TRAI versus Indian broadcasting

The TRAI's recent effort to micromanage India's television industry will end up hurting everyone — consumers, broadcasters and distributors

MEDIASCOPE

VANITA KOHLI-KHANDEKAR

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India or TRAI has managed to do the impossible. It has united Indian broadcasters. The head of every major broadcast firm in the country — NP Singh (Sony), Punit Goenka (Zee), Uday Shankar (Disney-Star), Aroon Purie (TV Today) among others — were on one podium in Mumbai last week. All of them compete bitterly for a share in India's ₹74,000 crore TV market. They have never spoken up for each other. But at a press conference called by the Indian Broadcasting Foundation or IBF they spoke in one voice. This is very unusual, but these are unusual times.

On January 1 this year, TRAI made changes to a tariff order it had implemented just 11 months ago in February 2019. On Friday last week (January 10) the IBF called its press conference. On Monday this week (January 13) the TRAI called a press conference to state its point of view. On Tuesday the IBF and its member broadcasters filed a writ petition in the Bombay High Court against the amendments.

The battle of wills between the world's second largest TV market and its regulator continues. And it will either the TV industry goes into decline or TRAI realises that in a highly competitive market broadcasters have every right to price their channels the way they want to. And that the prices of entertainment, sports, films or music cannot be set like that for voice or data or food grains. That bundling actually benefits consumers. That changing rules too frequently creates a negative spiral which affects all things an ideal regulator should facilitate — growth, jobs, taxes and consumer choice.

The battle could end if broadcasters and distributors learn to explain their point of view in a unified voice. After 28 years of private television, the average cable TV prices in India are among the lowest in the world and have remained way below inflation rates. Yet there is no single graph or chart from this huge industry that illustrates that — either to consumers or to regulators.

And the battle will definitely end when TRAI learns to do simple impact analysis. Analysing the effects and costs of regulating or not regulating requires phenomenal rigour but it would save the industry and consumers so much pain. That is what communications regulators like Ofcom of the UK do routinely.

If TRAI had done an impact analysis to start with it would not be making so many basic changes to an order issued less than a year back.

The tariff order first floated in 2016, came up with caps on channel prices, dos and don'ts on bundling and all sorts of rules. After much litigation it was implemented in February 2019. It helped increase transparency but also resulted in a rise in prices, complaints of complicated packages resulting in a shift from cable to DTH or from TV to online. In August 2019 the TRAI came up with a consultation paper that read like a rant against bundling. Then came this order.

If it is implemented there will be further rise in prices, more confusion on channels and packaging and even more money spent on communicating the changes. It will also mean the death of lifestyle, English several sports and niche channels. That means job and tax losses. Much of this is happening in a year when the economic slowdown has pushed ad growth from double to single digits.

Take prices, a point TRAI keeps harping on. They rose with the last order because it introduced, rightly, a network capacity fee of ₹130 per home per month (excluding taxes) for a basic tier of 100 free-to-air channels. In the new order this has been pushed to a maximum of ₹160 for 200 channels along with the new bundling curbs; it is inevitable that prices per home will go up.

This is where TRAI's beef with bundling makes no sense. Globally bundling is a done thing in most industries — airlines, hotels, media, consumer products and most importantly in telecom which TRAI regulates. In hotels, buffets are cheaper and offer more variety than an a la carte meal. A niche channel like Zee Café would be more expensive if it wasn't a part of a bundle that has the more popular Zee TV.

TRAI has at its disposal a huge amount of research resources, a lot of data and access to stakeholders. As a regulator it could connect with fellow regulators across the world to understand how an impact analysis could be done. That would save the industry, consumers and TRAI itself the trauma caused by its frequent flip-flops.

http://twitter.com/vanitakohlik

CHINESE WHISPERS

Protests in the sky

The protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, the National Register for Citizens, and the National Population Register (CAA-NRC-NPR henceforth) are set to dominate Uttarayan, one of Gujarat's most popular festivals, when the state hosts an international kite-flying contest. In Ahmedabad, members of civil society have distributed around 35,000 kites with anti-CAA-NRC-NPR slogans, primarily to the underprivileged. The kites carry slogans such as "Save Constitution, Save India" and "Hindu Muslim Bhai Bhai, CAA & NRC Bye Bye", and will be flown on Wednesday. Since Ahmedabad is the epicentre of the festival and "arbitrary imposition of Section 144 and rejection of applications for peaceful protests" are very common there, those behind the idea see this as an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone — get more visibility during a high-profile event and circumvent the restrictions. "If it's not possible on the ground, we will take the protests to the skies," said a protester.

Many players in Delhi polls

The Delhi Assembly polls look like a two-cornered fight between the Aam Aadmi Party, the party in power, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), but also a three-cornered one if one factors in the Congress as well. But a whole lot of smaller parties are also trying their luck. The Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), an ally of the BJP, announced on Tuesday that it would contest all the 70 seats and released its first list of 15 candidates. Not just the LJP, some other Bihar-based political parties, including the Janata Dal (United) and Rashtriya Janata Dal, are keen to field candidates as are parties that primarily have an influence in Uttar Pradesh, such as the Samajwadi Party. The Jannayak Janata Party (JJP), the BJP's coalition partner in the Haryana government, is also mulling fielding candidates in seats bordering that state. Last heard, the Delhi Pradesh National Panthers Party Working Committee met in New Delhi earlier this week and discussed whether the party should participate in the elections.

Maya's social engineering

Amid the fast-changing political scene, especially after Congress General Secretary (in charge of Uttar Pradesh) Priyanka Gandhi Vadra upped the ante against the Adityanath government in the state, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) President Mayawati is making quick amends. She has removed the party's Lok Sabha leader Danish Ali and replaced him by Ritesh Pandey, a Brahmin, to woo the upper castes. Interestingly, this is the fourth time in eight months that the Dalit czarina has effected such a rejig. Mayawati has termed the recent replacement balancing caste equations, since a Muslim, Munquad Ali, is currently the party's UP unit president. However, her critics have pointed out that another Brahmin, Satish Chandra Misra, is already national general secretary of the party.

The Railways' existential dilemma

A fare hike and restructuring proposal have raised afresh the debate over whether this state-owned transport utility is a service or a business

SHINE JACOB

During his tenure as Union Railways Minister, Lalu Prasad used to refer to the freight business as "Railway *ka kamau ghora*" (or cash cow). A decade after his stint in Rail Bhavan, this descriptor still applies. The state-owned carrier charges passengers recovers a little under half its cost on passenger service — charging about 36 paise per 10 km and spending 73 paise — with the freight business making up the difference.

This New Year's Eve, the issue came into stark focus again when a rise in passenger fares prompted talk about restructuring the Railways, raising private sector participation and focusing on "corporatisation". But with a social service obligation of over ₹35,000 crore — omitting staff welfare and law and order expenditures — the central question about the Railways has cropped up again: Is it a welfare service or a business?

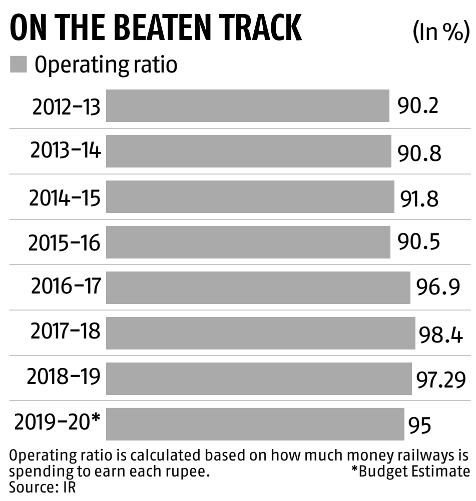
"Social commitments are natural for any public sector organisation. But if the Railways needs more private participation, the management should also see it as a business," said Prateek Kumar, an analyst with Antique Stock Broking.

A former Railway Board member thinks the two can run on parallel tracks. "Look at it as an FMCG company where the shampoo business may be making losses but its soap business may be making profits. Treat the passenger and freight business the same way," he said. The problem, however, does not resolve itself since the dependence on freight will remain.

The dichotomy came to the fore after the Railway Board raised fares for passenger trains by 1 to 4 paisa across various classes on December 31, which will add ₹2,300 crore to revenues, but excluded suburban and season tickets. "It is unfair to look at suburban trains as a business as we look at it as part of the transit-oriented development of our cities," a senior railways official. On suburban rail, the Railways recovers just 40 per cent of its costs from passengers.

The Railways' social obligations are as complex as they are extensive. These obligations include concessions to various categories of passengers; in suburban fares to various classes of tickets, season ticket concessions; in goods services, carriage of essential commodities at concessional rates. In addition, it continues to operate many uneconomic branch lines such as those in border areas and routes with a lower freight share.

All of this is reflected in the Railways' operating ratio (OR), or the money spent to earn each rupee (the lower the ratio, the healthier the utility). An ideal OR is 88. In December, the Comptroller and Auditor General said the Railways had recorded its worst OR in a decade at 98.44 in 2017-18 (it improved a tad in 2018-19 to 97.29 in 2018-19). But till September of the current financial year, the OR was as high as 121 per cent prompting Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said social obligations should not be part of calculating the OR but should be considered separately as a part for the budgetary support to the Railways.



Operating ratio is calculated based on how much money railways is spending to earn each rupee. *Budget Estimate

Source: IR

- Railways spend 36 paise per 10 km from passengers, while it spends around 73 paise for the same distance
- On suburban rail, the railways is recovering a mere 40 per cent from passengers.
- If finance ministry takes up pension liabilities that would bring down its operating ratio to as low as 70 per cent.

Subsidised fares are only one aspect of the financial impositions on the Railways. Recently, V K Yadav, Railway board chairman, pointed to the alarming fact that the organisation has over 1.3 million pensioners, more than its current employee base of 1.2 million employees. He, too, urged the finance ministries to take over these financial liabilities, which would improve the OR to 70 per cent. "Anything outside suburban passengers and strategic routes should be treated as a business. The extra money that can be used for infrastructure development is going nowhere because of this," said a former board member.

In its India 2020 report published last week, the International Energy Agency focused on the criticality of enhancing the role of the railways for India in 2050. It, too, has recommended phasing out the cross-subsidisation scheme to boost competitiveness.

This decision lies in the realm of politics. Old timers in the national transporter blame a 12-year no-fare hike period between 2002-03 and 2014 as the prime reason for the deterioration in Railway finances. In between, Lalu cut fares in 2009 and in 2012, Mamata Banerjee forced her party colleague Railway Minister Dinesh Trivedi to roll back a fare hike (he resigned).

Railways officials say the interdepartmental difference of opinion has also halted proposals to rationalise fare hikes. That is a key reason there is general approval for the recent decision to restructure the Railway Board by downsizing its strength and merging its eight cadres into a single Railway management service and corporatising production units.

How far this restructuring will streamline Railway operations on more commercial lines is an open question. Either way, the pressures to do so are becoming more acute because of an asymmetry in the transport business. First, the Railways relies on its freight business to cross-subsidise passenger fares, but the freight business has been steadily losing share to the private sector road transport business. At the very least, for a major public utility to rely on a shrinking market is surely bad business.

INNOCOLUMN

Fallout of acrimonious leadership disputes

Disputants must always try to find, directly or through well-wishers, a way to arrive at a compromise

R GOPALAKRISHNAN

I had written an article on *Ahankar-Mukt Leadership* (December 6, 2019). Even in successful companies, visible and acrimonious leadership disputes linger — like in L'Oréal, Viacom, Raymond, Infosys, Tata, Indigo and recently Murugappa. This article is not about who is right in a leaders' dispute. It merely emphasises the obvious: That bad and lasting consequences linger when a disgruntlement lands in the courts rather than get negotiated, away from public gaze. Dust is kicked up by the parties involved, each of whom feels that he or she has contributed to the company; there is usually an asymmetry in the respective perceptions of contribution. Busy lawyers argue in the courts about clauses in agreements or the articles of association.

Commercial disputes, usually about money, are inevitable, but leadership disputes, usually about ego and asmita, are not inevitable. A story from John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress is relevant here. An interpreter leads pilgrim Christian into a parlour, full of dust. The interpreter requests an attendant to sweep the parlour. There is so much dust that Christian can barely breathe. Next a woman sprinkles water on the dust and sweeps the room clean. The interpreter accompanying Christian explains his perspective, "The dust represents the sin of a person. The attendant, who raked up the dust, is the law. Law does not cleanse the sin, rather it arouses it without the power to subdue it. The woman who sprinkles water and sweeps the parlour clean is the gospel."

Leadership disputes tend to be about rights and legacy, with dollops of ego. No doubt these disputes are quite different from say, couple disputes. However, there is some similarity insofar as the disputants have been close, know a lot of internal secrets, and are required to be sensitive to multiple stakeholders, beyond the couple or the company. When a couple decides to separate in acrimony, friends, extended family and children are involved. Psychological studies suggest that messy divorces adversely affect the parent-child relationship, the child experiences a loss of home support, and the ability of the child to trust the parents gets impaired.

The Family Law Company, Exeter, summarised lessons from four well-known films dealing with divorce. In *The Parent Trap*, each parent tries to do what he or she considers the best for the children. Their actions end up separating the siblings. The parents fail to see the situation from the children's perspective. In their innocent world, children prefer to see a win-win outcome, in which their parents talk and be civil to each other. In *Kramer vs Kramer*, the son is torn between dad and mum. The film makes the point that it is wrong for either parent to assume that "what I want" equates with "what the child wants". If each parent seeks a win-lose outcome, then for sure, the child has a dilemma of lose-lose. The sense of loss is huge for the child. *Mrs Doubtfire* combines humour with deep messaging that the scars for the child can be long-lasting, and parents should find a mutually acceptable solution for themselves while avoiding harm to the child without public mud-slinging. In *The Squid and the Whale*, a successful novelist and his wife agree to separate, but there are two sons involved. As the divorce gets messier, the two sons take opposite sides of the arguments. This turns out to be devastating for the sons.

In a company leadership dispute, vital stakeholders — minority shareholders, business partners and employees, all watch aghast as private matters are washed in public through court proceedings. The disputants should empathise with the firm's highly engaged employees, many of whom would have served the firm for long, and very likely, would love the firm. Such employees feel distracted by the public reports and feel alienated from the leaders, whose leadership they might have experienced at work. The disputants should think of the damage to long-standing relations that have been built up by employees, vendors, customers and distributors.

Warring leaders play a win-lose game. Other stakeholders see the situation to have lose-lose outcome. The lesson is self-evident. Disputants should consciously shed their ego. By seriously considering the damage to corporate reputation, built over a long time by their predecessors, the disputants should find a way, directly or through well-wishers, to arrive at a negotiated compromise.

The writer is an author and corporate advisor. He is distinguished professor of IIT Kharagpur. He was a director at Tata Sons and a vice-chairman of Hindustan Unilever
Email: rgopal@themindworks.me

LETTERS

Think creatively

This refers to "Market sees a long pause from RBI as CPI hits 7.35%" (January 14). Since the 135 basis point cut in the repo rate is waiting for full transmission, any further cut would be worthless. The task of lifting the economy from the deep slowdown and to transform it into a $5trillion economy by 2024-25 needs fast growth in household savings to push investment. The current inflation is due mainly to the hike in the prices of food articles. The government must initiate corrective measures to resolve the supply-side bottlenecks for smooth flow of food products. It must not refrain from spending as envisaged in the Budget. Increasing the supply of credit and arresting the accumulation of bad assets is crucial to making the banking sector robust. Any push to the banks to reduce the lending rate will force them to cut the deposit rates and that would negatively impact resource mobilisation and ultimately the supply of credit.

VSK Pillai Kottayam

Wrong strategy

This refers to the report "Retail inflation surges to 7.35% in Dec, a 5.5-yr high" (January 14). The next three weeks will see analyses of the reasons for overshooting the upper limit of the inflation target accepted by the Reserve Bank of India and the possible implications thereof on the February deliberations of the Monetary Policy Committee. It may be recalled that it was under the able leadership of Raghuram Rajan that the statutorisation of the Monetary Policy Committee happened and a conservative and flexible moving inflation target of 4 plus or minus 2 per cent with different milestones achievable at different points of time was accepted the RBI.

The understanding was, the RBI would explain the reasons for the non-achievement of the inflation target if it happens. So, in all probability, when the MPC meets in February, there would be deliberations about the possible reasons for the rising trend in inflation and perhaps a plea for revision of the inflation target bargaining time for measures to bring the inflation down from the present level.

The government will have to listen to the RBI's plea for supportive fiscal policy measures for the above efforts, as the instrument of interest rate as a weapon to manage inflation has become blunt due to various other developments in the financial sector. The Budget 2020-21 might give some broad positive indications about what measures the government has in mind to balance the fiscal-monetary policy mismatch. It would be perilous if the government leaves this issue open and proceeds with the usual first-aid approach.

M G Warrier Mumbai

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

HAMBONE

Business Standard
Volume XXIV Number 109
MUMBAI | WEDNESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2020

Giving in to lobbying

Deadline extension for splitting CMD post is unfortunate

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has decided to give two more years to comply with its directive to separate the posts of managing director (MD) and chairman of the board in top 500 listed companies by market value. No clear reasons are available for this decision, but it comes after a great deal of lobbying by some of the companies affected. The rules stipulated that the chairman of the board should be a non-executive director and should not be related to the managing director or chief executive officer. It didn't apply to companies that didn't have identifiable promoters in accordance with the shareholding pattern. It is possible that powerful people leaned on the market regulator to extend the deadline for compliance, which it has now done till April 2022.

This is an unfortunate step. Companies should not be able to lobby aggressively for so self-serving an end, and somehow force the regulator into a retreat. Apparently, one of the stated reasons by the companies is the ongoing downturn. However, it is far from clear why improving governance standards must always happen during a boom. In fact, if better governance mechanisms can make companies more efficient, then it is one way of coping with a downturn. The purpose of the requirement was to bring Indian corporate governance practices in line with global standards, where the two roles have distinct responsibilities. The MD has operational control and is accountable to the board, while the chairman of the board has distinct strategic responsibilities and is accountable, along with the board, to the shareholders. The problem in India has always been "promoters" retaining excessive control. In family-run firms in particular, even when the original owners' stake has been somewhat diluted, the "promoter" continues to have more control than the ownership structure would dictate, in particular, through the office of chairman and MD. Separating the roles is necessary for more effective supervision and breaking promoters' hold — which is very much in the interests of broader economic efficiency as well as of shareholders in general. It is precisely those interests that the regulator is supposed to be speaking for and, thus, it is disappointing that in this case the regulator has chosen to give in to promoters.

The signal sent out by Sebi is even more disheartening than the substance of its action. The large companies in question had been given more than enough time to comply with the order, so an extension does not make sense — unless it is just another way of putting a much-needed reform on the back burner. Doing so this late in the day is, like all occasions when the rules of the game are changed in this manner, unfair to those who took the trouble of complying on time. They perhaps didn't know what the other half knew — after all, almost half the top 500 listed companies were yet to comply with the Sebi rule even though the deadline was just over two months away. Regulators' authority depends upon being seen as impartial and authoritative. If such measures are withdrawn, thanks to lobbying, then few will take regulators seriously. Given that Sebi has developed a reputation for being among India's most respected and independent regulators, its action is doubly disappointing.

Inflation blues

Onus of reviving growth will solely be on govt

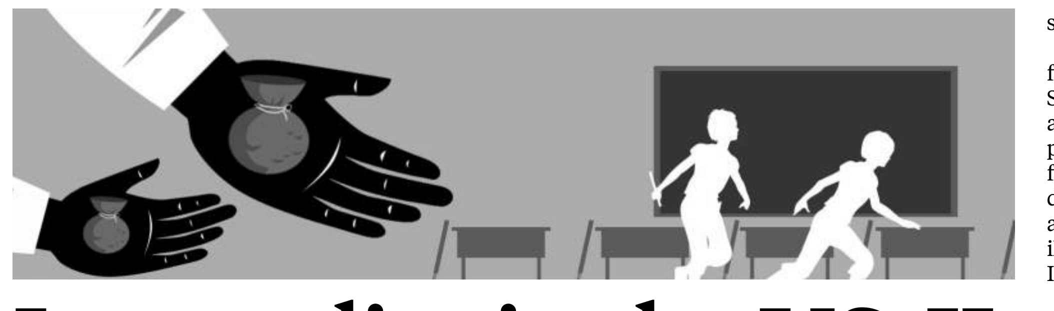
The latest inflation data has significantly increased the complexity of economic policymaking in India. Inflation, based on the consumer price index (CPI), increased sharply to 7.35 per cent in December, breaching the upper end of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) target band of 2-6 per cent. The food inflation rate was at 14.12 per cent, compared with 10.01 per cent in the previous month, largely on account of higher prices of vegetables and pulses. Retail inflation has breached the target at a time when growth has slowed sharply. The Indian economy is expected to grow at just 7.5 per cent in nominal terms in the current fiscal year.

After cutting policy rates by 135 basis points, the monetary policy committee (MPC) of the RBI rightly decided to keep interest rates unchanged in December, largely due to inflation risks. Apart from the monetary policy, a pick-up in retail inflation will also influence the Budget 2020-21. Low inflation has been one of the biggest achievements of the National Democratic Alliance government. The upcoming Budget will, thus, have a tough task of addressing both slowing economic growth and rising inflation. A few days after the presentation of the Budget, the MPC will deliberate the course of the monetary policy. Although some analysts believe that higher food inflation is transitory and will come down in the coming months, the MPC is likely to take a more cautious view. While core is at a comfortable level, the latest headline inflation reading has ruled out the possibility of a rate cut in the February meeting.

However, the bigger question now is: Till when will the MPC keep the policy rates on hold? There are two important points to note. First, as a research paper by the RBI — or the so-called Mint Street Memo — noted in May 2019 that large inflation-forecast errors in India had been related to unanticipated shocks from food prices, particularly those of perishables like vegetables. Cross-country evidence also suggests that forecast errors are associated with the weighting of food items in the CPI. Since the projections could not gauge food price shocks on the downside over the last few years, it is possible that it may not be able to do so even on the upside. Second, if the RBI fails to meet the inflation target for three consecutive quarters, it has to submit a report to the Central government, stating the reasons for failure, actions proposed, and the estimated time-period within which it will achieve the target. Undoubtedly, the central bank will want to avoid such an outcome.

Thus, the coming months would be the biggest test for the RBI since the adoption of the inflation-targeting framework. In this context, it will be important to see to what extent the RBI changes its inflation projection and how food prices behave in the near term. A research note by the State Bank of India shows that an increase in vegetable inflation leads to an increase in protein inflation with a lag of two months. Further, global food prices have moved up significantly. Thus, with upside risks to inflation, the monetary policy will not be in a position to support growth in the coming quarters. The onus of economic revival will now solely be on the government and the Budget will be expected to provide a road map.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Inequality in the US-II

Analysis of education data confirms it has worsened

PARTHASARATHI SHOME

Last month in this column ("Inequality in the US", *Business Standard*, December 18), I pointed to worsening inequality in the United States, where, by the end of the 20th century, economic growth slowed and inequality of income and wealth grew. Whatever gains there were, benefited smaller slices of the population at the top. Trend analysis using tax data received a thrust when Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez in a 2003 paper used French data to demonstrate "vertiginous" growth of income at the top during the 1970s and 1980s. US data was subsequently used to show growing inequality of income and its components[1].

The so-called "natural law" of the market that assured increased benefit to all as economies grew, failed. Inequality got exacerbated as the rate of return to capital exceeded the rate of economic growth. Robert Solow, well-known in the field of economic growth, iterated, "equitable growth is the central economic issue." Income distribution became increasingly unequal, more so with wealth. Some of the stock of wealth that comprises money, property, stocks, bonds and other capital, could be hidden and not counted. Gabriel Zucman claimed that $8.7 trillion in wealth or 11.5 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP) was held in offshore accounts (see my article on tax havens, November 20, 2019), of which 80 per cent by the top 1/10 of 1 per cent.

As income and wealth distribution worsened, microeconomic aspects began to be analysed revealing how worsening distribution obstructed the economy and its economic mobility. Heather Boushey has reviewed this literature comprehensively[2]. Raj Chetty viewed inequality as: "Fewer kids across the income distribution—in the middle class and at the bottom—end up doing better than their parents did", countering the achievements of the 1960s and 1970s. Chetty and others estimated that 70 per cent of the decrease in absolute mobility would not have occurred had the inequality in income and wealth been kept in check. Clearly, for the US youth to move up, the gap between incomes at the top and the bottom has to narrow.

Economic inequality led to health inequality that, in turn, exacerbated differences in lifelong skills people acquired. Claudia Goldin, Lawrence Katz, Janet Currie, Douglas Almond and Duncan Thomas demonstrated this in various ways. In the UK, 17,000 children born during one week in 1958 and tracked through adulthood, revealed that healthier ones passed school English and Maths more easily; they were 4-5 per cent more able to have jobs, and received higher wages at age 33. Based on this, in 1999, Currie and Rosemary Hyson concluded that children's health at birth relates to health during life. Adult employment is related to low birth weight. Thus, child and family characteristics at school entry explain future outcomes as much as the number of years of education. Epidemiologist David Barker pointed to mother's nutrition and health rather than only genetics or poor lifestyles as determinants of health disorders. Others related birth weight to the probability of graduating high school. These researchers thus have taken the view that prenatal conditions have lifelong ramifications.

Education differences have had a dual directional relation with inequality, one feeding the other. Out of the 31 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, the US ranks 20th in formal childcare, and 29th in preschool enrolment. An early "controlled experiment" by a number of joint authors more than half a century ago, studied 123 African American children from low-income Michigan families. At age 3-4, they were randomly assigned to, or excluded from, attending high quality pre-school. When they all reached around age 40 at the turn of the century, those who had attended pre-school, had experienced higher school completion rates, college attendance, higher earnings, more stable housing and family relationships, and fewer arrests[3].

The difference in education ultimately reflects different access to resources. Kerris Cooper and Kitty Stewart summarise research findings between 1988-and 2012 to conclude that poorer children perform poorly because they are poorer, implying that transferring money to poorer families would improve children's outcomes. This was established by Robert Dahl and Lance Lochner for children's performance in families that received transfers through the US's Earned Income Tax Credit programme.

Not only cash, but maternal nutrition, safe drinking water, pre-school services, school quality, neighbourhood safety, libraries, parks, zoos, museums, all have lasting effects on children. For this, feasibility to provide family care through paid parental leave ranks high, though the US lags behind Europe on this too. Garey Ramey and Valerie Ramey have argued that college educated parents spend more time with children to get them into competition for top college admissions. It is obvious that, otherwise, children would lose out in the competition.

To conclude, Boushay points out that children and their impact on the future of the US economy cannot be considered in a vacuum but as part of a holistic environment. She has argued in favour of continually disaggregating economic growth as it occurs, in order to view it more clearly and, accordingly, take policy action to make it less obstructive.

Accordingly, Boushey proposes a list of actions: (1) For every official updating of income and wealth growth statistics, show how that growth has been distributed across income and wealth deciles. I would say, do so for even fractions of the top decile since concentration is growing even within it. (2) Remove the hoarding of opportunity by the top which stops others from contributing to growth or receiving benefit from it. (3) To achieve this, socio-economic policy must target society from early on through access to high quality child care, preschool, public schools of high quality, and public health. (4) Prioritise infrastructure investments that buttress them. (5) Regulate those who subvert fair processes and manipulate economic growth in their own favour. (6) Rein in monopoly power that would generate more government revenue that could be used for the needed expenditures. And (7) boost the collective bargaining power of workers. Further (8) discourage capital use in investments such as financial products that do not lead to real productive activity or to an increase in economic instability.

1.-Lena Edlund, Wojciech Kopczuk and others have shown that inequality of women (versus men) and of minorities (versus the majority) has worsened even more than the inequality of income itself.
2. UnBound: How Inequality Constricts Our Economy and What We Can Do About It, Harvard University Press, 2019
3. Today such controlled experiments would be considered unethical in advanced economies inasmuch as half the needy children were excluded from a good early education. It is curious that controlled experiments in rudimentary environments continue to be conducted and awarded.

A wish list for agriculture

NEW DELHI DIARY

A K BHATTACHARYA

Is the Union government spending enough on agriculture? This question has gained salience in the run-up to the Budget to be presented on February 1, particularly because there is a demand that more resources should be allocated for the rural economy. The implicit idea is that an increase in the outlay for agriculture would result in higher disposable surplus in the hands of Indian farmers, who can then spend more and help revive demand and, therefore, the economy. What should the government do?

In the past many budgets of the Union government, finance ministers in their speeches would pay a lot of attention to the needs of farmers, but that would often be inversely proportional to the amount of expenditure allocated to the agricultural sector. Take, for instance, the Budget for 2017-18, for which the audited figures are now available. There were about a dozen paragraphs in the speech devoted to farmers. But the total expenditure on agriculture and allied activities, as given in the Budget At A Glance document released in July 2019, is estimated at ₹52,628 crore — just 2.45 per cent of the government's total expenditure in 2017-18.

This has changed a little after the announcement of the Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) programme in February 2019. Unveiled in the interim Budget for 2019-20, the scheme promised an annual cash transfer of ₹6,000 to all land-holding farmer families with less than two hectares of cultivable land. The scheme was introduced retrospectively from December 1, 2018, and covered almost 86 per cent of operational land holdings in the country.

The government's expenditure on agriculture and allied activities, consequently, went up to ₹86,602 crore in 2018-19, or about 3.5 per cent of the total government expenditure that year. Take away the PM-Kisan component from that outlay, the increase was very marginal with the government's farm sector outlay going up to only ₹66,602 crore or 2.7 per cent of the total government expenditure.

In 2019-20, when PM-Kisan had to be funded for the full year, the government's outlay on agriculture and allied activities saw a jump to ₹1.51 trillion, or about 5.4 per cent of the total government expenditure. Remember that almost half of this amount (₹75,000 crore) was meant for PM-Kisan. After the government expanded the coverage of PM-Kisan to include all land-holding farming families, irrespective of the size of their cultivable land, the annual outlay for this scheme was set to increase to ₹89,000 crore.

In other words, PM-Kisan has become the single largest item in the government's outlay for agriculture and allied activities. This is probably the most significant change in the government's budget exercise for farmers in recent years. Direct cash transfer to bank accounts of farmers has become the biggest item of expenditure on agriculture.

That perhaps is the way forward. Let there be more direct cash transfer to the farmer and let her decide where and how she wants to use that money. That would be like a partial income support scheme for rural India. The incremental effect on demand should be substantial, the impact on farmers' income would be significant and the additional expenditure burden as a result of that scheme would be relatively moderate.

Even if the annual cash transfer is doubled to ₹12,000 per family, the additional outgo would be just about ₹90,000 crore. In short, the Union Budget for 2020-21 could repackage NYAY (Nyuntam Aay Yojana or Minimum Income Guarantee Scheme), proposed by the Congress as part of its 2019 election manifesto and reap the benefits from reviving the rural economy. For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), it would be a convenient and useful marriage between politics and economics. In the process, the BJP could adopt yet another idea from the Congress, repackage it and implement it, as it did with several other programmes like the national rural employment guarantee scheme, Aadhaar-based direct benefit transfers and the soil health card scheme.

To be sure, the government's expenditure on agriculture is not restricted only to PM-Kisan or other schemes like crop insurance, interest subsidy for agricultural credit or pension for farmers. It also spends a substantial sum on fertiliser and food subsidies, which indirectly benefit the farmers. In 2019-20, for instance, the government is set to spend about ₹80,000 crore on fertiliser subsidy and another ₹1.84 trillion on food subsidy. The total government expenditure on schemes that benefit farmers, thus, is set to go up to ₹4.15 trillion in 2019-20, compared to ₹3.28 trillion in 2018-19 and ₹2.19 trillion in 2017-18.

What can the Budget do to make these subsidies more effective and targeted towards the intended beneficiaries? A scheme that the Budget should experiment with and implement across the country is to use the direct benefit transfer formula for food grain procurement as well. Already, the government has ensured that the subsidy for fertilisers is released only on the basis of their actual sale to farmers. It is now time to put in place a system where the procurement price for wheat and paddy is transferred directly to the farmers' bank accounts, if necessary through an Aadhaar-based identification system. The state governments in Odisha and Punjab are trying out similar schemes for farmers in their respective states. The Union Budget for 2020-21 could consider rolling out similar schemes all over the country. It would be able to cut its costs on operating the subsidies scheme by preventing leakages.

There is also a need for strengthening the existing food grain procurement system. The state-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) is in deep financial trouble as the government is yet to clear its dues of over ₹1.9 trillion. This is because for several years now, the government has been hiding its own expenditure liability on food procurement by transferring it to the FCI. Therefore, FCI's ability to increase capacity to store more food grain is now constrained by its financial problems. The Union Budget for 2020-21 must take bold steps to tackle the FCI mess. To begin with, the government must take a one-time hit in its accounts and clear the FCI's dues to help it start its operations on a clean slate. This could be followed up with steps like splitting the FCI into smaller units depending on their areas of operation and giving it operational autonomy.

Finally, the Budget must pay attention to the need for increasing investment in agriculture. As outlined in the recently released report on the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), the Budget must provide necessary outlays for upgrading 22,000 rural *haats* (marts) into Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAM), which should be exempted from the regulations of the agriculture produce market committees (APMCs) and linked to the national agriculture market (e-NAM) for online trading of commodities. There should also be adequate financial provisions for modernising the storage infrastructure and setting up cold storage facilities across the country to improve quality and shelf life of agricultural produce.

The NIP report has underlined the need for providing ₹50,000 crore for creating such infrastructure facilities for the agriculture sector from 2019-20 to 2024-25. The least the Union Budget for 2020-21 should do is to provide a road map for such infrastructure investments to be made for agriculture in the coming years.

India's higher learning curve

BOOK REVIEW

AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

If you are one of those Indians (like me) who scratch their chins in an attempt to understand news headlines about student protests in some of the elite educational institutions in India, this book will help equip yourself with the historical and social context of campus conflicts in India. Had we not all concluded that the merit-based super-competitive entrance exam system to gain entry into our top educational institutions like the IITs, the IIMs had pole vaulted us over issues like caste that we believed plagued ancient India and kept us back from our true destiny of being a world leading country? The author makes the case that "merit" itself is a not as straightforward as we think, and that caste lurks subtly behind it. Even if you disagree with the central role of caste in our higher education, as I must confess I disagree, there are many valuable insights in this book.

The author, Ajantha Subramanian, is a professor of anthropology at Harvard University, and brings an anthropologist's perspective to many issues that exist in India's higher education system. Though her focus is on the engineering education, the IITs and specifically, IIT Madras, many of her insights probably apply to all parts of the Indian higher education system.

An example of one of her valid insights is her analysis of a long-standing debate we have been having even in India: Whether higher education ought to teach specific job-enhancing skills versus mere intellectual empowerment that comes with a study of literature, history and so on. This debate, she points out, has been raging in India since the first engineering college in India, the Thomason College of Civil Engineering was set up by the British Raj in Roorkee, in 1847 in response to the demand for civil engineers to aid the construction of the Ganges Canal in the Northwest Provinces. But by the time Lord Curzon arrived in India as Viceroy, of the 191 colleges in British India, engineering colleges were a mere four in number — 145 were arts colleges with rest being spread across law (30), teaching (5), agriculture (3), medicine (4). What Lord George Hamilton, the secretary of state, said at that time about the dominance of literary education being "the joy of the Babu and anglicized Brahmin … produces a mass of discontented individuals who, if they cannot find government employment, spend their time abusing the government which has educated them", rings eerily true even today in the year 2020.

THE CASTE OF MERIT: Engineering Education In India
Author: Ajantha Subramanian
Publisher: Harvard
Price: $49.95,
Pages: 384

The author also provides an excellent account of the various waves that have driven the growth of engineering education in India. The first wave, as we noted above, was the demand for "PWD engineers", to be employed in the public construction efforts of the British Raj. Then came the pre-independence 1940s where the driving force for producing engineering graduates was the belief that "a strong industrial base is a precondition for development". The 1945 Sarkar Committee recommended the setting up of the IITs and the first, IIT Kharagpur, was set up in 1951 and soon after that the IITs in Bombay, Madras, Kanpur and Delhi. You can see the parallel between the Nehruvian-era belief that manufacturing was going to be the key to India's success with the fervour today for "Make in India".

The 1950s also saw the beginning of another dimension to the debate about higher education: Whether IITians should in their education be forced to "file, forge, and weld metal and sweat through hundreds of hours of this" or should they focus on achieving "world class" intellectual skills … a debate which is still going on.

The author's account of the mass exodus of IIT graduates to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s is another recurrent dimension to the Indian educational debate: The minor change being IITians now en masse join the IIMs and from there graduate to emigrate to work with Wall Street financial institutions.

The author's social anthropological eye is then cast on the IIT entrance exam tutorial classes originally centered on Kota and Hyderabad and now spread to many other cities. The author rightly raises the question whether the IIT entrance exam system which was created to make merit the main criterion for entrance to the IITs are in fact (she quotes Pierre Bourdieu here) "exams that conceal social selection under the guise of technical selection and merely legitimise the reproduction of social hierarchies by transmuting them into academic hierarchies?"

The reviewer (ajitb@rediffmail.com) is an internet entrepreneur and has in the past served on the Central Advisory Board on Education

Opinion

TUESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2020

CAUSE AND EFFECT
Chief minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar

How the question of NRC arise? We have no inkling that such an exercise would be conducted across the country. It would be needless and have no justification.

A step towards normalcy

SC does well to put curbs on govt's J&K mobile/net lockdown

THE SUPREME COURT, last week, in the context of the internet shutdown in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), ruled that the freedom of speech and right to carry on trade and business were protected by Article 19(1) of the Constitution and that the internet is now a crucial tool for these to be exercised. It also ruled that any curbs on these must be temporary, in keeping with the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Service) Rules, 2017, and must pass the test of proportionality, under Article 19(2) and (6). Thus, there is now no doubt that a prolonged shutdown, like that in J&K, is untenable. To the extent that the judgment will help matters normalise, aid the restitution of livelihoods, and even allow the people of the newly-declared Union Territory communicate with their families, it should restore the faith of the J&K body politic in the law of the land.

J&K has been in a virtual lockdown, with mobile and internet facilities suspended, for 163 days; some curbs have been lifted, but these are nowhere near what is needed to claim that there is normalcy in the UT. Meanwhile, Kashmiris living outside the states have had to learn of family members' death weeks after their passing, the UT has suffered a ₹10,000 crore loss in terms of suspended economic activity, as per the business community's estimates, and, indeed, people have had to physically go to a fire station to report a fire. To be sure, in the aftermath of the decision to revoke Article 370 of the Constitution and bifurcate the former state of J&K into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, there was a need to preempt the backlash, including possible violence and terror attacks, which would not have been possible without some manner of curbs on digital and telephonic communication. But, as the SC noted in its judgment, the state must pronounce complete, broad suspension of internet and mobile services as necessary and unavoidable only after having assessed the existence of "alternate less intrusive remedy". Indeed, while saying that the government is "entitled to restrict the freedom of speech and expression", the question is "one of extent rather than … the power to restrict". While local authorities make frequent use of Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to shut down mobile/internet services indiscriminately citing "national security" concerns, the court deemed such action abuse of power, and ordered the government to publish all orders on internet/mobile shutdowns to see if they met the test of proportionality. However, where the SC judgment falls short is in providing immediate, summary relief to the petitioners and the people of Kashmir. Instead, it creates the mechanism of a periodic review of the shutdown—with no such provision in the law—by the Union home ministry, which is akin to asking a cat to bell itself.

A recent research report pegged the economic cost of India's internet shutdowns in 2019 at $1.3 billion—third only to Iran and Sudan. Whether that estimate is a close approximate or not is difficult to say; indeed, a 2016 Brookings study pegged the cost of internet shutdowns across the globe in 2015 at $2.4 billion, while an Icrier study from 2018 said internet shutdowns in India between 2012 and 2017 cost the country $3 billion. But, a prolonged shutdown, in the manner that has happened in J&K, will surely break the economic backbone of the UT, and with the curbs on civilian, peaceful dissent that it places, it could fuel even worse disenchantment with the Indian state than what, the latter argues, is being contained by the lockdown.

Not just the Kochi builders

Panchayat permits were illegal, Kerala HC order helped

THE DEMOLITION OF the flats in Maradu municipality in Kerala's Ernakulam district are, without doubt, a ringing endorsement of the sanctity of the country's environmental laws. The Supreme Court ordered the demolition of all structures in the area built in violation of the Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) regulations. In doing so, it also invoked expert studies showing how the devastating floods faced by Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu in recent years could be blamed on "uncontrolled construction activities on river shores and unscrupulous trespass into the natural path of backwaters". But, the Maradu affair is also evidence of the complex maze that is the Indian administrative system, and the rather sordid way in which the government/courts remain insulated from the consequences of poor decisions while the masses and business pay the price.

In September 2006, the Maradu panchayat issued building permits to four companies to construct apartment complexes in an area designated as CRZ III. This itself was illegal, and twice over. First, CRZ III does not allow any construction within 200 metres of the coast; second, a panchayat is not allowed to give such permissions. After the panchayat permitted the construction, the Kerala Coastal Zone Management Authority (KCZMA) asked it to issue a show cause notice to the builders since the construction violated CRZ III; in other words, at least one part of the official machinery was doing its job. The builders, however, obtained an interim order in July 2007 from the Kerala High Court and resumed construction; indeed, in 2012 and 2016, the HC ruled in favour of the builders, saying that they couldn't be held responsible for the failure of the local government. The KCZMA had then approached the SC. A technical committee set up by the SC in 2018 found that the Maradu panchayat had violated the CRZ rules in giving the permission.

The new CZMP, the CZMP 2011, it is true, classified the area as CRZ II, where construction can be permitted beyond 50 metres from the coast; this, in fact, is the argument the builders used. But, the permission by the panchayat was given before this—in 2006—when it was a CRZ III zone. Also, even though the draft CZMP 2011 was made in that year, it was approved by the central government only in February 2019. Not surprisingly, then, in May last year, the SC ordered the demolition of the flats within a month, saying the permission granted by the panchayat was illegal and void. In September, the SC, taking up the matter *suo motu*, issued an ultimatum to the state government on the demolition. Since the flat-owners bought the flats at higher values than the ₹25 lakh compensation the SC had said they must get—the state is to collect it from the builders—there can be little doubt that they have been short-changed by the panchayat and the legal process.

HouseRULES

Maharashtra's liquor ordinance will lead to more harassment, state must find other ways to regulate home dine-ins

ALTHOUGH INDIA HAS scrapped many colonial laws since Independence, some stick out sorely even today. For instance, while prohibition has never really worked, states keep thinking of some form of it as a good idea. Andhra Pradesh is the latest to do so. There are also those who have some form of a partial ban, which is not only just as ineffective as a total ban but also signals contradictory goals. Take Maharashtra, for instance. On the one hand, it moved to allow bars to stay open till 5 am; and liquor shops can be in business till as late as 1 am on Christmas and New Years. On the other, it has moved to strengthen the prohibition law that dates back to 1949.

The ordinance, passed in September last year, sets a limit to possession of alcohol—given that it allows an individual to possess up to 12,000 litres, it shouldn't seem too restrictive. But, it has also imposed a rule whereby those hosting house parties of more than 10 people need to apply for alcohol licences. Though such regulations have existed for societies, restaurants and large gatherings, and other states also have restrictions, they are rarely observed. More importantly, if such rules are allowed, they shall only become a tool in the hands of local authorities to extort money. It is true that internet and platform economies have led to home dine-ins and apps like VizEat, and these put restaurants at a disadvantage. Restaurants have to apply for licences to serve liquor, whereas these establishments can do so without any restrictions. However, the state needs to find other ways to deal with the problem. One possible example can be asking such platforms to impose rules on behalf of the state—Uber and Ola, for instance, must ensure that no driver without a licence can register. The state needs to realise that old methods of regulation won't help with new, digital-age businesses.

TRADE WINDS

FAILURE OF SEZs AND A FORCEFUL COMEBACK OF THE *SWADESHI* IDEAS IN POLITICALLY ENABLING CONDITIONS HAS LED TO THE RETURN OF IMPORT PHOBIA OF THE 1960S AND 1970S

India turning the clock back on trade

AMITENDU PALIT

Senior research fellow and research lead (trade and economic policy), NUS. *Viewsare personal*

THE YEAR 2019 was notable for India's stubborn disengagement on trade. It also marked the exceptionally low priority trade has come to occupy in India's economic policy-making.

Historically, India was anti-trade for several years after independence. For four decades after independence, imports were limited to the 'essential' and 'high priority'. The ostensible reasons were encouraging local industry to develop sufficient capacities and capabilities. The eventual realisation that four decades of heavily protective import-substitution policies had resulted in large industrial shortages and inefficiencies, forced a re-think on trade. This coincided with negotiations going on at the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which led to the creation of the World Trade Organisation. India played an active role in establishing the WTO and formulating global trade rules. The active role was inspired by the belief that it needed to trade more with the rest of the world to maximise its own economic interests. It was equally influenced by the view that an outward-oriented, economically reformed India could be a model for achieving economic prosperity through greater participation in rules-based global trade for several other developing countries.

During the 1990s and the first decade of the current century, India remained engaged in global and regional trade consultations. At the WTO, its role became increasingly defensive. This was largely due to the push-back on the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). As most OECD countries resisted implementation of DDA without more significant market access concessions by developing countries, India begun leading the developing country resistance to such concessions. At the same time, like several other developing countries, it began exploring bilateral and regional FTAs, to get market access over and above that in the WTO. But, whether at the WTO or through FTAs, it remained engaged in trade talks, successfully pulling off various FTAs, first with smaller economies, and later, with advanced ones like Japan and Korea.

A significant change in India's trade engagement arose came in the middle of the last decade. India began turning back on various ongoing FTA negotiations. These included advanced negotiations like those with Australia, Canada, and the EU. The withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) last year, was, by far, the strongest example of India resorting to active disengagement on trade. Looking back, India appears to have turned around the last three decades in one single sweep by going back to the kind of disengagement it practised before the 1990s.

Today, trade in India suffers from a noticeable absence of champions. This wasn't so in the early years of the century. At a time when the Indian economy was growing at 8% annually and trade was expanding, the role of trade was considered virtuous for the economy's long-term growth. Indeed, it even inspired the government of the day to announce the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) strategy for prioritising exports through long-term financial incentives. Multiple imperfections led to limited results from the policy, with several SEZs getting scrapped, the policy inviting flak for encouraging dubious real estate deals, and state governments—who should have been at the forefront of the export drive—giving up on SEZs. A bottom-up, holistic implementation of the policy, backed by creation of durable infrastructure and trade facilitation might have resulted in much greater shares of Indian manufacturing and services in global trade.

> **Disengagement has... meant India not being involved in dialogues and discussions on the latest developments in global trade**

The failure of most SEZs to deliver, and the cynicism surrounding them, including politically catastrophic issues like acquisition of land for commercial and industrial development, pushed export promotion way down the priority ladder. A simultaneous forceful comeback of the *swadeshi* ideas in politically enabling conditions ensured the return of the import phobia of the 1960s and 1970s. Importing even for eventual exports, became a non-priority. Nowhere is this more evident than in the structuring of the GST, which, by not allowing exporters to avail exemptions on inputs used for manufacturing exports, has hit them hard.

As exports became low-priority, competitiveness and 'national interest' became useful grounds for disengaging from trade talks. The nearly five decades old logic of resisting opening up for fear of the adverse impact it would have on uncompetitive domestic industries has been reemployed successfully for disengaging from FTAs, particularly RCEP. While doing so, it has hardly been realised that the services currently driving the economy—hospitality, entertainment, education, and health—are not entirely domestic. The global exchanges prominent in these services necessitate India focusing closely on trade policies involving data, competition, investment, and standards—a far larger gamut of issues than India's sole point of obsession, i.e., tariffs.

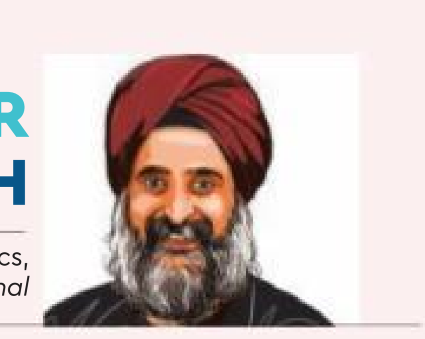
Disengagement has not just meant India losing out on multiple economic opportunities. It has also meant India not being involved in dialogues and discussions on latest developments in global trade, thereby losing out on the opportunity to contribute to the process of rule-making around these developments. Obsession with the local has shifted sight from the realisation that the local is hardly as local as it is made out to be. It has become more global than is imagined, and will become even more so, over time. A good dash of global is needed for nurturing the local, which is impossible without engagement.

Implementing India's economic strategy

NITI Aayog's strategy for new India @75 addresses some of the problems of the architecture of governance in India

NIRVIKAR SINGH

Professor of Economics, UC Santa Cruz. *Views are personal*



MY LAST COLUMN for 2019 reflected on India's lost year, where what can mildly be described as continued political missteps accumulated to the point of threatening the country's economic future. Nevertheless, one has to look to the future, and understand where there is room for making a positive difference. This involves thinking about India's economic strategy going forward. A year ago, I wrote two columns critically analysing a report titled *An Economic Strategy for India*, written by about a dozen premier economists with expertise on the Indian economy. The group included US- and India-based individuals in academia, the private sector, and international policy roles, but no one, as far as I could tell, working actively with the national government. The report said many of the right things, and my main concern was that not enough attention was given to focusing on India's lack of dynamism in the industrial sector, traditionally the core of economic development.

I have also been lamenting the lack of broad consultation of experts by the national government, but this thought prompted me to dig into what NITI Aayog, the government's premier think tank, has been doing. I discovered a significant report that was published a month before the "outsider" document I had discussed a year ago. *Strategy for a New India @75* is over 200 pages long, and identifies 41 areas for attention and focus. It is clear and well-written, the recommendations are good, and it has a foreword by the prime minister. Many experts were consulted, and it shows in the report's breadth and quality. Interestingly, there seems to be no overlap in the contributors to the two reports.

One major difference in the NITI Aayog report is that it doesn't give much attention to macroeconomic stability or to the need to clean up the mess in the financial sector. In some sense, these are preconditions that one can view as necessary, but at a different level than strategies for sustained growth. Given its length and the breadth of its coverage, it tackles many important issues that the "outsider" report neglects or does not emphasise enough. In particular, the seven sets of governance reforms, including civil service reform and modernisation of city governance, are given welcome prominence. I wish I had read this report a year earlier. But, since so little of what it recommends seems to have happened, perhaps it is not too late.

What do we learn from the NITI Aayog report—not just its content, but also its trajectory? In the rest of this column, I offer several tentative lessons. First, if the goal of creating NITI Aayog was to have a high-quality think tank, this report provides some validation. Freed of the futile and outmoded exercise of planning, and separated from the politics of allocating central government money to sub-national governments, the new organisation has great potential.

> **Any successful economic strategy will depend on systemic changes in the civil service, regulators, the judicial system, and of course, politicians**

Second, there is clearly considerable expertise within the system, or on its peripheries. I have been arguing that the government's economic policymakers should not hesitate to bring in outside expertise, but it seems that outsiders might also do better by interacting more on the ground with those who are engaged with the realities of India. Of course, as this year's Nobel Prize illustrated, there are such ties, particularly with NGOs and with some state governments, but deeper intellectual engagement across different groups must surely help, if only to refine ideas that most already agree on. A related point is that the internal document seems to me to have a clearer sense of the kind of structural transformation that India needs. The "outsider" report was, to some extent, circumscribed by the fashions of the economic profession, in academia and in international organisations. Economists need to engage more productively with non-economists.

Third, the NITI Aayog report and its overall efforts illustrate the continued weaknesses of economic policymaking in India. The report may have been launched with a splash, but I could find no evidence of updates, of assessment of progress, or linkages to all the other documents and ideas spread across the organisation's website. The report itself did suffer from the standard weakness of Indian government documents, having a long list of areas that need attention, without any clear prioritisation, systematic analysis of linkages between different areas, clearly presented pathways to implementation, or realistic timelines (India will turn 75 very soon).

The root cause is the internal organisation of India's national government, where the focus too easily becomes one of retaining and projecting political power. This tendency has been exacerbated in the current government. There is already too much centralisation of power and decision-making geographically, and further concentration within a small group at the Centre just makes everything worse. The NITI Aayog report does address some of these problems of the architecture of governance in India. Any successful economic strategy will depend on systemic changes in this architecture, including the civil service, regulators, the judicial system, and of course, politicians. Compared to what needs to be done on this front, the economics is relatively easy.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM's fallacious argument

Prime minister Narendra Modi bases his case for the CAA on the contention that the law is meant 'to give citizenship, not to take it away'. But, his line of argument does not hold. For one, religion is made the criterion for citizenship. For another, the law snatches the right to citizenship prospectively from Muslims on religious grounds. The CAA is unconscionable because it legalises religious discrimination. It is simplistic, shallow and fallacious for the PM to say from the headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission, of all places, that the CAA grants citizenship and does not snatch it away from anyone. The citizenship law should have been amended to give citizenship to all persecuted minorities of all religious persuasions from all neighbouring countries. Uighurs, Rohingyas, Ahmadiyyas, and Sri Lankan Hindus and Muslims, too, are human like Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs Christians and Zoroastrians from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. People persecuted are people persecuted. Why divide people who are essentially the same biologically on the basis of religion. No amount of rationalisation can alter the fact the CAA fundamentally changes the basis of citizenship. Modi's invocation of Mahatma Gandhi to justify a law that negates the constitutionally promised equality of religions is an affront to his memory. The incumbent PM who refused to wear a skull cap, referred to *kabristan* versus *shamshan* and exhorted people 'to identify rioters by their clothes' should know that Mahatma Gandhi was a martyr to the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity and avoid dragging his holy name to validate unholy things. The remark that 'CAA has made the world aware of Pakistan minorities' persecution' has brought out the Hindu revivalist in him. It is not clear whether Pakistan will now stop persecuting minorities fearing the amended citizenship law in India. One humble appeal to the Modi government is to let people have their peace of mind.

— G David Milton, Maruthancode

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

R.N.I. Reg. No. 6188/61 Printed for the proprietors, The Indian Express (P) Ltd by Vaidehi Chintaman Thakar at The Indian Express (P) Ltd Press, Plot No. EL-208, TTC Industrial Area, Mahape, Navi Mumbai-400 710 and published from Express Towers, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400 021. Editorial & Administrative Offices: Express Towers, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400 021. Phone: 22022627/67440000. Fax: 022-22856323.
Chairman of the Board: Viveck Goenka, Managing Editor: Sunil Jain, Resident Editor: Malini Bhupta* (*Responsible for selection of news under PRB Act)

ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

TV MOHANDAS PAI & S KRISHNAN

Pai is chairman, Aarin Capital Partners, and Krishnan is a tax consultant

Simplifying capital gains tax regime

A simple capital gains tax regime will help investors in compliance and the income-tax department in administration

IT WAS RECENTLY reported in the media that there are anomalies in the processing of I-T returns at the IT department's Central Processing Centre, resulting in incorrect computation of tax liability on capital gains. It's not surprising, since taxation of capital gains is one of the most complex regimes to understand. Holding periods are different for various types of assets. Tax rates are different for short-term and long-term gains, and are different for various assets. Exemptions are provided on meeting some preconditions and withdrawal of those exemptions when the preconditions are not met. In addition, some specified categories of long-term capital assets get the benefit of cost-inflation indexation, whereby the base cost of the asset is increased by the ratio of inflation in the year of sale and purchase. The rules for carry-forward and set-off are also not uniform. Short-term capital loss, which is carried forward from earlier years, can be adjusted against long-term capital gains as well as short-term capital gains, whereas long-term capital loss can be adjusted only against long-term capital gains!

Long-term capital gains (LTCG) arising from the transfer of a long-term capital asset are either taxed at a concessional rate in India or exempt from taxation on meeting some preconditions. A long-term capital asset is defined by the period of holding such capital asset. The de facto holding period for a long-term capital asset in India is more than 36 months immediately preceding the date of its transfer. However, this de facto period is modified for various types of assets. In the case of a share listed on a recognised stock exchange in India, the holding period is 12 months, while it is 24 months in the case of an unlisted share. The holding period in the case of a debenture listed on a recognised stock exchange in India is 12 months, while it is 36 months for unlisted debentures. In the case of an equity-oriented mutual fund unit, the holding period is 12 months, while it is 36 months for a debt-oriented mutual fund unit. An immovable property being land or building or both is considered long-term if the holding period is 24 months.

The capital gains tax rate is different for short-term and long-term assets, depending on the type of capital asset and payment of applicable securities transaction tax (STT). The accompanying table provides a summary of the tax rates and the tenure to determine long-term capital asset.

The LTCG exemption regime is further complicated with too many rules and restrictions, and is not uniformly applicable for all taxpayers. An individual or a HUF generating LTCG on transfer/sale of an existing residential house property is exempt to the extent the LTCG is used to buy or construct maximum of two new houses (residential property). However, LTCG on the sale of existing house property must not exceed ₹2 crore. The new properties must be purchased either one year before the sale or two years after the sale of the property. Or the new residential properties must be constructed within three years of the sale of the property. If the taxpayer is not able to use the capital gains to buy or construct new houses before the date of furnishing of the return of income, he or she should deposit the amount in the Capital Gains Accounts Scheme (CGAS), else the gains become taxable. This benefit can be claimed only once in the lifetime by an individual or a member of HUF. If full amount of LTCG is not reinvested, then pro rata relief is available.

LTCG arising on transfer of any capital asset not being a residential house is exempt from taxation if the taxpayer, being an individual or a HUF, has within a period of one year before or two years after the transfer date purchased, or within a period of three years after that date constructed one residential house in India. If full amount of LTCG is not used for the purchase or construction, then pro rata relief is available. The taxpayer will not be entitled to LTCG exemption if he or she (1) owns more than one residential house, other than the new asset, on the date of transfer of the original asset; or (2) purchases any residential house, other than the new asset, within a period of one year after the date of transfer of the original asset; or (3) constructs any residential house, other than the new asset, within a period of three years after the date of transfer of the original asset.

If a taxpayer within six months from the sale of land or building or both (residential or non-residential) has invested LTCG in long-term specified bonds issued by NHAI and REC or by the central government for a minimum period of five years, such LTCG shall be tax exempt to a maximum of ₹50 lakh. This exemption is available to any person. All of these are confusing to ordinary taxpayers, forcing them to seek professional help.

The finance minister, earlier this year, simplified the corporate tax regime by introducing two low-tax rates associated with no deductions and exemptions. A similar approach should be adopted for capital gains tax regime. An exclusive capital gains tax regime should be introduced for financial assets, whereby investments in equity and debt securities, whether listed or not, should be taxed in a uniform manner.

Various types of financial assets carry risks associated with returns. Defaults in interest payment of debt securities in India in the recent past indicate that debt securities also carry significant risk. There is no rationale for debt securities to be considered as long-term capital assets after a holding period of 36 months, instead of 12 months applicable for listed equity securities and equity mutual fund units. It is similar for the difference in tax rates. To take benefit of lower tax rates of equity securities, many investors opt to invest in arbitrage funds/hybrid funds, with the justification that the risk is similar to a debt fund and its taxation is similar to an equity fund, thereby possibly generating higher post-tax returns.

Investments in unlisted equity shares carry higher risks compared to listed equity shares. However, the holding period is 24 months for unlisted shares to qualify as a long-term capital asset and the tax rate is higher at 20% with indexation benefit. There is no rationale for this difference.

To rectify this anomaly, all investments in financial assets should be considered as long-term capital assets after 12 months of holding. Income-tax rate of 10% with an exemption up to ₹1 lakh should be extended to LTCG from all financial assets. Income-tax rate of 15% should be applicable for short-term capital gains from all financial assets. To incentivise investments in start-up companies, a tax deduction of 50% should be provided in the year of investment. Consequently, investments in listed and unlisted equity shares and debentures, and equity and debt mutual fund units, would be taxed in a similar manner. This will enable investors to choose investments based on risk and reward suitable to them, rather than driven by tax considerations.

Immovable property, being land or building, is considered long-term capital asset if held for a period of more than 24 months. LTCG from transfer of immovable property is subject to taxation at 20% with indexation benefits. The option of taxation at a lower rate of 10% without indexation benefit should also be extended to immovable property, which would then be similar to the rate applicable to financial assets. The lower tax rate of 10% would make the real estate sector attractive for investments, thereby helping real estate builders to reduce the volume of unsold inventory. A simple capital gains tax regime will help investors in compliance and the income-tax department in administration.

The tax rates and the tenure to determine long-term capital asset

Nature of asset	STCG tax rate	LTCG tax rate	Holding period for LTCG
Unlisted shares of a company	Regular income-tax rates applicable to various tax payers	**20%** with indexation benefit	24 months
Equity shares listed on a recognised stock exchange in India before February 1, 2018; applicable STT is paid; A unit of an equity oriented mutual fund	**15%**	If sold on or after April 1, 2018, 10% on LTCG exceeding ₹ 1 lakh. Capital gains up to January 31, 2018 is tax exempt. No indexation benefit	12 months
Equity shares listed on a recognised stock exchange in India after January 31, 2018; applicable STT is paid	**15%**	If sold on or after April 1, 2018, 10% on LTCG of more than ₹1 lakh. Indexation benefits apply. Cost will be indexed up to FY17-18	12 months
Equity shares listed on a recognised stock exchange in India on which STT is not paid (off-market transactions)	Regular income-tax rates applicable to various tax payers	**20%** with indexation benefit or 10% without indexation benefit, whichever is lower	12 months
Preference shares or non-convertible debentures listed on a recognised stock exchange in India (No STT is payable on a preference share or a non-convertible debenture)	Regular income-tax rates applicable to various tax payers	**20%** with indexation benefit or 10% without indexation benefit, whichever is lower	12 months
Units of debt mutual funds	Regular income-tax rates applicable to various tax payers	**20%** with indexation benefit or 10% without indexation benefit, whichever is lower	36 months
Immovable property being land or building or both	Regular income-tax rates applicable to various tax payers	**20%** with indexation benefit	24 months

In addition to income-tax, surcharge and cess as applicable are chargeable on the above tax rates

BIT BY BIT

How laptops are changing

NANDAGOPAL RAJAN

nandagopal.rajan@indianexpress.com

They are getting thinner, have foldable screens and almost day-long battery life

I CAN'T REMEMBER THE last time a Consumer Electronics Show generated so much excitement around laptops and so little around everything else. CES 2020 will stand out for the transitional year it has been for laptops. There are three big trends that emerged from the products launched that could underline how the laptop segment itself will pan out in the coming years.

To start with, there was clear indication that foldable laptops are something technologically possible now; companies have been working on foldable laptops for a while. Lenovo announced the ThinkPad X1 Fold, the first laptop with a foldable screen. The company's team in Japan spent well over four years figuring out the best possible iteration of such a device. A lot of effort seems to have gone into getting the screen, the materials behind it, and the hinge right. For any foldable device, the hinge will be key. Although foldable screen phones are available, the hinge issue hasn't really been solved. "Smartphone makers have to just cater to open-and-closed. But for laptops you need to work on everything in between, as far as folding screen goes," says Yasumichi Tsukamoto, director & principal engineer, System Innovation Commercial Notebook Development at Lenovo.

With the Yoga 5G, Lenovo is promising 24 hours of battery life! Almost unheard of when we think in terms of laptops

Intel and Dell, too, showcased their concepts of foldable laptops, but both seem to have different takes on the hinge. Justin Lyles, vice-president of Consumer Design at Dell, says we are going to see more dual display devices first. "There's a lot of opportunity here. But we want to make sure we don't misstep in that space by rushing into it too quickly," Lyles is very clear. "So you will see us explore different sizes of bendable displays over the next couple of years. We are really going to test this with users in different ways to make sure there's real good value before we release that to the customer."

The other big transition seems to be happening with battery life. With the Yoga 5G announced last week, Lenovo is promising 24 hours of battery life! Almost unheard of when we think in terms of laptops. Lenovo APAC president Ken Wong says the day-long battery life is like a smartphone experience. "We think the technology is very convincing. And it's very sellable," he says, adding how we will now be talking of battery life in terms of days and not hours.

There is also a trend that devices are much thinner than before. Yes, they have been becoming thin for years, but not across price points. In late 2019, Asus and AMD got together to showcase many new thin laptops across price points. Even an entry-level laptop can now be thin, even a gaming device for that matter. At CES, both Lenovo and Dell had many extremely thin laptops to display. Flipkart has announced its first private label laptop, the Falkon Aerbook—extremely thin when you consider its sub-₹40,000 price point.

While Lenovo is pushing its new Legion devices for gamers with a very thin chassis, Lyles is not convinced that thin and gaming are meant to go together, just yet. "A gaming device is not a thin Ultrabook-type device because the power required is much larger. It is a thicker, heavier device," he underlines. But across CES it was clear that gaming devices could become much thinner.

Also, AI is becoming more integral to laptops by optimising battery life based on usage, ensuring the laptop is locked when it's not in use, and even blurring the background while you make video calls. You will see more of these optimisations in devices launched this year.

Beyond these is the impending 5G revolution. While we all know it is coming, we don't know how it will play out. If 5G gives a huge bump to interactive, immersive experiences, we could see the laptop space heading towards another big pivot. But it is too early to take that call. For now, everyone is talking about 5G in terms of more download speeds, but this new technology could also let devices push all processing power to the cloud, unlocking themselves from issues of power and battery life. That could truly be a whole new world.

Making fiscal expansion effective

Current levels of inflation, especially core inflation, provide a conducive environment to increase spending

ANUJ AGARWAL

The author is an economist. Views are personal

THE LATEST ESTIMATE of India's growth for fiscal 2020, at 5%, is at a 11-year low. With every passing day comes a new anecdote of India's slowing growth. The most recent one was that of liquor sales taking a hit. Another one was Surat's diamond merchants and polishers suffering amidst the slowdown, and Nirav Modi's PNB scam case. Some interesting ones relate to innerwear sales and biscuits. A recent visit to a manufacturing facility made the ground-level impact of the slowdown clear—macro having a bearing at the micro level.

Amidst the ongoing slowdown, construction was banned in Delhi NCR to keep a check on air pollution. As a result, the demand for the product of this manufacturing plant took a hit. The plant was operating at around 60% capacity utilisation, and daily dispatches were down nearly 90%. As a result, some causal labourers (about 20% of the total workforce) were laid off. One can argue the very essence of casual/contact labour is to help the plant in tiding over highs and lows, nevertheless this meant loss of livelihood. The ancillary businesses that the plant supported in the vicinity had also taken a hit. Other industries in the area, too, were in a similar plight. Consumption in the area would take a big hit, leading to a lower demand for manufactured goods, and this vicious cycle might spill over to other sectors and industries.

Now, how do we revive demand and growth in such a scenario? While RBI is doing its bit by lowering policy rates and asking for a transmission, there is also a need for an expansionary fiscal policy. Breaching the fiscal deficit target (within acceptable limits) is not too big a sin, if it helps the economy tide over tough times. Some even question the sanctity of the 3% benchmark. On the fiscal front, the government has two levers to play with—expenditure and revenue. One way to provide stimulus is for the government to forego revenue by lowering taxes and duties. It has already announced corporate tax cuts, and there are expectations of concessions on personal income tax as well. Savings from reduction in corporate taxes aren't as huge as government estimates them to be, and there is no guarantee that these savings will translate into investment spending or increased payouts. The other option to provide fiscal stimulus is to increase spending. The quality, however, is crucial—increased spending should be focused on capacity creation and should ideally be capital expenditure.

Consider the case of the manufacturing plant. A reduction in government taxes both for the business as well as the individual employee won't be of any help. For the business, the demand for its output is weak amidst the slowdown. Employees of the plant are also witnessing this slowdown, and won't be too positive about future incomes and employment. For the workers who have been laid off, a reduction in income tax means nothing when there is no income. In such a scenario, increased demand/spending whether by the business or by individuals is unlikely. On the contrary, if the government decides to spend more on infrastructure projects, the demand for plant's output will increase. Employees will be confident about their future economic prospects. The plant will start to operate at a higher capacity utilisation rate. With increased demand, the business may be willing to hire more people to meet the increasing needs. In such a scenario, new investment by the business seems likely. Confident individuals are also likely to spend more.

The effectiveness of fiscal stimulus as increased spending versus tax cuts has been long debated by academicians. In a broad sense, with tax cuts, increase in revenue expenditure is assumed to precede and lead to increase in capital expenditure. Fiscal expansion via increased spending on infrastructure will lead to increased capital expenditure driving the increase in revenue expenditure—increased demand for capital goods, increased incomes for the people in those industries, and increased consumption spend. The advocates of lower taxes argue that tax cuts are self-financing by way of increased economic activity and higher tax collections in the future. In a similar way, increased fiscal spending of capital nature will lead to capacity creation and facilitate increased economic activity in the future. In the current scenario, fiscal expansion via increased government spending seems to be better suited. The effectiveness of tax cuts to stimulate demand and investments remains doubtful in a scenario of weak confidence. Moreover, direct tax cuts will have a limited impact given the following facts: With a population of around 1.3 billion, India has only 80 million individual taxpayers. Of this, around 22 million pay zero tax.

While the latest numbers suggest that fiscal deficit had reached 4% until November 2019, perhaps it is time to let go of the fiscal discipline and put faith into the Keynesian economic theory. Government consumption spending accounted for nearly a quarter of the growth in fiscal 2020—clearly, government spending is what is keeping the economy going. Public sector also accounts for nearly a quarter of capital formation. Current low levels of inflation, especially core inflation, provide a conducive environment to increase spending. The government must use the Budget for the next fiscal as an opportunity to jump-start the economy and revive all sectors, be it undergarments or auto.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
वर्ष 12 अंक 283

मुद्रास्फीति की चिंता

मुद्रास्फीति के ताजा आंकड़ों ने देश में आर्थिक नीति निर्माण की जटिलता को बढ़ा दिया है। उपभोक्ता मूल्य सूचकांक पर आधारित मुद्रास्फीति दिसंबर में बढ़कर 7.35 फीसदी हो गई। इस तरह उसने भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक के 2 से 6 फीसदी के दायरे को भी लांघ लिया। खाद्य मुद्रास्फीति 14.12 फीसदी रही जबकि इससे पिछले माह यह 10.01 फीसदी थी। इसके लिए सब्जियों और दालों की बढ़ी हुई कीमत उत्तरदायी थी। खुदरा महंगाई ने ऐसे वक्त तय लक्ष्य का उल्लंघन किया है जब वृद्धि में तेजी से धीमापन आया था। चालू वित्त वर्ष में अर्थव्यवस्था के 7.5 फीसदी की नॉमिनल दर से बढ़ने की उम्मीद है।

नीतिगत दरों में 135 आधार अंकों की कमी करने के बाद आरबीआई की मौद्रिक नीति समिति ने दिसंबर में ब्याज दरों में बदलाव नहीं करने का एकदम उचित निर्णय लिया है। ऐसा मोटे तौर पर मौद्रिक नीति संबंधी जोखिम के कारण किया गया। मौद्रिक नीति के अलावा खुदरा मुद्रास्फीति में इजाफा 2020-21 के बजट को भी प्रभावित करेगा। कम मुद्रास्फीति राजग सरकार की उपलब्धियों में से एक रही है। ऐसे में आगामी बजट में धीमी आर्थिक वृद्धि और बढ़ती मुद्रास्फीति दोनों को साधना आसान नहीं होगा।

बजट प्रस्तुत होने के कुछ दिन बाद एमपीसी मौद्रिक नीति की दिशा स्पष्ट करेगी। हालांकि कुछ विश्लेषकों का मानना है कि खाद्य वस्तुओं में उच्च मुद्रास्फीति अस्थायी है और आने वाले महीनों में इसमें कमी आएगी। एमपीसी को और सतर्कता बरतनी होगी। मूल मुद्रास्फीति जहां सहज स्तर पर है, वहीं ताजा शीर्ष मुद्रास्फीति के आंकड़े फरवरी की बैठक में दरों में किसी भी तरह की बढ़ोतरी की संभावना खारिज करते हैं।

बहरहाल बड़ा सवाल यह है कि आखिर एमपीसी कब तक दरों को लंबित रखेगी। दो बातें ध्यान देने लायक हैं। पहली, आरबीआई के मई 2019 के एक शोध पत्र में कहा गया कि मुद्रास्फीति के व्यापक अनुमानों में चूक होती है क्योंकि खाद्य कीमतों से लगने वाले झटकों का अंदाजा नहीं होता। खासतौर पर सब्जियों जैसी खराब होने वाली चीजों की कीमतों का।

पूरे देश से मिलने वाले प्रमाण यही सुझाव देते हैं कि अनुमान में कमियों का संबंध खुदरा मूल्य सूचकांक में खाद्य पदार्थों के भार से है। चूंकि बीते सालों में खाद्य कीमतों में गिरावट के अनुमान नहीं लगाए जा सके इसलिए कहा जा सकता है कि आने वाले समय में इसमें इजाफे के अनुमान लगाने में भी कठिनाई होगी। दूसरी बात, यदि आरबीआई लगातार तीन तिमाहियों तक मुद्रास्फीति के लक्ष्य हासिल करने में नाकाम रहा तो उसे केंद्र सरकार को रिपोर्ट प्रस्तुत करनी होगी। इसमें उसे नाकामी के कारण बताने होंगे और प्रस्तावित कदमों का जिक्र करना होगा। यह भी बताना होगा कि वह कितने समय में लक्ष्य को हासिल करेगा। जाहिर है केंद्रीय बैंक ऐसी स्थिति से बचना चाहेगा।

मुद्रास्फीति को लक्ष्य बनाने वाले ढांचे के कारण आने वाले महीनों में आरबीआई बड़ी परीक्षा भी होने वाली है। इस संदर्भ में यह देखना अहम होगा कि आखिर आरबीआई किस हद तक अपने मुद्रास्फीति संबंधी अनुमान बदलता है और निकट भविष्य में खाद्य कीमतें कैसा व्यवहार करती हैं। भारतीय स्टेट बैंक का एक शोध बताता है कि सब्जियों की मुद्रास्फीति में इजाफा होने के दो महीने बाद प्रोटीन की महंगाई में इजाफा होता है। इसके अतिरिक्त वैश्विक खाद्य कीमतों में भी अहम इजाफा हुआ है। ऐसे में मुद्रास्फीति में बढ़ोतरी के जोखिम के साथ मौद्रिक नीति आगामी तिमाहियों में वृद्धि को सहारा देने की स्थिति में नहीं होगी। ऐसे में आर्थिक स्थिति में सुधार की जिम्मेदारी पूरी तरह सरकार पर होगी। इसका खाका बजट में सामने आना चाहिए।

विनय सिन्हा

2020 में भी रहेगा 2019 की घटनाओं का असर

वर्ष 2019 की घटनाओं का धुंधलका भारत और पूरे विश्व पर और अधिक गहरा होता जाएगा। इस संबंध में विस्तार से जानकारी प्रदान कर रहे हैं **शंकर आचार्य**

वैश्विक स्तर पर और भारत के स्तर पर सन 2020 कैसा साबित हो सकता है? इस सवाल के जवाब की तलाश करते हुए मैं अनिश्चितता और अपर्याप्त जानकारी के धुंध को पार करने का प्रयास करता हूं तो हालिया समाप्त वर्ष 2019 की लंबी छायाएं मेरी राह रोक लेती हैं। सन 2019 न तो वैश्विक सहयोग के लिए, न ही वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए और न ही भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए बेहतर वर्ष था।

वैश्विक राजनीतिक और आर्थिक सहयोग

वैश्विक सहयोग के संपूर्ण फलक को देखें तो सन 2019 में भारी गिरावट देखने को मिली। व्यापक तौर पर देखें तो अमेरिका के राष्ट्रपति डॉनल्ड ट्रंप ने 2017 के बाद से नीतियों में लगातार बदलाव किए और उनकी बदौलत अंतरराष्ट्रीय मामलों में एकपक्षीय रुख आया। इसके अलावा बहुपक्षीय सहयोग और संधियों तथा संस्थानों के मामलों में भी उन्होंने निरंतर बदलाव किए। तीन उदाहरणों पर विचार करना आवश्यक है।

पहला, अंतरराष्ट्रीय व्यापार जगत की बात करें तो ट्रंप ने चीन, यूरोप और कुछ अन्य देशों के खिलाफ कारोबारी जंग की शुरुआत की। यह जंग जारी है और इसका असर वैश्विक व्यापार, निवेश और वृद्धि पर भी देखने को मिल रहा है। हालांकि चीन के साथ संभावित पहले चरण के समझौते से लाभ मिल सकता है लेकिन अभी यह स्पष्ट नहीं है कि यह किस हद तक होगा। विश्व व्यापार संगठन की विवाद निस्तारण वाली अपील संस्था में नियुक्तियों को व्यवस्थित तरीके से बाधित करके अमेरिकी प्रशासन ने यह सुनिश्चित कर दिया कि दिसंबर 2019 में यहां सात के बजाय केवल एक न्यायाधीश रह गया। इससे हुआ यह कि सदस्यों के बीच विवादित मसलों पर निर्णय के लिए अनिवार्य न्यूनतम तीन न्यायाधीश भी नहीं रह गए। अपील संस्था का कामकाज ठप हो गया और विश्व व्यापार अप्रत्याशित और खतरनाक रूप से ऐसी स्थिति का शिकार हो गया जहां विवाद निस्तारण की कोई ठोस व्यवस्था नहीं रही। इसका नकारात्मक असर 2020 में और आगे देखने को मिलेगा।

दूसरा, सन 2015 में जलवायु परिवर्तन पर हुए पेरिस समझौते से अब तक कार्बन उत्सर्जन नियंत्रण के क्षेत्र में बहुत अच्छे परिणाम हासिल नहीं हुए हैं। यकीनन जलवायु परिवर्तन की स्थिति निरंतर बिगड़ रही है। एक बार पुनः अमेरिका का ट्रंप प्रशासन इस बात का दोषी है कि उसने जून 2017 में अमेरिका के एकतरफा ढंग से बाहर निकलने का नोटिस दिया और अपनी नीतियों तथा संयुक्त राष्ट्र जलवायु सम्मेलन में असहयोग के जरिये समझौते की भावना के प्रतिकूल काम किया। गत माह मैड्रिड में ऐसे ही एक सम्मेलन का आयोजन किया गया लेकिन वहां भी कोई प्रगति नहीं हुई। कार्बन उत्सर्जन और जलवायु परिवर्तन के परिणामों के बारे में सर्वव्यापी रिपोर्ट होने के बावजूद ऐसा हो रहा है। लब्बोलुआब यह कि हम सन 2100 तक वैश्विक ताप में 3 डिग्री सेल्सियस की वृद्धि की दिशा में बढ़ रहे हैं जबकि अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर इसे 1.5 या 2 डिग्री सेल्सियस की वृद्धि तक रोकने की बात है।

तीसरा और सबसे अहम वैश्विक कृत्य है वैश्विक शांति जो 2019 में अमेरिका और रूस के बीच सन 1987 की एक संधि समाप्त होने के बाद से ही दबाव में है। इसके अलावा सामरिक हथियार कम करने संबंधी नई संधि को विस्तार नहीं मिल पाने, उत्तर कोरिया के परमाणु हथियार कार्यक्रम को सीमित रखने पर सहमति नहीं बन पाने और ईरान तथा अमेरिका (और उसके सहयोगियों इजरायल और सऊदी अरब) के बीच बढ़ते तनाव ने भी इसमें योगदान किया है। अमेरिका मई 2018 में 2015 की कई देशों वाली ईरान परमाणु संधि से एकपक्षीय रूप से अलग हो गया और उसने ईरान पर कई प्रतिबंध थोप दिए। पिछले दिनों अमेरिका द्वारा ईरान के एक शीर्ष जनरल की हत्या ने सन 2020 में पश्चिम एशिया में बड़े संघर्ष की राह प्रशस्त की है।

विश्व अर्थव्यवस्था

सन 2019 में वैश्विक आर्थिक वृद्धि घटकर 2.5 फीसदी रह गई। ऐसा तीन बड़ी अर्थव्यवस्थाओं में मंदी की वजह से हुआ। 21 लाख करोड़ डॉलर की अमेरिकी अर्थव्यवस्था की वृद्धि दर घटकर 2.4 फीसदी रह गई जबकि 19 लाख करोड़ डॉलर की यूरोपीय संघ की अर्थव्यवस्था 1.5 फीसदी और 14 लाख करोड़ डॉलर की चीनी अर्थव्यवस्था 6.1 फीसदी पर रही। दुनिया के सकल घरेलू उत्पाद में इन तीनों की हिस्सेदारी 60 फीसदी है। मंदी की बड़ी वजहों में अमेरिका में कर कटौती प्रोत्साहन में कमी, कारोबारी जंग, चीन का बढ़ता कर्ज और यूरोपीय संघ के वृद्धि के इंजन जर्मनी में आया धीमापन शामिल हैं।

अमेरिका और चीन में लगातार धीमापन आने और यूरोपीय संघ में मामूली बदलाव के अनुमान के बावजूद अक्टूबर 2019 में आईएमएफ के वैश्विक पूर्वानुमान में कहा गया कि 2020 में वैश्विक आर्थिक वृद्धि दर मामूली सुधरकर 2.7 फीसदी रहेगी। इसके लिए कुछ बड़ी उभरती अर्थव्यवस्थाओं के बेहतर प्रदर्शन की संभावना को वजह बताया गया है। इनमें ब्राजील, मैक्सिको, तुर्की भारत और सऊदी अरब जैसे देश शामिल हैं। परंतु पश्चिम एशिया में बढ़ते तनाव के साथ अब ये संभावनाएं धूमिल दिख रही हैं। ऐसे में कहा जा सकता है कि 2020 में वैश्विक वृद्धि 2019 से कमतर रह सकती है।

भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था

सितंबर 2019 तक की छह तिमाहियों में देश की आर्थिक वृद्धि 8 फीसदी से गिरकर 4.5 फीसदी रह गई। सन 2019-20 के पूरे वर्ष के लिए यह 5 फीसदी रह सकती है जो पूरे दशक का सबसे निचला स्तर है। आधिकारिक आंकड़े इससे कहीं अधिक हो सकते हैं। मंदी की वजहों पर पर्याप्त चर्चा हो चुकी है। इसमें वित्तीय क्षेत्र में तनाव और सरकारी उधारी शामिल हैं जिनके कारण निजी निवेश और खपत में कमी आई। प्रतिस्पर्धा में कमी के कारण जीडीपी में निर्यात की हिस्सेदारी कम हुई है, विनिर्माण कम हुआ है और प्रमुख सेवा क्षेत्रों मसलन दूरसंचार, विमानन और बिजली आदि में समस्याएं सामने आई हैं।

वृद्धि में हालिया गिरावट के पहले रोजगार और बेरोजगारी के आधिकारिक आंकड़ों ने बताया कि रोजगार की स्थिति खस्ता है। बीते दो वर्ष में मंदी बढ़ने के कारण हालात और खराब हुए हैं।

उत्पादन और रोजगार में सुधार की बहुत अधिक संभावना नहीं नजर आती। नीतिगत और संस्थागत बाधाएं भी राह का रोड़ा हैं। सन 2020 में संभावना यही है कि आर्थिक वृद्धि 5 फीसदी के आसपास बनी रहेगी। परंतु यदि पश्चिम एशिया में विवाद बढ़ता है तो इसमें काफी कमी आ सकती है।

(लेखक इक्रियर में मानद प्रोफेसर और देश के पूर्व मुख्य आर्थिक सलाहकार हैं। लेख में व्यक्त विचार निजी हैं।)

खूब नजर आने वाले कारोबारियों की सुनाई नहीं देती आवाज

जिंदगीनामा
कनिका दत्ता

भारत में कारोबार की स्थिति में कुछ बातें अवास्तविक हैं और पिछले सप्ताह मंगलवार के समाचारपत्रों से बेहतर इसे कुछ भी बयां नहीं कर पाता है। समाचारपत्रों में जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय (जेएनयू) के भीतर घुसकर मारपीट करने वाले नकाबपोश गुंडों के हमले से जुड़ी खबरें छाई हुई थीं। इन तस्वीरों के ठीक उलट एक और तस्वीर छपी थी जिसमें प्रधानमंत्री के साथ खड़े उद्योगपतियों का एक समूह नजर आ रहा था। ये सभी पुरुष एवं बुजुर्ग उद्योगपति अर्थव्यवस्था को मुश्किल स्थिति से बाहर निकालने के मुद्दे पर बुलाई गई बैठक में शामिल थे।

पिछले कुछ दिनों में बॉलीवुड हस्तियों के एक तबके ने जेएनयू में हुई हिंसा के खिलाफ खुलकर आवाज उठाई है। नागरिकता संशोधन अधिनियम (सीएए) पारित होने और जल्द ही देश भर में राष्ट्रीय जनसंख्या रजिस्टर (एनपीआर) की घोषणा भी विवादों में है। ये दोनों मुद्दे एक-दूसरे से जुड़े हुए नहीं हैं लेकिन उन्हें एक साथ जोड़कर नागरिक समाज के खिलाफ निष्ठुर बहुसंख्यकवाद के विरोध की बुलंद आवाज बना दिया गया है।

वैसे यह अजीब है कि किसी ने भी यह सवाल नहीं उठाया कि हमारा कारोबारी समुदाय दिखाई देने के बावजूद सुनाई क्यों नहीं दे रहा है? आखिरकार भारत के सबसे ताकतवर शख्स प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी तक उनकी पहुंच किसी भी अभिनेता, लेखक, गायक या डांसर से कहीं अधिक है।

गत 12 दिसंबर को सीएए पर राष्ट्रपति के दस्तखत होने के साथ ही देश भर में विरोध भड़क उठे थे। उसके बाद से प्रधानमंत्री कारोबारियों से समूह या व्यक्तिगत तौर पर कम-से-कम तीन बार मिले हैं। गत 20 दिसंबर को उन्होंने उद्योग मंडल एसोचैम के सम्मेलन को संबोधित किया। नए साल के पहले दिन प्रधानमंत्री ने 60 उद्यमियों एवं कारोबारी दिग्गजों से मुलाकात की, फिर 6 जनवरी को वह उद्योग जगत के दिग्गजों के एक और समूह से मिले।

आखिरी मुलाकात तो जेएनयू में हुई हिंसा के चंद घंटों बाद ही हुई थी। इस समूह में शामिल केवल एक उद्योगपति ने सार्वजनिक तौर पर अपनी राय रखी थी लेकिन यह साफ नहीं है कि उन्होंने प्रधानमंत्री के साथ बैठक में इसे उठाया या नहीं। वह आनंद महिंद्रा थे जिन्होंने एक ट्वीट में इसका जिक्र किया था। खुलकर अपनी बात कह चुके उद्योगपति इस मंत्रमुग्ध जमात से बाहर ही रहे लेकिन उन्होंने हिंसा की साधारण निंदा ही की। केवल हर्ष गोयनका ही पूरे साहस से कह पाए कि 'धार्मिक जंगल की आग ने पूरे देश को आगोश में ले रखा है'। इसे सत्तारूढ़ पार्टी के शासन एजेंडा की सीधी आलोचना माना गया। नौशाद फोर्ब्स ही अपने लेखों के जरिये कारोबारी समुदाय की नीति-निरपेक्ष चुप्पी का अपवाद बने रहे हैं।

चलिए, मोदी से मुलाकात करने वाले उद्योगपतियों को संदेह का लाभ दे देते हैं। शायद उन्होंने निजी तौर पर प्रधानमंत्री के समक्ष यह बात रखी हो कि एक लोकतांत्रिक देश में प्रदर्शन करने के लिए नागरिक समाज पर बेजा हमले करने से निवेशकों को आश्वस्त करने में शायद ही मदद मिलेगी। शायद उन्होंने यह भी कहा हो कि पुलिस के अपना दायित्व निभाने के बजाय राजनीतिक आकाओं के प्रति झुकाव दिखाने से वे लोग परेशान हो रहे हैं जो अपनी संपत्ति की सुरक्षा को लेकर चिंतित हैं?

हालांकि इस तरह की बातें कही जाने की संभावना बेहद कम ही हैं। अगर आप इस बात को ध्यान में रखें कि जोरदार तालियां बजाने के प्रधानमंत्री के अनुरोध को एसोचैम सम्मेलन में मौजूद कारोबारियों ने एक नहीं बल्कि दो बार पूरे जोश से पूरा किया।

क्या उन्होंने पूर्वानुमेय नीतिगत पथ की तत्काल जरूरत को लेकर प्रधानमंत्री को कोई सलाह दी? या फिर किसी ने यह कहा कि तीन साल पहले बिना किसी चेतावनी के अचानक ही 80 फीसदी नोट वापस लेने से इतनी समस्याएं हुई थीं कि आज भी उसका असर महसूस हो रहा है? या, अप्रत्यक्ष कर प्रणाली में व्यापक बदलाव के लिए एक साल की अग्रिम समयसीमा पर जोर देने से न तो कारोबारियों को फायदा हुआ है और न ही सरकार का राजस्व संग्रह ही बढ़ा है? या 'सशक्त रुपये' के लिए मजबूत मांग निर्यातकों के लिए मददगार नहीं रही है क्योंकि यह संरक्षणवाद की तरफ ले जाता है?

ऐसा होना संभव है लेकिन इसकी संभाव्यता कम है। एसोचैम बैठक की प्रतिक्रियाओं से यही लगता है कि कारोबार जगत सरकार से अर्थव्यवस्था को राहत देने की मांग कर रहा है क्योंकि सितंबर में घोषित कॉर्पोरेट कर कटौती से बात नहीं बन पाई है। इस तरह बहुत मुश्किल गुजरे साल के अंतिम दिन 31 दिसंबर को निर्मला सीतारमण ने 100 लाख करोड़ रुपये से अधिक की ढांचागत निवेश योजना की घोषणा कर दी। किसी को भी नहीं मालूम है कि इसके लिए पैसे कहां से आएंगे और न ही ढांचागत परियोजनाओं से जुड़े शुरुआती अवरोधों को दूर करने के तरीके बताए गए हैं। जो भी हो, जब सरकार के सामाजिक एजेंडा को नागरिक समाज रूपी अवरोध से टकराना पड़ रहा है तब यह ऐलान एक अच्छा प्रदर्शन है।

फिर भी, वर्ष 2014 के सुहाने दिनों से विषमता साफ दिखती है। उस समय कारोबारी नेता मेक इन इंडिया और स्टैंड अप इंडिया जैसे तमाम निवेश आयोजनों में उत्साह से हिस्सा लेते थे और प्रधानमंत्री की तारीफ में कसीदे पढ़ते थे। यह सबकुछ सारे टीवी चैनलों पर खुले दिल से प्रचारित किया जाता था।

लेकिन अब होने वाली ये बैठकें बंद दरवाजों के भीतर होती हैं और वहां होने वाली चर्चा के मुद्दे भी गोपनीय होते हैं। इसका मतलब है कि अपने कूटनीतिक अंदाज में भी कारोबारी प्रमुखों के पास अर्थव्यवस्था के प्रबंधन के बारे में कुछ अच्छा कहने के लिए बहुत बातें ही हैं।

ये कारोबारी नेता भारतीय समाज के विकास-पथ को लेकर भले ही अधिक फिक्र न करते हों लेकिन उन्हें यह बात समझनी ही होगी कि सत्ता के समक्ष सच्ची बात कहने से बचने का नुकसान खुद उनके कारोबार को भी उठाना होगा।

कानाफूसी

इनाम की बारी

मध्य प्रदेश कांग्रेस के कुछ वरिष्ठ नेताओं को जल्दी ही नए वर्ष का उपहार मिल सकता है। पार्टी राज्य में विभिन्न बोर्ड और निकायों के अध्यक्षों की नियुक्ति करने जा रही है। सूत्रों का कहना है कि इस दौरान उन नेताओं के नाम पर शायद ही विचार हो जिन्हें लोकसभा और विधानसभा चुनावों में टिकट दिया गया था। इसके बजाय पार्टी उन नेताओं को प्राथमिकता दे सकती है जो 15 वर्ष तक सत्ता से बाहर रहते हुए लगातार पार्टी के हितों के लिए संघर्ष करते रहे। जिन नामों की चर्चा चल रही है उनमें केके मिश्रा, शोभा ओझा और पंकज चतुर्वेदी हैं। पार्टी का राज्य और केंद्रीय नेतृत्व गुटबाजी से वाकिफ और चिंतित हैं क्योंकि इन नियुक्ति के बाद गुटबाजी और गंभीर हो सकती है। पार्टी महासचिव दीपक बाबरिया ने मुख्यमंत्री कमल नाथ से मुलाकात कर उनसे अखिल भारतीय कांग्रेस कमेटी और प्रदेश कांग्रेस कमेटी के बीच बेहतर तालमेल बिठाने को कहा है।

दोनों का फायदा

अफसरशाहों का निजी कंपनियों में शामिल होना कोई नई बात नहीं है लेकिन दागदार छवि वाले अधिकारियों का कर्ज में फंसी कंपनी में शामिल होना और उसका कायापलट कर देना अवश्य चकित करने वाली बात है। एक आईएएस अधिकारी जिनके खिलाफ धोखाधड़ी और रिश्वत का मामला था, ने अपने राज्य में सत्ता बदलने के बाद इस्तीफा दे दिया और उनके खिलाफ नई सरकार कोई मामला शुरू करती इससे पहले ही उन्होंने एक इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर कंपनी में काम करना शुरू कर दिया। कंपनी ने उन पर लगे दाग के बावजूद उन्हें अपने बोर्ड में शामिल किया। शायद ऐसा करते वक्त उनके पुराने अनुभव और संपर्कों का ध्यान रखा गया हो। एक प्रतिस्पर्धी ने कहा कि भले ही ऐसा हो लेकिन इस आधार पर कोई उनका आकलन नहीं करने वाला। बहरहाल जो भी हो, कहा जा सकता है कि कंपनी और अफसरशाह दोनों फायदे में रहे।

आपका पक्ष

गलती किसी की, सजा आम जनता को

केंद्र सरकार ने पिछले साल किसान सम्मान निधि योजना का शुभारंभ किया था। इस योजना के तहत किसानों को साल 6 हजार रुपये तीन किस्तों में दिए जाने का प्रावधान है। देश के सभी राज्यों में इस योजना का लाभ लघु एवं सीमांत किसानों को मिला है। लेकिन महाराष्ट्र में इस योजना की किस्त से संबंधित रोचक घटना पिछले दिनों मीडिया के माध्यम से सामने आई है। दरअसल पश्चिमी महाराष्ट्र के सांगली जिले में किसानों को इस योजना का लाभ लेने में कुछ परेशानियों का सामना करना पड़ा। प्रधानमंत्री किसान सम्मान निधि योजना के लिए किसानों का नामांकन किया जा रहा था। उस वक्त किसानों का नाम अंग्रेजी में अनुवाद हो गया। इस योजना के लिए पीएम किसान पोर्टल में नामांकन करना होता है। इस पोर्टल की इनपुट भाषा अंग्रेजी है। ऐसे में 'उत्तम' नाम के एक किसान का नाम ऑनलाइन रूप में 'बेस्ट' दिखाई पड़ा। इसी प्रकार 'सुतार' नाम 'कारपेंटर' में बदल गया। 'भगवान' नाम का अनुवाद 'लॉर्ड' हो गया। एक किसान जिनका नाम 'माली' था वह 'गार्डनर' में तब्दील हो गया। मीडिया में आई खबरों के अनुसार इससे जुड़े अधिकारी ने कहा कि बैंक खाता संख्या और आधार विवरण के आधार पर किसानों को खाते में राशि जमा कराई गई है। उन्होंने कहा कि यह डेटा प्रविष्टि की खामी थी जिसे सुधारा जा रहा है। बहरहाल सरकारी योजनाओं में अगर ऐसी समस्या आती है तो इसके लाभार्थियों के लिए यह परेशानी का सबब बन जाता है। देश में जिस प्रकार की सरकारी आंकड़ों की प्रविष्टि होती है उसमें नाम गलत होने, पता का गलत होना, जन्मतिथि का गलत होना आम बात है। मतदाता पहचान पत्र, आधार कार्ड, राशन कार्ड यहां तक कि पैन कार्ड में कुछ गलतियां निकल आती हैं जिसे बाद में सुधारा जाता है। इसे सुधारने में लोगों को अलग से परेशानी उठानी पड़ती है। मोटे तौर पर देखा जाए तो ऐसी गलतियां ऑपरेटरों द्वारा होती हैं जो सही नाम, पता, उम्र की प्रविष्टि नहीं कर पाते हैं जिसका खमियाजा लोगों को भुगतना पड़ता है। अतः सरकार ऐसे कुशल ऑपरेटरों द्वारा ही ऐसे कार्य कराए जिससे लोगों को दोबारा परेशानी नहीं हो या फिर सरकार को कुशल एवं प्रशिक्षित ऑपरेटरों की ही बहाली करनी चाहिए।

गरिमा सिंह, नोएडा

सरकारी दस्तावेजों जैसे मतदाता पहचान पत्र या आधार में नाम, पते की प्रविष्टि सही हो

बेरोजगार युवाओं को मौका देने की बारी

अगर सरकार बेरोजगारी को दूर करने के लिए छोटी बातों पर ध्यान दे तो कुछ हद तक इसमें कमी की जा सकती है। देश में कुछ सरकारी विभाग ऐसे हैं जिनमें अगर कोई कर्मचारी सेवानिवृत्त होता है तो अन्य कुछ विभागों में फिर से नौकरी के लिए दरवाजे खुले हैं। इसी तरह निजी क्षेत्र में भी ऐसी व्यवस्था है। सरकार और निजी क्षेत्र को चाहिए कि वे सरकारी या निजी कंपनियों से सेवानिवृत्त होने वाले व्यक्ति जो पेंशन की सुविधा लेते हों उन्हें नौकरी देने के बजाय बेरोजगार युवाओं को रोजगार देने का प्रावधान करें जो रोजगार पाने के लिए तरस रहे हैं। ऐसे व्यक्ति जो किसी विभाग से सेवानिवृत्त होते हैं और मोटी पेंशन लेते हैं, उनका नैतिक दायित्व बनता है कि वह न तो सरकारी और न ही किसी निजी क्षेत्र में नौकरी के लिए आवेदन करें, ताकि बेरोजगार युवाओं को नौकरी करने का मौका मिल सके।

राजेश कुमार चौहान, जालंधर

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

जनसत्ता

आतंक का दायरा

जिस दौर में पूरी दुनिया एक व्यापक और जटिल आतंकवाद की समस्या से जूझ रही है, उसमें किसी ऐसे व्यक्ति को आतंकियों के साथी के रूप में गिरफ्तार किया जाता है, जिसे आतंकवादियों से निपटने की जिम्मेदारी सौंपी गई थी, तो यह समझा जा सकता है कि इस समस्या की चुनौती कितनी गहरी है। खासतौर पर भारत ने आतंकवाद की पीड़ा जिस स्तर तक झेली है, वह किसी से छिपा नहीं है। लेकिन आतंकियों का सामना करने के लिए सरकार ने हर स्तर पर चौकसी बरती और यही वजह है कि आज आतंकवादियों के हौसले कमजोर हुए हैं। विडंबना यह है कि देश ने सुरक्षा व्यवस्था के तहत जिन लोगों को आतंकियों का सामना करने के लिए तैनात किया है, उनमें से ही कुछ लोग आतंकवादियों के साथी के तौर पर काम कर रहे थे। हालांकि देश का सुरक्षा तंत्र फिलहाल इतना चौकस है कि इसमें न केवल आतंकियों, बल्कि प्रच्छन्न रूप से उनका साथ देने वाले भी पकड़ में आ जाते हैं। गौरतलब है कि सोमवार को आई एक खबर के मुताबिक दक्षिण कश्मीर के कुलगाम इलाके में खुफिया सूचना मिलने के बाद शुरू किए गए सुरक्षा अभियान के दौरान जम्मू-कश्मीर में तैनात पुलिस उपाधीक्षक रैंक के एक अधिकारी को हिजबुल मुजाहिदीन के दो आतंकवादियों के साथ गिरफ्तार किया गया। तीनों एक ही वाहन में पकड़े गए और आशंका है कि वे किसी आतंकी वारदात को अंजाम देने के मकसद से कहीं जा रहे थे।

इससे ज्यादा अफसोस की बात और क्या होगी कि जिस पुलिस अफसर को पिछले साल श्रेष्ठ सेवाओं के लिए राष्ट्रपति पदक से सम्मानित किया गया था, उसके आतंकवादियों के साथ मिले होने की बात सामने आई। बेशक अभी गहन जांच के बाद स्थितियां और स्पष्ट होंगी कि पकड़ा गया डीएसपी किस स्तर तक इस आरोप में सहभागी था, लेकिन इससे इतना तो साफ हुआ ही है कि जिस तंत्र के बूते हमारे देश में एक बड़ी चुनौती का सामना करने का दावा किया जा रहा है, उसके भीतर भी कई तरह के खतरे मौजूद हैं। यों जांच के दायरे में शायद सामने आया एक और तथ्य हो कि संसद पर हमले के लिए मौत की सजा पा चुके एक आतंकवादी ने अपनी चिट्ठी में इसी अफसर पर मिलीभगत की अंगुली उठाई थी। इसका बस अंदाजा भर लगाया जा सकता है कि एक ओर समूचे देश में आतंकी तत्त्वों से निपटने के लिए एक चौकस तंत्र का गठन किया जा रहा है, संसाधन झोंके जा रहे हैं, दूसरी ओर उसी तंत्र में बैठा कोई व्यक्ति आतंकवादियों का मददगार निकल आता है।

हालांकि यह बेहद अफसोसनाक स्थिति है और देश के सुरक्षा तंत्र में एक बड़ी कोताही का सबूत भी कि उच्च पद पर बैठा पुलिस अधिकारी खुद ही आतंकियों के साथ पकड़ा गया। निश्चित तौर पर यह किसी इक्का-दुक्का पुलिस अफसर के आतंकियों के साथी के तौर पकड़े जाने का मामला है और उम्मीद यही की जानी चाहिए कि सुरक्षा बलों में आज भी इतनी विश्वसीयता कायम है कि वे देश की सुरक्षा जैसे सबसे संवेदनशील मसले पर कोई चूक बर्दाश्त नहीं करेंगे। इसके बावजूद यह समझना मुश्किल है कि इतने समय तक यह अफसर खुद उस महकमे में उच्च पद पर कैसे बना रहा, जिसका काम ही आतंकवादियों का सामना करना और खुफिया सूचनाएं हासिल कर देश के अर्धसैनिक सुरक्षा बलों को प्रेषित करना है। आखिर उसके बारे में खुफिया तंत्र को कोई सूचना कैसे नहीं मिल सकी और कैसे वह इतने समय से ऐसे काम में लगा हुआ था? क्या खुफिया सूचनाएं हासिल करने के इसी स्तर के बूते देश के सुरक्षा बल आतंकवाद से अपनी लड़ाई लड़ रहे हैं?

कर्ज माफी का बोझ

किसानों की कर्ज माफी अर्थव्यवस्था पर किस कदर भारी पड़ती जा रही है, इसका पता इस तथ्य से चलता है कि पिछले एक दशक में किसानों के करीब पौने पांच लाख करोड़ के कर्ज माफ कर दिए गए। इसमें दो लाख करोड़ रुपए तो पिछले दो साल में माफ किए गए। क्या यह गंभीर चिंता का विषय नहीं होना चाहिए कि एक तरफ तो हम किसानों के कर्ज माफ करते जा रहे हैं, लेकिन किसान की हालत में कोई सुधार नहीं हो रहा है। ऐसे तो कर्ज देने और माफ करने का चक्र कभी टूटने वाला नहीं। किसानों की कर्ज माफी को लेकर एसबीआइ रिसर्च की ताजा चौंकाने वाली है। इसमें साफ कहा गया है कि पिछले एक दशक में जितनी रकम किसानों को कर्ज के रूप में बांट दी गई है, वह देश के उद्योग जगत के फंसे हुए कर्ज यानी एनपीए का बयासी फीसद है। जाहिर है, अगर कुछ समय और किसानों को कर्ज माफी का यह झुनझुना थमाया जाता रहा है तो देश के समक्ष एनपीए का एक और पहाड़ खड़ा हो जाएगा।

किसानों की कर्ज माफी को लेकर पहले भी सवाल उठते रहे हैं। विशेषज्ञों का मानना रहा है कि किसानों की दशा सुधारने के लिए कर्ज माफी कोई स्थायी समाधान नहीं है। इससे न तो किसानों की समस्याएं ही दूर हो पाती हैं, बल्कि सरकारी खजाने पर बोझ और बढ़ता चला जाता है। भारत में यह हमेशा की समस्या रही है कि कर्ज माफी को हमारे राजनीतिक दल और सरकारें किसानों के वोट हासिल करने के हथियार के रूप में इस्तेमाल करते आए हैं। लेकिन किसान की बुनियादी समस्याओं के समाधान की दिशा में कोई कारगर प्रयास शायद ही हुआ हो। इसलिए भारत का किसान खासतौर से छोटे सीमांत किसान आज भी उसी हालत में हैं जो दशकों से चली आ रही है। पिछले दो साल में आंध्र प्रदेश, तेलंगाना, तमिलनाडु, उत्तर प्रदेश, महाराष्ट्र, कर्नाटक, पंजाब, छत्तीसगढ़ और राजस्थान में किसानों के कर्ज माफ होते रहे। अगर देश के कृषि क्षेत्र के लिए उचित नीतियां बनतीं और लागू होतीं तो आज भारत के करोड़ों किसान दयनीय हालत में नहीं होते और आत्महत्या करने को मजबूर नहीं होते। कृषि कर्जमाफी के आंकड़े बता रहे हैं कि पिछले वित्त वर्ष यानी 2018-19 में कृषि कर्ज का एनपीए एक लाख करोड़ रुपए से निकल गया था, जो इस वक्त देश के सभी वित्तीय संस्थानों के कुल एनपीए 8.79 लाख करोड़ का साढ़े बारह फीसद बैठता है। नतीजे में सिर्फ यही कहा जा सकता है कि किसानों के लिए पैसा तो बहाया जा रहा है, पर वह बेकार जा रहा है।

दो साल पहले नीति आयोग और रिजर्व बैंक तक ने भी किसानों के कर्ज माफ करने को लेकर अपनी असहमति जताई थी। नीति आयोग ने तब साफ कहा था कि कर्ज माफी का फायदा एक सीमित वर्ग जो दस-पंद्रह फीसद से ज्यादा नहीं है, को ही पहुंचता है, इसलिए इसे किसानों की समस्या के हल में रूप में देखना व्यावहारिक नहीं है। रिजर्व बैंक भी किसानों के कर्ज माफ करने के पक्ष में इसलिए नहीं रहा है, क्योंकि बड़े पैमाने पर कृषि कर्ज माफी से सरकारी खजाने पर बोझ तो पड़ता ही है, महंगाई भी बढ़ती है। किसानों की मदद लिए बेहतर रास्ता यह हो सकता है कि उन्हें कर्ज माफी जैसी सुविधा के बजाय खेती की जरूरत का सामान मुहैया कराया जाए। ऐसी दूरगामी योजनाएं बनें जिनसे किसान आर्थिक रूप से स्वावलंबी बन सके और उसे कर्ज की जरूरत ही न पड़े।

कल्पमेधा

कला की कीमत नतीजे से नहीं,
उसके कलात्मक गुणों से
आंकी जाती है।
- गोर्की

चुनौती बनती मानसिक बीमारियां

मोनिका शर्मा

भारत में तैंतालीस फीसद लोग ही मानसिक बीमारियों के इलाज के लिए अस्पताल जाने की जरूरत महसूस करते हैं। दूरदराज के गांवों-कस्बों में तो ऐसी बीमारी को अंधविश्वास तक से जोड़ दिया जाता है। ऐसे में न केवल मानसिक स्वास्थ्य से जुड़ी चिकित्सकीय सेवाओं की पहुंच बढ़ाने की दरकार है, बल्कि इन व्याधियों के प्रति जन-जागरूकता लाने की की जरूरत है।

भारत में मानसिक स्वास्थ्य से जुड़ी समस्याएं गंभीर रूप लेती जा रही हैं। इस बारे में हाल में लांसेट साइकियाट्री में 'इंडिया स्टेट लेवल डिजीज बर्डन इनिशिएटिव' द्वारा किया गया अध्ययन छपा है, जो देश में मानसिक स्वास्थ्य से जुड़े चिंताजनक हालात सामने रखता है। इस अध्ययन के अनुसार वर्ष 2017 में करीब बीस करोड़ भारतीय मानसिक विकारों से ग्रस्त पाए गए। इनमें हर सात में से एक भारतीय अलग-अलग तरह की मानसिक बीमारी से पीड़ित निकला। मानसिक रोगों की इस फेहरिस्त में अवसाद, व्यग्रता, सीजोफ्रेनिया, विकास संबंधी बौद्धिक विकृति, आचरण संबंधी विकार और ऑटिज्म जैसी बामरियां शामिल हैं। इनमें अवसाद और व्यग्रता सबसे आम मानसिक विकार हैं। इतना ही नहीं, ये दोनों मानसिक व्याधियां भारत में तेजी से फैल रही हैं। अध्ययन के मुताबिक दो साल पहले तक साढ़े चार करोड़ से ज्यादा लोग अवसाद से ग्रस्त थे। गौरतलब है कि यह अध्ययन मानसिक रोगों के कारण देश पर बीमारियों के बढ़ते बोझ और हर राज्य में इन समस्याओं के रुख को लेकर सामने आया पहला व्यापक अनुमान है। इसके मुताबिक साल 1990 से साल 2017 के बीच भारत में बीमारियों के कुल बोझ में मानसिक बीमारियों का योगदान बढ़ कर दोगुना हो गया। ऐसे में मन की सेहत बिगड़ने से जुड़ी ऐसी स्थितियां समाज और सरकार दोनों के लिए बेहद चिंतनीय हैं।

दरअसल, बीते कुछ सालों में लोग शारीरिक स्वास्थ्य को लेकर काफी सजग तो हुए हैं, लेकिन मानसिक सेहत संभालने की प्रवृत्ति आज भी नदारद है। इतना ही नहीं, बिगड़ी मनःस्थिति के मर्ज को स्वीकारने में भी संकोच किया जाता है। ऐसे में अपनी हो या किसी अपने की, अवसाद और व्यग्रता को छुपा कर और बड़ी बीमारी बना दिया जाता है। जबकि आज की बदलती जीवनशैली में तनाव और अवसाद घर से लेकर दफ्तर तक जीवन का हिस्सा बन गए हैं। भागमभाग ही कुछ ऐसी है कि बच्चों से लेकर बुजुर्गों तक, सभी मन की सेहत के मोर्चे पर पीछे छूट रहे हैं। एक सर्वे से मुताबिक भारत में तियालीस फीसद लोग ही मानसिक बीमारियों के इलाज के लिए अस्पताल जाने की जरूरत महसूस करते हैं। दूरदराज के गांवों-कस्बों में तो ऐसी बीमारी को अंधविश्वास तक से जोड़ दिया जाता है। ऐसे में न केवल मानसिक स्वास्थ्य से जुड़ी चिकित्सकीय सेवाओं की पहुंच बढ़ाने की दरकार है, बल्कि इन व्याधियों के प्रति जन-जागरूकता लाने की की जरूरत है।

असल में देखा जाए तो मानसिक स्वास्थ्य से जुड़े आंकड़े अब वैश्विक चिंता बन गए हैं। आज दुनियाभर में पैंतालीस करोड़ से भी अधिक लोग मानसिक रोगों से ग्रस्त हैं। हमारे यहां भी एक बड़ी आबादी मानसिक अस्वस्थता से जूझ रही है। कभी विकसित देशों की समस्या कही जाने वाली ये मानसिक व्याधियां अब भारत में भी तेजी से जड़ें जमा रही हैं। आंकड़ों को देखें तो साल 2017 में करीब बीस करोड़ भारतीयों का मानसिक विकारों से ग्रस्त होना देश के लिए एक बड़ी चिंता का विषय है, क्योंकि यह हमारी कुल आबादी की 14.3 फीसद है। राष्ट्रीय मानसिक स्वास्थ्य सर्वे 2015-16 के आंकड़े बताते हैं कि देश में अठारह साल से अधिक उम्र वाले 5.25 फीसद नौजवान अवसाद के शिकार हैं। यानी हर बीस में से एक व्यक्ति को अवसाद ने घेर रखा है। बच्चों में भी तनाव, व्याकुलता और आत्मविश्वास में कमी जैसी मानसिक समस्याएं तेजी से बढ़ रही हैं। इसके चलते नई पीढ़ी में कम उम्र में ही कई शारीरिक और मानसिक बीमारियां होने का जोखिम भी बढ़ रहा है।

हाल के वर्षों में भारत में आत्महत्या के आंकड़े भी तेजी से बढ़े हैं। हर उम्र, हर तबके के लोगों में जीवन से हार मान की लेने की प्रवृत्ति देखने को मिल रही है। हालांकि आत्महत्या की प्रवृत्ति दुनिया भर में देखने को मिल रही है, लेकिन हमारे देश के लिए ये एक बड़ी चुनौती है, क्योंकि किसानों से लेकर शिक्षित युवाओं तक हर वर्ग के लोग जिंदगी से मुंह मोड़ रहे हैं। पिछले कुछ सालों में तो सामूहिक आत्महत्या के मामले भी सामने आए हैं, जिनमें निराशा और असुरक्षा की भावना के चलते पूरे परिवार ने ही आत्मघाती कदम उठा लिया। मन को उद्वेलित करने वाले ऐसे मामलों में घर के बड़े-बुजुर्गों से लेकर बच्चों तक ने एक साथ मौत को गले लगा लिया। अधिकतर मामलों में तनाव और अवसाद ही अहम कारण रहा है, जो व्यावसायिक अफसलता, कर्ज, और सामाजिक-पारिवारिक कलह जैसी वजहों से पनपता है। कुछ समय पहले आई विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन की 'प्रिवेंटिंग सुसाइड' नामक रिपोर्ट में भी कहा गया था कि दुनिया भर में सबसे अधिक आत्महत्या के मामले भारत में हो रहे हैं। आर्थिक समृद्धि की दौड़ के बीच गुम अनमोल मानवीय जीवन के अवमूल्यन को सामने रखती इस रिपोर्ट में विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन ने (डब्लूएचओ) आत्महत्या को एक सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य समस्या के तौर पर रेखांकित किया था। डब्लूएचओ की इस रिपोर्ट में भारत को आत्महत्या के मामले में दुनिया की राजधानी तक कहा गया। ऐसे में मानसिक विकारों के शिकार लोगों की बढ़ती संख्या वाकई चिंतनीय है, क्योंकि इस अध्ययन में आत्महत्या और मानसिक बीमारी के बीच सीधा संबंध पाया गया है। रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक मानसिक रूप से बीमार लोग आत्महत्या के ज्यादा प्रयास करते हैं। मानसिक रूप से बीमार महिलाएं पुरुषों की तुलना में आत्महत्या के ज्यादा प्रयास करती हैं।

विचारणीय है कि हमारे देश की पारंपरिक जीवनशैली संयमित और सहज जीवन जीने का संदेश लिए हुए है। दिखावे के संस्कृति से दूर, जरूरतों और इच्छाओं में अंतर करने का भाव गहराई से समाहित है। कहना गलत नहीं होगा कि आज की बदलती जीवन शैली के चलते ही अवसाद और व्यग्रता जैसी समस्याएं दस्तक दे रही हैं। मौजूदा जीवनशैली में दो बातें बहुत आम हो चली हैं। एक, सब कुछ पा लेने की की इच्छाएं बढ़ी हैं और दूसरा यह कि हालात से मुकाबला करने की शक्ति कम हुई है। सहिष्णुता और सहनशीलता व्यवहार से नदारद है। राष्ट्रीय अपराध रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो (एनसीआरबी) के सर्वे में भी यही सामने आया है कि आत्महत्या करने वाले लोगों में अधिकतर पंद्रह से पैंतीस साल के बीच के नौजवान ज्यादा हैं, जिन पर इस आयु में रोजगार पाने और स्वयं को साबित कर दिखाने का दवाब होता है। युवाओं का एक बड़ा प्रतिशत ऐसा भी है, जो शिक्षित और सफल तो है, पर अवसाद और अकेलेपन के चलते आत्महत्या जैसे कदम उठा रहा है। एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक भारत के आईटी हब के तौर पर मशबूर बंगलुरू में आत्महत्या करने वालों की संख्या देश में सबसे अधिक है। यहां अकेलापन और अवसाद जान देने के बड़े कारण हैं। 'इंडिया स्टेट लेवल डिजीज बर्डन इनिशिएटिव' की रिपोर्ट भी बताती है कि नौकरी में अनिश्चितता, वैवाहिक स्थितियां और आर्थिक चिंताओं ने लोगों को अवसाद और तनाव की धकेला है।

निस्संदेह, मानसिक रुग्णता से जुड़ी व्याधियों के आंकड़े साल दर साल बढ़ रहे हैं। हमारा सामाजिक तानाबाना ही कुछ ऐसा है कि इसमें तनाव और उलझनें कम नहीं हैं। जीवन की आपाधापी में तनावजन्य परिस्थितियों में इजाफा हुआ है। सामाजिक तानेबाने के टूटने और एकाकी परिवारों के बढ़ते चलन ने ऐसे रोगियों की संख्या बढ़ा दी है, जो मन से बीमार हैं। बिगड़ती मनोदशा के कारणों में पारिवारिक समस्याओं का भी अहम स्थान है। राष्ट्रीय मानसिक स्वास्थ्य सर्वेक्षण 2015-16 के आंकड़े बताते हैं कि भारत की आबादी के करीब चौदह फीसद लोगों को सक्रिय मानसिक स्वास्थ्य हस्तक्षेप की आवश्यकता है। जबकि पहले से ही स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं के जर्जर ढांचे से जूझ रहे हमारे देश में मानसिक रोगियों की समस्याओं का समाधान करने के लिए स्वास्थ्य पेशेवरों की भी भारी कमी है। ऐसे में भारत के बदलते सामाजिक-आर्थिक ढांचे में मनोविकारों से जूझ रहे लोगों के बढ़ती तादाद चिंता का विषय है।

सितारे जमीन पर

दुनिया मेरे आगे

अरविंद दास

हमारे देश में सिनेमा महज मनोरंजन का मुख्य स्रोत नहीं है, बल्कि 'पॉपुलर संस्कृति' का हिस्सा भी है। सिनेमा के कलाकारों को सितारों का दर्जा हासिल है। ये सेलिब्रेटी माने जाते हैं। बॉलीवुड से लेकर दक्षिण भारत के सिनेमा के सितारे अपनी इस छवि की बदौलत राजनीति के क्षेत्र में भी उतरे, जिनमें कई सफल रहे और कई नाकाम। जहां एमजी रामचंद्रन, जयललिता आदि काफी सफल रहीं, वहीं अमिताभ बच्चन जैसे अभिनेता असफल रहे। पिछले कुछ समय से रजनीकांत और कमल हासन जैसे अभिनेता राजनीति में हाथ आजमाने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं।

मुख्यधारा की राजनीति में रहते हुए ये सितारे भले ही सामाजिक और राजनीतिक मुद्दों पर अपनी राय जाहिर करें, मगर आमतौर पर ये चुप ही रहते हैं। इसका कारण भी स्पष्ट है। सिनेमा एक व्यवसाय है, जिसमें बड़ी पूंजी दांव पर लगी रहती है। साथ ही ये कई कंपनियों के 'ब्रांड एंबेसडर' होते हैं और कई सरकारी विज्ञापनों में भी शामिल होते हैं। ऐसे में राजनीतिक पक्षधरता का खुल कर जाहिर करना कारोबार के लिए जोखिम भरा हो सकता है। पिछले दिनों चर्चित अभिनेत्री दीपिका पादुकोण ने जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय जाकर विद्यार्थियों से मिली और उनके साथ अपनी कुछ देर की मौजूदगी दर्ज की। दरअसल, जेएनयू पिछले कुछ महीनों से संघर्ष का परिसर बना हुआ है। जेएनयू में मौजूद दीपिका की तस्वीर सोशल मीडिया में खूब वायरल हुई। इसके बाद यह स्वाभाविक ही था कि कुछ लोगों ने उनकी तारीफ की, वहीं उन्हें 'ट्रोल' भी किया गया। लोगों ने इसे हाल ही में रिलीज हुई 'छपाक' फिल्म के प्रचार से भी जोड़ा।

दरअसल, नागरिकता संशोधन कानून (सीएए) और राष्ट्रीय नागरिक रजिस्टर (एनआरसी), जामिया-जेएनयू में हुई हिंसा के खिलाफ विरोध पूरे देश में विश्वविद्यालयों के परिसर से लेकर सड़कों पर दिखाई पड़ रही है। इसमें बॉलीवुड के कई कलाकार और निर्देशक भी शामिल हैं। अनुराग कश्यप जैसे कुछ फिल्म निर्देशक तो काफी मुखर हैं। यों फिल्म दुनिया की कुछ हस्तियों ने सीएए का समर्थन भी किया। यों किसी भी आंदोलन में युवाओं-विद्यार्थियों की अग्रणी भूमिका रही है। पिछले दिनों दिल्ली में हो रहे प्रदर्शनों में पुलिस की लाठी से एक पुरुष मित्र को बचाती दो छात्राओं और पुलिस को गुलाब का फूल देती एक छात्रा की तस्वीर काफी वायरल हुई। इस पूरे दौर में हिंसा के खिलाफ छात्र-छात्राओं ने विरोध प्रदर्शन में बढ़-चढ़कर हिस्सा लिया।

आजादी के आंदोलन से लेकर इस दशक की शुरुआत में भ्रष्टाचार के खिलाफ हुए प्रदर्शन आदि में छात्र-छात्राओं और युवाओं ने आगे बढ़ कर भागीदारी की थी। आपातकाल के दौरान किशोर कुमार, देवानंद और मनोज कुमार जैसे कलाकारों ने सरकार के खिलाफ अपना विरोध दर्ज किया था। सत्ताधारी दल के कई नेता और मंत्री आपातकाल के विरोध में हुए आंदोलनों में से ही निकले हैं। हाल ही में दिवंगत हुए राकांपा के नेता और जेएनयू छात्रसंघ के अध्यक्ष रहे देवीप्रसाद त्रिपाठी आपातकाल के दौरान छात्र नेता के रूप में ही उभरे थे।

बहरहाल, कुछ दिन पहले दफ्तर में बैठा खबरों में उलझा था और नजर टीवी स्क्रीन पर थी कि अचानक अपनी धुन में बांसुरी बजाते एक युवा की आवाज कानों में पड़ी। धुन इस गीत की थी- 'थोड़ा सा प्यार हुआ है, थोड़ा है बाकी'। बांसुरी की आवाज में इस फिल्मी गाने में एक कशिश थी। कवि वीरेन डंगवाल के शब्दों में- गोया एक फरियाद है अजान-सी। साहित्य हो या सिनेमा वह सामाजिक यथार्थ के चित्रण के साथ प्रेम और सामाजिक सौहार्द की ही बात करता है।

प्रसंगवश, सड़कों पर निकले जुलूस में 'हर जोर जुल्म के टक्कर में संघर्ष हमारा नारा है', और 'तू जिंदा है तो जिंदगी की जीत में यकीन कर' जैसे गाने खूब सुनाई दिए। इसे हिंदी फिल्मों के चर्चित गीतकार शैलेंद्र ने लिखा है। हालांकि जिस दौर में शैलेंद्र ने इसे लिखा था, वह दौर अलग था। बॉलीवुड में 'इप्टा' की पृष्ठभूमि से आए निर्देशक-अभिनेता और प्रगतिशील लेखक संघ से जुड़े लेखक-गीतकार काफी सक्रिय थे। इनमें से कई लोगों की राजनीतिक पक्षधरता स्पष्ट थी।

सिनेमा से जुड़े लेखक या सितारे इसी समाज के हिस्से हैं और जाहिर है कि समाज की हलचलों से वे दूर नहीं रह सकते। अगर कुछ युवा सितारे व्यापक महत्त्व के मुद्दों पर अपनी दखल दर्ज कर रहे हैं तो उनकी आवाज को लोकतंत्र की मजबूती के रूप में देखना चाहिए। हॉलीवुड में ऐसे सितारों, फिल्म निर्देशकों की लंबी परंपरा रही है जो राजनीतिक घटनाक्रमों पर तीखी प्रतिक्रिया व्यक्त करते रहे हैं। तीन साल पहले ऑस्कर पुरस्कार से सम्मानित अभिनेत्री मेरिल स्ट्रीप ने गोल्डन ग्लोब पुरस्कार समारोह के दौरान राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप पर जम कर निशाना साधा था और खरी-खोटी सुनाई थी।

असल में लंबे समय से पॉपुलर संस्कृति का इस्तेमाल राजनीतिक प्रतिरोध के रूप में होता रहा है। आखिरकार सिनेमा एक सांस्कृतिक उत्पाद है, जो अपने समय के यथार्थ को कलात्मक ढंग से रचता है। पिछले दिनों विद्यार्थियों के प्रदर्शन से प्रेरित होकर सुधीर मिश्रा ने ट्विटर पर लिखा कि वे अपनी पहली फिल्म 'ये वो मंजिल तो नहीं' का 'रिमेक' बनाएंगे। गौरतलब है कि 1987 में आई यह फिल्म भी छात्र-राजनीति के इर्द-गिर्द थी, जिसे राष्ट्रीय पुरस्कार मिला था।

अपारदर्शिता का चंदा

भारत को आजादी हासिल किए सत्तर साल से आधिक हो गए हैं। न केवल भारत के लोग, बल्कि वे लोग भी जिन्होंने देश को आजाद कराया था, उनकी आकांक्षा थी कि इस देश कि राजनीति एक आदर्श की तरह होगी और संविधानसम्मत चलेगी, अपने नागरिकों का उत्तम खयाल रखेगी। इतना ही नहीं, विपक्ष से भी यही उम्मीद थी कि उनकी तरफ से भी विरोध होगा, लेकिन अपनी महत्त्वाकांक्षाओं के लिए नहीं, बल्कि सत्ता पक्ष की गलत दिशा और दशा से युक्त नीतियों पर। लेकिन आज सत्ता पक्ष सोच रहा है कि संसद में हमारा हर तरफ से बहुमत हो, ताकि हम आसानी से मनमाना कानून बना सकें, वहीं विपक्ष को नकारात्मक विरोध से मौका नहीं मिल रहा। किसी भी देश के लिए विपक्ष लोकतंत्र और उसके नागरिकों के लिए तीसरी आंख से कम नहीं होती, क्योंकि सही रास्ता दिखाना और उचित नीतियों के बारे में दिशानिर्देश देना विपक्ष का कर्तव्य होता है।

आज सरकार खुल कर और एक अग्रगामी रूप में अपने नागरिकों के लिए बेहतर और समावेशी विकास की रणनीति इसलिए नहीं ला पा रही है और न इसे अच्छी तरीके से लागू कर पा रही है। राजनीति को आज स्वतंत्र नहीं रहने दिया गया है, क्योंकि सभी पार्टियां तो चंदे देने वाले के इशारे से चलती है। इसका अगर एक उदाहरण देखा जाए तो जैसे एक बड़ी कंपनी जो कीटनाशक का उत्पादन कर रही है और इसका कारोबार भारत में अच्छे से चल रहा है, लेकिन धीरे-धीरे एक लहर आती है कि अब कार्बनिक और जैविक खेती करना होगा, अन्यथा हमारा पर्यावरण और हमारे अपने खुद ही अस्वस्थ होकर काल के मुंह में जाने लगेंगे। अब लोगों ने सोचा कि इस अच्छी पहल पर सरकार भी हमारी बढ़-चढ़ कर मदद करेगी।

लेकिन उनको कहां पता था कि वोट से बढ़ कर मूल्य चंदा का होता है। अब अगर सरकार जैविक खेती को बढ़ावा दे तो उधर कीटनाशक कंपनी नाराज हो जाएगी और सरकार पर दबाव बनाएगी। ऐसी स्थिति में सरकार को जनता के सामने कुछ पत्ते खेलना होगा, इधर का मुद्दा उधर, उधर का इधर! इस राजनीतिक चंदे पर विशेष रूप से समीक्षा करके इसको पूर्ण पारदर्शी बनाना होगा। राजनीतिक दलों का पूरा लेन-देन और चुनावी व्यवस्था पारदर्शी होगी, तभी लोकतंत्र जिंदा रह पाएगा।

● *कुंदन वर्मा, बहराइच, उत्तर प्रदेश*

किसी भी मुद्दे या लेख पर अपनी राय हमें भेजें। हमारा पता है : ए-8, सेक्टर-7, नोएडा 201301, जिला : गौतमबुद्धनगर, उत्तर प्रदेश

आप चाहें तो अपनी बात ईमेल के जरिए भी हम तक पहुंचा सकते हैं। आइडी है :
chaupal.jansatta@expressindia.com

प्रदूषण के विरुद्ध

'प्रदूषण के उपाय' (संपादकीय, 6 जनवरी) पढ़ा। भारत में दिल्ली और एनसीआर के कई शहर विश्व के सर्वाधिक प्रदूषित शहरों में अग्रणी हैं। जाड़े की शुरुआत में दिवाली में यहां के शहरों में करोड़ों की संख्या में मुख्य रूप से फुलझड़ियों, चकरी पटाखों और अनार छोड़ने से भयंकर प्रदूषण की वजह से सांस लेना दूभर हो जाता है। आंखों में तेज जलन होने लगती है। पिछले वर्ष सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने दिल्ली, पंजाब, हरियाणा और उत्तर प्रदेश के मुख्य सचिवों को तलब करके प्रदूषण नियंत्रण में अब तक उनके द्वारा की ढिलाई के लिए कड़ी फटकार लगाई थी।

सुप्रीम कोर्ट की कड़ी फटकार और नसीहत के बाद अब देश का पहला बीस फुट ऊंचा वायु प्यूरीफायर दिल्ली के लाजपतनगर में लगाया गया है, जो अपने आसपास 500 से 750 वर्ग मीटर क्षेत्रफल के छह लाख घनमीटर तक की पीएम 2.5, पीएम 10 पार्टिकल्स वाली प्रदूषित हवा को 75 प्रतिशत तक साफ करेगा। चूंकि दिल्ली जैसे बड़े महानगर के लिहाज से यह बहुत छोटा प्यूरीफायर है, इसलिए सरकार सौरचालित चीनी मेगा प्यूरीफायर की तर्ज पर बड़े सौर प्यूरीफायर बनाने की सोच रही है, जो 10 मिलियन क्यूबिक मीटर तक की हवा को प्रतिदिन साफ करेगा।

हमें वायु प्रदूषण कम करने के लिए कई स्तरों पर ईमानदारी से प्रयास करने होंगे। मसलन, हमें देश भर में अपने हरेक शहरों में आबादी के अनुसार वायु प्यूरीफायर तो लगाने ही होंगे, उसके साथ हमें विकसित और सभ्य देशों की तर्ज पर कारों, टैक्सियों, मोटर साइकिलों आदि पेट्रोल और डीजलचालित निजी वाहनों का कम से कम प्रयोग करके इनकी जगह विद्युतचालित बसों, ट्रामों, ट्रेनों और मेट्रो आदि का अधिकाधिक प्रयोग करना चाहिए। इसके अलावा, साइकिल के प्रयोग को भी बढ़ावा देना चाहिए। हमें अपने शहरों का पानी भी जल प्यूरीफायर या जल संशोधन संयत्रों से साफ करके ही अपनी नदियों में डालना चाहिए।

● *निर्मल कुमार शर्मा, गाजियाबाद*

हिंसा का रास्ता

हाल ही में जेएनयू में हुई हिंसक घटना चिंताजनक है। देश में कई शिक्षण संस्थानों में ऐसे हालात देखने को मिल रहे हैं। वे हालात आंदोलन से कम नहीं हैं। इससे पहले दिल्ली की जामिया मिल्लिया में इस तरह का मामला हो चुका है। वहां पुलिस की भूमिका नकारात्मक रूप में देखी गई। इस तरह की घटनाएं बढ़ती ही जा रही हैं। कहीं बदमाशों ने विद्यार्थियों पर गोलियां चलाईं तो कहीं उन पर लाठीचार्ज किया गया। अगर यही स्थिति बनी रही तो लोग बच्चों को पढ़ने के लिए स्कूल या कॉलेज भी नहीं भेजेंगे। अभी भीड़ में मुखौटों की संख्या ज्यादा दिख रही है। वे कहीं छात्रों तो कहीं बेटियों की इज्जत से खिलवाड़ कर रहे हैं।

इस सारे मामले में सरकार मौन दिख रही है। लगता है कि सरकार लोगों की बात को सुनने में हिचकिचा रही है। लेकिन अगर विद्यार्थी अपने भविष्य के लिए सड़क पर उतरे हैं तो सरकार को उनकी बात अवश्य सुननी चाहिए। वे यह लडाई अपने लिए नहीं, बल्कि भविष्य में आने वाले नस्लों के लिए भी लड़ रहे हैं। भारत में आर्थिक स्थिति के साथ लोगों की मानसिक स्थिति भी खराब होती जा रही है। लेकिन सरकार सब पर नजर नहीं डाल रही है। अगर मौजूदा असहमति को ठीक से नहीं सुलझाया गया तो आने वाले दिनों में नफरत का दायरा फैल सकता है। और उसके बाद कैसी तस्वीर बनेगी, उसका सिर्फ अंदाजा लगाया जा सकता है। जबकि भारत प्रेम और स्नेह फैलाने वाला देश है। हमारा नाम हिंसा के लिए खराब क्यों हो?

● *मो जमील, मधुबनी, बिहार*