

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Date:07-01-21

Raise Bank Capital From the Public

ET Editorial

Public sector banks (PSBs) must swiftly be recapitalised, given looming bad loans and write-offs. The choice is between capital infusion by the majority owner, the State, and raising capital, equity and debt, from the public. The banks and their owner, the State, should opt for public issues to shore up bank capital. Capital is available in plenty from the far corners of the world, and cheap. The real question is, can supervision and regulation improve to a level that inspires sufficient investor confidence to draw in the capital required? We urge the government to have a serious go at such improvement, and the result would, in tandem with the creation of a vibrant market for corporate bonds that relieves banks of the risk of funding long-gestation projects they are ill-suited to finance, create well-capitalised banks that are answerable to savvy shareholders on the board.

Serious write-offs for banks are inevitable, whether a bad bank is created to buy assets off the PSBs or the bankruptcy code is put to use for the resolution of bad loans. The writing off of a bad loan means that the bank would have to make 100% provisioning (setting aside capital) against the loan to protect depositors even if that loan is not repaid, and clean-up its books. Banks wrote off a whopping Rs 2,37,876 crore in 2019-20 that enabled them to show lower NPAs, but RBI has warned that the modest NPA ratio of 7.5% at end-September 2020 'veils the strong undercurrent of slippage'. It makes eminent sense for banks to raise equity capital from the public, rather than from the government that burdens the taxpayer while recapitalising banks. After all, broad-based shareholding is feasible as banking is seen as a safe business: banks have a guaranteed clientele besides a growing depositor base, and face limited competition.

Raising equity from the public will, besides giving the government fiscal room, help lower State ownership below 51%, giving PSBs leeway to step outside the shadow of vigilance supervision and to fix their own remuneration plans.

Date:07-01-21

Cybercrime: Gear Up To Hack the Hackers

ET Editorial

A spectre is haunting the new year, one more frightening than the virus with the spike protein: the spectre of cybercrime. Data is being stolen and hawked on the Dark Web, ransomware freezes vital computer systems till its implanter is paid off, spyware steals vital data and intelligence, compromises corporate secrets and national security. As digitisation grows in extent and pace, the universe of

predation expands in tandem. Work from home (WFH) increases the vulnerability to cyberattacks manifold. Companies, especially small and medium businesses, need guidance and assistance to ward off this menace.

Cybercrime is a threat, but also an opportunity. Large, system-level technology providers, of web and application servers, must take on the challenge. The large-scale, months-long breach of vital US government departments by alleged Russian hackers was managed through an update to a network management tool supplied by SolarWinds. Whether companies and governments can afford to rely on a number of different software providers is open to question. If that means loss of competition and specialisation, a new breed of software integrators who filter all software and upgrades with forensic rigour must enter the picture. For ordinary citizens who happily download and instal all manner of apps on their phones, agreeing to terms that they hardly ever bother to read through, safety perhaps lies in mandating the stores from where apps are downloaded, hosted, for the most part, by Google and Apple, to show more rigour in keeping malware out.

The first task is for the government to secure its own systems and create a protocol for employee conduct to ensure that lax individual security habits do not become the system's Achilles heel.



Date:07-01-21

The Wrong Answer

Punitive responses to sexual violence need rethink, given perverse consequences

Neetika Vishwanath and Preeti Pratishruti Dash, [The writers are with Project 39A at the National Law University, Delhi]



On Human Rights Day 2020, the Maharashtra cabinet approved the Shakti Bill, enlarging the scope of harsher and mandatory sentences — including the death penalty — for non-homicidal rape, to purportedly deter sexual offences. The Bill also introduces a problematic standard of consent and allows decision-makers to presume consent from the conduct and circumstances surrounding the incident. Harsher sentences have had perverse consequences on the already low rates

of rape convictions. Besides, the new standard of consent poses the serious risk of reinforcing myths, including regressive notions about “ideal” rape victim.

The Shakti Bill comes amid the recent legislative trend to invoke the death penalty for sexual offences, beginning with the introduction of the death penalty for child rape in 2018. In 2020, the Andhra Pradesh government passed the Disha Bill, pending presidential assent, that provides the death penalty for the rape of adult women.

The death penalty is the last phase of a criminal trial while rape survivors face serious obstacles much earlier, especially at the time of registration of the complaint. The most severe gaps in the justice delivery system are related to reporting a police complaint. The focus of the criminal justice system, therefore, needs to shift from sentencing and punishment to the stages of reporting, investigation and victim-support mechanisms. The bill does not address these concerns.

Second, harsh penalties often have the consequence of reducing the rate of conviction for the offence. For instance, a study by one of us published in the Indian Law Review based on rape judgments in Delhi shows a lower rate of conviction after the removal of judicial discretion in 2013. Introducing harsher penalties does not remove systemic prejudices from the minds of judges and the police, who might refuse to register complaints, or acquit offenders in cases they do not consider as “serious” enough to warrant a mandatory minimum.

Third, studies on child sexual abuse have shown that in the few cases of convictions, the minimum sentence was the norm and the award of the maximum punishment was an exception. Moreover, crime data from the National Crime Records Bureau shows that in 93.6 per cent of these cases, the perpetrators were known to the victims. Introducing capital punishment would deter complainants from registering complaints. The Shakti Bill ignores crucial empirical evidence on these cases.

The other anti-women assertion in the bill is the move away from the standard of affirmative consent in cases involving adult victims and offenders. Significant advocacy from the women’s movement led to the introduction of an affirmative standard of consent, rooted in unequivocal voluntary agreement by women through words, gestures or any form of verbal or non-verbal communication. In a sharp departure, the bill stipulates that valid consent can be presumed from the “conduct of the parties” and the “circumstances surrounding it”. Rape trials continue to be guided by misogynistic notions, expecting survivors to necessarily resist the act, suffer injuries and appear visibly distressed. The vaguely worded explanation in the bill holds dangerous possibilities of expecting survivors to respond only in a certain manner, thus creating the stereotype of an “ideal” victim. It also overlooks the fact that perpetrators are known to the survivors in nearly 94 per cent of rapes, which often do not involve any brutal violence.

The Shakti Bill, while serving the populist agenda of making the public believe that the state is doing “something”, does not achieve more than that. Tackling crimes against women and children requires broader social reforms, sustained governance efforts and strengthening investigative and reporting mechanisms, instead of merely enhancing punishment. Punitive responses to sexual violence need serious rethinking, given the multitude of perverse consequences and their negligible role in addressing the actual needs of rape survivors.

Plugging the privacy gaps

Personal Data Protection Bill 2019 needs to be debated thoroughly. It provides an opportunity for India to forge an agenda that will act as a standard-setter in national data protection legislation

Christophe Jaffrelot and Aditya Sharma, [Jaffrelot is senior research fellow at CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS, Paris, professor of Indian Politics and Sociology at King's India Institute, London; Sharma is a student of political science at Columbia University, New York]

In recent years, the question of privacy has loomed large over the global legal, political, and commercial imagination, and India is no exception.

As per *Puttuswamy v India* (2017), privacy is a fundamental right. This was an important development. When previous cases on privacy had come before the Supreme Court, most notably *MP Sharma v. Satish Chandra* (1954) and *Kharak Singh v. Uttar Pradesh* (1962), the judges had declared that while in certain circumstances the privacy of individuals was to be protected, there was no constitutional right to privacy in and of itself.

But a Supreme Court ruling is certainly not enough. The relentless march of global technology and the implementation of the Aadhaar biometric programme, in particular, have created the need to take a new look at the legal position of privacy in India.

The main battleground of privacy today, as demonstrated by Aadhaar and many others cases, is data, an intangible product that now forms the basis of much of the world economy and carries staggering political capital. The rising importance of data has pushed over 80 countries to pass national laws protecting the collection and use of their citizens' data by companies and the government. Sometime in the near future, India will join them as the Personal Data Protection Bill 2019 (DPB) is currently under consideration by a parliamentary committee.

The DPB will have huge commercial and political consequences for India. According to Ernst and Young, emerging technologies in India will create \$1 trillion in economic value by 2025. Much of this value will be founded on the creation, use, and sale of data, and the DPB will have immense implications as firms scramble to meet new privacy regulations.

The bill establishes a number of conditions for companies to follow, and for large international tech firms that wish to operate in Indian territory. For one, it would require digital firms to obtain permission from users before collecting their data. It also declares that users who provide data are, in effect, the owners of their own data. This has major implications, suggesting that users are able to control the data their online selves produce, and may request firms to delete it, just as European internet-users are able to exercise a "right to be forgotten" and have evidence of their online presence removed.

But the bill does not protect individuals against the Indian government as effectively. It stipulates that "critical" or "sensitive" personal data, related to information such as religion, or to matters of national security, must be accessible to the government if needed to protect national interest. Critics have suggested that such open-ended access could lead to misuse. Even B N Srikrishna, who chaired the

committee that drafted the original bill, warned that government-access exemptions risk creating an “Orwellian state”.

There is enough reason to worry indeed. The bill outlines the establishment of a Data Protection Authority (DPA), which will be charged with managing data collected by the Aadhaar programme. It will be led by a chairperson and six committee members, appointed by the central government on the recommendation of a selection committee. But this committee will be composed of senior civil servants, including the Cabinet Secretary, raising questions about the board’s independence. The government’s power to appoint and remove members at its discretion also stokes fears about its ability to influence this ostensibly independent agency. Unlike similar institutions, such as the Reserve Bank of India or the Securities and Exchange Board, the DPA will not have an independent expert or member of the judiciary on its governing committee. The UIDAI, for its part, has a chairperson appointed by the central government and reporting directly to the Centre.

The need to protect individual freedom is particularly acute as recent developments have suggested that India was acquiring some features of a surveillance state. For instance, the government of India has resorted increasingly to facial recognition whereas using this technique violates privacy rights. After the anti-CAA protests and the Delhi riots, Home Minister Amit Shah declared, “Police have identified 1,100 people through facial recognition technology. Nearly 300 people came from Uttar Pradesh. It was a planned conspiracy.” How could the police know? It seems that the footage procured from CCTV, media persons and the public was matched with photographs stored in the database of Election Commission and e-Vahan, a pan-India database of vehicle registration maintained by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Aside from the controversy surrounding the Aadhaar programme, the most recent indication of the Indian government’s casual treatment of its citizens’ privacy was the backlash to the Aarogya Setu contact-tracing app, developed to track the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government first made the app mandatory, but reactions from opposition parties and civil-society groups forced it into backtracking. Technology experts criticised the app for its apparently wanton data collection and its lack of adequate data protection measures. Where are these data stored and who has access to them remain open questions.

These developments do not augur well for the Indian government’s responsibility when it comes to mass data collection and protection. This is why the privacy bill is such an important piece of legislation. The DPB is a unique opportunity for India, a country with some 740 million internet users, to forge a pathbreaking agenda that will act as a standard-setter in the still-developing field of national data protection legislation. Strangely enough, it will not be discussed by the parliamentary committee on Information Technology chaired by Shashi Tharoor, but by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) of 30 MPs, 15 of whom are from the BJP, that is headed by Meenakshi Lekhi. Tharoor has argued that his IT committee holds the mandate to examine the DPB, and has called the government’s decision to refer it to the JPC a “wilful exercise of undermining the House” that shows a “brazen disregard for the Standing Committee”. Will a transparent debate take place in the JPC and then in Parliament for promoting transparency? Such a debate would make Parliament an important power centre again, after the cancellation of the winter session, and the cancellation of the question hours in the previous session.

Friends and partners

There is a huge opportunity to move UK-India economic agenda forward in key areas

Richard Heald, [The writer is group chair, UKIBC]

The New Year is a time to identify new business opportunities and plan on their capture. The rollout of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, which has been approved in the UK and elsewhere, is in large part due to the collaboration between the Pune-based Serum Institute of India and the Wockhardt factory in the UK. With the UK-EU trade agreement finally concluded, the UK can fully devote all its efforts to conclude other trade agreements with key strategic and economic partners, of which India is at the top of the list.

As chair of UK India Business Council (UKIBC), I am very confident that great things can be achieved between Indian and UK businesses. There is a huge opportunity to move the bilateral economic agenda forward in key areas of common interest such as climate change and the green economy, our mutual economic recovery from COVID-19 and the further acceleration of UK-India trade and investment ties. The UKIBC, on behalf of UK business, is fully supportive of this.

Critically, businesses look to governments to create the right environment for businesses — “to do what businesses do” — and, at the same time, to engender confidence in the quality and consistency of decision-making which underpins multibillion-dollar investment decisions in boardrooms around the world.

As such, one hopes that the recent unanimous decision in favour of Cairn Energy PLC in the arbitration court in the Netherlands marks an end to the long-running dispute between Cairn Energy PLC and the Indian government over a retrospective \$1.2 billion tax demand levied in 2015. This has been a painful and protracted process for both parties.

In 2006, I was vice-chair for South and South East Asia for the advisors to Cairn Energy PLC in relation to their Indian exploration assets. I can recall the deliberations amongst the Cairn Energy PLC Board on maintaining a subsidiary in India or spinning the Indian assets off into Cairn India and listing them on the Bombay Stock Exchange.

Everyone recognised and celebrated the new resurgent, self-confident India. Indeed, Cairn Energy PLC was one of the first major global investors to realise that its assets in India needed to be held in an Indian company in which Indians sat on the board, which had Indian senior management, where many of the engineers were Indian and where Indians could invest their savings and benefit directly from its success.

Let us also remember that the success of Cairn India arose from a significant, albeit calculated risk. These were assets which Cairn Energy PLC bought from an international major which had failed to find hydrocarbons on the acreage. The acquisition also required commitment of significant risk capital to drill numerous wells to fully explore the fields in Rajasthan. Once oil was discovered, Cairn Energy PLC then developed these fields and deployed innovative world beating technology to extract the oil and transport it to refineries. All the time, Cairn Energy PLC not only paid all taxes and dues in a timely fashion, but also invested in the local community, creating valuable infrastructure and jobs.

Most boards, then and now, that are looking at making new and substantial investments in any overseas environment go through similar processes, not least because governance norms and their investors require them to do so, but also because the “indigenisation” of their overseas assets often results in greater success. And the encouragement of this thought process, plays to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s policies of Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Having made that decision, Cairn Energy PLC, a then FTSE 100 company on the London Stock Exchange, executed the strategy with full transparency and with the full approval of the relevant regulatory authorities in both the UK and in India. The judgement in favour of Cairn Energy PLC should finally be the end of the matter, allowing all parties to move forward.

Dragging this out further will only prolong the agony for all parties. And for what gain? Challenging the ruling will be costly. And a negative impact could extend beyond “credibility” within the global investment sentiment.

And what of those looking from the side-lines? The boards of companies that have not yet invested in India will be looking for clarity, as will international FDI and FII investors — not least as the Indian government has publicly stated in the past that the decision of the tribunal would be honoured.

On the other hand, a timely and pragmatic settlement of this dispute would lead to an immediate confirmation of the attractiveness of India as an investment destination and importantly on India’s status in the international and domestic debt and equity markets.

How should one contextualise this in the current environment of bilateral economic discussions? Both the UK and Indian governments have declared their joint ambition to work towards a UK India Free Trade Agreement via an enhanced trade partnership. This is a laudable ambition and one that UKIBC fully supports. A timely and pragmatic solution to the Vodafone and Cairn Energy judgments would enhance India’s position at the top table of global economic powers.



Date:07-01-21

The importance of social interactions

A year of being homebound has deepened divisions in a society already fraught with prejudices

Asha Venugopalan, [PhD Student, Department of Political Science, Stony Brook University]

A year of restricting ourselves to the confines of four walls has made us keenly aware of our past exchanges, not only with our families, but also with the larger society. Of the many victims of the COVID-

19 pandemic are social interactions and the millions of friendships that should have formed at schools and workplaces. In a country riven with oppressive prejudices, the past year may have widened the greatest fault line in the Indian society — religion.

Hindus and Muslims constitute not only the largest religious communities in India, but they perhaps also form the pair with the most fraught relations in the recent decade. Still, over the years, children and adults have mitigated the barriers created by socialisation through everyday interactions across religious groups. But what happens when everyone spends a year without forming new friendships or circumscribing their interactions to limited online (or offline) meetings? The pandemic's collateral damage may include tolerance and understanding between the majority and the minority.

Many inequities

The religious identities of Hindus and Muslims have shaped their social ties, their political loyalties and their interaction with the Indian state. The long history of Hindu-Muslim ties in the subcontinent is marred by grotesque violence fuelled by myths, rumours and prejudice.

The prevalence of cow-vigilante violence and 'anti-conversion' laws in recent years stands testimony to the worsening of inter-religious ties and deepening of prejudice by the majority community. In fact, tropes used to concoct fear about the Muslim community in the 1920s, such as 'cow-killers' and 'abductors of Hindu women', have found appeal even in the 21st century. The propagation of such stereotypes and the resulting prejudices allow for, and even normalise, violence against the minority to 'protect the self'. While it would be an exaggeration to claim that every social encounter between members of the two groups is troubled, all is certainly not well in India. The display of prejudice need not take a violent form at all. The refusal to grant tenancy to members of the Muslim community pushes them to seek houses in a more homogenised area, progressively creating ghettos and further fuelling stereotypes. How do you mitigate a prejudice that is so pervasive and intense?

'Contact Hypothesis'

In 1954, Gordon Allport published *The Nature of Prejudice*, which contained, among other analyses of inter-group behaviour, a theory on prejudice. Specifically, it contained a hypothesis on how to reduce prejudice among majority and minority groups, popularly called the 'Contact Hypothesis'. The idea was simple: contact (with some caveats) reduces prejudice. Subsequently, decades of social psychology research arrived at a far simpler idea: friendship reduces prejudice. Could it really be that simple? Could that work in India? The answer to both questions is the same: yes, to some extent.

The empirical evidence largely supports the proposition. Multiple studies have noted that frequent interactions between members of different religious groups vastly reduce negative perceptions and anxiety towards 'the other'. For instance, a youth study in 2017, conducted by Lokniti-CSDS and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, found that 83% of Hindus who had a non-Hindu friend were comfortable having a non-Hindu neighbour, compared to 70% of Hindus who did not have a non-Hindu friend. Another paper discovered that even among people who consume media plentifully, interactions with people outside their community weakens prejudice.

Education, however, presents an interesting puzzle. A recent study finds that college-educated Hindus are more likely than non-literate Hindus to perceive the Muslim community negatively, irrespective of whether they had a friend from the community or not.

Although close interaction may ‘significantly’ reduce prejudices, this reduction is minimal at best. Firstly, the attitudes of suspicion and negativity towards the Muslim minority are deeply entrenched in the Indian society. Secondly, as this newspaper has reported over the last few years, the ghettoisation of Muslims continues to define both urban and rural landscapes. This ensures that most instances of quotidian social interactions — be it an evening tea or meeting at markets — are effectively denied, thereby limiting the building of lasting friendships at workplaces and schools. Thirdly, while Hindu individuals might hold great respect and affection for Muslim friends, they might not hold the same view about the community as a whole since they would consider a Muslim friend to be an ‘exception to the rule’. As a result, whilst interactions do take place and reduce prejudice, they do not cross a threshold already laid down by generations of socialisation and stereotypes.

Redefining the ‘us’

Prejudice is a peculiar phenomenon. It is sustained through time, remains unaffected by even positive interpersonal relations, and provides the ammunition for communalism. Ashutosh Varshney asks in his book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, “Why do Hindus and Muslims live peacefully in Calicut but not in Aligarh?”. The answer, as he notes, lies in civic engagement and redefining the ‘us’. Ties need to be forged not just between individuals, but also across larger communities such that the relationships breach the confines of religious identities and encompass a multitude of identities. Be it local neighbourhood associations, professional unions or linguistic associations, membership of this civil society creates a new ‘us’. It allows society to maintain open lines of communication, even during a pandemic.

During a year in which students and professionals have remained within the confines of their houses, what they have missed out on are unencumbered everyday interactions with their peers. Bonds of camaraderie are built over watercooler chats and rants about bus mates. In the absence of such avenues, it behoves parents, teachers and employers to encourage engagement through social organisations or other forms of safe civic engagement.

Date:07-01-21

Boosting India with maritime domain awareness

Beyond monitoring Chinese activity in the Indian Ocean, India’s initiatives could help generate intraregional synergy

Abhijit Singh, [Retired naval officer and Senior Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi]

The legendary military theorist, Sun Tzu, is once said to have observed that the critical element in battle was foreknowledge, but that it “could not be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations”. As the great Chinese general saw it, foreknowledge could only be gathered with specialised tools and by men who knew the enemy well. A prior reading of the adversary and the theatre of battle, the master tactician asserted, could decisively shift the balance of fortune in war.

Nature of the enemy at sea

In the modern maritime arena, war is a more complex proposition than in the days of Sun Tzu, but 'foreknowledge' is still critical. Today, the enemy at sea is often unrecognisable — a terrorist, a pirate, a criminal or a sea robber — an invisible presence that lurks behind regular actors such as fishermen and port workers. Law enforcement agencies today need to be a lot more vigilant, highly reliant on high-grade sensors and communication networks that observe and track suspicious movements, sharing information in real time. Practitioners describe this state of enhanced consciousness as maritime domain awareness.

Of late, the Indian Navy has been on a drive to improve domain awareness in the Indian Ocean. The Navy is seeking to expand India's surveillance footprint by setting up radar stations in the Maldives, Myanmar and Bangladesh; Mauritius, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka have already integrated into the wider coastal radar chain network. The Indian Navy's efforts seem focused primarily on monitoring Chinese activity in the Eastern Indian Ocean, particularly in the seas around the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Since June 2020, when the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army clashed in Galwan in northern Ladakh,

Indian maritime planners have been wary of the possibility of a greater Chinese presence in the eastern littorals. In recent months, India's P-8I aircraft have scoured the near-seas for People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) submarines, and Indian naval ships have patrolled the Andaman Seas and eastern chokepoints to deter any maritime adventurism by Beijing.

Neighbourhood synergies

But maritime domain awareness is also generating cooperative synergies in the neighbourhood. There are reports that seven Indian Ocean countries — Bangladesh, Myanmar, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius and the Seychelles — will soon post Liaison Officers at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region in Gurugram. . France already has an officer at the IFC, and four other Indo-Pacific navies — Australia, Japan, the U.K and the U.S. — have also agreed to position officers at the centre, fast emerging as the most prominent information hub in the Eastern Indian Ocean.

New Delhi is also upping its engagement in the Western Indian Ocean by positioning a Liaison Officer at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar. Established under the auspices of the Indian Ocean Commission that India joined recently as an 'observer', the RMIFC is a key centre of maritime information in the Western Indian Ocean. India has also posted an officer at the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) in Abu Dhabi to assist in the monitoring of maritime activity in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

The French connection

Delhi's moves in the Western and South Western littorals have been facilitated by France, a key Indian Ocean power and a critical partner for India in the region. Having signed a logistics agreement with New Delhi in 2019, Paris is keen for a stronger partnership in the maritime commons. France has been instrumental in securing 'observer' status for India at the Indian Ocean Commission, and is pushing for greater Indian participation in security initiatives in the Western Indian Ocean. From an operational perspective, however, the Indian Navy's priority remains South Asia, where the naval leadership remains focused on underwater domain awareness in the Eastern Indian Ocean.

China watch

There is concern among maritime watchers that the PLAN may be poised to develop a generation of quieter submarines that would be hard to detect in the near-seas. Three years after the Chinese staged a breakthrough in submarine propulsion by successful testing shaftless rim-driven pump-jets, analysts fear that the next generation of PLAN nuclear submarines could be stealthier than ever, capable of beating adversary surveillance. The recent discovery of a Chinese unmanned underwater vehicle close to a southern Indonesian island suggests that China may already be mapping the undersea terrain in the approaches to the Indian Ocean Region, with a view to advance submarine operations.

Not surprisingly, India has moved to expand its underwater detection capabilities in the Eastern chokepoints. In a bid to enhance surveillance over sensitive sea spaces, the Indian Navy has inducted two Sea Guardian drones on lease from the United States. With nine operational P-8I aircraft, the Navy's coverage of the Bay of Bengal littoral is already considerable. With nine more aircraft planned to be inducted — three under an ongoing contract from the U.S. and six as part of a deal being negotiated with Washington — the surveillance footprint is set to further grow. Speculation abounds that New Delhi might also partner Japan in installing an array of undersea sensors near the Andaman Islands to help detect Chinese submarines.

The real test

India's initiatives in the maritime domain are motivated by more than just strategic considerations. Indian decision makers recognise the need for cooperative tools to fight transnational crime in the littorals. White shipping agreements with 21 countries in the Indian Ocean have enabled a comprehensive picture of maritime traffic, even as efforts are under way to help smaller island states build capacity to combat regional threats. India's military satellite (GSAT-7A) may soon facilitate a real time sharing of maritime information with partners. These endeavours, naval officers say, are a manifestation of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), Prime Minister Narendra Modi's philosophical mantra that advances the idea of India as a 'security provider' and 'preferred partner' in the Indo-Pacific region.

Indian initiatives, however, are yet to bring about an alignment of objectives and strategies of regional littoral states. While cooperative information sharing allows for a joint evaluation of threats, countries do not always share vital information timeously. To bring real change, India must ensure seamless information flow, generating operational synergy with partners, and aim to expand collaborative endeavours in shared spaces. That would be the real test of the maritime domain awareness 'game-changing' potential.



Date:07-01-21

सरकार मानती क्यों नहीं कि कृषि कानून समझा नहीं पाई ?

डॉ. वेदप्रताप वैदिक, (भारतीय विदेश नीति परिषद के अध्यक्ष)

मुझे उम्मीद थी कि सातवें दौर की बातचीत में सरकार और किसान नेता सारे मामले हल कर लेंगे। ऐसा इसलिए लग रहा था कि छठे दौर की बातचीत में दोनों पक्षों ने एक-दूसरे के प्रति सद्भावना का प्रदर्शन किया था। सरकार ने माना था कि वह अपने वायु-प्रदूषण और बिजली-बिल के कानून में संशोधन कर लेगी ताकि किसानों की मुश्किलें कम हों। किसान नेता इतने खुश हुए कि उन्होंने साथ लाया हुआ भोजन मंत्रियों को करवाया और मंत्रियों की चाय भी स्वीकारी। पिछली बैठकों में उन्होंने सरकारी भोजन और चाय लेने से मना कर दिया था। कृषि मंत्री नरेंद्र तोमर ने घोषणा की कि किसानों की 50% मांगें तो सरकार ने मान ही ली हैं। लेकिन सातवें दौर की बैठक शुरू होती, उसके पहले ही किसान नेताओं ने स्पष्ट कर दिया कि असली मसला अपनी जगह खड़ा है। ये छोटी-मोटी मांगें थीं। असली मुद्दा तो यह है कि तीनों कृषि-कानून वापस हों और न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य को कानूनी रूप दिया जाए। सरकार इसके लिए भी तैयार थी कि कोई संयुक्त कमेटी बना दी जाए, जो इन मुद्दों पर भलीभांति विचार करके राय पेश करे। लेकिन सातवें दौर की बातचीत भी बांझ साबित हुई। अब आठवां दौर भी शीघ्र होनेवाला है।

इस बीच दोनों तरफ से कुछ अच्छे संकेत मिले हैं। रक्षा मंत्री राजनाथ सिंह ने किसान आंदोलन को बदनाम करनेवालों को आड़े हाथों लिया है। उसका तार पाकिस्तान और खालिस्तान से जोड़ने की निंदा की है। उन्होंने सिख जवानों द्वारा राष्ट्र-रक्षा के लिए योगदान को सराहा और दूसरी तरफ हमारे किसान भाइयों ने गांधीजी के अहिंसक सत्याग्रहियों की याद ताजा कर दी है। दिल्ली की कड़ाके की ठंड में हजारों किसान शांतिपूर्वक धरने पर डटे हैं। लगभग 55 किसान स्वर्गवासी हो गए और कुछेक ने आत्महत्या भी कर ली। यह ठीक है कि बीच-बीच में रास्ते रोकने के उनके अभियान के कारण यात्रियों को काफी असुविधा हुई लेकिन प्रदर्शनकारी किसानों ने तोड़-फोड़ और हिंसा का सहारा नहीं लिया। यह भारतीय लोकतंत्र की श्रेष्ठता का परिचायक है। उन्होंने राजनीतिक नेताओं को भी प्रत्यक्षतः अपने आंदोलन में शामिल नहीं होने दिया।

इसके बावजूद लग रहा है कि 8 जनवरी को होनेवाली अगली बैठक में भी इस समस्या का हल मुश्किल है। दोनों पक्षों ने अपनी-अपनी राय को प्रतिष्ठा का प्रश्न बना लिया है। सरकार ने थोड़ी नरमी जरूर दिखाई है। उसका कहना है कि इन कानूनों के हर प्रावधान पर खुलकर बात हो। किसान नेता संशोधन सुझाएं। सरकार की कोशिश होगी कि वह उन्हें मान ले। यदि ऐसा है तो किसान नेता संशोधन पर संशोधन क्यों नहीं सुझा देते ? इन तीनों कानूनों में ऐसा जोड़-घटाव कर दें कि वे फिर पहचाने ही न जा सकें। उनका रहना या न रहना या उनका होना न होना, पता ही न चले। सरकार की नाक भी बची रहेगी और किसानों का लक्ष्य भी पूरा हो जाएगा। सरकार का दावा है कि ये कानून किसानों के भले के लिए हैं। यदि सरकार इसी पर अड़ी रही और उसने सारे सुझाव रद्द कर दिए तो यह आंदोलन क्या रूप धारण करेगा, कुछ नहीं कहा जा सकता।

इसमें असली पेंच यह है कि यहां डॉक्टर और मरीज अपने-अपने वाली पर अड़े हुए हैं। अगर मरीज कोई दवा नहीं लेना चाहता है और उसे वह जहर मानता है तो आप उसके गले में उसे जबर्दस्ती क्यों ठूसना चाहते हैं? इस संबंध में मेरे कुछ सुझाव हैं। पहला, यदि यह आंदोलन सिर्फ पंजाब, हरियाणा और पश्चिमी उत्तर प्रदेश के मालदार किसानों का है तो इन सभी राज्यों को इस कानून से छुटकारा क्यों नहीं दिला देते ? जिन राज्यों को यह कानून लागू करना हो, वे करें और जिन्हें न करना हो, वे न करें। यों भी संविधान की धारा 246 खेती को राज्यों का विषय मानती है। दूसरा, जहां तक न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य (एमएसपी) का सवाल है, ये अभी 23 फसलों पर हैं। यदि केरल सरकार की तरह ये दर्जनों

सब्जियों और फलों पर भी घोषित हो जाएं तो हरियाणा और पंजाब के किसान गेहूं और धान की खेती के अलावा कई अन्य लाभकारी खेतियां करने लगेंगे। सरकार का बोझ भी घटेगा। अनाज सड़ने और सस्ता बिकने से बचेगा। तीसरा, देश के 94% किसान समर्थन मूल्य की दया पर निर्भर नहीं हैं। वे अपना माल खुले बाजार में बेचते हैं। वे अपनी जमीन और फसल ठेके पर देने के लिए मुक्त हैं। सरकार यह फिजूल का कानून उन पर क्यों थोपना चाहती है? चौथा, इस कानून ने उपज के भंडारण की सीमा हटाकर ठीक नहीं किया। इससे शक होता है कि सरकार पूंजीपतियों को लूटपाट की छूट देना चाहती है। पांचवां, यदि यह सिर्फ कुछ मालदारों किसानों और विपक्षी नेताओं का आंदोलन है तो सरकार देश के 94% किसानों के समानांतर धरने पूरे देश में आयोजित क्यों नहीं करती? सरकार यह क्यों नहीं मानती कि वह किसानों को अपनी बात समझाने में असफल हो रही है?

राष्ट्रीय सहारा

Date:07-01-21

अब बर्ड फ्लू का आतंक

संपादकीय



कोरोना वायरस का खतरा अभी पूरी तरह कम नहीं हुआ कि देश में अब बर्ड फ्लू के चलते कई राज्यों में दहशत का माहौल है। आसन्न खतरों को देखते हुए कई राज्यों को अलर्ट रहने को कहा गया है, और हर जानकारी संबंधित महकमे को पल-पल देने के निर्देश भी जारी किए गए हैं। जिन राज्यों में हालात ज्यादा डरावने हैं, उनमें राजस्थान, हिमाचल प्रदेश, मध्य प्रदेश, केरल और पंजाब हैं। इन राज्यों में हजारों की संख्या में पक्षियों की मौत के बाद सरकार ने हालात को काबू में करने के लिए अपनी सक्रियता बढ़ा दी है। खास बात है कि बर्ड फ्लू के चलते

हिमाचल में प्रवासी पक्षियों के भी मारे जाने की खबर है। हिमाचल में तो मछली, मुग्रे और अंडों की बिक्री को बैन तक कर दिया गया है। चिंता की बात यह भी है कि एवियन इन्फ्लूएंजा वायरस से होने वाली इस बीमारी से पक्षी ही नहीं, मनुष्य भी प्रभावित हो सकते हैं। बर्ड फ्लू संक्रामक बीमारी है, और एच5एन1 वायरस के कारण सन तंत्र पर इसका असर पड़ता है। इसलिए सरकार को जल्द-से-जल्द इसकी रोकथाम के उपाय तलाशने की जरूरत है। हो सके तो इसके लिए

राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर एक दिशा-निर्देश या बुलेटिन जारी किया जाना ज्यादा हितकर होगा। हो सके तो जिन राज्यों में मामले ज्यादा गंभीर हैं, वहां अलग से कुछ अस्पतालों को इसके लिए तैयार करने और इस बीमारी से निपटने वाले विशेषज्ञ अधिकारियों और कर्मचारियों की तैनाती से स्थिति को काबू में किया जा सकता है। इससे जनता में डर भी नहीं फैलेगा। निश्चित तौर पर यह वक्त हम सभी के लिए चुनौतियों से भरा हुआ है। कोरोना अभी कायदे से खत्म भी नहीं हुआ है कि सन तंत्र पर हमला करने वाली दूसरी बीमारी के पैर पसारने से दुरियां स्वाभाविक रूप से बढ़ती दिख रही हैं। यह भी ध्यान देने योग्य तथ्य है कि कहीं प्रदूषण की वजह से तो परिंदों की जान नहीं जा रही। पहले हुए अध्ययन में इस तरह की रपट प्रकाश में आई थी कि पक्षियों के अचानक काल के गाल में समाने के पीछे प्रदूषण एक अहम वजह थी। इसके अलावा यह भी जांच करने का विषय है कि कहीं प्रवासी पक्षी अपने साथ कोई बीमारी तो नहीं लेकर आए और यहां आने के बाद उन्हें भी परेशानी हुई और उनके संपर्क में आए बाकी पक्षियों को भी जान से हाथ धोना पड़ा। हालांकि यह भी ध्यान रखना होगा कि इससे पशुपालकों की आजीविका पर असर न पड़ने पाए।
