



Two sides: “Libra may have a few things working in its favour. But going by the opposition to the idea, it is not going to be smooth sailing.” Representations of virtual currency in front of the Libra Logo • REUTERS/DADO RUVIC/ILLUSTRATION

Libra unveiled

What is Facebook’s plan to empower billions? What is Libra’s technology? Is this cause for worry?

SRIRAM SRINIVASAN

The story so far: On June 18, Facebook announced that it is going to launch a global digital currency by the first half of 2020. The currency has been named Libra. It will be run by the Libra Association, a Geneva-based entity that has over two dozen founding partners, including Facebook, Mastercard, Visa, Uber and the Vodafone group. Almost immediately, concerns were raised by some lawmakers, commentators and even the co-founder of Facebook, Chris Hughes, who is now one of the foremost critics of the social media network he helped create.

Why does the world need Libra?
A white paper released by the Libra Association says its mission “is to enable a simple global currency and financial infrastructure that empowers billions of people”. The point it makes is this: in a world with cheap data and smartphones, about 1.7 billion adults are still outside the organised financial system in the world. This, despite a billion of them having mobile phones and nearly half a billion having Internet access.
The reasons for this are high fees, lack of access, and absence of documentation. Libra is being pitched as a solution to this. The promise is of financial inclusion on a global scale.
The white paper says: “Moving money around globally should be as easy and cost-effective as – and even more safe and secure than – sending a text message or sharing a photo, no matter where you live, what you do, or how much you earn.”

It is apparently being built on the block chain technology. How similar is it to Bitcoin?
It is true that Bitcoin and Libra are both based on block chain technology, which refers to a form of distributed ledger – not centralised – of transactions. These are created by complicated math functions that make them almost incorruptible. But beyond this, there is very little in common between Bitcoin and Libra.

Libra is an initiative of 28 influential corporate entities. Bitcoin, which the world first came to know of in 2008, is seen as a product of libertarian values. Its founder, whose identity remains a mystery to this day, is referred to as Satoshi Nakamoto.
In *Bitcoin: The Future of Money?*, Dominic Frisby imagines what would happen if Bitcoin becomes somehow globally preferred: “In a flash, the ability for a government to fund itself through the manipulation of money disappears. You can’t obfuscate bitcoin supply – inflation is transparent. You can’t ‘quantitatively ease’ bitcoins... Central banks and private banks can’t create bitcoins when it suits them, and government can’t print bitcoins. It all means you don’t have to pay the price for the mistakes of governments and banks.”
Libra is going to be nothing like Bitcoin. The association white paper says, “We believe that collaborating and innovating with the financial sector, including regulators and experts across a variety of industries, is the only way to ensure that a sustainable, secure and trusted framework underpins this new system.”
Those are just some of the differences.

Though Bitcoin has come a long way, it has remained a niche currency. Why should Libra’s fate be any different?
Bitcoin, though built on a sound technological base, has had to encounter challenges relating to regulation across the world. Governments of the world, including India, have been wary of it functioning outside the ambit of organised finance. With huge swings in value, it remains one of the most volatile currencies.
Libra immediately has a few things working in its favour. A currency, to be a success, needs to have acceptability amongst many people. Facebook, with its over 2 billion users, and its partners could tick this box. Also, the Libra Association is promising to play by the regulatory rule book

Why is Libra being opposed?
Bloomberg has reported that the French Finance Minister, Bruno Le Maire, has called on the Group of Seven central bank governors to “prepare a report on Facebook’s project for their July meeting. His concerns include privacy, money laundering and terrorism finance”.
Markus Ferber, a German member of the European Parliament, has also been reported as saying that Facebook could become a “shadow bank” and that regulators should be on high alert.
Facebook’s co-founder Hughes, terming the digital currency “frightening”, has said it is a shift of power from central banks towards multinational corporations.

Why is the litchi toxin causing deaths?

Why is Methylene Cyclopropyl Glycine lethal for malnourished children? What can be done?

R. PRASAD

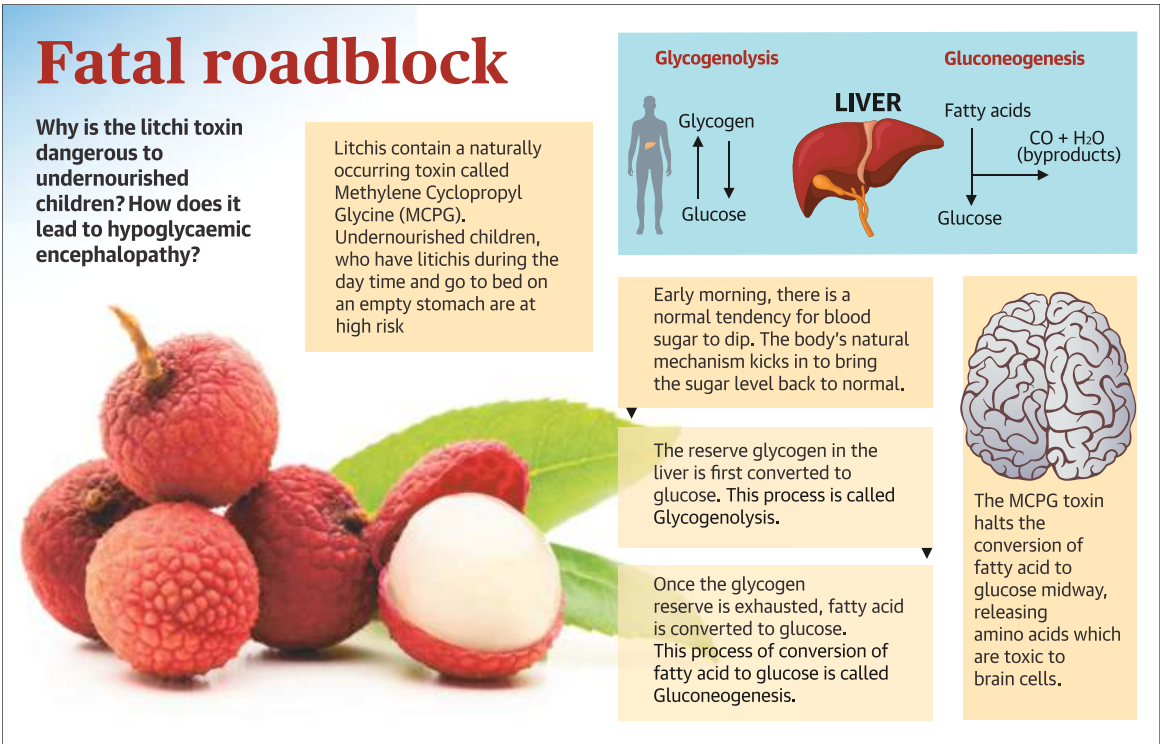
The story so far: Acute encephalitis syndrome (AES) in Bihar’s Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Sheohar and East Champaran districts has so far claimed the lives of over 100 children. More than 400 children with AES have been admitted to various hospitals. Most of the deaths have been attributed to low blood sugar level (hypoglycaemia).

What is acute encephalitis syndrome?
AES in short, it is a basket term used for referring to hospital, children with clinical neurological manifestations which include mental confusion, disorientation, convulsion, delirium or coma.
Meningitis caused by virus or bacteria, encephalitis (mostly Japanese encephalitis) caused by virus, encephalopathy, cerebral malaria, and scrub typhus caused by bacteria are collectively called acute encephalitis syndrome.
While microbes cause all the other conditions, encephalopathy is biochemical in origin, and hence very different from the rest. There are different types of encephalopathy. In the present case, the encephalopathy is associated with hypoglycaemia and hence called hypoglycaemic encephalopathy.

Is encephalitis different from hypoglycaemic encephalopathy?
Yes. The two conditions show very different symptoms and clinical manifestations.
Fever on the first day is one of the symptoms of encephalitis before the brain dysfunction begins. While fever is seen in children in the case of hypoglycaemic encephalopathy, fever is always after the onset of brain dysfunction (actually due to the brain dysfunction). And not all children exhibit fever. Some children have no fever, while others may have mild or very high fever.
The blood sugar level is usually normal in children with encephalitis but is low in children with hypoglycaemic encephalopathy.
In the case of encephalitis, fever (due to virus infection) for a day or two is followed by the onset of symptoms caused by the brain getting affected. However, in hypoglycaemic encephalopathy, children go to bed without any illness but manifest symptoms such as vomiting, convulsion and semi-consciousness early next morning (between 4 a.m. to 7 a.m.). At that time, the blood sugar level is low, hence the name hypoglycaemic encephalopathy. The most important difference between the two is the presence of white blood cells in the cerebrospinal fluid. In encephalitis, there are more white blood cells per unit volume of cerebrospinal fluid, which is a reflection of inflammation in the brain. In contrast, no increase in white blood cells is seen in hypoglycaemic encephalopathy as there is no inflammation in the brain.

What killed so many children in Bihar?
In a majority of cases, children died due to hypoglycaemic encephalopathy. According to a Press Information Bureau (PIB) release (June 18) , hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar level) was reported in a “high percentage” of children who died in Muzaffarpur. Unlike hypoglycaemic encephalopathy, encephalitis does not cause low blood sugar level so death in a high percentage of children couldn’t have been due to encephalitis.

Why has it affected only young children?
It is an observed fact that malnourished children between two to 10 years fall ill and die due to hypoglycaemic encephalopathy. It is not known why older children or adults do not suffer the same way. This clear discrimination by age is also a reason why the underlying cause of the illness cannot be a virus. A virus does not discriminate by age, and children younger than two years too are affected by Japanese encephalitis.
It has also been documented that most of the children



Hypoglycaemic encephalopathy can be easily treated. A full and complete recovery can be achieved if affected children are infused with 10% dextrose within four hours after the onset of symptoms

Is litchi fruit responsible for causing hypoglycaemic encephalopathy?
In 2012-2013, a two-member team headed by virologist Dr. T. Jacob John suspected, and confirmed the next year, a toxin found in litchi fruit that was responsible for causing hypoglycaemic encephalopathy. In 2017, an India-U.S. team confirmed the role of the toxin called methylene cyclopropyl glycine (MCPG).
Early morning, it is normal for blood sugar to dip after several hours of no food intake. Undernourished children who had gone to sleep without a meal at night develop hypoglycaemia. The brain needs normal levels of glucose in the blood. The liver is unable to supply the need. So the alternate pathway of glucose synthesis, called fatty acid oxidation, is turned on. That pathway is blocked by MCPG.

Litchi does not cause any harm in well-nourished children, but only in undernourished children who had eaten litchi fruit the previous day and gone to bed on an empty stomach.

Why is the toxin more dangerous for undernourished children?
In well-nourished children, reserve glucose is stored as glycogen (glucose polysaccharide) in the liver. Whenever the glucose level goes down, glycogen is broken down into glucose and circulated in the blood for use. But undernourished children lack sufficient glycogen reserve that can be converted into glucose. Therefore, the natural mechanism in undernourished children is unable to correct the glucose level in blood, leading to hypoglycaemia.
Normally, when glycogen reserve in the liver is exhausted or is not sufficient, the body converts the fatty acid (non-carbohydrate energy source) into glucose. But in the presence of the litchi toxin, the conversion of fatty acid into glucose is stopped midway. As a result, no glucose is generated and the low blood glucose level is not corrected by the body.

How will Jet’s insolvency process play out?

Will potential buyers be interested in capitalising on the airline’s brand value and try to relaunch the carrier?

PRASHANTH PERUMAL J.

The story so far: Jet Airways, the troubled private airline that has failed to meet its huge debt obligations, was admitted to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Thursday. This happened after a consortium of lenders led by State Bank of India (SBI) that had lent money to the airline over the years approached the NCLT to begin insolvency proceedings. Shares of the airline soared more than 120% on Thursday after news broke that the airline has been admitted by the NCLT for bankruptcy proceedings.
In accordance with the procedures laid out under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, the court ordered an interim resolution professional to take control of Jet Airways. The professional appointed by the court will now look at ways to salvage the most value out of the airline so that the money can be used to pay back lenders.

Why did Jet Airways fail?
It was founded by Naresh Goyal in 1992, and began flying a year later. It was one of the earliest private entrants into India’s airline industry after the government slowly began to liberalise the economy. The opening up of the airline industry to more private companies in the ensuing years caused a boom in air travel in the country. At the same time, greater competition put increasing pressure on airlines to either deliver better services to justify their high prices, or cut costs to operate more efficiently as budget airlines. Jet, which was unable to adapt to changing market conditions, suffered losses for many consecutive years. The unpredictability of the price of oil in the global market also played a role in messing up its cost calculations. In the first quarter of financial year 2018, Jet posted a loss of ₹1,323 crore.
Since that huge loss, its management has tried to pump additional money into the airline to meet its operating costs and has also announced various aggressive measures to cut down costs. But all this may have come a little too late. Lenders, seeing the writing on the wall, have refused to keep throwing good money after bad just to keep the airline afloat. Kingfisher and Sahara are two other private airlines which failed under the pressures of competition. Air India, which is again burdened by a huge amount of debt like Jet, was another prominent loser in



the battle for market share. But unlike Air India, Jet does not have the government to bail it out of its financial trouble.

What made lenders approach the bankruptcy court?
It is estimated that Jet may owe about ₹20,000 crore in the form of short- and long-term debt obligations to an array of lenders. A consortium of lenders that loaned money to Jet has already been in talks with some potential buyers such as Etihad (UAE) and Tata Sons who could invest capital in Jet in order to make the airline fully operational once again. However, these talks have failed to materialise into an actual deal given the high level of debt on Jet’s balance sheet. It is worth noting that buyers of troubled companies are generally reluctant to take responsibility for the debt of the troubled entity as it will affect their own return from the investment. The lender consortium led by the SBI, on the other hand, may believe that it can salvage more value from the failed airline through the insolvency proceedings carried out under the purview of the court.
Further, the lenders may also be able to gain greater control over Jet’s management by approaching court. Mr. Goyal’s resignation from the airline’s board in March may have been in expectation of unilateral action by the lender consortium to take it to the doorstep of the bankruptcy court. Mr. Goyal’s exit may give Jet’s lenders

How does the toxin cause coma and even death in children?
The toxin acts in two ways to harm the brain and even cause death. Because of the toxin, the body’s natural mechanism to correct low blood glucose level is prevented thus leading to a drop in fuel supply to the brain. This leads to drowsiness, disorientation and even unconsciousness. When the toxin stops the fatty acid conversion into glucose midway, amino acids are released which are toxic to brain cells. The amino acids cause brain cells to swell resulting in brain oedema. As a result, children may suffer from convulsions, deepening coma and even death.

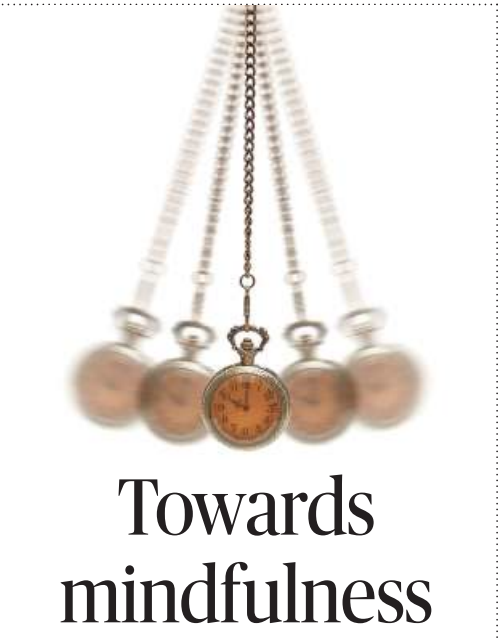
Can hypoglycaemic encephalopathy be prevented in undernourished children?
Yes, by making sure that undernourished children do not eat plenty of litchi fruit, ensuring that they eat some food and not go to bed on an empty stomach. Since 2015, the prevention strategy as recommended by Dr. Jacob John’s team has helped in sharply reducing the number of deaths from hypoglycaemic encephalopathy in Muzaffarpur. In 2017, the India-U.S. team published a paper corroborating these findings and recommendations.

Can hypoglycaemic encephalopathy be treated?
Yes, hypoglycaemic encephalopathy can be easily treated. A full and complete recovery can be achieved if children with hypoglycaemic encephalopathy are infused with 10% dextrose within four hours after the onset of symptoms.
Infusing 10% dextrose not only restores blood sugar to a safe level but also stops the production of amino acid that is toxic to brain cells by shutting down the body’s attempt to convert fatty acid into glucose.
Together with dextrose infusion, infusing 3% saline solution helps in reducing oedema of the brain cells. The concentration of ions in the fluid outside the brain cells becomes more than what is inside the cell; this causes the fluid from the cells to come out thus reducing oedema and damage to brain cells.
Using 5% dextrose, as is the norm in cases of general low blood sugar level, may help children with hypoglycaemic encephalopathy recover from hypoglycaemia, but the accumulation of amino acid is not turned off. And so, even if children survive, they will have brain damage.
If dextrose infusion is not started within four hours after the onset of symptoms, the brain cells may not recover but will die. As a result, even if they survive, children suffer from various aspects of brain damage – speech getting affected, mental retardation, muscle stiffness/weakness and so forth.

What lies ahead for the airline and its lenders?
Jet Airways is the first airline company in India to be admitted to undergo bankruptcy proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016. In contrast to other companies that have previously undergone bankruptcy proceedings under the bankruptcy code, Jet has very few assets, especially when compared to the size of its debt obligations. Many of the airline’s aircraft have already been seized by lenders after Jet stopped making payments. This leaves banks such as the SBI with very little to salvage from the airline, so it is very doubtful whether Jet’s lenders will be able to make any significant recovery of their debts just by selling off its assets.
The resolution professional in charge of Jet may thus want to keep the airline running as a going concern so that it might fetch the best value for lenders in the long run. Potential buyers may be interested in capitalising on the airline’s brand value and trying to re-launch the carrier by infusing fresh capital. Buyer interest, however, will depend largely on the amount of debt that lenders are willing to write off. The sale of Air India earlier this year failed to attract any bids due to the airline’s heavy debt burden that the lenders were unwilling to write off before the sale. If no buyer shows interest in purchasing Jet as a going concern, the only option left may be to sell each of Jet’s assets individually. Jet will then cease to exist as a company.

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ASHWIN SHANKER

It happened during yet another terrible day at work. I was frustrated with my boss, who simply wouldn't listen to my suggestions to better the code we were cracking, and would favour my partner's opinion over mine. Despondent thoughts crept into my mind – the politics, the favouritism, the bullying, all of which seem to come to no end. I thought I was about to explode, and I quickly retreated to the wash-room. I closed the door behind me and pulled the lid down to sit on the commode. I wanted to tear up, but the rage wouldn't let me give in to my vulnerability.

It was at that moment when I observed the slow ticking of the second hand of my watch.

It was the right kind of rhythm that my mind needed amid the chaos around my work life.

I thought about how the deliberate and ir-reverent movement of time, captured in this tiny device, would have witnessed both the happiest and the saddest periods of my life. The slow, rhythmic movements of the second hand tell me that this too shall pass. All I had to do was to hold on.

Regardless of how uplifting or upsetting that particular moment is in our life, there is no option but to accept the fact that things could change for the better or for the worse in the very next second. The moment cannot be controlled, but the mindset can be.

The calming realisation woke me up from my mindless slumber, and as I walked back to my desk I realised that most people around me are living their lives asleep.

I am glad that I listened to the timeless advice that my watch gave me, instead of reacting to my impulses. The ticking helped cut off the emotional time bomb.

The second hand is all about bringing your mind from a state of chaos to one of order. The minute hand will, however, sharpen your focus by bringing your attention to a dial that almost looks stationary, but is also moving forward, every minute. It has a hypnotic effect.

Have you ever wondered how many times a day you check the time? A study by a U.S. newspaper showed that Americans on an average check their watch once every 12 minutes. What if you could convert those moments into those of mindfulness?

By simply observing how each second passes by, we could reach a certain calm state. Then every moment would not be just about knowing what time it is, but about what best we could make of that time gifted to us.

Zen master Osho believed that by simply observing and moving our attention to one thing, we could raise our state of self-awareness; it morphs to a form of mindfulness.

Remember that mindfulness can never be something to be achieved or something to be desired for, because every desire has a chance of being a disappointment if not met.

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Live and let live: some thoughts on a sustainable future

Humans are not what they imagine themselves to be

VIDULA CHOPRA RASTOGI

Anyone who has ever bought a plant from a nursery, watered it every day and watched in dismay as it failed to thrive, knows that gardening isn't easy. Even if you manage to grow a plant successfully, growing food is another ballgame altogether. Vegetables such as bitter melon and tomato grow almost like weeds, but others are trickier. They have varied water needs, soil requirements and temperature and sunlight preferences. In the event you get all of this right, you still need to protect them from pests. Finally, after weeks or months of care and patience, your plants may yield just a few kilograms of vegetables.

Recently, I watched in astonishment as a vine took root in my balcony, sprouted



ILLUSTRATION: SATWIK GADE

leaves and filled up the entire length of my planter in a matter of days. Flowers blossomed, and before long I spotted a tiny pumpkin, as big as an avocado. The children were beside themselves with excitement.

We watched it grow each day, and I helped it along by cutting back the vine and snipping off the browning leaves. When we finally cut it off, it weighed a good 4 kg.

In our home of seven, the fruit of our labour didn't last long, but the children were

convinced it tasted better than any they had ever tasted. Not a crumb was wasted. If only we looked at all food in the same manner, for every fruit or vegetable that makes its way to us has been grown painstakingly by some farmer somewhere. One bad monsoon can ruin a crop, but we always have food on our tables and find it difficult to imagine that a day may come when we may not. The truth is, that day may arrive sooner than we think.

There was a book I read to my daughter, titled *Millions of Cats*. It's an old classic, printed as far back as 1928. Although the book's subject matter deals with aesthetics, a few lines stood out in my mind. A very old man was returning home with millions of cats. They came to a pond. Each cat took a sip, and the pond was gone. When they were hungry, each ate a mouthful of grass on a hill, and not a blade was left.

Humans have been around for an estimated two lakh years by some accounts. Think about it. It took thousands of centuries to reach the level of a billion people, and today we are at 7.5 billion. Have we ever wondered just how many people earth can take? How many can it feed before there's just a mouthful left for each of us?

We presume we have an endless supply of food, but the truth is that the quality of our soil is deteriorating thanks to the large-scale use of pesticides and toxins that enter the soil and water through garbage disposal.

Dead zones – areas in the ocean that can no longer sustain growth – are gradually increasing. Species are growing extinct at an alarming rate. More and more of marine life are being found with plastic in their bodies. Fish is getting progressively unsafe to eat and pregnant women are cautioned against eating many forms of seafood because of concerns about the mercury level in them. If our water is growing unfit to support marine life, how will it support us?

We buy things we don't need, often tire of them, and throw them away, without a thought to all the resources it took to make them. The numerous artefacts we gift each other make no sense, serve no purpose and destroy the environment. Everything, from fast fashion to fast food, is a burden the earth shouldn't have to bear.

We can do a lot to help – not just the earth but ourselves – by gardening, composting, planting trees, avoiding single-use plastic

Why we often get it wrong

Snap judgments made intuitively on the basis of limited information invariably lead you to trouble

BADDAM ARAVINDA REDDY

A few years back I used to experience thumping palpitations in my heart whenever I climbed steps. This condition came about suddenly without any advance warning. I consulted a noted physician in my town, and after doing blood and other tests he diagnosed my problem as rheumatic heart disease. He prescribed drugs and warned me that I had to be on life-long medication. I was totally depressed. Friends and relatives suggested that I should consult another doctor for a second opinion. The second doctor was a cardiologist. He ordered an echocardiogram test and found a lump of tissue in my left atrium. I had left atrial myxoma. After the tumor was surgically removed, my problem was gone.

Not long ago I purchased a piece of land in a bustling town. The purchase decision was made without much thought, on the advice of a friend.

Those days real estate prices were shooting up by the day and I was in a tearing hurry to get on to the real estate bandwagon. After the purchase was made, I realised that the land had no proper access and that the seller had a previous agreement with another buyer. With great difficulty and some financial loss I could finally get rid of the land.

Daniel Kahneman, economist and psychologist, a Nobel prize winner, in his book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, slots the human thinking process into two categories. System 1 thinking wherein the brain takes snap and intuitive judgments based on limited knowledge. System

2 thinking is a deliberate thinking process in which lot of information is gathered and options are considered. If we analyse the two cases mentioned above, the first case was an outcome of System 2 thinking. Options were searched and the better option was chosen. The second case is an example of System 1 thinking. A snap judgment was made on the basis of a limited amount of information and this led to lot of trouble. System 1 thinking was best suited when human beings were wandering in the African savanna. He had to make a quick judgment whether the figure lurking behind a bush was a lion or a harmless deer. In his daily life he had neither the time nor the security to

think through things. But modern life affords humans the luxury of security, time and abundant information to use System 2 thinking. Unfortunately for many of us, System 1 thinking is the default thinking mode. We use it constantly and make many mistakes.

Rolf Dobelli, the Swiss author, in his book *The Art of Thinking Clearly*, puts together a hundred

biases in human thinking which lead to wrong judgments. The list of biases include the contrast effect, the fear of regret, loss aversion, reciprocity, the anchor effect, the sleeper effect, story bias, the halo effect, the availability bias and so on.

The common theme running through all these biases is snap judgments made intuitively on limited information. Most of our purchases of branded goods are influenced by the halo effect. Our minds are mesmerised by the aura built around them. We purchase them without examining quality parameters.

Knowing full well that System 1 thinking leads us to make mistakes we can't free ourselves from System 1 thinking. From morning to evening in our daily life we have to make hundreds of judgments. We can't sit on each event and ponder over options. If we do that, we'll be stuck. Many of our decisions are snap decisions and most of the time it is ok with these decisions. When it's a big event such as choosing a life-partner, choosing a career, leaving a job, buying a home, making a large investment or any instance of substantial stake, we have to sit up and play System 2 thinking.

There is no guarantee that when we use System 2 thinking, we'll get the best outcomes. In spite of the time and effort put into System 2 thinking, sometimes the result may be contrary to expectations. A big black swan may come up to thwart our expectations. In such cases, we have to console ourselves by remembering that the world is its own master and that we cannot control it. Life could throw up surprises. We have to take them in our stride and move on.

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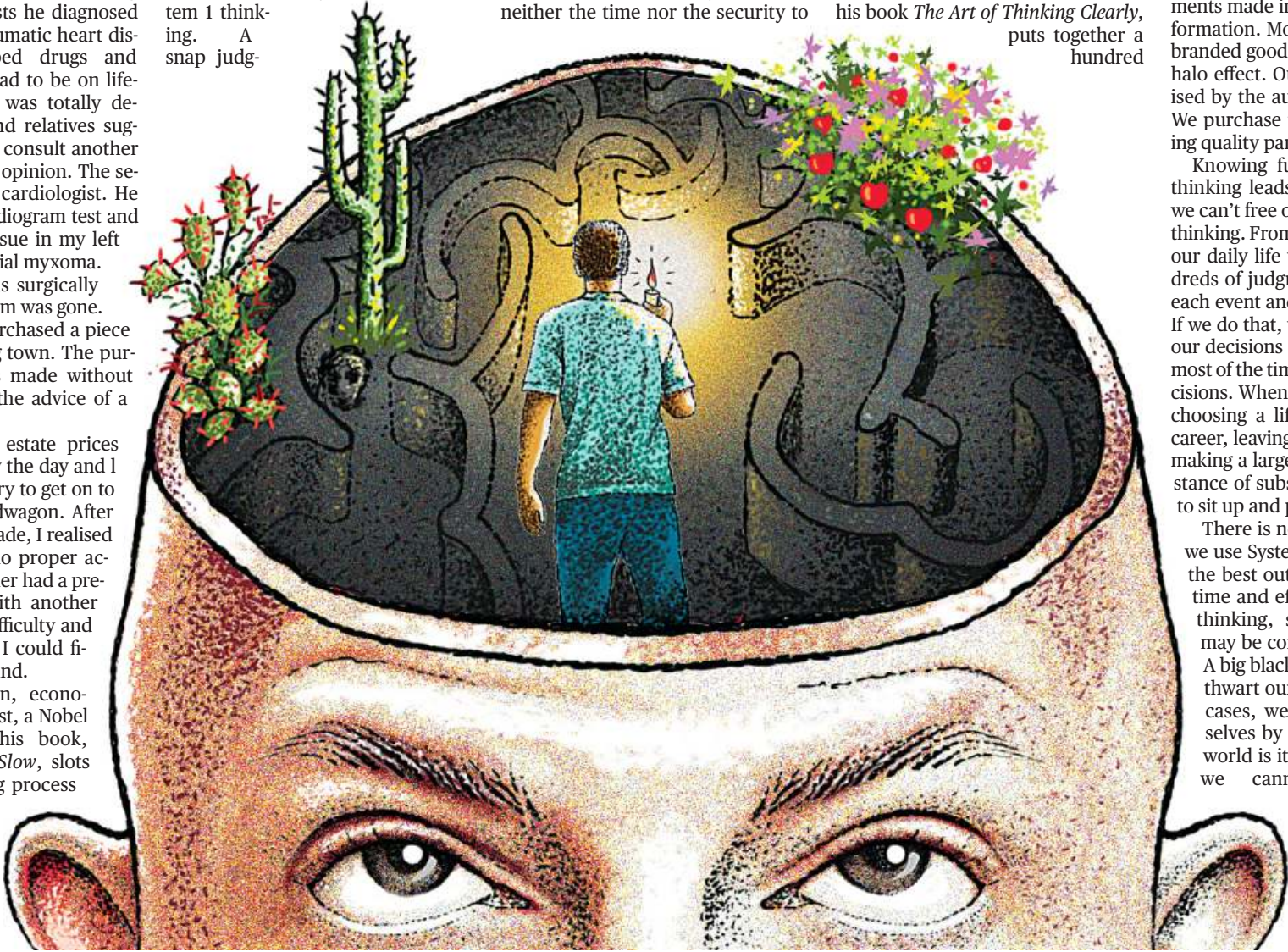


ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

A lone golfer waiting for a weekend game

What could have been a blissful time on the course...

T.P. KANNAN

After a busy week in the office, the least that a golfer worth his salt may look forward to at the weekend is a round of golf. Blissful four hours, devoid of the bane of the stressful office and domestic preoccupations. The blue sky above, just green grass below, a cool breeze...

But try getting a game-slot on a Saturday or Sunday on your own. This is what will happen.

You couldn't book one because the slot booking rules demanded that you give at least three players' names, but you are a loner. You go to the course around 1.30 and tell the marshal you would like to play. He asks you to wait as there are several four-ball groups. One three-ball, the last group, is scheduled to tee off

at 2.34 p.m., and you may perhaps join them.

You sit on a bench under the shade watching team after team tee off. The first few minutes of watching are interesting – two OBs, one water hazard, two hitting the trees and one powerful air shot with intermittent fairway shots. But as time passes you get restless. The shade is not of much help. It's a hot day. The penultimate group on the tee box leaves. And the last group you are to join is nowhere to be seen.

The tee box is now deserted. You are sitting there all alone on the bench getting anxious, with only a skinny dog that is enjoying an afternoon nap under a nearby tree for company. The breeze seems to have stopped. Exasperated, you go up to the marshal, who hates coming out of his cabin, and ask, "Where are they?"

He looks towards the car park through the window and announces, "They've arrived, sir." Ah, finally! You get up with a sigh of relief, flex your muscles and, pulling out the

driver, take practice swings.

The three senior gentlemen, all well past their seventies, are however in no hurry to reach the tee box. They are in fact always the last to tee off. With no group behind, they play the game at their own leisurely pace.

While walking they talk about their grandchildren, the annual baby-sitting trips to San Jose or Atlanta or New Jersey, President Trump and local politics, stopping in between to say 'good shot' when one of them hits a

100-yard drive.

"Good shot! Straight and long. Must be easily 100 yards."

"What do you mean 100 yards? It must be a minimum of 280 yards. I can't even see the ball."

"That's because you have cataract."

Presently they are strolling towards the first tee box. Looking at their tired walk, one would think they have just finished playing 18 holes.

The marshal walks up to them and asks, "Sir, that gentleman over there, he is alone and wants a game. Can he now join you?"

They stop where they are, to take a good look at you, now doing your pre-game stretching exercise – you in your early-40s, neatly tucked T-shirt with matching shorts, branded golf shoes and black cap with a premier logo. They also see your new expensive golf bag leaning majestically on its stand. As they watch, you take a practice swing with your arms fully stretched and the

hip turning ninety degrees. The club hits your back as you complete the swing. A typical pro-like golf swing.

They exchange glances with 'Are-you-thinking-what-I-am-thinking?' kind of expression on their faces. Decision made but still they had a question.

"What is his handicap?" one of them asks.

"He says twelve," replies the marshal.

The marshal starts towards you. Seeing him come, you climb up the tee box and place the tee, not wanting to lose a minute more after the one-hour wait. You are all geared up to hit the tee shot. You see the threesome approaching you, and giving them a friendly smile, you extend your hand. "Good afternoon, gentlemen. I am..."

That's when the marshal would interrupt you to say, "Sorry sir, their fourth ball is joining them after two holes. And at weekends you cannot play alone."

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ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR



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The visual carnival

The days of voyeuristic reading are here, with words seemingly overshadowed by pictures
P. DALAI

A profession and a passion

The portrait of an acclaimed artist in an unlikely life-setting
UMESH PATRA

Perils of excessive screen-time

Why early action by vigilant elders could help youngsters avoid the digital trap
RAJESH KRISHNAN

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