Compressed biogas: Far short of the 5,000-plant mark, but getting there?

The initiative to step up production of the sustainable fuel has faced challenges such as unremunerative pricing and lack of infrastructure to move the gas

M Ramesh

A recent press release from the government stated that there has been an "impressive year-on-year growth" in the number of compressed biogas (CBG) plants set up in India, "from only 19 functional plants in 2020 to 125 currently".

Well, here is something that is not so impressive: In October 2018, when the government launched the 'Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation' (SATAT) initiative, it said it aimed for 5,000 CBG plants, with total output of 15 million tonnes a year (equivalent to 54 million MMSCMD, or metric standard cubic metres per day, of natural gas), by 2023-24.

While the government release mentions 125 plants, the SATAT portal says 77 plants have been commissioned, and 17,801 tonnes of gas was sold in 2024-25 — a far cry from 15 million tonnes.

The initiative has faced several challenges such as unremunerative pricing and lack of infrastructure to move the gas.

However, according to industry sources, these issues have largely been resolved and things are looking better, even though the trajectory is not yet good enough for the target.

DECEPTIVE PRACTICE

That the CBG scheme has not taken off as expected was noted, back in December 2022, by a report of the Standing Committee on Petroleum and Natural Gas. It observed that the scheme "has not been able to encourage investors/ entrepreneurs to establish CBG plants".

It also flagged several hurdles in the scheme's implementation, including the multiple letters of intent that the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas issued "to show that targets under the scheme will be met". Without mincing words, the committee said it "found the practice to be deceptive on the part of MoPNG and oil and gas marketing companies". Moreover, when entrepreneurs approached banks for loans towards setting up CBG plants, "the banks are not extending loans for more than one project to entrepreneurs with multiple letters of intent".

It also noted that "CBG plants have a very low internal rate of return" and that the pricing of gas "needs to be remunerative to the marketing companies".

GREEN FEEDSTOCK. Compressed biogas plants are set up in rural areas for assured supply of biomass

IMPROVED SCENARIO

Mohit Gupta, COO, GPS Renewables, however insists that things are looking better. Reliance, Adani and several other big players have announced projects. Also, the median size of projects has gone up. When the SATAT scheme was launched, it was assumed that each plant's capacity would be 5 tonnes a day, but most plants are now planned for 15-20 tpd, some even 40 tpd. Based on the announcements, Gupta reckons that, in three years, India could have at least 500 plants (it takes roughly ₹100 crore to set up one plant). In terms of capacity, these would be equivalent to 2,000 plants of the originally envisaged size. But that is still far short of the targeted 5,000.

A critical issue that remains unaddressed, says Gupta, whose company has announced it would set up eight CBG plants in a joint venture with Oil India Ltd, is the regulation for injecting the gas into pipelines. Today, you can sell the gas only within a certain geographical limit. Since CBG plants are typically set up in rural areas, where the feedstock biomass is available, the gas is produced in low-consumption centres. To supply to high-consumption centres, such as cities, it needs to be transported by road in cylinders. If CBG companies are allowed to transport the gas via pipeline, its reach and business prospects would improve. The government is said to be looking into this.

Today, CBG prices are linked to natural gas prices (at 20 per cent discount). The Indian Biogas Association has called for a ₹10-15 per kg premium to CNG, to recognise the green credentials of CBG.

CENTRE LIKELY TO MISS ₹50K-CRORE TARGET FOR FY25

Disinvestment target for FY26 may remain same

PRIYANSH VERMA
New Delhi, December 8

THE CENTRE MAY miss the disinvestment and asset monetisation target of ₹50,000 crore for the current financial year, a senior official told *FE*. For the next fiscal, the upcoming Budget may still peg the target for such receipts at around ₹50,000 crore, the source added.

The Centre had set a target of ₹50,000 crore in miscellaneous capital receipts (from disinvestment and asset monetisation) in FY25, doing away with the practice of setting separate annual 'disinvestment' targets.

This marked a less ambitious approach with regard to key source of non-debt capital receipts. No strategic sales (privatisation of CPSEs) have been carried out by the government in recent years, after the sale of Air India to Tata group in October 2021.

"Full efforts are on to reach as close as possible to the Budget figure (on disinvestment/asset monetisation). We're going to receive substantial revenue in the remaining months of FY25, but it (overall proceeds) may still be fairly lower than the Budget estimate," the official said

BEHIND TARGET

- In the current financial year, the government has garnered only **₹8,625 cr** from divestment

- The government has collected these funds from the divestment of GIC, Cochin Shipyard and Hindustan Zinc
- IDBI Bank's strategic sale could potentially fetch around ₹28,000 crore in FY25 if the transaction goes through
- The Centre opted to do away with the practice of setting separate annual 'disinvestment' targets in the FY25 Budget
- In the interim Budget, the FM announced that the government was going for a holistic strategy for management of equity of PSUs

Continued on Page 5

Disinvestment target for FY26 expected to remain same

SO FAR IN the current financial year, the government has garnered only ₹8,625 crore from the divestment in three central public sector enterprises (CPSEs), namely General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC), Cochin Shipyard and HZL, according to official data.

IDBI Bank's strategic sale could potentially fetch around ₹28,000 crore in FY25 if the transaction goes through, as per analysts. The disinvestment of a 60.7% stake in IDBI Bank, includes 30.48% from the Centre and balance from promoter LIC. The official also said that just like in the current year, the government is not going to mention 'divestments' in the FY26 Budget documents, nor will there be a separate target for it. In July, after the presentation of the full Budget, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey had said that the government's focus is now on 'value creation'.

In the interim Budget, the finance minister (FM) announced that the government was going for a holistic strategy for management of equity of PSUs, which includes value creation, using the performance, capex, dividends, along with calibrated disinvestment strategy, which also includes listing and market dilution. "So that same value maximisation strategy will continue," Pandey had said. A Parliament's standing committee report recently said, "With the discontinuation of disinvestment targets, the committee would like to press upon the importance that strategic disinvestment holds in the country, particularly in reducing the fiscal burden of the government and promoting efficiency."

BUSINESS STANDARD, Delhi, 9.12.2024
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India plans final refinery expansion as EV era looms

S DINAKAR
8 December

In what may be the last wave of grassroots refinery projects, the crude oil-refining capacity of state-run companies may go up by 500,000-600,000 barrels per day (bpd) in a little more than 10 years, according to industry executives and government officials.

This comes even as New Delhi is struggling to strike a balance between rapidly adopting electric vehicles and bolstering energy security by taking recourse to affordable and more reliable transport fuels.

There are plans for three new refineries, which are in addition to the ongoing addition of around 800,000 bpd, around 16 per cent of the current capacity, according to the industry data.

The proposed projects — in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat — are still on the drawing-board, with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) trying to identify the right type of land, hard and strong with little need for expensive piling, for a refinery-cum-petrochemicals plant. Soft, soggy land can drive up the project cost, an industry official said.

Costs are more critical today than for projects planned earlier because the shelf life of transport fuels is on the wane as India projects Net Zero emission by 2070.

BPCL is leading in this with an emphasis on petrochemicals and fuel export, an atypical strategy for Indian state refiners, which have traditionally met the country's needs for transport and cooking fuels.

BPCL's focus on a proposed 240,000 bpd refinery in Andhra Pradesh is on petrochemicals with an oil-to-chemical conversion intensity of as much as 40 per cent — nearly twice that of Hindustan Petroleum's upcoming grassroots refinery project in Barmer, industry sources said.

Simultaneously, it is studying the potential for a smaller 120,000 bpd refinery venture in Allahabad, where it owns land provided BPCL can find investors for both projects. It will need pipeline infrastructure to source crude oil from the west coast. The proposed facility in Allahabad will focus on transport fuels, with India's northern region the biggest growth guzzler of petrol and diesel.

ONGC is evaluating plans for a refinery in Gujarat, a state with the highest refining intensity in the country. But industry sources say the explorer's interests in Gujarat may be because of land available at existing projects. Earlier this year, the company completed ownership of OPAL, a mega petrochemicals complex spread over 5 square km in the port city of Dahej.

India programme of refinery addition, which started before the pandemic, will lead to an addition of 1.06 million bpd by 2028, taking the total to 6.2 million bpd, which includes HPCL's 180,000 bpd Barmer plant and India Oil's 180,000 bpd project in Nagapattinam (Tamil Nadu), according to Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri: After meeting the domestic oil demand of around 5.5 million bpd, refiners will have a capacity of at least 700,000 bpd for export.

CRISIL said in September India's oil-marketing companies were expected to add 800,000 bpd of refining capacity by 2029-30, requiring an expenditure of ₹2.2 trillion.

"Project risk in these investments is expected to be low, which coupled with the expectations of steady returns from the business will support credit risk profiles of OMCs," it said.

Top officials in the industry have had talks with Saudi Aramco, seeking investment in new refineries, but the kingdom's insistence on long-term oil supply conditions to ensure a captive market for its crude oil is delaying negotiations, sources said.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had agreed to take a 50 per cent stake in a 1.2 million bpd plant, along with chemicals ($44 billion), in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first term. But politics and protests over land acquisition torpedoed the project.

India will be the biggest contributor to oil demand growth this year, with consumption growing at six times China's pace, according to the data from global forecasters like the International Energy Agency and US Energy Information Administration.

FUELLING UP

Ongoing refining capacity expansions (000' barrels per day)

Company (refinery)	Nature	Capacity addition
HPCL (Barmer)	Grassroot	180
IOC (Panipat)	Brownroot	200
IOC (Nagapattinam)	Grassroot	180
NRL (Numaligarh)	Brownroot	120
IOC (Koyali)	Brownroot	86
BPCL (Bina)	Brownroot	64
IOC (Barauni)	Brownroot	60
HPCL (Vizag)	Brownroot	26
Total additions		916
TOTAL EXISTING CAPACITY		5,020

Note: All expansions by 2027-28

Source: Company

BUSINESS STANDARD, Delhi, 9.12.2024
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Petroleum sector tax revenues may plunge in FY25

Collections from windfall tax had cooled even before it was withdrawn on December 2

SUBHAYAN CHAKRABORTY
New Delhi, 8 December

Sluggish collection of excise duty from petroleum and natural gas — even before the windfall tax regime got scrapped in December — shows that the sector's overall tax contribution to the public exchequer may drop significantly in FY25, said officials.

Tax collected by the Centre from petroleum as excise duty was ₹1.22 trillion during the first six months (April-September) of FY25. This is less than half of the ₹2.73 trillion collected for the full FY24, data from the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry submitted to Parliament last week showed. The slow pace of collections in the first six months of FY25 is due to lower receipts from the windfall tax, Petroleum Ministry officials said.

MONEY MATTERS

Figures in ₹ crore

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25*
Excise duty	223,057	372,970	363,305	287,575	273,684	122,507
Corporate/income tax	23,134	21,909	29,219	33,292	57,493	19,053
IGST	13,099	11,594	19,726	22,236	20,930	10,364
Cess on crude oil	14,789	10,676	19,214	21,445	19,580	7,769
Dividend income to central govt	12,270	10,393	22,612	15,673	19,310	4,294
Other taxes and duties	269,021	245,168	320,349	368,497	360,159	175,198
Total contribution to exchequer**	555,370	672,710	774,425	748,718	751,156	339,185

Note: *Apr-Sep; **includes both Central and state exchequer

Source : Petroleum and natural gas ministry

"With the windfall tax now being junked by the Centre in early-December, the government expects lesser tax from the sector in the current year," an official said.

Excise duties on petrol and diesel were last changed in May 2022.

Meanwhile, fuel consumption, a proxy for oil demand, hit a record 157.53 million tonnes (mt) in the first eight months of the current year. This was up from 152.37 mt in the same period of the previous financial year. It signifies that oil demand is not behind the fall in excise collections.

Excise duty is levied by the Centre on the domestic sale of petrol and diesel. Currently, it is ₹19.90 per litre for petrol and ₹15.80 per litre for diesel. On top of that is the state government levy of value added tax (VAT), sales tax and other additional charges.

Meanwhile, classified as special additional excise duty, windfall tax was levied on domestically-produced crude oil, and export of diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF).

In place since July 1, 2022, it was designed to tax the profits of oil companies as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

But falling global prices of crude oil have ended the justification for the tax, and it was discontinued last week, after 29 months.

The sector's total contribution had risen in FY23, albeit by a marginal 0.38 per cent to ₹7.51 trillion from ₹7.48 trillion in FY24. It had shrunk by 3.4 per cent in FY23 compared to FY22.

Within this, its contribution to the central government through taxes shrank to ₹3.5 trillion in FY24 from ₹3.7 trillion in the year before.

BUSINESS LINE, Delhi, 9.12.2024
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'Prepare for growing electricity demand from data centres'

Our Bureau
Chennai

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has called upon policymakers and industry to collaborate on a vision for meeting the fast-growing demand for electricity from data centres.

In a statement issued after the conclusion of a 2-day Global Conference on Energy and AI in the agency's headquarters in Paris, it was noted that while AI is helping energy transition by discovering new materials, data centres were also turning out to be big consumers of electricity.

GRID CHALLENGES

Though the overall consumption of electricity by data centres, as a proportion of global electricity demand, will remain small, they could cause grid challenges in pockets where they are concentrated, the statement said. It noted that each data centre could consume as much electricity as 100,000 households. Although data centres currently account for just one per cent of electricity usage globally, there are already significant challenges to the grid in areas where they are concentrated, and demand is expected to keep growing.


Fatih Birol, Executive Director, IEA

The IEA conference was attended by ministers and high-level government officials from about 25 countries, such as Brazil, Canada, France, India, Japan, Singapore, the UK and the US. CEOs and senior executives from companies were also in attendance, with representatives from Amazon Web Services, Google, Hitachi Energy, Iberdrola, Infosys, Meta, Microsoft, NVIDIA, Schneider Electric sharing insights during sessions.

"Understanding the AI revolution is critical to understanding the future of energy," Fatih Birol, IEA's Executive Director, said in the statement.

"The IEA is uniquely placed to ensure that the opportunities that AI offers are fully grasped while associated risks and challenges are addressed," he said, adding that the agency would bring out a special report on energy and AI that they will publish in the spring of 2025. Next week, the IEA will launch a new AI-based chatbot for users to explore the 2024 edition of the Agency's flagship *World Energy Outlook* report. Developed in cooperation with Microsoft, the online tool "is designed to answer questions about energy trends, allowing anyone curious about the findings of the report to easily dig into its analysis and projections."

TIMES OF INDIA, Delhi, 9.12.2024
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S Arabia cuts oil prices

Saudi Arabia is cutting oil prices for buyers in Asia by more than expected after OPEC+ further delayed an output revival, underscoring how the outlook for the market remains weak.

State oil producer Saudi Aramco will sell its main Arab Light crude grade at a premium of 90 cents a barrel to the regional benchmark in Jan, according to a price list seen by Bloomberg. That compares with $1.7 for this month.

Earlier, OPEC+ — led by Saudi Arabia and Russia — agreed to push back production increases planned for the start of January by another three months, following two previous delays. The prospect of an impending oversupply leaves the group with the uncomfortable dilemma of whether to prolong production curbs well into 2025 or risk a price slump. BLOOMBERG

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Saudy Aramco also cut prices for north-west Europe and the Mediterranean.. AP

Saudi Arabia cuts oil prices for Asia

Saudi Arabia is cutting oil prices for buyers in Asia by more than expected after OPEC+ further delayed an output revival, underscoring how the outlook for the market remains weak.

State oil producer Saudi Aramco will sell its main Arab Light crude grade at a premium of 90 cents a barrel to the regional benchmark in January, according to a price list seen by *Bloomberg*. That compares with $1.70 for this month. The firm was expected to lower the premium by slightly less, to $1, according to a survey of traders and refiners. Aramco also cut prices for north-west Europe, Mediterranean. It made no change for North America.

Benchmark oil prices in London are lower down this year on concerns sluggish demand growth, especially in China, will leave the global market in a surplus next year. Brent crude is now just over $71 a barrel and trading in a tight range as a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon has so far held, largely eroding a risk premium that traders had priced into the market.

Earlier, Opec+ agreed to push back production increases planned for the start of January by another three months. **BLOOMBERG**

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Saudi cuts oil prices after OPEC+ delays

SAUDI ARABIA IS cutting oil prices for buyers in Asia by more than expected after OPEC+ further delayed an output revival. Saudi Aramco will sell its main Arab Light crude grade at a premium of 90 cents a barrel to the regional benchmark in January.

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The new Oilfields Bill, concerns it raises about states' rights

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 8

EXPLAINED POLICY

RAJYA SABHA passed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024 (Oilfields Bill) last week. It seeks to amend the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948 (Oilfields Act), which governs the exploration and extraction of natural gas and petroleum in the country.

The Centre expects the amendments would encourage domestic production of petroleum and other mineral oils, and push private investment in these sectors to reduce India's reliance on oil imports. However, Opposition parties have criticised the Bill for several reasons.

What amendments the Bill seeks to introduce?

The Bill seeks to introduce four major amendments to the Oilfields Act. These are:

Expanding Definition Of Mineral Oil: Currently, in the Act, petroleum and natural gas are the only two that have been defined as mineral oil. The Bill expands the definition to include any naturally occurring hydrocarbon, coal bed methane, and shale gas/oil. However, the Bill clarifies that the definition will not include "coal, lignite and helium occurring in association with petroleum or coal or shale".

Introducing Petroleum Lease: The Act defines and regulates a mining lease. The Bill seeks to replace it with a "petroleum lease", which has been defined as "prospecting, exploration, development, production, making merchantable, carrying away or disposing of mineral oils". All the mining leases currently in use will remain valid and none of the leases will be "altered to the disadvantage of the lessee during the period of the lease".

Expanding Centre's Regulatory Powers: The Act gives power to the Centre to make rules on matters such as the grant of leases, deciding the terms and conditions of the lease, conservation and development of mineral oils, methods for producing oil etc., according to the legislative research organisation PRS. The Oilfields Bill retains these provisions and further expands the Centre's power by allowing it to make rules for leases to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, sharing of oil production and processing units, merger of leases, and resolving disputes on leases.

Decriminalisation Of Offences: The Bill seeks to scrap criminal punishment for those who contravene provisions of the Oilfields Act, replacing it with fines. Currently, under the Act, any violation of its provisions or connected rules passed by the Centre may be punished with up to six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1,000. The Bill instead mentions a penalty of up to Rs 25 lakh, with the possibility of a further penalty of Rs 10 lakh per day starting from the date of the first penalty if the violations persist. The Bill also adds the following offences: undertaking activities related to mineral oils such as exploring, prospecting, and production without a valid lease; and non-payment of royalty, according to PRS.

ONGC processing platform at the Mumbai High offshore oilfield. *Wikimedia Commons*

Why is the Bill being criticised?

Several Opposition parties have raised concerns about how the Bill would affect the rights of states. For instance, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP N R Elango said that the word "mining" is being "replaced only to take away the rights of the states". He demanded that the Bill be sent to a Select Committee of Parliament for review.

On July 25 this year, a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court held that states had the exclusive power to tax mining activities and collect royalties from mining leaseholders. This power, the court held, stems from Entry 50 of the State List in the Indian Constitution, which gives states the power to impose taxes on "mineral rights".

However, if mining leases are replaced with petroleum leases in the Oilfields Act, the law would fall under Entry 53 of the Union List. This gives Parliament the power to create laws regarding the "Regulation and development of oilfields and mineral oil resources; petroleum and petroleum products; other liquids and substances declared by Parliament by law to be dangerously inflammable".

Another concern is that the provisions of the Bill give private players a certain amount of discretion in how they operate. This would happen as the Bill removes the possibility of criminal punishment, according to Communist Party of India (CPI) MP P P Suneer. He said that public sector undertakings such as the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) should be given priority over private players.

Critics have also claimed that a larger role of private companies in the oil and petroleum sectors could lead to severe environmental impacts.

RASHTRIYA SAHARA, Delhi, 9.12.2024
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घाटकोपर में होर्डिंग्स गिरने की घटना का असर

पेट्रोल पंपों पर जोखिम आकलन के आदेश

नई दिल्ली (भाषा)। तेल नियामक ने ईंधन खुदरा विक्रेताओं को देश के सभी पेट्रोल पंपों का व्यापक जोखिम आकलन करने का आदेश दिया है। इसमें खासतौर से परिसर में स्थित ऐसे होर्डिंग की पहचान करने को कहा गया है, जो सुरक्षा जोखिम पैदा कर सकते हैं। पेट्रोलियम और प्राकृतिक गैस नियामक बोर्ड (पीएनजीआरबी) की यह कार्रवाई 13 मई को मुंबई के घाटकोपर में एक पेट्रोल पंप पर एक विशाल होर्डिंग गिरने की घटना के बाद की। इस दुर्घटना में 17 लोगों की मौत हो गई और 75 लोग घायल हुए थे।

पीएनजीआरबी ने छह दिसंबर को जारी आदेश में कहा कि उसने बीपीसीएल के एक पेट्रोल पंप पर अचानक धूल और बारिश के बाद होर्डिंग गिरने की घटना की जांच के लिए एक समिति गठित की थी। बोर्ड ने कहा कि अंतिम जांच रिपोर्ट में दी गई सिफारिशों के आधार पर सभी ईंधन खुदरा विक्रेताओं और हितधारकों को एक महीने के भीतर समीक्षा करनी होगी और एक योजना तैयार करनी होगी। पीएनजीआरबी की नोटिस के अनुसार खुदरा विक्रेताओं से कहा गया है कि वे एक गहन जोखिम मूल्यांकन करें, जिसमें खुदरा दुकानों के भीतर या आस-पास ऐसे होर्डिंग, बिलबोर्ड, संरचना, इमारत आदि की पहचान की जाएगी, जो सुरक्षा जोखिम पैदा कर सकते हैं।

AMAR UJALA, Delhi, 9.12.2024
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सीरिया, तख्तापलट और गैस का खेल

सीरिया में असली लड़ाई कतर की गैस पाइपलाइन को लेकर थी, जिसमें अमेरिका और रूस अपने हित साधना चाहते थे। असद ने 2010 में कतर द्वारा दिए गए गैस पाइपलाइन के प्रस्ताव को ठुकरा दिया था, क्योंकि वह रूस के वाणिज्यिक हितों की रक्षा करना चाहते थे। यही उनके अंत की शुरुआत थी।

सीरिया में बशर अल-असद की सत्ता का पतन हो गया है और अपदस्थ शासक भाग खड़े हुए हैं। लेबनान में उतरने की अनुमति नहीं मिलने पर उनका विमान यू-टर्न लेता हुआ रूसी बेस टार्टस की ओर बढ़ गया और तभी से वह वाणिज्यिक रडार से गायब है। आशंका यह भी है कि तुर्किये द्वारा उपलब्ध कराई गई अमेरिकी मिसाइल से उन्हें मार गिराया गया हो। उनका परिवार कुछ दिन पहले ही रूस चला गया था।

दरअसल, जिहादी समूह हयात तहरीर अल-शाम (एचटीएस) की अगुवाई में विद्रोहियों ने नवंबर के अंत में बड़ा संघर्ष छेड़ा और सीरिया के सबसे बड़ शहर अलेप्पो समेत कई प्रमुख शहरों पर कब्जा करने के बाद आठ दिसंबर को राजधानी दमिश्क को भी अपने कब्जे में ले लिया। सेना के अधिकारी इराक भाग गए, जो कभी तानाशाह सद्दाम हुसैन के अधीन उनके सबसे बड़े हितैषी थे। अमेरिका के नवनिर्वाचित राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रंप ने इस मामले में कहा कि सीरिया हमारा दोस्त नहीं है और वहां जो कुछ भी हो रहा है, उससे हमें कोई मतलब नहीं, क्योंकि यह हमारी लड़ाई नहीं है। कभी अलकायदा से संबद्ध रहा जभात अल-नुसरा, जिसे हयात तहरीर अल-शाम के नाम से जाना जाता है, ने पहले तुर्किये से सटे इदलिब प्रांत में जबर्दस्त हमला किया। इसके बाद अलेप्पो पर कब्जा करने समेत 72 घंटे में ही राजधानी दश्मिक पर चढ़ाई कर दी। एक विद्रोही नेता ने खुलासा किया है कि वे इसके लिए बीते पांच वर्षों से तुर्किये में ट्रेनिंग ले रहे थे।

दीपक वोहरा
पूर्व राजनयिक

सीरियाई सरकार के सबसे बड़े सहयोगी ईरान, रूस और लेबनानी लड़ाके हिजबुल्ला थे, जबकि विद्रोहियों को अमेरिका, तुर्किये, सऊदी अरब, कतर, ब्रिटेन, फ्रांस, इस्राइल और नीदरलैंड से राजनीतिक और सैन्य समर्थन मिला। तहरीर अल-शाम के चालाक नेता अबू मोहम्मद अल-जोलानी ने सीएनएन को दिए साक्षात्कार में कहा कि हमें बशर अल-असद को उखाड़ फेंकने का काम सौंपा गया था और यही हमारा भी मकसद था। अल-जोलानी कट्टर इस्लामवादी है, जिसने इराक में अमेरिका के खिलाफ अलकायदा के लिए लड़ाई लड़ी थी और 2018 में अमेरिका ने एचटीएस को विदेशी आतंकवादी संगठन घोषित कर उस पर एक करोड़ डॉलर का इनाम रखा था। अल-जोलानी ने कहा कि ईरानियों ने समय लेकर शासन को पुनर्जीवित करने का प्रयास किया और रूस ने इसे आगे बढ़ाने की कोशिश की। रूस के सबसे सुरक्षित चार सैन्य अड्डे सीरिया में हैं। सीरिया का बड़ा हिस्सा अमेरिका समर्थित कुर्द लड़ाकों और तुर्किये समर्थित सुन्नी गुट के नियंत्रण में था और पूर्वी सीरिया को अमेरिका नियंत्रित कर रहा था। इस्राइल ने जब जरूरी समझा, तभी हवाई हमले किए। इससे आईएस हार गया, लेकिन वह छिप कर धावा करने की शैली वाले हमले करता रहा।

सवाल यह है कि सीरिया में 2011-2012 में गृहयुद्ध क्यों शुरू हुआ? दरअसल, यह सब मामला गैस का है। अमेरिका और उसके सहयोगी कतर की गैस को तुर्किये के रास्ते सऊदी अरब, जॉर्डन और सीरिया से होते हुए यूरोप तक पाइपलाइन से ले जाना चाहते रहे हैं, ताकि यूरोप की रूसी प्राकृतिक गैस पर निर्भरता खत्म हो जाए, विशेषकर सर्दियों के दिनों में। रूस और उसके सहयोगी 5,600 किलोमीटर पाइपलाइन ईरान-इराक-सीरिया के रास्ते बनाना चाहते थे, जो रूस के सहयोगियों को मजबूत करने के साथ ही ईरानी अर्थव्यवस्था को बढ़ावा देती। वर्तमान में जो भी फसाद हुआ है, उसके पीछे की असल वजह पाइपलाइन ही है।

बशर अल-असद ने वर्ष 2010 में कतर द्वारा दिए गए दस अरब डॉलर की गैस पाइपलाइन के प्रस्ताव को ठुकरा दिया था। वह यूरोप में रूस के वाणिज्यिक गैस हितों की रक्षा करना चाहते थे। वर्ष 2019 में लीक हुए दस्तावेजों से पता चलता है कि सीआईए ने सीरिया में गृहयुद्ध को भड़काने के लिए फंडिंग की और बशर अल-असद पर इस्तीफा देने के लिए दबाव बनाया, ताकि अमेरिकी समर्थक को राष्ट्रपति पद पर बैठाकर अपने हिसाब से समझौते करवाए जाएं। इसलिए तथाकथित रूप से वर्ष 2011 में अरब स्प्रिंग (सरकारों के खिलाफ विद्रोह) पूरे क्षेत्र में फैल गया, ट्यूनीशिया, मिस्र और लीबिया में तानाशाहों को उखाड़ फेंका तथा यमन, बहरीन और सीरिया में महंगाई, भाई-भतीजावाद, बेरोजगारी और भ्रष्टाचार जैसे मुद्दों को लेकर बड़े पैमाने पर विरोध प्रदर्शन हुए। फ्री सीरियन आर्मी जैसे विद्रोही समूहों को पश्चिम और तुर्किये की खुफिया एजेंसियों का साथ मिला। सीरिया के सहयोगी ईरान, लेबनान का हिजबुल्ला और रूस उसके बचाव में उतर आए।

पश्चिम पूरी तरह से विद्रोहियों के साथ था, क्योंकि वे बशर को पसंद नहीं करते थे। बराक ओबामा के समय अमेरिका की विदेश मंत्री रहीं हिलेरी क्लिंटन ने वर्ष 2012 में घोषणा कर दी थी कि बशर अब कुछ ही दिन के राष्ट्रपति हैं। क्लिंटन ने इस्तांबुल में फ्रेंड्स ऑफ द सीरियन पीपुल के एक सम्मेलन में भाग लेने के बाद कहा था, 'असद को जाना ही होगा।' लेकिन वर्ष 2015 में रूस ने उनकी सत्ता बचा ली थी। रूस ने इस बार भी विद्रोहियों पर बमबारी की, लेकिन वे आगे बढ़ते गए, जिसने वर्ष 2014 के इस्लामिक स्टेट (आईएस) के मार्च की याद दिला दी। वर्ष 2017 में इस्लामिक खलीफा के अमीर अबू बक्र अल-बगदादी ने खुद को उड़ा लिया था। इस्राइल ने पश्चिमी सीरिया में हिजबुल्ला और ईरानी सेनाओं पर बार-बार हमले किए हैं। अगस्त 2016 में तुर्किये ने उत्तरी सीरिया पर बहुआयामी हमले किए। अक्तूबर 2019 में डोनाल्ड ट्रंप ने अल-बगदादी के खात्मे के बाद उत्तर-पूर्वी सीरिया से तत्काल अमेरिकी फौजों को बुला लिया था, लेकिन तुर्किये को चेतावनी दी थी कि उसके फैसले का गलत लाभ न उठाया जाए, अन्यथा तुर्किये की अर्थव्यवस्था को तबाह कर दिया जाएगा।

सीरियाई संघर्ष में दस लाख से अधिक लोगों की मौत हुई, जो 21वीं सदी में द्वितीय कांगो युद्ध के बाद दूसरा सबसे बड़ा घातक संघर्ष बन गया। वर्ष 2023 की अंकारा बमबारी के जवाब में तुर्किये की सेना ने वर्ष 2023 के अंत में सीरियाई डेमोक्रेटिक सेना को लक्षित कर उत्तर-पूर्वी सीरिया में हवाई और जमीनी हमले किए। हालांकि यह भी सच है कि बशर द्वारा मुक्त बाजार नीतियों में तेजी लाने के बाद से सामाजिक और आर्थिक असमानता काफी बढ़ गई थी। इन नीतियों की वजह से देश की अल्पसंख्यक आबादी को लाभ पहुंचा, जो सरकार के साथ जुड़ी थी। देश उच्च युवा बेरोजगारी का सामना कर रहा था। इसलिए कुछ तो होना ही था। इसका नतीजा यही हुआ जो आप देख रहे हैं।

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