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How To Double Farmers' Income

PM-Kisan scheme is only the first step towards a future-oriented agriculture policy

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Last week, over one crore small farmers were pleasantly surprised to receive Rs 2,000 in their bank accounts. This was the first of the three instalments under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) scheme, which contains the seeds of many breakthrough reforms. If implemented diligently, these will change the face of Indian agriculture. First, the creation of accurate land records. Pity, 70 years after Independence progress in this area is patchy. Most states do not have a central database of land records. Farmers are dependent on the lowest rung of state bureaucracy for any changes in land records. Since

the first instalment under PM-Kisan is due by March 31, state bureaucracy will have to complete the task fast. PM-Kisan cannot succeed without accurate land records of farmers. Clear titles will make land pooling, sale and leasing easy.

Second, using evidence-based policy making for Indian agriculture. PM-Kisan will function through an online portal (<http://pmkisan.nic.in>). State governments will load information about the eligible farmers on this. To get the benefit, 10 crore plus farmers will have to provide information like Aadhaar enrolment number, bank account and land details. This data will help in tweaking the existing subsidy schemes.

For example, consider the Shanta Kumar committee report. It says minimum support price (MSP) benefits only 6% of farmers. And just in wheat and paddy. With data support, the government may choose to restrict MSP procurement from marginal farmers and for wheat and paddy. Also, the database with Aadhaar and bank details will make benami transactions difficult. Today, buying rural land is one of the major ways to invest black money. Utmost care is needed to prevent leakage and misuse of this database.

Third, possible integration of existing subsidy schemes. Removal of subsidy on power, fertiliser, etc will change a farmer's decision-making process. Purchase of power at market rate will dissuade him from growing water-intensive crops like rice in the low water table states. And buying fertiliser at market rate will reduce its indiscriminate use that has made vast lands barren. Phasing out subsidies will thus improve farm health and ecology. Money saved from the removal of subsidies can be used for expanding annual payments to say Rs 25,000.

PM-Kisan has demonstrated the efficacy of JAM trinity. PM could transfer the money into farmers account with just a click. No leakage, no middlemen. Then, the scheme is WTO compatible. Most of our agriculture schemes like MSP or subsidies on power, fertiliser and seeds are not. India is fighting a tough battle at WTO against subsidies. The US has filed a case against India for giving more than the allowed support.

Any income transfer scheme like PM-Kisan will work best if we understand its two critical limitations. One, it cannot ensure food security to the poor or prevent cheap imports. Consider a scenario after the withdrawal of MSP. In the absence of any assured price and buyback guarantee, farmers may choose not to grow crops like rice or wheat. We will then have to import food grains. MSP ensures a livelihood for farmers and food security for poor consumers. And keeps the country self-reliant in food. But most countries have lost this policy space.

The number of countries dependent on the import of food grains is increasing. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization says most poor countries will be dependent on food imports from rich countries by 2030. Developed country farmers overproduce and export at a low price. With help from enormous subsidies from their governments. Cheap imports depress local prices, make farming unviable, and make a country import dependent. Discontinuing MSP may have these perils.

Two, PM-Kisan covers farmers with clear land titles. It does not cover sharecroppers who are more than 50% of the farmer population. It's difficult to transfer money to them. They are the real farmers working as landless labourers.

Keeping the above limitations in mind, what could be the ideal package for Indian agriculture? An expanded PM-Kisan scheme which replaces all subsidies except MSP and a reduced size MSP scheme would work best. This will keep us free from food grain imports, raise farmers' income and significantly reduce pressure at WTO. But for exports, we need a different strategy.

We have many examples of successful practices – Dutch food and floriculture, French vineyards, Japanese intensive farming or Israeli water conservation technique. Let us see what made the Netherlands the world's second-largest food exporter. It has many farming centres of excellence focussed on exports. They use glasshouses. Produce pesticide-free fruit and vegetables. Use 90% less water. And drones to track crop growth.

Such practices need massive investments. In technology, farm to fork infrastructure, global certification of farms and produce. Government and most Indian farmers are not in a position to make such investments. We may invite private participation in less than 1% of arable land. Land can be taken on lease from farmers. No need to transfer land rights. This can be done by actively promoting contract farming ventures (CFVs) for large scale exports. They will be like SEZs for agriculture.

CFVs may invest in the best global practices. Soon, neighbouring farmers will begin to copy these. Many CFVs are already functioning in India. We need to remove policy glitches to ensure large scale participation. An expanded PM-Kisan plus MSP plus CFVs will set Indian agriculture on a high growth path.

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Spare The Greens

For cities to grow ease land acquisition laws. Hills and forests keep cities alive and kicking

TOI Editorials

Haryana's amendments to a century-old law that forbade development activity on the Aravalli ranges to free up land for urban expansion is an example of sweeping legislation without accounting for environmental impact. Nearly 30,000 hectares of Aravalli land – 7,000 ha in Gurgaon and over 4,000 ha in Faridabad – have become vulnerable. Much of the Aravallis have already been degraded by illegal mining and real estate development despite Supreme Court strictures on Haryana and Rajasthan governments.

Scientists also link the Aravalli hills to Delhi NCR region's temperature, rainfall, wind and dust storm patterns. The Aravallis are also a groundwater sink for the entire region. More studies into these links were needed before diluting ecological regulations. Illegal mining and encroachment in Aravallis – to the extent that entire hills have disappeared – also reflect a weak law and order apparatus. Gurgaon and Faridabad are among India's fastest growing cities today but until a few decades ago were largely fertile farmlands. With farming in crisis, urbanisation must similarly accelerate again to meet new developmental goals and give farmers better returns for their land.

But the Land Acquisition Act, enacted hastily before the 2014 elections, is a hindrance. The law is unworkable and serves as a perverse incentive to states to turn towards forest land for human activities. The similarities between this Act and Haryana's peremptory amendment of the Punjab Land Preservation Act 1900 which protected the Aravallis are hard to miss. Both purportedly serve public good but induce adverse effects. Amending the land acquisition law has now become difficult amid competitive scaremongering. But this needs to be done and can even protect suburban forests amid climate change scenarios. Common sense, consensus, and clarity on developmental and environmental goals are sorely missing, irrespective of the party in power.

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For Real Peace

Let release of Varthaman trigger a process to take down terror safe havens

TOI Editorials

World capitals have been calling on India and Pakistan to de-escalate the crisis between them since the IAF strike on a Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM) terror facility in Balakot. Captured Indian pilot Wg Cdr Abhinandan Varthaman is likely to be released today, in what Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has described as a "peace gesture". New Delhi should concur on de-escalating for now, while making it clear

that a key part of de-escalating tensions is dismantling Pakistan's terror infrastructure, in the absence of which we could be back here again rapidly.

US secretary of state John Pompeo has concurred with the Indian description of the IAF strike as a "counterterrorism action" and called on Pakistan to take "meaningful action against terrorist groups operating on its soil"; even his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi has said "it was especially important" to "eradicate the breeding grounds of terrorism and extremism". Countries that desire a durable peace between India and Pakistan must be asked to pressure Pakistan to meet its minimum obligation as a UN member state and civilised nation: not to export terror to its neighbours. Towards this end, India should ratchet up diplomatic pressure for Pakistan to undertake concrete and verifiable steps towards taking down its terror infrastructure.

Blanket denials by Pakistan, or even offers to 'probe' the existence of terror camps and activities of groups such as JeM, won't do any longer. The world is aware of Pakistan's sponsorship of terror groups; "plausible" deniability is implausible now. Khan has offered talks, but they can only succeed if preceded by a clear acknowledgement of Pakistan offering safe haven to terror groups. Meanwhile there's always the diplomatic back channel that can be activated, in case Khan has something significant on offer.

The US, UK and France have moved a fresh proposal in the UN Security Council to designate JeM chief Masood Azhar a global terrorist. Delhi should lobby hard to ensure its success. Thereafter India should work closely with the US, other Western powers and Russia to ensure Pakistan gives up terror safe havens. The US in particular would have a common interest in doing this as it has expended blood and treasure – to the tune of thousands of lives and trillions of dollars – in stabilising Afghanistan, all of which would be wasted if terror safe havens continue to operate. India must simultaneously reserve its right to retaliate if terror attacks on its soil are traced back to Pakistan.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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Trump-Kim Love Story —A Sterile Romance

ET Editorials



The second summit between the US and North Korea ended without any formal agreement, but Pyongyang got an extension of US moratorium on joint military exercises with South Korea and China's role as the region's arbiter became a little more prominent, following Washington's failure to extract any commitment from the Kim regime apart from to maintain the status quo. The decision to continue talks at the level of officials indicates that President Donald Trump might actually learn the lesson that his claimed super capability to strike deals with other heads of state can work only when detailed

preparatory work has been undertaken.

The talks failed over differences on lifting of sanctions and dismantling of Pyongyang's nuclear establishment. President Trump said that no future summits were planned and the negotiations will

continue. The talks ended in a stalemate with North Korea willing to dismantle the Yongbyon nuclear facility, that, too, only after all sanctions were lifted, and not the other covert facilities or the uranium enrichment plant. That North Korea will not undertake testing of rockets and missiles is good news for the region. The decision to continue talking and negotiating at the level of officials rather than at the level of the leaders augurs well for maintaining peace in the region. The outcome at Hanoi will mean that China is set to play a larger role in the process. Beijing has already publicly announced a willingness to continue to play a constructive role.

The outcome at Hanoi was not completely unexpected as evident from statements by President Trump and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo ahead of the summit. This is clearly one of those occasions when ensuring the maintenance of status quo is an achievement by itself.



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दैनिक भास्कर

यह बदले हुए भारत के लिए दुनिया का अभिनंदन है

संपादकीय

अभिनंदन सही सलामत भारत लौट आएं; इसमें पहले ही दिन से किसी को शक नहीं था। सवाल तो यह था कि वे कितनी जल्दी लौटते हैं और क्या उनकी रिहाई के एवज में पाकिस्तान कोई शर्त तो नहीं थोपता है। दोनों ही सवालों के जवाब भारत के पक्ष में है। इसके पहले करगिल युद्ध के दौरान पकड़े गए फ्लाइंग लेफ्टिनेंट नचिकेता को छोड़ने में पाकिस्तान ने एक सप्ताह का वक्त ले लिया था। लेकिन, इस बार वह इतना वक्त नहीं ले पाया। निश्चित तौर पर यह भारत के सख्त रुख, अंतरराष्ट्रीय दबाव, सफल कूटनीति और सैन्य ताकत दिखाने का ही नतीजा है। सिर्फ इतना ही नहीं, यह भी काबिलेगौर बात है कि पाकिस्तान न केवल गिड़गिड़ाने के अंदाज में बार-बार बातचीत की पेशकश कर रहा है बल्कि पहली बार कह रहा है कि वह दहशतगर्दी पर भी बात करने को तैयार है। यानी एक तरह से उसने मान लिया है कि आतंक को वह सरपरस्ती देता है। असल में पिछले एक सप्ताह में जो कुछ घटा है उसके कई आयाम हैं। इस बार भारत ने जिस तरह का सख्त रुख अपनाया था उससे पाकिस्तान में खलबली मच गई थी। पाकिस्तान ने कभी सोचा भी नहीं था कि भारत इतना कड़ा और बड़ा कदम उठा सकता है।

इसके बाद पायलट अभिनंदन के पकड़े जाने पर भी भारत नरम नहीं पड़ा। गुरुवार सुबह ही भारत ने साफ कर दिया था कि वह पायलट की रिहाई बिना किसी शर्त के चाहता है। इस सबके अलावा जिस तरह दूसरे देशों ने भारत का साथ दिया उससे साफ हो गया कि भारत अब बदल चुका है और पूरी दुनिया उसकी ताकत को मान्यता दे रही है। जैश सरगना मसूद अजहर को ग्लोबल टेरिस्ट घोषित करने के संयुक्त राष्ट्र सुरक्षा परिषद में पेश प्रस्ताव को अमेरिका, फ्रांस और ब्रिटेन जैसे बड़े देशों ने समर्थन दिया। पाकिस्तान के नज़रिये से देखें तो सबसे चौंकाने वाला रवैया चीन का रहा। हर मौके पर पाकिस्तान का हाथ थामे रखने वाला चीन इस बार तटस्थ बना हुआ था। जाहिर है अमेरिका ने भी पाकिस्तान का साथ नहीं दिया। हालांकि, यह मान लेना कि पाकिस्तान अब सुधर जाएगा, बहुत जल्दबाजी होगी। लेकिन, फिर भी

एक बात की आशा तो जताई ही जा सकती है कि भविष्य में पाकिस्तान अपनी सरजमीं से आतंक को बढ़ावा देने में लाख बार सोचेगा जरूर और कोई भी कदम उठाने से पहले उसकी रूह भी कांपेगी जरूर!
