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To Deliver NGOs The Last Mile

FCRA can be broadened for better reach

ET Editorials

Even in calmer times, civil society is rarely in accord with the state on a law like the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA). Born during the Emergency, the statute aimed to stymie the 'foreign hand' to ensure institutions and individuals respect the values of the sovereign. It was made sterner in 2010 — the FCRA licence, till then issued in perpetuity, had to be renewed every five years — as the government of the day faced angry agitators opposing nuclear plants and allocation of telecom spectrum. The amendment in September 2020, which sparked a fresh controversy, blocked sub-granting by larger NGOs distributing money to smaller non-profits coveringthe last mile.

The differences between those talking about community development and the state focusing on security took a different hue with society more fragmented, the state more assertive, and debates sullied by religious rhetoric and allegations that dollar donations, meant for the have-nots and unbanked, are misused to lure poor citizens to embrace a new faith. But the two sides of the aisle, viewing FCRA through very different lenses, must talk to find a meeting point.

GoI has, reportedly, restored the licence of many well-known foundations and extended the validity of FCRA licence till end-March. It should now frame a transparent mechanism so that smaller NGOs, carrying out valuable work in far-flung areas — outfits with neither access to foreign donors nor technology and resources to follow onerous compliance rules — are used in a meaningful way that allays the government's fears. More so, with the pandemic impacting livelihoods and deepening inequality. Larger NGOs may be asked to bring the smaller ones under their fold, keep tabs on them, scrutinise fund end-use and ensure that final beneficiaries have bank accounts where the money is credited. In the absence of an acceptable system, funds received by NGOs in metros will never reach healthcare units, schools and weavers in the villages of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, the northeast, etc. That would be a shame.

THE HINDU

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Talking to Russia

NATO needs to warn Putin against any European misadventure, and also calm his nerves

Editorial

The Geneva talks between the United States and Russia were, not surprisingly, inconclusive. It was practically impossible for the former Cold War rivals to iron out their differences in the first round of talks at a time when tensions are running high in Europe, especially over Ukraine. But the fact that hurried talks were held between the two powers and they agreed to continue the negotiations to discuss both NATO's expansion and Russia's troop mobilisation is itself a welcome step. The U.S. was actually forced to come to the table by President Vladimir Putin, who has amassed about 100,000 troops along Russia's border with Ukraine. The Kremlin has also issued a host of demands to the West that sought to stop NATO's further expansion into Eastern Europe and roll back the alliance's military presence to the 1990s levels. Now, the deadlock is that the U.S. has publicly said that it won't shut NATO's door on potential future members. And nobody knows what Mr. Putin would do if the talks collapse. By forcing the U.S. to come to the table to discuss NATO's expansion, an issue which Moscow has been complaining about for years, Mr. Putin has scored the first victory. But it would be naive of him to believe that the Russian demands would be accepted by the West without any resistance. So the challenge, for both sides, is to find common ground.

The source of Russia's staunch opposition to NATO is its deep insecurity. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a substantially weakened Russian Federation saw NATO's continued expansion into Eastern Europe as a violation of the post-Cold War consensus. Russia responded militarily in 2008 when Georgia was considering joining NATO, and in 2014, it took Crimea from Ukraine after the pro-Russian regime in Kiev was toppled by protests. On the other side, the West sees Russia as an aggressive, abrasive and destabilising giant that breathes down the neck of Europe. In hindsight, both NATO's expansions and Russia's military responses are driving instability in Eastern Europe. Finding a solution to the crisis will not be easy. It depends on whether both sides are able to get out of their Cold War mentality and build mutual confidence in bilateral relations. For all practical purposes, Ukraine and Georgia, both faced with separatist conflicts, cannot join NATO in the foreseeable future. NATO could use this reality as a policy promise to calm Russian nerves. Mr. Putin, on the other hand, is also in a tough spot. Russia is still battling with the economic costs of his Crimea annexation, which has left a wide chasm in Russia's ties with Europe. Further aggression on Ukraine might serve his tactical interests but could leave a deadly blow to any plan to bring the Russia-Europe ties back on track. A war is in nobody's interests. Russia and the West should keep that in mind when they sit down for the next round of talks.

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A quest for social consensus against hate speech

It requires consistent legal implementation over time and daily conversations that society needs to have

Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based lawyer.

On January 12, 2022 , the Supreme Court of India agreed to hear petitions asking for legal action to be taken against the organisers of, and speakers at, the "Hardwar Dharma Sansad". During this Dharma Sansad, that had taken place between December 19 and 21, numerous speeches had been made. These speeches ranged from open calls to violence ("… waging a war that would be more gruesome than 1857" or "if you want to eliminate their [i.e., Muslim] population, then kill them"), to the economic and social boycott of Muslims ("… there is no Muslim buyer here, so throw that [Muslim] vendor out"), and to dog-whistles, (such as drawing comparisons to the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar).

Before the Supreme Court, it was argued that the reason why the Court needed to take up the issue was that despite FIRs having been registered in the aftermath of the event, no arrests had been made. Meanwhile, however, in the aftermath of a similar Dharm Sansad in Chhatisgarh, the state police arrested one Kalicharan Maharaj, who had accused Gandhi of destroying India, and praised Nathuram Godse for assassinating him.

While it may rightly be pointed out that political patronage and ideological complicity are responsible for this contrast, there remains a deeper problem: and that is the absence of any legal or social consensus around what constitutes "hate speech."

To start with, it is evident that the statements for which Kalicharan Maharaj has been arrested – no matter how personally distasteful they might be – do not, or at least should not, constitute illegal speech. The fact that Gandhi is a towering figure in Indian history does not preclude individuals from expressing repugnant views about him and the circumstances of his assassination. On the other end of the spectrum, it is clear that direct calls to violence – such as taking up arms and killing Muslims – are not, and ought not to be, protected under the right to free speech. No society can survive for long when incitement to violence is normalised, and enjoys legal impunity.

Strengthens and entreches

However, there are a range of cases – many of them at the forefront in the Hardwar Dharm Sansad – that present more difficult problems. As societies around the world have long understood, the harm in hate speech is not simply restricted to direct and proximate calls to violence. Hate speech works in more insidious ways, creating a climate that strengthens existing prejudices and entrenches already-existing discrimination. A good example of this is the history of anti-semitism in Europe. While anti-semitism took its most ghastly form in frequent pogroms and – ultimately – the holocaust, on a daily level, it took the form of inculcating in society a "cultural common sense" about the Jewish people. This "cultural common sense" traded on stereotypes and social prejudice, and justified ongoing discrimination, social and economic boycotts, and ghettoization, on a day-to-day level. The end result of this – which is the continued subordination of a section of society – can be accomplished without direct calls to violence.

This is why – with the exception of the United States of America – most societies define hate speech in terms of both inciting violence, but also, inciting discrimination. This is why, for example, calls to socially boycott a community (as advocated for at the Dharm Sansad) fall within most definitions of hate speech. This understanding of hate speech is informed by a long history where violence and discrimination have often blurred into each other, and where hate speech has not merely set the stage for future violence, but has also been weaponised in its own right to further entrench and endorse inequality and subordination.

Key problems

It is here that three further problems arise. The first is specific to India. Our laws – as they stand – are unequipped to deal with the challenges of hate speech. The laws commonly invoked in such cases are section 295A of the Indian Penal Code (blasphemy) and section 153A of the Indian Penal Code (creating enmity between classes of people). Hate speech, however, is most certainly not the same as blasphemy, but nor is it captured by vague phrase "enmity between classes". Hate speech is speech that targets people based on their identity, and calls for violence or discrimination against people because of their identity. The Supreme Court of India has gestured towards this understanding of hate speech, both in prior judgments, and in the ongoing case involving Sudarshan TV. More clarity, however, is needed.

The second problem is that hate speech, by its very nature, will not always trumpet itself to be hate speech. Rather, it will often assume plausible deniability – as has been seen in the Hardwar case, where statements, worded with the right degree of ambiguity, are now being defended as calls to self-defence rather than calls to violence.

Here again, the history of anti-semitism in Europe is instructive. Over a long time, a number of visual and verbal cues were developed that everyone knew referred to the Jewish community, to the point where it was no longer necessary to take the community by name. These included, for example, hooked noses and drooping eyelids, and a grasping nature, among others. Indirect hate speech of this kind is known as a "dog-whistle": while it may escape the attention of an external observer, both the speaker and the listener know what – and who – is being referred to. In the Hardwar case, for example, veiled references about what was done to the Rohingyas fall within the definition of dog-whistling. Any comprehensive understanding of hate speech is a matter of judgment, and must take into account its ambiguous and slippery nature.

Court's gaze is important

The third problem is perhaps the most difficult and intractable. As we have seen above, no matter how precise and how definite we try to make our concept of hate speech, it will inevitably reflect individual judgment. If, therefore, social and legal norms against hate speech are to be implemented without descending into pure subjectivity, what is needed – first – is a social consensus about what kind of speech is beyond the pale. In Europe, for example, holocaust denial is an offence – and is enforced with a degree of success – precisely because there is a pre-existing social consensus about the moral abhorrence of the holocaust, and the determination not to see it repeated. Social consensus allows us to discount whataboutery, and also distinguish cases of hate speech from other forms of confrontational or agitational speech – that often comes from hitherto marginalised classes – which nonetheless deserves to belong to the marketplace of ideas.

Achieving this social consensus is an immense task, and will require both consistent legal implementation over time, but also daily conversations that we, as a society (and especially, the socially privileged

classes) need to have among ourselves. However, here – as in many other cases – circumstances have made it possible for the Supreme Court to initiate that much-needed conversation. For these reasons, its intervention in the Hardwar Dharm Sansad case will be an important one.

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Act now, recast the selection process of the ECs

A multi-institutional, bipartisan committee will ensure a transparent exercise, given the quasi-judicial nature of the ECI

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Reports of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and his Election Commissioner (EC) colleagues at an "informal" meeting with the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister has brought renewed focus on the independence and impartiality of the Election Commission of India (ECI). The CEC's initial hesitation when "summoned" was appropriate given that the ECI is a constitutionally mandated body that should maintain distance from the Executive, in perception and reality.

Charges levelled

Over the last seven years, the ECI has faced multiple accusations of favouring the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. For instance, the Citizens' Commission on Elections (CCE), chaired by the retired Supreme Court judge, Justice Madan B. Lokur, in its report titled "An Enquiry into India's Election System," highlighted several instances of inaction on the part of the ECI while conducting the 2019 general election. The government was also accused of hounding EC Ashok Lavasa when he favoured taking action against the Prime Minister for violations of electoral codes of conduct.

Given that ECI is the institutional keystone holding up the edifice of Indian democracy, we suggest that changes in the appointment process for ECs can strengthen ECI's independence, neutrality and transparency. The appointment of ECs falls within the purview of Article 324(2) of the Constitution, which establishes the institution. Pertinently, it contains a 'subject to' clause which provides that both the number and tenure of the ECs shall be "subject to provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by the President."

This 'subject to' clause was introduced, in the words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, to "prevent either a fool or knave or a person who is likely to be under the thumb of the Executive." It was left to Parliament to enact legislation regarding the appointment of ECs. Apart from enacting a law in 1989 enlarging the number of ECs from one to three, Parliament has so far not enacted any changes to the appointment process.

The judiciary could act

In the face of legislative inaction, there is now a possibility that the judiciary will force parliament's hand. Three Writ Petitions, with one pending since 2015, are urging the Supreme Court to declare that the

current practice of appointment of ECs by the Centre violates Article 14, Article 324(2), and Democracy as a basic feature of the Constitution. These petitions argue for an independent system for appointment of ECs, as recommended by previous Law Commission and various Committee reports.

In 1975 itself, the Justice Tarkunde Committee recommended that ECs be appointed on the advice of a Committee comprising the Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Opposition Leader and the Chief Justice. This was reiterated by the Dinesh Goswami Committee in 1990 and the Law Commission in 2015. The 4th Report (2007) of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission additionally recommended that the Law Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha be included in such a Collegium.

The nature of the ECI

Precedent does exist in the case of Rojer Mathew v South Indian Bank Ltd, to argue against the Executive being the sole appointer for a quasi-judicial body. The Supreme Court had recognised that "Election Commission is not only responsible for conducting free and fair elections but it also renders a quasi-judicial function between the various political parties including the ruling government and other parties. In such circumstances the executive cannot be a sole participant in the appointment of members of Election Commission as it gives unfettered discretion to the ruling party to choose someone whose loyalty to it is ensured and thereby renders the selection process vulnerable to manipulation."

Hence, establishing a multi-institutional, bipartisan committee for fair and transparent selection of ECs can enhance the perceived and actual independence of ECI. Such a procedure is already followed with regard to other Constitutional and Statutory Authorities such as the Chief Information Commissioner, Lokpal, Vigilance Commissioner, and the Director of the Central Bureau of Intelligence. The quasi-judicial nature of ECI's functions makes it especially important that the appointments process conform to the strictest democratic principles.

The Executive's role in the current appointment process has come under judicial scrutiny over its lack of transparency. Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India, Ministry of Law and Justice Secretary (WP (C) 104/2015) which has been pending since 2015, and referred to a Constitution Bench in 2018, has raised this very demand for a Collegium system for the ECI. Even though it has been listed multiple times in 2020, it is yet to reach hearing stage. A Bench comprising Chief Justice J S Khehar and Justice D Y Chandrachud had also noted that "The Election Commissioners supervise and hold elections across the Country, and this is the significance of their office, and their selection has to be made in the most transparent manner." The Bench referred to the mandate of Article 324(2) of the Constitution to state that, "it is expected from Parliament to make the law, but it has not been made."

Advice for Parliament

Parliament would do well to pre-empt judicial strictures by going ahead and formulating a law that establishes a multi-institutional, bipartisan Collegium to select ECs. Separation of powers is the gold standard for governments across the world. ECI's constitutional responsibilities require a fair and transparent appointment process that is beyond reproach, which will reaffirm our faith in this vital pillar of our polity. The existing veil over the appointment process of ECs potentially undermines the very structure on which our democratic aspirations rest.

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Establishing India's Apple

For India to be a research and development-driven economy, universities play an indispensable role

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This month, the U.S. tech company Apple reached the $3 trillion-mark in market capitalisation. This made it wealthier than most countries. The question is: can or will India be able to produce a company like Apple? The answer is 'no' — not until we turn our university campuses into powerful economic accelerators. But how? This will require an understanding of how innovation works. For that, we need to get into how a research- and development-driven economy works and the universities' indispensable role in it.

The foundation

Innovation requires establishing ecosystems, which requires building institutional frameworks and research infrastructure. To build ecosystems, we should start by connecting institutions nearby. Facilitating easy access to tools and equipment for each others' students and faculty, creating an open, inclusive atmosphere, and encompassing each other's strengths should follow that. Building research infrastructure should be envisioned for an ecosystem rather than an institution. Such a system will use optimal resources. The initial funding to build large research infrastructures needs to come from the public exchequer. Government funding is the initiator of turning ideas into workable solutions in science and technology-led innovation. Once kick-started, the start-up companies need to be financed by private investors, like angel investors and venture capitalists. Fostering innovation goes beyond making the physical infrastructure and providing access. It includes having excellent tech transfer offices, access to legal counsel and law firms, funding opportunities outside the government, and most importantly, having world-class faculty members.

Tech transfer offices and incubators play a vital role in commercialising technologies. Their part is to make sure that the universities are incentivised while providing a physical space with technical and legal help for individual faculty-driven innovations to get commercialised. To do this, they need to build independent mechanism(s) for their governance, funding, and a competitive process of licensing inventions to third parties. University incubators need the freedom to operate and to establish linkages with funders, both government and private, to raise funds to support start-up companies within their ecosystem. They need to draw mechanisms to be incentivised back too. Finally, the tech transfer offices need to formulate clear guidelines regarding ownership rights on inventions coming out from the universities.

Proper legal frameworks are needed for university-driven innovation to mature. After consultations and modifications, Parliament needs to pass the Protection and Utilization of Public Funded Intellectual Property Bill (PUPFIP), 2008. Although there are other policies and guidelines, making PUPFIP a law will help formulate a clear and uniform set of rules and remove the universities' lack of clarity on intellectual property rights to commercialise inventions from government-funded research programmes. Apart from

infrastructure, funding, and legal help, the innovation ecosystems need early adopters to risk their time and energy to take products and solutions to the broader masses.

A broader reach

While STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects will lead innovation out of the university campuses, it is essential to broaden the reach to cover all streams within the liberal arts. Universities need to engage a broader group with integrated curricula incorporating all disciplines' best practices. Additionally, the university curricula need to get away from focusing exclusively on awarding degrees on broad subjects to providing vocational training towards developing students' skills for a specific task. Focusing on innovation must not take our minds away from problems in fundamental sciences or other streams. Funding for applied sciences should not be at the cost of fundamental sciences.

With the market caps of many technology-driven companies ranking in the top 20 of global GDP alongside the nation-states, universities can play a significant role in fostering the economies of all nations. The time has come for the universities in India to provide value outside of their traditional niche of creating knowledge and teaching. Sustained public funding to build world-class research and development infrastructure and hiring the best faculty in our university system are the first steps to realising this dream. Equally important is encouraging and providing the faculty the freedom to dive more into the space without sacrificing critical thinking. This will propel 'innovation quotient" to be used as a defining parameter for ranking universities rather than parameters like the size of the graduating class and faculty-to-student ratio.

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Reaping India's demographic dividend

India has a unique opportunity to develop and grow richer before ageing sets in

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A nation's growth requires the productive contribution of all segments of society, particularly the children and the youth, who need to be provided opportunities for self-expression. Household and national investments in children and youth yield long-term returns in terms of high productivity of the economically active population till they enter the elderly cohort.

Fertility decline

As fertility declines, the share of the young population falls and that of the older, dependent population rises. If the fertility decline is rapid, the increase in the

population of working ages is substantial yielding the 'demographic dividend'. The smaller share of children in the population enables higher investment per child. Therefore, the future entrants in the labour force can have better productivity and thus boost income. With the passage of time, the share of the older population rises and that of the working age population begins to fall and hence the dividend is available for a period of time, 'the window of demographic opportunity'.

However, realisation of the benefits of potential demographic dividend is not automatic and thus presents many challenges. Without proper policies, the increase in the working-age population may lead to rising unemployment, fueling economic and social risks. This calls for forward-looking policies incorporating population dynamics, education and skills, healthcare, gender sensitivity, and providing rights and choices to the younger generation.

With falling fertility (currently 2.0), rising median age (from 24 years in 2011, 29 years now and expected to be 36 years by 2036), a falling dependency ratio (expected to decrease from 65% to 54% in the coming decade taking 15-59 years as the working age population), India is in the middle of a demographic transition. This provides a window of opportunity towards faster economic growth. India has already begun to get the dividend. In India, the benefit to the GDP from demographic transition has been lower than its peers in Asia and is already tapering. Hence, there is an urgency to take appropriate policy measures.

Forward-looking policies

Countries like Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea have already shown us how demographic dividend can be reaped to achieve incredible economic growth by adopting forward-looking policies and programmes to empower the youth in terms of their education, skills and health choices. There are important lessons from these countries for India.

The first is to undertake an updated National Transfer Accounts (NTA) assessment. Using NTA methodologies by Lee and Chen (2011-12) and M.R. Narayana (2021), we find that India's per capita consumption pattern is way lower than that of other Asian countries. A child in India consumes around 60% of the consumption by an adult aged between 20 and 64, while a child in China consumes about 85% of a prime-age adult's consumption. The NTA data for India needs to be updated to capture the progress made on such investments since 2011-12. State-specific NTAs need to be calculated every year and States need to be ranked for investing in the youth.

The second is to invest more in children and adolescents. India ranks poorly in Asia in terms of private and public human capital spending. It needs to invest more in children and adolescents, particularly in nutrition and learning during early childhood. Given that India's workforce starts at a younger age, a greater focus needs to be on transitioning from secondary education to universal skiling and entrepreneurship, as done in South Korea.

The third is to make health investments. Health spending has not kept pace with India's economic growth. The public spending on health has remained flat at around 1% of GDP. Evidence suggests that better health facilitates improved economic production. Hence, it is important to draft policies to promote health during the demographic dividend. We need more finance for health as well as better health facilities from the available funding.

The fourth is to make reproductive healthcare services accessible on a rights-based approach. We need to provide universal access to high-quality primary education and basic healthcare. The unmet need for family planning in India at 9.4% as per the latest National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) is high as compared to 3.3% in China and 6.6% in South Korea, which needs to be bridged.

Fifth, education is an enabler to bridge gender differentials. The gender inequality of education is a concern. In India, boys are more likely to be enrolled in secondary and tertiary school than girls. In the Philippines, China and Thailand, it is the reverse. In Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia, the gender differences are rather minimal. This needs to be reversed.

Sixth, India needs to increase female workforce participation in the economy. As of 2019, 20.3% of women were working or looking for work, down from 34.1% in 2003-04. New skills and opportunities for women and girls befitting their participation in a $3 trillion economy is urgently needed. For example, a girl who passes Class 10 needs more choices to learn skills that will help her find appropriate work. She will need safe transport to travel to work. Finding work will likely delay her age of marriage and make her participate in the economy more productively, as also exercise her rights and choices. South Korea's female workforce participation rate of 50% has been built on i) legally compulsory gender budgeting to analyse gender disaggregated data and its impact on policies, ii) increasing childcare benefits, and iii) boosting tax incentives for part-time work. It is predicted that if all women engaged in domestic duties in India who are willing to work had a job, female labour force participation would increase by about 20%.

Seventh, India needs to address the diversity between States. While India is a young country, the status and pace of population ageing vary among States. Southern States, which are advanced in demographic transition, already have a higher percentage of older people. These differences in age structure reflect differences in economic development and health – and remind us of States' very different starting points at the outset of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. But this also offers boundless opportunities for States to work together, especially on demographic transition, with the north-central region as the reservoir of India's workforce.

Eight, a new federal approach to governance reforms for demographic dividend will need to be put in place for policy coordination between States on various emerging population issues such as migration, ageing, skiling, female workforce participation and urbanisation. Inter-ministerial coordination for strategic planning, investment, monitoring and course correction should be an important feature of this governance arrangement.

दैनिक भास्कर

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नेता वर्ग वोटरों की समझ इतनी कम क्यों आंकता है?

संपादकीय

यू पी केबिनेट से एक पिछड़े वर्ग के मंत्री ने इस्तीफा दिया। उसी दिन प्रमुख विपक्षी पार्टी सपा के अगुवा ने इस मंत्री के साथ अपना एक फोटो शेयर किया जो मंत्री के सपा में जाने का संकेत है। राजनीति में पाला बदलना एक आम प्रक्रिया है। कई बार वह पार्टी जो किसी अन्य पार्टी के खिलाफ हर स्तर तक एक दूसरे की लानत-मलानत करते हुए चुनाव लड़ती हैं, चुनाव नतीजे के बाद उसी के साथ सरकार बनाती है। लेकिन चिंता तब होती है जब सत्ता के लिए हर स्याह-सफेद करने वाला यह राजनीतिक वर्ग ऐसे कदमों का भी औचित्य नैतिक आधार बताता है। मंत्री ने अपने इस्तीफे में कहा कि वह विपरीत परिस्थितयों और विचारधारा में रहकर भी बहुत ही मनोयोग से 'उत्तरदायित्व' का निर्वहन करते रहे, लेकिन अब 'उन्हें दलितों, पिछड़ों, किसानों, युवाओं, लघु एवं मध्यम श्रेणी के व्यापारियों के प्रति घोर उपेक्षात्मक रवैया के कारण इस्तीफा देना पड़ा।' मंत्री महोदय पहले बसपा में भी कई बार मंत्री रहे लेकिन पार्टी छोड़ते समय आरोप लगाया था कि बसपा पैसे लेकर टिकट देती है। यह नया ब्रह्मज्ञान मंत्री जी को भाजपा-शासन के खिलाफ पांच साल बाद तब आया जब चुनाव आयोग ने चुनाव की तारीखें घोषित कर दीं। मंत्री की पुत्री अभी भी भाजपा टिकट पर प्रदेश के बदायूं सीट से सांसद हैं और उन्हें अभी तक भाजपा की विचारधारा में कोई खोट नहीं नजर आया है। संसद में उनकी सदस्यता का काल अभी ढाई साल और है। मंत्री का अब कहना है कि वह भाजपा के ताबूत में आखिरी कील ठोकेंगे। उनका जनाधार पश्चिमी व मध्य उत्तरप्रदेश में है। शायद जनता की सोच पर भोगे हुए यथार्थ पर जाति, सम्प्रदाय, अगड़ा-पिछड़ा आज भी भारी पड़ते हैं। आखिर, नेता वर्ग वोटरों की समझ इतनी कम क्यों आंकता है?

दैनिक जागरण

Date:13-01-22

आदर्श ग्राम योजना

संपादकीय

प्रधानमंत्री आदर्श ग्राम योजना के तहत पिछड़े और खासकर अनुसूचित जाति बहुल गांवों को विकसित करने के काम को आगे बढ़ाने का फैसला एक स्वागतयोग्य कदम है। यह योजना 2009 में शुरू की गई थी, लेकिन उस पर काम शुरू हो पाया 2014 में। इसी योजना की नए सिरे से सुध लेते हुए अब अगले छह महीनों के भीतर देश के आठ हजार से ज्यादा गांव आदर्श ग्राम बन जाएंगे। सामाजिक न्याय एवं अधिकारिता मंत्रलय ने प्रधानमंत्री आदर्श ग्राम योजना के तहत यह तय किया है कि 2025 तक देश भर के सभी अनुसूचित जाति बहुल गांवों को आदर्श ग्राम बना दिया जाए। चूंकि ऐसे गावों की संख्या करीब 27 हजार है इसलिए कहीं तेजी से काम करने की जरूरत होगी। इस योजना के तहत पेयजल, स्वच्छता, शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य एवं पोषण पर ध्यान दिए जाने के साथ ही लोगों को बैंकिंग व्यवस्था से जोड़ा जाएगा और उन्हें इंटरनेट की सुविधाएं प्रदान करने के साथ ही कौशल विकास पर भी ध्यान दिया जाएगा। उम्मीद की जानी चाहिए कि इस योजना के अमल में वैसी ढिलाई देखने को नहीं मिलेगी, जैसी सांसद आदर्श ग्राम योजना में मिल रही है। यह भी एक महत्वाकांक्षी योजना है।

प्रधानमंत्री ने सांसद आदर्श ग्राम योजना शुरू करने की घोषणा लालकिले की प्राचीर से अपने पहले कार्यकाल के प्रारंभ में ही की थी। इसके तहत प्रत्येक सांसद से यह अपेक्षित था कि वे 2014 से 2019 के बीच चरणबद्ध तरीके से तीन गांव गोद लेंगे और फिर 2019 से 2024 के बीच पांच गांव। दुर्भाग्य से सांसदों ने इसमें वांछित रुचि नहीं दिखाई। सरकार इससे अपरिचित नहीं हो सकती कि ऐसे सांसदों में सत्तापक्ष के भी सांसद हैं। आखिर जब सत्ताधारी दल के सांसद ही इस योजना के प्रति प्रतिबद्ध नहीं तब फिर यह अपेक्षा कैसे की जाए कि विपक्षी दलों के सांसद उसमें दिलचस्पी लेंगे? इस पर गौर किया जाना चाहिए कि सांसद गांवों को आदर्श रूप से विकसित करने में दिलचस्पी क्यों नहीं दिखा रहे हैं? उन कारणों की तह तक जाने और उनका निवारण करने की आवश्कता है, जिनके चलते यह योजना गति नहीं पकड़ पा रही है। गांवों को मूलभूत सुविधाओं से विकसित करने की योजना पर केवल इसलिए बल नहीं दिया जाना चाहिए कि इससे ग्रामीण जनता का जीवन स्तर सुधरेगा, बल्कि इसलिए भी दिया जाना चाहिए ताकि गांवों से शहरों की ओर पलायन का सिलसिला थमे। वास्तव में लक्ष्य तो यह होना चाहिए कि गांवों में शहरों जैसी सुविधाएं उपलब्ध कराई जाएं। पश्चिम के देशों में ऐसा ही है। यह आवश्यक है कि जैसे सरकार प्रधानमंत्री आदर्श ग्राम योजना पर ध्यान दे रही है वैसे ही सांसद आदर्श ग्राम योजना पर भी दे।

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

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एकमात्र विकल्प

संपादकीय

केंद्र सरकार अब दूरसंचार कंपनी वोडाफोन आइडिया में सबसे बड़ी अंशधारक बन जाएगी। देश भर में इस कंपनी के 27 करोड़ ग्राहक हैं। कंपनी को स्पेक्ट्रम के लंबित भुगतान पर ब्याज और समायोजित सकल राजस्व बकाये के रूप में काफी अधिक राशि चुकानी थी लेकिन वह ऐसा करने में नाकाम रही। इस स्थिति में उसे इस राशि कोशेयरों में बदलने का विकल्प दिया गया और उसने इसे स्वीकार कर लिया। इसके परिणामस्वरूप अब सरकार के पास वोडाफोन आइडिया की 35.8 फीसदी हिस्सेदारी होगी।

कंपनी ने कहा है कि यह राष्ट्रीयकरण जैसा नहीं है और प्रबंधन नियंत्रण निजी हाथों में बना रहेगा। कंपनी ने यह संकेत भी दिया है कि सरकार परिचालन में किसी तरह का दखल नहीं देगी।

बहरहाल, बाजार ने इस घटना को सकारात्मक ढंग से नहीं लिया। इस वजह से शेयर कीमतें अस्थिर रहीं और सुधार आने के पहले उनमें 20 फीसदी की गिरावट दर्ज की गई। कंपनी को सरकार को शेयर हिस्सेदारी देनी पड़ी क्योंकि बड़े पैमाने पर जरूरी पूंजी नहीं मिल सकी।

समूचे घटनाक्रम के लिए सरकार को खुद को दोष देना चाहिए। विश्लेषक भारत के दूरसंचार क्षेत्र को दुनिया में सर्वाधिक कठिनाई भरा मानते हैं। एक दशक पहले देश के दूरसंचार जगत में कई दावेदार थे। आज सरकार को तीन बची कंपनियों

में से एक की हिस्सेदारी लेनी पड़ी ताकि इस क्षेत्र में केवल दो कारोबारी न रह जाएं। अत्यधिक कराधान और शुल्क, लाइसेंस रद्द होने और नियामकीय अनिश्चितता आदि सभी ने सरकार के हस्तक्षेप में योगदान किया। सरकार को एक ऐसी समस्या को हल करना पड़ा जो उसने खुद खड़ी की।

सवाल यह है कि यहां से आगे की राह क्या होनी चाहिए? यह बात एकदम स्पष्ट होनी चाहिए कि वोडाफोन आइडिया में सरकार अपनी हिस्सेदारी हमेशा नहीं रख सकती। कंपनी को समय चाहिए ताकि वह शुल्क बढ़ा सके और सेवाओं में सुधार कर सके तथा अपने उपभोक्ता आधार को संभाल सके जो अभी हाल तक 40 करोड़ था। सामान्य तौर पर देखें तो भारत में शुल्क को असामान्य रूप से निचले स्तरों से ऊपर ले जाने की आवश्यकता है। दूरसंचार सेवा प्रदाताओं ने शुल्क में इजाफा किया है लेकिन अभी काफी कुछ किए जाने की आवश्यकता है। एक बार एक खास स्तर का ठहराव आने के बाद सरकार को इससे बाहर निकलने के अवसर तलाशने होंगे। संभव है कि सरकार एक बार में पूरी हिस्सेदारी न बेच सके लेकिन उसे जल्द विनिवेश की प्रक्रिया शुरू करनी चाहिए।

अब समूचे दूरसंचार क्षेत्र में परिपक्वता आनी चाहिए। अगर नियमों का समुचित पालन किया जाए तो तीन बड़े प्रतिस्पर्धी इस क्षेत्र में प्रतिस्पर्धा बनाए रखने के लिए पर्याप्त हैं। सेवाओं में सुधार करना होगा और उनका विस्तार करना होगा।

5जी नेटवर्क तथा अन्य प्रकार के इजाफों के लिए निवेश की आवश्यकता होगी। सरकार देख चुकी है कि एक दशक तक इस क्षेत्र को दुधारू गाय समझने का क्या हश्र हुआ है। 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम का मूल्य तय करते समय इस बात को ध्यान में रखा जाना चाहिए। दूरसंचार सेवा प्रदाता 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम के लिए कम आधार कीमत की मांग करते रहे हैं।

सरकार को इस क्षेत्र को केवल राजस्व बढ़ाने और राजकोषीय जरूरतें पूरा करने के माध्यम के रूप में नहीं देखना चाहिए। अब समय आ गया है कि वह दूरसंचार क्षेत्र में स्थिरता, निवेश और गुणवत्ता में सुधार को प्राथमिकता दे। डिजिटल इंडिया की योजना ऐसी ही स्थिरता पर निर्भर करती है।

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नफरत के खिलाफ

संपादकीय

सांप्रदायिकता पर लगाम लगाने की हर कोशिश स्वागतयोग्य है। विगत दिनों कथित धर्मसंसद से जो उद्गार निकले थे, उनकी गूंज एक याचिका के माध्यम से देश के सर्वोच्च न्यायालय तक पहुंची है और न्यायालय ने केंद्र व उत्तराखंड सरकार से जवाब मांगा है। याचिका में न्यायालय से मांग की गई है कि हरिद्वार और राष्ट्रीय राजधानी दिल्ली में हाल में आयोजित कार्यक्रमों में कथित रूप से नफरत फैलाने वाले भाषण देने वालों के खिलाफ जांच व यथोचित कार्रवाई सुनिश्चित की जाए। याचिकाकर्ता पत्रकार कुर्बान अली और पटना उच्च न्यायालय की पूर्व न्यायाधीश व वरिष्ठ अधिवक्ता

अंजना प्रकाश की प्रशंसा करनी चाहिए कि उन्होंने इस महत्वपूर्ण विषय को सर्वोच्च न्यायालय के सामने उठाया है। देश में एक बडे वर्ग में यह शिकायत है कि घृणा या हिंसा के ऐसे उद्गारों के बावजूद कानून-व्यवस्था ने अपना काम नहीं किया है। हालांकि, महात्मा गांधी को अपशब्द बोलने वाले एक धर्माचार्य को छत्तीसगढ़ की पुलिस ने मध्य प्रदेश से गिरफ्तार किया है और करीब आधा दर्जन थानों में रिपोर्ट दर्ज हुई है। अब सर्वोच्च न्यायालय के हस्तक्षेप के बाद कार्रवाई में तेजी आने की संभावना है। विशेष रूप से उत्तराखंड और केंद्र सरकार को जांच व कार्रवाई की सूचना न्यायालय को देनी पड़ेगी।

मामले में अगली सुनवाई 10 दिन बाद होगी और इस सुनवाई का व्यापक असर होगा। इसमें कोई शक नहीं कि देश में नफरत फैलाने वाले भाषणों को रोकना हर हाल में जरूरी है। यह काम स्थानीय पुलिस को पहले ही कर लेना चाहिए था,पर ठोस कार्रवाई छत्तीसगढ़ की सरकार ने की और वह भी मध्य प्रदेश की सीमा में घुसकर। मतलब साफ है कि हम नफरत फैलाने वाले भाषणों को भी राजनीतिक नजरिये से देख रहे हैं। क्या उत्तराखंड या मध्य प्रदेश ने कार्रवाई इसलिए नहीं की, क्योंकि वहां भाजपा की सत्ता है? क्या छत्तीसगढ़ की सरकार इसलिए कार्रवाई कर पाई, क्योंकि वहां कांग्रेस सत्ता में है? सरकारें अपनी सुविधा या राजनीति के आधार पर चलाई जा रही हैं या कानून-संविधान के आधार पर? कोई आश्चर्य नहीं, अगर याचिकाकर्ता नफरत फैलाने वाले भाषण मामले में विशेष जांच दल की मांग कर रहे हैं? स्वतंत्र और निष्पक्ष जांच की मांग हो रही है। याचिका में खासतौर पर 17 व 19 दिसंबर, 2021 को हरिद्वार और दिल्ली में नफरत पैदा करने वाले भाषणों का उल्लेख किया गया है। मामला बहुत गंभीर है, क्या किसी समुदाय के नरसंहार का आह्वान किया गया? क्या ऐसी हिंसा की पैरवी कोई धर्म करता है? यदि कोई धर्म हिंसा की पैरवी करता है, तो फिर भारत में उसकी जगह कहां होनी चाहिए?

समग्रता में यह जरूरी है कि ऐसे अनुशासनहीन आयोजनों को रोका जाए। हिंसा के पक्ष में न कोई प्रवचन हो और न तकरीर। कौन धर्म है, जो गैर-धर्म वालों से घृणा सिखाता है? सांप्रदायिक नफरत की बुनियाद पर बने देशों का हश्र क्या हम नहीं देख पा रहे हैं? क्या कुछ लोग उस सहिष्णु, उदार, समझदार भारत को खत्म करना चाहते हैं, जिस पर दुनिया गर्व करती है। भारत में हो रही ऐसी कोशिशों पर प्रतिक्रिया पूरी दुनिया में हो रही है, भारत को चाहने वाले आज चिंतित हैं। न्यायालयों, सरकारों व धर्म समाजों को सुनिश्चित करना चाहिए कि भारत में जैसे सदियों से तमाम धर्म शांतिपूर्वक रहते आए हैं, वैसे ही सदा रहें।