Trends in the new year

Just about a month old and 2020 is turning out to be an interesting, even momentous, year for businesses in India

ACROSS THE BOARD

SHAILESH DOBHAL

Republic Day is behind us, and the Union Budget, with expectations running high for it to deliver the economy out of the morass, is a few days away. Just four weeks into New Year 2020, and it is already looking like an eventful, nay momentous one, as far as world of business is concerned. Here are five reasons for it.

Global goliaths can be gobbled up in India: Indian business history is replete with examples of global behemoths trampling or gobbling local competitors. Think soft drinks (Coca-Cola buying Parle's five leading soft drinks brands), electronics (the Japanese and Koreans virtually pushing Indian brands out of the market), cars (Tata Motors waging a lonely battle against the might of Japanese and Korean carmakers) or consumer expendables (Anglo-Dutch Unilever's Indian subsidiary buying Tata's fast moving consumer goods business in Lakme, Tata Oil Mills). You get the drift.

Though it is being billed as the making of a duopoly after the third-ranked player was acquired by the second ranked, perhaps in a rare instance, homegrown firm Zomato bought American Uber's Indian food delivery business, Uber Eats, in an all-stock deal last week. Though not in the same league as Didi Chuxing buying Uber's main ride-hailing business in China lock, stock and barrel in 2016, the Uber Eats' acquisition by Zomato is perhaps an indicator of Indian businesses' growing confidence in their own models and the ability to compete and win against global biggies in its backyard.

Beginning of the gender fight in family-owned businesses: When one of Murugappa Group heirs, Valli Arunachalam, came out in the open against the family's male-dominated board for denying her a board seat in the group's holding company Ambadi Investments, she raised the flag for gender equality in family-run businesses. Though it is still early days in what could be a prolonged intra-family battle, Arunachalam's move is a welcome development because most family-run big businesses in the country are conservative and patriarchal, and often relegate female heirs to the peripheries of the business, allowing them into the sanctum sanctorum only in the absence of a male heir.

Open like this!: It doesn't sound like a big deal, but one can't remember the last time a sector as regimented as coal — the bedrock of power and many a core industry —and a virtual monopoly of a state-owned firm, Coal India in this case, was completely thrown open by the government for all manner of people to come in when it cleared an ordinance on commercial coal mining earlier this month. Though they were liberalised sometime back, sectors such as insurance, banking, aviation, retail and even ecommerce still carry restrictions related to either foreign-capital, ownership or control. But not coal. Not on nationality, end-use, market restriction on who, how much and at what price can you sell. True, new projects will take time to fructify, and funding the venture will remain a challenge given coal's pariah status with many a marquee global investor.

Ignominy of a foreign investor: Whatever his reasons or compulsions, Union Minister Piyush Goyal's comments on Amazon, a big foreign investor, not doing the country "any favour" by committing another $1 billion was a first of sorts. Yes, governments are known to berate businesses, sectors and lobbies, but rarely do they single out individual firms for such public treatment, more so in a scenario where growth, investment and employment are all headed southwards. Whether one sees it is a mark of a rule-book-following government or a sign of nervousness depends on one's perspective.

India, from a buoy to a sinker: There was a time was when the country was the toast of the global community. It was feted as one of the global growth engines, bracketed in flattering acronyms and spoken as a counter-weight to China (remember Chindia!). That entire global aura somewhat dimmed when the International Monetary Fund earlier this month said that its downward revision in global growth for 2019, 2020 and 2021 is owed largely to downward revisions for India.

The corner store takes centre stage

To take on the might of Reliance and Flipkart, Amazon is taking a page from Alibaba's playbook in India

PEERZADA ABRAR

Besides holding closed-door meetings with top industry leaders, hobnobbing with Bollywood stars and visiting the iconic Taj Mahal, Amazon founder and Chief Executive Jeff Bezos did something unusual during his India trip this month. He delivered a package to a customer from a *kirana* store in Mumbai and shared the picture on his Instagram account.

Later, during a fireside chat with Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan, Bezos described going to a *kirana* store as an "incredible experience." "It is this tiny little store. We have thousands of these points of presence now, where they do their regular business, but then they also provide a place for people to pick up their packages," Bezos told Khan. "I talked to this young man (at the *kirana*) who helps his parents to run the store, about how it has really improved their lives, to have that extra source of income. It was a moving experience."

Delivering the package was not a random act by Bezos. It gives a sneak peek into the business strategy that Amazon is betting on to take on rivals such as Walmart-owned Flipkart and Reliance's e-commerce venture JioMart by merging online and offline retail. Only 7 per cent of the $1.2 trillion retail market is online and Amazon is eyeing the remaining 93 per cent of the industry, according to sources.

This month, Bezos announced that the company planned to invest $1 billion to help bring 10 million traders and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) across India online, enabling $10 billion in cumulative exports by 2025. The firm also said it planned to create 1 million jobs in India by 2025 through continued investments in technology, infrastructure, and its logistics network. Amazon has so far committed $6.5 billion to the India market, including $1 billion announced this month. It is making these investments not only to tap the e-commerce market in the country, which is expected to touch $200 billion by 2028, but also digitalisation of small businesses including *kiranas* and in building its grocery and financial services business.

People familiar with Amazon's business strategy in India said that the company is looking at replicating the model of e-commerce giant Alibaba which has Hema stores and business-to-business retail platform Ling Shou Tong (LST) in China, to empower small enterprises in the country. The Seattle-headquartered firm is also looking at adopting the model of Canada-based Shopify, which sets up e-commerce websites for small businesses, and partners with others to handle digital payments and shipping.

"Globally, it is a strategic thing that they are doing from the last one year. It is about giving technology to small businesses to run the business, digitise them and create catalogues," said a person familiar with Amazon's business strategy in India. "It is like what Alibaba is doing in China with their LST platform and Hema stores."

In China, Alibaba is using LST, a retail-management platform to help mom-and-pop store owners optimise product procurement and boost sales. Jack Ma-led Alibaba is also quickly expanding its offline retail store Hema, which has gained popularity in China for its mobile-first approach to grocery shopping. Shoppers use Hema's mobile app to scan barcodes across the store to get information about the products and recipe ideas. Utilising neighbourhood stores as warehouses, Hema enables 30-minute delivery within a three-km radius.

"Mom-and-pop stores are really the future in India. When all the tier 1 and tier 2 cities are digitised, what remains are the tier 3, tier 4 and tier 5 cities and that is where all the action is going to happen. This also includes bringing large vendors who are not on their platform from these locations."

Last year, Amazon said it was on track to invest over $15 billion in 2019 in infrastructure, tools, services, people, and programmes to help third-party sellers succeed. This means Amazon profits when third-party sellers succeed.

One of the biggest challenges, though, that Amazon is aiming to solve to tap tier-3 and tier-4 cities and towns is last-mile delivery. In areas where the order volume is not high, it is not viable for firms such as Amazon or Flipkart to maintain warehouses.

"So, they are going to work with these *kirana* stores and use them as delivery and pickup points and also use some space as a warehouse," said Satish Meena, a senior forecast analyst at Forrester Research. "They don't want to lose out to Reliance, because Reliance is also trying to attempt the same thing. Amazon will certainly do something similar to Alibaba (in future). At this moment, they are taking the first steps to digitise the stores," said Meena.

Amazon is also going to invest a large chunk of the capital to build the supply chain for its grocery and food category. "That is where you are seeing the competition coming up from Reliance, Walmart, Bigbasket and Grofers," added Meena.

A big part of its strategy is its financial technology platform to rapidly enable transactions online for small businesses and even provide them access to capital. "In the last 24 months, Amazon has poured in more than half a billion dollars into its Indian payment business. That's an indication of how competitive, the payment space has become in India," said Vivek Durai, founder of business signals platform Paper.vc.

Amazon and Alibaba have generally avoided direct competition by dominating different parts of the world. Salman Waris, managing partner at New Delhi-based specialist technology law firm TechLegis Advocates & Solicitors, said this could change as the two giants expand their footprint in India.

The two have taken different approaches to invest in India's growing economy. Waris said while Amazon is pouring billions into its branded marketplace, Alibaba has made heavy strategic investments in payment solutions and existing e-commerce businesses as it pursues a "super app" strategy in India.

Regardless, capturing market share and becoming profitable will require scale of business and vast amounts of capital, said Waris. "Amazon's present investment initiative is aimed exactly at this 'scaling up' and it has realigned its strategy by trying to help India's SMEs or *kirana* stores," said Waris.

PHOTO CREDIT: INSTAGRAM

EVERY NOOK & CORNER

$6.5 billion is Amazon's total commitment for India

- The money will be spent on digitising small businesses and on financial services businesses

$1 billion of this will be spent on bringing 10 million traders and MSMEs across India online

- It plans to merge offline and online retail
- Tier 2, 3 and 4 cities are the next frontier of growth

CHINESE WHISPERS

Joke turns almost true

Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro, though known for his tough statements, has stayed away from controversy during his India visit. A senior official of the South American country said its president had been advised to be on his best behaviour and, through the liberal use of humour and smiles, charm his hosts. This was on show during an industry summit on Monday, when Bolsonaro addressed business captains of both the nations. Being the last to speak, he approached the podium and sternly announced that lunch should be cancelled because the programme was running late. After an uncomfortable moment when the organisers mulled the fallout, Bolsonaro burst out laughing. While the audience got the joke eventually, many were baffled following the President's exit some time later when it was announced that lunch had indeed been postponed by an hour to accommodate more sessions.

A tepid press conference

The Congress on Monday announced it would hold a press conference daily at least until Saturday to "highlight the state of the Indian economy". The Union Budget will be presented on Saturday. On the first day of its series of press conferences, the Congress fielded a lesser-known spokesperson who had quit journalism to join the party and contest Lok Sabha election from a seat her father once represented. The press conference not only started 15 minutes late but evoked little interest, with few television cameras and reporters around to cover it. It yet again highlighted the trust deficit between the veterans in the party and some of the younger leaders who want Rahul Gandhi to return as party president. The spokesperson fielded by the party on Monday is considered close to the young leadership. Gandhi will address a public rally in Jaipur on Tuesday, when he will speak primarily on economic matters. The veterans, who have secured some significant gains, including in Jharkhand, Haryana, and Maharashtra, have their misgivings about his return.

Thank *tithi* for long weekend

Thanks to the confusion around the *tithi* (a lunar day in the Vedic calendar) to perform Saraswati *puja*, state government employees in West Bengal are expected to get a three-day holiday from Wednesday to Friday this week. Earlier, the government had declared a two-day holiday on Thursday and Friday but a recent circular stated that it had been observed that the *puja* could be held on Wednesday also. Therefore, the state government had decided to declare a holiday on January 29, in addition to January 30 and 31, as was announced earlier. The three-day holiday period covers all state government offices, urban and rural bodies, educational institutions, and other offices/institutions under the control of the state government except the Registrar of Assurances, Kolkata, the Collector of Stamp Revenue, Kolkata, and the West Bengal State Beverages Corporation Ltd, the circular said.

ON THE JOB

Where are the jobs?

MAHESH VYAS

Employment takes many forms and a salaried job is only one of them. CPHS captures all forms of employment — whether it is formal or informal employment in the organised or unorganised sector; whether it is a salaried job or entrepreneurship in some form, even if the entrepreneurship is essentially self-employment. Today's gig workers would classify as self-employed entrepreneurs, for example. So would the typical Ola/Uber cab driver. CPHS is designed to cover them all — so long as they live in households in India.

The first observation we make is that the overall employment in India has been almost a constant at around 406 million since 2016. During the 12 Waves of CPHS conducted since January 2016, the total employment has been estimated at between 401 million and 412 million with an average of 406 million. The first Wave conducted during January-April 2016 estimated employment at 404 million and the last Wave conducted during September-December 2019 estimated employment at 406.5 million. Evidently, there hasn't been much movement on total employment over the four years since 2016.

Within this stable of 406 million employed persons, the share of employment for those less than 30 years of age has been declining. These accounted for about a quarter (25.6 per cent) of total employment in January-April 2016. By September-December 2019, their share had fallen to a little over a fifth (20.8 per cent). Those in their thirties also accounted for a quarter of the total employment in early 2016 and their share fell lesser to 23 per cent. Bulk of the employment is with those over 40 years of age. It was 49 per cent in early 2016 and their share has risen to 56 per cent in late 2019.

This ageing profile of India's workforce is as intriguing as it is disturbing. It is intriguing because India is a young country with 35 per cent of its working age population in the 15- to 30-year bracket. These young people carry the promise of the fabled demographic dividend. But, it is intriguing that their presence in the workforce has been shrinking. This structural shift in the age profile is also disturbing because an ageing profile is least capable of tackling with the challenges of new technology and an increasingly competitive business environment.

This ageing profile of the workforce is also prevalent in the salaried employees. Salaried employees include industrial workers, white collar workers, managers and support staff. It excludes farmers, traders, wage labourers and entrepreneurs.

We observe that salaried jobs have remained within a narrow band of 86 million and 88 million during this period. So, salaried jobs have accounted for around 21 per cent of total employment in the country. But this share has fallen a tad — from 21.7 per cent in 2016 to 21.4 per cent in 2019.

In 2016, 34 per cent of the salaried jobs were with people who were under the age of 30 years. In 2017, this proportion dropped to 31 per cent. Then it dropped to under 30 per cent in 2018 and, in 2019, it fell further to 29 per cent. This is not just a decline in relative terms. There is an absolute decline in salaried jobs for those under 30 years of age.

About 30 million people under 30 years of age had a salaried job in 2016. By 2019, this number dropped by five million to 25 million. This decline is as intriguing as it is disturbing. It is possible to assume for a moment that there is a decline in new salaried jobs available although even that is a bit incredulous. There has to be at least some increase in salaried jobs for those below 30 years of age.

This fall in the number of salaried employees and in particular young salaried employees or even those in their thirties with salaried jobs has implications on India's consumption growth story and also on its savings rate.

While salaried jobs have fallen a bit, the count of wage labourers and small traders has declined sharply from 173 million in 2016 to 131 million in 2019. On the other hand, the count of farmers and business persons has increased. The count of farmers has increased from 93 million in 2016 to 111 million in 2019. The count in entrepreneurs is bigger — from 52 million to 76 million. While there was an 18 million increase in farmers, there was a 24 million increase in entrepreneurs.

Wage earners are shrinking. In both, the organised and unorganised sectors. And, entrepreneurs are growing.

But it is worth noting here that the increase in entrepreneurship is of a kind that does not create salaried employment or daily wage employment. There is only one kind of employment that can do this — self-employment. The count of self-employed shot up by 23 million from 33 million in 2016 to 56 million in 2019. Their share in total employment has increased from 8 per cent in 2016 to nearly 14 per cent in 2019.

Entrepreneurship is vitally important for India's growth but, these enterprises need to grow beyond merely being means of self-employment.

The author is managing director & CEO, CMIE

LETTERS

The big question

The decision of the Union government to transfer the investigation into the Bhima Koregaon cases to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) — without consulting the Maharashtra state government led by Shiv Sena — and the resultant grave threat it poses to the concept and spirit of federalism is a matter of grave concern. The fact that the decision to hand over the probe to NIA came a day after the Maharashtra government reviewed the charge sheet filed in the cases had raised more questions than they answer. Investigation by the Pune police saw several human rights activists and lawyers who, labelled as "Urban Naxals" by the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders being named in the charge sheet and the judiciary took cognisance of the matter. The intervention by the Centre through the NIA at this critical juncture by riding a roughshod over the police powers of the state is wholly unwarranted. Not only does the credibility of NIA as an independent investigation agency come under a cloud, but the move also raises question marks on the commitment of the government at the Centre in upholding the spirit of cooperative federalism..

M Jeyaram Tamil Nadu

Missing the target

This refers to "Budget 2020: Govt unlikely to offer relief on Income tax" (January 27). It was intriguing to learn that the tax collection (both direct and indirect taxes) may fall short by ₹2 trillion this fiscal owing to the continued sluggishness in the Indian economy. As revealed in this report, the likely shortfall in respect of personal and corporate taxes might be as high as ₹1.5 trillion with the share of the goods and services tax also being a staggering ₹50,000 crore. As regards these twin direct taxes missing the targets, it seems that the FM had not done her homework before ushering in the cuts in the corporate tax rates last year.

Sadly, the much publicised revisit of the personal income tax regime — based on the recommendations of a direct taxes committee report — may also turn out to be a bubble getting burst on its own, as the FM may take some convenient shelter behind the depleted tax collection vis-a-vis the budgeted targets. But who may be held responsible for such a poor show? Moreover, why not wisely fix some realistic targets while preparing the Union Budget? It, however, may not be a surprise if the golden goose, the Reserve Bank of India, is once again pressurised into parting with a share of its most prudently maintained (read preserved) reserves. Where are we headed? Towards achche din? For whom?

Kumar Gupt Panchkula

Plain politics

This refers to "Locust attacks have links with climate change" by Sunita Narain (January 27). If this is read by our political leaders from different regions, it might nudge them to take some proactive measures to bring

down the losses for the poor farmers in Rajasthan and Gujarat. However, the poor "locust" has come handy for the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Rajasthan. A BJP MLA, Bihari Lal Nokha, entered the state Assembly carrying a basket of locust — a unique way of protesting and drawing the attention of the Congress government there. Hence, locusts have turned into a fodder for the political slugfest between the two sides. There is a good chance that the BJP would take it to the next level and claim that it is a conspiracy to tarnish its image.

N Nagarajan Secunderabad

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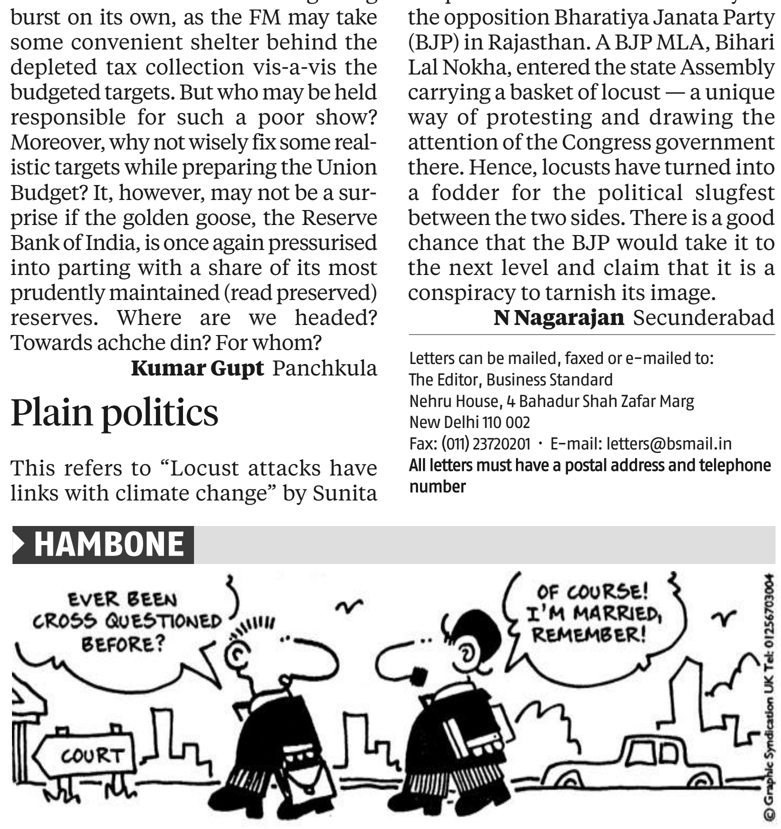
HAMBONE



Business Standard
Volume XXIV Number 117
MUMBAI | TUESDAY, 28 JANUARY 2020

Don't reduce devolution

Increasing grants and tied funds not enough

In recent decades, the responsibilities associated with running a state government have increased considerably. A greater political emphasis on the services that state governments can and must provide has become the norm. This has naturally been associated with the increased devolution of the tax pool to the governments that are the primary interface of the citizen and the Indian state. The Fifteenth Finance Commission is reportedly set to reverse this trend. It is likely, according to a report in this newspaper, that the existing share of the divisible pool of taxes that is set aside for state government spending — 42 per cent — may be reduced. This does not take into account any changes to the divisible pool itself. That too might be reduced following a late addition to the terms guiding the Finance Commission, which was asked to consider the needs of defence and national security as having a separate claim on national resources.

Given that defence is the Union government's responsibility, the Commission would naturally reduce the divisible pool. Put together with a reduction in the untied transfers to states, this would amount to a considerable reduction in the freedom to manoeuvre for state governments and their abilities to provide services.

This is not the direction in which India should be moving. While the Commission may seek to claim that increasing the "tied" funds — resources associated with specific Union government programmes and initiatives — might serve as compensation, it does not in fact amount to the same thing. State governments are directly accountable to the people for the services that they provide and should be able to make decisions on their governance with required resources in hand. Politicians at state levels are expected by their electorates to be the providers of essential services, and they justifiably expect, in turn, that this democratic momentum be reflected in the resources made available to state governments.

The Union government will no doubt argue that it has seen a crunch in its own resources, after the introduction of goods and services tax (GST). But it cannot blame anyone but itself. It has the primary responsibility for growing the size of the economy, and economic growth stalling is one essential reason for the reduced tax collection. The states themselves can also complain about GST, pointing out that they have signed away their powers to raise some indirect taxes, and that a reduction in the pool of divisible taxes is not a good way to reward them.

It is also important to consider the political circumstances in the country in general. Multiple stresses have emerged on the federal structure of the country in recent years. The widespread unwillingness on the part of state governments to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act is only one such stress. Others include differing demographic pressures and the consequent changes in relative political power across geographies of the country. It would be unwise from the standpoint of national interest to alter the decades-long momentum towards greater financial resources for states.

Air India's new deal

Despite better terms, finding a buyer may still be a challenge

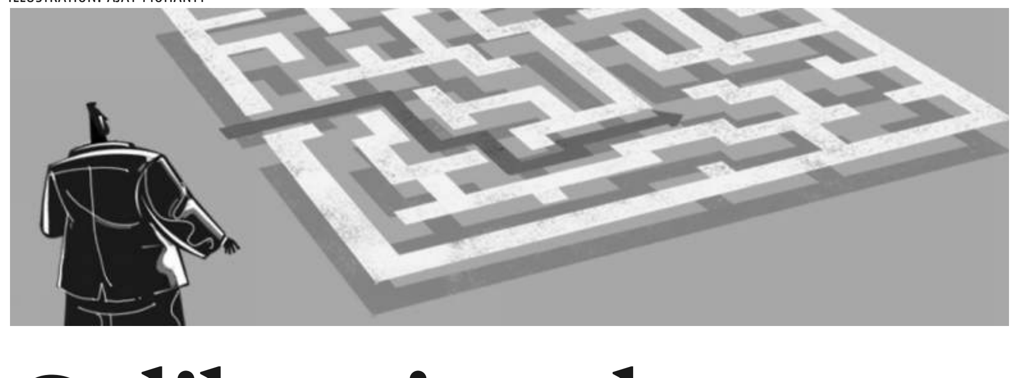
The government's second attempt to sell national carrier Air India, worked out by a committee headed by Home Minister Amit Shah, reflects a partly constructive attempt to correct weaknesses in the earlier bid document. First, in place of the earlier plan to disinvest 76 per cent in Air India and Air India Express, the government is now offering a 100 per cent sale, giving the prospective new owner much-needed operational freedom. In its ground-handling facility AI-SATS, the government is offering its 50 per cent stake (Singapore-based SATS owns the rest). Second, the new preliminary information memorandum, or PIM, also lowers the debt component that the new owner will have to shoulder to ₹23,286 crore against ₹33,392 crore in the earlier bid documents, limiting the buyer's debt to the cost of acquisition of aircraft that the airline will continue to operate. The government, thus, will bear the entire working capital and non-aircraft debt.

Taken together with valuable bilateral rights, which will be retained by the buyer as was done when British Airways, Lufthansa, and Qantas were privatised, the new deal is admittedly an improvement on the earlier proposal. The country's second-largest airline by market share has a fleet of 128 aircraft, 70 of them owned by the airline. More importantly, the new owner can take advantage of the 4,486 domestic and 2,738 international slots and code share agreements with 25 airlines that the flag carrier currently enjoys. The government's assurance that the terms of selling will be tweaked on the basis of suggestions from potential investors signals that it will be responsive to market expectations.

The question is whether the sweeteners are sufficient to entice a buyer at a time when the aviation sector is under stress worldwide. Indeed, against a robust intangible and tangible asset base, the critical problem of Air India's bloated workforce remains. It has 13,629 employees and one of the worst employee-to-aircraft ratios in the industry at 133 (for comparison, IndiGo's is 108). The Shah committee had indicated a one-year lock-in period, after which the buyer could offer a voluntary retirement scheme, but this remains a significant prospective cost for any new owner. The presence of 11 powerful unions certainly complicates the issue, and it is possible that the government will have to bear at least part of that burden as well. There is also some uncertainty over the issue of trademarks, including the famous Maharaja logo. The PIM states that the period for which they need to be retained will be declared in the request for proposal, which will be issued after March 31, after qualified bidders have been selected. Given that branding is the key in the airline business, the need for greater clarity on this would have gone a long way towards attracting bidders.

Finally, the timeline the government has proposed to close the deal also appears challenging. Bidders will have to submit their offers by March 17, and the qualified bidders will be notified by March 31. The reason for the government's haste to complete the deal before the end of the current fiscal year is understandable in the light of its inability to meet the ₹1.05 trillion disinvestment target. It is, however, difficult to see how any bidder will be able to complete a due diligence exercise in this timeframe or even agree to do so. An extension in this long-delayed process is, therefore, more than likely.

ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY



Calibrating the policy mix

The right fiscal-monetary-external balance must be achieved to nurture and harness a nascent recovery

After a challenging few months, first light is emerging at the end of the growth tunnel. The recent high frequency data — whether power demand, cargo and railway traffic, industrial production, or the Purchasing Manager Index surveys — are either showing signs of stabilisation or some lift on a sequential (month-on-month) basis. But this will not show up any time soon in the year-on-year data, which is far more sluggish and doesn't capture turning points well.

Year-on-year growth in the October-December quarter is tracking 4.5 per cent — the same as last quarter — and may even print a tad lower. Prima facie, this will suggest no respite from the slowdown. In fact, however, a year-on-year print of 4.5 per cent would be signalling a sequential growth (quarter-on-quarter, seasonally adjusted and annualised) pick-up to 5.5 per cent in the October-December quarter from 3.5 per cent the previous two quarters.

Yet, it's too early to believe the corner has been turned just yet. Some of the lift is likely because of a series of one-offs (a postponement of consumption on goods and services tax, or GST, uncertainty in September and unseasonal rains that hurt mining and electricity production) have corrected. Only when growth stabilises at the 5-6 per cent level sequentially for a couple of quarters will there be conviction a corner has been turned. Furthermore, any lift is likely to be bounded given different balance sheets in the economy. Consumption has been the prime mover in recent years, but with individual debt rising, households have become risk-averse in the wake of the slowdown, manifested in falling consumer confidence in recent surveys. Meanwhile, financial sector balance sheets have thwarted the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) monetary easing cycle in 2019 from permeating to the broader economy. Lending rates have only come down a fraction of policy rates and inflation, such that real lending rates have actually increased over the last year. This helps neither household consumption nor corporate deleveraging.

Given these cross-currents, policy will have to perform a delicate balancing act in 2020. Fiscal policy, in particular, will have to walk a tightrope between avoiding pro-cyclicality yet simultaneously pursuing prudence. Government spending has grown twice as fast as other components of demand in recent quarters, and, therefore, played an important counter-cyclical role in propping up growth. But with real and nominal growth slowing precipitously, tax buoyancy is understandably under pressure. With the Centre's tax collections (net of the state share) estimated to undershoot budget targets by about 1.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), sticking to this year's deficit target of 3.3 per cent of GDP, will likely entail a sharp cut in government spending in the last quarter of the fiscal year — which would constitute a formidable headwind to a fledgling growth recovery. Against this backdrop, it's understandable if authorities were to use the 0.5 per cent of GDP space accorded under the FRBM Act, and let the deficit widen towards 3.8 per cent of GDP. This should be seen more as the Budget's "automatic stabilisers" being allowed to work on the revenue side, rather than a fiscal stimulus in the form of the underlying structural deficit widening.

SAJJID Z CHINOY

If, however, the deficit does widen to these levels, it's important to show credible, if gradual, consolidation next year. India's yield curve remains steep — despite the growth slowdown, a sustained monetary easing cycle, and a gush of inter-bank liquidity — more confirmation it's an equilibrium response to the difference between public sector borrowing requirements and household savings, with foreign interest in India's bond market remaining muted in recent years. Against this backdrop, it will be important to show a credible consolidation to anchor bond market expectations, and avoid an inadvertent tightening of financial conditions.

But if fiscal policy is tightening next year, wouldn't that hurt growth in 2020-21? Not if that consolidation is achieved through asset sales. If asset sales were to rise from, say, 0.3 per cent of GDP to, say, 0.8 per cent of GDP next year, and the deficit is consolidated by, say, 0.3 per cent of GDP next year, the underlying fiscal impulse will actually be expansionary, even as the headline deficit is narrowing. From the perspective of macro management, one cannot think of a more appropriate time to step on the asset-sale pedal.

Finally, fiscal space created should ideally be spent to generate the highest possible fiscal multipliers. This would include spending that directly impacts the bottom of the pyramid (NREGA, PM Kisan) where the marginal propensity to consume is the highest, or temporary indirect tax-cuts to sectors with large multiplier effects (e.g. real estate sector) to stoke and bring-forward demand. New infrastructure spending has large positive spill-over effects, but its gestation often makes it impractical to serve as an urgent counter-cyclical response. All told, fiscal policy will have to perform a delicate balancing act, striving to remain counter-cyclical without inadvertently turning counter-productive.

But if fiscal policy must face trade-offs, monetary policy is not far behind. The sharp growth and inflation slowdown in 2019 allowed the RBI to slash policy rates to support growth. But the recent food price surge is creating policy trade-offs. While the focus is on vegetable prices, the real story is food inflation (ex-vegetables) has firmed from less than 1 per cent in 2017 and 2018 to almost a 7 per cent annualised momentum in recent months. Is this because of a temporary supply disruption from the unseasonal deluge last year? Or is it a more organic supply response to muted prices in recent years (Cobweb Cycle)? Or is some of it from firming global food inflation, which is in double digits? The answer to these questions will likely shape the inflation and monetary policy — trajectory for 2020.

There are other considerations. While firming food prices could harden urban inflation expectations, they will help correct the agrarian terms of trade that have been declining for a decade. To the extent that the resulting food inflation is not completely offset by the quantum of any supply shock, agrarian purchasing power and consumption should lift. Think of this as a transfer of purchasing power back from urban to rural.

But the trade-offs don't end there. With growth slowing, India's current account deficit is tracking just 1 per cent of GDP. Simultaneously, capital inflows have increased as global financial conditions have eased and Indian firms seek to raise capital overseas. This is resulting in a large balance of payments surplus. The RBI has correctly intervened to prevent rupee appreciation so that tradable sector competitiveness is not impinged. But this intervention creates a large liquidity surplus which can complicate monetary management if inflation firms. The RBI could intervene in a liquidity-neutral manner in the forward market, but that could disincentivise economic agents from hedging their dollar exposures, creating financial stability concerns down the line. There are no easy answers and this is the classical "trilemma" that emerging markets must contend with. Ultimately, more instruments (like macro prudential measures) may be needed to address multiple objectives.

Policy-makers must be commended for a slew of pronouncements in recent months to arrest the slowdown. There are first signs that growth is inflecting. Now, policy must calibrate the fiscal-monetary-external mix appropriately to nurture and harness a fledgling recovery.

The writer is chief India economist at J P Morgan. Views are personal

China and the West race to the top

Over the last 25 years, the relative growth rates of the world's major economies have changed dramatically. Six developing countries in particular —China, South Korea, India, Poland, Indonesia, and Thailand — have grown extremely fast during this period. The rich G7 countries, on the other hand, have experienced slowing rates of labour productivity growth, and their combined share of world gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen from two-thirds to one-half.

Neoclassical growth theory, which has dominated economic thinking over this period, has not been able to explain this reversal of fortunes. For anyone who has watched South Korean and Chinese firms triumph in one world market after another, it is difficult to believe that Western countries will be able to compete more effectively in the future simply by making their own markets more efficient.

DAVID SAINSBURY

If the developed world is to boost its competitiveness, we in the West need to embrace some new economic thinking. That means gaining a better understanding of the growth process, and using this knowledge to develop policies that can help accelerate it. Moreover, we should not think that we can acquire this knowledge by building ever more complex and unrealistic mathematical models.

A good place to start is with the measurement of national wealth, and the fact that a country's GDP per capita is simply the sum of the value added per capita of all its economic organisations, mainly firms.

We then need to ask how firms increase their value added per capita. In the observable world, rather than the world of perfect competition embraced by neoclassical economists, companies can do this in two ways. They can increase their production efficiency, as Henry Ford did when he started using an assembly line to manufacture cars, or increase the competitive advantage of their products, as Steve Jobs did when he developed Apple's iPhone.

Both Ford and Jobs increased the competitiveness of their firms by innovating. Countries like China and Singapore have done the same, helped along by lessons from more advanced economies. Both have declared themselves to be innovation nations, and have put innovation at the heart of government policy.

Western countries, therefore, need to understand three things in particular. First, they must increase their rates of innovation in order to compete better against fast-growing emerging economies. That will require them to develop policies that strengthen national systems of innovation, education, and training, and improve the governance and financing of their firms. Municipal- and regional-level policies should support these goals.

Second, the West needs to understand that there is a global ladder of economic development, the rungs of which represent increasing levels of organisational and technological complexity, and value added per capita. It is difficult for any firm to gain a competitive advantage in activities such as manufacturing cheap clothes and assembling electronic components, resulting in low value added per capita, and thus low wages and salaries. By contrast, companies in industries such as aerospace and pharmaceuticals can build up significant competitive advantages, leading to high value added per capita and consequently high wages and salaries.

Developing countries are rapidly moving up the ladder, and are increasingly competing directly with developed economies. The latter therefore must innovate rapidly both to increase the value added of their current industries, and to move into new high-value-added sectors.

Finally, Western firms and policy-makers should understand that their countries' competition with China and other rising economic powers is now a "race to the top," not a "race to the bottom" in which cheap labour and a "favourable" exchange rate are seen as the best ways to achieve and maintain competitiveness.

If developed countries can move further up the ladder of economic development by innovating and creating new high-value-added products and services while ceding lower value-added areas of activity to developing countries, then all can increase their national standards of living at the same time. If the pie is larger, everyone can have a larger slice.

To be sure, macroeconomic stability and efficient markets, which lie at the heart of neoclassical economic thinking, remain essential conditions for growth. But they do not drive it. If we in the West want to compete effectively against China and other fast-growing Asian countries, we need to understand that innovation is the engine of growth, and governments need to make it central to their economic policies.

The writer, a member of the British House of Lords and Minister of Science and Innovation from 1998 to 2006, is the author of Progressive Capitalism: How to Achieve Economic Growth, Liberty, and Social Justice. © Project Syndicate

A radical reset for the Indian economy

BOOK REVIEW

SUBHOMOY BHATTACHARJEE

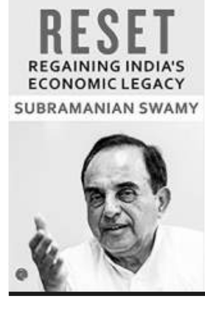
He gets the history right, the analysis spot-on, the target just about right but insists on a plan of action to achieve it that is a gamble even bigger than demonetisation.

Subramanian Swamy argues the Indian economy needs to grow close to 10 per cent per annum for at least a decade to make a dent on poverty, on unemployment and reach the league of middle-income economies.

To achieve this massive growth rate, Mr Swamy offers a menu of options that will upend the Indian economic administration and much else, irrevocably. It will also push the economy on a somewhat mercantile trajectory with huge risks of failure. That is the title of his book; *Reset: Regaining India's Economic Legacy*.

Mr Swamy suggests doing away with income tax, moving to a fixed exchange rate of ₹50 to a US dollar "and then gradually lowering the exchange rate for subsequent years", and offering a rate of interest of 9 per cent for fixed deposits in banks to incentivise savings and push investment. Yet later on (page 166) he acknowledges that India is now committed to a floating exchange rate and argues for only intervention instead of pegging it to a fixed rate. It is unclear which one of the options one of India's most famous economists would suggest the government should take.

It is also unclear how a state that will be made more or less bankrupt by eliminating personal income tax and financing a pegged exchange in an environment of hugely loose monetary and fiscal policy environment will be able to generate resources to finance the massive infrastructure support for building cities and in agriculture. He suggests keeping the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) printing presses open to keep financing this deficit, "setting aside concerns about the fiscal deficit ratio in the cold storage for the time being". Why this will not lead to inflation is, again, not quite evident.



REGAINING INDIA'S ECONOMIC LEGACY
Author: Subramanian Swamy
Publisher: Rupa
Price: ₹595
Pages: 189

Mr Swamy expects the bill to finance the impact of such a reset will be made good by exports which, in turn, will become competitive on the back of the manufacturing sector supplied with cheap capital gathering steam. While he contends, rightly, that the successive five-year plans often took no account of the weakness of the Indian economy by "squeezing agriculture through taxes, terms of trade...to raise funds for financing the industry", his mantra also glosses over some of the festering weakness of the economy, such as an uncompetitive manufacturing sector that needs far more than cheaper capital and difficult centre-state relations that will make any such bartering away of tax revenues a non-starter. He describes his blueprint as "an alternative ideological thrust", and like all ideologies makes light of any opposition to it.

This is unfortunate because he makes several valid points in his analysis of the problems besetting the Indian economy. For instance, he maintains that there is a need to "cajole the stakeholders in the economy to get enthusiastic about economic activity and be incentivised for it"— the animal spirit problem. Mr Swamy is also spot on about the causes for the decline in household savings rate and the rise in rural indebtedness as also about demonetisation, which he terms as a monumental blunder. "It had a major negative effect on small businesses, workers and farmers, while leaving the rich virtually unaffected because of the class' ability to rig the system".

But then, from there he jumps from these to suggest, "The government will therefore have to stimulate the economy by monetary and fiscal measures. These will have to come from radical, out-of-the-box and rational risk-taking on intuitive thinking". One would instead suggest that in Budget 2020, the finance minister should settle on conservative measures for economic revival instead of walking on a risk taking path that Mr Swamy suggests. He does not countenance that his more sane advice for large-scale privatisation, reform of the financial sector and "synchronisation with the WTO", which possibly mean keeping customs duty low are by themselves good enough to take the growth rates quite high.

As he rightly says in the Modi government's two spells, "till date, deregulation measures have been confined to the central government and even here it has been piecemeal". He also suggests land consolidation through market forces for agriculture. In fact, his list of reforms for this sector including wider adoption of land leasing, more public investment including in warehouses and formation of an agriculture advisory service are most unexceptionable.

Reset, thus, is not much of a reset as much as setting of the lines of sound policies for the government to adopt, once the extravagant bits are edited out.

Opinion

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2020

SAVING GRACE

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee

The CAA is anti-people, anti-constitutional... We want this law to be repealed immediately. Time has come to forget our narrow differences and fight together to save the country

Make states bleed for the lack of power sector reform

More money to states, even if linked to 'reform', often fails; deduct state govt revenues for real power reforms

THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT is expected to announce a new reform package for the power sector—most likely in the budget—and the plan is to reduce ATC loss levels in the sector to 12%; the gap between the cost of electricity and the sale price is to be reduced to zero. To do this, the plan—there are two, actually, for state electricity boards (SEBs) in dire and more dire trouble—includes the use of pre-paid meters, ensuring that SEB operations are either privatised (as has happened in Delhi) or run through franchisees, state governments committing to setting up dedicated police stations to tackle power theft, SEBs clearing all government and private sector debt within a year, releasing all subsidy payments (for agriculturists, by way of example) on time, adhering to the new trajectories for ATC and cost-tariff reduction/elimination. Funding by government-owned banks and financial institutions is to be clearly linked to the states undertaking these reforms, and one of the presentations prepared by the ministry of power talks of "no fund release against non-achievement of any measure for a year".

If this sounds familiar, it is because it is. Some of the micro details may differ, but the Uday reforms programme during the first tenure of this government targeted an ATC reduction level of 15%, and a complete elimination of the cost-tariff gap. Uday was a bonanza for state governments as banks were made to convert their lending at 12-14% interest rates to state government bonds with a 8.5% coupon; yet, as a government presentation on the new reforms package points out, 21 states have ATC loss levels of over 18%. For some of the big ones like Uttar Pradesh, these are as high as 38%, and the gap between costs and tariffs is as high at 45 paise per unit; it is 79 paise for Bihar, where the ATC loss levels are 33%. While Uday had said that banks would not be coerced into lending to bankrupt SEBs—as they had been in the past—one way around this seems to be simply not paying suppliers; nor is it clear whether bank lending to SEBs is based on genuine appraisals.

The central government's Praapti website records that SEB owe power generators ₹81,000 crore; of this, ₹71,673 crore is beyond the allowed grace period of 60 days and represents a 45% jump over that a year ago. Indeed, the private sector power producers say the data is incomplete; while Praapti shows their dues as ₹23,000 crore, they claim this does not include the late payment surcharge of ₹6,000 crore, or the 'change in law' claims of ₹17,000 crore that the courts have ruled the SEBs need to pay. With the SEBs cash-strapped, they are also not signing new power purchase agreements (PPAs), and around 14,700 MW of power plants do not have PPAs.

So, while it is to be hoped the government will genuinely ensure SEBs reform this time around, the reality is that doing so is tough; can a government hoping to win an election in UP, by way of example, actually turn off financing for the state? So, even if the government is serious, the only way to make the reforms look credible is to put an automatic mechanism to make the states bleed if they don't deliver. In the early 2000s, the government forced states and SEBs to sign on to a scheme where, if the SEBs didn't pay the dues of central PSUs, RBI deducted this money from the accounts of states—where central taxes etc were deposited—and paid this to the PSUs. As it happens, the PSUs are probably not insisting on this—how else could their dues rise so much?—but, this needs to be done for the private sector as well. Else, the new reforms package is just another waste of time.

Get criminal politicians out

Don't allow those with criminal charges to fight elections

VARIOUS ATTEMPTS HAVE been made over the years to try and decriminalise India's politics. In 2013, in the *Lily Thomas* case, the Supreme Court ruled that there would be immediate disqualification as soon as any court convicted a politician; this meant the endless time given for the appeals to end was done away with. But, since conviction in India also takes a very long time, the Association for Democratic Reforms found that the 2019 Lok Sabha elections had 43% winners with criminal cases as compared to 34% and 30% in 2014 and 2009, respectively. One in three MPs were facing serious criminal charges in 2019, while this ratio was one in five in 2014.

That is also why one of the proposals before the Election Commission of India (ECI) was to recommend amending the law so that any person accused of a crime was debarred from contesting elections once the charges were framed by a court. The reasoning here was that while frivolous charges could be brought against anyone, considerable thought would have gone into the issue before a court actually frames the charges; in which case, that should be sufficient to debar a candidate. This, in fact, was an argument even the Law Commission has made in the past. Certain checks were also proposed to ensure that legal charges weren't used as a political tool; so, for instance, it could be stipulated that no charges made six months before an election were to be taken into account, or the debarring could only apply to those offences where the maximum sentence would be five years or more.

Yet, when the matter was before the Supreme Court in 2018, it contented itself with directing that, for now, both the candidates and the parties needed to give wide publicity—in prominent newspapers, and television channels/radio—to the criminal charges. It is not clear that, in the 2019 elections, 'these directions (were) implemented in true spirit and right earnestness' to, as the SC said, 'strengthen the democratic set-up'. Which is perhaps why the SC added, 'a time has come that the Parliament must make law to ensure that persons facing serious criminal cases do not enter into the political stream'. With the political class, not surprisingly, not doing anything to stop criminals from becoming MLAs/MPs, the SC is once again examining the issue. Hopefully, this time around, it will be quite strict. Not allowing those with allegations of criminal charges to fight elections may be violating their constitutional rights, but allowing criminals to be MLAs/MPs violates the citizens' rights; and, if Parliament wants to protect the rights of those with criminal charges, it can legislate that cases of politicians need to be fast-tracked in court.

TestingTIMES

States must take a cue from the second cheating scandal in Tamil Nadu and use more technology to curb cheating

ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENT EXAMS are to test applicants on their innovativeness, in Tamil Nadu, aspirants are becoming innovative in a rather different fashion. According to a *Times of India* report, 99 applicants, 39 of whom secured top 100 positions, for Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) were found cheating in the exam. The students, in this case, used invisible inks to fill the MCQ exam, which was later completed by one of the employees. The problem is that when the government found that most of these candidates belonged to two centres, it initiated a CB-CID enquiry, which found more instances of cheating. While these 99 have been disqualified, it is not clear how long this has been going on, or how many candidates have gotten selected using such means. Nor is it clear, if such a practice has been taking place at other centres. But, it surely puts Tamil Nadu at the centre of the controversy. Last year, it was found that students from Tamil Nadu were using impostors to appear for NEET. Only six cases were discovered, but the Madras High Court had ordered an enquiry highlighting there may be many more. The order further claimed that it might not be limited to just Tamil Nadu.

Surprisingly, the state has also been opposing the use of computers for such examinations, on the pretext that applicants in rural areas may not be well-versed with technology. While computers do not guarantee protection from cheating, they do ensure that episodes like TNPSC do not happen again. More important, in cases like CAT, where there are multiple levels of checks, they can ensure better compliance. States would do better to follow such models as also allow verification of students using Aadhaar data. Otherwise, they risk diluting the quality of government officials.

ASER 2019

IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CANNOT BE DONE THROUGH BABY-STEPS; IT NEEDS TRANSFORMATIVE REFORMS LIKE THE DRAFT NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

Early childhood education is not child's play

BHAMY V SHENOY

Former manager, Conoco, and former board member of the National Oil Company of Georgia

Views are personal

PRATHAM HAS BEEN publishing the Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) for rural India since 2005, with a break in 2014. ASER assesses the learning levels of rural students—both in government, and private schools. Successive reports should have shocked the nation since they have consistently showed that our children are not performing at the level they should.

For example, ASER 2018 revealed that only 27.2% of Standard III students can read a Standard II-level text, and 28.1% can do subtraction. The same report showed that 25% of children leaving Standard VIII cannot read a second-grade-level text; performance on this aspect was much better in 2008—only 15%. Do we need any further proof that we have an education crisis?

ASER 2019 results were unveiled on January 15, 2020 in Delhi. This report has focused on "early years" of child development. Globally, 'early years' is defined as the first eight years of a child's life. It is this period that is most important for the cognitive, motor, emotional, and social development of children. Since 90% of a child's brain is fully formed by age six, it is critical that the school environment provides for creative learning, and other developmental activities.

ASER 2019 has collected data on schooling status, and analysed important development indicators of children in the age group of 4-8 years. It does not reveal a pretty picture. The findings strongly support the recommendation of Draft National Education Policy (DNEP) of strengthening early childhood education (ECE) by shifting it to school complexes, with trained teachers handling ECE rather than poorly-trained, poorly-paid, and overburdened *anganwadi* teachers.

ASER surveyors covered a total of 36,930 children in the age group of 4-8 years in 26 rural districts across 24 states. They asked each child to perform a variety of tasks that would test their cognitive skills, literacy, as well as numeracy knowledge. Furthermore, social and emotional development was tracked through activities.

Only 12.7% of the children aged between four and five years were found not to be enrolled in any type of school—*anganwadi*, preschool, or school. While this is a good thing, what is not encouraging is that 21.9% of the children in this age bracket were in Standard I or above. It is presumed that children, while entering Standard I, are at least six years old; allowing underage children into primary grades puts them at a learning disadvantage, which is difficult to overcome later.

On the other hand, 36.4% of the children aged seven and above are still in Standard I when they should have been in a higher grade. According to the Right to Education Act, compulsory and free education is applicable from ages 6-14. However, the ground reality is different. Earlier, ASER reports have also revealed such dismal statistics. But, nothing has happened.

Five-year-olds are exposed to a wide variety of environments and inputs, depending on where they are enrolled: 26.3% children are in *anganwadis*, 40.6% are in private lower or upper KG classes, and 23.9% are in government or private schools, attending Standard I or above.

Children were administered five cognitive tasks—sorting, spatial awareness, seriation, pattern recognition, and puzzle solving. As expected, the ability to perform tasks improves with age from four to five, regardless of schooling status. It came as a surprise that most students were not able to perform these simple tasks even at age five. For example, among five-year-old children, only 44% of those in *anganwadi*, 50% of those in private preschools, and 30% of those not enrolled for any form of schooling could do simple pattern recognition.

One more example. Of all four-year-olds enrolled in *anganwadis*, 63.8% can do a sorting task, 51.7% can do a spatial awareness task, 39.4% can do a seriation task, 38.8% can do pattern recognition, and 31% can solve a puzzle. Worse has yet to come.

While it is certainly advantageous to have educated parents, children can still overcome the handicap if they have dedicated and competent teachers

The ability to identify emotions is an important part of social and emotional development. The child is shown four face cards depicting sadness, happiness, anger, and fear. At age four, only 24% could identify all four emotions; this was only slightly better for children aged five years at 33.6%. Happiness was the emotion most easily identified, with 62% of four-year-olds, and 72% of five-year-olds successfully recognising it.

Lack of preparedness at the preschooling level becomes evident while looking at reading and numeracy skills of children in Standard I. Only 16% of the children in Standard I can read at the level expected of that grade; while 39% cannot even read a letter, 29% can identify letters, and only 15% can read a word.

Of those enrolled in Standard I, 25% could not recognise a number while 51% could do one-digit addition, and 39% could do-one digit subtraction. Only 40% could do oral word-problem addition.

ASER analysis has shown that early language and numeracy skills improve if a child is able to perform cognitive tasks better. This suggests that focusing on play-based activities that build memory, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities is far more productive than an early focus on content knowledge.

Unfortunately, today, even at the pre-schooling level, reciting nursery rhymes or rote learning to demonstrate one's knowledge of facts is stressed more than encouraging children to indulge in discovering new things out of their own inherent curiosity, a methodology stressed in Montessori school.

ASER tried to correlate the education level of mothers with the performance of their children in terms of performing three cognitive tasks, and reading and numeracy skills. In all categories, there a positive correlation was found—higher the education level of the mother, better the performance of the children. This should not come as a surprise.

However, this does not justify teachers blaming parents for students' poor performance. While it is certainly advantageous to have educated parents, children can still overcome the handicap if they have dedicated and competent teachers.

Pratham has made a great contribution by highlighting the problem of dysfunctional early childhood education. It is not rocket science to improve ECE as has been clearly discussed in DNEP. And, it cannot be done through baby-steps; we need transformative reforms. Let us hope that our country will implement DNEP on a war footing.

Budgeting for a growth in exports

To incentivise "Make in India", the government should increase the customs duty rates on finished products, and reduce rates on corresponding inputs, encouraging higher value addition

ABHISHEK JAIN

Tax Partner, EY India

Views are personal

WITH PERSISTENT DOMESTIC and external headwinds in the last year, there is an expectation of strong and robust measures being announced in the upcoming budget to support economic revival, and boost sagging growth. There are high hopes from the budget, with expectations of a personal tax rate cut and other measures to boost demand.

While the government has the flexibility of considering budget proposals from a direct tax (mainly income tax) perspective, a major chunk of indirect taxes, i.e., Goods and Services Tax, remains outside its consideration; India's federal structure requires amendments to GST to be evaluated and recommended by the GST Council. Hence, from an indirect tax perspective, proposals on customs duty are expected to be analysed and considered by the government—these have a direct impact on businesses in India, at an individual level. Businesses look forward to some of the following being considered and proposed:

A legal dispute resolution scheme for customs-related disputes: Similar to the recently announced dispute settlement scheme for historical indirect tax levies like central excise and service tax, businesses have been hoping for an amnesty scheme under customs as well, essentially to ensure certainty on potential financial impacts on pending disputes, and to help business monetise the probable recoveries on impending litigations and bridge the fiscal deficit. A dispute resolution scheme under customs, similar to the recently introduced Sabka Vishwas Scheme, which elicited an overwhelming response from businesses, should garner appreciation, especially from global businesses that have set up operations in India by outsourcing their manufacturing processes, for promoting the "Make in India" campaign.

Tweaks in customs duty rates: To incentivise the "Make in India" leitmotif, the government could consider increasing the customs duty rates on finished products, with reducing rates on corresponding inputs, thereby encouraging higher value addition. The Budget could also consider proposals for reduction of export duty on certain goods, like bauxite, lower-grade ore, etc, for enhanced foreign currency earnings and boost to businesses.

Not much is expected on indirect taxes, but there is a general expectation that wider policy measures will be announced to reinstate the trust of businesses and bolster demand

A blueprint of the expected Foreign Trade Policy and incentives for foreign exchange earners: Recently, a decision of the World Trade Organization has outlawed various incentives given by India to exporters; these include Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) incentives, Special Economic Zones Scheme, and Export Promotion Capital Goods. While an appeal against the verdict has been filed by India, the exporters are worried about the continuity of these schemes, especially at a time when these incentives are imperative for global trade by Indian businesses.

While the decision on the contours of the export schemes/incentives remains a prerogative of the ministry of commerce, the broad outlook/plan of the government in the upcoming Budget, and assurance of long-term confirmed policies being considered should help boost the morale of exporters.

Expected GST revenue collections and relatedly expected roadmap for the coming year: Another aspect which pulls in attention of businesses is the estimated revenue collection from each of the taxes in the forthcoming fiscal year. While the policy decisions on GST remain outside the purview of the budget, the estimates on collections are a part of the fiscal budget. An aggressive target, surmising a possible increase in the GST rates or implementation of tax evasion measures, including new returns, e-invoicing, etc, would be expected.

While, as mentioned earlier, not much is expected to be proposed on indirect taxes in the upcoming budget, there is a general expectation that wider policy measures will be announced to reinstate the trust of businesses, bolster demand, and tackle the slowdown in the economy.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Racing against time

Nature's fury seems to have no end, and natural disasters like floods, droughts, earthquakes have been playing havoc with countries and people indiscriminately. Turkey has become the latest victim of this wrath, having been hit by a mighty earthquake, measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale. As for casualties, so far, over 29 people have been killed, and many more, nearly 1,100 persons, injured. As a matter of fact, my workstations, like Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, etc, have encountered a lot of floods and other natural disasters. And, on the other hand, my native areas, like Korkai, Tiruchendur, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Kanyakumari, Marthandam, and Nagercoil, in Tamil Nadu, have been in the grip of weather vagaries—hit sometimes by floods and at other times by drought-like situations. In all these cases, all we are in need of is to be helped through rescue efforts and makeshift arrangements. Damage control has, so far, come to the rescue of the people, be it in my workstations—Mumbai, to take a recent example—or in my native areas—Tirunelveli, Korkai—all for the common good. Right now, the Elazig province in Turkey is crying for help as this magnitude 6.8 earthquake was centred there. Immediate help from neighbouring countries aside, the international community, and NGOs should send relief material, rescue teams, urgent foodstuff, medical assistance as well as equipment to the affected areas so that the needy in Turkey in this unfortunate time of crisis may find some relief.

— PS Saravana Durai, Mumbai

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

R.N.I. Reg. No. 6188/61 Printed for the proprietors, The Indian Express (P) Ltd by Vaidehi Chintaman Thakar at The Indian Express (P) Ltd Press, Plot No. EL-208, TTC Industrial Area, Mahape, Navi Mumbai-400 710 and published from Express Towers, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400 021. Editorial & Administrative Offices: Express Towers, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400 021. Phone: 22022627/67440000. Fax: 022-22856323.
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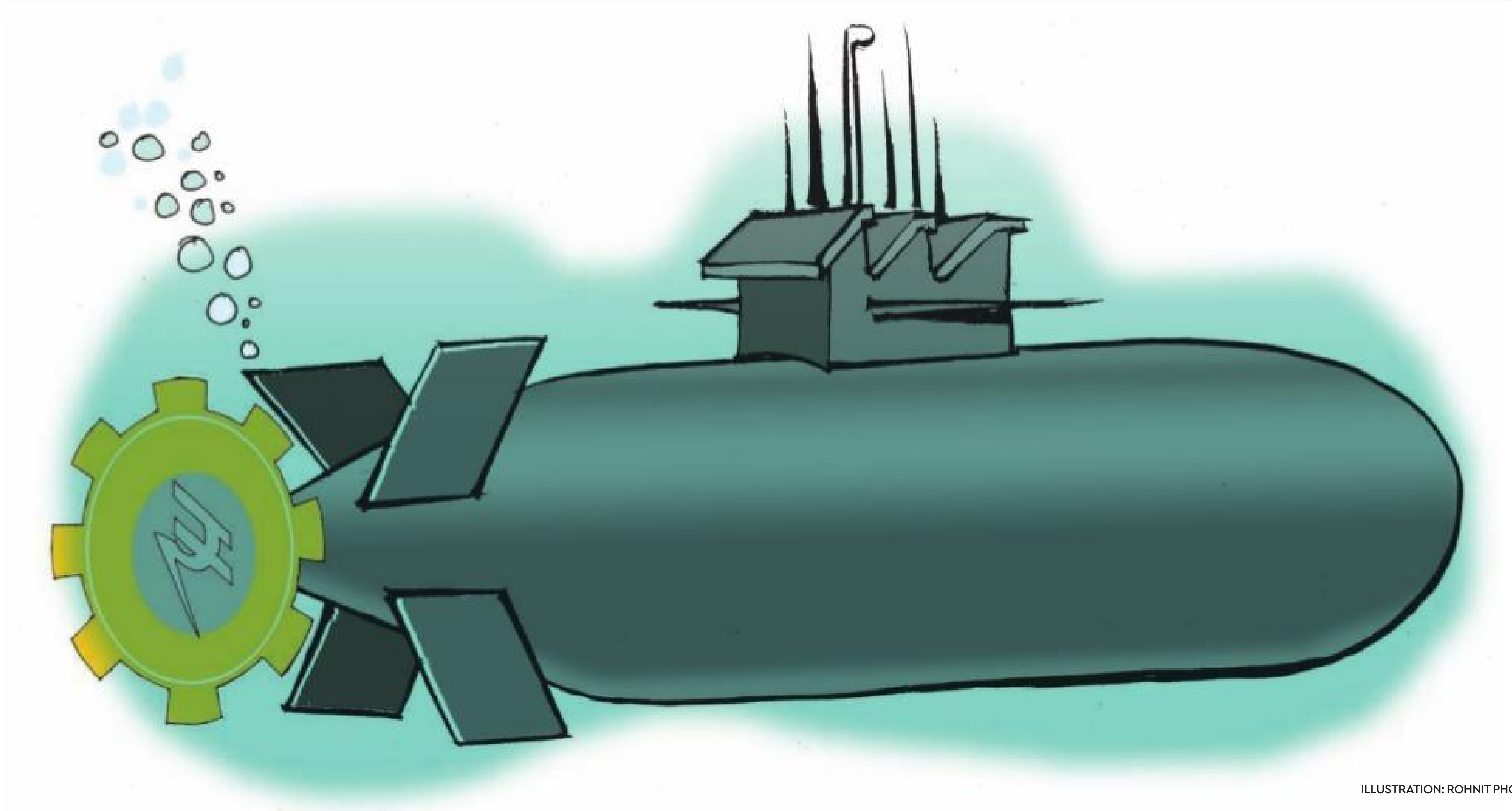

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EJAZ GHANI

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INDIA 2025

Towards a $5-trillion economy?

India's growth will be driven by competitive federalism and increased competition between the states. A move towards increased expenditure flexibility in favour of the states presents an opportunity to align local development needs and priorities with the resources available

WILL INDIA BECOME a $5-trillion economy in 2025? There are two contrasting outlooks: optimistic and pessimistic. Both views are grounded in reality. The optimistic view is that growth will be propelled higher by rise of the middle class, young demographics, and changes in globalisation. The pessimistic outlook is that poor physical and human infrastructure will transform India's demographic dividend into a disaster.

The optimistic outlook

India will emerge with the largest middle class in the world by 2025, and much larger than in the US today. India has long been known as a country of poor people, with a handful of billionaires. This has changed dramatically due to the large bulge of the population that has emerged out of poverty. They are the 'birds of gold' that will propel growth. Growth, education, home ownership, and improved economic security are associated with an expanding middle class.

The pace at which the middle class will increase will be staggering, and has the potential to increase at a much faster rate compared to China. The median age in India is 28 years, compared 37 in China and the US, 49 in Japan, and 45 in Western Europe. The middle class will expand through several channels in India: swelling of the labour force as the baby boomers reach working age; divert resources from spending on children to investing in skills technological progress; increased women's workforce that naturally accompanies a decline in fertility; working age also happens to be the prime years for savings, which is key to the accumulation of physical capital; and the boost to savings that occurs as the incentive to save for longer periods of retirement increases with greater longevity.

Thanks to young demographics, India is well positioned to benefit from a rising global talent race. More than 3% of all people live outside the country of their birth. But while the share of migrants in the world's population has remained mostly stable for six decades, its composition has changed. The share of high-skilled migrants relative to low-skilled migrants has grown dramatically, owing to the globalisation of demand for talent. And this development has a clear geographic dimension. Nearly 75% of all high-skilled migrants reside in the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia; over 70% of software engineers in Silicon Valley are foreign-born, mostly India.

A worldwide 'war for talent' is being waged, and enterprises that manage their global talent pool well are marching ahead. Most multinational corporations now insist that high-potential executives gain global experience by working in other countries, and they have made international mobility a prerequisite for senior leadership positions. Some of the global economy's most familiar players—including Google, Microsoft, Alcoa, Clorox, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Pepsi and Pfizer—have immigrant CEOs.

India will continue to benefit from a global talent race, thanks to declining transportation and communication costs (high-skilled migrants tend to travel farther to their destination countries than do less-skilled migrants), and the growing recognition that human capital will play a key role in today's knowledge economy.

Can India sustain high growth rate to become a $5-trillion economy if global growth becomes fragile? It is not growth in the rich countries that will drive India's growth, but the room for 'catch up' that will drive India's fast pace. This 'convergence gap' between India and the US is wider now than it has been at any time since the 1970s. So the growth potential is correspondingly larger. This can be seen in India's digitisation process, which is much faster compared to the US's.

Unlike China, India is less exposed to rising global trade disputes. India has relied on twin engines of growth—export and domestic consumption. The resilience of India rests on the huge domestic market, as the share of household consumption in GDP in India is much higher than in China.

India has also trades differently. While China is the global centre for manufacturing, India has acquired a global reputation as a hub for services export. The pace at which trade in services will grow will outpace trade in goods, given higher global cost differential in the production of services, and the ease with which modern services can be transported through the internet.

Will a global financial crisis and capital volatility derail India's growth? No. India has attracted remittances inflows than portfolio flows and bank loans. Remittance inflows are more stable and persistent than portfolio flows. The 2008 financial crisis showed that the 'Washington Consensus' was too complacent about changing market and macroeconomic conditions. A decade later, new concerns have emerged.

The pessimistic outlook

The 20th century has sent shocking waves of industrial destruction, with the shift of manufacturing base from developed to developing countries. The 21st century of cyber globalisation will not be immune to crack-ups and rising global trade disputes.

India is very dependent on the monsoon, given its importance to agriculture, and the country still remains largely a rural economy. Monsoons have been adversely impacted by a changing global environment that has already reached a tipping point of no recovery. India is the most water-scarce country in the world. More than 20 Indian cities would be adversely impacted by zero groundwater levels soon. It is unfortunate that cities and mayors have no say in policymaking.

A key challenge is to scale up investment in human and physical infrastructure to benefit from youth bulge and demographic dividend. India needs more fiscal federalism and less fiscal centralisation. States are not able to invest as they have a low base of economic activity to tax, and revenue constraints restrict investments needed to establish a level-playing field. Policymakers need to resolve coordination problems that are not easily or efficiently handled by administrative institutions, where institutions remain weak.

> **Where India ends up in 2025 will depend a lot on what choices are provided today, and what actions are taken to reshape tomorrow**

The challenges ahead

Both the optimistic and pessimistic outlooks are backed by equally strong arguments. Both views agree that growth is not automatic, and it should not be taken for granted. India's demographic dividend and the rise of the middle class is a time-bound opportunity. In particular, it provides policymakers an incentive to redouble their efforts to tap into demographic dividend by improving physical infrastructure to promote entrepreneurship and job creation.

Pluralism in development is of great value today. India's growth will be driven by competitive federalism and increased competition between the states. A move towards increased expenditure flexibility in favour of the states presents an opportunity to align local development needs and priorities with the resources available. The challenge is to find out what works best, in what context, and in what setting. This is not just about structural transformation, and a shift from agriculture to industry, but the 'ownership of process'. Where India ends up in 2025 will depend a lot on what choices are provided today, and what actions are taken to reshape tomorrow.

BUDGET 2020

Boosting the financial sector

SUNIL BADALA & HARDIK VASA

Badala is partner & head of Financial Services, Tax, KPMG in India, and Vasa is a chartered accountant

Financial services sector is a focus area to boost the economy, investor confidence

THE YEAR GONE BY has been tumultuous for the economy. We already saw a Budget in July 2019, post the government taking charge. The Ordinance for lowering corporate tax rates was a welcome decision to provide impetus to domestic industries. Yet a lot needs to be done to reinvigorate the economy. This is exactly the expectation from the finance minister as she gears up to present the Budget. Fulfilling demand across sectors and trying to keep the fiscal deficit in control at the same time is no easy task, but the economy is in a dire need of a push that propels it to the $5-trillion trajectory.

The government has taken various steps to revive the economy. The financial services sector, being the backbone of the economy, would be a focus area to boost the economy and investor confidence. Whilst the wish list of sectoral players is long, even if some changes discussed hereafter are considered by the minister, it would give a boost to the sector.

The government should scrap long-term capital gains (LTCG) tax introduced by the Finance Act, 2018. The other proposition could be to scrap securities transaction tax (STT). The cost of transacting on Indian stock exchanges includes STT, brokerage, GST, stamp duty, SEBI turnover fees and exchange transaction fees. Considering these, it becomes expensive to trade in securities. STT makes up a significant part of the cost of trading in Indian equities and derivatives. The purpose of introducing STT in 2004 was to exempt LTCG on equities and lower short-term capital gains tax rate. Effective April 2018, the LTCG tax was reintroduced without any corresponding relief in STT. LTCG could be scrapped, or STT could be removed or significantly reduced.

> **LTCG tax could be scrapped or, alternatively, STT could be removed or vastly reduced**

NBFCs are a major source of financing and play a key role in supporting the banking sector. Section 43D of I-T Act, 1961, recognises the principle of taxing income on sticky advances only in the year in which they are received or credited to P&L, whichever is earlier. In the last Budget, the benefits of Section 43D were extended to certain categories of NBFCs to ease liquidity crunch. Most of these NBFCs need to prepare accounts in line with Ind As and, thus, recognise interest income on certain stage-III loans (NPAs) in P&L account. So, they are unable to claim the benefit of Section 43D. Suitable relief should be provided for such NBFCs.

Another change the NBFC sector has been asking is to be on a par with banks when it comes to thin capitalisation norms. To fund borrowings, NBFCs may need to borrow and, for this, may depend on global parents for direct borrowings, guarantees, etc. To cap the interest expense in such cases can be quite harsh. There is a need to extend the exemption from thin capitalisation norms to systemically important NBFCs or at least bring clarity on the extent of applicability and coverage intended, i.e. whether the borrowings from Indian branches of foreign banks would be covered? Considering that these branches pay tax in India at the highest rate and there is no base erosion, there is a case to keep such payments beyond the purview of thin capitalisation norms.

As the objective of the India International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) is to compete with IFSCs in global markets, exemption from obtaining PAN in India and filing tax returns should be extended to all investors and funds set up under IFSC. The government should also do away with the 9% MAT currently imposed on such entities.

The minister, in her last Budget speech, indicated there may be an increase in FDI limit for insurance sector. But the announcement has not been made. It is expected the government will increase FDI in the core insurance sector to 74% from 49%. Period of carry-forward and set-off of losses in case of insurance business should be increased. Given the quantum of stressed assets in the system, the government should prescribe a concessional tax rate for foreign investors.

There are several cases of fund houses resorting to segregation of bad portfolios from schemes—known as side-pocketing of schemes. Clarity is needed on the tax treatment to be followed in such cases, especially as to what should be the date and cost of acquisition of segregated units?

It will be interesting to see how many of these changes come through on February 1, 2020.

CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN (1952-2020)

Measuring the life of a gentle giant

Clayton Christensen brought innovation to the global stage; with his untimely demise the world is a poorer place

SRIVATSA KRISHNA

The author is an IAS officer. Views are personal

AT 6 FEET 8 INCHES, Clayton Christensen had both height and stature. As he walked up to me at the Skydeck at Harvard Business School (HBS), showed me the picture of poor children in an orphanage in Chennai, to who he had donated thousands of dollars, he whispered, "Vatsa, can you please find out for me if the money reached them and is being used well?" He didn't know them; they just wrote to him, and Clay, generous to a fault, wrote a big cheque for them without ever having known or met them. This was one of Clay's many acts of philanthropy—a devout Mormon, a loving family man, an extraordinary teacher, an authentic friend, and above all God's own man, is how I remember him.

His life, by itself, is like a Harvard case study on how to lead a life of high morality, unparalleled kindness and conduct. Amongst Clay's final books was '*How Will You Measure Your Life?*' which is a summary of his being, soul and spirit—I would strongly recommend every parent to make this a mandatory reading for their children when they complete schooling, for it is a remarkable instruction manual of life.

Clay's trilogy on innovation remains a bible till date, and his greatest academic contribution was to bring innovation to the centre stage of academia and also to make his research valuable to the corporate sector, the actionable insights of which were acknowledged and hugely valued, among others, by Andy Grove of Intel, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos and Reed Hastings. I had the privilege of writing a paper with Clayton Christensen on how to create disruptive innovation in policy and helped a bit with his consulting through the firm he had set up, called Innosight. He advised the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, on creating an innovation cluster there, and his travels through Asia won him numerous admirers. What came across while working alongside Clay was not just his extraordinary repertoire of skills, but his amazing ability to turn theory into action, which not too many of even the greatest professors possess in their arsenal.

When I was at HBS, I got a request from the top leadership of the Tatas who wanted to bring him onto the TCS board—they had approached him, and he was reluctant given the distances and time commitment. I went over to his home for dinner and requested him to consider TCS's request. He smiled and said, "How can I ever say no to you?" He accepted it immediately and stayed on their board for more than a decade. In fact, Clay and his daughter were stranded in the infamous Mumbai floods, first inside a car for hours, which he would recount to me later with childlike enthusiasm.

I had the privilege of knowing him, his entire family and personal staff, most importantly his dignified and devoted wife Christine who stood by him at every step as he battled a debilitating cancer, which was preceded by a heart attack and a stroke. Mere mortals would have given up and gone away, but not Clay—despite the stroke, he would go in a wheelchair to teach at HBS, for a course that one of the most sought after and oversubscribed. Christine stood like a rock beside him, as did his children, all through the trials and tribulations, and when I met him last earlier this year at a hospital in Cambridge, he promised me that he will be back to teach soon and come to India to deliver a major lecture that was being planned.

Alas, that was not to be. Clayton Christensen got into the Thinkers50 Hall of Fame recently, and pulled my leg that he followed me there (whereas it was always the other way round).

He would always keep encouraging me to use my intellect and karma to do larger good for India and the world, and often generously recommended me to some of the top-most companies in the world. He said you have done one lifetime in public service, now do the next one in the private sector to create and share wealth. I am now, after completing over two decades in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), standing at the cusp of making his prophetic advice hopefully happen soon, through his blessings.

With Clay Christensen's passing away, the world has lost not just a great thinker and teacher, but, more importantly, a 24-carat gold authentic, rare creation of the Lord, almost in his own reflection. We all, his students and friends, carry a little bit of Clayton Christensen in us, and will keep him alive forever.

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

Why some states have Vidhan Parishads, why AP doesn't want one

SREENIVAS JANYALA & OM MARATHE
HYDERABAD, NEW DELHI, JANUARY 27

THE ANDHRA Pradesh Assembly on Monday evening passed a resolution to abolish the state's Legislative Council, where the opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has a majority. The resolution was passed under Article 169(1) of the Constitution, which allows Parliament to either create or abolish a Council in a state "if the Legislative Assembly of the State passes a resolution to that effect by a majority of the total membership of the Assembly and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting".

The TDP, which has 23 members in the Assembly, boycotted the session to indicate that the resolution to abolish the Council was passed in the absence of the Opposition.

Casualty in political war

While the YSR Congress has an overwhelming majority of 151 in the 175-member Assembly, it has only 9 MLCs in the 58-strong Upper House. The government decided to abolish the Council after the TDP's MLCs last week blocked The Andhra Pradesh Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill, 2020 and The Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority Repeal Bill, 2020 — the first steps towards the establishment of three capitals for the state at Amaravati, Visakhapatnam, and Kurnool.

Chairman of the Council Mohammed Ahmed Shariff, who belongs to the TDP, had used his discretionary powers to refer the two Bills to a Select Committee for review, tying the government's hands for at least the next three months. The position taken by the TDP in the Council had also led to two other important Bills — to establish separate commissions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and to make the medium of instruction English in government schools — being stalled.

The YSRCP had last month threatened to do away with the Council after it became clear the TDP would block the latter two Bills. After the Bills to create the three capitals were blocked, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had said, "We need to seriously think whether we need to have such a House which appears to be functioning with only political motives."

After a Cabinet meeting on Monday morning that cleared the resolution to dissolve the Council, Finance and Legislative Affairs Minister B Rajendranath said: "People have given us a big mandate and power to take decisions in the interest of the state. But TDP is using its political clout in the Legislative Council to stall important Bills. They illegally blocked the three-capitals Bill. The TDP is not letting us carry on our work, so we have proposed to abolish the Council. We will send the resolution to the Centre for approval."

The Council's journey

The Vidhan Parishad of united Andhra Pradesh was created on July 1, 1958, and dissolved on May 31, 1985. It was resurrected after 22 years, on March 30, 2007. Ironically, it was abolished the last time by N T Rama Rao, the founder of the TDP, after the Congress blocked all the government's decisions in the Council. And it was restored by Dr Y S Rajashekara Reddy, the father of Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy.

Since the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014, the Council has had 58 members. The TDP's strength fell to 28 last week after the resignation of D Manikya Varaprasad. Two

CM Jaganmohan Reddy's 3-capitals plan has been thwarted in the Council. *Archive*

Ministers in the Jaganmohan Reddy government, Deputy Chief Minister Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose, and Marketing Minister Mopidevi Venkata Ramana are members of the Council. They will have to resign when the Council is ultimately abolished.

That, however, will happen only after Parliament approves the resolution passed by the Assembly. The Union Law Ministry will prepare a Bill to be tabled in Parliament. The process may take 3-6 months, during which time the Council will continue to function.

Councils in the Constitution

Under Article 168, states can have either one or two Houses of legislature. Article 169 leaves the choice of having a Vidhan Parishad to individual states.

The Constituent Assembly was divided on having a second chamber in the states. It was argued that a second House can help check hasty actions by the directly elected House, and also enable non-elected persons to contribute to the legislative process. However, it was also felt that some of the poorer states could ill afford the extravagance of two Houses.

It has been pointed out that the Councils can be used to delay important legislation, and to park leaders who have not been able to win an election.

Under Article 171, a Council cannot have more than a third of the number of MLAs in the state, and not less than 40 members. A third of the MLCs are elected by MLAs, another third by a special electorate comprising sitting members of local government bodies such as municipalities and district boards, 1/12th by an electorate of teachers, and another 1/12th by registered graduates. The remaining members are appointed by the Governor for distinguished services in various fields.

Councils in other states

Besides Andhra Pradesh, five other states have Vidhan Parishads — Bihar (58 members), Karnataka (75), Maharashtra (78), Telangana (40), UP (100). Jammu and Kashmir had a Council until the state was bifurcated into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.

In 1986, the M G Ramachandran government in Tamil Nadu abolished the Council. The DMK government passed a law revive it, but the subsequent J Jayalalithaa-led government withdrew it after coming to power in 2010.

The Odisha Assembly has passed a resolution for a Legislative Council. Proposals to create Councils in Rajasthan and Assam are pending in Rajya Sabha.

The parliamentary panel that examined the Rajasthan Bill advocated a national policy for creation and abolition of Councils: "The status of Second Chamber cannot be of temporary in nature depending on the mood of the Government of the day nor can be abolished once created, only at the whims and fancy of a newly elected Government in the State."

TELLING NUMBERS

India slips in global corruption index, Denmark, NZ top list

India has slipped two spots to number 80 in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), with its score remaining the same at 41. The index is prepared annually by the Germany-based Transparency International, and offers a snapshot of the relative degrees of public sector corruption by ranking countries and territories from around the world. It gives each country a score from zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

Major protests across the world last year signal a growing lack of trust in government, and erodes public confidence in political leaders, elected officials and democracy, the report says.

The 2019 CPI, released on January 23, draws on 13 surveys and expert assessments to measure public sector corruption in 180 countries and territories. The average 2019 score is 43, with more than two-thirds of countries scoring below 50. "Corruption is more pervasive in countries where big money can flow freely into electoral campaigns...," Transparency International said on its website.

INDIA IN LAST 5 YEARS

Index Year	Rank	Score	Countries Surveyed
2012	94	36	174
2013	94	36	175
2014	85	38	174
2015	76	38	167
2016	79	40	176
2017	81	40	180
2018	78	41	180
2019	80	41	180

INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE
India	80	41
China	80	41
Pakistan	120	32
Bangladesh	146	26
Sri Lanka	93	38
Nepal	113	34
Myanmar	130	29

WORLD

MOST CLEAN

COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE
Denmark	1	87
New Zealand	1	87
Finland	3	86
Singapore	4	85
Sweden	4	85
Switzerland	4	85
Norway	7	84
Netherlands	8	82

MOST CORRUPT

COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE
Afghanistan	173	16
Equatorial Guinea	173	16
Sudan	173	16
Venezuela	173	16
Yemen	177	15
Syria	178	13
South Sudan	179	12
Somalia	180	9

Source: Transparency International

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Departure announcement

The government has tweaked the terms of Air India's sale, and is now putting 100% of its equity in the airline on the block. Will there finally be a buyer? How will flyers and employees be impacted?

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 27

THE FIRST formal attempt at privatising Air India and, at the time, Indian Airlines, in 2000 had elicited interest from the who's who of India Inc., including the Tata Group, Hinduja Group, L N Mittal, and Videocon Group.

But the airlines were not privatised after political opposition from within the then-NDA government.

Cut to 2018. The NDA government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, despite all the political will to disinvest its stake in the airline, could not attract a single bidder. The reasons: the Centre's unwillingness to part with 100% of its holding in the flag carrier, and lack of clarity over the debt being packaged with the airline, among others.

Less than two years later, the government has tweaked the terms of sale — with room for more changes — and is now putting 100% of its equity in the airline on the block. Like the last time, low-cost arm Air India Express and a 50% stake in ground handling joint-venture Air India-SATS are also up for sale. The government has also laid down a principle for calculating debt, which will be bundled with airline, and relaxed the minimum net worth criteria for potential bidders to Rs 3,500 crore from the Rs 5,000 crore in 2018.

The government has rolled out the red carpet for potential buyers. *AP*

Will the new terms attract investors?

After having conducted eight roadshows across the world seeking inputs on how the disinvestment package should be structured, the government is hopeful of attracting investors with the new sale criteria, coupled with the main benefits of the airline, which are prime slots in capacity-constrained airports across the world, wide-bodied aircraft, and a 50.64% market share in international traffic among Indian carriers.

The first time around, the manner in which debt and liabilities were bundled with the airline were called into question. This time, the airline will come with a frozen long-term liability of Rs 23,286.50 crore, and current liabilities that will be calculated on the date the transaction closes.

However, any potential investor is also expected to look at the size of the airline's operations with reference to what those operations generate. For example, both Air India and Singapore Airlines operate with a fleet of 121 aircraft, but in 2018-19 (April-March), Air India posted a net loss of Rs 8,556 crore, whereas Singapore Airlines (as a standalone airline) reported a net profit of Singapore $ 779.1 million (approximately Rs 4,100 crore).

Further, even though the debt calculation has been changed to instill a level of certainty in what will be packaged with the airline, the combined amount of debt and liabilities are at least Rs 32,058 crore. Therefore, in addition to valuing the airline and placing a bid for its equity, the new investor will need to invest in turning the airline around.

What will the new investor get?

The most attractive proposition in acquiring Air India is the slots and landing rights that it holds at airports such at Delhi, Mumbai, London, New York, Chicago, Paris, etc. These could be helpful both to airlines looking to expand into long-haul international operations, and to entities looking to set up global operations from scratch.

Air India currently operates to 56 Indian cities and 42 international destinations. Several of Air India's international and domestic routes are profit-generating, while a number of them are loss-making or witness low load factors. This is a legacy problem that the airline comes with for the new promoter.

Additionally, while the airline comes with 121 aircraft primed as domestic and international workhorses, 18 of them are grounded for lack of funds to make them airworthy.

The new investor also gets hold of the ground-handling firm AI-SATS, which offers end-to-end ground handling services such as passenger and baggage handling, ramp handling, aircraft interior cleaning, load control and flight operations, and cargo handling services for general, perishable, trans-shipment, express courier and special cargo at Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mangaluru and Thiruvananthapuram airports. This would provide the investor with an ancillary services firm with captive use.

How will consumers and employees be impacted?

CONSUMERS: If and when Air India is taken over by a private entity or consortium, experts believe the first move could be pruning of operations to ensure the airline inches closer to profitability. This could cause Air India to cease operations on certain loss-making domestic and international routes — leading to a rise in fares. It is believed that Air India's continuous loss-making operations have skewed the market, wherein private companies have to play ball even when fares are artificially low. Cutting certain routes could also impact consumers in terms of the unique offerings by Air India, such as higher baggage allowance, etc.

EMPLOYEES: Air India's bloated staff strength was flagged by potential investors in the last disinvestment attempt. The airline has 17,984 employees, of which 9,617 are permanent staff. According to the preliminary information memorandum, 36% of the permanent staff will retire in the next five years. However, Air India's Chairman and Managing Director Ashwani Lohani insisted on Monday that the airline did not have any "excess staff". Whether the employees will be retained by the new investor is unclear. The government is expected to provide more clarity on conditions for retaining staff in the request-for-proposal stage, which will come after expressions of interest are received.

So will the airline be finally sold?

Despite the strong political will to privatise the airline, the government has received opposition even from within. BJP leader Subramanian Swamy tweeted on Monday: "This deal is wholly anti-national and I will (be) forced to go to court. We cannot sell our family silver."

Employee unions have always opposed stake sale. However, the government has held extensive meetings with the unions, and tried to identify specific issues raised by them.

A lot also depends on the global politico-economic scenario that enables bidders, from India or abroad, to show interest in acquiring the loss-making airline. Given that there are specific parts of the airline that are considered attractive for different entities, experts are of the view that if this second attempt too fails, the government will have no choice but to take a piecemeal approach at divesting the national carrier.

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

Why China has emerged as the epicentre of global outbreaks of disease

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 27

SEVERAL DEADLY new viruses in recent years have emerged in China — Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), bird flu, and now the novel coronavirus (nCOV). The reason could lie in the busy food markets dotting cities across the country — where fruits, vegetables, hairy crabs and butchered meat are often sold next to bamboo rats, snakes, turtles, and palm civets. Closely packed stalls in busy marketplaces, the Chinese taste for exotic meats, and the high population density of cities create the conditions for the spread of zoonotic infections, experts say.

Zoonotic infections

The relationship between zoonotic pathogens — those of animal origin — and global pandemics is not new. The Justinian Plague (541-542 AD), the Black Death (which started in Europe in 1347), yellow fever in South America in the 16th century, the global influenza pandemic in 1918, and modern pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, SARS, and triple-reassortant A H1N1 influenza have one thing in common: the causal organisms came to humans from animals.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that globally, about a billion cases of illness and millions of deaths occur every year from zoonoses, i.e, diseases and infections naturally transmitted between people and vertebrate animals. Some 60% of emerging infectious diseases globally are zoonoses. Of the over 30 new human pathogens detected over the last three decades, 75% originated in animals.

Animal markets everywhere...

"Wherever there is close mixing of humans and animals, especially the unregulated handling of blood and other body products, as happens for example in China's animal markets, there are greater chances of transmission of a virus from animals to humans, and its mutation to adapt to the human body," a senior WHO functionary told *The Indian Express* from Geneva.

It isn't just China, the official said. "It has happened wherever in the world there is unregulated mixing of humans and animals, either wild or domesticated." The official referred to the Ebola outbreak in Africa: "There it was wild chimpanzees who had the disease. It came into humans after these were killed and consumed. Animal markets are breeding grounds because there is free interchange of pathogens between species and mutations."

...And especially in China

Dr K S Reddy, former professor of AIIMS and president of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) noted that the majority of new outbreaks and pandemic threats over the past five decades had arisen from microbes transmitted from animals to humans, either directly or through another animal reservoir host.

"Proximity to animals grows from wild food markets and captive animal breeding, with deforestation creating a conveyor belt for viruses and vectors to move from wildlife to captive animals, and from them to humans. The wild food markets in China offer both a mix of many animals which harbour deadly viruses, and an opportunity to transmit with ease to crowds of humans whose taste for a diversity of wild as well as close-bred animals provides a conveyor belt for animal-to-human transmission. Once the virus gains entry into humans who travel and transport animals, the infection spreads," Dr Reddy said.

The more virulent strains emerge from mutation which occurs when a large human host community offers itself for easy transmission, Dr Reddy said. "Human folly opens the ecological window and microbial genetics seize the opportunity. Deadly viruses can then play Chinese Checkers leaping from species to species. This happens in other parts of the world too, but the Chinese taste for exotic animal foods and the population density makes it a prime playground for zoonotic infections," he said.

Ecology of infections, spread

With a population of nearly 1.4 billion and 50% of the world's livestock, China's ecology poses a risk for emerging, re-emerging, and novel diseases that could threaten China and the rest of the world, says the US federal agency Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"Moreover, the world's growing network of air travel routes dramatically increases the risk for infections to rapidly spread, and for potential pandemics that can cause illness, death, and costly disruption to global trade," the CDC states.

The SARS epidemic began in November 2002 in the Guangdong province of southern China, and spread across the world. Bird flu of various provenances — the virus keeps mutating — have been repeatedly reported from China after the first H7N9 novel avian influenza outbreak of 2013. In 2018, a 68-year-old patient from Jiangsu province was infected with H7N4. Last year, there was an outbreak of H5N6 bird flu in Horgos in the far western Xinjiang region.

In the wake of the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak, Dr Takeshi Kasai, Regional Director for the Western Pacific, WHO (under which China falls), wrote: "This New Year's wake-up call reminds us to be vigilant against SARS, bird flu and the causes of more recent outbreaks in the region... In fact, two of the last four influenza pandemics began in the Western Pacific Region — home to 1.9 billion people and a hot spot for outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases and natural disasters. These were threats that put people's health and safety and economic development at risk... It is fair to ask: are we safer from health security threats than we were a decade ago, following the H1N1 influenza pandemic? Or than we were when SARS emerged 17 years ago?"

WORDLY WISE

EVEN WHEN I'M OLD AND GREY, I WON'T BE ABLE TO PLAY IT, BUT I'LL STILL LOVE THE GAME.

— MICHAEL JORDAN

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Poised for takeoff

Government move to revive Air India sale is welcome. But it should devise a better strategy for disinvestment

THE NDA GOVERNMENT has kicked off the disinvestment process for Air India for the second time — its previous attempt in 2018 had failed to receive a single bid. It has issued a preliminary information memorandum for interest to sell its stake in Air India, Air India Express and Air India-SATS. Qualified bidders will be notified by March 31, implying that the stake sale will be closed only in the next fiscal year. But this time, the government seems to have taken care to address some of the contentious issues which had dampened investor interest in the past. This is a welcome move. As the airline has been incurring huge losses, there is simply no rationale for continuing to pump in money into a loss making entity operating in a hyper competitive sector where consumers are well-served by the private sector.

The government has sweetened the deal on several counts. First, unlike last time when it offered to offload only 76 per cent of its stake in the airline, the government will offload its entire stake. This is likely to encourage prospective bidders as it implies having full operational freedom to run the carrier. Second, the government has taken steps to address the airline's massive debt, which has been a major stumbling block for prospective buyers. This time around, the government has transferred part of the debt to a special purpose vehicle. As a result, the buyer will now have to take over only Rs 23,286 crore of debt. Third, the government has lowered the net worth criteria for potential bidders from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 3,500 crore. Fourth, eligibility norms have been tweaked and consortiums have been given greater flexibility for bidding, making it a better structured deal. However, prospective buyers will still have to contend with the airline's huge workforce. Some have argued that investors may find it difficult to buy the entire airline. Thus, a more prudent approach would be to split its various businesses such as international and domestic operations, its ground services arm, and the airport services company, and sell them separately. With the demise of Jet Airways — Air India's competitor in both domestic and international markets — this revised structure should be attractive to investors.

The repeated delays in the government's stake sale in Air India, or BPCL for that matter, underline the need to have a better strategy for the disinvestment programme. So far, the approach has been to view it as a means for shoring up the Centre's revenue towards the end of each financial year. Instead, the Centre could draw up a list of companies for disinvestment and release an advance calendar. This would provide clarity and help potential investors.

Warnings from Europe

Resolutions on CAA, Kashmir in European parliament point to the limits of diplomacy when the ground situation is fraught

THERE IS NO getting around the reality that the six resolutions tabled in the European Parliament against the Citizenship Amendment Act and proposed NRC, as well as the detentions and restrictions on communications in Kashmir, show India in poor light. The resolutions, which will be taken up for discussion on January 29, varyingly denounce the CAA as having the potential to create the largest crisis of statelessness in the world, of having adverse consequences for India's internal stability, of being discriminatory on the grounds of religion, and of violating the principle of equality. In all, the resolutions involve 626 of the 751 members of the European parliament. Only one of the resolutions, by a centre-right bloc in the EP, was willing to give any quarter to India, coming close in its formulation to India's position that these are internal matters on which a sovereign power has the right to take its decisions.

The resolutions have come weeks before Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to go to Brussels for the EU-India summit in March, an important event in Delhi's diplomatic calendar. The two sides have been trying to tie up a Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement, a pact that acquires more significance after India's withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The EU is India's largest trading partner and some parliamentarians had earlier said that any trade agreement with India should include a human rights clause. Delhi has not made an official statement yet, but has put out unofficially that the European Parliament has no business debating the authority and rights of a democratically elected government and its legislature. However, it has to be borne in mind that just three months ago, it was the Indian government that invited two dozen European lawmakers from India-friendly far-right groups and took them on a guided tour of Kashmir as part of its diplomatic outreach to explain the August 5 decisions, hoping their pro-India views would carry the day. As a seasoned international player, the Ministry of External Affairs should know that it cannot take the position that only favourable views on its internal affairs are kosher.

Today's globalised world is as concerned about the movement of people as it is about the movement of goods. Actions by any country with potential for causing ripples elsewhere worries the international community. India cannot turn its face away from such concerns though no European nation has criticised the government's moves. The resolutions should also give pause for Delhi to consider how much headway diplomacy can make when the ground situation inspires little confidence.

Ahead of the buzzer

Kobe Bryant aspired for greatness, leaves behind a tortured legacy

BASKETBALL LOST ITS synonym and the Los Angeles Lakers its biggest face when NBA legend Kobe Bryant, 41, died in a helicopter crash with eight others including his 13-year-old hoopster daughter, Gianna. A deeply polarising figure in NBA, Kobe brashly dared to become the next Michael Jordan, and some might say, succeeded almost with 18 All Stars and five championship rings headlining his career. The sheer command on the court put him in a three-way race with Jordan and LeBron for the greatest ever. His frequent feuding with teammates and his cold, reticent personality made him quite the hated figure amongst his peers and coaches in his early years. And a sexual assault complaint by a hotel employee in Colorado permanently blotted his legacy.

What will not be eclipsed was Kobe's years on the court where he finally found the balance between being called a ball-hog in a team and passing to his teammates, mentoring them in his later years to mirror him in the clutch situations. If the clock was running down and you needed someone to make a three-pointer to beat the buzzer, then Kobe was the man.

What will perhaps be Kobe's abiding association with basketball is his pure love for the game. Schooled in Italy where his father played, he grew up different from other American NBA players, and channelled his unapologetic pursuit of Jordan's greatness by making his life all about the sport. NBA is replete with stories of how hard he worked. First to practice, last to leave, immense workouts in the gym everyday, off-season training alone and the famous figure of just 18 days taken off in a year. He went with humility to Hakeem Olajuwon to better his game after he had won plenty. He retired in 2016 with $680 million in total earnings, highest for a team athlete, but none of the Nike-propelled cult that built Jordan. He died leaving conflicted and mourning fans, far too soon for the buzzer.

Lifting the pall of fear

Centre faces classic dilemma civil disobedience unfailingly poses: Whether or not it cracks down, protests will grow

ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

"AS IT WERE, that pall of fear was lifted from the people's shoulders, not wholly, of course, but to an amazing degree." This is how Jawaharlal Nehru described what Gandhi, after 1918-19, did to India's psyche against the British rulers.

After three recent weeks in Delhi (including Shaheen Bagh), Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bhopal and Lucknow, it is clear to me that the pall of fear which accompanied BJP's victory in May has been lifted. The analogy is not perfect. Instead of Gandhi, it is women and students who have taken charge of protests. And the current rulers, like the British, are not alien, though to India's 200 million Muslims, they feel like one.

Continuing citizen protests illustrate a well-known feature of parliamentary democracy. If a parliamentary system is first-past-the-post (FPTP), and it does not have proportional representation (PR), election victories and defeats acquire an exaggerated form. The BJP had 37.4 per cent of the national vote in May 2019, which yielded 55.8 per cent of the Lok Sabha seats. In contrast, the Congress received 19.5 per cent of the vote, but only 9.6 per cent of seats. In a PR system that marks much of Western Europe, votes and seats are in proportion.

The vote-seat paradox of FPTP systems, prevalent in British-style democracies, generates an illusion. The winners often begin to believe that they have not only won a majority of seats, but also a majority of vote. They think that their parliamentary majority entitles them to making laws, which radically restructure a polity. But what often happens is that a brute assertion of executive or parliamentary power touches off citizen anxiety and protest, at least among those who did not vote for the party in power, which was nearly 63 per cent in the recent Indian elections.

The unrelenting march of protesters undoubtedly contains a substantial proportion of non-BJP voters. But I also met many Modi voters, certainly those not wedded to the ideology of Hindu nationalism, who have found the behaviour of the Modi government excessive. The ideologically-committed, on the whole, think that cracked skulls and maimed bodies are simply the price to pay for establishing their preferred political order. They are after a "higher truth", as it were, the "truth" of Hindu primacy and Muslim subsidiarity, which they think the "New India" must seek, even though the Constitution is decidedly against that. In contrast, the symbolic repertoire of the protesters shows an unmistakable embrace of constitutional values: The preamble of the Constitution, pictures of Gandhi and Ambedkar, songs, poems and artwork of defiance as well as pluralism, and a commitment to civil disobedience aptly depicted in a Shaheen Bagh poster, "Don't be Silent, Don't be Violent".

> The intensity and breadth of protests illustrate that the BJP is dominant, but not hegemonic. More significantly, after its enhanced majority in May 2019, the BJP government assumed that it was hegemonic. Only such an assumption can possibly explain why it went for what, in retrospect, was a legislative overkill: The triple *talaq*, the unlawful activities prevention, Kashmir, Ayodhya (a victory the court handed), and the citizenship amendment. It is as though the BJP rulers thought it was time to turn the Constitution upside down and realise their long-held ideological dream, the dream of Hindu supremacy and Muslim marginality.

It is hard to escape the well-known political hypothesis that India is witnessing a conflict between two different majorities: The majority of voters, who did not vote for the BJP, and the parliamentary majority, which was based only on a plurality, not a majority, of vote. The BJP might still win a parliamentary majority four and a half years from now, but meanwhile it has to deal, at least as a governance matter, with what could well be the wishes of a majority of citizens. The BJP used to be proud of its control of the streets. It has lost that dominance, and the narrative control that comes with it.

Another important analytic point is worth emphasising. Scholars have long drawn a distinction between hegemony and dominance. Hegemony implies a takeover of minds and an obliteration of virtually all opposition spaces. Dominance means the victor is far ahead of the competing alternatives, but pockets of resistance are substantial, not meagre.

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Delhi's rulers have tried to wrest the narrative by arguing that the protests are an artefact of opposition political parties and the protesters are Muslim, who can be identified, as the PM put it, by their clothes. But it is abundantly clear that civil society organisations, not political parties, have led the protests, with the partial exception of West Bengal and Hyderabad. Individual party leaders might have spoken at the rallies, but political parties are not the vanguard. Moreover, though statistically valid surveys are still to be conducted, it is fair to hypothesise that every fourth protestor is a Hindu, or at least a non-Muslim. The protests are undoubtedly multi-religious.

Indeed, if a political party had led nationwide protests, if only Muslims had protested, if the protests had been predominantly violent, it would have been easy for Delhi to crush them. There was a violent streak in the beginning. But the dominant form since then is non-violent. It is Gandhian-style civil disobedience without a Gandhi at the helm.

The Modi government is caught in a classic dilemma that civil disobedience unfailingly poses: If it cracks down, as it did at Jamia, JNU or AMU, the protests will only grow, and if it does not, then too protests will continue. Two more factors contribute to the government's difficulties. There are so many civil society organisations involved, with none as a clear leader, that the Modi government really does not know who to target. Besides, women are holding the centrestage at Shaheen Bagh and if more Shaheen Baghs emerge in different cities, the government would find it extremely hard to use coercion. Use of state violence against women almost always boomerangs.

Normally, civil society has the feet to stand on, but rarely the legs to run with. So it is unclear how far the protests will go. But one thing is clear. If the Modi government violently cracks down, the protests will engulf more of India. The energy demonstrated in protests and the opposition of multiple state governments have placed the Centre in a quandary that civil disobedience always generates.

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The fringe that isn't

Religio-cultural public spheres, ignored by most, are tapped well by Hindutva groups

BADRI NARAYAN

IN JANUARY, THE VHP — at its Prayagraj Magh mela convention — announced the organisation of a series of functions as part of Ram Mahotsav in villages across India before the Ram Janmabhoomi construction starts. These would be the same villages where Ramshila poojan happened during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement under the leadership of the RSS, VHP and Sant Samaj. This move may be observed as the VHP's effort to sustain Ram-based memories among Hindus, through various celebrations, in order to strengthen the Ram-based religious public sphere in India.

After the SC verdict on Babri Masjid was delivered, the VHP organised a Ram *baraat* from Ayodhya to Janakpur. In that procession, the VHP organised meetings involving religio-social organisations and Ramleela committees working in villages, qasbas and cities in north India. The Ram Janmabhoomi issue strengthened Hindutva politics in India and Hindutva politics, in turn, kept alive the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. Hindutva forces entered the religious public sphere through the Ram Janmabhoomi movement initially, but it evolved later as it entered and worked in religious public sphere.

The Ram Janmabhoomi movement connected with the grass roots using the cultural consciousness and memories of Ram, which was circulated and re-narrated in the religious public sphere of the country. The RSS, VHP and BJP forged a relationship with this vibrant religious public sphere. They facilitated the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which in turn strengthened their political-organisational influence in the electoral landscape of the country.

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Most of the parties that claim to be secular stay aloof from the religious public sphere, which Hindutva politics gives due importance to, especially during their mobilisations. Religious-cultural actions have also contributed to the expansion of Hindutva ideology and politics. These spheres may evolve around a place, institutions, events and individuals: Sometimes, they evolve in fixed geographies like Ayodhya, Varanasi and Prayag which carry the attractions of the past and reflections of cultural heritage. A part of such public spheres may emerge around institutions like temples, mutts and akharas — which are woven with Hindu cultural-religious traditions. These spheres may also emerge while celebrating festivals like Dussehara, Diwali, Janmashtami etc. Finally, a section of such spheres can emerge around individuals like saints and kathavachaks (storytellers).

Religious-cultural public spheres also include Ram *katha mandals*, various kirtan *mandals* and Krishna bhajan *mandals* etc. — these create space where lakhs of people gather and engage in religious discourse, and also become a part of the discussion on a few issues of national-political importance. These events are organised in some states by regional-level trusts, associations and temple organisations in various parts of India.

These associations also help to develop *mandapas* — these, for example, are found in villages in Odisha, which evolve as village public spheres where religious stories are narrated. Many Ram katha pravachaks and Bhagwat katha storytellers attract lakhs of people in their gatherings. An interaction with these storytellers would reveal how most of them are impressed with Hindutva politics in one way or another. During their Ram kathas and Bhagwat katha pravachans, these storytellers also discuss issues like Ram Janmabhoomi and Article 370. In October 2019, Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Yogi Adityanath inaugurated a nine-day Ram katha utsav by famous storyteller Murari Bapu in Gorakhpur. That is also when he dropped hints about the possibility of a positive Ram temple verdict.

While such spheres are ignored by non-Hindutva political parties, they contribute towards the forming communities in the society. It enables the Hindutva groups to accumulate social capital that is later used for the expansion of their ideology. Hindutva politics, thus, is increasingly becoming influential due to its engagement with the non-political but socio-culturally and religiously powerful public spheres associated with the Hindu religion.

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January 28, 1980, Forty Years Ago

INDIAN EXPRESS

India, France plan initiative to ease tension in region

Indo-France talks

AFTER THREE DAYS of talks between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the French president, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, India and France decided to take all necessary initiatives to defuse tensions threatening peace and stability in several sensitive regions. The decision to take initiatives is contained in a joint declaration the two leaders signed in New Delhi. The declaration, though, does not spell out the nature of initiatives: It merely says the two countries will remain in close consultation with each other. However, the joint declaration clearly shows that the Soviet armed intervention in Afghanistan as well as its after-effects on the international situation took most of the time of President Giscard and Mrs Gandhi during the talks.

New Afghanistan

THE NEW REGIME is stripping Afghanistan of leftist slogans and pictures, apparently as part of its efforts to pacify Muslims who have rebelled against the country's Marxist revolution. Signs proclaiming worker solidarity are being painted over or removed, portraits of Afghan leaders past and present are disappearing from public display. A decision by the country's politburo published in *Kabul New Times* said signs that have a "leftist character and are not in conformity with the present stage of national and democratic revolution should be collected and disposed of".

Zia and Kashmir

K S BAJPAI, India's ambassador in Islamabad, left the Islamic conference of foreign ministers and lodged a verbal protest with the Pakistan Foreign Office against a reference to Kashmir in the inaugural speech of Pakistan president, General Zia-ul- Haq. Zia did not mention Kashmir in the rest of the speech even though he referred to the people of Palestine twice. Nor did Agha Shahi, adviser on foreign affairs, who was elected the chairman of the conference, say anything about Kashmir although he spoke about Palestine at length.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"What the coronovirus reveals is a global failure to take action to minimise the risk of zoonotic viruses jumping species from animals to humans."

— THE GUARDIAN

Money in consumers' hands

A heightened fiscal deficit in the Budget can help increase spending and rejuvenate markets, especially in sectors like real estate and renewables

KARAN BHAGAT

C R Sasikumar

IN THE LAST six years, the government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken many bold and positive decisions. There have been a slew of initiatives including demonetisation, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). These measures had a revolutionary purpose: To kickstart India's journey from an informal, state driven, physical economy to a formal, one-nation market and a digital economy.

Over the medium to long-term, these ideas will play out for sure and get our GDP growth rate back to its historic highs. However, the immediate impact of these changes has disrupted the Indian economy. It has affected the supply of money to small and medium business enterprises. Challenged by the availability of resources, consumption has slowed down and this has had an inevitable impact on job creation. In addition, the IL&FS issue has added to the crisis of confidence. Most NBFCs are being forced to cut credit to consumers even as they grapple with their own asset liability mismatch. Banks, both PSUs and private, are reeling from their own NPA issues from 2013-14 and continue to be extremely conservative, sticking to only high-quality credit. This, in turn, has created a unique dichotomy in the capital markets with the top 30-40 stocks quoting at all-time highs and the rest of the market witnessing multi-year lows. Sectors with high capital needs like real estate, infrastructure and renewables are seeing interim stoppage of work amid a worsening demand environment.

Demand-side issues have consequently led to a fall in direct and indirect tax revenues. The government has rightly continued with its social agenda of empowering the poor with direct subsidy schemes and special compensation to farmers. A tepid capital market has prevented privatisation at a pace the government would have desired. With a shortage in revenues, and expenses being incurred as per plan, the fiscal deficit targets have started to look larger than ever before. Interest rates continue to be high as the RBI has been conservative with rate cuts, aiming to ensure that it stays the course on keeping inflation below the 4 per cent mark. Given this framework, revolutionary steps to cut rates have not been possible. Demand and supply problems are thus keeping GDP growth muted. The first positive step was taken in the form of reducing corporate tax rates, in my opinion, "a bold decision in the right direction". The finance minister now has a very tight rope to walk on. Here I suggest some measures, which could go a long way to "monetise the Indian consumer again".

One, simplify individual tax rates further, specially at the lower income slabs. Income up to Rs 5 lakh or even Rs 7.5 lakh should be exempt from taxes. This will put more money in the hands of the urban middle class, which will help get consumption back on track.

Two, post the Global Financial Crisis, America was saddled with a huge amount of home inventory. A provision introduced to get full interest set-off against salary for the purchase of the first house, proved to be a game changer. In India, the rental yield today is as low as 2-2.5 per cent; a tax exemption through HRA allowance makes cost of renting as low as 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent. On the other hand, for purchase of a house, home loan costs are still as high as 8.5 per cent — with a cap of Rs 2 lakh of interest exemption for tax purposes. This translates into at least an annual interest cost of 6.75 per cent to 7 per cent (assuming an average home cost of Rs 1 crore). This anomaly — between renting and purchasing a house — is discouraging new purchases, even for first-time buyers. An exemption of interest only for the purchase of first house will keep speculators away and ensure effective cost of borrowing dips to as low as 5 per cent to 5.5 per cent for genuine home buyers.

Three, startups could be the next big catalyst for the country. Currently, taxation of long-term gains on sale of shares of unlisted companies are effectively at the highest level; being taxed at 20 per cent plus surcharge (indexation benefits tend to be zero as the cost of acquisition is very low). Getting startups at par in terms of tax with listed companies will go a long way in unlocking the potential of the entrepreneurial engine of India. Startups ought to be subject to a long-term capital gain (LTCG) tax of 10 per cent, plus surcharge, plus the applicable securities transaction tax (STT).

Four, the government must free up its resources to fund infrastructure. This can be anti-inflationary as better infrastructure typically leads to downward price revisions of real estate and transportation costs as the distance between cities effectively comes down. To increase its spend on infrastructure, the government could look at the following options. Launch a Global Indian Sovereign Bond in foreign currency and push for its inclusion in at least two of the major indices. These will have great demand from sovereign funds and endowments globally. At 2.5 per cent to 3 per cent per annum in dollar terms, we should be able to generate enough demand. For NRIs, an extra 0.5 per cent can be offered to encourage them to contribute to nation building.

Replace the current Provident Fund (PF) scheme with the National Pension Scheme (NPS). For all PSU enterprises, the government has already initiated the same. All new flows (with the earlier PF being grandfathered) should be allowed into NPS only. Akin to the 401(k) in the US, this will take away the liability imposed on the government treasury to guarantee a rate of 8.5 per cent post tax — effectively a pre-tax of 12 per cent. With low cost ETFs now available both on the fixed income and equity side, this responsibility can easily be shared between NPS holders and investment managers directly.

> Foreign companies with profitable Indian subsidiaries should be required to necessarily list their Indian companies within a stipulated time-frame. Though India is a large consumer base for large new age companies, Indian investors have not been able to participate as equity holders in the upside of these companies. Free up the corporate debt market and open it up to Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) without most of the current restrictions as local bond markets are not adequately large and need long term sticky money.

Relaunch GOI tax free bonds. The tax saving can be shared equally between the government and citizens. For example, a 20-year G-sec bond quoting at 7.16 per cent can be launched as a tax-free bond at 6.25 per cent. This will allow the government to raise a large amount of money for infrastructure domestically.

Accelerate disinvestment and privatisation — examples like IRCTC prove it can be mutually beneficial to government and private enterprises; freeing up this capital allows the government to match its long-term capital requirements for infrastructure.

Simplify rules relating to land acquisition and compensation for building infrastructure like roads; projects like bullet trains must be fast-tracked.

For the Indian investor, few measures can go a long way to help invest more money into capital markets: STT was introduced to offset LTCG; now both co-exist. Ideally, we should have just one of these, as opposed to having both. Foreign companies with profitable Indian subsidiaries should be required to necessarily list their Indian companies within a stipulated time-frame. Though India is a large consumer base for large new age companies, Indian investors have not been able to participate as equity holders in the upside of these companies. Free up the corporate debt market and open it up to foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) without most of the current restrictions as local bond markets are not adequately large and need long-term sticky money.

The impact of all of these measures on the fiscal deficit or on the rupee or interest rates may not be predictable. A slight distortion in the same will be tolerable by the financial markets as long as the road map for the future is clear. A heightened fiscal deficit in the short term may inversely over the longer term, help rates and currency — with adequate pick up in consumption and infrastructure spend. While none of us can predict the future with 100 percent accuracy, I do feel that now is the time to continue on the path of taking bold decisions.

The author works as MD & CEO of IIFL Wealth & Asset Management. Views are personal

Here's looking at you

Policy makers on facial recognition tech in India must straddle national interests, new digital norms

RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

ON THE FACE of it, the Google CEO Sundar Pichai's recent support for a temporary ban on facial recognition technologies seems uncharacteristic. It is not often that companies developing a technology call for its ban. Their interest is in promoting the use of technology, not proscribing it. Not every one of the leading tech companies agree with Google on facial recognition.

Brad Smith, the president of Microsoft, has questioned the idea of a ban. Calling facial recognition a "young technology", Smith said "it will get better. But the only way to make it better is actually to continue developing it. And the only way to continue developing it actually is to have more people using it." Microsoft wants the scalpel rather than a meat cleaver in addressing the problems posed by the new technologies. IBM has taken a step forward in developing the "policy scalpel" by setting up a "lab" that will generate actionable ideas for policy makers to manage the emergence of new technologies like facial recognition that are shaping our digital future. The idea is to develop "precision regulation" rather than enforce "blunt" instruments like the ban.

The debate on finding the right balance between regulation and promotion of emerging technologies comes in the wake of leaked plans of the EU to issue a temporary ban on the use of facial recognition technologies by private and public entities. The ban could be up to five years. The proposed ban is not a comprehensive one, and will be applicable to the use of facial recognition in public spaces.

The new thinking on facial recognition is part of an EU white paper, likely to be issued next month, on guidelines to regulate the use of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies.

The intensifying global debate also coincides with India's own plans to roll out a massive project on deploying facial recognition technologies, essentially for law enforcement. The international discourse, hopefully, provides the context for developing a broad and effective Indian policy framework for the use of facial recognition.

Well before the EU had begun to discuss a temporary ban on facial recognition, there has been a "techlash" against the companies that have so dramatically altered our lives in the last few years. For nearly two decades, the idea that "digital is different" and does not need public oversight had triumphed in most capitals of the world. The main argument was that regulation constrains technological innovation and retards progress.

But the triumph of the digital companies, especially at the federal level in the US, has been muddied by state-level regulations across America. The urge to regulate has triggered widespread concerns about the dangers of digitalisation, especially the use of big data and AI by private companies as well as governments.

If companies were seen as monetising the data generated by the widespread use of digital platforms like Google and Facebook, China became the prime example of states using data and information to exercise ever more control over their citizens.

Civil society groups, which saw both "surveillance capitalism" and "surveillance state" as evils of the digital age that threaten individual rights, began to press for legislative action at the provincial and municipal levels.

These pressures from multiple directions have compelled the dominant technology companies to recognise that regulation is inevitable and that they should focus on shaping the outcomes. The technology companies also saw the need for some collective understanding at the international level for a set of universal rules for the conduct of digital business across the world. Microsoft's promotion of a global code of conduct for the digital domain is an example.

Tech companies fear that too many constraints in democratic societies will weaken them against competition from China, where the party-state is actively developing and deploying AI.

But no aspect of AI triggers greater anxiety than facial recognition technology, the use of which has become widespread. China's use of facial recognition to track and control its Muslim citizens in Xinjiang to using the technology to control the prolonged protests in Hong Kong are at one end of potential concerns.

At the other end are concerns that facial recognition is not entirely accurate and could lead to punitive actions against innocent people. There is also concern in the US that the algorithms behind facial recognition carry the baggage of racism and misogyny that are inherent in the political culture shaping the development of technology.

But few can deny some of the advantages of the use of facial recognition for governments in the control of crime, better border controls and countering terrorism. In India, a severely under-policed nation, facial recognition surely offers many benefits.

But it also remains a fact that the Indian state has always been tempted to empower itself against its citizens in the name of collective security. It has also tended to weaponise information against political opponents and dissidents.

Delhi's statist impulses have also tended to stifle the role of the private sector in the development of new technologies and their innovative use. In the immediate post-war years, Delhi punched way above its weight in debates on the global governance of new technologies like nuclear and space. Its voice has become increasingly marginal in the digital era where the private sector is driving technological development.

The foreign office must reclaim India's place in the international discourse on AI and facial recognition and develop a productive alignment between India's national interests and the development of new digital norms. At the same time, the government needs a more comprehensive domestic framework that promotes the use of new technologies for public good as well as imposes necessary constraints against their abuse by both state and capital.

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The stress in state finances

Lower tax devolution, delays in GST compensation are potential risks

JAYANTA ROY AND ADITI NAYAR

GENERAL GOVERNMENT SPENDING was one of the major drivers of economic growth in the first half of this fiscal year. And with state governments accounting for a majority of total general government spending, it is critical to analyse the trends in their finances. The unaudited fiscal data of 21 states, which account for around 90 per cent of India's GDP in 2017-18, for the first eight months (April-November) of the current financial year, reveals some sombre trends.

First, at the aggregate level, revenue receipts of these states have grown by a mere 4.6 per cent, sliding down from 15.3 per cent over the same period last year. Under the broad rubric of revenue receipts, the analysis shows that the states' share in Central tax devolution has slowed the most, contracting by 2.3 per cent during this period, after having grown by 12.1 per cent over the same period last year. This fall likely reflects an adjustment made for the higher-than-mandated devolution carried out in during the last fiscal year. This was a consequence of the optimistic forecast of the Centre's gross tax collections in its revised estimates for that year, relative to the subsequently available provisional actuals.

Moreover, the Centre's gross tax revenues are expected to fall short of the budgeted target by a considerable Rs 3-3.5 trillion this fiscal year. Based on the shortfalls in the Centre's tax collections last year, and the estimated gap this year, the aggregate tax devolution to all states may be as much as Rs 1.7 - 2.2 trillion lower in the current fiscal year than what was budgeted. This is a key revenue risk staring at the state governments this year.

In addition, the states' own non-tax revenues have contracted by 1.5 per cent during the first eight months of this fiscal year, after an expansion of 15.3 per cent over the same period last year. Further, growth of states' own tax revenues, the largest source of their revenue receipts, eased to a tepid 2.2 per cent during this period, down from a healthy 16 per cent over the same period last year, dampened, in part by the modest rise in collections of the State Goods and Services Tax (SGST).

However, grants from the Centre to these states grew by 26.9 per cent during these eight months, up from 18.7 per cent last year, driven likely by a 72.7 per cent expansion in the GST compensation paid to all states. This amounted to Rs 647 billion in April-November 2019, up from Rs 374 billion in these months last year. Subsequently, another tranche of Rs 359 billion was released to states in December 2019, comparable in size to the release in the first eight months of last year. The primary factor boosting the GST compensation seems to be the low growth in states' GST revenues relative to the mandated 14 per cent annual growth for the five-year transition period.

Some state governments have voiced concerns over the delays in receipt of the compensation amount in recent months, which has complicated their fiscal position and cash flow management. The timing of receipt of the compensation is the second major revenue risk facing state governments. If compensation for one or more months of the current fiscal year gets delayed to the next fiscal year, we may well find some traditionally revenue surplus states staring at a revenue deficit as well as a sharp rise in their fiscal deficit this year. But it seems states will have to start gearing up for life without the GST compensation.

The brunt of subdued revenue expansion is clearly faced by capital expenditure, whose growth shrank to 1.4 per cent in the first eight months of this fiscal year, down from a healthy 19.8 per cent over the same period last year. The data indicates a multi-fold increase in the aggregate revenue deficit of these states to Rs 829 billion (April-November 2019), up from Rs 155 billion over the same period last year. Their fiscal deficit has also widened to Rs 2,643 billion over this period (53 per cent of the budgeted amount), up from Rs 2,199 billion last year (48.7 per cent of the budgeted amount).

It is thus not a surprise that market borrowings or State Development Loans (SDLs) have risen substantially this year. According to ICRA's estimates, net SDL issuance of all states and eligible union territories (UTs) rose by 15.5 per cent to Rs 2,806 billion in the first three quarters of this fiscal year, up from Rs 2,429 billion last year. This trend has been exacerbated by larger redemptions this year. Accordingly, the combined gross SDL issuance have expanded by a significant 34.9 per cent to Rs 3,874 billion this fiscal year (April-December), up from Rs 2,872 billion last year.

The calendar for state government market borrowings for the fourth quarter indicates tentative gross SDL issuances of Rs 2,086 billion in the quarter, implying a moderate 9.1 per cent growth. But, this conceals a large dip in redemptions. According to our estimates, there will be a dip in redemptions during the fourth quarter, implying that net SDL issuances will expand by a staggering 55.7 per cent to Rs 1,766 billion in Q4FY20, up from Rs 1,134 billion last year, underlining the stress in state government finances this year.

If market borrowings in the fourth quarter are in line with the amounts indicated, total gross borrowing this fiscal year would rise by 24.6 per cent to nearly Rs 6 trillion, up from Rs 4.8 trillion last year. Moreover, net borrowings by states would rise by an even sharper 28.3 per cent to Rs 4.6 trillion this year, becoming nearly as large as the Central government's net market borrowings of Rs 4.7 trillion that have been announced so far for this year.

Roy is Group Head Corporate Sector Rating and Nayar is Principal Economist, ICRA Ltd

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CAA FAILS PEOPLE

THIS REFERS to the article 'CAA does not carry out Mahatma Gandhi's wishes, it brazenly defies them' (IE, January 27). The Citizenship Amendment Act appears to be a piece of legislation that has not been drafted well and is not inclusive. Many Muslims migrated to India from neighbouring countries because of persecution and it would be unfair to exclude them from the CAA. In a sense, protests against the CAA also highlight a vibrant democratic structure in the country: CAA passed the litmus test in Parliament but clearly failed to get acceptance from large sections of people in the country.

Devendra Khurana, *Bhopal*

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.

TO LIVE AND LOVE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Two bicycles, a broken dream' (IE, January 27). Shalini Langer's poignant description of Sageer's brutal end and the story of Rahi Masoom Raza give us reason to be sane in these turbulent times. Sageer's death stands out as a metaphor for the death of our dreams. E M Forster had said that it was imperative that we "only connect prose and passion and both will be exalted and human love will be at its height". It is for all of us to remember that the greatest ideology, is that the milk of human kindness should never cease to flow.

Sangeeta Kampani, *New Delhi*

THE RIGHT DATA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Restoring Trust' (IE, January 27). The Indian statistical system has taken a huge beating because of our government's lack of belief in its data: Evidently because it tells a reality which doesn't suit the regime's narrative. India is going through an economic slowdown and unemployment is a harsh reality. Pronab Sen and his team should be given a free hand. They should now be empowered enough to ensure zero compromise on integrity of these critical data.

Bal Govind, *Noida*

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड
वर्ष 12 अंक 293

कम न हो हस्तांतरण

हाल के दशकों में राज्य सरकारों के संचालन से जुड़ी जवाबदेहियों में उल्लेखनीय वृद्धि हुई है। राज्य सरकारों को जो सेवाएं प्रदान करनी चाहिए और जो वे प्रदान कर सकती हैं उन पर अधिक राजनीतिक जोर दिया जाने लगा है। जाहिर है इसे राज्य सरकारों को मिलने वाली कर हिस्सेदारी में बढ़ोतरी से जोड़कर देखा जाता है। कर ही देश और उसके नागरिकों के बीच जुड़ाव का प्राथमिक जरिया है। जानकारी के मुताबिक 15वें वित्त आयोग के माध्यम से इस परिपाटी को उलटा जा रहा है।

इस समाचार पत्र में प्रकाशित एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक राज्य सरकारों के व्यय के लिए अलग किया जाने वाला टैक्स पूल का 42 फीसदी हिस्सा वास्तव में कम किया जा सकता है। इसमें बांटने वाले पूल में किसी तरह के बदलाव को शामिल नहीं किया गया है। वित्त आयोग की शर्तों में बाद में हुए बदलाव के आधार पर आगे चलकर इसमें भी परिवर्तन कर सकता है। उक्त बदलाव के अनुसार राष्ट्रीय संसाधनों पर रक्षा और राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा की आवश्यकताओं का अलग से दावा होने की बात कही गई है।

चूंकि रक्षा केंद्र सरकार का दायित्व है इसलिए आयोग द्वारा ऐसा करने से यकीनन बांटने लायक पूल में कमी आएगी। यदि राज्यों के एकीकृत हस्तांतरण में कमी के साथ मिलाकर देखें तो यह राशि बहुत ज्यादा होगी और इसके अभाव में राज्यों की जरूरी सेवाएं मुहैया कराने की क्षमता पर असर पड़ सकता है। हमें इस दिशा में आगे नहीं बढ़ना चाहिए। आयोग जहां यह दावा कर सकता है कि केंद्र सरकार की खास योजनाओं और पहलों के लिए पहले से आवंटित धन में दावेदारी करके इसकी क्षतिपूर्ति की जा सकती है। परंतु यह पर्याप्त नहीं होगा। राज्य सरकारें लोगों को जरूरी सेवाएं मुहैया कराने के लिए सीधे तौर पर उत्तरदायी हैं। उनके पास यह अधिकार होना चाहिए कि वे जरूरी संसाधन अपने पास रहते हुए शासन संबंधी निर्णय ले सकें। हाल के दशकों में देश की राजनीति कमोबेश इसी दिशा में आगे बढ़ी है। राज्य स्तर के राजनेताओं से उनके मतदाता यही अपेक्षा करते हैं कि वे उन्हें जरूरी सेवाएं मुहैया कराएंगे और यह अपेक्षा गलत भी नहीं है। जाहिर है राज्य सरकारों को मुहैया कराए जाने वाले संसाधनों में यह लोकतांत्रिक गतिशीलता नजर आनी चाहिए।

इसमें दो राय नहीं कि केंद्र सरकार कहेगी कि उसके पास खुद संसाधनों की कमी है। खासतौर पर वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) व्यवस्था लागू होने के बाद ऐसा हुआ है। परंतु इसके लिए वह किसी और को दोष नहीं दे सकती। अर्थव्यवस्था के आकार में इजाफा उसकी जवाबदेही है और कर संग्रह में कमी आने की एक अहम वजह आर्थिक वृद्धि में आया ठहराव भी है।

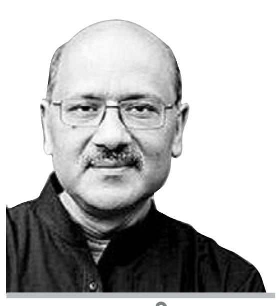
राज्य भी जीएसटी को लेकर शिकायत कर सकते हैं। वे कह सकते हैं कि उन्होंने कुछ अप्रत्यक्ष कर जुटाने की अपनी शक्तियां केंद्र को सौंप दीं और हस्तांतरणीय कर पूल में कमी करके तो उन्हें पुरस्कृत नहीं किया जा सकता है।

देश की आम राजनीतिक परिस्थितियों पर गौर करना भी आवश्यक है। हाल के वर्षों में देश के संघीय ढांचे को लेकर कई तरह के तनाव उभरे हैं। कई राज्य सरकारों द्वारा नागरिकता संशोधन अधिनियम को लागू करने के प्रति अनिच्छा इसका केवल एक उदाहरण है। अन्य उदाहरणों की बात करें तो अलग-अलग जनांकीय दबाव और देश के भौगोलिक क्षेत्र में सापेक्षिक राजनीतिक शक्ति में बदलाव भी हमारे सामने हैं। ऐसे में कहा जा सकता है कि राज्यों को अधिक वित्तीय संसाधन आवंटित करने की दशकों लंबी गतिशील प्रक्रिया में बदलाव करना राष्ट्रीय हित में नहीं होगा। इसे समझदारी नहीं माना जा सकता है।

अजय मोहंती

ब्रांड भारत और ब्रांड मोदी को झटका

आर्थिक पराभव और पहचान आधारित राजनीति ने ब्रांड भारत और ब्रांड मोदी दोनों को नुकसान पहुंचाया है।



राष्ट्र की बात

शेखर गुप्ता

क्या दुनिया हमेशा भारत को नीचा दिखाने के षडयंत्र में लगी रहती है? क्या बड़ी ताकतें, खासतौर पर पश्चिम के लोकतांत्रिक देश भारत के उभार से आशंकित हैं? पिछले कुछ समय से सरकार के प्रति आस्था रखने वालों में एक जुमला चल रहा है- हिंदू भारत के उदय के खिलाफ ईसाई-इस्लामिक षडयंत्र का जुमला। क्या शेष विश्व भारत तथा अन्य देशों मसलन चीन आदि के साथ अलग-अलग व्यवहार करते हैं?

उपरोक्त में से अंतिम को छोड़कर सारी बातें गलत हैं। अंतिम बात इसलिए सच है क्योंकि चीन की अर्थव्यवस्था का आकार हमसे बहुत बड़ा है। सच तो यह है कि अब तक के सात दशक में तमाम विश्व भारत की सफलता की कामना करता रहा है।

पाकिस्तान और चीन जैसे पारंपरिक शत्रुओं को छोड़ दिया जाए तो ऐसे देश का नाम लेना मुश्किल है जिसने भारत का भला न चाहा हो या जिसे भारत की नाकामी से लाभ हुआ हो। यह इस तथ्य के बावजूद है कि हम हर दशक में अपने बारे में अपेक्षाएं मजबूत करने और फिर न केवल खुद को बल्कि अपने वैश्विक प्रशंसकों तक को नीचा दिखाने की आदत सी डाल चुके हैं।

देश की आर्थिक प्रगति में आया ठहराव एक झटका है। बहरहाल, बड़ी दिक्कत यह है कि सामाजिक संकेतकों पर पिछड़ने, लोकतंत्र की रैंकिंग में गिरावट, भ्रष्टाचार में इजाफा, सीएए/एनआरसी को लेकर शांतिपूर्ण देशव्यापी प्रदर्शनों और सत्ता की ओर से आक्रामक,भेदभावपूर्ण और प्रतिशोधात्मक कार्रवाई के कारण आदि के कारण हमारा नैतिक कद घटा है।

शीतयुद्ध के बाद के तीन दशक में दावोस बैठकों में भारत भले ही पसंदीदा रहा हो या नहीं लेकिन उससे अपेक्षाएं की गईं। वह जिस प्रकार अपनी विविधता के साथ बढ़ता रहा, जिस लोकतांत्रिक ढंग से वहां सत्ता परिवर्तन हुआ, उसने अपनी सोच को आर्थिक और सामरिक दृष्टि से वैश्वीकृत किया। इन तीन दशकों में दुनिया के सामने कई बड़े संकट आए क्योंकि दुनिया के बाकी हिस्से यह सिलसिला दोहरा नहीं सके। बाल्कन देशों से लेकर पश्चिम एशिया और अफ्रीका तक इसके उदाहरण बिखरे हुए हैं।

सन 1991 के बाद के दौर में भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था तेजी से बढ़ी और ब्रांड इंडिया मजबूत हुआ। दुनिया अचरज में थी कि यह अराजक देश तो साल दर साल सामाजिक और राजनीतिक रूप से स्थिर होता जा रहा है और वैश्विक वृद्धि का वाहक बन गया है। चीन भारत से आगे था लेकिन वहां अधिनायकवादी शासन था। उसकी राजनीतिक अर्थव्यवस्था ऐसी थी जिसे कोई अपनाना नहीं चाहता था। पुतिन या ईरान के आयतुल्लाह तक नहीं। भारत इसके उलट था। यह पूरी दुनिया के सामने उदाहरण था कि कैसे बड़ा, विविधतापूर्ण देश लोकतांत्रिक तरीके से बल्कि लोकतंत्र के कारण आगे बढ़ रहा है। कल्पना कीजिए कि अगर भारत जैसे विविधतापूर्ण देश के पास उदार, लोकतांत्रिक, समावेशी राजनीतिक और सामाजिक संस्कृति नहीं होती तो उसका क्या होता?

यह सोवियत संघ, युगोस्लाविया या पश्चिमी एशिया की तरह खंड-खंड हो सकता था या रूस, तुर्की अथवा चीन की तरह अधिनायकवादी हो सकता था। तेजी से विकसित होता हुआ, सुरक्षित और स्थिर भारत अपनी गरीबी, विविधता और लाखों समस्याओं के बावजूद लोकतंत्र और उदारवाद का मूल्यवान वाहक था।

अब यह खतरे में है। भारत के दशकों पुराने दोस्त और प्रशंसक अब उसे संदेह की दृष्टि से देख रहे हैं। अक्सर यह सवाल सुनने को मिलता है कि भारत में चल क्या रहा है? क्या हालात और खराब होने वाले हैं? आप यहां तक पहुंचे कैसे? कोई विदेशी शक्ति, चाहे वह राजनीतिक हो या कॉर्पोरेट या नेता, वह भारत में आए इस ठहराव का जश्न नहीं मना रही। लेकिन हमारे मित्रों को लग रहा है कि कुछ तो दिक्कत है।

हम ऐसी स्थिति में नहीं हैं जिसे महानता से गिरावट की संज्ञा दी जा सके। इसलिए क्योंकि हमारे मित्र भी निहायत आशावादी हैं। उन्हें यकीन है कि तमाम झटकों के रूप में भारत का विचार कायम रहेगा। उन्हें इस बात से राहत मिलती है कि देश के कुछ बड़े संस्थान, कभी न्यायपालिका तो कभी मीडिया प्रतिरोध करते हैं। महिलाओं, युवाओं और मुस्लिमों का व्यापक प्रतिरोध आशा जगाता है। संदेश यही है कि हमारे यहां समस्या है। लेकिन दुनिया का दूसरा कौन सा देश होगा जहां इस स्थिति में भी पुरुष और स्त्रियां, मुस्लिम और हिंदू सड़कों पर एकत्रित होकर संविधान की प्रस्तावना का पाठ करते होंगे।

इसका एक अतिराष्ट्रवादी प्रतिरोध यह होगा कि यदि आप अपने जैसे लोगों से ही बात करेंगे जो आपकी तरह भ्रमित, वाम-उदारवादी हैं तो भला आप और क्या सुनेंगे? वे तो देश में पहली बार लोकतांत्रिक ढंग से चुनी गई दक्षिणपंथी हिंदू सरकार को लेकर अवमानना का भाव ही रखेंगे।

दो बातें समझने की आवश्यकता है। पहला, इस श्रेणी के लोग पारंपरिक रूप से सबसे बड़े भारत प्रेमी रहे हैं। सन 1991 के बाद देश के उदय की सराहना करने वालों में भी वे अव्वल रहे हैं और पाकिस्तान जनित आतंकवाद का विरोध करने वालों में भी। इन दशकों में उन्होंने पाकिस्तान को वैश्विक सरदर्द, जिहाद की पाठशाला और एक परेशान करने वाला देश ही माना है।

आज जब इमरान खान भारत की तुलना सन 1930 के दशक के नाजी जर्मनी से करते हैं तो ये खामोशी से देखते रहते हैं। वे सहमत नहीं हैं, न ही वे इसे सच होते देखना चाहते हैं लेकिन उन्हें पता नहीं कि भारत का बचाव कैसे किया जाए? वे अकादमिक लोगों और पत्रकारों को वीजा मिलने की समस्या की बात करते हैं, मीडिया पर दबाव की बात करते हैं और पूछते हैं कि भारत चीन की तरह व्यवहार क्यों कर रहा है?

दूसरा ये संदेह केवल बौद्धिकों, नीति जगत और मीडिया के मन में नहीं हैं। वैश्विक कारोबारी जगत भी चिंतित है। नीतिगत स्थिरता गायब हो चुकी है। नए कर और नियमन देखने को मिल रहे हैं। कर एवं नियामकीय प्रक्रियाओं और सबसे बढ़कर न्यायपालिका में अव्यवस्था देखने को मिली और अब आयात प्रतिस्थापन, स्वदेशी, छोटे व्यापारियों के बचाव को लेकर पुरानी समाजवादी व्यवस्था की वापसी नजर आ रही है। सबसे बढ़कर आपके मंत्री हमें फटकारते हैं। संक्षेप में कहें तो भारत एक चिड़चिड़े राष्ट्र में बदल रहा है। यह उन्हें पसंद नहीं।

अगले कदम में शायद हम एक सॉफ्ट पावर से हार्ड पावर बनने की ओर बढ़ जाएंगे। कहा जाएगा कि सन 2014 के बाद एक नया इतिहास शुरू हुआ है और यह भारत दूसरों को खुश करने के लिए पीछे नहीं हटता। यहां फिर दो समस्याएं सामने हैं।

पहली बात, यह बदलाव तभी हो सकता है जब आपने वैसी हार्ड पावर अर्जित की हो। अंतरराष्ट्रीय सामरिक जगत की समझ रखने वाले अच्छी तरह जानते हैं कि पुलवामा में हुए आतंकी हमले के बाद भारत निर्णायक प्रतिकार करने का हौसला रखता है लेकिन इसके साथ ही पाकिस्तान जैसे छोटे से देश को दंडित न कर पाने की हमारी कमजोरी भी उजागर हो गई। ऐसे में खुद को हार्ड पावर जताना अपरिपक्वता है।

दूसरा, मार्केटिंग की दुनिया का कोई भी व्यक्ति आपको बताएगा कि राष्ट्रों समेत तमाम ब्रांड की अपनी खासियत होती है। चीन के मामले में यह है सख्त, बेलागलपेट, सक्षम शासन, जातीय समरसता, सैन्य शक्ति और हर वर्ष दुनिया में सर्वाधिक लोगों को मृत्यु दंड देते हुए भी इसे गोपनीय बनाए रखना।

पाकिस्तान जो इन दिनों हमारा पसंदीदा संदर्भ बिंदु है, उसके बारे में तो बात न ही करें तो बेहतर है। भारत का बुनियादी ब्रांड मूल्य है लोकतंत्र, विविधतापूर्ण जीवन की सहजता, समावेशी शासन, तर्कपूर्ण और विचारपूर्ण समाज। भारत किसी भी दृष्टि से नरम राज्य नहीं है। अगर दूसरे विश्व युद्ध के बाद भारत इकलौते बड़े, विविधतापूर्ण देश के रूप में उभरा है जो अक्षुण्ण है और लगातार मजबूत हुआ है तो ऐसा हो भी नहीं सकता। तमाम अन्य देश मसलन सोवियत संघ से पाकिस्तान तक, चाहे जितने सख्त रहे हों, वे टूट गए। हमें इसे भारत के प्रति, खासकर हिंदुत्व के प्रति पश्चिम का पूर्वग्रह कहकर खारिज कर सकते हैं। इससे यह हकीकत नहीं बदलेगी कि पहचान की राजनीति और आर्थिक पराभव ने एक ब्रांड के रूप में भारत को नुकसान पहुंचाया है। इसका असर ब्रांड मोदी पर भी पड़ा है। हमें गहरी सांस लेकर सुधार शुरू करने की आवश्यकता है। हम कह सकते हैं कि हमें परवाह नहीं लेकिन 4.8 फीसदी की वृद्धि दर और 45 वर्ष की उच्चतम बेरोजगारी दर पर यह जवाब सही नहीं।

राजस्थान एवं गुजरात में टिड्डियों के हमले का कारण जलवायु परिवर्तन

जमीनी हकीकत

सुनीता नारायण

अब यह बिल्कुल स्पष्ट हो गया है कि ऑस्ट्रेलिया के जंगलों में भयंकर आग का कारण जलवायु परिवर्तन से जुड़ा है। इस आग से वहां की जमीन बुरी तरह झुलस गई तथा कई लोग और जंगली जानवर मारे गए हैं। वहां के जंगलों में आग लगना सामान्य है लेकिन इस भयानक आग का कारण यह था कि गर्मी का स्तर बढ़ रहा है। इस वजह से वहां मैदान सूख गए और स्थिति विकराल हो गई। लंबे समय से पड़ रहे सूखे के कारण वहां आग के लिए आदर्श स्थिति बन गई। लेकिन दुनिया का ध्यान ऑस्ट्रेलिया के जंगलों में लगी आग की तरफ था और दूसरी ओर हमारे यहां इससे भी बदतर मानवीय संकट पैदा हो गया। इसका संबंध भी जलवायु परिवर्तन से है।

दिसंबर में टिड्डियों के भारी भरकम झुंडों ने राजस्थान और गुजरात में फसलों को चौपट कर किसानों की आजीविका को बरबाद कर दिया। इससे फसलों को हुए नुकसान के बारे में अभी तक ज्यादा अनुमान नहीं है लेकिन सरकारों ने दिल्ली के आकार से लगभग तीन गुना अधिक क्षेत्र में कीटनाशकों का छिड़काव किया है। लेकिन ऑस्ट्रेलिया के जंगलों में लगी आग की तरह यह दलील दी जा सकती है कि इस क्षेत्र में टिड्डियों का हमला आम है तो फिर से हंगामा क्यों?

'डाउन टु अर्थ' पत्रिका में मेरे सहयोगियों ने अपनी जांच में पाया है कि जिस तरीके से टिड्डियों के हमले हो रहे हैं उसमें बदलाव आया है। इसकी वजह भारत ही नहीं बल्कि उन इलाकों में हो रही बेमौसमी बारिश है जहां टिड्डियां पनपती हैं। इनमें लाल सागर के तट से अरब प्रायद्वीप, ईरान और राजस्थान शामिल हैं। यह कीट बहुत तेजी से अपनी आबादी बढ़ाता है और टिड्डियों के एक औसत झुंड में 80 लाख तक कीट हो सकते हैं। यह झुंड एक दिन में 2,500 लोगों या 10 हाथियों के बराबर खाना खा सकता है। पहले प्रजनन काल में 20 गुना बढ़ता है। दूसरे प्रजनन काल में यह 400 गुना और तीसरे प्रजनन काल में 16,000 गुना बढ़ता है। इसका सीधा मतलब यह है कि अगर प्रजनन काल लंबा होगा तो इसकी संख्या में भारी इजाफा होगा। इसमें कोई आश्चर्य की बात नहीं है कि टिड्डियों का झुंड हमें अकाल की याद दिलाता है।

इस साल टिड्डियों के झुंड बहुत बड़े थे और इस वजह से ज्यादा तबाही हुई। क्यों? इसके कई कारण हैं जिनकी पड़ताल की जरूरत है। पहली वजह यह थी कि इस बार पाकिस्तान के सिंध प्रांत और पश्चिमी राजस्थान में बेमौसम बारिश हुई थी। भारत का मरुस्थल टिड्डियों के प्रजनन के लिए मुफीद जगह नहीं है। इन कीटों को अपना परिवार बढ़ाने के लिए गीली और हरी जमीन की जरूरत होती है। लेकिन पिछले साल इस इलाके में समय से पहले बारिश हुई। यही वजह थी कि मई 2019 में ही वहां टिड्डियों के हमले की खबरें आने लगी थी। लेकिन इन्हें नजरंदाज किया गया। इसके बाद मॉनसून ज्यादा लंबा खिंच गया। अक्टूबर तक इसकी वापसी नहीं हुई थी। बारिश जारी रही और कीट पश्चिम एशिया और अफ्रीका की ओर पलायन करने के बजाय यहीं जमे रहे और प्रजनन करते रहे।

दूसरी वजह यह रही कि मई 2018 में चक्रवाती तूफान मेकुनू और फिर अक्टूबर 2018 में चक्रवाती तूफान लुबान के कारण अरब प्रायद्वीप में भारी बारिश हुई। इससे मरुस्थल में झीलें बन गईं जो कीटों के प्रजनन के लिए आदर्श स्थिति है।

टिड्डियों ने इन गरीब और युद्ध प्रभावित क्षेत्रों में भारी तबाही मचाई लेकिन बाहरी दुनिया को इसकी जानकारी नहीं मिली। फिर लाल सागर के तटीय इलाकों में पिछले साल जनवरी में भारी बारिश हुई। यह भी बेमौसम बारिश थी। वहां बरसात का मौसम नौ महीने तक खिंच गया और इस दौरान टिड्डियों ने अपनी तादाद में भारी इजाफा किया।

टिड्डियों के प्रकोप पर काम कर रहे वैज्ञानिकों का कहना है कि इनकी संख्या इतनी बढ़ गई कि लाल सागर के तटीय इलाकों में पर्याप्त फसल नहीं हो पाई। साथ ही समुद्री चक्रवाती तूफानों और हवा के प्रवाह में बदलाव के कारण टिड्डियां भारत पहुंच गईं। अमूमन टिड्डियां मॉनसूनी हवाओं के साथ भारत आती हैं। वैज्ञानिकों का कहना है कि 2019 में टिड्डियां लाल सागर को पार करते हुए अफ्रीका और फारस की खाड़ी से होते हुए ईरान पहुंचीं। सर्दियों में टिड्डियों का दल ईरान में आराम करता है। वहां से उन्होंने भयंकर झुंडों के रूप में पाकिस्तान और भारत का रुख किया।

टिड्डियों के झुंड ने जब गुजरात और राजस्थान के बाद पाकिस्तान और ईरान की ओर लौटना शुरू किया तो तीसरी पीढ़ी के कीट पैदा हो चुके थे। इनका जन्म राजस्थान में मॉनसून की अवधि बढ़ने के कारण हुआ था। यही वजह है कि इस साल नुकसान अधिक हुआ है। किसान बुरी स्थिति में हैं। अब इस बात के पर्याप्त सबूत हैं कि इस क्षेत्र में बेमौसम बारिश या बार-बार समुद्री चक्रवाती तूफान आने की वजह जलवायु परिवर्तन से जुड़ी है। इसलिए इस बात को समझना मुश्किल नहीं है कि परस्पर निर्भर और वैश्वीकृत दुनिया में हमें क्या देखने को मिल रहा है। यह केवल लोगों या पूंजी के प्रवाह के बारे में नहीं है। यह केवल ग्रीनहाउस गैसों के बारे में नहीं हैं जो किसी सीमाओं में नहीं बंधी हैं। इसका संबंध जलवायु परिवर्तन के कारण कीटों के प्रकोप और कीटों के हमलों के वैश्वीकरण से है।

लेकिन हमारी असमान और सूचना-विभाजित दुनिया में जो बात इसे ज्यादा घातक बनाती है, वह यह है कि हम ऑस्ट्रेलिया के जंगलों की आग के बारे में तो जानते हैं लेकिन अपने इलाके में हो रहे टिड्डियों के हमले से अनभिज्ञ हैं। हम यह संबंध नहीं बना रहे हैं। अफ्रीका से एशिया तक हम अपने लोगों का दर्द नहीं समझ सकते हैं जो पहले से ही जलवायु से जुड़े जोखिम वाले भविष्य में जी रहे हैं। इसलिए उन्हें जलवायु परिवर्तन के बारे में बताने या भाषण देने की बात भूल जाइए। इस समस्या से निपटने के लिए मिलकर काम कीजिए। इसकी समस्या हम हैं। वे हमसे पीड़ित हैं। यह ठीक नहीं है।

(लेखक सेंटर फॉर साइंस ऐंड एनवॉयरनमेंट से संबद्ध हैं)

कानाफूसी

पत्रकारों की मुश्किल

पहली बार केंद्रीय मंत्रिमंडल में शामिल एक मंत्री की मीडिया टीम और उनके मंत्रालय से संबद्ध पत्र सूचना कार्यालय की टीम के बीच तालमेल की कमी ने संबंधित बीट कवर करने वाले पत्रकारों के लिए भ्रम और देरी की स्थिति निर्मित कर दी है। यह इससे पहले वाले मंत्री की स्थिति से एकदम उलट है। उनकी व्यक्तिगत मीडिया टीम मंत्रालय के कदमों को लेकर अग्रिम जानकारी का प्रमुख जरिया थी। नए मंत्री की मीडिया टीम काम संभालने के कई महीने बाद भी अभी तक ठीक से सहज नहीं हो पाई है। इसका खमियाजा पत्रकारों को उठाना पड़ रहा है क्योंकि मीडिया टीम उनसे बात करते हुए भी अतिरिक्त सतर्कता बरतती है। सवाल यह है कि कहीं यह मंत्रालय भी वित्त मंत्रालय की राह पर तो नहीं चल निकलेगा जिसने गत वर्ष जुलाई से ही पत्रकारों का प्रवेश प्रतिबंधित कर रखा है।

बेरोजगारी रजिस्टर!

नागरिकता संशोधन अधिनियम (सीएए) और राष्ट्रीय जनसंख्या रजिस्टर (एनपीआर) का मसला इन दिनों मीडिया पर छाया हुआ है। कांग्रेस ने इस सिलसिले में राष्ट्रीय बेरोजगारी रजिस्टर (एनयूआर) शीर्षक से एक अभियान शुरू किया है। इस अभियान के तहत पार्टी के कार्यकर्ता उत्तर प्रदेश के हर जिले में बेरोजगार युवाओं के आंकड़े जुटाएंगे। बाद में इस आंकड़े को राज्य स्तर पर और राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर एकत्रित किया जाएगा। इसका इस्तेमाल सत्ताधारी भारतीय जनता पार्टी पर हमला करने के लिए किया जाएगा। युवा कांग्रेस की उत्तर प्रदेश इकाई ने इस सिलसिले में अभियान शुरू भी कर दिया है। पार्टी ने इस संबंध में एक मोबाइल नंबर भी जारी किया है। बेरोजगार युवा उस पर मिस्ड कॉल देकर अपना पंजीयन एनयूआर में करा सकते हैं।

आपका पक्ष

सीएए के लिए क्यों नहीं जाते अदालत

देश की संसद ने नागरिकता संशोधन कानून (सीएए) पारित किया है। इस कानून के तहत पाकिस्तान, बांग्लादेश और अफगानिस्तान में धार्मिक प्रताड़ना झेल रहे गैर मुस्लिम लोगों को भारत में नागरिकता मिल सकेगी। इस कानून का अभी बीज ही बोया गया है। जब तक यह फल नहीं देने लगे तब तक इसका आकलन करना उचित नहीं है। वहीं नागरिकता संशोधन कानून जब तक पूरे देश में लागू नहीं हो जाता तथा सर्वोच्च न्यायालय में इस मामले पर फैसला नहीं हो जाता तब तक इसका विरोध करना नासमझी ही होगी। भारत दुनिया का सबसे बड़ा लोकतांत्रिक देश है। लोकतंत्र की मजबूती के लिए जितनी मुख्य भूमिका लोगों द्वारा चुनी गई सरकार की होती है, उतनी ही लोकतंत्र की सुरक्षा के लिए विपक्ष की भी जरूरत होती है। लेकिन वर्तमान में देश की राजनीति अवसरवाद की शिकार होती दिख रही है। इसलिए राजनीतिक पार्टियों को न तो संविधान की चिंता है और न ही न्यायपालिका पर भरोसा रह गया है। सीएए पर विपक्षी पार्टियां अपने वोट बैंक को ध्यान में रखते हुए धर्म विशेष के लोगों को गुमराह कर रही हैं। नागरिकता संशोधन कानून को संसद ने पारित कर दिया है जिसके बाद इसे असंवैधानिक नहीं कहा जा सकता है। लेकिन संसद से पारित किसी कानून को लेकर अगर कोई उच्चतम न्यायालय में चुनौती दे तो अदालत उसकी संवैधानिकता पर फैसला लेने के लिए तैयार हो सकता है। केरल सरकार ने सीएए को लेकर अदालत की शरण ली है। ऐसे लोग जो सीएए को राजनीति के चश्मे से देख रहे हैं, उन्हें इस पर विचार करना चाहिए कि देश का सर्वोच्च न्यायालय न तो किसी सरकार की और न ही किसी धर्म विशेष के लोगों की हाथ की कठपुतली है। अत: हिंसा के साथ विरोध करने वालों को अदालत की शरण लेनी चाहिए जिससे विरोध के नाम पर हिंसा पर रोक लग सके।

राजेश कुमार चौहान, जालंधर

सीएए के विरोध में हिंसा के खिलाफ कई प्रबुद्ध लोगों ने राष्ट्रपति को पत्र लिखा था

सरकारी अस्पतालों की बदहाली दूर हो

सरकारी अस्पतालों में किसी मरीज को इलाज के लिए पहले ओपीडी से 15 रुपये की पर्ची बनानी पड़ती है जिसके बाद डॉक्टर मरीज की जांच करते हैं। निजी डॉक्टरों को दिखाने की फीस तकरीबन 400 रुपये हैं। सरकारी अस्पतालों में किसी भी बीमारी की दवा मुफ्त में मिल जाती है। सरकारी अस्पताल में फीस का कम होना तथा मुफ्त में दवा मिलना इनकी बदहाली का एक कारण हो सकता है। सरकारी अस्पतालों की बदहाली दूर करने के लिए केवल गरीबों का इलाज मुफ्त में करना चाहिए। इसके लिए गरीबों की परिभाषा तय करने की जरूरत है। एक निश्चित आय वर्ग को अर्थात गरीबी रेखा से नीचे रह रहे लोगों का ही इलाज मुफ्त होना चाहिए। इसके अलावा अस्पतालों की देखभाल का जिम्मा शहर के नगर निगम तथा नगरपालिका को दे देनी चाहिए। बहरहाल सरकारी अस्पताल के कारण ही लाखों गरीब लोगों का मुफ्त इलाज हो पाता है तथा गंभीर रोग का भी इलाज होने से गरीब मरीजों की जान बच जाती है।

राकेश जैन, सतना

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

दैनिक जागरण
स्वयं को जानने से बड़ा कोई और ज्ञान नहीं

एयर इंडिया की बिक्री

सरकारी एयरलाइंस एयर इंडिया को बेचने की एक और पहल समय की मांग है। घाटे में डूबी किसी कंपनी को इस आधार पर चलाते रहने का कोई मतलब नहीं कि वह एक सार्वजनिक उपक्रम है। यह सही है कि एयर इंडिया एक बड़ा ब्रांड है और उसे खास सरकारी कंपनी होने का तमगा भी हासिल है, लेकिन अगर ऐसी कोई कंपनी खजाने पर बोझ बन जाए तो फिर उसे चलाते रहना न तो आर्थिक दृष्टि से समझदारी है और न ही प्रशासनिक नजरिये से। सरकार का काम उद्योग-धंधे चलाना नहीं होता। उसका काम तो ऐसे नियम-कानून और साथ ही निगरानी व्यवस्था बनाना होता है जिससे हर तरह के उद्योग-धंधे सही तरह से चल सकें। इनमें एयरलाइंस भी शामिल हैं। बेहतर हो कि सरकार अपनी विनिवेश नीति को धार दे और इसके पहले कि अन्य सार्वजनिक उपक्रमों की स्थिति डांवाडोल हो, उनका विनिवेश किया जाए। उसे इससे अवगत होना चाहिए कि यदि कोई सरकारी कंपनी घाटे की चपेट में आ जाती है तो फिर उसका विनिवेश तो मुश्किल से होता ही है, अपेक्षित राजस्व भी नहीं मिल पाता। उसे इससे भी परिचित होना चाहिए कि सेवा क्षेत्र की सरकारी संस्थाएं निजी संस्थाओं का मुकाबला नहीं कर सकतीं।

किसी भी ऐसी सरकारी कंपनी का विनिवेश करना ही बेहतर है जो घाटे से उबर न पा रही हो। एयर इंडिया इसी तरह की एक कंपनी है। उसका सालाना घाटा बढ़ता जा रहा है। यदि उसके विनिवेश में और देरी हुई तो ऐसी भी नौबत आ सकती है कि उसे बंद करना पड़े। मोदी सरकार ने दो वर्ष पहले भी एयर इंडिया को बेचने की कोशिश की थी, लेकिन तब केवल 76 फीसदी हिस्सेदारी बेचने का फैसला किया था और साथ ही भारी-भरकम बकाया राशि चुकाने की शर्त लगाई थी। माना जाता है कि इसी कारण कोई खरीदार आगे नहीं आया। इस बार सरकार ने सौ प्रतिशत हिस्सेदारी बेचने का इरादा जाहिर करने के साथ ही बोली की शर्तों को आसान किया है। देखना है कि ये आसान शर्तें एयर इंडिया के विनिवेश को आसान बनाती हैं या नहीं? जो भी हो, यह हैरानी की बात है कि उदारीकरण को आगे बढ़ाने और विनिवेश नीति का श्रीगणेश करने वाली कांग्रेस एयर इंडिया की बिक्री की पहल का विरोध कर रही है। यह दिखावे की राजनीति के अलावा और कुछ नहीं। कम से कम कांग्रेस को तो इससे अच्छी तरह परिचित होना ही चाहिए कि आर्थिक मामलों में दिखावे की इसी राजनीति ने सार्वजनिक उपक्रमों की हालत खस्ता की है। सरकारी संपत्ति बेचने पर हाय-तौबा मचाना इसलिए व्यर्थ है, क्योंकि विनिवेश के जरिये हासिल राजस्व अर्थव्यवस्था को गति देने में ही इस्तेमाल होता है।

जानलेवा चाइनीज डोर

पंजाब में एक दूसरे की पतंग काटने लिए गैरकानूनी तरीके से इस्तेमाल की जा रही चाइनीज डोर जिंदगी की डोर काटने लगी है। कहीं यह डोर बिजली की अच्छी सुचालक होने का उदाहरण पेश करते हुए सांसों को झटका दे रही है तो कहीं यह कसाई की भूमिका निभाते हुए लोगों के गले काट रही है। दूसरी ओर, पुलिस और प्रशासन पंजाब एवं हरियाणा उच्च न्यायालय के आदेशों पर चाइनीज डोर की बिक्री और इसके चलन को रोक पाने में असफल साबित हो रहे हैं। राज्य में लगभग हर रोज लोग इस जानलेवा डोर के साथ पतंगबाजी कर रहे हैं और जख्मी भी हो रहे हैं, इसके बावजूद इस डोर से खूनी खेल खेलने वालों पर नकेल नहीं कसी जा रही रही है। यही वजह है कि गत दिनों इस डोर से जालंधर एवं बठिंडा में भी दो लोगों के गले कट गए। शुक्र है कि दोनों की जान बच गई। जालंधर में जिस व्यक्ति का गला कटा है वह अपने दोपहिया वाहन पर घर से सैलून पर काम के लिए जा रहा था। दोमोरिया पुल रेलवे ओवरब्रिज पर उसके गले में चाइनीज डोर लिपट गई। जब तक वह संभलता उसकी गर्दन पर गहरा कट लग गया। लोगों ने तुरंत खून से लथपथ व्यक्ति को अस्पताल पहुंचाया। इसी तरह बठिंडा में एक बुजुर्ग स्कूटर से बस स्टैंड की तरफ जा रहा था कि रास्ते में खूनी डोर ने उसे अपना शिकार बना डाला। बुजुर्ग की गर्दन बुरी तरह से कट गई। डोर से होने वाले हादसे कोई नए नहीं हैं, इससे पहले भी विगत कुछ वर्षों पर नजर डालें तो कई लोग अपनी जान गंवा चुके हैं और कई लोग इससे अपने अंग कटवाकर इसके खतरनाक होने की गवाही दे रहे हैं। लोग फिर भी मान नहीं रहे हैं और खतरे से खेलकर खुद तो जोखिम उठा ही रहे हैं साथ ही दूसरों की जान को भी खतरे में डाल रहे हैं। पंजाब में गांव से लेकर शहरों तक सब जगह प्रतिबंधित चाइनीज डोर चोर दरवाजे से बिक रही है, पतंगबाजी के लिए इसका इस्तेमाल भी सरेआम हो रहा है और हर रोज लोग इससे लहूलुहान होकर अस्पतालों में पहुंच रहे हैं, परंतु बड़ी हैरानी की बात है कि पुलिस और प्रशासन को न तो कहीं पर चाइनीज डोर बिकती हुई मिल रही है और न ही इससे जख्मी होने वाले लोग नजर आ रहे हैं। सरकार को चाहिए कि वह चाइनीज डोर की बिक्री और इस्तेमाल के खिलाफ सख्त कदम उठाए।

पंजाब में गांव से लेकर शहरों तक सब जगह प्रतिबंधित चाइनीज डोर चोर दरवाजे से बिक रही है, पतंगबाजी के लिए इसका इस्तेमाल भी सरेआम हो रहा है

नए सिरे से विचार हो मुक्त व्यापार पर

डॉ. भरत झुनझुनवाला

प्रत्येक देश को अपनी स्थिति एवं अपने हितों के अनुसार उन खास देशों से विदेश व्यापार को बढ़ाना चाहिए जिससे उन्हें परस्पर लाभ होता दिखे

बजट का एक प्रमुख विषय विदेशी व्यापार का होता है। बजट में सरकार तय करती है कि विदेशों से आयातित हो रहे माल पर कितना आयात कर लगाया जाए और विदेशों से आ रहे निवेश को कितनी सहूलियत दी जाए। इस विषय पर आज हमारे सामने दो विरोधाभासी विकल्प उपलब्ध हैं। यदि हम मुक्त व्यापार को अपनाते हैं तो हमें आयात कर घटाना होगा और विदेशी निवेश को सहूलियतें देनी होंगी। इसके विपरीत यदि हम मानते हैं कि घरेलू उद्योगों को संरक्षण देने से लाभ होगा तो हम आयात कर बढ़ाएंगे और घरेलू पूंजी को बाहर जाने से रोकने का प्रयास करेंगे। खुले व्यापार के पक्ष में चीन का उदाहरण सामने है। 1995 में विश्व व्यापार संगठन यानी डब्ल्यूटीओ की स्थापना के समय चीन इस संस्था का सदस्य नहीं था। बड़ी मशक्कत के बाद चीन उसका सदस्य बना। चीन के आर्थिक विकास में डब्ल्यूटीओ ने चार चांद लगाए। इसीलिए अर्थशास्त्रियों का एक वर्ग मानता है कि हमें मुक्त व्यापार को अपनाना चाहिए जैसा कि चीन ने किया। हालांकि विचारणीय यह भी है कि चीन के आर्थिक विकास का स्रोत मुक्त व्यापार है या घरेलू बचत? 2008 में हमारी घरेलू बचत दर 37 प्रतिशत थी और चीन की 51 प्रतिशत। घरेलू बचत उस रकम को बोलते हैं जिसकी हम खपत न करके निवेश करते हैं। वर्तमान में भारत की घरेलू बचत दर घटकर 31 प्रतिशत और चीन की घटकर 46 प्रतिशत हो गई है। चीन की तुलना में हम ज्यादा खपत और निवेश कम कर रहे हैं। मेरे खयाल से चीन के आर्थिक विकास का मुख्य स्रोत डब्ल्यूटीओ की सदस्यता न होकर यही घरेलू बचत दर है। इसके अन्य प्रमाण भी उपलब्ध हैं।

जर्मनी की बर्तल्स्मान संस्था द्वारा डब्ल्यूटीओ के 25 वर्षों के प्रभाव का आकलन किया गया। उनके अनुसार भारत और चीन, दोनों पर इसका सकारात्मक प्रभाव पड़ा है। चीन की जनता के जीवन स्तर में डब्ल्यूटीओ का योगदान मात्र 0.65 प्रतिशत रहा है जबकि भारत में 2.68 प्रतिशत। यह महत्वपूर्ण इसलिए है, क्योंकि चीन ने खुले व्यापार को पुरजोर तरीके से अपनाया जबकि भारत ने कम ही अपनाया है। दोनों देशों के निर्यात में वृद्धि अवश्य हुई है, लेकिन उसका असर जनता के जीवन स्तर पर भारत में अधिक पड़ा है। अतः कम विदेशी व्यापार से जीवन स्तर में अधिक सुधार हुआ। इसलिए अधिक विदेशी व्यापार को चीन की जनता के जीवन स्तर में सुधार का कारण नहीं बताया जा सकता। उसका वास्तविक कारण चीन की घरेलू बचत दर है। भारत की घरेलू बचत दर कम होने के बावजूद हमारी जनता के जीवन स्तर में सुधार अधिक हुआ है, क्योंकि हमने मुक्त व्यापार को कम अपनाया है।

चीन को मुक्त व्यापार से कम लाभ होने का दूसरा प्रमाण यह है कि इसी माह चीन ने अमेरिका के साथ एक द्विपक्षीय समझौता किया। चीन ने अमेरिका को आश्वासन दिया है कि वह अमेरिका से कुछ वस्तुओं का आयात बढ़ाएगा। इसके बदले में अमेरिका ने कहा है कि वह चीन से आयातित होने वाली वस्तुओं पर लगाए आयात कर को घटाएगा। इस बीच बड़ा सवाल यही है कि इन देशों को डब्ल्यूटीओ के दायरे से बाहर जाकर द्विपक्षीय समझौते की जरूरत क्यों पड़ी?

यदि चीन का मुक्त व्यापार मंत्र ही सही है तो चीन अपने आयात कर घटाकर संपूर्ण विश्व से आयातों को बढ़ा सकता था, लेकिन डब्ल्यूटीओ की बहुराष्ट्रीय व्यवस्था के अंतर्गत व्यापार को संचालित करने के स्थान पर इन दोनों देशों ने द्विपक्षीय समझौता किया है। यह समझौता खुले व्यापार का लाभ हासिल करने के लिए नहीं, बल्कि अमेरिका और चीन के सामरिक स्वार्थों से कहीं अधिक प्रेरित है। या फिर हम कह सकते हैं कि उन्होंने खुले व्यापार को उपयुक्त नहीं माना, इसीलिए उन्होंने सभी देशों के लिए खुले व्यापार को अपनाने के बजाय आपस में खोलने तक सीमित रखा है। इसका अर्थ हुआ कि डब्ल्यूटीओ की व्यवस्था में मुक्त व्यापार लाभप्रद नहीं रह गया है। प्रत्येक देश को अपनी स्थिति एवं अपने हितों के अनुसार उन खास देशों से विदेश व्यापार को बढ़ाना चाहिए जिससे उन्हें परस्पर लाभ होता दिखे। इस तरह देखें तो मुक्त व्यापार का सिद्धांत अनुपयुक्त हो गया है।

अवधेश राजपूत

ऑब्जर्वर रिसर्च फाउंडेशन की जयश्री सेनगुप्ता के अनुसार भारत के कई देशों विशेषकर आसियान देशों के साथ द्विपक्षीय व्यापार समझौते हो चुके हैं। यानी डब्ल्यूटीओ से बाहर आ जाने पर भारत को कोई विशेष नुकसान नहीं। इसके कई कारण हैं। पहला यह कि आसियान की तर्ज पर हम दूसरे प्रमुख देशों के साथ द्विपक्षीय समझौते कर अपने व्यापार को अपेक्षित दिशा में ले जा सकते हैं। दूसरा यह कि डब्ल्यूटीओ से बाहर निकलकर हम अपने चिन्हित उद्योगों को संरक्षण दे सकेंगे। छोटे उद्योगों को इसका सबसे अधिक लाभ मिलेगा। इससे रोजगार के अवसर सृजित होंगे और अर्थव्यवस्था में जमीनी स्तर पर मांग बढ़ेगी जो वृद्धि दर को तेजी देने का काम करेगी। डब्ल्यूटीओ से बाहर निकलकर हमें मौजूदा पेटेंट एक्ट के मकड़जाल से भी मुक्ति के रूप में तीसरा फायदा मिलेगा। हम विदेशी कंपनियों के उत्पादों की नकल करके उन्हें यहां भी बना सकेंगे। इससे देसी कंपनियों के लिए अवसर बढ़ेंगे और रॉयल्टी की मद में देश से बाहर जा रही रकम बचेगी। इसका चौथा लाभ पर्यावरण के मोर्चे पर मिलेगा। असल में खुले व्यापार में उसकी जीत होती है जो अपने पर्यावरण को सर्वाधिक नष्ट करता है। जैसे चीन ने अपनी नदियों और हवा को प्रदूषित करने की पूरी छूट दे दी। चीन के सस्ते उत्पादों की एक वजह यह भी है। पर्यावरण की इस क्षति से चीन में उत्पादन लागत कम आती है और वह विश्व व्यापार में आगे है। यदि हम डब्ल्यूटीओ से बाहर आते हैं तो हम चीन के सस्ते माल पर भारी आयात कर लगाकर उसके आयात को रोक सकेंगे। तब हमें भी अपने पर्यावरण को नष्ट करके सस्ता माल बनाने की होड़ में पड़ने की जरूरत नहीं होगी।

पांचवां कारण यह है कि भविष्य में विश्व व्यापार का विस्तार मुख्य रूप से सेवा क्षेत्र में होगा। यह क्षेत्र मूल रूप से डब्ल्यूटीओ से बाहर है। इसीलिए हमारी सेवाओं के निर्यात पर डब्ल्यूटीओ से बाहर आने का कोई प्रभाव नहीं पड़ेगा। इन फायदों को देखते हुए देश को डब्ल्यूटीओ से बाहर आकर संरक्षणवाद की नीति अपनानी चाहिए। इसी के साथ आधुनिक तकनीकों का आयात किया जाए ताकि देश तकनीकी रूप से पीछे न रह जाए और घरेलू प्रतिस्पर्धा को बढ़ाया जाए। इससे हम विश्वस्तरीय उत्पाद बनाने के साथ ही घरेलू उद्योगों को संरक्षण भी दे सकेंगे।

(लेखक आर्थिक मामलों के जानकार हैं)

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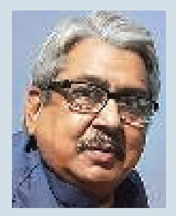
अभिव्यक्ति की आजादी का घातक इस्तेमाल



हरेंद्र प्रताप

दिल्ली का शाहीन बाग हो या ऐसे ही अन्य धरना स्थल, उनमें सक्रिय शरजील जैसे तत्व चेहरा भर हैं

नागरिकता संशोधन कानून (सीएए) का कांग्रेस समेत तमाम विपक्षी दलों की ओर से विरोध प्रदर्शन जारी है। इस क्रम में वे तमाम संवैधानिक मर्यादाओं को ताक पर रखने में भी संकोच नहीं कर रहे हैं। आलम यह है कि पंजाब, केरल, बंगाल, राजस्थान आदि राज्य इसके खिलाफ प्रस्ताव पारित कर केंद्र की शक्ति को खुलेआम चुनौती दे रहे हैं। इस तरह वे देश के मुसलमानों के मन में बेवजह का डर फैलाकर अपना वोट बैंक दुरुस्त करने की कुटिल सोच को ही जाहिर कर रहे हैं, लेकिन उनका यह कदम देशहित पर भारी पड़ता प्रतीत हो रहा है। दरअसल इसके दुष्प्रभाव दूसरे रूप में नजर आ रहे हैं। मुसलमानों के मन में उनके द्वारा बैठाए गए भय का फायदा कट्टरपंथी ताकतें उठाती नजर आ रही हैं। बिहार के जहानाबाद के रहने वाले जेएनयू के छात्र शरजील इमाम का जो वीडियो सामने आया है वह इस बात की पुष्टि कर रहा है। अपने वीडियो में वह साफ-साफ असम को शेष भारत से काटने के लिए 'चिकन नेक' कहे जाने वाले सिलीगुड़ी गलियारे को बाधित करने की बात कह रहा है। उसने जिस 'चिकन नेक' गलियारे को बंद कर असम को शेष देश से काटने की बात की है वहां से बिहार का किशनगंज जिला कुछ ही दूरी पर है और किशनगंज से बांग्लादेश की दूरी मात्र 22 किलोमीटर है।

पूर्वोत्तर के आठों राज्य-सिक्किम, अरुणाचल प्रदेश, नगालैंड, मणिपुर, मिजोरम, त्रिपुरा, मेघालय, असम इसी 'चिकन नेक' के जरिये शेष भारत से जुड़े हैं। ऐसे में इसके महत्व का अंदाजा इसी से लगा सकते हैं। दरअसल सामरिक दृष्टि से महत्वपूर्ण किशनगंज बिहार का एकमात्र मुस्लिम बहुल जिला है जिसे लालू प्रसाद यादव ने अपने शासनकाल में पूर्णिया जिला से काटकर बनाया था। आजादी के समय इस जिले का किशनगंज प्रखंड हिंदू बहुल था। 1961 में किशनगंज प्रखंड में मुस्लिमों की आबादी 46 प्रतिशत थी जो अब बढ़कर लगभग 61 प्रतिशत हो गई है। हाल में बिहार विधानसभा के लिए हुए उपचुनावों में किशनगंज विधानसभा से असदुद्दीन ओवैसी की पार्टी का एक उम्मीदवार चुनाव जीता है। यह जगजाहिर है कि बिहार के पूर्वी और बंगाल के उत्तरी-पूर्वी जिले घुसपैठ प्रभावित हैं। पाकिस्तान के पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री जुल्फिकार अली भुट्टो ने 'मिथ ऑफ इंडिपेंडेंस' में लिखा है कि 'पाकिस्तान का भारत के साथ मतभेद केवल कश्मीर को लेकर नहीं है, बल्कि असम, बंगाल और बिहार के सीमावर्ती जिले जो बांग्लादेश (पूर्वी पाकिस्तान) से सटे हुए हैं, उन्हें लेकर भी है।' इस कथन के संदर्भ में देखें तो आजादी के बाद जिस प्रकार योजनाबद्ध ढंग से बांग्लादेशी घुसपैठिये भारत आ रहे हैं, उसके कारण भारत के लिए खतरा गहराता जा रहा है। यहां यह भी जानना महत्वपूर्ण होगा कि जिस प्रकार बिहार के किशनगंज और बंगाल के दिनाजपुर, मालदा एवं मुर्शिदाबाद मुस्लिम बहुल जिले हैं उसी प्रकार असम में बोगाईगांव, धुबरी, ग्वालपाड़ा, बारपेटा आदि भी मुस्लिम बहुल जिले हैं। इन्हीं से होकर असम और अन्य पूर्वोत्तर राज्यों में जाया जा सकता है। वर्ष 1961 का ग्वालपाड़ा जिला आज ग्वालपाड़ा, कोकराझार, बोगाईगांव तथा धुबरी जिलों के रूप में बंट गया है। किशनगंज प्रखंड की तरह ही यहां भी मुस्लिमों की जनसंख्या तेजी से बढ़ी है।

रेलवे मार्ग से पूर्वोत्तर राज्यों की ओर जाने वाले लोगों को मालूम है कि कोकराझार के बाद आने वाला प्रमुख स्टेशन बोगाईगांव है। तेल और प्राकृतिक गैस, रिफाइनरी के लिए प्रसिद्ध बोगाईगांव जिला 2001 तक हिंदू बहुल था, लेकिन फिर वह मुस्लिम बहुल जिला इसलिए हो गया, क्योंकि पुराने बोगाईगांव जिले के हिंदू बहुल हिस्से को काटकर एक नया जिला चिरांग बना दिया गया। मुस्लिम बहुल जिलों से गैर मुस्लिमों के पलायन का सिलसिला कायम है। बोगाईगांव में 1991-2001 के बीच हिंदुओं की आबादी मात्र 3.6 प्रतिशत की दर से बढ़ना इसका सुबूत है। पूर्वोत्तर राज्यों के लिए न्यू जलपाईगुड़ी रेलवे स्टेशन का महत्व किसी से छिपा नहीं है। भारत-चीन सीमा पर तैनात देश के जवान इसी स्टेशन पर आकर ट्रेन पकड़ते हैं। 1999 के कारगिल युद्ध के समय 22 जून को इस स्टेशन पर एक भयानक बम विस्फोट हुआ था, जिसमें 10 लोग मारे गए थे और 80 के करीब घायल हुए थे। उस दौरान किशनगंज-न्यू जलपाईगुड़ी के रेलवे ट्रैक पर भी बम रखे गए थे जिस पर समय रहते एक किसान की नजर पड़ गई और एक बड़ी दुर्घटना टल गई थी। शरजील इमाम एएमयू में इसी किशनगंज-न्यू जलपाईगुड़ी रेलवे लाइन को बाधित करने की हिदायत दे रहा था।

यह दिखाता है कि नागरिकता कानून में हुए संशोधन और एनआरसी तैयार करने की चर्चा से डरे घुसपैठियों के वापस बांग्लादेश लौटने की आ रही खबरों से देश में वोटबैंक के सौदागर तिलमिला उठे हैं। यह मानने के अच्छे-भले कारण हैं कि भारत को पुनः तोड़ने का सपना देख रहे पाकिस्तान परस्त भी अपनी खोह से निकलकर सक्रिय हो रहे हैं। दिल्ली का शाहीन बाग हो या ऐसे ही अन्य धरना स्थल, उनमें सक्रिय शरजील इमाम तो एक चेहरा भर है। पर्दे के पीछे ऐसे अनेक चेहरे छुपे हैं जो पाकिस्तानी नेता जुल्फिकार अली भुट्टो के सपने को साकार करने के लिए मौके का इंतजार कर रहे हैं। हालांकि मोदी सरकार के मजबूत सुरक्षा घेरे के आगे वे अपनी बाजी हारते जा रहे हैं। नागरिकता कानून के विरोध में धरने पर बैठे जो लोग संविधान की दुहाई दे रहे हैं उन्हें पता होना चाहिए कि भारत के संविधान की प्रस्तावना में 'राष्ट्र की एकता और अखंडता सुनिश्चित करने' की बात कही गई है। इसका अर्थ है कि यह संविधान अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता उन्हीं को देता है, जिनका इस देश की एकता और अखंडता में विश्वास है। ऐसे में अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता के नाम पर दिए गए शरजील इमाम के बयान को हल्के में न लिया जाए। शरजील इमाम के साथ-साथ उसके शातिर साथियों को भी बेनकाब करना समय की मांग है।

(लेखक बिहार विधान परिषद के पूर्व सदस्य हैं)

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ऊर्जा

संबंधों का इंद्रजाल

परमात्मा हर जीव को जन्म देता है। उसके पोषण की व्यवस्था करता है और नियत अवधि के बाद उसका जीवन हर लेता है। सृष्टि का चक्र इन तीन बिंदुओं पर ही टिका हुआ है। इस दृष्टि से एक ही शाश्वत संबंध है जो परमात्मा और जीव के मध्य स्थापित होता है। परमात्मा न चाहे तो जीव का जन्म ही न हो। इस इच्छा के लिए परमात्मा से दिन-रात प्रार्थना करने वालों की कमी नहीं है। विडंबना यह है कि जीव जन्म लेते ही उस शाश्वत संबंध को भुला देता है और अपने बनाए संबंधों के जाल में उलझकर रह जाता है। उसे माता-पिता, भाई-बहन, पत्नी, बेटी-बेटा, मित्र आदि ही दिखाई देने लगते हैं। इन संबंधों की औपचारिकता निभाने में इतना समय निकल जाता है कि परमात्मा से संबंध निभाना तो दूर याद करने का समय नहीं बचता।

यदि हम अपने मूल संबंध के प्रति निष्ठावान नहीं हैं तो हम किसी अन्य संबंध को भी निष्ठा से निभाने योग्य नहीं हैं। परमात्मा से संबंध की चिंता न करने का ही फल है कि आज निकट से निकट संबंध में खोट दिखाई दे रहा है। सारे संबंध स्वार्थों पर टिके हैं। जब वे स्वार्थ पूरे नहीं होते तो संबंध पल भर में ध्वस्त हो जाते हैं। बाहर से सामान्य दिखने वाले सारे संबंध मन की गहराइयों में कहीं न कहीं दरके हुए हैं। जब ये दरके संबंध दबाव नहीं सह पाते तो सामाजिक विघटन दिखने लगता है। जब जड़ें सूखने लगें तो पेड़ कितने दिनों तक हरा-भरा रह सकता है। हम एक भयावह स्थिति की ओर बढ़ रहे हैं। इसका एक ही समाधान है अपने मूल संबंध की जड़ों को फिर से हरा-भरा करना।

परमात्मा ने जीवन दिया। जीवित रहने के लिए सांसें दे रहा है। इससे बड़ा कारण और क्या हो सकता उसके प्रति आभारी होने का। हर एक सांस के लिए उसका आभारी होना ही परमात्मा से संबंध की निष्ठा का निर्वहन करना है। इससे संसार और जीवन को देखने की दृष्टि बदल जाएगी।

डॉ. सत्येंद्र पाल सिंह

कौन खरीदेगा 'महाराजा' को

मोदी सरकार ने साफ कर दिया है कि वह सरकारी विमानन कंपनी एयर इंडिया की 100 फीसद हिस्सेदारी बेचेगी। सरकार ने 17 मार्च तक इसके लिए बोली मंगाई है। अब मोदी सरकार एयर इंडिया को और अधिक आर्थिक सहायता नहीं देना चाहती है। अगर आधिकारिक आंकड़ों को देखें तो वित्त वर्ष 2019 में कंपनी ने 25,509 करोड़ रुपये की कमाई की और 30,194 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किए? यानी 4,685 करोड़ रुपये का नुकसान। बता दें कि एयर इंडिया के पास करीब 125 एयरक्राफ्ट हैं और दिसंबर 2019 के अनुसार इसका घरेलू मार्केट में शेयर करीब 11.9 फीसद है।

मोदी सरकार ने पहले भी 2018 में एयर इंडिया को बेचने का प्रस्ताव रखा था। उस समय सरकार 76 फीसद हिस्सेदारी बेच रही थी, लेकिन किसी ने भी इसे खरीदने में कोई रुचि नहीं दिखाई। अपने पुराने अनुभव से सरकार ने सबक लेकर इस बार एयर इंडिया की 100 फीसद हिस्सेदारी बेचने का फैसला किया है। यह भी सुनने में आ रहा है कि सरकार ने एयर इंडिया की 60 हजार करोड़ रुपये की कर्जदारी का एक बड़ा हिस्सा माफ करने का भी ऑफर दिया है। बता दें कि यूपीए सरकार ने 2011-12 में एयर इंडिया में आने वाले 10 साल में 30,000 करोड़ रुपये लगाने को मंजूरी दी थी और दिसंबर 2019 तक सरकार की ओर से एयर इंडिया में 30,520.21 करोड़ रुपये डाले जा चुके हैं।

फिर से

एयर इंडिया की घरेलू बाजार में हिस्सेदारी करीब 12 फीसद है। इसके बंद होने से बहुत से लोगों पर इसका असर पड़ेगा

माना जा रहा है कि इसे खरीदने के लिए टाटा समूह, हिंदुजा, इंडिगो, स्पाइसजेट और कुछ निजी इक्विटी फर्म की तरफ से बोली आ सकती है। एविएशन इंडस्ट्री के एक सूत्र के अनुसार इंडिगो इसे खरीदने वाला सबसे बड़ा दावेदार हो सकता है। एयर इंडिया के एक अधिकारी की मानें तो अगर जून 2020 तक एयर इंडिया को कोई खरीददार नहीं मिलता है तो इसकी हालत भी जेट एयरवेज की तरह हो सकती है और कंपनी बंद करने की नौबत आ जाएगी। कंपनी ने सरकार से 2,400 करोड़ रुपये की सोवरेन गारंटी (कंपनी पर किसी थर्ड पार्टी के कर्ज का निपटारा करने का वादा) मांगी थी, लेकिन सरकार ने सिर्फ 500 करोड़ रुपये की गारंटी दी है। उनके अनुसार कंपनी के फंड्स से एयर इंडिया अधिक से अधिक जून 2020 तक चल सकती है, उसके बाद भी अगर सरकार ने पैसे नहीं दिए या कोई खरीददार नहीं मिला तो एयर इंडिया के विमान आसमान में नहीं दिखेंगे।

यूं तो एयर इंडिया की घरेलू बाजार में हिस्सेदारी करीब 12 फीसद है और अंतरराष्ट्रीय बाजार में करीब 18 फीसद, लेकिन इसके बंद होने से बहुत से लोगों पर इसका असर पड़ेगा। विभिन्न धर्म के लोगों के लिए धार्मिक स्थलों तक जाने के लिए कई विमान सेवाएं शुरू की हैं। कंपनी उस इलाकों में भी सेवा देती है, जहां बाकी एयरलाइन अपने विमान नहीं भेजते हैं। ऐसे में कर्ज बढ़ना स्वाभाविक है। अब अगर यह कंपनी बंद होती है तो समझिए कि श्रद्धालुओं को मिलने वाली सब्सिडी बंद हो जाएगी।

(साभार : आइचौक.इन में अनुज मौर्या)

मेलबाक्स

विरोधाभासी तथ्य

बजट में अवसर न गंवाए सरकार शीर्षक से लिखा प्रो. राजेंद्र प्रताप गुप्ता का लेख पढ़ा। लेख कई विरोधाभासों से भरा हुआ है। एक तरफ तो वह स्वीकार कर रहे हैं कि सरकार के पास पर्याप्त नकदी है, अतः देश में 1991 जैसी भुगतान संतुलन की समस्या नहीं है। दूसरी तरफ वह आगामी बजट में सरकार को कुछ अभूतपूर्व कदम उठाने की सलाह भी दे रहे हैं, ताकि अर्थव्यवस्था से जुड़े आवश्यक मुद्दों का समाधान हो सके। हालांकि एक जगह वह स्वयं मानते हैं कि अर्थव्यवस्था की वर्तमान दिक्कतें बजट के दायरे से बाहर की चीज हैं। लेखक यह भी मानते हैं कि हमारे पास बेहतर इरादों वाले प्रधानमंत्री हैं। यदि ऐसा है तो फिर उन्हें प्रधानमंत्री द्वारा अर्थव्यवस्था में घुस आई कतिपय बुराइयों को दूर करने के लिए उठाए गए कदमों पर भी भरोसा रखना चाहिए था। नोटबंदी और जीएसटी को इसलिए लाना पड़ा, क्योंकि देश की अर्थव्यवस्था के अंदर ही दो नंबर की समानांतर अर्थव्यवस्था, जैसे जाली नोटों की तस्करी, कर वंचना, हवाला कारोबार आदि ने अपना वर्चस्व बना लिया था। पिछले कई वर्षों से यह औपचारिक अर्थव्यवस्था को घुन की तरह खाए जा रही थी। कोई भी जिम्मेदार राष्ट्र, जो अर्थव्यवस्था की दीर्घकालीन मजबूती के लिए काम कर रहा हो, इस अव्यवस्था को अनंत काल तक चलने नहीं दे सकता। हां, इतना जरूर है कि कई सारे सुधारात्मक कदमों को करीब-करीब एक ही समय लागू किए जाने से उद्यमियों के लिए तत्कालिक तौर पर कुछ कठिनाइयां आई हैं। इस स्थिति को देखते हुए ही सरकार ने कॉरपोरेट टैक्स को कम किया है तथा जीएसटी दरों को भी तर्कसंगत बनाया है। उम्मीद है कि आगामी बजट में अर्थव्यवस्था को गति देने के लिए सरकार द्वारा अन्य जरूरी कदम भी उठाए जाएंगे।

चंदन कर्ण, देवघर

खुद को बनाएं संविधान सम्मत

दैनिक जागरण के 25 जनवरी के अंक में प्रकाशित गिरीश्वर मिश्र का लेख, अनुशासन मांगता है गणतंत्र, में शिक्षा से लेकर राजनीति तक गांधी जी के सिद्धांतों को अपनाने की बात कहने के साथ भारतीय गणतंत्र से बंधुता, समरसता, समानता जैसे लक्ष्यों को हासिल करने के अलावा गणतंत्र में अनुशासन की मांग उठाई गई जो कि औचित्य पूर्ण है। लेकिन अब प्रश्न यह उठता है कि हमारा गणतंत्र भटक क्यों गया? क्या वजह रही जिनके चलते आज ये मांग उठने लगी कि गणतंत्र में अनुशासन की जरूरत है? पहले हमें ये ज्ञात होना चाहिए कि शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, सुरक्षा, श्रम, कानून, तकनीकी, रोजगार, प्रर्यावरण में निहित जल, जंगल, जमीन आदि गणतंत्र के वो विभिन्न आयाम होते हैं जो संविधान सम्मत होकर गणतंत्र के अधीन रहने वाले प्रजातंत्र को प्रत्यक्ष अथवा अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से प्रभावित करते हैं। अब ये प्रश्न उठता है कि क्या हम और हमारी सरकारें इन आयामों पर कार्य कर रही हैं? यदि हां तो फिर ये जाति, धर्म, भाषा संप्रदाय के झगड़े आज भी क्यों होते हैं? इन सब की वजह दलगत, स्वार्थगत और संकुचित राजनीति है। ऐसा लगता है जैसे कि संविधान सरकारों को नहीं, बल्कि सरकारें संविधान को चला रही हैं। इन सरकारों को राजनीतिक दल चलाते हैं। अतः जरूरत इस बात की है कि हम अपने आपको भी संविधान सम्मत बनाकर अनुशासित कर एक बेहतर सरकार के गठन में अपनी भागीदारी निभाएं।

पवन कुमार मुरली, कादीपुर, गुरुग्राम

ऐसे बयान ठीक नहीं

नागरिकता संशोधन कानून (सीएए) को लेकर बॉलीवुड दो खेमों में बंटा हुआ है। सरकार द्वारा बनाए गए कानून को लेकर सबकी राय अलग हो सकती है, परंतु इस पर सियासत और देश को बांटने वाली सियासत नहीं होनी चाहिए। किसी भी देश की सरकार नागरिकों के हितों को ध्यान में रखकर ही कोई कानून बनाती है। नागरिकता संशोधन कानून भी इससे अछूता नहीं है। बॉलीवुड से जुड़े अथवा अन्य प्रतिष्ठित व्यक्तियों को कोई भी बयान देते समय देशहित को ध्यान में रखना चाहिए। कुछ लोग इस कानून को सिर्फ धर्म के चश्मे से ही देख रहे हैं। बालीवुड से जुड़े व्यक्तियों को देश में धार्मिक आधार पर जहर घोलने वाले बयानों से बचना चाहिए।

हितेंद्र डेढ़ा, चिल्ला गांव

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. DELHIN/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।

शांति का रास्ता

अलग बोडोलैंड राज्य की मांग को लेकर असम में लंबे समय से चले आ रहे हिंसात्मक आंदोलन ने अब शांति का रास्ता अपनाया है। बोडोलैंड आंदोलन चलाने वाले संगठन नेशनल डेमोक्रेटिक फ्रंट ऑफ बोडोलैंड (एनडीएफबी) ने सोमवार को केंद्र सरकार के साथ शांति समझौते की जो पहल की है, वह स्वागतयोग्य है। हालांकि इस तरह का शांति समझौता हो पाना कोई आसान काम नहीं था, लेकिन केंद्र और राज्य सरकार ने उग्रवादियों से बातचीत की पहल करते हुए जो सकारात्मक रुख दिखाया, उसी का नतीजा है कि एनडीएफबी जैसे खूंखार संगठन ने भी शांति और बातचीत के विकल्प को तवज्जो दी है। हालांकि उग्रवाद को लेकर सरकार के कड़े रुख से भी उग्रवादी संगठनों को यह कड़ा संदेश तो गया ही है कि अब और ज्यादा हिंसा के रास्ते पर नहीं चला जा सकता और सरकार भी झुकने वाली नहीं है। इसलिए अगर उग्रवादी गुट हथियार डाल कर कोई सकारात्मक कदम उठाते हैं तो यह प्रशंसनीय है। सोमवार को केंद्रीय गृह मंत्री की मौजूदगी में दिल्ली में असम के मुख्यमंत्री और एनडीएफबी के विभिन्न धड़ों के बीच हुए इस त्रिपक्षीय समझौते को असम में अमन की दिशा में सरकार की बड़ी कामयाबी भी माना जा रहा है।

असम में अलग बोडोलैंड राज्य की मांग पिछले चार दशक से चल रही है और ऑल बोडो स्टूडेंट्स यूनियन (आबसू), यूनाइटेड बोडो पीपुल्स ऑर्गनाइजेशन जैसे संगठन इस आंदोलन के अगुआ रहे हैं। लेकिन पिछले चार दशक से असम जिस तरह की राजनीति से रूबरू होता रहा है, उसमें उग्रवादी गुटों को पनपने के मौके मिलते गए और सरकारों ने ऐसे मुद्दों को बातचीत से हल करने के बजाय सख्ती से कुचलने की रणनीति पर ज्यादा जोर दिया। उसी का नतीजा रहा कि आज तक पूर्वोत्तर में अलग राज्यों की मांग को लेकर उग्रवादी गुट सक्रिय हैं। एक मोटे अनुमान के मुताबिक बोडो उग्रवादियों की हिंसा में पिछले चार दशक में चार हजार से ज्यादा लोग मारे जा चुके हैं। बोडो ब्रह्मपुत्र घाटी के उत्तरी हिस्से में बसी असम की सबसे बड़ी जनजाति है। जब राज्य में इनकी जमीन पर दूसरे समुदायों का अनाधिकृत प्रवेश बढ़ने लगा और बोडो लोगों की जमीन और संसाधनों पर आंच आने लगी, तो असंतोष पनपना स्वाभाविक था। समस्या तब और गंभीर होती गई जब आंदोलन का नेतृत्व भी कई धड़ों में बंटता चला गया और फिर अलग-अलग गुटों ने हथियार उठाने को अंतिम विकल्प समझ लिया। ऐसे में सरकार किससे बात करे, या कौन सा धड़ा सरकार से बात करे, यह अड़चन बनी रही। एक-दो धड़े साथ होते हैं तो तीसरा उनके विरोध में आ जाता है और समस्या सुलझने के बजाय उलझती चली जाती है। यही बोडोलैंड आंदोलन के साथ भी हुआ।

फिलहाल केंद्र, राज्य और एनडीएफबी के बीच जो समझौता हुआ है, उसमें सबसे बड़ी बात तो यह है कि अब एनडीएफबी ने बोडोलैंड की मांग छोड़ दी है। एनडीएफबी के डेढ़ हजार से ज्यादा उग्रवादी तीस जनवरी को हथियार डाल देंगे। पर केंद्र और राज्य सरकार के समक्ष बड़ी चुनौती ये है कि वह बोडो क्षेत्रों में विकास के काम तत्काल शुरू करे। बोडोलैंड क्षेत्रीय परिषद् (बीटीसी) को और अधिकार दिए जाएं। मूल बात विकास की है। अगर सरकार बोडो इलाकों के आर्थिक विकास और राजनीतिक मसलों पर ध्यान दे, नौजवानों को रोजगार मिले तो कोई कारण नहीं कि बोडो समुदाय हथियार उठाने को मजबूर हो। यह समझौता शांति की दिशा में बड़ी पहल है, इसलिए हर पक्ष को अमल भी ईमानदारी से करना होगा।

संकट का तापमान

पर्यावरण के सामान्य चक्र में आ रहे बदलावों की अनदेखी या फिर उसमें जाने-अनजाने बाधा पहुंचाने का नतीजा क्या हो सकता है, अब यह सामने आने लगा है। हालांकि पिछले दो-तीन दशकों से लगातार इस मसले पर होने वाले अंतरराष्ट्रीय सम्मेलनों में गहरी चिंता जताई जाती रही है और जलवायु में होने वाली उथल-पुथल के व्यापक परिणामों को लेकर चेतावनियां भी जारी हुई हैं। विडंबना यह है कि लगभग सारी तस्वीर साफ होने के बावजूद शायद ही दुनिया भर में तापमान में वृद्धि रोकने को लेकर गंभीरता दिखाई देती है। नतीजतन, अब तक होने वाले अध्ययनों में जो आशंकाएं जताई जाती रहीं, वे अब प्रत्यक्ष खतरे के रूप में सामने आने लगी हैं। अंतरराष्ट्रीय शोध संस्थान मेकेंजी ग्लोबल इंस्टीट्यूट की हाल ही प्रकाशित रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक अगले दस सालों तक जलवायु परिवर्तन का असर विभिन्न देशों के सकल घरेलू उत्पाद पर भी साफतौर पर दिखने लगेगा। इसका कारण यह होगा कि मौसम में गरमी बढ़ेगी और उमस से पैदा होने वाली शारीरिक-मानसिक शिथिलता के चलते लोगों की कार्यक्षमता में कमी आने के साथ-साथ उनके काम करने के घंटों में तेजी से कमी आएगी। रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक आने वाले सालों में जलवायु परिवर्तन के संभावित खतरों की जद में शामिल एक सौ पांच देशों के प्राकृतिक एवं मानव संसाधन को प्रत्यक्ष जोखिम का सामना करना पड़ सकता है।

यह एक सामान्य-सी तस्वीर है, जिसे महज आशंका मान कर दरकिनार करना एक बड़े खतरे को न्योता देने की तरह होगा। पिछले कई सालों से दुनिया भर में मौसम में अप्रत्याशित उतार-चढ़ाव देखने को मिल रहे हैं। विश्व के किसी हिस्से में अपेक्षा से ज्यादा तापमान दर्ज किया जाता है तो कहीं गरमी के मौसम की अवधि लंबी हो रही है। पिघलते हिमनद अब यथार्थ हैं और एक बड़े खतरे के तौर पर देखे जा रहे हैं। इसकी वजह से समुद्र के जलस्तर में होने वाली मामूली बढ़ोतरी के नतीजे में पृथ्वी का क्या स्वरूप हो जा सकता है, इसकी कल्पना कोई भी कर सकता है। इन सबका असर मानव समाज पर किस तरह पड़ रहा है, यह भी किसी से छिपा नहीं है। सवाल है कि प्रत्यक्ष जोखिम से बचने या उससे लड़ने के मामले में ही जब कोई ठोस पहलकदमी नहीं हो पा रही है तो परोक्ष और दीर्घकालिक खतरों से कैसे निपटा जाएगा! लोगों की घटती कार्यक्षमता के कारण उनके काम की अवधि में कमी आने से व्यक्ति, परिवार के सामने जो आर्थिक चुनौतियां पैदा होंगी, श्रम उत्पादकता के साथ-साथ सकल घरेलू उत्पाद तक में जो कमी आएगी, उसके लिए कौन जिम्मेदार होगा?

खासतौर पर भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था पहले ही नाजुक हालत से गुजर रही है। ऐसे में अगर रिपोर्ट में जताई गई आशंका के मुताबिक श्रमिकों के काम के घंटों में बीस फीसद तक की कमी आने से भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था में जीडीपी में 2.5 फीसद से 4.5 फीसद तक की गिरावट आई, तो क्या हम भावी आर्थिक चुनौतियों का अंदाजा लगा सकते हैं? बढ़ते वैश्विक तापमान के संदर्भ में लगभग हर मौके पर कार्बन डाइऑक्साइड के बेलगाम उत्सर्जन पर रोक लगाने को लेकर जताई जाने वाली चिंता के बरक्स हकीकत यह है कि इस समस्या की जटिलता में तेजी से बढ़ोतरी हो रही है। दुनिया के विकसित देश कार्बन उत्सर्जन के लिए सबसे ज्यादा जिम्मेदार हैं, लेकिन जैसे ही इसे जलवायु तापमान के सबसे गंभीर कारक के रूप में पेश किया जाता है, आरोप तीसरी दुनिया या विकासशील देशों पर थोप कर उन्हें ही इस पर लगाम लगाने की सलाह दी जाती है। क्या इसी तरह जिम्मेदारियों के टालमटोल से इस गंभीर और व्यापक समस्या का हल निकाला जा सकेगा?

कल्पमेधा

जब आप अनजाने मार्गों पर चलते हैं तो विकसित होते हैं। जब आप खतरा उठाते हैं तो आगे बढ़ते हैं।
-ओशो

तकनीक ने बदल डाली दुनिया

निरंकार सिंह

भारत में सोशल नेटवर्क का इस्तेमाल बढ़ा है। वाट्सऐप और वाइबर जैसे ऐप ने लोगों के बात करने का पूरा तरीका ही बदल दिया है। एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक हर साल दुनिया में सोशल मीडिया का उपयोग करने वालों की संख्या तेरह फीसद की दर से बढ़ रही है। भारत में यह दर इकतीस फीसद है। जनवरी, 2018 तक भारत में एक व्यक्ति द्वारा सोशल मीडिया पर बिताया जाने वाला औसत समय दो घंटा छब्बीस मिनट था।

नई-नई तकनीकों के आविष्कारों से हमारे रहन-सहन के साथ-साथ कामकाज के तरीके भी बदल रहे हैं। अब आपके सुख-दुख के साथी बनेंगे कृत्रिम मानव रोबोट। ये देखने में बिल्कुल इंसानों की तरह होंगे। नियान नाम के इस रोबोट की खासियत होगी कि यह न सिर्फ इंसानों जैसा दिखता है, बल्कि उनकी तरह बात भी करता है। यह जज्बातों का इजहार भी बखूबी कर सकता है। अकेलेपन के शिकार लोगों के लिए यह ऐसा दोस्त साबित हो सकता है, जिससे सारी बातें कही जा सकें। इसे नई चीजें सीखने में महारत हासिल है। साथ ही, अनुभव के आधार पर यह नए काम को और बेहतर तरीके से कर सकता है। इस नायाब कृत्रिम रोबोट को सैमसंग ने तैयार किया है। कंपनी ने नियान के छह अवतार लांच किए हैं। इनमें किसी को बैंकर, किसी को योग सिखाने वाले, तो किसी को न्यूज एंकर के रूप में। इन सबके हावभाव, चाल-ढाल और बोल-चाल का लहजा अलग-अलग है। अमेरिका के लॉस वेगास में एक इलेक्ट्रॉनिक शो के दौरान कंपनी की यूनिट स्टार लैब नियान को पहली बार दुनिया के सामने लाई है। यह मानव रोबोट नई भाव-भंगिमाएं प्रदर्शित करता है और हिंदी में भी संवाद कर सकता है।

पिछले एक दशक में लोगों की जीवन शैली में काफी बदलाव आया है। सेहत से जुड़ी जानकारी देने वाली फिटनेस और स्मार्ट वॉच लोगों की जिंदगी में जगह बना चुकी है। सेहतमंद रखने में मदद करने की क्षमता के चलते ये लोगों को पसंद आने लगीं। भविष्य में ऐसे ही और भी गैजेट्स और स्मार्ट बेल्ट बाजार में आने वाले हैं। इंटरनेट की उपलब्धता बढ़ने से गैजेटों का इस्तेमाल भी बढ़ा है। एलेक्सा और गूगल असिस्टेंट ने दफ्तरों में निजी सहायक (पीए) की जगह ले ली है। वॉयस कमांड के जरिए लोग घर के किसी भी कोने से घर के सामान को चला सकते हैं। अमेरिका में डिजिटल होम पहले से ही इस्तेमाल हो रहे हैं। इस दशक में बिना ड्राइवर वाली कारें भी सड़कों पर उतरी हैं। टेस्ला जैसी कंपनियों की इन कारों की बाजार में मांग है। इंटरनेट से जुड़ कर गूगल मैप और कृत्रिम मेधा का इस्तेमाल करके ये कारें लोगों को बिना किसी जोखिम के उनकी मंजिल तक पहुंचाती हैं। कई बड़ी कंपनियां इस तरह की कारें बनाने के अभियान पर जुट गई हैं। हो सकता है कि ये कारें भारत के लिए सही न हों। यहां पर इस तरह की कारों के साथ डाटा सुरक्षा से जुड़े मसले हैं। इस दशक में ड्रोन को लेकर महत्त्वपूर्ण प्रगति हुई है। ड्रोन कैमरे से आसमान से जमीन की तस्वीरें लेने में आसानी होती है। हवाई टैक्सी जैसे विकल्प इसके चलते ही संभव हुए हैं। इससे लोगों को यातायात जाम से निजात मिल सकती है। उबर कंपनी ने लॉस एंजेलिस, डलास और मेलबर्न में हवाई टैक्सी शुरू करने का एलान भी किया है। कंपनी ने ड्रोन टैक्सी चलाने की तैयारी लगभग पूरी कर ली है। इस साल इसका परीक्षण होना है और 2023 में व्यावसायिक स्तर पर इसकी सेवाएं शुरू हो जाएंगी।

ऑनलाइन नक्शा अब हमारी जिंदगी का हिस्सा बन गया है। ओला, उबर जैसी सेवाएं गूगल मैप के जरिए काम करती हैं। इसकी मदद से बाहर से खाना तक मंगा सकना संभव हो गया है। यातायात और खाने की इन सेवाओं ने लोगों की जिंदगी को आसान बनाया है। मोबाइल के जरिए पैसे का लेनदेन एक समय पर बहुत ही सीमित था। लेकिन अब गूगल पे, पेटीएम और फोन पे जैसे कई ऐप आ गए हैं और जिंदगी को आसान बना दिया है। हालांकि इसमें कोई दो राय नहीं कि इससे जोखिम बढ़े हैं। भारत में इस तरह के ऐप का इस्तेमाल बढ़ने में नोटबंदी ने भी भूमिका निभाई है। लेकिन स्मार्टफोन का बढ़ता इस्तेमाल भी इसका एक अहम कारण है। पिछले एक दशक में ऑनलाइन खरीदारी बहुत तेजी से बढ़ी है। भारत में लोगों ने किराने के सामान से लेकर महंगे इलेक्ट्रॉनिक सामान और घर के सामान से लेकर सोना तक ऑनलाइन खरीदना शुरू कर दिया है। ऑनलाइन खरीदारी में छूट-रियायत, आसानी और समय बचने से लोगों में इसे लेकर दिलचस्पी बढ़ी है। एक अनुमान के मुताबिक भारत में ऑनलाइन कारोबार आज एक सौ बीस अरब डॉलर तक पहुंच गया है।

गूगल, माइक्रोसॉफ्ट जैसी कंपनियां कृत्रिम मेधा (एआइ) आधारित ऑपरेटिव सिस्टम के लिए काम कर रही हैं। एआइ की मदद से हमारी जिंदगी में रोबोटों का इस्तेमाल दिन पर दिन बढ़ता जा रहा है। इसका इस्तेमाल खिलौनों में भी किया जा रहा है। रेलवे की टिकट बुकिंग, फिटनेस गजेट में भी इनका इस्तेमाल हो रहा है। विशेषज्ञों का कहना है कि शेयर बाजार और कारोबार प्रबंधन में भी इनका इस्तेमाल हो सकता है। भारत में सोशल नेटवर्क का इस्तेमाल बढ़ा है। वाट्सऐप और वाइबर जैसे ऐप ने लोगों के बात करने का पूरा तरीका ही बदल दिया है। एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक हर साल दुनिया भर में सोशल मीडिया का उपयोग करने वालों की संख्या तेरह फीसद की दर से बढ़ रही है। भारत में ये दर इकतीस फीसद है। जनवरी, 2018 तक भारत में एक व्यक्ति द्वारा सोशल मीडिया पर बिताया जाने वाला औसत समय दो घंटा छब्बीस मिनट था। सोशल मीडिया इस्तेमाल के मामले में तीन घंटे सत्तावन मिनट के साथ फिलीपीन सबसे ऊपर है। जापान में ये औसत समय अड़तालीस मिनट है। ट्विटर, फेसबुक, इंस्टाग्राम, हैलो और शेयर चैट भी हमारी रोजमर्रा की जिंदगी में घुल मिल गए हैं।

पिछले दशक में टीवी का इस्तेमाल भी पूरी तरह बदल चुका है। एलसीडी, एलईडी टीवी एक स्मार्ट टीवी की तरह काम करने लगे हैं। अमेजन प्राइम, नेटफ्लिक्स और हॉट स्टार टीवी देखने के पैटर्न में बहुत बड़ा बदलाव लेकर आए हैं। क्लाउड स्टोरेज बहुत आम बन गई है। एक ड्राइव, ड्रॉप बॉक्स, गूगल फोटो स्मार्टफोन में होना आम बात है। हमारी तस्वीरें अपने आप गूगल फोटोज में सेव हो जाती हैं। कई उद्योग क्लाउड कंप्यूटरिंग का इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं। भारतीय अंतरिक्ष अनुसंधान संस्थान (इसरो) ने इस दशक में कई सफलताएं पाई हैं। पहले ही प्रयास में मंगलयान सफल हुआ और चंद्रयान-2 भी छोड़ा गया। बड़ी संख्या में अंतरिक्ष में उपग्रह भेजे गए। अगले दशक में गगनयान और सूर्ययान की बारी है।

उद्योग जगत में रोबोट तकनीक का प्रयोग काफी बढ़ा है। सुरक्षा, बचाव और उत्पादन में बड़े पैमाने पर इनका उपयोग हो रहा है। रोबोट सोफिया ने बाजार में आते ही सनसनी पैदा कर दी थी। वह पर्सनल असिस्टेंट की तरह काम कर सकती थी और इंसान की तरह हावभाव दे सकती थी। औद्योगिक इस्तेमाल में लाए जा रहे रोबोट घरेलू इस्तेमाल के लिए भी काम आ रहे हैं। 3डी प्रिंटिंग इस दशक की एक महत्त्वपूर्ण खोज है। साउथ कैलिफोर्निया यूनिवर्सिटी में एक ऐसी तकनीक विकसित की गई की है जो खतरे का पता लगा सकती है और मौसम के अनुसार काम कर सकती है। ब्लॉक चेन और बिट कॉइन का इस्तेमाल बढ़ा है। तकनीकी कंपनियां आभासी मुद्रा का इस्तेमाल करने की प्रक्रिया में हैं। इससे दुनिया में बिट कॉइन की मांग बढ़ी है। बिट कॉइन को भारत में संचालन की इजाजत नहीं है। पिछले एक दशक में एलईडी का उपयोग काफी बढ़ा है। सीसीटीवी कैमरा निगरानी का एक बड़ा माध्यम बन गए हैं। किंडल और ई-बुक्स ने पढ़ने का तरीका बदल दिया है। ऑडियो बुक्स और पॉडकास्ट भी जानकारी पाने का महत्त्वपूर्ण साधन बन गए हैं। पिछला दशक विभिन्न तकनीकी प्रगतियों के लिए अहम रहा है। लेकिन इस विकास को बनाए रखने के लिए साइबर सुरक्षा को मजबूत किया जाना चाहिए, वरना ये हमें खतरे में डाल सकता है।

अपशब्दों की हिंसा

विभा त्रिपाठी

आज जब हर जगह भारत को स्वच्छ बनाने की मुहिम चलाई जा रही है, एक प्रश्न अनुत्तरित-सा अब उत्तर पाना चाहता है। अपशब्द मुक्त भारत का सृजन क्या इस इक्कीसवीं शताब्दी के तीसरे दशक में कल्पित किया जा सकता है? क्या व्यक्ति को उसकी दूषित मानसिकता से अलग किया जा सकता है? क्या लैंगिक हिंसा की जड़ों में भाषायी हिंसा को एक मुख्य कारण माना जा सकता है? क्या व्यक्ति को उसके मूलभूत मानव अधिकार, गरिमा के साथ जीने का अधिकार उपलब्ध हो पाएगा? अब जबकि शिक्षा एक मौलिक अधिकार के रूप में हम सभी को उपलब्ध हो रही है और हर जाति, लिंग और वर्ग के लोगों को कुछ वर्षों तक मुफ्त शिक्षा की व्यवस्था की जा रही है... तो उसके पीछे लक्ष्य है कि हम वैश्वीकरण के दौर में एक नए भारत के निर्माण में अपना सक्रिय योगदान करें।

किसी देश की शिक्षा व्यवस्था और भाषा ही इस बात के द्योतक होते हैं कि उस देश के लोग एक सभ्य समाज के नागरिक हैं। एक सभ्य समाज का आधार उस समाज के नागरिकों द्वारा प्रयुक्त की जा रही भाषा होता है। ऐसे में यह विचार करना जरूरी है कि कब और कहां हम गलत हो गए! आज चाहे फिल्मी दुनिया की बात हो या फिर टीवी सीरियल की... हर जगह धड़ल्ले से द्विअर्थी संवादों का प्रयोग किया जा रहा है। ऐसा लगता है मानो बिना अश्लील भाषा के न कोई कहानी आगे बढ़ सकती है और न कोई हास्य पूर्ण हो सकता है। न सिर्फ तथाकथित अनपढ़ लोग अपशब्द का प्रयोग करते हैं, बल्कि कॉन्वेंट स्कूल में पढ़ने वाले छात्र और छात्राएं भी अपशब्दों का प्रयोग धड़ल्ले से करते दिखते हैं। यहां तक कि उन्होंने इन शब्दों के लिए शब्द-संक्षेपण भी विकसित कर लिया है और निराशाजनक तौर पर भाषायी हिंसा को अपनी रोजमर्रा की जिंदगी का हिस्सा बना लिया है।

दुनिया मेरे आगे

समस्या यह नहीं है कि वे भाषा कौन-सी प्रयोग कर रहे हैं, बल्कि यह है कि उनकी सोच कैसे और क्यों इतनी कुंठाग्रस्त हो गई! आपने अपशब्दों का प्रयोग बोल कर किया या फिर किसी के लिए अपने मन में ही उन शब्दों को उच्चरित किया, इसमें बहुत फर्क नहीं पड़ता। मुख्य समस्या है एक घृणित मानसिकता की। मूलतः जननांगों पर आधारित ऐसे अपशब्दों का प्रयोग कर हम क्या सिद्ध करना चाहते हैं? हम कौन-सा वर्चस्व हासिल करना चाहते हैं और किस पर? एक तरफ तो हम देवियों की आराधना करते हैं, पर दूसरी तरफ केवल अपने क्षोभ को प्रकट करने के लिए मां-बहन के नाम की गालियों का प्रयोग करते हैं।

आज जाने कितने ऐसे कानून बन चुके हैं जिनमें गाली-गलौज वाली भाषा का प्रयोग अपराध माना गया है, लेकिन जब पूरा समाज ही ऐसा अपराधी हो तो किसके खिलाफ मुकदमा दर्ज किया जाए और किससे न्याय की उम्मीद की जाए? अब जब बालिकाओं को भी शिक्षा मिल रही है, उनके अंदर बराबरी का भाव आ रहा है तो वे भी खुलेआम अपशब्दों का प्रयोग कर शायद यही दिखाना चाहती हैं कि लो, हो गए हम भी ताकतवर! दरअसल, आज की युवा पीढ़ी जितनी तेजी से नकारात्मक भाव और विचारों की ओर आकर्षित हो रही है, वह निराशाजनक है।

ऐसे में बस यही याद आता है कि हम कौन थे, क्या हो गए और क्या होंगे। समस्या की जड़ों में जाएं तो एक पुरानी कहावत याद आती है कि 'बोया पेड़ बबूल का तो आम कहां से होय'। यानी सारा दोष युवा पीढ़ी का नहीं है, बल्कि प्रौढ़ावस्था के लोगों की भी है। हमने यह कभी नहीं सोचा था कि हमारी भाषायी हिंसा का इतना वीभत्स स्वरूप सामने आएगा। इसमें बदलाव आ सकता है। बस सिर्फ यह सोच विकसित करना है कि क्या हम बर्दाश्त कर सकेंगे यह अपशब्द, जब इनका प्रयोग कोई मेरे ऊपर करेगा... मेरी क्या प्रतिक्रिया होगी। फिर यह सोचना चाहिए कि ऐसी ही प्रतिक्रिया शायद उस व्यक्ति के मन में भी होती होगी, जिसके ऊपर मैंने अपने प्रभुत्व का इस्तेमाल करते हुए अपशब्दों का प्रयोग किया है।

यों भी वह व्यवहार हमें दूसरों के साथ नहीं करना चाहिए, जिसे खुद अपने साथ किए जाने पर हम बर्दाश्त नहीं कर सकते। महात्मा गांधी की डेढ़ सौवीं जयंती मना रहे विश्व को उनका यह कथन याद करना होगा कि जो बदलाव आप पूरे विश्व में लाना चाहते हैं, उसे पहले अपने अंदर लाने का प्रयास करें। इसके साथ ही हमें रिश्तों के महत्त्व को भी समझना होगा। तार-तार हो जाती है रिश्तों की मधुरता, जब पड़ती है चोट भावनाओं के ऊपर। समय की मांग या मजबूरी से किसी की चुप्पी का कभी भी दुरुपयोग नहीं करना चाहिए। हमें अपनी भाषा बिगाड़ने की जगह अपने तर्क को मजबूत करना चाहिए। किसी भी तरह हिंसा से मुक्त भारत की शुभेच्छाओं को जेहन में संजोया है उस भारत ने, जिसमें जन्मे थे स्वामी विवेकानंद, महात्मा गांधी और बाबा साहेब भीमराव आंबेडकर।

संविधान के साथ

देश को उसका सबसे पवित्र ग्रंथ समर्पित करते हुए बाबा साहेब भीमराव आंबेडकर ने कहा था कि यह ऐसी किताब है जो युद्ध काल में भी देश की रक्षा करेगी और शांतिकाल के लिए भी प्रासंगिक होगी। सात दशक हो गए देश में संविधान को लागू हुए। बड़ी-बड़ी संवैधानिक जटिलताएं खड़ी हुईं, लोकतांत्रिक मूल्य संकट में नजर आए। प्राकृतिक आपदाएं आईं। पड़ोसी देशों से जंग हुई। आपातकाल का काला अध्याय भी देखा। पर संविधान अपने नियमों-उपबंधों के कवच से देश को हर प्रतिकूल हालात से उबारता रहा। आज जो लोग यह सोच रहे हैं कि संविधान बदला जा सकता है वे या तो नादान और अज्ञानी हैं या फिर उन्होंने संविधान पढ़ा नहीं है।

दरअसल, कोई भी ताकत हमारे संविधान के मूल स्वरूप को नहीं बदल सकती। अनुच्छेद 368 में लिखा हुआ है कि संसद भारत के संविधान में संशोधन कर सकती है। संशोधन 103 बार किया भी जा चुका है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट साफ कर चुका है कि संसद संविधान में संशोधन तो कर सकती है लेकिन मूल ढांचे में संशोधन करने का अधिकार उसे नहीं है। संविधान का मूल ढांचा संघीय व्यवस्था, प्रजातंत्र, न्यायपालिका की स्वतंत्रता, मौलिक अधिकार और धर्मनिरपेक्षता है। लोग बिना वजह की भ्रांतियां फैला रहे हैं। जब देश की संसद ही मूल ढांचे को बदल नहीं सकती तो फिर देश को हिंदू राष्ट्र या मुसलिम राष्ट्र बनाने की बात कहां से खड़ी हो गई? ये सभी बातें पूरी तरह से गलत हैं। जो लोग ऐसा कह रहे हैं उनकी बातों से लगता है कि उन्होंने संविधान पढ़ा ही नहीं है। अनुच्छेद 370 और 35 ए को हटाए जाने का इससे कोई संबंध नहीं है। तीन तलाक का भी इससे कोई लेना-देना नहीं है। राजनीतिक पार्टियों का अपना एजेंडा होता है। वे बहुमत लेकर आती हैं। उन्हें क्या काम करना है इसे चुनाव के समय बाकायदा अपने घोषणा पत्र में जनता के सामने रखती हैं। केंद्र सरकार अपने घोषणा पत्र में कही गई बातें अमल में ला रही है।

भारत के संविधान में अनुच्छेद पांच से तेरह तक साफ लिखा हुआ है कि नागरिकता देने या न देने का अधिकार भारत की संसद को है। इसके लिए वह कानून बना सकती है, यह संघ का कार्यक्षेत्र है, इसमें राज्य सरकारों का कोई लेना-देना नहीं है। केंद्र सरकार ने नागरिकता कानून में जो संशोधन किया उसके मुताबिक इस्लामिक देश पाकिस्तान, अफगानिस्तान और बांग्लादेश से धार्मिक आधार पर उत्पीड़न के शिकार जो हिंदू, सिख, ईसाई, बौद्ध या पारसी अल्पसंख्यक आएंगे उन्हें चाहे तो केंद्र सरकार नागरिकता दे सकेगी। इस पर सारा बवाल खड़ा हुआ है। कुछ राज्य सरकारें कह रही हैं कि हम इसे लागू नहीं करेंगे। संसद के दोनों सदनों ने यह कानून पास किया है, उन दोनों सदनों में सभी प्रदेशों के सांसद और प्रतिनिधि भी हैं। यह कानून राष्ट्रपति के हस्ताक्षर के बाद अधिसूचित होकर लागू भी हो गया। अब कहा जा रहा है कि इसे वापस ले लो! इसे वापस करने के दो ही तरीके हैं। पहला, सुप्रीम कोर्ट कहे कि यह संविधान के खिलाफ है। दूसरा, विपक्ष आगामी लोकसभा चुनाव में बहुमत लेकर आए और अपनी सरकार बनने पर इस कानून को फिर से बदल दे। इसके अलावा तीसरा कोई रास्ता नजर नहीं आता।

● *दिपिका शर्मा, सूरजकुंड, गोरखपुर*

ये नायक

अयोध्या के मोहम्मद शरीफ को इस वर्ष पद्मश्री सम्मान से नवाजा गया है। वे पिछले कई सालों से बिना धार्मिक भेदभाव के अब तक 3000 हिंदुओं और 2500 मुसलमानों के लावारिस शवों का अंतिम संस्कार कर चुके हैं। इसी तरह 68 वर्ष के हरेकाल हजाब्बा अपनी फलों की छोटी-सी दुकान की आमदनी से प्राथमिक, माध्यमिक विद्यालय बनवा चुके हैं और अब विश्वविद्यालय बनवाने की तैयारी कर रहे हैं। लंगर बाबा के नाम से मशहूर 84 वर्षीय जगदीश लाल आहूजा पिछले 39 सालों से चंडीगढ़ के पीजीआई में जरूरतमंदों व मरीजों को मुफ्त में खाना खिलाते हैं। देश में ऐसे लोगों की कमी नहीं है जो अपना सब कुछ दांव पर लगा कर लोगों की सेवा करने को ही परम धर्म समझते हैं। ऐसे लोगों के कारण ही इंसानियत कायम है। ये हमारे असली हीरो हैं।

● *हेमा हरि उपाध्याय अक्षत, उज्जैन*

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

चौपाल

जानलेवा लापरवाही

दिल्ली के भजनपुरा इलाके में कोचिंग केंद्र की निर्माणाधीन इमारत ढहने से चार छात्रों समेत पांच लोगों की मौत के समाचार ने मन दुखी कर दिया। आखिर कब तक बेकसूर लोग लापरवाही के शिकार होते रहेंगे? सूरत में कोचिंग सेंटर की भयावह आग अभी आंखों के सामने ही है। सही है कि हादसे बता कर नहीं होते पर यह तय है कि उनकी कोई न कोई वजह जरूर होती है और आमतौर पर उनसे बचा जा सकता है। आज कोचिंग केंद्रों की बहार आई हुई है, मगर उनमें बच्चों की सुरक्षा पर कितना ध्यान दिया जाता है, कहना मुश्किल है।

● *साजिद अली, चंदन नगर, इंदौर*

जागरूक हों उपभोक्ता

अगर दूषित और मिलावटी खानपान से हमारी सेहत खराब होगी तो इससे परेशानी और आर्थिक नुकसान हमारा होगा, न कि सरकारों का। लिहाजा, खानपान की गुणवत्ता में सुधार के लिए हमें सरकारों का मुंह नहीं ताकना चाहिए, बल्कि खुद जागरूक होकर इसके लिए अपने स्तर पर उपाय करने चाहिए। वैसे सरकारों ने खानपान का घटिया और मिलावटी सामान बेचने वालों पर शिकंजा कसने के लिए विभागों का गठन भी किया है, लेकिन कुछ इन विभागों की लापरवाही और कुछ आम लोगों द्वारा गलत-घटिया खानपान का सामान बेचने वालों की शिकायत संबंधित विभाग में न कराने के कारण सरकारों के प्रयास इस दिशा में सफल नहीं हो पा रहे हैं।

एक तरफ तो सरकारें भारत को स्वस्थ बनाने का सपना देख रही हैं मगर दूसरी तरफ खाने-पीने की चीजों की गुणवत्ता सुधारने की तरफ अपेक्षित ध्यान नहीं दे रहीं। क्या इसी तरह बनेगा स्वस्थ भारत? यह कहना भी उचित होगा कि विज्ञापनों के भ्रम में आकर अपनी सेहत के साथ खिलवाड़ करना सरासर गलत है। सरकारें लोगों को मिलावटी या घटिया गुणवत्ता वाली चीजों से बचने के लिए जागरूकता के कई अभियान और हेल्पलाइनें भी समय-समय पर शुरू करती रही हैं। लेकिन जब तक लोग चीजों की गुणवत्ता पर ध्यान नहीं देंगे और किसी गड़बड़ी की शिकायत संबंधित विभाग या उपभोक्ता अदालत में नहीं करेंगे तब तक सरकार के उपभोक्ता संरक्षण के प्रयास कामयाब नहीं हो सकते। सरकार को नौकरी देने के भ्रामक विज्ञापनों और ऑनलाइन बाजार के बाबत भी ठोस कदम उठाने चाहिए, ताकि इनका कोई शिकार न हो सके।

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