हैं। (लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)



विवेक काटजू

बाजवा के सेवा विस्तार पर अड़ंगा लगाने के बाद मुशर्रफ को मौत की सजा सुनाकर न्यायपालिका ने पाकिस्तानी फौज को सख्त संदेश दिए हैं

पाकिस्तान के इतिहास में 17 दिसंबर की तारीख एक अहम पड़ाव के रूप में दर्ज की जाएगी। ऐसा इसलिए, क्योंकि इसी दिन पाकिस्तान की एक विशेष अदालत ने पूर्व राष्ट्रपति एवं सेनाप्रमुख परवेज मुशर्रफ को देशद्रोह के आरोप में मृत्युदंड की सजा सुनाई। एक जज ने तो यहाँ तक कहा कि यदि मुशर्रफ मृत पाए जाएं तब भी उनके शव को घसीटकर इस्लामाबाद के चौक पर तीन दिन के लिए सूली पर चढ़ाया जाए। हालाँकि उनके साथी जज इससे सहमत नहीं रहे। यह टिप्पणी पाकिस्तानी सेना को बहुत चुभने वाली है। इससे पहले पाकिस्तान की ताकतवर सेना और उसके पिट्टू माने जाने वाले प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान की सरकार ने मुशर्रफ को बचाने के लिए सारी तिकड़में आजमाई, लेकिन वे अदालती फैसले को रोकने में नाकाम रहे। तीन न्यायाधीशों द्वारा 2-1 के बहुमत से दिए गए इस फैसले की धमक बहुत दूर तक सुनी जा सकती है। इससे पाकिस्तान की राजनीति, समाज और सेना में भूचाल सा आ गया है।

मुशर्रफ 2016 से देश के बाहर हैं और आजकल दुबई में गंभीर बीमारी का इलाज करा रहे हैं। मुशर्रफ को झटका देने वाले इस फैसले का आधार पाकिस्तानी संविधान के अनुच्छेद छह और उसके तहत बने कानून हैं। उनके मुताबिक अगर कोई व्यक्ति पाकिस्तान के संविधान को दरकिनार करने की कोशिश भी करता है तो वह देशद्रोह का दोषी माना जाएगा। इसे 1973 में तत्कालीन प्रधानमंत्री

जुल्फिकार अली भुट्टो की पहल पर बनाए गए पाकिस्तानी संविधान में शामिल किया गया था। इसमें दोषी पाए जाने पर उम्रकैद या मृत्युदंड का प्रावधान किया गया। भुट्टो ने इसे इस मंशा के साथ लागू किया था ताकि पाकिस्तानी सेना प्रमुख देश की हुकूमत पर काबिज न हो सकें। उनका मकसद था कि अयूब खान और याह्या खान जैसे फौजी तानाशाह फिर से न उमरें, लेकिन विडंबना यह रही कि उसके शिकार वह स्वयं हुए। इसकी कीमत उन्हें अपनी जान देकर चुकानी पड़ी, क्योंकि उनके द्वारा नियुक्त जनरल जिया उल हक ने न केवल उन्हें सत्ता से बेदखल किया, बल्कि उन्हें फांसी पर लटका दिया। इस वाक्ये के बीस साल बाद 1999 में परवेज मुशर्रफ ने तत्कालीन प्रधानमंत्री नवाज शरीफ का तख्तापलट कर स्वयं सत्ता हथिया ली। जिया उल हक और फिर परवेज मुशर्रफ द्वारा किए गए सैन्य तख्तापलट को पाकिस्तान की न्यायपालिका से पूर्ण सहमति मिली।

जिस मामले में मुशर्रफ को सजा मिली है उसकी कड़ियाँ 2007 से जुड़ी हैं जब वह राष्ट्रपति के साथ-साथ सेना प्रमुख भी थे। तब राजनीतिक वर्ग पर शिकंजा कसने के बाद मुशर्रफ ने न्यायपालिका पर भी दबिश बढ़ा दी थी। इसी सिलसिले में तत्कालीन मुख्य न्यायाधीश इफ्तिखार मोहम्मद चौधरी को बखर्क कर नजरबंद करा दिया था। पाकिस्तान की न्यायिक बिरादरी ने इसका भारी विरोध किया। नवंबर, 2007 में मुशर्रफ ने संविधान को निलंबित कर दिया। छह हफ्ते बाद संविधान



अवधेश राजपूत

की फिर बहाली हुई। इस अवधि में उन्होंने सेना प्रमुख का पद छोड़ा और एक सिविलियन राष्ट्रपति बने। आठ महीने बाद उन्होंने राष्ट्रपति पद भी छोड़ दिया। उनके राष्ट्रपति पद छोड़ने से पहले ही मुख्य न्यायाधीश इफ्तिखार चौधरी ने संविधान के निलंबन को अवैध करार दिया। यही पहलू इस मुकदमे का आधार बना।

जैसी उम्मीद जताई जा रही थी, इस मामले में पाकिस्तानी फौज ने बेहद तल्ख प्रतिक्रिया जताई। उसने इस फैसले पर कई सवाल उठाए हैं। फौज का यह आक्रोश बेवजह नहीं है। वह मौजूदा सेना प्रमुख जनरल बाजवा के सेवा विस्तार में अदालती अवरोध को लेकर पहले ही तिलमिलाई हुई है। उनसे जुड़े फैसले में भी अदालत ने स्पष्ट किया है कि यदि पाकिस्तानी संसद ने छह महीने में उनकी नियुक्ति को लेकर उचित कानून नहीं बनाया तो उनका सेवा विस्तार अटक सकता है। स्वाभाविक है कि पाकिस्तानी सेना इन अदालती फैसलों को अपनी साख से जोड़कर देख रही है। पाकिस्तानी सेना श्रेष्ठता बोध से ग्रस्त है। उसे यह मुग़ालता है कि केवल वही पाकिस्तानी

सीमाओं एवं वैचारिक बुनियाद को महफूज रख सकती है। पाकिस्तानी नेताओं के बारे में उसकी धारणा है कि वे कमजोर, अक्षम और भ्रष्ट हैं जो राष्ट्रीय हितों का संरक्षण नहीं कर सकते। नौकरशाही को भी वह नकारा और स्वार्थी समझती है। उसकी नजर में केवल वही एकमात्र ऐसा पवित्र संगठन है जिसे देश और जनता की फि़क्र है और जिसका दामन भ्रष्टाचार से बचा है। राष्ट्र की स्वयंभू संरक्षक मानते हुए वह कानून और परंपराओं को तोड़ने से भी गुरेज नहीं करती। इसी कारण पाकिस्तान का इतिहास सेना की कारगुजारियों से भर है। हालाँकि यदाकदा पाकिस्तानी न्यायपालिका ने सेना को असहज करने वाले फैसले भी सुनाए, परंतु यह तभी हुआ जब न्यायपालिका के शीर्ष पर सख्तिमिजाज और विधि के लिए समर्पित न्यायाधीश मौजूद रहे हों। मिसाल के तौर पर बलूचिस्तान में लापता लोगों के मामले में पाकिस्तानी न्यायपालिका ने सक्रियता के साथ सख्ती दिखाई। कुछ मामलों में तो सैन्य अधिकारियों को फटकार तक लगी, लेकिन सेना के शीर्ष नेतृत्व पर इसका कोई असर नहीं

कुप्रचार का शिकार नागरिकता कानून

संसद के शीतकालीन सत्र में संसद से पारित किए गए विधेयकों में सबसे महत्वपूर्ण नागरिकता संशोधन विधेयक था, जो अब कानून बन चुका है। किसी भी देश के लिए नागरिकता एक महत्वपूर्ण राजनीतिक प्रश्न होता है। जब सरकार किसी व्यक्ति को देश के नागरिक के रूप में मान्यता देती है तो वह नागरिक की सुरक्षा और उसके अधिकारों को सुनिश्चित करती है, ताकि वह देश के नागरिक के रूप में गरिमापूर्वक अपना जीवन व्यतीत कर सके। संसद से पारित इस कानून के तहत नागरिकता, बांग्लादेश और अफगानिस्तान से भारत आए अल्पसंख्यक समूहों-हिंदू, जैन, सिख, ईसाई, बौद्ध और पारसी समुदाय के लोगों को भारत की नागरिकता देने का प्रावधान है। भारतीय संविधान के तहत दिए गए अधिकारों में से कुछ सभी को दिए गए हैं, जबकि कुछ केवल देश के नागरिकों को दिए गए हैं। यह केवल भारत में ही नहीं, बल्कि दुनिया के हर देश में है कि कुछ अधिकार सभी के लिए होते हैं और कुछ अधिकार केवल वहाँ के नागरिकों के लिए होते हैं। इस कानून से जुड़े तीन महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्न हैं। पहला, सरकार को इस कानून को लाने की आवश्यकता क्यों पड़ी? दूसरा, क्या यह कानून लोगों को नागरिकता प्रदान करने में धर्म के आधार पर भेदभाव करता है? तीसरा, क्या सरकार द्वारा विधेयक लाने की पूरी प्रक्रिया में संवैधानिक वैधता है? इन प्रश्नों का उत्तर जानने के पहले यह समझना होगा कि देश का विभाजन 1947 में धार्मिक आधार पर हुआ। 1950 में तत्कालीन प्रधानमंत्री जवाहरलाल नेहरू और उनके पाकिस्तानी समकक्ष लियाकत अली खान के बीच एक समझौते पर हस्ताक्षर हुए। यह दोनों देशों में अल्पसंख्यक समुदाय को सुरक्षा प्रदान करने से संबंधित था। नेहरू-लियाकत समझौते पर पाकिस्तान ने कभी अमल नहीं किया। इस कारण बड़ी संख्या में अल्पसंख्यक पाकिस्तान और बांग्लादेश (उस दौर के पूर्वी पाकिस्तान) से भारत आए। इनके भारत आने का मुख्य कारण धार्मिक उत्पीड़न और उनकी धार्मिक पहचान का खतरे में होना था। इस गंभीर समस्या पर सिर्फ वर्तमान सरकार का ध्यान गया।

2003 से 2014 के बीच संग्रम सरकार ने संसद में अनेक बार यह बात दोहराई कि पाकिस्तान, बांग्लादेश और अफगानिस्तान में धार्मिक अल्पसंख्यकों को प्रताड़ित किया जा रहा है और इसलिए वे भारत आ रहे हैं। इतना ही नहीं, 2003 में जब केंद्र में राजग सरकार थी तब मनमोहन सिंह ने इन पीड़ित धार्मिक अल्पसंख्यकों को नागरिकता



भूपेंद्र यादव



देने का मुद्दा उठाया था। माकपा नेता प्रकाश करार ने 2003 में मनमोहन सिंह द्वारा दिए गए बयान के आधार पर एक पत्र लिखा। कुल मिलाकर लंबे समय से चली आ रही इस समस्या की तरफ लगभग हर दल के नेताओं का ध्यान गया। सभी ने इस समस्या को एक गंभीर चिंता के रूप में जाहिर किया, किंतु दुर्भाग्य से समस्या को जानते और स्वीकारते हुए भी कांग्रेस ने ठोस समाधान निकालने की कभी कोशिश नहीं की। मोदी सरकार ने नागरिकता संशोधन कानून लाकर इस समस्या का समाधान किया है।

जहां तक इस विधेयक की संवैधानिक वैधता का प्रश्न है तो हमें यह याद रखना चाहिए कि संविधान की प्रस्तावना में कहा गया है कि प्रत्येक व्यक्ति को विचार, अभिव्यक्ति, विश्वास और पूजा पद्धति की स्वतंत्रता है। निष्पक्ष द्वारा इस विधेयक के संबंध में उठाया गया मुख्य मुद्दा संविधान के अनुच्छेद 14 के संदर्भ में है। वे तर्क दे रहे हैं कि पड़ोसी देशों के कुछ धार्मिक अल्पसंख्यकों को नागरिकता देकर सरकार भेदभाव की राजनीति कर रही है। सच्चाई आरोपों से परे है। यदि एक कल्याणकारी सरकार किसी उपयुक्त आधार पर लोगों को वर्गीकृत करती है और फिर समूह के सभी सदस्यों को समान अधिकार प्रदान करती है तो यह व्यवस्था अनुच्छेद 14 के तहत मान्य है। यह लोगों

को आरक्षण का लाभ देने के लिए एक वर्ग को चिन्हित करने के समान है। यदि देश के दस प्रतिशत लोगों को गरीबी के आधार पर आरक्षण दिया गया है तो यह नीति देश के करदाताओं के खिलाफ नहीं है। इसी तरह अबीसी मुस्लिमों को दिया जाने वाला आरक्षण उच्च जाति के हिंदुओं के खिलाफ नहीं है।

टीएमए पई मामले में सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने धार्मिक और भाषाई आधार पर लोगों के वर्गीकरण को संविधानसम्मत स्वीकृत किया था। इसलिए विश्व ध्वरा उठाए जा रहे ऐसे मुद्दे निराधार हैं। ये भी आरोप लगाए जा रहे हैं कि यह कानून पूर्वोत्तर राज्यों के खिलाफ है। यह भी सच नहीं है। सरकार ने पूर्वोत्तर के सभी 'इनर लाइन परमिट क्षेत्रों' को कानून के दायरे से बाहर कर दिया है। साथ ही पूर्वोत्तर के जनजातीय क्षेत्रों को भी इस कानून के दायरे से बाहर रखा गया है। सरकार ने इस कानून के तहत लोगों को नागरिकता देने के लिए 31 दिसंबर, 2014 की तिथि निर्धारित की है। यानी नागरिकता प्रदान करने के लिए एन प्रवासियों को इसमें शामिल नहीं किया जाएगा। इस कानून के तहत केवल उन्हें नागरिकता दी जाएगी जो निर्धारित तिथि या उससे पहले प्रवेश कर चुके हैं। बाहर से आए लोगों को विशेष परिस्थिति में नागरिकता पहले भी दी जाती रही है। 2003 में राजग सरकार और यहाँ तक कि 2013 में संग्रम सरकार ने सुकुलर के माध्यम से पाकिस्तान से आए हिंदू प्रवासियों को नागरिकता प्रदान की थी। इसलिए धार्मिक उत्पीड़न के आधार पर लोगों को नागरिकता देना संविधान के सिद्धांतों का उल्लंघन नहीं है। यह कानून लाकर तो सरकार ने लंबे समय से चली आ रही समस्या का स्थायी हल निकाला है। बिना किसी अधिकार के अनिश्चितता और असुरक्षा का जीवन व्यतीत कर रहे लोगों को नागरिकता प्रदान करके भारत सरकार ने मानव अधिकारों की दिशा में महत्वपूर्ण कार्य किया है। कांग्रेस सहित कुछ विपक्षी दलों द्वारा जिस ढंग से नागरिकता संशोधन कानून पर भ्रामक अप-प्रचार करके जनता में भ्रम की स्थिति पैदा करने की कोशिश की गई है, वह अत्यंत दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण और निंदनीय है। यह बार-बार स्पष्ट किया जा चुका है कि नागरिकता संशोधन कानून 2019 से भारत के किसी भी धर्म के नागरिक को कोई खतरा नहीं है। इस कानून से किसी भी नागरिकता पर कोई खतरा होने का सवाल ही नहीं है।

(लेखक भाजपा के राष्ट्रीय महासचिव एवं राज्यसभा सदस्य हैं)

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ऊर्जा

मानवीय गुण

इस दौर में मानव का शारीरिक एवं मानसिक रूप से स्वस्थ रहना एक बड़ी चुनौती बन गया है। इसका कारण तमाम तरह की व्यापियों से घिरा होना है। अधिकांश व्यापियों का संबंध मानव मन एवं मस्तिष्क से जुड़ा है। वास्तव में मानव शरीर सदगुण, प्रश्रय एवं तमोगुण से मिलकर बना है। इनकी अलग-अलग विशेषताएं हैं। सदगुणों द्वारा मनुष्य में ईश्वर के स्वरूप की पहचान रहती है। इससे वह प्रायः प्रसन्न रहता है। रजोगुण की प्रधानता में हर्ष तथा भय साथ रहते हैं। वहीं तमोगुण में मनुष्य पशु के समान केवल स्वयं के स्वार्थ के बारे में ही सोचता है। इससे वह मानसिक रूप से एकाकी होकर चहुँओर विपैला माहौल पाता है। सनातन धर्म के अनुसार वर्तमान काल को कलयुग कहा जाता है। इसमें मानव में तमो और रजो गुणों के प्रभावों से मुक्त होकर सदगुण अपनाकर किसी भी परिस्थिति में प्रसन्न रह सकता है। इन सदगुणों को पतंजलि के अष्टांग योग एवं ईश्वर भक्ति द्वारा प्राप्त किया जा सकता है। ईश्वर भक्ति सदगुण में योग, जेता में यज्ञ और धारण में पूजा द्वारा प्राप्त की जा सकती है, परंतु यही ईश्वर भक्ति कलयुग में केवल भगवान के नाम से ही प्राप्त हो जाती है। इसलिए कलयुग के स्वरूप को समझते हुए रामचरितमानस में कहा गया है कि इस युग में मानसिक पुण्य तो होते हैं, परंतु मानसिक पाप नहीं होते। ऐसा इसलिए, क्योंकि सभी जगह ऐसा ही माहौल है जहाँ सर्वत्र पाप एवं अग्रिय दृश्य उत्पन्न होते रहते हैं। इनके कारण कभी-कभी बुरे विचार मनुष्य को घेर लेते हैं कि वे स्वयंविदित है कि केवल मीडिया अपराध बोध में गिरा रहता है। ऐसी स्थिति में वह ईश्वर भक्ति तथा विवेक से इन मानसिक पापों से निवृत्त होकर सकरात्मक विचारों से स्वयं को ऊर्जावान बना सकता है। संभव है इसलिए कलयुग को सबसे अलग माना जाता है, क्योंकि इसमें वह थोड़े से प्रयास से ही अपनी उन्नति कर सकता है। इसलिए मनुष्य को यह रह अपनाकर आगे बढ़ना चाहिए।

कर्नल शिवदास सिंह

रही हैं और उसने इस मामले में सुनवाई करना स्वीकार भी कर लिया है। इसके बावजूद कुछ निहित स्वार्थी तत्वों द्वारा मुस्लिम समाज को गुमराह किया जा रहा है।

डा. शोभा भारद्वाज, दिल्ली

सुधार के लिए स्वयं करनी होगी पहल

अगर देश की प्रमुख राजनीतिक पार्टियाँ ही ऐसे लोगों को टिकट देगी जिनके विरुद्ध दुष्कर्म के मुकदमे चल रहे हैं तो उनका कोई हक नहीं बनता कि वे किसी भी दुष्कर्म की घटना का विरोध करें। उनका खुद की कथनी और करनी में बहुत बड़ा फर्क है। इससे सिर्फ एक बात साबित होती है कि वे सब राजनेता, जो संसद और संसद के बाहर आक्रोश जगित कर रहे थे, उनका विरोध सिर्फ घड़ियाली ऑसुओं जैसा ही है। यह भी सर्वविदित है कि केवल मीडिया के दबाव के कारण ही भाजपा को अपने उत्तर प्रदेश के विधायक कुलदीप सिंह सेंगर को पार्टी से निष्कासित करना पड़ा। जब तक इन पार्टियों की महिला नेता अपने दलों पर दबाव नहीं बनाएंगी तब तक बड़ा बदलाव नहीं आएगा।

बाल गोविंद, नोएडा

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

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