The long, circuitous road to success

Delhi school reforms need to bring more students under their fold and be ready to tackle the "private" backlash

OUT OF THE BLUE

ANJULI BHARGAVA

On a cold January morning, the School Of Excellence in Delhi's Kalkaji is abuzz with activity. A long line of boys on either side of the drive-in await the arrival of Delhi's Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia to hand out tablets to students who have achieved more than a certain percentage of marks in their board examinations. An attractive incentive to my mind for a tech-obsessed generation!

I accompany the deputy minister and his small team of two in his vehicle, no "laal batti", howling sirens or security in tow. The normalcy of it all surprises me, so accustomed am I to ministers who acquire a halo and radiate power almost as soon as they take charge.

We chat all the way on the reforms his party has undertaken in Delhi government schools, the first and the only state government to make school education a political issue. The Union Territory has 1,029 Delhi government schools with roughly 1.6 million students enrolled. There are an additional 2.8 million-odd students studying in the usual mishmash that we have made of our education system: 1-1.2 million in primary schools run by the three municipal corporations, all of them currently under the Bharatiya Janata Party besides those in private aided, private unaided schools, unrecognised and so on. It's a holy mess.

I skip the function and the speeches once we reach to take a tour of the school and chat with the students I find. I meet a group of boys, several of whom have joined the school a year back, mostly from private schools in the area. I question them for a while on when and how they ended up joining this school and how they like it.

The school building itself is like a mid-range private school, closer to a DAV school or Ryan International than an Amity or a DPS but a far cry from a typical government school anywhere in India. The notice board on the day I am there is full of colourful charts and drawings, conveying energy but that may well be in view of the event in progress.

I have been hearing about the Delhi education reforms undertaken for over three years now in dribs and drabs but this is my first and very cursory exposure to what is being attempted.

The attempt is ambitious and if it succeeds, can be far-reaching. The Aam Aadmi Party has embarked on the noble mission of making quality education more inclusive by offering at no cost an option as good as a private school might. In the process, it hopes to lure students back from the plethora of private options that have sprung up as an answer to the broken state system. To its credit, it is not outsourcing the job to someone as politicians and bureaucrats facing a broken situation tend to do. Here's my problem, now you fix it. Sisodia and his team have jumped in with missionary zeal and been at it for the last five years.

In many countries with robust state-run and financed systems, a majority of students attend a school usually in the neighbourhood that offers a high quality of education, as good as any available private options. But Delhi's efforts are closer to Tony Blair's London Challenge, where the government- run schools in London when Blair took charge were at the bottom of the barrel in national assessments. After a multipronged reform exercise, the city's schools climbed to the top, many parents choosing them over exclusive private ones.

Expecting an overnight change in Delhi schools would be naïve. Fixing the rot that has set in over the last three decades will take much more than five years. Some of the early and easier to tackle results are visible. Infrastructure in schools has improved, teachers are being given their due importance, accountability is being introduced but a visible and sustained change in culture is still a far cry.

To make a real dent, it is important that the 1-1.2 million students in the city who study in the municipal primary schools as of now be brought under the Delhi government fold —whichever the city's government may be. As things stand, most municipal school students arrive to study in Delhi government secondary schools at the age of 11-12, far behind their years. Unless the change is wider and all encompassing, it may not be impactful. A public interest litigation that demands this is pending.

Last but not least, the ability of the Delhi government to handle the backlash as and when it happens will be critical. Unhappy murmurs are already being heard from the budget private schools but the moment, the pinch begins to hurt, the education mafia and lobbies will kick in. That's when the real acid test for the Delhi school reforms will begin. This story is far from over.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Two events and a jam

When several parts of Delhi were gridlocked on Monday, commuters were quick to blame the protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) at Shaheen Bagh in south-east Delhi as the reason for this. But they soon discovered that events of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) were equally to blame. Hundreds of vehicles and thousands of supporters gathered at the BJP national headquarters as Jagat Prakash Nadda was made president of the party in the presence of outgoing party chief Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Around the same time, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal held a roadshow in the heart of the capital on his way to file his nomination papers for the February 8 Assembly polls. The filing of the nomination was delayed. "I was supposed to file my nomination today but the office closes at 3 pm. I was asked to file the nomination while the roadshow was on, but I asked how I could leave the people," Kejriwal said. People asked jokingly if the filing was postponed after astrologers advised him Tuesday was a better day to do it.

Another BSP!

Savitri Bai Phule (*pictured*), former Member of Parliament (MP) who recently quit the Congress, has floated a party called the "Kanshiram Bahujan Samaj Party". Stating that the new outfit will work towards realising the vision of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) founder, the late Kanshiram, Phule said her pan-Indian campaign for "saving democracy" had received an overwhelming response, which prompted her to float a new political platform. While Phule was elected to the Lok Sabha in 2014 on a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ticket, she joined the Congress before the 2019 general elections and was nominated to contest from Bahraich. However, she failed to retain her seat and lost to the BJP candidate. Eventually, Phule got disenchanted with the Congress too, since she was not accommodated in the team of the party general secretary in charge of UP, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

Learning at no cost

The Institute of Cost Accountants of India recently organised a seminar to discuss ways of India becoming a $5-trillion economy as well as the steps the body could use to follow its work. One of the speakers began by addressing his audience, comprising mostly cost accountants, or CMAs, as chartered accountants (CAs). He continued calling them CAs until a member of the audience, a CMA himself, interrupted him. After correcting the speaker, he explained how the two — cost accountants and chartered accountants — were different. The speaker apologised before resuming to speak.

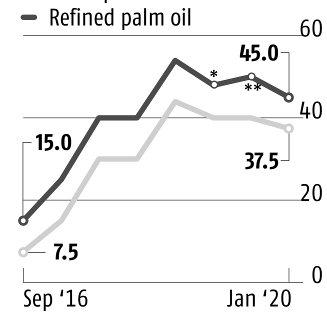
Mahathir speaks, India gains

Why Malaysian premier's criticism of Indian politics is good news for domestic edible oil refiners and oilseed farmers

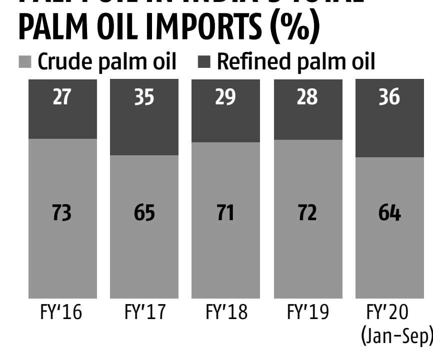
SANJEEB MUKHERJEE

BOTTLED UP

Import duty trends for palm oil (%)



SHARE OF CRUDE AND REFINED PALM OIL IN INDIA'S TOTAL PALM OIL IMPORTS (%)



*Import duty on Malaysia was 45%; 50% for other countries; **Levy of 5% safeguard duty on import from Malaysia
Source: ICRA Research Report

In October 2019, when Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad criticised the Indian government's moves to change the status of Jammu & Kashmir in his address to the 74th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the domestic edible oils industry took note. The Narendra Modi government was not expected to take Mahathir's criticism lightly, and the industry lobby issued an informal warning to local importers of refined palm oil to exercise "necessary caution" in negotiating new contracts with Malaysia.

In doing so, the industry was recognising geo-economic realities. India is Malaysia's top buyer of palm oil and that country's efforts to push exports have been the cause of tension for the Indian edible oil refining industry.

India imports 9-9.5 million tonnes of palm oil annually, both crude and refined. Of this, 2.5-3.0 million tonnes comes from Malaysia mainly in refined form, and rest comes in crude form, mostly from Indonesia.

In January 2019, India had to lower the import duty on refined palm oil from Malaysia to 45 per cent from the earlier 50 per cent under the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) between India-Malaysia), thus reducing the duty differential between refined and crude imports to India from Malaysia to 5 per cent from the earlier 10 per cent.

The impact on import was dramatic: Data shows that between January and September 2019, India imported 2.40 million tonnes of refined palm oil compared with 1.74 million tonnes in the same period last year (an increase of 38 per cent) largely from Malaysia.

As a result, domestic refiners found themselves almost out of business. "India was forced to lower its import tax on refined palm oil and the industry there went into an overdrive to push refined palm oil into India creating a big problem for the domestic refiners," says B V Mehta, executive director of Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA), the main lobby for domestic oilseed extractors and refiners. From a high of almost 60 per cent, refining capacities in January to September of the 2019-20 edible oil year had slumped 30-40 per cent (the edible oil year runs from November to October).

The surge in refined palm oil imports prompted the SEA to appeal to the Centre. In September, a 5 per cent safeguard duty was imposed on refined palm oil imports from Malaysia for six months. This restored the import duty differential between refined and crude palm to 10 per cent, on a par with neighbouring Indonesia.

Mahathir's UNGA statement initially caused refined palm oil importers to cut back but when no retaliatory tariffs followed, importers re-started orders of refined palm oil consignments from Malaysia and supplies started trickling in. Refined palm oil imports in November 2019 jumped to around 122,409 tonnes, up 3.31 per cent from October.

Thereafter in January 2020, India under the terms of the Asean free trade agreement signed in 2010, lowered import duty on refined palm oil from 50 to 45 per cent and that on crude palm oil from 40 to 37.5 per cent for the first time, as part of a periodic revision process, which brought back duty differential between refined and crude palm oil to 7.5 per cent.

Simultaneously, Malaysia and Indonesia together announced export protection measures from January 1, 2020. The combined impact of this along with India's import duty cuts under the Asean agreement meant that the differential between crude and refined was just 2.5 per cent for Indian importers.

Just weeks before that, Mahathir decided to criticise the Indian government again, this time over the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), questioning the need for it when Hindus and Muslims have been living peacefully in the country for the past 70 years. This time, the Centre responded promptly, placing the import of refined palm oil under the "restricted" category and announcing plans to issue import licences to keep a tab on supplies.

This may not have been an example for skilful economic diplomacy but for the domestic edible oil industry the move could not have been more welcome. "For refiners and farmers this is not blessing in disguise, but a pure blessing," said Mehta of SEA.

Domestic farmers gained because domestic oilseed prices jumped after more than three years. Data from agmarket.nic.in shows that in the Indore *mandi* average price of soya bean between September 16, 2019 and January 16, 2020 stood at ₹3,900 per quintal, almost 6 per cent more than the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹3,710 per quintal for the 2019-20 crop year.

Rating agency ICRA in a recent note on the subject said that the restriction on refined palm oil imports will not only improve efficiency but will also improve margins of domestic refiners.

Though farmers and refiners are reaping the benefits of the government's retaliatory moves, the uncertainty of this simmering trade war persists. Latest reports say commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal will not meet his Malaysian counterpart in Davos next week, citing a tight schedule, though a meeting on the sidelines is possible. Mahathir, meanwhile, is attempting some damage control by admitting his country was too small to retaliate against India. Mehta says the industry wants government to ensure that the licence route is not misused so that refined oil imports start flooding in again. For the time being, though, the domestic industry has the opportunity to make the best of a diplomatic skirmish.

ON THE JOB

The real unemployment challenge

MAHESH VYAS

On December 31, 2019, CMIE completed the 18th Wave of the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey. This included the 12th Wave of questions related to employment and unemployment. This survey was executed over a period of four months from September through December 2019 on a sample of 174,405 households. In the paras below, we discuss population estimates of the unemployment rate during this period.

The unemployment rate rose to 7.5 per cent during September-December 2019. This was the seventh consecutive Wave to record an increase in the unemployment rate since May-August 2017 when the unemployment rate was 3.8 per cent.

As usual, the unemployment rate in rural India was lower at 6.8 per cent than it was in urban India, which scaled up to 9 per cent.

Rural India has a large 66 per cent share in the overall estimate of India's unemployment rate. Rural India has a low unemployment rate and this has a big impact on lowering India's overall unemployment rate. But, rural employment is of poor quality. And grown ups, those over 30 years of age, have a similarly large 66 per cent share in the total population that is over 15 years of age. After the age of 30, people take whatever job is available and so the unemployment rate among people of more than 30 years of age falls very sharply. But, these have a high share in the total unemployment estimate for the country.

What matters most is the unemployment rate in the urban youth and in particular, the urban educated youth.

The unemployment rate is very high among the youth. It is 45 per cent for those between 15 and 19 years of age. But, arguably, this is not the age at which youngsters should be looking for jobs. Ideally, they should be still studying at this age. However, if, for any reason, they do look for jobs, it is evident that they find it very difficult to find one.

Employment prospects for youngsters between 20 and 24 years of age who are looking for jobs are not much better. The unemployment rate for these has more than doubled from 17 per cent in May-August 2017 to 37 per cent in September-December 2019. Similarly, it has risen from 8 per cent in May-August 2017 to 11 per cent for youngsters between 25 and 29 years of age. It is this high and growing unemployment among the youth of the country that is very worrisome. The situation gets worse in the cities.

An urban youngster in his early twenties had a discouragingly high unemployment rate of 44 per cent during September-December 2019. It was never so difficult in the past. A wait till these urbanites reached their late twenties improved the unemployment rate they face to 14.8 per cent. But, even this is the worst experience of this age-group.

The unemployment rate drops dramatically from the age of 30. It falls to 2.5 per cent for the age group 30-34 years and then it falls to close to 1 per cent and then less than 1 per cent. The problem, evidently is severe for the youth who are looking for jobs. The sudden sharp fall in unemployment after 30 years of age implies that beyond a point in age, people settle for whatever jobs become available. A wait for a job cannot be infinite.

Matters get worse for the educated youth. The educated young report a much higher unemployment rate. This indicates that the educated are looking for better quality jobs but are unable to find them.

While youngsters in the age group of 20-24 years reported an unemployment rate of 37 per cent, graduates among them reported a much higher unemployment rate of over 60 per cent. 2019 was the worst year for these young graduates. The average unemployment rate for them during 2019 was 63.4 per cent. This is much higher than the unemployment rate they faced in any of the preceding three years. The unemployment rate they faced in 2016 was 47.1 per cent. In 2017, it was 42 per cent and in 2018 it was 55.1 per cent. 2019, therefore saw a very severe worsening of conditions for the young graduates.

Similarly, while the age group 25-29 years reported an unemployment rate of 11 per cent, graduates in this age group faced an unemployment rate of 23.4 per cent. They, too, found 2019 to be the worst of the past four years with an average unemployment rate of 23.7 per cent. The rate in 2016, 2017 and 2018 were 21.3 per cent, 18.3 per cent and 20.5 per cent, respectively.

The unemployment rate for post-graduates is also similarly high but it has not deteriorated since 2016, when it was 24.6 per cent. In 2017 it rose to 25.4 per cent, then fell to 22.3 per cent and rose again to 23 per cent in 2019.

An overall unemployment rate of around 7.5 per cent does not reflect the real challenges faced by India. Graduates between 20 and 29 years of age, face a much higher unemployment rate of 42.8 per cent. This is India's real challenge. An equally important challenge is that graduates of all ages put together also have a very high unemployment rate of 18.5 per cent.

The author is managing director & CEO, CMIE

LETTERS

History repeats itself

This refers to "It's divided house at RBI over new oversight cadre". I retired from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) about 36 years ago after serving it for over 35 years. I was associated with the work of RBI supervision and control of commercial banks during most of my years there. The controversy whether the RBI officers — entrusted with overseeing — should be generalists or specialists arose at the very inception, way back in 1949 when this function first devolved on the RBI. Under the then dispensation, it was decided that officers who were not specifically trained for this work should not be entrusted with it and those trained for it, should not be allotted any work unconnected with bank supervision and control. This arrangement worked for about 19 years till the specialised officers felt that they were being deprived of opportunities in various other departments of the RBI. As a result of their representations, came what was called Combined Seniority Scheme or CSS around the year 1978.

From the front page report in *Business Standard* on Monday, it appears that the problem has arisen again after some 42 years in a somewhat different garb. The sub-title "Crisis in the making" indicates that the problem this time is serious. The solution lies in an in-depth study of the problem by experts, keeping in mind the historical background and laying down the future course. It cannot be vouchsafed that it is possible to find out a permanent solution. With change of circumstances, new problems would arise and new solutions would have to be worked out from time to time.

R C Mody New Delhi

Incentivise savings

One tends to endorse the well-timed views of the State Bank of India's (SBI's) research report Ecowrap stating that the interest on the Senior Citizens Savings Scheme (SCSS) should be given full tax rebate as the revenue foregone by the government could only be ₹3,092 crore, with minimal impact on the government's fiscal deficit. Curiously enough, this report has also assessed that there are around 41 million senior citizens' term deposits accounts (with average deposit per account being ₹3.3 lakh) accounting for the total deposit of ₹14 trillion across the country. In fact, Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic advisor, SBI seems to be standing with the nation's senior citizens when he pleads that "It is imperative that the government exempts such interest income from taxes/or increase the threshold limit" as he substantiates his well-meaning arguments with statistics.

He also went on to claim that an increase in the Public Provident Fund limit by ₹1 lakh to ₹2.5 lakh for individual households under 80C will lead to additional savings of more than ₹2 trillion compared to the total revenue foregone of ₹40,000 crore, even after adding to the interest burden. It could be a win-win for the revenue-starved government of the day. Mind you, the government has reportedly asked the central public sector undertakings to declare a dividend of ₹19,000 crore apart from seeking some hefty sums of money as interim dividend from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), representing a part of its annual transfer of surpluses in the month of July after finalisation of its annual books of accounts (as on June 30 each year) under Section 47 of the RBI Act. It might be in addition to the transfer of a massive amount (out of the central bank's so-called excessive capital reserve funds) as was recently identified by a specially constituted committee led by former governor Bimal Jalan, at the insistence of the government.

Kumar Gupt Panchkula

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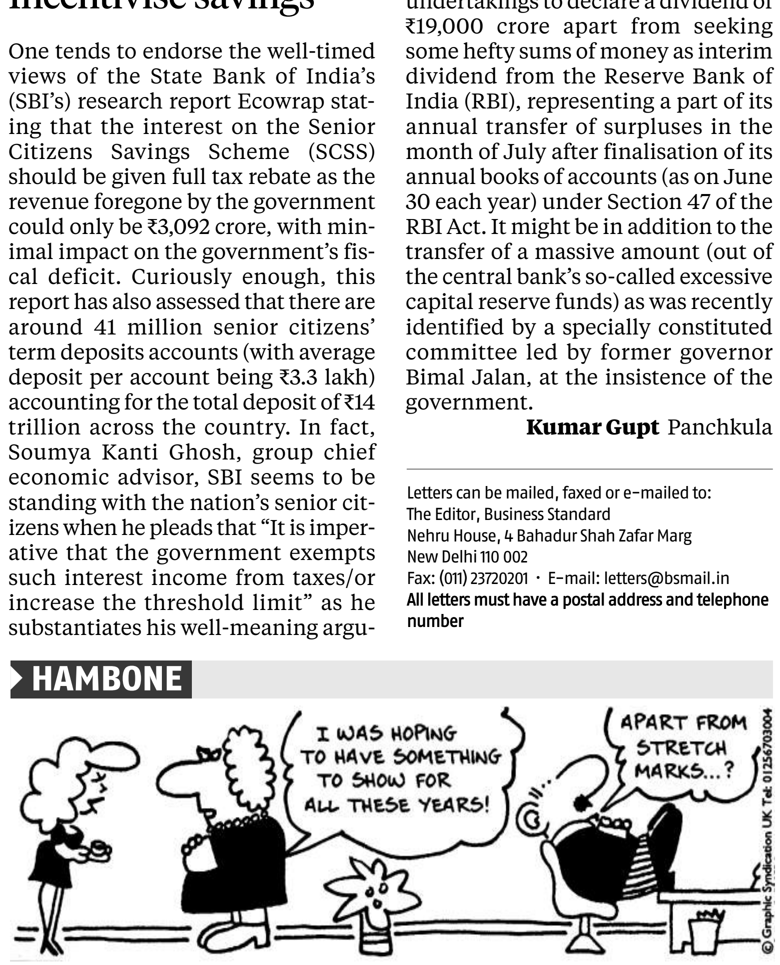
HAMBONE



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A flawed strategy

Asset sales for raising ₹1 trillion is a mirage

The real possibility of a massive slippage in the disinvestment target of ₹1.05 trillion in the current fiscal year is pushing the government to look for alternatives. It is now reportedly looking at selling assets owned by the Centre and central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) and raise about ₹1 trillion by March-end. Assets that are being considered include land and brownfield operational assets such as pipeline, roads, mobile towers, and electricity transmission lines owned by CPSEs.

The idea of asset monetisation is worth pursuing as there are vast tracts of land held by government wings, such as the armed forces and railways, in metropolitan areas that developers might be willing to bid big bucks for. But completing the sale process in the given timeframe is almost impossible. Besides, the way it is being approached is fundamentally flawed. For one, the targeted assets belong largely to CPSEs, which would be forced to sell and transfer the proceeds to the government as dividend. This goes against the basic idea of giving functional autonomy to state-owned companies. Second, the asset sale is being considered at the near end of the fiscal year, solely to meet the Budget targets. This can affect valuations and realisation, and lead to legal complications.

Evidently, the government is considering this option because it is unlikely to complete the privatisation of companies such as Bharat Petroleum Corporation and Container Corporation of India in the current year, primarily because of poor planning. Since revenue collection is likely to fall short significantly, lacklustre performance on the disinvestment front will further complicate fiscal management. The government has raised only ₹18,095 crore, or about 17 per cent of the disinvestment target, so far in the current year. The biggest reason why the government often struggles to meet the disinvestment target is because it does not approach the issue systematically. For instance, if the government wanted to go for large-scale strategic disinvestment, it should have selected the names early in the fiscal year. Such transactions take time as the potential buyers want to do their due diligence. The idea of asset sale of the CPSEs is another example of impromptu policymaking.

Therefore, the right approach would be that the government keeps a ready list of CPSEs that it intends to divest in the medium term, both strategically or through a minority stake sale. The process should be extended to other assets, such as land as well. This approach will not only allow the government to proceed more systematically but will also give market participants the necessary time to prepare and bid for assets. Such a process will result in higher competition among bidders and lead to better valuation. This will also give the government a fair idea as to how much money can be raised over the medium term, compared to the current system of deciding a target to plug the fiscal gap and then look for assets to sell. Ideally, asset sale should not be seen purely as an option to plug the deficit. The proceeds should be invested in creating new assets, which will help increase potential growth in the medium to long run.

Grim scenario

Climate-related financial risks should be mainstreamed

Every year, on the eve of its high-profile conference at Davos, the World Economic Forum releases a report that outlines what its stakeholders believe are the major risks to the global order and to geo-economic stability. This year's report is somewhat unusual, in that all top five risks, as estimated by the report, are related to climate change. The headline concern of the report is: "Climate and corresponding economic risks threaten a 2008-style systemic collapse unless net human-caused carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions fall by 50 per cent by 2030 relative to 2010, and to net zero by 2050." The report outlines the multiple axes upon which climate change and weird weather will impact societies, conflict, and economic stability. Health impacts of extreme weather and greater heat stress will directly impact the poorest societies that already have over-stretched health systems, such as India. Food production and water availability will be under increasing pressure, which again has major consequences for an India that is already struggling to equitably and efficiently distribute water. Internal and cross-border migration will inevitably increase — the current conversation around the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act only prefigures the political disputes in the decades to come as climate-induced migration swells to a flood. The report points out that there is essentially a decade left to deal with the problem.

Yet, in some ways, it is the direct economic threat of climate change outlined in the report that deserves immediate attention, as climate risk simply does not figure enough in discussions of macro-economic stability and vulnerability. This risk operates on several levels. For instance, there is the damage caused to the economic base by extreme weather events. Of the $165 billion of damage caused by natural disasters in 2018, about half was to assets that were uninsured. In fact, as climate-related damage becomes both more common and less predictable, insurance may not be able to keep up. Entire segments of assets — for example, coastal infrastructure and housing — might become effectively uninsurable. The effects on labour productivity because of heat stress and the spread of disease to new areas opened up by global warming will also effectively reduce the economic base. Again, a labour-surplus and less developed country like India will find its ability to grow severely compromised by an increase in heat stress and a further reduction in health indicators.

Financial regulators, policymakers, and investors need to mainstream climate risk into their analysis. In the Indian case, for example, infrastructure investment needs to routinely analyse the effect of more extreme climate on the value of the asset. Companies need to start revealing their exposure to climate change risks — in some jurisdictions, listed companies are now expected to do so routinely, and the Indian market regulator should look into how soon similar disclosure requirements can be announced in this country. A whole-of-economy look at climate risks in India is overdue. For example, to what degree are existing "dirty" assets — old coal power plants and unextracted coal mines — likely to lose value as India undergoes its green transition? What will be the effect on banks and government finances? Given the compressed time-frame for climate action, preparing the financial ground for proper risk assessment is overdue.

ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY

Investor expectations from the Budget

It will be a litmus test for the government's reform credentials

On February 1, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present in Parliament what will arguably be the most important Budget this government has formulated to date. Investors will go through the document and the Budget speech with a fine-tooth comb, looking for any indication on how the government will tackle the slowdown and the path forward. Investors are keen to see a coherent economic game plan.

There is consensus among global investors that the time has come for a serious push to improve the business climate. If we do not see major reform steps to boost the economy now, given the economic weakness and the majority this government enjoys, there is little chance anything significant will happen later. For investors, this Budget will be a litmus test for judging the reform credentials of the government.

AKASH PRAKASH

A few things are clear. We will have a significant fiscal slippage. Most investors expect a revised fiscal deficit of 3.7-3.8 per cent of GDP, compared with the targeted 3.3 per cent. We have a slippage of 11 basis points, 3.3 per cent to 3.41 per cent, simply due to a lower nominal GDP. An additional 30 or 40 basis points of fiscal slippage over that will be acceptable to most, given the weakness in the economy and the need to maintain government spending in the absence of a revival in either consumption or exports.

Investors would like to see this fiscal space be used for capital expenditure. For the following year, though, they do expect efforts to get the fisc back on track, and a target of 3.3- 3.5 per cent of GDP for 2021 seems realistic. No one expects the 3 per cent fiscal target to be hit anytime soon.

Given the lack of space on the fiscal front and constraints on monetary policy, now is the time for genuine reforms. The finance minister would be well advised to go sector by sector and try to implement the policy changes needed to boost investment and exports, with the hope that consumption will follow. Here's what investors are hoping for from the Budget.

For global investors, one important step would be the scrapping of the long-term capital gains (LTCG) tax on equities. LTCG tax has not yielded much revenue and administratively makes life complicated for global funds. Many of the truly long-term investors (the endowments, sovereign wealth and foundations) pay no tax in their home jurisdictions and consider India an outlier in levying capital gains taxes on them.

It would not be feasible to totally scrap capital gains taxes but at least long-term capital gains may be exempted. This would raise the expected post-tax returns of investing in Indian financial markets, and lower the cost of capital for companies. This move for equities can be easily funded by marginally raising the securities transaction tax. This step, while not costing the fisc much, would boost risk appetite, encourage the financialisation of savings and send a positive signal to global capital providers.

Another step in the Budget must be to provide funding to implement a scrappage scheme for old vehicles. Any commercial vehicle over 15 years old must be scrapped, and incentives provided to do so. This will not cost the exchequer more than ₹10,000-₹15,000 crore, but provide a huge boost for the auto industry. It will dramatically lower pollution and vastly improve fuel efficiency of the commercial fleet. This is a win- win for everyone.

The auto industry is a big employer with a significant multiplier for the economy, but it is currently doing poorly. Cash for clunkers schemes have been implemented across the world, especially during the time of the financial crisis. They have been proven to work. There is no reason why India cannot go down this path. The only constraint is money. Whatever fiscal leeway is available must be used to implement schemes like this.

Another area where we should see government action is start-ups. We now have a robust start-up ecosystem, with money available across the maturity spectrum of companies. From angel rounds to series D, E and F, money is available. While the government has done a lot to encourage start-ups, clearly recognising their importance, more can be done. They should be allowed to carry forward losses for 15 years, rather than the eight years permitted today. The median start-up today will remain a private company for 12 years (US data), compared with six or seven years earlier. They will also most likely lose more money, for longer than in the past, before turning profitable. Extending their period of carry forward losses, improves their cash flows and net margins when they finally turn the tide on profitability. A case can also be made to tax employee stock options on sales, rather than on exercise. This will make options more attractive for employees and ease their cash flow burden. A final point would be to exempt the start-ups from provisions of Article 42 of the companies Act, wherein under certain conditions, these start-ups can be considered as public companies.

Exports have been a big disappointment over the past few years. Till such time as domestic demand recovers, exports would be a good way to tap into global demand. Higher utilisation will eventually trigger an investment cycle. A comprehensive package of incentives and policies to improve export competitiveness must be announced.

For the telecom and power sectors, we need industry specific interventions. On telecom, the government has to find a middle path and provide some relief to the beleaguered industry from the whole adjusted gross revenue fiasco. We cannot have only two private players surviving.

On power, the state electricity boards (SEBs) remain bankrupt. The UDAY scheme has not worked. Why will anyone invest in a sector where your principal counterparty is bankrupt? The SEB debt to private power players has once again ballooned to ₹46,000 crore.

When it comes to direct taxes, many expect that we will see significant cuts in rates. Realistically, the best we can hope, though, is some rationalisation in the exemptions, simplification and a marginal rebalancing of the slabs/ rates.

The disinvestment targets for 2020 will be missed but 2021 should be a big year as the Bharat Petroleum Corporation, Container Corporation of India and Air India transactions will get completed. The government must sell its stakes in Tata Communications and Hindustan Zinc, and other such residual holdings and monetise whatever is possible. In both these companies, the government is not involved in day to day management, why keep the stakes?

The government must also go through the list of public sector units and see where value can be captured. NMDC is an obvious example. Another example of potential value unlocking is Hemisphere Properties. The land is worth thousands of crores and there has to be a way to monetise its value, rather than wait years to develop the asset. The big one, however, will be the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC). This is probably the most valuable wholly-owned asset of the government. Given that LIC has done a reasonable job handling private sector competition, there is significant value. Will the government list LIC? It cannot be a strategic sale, but a listing and gradual sell-down of stake while maintaining control.

There are many other sector-specific things which can be announced in the Budget. Real estate and the NBFC space are other areas of focus. This Budget needs to revive confidence in the Indian economy, and convince investors and India Inc that the economy and reforms are once again a top priority for this government.

The writer is with Amansa Capital

Natural farming for fiscal prudence?

After decades of intensive agriculture, farms and farmers are in a crisis, food markets remain distorted, and consumers do not have access to nutritious diets. India needs a shift towards sustainable food systems. Among many alternative farming techniques is natural farming, with the potential to improve sustainability and also meliorate government finances.

Natural farming is an alternative to chemical fertiliser-based and high input cost agriculture. It embodies principles of agroecology, activating microbial life in soil via bio-inoculums (prepared using cow dung, cow urine, jaggery, etc.), thereby improving both soil and plant health. The practice advocates complete elimination of synthetic chemical inputs and encourages natural inputs, mulching practices and symbiotic intercropping.

Andhra Pradesh has had a statewide natural farming programme since 2016, now covering 580,000 farmers. Other states — Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Uttarakhand — have shown interest. The central government has held discussions. In her Budget speech of July 2019, the finance minister highlighted natural farming, its potential to contribute to the goal of doubling farmers' incomes and allocated □325 crore for its study and promotion. In September, at the meeting of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the prime minister also promoted "Indian natural farming practices".

INFLEXION POINTS

ARUNABHA GHOSH & NITI GUPTA

Researchers at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) have estimated that, at scale and properly implemented, natural farming could potentially impact a quarter of the 169 targets under the Sustainable Development Goals. But there are gaps between promise and practice. Not all farmers switch to natural farming entirely. Not all farmers have been practising it for long, so there remain uncertainties about yields. Not all farmers have access to functioning markets to secure higher returns.

A central proposition of natural farming is that chemical fertiliser use and related input costs could be significantly reduced. CEEW's latest study investigated this claim — and the impact on fertiliser subsidies*. Evidence appears promising. Based on a survey of 600 farmers across all agro-climatic zones in Andhra Pradesh, the study found significantly lower fertiliser consumption (more than 95 per cent reduction in most cases) for naturally farming rice and maize. A conventional farmer uses 74.46 kg of urea per acre. The expected urea use for a natural farmer was found to be 0.59 kg/acre. Farmers also reported 90-93 per cent lower expenditure on fertiliser and pesticide inputs compared to conventional farming, or savings of □5,000-7,000 per acre.

India is the world's second largest producer of urea (and the largest importer in 2016). Fertiliser subsidies are budgeted to be □80,000 crore in 2019-20. Andhra Pradesh, alone, received more than □3,500 crore in 2018-19 as fertiliser subsidy. In 2019, the government spent $3.2 billion as additional subsidy on imported gas used in fertiliser industries. This represented about 8 per cent of the total subsidy (food, fuel and fertiliser) budget for FY2019-20. Further, subsidies have resulted in urea imports jumping from 0.2 million tonnes in 2000 to 6 million tonnes in 2017.

Reducing fertiliser use with natural farming has significant fiscal implications. With complete penetration of natural farming across Andhra Pradesh, the state could save almost □2,100 crore in fertiliser subsidies annually (based on reported consumption by farmers). Even with low penetration of 25 per cent, estimated savings could be □517 crore annually. These estimates acknowledge that some farmers continue to use chemical inputs for a portion of their land during a transition phase. This could be thanks to behavioural inertia, hesitation with wholly adopting a new practice, or lack of natural inoculants in sufficient quantity. If they switched completely, then fertiliser subsidy savings would range between □539 crore and □2,154 crore in the low- and high-penetration scenarios, respectively. Such savings could finance full rollout of natural farming in Andhra Pradesh (estimated to cost □17,000 crore) within 8-10 years.

Adopting natural farming more widely needs more research, deployment and evaluation. There is urgent need to conduct a long-term comprehensive impact evaluation of natural farming methods on food production (quality and quantity), farmers' incomes and welfare (lower debt burden, for instance), and environmental outcomes (soil health, water conservation, and carbon sequestration).

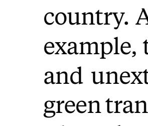
Research should cover several agro-climatic zones across the country. Data from crop-cutting experiments must be analysed against the social and economic conditions under which the practices were adopted. Are there commonalities in the circumstances of high-performing farmers that could be scaled up in other regions as well? Is there a relationship between prior ecological conditions and subsequent improvements, which could indicate the regions where natural farming is more likely to succeed?

Another link is between natural farming and climate adaptation and mitigation. Chemicals and fertilisers account for 12 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions from India's manufacturing sector. Apart from reducing manufacturing emissions, studies of soil carbon retention and resilience of naturally farmed crops against climate stresses could be documented in state climate action plans. New information from field surveys could be used to update the plans. Robust studies on carbon sequestration could link farmers to climate finance mechanisms, creating new channels for investment in natural farming or additional income for farmers.

A systemic shift in agriculture would mean vastly upgrading resource productivity, increasing economic viability of alternative practices, and greater social inclusion of the small and marginal farmer. More information is needed to definitively say whether natural farming increases yields and farmers' incomes. But the impacts on fertiliser use and lower subsidy burden suggest that we encourage more experiments and scientific evaluation — at scale — towards sustainable food systems.

*Ghosh is CEO and Gupta is Research Analyst, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (http://ceew.in). Follow @GhoshArunabha @CEEWIndia *Gupta, Tripathi, Dholakia (2020) Can Zero Budget Natural Farming Save Input Costs and Fertiliser Subsidies? Evidence from Andhra*

Small powerhouses



BOOK REVIEW

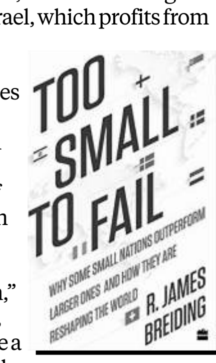
CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

For a book that argues that smaller is better, the title is more than a mouthful. *Too Small To Fail: Why Some Small Nations Outperform Larger Ones And How They Are Reshaping The World* presents the idea that economic power is no longer linked to maintaining giant armies and navies. It is a matter of winning trade battles and global contests for attracting professional talent.

"For centuries, a country's status has been measured by the size of its territorial reach, its military might and its natural resource endowment," writes the author R James Breiding. "While still important to the global balance of power, these physical metrics are waning today in relevance in the face of increasing global economic interdependence, driven largely by rapid developments in information technology, telecommunication and transportation."

Part A of this book, called "Secret Sauces", focuses on the qualities and attitudes valued in smaller countries that have overcome physical limitations to make progress in several spheres. Mr Breiding believes that their success lies in their alertness to risks, their willingness to adapt, and the fact that their investment in human resources reflects industry needs. They are adept at using soft power, and skilled at resolving geopolitical conflicts through negotiation. It is surprising, therefore, that Mr Breiding chose to include Israel, which profits from its occupation of Palestine.

Smaller countries prefer to attain prosperity through innovation rather than annexation of territory, expansion of borders or enslavement of people. "In Sweden," Mr Breiding writes, "all employees have a statutory right to take six months off work and start their own business. No wonder Sweden is dubbed 'Europe's start-up capital' and has produced more unicorns …such as Klarna, Spotify and Skype than anywhere outside of Silicon Valley."



TOO SMALL TO FAIL: Why Some Small Nations Outperform Larger Ones And How They Are Reshaping The World
Author: R. James Breiding
Publisher: HarperCollins

What is most enjoyable about the writing style is that, apart from giving you relevant statistics to back up observations, it also brings you anecdotes from the author's conversations with leaders from academia, industry and government. His expertise lies in synthesising their insights on the histories, economies, political systems and social norms of their respective countries. For example, he cites an interview with Ralph Eichler at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), who feels that excessive time pressure and over-measurement discourage innovation. He told the author that researchers in Asian countries tend to pick low-risk projects because they fear looking foolish if they are unable to measure up to the prescribed key performance indicators.

Part B, titled "Leading By Example", looks closely at specific countries and their accomplishments despite their seeming disadvantage with respect to size. In Finland, all citizens get access to the same educational opportunities regardless of their family wealth, stature, ethnicity, or place of residence. In the absence of admission restrictions, parents do not feel pressured to game the system to get their children into the best schools. Education is also free right up to and including higher education. Apart from tuition, this covers hidden costs such as meals, textbooks and healthcare insurance. Moreover, there are no elite private schools and no stigma attached to specialised crafts and trades because people who excel at them are valued in their society.

In Part C, titled "The Future of Nations", Mr Breiding notes that citizens are becoming more mobile thanks to countries that use residence permits and citizenship to attract the most desirable immigrants such as top scientists, executives and the ultra-rich. Many of these are *TSTF* countries. He predicts that countries will be smaller, more cohesive because that would make it easier to craft and implement policies. There would be fewer degrees of separation between government and the citizens. This sounds like the perfect world but Mr Breiding gives us a reality check: smallness is no guarantee of success as evident in the case of Haiti, Lebanon and Zimbabwe. Each country grapples with its own circumstances and must find its own path.

A longer version of this review appears on the website

Opinion

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2020

UNITING AGAINST CAA

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee

"We have already passed a resolution against NRC and CAB three to four months ago. As for the CAA, we will also pass a resolution within three to four days... I will also request the other states to pass a similar resolution"

Curbs on duty-free booze won't fix import hangover

Policy to produce minerals here & promoting electronic value-add is needed, not restricting duty-free shopping

IF ONLY, THE perfect *swadeshi* dream probably goes, India had the political will, it could restrict—in FY19—$514.1 bn of imports, not only saving precious foreign exchange but also adding a lot of potential manufacturing opportunity for Indian firms, considering India's import-to-GDP ratio is 18.9%. Restricting all imports, of course, is not possible; it drives up prices of goods for both consumers and manufacturers and, in many cases like oil or various minerals, imports are critical since there simply isn't enough production in India. Which is why, over the past few years, the government has been hiking import duties of just some goods. The latest suggestion from the commerce ministry is that passengers coming in from abroad be allowed to buy only one bottle of alcohol from duty-free shops instead of two, and that even the one carton of cigarettes allowed right now be stopped; it appears, imports are to be raised on hundreds of 'non-essential imports', like toys, footwear, and rubber goods.

It is not clear if finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman will do this in the budget, but if she does, this is not just missing the woods for the trees but, worse, for the branches given how minuscule such imports are. While sales of duty-free alcohol is, at best, a few hundred million dollars, India's imports of minerals (including oil) are over $280 bn while that of mobile phones/components is around $23-24 bn. Instead of trying to save a few hundred million dollars, India should be aiming to curb these imports given that, were India's domestic policies to encourage domestic exploration and production, in fact, these imports are really the 'non-essential' ones. Indeed, in the case of mobile phones, while India's domestic assembly of phones has risen manifold over the past few years, so have imports of components since the government has not been able to woo big companies like Apple and Samsung, who can do more value addition in India. Worse, with its domestic manufacturing policies still quite restrictive, India remains quite uncompetitive and, so, while exports of countries like Vietnam have spiraled, India's exports rose just 5% in the last five years, from $314 bn in FY14 to $330 bn in FY19; had India's exports been rising fast, there would be no talk of curbing imports.

Apart from the fact that India will not be able to export if it keeps driving up import tariffs—reduction of import restrictions/tariffs has been a common demand in all of India's bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations—higher import duties just make Indian production more uncompetitive. Import duties give extra protection to local manufacturers who, then, have no reason to try and bring down costs. In an increasingly globalised world, if you are not globally competitive, you can't even be locally competitive since either imports or smuggled goods—in case, import tariffs are high—will pour in. If the hike in import duties was temporary, and was accompanied by dramatic and sweeping changes to make local production more competitive, it could still be acceptable; but, there is little evidence of that happening. Indeed, when import protection falls, as it did in the early 1990s, this becomes a trigger for some local reform as well. The government will be hard-placed to show examples of countries that have become more competitive while hiking import tariffs/restrictions, but it is fair to say the move will go down well with individual lobby groups like domestic manufacturers of IMFL, cigarette producers, etc.

Why apply NSA in Delhi?

Gets more worrying in the context of JNU-Jamia protest

THE DELHI POLICE (DP) getting powers under the National Security Act (NSA) may be a routine matter—DP has clarified that the NSA provision has been there in the law and is just re-notified every quarter—but that doesn't make it any less of a concern. Indeed, that a routine notification should have caused the kind of furore it has points to how poor the optics of the move are. The NSA's provisions are draconian since they allow detention of people without filing of charges for up to 12 months (extendable if the government finds fresh evidence), and suspension of a host of rights under the Criminal Procedure Code—including the right to legal counsel—that apply to people arrested under other laws and legal provisions. NSA was originally meant to deal with threats to national security since, very often, it is difficult to get enough proof against terrorists in a relatively short period of time, to ensure they don't get out on bail. This provision, however, is a double-edged sword; while such powers need to be available to combat terrorism, they can also be made an instrument of state oppression. The recent instances of Manipuri journalist Kishorechandra Wangkhem being jailed under NSA for over four months for being critical of the chief minister of the state, and of Bhim Army chief Chandrashekar Azad Ravan being jailed for nearly 15 months show how such powers can be misused by the state.

Against the backdrop of the anti-CAA protests in the national capital, among other places in the country, and the aggressive statements from members of the ruling party on the need to clamp down on the protests which, they claim, are anti-national, the NSA powers will exacerbate the anxieties of those who believe the CAA—along with the talk on NPR/NRC—is discriminatory towards Muslims. Delhi's winter of protests has also seen violence against students in Jamia Millia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru University, in which the role of the police has stoked controversy. Although there have been instances of unrest, the anti-CAA protests in the national capital have largely been peaceful, and there seems little threat of them degenerating into situations that will threaten the security of the country. And, student protests, loud and disruptive though they may be, are little threat to national security. Indeed, for a functioning democracy, dissent must be allowed. With the Delhi Police under the Union home ministry, the Centre must offer reassurance, volubly and visibly, that the NSA provisions won't be used to crush democratic dissent.

RareRELIEF

Govt aid to beneficiaries of PM-JAY for one-time treatment of select rare diseases is good, but more needs to be done

THE SUBSTANTIVE PART of the Centre's proposed policy on rare diseases—extending medical cover of upto ₹15 lakh for a one-time treatment in the case of certain treatable rare diseases at tertiary hospitals to the beneficiaries of the PM Jan Arogya Yojana—may not prove a healing touch. Rare diseases often require phased or lifelong treatment and these can be quite expensive. But, meant for people who can't even afford the basic care for such diseases, it is actually a big step forward. That said, to be successful in making any manner of dent against such diseases, India needs epidemiological data on these, something that it sorely lacks. The data unavailability hampers efforts to define and identify rare diseases; the resulting lack of awareness leads to multiple misdiagnoses and prolonged suffering for patients. While the draft bill does propose encouraging research into rare diseases in India, and speaks of a National Registry for Rare Diseases to be developed by the Indian Council for Medical Research, it does not lay out any actionable measures to do so.

Globally, as many as 300 million people suffer from rare diseases. While there are about 5,000-8,000 known rare diseases, cures are known for less than 5% of these. In India, so far, only about 450 diseases that are globally recognised as rare have been recorded. The medical cover proposed by the draft bill extends only to a minority of diseases that can be cured—severe combined immunodeficiency, polycystic kidney disease, tyrosinemia, etc. The decision, and onus, of supporting patients that require lifelong care has been left entirely to the state governments. While resource constraint is a real factor—the government had planned a corpus of ₹100 crore to fund treatment of rare genetic diseases in 2017, but this, too, fell through due to budget limitations—the Centre would, perhaps, be well-advised to invest in palliative care units and pain management centres, and building an infrastructure of healthcare workers to aid those excluded from medical coverage for treatment in the draft bill.

BUDGET 2020

BUDGET 2020 WILL MOSTLY BE A POINTER ON THE FISCAL EXPECTATION AND DIRECTION, WITH ANY ACTUAL POLICY ANNOUNCEMENT TAKING A BACK SEAT

A Budget for hard times

MADAN SABNAVIS

Chief economist, CARE Ratings
Views are personal

THE NEXT BIG policy announcement will be the Union Budget, which, as usual, has raised expectations. While a lot of announcements pertaining to different sectors have been made by the government since August, the issues on taxation have not been completely addressed, and, hence, the market expects these to be addressed on February 1. But, since changes to GST are solely within the ambit of the GST Council, it is only income tax that can be addressed. Similarly, a number of announcements have been made with respect to tax refunds and operational issues, especially for SMEs, as well as bank mergers, which obviates the need for a fresh set of measures addressing these concerns.

Two things would be important—the revised numbers of FY20, and the fiscal contours of FY21. The revised numbers are important because there has been substantial debate on the achievement of fiscal targets for FY20. More so, because when the corporate tax rate was lowered, it was officially stated that the revenue loss from this could be ₹1.45 lakh crore. Besides, the Budget was drawn up with two rather aggressive assumptions. The first is the 7% GDP growth rate during the year; this will now be 5%, as per the CSO. The other is that the overall size of the budget, which comprises revenue collections and borrowings, was ₹27.9 lakh crore over a revised number of ₹24.6 lakh crore; this was surprising given that the actual number, as per accounts for March 2019, was ₹23.11 lakh crore. The important implication, here, is that, as per the budget, the government was to raise an additional ₹3.3 lakh crore over FY19; this would, then, amount to ₹4.8 lakh crore, based on the actual number at a time when the economy has slowed down sharply.

Therefore, the fiscal numbers for FY20 assume significance as they will also reveal the willingness to compromise on the fiscal deficit target to prop up the economy by enhancing the fiscal deficit. Hence, the questions here are: Will tax revenue collections be met? Will disinvestment of ₹1 lakh crore materialise even though some announcements have been made? At present, the market does not expect more than two-thirds of the target to be achieved. Missing the disinvestment target will have implications for the FY21 target, too.

On the expenditure side, the accounts show that ministries have been spending within the budgets mandated by the FM, so far. Now, with slippages on the revenue side, the obvious question to be asked is whether or not expenditures will be managed by some tweaking, especially in February and March, after the budget is presented. There are two options available to the government, here. The first is rollover of some expenses, in particular, subsidies. Last year, there was a large rollover, where the FCI had to borrow from banks to procure foodgrains from farmers. The other is cutbacks on capex by ministries towards the end of the year. These are standard ways of controlling the level of fiscal deficit, which appears almost certain to go towards 3.8-4% this year, even with these cuts. In fact, some social programmes can also be pruned. Which option is availed will be known only when the accounts are presented.

The more important announcements that will be observed are those pertaining to FY21. Income tax rates are something that households are expecting to come down. Now, at a time when GDP growth has slowed down and will probably not move beyond the 6-6.5% range for FY21, it may be hard for the FM to go in for such cuts. But, with consumption being down, there is demand for these rates to be rationalised. This will be an interesting call because the DTC spoke of lower rates, but annulment of tax deductions, which if done, may not leave households better off in net terms. At the same time, doing it upfront risks collections coming down. Therefore, this will be a tough call for the government to take, considering that there is reason to believe that the GST rates may be tweaked upwards during the course of the year as the continuous downward movement of rates has impacted collections.

> **Under the present circumstances, a real growth rate of 6-6.5% could be the maximum that can be expected along with 4% inflation**

Second, the fiscal target would be very important not just from the point of view of the market borrowings likely for the year, which in turn will have a bearing on RBI policy, but also because it will reveal the fiscal path chosen by the government. If the target is lower than that for FY20(R), it would mean that the prudent path is being pursued; anything in the range of 4% or above will mean that the government will be taking on the role of a fiscal stimulus given that the monetary push has not quite worked the way it was intended to.

Third, the expenditure pattern will be of interest on two grounds that will partly be revealed in the fiscal deficit numbers. The first is the allocation for capex—₹3.4 lakh crore for FY20. As the government has spoken of a target of ₹102.5 lakh crore for infra spending, of which the central government is to contribute 39%, this number should ideally be increasing. The other pertains to the social expenditure as there will be no further compulsions of elections for some time. The ₹75,000 crore PM-Kisan scheme was a big-ticket expense announced last year, and while it would be interesting to see if the entire amount for the year gone by has been, or will be spent, the target for the next year will be important, too, as it will have a bearing on the fiscal trajectory.

Fourth, the growth assumption will be indicative of what the government feels will happen, and while there has always been a tendency to be aggressive in assumption, it will lay the foundation for all the other numbers, especially on the revenue side. Under the present circumstances, a real growth rate of 6-6.5% could be the maximum that can be expected along with 4% inflation, thus denoting a growth rate of 10-10.5% in nominal GDP, which serves as a denominator for reckoning the fiscal deficit. Interestingly, in four of the last five years, the budget overstated the GDP growth by between 0.3-2.4%, while in FY17, it was understated by 0.5%. For FY20, the budgeted growth is 10.5% and has come in at 7.5%.

In short, this year's budget will be looked at more from the point of view of fiscal expectation and direction, with policy taking a back seat, considering that the FM has covered almost the entire perimeter of measures to revive the economy, both with regards to specific sectors as well as procedure.

Budget fog

As and when credit conditions improve, the economy will revive. Attempts to accelerate the recovery by fiscal stimulus when financial accounts are in a dire state will not help

MEGHNAD DESAI

Prominent economist and labour peer. *Views are personal*

ECONOMIC POLICY-MAKING HAS been described as driving in the rain, when neither the road ahead can be seen nor does the rear view mirror work. The Budget about to be introduced by Nirmala Sitharaman will be very much such an exercise, without any fault of hers.

As it is, budgets are a strange phenomenon. They are not so much an economic exercise as an accounting one. By established rules and procedures, a government has to present the financial accounts for the previous year and plans for the current one. Being an accounting exercise, two sides have to balance with the deficits or surpluses being listed, whether achieved or hoped for.

Despite the fuss made over budgets, they do not bear to be taken seriously beyond the first flush. A day later, the stale budget is no longer appetising. The economic effect of any budget will only be felt over the coming year. Ideally, any budget speech should dwell on the previous year's exercise and evaluate its results.

The Budget about to be presented will face not only the problems of the fog surrounding any economic intelligence but will also have to regain the credibility of the exercise. Last year's budget was surprisingly fragile and had to be supplemented by corrections of already declared policies and new initiatives. It was a very tentative exercise.

Having said that, one should ask whether that is not a better way of budgeting from an economic rather than a financial perspective. Economists would, or rather should, prefer fuzzy budgeting. Revenue and expenditure numbers should be given as ranges around a central figure, since it is inherently unknowable what the future will bring.

This year, especially, not only is the fog thicker, but the ground, too, is shifting and sinking. Given the fragility of even the statistics on GDP growth, the outcomes are pretty bad. If Aravind Subramanian, the former CEA is to be believed, even the 5% growth may be 2% or less. All the numbers for the economy, except perhaps the inflation numbers, are more unreliable than they normally are. The government's most urgent task is to announce some policy designed to reestablish confidence in India's economic statistics, perhaps by hiring outside experts.

> **Revenue and expenditure numbers should be given as ranges around a central figure, since it is inherently unknowable what the future will bring**

But, whatever the growth number, it is one of the lowest in recent years. The economy is in a severe growth recession, having traversed a cycle of six years. India benefited from the spectacular growth cycle of 1998-2008, but it has not been able to sustain another such cycle. That cycle benefited from a fast growing global economy since India had opened up its own economy. Since 2008, western economies have slowed down spectacularly, from 3-4% growth to 0.5-1.5% growth. India has suffered due to this slowdown. It has also had the most spectacular crash in credit availability. Structural weaknesses of PSU banks, and the generally weak nature of contract enforcement discipline in the financial markets have become costlier as the economy gets more modern. The IBC was the first attempt to recognise that the financial markets are central to any economy and must be cleaned up. That effort has stalled, and the Indian economy is paying the price.

In earlier years, it was thought that the economy was driven by the government, which dragged the private economy along. Now, India has attained the stage where the economy is more like other capitalist economies, where the government can no longer drive it, but has to correct its course judiciously by using delicate, but effective, controls.

This means, that neither physical controls nor massive fiscal shocks are necessary, or desirable. The government needs to seriously rethink how the Indian economy in the last two decades has evolved to be a modern capitalist economy that needs sophisticated, but delicate controls. Old-style planning and intervention must be removed from the menu of policies.

The government has tried, once again, to initiate divestment, but the internal opposition it faces (Hindu nationalists are as statist as the Leninists) has stalled the process. Even Air India is still draining resources. I do not wish it, but, perhaps, only a more serious collapse will bring sanity on this score. Policies of labour and land market reforms are similarly no-go areas despite the old idea that BJP was a traders'/*bania* party.

I do not have much hope of the budget. As and when credit conditions improve, the economy will revive. Attempts to accelerate the recovery by fiscal stimulus when financial accounts are in a dire state (if we were told the truth) will not help. The Indian economy needs a bold monetary and a timid fiscal policy. Any hope we will get it?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

New BJP president

The elevation of JP Nadda as the national president of BJP is a foregone conclusion ever since he was made its working president. Under the leadership of Modi-Shah duo, BJP had not only expanded its electoral imprint in several states, but also strengthened its domination in areas where it was already a major force to reckon with. BJP's humungous mandate in both Lok Sabha polls, is perhaps one of the major reasons for its present renewed push of its core ideological agendas, manifested itself in its decisions such as abrogation of Article 370 and CAA. The ongoing vociferous protests involving students, youths and members of civil society against the divisive and discriminatory CAA in several parts of the country, and the resultant mass outreach programme by BJP leadership in support of CAA along with the reality of it ceding ground to oppositon in recently held assembly polls in states such as Jharkhand, Maharashtra reminds the challenge before JP Nadda, and his party, when it comes to boosting party's victory in electoral arena.

— M Jeyaram, Sholavandan

On CAA

Congress leader Kapil Sibal remarks that no state can deny the implementation of the CAA when the Parliament has already passed it suggests that the 'Grand old party' has climbed down from its earlier rigid stance. Sibal stressed that it would be 'constitutionally difficult' to refuse cooperation if upheld by the SC. While the left government in Kerala has approached the SC, the Punjab government has also planned to move the apex court. Though the rumblings over the CAA is disquieting, it must soon taper down.

— N J Ravi Chander, Bengaluru

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PORTRAIT: SHYAM KUMAR PRASAD

FOOD CAFE: SATYA PRABHAKAR

Growing by helping small businesses find their feet

The CEO of Sulekha.com shares with **Sushila Ravindranath** how the company's focus on expert service listings has pushed it headlong into competition with Google, and it is fighting a war without fighting to win. It aims to be the largest services marketplace brand for Indians all over the world

I **HAVE MORE OR** less met Satya Prabhakar, the CEO of Sulekha.com—which is one of the earliest internet companies to come up in the country—every four years, when he has announced something new. Unlike many other such companies that got started around the same time, in 2007, Sulekha has survived, kept up with fast-changing technology, and emerged as one of the leaders in its space.

The company's early-mover advantage began to fade with the arrival of specialised digital service players like Housejoy, UrbanClap, CarDekho, Ola, Amazon, Zomato and others, but Sulekha didn't give up. It started reinventing itself. Today, Sulekha.com is an AI-enabled platform for expert services. It has 73,000 paid service providers, and 2,05,000 unpaid service providers. All the paid service providers have recently successfully migrated from its platform to a dedicated business app; the company has a separate app for its consumers.

I am meeting Prabhakar to know about the changes he is making and how he is combating the competition for many of the service providers on his platform. We meet for an early morning breakfast at the Eco Cafe at Chamiers, a lifestyle store, as we always do. Chennai businessmen usually like meeting at the crack of dawn for breakfast, their favourite meal. Prabhakar orders a *masala* omelette with a lot of chillies, and I ask for French toast. We are also served fresh fruits and coffee.

Sulekha, when it was launched, was one of the most popular Indian internet media companies, connecting millions of Indians across 24 cities in India and the US. It integrated classifieds and yellow pages. At that point, it was also the largest online ticketer for Indian events and films in North America.

Although successful, it was a low-volume business, and not highly profitable. Prabhakar tweaked the business model several times. Sulekha then became a platform for trading products and services with classified advertisements. "We started focusing on small and medium scale businesses, which presented a huge potential."

Prabhakar tells me what Sulekha is not doing. "There are fulfilment focused vertical solutions such as ordering cabs, food delivery or handymen providing either products or low-value services. Online information and payment systems like ticketing are low-volume commoditised businesses. C-to-C and ticketing services are online demand-supply brokers. We don't compete in these areas."

He says these are all high-frequency, need-based businesses. "Here, people are sensitive to price and you don't have pricing power. You have to dominate your space to get attention. It is a global phenomenon."

He sees Sulekha as the provider of market-based expert services. "It's an intelligent matchmaker. There are MSMEs in the services space that do not have enough capital, enough business, no name recognition, no medium that will help them grow. They just don't have an accountable and marketing-driven channel. Customers who need them don't know whom to trust, don't know how to choose, and they are under time pressure," he says.

Small and medium businesses (SMBs), therefore, are ready for a digital disruption. That is where Sulekha comes in. As we get ourselves more coffee, he explains: "We address diverse needs across the hubs of home accommodation, business, events, training and lifestyle. We decided to focus on defined areas. Our customers' requirements are matched with the services they need. For example, if you want an event manager, we find one specific to your needs."

As we are about to finish our rather substantial breakfast, Prabhakar adds, "Business has to solve problems and people must pay for them. We have a value proposition for MSMEs to grow their business on our platform. They pay us, and it is not an expensive holding. We will tell them that they will get so much response. Sulekha provides verified matched service requests."

On competition, he says the company's focus on expert service listings has pushed it headlong into competition with Google. "In this case, we have to fight a war without fighting to win. We give differentiated higher value for the customer. You scratch a customer's problem, an innovation is hiding. We give an accountable, actionable, simple solution. It is AI-driven matchmaking."

Prabhakar adds the company has to move with the changes in mobile and digital technology. Sulekha's business app provides several advantages to service providers. They can manage their Sulekha account from the app without having to speak with any customer support executive. They can decide the volume and size of the business leads they want, depending on their business capacity and bandwidth at any given time. They can also manage their profile page, which includes contacts.

Due to the feedback system, service providers can give feedback and receive insights that can help in improving their leads into conversion. Payments and renewals have been made easy. Service providers can choose Sulekha campaign packages and opt for a range of payment options, from the app.

"We get 10 lakh service requests per month. We match them in the cloud with the service provider. Since we moved all our service providers to the app, there has been a significant increase in the conversion rate of service requests. This is due to rising smartphone penetration and greater uptake for business apps in metro cities as well as in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, amongst smaller businesses. In fact, 98% of paid service providers in the metros are using the app, and 93% in smaller cities," he adds.

As a result of all the paid service providers moving onto Sulekha's business app, there has been a surge in the number of paid service providers on Sulekha, a 30% increase was seen last year. "This move is in alignment with Sulekha's core philosophy of helping small businesses grow. We believe that digitally-engaged service providers are more likely to convert service requests," says Prabhakar.

He adds the company is not starved of opportunities. "We have to build scalable, reliable, digitally-deliverable models. We want to be the largest services marketplace brand for Indians all over the world. Moving forward constantly gives you continuous low-burn anxiety," he says as we finish our coffee.

BUDGET 2020

Powering up electric vehicles

PANKAJ M MUNJAL

The author is chairman & MD, Hero Motors Company

Extending the subsidy benefits of FAME-II to e-bikes will help offer more affordable products to consumers

THE 2019 UNION Budget was a landmark one for electric mobility. Not only was GST on electric vehicles (EVs) slashed to 5%, the Budget also offered major incentives for buyers of EVs in the form of income-tax rebates on loan. These measures were designed to push the sale of EVs—on the top of the government's priority in recent years. These were in addition to the FAME-II scheme. However, the sale of EVs has remained largely muted; analysis suggest that 1,309 units of electric cars have been sold between April and November 2019. The industry needs a slew of measures, therefore, to address concerns on the demand and supply side. With finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman set to announce her second Budget, we hope more disposable income will be put in the hands of the consumers and there will be more sops for EVs. More importantly, the finance minister must seriously consider giving a policy push to electric bicycles.

In its annual review, the IMF said that declining consumption and investment accompanied by falling tax revenue have arrested India's once surging GDP growth. The IMF also called for "urgent" policy actions to reverse this slowdown. Cutting income tax rates and readjusting income tax slabs might be a tough call at a time when the government's revenues are shrinking, but it might also be the bitter pill the economy needs. In addition, the Indian economy needs a major fiscal policy push to increase employment and income. Also, revisions in GST slabs to reduce a low-tax economy need to be considered.

While the government has already announced a slew of measures to push EV production and sale, more might be needed to reduce the viability gap of EVs

Earlier this year, the finance minister had announced a scrappage policy aimed at shunting out old, polluting vehicles. The policy is aimed at serving the twin objectives of reducing emissions and boosting consumer demand. The government must ensure a quick roll-out and must also lay down positive incentives for customers. The incentives may include exemption on road tax and low interest loan schemes for purchase of new commercial vehicles.

According to industry body SIAM, the commercial vehicle industry suffered a decline of 22% in sales between April and November 2019. A supportive scrapping policy can help revive some of this lost demand.

Electric bicycles have recently been categorised as EVs for tax benefits. However, electric bicycles do not get the benefits designated under the government's FAME-II initiative. We hope the government recognises the need to promote electric bicycles as much as the need to promote electric cars. While electric cars address the problem of pollution, they do not address the rising concern of traffic congestion. Electric bicycles are both eco- and space-friendly. They also offer a viable solution to the problem of range anxiety that comes with lack of charging infrastructure, as they can be easily pedalled in case of battery discharge. Extending the subsidy benefits of FAME-II to electric bicycles will help manufacturers offer more affordable products to consumers.

While the government has already announced a slew of measures to push EV production and sale including subsidies to manufacturers and loan rebates to buyers, more measures might be needed to reduce the viability gap of EVs. For example, an analysis by SIAM in 2017 found that the current viability gap for electric buses is 1.7-2.5 times a regular diesel or CNG bus on account of low battery life and high cost of replacement. Logically, the viability gap is expected to reduce over time as technology evolves, leading to reduction in battery prices. Till then, the government must support the sector in different ways to make EVs more affordable and viable. These measures can include exemption on road tax, lower power tariffs for charging EVs, exemption of parking fees for EV users, exemption of permit costs, among others.

BUDGET 2020

Fixing India's Achilles heel?

There is a need to rationalise and recalibrate the existing I-T slabs

NAVEEN AGGARWAL

The author is partner, Tax, KPMG, India

DESPITE THE CURRENT slowdown, the India story still remains real and relevant. While a large part of this is attributable to global factors, the dwindling performance of certain internal factors seems to have added to the cause. The economy needs to be careful of not getting into a vicious cycle of decline in investment and retarding growth.

The encouraging part of the story is that the government acknowledges the current demand and supply challenges triggering the fall, and seems undeterred in pulling the levers to revise consumption and drive growth and investment. If one was to go by the current mood in the North Block and the recent prime ministerial consultations with industry and academia, policymakers seem determined to fix structural weaknesses—the genesis of the country's current economic predicament.

On the demand side, the government is on course to boost consumption. From a supply perspective, one can expect higher investment outlay in health, education and infrastructure. A critical growth engine will be direct taxes. One can expect measures to provide additional focus on widening the tax base, ensuring compliance, easing administration and augmenting revenue.

Corporate tax rate cuts: It is a welcome step to put India on a competitive level with other global economies. That being said, if taxes payable on shareholder profit distributions are included, on an overall basis, India continues to be a high-tax country. These rate cuts do not actually translate to an effectively low tax rate owing to the levy of the dividend distribution tax (DDT). India levies DDT at an effective rate of 20.56% on the company declaring dividends. After receiving their share of profits, post DDT, the woes of Indian resident shareholders (individuals/trusts) are aggravated by an additional levy of 10% on dividends earned greater than ₹10 lakh. For foreign investors, the 20.56% DDT becomes an additional cost as the tax is not creditable in most jurisdictions. There is a need to relook rates or replace DDT with withholding tax.

Cut in individual tax rates? There is an impending need to look at rationalising and recalibrating the existing income tax slabs to achieve the objective of a more progressive tax rate structure, in line with many developed nations. To this cause, the government should look at raising basic exemption limit from ₹2.5-5 lakh and reintroduce a rate of 10%, while recalibrating other slabs. With escalating costs of education and borrowed capital for homebuyers etc, the government should consider increasing the limits under Section 80C. While the challenge of limited fiscal bandwidth remains, the government needs to bite the fiscal slippage bullet.

India is seen as a pioneer in enacting legislative changes such as the introduction of the equalisation levy (EL) in 2016 and Significant Economic Presence (SEP) in 2018. However, these provisions are still plagued with ambiguities. The SEP provisions, instead of limiting to digital transactions, suggest a broader application to physical transactions/goods. Some of the terms used in SEP have an expansive scope and the undefined revenue threshold and user base create uncertainty for investors. That apart, there is also duplicity of taxes with SEP, EL and software royalty operating simultaneously. The government needs to address some of these ambiguities and consciously align domestic provisions with the ongoing progress in the OECD Unified Approach and the consensus that will emerge eventually.

The ever-burgeoning litigation pendency has shown little signs of abatement. As per the FY20 receipt budget as of March 31, 2018, a total of 4,62,824 direct tax cases were pending before various appellate forums involving a tax demand of almost ₹6.23 trillion. While providing a minimum tax threshold for filing appeals by the I-T department is expected to marginally bring down pending litigation, radical measures may be required. Adding rigour to clear the backlog of pendency before the Authority for Advance Rulings (AAR) and advance pricing agreements (APAs), coupled with the introduction of negotiated settlement by way of mediation/conciliation, is expected to go a long way in achieving this objective.

On the back of the success witnessed by the Sabka Vishwas Amnesty Scheme introduced last year for past service tax and excise disputes, the FM may play to popular expectation, and also consider introducing an immunity scheme for direct tax disputes on similar lines.

The government has showed its intent to ease processes by maximising e-filing and minimising taxpayers' physical presence. However, more work is needed on the ground to ensure a seamless experience where routine processes such as rectification of apparent mistakes, appeal effect orders of higher authorities, processing of tax refunds, and lower/nil withholding tax certificates are done within reasonable timelines.

In summary, amidst all the burden of a slowing economy, dampened job growth and private investments related challenges, the FM has her job cut out in this Budget to focus her energy and the government's resource to fix the Achilles heel of the Indian economic growth story.

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

TELLING NUMBERS

The gulf between rich and poor, men and women, globally

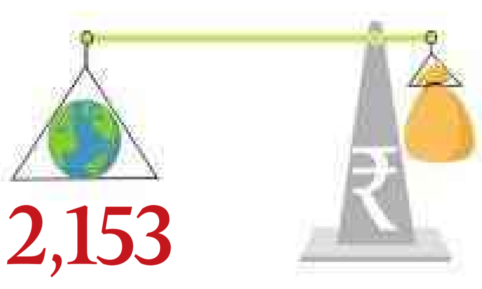
A REPORT published on Monday by Oxfam, the international nonprofit focussed on the alleviation of global poverty, underlined what has been said repeatedly by governments, research organisations and a range of multilateral bodies over the past decade or more — that economic inequality, as the report said, "is out of control", with extremes of wealth existing alongside great poverty.

"This great divide", the Oxfam report said, "is based on a flawed and sexist economic system" which has "accumulated vast wealth and power into the hands of a rich few, in part by exploiting the labour of women and girls, and systematically violating their rights".

The report, titled *Time to Care: Unpaid and Underpaid Care Work and the Global Inequality Crisis*, released ahead of the 50th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) beginning in Davos on Tuesday, also said that India's richest 1% hold more than four times the wealth held by the 953 million who make up for the bottom 70% of the country's population.

Some snapshots from the report:

HOW WIDE IS THE GAP BETWEEN THE RICHEST AND THE REST?



2,153 individuals, the number of billionaires in the world in 2019, have more wealth among them than 4.6 billion people.

22 of the world's richest men have a combined wealth that is more than the wealth of all the women of Africa.

■ The world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.

■ If everyone sat on their wealth piled up in $ 100 notes, most people would be sitting on the floor; a middle-class person in a rich country would be at the height of a chair; and the world's two richest men would be sitting in outer space.

■ If you saved $ 10,000 (about Rs 7.1 lakh) every day since the building of the pyramids in Egypt (about 4,500 years ago) you would have one-fifth the average fortune of the 5 richest billionaires.

■ An additional 0.5% tax on the wealth of the richest 1% over the next 10 years can create 117 million jobs in education, health and elderly care, etc.

■ From 2011 to 2017, average wages in G7 countries grew 3%, while dividends to wealthy shareholders increased by 31%.

HOW BADLY OFF ARE GIRLS & WOMEN AS COMPARED TO MEN?

Worldwide, men own 50% more wealth than women.

■ Globally, extreme poverty rates are 4% higher for women than men; this gap rises to 22% during women's peak productive and reproductive ages; that is, 122 women aged 25-34 for every 100 men of the same age group live in extremely poor households, largely due to childcare responsibilities.

■ $10.8 trillion is the estimated minimum annual monetary value of the unpaid care work by women aged 15 and above globally — this is three times the size of the world's tech industry.

■ Women do 12.5 billion hours of unpaid care work every day, equivalent to 1.5 billion people working 8 hours a day with no remuneration.

■ Globally, 42% of working age women are outside the paid labour force, compared with 6% of men, due to unpaid care responsibilities.

■ 80% of the estimated 67 million domestic workers worldwide are women. An estimated 90% of domestic workers have no access to social security such as maternity protection and benefits.

■ Worldwide, girls aged 5-9 and 10-14 spend on average 30% and 50% more of their time respectively on unpaid care work than boys of similar ages.

SIMPLY PUT

Contesting claims over Sai Baba

A proposed Rs 100 cr grant for Baba's 'birthplace' Pathri has triggered anger in Shirdi, the town synonymous with the saint. What is the basis of Pathri's claim? Is the quarrel rooted in faith or insecurity?

ATIKH RASHID
PUNE, JANUARY 20

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday met representatives from the temple town of Shirdi, who have been upset over the government's decision to develop Pathri in Parbhani district as the birthplace of Sai Baba. Shirdi MLA Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil said the meeting was "positive", and the agitation would be withdrawn.

On January 9, Thackeray announced in Aurangabad that his government would grant Rs 100 crore for the development of Pathri as a centre of religious tourism and "the birthplace of Sai Baba". The plan was originally mooted over three years ago when Devendra Fadnavis was CM, after President Ram Nath Kovind, who was then the Governor of Bihar, visited Pathri in January 2016 and promised local leaders that he would take up the issue of infrastructure in the town with the state government.

Thackeray's announcement triggered joy and hope in Pathri, a town of 40,000 people about 180 km to the southeast of Aurangabad. In Shirdi, located about 125 km to the west, however, there was anger — and residents of the town that has become synonymous with Sai Baba announced an indefinite *bandh* in protest.

Express Archive

Haseeb Shaikh

The Sai Baba temple in Shirdi *(left)*, and Pathri. Baba's birthplace is shrouded in mystery; some believe he was born in Pathri.

Pathri: What records say

In 1975, V B Kher, a Sai devotee and former trustee of the temple trust in Shirdi, announced that it was "probable" that the 19th century saint was born in a Yajurvedi Deshastha Brahmin family in Pathri as one of the five sons of one Parshuram Bhusari. In 1978, a trust, the Shri Sai Smarak Samiti, was established to build a temple to Sai Baba at the site where some believed he was born.

In fact, several authoritative, popular works on Baba either directly mention Pathri as his possible birthplace, or speculate that he may have been from that area. Some of these works were either written by, or quoted those who knew Baba personally. Baba is said to have come to Shirdi in 1872, where he lived until he took *mahasamadhi* (passed away) on October 15, 1918.

The introduction — written by Hari Sitaram Dikshit alias Kakasaheb — to the *Shri Sai Satcharita* mentions Pathri. The *Shri Sai Satcharita*, written in Marathi verse by Govind Raghunath Dabholkar alias Hemadpant, was the first biography of the saint, and was serialised in the *Sai Leela* magazine. Both Dikshit and Dabholkar were close aides and devotees of Baba.

Dikshit, who gave up his law practice and political activities as a Congress member of the Bombay Legislative Council to serve Baba, is credited with establishing and running the Shirdi Saibaba Sansthan in its intial days. His introduction to the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, which reportedly appeared in 1923, said: "Sri Sainath Maharaj came to Shirdi about 50 years ago... There's no reliable information on his place of origin and his parentage... Once a visitor from Pathri came to Shirdi for Sai Baba's *darshan*. Sai Baba enquired about several prominent persons by naming them. This leads one to believe that he had special knowledge of Pathri. However, it can't be stated with surety that he was born there."

Baba's "great apostle" B V Narsimhaswami wrote in his book that the saint discouraged questions on his parentage, and when pressed, gave mystifying answers. However, the book quotes Mhalsapaty, a Shirdi goldsmith who was among Baba's earliest devotees, as saying that on a "momentous occasion" very late in Baba's life, the saint had told him (Mhalsapaty) that his parents were "Brahmins in Patri in Nizam's state".

In a chapter titled 'Baba's Earliest Period' in Vol I of his four-volume tome written in the late 1950s, Narsimhaswami said: "Patri is part of Parvani *taluk*, and near Manwath. Sai Baba added (in explanation of the fact that he was living in a mosque) that while still a tender child his Brahmin parents handed him over to the care of a *fakir* who brought him up... Sai Baba occasionally showed interest in Patri and Parvani when people from those parts came to him, (but)... this is practically all that we have about the birth and parentage of Sri Sai Baba."

Kher, the first person who claimed to have somewhat resolved the mystery and zeroed in on a family in Pathri to which, he believed, Sai Baba "probably" belonged, started his probe from where those before him had left.

In June 1975, Kher arrived in Pathri and interviewed locals who told him anecdotes about Baba being born in a Brahmin family, and that he was taken away by a Muslim *wali* when he was a child. Elders of the local Brahmin community told Kher that they believed Baba was born in the Bhusari family house in Vaishnav Galli.

Kher found the house empty and in ruins, but managed to contact a member of the family, Raghunath Bhusari, who had retired as a professor of Marathi in Hyderabad's Osmania University. Prof Bhusari helped Kher chalk out a family tree going back three generations to the individual who could have been Baba's father. Bhusari told Kher that he had heard from his grandmother that of the five sons of his great grandfather Parshuram, three had left home very young. One of them, "Haribhau," had left in search of God.

"Could it not be that Haribhau Bhusari was Sai Baba? I wonder. The theory advanced above is probable. I discussed it jointly with an experienced lawyer and a reputed historian, and both of them agreed that it could be so. I do not wish to add anything further, I leave the matter to the readers to judge for themselves," Kher wrote.

Later, Kher and Pathri resident Dinkar Chaudhari bought the Bhusari family house and established the Shri Sai Smarak Samiti. The trust built a temple at the site, which was inaugurated in 1999.

Devotee vs devotee

Abdullah Khan Durrani, a senior NCP leader who has controlled Pathri Municipal Council for over three decades and has been a member of the Shri Sai Smarak Samiti Trust since 1978, said local people had met President Kovind four years ago.

"He was Bihar Governor when he visited the temple. We apprised him of the inconvenience that devotees faced because the temple has a very narrow approach road, and there are no proper places for devotees to stay. Kovindji had called (then CM) Devendra Fadnavis and requested him to do something to improve the situation. We met Fadnavisji in Mumbai, and he told us to prepare a development plan, and that he would grant Rs 100 crore. The Pathri Municipal Council prepared the plan, but it was not sanctioned due to opposition from the people of Shirdi. Now, Uddhavji has made the announcement and we are sure the plan will go ahead."

Durrani, who is a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Council, said the people of Shirdi had no reason to feel insecure. "Shirdi is Baba's *Karmabhoomi*. Pathri is his *Janmabhoomi*. Even now about 1,500-2,000 devotees visit the temple in Pathri every day; it does not mean that they don't want to go to Shirdi," he said.

But the residents of Shirdi argue that if Baba wanted his roots to be known, he would have announced it himself.

"There is no point in looking for his birthplace. There will be many claimants. We don't mind if Pathri is given Rs 100 crore or even Rs 1,000 crore. What we are objecting to is the claim that Baba was born in Pathri. It appears to be a conspiracy to spread a wrong message among Baba's devotees," Sachin Tambe, a former trustee of Saibaba Sansthan Shirdi, said.

THIS WORD MEANS | XENOBOT

The world's first living machines, built with frogs

SCIENTISTS IN the United States have created the world's first "living machines" — tiny robots built from the cells of the African clawed frog, that can move around on their own.

They have named the millimetre-wide robots "xenobots" — after the species of aquatic frog found across sub-Saharan Africa from Nigeria and Sudan to South Africa, *Xenopus laevis (right)*.

"Scientists have repurposed living cells scraped from frog embryos and assembled them into entirely new life-forms," the University of Vermont said in a press release last week. The xenobots "can move toward a target, perhaps pick up a payload (like a medicine that needs to be carried to a specific place inside a patient) — and heal themselves after being cut", it said.

Joshua Bongard, a computer scientist and robotics expert at the university who co-led the new research said the "novel living machines" were "neither a traditional robot nor a known species of animal", but "a new class of artifact: a living, programmable organism".

The new creatures were designed on a supercomputer at the university, and then assembled and tested by biologists at Tufts University. "We can imagine many useful applications of these living robots that other

machines can't do," research co-leader Michael Levin of the Center for Regenerative and Developmental Biology at Tufts, was quoted as saying in the release. "Like searching out nasty compounds or radioactive contamination, gathering microplastic in the oceans, travelling in arteries to scrape out plaque," Levin said.

The results of the new research were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. ('A scalable pipeline for designing reconfigurable organisms'.) While humans have been manipulating organisms for their benefit since at least the dawn of agriculture, and genetic editing has created a few artificial organisms in recent years, the latest research is a breakthrough because it designs, for the first time ever, "completely biological machines from the ground up", the researchers wrote in their paper.

Personal privacy vs public safety: How Apple vs FBI frames a big tech debate

SHRUTI DHAPOLA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 20

US ATTORNEY General William Barr last week asked Apple to provide access to two iPhones used by Saudi Air Force officer Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani who shot and killed three people at a naval base in Pensacola, Florida, in December. Barr accused Apple of providing no "substantive assistance" to investigators trying to break into the phones.

Apple says it has already handed over all the data in its possession to the FBI. But the FBI also wants data on the phone that might not be on the cloud. Two days after Barr's demand, President Donald Trump tweeted his frustration with the company: "We are helping Apple all of the time on TRADE and so many other issues, and yet they refuse to unlock phones used by killers, drug dealers and other violent criminal elements. They will have to step up to the plate and help our great Country, NOW!"

This is the second time in four years that Apple is at the centre of a battle that pits personal privacy against public safety. In 2015, the FBI went to court to force Apple to help them unlock an iPhone 5c that belonged to Syed Rizwan Farook who, along with his wife Tashfeen Malik, killed 14 people and injured 22 others in a terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California.

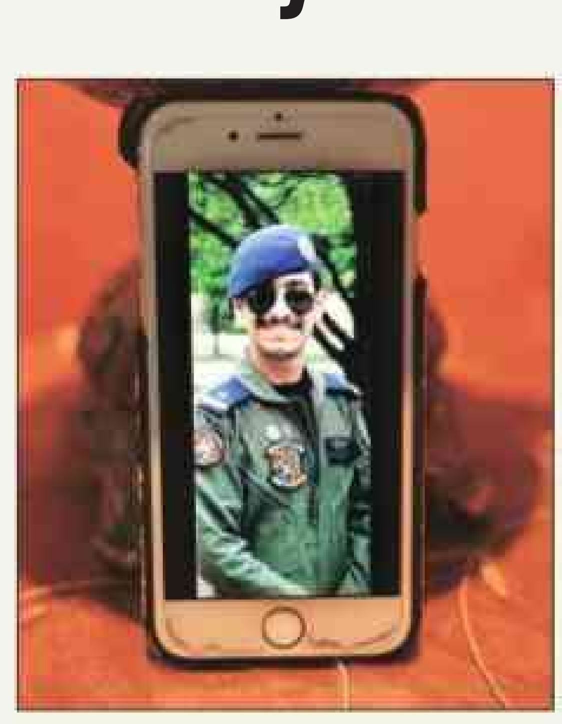
What does the FBI want this time?

FBI wants Apple's help to unlock an iPhone 5 and an iPhone 7 that belonged to Alshamrani. It appears the phones were damaged, but the FBI got them working again — but is unable to unlock them due to Apple's encryption and enhanced security tools. As in 2015, this would require a "backdoor entry" to the phones, bypassing encryption.

Apple insists it does not create back doors for anyone, including law enforcers and its own employees, because these can be exploited easily, and would compromise the security of all iPhone users. At the recent CES 2020 show in Las Vegas, Apple's Senior Director of Global Privacy Jane Horvath defended the company's position on encryption, saying iPhones contain a lot of personal data on health and financial matters, etc. that need to be protected in case a device is stolen.

Can an iPhone be unlocked without Apple's help?

As has been demonstrated earlier, it is



A photo of Alshamrani is displayed on the phone of one of his sisters at their home in Saudi Arabia last month.
Iman Al-Dabbagh/The New York Times)

not impossible to break the encryption. Alshamrani had models that were relatively old, and it is argued that they can be opened by specialised cyber-security firms that offer their services to law enforcement agencies. The FBI had ultimately got into the San Bernardino terrorist's iPhone 5c with help from a third-party vendor that supplied the software, reportedly for $900,000.

It is being said that on this occasion too, the FBI might not need Apple's help, especially if Alshamrani's phones run an older (and therefore less secure) version of iOS. But the FBI has said in a statement that it has turned to Apple only after exhausting all options. Since the 2015 showdown, Apple has fixed security vulnerabilities or 'bugs' in its software, thus making it harder to 'hack' into a device.

However, software such as Cellebrite and GrayKey can break into iPhones. GraftShift, the company behind GrayKey, is focused exclusively on iPhones, and is believed to have been used by the FBI in the past.

How did Apple react on the earlier occasion (2015)?

After Apple refused the help that FBI wanted, the agency got an order from a judge who directed the company to provide "reasonable technical assistance" to the investigators. Apple was required to load a specific iOS recovery file onto the device so the FBI could recover the password.

Apple CEO Tim Cook wrote a letter to all customers during the crisis, which was posted on the company's website. Cook underlined in the letter that the order would have an impact far beyond the case at hand — and pointed out that basically, engineers who had worked to secure the device were now being told to undo those same protections. This would be opening the Pandora's box, Cook said, because it would put consumers' data at risk from cyber criminals.

Apple did not have to ultimately comply, which it had seemed unlikely to anyway. The FBI managed to open the iPhone 5c, and the government moved to have the order vacated, arguing it was no longer needed.

But why do tech companies not want to allow access to phones?

The issue is not just about a terrorist's or a criminal's phone, as Trump said on Twitter. For the tech companies, this is a much wider issue of privacy. Smartphones are today the most important device for many people, who store personal information, including financial information, on their devices. For tech companies, be it Apple with its iOS devices or Google and its Android ecosystem, it is critical to secure devices against any kind of vulnerability. That is why companies push out monthly updates to the software — or sometimes a quick security update when they discover serious a flaw.

No "back door" can be restricted only to law enforcement; it can be exploited by anyone, including hackers. If a key to open a device without a passcode is created, it can be easily replicated in the digital world by someone for whom the key was not originally intended.

The knowledge that their devices could be accessed by someone else will result in a major loss of consumer trust — not something tech companies want. Across the world, there is deepening concern over unauthorised surveillance of devices by state agencies.

The privacy vs encryption debate is playing out in India too. In several cases, law enforcement authorities have demanded that tech companies hand over consumers' data. However, in end-to-end encrypted apps such as WhatsApp, data such as messages are with the user, and are not backed up to the company's servers. Companies are saying they don't have the data that the agencies are seeking. And as the Apple case shows, this tussle is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon.

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

SOMEBODY MUST TRESPASS ON THE TABOOS OF MODERN NATIONALISM, IN THE INTERESTS OF HUMAN REASON. — ROBERT BYRON

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

IN PLAIN BANGLA

It may be diplomatically imprudent to alienate a friendly neighbour with CAA premise — persecution within

WHEN SHEIKH HASINA won a decisive election in 2008, her victory came with the promise that the close ties with India forged by her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, at the time of the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, with military help from India, would be resurrected. Ties had suffered occasionally in the years of military rule and the resurgence of the right that followed Mujib's assassination, the lowest point being in the period following 2001, when Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party had allowed its soil to be used as a springboard for insurgency in the Northeast. The legacy of the Awami League seemed to return with Hasina, and despite rough patches like the Teesta waters pact, relations between the two nations have been positive and constructive. Initiatives that had long hung fire were resolved, the most striking being the swap of chhitmahals or enclaves in each other's territory, a rationalisation of borders which had been pending since Independence.

But now, with the uproar over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the proposed countrywide application of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the India-Bangladesh relationship threatens to become less frictionless. Hasina and Modi had met bilaterally on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly and in October 2019, when she visited Delhi for the India Economic Summit of the World Economic Forum, she had said that she was satisfied with Modi's assurance that the NRC in Assam would not affect Bangladesh. Now, however, in an interview to Gulf News in Abu Dhabi, Hasina has described the CAA as "not necessary", and as a step whose purpose mystifies her. In response to the ongoing domestic agitation against the Act, the government has repeatedly explained that the specific purpose is to confer citizenship on minorities (read Hindus) fleeing persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. It is founded on the implicit premise that India's neighbours, including Bangladesh, are engaged in the persecution of minorities, and a reaction from the neighbourhood was inevitable.

Hasina has phrased her criticism diplomatically, addressing the Indian state rather than the government or its chief executive, and terming the citizenship issue as its internal affair. But Bangladesh has officially denied any out-migration to India due to religious persecution, and Hasina herself has clarified that there is no movement in the reverse direction either. India had to hasten to clarify that persecution had happened before her term, yet the damage seems to have been done. At a time when regional geopolitics is changing rapidly, India cannot afford to alienate neighbours for the compulsions of domestic politics, or cause strain in a strong and necessary relationship.

DEVELOP DELHI PARTY

AAP's '10 guarantees' indicate its evolving strategy — its record in government has become its politics

THE AAM AADMI Party's list of 10 "guarantees", released by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday, is an indicator of how the party has styled — and shifted — its political idiom and practice since 2015. The promises made on Sunday — mohalla marshals, quality public education and healthcare, amenities like water and electricity, women's safety — steer clear of the politically sensitive issues at a time when a polarising battle of grand narratives is underway in India, sparked by the CAA, the proposed NRC and NPR, and Delhi is at the centre of that churning.

For some time since its formation, emerging as it did from the Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement, the AAP had a definite if simplistic political plank — against the entrenched, systemic corruption that was widely seen to have marred Indian politics and by extension, the political class as a whole. This anti-politics of the AAP was also marked by tactical audaciousness on the ground — Kejriwal contested against Narendra Modi in Varanasi in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and the then-fledgeling party fielded 434 candidates nationally. Even as a party of government, AAP remained at loggerheads with the BJP and the Centre, demanding for Delhi the same powers and status as that of other states. Over the last few years, however, that strategy and tactic has undergone a perceptible change — its record in government appears to have become its politics.

The AAP's "10 guarantees" strategy appears to be to highlight its successes in education and healthcare in Delhi. Its long battles with the Centre over the powers of the Lieutenant Governor and control of the Delhi Police yielded little by way of political dividends. And its earlier "all politicians are corrupt" charge appears neither to have dented the image of the prime minister nor hurt the BJP's prospects in Delhi — the party won all seven Lok Sabha seats in the city in 2019. Rather than wage the political battle on ideological terms, the AAP's attempt appears to be to shift the discourse towards a solutions-oriented politics. On the abrogation of Article 370, Kejriwal supported the Centre and even on the CAA and NRC, the party's response has been relatively muted. On the streets in Delhi, it has been careful to not be seen as organising or spearheading the protests. The politics of solutions to issues like *bijli*, *paani* and *chikitsa* is, at least partially, a novel approach, not least because the idea of the city and its needs has seldom occupied centre-stage in the national conversation.

SHADOW PLAY

The pressures of modern-day cricket, the toll they can take on players, need to be acknowledged and talked about

FORMER INDIAN CRICKETER Praveen Kumar has opened up about the time he found himself on the cusp of losing the battle with depression. This newspaper reported how Kumar, revolver in hand and the baggage of eight years of non-selection to the Indian team weighing him down, recovered at the very last second as he thought of his family. Two months ago, Abhinav Mukund spoke about a crippling inability to deal with pressures of the sport. From Virat Kohli, Glenn Maxwell, Andrew Flintoff, to those yet to attain major international acclaim — Australians Nic Maddinson and Will Pucovski — several cricketers have spoken about their personal battles.

Cricketers are seen to be modern-day superheroes. Much less discussed is the grim toll that the pressures of the game may take. More than a century ago, A E Stoddart, who captained England in the first Ashes series of 1894-95, committed suicide — he reportedly succumbed to loneliness. His story forms an important section in former editor of Wisden Cricket Monthly, David Frith's 2011 book on 100 cricketing suicides over the last century, *Silence of the Heart*. He concluded that the suicide rate among English Test players and a dozen other competing countries was significantly higher than that for all other sports.

Most sports struggle with reconciling the "strong" physicality of the game with what is essentially seen as "weakness" to cope with pressure: Masculinity associated with a sport, in the popular narrative, cannot coexist with something as "feminine" as mental health. Gendered notions about sport and skewed ideas about dressing room machismo have foisted even more performative baggage on players. In an interview to *The Guardian* in 2001, Frith said, "Cricket has this dreadful, hidden burden. It must now answer the very serious question of whether it gradually transforms unwary cricket-loving boys into brooding, insecure and ultimately self-destructive men." The sporting community must acknowledge the seriousness of this question.

Where Goyal is right

Business model of traditional grocery store, essentially efficient, can be upended by unfair competition

HARISH DAMODARAN

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY Minister Piyush Goyal courted criticism last week for his comment that Amazon wasn't "doing a great favour" by promising to invest an additional $1 billion in the country. Both the statement (indiscreet, bordering on arrogance) and timing (when the $232.9-billion American e-commerce giant's founder was visiting India) have certainly done no favour to an economy facing its worst growth, investment and jobs crisis in at least two decades.

Yet, Goyal has a point when he makes a distinction between investments by Amazon in warehousing and logistics infrastructure ("which is welcome") and money brought in "largely to finance losses" (which "raises questions"). The latter part he elaborates by claiming that the Seattle-based retailer is losing $1-1.5 billion in India on a turnover of $10 billion (presumably the gross merchandise value of products sold through its online marketplace) due to "indulging in predatory pricing or some unfair trade practices".

It's possible that the minister's harangue against Amazon was aimed more at small shopkeepers and traders, the ruling BJP's original support base, ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections. But the basic concern — that the price points on many products offered on Amazon's or Flipkart's platforms are below even the cost price for ordinary brick-and-mortar retailers — is a valid one. If much of the new investments are only funding the losses from such deep discount sales, which are simultaneously undermining the operations of traditional kirana stores, it is a serious allegation.

The viability of mom-and-pop outlets — the country has an estimated 12 million of them — has primarily rested on three things. The first is low overheads: Kiranas are predominantly family-run enterprises employing one or two hands ("chhotus"), not paying rent on their own little shopping premises, and avoiding taxes by dealing in cash. The second is maximum space utilisation: The small retailer's focus isn't his store's layout or appeal as much as ensuring the highest possible sales per square foot. That would mean packing, say, 200 items or SKUs (stock keeping units) within a 200 sq ft area.

It's possible that the minister's harangue against Amazon was aimed more at small shopkeepers and traders, the ruling BJP's original support base, ahead of Delhi Assembly elections. But the basic concern — that the price points on many products offered on Amazon's or Flipkart's platforms are below even the cost price for ordinary brick-and-mortar retailers — is a valid one. If much of the new investments are only funding the losses from such deep discount sales, which are simultaneously undermining the operations of traditional kirana stores, it is a serious allegation.

But it is the third USP — high inventory turnover and working capital rotation — that is least appreciated. The real business of mom-and-pop stores comes from very fast-moving SKUs such as milk, curd, eggs, bread and vegetables. Take milk, where the neighbourhood grocer sells 100 litres daily. At an average maximum retail price (MRP) of Rs 50/litre and a margin of Rs 1.5/litre, his return on an investment of Rs 5,000 would be Rs 150. While that might seem small, our kiranawala is, however, getting back his Rs 5,000 (plus Rs 150) the same day for re-investing to buy and sell 100 litres the very next day. His cumulative return on a daily rotating capital of Rs 5,000 is, then, Rs 4,500 at the end of 30 days or Rs 54,750 over 365 days. A 3 per cent margin translates into an annual return that is nearly 11 times his capital investment.

The provision store-owner may, apart from the 100 litres milk, also sell about 25 litres of curd and butter milk/chhaachh (Rs 2-4 margin on MRPs of Rs 55-60 and Rs 20-25 per litre, respectively), five crates of eggs (Rs 15 margin on each 30-piece crate retailing at Rs 180) and 20 packs of bread (Rs 3 margin on an MRP of Rs 30). These articles of daily consumption are what keep our mom-and-pop stores going. By allowing rotation of capital almost 365 times a year, they generate good returns even on small margins, while making it possible for the kirana to also stock other less fast-moving items — both food (sugar, edible oils, dal, rice, biscuits, beverages, snacks) and non-food (toothpaste, soap, shaving cream, sanitary pads, washing powder, light bulb, stationary, broom).

The above business model of the traditional Indian grocery store, which is fundamentally efficient like our family-owned and managed farms, can be upended if subjected to unfair competition. The pioneering role of Amul, in procuring of milk directly from millions of farmers for processing and marketing to urban consumers, is well acknowledged. For the Rs 55/litre price of full-cream six per cent-fat milk that the consumer in Delhi pays, the farmer at Banaskantha in Gujarat today gets roughly Rs 43.9 (at a procurement price of Rs 710 per kg of fat) or close to 80 per cent. The rest is accounted for by the cost of chilling at the village collection centre (Rs 0.40), taking to dairy plant (Rs 0.50), processing (Rs 1.50), packaging (Rs 0.70), transportation from Banaskantha to Delhi (Rs 2.50), local distribution and marketing (Rs 2.50), advertising and other assorted expenses. This is a remarkably equitable and efficient system made in India, benefiting producers as well as consumers.

Not as well highlighted, though, is the part played by organised dairies, both cooperative and private, in providing livelihoods to mom-and-pop enterprises. Amul alone, for instance, has a network of a million retailers, in addition to its 3 million-odd farmers. Whether it is dairies, sugar mills or other food processing industries, the entire livelihood chain they support — farmers on one side and small grocers on the other — needs to be factored in. Retail is ultimately about margin, stock turnover and sales per sq ft — key metrics in which our kirana outlets, perhaps, fare as well or even better than an Amazon, Walmart or Reliance. Walmart's average "days inventory outstanding" — a measure of how quickly stocks in its shelves turn into cash — is about 43, whereas the same would not exceed five days across all SKUs for the traditional stores. Where the kirana sector cannot compete is in scale and deep pockets.

India's small retailers were badly bruised by demonetisation and the goods and services tax, while the ones in the mobiles and electronics business have simply been unable to take on Amazon or Flipkart. The Narendra Modi government is now seemingly trying to make amends. Goyal's sanctimonious pronouncements are basically an outreach exercise to the BJP's oldest constituency. By drawing a distinction between so-called genuine investment and investments to fund losses from heavily discounted sales, his government has put the big global e-retailers on notice.

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ACTING IN CONCERT

India and EU have accomplished much. There is more to be done

JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES

OUR WORLD IS so closely interconnected that a rules-based global order based on partnerships and multilateralism is the only way to ensure stability and prosperity for our citizens. The decisions of one country can have a global impact. Regional events can trigger incidents in a different part of the world. Think of climate change, migration or trade. This is why cooperation between India and the European Union is more important than ever before.

The EU-India Strategic Partnership has come a long way in recent years. Our relationship is based on long-standing shared values and interests. We are the world's largest democracies and are both staunch supporters of a rules-based international order with the United Nations at its core. We closely work together to promote peace, prosperity and enhance sustainable development.

Today, however, we are experiencing a rise of great power politics, the weaponisation of economic tools and an overall erosion of trust between international partners. This is not the world that the EU and India seek. That requires us to join forces in defence of our interests and values. Only by acting together will we be able to prevent a logic of power politics taking precedence over a global multilateral, rules-based system. We must have the ambition and determination to scale up our partnership. There are numerous opportunities to unleash the full potential of EU-India cooperation.

Take the climate crisis. The icecaps are melting and Australia is burning. We literally have no time to lose. The EU has committed to become carbon neutral by 2050. But EU member states together only account for 9 per cent of global emissions. We cannot solve this problem unless we engage with the rest of the world to address it. India's commitment, as one of the biggest democracies in the world, is a key part of the solution. The mixed outcome of the COP25 Climate Conference shows how much more remains to be done.

Work between the EU and India has started: In 2016 Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European leaders agreed on an EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP). In 2018, the EU joined efforts with the International Solar Alliance, headquartered in India. Let's build on this to ensure the full implementation of the Paris Agreement worldwide and together promote the use of renewable energy.

Work between the EU and India has started: In 2016 Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European leaders agreed on an EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP). In 2018, the EU joined efforts with the International Solar Alliance, headquartered in India. Let's build on this to ensure the full implementation of the Paris Agreement worldwide and together promote the use of renewable energy.

Then there is trade. We both agree on the vital role of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the need to overcome the crisis of the dispute settlement system. The launch of a regular ministerial dialogue on economic, trade and investment issues could give additional impetus to our relations.

The EU has a strong record on liberalising trade. We have concluded ambitious free trade agreements with countries such as Japan, Singapore and Vietnam. We remain interested in balanced, ambitious and mutually-beneficial trade and investment agreements with India. This requires further efforts to bring our respective levels of ambition closer.

In the field of security, our cooperation is increasing, to bring further stability to regions of common interest for the EU and India, notably the Indian Ocean. Indian Navy vessels are now escorting World Food Programme ships in the framework of the EU Atalanta operation against piracy off the coast of Somalia. More such activities can be organised.

India and the EU are both highly exposed to the terrorist threat. We have already brought together counter-terrorism experts from Europe and India to exchange experiences and best practices. As a result, an enhanced working relationship between our police officers is taking shape.

Finally, there is the field of digital economy and cyber: EU and India should deepen cooperation to protect fundamental freedoms in cyber space and the free flow of data — and counter the drift towards high-tech "de-coupling". We do not want a split in cyber space, forcing us to "choose sides" between competing systems and standards. We both believe in fair competition, based on global standards, for 5G, AI, big data and the internet of things.

In short, there is much that the EU and India have accomplished in recent years. But there is even more to be done to further strengthen our dynamic dialogue and cooperation in all areas of mutual interest and as players on the world stage.

The writer is high representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy and vice-president of the European Commission

JANUARY 21, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ON AFGHANISTAN

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi said that India's sole concern was that situation in Afghanistan did not escalate from a cold war between big powers into a hot war and that "it does not engulf India". Addressing the leaders of the Opposition in Parliament on the eve of the first session of the newly elected Lok Sabha, the PM said that "we are neither pro-Russia, nor pro-America. We are only pro-India".

ASSAM UNREST

IN NEW DELHI, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said that "some sort of secessionist movement is being sought to be encouraged in Assam and that some anti-India posters are also being brought out there". Addressing an eve-of-the-session meeting of the Congress (I) parliamentary party, she said that part of the problem was that the movement in Assam, initially started by students, seemed to be getting out of their hands: "The previous government could not handle the situation promptly and this has aggravated the situation. It may have serious repercussions in other parts of the country also."

MOSCOW GAMES

US PRESIDENT JIMMY Carter asked the US Olympic committee to boycott the Moscow Olympics, or move the games to some other city, unless Soviet troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan within a month. Carter said it was "important that the world realise the seriousness" of the Soviet move into Afghanistan.

GAVASKAR QUITS

SUNIL GAVASKAR ANNOUNCED his decision to relinquish the captaincy of the Indian cricket team. Gavaskar told journalists after the Madras Test that while he would play in both the final Test against Pakistan at Calcutta and the golden jubilee Test against England at Bombay, he would not be available to lead the side. Gavaskar also announced that he was "not available" for the West Indian tour.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Though no miracles should be expected (the moribund status of Saarc is before us), were the prime minister to participate [in the SCO summit] and interact with his Indian counterpart, perhaps the ice between Islamabad and New Delhi could be broken."

— DAWN

The deficit bogey

The budget should increase spending in rural areas, cut taxes, incentivise household savings and bring back trust in the financial system

SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

C R Sasikumar

THE UNION BUDGET will be presented in the context of an entrenched slowdown that is becoming increasingly difficult to overcome. Coupled with this, the recent increase in inflation (notwithstanding the current methodology) has complicated the budget-making exercise. We believe that this budget could make a substantial difference by challenging the conventional wisdom that does not stand the test of scrutiny.

The primary purpose of the budget is to lay out a receipt-expenditure statement and thereby the fiscal deficit estimates. This year is, perhaps, different as the slowdown has derailed the fiscal arithmetic. Our estimates show that the shortfall might be anywhere between 0.5-0.7 per cent of the GDP in the current fiscal after adjusting for revenue shortfall and expenditure rationalisation.

Given that the government is now facing such a huge mismatch, the fiscal deficit glide path is likely to be recalibrated. But, here lies strong resistance from the votaries of fiscal consolidation, which is echoed in government circles too with independent reports pegging the fiscal deficit estimate at 3.5 per cent for 2020-21. We believe the government must not target a number in FY21 that is not credible and achievable. The growth dynamics suggest that with a nominal GDP growth that could be at 10 per cent, a 3.5 per cent target will result in the absolute fiscal deficit in FY21 being lower than in FY20, and that again will be unachievable.

In this context, the fiasco in FY12 bears mentioning. The government wanted to reduce the fiscal deficit from 4.8 per cent of the GDP to 4.6 per cent. But, in absolute terms, the difference between the fiscal deficit in FY11 and FY12 jumped four times as the 3.3 percentage point collapse in growth was not factored in. Thus, the temptation of having a 3.5 per cent deficit target in the budget must be avoided at any cost as we face a similar growth slowdown. Instead, the fiscal deficit must be kept only at a marginally lower level or the same level in FY21 (vis-à-vis FY20). We must focus on growth. A large fiscal compression in the budget, through a reported expenditure curtailment of Rs 2 lakh crore, could be an unmitigated disaster for growth and will definitely raise the possibility of lack of transparency in the fiscal numbers of FY21 in the eyes of the market.

So, what are the options before the government? First, is the apparent trade-off between tax concessions and stimulating the economy by giving a fillip to the rural economy. There is now an apparent consensus that with only 4 per cent of people paying income tax, a tax concession might be a wrong approach to stimulate demand. There are, however, two fallacies with this argument. First, even when 2 per cent of the people paid income tax during 2004-08, the Indian economy expanded by close to 8 per cent on average. Second, the 4 per cent population accounted for a significant part of overall consumption, and in FY19, the overall gross taxable income of this population was Rs 46 lakh crore, which is 40.8 per cent of the overall private final consumption expenditure. Hence, it is possible to tweak both the slabs and the tax rates to increase consumption, which is key to growth. The only issue with such tax changes that could make the government wary is the revenue foregone. Our estimates suggest that a 5 per cent cut in taxes across income buckets can result in a revenue shortfall of only 0.5 per cent of GDP.

Second, the idea of a rural push through PM-KISAN scheme is understandable, but efforts must first be made to cover all the farmers under the scheme. It is quite puzzling that despite 92 per cent of the land records being digitised, PM-KISAN still covers only half of the eligible beneficiaries. As was promised in the 2018 budget, a tenancy certificate must be issued to every tenant farmer — 70 per cent of farmland is cultivated by tenant farmers, who are not entitled to any benefit because they do not own land. Third, the government should think about increasing the Rs 6,000 yearly amount in a calibrated manner (say Rs 500 per year over the next four years) as the incremental cost will be negligible. As this will create a feel-good factor across the farming community, why not start from this year itself?

Third, the government must think about the trade-off between tax adjustment and incentivising savings. When the government notified an increase in the public provident fund (PPF) limit by Rs 50,000 to Rs 1,50,000 in August 2014, its impact on household savings was enormous. For example, an increase in the 80C limit by Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh for individual households will lead to additional savings of more than Rs 2 lakh crore as compared to a revenue and interest foregone amount of Rs 40,000 crore. The question is thus of incentivising consumption, or savings or both?

In this context, let me also comment on the repeated fallacies of commentators who advocate in favour of fiscal conservatism on the ground that entire household financial savings are being used to finance government borrowings. The numbers suggest otherwise. Of the Rs 11.2 lakh crore of net financial savings in FY18, total claims on government were around Rs 70,000 crore, while Rs 7.74 lakh crore were claims on insurance, pension and provident funds (assuming FY17 ratios). Household claims on pension, insurance and provident funds are purely savings for the households' retirement corpus and it is completely naïve to equate such claims as financing government borrowings. The decision of such retirement funds on where to invest their corpus is a purely portfolio-decision, just as is the household decision to investment in small savings.

> Apart from such fiscal measures, the budget must announce its intention to bring back trust in the financial system. To this end, a simultaneous recognition of stressed assets of NBFCs and thereafter immediately initiating measures to help them to raise capital by initiating takeovers/ mergers if required and giving the rest a clean chit thereby, increasing the confidence to lend, is required.

Apart from such fiscal measures, the budget must announce its intent to bring back trust in the financial system. To this end, a simultaneous recognition of stressed assets of NBFCs and thereafter immediately initiating measures to help them to raise capital by initiating takeovers/mergers if required and giving the rest a clean chit, thereby, increasing the confidence to lend, is required. We must not repeat the mistake we made with banks when we first initiated recognition of bad loans through the asset quality review in 2015, then brought resolution through the IBC law in 2016, and then resorted to recapitalisation in October 2017. The sequence should have been resolution first, and recognition and recapitalisation simultaneously thereafter.

We can also think of forbearance for large NBFCs by deferment of principal repayments by systemically important NBFCs and HFCs. These NBFCs and HFCs can allow similar deferments to their clients. Since interest would be paid during this period, lenders would not make a loss. This should be adequate to get the cash flows from stuck projects going and to ensure the fulfillment of the prime minister's vision of Housing for All by 2022.

Interestingly, as we write on the budget priorities, the Supreme Court judgment on telcos' adjusted gross revenues could just about tilt the budget arithmetic in the government's favour. On the flip side though, this order could lead to significant market disruptions and possibly impact consumption as well.

The writer is group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India. Views are personal

Delhi-Davos disconnect

India must finds ways to take advantage of new opportunities arising from the rearrangement of the global economic system

RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

AS THE WORLD'S business elite, political leaders and the chatterati show up at the annual Davos conclave in the Swiss Alps this week, the talk is about "stakeholder capitalism". Klaus Schwab, who founded the World Economic Forum 50 years ago, wants capitalists to look beyond their shareholders and consider the interests of all the stakeholders. Some hope that the debate on stakeholder capitalism is a long overdue recognition of the capitalist excesses of recent decades. Last August, the Business Roundtable in the US, which brings together some of the top American corporates, said American companies must now generate value for customers, invest in their employees, deal fairly with suppliers and support the communities in which they operate even as they service their shareholders.

Sceptics, however, dismiss this as a gimmick. "Stakeholder capitalism," they say, is a nice way of saying the right things, repackaging old ideas on corporate social responsibility and creating illusions about reforming capitalism. Cynics insist that it will be business as usual for the world's capitalists.

Beyond this divide between optimists and pessimists, there is no question that the discourse on "stakeholder capitalism" is a reflection of the deeper crisis afflicting the global economy today. In its annual survey on global risks, the WEF has identified many challenges. Three of them stand out and relate to polarised politics in major industrial societies, trade wars and technological change.

US president Donald Trump, who is joining Davos this year, is at the heart of the wrenching debates on all the three issues. Trump's politics have been defined by his trenchant opposition to "globalism" — exemplified by the Davos gathering. As he brushes off the impeachment trial in the US Senate and begins his campaign for a second-term in the White House, which many fear could well be successful, there is great interest on what he has to say on key global issues.

On political polarisation in America, Trump is unlikely to be defensive. While the dominant sentiment at Davos sees Trump as the very embodiment of nationalism and populism that are polarising politics around the world, others point to the structural conditions that have bred these forces. They suggest Trump has merely mobilised these popular resentments. As Robert Reich, who served as Secretary of Labour in the Bill Clinton Administration put it recently, "Trump's support comes largely from America's working class whose wages haven't risen in decades, whose jobs are less secure than ever and whose political voice has been drowned out by big money".

As the Democratic Party abandoned its traditional working class supporters, Trump drew them towards the Republican Party — long seen as the party of the rich. His political genius lies in simultaneously appealing to both capital and labour — massive tax cuts to the former and the promise to the latter of bringing jobs back to America that were lost through globalisation and immigration.

Much the same happened in the British elections last year, where the Tory leader Boris Johnson won a sweeping mandate by breaking into the working class strongholds of the Labour Party. Trump's success in mobilising the working people was tied to challenging the logic of globalisation that was taken for granted by the Democratic Party, large swathes of American capital and the policy wonks.

Long before the 2016 election, Trump had a long record of denouncing free trade. His attack on globalism was mistaken by many as an electoral ploy rather than a considered strategy. Many had hoped that Trump will moderate his anti-globalist rhetoric once in office. Instead Trump has taken a pickaxe to the core principles of the globalised economic order — free trade, open borders and multilateralism.

Anti-globalisation protests have become common over the years at the annual gatherings of Davos as well as the G-7 and G-20 summits. But few had anticipated that the president of a country, long the champion of globalism, would be at the forefront of dismantling it. Many had also hoped that Trump's war against global trading regime would come a cropper, for it was assumed that the cost of uncoupling with the global economic order would be too costly.

But Trump, who is scheduled to speak on Tuesday at Davos, could well boast about his successes on the trade front. He has renegotiated a 25-year old trade agreement with America's neighbours, Canada and Mexico. Trump's threat of an all-out trade war with China over the last couple of years has led to an interim agreement that commits Beijing to reduce its trade surplus with the US by importing more.

At Davos, Trump is also expected to turn his ire on the EU, which has a near $200 billion trade surplus with the US. Trump has often said the EU treats America "worse than China".

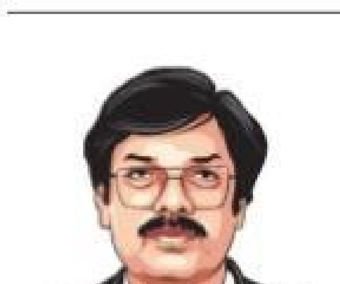
The trade wars among the world's major capitalist centres is accentuated by the technological revolution, especially in the digital domain. The Davos report on global risks argues that the realisation of the full potential of new technologies depends on unprecedented coordination among all stakeholders. What is emerging instead is "digital fragmentation" marked by the extension of geopolitical and geo-economic rivalries into the new domain. Digital issues have come to the front and center of American arguments with both and Europe.

Given its growing stakes in the global economic order, Delhi ought to be at the leading edge of the current debate on the future of capitalism. India, though, seems too preoccupied sorting out the persistent legacies of feudalism. But sooner than later, India must find ways to take advantage of the new opportunities from the unfolding rearrangement of the global capitalist system.

The writer is Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

The republic's defenders

The ruling elite is smug, the young are standing up for India's soul



ABDUL KHALIQ

WHEN THE CITIZENSHIP Amendment Bill became law, a distressed friend moaned: "As we clearly don't need our Constitution, why not give it to the rebel Naga NSCN who have been demanding a separate flag and Constitution for Nagaland?" In one fell blow, the CAA has struck at the heart of India's secular, democratic Constitution. By sanctifying a faith-based division of people into law, the Act has paved the way for the Hindu Rashtra conceived by V D Savarkar, who first formulated the two-nation theory. Judging from the social turmoil in its wake, with Muslims no longer shrinking back in the shadows, the CAA has also resurrected the ghosts of Partition. Yes, dear PM, in the truly eclectic anti-CAA protests, many can be recognised by their skull caps and hijabs.

The CAA is a critical component of the Hindutva project that has been gathering pace in the last few years. The lynchings, ghar wapsi and love jihad campaigns, cow vigilantism and the recent abrogation of Article 370 are all part of a sinister design to consign Muslims to second-class citizen status. Now with the CAA — and the ominous NRC and its blood brother, the NPR — looming on the horizon, M S Golwalkar's exhortation that Muslims "may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment — not even citizen's rights" is perilously close to becoming a reality.

A large section of the country is outraged at the sheer injustice of it all. Even allies of the BJP who had supported the CAB in Parliament have now balked at the implementation of the NRC, but only after witnessing the outburst of anger against this patently discriminatory legislation. Their craven, opportunistic backing of an unconstitutional, unjust law that threatens to tear the country apart will not be easily forgotten or forgiven.

The implicit message of the CAA is that Muslims do not "belong" in the new idea of India crafted by the ruling dispensation. In fact, even before the public discourse on the CAA, a clear distinction had been drawn between Hindus and Muslims. When the final list of the Assam NRC left out lakhs of Hindus, contrary to the common perception that it would weed out an overwhelming number of Muslim "termites", a tendentious central government announced a fresh NRC for Assam. Amit Shah then repeatedly insisted that no Hindu would ever be deported. The hastily enacted CAA is the direct consequence of that inconvenient outcome. Contrast this with what Shah said about the exclusion of Muslims in the CAA. His condescending concession to them was that "Indian Muslims have nothing to fear", making it sound like he was doing them a huge favour. Far from assuaging their fears, the home minister's assurance has filled them with dread. They have not forgotten how the Kashmiris were lulled before the great betrayal of abrogating Article 370.

The CAA is riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions that expose its real intent. The rationale of considering illegal migrants only from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh defies logic. Afghanistan was neither a part of British India nor shares a common boundary with this country and hence was immune from the trauma of Partition, which is touted as the genesis of the migrant problem. Furthermore, if religious persecution of minorities was the criterion, the omission of Myanmar and Sri Lanka is unconscionable. The Rohingya Muslims, in particular, are the most persecuted religious minorities in the Subcontinent. Also, how do the apologists for the Bill explain the omission of Ahmadiyas who suffer greater persecution than even Christians and Hindus in Pakistan?

What terrifies Muslims the most is not what is incorporated in the CAA but the predictable repercussions of its implementation. Given the institutionalised bias against this beleaguered community, lakhs of poor Indian Muslims face certain disenfranchisement for want of documentation to prove date and place of birth.

In a vibrant democracy, there is infinite belief that the courts are the last resort against injustice. However, the relaxed pace at which the Supreme Court has dealt with the anguished petitions against the CAA inspires little hope. That's how the SC has also responded to the cries for justice by Kashmiris after abrogation of Article 370. Today's Supreme Court is suspect in the eyes of Muslims — more so after its shocking Ayodhya judgment, a barefaced concession to majoritarian sentiment.

Howard Zinn referred to civil society as the "ultimate power" and "the locomotive that drives the train of government in the direction of equality and justice". It is gratifying that the ordinary citizens have crashed through the sound barrier of complicit silence to register their opposition to the CAA and NRC.

The oasis of hope are our universities. In striking contrast to the smugness and social apathy of the ruling elite, the young have emerged as the standard bearers of a more caring and inclusive society. The country-wide protests spearheaded by university students are essentially about upholding the foundational ideals of our Republic — democracy, freedom, equality and brotherhood — which have frayed badly in the last few years. They are fighting for India's soul.

It would be an exaggeration to call the current upheaval India's "Tahrir moment", but the unrest is an encouraging sign of growing resistance to injustice.

The writer is secretary general of the Lok Janashakti Party. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FUTURE IS THEIRS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Students as protesters' (IE, January 20). Education is not about literacy but about creating individuals who have the bandwidth to understand multiple issues, including those pertaining to politics. A "good" student should be able to channelise all that she learns in the classroom.

Sangeeta Kampani, *Delhi*

SOFT FACE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'New chief, new Task'(IE, January 20). Students and the general public are in the vanguard of the protests against the CAA/NRC. JP Nadda,seems to have been asked to don the mantle of BJP's president because the party needed a soft face to get out of this volatile situation.

Tarsem Singh, *Mahilpur*

WHY THE HURRY?

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'CAA rules not in but UP sends out form to identify migrants, list persecution' (IE, January 18). It is often stated that those who have come to India without valid documents are illegal immigrants. However, for more than five years, no efforts were made to count them. CAA seems to have hurried the process of identification. It is reported that of the 95,000 refugees, around 58,000 have obtained citizenship (even without CAA). The fundamental question is: Why are then millions of Indians being subjected to the pain of CAA ?

L R Murmu, *Delhi*

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

MAKE IT CLEAR

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'States have an obligation', (IE, January 20). If the Opposition is spreading rumours, the government should come forward and hold a charcha, just like Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Pariksha pe Charcha". The people of India should have clear picture about the new law, especially because it pertains to their citizenship.

Zainab Gausiya, *Chandigarh*

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
वर्ष 12 अंक 288

स्वामीयुक्त नीति

चालू वित्त वर्ष के लिए 1.05 लाख करोड़ रुपये के विनिवेश लक्ष्य में भारी कमी की आशंका के चलते सरकार वैकल्पिक रास्ते देख रही है। खबरों के मुताबिक अब वह सरकारी उपक्रमों के स्वामित्व वाली संपत्ति बेचकर मार्च के अंत तक एक लाख करोड़ रुपये जुटाना चाहती है। जिन परिसंपत्तियों पर बिक्री के लिए विचार किया जा रहा है उनमें भूमि और पाइपलाइन, सड़क, मोबाइल टावर, बिजली, सरकारी उपक्रमों के स्वामित्व वाली पारेषण लाइन आदि शामिल हैं। परिसंपत्तियों के मुद्रीकरण का विचार जहां आगे बढ़ाने योग्य है, वहीं सशस्त्र बलों और रेलवे आदि सरकार की विभिन्न शाखाओं के पास शहरी इलाकों में बहुत बड़े पैमाने पर ऐसी जमीन है जिनके लिए डेवलपर बहुत बड़ी राशि चुकाने को तैयार होंगे। परंतु दी गई अवधि में यह बिक्री करना लगभग असंभव है। इसके अलावा इसके लिए जिस तरह प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं वह बुनियादी रूप से गलत है। पहली बात तो यह लक्षित परिसंपत्तियां मोटे तौर पर सरकारी उपक्रमों की हैं। इन्हें मजबूरी में बेचकर हासिल होने वाली राशि सरकार को लाभांश के रूप में देनी होगी। यह सरकारी उपक्रमों की काम करने की स्वायत्तता के खिलाफ है। दूसरी बात, परिसंपत्तियों की बिक्री पर विचार करने के लिए वित्त वर्ष के लगभग अंत का समय चुना गया है। जाहिर है ऐसा केवल बजट लक्ष्यों को हासिल करने के लिए किया गया है। इसका असर मूल्यांकन और हासिल होने वाली राशि पर पड़ सकता है। इतना ही नहीं इससे वैधानिक जटिलताएं भी पैदा हो सकती हैं। स्पष्ट है कि सरकार यह विकल्प इसलिए चुनना चाहती है क्योंकि चालू वर्ष में भारत पेट्रोलियम कॉर्पोरेशन, कंटेनर कॉर्पोरेशन ऑफ इंडिया और एयर इंडिया के निजीकरण की प्रक्रिया पूरी होती नहीं दिखती। इसके लिए भी खराब योजना ही जिम्मेदार है।

चूंकि राजस्व संग्रह में अहम कमी आने वाली है तो ऐसे में विनिवेश के मोर्चे पर कमजोर प्रदर्शन राजकोषीय प्रबंधन को और जटिल बना देगा। चालू वर्ष में सरकार अब तक 18,095 करोड़ रुपये ही जुटा सकी है जो विनिवेश लक्ष्य का 17 फीसदी है। सरकार विनिवेश लक्ष्य हासिल करने में इसलिए भी संघर्ष करती है क्योंकि वह इस विषय पर व्यवस्थित तरीके से काम नहीं करती। उदाहरण के लिए यदि सरकार व्यापक रणनीतिक विनिवेश करना चाहती है तो उसे वित्त वर्ष के आरंभ में ही नामों का चयन कर लेना चाहिए। इसे अमल में लाने में समय लगता है क्योंकि संभावित खरीदार उचित जांच-परख करना चाहते हैं। सरकारी उपक्रमों की परिसंपत्ति बेचने का विचार नीति निर्माण में खामी का एक और उदाहरण है।

ऐसे में सही यही होगा कि सरकार ऐसे सरकारी उपक्रमों की सूची तैयार रखे जिनमें वह मध्यम अवधि में विनिवेश करना चाहती है। यह विनिवेश अंशकालिक भी हो सकता है और सामरिक भी। इस प्रक्रिया को अन्य परिसंपत्तियों मसलन भूमि आदि में भी अपनाना चाहिए। इससे न केवल सरकार को व्यवस्थित तरीके से आगे बढ़ने में मदद मिलेगी बल्कि इससे बाजार भागीदारों को तैयारी और बोली लगाने के लिए उचित समय भी मिलेगा। ऐसी प्रक्रिया अपनाने से बोली लगाने वालों में प्रतिस्पर्धा बढ़ेगी और मूल्यांकन सुधरेगा। इससे सरकार को भी इस बात का बेहतर अंदाजा हो जाएगा कि मध्यम अवधि में पैसा कैसे जुटाया जा सकता है। आदर्श स्थिति में परिसंपत्ति बिक्री को पूरी तरह घाटे में पूर्ति करने के विकल्प के रूप में नहीं देखा जाना चाहिए। इस प्रक्रिया से हासिल राजस्व का इस्तेमाल नई परिसंपत्तियां तैयार करने में किया जाना चाहिए। इससे मध्यम से दीर्घ अवधि में संभावित वृद्धि को तेज करने में मदद मिलेगी।

विनय सिन्हा

थोड़ी स्थिरता हासिल मगर जोखिम बाकी

धीरे-धीरे वृद्धि में स्थिरता आ रही है लेकिन अभी भी कई चक्रीय कारक मौजूद हैं जिनका जोखिम बरकरार है। इस संबंध में विस्तार से जानकारी दे रहे हैं **नीलकंठ मिश्रा**

मांग में कमी से उत्पन्न आर्थिक मंदी की इकलौती अच्छी बात यह है कि माल कम करने से वह समाप्त हो जाता है। ऐसा इसलिए, क्योंकि कटौती अनंतकाल तक जारी नहीं रखी जा सकती है। बीती छह तिमाहियों में सकल घरेलू उत्पाद (जीडीपी) में जो गिरावट आई है उसकी एक अहम बात है इन्वेंटरी में गिरावट। जीडीपी में जब गतिविधियों का आकलन किया जाता है तो इन्वेंटरी का आकार वृद्धि में जोड़ा जाता है। कम इन्वेंटरी का असर उलटा होता है। बीती छह तिमाहियों में सेवा और उद्योग जगत में वृद्धि के अंतर तथा जीएसटी संग्रह में कमी में इसे महसूस किया जा सकता है। तिमाही सेवा वृद्धि के आकलन में दिक्कत हो सकती है लेकिन इसमें उद्योग की तरह गिरावट नहीं आई है। शायद ऐसा इसलिए हुआ क्योंकि सेवा क्षेत्र में ज्यादा इन्वेंटरी नहीं हो सकती।

इससे पहले ऐसा वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) की शुरुआत के पहले वाली तिमाही में देखने को मिला था। उस वक्त उद्योग और सेवा की वृद्धि में समान भिन्नता नजर आई थी। वस्तु आपूर्ति शृंखला ने इन्वेंटरी कम करके जीएसटी के साथ नई शुरुआत करने की सोची। बीती पांच तिमाहियों में ऐसा वित्तीय हालात तंग होने से हुआ। क्योंकि इसका असर वितरकों, थोक विक्रेताओं और खुदरा कारोबारियों को ऋण की उपलब्धता पर पड़ा।

ऐसे प्रमाण हैं कि माल में कमी का दौर अब समाप्त हो चुका है। बिजली की मांग वृद्धि जो अक्टूबर और नवंबर में दो अंक में थी वह दिसंबर में केवल 2 फीसदी कम रही। जनवरी के पहले सप्ताह में इसमें मामूली इजाफा हुआ। जीएसटी संग्रह और रेल मालवहन भी सकारात्मक वृद्धि दर्शा रहे हैं। ये आंकड़े अभी भी कमजोर हैं लेकिन पहले आई तीव्र कमी से तो बेहतर ही हैं। यदि बाकी सब सामान्य रहा तो एक बार फिर इन्वेंटरी भरनी शुरू हो जाएगी और इसका लाभ वृद्धि को मिलेगा।

परंतु वित्तीय स्थिति तंग बनी हुई है। जिन वित्तीय कंपनियों के पास पूंजी, उत्पाद और पूंजी तक पहुंच है वे भी वृद्धि में धीमेपन के चलते ऋण देना कम कर रही हैं। नॉमिनल जीडीपी वृद्धि दर आधी हो जाने के बाद यदि मौजूदा कर्जदारों के लिए ऋण की गुणवत्ता का नए सिरे से आकलन किया जाए तो आश्चर्य नहीं होना चाहिए।

केंद्र और राज्य सरकारों द्वारा व्यय में कटौती वृद्धि की राह में एक और बाधा होगी क्योंकि वे ऐसे वर्ष में अपने राजकोषीय घाटे की पूर्ति करने का प्रयास करेंगे जहां कर प्राप्ति तय लक्ष्य से कम रही हो। पहले आठ महीनों के दौरान केंद्र सरकार का व्यय 13 फीसदी बढ़ा। लेकिन प्राप्तियों में कमी को देखते हुए यदि यह राजकोषीय घाटे के लक्ष्य पर कायम रहा तो अंतिम चार महीनों में व्यय पिछले साल से एक फीसदी कम होगा। यदि विनिवेश प्रक्रिया बजट से कमजोर रही तो कहीं अधिक बड़ी कमी उत्पन्न हो जाएगी। राज्य सरकारों के लिए वित्त वर्ष के मध्य तक ऋण के लक्ष्य स्थिर हो जाते हैं और वे अपने घाटे में और इजाफा नहीं कर सकतीं। उनके लिए व्यय में कटौती करना आवश्यक है। वे पहले ही भुगतान करने में देरी कर रहे हैं। उदाहरण के लिए फसल बीमा का नुकसान। बल्कि वित्त वर्ष के अंत तक राज्य सरकार के कर्मचारियों के वेतन में भी देरी हो सकती है। ऐसे कदमों से कमजोर उपभोक्ता रुझान और कमजोर हो सकते हैं और कंपनियों की निवेश योजनाएं और कमजोर हो सकती हैं।

कई नैसर्गिक स्थिरता प्रदान करने वाले कारक अब काम नहीं कर रहे हैं। कमजोर आर्थिक वृद्धि प्राय: ब्याज दरों को प्रभावित करती है लेकिन जैसा कि हम अक्सर कहते आए हैं कमजोर वृद्धि और कम मुद्रास्फीति के बावजूद कर्जदारों के लिए ब्याज दर अपरिवर्तित रही है।

गत वर्ष देश के विदेशी मुद्रा भंडार में भी जीडीपी के दो फीसदी से अधिक का इजाफा हुआ है। ऐसा इसलिए क्योंकि पूंजीगत आवक और निर्यात तब भी बढ़े जब कमजोर घरेलू मांग से आयात कम हुआ। यदि विदेशी बचतकर्ता देश की जरूरत से अधिक धन देना चाहते हैं तो या तो मुद्रा का अधिमूल्यन होगा या फंड की लागत घटेगी। लेकिन ऐसा नहीं हुआ। इस बीच केंद्रीय बैंक द्वारा सरकारी बॉन्ड खरीदने का एक जोखिम यह है कि मुद्रा कमजोर होगी लेकिन भुगतान संतुलन का ऐसा अधिशेष दिखाता है कि फिलहाल ऐसा कोई जोखिम नहीं है।

आम चर्चा की बात करें तो बीते कुछ महीनों में बैलेंस शीट की समस्याओं की तादाद बढ़ी है। वह सही हो सकती है और हमें यह याद रखना चाहिए कि बैलेंस शीट पर दबाव कमजोर वृद्धि के कारण भी उत्पन्न हो सकता है। जरूरी नहीं कि ऐसा हमेशा चोरी या भ्रष्टाचार के कारण हो। उदाहरण के लिए केंद्र सरकार का 45 प्रतिशत का ऋण-जीडीपी अनुपात स्थायी नजर आया और उसमें निरंतर गिरावट आ रही है क्योंकि नॉमिनल वृद्धि दर ऊंची रही लेकिन वृद्धि में धीमापन आने और ऋण की लागत के करीब 7 फीसदी तथा ब्याज दर के जीडीपी के 3 फीसदी रहने के कारण जीडीपी अचानक खतरे में नजर आने लगी। गत वर्ष ये वृद्धिकारी व्यय का तिहाई थी। यदि कर 8 फीसदी की दर से बढ़ते हैं और नॉमिनल जीडीपी के अनुरूप गैर विवेकाधीन व्यय मसलन ब्याज और वेतन आदि उसी गति से बढ़ते हैं तो राजकोषीय समावेशन कैसे होगा? अतिरिक्त व्यय की तो बात ही छोड़ दी जाए। यदि नॉमिनल जीडीपी वृद्धि में आया धीमापन तनावग्रस्त ऋण को बढ़ावा देता है तो सही उपाय यही होगा कि वृद्धि को गति प्रदान की जाए, न कि बैलेंस शीट सुधारने की कवायद की जाए।

आर्थिक कारक समय-समय पर अपनी भूमिका निभाते हैं भले ही यह वांछित से धीमी गति से हो।

कम ब्याज दर पर बात करें तो वृद्धि में सुधार के लिए वह आवश्यक है। बैंक जमा दर में गिरावट आने लगी है और समय बीतने के साथ इसका असर ऋण दर पर भी पड़ेगा। मोर्गेज दर बीते पांच महीने में करीब 50 आधार अंक कम हुई है। बजट प्रस्तुत होने के बाद राजकोषीय घाटे और व्यय को लेकर अनिश्चितता कुछ हद तक कम होगी। अप्रैल के बाद केंद्र और राज्य सरकारों व्यय सुधारने में कामयाब हो सकती हैं। तब तक संभवत: शीर्ष मुद्रास्फीति भी सार्थक सुधार के साथ नजर आए। यदि वित्तीय तंत्र में कोई और गड़बड़ी नहीं होती है तो ऋण विस्तार में भी गिरावट आएगी, भले ही यह धीमी गति से हो। अर्थव्यवस्था शायद धीमी गति से स्थिरता हासिल करे, वृद्धि मौजूद स्तर से थोड़ी सुधर सकती है, हालांकि वह वांछित लक्ष्य से फिर भी कोसों दूर रहेगी।

(लेखक क्रेडिट स्विस में इंडिया स्ट्रैटिजिस्ट और एशिया पैसिफिक स्ट्रैटिजी के को-हेड हैं)

सेना के तीनों अंगों की एकीकृत थिएटर कमान पर विचार जरूरी

दोधारी तलवार

अजय शुक्ला

सेना के उच्च प्रबंधन को मजबूत करने की चर्चाओं में आम तौर पर दो सुधारों की जरूरत पर सहमति होती है। पहली जरूरत सेना के तीनों अंगों- थलसेना, नौसेना और वायुसेना के बीच तालमेल बिठाने के लिए एकीकृत प्रमुख की नियुक्ति है। भारत के पहले सैन्य बल प्रमुख (सीडीएस) की नियुक्ति के साथ आंशिक तौर पर इसे पूरा किया जा चुका है। सीडीएस को तीनों सेनाओं के बीच समन्वय बनाने का जिम्मा दिया गया है लेकिन वह ट्राई-सर्विस मसले पर ही सरकार को परामर्श देगा और तीनों सेनाओं के प्रमुख अपने बल के बारे में पहले की तरह सलाह देते रहेंगे।

अधिकतर विशेषज्ञ इस जरूरत पर सहमत हैं कि तीनों सेनाओं को साथ आकर ट्राई-सर्विस लड़ाकू कमान बनानी चाहिए। एक भौगोलिक क्षेत्र में तीनों सेनाओं की कमान अलग होती है, मसलन सेना की उत्तरी कमान, वायुसेना की पश्चिमी कमान और नौसेना की दक्षिणी कमान। तर्क यह रहा है कि तीनों सेनाओं की एकीकृत कमान बनाकर यह अलगाव खत्म किया जाए। इस कमान को जंग की स्थिति में लड़ाकू अभियान चलाने के लिए थल सेना, नौसेना और वायुसेना के जरूरी सभी अधिकार होंगे। अंडमान एवं निकोबार कमान में ऐसी एकीकृत कमान पहले से मौजूद है लेकिन उस प्रायोगिक अनुभव को आगे नहीं बढ़ाया गया। एकीकृत कमान की अवधारणा सबसे पहले अमेरिका ने लागू की थी। उसने 1947 में पांच क्षेत्रों के लिए पांच युद्धक कमान गठित की थी। मध्य कमान, अफ्रीका कमान और हिंद-प्रशांत कमान जैसे नाम पूरी दुनिया को ही कवर करते थे। चीन की सेना ने भी 2016 में यह मॉडल अपनाते हुए पांच संयुक्त थिएटर कमान में पुनर्गठन किया।

साझा नेतृत्व जहां सैन्यबलों के पुनर्गठन और उपकरणों की खरीद में किफायत बरतने में मदद करता है, वहीं साझा थिएटर कमान ढांचा लागू करने के पहले काफी सोच-विचार करना होगा। भारतीय वायुसेना ने थिएटर कमान व्यवस्था का लगातार विरोध किया है। हमें उसकी दलीलों पर ध्यान देना चाहिए।

पहली, लड़ाकू विमानों के तीव्र रफ्तार से उड़ान भरने और तेजी से भौगोलिक दायरा बदलने को आधार बनाते हुए वायुसेना कहती है कि पूरा भारत एक ही भौगोलिक थिएटर है। वहीं अपेक्षाकृत धीमी रफ्तार वाली थलसेना और नौसैनिक पोतों को भौगोलिक आधार पर एक समूह में रखना तर्कसंगत लगता है। लेकिन यह भी सही है कि लड़ाकू विमान जिस तरह मिनटों में ही दूसरी जगह जा सकते हैं, उसी तरह वे एक से दूसरी लड़ाकू भूमिका भी अपना सकते हैं। पाकिस्तान में बालाकोट के आतंकी शिविर पर गत फरवरी में हुए हमले के दौरान मिराज-2000 विमानों ने मध्य कमान में स्थित ग्वालियर से उड़ान भरी थी और पश्चिमी थिएटर से भी दूर के निशाने पर धावा बोला था। उस अंतर-थिएटर अभियान में मिराज विमानों ने 1,500 किलोमीटर से अधिक उड़ान भरी और हवा में ही ईंधन भरा गया।

ऐसे ही किसी अभियान में लड़ाकू विमान ग्वालियर से उड़ते हुए पूर्वी थिएटर में जाकर मैकमोहन रेखा के पार भी हमला कर सकते हैं। इसमें उड़ान भरने से लेकर निशाना लगाने तक केवल एक घंटे का वक्त लगेगा और हवा में ईंधन भरने की भी सीमित जरूरत पड़ेगी। इसकी वजह यह है कि मिराज-2000 विमान वापस लौटते समय आसानी से तेजपुर या चाबुआ के एयरफोर्स स्टेशन पर उतरकर ईंधन भर सकते हैं। एक लड़ाकू विमान के लिए दूसरे कमान क्षेत्र में जाकर कार्रवाई करना बेहद आसान है।

दूसरी, ऐसे अभियानों में अलग-अलग थिएटरों के बीच समन्वय बनाना कठिन है। पाकिस्तान और चीन के हवाई क्षेत्र में जाकर हमला करने के लिए आज एक पूरा पैकेज चाहिए। हमलावर विमान को वायु प्रतिरक्षा एस्कार्ट, इलेक्ट्रॉनिक जंगी विमान, हवा में ईंधन भरने वाले विमान और हवाई चेतावनी एवं नियंत्रण प्रणाली की भी जरूरत होगी। यह पैकेज कई एयरबेस से जुटाए विमानों से ही तैयार होगा क्योंकि एक बेस में सभी मौजूद नहीं होती हैं। ऐसे में सभी तरह के विमानों के उड़ाने भरने में बेहद सटीक समन्वय जरूरी होगा ताकि तय समय पर वे उपलब्ध रहें। लेकिन अलग-अलग थिएटर कमान में बांटे जाने पर ऐसा होना मुश्किल होगा। हरेक थिएटर कमांडर अपने काम को सबसे आगे रखेगा और दूसरे थिएटरों में हमले के लिए संसाधन देने में हिचकेगा।

तीसरी, वायुसेना की युद्धक क्षमता महज 28 स्क्वाड्रन है। इन्हें अगर तीन या चार थिएटरों में बांट दिया जाए तो स्थिति कमजोर हो जाएगी। विशाल वायुसेनाएं ही अपने विमान अलग थिएटर कमान में देने का जोखिम उठा सकती हैं। भारत का हवाई क्षेत्र चीन के पश्चिमी थिएटर कमान से भी छोटा है, लिहाजा भारतीय वायुसेना एक थिएटर का ही हिस्सा रह सकती है।

चौथी, एकल थिएटर आधार पर परिचालन के लिए वायुसेना को नियंत्रण एवं नियोजन केंद्रीकृत करना होगा जबकि क्रियान्वयन को विकेंद्रित रखना होगा। जंगी स्क्वाड्रनों के अपने स्थायी ठिकाने हैं लेकिन किसी भी थिएटर में अभियान अंजाम देने के लिए एक पायलट को दूसरी जगहों पर भेजकर अनुभव दिलाना होगा। इस तरह का लचीलापन लाना मुश्किल होगा।

पांचवीं, भारत के हवाई क्षेत्र को सुरक्षित रखने के लिए वायुसेना को केंद्रीकृत नियंत्रण की जरूरत है। वायु सुरक्षा निगरानी को स्वचालित नेटवर्क आईएसीसीएस से अंजाम दिया जाता है। एस-400 और एमआर-सैम प्रणालियों के इस साल लागू हो जाने पर स्थिति साफ हो जाएगी। अंतरिक्ष की निगरानी के लिए केंद्रीकृत नियंत्रण चाहिए।

वैसे सीडीएस ने कहा है कि भारत एकीकृत थिएटर कमान में दूसरे देशों की आंख मूंदकर नकल नहीं करेगा और फैसला पूरी तरह देश की जरूरतों पर आधारित होगा। यह भी सच है कि सेना की अधिकांश कमान में नौसेना की कोई भूमिका नहीं है। ऐसे में हमें एकीकृत ट्राई-सर्विस ढांचा बनाने के बजाय इस बारे में सोचना चाहिए कि युद्ध शुरू होने पर तीनों सेनाओं की समन्वित मारक क्षमता किस तरह बढ़ाई जा सके।

कानाफूसी

सीएए का समर्थन

भारतीय जनता पार्टी (भाजपा) ने विपक्ष द्वारा नागरिकता संशोधन अधिनियम (सीएए) के भारी विरोध को देखते हुए देशव्यापी कार्यक्रम की शुरुआत की है। उत्तर प्रदेश में इस अभियान की शुरुआत गृहमंत्री अमित शाह, उत्तर प्रदेश के मुख्यमंत्री योगी आदित्यनाथ, रक्षा मंत्री राजनाथ सिंह आदि की उपस्थिति में होगा। ये नेता सीएए के समर्थन में आयोजित रैलियों को संबोधित करेंगे। 21 जनवरी को गृहमंत्री अमित शाह लखनऊ में एक जनसभा को संबोधित करने आ रहे हैं। यह सभा उत्तर प्रदेश में इस चरण में बनी छह जन सभाओं में से पहली होगी। इस रैली में मध्य उत्तर प्रदेश के अवध क्षेत्र के सभी जिलों को शामिल किया जाएगा। राज्य पार्टी संगठन ने यह दिखाने की पूरी तैयारी कर ली है कि ज्यादातर लोग इस नए कानून के समर्थन में हैं। गौरतलब है कि नागरिकता संशोधन अधिनियम का कई राज्यों के लोग पिछले कई दिनों से विरोध कर रहे हैं।

आमने-सामने

पत्रकारों के प्रतिनिधि संगठन वित्त मंत्रालय की रिपोर्टिंग करने वाले अधिमान्य संवाददाताओं के नॉर्थ ब्लॉक में प्रवेश पर लगी रोक हटवाने के लिए कानूनी रास्ता अपनाने जा रहे हैं। भारतीय प्रेस परिषद ने इस संबंध में भारतीय प्रेस क्लब और फॉरेन कॉरेस्पॉन्डेंट्स क्लब समेत विभिन्न पत्रकार संगठनों की शिकायत सुनने का निर्णय किया है। वित्त मंत्रालय ने रोक गत वर्ष जुलाई में लगाई थी। संवाददाताओं का कहना है कि इस आदेश के बाद अफसरशाह आधिकारिक रूप से उनसे मिलने में भी घबराने लगे हैं। उनका यह भी कहना है कि अन्य मंत्रालयों में अधिमान्य संवाददाताओं के लिए ऐसी कोई रोक नहीं है।

आपका पक्ष

अर्थव्यवस्था की स्थिति और बजट

भारत की जीडीपी दर पांच साल के न्यूनतम स्तर पर आ चुकी है। विभिन्न अंतरराष्ट्रीय संस्थाएं भी भारत की जीडीपी दर के पूर्वानुमान में कमी कर रही हैं। विशेषज्ञ मौजूदा स्थिति के लिए निवेश में कमी को कारण मान रहे हैं। भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था निजी निवेश की कमी से जूझ रही है। सरकार ने अर्थव्यवस्था को पटरी पर लाने के लिए कई प्रयास किए हैं जैसे निवेश बढ़ाने के लिए सरकार द्वारा कॉरपोरेट कर में कटौती, बैंकों का विलय, बैंकों को नई पूंजी देने, जीएसटी दर में कटौती और रीपो दर में कटौती का अभी तक कुछ खास असर नहीं दिखा है। प्रयासों की शृंखला में आगामी बजट में वित्त मंत्री को अर्थव्यवस्था में सुधार के लिए निजी निवेश पर निर्भर रहने की अपनी रणनीति में बदलाव करना होगा, क्योंकि अगर चुनौती है तो इसके लिए समाधान भी हैं। इसमें प्रमुख उपायों के रूप में कृषि और बुनियादी ढांचा क्षेत्र के साथ सूक्ष्म एवं मध्यम उद्योग क्षेत्र के लिए विशिष्ट उपायों की घोषणा की जा सकती है। आर्थिक सुस्ती के परिणामस्वरूप रोजगार की स्थिति और बिगड़ गई है। स्किल इंडिया, स्टार्टअप, मेक इन इंडिया आदि ने कुछ हद तक रोजगार सृजन का काम किया है। लेकिन आर्थिक सुस्ती ने इन योजनाओं के प्रभाव को सीमित कर दिया है, जबकि स्वरूप में बदलाव से मनरेगा जैसी रोजगारमूलक योजना को संपत्ति सर्जक योजना बना दिया है। इसमें सुधार के लिए बजट में मनरेगा को लेकर कुछ घोषणा संभव है। इसके अलावा कृषि और कृषि से जुड़े उद्योगों में रोजगार के अवसर बढ़ाने के लिए विशिष्ट उपायों की घोषणा भी की जा सकती है। ग्रामीण क्षेत्र को वित्तपोषण को एक बेहतर विकल्प के रूप में देखा जा सकता है। ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर और रोजगार आदि में निवेश करने से इस क्षेत्र को मंदी के प्रभाव से उभरने में काफी मदद मिलेगी। आर्थिक चुनौती से निपटने के लिए सबसे पहले जरूरी है कि मांग, खपत और निवेश को बढ़ाया जाए। अन्य उपायों में बुनियादी ढांचे पर सरकारी खर्च बढ़ाना, आयकर की दरों में कटौती, वित्तीय क्षेत्र मुख्यत: एनबीएफसी में सुधार किया जाना आवश्यक है तभी अर्थव्यवस्था की वर्तमान चुनौतियों से निपटते हुए 5 खरब डॉलर की अर्थव्यवस्था बनने के लिए अपेक्षित विकास दर को बनाए रखा जा सकता है।

सुजीत कुमार, बिलासपुर

देश की अर्थव्यवस्था को मजबूती प्रदान करने के लिए बजट में अलग प्रावधान करने चाहिए

राजनीतिक तौर पर जागरूकता जरूरी

देश की राजधानी दिल्ली में विधानसभा चुनाव की घोषणा हो गई है। इसकी तैयारी राजनीतिक पार्टियों ने कर दी है। मुख्यतौर पर आम आदमी पार्टी (आप), कांग्रेस और भारतीय जनती पार्टी (भाजपा) मतदाताओं को अपनी ओर आकर्षित करने के लिए कई वादे कर रही हैं। इसके लिए कुछ राजनीतिक दल बड़ी-बड़ी रैलियां करेंगें तो कुछ जनसभाएं करेंगे, कुछ घर-घर जाकर मतदाताओं को लुभाने की कोशिश करेंगें। मतदाताओं को जागरूक होकर मतदान करना चाहिए। किसी भी लालच में आकर मतदान नहीं करना चाहिए। मतदाताओं को यह सोच एवं परख लेना चाहिए कि जिसे वह अपना मत देने जा रहे हैं उस पर कोई भ्रष्टाचार का आरोप तो नहीं है या वह दागी नेता तो नहीं है। एक गलत वोट का प्रयोग पांच साल तक पछतावा ही देता है।

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।

दैनिक जागरण

आसक्ति से मुक्ति ही प्रसन्नता का द्वार खोलती है

जेपी नड्डा की चुनौती

जेपी नड्डा का भाजपा अध्यक्ष बनना तभी तय हो गया था जब अमित शाह के गृह मंत्री बनने के बाद उन्हें कार्यकारी अध्यक्ष बनाया गया था। नए पार्टी अध्यक्ष के रूप में उनकी विधिवत ताजपोशी से यह धारणा निराधार हुई कि गृह मंत्री बनने के बावजूद अमित शाह पार्टी की कमान अपने हाथ में ही बनाए रख सकते हैं। भाजपा ने केवल अपने संविधान के अनुसार ही चलना पसंद नहीं किया, बल्कि यह संदेश भी दिया कि वह उन राजनीतिक दलों सरीखी नहीं है जहां सब कुछ एक व्यक्ति या फिर परिवार के इर्द-गिर्द घूमता है। जेपी नड्डा के अध्यक्ष बनने से यह आरोप लगाने वालों को कुछ नया सोचना होगा कि इस सरकार और पार्टी में सब कुछ नरेंद्र मोदी और अमित शाह की इच्छा के अनुरूप ही होता है। इसी के साथ उन्हें इस पर भी गौर करना होगा कि बीते दो दशक में जहां भाजपा ने करीब दस अध्यक्ष देखे वहीं कांग्रेस सोनिया गांधी और राहुल गांधी के अलावा अन्य किसी को इस लायक नहीं समझ सकी कि उसे पार्टी की कमान सौंपी जा सके। हैरानी यह है कि कांग्रेस गांधी परिवार से बाहर के किसी नेता को अंतरिम अध्यक्ष बनाने पर भी विचार नहीं कर सकी।

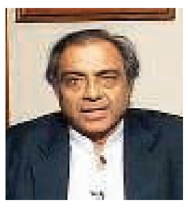
यह भारतीय राजनीति की विडंबना ही है कि जहां भाजपा यह प्रदर्शित कर रही है कि पार्टी का एक आम कार्यकर्ता भी अध्यक्ष पद पर आसीन हो सकता है वहीं देश की सबसे पुरानी पार्टी परिवारवाद से इस कदर चिपकी हुई है कि सोनिया गांधी के अध्यक्ष पद छोड़ने के बाद बेटे राहुल गांधी ने पार्टी की कमान संभाली और उनके पद छोड़ने के बाद फिर से मां ने अंतरिम अध्यक्ष बनना जरूरी समझा। आखिर इसे लोकतांत्रिक तौर-तरीकों के अनुरूप कैसे कहा जा सकता है? मुश्किल यह है कि परिवारवाद से अन्य अनेक दल भी जकड़े हुए हैं। क्षेत्रीय दल तो एक तरह से परिवारवाद का पर्याय ही बन गए हैं। इस पर आश्चर्य नहीं कि जेपी नड्डा को पार्टी की कमान सौंपते समय गृह मंत्री अमित शाह ने यह रेखांकित किया कि हम वंशवाद के आधार पर चलने वाले दल नहीं हैं। इसी के साथ उन्होंने यह अपेक्षा व्यक्त की कि नड्डा जी पार्टी को नए मुकाम पर ले जाएंगे। वास्तव में जेपी नड्डा के सामने वैसी राजनीतिक सफलता हासिल करना एक बड़ी चुनौती है जैसी अमित शाह ने भाजपा अध्यक्ष के रूप में हासिल की और पार्टी का व्यापक विस्तार कर उसे एक मजबूत दल के रूप में स्थापित किया। जेपी नड्डा को विस्तार के इस सिलसिले को कायम रखना होगा और यह तभी कायम हो सकता है कि जब आगामी विधानसभा चुनावों में भाजपा उल्लेखनीय सफलता हासिल करेगी।

ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों की अनदेखी

जम्मू संभाग के राजौरी जिले के थन्नामंडी तहसील के मंगोटा में स्थानीय लोगों ने एक नदी पर स्वयं पुल बनाकर मिसाल कायम की है। यह सब उस समय हुआ जब जम्मू-कश्मीर में केंद्रीय मंत्रियों के दौरों के बीच विकास कार्य तेजी होने के दावे किए जा रहे हैं। यह पहली बार नहीं है कि प्रशासनिक अनदेखी से खफा लोगों ने खुद ही रुपये एकत्र कर विकास कार्य करवाएं हों। इसे पूर्व भी कई दूरदराज के क्षेत्रों में लोगों ने सड़कें तक बनवा डाली हैं। जम्मू-कश्मीर के दूरदराज के पहाड़ी क्षेत्रों की स्थिति से हर कोई अवगत है। कई ऐसे गांव हैं जहां पर अभी भी संपर्क मार्ग नहीं हैं और लोग नदियों एवं नालों के बीच से जान हथेली पर रखकर गुजरते हैं। इनमें स्कूली बच्चे भी शामिल हैं। विगत दिवस जिस गांव में लोगों ने पुल का निर्माण किया, वहां पर भी स्थानीय लोग वर्षों से प्रशासनिक कार्यालयों में चक्कर लगाकर पुल बनाने की गुहार लगा रहे थे। विडंबना है कि उनकी किसी ने भी नहीं सुनी और वे नदी के बीच से ही जाने के लिए विवश थे। हैरानगी की बात यह है कि पुल निर्माण में लोगों ने महज 60 हजार रुपये ही खर्च किए। अगर यही पुल सरकार को बनाना होता तो इस पर लाखों रुपये खर्च बताया जाता। होना तो यह चाहिए था कि अधिकारी ग्रामीणों की समस्या को समझते और पुल का निर्माण कार्य कराते, मगर ऐसा नहीं हो पाया। अब ग्रामीणों ने खुद पुल का निर्माण कर पूरे प्रशासनिक तंत्र के कामकाज के तरीके पर ही प्रश्नचिन्ह लगा दिए। प्रशासनिक अधिकारी यह भी भूल गए कि हाल ही में उन्होंने गांव की ओर कार्यक्रम का आयोजन कर लोगों को यह विश्वास दिलाया था कि सरकार के विकास के एजेंडे में ग्रामीण क्षेत्र प्राथमिकता पर हैं। दुखद है कि चंद दिनों में ही इसे भूला दिया गया। उपराज्यपाल प्रशासन को इस मामले की जांच करानी चाहिए ताकि यह पता चल सके कि किन अधिकारियों की बेरुखी के कारण लोगों को अपने रुपयों से दिन रात एक करके पुल का निर्माण कार्य कराना पड़ा। अगर ऐसा नहीं होता है तो गांव की ओर जैसे कार्यक्रमों का भी कोई लाभ नहीं।

जम्मू-कश्मीर के दूरदराज के पहाड़ी क्षेत्रों की स्थिति से हर कोई अवगत है। कई ऐसे गांव हैं जहां पर अभी भी संपर्क मार्ग नहीं हैं और लोग नदियों एवं नालों के बीच से जान हथेली पर रखकर गुजरते हैं। इनमें स्कूली बच्चे भी शामिल हैं। सरकार को इस मामले का संज्ञान ले कर जरूरी विकास कार्यों को पूरा करना चाहिए

नागरिकता कानून की मनमानी व्याख्या



महेश जेठमलानी

संवैधानिक रूप से वैध होने के बाद भी सीएए के विरोधी अपने कुत्सित हितों की पूर्ति के लिए गफलत फैला रहे हैं

देश में एक तबका नागरिकता संशोधन कानून यानी सीएए के खिलाफ मुहिम छेड़े हुए है। विरोध करने वाले पाकिस्तान के अहमदिया और शिया मुसलमानों के लिए पैरवी कर रहे हैं और साथ ही म्यांमार के रोहिंग्या मुसलमानों और श्रीलंकाई तमिलों के लिए भी आवाज उठा रहे हैं। ऐसे में हमें इन देशों के ढांचे और सीएए के स्वरूप को समझना होगा। सीएए में भारतीय नागरिकता देने का आधार ही धार्मिक उत्पीड़न है। चूंकि ये तीनों देश घोषित रूप से इस्लामिक राष्ट्र हैं तो वहां मुसलमानों के धार्मिक उत्पीड़न की दलील टिकती नहीं। अहमदिया मुसलमानों के बारे में हमें पता होना चाहिए कि पाकिस्तान के मुख्य शिल्पकारों में से एक सर जफीरूल्ला खान अहमदिया थे। उन्होंने ही 1940 के उस कुख्यात लाहौर प्रस्ताव की अवधारणा पेश की थी जिसने पाकिस्तान को एक धार्मिक मुल्क बनाने का आधार तैयार किया। वह पाकिस्तान की पहली संविधान सभा के उन प्रमुख सदस्यों में से एक थे जिन्होंने पाकिस्तान में धर्मनिरपेक्षता की बची-खुची उम्मीदों पर पानी फेरने का काम किया। हालांकि पाक के संस्थापक मुहम्मद अली जिन्ना ने शुरुआती दौर में अपने मुल्क को सेक्युलर ढांचा प्रदान करने के संकेत दिए थे, लेकिन उनकी मौत के साथ ही वे दफन हो गए। रही-सही कसर जिन्ना के उत्तराधिकारी लियाकत अली खान ने पूरी कर दी जिन्होंने मार्च 1949 में 'ऑब्जेक्टिव रिजोल्यूशन' के जरिये पाक को एक धर्मांध इस्लामिक देश बनाने की राह पर धकेला। यह प्रस्ताव पाक में गैर-मुस्लिमों को दोयम दर्जे का नागरिक बनाने के लिए ही था। शिया और अहमदिया ने भी इसका समर्थन किया। दरअसल पाक में प्रत्येक मुस्लिम का अरमान अपने मुल्क को मजहबी खाका प्रदान करना था। इस प्रस्ताव के अमल में आने के बाद पाक में हिंदू, सिख और ईसाइयों के हिस्से में उत्पीड़न के सिवाय कुछ नहीं आया। पाकिस्तानी आबादी के अनुपात से इसकी पुष्टि भी होती है। गैर-मुस्लिमों से छुटकारा पाने के बाद बहुसंख्यक सुन्नियों ने अहमदिया को निशाना बनाना शुरू किया। उन्हें मुस्लिम न मानने को लेकर अभियान छेड़ा गया। अहमदिया के बाद शिया निशाने पर आए।

जो लोग पाकिस्तानी मुस्लिमों को सीएए में शामिल करने की दलील दे रहे हैं, उनका आधार शिया और अहमदिया मुसलमानों की मौजूदा स्थिति है। ऐसी दलील देने वाले लोग खुद दोहरे रवैये वाले हैं। प्रमुख मुस्लिम नेताओं में शुमार असदुद्दीन ओवैसी ने जून 2008 में आंध्र के तत्कालीन मुख्यमंत्री वाईएस राजशेखर रेड्डी से अनुरोध किया था कि वे हैदराबाद में अहमदिया मुसलमानों को रैली आयोजित न करने दें और ठीक वैसा ही हुआ। इसी तरह मुस्लिम विद्वानों की एक प्रमुख संस्था एमटीएनके ने 2011 की जनगणना में अहमदिया को मुस्लिम मानने पर केंद्र सरकार की आलोचना की। सितंबर 2011 में जामा मस्जिद के शाही इमाम के आह्वान पर दिल्ली में अहमदिया की एक प्रदर्शनी रोकी गई। ऑल इंडिया मुस्लिम पर्सनल लॉ बोर्ड में भी अहमदिया का प्रतिनिधित्व नहीं है। फरवरी 2012 में आंध्र प्रदेश वक्फ बोर्ड ने अहमदिया मस्जिदों को जब्त करने का फरमान सुनाया कि शिया-सुन्नी मस्जिदों का प्रबंधन गैर-मुस्लिमों द्वारा नहीं किया जा सकता। इसके अगले महीने हैदराबाद में अहमदिया मस्जिद पर हमला हुआ। मई 2012 में ही जमीयत-ए-इस्लामी-हिंद ने अहमदिया के पूर्णतया सामाजिक बहिष्कार का एलान किया। इसी दौरान कश्मीर के प्रमुख मुफ्ती ने राज्य सरकार से अनुरोध किया कि विधानसभा में प्रस्ताव पारित कर अहमदिया को गैर-मुस्लिम घोषित किया जाए। तमिलनाडु और बंगाल में अहमदिया पर हमले की खबरें भी आईं।

जामिया और एएमयू के प्रदर्शनकारी छात्रों ने भी अपना रुख स्पष्ट नहीं किया है कि क्या वे अहमदिया को मुस्लिम मानते हैं? इसे देखते हुए यदि धार्मिक उत्पीड़न के आधार पर उन्हें नागरिकता दे भी दी जाती है तब देश में वर्ग संघर्ष की एक नई आशंका गहरा सकती है। जहां तक अफगानिस्तान के हजारा शरणार्थियों की बात है तो दिल्ली में उनकी तादाद करीब 500-700 है। ये धार्मिक उत्पीड़न के कारण नहीं, बल्कि तालिबान के अत्याचारों से तंग आकर अपना देश छोड़ आए थे। चूंकि अब पश्चिमी काबुल में हजारा समुदाय के लिए एक बस्ती बना दी गई है तो वे अपने वतन लौट सकते हैं।

श्रीलंका और म्यांमार के अल्पसंख्यकों को भी सीएए से बाहर रखने पर गफलत फैलाई जा रही है। म्यांमार में कोई राष्ट्रीय धर्म नहीं है। देश की 90 फीसद आबादी थेरवाद बौद्धों की है। संविधान उन्हें प्रोत्साहन देता है तो साथ ही अल्पसंख्यकों को धार्मिक स्वतंत्रता का अधिकार भी प्रदान करता है। श्रीलंका का संविधान भी बौद्ध धर्म को वरीयता देता है, लेकिन श्रीलंकाई संविधान का अनुच्छेद 10 और अनुच्छेद 14 सभी धर्मों के अनुयायियों को व्यापक रूप से धार्मिक स्वतंत्रता सुनिश्चित करते हैं। श्रीलंकाई सुप्रीम कोर्ट देश को सेक्युलर घोषित कर ही चुका है।

रोहिंग्या का मसला मुख्य रूप से भारत के दो पड़ोसी मित्र देशों म्यांमार और बांग्लादेश के बीच फंसा पेच अधिक है। फिर म्यांमार के रखाइन प्रांत से उनके निर्वासन की कहानी के तार भी आंतरिक संघर्ष से जुड़े हुए हैं। उन्हें लेकर खतरे भी कम नहीं। भारतीय खुफिया एजेंसियों ने आगाह किया है कि रोहिंग्या शरणार्थियों के संबंध इस्लामिक स्टेट, अल कायदा और पाकिस्तान के पिट्ठू आतंकी संगठनों से भी हैं। बांग्लादेशी प्रधानमंत्री शेख हसीना भी कह चुकी हैं कि बांग्लादेश में आ बसे 11 लाख रोहिंग्या न केवल उनके देश, बल्कि पूरे क्षेत्र की सुरक्षा के लिए खतरा बन गए हैं। ऐसे समूह जिहादी ताकतों को विस्तार देने के लिए एकदम माकूल होते हैं। राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा के जोखिम को देखते हुए भारत द्वारा रोहिंग्या को सीएए से दूर रखने का औचित्य समझ आता है। श्रीलंकाई शरणार्थियों की समस्या देश में दशकों तक चले गृहयुद्ध से उपजी थी और उसके समाप्त होने के साथ ही उसका पटाक्षेप समझा जाना चाहिए।

इस प्रकार सीएए संवैधानिक रूप से पूरी तरह वैध है। यह प्रताड़ित लोगों को मानवीय आधार पर आसरा देने वाला कानून है। यह मुस्लिम विरोधी नहीं है। वे भी नागरिकता कानून के एक अलग प्रावधान से नागरिकता के लिए आवेदन कर सकते हैं। सच तो यह है कि पिछले कुछ अर्से में करीब 600 मुस्लिमों को भारतीय नागरिकता दी भी जा चुकी है। इस कानून का सीमित दायरा संवैधानिक नैतिकता एवं सार्वजनिक नीति से आबद्ध है। यह कानून तनिक भी विभाजनकारी नहीं है, लेकिन अफसोस है कि इसके विरोधी अपने कुत्सित हितों की पूर्ति के लिए इसकी मनमानी व्याख्या में जुटे हुए हैं।

(लेखक वरिष्ठ वकील हैं)

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अवधेश राजपूत

झूठ और फरेब से भरा अभियान

अवधेश कुमार

सीएए विरोध के बहाने कुछ लोग मोदी सरकार को मुसलमान विरोधी साबित करने पर तुले हैं

राजधानी दिल्ली का शाहीन बाग इन दिनों सुर्खियों में बना हुआ है। वहां के घटनाक्रम को देख-सुनकर यह साफ हो जाएगा कि पूरा धरना ही झूठ, भ्रम, नासमझी, पाखंड, सांप्रदायिक सोच और भाजपा, संघ, नरेंद्र मोदी एवं अमित शाह के प्रति एक बड़े वर्ग के अंदर व्याप्त नफरत की सम्मिलित परिणति है। वहां अधिकतर को पता ही नहीं कि नागरिकता संशोधन कानून, एनपीआर या एनआरसी है क्या? कई लोग कहते मिल जाएंगे कि मोदी और शाह मुसलमानों को बाहर निकालना चाहते हैं या हमें कैद में रखना चाहते हैं। कहा जा रहा है कि नागरिकता संशोधन कानून मुसलमानों के खिलाफ है। यह भ्रम है जिसे योजनापूर्वक फैलाया गया है। आप पूरी व्यवस्था देख लीजिए, इतना भारी संसाधन बिना पूर्व योजना के आ ही नहीं सकता। इसका वित्तपोषण भी एक रहस्य बना हुआ है कि आखिर कौन इतना खर्च कर रहा है?

इस बहुप्रचारित धरने में कई तरह के लोगों की भूमिका है। पहली श्रेणी में ऐसे लोग हैं जिनके अंदर वाकई यह भय पैदा कर दिया गया है कि मोदी सरकार मुस्लिम समुदाय के खिलाफ काम कर रही है इसलिए हमें अपनी रक्षा के लिए वहां जाना चाहिए। दूसरी श्रेणी में वे लोग हैं जिनको सच मालूम है, लेकिन मोदी और भाजपा से नफरत में उन्होंने यह आग लगाई है और वे वहां डटे हुए हैं ताकि आग बुझे नहीं। तीसरी श्रेणी में वे हैं जिनका आंदोलन से कोई लेना-देना नहीं। वे या तो अपने नेता, मालिक या अन्य के कहने या फिर पैसे एवं अन्य लालच में आते हैं। चौथी श्रेणी नेताओं की है जो वहां इसलिए जा रहे हैं ताकि वे मुसलमानों के हमदर्द बनकर उनका वोट पा सकें। पांचवीं श्रेणी उनकी है जो जेएनयू से लेकर जामा मस्जिद एवं अन्य कई जगहों पर देश विरोधी नारों से लेकर उत्पात की वजह बने हैं। उन्हें लगता है कि इसके साथ जुड़कर वे अधिक ताकतवर होंगे एवं मोदी सरकार पर दबाव बढ़ेगा। छठी श्रेणी मजहबी कट्टरपंथियों की है जो देश में जिहादी माहौल पैदा करने लिए सक्रिय हैं। अगर इन सबको साथ मिला दें तो निष्कर्ष यह है कि हर हाल में मोदी सरकार को मुसलमान विरोधी, सांप्रदायिक, लोकतंत्र का हनन करने वाला करार देकर देश एवं दुनिया में बदनाम करना है। हालांकि उन्हें इसमें सफलता मिलने की संभावना इसलिए नहीं है कि ऐसे झूठ और फरेब पर आधारित प्रदर्शन से मोदी सरकार का समर्थन ही बढ़ेगा।

दिल्ली-एनसीआर का एक बड़ा वर्ग इस धरने के कारण लगने वाले जाम से परेशान होकर इसके खिलाफ है। लोग विरोध में प्रदर्शन भी करने लगे हैं। हालांकि मीडिया के बड़े समूह द्वारा सच सामने रखने तथा अलग-अलग संगठनों द्वारा मोहल्ला सभाओं में नागरिकता कानून का सच बताने से मुस्लिम समुदाय के अंदर भी यह भाव पैदा हो रहा है कि इस कानून से उनका तो कोई लेना-देना नहीं है, लेकिन उनमें यह भाव जैसे-जैसे बढ़ रहा है, मोदी विरोधी उन्हें एनपीआर एवं एनआरसी का भय दिखाकर कह रहे हैं कि एनपीआर में तुमसे पहचान मांगी जाएगी, तुम्हारे खानदान का विवरण मांगा जाएगा और नहीं देने पर तुम भारत के नागरिक नहीं रहोगे। वे यहां तक दुष्प्रचार कर रहे हैं कि उसके बाद तुम्हें जिस सेंटर में रखा जाएगा वहां मोदी और शाह केवल एक समय भोजन देंगे। सबसे भयावह स्थिति इस तथाकथित आंदोलन में छोटे-छोटे बच्चों का दुरुपयोग है। उनके अंदर किस तरह का जहर भरा जा रहा है, यह उनके बयानों एवं नारों से मिल जाएगा। जिसे आजादी का अर्थ नहीं मालूम उसे रटवाकर नारा लगवाया जा रहा है। एक बच्ची कह रही है कि मोदी और शाह हमें मारने वाले हैं, लेकिन हम उन्हें मार डालेंगे। एक बच्चा नारा लगा रहा है कि जो हिटलर की चाल चलेगा और उसके साथ सब बोल रहे हैं कि वह हिटलर की मौत मरेगा। कोई बच्चा बिना सिखाए यह नारा बोल सकता है क्या?

इस तरह बच्चों के अंदर सांप्रदायिकता और हिंसा का बीज बोने वाले आखिर देश को कहां ले जाना चाहते हैं? इन बच्चों का क्या दोष है? लेकिन यह भी रणनीति है। बच्चों और महिलाओं को आगे रखो ताकि दुनिया का मीडिया यह सुने और इन पर कोई कार्रवाई हो तो फिर हमें छाती पीटने का मौका मिल जाए कि महिलाओं और बच्चों के साथ बर्बरता की गई। इनके नेताओं के मुंह से बार-बार यही निकलता है कि महिलाएं यहां अपने अधिकारों और संविधान की रक्षा के लिए लड़ रही हैं तो उनके बच्चे कहां जाएंगे? प्रश्न है कि यह ऐसे ही चलेगा या इस पर पूर्ण विराम लगाया जाएगा? यह कहना कि विरोध-प्रदर्शन हमारा संवैधानिक अधिकार है, इस खतरनाक अभियान का सरलीकरण करना है। सबसे पहले तो किसी विरोध या आंदोलन का तार्किक आधार होना चाहिए। नागरिकता कानून मुसलमानों के खिलाफ है नहीं। एनपीआर 2010 में लागू हुआ, 2015 में उसको अद्यतन किया गया। तब कोई समस्या नहीं आई। यह जनगणना का भाग है और सरकार के कल्याणकारी कार्यक्रमों के लिए आवश्यक है। एनआरसी अभी आया नहीं है। जब आएगा और उसमें कुछ आपत्तिजनक बातें होंगी तो उसका विरोध किया जाना चाहिए। इस समय ऐसा कुछ है नहीं। तो जिस विरोध का कोई तार्किक आधार नहीं है, जिसमें एक समुदाय को भड़काने जैसे सांप्रदायिकता के तत्व साफ दिख रहे हैं, जिसका पूरा उद्देश्य ही कुत्सित राजनीति है वह संवैधानिक अधिकार के तहत नहीं आ सकता। संविधान में मौलिक अधिकार के साथ मौलिक कर्तव्य भी हैं। ऐसा नहीं हो सकता कि अधिकारों के नाम पर ऐसी स्थिति पैदा कर दें जिनसे दूसरे के लिए कर्तव्य पालन कठिन हो जाए और यह भी सुनियोजित राजनीतिक साजिश के तहत।

देश के कुछ अन्य हिस्सों में भी शाहीन बाग जैसे धरने जारी हैं। ऐसे धरनों के कारण देश के बड़े वर्ग में गुस्सा पैदा हो रहा है। खतरा यह है कि कहीं प्रतिक्रिया में यह इन्हें चुनौती देने लगा तो फिर स्थिति नियंत्रण से बाहर हो सकती है। इसलिए जरूरी है कि इसका कानूनी तरीके से अभी अंत किया जाए।

(लेखक राजनीतिक विश्लेषक हैं)

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ऊर्जा

यादों की खिड़की

यादें मानव जीवन का महत्वपूर्ण हिस्सा होती हैं। यादों का कारवां अनवरत चलता रहता है। जैसे-जैसे हम जीवन की राह में आगे बढ़ते जाते हैं, वैसे-वैसे यादों का कारवां फलता-फूलता जाता है। यादें हमसे परछाई की तरह चिपकी रहती हैं। मानव का अतीत यादों से भरा हुआ होता है। कुछ यादें दुख एवं विषम परिस्थितियों के अवसाद से घिरी रहती हैं तो कुछ यादें हंसी, खुशी और रोमांच से भर देने वाली होती हैं। यादें अच्छी हों या बुरी, दोनों ही जिंदगी की सच्चाई होती हैं। अच्छी यादें जिंदगी में आगे बढ़ने का हौसला देती हैं तो बुरी यादें हमें जिंदगी की आगामी कठिनाइयों से लड़ने का अनुभव प्रदान करती हैं। अतः प्रत्येक इंसान को अपनी यादों की खिड़की खुली रखनी चाहिए। अपनी यादों को स्मरण और अपने मित्रों एवं सगे-संबंधियों से साझा करते रहना चाहिए।

दुनिया में तीन तरह के लोग होते हैं, एक तो वे जो अपनी यादों के सहारे पूरी जिंदगी गुजार देते हैं, दूसरे वे जो यादों से सबक लेकर अपनी जिंदगी संवार देते हैं और तीसरे वे जो बुरी यादों को याद करके खुद का वर्तमान और भविष्य दोनों ही बर्बाद कर देते हैं। आज अवसाद का प्रमुख कारण भी यही है कि व्यक्ति अच्छी यादों के बजाय बुरी यादों में ज्यादा डूबा रहता है। एक बुरी याद व्यक्ति को घंटों तक नकारात्मक करके वर्तमान जीवन के प्रति मोहभंग कर देती है। इस हताशा में व्यक्ति नशीले पदार्थों के चंगुल में फंसकर अपना अनर्थ करने लग जाता है। हमें बुरी यादों को भुलाने के बजाय भुलाने का प्रयास करना चाहिए। जिंदगी उत्कर्ष और अपकर्ष, जय और पराजय, खुशी और गम का मिश्रित रूप है। अतः दुख और सुख प्रत्येक इंसान की जिंदगी में स्वाभाविक हैं। दुखों से हम बच नहीं सकते हैं और सुख भी हमसे अधिक समय तक अछूते नहीं रह सकते हैं। किसी इंसान के जीवन में सबसे ज्यादा जरूरी कोई चीज होती है तो वह है धैर्य। जो धैर्यपूर्वक अपने दुखों के पलों को गुजार देता है उसी के हिस्से ही सुख भी आता है।

देवेंद्रराज सुथार

अधिकारों से पहले जानें कर्तव्य

शिवांशु राय

जब हम अधिकारों की बात करते हैं तो यह हमारा दायित्व है कि हम अपने नैतिक और कानूनी कर्तव्यों की भी बात करें और उनका पालन करें

कर्तव्य से यह बोध होता है कि वह कार्य जिसको मनुष्य करने के लिए नैतिक या कानूनी रूप से प्रतिबद्ध रहता है। कर्तव्य मनुष्य के दैनिक जीवन का हिस्सा है जिसे हर वक्त किसी न किसी रूप में निभाना होता है। कर्तव्य ही हमें अपने कर्मों की ओर उन्मुख करते हैं जो हमारी सफलता का मार्ग प्रशस्त करने में बड़ी भूमिका निभाते हैं और समाज में संतुलन का भाव बनाए रखते हैं।

यह सत्य है कि कर्तव्यों का बोध किसी भी मनुष्य के अंदर बाहरी प्रेरणा या दबाव से नहीं, बल्कि आंतरिक और नैतिक प्रेरणा से आता है। यह मनुष्य के अंदर स्थापित और संतुलन का बोध कराती है, क्योंकि बाहरी प्रेरणा छणभंगुर होती है उसमें स्थायित्व नहीं होता। नैतिक प्रेरणा के कारण ही कर्तव्य मनुष्य के अंदर आदर्श व्यवहार का निर्माण करता है जो व्यक्तिगत और सामाजिक जीवन में समन्वय के लिए महत्वपूर्ण होता है। इसके पालन से मनुष्य के अंदर निःस्वार्थता और समानता जैसे गुणों का विकास होना शुरू हो जाता है जो समाज में भी संतुलन बनाए रखते हैं। शास्त्रों में अधिकारों के बजाय कर्तव्यों का ही वर्णन है जो वास्तव में एक संतुलित समाज के निर्माण में सहायक है। हमारे देश के संविधान में भी कर्तव्यों का उल्लेख प्रमुखता से किया गया है।

कर्तव्य दो प्रकार के होते हैं एक नैतिक कर्तव्य और दूसरा कानूनी कर्तव्य। नैतिक कर्तव्यों के अंतर्गत मनुष्य द्वारा स्वयं मानवता और सामाजिकता के लिए नैतिक भावना से किए गए कार्य होते हैं जो राज्य द्वारा बाध्यकारी नहीं होते। वहीं कानूनी कर्तव्यों को राज्य का संरक्षण प्राप्त होता है। अक्सर हमें अधिकारों और कर्तव्यों के बीच द्वंद्व देखने को मिलता है, क्योंकि हम हक और अधिकारों के प्रति हमेशा सचेत रहते हैं, जिसका एक पक्ष यह भी है कि हमें शुरू से अधिकारों को बताया और पढ़ाया जाता है, पर मनुष्य अधिकारों की बात करते वक्त अक्सर अपने कर्तव्यों को भूल जाता है। यह संकीर्ण नजरिया है, क्योंकि कर्तव्य जीवन पद्धति को सुगम बनाने के साथ-साथ समाज में समानता और समन्वय की वकालत करते हैं।

वास्तविकता यह है कि अधिकार और कर्तव्य दोनों समांतर चलते हैं। जब हम अधिकारों की बात करते हैं तो यह हमारा दायित्व है कि हम अपने नैतिक और कानूनी कर्तव्यों की भी बात करें और उनका पालन करें। इससे मनुष्य को अपने 'निश्चित दायरे' को समझने में सहायता मिलती है। यह गुण हमें कमजोर नहीं, बल्कि मजबूत बनाता है, क्योंकि मनुष्य जब अपने कार्य के दायरे को पहचान लेता है तो वह कार्य व्यवस्थित होने के साथ-साथ दृढ़-निश्चय, आत्मविश्वास और नैतिक मूल्यों से परिपूर्ण रहता है। साथ ही संतुलन की स्थिति स्वभावतः ही उत्पन्न हो जाती है। चूंकि जिंदगी जीने के लिए एक संतुलित व्यक्तिगत और सामाजिक जीवन की आवश्यकता होती है इसलिए यह एक आदर्श स्थिति होती है। संतुलन से ही तो मजबूती आती है।

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)

संवैधानिक मान्यताओं का अनादर

सीएए पर सस्ती राजनीति शीर्षक से लिखे अपने लेख में संजय गुप्त ने नागरिकता संशोधन कानून यानी सीएए सहित एनपीआर और एनआरसी पर विपक्षी दलों तथा वामपंथी एक्टिविस्टों द्वारा फैलाए जा रहे झूठ का पर्दाफाश किया है। संसद से पारित कानून का जिस तरह से सड़कों पर उतर कर विरोध किया जा रहा है, वह संवैधानिक मान्यताओं का अनादर ही नहीं, संघीय ढांचे को सीधे तौर पर दी जाने वाली चुनौती भी है। इन विपक्षियों-वामपंथियों को सीएए के विरोध के नाम पर नारा-ए-तकबीर अथवा जिन्ना वाली आजादी जैसे मजहबी नारों से कोई तकलीफ नहीं, किंतु इस्लामिक देशों में शोषित, दलित और हर तरह से सताए गए अल्पसंख्यकों के जख्मों पर सरकार द्वारा मरहम लगाना कतई मंजूर नहीं। उल्लेखनीय है कि गतिहीनता से हर चीज सड़ने लगती है, चाहे वह पानी हो या फिर कोई विचारधारा। विपक्षियों-वामपंथियों का छद्म धर्मनिरपेक्षतावाद भी इसी सच का शिकार है। लेखक ने बिल्कुल वाजिब सवाल किया है कि क्या भारत के मुसलमानों का हित देश हित से अलग है। अच्छा होगा कि मुस्लिम समाज विपक्षियों द्वारा फैलाए जा रहे छल-प्रपंच के इस जाल को समझे। यूं भी सुप्रीम कोर्ट सीएए के खिलाफ दायर याचिकाओं की सुनवाई करने जा रही है, तब सब दूध का दूध और पानी का पानी हो जाएगा।

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दलित-मुस्लिम गठजोड़

दैनिक जागरण के 16 जनवरी के अंक में प्रकाशित बद्री नारायण का लेख, दलित-मुस्लिम गठजोड़ की राजनीति, में लेखक के विचार पढ़कर निराशा हुई। उन्होंने बड़ी सफाई से उन तथ्यों को छिपाने की कोशिश की है जिसे दलितों को भलीभांति जानना चाहिए। इतिहास के तथ्यों को छिपाकर बनाए जाने वाले गठजोड़ की बुनियाद न केवल कमजोर होगी, बल्कि दलितों के लिए विनाशकारी भी होगी। पाकिस्तान इसका सुबूत है। बद्री नारायण जी लिखते हैं कि जोगेंद्र नाथ मंडल ने संविधान सभा के चुनाव में दलित मुस्लिम गठबंधन बनाने का सफल प्रयास किया। लेकिन जोगेंद्र नाथ मंडल के भारत लौटने व पाश्चाताप में गुमनामी में जीने की जानकारी संक्षिप्त में दे दी। अच्छा होता कि वे मंडल जी के भारत लौटने के पीछे की कहानी को, उनके द्वारा लिखे गए इस्तीफे के पत्र के बारे में लोगों को विस्तार से बताते। किस प्रकार दलितों को मारा काटा गया? उनके घर जलाए गए। दलित महिलाओं के साथ घिनौनी हरकतें की गईं व उन्हें सैनिकों की छावनियों में भेजा गया। यह सही है कि ऐसे किसी भी गठबंधन के लिए सामाजिक सहभागिता, भाईचारा आवश्यक है, लेकिन सैकड़ों साल से अब तक के अनुभव क्या कहते हैं? क्या मुस्लिमों ने दलितों को कभी सम्मान दिया? क्या उन्हें साथ बैठाया? दो विभिन्न सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक पहचान वाले समूह के राजनीतिक गठबंधन की नींव कभी भी मजबूत नहीं हो सकती। इसे केवल स्वार्थ का गठबंधन कहा जा सकता है।

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मेलबाक्स

ताकि न हो पुनरावृत्ति

पूर्व में यूपी, बिहार और अब राजस्थान के अस्पतालों में बच्चों की दुःखद मौतों ने हमारी स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं की पोल खोलकर रख दी है। राजस्थान के कोटा में अनेक बच्चों की मौतों से हमें सबक लेने की आवश्यकता है। स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं के नाम पर अनेकों योजनाएं चल रही हैं, परंतु इनमें अभी भी बहुत कुछ सुधार करने की जरूरत है, ताकि ऐसी घटनाओं की पुनरावृत्ति होने से रोका जा सके।

हितेंद्र डेढ़ा, चिल्ला गांव

निर्भया की मां का अपमान

अधिवक्ता इंदिरा जय सिंह से यह कहना चाहता हूं कि निर्भया की मां अपनी बेटी को न्याय दिलाने के लिए एड़ी चोटी का जोर लगाए हुए दर-दर भटक रही हैं और देश दुनिया की अधिकांश जनता उनके साथ है। सोनिया गांधी की तुलना निर्भया की मां से नहीं की जा सकती। निर्भया की मां एक आम महिला हैं, जबकि सोनिया गांधी राजनीतिज्ञ हैं। वह जो भी निर्णय लेंगी उसमें राजनीति की गंध महसूस की जा सकती है। उनका अनुसरण करने की सलाह देना एक आम महिला का अपमान है। इसके लिए इंदिरा जय सिंह को माफी मांगनी चाहिए।

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

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दूरभाष : नई दिल्ली कार्यालय : 011-43166300, नोएडा कार्यालय : 0120-4615800, E-mail: delhi@nda.jagran.com, R.N.I. No. DELHI/2017/74721 * इस अंक में प्रकाशित समस्त समाचारों के चयन एवं संपादन हेतु पी.आर.बी. एक्ट के अंतर्गत उत्तरदायी। समस्त विवाद दिल्ली न्यायालय के अधीन ही होंगे। हवाई शुल्क अतिरिक्त।

ताज और चुनौतियां

पिछले साल जुलाई में जगत प्रकाश नड्डा को जब भाजपा का कार्यकारी अध्यक्ष बनाया गया था, तभी यह साफ हो गया था कि वे ही भाजपा के अगले अध्यक्ष होंगे। सोमवार को औपचारिक रूप से भाजपा अध्यक्ष के लिए चुनाव की प्रक्रिया पूरी हुई और नड्डा के सामने कोई उम्मीदवार नहीं होने के बाद उन्हें पार्टी का अगला अध्यक्ष घोषित कर दिया गया। पर अब अध्यक्ष बनते ही नड्डा की जिम्मेदारियों और चुनौतियां पहले के मुकाबले कहीं ज्यादा बढ़ गई हैं। अभी तक तो भाजपा संगठन में सारे फैसले अमित शाह ही लेते रहे थे, बिना उनके पार्टी में पत्ता तक नहीं हिलता था। अब यह काम नड्डा को करना होगा। ऐसे में जो कुछ अमित शाह छोड़ कर जा रहे हैं, उसे बनाए रखते हुए नड्डा को पार्टी को और तेजी से आगे ले जाना है। प्रधानमंत्री और गृह मंत्री (पूर्व भाजपा अध्यक्ष) ने उम्मीद भी यही जताई है कि नए अध्यक्ष पार्टी को और ज्यादा मजबूत व व्यापक बनाएंगे। इसलिए नड्डा के लिए सबसे बड़ी चुनौती यही है कि वे पार्टी संगठन से ज्यादा प्रधानमंत्री और गृह मंत्री की उम्मीदों को पूरा करें।

नड्डा भाजपा के पुराने मंजे हुए नेता हैं। छात्र संघ से लेकर संगठन तक की राजनीति उन्होंने की है। हिमाचल प्रदेश जैसे राज्य की राजनीति का उन्हें गहरा तजुर्बा है। नड्डा ने उपेक्षित से समझे जाने वाले हिमाचल प्रदेश में पार्टी की जड़ें मजबूत करते हुए इसे भाजपा का गढ़ बना डाला। इसलिए भाजपा को आगे बढ़ाने का अमित शाह जैसा कौशल नड्डा में भी है, इसमें कोई संशय नहीं है। हालांकि नए अध्यक्ष के लिए यह चुनौती भरा काम होगा। नड्डा का कार्यकाल तीन साल का है और इन तीन सालों में ही उन्हें काफी कुछ करके दिखाना होगा। ऐसा इसलिए भी है कि हर कोई नड्डा की सफलताओं-विफलताओं की तुलना पूर्व अध्यक्ष से करेगा। अमित शाह के पार्टी अध्यक्ष रहते हुए देश के कई राज्यों में भाजपा का न सिर्फ आधार बढ़ा है, बल्कि कई राज्यों में भाजपा सत्ता में आई। खासतौर से 2014 और 2019 के लोकसभा चुनाव में उत्तर प्रदेश में भाजपा की जोरदार जीत और 2017 में विधानसभा चुनावों के बाद प्रदेश में भाजपा की सरकार बनना अमित शाह की बड़ी उपलब्धि मानी जाती है। इसी तरह असम सहित पूर्वोत्तर के राज्यों में भी भाजपा की जीत का जो परचम फहरा, उसका श्रेय शाह को ही जाता है। अब जीत का यही सिलसिला नड्डा को आगे बढ़ाना है।

नड्डा ने पार्टी की कमान ऐसे वक्त में संभाली है जब कुछ दिन बाद ही दिल्ली विधानसभा के चुनाव हैं। 2014 में केंद्र में धमाकेदार जीत के बाद भी 2015 के दिल्ली विधानसभा चुनाव में भाजपा को मात्र तीन सीटें मिली थीं। इसलिए अब दिल्ली विधानसभा का चुनाव नड्डा की पहली परीक्षा होगा। इसी साल बिहार में विधानसभा चुनाव हैं। अगले साल पश्चिम बंगाल, तमिलनाडु सहित जिन राज्यों में चुनाव हैं, उनकी दिशा तय करने में बिहार विधानसभा चुनाव महत्त्वपूर्ण होंगे। नड्डा के लिए उन सारे राज्यों को, जहां भाजपा सत्ता में नहीं है, संभालना दुष्कर इसलिए भी है कि सभी राज्यों में नागरिकता कानून को लेकर केंद्र के कदम का जोरदार विरोध हो रहा है और लोग सड़कों पर हैं। तीन बड़े राज्य राजस्थान, मध्यप्रदेश और छत्तीसगढ़ भाजपा पहले ही खो चुकी है। हाल में महाराष्ट्र और झारखंड के नतीजों ने भी ये साबित कर दिया है कि भाजपा का ग्राफ उतार पर है। कश्मीर के राजनीतिक घटनाक्रम भी भाजपा के लिए मामूली नहीं हैं। ऐसे में पार्टी में नया दमखम भरते हुए कैसे राज्यों को फतह किया जाएगा, ये नड्डा को सोचना होगा।

वोट के लिए

सत्ता पाने के मकसद से होने वाली चुनावी लड़ाइयों में मतदाताओं को अपनी ओर आकर्षित करने के लिए राजनीतिक दलों की ओर से लुभावने वादे करना कोई नई बात नहीं है। लेकिन विडंबना यह है कि चुनावी मौसम में वोट पाने के लिए किए गए ऐसे ज्यादातर वादे किसी अंजाम तक पहुंचने का इंतजार ही करते रह जाते हैं। इसके बरक्स एक हकीकत यह भी है कि कई राजनीतिक पार्टियां चुनावों में हर हाल में जीत के लिए मतदाताओं के सामने ऐसे वादे भी कर देती हैं, जो दिखने में तो आकर्षक लगते हैं, लेकिन उनका आर्थिक बोझ दूसरे पहलुओं पर असर डालता है। राजधानी दिल्ली में अगले महीने विधानसभा चुनावों के लिए मतदान होना है तो उसके मद्देनजर सभी राजनीतिक दल अभी से कवायद में लग गए हैं। सत्ताधारी आम आदमी पार्टी भी इसी मकसद से सक्रिय दिख रही है। हालांकि अभी पार्टी का घोषणा-पत्र सामने नहीं आया है, लेकिन रविवार को जारी 'गारंटी कार्ड' के तहत जिस तरह की घोषणाएं की गई हैं, उनसे यही लगता है कि पिछली बार की तरह इस बार भी पार्टी ने लोगों के सामने वोट के बदले आकर्षक प्रस्ताव रखे हैं।

इसमें मौजूदा कार्यकाल के बिजली और पानी के बिल को मुद्दा बनाने के अलावा पार्टी ने शिक्षा, चिकित्सा, प्रदूषण से लेकर झुग्गी बस्तियों के लोगों को पक्के मकान की गारंटी जैसे कई अन्य आकर्षक प्रस्ताव दिए हैं। लेकिन यह देखने की बात होगी कि इन पर ठोस पहलकदमी का स्तर क्या होता है। पार्टी ने जिस तरह विश्वस्तरीय यातायात व्यवस्था सुनिश्चित कराने के साथ विद्यार्थियों को मुफ्त यात्रा की सुविधा मुहैया कराने की घोषणा की है, उसने एक बार फिर सत्ता के लिए उसके लोकप्रियतावाद का सहारा लेने की प्रवृत्ति की पुष्टि की है। यों इस तरह के लुभावने वादे सभी पार्टियां करती रही हैं, लेकिन इस प्रवृत्ति से एक सवाल यह भी उठता है कि जनता को कोई सुविधा मुफ्त मुहैया कराने से सरकार के कोष पर जो बोझ पड़ता है, क्या उसकी भरपाई जनता से ही नहीं की जाती है! आम आदमी पार्टी की सरकार ने हाल ही में दिल्ली में सार्वजनिक परिवहन के तहत चलने वाली बसों में महिलाओं के मुफ्त सफर की शुरुआत की। अब ताजा गारंटी कार्ड में विद्यार्थियों को भी यह सुविधा मुहैया कराने का आश्वासन दिया गया है। सवाल है कि कार्यकाल के अंतिम दौर में महिलाओं के लिए और अब अगले चुनाव को ध्यान में रख कर विद्यार्थियों के लिए मुफ्त सफर के वादे को क्या लोभ की राजनीति नहीं माना जाएगा?

दरअसल, राजनीतिक दलों के आकर्षक माने जाने वाले वादे नागरिकों के आम अधिकार ही होते हैं। सही है कि दिल्ली में सरकारी स्कूलों और मोहल्ला क्लीनिक जैसे कुछ कामों को 'आप' सरकार अपनी उपलब्धि बता सकती है। लेकिन एक लोकतांत्रिक व्यवस्था में जनता के अधिकार को सरकार की ओर से अपनी उपलब्धि बताने को कैसे देखा जाए? गुणवत्ता से लैस सस्ती चिकित्सा और शिक्षा, यातायात सुविधा जनता को मिलने वाले एक सहज अधिकार होने चाहिए। समाज के किसी हिस्से के लिए मुफ्त सफर की व्यवस्था के समांतर जरूरी यह भी है कि सार्वजनिक परिवहन के स्तर को उन्नत बनाया जाए। लेकिन दिल्ली में विश्वस्तरीय यातायात व्यवस्था की गारंटी परोसने के बरक्स पिछले पांच साल में दिल्ली परिवहन निगम के बेड़े में कितनी बसें जुड़ीं, यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है। इस मामले में सरकार का ज्यादा ध्यान क्लस्टर बसों का विस्तार करने पर रहा। पानी-बिजली के बिल में सुविधा या सार्वजनिक परिवहन में मुफ्त सफर के वादे से ज्यादा जरूरी यह है कि जनता के बुनियादी अधिकारों को लोभ का मुद्दा न बना कर उसे सरकार के दायित्वों के रूप में देखा जाए।

कल्पमेधा

तुम यहां मेहमान हो। इस पृथ्वी को कुछ अधिक सुंदर छोड़ कर जाओ; अधिक इंसानियत से भरी, अधिक प्रेमपूर्ण, अधिक सुगंधयुक्त, उन मेहमानों के लिए जो तुम्हारे बाद आएंगे।

-ओशो

भूजल संकट की गंभीरता

सुविज्ञा जैन

पिछले कुछ समय में जिस रफ्तार से जमीन से पानी निकाला जा रहा है, वह पुनर्भरण की रफ्तार से तेज है। जाहिर है, भूजल घटता जा रहा है। देश में कई क्षेत्र ऐसे हैं, जहां भूजल खत्म होने को है या पहुंच से काफी नीचे चला गया है। इसके लिए अगर पूरी ताकत लगा दें, फिर भी इसके पुनर्भरण में कई साल लग जाएंगे।

घटते भूजल की चिंता बढ़ती जा रही है। हाल में दुनिया के चौरानवे देशों के एक हजार से ज्यादा वैज्ञानिकों, जल विशेषज्ञों और संबंधित जानकारों ने इस ओर ध्यान दिलाते हुए दुनियाभर की सरकारों और गैर सरकारी संगठनों के नाम एक बयान जारी किया है। यह मसला हाल फिलहाल उतना बड़ा जरूर न दिख रहा हो, लेकिन साल दर साल जिस तरह भूजल संकट बड़ा बनता जा रहा है, उसके मद्देनजर फौरन ही चेत जाना चाहिए।

पिछली सदी के अस्सी के दशक से आज तक दुनिया में पानी की खपत हर साल कम से कम एक फीसद बढ़ रही है। इस हिसाब से यह अंदाजा भी लग गया है कि कितनी भी किफायत बरत लें, आज की तुलना में 2050 तक दुनिया को कम से कम तीस प्रतिशत अतिरिक्त पानी की जरूरत पड़ेगी ही पड़ेगी। पिछले हफ्ते जारी वैज्ञानिकों का बयान चेता रहा है कि इसे दूर की बात न मानें बल्कि निकट भविष्य में भी खतरे की घंटी बजने को है। ऐसा बिल्कुल नहीं है कि जल संकट कोई नई चिंता है। पिछले तीन दशक से इसे जताया जा रहा है। ये अलग बात है कि इस बीच कोई बड़ा हादसा हुआ दिखाई नहीं दिया। सवाल उठना स्वाभाविक है कि बढ़ती मांग के बावजूद पानी का इंतजाम हो कहां से रहा है। जवाब है कि सतही जल कम पड़ने के बाद पूरी दुनिया में जमीन के नीचे आरक्षित भूजल का दोहन बढ़ता गया। दुनिया की जो हालत है, वह तो फिर भी उतनी खराब नहीं है जितनी कि अपने देश की है। इसका सीधा-सा कारण है कि दुनिया में इस समय जितना भूजल दोहन हो रहा है, उसका एक चौथाई सिर्फ भारत में जमीन से उलीचा जा रहा है। जबकि भौगोलिक तथ्य यह है कि दुनिया में जितनी जमीन है, उसकी तुलना में भारत की भूमि का क्षेत्रफल सिर्फ ढाई फीसद है। इस हिसाब से देखें, तो हम विश्व के मुकाबले कोई दस गुना भूजल दोहन कर रहे हैं, यानी घटते भूजल से होने वाला खतरा सबसे ज्यादा हमारे सामने ही है।

इसे ज्यादा दोहराने की जरूरत नहीं कि बढ़ती आबादी, जलवायु परिवर्तन और अतिदोहन से घटते भूजल के कारण प्रति व्यक्ति जल उपलब्धता पिछले दशकों के मुकाबले तेजी से घट गई है। कहा जा सकता है कि सिर्फ हम नहीं, बल्कि दुनिया के कई इलाके पानी की किल्लत से जूझ रहे हैं। संयुक्त राष्ट्र की 'वर्ल्ड वाटर डवलपमेंट' रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक करीब चार सौ करोड़ लोग यानी दुनिया की दो तिहाई आबादी ऐसे क्षेत्रों में रह रही है, जहां साल के कई महीनों में पानी की भारी किल्लत रहती है और इनमें से दो सौ करोड़ लोग ऐसे हैं जो पूरे साल ही पूर्ण रूप से पानी का संकट झेल रहे हैं। इन क्षेत्रों को 'वाटर स्ट्रेस्ड' क्षेत्र कहा जाता है। गंभीर बात यह है कि पानी की बेहद कमी वाले इन क्षेत्रों में वे क्षेत्र भी शामिल हैं जहां बारिश से पर्याप्त जल मिलता है। पर्याप्त वर्षा के बावजूद जल संकट का मुख्य कारण वहां बारिश के पानी का सीमित भंडारण है। बारिश से मिलने वाले पानी को पूरा-पूरा रोक कर रखने में ज्यादातर छोटे और विकासशील देश आज भी असमर्थ हैं। दरअसल, वर्षा जल भंडारण एक खर्चीला काम है। जिन गरीब और विकासशील देशों को अपने विकास में पानी का महत्त्व समझ में आ रहा है, वे इस ओर ध्यान तो देना चाहते हैं, लेकिन इसमें उनकी माली हालत आड़े आ जाती है। हालांकि यह सवाल जरूर उठाया जा सकता है कि जीवन के लिए सबसे जरूरी चीज पानी के इंतजाम के लिए क्या आर्थिक संसाधन का तर्क दिया जा सकता है?

भारत की बात करें तो क्या इस स्थिति पर हैरत नहीं होनी चाहिए कि बारिश के महीनों में जो क्षेत्र बाढ़ से जूझते हैं, वे इलाके बाकी के महीनों में पानी की किल्लत में रहने लगे हैं। अभी तक तो किल्लत वाले इलाकों में कामकाज किसी तरह चल रहा था। इसका कारण था भूजल की पर्याप्त उपलब्धता, यानी भूजल को उलीच कर काम चल रहा है। लेकिन अब चेत जाना चाहिए, क्योंकि भूजल चुकने लगा है। भूजल चुकने का कारण भी साफ है। बारिश से ही सतही जल और भूजल दोनों का पुनर्भरण होता है। लेकिन भूजल के पुनर्भरण की एक गति है। पिछले कुछ समय में जिस रफ्तार से जमीन से पानी निकाला जा रहा है, वह पुनर्भरण की रफ्तार से तेज

है। जाहिर है, भूजल घटता जा रहा है। देश में कई क्षेत्र ऐसे हैं, जहां भूजल खत्म होने को है या पहुंच से काफी नीचे चला गया है। इसके लिए अगर पूरी ताकत लगा दें, फिर भी इसके पुनर्भरण में कई साल लग जाएंगे। इसीलिए वैज्ञानिकों और जल विशेषज्ञों ने पिछले महीने जो बयान जारी किया है, उसमें कहा गया है कि भूजल पर ज्यादा सोचने के लिए अब बिल्कुल समय नहीं बचा है।

भूजल संकट की बात को अगर और पुख्ता करना चाहें तो संयुक्त राष्ट्र की अंतरराष्ट्रीय रिपोर्ट पर नजर डाल लेनी चाहिए। इसके मुताबिक इस समय दुनिया में दो अरब लोग पीने के पानी के लिए भूजल पर आश्रित हैं। यही नहीं, खेती के लिए भी चालीस फीसद पानी जमीन से लिया जा रहा है। यहां तक कि कई नदी-तालाबों का स्रोत भी भूजल ही है। वर्ल्ड रिसोर्स इंस्टीट्यूट के 'वॉटर रिस्क एटलस' के मुताबिक एक सौ चौरासी में से करीब सत्रह देश ऐसे हैं जो जल संकट की 'अति गंभीर' श्रेणी में आ चुके हैं। ये वे देश हैं जहां कहा जाता है कि डे जीरो अब दूर नहीं। डे जीरो यानी वह दिन जब सभी नल सूख जाएंगे। इन देशों में कतर, इजराइल, लीबिया, जॉर्डन, ईरान, कुवैत, ओमान जैसे देश शामिल हैं। भारत भी इन्हीं में एक है। इस सूची में भारत का होना समस्या की गंभीरता समझने के लिए काफी माना जाना चाहिए।

ऐसा भी नहीं है कि भूजल संकट को लेकर भारत में समय-समय पर चिंताएं न जताई गई हों। पिछले साल ही नीति आयोग ने 'वाटर कंपोजिट इंडेक्स' रिपोर्ट में बताया था कि आने वाले एक साल में इक्कीस भारतीय शहरों में भूजल लगभग खत्म होने जा रहा है। भारत में आज बयासी करोड़ लोग ऐसे इलाकों में रह रहे हैं, जहां प्रति व्यक्ति प्रतिवर्ष जल उपलब्धता सिर्फ एक हजार घनमीटर या उससे कम है। जबकि अंतरराष्ट्रीय मानदंड के मुताबिक प्रति व्यक्ति सालाना कम से कम एक हजार सात सौ घनमीटर पानी से ज्यादा उपलब्ध होना चाहिए।

भूजल के आसन्न संकट के सुविधाजनक समाधानों की सूची लंबी होती जा रही है। इन समाधानों में पानी का किफायत से इस्तेमाल का नारा प्रमुख है। जल संरक्षण में नागरिकों की भूमिका भी जोर-शोर से प्रचारित की जा रही है। वक्त-वक्त पर भूजल दोहन को कानूनी डंडे से रोकने के समाधान भी बताए जाते हैं। लेकिन जिस एक प्रमुख कारण की चर्चा कम होती है, वह है भूजल का अंधाधुंध दोहन। इसकी जरूरत इसलिए पड़ रही है कि वर्षा जल को रोक कर रखने का पर्याप्त प्रबंध हमारे पास नहीं है। हमें हर साल चार हजार अरब घनमीटर पानी प्रकृति से मिलता है, जिसमें से सिर्फ दो सौ सत्तावन अरब घनमीटर पानी हम बांधों, जलाशयों में रोक पाते हैं। जबकि विशेषज्ञ बताते हैं कि बारिश के दौरान हमें छह सौ नब्बे अरब घनमीटर वह सतही जल आसानी से उपलब्ध है जिसे गैर बारिश वाले आठ महीनों के लिए रोककर रखा जा सकता है। यदि यह पानी भंडारित हो तो भूजल पर निर्भरता अपने आप ही कम हो सकती है।

सच पर परदा

योगिता यादव

दुनिया मेरे आगे

जब कोई व्यक्ति चोरी करता पकड़ा जाता है, तो क्या आप उसे बाबा भारती और खड़ग सिंह की कहानी 'हार की जीत' सुनाते हैं? नहीं न! तब फिर स्त्रियों से संबंधित अपराध होने पर हमारे देश का कोई नेता और उन जैसे लोग श्लोक, मंत्र और पंचतंत्र की कथाएं क्यों सुनाने की सलाह देने लगते हैं? दरअसल, वे जानते हैं कि छोटे से दिमाग को उलझाए रख कर जेंडर या सामाजिक लिंग के एक बड़े प्रश्न को बेदखल किया जा सकता है। क्षेत्रवाद, जातिवाद, धर्म, आधुनिक बनाम पारंपरिक की लड़ाई के बीच जेंडर की अस्मिता और संरक्षा के मुद्दे को बहुत शातिराना तरीके से उलझाया जा सकता है, जिसे इसके खैरख्वाहों ने ही यथासंभव उलझाया है।

भूख एक नैसर्गिक क्रिया है, लेकिन भूख के लिए किसी का अन्न, औषधि या सामान चुराना अपराध है और उसके लिए सजा निर्धारित है। भूख की मजबूरी से आप चोरी को न्यायसंगत नहीं ठहरा सकते। पर यौन शोषण और बलात्कार के मामलों में इन दोनों को भरसक उलझाया जाता है। दोनों ही जघन्य अपराधों को मनुष्य की स्वाभाविक सहजता की आवश्यकता बता कर सही ठहराने की कोशिश की जाती है। फिर चाहे इसके लिए पीड़िता का चरित्रहनन ही क्यों न करना पड़ जाए!

कुछ समय पहले 'मी टू' की मुहिम के दौरान जब महिलाएं अपने पुराने कटु अनुभवों को सामने लाकर अपनी साझी अस्मिता के लिए खड़ा होने की कोशिश कर रही थीं, तब भी कुछ महिलाएं इनके विरोध में आईं। यह उन लोगों के लिए अनुकूल मौका बन गया, जिन्हें स्त्री के आर्थिक, राजनीतिक और सामाजिक अधिकारों से ज्यादा उसकी यौन स्वतंत्रता की वकालत सूट करती है। जबकि अपनी दुनिया में वे आर्थिक मामलों में धोखाधड़ी, दल-बदल कानून और सामाजिक कुरीतियों को दूर करने के लिए भी कानून का सहारा लेते हैं।

सच यह है कि सहमति से हुए सेक्स के बावजूद यौन शोषण की संभावना से इनकार नहीं किया जा सकता। यह बस वैसा ही है जैसे साझेदारी में शुरू किए गए कारोबार में धोखाधड़ी होने पर कानून किसी को मुकदमा करने का अधिकार देता है। हमारे देश और समाज में आर्थिक मामलों में धोखाधड़ी होने पर तो अपील का अधिकार है, पर शारीरिक संबंधों और प्रेम में हुई धोखाधड़ी पर महिलाएं 'चटखारे की विषयवस्तु' बन जाती हैं। कारण साफ है कि अब भी आधी आबादी जेंडर के मुद्दे को वोट बैंक नहीं बना पाई है। कितनी ही बार उसके मन का पलड़ा अपने जेंडर के बजाय अपने पुरुष साथी की विद्वता, महानता, सामाजिक-आर्थिक हैसियत और रसूख की तरफ झुक जाता है। स्त्री अस्मिता और सुरक्षा की गारंटी जैसा कोई संकल्प कहीं जगह नहीं हासिल कर पाता है। अब भी भारतीय राजनीति 'वीरों' की पनाहगाह है, स्त्री अस्मिता की नहीं।

करीब सत्रह साल पहले की बात है। उत्तर प्रदेश के लखीमपुर में एक लड़की ने किशोरावस्था में ही वीर रस की कविताओं से मंचों पर तहलका मचा दिया था। चौबीस साल की उम्र में जब उसकी हत्या हुई तो वह गर्भवती थी। पोस्टमार्टम और फिर डीएनए जांच में पता चला कि उसके गर्भ में बच्चा एक स्थानीय बाहुबली नेता का था। फिर उससे जुड़ी कई कहानियों के अलावा नेता की पत्नी के नाम पर कवयित्री को कई तरह के लाभ दिलाने की खबरें तैरने लगीं। दरअसल, उस नेता के साथ उसकी पत्नी भी हत्या में शामिल थी। दोनों को आजीवन कारावास की सजा हुई। उस हत्याकांड ने पूर्वांचल की सियासत में तूफान मचा दिया था। लेकिन जानते हैं, जनता जनार्दन ने क्या किया? तैंतीस से ज्यादा मामलों में दोषी वह बाहुबली नेता सन 2007 में गोरखपुर जेल से ही चुनाव लड़ा और महाराजगंज की लक्ष्मीपुर सीट से बीस हजार वोटों से चुनाव जीता। तो हम, भारत के लोग, जो संविधान पर अटूट आस्था रखते हैं, वे असल में इतने भावुक और इतने विवेकहीन हैं कि मतदान करते समय हमें अपनी मां, बहन और बेटियों का भी खयाल नहीं आता।

हम वही जनता जनार्दन हैं जो बलात्कार के आरोपी और दोषी ठहराए गए बाबाओं की गिरफ्तारी के विरोध में लट्ठ लेकर खड़े हो जाते हैं, समाज सेवा और अध्यात्म के नाम पर। क्या हुआ जो बाबा ने आठ, दस या उससे भी ज्यादा महिलाओं, बच्चियों को अपनी हवस का शिकार बना लिया! न्याय मांगने के लिए दर-दर भटकती बलात्कार पीड़िता के लिए हमारा दिल भले न पसीजे, पर जब कोई नेता बलात्कार के आरोप में गिरफ्तार हो जाए तो हम उसके लिए जुलूस निकालेंगे और कहेंगे- 'हमारा विधायक निर्दोष है'। इन जुलूसों में महिलाएं भी होंगी!

अब भी हमारी लोकसभा और राज्य की विधानसभाओं में कई ऐसे नेता हैं जिन पर संगीन आरोप लगे हैं और मुकदमे चल रहे हैं। चुनाव प्रक्रिया से जुड़े एक शोध संस्थान के आंकड़े बताते हैं कि सत्रहवीं लोकसभा के लिए चुन कर आए 542 सांसदों में से 233 के खिलाफ गंभीर आपराधिक मामले दर्ज हैं। अब बताइए कि आप किस तरफ हैं? इन्हें जिता कर दामिनी, निर्भया या दिशा के साथ जो हुआ, उससे उपजी पीड़ा पर मोमबत्तियां जलाने वालों की तरफ या बलात्कार से बचने के लिए लड़कों को श्लोक और मंत्र सुनाने वालों की तरफ?

स्वास्थ्य की सुध

हमारे देश में स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र से संबंधित सबसे प्रमुख चुनौती है आबादी के अनुपात में अस्पतालों और डॉक्टरों की कमी। सरकारी अस्पतालों में स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं, आधारभूत संरचना, दवाइयों, कुशल व प्रशिक्षित नर्सिंग स्टाफ एवं अन्य सुविधाओं की भारी कमी है। इसके मद्देनजर टेलीमेडिसिन सेवा का उपयोग करके देश के सुदूर भागों और पिछड़े क्षेत्रों में स्वास्थ्य सेवा में गुणात्मक सुधार ला सकते हैं। हमें चिकित्सा की ऐलोपैथिक पद्धति के अलावा उपलब्ध अन्य पद्धतियों पर भी जोर देना चाहिए, जैसे- आयुर्वेद, योग, होम्योपैथी आदि। वैकल्पिक चिकित्सा के प्रचार-प्रसार के लिए भी प्रयास करने होंगे। इसके साथ ही विभिन्न सरकारी कार्यक्रमों और प्रसिद्ध व्यक्तियों द्वारा स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं से जुड़ी हुई बातों का रेडियो और टेलीविजन के माध्यम से प्रचार-प्रसार किया जाना चाहिए।

आज देश के सकल घरेलू उत्पाद का मात्र 1.4 फीसद चिकित्सा सेवा में खर्च किया जाता है। इसे बढ़ाने की काफी जरूरत है तभी आबादी के अनुपात में डॉक्टर, अस्पताल और अन्य सुविधाओं का विस्तार हो सकेगा। सरकार को यह भी सुनिश्चित करने की आवश्यकता है कि निजी चिकित्सा उद्योग क्षेत्र सिर्फ चुनिंदा शहरों तक सीमित न रहे बल्कि यह अपनी सुविधाओं का विस्तार छोटे एवं पिछड़े शहरों में भी करे। सरकार को यह भी देखना चाहिए कि निजी अस्पताल वे मरीजों से मनमानी रकम न वसूल सकें। इसके लिए भी समुचित तंत्र की व्यवस्था की जानी चाहिए।

निष्कर्षतः आज देश को एक ऐसी स्वास्थ्य नीति की आवश्यकता है जो मौजूदा समय की चुनौतियों से निपटने में सक्षम हो और लगातार परिवर्तित हो रहे परिवेश में उत्पन्न संक्रामक बीमारियों से रक्षा कर सके। भारत में स्वास्थ्य के क्षेत्र में काफी प्रगति हुई है, पर अभी भी इस क्षेत्र में काफी काम बाकी है। देश में स्वास्थ्य संरचना, उपचार परीक्षण और शोध की दिशा में निरंतर कार्य करने की आवश्यकता है ताकि सबके लिए स्वास्थ्य का सपना साकार हो सके।

● सूर्यभानु बांधे, रायपुर, छत्तीसगढ़

विरोध और राजनीति

देश में अलग-अलग जगह हो रहा संशोधित नागरिकता कानून (सीएए) और राष्ट्रीय नागरिकता रजिस्टर (एनआरसी) का विरोध थमने का नाम नहीं ले रहा है। विरोध इस कदर बढ़ गया है कि लोग महीनों से सड़क जाम कर बैठे हुए हैं। इससे आने-जाने वालों को भारी यातायात जाम और परेशानियों से जूझना पड़ रहा है। भारत देश एक लोकतांत्रिक देश है जिसमें अपनी आवाज उठाने का सबको हक है। लेकिन हमें समझना होगा कि दुनिया के सौ से ज्यादा देशों में एनआरसी लागू है। जब कोई नई चीज बनती है तो उसमें कुछ खामियां हो सकती हैं लेकिन उसका पूरी तरह विरोध करना गलत है। यह देश हम सबका है, हम बदलाव के लिए सुझाव दे सकते हैं। इस वक्त विरोध कम राजनीति ज्यादा हो रही है।

इन दिनों धरने पर आ रहे छोटे-छोटे बच्चों के अंदर जहर भरा जा रहा है। जिन बच्चों को स्कूल में होना चाहिए वे धरने में आ रहे हैं। इस समय सरकार की महत्त्वपूर्ण जिम्मेदारी है कि वह लोगों को आकर समझाए और उनसे संवाद करे। हम सबको समझदारी से काम लेने की जरूरत है।

● आशीष गुसाईं, दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय

चौपाल

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

रहने लायक

अमेरिका के यूएस न्यूज, वर्ल्ड रिपोर्ट व वॉर्टन स्कूल के संयुक्त सर्वेक्षण में भारत को 73 देशों की वैश्विक सूची में 'रहने लायक देश' के लिहाज से 25वां स्थान मिला है। इससे पहले 2018 में थॉमसन रॉयटर्स फाउंडेशन की रिपोर्ट में बताया गया था कि भारत महिलाओं के लिए विश्व में सबसे 'असुरक्षित' और 'खतरनाक' देश है। नन्हे बच्चों को पौष्टिक आहार व दवाओं से सुरक्षा देने के मामले में तो भारत की हालत अफ्रीकी गरीब देश केन्या और मिस्र से भी बुरी है। वैश्विक स्तर पर इस मामले में भारत 59 वें पायदान पर है।

पश्चिम एशिया के मुसलिम बहुल सऊदी अरब, कतर और संयुक्त अरब अमीरात जैसे कम स्त्री स्वतंत्रता वाले देशों की तुलना में, भले ही वे भारत की तरह औरतों को स्वतंत्रता नहीं देते, लेकिन जिस हिसाब से भारत में लड़कियों और महिलाओं के साथ बलात्कार, जघन्य हत्या और मानव तस्करी की अनवरत घटनाएं हो रही हैं, उससे भारत की वैश्विक स्तर पर एक बहुत खराब छवि बन रही है। हमें आर्थिक, सैन्य व अंतरिक्ष महाबली बनने के साथ-साथ मानवीय, सहिष्णु, संवेदनशील, दयालु तथा धार्मिक व जातीय आधार पर मिल-जुलकर रहने वाले, शांतिपूर्ण समाज बनने का सद्प्रयास भी करना चाहिए, ताकि हम भी विश्व के उन 'रहने के लिए के लिए सर्वोत्तम देशों' में अपना कुछ गौरवपूर्ण स्थान बना सकें।

● निर्मल कुमार शर्मा, गाजियाबाद, उत्तर प्रदेश

प्रदूषण का जहर

आज चूंकि जल और वायु प्रदूषण का दौर है इसलिए मनुष्य के खाद्य उपभोग की तमाम चीजों को भी इस प्रदूषण ने अपने आगोश में ले लिया है। अनाज, दालों और सब्जियों में आर्सेनिक, यूरिया और पारे की खतरनाक स्तर में मौजूदगी मनुष्य जीवन पर आसन्न गहरे संकट की तरफ इशारा करती है। आवश्यकता से अधिक रसायनों के उपयोग से न केवल फसलें जहरीली हो रही हैं बल्कि भूजल भी खतरनाक रूप से कैंसर और अन्य रोगों का कारण बन कर लोगों की मौत की ओर धकेल रहा है। जहरीले और बेहद गंदे जल से सब्जियों की सिंचाई, उनकी धुलाई और उन्हें ताजा व हरा दिखाने के लिए प्रयुक्त रसायनों से पारा और आर्सेनिक तत्त्व सीधे मनुष्य के शरीर में प्रवेश कर रहे हैं। इससे स्थिति और अधिक भयावह होती जा रही है। इसे रोकने के अनेक उपाय हो सकते हैं, लेकिन सबसे उपयुक्त उपाय उपभोक्ताओं की जागरूकता है। जहां भी गंदे नालों से सिंचाई और सब्जियों की धुलाई होती दिखे, किसानों को समझाया जाए। सरकार अधिक सजग होकर इसे रोके अन्यथा बहुत बड़ी आबादी के बीमार होने पर सकल घरेलू उत्पाद (जीडीपी) का अधिकतम अंश स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं पर खर्च करना पड़ सकता है।

● सतप्रकाश सनोठिया, रोहिणी, दिल्ली