Solo in 2020

Air India's prospects of finding a good match look bleak



OUT OF THE BLUE

ANJULI BHARGAVA

The other day, a news report caught my attention. It quoted a government official claiming that two airlines — IndiGo and Etihad had evinced interest in acquiring Air India. It also stated that the Tatas had not yet shown any interest in the proposed sale. As things stand, only an Indianowned carrier can opt for 100 per cent of the stake; a foreign airline or investor can own only

Of all the possible airlines,

the two mentioned in the report struck me as most unlikely suitors. IndiGo already commands close to 50 per cent of the domestic market share and although Air India's domestic presence has been on a steady decline, the combined entity would cross 50 per cent of the market share, attracting the attention of the Competition Commission of India (CCI). As it is, IndiGo is driving fares and many in Jet argue that its closure was driven by the market leader's predatory pricing once Jet's problems surfaced. A former CCI chairman told me that there was no chance that the CCI would approve an acquisition of the national carrier by Indigo.

Expecting Etihad — which recently burnt its fingers with Jet's closure and has plenty of troubles of its own — to step in would be equally naïve. In 2018, the airline posted a loss of \$1.8 billion, taking its three-yeardeficit up to \$4.8 billion. There have in fact been talks of Etihad being bought out by Emirates or one of the stronger partners in the Gulf region. To float its name as a potential taker for Air India at this stage sounds almost silly.

Meanwhile, Air India's own internal problems refuse to abate. The airline's net loss for 2018-19 was ₹8,400 crore, against a revenue of ₹26,400 crore. Although at some stage during the current financial year and after Jet's demise, Air India

hoped to lower its losses for the year and even post a small operating profit, it now seems unlikely. CAPA estimates that the airline will end the year with a loss upwards of \$500 million but the industry is willing to bet the final loss will be much higher than the CAPA estimate.

In addition to its mounting losses, a substantial part of Air India's fleet is on the ground due to maintenance problems and parts being unavailable due to a paucity of funds. Almost through the last year, between 25 and 35 aircraft were grounded, give or take a few. This, of course, is paradoxically good news for the carrier as more aircraft in the air means higher losses. Typically, airlines don't want to keep any planes on the ground and look at maximising utilisation. As with the country as a whole, none of the usual yardsticks apply in the case of our national carrier!

An acute shortage of funds has the airline strapped on all fronts. Salary delays are a given,

no one expects timely payments. They are, in fact, grateful that payments are still being made. CMD Ashwini Lohani meanwhile has been out with a begging bowl, yo-yoing between the threat of closure and reassurances of continued operations, a daily comedy circus that no one takes very seriously any longer. Responses to his threats and exhortations appear to be taken in from one ear and let out from the other by a government that's mired in all manner of controversy.

Although Lohani with his more tempered handling of staff has proved better for employee morale than his predecessor, junior pilots in the airline have been putting in their papers. Resignations have been high enough in numbers to raise a degree of alarm, stirring the director operations into action, making himself available to meet the aggrieved in the last week of holiday season in December. Heavens must truly be falling!

Resignations of any kind are

a rarity in our national carrier, known for the stickiness of its staff in general. After you have worked in Air India, a job in any other airline feels like actual work so you'd really have to be bitten by a mad dog to quit. When I asked one of the senior employees - who has been there since the late 1980s - about this strange and recent phenomenon, he pointed out that it must be the younger lot. "The high command and commanders of the airline will never leave until it shuts down: who else will tolerate their tantrums", he said in jest but with an uncanny degree of realism.

So dear reader, loath as I am to be the harbinger of bad news in the very first days of the new year and decade. I am really not optimistic on any kind of wedding in 2020. With a less than comely bride and no dowry to speak of, the prospects of landing a good match look bleak, a grim, sinister and nononsense prospective father-inlaw notwithstanding.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Diplomatic Yadav



In the past, the Samaiwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh (UP) had forged pre-poll alliances with both the Congress

and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) under its incumbent chief. Akhilesh Yadav (pictured). These experiments woefully failed to fetch the desired results and the partnerships felt apart. Now as the SP, BSP, and Congress are mounting pressure on the Adityanath government over the Citizenship Amendment Act to emerge as the main challenger before 2022 UP elections. Yadav is treading carefully so as not to annoy the opposition peers. While the BSP and Congress are taking potshots at other opposition parties, Yadav is guarded in his statements, reserving the salvos for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

Aadhaar in place of PIB card

The new year has begun with unique demands on the media. The Press Information Bureau (PIB) accreditation card, which is authorised by the Union home ministry after police clearance, is being disregarded by key ministries and departments. Some offices on Raisina Hill, which takes you to at least five major ministries in North Block and South Block as well as the Rashtrapati Bhawan, had for long made it clear that PIB cards were not meant for them, insisting on their own access system to meet officials on the premises. But there's a change now. That is, some prominent ministries are de-recognising the PIB even at the outer gate before one can reach the reception for a visitor's pass. Security guards at one such building were heard asking for an authentic government document from a journalist before he could be ushered into the recention for a pass, "Give us something other than the PIB card Show us your Aadhaar card," someone said in a grave tone. They couldn't clarify why Aadhaar was a preferred document.

Pitching for Pawar as president Amid the turmoil in Delhi, some

statements in Mumbai signalled a new rallying point for the Opposition. Whereas Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said that Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar's name should be considered by all political parties for the 2022 presidential election, the NCP's Majid Memon sent out a tweet saying "The move to muster support for Shri Sharad Pawar to be next Rashtrapati may yield positive results and will bring all non BJP forces closer by 2022...". Meanwhile, at an event in Mumbai later in the day, state minister and key Maharashtra Congress face Ashok Chavan also gave a diplomatic "consensus should be built on the candidature" statement, which hinted at some beneath-the-surface movement on the issue. While the presidential elections are more than two years away, one wonders what the significance of these statements could be. Observers believe it could be either to build enough support by making an early move or to irritate the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by talking about another adhesive force for anti-BJP unity.

A sweeter deal for sugar exports

Although the industry was unable to meet its export quota last year, the forecast of global shortage this year offers fresh hope

roduction and consumption forecasts and the resultant global surplus or deficit are the principal movers of raw sugar futures (raws) prices on the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) in the US. With Brent crude holding well above \$65 a barrel and seemingly on track for monthly gains in the new year, Brazil. the world's largest producer and exporter of sugar, will be using a still higher percentage of its sugarcane output to make ethanol. Expert body reports suggesting a global shortfall of up to 8 million tonnes (mt) between sugar production and use in the current season that began in October 2019, a fall in global

stocks to 50 mt and Brazilian exports likely to drop 1 mt to 18.6 mt will do good to raw futures to India's advantage.

This is because the Indian industry contending with brimming inventories has been given a mandate by the government to sell 6 mt in the world market. Even while the country is a now-on, now-off kind of exporter of the commodity, depending on production cyclicality and stocks, mills with sup-

port of what is claimed to be World Trade Organization (WTO)-compliant government subsidy have not done badly in the competitive world market. Besides Brazil, producing countries such as Thailand, Australia, Mexico and Guatemala, with limited domestic markets, must in all circumstances be able to sell large quantities in the world market for industry survival. No wonder, some rival exporting nations have complained to WTO that Indian sugar exports are aided by "illegal" subsidies. The fact is WTO rules allow subsidies for lefraving transportation cost and mar-

keting of agricultural products till 2023. Last season, the Indian industry had the authorisation to export 5 mt and it ended up selling 3.8 mt. Considering the improvement in the sugar market scene since, how much of the 6 mt will get

shipped overseas during the season ending September 2020? Balrampur Chini Managing Director Vivek Saraogi is on record saying: "Hopefully, we are able to export 5 mt this season and that will pare our sugar inventory to below 10 mt." Two consecutive years of Indian bumper production left an unmanageably large October 2019 opening stock of 14.6 mt, equalling over six months of domestic consumption.

To counter the negative fallout of this on local sugar prices that finally compromises mill capacity to settle cane bills in time, New Delhi is keen on large exports. A WTOcompliant subsidy of ₹10,448 a tonne that will cost the exchequer ₹6,268 crore in case the entire 6 mt is exported is, therefore, sanctioned. That the Centre concedes the industry needs more suc-

cour is confirmed by its expanding the buffer stock by 1 mt to 4 mt and freezing the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of sugarcane at ₹275 a quintal, leaving growers somewhat disappointed. The upshot is the government support is linked to the industry doing well with exports.

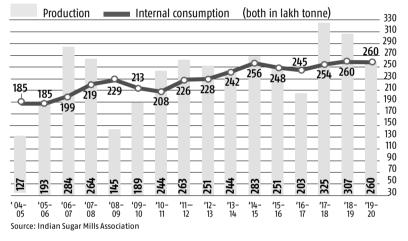
ANALYSIS BEHIND

THE HEADLINES

Trade officials believe that the achievement of 6 mt overseas sales target is possible because of government support and improving raw futures quotes on ICE. March delivery raw futures are traded at around 13.50 cents a pound. In the past 52 weeks, raws moved from a low of 10.68 cents to a high of 13.67 cents



SUGAR RUSH



a pound. The more recent positive disposition of Indian mills to export has got as much to do with ICE price improvement as with production shrinkages in other producer-exporter nations.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently projected that 2019-20 global sugar production is likely to be down 6 mt to 174 mt with "overall exports estimated to be flat." Sugar output in Brazil is restrained due to a higher

rate of diversion of sugarcane for ethanol production. The Brazilian sugarcane industry association UNICA has indicated that sugar factories will be using 35 per cent of the crop to make sugar against 35.9 per cent in the previous season. Lower production will automatically result in a smaller export surplus. In any case, the Brazilian industry has found domestic sales and ethanol production rewarding enough not to be

American nation's sugar exports will be at a decadal low, says USDA. The European Union is likely to see

obsessed about exports. The South

its beet-based sugar production up 119,000 tonnes to 17.9 mt. Even then, the region will need to import at least 500,000 tonnes for internal consumption. USDA says lower rainfall leading to compression in sugarcane productivity and juice recovery rate on cane crushing will be responsible for Thailand's 1 mt fall in sugar production to 13.5 mt. Among other ICE price boosters will be the forecast of a 5 per cent fall in Australian production to 4.5 mt, owing to lower cane juice recovery due to dry weather. Australia exports approximately 80 per cent of its sugar production. Indonesia is one major importing nation where India will be in competition with Australia.

Driven by population growth and the expansion of food and beverage industry, the Indonesian sugar requirement for the new season will likely be 6.8 mt against 6.6 mt in 2018-19 and imports will meet part of that demand. An importer of close to 5 mt, Indonesia needs to be in constant focus of Indian industry. Till December, Indian mills have signed export contracts for 2.5 mt against their maximum admissible export quantity (MAEO.)

The MAEQ has been structured in a way as to allocate the unused quota by mills unable to export for whatever reasons to factories that have export successes. This is to ensure that failures of some industry constituents do not hamper India achieving the 6 mt export target. Earlier in better times, non-coastal single factory groups would sell their quotas at a premium to exporting groups. In the present market scene, there are no buyers of export quotas. Om Dhanuka, a former president of Indian Sugar Mills Association, says about 140 of the 530 are in no position to use their MAFO quota

ON THE JOB

Inadequate & inappropriate jobs growth



MAHESH VYAS

abour markets had performed very poorly in November 2019. The labour force participation rate (LPR) and the employment rate had fallen to their all-time lows. These metrics were on a mildly declining trend but the fall in November was steeper than warranted by the trend.

Weekly estimates had indicated an improvement in the labour force participation rate in December, but only to the mean value along the mildly declining trend. The December LPR did indeed recover to 42.85 per cent from the earlier month's 42.37 per cent. Similarly, the employment rate recovered from 39.2 per cent in November to 39.55 per cent in December.

These recoveries in December notwithstanding, the quarter of October-December 2019 has turned out to be the worst for the labour markets since 2016. It ended with an LPR of 42.84 per cent which was lower than the LPR in the previous quarter. Similarly, the quarter's employment rate at 39.48 per cent was the worst.

Even the unemployment rate at 7.85 per cent during the quarter was the worst since mid 2016.

Data for calendar year 2019 tell us that a jobs growth was underway during the year. It was, however, inadequate and

also inappropriate. In absolute terms, employment was

rising during 2019. This rise could either be a recovery from the fall of 2018 or a sign of desperation to get some jobs, no matter how poor, in difficult times. The fall in 2018 was apparently the result of the combined effects of demonetisation in late 2016 and implementation of GST in mid 2017.

On a point-to-point basis, i.e. from one December to the next, 2018 saw a loss of 10.9 million jobs. By a similar point-topoint comparison, 2019 saw the addition of 9.6 million jobs. A more robust measure is the average monthly employment during one year compared to the next. This shows that 5.2 million jobs were lost in 2018 and 2.2 million were gained in 2019. Either way, we see a recovery in absolute employment estimates in 2019 but, this recovery is inadequate to even fill in the losses incurred in 2018.

But, employment needs to grow to match a growing young population and not to just fill in losses of the recent past. Employment needs to grow to ensure that a larger proportion of working age people are engaged in fruitful economic activities which in turn may ensure growth without inequality. In this respect, India is losing ground steadily.

The employment rate is a measure of the proportion of working age population that are employed. According to the World Bank's modelled ILO estimate (data retrieved by World Bank in September 2019), India has an employment to population ratio of 50 per cent compared to a world average of 58 per cent. And, India ranks 144th out of 189 countries for which such data is available. This database also shows that the employment ratio in India has been falling. It fell from 57 per cent in 1991.

It is intriguing that a lesser and lesser proportion of the working-age people in India are at work. Why more than half the Indians are not at work and why is this proportion falling? This is a question that begs a serious answer. Why is this proportion so small even when the definition of being employed is extremelv liberal where being employed for wages or for profit for even one hour in a week before the survey is sufficient to be called employed.

Consumer Pyramids CMIE's Household Survey deploys a more meaningful definition of being employed — that of being employed on the day of the survey. And it finds that the employment ratio is much worse than the ILO modelled estimate. It was a shade below 43 per cent in 2016. In 2019, it was down to less than 40 per cent. What this means is that on any given day, on an average, less than 40 per cent of the working-age population of India are employed.

During the last quarter of 2019, the employment ratio was down to 39.5 per cent. This is the lowest employment ratio seen in India during any quarter.

The employment ratio is lower in urban India than it is in rural India. Urban India is where Indians migrate to in search of jobs; it is where the more qualified-to-work live; it is where more good quality jobs are available; it is where better infrastructure is available for people to get to work. Yet, employment rate in urban India has been consistently lower than it is in rural India.

Further, the employment rate has continued to fall in urban India in 2019 while it has stabilised in rural India. Most of the increase in absolute employment in 2019 has been in rural India. This is not very reassuring about the quality of jobs that have increased in absolute terms in 2019.

We will study this more in the coming weeks but, prima facie, the increase in employment in 2019 appears to be both inadequate and inappropriate.

The author is managing director & CEO, CMIE

LETTERS

Messy war ahead



This refers to the well-written piece, "Five banking trends for the new year" (Banker's Trust, January 6). While there will be more non-performing asset (NPA) recovery and a slight increase in credit off-take, there are certain features which will continue to cause concern in the financial sector. Firstly, there will be fresh accretion of NPAs from problematic NBFCs/HFCs and from Mudra loans as well as retail loans going bad. This feature will get aggravated in an economy which is slowing down. Secondly, with fairly wide divergence in the NPAs as declared by banks and those assessed by the Reserve Bank of India in 2018-19, the high level of NPAs is not subsiding anytime soon. I am referring to some of biggest public sector banks — SBI, PNB, BoB and private banks such as Yes Bank. Thirdly, with no AQR carried out of big NBFCs, more unpleasant surprises cannot be ruled out. Fourthly, the large but weak and poorly managed urban cooperative banks could spring some shocks. Lastly, the unreformed public sector banks with their governance and operational issues will continue to drag down the overall performance of the banking sector.

Arun Pasricha New Delhi

Time to speak up

The mounting tension in West Asia following the assassination of Iran's

Ouds Force commander Oassem Soleimani, an immensely popular figure in his country, by the US is cause for concern for the international community. It is rapidly reaching a flashpoint. It is a highly volatile situation from which a fullscale war might develop. Looked at objectively, the US is squarely responsible for the conflict and its escalation in the region.

It is legitimate to ask why there are US troops in the region and no Iranian or Iraqi soldiers in the US soil to understand who is violating the principle of sovereignty of nations with impunity. Just because of US pre-eminence on the international stage, we should not shy away from some straight talking. As an imperialist power, currently led by a bellicose President, the US has brought the Gulf region to the brink of war.

The Trump administration has pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal and re-imposed economic sanctions and sought a "regime change" in Iran. It has downplayed the assassination of Soleimani as part of Trump's "maximum pressure campaign". But the US has once more shown that its foreign policy is based on the principle of "might is right".

The US is duplicitous and speaks in a forked tongue; it says it favours de-escalation and talks and then threatens "to target 52 sites" in Iran representing 52 Americans taken hostage on November 4, 1979. The

series of tweets from Donald Trump cast him as a war monger. There is a deep sense of loss and anger over the assassination of Soleimani as is evident from the chants of "Death to America" and "We will take revenge' and burning of American and Israeli flags by crowds of people in the funeral processions.

Pushed to the wall, Tehran could act in unpredictable and ingenious ways to defend itself from the US aggression. The US seems to think that anyone who seeks to resist its military and economic expansionism is expendable. For it, anyone who is not on its side in its pursuit of self-interest is a "terrorist".

The international community must raise its voice against the US for its rash and reckless acts such as the assassination of Soleimani in the belief that the targeted countries cannot exact revenge because of its military might (it is not enough to do nothing beyond denouncing them as "short-sighted") and rein it in through all possible means from destabilising the world and making it more insecure.

G David Milton Maruthancode

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



Preparing the response

Three axes along which India must respond to West Asian crisis

he killing of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani by the US during his visit to Iraq has shaken up the situation in West Asia, moved the region closer to an armed confrontation, and caused oil prices to react sharply. Soleimani, as leader of the Quds Force — which is the division that carries out the extra-territorial influence and insurgency operations of the Islamic Republic of Iran — was a major player in the politics of the region and had become enormously powerful and popular in Iran itself. A cycle of response and escalation might result. If so, it is not easy to predict the path of oil prices in the short- to medium-term. US shale oil output has been robust but demand in the global economy has been weak. The market was on its way to oversupply anyway. But any low-level conflict might target oil infrastructure. Depending on what is taken out of the supply chain and for how long, this may create a scarcity that forces prices upwards in the short- or medium-term.

There are, thus, three axes along which the Indian government will need to prepare. These axes have been the same for some decades — and are the cause of India's dependence upon stability in the West Asian region. First, of course, is the supply of oil. India imports 84 per cent of the oil it needs. Thus, a spike in the price of oil makes a big difference not just to domestic cost conditions but also to the balance of payments. An increase in oil prices will naturally cause inflationary pressures throughout the economy; the Reserve Bank of India will, therefore, be forced to exercise greater caution than it would have otherwise when it comes to setting interest rates. In the past, high oil prices have severely weakened the external account; a previous crisis in West Asia was, in fact, part of the reason for the balance of payments crisis that precipitated the 1991 liberalisation. Today, India's foreign exchange reserves are relatively comfortable, at over \$450 billion, and can easily cover 9-10 months' imports at current prices. An increase in the price of oil would have to be both sharp and sustained in order to erode this buffer.

However, there are two other axes of concern for the government, and both are related to the large Indian diaspora in West Asia, and particularly the Persian Gulf. Their safety will have to be a priority. India has in the past organised big evacuations — famously from Kuwait at the time of the first Gulf War, and more recently from Libya. The scale of any evacuation from the Gulf would on this occasion be even larger even if it remains relatively unlikely. A downturn caused by tensions, however, might cause a large number of guest workers to return to India — and to stop remitting money. In 2016-17, for instance, 27 per cent of remittances into India came from the United Arab Emirates, and 27 per cent from other Gulf states. This inward flow is concentrated geographically as well, with more than half flowing to Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. A sharp decrease in remittance income would further stress the external account and the economies of these states. The Indian government should thus keep a wary eye on developments in the Gulf and make its own preparations.

Unmasked questions

Delhi police's variable responses require explanation

wo decisions by the Delhi police roughly three weeks apart raise serious questions. On December 15, during a protest against the Citizens' Amendment Act that spilled over to the students of Jamia Millia Islamia, the Delhi police chose to exercise great zeal in pursuing miscreants, who were not students, into the campus. They proceeded to beat up students indiscriminately, fire tear gas shells in the library, and even storm the women's hostel. But on January 5, they failed to display similar zeal when a masked mob armed with sticks, bottles, and iron rods rampaged through Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) for three hours, perpetrating roughly the same sort of havoc that the police wrought in Jamia Millia. Some 40 people were injured, and the JNU students' union president sustained a head injury as did a senior professor. This time, the police chose to remain inactive outside the university gates even as chilling CCTV footage showed goons striding into campus untouched and exiting unhindered some hours later. The attackers also prevented ambulances from entering the campus, to no noticeable reaction from the police. The explanation that the police had learnt from the Jamia Millia controversy and chose not to enter the campus *suo motu* does not wash. They were stationed at the campus in the first place at the express request of the university administration to quell a fracas that had broken out that afternoon between rival unions over a fee hike announced late last year. So it is unclear why they did not exercise their core function and intervene to stop manifest lawlessness.

Inevitably, questions have arisen over the identity of the masked mobsters, an issue that has been linked to the Delhi police's inactivity. The Delhi police come under the Union home ministry. So the inference drawn from their curious inertness is that they were under orders to stand aside because the attackers were members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's student wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). The fact that the streetlights were switched off ahead of the attack has strengthened these suspicions. This is the same method of operation the police used when they lathi-charged JNU students protesting fee hikes in November last year. To be sure, this police-ABVP link is still in the realm of circumstantial evidence. The home ministry has asked the lieutenant governor, the constitutional head of Delhi, to investigate and his report should, hopefully, explain the variable response of the Delhi police, among other things.

The expected political blame game that has broken out obscures the bigger question about the credibility of those institutions that are responsible for citizens' security and safety. From the law courts to the police, it is vital that taxpayer-funded citizen-facing institutions discharge their duties with impartiality. A police force in Delhi that is seen to align its actions to the party in power at the Centre for political ends imparts a strong degree of legitimacy to an egregious trend that is rampant in almost every state administration in India. In the long run, as Uttar Pradesh has demonstrated, the institutional weakness of those responsible for upholding the law is unlikely to make India a desirable destination for investors, whether domestic or foreign. In the process, India's economic development becomes a casualty.

ILLUSTRATION: ALAY MOHANTY



The last decade for equities

Betting on the US was a winning strategy

iven that 2020 marks the start of a new decade, there have been multiple reports published highlighting the performance of various asset classes and markets over the last decade. The last decade marked the total domination of US financial assets. The S&P 500 delivered a return of 250 per cent, trouncing all other markets. US equities are now over 50 per cent of most global indices. At \$32.5 trillion, equity market capitalisation

in the US dwarfs the next biggest country, China at \$7 trillion. A simple, old fashioned 60/40 asset allocation to equities and bonds (indexed) would have seen investors in the US triple their money over the last decade. Active managers faced severe challenges globally, with hedge funds in the US unable to even beat the return of the 10-year bond. Stocks with intangible assets trounced stocks reliant on real assets like commodities.

Betting on the US, taking risk and recognising that neither inflation nor rising rates posed a risk was a winning strategy.

AKASH PRAKASH

It was an interesting decade for India as well. Over the last decade, the Nifty delivered a return of 8.9 per cent compounded, keeping pace with gold and mildly outperforming 10-year bonds, which delivered 7.7 per cent. While equities did outperform, the risk premium investors were paid to hold equities over risk-free government bonds over the last decade at 1.2 per cent was clearly inadequate. Gold remained a bet on a falling currency as the rupee depreciation bumped up the asset class return to near 9 per cent. It delivered a sub 4 per cent return in dollars. The equity market tracked corporate earnings growth with little multiple expansion. The earnings per

share (EPS) growth of the Nifty index over the decade was 8.2 per cent. Worryingly, earnings kept decelerating through the decade, with the last five years showing an EPS CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of only 5.6 per cent. The bet for the coming decade has to be that given how low corporate profits are as a proportion of gross domestic product today, earnings will accelerate back to double-digit growth rates, driving similar market performance as valua-

tions hold. That is the hope at least, as regression to the mean will kick in at some point.

In global terms, over the decade, the Nifty delivered a return of 4.3 per cent compounded in dollars, compared to 11.2 per cent for the S&P 500. Although mediocre performance compared to the US, the Nifty actually outperformed the emerging markets index, which delivered only a 1 per cent return over the same period. Over the last 10 years, despite all the excitement around small- and mid-

caps, the emergence of the domestic investor etc, the Nifty marginally outperformed the mid-cap index and trounced the small-cap index, which only delivered a rupee return of 5 per cent. The entire outperformance of the mid- and small-caps, which were delivering much higher returns till the beginning of 2018, has been reversed in the last two years.

Given the inherently higher risk in smaller stocks, it seems one has not been paid enough of an incremental return to justify owning smaller companies. Logically, this should change in the coming decade, otherwise there is no case to own anything other than the large caps.

Over the decade, the best performing sectors were—not surprisingly—the banks and consumer

pounded with the worst being real estate and power (returns of -5 per cent). In line with the above, the best performing stocks among the Nifty, were Bajaj Finance (63 per cent CAGR), Eicher Motors (42 per cent), Britannia (34 per cent) and Titan (33 per cent. The worst performers were Vedanta (-9 per cent), NTPC (-5 per cent), ONGC (-5 per cent)and Tata Steel(-2 per cent).

In terms of sectoral composition, the financials kept gaining share through the decade. Today almost 43 per cent of the Nifty index is composed of financials. Within the financials, the private banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) have gained share at the expense of the public sector banks. While the weight of the financials has almost doubled over the decade, the weight of every sector except consumer, technology, automobiles and healthcare has at least halved. A case in point being the capital goods sector, where the weightage has dropped from nearly 11 per cent to 3 per cent.

While one can never be sure when the reversal will take place, this continued outperformance, at this pace, of the financial sector is unsustainable. We cannot have the financials accounting for 60-70 per cent of the benchmark, which will be the outcome of extrapolating the current outperformance into the future. The current consensus of being long private sector financials will not continue to deliver sustained outperformance.

Over the last decade, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) invested about \$115 billion, with domestic institutions buying about \$24 billion (mutual funds bought over \$50 billion, but we had net redemptions from other domestic institutions). Over the last five years. however, domestic investors have been the buyer at the margin, investing over \$50 billion into equities compared to FII inflows of \$24 billion. One would expect the importance of domestic investors to only increase over time as both awareness and understanding of financial products increases. Mutual fund flows, though reduced, have still been consistently positive over the last two years, despite the poor performance of most funds. The stability in flows has been impressive.

From inception in 1993, FII inflows have reached almost \$190 billion, and they now own over 21 per cent of the market.

Over the last decade India Inc raised about ₹7 trillion, almost \$100 billion from the equity markets through a combination of initial public offerings. offer for sale and qualified institutional placement. The best year for equity fund raising was calendar 2017, when ₹150,000 crore was raised. The government has set an ambition to raise billions of dollars in divestment proceeds, but there is no way that the domestic equity markets can support this quantum of sale. We do not have the depth in our markets. Strategic sale is the only alternative.

It has been a fascinating decade, we have seen the despair of a year of negative 25 per cent returns as well as the exhilaration of three years of near 30 per cent returns. We have seen stocks compounding at 60 per cent, as well as others giving a negative return. The only thing one can say with certainty is that the coming decade will throw up its own share

The writer is with Amansa Capital

Public finances: Something doesn't add up

of dismal economic news. The Budget is three weeks away and there is little reason to believe that the pall of gloom will lift. Here's why.

Revenues for 2019-20 projected in the July Budget simply cannot be realised. The estimate for gross tax revenue (GTR) was ₹24.6 trillion, a 9.5 expect it to do? First, let the fiscal deficit slide to, per cent increase over revised estimates (RE) of ₹22.5 trillion for 2018-19. The problem, however, is Second, shave the balance (0.7 per cent of GDP) by that the actual GTR for 2018-19 was ₹20.8 trillion. a combination of expenditure cuts, deferred payimplying an 18.3 per cent increase, which was never possible.

In its recent (December 2019) submission to the Fifteenth Finance Commission (FFC), the government stated that GTR was now estimated to be ₹23.6 trillion, a clear ₹1 trillion short of the target. The shortfall will actually be far more — do the math. Assume that corporate, income taxes and goods and services tax (GST) grow by 8.5 per cent (ambitious), customs by 7 per cent (unlikely) and Union excise by 10 per cent over the actuals for 2018-19. Deduct ₹0.6 trillion (conservative) for the corporate tax cut. The GTR comes to ₹22 trillion, ₹2.6 trillion short, So, on a con-

servative basis, the GTR shortfall will be 1.25 per of 2019-20. On more realistic estimates of revenues, cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Other estimates doing the rounds peg GTR losses at ₹3 trillion, or 1.4 per cent of GDP.

The implications are clear. The central government's net tax revenue (NTR) will be ₹14.75 trillion, ₹1.75 trillion short. Capital receipts from disinvestment were projected as ₹1.05 trillion. This target cannot be met; at best realisation may be ₹0.3 trillion. So, NTR plus capital receipts are likely to be short by ₹2.5 trillion. This translates into a fiscal deficit (FD) slippage of 1.2 per cent of GDP.

The estimated slippage does not take into account other creative measures (deferring payment was 34 per cent. For Below Poverty Line, the price of bills) and off-book shenanigans (public sector subsidy was 46 per cent in 2002; it is now 83 per The writer is the former chairman of Trai

unit borrowing to meet government obligations). Food and fertiliser subsidy carryovers in 2019-20 are estimated to be ₹0.8 trillion and ₹0.6 trillion. respectively (together 0.7 per cent of GDP).

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) cannot publicly concede such a large slippage. So, what should we say, 3.8 per cent of GDP. This will not be unexpected. ments (including the GST compensatory cess to states) and exaggerated RE revenue receipts for 2019-

20. At year-end, there is little else the mandarins can do.

And, future prospects are not cheerful. In the submission to FFC, the government has projected that in 2020-21 food. fertiliser and fuel (FFF) subsidies will amount to ₹4.9 trillion as against ₹3 trillion in 2019-20. Fuel subsidies are expected to triple and fertiliser subsidies to almost double. GTR is projected to grow by 12.9 per cent in 2020-21, an unlikely prospect given

the exaggerated base revenues the growth comes to an impossible 19 per cent. In short, be ready for déjà vu.

The upshot is that there is just no fiscal headroom for providing a stimulus. So, much of the talk of pumppriming through huge public investment is just that talk. The top priority must be to fix the fisc.

The revenue deficit (RD) is 2.4 per cent of GDP and must be reduced. This implies subsidy cuts, though it seems there is little appetite for subsidy reduction or rationalisation. Consider the following. Above Poverty Line households get a 75 per cent price subsidy on wheat and rice; in 2002, the subsidy

the non-poor) is ballooning; surely there is a case for rationalisation. In an earlier column, I had mooted specific proposals for subsidy reform and redirecting public expenditure (Business Standard, 2 and 3 November 2015).

Another way to reduce the deficit is to target tax expenditures. Some economists estimate this can yield fiscal space of 3-4 per cent of GDP. The reality check could be the fourth or fifth version of the direct tax code (DTC). Any bets on tax expenditure reform?

Faltering growth has been diagnosed extensively and a slew of recommendations (some contradic tory) have been made. Reviving investment is a common refrain. As is boosting consumption. A common prescription to accelerate growth is "major reforms", mostly left undefined. This when the credit system is severely stressed. And, we are in the throes of a fiscal crisis: A cutback in expenditures by the Centre of ₹2.2 trillion is reportedly on the cards. This will impact growth and revenues with knock-on effects on the credit system.

Without last-minute expenditure cuts, the FD would be 5.2 per cent of GDP (including only the carryovers of food and fertiliser subsidies). The FD needs a 2 per cent reduction. Taxation revitalisation is imperative (including the DTC). However, expenditure restructuring is the critical reform. We need 2-2.5 per cent of GDP to fix the credit system; without this, the drag on growth will simply persist. A similar amount is needed to spur public investment and promote complementary private investment. True, sectoral reforms are urgently needed in power, telecom, transport and coal to revive private investment and staunch public dissaving.

A 5 per cent correction in the fisc is no easy task. But, it is not impossible. It will take two to three years, as in 1991. The imperative is to start now. And, that means coming clean on the state of India's public finances.

Confronting an existential crisis



HASAN SUROOR

The last book I read on madrasas (Hem Borker's Madrasas and the Making of Islamic Womanhood) argued that for all their flaws they offer a route to educational mobility for Muslim girls from conservative families, particularly from rural areas. These girls find madrasas empowering and a potential stepping stone to mainstream higher education, even a career. Some told her

madrasas had transformed their lives. Yet, her description of the life inside a typical madrasa (Borker spent some time at a Delhi women's madrasa as part of her research) showed an institution mired in a culture of exclusion, with girls living isolated lives totally cut off from the Ms Borker wrote she had worked with

minority communities before but had "never engaged with an institution that is so Muslim, not just in terms of the student and staff composition, but also in its cultural norms, behavioural practices and ethos. ... zealously fenced, with multiple levels of security, which can be quite unwelcoming and intimidating". Her brave attempt to work up

enthusiasm for madrasas was ultimately frustrated by the reality she encountered on the ground. The book under review also sets out to refurbish madrasas' image by trying to portray them as a casualty of widespread Islamophobia, but soon it comes up against the hard reality behind the plight of madrasas and why they are

perceived by the outside world with disdain and suspicion, making them a sitting target for attacks. Describing a madrasa adjacent to a

well-appointed school in Kishanganj (Bihar), which famously organises an international literature festival, it says that while the "students of the school in smart trousers, shirt and tie attend many of the deliberations, the students of the

madrasa remain conspicuous by their

"All through the festival, they remain inside, emerging only to offer prayers at their appointed time....They are like frogs in the well: read, learn, memorise and repeat. From early morning to lunch, then

tables, chairs, just benches to place their books and rough jute rugs to sit on," the authors write pointing out that it's the same story at "countless madrasas across the country". None of this--lack of basic amenities,

again after a lunch break...the students sit

hunched over religious texts. There are no

regressive MADRASAS IN THE

"indoctrinate" their students against

rival Muslim sects. They are even

forbidden from reading literature

to isolate students from the outside

world stretch to banning them from

RAHUL KHULLAR

MADRASAS in the AGE of ISLAMOPHOBIA AGE OF **ISLAMOPHOBIA** Author: Ziya Us Salam and M Aslam Parvaiz Publisher: Sage **Price:** ₹395

environment, antiquated curriculum and teaching methodshas got anything to do with Islamophobia, and everything with the system's inherent institutional flaws.

Some madrasas, as

the book points, not

"seen the inside of a madrasa" (as one madrasa head is quoted as saving about critics). But Ziva Us Salam (a former colleague at The Hindu) and M Aslam only openly practise exclusion but also Parvaiz are "kosher" Muslim voices and the community will find it harder to shrug off their outspoken criticism of a system teetering on the brink-starved of funds, steeped in conservatism, stuck published by other sects. And attempts with an outdated curriculum and

considering these languages as "foreign This book is significant not because of

what it says but because who is saying it. It's written not by any old Islamophobic madrasa-sceptic, but by two devout Muslims who are knowledgeable about madrasas; appear passionately to care for them, writing about their decline with a real sense of loss; and believe in their continued relevance. Generally, a reflex Muslim reaction to

reading English and Hindi newspapers

to Muslims". (Page 173).

any criticism of madrasas is to dismiss it as Islamophobic rant, or coming from armchair detractors who have never resistant to change.

They warn that only a radical "overhaul" (end to sectarianism and modernising the syllabus) can help it "survive into the next century". Sectarianism runs so deep that most madrasas teach "only one interpretation of Islam" depending on the sect to which a madrasa belongs. None of this is news. But, for a change, the conveyors of this bad news are not the so-called usual madrasa or Muslim-baiting suspects but respected credible voices from within the community. Which will make it harder for the madrasa lobby to shoot the messenger this time.

The book offers a well-documented and honest critique of madrasas, but spoils its card somewhat by opting for a slightly misleading populist title, "Madrasas in the Age of Islamophobia". Those who buy it hoping to get an understanding of how Islamophobia has affected madrasas may be forgiven for feeling disappointed that it doesn't quite deliver what it says on the tin.

The reviewer is the author of, Who Killed Liberal Islam



MONDAY, JANUARY 6, 2020



Chief minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal

The economy is down, no homes, no jobs for our children... and they plan to get 2 crore Pakistani Hindus. What was the need for this law? First fix your own country. Then we will get everyone

RationalExpectations



Unfair to expect India Inc to be bold

Govt policy can kill your business, your assets can be seized, your dues may stay unpaid ... not criticising govt is a good idea

S THE INDUSTRIAL/INVESTMENT climate gets worse, paradoxically, India Inc is the new villain of the piece. If only top industrialists spoke their mind — like Rahul Bajaj did with home minister Amit Shah — and told the prime minister just how badly he was getting it wrong, the government would have course-corrected a long time ago. As part of this narrative, a former CII president, Naushad Forbes, has a recent article where he blames Indian industry's habit of seeking favours from the government for this state of supplication (his term).

Certainly, even close to 30 years after the Bombay Club days—ironically, Bajaj was a leading spirit of that gathering—sections of India Inc continue to look for favours. Many industrialists have, successfully, petitioned the government to raise import duties—using anti-dumping and other actions as well—on their products; indeed, sections of industry petitioned the government to walk out of RCEP since they were uncomfortable with the import competition this would have resulted in.

But, in a more fundamental sense, the problem is that even after three decades of the PV Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh reforms, India hasn't reformed in critical ways. Reforms are not just about cutting taxes and import duties, they are equally about their irreversibility, the predictability of the downward cuts; the moment there is subjectivity involved, and the possibility that the rates can be hiked, lobbying begins.

Reforms are about easing entry barriers—including for FDI—in as many sectors as possible, but if firms are not allowed to exit, it creates room for lobbying; more important, it ensures that firms *have* to lobby for what is a natural right. An obvious example is that of Vodafone. When, after years of hostile government policy has driven most telcos to the ground—this newspaper has chronicled this in detail—the Vodafone global CEO said his firm would have to shut its India operations, telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad found it easy to condemn this as 'dictating terms' to India. Imagine the irony—the firm has invested \$30 bn in India, is close to losing all

Govt seized Cairn's

shares but not

Vodafone's, it asks

telcos for AGR dues

but not PSUs, stops

Airtel-Tata merger,

won't pay damages

in Antrix-Devas case,

doesn't allow GST

credit for telcos ...

who can take it on?

of it due to hostile government policy, and a senior minister is upset at the Vodafone chief speaking the truth! More important, when Vodafone-Idea does shut shop, will the government allow it to, or will it put all manner of hurdles in the way? Keep in mind that while Airtel bought Tata Tele's mobile business more than two years ago—when the Tatas wanted out—the government has just approached the Supreme Court to nullify this!

Is asking the government to fix this asking for a favour, or is it just a demand for rights? Another good example is the purchase of Bhushan Power and Essar Steel by JSW and Arcelor Mittal, respectively, in the insolvency courts. These were sales that PSU banks initiated under a mechanism devised by the government; yet, when the sales were nearly complete, JSW found some of Bhushan's assets were seized by authorities investigat-

ing the crimes committed by the previous owners. Both

JSW and Arcelor approached the government to ask for a halt to all investigative action and criminal action—including seizing of assets—since they were not responsible for what happened before they bought the firms; pursue the previous owners, don't take action against the company, they argued. The question to ask is if either Sajjan Jindal or Lakshmi Mittal were to criticise the government for its poor handing of the economy earlier, would it have changed the law to put a stop to such action after a firm was sold at the insolvency courts? Chances are it won't have acted so fast, if at all.

There are countless such examples of firms needing to approach the government, not for favours, but just to correct obvious wrongs; but, to get even that done, businessmen can't afford to take a chance and criticise the government—this applies as much to the Congress as it does to the BJP. After the Congress levied the retrospective tax, and the BJP didn't fix this despite campaigning against it when in the Opposition, it even seized \$1.3-1.4bn of assets of Cairn Energy; can the CEO of Cairn Energy afford to talk openly about the government's breach of faith and still hope to get justice? Keep in mind that even if Cairn wins the arbitration case on the tax, the decision to honour the award and to give Cairn back its money is Narendra Modi's. And, in cases like Antrix-Devas, despite the government losing the arbitration, the money has not been paid to Devas Multimedia; in the case of Tata-Docomo, where the government was not even a party, it petitioned the court to prevent the Tatas from paying Docomo!

Even if you believe that the government shouldn't be diluting the demands made on telcos after the SC's AGR ruling—read *bit.ly/2MO4QPZ* to know how flawed this assumption is—it is surely unfair that while the government leans on private telcos to pay up, it is quite relaxed about PSUs paying up even though the amount they have to pay is much higher. Once again, the government has such huge discretion, only someone not too worried about their business would openly take it on.

And, is it a favour if KM Birla approaches the FM to ask for permission to use the GST input credit that is due —₹35,000 crore for all telcos—to reduce the GST that he has to pay? Or take the case of Ajit Gulabchand, who is owed more money by the government's NHAI—not only was he owed the money, when NHAI contested it, the arbitration panels ruled in his favour—than he owes the PSU banks for his Lavasa township project; he hasn't got his money from NHAI, but the banks have taken over Lavasa!

If PM Modi really wants to make it easy for industry to invest, he needs to stop this discretionary power his government has, not showcase the easily-gamed and irrelevant Ease of Doing Business index of the World Bank. So, let's praise Rahul Bajaj for his statement to the home minister, but keep in mind he doesn't run any business now—indeed, one of his two sons, who runs Bajaj Auto, was quick to criticise his father's statement the very next day!—and be less harsh on businessmen who don't want a favour, but are just asking for freedom to run their businesses; businessmen who don't know, even if they agree to opt out, whether they will be allowed to sell their businesses since government permissions are required for this as well.

Kota, Gorakhpur...

Preventing a Kota redux will need a structural overhaul of the public healthcare system in the country

VERA 100 infants dying in Kota's JK Longovernment hospital in 33 days is a perverse reminder of the failure of public healthcare that, among other instances, caused the death of nearly 1,300 children in Gorakhpur's BRD Hospital in 2017. At JK Lon, 963 children died last year, and that's after such deaths at the hospital have trended downwards over the past few years. What is atrocious is that the state government should point to the trend to defend itself. Even as patients, parents, and external supervisors point to the lack of basic but life-saving infrastructure—nearly 320 of 500-plus key medical equipment at the hospital, includingventilators, are invarious states of disrepair—the hospital has attributed the deaths

to the critical condition of the children at the time of being brought to the hospital. To be sure, the severe imbalance between the supply and demand at the hospital is a factor that must be considered; the hospital records an average of 200-300 out-patient consultations and 30-40 admissions per day. But, JK Lon is the norm, not the exception. Given how poor India's public health infrastructure is—there are just three government hospital beds for every 10,000 rural population, and one government allopathic doctor for 10,926 Indians—a Kota/Gorakhpur-like situation is, in theory, possible anywhere in the country. There is just one government hospital for 90,000 people. If India has to meet the SDG of ending under-five child deaths by 2030, it needs a structural overhaul of its healthcare system.

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

REFORMING THE COUNTRY'S GRAIN MANAGEMENT SYSTEM COULD SAVE THE GOVT ₹50,000 CRORE ANNUALLY, ALLOWING THE FM TO FUND INFRA INVESTMENTS WHILE MAINTAINING FISCAL DEFECIT

Lifting growth, containing inflation

GROWTH RATES plummeting to 4.5% for overall GDP and 2.1% for agricultural GDP (GDPA) in the second quarter of this fiscal year, everyone concerned with the economy is anxious and a bit worried. The moot question being asked is whether the Indian economy can be put back on its 7-8% growth track and whether agri-GDP can grow at least at 4%, if not more. It may be noted that while the aver-

age rate of GDP growth in the UPA-2 and Modi 1.0 periods was 7.2% and 7.5%, respectively, GDPA growth slowed down in the latter to 2.9%, way below the 4.3% achieved during UPA-2. And, now that quarterly GDPA growth is hovering around 2%, it is cause for greater concern (see graphic). As agriculture still engages about 44% of India's workforce—and if masses do not gain from the growth process, their incomes remain subdued—the demand for manufactured goods as well as for housing etc will remain low. This low demand in the economy is one of the prime reasons behind India's great slowdown today.

Interestingly, during this slowdown, inflation has started surging after a long period of low inflation under Modi 1.0. Inflation is led by different components of the food basket—cereals, pulses, and vegetables—in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

So, everyone is waiting to see how finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman can prop up the economy by boosting demand, without causing undue inflation (beyond the threshold level of 6% observed by RBI). Also, there is the challenge of not slipping on the fiscal deficit target of 3.3%, although the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has already indicated that the real fiscal deficit in the country, if one accounts for the increasing loans being undertaken by many PSUs, is much more than this number.

Sitharaman has already announced an infrastructure investment package of

ASHOK GULATI Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture, ICRIER Views are personal

about ₹102 lakh crore for the next five years, which implies more than doubling the growth in infra-investments from its current levels. The legitimate question being asked is from where the resources will come. The announcement does not unveil any clear strategy on the resource mobilisation front.

Here are my two cents on raising (saving) about ₹50,000 crore per annum to finance infrastructure projects without causing high inflation and without breaching fiscal deficit targets. I would submit that the FM and PM kindly look at the massive inefficiencies in the grain management system under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) to find the required resources.

The NFSA gives certain quantities of wheat and rice to 67% of the population at ₹2/kg and ₹3/kg, respectively, while these cost the Food Corporation of India about ₹25/kg and ₹35/kg, respectively. This led to a provision of food subsidy worth ₹184,000 crore in the Union Budget for FY20. Not many people know that FCI has pending bills of ₹186,000

crore, and FCI has been asked to borrow more and more to finance its operations. The grain stocks with FCI are more than even double of the buffer stock norms as on January 1 every year (see graphic).

The massive grain stock accumulation is the result of a highly inefficient food management strategy, wherein the procurement of wheat and rice (paddy) remains open ended, but disbursal is largely restricted to public distribution system (PDS). The open market operations (OMO) are much lower compared to what is needed to liquidate excessive stocks. We don't have a clear strategy. And now, if the rabi procurement is good, FCI may not have ample storage space to accommodate this. The money locked in these excessive stocks (beyond the buffer norm) is more than ₹1 lakh crore. Even if the government decides to liquidate half of it, it can garner ₹50,000 crore to finance at least half of its infrastructure projects! We need a bolder move to reform our grain management system. There is no need to set up another expert committee for this. The

blueprint for reforming grain management was presented to PM Modi by the Shanta Kumar Panel, whose report is on FCI's website. Only three points from this report need reiteration:

1. While the poor under the Antyodaya category should keep getting the maximum food subsidy, the issue price for the others should be fixed at, say, 50% of the procurement price (as was done under former PM Atal Bihari Vaypayee for the BPL category).

2. Limit subsidised grain distribution under NFSA to 40% of the population rather than the current 67%. After all, we must ask: what is the poverty ration that cannot afford even basic food? Since 2011, when the number of poor as perthe Tendulkar poverty line was 21%, the Indian government has not updated this figure. Time for the Modi government to tell the nation what the level of extreme poverty in India is.

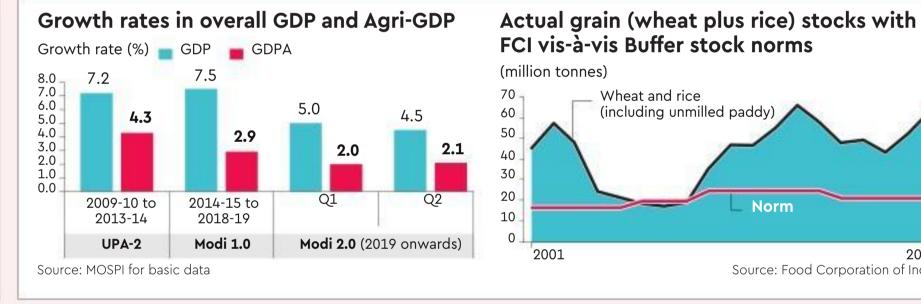
3. Limit procurement of rice, particularly in the north-western states of Punjab and Haryana, where the groundwater table is depleting fast, and invite the private sector in grain management.

If the government can implement just these points, it can save another ₹50,000 crore annually! Additionally, this will help the government reduce the fiscal deficit. And, if it liquidates stocks fast, it can contain inflation too. Can the Modi government focus on

reforms and implement them? Only time will show.

2019

Source: Food Corporation of India



Central banks: Economy's biggest risk

There is no need for central banks to start tightening monetary policies anytime soon and "break" the economy. But, should policy makers get their wish and some inflation returns, then it would be time to worry

BIANCO Bloomberg

THE US ECONOMIC recovery that began in June 2009 is now in its 127th month, which is a record. Even more impressive is that for the first time since the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the US just completed the first calendar decade without even one day of a recession. There are a few key reasons why this is happening, and one clear risk that could bring the expansion to an end. The natural trend for an economy

is to grow. A recession only occurs when something "breaks." So, this record expansion is happening because nothing has broken. The primary reason is new technology that gives businesses more flexibility to adapt to changing conditions. Technology is also preventing faster

inflation in the developed world, a major cause of recessions in the past. Pricing has become hyper-competitive (think of the "Amazon effect") and the internet allows for product substitution at lighting speed. Unhappy with a Chinese supplier? A quick Google search or a Skype call will quickly help you find a Vietnam substitute at virtually no cost.

Breaking things, in the literal sense, is also at an all-time low. Major powers have been at war with each almost continuously for over 500 years. But starting in 2000, they have stopped fighting in an unprecedented period of peace in human history.

Another leading cause for breaking an economy has been rapidly rising energy prices. Crude oil at \$147 a barrel was concurrent with the Great Recession in 2008. But, this is changing. Abundant energy supplies due to new fracking technologies are reducing the threat of a supply shock. *Bloomberg News* reported that November was the first month in 70 years that the US was

a net petroleum exporter.

And note the muted response in energy markets to the drone attack on Saudi oil facilities in Abqaiq in September. Forecasts that the attack would cause oil prices to spike to \$100 were not entirely unfounded, as that would have happened in the past, when supplies were not nearly as flexible. Instead, Brent crude is holding below \$70 a barrel.

All of these are powerful, but standard, reasons for why the economy is stable. There is, however, an unconventional source of strength that emerged in the last decade that

also doubles as its biggest risk: central banks. As of November, the collective balancesheet assets of the Federal Reserve, European Central Bank, Bank of Japan and Bank of England stood at 35.9% of their countries' total gross domestic product, up from about 10% in 2008, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

At the same time, the latest World Bank data show that developed country GDP expanded to \$54.2 trillion at the end of 2018 from \$46.1 trillion a decade earlier. Restated, central bank balance sheets grew at faster rate, by \$9.9 trillion, than their underlying economies, which have expanded by \$8.1 trillion, which is a big reversal from the 2001 to 2006 period.

It is hard to quantify just how much of this combined "money printing" by central banks contributed to GDP growth, but most would agree that it ranges anywhere from "some" to "much".

So, what happens when central

banks pull back from this stimulus? When the Federal Reserve hinted in late 2018 that they were going to increase interest rates several more times in 2019, and the balance sheet reduction was on "automatic pilot", the S&P 500 Index plunged almost 20% and recession fears became prevalent.

And when the Fed partly reversed its stance in early 2019, suggesting it wouldn't increase rates, recession fears receded and stocks soared to post one of their best years ever in

But, the Fed kept shrinking its bal-

A recession only

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ance sheet, and by September the repo market ran into trouble. The central bank was forced to reverse here, too, and has boosted its assets by more than \$400 billion, a move that coincided with the strong fourth-quarter rally in riskier assets such as equities. The takeaway here is that it will be extremely hard for central banks to reverse "money printing."

With inflation doormat, though, there is no need for central banks to start tightening monetary policies anytime soon and "break" the economy. But, should policy makers get their wish and some inflation returns, then it would be time to worry.

Central bankers try to operate under the Hippocratic Oath: "First, do no harm". We will not know if they have caused any harm until they reverse their unprecedented balance sheet expansion without incident. The Fed's recent experience is not encouraging.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trader last year, investor this year After a series of diktats to promote

accountability of fiduciaries and curb violations by auditors, financial advisors, and portfolio managers, the stringent regulatory stance is expected to continue in the new year too. In order to mitigate investment risks, it is prudent to improve the quality of service, discourage cartelisation, and lower the cut-throat competition in the market. Regulatory compliance demands equitable focus on accurate reporting of financials, expedited redressal of delinquencies, and high return on investments. It is important to flag concerns proactively, resolve nonconformances and penalise negligence to limit the business impact, probability of a wilful default, money laundering, and nonadherence to CSR-goals. It is time to embrace a business culture driven by rule-based due diligence to mix caution with aggression. The last thing which the resilient capital markets need is recurring instances of subprime lending, security breach, redundant corporate actions, and trade malpractices. As it becomes increasingly difficult for underperforming entities to conduct business and thrive in the economy, authorities must continue to highlight the grey areas to safeguard enterprises from potential losses. Although, the recent proposal to discourage intraday trading is a mixed bag, it sets the tone for the year. Market participation could witness a setback as retail and institutional traders, would be reluctant to pay upfront the full consideration, including the increased fee towards a delivery order. Undoubtedly, stricter guidelines can prevent potential adverse impact and help improve transparency, and shareholder confidence. — Girish Lalwani, Delhi

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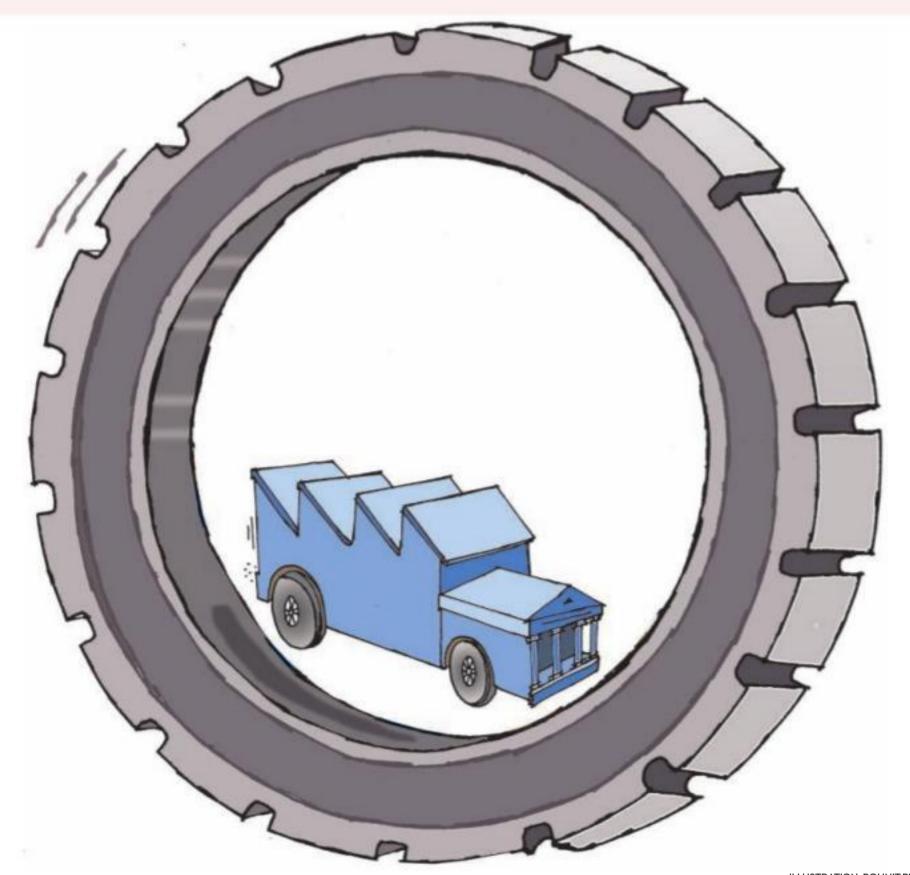


ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE



OVER THE BARREL

From State vs society to State and society

The hope for the new decade must be that our 'State' and 'society' will find a narrow corridor where both can be in balance (shackled leviathan). This would reinvigorate our institutions, and accelerate the resolution of outstanding critical issues

SIREFLECT ON the decade just ended and the year ahead, three thoughts cross my mind. First, most of the issues that are front and centre on this government's policy agenda are those that have been on the previous government's priority list for years. Irrespective of the acronym defining the politics of the government or the personalities in charge, the nee-

dle of change has hardly moved on these issues.

Second, there are multiple reasons for this policy stasis, but the one that is relevant for all governments is the steady erosion of the institutional underpinnings of governance and the consequential concentration of power in the hands of extra-constitutional authorities and individuals. Decisions have been held in abeyance because of

the blurring of the lines of responsibility and accountability, and the lack of clarity on where power truly resides.

Third, 'society' and the 'State' are in conflict. This conflict is structural. A youthful, vibrant, ambitious and connected 'society' is pitted against a hesitant, at times paralytic, politicallyshackled and precedent-bound 'State'. How this clash will evolve is a matter of uncertainty, but what is clear is that constructive change will be difficult to bring about in the absence of a balancing of interests—a modus vivendi between these two entities.

I have been a columnist for the past nearly two decades. I have written mainly on energy and business, but my op-eds have also covered the economy, finance, environment and governance. I have endeavoured to write about issues of contemporary signifi-

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politically-shackled

and precedent-

bound 'State'

cance. I was flipping through my articles recently, and I noted that many of the topics I had written about in the past remain unresolved issues of concern today.

I have, for instance, written about our vulnerability to energy imports, and the need for developing and implementing an integrated energy strategy. Today, we import 85% of our oil requirements and, more worrying, our imports of thermal coal are increasing despite the abundance of indigenous

deposits. Further, there is still no one executive authority responsible for energy policy. The banking crisis has been staring us in the face for years, and reams have been written about it, including by economists of world-class renown. Solutions have been proffered, and some steps have been taken. But, clearly, not enough has been done. For the contagion has now spread to the non-banking financial institutions. The consequent credit choke is a major contributor to the cur-

rent economic downturn. Disinvestment was first brought onto the governments' policy agenda 20 years ago. Several Maharatnas, including the PSU petroleum companies, were identified for strategic sale. I

advocated the government hold fast to its policy in the face of the inevitable challenge from trade unionists and vested interests. The government was not persuaded, and the process was aborted. Today, BPCL (and Air India) are back on the table. Interested investors will be wondering whether the countervailing forces that stalled the process earlier are now firmly in check.

One could continue to cite examples of policies that everyone agreed needed to be implemented, but which remain unresolved and unimplemented to date. Issues like 'second generation' factor market (land, labour, capital) reforms, environmental pollution and administration overhaul.

The question is, 'why'?

The simple answer is, it is because of the nature of our democratic system of governance. This is a system that does not allow pragmatic politics and good economics to share the same bedspread. And when political push comes to economic shove, it pushes economics off the mattress.

But some issues do not impact politics. Why has there been no progress in tackling those issues? Why have governments not effectuated good economics when politics has not been a constraint? Here, the answer is more complex and, in my view, rooted in the erosion of our institutions of governance. This erosion commenced decades ago, in the 1970s, when for the first time since Independence appointments to the bureaucracy and the judiciary were made on the basis of personal and political preference, not professional integrity. The erosion has continued unabated, and as a result, today, the institutional checks and balances embodied in our constituency have got corroded and power has shifted from the constitutionally embedded organs of governance towards extraconstitutional authorities and individuals. There is now lack of clarity about who is responsible for what, and this has further calcified decision-making. A senior bureaucrat on the edge of retirement is now understandably cautious. Why risk the fallout from an 'act of commission' when there are no sanctions attached to 'acts of omission'.

The consequence of the hollowing out of our institutions, the 'personalisation' of power and the widening gap between the promise of policy and its delivery is compounding the tensions between the 'society' and the 'State'. These relations have been tense since 1991-92 when economic reforms unleashed the 'animal spirits' of our youthful population, and since the forces of globalisation and technology

heightened expectations. We are witness today to public manifestation of these tensions. The trigger is the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), but there is a deeper message underlying the current protests. The 'society' will not allow the 'State' to rewrite the social contract to reflect narrow and partisan

predilections. Professors Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson have recently published a book entitled "The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty". They write that

squeezed between the lawless chaos of a failed State ('absentee leviathan') and the choke on civil liberties by autocracy ('despotic leviathan'), there is a narrow corridor where the 'State' and the 'society' can be in balance ('shackled leviathan'). It is within this corridor that the State can discharge its duties to "resolve conflicts, enforce law, provide public services, and create economic opportunities," but without "encroaching on the rights and liberties of the society." The hope for the new decade must be that our 'State' and 'society' will find a way into such a corridor. This would reinvigorate our institutions, and accelerate the resolution of out-

standing critical issues.

DATA PROTECTION BILL

Game-changer for fintech?

MEGHNA SURYAKUMAR

The author is founder & CEO, Crediwatch

How the personal data protection Bill will impact the Indian fintech sector

NION IT MINISTER Ravi Shankar Prasad recently presented the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, in Parliament. The Bill provides a framework for protecting citizens' privacy, barring technology companies from storing and processing 'sensitive' personal data without explicit consent from individuals. But it empowers the central government to "exempt any agency of government from the application of Act in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order." It also provides exemptions for 'reasonable purposes', such as prevention and detection of any unlawful activity including fraud, whistle blowing, merger and acquisitions, network and information security, credit scoring, and recovery of debt, among others.

The Bill intends to bring more 'accountability and transparency' into the country's information ecosystem while addressing the loopholes and major data security concerns. Once implemented, it is expected to create disruptions across industries and verticals. One such sector is fintech, which includes digital lending, mobile payment companies and investment platforms. RBI and SEBI are yet to release separate, comprehensive guidelines for the fintech sector. Hence, ambiguity over regulations continues to be a pain point for fintech participants in India. With standardised rules in place, even smaller companies will have to adhere to practices that are on par with global standards.

The Bill can pave way for a true consent-based data sharing in the financial services industry. Financial institutions

often fail to accurately price risk, mainly because of lack of relevant data on each individual and, so, it is largely a game of averages applied over an aggregate. If enforced strategically, customers may be willing to disclose personal data as the chances of data misuse will go down. With more data available, fintech companies will be able to better customise their services and products.

With more data available, fintech companies will be able to better customise their services, products

At the same time, the Bill has sparked concerns within the industry as it necessitates fintech companies to prepare for additional compliance obligations. Fintech companies deal with large volumes of sensitive customer data—names, cellphones, address, bank account number, credit history, PAN, etc. The Bill classifies all forms of personal financial data as 'sensitive personal data'. As such, most companies operating in the fintech space could be categorised as 'Significant Data Fiduciaries' by the data protection authority (DPA).

The Bill proposes restrictions on cross-border data transfer, and prohibits processing of sensitive personal data and critical personal data outside India. Another challenge is the provision of 'right to be forgotten', where organisations are not allowed to access customer data after the purpose of which it was shared is met, unless they have explicit consent from the customer. This can create new regulatory bottlenecks for fintech companies. But it is the large internet companies, both global and domestic, that will face severe consequences. Since they won't be able to assume ownership of consumer data as their own, it will not only eliminate their dominance on consumer data, but also erode their competitive edge where data was their moat. In contrast, opportunities will open for new players like consent brokers who facilitate data sharing, storage and management of end-user data across multiple platforms on behalf of users.

Companies should start making investments in data systems to comply with the Bill; they would need to put the control of customer data back in the hands of their true owner, the customer. This is essential to obtain informed consent from the customer to use the data for specific purposes and share the same with other providers as well, if needed.

It might take a while for fintech companies to adapt to the new data protection guidelines. A quick make overwon't suffice; they must make continued efforts to build a robust privacy system for storing and processing of personal data. Despite initial hiccups, however, the Personal Data Protection Bill can be a game-changer for fintech companies wherein they can derive immense value from free sharing of data between the customer and the service provider as a result of new-found end-user comfort.

SIONAL services to the competition is necessary. The time is opportune when audit firms—as well as secretarial practice firms—be allowed to graduate to the next level, and along with the freedom to advertise with some reasonable restrictions.

In a rapidly growing interdependent global economy, the Indian audit and secretarial practice community cannot, and should not, lock itself up into a corner. It is in the best interest of Indian firms to globalise by adopting best practices, state-ofthe-art technology and invest in people, rather than resisting international networking, especially when we have one of the best talent pool.

Restrictions on advertising and marketing by Indian accountants that have been applied by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), over and above internationally accepted rules, need to be reviewed. If the Indian chartered accountant (CA) firms, in their own right, aspire to have a global presence, it may be necessary to adopt the internationally accepted and applied policies under the laws of the country. Instances may be drawn from the mature audit markets such as the US, the UK, France, Germany, China, Singapore and many others on advertising and branding that is allowed

for public accountants. Indian CAs and company secretaries

Audit lessons from across the world

Why Indian audit and secretarial business needs to globalise?



(CSs), too, should be allowed to perform advertising and marketing activities that do not bring the profession into disrepute. In such activities, the professional advertising should be honest and truthful, and not make exaggerated claims for the services offered, qualifications possessed, or experience gained, or make disparaging references or unsubstantiated comparisons to the work of a fellow professional. Objective and non-misleading advertising and marketing activities will help in spreading awareness and knowledge-

sharing. CAs and CSs would be able to organise leadership conferences on new accounting, secretarial and auditing standards, changes in laws and regulations.

Regulation 190 of the Chartered Accountants Regulations, 1988, requires a CA firm established in India after 1988 to apply to the ICAI for approval to use a firm name. Subsequently, since 2005, the ICAI has allowed Indian CA firms to enter into contractual or other arrangements with an international network and become a member of the said network. In

fact, the ICAI's Revised Guidelines of Network, 2011, allow the use of a familiar

brand name. Consequently, Indian audit firms that are members of an international network are often associated with the brand name of the network. Regulation 190 does not explicitly prohibit the use of international brand names of networks. It gives power to the Council of the ICAI to reject a trade/firm name that, it thinks, may smack of publicity. In addition, the Council of the ICAI reserves the discretion to

refuse registration of a trade or firm name, if that name is undesirable in the opinion of the members.

The current guidelines to approve firm names followed by the ICAI and the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) seem to be too restrictive. The guidelines require that the name should include the name of the proprietor/partner as they appear in the Register of Members. A trade or firm name that has no relationship with the name of the member(s) is not allowed. Similarly, descriptive trade/firm name is

not allowed. Therefore, it's time that these guidelines are reviewed and liberalised as long as the name applied for does not smack of publicity.

Indian audit and secretarial firms need to equip themselves to manage stakeholder expectations, disclosure of financial information, and global accounting practices, as domestic companies are looking to move beyond the country. MNCs are seeking to invest in growth hotspots such as India.

Indian firms need to be as nimblefooted as some of the domestic companies that successfully turned MNCs by expanding overseas by drawing from the templates of global companies that set shop here in 1991. There could be a lot to gain by allowing audit firms to market them selves in India.

A government-appointed committee of experts (COE) in its report on Regulat ing Audit Firms and the Networks last year also held out similar views, concluding that branding with international networks would increase the competitiveness of Indian audit firms. Indian companies may benefit from using Indian audit firms that are members of international networks with a brand name.

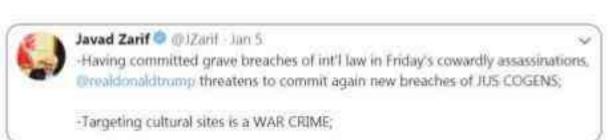
The COE has recommended that the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) and the ICAI make appropriate changes to respective laws and regulations, including Regulation 190, and the Code of Ethics, 2009.



THIS WORD MEANS

JUS COGENS

The Latin term that Iran invoked after Trump threatened to target its cultural sites



ON SUNDAY, responding to President Donald Trump's threat to attack sites that were "important to Iran and Iranian culture", Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif posted on Twitter: "Having committed grave breaches of int'l law in Friday's cowardly assassinations, @realdonaldtrump threatens to commit again new breaches of JUS COGENS; — Targeting cultural sites is a WAR CRIME;... Those masquerading as diplomats and those who shamelessly sat to identify Iranian cultural & civilian targets should not even bother to open a law dictionary. Jus cogens refers to peremptory norms of international law, i.e. international red lines. That is, a big(ly) "no no"."

("Bigly" is a word that many believe Donald Trump has been heard to say, and is frequently used to mock the President's speech, mannerisms, and behaviour. However, in 2016, the BBC quoted Fiona McPherson, a senior editor with the Oxford English Dictionary, as saying that "bigly" is, in fact a real word, which can mean "with great force". The US reference book company Merriam-Webster also agrees that "bigly" is a word, the BBC report said.)

JUS COGENS or *ius cogens*, meaning "compelling law" in Latin, are rules in international law that are peremptory or authoritative, and from which states cannot deviate. These norms cannot be offset by a separate treaty between parties intending to do so, since they hold fundamental values. Today, most states and international organisations accept the principle of *jus cogens*, which dates back to Roman times.

The jus cogens rules have been sanc-

tioned by the Vienna Conventions on the Law of Treaties of 1969 and 1986. According to both Conventions, a treaty

is void if it breaches jus cogens rules. Article 53 of the 1969 Convention ("Treaties conflicting with a peremptory norm of general international law ("jus cogens")") says: "A treaty is void if, at the time of its conclusion, it conflicts with a peremptory norm of general international law. For the purposes of the present Convention, a peremptory norm of general international law is a norm accepted and recognized by the international community of States as a whole as a norm from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character."

Article 64 of the 1986 Convention, "Emergence of a new peremptory norm of general international law (jus cogens)", says: "If a new peremptory norm of general international law emerges, any existing treaty which is in conflict with that norm becomes void and terminates."

Besides treaties, unilateral declarations also have to abide by these norms.

So far, an exhaustive list of *jus cogens* rules does not exist. However, the prohibition of slavery, genocide, racial discrimination, torture, and the right to self-determination are recognised norms. The prohibition against apartheid is also recognised as a jus cogens rule, from which no derogation is allowed, since apartheid is against the basic principles of the United Nations.

OM MARATHE

TIP FOR READING LIST -

Papers

TRIBUTE TO AN ICONIC COMIC STRIP

THE PREFACE to The Peanuts Papers: Writers and Cartoonists on Charlie Brown, Snoopy & the Gang, and the Meaning of Life, edited by Andrew Blauner, begins: "Nearly twenty years after the death of Charles M Schulz,... there still seems so

much to say about *Peanuts*, the singular comic strip that occupied the artist for the greater part of his life and, through a miraculous ensemble of handdrawn children and an independent-minded beagle, won over the world."

Schulz's iconic work, which ran in newspapers around the world from 1950 to 2000 (and continues to appear in many

publications even today), was once described by John Updike as a "comic strip at bottom tragic". The Peanuts Papers, a "collection of deeply personal essays, will help you see it clear, if you don't already, as a psychologically complex epic about stoicism, faith and other approaches to existential struggles", says the review of the book in *The New York Times*.

"This collection is varied, even kaleidoscopic, but it also offers the pleasure of detecting echoes and corresondences among writers who come to Peanuts from their

> own distinct perspectives... The Peanuts Papers celebrates Schulz's real-world cartoon universe by allowing this sort of dialogue among its contributors. Even matters they all agree on, above all the view that Peanuts is of endless interest and remains deserving of the highest praise, can be expressed through a wealth of fruitful approaches," says the Preface.

However, as The New York Times review notes, the list of contributors "skews quite noticeably to the older and whiter side", and the book does not have any of Schulz's strips. There are, however, some original illustrations by some of the cartoonist contributors.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

California's data privacy law

It gives users new controls over the way Internet companies use their data. What are these changes, which will affect users beyond California too? How does the law compare with the privacy bill India has planned?

KARISHMA MEHROTRA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 6

CALIFORNIA'S NEW privacy law - the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) – is first-of-its-kind data legislation. As users' data are increasingly commodified by technology conglomerates, the law — which went into effect on January 1 – gives Californians new controls over how companies use their data. These controls include the right to access the data, the right to ask for its deletion, and the right to prevent its sale to third parties. Significantly, because of the global nature of the Internet, these changes will affect users worldwide.

"What this new law comes down to is giving consumers the right to take back control over their information from thousands of giant corporations. This is about power: the more a company knows about you, the more power it has to shape your daily life. That power is exercised on the spectrum ranging from the benign, such as showing you a shoe ad, to the consequential, like selecting your job, your housing, or helping to shape what candidate you support in an election," Alastair Mactaggart, author of the 2018 ballot initiative that led to CCPA, wrote in the law's proposal.

What rights does the CCPA give Californian users?

They have the right to see what personal information businesses collect about them, and the purpose and process of the collection. Personal information refers to any information that can be linked back to the user.

They can request and view what inferences the businesses make about them, and have the right to see details about their personal information being sold or given to a third party.

Users can make businesses delete their personal information, and opt out of having their data sold to third parties. The law lays out some exceptions, such as information necessary for completing transactions, providing a service, protecting consumer security, and protecting freedom of speech.

Users can get a copy of the collected per-



Facebook says it doesn't "sell" data, and the law does not apply to it. The New York Times

sonal information for free. Parents have to give permission to companies before the companies can sell the data of their children under the age of 13 to third parties.

To which companies does the law apply? The law only applies to businesses with

gross annual revenues of more than \$25 million; those that buy, receive or sell the personal information of 50,000 or more consumers in California; or those that derive more than half of their annual revenue from selling consumers' personal information.

The law applies to businesses collecting information of Californians; not just to businesses that operate in the state.

Unintentional noncompliance will lead to fines of \$2,500 per violation; intentional noncompliance will attract a penalty of \$7,500 per violation.

Some studies estimate it will cost businesses \$55 billion to initially meet the standards, of which \$16 billion will be spent over the next decade.

One study has said that the law protects \$12 billion worth of personal information

that is used for advertising in California every year.

What has changed in practical terms? The law went into effect on January 1, but

the California Attorney General has not begun enforcing the act yet. The AG will be allowed to take action six months after the rules are finalised, or on July 1.

At the very least, companies will need to set up web pages and phone numbers to take requests. Users also may begin to see a new button on websites stating "Do Not Sell My Personal Information".

Several large companies have set up new infrastructure to comply. Google launched a Chrome extension to block Google Analytics from collecting data. Facebook has said that the law doesn't apply to them since they do not "sell" data, and that they already have features that comply with the law (such as a tool that allows users to access and delete their information).

Bloomberg has reported that a wave of new start-ups are pitching products to companies to help them adhere to the new rules. How does this affect non-Californians? First, even Indian companies that have

customers in California would have to comply with the law. Second, many firms are finding it easier to

make the legal changes for all users rather than trying to distinguish users from California. Microsoft will roll out changes for all Americans, and Mozilla (which owns the Firefox browser) will make changes for all their users. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) too, shifted the entire Internet economy, not just that of the EU.

California is often a trailblazer for legislation, inspiring other states and even countries to adopt similar regulations. In the US itself, there is bipartisan support for several new data privacy bills making their way through Congress now.

What are the criticisms of the Act?

The Act gives users the right to stop the selling of their data, but not the collection of their data. So while this reins in the data broker system, it does not do much to affect companies like Facebook and Google that make most of their money by collecting the data, not by selling it. Advertisers pay Facebook to target ads to users based off that data; they don't pay Facebook for the data itself.

Some say the act places the burden of navigating this complex economy on users. Others argue that many of the provisions are vaguely worded — leaving concepts such as "third-party sharing" or "selling" up to interpretation. Experts told *The Verge* that compliance challenges will be greater with CCPA than with the GDPR.

How does this act compare with India's proposed data protection bill?

Several of these rights are also in India's Personal Data Protection Bill. These include the right to access a copy of your data, and the right to deletion. India's bill goes further in some regards, including the right to correction. However, India's bill is more focused on users' rights over collections, while California's act is focused more on the thirdparty sharing and selling of a user's data.

There's hope for the rare Bustard — here's why

ANJALI MARAR

PUNE, JANUARY 6

ONCETHE frontrunner to be named India's national bird, the Great Indian Bustard has long been on the brink of extinction. The Great Indian Bustard (GIB), is one of the heaviest flying birds, and is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent. Barely 150 of these birds are estimated to be surviving now globally. However, a major conservation effort launched about four years ago is bringing a ray of hope.

Nine chicks

Since June last year, nine GIB eggs collected from the Desert National Park in Jaisalmer where a conservation centre has been set up, have hatched, and the chicks are reported to be doing well. This is the largest number of hatchings reported within a sixmonth frame by any GIB conservation programme in the world, say officials.

Forest officials have identified seven females and one male among the GIB chicks; the sex of the ninth and youngest chick, which hatched a couple of months ago, is not yet known.

Giving the chicks the right diet is a challenge, the officials said. "Very little is known



The Great Indian Bustard was once common in several parts of Gujarat, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. Archive

about their food habitat. With inputs provided by our counterparts in Gujarat, scientists have identified bird feed that is rich in proteins and calcium," Arindam Tomar, Chief Wildlife Warden of the Rajasthan Wildlife Department, told *The Indian Express* over the phone.

The GIB is known to eat insects, harvested foodgrains, and fruit. "The uncontrolled use of pesticides and insecticides in farms has badly hit their food habitat," said Tomar, who took over as the project head in early 2019.

Vanishing grasslands, and attacks by dogs and foxes have contributed to the threat to the GIB's survival.

Conservation

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, are working to save the GIB. The Ministry has allotted special funds to the tune of Rs 33 crore, a part of which was used to set up the incubation and chick-rearing centre in Jaisalmer. In a report submitted to the Ministry in

November 2018, the WII said extensive land surveys have been carried out to locate suitable habitats for the chicks. Officials have zeroed in on 14 spots, based

rainfall, accessibility, proximity to wild source, habitat and topographic suitability, availability of water, temperature, etc., and identified Sorsan as the site most conducive for their rearing.

"Sorsan would allow the birds to breed more frequently, unlike Jaisalmer, which sees frequent droughts. Also, with access via road and suitable flat grassland habitat is available," the WII report said. The centre will be the birds' home for a few years — a safe habitat would have to be readied before they can be released into the wild.

Male birds reach sexual maturity between the ages of 4 and 5; females at age 3-4. Generally, the GIB lives up to age 15 or 16, experts said. A female lays an egg once in 1 2 years, and the chicks' survival rate is 60%-70%. "Being such long-lived and slow reproducing species, adult mortality remains high," the WII report said.

Tomar said: "Once these birds mature and can produce offspring, there must be enough habitats to support their growth. Readying the necessary habitat will be key in the coming months and years." According to the WII report, the bird was

once abundant in Kutch, Nagpur, Amravati, Solapur, Bellary, and Koppal districts in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. "Karnataka has expressed interest in working with us, but there is nothing concrete from Maharashtra so far," the officer said.

Globally and in India, high voltage power lines are a major threat to the GIB, the WII report says. The bird has poor frontal vision which restricts it from spotting power lines early. "...About 15% of the population (dies) due to the power lines in Jaisalmer alone This, in comparison to the natural cause of deaths contributed only 4% to 5% cases," the report says.

Why an American attack on Iran's cultural sites could constitute a war crime

NEHA BANKA

KOLKATA. JANUARY 6

FOLLOWING THE assassination of Maj Gen Qassem Soleimani, President Donald Trump tweeted on Saturday that if "Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets" in retaliation, the US would target 52 sites in Iran, "some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture".

It was not clear what Trump would achieve by deliberately destroying Iran's cultural heritage, but such a step, should he follow through on his threat, could be considered a war crime.

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest civilisations dating back to 10,000 BC. Twenty-four Iranian sites are on UNESCO's World Heritage List, two of which are natural sites and the rest cultural sites.

Among the main World Heritage Sites in Iran are the Meidan Emam and Masjede-Jame in Isfahan; the Golestan Palace in the historic heart of Tehran; Pasargadae and Persepolis, capitals of the Achaemenid Empire, founded by Cyrus II and Darius I respectively in the 6th century BC; and the archaeological site of Takht-e Soleyman,

which has the remains of an ancient Zoroastrian sanctuary.

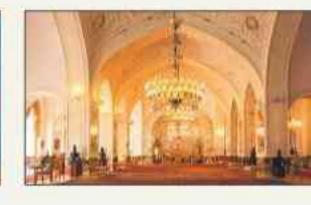
What is the problem with targeting cultural heritage?

Following the unparalleled destruction of cultural heritage in World War II, the nations of the world adopted at The Hague in 1954, The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the first international treaty focussed exclusively on the protection of cultural heritage during war and armed conflict.

The Convention defined cultural property as "movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites....", etc. The signatories, referred to in the Convention as "the High Contracting Parties", committed themselves to protecting, safeguarding, and having respect for cultural property.

There are currently 133 signatories to Convention, including countries that have acceded to and ratified the treaty. Both the United States and Iran (as well as India) signed the Convention on May 14, 1954, and it entered into force on August 7, 1956.





Iranian World Heritage Sites Meidan Emam in Isfahan (left) and Golestan Palace in Tehran. Sorush Angabini/UNESCO

The Rome Statute of 1998, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, describes as a "war crime" any intentional attack against a historical monument, or a building dedicated to religion, education, art, or science. The International Criminal Court started functioning in 2002 with jurisdiction over four main crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.

Article 8 of the Rome Statute deals with war crimes. Article 8(2)(b)(ii) says war crimes include "intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives", and 8(2)(b)(ix)

mentions "intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives".

122 countries are States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The United States is a signatory that has not ratified the Statute. India has neither signed nor ratified the Statute.

Is it likely that the US will in fact, attack these heritage sites?

Following Trump's threats, Secretary of

State Mike Pompeo told ABC News: "We'll behave lawfully. We'll behave inside the system. We always have and we always will."

To CNN, Pompeo said, "We will be bold in protecting American interests and we'll do so in a way that is consistent with the rule of law." Pressed on whether "cultural centres" were fair targets, he said: "We're going to do the things that are right and the things that are consistent with American law."

Trump himself has been direct, underlining that he meant what he tweeted.

"They're (the Iranians) allowed to kill our people. They're allowed to torture and maim our people. They're allowed to use roadside bombs and blow up our people," the President told reporters on Sunday. "And we're not allowed to touch their cultural site? It doesn't work that way."

How has Iran responded to the threats?

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif posted on Twitter: "A reminder to those hallucinating about emulating ISIS war crimes by targeting our cultural heritage: Through MILLENNIA of history, barbarians have come and ravaged our cities, razed our monuments and burnt our libraries. Where are they now? We're still

here, & standing tall." He also said that Trump's threats, if carried out, would be a breach of "jus cogens" (See 'This Word Means' *in column at left*) and a war crime.

When has cultural property been targeted earlier?

■ During the Siege of Dubrovnik in 1991-92 by the Yugoslav People's Army, the old town of Dubrovnik in Croatia was targeted in an attempt to wipe out Croatian history and cultural heritage. Subsequently, during the Croat-Bosniak war, Croat paramilitary forces destroyed the 16th century Stari Most bridge in Mostar in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1993.

■ In 2001, the Taliban destroyed Buddhas that had been carved into the mountainside in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, between the 3rd and 6th centuries AD.

■ In 2006, the UN and the Cambodian government established the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to prosecute the destruction of Cambodia's cultural assets.

■ Between 2014 and 2017, the Islamic State destroyed several places of religious and cultural significance. In 2015, the IS captured and destroyed the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

WORDLY WISE

IF YOU WANT A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE, IMAGINE A BOOT STAMPING ON A HUMAN FACE—FOREVER.

— GEORGE ORWELL

The Indian EXPRESS

S FOUNDED BY S

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

POWER TO THE GOON

The mob violence on JNU students is a chronicle foretold. Those whose job is to protect the campus are accomplices

HE VICIOUS ATTACK on students and teachers in JNU by a group of goons, allegedly affiliated to the RSS student-wing ABVP, on Sunday night is not merely a case of campus violence peaking. It is the outcome of the daily demonising of the university, its staff and faculty, over a period of time by people holding high public office. The mob that went on a rampage in the campus, including in girls' hostels, was empowered by the very government that is vested with the power and responsibility to uphold law and order, to act as it did. It did not happen in a day, of course; it has been in the works ever since JNU was seen by the establishment as a rebel outpost. Students and faculty have been branded "anti-nationals", who need to be punished. Phrases like "tukde tukde gang" and Urban Naxal were used by BJP functionaries, including senior ministers, to describe students and cases foisted on student leaders. A narrative of aggressive nationalism was carefully nurtured to normalise the vilifying of the university and its inhabitants, dogwhistling that targeting JNU has the sanction of the government.

Two members of the Union Cabinet, both JNU alumni, have condemned the incident. But this rings hollow. Visuals of hooligans roaming in dormitories and the campus, wielding hockey sticks and bludgeons, shouting "desh ke gaddaro ko, goli maaro saalo ko", and finally trooping out of the campus, under the benign gaze of Delhi Police, are available in the public domain. Delhi Police, which the other day was seen wreaking havoc on the Jamia Millia Islamia campus, has been coy to act against the thugs who had a free run in JNU. The vandals have been aided and abetted by the institutions that ought to have cracked down on them in the first place. What is the message that is sent out? Who is to act against the hooligans? How long before such mob transforms itself into lynch bands that have murdered people in the name of food and faith in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand in recent years.

The wardens of JNU hostels that faced the brunt of the thugs have quit their posts, taking responsibility for failure to protect students. The university vice-chancellor, M Jagadesh Kumar, a divisive presence in the campus at the best of times, seems to run the university as a department of the Union Human Resources Development Ministry, its strings pulled by Union Home Ministry. Clearly, his fidelity is not to the students and staff — his tenure is remarkable for its failure in winning the trust of the campus. Kumar should be relieved of the responsibility he has long abdicated. But for that to happen, saner heads need to prevail. Who understand that a campus where goons are empowered is a campus that will shrivel — and shrink a nation's future.

BLAZE DOWN UNDER

In Australia's bushfires lie warnings about the complex ways in which climate variables interact

TLEAST 24 people have lost their lives, nearly 500 million animals have perished and more than 12 billion acres of land — an area as large as Denmark — has turned to cinders as bushfires have ravaged large parts of Australia. The fires, among the worst in the country's history, have been raging since September and show no signs of abating. New South Wales, the country's worst-affected state, declared an emergency last week in its southeastern region and people were asked to move to safer locations. But the state government faced people's ire when those fleeing the inferno had to face long traffic jams. More opprobrium has been heaped on the country's Federal government. Across the country, frustrated Australians have vented their anger at Prime Minister Scott Morrison for playing down the blaze's association with climate change — a charge the Federal government has denied.

Bushfires are actually a part of Australia's ecosystem. Many plants depend on them to cycle nutrients and clear vegetation. In fact, eucalyptus trees in Australia depend on fire to release their seeds. But all this usually happens during a few weeks in late January-February, when the country is at its driest. The prolonged blaze this year has coincided with Australia's harshest summer. Parts of the country recorded their highest recorded temperature in December. Then, longer-term factors have been at play. Much of Australia is facing a drought that is a result of three consecutive summers with very little precipitation. This, according to climate scientists, is unprecedented. Moreover, as the Australian Bureau of Meteorology's 2018 State of the Climate report notes, "Australia's climate has warmed by just over 1 degree Celsius since 1910, leading to an increase in the frequency of extreme heat events." This has led to more rainfall in northern Australia, but created drought-like conditions in the more densely populated southeast.

Australia is home to nearly 250 animal species, some of them like the koalas and kangaroos are not found elsewhere. But the region also has the highest rate of native animals going extinct over the past 200 years. The fires will aggravate this situation. Experts, for example, reckon that more than a quarter of the koala habitat has been consumed by the blaze. The fires have also caused a drop in the bird, rodent and insect populations. These creatures are the building blocks of the ecosystem and the fall in their population is bound to have long-term impacts. In Australia's bushfires lie a warning about the complex ways in which climate variables interact.

PURE STARSHINE

The Golden Globes had many surprises, least of which was an all vegan menu

HERE WAS A time stars let down their hair at the Golden Globes, with the first awards of the season a good dress rehearsal for the Oscars and the over 75,000 glasses of free Champagne lubricating enough Dutch courage. Now, Hollywood's glitziest night has stirred itself "woke". On Sunday night, the best of TV and cinema of 2019 were first served the rapier-sharp tongue of anchor Ricky Gervais, and then an all-vegan menu (a Globes first). With Donald Trump rushing the US headlong into another blunder in West Asia, the best film surprise was a just-released war movie, 1917. The best actor no-surprise was Joaquin Phoenix's anarchist and confused Joker who, in his acceptance speech, strewn with cuss words and casual informality, lectured Hollywood on climate change, private jets and responsible voting. The luminaries of Netflix's hot contenders which were resoundingly shut out — Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro (*The Irishman*), Adam Driver (*Marriage Story*) — looked on unimpressed.

But if Phoenix stressed that he didn't want to rock the boat, the women didn't need reminding. Top honours again eluded them, while Olivia Colman won best TV actress for the solidly establishment *Crown*. Michelle Williams struck a few political notes, as Awkwafina

became the first performer of Asian descent to win a Best Actress Musical or Comedy. With no fire sizzling the red carpet either, the clouds parted for pure starshine for one brief moment. Brad Pitt, the Best Supporting Actor, wearing his blond splendour and dating status lightly, complimented his director Quentin Tarantino and thanked co-actor Leonardo Di Caprio as their Hollywood nostalgia film walked away with the most awards of the night. Pitt's four-letter word of choice was simpler. "If you have the chance to be 'kind' to someone tomorrow, take it. I think we need it," the actor said. Aah, for that forever fairytale, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*.

Innocents no more

JNU violence reflects an apocalyptic politics driven

by a constant need to find new enemies



Pratap Bhanu Mehta

THE SHOCKING VIOLENCE at JNU should convince you of one simple proposition: India is governed by a regime whose sole raison d'etre is to find an adversarial rallying point and crush it by brute force. Cowardly thugs running amok in one of India's most premier universities, inflicting head injuries on teachers and students, is not a minor scuffle explained away by JNU's local conflicts. To better understand what is at stake, it is important to listen to the entire range of speeches our honourable, "He Who Must not be Named" Home Minister delivers. One thing will become abundantly clear. The current political regime cannot exist unless it finds a new enemy. It now legitimises itself, not by its positive accomplishments, but by using the enemy as a rallying point. The targeting of enemies — minorities, liberals, secularists, leftists, urban naxals, intellectuals, assorted protestors — is not driven by a calculus of ordinary politics. It is driven by will, ideology and hate, pure and simple. When you legitimise yourself entirely by inventing enemies, the truth ceases to matter, normal restraints of civilisation and decency cease to matter, the checks and balances of normal politics cease to matter. All that matters is the crushing of real and imaginary enemies, by hook or by crook.

The events at JNU are another symbol of the apocalyptic politics this government is playing. It is apocalyptic in a triple sense. At the level of discourse, the normalisation of the phrase "tukde tukde gang" abetted by the home minister, with the help of a pliant media, laid the background conditions for this kind of violence.

There is no doubt that many of those who were cowardly enough to assault unarmed professors and students and hit them on the head, see themselves as some kind of nationalist warriors: Avenging national honour by unleashing violence in a university. But the fact that they think in this way has been enabled by the larger ideological climate, something government functionaries have done much to inculcate.

There is no getting away from the fact that hunting down your own citizens as anti-national is now part of the ideological construct of this government, as evidenced by the home minister's speeches. There is no getThe silver lining is that, as recent events have shown, enough Indians are refusing to be cowed down. This is embittering and shaking the government and its supporters even more. In the short run, we need three things. There has to be an

absolute refusal to patronise anyone who normalises the 'tukde tukde gang' talk — licensing the militarisation of domestic politics. There has to be institutional accountability: From the JNU VC to the home minister. But, this moment will also require the forces of protests to be more visible in the peaceful and dignified

way they have been over the

last few days.

ting away from the fact that the kind of state response that you have seen in UP against minorities, on the heels of the tepid response to earlier episodes of lynching, emboldens the worst elements of our society to act as vigilantes. The state will, directly or through proxies, encourage violence against anyone who is not in tune with it.

This violence is apocalyptic in another

sense: Its purpose is to foment more violence, so that targeting enemies becomes self-fulfilling. The logic is: Apply force and intimidation. If it succeeds, all well and good. If it does not succeed respond in two ways. One is to ideologically discredit the opposition even more. The pattern is depressingly familiar. The attacks on JNU will be presented as some kind of "left-liberal" conspiracy. They will intone, as many are doing on social media, "these left liberals are so fanatical that they will smash their own skulls to embarrass government". The second strategy is to use the violence as a pretext for more control and violence. "See these anti nationals, they refuse to be crushed by violence. So, we need more violence." This is the strategy in Kashmir, this is the strategy in UP, and now it is coming to the heart of the capital. There will be a massive disinformation campaign. Remember, the government exploits the asymmetry between doubt and truth. It will use odd bits of information, without context, to buttress its claims that this is a conspiracy. Meanwhile, the most obvious

questions will go unanswered. Let us for a moment assume there was a local scuffle between students — those wanting to register and other students preventing them from the registering process. That cannot explain the fact that armed goons from outside the campus were allowed to run amok; that does not explain the fact that the police, which had no compunction in cracking down in Jamia, stood by as mute spectators and even respectfully seem to have escorted out the thugs. That cannot explain why unarmed professors and students would be hit in the head. The government is counting on the fact that it thinks we are looking for a pretext to support it. It thinks pictures of disorder — the spectre of rioting minorities or leftists — will increase support for authoritarianism. The worst indictment of India is that

the government thinks the people are behind it in this apocalyptic vision.

The third apocalyptic element of the vision is the literal destruction of all institutions. The most pathetic moment of the long night was two "who do not deserve to be named" ministers — the finance minister and minister of external affairs - reduced to tweeting a general, anodyne condemnation of violence. They are members of the cabinet committee on security. They could have arranged, through their colleagues, for Delhi Police to act. If they, with their privileges, exude this kind of pathetic helplessness, think of the ordinary JNU student or citizen in UP or Kashmir. Think of those who are the target of vigilante violence and have no recourse to justice; think of those whose homes were invaded by UP police; think of those who have disappeared in Kashmir. The aim of the government may or may not be literal annihilation of its citizens. But its aim certainly is that it annihilates our will, our reason, our spirit, so that we all become willing supplicants in its ideological project.

The silver lining is that, as recent events have shown, enough Indians are refusing to be cowed down. This is embittering and shaking the government and its supporters even more. In the short run, we need three things. There has to be an absolute refusal to patronise anyone who normalises the "tukde tukde gang" talk — licensing the militarisation of domestic politics. There has to be institutional accountability: From the JNU VC to the home minister. But, this moment will also require the forces of protests to be more visible in the peaceful and dignified way they have been over the last few days. The government's strategy is not to solve old issues; it is to divert attention by bringing in new adversaries in the hope that we remain divided. But now the movement against the government has to turn this very fact into an advantage. The one thing the violence in JNU, and Delhi more generally, should bring home is that plain truth: In the eyes of this government, no one is innocent. None of us have the choice to even pretend otherwise.

The writer is contributing editor at The Indian Express

AFTER THE STICKS AND STONES

remember, is the same force that was load-

ing up by the busloads peaceful protestors

last month from anti-CAA-NRC demonstra-

tions. Campus security is conspicuous by its

absence, the university's vice-chancellor

With the violence at JNU, citizens face a stark, binary moral choice

Aakash Joshi

GEORGE ORWELL ONCE lamented that he "was forced to become a pamphleteer" by the times that he lived in. His happy place, to use the contemporary parlance, was gardening and writing novels. Orwell was much more than a pamphleteer. He was a chronicler of the evils of nationalism as well as one who understood its appeal. There are few Orwells among us. But our time, like his, is a moral test.

What is the metaphor, the analogy, that describes the masked men and women that rampaged across Jawaharlal Nehru University on the night of December 5? Were these stone-pelters (though given the size of their projectiles, perhaps rock throwers) and rodusing assaulters of students the great Indian Ku Klux Klan — they have it down pat, the masks and narrow majoritarianism? Or, perhaps, they are just "goons" or the "lumpen element" — those broad terms that can mean anyone, on a given day. And, since we dare not say the F-word or the N-word, can we call them Brownshirts, despite the decidedly saffron tint to their sloganeering? By the time of writing this, both the complicities that enabled the violence and the equivocations in its aftermath are well underway.

The Delhi Police, which reports to Home Minister Amit Shah, has not made a single arrest, nor taken into custody anyone connected to the violence. In fact, by all accounts, the mob moved with impunity through the campus even as the police stood at the gate. This,

deafening in his silence.

Now, the equivocations. BJP MP
Meenakshi Leki managed to blame Left parties (even as the violence was underway) for
"politicising students", evoke the spectre of
"Jamia students" on the JNU campus and took
a swipe at Priyanka Gandhi. She went on to
say that "if my kids were doing this (protest-

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"Jamia students" on the JNU campus and took
a swipe at Priyanka Gandhi. She went on to
say that "if my kids were doing this (protesting, striking) they would get a tight one (presumably a slap) from me". Shah has asked for
a "report" on the matter from the Delhi Police
— seen on video allegedly escorting weaponwielding men and women from the campus.
It is not difficult to imagine what will follow. More voices from the BJP, the Union gov-

It is not difficult to imagine what will follow. More voices from the BJP, the Union government and their loud sympathisers will try to present this as a clash between student groups; Urban Naxals will be brought up and a minor disagreement between students — an everyday part of campus life — will be used as a justification for creating terror in a place that dissents. And, given the love for "debate", of pretending that there are two equal sides to every immortality, the discourse will move on as it always does. But it need not be so.

Something has changed in India over the last few months. In Delhi, those who watched the country change, lose its character have fi-

nally decided to show up for others. As with Jamia, so with JNU. Even before the police took action, well-meaning citizens and alumni of JNU showed up at the university. There, a young woman was first chased by men with rods — outside the gate on the road leading up to the campus. When she did make it, ABVP activists greeted her and others with slogans of "Jai Shri Ram", "Desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maaro saalon ko" and

"...Afzal (Guru) ki maut maroge". When they spoke to these men, argued with them, they were told to get the men of their house. She, and others like her, were a symptom of their cowardice, "pallu ki aad mein anti-national" is how they were described.

The women engaged in the debate, pointed out that their agency was not circumscribed by men, and that's a privilege that should be a right.

But this must be said to the men who chased the young women, those who assaulted JNUSU President Aishe Ghosh leaving her face battered and bleeding. And because in the times we live in, the dreaded first person must be employed — the political is as personal as it gets. The "men of the house" — for the children we may someday have, or just to assuage our conscience — will, at the very least, have to turn pamphleteers.

Beat that with a stick.

aakash.joshi@expressindia.com

Congress-I heading for major victory Vajource wine i of da ether Della seats go to Corgel Find the large of the large of

JANUARY 7, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

CONG SET FOR WIN
THE CONGRESS-I SEEMED to be firmly in the saddle for a major victory in the Lok Sabha mid-term election. The results declared so far show that the voters have swung away from the Janata Party and the Lok Dal. The performance of both parties was utterly dismal. Of the 61 results declared till midnight, the Congress (I) had won as many as 44 seats.

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BACK TO MRS GANDHI
THE PEOPLE LOOK like returning Mrs
Gandhi with the same vengeance as they
had rejected her in the 1977 election. The
verdict against the Janata may be even more

severe because the combined Congress did win 153 seats in the last poll. As predicted, the Lok Dal does not figure anywhere. The leftists may do far better than the Lok Dal and the Congress put together. If today's trend continues, the Congress (I) may have a two-third majority in the new Lok Sabha. Indeed, it will be Mrs Gandhi's personal victory. The argument that she alone can give a stable government to the country seems to have gone down well with the people.

SOVIETS DENY CHARGES THE SOVIET UNION, denying charges of military interference in Afghan affairs, last night accused United States officials of making the charges to kill the second Soviet-American Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. The Soviet Ambassador, Oleg A. Troyanovsky, seemed to have President Jimmy Carter in mind when he brought the accusation in the UN Security Council, at the second meeting of a debate on the situation in Afghanistan begun last afternoon by request of the United States, China and 48 other countries. "American leaders", he said, "have seized on the so-called Afghan question to justify attempts to prevent the so-called SALT II treaty from coming into force and justify the increase in the military budget."

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THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Trump has increased the risk of a region-wide conflagration sucking in Iraq, Syria and Israel. And he has normalised murder of high officials as a tool of state policy, a precedent whose implications he himself might do well to ponder.

— THE GUARDIAN

West Asia after Soleimani

An all-out war between the US and Iran will destabilise the region and have major economic impact worldwide. The outcome could be apocalyptic for India's interests



Ata Hasnain

NOT MANY IN India are aware of Major General Oassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran the man who was killed by a surgical drone airstrike near Baghdad airport on the morning of January 3. The killing began the New Year and decade with a trigger that may have far reaching consequences. But first, Soleimani needs a brief introduction.

"His brilliance, effectiveness, and commitment to his country have been revered by his allies and denounced by his critics in equal measure," wrote US General Stanley McChrystal in 2018. "Soleimani is arguably the most powerful and unconstrained actor in the Middle East today. A ghostly puppet master, a practical strategist." It was Soleimani who put the Quds Force among the top few forces of the world that have the rare capability to combine intelligence with special forces strike capability and possess a fiercely strategic ideological orientation. The IRGC, with Ouds Force at its core, is an organisation which oversees and executes Iran's regional interests, maintains linkages with other friendly forces and also works through a system of local proxies. Its effectiveness over time has created linkages with the Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, Houthis in Yemen, militias in Iraq, Bashar al Assad's forces in Syria and, very importantly, with the Russians in the Middle East. Iran's Middle East strategy was developed through this capability and it gives out the message that it cannot be meddled with.

The US can use a sledgehammer to defeat and destroy Iran and its forces but after the Iraq and Afghanistan experiences, it is aware that victory in such wars does not necessarily belong to the stronger side.

Soleimani had been in the US's crosshairs right from the time the US declared the Quds Force a terror organisation. His operational effectiveness had the US worried but it is learnt that even when opportunities to target him arose in the past, former President Barack Obama desisted from following up with an authorisation simply because the next steps in escalation gave no positive options. That is the issue now as well. While no one in the US laments Soleimani's death, no one is happy with it either since it was not part of a strategy with a focused aim. Is that being fair to President Donald Trump, who is obviously revelling in this achievement?

A short chain of events in Iraq, set off in the last few days of 2019, led to the assassination. US military facilities in Kirkuk (Iraq) were attacked on December 27 by a Shia militia, killing a US contractor. The US responded on December 29, killing 25 militants — Iraq's leadership was extremely upset. This sparked a retaliatory attack on the US base in Taji before a mob attacked the US Embassy compound in Baghdad on December 31. This is a flagship US embassy in the Middle East, spread over 100 acres, and the breach of its security unnerved the US — that is actually all the more reason that any attack on the Quds Force Commander should have been outside Iraq. The US cannot afford to yield



space in Iraq to a Iran-driven popular people's movement – very much a possibility as a consequence of Soleimani's killing.

The question everyone seems to be asking is related to the feasibility of an all-out war. There is no doubt that the domestic political environment of the US is in flux and Trump would risk anything for a fillip to his chances of re-election. However, the US is war weary and if Trump thinks that an all-out war will help his re-election chances, he would be mistaken. A limited set of military actions from time to time — those that exploit US technological superiority — will draw more favourable support. Of course, a lot is contingent upon the nature of Iran's retribution for the death of the man who was often called a "living martyr".

Iran's leadership is aware of its limitations and would wish to stay short of a tipping point, which the US could use to commence an all-out war. For its own larger cause and image, the US would be least concerned about the worldwide economic ramifications of it subsequent actions. Energy price rise, risk to shipping and the economic collapse of the Gulf economies will probably be of less concern than it did in 1990 because the US is no longer dependent on the Middle East for energy. It will, of course, have to be mindful of the worldwide economic impact.

The other question for strategic minds is the nature of a future proxy war in the Middle East. Early reactions from US-based thinkers appear to conclude that a war between the US and Iran will now be direct and beyond proxies. This may not be entirely correct. Weaker nations, such as Iran in this case, choose to fight through proxies who are not

ments. If the US chooses to confront them directly without using its own proxies, it runs the risk of an Afghanistan or an Iraq type of commitment. For Iran's proxies, borders remain just lines on maps; they can be crossed at will despite modern surveillance systems. In flat organisations, such as those the proxies are part of, there is minimum control and direction. That is where Iran too runs the risk of overplaying its strategy without presence of a strong and experienced commander like Soleimani, which could lead to a more direct confrontation. An irregular entity such as the Islamic State (IS) lacked air power, armed drones and missiles and yet displayed its conventional war fighting capability. All this will be available if irregular proxies receive a higher level of state support.

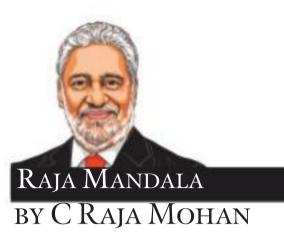
exactly unorganised and undisciplined ele-

Finally, a look at the effect on Indian interests. Energy prices, a diaspora of eight million and \$40 billion in remittances for 5m the core of India's concerns. Energy prices are already on the rise, without even an inkling of the Iranian response. The diaspora presence is mainly in the Gulf countries, which have thus far been largely out of the theatre of proxy war, except for Saudi Arabia. However, this situation is not permanent. It is contingent on the intensity of escalation of the war by proxies and could extend beyond the current sub regions of the conflict, engulfing the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. That would be apocalyptic for Indian interests.

The writer, a former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps, is chancellor, Central University of Kashmir

Realism behind the rhetoric

Both Trump and Khamenei are realists. There are political constrains on them that limit the pressures of a further escalation of conflict between US and Iran



AS US PRESIDENT Donald Trump and the "Supreme Leader" of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, raise the pitch of their rhetoric, it is quite easy to underestimate the political constraints on both leaders that limit the pressures for an escalation.

Khamenei has promised "harsh revenge" for the killing of Major General Qassem Soleimani and Trump responded with the threat to bomb 52 Iranian sites, including its precious cultural heritage. While the world gasped at Trump's threat, he insists that nothing is off limits if Iran takes another American life.

Khamenei certainly can't afford to look weak in the face of an unprecedented provocation from Trump. He, however, would certainly not want to lose his head in trying to save his political face. The Supreme Leader will also have to factor in Trump's unpredictability. Barely 48 hours before Soleimani was killed, Khamenei had dared Trump last week by saying "you can't do a damn thing". Trump's campaign of maximum pressure has put Iran's economy under great strain and deepened domestic political discontent. While the killing of Soleimani helps Khamenei in the near term to close domestic political ranks, a prolonged war with the US could sharpen the Islamic Republic's internal contradictions. For Trump, too, the elimination of Soleimani has played well with his political base. But pushing the confrontation too far carries huge risks for Trump's campaign to retain the White House in the general elections later this year. Like Khamenei, Trump would not want to lose the crown in trying to win a distant war.

Is there some room, then, for de-escalation? US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has repeatedly emphasised that the Administration's strategy is to establish deterrence against future threats to Americans and that it is prepared for de-escalation. Meanwhile, Trump has also sent signals of reassurance to Khamenei by affirming that his Administration has no interest in engineering a "regime change" in Tehran. Through the last few years of his presidency, Trump has often talked about a potential deal with Iran's clerics. And it was Khamenei who spurned Trump's offer of an unconditional dialogue as unacceptable amidst the pressure of sanctions.

Until now, Khamenei had some success in running a proxy war against the US but a direct confrontation would be suicidal. Triggering self-destruction can't be a strategy for Tehran. Despite all the talk of a "third world war", a direct military contest between US and Iran is loaded in America's favour.

Iran's leaders are also realists. Recall the decision of Ayatollah Khomenei, the founder of the Islamic Republic, to accept a ceasefire in the prolonged and bloody war with Iraq in 1988 amidst domestic difficulties. Iran's decision to stop fighting was also influenced

by the brutal use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein and the accidental downing of an Iranian airliner by US that killed nearly 290 passengers. Khomeini was convinced that the US was about to destroy his clerical regime. Khomeini's words on "drinking the poison of peace" are very much part of the Islamic Republic's political lexicon. More recently, Khamenei accepted quite a humiliating set of terms in concluding a nuclear deal with the Obama Administration. That Trump wants ever harder terms is another story.

Tehran's first responses to the killing of Soleimani have been measured. One, Iran has resumed uranium enrichment as part of its step-by-step withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement with the international community in response to Trump's decision to tear it up. Second, it has got its political allies in Iraq to get the parliament in Baghdad to pass a resolution demanding an end to US military presence in Iraq.

The two moves ramp up pressure on US allies and mobilise anti-Americanism in the Middle East. The Europeans are deeply committed to the nuclear agreement. They are eager to contribute to the de-escalation of the current crisis if only to save the nuclear deal. But Trump does not set much store by America's traditional alliances like NATO. He did not bother to consult the allies in Europe before taking out Soleimani.

The second move feeds into the declared long-term Iranian objective of driving Americans out of the Gulf and brings us to the ultimate irony of the present crisis. During the 2016 campaign and since, Trump has repeatedly affirmed that he would rather bring the American troops home.

Unlike the security establishment in Washington, Trump does not believe the US needs a permanent military presence in the Middle East in the name of "American global leadership". With the US emerging as a major oil producer and exporter, energy security is no longer a driving force for Trump. For Trump, counter-terrorism is perhaps the only credible reason to sustain a large military footprint in the Middle East. That, arguably, could also be achieved through offshore military presence.

troops off the ground in the Middle East. But he would like to do it on his own terms. In responding to the non-binding resolution in the Iraqi parliament, Trump threatened Iraq with major sanctions if the US withdrawal is not on friendly terms. Trump is also conscious that not everyone in Iraq wants America to leave the country and cede it to Iranian domination. The minorities in Iraq — the Sunni and Kurdish communities — as well as sections of the majority Shia see US presence as critical in ensuring Iraqi sovereignty vis a vis Iran.

Trump might not be averse to taking US

Trump's radical departure from the conventional US thinking on the Middle East and the deepening of many regional contradictions make the current crisis very different from those we have seen in the past. While there is always the danger of miscalculation by one or more of the actors, it would be unwise to assume they are irrational.

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



Proceed with CAA, reject NRC

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State miscalculated law's fallout, failed to recognise anger among Muslims

Prakash Singh

THE AGITATION AGAINST the Citizenship Amendment Act appears to have gone through three phases. In the first phase, it was a protest against its enactment, as there were genuine apprehensions that the Act, followed by a pan-India NRC exercise, would lead to a large section of society, mostly Muslims, being declared illegal migrants/citizens. There was protests in Jamia Millia Islamia and large-scale demonstrations in Assam and other Northeast states. In the second phase, it became a confrontation between students and the police. Allegations of police high-handedness spread and there were sympathetic protests in educational institutions across the country. The CAA remained the trigger, but it was pushed to the background. Student anger was directed against the police and the government. In the third phase, which we are witnessing today, the movement has been hijacked by political opportunists, separatist factions, fundamentalist groups and lumpen elements. The CAA is an excuse; the target is the ruling party.

The government, in retrospect, appears to have seriously miscalculated the fallout of the CAA. Its success on three fronts appears to have made it insensitive to the simmering anger among the Muslim community. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2019, which banned triple talag, was a good measure for the emancipation of Muslim women from an atrocious practice,

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but it antagonised the radical elements. The abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution. ending the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, aggravated the discomfiture of Muslims. Then the Supreme Court verdict on Ayodhya added to the sense of unease. The canard that the judiciary had been influenced to give the disputed plot to the Hindus for the construction of the Ram temple, with some luminaries writing about the alleged flaws in the judgment, added fuel to the fire. All these three developments — the annulment of triple talaq, the abrogation of Article 370 and the Ayodhya verdict — collectively led to a feeling of anger, resentment and frustration among Muslims. The government either was not aware of the depth of Muslim resentment or was not bothered about it and was confident of being able to weather any storm. The announcement of the National

Population Register was unexceptionable, but it was ill-timed. Heavens would not have fallen if it had been delayed by a few months. It has provided further ammunition to the Opposition which has embarked on a disinformation campaign to mislead people.

The police are presently doing a thankless job. If they take action against the agitators, as they did in UP, there are allegations of high-handedness. If they play it safe, as they did in West Bengal, the agitators will have a field day — destroy railway property, burn buses, attack police posts and indulge in acts of vandalism. It is indeed sad that in most of the states, the governments are not particularly bothered about the destruction of public and private property. The taxpayer's money is nobody's concern.

The Supreme Court had, in the context of state governments not taking effective measures to protect public and private property from being damaged by unruly mobs, constituted two committees, one headed by Justice KTThomas and the other by FS Nariman, to study the problem. The Thomas Committee gave recommendations regarding the modalities for preventive action and for providing sharper teeth to inquiry/investigation. The Nariman Committee made suggestions regarding the assessment of damages. These were accepted by the Court which clearly said that "the liability will be borne by the actual perpetrators of the crime as well as the organisers of the event giving rise to the liability" and that "exemplary damages may be awarded". Uttar Pradesh is perhaps the first state to have shown the political will to punish those who vandalised property.

The agitation has thrown up some disturbing questions. In UP, according to the police chief, there was a conspiracy to create disturbance. If so, one would like to know its full ramifications. Another senior police officer said that the pattern of protests in the state showed guerrilla tactics. The official version that the police did not open fire, and the fact

that there have been deaths due to bullet injuries need to be reconciled. Reports about the involvement of Popular Front of India (PFI) in the agitation are a matter of grave concern and require in-depth investigation. The Karnataka home minister, speaking about the Mangaluru violence, stated that the attack on police was premeditated and the arson was orchestrated by anti-social elements. It would appear that the roots of the agitation go much deeper. Resentment against CAA was perhaps the proverbial last straw. But the movement has since degenerated into a confrontation between the government and diverse elements opposed to it.

The objections to the Citizenship Act are generally unconvincing. Assam is the only state which has reasons to feel aggrieved. There is substance in the argument that the Act contravenes Clause 6 of the Assam Accord which guaranteed safeguards to "protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people". Reservations on the NRC are understandable. While going ahead with the CAA, the government would do well to scrap the proposal to expand the NRC and explore the possibility of settling refugees in other states across the country which are willing to and in a position to absorb them.

The writer was formerly Director General of Police, Assam

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WHOSE NATION?

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Tableaux of exclusion' (IE, January 6). The government at the Centre is on the backfoot especially in these "excluded states". And that is why it is arguing that nationalism is under threat. Actually, it's the Sangh Parivar's idea of nationalism that is under threat. The Centre-state confrontation goes against federalism.

Anurag Ekka, Ranchi

GRAINS OF TRUTH

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Lifting growth, containing inflation', (IE, January 6). The foodgrain procurement regime under the FCI requires reimagination. The decentralised scheme, wherein participating states procure grains on behalf of the FCI for their projects, must be made more flexible. States should be allowed to expand their procurement basket, incentivise procurement of pulses and millets.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO 'Lifting growth, containing Inflation' (IE, January 6). There is a need to address certain structural issues such as de facto nationalisation of the grain market, the open ended procurement system and inefficient management of inventory. Steps such as scaling up of the National Warehouse Receipt system, outsourcing stocking operations to the private sector and revisiting the MSP policy could be some

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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Sarthak Sonwalkar, Ujjain

BJP IN DELHI

issues to ponder upon.

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'BIP to fight Delhi polls in Modi name, CAA agenda'(IE,January 6). It is strange that the BIP's leaders in Delhi could not reach a consensus over a CM candidate for the assembly elections. If the elections to be fought under Narendra Modi's leadership, as announced by Home Minister Amit Shah, do not result in a victory for the party, will it accept that the PM's charisma is on the wane?

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड वर्ष 12 अंक 276

खाड़ी संकट में तैयारी

कासिम सुलेमानी की अमेरिकी हमले में हुई हत्या ने पश्चिम एशिया में हालात बिगाड़ दिए हैं। इस इलाके के सशस्त्र संघर्ष के मुहाने पर पहुंच जाने से तेल कीमतों में अचानक उछाल आई है। ईरानी सेना की विशिष्ट इकाई कुदुस फोर्स के मुखिया के रूप में सुलेमानी क्षेत्रीय राजनीति में अहम स्थान रखते थे और खुद वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था में मांग कमजोर है। वैसे

इराक दौरे पर गए ईरान के शीर्ष सैन्य अधिकारी ईरान के भीतर वह काफी लोकप्रिय एवं सशक्त थे। इस हत्या के बाद खाडी क्षेत्र में तनाव बढने के आसार नजर आ रहे हैं। ऐसा होने पर अल्पाविध से लेकर मध्यम अविध में तेल कीमतों के रुख को लेकर कोई भी अनुमान लगा पाना आसान नहीं है। एक तरफ तो अमेरिका का शेल तेल उत्पादन तेज है जबकि

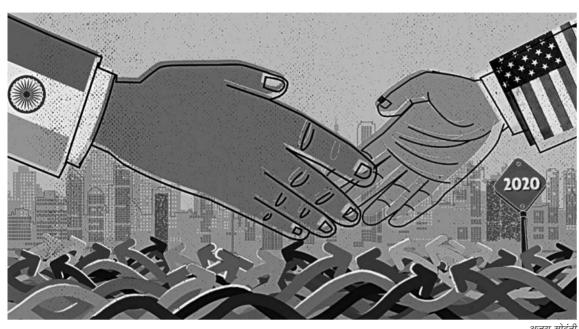
बाजार किसी भी तरह जरूरत से ज्यादा आपूर्ति की तरफ बढ़ रहा था। लेकिन समस्या यह है कि सीमित संघर्ष में भी तेल प्रतिष्ठानों को निशाना बनाया जा सकता है। आपूर्ति शृंखला से हटा देने पर तेल की किल्लत पैदा हो सकती है जिससे अल्पावधि से मध्यावधि के भीतर तेल कीमतें चढ सकती हैं।

इस तरह भारत सरकार को तीन पहलुओं पर ध्यान देते हुए अपनी तैयारियां करनी होंगी। ये पहलू कई दशकों से एकसमान रहे हैं और पश्चिम एशिया में स्थिरता पर भारत की निर्भरता का कारण भी हैं। पहला बिंदु तेल की आपूर्ति से जुड़ा है। भारत को अपनी 84 फीसदी तेल जरूरतें आयात से पुरी करनी पड़ती हैं। इस तरह तेल कीमतों में उछाल न केवल घरेलू लागत परिस्थितियों बल्कि भुगतान संतुलन पर

भी बडा अंतर डालता है। तेल कीमतें बढने से पूरी अर्थव्यवस्था में स्वाभाविक तौर पर स्फीतिकारी दबाव पड़ेंगे। लिहाजा भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक को ब्याज दरें तय करते समय कहीं अधिक सजगता दिखाने के लिए मजबूर होना पडेगा। अतीत में ऊंची तेल कीमतों ने बाह्य खाते को खासा कमजोर किया है। पश्चिम एशिया में 1991 में पैदा हुए ऐसे ही संकट के बाद भारत के समक्ष भुगतान संतुलन का संकट पैदा हुआ था जिसके बाद देश में उदारीकरण की शुरुआत हुई थी। आज 450 अरब डॉलर के साथ भारत का विदेशी मुद्रा भंडार काफी सुविधाजनक स्थिति में है और तेल कीमतों के मौजुदा स्तर पर रहने पर इससे अगले नौ-दस महीनों तक तेल आयात का इंतजाम हो सकता है। अगर तेल कीमतों में लगातार एवं तीव्र वृद्धि

होती है तो फिर इस बफर में सेंध लग सकती है। हालांकि दो पहलू ऐसे हैं जो सरकार के लिए चिंता का विषय हैं। इन दोनों का ताल्लक पश्चिम एशिया खासकर फारस की खाड़ी क्षेत्र में बड़ी संख्या में भारतीय समुदाय की मौजूदगी है। निश्चित रूप से उनकी सुरक्षा को प्राथमिकता देनी होगी। अतीत में भारत ने खाडी देशों में रहने वाले अपने नागरिकों की सुरक्षित वापसी के लिए बड़े स्तर पर अभियान चलाया था। पहले खाड़ी युद्ध के समय कुवैत और हाल में लीबिया से अपने नागरिकों को सुरक्षित वापस लाया गया था। खाड़ी देशों से भारतीयों की सुरक्षित निकासी की योजना इस बार कहीं अधिक बडे पैमाने पर अंजाम देनी होगी, वैसे ऐसी स्थिति आने की संभावना कम ही लग

हालांकि तनाव गहराने से आने वाली गिरावट के चलते बड़ी संख्या में अस्थायी कामगारों को भारत लौटना पड़ सकता है। ऐसा होने पर भारत को खाड़ी देशों से भेजा जाने वाला पैसा भी कम हो जाएगा। वर्ष 2016-17 में अकेले संयुक्त अरब अमीरात से 27 फीसदी विदेशी धन भारत में आया था और अन्य खाडी देशों का भी योगदान 27 फीसदी रहा था। भारत आने वाली आधी से भी अधिक विदेशी मुद्रा केरल, महाराष्ट्र, तमिलनाडु एवं कर्नाटक राज्यों में आती है। धन की आवक में बड़ी कमी होने से बाह्य खाते एवं इन राज्यों की अर्थव्यवस्था पर भी दबाव बढेगा। लिहाजा भारत सरकार को खाडी के घंटनाक्रम पर नजदीकी निगाह रखने के साथ अपनी तैयारियां भी रखनी होंगी।



नए साल में कैसे होंगे भारत-अमेरिका संबंध

घरेलू मोर्चे पर भारत के हालात उसे चीन के बरक्स खड़ा करने की रणनीति की राह में रोडे बन सकते हैं। नए साल में भारत-अमेरिकी संबंधों के भविष्य का जायजा ले रही हैं अनीता इंदर सिंह

संबंधों के लिए क्या परिदृश्य दिख रहा है ? वर्ष 2006 में असैन्य परमाणु समझौते पर हुए हस्ताक्षर इस रिश्ते में उछाल की बानगी थी लेकिन वर्ष 2017 में डॉनल्ड टंप के अमेरिका का राष्ट्रपति बनने के बाद हालात बदलने लगे। वर्ष 1991 के बाद अमेरिकी आकलन में भारत की हैसियत ऊपर होने का सबसे बड़ा कारण आर्थिक प्रगति थी। करीब डेढ़ दशक तक इसकी उच्च वृद्धि दरों ने अमेरिका को यह यकीन दिला दिया था कि भारत को तेजी से उभरते सर्वाधिकारवादी चीन के बरक्स खड़ा किया जा सकता है। इसके अलावा एक बहसांस्कतिक लोकतंत्र के तौर पर भारत के स्थायित्व ने भी अमेरिका को प्रभावित किया, खासकर 1991 में यूगोस्लाविया और सोवियत संघ के पतन के बाद। हालांकि 2019 आने तक दुनिया के समक्ष यह साफ हो चुका है कि भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था गत छह वर्षों से पतन की राह पर है। इसके अलावा 2014 के बाद से ही सांप्रदायिक हिंसा की बढती घटनाएं और नागरिकता संशोधन अधिनियम (सीएए) को लेकर देश भर में छिड़े विरोध प्रदर्शन राजनीतिक एवं सामाजिक ध्रुवीकरण को बयां कर रहे हैं। ये परिस्थितियां अपने लोकतंत्र की गुणवत्ता पर गंभीर सवाल खडे करती हैं।

आर्थिक गिरावट और इससे जल्द उबरने की संभावना खारिज करने के बाद चीन के मुकाबले भारत को खड़ा करने के लिए ट्रंप

वनर्ष 2020 में भारत-अमेरिका की तरफ से पेश 'हिंद-प्रशांत 'की अवधारणा भी सवालों के घेरे में आ गई है। बीते दशक में भारत और अमेरिका ने 15 अरब डॉलर से अधिक मुल्य वाले रक्षा सौदों पर दस्तखत किए हैं और हाल ही में अमेरिका ने एक अरब डॉलर मुल्य की नेवल गन बेचने की भी पेशकश रखीं है। लेकिन भारत को चिढाने वाली बात यह है कि एक औपचारिक सहयोगी नहीं होने से अमेरिका अब भी उसे संवेदनशील सैन्य तकनीक देने से मना कर देता है। संप्रभुता कहती है कि भारत को रूस से एस-400 मिसाइलें खरीदने का हक है. वहीं इस हवाई सुरक्षा प्रणाली के चलते अमेरिका के साथ नजदीकी सैन्य संबंध अवरुद्ध हो जाते हैं। अमेरिका रूस को अपनी सुरक्षा के लिए एक खतरे के तौर पर देखता है। अगर एक गठबंधन का अभाव अपनी सामरिक स्वायत्तता बनाए रखने की भारतीय प्रतिबद्धता को दर्शाता है तो यह अमेरिका को भारत के साथ संबंधों की व्यवहार्यता को लेकर संदिग्ध बना देता है।

> कारोबारी मुद्दे भी उनके रिश्ते में अहम हैं। भारत की लालफीताशाही और संरक्षणवादी शुल्क अमेरिका को नागवार गुजरते हैं। ये मुद्दे एक व्यापारिक साझेदार के तौर पर भारत की चमक फीकी कर देते हैं। अमेरिकी निर्यात का महज 2.1 फीसदी ही भारत आता है और 2.2 फीसदी आयात भारत से होता है। वहीं भारतीय आयात का 15 फीसदी अमेरिका से आता है और उसके निर्यात का 16 फीसदी अमेरिका को जाता

है। लेकिन भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था के पतनोन्मुख होने के बीच चीन ने अपनी बेल्ट एवं सडक पहल (बीआरआई) का विस्तार दुनिया भर में कर अपनी आर्थिक प्रगति का प्रदर्शन किया है। यूरोपीय संघ के कई सदस्य देशों और भारत के सारे पडोसियों ने बीआरआई का हिस्सा बनना स्वीकार कर लिया है। चीन के वित्तीय घूंसे ने उसे इन अर्थव्यवस्थाओं में सबसे बर्ड निवेशक के तौर पर स्थापित कर दिया है। यह म्यांमार और बांग्लादेश को सबसे बड़ा हथियार विक्रेता भी है। हिंद महासागर में उसकी बढ़ती मौजूदगी एक प्रभावशाली दक्षिण एशियाई ताकत के तौर पर भारत की हैसियत समक्ष मश्किल सवाल खडे करता है।

घरेलु मोर्चे पर सीएए पारित होने के बाद देश भर में उठे विरोध के स्वरों ने भारत की धर्मनिरपेक्ष लोकतांत्रिक छवि को लेकर अमेरिका में बहुतों को आशंकित कर दिया है। उसके पहले भी अमेरिकी विदेश विभाग ने गत वर्ष जुन में कहा था कि प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी की सरकार के समय भारत में धार्मिक असहिष्णुता बढ़ी है। भारत ने इसका प्रतिवाद करते हुए कहा था कि किसी विदेशी सरकार को उसके अंदरूनी मामलों पर टिप्पणी करने का कोई अधिकार नहीं है।

वॉशिंगटन में दिसंबर में हुई 2प्लस2 बैठक में अमेरिकी विदेश मंत्री माइक पॉम्पिओ ने कहा कि अमेरिका हर जगह अल्पसंख्यकों एवं धार्मिक अधिकारों के संरक्षण को लेकर फिक्रमंद रहता है। उन्होंने हिंद–प्रशांत भागीदारी में विश्वास जताते हुए कहा कि यह सहयोग लोकतांत्रिक मुल्यों पर

अमेरिकी अधिकारियों के विचार एक-दूसरे से मेल नहीं खाते हैं। पॉम्पिओ का बयान घरेलू तनावों के चलते भारत पर टुंप प्रशासन की तरफ से कोई भी दबाव डालने की बात नकारता नजर आया लेकिन अमेरिकी सांसदों का रवैया कुछ अलग कहानी ही कहता है। अगस्त के बाद कश्मीर के हालात और नागरिकता कानून के विरोध में उठे विरोध से निपटने के लिए किए गए ताकत के इस्तेमाल का हवाला देते हुए अमेरिकी कांग्रेस ने धर्मनिरपेक्षता के प्रति भारत की प्रतिबद्धता पर सवालिया निशान लगाए हैं। लोकतांत्रिक व्यवस्था में सभी अल्पसंख्यकों को समान अधिकार देने का मुद्दा उठाया गया है। विदेश मंत्री एस जयशंकर ने कश्मीर पर चर्चा के लिए अमेरिकी संसद की विदेश समिति से मिलने से मना कर दिया तो यही बात उठी कि मानवाधिकार का मुद्दा उठाने वाले अमेरिकी सांसद ऐसी हरकत की उम्मीद किसी तानाशाही सरकार से करते हैं, भारत

सामरिक भागीदारी के बावजूद भारत और अमेरिका का रिश्ता वर्ष 2020 में हिलोरें मारती तरंगों से ही गुजरेगा। लेकिन भारत और चीन के बीच आर्थिक फासला होने से हिंद-प्रशांत के लिए ट्रंप की योजना में भारत की अहमियत को लेकर सवाल खड़े होते हैं। चीन की प्रति व्यक्ति जीडीपी भारत की तुलना में चार गुने से भी अधिक है। इसी तरह चीन का 177.6 अरब डॉलर का रक्षा बजट भारत का तिगुना है। जहां चीन वर्ष 2050 तक विश्व स्तरीय सेना बनाने की मंशा रखता है, वहीं भारत को अपने सशस्त्रबलों को आधुनिक बनाना भी मुश्किल हो रहा है।

अमेरिका पर अपनी आर्थिक एवं सैन्य निर्भरता से भारत जहां जलता है वहीं अमेरिका को इससे कोफ्त होती है। ट्रंप प्रशासन समृद्ध सहयोगी पसंद करता है क्योंकि इस तरह वे साझा खतरों का सामना बेहतर ढंग से कर सकते हैं।

नए साल की शुरुआत में भारत की लोकतांत्रिक स्थिरता एवं आर्थिक प्रगति अनिश्चित नजर आ रही है। भले ही नागरिकता कानून के खिलाफ हो रहे व्यापक प्रदर्शन रोजगार के मौके कम होने से उपजे गस्से को भी बयां करते हैं लेकिन सरकार आर्थिक एवं सामाजिक-राजनीतिक संकट से उबरने के लिए वित्तीय एवं मानव संसाधनों के इस्तेमाल का कोई संकेत नहीं दिखा रही ैहै। इसके बजाय नागरिकता कानून पर अमल की दिशा में बढ़ना यह दिखाता है कि वह धर्मनिरपेक्ष लोकतंत्र से दूर होने की कोशिश से अस्थिरकारी संघर्षों के पनपने की चेतावनी को नजरअंदाज करती है।

हिंद महासागर में भारत की सामरिक स्थिति ऐसी है कि अमेरिका उसे नजरअंदाज नहीं कर सकता है। लेकिन वर्ष 2020 यह बताएगा कि क्या घरेलू स्तर पर आर्थिक एवं राजनीतिक मुश्किलों में घिरा भारत अमेरिका के साथ सामरिक सहयोग के लिहाज से बेमेल है या दोनों देशों के बीच करीबी सामरिक संबंध संभव हैं?

(लेखिका सेंटर फॉर पीस ऐंड कॉन्फ्लिक्ट रिजॉल्युशन, नई दिल्ली की संस्थापक प्रोफेसर हैं)

देश के बुनियादी विकास में तेजी की तैयारी

बीते वर्ष के अंतिम दिन एक संवाददाता सम्मेलन में टास्क फोर्स ऑन नैशनल इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर पाइपलाइन फॉर 2019-25 की रिपोर्ट जारी करते हुए वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण ने दो महत्त्वपूर्ण संदेश दिए। पहला, उन्होंने स्पष्ट कर दिया कि उन्हें 2020-21 का आम बजट पेश करने से एक महीना पहले मीडिया से मिलने में कोई परेशानी नहीं है। दूसरा, यह कि उन्हें अर्थव्यवस्था की स्थिति को देखते हए देश को यह बताने में देरी का कोई कारण नजर नहीं आता कि वरिष्ठ सरकारी अधिकरियों के एक समृह ने बुनियादी ढांचा क्षेत्र में निवेश को पटरी पर लाने के लिए क्या सिफारिश की है।

अमूमन बजट से पहले वित्त मंत्री और वित्त मंत्रालय मीडिया से दूर ही रहते हैं। ऐसा कम ही होता है कि वित्त मंत्रालय का कोई अधिकारी बजट पेश होने से चार हफ्ते पहले प्रेस कॉन्फ्रेंस करे, वित्त मंत्री तो दूर की बात है। बजट को लेकर गोपनीयता बरती जाती है और बजट में की जाने वाली घोषणाओं को गोपनीय रखने के लिए सभी जरूरी कदम उठाए जाते हैं। इसलिए, बजट से एक महीना पहले प्रेस कॉन्फ्रेंस से परहेज किया जाता है। ऐसी स्थिति में बजट से एक महीना पहले प्रेस कॉन्फ्रेंस करने का मकसद यही रहा होगा कि सभी को यह स्पष्ट संदेश दिया जाए कि सरकार बनियादी ढांचे में ज्यादा निवेश को लेकर गंभीर है।

हालांकि, इस प्रक्रिया में एनआईपी टास्क फोर्स की रिपोर्ट में 1 फरवरी को पेश किए जाने वाले बजट के बारे में कुछ अहम संकेत दिए होंगे। उदाहरण के लिए टास्क फोर्स के अनमान के मुताबिक 2019-20 में सकल घरेलू अनुपात (जीडीपी) की नॉमिनल वृद्धि करीब 8 फीसदी रहेगी जबकि पहले इसके 12 फीसदी रहने का अनमान जताया गया था। नॉमिनल संदर्भ में 2019-20 में जीडीपी के 205.37 लाख करोड़ रुपये रहने का अनुमान है जो 2018-19 में 190 लाख करोड़ रुपये थी। टास्क फोर्स के मुताबिक नॉमिनल जीडीपी के 2020-21 में 10.5 फीसदी और 2021-22 में 12 फीसदी की रफ्तार से बढ़ने का अनुमान है।

आर्थिक मामलों के सचिव अतनु चक्रवर्ती टास्क फोर्स के



दिल्ली डायरी

ए के भट्टाचार्य

एनआईपी टास्क फोर्स

ने अगले साल बनियादी क्षेत्र के लिए सरकारी फंड में भारी बढ़ोतरी का सुझाव दिया है। क्या सरकार बुनियादी क्षेत्र के लिए ज्यादा वित्तीय खर्च की मांग को नजरदांज कर सकती है ?

प्रमुख हैं। नीति आयोग के मुख्य कार्याधिकारी और वित्त मंत्रालय तथा दूसरे प्रशासनिक मंत्रालयों के सचिव इसके सदस्य हैं। तो क्या टास्क फोर्स के आंकड़ों से आपको मौजूदा आर्थिक वृद्धि परिदृश्य की थाह नहीं मिलती है जिसमें अगले वर्ष का बजट बनाया जा रहा है ? हर कोई जानता है कि आर्थिक वद्धि की गति धीमी पड रही है लेकिन इस रिपोर्ट के जारी होने से पहले सरकार में किसी ने भी नहीं कहा था कि 2019-20 में नॉमिनल वृद्धि केवल 8 फीसदी रहेगी। जाहिर है कि सरकार के कर राजस्व पर इसका प्रतिकृल असर होगा।

एनआईपी टास्क फोर्स की रिपोर्ट से यह पता भी चलता है कि बुनियादी ढांचा क्षेत्र के लिए अगले बजट में क्या हो सकता है। 2018-19 में बुनियादी ढांचा क्षेत्र के लिए केंद्र सरकार की सकल बजट सहायता 1.39 लाख करोड रुपये रही थी जो विभिन्न मदों के तहत सभी पुंजीगत व्यय

के लिए सरकार की कुल बजट सहायता का 44 फीसदी है। 2019-20 में कुल पूंजीगत खर्च के लिए सकल बजट सहायता में बुनियादी ढांचा क्षेत्र के लिए बजट सहायता का हिस्सा 45 फीसदी यानी 1.53 लाख करोड़ रुपये है। टास्क फोर्स के मुताबिक 2020-21 में बुनियादी ढांचा क्षेत्र के लिए 1.86 लाख करोड़ रुपये के बजट सहायता की जरूरत होगी। अगर अगले वर्ष भी 44-45 फीसदी हिस्सेदारी बरकरार रहती है तो पूंजीगत व्यय के लिए केंद्र सरकार की सकल बजट सहायता 22 फीसदी बढ़कर 4.13 लाख करोड़ रुपये बढ़नी चाहिए। 22 फीसदी से कम बढोतरी का मतलब होगा कि वित्त मंत्रालय ने अपनी समिति की रिपोर्ट ही

एनआईपी टास्क फोर्स का साथ ही कहना है कि बुनियादी क्षेत्र के लिए सरकार का कुल खर्च 2020-21 में 21 फीसदी बढ़कर 4.58 लाख करोड रुपये होना चाहिए जो 2019-20 में 3.77 लाख करोड रुपये है। यह एक महत्त्वाकांक्षी लक्ष्य है क्योंकि 2019-20 में बुनियादी क्षेत्र के लिए कुल व्यय में केवल 6.5 फीसदी की बढ़ोतरी की गई थी।

स्वीकार नहीं की है।

सरकार के कुल पूंजीगत खर्च (भारतीय रेल सहित सार्वजनिक इकाइयों की आंतरिक और अतिरिक्त बजट संसाधनों सहित) में बुनियादी क्षेत्र पर कुल सरकारी खर्च का हिस्सा 38 से 43 फीसदी के बीच रहा है। अगर यह हिस्सा 2020-21 में बरकरार रहता है तो अगले साल के बजट में सरकार के कल पंजीगत व्यय में 21 फीसदी बढ़ोतरी के साथ 10.65 लाख करोड रुपये का प्रावधान होना चाहिए।

इन आंकड़ों से साफ है कि एनआईपी टास्क फोर्स ने अगले साल बुनियादी क्षेत्र के लिए सरकारी फंड में भारी बढोतरी का सुझाव दिया है। क्या सरकार बनियादी क्षेत्र के लिए ज्यादा वित्तीय खर्च की मांग को नजरदांज कर सकती है ? और क्या बजट से कुछ दिन पहले प्रेस कॉन्फ्रेंस कर एनआईपी टास्क फोर्स की रिपोर्ट जारी करने के फैसले का मकसद सरकार के भीतर प्रभावशाली वर्गों पर ज्यादा खर्च करने की जरूरत स्वीकार करने और राजकोषीय समेकन लक्ष्यों के लिए ज्यादा दबाव डालना है।

की विकास दर में अच्छी बढ़ोतरी

हो। साल 2020 का बजट

प्रधानमंत्री मोदी और वित्त मंत्री

निर्मला सीतारमण के लिए काफी

महत्त्वपूर्ण है क्योंकि सरकार देश

कानाफूसी

मीठा और गर्म प्रचार

दिल्ली में चुनाव नजदीक आ गए हैं, इसलिए टिकट उम्मीदवारों ने अनोखे उपहारों से मतदाताओं को लुभाना शुरू कर दिया है। ऐसे ही एक नेता भारतीय जनता पार्टी (भाजपा) के आजाद सिंह हैं, जो मतदाताओं को गुड़ और कैलेंडर बांट रहे हैं। हर कोई यही कहेगा कि ये इस समय के लिहाज से सबसे उपयुक्त तोहफे हैं क्योंकि नया साल शुरू हुआ है और पिछले पखवाडे में मौसम अब तक का सबसे ठंडा रहा है। गुड और कैलेंडर को कपड़े के थैले में पैक किया गया है, जिस पर फोन नंबर लिखे हैं। यहां कपड़े के थैले का जिक्र करना इसलिए अहम है क्योंकि थैले पर छपा है-'प्लास्टिक को ना कहें'। पिछले सप्ताह ये तोहफे वसंज कुंज में बांटे गए। सिंह के समर्थक तोहफे को लेने से इनकार करने वालों को मनाने की पुरजोर कोशिश कर रहे हैं। जो लोग घर पर नहीं थे, उन्हें भी ये थैले अपने दरवाजे पर टंगे मिले।

चौथी बार खुली किरमत

पश्चिम बंगाल जैसे राज्य इस बात से खफा हैं कि उन्हें इस साल की गणतंत्र दिवस परेड में हिस्सा लेने की मंजूरी नहीं दी गई। लेकिन गृह मंत्रालय के तहत आने वाले एक विशेष बल राष्ट्रीय आपदा मोचन बल (एनडीआरएफ) को अपने करीब 15 साल के इतिहास में पहली बार सूची में रखा गया है। एक वरिष्ठ अधिकारी ने कहा कि एनडीआरएफ ने चौथी बार झांकी सौंपी थी। पहले तकनीकी या अन्य वजहों से जगह बनाने में नाकाम रहने के बाद झांकी को तैयार कर रही टीम इस बार अपनी किस्मत को जानने के लिए उत्सुक थी। जब पिछले शुक्रवार को 22 भागीदारों की सूची की घोषणा की गई तो उनके पास पास खुशी मनाने का मौका था। झांकी में बचाव कार्यों के दौरान बल की सतर्कता और त्वरित प्रतिक्रिया दिखाई जाएगी।



आपका पक्ष

विश्व को अमेरिका-ईरान टकराव से घाटा

हाल में अमेरिका ने ईरान के शीर्ष सैन्य कमांडर कासिम सुलेमानी को ड्रोन हमले में मार गिराया। इसके बाद अंतराष्ट्रीय बाजार में कच्चे तेल के दाम में बढो़तरी हो गई। ईरान कच्चे तेल का बड़ा निर्यातक देश है और विश्व के कई देश ईरान से कच्चा तेल आयात करते हैं। भारत भी उससे कच्चे तेल का आयात करता है। इससे पहले अमेरिका ने ईरान पर प्रतिबंध लगाया था और अन्य देशों को ईरान से तेल आयात करने को मना किया था। इसके बाद तेल कीमतों में उछाल आई थी। अंतरराष्ट्रीय बाजार में कच्चे तेल के दाम बढ़ने से इसका सीधा असर उपभोक्ताओं पर पडता है। भारत में भी पेट्रोल के दाम तेजी से बढ गए। इसके अलावा भारत का ईरान को आयात निर्यात भी प्रभावित हुआ है। भारत का कारोबार अमेरिका और ईरान दोनों देशों से होता है। भारत के लिए दोनों देश काफी महत्त्व



रखते हैं। कारोबार के मामले में भारत के ईरान से घनिष्ठ व्यापारिक संबंध है। अमेरिकी प्रतिबंध के बाद भी ईरान भारतीय मुद्रा में तेल निर्यात पर सहमत हो गया था। अगर अमेरिका और 🗄 ईरान के बीच टकराव गंभीर स्थिति तक पहुंच जाता है तो इससे विश्व के कई देशों को भी

नुकसान होगा। अमेरिकी हमले

अमेरिका-ईरान के बीच बढ़ते तनाव को कम करने के लिए अन्य देशों को आगे आना चाहिए

के बाद विश्व युद्ध छिड़ने की संभावनाएं बढ़ने लगी हैं। इस समय सभी देशों को संयम से काम लेना चाहिए और युद्ध के ं हालात नहीं बने इसपर सोचना

पाठक अपनी राय हमें इस पते पर भेज सकते हैं : संपादक, बिजनेस स्टैंडर्ड, 4, बहादुर शाह

जफर मार्ग, नई दिल्ली - 110002. आप हमें ईमेल भी कर सकते हैं : lettershindi@bsmail.in

पत्र/ईमेल में अपना डाक पता और टेलीफोन नंबर अवश्य लिखें।

नुकसान होता है बल्कि आने वाली पीढ़ियों पर भी इसका असर पड़ता है। आज कई देश परमाणु संपन्न देश हैं। ऐसे में अगर एक भी परमाणु बम इस्तेमाल किया जाता है तो इसका असर पूरे विश्व पर पड़ सकता है जैसा कि जापान के नागासाकी और हिरोशिमा पर पड़ा था। अत: विश्व के सभी देशों को अमेरिका और ईरान के बीच टकराव को रोकने की दिशा में विशेष पहल करनी चाहिए और दोनों देशों के बीच शांति बहाल करने का संदेश देना चाहिए।

चाहिए। युद्ध से देश को तो ! सकती है कि इस साल में देश

बजट से मिलेगी बदलाव की उम्मीद

सरकार इस आम बजट को इस अनुमान के आधार पर तैयार कर

को आर्थिक सुस्ती से बाहर निकालने की कोशिश कर रही है। साल 2020 में विकास दर 6 से 6.5 फीसदी विकास होने का अनुमान है। अर्थव्यवस्था में तेजी से वापसी के संकेत दिख रहे हैं। शेयर बाजार चालू वित्त वर्ष में मुनाफे में 25 फीसदी वृद्धि की उम्मीद कर रहा है। अगर यह अनुमान सही साबित हुआ तो नए साल में शेयर बाजार नए शिखर पर पहुंच सकता है। सरकार को आम लोगों के साथ निवेशकों की धारणा भी सुधारने की जरूरत है। अमेरिका और चीन के बीच चल रहे व्यापार युद्ध सुलझाने की दिशा में भी बाजार में तेजी आ सकती है। इस वर्ष अंतरराष्ट्रीय बाजार में कच्चे तेल के दाम में होने वाले उतार-चढ़ाव का भी असर देखने को मिल सकता है।

अमित जायसवाल, गोरखपुर



हिंसा किसी मसले का हल नहीं निकलता

विश्वविद्यालय में गुंडागर्दी

जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय एक बार फिर चर्चा में है, लेकिन अप्रिय कारणों से ही। विगत दिवस इस विश्वविद्यालय में चेहरा ढके लोगों ने छात्रों एवं शिक्षकों के साथ मारपीट करने के साथ जिस तरह तोडफोड़ की उसकी जितनी भी निंदा की जाए, कम है। किसी भी शैक्षिक संस्थान में ऐसी हिंसा होना बेहद शर्मनाक है। इससे खराब बात और कोई नहीं कि देश की राजधानी का एक नामी विश्वविद्यालय खौफनाक गुंडागर्दी का गवाह बने। दिल्ली पुलिस को न केवल नकाबधारी हिंसक तत्वों को बेनकाब करना होगा, बल्कि उन्हें शह देने वालों तक भी पहुंचना होगा। अगर हिंसा के लिए जिम्मेदार तत्वों पर शिकंजा नहीं कसा गया तो यह विश्वविद्यालय खूनी छात्र राजनीति का अखाड़ा ही बनेगा और अपनी रही-सही प्रतिष्ठा से भी हाथ धोएगा। हालांकि जेएनयू प्रारंभ से ही वामपंथी विचारधारा का गढ़ रहा है, लेकिन बीते कुछ समय से वहां वैचारिक स्वतंत्रता के नाम पर अराजक एवं असिहण्णु विचारधारा को भी पोषण मिल रहा है। कभी-कभी तो ऐसा लगता है कि जेएनयू में उन्हें विशेष संरक्षण मिलता है जो भारतीयता, राष्ट्रीयता आदि को हेय दृष्टि से देखने को तत्पर रहते हैं। यह किसी से छिपा नहीं कि जेएनयू में कभी नक्सलियों का गुणगान होता है तो कभी आतंकियों का। इस तरह के ओछे आचरण को वैचारिक स्वतंत्रता के आवरण में ढकने की भी कोशिश होती है। इस कोशिश में कई राजनीतिक दल खुशी-खुशी इसलिए शामिल होते हैं, क्योंकि इससे ही उनका हित सधता है। ये वही दल हैं जो जेएनयू में रजिस्ट्रेशन के साथ पठन-पाठन को हिंसा के सहारे बाधित किए जाने पर तो मौन धारण किए रहे, लेकिन जैसे ही विश्वविद्यालय परिसर में नकाबपोशों के उत्पात की खबर मिली वैसे ही इस निष्कर्ष पर पहुंच गए कि यह सब कुछ सरकार के इशारे पर हुआ है। यह आरोप इसलिए गले नहीं उतरता, क्योंकि नागरिकता कानून के हिंसक विरोध से सरकार पहले ही परेशान है।

आखिर कोई सरकार खुद को सवालों से घेरे जाने वाला काम क्यों करेगी? कहीं ऐसा तो नहीं कि सरकार का संकट बढ़ाने पर आमादा ताकतों ने जेएनयू में उत्पात मचाने की साजिश रची हो? इस अंदेशे का एक बड़ा आधार यह है कि दोनों ही पक्ष के छात्र हिंसा का शिकार बने हैं। बेहतर हो कि सरकार इसके लिए हर संभव कोशिश करे कि जेएनयू में हिंसा फैलाने वालों का सच जल्द सामने आए। आवश्यक यह भी है कि उन कारणों का निवारण किया जाए जिनके चलते जेएनयू अराजक शैक्षिक संस्थान के तौर पर कुख्यात हो रहा है। यह काम इसलिए प्राथमिकता के आधार पर होना चाहिए, क्योंकि इस संस्थान की स्थापना जिन उद्देश्यों के लिए की गई थी उनसे वह दूर जा रहा है।

हड़ताल से अलग ममता

नागरिकता संशोधन कानून (सीएए) और राष्ट्रीय नागरिक पंजी (एनआरसी) समेत कई मुद्दों के विरोध में वाममोर्चा श्रमिक संगठनों और कांग्रेस ने आठ जनवरी को राष्ट्रव्यापी आम हड़ताल बुलाई है, लेकिन पश्चिम बंगाल की मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी ने दो टूक कह दिया है 'वह सीएए और एनआरसी के विरोध में हैं, मगर बंद-हड़ताल की हिमायत नहीं करेंगी। वह इसके खिलाफ आंदोलन की पक्षधर हैं, लेकिन बंद का साथ इसलिए नहीं देंगी, क्योंकि जनता को परेशानी होती है और राजस्व का नुकसान होता है।' दरअसल जनता के हितों का हवाला देकर ममता बनर्जी ने वामो-कांग्रेस से अलग राह बनाई है। वामपंथी दलों ने गुजरे वर्ष 26 दिसंबर को ही यह घोषणा की थी कि एक जनवरी से सात दिनों तक सीएए और एनसीआर के विरोध में उनका प्रदर्शन होगा और आठ जनवरी को देशव्यापी हडताल होगी। इन मुद्दों पर लगातार प्रदर्शन और जुलूस निकाल रहीं ममता बनर्जी को अचानक जनता के हितों का ख्याल आ गया और वह इससे अपने को किनारे कर लीं। हालांकि राजनीतिक तजुर्बेकार इसके निहितार्थ समझते हैं। मोदी सरकार के विरोध में खुद को सबसे आगे रखने वाली ममता बनर्जी यह तो चाहती हैं कि उनके अभियान में विपक्षी दल जुड़ें, लेकिन दूसरों की अगुआई में वह पीछे नहीं चलना चाहती हैं। आगे के मोर्चे पर रहकर वह मुस्लिम वोट बैंक को साधने में जुटी हैं और उनकी आखिरी कोशिश यही है कि इस मुद्दे पर उनके आंदोलन को मिल रहे समर्थन में कोई और हिस्सेदारी न ले सके। लोकसभा चुनाव में ममता बनर्जी की पार्टी तुणमूल कांग्रेस को जबर्दस्त झटका लगा था। भाजपा ने बंगाल की 18 सीटों पर कब्जा जमाकर 2021 में होने वाले विधानसभा चनाव पर नजर टिका दी। बस इसके बाद से ही सीएए और एनआरसी के मुद्दे को लेकर ममता ने विरोधी सुर और तेज कर दिए। बंगाल विधानसभा के गुजरे उप चुनाव में भी ममता को इस तेवर का लाभ मिला, जब उन्होंने अपनी तीन सीटों को बचाने के साथ ही कांग्रेस और भाजपा के कब्जे वाली भी एक-एक सीटें जीत लीं। जाहिर है कि वह गेंद दूसरों के पाले में नहीं जाने देना चाहती हैं। इसीलिए ममता वर्चस्व की इस लड़ाई में वामो और कांग्रेस को कोई मौका देना नहीं चाहती हैं। अगर वह जनता के हितों का ख्याल रखते हुए बंद का विरोध करती हैं तो उनकी सराहना भी होनी चाहिए। यकीनन बंद, प्रदर्शन, जाम और जुलूसों से जनता के हितों की अनदेखी होती है। ममता सरकार चला रही हैं तो जाहिर है कि उन्हें कानून-व्यवस्था की भी चिंता होगी।

सरकारी कामकाज के खिलाफ शरारत



ए. सूर्यप्रकाश

यदि एनपीआर और जनगणना में अवरोध डालने वाले तत्व सफल होते हैं तो इससे शासन–प्रशासन चलाना बहुत मुश्किल हो जाएगा

गरिकता संशोधन कानून यानी सीएए के खिलाफ कुछ राजनीतिक दलों का दुष्प्रचार नित नई गिरावट का स्तर छूता जा रहा है। अब उन्होंने राष्ट्रीय जनसंख्या र्राजस्टर यानी एनपीआर और हर दस साल में होने वाली जनगणना की कवायद का भी विरोध शुरू कर दिया है। एनपीआर और जनगणना को लेकर अफवाहें फैलानी शुरू कर दी गई हैं, जबिक ये दोनों पहलू गवर्नेंस के लिहाज से बहुत महत्वपूर्ण हैं। इससे पहले विपक्षी दल सीएए के खिलाफ अनर्गल प्रलाप करते रहे जबकि इसका किसी भी धर्म के भारतीय नागरिक से कोई लेना-देना नहीं। न ही दूसरे देश के नागरिकों के लिए इससे हमारे दरवाजे खोल दिए जाएंगे, क्योंकि इसमें नागरिकता देने के लिए एक मियाद तय की गई है।

एनपीआर और जनगणना से जनसांख्यिकीय जानकारियां तो मिलती ही हैं, साथ ही देश के विभिन्न इलाकों में लोगों के सामाजिक एवं आर्थिक स्तर का हाल भी पता चलता है। इनमें से एक भी कवायद का मकसद किसी को किसी प्रकार के अधिकार से वंचित करना नहीं है। इनमें भी एनपीआर तो कांग्रेसनीत पर्ववर्ती संप्रग सरकार की देन है जिसने 2010 में इसकी शुरुआत की थी। उसमें लोगों की डेमोग्राफिक और बायोमीट्रिक जानकारियां इकट्ठा करनी थीं। इसमें लोगों के स्थाई आवास से लेकर पिछले छह महीनों के प्रवास से जुड़ी सूचनाएं एकत्र की जा रही थीं। ऐसे में यह बहुत अजीब है कि एनपीआर का आगाज करने वाली कांग्रेस ही अब इसके विरोध में उतर आई है। वह जिस तल्खी से इसका विरोध कर रही है वह किसी नाटक से कम नहीं लगता।

भारत में जनगणना मुख्य रूप से लोगों की गिनती के लिए होती है। यह दुनिया में सबसे बड़ी प्रशासनिक एवं सांख्यिकीय गतिविधि मानी जाती है और ऐसा माना जाना एकदम उचित भी है। इसके लिए आंकड़े जुटाने के काम में करीब तीस लाख लोग लगेंगे। इसमें पहली बार आंकड़ा संग्रहक एक मोबाइल एप का भी इस्तेमाल करेंगे। भारत में दशकीय जनगणना का सिलसिला 1892 से शुरू हुआ जिसमें अभी तक कोई अंतराल नहीं आया। राष्ट्रीय महत्व के दिष्टकोण से यह बहुत महत्वपूर्ण कवायद हैं, क्योंकि इससे बीते दस वर्षों के दौरान राष्ट्रीय एवं स्थानीय स्तर पर जनसांख्यिकीय परिवर्तन को लेकर तस्वीर स्पष्ट होती है। ये दोनों किस्म के सर्वेक्षण नीति निर्माताओं के लिए कार्यक्रमों की रूपरेखा तैयार करने में आधारभृत तत्व की भूमिका निभाते हैं। समाज के एक बड़े तबके के लिए तमाम बुनियादी सुविधाओं से जुड़ी योजनाओं में ये जानकारियां ही आधार बनती हैं। जनगणना गांव, कस्बे और वार्ड स्तर की सूक्ष्म जानकारियों का अहम स्रोत होती है। इससे आवास, शिक्षा, साक्षरता, विस्थापन, प्रजनन दर, भाषा, धर्म, अनुसूचित जाति एवं जनजातियों के बारे में सूचनाएं मिलती हैं।

राष्ट्रीय जनसंख्या रजिस्टर और जनगणना



केंद्र सरकार की एक वैधानिक गतिविधि है। इससे हासिल आंकड़े न केवल संघीय, बल्कि राज्य, जिला एवं तालुका स्तर पर नीतियां बनाने में काम आते हैं। ऐसे में अरुंधति रॉय जैसे लोगों का इस गतिविधि में नागरिकों को फर्जी नाम और पता बताने के लिए उकसाना बहुत शर्मनाक है। उन्होंने लोगों से यहां तक कहा कि वे पते के रूप में सात, लोक कल्याण मार्ग बताएं जो असल में प्रधानमंत्री आवास का पता है। मानों इतना ही पर्याप्त नहीं था। उन्होंने लोगों को इसके लिए भी उकसाया कि उस मोदी सरकार को काम न करने दिया जाए, जिसे कुछ महीने पहले ही 2024 तक शासन

जनसंख्या आंकड़ों के संग्रहण को लेकर केंद्र सरकार के कामकाज को अस्थिर करना और एक चुनी हुई सरकार के कार्यकाल को कम करने का आह्वान पूरी तरह संविधान विरोधी है। ऐसी अराजक गतिविधियों को बर्दाश्त करना राष्ट्रीय एकता एवं अखंडता के लिए हानिकारक है। हमें किसी भी सूरत में कुछ असंतुष्ट लोगों के गिरोह को शासन-प्रशासन

करने के लिए भारी जनादेश मिला है।

एवं लोकतांत्रिक परंपराओं को इस तरह आघात पहुंचाने की गुंजाइश नहीं देनी चाहिए।

यह दुष्प्रचार भी हो रहा है कि एनपीआर का इसलिए विरोध किया जाना चाहिए, क्योंकि यह मुस्लिमों के विरुद्ध है। यह भी सरासर झूठ है। इस पूरे घटनाक्रम से यही प्रतीत होता है कि मानों कुछ लोग सच्चाई सामने आने की आशंका से डरे हुए हैं। तमाम कारणों से आंकड़े बेहद अहम हैं। मिसाल के तौर पर केंद्र सरकार और कई राज्य सरकारों ने धार्मिक एवं भाषाई अल्पसंख्यकों की स्थिति सुधारने के लिए तमाम योजनाएं एवं कल्याणकारी कार्यक्रम तैयार किए हैं। इन योजनाओं में शिक्षा, रोजगार, कौशल विकास और स्वरोजगार के लिए वित्तीय सहायता तक शामिल होती हैं। इन योजनाओं का दायरा काफी हद तक जनसांख्यिकी पर निर्भर करता है और इस कारण दशकीय जनगणना अनिवार्य हो जाती है। जनगणना के आंकड़े केवल संघ सरकार द्वारा ही उपयोग नहीं होते. बल्कि प्रत्येक स्तर पर सरकारों और संस्थानों के काम आते हैं।

छद्म धर्मनिरपेक्षतावादी केवल मुस्लिमों

को ही भारत में अल्पसंख्यक मानते हैं, जबिक हकीकत कुछ और ही है। भारत की आबादी में हिंदू लगभग 80 फीसद हैं। यानी मोटे तौर पर 133 करोड़ लोगों में हिंदुओं की संख्या लगभग सौ करोड़ है। इसका भी एक दूसरा पहलू है औ वह यह कि देश के 28 में से छह राज्यों और कुछ केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों में हिंदू अल्पसंख्यक हैं। वहीं यदि देश में मुस्लिम आबादी की बात करें तो आजादी के समय यह 3.5 करोड़ थी जो अब 17.5 करोड हो गई है। इसके अलाव हमें भाषाई अल्पसंख्यकों को भी देखना होगा जिनका संविधान के अनुसार धार्मिक अल्पसंख्यकों जैसा ही दर्जा है। अनुच्छेद 29 और 30 के अनुसार हमारे राष्ट्रनिर्माताओं की मंशा स्पष्ट थी किं वे भाषाई अल्पसंख्यकों को भी धार्मिक अल्पसंख्यकों के समान संरक्षण चाहते थे और इसके निर्धारण का दायित्व राज्य को सौंपा गया। इन प्रावधानों के अनुसार हिंदी भाषी हरियाणा में किसी कन्नडिगा को भी वैसे ही संरक्षण मिलेगा जैसे हिंदू बहुल हरियाणा में किसी मोहम्मद इकबाल को।

अगर छद्म धर्मनिरपेक्षतावादी दुनिया भर की सरकारों द्वारा कराई जाने वाली जनगणना जैसी कवायद के विरोध में हैं तो इससे यही आशंका बलवती होती है कि वे वास्तविक आंकड़ों के उजागर होने को लेकर सशंकित हैं। दस वर्षों के दौरान देश में ईसाई, बौद्ध, जैन और पारसियो की तुलना में मुस्लिमों की आबादी में इजाफा इस दुष्प्रचार की हवा निकाल देगा कि भारत मे मुस्लिम तबके का उत्पीड़न हो रहा है।

ऐसे में मुस्लिमों के हमदर्द भारतीयों को इन छद्म निरपेक्षतावादियों के झांसे में नहीं आना चाहिए। उन्हें एनपीआर-जनगणना को बाधित करने के उनके मंसूबों पर पानी फेरना होगा। यदि ऐसी प्रवृत्तियां उभरती हैं तो देश का

शासन-प्रशासन चलाना मुश्किल हो जाएगा। (लेखक लोकतांत्रिक मामलों के जानका

एवं वरिष्ठ स्तंभकार हैं) response@jagran.com

दुश्मनी में बदलते वैचारिक मतभेद

वाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय यानी जेएनयू के दृश्य किसी भी विवेकशील व्यक्ति को व्यथित कर देने वाले हैं। विश्वविद्यालय परिसर में नकाबपोश लाठी-डंडे लेकर छात्रों, शिक्षकों पर हमला कर दें, छात्रावासों में तोड़फोड़ करें और फिर भी आराम से भाग जाएं, यह सब सामान्य कल्पना से परे है। जिस तरह के वीडियो सामने आए हैं उनसे लगता ही नहीं कि जेएनयू कोई विख्यात विश्वविद्यालय है। अब पुलिस सिक्रय है, प्राथमिकी भी दर्ज हो गई है। उम्मीद करनी चाहिए कि छानबीन निष्पक्ष होगी और दोषी पकड़े जाएंगे। हालांकि जिस तरह की राजनीति इस हिंसा को लेकर हो रही है उससे पुलिस पर भी दबाव बढ़ा है। एक स्वर में हिंसा की निंदा हो तो पुलिस निर्भीक और निष्पक्ष होकर जांच करती है, लेकिन अगर एक समूह दूसरे पर हिंसा का आरोप मढ़े और दूसरा पहले पर तथा राजनीतिक दल भी कूद जाएं तो फिर दोषियों और अपराधियों का पकड़ा जाना कठिन हो जाता है। जेएनयू में विचारधारा को लेकर अखिल भारतीय विद्यार्थी परिषद एवं वामपंथी संगठनों के बीच संघर्ष नया नहीं है। इसका अंत भी नहीं हो सकता, लेकिन वैचारिक संघर्ष विचारधारा तक ही सीमित होना चाहिए। इसमें हिंसा के लिए कोई स्थान नहीं। जैसे ही आप हिंसा करते हैं वैसे

ही आप अपराधी हो जाते हैं। जेएनयू में जो कुछ भी हो रहा है वह कई पहलुओं पर हमें गंभीरता से विचार करने को मजबूर करता है। पिछले साल अक्टबर में फीस वृद्धि को लेकर दोनों पक्षों के छात्र संगठनों ने आंदोलन किया। वामपंथी संगठन और कांग्रेस से जुड़ा एनएसयूआइ आंदोलन पर कायम रहे, लेकिन विद्यार्थी परिषद यह कहते हुए पीछे हुट गया कि हमारी लड़ाई केवल फीस वृद्धि के खिलाफ है। यह आंदोलन पिछले तीन महीनों से चल रहा है। विश्वविद्यालय प्रशासन ने फीस में कटौती भी की। आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर छात्रों के लिए भी प्रावधान किया गया है। अब फीस इतनी ज्यादा नहीं कि आंदोलन को सही ठहराया जा सके। बावजूद इसके अगर अहिंसक तरीके से कोई विरोध प्रदर्शन हो रहा है तो हम उसे रोकने के लिए बल प्रयोग की अनुशंसा नहीं कर सकते, लेकिन अगर आंदोलनरत समूह परीक्षाओं का बहिष्कार करें और इसके लिए बलपूर्वक दूसरे छात्रों को भी मजबूर करें तो यह कानून हाथ में लेना है। वामपंथी छात्र समृह सेमेस्टर परीक्षाओं के लिए रजिस्ट्रेशन को रोक रहे थे। प्रशासन ने रजिस्ट्रेशन के लिए ऑनलाइन व्यवस्था की तो उन्होंने सर्वर केंद्र पर कब्जा कर उसके तार काट



टकराव केवल कानून-व्यवस्थाका प्रश्न नहीं।पुलिस की भूमिका तो अराजकता के बाद शुरू होती है

जेएनयू में हिंसक



दिए। जो छात्र रजिस्टेशन करने जाते थे उन्हें जबरन भगाया जाता था। उनके साथ मारपीट भी की जाती थी। यहां एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्न यह है कि अगर कोई छात्र संगठन या कई संगठनों का समूह बलपूर्वक छात्रों को रजिस्ट्रेशन कराने से रोकता है, सर्वर केंद्र पर कब्जा कर लेता है तो उनके खिलाफ कानुनी तौर पर कार्रवाई करने में समस्या

आखिर जेएनयू प्रशासन बार-बार इतना दब्बू और कमजोर क्यों नजर आता है कि कोई भी छात्र संगठन कानून हाथों में लेकर मनमानी करें और उसके खिलाफ कुछ न किया जाए? इससे पता चलता है कि जेएनयू के अंदर कितनी विकट और जटिल चुनौतियां पैदा हो गई हैं। यह स्थिति एक-दो दिनों में नहीं हुई है। वर्षों से वहां विचारधारा का टकराव चला आ रहा है। वामपंथी समूह का वर्चस्व जेएनयू में लंबे समय से रहा है। एक समय ऐसा था जब कांग्रेस से जुड़े छात्र संगठन एनएसयूआइ के साथ भी उनका टकराव होता था। विद्यार्थी परिषद के शक्तिशाली होने के बाद एनएसयूआइ वामपंथी छात्र संगठनों के सहयोगी की भूमिका में आ गई है। यह

वैचारिक विभाजन छात्रों तक सीमित नहीं है। यह शिक्षकों, प्रशासनिक अधिकारियों और कर्मचारियों सभी के बीच है। जेएनयू में जो कुछ भी होता है उसे वैचारिक चश्मे से देखा जाता है। किसी भी शिक्षा संस्थान में ऐसी स्थिति के कारण असामाजिक और उपद्रवी तत्वों को प्रवेश करने का मौका मिलता है। हमने फरवरी 2016 में वहां भारत विरोधी नारे के दृश्य देखे थे। उसके बाद जेएनयू में क्या हुआ, यह सबके सामने है। मकबूल बट्ट से लेकर अफजल गुरु तक की बरसी मनाना जेएनयू के अंदर घनीभूत हो चुकी वैचारिक विकृति के ही प्रमाण थे। वर्तमान हमले और प्रतिहमले को देखने के बाद यह मानने में कोई हर्ज नहीं है कि वहां असामाजिक और उपद्रवी तत्व प्रभावी हो चुके हैं।

दुर्भाग्य यह है कि भाजपा विरोधी पार्टियां पूरे कांड को संघ परिवार द्वारा प्रायोजित बताकर आग में घी डाल रही हैं। विचार करने की जरूरत है कि कोई सत्तारूढ़ पार्टी इस ढंग से हिंसा कराकर कौन-सा लक्ष्य प्राप्त करेगी? इस पर भी विचार करना जरूरी है कि जेएनयू में इस तरह के टकराव को रोकने के लिए क्या किया जाए? यह केवल कानून और व्यवस्था का प्रश्न नहीं है। पुलिस की भूमिका कानून तोड़े जाने के बाद आरंभ होती है। कानून तोड़े जाने की पृष्ठभूमि को रोकने में मुख्य भूमिका विश्वविद्यालय प्रशासन, शिक्षकों, छात्रों और सामाजिक समूहों की ही हो सकती है। राजनीतिक दलों की भूमिका की हम अनुशंसा इसलिए नहीं कर सकते, क्योंकि भाजपा के विरोध में मौका ढूंढ़ने वाले राजनीतिक दल कभी नहीं चाहेंगे कि टकराव खत्म हो और सरकार को घेरने का अवसर उनके हाथ से निकल जाए।

विचारधारा के स्तर पर असहमति खत्म नहीं हो सकती. लेकिन यह दुश्मनी में न बदले इसका उपाय करना होगा। इसलिए ऐसे लोग, जो किसी राजनीतिक विचारधारा से नहीं जुड़े हैं, वे आगे आएं। जेएनय प्रशासन, छात्र संगठन, शिक्षक संगठन सभी से बातचीत करें। उनके बीच संवाद कराने की कोशिश हो। सबको समझाया जाए कि विचारधारा के संघर्ष का मतलब यह नहीं कि हम एक-दसरे के दश्मन हो जाएं। संवाद की यह प्रक्रिया सतत चले। जब भी टकराव की नौबत आए उनके बीच मध्यस्थता हो सके, इसकी औपचारिक संस्थानिक व्यवस्था हो। अगर ऐसा नहीं हुआ तो जेएनयू में हुई हिंसा की पनरावत्ति आगे भी हो सकती है।

(लेखक राजनीतिक विश्लेषक एवं वरिष्ठ पत्रकार हैं)



स्वयं की तलाश

मैं कौन हूं? वैसे तो प्रत्येक व्यक्ति को खुद के बारे में पूर्ण ज्ञान होता है, किंतु इस प्रश्न का उत्तर इतना आसान और साधारण नहीं है। उपनिषद के चार महावाक्यों में एक महावाक्य है, 'अहं ब्रह्मास्मि' अर्थात मैं ही ब्रह्म हूं। आशय यह है कि इस मायावी संसार में मानव केवल ईश्वर की सबसे सुंदर कीर्ति ही नहीं है, बल्कि वह इस ब्रह्मांड में प्रत्यक्ष रूप से ब्रह्म का अंश है। ब्रह् का स्वरूप है। रामचरितमानस में तुलसीदास ने कह है कि जीव ईश्वर का अंश है। बाइबिल में भी जीसस क्राइस्ट ने कहा था कि क्या आपको यह ज्ञान नहीं है कि आप ईश्वर हैं? लेकिन दुर्भाग्यवश मनुष्य खुद को पहचान नहीं पाता है और वह तुच्छ सांसारिक और नश्वर उपलब्धियां हासिल करने की अंधी दौड़ में अपने जीवन की अंतिम सांस तक भागता रह जाता है और अंत में असंतष्टि ही पाता है।

महान वैज्ञानिक सर आइजक न्यूटन जब मृत्यु शैया पर थे तो उनके मित्रों ने उनसे पूछा कि वह अपने जीवन की संपूर्ण यात्रा को किस रूप में देखते हैं? इस पर उन्होंने कहा था कि मैं यह तो नहीं जानता हूं कि मेरी बातों को दुनिया किस रूप में सोचती है, लेकिन हकीकत तो यही है कि मैं जीवन भर एक छोटे बच्चे की तरह किसी समुद्र तट पर कंकड़-पत्थर ही चुनता रहा जबिक सत्य का अगाध सागर बिना किसी खोज के मेरी नजरों के सामने बेकार ही पड़ा रहा। उसे नहीं देख सका।

गंभीरता से खुद के अंदर झांकने की कोशिश करें तो क्या ऐसा प्रतीत नहीं होता है कि हम सभी में एक आइजक न्यूटन छुप कर बैठा हुआ है जो ज्ञान और सत्य के अथाह सागर के किनारे बैठकर भ्रमवश कंकड़ और पत्थर चुन-चुनकर अपनी थैलियों में भरता रहता है और एक दिन उसे यह आत्मज्ञान होता है कि उनके जीवन भर की कमाई के रूप में थैले में रखे गए धन-दौलत तो मिट्टी के मोल सरीखे हैं। असली मोतियों को तो वह अभी तक स्पर्श भी नहीं कर पाया है? लेकिन अफसोस तब तक बहुत देर हो चुकी होती है। क्या आज इस प्रश्न का उत्तर देना अनिवार्य नहीं है कि आखिर हम कौन हैं ?

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विश्व की जरूरत है सतत विकास

हाल ही में नीति आयोग ने सतत विकास लक्ष्य सूचकांक-2019 जारी किया है। इस सूचकांक में यह दर्शाया गया है कि सतत विकास के अंतरराष्ट्रीय लक्ष्यों को 2030 तक प्राप्त करने की दिशा में भारत के राज्यों और केंद्र शासित प्रदेशों ने अब तक क्या प्रगति की है। इस सूचकांक के जरिये केंद्र सरकार राज्यों की प्रगति की निगरानी तो रखती ही है, इससे पिछड़े राज्यों को प्रतिस्पर्धी बनाने में भी मदद मिलती है। सतत विकास लक्ष्य के तीन मुख्य आयामों-आर्थिक विकास, सामाजिक समावेशन और पर्यावरणीय वहनीयता के आधार पर जारी इस सूचकांक में केरल ने शीर्ष स्थान बरकरार रखा है, जबकि बिहार, झारखंड और अरुणाचल प्रदेश का प्रदर्शन सबसे खराब रहा है।

गौरतलब है कि संयुक्त राष्ट्र के आह्वान पर भारत सहित दुनिया के 193 देशों ने 2015 में सतत विकास लक्ष्यों को 2030 तक हासिल करने का संकल्प लिया था। इसमें गरीबी व भुखमरी की समाप्ति, बेहतर स्वास्थ्य, समावेशी शिक्षा, लैंगिक समानता, स्वच्छता, पेयजल, सस्ती व टिकाऊ ऊर्जा तक सबकी

सतत विकास आधुनिक व वैज्ञानिक दृष्टिकोण है। इसे धारणीय, संपोषणीय व टिकाऊ विकास भी कहा जाता है

पहुंच, पूर्ण व उत्पादक रोजगार, असमानता को खत्म करना तथा जलवायु परिवर्तन से निपटने के प्रयास समेत 17 मुख्य और 169 सहायक लक्ष्य शामिल हैं। इससे पहले संयुक्त राष्ट्र ने सहस्राब्दि विकास लक्ष्य (2000-2015) तय किए थे, जिसे पूर्णतः हासिल नहीं किया जा सका था। सतत विकास के यूएन द्वारा तय लक्ष्यों को हासिल करने के लिए भारत पूरी प्रतिबद्धता से जुटा है। मोदी सरकार द्वारा प्रारंभ की गई आयुष्मान भारत योजना, जनधन योजना, उज्ज्वला योजना, सुकन्या समृद्धि योजना, बेटी बचाओ-बेटी पढ़ाओ, स्वच्छ भारत अभियान और मिशन इंद्रधनुष आदि के परिणाम सकारात्मक रहे हैं। इससे सतत विकास

लक्ष्यों को हासिल करने में बल मिला है। सतत विकास संसाधनों को उपभोग करने का एक आदर्श मॉडल है, जो यह बताता है

कि आर्थिक विकास के साथ-साथ पर्यावरण को भी सुरक्षित करना है। इस दृष्टिकोण को अपनाने से वर्तमान एवं भावी दोनों पीढ़ियों की आवश्यकता की पूर्ति होती है। संतुलित विकास का यह स्वरूप विनाश को आमंत्रण नहीं देता है। इससे पर्यावरण में संतुलन बना रहता है। सतत विकास को अपनाना आधुनिक विश्व की जरूरत इसलिए भी है, क्योंकि अंधाधुंध औद्योगिक विकास के चलते आज पूरी दुनिया जलवायु परिवर्तन के खतरे से जूझ रहा है। धरती पर उपलब्ध संसाधनों के अत्यंत दोहन और शोषण के कारण कई तरह की सामाजिक और पर्यावरणीय विकृतियों का उद्भव हुआ है।

बहरहाल सतत विकास लक्ष्यों को हासिल करने में सभी राष्ट्रों की सहभागिता जरूरी है। सुखी भविष्य बनाने के लिए सबों को मिलकर काम करना होगा। बतौर नागरिक हम भोजन, पानी व ऊर्जा की बर्बादी पर अंकुश लगा सकते हैं। पौधारोपण करके, प्लास्टिक से दूरी बनाकर तथा संसाधनों का सीमित उपभोग कर सतत विकास लक्ष्यों को हासिल करने में व्यक्तिगत स्तर पर हम अपनी सहभागिता सुनिश्चित कर सकते हैं।

(लेखक बीएचयू में अध्येता हैं)

चुनौतियों पर विजय पाने वाली सरकार

संजय गुप्त ने अपने आलेख 'दोहरी चुनौतियों से दो-चार सरकार' में देश के सामने आर्थिक और राजनीतिक स्तर पर मुंह बाए खड़ी दोहरी चुनौतियों का जो जिक्र किया है, वह वर्तमान हालातों में समीचीन है। लेकिन सुदृढ़ मोदी सरकार ऐसी अनेक चुनौतियों से जूझकर न केवल विजयी हुई है, अपित् उसने विश्वफलक पर भारत की छवि को निखारने का काम भी किया है। भला कोई सोच सकता था कि अपने दूसरे कार्यकाल में मोदी सरकार कश्मीर के अनुच्छेद-370 और 35-ए की आग से खेलने का साहस भी जुटा पाएगी। लेकिन प्रधानमंत्री मोदी और उनकी विश्वसनीय टीम ने वह कर दिखाया जिसकी कोई कल्पना नहीं कर सकता था। यह सब मोदी सरकार की कुशल कार्यपद्धति और निष्पक्ष शासन के कारण ही संभव हो पाया। सबका साथ, सबका विकास और सबका विश्वास के मूलमंत्र के साथ संचालित होने वाली केंद्र सरकार की पारदर्शी शासन व्यवस्था के प्रति उन तत्वों का विरोध प्रकट करना स्वाभाविक है जो देश के अंदर होने वाले राष्ट्रहितैषी परिवर्तन को अपनी स्वार्थपरक राजनीति पर कुठाराघात मान रहे हैं। वर्तमान में नागरिकता कानून के विरोध के पीछे भी यही बात है। तीन तलाक कानून ने मुस्लिम वर्ग की आधी आबादी को मोदी के पक्ष में खड़ा कर दिया यह बात उन विपक्षी दलों को रास नहीं आई जो इस वर्ग को अपना वोटबैंक मानकर देश की सत्ता पर पुनः काबिज होने का दिवास्वप्न देखते रहे हैं। नागरिकता कानून में तकनीकी तौर पर मुस्लिम समुदाय का नाम न होने से ऐसे लोगों को अवसर मिल गया और उन्होंने एक वर्ग विशेष को इस कानून के विरोध में भड़काकर देश में अराजकता फैला दी। लेकिन सक्षम मोदी सरकार ने समय रहते इस अराजकता पर काबू पाकर नागरिकता कानून के

मेलबाक्स

संबंध में फैलाए जा रहे भ्रम को भी दूर करने के लिए कमर कस ली है। लोकतंत्र में सत्तापक्ष का विरोध होना स्वाभाविक है, पर जब विरोध के नाम पर देश की सार्वजनिक संपत्ति को जलाने की अराजकता की जाए तो यह राष्ट्रघाती नकारात्मकता है। विपक्ष की इस नीति से मोदी सरकार को सावधान रहने की जरूरत है।

डॉ. वीपी पाण्डेय, अलीगढ़

बढ़ती जनसंख्या बड़ी समस्या

क्या देश की सबसे बड़ी समस्या बेरोजगारी, आर्थिक मंदी, बढ़ते अपराध या सांप्रदायिकता हैं? शायद नहीं। देश की सबसे बड़ी समस्या बढ़ती जनसंख्या है जो इन सभी समस्याओं का कारण है। इस पर अधिकांश विपक्षी दलों ने चुप्पी साध रखी है, क्योंकि वोट बैंक की राजनीति ने इन दलों की आंखों पर पट्टी बांध रखी है। चीन ने दृढ़ शक्ति के साथ अपनी जनसंख्या नियंत्रित करके अभूतपूर्व प्रगति की है। क्या भारत ऐसा कर पाएगा? जिस देश में सिर्फ जनगणना की घोषणा पर विपक्षी दल हिंसा और बवाल मचाए, उस देश में क्या जनसंख्या नियंत्रण के बारे में सोचा जा सकता है? सभी राजनीतिक दल अगर वोट बैंक भूल कर देशहित में जनसंख्या नियंत्रण के बारे में एक राय रखें तो देश तीव्र गति से प्रगति के रास्ते पर बढ़ सकता है।

सुधीर पांचाल, मयूर विहार, दिल्ली

गुम हो रहा बालपन

आज तकनीकी दौड़ में बालपन बहुत पीछे छूटता जा रहा

है। अधिकतर बच्चे मोबाइल से चिपके रहते हैं। खेलकद से इनका नाता छूटता जा रहा है। कहीं ऐसा न हो कि एक दिन देश में पहलवानों की कमी हो जाए। हमें अभी से चेतना होगा और मोबाइल की तिलस्मी दुनिया से बच्चों को बाहर निकालकर अखाड़ों और मैदानों में उतारना होगा। ताकि इस गुम होते बालपन को बचाया जा सके।

पवन कुमार मुरली, गुरुग्राम

संयम बरते दोनों देश

ईरान के सैन्य कमांडर कासिम सुलेमानी के मारे जाने के बाद से ही दोनों देशों में तनाव बढ़ गया है। दुश्मनी पुरानी हो या हाल-फिलहाल की, दोनों को संयम बरतने की जरुरत है अगर दोनों देशों में तनाव बढ़ा तो इसमें उनका तो नुकसान होगा ही, मध्य एशियाई देशों पर भी इसका बुरा प्रभाव पड़ेगा ईरान और अमेरिका में यदि युद्ध हुआ तो दोनों की तबाही होगी। अतः अमेरिका को दुनिया के देशों पर पड़ने वाले दुष्प्रभाव को भी ध्यान में रखना चाहिए। अमेरिका को ईरान से ज्यादा संयम की जरूरत है।

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

दैनिक जागरण, राष्ट्रीय संस्करण, डी-210-211, सेक्टर-63, नोएडा ई-मेल: mailbox@jagran.com

परिसर पर हमला

जधानी दिल्ली के जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय में रविवार शाम जो हुआ, वह अपने आप में बताने के लिए काफी है कि हर तरफ किस तरह के तत्त्व हावी हो रहे हैं और पुलिस कैसे अराजक तत्त्वों को खुली छूट दे रही है! जिस जेएनयू परिसर में प्रवेश करने तक के लिए किसी बाहरी व्यक्ति को एक औपचारिक पूछताछ और जांच की प्रक्रिया से गुजरना पड़ता है, उसमें पचास से ज्यादा नकाबपोश गुंडे सरियों और डंडे के साथ दाखिल हुए और दो घंटे तक आतंक मचाते रहे। वे लड़िकयों के छात्रावासों तक में घुस गए और उन पर जानलेवा हमला किया। उन्हें इस बात से कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ रहा था कि उनके सामने कोई छात्रा है या छात्र या कोई महिला प्रोफेसर, पूरी बर्बरता से उन्होंने डंडों और सरियों से उन्हें मारा-पीटा। नतीजतन, जेएनयू छात्र संघ की अध्यक्ष का सिर फट गया, एक महिला प्रोफेसर के अलावा लगभग कई विद्यार्थी बुरी तरह घायल हो गए। अफसोसनाक यह है कि इस आपराधिक घटना को रोकने-टोकने के लिए न जेएनयू के सुरक्षा गार्ड सामने आए, न पुलिस को हस्तक्षेप करना जरूरी लगा।

सवाल है कि सरेआम इस तरह की अराजक हिंसा के बरक्स दिल्ली पुलिस के रवैये को किस तरह देखा जाएगा? क्या यह पुलिस की क्षमता की सीमा है या फिर वह किसी पूर्वाग्रह या अघोषित निर्देश पर काम कर रही थी? जो पुलिस हाल में जामिया मिल्लिया परिसर में कथित हिंसा से निपटने का हवाला देकर बिना किसी हिचक के घुस गई थी और व्यापक पैमाने पर छात्र-छात्राओं को बेहरमी से पीटा था, जेएनयू में घुसे नकाबपोश हमलावरों से निपटना उसे क्यों जरूरी नहीं लगा ? हालत यह थी कि जेएनयू के मुख्य गेट के बाहर भी मौजूद अराजक लोग हिंसक नारे लगा रहे थे, परिसर के भीतर घायल विद्यार्थियों और शिक्षकों की मदद के लिए जा रही एंबुलेंस पर तोड़फोड़ कर रहे थे, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं से मारपीट कर रहे थे और पुलिस मूकदर्शक खड़ी थी। क्या ऐसे संवेदनशील मौके पर पुलिस की यही भूमिका होती है? इस पूरी अवधि में दिल्ली पुलिस के आयुक्त क्या कर रहे थे? क्या यह समूचा प्रकरण खुद पुलिस आयुक्त की क्षमता पर सवालिया निशान नहीं है?

जेएनयू परिसर में छात्र-छात्राओं पर जानलेवा हमले की जैसी खबरें, ब्योरे और वीडियो सामने आए हैं, वे विचलित करने वाले हैं। ऐसा लगता है कि सब सुनियोजित तरीके से हुआ। जेएनयू छात्र संघ ने सीधा आरोप अखिल भारतीय विद्यार्थी परिषद से जुड़े लोगों और उनके साथ आए गुंडों पर लगाया। प्रति–आरोप भी हैं। लेकिन घटना के दौरान किसी तरह कैद की गई तस्वीरों और वीडियो में जो लोग दिख रहे हैं, उससे बहुत कुछ साफ हो जाता है। दूसरी ओर, पुलिस ने जो मामला दर्ज किया है, उसमें आरोपी 'अज्ञात लोग' हैं! हाल में नागरिकता संशोधन कानून के विरोध में प्रदर्शनों के बाद हिंसा का हवाला देकर पुलिस ने जिन लोगों को गिरफ्तार किया और उन पर मुकदमा दर्ज किया, उसके बरक्स दिल्ली पुलिस के इस रवैये को कैसे देखा जाएगा? पिछले कुछ समय से जेएनयू में चल रही उथल-पुथल और विश्वविद्यालय प्रशासन के रवैये की वजह से पहले ही स्थितियां सहज नहीं थीं! यह ध्यान रखने की जरूरत है कि जेएनयू परिसर में नकाबपोश गुंडों की शक्ल में जिन्होंने छात्र-छात्राओं पर जानलेवा हिंसा की, अगर ऐसी स्थितियों को तुरंत नहीं रोका गया तो दुनिया भर में देश की साख बेहतर बनाने वाले एक प्रतिष्ठित शिक्षा संस्थान के सामने चुनौतियां गहरा सकती हैं। इसके लिए नेताओं को भी किसी को 'सबक सिखाने' जैसी भाषा के इस्तेमाल के बजाय देश में सहज शैक्षणिक गतिविधियां और मानवीय जीवन की स्थितियां बनाने में ऊर्जा लगानी चाहिए।

मौत और राजनीति

र्जस्थान में कोटा शहर के सरकारी अस्पताल में बच्चों की मौत का मामला ठंडा भी नहीं पड़ा है कि अब जोधपुर, बीकानेर और उदयपुर से भी दहला देने वाली खबरें आई हैं। पड़ोसी राज्य गुजरात के अमदाबाद और राजकोट के सरकारी अस्पतालों में दो सौ से ज्यादा बच्चों के मारे जाने की खबर और ज्यादा स्तब्ध कर देने वाली है। हैरानी की बात यह है कि इन राज्यों में शिशुओं की मौत की खबरें जिस तरह छन-छन कर बाहर आ रही हैं, उससे यह साफ हो गया है कि राज्य सरकारों को इस बारे में सब कुछ पता था, लेकिन खबरों को बाहर आने से रोका गया। यह कोई नहीं जानता कि दोनों राज्यों के और जिलों में हालात कितने भयावह होंगे, कितने नवजात दम तोड़ चुके होंगे या नहीं बचने की हालत में होंगे। पिछले कई दिनों से सिर्फ कोटा के अस्पताल में बच्चों की मौत की खबर मीडिया में आ रही थी। लेकिन अचानक से अगर यह पता चले कि बीते दिसंबर में जोधपुर के संपूर्णानंद मेडिकल कॉलेज में एक सौ छियालीस, बीकानेर के पीबीएम अस्पताल में एक सौ बासठ और उदयपुर के महाराणा भूपाल अस्पताल में एक सौ उन्नीस बच्चे मारे गए हैं, जिनमें से ज्यादातर नवजात हैं, तो किसके रोंगटे खड़े नहीं होंगे?

बच्चों का इस तरह से दम तोड़ते जाना बता रहा है कि हमारी सरकारें किस कदर निष्ठुर, निकम्मी और लापरवाह हो चुकी हैं। ऐसा लगता है कि पूरा सरकारी तंत्र आंखों पर पट्टी बांध कर बैठ गया है। नागरिकों की जान की कोई कीमत नहीं रह गई है। जोधपुर मुख्यमंत्री का गृह जिला है। ऐसे में यह सवाल उठना स्वाभाविक ही है कि क्या इतने दिनों मुख्यमंत्री को इस बात की भनक भी नहीं लगी कि उनके गृह जिले में सिर्फ महीने भर में एक सौ छियालीस बच्चे मर चुके हैं! आखिर क्यों नहीं सरकार ने संज्ञान लिया? अगर मुख्यमंत्री के अपने शहर में ऐसा हो रहा है और उन्हें मालूम नहीं है तो इससे अंदाजा लगाया जा सकता है कि सरकार कैसे और क्या काम कर रही है।

देश के सबसे संपन्न राज्य होने का दावा करने वाले 'वाइब्रेंट' गुजरात ने तो राजस्थान को भी पीछे छोड़ दिया। पिछले साल दिसंबर में राजकोट के दीनदयाल उपाध्याय अस्पताल में एक सौ ग्यारह और अमदाबाद के सिविल अस्पताल में अट्टासी बच्चों की मौत गुजरात के सरकारी अस्पतालों की दयनीय हालत बताने के लिए काफी है। राजकोट के अस्पताल में तो पिछले तीन महीनों से बच्चे मर रहे हैं। अक्तूबर, 2019 में सत्तासी और नवंबर में इकहत्तर बच्चे मर चुके हैं। पर सरकारी तंत्र अपनी नाकामी को छिपाने में कामयाब रहा। विकास के मामले में जिस गुजरात को देश के दूसरे राज्यों के लिए मॉडल के रूप में पेश किया जाता रहा है, वहां बच्चे ऐसे दम तोड़ते रहें और सरकार मामलों को दबाए रहे, यह शर्मनाक है। सबसे ज्यादा अफसोसजनक तो यह है कि गुजरात के उपमुख्यमंत्री ने जहां इसे 'सामान्य' बताने में कोई झिझक महसूस नहीं की, वहीं राजस्थान के मुख्यमंत्री इसे अपनी उपलब्धि बता रहे हैं कि उनके राज में मौतें कम हुई हैं, पिछली सरकार के राज में ज्यादा हुई थीं। हालात बता रहे हैं कि सुविधाओं के अभाव में सरकारी अस्पताल खुद दम तोड़ रहे हैं, बच्चों को क्या बचाएंगे! अगर अस्पतालों में बुनियादी सुविधाएं नहीं हैं, इमारतें जर्जर हैं, दवाइयां-बिस्तर नहीं हैं, तो फिर इन पर खर्च होने वाला पैसा कहां जा रहा है ? अगर हम बच्चों को नहीं बचा पाएंगे तो विकास क्या करेंगे? बच्चों की मौतों का बढ़ता आंकड़ा कल्याणकारी सरकारों पर बड़ा सवालिया निशान खड़ा करता है।

कल्पमेधा

विचार का चिराग बुझ जाने से आचार अंधा हो जाता है। -विनोबा भावे

रेलवे के कायाकल्प की चुनोती

प्रेमपाल शर्मा

यदि राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप, मुफ्त यात्रा आदि को हटा लिया जाए तो रेल संगठन आज भी देश के सबसे कुशल संगठनों में गिना जाएगा। इसमें बहुत बड़ा योगदान ब्रिटेन द्वारा स्थापित नियमों, कार्य प्रणालियों का भी है। नकारात्मक बदलाव हुआ है तो राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप की वजह से। जहां स्टेशन देने की जरूरत नहीं है, वहां राजनीतिक दबाव से देना पड़े, जहां रियायत देने की जरूरत न हो वहां भी देना पड़े तो उसके अंजाम ऐसे होंगे ही।

भारतीय रेल सचमुच में ऐतिहासिक परिवर्तन की ओर अग्रसर है। रेल मंत्री ने जो तस्वीर पेश की है, उसके अनुसार रेलवे की आठ सेवाओं की बजाय रेल प्रबंधन सेवा नाम का केवल एक कैडर होगा। रेल मंत्री ने इसकी आवश्यकता इसलिए बताई कि आठ विभाग होने की वजह से कई बार उनमें आपस में प्रतिस्पर्धा और गुटबाजी चलती रहती है, इससे निर्णय लेने में देरी होती है। एकीकृत सेवा से यह सब खत्म हो जाएगा। दूसरा महत्त्वपूर्ण निर्णय मौजूदा नौ सदस्यों के बोर्ड की बजाय पांच सदस्यों का बोर्ड रहेगा। अभी तक हर सदस्य अपनी तकनीकी योग्यता से जाना जाता था, जैसे- सदस्य इंजीनियरिंग, सदस्य यातायात, सदस्य सिगनलिंग। इसकी बजाय अब चेयरमैन सहित पांच सदस्य होंगे। एक आधारभूत ढांचा जैसे ट्रक सिग्नल टेलीकम्युनिकेशन को देखेगा यानी सदस्य (इंफ्रास्क्ट्चर)। दुसरा सदस्य (परिचालन) और बिजनेस, तीसरा वित्त और चौथा रेल इंजन, डिब्बे,

पहिया आदि। शीर्ष पर इन सुधारों के साथ-साथ कुछ और भी सुधार होंगे, जैसे- महाप्रबंधक को प्रोन्नत किया जाएगा सचिव के पद पर। रेल की बढ़ती जिम्मेदारी और अपेक्षाओं को पुरा करने के लिए बदलते वक्त के साथ किसी भी विचार का स्वागत किया जाना चाहिए। इस पर तुरंत कोई निर्णय या फतवा देना जल्दबाजी होगी। वैज्ञानिक सोच तो यही कहती है कि यदि चीजें सुधारने में न आ रही हों तो कोई और रास्ता निकाला जाए। उस रास्ते को आप प्रयोग भी कह सकते हैं।

अच्छी बात है कि रेलवे संगठन में पिछले बीस वर्षों से कई बार ऐसे विकल्पों पर विचार किया गया है और फिलहाल का निर्णय उन्हीं विकल्पों में से कुछ-कुछ सूत्र लेकर घोषित हुआ है। इस समय घोषित होने का कारण यह भी हो सकता है कि पिछले वर्ष रेलवे की कमाई और लागत का अनुपात (ऑपरेटिंग रेशो) और बिगड़ा है। अनठानवे रुपए खर्च करके सौ रुपए कमाए जा रहे हैं। पिछले बजट में भविष्य के लिए जो

घोषणाएं की गई हैं, उनको पूरा करने के लिए 🔰 अगले बारह साल में पचास लाख करोड़ रुपए चाहिए। पटरियों को सुधारना है, सिगनल प्रणाली को आधुनिक बनाना है, ज्यादातर मार्गों पर गाड़ियों की रफ्तार बढ़ानी है, कश्मीर और पूर्वोत्तर में विस्तार करना है आदि।

इससे पहले वर्ष 1994 में प्रकाश टंडन कमेटी ने भी कुछ ऐसे ही सुझाव दिए थे, जिसके अनुसार रेल सेवाओं को टेक्निकल (तकनीकी) और नॉन-टेक्निकल (गैर-तकनीकी) नाम से केवल दो समूहों में रखा जाए। उसके बाद सन 2000 में राकेश मोहन कमेटी ने भी विभागों की आपसी लडाई को

रेलवे की कार्यकुशलता में बाधक माना था। उन्होंने भी टंडन कमेटी के सुझावों को और आगे बढ़ाते हुए कहा था कि डीआरएम लेवल तक विभाग अलग रहे. उसके बाद उन सबको जनरल मैनेजमेंट में बात को ध्यान में रखेंगे। कार्मिक मंत्रालय और संघ शामिल किया जाए। विवेक देवराय और सैम पित्रोदा समितियों ने भी अकाउंटिंग प्रोसीजर, जनरल मैनेजर को और शक्ति देने के साथ-साथ सुरक्षा और भर्ती के बारे में बहुत सारे सुझाव दिए थे।

पहले इसके कुछ खतरों या चुनौतियों की बात करते हैं। इसमें कोई संदेह नहीं कि संघ लोक सेवा आयोग (यूपीएससी) से चुने हुए सर्वश्रेष्ठ मेधावी नौजवान भारतीय रेल में आते हैं। इनमें यातायात, कार्मिक, लेखा सेवाओं में सिविल सेवा परीक्षा से और तकनीकी यानी सिविल, सिग्नल, मैकेनिकल और इलेक्ट्रिकल इंजीनियर इंजीनियरिंग सेवा परीक्षा से आते हैं। दोनों में ही पिछले कुछ वर्षों से लगभग पचास

फीसद आइआइटी से निकले हुए छात्र होते हैं। कोई अंतर नहीं होता इनकी मेधा, कार्यक्षमता और भारतीय प्रशासनिक सेवा के अधिकारियों में। रेलवे एक तकनीकी विभाग है, इसलिए किसी को भी शीर्ष पर बाहर से बिठाने से और नुकसान हो सकता है।

बड़ा प्रश्न यह है कि यदि एक प्रबंधन सेवा होगी तो उसकी भर्ती प्रक्रिया क्या होगी? रेल में तकनीकी और गैर तकनीकी दोनों ही अधिकारियों की जरूरत है और यह सिर्फ एक परीक्षा से संभव नहीं है। अच्छा हो कि फिलहाल भर्ती की प्रक्रिया संघ लोक सेवा आयोग के तहत कुछ वर्षों तक ज्यों की त्यों रखी जाए, रेलवे में सेवा के पांच वर्षों के बाद पर्याप्त प्रशिक्षण से एक कैडर हो। यह सरकार की मौजूदा सोच से भी मेल खाता है कि आपकी अभिरुचि या सामर्थ्य दक्षता क्या है, उसके आधार पर कैडर या मैनेजमेंट सेवा में उन्हें उचित पद दिए जाएं। लेकिन इसके बजाय अगले ही वर्ष प्रबंधन



सेवा के नाम से भर्ती की जल्दबाजी, उसकी परीक्षा का प्रारूप बनाना आदि से चीजें और बिगड़ सकती हैं। उम्मीद है कि सचिवों की समिति और मंत्री समृह इस लोक सेवा आयोग के लिए भी मुश्किलें नहीं आएंगी। इस बीच में दुनिया के अनुभवों से सीखते हुए भर्ती प्रक्रिया के और विकल्पों पर विचार जारी रह सकता है।

बोर्ड का पुनर्गठन भी एक नई चुनौती पैदा करेगा, क्योंकि अभी तक तो वे अपनी-अपनी सेवाओं की वरिष्ठता के हिसाब से शीर्ष पर सीधे पहुंच जाते थे। उसका भी एक बुरा पहलू यह है कि आपकी कार्यक्षमता से ज्यादा से महत्त्वपूर्ण है आपकी जन्मतिथि। आधृनिक प्रबंधन में भारतीय रेल के लिए यह बहुत घातक साबित हो रहा है। अपनी कम उम्र की तड़ी में कुछ तो सेवा शुरू होने के वक्त ही बोर्ड के सदस्य के नशे में रहने लगते हैं बिना अपनी क्षमताओं को बढ़ाए। यूरोप के

देशों में या दुनिया के तेजी से बढ़ते संगठनों में उम्र और वरिष्ठता इतनी महत्त्वपूर्ण नहीं है जितना कि आपका योगदान और संगठन को आगे बढ़ाने की क्षमता। विभागीय खींचतान और अपने-अपने खांचे-सांचे में आत्मकेंद्रित रहने या गिरोह बनाने की जहां तक बात है, इसमें जरूर कुछ सच्चाई है। लेकिन समाज के किस स्तर पर ऐसा नहीं है ? रेलवे की गंभीर दुर्घटनाओं के बाद ये विभागीय आरोप बार-बार साबित हुए हैं। इसकी बुनियाद तो दरअसल राजनीतिक सत्ता में है जो इसी के बूते पर शासन कर रही है। रेलवे अधिकारियों को पूरा दोष देना सही नहीं होगा।

कुछ और पक्षों पर विचार करने से पहले यदि दिल्ली मेट्रो जैसे विकल्प की तरफ बढ़ा जाए तो अच्छा रहे। दिल्ली मेट्रो ने परिवहन व्यवस्था में परे भारत के द्वार खोले हैं। उसके संगठन, कार्य-संस्कृति, अनुशासन, नई सोच, बदलाव के निर्णय से सीख लेने

की जरूरत है। वह पूरी तरह सरकारी नहीं है, लेकिन सरकार के अधीन भी है, किसी निजी कंपनी की मनमानी नहीं है। उसमें भारत सरकार, शहरी विकास मंत्रालय, दिल्ली सरकार और जापानी सरकार का भी कुछ हस्तक्षेप और नियंत्रण है। बुनियादी फर्क यह है कि उसमें राजनीतिकों का हर पल गैरजरूरी हस्तक्षेप कम से कम है। रेलवे की यूनियन, संगठन का रेलवे के लिए योगदान कम नहीं है, लेकिन अनुशासन हीनता के लिए भी ये उतने ही जिम्मेदार हैं। कायाकल्प की जरूरत तो रेल यूनियन और संगठनों को भी है। यदि राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप. मुफ्त यात्रा आदि को हटा लिया जाए तो रेल संगठन आज भी देश के सबसे कुशल संगठनों

में गिना जाएगा। इसमें बहुत बड़ा योगदान ब्रिटेन द्वारा स्थापित नियमों, कार्य प्रणालियों का भी है। नकारात्मक बदलाव हुआ है तो राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप की वजह से। जहां स्टेशन देने की जरूरत नहीं है, वहां राजनीतिक दबाव से देना पड़े, जहां रियायत देने की जरूरत न हो वहां भी देना पड़े तो उसके अंजाम ऐसे होंगे ही।

भारतीय रेल देश की धमनी के रूप में जानी जाती है, उसे और स्वस्थ और कुशल बनाने की जरूरत है। इतने विशाल देश का परिवहन एक मजबूत रेल नेटवर्क से ही संभव है। इक्कीसवीं सदी और समाज की आकांक्षाओं के अनुरूप इसे बदलना ही होगा। पचास के दशक की समाजवादी नीतियां, अधिकारियों की फिजुलखर्ची, सामंतवादी सोच, लालफीताशाही से यह नहीं सुधर सकती। और न कॉरपोरेट पूंजी के सिर्फ मुनाफा कमाने के औजार के रूप में इसे बर्बाद करने की इजाजत दी जा सकती है।

जड़ता का समाज

अनीता यादव

छ वक्त पहले एक मित्र के घर जाना हुआ। हाल ही उनके घर में लड़की का जन्म हुआ था। नवजात बच्ची की प्यारी-सी मुस्कान व्यक्ति के जन्मों का दर्द हर लेने को काफी थी। छोटी-छोटी आंखों से अभी वह दुनिया को ढंग से देख भी नहीं पा रही थी। फिर जीवन में सपनों का बुनना तो अभी दूर था। इसी के समकक्ष बच्ची के आसपास कुछ ऐसा भी था जो डरा और सहमा था। बच्ची की मां का चिंता से भरा चेहरा और पिता के माथे पर पड़े बल माहौल को गंभीर करने को काफी थे। एकबारगी मुझे लगा कि समाज में लड़की का जन्म बोझ स्वरूप माना जाता है, उसी का प्रभाव इस माता-पिता के चेहरे पर चस्पां है। लेकिन जिक्र करने पर पता चला कि मामला लड़की के पैदा होने का नहीं, बल्कि उसकी सुरक्षा का है। फिर मित्र ने जो कुछ मुझे बताया, उसका लब्बोलुआब था कि उनके पति ने चेतावनी भरे शब्दों में कहा था कि बच्ची को लेकर कोताही नहीं बरतनी है। चाहे आस-पड़ोस हो या घर-परिवार या फिर नाते-रिश्तेदार, किसी भी पुरुष के पास बिटिया को अकेले नहीं छोड़ना है। इसे हम नवजात कन्या शिशु के पिता की चिंता मात्र नहीं कह सकते, बल्कि विशृंखल और विद्रुप होते संबंधों को यह एक

वैधानिक चेतावनी भी है। साथ ही हमारे कुरूप होते समाज का प्रतिबिंब भी आसानी से देख सकते हैं।

आदिम विकास के शुरुआती चरणों में समाज या राज्य हमारी सुरक्षा के रूप में जन्मा था, जिसके बदले आम नागरिक को राज्य द्वारा निर्मित नियम-कायदे और कानून का पालन करना अनिवार्य भी था। बदले में व्यक्ति की सुरक्षा समेत उसके चहुंमुखी विकास की अनुकूल परिस्थितियां मुहैया कराना राज्य का कर्तव्य

था। यानी सुरक्षा का नैतिक दायित्व समाज और राज्य के कंधों पर शुरुआती दौर से ही

रहा है। आज हम सामाजिक, आर्थिक विकास से लेकर तकनीकी विकास के उच्चतम पायदान चढ़ चुके। लेकिन सामाजिक और पारिवारिक संबंधों के मामले में हम सबसे निम्नतम पायदान पर आ चुके। आज हम जिस दौर में पहुंच चुके हैं, वह आत्मिक

और मानवीय संबंधों की दुष्टि से बेहद संवेदनहीन है। कंप्यूटर से स्मार्टफोन की यात्रा तक हमने आखिर क्या हासिल नहीं किया? घर बैठे एक क्लिक पर खरीदारी से लेकर शेयर बाजार तक, रोजमर्रा के सामान से लेकर यात्रा टिकट, टैक्सी- सब हमारी उंगली के नीचे समा गए हैं। इसके बावजूद हम महिलाओं की सुरक्षा का दायित्व तक ढंग से नहीं संभाल पा रहे। महिलाओं की सुरक्षा के मुद्दे पर हमारे जन प्रतिनिधि चुनाव लड़ते हैं। जीतते भी हैं, लेकिन चुनावी वादे खोखले साबित होते हैं। कहा गया है कि किसी समाज की असली तस्वीर जाननी है तो उस समाज में महिलाओं की स्थिति देखनी चाहिए। यानी समाज में महिलाओं की अच्छी और खराब स्थिति समाज की उत्कृष्ट और अवनति।

आज हम जिस दौर में जी रहे हैं, उसमें सबसे बड़ा मुद्दा महिलाओं की सुरक्षा को लेकर है। एसिड अटैक या तेजाबी हमले से लेकर अपहरण,

दुनिया मेरे आगे सामूहिक बलात्कार, यौन शोषण सरीखे जघन्य अपराध कम होने के बजाय बढ़ते जा रहे हैं। ये अपराध महिलाओं के न केवल आत्मसम्मान को तार-तार करते हैं, बल्कि तन, मन को क्षत-विक्षत कर समाज में सम्मानजनक जीवन से भी महरूम कर देते हैं। ऐसी कुत्सित मानसिकता की शिकार छह महीने की बच्ची से लेकर नब्बे साल की बुजूर्ग तक हैं। हम न केवल उनकी सुरक्षा में नाकाम हैं, बल्कि न्याय प्रणाली की लंबी और जटिल प्रक्रिया भी इसकी जिम्मेदार है। घटना के सालों बाद भी अपराधी को

सजा नहीं मिल पाती। यह कहने में गुरेज नहीं कि न्याय

व्यवस्था की कमजोरी ही हर रोज नए अपराधियों को पैदा

होने के लिए कहीं न कहीं मानसिक आधार मुहैया करा

रही है। समाज में महिलाओं की सरक्षा का दायित्व

शासन-प्रशासन पर है। इससे मुंह नहीं मोड़ा जा सकता। न केवल अपराधों पर लगाम, बल्कि जो घटनाएं हो चुर्की, उनमें पीड़ित को शीघ्र न्याय दिलाने का नैतिक दायित्व भी हमारी प्रशासनिक और न्यायिक व्यवस्था के जिम्मे है।

सिमोन कहती हैं कि लड़िकयां पैदा नहीं होती बनाई जाती हैं। वैसे ही अपराधी भी पैदा नहीं होते, बल्कि बनाए जाते हैं। बनने की इस प्रक्रिया को हमें रोकना होगा। घरों में लड़कों की परवरिश की तरफ ध्यान देना होगा, जिसमें मां और परिवार की भूमिका सर्वाधिक है। स्त्रियों के प्रति संवेदनशीलता, स्नेह और सम्मान जैसे भाव लड़कों में शिशुपन से ही परवरिश के दौरान भरने होंगे। आज भी समाज में खान-पान को लेकर लड़का और लड़की में भेदभाव किया जाता है। इसलिए आज बहुत जरूरी है कि परिवार से लेकर सामाजिक संस्थाओं, राजनीतिक जननायकों और न्यायिक व्यवस्था से जुड़े लोगों को महिलाओं के प्रति न केवल लिंग आधारित भेदभाव, सुरक्षा खामियों को दूर करने, न्यायिक व्यवस्था को दुरुस्त करने, बल्कि उन्हें समाज में सहज रूप से जीवनयापन की अनुकूल स्थितियां उपलब्ध कराने की जिम्मेदारियों को सहर्ष उठाना होगा। अब इन विषयों पर न केवल विचार करना, बल्कि क्रियात्मक होना होगा। महिलाओं के प्रति समाज की संवेदनशीलता ही सही रूप में किसी समाज के विकास की साधक होगी।

स्वनिर्मित गैस चैंबर

हुत जल्दी थी तो अब सुकून की तलाश क्यों? विकास की अंधी दौड़ ने, जीने के लिए सबसे महत्त्वपूर्ण तत्त्व हवा को ही ताक पर रख दिया है। वृक्षों को काट कर सड़कें चौड़ी हो रही हैं, कंक्रीट के जंगल उगाए जा रहे हैं, उद्योगों को स्थापित किया जा रहा है। इस सबके बीच दिल्ली की हालत हिटलर के गैस चैंबर की याद दिला रही है अंतर बस इतना है कि यह चैंबर हम अपने लिए खुद तैयार कर रहे हैं। वायु गुणवत्ता सूचकांक के आंकड़ों का सैकड़े में जाना खतरनाक स्थिति माना जाता है लेकिन अब तो तकरीबन हर साल राजधानी दिल्ली में वायु गुणवत्ता सूचकांक चार सौ से पांच सौ अंकों तक अक्सर पहुंच जाता है।

किसी पदार्थ को जला कर नष्ट करना सबसे आसान तरीका है। इसी कारण रोक के बावजूद हर साल बड़े पैमाने पर पराली को जलाया जा रहा है। वैसे केवल पराली इसके लिए जिम्मेदार नहीं है। दिल्ली की सड़कों पर दौड़ रहे अस्सी लाख दोपहिया और करीब छत्तीस लाख चौपहिया वाहन भी इसके लिए जिम्मेदार हैं। सार्वजनिक परिवहन सुलभ होने के बावजूद कार से यात्रा करना अपनी सामाजिक हैसियत को दर्शाने का माध्यम होने के कारण वायु प्रदूषण का प्रमुख कारण बन रहा है। दिल्ली वाले दिवाली पर पटाखों का इस्तेमाल कम करेंगे तो भी वहां की जनसंख्या इतनी अधिक है कि पटाखों की मात्रा बहुत ज्यादा हो जाती है। बाकी कसर दिल्ली के उद्योग, वातानुकूलन के साधन और प्रशीतक पूरी कर दे रहे हैं।

वायु प्रदूषण न केवल उस क्षेत्र में निवास करने वाली जनसंख्या और जीव-जंतुओं, बल्कि अजन्मे बच्चों को भी अपनी जद में ले रहा है। बेल्जियम में

हुए एक शोध में पाया गया कि मां के सांस के साथ भीतर गए ब्लैक कार्बन के कण उनके अजन्मे बच्चों के शरीर में भी पहुंच रहे हैं। स्टेट ऑफ ग्लोबल एयर –2019 के अध्ययन के अनुसार भारत में 12.4 लाख लोग हर वर्ष इसका शिकार बन जाते हैं। आखिर हवा में कब तक जहर घोलते रहेंगे हम? • भावेश प्रताप सिंह, इलाहाबाद विश्वविद्यालय

हठ से इतर

पिछले दिनों अमेरिकी सेना ने इराक के अंतरराष्ट्रीय हवाई अड्डे पर हमला किया जिसमें ईरान के शीर्ष कमांडर कासिम सुलेमानी और

अमेरिका और ईरान के मध्य वैमनस्य को समाप्त करने के लिए अंतरराष्ट्रीय समदाय को आगे आना चाहिए और दोनों देशों को भी अपने हठ से इतर वाताओं के लिए दरवाजे खोलने चाहिए।

मोहम्मद शायान, कैराना, उत्तर प्रदेश

जानलवा लापरवाहा राजस्थान में कोटा के अस्पताल में सौ से

अधिक बच्चों की मौत की खबर से मन सिहर उठा। आखिर सरकारी व्यवस्था की लापरवाही सैकडों बच्चों को लील गई। हद

तो तब हो गई जब राज्य सरकार किसी भी मुद्दे या लेख पर अपनी राय हमें भेजें। हमारा पता है : ए-८, सेक्टर-७,

नोएडा २०१३०१, जिला : गौतमबुद्धनगर, उत्तर प्रदेश

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

उनके कई अहम सहयोगियों की मृत्यु हो गई। दरअसल, अमेरिका और ईरान के बीच कई मुद्दों पर टकराव है जिसके चलते दोनों के संबंध दिनोंदिन खराब होते जा रहे हैं। 2015 में हुए परमाणु समझौते से अमेरिका का खुद को अलग करना, ईरान पर व्यापारिक प्रतिबंध लगाना और उसके सैन्य अड्डों की ड्रोन द्वारा जासूसी कराना-यह सब अमेरिका के हठ को दर्शाता है।

इस सबके बीच भारतीय विदेश मंत्रालय ने दोनों देशों से संयम बरतने की अपील की है। यदि अमेरिका और ईरान के बीच युद्ध हुआ तो उसका असर संपूर्ण अंतरराष्ट्रीय बिरादरी पर होगा। विशेषज्ञों की मानें तो इस युद्ध से विश्व में कच्चा तेल महंगा होने की आशंका है। लिहाजा, ने जवाबदेही तक तय नहीं की। और तो और, पक्ष-विपक्ष राजनीति करने तथा एक-दूसरे पर आरोप-प्रत्यारोप लगाने में लग गए। क्या बच्चों की मौत पर राजनीति करना उचित है? अच्छा होता, वे दुखी परिवारों के बीच जाकर उन्हें ढांढस बंधाते।

• पूनम चंद सीरवी, कुक्षी, मध्यप्रदेश इंसाफ की राह

चार जनवरी को एक उन्मादी ननकाना साहब (पाकिस्तान) पर भीड़ लेकर हमला करता है, वहां से सिखों को खदेड़ने का आह्वान करता है, ननकाना साहब का नाम बदल कर गुलाम-ए-मुस्तफा करने की धमकी देता है, और कहता है कि वहां के ग्रंथी की पुत्री, जिसे उसके भाई ने चार महीने पहले अगवा कर मुसलिम बना दिया था,

कभी वापस नहीं दी जाएगी। उसने ऐलान किया कि 'उसका निकाह रद्द नहीं हो सकता'। इसके अगले ही दिन किसी राजनीतिक की तरह पलटी मारते हुए वह कहता है कि सिख तो उसके भाई हैं, उनसे कोई दुश्मनी नहीं हो सकती! अपनी शब्दावली में वह माफी भी मांग लेता है। अलबत्ता लड़की अब भी नहीं लौटाई जाएगी। वह तो 'स्वेच्छा से' मुसलिम

बनकर उसके भाई की बेगम बन चुकी! पाकिस्तान में यह स्वेच्छा से इस्लाम स्वीकारने वाली गैर-मुसलिम लड़िकयों की न सिर्फ संख्या बढ़ रही है, बल्कि उनकी वापसी की राह बंद होने का सिलसिला भी बरकरार है। वहां न्यायपालिका से भी इन लड़िकयों और उनके माता-पिताओं को न्याय नहीं मिलता। 2014-15 में सिंध की तीन नाबालिग हिंदू बहनों- लता कुमारी, रिंकल कुमारी और आशा कुमारी, जिनका जबरिया धर्मांतरण कर निकाह कर दिया गया था, का मामला लेकर मानवाधिकार कार्यकर्ता व सांसद दिवंगत अस्मा जहांगीर सुप्रीम कोर्ट पहुंची थीं। वहां खुद मुख्य न्यायाधीश मोहम्मद इफ्तखारुद्दीन ने इंसाफ का विद्रूप नाटक कर तीनों को उनके अपहर्ताओं को ही सौंप दिया था। न तो उन्हें अपने माता-पिता से मिलने दिया गया, न बात करने दी गई।

इतना ही नहीं, बुरका-बंद बहनों की पहचान भी उजागर नहीं होने दी गई। अस्मा ने कहा था कि ये इंसाफ अन्याय से भी बदतर है! तीनों के माता-पिता दहाड मार कर रोते-पीटते कोर्ट से लौटे। ऐसे लोग भारत में पनाह नहीं मांगेंगे तो और क्या करेंगे! लेकिन क्या उनके अपहर्ताओं-उत्पीडकों को भारत अपने यहां बुलाएगा, बसाएगा ? नागरिकता संशोधन कानून (सीएए) की आवश्यकता को इन घटनाओं से समझने की कोशिश की जानी चाहिए।

• पूनम मित्तल, मेरठ

नई दिल्ली