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The Social Media Crisis

Why Facebook and other "platforms" must be made liable for their content

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The controversy over content moderation at Facebook has descended into personalities, eclipsing (as perhaps both government and industry would like) the larger and more important issues.

Social media "platforms", which enable their users to publish their thoughts and emotions directly, have become the largest and most influential media companies on the planet. They now tightly oligopolise the digital advertising market that they have transformed through large-scale privacy invasion. These are directed against those very users who make and consume their "content", whose every breath and movement online they have arranged to spy on.

Because these companies watch everyone, read everything on their platforms (and, through their "like" buttons and URL-shorteners, much of what people read everywhere else on the Web), they have destroyed the anonymity of reading, which is crucial to the fundamental freedom of thought. If every book, newspaper and placard had been reporting every reader at headquarters for the last 500 years, the basic foundations of democracy and human rights would never have come into existence. Thanks to Facebook, Google, Twitter, TikTok, WeChat and their ilk – now they do.

These companies can exist, however, only because the law ignores the bad consequences of their actions, which it has never done for other publishers. Newspapers or broadcasters who publish harmful lies that cause harm to people in their lives face important legal consequences, not at the hands of the state, but because law provides private citizens protection against wrong. The platform companies have succeeded in placing themselves outside the sphere of mutual social responsibility. They do this by hiding behind the users once again.

In India, immunity is provided under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act under which intermediaries upon receiving actual knowledge of a court order and/ or the notification by the appropriate government agency must expeditiously remove the content to avail this immunity. The irony at the heart of the current crisis is that no government wants the local or multinational platform

companies to be mere conduits. They all require the platforms to regulate and edit their content – to prevent copyright infringement, to block hate speech, to implement "the right to be forgotten", or to further the corrupt purposes of political leadership.

As businesses subject to government regulation, and in receipt of the de facto or de jure privilege of inflicting harm on private citizens without legal responsibility, the platform companies must constantly negotiate with political power. The resulting contradiction lies at the heart of the mess that presently existing social media are making of politics and society everywhere. They have risen above the law because they are fictionally supposed never to do what government constantly forces them to do. They comply, and intensively moderate all content that passes through their hands. They do this in order to maintain their indispensable privilege of civil impunity.

Because of this inherent contradiction, further government regulation of the platform companies cannot solve the problem, but can only worsen it. Imposing additional government restrictions or liabilities to the state imposes government-influenced censorship and surveillance on society while continuing the platform oligopolies' impunity and power grabbing in the private sphere. Therefore, the proposed amendment to the Intermediaries Guidelines Rules, 2018, creates more problems than they will solve.

Pressure to put the companies back in the same context of civil liability that other publishers face is therefore growing in the US. Despite the patent falsehood of the myth of the "mere conduit" as things now stand – such pressure will be resisted by all such companies to the bitter end. They will take refuge behind the idea of "free speech", maintaining once again that they are the moral representatives of the users they actually spy on, turn to mulch and sell to advertisers based on their surveillance data.

Twitter was the prime originator of this idea that the oligopoly of surveillance publishing was the protector of free speech. But once Mark Zuckerberg proclaimed that politicians' right to lie on Facebook was a basic part of the system of human rights, the events we are presently witnessing, in all their gossipy reek with sinister background music, became inevitable.

The way out of this swamp is improved social policy based on a better understanding of the internet. These centralised oligarchs of social media are unnecessary technical contrivances, not facts of nature. The internet was built for "federation", not centralisation. In the design of the Net, anyone can offer services like social sharing to anyone else.

Anyone can have a web server to share chat, videos, pictures and online experiences with others, not just Facebook. Anyone can run an email server, not just Gmail. Anyone can run a videoconferencing server that works so robustly that it can meet the needs of higher education, as the professors at the IITs who use the BigBlueButton free software for that purpose can affirm. We don't need Zoom, or local Zoom-like startups, surveilling our communications for ad data, or for any other purpose.

Government needs to foster federated services based on free software ecologies. By returning our technology to real modes of sharing already built into the design and culture of the internet, technology we can all use instead of the platforms, we can build a better and juster society than these giants would ever let us have. Putting science at the disposal of the people is an aspiration from India's past that should be central to its future.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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To Keep Sun Shining On Renewable Power

ET Editorials

There is marked slowdown in solar power capacity addition nationally and the policy regime seems to have taken a turn for the worse. Several states have made solar power costlier for open access consumers. Renewable energy (RE) projects face a new tax, in Rajasthan, for instance. And tariffs are going up on solar cells, modules, inverters and equipment.

The way ahead is to policy-induce better integration of RE with the national grid, rev up flexibility in conventional power supply and boost realisation by power distribution companies (discoms) by doing away with gross, open-ended giveaways. Subsidies, if any, need to be budgeted and provided as direct benefit transfers. We do need to fast-forward RE power for stepped-up energy and environmental security: the current solar power capacity is hardly 40% of the 100 GW target set for 2022. But the resources required for grid integration of RE can no longer be glossed over. Solar or wind power is variable and intermittent. Utility-scale energy storage remains much too costly. Hence the need to back down thermal plants and pay them for making their capacity available. Hydroelectric generation must act as a quick standby, and have adequate infrastructure in place for evacuating the power.

All this calls for large resources and modern systems, such as smart grids and efficient, quick-starting thermal plants. Yet, we seem to have institutionalised reckless giveaways and, concurrently, steep cross-subsidies, with the result that the moribund finances of discoms hugely affect the fiscal position of the concerned states. Our per-capita power consumption remains low, barely a third of the global average. Without the political courage needed to make people pay for the power they consume, a robust power sector is a dream.



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An unserviced sector

Service sector, driver of India's growth, has been left out of Centre's relief package

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The service sector has been a key driver of both the global and Indian economy over the last three decades. The economic reforms since the early Nineties unleashed the potential of the services sector by utilising available skilled manpower due to state-supported higher education. India is probably the only

big economy that didn't follow linear growth theories by jumping from a predominantly agricultural economy to a services-led growth economy without much improvement in manufacturing. The share of manufacturing in India's GDP has remained stagnant around 16 per cent for nearly three decades and we are nowhere near the 2022 target of 25 per cent. As a result, India's growth story has been driven by services, which has a 55 per cent share in the economy. Services exports have outperformed goods exports in the recent years, due to which India's share in the world's commercial services exports has risen steadily over the past decade to reach 3.5 per cent in 2018 — twice the sector's share in the world's merchandise exports,1.7 per cent.

India is fast becoming a major quality service provider. Even before the COVID pandemic set in and just before the nationwide lockdown was announced at the end of March, the sector was booming. The widely-tracked Nikkei India PMI Index stood at 57.5 in February, up from 55.5 in January. However, IHS Markit India Services Index reports that the services sector has been contracting for five consecutive months since March, with an index of 34.2. In PMI jargon, the 50-mark level separates expansion from contraction. Given the uncertainty in the world market and the projected slowdown of developed economies by 8 per cent this year, India's services-led growth has to depend mostly on the domestic economy. Have we done enough to revive the services sector?

The Centre rolled out a whopping Rs 20.9 lakh crore stimulus package to pull the economy out from the ravages of the pandemic. The package had a strong focus on the MSME sector, employee provident fund, power distribution companies and taxation, among other affected areas. Most of the stimulus package is in the form of funding and loan opportunities and, injecting liquidity to the market.

While the package is a beam of hope for some, it has overlooked the plight of the services sector. The sector finds little mention or attention in the government's Atmanirbhar Reform Package. The sector's significance in the economy continues to grow with its share amounting to two-thirds of total FDI inflows into India and about 38 per cent of total exports.

As the post-pandemic world is taking shape, the sector is struggling hard to keep its head above water.

The tourism industry, which contributed nearly 10 per cent of GDP, is now witnessing a large-scale reduction in jobs and operating returns have plummeted to 10 per cent of previous revenues for most. If the CAPA Centre for Aviation is to be believed, the aviation sector is expected to have lost \$3.6 billion in the three months leading up to June. The number of potential job losses in the sector gives an even harder jolt to an already dwindling economy. After holding rounds of meetings with industry representatives and making several references to its condition in speeches, the government is not aloof from the catastrophic consequences suffered by the sector. But its by-stander position would only worsen the situation.

From tourism, aviation, shipping, space to call centres and delivery services, the standstill in activities is bound to have a knock-out effect on employment, production and the economy as a whole. The big picture suggests that the current relief provisions for the primary and secondary sectors would also be nullified as a consequence of neglecting the tertiary sector. An immunity-building exercise through capital infusion and appropriate relaxation in relevant sectors will help the economy to survive the pandemic. Most of the services sectors are the worst affected and unfortunately, we don't see any specific fiscal and monetary stimulus for them. In fact, some sectors would find it difficult to survive if the pandemic continues. In the short run, the government needs to make cuts in VAT, which ranges from 0-

30 per cent on aviation fuel, make provisions for GST holidays, compensate for wages of workers under distress and draft flexible terms for working capital credit.

Since no great incentives were given to this sector in the reform package, it contracted for the fifth successive month in July (34.2 PMI). The government is also in the process of scrapping or rationalising most of the export-incentive schemes affecting both goods and services exports — these including the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS), Services Exports from India Scheme (SEIS), schemes related to export-oriented units and the Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme — due to certain issues raised by the department of revenue and also to make some of these schemes WTO-compliant. This is expected to further hurt exporters. Unless the government focuses on the sector in the forthcoming Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) by announcing schemes-based export incentives and provides interim relief by continuing with the existing schemes in the short run, the sector will take a long time to revive.



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Making agricultural market reforms successful

Consistency in Central policy, complementary reforms and a collaborative Centre-State approach are necessary

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recent reforms in agricultural marketing have brought a sea change in policy. The removal of restrictions under the Essential Commodities Act (ECA) should help attract private investment in agriculture and help farmers of cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onion and potato, who have been adversely affected by the policy regime hitherto that discouraged private investment. The two new ordinances are expected to enable inter-State trade and contract farming, promote providing a large number of options to farmers.

However, there are several difficulties that need to be addressed before the full benefits of these policies are realised. The

first one is what the behavioural economists call the 'time-inconsistency' problem, or in simple terms, the policy credibility problem. This situation arises when a decision maker's preferences change over time in such a way that the preferences are inconsistent at different points in time. Why is this problem relevant in the present context? Because the policy signals are not very clear in the last few years as relates to agricultural marketing, as we will see below.

In 2016, the electronic national agricultural market (e-NAM) was launched with a lot of fanfare. The e-NAM was intended to be a market-based mechanism for efficient price discovery by the farmers. In the first phase, 585 markets across 16 States and 2 Union Territories were covered. States needed to amend their respective Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Acts to put in place three prerequisites for the success of this programme — a single licence across the State; a single-point levy of the market fee; and electronic auctioning in all the markets. Several States could not or did not carry out these amendments and the e-NAM proved to be far less effective than desired.

Policy reversals

As a result, the government reverted back to public price support by launching an ambitious programme, PM-AASHA, in September 2018. The main objective of this programme was to provide an assured price to farmers that ensured a return of at least 50% more than the cost of cultivation. The programme was confined to pulses and oilseeds to limit the fiscal costs, although many other crops, which did not receive the benefits of the MSP-procurement system, also needed this coverage. Public procurement, deficiency payments and private procurement were the main planks of this programme. However, only public procurement was carried out in a meaningful way. Deficiency payments were only implemented on a pilot basis in Madhya Pradesh and private procurement was not initiated, even on a pilot basis, in any State. However, the initial budgetary outlay did not match the level of ambition of the programme. An outlay of only ₹4721 crore was made in 2018-19. A study by the Institute of Economic Growth at the time showed that the programme needed a much larger outlay to provide comprehensive coverage. The initial outlay further dwindled to ₹321 crore in 2019-2020 and only ₹500 crore have been earmarked in 2020-2021. In addition to the PM-AASHA programme, two Model Acts were formulated by the Central government in 2017 and 2018 to promote agricultural marketing and contract farming in States. States were required to legislate these Model Acts. However, progress has been tardy and many States have not adopted the Model Acts. This uninspiring performance of PM-AASHA necessitated a more radical and direct approach. Thus evolved the PM-KISAN, a direct cash transfer programme, in the interim Budget of 2019-2020 (February 2019). This programme involved a fixed payment of ₹6,000 per annum to each farm household with a budgetary outlay of ₹75,000 crore. This programme has worked reasonably well so far with many States topping up the amount at their end. With the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, improving the market functioning received renewed attention. E-NAM has been scaled up to cover 415 more markets, farmers have been allowed to sell and transport directly from registered warehouses and Farmer Produce Organisations (FPOs) and app-based transport services have been devised. Taking this thrust further, the government announced a slew of reforms on May 15, including the major marketing reforms mentioned above.

However, some of the issues that impeded the success of the earlier initiatives still remain. The frequent flip-flops in farm policy — from a market-based e-NAM to a public funded PM-AASHA and now back to market-based measures — may not inspire much confidence in the minds of private investors about the continuance of the present policies. This may result in the investors adopting a wait-and-watch approach.

Better coordination

The second issue is the Centre-State and State-State relations. Although the Ordinances were passed by the Central Government using the constitutional provisions, the implementation of the same vests with the States. Also, inter-State trade involves movement of goods across the State boundaries. Thus, coordination between the Central and the State governments, and also among various States becomes crucial. Also, the States must have faced several problems in legislating and implementing the earlier Model Acts. Thus, the Centre must engage with the States about these constraints in order to iron out the potential problems in implementation of the ordinances. Such a consultative and conciliatory approach will also minimise friction between the Centre and the States when the ordinances come up before Parliament.

The third important issue is the multiple market failures and the resultant inter-linkage of rural markets. Absence or failure of credit and insurance markets may lead a farmer to depend upon the local input dealer or the middleman to meet his/her farming needs. This, in turn, may tie him to these intermediaries and constrain his choice of output markets. Similarly, the widespread restrictions on land leasing in many States lead to inefficient scale of production. Thus, reforms in the output market alone are not sufficient and must be supplemented and complemented with liberalisation of the lease market and better access to credit and insurance markets.

In conclusion, consistency in policy, collaborative approach and complementary reforms are necessary for the success of the recent agricultural market reforms.

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Bringing the Internet to everyone

For everyone to access the same economic opportunities, we need to bridge the digital divide

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The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the influence of technology in our lives. We live in times where we can buy or sell anything online. We get quality access to healthcare, government services and education online. Payment gateways enable us to make cashless transactions. Verifications and signatures are digitised. Communication devices and platforms enable us to stay in touch with one another. The meals we desire are delivered home. We can teach students, mobilise crowds, conduct conferences or meetings, hold digital political rallies, all within the comfort of our homes. Even amidst this pandemic, technology enables some of us to stay within the safety of our homes, survive and even thrive. Technological giants like Google, Facebook, and TCS have allowed their employees to work from home for the foreseeable future. While the world struggles with an economic downturn, the video-conferencing platform Zoom managed a jaw-dropping 300 million downloads within a quarter of a financial year. These are just a few indicators of trends fast emerging during these times.

Marginalised and isolated

Meanwhile, a substantial section of our population, including the urban poor, the elderly and those in remote areas, find themselves marginalised and isolated because of their inability to navigate the digital space. They find themselves unable to get access to health and welfare alerts, critical services, engage in upskilling or learning, or take part in economic activities without potentially exposing themselves to the virus.

Kerala, my home State, with India's second highest Internet penetration rate, is attempting to conduct all its classes for this academic year online. It is a case in point of the digital divide. With the COVID-19 outbreak, thousands of underprivileged students suddenly found themselves left out of all avenues of learning in the most literate State. One teenage girl without a smartphone even died by suicide allegedly because she couldn't attend online classes. This must deeply prick our conscience.

Last mile connectivity

In 2016, the UN General Assembly passed a non-binding resolution that declared Internet access as a human right. However this hasn't translated to affirmative governmental action. In 2011, the Indian government launched the National Optical Fibre Network project for providing broadband connectivity to 2,50,000 Gram Panchayats. In 2015, the programme was renamed Bharat Net and integrated into the Modi government's Digital India initiative. It included plans for tying up with and subsidising 4G telecom operators for setting up 700,000 Wi-Fi hotspots spread across each of our villages for last mile connectivity. But the rate of Internet penetration still stands at 50%.

Internet connectivity has to be ensured in our remotest areas by accelerating the deployment of additional optical fibres, wireless technology, drones and satellites. Community access points have to be installed in every nook and corner to ensure that even those who lack their own devices can access the digital space. The Punjab government has just started distributing 1.75 lakh free smartphones to its students. There have to many more initiatives of distribution of subsidised smart devices along with low cost data plans to lower income groups for us to have a fair chance in bridging our digital divide.

The National Education Policy 2020 advocates greater integration of technology. However, India still lacks a concrete roadmap for ICT training in various proficiency levels for our diverse population segments. Staying connected online has become a necessity for us to survive this pandemic. The post-COVID world will be more digitised than before. Those with the ability to navigate the digital landscape would get more economic opportunities and receive more avenues of social mobility than others. Therefore it should be our priority to ensure basic digital literacy and Internet connectivity for every Indian.



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जागरूकता जरूरी

गत जून माह में तीन अध्यादेशों के जिरये लागू किए गए कृषि विपणन सुधारों को लेकर विरोध प्रदर्शन का जो सिलिसला शुरू हुआ वह इस बात का स्पष्ट संकेत है कि इन उपायों के कुछ किसान समर्थक पहलुओं को लेकर किस तरह गलतफहमी व्याप्त है। ये सुधार काफी समय से लंबित थे और इन्होंने कृषि उपज विपणन समितियों (एपीएमसी) का एकाधिकार तोइते हुए किसानों को यह आजादी प्रदान की है कि वे अपनी उपज जिसे चाहे, जहां चाहे बेच सकते हैं। निजी कृषि बाजार स्थापित करने से एपीएमसी मंडियों को प्रतिस्पर्धा मिलना भी सुनिश्चित हुआ है। मंडी परिसर के बाहर जिन वस्तुओं का कारोबार होगा उन्हें बाजार शुल्क से भी रियायत प्रदान की गई है। बहरहाल जैसी कि आशा की जा रही थी, इन कदमों को लेकर विभिन्न अंशधारकों मसलन राज्य सरकारों, एपीएमसी, व्यापारियों और किसानों की प्रतिक्रिया उनके हितों के मुताबिक अलग-अलग रही। मतों का यह अंतर कई राज्यों की कृषि मंडियों में हालिया हड़ताल के दौरान भी नजर आया।

अधिकांश राज्य सरकारों ने केंद्र की पहल पर इन बदलावों को खुले दिल से या कुछ रद्दोबदल के साथ स्वीकार कर लिया है। इनमें वे राज्य भी शामिल हैं जो शुरुआत में हिचिकचा रहे थे। परंतु कुछ अन्य राज्यों ने इसे संघवाद पर हमला बताया है क्योंकि कृषि राज्यों की विषयवस्तु है। उत्तर प्रदेश, मध्य प्रदेश, गुजरात, ओडिशा और तिमलनाडु जैसे कुछ राज्यों को इस अध्यादेश से कोई दिक्कत नहीं क्योंकि वे पहले ही अपने एपीएमसी अधिनियम में बदलाव करके मंडी से बाहर कृषि जिंसों के लेनदेन को मंजूरी दे चुके हैं। पंजाब अवश्य अपवाद बना हुआ है। कांग्रेसनीत पंजाब सरकार केंद्र के कदम को लगातार निम्नतर दिखाने का प्रयास कर रही है जबिक हकीकत में वह स्वयं अपने एपीएमसी दर्जे में बदलाव कर चुकी है और कमोबेश वैसी ही इजाजत दे चुकी है जैसी अध्यादेश में उल्लिखित है। पंजाब सरकार राज्य के अधिकार क्षेत्र में घुसपैठ का हवाला देते हुए इसे अदालत में चुनौती देने की धमकी भी दे रही है। हालांकि विधिक जानकारों का कहना है कि संविधान केंद्र को ऐसे हस्तक्षेप की अनुमित देता है और यह विरोध राजनीति प्रेरित है।

उधर, एपीएमसी और व्यापारियों का एक धड़ा कृषि बाजार में खुलेपन को लेकर अलग तरह की दिक्कतें बता रहा है। बल्कि कहा जाए तो मंडी शुल्क को लेकर वे एक दूसरे के आमने-सामने हैं। मंडी में काम करने वाले व्यापारी (आढ़ितये) चाहते हैं कि इस शुल्क को समाप्त किया जाए ताकि उन्हें उन लोगों के समान कारोबारी माहौल मिल सके जो मंडी के बाहर बिना किसी शुल्क के कारोबार कर रहे हैं। उधर, एपीएमसी इसे बरकरार रखना चाहती है क्योंकि यह उनके फंड का प्राथमिक स्रोत है। इस पर तत्काल ध्यान देना आवश्यक है। इन सुधारों को जिन किसानों के फायदे के लिए अंजाम दिया गया है वे भी एकमत नहीं हैं, हालांकि अधिकांश ने इसे सही कदम बताया है। किसानों का एक धड़ा सुधार विरोधी लॉबी द्वारा प्रसारित गलत सूचनाओं से प्रभावित होकर इससे विमुख है। वाम रुझान वाले किसान संगठन इन सुधारों को न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य और सरकारी खरीद की व्यवस्था खत्म करने की दिशा में उठाया गया कदम बता रहे हैं। उनका कहना है कि इससे व्यापारियों द्वारा किसानों के शोषण की आशंका बढ़ेगी। ऐसे में इन आशंकाओं से निपटने के लिए गहन जागरूकता अभियान की आवश्यकता है। किसानों को आश्वस्त करना होगा कि मौजूदा मंडी ढांचे और समर्थन मूल्य पर खरीद प्रणाली को समाप्त करने की कोई योजना नहीं है। प्रस्तावित उपाय प्रमुख रूप से किसानों के लिए विपणन चयन बढ़ाने से संबंधित हैं। इसके अलावा यह सुनिश्चित करना भी जरूरी है कि मंडी के बाहर अपनी उपज बेच रहे किसानों को समय पर पूरा भुगतान मिले। अन्यथा इन सुधारों का मूल उद्देश्य ही पूरा न हो सकेगा।



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भारत को तरजीह

संपादकीय

भारत के प्रति श्रीलंका की ताजा सकारात्मक टिप्पणी सराहनीय और स्वागत योग्य है। एक पड़ोसी देश की ओर से यह भलमनसाहत ऐसे समय में सामने आई है, जब भारत को इसकी ज्यादा जरूरत है। श्रीलंका के विदेश सचिव जयंत कोलंबेज ने साफ कर दिया है कि उनका देश 'इंडिया फस्ट' की नीति की पालना करेगा। यह नीति न केवल रणनीतिक, बिल्क सुरक्षा मामलों में भी कायम रहेगी। श्रीलंकाई विदेश सचिव की बात को इसलिए भी गंभीरता से लेने की जरूरत है, क्योंकि उन्होंने यह टिप्पणी राष्ट्रपति गोटबाया राजपक्षे के हवाले से की है। यह बात हमारे मनोबल को बढ़ाने वाली है कि श्रीलंका भारत के लिए कर्तई रणनीतिक खतरा नहीं बनना चाहता। श्रीलंका को भारत से लाभ लेना चाहिए और इसी दिशा में उसकी विदेश नीति सक्रिय है। जहां तक सुरक्षा की बात है, तो इतिहास गवाह है, भारत ने खुद को जोखिम में डालकर भी श्रीलंका को सुरक्षित करने की कोशिश की है। दोनों के बीच केवल रणनीतिक-आर्थिक ही नहीं, बिल्क सामुदायिक-सामाजिक रिश्ते रहे हैं। दोनों की संस्कृतियों में कमोबेश समानता रही है। लिट्टे के दौर में भी दोनों देशों की सरकारों के बीच कभी रिश्ते पटरी से नहीं उतरे।

हरेक देश को अपने हित में फैसले लेने और दुनिया के अन्य देशों से संबंध बनाने की जरूरत पड़ती है और इसमें कोई गलत बात नहीं है। श्रीलंकाई विदेश सचिव ने भी यही कहा है कि अपनी आर्थिक समृद्धि के लिए हम अन्य देशों के साथ भी संबंध बढ़ाएंगे। अपने हित में किसी भी देश को एक तटस्थ विदेश नीति की जरूरत पड़ती ही है और दुनिया में कूटनीतिक संबंधों को संभालने का यही सही तरीका भी है। भारत की ओर से भी दुनिया के तमाम देशों के साथ अच्छे संबंध रहे हैं। किसी देश से दुश्मनी की सोच भारत में कभी नहीं रही। यहां तक कि पाकिस्तान को भी हमने लंबे समय तक व्यापार के मामलों में तरजीही मुल्क का दर्जा दे रखा था। चीन को हमने भारत में फैलने की कितनी आजादी दी, यह बात दुनिया से छिपी नहीं है। दक्षिण एशिया में अगर पाकिस्तान और चीन को छोड़ दें, तो कमोबेश सभी देशों से भारत के संबंध अच्छे रहे हैं और परस्पर सहयोग और सबकी तरक्की में भारत की भी एक भूमिका रही है।

दुनिया जानती है, चीन दक्षिण एशिया में भारत के पड़ोसियों को लुभाता रहा है। एक समय उसने श्रीलंका को भी लुभाया था। श्रीलंका ने खुशी में अपना एक महत्वपूर्ण बंदरगाह चीन को लीज पर सौंप दिया। रणनीतिक रूप से महत्वपूर्ण हंबनटोटा बंदरगाह को लेकर की गई गलती को श्रीलंकाई विदेश सचिव ने स्वीकार किया है, तो यह बात सभी के लिए गौर करने की है। आज दबंग दिखते चीन से हुए किसी समझौते को भूल मानना एक बड़ी बात है और यह भूल मानते हुए भारत को प्राथमिकता देने की घोषणा तो इतिहास में दर्ज करने लायक टिप्पणी है। श्रीलंका की इस स्वीकारोक्ति पर तमाम देशों का ध्यान जाना चाहिए। भारत ऐसा देश नहीं है, जो मदद करने के बाद किसी देश को समर्पण के लिए मजबूर करता हो। भारत ऐसा देश नहीं है, जो किसी की हथेली पर कुछ रखने के बाद उसकी बांह मरोड़ता हो। श्रीलंका के

सता-प्रतिष्ठान को अतीत में भारत की तुलना में चीन के अधिक निकट देखा गया था, लेकिन अब वहां सोच में जो सुधार नुमाया है, तो उसे बल देने के लिए भारत को भी हरसंभव पहल जारी रखनी चाहिए।



Date: 27-08-20

अवसरों को आसान बनाने की कोशिश

डॉ. जितेंद्र सिंह ,(लेखक केंद्रीय मंत्री हैं)

कंद्रीय कैबिनेट ने राष्ट्रीय भर्ती एजेंसी (एनआरए) के गठन को मंजूरी देकर ऐतिहासिक पहल की है। इस फैसले पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने उचित ही कहा कि सरकार की यह पहल करोड़ों युवाओं के लिए एक वरदान साबित होगी। इससे तमाम तरह की परीक्षाएं देने की जरूरत नहीं होगी और युवाओं के कीमती समय एवं संसाधनों की बचत होगी। एनआरए की स्थापना से पारदर्शिता को भी काफी बढ़ावा मिलेगा। एनआरए नामक संस्था ग्रुप बी और सी (गैर-तकनीकी) पदों के लिए उम्मीदवारों को शॉर्टलिस्ट करने के लिए एक साझा सामान्य पात्रता परीक्षा (सीईटी) आयोजित करेगी। वर्तमान में केंद्र सरकार की नौकरियों के लिए हर साल करीब ढाई से तीन करोड़ उम्मीदवार अलग-अलग परीक्षाएं देते हैं, जो विभिन्न एजेंसियों द्वारा आयोजित की जाती हैं, लेकिन अब अगले साल से एनआरए एक सीईटी आयोजित करेगा। इसमें प्राप्त अंकों के आधार पर कोई भी उम्मीदवार संबंधित विभागों में रिक्त पदों के लिए अवेदन कर सकेगा। इस प्रकार यह रोजगार की तलाश करने वाले लाखों युवाओं के जीवन को सरल बनाने के लिए एक क्रांतिकारी कदम से कम नहीं है।

पिछले छह वर्षों में प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के नेतृत्व में प्रशासनिक सुधारों की दिशा में कई कदम उठाए गए हैं। इसी क्रम में दस्तावेजों को किसी राजपित अधिकारी द्वारा सत्यापित कराने की पुरानी प्रथा को खत्म करते हुए स्व-सत्यापन का प्रावधान किया गया है। इसके अलावा निचले स्तर के कर्मचारियों के चयन के लिए साक्षात्कार को खत्म करना, 1500 से अधिक अप्रचलित नियमों/कानूनों को समाप्त करना, आइएएस अधिकारियों के लिए उनके करियर की शुरुआत में तीन महीने के लिए केंद्र सरकार में सहायक सचिव के रूप में अनिवार्य कार्यकाल तय करना आदि शामिल हैं। एनआरए एक अनोखा मॉडल है। इससे सरकारी भर्ती प्रक्रिया में उल्लेखनीय बदलाव सुनिश्चित होगा। विभिन्न भर्ती परीक्षाओं का आयोजन न केवल उम्मीदवारों के लिए, बल्कि संबंधित भर्ती एजेंसियों के लिए भी एक बड़ा बोझ होता है, क्योंकि इसमें अनावश्यक खर्च, कानून व्यवस्था एवं सुरक्षा और जगह संबंधी तमाम समस्याएं शामिल होती हैं। एनआरए के जिरये इन सभी समस्याओं को खत्म करने की कोशिश की गई है। इसके तहत देश के प्रत्येक जिले में परीक्षा केंद्र तक अभ्यर्थियों के पहुंचने के लिए सुविधाओं को बेहतर किया जाएगा। साथ ही देश के 117 आकांक्षी जिलों में परीक्षा संबंधी बुनियादी ढांचे के निर्माण पर विशेष ध्यान दिया जाएगा, तािक अभ्रियथयों को उनके निवास स्थान के समीप परीक्षा केंद्रों तक पहुंचने में आसािनी हो सके।

एनआरए के जिरये ग्रामीण युवाओं के लिए मॉक टेस्ट आयोजित करने की भी परिकल्पना की गई है। इसकी हेल्पलाइन एवं शिकायत निवारण पोर्टल होंगे। सीईटी की एक अन्य बड़ी विशेषता यह है कि इसमें हासिल अंक परिणाम की घोषणा की तारीख से अगले तीन साल की अविध के लिए वैध रहेंगे। सीईटी में शामिल होने के लिए उम्मीदवार द्वारा किए जाने वाले प्रयासों की संख्या पर कोई पाबंदी नहीं होगी, लेकिन वह उम्मीदवार की ऊपरी आयु सीमा पर निर्भर करेगा। अनुसूचित जाति, अनुसूचित जनजाति, अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग एवं अन्य श्रेणियों के उम्मीदवारों को सरकार की मौजूदा नीति के अनुसार ऊपरी आयु सीमा में छूट दी जाएगी। यह उम्मीदवारों के लिए काफी सुविधाजनक होगा, क्योंकि फिलहाल उन्हें इन परीक्षाओं की तैयारी करने और उनमें शामिल होने के लिए हर साल काफी मेहनत करनी पड़ती है, जिससे उनके समय और धन की बर्बादी होती है।

एनआरए सभी गैर-तकनीकी पदों के लिए 10वीं, 12वीं और स्नातक पास उम्मीदवारों के लिए तीन स्तरों पर एक सीईटी आयोजित करेगा। वर्तमान में इन पदों के लिए परीक्षाओं का आयोजन कर्मचारी चयन आयोग (एसएससी), रेलवे भर्ती बोर्ड (आरआरबी) और बैंकिंग कार्मिक चयन संस्थान (आइबीपीएस) द्वारा किया जाता है। सीईटी स्तर पर की गई स्क्रीनिंग के आधार पर अंतिम चयन के लिए संबंधित भर्ती एजेंसियों द्वारा विशिष्ट स्तरों पर अलग-अलग परीक्षाओं का आयोजन किया जाएगा। इस परीक्षा का पाठ्यक्रम एक जैसा होगा, जो मानक होगा। इससे अभ्यर्थियों का बोझ काफी हद तक कम हो जाएगा, क्योंकि वर्तमान में उन्हें अलग-अलग पाठ्यक्रमों के अनुसार अलग-अलग परीक्षाओं की तैयारी करनी पइती है। उम्मीदवारों को एक साझा पोर्टल पर पंजीकरण करने और केंद्रों का विकल्प देने की सुविधा होगी। उपलब्धता के आधार पर उन्हें केंद्र आवंटित किए जाएंगे। इसका उद्देश्य एक ऐसे चरण तक पहुंचना है, जहां उम्मीदवार खुद अपनी पसंद के केंद्रों पर परीक्षा दे सकें। इससे देश के विभिन्न हिस्सों में रहने वाले के लोगों को परीक्षा देने में काफी सुविधा होगी और उन्हें चयन के लिए समान अवसर मिलेगा।

हिंदी और अंग्रेजी के अलावा 12 अन्य भाषाओं में इस परीक्षा का आयोजन किया जाएगा। इसके साथ ही संविधान की 8वीं अनुसूची में उल्लिखित सभी भाषाओं को इसमें शामिल करने का प्रयास किया जाएगा। शुरुआत में सीईटी का उपयोग तीन प्रमुख भर्ती एजेंसियों द्वारा किया जाएगा, जबिक समय के साथ इसे केंद्र सरकार की अन्य भर्ती एजेंसियों द्वारा अपनाए जाने की उम्मीद है। यदि सार्वजनिक एवं निजी क्षेत्र की अन्य भर्ती एजेंसियां भी चाहें तो इसका इस्तेमाल कर सकती हैं। इस प्रकार सहकारी संघवाद की भावना के अनुरूप दीर्घाविध में सीईटी के परिणाम को राज्य सरकारों/केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों, सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के उपक्रमों और निजी क्षेत्र की अन्य भर्ती एजेंसियों के साथ साझा किया जा सकता है।