

'Aid' as Reason

AS 2012 OPENED, GOVERNMENTS FROM FEDERAL TO LOCAL grabbed more media space, always for wrong reasons, of course, reflecting their grand strategy of inaction in areas that otherwise deserve urgent attention. These past several months have witnessed something not very different in Indian political drama. The unending duel over this scam or that and legal activism which is a device to produce smoke without fire! The very nature and scale of scam suggests among other things that Indian parliamentary democracy has come of age, eliminating the line between the virtual and the real. It's no longer backward culture relating to animal fodder. Right now parliamentarians, patriots to be precise, have a good reason to extend their shadow-boxing to a new area—British 'aid' controversy. When some people in Britain made some noises by demanding stoppage of 'aid' to India for what they think New Delhi's 'ingratitude', politicians cutting across party lines reacted in their usual fashion as if they realised for the first time that 'aid' could be used to influence government decision-making. And Andrew Mitchell, Britain's international development secretary, lost no time to assure Indian patriots of both saffron and red varieties that they were not going to cut 'aid' to India as it was in India's and Britain's mutual national interest. There lies the crux of the issue which sabre-rattlers don't see.

Western donors including Britain, don't spend their 'pennies' without a long term perspective to further their business interests. How 'aid' with a chain of strings having humiliating conditionalities in many cases, is being increasingly utilised by the donors to pressurise third world governments is now an open secret. It's part of the game called globalisation—or bilateral diplomacy. Whether India's lucrative defence deal that was bagged by the French, tempted the Tory hardliners to create 'aid-trade' fiasco is not overtly admitted. But French *Rafale*, not British *Typhoon*, certainly played its role in bomberding the headquarters.

Patriots who are trying to make a case out of it know well how defence contracts are made in heaven, ostensibly in the best interests of the country. Since the days of Bofors scam of Rajiv Gandhi era, India's defence establishment has been plagued by the incurable disease called scam. And Opposition that is now asking the Congress-led UPA-II dispensation to refuse British 'aid' on moral grounds is no angel. Their term in office was not free from defence-related scam deals. That 'Aid', rather foreign 'aid', is a smoke-screen to bribe politicians and bureaucrats is a fact of life.

For one thing, politics of aid, of late, is itself in crisis because of overall economic slow-down in the West, particularly in the European Union hemisphere. In truth the rage that broke through the streets of England in August, had its roots in the Tory government's vicious austerity programme, affecting social security schemes badly. Britain apart, the entire European Union is in trouble, to maintain their existing level of 'aid' business.

Very recently the European Commission decided to cut 'aid' from its 2014-2020 budget to 19 emerging economies. Countries such as India, China, Brazil, Argentina which are either

upper middle income countries as per current international standards or countries whose GDP represent more than 1 percent of the global GDP, are on their agenda. They will cease to receive bilateral 'aid' as the 27-state European Union, accounting for 50 percent of world aid with 53.8 billion Euros last year, is opting for a gradual shift in their relations with emerging economies. And Britain's changed stance towards India though under a different context, is very much in compliance with EU's general line on 'aid' business.

EU seems to have devised a new scheme with reduced 'aid' budget through thematic or regional programmes while promoting new associations, but not based on bilateral 'aid'. These associations are supposed to be founded on 'mutual interests' that promote European values and issues of global concern, from climate change to food security which will in the end strengthen private cooperation. So they think.

'Aid' is instrumental to EU strategic interests, albeit they quite often talk about public money aimed at innocuous poverty eradication. But cut in 'aid' business means NGOs will feel the heat most. And their lobby is already in action as the CONCORD confederation representing 1600 non-governmental organisations finds it difficult to maintain their charity business under the EU's new plan.

The point at issue is no political party in India is against 'aid' otherwise tagged with a number of conditionalities. Both the left and the right are reacting against the British opinion to stop 'aid' just to refurbish their public image. Ironically, those who are hoping to become an economic super power in the near future, cannot really do away with foreign 'aid', the so-called emerging economies—India, China, Brazil—are not really going to be considered more like partners of the EU anytime soon. □□□