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Research Foundation

ISSN 2454-9401
Issue: September 2020

The Nationalist

The Farm Bills 2020: Milestone
Legislation for Doubling the
Farmers' Income

Dr. Sudhir Bisht

Farm Bills – Breaking
Resistance to Pending Reform

Pratim Ranjan Bose

किसानों के हितों के प्रति पूर्णतः प्रतिबद्ध
है मोदी सरकार

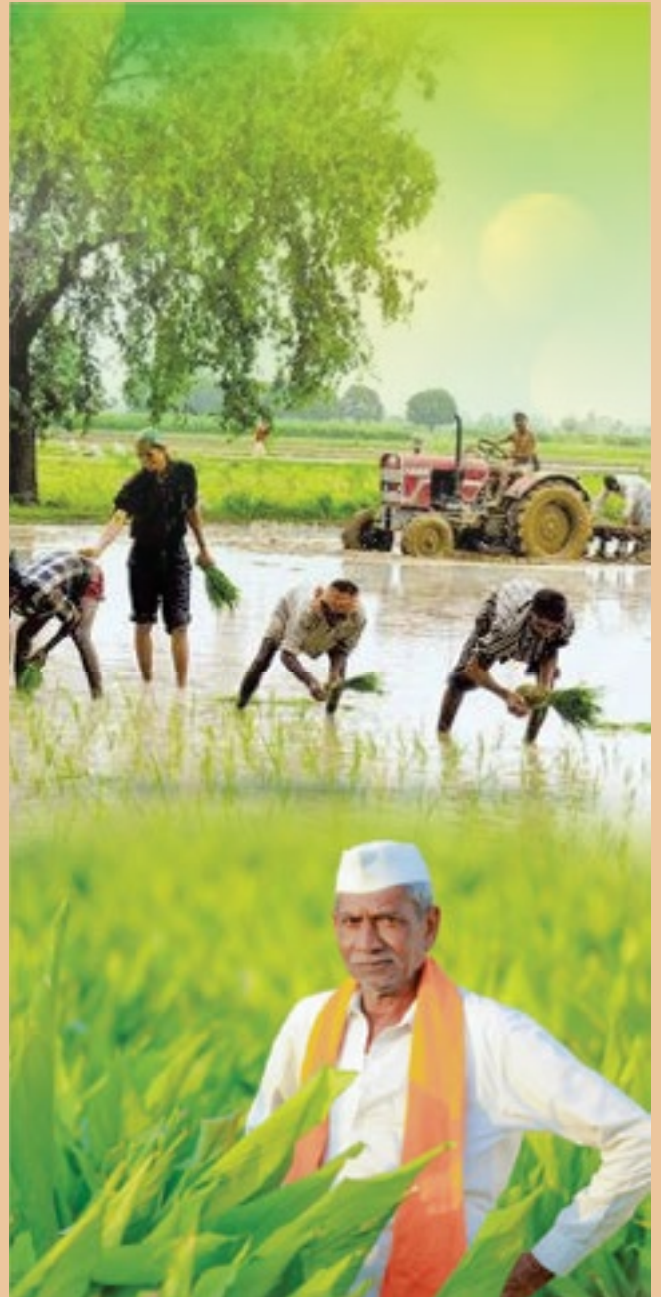
राजीव प्रताप सिंह

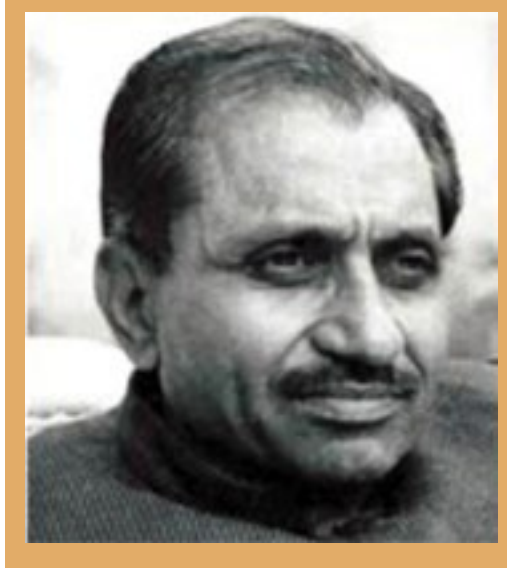
Pro-Farmer Laws: A Mission
Who's Time Has Come!

Ashok Dixit

Emerging Perspectives of the
Indo-Pacific

Ambassador Anil Wadhwa





“यह भी आवश्यक है कि हम आर्थिक क्षेत्र में आत्मनिर्भर बनें. यदि हमारे कार्यक्रमों की पूर्ति विदेशी सहायता पर निर्भर रही तो वह अवश्य ही हमारे उपर प्रत्यक्ष- अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से बंधनकारक होगी. हम सहायता देने वाले देशों के आर्थिक प्रभाव में आ जायेंगे. अपनी आर्थिक योजनाओं की सफलपूर्ति में संभव बाधाओं को बचाने की दृष्टि से हमें अनेक स्थानों पर मौन रहना पड़ेगा”

पं दीनदयाल उपाध्याय,
पुस्तक ‘भारतीय अर्थ-नीति विकास की एक दिशा’ से

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CONTENT

EDITORIAL

- ★ PM Modi's Call for Reforming the UN - a historic imperative - **Dr. Anirban Ganguly**

PM MODI'S VISION

- ★ PM's address at the 75th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session 2020 on 26 September 2020
- ★ PM's address at Fit India Dialogue on the first anniversary of Fit India Movement on 24 September 2020
- ★ PM's address at Conclave on "School Education in 21st Century" under NEP 2020 on 11 September 2020

POLICY ANALYSIS

- ★ The Farm Bills 2020: Milestone Legislation for Doubling the Farmers' Income - **Dr. Sudhir Bisht**

POLICY OPINION

- ★ Farm Bills – Breaking Resistance to Pending Reform - **Pratim Ranjan Bose**
- ★ किसानों के हितों के प्रति पूर्णतः प्रतिबद्ध है मोदी सरकार - **राजीव प्रताप सिंह**

INDIA & THE WORLD

- ★ Emerging Perspectives of the Indo – Pacific - **Ambassador Anil Wadhwa**

POLICY ROUNDUP

- ★ Pro-Farmer Laws: A Mission Who's Time Has Come! - **Ashok Dixit**

VISION AATMANIRBHAR

- ★ AatmaNirbharata, Globalization and the Indian Toys Industry: A Tale of Reconnections and Revival - **Suchismita Das**
- ★ आत्मनिर्भर भारत की दिशा में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभा रहे बैंक - **सतीश सिंह**

POLICY NOTE

- ★ Increasing Age of Marriage for Women - **Varada Sambhus**

EVENT @ SPMRF



Dr. Anirban Ganguly

PM Modi's Call for Reforming the UN - a historic imperative

international politics, India under PM Modi has placed before the world several alternatives in so far as collective living and exploration of a new and lasting energy framework is concerned.

Not only has India, under Modi, continued with a transformative agenda which is altering the matrix at the grassroots domestically by mainstreaming the marginal and empowering the relegated, it has also displayed an impressive involvement at the global level as well. PM Modi referred to this transformative programme at home and its impact on the world at large, in his now-famous sentence, "How long would a country have to wait particularly when the changes happening in that country affect a large part of the world?" Be it the vigorous and imaginative push in the global climate change narrative, be it the articulation of a new vision of energy sources, through the International Solar Alliance, be it the push given to the acceptance and dissemination of an alternate lifestyle inspired by Indian knowledge systems and tradition – when the International Yoga Day came through in 2015 few could have imagined how relevant it would eventually become in a world struck by the Corona pandemic – India, PM Modi pointed out, in its dealing with the world, manifested its philosophical belief of the world being a family.

P rime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the UNGA's 75th General Assembly must necessarily rank as one of the boldest, most earnest, frank and far-seeing speeches in the history of the UN. Just as Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech delivered at Fulton, Missouri in March 1946, in another context and for another arena, is repeatedly referred to by historians and experts of the evolution of the post-World War II global order and geo-strategy, PM Modi's address which may be called the "How long would a country have to wait" speech expressed, exuded and articulated the positive impatience – not a desperation – of a rising power, which has diligently and consistently fulfilled its international obligations. It described the impatience of a country, which, in the last six years has especially demonstrated a definite international vision and aspiration. Besides deftly and imaginatively navigating the often choppy waters of

It is reflected in India's development partnership vision, it is reflected in India's neighbourhood first policy, it is felt in the narrative and vision of SAGAR. This approach has never been with the intent of imposing a hegemony, it has rather insisted on the need to evolve a framework of development partnership based on mutual trust and transparency. As PM Modi said in his historic speech, "This philosophy has always been the driving force of India's policies. One can see the glimpses of this philosophy in India's Neighbourhood First Policy to our Act East Policy, in the thought of Security and Growth for All in the Region, and in our approach towards the Indo Pacific region. India's partnerships are also guided by this very principle. Any gesture of friendship by India towards one country is not against someone else. When

India strengthens its development partnership, it is not with any malafide intent of making the partner country dependent or hapless. We have never hesitated from sharing experiences of our development.” Indian external affairs minister, S. Jaishankar, pointing at this approach by India, observes, that “India’s progress in social development has the potential to make it a key source of trusted talent for the global knowledge-based economy” as well. A crucial source of knowledge – both technical and civilizational, talent and innovation is how India is being increasingly seen. India today is brimming with possibilities and opportunities and it cannot sit on the side-line of the global arena and merely applaud.

Even during the pandemic, while catering to its one billion plus population and handling the many challenges and diverse needs and demands internally, India continued to be responsive and sensitive to the needs of the world. India’s response to the world was not utilitarian or commercial, it was humanitarian driven by this deeper civilizational perspective of the globe. On this PM Modi observed, “As the largest vaccine producing country of the world, I want to give one more assurance to the global community today, India’s vaccine production and delivery capacity will be used to help all humanity in fighting this crisis.” It is in such a crisis that the collective mind of a nation becomes evident and its sense of global responsibility too becomes clear. India’s global responsibility and approach was evident during this phase.

But the fundamental, core message of PM Modi’s speech, was that the world view which had formed the United Nations and had shaped it, no longer reflected the realities of the world today, seventy five years after it was formed. New aspirations, new alignments, new formations have made the need for a thorough restructuring of the world body an imperative that can no longer be postponed. When PM Modi spoke, he spoke for the collective

aspirations of many countries and people who were awakening to this urgent need. The perception that without such a historic restructuring the UN as a body symbolising the hopes of humanity will become incongruent in global dealings is also emerging. A certain dominating mind-set which has got conditioned to controlling the international political discourse through the UN and its many paraphernalia will naturally grudge this call for introspection that PM Modi made. Today, he said, “we are in a completely different era. In [the] 21st century, the requirements and challenges of our present as well as our future are vastly different from those of the past. Therefore, the international community today is faced with a very important question: Whether the character of the institution, constituted in the prevailing circumstances of 1945, is relevant even today? If the century changes and we don’t, then strength to bring changes becomes weak.” PM Modi’s call has, in a sense, rekindled the will to change. No one can dispute India’s commitment to a reformed multilateralism, no one can find fault with India’s earnest zeal for creating an international partnership framework on several positive global agendas that will affect or determine global living, and therefore this call coming from India’s Prime Minister at this juncture is a sincere and empowered exhortation, not the exhortation of a balancing power.

With his call for the need to reform the UN, PM Modi has also launched the process of correcting a historic wrong committed in the 1960s, when India squandered away her chances, driven by a hollow morality, of being at the UN high seat. PM Modi’s call to the UNGA, on its seventy fifth year, is the call of a confident nation, a nation which has vastly contributed to global welfare, which has legitimate power aspirations and which has consciously emerged on the world scene as the voice of a just, fair and equitable international order. None can honestly dispute that.

PM's address at the 75th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session 2020 on 26 September 2020



- » Respected President of the General Assembly. On behalf of over 1.3 billion people of India, I would like to congratulate every member country on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.
- » India is proud of the fact that it is one of the founding members of the United Nations. On this historic occasion, I have come to this global platform to share the sentiments of 1.3 billion people of India.
- » Your Excellency, The world of 1945 was significantly different from today's world. The global situation, sources-resources, problems-solutions; all were quite different.
- » And as a result the form and the composition of the institution, established with the aim of global welfare, were in accordance with the prevailing situation of those times.
- » Today we are in a completely different era. In 21st century, The requirements and challenges of our present as well as our future are vastly different from those of the past.
- » Therefore, the international community today is faced with a very important question: Whether the character of the institution, constituted in the prevailing circumstances of 1945, is relevant even today?

- » If century changes and we don't, then strength to bring changes becomes weak. If we assess the last 75 years of the United Nations, we see several achievements
- » But at the same time, there are also several instances that point to a serious need for introspection for the United Nations. One could say that we have successfully avoided a third world war, but we cannot deny that there have been several wars and many civil wars.
- » Several terrorist attacks shook the world and there have been bloodsheds. The people who lost their lives in these wars and attacks were human beings, like you and me.
- » Thousands of children, who would have otherwise enriched this world, left us prematurely. So many people lost their life savings and became homeless refugees.
- » Were the efforts of the United Nations sufficient during those times or are these efforts adequate even today? The whole world is fighting the global pandemic of Corona for the last 8-9 months.
- » Where is the United Nations in this joint fight against the pandemic? Where is its effective response? Your Excellency, Reform in the responses, in the processes,

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in the character of the United Nations is the need of the hour.

- » It is a fact that the faith and respect that the United Nations enjoys in India are unparalleled. But it is also true that the people of India have been waiting for a long time for the completion of the reforms of the United Nations. Today, people of India are concerned whether this reform-process will ever reach its logical conclusion?
- » For how long will India be kept out of the decision-making structures of the United Nations? A country, which is the largest democracy of the world, A country with more than 18% of the world population, A country, which has hundreds of languages, hundreds of dialects, many sects, many ideologies, A country, which was a leading global economy for centuries and also one which has seen hundreds of years of foreign rule.
- » Your Excellency, When we were strong, we did not trouble the world; when we were weak, we did not become a burden on the world.
- » Your Excellency, How long would a country have to wait particularly when the changes happening in that country affect a large part of the world?

PM's address at Fit India Dialogue on the first anniversary of Fit India Movement on 24 September 2020

- » आज देश को प्रेरणा देनेवाले ऐसे सात महानुभावों का भी मैं विशेष रूप से आभार व्यक्त करता हूँ क्योंकि आपने समय निकाला और आपके खुद के अनुभवों को बताया आपने फिटनेस के भिन्न-भिन्न आयामों पर खुद के जो अपने अनुभव शेयर किए वो निश्चित रूप से देश की हर पीढ़ी को बहुत ही लाभकारी होंगे, ऐसा मुझे लगता है।
- » आज का यह discussion हर आयु वर्ग के लिए और भिन्न-भिन्न रुचिर रखने वालों के लिए भी बहुत ही उपयोगी होगा। फिट इंडिया मूवमेंट की first anniversary पर मैं सभी देशवासियों के अच्छे स्वास्थ्य की कामना करता हूँ।
- » एक साल के भीतर-भीतर ये फिटनेस मूवमेंट, movement of people भी बन चुका है, और movement of positivity भी बन चुका है।
- » देश में health और fitness को लेकर निरंतर awareness भी बढ़ रही है, और activeness भी बढ़ी है। मुझे खुशी है कि योग, आसन, व्यायाम, वॉकिंग, रनिंग, स्वीमिंग healthy food habits, healthy life style, अब ये हमारी natural consciousness का हिस्सा बन रहा है।
- » साथियों, Fit India मूवमेंट ने अपना एक साल एक ऐसे समय में पूरा किया है जिसमें से करीब-करीब 6 महीने अनेक प्रकार के restrictions के बीच हमें गुजारा करना पड़ा है। लेकिन फिट इंडिया मूवमेंट ने अपने प्रभाव और प्रासंगिकता को इस कोरोनाकाल में सिद्ध करके दिखाया है।
- » वाकई, फिट रहना उतना मुश्किल काम नहीं है जितना कुछ लोगों को लगता है। थोड़े से नियम से, और थोड़े से परिश्रम से आप हमेशा स्वस्थ रह सकते हैं।
- » 'फिटनेस की डोज़, आधा घंटा रोज' इस मंत्र में सभी का स्वास्थ्य, सभी का सुख छिपा हुआ है। फिर चाहे योग हो, या बैडमिंटन हो, टेनिस हो, या फुटबाल हो, कराटे हो या कबड्डी, जो भी आपको पसंद आए, कम से कम 30 मिनट रोज़ कीजिये।
- » अभी हमने देखा, युवा मंत्रालय और स्वास्थ्य मंत्रालय ने मिलकर फिटनेस प्रोटोकॉल भी जारी किया है। साथियों, आज दुनिया भर में fitness को लेकर जागरूकता है।
- » World Health Organisation-WHO ने Global strategy on Diet, physical activity and health बनाई है। Physical activity पर global recommendation भी जारी किए हैं।
- » आज दुनिया के अनेक देशों ने फिटनेस को लेकर नए लक्ष्य बनाए हैं और उन पर अनेक मोर्चों पर वो काम कर रहे हैं, अनेक प्रकार के काम कर रहे हैं।
- » ऑस्ट्रेलिया, जर्मनी, ब्रिटेन, अमेरिका, ऐसे अनेक देशों में इस समय बड़े पैमाने पर फिटनेस का अभियान चल रहा है कि उनके ज्यादा से ज्यादा नागरिक daily physical exercise करें, physical exercise के रूटीन से जुड़ें।
- » साथियों, हमारे आयुर्विज्ञान शास्त्रों में कहा गया है- सर्व प्राणि भूताम् नित्यम् आयुः युक्तिम् अपेक्षते। दैवे पुरुषा कारे च, स्थितम् हि अस्य बला बलम्॥
- » अर्थात्, संसार में श्रम, सफलता, भाग्य, सब कुछ आरोग्य पर, health पर ही निर्भर करता है। स्वास्थ्य है, तभी भाग्य है, तभी सफलता है।
- » जब हम नियमित रूप से व्यायाम करते हैं, खुद को फिट और मजबूत रखते हैं। एक भावना जागती है कि हाँ हम स्वयं के निर्माता हैं। एक आत्मविश्वास आता है।
- » व्यक्ति का यही आत्मविश्वास उसको जीवन के अलग अलग क्षेत्रों में भी सफलता दिलाता है। यही बात परिवार, समाज और देश पर भी लागू है, एक परिवार जो एक साथ खेलता है, एक साथ फिट भी रहता है।

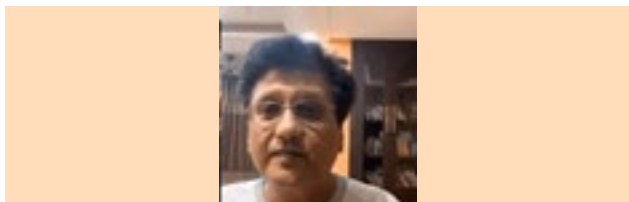
PM's address at Conclave on "School Education in 21st Century" under NEP 2020 on 11 September 2020



- » Namaskar! My cabinet colleagues, the country's Education Minister Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank ji, Shri Sanjay Dhotre ji, chairman of the drafting committee of the National Education Policy Dr. Kasturirangan ji, esteemed members of his team, scholars, principals, teachers, ladies and gentlemen from all the states participating in this special conference.
- » Today, we all are becoming part of a moment that is laying the foundation for building the future of our country. This is a moment in which the seeds of the new era have been sown. The National Education Policy is going to give a new direction to 21st century India.
- » Friends, every domain of the world has changed in the last three decades. Every system has changed. In these three decades, there is hardly any aspect of our life which has remained the same.
- » But the path on which the society moves towards the future, our education system, it was still running under the old pattern. It was as necessary to change the old education system as it is necessary to replace a damaged blackboard.
- » Like every school has a pin-up board. You pin up all the necessary papers, necessary school orders, children's paintings, etc. on it. The board gets filled up after some time. You have to make changes to put new paintings of the new children of the new class on that pin-up board.

- » The new National Education Policy is also a powerful means of meeting the new aspirations and new requirements of a New India.
- » It is the outcome of the hard work of the last four-five years. People from all walks of life, every discipline and language, have worked on it day and night. But, this is not over.
- » In fact, the real work has just started. Now, we have to implement the new National Education Policy in a very effective manner. And all of us will do it together.
- » I know, many of you are having several questions in your mind after the announcement of the National Education Policy. What is this education policy? How is it different?
- » What changes will it herald in the system of the schools and colleges? What is there for a teacher in this education policy? What is there for a student? And most importantly, what needs to be done for its successful implementation and how?
- » These questions are legitimate and necessary also. And therefore, we have all gathered here in this programme so that we can discuss it and make a way forward. I am told that yesterday, all of you discussed these things for hours in a very detailed way.
- » Teachers should prepare learning material according to themselves, children should create their own toy museums, there should be a community library at school to connect with parents, there should be a multilingual dictionary with pictures and there should be kitchen gardens in schools.
- » Many of such topics have been discussed and new ideas given. I am happy that our principals and teachers are enthusiastically participating in this campaign to implement the National Education Policy.
- » A few days ago, the Ministry of Education had also sought suggestions from teachers across the country on the Mygov portal for implementation of the National Education Policy.
- » More than 15 lakh suggestions have been received within a week. These suggestions will help in implementing the National Education Policy in a more effective manner. The Ministry of Education is organizing a number of programmes to create more awareness in this regard.
- » Friends, the younger generation and young energy have a big role to play in the rapid development of any country. But the foundation of that younger generation starts from childhood.
- » The life of the future depends largely on childhood. Children's education, the environment they get, determines to a large extent, how they will become as a person in the future, what will be their personality.
- » Therefore, the National Education Policy has placed a lot of emphasis on children's education. During pre-school, the child takes the first step to come out of the care of his parents and the relaxed home environment.
- » This is the first stage when children begin to realize their senses, their skills in a much better way. This requires schools and teachers who can provide children the environment of fun learning, playful learning, activity-based learning and discovery-based learning.

The Farm Bills 2020: Milestone Legislation for Doubling the Farmers' Income



Dr. Sudhir Bisht

Farm Bills that have the potential to change the agricultural landscape of India.

I will discuss the three bills briefly and explain how they can benefit the agri sector of India.

The farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Production and Facilitation) Bill 2020

The 'annadata' or the 'food-giver' has suffered at the hands of iniquitous forces that have been inimical to the farmers. Hitherto the farmers were compelled to sell most of their agricultural produce to the 'mandis' or the agri-markets owned and controlled by Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMC). A farmer was wedded to the mandis in his area and the mandis were dominated by very parochial middle-men (or arhatiyas or commission agents) who dictated the sale price to the farmers. The minimum support price or the MSP had come to denote 'maximum sale price' and farmers often sold at a price lower than the MSP to the intermediaries. The farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Bill frees the Indian farmers from the shackles of mandis. They will no longer have to pay 2 to 3% fees to the commission agents. The farmer can sell his produce to anyone he fancies, without any fear or inhibition.

The Farmers (Empowerment & protection) Agreement & Price Assurance & farm Services Bill, 2020

This bill will facilitate contract farming and will provide triple advantage to the farmers.

One, the farmers and buyers can sign simple contracts that will give the farmers assurance of sale by the buyers at a pre-agreed price. This will

There are landmark reforms that have the potential to lift the entire nation economically. The BJP led governments have never been shy of undertaking systemic reforms.

The restructuring and disinvestment of loss making and non core public sector enterprises was a bold step taken by the first NDA government led by the late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee (ABV). It ushered in the beginning of disinvestment by the Government of India. To my mind, it was a major shift in the economic policy that the Indian governments had followed till then. I would term it as a major structural reform.

The political successor of ABV, PM Narendra Modi has already surpassed the pace of economic reforms that was achieved by any of his predecessors. The Narendra Modi led government's biggest economic reform has been the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017.

GST has been called as the 'one nation, one-tax' and it has been hailed as the most significant economic reform in India. There have been many other economic reforms undertaken by the Modi government and the biggest, boldest reform in the series of structural reforms taken by the BJP-led NDA is the introduction of the three new

eliminate the fear factor from the minds of the farmers of not finding buyers in case of excess production.

Two, the agreement acts as some kind of payment guarantee, even before the farmer sows his crops.

Three, the buyer can even advance loans to the farmers and this can help the farmer to meet his input costs.

The bill ensures that farmers are not be exploited by the buyers as market prices would be paid to the farmer in case the market prices are in excess of prices mentioned in the contract.

The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2020

An amendment to Essential Commodities Act, 1955 will deregulate key food items except in extraordinary circumstances like wars, famine, natural calamities etc. The original Act gave sweeping powers to central government to “control production, supply, and distribution of essential commodities.” This had led to fears in the minds of storage owners due to the inspector raj that has come to be associated with such archaic laws.

The bill will dispel fears of private players of excessive regulatory interference in their operations. The bill also seeks to remove cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities.

These amendments are bound to attract corporate and foreign investment in the food supply chain that badly needs modern warehouses and cold storages. The big corporates fear excessive regulatory interference but once the above-mentioned food items are removed from the list of essential commodities, the private sector investment would surely come along.

It is an established fact that better SCM (supply

GST has been called as the ‘one nation, one-tax’ and it has been hailed as the most significant economic reform in India. There have been many other economic reforms undertaken by the Modi government and the biggest, boldest reform in the series of structural reforms taken by the BJP-led NDA is the introduction of the three new Farm Bills that have the potential to change the agricultural landscape of India.

chain management) brings about two positive changes. It brings price stability for the buyers, sellers and end consumers and it reduces wastage substantially.

Farmers and consumers have welcomed the removal of monopoly of mandis

The farmers have welcomed the participation of the private sector. A recent study reveals that the farmers of Western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana have benefitted by the participation of companies like Grofers, Big Basket, Mother Dairy, More store, Ninjacart & Reliance Fresh. These buyers pay instant cash, better prices and treat farmers with respect. The farmers love dealing with such reputed private enterprises and admit that the monopoly of mandis is bad for the market

The consumers too would benefit by the Farm bills. The farm-to-fork price gap in India is as large as 60% as against the 20% gap that exists in developed economies. The large gap can be attributed to food wastage, inefficient logistics and most importantly to the excessive margin of intermediaries. The three farm bills will go a long way in ushering fair prices for farmers as well as consumers.

The political campaign against farm bills has no basis

The opposition parties have started a misinformation campaign against the farm Bills but it has not met with much success. I reproduce the charges labelled against the bills and the government's calibrated response to them

S r . No	Opposition's claim	Fact check
1	The Bills will lead to withdrawal of Minimum Support price (MSP). The bills should have included a clause on MSP	MSP is not covered by any Act. The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) is responsible for MSP and it will continue to do so in future as well.
2	The agri-markets or mandis will disappear	The mandis will stay and will have to become more professional. Only the monopoly of mandis would end.
3	Big industrialists will take over agricultural land	Farmlands cannot be sold or contracted out to any corporate. The contracts between farmers and buyers will be limited to farm produce only
4	Big industrialists will exploit farmers	Non-APMC items- like milk, certain vegetables, and poultry- have flourished without the interference of mandis. Competition among private players will benefit farmers. Farmers can walk out of contract anytime without any penalty

The introduction of Farm bills is a major step in the direction of doubling the farmers' income. It will usher in the much-needed agriculture reforms in India.

(The writer is professor of management at DME Noida is also a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

Farm Bills – Breaking Resistance to Pending Reform



Pratim Ranjan Bose

If history remembers P V Narasimha Rao as architect of modern India, the Narendra Modi rule will be remembered for breaking every resistance to reforms and implementing proposals, pending for decades.

The latest and the most critical addition to this list is farm sector reforms. If backed by the right regulatory environment, they are potent to bring long term change in the wider agri-economy that dominates lives of majority Indians.

The reforms freed the farmer from the restrictions on market access, which were imposed by a food-deficit India of control-era. The Essential Commodities Act, that now stands amended, had an even narrow objective of sourcing cheap food for soldiers during World War-II.

The change will take time, probably next four-five years, to reflect on ground. But the tepid response to the Opposition's call for protests, beyond Punjab and Haryana; is an indication that majority farmers didn't gain from the erstwhile system.

For the rich, by the rich

Such reactions were not unexpected. Successive committees recommended removing

the stranglehold of State level APMC (Agriculture Produce Market Committee) Acts that denied the farmer the right to decide his point of sale.

The erstwhile legal framework forced the farmer to sell his produce to designated APMC mandis or market, dominated by rich farmer-trader-middleman-politics cartel visited by a set of buyers. Small farmers could barely afford this trouble, they sold produce to middlemen at farmgate.

As a result, small farmers missed out from the 'open-ended' state procurement at MSP (minimum support price) spearheaded by Central government-run Food Corporation of India.

In 2015 the "High level committee on reorienting the role and restructuring of FCI", quoted the 70th round of National Sample Survey (NSSO) data to point out that only 13.5 percent paddy farmers and 16.2 percent wheat farmers (constituting six percent of the total farming community) sold produce directly to procurement agency during kharif season of 2012 and Rabi season of 2013.

The second point is even more critical. Rich farmers and that too from a few States, enjoyed the maximum benefits of state procurement at MSP.

In the 2019-20 agri-marketing year, India produced 106-million-ton wheat and 117 mt of rice. FCI procured roughly one-third of wheat and 44 percent of rice production. Nearly 85 percent of wheat was procured from three States and 73 percent of rice was contributed by six States.

Punjab and Haryana are top gainers, together

In 2015 the “High level committee on reorienting the role and restructuring of FCI”, quoted the 70th round of National Sample Survey (NSSO) data to point out that only 13.5 percent paddy farmers and 16.2 percent wheat farmers (constituting six percent of the total farming community) sold produce directly to procurement agency during kharif season of 2012 and Rabi season of 2013.

contributing two-third of wheat and a little less than one-third of rice procurement. Punjab tops either list.

The procurement doesn't come cheap. With complete stranglehold over the farm produce market (through APMC act), the farmer-politics cartel, particularly of Punjab, forced the Centre to hike MSP rates way above all viable limits.

Between 2010-11 and 2019-20, MSP for common paddy and wheat increased by 81 percent and 75 percent respectively. The increase was sharper after 2014.

The end result is, MSP was converted into 'maximum selling price'. Rich farmers of select States gained. Farm practices became unsustainable (as is evident in the high NKP ratio of Punjab) as returns were assured. Some States gained too by pocketing high Mandi tax, which now stands abolished.

The nation paid a fortune in procuring wheat way above the stock limits. Leakages soared. According to Shanta Kumar Committee (2015) 46 percent of cheap food grain was diverted from the public distribution system (PDS).

Last but not the least, the subsidy burden

increased astronomically. Between 2016-17 and 2018-19, FCI's borrowings from National Small Savings Fund alone increased from Rs 70,000 crore to Rs 1,86,000 crore (Bloomberg, September 20, 2019).

Disruptive Reform

The Centre assured that the MSP and FCI procurement will continue. But, farmer-politics nexus in Punjab and Haryana are afraid that they will lose the ability to arm-twist the government to hike MSP.

The suspicion is valid. The reforms have thrown Punjab farmers open to competition. It will be difficult for FCI to justify procurement of wheat at high MSP, if the local millers procure the same at a lower price from UP or Bihar.

But that is a narrow perspective of the reform. As the attractiveness of MSP wanes and contract farming gains momentum, there will be crop diversification away from rice and wheat, which is bound to offer natural support to prices of these two commodities.

It means, reforms will trigger a shift from the present model of farming, where rice and wheat are produced way above requirement. But any such eventuality will take time to unfold, as MSP has reached so high that it will continue to be attractive for the next couple of years.

Also, the government needs to invest in integrating markets across the country to allow free flow of price information. The regulations are to be tightened so that we do not see a repetition of Bihar experience.

Bihar liberalized the agri market from the stranglehold of APMC, in 2006. However, due to lack of due mechanism, the middlemen regrouped to serve buyers sitting in big cities, without much impact on the 'farm-to-fork' price differential that stands at a staggering 65-70 percent in India.

The purpose of the agri reform is to reduce the differential by allowing play of more efficient market forces, preferably the organized sector, so that both farmer and consumer benefits at the expense of the middlemen.

Chain reaction anticipated

In all probability the farm sector reforms captured by three Acts - the Farmers' and Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and; Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 – passed by the Indian Parliament will trigger a chain reaction.

There will be some political noise – as is signified in exit of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) from NDA - in nearly half a dozen States which were most benefited in the previous regime and thereby created a sizable interest group(s).

It will initiate restructuring of FCI, which is long overdue. The direct transfer of fertilizer subsidy should henceforth be a reality. Together both these measures will plug leakages and reduce the total estimated food subsidy bill of Rs 5,00,000 crore, thereby ensuring fiscal prudence.

The bill may also have a significant impact on the power distribution sector and State finances; as the reforms will call for fiscal prudence in States. As states like Punjab lose mandi tax, there will be demand for fresh taxes.

It will be interesting to watch how the farm sector reform unfolds in West Bengal.

Shanta Kumar Committee pointed out that despite being a front runner in rice (and vegetable) production, farmers in the State failed to take advantage of the FCI procurement regime due to infrastructure paucity. In comparison Odisha did better.

Post-reforms, farmers in border districts might take advantage of the inter-State sales to optimize earnings. It is an opportunity for farmers in North Bengal districts to take advantage of the integrated market space with Assam.

The northeast India which failed to take advantage of its potential in agri-horti production in the past, can take advantage of contract farming to attract investment in food processing.

India inflicted a great harm to its farmer community by living in a state of self-denial to contract farming so far. On the one side there is West Bengal which gave contract farming license to Frito-Lay as early as in 2005, but denied to open the market to competition.

On the other hand, North East India paid the price of shunning contract farming altogether. Over the last few decades, a number of attempts were made both by the State and private sectors to tap the horticultural potential of the region.

Public sector North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Ltd (NEAMAC) had closed all four processing facilities in the region. The Mega Food Park in Assam which was inaugurated in 2015, failed to establish backend linkages.

Bangladeshi food major PRAN opened a pineapple processing facility in Tripura in 2015. The facility now survives on imported pulp. The reason behind is the disconnect between the farmer and processor.

Due to its geographic location, North-East is a high cost producer of cereals and pulses. But it can surely turn the table in agri-horticultural production, provided it braces for contract farming.

(The writer is a columnist, researcher and a public policy expert. Views expressed are his own)

किसानों के हितों के प्रति पूर्णतः प्रतिबद्ध है मोदी सरकार



राजीव प्रताप सिंह

भा

रत में स्वतंत्रता प्राप्ति के बाद से ही प्रत्येक स्वतंत्रता दिवस के उपलक्ष्य में लाल किले की प्राचीर से प्रति वर्ष प्रधानमंत्री द्वारा दिए जाने वाले भाषणों में किसानों के मुद्दे प्रमुखता से जगह पाते आए हैं। परन्तु, दुर्भाग्यवश ऐसा होने की बाद भी आज तक किसानों की स्थिति बदहाल ही रही।

पूर्व की अधिकांश सरकारों ने किसानों के मुद्दों पर खूब राजनीति की लेकिन दृढ़ इच्छाशक्ति के अभाव में वे किसानों की समस्याओं के समाधान के लिए ठोस नीतिगत परिवर्तन नहीं कर सकीं। वर्तमान सरकार ने अपने प्रथम कार्यकाल से ही 2022 तक किसानों की आय दोगुनी करने लक्ष्य निर्धारित किया हुआ है और इस दिशा में लगातार काम भी कर रही है।

फसल बीमा योजना, मृदा स्वास्थ्य कार्ड योजना, प्रधानमंत्री सिंचाई योजना, किसान क्रेडिट कार्ड जैसी अनेक योजनाओं के माध्यम से वर्तमान सरकार ने किसानों के हितों को प्रोत्साहन देने का प्रयास किया है। इसी क्रम में सरकार ने 2019 में किसान हित से जुड़ी 'प्रधानमंत्री किसान सम्मान निधि योजना' प्रारम्भ की। इसके तहत किसानों को प्रतिवर्ष 6000 रुपये सीधे उनके खातों में आर्थिक मदद के रूप में भेजे जाते हैं।

लेकिन इन सब प्रयासों के बावजूद वर्तमान सरकार ने जब यह महसूस किया कि किसानों की आय दोगुनी करने के लिए इतना ही पर्याप्त नहीं है, इससे आगे भी कुछ नीतिगत परिवर्तनों की आवश्यकता है तो सरकार विगत जून माह में किसानों के हित में तीन अध्यादेश लेकर आई जिसे पिछले दिनों दोनों सदनों में पारित भी कराया जा चुका है और अब तो वे राष्ट्रपति के हस्ताक्षर के बाद कानून भी बन चुके हैं। लेकिन विपक्षी दल लगातार किसानों को भ्रमित करने अपना असल चरित्र दिखा रहे हैं। वे सरकार में रहें या विपक्ष में, उन्होंने हमेशा ही किसानों के मुद्दों पर राजनीति की और आज भी वे वहीं कर रहे हैं।

इस नए संशोधनों में तीन कानून हैं, जिसके संक्षिप्त विवरण निम्नलिखित है-

कृषक उपज व्यापार और वाणिज्य, (संवर्धन और सरलीकरण) अधिनियम, 2020

इस कानून में प्रावधान किया गया है कि किसान अपने उत्पाद मंडी से बाहर बेचने के लिए स्वतंत्र हैं। इस विधेयक में राज्य के अंदर और दो राज्यों के बीच व्यापार को बढ़ावा देने की भी छूट दी गई है। स्वाभाविक तौर पर इससे मार्केटिंग और ट्रांसपोर्टेशन पर खर्च कम होगा और किसानों को ज्यादा लाभ मिल सकेगा।

कृषक (सशक्तिकरण व संरक्षण) कीमत आश्वासन और कृषि सेवा पर करार अधिनियम, 2020

इस कानून में अनुबंधित कृषि को लेकर राष्ट्रीय फ्रेमवर्क का प्रावधान किया गया है। ये बिल कृषि उत्पादों की बिक्री, कृषि बिजनेस फर्मों, थोक विक्रेताओं, फार्म सेवाओं, बड़े खुदरा विक्रेताओं, प्रोसेसर और निर्यातकों के साथ किसानों को जुड़ने के लिए शक्ति प्रदान करता है।

अनुबंधित किसानों को गुणवत्ता वाले बीज की आपूर्ति सुनिश्चित करना, तकनीकी सहायता और फसल स्वास्थ्य की निगरानी, ऋण की सुविधा और फसल बीमा की सुविधा उपलब्ध कराई जाएगी। इसके साथ ही यदि पैदावार अपेक्षा से ज्यादा हो गई तब भी किसानों को कम पैसे मिलते थे लेकिन अनुबंधित कृषि के द्वारा किसानों को पूर्व

विपक्ष ने जो भी भ्रम किसानों के बीच फैलाने का काम किया है उसके बारे में स्पष्टीकरण स्वयं केन्द्रीय कृषि मंत्री के साथ-साथ प्रधानमंत्री भी दे चुके हैं। विपक्षी दलों ने सीएए के समय भी इस तरह का भ्रम फैलाने का काम किया था, जिसका दुष्परिणाम हमने देश भर में हुए दंगों के रूप में देखा।



Credit: Economic Times

में तयशुदा राशि का भुगतान इस कानून के द्वारा सुनिश्चित हो सकेगा।

आवश्यक वस्तु (संशोधन) अधिनियम, 2020

इस कानून में अनाज, दलहन, तिलहन, खाद्य तेल, आलू-प्यारज को आवश्यक वस्तुओं की सूची से हटाने का प्रावधान है। विशेषज्ञों का मानना है कि इस कानून के प्रावधानों से किसानों को सही मूल्य मिल सकेगा क्योंकि बाजार में स्पर्धा बढ़ेगी।

समग्रतः देखा जाए तो ये तीनों कानून किसानों के हितों को बल देने वाले हैं तथा इनसे किसानों की आय बढ़ना भी निश्चित है। बाकी हर नए निर्णय के साथ कुछ संशय होते हैं, लेकिन बिना ठोस निर्णयों के बड़े परिवर्तन नहीं आ सकते। कृषि क्षेत्र के समक्ष आज जो चुनौतियाँ हैं, वे आजादी के सत्तर सालों में ऐसे बड़े निर्णय न लिए जाने के कारण ही हैं। परन्तु, देश के विपक्षी दलों को तो जैसे इस तथ्य से कोई सरोकार नहीं है, अपितु केवल अपनी राजनीति से ही मतलब है।

आज देश में हो रहे अधिकांश प्रदर्शन राजनीति से प्रेरित हैं। ग्राउंड जीरो से प्राप्त मीडिया रपटों के अनुसार अनेक प्रदर्शनकारियों को यही नहीं पता कि वे जिसका विरोध कर रहे हैं, उसमें ऐसा क्या है जिससे किसानों का अहित हो रहा हो।

विपक्षी राजनीतिक दलों का यह रवैया इस बात का द्योतक है कि उनका किसानों के हित से कोई लेना देना नहीं है अपितु वे पूर्व की भांति पुनः किसानों को वोट बैंक के रूप में देख रहे हैं और उनको भ्रमित करने का काम कर रहे हैं। हालाँकि यदि हम इतिहास में देखें तो वर्तमान मुख्य विपक्षी दल कांग्रेस ने कृषि सम्बंधित कानूनों में इस

तरह के संशोधन की वकालत एक बार नहीं, अपितु कई बार की है।

कांग्रेस का शीर्ष नेतृत्व इस प्रकार के संशोधन की वकालत संसद और प्रेस कांफ्रेंस के साथ-साथ अपने चुनावी घोषणापत्र में भी कर चुका है। मगर आज केवल राजनीति के लिए वही कांग्रेस इस कानून के विरोध में खड़ी है।

विपक्ष ने जो भी भ्रम किसानों के बीच फैलाने का काम किया है उसके बारे में स्पष्टीकरण स्वयं केन्द्रीय कृषि मंत्री के साथ-साथ प्रधानमंत्री भी दे चुके हैं। विपक्षी दलों ने सीएए के समय भी इस तरह का भ्रम फैलाने का काम किया था, जिसका दुष्परिणाम हमने देश भर में हुए दंगों के रूप में देखा।

सबसे बड़ा भ्रम न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य को खत्म करने और एपीएमसी मंडियों को समाप्त करने को लेकर फैलाया जा रहा है जबकि इस पर स्पष्टीकरण देते हुए स्वयं केन्द्रीय मंत्री बोल चुके हैं कि न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य था, है और आगे भी जारी रहेगा।

विपक्षी दलों ने इस मुद्दे पर जिस तरह से सदन की गरिमा को भंग किया वे समाज में भी भ्रम फैला कर सदन के बाहर भी उस तरह का उन्माद फैलाना चाहते हैं, अतः प्रदर्शनकारियों को विपक्ष की राजनीति का सहज उपकरण बनने से बचना चाहिए। नए कानून किसान हित में हैं और इनका सुपरिणाम शीघ्र ही देश के सामने आएगा।

(लेखक गुरु घासीदास केंद्रीय विश्वविद्यालय, बिलासपुर में पत्रकारिता में पीएचडी शोधार्थी हैं। प्रस्तुत विचार उनके निजी हैं।)

Emerging Perspectives of the Indo – Pacific



Ambassador Anil Wadhwa

The Indo Pacific construct has been gaining in lexicon, thinking and strategy of states around the world. For India, the US India joint strategic vision for Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions agreed in January 2015 constituted a huge jump in geo strategic thinking. India has important political and economic interests in the east and South East Asia. The Malacca straits connect the Indian ocean to the South China sea, and over 40% of our sea borne trade passes through it. ASEAN is one of our largest trade partners. India however, is primarily an Indian Ocean country. Like Malacca, the straits of Hormuz, critical for unimpeded energy and trade flows are of operational concern to the Indian navy. For India, the Indo Pacific as a concept always stretched from the East coast of Africa through the Indian Ocean till the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Prime Minister Modi had clearly articulated India's vision of the Indo Pacific concept at the Shangri-La dialogue in May 2018. This vision stands for free, open inclusive region, which embraces all in this geography as well as beyond who have a stake in it. ASEAN has been and will be central to its future. A common rules-based order for the region and its applicability to all individually as well as to the global commons, which believes in sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as equality of all nations, irrespective of size and strength, based on faith in dialogue without dependence on force was articulated. PM Modi also stated that when nations make international commitments, they must

uphold them and that we must have equal access as a right under international law to the use of common spaces on sea and in the air that would require freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law. India, he stated, will support a rule based, balanced and stable trade environment in the Indo Pacific region and the connectivity initiatives in the region must be based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability. They must empower nations, not place them under impossible debt burden. Importantly, he stated that India's own engagement in the Indo Pacific region, from the shores of Africa to that of Americas will be inclusive. India will promote a democratic and rules based international order in which all nations, small and large, thrive as equal and sovereign. We will work with others to keep our seas, space and airways free and open, our shores secure from terrorism, and our cyber space free from disruption and conflict.

In March 2015, PM Modi also spoke about his vision for the future of the Indian Ocean region when he elaborated the concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) while commissioning the first Indian Offshore patrol Vessel built for export, the Barracuda, into the National Coast Guard of Mauritius. Broadly speaking, SAGAR has five goals: seeking a climate of trust and transparency in the Indian Ocean Region, respect for international maritime laws, promotion of sensitivity towards each other's interests, peaceful resolution of maritime disputes, and increase in maritime cooperation. Technical teams from India have been working on the installation of Coastal Surveillance Radar systems in countries like Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Seychelles. India has set up an Information Fusion Centre in

Gurgaon for the Indian Ocean region in December 2018 which shares real time maritime information with friendly countries of the region.

PM Modi also announced India's Indo Pacific Oceans Initiative in November 2019 at the Thailand Summit with ASEAN. The Initiative focuses on seven pillars, namely Maritime Security, Maritime Ecology, Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Resource sharing, disaster risk reduction and management, science, technology and academic cooperation, and trade connectivity and Maritime Transport. The idea is that one or two countries could take the lead in driving work on a particular pillar thus creating a cooperative network.

Meanwhile, this region has faced the brunt of Chinese aggressive policies. It has continued to occupy, rebuild, militarize and populate a number of disputed islands in the South China Sea. It is seeking bases and resources in the Western Pacific. It has stepped up its naval activities around the Senkaku islands of Japan, in the Taiwan straits, and has shown intent to alter the status quo unilaterally on the line of Actual control and the border with India. Australia has faced trade retaliation. Its naval activities in the Indian ocean have continued to grow. The port facilities that China is obtaining or building in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan are of growing concern.

The Quadrilateral dialogue for Security Cooperation (Quad) between USA, India, Japan and Australia has been resurrected in 2017 mainly due to the aggressive Chinese policies but is primarily a consultative mechanism of like-minded democracies with considerable naval power and priorities focused on the region. Its aim is to reinforce the existing rule based regional order, to promote a liberal trading regime and freedom of navigation. A Quad plus grouping with the addition of New Zealand, Republic of Korea, and Vietnam has been working to coordinate positions on combating the pandemic successfully.

PM Modi's forward looking and cooperative vision for the future of the Indo Pacific is attracting more countries. In May 2018, France announced the "French Indo Pacific strategy" whose core aspects are: settling regional crises, protecting shipping routes and fighting against terrorism, radicalization and organized crime; strengthening strategic partnership with regional partners like Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and also with China. France has also been working closely with Asean as the core of inclusive Indo Pacific strategy. France is committed to digital technology and quality infrastructure in the region. Germany shared a policy guideline to associate with Indo Pacific countries on 1 September 2020. Importantly, the German vision also supports rules based free trade; ensuring the enforcement of rules and norms in the region while being committed to the ASEAN centric security architecture. Germany's vision has called for diversifying supply chains and markets.

An indication of the likely shifts in the post Covid global economic order in the region is visible from the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative (RSCI) proposal mooted jointly by Australia, India and Japan. India should work with Quad countries on infrastructure projects as an alternative to the Chinese BRI by pooling resources for few model projects as capability demonstrators. The Blue Dot Initiative which aims at Quality Infrastructure, can work out a concrete corpus for funding projects as an alternative to the Chinese BRI.

India will need continued focus on creating lasting defence and economic interdependencies with countries of the region, and similar like minded countries like France and Germany, thus ensuring a stable and peaceful external environment for its own economic development.

(The Writer is a former Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and has served as Ambassador to Italy, Thailand, Oman and Poland.)

Pro-Farmer Laws: A Mission Whose Time Has Come!



Ashok Dixit

The Monsoon Session of Parliament 2020 will go down in independent India's history as a legislative session to be remembered more for what it achieved than what it did not.

It achieved an outstanding record amount of business/work in the shortest period of just ten days (September 14 to 23) before being prematurely declared closed sine die due to a need to maintain safety protocols to keep exposure to the Covid-19 pandemic at bay.

During the session, Parliament passed a total of 25 Bills, including three Bills for liberalising farmers, three for labour reforms and one to ensure greater accountability from foreign-funded non-government organizations (NGOs). This despite predictable and high decibel protests by the opposition.

Of the 25 Bills passed as laws, three farm bills i.e. (1) The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, (2) The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, and (3) The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020, and a fourth in the shape of The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act or FCRA to manage the administrative activities of NGOs more efficiently, dominated

parliamentary discourse, and therefore, merit further explanation.

Why did Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government have to necessarily table these four Bills for Parliament to consider making them laws of the land?

Let's begin with some background to give context to the three farm-related legislations?

As of May 2020, India officially had 16.6 million farmers and 131,000 traders associated with the agriculture sector.

Since Narendra Modi assumed the office of Prime Minister in 2014, improving the lot of farmers and rural families has been a priority. One only has to look at the several initiatives launched by the Modi government to understand their impact on the country's agricultural sector, which by all accounts is positive.

Some of these include:

- Launch of an Electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) in April 2016 to create a unified national market (through APMCs) for agricultural commodities. Currently, 1000 agro-centric mandis (markets) are linked to e-NAM. An additional 22,000 mandis are expected to be linked by 2021-22.
- A new Agriculture Export Policy announced in December 2018 aimed at increasing India's agricultural exports to USD 60 billion by 2022.
- In May 2019, the government-run National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) announced a Rs.700 crores (US \$ 100 million) venture capital fund for equity

investment in agriculture and rural-focused start-ups.

- Prime Minister Modi launched the National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP) in September 2019 with the aim of eradicating foot and mouth disease (FMD) and Brucellosis (bacterial infection arising from non-pasteurized dairy products) in livestock. In May this year, Rs.13, 343 crores (US \$ 1.89 billion) was allocated to the scheme.
- In Budget 2019-20, the government announced the Pradhan Mantri Samman Nidhi Yojana that aims to give a minimum fixed pension of Rs. 3000 (US \$ 42.92) to eligible small and marginal farmers, subject to certain exclusion clauses, on attaining the age of 60.
- A Transport and Marketing Assistance (TMA) scheme is in place to provide financial assistance for transport and marketing of agriculture products to boost agriculture exports.
- The Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) has been launched with an investment of Rs. 50,000 crores (US \$ 7.7 billion) to develop sources of irrigation to save farmers from drought.
- In May 2020, the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund with a corpus of Rs. 15,000 crores (US \$ 2.13 billion) was announced.
- To ensure agricultural cooperatives function more efficiently, the Modi Government has committed to provide Rs. 2,000 crores (US \$ 306.29 million) for digitization of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS).
- A Rs. 6685 crore scheme for forming 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)
- An Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF).

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Keen to course correct the functioning of Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) that act as the “middlemen” to the farmer-trader-consumer nexus, the Modi government was convinced it was the right time to reduce official interference and monopolistic practices.

It took a decision to table the three farmer-related Bills with the aim of freeing agricultural trading areas of middlemen, leveling fewer government taxes outside the APMC structure and undoing some of the restrictions on private stockholding of agricultural produce.

Undertaking reform of APMCs in India is not a new phenomenon and, in fact, governments of the past two decades have included it in their respective common minimum programmes (CMPs) with the aim of unleashing the full potential of India's agricultural sector both within the country and globally.

Creation of World-Class Agriculture Ecosystem

The Modi government believes the above-mentioned initiatives along with The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020 will create a world-class agriculture



Credit: Financial Express

ecosystem that will benefit all stakeholders i.e. farmers, consumers, agricultural wholesalers, processors and start-ups.

On the claim by opposition parties that farmers will be denied the benefits of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system due to the above laws, Prime Minister Modi said on the sidelines of Parliament's Monsoon session: "These bills will empower farmers to freely trade their produce anywhere. I want to make it clear that these bills are not against the agriculture mandis. They were the need of the present hour and our government has brought this reform for the farmers. Farmers can sell their produce wherever they see more profit."

New MSP for Rabi Crops Announced

To prove his government's bonafide, Modi presided over a Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) meeting that announced higher MSPs for Rabi crops that grow in winter, setting them at 50 percent over costs of cultivation. The new MSP ensures that farmers will at least get a 106 percent return over cost of cultivation for wheat, 65 percent return over costs for barley and 78 percent returns over costs for lentils (masoor)

and gram, and 98 percent return over costs for mustard.

Fillip to National Economy

The government believes that the farmer-related laws will give the necessary fillip to a Covid-hit economy and bring it back on the growth track. With agriculture growing by healthy 3.4 percent in the first quarter of fiscal 2020-21, there is a belief in government that the rural economy is the key to overall recovery of the national economy, currently reeling under a shocking 23.9 percent GDP decline.

The new laws aim to legally and institutionally help farmers explore the possibility of selling their produce at higher prices, while retaining the MSP safety net. Allowing private players into the mandi or market system only ensures that APMCs' don't have a monopoly and ensures that farmers benefit from better services while being protected by well thought out safeguards.

Reining in Foreign Funded NGOs

NGOs have been developing since the early part of the 20th century and by and large have focused their attention and skills on humanitarian issues,

developmental aid and sustainable development. Though as institutions they are useful, but that they have a dark side too cannot be ignored or pushed under the carpet.

With the passage of time, NGOs have grown in huge numbers. According to one estimate, there are 10 million NGOs worldwide, with a third of them (3.3 million) located in India, i.e. approximately one NGO for every 400 people.

According to a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study, “20 percent of all NGOs worldwide concentrate 80 to 90 percent of their resources available for NGOs.” This, the OECD says leads to a furious competition for donations, putting their stated humanitarian mindset or mission on the backburner.

At times, this has led to questions being raised about their legitimacy and effectiveness in developing countries like India.

The Modi government’s proposal to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) through the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020 must be seen in the context of both history and its intent.

Historically, India has always been a difficult place for NGOs to operate, with the government often stepping in to curb their activities.

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While NGOs in India see themselves as a vital cog of civil society, governments, both past and current, have harboured deep reservations and suspicions about their functioning, especially at the grassroots level.

It, therefore, isn’t a surprise that the Modi government is initiating a fresh amendment of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA).

India’s disproportionate number of (global) NGOs and this sector’s lack of transparency and accountability clearly demands better monitoring and reform.

What this Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020 (now Law) is proposing to do is to make the functioning of NGOs more transparent, both administratively and financially.

It is widely acknowledged that a majority of NGOs have been functioning with regulatory frameworks that are at best thin, if not non-existent. This government’s aim is to curb excesses.

There is, therefore, nothing wrong in feeling the need for making NGOs more transparent about their sources of funding, whether foreign or domestic.

The proposed Bill aims to prevent public servants from receiving foreign funding, reduce the NGO foreign funding component to meet administrative costs from 50 to 20 percent, prohibit transfer of foreign funds to any association or person, make Aadhaar a mandatory identification document for all key functionaries of NGOs or associations eligible to receive foreign donations.

NGOs are a necessary component of civil society, but it is the government’s view that they need to be reined in from time to time.

(The writer is a New Delhi-based senior editor/journalist.)

AatmaNirbharata, Globalization and the Indian Toys Industry: A Tale of Reconnections and Revival



Suchismita Das

The need to promote the Indian toy industry has recently been brought to the forefront by PM Narendra Modi. Amid the gloom of the Covid-19 pandemic and the tremendous socio-economic upheavals entailed by it, economies all around the world have naturally faced an inevitable slowdown. Amidst such socio-economic conditions, Modi's attempts to promote, among other things, the Indian toy industry comes as a truly constructive step. More importantly, this promotion of the Indian toy industry is laden with the power to bring about a genuinely inclusive economic development as well as social amelioration.

To understand the economic significance of this step, it is important to remember the economic problems that our nation has been plagued with as a result of socialist policies which were implemented during the Nehruvian regime and continued through Indira Gandhi's regime, in newer forms. As sociologist Vivek Chibber has discussed, in the years immediately after independence, the state builders of India focussed mainly on developing an extensive and sprawling public sector, and heavy industries through import substituting industrialization. The socialist Nehruvian License Raj that was imposed during this time eventually led to remarkably slow growth as it restricted competitive progress. While

the License Raj was shown to be a form of state control, in reality, it only enabled the monopoly of the already existing elite businesses while naturally restricting the upward mobility of aspiring, competitive entrepreneurs.

Eventually, the creation of such an oligopolistic economic regime served to stifle both domestic and international competition. This stifling of both kinds of competition led to a natural complacency among the existing, privileged businesses which had the cushion of a protected market. However, the stifling of domestic competition in particular had yet another painful impact – it stymied the possibilities for aspiring entrepreneurs. This led to a rigidity and systemic perpetration of inequality, engendered by the socialist Nehruvian regime and continued by his descendants – albeit under new garbs. Indira Gandhi's regime continued the monopoly of elite businesses under a newer façade. Her populism and poverty alleviation programs did little to address this fundamental, systemic flaw which restricted the opportunity of aspiring entrepreneurs and reproduced the privilege of oligopolistic business dominions. In fact, business oligopolies continued to be allied to Indira Gandhi's regime, further facilitating the economic rigidities sustained by socialist policies.

While the creation of such economic rigidity has historical origins, the percolation of this rigidity over the decades as embedded it in our socio-economic structure in such a way that makes it appear like an inherent quality of our country. However, such rigid restriction to equality of opportunity was never an inextricable part of our Indic civilization – it was

constructed and sustained by phases of colonization followed by the Nehruvian socialist regime and its successors. Thus, the regression inherent in socialist policies restricts the upward social mobility of the poor by hindering entrepreneurial possibilities and creating dependence on the state. Further, socialist policies also engender oligopolistic cronyism that exclusively benefits the privileged few who have historically enjoyed access to connections in any political economy. Therefore, socialist policies are perfect for reproducing privilege or the lack of it. The only way to redress such regressive economic ordeals perpetrated by socialist policies is to promote greater human liberation, to promote entrepreneurship, and to promote freedom of thought and freedom from dependence on the state for income. The role of the state thus becomes that of maintaining security and engendering economic development not only through the creation of jobs, but also through the creation of conditions conducive to entrepreneurial freedom. Modi's promotion of the Indian toys sector can be read precisely as such an attempt to promote entrepreneurial possibilities and thereby enable greater human liberation.

As prominent economist Jagdish Bhagwati has shown, in the Nehruvian era, the creation of such an extensive public sector, promotion of capital-intensive production techniques, and promotion of heavy industries that relied massively on import substitution, all led to an exclusivist form of development. This essentially delinked the poor from the process of reaping the fruits of development. This naturally led to greater inequality as the labourers were deprived of the chance to ameliorate their economic conditions. While heavy industries and capital-intensive production certainly are important, Bhagwati explains that an emphasis on the toy industry, the garment industry, or such other light manufacturers, which would be more labour-intensive and also export-oriented, would have led to a truly holistic, all-encompassing

In today's fast-paced lifestyles, where parents are often burdened with work even after they return home, it is difficult for them to pay attention to children. Often, this results in guilt and parents compensate by gifting their children expensive gadgets. However, this hardly reduces resentment as a gadget is a poor substitute for genuine human connections.

development. Thus, PM Modi's decision to promote the Indian toy sector is not only beneficial for the economy today, it is also a redressal of a historical blunder of the socialist Nehruvian regime.

The economic ordeal unleashed by socialist economic policies of Nehru, Indira Gandhi, have impacted successive regimes as well. Contrary to physical ordeals, which may leave visible signs, economic ordeals manifest in ways that makes it difficult to formulate a solution. When we see the economic ordeals plaguing our country today, we often don't remember to trace it back to the disastrously unsustainable and regressive socialist policies that increased inequality of opportunity, stifled entrepreneurial possibilities, and eventually crumbled our economy in the first place. This inability to trace the source often leaves us bereft of the ability to reach a serious solution as well. Modi's promotion of the Indian toy industry addresses many of these historical failures and attempts to help us recover from the decades worth of socio-economic damage by promoting entrepreneurial freedom and consequently, economic liberation of human beings.

Therefore, criticizing the promotion of the Indian toy sector is essentially no different from belittling a constructive attempt to eradicate poverty by rectifying historical economic fallacies

and blunders. Moreover, this constructive step also revitalizes the importance of indigenous craftsmen, traders, small businesspeople, and the very spirit of Indian entrepreneurship. The attempt here is thus both to revive the economy, and to increase equality of opportunities to achieve a better lifestyle – thereby also addressing the historical blunders of the previous regimes. By promoting labour-intensive industries such as the toy industry, Modi has taken a step towards including labourers as beneficiaries in the march towards greater economic development. The promotion of Indian toy industries thus helps rebuild the spirit of Indian entrepreneurship and liberate ourselves from a dependence on the state for employment.

Needless to add, this is a truly constructive step in the creation of 'AtmaNirbhar Bharat' as well. Modi's quote of 'Vocal about local' is excellently exemplified through his promotion of the Indian toy industry. It is literally promoting local small businesses and helping them reach newer goals. Moreover, this step has positive social implications as well. Indulging children with expensive gifts is not a new concept, it is something many parents have done in the past. At the same time, austerity also occupies a large part of raising children. Most importantly, raising children requires the rarest commodity in our world today – attention.

In today's fast-paced lifestyles, where parents are often burdened with work even after they return home, it is difficult for them to pay attention to children. Often, this results in guilt and parents compensate by gifting their children expensive gadgets. However, this hardly reduces resentment as a gadget is a poor substitute for genuine human connections. Gifting gadgets has become such a commonplace occurrence today that even parents who do have time for their children, or don't have enough money to spare, also go out of their way to buy expensive gadgets for their children. Gadgets, unlike other non-digital gifts, have the ability to

occupy children's minds almost completely. Even toddlers are prone to getting addicted to gadgets – and while some find this trait endearing, it has the potential to create problematic social and behavioural tendencies among children, depending on its content. If the content of the gadget is problematic, it could have serious implications for the mental health and growth of the child.

While gadgets are an inevitable part of our lives today, it is always advisable to keep them away from babies, toddlers and even children and teenagers up to a certain point. Of course, gadgets would continue to remain a part of our lives, and they would seep into the lives of children as well. In that context as well, the promotion of more educational apps or games based on stories from Indic literatures can positively reconnect children with their roots.

Especially for toddlers and small children, promoting the Indian toy market could help to reduce gadget addiction by providing them with an alternative form of entertainment. Unlike gadgets, which demand a physical isolation and complete focus of the child, the use of toys and board games require the involvement of other human beings. If more children are encouraged to play with toys that require more human connections, it would significantly help in their mental and social development. An engagement with Indian toys would also help children to not be deracinated and instead reconnect with the older generations. By restoring the human connections in a child's life and extracting the child from the isolation demanded by a gadget, this step has the potential to make children socially vibrant, thoughtful, and empathetic human beings. Thus, the promotion of Indian toys has not only positive economic but also positive socio-cultural effects for the future generations.

(The author teaches sociology and writes extensively on various socio-economic issues. Views expressed are her own.)

आत्मनिर्भर भारत की दिशा में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभा रहे बैंक



सतीश सिंह

बैं

क अर्थव्यवस्था की रीढ़ हैं। यह लोगों की आर्थिक जरूरतों को पूरा करने और रोजगार सृजन का बड़ा माध्यम हैं। गरीब से अमीर सभी को अपने जीवनयापन, कारोबार शुरू करने या उसमें बढ़ोत्तरी हेतु आर्थिक मदद की जरूरत पड़ती है, जिसे पूरा करने का काम बैंक कर रहे हैं।

कोरोना महामारी के कारण भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था में हुए नुकसान की भरपाई के लिये प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने लगभग 21 लाख करोड़ रुपये के राहत पैकेज की घोषणा की है और वित्त मंत्री श्रीमती निर्मला सीतारमण ने बैंकों को आत्मनिर्भर भारत बनाने के लिये काम करने को कहा है।

घोषित पैकेज को “आत्मनिर्भर भारत अभियान” का नाम दिया गया है। इसके तहत, कृषि एवं संबद्ध क्षेत्र, सूक्ष्म, लघु एवं मध्यम उद्यमों (एमएसएमई), ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में किफायती आवास आदि के लिये अनेक प्रावधान किये गये हैं। नीतिगत उपायों के जरिये भी अर्थव्यवस्था को मजबूत बनाने की पहल की गई है। नीतिगत दरों में कटौती भी की गई है।

स्टेट बैंक ने योनो डिजिटल प्लेटफॉर्म के तहत किसान ई-स्टोर खोला है। इस ई-स्टोर में बीज, पौधा संरक्षण से संबंधित सामग्री, पौधा पोषण, कृषि से संबंधित विविध उत्पाद, कीटनाशक, फफूंदनाशक, कृषि जैव उत्पाद, नीम का तेल, ऑर्गेनिक उत्पाद, संवर्धक, कृषि उपकरणों के अग्रणी ब्रांडों की विस्तृत श्रृंखला जैसे, छिड़काव यंत्र, बुवाई यंत्र आदि ऑनलाइन एवं सस्ती दर पर उपलब्ध हैं।

स्टेट बैंक किसानों के लिये मंडी, मित्र और कृषि गोल्ड ऋण की सुविधा भी उपलब्ध करा रहा है। मंडी के अंतर्गत किसानों के गैर बैंकिंग जरूरतों को पूरा किया जा रहा है। किसानों को बाजार उपलब्ध कराया जा रहा है, जहाँ किसान बिना किसी बिचौलिये के लेनदेन कर

रहे हैं। मित्र के तहत किसानों को वित्तीय सेवाएँ उपलब्ध कराई जा रही हैं। जरूरतमंद किसानों को कृषि गोल्ड ऋण दिया जा रहा है। यह बहुत ही लोकप्रिय उत्पाद है।

बैंक ने किसानों को पूर्ति और नपंता प्लेटफॉर्म भी उपलब्ध कराया है, जिसके तहत किसान बीज, उर्वरक, कृषि उत्पाद आदि सस्ती दरों पर खरीद रहे हैं। इससे जुड़े किसान इनकी खरीदारी के लिये बैंक से ऋण भी ले सकते हैं। यह प्लेटफॉर्म रियल टाइम बेसिस पर किसानों को बाजार में चल रहे फसलों के भाव, फसल प्रबंधन, फसल बीमा, कृषि तकनीकी समस्याओं का समाधान, कोल्ड स्टोरेज आदि की जानकारी भी उपलब्ध करा रहा है।

योनो पम्पकार्ट, एग्रोस्टार और स्कामेटवेदर प्लेटफॉर्म भी उपलब्ध कराता है। किसान कृषि उपकरण खरीदने के लिये इस प्लेटफॉर्म का उपयोग कर रहे हैं। एग्रोस्टार भारत का पहला तकनीकी स्टार्टअप है। यह प्लेटफॉर्म किसानों की कृषि से जुड़ी समस्याओं का समाधान पेश करता है। इस प्लेटफॉर्म पर मिस्डकाल या ऐप के जरिये किसान अपनी समस्याओं का समाधान पा सकते हैं, जबकि स्कामेटवेदर प्लेटफॉर्म किसानों को मौसम संबंधी जानकारी उपलब्ध कराता है।

बैंक एमएसएमई कारोबारियों को संपत्ति के एवज में ऋण, ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पेट्रोल पंप डीलरों एवं अन्य डीलरों को ऋण; वेयरहाउस रिसीट पर ऋण अर्थात वेयरहाउस में रखे अनाजों के बदले ऋण; दाल, चावल, चीनी, कपड़ा आदि मित्तों के लिये ऋण; शिक्षा ऋण; दैनिक जरूरतों को पूरा करने के लिये वैयक्तिक ऋण; ग्रामीण क्षेत्र

बैंक किसानों को जमीन खरीदने, एग्री किलीनिक खोलने, पोली हाउस बनाने, कम्बाईन्ड हार्वेस्टर खरीदने, पशुपालन, मछलीपालन, मशरूम की खेती करने, कुक्कट पालन, सुअर पालन, हार्टीकल्चर, बकरीपालन, सेरीकल्चर, भेड़ पालन, मधुमक्खी पालन, ट्रैक्टर, पंपसेट व पाईपलाइन खरीदने आदि के लिये भी ऋण दे रहे हैं।



Top 10 Banks In India

Credit: www.bankingfinance.com

में क्लिनिक खोलने के लिये डॉक्टर प्लस ऋण और स्कूल या महाविद्यालय खोलने के लिये ऋण उपलब्ध करा रहे हैं।

ग्रामीण कोर्पोरेट टाई-अप के जरिये किसान अपनी फसलों या कृषि उत्पादों को सीधे कोर्पोरेट्स को बेच रहे हैं, जिससे उन्हें स्थानीय मंडी जाने की जरूरत नहीं होती है। साथ ही, किसानों एवं ग्रामीण कारोबारियों को बिचौलिये को कमीशन नहीं देना पड़ता है। इससे किसानों के दुलाई और भाड़े पर होने वाले खर्च बच रहे हैं।

बैंक किसानों को जमीन खरीदने, एग्री क्लिनिक खोलने, पोली हाउस बनाने, कम्बाईन्ड हार्वेस्टर खरीदने, पशुपालन, मछलीपालन, मशरूम की खेती करने, कुक्कट पालन, सुअर पालन, हार्टीकल्चर, बकरीपालन, सेरीकल्चर, भेड़ पालन, मधुमक्खी पालन, ट्रैक्टर, पंपसेट व पाईपलाइन खरीदने आदि के लिये भी ऋण दे रहे हैं।

कोरोना काल में प्रधानमंत्री मुद्रा लोन योजना से अधिक से अधिक लोग लाभान्वित हों, इसके लिये सरकार ने 1,500 करोड़ रुपये का प्रावधान किया है। यह लाभ शिशु मुद्रा ऋण लेने वाले लगभग 3 करोड़ लाभार्थियों को कम ब्याज दर के रूप में देने का प्रस्ताव है। पीएमएमवाई योजना के तहत तीन प्रकार के ऋण – शिशु, किशोर और तरुण दिये जाते हैं।

शिशु योजना के तहत 50,000 रुपये तक का ऋण कम ब्याज दर और आसान शर्तों पर दिया जाता है। किशोर योजना के तहत स्वरोजगार शुरू करने वाले व्यक्ति को 50,000 रुपये से 5,00,000 रुपये तक तक ऋण दिया जाता है और तरुण योजना के तहत कारोबार शुरू करने के लिए 5 लाख से 10 लाख रुपए तक का ऋण जरूरतमंदों को दिया जाता है।

राष्ट्रीय प्रतिदर्श सर्वेक्षण कार्यालय (सांख्यिकी मंत्रालय) के वर्ष 2018 में जारी सर्वेक्षण रिपोर्ट के अनुसार देश में करीब 6 करोड़ लघु उद्योग हैं, जिनमें 12 करोड़ से अधिक लोग कार्यरत हैं। अधिकांश लघु उद्योग प्रधानमंत्री मुद्रा ऋण की वजह से चल रहे हैं। एक अनुमान के अनुसार इस योजना की मदद से देश में 3.5 करोड़ से अधिक लोग रोजगाररत हैं।

बैंक, ग्रामीणों को बैंक से जोड़ने, महिलाओं का सशक्तिकरण करने, प्रत्यक्ष लाभ हस्तांतरण या सरकारी योजनाओं का लाभ सीधे ग्रामीणों के खाते में डालने, डिजिटल लेनदेन को बढ़ावा देकर ग्रामीणों की पहुँच दुनिया के बाजार तक करने, बिचौलिये की भूमिका को खत्म करने आदि का काम भी कर रहे हैं।

देश में लगभग 1.30 लाख से अधिक बैंक शाखाओं का नेटवर्क है। प्रधानमंत्री जनधन योजना की मदद से लगभग 40 करोड़ लोग बैंक से जुड़े चुके हैं। इस वजह से बैंक ज्यादा किसानों और लघु, छोटे एवं मझौले कारोबारियों को ऋण दे पा रहे हैं।

बैंक, ग्रामीणों को वित्तीय रूप से साक्षर भी बना रहे हैं। बैंक देश को आत्मनिर्भर बनाने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं, लेकिन आत्मनिर्भरता का भाव समाज में भी उत्पन्न होना चाहिए, क्योंकि आत्मनिर्भर भारत के निर्माण के लिये सरकार के साथ-साथ समाज के सभी वर्गों का सहयोग आवश्यक है।

(लेखक भारतीय स्टेट बैंक के कॉर्पोरेट केंद्र मुंबई के आर्थिक अनुसंधान विभाग में कार्यरत हैं। आर्थिक मामलों के जानकार हैं। प्रस्तुत विचार उनके निजी हैं।)

Increasing Age of Marriage for Women



Varada Sambhus

P rime Minister Modi, in his I-day speech, hinted at the centre's mulling over the issue of what shall be an ideal age of marriage, especially for women. It is expected that reviewing the age of marriage for women will not only ensure equal job opportunities for them in employment but also improve the parameters of health and nutrition. Prime Minister Modi also indicated that the decision on the issue would be taken soon after the committee (set-up to study the issue) submits the report.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her budget speech of 2020, had announced the constitution of a Task Force to give recommendations on the issues related to women's age of marriage and age of entering motherhood. Accordingly, in June 2020 the Women and Child Development Ministry set up a Task Force headed by Jaya Jaitley to review the legal age for marriage for women along with the issues of Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Rate, Total Fertility Rate, Sex Ratio at Birth, Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and any other issue related to health and nutrition of child and mother. The Task Force is also expected to suggest suitable legislations and amendments in existing laws and to chalk out a detailed roll-out plan with timelines to implement the recommendations.

The British-era Sarda Act (officially called the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929) fixed the minimum age of marriage for girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years. It was amended in 1978 to raise the age for women to 18 years, and men to 21. The Sarda Act was repealed in 2006 and replaced by the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. The proposed changes are believed to further increase the age of marriage for women to 21 years. From time to time multiple national and international agencies including the non-governmental organisations, National Commission for Women, Law Commission, National Human Rights Commission, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) etc. have recommended revisions in the minimum age of marriage. Though the reasons for revisions sought might differ from agency to agency, there is a broad consensus on the need for such a revision.

Need for Revision

Uniform age of marriage

The Law Commission, in its Report No.205 published in 2008, recommended common marriageable age for both the sexes, i.e. 18 years to avoid any severe consequences to the individual and the society as a whole. The idea behind keeping the age lesser for women was the belief that girls reach puberty earlier as compared to men, and therefore, she becomes mature at an early age as compared to boys. In a consultation paper on reform in family law in 2018, the Law Commission observed that having different legal standards of the age of marriage "contributes to the stereotype that wives must be younger than their husbands".

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The commission has also recommended stricter punishment for conducting child marriages. However, given the circumstances and the needs of young Indians, it would be a regressive step to reduce the age of marriage for boys to 18 years. What has been considered as hurdles in women's development caused by early marriage, i.e. lack of opportunities of higher education and career choices, would apply to men as well if the age of marriage is reduced for men. Therefore, even though the uniform age of marriage for both the sexes is a welcome recommendation, a reduction in the age of marriage for men is undesirable.

Health Concerns

Prime Minister Modi, as well as Finance Minister Sitharaman, in their speeches, talked about the need for revision in the age of marriage for women for better health and nutrition parameters. There are serious health concerns of early marriage when a girl is not fully ready, physically, emotionally and psychologically. Further, the issues get complicated by early forced motherhood caused by social/ family pressure and/or lack of awareness of contraceptive

measures. There is a direct correlation between the age of marriage of a girl as well as age of entering motherhood and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Total Fertility Rate (TFR), malnutrition and Morbidity Rates. The early motherhood not only impacts the health of a woman negatively but also have severe social and economic implications. Through research, it is concluded that to improve health and nutritional parameters of women, delaying the age of marriage can play a crucial role.

Gender Equality and Dignified Social Life

The early age of marriage pushes many women to drop out of school and colleges denying them an opportunity of rightful education, employment opportunities and thereby denying them a chance to fulfil their aspirations of being an independent woman. The story of India's rise in the twenty-first century can be realised only with robust participation and leadership of women in all sectors. Getting married at an early age leads to restrictions on women's participation in civic life which is not only detrimental to individual woman's growth and aspirations but also for the rise of the nation.

The disparity in age of marriage is reflected not only in the gender domain, i.e. between men and women but also reflects in the social and economic domain. The National Family Health Survey (NHFS -4) data 2015-16 indicates specific socio-economic trends relating to the age of marriage. The data shows that as compared to the urban women, rural women are likely to marry earlier; women belonging to low-income groups are likely to marry at an early age due to the financial reasons. Amongst the significant determinants of early marriage, one is poverty. The data also establishes the link between the levels of education and age of marriage. It indicates that women with 12

years or more of schooling are most likely to marry later. From this data, one can reasonably conclude that it is mostly women from the marginalised groups who get married at an early age for social, religious or economic reasons and mostly without choice.

Though principally as well as contextually increasing age of marriage for women is a welcome and progressive step, there are several challenges in realising this change on the ground.

Challenges

Various legislations define 'child' and hence 'adult' differently. Laws relating to Child Marriage, Prohibition of Child Labour, POCSO etc. define 'child' differently. Though it is true that the logic of these acts demand differentiated definitions and to have uniform definitions is implausible, at least harmonious construction of laws can be ensured. Similarly, the relationship between age of attaining maturity, age of consent, age of entering adulthood and age of marriage need to be seen holistically. E.g. Decreasing age of attaining puberty and increasing age of marriage lead to many social and cultural challenges and need to be accounted for. Some critics pointed out that women who become sexually active before the legal age of marriage and say any increase in the age of marriage may push more women and their children out of the formal reproductive healthcare framework. Increasing age of marriage for women may also lead to ballooning of numbers of child marriage cases, as the marriage of a girl between 18-21 years will also be considered illegal.

The process of translating social legislation, aiming to bring in progressive social change into a social reality is slow. Even though the latest NFHS data indicates that majority of women in India marry after the age of 21 and the mean age of women at marriage is 22.1 years, and more

than 21 in all states, it is essentially in socially and economically underprivileged communities like SCs, STs and Muslim community that child marriages are prevalent. Further, the differentiated provisions in the Personal Laws regarding the void, voidable and valid marriages may obstruct percolation of the benefits of the progressive legislation of this kind. Hence, while implementing the law, special attention needs to be paid to spread awareness among underprivileged communities with the help of civil society organisations, community leaders etc.

For over six years, the Modi Government has made several laws and policies for the welfare of women, laying the path for a dignified life for women. These include the abolition of Triple Talaq, Ujjwala Yojana and Swachh Bharat, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, maternity leave up to 26 weeks etc. to mention just a few. The proposed increase in the legal age of marriage for women will be a step towards opening up equal opportunities of education and employment, reducing MMR and improving health and nutrition standards of women. The law itself needs to be backed by civil society organisations to ensure uniform implementation of the proposed changes across the social and economic spectrum. Women will play a crucial role in inscribing the story of the rise of India. The proposed changes will serve as a deterrent, at least in the legal sense, to getting girls married off at an early age under pressure. The civil society organisations will have to play a crucial role in spreading the awareness and taking the benefits of these changes to the grassroots, especially to the women who belong to the socially and economically marginalised sections.

(The writer is an Assistant Professor at Maharashtra National Law University, Mumbai, Views expressed are her own.)

30th September 2020



25th September 2020



24th September 2020



22nd September 2020



20th September 2020



20th September 2020



19th September 2020



17th September 2020



15th September 2020



14th September 2020

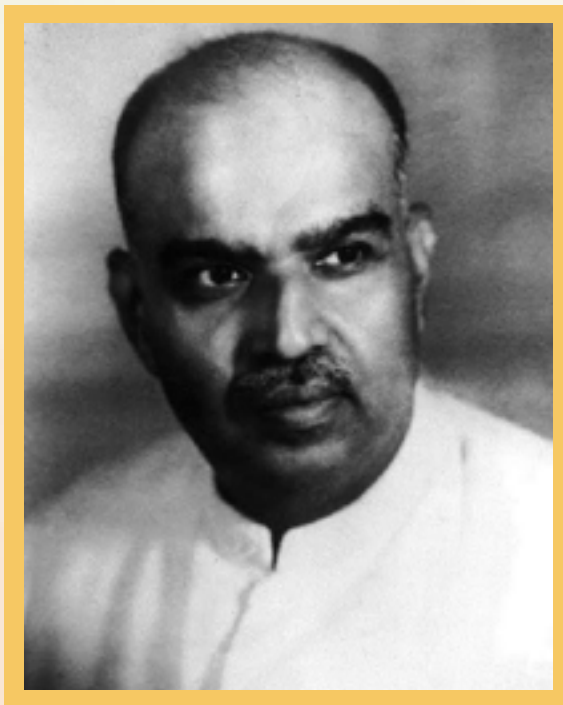


11th September 2020



08th September 2020





“As a university you have a great role to play in reshaping the destinies of the people of your country. We must bear in mind the cardinal principle that we want to see developed and trained through education the whole nature of our alumni, intellectual, moral and physical, not merely for the purpose of qualifying for any special calling but to bring up good citizens, useful members of society, men, true and fearless capable of bearing their part with credit in public and private life...”

-Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee
Banaras Hindu University,
1 December 1940

Published By:

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