

RationalExpectations



Hamara Bajaj, Tumhara fear

Home minister Amit Shah’s reply to Bajaj was pitch perfect, but there’s enough evidence to show the govt doesn’t like criticism

GIVEN THAT EVEN Rahul Bajaj’s son Rajiv—he heads Bajaj Auto—disagreed with his father, it is not surprising that opinion is divided on what Bajaj senior said to home minister Amit Shah. While Rahul Bajaj had talked of how industrialists were scared to criticise the BJP—he added that most felt free to criticise UPA ministers when they were in power—his son said that he had read somewhere that courage is knowing that it may hurt and doing it anyway, and *stupidity is the same* (emphasis added).

While it is difficult to reply to such sweeping and multi-layered criticism—was Bajaj upset with the NDA’s social or economic policies?—the home minister did an admirable job. He said that, in the past, lynching didn’t get the kind of publicity it gets now and, given that no government had been criticised as much as the BJP has been, no one should worry about criticising the BJP. Shah added, and this is important, that if despite this, people were still scared to tell the truth to the BJP, the government would have to work to dispel this.

Even those who didn’t find Shah convincing would agree, though, that Bajaj was guilty of fairly wild exaggeration. For one, given India Inc’s penchant for marking even the most ordinary Budget 12 out of 10, it is difficult to believe industrialists openly abused UPA ministers. No top industrialists spoke up, for instance, against the UPA’s blatant corruption/favouritism, of the type A Raja did in telecom, or when Pranab Mukherjee decided to overrule a Supreme Court judgment on Vodafone’s tax liability and came up with his retrospective taxation; this dealt a body blow to India’s reputation for being fair, but no one criticised it openly.

And, while some like Ratan Tata and Anu Aga came out against Narendra Modi in the aftermath of the Godhra violence, it is difficult to recall senior industrialists speaking out against top Congress leaders accused of being part of the anti-Sikh pogrom being given plum postings as ministers. If Indian industrialists are silent now, they were pretty silent earlier as well.

If lynching took place earlier too, did people attack the Centre as they are doing now? And, if the BJP is intolerant of criticism, did the Congress welcome it...The media spinning stories in an anti-BJP way, or highlighting every fringe BJP MP, is a possible explanation—though with *Republic TV* and *Times Now*, Modi is hardly dealing with an entirely hostile media!—but, a large part of the criticism is due to how the BJP treats its critics.

Some recent instances make this clear. Just before the elections, when there was talk of jobless growth, the government suppressed the NSS report on jobs. It is true the report was not comparable with earlier ones because of methodological differences, but instead of stressing this, the government refused to release the report. If jobs were growing the way the government claimed they were, why is the economy slowing so dramatically today? When, more recently, the NSS showed falling real consumption, the BJP buried the report again! Every serious analyst knows the shortcomings in the NSS data—it captures less of consumption than in the past—but, even if the report was biased, it was pointing to something, wasn’t it?

Or take the case of Ashok Lavasa, the Election Commissioner who wanted the EC to ask Modi to cooperate in upholding the Model Code of Conduct, and who disagreed with the EC’s clean chit to Modi using the Pulwama martyrs as a campaign issue. Since Lavasa served under the BJP for three years, as environment and finance secretary, you’d think he had been vetted and his work found good—why else did the BJP appoint him an EC? Yet, his family is under the taxman’s scanner, and PSUs are being asked if his wife was appointed to their boards because of Lavasa’s pressure.

And then, there is Aatish Taseer, the once pro-Modi writer who earned the PM’s ire with his divider-in-chief piece for *Time* magazine just before the elections. Did the government really want to be seen as punishing a critic, especially one who many thought was pretty over-the-top anyway? More so since, after the furore, *Time* published a uniter-in-chief piece anyway. Yet, the government revoked Taseer’s Overseas Citizen of India card, and 260 top writers, including Salman Rushdie and Orhan Pamuk, came out supporting him. Possibly, Taseer lied on his original OCI form several years ago (*bit.ly/2Y6pmQB*), but why not ignore him?

It is true that the same Lavasa, or his colleagues in the EC—most of civil society, actually—didn’t think it was worth censuring Rahul Gandhi for repeating, in the run-up to the elections, without an iota of proof, that Modi had given Anil Ambani ₹30,000 crore worth of Rafale orders; indeed, Gandhi also told tribals that the crux of one of Modi’s proposed bills was “shoot Adivasis with impunity” when the reality was a lot more complex.

But in acting against its critics—or justifying its actions by citing what the Congress did—the Modi government is just hurting its own prospects. Indeed, its demonising of JNU as a haven for anti-India elements in the past ensured that even when JNU students were in the wrong—they were paying 0.5% of what Delhi University students pay for their hostel!—a couple of weeks ago, the public sympathy was with the students. What was just a long-overdue fee hike became the case of a right-wing government trying to crush left liberal students!

Postscript: Cricketing legend Sunil Gavaskar was known as much for the strokes he played as the balls he left. Well-left is something the Modi government would do well to emulate.

DiallingDISASTER

A few more tariff hikes will save telcos from the near-certain bankruptcy that government inaction was leading them to

IT SPEAKS VOLUMES for how the telecom industry was brought to its knees that no one alleged cartelisation when, within hours of each other, Vodafone Idea, Bharti Airtel, and Rjio said they would be raising tariffs; the first two have already announced 25-40% increases. Not surprisingly, given how it slept through Rjio’s below-cost pricing, the Competition Commission of India kept quiet when tariffs were raised, as did the telecom regulator, whose job is to ensure customers don’t get rooked by cartelising telcos. This is not to say that telcos are ripping off customers; how can they when, between the pre-Jio situation and now, the average realisation per user (ARPU) has fallen from ₹174 per month to ₹113 while their data consumption rose from 153MB to 10GB, and voice minutes rose from 400 to 700? But, if the government or regulators are not going to examine cartelisation now, when will tariff hikes be seen as collusive; after ARPUs are ₹174 or 200 or 225? It is ironic, but while competition authorities normally strive to increase competition levels, by driving the industry to bankruptcy—by not cutting rapacious licence fee obligations, and by allowing Rjio’s predatory pricing—the government had a big role in the declining competition in the industry.

While it is difficult to prove that the government encouraged the tariff hike, what could have forced this change of heart is that, with Vodafone Idea perilously close to shutting down, the government realised that it stood to lose ₹200,000 crore of dues, and would have got just a fraction of this in the insolvency courts. And, with Vodafone alone having invested \$30 bn, its shutting down—there is still the retrospective tax case!—would scare off most investors.

Right now, if the tariff hike results in an annual ebtda hike of ₹8,000-9,000 crore each for Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel—going by Kotak Institutional Equities’ analysis—this will help keep them afloat even after the Supreme Court’s (SC) Adjusted Gross Revenues (AGR) blow. But, as this newspaper has argued, the SC erred in its judgment since no independent authority had ever examined the government’s view of what AGR must comprise. And, the AGR blow would have been a lot smaller had the government scrapped licence fees in 2010 as it should have. Since, by then, the government was charging an arm and a leg for spectrum, the earlier policy of high annual licence fees had to be stopped; you can’t charge EMI for a flat as well as ask for the full payment upfront. While many in government argue that they can’t scrap licence fees as they will lose revenue, they need to recall how, after the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government slashed telco fees by moving to a revenue-share regime, the government’s revenues soared after a few years; by contrast, despite the high licence fees, government revenues fell from ₹70,241 crore in just FY17 to ₹39,345 crore in FY19; and, thanks to the government’s actions, there is still the possibility that it could lose several lakh crore rupees of dues. This is mismanagement—by both UPA and the NDA—on a scale that’s hardly ever seen before.

● **TAX REVENUES**

STRUCTURAL AND OPERATIONAL REFORMS—REDUCING NUMBER OF TAX SLABS AND BROADENING THE BASE, ETC—MUST BE UNDERTAKEN ONCE TAX REVENUES BECOME RELATIVELY STABLE

Sequencing the GST reform



AT LAST, AFTER four months, the GST revenue has crossed ₹1 lakh crore in November. That should bring in some cheer in an otherwise gloomy scenario. Of course, this too falls short of the monthly target of ₹1.18 lakh crore, and immediate measures are needed to improve tax compliance. There are many stories making rounds about the ingenious ways adopted to create a parallel informal economy. Therefore, the time is opportune to identify reform areas to increase revenue productivity and minimise administrative, compliance, and distortion costs.

It must be admitted that GST implementation has important positives. The most important gain is from the abolition of inter-state check-posts. It is estimated that the long-distance travel time for goods has reduced by almost 20%. The reform has also helped improve supply chain management by not requiring the creation of branch offices to avoid inter-state sales tax. Also, the abolition of inter-state sales tax has made the tax destination-based, and reduced inequitable inter-state tax exportation. Equally important is the compliance gain due to the exchange of information between the income tax and GST departments. A major gain is the reduced distortion due to cascading. Earlier, the central excise duty, levied at the pre-retail stage, cascaded into the final retail value. Also, the state value-added tax was levied on excise duty paid value. Besides, there was no systematic mechanism for providing input tax credit between excise duty and service taxes. Thus, there was tax on tax, tax on the margins, and margins on the tax, resulting in the consumer paying more than what the governments collected.

While these are the real gains, the stagnation of revenues is a major concern. The budget estimate for 2018-19 for the central government was ₹7.43 lakh crore—the actual collection was 22% lower at ₹5.81 lakh crore. In 2019-20, while the estimated monthly collection of GST is ₹1.18 lakh crore, the average monthly collection during

the last seven months has been less than ₹1 lakh crore. The government is, thus, staring at a shortfall of ₹2 lakh crore for the whole year.

Equally notable are the shortcomings in the structure of GST. The problem includes large list of exemptions, multiplicity of rates, and exclusion of several items of consumption from the base. All this has resulted in erosion of the base and continued distortions. The decision to exempt almost 50% of the items in the Consumer Price Index basket has narrowed the base. The exclusion of petroleum products and electricity has rendered the reform only partial as almost 43% of internal indirect taxes at the Centre, and 40% of those at the state level are excluded from input tax relief.

The tax is levied at four different rates—5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%—in addition to the special rates on precious metals (0.25%), gold (3%), and job work in the diamond industry (1.5%). A special cess is also levied at varying rates on items in the 28% category and, in the case of some class of automobiles, there is a cess of 22%, resulting in the total incidence of 50%. Multiplicity of tax rates enhances administration and compliance costs, enables misclassification, and, in some cases, causes inverted duty structure. Moreover, high tax rates on automobiles, and building and construction material at a time when demand conditions are compressed have caused further slowdown in these sectors. There are infirmities arising from the rate variations according to use of product, value of product, and lower rates on items considered as inputs as compared to those judged to be outputs. These cause distortions as well as compliance problems.

The most important measure

needed, at present, is to stabilise revenues. This requires better compliance with the tax, for which the major action needed is to stabilise the technology platform. The originally proposed three forms—GSTR-1, GSTR-2, and GSTR-3B—could not be operationalised. The summary form, GSTR-3B, does not provide the information required for invoice matching. As the filing of the annual returns, too, is being repeatedly postponed, there is no mechanism to match invoices; this has given rise to a fake invoice industry. So far, 9,385 cases of tax fraud by this means have been detected, involving an amount of ₹45,700 crore. The undetected amount would be much larger. In addition, the dysfunctional technology platform has resulted in integrated GST allocation to states in *ad hoc* ways, and has caused delays in refunds to exporters; small scale industry has particularly been at the wrong end of this.

Firming up the IT platform will be greatly helped if the threshold is kept at ₹50 lakh. Data for 2017-18 from Karnataka shows that 93% of taxpayers had less than a ₹50 lakh turnover; they accounted for 6.5% of the turnover and 12% of the tax paid. It is important to focus on the “whales” rather than the “minnows”. Second, 100% invoice matching is not followed anywhere. Korea tried to do this, but had to give up. E-invoicing could be done, but for the immediate purpose, it may be desirable to confine the matching to invoices above a certain value—say ₹10,000.

Once, a measure of stability is

Reducing the number of tax rates is important, and it should begin by getting rid of the 28% category altogether

brought into the revenues, it is easy to undertake reforms in the structure and operational details. Reducing the number of tax rates is important, and it should begin by getting rid of the 28% category altogether and transferring them to the 18% slab. The revenue from this category, including the cess, is reported to be 22% of the total. At a lower rate, the demand would be higher, and the loss of revenue will be lower. Simultaneously, it is desirable to prune the list of exempted goods and services. Only those that are difficult to tax for administrative reasons should be exempted, and many of the items under 5% should be moved to 12%. In fact, equity is better served through targeted cash transfers, and not by differentiating tax rates. Besides, calibrating tax rates based on consumption pattern alone ignores the employment potential from these sectors. In the next stage, the 12% and 18% categories can also be merged at 15%. This will simplify the tax system into two main rates. As the revenue stabilises, petroleum products and electricity could be brought within the ambit of GST. All these reforms should be sequenced and calibrated over a period of two-three years.

At present, the GST Council relies on the analysis done by the “fitment committee”, which consists of the nominated officials of the Tax Research Unit in CBIC, and officials of the commercial taxes department from some states. For a major reform like the GST, it is important to have a strong technical secretariat, with experts in administration, economics, accountancy, and law to present the Council with options to take informed decisions based on rigorous research. Equally important is the need to make all data that is not sensitive to enforcement available in the public domain for independent researchers. Reluctance to share the data is a major constraint for undertaking independent research.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Going green

When it comes to municipal administration, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) would do well to borrow a leaf out of Indore’s book. The city has been declared the cleanest city in India for three years in a row. Now, in another move that is worthy of emulation, the district administration and municipal employees of the city have decided to use public transport to reach their offices every Friday. Besides encouraging use of public transport and decongesting roads, the objective is also to demolish the myth that only people who cannot afford cars travel by buses. The collector has appealed to private organisations to encourage their employees to use public transport at least once a week, and given the fact that the people of Indore have been extremely supportive of the administration’s initiatives, there is no doubt that this project too will be a success.

— Tarique MERC, on email

Deterring crime

It is heartening that Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao has ordered the setting up of a fast-track court for the expeditious trial of the Hyderabad woman veterinarian murder case, besides assuring the victim’s family of all help. Public fury over the ghastly crime has sent shock waves across the country, and protesters have even demanded that the accused be handed over to them. The authorities have also done well to suspend three police personnel for an alleged delay in registering an FIR. Coming down hard on criminals and handing them exemplary punishment is the only way to deter them from treading the wrong path.

— N J Ravi Chander, Bengaluru

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Taxing C-suite salaries defies global norm

The provision of levying tax on inter-branch cross charges is unworkable and increases compliance costs for businesses. It must be repealed

RAHUL RENAVIKAR

MD, Acuris Advisors Pvt Ltd Views are personal

RECENTLY, THERE WAS hue and cry concerning the application of GST on the allocation of head office costs of an organisation to its branch offices in different states. It was reported in the media that the government intended to recover GST on cross charges on account of allocation of common costs, including salaries of CEO, CFO, IT support, administration support, etc. The government quickly issued a press release and clarified that there was no intention to levy GST on salaries of the ‘C’ suite of an organisation as the services provided by an employee to the employer are neither a supply of goods nor a supply of services, and hence, do not attract any GST. So far, so good. However, in the same press release, the government clarified that, following global practice, GST will apply to cross charges for inter-branch supplies of goods and services, which, of course, include the salaries of employees. This appears to confirm the fear of taxpayers rather than allaying it. Further, it stated that the GST so charged by one branch to another is available as an input credit, and hence, is not a cost to business.

Many companies follow the accounting practice of allocating common costs amongst various locations within the organisation, especially to determine the profitability of different profit centres within the organisation. Under India’s dual GST, supplies in a state attract the central GST and also the state GST. Further, a branch of an organisation located in another state is treated as a “distinct person”; any inter-state activity between the head office and a branch, or between two different branches, is treated as a ‘supply’ and is subject to the GST levy.

Rather than being a common global practice, India is the only country in the world that applies tax on activities between two branches of the same legal entity. In other jurisdictions, flow of goods or services between two arms of

the same legal entity is not considered a supply and isn’t subjected to GST. This reflects the logic that one cannot transact with oneself; you need two to tango. The Indian GST, on the other hand, requires a business entity to register separately in each of the states where it operates, and deems any inter-branch flow of goods or services to be a supply, subject to tax. It is through this deeming fiction that an allocation of head office salaries among the branch is considered a charge for a taxable supply by the head office.

It may be argued that the state-wise registration of each legal entity is necessary for the levy of the state GST. But, this need not be so. Canada also levies a dual GST, but there is no requirement of multiple registrations in each of the provinces where companies operate a business. The two taxes are collected by each legal entity, but under a single registration. In China, individual operating units or branches are required to have separate registrations for VAT, but there is no provision deeming inter-branch activities to be a supply of service that is subject to tax. As there is no fiction of a person making a supply of services to oneself, allocation of CEO, CFO, or other salary costs to branches does not attract any VAT or GST.

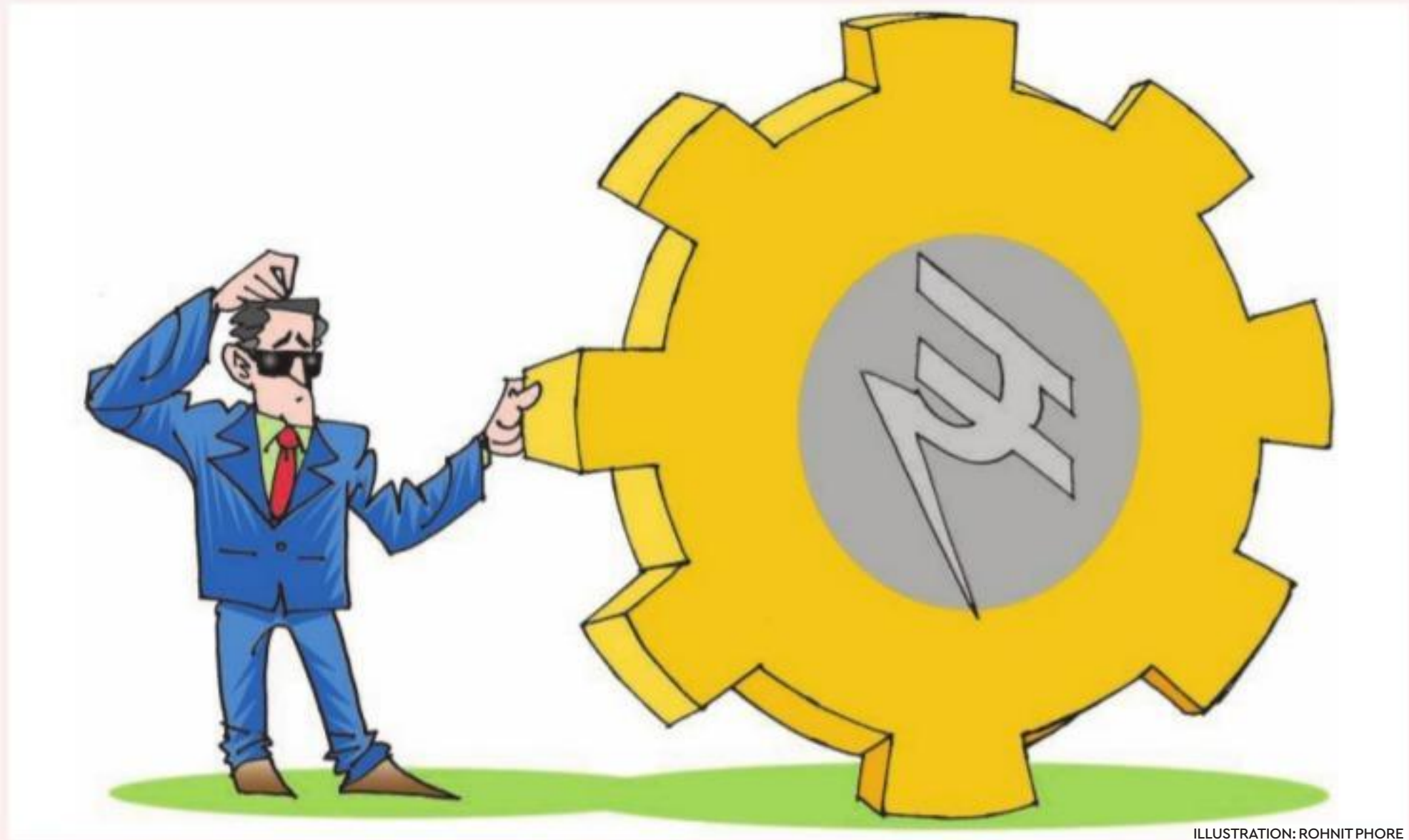
This feature of the Indian GST is, thus, without any international precedent. More importantly, it is unworkable. There is no clarity on which inter-branch activities constitute a supply, and how they are to be valued for applying the tax. Does the exchange of information on business performance (MIS reports) between a branch and the head office constitute a supply of service, subject to an 18% tax? What about the inputs provided by different operating units to the head office in raising capital, in managing cash flow, or in developing sales/marketing plans? How are these fictional supplies to be identified

and valued? Organisations do allocate some of the common costs among various operating units, but there is no consistency in the practices they follow. It is for this reason that few business entities are currently complying with the GST law and remitting tax on inter-branch service activities. The tax authorities have also not provided any guidelines.

These provisions are a significant contributor to the complexity of GST. Multiple registrations increase the compliance load several-fold. They also add to the costs of administration, with not a *paisa* gained in revenues. Each registration is treated as a separate pocket, and no offsetting or consolidation of positive and negative balances in different accounts is allowed. This increases the working capital requirement of businesses. There are complex provisions for inter-branch distribution of input tax credits, which would not be needed under a single registration system.

The government press release says that the GST imposed on inter-branch supplies is not a cost to business as it is available as an input tax credit for the recipient branch. This is true only in theory; in practice, organisations dealing in a mix of taxable and exempt supplies (e.g., banks, companies dealing in basic food, alcohol, petroleum, electricity, real estate, and hospitals, etc) are allowed only a partial credit. Where the tax is fully creditable, why impose the burden of computing the tax on fictional supplies and then giving it all back?

The government has been very accommodative since the launch of GST in July 2017. Following global practices, it should repeal the provisions applying the tax on fictional supplies in the form of inter-branch cross charges. As they are unworkable and few companies are complying with them fully, their repeal should have no adverse impact on revenue, but would save the country wasteful spending on workaround solutions.



LEKHA CHAKRABORTY, ANINDITA GHOSH & MD AZHARUDDIN KHAN

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● TELANGANA

Indebted to growth

When elongation of debt maturity structure is crucial for economic growth

THE NEWEST STATE of India, Telangana, since its formation, is on the high growth trajectory and the economy is growing at a higher rate than national GDP growth. The state was formed on June 2, 2014, as per the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014. The state maintains a zero revenue deficit, satisfying the “golden rule” of the FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) that a state must meet its revenue expenditure from its revenue receipts. But Telangana has a fiscal deficit-GSDP ratio slightly higher than the FRBM-legislated threshold at 3%.

The outstanding liability of the state is around 22% of GSDP, when the FRBM stipulates it to be only 20%. Laudable are the achievements of the new state in terms of economic growth, but macro-fiscal fundamentals like fiscal deficit and outstanding debt not in concomitant with the FRBM targets is a concern. Telangana has formulated a medium-term fiscal framework to work towards stipulated threshold in debt-fiducit dynamics.

According to the 14th Finance Commission, had the state been maintaining fiscal deficit at 3%, and the outstanding debt-to-GSDP ratio below 25% (along with a macro-fiscal ratio of interest payment to revenue receipts at 10%), it would have been eligible for 0.5% additional borrowing power. But Telangana missed this extra borrowing power granted by the 14th Finance Commission.

Yet another point to be noted is that states have significantly resorted to market borrowing in financing the fiscal deficits (following the recommendations

of the 14th Finance Commission) to exclude states from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) financing facility (except Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Arunachal Pradesh). The power bond scheme titled UDAY (Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana) has deteriorated state finances further. The RBI State Finances report 2019 noted that the “state governments are mandated to fund a progressively greater share of discom future losses from their own finances, and prevent ballooning of losses on discoms’ books. The impact of this provision on

state finances could increase significantly in 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to: i) higher share of losses to be funded; and ii) reduction in revenue benefits to discoms from the conversion of state government debt into grants on account of varied debt restructuring models adopted by state governments.” The NIPFP study on power bonds by this author and Amandeep Kaur showed that there is no financial efficiency or operational turnaround in discoms across states, except UDAY.

On the expenditure side, Telangana has ambitious projects. It was the first state to announce an income support scheme for farmers, among the other five states in 2019-20. This is in the form of unconditional cash transfers to farmers, instead of providing them loans. Farmers’ credit waiver has created “moral hazard” issues. The RBI State Finances report noted that these income support transfers are categorised as “Green Box payments” within the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The new state has given importance to capital projects. The flagship capital projects in Telangana include public irrigation projects and a comprehensive drinking water programme termed “Mission Bhagiratha” to provide safe drinking water to all the households. On the revenue side, given the uncertainties in GST revenue, taxes are buoyant

Maturity profile of outstanding state* govt securities (as % to total)

State/UT	Andhra Pradesh	Gujarat	Haryana	Maharashtra	Odisha	Telangana	Puducherry	All states and UTs
2019-20	7.6	5.7	2.8	6	3.6	-	9	5.3
2020-21	7.6	6.4	3.2	7.4	8.9	-	10.8	5.3
2021-22	8.3	9.8	7	10.9	12.4	-	9.6	7.3
2022-23	9.8	8.2	10.3	8.8	12.5	0.9	9.1	7.7
2023-24	11	8.1	12.2	9.3	13	0.9	9	8.3
2024-25	8.8	8.3	11.9	9.8	3.6	8.7	8.5	9.3
2025-26	8.9	8	13.7	12.7	7.1	14.2	8.1	11.5
2026-27	7.9	10.7	12.4	12.7	7.1	16.7	5	13.1
2027-28	5.5	13.4	11.8	6.2	1.8	0.9	7.2	11.8
2028-29	6.1	20.3	5.3	5.1	1.8	0.9	4.5	11.4
2029-30	4.1	-	-	5.5	3.6	0.9	4.1	1.3
2030-31	3.4	1.1	-	-	-	0.9	4.5	1
2031-32	3	-	-	2.1	8.6	4.4	10.4	0.9
2032-33	3.7	-	-	3.5	3.6	4.7	-	1.6
2033-34	2.5	-	1.4	-	1.8	-	-	1.4
2035-36	0.2	-	0.5	-	5.4	-	-	0.1
2036-49	1.7	-	7.5	-	5.4	46.2	-	2.9
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Select states; (outstanding as on March 31, 2019); Note: compensation bonds, loans not bearing interest and special bonds (UDAY) are not included. Source: RBI records

and estimates are above unity.

The intergovernmental fiscal transfers from the 15th Finance Commission are a potential source of revenue to finance their ongoing capital projects. The chairman of the 15th Finance Commission, NK Singh, during the commission’s state visit noted that though capital projects in Telangana have a multiplier effect on economic growth, the rising debt and deficit is a matter of concern. The state has echoed the concern that the potential significant weightage to “population 2011” in the forthcoming tax transfer formula of the 15th Finance Commission can plausibly reduce fiscal transfers to Telangana, unless the commission designs a transfer scheme to mitigate this potential loss to those states that have well managed demographic transition.

Given the aspirational development agenda of the new state, it is a formidable challenge to maintain the stipulated growth path at 14-15%, and even at the projected 20% in the long run, while adhering to fiscal rules by containing the debt-GSDP ratio at 20%.

Against this backdrop, Telangana has adopted a new debt strategy. The state has decided to go for elongation of maturity structure of outstanding debt. The RBI State Finances report noted that elongation of maturity structure of debt is important to mitigate “roll-over risks and debt servicing costs, which impinge on the efficacy of debt management strategies.” Satyajit Chatterjee and Burcu Eyyigunor, in their paper titled “Maturity, Indebtedness, and Default Risk” published in the American Economic Review (2012) noted that when the possibility of self-fulfilling rollover crises is

taken into account, “long-term debt is superior to short-term debt.” This study was conducted in the context of Argentina. The other plausible benefit of long-term bond issuance is that it can fix the yield rate at current levels of interest rate scenario, and also act as “reference rates.”

The recent OECD Sovereign Borrowing Outlook report also showed that the share of long-term debt in the central government marketable debt reached 90% in 2015 in the OECD region, and is projected to rise gradually. This relatively high level of longer-term debt redemption profile in the OECD region is to limit the potential rollover risk and to make the debt portfolio resilient. The RBI State Finances report emphasised that, in India, the maturity structure of debt of the government of India has been steadily increasing, with the tenure of the longest sovereign debt security being 40 years.

The maturity pattern of outstanding debt across Indian states and Union Territories has also been increasing (see table). As noted by RBI, since 2015-16, 15 state governments including Telangana and the UT of Puducherry have issued longer tenor securities. Among these states, Telangana has the longest tenure for state government securities, with the debt maturity profile being 30 years. This is instructive, and of interest to public policy researchers, how a state within the framework of fiscal rules manages to keep aspirational choices to take itself to higher growth trajectory. This is also challenging, especially when there is no “economic convergence” in the state, with the poor regions “catching up” with the rich regions, and the spatial inequality “within the state” significant. It is to be noted that only four districts, including Hyderabad, are contributing around 50% to the state’s growth, and the rest of the regions require high investment to reach the comparable growth trajectory within the state. The “fiscal agency” of the new state is thus grappled between the “equality in processes” and “equality in outcomes.”

● BIT BY BIT

Going beyond face value

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Face recognition is changing how we unlock phones, authenticate transactions

IN PHILIP PULLMAN’S fantasy trilogy ‘His Dark Materials’, every character has a daemon, an animal that manifests the inner self of a person. For us, the daemon would be our smartphones, capturing our souls in the palm of our hands. But how do we protect something so precious from prying eyes? With these small devices carrying everything from access to our corporate identities to our secret lives, smartphone companies have been stressing on the need to add screen locks to prevent others from accessing our phones. Over the years, companies have offered everything from number locks to patterns and even fingerprint scanners to protect phones, and for authentication in place of passwords or to initiate payments.

Of late, there has been a move towards the phone recognising user’s face and then opening the screens for her. Samsung has, for instance, experimented with iris scanners, and has settled with face unlock, where the phone matches ‘face’ to what it has in its records. A lot of other Android phones, too, use face unlock in one way or the other. Apple, meanwhile, has been using Face ID, which is more complex than face unlock on Android phones, as it uses more layers of data.

Kaia Drance, V-P, product marketing, Apple, recently told me how Apple’s technology is different. Face ID, Drance explained, utilises some of Apple’s most sophisticated technologies like the TrueDepth camera, the secure enclave on the chip, and the neural engine. In simple terms, TrueDepth looks for the face when you wake the iPhone up by raising it or simply tapping the screen; when the face is detected, Face ID confirms user’s attention and intent to unlock it by detecting if the eyes are open and are directed towards the camera. This process ensures spoofing is near-impossible and reduced to a one-in-a-million possibility. On top of this, the phone locks itself if there have been five failed attempts to unlock using Face ID.

But those who have used Face ID on an Apple phone, first introduced with the iPhone X, would have noticed how this works even if you are in a dark room. This is because the TrueDepth camera system has an inbuilt dot projector that puts 30,000 invisible dots on the user’s face to build out a unique facial map. This works along with the flood illuminator to identify a face even in the dark. According to Drance, facial authentication technologies that don’t have this layer don’t work well in the dark, and can potentially be spoofed by a photograph as these don’t have depth information or a facial map to match against.

Face ID and other such technologies are now getting widespread acceptance as a secure authentication method. Just in India, a bunch of financial services apps, from ICICI to Paytm Money and HDFC Bank, have started using this, negating the need to enter a PIN for transactions. I personally use it to secure my blood sugar data on the OneTouch app. Also, on Apple devices, a lot of passwords will auto fill if the phone detects the user’s face. Interestingly, Apple does all of this on the device and no data needs to be backed up to the cloud. Even natural changes to the face are factored in, as it has trained multiple neural networks to see if there are changes every time it looks at the user, and then make that adaptive change. Drance said this meant training the network with over 2 billion images, including infrared and depth images collected in extensive studies.

In the coming months, you can expect more devices to unlock when it sees the user’s face, even as across other devices this becomes a standard way to authenticate if the user is genuine. This will also lead to a lot of new use cases. If the computer is able to verify a user this accurately, then you could even be doing job and visa interviews remotely. A lot of instances where personal presence is now needed could be replaced by videoconferencing. The possibilities are endless.

In India, a bunch of financial services apps, from ICICI to Paytm Money and HDFC Bank, have started using face recognition, negating the need to enter a PIN for transactions

SHARP AND PROTRACTED economic slowdowns aren’t new to India. Since Independence, there have been at least eight episodes of significant GDP growth rate declines over two years or more—1961-62 and 1962-63, 1965-66 and 1966-67, 1971-72 and 1972-73, 1984-85 to 1987-88, 1990-91 to 1992-93, 2000-01 to 2002-03, 2012-13 and 2013-14, and the current one from 2018-19.

The slowdowns till the 1980s were mostly a result of drought-induced agricultural contractions, wars or balance of payments (BoP) pressures. Shortage of foreign exchange for imports, even of essential materials or components and spares used in capital goods, besides austerity measures introduced after the 1962 Sino-Indian War, caused the first growth dip episode. Back-to-back droughts and a BoP crisis leading to the 36.5% rupee devaluation of June 1966, likewise, precipitated the second downturn, while it was a combination of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War and the 1972 famine in the case of the third. The 1980s saw three consecutive drought years—1985, 1986 and 1987. Its impact on the broader economy was predictable, given the farm sector had a roughly one-third share in India’s GDP even at this point in time.

Only during the past three decades has agriculture’s role in bringing down or pushing up overall growth diminished relative to other macroeconomic factors. Thus, both the early-1990s slowdown and the one in the last two years of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime were preceded by “twin deficits”—on the fiscal and external current account fronts. The

A different downturn

This is India’s first ever slowdown at a time of political as well as macroeconomic stability

HARISH DAMODARAN

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growth slump of the early-2000s during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government had mainly to do with the after-effects of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the sanctions imposed by the US and other countries following the 1998 Pokhran nuclear tests, and the end of a mid-1990s corporate-driven mini-investment boom.

The current slowdown—GDP growth has dropped in every quarter from January-March 2018 down to July-September 2019 and showing little signs of recovery—is unique by contrast.

Firstly, it has taken place amidst remarkable political stability, with the unquestioned leader of a single-party majority government at the helm. This was not so with the UPA, Vajpayee’s NDA or the 1991 minority Congress government of

Narasimha Rao. Narendra Modi’s popularity is probably rivalled only by Indira Gandhi. But she was a relative novice as Prime Minister during the 1966 devaluation and emerged as a truly strong leader only after the 1971 general elections, which were held before the economy went into a tailspin. One could similarly argue that Jawaharlal Nehru was well past his prime when India’s first major downturn happened. That leaves only Rajiv Gandhi, who took over after his mother in 1984. However, he never enjoyed the cult status or credibility that Modi today commands.

Secondly, this slowdown isn’t courtesy the usual “F” suspects—food, foreign exchange and fisc. Not only does agriculture account for hardly 15% of India’s GDP now, annual consumer food price inflation, too, has averaged a mere 1.59%



between October 2016 and October 2019. There has been no BoP crisis either; foreign exchange reserves were, in fact, at a record \$448.6 billion as on November 22. The Modi government may have deviated from the original schedule of reducing the fiscal deficit to 3% of GDP, but the average figure of 3.7% for 2014-15 to 2018-19 is much better than the 5.4% during the previous five years under the UPA.

The Modi period, if anything, has been marked by both political and macroeconomic stability. Nor has it been witness to “external” disruptions in the form of wars or oil price surges. Even the US-China trade conflict from 2018 is not comparable in its effects on the Indian economy to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis or the 2013 “taper tantrum.” In any case, it’s not as though India’s exports were really

booming before 2018.

Unlike all the earlier downturns whose precursors/triggers were supply-side constraints in food and forex, macroeconomic imprudence or external shocks, what we are now experiencing is more of a “western-style” slowdown exacerbated by internal policy misadventures. At the heart of it has been the twin balance sheet (TBS) problem—of debts accumulated by private corporates during the investment binge of 2004-11 turning into non-performing assets of mainly public sector banks. A similar bad loan build-up did take place even in the mid-1990s, forcing the subsequent cleanup of bank balance sheets and deleveraging by India Inc that also impacted growth during the Vajpayee government period.

But the difference between then and

now is how the TBS problem, despite being flagged way back in December 2014 by the former chief economic adviser, Arvind Subramanian, has been allowed to fester—and spread to sectors such as non-banking financial companies and real estate that have far more contagion effect than steel, power or textiles. Even worse is the self-inflicted wounds from demonetisation and the unprepared rollout of the goods and services tax (GST), hitting those who were least responsible for the TBS problem: Farmers, petty producers and MSMEs. Job and income losses in the informal sector have, in turn, depressed consumption demand, including for the products of listed firms and other organised players that were supposed to have benefited from demonetisation and GST.

If indebted corporates, risk-averse banks and the more recent credit crunch resulting from defaults by the likes of IL&FS, Dewan Housing Finance and Altico Capital—these are threatening to spill over to other financial and real estate-linked entities—have come in the way of investment demand picking up, consumption also taking a hit makes for a gloom-and-doom narrative.

The irony, of course, is that all this comes at a time of great political as well as macroeconomic stability. This is, indeed, a first-of-its-kind slowdown in India, where food, foreign exchange, oil, war and other “supply-side/external” factors have had no role. And if economic history is any guide, Western-style slowdowns, which are largely about crisis of confidence, sentiment and “demand,” tend to be long-drawn-out affairs. Controlling inflation may be easier than getting consumers to spend and firms to invest.

TELLING NUMBERS

Nearly 3 out of 5 babies and children in India are anaemic

AS MANY as 58.5% of children between the ages of 6 months and 59 months, and 53.1% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 years, are anaemic in the country, the government told Lok Sabha last week.

As per the details of anaemic women and children in urban and rural India given by the government, 29.8% of children in rural India suffer from moderate anaemia, and 40.3% of women in the villages are mildly anaemic. The data, based on the findings of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) IV (2015-16), divide the incidence of anaemia into 'Mild', 'Moderate' and 'Severe' kinds for both rural and urban India.

Answering a question by Chandigarh BJP MP Kirron Kher, Minister for Health and Family Welfare Harsh Vardhan said that the union government had, in 2018, launched the "Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB) Strategy under POSHAN

Abhiyaan with the aim to reduce anaemia prevalence by three percentage points every year till 2022".

AMB, the Minister said, "is a 6x6x6 strategy that is targeting six age groups, with six interventions and six institutional mechanisms". The six age groups include pre-school children (6-59 months), children (5-9 years), adolescent girls (10-19 years), adolescent boys (10-19 years), women of reproductive age group (15-49), and pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Among the six interventions are prophylactic iron folic acid supplementation, periodic deworming, and addressing non-nutritional causes of anaemia in endemic pockets, with special focus on malaria, haemoglobinopathies and fluorosis, the Minister said. Institutional mechanisms include a National Anaemia Mukh Bharat Unit, and a National Centre of Excellence and Advanced Research on Anaemia Control.

PREVALENCE OF ANAEMIA AMONG CHILDREN (6-59 MONTHS)

	RURAL	URBAN	TOTAL
Mild (10.0-10.9 gm/dl)	28.2	26.8	27.8
Moderate (7.0-9.9 gm/dl)	29.8	27.5	29.2
Severe (<7.00 gm/dl)	1.5	1.6	1.6
Any (<11.00 gm/dl)	59.5	56.0	58.5

PREVALENCE OF ANAEMIA AMONG WOMEN (15-49 YEARS)

	RURAL	URBAN	TOTAL
Mild (10.0-11.9 gm/dl)	40.3	38.3	39.6
Moderate (7.0-9.9 gm/dl)	12.8	11.6	12.4
Severe (<7.00 gm/dl)	1.1	0.9	1.0
Any (<12.00 gm/dl)	54.2	50.8	53.1

Source: Lok Sabha Question; data from NFHS-IV (2015-16); figures in per cent

TIP FOR READING LIST

Two Housing Tales, Many Lessons

JOURNALIST AARON Glantz remodelled his home with \$8,000 that his wife and he received as part of the Obama administration's stimulus package, also giving people employment in the process. He has now written *Homewreckers*, a book about the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, which tells the story of, as the book's long, blunt subtitle says, "how a gang of Wall Street kingpins, hedge fund magnates, crooked banks, and vulture capitalists suckered millions out of their homes and demolished the American Dream". It is, according to the review of the book in *The New York Times*, the "bigger story about American housing that's tortuous, confounding and ultimately enraging".

The other book out recently, also on housing, though with a different focus and from a different era, is Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*.

Taylor covers the period in the late 1960s and early 1970s when, "federal government partnered with a real estate industry enthusiastic about exploiting a new market but refusing to bear most of the risk". Mismanagement, corruption, distorted incentives, and unenforced civil



rights regulations were seen in what Taylor calls a system of "predatory inclusion", which replaced the earlier system of racist exclusion. The government's market-based solutions in its low-income housing programmes in the 1970s impacted Black neighbourhoods, Black women on welfare, and emergent discourses on the urban "underclass", says Taylor.

Together, the two books present a picture of faulty government interventions in housing that, despite being focussed on the US, hold lessons for other parts of the world as well. As their joint review in *The NYT* says, they demonstrate together "what happens when private speculators get buoyed by government largess while non-tycoons are largely left to fend for themselves".

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Bullet train: where things stand

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has announced a 'review' of the project. Where does land acquisition stand in Maharashtra and Gujarat? Why is it moving slowly in some areas?

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF Minister Uddhav Thackeray has announced a "review" of the bullet train project, sending out signals of uncertainty over the prestigious enterprise. "This government is of the common man... Yes, we will review the bullet train (project). Have I stayed the bullet train project like Aarey car shed? No, I haven't," Thackeray told reporters late on Sunday night.

Controversy is not new for India's bullet train. From its inception, the National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited (NHSRL), the body implementing the project, has been facing controversies over land acquisition in tribal-dominated areas, and cases filed by farmers in court. There is fundamental opposition to the idea of a Rs 1.1 lakh crore train corridor between Mumbai and Ahmedabad — even though the project is being funded by an 80% loan from Japan.

Even so, the project has made some headway. The initial plan was to complete the land acquisition process by December 2018; this strategy was, however, revised to link land acquisition to tender requirements. The implementing company now says it is on course to do a trial run between Surat and Bilimora in Gujarat in August 2022, and to open the full service to the public around December 2023. NHSRL officials say they are hopeful of getting most of the land required for the project by the time tenders are finalised in mid-2020.

How much land has been acquired?

The project needs land in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and a little in Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Of the total 1,380 hectares required, 705 hectares have already been acquired.

In Gujarat, out of the required 940 hectares, 617 hectares have been acquired; in Maharashtra, out of the total 431 hectares required, 81 hectares have been acquired. In Dadra and Nagar Haveli, of the total 8.7 hectares needed, 6.9 hectares have been acquired.

So why has land acquisition moved slowly in Maharashtra?

Mainly because of problems in Palghar district, where the project requires 286



Former CM Devendra Fadnavis hands over land documents to Railways Minister Piyush Goyal in Mumbai in February 2018. Prashant Nadkar

hectares. However, much of the past one year has been spent in holding parleys with the landowners, and many have agreed over the past few months.

With the offer of various schemes like providing health facilities for villagers, village development expenses, and other outreach programmes in addition to the compensation package, 31 out of the required 286 hectares in Palghar have been acquired.

Of the 73 villages in which the project needs land, joint measurement surveys have been done in 65. Joint measurement surveys are considered a major breakthrough, because they involve the landowner and the project engineers jointly measuring the land, physically on the ground. The company has appointed a manager just for issues related to Palghar.

In Gujarat, the process was smoother after the High Court dismissed 120 petitions by farmers by upholding the validity of the Land Acquisition Act as amended by the state government in 2016.

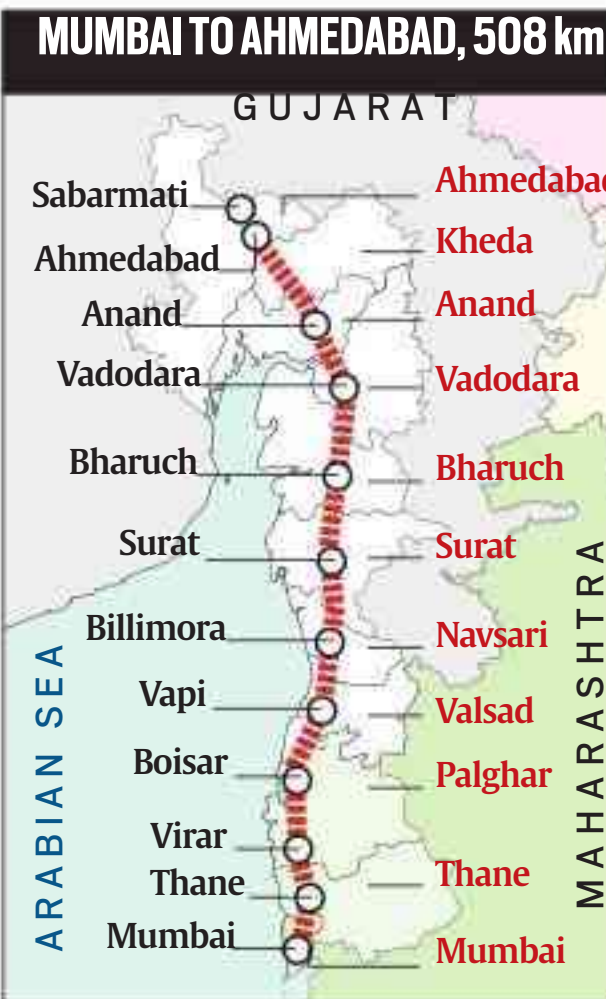
The land across the alignment is divided into 7,000 plots, in 195 villages in Gujarat and 104 villages in Maharashtra.

Can the new Maharashtra government scrap the project?

Maharashtra is not investing any money *per se* in the project. Its equity is through land. Both Gujarat and Maharashtra own 25% each in the project, while the remaining 50% is owned by the Government of India. The state government can change the rules for land acquisition, as that is within its purview. However, the contract with Japan that the Centre has entered into, cannot be impacted.

That said, a change in government may affect the priority that is accorded to the project in the state's scheme of things. When the BJP's Devendra Fadnavis was Chief Minister, the bullet train project was in the CM's "war room" — meaning it was directly monitored by the CMO. Officials said that this helped a lot in land acquisition efforts — anything to do with the bullet train got priority treatment at every level from the Secretariat in Mumbai to the administration in the district.

The Shiv Sena is politically strong in Palghar. The MP, Rajendra Gavit, is from the Shiv Sena. The party has in the past joined the chorus against the project in Palghar and nearby areas. Sena leaders have had altercations with



NHSRL officials working on the ground.

Can the project change the alignment to avoid problem areas?

While the government decides which places to link with a train corridor, the precise alignment is a technical reality that has been frozen after scientific surveys and measurements. It cannot be tampered with at will. The high-speed alignment, for instance, needs to be as free of curves as possible. Any speed upwards of 300 kph requires a straight alignment.

How can the acquisition process be expedited?

NHSRL has adopted the strategy of land acquisition by consent, and not by invoking the various laws that empower government agencies to acquire land for public purposes. The provisions of the central Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, would have allowed the linear project to acquire land even without the consent of certain parties, if needed, against the payment of compensation. But the company is not looking to invoke such provisions, officials said.

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

When is the oath taken by a Minister (in)valid?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, DECEMBER 2

ON THE first day of the Assembly session in Maharashtra on November 30, former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis alleged that the oath-taking ceremony of the new government had violated the Constitution.

He was referring to the invocation — by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and each Minister — at the start of the oath, before reading out the text, which he alleged had altered the oath itself.

Thackeray invoked Chattrapati Shivaji and "my parents"; Eknath Shinde named Bal Thackeray, Ananda Dhige, a Thane Shiv Sena leader who died in 2000, Uddhav Thackeray, and Shivaji.

Subhash Desai invoked Bal Thackeray. Jayant Patil of the NCP invoked Shivaji and Sharad Pawar.

Chhagan Bhujbal began with Jai Shivratri, Jai Maharashtra, and invoked Mahatma Phule, Chattrapati Shahu, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Bal Thackeray, and Sharad Pawar.

Balasaheb Thorat took Sonia Gandhi's name. Nitin Raut named Ambedkar, Sonia, Rahul Gandhi, and the Buddha.



At the swearing-in. Prashant Nadkar

In the Constitution

Article 164(3) says: "Before a Minister enters upon his office, the Governor shall administer to him the oaths of office and of secrecy according to the forms set out for the purpose in the Third Schedule." The Third Schedule requires the taker of the oath to either "swear in the name of God" or to "solemnly affirm" to "bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution..."

According to constitutional experts and those familiar with procedures and rules of swearing-in ceremonies, Art 164 makes it clear that the text of the oath is sacrosanct, and the person taking the oath has to read it out exactly as it is, in the given format. If a

person wanders from the text, it is the responsibility of the person administering the oath — in this instance the Governor — to interrupt and ask the person being sworn in to read it out correctly.

Instances of deviation

The most famous case of a political leader changing the oath was in 1989, when Devi Lal inserted the words "Deputy Prime Minister" as he was being sworn in to Prime Minister V P Singh's cabinet, and was corrected by President R Venkataraman.

In 2012, Azam Khan of the Samajwadi Party had to retake his oath in Uttar Pradesh after he skipped the oath of office, and only took the oath of secrecy.

Fadnavis's objections

According to former Maharashtra Advocate General Shreehari Aney: "It is the content of the oath that is important. That should be as per the format laid down in the Constitution. Addition something before or after the oath is not unlawful as long as the substance of the oath is unaltered."

Aney, who was AG for some time when the Fadnavis government was in power, however, added that the "practice of invoking

gods, national leaders, reformers, while administering the oath of office can be termed as immature, as it detracts from the importance of the oath". But even so, Aney said, "it doesn't flout constitutional requirements."

Role of the Governor

The Governor's approval is key. According to experts, if the person administering the oath approves the oath, the matter is closed. Immediately on taking the oath, the person who has been sworn in, must sign a register. The register is attested by the Secretary to the Governor, which means it has been approved by the Governor. In Maharashtra, that approval was also formalised by a gazette notification on the appointment of the Chief Minister and six ministers, which was issued on November 30.

"Ultimately it is the responsibility of the Chair, the functionary administering the oath, in this case the Governor [to correct]. Once Governor takes it as read, and the Secretary to the Governor has attested that the oath has been administered, and the gazette notification has come out, then it is no longer an issue, it cannot be legally challenged," Shumsher Sheriff, former Rajya Sabha Secretary General, said.

Why, if growth is to revive, credit flows to industry must pick up fast

SHOBHANA SUBRAMANIAN
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

AT 6.1% year-on-year, the growth in India's nominal GDP in Q2FY20 is the lowest in more than 16 years. While the slowdown has no doubt been exaggerated by the extraordinarily low inflation, even in real terms, a 4.5% y-o-y growth in GDP is the lowest since Q4FY13.

What is worrying is that nominal GDP has grown by just 6.1% y-o-y in a quarter when nominal government spending jumped 18.9% y-o-y, the biggest increase in 30 quarters. With government spending likely to be constrained due to poor tax collections, other sections of the economy need to pull their weight if the nominal growth is to pick up meaningfully.

The government has cited weakening global growth as a reason for India's sharper-than-expected growth slump. But India is a relatively closed economy, and domestic fac-

tors have played a bigger role; the weak domestic demand has been cushioned somewhat by government spending and contracting imports.

Which is why, with a real GDP growth of 4.8% y-o-y in H1, it is hard to see the economy clocking in much more than 5% in FY20. And that is with a hugely helpful base, since GDP in H2FY19 grew at just 6.2% y-o-y.

The big worry now is the fisc.

Unless there is a big jump in nominal GDP growth in the second half — the budget has pencilled in a 12% growth in nominal GDP for FY20 while the number is more likely to be 8-8.5% — the fiscal deficit ratio will take a real knock. Thanks to the government using the wrong base numbers, the tax projections were quite unrealistic to begin with. Now, they look even worse.

At a time when the economy is slowing, it is only to be expected that tax collections too, will slow. And since the denominator — nominal GDP — will be lower, the deficit-to-GDP will go up even more.

The fiscal deficit for the April-October period — Rs 7.2 lakh crore — doesn't look too good at 102% of GDP. To be sure, much of the increase in the deficit is because the government has spent more — Rs 16.55 lakh crore versus Rs 14.55 lakh crore in the corresponding period of 2018-19.

At the same time, it is also true that the tax mop-up this year has been virtually flat at Rs 10.52 lakh crore versus Rs 10.39 lakh crore in the April-October 2018 period.

The government believes that the economy will revive in the second half, but so far, there is very little to suggest a meaningful pick-up.

Indeed, the output of the core sector contracted 5.8% y-o-y in October — slightly more than it did in September — suggesting the busy season hasn't got off to a great start. Demand for cars was subdued in the festival month, and has fallen in November. Sales of two-wheelers fell 14% y-o-y in October, and

haven't done very much better in November, suggesting poor rural demand. Also, sales of commercial vehicles were weak, crashing by 23% y-o-y.

Consumers are clearly not willing to spend, especially on big ticket items such as homes. The fact that there is no quick fix for the compression in credit growth will, in fact, prevent growth in Q3 and Q4 from picking up meaningfully.

One big reason why consumption demand has tapered off is rural stress — with prices of agri goods collapsing, farm incomes have been badly hurt. The agricultural GVA in the September quarter grew at just 2.1% y-o-y, the slowest in 14 quarters save one. Unless many more jobs are created, it is hard to see consumption getting a boost.

But it is even harder to visualise where the jobs are going to come from, since the manufacturing sector is in a slump — man-

ufacturing GVA contracted 1% in the September quarter. And the services sector is in big trouble since the financials of a couple of large telcom players are fragile following adverse regulation. These companies are laying off people in large numbers.

Also, gross fixed capital formation, an indicator of capex, barely grew in the September quarter — it rose 1% y-o-y, the slowest in 19 quarters. That suggests not too much fresh capacity is being added, which is not surprising, since there is a fair bit spare capacity to be utilised.

Also, since several business houses have bought stressed assets via the IBC route, using up some of their financial resources, it is unlikely they will undertake greenfield expansion. But the government needs to worry more about existing businesses.

The biggest challenge today is to unplug credit flows to industry — small and large. This looks virtually impossible because banks have turned risk averse and are staying cautious in what is an extremely tough

environment — 2019 has seen more than 3,300 companies being downgraded so far. Incremental lending between April and November 8 is up barely by 0.43%; in the fortnight to November 8, loan growth slumped to a two-year low of 7.9% y-o-y.

Banks can't be blamed for their approach because there are few businesses worth lending to. But companies too are not inclined to create fresh capacity. Meanwhile, lending by NBFCs has slowed sharply over the past year — 34% y-o-y in Q2FY20 — with several of them in financial trouble. Indeed, whether the Reserve Bank of India cuts repo rates or not is less important now because banks have become extremely cautious.

Also, with credit flows tight — despite a Rs 2 lakh crore surplus liquidity — more companies are likely to default on loan obligations, which, in turn, means rising loan losses. To be sure, there is no systemic risk, but there is the danger of many small and mid-sized businesses closing down, leading to more job losses.



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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Mr Bajaj speaks again

Government-business relations remain fraught.
But why PM Modi must pay heed



SANJAYA BARU

IF THE GENERAL GOES

After court intervention, Gen Bajwa's position as army chief is undermined. Battle lines in Pakistan are actually within army

TWELVE YEARS AFTER Pakistan's Supreme Court took on an army ruler for ousting its chief justice, the country's higher judiciary has taken on another army chief, this time questioning the three-year extension given to him by the civilian government of Imran Khan. The bench, headed by Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, cut the extension granted to General Qamar Javed Bajwa, whose term expired on November 28, to a bare six months while ordering the government to bring in constitutional changes to lay down the tenure of the army chief and other terms and conditions of his appointment. In the process, the government, which had announced the extension back in August, was exposed for its ineptness and inability to get the paperwork right in a matter as important as this. Bajwa continues as COAS at the pleasure of the court. Is this a rare civilian moment in the affairs of military-dominated Pakistan? Not really. Although the court has thrust into the public domain the issue of extensions to the army chief, a matter that has haunted many previous governments and jeopardised their continuance, the reality is that Prime Minister Imran Khan, who cheerfully admits to being on the "same page" as the army, sees no risk from Bajwa, and in fact, wants him to continue.

In the last two decades, there have been two other instances of a Pakistan Army Chief on extended stay. General Pervez Musharraf granted himself an indefinite extension as COAS in 2001. Musharraf's 10-year stay at the top, and his successor, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani's, six years (including one extension) held up the careers of scores of officers in the Pakistan Army. In the present instance, it was a member of the public who went to court against the extension to Bajwa. The chief justice, then, took it on as a matter of national interest. At least 11 three-star generals would have retired by the time Bajwa's three-year extension ended. The promotions of many others would have been held up.

The dissent within the army over this is perhaps not unconnected to the growing unease among officers that the institution and its leadership are seen on "the same page" as an increasingly unpopular civilian government. The sentiment was most apparent during the recent "long march" by a veteran Pakistani politician from a right wing religious party, who questioned the government's silence on Kashmir and contrasted this with its enthusiasm over the Kartarpur corridor. After the court's intervention, Bajwa's position as COAS is much undermined. It is possible that the Parliament may not be able to agree on amendments to Article 243 of the Constitution that deals with the army chief's appointment, as demanded by the court. An extension for Bajwa beyond the court-granted six months seems iffy. The battle lines are actually within the army, and the civilian politicians will only choose their side. It is not difficult to see which side those in the Opposition will pick. The next question, then, is: If Bajwa goes, can Imran Khan be far behind?

TIME IS NOW

Success of CoP 25 hinges on how urgently countries resolve discord over climate finance, carbon markets

ON SUNDAY, A day before the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 25th Conference of Parties got under way in Madrid, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, issued a stern warning. "The point of no return is no longer over the horizon. It is in sight and hurtling towards us," he said. Over the next two weeks, as delegates from almost 200 countries attempt to firm up the commitments made in Paris in 2015, establish new rules for emissions trading, and create systems to compensate countries already affected by global warming, they would do well to keep this warning in mind.

Signatories to the Paris Pact will have to update their commitments to the landmark treaty — Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) — in 2020. Given that several studies have shown the inadequacy of these targets in combating the climate crisis, CoP 25 will be keenly watched for the signals given by countries in upscaling their NDCs. India and China have consistently resisted demands to enhance targets. The two countries have argued that their NDCs are way beyond their historical culpability for global warming and the developed countries, mainly responsible for the climate problem, should be doing more — especially when it comes to helping the poorer countries with funds and technology. In this context, a study by the US think-tank Climate Policy Initiative, which shows that global climate financing fell by about 11 per cent in 2018, compared to 2017, should be sobering to the delegates assembled at Madrid.

Carbon markets could be another thorny issue at CoP 25. The Paris Pact's predecessor, the Kyoto Protocol, allowed countries, or industries, to earn carbon credits for emission reductions they made in excess of what was required of them. These credits could be traded to the highest bidder, who could then show the emission reductions as their own. India, China and Brazil have accumulated huge amounts of carbon credits and want them to be incorporated in the Paris Pact's market-related clause — Article 6. But developed countries have been resisting such claims on the grounds that the Kyoto Protocol's weak verification procedures allowed dubious projects to obtain carbon credits. At the last CoP in Katowice, when the rulebook for the Paris Pact was drawn up, Article 6 was one of the unresolved issues. Resolution of the impasse will hold the key to the success of CoP 25.

THE RIGHT STUFF

Bottlenose dolphins have more in common with humans than we imagined. They even share our directional bias

DOLPHINS, PRESUMED TO be the most intelligent and empathetic creatures of the deep, have shared a deep bond with humans. There are innumerable heart-warming stories about dolphins helping to save doomed swimmers, heading off sharks, retrieving dropped tools for divers, and so on. But a paper on dolphin behaviour in the Royal Society's journal, *Open Science*, finds more common ground — like humans, dolphins are predominantly right-handed, and they are even more fundamentalist about their preference than humans. The authors observed that over 99 per cent of observations showed them favouring the right side.

Right-handedness appears to be intrinsic to cetaceans, which include whales and dolphins, the only creatures other than primates who are presumed to have some human-like qualities. This is bad news for the left-handed, who are oppressed quite enough already by the primacy of right-handedness among humans. The very words we speak are directionally weighed. Dexterity is from the Latin *dexter* (right), and sinister is Latin for "left". The modern meanings are derived via convoluted routes, including but not limited to myth and augury, but the association of the terms with cleverness and vileness are now permanently set. In politics, too, left and right originally signified your place in the pecking order. The world is deeply divided into nations which drive on the right and on the left, each side believing that the other is plain wrong. The list is endless.

The most egregiously handed word is hiding in plain sight. It's even in the headline above: "Right". A wily, duplicitous word signifying both a direction and rectitude, and thereby conflating the ideas. With that, the victory of the right in human affairs is complete. But fortunately, barring humans and cetaceans, the rest of nature is ambivalent about handedness. Mice and budgies just don't care, for instance. It's best that way.

TWENTY-SIX YEARS AFTER he made news as the voice of beleaguered Indian big business, industrialist Rahul Bajaj has once again spoken on their behalf. In 1993, he voiced their fear of foreign competition. Today, he voices their fear of domestic governance. Fear of arbitrary governance is only one side of a multi-dimensional problem that Indian business has come to confront. There is also a growing concern about economic slowdown and policy uncertainty. Bajaj is known to speak a lot, and even shoot his mouth off on occasion, but he is a widely respected and a hugely successful leader of Indian business. His views must be heard with care.

In 1993, the then finance minister, Manmohan Singh, was publicly dismissive of the concern Bajaj and friends articulated about the threat to domestic business from external economic liberalisation. The business media also did not share the concerns of big business, dubbing those who met at a Mumbai hotel to draft a memorandum of shared concern regarding foreign trade and investment policy, as "The Bombay Club". The appendage of the word "club" damned them.

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, however, paid heed. He reached out to business leaders and fine-tuned policy. He said he was turning neither Right nor Left, but would walk the Middle Path. His critics, including the more enthusiastic liberals, called it the "Muddle Path", but the PM ensured he had everyone on board, stayed the course and moved India forward. The time has come for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to also reassure the nation that he will neither swerve to the Right nor the Left, but walk the Middle Path of "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas", with greater conviction.

If, in 1993, Bajaj voiced business's "concerns", today he voices its "fears". There is a world of difference between fear and concern. Concern can be about bureaucratic procedures and delays, poor infrastructure, dumping of subsidised goods by foreign competitors, and so on. Fear is often about the knock on the door, the tap of the phone, mysterious acts of retribution by persons in

What ails this government is precisely what has ailed all governments — the arrogance of power. While such arrogance is often a mask for incompetence, business persons tolerate that arrogance in the hope of benefitting from the incompetence, and consequent arbitrariness. It is this incestuous nexus that Prime Minister Modi has tried to break, but in doing so he may have ignored the impact it would have on investor sentiment and business confidence. Clearly, it is time for some course correction.



SOLI J SORABJEE

ONE MAY CRITICISE our Supreme Court for some of its judgments, but no person can describe it as a passive judiciary. The recent judgments of the Court clearly portray it as an active, rather an overactive judiciary.

No one can claim unrestricted entry to any temple or religious institution or a public meeting. A person with proven criminal antecedents may be rightly denied entry. But, surely, it is irrational to deny entry to a certain class of citizens, for example, women, because of a natural physical phenomenon like menstruation. Menstruation is not a crime. This practice, prevalent at the Sabarimala temple in Kerala, ignited the jurisdiction of our Supreme Court which battled with this issue, and occasioned the dissenting judgment of Justice Indu Malhotra.

Lengthy and erudite arguments were advanced by parties who championed a woman's right of entry based on the guarantees of equality and prohibition of discrimination inter alia on the ground of sex. Parties supporting the no-entry practice relied on Article 25 which guarantees the right to practise and profess religion. They overlooked that this Article is "subject to other provisions of the Constitution". In other words, subject to Articles 14 and 15, which prohibit discrimination inter alia on grounds of gender.

Another argument was the right of the "Deity" Ayyappa, who is believed to be in dis-favour of the entry of women of certain ages in a temple and whose divine right, it is argued, should be respected.

Ordinarily, the Supreme Court judgment

A JUDICIOUS BALANCE

Supreme Court's recent judgments reaffirm its role as a vigilant monitor

should finally settle any controversial issue, but not in our country. This is evident from the heated debates on the issue on TV channels and in public meetings. Interestingly, many women support the no-entry rule, not on legal or constitutional grounds, but on the misconception that a menstruating woman is not "clean" and, therefore, allowing her to enter the temple would be a desecration of a holy place. To keep the pot boiling, the issue has been referred to a larger bench of seven judges. It is debatable whether the seven judge bench judgment will finally put a lid on the matter. The real remedy would be to cleanse the minds of the supporters of no-entry to women doctrine.

The Rafale case is another instance worth noting. The Supreme Court dismissed the review petitions filed against its previous order, which found nothing wrong with the Rafale transaction. This has not excited the public. What has is the Supreme Court's dismissal of the contempt petition against Rahul Gandhi for him attributing his comment — "chowkidar chor hai" — to the Court itself. Rahul Gandhi tendered an unconditional apology, which was accepted, but with a strong warning to him to be careful in the future. I think Rahul Gandhi was dealt with leniently. He is an influential political leader who should not make statements which are untrue and betray disrespect for the Court.

Another Supreme Court judgment which has hit the headlines is its decision to uphold the Karnataka Speaker's orders disqualifying 17 defectors. The Supreme Court, how-

ever, quashed the Speaker's order to the extent that it prevented the disqualified candidates to contest elections till 2023. The Court's exposition of the law relating to the inter-play between resignation and defection is welcome.

It ruled that the resignation does not take away the effect of a prior act that incurs disqualification. The Supreme Court made instructive observations about the role and function of the Speaker in dealing with cases of disqualification of a candidate on the grounds of defection. It ruled that Speakers are not given a free pass to sit on resignation letters indefinitely. Once it is demonstrated that a member is willing to resign out of his free will, the Speaker has no option but to accept the resignation. The Speaker is not empowered to consider the motives and circumstances whenever a resignation letter is submitted. The Supreme Court deplored that Speakers sometimes tend not to be neutral.

Hopefully, Speakers will pay serious heed to the Court's observations. When the anti-defection law was enacted in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, it was believed that the vice of defection would be effectively curtailed. Regrettably, subsequent developments have belied the hope. The remedy lies not so much in amending the law or introducing fresh legal provisions, but in arousing the conscience of every honest citizen to reject the defector at the poll booth.

The writer is a former attorney general of India

DECEMBER 3, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

POWER STRIKE OFF

UTTAR PRADESH POWER minister Rewati Raman Singh said that the agitating power engineers of the state electricity board had called off their strike. He said he had been informed of the decision by the Power Engineers Association president, Rejendra Prasad. The announcement came shortly after the association secretary, Shailendra Dubey, declared that the power engineers of Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh would go on "work-to-rule" in support of the agitating UP engineers.

NEW IRAN

IRANIANS STARTED VOTING to a non-secret

referendum to approve an Islamic constitution entrenching the religious leadership as the absolute rulers of the country. Approval by the simple "yes or no" vote would automatically confirm Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the uncrowned ruler of Iran for life with sweeping powers described as "dictatorial" by critics of the constitution. There was a brisk turnout of voters in Teheran's numerous polling stations, particularly to the poorer neighbourhoods of the capital, with men and women above 16 lining up separately to cast votes. "We've had more than 700 votes cast here already and only one was a no. And that was a mistake," an English-speaking official at the Teheran polling sta-

tion told the Associated Press.

ASSAM BANDH

THE STUDENTS OF Assam are on the war path and are determined to thwart elections in the state. The All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad have given a call for a 44-hour Assam bandh from 6 am on December 3 to 4 pm on December 4, to be followed by mass picketing from December 5 to 8 outside the state and central government offices. The main purpose of the agitation will be to thwart the move of candidates to filing their nomination papers. The essential services have been exempted from the purview of the bandh.



All's not well with secularism

It is caught in a crisis not because it is irrelevant, but because it is subjected to rank overuse and invested with too many expectations



NEERA CHANDHOKE

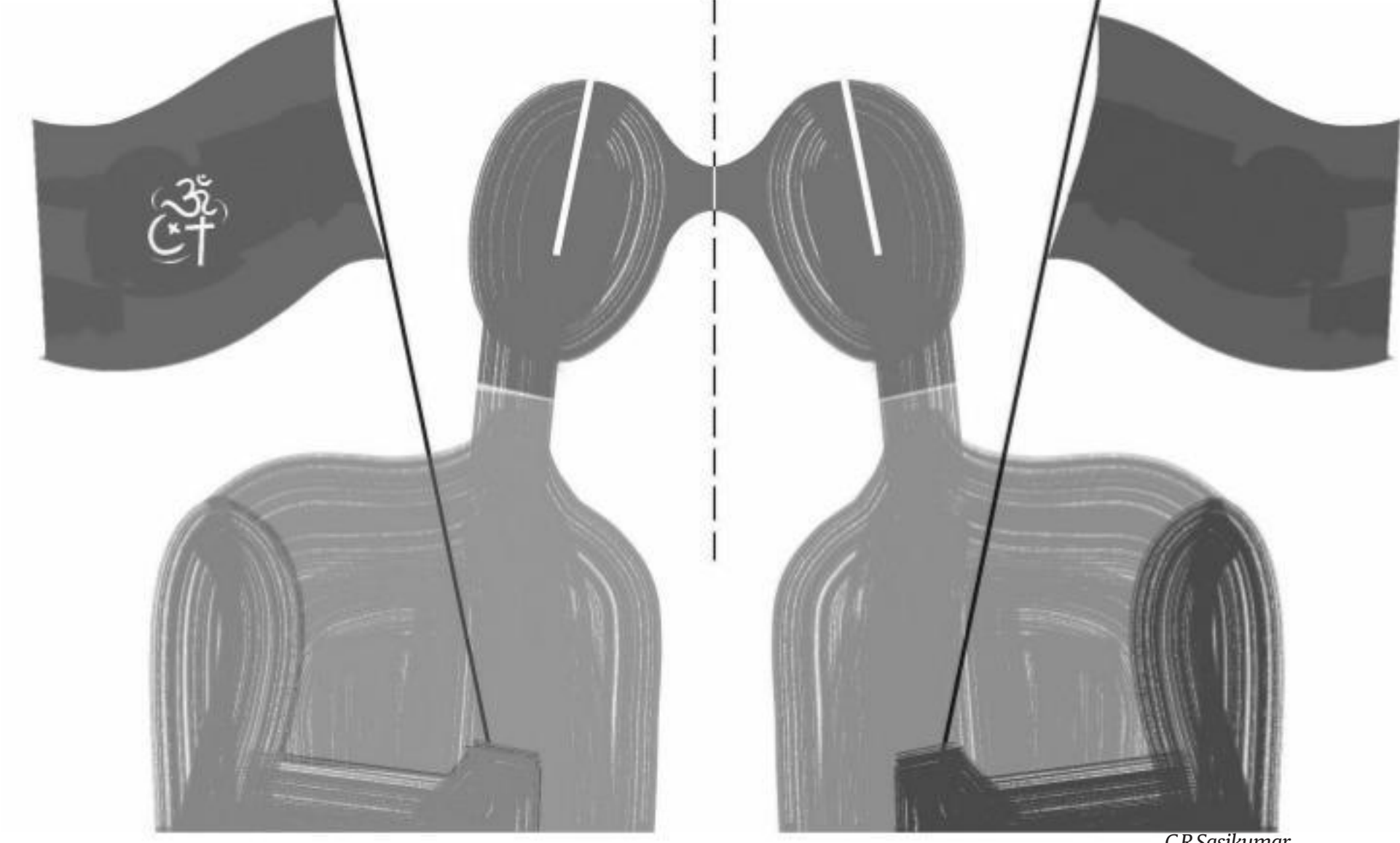
THIS IS, PERHAPS, not the best time to clarify and defend the principle of secularism in India. For the religious right, secularism has become a “bad” word, an object of mockery, disdain, and casual dismissal. There is still an urgent need to ponder, reflect and rethink. India’s recent history of discrimination against minorities demands this. Recollect that history is a hard taskmaster. No one can dodge the big questions that history crashes onto political platforms. History poses questions; it is the job of imaginative and visionary politics to find the right answers. Or, these questions will continue to haunt us.

The leaders of the freedom struggle were confronted by one such big question in the aftermath of the 1931 Kanpur riots, which left 400 dead. The Indian National Congress established an inquiry commission to investigate the problem. The committee reported that communal riots are an outcome of historical processes sparked off by colonial rule. Overturning the assumption that Hindu-Muslim enmity is endemic to India, the Congress held that India is home to both Hindus and Muslims. It is possible to end the conflict if minorities can be assured that their rights to religion and culture will be given full protection in an Independent India, the party held.

On March 31, 1931, while moving the resolution on fundamental rights in the open session of the Congress at Karachi, Gandhi spoke on the issue. “Though Islamic and Aryan cultures are not mutually exclusive,” he said, “we must recognise that Mussalms look upon Islamic culture as distinctive from Aryan. Let us therefore cultivate tolerance.. Religious neutrality is important and Swaraj will favour Hinduism no more than Islam, nor Islam more than Hinduism.. Let us from now on adopt the principle of state neutrality in our daily affairs”. This neutrality of the state we call secularism.

Secularism is not a standalone concept, it flows from Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees equality. No one shall be discriminated against on the basis of birth into a class, caste, gender, or religious community or for her sexual preferences. This was the intention of the founders of democracy in India, and this is what secularism should be understood as — as related to democracy.

The significance of secularism becomes clearer when we make three distinctions. The first distinction is between secularisation and secularism. Secularisation is a social process that involves the privatisation of religion, as in Europe after the Enlightenment. In India, processes of secularisation were stymied because religion, since the late 19th century, was latched to the nationalist project, and, from the 20th century, to competitive nation-state projects. Hinduism and Islam had been politicised and continue to be so. Two, religion as politics has nothing to do with religion as faith. Politics in search of power seeks only one thing — monopoly over resources. The third distinction dispels a confusion that has accompanied the debate on secularism in India. Secularism is not the binary opposite of communalism. The opposite of communalism is religious harmony. Secularism is the diametric opposite of



CR Sasikumar

theocracy or the merging of two awesome forms of power — the non-religious and the religious. Theocracy simply does not fit into modern democratic imaginations.

Secularism for long has ridden to prominence on the shoulders of secularisation. Now that secularisation has been shown to be one of the vanities of modernity, secularism needs a new home. What other home can it live in except democracy? Democracy and secularism are companion concepts, because of their shared commitments to basic values such as freedom, equality and justice. This does not imply that secularism can be collapsed into democracy. We need to distinguish between the two.

Indian society is fractured in many ways. Vertically, it is fractured along the axis of caste, class and gender. Horizontally, it is divided along the matrix of different belief systems. Different sorts of strategies are needed to deal with different kinds of inequalities and oppressions. The responsibility of reorganising unequal and unjust religious communities on the norms of freedom, equality, and rights falls on democracy. The principle of secularism is intended to ensure equality between these communities. It is not the job of secularism to reorder unequal gender or caste relations. That falls within the province of democracy. Secularism ensures that the state is not aligned to any one religion, that all religious communities are treated with equal care and consideration, that no community is granted special advantages because it is in a numerical majority. Similarly, it ensures that no religion is discriminated against just because its numbers are smaller than the majority community. Secularism extends the principle of equality — or even its weaker form, non-discrimination — specifically to the relationships between religious communities. If a government openly supports a majority religion and discriminates against minorities, justice kneels before political power.

This is not to say that all is well with the concept. Secularism is today caught in a crisis, not because it is irrelevant, but because it has been subjected to rank overuse and invested with far too many expectations, from solving the issue of national integration to gender justice. Notably, secularism is not a robust concept like democracy or justice; it is a “thin”

The coexistence between religious identity and democratic politics is not easy. There is, arguably, a fundamental discrepancy between religious and secular languages. Religion gives to believers ‘thick’ or comprehensive conceptions of the good that help them to make sense of the world, order their lives, and relate to others. The concept of secularism is, in comparison, ‘thin’ insofar as it establishes procedures that indicate what the place of religion in the public domain is, and what the relationship between different groups should be, and how justice and democracy can be secured.

and a limited procedural concept. The challenge to secularism has not come from personal faith or religion, but from religious groups that struggle for power. The challenge is also to democracy because denial of secularism catapults issues about the rights and privileges of citizenship, and throws into sharp relief the intersections between religion and the lack of voice, inadequate distribution of goods, and recognition of unique distinctiveness of groups.

Finally, the coexistence between religious identity and democratic politics is not easy. There is, arguably, a fundamental discrepancy between religious and secular languages. Religion gives to believers “thick” or comprehensive conceptions of the good that help them to make sense of the world, order their lives, and relate to others. The concept of secularism is, in comparison, “thin” insofar as it establishes procedures that indicate what the place of religion in the public domain is, and what the relationship between different groups should be, and how justice and democracy can be secured.

This is not to suggest that secularism is not a good; merely that secularism does not tell people how to lead their lives or what to strive for. The principle of secularism contributes to the construction of a constitutional framework where people can pursue their faith or any other substantive conception of the good, unburdened by discrimination, and where the state does not discriminate between different religious groups. Religion and secularism relate to different kinds of justice and are in many cases difficult to translate into each other.

But that is the nature of democratic political life. Irresolvable dilemmas that can only be negotiated through the deployment of imagination and creativity in thinking and practice. Let us remember and take heart from Jawaharlal Nehru's words in the *Discovery of India*. He quotes the chorus from the *Bacchae* of Euripides, translated by Gilbert Murray. “What else is wisdom? What of man's endeavour/ Or God's high grace, so lovely and so great?/ To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait;/ To hold a hand uplifted over Hate;/ and shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?”

The writer is a former professor of political science, Delhi University

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“China needs to make efforts to dismantle the influence of the West’s China-related reports worldwide... Only by gradually achieving this task can China’s soft power make a necessary breakthrough.” — **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA**

A new mould for Mauritius

From trade to geopolitical significance, it is time for India to look again at the island nation



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

AS IT PREPARES to host the prime minister of Mauritius, Pravind Jugnauth, who returned to power in the recent general elections, Delhi needs to change the lens through which it sees the small island republic in the western Indian Ocean.

For far too long, Delhi has viewed Mauritius through the prism of diaspora. This was, perhaps, natural since communities of Indian origin constitute a significant majority in the island. But the time has come to reimagine Mauritius in much larger terms.

More recently, Delhi has certainly begun to see the strategic significance of Mauritius thanks to the renewed great power contestation in the Indian Ocean. Right at the very start of his first term in May 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi saw Mauritius as part of India's neighbourhood and invited its leadership to join his inauguration along with other South Asian leaders.

It was during his visit to Mauritius in 2015 that Modi unveiled an ambitious policy called the SAGAR (security and growth for all). It was India's first significant policy statement on the Indian Ocean in many decades. Delhi has some ways to go before it can translate the logic of SAGAR into effective outcomes on the ground.

But there is a bigger challenge for Delhi in dealing with Mauritius. It is the urgent need to discard the deep-rooted perception that Mauritius is simply an extension of India. It is not. Mauritius is a sovereign entity with a unique national culture and an international identity of its own. Its leaders are also conscious of the island's special place in the Indian Ocean as a thriving economic hub and an attractive strategic location. Although it is quite small with just 1.3 million people, Mauritius has been punching way above its weight.

Jugnauth's visit is a good moment for India to visibly demonstrate its respect for the sovereignty of Mauritius. Jugnauth, who took over from his father Anerood as the PM in January 2017, has now won power on his own steam. At 61, Pravind may not be too young, but he represents a new generation that is immensely proud of the republic's extraordinary evolution from a slave island to a prosperous economy.

An India that begins to see Mauritius on its own terms would want to go beyond sentimentalism and to explore the immense possibilities for elevating India's strategic partnership with an island that is looking beyond sugar plantations to financial services and technological innovation.

Mauritius is all about location and the genius of its people. As early European explorers sailed around the African continent and ventured eastwards to India, they began to call Mauritius, the “Star and Key of the Indian Ocean”. If the Portuguese and the Dutch were the first to gain a foothold in Mauritius, it was the French who gained ef-

fective control over the island in the early 18th century.

The French developed sugar plantations, introduced ship building and developed a naval base. The French certainly understood the strategic significance of Mauritius. A French soldier and colonial official, Félix Renouard de Sainte-Croix, described the island as “a central geographical point between every other place in the world”.

The British who gained control over Mauritius during the Napoleonic wars turned it into a garrison island that would help secure the sea lines of communication between Europe and India. The enduring value of its location is reflected in the fact that Diego Garcia, once part of Mauritius, today hosts one of America's largest foreign military bases in the world.

But in emphasising the value of military access to Mauritius, it is easy to miss its geo-economic significance. The French description of the island as a “central geographic point” holds equally true for commerce and connectivity in the Indian Ocean. As a member of the African Union, Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Commission, Mauritius is a stepping stone to multiple geographies.

If Delhi appreciates the value of Mauritius as a regional hub, a number of possibilities present themselves. One, as new investments pour into Africa, Mauritius is where a lot of it gets serviced. Mauritius can be the fulcrum for India's own African economic outreach.

Two, until now India has tended to deal with the so-called Vanilla islands of the south western Indian Ocean — Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Reunion and Seychelles — on a bilateral basis. If the Indian establishment thinks of them as a collective, it could make Mauritius the pivot of Delhi's island policy.

Three, the Mauritius pivot can facilitate a number of Indian commercial activities in the south western Indian ocean — as a banking gateway, the hub for flights to and from Indian cities and tourism.

Four, India could also contribute to the evolution of Mauritius as a regional centre for technological innovation. India has not really responded so far to the demands from Mauritius for higher education facilities from India like the IIT.

Five, climate change, sustainable development and the blue economy are existential challenges for Mauritius and the neighbouring island states. Mauritius will be the right partner in promoting Indian initiatives in these areas. It could also become a valuable place for regional and international maritime scientific research.

Finally, if Delhi takes an integrated view of its security cooperation in the south western Indian Ocean, Mauritius is the natural node for it. The office of a defence adviser in Mauritius, for example, can service the demands of all the island nations as well as the East African states.

All this and more is possible if Delhi takes a fresh and more strategic look at Mauritius. One way of getting there is to have an early Indian summit with the leaders of the Vanilla islands.

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Goals within reach

Six months of Modi 2.0 show it is on track to achieving its development targets



GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT

DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS, A subject for which Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo won the 2019 Nobel Prize and classical economists like Robert Lucas, also a Nobel laureate, have had a long-standing debate on what rids nations of poverty. Classical economists argue that any nation which has seen rapid growth and development has seen rapid decline in their poverty levels, while development economists say that tinkering and experimenting in sample spaces will help us find out the economic intentions of people and thus help the government in making better economic choices.

The current Union government, after a successful re-election under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has done both: It committed itself to the vision of a \$5-trillion economy by 2024-25 much to the pleasure of classical economists and decided to shape the economic intentions of people through its various social schemes and programmes, making the development economists happy. Riding on the rainbow of trust due to the stellar work done during its first term, the NDA government is not shying away from taking major economic decisions.

The achievements of the government are numerous. I should begin with the biggest achievement of any government since Independence — the removal of special provisions under Article 370 and Article 35A. No issue in this country has been more sentimental than Kashmir's special provisions.

Generations of Indians shall be grateful to the government.

Understanding that a major re-calibration of various aspects of the economy was needed, the government began by forming an inter-ministerial taskforce to finalise infrastructure projects worth over Rs 100 lakh crore. The first major sector that was tackled was real estate. Against a demand for 1.12 crore houses, 93 lakh houses have been sanctioned, 28 lakh houses have been handed over and 56 lakh are under construction.

In the health sector, under Ayushman Bharat scheme, 64,26,238 beneficiaries have been admitted across 20,757 empanelled hospitals. Along with health, women's empowerment is a priority for this government. To protect vulnerable married Muslim women, the regressive practice of triple talaq was abolished and made punishable with three years imprisonment. Wage inequality has also been dealt with through the Code on Wages, 2019. We understand that the future lies in the proactive adoption of energy-efficient and non-polluting practices. India's total installed renewable energy capacity crossed the milestone of 80,000 MW on June 30. The fact that India has become the most secure habitat for the tiger is a testimony to this government's efforts and foresightedness.

MSMEs and startups are the vehicles for future economic growth. Startups with over Rs 25 crore as turnover shall get the promised

tax holiday for three years. The withdrawal of the Angel Tax will also give a major investment boost to startups. The government has also launched the Van Dhan Yojana, which shall link 1.92 lakh tribal entrepreneurs to the national market. In the meantime, 28,211 micro enterprises have been set up, giving employment to 2,25,288 people. The government has also mandated that 25 per cent of the sourcing in CPSUs come from MSEs — goods and services worth Rs 16,746 crore have already been procured from 61,641 MSEs.

Farmers are at the centre of this government's agenda. Nearly Rs 34,873 crore has been transferred to about 7.33 crore farmers under the PM-KISAN yojana till date. A minimum assured pension of Rs 3,000 per month is being provided to both farmers and traders upon reaching the age of 60. Welfare measures and assured MSP for rabi and kharif at 1.5 times the cost of production has improved the lives of our farmers and strengthened the rural economy. Development with empowerment has been the mantra of this government from its first day in office. By the 75th year of Independence, not a single rural family will be bereft of electricity or cooking gas. In a commendable achievement, the Ujjwala Yojana achieved its target of eight crore LPG connections seven months before the target date.

In order to achieve water security, drinking water shall be provided to all households by 2024 through the integrated management of

water supply, conservation and grey water reuse through the Jal Jeevan mission. The Jal Shakti Abhiyan, under which 3.56 lakh water conservation projects, 1.23 lakh watershed development projects and 1.5 lakh acres of rainwater harvesting measures are being undertaken, has sounded the government's intentions. After the grand success of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the Jal-Jeevan Mission shall be the next major achievement.

The prime minister in the past six months has led by example: His video of plogging on the beach in Mamallapuram made every Indian more conscious of his/her surroundings and the Global Goal Keeper Award received by him reaffirmed India's commitment to the SDGs. The “Howdy Modi” event brought leaders of the two biggest democracies together in a rare spectacle of friendship and brotherhood. The second informal India-China meet at Mamallapuram ushered a new dawn of cooperation between the two countries.

The past six months has seen India taking big strides. With renewed vigour and focus, the government is marching towards the \$5-trillion economy mark. If this pace continues for the next four-and-a-half years, there is no doubt that India shall achieve this milestone before the target date.

The writer is Union minister, Ministry of Jal Shakti

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FAILING A MINORITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘The fight for dignity’ (IE, December 2). The Transgender Persons Bill is supposed to be a progressive legislation, which discards societal prejudice. But it fails to provide dignified existence to transgenders as their fundamental right to sexual identity is dependent on a piece of paper issued by a magistrate. Besides, it inclines towards entitlement rather than the empowerment approach.

Divya Singla, Patiala

LIVING IN DENIAL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘A new low’ (IE, November 30). What is more scary than the economic slowdown is the government's refusal to check populism and wasteful expenditure. One-time investments in non-bankable and economically disastrous infrastructure projects or increasing tax rates through GST may earn revenues in a particular FY, but is unlikely to ease the recession.

Varin Dhir, Ahmedabad

LIGHTER BAGS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘In Rajasthan, integrated books make school bags lighter, student happier’ (IE, December 2). It is heartwarming to see this small but creative initiative turning out to be a game changer in the realm of education at the grass roots, where it is needed the most. One hopes that the

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.

move doesn't get mired in cheap political stunts and is replicated throughout the country.

Rahul Gaur, Gurugram

FOR HER SAKE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Her freedoms’ (IE November 30). It is a matter of great regret that despite a raft of laws there is no let up in cases of violence against women. It seems that the problem cannot be tackled through laws alone, and requires societal changes. There is also a need for judicial reforms. Trials are slow and the judicial process does is unfair to the survivor.

Ravi Mathur, Ghaziabad



Winning the peace

India must ensure Sri Lanka makes certain security, dignity, and prosperity for the Tamils

The visit last week of Sri Lanka's new President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to India and his extended talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi was an affirmation by the two nations to make good bilateral ties a priority for each. Mr. Rajapaksa is aware of the problems the relationship has faced, due to both the proximity between India and Sri Lanka, and the interlinked and complicated peoples' histories. In comments to *The Hindu*, he made it clear that he wants consistency and constant communication to avoid the problems of the past. In the last decade, these have included India's concerns about the pace of reconciliation in the Tamil-majority North and East, the welcoming of Chinese investment for major projects including the Hambantota port and Colombo harbour and military engagement, unhappiness over the slow pace of clearance for Indian projects, and other bilateral issues. In Colombo there has been the overhanging suspicion that Indian intelligence agencies play a role in domestic politics, including the 2015 defeat of Mahinda Rajapaksa. In the hour-long conversation the two leaders had, it seemed apparent that there was some clarity on all issues and a will to build a new future. There was also a recognition that after working together closely against the LTTE, there were new threats, especially in the wake of the Easter Day bombings by an Islamic State-affiliated group that has Indian links. India's announcement of \$50-million in aid along with an additional \$400-million in development aid is proof of that. India's and Sri Lanka's security is "indivisible" Mr. Modi said, indicating the need for more high-level contacts. Mr. Rajapaksa accepted Mr. Modi's invitation to make his first presidential visit abroad to New Delhi, and has invited the Indian leader to be the first State guest he welcomes to Colombo.

However, the next few months will reveal how much the new regime will actually work to engage New Delhi's concerns. Apart from clearances for infrastructure projects in the north, port projects in Trincomalee, and the airport in Mattala, Mr. Rajapaksa will be judged on how far he regulates investment and manage debts to China. Above all, his attitude towards the less developed areas of the North and East, where most minorities did not vote for him, will be keenly watched. His stated desire to place development over devolution commitments will be a cause for worry for New Delhi as well as Chennai, that have consistently urged the Sri Lankan government to ensure what the MEA called "dignity, peace, equality and justice" for Tamils; they suffered devastating losses during the three decades of war and remain less prosperous than the rest of the Island country. While a war can be won in a defined and short span, winning the peace and healing people is an extended process that takes decades, a process that India will follow closely in Sri Lanka.

Terror in London

Efforts to stop lone-wolf attacks must use community leaders, deradicalisation plans

The knife attack on Friday near London Bridge that killed two and injured three others is yet another reminder of the threat lone-wolf assaults pose to public security. The attacker, Usman Khan, who was born in the U.K. to immigrants from Pakistan-held Kashmir, was a convicted terrorist. He was released in December 2018 with conditions after serving half his jail term. On Friday, Khan was attending a prisoner rehabilitation programme at Fishmongers' Hall, a historic building on the northern end of London Bridge. Wearing a fake explosive vest, he first threatened to blow up the building and then went on a killing spree. He was driven out of the hall by members of the public and was later shot dead by the police. This is the latest in a series of terror attacks the U.K., especially London, has seen in recent years. In June 2017, terrorists had rammed a van into pedestrians on the Bridge and stabbed people in nearby bars and restaurants. In the same month, a van ran into pedestrians outside a London mosque. In May that year, a suicide bomber killed 22 concert-goers in Manchester. With the latest attack, which the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for, Khan at least succeeded in keeping the threat of terror to London alive.

While radicalisation is the primary problem, Friday's attack also points to security, intelligence and systemic failures. While the British intelligence is often credited for foiling dozens of terrorist attacks since the 2005 London train bombings that killed 56, less sophisticated, less coordinated, often lone-wolf attacks are on the rise. Usman was convicted in 2012 for being part of an al-Qaeda-linked plot to bomb the London Stock Exchange. He was sentenced under the imprisonment for public protection (IPP) programme, which allowed the authorities to keep him, or convicts considered a threat to the public, in prison indefinitely. But when the Conservative-Liberal government withdrew the IPP, he got the verdict overturned and was sentenced to 16 years. Under the automatic early release scheme, he was freed in 2018 with an electronic tag and supposed to be monitored. But the police still could not prevent the knife attack. And with hardly two weeks to go before the parliamentary election, both Labour and the Tories have taken the issue to the political battle and promised to address the systemic issues – making policing more efficient and reviewing the early release scheme. While these could take time and are up to the next government, what is needed is a good counter-terror plan to tackle both extremism among youth and prevent lone-wolf attacks that often go undetected. For this, state agencies need to work with civil society groups as well as community leaders and have deradicalisation programmes. There is no one-stop solution to terrorism.

Taking stock of the anti-AIDS fight

The slowdown, which places targets out of reach, calls for a renewal of political commitment, finances and engagement



K. SRINATH REDDY

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), adopted by member countries of the United Nations in 2015, set a target of ending the epidemics of AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria by 2030 (SDG 3.3). The key indicator chosen to track progress in achieving the target for HIV-AIDS is "the number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations". In the terminology of HIV prevention and control, the phrase "key populations" refers to: men who have sex with men; people who use injected drugs; people in prisons and other closed settings; sex workers and their clients, and transgender persons.

Bridging gaps

In order to infuse energy and urgency into global efforts to combat HIV-AIDS and complement the prevention target set by the SDGs, an ambitious treatment target was also adopted through UNAIDS, the lead UN agency that coordinates the battle against HIV. The "90-90-90" target stated that by 2020, 90% of those living with HIV will know their HIV status, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained anti-retroviral therapy and 90% of all people on such therapy will have viral suppression. The gaps in detection, initiation of drug therapy and effective viral control were to be bridged to reduce infectivity, severe morbidity and deaths from undetected and inadequately treated persons already infected

with HIV, even as prevention of new infections was targeted by SDG 3.3.

Where are we, at the end of 2019, on the road to the 2020 and 2030 targets? While much success has been achieved in the past 20 years in the global battle against AIDS, there has been a slowdown in progress which seems to place the targets out of reach. There has to be a fresh surge of high-level political commitment, financial support, health system thrust, public education, civil society engagement and advocacy by affected groups – all of which were part of the recipe for rapid progress in the early part of this century.

High and low points

It is the confluence of those ingredients that made it possible for the world to achieve a reduction in new HIV infections by 37% between 2000 and 2018. HIV-related deaths fell by 45%, with 13.6 million lives saved due to Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART). Not only were effective drugs developed to combat a disease earlier viewed as an inescapable agent of death but they also became widely available due to generic versions generously made available by Indian generic manufacturers, led by the intrepid Yusuf Hamied. A rush of public and private financing flowed forth in a world panicked by the pandemic. Ignorance and stigma were vigorously combated by coalitions of HIV-affected persons who were energetically supported by enlightened sections of civil society and the media. Never before had the world of global health resonated so readily to the rallying cry for adopting a rights-based approach and assuring access to life-saving treatments. According to a recent report by UNAIDS, of the 38 million persons now living with HIV, 24 million are receiving ART, as



compared to only 7 million nine years ago.

Why then the concern now? At the end of 2018, while 79% of all persons identified as being infected by HIV were aware of the fact, 62% were on treatment and only 53% had achieved viral suppression – falling short of the 90-90-90 target set for 2020. Due to gaps in service provision, 770,000 HIV-affected persons died in 2018 and 1.7 million persons were newly affected. There are worryingly high rates of new infection in several parts of the world, especially among young persons. Only 19 countries are on track to reach the 2030 target. While improvements have been noted in eastern and southern Africa, central Asia and eastern Europe have had a setback, with more than 95% of the new infections in those regions occurring among the 'key populations'. Risk of acquiring HIV infection is 22 times higher in homosexual men and intravenous drug users, 21 times higher in in sex workers and 12 times more in transgender persons.

Complacency, new factors

There are several reasons for the slowdown in progress. The success achieved in the early part of this century, through a determined global thrust against the global threat, led to a complacent assumption of a conclusive victory. The expanded health agenda in the SDGs stretched the resources of national health systems, even as

global funding streams started identifying other priorities. Improved survival rates reduced the fear of what was seen earlier as dreaded death and pushed the disease out of the headlines. The information dissemination blitz that successfully elevated public awareness on HIV prevention did not continue to pass on the risk-related knowledge and strong messaging on prevention-oriented behaviours to a new generation of young persons. Vulnerability of adolescent girls to sexual exploitation by older men and domineering male behaviours inflicting HIV infection on unprotected women have been seen as factors contributing to new infections in Africa. Even the improved survival rates in persons with HIV bring forth other health problems that demand attention. Risk factors for cardiovascular disease are high among survivors as they age, with anti-retroviral drugs increasing the risk of atherosclerosis. Other infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis can co-exist and cannot be addressed by a siloed programme. Mental health disorders are a challenge in persons who are on life-long therapy for a serious disease that requires constant monitoring and often carries stigma.

Need for vigil in India

The Indian experience has been more positive but still calls for continued vigilance and committed action. HIV-related deaths declined by 71% between 2005 and 2017. HIV infection now affects 22 out of 10,000 Indians, compared to 38 out of 10,000 in 2001-03. India has an estimated 2.14 million persons living with HIV and records 87,000 estimated new infections and 69,000 AIDS-related deaths annually. Nine States have rates higher than the national prevalence figure. Mizoram leads with

204 out of 10,000 persons affected. The total number of persons affected in India is estimated to be 21.40 lakh, with females accounting for 8.79 lakh. Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Uttarakhand showed an increase in numbers of annual new infections. The strength of India's well established National AIDS Control Programme, with a cogent combination of prevention and case management strategies, must be preserved.

Drug treatment of HIV is now well founded with an array of established and new anti-viral drugs. The success of drug treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and male circumcision, especially among MSM population, is well-documented. Given the wide diversity of the HIV virus strains, development of a vaccine has been highly challenging but a couple of candidates are in early stage trials. However, mere technical innovations will not win the battle against HIV-AIDS. Success in our efforts to reach the 2030 target calls for resurrecting the combination of political will, professional skill and wide ranging pan-society partnerships that characterised the high tide of the global response in the early part of this century. The theme of the World AIDS day this year ("Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Community by Community) is a timely reminder that community wide coalitions are needed even as highly vulnerable sections of the community are targeted for protection in the next phase of the global response.

K. Srinath Reddy is President, Public Health Foundation of India, and author of 'Make in India: Reaching a Billion Plus'. The views expressed are personal

In telecom, time to send the right signals

The government needs to take bold action like it did in 1999; it is critical to have multiple players



ASHOK JHUNJHUNWALA

In the early 1990s, India had merely seven million telephones with a waiting time of seven to eight years to get a connection. The simple reason was that the cost of installing a landline telephone was too high and the required average revenue per user (ARPU) just to break even was ₹1,250 per month, which was too high for most Indians at that time. Indian telecom grew at a slow pace through government budgets and subsidies. It is in this context that wireless telephony was introduced. This would bring down the capital cost, make telephones affordable in India, would be easier to install and bring in private investments for a potentially profitable business.

Rapid growth

The results have been nothing short of dramatic. The telecommunications sector has grown at a rapid pace, riding on a virtuous cycle of growing demand and increasing competition that has pushed down prices to levels not seen anywhere else in the world.

Today, the sector is at a turning point. The troubles of today are rooted in the fast-paced growth of yesterday and regulation that increased tele-density by pushing down ARPUs. This drove businesses to work with a single mind focus on consumer acquisition as the base of users ballooned. It is im-

portant to take a historic look if one is to understand the imbroglia of today.

The first telecom auctions for private players were in 1995. The financial bids were unbelievably high; some international consultants proposed large licence fees without understanding Indian affordability. As the dust settled, the winners realised that the bids were economically unsustainable. Several legal ploys were used to stop the payment against bids, cases multiplied, and the telecom dream was stillborn. In 1999, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee became Prime Minister, a group of telecom academics and professionals advised him that the only way out of this imbroglia was to cancel the licence fees due to the government and introduce the "revenue share" model. He was worried that he would be accused of selling the country and causing huge "loss of revenue". But this group egged him on saying that India needed this bold step for telecom to thrive and he could do this only in his first hundred days. The Prime Minister took the bold step and licences were offered an option to switch to revenue-share instead of upfront licence fees.

This bold step got mobile telephony going. The installation cost of wireless telephony was less than one-fourth of a landline telephone. Low ARPU was no longer a big concern. By around 2003, India had around 300 million telephone lines and the urban market was saturating. Airtel, Vodafone and Idea, with their GSM mobile licence, were the leaders. The CDMA mobile licensees had grown slowly, stuck with a technology without a future and could not



compete. Rural markets required lower tariff, but the GSM trio were happy with the urban market and resisted reduction in tariffs. The market grew at a slow pace since then.

It was around 2007 that the then government saw this imbroglia and found ways to give new GSM licences using primarily revenue-share. These newcomers, primarily Reliance Communications (RCOM) and Tata Teleservices, dropped tariffs and introduced per-second billing. Others had to follow. The market grew quickly to 900 million lines. Indian telecom was thriving. The operators were making decent money, even with lower tariffs. Till then, India was using only 2G telephony. Data and Internet was at very low speed; 3G telephony was just being introduced and operators were haggling for more 3G spectrum in 900 MHz and 1800 MHz bands. The government was periodically conducting auctions since 2010, fetching large spectrum bids.

Old versus new players

Around 2013, the Government made available some spectrum in the 2300-2500 MHz band. This was not considered suitable for 3G telephony then; 4G was in its infancy and there was some concern about technology standards and technology readiness. A new com-

pany, Reliance Jio, betted on it and won the whole spectrum pan-India through a partner company at a relatively lower price as there was little interest from established operators. Jio had to wait four years to get the technology ready and launched the 4G service late in 2016 and caught the imagination of users. It made voice calls almost free and offered good quality video on smart handsets at very low tariffs. Others did follow suit but paid higher amounts for spectrum in later auctions. Jio has been gaining market share since then. The older operators have been on the defensive, facing serious erosion in market share and profitability. RCOM and Tata Teleservices have been wiped out. Vodafone and Idea merged to just about survive. Airtel, the strongest operator two years back, continues to lose market share and profitability.

Issue of penalties

It is at this time that the revenue-sharing agreement that companies like Airtel, Idea, Vodafone and others signed in 2001 has come to haunt them. The Supreme Court ruled this October that these companies are liable to pay revenue share not just on telecom revenue but all revenues of the company – sales proceeds on handsets, renting of their towers, infrastructure sharing, and even on dividend incomes from any investment. Furthermore, they have to pay huge late-fees and penalties, totalling ₹1.3 lakh crore.

While the court has rightly interpreted the written agreement of 2001, the amounts are enormous that when paid, is likely to bankrupt these players. The industry is already saddled with debt of

₹7 lakh crore. Once again India is faced with the prospect of a telecom monopoly or duopoly. Further, except that it says so in a contract, it makes little sense to pay revenue share to the government on unrelated businesses. If the operators ever thought otherwise, they would have hived off these businesses to a sister company as many have done since then.

It is precisely in such a precarious situation, that the government needs to act, just like it did in 1999. They could offer the operators payment of principal in instalments and waive off interest and penalties. It is critical for the nation to have multiple players compete in telecom services. Besides, the time has come to relook the role of telecom in the country. The Prime Minister has rightly emphasised the role digital connectivity plays in society. If India is to reap the benefit of being fully digital, government's taxes and earnings from telecom should be limited. Today, in addition to corporate taxes, the government's telecom revenue includes Goods and Services Tax, spectrum auction, revenue share as licence fees, amounting to about 30% of customer bill. The government should not look at the telecom sector primarily as a revenue-earner. The money could be better spent by operators to improve today's average service-quality. This would help telecom reach the remotest parts of the country and the service needs to continue to be affordable.

Ashok Jhunjhunwala, a Padma Shri for his work on wireless telephony, is a Professor at IIT Madras and has advised the government on the telecom sector in the past. Through The Billion Press

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

How safe?

India is a study in contrasts – it attempts to address rising aspirations by bringing women on a par with men in terms of participation in society, the economy and political spheres. At the other end, there has hardly been any progress in making India a safe place for women. Incidents of rape and harassment are being reported every other day, bringing shame to the nation. What is worrying is growing apathy. Small steps need to be made standard across India – active policing at public places is one. There also needs to be

a better police response time. Behavioural change and gender sensitisation programmes should be conducted in schools.

ROHAN DIXIT,
New Delhi

■ The monstrous incident of the rape and murder of a young woman in Hyderabad has undoubtedly shocked the nation. Special fast track courts are essential to render speedy justice to survivors and their families. That the wheels of justice usually move slowly is obvious from the fact that those involved in the Nirbhaya case are yet to undergo extreme punishment. Measures to

help women such as imparting physical self-defence training, in all schools and colleges, need to be up immediately taken. Another idea would also be looking at arming women with mild chemical sprays which could help give them time to seek police help after immobilising their attackers.

A. MOHAN,
Chennai

Reviving Air India

While the government is on the look out for an interested buyer for Air India and new capital infusion to revive the airline has proved "ineffective, it is time that the authorities find able

managers to turn things around. People with job experience in managerial positions in private airlines must be engaged to manage the debt-stricken airline and with absolute autonomy. Air India is most often the face of India and we cannot portray a poor image of the country even before travellers land on our soil (Editorial page, "Making Air India's disinvestment work", December 2).

SOURJYA RAY,
Kolkata

In print and the reality

The article, "The fountainhead of India's economic vitality" (OpEd,

December 2), comes at a time when the economy is in a tailspin, unemployment is at a record high, and industries are struggling to survive in general, the selling of some profit-making public sector units... the list can be endless. . Whatever facts and figures the writer has provided may be good to look at in print, but the reality is that the life of the common man is stressful. Talk of a \$5-trillion economy is good to hear, but blunders

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the report titled "BJP puts up a brave face amid tribal discomfort" (Dec. 2, 2019), there was an erroneous reference to 22 ST reserved seats. It should have been 28.

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बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 246

मौद्रिक नीति की दुविधा

वित्तीय बाजार का अनुमान है कि भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक की मौद्रिक नीति समिति (एमपीसी) इस सप्ताह छठी बार नीतिगत रीपो दर में कटौती करेगी। चूंकि चालू वित्त वर्ष की दूसरी तिमाही में सकल घरेलू उत्पाद (जीडीपी) की वृद्धि दर घटकर 4.5 फीसदी रह गई है, देश की अर्थव्यवस्था की नॉमिनल वृद्धि दर घटकर 6.1 फीसदी हो गई है और

सुधार के कोई संकेत नजर नहीं आ रहे हैं तो नीतिगत दरों में कटौती ही उचित प्रतीत होती है। बहरहाल यह निर्णय लेना इतना आसान नहीं होगा। एमपीसी को कई अन्य मसलों पर ध्यान देना होगा। मौजूदा आर्थिक परिदृश्य दुविधा की एक बड़ी वजह है।

पहली बात, खुदरा मूल्य सूचकांक पर आधारित मुद्रास्फीति की दर के बारे में माना

जा रहा है कि वह नवंबर में 5 फीसदी का स्तर पाकर गई और विश्लेषकों के अनुसार आने वाले महीनों में भी यह ऊंचे स्तर पर बनी रहेगी।

यह सच है कि शीर्ष मुद्रास्फीति में इजाफा मोटे तौर पर सब्सिडियों की कीमत में बढ़ोतरी के चलते हुआ और यह महज कुछ दिनों के लिए हो सकती है। कमजोर मूल मुद्रास्फीति भी यही बताती है। जीडीपी अपस्फीतिकारक और थोकमूल्य सूचकांक पर आधारित मुद्रास्फीति भी निचले स्तर पर है। परंतु केंद्रीय बैंक का लक्ष्य शीर्ष मुद्रास्फीति को लक्षित करना है और यदि वह वास्तविक नीतिगत दरों को ऋणायत्मक दायरे में ले जाना चाहती है तो उसे इस बारे में स्पष्ट रूप से बताना होगा।

यदि खाद्य मुद्रास्फीति लंबी अवधि तक ऊंचे स्तर पर रहती है या उसका सामान्यीकरण होता है (वैश्विक वित्तीय संकट के बाद ऐसा हो चुका है) तो इसका असर केंद्रीय बैंक की विश्वसनीयता पर पड़ेगा और मुद्रास्फीति के अनुमानों का प्रबंधन और मुश्किल हो जाएगा।

दूसरा, मौजूदा वित्त वर्ष में केंद्रीय बैंक ने राजकोषीय प्रबंधन में सरकार की बात सुनी है। इसे बदलना होगा। राजस्व की स्थिति को देखते हुए इस बात की संभावना बहुत कम है कि सरकार चालू वित्त वर्ष के लिए तय जीडीपी के 3.3 फीसदी के राजकोषीय लक्ष्य को हासिल कर पाएगी।

यदि सरकार कुछ देनदारी सरकारी उपक्रमों की और स्थानांतरित भी करती है तो भी

दूसरे शब्दों में कहें तो दी गई परिस्थितियों में मौद्रिक नीति के प्रभाव पर सवाल उठाना जरूरी है। भविष्य में दरों की कटौती की संभावना कम होने के कारण पारेषण आसान नहीं रहेगा। क्या एमपीसी को उस स्थिति में मौद्रिक नीति की सीमाओं का ध्यान रखना चाहिए। बहरहाल, दूसरी ओर अगर फिलहाल दरों में कटौती नहीं की गई तो वित्तीय बाजारों में हड़बड़ी आपसी और बॉन्ड प्रतिफल और बढ़ेगा। ऐसे में एमपीसी के सदस्य संतुलन साधते हुए कटौती कर सकते हैं लेकिन केंद्रीय बैंक को इससे जुड़े जोखिम भी साफ बताने चाहिए और इसकी सीमाओं से भी अवगत कराना चाहिए। दरों में कटौती करने से बात खत्म नहीं हो जाती।



अजय मोहंतेजी

अर्थव्यवस्था में हरित नीति अपनाने से होगा सुधार

देश की अर्थव्यवस्था को ढांचागत सुधारों के रूप में एक बड़े कदम की आवश्यकता है। इसके साथ ही फिलहाल दूसरी पीढ़ी की हरित नीतियों की भी जरूरत महसूस की जा रही है। विस्तार से बता रहे हैं **अरुणाभ घोष**

क्या हरित अर्थव्यवस्था देश की अर्थव्यवस्था को बचा सकती है ? वर्ष 2012–13

की चौथी तिमाही के बाद पहली बार 2019–20 की दूसरी तिमाही में वास्तविक जीडीपी वृद्धि दर 5 फीसदी से नीचे खिसक गई है। सरकारी व्यय, बुनियादी निवेश या उपभोक्ता व्यय से वृद्धि को गति मिल सकती है। परंतु सरकारी व्यय पर राजकोषीय जवाबदेही के नियमों ने अंकुश लगा रखा है। अर्थव्यवस्था को बुनियादी ढांचा क्षेत्र में 1.4 लाख करोड़ रुपये के निवेश की आवश्यकता है, तभी 2024 तक 5 लाख करोड़ की अर्थव्यवस्था का लक्ष्य हासिल हो सकेगा। परंतु बुनियादी ढांचा क्षेत्र के बकाया भुगतान आदि के कारण निवेश को बरकरार रखना मुश्किल है। उपभोक्ता व्यय 2019–20 की पहली और दूसरी तिमाही के बीच 6.5 फीसदी घटा है।

मौजूदा वृहद आर्थिक दौर में यदि किसी चीज के हरित होने की बात कही जाती है तो यह माना जाता है कि उसके साथ अतिरिक्त लागत जुड़ी होगी। एक दशक पहले जब हरित अर्थव्यवस्था की नीतियां पहली बार प्रभावी हुई थीं तब कई लोग इस पर यकीन करते थे। तब से अब तक भारत ने औद्योगिक क्षेत्र में ऊर्जा किफायत हासिल करने में कामयाबी पाई है, किफायती उपकरण निर्माण की लागत कम की है, हरित इमारतों में इजाफा किया है, जीवाश्म ईंधन सब्सिडी सुधार लागू की, इनकी दरों को

न्यूनतम किया और अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर नेतृत्व क्षमता प्रदर्शित की।

अब अर्थव्यवस्था और हरित अर्थव्यवस्था दोनों की गति में भीमापन आया है। सितंबर में प्रधानमंत्री ने न्यूयार्क में घोषणा की कि नवीकरणीय ऊर्जा की क्षमता को 450 गीगावॉट तक पहुंचाया जाएगा। सन 2022 तक इसे 175 गीगावॉट तक पहुंचाने का लक्ष्य इसलिए हासिल नहीं हो पाएगा क्योंकि अनुबंधों में देरी हुई और विद्युत विक्रय अनुबंधों पर रद्द होने का खतरा मंडराता रहा। केवल अच्छे लक्ष्य तय करने से निवेशक उत्साहित नहीं होते।

ऐसे वक्त में जबकि देश की अर्थव्यवस्था को दूसरी पीढ़ी की हरित नीतियों की आवश्यकता है, देश की अर्थव्यवस्था में ढांचागत सुधारों की आवश्यकता है। दोनों को साथ शुरू करने के लिए चुनिंदा परिस्थितियां आवश्यक हैं। अबाध विकास वाले बाजार, शुरुआती पूंजी निवेश की क्षतिपूर्ति के लिए परिचालन व्यय में कमी, शुद्ध मूल्य वृद्धि के लिए स्वदेशीकरण और सामाजिक और समतापूर्णक परिस्थितियां। मैं आगामी एक दशक के लिए चार कारक चिन्हित करता हूं।

पहला, वितरित ऊर्जा में मौजूद अवसरों का अब तक लाभ नहीं लिया गया है। रूफटॉप सौर फोटोवॉल्टिक क्षमता करीब 4.3 गीगावॉट है जो 40 गीगावॉट के तय लक्ष्य या उससे अधिक की क्षमता से कम

है। वाणिज्यिक और औद्योगिक उपभोक्ताओं के पास थोक क्षमता है और पांच राज्यों महाराष्ट्र, राजस्थान, तमिलनाडु, गुजरात और कर्नाटक कुल क्षमता का 45 फीसदी पूरा करते हैं। आवासीय उपभोक्ताओं तथा अन्य क्षेत्रों तक विस्तार की काफी गुंजाइश मौजूद है। छत पर नवीकरणीय ऊर्जा उपकरण लगाने से जमीन की बचत भी होती है। परंतु आवासीय उपभोक्ताओं को ऋण के लिए सुसंगत बनें और बिजली की लागत में बचत कर सकें। गौरतलब है कि छत पर लगाने वाली परियोजना सामान्य सौर परियोजना की तुलना में सात गुना तक अधिक रोजगार तैयार करती है।

दूसरा, गतिशीलता से नई संभावनाएं तैयार होती हैं। रॉकी मार्टेनो इस्टीम्यूट और नीति आयोग के मुताबिक सन 2015 से 2030 के बीच देश में एकौनों की तादाद 3.4 से 3.8 गुना तक बढ़ जाएगी। सन 2030 तक वाणिज्यिक कार-जीप और तिपहिया वाहन क्षेत्र में इलेक्ट्रिक व्हीकल का दबदबा हो सकता है। कीव के शोधकर्ताओं का अनुमान है कि यदि सन 2030 तक इलेक्ट्रिक व्हीकल इंजन की लागत के मामले में सामान्य इंजन के समान हो जाता है तो उस समय तक भारत में 2.7 करोड़ इलेक्ट्रिक

वाहन होंगे। हमारा अध्ययन बताता है कि सन 2030 में प्रति वाहन कार्बन डाइ ऑक्साइड उत्सर्जन 2 फीसदी से 16 फीसदी कम होगा। एक अन्य सर्वेक्षण में शामिल 37 फीसदी लोगों ने सार्वजनिक परिवहन का इस्तेमाल किया और औसतन 1.4 किमी चलकर सार्वजनिक परिवहन की सेवा ली। बुनियादी ढांचे की गुणवत्ता और सेवाओं की आवृत्ति अहम गतिरोध है। इलेक्ट्रिक वाहन के जरिये हालात में सकारात्मक बदलाव लाया जा सकता है।

यदि स्वदेशीकरण पर ध्यान दिया जाए तो वितरित उत्पादन और गतिशीलता में स्थायित्व अधिक काम आएगा। सन 2030 तक इलेक्ट्रिक वाहनों की 30 फीसदी बिक्री के साथ देश के वाहन क्षेत्र में 5.7 फीसदी मूल्यवर्धन होगा। बशर्ते कि 90 फीसदी पावरट्रेन और बैटरी देश में बनें। घरेलू विनिर्माण के बिना इस क्षेत्र का मूल्यवर्धन 8 फीसदी तक गिरेगा।

बैटरी तकनीक में उल्लेखनीय वृद्धि में संभावनाएं निहित हैं। लिथियम आयन बैटरी की कीमतों में 2010 से अब तक 85 फीसदी गिरावट आई है लेकिन कोरियाई, चीनी और जापानी विनिर्माता बाजार पर दबदबा रखते हैं। इस बीच भारत में इसरो, ईंडियन ऑयल और टाटा केमिकल्स काम लगात वाली ली-इयॉन अथवा अल्ट्रा लाइट धातु बैटरियों के निर्माण के साथ प्रयोग कर रहे हैं। ये कंपनियां उत्पादन बढ़ाने के लिए संयुक्त उपक्रम की तलाश में हैं। भविष्य में भंडारा उपकरणों की क्षमता 2018 के 24 गीगावॉट प्रति घंटा से बढ़कर 270 से 365 गीगावॉट प्रति घंटे हो सकती है।

स्वच्छ तकनीक का प्रयोग चौथा कारक है। ऊर्जा की मांग का अहम हिस्सा न केवल वितरित बुनियादी और इलेक्ट्रिक परिवहन के लिए होगा बल्कि कूलिंग की आवश्यकता के लिए भी। सन 2038 तक आवासीय, गतिशीलता और वाणिज्यिक क्षेत्र में प्रशीतन और वातानुकूलन आठ गुना बढ़ेगा। इन तमाम क्षेत्रों में निवेश बढ़ेगा। जब सूरज चमकेगा तब आवासीय ऊर्जा की मांग कम हो सकती है। लोड को इलेक्ट्रिक वाहन चार्जिंग या कूलिंग से संतुलित किया जा सकता है।

ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में वितरित ऊर्जा से चलने वाली किफायती मोटर आय बढ़ाने वाले उपक्रम को ऊर्जावान कर सकती हैं। इस बाजार का अनुमानित आकार 53 अरब डॉलर है। वितरित ऊर्जा फर्म पहले ही 3 लाख प्रत्यक्ष रोजगार तैयार कर चुकी हैं। सौर ऊर्जा आधारित सिंचाई में भी वृद्धि हो रही है। व्यवस्थित बनाने पर यह व्यवहार्य भी हो सकती है। ऐसे में अधिशेष बिजली का इस्तेमाल अन्य ग्रामीण उपभोक्ताओं को जोड़ने के लिए किया जा सकता है। इससे किसानों की आय बढ़ेगी।

वितरित ऊर्जा, स्थायित्व भरी गतिशीलता, स्वदेशीकरण (खासकर बैटरी निर्माण में) और एकीकृत स्वच्छ तकनीक हरित अर्थव्यवस्था के नए वाहक हैं। इनमें से हर कारक नए निवेश को आकर्षित करने वाला है। यह सारी प्रक्रिया मूल्यवर्धन और रोजगार तैयार करने वाली है। बोझ बनने के बजाय हरित सुधार अर्थव्यवस्था को जरूरी बचाव मुहैया कर सकती है।

(लेखक कौंसिल ऑन एनर्जी, एनवायरनमेंट एंड वाटर के सीईओ हैं)

समग्र उधारी बढ़ेगी। यह आशंका भी है कि इस वर्ष राज्य भी राजकोषीय मोर्चे पर लक्ष्य से पीछे रह जाएं। इसका असर मौद्रिक नीति पर पड़ेगा। सरकार की राजकोषीय स्थिति भी खराब पारेषण की प्रमुख वजह है। उदाहरण के लिए व्यवस्था में पर्याप्त नकदी होने के बावजूद नीतिगत रीपो दर तथा 10 वर्ष के सरकारी बॉन्ड के प्रतिफल का अंतर 130 आधार अंक के बराबर है। आंशिक तौर पर ऐसा इसलिए है क्योंकि बाजार को यकीन नहीं कि सरकार राजकोषीय घाटे के लक्ष्य को पूरा कर पाएगी।

तीसरा, दिए गए संदर्भ में एमपीसी अगर यह बताए कि एक और बार दरों में कटौती से वह क्या हासिल करना चाहती है तो बेहतर होगा।

वायु प्रदूषण से निपटने की खातिर कुछ कदम तत्काल उठाना जरूरी

राष्ट्रीय राजधानी क्षेत्र (एनसीआर) में वायु प्रदूषण को लेकर जो आपात स्थिति बनी है, उस सिलसिले में यह मेरा तीसरा आलेख है। सबसे पहले मैंने इस विषय पर चर्चा की कि आखिर अब तक उत्सर्जन कम करने के लिए क्या किया गया है। उसके बाद मैंने संकट की प्रकृति के बारे में लिखा कि आखिर क्यों ठंड के दिनों में प्रदूषण इतना विकराल नजर आता है और हमें इससे निपटने के लिए और कदम क्यों उठाने होंगे ? इस बार मैं इस विषय पर बात करना चाहती हूं कि आखिर कौन से कदम तत्काल उठाए जाने की जरूरत हैं और संकट से निपटने के लिए उन्हें किस पैमाने पर उठाना होगा। मैं इस बारे में लिखना चाहती हूं क्योंकि अगर ऐसा नहीं किया गया तो हम जिस हवा में सांस लेते हैं, उसकी गुणवत्ता को लेकर नाराज तो होंगे लेकिन उस स्थिति में हम स्वच्छ आकाश और साफ फेफड़े नहीं हासिल कर पाएंगे।

लम्बोलुआब यह कि हमें उस पैमाने पर कड़े कदम उठाने की जरूरत है ताकि इतना बदलाव आ सके कि हम निरंतर बढ़ते प्रदूषण को पछाड़ सकें। जब दिल्ली में कंफ्रेंड नैचुरल गैस (सीएनजी) का इस्तेमाल शुरू हुआ तो एक-दो साल में ही कार्पों सुधार हुआ। एक लाख से अधिक सार्वजनिक परिवहन वाले वाहनों को सीएनजी के रूप में स्वच्छ ऊर्जा माध्यम पर स्थानांतरित कर दिया गया। ऐसे में हमारे प्रदूषण के आंकड़ों में भी नाटकीय बदलाव आया। हमें आसमान में तारे देखने को मिले। बीते तीन सालों में अहम कदम उठाए गए हैं। दिल्ली में कोयले के इस्तेमाल पर प्रतिबंध से लेकर वाहनों के लिए स्वच्छ ईंधन के इस्तेमाल और ट्रकों से होने वाले प्रदूषण में कमी लाने तक तमाम उपाय किए गए लेकिन ये अपर्याप्त साबित हुए।

प्रश्न यह है कि आगे हम क्या करेंगे ? हमें प्रदूषण के प्रमुख स्रोतों के बारे में पता है। यह प्रमुख तौर पर वाहनों, फैक्टरियों, ताप बिजली घरों, डीजल जेनरेटरों, खुले में कचरा जलाने, धूल आदि से फैलता है। फसल अवशेष जलाए जाने के कारण भी महीने भी तक प्रदूषण का प्रकोप बना रहता है। मौसम में बदलाव आते ही यानी हवा बंद होने और नमी बढ़ने पर इसका असर नजर आने लगता है। हमें यह भी पता है कि



जमीनी हकीकत

सुनीता नारायण

हमें स्वच्छ बिजली संयंत्रों की भी जरूरत होगी। दिल्ली ने पहले ही अपने कोयला आधारित बिजली संयंत्र बंद कर दिए हैं। हमें अब यह सुनिश्चित करना होगा कि राष्ट्रीय राजधानी क्षेत्र के सभी उत्पादन संयंत्र वर्ष 2015 के सख्त उत्सर्जन मानकों का पालन करते हुए गैस का इस्तेमाल करें या बंद कर दिए जाएं। ऐसा करना आसान नहीं है। इसके अलावा वाहनों की बिक्री को भी सीमित करना होगा। उन्हें अधिक स्वच्छ भी बनाना होगा। हमें यह सब पता है लेकिन इस दिशा में कुछ खास नहीं किया जा रहा है।

फसल अवशेष जलाने की समस्या का भी हल तलाश करना होगा। आदर्श हल तो यही होगा कि फसल अवशेष खासकर धान के अवशेष के लिए बाजार मुहैया कराया जाए ताकि किसान उसे जलाने के बजाय बेचें। एक विकल्प यह भी है कि उन्हें ऐसी मशीन मुहैया कराई जाए जिसकी मदद से वे उन अवशेष को दोबारा मिट्टी में मिला सकें। हल मौजूद हैं केवल उन्हें अपनाने के तरीके तलाश करने हैं। इन सब बातों के अलावा हमें प्रदूषण के स्थानीय स्रोतों पर भी अंकुश लगाना होगा।

इसमें कूड़ा जलाने से लेकर कचरा प्रबंधन तक तमाम चीजें शामिल हैं। इसके लिए अप्रवर्तन और व्यवस्थित सुधार की आवश्यकता होगी। हमें कूड़े को अलग-अलग करके उसका प्रबंधन करना होगा। यह बात हम सभी जानते हैं। सबसे अहम बात, हमें इन सभी मोर्चों पर ठोस और वर्ष लंबी कार्य योजना के साथ काम करना होगा। अभी तक प्रदूषण के बढ़ने पर हुए हो हल्ले के बाद हम अगले जाड़े तक शांत हो जाते हैं। ऐसे काम नहीं चलेगा। दिल्ली की हवा को साफ करना सालाना कवायद नहीं बननी चाहिए। इसलिए, क्योंकि इसका रिश्ता हमारे स्वास्थ्य और सांस लेने के हमारे अधिकार से है।

दूसरा हल है उद्योग-धंधों और घरों को व्याक्तिगत बिजली उत्पादन (डीजल जेनरेटर) से बिजली पर स्थानांतरित करना। तीसरा उपाय यह सुनिश्चित करना है कि बिजली का उत्पादन

कानाफूसी

मध्य प्रदेश में फिर से नई जांच

मध्य प्रदेश सरकार का वन विभाग भारतीय जनता पार्टी के शासनकाल में हुए पौधरोपण घोटाले को लेकर एक बार फिर नई जांच शुरू करने जा रहा है। जुलाई 2017 में नर्मदा तट पर एक दिन में रिकॉर्ड 7 करोड़ पौधे लगाने का अभियान छेड़ा गया था। मौजूदा कांग्रेस सरकार के वनमंत्री उमंग सिंघार का आरोप है कि तत्कालीन सरकार में शामिल लोगों ने इस दौरान व्यवस्थित तरीके से शासकीय धन की हेराफेरी की। वन विभाग ने जांच के बाद कहा था कि पौधरोपण के आंकड़ों को बहुत अधिक बढ़ाचढ़ाकर पेश किया गया और हकीकत में यह आंकड़ा बहुत कम था। अब सरकार एक नई जांच के द्वारा यह आकलन करने का प्रयास कर रही है कि राज्य की नर्सरियों में इतने पौधे देने की क्षमता थी भी या नहीं।

बाहर का रास्ता

बहुजन समाज पार्टी (बसपा) ने कुछ वरिष्ठ नेताओं को अनुशासनहीनता और पार्टी हित के खिलाफ काम करने का आरोप लगाकर पार्टी से बाहर निकाल दिया है। इन नेताओं में पूर्व मंत्री और विधायक भी शामिल हैं। इनमें से कई ऐसे भी हैं जिन्होंने मई 2019 के लोकसभा चुनाव और कुछ दिन पहले हुए विधानसभा उपचुनाव में भी शिरकत की थी लेकिन उन्हें हार का सामना करना पड़ा। पार्टी की अध्यक्ष मायावती ने अपने विश्वसनीय सहयोगी और लखनऊ की मोहनलालगंज लोकसभा सीट से प्रत्याशी रहे सी एल वर्मा को भी बाहर का रास्ता दिखा दिया है। वर्मा को भाजपा के कौशल किशोर के हाथों हार का सामना करना पड़ा था। दिलचस्प बात है कि वर्मा उत्तर प्रदेश के पूर्व मंत्री नसीमुद्दीन सिद्दीकी के भी करीबी हैं। नसीम भी पहले मायावती के सच्चे अनुयायी थे लेकिन बाद में वह कांग्रेस में शामिल हो गए।



आपका पक्ष

न्याय व्यवस्था में हो ठोस सुधार

अदालतों में मुकदमों की संख्या लगातार बढ़ती जा रही है। यह विभिन्न विसंगतियों की जन्म दे रहा है। राष्ट्रीय अदालत प्रबंधन की रिपोर्ट की मुताबिक बीते तीन दशकों में मुकदमों की संख्या दोगुनी तेजी से बढ़ी है। अगर यही स्थिति बनी रही तो अगले 30 वर्षों में देश की विभिन्न अदालतों में लंबित मुकदमों की संख्या करीब 15 करोड़ तक पहुंच जाएगी। आजादी के बाद से अदालतों और न्यायाधीशों की संख्या आबादी के बढ़ते अनुपात के मुताबिक कभी भी कदमताल नहीं कर पाई है। इस वजह से न्याय के नैसर्गिक सिद्धांत के मुताबिक न्यायपालिका में भी मांग और आपूर्ति के बीच संतुलन कायम नहीं हो सका है। विधि आयोग ने वर्ष 1987 में कहा था कि 10 लाख लोगों पर कम से कम 50 न्यायाधीश होने चाहिए। लेकिन आज भी 10 लाख लोगों पर न्यायाधीशों की संख्या तकरीबन 15 से 20 है। कहते हैं कि दुश्मनों



को भी अस्पताल और कचहरी का मुंह नहीं देखना पड़े। यह इसलिए है क्योंकि दोनों जगह आदमी को तबाह कर देती है और जीतने वाला भी इतने विलंब से न्याय पाता है जो अन्याय के बराबर हो जाता है। जमीन के छोटे-छोटे टुकड़े को लेकर पचास-पचास साल मुकदमे चलते हैं। फौजदारी के मामले तो और भी संगीन स्थिति

है। अपराध से ज्यादा सजा लोग फैसला आने के पहले ही काट लेते हैं। यह सब केवल इसलिए होता है कि मुकदमों की सुनवाई और फैसले की गति बहुत धीमी है।

एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक तीन दशकों में मुकदमों की संख्या दोगुनी तेजी से बढ़ी है

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@bmail.in

उस जगह का उल्लेख अवश्य करें, जहां से आप ईमेल कर रहे हैं।

की प्रक्रिया को तेज करने की तैयारी कर रही है। सरकार इन कंपनियों की हिस्सेदारी बेचकर नकदी जुटाना चाहती है जिससे चाटे में चल रही इन कंपनियों को उबार जा सके। सरकार ने पहले से ही रणनीति बिक्री के लिए लगभग 35 उपक्रमों की पहचान की है। इनमें एयर इंडिया, बीपीसीएल और प्रमुख इस्पात कंपनी सेल की भद्रावती और दुर्गापुर इकाइयां शामिल हैं। और सीएम कारपोरेशन ऑफ इंडिया तथा आईटीसी इकाइयों में हिस्सेदारी की बिक्री की मंजूरी मिल चुकी है। इन उपक्रमों की शक्ती में बेहतर प्राप्ति सुनिश्चित करने के लिए सभी परिसंपत्तियों की उचित देखभाल सुनिश्चित करने को कहा गया है। सरकार का यह कदम राजस्व घाटे को कम करना है तथा इन कंपनियों को सुचारु रूप से चलाने की दिशा में एक प्रयास है।

दीप कुमार, महााजगंज

दैनिक जागरण

धैर्य भी किसी धन-संपदा से कम नहीं

विकास विरोधी राजनीति

महाराष्ट्र के मुख्यमंत्री उद्धव ठाकरे ने बुलेट ट्रेन परियोजना की समीक्षा के आदेश देकर इस अंदेशे को बढ़ाने का ही काम किया है कि राज्य की नई सरकार इस महत्वाकांक्षी परियोजना पर अड़ंगा लगा सकती है। इसके पहले उद्धव ठाकरे मुंबई में बनने वाले आरे मेट्रो कार शोड निर्माण को रोकने के आदेश दे चुके हैं। उन्होंने यह आदेश इस आधार पर दिया कि इस मेट्रो कार शोड निर्माण के लिए कई पैड़ काटे गए। हालांकि जरूरत पर के पैड़ काटे जा चुके हैं, फिर भी ठाकरे सरकार मेट्रो कार शोड का निर्माण ठप करना पसंद कर रही है। इसका नतीजा यह होगा कि नई जगह मेट्रो कार शोड बनने में देर तो होगी ही, उसकी लागत भी बढ़ जाएगी। वक्त और पैसे की बर्बादी करने वाला यह काम तब हो रहा है जब राज्य सरकार के खजाने में पर्याप्त धन न होने का रोना भी रोया जा रहा है। हैरत नहीं कि यही रोना रोकर उद्धव ठाकरे पिछली सरकार और साथ ही केंद्र सरकार की कुछ और महत्वाकांक्षी परियोजनाओं पर कैंची चलाते दिखें। कम से कम विकास के मामलों में राजनीति और वह भी समय और संसाधन नष्ट करने वाली घटिया राजनीति तो नहीं ही होनी चाहिए। यह हास्यास्पद है कि एक ओर विकास के मामले में चीन से सीख लेने की नसीहत दी जाती है और दूसरी ओर तेज विकास में अड़ंगे डालने वाले हर तरह के काम भी किए जाते हैं।

क्या इससे बुरी बात और कोई हो सकती है कि सरकार बदल जाने के साथ ही विकास का एजेंडा भी बदल जाए? दुर्भाग्य से ऐसा केवल महाराष्ट्र में ही नहीं हो रहा है। अन्य राज्यों में भी हो रहा है। हाल में आंध्र प्रदेश में सत्ता में आए जगन मोहन रेड्डी चंद्रबाबू नायडू सरकार की कई परियोजनाओं को दाखिल दफ्तर करने में जुटे हुए हैं। वह अमरावती को नई राजधानी बनाने के खिलाफ कमर कसते हुए दिख रहे हैं। राजनीतिक बदले की भावना अथवा राजनीतिक क्षुद्रता के वशीभूत होकर किस तरह विकास योजनाओं से खिलवाड़ किया जाता है, इसका ही सटीक उदाहरण है अहमदाबाद से मुंबई के बीच की बुलेट ट्रेन परियोजना की समीक्षा का आदेश। इस परियोजना में महाराष्ट्र सरकार को मामूली अंशदान ही देना है, फिर भी किसान हित के नाम पर उसमें अड़ंगा लगाने की कोशिश हो रही है। ठाकरे सरकार का यह कहना लोगों को गुमराह करना ही अधिक है कि हमारी प्राथमिकता में बुलेट ट्रेन नहीं, बल्कि किसान हैं। यह सही है कि राज्य के कुछ किसान इस परियोजना का विरोध कर रहे हैं, लेकिन क्या ऐसा है कि उन्हें मुआवजा देने से इनकार किया जा रहा है?

एनआरसी और उपचुनाव

राष्ट्रीय नागरिक पंजी (एनआरसी) यूं तो पूरे देश के लिए अहम मसला है, लेकिन बंगाल में यह राजनीतिक दलों के टकराव का केंद्रबिंदु बना हुआ है। खासकर सत्ताधारी तृणमूल कांग्रेस इस मुद्दे पर केंद्र सरकार से दो-दो हाथ करने को तैयार है। हालिया संपन्न विधानसभा उपचुनाव में तृणमूल को तीनों सीटों पर जीत मिल गई, जिसे एनआरसी के विरोध का नतीजा माना जा रहा है। मुख्यमंत्री एवं तृणमूल प्रमुख ममता बनर्जी को इस मुद्दे पर पहली कोशिश केंद्र सरकार पर हमला बोलकर अल्पसंख्यों के वोट को खींचना था, जो उपचुनाव में स्पष्ट दिखा भी। यही नहीं, भाजपा प्रदेश नेतृत्व भी मान रहा है कि एनआरसी की वजह से ही हार मिली है। वैसे भी वर्ष 2011 और 2016 के विधानसभा चुनावों में ममता को अल्पसंख्यक बहुल इलाकों की करीब 125 सीटों में से क्रमशः 90 और 105 पर जीत मिली थी, लेकिन गुजरे लोकसभा चुनाव में कहानी बदल गई। भाजपा ने अल्पसंख्यक मतदाताओं की बहुत वाली उत्तर मालदा सीट जीत ली और दक्षिण मालदा में भी निकटवर्ष प्रतिद्वंद्वी रही। इससे ममता की उम्मीदों को झटका लगा। भाजपा की इस उपलब्धि ने उनकी नौद उड़ो दी थी और वह अपने परंपरागत मतदाताओं को साधने में सक्रिय हो गईं।

ममता की चिंता लाजिमी थी, क्योंकि बंगाल में परचम लहराने के बाद पहली बार अल्पसंख्यक वोटों में उन्होंने बिखराव देखा। ये मतदाता लोकसभा चुनाव में तृणमूल के अलावा माकपा और कांग्रेस के भी खेमे में बंटे। अब जबकि माकपा और कांग्रेस के बीच उपचुनाव में समझौता होने के बावजूद अल्पसंख्यक वोट तृणमूल को मिले तो आने वाले चुनावों में तृणमूल इस मुद्दे पर और आक्रामक हो सकती है, क्योंकि ओबेसी की पार्टी ने बंगाल की सभी सीटों पर विस चुनाव लड़ने का एलान कर नई चुनौती पेश कर दी है। ममता अब कोई चूक नहीं करना चाहती हैं इसलिए अल्पसंख्यकों के वोट के लिए वे भाजपा पर सीधे हमला कर अपने पक्ष में हवा बनाए रखना चाहती हैं। गौर करने वाली बात है कि विभाजन के समय बंगाल में अल्पसंख्यकों की आबादी 13 से 14 फीसद थी, जो अब बढ़कर 30 फीसद से ज्यादा हो गई है और यह बड़ा वोट बैंक भी है। यही वजह है कि संसद में कभी घुसपैठियों के मुद्दे पर हंगामा खड़ा करने वाली ममता अब विपरीत ध्रुव पर खड़ी हैं। जाहिर तौर पर यह मुद्दा बंगाल में और गरमाये जा रहा है, क्योंकि भाजपा और तृणमूल इस लेकर एक-दूसरे को घेरने में लगे हैं तो बाकी राजनीतिक दल भी बनने-बिगड़ने वाले समीकरण में अपने लिए संभावनाएं तलाश रहे हैं।

विधानसभा उपचुनाव में तृणमूल को तीनों सीटों पर जीत मिल गई, जिसे एनआरसी का विरोध करने का नतीजा माना जा रहा है



डॉ. भरत झुनझुनवाला

विनिवेश का मकसद तभी सफल माना जाएगा जब सरकार उससे अर्जित होने वाली रकम का इस्तेमाल अपनी खपत को पूरा करने में न करे

केंद्र सरकार ने हाल में तीन सार्वजनिक उपक्रमों यानी पीएस्सू के विनिवेश का फैसला किया है। ये तीन उपक्रम हैं-भारत पेट्रोलियम, शिपिंग कॉर्पोरेशन और कॉन्कोर। इनमें सरकार की बहुलशा हिस्सेदारी है। इनका संचालन मुख्य रूप से सरकारी अधिकारियों द्वारा होता है। विनिवेश के जरिये सरकार अपनी हिस्सेदारी किसी एक विशेष खरीदार को बेच देगी। इस कदम का स्वागत किया जाना चाहिए। ऐसी अधिकांश इकाइयों के कारण सरकार को घाटा ही होता है। अधिकारियों के निजी हितों और इकाइयों के हितों में तालमेल नहीं होता। जैसे अधिकारी किसी चहेते को ऊंचे दाम पर ठेका दिला दे तो इससे उसे निजी लाभ होता है जबकि संबंधित उपक्रम को घाटा हो सकता है। इस लिहाज से विनिवेश स्वागतयोग्य एवं सख्तीय है। इन तीन बड़े उपक्रमों के अलावा सरकार ने दो अन्य इकाइयों के विनिवेश का भी फैसला किया है। इनमें एक है नीपको। यह पूर्वोत्तर राज्यों में जलविद्युत परियोजनाओं से जुड़ी है। दूसरी इकाई है टिहरी हाइड्रो डेवलपमेंट कॉर्पोरेशन, जिसने टिहरी बांध का निर्माण किया है। यह गंगा पर विष्णुगाड-पीपलकोटी जल विद्युत परियोजना भी विकसित कर रही है। इन दोनों कंपनियों के विनिवेश में तीन समस्याएँ हैं। पहली यह है कि सरकार ने निर्णय लिया है कि वह इन कंपनियों के शेयरों को किसी निजी खरीदार को बेचने के स्थान पर अपनी ही दूसरी

इकाई एनटीपीसी को बेचेगी। यह कुछ वैसा ही होगा जैसे पिता अपनी दुकान अपने साथ रहने वाले बेटे को बेच दे। इससे पिता के हाथ में पैसा तो आ जाएगा, लेकिन दुकान पर पिता का वर्चस्व और दखल बना रहेगा।

नीपको और टिहरी हाइड्रो डेवलपमेंट कॉर्पोरेशन के शेयरों को बेचकर सरकार रकम तो जुटाएगी, लेकिन उसका इन पर नियंत्रण बना रहेगा। इससे सरकार का वित्तीय घाटा घुस जाएगा। इस सबके बावजूद सरकारी अधिकारियों के नियंत्रण की इन दोनों इकाइयों की मूल समस्या ज्यों की त्यों रह जाएगी। इन इकाइयों का शरीर पूर्ववत ‘सरकारी’ बना रहेगा और केवल चेहरा बदल जाएगा। इन दोनों इकाइयों के विनिवेश में दूसरी समस्या है कि उनकी वास्तविक हालत या तो खस्ता है या फिर जनता के अनुरूल नहीं है। महज चेहरा बदल या चमका कर ही काया की कमजोरी को छिपाया नहीं जा सकता। ऐसा करके सरकार सिर्फ वास्तविक स्थिति को छिपाने का काम कर रही है। नीपको ने हाल में तीन सौ करोड़ रुपये के बांड बेचने का प्रयास किया था, लेकिन उनमें से केवल 13 करोड़ रुपये के बांड ही बिक पाए। यह दर्शाता है कि बाजार को नीपको पर भरोसा नहीं है। टिहरी हाइड्रो डेवलपमेंट कॉर्पोरेशन का हाल तो इससे भी बुरा है। यह आम लोगों से बिजली के ऊंचे दाम वसूल कर भारी लाभ कमा रही है। यह राज्यों के बिजली बोर्डों को प्रति यूनिट



अवधेश राजपूत

म्यारह रुपये की दर से बिजली बेच रही है जो बाजार में चार रुपये की दर पर ही उपलब्ध है। इस महंगी बिक्री से टिहरी हाइड्रो डेवलपमेंट कॉर्पोरेशन को भारी लाभ हो रहा है जबकि उत्तर प्रदेश, दिल्ली और अन्य राज्यों के उपभोक्ता इसका खामियाजा भुगत रहे हैं। कंपनी अनुचित रूप से अर्जित किए जा रहे इस लाभ का दूसरी इकाइयों के घाटे से होने वाले नुकसान को पाटने में इस्तेमाल कर रही है।

टिहरी हाइड्रो डेवलपमेंट कॉर्पोरेशन की विष्णुगाड-पीपलकोटी जलविद्युत परियोजना को केंद्र ने 2008 में मंजूरी दी थी। तब इसकी लागत 2,491 करोड़ रुपये थी। इसे 2013 तक बनकर तैयार हो जाना चाहिए था। तब इससे उत्पादित बिजली की दर 2.26 रुपये प्रति यूनिट आंकी गई थी। अब इस परियोजना की लागत बढ़कर 4,379 करोड़ रुपये हो आई है। वहीं बिजली की लागत 6.42 रुपये प्रति यूनिट तक पहुंच जाएगी जबकि बाजार में यह चार रुपये प्रति यूनिट में आसानी से उपलब्ध है। साथ ही परियोजना 2022 तक ही पूरी तरह तैयार हो जाएगी। हालांकि उसमें भी देरी की

आशंका है। यदि ऐसा हुआ तो इसकी लागत और ज्यादा बढ़ती जाएगी। स्वाभाविक रूप से बिजली बनाने की लागत भी प्रभावित होगी।

सार्वजनिक उपक्रमों की स्थापना के पीछे जनसेवा की भावना थी, लेकिन अब वे जनता से वसूली करने वाली इकाइयां या सफेद हाथी बनकर रह गई हैं। इनसे जुड़ी तीसरी समस्या यह है कि जुटाई गई रकम का इस्तेमाल सरकारी खपत में किया जा रहा है। 2013-14 में सरकार ने कुल खर्च का 4.8 प्रतिशत सरकारी कर्मियों की पेंशन पर व्यय किया। 2017-18 में यह बढ़कर 6.1 प्रतिशत हो गया। जैसे कोई व्यक्ति अपने पुरतैनी मकान को बेचकर उससे मिली रकम को अत्याशी में उड़ा दे। यह जरूरी है कि सरकार विनिवेश से अर्जित रकम का इस्तेमाल सही जगह निवेश में करे। अभी आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस, अंतरिक्ष, बिग डेटा प्रोसेसिंग, स्टेम सेल जैसे क्षेत्रों में संभावनाएं बढ़ रही हैं। भारत को इनमें निवेश करना चाहिए। इससे भारत आधुनिक तकनीक के सृजन में अग्रणी बन सकेगा।

भारत के सामने इस समय चीन की चुनौती

गुलाम कश्मीर की वापसी का रास्ता

अनुच्छेद 370 को समाप्त करने और जम्मू-कश्मीर की यथास्थिति को भंग करके उसे दो केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों में विभाजित करने के बाद कश्मीर के अंशों हो जाने की आशंका निर्मूल साबित हो रही है। एक तरह से अब हम वहां पहुंच गए हैं जहां से हमारी निगाह से ओझल रहा गुलाम कश्मीर साफ दिखाई देने लगा है। गुलाम कश्मीर को पाकिस्तान से मुक्ति के लिए हमारा रास्ता क्या है? 22 फरवरी, 1994 को प्रधानमंत्री नरसिंह राव के नेतृत्व में संसद ने सर्वसम्मति से एक प्रस्ताव पारित किया था। इसमें कहा गया है कि पाकिस्तान कश्मीर से अपना अवैध कब्जा खाली करे। यदि हमारी सेना को 1947 में रोका न गया होता तो संपूर्ण कश्मीर भारत का भाग होता और आज के गुलाम कश्मीर के मूल निवासी हमारे नागरिक होते। यह स्थिति करने में कोई गुरेज नहीं कि वे आज भी हमारे नागरिक हैं।

कश्मीर विवाद को संयुक्त राष्ट्र में ले जाने और फिर पाकिस्तान से कश्मीर के बंटवारे की बातों में न निश्चित ही पाक अधिकृत कश्मीर पर हमारा पक्ष कमजोर किया। अब केंद्रशासित प्रदेश के रूप में जम्मू-कश्मीर एवं लद्दाख मानचित्र पर आ चुके हैं। मानचित्र पर लद्दाख का क्षेत्र जो एक लाख 67 हजार किलोमीटर में फैला है, सम्मत्याविवीन क्षेत्र है। लद्दाख से अलग हो जाने से जम्मू-कश्मीर अब मात्र 42 हजार वर्ग किमी का राज्य रह गया है। जो लद्दाख के क्षेत्रफल का एक चौथाई है। समस्याग्रस्त क्षेत्र के सीमित हो जाने का भी एक मनोवैज्ञानिक प्रभाव पड़ता है। यदि जम्मू को भी समस्या से बाहर मांते तो कश्मीर का कथित समस्याग्रस्त क्षेत्र मात्र 16 हजार वर्ग किमी की घाटी तक ही सीमित हो जाता है। इतना ही क्षेत्रफल तो नगालैंड का भी है। हमारी राजनीति ने कश्मीर समस्या (जो सिर्फ कश्मीर घाटी की अलगाववादी समस्या है) को बेवजह फैला रखा था। इस समस्या के स्वरूप को सही तरह से आकलन करने में उससे गलतियां भी हो रही थीं।

पश्चिमी कश्मीर का 13 हजार वर्ग किमी का जो भाग पाकिस्तान के कब्जे में है, वह मूलतः गैरकश्मीरी प्रकृति का कश्मीर है। वहां कश्मीरी नहीं, बल्कि पहाड़ी, गोजरी, पंजाबी भाषाएं बोली जाती हैं। गुलाम कश्मीर की नीलम घाटी से लेकर मीरपुर, भिंबर तक 10 जिलों में बसी हुई 45 लाख आबादी मुख्यतः पहाड़ी, गुज्जर-बकरवाल, पंजाबी राजपूत समाज की है। गुलाम कश्मीर की प्रकृति, भाषा, संस्कृति कश्मीर घाटी से पूर्णातः भिन्न है। इसके साथ ही भारतीय पश्चिमी कश्मीर के उन सीमांत जिलों,



केप्टन आर विक्रम सिंह



गुलाम कश्मीर में सीधे दखल नहीं दिया जा सकता, लेकिन वहां के लोगों को सहयोग देना तो हमारा फर्ज बनता है

जो 1947 के युद्ध में हमारी सेनाओं ने वापस ले लिए थे, की भी भाषा एवं प्रकृति गुलाम कश्मीर के अनुरूप है। ये क्षेत्र हैं, कुपवाड़ा, आंशिक बारामुला, उड़ी, पुंछ, राजौरी। इन चार सीमावर्ती जिलों को गुलाम कश्मीर के दस जिलों के साथ मिलाकर पश्चिमी कश्मीर के कुल 14 जिलों का एक तीसरा केंद्रशासित प्रदेश बना सकता है।

गुलाम कश्मीर के लिए हमने जम्मू-कश्मीर विधानसभा में 24 रिक्त स्थान आरक्षित रख रखे हैं। हमारे अपने क्षेत्र के चार जिलों में विधायकों की संख्या 13 है। यदि हम इसके साथ गुलाम कश्मीर के 24 जनप्रतिनिधियों को जोड़ लें तो कुल विधायकों की संख्या 37 हो जाती है। मात्र एक संवैधानिक संशोधन से जम्मू-कश्मीर एवं लद्दाख की तरह यह पश्चिमी कश्मीर हमारी तीसरी केंद्रशासित इकाई का स्वरूप हो सकता है। फर्क सिर्फ यह है कि इसके दस जिले पाकिस्तान के कब्जे में हैं और चार जिले हमारे अधिकार में। ये 24 सीटें गुलाम कश्मीर की वापसी की उम्मीद में प्रारंभ से ही खाली रही हैं। गुलाम कश्मीर के बहुत से नागरिक इस इलाके में और विदेशों में भी आजादी की आवाज उठा रहे हैं। हमारी पूर्व की सरकारों ने इन्हें कोई सहयोग नहीं दिया। इन दस जिलों की आवाज इस तीसरे केंद्रशासित प्रदेश के सदन से बुलंद हो सकती है। उनके प्रतिनिधियों को यहाँ सदस्य नामित किया जा सकता है जो

पाकिस्तान से मुक्ति की मशाल जलाए हुए हैं। पाकिस्तान के अवैध कब्जे में होने के कारण गुलाम कश्मीर में हमारी सरकार सीधे दखल नहीं दे सकती, फिर भी उन्हें सहयोग देना हमारा फर्ज बनता है। इसका तात्पर्य यह है कि गुलाम कश्मीर के विकास संबंधी दायित्वों के निर्वहन के लिए हमारी पहल पर कोई अंतरराष्ट्रीय संगठन बनाया जा सकता है, जो इसमें सहयोग कर सके। इन 24 प्रतिनिधियों की सक्रियता से गुलाम कश्मीर की पाकिस्तान से मुक्ति की मुहिम को धारा मिलनी प्रारंभ हो जाएगी। पश्चिमी कश्मीर के इन 14 जिलों को बतौर तीसरे केंद्रशासित प्रदेश की घोषणा पाकिस्तान के लिए अनुच्छेद 370 के समापन के बाद दूसरा बड़ा झटका होगा।

पर्यटन का गुणात्मक विकास लद्दाख को देश का सबसे समृद्ध राज्य बनाने जा रहा है। यही स्थिति कश्मीर घाटी की होगी। यथास्थितियां अपने हितबद्ध समर्थक विकसित कर लेती हैं जो प्राणपण से परिवर्तन का विरोध करते हैं। नेहरू के जनमत संग्रह के वाक्ये ने कश्मीर को उसके अतीत का बंधुआ बना दिया था। सारा देश विकास के रास्ते बना रहा था, लेकिन कश्मीर 1947 से आगे चलने को तैयार नहीं था। उम्मीदी की जानी चाहिए कि युवा नेतृत्व की नई पैघ कश्मीर की राजनीति के पाकिस्तान उन्मुख मठगंधियों को हाशिये पर धकेल देगी।

व्यवस्था में सुधार का दूसरा बड़ा कार्य निर्वाचन क्षेत्रों के परिसीमन का है। राजनीतिक सत्ता की भागीदारी से पीरपंजाल पर्वतमाला के दक्षिणी क्षेत्रों, जम्मू और डोडा की भूमिका में वृद्धि होगी। आजादी के बाद 70 वर्षों में हमारी सरकारों ने गुलाम कश्मीर के भारतीय कश्मीर के साथ एकीकरण का एजेंडा स्थगित कर रखा था। गुलाम कश्मीर के लिए हमारी नीतियां घोर निष्क्रियता की रही हैं। प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी से पहले नेतृत्व ने नीतिगत परिवर्तन की संभावना पर विचार ही नहीं किया। वे कहां सोच पाते कि 370 का समापन भी हो सकता है। कश्मीर के लिए दो केंद्रशासित राज्यों का विकल्प तो कल्पनाओं से भी परे था। नेहरू के जमाने से युद्धविराम रेखा को ही अंतरराष्ट्रीय सीमा मानने का अनुनय-विनय चल रहा था। हमारे चारों ओर विकल्पहीनता और समझौतापरस्ती का एक इंद्रजाल बुन दिया गया था। वह समस्त आभासी प्रमजाल एक ही वार में समाप्त हो गया। पहली बार हमें उस राष्ट्रशक्ति का आभास हो रहा है जिसकी हमें कभी आदत ही नहीं रही।

(लेखक पूर्व सैनिक एवं पूर्व प्रशासक हैं।

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कहां है महिला सशक्तिकरण ?

‘महिलाओं के लिए कब सुधरेंगे हालात’ शीर्षक से लिखे लेख में अद्वैता काला ने हैदराबाद में शर्मसार करने वाली घटना का जिक्र करते हुए समाज में महिलाओं के जिस दयनीय हालात का उल्लेख किया है वह वाकई में विचारणीय है। यहां एक प्रश्न पर विचार करने की दरकार है कि आखिर महिला सशक्तीकरण का राग अलापने वाले देश में महिलाएं इतनी असुरक्षित क्यों हैं? हालांकि यह पहली घटना नहीं, बल्कि एक श्रृंखला है। हमारे सामने आने वाली घटनाएं हैं, लेकिन कानून का इस पर कोई खास असर नहीं है। 2016 का एक आंकड़ा यह भी बताता है कि प्रत्येक दिन दुर्कर्म के 106 मामले सामने आते हैं। 2012 के निबंधा मामले के बाद ऐसा प्रतिव हो रहा था कि अब शायद ऐसे मामलों में कमी आएगी, लेकिन ऐसा कुछ नहीं हुआ। जहाँ 2012 में दुर्कर्म के 24206 मामले सामने आए वहीं 2017 में लगभग 30 फीसद की वृद्धि के साथ इसकी संख्या 32559 तक पहुंच चुकी थी। गौरतलब है कि ऐसी घटनाओं को अंजाम देने वाले दरिद्रों के मन में देश के कानून और प्रशासन का भय क्यों नहीं है? इसका सीधा कारण है हमारी न्याय व्यवस्था की शिथिलता। यह जानना आवश्यक है कि निर्भया मामले के सात साल हो गए, फिर भी उसके किसी दोषी को अभी तक सजा नहीं दी जा सकी है। यह कानून की शिथिलता नहीं तो और क्या है? इसके कारण ही अपराधियों के मन से डर गायब हो चुका है। यदि त्वरित कार्रवाई हो तो शायद इस तरह की दुष्टता ही ह्रदकत को अंजाम देने से पहले अपराधी हज़ार बार सोचेंगे। इस तरह देश की नारी शक्ति की मर्यादा को भंग होने से रोका जा सकेगा।

आशुतोष कुमार सिंह, सारण

मेलबाक्स

बापू के अनमोल विचार

दैनिक जागरण के 2 दिसंबर के अंक में प्रकाशित अवधेश कुमार का लेख, हिंदुत्व का अहित करते फर्जी परोकार, पढ़ा। लेखक ने बहुत अच्छी बात कही है कि आज लोग अपने को चमकाने के लिए कुछ भी बोल देते हैं जिसे कुछ गिनती के लोग सही मान लेते हैं और शुरू कर देते हैं बिना सोचे समझे उल्टी सीधी बयानबाजी। गाँडसे के विषय में भी यही हो रहा है। चंद लोग उसकी विचारधारा से सहमत होंगे, पर राजनीतिक रेटियां सँकने वाले उस इस तरह से पेश कर रहे हैं मानो सारा देश गोडसे और उसकी विचारधारा का अनुयायी हो गया हो। मेरे हिसाब से सत्ता पक्ष और विपक्ष दोनों को इस तरह की प्रवृति को पनपने से रोकना चाहिए। गोडसे हत्याका था और हत्याका रहेगा, क्योंकि आप किसी से असहमत हो सकते हैं, पर आपकी असहमति इतनी विकृत हो जाए कि आप सामने वाले की हत्या पर उतर आएँ तो इसे पागलपन ही कहा जाएगा और समाज में ऐसे पागलपन के लिए कोई जगह नहीं। दूसरी बात राष्ट्रपिता के बारे में उल्टा सीधा बोलने वाले जरा उस जीवन को जी कर तो देखें तो उन्हें पता चलेगा कि राष्ट्रपिता क्या थे? ध्यान रहे बापू के शरीर की हत्या हुई है उनके अनमोल विचार की नहीं। बापू की सोच इस देश के लिए प्रासंगिक थी, है ,और हमेशा रहेगी। कुछ लोग गांधी को बदनाम करने की कोशिश करते रहते हैं, हकीकत में उन्हें गांधी के बारे में कोई सही जानकारी नहीं है। ऐसे लोग गलत लोगों के गलत विचारों को आगे बढ़ा रहे होते हैं। गांधी को जानने के लिए उनके साहित्य को पढ़ना होगा। किसी की कही बातों से यह मान

लेना कि गांधी ऐसे थे, ठीक नहीं है।

सतीश त्यागी काकड़ा, इंदिरापुरम, गाजियाबाद

वने कठोर कानून

देश में दुर्कर्म की घटनाएं बढ़ती जा रही हैं और इस रोक पाने में राज्य एवं केंद्र सरकार विफल रही हैं। अभी हाल ही में तेलंगाना में दरिंदगी का रूप देखने को मिला जिससे पूरा देश शर्मसार है। ऐसी जघन्य घटनाओं से एक तरफ जहाँ दुर्कर्म-हत्या पीड़ित परिवार से संवेदनाएं जुड़ी हैं, वहीं सरकार के लिए पाठकण सादर आमंत्रित है। आप हमें पत्र भेजने के साथ ई-मेल भी कर सकते हैं।

अपने पत्र इस पते पर भेजें :
दैनिक जागरण, राष्ट्रीय संस्करण, डी-210-211, सेक्टर-63, नोएडा ई-मेल- mailbox@jagran.com

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

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खर्चीला संचार

संचार कंपनियां जिस तरह कुछ समय से अपने घाटे का ब्योरा दे रही थीं, उसी से जाहिर हो गया था कि मोबाइल फोन सेवाओं के शुल्क बढ़ सकते हैं। आखिरकार सभी बड़े नेटवर्क वाली कंपनियों ने अपने शुल्क में चालीस से पचास फीसद तक बढ़ातरी की घोषणा कर दी। वोडाफोन, एअरटेल, जियो और आइडिया ने अलग-अलग बयान जारी कर अपने बड़े हुए शुल्कों की जानकारी दी। पिछले करीब चार सालों में यह पहली बढ़ातरी है। अब उपभोक्ताओं को न सिर्फ मुफ्त बातचीत के लिए मिलने वाले असीमित समय और प्रतिदिन मिलने वाले इंटरनेट डाटा का लाभ मिलना कम हो जाएगा, बल्कि उन्हें नियमित शुल्क भी बढ़ी दर पर चुकाना पड़ेगा। यानी अब तक जो लोग सौ रुपए खर्च किया करते थे, उन्हें नई शुल्क दर के अनुसार करीब डेढ़ सौ रुपए खर्च करने पड़ेंगे। इस पर स्वाभाविक ही कुछ लोगों को हैरानी हो रही है कि ये कंपनियां जब पिछले चार सालों से मुफ्त या सस्ती सेवाएं उपलब्ध करा रही थीं, तो अचानक ऐसा क्या हुआ कि वे घाटा उठाने लगीं और उन्हें शुल्क की दरें बढ़ानी पड़ीं! हैरानी इस पर भी स्वाभाविक है कि मोबाइल कंपनियों की इस घोषणा पर दूरसंचार नियामक अधिकरण यानी ट्राई ने कोई प्रतिक्रिया नहीं दी है।

दूरसंचार के क्षेत्र में निजी कंपनियों को इसलिए कारोबार का मौका दिया गया था कि इससे संचार के क्षेत्र में प्रतिस्पर्धा बढ़ेगी और इसके फलस्वरूप संचार शुल्क घटेगा। इसके सकारात्मक नतीजे भी आए। संचार सेवाओं के शुल्क काफी कम हो गए। मोबाइल सेवाओं की पहुंच सामान्य आयवर्ग तक भी संभव हो सकी। स्मार्टफोनों का चलन बढ़ा और इंटरनेट सेवाओं का तेजी से विस्तार हुआ। सेवा क्षेत्र में जितनी तेजी से दूरसंचार का विस्तार हुआ, उतना किसी अन्य क्षेत्र में नहीं हुआ। इसी दौर में जियो ने असीमित मुफ्त बातचीत और इंटरनेट सेवाएं देने की लंबे समय तक योजनाएं चलाई। उसका नतीजा यह हुआ कि जिन लोगों के पास फोन सेवाएं नहीं पहुंची थीं, वे भी इसका लाभ उठाने लगे। आंकड़े बताते हैं कि संचार सेवाओं के मामले में भारत सबसे तेजी से उभरता देश हो गया। अब बहुत कम परिवार ऐसे हैं, जिनके पास मोबाइल सेवाओं की पहुंच नहीं है। यानी उपभोक्ताओं की संख्या निरंतर बढ़ी है। फिर दूरसंचार कंपनियों को घाटा कैसे उठाना पड़ रहा था।

इसकी कुछ वजहें समझी जा सकती हैं। एक तो यह कि निजी दूरसंचार कंपनियों ने प्रतिस्पर्धा के चलते बहुत तेजी से अपनी सेवाओं के विस्तार पर जोर दिया। उसमें सस्ती दर पर अधिक सेवाएं उपलब्ध कराने की योजनाएं भी चलाई। इस तरह उनका खर्च बढ़ता रहा और कमाई अपेक्षित रूप से कम हुई। फिर बाजार में मंदी, महंगाई बढ़ने और लोगों की कमाई घटने की वजह से बहुत सारे लोगों ने अपने खर्चों पर अंकुश लगाना शुरू कर दिया। इसका असर दूरसंचार कंपनियों के कारोबार पर भी स्वाभाविक रूप से पड़ा। महंगाई बढ़ती है तो सेवाएं भी भयग्रस्त होती हैं। पर जिस क्षेत्र में उपभोक्ता निरंतर बढ़ रहे हैं, जिस पर तमाम कारोबारी और सामाजिक गतिविधियों की निर्भरता बढ़ती जा रही है, उसमें लाभ कम रहने का तर्क खटकता ही है। सरकारी संचार सेवाओं की हालत बहुत खराब है, जिसकी वजह से अधिसंख्य लोग निजी संचार सेवाओं की तरफ मुड़ चुके हैं। ऐसे में कमजोर आर्थिक स्थिति वाले, जैसे ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में मोबाइल सेवाओं का लाभ लेने वाले, तेजी से घटेंगे। तब इन कंपनियों के लिए अपना घाटा पाटना और मुश्किल हो सकता है।

स्त्री का भय

इससे बड़ी विडंबना और क्या होगी कि हमारे देश में विकास के नारे के बीच बड़ी तादाद में महिलाएं खुद को, अमूमन हर जगह, असुरक्षित महसूस करती हैं। वे शायद ही कोई ऐसी जगह पाती हैं, जहां इस बात को लेकर आश्वस्त हों कि उनके खिलाफ कोई अपराधिक घटना नहीं होगी। खासतौर पर वे यौन हिंसा की प्रकृति की घटनाओं के खौफ से लगातार खुद को घिरी पाती हैं। यों यह एक आम और त्रासद हकीकत है, जिस पर कोई भी संवेदनशील व्यक्ति गौर कर सकता है, लेकिन अक्सर इस सामाजिक पहलू पर होने वाले अध्ययनों की रिपोर्टें में यही तथ्य उभर कर सामने आता है। इसी क्रम में सामाजिक उद्यम ‘सेप्टीपिन’, सरकारी संगठन कोरिया इंटरनेशनल कॉर्पोरेशन एजेंसी और एक स्वयंसेवी संगठन एशिया फाउंडेशन के संयुक्त अध्ययन में एक बार फिर यही विडंबना दर्ज हुई है कि देश के मुक्त शहरों में महिलाएं लगातार खुद को भयग्रस्त पाती हैं। रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक भोपाल, वल्लियार और जोधपुर में करीब नब्बे फीसद महिलाएं सुनसान और खाली इलाकों की वजह से खुद को असुरक्षित महसूस करती हैं। खासकर अविवाहित महिलाओं और छात्राओं को यौन हिंसा का खतरा ज्यादा है।

हालत यह है कि करीब दो तिहाई महिलाएं सार्वजनिक परिवहन की खाली या कम लोगों को ले जाती गाड़ियों में सफर करने से डरती हैं या सुरक्षा ईजामों की कमी की वजह से वे लगातार एक आशंका से घिरी रहती हैं। लगभग छियासी फीसद महिलाएं आसपास शराब या दूसरे नशीले पदार्थों की बिक्री से असुरक्षित महसूस करती हैं। आखिरकार ये कमियां किसकी लापरवाही से मौजूद हैं? विचित्र है कि महिलाओं को घूरने, पीछा करने, फब्तियां कसने और गलत तरीके से छूने जैसी घटनाओं में बढ़ोतरी हुई है, लेकिन इन्हें यौन उत्पीड़न के मामलों में गंभीर प्रकृति का नहीं माना जाता है। जबकि शुरुआती तौर पर घटने वाली ऐसी ही घटनाओं की अनदेखी और उनसे निपटने में बरती जाने वाली लापरवाही के बाद अपराधी प्रवृति वालों का मनोबल बढ़ता है। यह बलात्कार या यौन हिंसा की बड़ी वजह है। इसके अलावा, घर की दहलीज से बाहर घटने वाली ऐसी घटनाओं के समांतर महिलाओं के लिए घर की चारदिवारी भी कितनी सुरक्षित है, यह सभी जानते हैं। इस मसले पर भी अनेक अध्ययनों में बताया गया है कि महिलाओं और बच्चियों के यौन उत्पीड़न के ज्यादातर मामलों में आरोपी उनका कोई परिचित, यहां तक कि संबंधी भी होता है।

हाल ही में हैदराबाद की घटना के अलावा ऐसी तमाम घटनाओं ने देश भर में लोगों के भीतर आक्रोश पैदा किया है। दूसरी ओर, सरकारें अक्सर यह दावा करती रहती हैं कि कानून-व्यवस्था और सुरक्षित माहौल मुहैया कराने के मोर्चे पर कोई कमी नहीं की जाती है। लेकिन अगर यह दावा सच है तो ऐसा क्यों है कि सौ में नब्बे महिलाओं को लगभग हर वक्त खौफ से गुजरना पड़ता है। सवाल है कि जब पितृसत्तात्मक मानसिकता से लैस पुरुषों का एक बड़ा हिस्सा उपनी यौन कुंठा की वजह से कभी भी यौन हिंसा या उत्पीड़न करने को तैयार रहता है, तो ऐसी स्थिति में महिलाएं खुद को कैसे सुरक्षित महसूस करें? निश्चित रूप से सख्त कानूनी व्यवस्था और समयबद्ध न्यायिक प्रक्रिया ऐसे अपराधों पर लगाम लगाने का एक सबसे जरूरी हिस्सा हैं। लेकिन जब तक सामाजिक विकास नीतियों और उनमें समाज को पितृसत्तात्मक मूल्यों से मुक्ति के सूत्रों को प्रमुखता नहीं दी जाएगी, तब तक स्त्री के लिए अपने आसपास की दुनिया खोफ ही पैदा करेगी।

कल्पमेधा

अपनी वर्तमान प्रसन्नताओं को इस प्रकार भोगो कि भावी प्रसन्नताओं को क्षति न पहुंचे। –सेनेका

जन्मसंज्ञा

अतिक्रमण की भेंट चढ़ते तालाब

दिनेश प्रसाद मिश्र

हमारी सांस्कृतिक परंपरा में वर्षा जल को संरक्षित करने पर विशेष ध्यान दिया गया था, जिसके लिए जगह–जगह पोखर, तालाब, बावड़ी, कुएं आदि निर्मित कराए जाते थे, जिनमें वर्षा जल एकत्र होता और वह वर्ष भर जीव–जंतुओं सहित मनुष्यों के लिए भी उपलब्ध होता था। पर वैज्ञानिक प्रगति के नाम पर इन्हें संरक्षण न मिलने के कारण अब तक लगभग साढ़े चार हजार नदियां तथा बीस हजार झील, पोखर, तालाब आदि सूख गए हैं।

आज पूरे देश में पोखर और तालाब संकट में हैं। बहुत सारे तालाब या तो सूख गए हैं या अंतिम सांसें गिन रहे हैं। उत्तर प्रदेश में आगरा के राजपुर गांव में कभी अपार जल राशि रहा करती थी। वह जल आसपास के लोगों तथा जीव–जंतुओं के लिए जीवन अमृत प्रदान करता था, पर नवधनाद्यों की नजर उस पर ऐसी लगी कि आज उस तालाब के स्थान पर विशाल अट्‌टालिकाएं खड़ी हैं।

बदायूं जिले के अनेक तालाब भू माफिया की भेंट चढ़ चुके हैं। चंदोखर, पक्का तालाब तथा चमरतलैया, जिनका क्षेत्रफल पचास बीघे से भी अधिक था, अपना अस्तित्व गंवा चुके हैं। अब उनके स्थान पर कल्याण नगर, प्रोफेसर कॉलोनी जैसी पाश कॉलोनियां उग आई हैं। पक्का तालाब का संबंध सुरंग के माध्यम से राजा महिपाल के महल से था, जहां स्नान करने के लिए रानियां जाया करती थीं। अब पक्का तालाब का अवशेष मात्र शेष है। इसी प्रकार कानपुर–आगरा राजमार्ग पर एत्मादपुर

मेधा

भाषा का सवाल बचपन से लेकर अब तक न जाने कितने तरह से मन में उभरता रहा है। एक वजह तो यही समझ में आती है कि व्यक्ति की देह और मन की नाल मां के अलावा अगर किसी और शय से सबसे ज्यादा गहराई से जुड़ी होती है तो वह है अपनी भाषा। बचपन में मां की भाषा में सोना–जागना, हंसना–रोना हुआ और थोड़ी उम्र बढ़ने पर आस–पड़ोस की भाषा भी मां की सिखाई भाषा के ही दायरे में आ गई। कई बार मां की सिखाई भाषा के साथ आ मिली यह पड़ोस की भाषा भी अपनी मातृभाषा बन जाती है। हो सकता है, किन्हीं मामलों में ऐसा न होता हो, लेकिन अक्सर ऐसा ही होता है। तभी तो ज्यादातर भारतीय परिवार अपनी मूल भाषाई बनावट में बहुभाषी होता है।

मिसाल के लिए, मेरी मां के घर पटना में मगही बोली जाती थी। जब वे ब्याह कर गंगा की गोद से निकल बूढ़ी गंडक (नदी) के तट पर आईं तो उनके भाई–बंधु, परिवार–पड़ोस ही नहीं, मायके की भाषा भी छूटी। मायके की भाषा एकदम से छूट गई– ऐसा तो नहीं कह सकते, भाषा व्यक्ति के जीवित होते कभी छूटती नहीं। वह रहती आपके साथ ही है,

गांधी के मूल्य

महात्मा गांधी के हत्यारे नाथूराम गोडसे में दक्षिणपंथ की कट्टर सनक थी, बावजूद इसके संघ या भाजपा ने हाल के वर्षों में गांधी–विरोध या गोडसे का पक्ष नहीं लिया। कारण स्पष्ट है कि गांधी इस देश के जेहन में रचे–बसे हैं। हमारी राजनीति और इसके नुमाइंदों की वैचारिकता चाहे जितनी निकृष्ट हो जाए लेकिन राहत की बात है कि महात्मा गांधी की शहादत के इकहत्तर साल बाद, किसी सरकार या किसी पक्ष की इतनी हैसियत नहीं कि राष्ट्रपिता गांधी का खुलेआम विरोध कर उस पर कायम रह जाए। तर्कशील व्यक्ति भी यदि गांधी को भला–भुरा कहे तो आत्मग्लानि का शिकार हो जाता है।

भाजपा भी जानती है कि गांधी का क्षणिक विरोध कर वह एक जमात को अपने पक्ष में तो कर सकती है, लेकिन वह समर्थन अल्पकालिक ही होगा जिसके चलते एक बड़ा जनाधार उससे दूर चला जाएगा। कट्टरता, भेदभाव, नफरत, हिंसा, अतिवाद और द्वेष का जहर कितना ही लोगों के मन में भर दिया जाए, लेकिन अहिंसा, सत्य, भाईचारा, सौहार्द, प्रेम को मानवीय वृत्ति से आमजन स्थायी तौर पर दूर नहीं हो सकता। गांधी इसी मानवता के पर्याय थे, व्यावहारिक और स्वाभाविक थे। आज देश–दुनिया में गांधी के विचार, उनके सिद्धांत, नजरिया, सोच पढ़ाई जाती है। पांच बार शांति के नोबेल के लिए नामित होने वाले महात्मा गांधी को वह पुरस्कार न दिया जाना आज भी नोबेल कमेटी को अखरता है। बड़ी संजीदगी से असहमति का सम्मान करने और हर भावना व राय को व्यक्त करने के अधिकार के समर्थक गांधी स्वतंत्रता के प्रबल पक्षधर व हर तरह के भेदभाव के घोर विरोधी थे। निर्भीकता से

जन्मसंज्ञा

अतिक्रमण की भेंट चढ़ते तालाब

से पहले कभी ‘बुढ़िया का तालाब’ विशाल दरिया के रूप में स्थित था, जिसमें रजवाहे के माध्यम से पानी निरंतर आता रहता था और वह वर्ष पर्यंत लबालब भरा रहता था। अब वहां पर पानी का नामोनिशान नहीं है, बबूल सहित कांटेदार वृक्षों का जंगल खड़ा हो गया है। प्रयागराज स्थित तालाब नवल राय अब इतिहास का विषय बन गया है। उसके स्थान पर आज इस नाम का मोहल्ला कायम है। प्रयागराज में ही धरा गांव का तालाब अपने आप में अद्वितीय था। चालीस एकड़ में फैले इस तालाब की भूमि कंक्रीट की बनाई गई थी और उसमें चारों ओर से आकर बरसाती पानी जमा होता था। वह अड़ोस–पड़ोस के गांवों सहित जीव–जंतुओं के पेयजल के साथ–साथ फसलों की सिंचाई और अन्य आवश्यक कार्यों में उपयोग में लाने पर भी वर्ष पर्यंत लबालब भरा रहता था। पर आज वहां पानी के स्थान पर सूखी भूमि नजर आती है।

गोरखपुर स्थित असुरन पोखरा सन 1075 से 1077 के मध्य राजा शूरपाल ने विष्णु मंदिर के साथ बनवाया था। वह आज पानी रहित होकर असुरन मोहल्ले के नाम से गोरखपुर में जाना जाता है। कानपुर देहात घाटमुपुर स्थित कुम्भांडा देवी मंदिर का तालाब भी अपनी यही कहानी कह रहा है। गाजीपुर के सिद्ध पीठ भुइकुड़ा के उत्तरी छोर पर स्थित पोखरा चमत्कारी पोखरा के नाम से जाना जाता है, जिसे सिद्ध पीठ के दूसरे महान संत गुलाल साहब ने लगभग साढ़े पांच सौ साल पहले खुदवाया था। वह आज अंतिम सांसें गिन रहा है। इसी प्रकार अलीगढ़ से अतरौली स्थित राजमार्ग पुर गांव का तालाब, शाहजहाँपुर की तहसील तिलहर और पुवाया की सीमा में लघौला चेना में चौरासी बीघा के विशाल क्षेत्र में फैला तालाब, मेरठी के एक सौ नौ हेक्टेयर में फैला समदा ताल, नोएडा के बिलासपुर में स्थित चालीस बीघा में फैले बूढ़े बाबा का तालाब, बदायूं के अनेक तालाब भू माफियाओं की बुरी नजर का शिकार होकर अपने अस्तित्व को गांवों बैठे हैं और उनके पेट में कंक्रीट के जंगल उग कर मुहल्लों के रूप में परिवर्तित हो गए हैं। मुरादाबाद के खुशहालपुर रोड स्थित लोको शेड के पास स्थित तालाब तथा चित्रकूट जिला कलेक्ट्रेट के पास स्थित चंदेल राजाओं द्वारा बनवाए गए मिनी खजुराहो के नाम से विख्यात गणेश बाग स्थित बावड़ी और तालाब आज अंतिम सांसें ले रहे हैं। उनकी सुध लेने वाला कोई नहीं है। कभी समीपवर्ती गांव के सांस्कृतिक, धार्मिक आयोजनों के केंद्र बनने वाले ये तालाब आज मृतप्राय हो गए हैं।

मृतप्राय तालाब–पोखरों की संख्या पूरे देश में बीस

तालाबों की संख्या पूरे देश में बीस लाखों की है। तालाबों की संख्या में घटती गति को रोकने के लिए सरकारें अनेक कार्यक्रम चला रही हैं।

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भाषा का जीवन

लेकिन हृदय में रहने और जबान पर होने के बीच का फर्क करना भी जरूरी है। ससुराल के नए संसार में मां की एक नई भाषा से भेंट हुई, महिलाएं बज्जिका बोलती थीं और पुरुष अधिकतर खड़ी बोली हिंदी। चूँकि मेरा शहर मिथिलांचल के ज्यादा करीब है तो वहां मैथिली बोलने वाले भी बहुत लोग थे।

इस तरह मेरा बचपन जिन भाषाओं से समृद्ध हुआ, उनमें हिंदी, बज्जिका, मगही, मैथिली और भोजपुरी थीं। स्कूल में अंग्रेजी तो थी ही। बचपन में ही पिताजी के पुस्तकालय से गालिब और मीर को पढ़ने का चस्का लग गया, सो उर्दू ने भी मेरे भाषा–संसार में अपनी जगह बना ली। दिल्ली आने पर और जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय में दाखिल होने के बाद सुदूर असम से आई कारबियांग जनजाति की एक छात्रा से दोस्ती हुई। उनकी भाषा कार्बी के बारे में जाना तो उसकी सौंदी महक भी मेरे भाषा संसार को सुगंधित करने लगी। कई बंगाली दोस्तों की संगत का असर कहिए या फिर कवींद्र टैगोर की कविताओं का प्रभाव कि बांग्ला कभी भी दूसरे प्रांत की भाषा नहीं लगी। बांग्ला उतनी ही अपनी लगी, जितनी कि बज्जिका और भोजपुरी। हैदराबाद की एक सहेली ने तेलुगू को कब और कैसे मेरे भाषा–संसार में दाखिल

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हजार से ऊपर पहुंच गई है। उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार के आंकड़ों के अनुसार मेरठ में 1115, बुलंदशहर में 3997,

मुजफ्फरनगर में 767, शामली में 348, मुगदाबाद में 2532, अमरोहा में 2101, रामपुर में 2257, संभल में 599, अलीगढ़ में 1848, हाथरस में 94, प्रयागराज में 2800, प्रतापगढ़ में 1378, वाराणसी में 1519, बलिया में 4622, बरेली में 6500, शाहजहाँपुर में 5000, बदायूं में 2243, पीलीभीत में 1071, नोएडा में 1002, लखनऊ में 1345, कन्नौज में 1818, चित्रकूट में 1499, फतेहपुर में 6650, कानपुर देहात में 2750, आगरा मंडल में 9423, आजमगढ़ में 45,000, सोनभद्र में 7000, गोरखपुर में 5646 और बस्ती मंडल में 4200 पोखर और तालाब हैं, जिनमें से दस फीसद तालाबों में भी गत जून माह में पानी नहीं था।

प्रदेश सरकार इन तालाबों पर पानी भरवाने का प्रयास कर रही थी। पर मन्नरंगा के अंतर्गत किए गए प्रयासों के बावजूद जल भरे तालाबों की संख्या कुल

अनुपलब्धता के कारण आंदोलन और संघर्ष हो रहे हैं। दक्षिण भारत के चेन्नई से लेकर उत्तर भारत के अनेक शहरों में पेयजल की समस्या मुंह बाए खड़ी है। देश के लगभग सत्तर प्रतिशत घरों में शुद्ध पेयजल उपलब्ध नहीं है। लोग प्रदूषित पानी पीने को बाध्य हैं, जिसके चलते लगभग चार करोड़ लोग प्रतिवर्ष प्रदूषित पानी पीने से बीमार होते हैं और लगभग छह करोड़ लोग फ्लोराइड युक्त पानी पीने को विवश हैं। उन्हें पीने के लिए शुद्ध जल उपलब्ध नहीं है। देश में प्रतिवर्ष लगभग चार हजार अरब घन मीटर पानी वर्षा के जल के रूप में प्राप्त होता है, पर उसका लगभग आठ फीसद पानी ही हम संरक्षित कर पाते हैं। बाकी पानी नदियों, नालों के माध्यम से बह कर समुद्र में चला जाता है।

हमारी सांस्कृतिक परंपरा में वर्षा जल को संरक्षित करने पर विशेष ध्यान दिया गया था, जिसके लिए जगह–जगह पोखर, तालाब, बावड़ी, कुएं आदि निर्मित

कराए जाते थे, जिनमें वर्षा जल एकत्र होता और वह वर्ष भर जीव–जंतुओं सहित मनुष्यों के लिए भी उपलब्ध होता था। पर वैज्ञानिक प्रगति के नाम पर इन्हें संरक्षण न मिलने के कारण अब तक लगभग साढ़े चार हजार नदियां तथा बीस हजार झील, पोखर, तालाब आदि सूख गए हैं।

देश का कोई भी ऐसा हिस्सा या प्रदेश नहीं है, जहां पोखर और तालाब दिन–प्रतिदिन सूख न रहे हों तथा उन पर भू माफिया और बिल्डरों का

अवैध कब्जा न हुआ हो। इसे देखते हुए प्रकृति प्रेमी और जल संरक्षण तथा संवर्धन की दिशा में

कार्य कर रहे लोगों द्वारा समय–समय पर ऐसे जल स्रोतों की सुरक्षा के लिए माननीय उच्च

न्यायालय तथा उच्चतम न्यायालय में भी गुरार

लगाई गई। हिंचलाल तिवारी, जगपाल और अन्य की जनहित याचिका में माननीय उच्चतम

न्यायालय द्वारा देश के सारे झील–तालाब–झरनों को अतिक्रमण मुक्त करने का आदेश दिया गया था। इसके

बाद गाजीपुर के इकबाल अहमद की जनहित याचिका पर उच्च न्यायालय इलाहाबाद ने तालाबों से अतिक्रमण

हटाने के लिए 2005–06 में आदेश पारित करते हुए

कहा था कि 1952 के पहले के राजस्व अधिनियमों में

पोखर, तालाब आदि के रूप में अंकित जलाशयों को अतिक्रमण मुक्त कर उन्हें बहाल किया जाए। माननीय

न्यायालयों द्वारा पारित उक्त निर्णयों से समस्या विशेष का तो समाधान हुआ तथा कुछ जलाशयों को

जीवनदान मिला पर उनका व्यापक प्रभाव नहीं पड़ा। भू–माफिया, राजनेता और अधिकारियों के गडजोड़ की

वजह से जलाशयों की मुक्ति तथा उनकी बहाली की दिशा में ठोस कार्रवाई नहीं की गई।

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