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Shadows Catch Fire

Iran-Israel conflict has taken a historic wrong turn. Global focus has to be on preventing further escalation

TOI Editorials

Unlike on Oct 7 last year, Israeli defences held up excellently against Iran's attack this weekend. They successfully intercepted over '99%' of the 300 drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles Iran fired. This attack is 'historic' – because hitherto Iran had fought Israel in the shadows and by proxies. It also threatens to tip West Asia into a wider conflagration – even as Gaza is already laid to waste and the Ukraine war has entered its third year. Condemning the attack is the easier part. What's really needed is talking both countries down from the edge of wild escalation.

Damascus's toll | In both countries, not to mention US, there are hardliners baying for escalation. And they all cite international law, very selectively. Iran retaliated against the April 1 Israeli strikes on its Damascus consulate within 13 days, but it hardly considers other countries' diplomatic privileges sacrosanct. It describes the historic attack on Israel as 'legitimate self-defence', but on the opposite side Netanyahu uses this same card no less righteously.

MSC Aries's warning | Also this weekend, Iranian troops descended from helicopters to seize a commercial ship, as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz. Reason? 'Israel links'. Indians form the majority of its crew. This is not the first time Indian sailors are taking collateral damage. But any sustained disruption of energy supply will cause more broad-based hurt. In US, the economic repercussions of increased chaos in West Asia would impact Biden's chances of re-election. Inflationary pressures would be unpleasant here as well.

Hardliners' sway | Biden's role to maintain homeostasis is going to be incredibly important here. He has indicated that US will not participate in offensive operations against Iran. But while much is heard about his suboptimal relationship with Netanyahu, the one with Iran is even more wanting. Following the attack on Israel, Iran's parliament reportedly cheered, 'Death to Israel! Death to America!' What reckless actions such a mood can propel is worrying. Billy Joel is right on this – who 'didn't start the fire' is less important than who 'tried to fight it'.

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Thought For Food

Govt advisory on 'health drinks' highlights the larger challenge of regulating misleading claims

TOI Editorials



GOI advisory on categorising Bournvita and other beverages as 'health drinks', follows food safety authority FSSAI's remark to ecommerce websites on April 2. FSSAI had asked for appropriate categorisation of foods on sites. It pointed out that since the term 'health drink' was neither defined nor standardised in the 2006 food standards law, or in any rules thereafter, no drink could claim to be 'healthy'.

'Health' is wealth – for companies | FSSAI made the right call in tackling the nub of the issue – categorisation as a 'health drink'. India has consumed malt-based beverages for generations. White beverages – such as Horlicks, Boost, Bournvita – make up about 70% of the ₹14.4b market. Users are children across India, who reportedly consume three times more than recommended values of added sugars.

Some believe malt-based beverages should be seen as ultra-processed food, responsible for child obesity and teen diabetes.

Online, ad is product | Companies argue their formulations are clearly labelled, that consumers make informed choices. But for decades they've been advertised as aids to stronger, taller, smarter growth. Shop sales is one thing, but on online stores, the ad is the product – all you do is click. Recall that a govt ban on advertising of infant food and milk substitutes, for babies less than 24 months old, curtailed these products' growth in India, promoting breast milk and home food.

Market maturity | Indian food companies, and MNCs operating in India, advertise even snacks as 'healthy', but resist labelling. But consumer awareness forced ice cream giants to relabel their sugar overkills as frozen desserts. It's a sign of a maturing market. That said, a large section of buyers choose basis advertising and labels. Most consumers don't think through the health implications of popular products. For many, a ₹5 biscuit packet, a malt-drink sachet or instant noodles is the cheapest food around.

What this episode highlights is the dire need for food safety regulations and monitoring. Bournvita has been in the eye of a storm since last April. The company responded to a social influencer's video on its sugar content with a legal notice. That's not how healthy markets or iconic brands operate.

Urbanisation, no liberating force for Dalits

Fahad Zuberi, [Indira Gandhi Radhakrishnan Graduate Scholar at the University of Oxford and writes on the politics of the built environment]

A quick look at the nameplates in India's neighbourhoods will show you that caste is the primary language of spatiality in Indian cities. Despite such failings, B.R. Ambedkar rejected village life and encouraged Dalits to move to the city. Ambedkar said that an Indian village is "the working plant of the Hindu social order" and argued that it is the ideal place to understand caste. Gandhi, however, saw the Indian village as a self-reliant, equitable and a just non-violent order, and argued for the decentralisation of power to the villages through Gram Swaraj. In strong opposition, Ambedkar believed that the idealisation of Indian village life emerged either from the colonial romanticisation of the rural population or from the desire of Hindus to retain caste domination. In the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar opposed the idea that villages should be recognised as autonomous administrative units and felt relieved that the Assembly rejected the idea. "For the untouchables, there could not have been a bigger calamity," he wrote.

Urbanisation and Ambedkar's belief

In the process of urbanisation, Ambedkar saw an opportunity for Dalit liberation. He believed that the systems of caste oppression that thrive in Indian villages become weaker in cities. These included segregation of Dalits into ghettos, restrictions on economic activities, and denial of land ownership. Jyotirao Phule had also admired city life for being liberal and enabling him to earn a living. At the core of the liberating power of cities, for Ambedkar and Phule, was the opportunity to become anonymous. Cities, in principle, offer an opportunity to become a stranger among a sea of strangers and transition from a caste-based order to a class-based order. One defined not by genealogy but by accumulation of resources or capital.

Here, it is important to acknowledge that Ambedkar had seen the ways in which caste adapts to urbanisation. In *Waiting for a Visa*, Ambedkar reflects on his struggle to find a house in Baroda.

While modern urbanisation was fuelled by a skill-based transition to economy, i.e., industrialisation, the dominance of caste over skill had also become clear to Ambedkar when even skilled Dalits were not allowed to enter the weaving sections of textile mills. Despite these experiences, Ambedkar saw urbanisation as a liberating force. However, after a century of Ambedkar's struggles with renting a house in Baroda, caste remains the spatial logic of Indian cities.

Language of 'purity-pollution'

Caste translates into a city's spatiality through the language of 'purity-pollution'. A consumer survey in 2021 revealed that eating non-vegetarian food is the biggest deal-breaker in finding rental housing in India. Writing about segregation policies under the Peshwas in the Maratha kingdom, Gopal Guru explains this phenomenon. Guru says that the ghetto is not merely a space but also forms the constitution of the body of the ghetto dweller. The language of purity-pollution that identifies the savarna space as 'pure' and one that can be polluted by the Dalit body, extends to the logic of the city. Here, the ghetto dweller carries the ghetto on their body when they step out into the city. In the language of caste, the space of the ghetto — characterised by filth and dirt — becomes mutually reinforcing on the body of the Dalit — characterised by meat-eating and other "unacceptable" traits.

More recently, the language of caste has been imposed on public spaces of the city by various governments. In March 2017, the Uttar Pradesh government, for example, issued regulations for meat shops that included, for example, a ban on selling meat near religious places and black paint or curtains in the facade of the shop to hide the sight of meat from pedestrians. In 2021, several municipal corporations in Gujarat banned the sale of meat-based street food on the city's main roads citing "religious sentiments". Through these Brahminical regulations, the State has characterised meat as the impurity that could pollute a public space — both secular and religious — or even a pedestrian's sight.

A crippling segregation

Urban governance policies and housing crises have also sustained caste-based segregation. Scholars such as Raphael Susewind, Sheba Tejani and Christophe Jaffrelot have shown that Muslims and Dalits face the most crippling segregation in Indian cities.

A large-scale study also found that public services and access to municipal infrastructure such as clean drinking water are the worst in Dalit and Muslim ghettos. Research in sacrifice zones — regions marked for severe environmental pollution such as landfills — shows that such areas are overwhelmingly inhabited by Dalits and Muslims. A recent report by the Housing and Land Rights Network on forced evictions in India also shows that Dalits and Muslims are the most impacted by slum demolition drives.

Through lived experience and extensive research, we can see that the Indian city has failed the aspirations and expectations that the Dalit liberation movement had placed in urbanisation. While transition to city life might have weakened some structures of caste oppression, they have morphed through language, state sanction and policy, and have evolved to allow caste to thrive in Indian cities. The Indian city has fallen short of the potential and promise that Ambedkar saw in urbanisation. Even after a century of urban development, Dalits remain, to use Ambedkar's words, "the children of India's ghettos".

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Decoding the judgment on Jim Corbett

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In its ruling in March, the Supreme Court brought to light the unholy nexus of politicians, forest officials, and local contractors responsible for the felling of 6,000 trees in the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand. This state of affairs underlines one fact clearly: despite conservation goals receiving priority through policies and laws including the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Project Tiger, and the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the state's main interest remains increasing revenue. The illegal destruction of trees in Jim Corbett can be seen in contravention of the Supreme Court

judgment in Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra vs. State of Uttar Pradesh, which said that “economic growth cannot be achieved at the cost of environmental destruction and people’s right to healthy environment.”

The judgment

National and State forest authorities have leaned on ecotourism to simultaneously attain conservation goals, enhance revenue, and improve the livelihoods of local people. In its recent judgment, instead of treating ecotourism as a panacea for conservation and revenue generation, the Supreme Court said that the approach must be of eco-centrism and not anthropocentrism. The court directed the banning of tiger safaris in core areas and the constitution of a committee to explore the feasibility of permitting tiger safaris in peripheral areas in not just Jim Corbett, but across India. It also disagreed with the 2019 guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority permitting a tiger safari on the lines of a zoo in a national park. The court stressed that tigers should be sourced from the same landscape as where the safari is being conducted and not outside the tiger reserve.

According to British environmentalist Norman Myers, the precautionary principle is becoming an established principle for policymakers tackling environmental problems. The principle says “where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent such environmental degradation.” On banning safaris in core areas, the Court invoked this principle to ensure that there is least damage to the environment. Myers had said, “In salient respects, the principle applies to biodiversity more than any other environmental problem. This is because the mass extinction gathering force will, if it proceeds unchecked, not only eliminate half or more species but will leave the biosphere impoverished for at least 5 million years.” The International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List of Threatened Species monitors 1,212 animal species in India. In 2021, it found that 12% of them are endangered. According to a report of the Centre for Science and Environment in 2021, India has lost 90% of the area under its four biodiversity hotspots. The precautionary principle therefore applies not only in the case of tigers, but also other species, especially endangered ones.

What the court missed

However, the Court’s decision to assess the damage done to the green cover of Jim Corbett so as to identify the cost of restoration and recover the same from the errant individuals and officers appears to be a mirage in the absence of a well-defined methodology. Recovering the cost of restoration does not amount to necessarily recovering the loss of the ability of the environment to provide goods and services. As per the European Liability Directive 2004, conservation status of natural habitat means the “sum of influences acting on a natural habitat and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure, and functions as well as the long-term survival of its typical species.” In India, the framework of valuation which predated the T.N. Godavarman case (1996) was aimed at replacing lost natural forest with compensatory plantations. The two choices which are supported legally and institutionally and serve as the background for the valuation of forest land in India are now compensatory afforestation levy and net present value (NPV). The levy is essentially a form of replacement cost, designed to replace the forest land which was lost as a result of diversion of forest towards non-forestry use. Since the levy is found to be insufficient in terms of making good the loss, the Court introduced the NPV in 2002 as an additional payment obligation. But both these methodologies do not rightly account for the correlation between the removal of trees and the harm caused to other environmental goods and services.

In the context of the growing degradation of biodiversity hotspots and the support to revenue-generating eco-tourism, a valuation method which is based on ecosystem services (food, water, and services regulating the climate and floods, etc.) is a must. The system refers to the benefits people obtain from natural ecosystems in contrast with man-made structures. The Court could have set a precedent by saying that ecosystem services are more important and generate more revenue than eco-tourism or raised the need of putting in place a precise law and policy relating to ecosystem services. The reasoning provided by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in *Costa Rica v. Nicaragua* (2018) could have been used to understand the methodologies in evaluating damage to the environment. The ICJ asserted that damage to the environment, and the consequent loss of the ability of the environment to provide goods and services, is compensable.



दैनिक जागरण

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भारत के विकसित बनने की राह

रमेश कुमार दुबे, (लेखक एमएसएमई मंत्रालय के निर्यात संवर्धन एवं विश्व व्यापार संगठन प्रभाग में अधिकारी हैं)

सामान्यतः लोकसभा चुनाव से पहले सरकारें जनादेश को लेकर आशंकित रहती हैं, लेकिन मोदी सरकार इन सबसे अलग नजर आ रही है। तभी तो लोकसभा चुनाव की तारीखों के एलान के बाद प्रधानमंत्री नरेन्द्र मोदी ने कैबिनेट की बैठक की अध्यक्षता करते हुए अपने मंत्रियों से नई सरकार के लिए पहले 100 दिन और पांच साल के लिए रोडमैप तैयार करने के लिए कहा। इससे पहले प्रधानमंत्री मोदी की अध्यक्षता में कैबिनेट ने विकसित भारत-2047 के विजन दस्तावेज पर विचार-विमर्श किया था। तब प्रधानमंत्री ने कहा कि मैं न छोटा सोचता हूँ, न मामूली सपने देखता हूँ और न ही मामूली संकल्प करता हूँ, क्योंकि 2047 में मुझे देश को विकसित भारत के रूप में देखना है। स्पष्ट है कि प्रधानमंत्री मोदी 25 वर्ष का रोडमैप बनाकर आगे बढ़ रहे हैं और इसके केंद्र में हैं छोटे शहरों का विकास।

इसका आभास संकल्प पत्र के नाम से जारी भाजपा के चुनावी घोषणा पत्र से भी होता है। प्रधानमंत्री मोदी का भारत को विकसित देश बनाने का यह संकल्प हवा-हवाई नहीं है। इसकी सफलता के ठोस जमीनी आधार हैं। पिछले 10 वर्षों में मोदी सरकार में चार करोड़ गरीबों को घर बनाकर दिए गए हैं। सरकार 83 करोड़ लोगों को मुफ्त में राशन दे रही है। नल जल योजना के तहत 75 प्रतिशत ग्रामीणों तक पाइपलाइन से पेयजल की आपूर्ति की जा रही है। देश के हर घर में स्वच्छ ईंधन उपलब्ध कराने के लिए शुरू की गई प्रधानमंत्री उज्ज्वला योजना के तहत अब तक 10 करोड़ से अधिक रसोई गैस के कनेक्शन दिए जा चुके हैं। इसी तरह स्वच्छ भारत मिशन के तहत देश भर में करोड़ों शौचालय बनाए गए हैं, जिससे देश खुले में शौच की कुप्रथा से मुक्त हो रहा है।

गरीबी उन्मूलन की दिशा में सरकार की जनधन-आधार-मोबाइल त्रयी के जरिये विकसित हुए बिचौलिया मुक्त धन हस्तांतरण नेटवर्क की मुख्य भूमिका रही है। आज जनधन बैंक खातों का इस्तेमाल सरकारी योजनाओं की सब्सिडी, छात्रवृत्ति, पेंशन, आपदा सहायता जैसी अनगिनत योजनाओं का लाभ सीधे लाभार्थियों के बैंक खातों में पहुंचाने में किया जा रहा है। वित्त वर्ष 2022-23 में सरकार ने विभिन्न योजनाओं के 7.16 लाख करोड़ रुपये लाभार्थियों के बैंक खातों में हस्तांतरित किए, जो 2013-14 में हस्तांतरित राशि (7,367 करोड़ रुपये) की तुलना में 100 गुना ज्यादा है जब प्रत्यक्ष नकदी हस्तांतरण (डीबीटी) शुरू किया गया था। आज 53 केंद्रीय मंत्रालयों की 320 योजनाओं के लाभ डीबीटी के तहत सीधे लाभार्थियों के बैंक खातों में भेजे जा रहे हैं। इसी तरह महंगे इलाज के कारण जनसंख्या का एक बड़ा हिस्सा अस्पतालों तक नहीं जा पाता था। लाखों परिवारों को इलाज के लिए कर्ज लेना पड़ता था जिससे उनकी जमीन-जायदाद तक बिक जाती थी। इस संकट को आयुष्मान भारत योजना के तहत मिल रहे मुफ्त इलाज ने खत्म कर दिया।

भारत विकसित देश बने, इसके लिए गुणवत्तापूर्ण बिजली आपूर्ति भी जरूरी है। इसी के तहत पहले चरण में देश के हर गांव तक बिजली पहुंचाने के साथ-साथ आपूर्ति में सुधार किया गया। इसी का परिणाम है कि आज शहरी क्षेत्रों में प्रतिदिन औसतन 23.5 घंटे और ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में औसतन 20.5 घंटे बिजली आपूर्ति की जा रही है। अब सरकार देश के हर घर को सातों दिन-चौबीसों घंटे रोशन करने की कवायद में जुटी है। इसके लिए मार्च 2025 की समयसीमा तय की गई है। बिजली क्षेत्र की भांति ही सरकार रेलवे और सड़क क्षेत्र का भी कायाकल्प कर रही है, ताकि देश में विश्वस्तरीय आधारभूत ढांचा बने। विकास में बाधा बने सैकड़ों कानूनों को पहले ही निरस्त किया जा चुका है।

मोदी सरकार की योजनाओं के पारदर्शी क्रियान्वयन का नतीजा गरीबी उन्मूलन के रूप में सामने आया है। वित्त वर्ष 2013-14 से 2022-23 के बीच देश में बहुआयामी गरीबी 29.17 प्रतिशत से घटकर 11.28 प्रतिशत रह गई। इस दौरान 24.8 करोड़ लोग बहुआयामी गरीबी से बाहर निकले। शहरों की तुलना में ग्रामीण आबादी का अधिक हिस्सा गरीबी रेखा से ऊपर उठा है। इसमें उत्तर प्रदेश, बिहार, मध्य प्रदेश मुख्य राज्य रहे हैं। गरीबी घटने की इस रफ्तार को देखें तो जल्दी ही वह एक अंक में रह जाएगी। अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर संयुक्त राष्ट्र विकास कार्यक्रम (यूएनडीपी) गरीबी की एक परिभाषा का उपयोग करता है जिसे बहुआयामी गरीबी सूचकांक कहा जाता है। यह सूचकांक शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य और जीवन स्तर के 10 संकेतकों को शामिल करता है। भारत में नीति आयोग ने इसके अलावा मातृत्व स्वास्थ्य और बैंक खाते को भी शामिल कर लिया है। इस प्रकार भारत में 12 संकेतकों के आधार पर बहुआयामी गरीबी का आकलन किया जाता है। इसमें बहुआयामी गरीबी को शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य और जीवन स्तर में सुधार की कसौटी पर मापा जाता है। सरलता से देखें तो एक व्यक्ति जो इन सभी मोर्चों पर मजबूत हुआ हो उसे ही बहुआयामी गरीबी से बाहर निकलने के तौर पर गिना गया है। अब तक देश में गरीबी आकलन के आंकड़े प्रति व्यक्ति आय तक सिमटे रहे हैं। इससे गरीबी उन्मूलन की सटीक जानकारी नहीं मिल पाती थी। इसका कारण है कि आय के अनुमान हासिल करना कठिन है।

कुल मिलाकर मोदी सरकार के इन्हीं प्रयासों का नतीजा है कि भारत दुनिया की 10वीं से पांचवीं सबसे बड़ी आर्थिक शक्ति बन गया है। इसी को देखते हुए प्रधानमंत्री नरेन्द्र मोदी गारंटी दे रहे हैं कि उनकी तीसरी पारी में भारत दुनिया की तीन शीर्ष अर्थव्यवस्थाओं में से एक होगा। स्पष्ट है कि प्रधानमंत्री मोदी 2047 तक भारत को विकसित देश बनाने की दिशा में अग्रसर हैं।

समय रहते

संपादकीय

पिछले दो विश्व युद्धों के इतिहास से ज्यादातर लोग वाकिफ हैं। दो देशों के बीच शुरू हुआ टकराव कब एक युद्ध में बदल जाए, कब वह दोनों पक्षों के सहयोगी देशों के बीच फैल जाए और विश्व युद्ध की शकल ले ले, कहा नहीं जा सकता। विडंबना है कि अतीत के अनुभवों से सबक लेना जरूरी नहीं समझा जाता। अमूमन हर युद्ध में इसी गलती को दोहराया जाता है। अब इजराइल - फिलिस्तीन संघर्ष की आग अन्य देशों की ओर भी फैलती दिखने लगी है। गौरतलब है कि हाल ही में दमिश्क में ईरान के दूतावास पर इजराइल की ओर से हमला करने की खबर आई थी। उसमें ईरान के दो जनरलों की मौत हो गई थी। उसके बाद से ईरान ने इसे मुद्दा बनाया हुआ है और जवाबी कार्रवाई की धमकी दी है। मगर अब मामला धमकियों से आगे बढ़ गया लगता है और ईरान ने जिस तेवर में जवाबी कार्रवाई की बात की है, उससे दोनों देशों के बीच तनाव बढ़ गया है। अमेरिका ने भी ईरान के हमले की तैयारी को लेकर चेतावनी दी है। भारत और अमेरिका सहित कई देशों ने अपने नागरिकों को सलाह दी है कि वे इस समय इजराइल और ईरान जाने से बचें। भारतीय विदेश मंत्रालय ने कहा है कि जो लोग अभी ईरान या इजराइल में रह रहे हैं, वे वहां के भारतीय दूतावासों से संपर्क करें और अपना पंजीकरण कराएं। ईरान में फिलहाल लगभग चार हजार और इजराइल में साढ़े अठारह हजार भारतीय रहते हैं। मगर ईरान के तेवर तीखे होने के बाद जिस तरह युद्ध का दायरा फैलने की आशंका मंडराने लगी है, उसके मद्देनजर भारत सरकार इन दोनों देशों में रह रहे भारतीयों की संभावित निकासी के साथ-साथ अचानक पैदा होने वाली स्थितियों से निपटने की तैयारी कर रही है। जाहिर है, अगर किन्हीं वजहों से बातचीत के जरिए स्थिति को संभाला नहीं गया, युद्ध को टाला नहीं जा सका तो फिलहाल फिलिस्तीन और इजराइल के बीच चल रहे जंग का दायरा चिंताजनक स्तर तक फैल जा सकता है। इसलिए भारत या अन्य देशों का अपने नागरिकों की सुरक्षा के लिए समय रहते कदम उठाना जरूरी है।
