



THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Don't Micro-manage

If private universities are to flourish, they must be freed from licence raj

TOI Editorials

One of the reasons the Indian economy does poorly is the overwhelming urge to regulate the private sector, stemming from the overall belief that babus know best, and the state must occupy the economy's commanding heights. When sectors have been liberalised and bureaucratic controls relaxed, they have seen growth. Two key sectors that haven't been are agriculture and education. The Covid crisis has finally prompted some action on the agricultural front – as in recent moves to free farmers from mandi monopoly.

However, the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which is being finalised betrays once again government's penchant for micro-managing education. It's fine to propose, as NEP does, that fees charged by a private higher educational institution (HEI) should be transparent and there be no arbitrary increases in a short span – this falls within the remit of necessary and optimal regulation. But NEP goes much further and proposes a cookie cutter approach for HEIs that undermines their autonomy, by prescribing that at least 20% of students are able to attend through freeships and another 30% through scholarships. Moreover, it also promises to cap the fees HEIs can charge.

Since government already presides over a huge public education sector, it should use this to signal on fees through a market mechanism. Blunt force mechanisms such as a fee cap must be dropped, nor should NEP seek to determine the extent of scholarships a HEI must give out. The proposals need to factor in that private but non-autonomous institutions are a contradiction in terms, the equivalent of farmers being forced to sell at the mandi. The licence raj approach has to change if quality higher education – for which there is huge appetite in India – is to be scaled up, producing cutting edge research and innovation. Else one can bid goodbye to realising Atmanirbhar Bharat by unleashing domestic development of critical technology and supply chains.

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Applying The Wrong Medicine

Revival package doesn't help the poor or middle class, backbone of India's broken economy

Kapil Sibal , [The writer is a Congress member and former Union minister]



Justice is at the heart of all human endeavour. This pandemic has taken us all by surprise. The task of a responsive government is to ensure the economic survival of diverse interests. Our nation's economy, buffeted by this pandemic, must be protected not by knee-jerk reactions but thoughtful decisions embedded in equity.

The Rs 20 lakh crore package announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and delivered in tranches by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, doesn't address the real problems the economy faces. This package is nowhere near 10% of India's GDP, as claimed. Analysts peg it at about 1% of GDP. Before March 24, when Modi announced the lockdown, our economy was already

stuttering. There is nothing in the economic package catering to the needs of a self-reliant India, which requires world class infrastructure, efficient bureaucratic systems and skilled human resource. On all these fronts, we are wanting.

The basic flaw is in the direction of the package. More than a revival package, what's desperately needed is a survival package for the poor and small businesses. The first tranche catered to credit availability. Neither additional working capital loans nor subordinate debt for businesses including MSMEs are the right prescription in the absence of robust consumer demand.

In any case, a large number of MSMEs are excluded since they have not borrowed from formal channels like banks and NBFCs. Neither are likely to provide debt to promoters to put into already stressed MSMEs. Providing liquidity to discoms, a repackaging of the failed UDAY, will not cater to economic revival. Capital is required to generate and satisfy demand. Access to capital in the absence of demand is a risky proposition.

The second tranche allowed something for the needy. Free food grain supply for migrants for two months will be difficult to implement given that thousands are waiting to reach home. The rest of the measures are futuristic. Access to PDS rations from fair price shops by March 2021, with the concept of one nation one ration card, has little to do with the present crisis. It is the repetition of an initiative announced in January to be realised by June 2020.

Credit facility to street vendors; affordable rental housing under PPP for migrants and urban poor; boost to the housing sector indicated that the finance minister was clueless about solutions required today, in situ, to alleviate the misery of the poor. Farm-gate infrastructure for farmers; a scheme for formalisation of micro-food enterprises, a scheme for fishermen, all included in the third tranche, fell far short of what is needed now.

The fourth tranche too consisted of policy prescriptions to deal with commercial mining, defence production and tariff reforms in the power sector with privatisation of distribution in view. The fifth tranche increased the allocation for MGNREGA, the only silver lining within the cloudy and unfocussed vision of this government.

One felt that the FM was presenting a fresh budget along with off budget policy reforms. Despite these announcements, the RBI thinks growth this year will be in the negative territory and various sectors of the economy will continue to face acute stress. It was, however, touching of the FM to share the pain of the migrants walking hundreds of kilometres, and offer them nothing apart from the promise of food grains for comfort.

The pandemic has left a large underbelly of poverty stricken people. The movement of 4.6 crore migrants has exposed us to the prevailing massive scales of poverty. 93% of our workforce including migrants being in the informal sector, without security of jobs, is a reflection of an economy where millions live on the margins. A recent survey conducted by Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) of 11,000 migrant workers, indicated that 86% of them had not been paid by their employers during the lockdown, and 96% received no food from the government.

The ILO Report 2020 suggests that 400 million workers employed in the informal economy are at risk of falling deeper into poverty during this crisis. Unemployment, which rose to 8.4% on March 22, increased to 27.4% by April 5. The rate of unemployment in urban India reached 24.95% and in rural India 22.89% (CMIE Report). In aviation and tourism alone, job losses of 38 million represent 70% of the total workforce (KPMG). In the textile and apparel sector, 2.5 to 3 million job losses have occurred because of order cancellations.

It is estimated that over 136 million non-agricultural jobs are at immediate risk, the most vulnerable being workers without formal employment, contractual workers, casual labour, those working in small companies and the self-employed. Casual labour, which forms 25% of the total workforce, are the first to be hit by the lockdown. In the construction industry, they form 83% of the workforce. With real estate in dire straits, their plight should be a matter of national concern.

Faced with a bleak future, apart from layoffs, companies across sectors are imposing salary cuts of 15-40% for the remaining staff. What we don't need now are long-term solutions. A doctor dealing with a patient in the emergency ward needs to revive him by administering medicine to help him survive. It's no good telling him that he will survive if structural changes are carried out in the hospital premises. These packages offer nothing for the migrant, the informal sector, the poor or even the middle class – the backbone of the Indian economy. Supply side solutions are the wrong medicine to administer in the midst of the pandemic.

The PM and FM have sold another dream. Only time will tell whether the poor and middle class will again be misled by yet another 'jumla'.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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Build Consensus On Farm Reforms

ET Editorials

The reforms the central government seeks to bring about in India's farm sector via the three Ordinances the Cabinet approved last week are welcome. However, some reservations remain, and the government would do well to address them. It is also relevant to note that these reforms will not, by themselves, quite make milk and honey flow in rural India and will need be supplemented with reforms to input pricing and significant public investment in farm infrastructure and its linkage to marketing.

While the amendment to the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), removing cereals, pulses, onions, potatoes, oil and oilseeds from its ambit, is welcome, the Centre's decision to retain the power to reintroduce these items under the Act if prices go up unreasonably is ill-advised. This prospect of the draconian provisions of the Act kicking in at the government's will would make it difficult for commodity futures to work efficiently. When the Ordinance is converted into law, the government would do well to drop this condition. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance 2020 seeks to free up farm trade across states and within states. This is most welcome, as farmers lack marketing freedom because the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Acts of most states compel them to sell to a specified set of traders. However, while inter-state commerce is a subject in the Union list, intra-state trade lies within the ambit of the state government. Since the states stand to lose considerable sums of mandi tax derived from the APMC system, they are guaranteed to protest, cutting across political parties. Their concerns would have to be addressed.

Instituting a legal framework for contract farming, via the third Ordinance, is a good idea. However, these contracts are one-sided, with no real recourse for the buyer. Bihar has had no APMC for several years, but its farmers are not exactly in clover. Different states call for different kinds of additional inputs, marketing freedom being only a hygiene factor. Supplying these should be a priority, too.

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Ensure Life Through Crop Insurance

Sonia Jabbar , [The writer is owner, Nuxalbari Tea Estate, West Bengal]

I was horrified and deeply saddened by the painful death on May 27 of a pregnant elephant in Kerala's Palakkad district after she was fed a pineapple packed with firecrackers. But as someone who runs a successful elephant conservation programme at Nuxalbari Tea Estate in northern West Bengal, it was just another one in a sadly long series of cruel and unnecessary deaths of elephants.

For those who recently woke up to #elephantlivesmatter, they should know that despite India's elephants being on the endangered list, these animals are regularly hounded, killed and injured. Entire herds are electrocuted by farmers who try and save their crops, and by wires left hanging by electricity departments. They are shot at with guns, and targeted with spears and arrows. Elephants and their babies are chased with burning torches and sometimes suffer horrific burn injuries. They are stoned and teased by young men — who just do it for fun and selfies.

Entire herds are mown down by speeding trains — almost 70 elephants were killed by trains between 2013 and mid-2019, mostly in Assam and northern West Bengal. Last year, an elephant tried to save her young calf from a speeding train. The herd was able to cross, but the young elephant got stuck. The

mother, who was pregnant at the time, stood between the train and her calf. Neither of them survived. Local farmers cremated them, I buried their bones.

A few months ago, an elephant gave birth on a dry riverbed. Elephant babies need to get on their feet immediately if they are to survive. But there was something wrong. The baby couldn't get up. The mother tried, the herd tried, the baby tried. In the meantime, a crowd of men had gathered. And what did this group do? They pelted stones at the herd, at the mother, and at the struggling infant. All the while, they laughed and recorded it on their phones — which is how I came to know of this vile act.

The herd was forced to retreat to the edge of the forest. The mother continued to urge her baby to move and shelter it from the shower of stones. The baby, however, died.

In the Palakkad incident, the elephant was not targeted. The pineapple bomb was probably left for wild boar that was causing crop depredation. The farmers used this method to save their crops. The pregnant elephant's death was unintentional and, therefore, not murder, as is being described in sections of the media.

I do not believe the 'culprits' of the elephant's death should be meted out 'exemplary punishment'. This cruel method to save crops — whether by using bombs, firecrackers or electric wires — needs to stop. But farmers need solutions, not lectures, and much less punishment.

GoI should immediately make crop depredation by wildlife qualify for crop insurance. If a farmer is paying a premium to be insured against crop destruction caused by hailstorms, cyclones and floods, it stands to reason that crop depredation caused by wildlife, occurring with tiresome regularity, is also insurable. If farmers got even 50% of what they lose to wildlife — whether elephants or wild boar or nilgai — much of this violence targeted against animals would stop.

And why do wild animals leave the forest to raid crops? Mostly because humans are eating up their habitats – forest land. Elephant herds, which need large tracts of natural forests with grassland and water bodies for their nutritional requirements, are being squeezed into reserves that are shrinking by the day because of human greed. But that is another, much larger tragic story.



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Death Of An Elephant

Our reaction speaks of the nature of the animal, the best and worst instincts in humanity

Aakash Joshi

"I don't know why the elephant did it," remarked an old friend, looking and sounding completely spent on a video chat. Last week, before the details of the now seemingly accidental killing of a pregnant pachyderm in Kerala had emerged, the grotesque, tragic event seemed like the final straw.

We had, all of us on that call, become inured to suffering. The millions abandoned by the state and society, trudging along for months to go home, had become a talking point, more than a thinking point; America was fighting its own worst instincts; professional and economic uncertainty clouded plans for the future. To go on with life, without completely giving in to either anger or despair, all you can do is not think about things too hard. Yet, all of us in the cocoon of relative privilege, so accepting of injustice and suffering, eaters of meat, were saddened by an elephant dying, moved almost to tears.

This reaction says something about the nature of the animal, as well as the best and worst instincts in humanity. An elephant, even more than a dog (a pet), is a person. From Aristotle's time — he said an elephant is "the animal that surpasses all others in wit and mind" — human beings have seen elephants as wise, formidable, useful and good. Its brain has as many neurones as ours and is likely capable of complex thoughts and emotions we are as yet unaware of. Elephant societies are matriarchal and deeply bonded. They remember their dead, show grief and have language. They think. Yet, they are not considered persons, not in a legal sense.

Jane Goodall, whose decades-long work with chimpanzees has shown how close they are to us — both in decency and violence — has long argued for the rights of non-human persons. Along with dolphins and pachyderms, great apes have the intelligence and emotional and social complexity to be considered sentient. Yet, little has been done seriously in this regard.

There are two conceivable arguments against granting basic rights to non-human persons. The first is ridiculous, the second is not.

One, that the law, made by humans, should apply only to humans, is specious. For hundreds of years, legal persons have not been co-terminus with homo sapiens. Rivers have rights in India, as do corporations. Animal rights are a broad term, to do with cruelty. But the right to land, habitat and a way of life is not guaranteed to elephants and other sentient creatures.

A right is not enshrined in a violation, an injunction on the immorality of those who would violate it. Rather, it recognises the intrinsic and inalienable worth of those whom it is conferred on. Both in terms of legal first principles and morally, there is little argument against the granting of such rights, especially since there is enough science behind the claims to personhood of these creatures.

The second and more convincing argument against making elephants persons is the same reason that its death caused such an emotional reaction in my friend.

In 1936, George Orwell wrote "Shooting an Elephant", which described his time as a police officer in Burma, where he had to kill a male elephant in must because of the pressures of a crowd. A popular story, it is an indictment of colonialism and the cruelties of power. Orwell writes: "We began questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes." The killing of the elephant, all these years later, is as murky, its truth more disturbing than even the suffering of the animal.

It seems now that the elephant was likely killed by accident, with a trap meant for pests like boars. It is also clear that the death is being used by certain elements as a way to spread bigotry, against Muslims.

Initially, the elephant's death seemed like an act of wanton cruelty, another injustice in a country where callousness seemed to have become the norm. The real problem, though, runs deeper and is cause for much more despair.

The elephant that died was certainly a person. But we may not be the competent authority to judge it so.

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From subsidies to cash transfers

It could help government to get closer to doubling farmers' incomes by 2023

Ashok Gulati , [Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIER]



Let us start with some good news on the economic front. During the first year (2019-20) of the second term of the Narendra Modi government, gross value added (GVA) in agriculture and allied sectors registered a growth of 4 per cent. This is commendable, especially when juxtaposed with the growth of overall GVA of the economy at 3.9 per cent, and overall GDP (including net taxes) at 4.2 per cent. And even in 2020-21, when the impact of COVID-19 will be on full display, and when the GDP may register a negative

growth of as high as -5 per cent, agriculture may still surprise with a positive growth of 2.5 per cent, as per CRISIL's recent forecast.

Agriculture matters not just for food security, but also for the good of the masses, since almost 44 per cent of the country's labour force is engaged in agriculture. So, "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas" will not be possible unless agriculture performs in a sustained manner at around 4 per cent per annum, if not more. The potential is definitely for more.

While using China as an example may be somewhat problematic these days, let me remind the reader that Chinese agriculture growth has been about 4.5 per cent over the last 40 years. Even today, China produces three times more agri-produce from a cultivated area that is much less than ours, and with a holding size that is also much smaller (0.7 ha) than ours (1.08 ha). It is this prosperity at the bottom of the pyramid that provides a large demand base for their industrial goods. Migration out of agriculture is largely from a "demand-pull" to higher productivity sectors with better skills. In contrast, in India, at

several places, migration is from a “push” factor because agriculture cannot support a large percentage of the working population.

In any case, the Modi government in its second term has started some reforms on the agri-marketing front. By liberalising the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), APMC Act, and contract farming through the ordinance route, it has made a great beginning, and I am hopeful the government will invite private sector investments in building more efficient value chains, which will be beneficial to farmers and consumers alike.

I have earlier described these reforms as a historic “1991 moment” (IE, May 18) — like the de-licensing of industry, this is a de-licensing of agri-marketing. My only reservation was regarding the fine print, and that in the amended ECA, they have inserted a clause about stocking limits being imposed in case of “extraordinary price rise”. This is being defined as a 100 per cent increase in the price of perishables and a 50 per cent increase for non-perishables over a 12-month period. If onion prices, which are hovering at around Rs 15/kg in the retail market of Safal in Delhi go to Rs 30/kg, and if the government imposes stocking limits, the whole purpose of this exercise — to attract private investment in storage — will be nullified. One can understand if stocking limits are imposed in case of natural calamity, famine, wars, etc. But beyond that, it is only for rent-seeking by the “inspector raj”.

There is another issue that we need to revisit vis-a-vis agriculture and farmers. And that relates to doubling farmers’ incomes by 2022-23. In February 2016, after two successive years of drought in 2014-15 and 2015-16, PM Modi said that his dream was to double farmers’ incomes by 2022-23. We did not take that political statement very seriously, as it did not mention whether he was referring to nominal incomes or real incomes. But in April, when he set up a committee under Ashok Dalwai to double farmers’ incomes, and the Committee said that it is real income they are talking about, and it required a growth rate of 10.4 per cent per annum till 2022-23, it was time to examine the notion carefully as all ministers and bureaucrats started rallying around “doubling of farmers’ incomes” in all their public speeches. While shifting the focus from production (tonnage-centric) to incomes (farmer-centric) was laudable, I had expressed my serious reservations about its achievement because of the following reason.

If one looks at the data on farmers’ incomes in 2002-03, 2012-13, and 2015-16, for which NSO and NABARD surveys are available, and compares it with agri-GDP growth over the same period, the trends in agri-GDP and farmers’ incomes follow each other very closely (about 3.6 to 3.7 per cent per annum). There is no official data on farmers’ incomes after 2015-16. But if we assume roughly the same relation between agri-GDP growth rate and growth in farmers’ incomes that existed during 2002-03 to 2015-16, it is possible to assess the likely achievement of this goal post of doubling farmers’ income.

Since the base year growth rate in 2015-16, which was a drought year, was meagre (0.6 per cent), the average annual growth of agri-GDP during the next four years (2016-17 to 2019-20) was 4.8 per cent. This year, in 2020-21, CRISIL forecasts GVA in agriculture at 2.5 per cent and even if one assumes agri-growth to be around 4 per cent per annum for the next two years, for the seven-year period (from 2016-17 to 2022-23), the likely annual agri-GVA growth is going to be around 4.2 per cent. This cannot double the income of farmers by 2022-23. That’s why I had said that the achievement will be less than 50 per cent of the target.

But if direct income transfers under PM-Kisan are also added, and continued each year till 2022-23, the shortfall from the target will be much less. My humble suggestion is that if the PM can convert food and

fertiliser subsidies into direct cash transfers, he will come closer to doubling farmers' real incomes by 2022-23. If he bites this bullet, it will give him even better results than agri-marketing reforms.

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Reimagining the City

Pandemic offers chance to pursue an alternative model of urbanisation

Rajiv Kumar & Srijan Pal Singh , [Kumar is vice chairman NITI Aayog, Singh is CEO of Dr. Kalam Centre, New Delhi.]

Between the year 1 CE and the start of the Industrial Revolution (around the early 1800s), the decadal growth of the global population was around 0.8 per cent. With the advent of concentrated production centres, improved medicine and the era of fossil fuels, the global population has shot up by seven times in the last 180 years, clocking a decadal growth rate of over 11 per cent.

This population growth rate has been largely urban and metro-centred. Today, cities consume two-thirds of the global energy consumption and account for more than 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. London became the first modern city to cross the one million population mark around 1800. By 1960, our planet had 111 cities with over a million inhabitants. In China and India, the number rose from 371 in 2000 to 548 in 2018, with 61 of these cities in India. Recently, the UN projected that by 2030, 28 per cent of the world population will live in dense, congested spaces, jostling for ever-dwindling space and choked infrastructure. Population densities have increased enormously, with the Dharavi slum in Mumbai registering a mind-boggling density of 3.75 lakh persons per sq km.

But COVID-19 has raised the question: Will concentrated, high-investment, high-density cities have a prominent place in the new, emerging world? Are they successful at providing an adequate return on investment? And, above all, do they provide a quality of life and happiness to all their inhabitants? An average Mumbaikar daily spends 95 minutes commuting between office and home, wasting nearly 10 per cent of his time awake everyday. Eight people die every day in Mumbai in local train-related accidents, and in Delhi, five people lose their lives in road accidents.

Going by present trends, India will build a new Chicago every year to accommodate new urban dwellers. This will require about \$2.5 trillion of investment until 2030 — to create more congested urban spaces. Should we not look at alternative models of habitations, which are more frugal, more sustainable and offer more satisfying lifestyles and higher welfare levels?

Once cities expand beyond one million, they start to experience dis-economies of scale with pressure on every urban amenity increasing exponentially — more people means more vehicles, more vehicles mean need for more roads and increased pollution, which mean more hospitals, more energy and more waste. Even the most robust megacities can easily witness the “domino” effect where a minor and local failure is compounded into a catastrophe. In China in 2010, due to some broken cars and road repair work, a minor traffic snarl expanded quickly into a massive jam of 120 kilometres on the highway connecting Inner Mongolia and Beijing. Drivers were left with nowhere to go for a punishing 12 days. Even in India, we

have witnessed smaller but painful versions of the same phenomenon. The truth is that overpopulated cities strain their resources inordinately and leave little room to successfully tackle every contingency.

Thus, cities are the most affected by natural and man-made disasters. Nearly every hot-spot of the COVID-19 outbreak is a congested urban centre. The low-income areas of cities, where anything from drinking water to sanitation can be a shared facility, are the most vulnerable to any disease outbreak. Congested low-income urban spaces not only bear an inordinately high disease burden, they also bear the brunt of air pollution, water contamination and crime infestation. In the face of any disaster like a flood, earthquake or, worse still, a pandemic, migrant workers, who throng these megacities, rush to go back to their villages. India, with its approximately 72 million migrant workers (including their families), is vulnerable to such disruptions as amply demonstrated in recent weeks.

Some of the principal and strong advantages claimed for megacities with their sky scrapers are the economies of agglomeration and the generation of new ideas and innovations through multi-disciplinary interactions. These advantages have been largely nullified with advances in digital technologies that have made online interactions numerous, equally rich in content and covering a wider range of disciplines. The “cloud” is the new interaction space, which can be accessed by innovators from widely-spread geographies. Digitisation has apparently resulted in the loss of cities’ innovative mojo.

With this major transformation and with the onset of COVID-19, it is surely the time to reconsider our habitation model. Gandhiji’s model of gram swaraj, APJ Abdul Kalam’s vision of providing urban amenities in rural areas and Nanaji Deshmukh’s idea of self-reliant village development clearly deserve of fresh and focused attention. We have vast swathes of land, people and resources located in our over 6,00,000 villages. These offer another chance for us to pursue an alternative model of development where agriculture, industry and service sectors move in sync for sustainable development, which is in harmony with nature. This will minimise our carbon footprint. At the same time, it will also minimise social disruption with jobs coming to people rather than the other way round. New technology, the carbon constraint and diseconomies of congestion and density must force us to review our urbanisation landscape.



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Addressing the elephant in the room

While there is outrage over the death of an elephant, there are no protests against environmental destruction

Tarsh Thekaekara is a Post Doctoral Fellow at the National Centre for Biological Sciences

The news last week about a pregnant elephant having her mouth blown caused outrage on social media. It’s impossible not to empathise with the pain of the elephant, which stood impassively in a river and died a slow death. But the wide narrative about the death of humanity is oversimplified. While people are

demonising the farmer responsible for the incident, it is important to note that the elephant was an unintended target. Most crackers are aimed at wild boar that destroy small farmers' crop. A major failing of conservation in India is that the needs of farmers and wild animals do not go hand in hand.

Problems with the narrative

With the absence of large predators outside forests and the huge availability of easily accessible food crops, deer, monkeys, boar and other species inevitably fill this space. In almost all developed nations these species are kept in control so they don't destroy large crop areas. In less developed countries, local people take matters into their own hands. Studies show this "reciprocity" — boars eating crops, people eating boar — is what allows farmers tolerate these otherwise problematic animals. India does not allow rural people to hunt animals, but neither does the government cull animals regularly despite their numbers shooting up.

While the government has the provision to declare overabundant animals "vermin", and cull them under the Wildlife Protection Act, it very rarely does this. Vocal urban wildlife activist groups generally create a social media storm when such decisions are taken and challenge the order in court. These groups have no empathy for the farmers who struggle to make their ends meet while growing food for all of us. Kerala had declared boar "vermin", but very few have been killed over the years.

Given the widespread destruction of crop by these animals, farmers urgently need a safety net. Compensation schemes are one part of the solution, but in India this is always only a fraction of the market value of the crop, which is already precariously low. Poor farmers spend a lot of time navigating bureaucratic processes to get it. And there is no end to this process — some animal numbers just keep going up, linked to the availability of agricultural food crops, and the government cannot sustain an exponential growth in compensation.

Second, this incident is far from new. The start of the monsoon is when animals move into human habitation more, partly on account of jackfruit and other crops/fruits. Incidents like this take place as it is notoriously hard to identify the culprits, since the event occurs much before the injured elephants are found. While there are dozens of calls to charge the culprits, it is far from easy for the forest department and police to do this.

The third problem with the narrative around this incident is that all humans are grouped together. While some people are indeed over-exploiting the planet, everyone is far from being equally culpable for the ecological disaster that we are now in. Modern, developed, urban humans are in fact disproportionately responsible since we consume infinitely more resources. It is our greed that has destroyed vast tracts of forests and thousands of elephants and other animals over the last few decades. The poor farmer who inadvertently kills one elephant in an attempt to feed us while making enough money for himself is much less responsible.

If arresting the person responsible is not going to be the solution, what can we do? This is best answered at two levels: one, how do we make sure that elephants don't die in this way, and two, how do we reduce negative human-elephant interactions?

The first problem is relatively simpler to solve: we should control the population of wild boar to minimise the impact they have on farmers. This is untenable to most people, since conservation in India is arguably mixed up with animal rights. Boars are classified "least concern", and are in absolutely no danger of going

extinct. If they are causing the death of much more threatened species like elephants, that gives us all the more reason to control their numbers. The modalities of this have to be worked out carefully to ensure there is no over-hunting and local extinction in some areas that have governance or enforcement problems. But the inability to enforce rules should not be used as an excuse for not taking decisive action about the expanding boar population.

What can we do about the problem of elephants destroying crops, damaging property and killing people in accidental encounters? The modern conservation movement aims to separate human and wildlife spaces. When there is an overlap, there is a mistaken assumption that “conflict” is inevitable. This is arguably at odds with the reality in India, where the majority of animal range is outside protected areas. For elephants only about 25% of their range is within protected areas. The extent of distribution of other species is not even fully known. One study in central India by Majgaonkar and others found that only 2.6% of the range of leopards, hyenas and wolves in central India was within protected areas. So animals and people, particularly elephants, have always been interacting with each other. While there have always been problems, most interactions are peaceful, and there is a deep cultural tolerance not found in other parts of the world. However, as animals and human numbers grow and there is more pressure on land, the challenges of living together will also increase.

The way forward

At a policy level, a good starting point would be to reorient the forest department to do away with the wildlife-territorial dichotomy of management that currently exists, especially since nobody has managed to inform animals that they are only allowed to stay in wildlife divisions. Beyond that there are no universal solutions. Solutions vary based on the context, the kinds of crops grown, density of people, socioeconomic status, etc. Farmers should be empowered and subsidised to better protect their land rather than wait for compensation or be forced to resort to these extreme, illegal measures out of desperation.

India has done well in saving nature given its high population density. But as it continues to develop, there is going to be huge pressure on the natural world. While it is heartening to see everyone get upset about the death of the elephant, the hope is that there will also be large-scale protests about the large-scale destruction of the environment. The National Board for Wildlife and the Forest Advisory Committee are meant to scrutinise and minimise the large-scale diversion of forest land for development projects, but they have been reduced to rubber-stamping bodies. Even a coal mine inside an elephant reserve in Assam was recently cleared. The government is easing up environmental clearances and opening up forests for destruction to boost a post-COVID economy. When industrialists like Ratan Tata, who are angry and easily condemn the farmer, also start to protest about these bigger concerns on Twitter, we can pat ourselves on the back for being a truly environmentally conscious society.

संपादकीय

गुजरे एक महीने के दौरान पूर्वी लद्दाख में वास्तविक नियंत्रण रेखा के पास भारतीय क्षेत्र में घुसपैठ कर चीन ने जिस तरह की आक्रामकता दिखाई, वह अब शांत पड़ चुकी है। चीनी सैनिक पीछे हट गए हैं और अपने तंबू भी उखाड़ लिए हैं। लेकिन इस बात की क्या गारंटी है कि भविष्य में चीन अशांति पैदा करने वाली इस तरह की गतिविधियों को अंजाम नहीं देगा। भारतीय इलाकों में चीनी सैनिकों की घुसपैठ की घटनाएं अक्सर होती रही हैं। सीमा पर उपजे तनाव के हालिया मामले को सैन्य और कूटनीतिक स्तर पर सुलझाने के प्रयासों के तहत ही पूर्वी लद्दाख में वास्तविक नियंत्रण रेखा पर शनिवार को दोनों देशों के सैन्य अधिकारियों में वार्ता हुई। हालांकि यह शुरूआती बैठक है और इससे कोई नतीजे निकालना जल्दबाजी ही होगी। लेकिन सीमा पर जिस तरह के हालात बन गए थे, उसे देखते हुए शांति स्थापित करने के लिए इस तरह के सैन्य और कूटनीतिक स्तर के प्रयास जरूरी इसलिए हो जाते हैं, ताकि मामला गंभीर रूप धारण न कर ले। स्थिति को बिगाड़ने के लिए चीन ने तो अपनी ओर से कोई कसर नहीं छोड़ी थी।

भारतीय क्षेत्र में घुसपैठ करा कर विवादों को जन्म देना और इसकी आड़ में भारत पर दबाव बनाते रहना चीन की पुरानी रणनीति है। यह तथ्य और हकीकत तो चीन की सत्ता और सेना दोनों ही समझते हैं कि भारत के किसी भी इलाके पर कब्जा कर लेना उनके लिए अब आसान नहीं होगा। भारत अब 1962 वाला देश नहीं है। चीन की तरह ही भारत भी परमाणु शक्ति संपन्न राष्ट्र है। दरअसल, भारतीय क्षेत्र में घुसपैठ जैसी गतिविधियां इन इलाकों में भारत द्वारा किए जा रहे ढांचागत विकास के विरोध का प्रतीक हैं। भारतीय सेना ने सीमाई इलाकों में जिस तरह का मजबूत बुनियादी ढांचा खड़ा कर लिया है, सड़के बना ली हैं, हेलीपैड बना लिए हैं, उनसे चीन की नींद उड़ी हुई है। पेंगोंग त्सो झील के पास फिंगर क्षेत्र में भारत ने सामरिक दृष्टि से एक महत्वपूर्ण सड़क बना ली है और अभी यही बात चीन को खटक रही है। मौजूदा विवाद का मूल इसी में है। गलवान घाटी में दरबुक-शायोग-दौलत बेग ओल्डी मार्ग को जोड़ने वाली एक सड़क को लेकर भी चीन बौखलाया हुआ है। इसमें कोई संदेह नहीं कि सीमा विवाद के चलते भारत और चीन के बीच एक-एक इंच जमीन का महत्व है। जैसे चीन अपनी जमीन नहीं छोड़ सकता, वैसे ही भारत भी अपना हिस्सा नहीं छोड़ेगा। तथ्य तो यह है कि सीमाई क्षेत्र में भारत ने जितने भी सामरिक निर्माण किए हैं, वे अपने क्षेत्र में किए हैं, न कि चीन के इलाके में जाकर। अगर भारत भी चीन की तरह घुसपैठ जैसी हरकतें करता तो क्या चीन अब तक चुप बैठता!

विवाद शांत करने के लिए भले कूटनीतिक और सैन्य स्तर पर प्रयास चलते रहें, लेकिन इतना निश्चित है कि यह कोई दीर्घकालिक समाधान नहीं है। चीन एक तरफ सदियों पुराने संबंधों की दुहाई देता है, भारत से शांति और सदभाव की अपेक्षा रखता है, भारत को एक बड़े बाजार के रूप में देखता है जो उसकी अर्थव्यवस्था की मजबूती के लिए सबसे जरूरी है, लेकिन फिर भी इस तरह के विवादों को खड़ा कर हर बार वैमनस्यता को जन्म देता है, जो उसकी दोस्ती का सबसे विरोधाभासी रूप है। अड़तीस सौ किलोमीटर लंबी सीमा का विवाद शांति और तार्किक तरीके से ही निकल जाएगा। घुसपैठ जैसी गतिविधियों से तो शांति के प्रयासों को धक्का ही पहुंचता है।

Date: 08-06-20

मनरेगा से ही निकलेगा मार्ग

सोनिया गांधी, (लेखिका भारतीय राष्ट्रीय कांग्रेस की अध्यक्ष हैं)

महात्मा गांधी राष्ट्रीय ग्रामीण रोजगार गारंटी कानून, 2005 (मनरेगा) एक क्रांतिकारी और तर्कसंगत परिवर्तन का जीता जागता उदाहरण है। यह क्रांतिकारी बदलाव का सूचक इसलिए है, क्योंकि इस कानून ने गरीब से गरीब व्यक्ति के हाथों को काम व आर्थिक ताकत दे भूख व गरीबी पर प्रहार किया। यह तर्कसंगत है क्योंकि यह पैसा सीधे उन लोगों के हाथों में पहुंचाता है जिन्हें इसकी सबसे ज्यादा जरूरत है।

मौजूदा केंद्र सरकार के छह साल व उससे पहले भी, लगातार मनरेगा की उपयोगिता साबित हुई है। मोदी सरकार ने इसकी आलोचना की, इसे कमजोर करने की कोशिश की, लेकिन अंत में मनरेगा के लाभ व सार्थकता को स्वीकारना पड़ा। कांग्रेस सरकार द्वारा स्थापित की गई सार्वजनिक वितरण प्रणाली के साथ-साथ मनरेगा सबसे गरीब व कमजोर नागरिकों को भूख तथा गरीबी से बचाने के लिए अत्यंत कारगर है। खासतौर से कोरोना महामारी के संकट के दौर में यह और ज्यादा प्रासंगिक है। हमें यह नहीं भूलना चाहिए कि देश की संसद द्वारा सितंबर, 2005 में पारित मनरेगा कानून एक लंबे जन आंदोलन तथा सिविल सोसायटी द्वारा उठाई जा रही मांगों का परिणाम है। कांग्रेस पार्टी ने जनता की इस आवाज को सुना व अमलीजामा पहनाया। यह हमारे 2004 के चुनावी घोषणापत्र का संकल्प बना और हममें से इस योजना के क्रियान्वयन के लिए अधिक से अधिक दबाव डालने वाले हर व्यक्ति को गर्व है कि यूपीए सरकार ने इसे लागू कर दिखाया।

इसका एक सरल सिद्धांत है : भारत के गांवों में रहने वाले किसी भी नागरिक को अब काम मांगने का कानूनी अधिकार है और सरकार द्वारा उसे न्यूनतम मजदूरी के साथ कम से कम 100 दिन तक काम दिए जाने की गारंटी होगी। इसकी उपयोगिता बहुत जल्द साबित भी हुई। यह जमीनी स्तर पर, मांग द्वारा संचालित, काम का अधिकार देने वाला कार्यक्रम है, जो अभूतपूर्व है तथा इसका उद्देश्य गरीबी मिटाना है। मनरेगा की शुरुआत के बाद 15 साल में इस योजना ने लाखों लोगों को भूख व गरीबी के कुचक्र से बाहर निकाला है। महात्मा गांधी ने कहा था, 'जब आलोचना किसी आंदोलन को दबाने में विफल हो जाती है, तो उस आंदोलन को स्वीकृति व सम्मान मिलना शुरू हो जाता है'। स्वतंत्र भारत में महात्मा गांधी की इस बात को साबित करने का मनरेगा से ज्यादा अच्छा उदाहरण और कोई नहीं।

पद संभालने के बाद, प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी को भी समझ आया कि मनरेगा को बंद किया जाना व्यावहारिक नहीं है, इसलिए उन्होंने इस योजना को 'कांग्रेस पार्टी की विफलता का एक जीवित स्मारक' तक कह डाला। पिछले सालों में मोदी सरकार ने मनरेगा को खत्म करने, खोखला करने व कमजोर करने की पूरी कोशिश की। लेकिन मनरेगा के सजग प्रहरियों, अदालत एवं संसद में विपक्षी दलों के भारी दबाव के कारण सरकार को पीछे हटने पर मजबूर होना पड़ा। इसके बाद केंद्र सरकार ने मनरेगा को स्वच्छ भारत तथा प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना जैसे कार्यक्रमों से जोड़कर इसका स्वरूप बदलने की कोशिश की, जिसे उन्होंने सुधार कहा। लेकिन, वास्तव में यह कांग्रेस पार्टी की योजनाओं का नाम बदलने का एक प्रयास मात्र था। यह और बात है कि मनरेगा श्रमिकों को भुगतान किए जाने में अत्यंत देरी की गई तथा उन्हें काम तक दिए जाने से इनकार कर दिया गया।

कोविड-19 महामारी और इससे उत्पन्न आर्थिक संकट ने मोदी सरकार को वास्तविकता का अहसास करवाया है। पहले से ही चल रहे अभूतपूर्व आर्थिक संकट व मंदी की मार झेल रही अर्थव्यवस्था ने सरकार को आभास दिलाया कि पिछली यूपीए सरकार के प्रमुख ग्रामीण राहत कार्यक्रमों को दोबारा शुरू करने के अलावा कोई विकल्प नहीं बचा है। काम स्वयं

बोलता है। चाहे देर से ही सही, वित्तमंत्री द्वारा हाल में ही मनरेगा का बजट बढ़ाकर एक लाख करोड़ रुपए से ज्यादा का कुल आबंटन किए जाने की घोषणा ने इस बात को साबित कर दिया है। अकेले मई 2020 में ही 2.19 करोड़ परिवारों ने इस कानून के तहत काम की मांग की, जो आठ साल में सबसे ज्यादा है। कांग्रेस पार्टी के कार्यक्रमों को यथावत स्वीकार करने के लिए मजबूर मौजूदा राजग सरकार अभी भी कमियां खोजने के लिए कुर्तकों का जाल बुनने में लगी है। लेकिन पूरा देश जानता है कि दुनिया के इस सबसे बड़े जन आंदोलन ने किस प्रकार न केवल लाखों भारतीयों को गरीबी के कुचक्र से बाहर निकाला, अपितु पंचायती राज संस्थाओं का स्वरूप बदल दिया, जलवायु परिवर्तन का प्रभाव कम करने में मदद की तथा ग्रामीण अर्थव्यवस्था को पुनर्जीवित किया। इसने सभी के लिए समान वेतन सुनिश्चित कर, महिलाओं, दलितों, आदिवासियों तथा कमजोर वर्गों को सशक्त बनाकर एक नए सामाजिक परिवर्तन की शुरुआत की। इसने उन्हें संगठित होने की ताकत दी और उन्हें सम्मान व स्वाभिमानपूर्ण जीवन प्रदान किया। आज के संकट में भारत को सशक्त बनाने के लिए इन तथ्यों को जानना बहुत आवश्यक है।

आज निराश मजदूर व कामगार विभिन्न शहरों से समूहों में अपने गांवों की ओर लौट रहे हैं। उनके पास न तो रोजगार है और न ही एक सुरक्षित भविष्य। जब अभूतपूर्व संकट के बादल मंडरा रहे हैं, तो मनरेगा की जरूरत व महत्व पहले से कहीं और ज्यादा है। इन मेहनतकशों का विश्वास पुनः स्थापित करने के लिए राहत कार्य उन पर केंद्रित होने चाहिए। सबसे पहला काम उन्हें मनरेगा का जॉब कार्ड जारी किया जाना है। राजीव गांधी ने अपने विशेष प्रयासों द्वारा जिस पंचायती राज तंत्र को सशक्त बनाने का संघर्ष किया, आज मनरेगा को लागू करने की मुख्य भूमिका उन्हीं पंचायतों को दी जानी चाहिए, क्योंकि यह कोई केंद्रीकृत कार्यक्रम नहीं है। जन कल्याण की योजनाएं चलाने के लिए पंचायतों को और मजबूत किया जाए तथा प्राथमिकता से पैसा पंचायतों को दिया जाए। ग्राम सभा यह निर्धारित करे कि किस प्रकार का काम किया जाए। क्योंकि स्थानीय निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधि ही जमीनी हकीकत, श्रमिकों की स्थिति व उनकी जरूरतों को समझते हैं।

संकट के इस वक्त केंद्र सरकार को पैसा सीधा लोगों के हाथों में पहुंचाना चाहिए तथा सब प्रकार की बकाया राशि, बेरोजगारी भत्ता व श्रमिकों का भुगतान लचीले तरीके से बगैर देरी के करना चाहिए। मनरेगा की उपयोगिता बार-बार साबित हुई है क्योंकि यूपीए सरकार के दौरान इसमें निरंतर सुधार व बढ़ोतरी हुई। विस्तृत सोशल ऑडिट, पारदर्शिता, पत्रकारों व बौद्धिकों द्वारा जांच-परख व लोकपाल की नियुक्ति के माध्यम से सरकार व नागरिकों ने मिलकर इसे मौजूदा आकार दिया। राज्य सरकारों ने सर्वश्रेष्ठ विधियों को अपनाकर इसमें महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई। यह पूरी दुनिया में गरीबी उन्मूलन के एक मॉडल के रूप में प्रसिद्ध हो गया। अनिच्छा से ही सही, मोदी सरकार इस कार्यक्रम का महत्व समझ चुकी है। मेरा सरकार से निवेदन है कि यह वक्त देश पर छाए संकट का सामना करने का है, न कि राजनीति करने का। आपके पास एक शक्तिशाली तंत्र है, कृपया इसका उपयोग कर आपदा के इस वक्त भारत के नागरिकों की मदद कीजिए।

भेदभाव कब तक ?

सुभाष गाताडे

तेरह साल का एक वक्त गुजर गया जब थोराट कमेटी रिपोर्ट प्रकाशित हुई थी। याद रहे सितम्बर 2006 में उसका गठन किया गया था, इस बात की पड़ताल करने के लिए कि एम्स (ऑल इंडिया इन्स्टीट्यूट आफ मेडिकल साइंसेस, दिल्ली) में अनुसूचित जाति-जनजाति के छात्रों के साथ कथित जातिगत भेदभाव के आरोपों की पड़ताल की जाए। उन दिनों के अग्रणी अखबारों में यह मामला सुर्खियों में था।

आजाद भारत के इतिहास में वह अपने किस्म की पहली रिपोर्ट रही होगी, विश्वविद्यालय अनुदान आयोग के तत्कालीन चेयरमैन प्रोफेसर सुखदेव थोराट तथा अन्य दो सदस्यों ने मिल कर, इस अग्रणी संस्थान में आरक्षित श्रेणी के छात्रों को झेलने पड़ते भेदभाव के परतों को नोट किया था। विगत माह इसी संस्थान में एक महिला डॉक्टर द्वारा की गयी खुदकुशी की कोशिश-जिसकी वजह उसे कथित तौर पर झेलनी पड़ी यौनिक और जातिगत प्रताड़ना थी- दरअसल इसी बात की ताड़ करती है कि समस्या अभी भी गहरी है और थोराट कमेटी की अहम सिफारिशों के बाद भी जमीनी हालात में कोई गुणात्मक बदलाव नहीं आया है। निश्चित ही एम्स की यह घटना कोई अपवाद नहीं है। हम इसे उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों में व्यापक पैमाने पर देख सकते हैं। अभी पिछले ही साल पायल तडवी नामक अनुसूचित तबके से जुड़ी प्रतिभाशाली एवं सम्भावनाओं से भरपूर डॉक्टर ने-जो मुंबई के एक कालेज कम अस्पताल में पोस्ट ग्रेजुएशन की तालीम ले रही थी। उसने अपने वरिष्ठों के दुर्व्यवहार से तंग आकर आत्महत्या कर ली थी। अगर 26 साल की वह प्रसूति रोग विशेषज्ञ जिंदा रहती तो वह भील-मुस्लिम समुदाय की पहली महिला डॉक्टर बनती। एम्स की पीड़िता डॉक्टर की तरह पायल ने भी कालेज/अस्पताल के कर्ताधर्ताओं के पास-तथा अपने परिवारजनों के पास उसे अपनी सवर्ण सहयोगियों से झेलनी पड़ती जातीय प्रताड़ना की शिकायत बार-बार की थी। पिछले साल किसी अखबार ने डॉ. पायल तडवी की आत्महत्या के बाद प्रोफेसर थोराट का साक्षात्कार लिया था, जिसमें उन्होंने बताया था कि किस तरह ऐसी संस्थानों में हाशिये के छात्रों के प्रति एक किस्म का दुजाभाव मौजूद रहता है और यह सवाल पूछा था 'विगत दशक में ऐसे अग्रणी शिक्षा संस्थानों में अध्ययनरत 25-30 छात्रों ने आत्महत्या की है, मगर सरकारों ने शिक्षा संस्थानों में जातिगत भेदभाव की समाप्ति के लिए कोई ठोस नीति निर्णय लेने से लगातार परहेज किया है।' दो साल पहले आईआईटी मद्रास सुर्खियों में था, जब वहां शाकाहारी और मांसाहारी छात्रों के लिए मेस में अलग अलग प्रवेशद्वार बनाये जाने का मामला सुर्खियों में था-जिसे लेकर इतना हंगामा हुआ कि संस्थान को यह निर्णय वापस लेना पड़ा। इस पूरे मसले पर टिप्पणी करते हुए अम्बेडकर पेरियार स्टडी सर्कल-जो संस्थान के अन्दर सक्रिय छात्रों का समूह है-ने कहा था: 'दरअसल, 'आधुनिक' समाज में जाति कुछ अलग ढंग से भेष बदल कर आती है। आईआईटी मद्रास में वह मेस में अलग प्रवेश द्वार, शाकाहारी और मांसाहारी छात्रों के लिए अलग-अलग बर्तन, खाने-पीने के अलग टेबिल और हाथ धोने के अलग बेसिन के तौर पर प्रतिबिम्बित होती है। यही वह समय था जब आईआईटी पर ही केंद्रित एक अध्ययन सुर्खियों में आया था, जिसमें आईआईटी में जाति और प्रतिभातंत्रा के आपसी रिश्ते पर रोशनी डाली गई थी।

अपने निबंध 'एन एनोटोमी आफ द कास्ट कल्चर एट आई आई टी मद्रास' में अजंता सुब्रम्हणयम, जो हार्वर्ड विश्वविद्यालय में सोशल एन्थ्रोपोलोजी की प्रोफेसर हैं और जो आईआईटी में जाति और मेरिटोक्रेसी/प्रतिभातंत्रा की पड़ताल की थी, उन्होंने इस बात को रेखांकित किया था कि किस तरह 'जाति और जातिवाद ने आईआईटी मद्रास को लंबे समय

से गढ़ा है, और जिसका आम तौर पर फायदा उंची जातियों ने उठाया है'। सवाल आज भी यह मौजू है कि आखिर सामाजिक तौर पर वंचित एवं उत्पीड़ित तबकों से आनेवाले ऐसे कितने छात्रों को जो शेष मुल्क के लिए एक रोल मॉडल बन सकते हैं अपनी कुर्बानी देनी पड़ेगी ताकि शेष समाज इस मामले में अपनी बेरुखी और शीतनिद्रा से जागे। क्या शेष समाज का यह फर्ज नहीं बनता कि वह इस पूरे मामले में आत्मपरीक्षण करे और यह देख कि वह ऐसे अपमानों/इनकारों/मौतों में किस हद तक संलिप्त है या नहीं है। मशहूर कवयित्री मीना कंडास्वामी ने रोहित की मौत के बाद जो लिखा था वह आज भी मौजू है: 'एक दलित छात्रा की आत्महत्या कोई निजी पलायन की रणनीति नहीं होती, दरअसल वह उस समाज के शर्म में डूबने की घड़ी होती है, जिसने उसे समर्थन नहीं दिया।
