दैनिक जागरण

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जीडीपी बढ़ रही है तो बेरोजगारी में भी हो रहा है इजाफा

मधुरेंद्र सिन्हा

भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था विचित्र परिस्थितियों से गुजर रही है। एक ओर तो जीडीपी की दर 7 फीसद से भी ज्यादा है और उसके बढ़कर 7.5 हो जाने के पूरे आसार हैं लेकिन दूसरी ओर बेरोजगारी की दर भी बढ़ती जा रही है। पिछले साल बेरोजगारी की दर 3.6 फीसद हो गई थी। रोजगार की दर 50 फीसद या उससे भी कम है। रोजगार की दर बढ़ाए रखने के लिए हर साल कम से कम 85 लाख नौकरियां देनी होंगी। लेकिन ऐसा होता दिख नहीं रहा है। इसका मतलब साफ है कि विकास के हमारे मॉडल में कहीं कोई भारी कमी है। अगर विकास की दर तेज होती है तो वह रोजगार के मोर्चे पर दिखनी चाहिए पर ऐसा नहीं है। अन्य अर्थव्यवस्थाओं की तरह भारत में मैन्युफैक्चरिंग सेक्टर रोजगार का बड़ा जरिया है लेकिन इसमें विस्तार नहीं हो रहा है। सरकार का दावा है कि उसने 'इज ऑफ डूइंग बिज़नेस' को बेहतर किया और इस दिशा में भारत ने काफी तरक्की की है लेकिन जमीनी स्तर पर ऐसा दिखाई नहीं दे रहा है।

नीति का अभाव

वर्ल्ड बैंक का कहना है कि जिस रफ्तार से भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था बढ़ रही है उसके मुताबिक तो रोजगार की दर 60 फीसद होनी चाहिए लेकिन यह 50 फीसद भी नहीं है। इसका मतलब है कि बेरोजगारों की तादाद लगातार बढ़ती जा रही है। उपलब्ध आंकड़ों के मुताबिक देश में कुल तीन करोड़ से भी ज्यादा लोग बेरोजगार हैं। यह मलेशिया की आबादी के लगभग बराबर है। हैरान करने वाली बात यह है कि इसमें कोई गिरावट नहीं हो रही है उल्टे बढ़ोतरी ही हो रही है। हर महीने नए-नए लोग इसमें जुड़ते जा रहे हैं जबकि रोजगार का बाजार ठंडा पड़ा हुआ है। वित्त मंत्रालय जीडीपी के बढ़ते आंकड़े दिखा रहा है लेकिन रोजगार के आंकड़े कुछ और कह रहे हैं। शहरों और गांवों दोनों में बेरोजगारी का रूप एक जैसा है। शहरों में तो बेरोजगारी और बढ़ेगी क्योंकि हर साल यूनिवर्सिटी से पढ़कर लाखों नौजवान जॉब मार्केट में पहुंच रहे है, जबकि रोजगार के नए रास्ते नहीं खुल रहे हैं। आज हमारा देश सबसे ज्यादा बेरोजगारों का देश बन गया है। पीएम नरेंद्र मोदी ने लोकसभा चुनाव के अपने घोषणापत्र में कहा था कि सत्ता में आने के बाद उनकी सरकार हर साल एक करोड़ लोगों को रोजगार दिलाएगी। लेकिन किसी भी साल ऐसा नहीं हुआ और सरकार के इकोनॉमिक सर्वे में भी कहा गया कि देश में रोजगार सृजन की दर धीमी है।

देश में बेरोजगारी बढ़ने के कारण कई हैं जिनका उचित सामधान किए बिना रोजगार नहीं बढ़ सकता। देश में निजी निवेश की गति बहुत धीमी है यानी कल-कारखाने कम लग रहे हैं और जो हैं भी, उनका उतना विस्तार नहीं हो रहा है। इससे रोजगार के अवसर नहीं बन पा रहे हैं। सरकार के पास रोजगार से जुड़ी कोई ठोस नीति नहीं है। इस समय प्राइवेट सेक्टर ही ज्यादा रोजगार दे रहे हैं। मोदी सरकार ने अपने शुरुआती दिनों में छोटे और मंझोले इंटरप्राइजेज को तवज्जो

देने की बजाय कॉरपोरेट पर नजरें इनायत कीं। सरकार यह भूल गई कि इस देश में आज भी एसएमई 85 प्रतिशत रोजगार की जनक हैं। उनकी उपेक्षा भारी पड़ी है। दूसरी ओर सरकारी नौकरियां घटती जा रही हैं। खर्च कम रखने की नीति के कारण भी पीएसयू या राज्य सरकारों में नौकरियां बढ़ नहीं रही हैं। सातवें वेतन आयोग ने तो राज्यों की कमर तोड़ दी है और उनके लिए अपने कर्मचारियों को वेतन देना भारी पड़ता जा रहा है। नोटबंदी और जीएसटी के लागू होने के बाद जॉब मार्केट में व्यवधान आया है और नई नौकरियों का अकाल सा हो गया है। सरकार के पास मनरेगा छोड़कर जॉब की गारंटी देनी वाली कोई योजना नहीं है। प्राइवेट इन्वेस्टमेंट कम होने का कारण यह भी है कि देश में पूंजी मुट्ठी भर लोगों के पास केंद्रित होती जा रही है। बेरोजगारी का एक कारण पिछले सरकार में हुआ भ्रष्टाचार भी है। उसकी वज़ह से अदालतों को आगे आना पड़ा और उन्होंने कई ऐसे फैसले किए जिनसे संबंधित उद्योग-धंधों को धक्का पहुंचा। हजारों इकाइयां बंद हो गईं और उनके कर्मचारी बेरोजगार हो गए। इसमें सबसे बड़ा उदाहरण है माइनिंग सेक्टर जिस पर सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने जबर्दस्त तलवार चलाई। कर्नाटक और गोवा में सैकड़ों खदान बंद कर दिए गए। इसी तरह गोवा में सरकार की गलत नीतियों के कारण इसी साल मार्च में आयरन ओर की लगभग 100 खदानें बंद कर दी गईं। इससे कारखानों में काम करने वाले हजारों मजदूरों के अलावा इस सेक्टर से सीधे जुड़े कुल दो लाख लोग बेरोजगार हो गए हैं। उनके सामने रोजी-रोटी का संकट खड़ा हो गया है। इस घटना से गोवा की जीडीपी को भी धक्का लगा है क्योंकि टूरिज्म के बाद माइनिंग वहां रोजगार देने वाला दूसरा सबसे बड़ा सेक्टर रहा है। पर्यावरण के कठोर नियमों के कारण भी कई परियोजनाओं को धक्का पहुंचा और वहां लोग बड़ी तादाद में बेरोजगार हो गए हैं।

निवेश की जरूरत

रियल एस्टेट कृषि के बाद रोजगार देने वाला एक बड़ा सेक्टर है लेकिन लालची बिल्डरों, भ्रष्ट नेताओं व कर्मचारियों की सांठगांठ से ग्राहक ठगे गए। इसका नतीजा है कि आज यह क्षेत्र मंदी की मार से जूझ रहा है और लाखों मज़दूर बेरोजगार हो गए हैं। इस मामले में भी अगर केंद्र और राज्य सरकारें जोर लगाएं तो स्थिति सुधर सकती हैं। 1971 में प्रचंड बहुमत से सत्ता में आई इंदिरा गांधी अगले दो-तीन वर्षों में ही लोकप्रियता खो बैठीं क्योंकि देश में पढ़े-लिखे लोगों के लिए रोजगार पाना बेहद कठिन हो गया था। इससे पहले कि ठीक वैसे ही हालात हो जाएं, मोदी सरकार को कुछ ठोस कदम उठाने पड़ेंगे। सरकार को अपना निवेश बढ़ाना होगा साथ ही प्राइवेट इन्वेस्टमेंट को बढ़ावा देना होगा ताकि बाज़ार में तरलता आए और रोजगार के साधन बढ़ें।

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Amazon vs Walmart

Take advantage of the coming battle of giants by freeing India's farmers

Gurcharan Das

In the uproar surrounding last week's acquisition of Flipkart by Walmart, the true significance of the world's largest e-commerce deal escaped everyone. Headlines screamed about the coming battle in India between two American giants, Amazon and Walmart. News channels narrated a Cinderella story of two youngsters who started selling a few books from their two bedroom flat in Bengaluru and created a company that was worth $21 billion ten years later, making a hundred of its employees dollar millionaires. Nationalists moaned about the takeover of an Indian by a foreign company. Economists saw it as a coming of age of India: following China's example, India too would now join up with one of the most powerful global supply chains, giving a major impetus to our exports, accelerating foreign investment and jobs in the country.

India's young start-up community was excited that the deal was a role model of how an Indian entrepreneur could be handsomely rewarded for the hard work in building a company. And our tax department was salivating over the bonanza in capital gains from the deal. All this is true but none of it captures the full story. Yes, May 10, 2018 was a historic milestone in India's economic history when Walmart, the world's largest retailer announced a $16 billion acquisition for a 77% stake in Flipkart, India's largest online marketplace. It was a lot of money to pay for a company that was losing money and not expected to break even in the next five years; some had even predicted the demise of Flipkart. When the deal was announced, the price of Walmart shares fell in its home country and investors lost $10 billion.

What most observers failed to grasp are the true benefits to India, which emanate from Walmart's competitive advantage over Amazon. It is able to deliver fresh, high quality vegetables, fruits and other farm produce via a legendary cold chain which it has perfected in 28 countries. Neither Amazon, nor Flipkart has this. Reliance also tried to do a Walmart in India in its foray into 'Reliance Fresh' but it failed. It is also good news for kirana stores. Walmart has been operating a chain of 21 Best Price wholesale stores, supplying to over a million retailers in India. It now plans to convert many of them into 'partners' for its last mile delivery to the Indian home.

It will upgrade the kirana store's skills in inventory management, digital payments, and logistics technology. Thus, it has neutralised the earlier hostility from the trade. The real story in the emerging e-commerce battle is the potential transformation of India's agriculture and kirana store. A respected management consultancy firm has estimated that the Walmart-Flipkart venture will require infusion of significantly more capital – Walmart has already announced $5 billion – and this could create roughly a crore new jobs over time. It has already made a strong start by sourcing 97% of its goods from Indian medium and small enterprises, exporting $4-5 billion each year.

This trend will accelerate. In line with its global practice, the new Walmart operation will source 95% of its goods locally. Plus, the jobs it will create in logistics, cold chain, warehousing, distribution and delivery, add up to 10 million jobs. I sometimes wonder why i pay Rs 20 per kilo for potatoes when the farmer receives only Rs 5. My potatoes travel some distance, i realise, from the farm to the mandi to my kirana shop, and each person in the chain takes his cut. Still, the Rs 15 gap seems excessive. Analysis shows that in countries where large supermarkets operate, the gap is smaller because farmers have long term contracts with large retailers and they invariably receive higher returns because of eliminating middlemen.

Yes, it is arthiyas and wholesalers in the mandi who will lose. But i refuse to shed tears for them since they operate a corrupt cartel which exploits the farmer. A typical farmer harvests his crop, loads it on a bullock cart, travels 30 km to the mandi, where he is often forced to sell at distress prices fixed by the cartel. The arthiya knows that the crop is perishable. Aware of this corrupt system, the central government has created a model reform act, scrapping the 'agricultural produce marketing committees'

(APMC). But only a few states (like Maharashtra and Bihar) have implemented it. The reason is that the corrupt APMCs provide black money to politicians to fight elections. The e-NAM portal was supposed to provide online information to farmers in surrounding mandis, but like most government programmes it has been a flop.

In contrast, global retailers like Walmart invest in cold storages, airconditioned trucks and grading facilities, and connect the farmer to food processors; this saves post-harvest losses and increases farmer income. Given the pervasive APMC cartels, the benefits of Walmart's entry will thus only be confined to a handful of states. This is a great pity since a third to half of India's food crop rots. If he is serious about doubling farmer incomes, Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces a choice. Will he pick up the phone and tell chief ministers of BJP ruled states to abolish APMCs, or will he accept the corrupt cartels that finance his, and other parties? If he is true to his election promises to end corruption and double farm incomes, he will free farmers to sell their produce to anyone they choose, freeing them from the clutches of the 'APMC Raj'. Only in this way will India take the full advantage of the coming battle of the giants.

THE HINDU

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A triple blow to job guarantee scheme

A lack of sufficient funds, rampant payment delays and abysmal wage rates are to blame

Rajendran Narayanan & Madhubala Pothula,[Rajendran Narayanan teaches at Azim Premji University, Bangalore. Madhubala Pothula is an undergraduate student in the same institution]

The ₹11,000 crore fraud that diamond merchant Nirav Modi is said to have created is a figure that needs to be put in perspective. The total amount of wages pending under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme for the whole country (2016-17) was around ₹11,000 crore too. This sum is a fifth of the MGNREGA budget announced for financial year 2018-19.

MGNREGA stands out in its worker-centric legislation and stated emphasis on transparency and accountability. Several potentially progressive measures such as a real-time management information system have been put in place. The scheme is meant to be demand-driven in the sense that the government is mandated to provide work within 15 days of a worker seeking work. Otherwise the worker is entitled to an unemployment allowance. A second key provision of the Act pertains to payment of wages within 15 days of completion of work, failing which a worker is entitled to a delay compensation of 0.05% per day of the wages earned. However, both these provisions have been routinely violated. There is an ongoing Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court (Swaraj Abhiyan v. the Union of India) concerning these violations. We look at three ways in which a lack of funds has led to a subverting of these provisions in letter and spirit.

First, budget allocation over the years has been insufficient. While there has been an increase in the nominal budget in the last two years, after adjusting for inflation, the budget has actually decreased over the years. The real budget of 2018-19 is much lower than that of 2010-11.

Further truncation

Second, even this low budget allocation has undergone various kinds of curtailment. By December of each year, through a bottom-up participatory planning approach, every State submits a labour budget (LB) to the Centre. This contains the anticipated labour demand for the next financial year. The Centre, on its part, has been using an arbitrary "Approved Labour Budget" to cut down funds requested by States (using the National Electronic Fund Management System, or Ne-FMS), making this a supply-driven programme.

Ne-FMS guidelines issued in 2016-17 say the Management Information System (MIS) "will not allow" States to "generate more employment above the limits set by Agreed to LB". This meant that the work demand of workers was not even getting registered and the MIS was being used as a means to curb work demand. Thus the "approved labour budget" puts a cap on funds. So, for 2017-18, for example, if one aggregates the requested LB of all States, the minimum budget requirement adds up to ₹72,000 crore. However, the initial allocation was only ₹48,000 crore, which is in synchrony with the approved LB (as on the first week of April 2018).

Because of the ongoing PIL, the Centre was forced to rescind guidelines that enabled the use of the MIS to constrict demand for work. The Centre releases an Annual Master Circular (AMC) each year that serves as a guide to the programme implementation of MGNREGA. The most recent AMC suggests the setting up of an Empowered Committee (EC) to this effect.

The lack of payment of wages on time has meant a violation of the second key aspect of the Act. By analysing transactions (over 90 lakh in 2016-17 and over 45 lakh in the first two quarters of FY17-18), a study on wage payment delays has highlighted how the Centre has completely absolved itself of any responsibility of a delay in the release of wages. Only 21% of payments in 2016-17 and 32% of payments in the first two quarters of FY17-18 were made on time.

In response to the first phase of the study, the Ministry of Finance issued an office memorandum. Acknowledging the validity of the study's findings, the memorandum also said that the principal reasons for payment delays were "infrastructural bottlenecks, (un)availability of funds and lack of administrative compliance". The study findings and this memorandum are at odds with the Centre's dubious claims of 85% of payments having been made on time. The situation worsened in the last six months of FY17-18. Around 25% of the funds transfer orders (FTOs) pertaining to worker wages from January to April this year are still to be processed by the Centre. Last year, the Ministry froze the processing of FTOs (over ₹3,000 crore) due to a lack of funds. In August 2017, the Ministry of Rural Development demanded a supplementary MGNREGA budget of ₹17,000 crore, but the Ministry of Finance approved only ₹7,000 crore, that too in January 2018. The poor are paying a heavy price for this throttling of funds by the Centre.

Stagnating wages

The third point is about stagnating MGNREGA wages. Delinking of MGNREGA wage rates from the Minimum Wages Act (MWA), 1948 has contributed to this. MGNREGA wages are a less lucrative option for the marginalised, being lower than the minimum agricultural wages in most States. As primary beneficiaries of the Act, women, Dalits and Adivasis could be the most affected and pushed to choose more vulnerable and hazardous employment opportunities. Such contravention of the MWA is illegal.

MGNREGA now faces a triple but correlated crisis — a lack of sufficient funds, rampant payment delays, and abysmal wage rates. What this reflects is not only a legal crisis created by the Centre but also a moral one where the fight is not even for a living wage but one for subsistence. One hopes for a just order from the judiciary.

The Indian EXPRESS
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

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Job growth or number jugglery

The problem is under-employment. It won't be resolved if the residually-employed are notionally shifted from the informal to formal sector.

Arun Kumar , [Kumar, Malcolm Adiseshiah Chair Professor, Institute of Social Sciences is author of Indian Economy since Independence: Persisting Colonial Disruption]

In an article in January, Soumya Kanti Ghosh and Pulak Ghosh (Ghosh and Ghosh) claimed that seven million new jobs have been created in the formal sector. Their claim is based on the increase in registration under the Employees Provident Fund (EPFO), National Pension Scheme and Employees State Insurance Corporation. The government and the ruling party are now widely quoting this figure. In a column in this paper ('Robust job growth, not fake news,' IE, April 28), Surjit Bhalla has, by and large, endorsed this study. The Niti Aayog vice chairperson has discounted these figures slightly but added that 36 million jobs have perhaps been created by the Mudra Scheme and via self-employment in enterprises such as those pertaining to taxi aggregation and e-commerce.

This runs counter to the impression that the shocks of demonetisation and implementation of GST resulted in the loss of many jobs. There were reports of retrenchment of workers and workers migrating from urban to rural areas to seek employment under MGNREGS, and youngsters not getting jobs commensurate to their skills. With no social security, few in India can afford to remain unemployed. Many who do not get formal employment often have no option but to carry headload or push carts. Hence, the issue at stake is under-employment. This author has been arguing for long that the sector in which a person is employed, formal or informal, matters much in reckoning employment figures. If there is an increase of seven million jobs, has there been a corresponding decline in informal sector jobs? If taxi aggregators are offering jobs, are these at the expense of traditional taxi drivers and private chauffeurs?

Seven million new jobs on a base of about 50 million in the formal sector would represent a growth of 14 per cent. Is this likely when the economy's growth rate plummeted after demonetisation and implementation of GST? Why have the EPF registrations shown a sharp increase? There are two possibilities. One, this is a one off increase due to special reasons. Second, it is a trend. But then how come the total employment in the formal sector is only 50 million? With a 14 per cent growth rate, employment would double in 5.2 years. Public sector employment has been stagnant at about 20 million. So, the increase of seven million would have taken place largely in the private formal sector. This would give a growth rate of about 23 per cent with employment doubling in 3.5 years, and there would be no dearth of decent jobs for the young.

Two factors could explain the rise in EPFO registration. First, earlier only employers who had more than 20 employees on their rolls were required to register under the EPFO. In 2016, this was changed to employers employing more than 10 employees. Since in India, most firms employ less than 20 employees, the numbers of those eligible for enrolment would have shot up. So, this is just a definitional shift from informal to formal employment and does not represent an increase in total employment.

The second factor is stated in the Union Budget 2018-19. The government has been encouraging enrolment in the Employee Provident Find since the last three years. It has offered concessions like, "Contribution of 8.33 per cent of Employee Provident Fund (EPF) for new employees by the Government for three years". It has also promised, "Contribution of 12 per cent of EPF for new employees for three years by the Government in sectors employing large number of people like textile, leather and footwear". Other concessions include, "additional deduction to the employers of 30 per cent of the wages paid for new employees under the Income Tax Act". These concessions have now been extended for another three years. Thus, it would be highly profitable to the firms to employ new employees and register them under EPF.

The organised sector is not hiring people directly. It has, increasingly, preferred to get labour on contract. It is likely that such contract labour from the unorganised sector is getting registered under the EPF due to the concessions offered by the government. Since the concessions are for new employees, it is possible that the older employees are being replaced by newer ones and being enrolled. If the older employees remain on the EPF rolls, then the number would just increase without new employment. Many analysts point to the lacunae in the EPF data. Ghosh and Ghosh do claim to have adjusted for them. But how successfully can this be done?

It is claimed that those being counted are under 25; they are first timers at work. Most of the poor drop out of school before they reach Class 12 and start working. Only about 26 per cent of the relevant age group (18-25) are enrolled in higher education. Rest join the workforce, starting at the age of 15 — even earlier. Fifteen years back, about 22 million were added to the population and would now be potential job seekers. But, if those who go for higher education and 75 per cent of the women are removed from this number, the job seekers today would be about 12 million unskilled and another three million with higher degrees. Most of these 15 million are employed in the unorganised sector, though some work indirectly for the organised sector. They may now be getting counted under the new scheme.

The huge expansion of employment under Mudra Scheme claimed by the Niti Aayog vice-chairperson is unlikely given that the average size of the loan under this scheme is Rs 45,000. An average micro unit employs 1.7 persons with a capital of less than Rs 25 lakh. The loan may strengthen the capital base of the unit but would hardly generate any new jobs. The issue is not whether new employment is rapidly rising but where the vast majority of the residually-employed are being counted — in the formal or the informal sector. That requires a careful study.