

A nudge for desirable behaviour

Several companies are using behavioural economics for HR practices



HUMAN FACTOR

SHYAMAL MAJUMDAR

Behavioural economics has been a much-discussed topic after the Economic Survey last week devoted an entire chapter on how it provides insights to “nudge” people towards desirable behaviour even while preserving their liberty to choose. The chapter illustrated how the Swachh Bharat Mission and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have successfully employed behavioural insights.

One of the most successful use of the nudge technique was in the UK when the government was finding it hard to cope with the last-minute surge in tax payments. A Behavioural Insights Team set up by the government started sending repeated reminder letters to inform people that most of their neighbours had already paid. This speeded up tax payments considerably. Encouraged by the success, the UK government increased the scope of the nudge activities: From tax payment to reducing missed hospital appointments. Behavioural economics, which is essentially the study of how individuals make economic decisions, looking at the psychological, emotional, social and cognitive factors at play, is being used to significant effect in human resource practices in many large companies. In some cases, HR professionals are perhaps using nudge techniques instinctively, but they are effective nevertheless. Google, for instance, partnered with

Yale University to study how behavioural economics can improve employee wellness after it found that the effects of poor health and obesity cost a huge sum to US companies every year. So the company made subtle changes in the order of the placement of food to bring the attention of employees to healthier options and make it easier to choose. So placing the healthier items ahead of the unhealthy food on the shelf nudged the employees to pick those food items. Google and Yale researchers also experimented with promoting unpopular vegetables as the “Vegetable of the Day”. So they placed colourful fliers filled with fun facts about the food next to the vegetable in the cafeteria. This increased consumption of the vegetable by 74 per cent. Other companies have done a variation of this by prominently displaying information about the calories in the various meals on offer. This is to help

those who were watching their weight or trying to eat more healthy make appropriate choices. Behavioural economics actually came to the fore in 2008 with the publication of *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*, the bestselling book that Richard H Thaler co-wrote with legal scholar Cass R Sunstein. The trick in delivering the nudge lies in what the authors call “choice architecture”. Put simply: How choices are presented. For example, research has also found that people use the office stairs more often if they are stylish and centrally located (in contrast, the elevator is in a corner and requires a key card). This not only encourages exercise; it creates a more open working environment. Thus, behavioural economics is a crucially important field for HR and can be employed in a broad range of activities — helping the company make the best hiring decisions and make people feel engaged with their work, etc. So many leading companies incorporate behavioural economics principles through nudges in most of their HR practices. Behavioural science has also given companies insights into how employees’

minds work effectively. For example, it has been found that repetition and recall help employees learn better. So while planning their training programmes, many companies have incorporated a learner recall exercise every half an hour, or at the end of a session, or even a few months later. While some employees will find this irritating, many others find this useful, helping managements to get valuable feedback of the effectiveness of their training programmes and the tweaks they should make. The trick lies in properly thought-out messaging. For example, small, simple reminders that are helpful rather than pushy is what inspires positive action. Because when you make something top of mind in a non-interfering way, people are going to act on it. Thaler set out three principles, which he said, should guide the use of nudges: All nudging should be transparent and never misleading; it should be as easy as possible to opt out of the nudge; and there should be good reason to believe that the behaviour being encouraged will improve the welfare of those being nudged. Thaler once summarised his work in three words: “Make it easy”. Great companies follow that as the Bible.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Mumbai's white elephant



The monorail project in Mumbai, set up by the Maharashtra government with an investment of more than ₹3,000 crore, has become the proverbial white elephant. After taking more than eight years — resulting in road closures and traffic jams in the central part of the city — the project is as good as shuttered. Currently only one rake is in use, but thanks to incessant rain, service on that is frequently disrupted. Due to salary delays, members of the staff are not interested in its operations and upkeep, either. No wonder the stations look deserted. So who rides the monorail, which connects Chembur with Mahalaxmi? Operators say only the tourists visiting the city.

Interpreting cricket defeat

There has been much recrimination in the Congress after the Lok Sabha election defeat. Insiders have blamed people starting from outgoing party chief Rahul Gandhi to seniors like Ahmed Patel, and also some lateral entrants, particularly the party's data analytics department chief, Praveen Chakravarty. On Thursday, Chakravarty tweeted it was heartbreaking to watch India lose to New Zealand in the cricket World Cup. "Led valiantly by their captain, India had a string of remarkable wins and fought hard in this crucial game but lost," he said. However, there was a sting in the tale. "Wisely, the team's support staff is not being blamed solely for this defeat," the tweet concluded. It does not take much wracking of the brain to catch the drift.

All praise for Jaitley

The Rajya Sabha resumed its discussion on the Union Budget on Thursday. More than 40 MPs spoke, including some from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, but none except Shiromani Akali Dal's Naresh Gujral mentioned former finance minister Arun Jaitley. The two are good friends, and Gujral said he would like to remember the contribution of Jaitley, who for five years brought back the Indian economy from the brink of disaster. Jaitley brought back fiscal discipline and piloted the implementation of the goods and services tax (GST), he said. The Akali Dal MP gave "full marks" to him for bringing in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and ending the "discretion raj". Jaitley is convalescing and staying away from active politics.

Swapping cashiers for cameras

More retailers are embracing product-recognition technology pioneered by Amazon

PARMY OLSON

A man strolled down the candy aisle of a grocery store in England last month, picked up a bar of chocolate and stashed it in his back pocket. He wasn't stealing. Specially equipped surveillance cameras were tracking both his body and the products he was taking off the shelves, to help him pay for them. Tesco PLC, one of the world's largest supermarket operators, demonstrated this technology recently to investors, labelling it as one of the retailer's big ideas for making shopping at its physical stores more convenient. Tesco is one of the several grocers testing cashierless stores with cameras that track what shoppers pick, so they pay by simply walking out the door.

The retailers hope the technology — similar to that pioneered by Amazon.com Inc in its Amazon Go stores in the US — will allow them to cut costs and alleviate lines as they face an evolving threat from the e-commerce giant.

European efforts to scale up the technology in traditional stores — economically and without upsetting privacy advocates — will likely be closely watched in the US. Grocers in the UK often pioneer new technology like online delivery and self-payment kiosks that their American peers eventually adopt. For instance, Kroger Co last year hired Britain's Ocado Group PLC to build an automated warehouse filled with robots to fulfill home deliveries.

"People [in the US] will definitely take note of Tesco's experimentation,

if only because it shows that someone outside of Amazon is now testing the concept," said Chris Walton, a former Target Corp executive and founder of consulting firm Red Archer Retail. Tesco plans to open its self-styled "pick and go" or "frictionless shopping" store to the public next year after testing with employees. Eventually it wants to use the technology, developed by Israeli startup Trigo Vision, in more of its smaller grocery stores.

Tesco's 4,000-square-foot test store uses 150 ceiling-mounted cameras to generate a three-dimensional view of products as they are taken off shelves. In its recent demo, Tesco's system detected shoppers as they walked around the store. It also identified a group of products when a person holding them stood in front of a screen, tallying up their total. Tesco is considering identifying shoppers through an app or loyalty card when they enter the store and then charging their app when they leave.

Tesco told investors its method costs one-tenth of systems used by its competitors, partly because it only uses cameras. Amazon Go uses cameras and sensors to track what shoppers pick. Amazon customers scan a QR code at a gate when they enter a store, then walk out when finished.

French retail giant Carrefour SA is also running tests in at least two stores where cameras track what is taken off shelves and shoppers are charged automatically when they leave. Carrefour is working with French startup Qopius Technology, whose cameras and software can read labels on products.



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It used to be difficult to sell product-recognition technology to retailers, said Vasco Portugal, co-founder of Sensei Tech. "It seemed like crazy technology and it sounded like magic." That changed after Amazon Go launched last year. "Immediately we started seeing a lot of appetite," he said. The Portuguese startup, which charges tens of thousands of dollars to fit out stores with the computing power equipment needed to track products, in addition to a monthly fee, said three European grocers are planning to roll out its system this year. Israel's biggest supermarket chain, Shufersal, plans to deploy similar technology across all its stores if its own trial works out. "The whole notion of waiting in line will vanish," a spokesman said. Retailers face some challenges with this technology. Customers may balk at having their movements tracked, though Tesco said the system used in

its trial doesn't recognise faces. Image-recognition technology is also expensive to run in larger stores, and requires enormous on-site computing resources. But the cost of computing power is falling, Portugal said, making product-tracking systems more commercially viable. American grocery chains have typically been slower to adopt new technology than their peers across the Atlantic because the US market is less competitive, said Bruno Monteyne, an analyst at Bernstein Research. Despite initial excitement after Amazon Go launched, US retailers have also faced concerns about excluding low-income shoppers who tend to pay with cash. Lawmakers in several cities, including San Francisco, have been considering bans on cashless stores. US retailers also operate many large stores, where tracking thousands of products all

day long would be more expensive. Walmart Inc is testing artificial intelligence-enabled cameras in a store in New York that can recognise hundreds of products, but only to manage inventory levels. The retailer plans to test its system on a 30,000-item "real-world" store that is nearly the size of a football field, but a spokesman said it wasn't testing cameras for purchases. Kroger last year launched a system that allows customers to scan and bag products as they shop and then pay by scanning a final bar code. It has looked at ideas for quicker payments but hasn't embraced Amazon Go-style technology, a former Kroger executive said. A Kroger spokesman didn't respond to requests for comment. Heather Haddon and Sarah Nassauer contributed to this article.

Source: The Wall Street Journal

INSIGHT

An open letter to Rahul Gandhi



YOGENDRA YADAV

Dear Rahul, I take the liberty of writing to you in response to your resignation letter. I draw upon our earlier acquaintance nearly a decade ago. My impressions from those few meetings with you were of a leader who was more sincere than most politicians one meets and more intelligent than anyone was willing to believe. That positive impression, however, is not the trigger for this letter. I write to you because you invoke something bigger than your party's interest, something that speaks to me. You seek to fight "to defend the ideals India was built upon". Knowing you, I assume this is not insincere rhetoric. You express concern that "the attack on our country and our cherished Constitution that is taking place is designed to destroy the fabric of our nation". This is exactly what many Indians like me fear today. You acknowledge: "We will not defeat our opponents without sacrificing the desire for power and fighting a deeper ideological battle". I couldn't agree more. I wish I could agree with the rest of what you say. I wish the task of fighting this battle was as straightforward as "resuscitation" of the Congress. Any serious effort to take on the current assault on the fabric of our nation must begin by facing some inconvenient truths. The fact is that

the opposition, led by the Congress, failed the nation at this critical juncture in history. You say that your party fought a "strong and dignified" election. I'm afraid that is living in denial. Dignified in some respects yes, but strong it certainly was not. True, "the entire machinery of the Indian state... was marshalled against the opposition". But that hardly explains the Himalayan blunders that the opposition inflicted upon itself. Let me not detail here all that the Congress did not do in this election. I have done that elsewhere. Let me just say that when the nation needed a coherent alternative to the BJP, your party was distracted, self-absorbed and amateurish. I do not know who to blame in the Congress. That is for your party and its leadership to find out. My own impression, as an outsider, is that the Congress leadership comprises many well-meaning persons, but no shared roadmap for larger good; many clever individuals, but no collective wisdom; unlimited personal ambition, but no institutional will to power. When this happens in any organisation, the top leadership must take responsibility. It would seem only appropriate that you owned up and resigned. The solution you propose is "resuscitation" of the Congress. I'm afraid, this again misses the basic point. The Congress of today is not the party that you speak of, the party with a "profound history and heritage, one of struggle and dignity". The party you presided over does not remind today's Indians about Gandhiji, Nehru, Patel and Azad or the values of freedom struggle enshrined in our Constitution. The Congress, as it stands today, reminds the people of dynasty rule, of unbridled corruption, of assault on democratic institutions, of massacres that enjoyed political protection, not to mention unadulterated political



greed. I do not blame you or any one leader for this, but it would be farcical to deny this harsh truth. Today, the opinions of a majority of ordinary Congress workers are not very different from that of a BJP worker. Not to put too fine a point on it: The Congress of today is not an expression of the idea of Congress. We cannot assume that the Congress is the solution. It is part of the problem that the country faces today. I wish you had also acknowledged another truth: Much of the solution today lies outside the Congress party. The country has considerable energy and ideas needed to take on the current challenge to the idea of India, but these are with social movements, individuals and organisations that are either not political or not with mainstream parties. The Congress is thus not the natural vehicle for this historic mission. In your letter, you say that the "Congress party must radically transform itself". I do not know what you mean by that. If it means a radical reshuffle of party functionaries, that is strictly your internal matter. If it means revamping the party organisation, once again outsiders like me

have no business to comment. But allow me to say that the time for internal medicine is long over. I doubt if any of these would be of great relevance to the people outside your party or would prepare the Congress to take on the big challenge facing our country. I hope the opposition does not wait for the third BJP victory to realise this. A radical transformation could mean something else. It could mean going back to the spirit and the form of the Indian National Congress as it existed during the freedom struggle. At that point, the Congress was a grand coalition bound by a single objective of *swaraj*. It contained within itself political parties like the Congress Socialist Party and the Swaraj Party. Responding to the current challenge to our republic needs nothing short of that imagination. This cannot be achieved by another opportunistic *mahagathbandhan*. It has to be a coming together of all Indians who believe in defending the foundational values of our Constitution. As a party that secured the support of 12 crore Indians, the Congress is essential to this project, but only if it realises that the Indian National Congress of today is no longer the umbrella to create such a broad-based unity. That is why I ask you Rahul, when you speak of "sacrificing the desire for power", is it only about individuals or does it apply to the party itself? Are you and your party willing to lose yourself in the service of the historic cause that you correctly identify, to submerge the organisation into something larger? Some might call it the death of the Congress. Some others might call it a rebirth. For me, what matters is reclaiming the republic. And for you? Yours sincerely, Yogendra Yadav

By special arrangement with ThePrint. The author is the national president of Swaraj India

LETTERS

PSBs need overhaul



Kudos to the editorial, "The missing 'R'" (July 11). The proposed fresh recapitalisation of ₹70,000 crore will help public sector banks (PSBs) but as the editorial rightly pointed out, to pull the PSBs out of the rut, a much wider set of reforms are required to be implemented. A major overhaul is needed on the management of human resources. It would be ideal to make wage negotiations bank specific. The staff members of well managed and more revenue generating banks need to be paid better than the laggards. The work culture in PSBs needs some overhaul vis-à-vis the new generation private sector banks. Unless there is a realisation among the bank staff about the need for a proactive customer service, PSBs will continue to lose good customers to nimble and on-the-ball new generation banks. Consolidation of PSBs through mergers needs to be paced up. There will be angst amongst many staff members as they get pushed away from their comfort

zones. But we need to move with the times and accept the new reality. No amount of recapitalisation will help unless the culture in these banks undergoes a sea change.

KVPremraj Mumbai

Corrections

The book review "Why Nehru matters" by Mahesh Rangarajan (July 10) contained some factual errors and syntactic and semantic anomalies. ■ Nehru wrote *Discovery of India* in the famous Ahmednagar Fort, not Aurangabad. ■ The name of the famous Hindi poet known as *Rashtrakavi* is Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar', not *Nam Dhari...* ■ Rangarajan says "Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad were of an older generation..." Patel, yes, but not Azad, who was only a year older than Nehru. ■ Rangarajan describes "Blitz" as a magazine. In fact, it was a weekly newspaper. ■ He says, "When Andre Malraux...was asked...", Malraux was not asked; he was the one who asked Nehru about his (Nehru's) challenge and then Nehru named not one but two, as recounted by Rangarajan.

Sharad Panse via email

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HAMBONE



Pricing impasse

It is vital to revise the reserve price for 5G spectrum

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai), by rejecting the suggestion of the Digital Communications Commission (DCC) to reduce the reserve price for 5G spectrum, has overlooked the financial stress in the sector. Reiterating the stand taken in its recommendation of August 2018, Trai has suggested that the 3,300-3,600 MHz band meant for 5G spectrum be auctioned at ₹492 crore per MHz. While it's up to the DCC (formerly known as the Telecom Commission) to take a call now, history shows it has never revised the price downward from what has been recommended by Trai.

On the contrary, in several instances earlier, the Telecom Commission has only revised upwards the prices recommended by Trai. For instance, in 2015, the Telecom Commission had sent back the Trai recommendations on 3G spectrum pricing at ₹2,720 crore per MHz for reconsideration because it was considered low. While Trai stuck to its stand, the Telecom Commission approved a 36 per cent higher base price of ₹3,705 crore per MHz. Also, Trai itself has revised downwards its own recommended reserve price for high-value 700 MHz spectrum that had gone unsold in the previous auction.

This time around, the DCC, despite Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad admitting stress in the industry, could well play safe by not going against Trai in spectrum pricing, fearing a scrutiny by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) over loss to the exchequer, as was the case during the 2G spectrum allocation under the United Progressive Alliance rule. At the current reserve price, across multiple frequency bands including 5G, recommended by Trai, the government could mop up around ₹5.83 trillion (\$83.8 billion).

However, the DCC should realise that these are unusual times. With the telecom industry saddled with ₹4.3 trillion of debt, the health of the sector should be a key consideration for the government while aiming for technological progress through 5G services. All telecom firms, including Reliance Jio, are unanimous that the spectrum prices are too high. Bharti Airtel has said it will not participate in an auction held at these prices, while Vodafone Idea has suggested the 5G auction take place in 2020. It's important for India to not miss the 5G bus when countries around the world are going headlong, but it should not be at the cost of the telcos.

So, the government should step out of its safe zone, and revise the reserve price downwards for 5G spectrum to be sold in an auction later this year. The second-best option for the government would be to work out a payment mechanism that's less strenuous for the companies. A lower down-payment and easier tranches could hold an answer, as reported in this newspaper. But, such a measure will only give a partial relief to the industry. Trai in its latest review has observed that the government's marketing efforts will have an impact on the auction, adding that no guarantee can be given about the sale of all the spectrum put to auction. That disclaimer from the regulator should embolden the government to step out of convention.

Policing social media

MHRD should focus more on improving the state of higher education

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) is reportedly giving a push to ensure that each of the 900-odd higher education institutions (HEIs) under its control develops a "positive" social media profile. In itself, this might, at best, indicate misplaced priorities, given that the ministry has to manage a critical sector with many glaring problems and extremely limited resources. However, the social media initiative includes a disturbing element in that it recommends that all 30 million-odd students studying in the HEIs be asked to link their social media accounts to their respective institutes. That could create a situation where students are placed under a mass surveillance net as well as rendered vulnerable to other potential breaches of privacy.

In a recent letter circulated to HEIs, the secretary to the MHRD recommended that each HEI choose a member of the staff as a "social media champion". This person would have to set up and maintain the HEI's profile on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This champion would also have to release some positive news about the HEI each week and, after linking up with other HEI profiles and with the MHRD, retweet, or otherwise amplify, positive posts and "other good news" from other HEIs and the MHRD. This champion is to be identified by July 31. It would be this person's responsibility to also request students to link their social media profiles to that of the institute. Students would also be asked to publicise and amplify good news and positive stories about the HEIs.

Upon enquiry by *The Quint*, the ministry clarified this linkage of student accounts would be voluntary. In practice, however, given the power equations between students and their institutions, such a "request" by the champion would effectively carry the force of a diktat. It is possible to link students' Twitter/Facebook/Instagram accounts to the HEI accounts without yielding access to their private content. But it would create a huge list for the MHRD to look at and study using Big Data analysis. It would destroy the anonymity of social media users since their accounts would be linked to their identities and institutions.

Given that public criticism of the government usually causes targeting by trolls supporting the government, and indeed sometimes results in arrests under regressive laws, this is a serious issue. Students who express dissent could be made to suffer in many ways if this sort of monitoring of social media is normalised. This measure could, therefore, have a powerful, chilling effect on freedom of expression since students would not only be "encouraged" to amplify "positive posts"; they would know that the MHRD was reading over their shoulder. Quite apart from this, such a database of linked accounts would be a goldmine for any organisation looking to exercise undue influence on elections. There are other ways to amplify the MHRD's activities and spread good news about HEIs. For example, the MHRD could easily create space for positive feedback and comments online from students and other stakeholders. Policing social media spaces where people interact informally with each other and creating a mechanism for monitoring on such a vast scale is not how the MHRD should set about developing a positive social media profile.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



A waning resistance to majoritarianism

There is no effective counter to Hindu nationalism in politics and society in India today

The crisis of our times is India's inability to respond to majoritarianism and a nasty Hindu nationalism. There is no effective resistance to it in politics and there is none in society. What is to be done? In liberal democracies around the world, the locus of such resistance is usually academia and the media. In India, neither of these has delivered.

The former has never been an influence on a society where the intellectual is respected but not taken seriously. For the most part, the media have become coopted, whether through coercion or attraction.

Elsewhere, the justices have shown little interest in protecting constitutional values at the ideological level. Their behaviour is not any different from the pusillanimity the Supreme Court showed in the fact of Congress authoritarianism in the past.

At the root of the crisis, a militant Hindu majoritarianism has become efficiently fused with Indian nationalism. This comes from the conflation of Hindu and India long promoted by Hindutva ideology. It was an idea on the periphery during the decades of Congress dominance. The Nehru-Gandhis pushed inclusion from the top down but this was akin to imposition, almost in the Ataturkian sense. The reality was the powerful hold of a tribal identity—as in the rest of South Asia.

Today, the Congress' inability to hold on to leg-

islators elected on its symbol shows the acceptability inside its own regional leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ideology. There is no line, as was drawn in the post-1992 phase, which made Hindutva and its politics unsavoury and unacceptable. And so electoral politics has also failed us.

Hindutva plays both sides and effectively owns nationalism. The BJP membership form requires one to take an oath pledging loyalty to the Constitution's secular and socialist principles. However, these two words are open to the BJP's interpretation and it can easily continue pushing its agenda.

We have ruled out academia, the media, judiciary and political parties. Culturally, it is not possible to oppose Hindu nationalism. The crowd cheering the Indian team can comfortably echo quasi-religious sentiment — "Bharat mata ki jai" — without consideration of the sensibility of fellow patriots.

On the other hand, pluralism is essentially constitutional and expressed in dry and rational terms. It does not identify any clear enemy, internal or external. Mass mobilisation against Hindutva majoritarianism and in support of pluralism is, therefore, not easy. Inclusion and tolerance are not expressible collectively in the way that nationalism is. Symbols exist for the latter, such as the iconog-



REPLY TO ALL

AAKAR PATEL

The case for a World Carbon Bank

Although much derided by climate-change deniers, not least US President Donald Trump, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal hits the nail on the head with its urgent call for the United States to lead by example on global warming. But the sad truth is that, for all the needless waste produced by American's gluttonous culture, emerging Asia is by far the main driver of the world's growing carbon dioxide emissions. No amount of handwringing will solve the problem. The way to do that is to establish the right incentives for countries such as China, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.

It is hard to see how to do this within the framework of existing multilateral aid institutions, which have limited expertise on climate issues and are pulled in different directions by their various constituencies. For example, to the dismay of many energy experts, the World Bank recently rather capriciously decided to stop funding virtually all new fossil-fuel plants, including natural gas. But replacing dirty coal plants with relatively clean natural gas is how the US has managed to reduce emissions growth dramatically over the past decade (despite Trump's best efforts), and is a centrepiece of the famous "Princeton wedges" pragmatic options for minimising climate risk. One cannot let the perfect become the enemy of good in the transition to a carbon-neutral future.

It is high time to create a new, focused agency, a World Carbon Bank, that provides a vehicle for advanced economies to coordinate aid and technical transfer, and that is not simultaneously trying to solve every other development problem. Yes, I fully understand that the current US administration is reluctant to fund even existing international insti-

tutions. But the West cannot retreat from a world of intertwined climate responsibilities.

According to the International Energy Agency — one of the few honest brokers in the global climate-change debate and a model on which a new World Carbon Bank research department could build — annual CO2 emissions in Asia are now double that of the America's, and triple that of Europe. In advanced economies, where the average age of coal plants is 42 years, many are reaching the natural end of their lifespan, and it is not a great burden to phase them out.

But in Asia, where one new coal plant a week is being built, the average age is only 11 years, and most will be running for decades to come.

Coal accounts for over 60 per cent of electricity generation in rapidly growing China and India. Even though both countries are investing heavily in renewables such as solar and wind power, their energy needs are simply growing too fast to cast aside widely available coal.

How can the US arrogantly tell India to cut back on CO2 emissions that are only one-tenth those of the US? For that matter, how can the US persuade Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's government to cut back on Amazon deforestation (rainforests are nature's carbon sink) and development without providing some concrete incentives?

There are many options for trying to reduce carbon emissions. Most economists (including me) favours a global carbon tax, though some argue that the more politically digestible cap-and-trade formula can be virtually as effective. But this is pie in the sky for developing-country governments desperate to meet their people's basic energy needs. In Africa, only 43 per cent of people have access to electricity, versus 87 per cent worldwide.



KENNETH ROGOFF

raphy of Bharat Mata, as does a slogan which is today imposed on all of us. There are no slogans for liberals to rally around and mobilise and, absent any enemy, ill-will or powerful sentiment, no feeling of congregation.

While being sworn in at the Lok Sabha, the Hyderabad Member of Parliament Asaduddin Owaisi was heckled by Hindus who goaded him with their Bharat Mata chant. He responded with a few slogans of his own, invoking his faith and Dalit power.

Jai Hind was never popular as a slogan because it does not have the element of a joint cry (the word to be emphasised — 'Jai' — is at the beginning of the slogan rather than the end, showing it to be of poor coinage).

The Indian abroad, though attracted to the message of a muscular nation, is a net negative contributor to this debate, as is the local.

We must accept that the instinct of the bystander at the Indian mob lynching is not to intervene but to record and distribute the visuals. We do not have videos being circulated that show individuals stepping in to prevent the murder of a Muslim.

The world is unsure of what is happening in India, given the absence of data on hate crimes, a category not recognised by the government. Human rights groups have compiled some frightening numbers showing that this phenomenon has taken hold and there were over 200 incidents of hate crimes last year alone.

This is secondary data, meaning that it is taken from media reports, limited to a couple of languages and dependent on how the newspaper has framed the incident. This is relevant because the nature of the media is to demote those headlines that become frequent. The aggressive promotion since 2015 of a sentiment — the prohibition of cattle slaughter — by the BJP has introduced this violence. It has produced over 300 victims, the vast majority of them not Hindus.

Civil society groups, meaning the hated Non-government organisations (NGOs), are perhaps the only space where inclusion is insisted upon. The capacity of these groups to mobilise around these values is limited and the state seeks to constantly delegitimise them and their work. Unlike in traditional liberal democracies, the NGO is seen as an enemy, harming India's ability to examine itself honestly.

The unrestricted spread of majoritarianism is manifesting itself in many ways. Today, we look favourably on the locking up of four million people, most of them Muslim, in Assam's detention camps. The demand is to replicate this barbarism elsewhere in India. Hindu nationalism is a threat to the weakest Indians and, increasingly, as we will find out, to India's neighbours.

What is our response, and how will we counter it? Voters think that pluralism and secularism are things that have been permanently outsourced to political parties. They are not.

Our society will have to correct itself but the portents are clear that it lacks the capacity to do so.

Ignorant presidents aside, most serious researchers see the risk of catastrophic climate change as perhaps the greatest existential threat facing the world in the 21st century. The effects are already with us, whether record heat on the US West Coast and in Europe, epic flooding in Iowa, or the impact of climate risks on the price of home insurance, which is rising beyond the reach of many people. And today's refugee problem is nothing compared to what the world faces as equatorial regions become too hot and too arid to sustain agriculture, and as the number of climate migrants explodes to perhaps a billion or more by the end of the century.

The US military is readying itself for the threat. Back in 2013, the chief of the US Pacific forces, admiral Samuel J. Locklear, listed long-term climate change as the biggest national-security threat. Given grave doubts about whether existing measures, such as the 2015 Paris climate agreement, are likely to do more than slightly slow down global warming, pragmatists are right to see preparing for the worst as a grim necessity.

Advanced economies need to put their own environmental house in order. But it will not be nearly enough if developing Asia, and perhaps someday developing Africa, are not also placed on a different development track. A new World Carbon Bank is almost surely a necessary piece of any comprehensive solution, even given the miraculous technological developments everyone is hoping for.

How much it will cost depends on assumptions and ambitions, but one can easily imagine a trillion dollars over 10 years. Crazy? Maybe not, compared to the alternatives. Even a Green New Deal is better than a Green No Deal.

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The Da Vinci code to life



BOOK REVIEW

KANIKA DATTÀ

Lynne Truss, author of that peerless book on grammar and usage titled *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, attributed the decline of punctuation to the rising use of text messaging. She wrote this before the explosion of social media so you can guess that she must be trebly appalled today at the steady massacre of the English language. Grammar and punctuation are not the only casualties of the rise of the SMS, Twitter and WhatsApp schools of communication. Reading habits, too, have been altered

so dynamically that any wordage beyond the scope of a limited set of characters has little chance of being read. The beleaguered publishing industry has made a gallant attempt to address this drastic alteration in literary proclivities by creating an expanding genre of "self-help" books that combine life-coaching with quasi-psychiatric truisms.

How to Think Like Da Vinci, the book under review, falls squarely in this category. Its author, Daniel Smith, appears to have created a personal cottage industry in the potted life coach business, having written no less than eight books before this one advising potential readers how to think like: Sherlock, Steve Jobs, Mandela, Einstein, Churchill, Bill Gates, Freud and Obama (no woman has been deemed worthy of his attention). That at least one of his subjects is fictional does not appear to have deterred him or the buying public: according to

his then publisher, *How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes* sold over 30,000 copies.

Mr Smith's credentials for offering advice on life and living are unclear. This slim book of 204 pages contains none of the obligatory information about the author. An internet search is not particularly revelatory either. It describes him as "non-fiction author and editor who has written across a range of subjects, including politics, economics and social history". He is also, the information sheet says, a contributor to *The Statesman's Yearbook*, a geo-political guide that has been published from the UK for over 150 years.

If I sound uber-cynical about this book, it's because Mr Smith has employed the kind of trite technique that can be readily found in the weekend health sections of daily paper or in those discourses of art of living-style gurus. It has a certain facetious appeal

but a deeper probe reveals arrant illogic in most of it.

That starts with the premise of the title. It suggests that emulating Da Vinci's thought processes will catapult one into a rarefied world of high achievement. Leonardo Da Vinci was, by any yardstick, a genius. That means he was, if we go by the dictionary definition, exceptional. All human beings cannot be exceptional, even if they follow the thought processes or habits of a chosen genius. Stan Wawrinka has a sublime one-handed backhand, just like his mentor Roger Federer. Mr Wawrinka is a very good tennis player; Mr Federer is a genius.

In any case, we do not know if Da Vinci actually thought the way Mr Smith says he did. The process is deductive and interpretative. For instance, he uses Da Vinci's humble, difficult childhood — he was the neglected, unloved, illegitimate child of a gentleman and a serving girl — as lesson number one. That Da Vinci grew up to become a giant of Renaissance art and science despite his

origins holds, according to the author, a lesson that you, the reader, must "pull yourself up by your bootstraps".

It seems not to have occurred to the author that the unique era in which Da Vinci lived, which saw the flowering of patronage of culture and intellectual life, may have had as much of a starring role to play in nurturing his genius (after all, Michelangelo was a contemporary and sometime rival). Da Vinci's greatest patron was Lorenzo de Medici, the Florentine ruler who is generally credited with ushering in a golden age of the arts. Had Da Vinci been born, say, in 15th century Afghanistan, would he have painted some equivalent of the Mona Lisa or experimented with the science of flight?

Da Vinci's manifest exceptionalism does not deter Mr Smith from placing him within a deceptively achievable template for lesser human beings to follow, and he confidently generalises on his various attributes. "Indulge Your Playful Side" is one of the prescriptions on offer. The opening line of this section

says: "Da Vinci approached his work with an energy and seriousness of intent that few individuals have come to equaling". Really? How does he know this? Anyway, this "playful side", according to the author was manifest in his stage designs for grand spectacles that were staged by wealthy patrons and by "several jokes and bawdy tales".

There's lots more in this vein: "Study, Study, Study", "Read like Da Vinci" (ha ha), "Get to the Heart of the Matter" and similar banalities. If the book has one virtue, it is that it offers a useful abbreviated biography of Da Vinci, which is also helpfully bullet-pointed in six pages. Increasingly prosperous Indians who stand in those interminable queues for the obligatory view of Mona Lisa at the Louvre may find it a useful rapid read, even if the subtleties of the artist's thought processes eludes them.

HOW TO THINK LIKE DA VINCI

Daniel Smith

Hachette, ₹299, 204 pages

Controlling access is akin to filtering news flows

Logging all meetings restricts a reporter’s ability to get sensitive news; the FM’s decision is effectively a ban

IT IS NOT quite clear what the finance ministry meant when, in response to the outcry over its proposed restrictions on the entry of PIB-accredited journalists, it claimed that while no ban had been put in place, all that was being asked for was that journalists seek an appointment with officers; and once this is done, a PIB-accredited journalist will not require an additional pass to enter the ministry. That sounds reasonable, and, in fact, a lot of the criticism of the journalists’ protest has centred on this very issue: what makes journalists so special that they can just barge into the minister or a secretary’s room? This is missing the point and, to that extent, minimising the impact of the ministry’s actions. Most PIB-accredited journalists—a privilege given only to journalists after a certain number of years in the profession—do not want to barge into the ministry to buttonhole the minister or bureaucrats unannounced; that does happen, but that is something that can be handled by laying down ground rules that everyone agrees with.

The purpose of the PIB card is to protect sources. If the minister or top bureaucrats know whom journalists are meeting in the ministry, it becomes quite easy to track where information for a story came from and, once that is done, clamping down on information leaks is easy. But, since an accredited journalist does not, at the time of entering the ministry, give the names of officials she is meeting, the meeting remains relatively below the radar. Once a meeting is logged, as the ministry seems to be wanting now, this cloak of anonymity goes; along with that, information sources dry up too with most bureaucrats with any kind of sensitive information becoming wary of meeting. In most ministries, officials below a certain rank—often the ones with the most information—are not allowed to meet the media; the PIB accreditation gets over that hurdle.

Line ministers or bureaucrats are understandably keen to block any source of information that makes them look bad. Indeed, in the current context, the government was unwilling to release the latest labour survey results since it showed unemployment had risen even as the government was saying lots of jobs were being created; given that elections were around the corner, the report was particularly sensitive. Had a finance-ministry-type diktat been in place in other ministries/departments, and were the *Business Standard* reporter who scooped the report forced to reveal the names of people whom he was meeting, chances are the report would have remained buried. Similarly, when prime minister Manmohan Singh was allowing telecom minister A Raja to give out licences for a song, his government would have been keen that his correspondence with Raja—and notings about Raja’s actions—were kept secret; the fact that they were not due to enterprising reporters only helped increase transparency in the system. It is for this reason that, the way the system evolved, there was a legitimate space for journalists—RTI is another attempt to create another such avenue—to get information in the public interest. Given how the BJP benefited so much from information about UPA-era scams leaking out, and how it prides itself on being a government with a difference, it is especially unfortunate that it is now being seen as trying to block information flows. The finance minister is right to want to prevent journalists from hounding officials, but it needs to work on a more reasonable solution.

See sense on censorship

Bombay HC right in castigating CBFC

THE CENTRAL BOARD of Film Certification (CBFC) received a sharp rebuke from the Bombay High Court last week for certifying a children’s film as U/A, meaning that children aged below 12 couldn’t watch it unsupervised. In January, the CBFC—more popular, tellingly, as the Censor Board—had asked the producer, the Children’s Film Society of India, to mute a certain word and delete a particular scene to which the latter agreed. Yet, the film was denied the U (unrestricted) certificate that would allow children of all ages to watch the film in theatres. The Bombay HC told the CBFC it was a “certification body and not a censor board”, and it didn’t have the “intellectual morality and authority to decide what one wants to watch”. The HC noted that films were a medium to explain difficult issues like caste discrimination, addiction, etc, to children, and the CBFC’s action in this case showed that it considered viewers “infantile and imbecile”. Despite a series of questionable, even some reprehensible past decisions, the CBFC evidently continues to think of censoring as its primary function, over a more pragmatic regulatory role that focuses on certification. But, why blame the CBFC? The Union government itself seems to have no clarity on how cinematic content is to be regulated.

It has been three years since an expert-panel headed by director Shyam Benegal recommended shifting to a certification-only regime unless the film violates Section 5B (2) of the Cinematograph Act 1952, which allows the Centre to issue directions for certification if a film, or any part of it, is against the interests of the sovereignty and security of India, or is inimical to friendly relations with foreign states, involves defamation/contempt of court or is deemed to affect public order, or if the film exceeds the limits set for the highest degree of certification. It suggested that the existing UA certification include the sub-categories UA12+ and UA15+, assuming a correlation between age and maturity. The panel had called for scrapping the CBFC’s power to recommend cuts. However, two subsequent inter-ministerial meetings on repealing/amending the Cinematograph Act 1952 and Rules 1983—the Act needed significant amendments for many of the Benegal recommendations to be implemented—held that extensive deliberation was needed since this could “end up ignoring diverse sensibilities across the country”. So, the government sought wider consultation to decide how the nuances of issues such as depiction of women, representation of social realities, etc, were to be built into the regulation of cinematic content. The inter-ministerial meetings ended in 2017; ever since, the Benegal recommendations and re-imagining of film regulation have been in a limbo. The government and the CBFC fail to appreciate that theatre-releases are not the only way the public now watches films—from streaming websites to OTT platforms, there is a whole new digital world where cinema, censored and uncensored, is available to viewers. Given how delivery on the internet has no regard for borders, much less regulatory regimes, the government and CBFC shouldn’t think of censorship as effective.

LimitingGROWTH

A new report states that, by 2022, one in three children in India will exhibit stunting

THE FOOD AND Nutrition Security Analysis of India, 2019, a report by the Government of India and UN World Food Programme, says that, by 2022, 31.4% of Indian children—or nearly one in three—will exhibit stunting. Findings of the report, a base line analysis in assessing India’s progress in meeting the second Sustainable Development Goal (tackling hunger), mean that the efforts under the National Nutrition Mission (NNM) that aims to contain prevalence of stunting in children to 25% must be significantly stepped up. Malnutrition fell at the rate of 1% per year over the past decade, the slowest decline amongst emerging economies. For the government to meet the SDG target, it must fall by 2 ppts per year.

Many researchers make particular note of the poverty trap in India’s malnutrition story—a malnourished mother gives birth to a weak and a stunted child, and thus malnutrition is passed on from one generation to another. Given how under-nutrition affects a child’s cognitive growth, resulting in the child getting left behind, the poverty cycle is also continued. The poorest 30% of the population have an average per capita consumption of 1811 kCal/day vs the advised normal of 2,155 kCal/day. There is also disparate effect of stunting across Indian states—Bihar and UP have one in two children stunted, whereas, Kerala and Goa have one in five children stunted. Communities such as SCs and STs (42.5% and 43.6%, respectively) are also at a bigger disadvantage compared to other communities. As an article in *The Hindu* notes, only 1.6% of the total funds allocated to the Poshan Abhiyan (NNM) have been used so far. The government must double its efforts and, most importantly, improve accessibility for all communities.

TAX BURDEN

THE RISE IN TAX ON INDIAN CAT III AIFS ANNOUNCED IN THE BUDGET DISCOURAGES GREATER DOMESTIC CAPITAL PARTICIPATION

India’s investment trust deficit

THOSE WHO TRACKED the markets during the Budget speech can attest to the inordinate sway every word can have on the market. The finance minister’s statement that the government does not “look down upon legitimate profit earning” and the proposal of “a number of initiatives as part of a framework for kick-starting the virtuous cycle of domestic and foreign investments” during the early parts of the speech rallied the market, which was anticipating several much-needed measures to galvanise investments in the country. The proposed measures, such as easier KYC norms for FPIs, increased FDI limits, opening up new investment vehicles for foreign participation, etc, hold a lot of promise for the future. But, the rudest shock came when the finance minister discussed revenue mobilisation measures and the increased surcharge on incomes above ₹2 crore.

A tax on the super-rich was expected, with rumours about such measures doing the rounds before the Budget. But, what was especially shocking was that this was extended not only to individuals but also to all association of persons and trusts—whether domestic or foreign. And therein, as the bard would tell us, lies the rub.

Many foreign portfolio investors consist of pension funds, insurance funds, etc, that are incorporated as trusts. This highlights the fiduciary responsibility they have towards their thousands of beneficiaries and the governance norms that they must adhere to. Their structure also allows them to pass-through the gains to their beneficiaries—people who rely on this income to sustain themselves in their retirement. But, as per the lat-

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est proposals, they’re going to suffer a surcharge that is much higher than that attributed to foreign companies and which turns a blind eye to their pass-through status. The very structure adopted by these FPIs renders them liable to tax at much higher effective rates than foreign corporations. These measures run the risk of countering efforts to facilitate greater foreign participation in structures such as REITS, InvITs, etc.

This also adversely affects Indian Category III AIFs, who are already reeling from an 18% GST on fees which cannot be claimed as well as the lack of any pass-through status for any income. Most of them are also structured as trusts as it offers the greatest flexibility and is the most tax-effective structure. Indian tax laws tax any business income of a trust at the maximum marginal rate and treat gains from hedging instruments such as futures and options as business income. This renders all income from any CAT III AIF to be taxed at 42.7%! Hedge funds across the world have pass-through status, thus allowing any gains to be taxed in the hands of the investors as though they invested directly into the underlying portfolio, something Indian hedge funds were denied since 2014. CAT III AIFs in India have long suffered under an unfair tax regime wherein ambiguity abounds. Though the government has taken

great pains in addressing the needs of FPIs, even amending the definition of the term “capital asset” to include any securities held by an FPI, no such generosity has been extended to Indian investors. While India seeks greater domestic capital participation in the country, its own tax laws cripple investor appetite due to such draconian measures.

A pass-through status for pooling vehicles such as CAT III AIFs and trusts is a just form of taxation as it follows the principle of ascribing tax rates as per the individual investor’s income. A common investment pooling vehicle cannot imply the highest tax rate to its investors. To put things in perspective, this is akin to taxing the savings bank interest of a person with a net income of ₹10 lakhs and a person with a net income of ₹10 crore at the same rate just because they both use the same bank! The law cannot turn a blind eye to the end beneficiary and assume that all investors belong to the highest tax slab regardless of their actual income. To each his own rate.

The impact of this proposal on investor sentiment is visible to all. The markets shed over 1000 points over the past 3 days, lead primarily by FPIs who’re looking to rethink their India strategy. Many domestic fund managers have reached out to the government to plead their case.

The budget speech did not intend for this distortion. The honourable finance minister stated, and I quote, “I, therefore, propose to **enhance surcharge on individuals** having taxable income from 2 crore to 5 crore and 5 crore and above”. Thus, it is the unintended, inadvertent consequence to tax FPIs and CAT III AIFs with these surcharges that deserves to be rectified immediately.

The government cannot roll out the red carpet to investors, then bolt the door and shake them down for all they are worth.

India requires investments of at least \$300 billion a year as per the 2019 Budget speech. With a savings rate of 10% of our GDP of \$2.7 trillion, India needs capital from all sources to meet its investment needs. Our ratio of foreign investment to GDP is already low compared to other large economies worldwide. In

order to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2025, India needs a growth rate of 12% and access to low-cost capital. But, the proposed measures of lop-sided surcharges and the mistreatment of Indian investment vehicles will make these proposals the architect of India’s misery.

GSTR-3B—blowing hot and cold

The Gujarat High Court held that GSTR-3B is not a return in lieu of that required to be filed in Form GSTR-3 but only a stopgap arrangement

THE LANDMARK GOODS and Services Tax (‘GST’) has completed two years. The one-nation, one-tax revolution is witnessing many legal issues, but it’s settling down gradually. Recently, the Hon’ble Gujarat High Court has pronounced its judgement on the convoluted saga of the last date of availing ITC relating to invoices issued during the period from July 2017 to March 2018.

In the benevolent decision, the High Court has held that GSTR-3B is not a return in lieu of that required to be filed in Form GSTR-3. The return in Form GSTR-3B is only a stopgap arrangement till due date of filing the return in Form GSTR-3 is notified. Meaning, that businesses can still avail ITC of missed invoices issued during the mentioned period till the date of filing of Annual Return in form GSTR-9. Many taxpayers will be relieved by this decision of the High Court. Section 16(4) of the CGST Act provides that the registered person shall not be entitled to avail ITC in respect of any invoice after the due date of furnishing of the return under Section 39 for the month of September following the end of financial year to which such invoice pertains or furnishing of the relevant annual return, whichever is earlier.

Since the return GSTR-3 continued to be deferred due to technical glitches right from its introduction, the question that arose was what could be said to be the return under Section 39. Consequently, what would be the last date for availing ITC relating to invoices issued during the period from July 2017 to March 2018. A press release dated October 18, 2018 clarified that with taxpayers self-assessing and availing ITC through return in Form GSTR-3B, the

last date for availing ITC in relation to the invoices issued during the period from July 2017 to March 2018 is the last date for the filing of such return for the month of September 2018, i.e., October 20, 2018.

The High Court held the above clarification to be illegal and contrary to Section 16(4) of the CGST Act read with Section 39(1) of the CGST Act and Rule 61 of the CGST Rules.

The Court further held that GSTR-3B is not a return under Section 39. The due date of filing return under Section 39 for the months of July 2017

to March 2019 shall be subsequently notified in the official Gazette.

The recent decision of the High Court has tried to settle the controversy regarding the last date of availing ITC, but it has given birth to many more controversies. Without going into the legality of the decision, let us quickly have a look at the areas where the decision would have grave implications.

Section 39(7) of the CGST Act provides that registered person who is required to furnish return under Section 39 shall pay to the government tax due as per return not later than the last date on which he is required to furnish such return. If GSTR-3B is not a return under Section 39, whether it is open for a taxpayer to contend that there is no last date for payment of tax due till GSTR-3 is notified and therefore, not liable for interest for any delay in payment so far.

Further, the first proviso to Sec-

tion 37(3) of the CGST Act provides that no rectification of error or omission in respect of the details furnished under Section 37(1), i.e., GSTR-1 shall be allowed after furnishing of the return under Section 39 for the month of September following the end of the financial year to which such details pertain, or furnishing of the relevant annual return, whichever is earlier. If GSTR-3B is not a return under Section 39, the natural consequence will be that GSTR-1 can be rectified for any mismatch till the date of filing annual return.

So far, all these consequences go in favour of the taxpayer and he would be the happiest ever! Now, let us see how this interpretation turns the cards upside-down. Section 16(2)(d) of CGST Act provides that no registered person shall be entitled to ITC in respect of any supply of goods or services or both to him unless he has furnished the return under Section 39. Such an interpretation would put the taxpayers into huge problems as businesses have already claimed ITC based on GSTR-3B, without waiting for GSTR-3 to be notified. This interpretation would endanger all the ITC claims of the taxpayers and may even trigger the interest liability.

In the authors’ view, the decision has much wider implications than the limited question of last date for ITC availment. The decision has opened a Pandora’s Box, and one will have to wait to see whether the government brings any amendment to resolve the controversy or what other High Courts decide.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India’s WC loss

It just like a “wedding cake left out in the rain”, when India after its 18 runs of a heart breaking semi-final, exit at the hands of New Zealand in the Cricket World Cup (WC). After the shocking defeat press meet captain Virat Kohli lamented not only ‘45 minutes of bad cricket’ against New Zealand (NZ) that led to India crashing out but also the World Cup format. People wonder why Kohli does not realise that India played the Kiwis twice in this tournament and couldn’t beat them once. Moreover, Kiwis is a country of 4 Million playing as a team, were able to defeat India of 1.3 billion where they played as 11 cricket demi-god. Starting with the ‘Man of Century’ Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and KL Rahul’s dismissal brought up the first ever instance of a side’s top three batsmen departing for one each in an international match. Win and loss is part of any game, and here, too, though India was the best team in the tournament, at least by their standing in the points table, whereas, NZ was coming off of 3 defeats. Naturally, India’s victory over NZ’s manageable 240 runs was almost certain. But, cricket is famed for its glorious uncertainty, and its glaring example was that after India’s poor start, Rishabh Pant and Hardik Pandya, set about trying to rebuild the innings, and later Jadeja and Dhoni took it so close. But, after Jaddu’s life’s best 77 run innings, world’s no. 1 chaser, Dhoni, was there and he nearly did it too, but when India smell its victory, just at that moment, no wider than the single -inch between the tip of MS Dhoni’s bat and the crease when he was run-out by a direct hit from Martin Guptill, to prove that even this WC’s non performer’s fielding had won NZ through to the World Cup final. Kudos to NZ as deserving winners and good luck to for Grand Finale!

— BK Chatterjee, Faridabad

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India ditches data dialogue again

Several developing countries would want digital trade to happen seamlessly. That's precisely why engage in global e-commerce talks and support the Osaka Track. By staying away from both, India might convey the signal that its justification for disengaging with global efforts is more for pure self-interests, and not with a greater welfare objective for developing countries

Brazil, India, South Africa, Indonesia—are walking on different paths on digital trade. The first three have joined the Osaka Track, while the other three have not. The former, along with Russia, are also participating in the informal talks on global e-commerce rules that were launched by almost 80 World Trade Organisation (WTO) members earlier this year on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum meeting at Davos in Switzerland. The difference among these large developing countries, some of which are among the world's top-10 economies (i.e. China, India, Brazil, followed closely by Indonesia), on digital trade governance is striking.

Both China and Brazil endorsed the Osaka Declaration for working with other G20 members to achieve a high-standard global agreement on digital trade and e-commerce. This might convey the impression that they have identical domestic data governance policies reflecting a tendency towards liberal cross-border data flows. China's data policies are primarily restrictive, certainly when compared with Brazil. China, much like Russia, is a unique example of large economies displaying a tendency to 'accommodate' their commitment to working on global rules for e-commerce with a pronounced hesitation to agree on free flow of cross-border data. In spite of aiming to work with other WTO members on developing rules on trade-related aspects of e-commerce, in its latest submission to the WTO on the subject, China insists on more discussions before including data flows, storage and management as part of e-commerce talks. This is in line with China's cybersecurity regulations that insist on a large amount of personal data to be stored within China with very restricted scope of cross-border flow. Russia's data localisation laws, which have come into force a few years ago, impose strict conditions on agencies to store personal data within Russia.

India's Personal Data Protection Bill, once introduced in the upcoming session of Parliament, would reflect the degree by which Indian authorities insist on localisation. The scope of the latter is primarily defined by what national agencies construe as personal data. Whether the Indian localisation rules would be comparable to those in Russia or in some other emerging markets like Indonesia is a different discussion.

The bigger point, though, is the dichotomy between developing coun-

tries in their willingness to engage in global digital trade rule talks. India and Indonesia are unwilling to do so. China, Russia, and even Nigeria, which has fairly strict data laws and mandates all government data to be located within the country, are participating in talks and are committed to the Osaka Track. Vietnam is another example of a developing country participant in both global e-commerce talks and a signatory to the Osaka Track despite bringing in hard data rules.

The sensitivity about protection of data, therefore, is clearly not the main reason behind some developing countries staying away from global digital trade work programmes. Many developing countries are committing to such initiatives notwithstanding tough domestic data protection laws.

India is a notable exception. While it is yet to introduce a domestic data protection framework, it is conspicuously disengaging itself from all ongoing digital trade rule-making efforts. There's clearly more than the urge to protect data that is driving India's position.

Perhaps the explanation behind India's posture can be gleaned from its latest submission on June 3, 2019, jointly with South Africa, on the WTO's ongoing work programme on e-commerce. The submission argues for discontinuation of the moratorium on imposition of customs duties on e-commerce transactions enabling 'willing' WTO members to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions, such as software and digital products. India and South Africa alluded to Indonesia's policies for doing so in support of their argument leaving no surprise behind their common posture at Osaka.

None would mind India, and others, acting in their own national economic interests. The problem would arise if the former would expect others to support major proposals that might serve only interests of a few. Several developing countries are keen on participating in global digital trade and are not interested in discontinuing the moratorium on e-commerce. They would want digital trade to happen seamlessly and without restrictions as far as possible. That's precisely why engage in global e-commerce talks and support the Osaka Track. By staying away from both, India might convey the signal that its justification for disengaging with global efforts is more for pure self-interests, and not with a greater welfare objective for developing countries.

The sensitivity about protection of data is clearly not the main reason behind some developing countries staying away from global digital trade work programmes

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

Towards reforms in agriculture

Intense cooperation between the Centre and states is a sine qua non for implementation of reforms in the agriculture sector

**HARSH KUMAR
BHANWALA
& SK DORA**

Bhanwala is chairman, Dora is senior officer, NABARD. Views are personal

THREE ESSENTIAL PILLARS of economic reforms are liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Liberalisation means removal of state restrictions on private individual activities; privatisation encompasses transfer of business, industry or service from public to private ownership and control; and globalisation is the transborder spread of products, technology and information through international trade and transfer. It is believed that though a large number of reforms have been introduced in the agriculture sector in the last few years, they have met with limited success in liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation of agriculture. Importantly, policy reforms in the sector have not yielded the anticipated benefits to farmers and consumers.

This is because, since 1919, when the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms introduced diarchy and declared agriculture as a 'provincial' subject, agriculture has enjoyed the distinction of being a state subject. And when the Constitution was drafted, it continued as a 'state' subject. Thus, while the Centre formulates policy guidelines, advises and allocates funds, implementation of farm and market reforms lies at the behest of states.

For instance, reforms for liberalisation and privatisation of agriculture marketing system. In many parts of India, farmers do not have the right to make the first sale of their produce outside regulated market yards. There is no freedom for a farmer or an entrepreneur to establish private market yard/private market managed by a person other than a market committee. Both corporates and farmers show reluctance for entering into contract for production and marketing of a farm prod-

uct or products as per pre-agreed conditions of the contract. The result is a marketing system that is inefficient and leads to exploitation of farmers by a chain of intermediaries, who siphon off a large part of the consumer's pie that is highly disproportionate to their value addition. Consequently, price realisation by farmers is low and non-remunerative. Also, farmers in many states are exploited through a non-transparent and multipoint levy of market fee across the state due to the absence of a unified single trading licence valid across the state/UT.

The government, to deregulate and privatise agriculture marketing system, has ushered in a series of structural market reforms over the years. For enhanced transparency in trading, better price discovery and to provide multiple choices to farmers to sell their commodities to buyers online and in the markets of their choice, the government launched e-NAM in April 2016. The agriculture ministry also introduced the Agricultural Produce

and Livestock Marketing Act in April 2017, which provides for alternative marketing channels, direct marketing, and setting up of private markets, farmer-consumer markets, commodity markets, and allows declaring warehouses/silos/cold storages as market sub-yards to promote agriculture marketing. In May 2018, the ministry released Agricultural Produce and Livestock Contract Farming and Services (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2018, which, in addition to contract farming, provides for service contracts all along the value chain, including pre-production, production and post-production. These are long-pending policy reforms that have the potential to deregulate agriculture marketing system, ushering in large-scale efficiency gains. Similarly, in the Budget 2018-19, the government announced for developing and upgrading existing 22,000 rural haats into Gramin Agriculture Markets (GRAMs). In these GRAMs, physical infrastructure will be strengthened. Also, GRAMs are electronically linked to e-NAM and exempted



from regulations of APMCs, and will provide farmers a facility to make direct sale to consumers and bulk purchasers. But the progress in adoption of many of these market reforms at the state level has been painfully slow. Each state has its own set of priorities, socio-economic and political realities, cultural and historical legacy, budgetary compulsions and agro-climatic nuances, which come in the way of aligning the state policy with national policy.

An area that is crying out loudly for reform is land leasing. Most states have either legally prohibitive land leasing laws or adopt restrictive practices in different forms. These pugnacious laws manifest as period of lease, landowners' right of resumption, conditions for termination of lease, tenants' right to pre-emptive purchase of leased-in land, conferment of ownership right on tenants, recording of lease, heritability of lease, regulation on rent, etc. The effect is, almost one out of five farmers known by various names like tenant farmers, oral lessee, share croppers,

benami farmers, etc, have difficulty in accessing credit, crop insurance and also are deprived of the relief benefits provided by the government for loss and damage due to natural calamities. An expert committee on land leasing constituted by the NITI Aayog, under the chairmanship of T Haque, came out with the Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act, 2016. Land leasing reforms, if carried out by state governments, will contribute immensely towards inclusive growth. However, the Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act, 2016, has been fully adopted in very few states.

Let us consider the third pillar, i.e. globalisation, and see how cooperative federalism is essential for integrating Indian farmers with the global agricultural value chain. 'Trade and commerce' are in the Union list and states often see no formal role for themselves in the nation's agricultural exports. The new Agriculture Export Policy by the ministry of commerce and industry exhorts greater involvement of state governments for creating agri-logis-

tics and infrastructure, development of product-specific clusters, promoting good agricultural practices (GAP), working on quality assurance systems, while pushing for marketing reforms for doubling our agricultural exports from the current \$30-plus billion to over \$60 billion by 2022, and reach \$100 billion in next few years.

There is no doubt that intense cooperation between the Centre and states is a *sine qua non* for expeditious implementation of reforms in the agriculture sector. Probably a structured mechanism based on the philosophy of cooperative federalism is the need of the hour. There are a large number of examples of successful cooperative federal institutions in India. Prominent among them include the Inter-State Council (ISC), five Zonal Councils, NITI Aayog, the Finance Commission and the recent GST Council. However, we require a dedicated federal and cooperative body for the agriculture sector, on the lines of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) in the US—which is a non-partisan, non-profit association that represents the elected and appointed commissioners, secretaries, and directors of the departments of agriculture in 50 states and four US territories. NASDA grows agriculture by forging partnerships and creating consensus to achieve sound policy outcomes between state departments of agriculture, the federal government and stakeholders. One of its objectives is to develop a spirit of mutual teamwork between federal, state and territorial agencies with respect to programmes and activities related to agriculture. It is time we work towards creating a truly cooperative and federal entity like NASDA for expeditious implementation of reforms in the agriculture sector.



Tread with caution

The consolidated codes on labour laws need a thorough vetting and discussion in Parliament

As part of its commitment to simplify and consolidate labour rules and laws under four codes, the Union Cabinet has cleared the Occupational, Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, a week after it approved the Code on Wages Bill. The latter seeks to include more workers under the purview of minimum wages and proposes a statutory national minimum wage for different geographic regions, to ensure that States will not fix minimum wages below those set by the Centre. These steps should be welcomed. The Code on labour safety and working conditions include regular and mandatory medical examinations for workers, issuing of appointment letters, and framing of rules on women working night shifts. Other codes that await Cabinet approval include the Code on Industrial Relations and the Code on Social Security. Unlike these pending bills, especially the one related to industrial relations that will be scrutinised by labour unions for any changes to worker rights and rules on hiring and dismissal and contract jobs, the two that have been passed should be easier to build a consensus on, in Parliament and in the public sphere. Organised unions have vociferously opposed changes proposed in the Industrial Relations code, especially the proviso to increase the limit for prior government permission for lay-off, retrenchment and closure from 100 workers as it is currently, to 300. The Economic Survey highlighted the effect of labour reforms in Rajasthan, suggesting that the growth rates of firms employing more than 100 workers increased at a higher rate than the rest of the country after labour reforms. But worker organisations claim that the implementation of such stringent labour laws in most States is generally lax. Clearly, a cross-State analysis of labour movement and increase in employment should give a better picture of the impact of these rules.

Simplification and consolidation of labour laws apart, the government must focus on the key issue of job creation. The Periodic Labour Force Survey that was finally made public in late May clearly pointed to the dire situation in job creation in recent years. While the proportion of workers in regular employment has increased, unemployment has reached a 45-year high. The worker participation rate has also declined between surveys held in 2011-12 and 2017-18. The government's response to this question has either been denial, as was evident after the draft PLFS report was leaked last year, or silence, after it was finally released. In such a situation, the government should be better off building a broader consensus on any major rule changes to existing worker rights rather than rushing through them for the sake of simplification. The consolidated code bills should be thoroughly discussed in Parliament and also with labour unions before being enacted.

Picking out plastic

Recycling is integral to addressing the problems posed by plastic packaging material

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has put 52 producers, brand owners and importers, including big online retailers such as Amazon and Flipkart, and companies such as Patanjali Ayurved and Britannia, on notice, for failing to take responsibility for their plastic waste. These and other entities with a large plastic footprint need to respond with alacrity. It is eight years since the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) was incorporated into the Plastic Waste Management Rules, but municipal and pollution control authorities have failed to persuade commercial giants to put in place a system to collect and process the waste. Tighter rules in 2016 and some amendments two years later put the onus on producers and brand owners to come up with an action plan for the retrieval of waste within six months to a year, but that too failed to take off. Mountains of garbage with a heavy plastic load have been growing in suburban landfills, out of sight of city dwellers. Without determined steps, the crisis is certain to worsen. It should be noted that the retail sector expects e-commerce to grow from about \$38.5 billion-equivalent in 2017 to \$200 billion by 2026. Given the role played by packaging, the waste management problem is likely to become alarming. There is also a big opportunity here, which the trade, municipal governments and pollution control authorities need to see. The two prongs of the solution are packaging innovation that reduces its use by using alternatives, and up-scaling waste segregation, collection and transmission.

Recovering materials from garbage should be a high priority, considering that India is the third highest consumer of materials after China and the U.S.; the Economic Survey 2019 estimates that India's demand for total material will double by 2030 at current rates of growth. Plastics may be less expensive than other inputs in manufacturing, but recycling them into new products extends their life and provides a substitute for virgin material. Keeping them out of the environment reduces clean-up and pollution costs. Unfortunately, in spite of legal requirements, municipal and pollution control authorities fail to see this and mostly pursue business-as-usual waste management methods. Recyclable waste is rendered useless when it gets mixed with other articles. Online retailers have not felt compelled to take back the thousands of polybags, plastic envelopes and air pillows used to cushion articles inside cardboard boxes. This is in contrast to more developed markets where they are trying out labels on packages with clear recycling instructions. These companies can form waste cooperatives in India, employing informal waste-pickers. In such a model, consumers will respond readily if they are incentivised to return segregated plastic waste. Making municipal and pollution control authorities accountable is also equally important.

A welcome debate on electoral reforms

A number of practical and constructive proposals were raised by Opposition parties in Parliament last week



S.Y. QURAISHI

On July 3, a short-duration discussion in the Rajya Sabha on electoral reforms attracted my attention. It was initiated by Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Derek O'Brien, with the backing of as many as 14 Opposition parties. I have been extremely passionate and vocal about the issue throughout my years in office as well as after, and it was heartening to see political parties across the ideological divide trying to push the subject of how to make elections freer, fairer and more representative.

The TMC MP touched on six major themes – appointment system for Election Commissioners and Chief Election Commissioner (CEC); money power; Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs); the idea of simultaneous elections; the role social media (which he called “cheat India platforms”); and lastly, the use of government data and surrogate advertisements to target certain sections of voters.

Appointment process

On the issue of appointments of Election Commissioners, Mr. O'Brien quoted B.R. Ambedkar's statement to the Constituent Assembly that “the tenure can't be made a fixed and secure tenure if there is no provision in the Constitution to prevent a fool or a naive or a person who is likely to be under the thumb of the executive.”

The demand for revisiting the issue was supported by the Communist Party of India (CPI); the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M); the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Bahujan

Samaj Party (BSP), all of whom demanded the introduction of a collegium system. As regards the chronic problem of the crippling influence of money power, Mr. O'Brien spoke about various reports and documents – a 1962 private member's Bill by Atal Bihari Vajpayee; the Goswami committee report on electoral reforms (1990); and the Indrajit Gupta committee report on state funding of elections (1998). Congress MP Kapil Sibal, citing an independent think tank report on poll expenditure released in June, discussed at length the regressive impact of amending the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) and removing the 7.5% cap on corporate donations.

Congress MP Rajeev Gowda termed electoral bonds “a farce” and gave a proposal for state funding (of political parties) based on either a National Electoral Fund or the number of votes obtained by the respective parties. He also proposed crowdfunding in the form of small donations. He said that the current expenditure cap on candidates is unrealistic and should either be raised or removed to encourage transparency.

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) supported capping the expenditure of political parties in accordance with a 1975 judgement of the Supreme Court on Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951. The Samajwadi Party (SP) suggested that expenditure on private planes etc. should be added to the candidates' accounts and not to those of the party. Banning of corporate donations was passionately advocated by the CPI and the CPI (M).

The old issue of returning to ballot papers was raised by several parties. The TMC said that “when technology doesn't guarantee perfection, you have to question technology.” On the other hand, the



BJD, the Janata Dal (United) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) asserted that EVMs have reduced election-related violence in States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The BJD said that to strengthen public faith in Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trails, five machines should be counted right in the beginning. The BSP added that postal ballots should be scanned before counting so as to increase transparency.

On simultaneous elections

Many BJP MPs highlighted issues linked to electoral fatigue, expenditure and governance and also reports of the Law Commission and NITI Aayog to push for simultaneous elections.

Vinay Sahasrabudhe of the BJP said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal should be seen with an open mind and made a suggestion that it should be understood as a call for minimum cycle of elections rather than “one nation one election”.

But the TMC said that the solution lies in consulting constitutional experts and publishing a white paper for more deliberation. Simultaneous elections were vehemently opposed by CPI MP D. Raja, who called them “unconstitutional and unrealistic.” Quoting Ambedkar, he said that accountability should hold prece-

dence over stability. Internal democracy within political parties was also mentioned by a couple of speakers. The BJD suggested that an independent regulator should be mandated to supervise and ensure inner-party democracy.

For improving the representativeness of elections, the demand for proportional representation system was put forth by the DMK, the CPI and the CPI (M). The DMK cited the example of the BSP's performance in 2014 Lok Sabha elections, when the party got a vote share of nearly 20% in Uttar Pradesh but zero seats. A number of MPs argued for a mixed system, where there was a provision for both First Past the Post and Proportional Representation systems.

The important issue of the “fidelity of electoral rolls” was raised by the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP). The idea of a common electoral roll for all the three tiers of democracy was supported by the BJP and the SP.

For remedying the ‘ruling party advantage’ in elections, SP MP Ram Gopal Yadav made a radical suggestion that all MPs/MLAs should resign six months before elections and a national government should be formed at the Centre. He said States should be ruled by the Governor who would have to follow the binding advice

of a three-member High Court advisory board.

Advocacy over the years

I have long been an advocate of a number of these reform recommendations. Some proposals that I have elaborated upon in detail throughout the years include – reducing the number of phases in elections by raising more security forces; depoliticisation of constitutional appointments by appointing Commissioners through a broad-based collegium; state funding of political parties by means of a National Electoral Fund or on the basis of the number of votes obtained; capping the expenditure of political parties; giving the Election Commission of India (ECI) powers to de-register recalcitrant political parties; inclusion of proportional representation system; and revisiting the Information Technology Act, to strengthen social media regulations.

Hence, the parliamentary debate was music to my ears. But Indian politics has been suffering from a wide gap between thought and action. The governments should also rise above their obsession with immediate electoral gains and think of long-term national interests. The TMC MP was right in saying that Parliament must not only urgently “debate and deliberate but also legislate” on electoral reforms. The time has come to find and enact concrete solutions in the national interest. Having heard a number of practical and constructive proposals raised in the Rajya Sabha last week, I remain hopeful that Parliament will take it upon itself to enable the world's largest democracy to become the world's greatest.

The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner of India and the author of 'An Undocumented Wonder – the Making of the Great Indian Election'

Jobless growth becomes more systemic

Earlier confined largely to the organised sector, it has now spread to other areas, as revealed by the latest survey results



K.P. KANNAN
G. RAVEENDRAN

The findings of the latest employment survey, called the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2017-18), are a cause for concern as the scenario is still far from anything that would denote decent employment. The two biggest issues here are: the shrinking share of the labour force; and the rising unemployment.

The labour force participation rate (% of people working or seeking work in the above-15 years age category) in the earlier survey of 2012 was 55.5%. This has shrunk to 49.7% in 2018. There is an absolute decline in the number of workers from 467.7 million in 2012 to 461.5 million in 2018.

Multiple dimensions

Recent attempts by some to create an impression that self-employment has not been captured by the National Sample Survey is absolutely false since the definition of ‘employment’ includes in itself

‘self’ as well as ‘wage employment’. Within the category of ‘self-employed’, the survey also counts those engaged in ‘unpaid family labour’.

The figure for the overall unemployment rate at 6.1% is 2.77 times the same figure for 2012. A few experts have raised doubts about comparability of estimates between the two periods though we feel that they are not substantial issues that prevent anyone from a judicious comparison.

The rise in overall unemployment has both locational and gender dimensions. The highest unemployment rate of a severe nature was among the urban women at 10.8%; followed by urban men at 7.1%; rural men at 5.8%; and rural women at 3.8%.

When we ignore the location of residence, we find that severe unemployment among men at 6.2% was higher than among women at 5.7%. However, given the sharp decline in women's labour force participation rate, they have been losing out heavily due to the double whammy of exclusion from the labour force and an inability to access employment when included in the labour force. The decline in women's labour force participation from 31% to 24% means that



India is among the countries with the lowest participation of women in the labour force.

The issue of educated unemployment, given its link with not just growth but also with transformative development, has never been as acute as at present. Defined as unemployment among those with at least a secondary school certificate, it is at 11.4% compared to the previous survey's figure of 4.9%.

But what is significant is that the

unemployment rates go up as levels of education go up. Among those with secondary school education, it is 5.7% but jumps to 10.3% when those with higher secondary-level education are considered.

The highest rate is among the diploma and certificate holders (19.8%); followed by graduates (17.2); and postgraduates (14.6%).

Of course, educated persons are likely to have aspirations for specific jobs and hence likely to go through a longer waiting period than their less-educated counterparts. They are also likely to be less economically deprived. But the country's inability to absorb the educated into gainful employment is indeed an economic loss and a demoralising experience both for the unemployed and those enthusiastically enrolling themselves for higher education.

Burden more among women

Here again, the burden is the highest among urban women (19.8%) followed by rural women (17.3%), rural men (10.5%) and urban men (9.2%). Among the educated, women face a more unfavourable situation than men despite a low labour force participation rate. Compared to the earlier 2012 sur-

vey, unemployment of educated men has more than doubled in both rural and urban areas and in the case of women, the rate has nearly doubled. However, it is important to remember is that the rate was higher for educated women, when compared to educated men, in both the periods.

It is almost scandalous that youth unemployment rate (unemployment among those in the 15-29 years age category) has reached a high 17.8%. Even here, the women stand more disadvantaged than the men, especially urban women, whose unemployment rate of 27.2% is more than double the 2012 figure of 13.1%. The rate for urban men, at 18.7%, is particularly high as well.

The overall conclusion here is that the trend of ‘jobless growth’ that was till recently confined largely, if not only, to the organised sector has now spread to other sectors of the economy, making it more generalised. This calls for a thorough re-examination of the missing linkages between growth and employment.

K.P. Kannan is a former Director, Centre for Development Studies. G. Raveendran is a former Additional Director General, Central Statistical Organisation

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Party hopping

It is very disheartening to see some legislators leaving their original party and joining another *en masse* (Front page, “10 Congress MLAs join BJP in Goa,” July 11). This totally unprincipled defection is crass opportunism and a slap in the face of voters who elected the MLAs on their party tickets. The present anti-defection law cannot rein in such defectors and it needs to be drastically amended. Any legislator who leaves his party and joins another should be disqualified and a new candidate should be chosen in his place.

MATTHEW ADUKANIL,
Tirupattur

Nehru's Kashmir move

It is preposterous and childish to argue that liberation of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)

would have relegated Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir even more to a minority, engendering disastrous consequences (Op-Ed page, “Nehru and the Kashmir quandary,” July 11). Even the best statesmen can commit an error of judgment and Jawaharlal Nehru erred on the Kashmir problem. Had PoK been liberated, the region would have been much more peaceful than at present. Also, the writer's tracing of the genesis of cross-border terrorism to the pre-Independence days is way too far-fetched. Further, to argue that the main task of Nehru, after the Maharaja's signing of the instrument of accession, was to secure the safety of Hindus is to understand Nehru in a very narrow sense.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,
Hyderabad

Not under production

The news that the production of more train sets of the Vande Bharat Express has come to a halt is disappointing (Tamil Nadu page, “ICF told to scrap tenders for Train18 rakes,” July 11). The fact that the train set was delivered on schedule within 18 months and the inaugural run was flagged off by the Prime Minister after passing stringent performance trials is a unique achievement in the annals of India Railways. It will be extremely short-sighted and unfortunate if a witch-hunt is launched to establish *malafide* intentions in the tendering process. Any project of this complexity and magnitude executed on a ‘mission mode’ would have required cutting out red tape. It is likely that in the process certain boundaries of

departmental silos were breached to speed up decision-making. The Sreedharan Committee has made wide-ranging recommendations for devolution of financial powers, many of which have been accepted. It will be unfortunate if at the first demonstration of these reforms, the reaction is to launch an inquiry. Nothing can be more de-motivating.

K. BALAKESARI,
Chennai

Exit India

Agonising as it is, India's exit from the Cricket World Cup does not need hindsight. Contrary to what experts had been harping on, India went to England without a permanent No. 4 batsman. Ambati Rayudu was unceremoniously dropped and all sorts of experiments were carried out with team selection.

Rishabh Pant, who was drafted in only after Shikhar Dhawan suffered an injury, should have been included in the original squad. When Vijay Shankar got injured, Rayudu's inclusion should have been a no-brainer, as he was in the official list of reserves. But Mayank Agrawal was called in, without any past ODI experience. Over the last two years, a number of players have been tried and not allowed to settle down at No. 4. And India paid a price for this misadventure. In the end, it was a perfect, three-dimensional performance from New Zealand on Wednesday.

SAURABH SINHA,
Bhilai

■ Millions of Indian fans were disappointed. Universally acclaimed finisher M.S. Dhoni should have been sent at No.5, which would have had a calming effect on the likes of Pant and Hardik Pandya. Sending him at No. 7 was a tactical blunder. Ravindra Jadeja, though not in the playing 11 in many of the matches, showed extraordinary prowess with both the bat and the ball, apart from displaying some excellent fielding. This is not to take anything away from New Zealand's brilliant performance. Matt Henry's spell and Jimmy Neesham's catch were the highlights.

D.S. RAJAGOPALAN,
Chennai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>The caption in the photograph that accompanied the lead story (front page, July 11, 2019) erroneously identified Milind Deora as Murlid Deora.

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Can India make the transition to electric vehicles?

PARLEY

India has taken some baby steps but more needs to be done to improve demand and supply

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an additional income tax exemption of ₹1.5 lakh for purchasers of electric vehicles in Budget 2019-2020. She also said that the GST rate on electric vehicles would be lowered to 5%. Can India make a smooth shift to electric vehicles? G. Ananthakrishnan explores the options with Ashok Jhunjunhwalla and Tarun Mehta. Edited excerpts from a conversation:

What do you think will be the impact of the Budget announcement of a tax break for electric vehicle purchases?

Ashok Jhunjunhwalla: Electric vehicles are very important for the country. I think this is the first definite statement made by the Government of India in that direction. Some companies have been resisting the change, but it will happen however much you resist it. It is a matter of time. But by slowing it [the transition] down, India will get hurt, and will be dependent on outsiders for the technology. This Budget clearly indicates that the government will go all out for it, and it is best that companies prepare and take advantage of it. It is giving specific breaks in the beginning, but finally India has to win with electric vehicles even without any subsidy or concession. It is time for the auto industry, researchers and everybody working towards the development of next generation products to make up their mind that it is going to be electric vehicles.

Tarun Mehta: The tax concession is positive as a Budget announcement, but in terms of numbers GST is a bigger benefit. From a market shaping perspective, incentivising EMI purchase of electric vehicles has a big impact. There are two things. Today, the market does not have many financing options for electric vehicles. By incentivising EMI purchases, the government has ensured that [for] every customer who wants to go in for them, there will be a lot of interest from banks and NBFCs to create relevant products. The second advantage is that electric vehicles need more financing options. Because you want to

take the upfront sticker shock out of the battery, motor, etc. Today, a lot of customers may not consider financing options and hence are dissuaded by the upfront price. Incentivising makes the customers do the mathematics with financing in mind, which makes them realise that for electric vehicles the overall total cost of ownership is so much better.

Where does India stand on the global scene on electric two-wheelers?

AJ: We have just begun. Frankly, we don't stand very far up. But there is nothing in this technology that we cannot do ourselves. We have started making batteries. I have seen in many places that motor controllers are in the final stages of design and development. The rest, we can do: the body, tyres. Of course, some improvements can be there. In the next one or two years, a huge push [will be witnessed] and that's where India will be not just on par [with other countries] but will start leading in the technology.

The key concern for me will be whether we import everything from China or make it ourselves. If our industry is not to be affected, and jobs are not to be lost, there is huge employment in the auto sector. If the traditional internal combustion engine (ICE)-based vehicle is going away, we will have a huge crisis with many losing jobs. The only way they will continue to have jobs, or the number of jobs can be increased, is to start making every sub-system of electric vehicles.

We have to beat China on performance and price. That needs to be done in the next couple of years. That is what the Centre for Battery Engineering and Electric Vehicles at IIT-Madras has been working on for four years. It has actually done so much to convince India that yes, we can do it ourselves. And there are a number of incubated companies working closely, getting these things done. Two-wheelers and three-wheelers will start scaling up in a year. This year you will see plenty of it, and next year it will really scale up. Two years down the line, it will start edging out ICE vehicles.



BIJOY GHOSH

There are only some small players now. A large number of small players and some big players must get into it in a full-fledged way. Customers don't want only a single type of vehicle, [they have to be] in different sizes, with different power, battery sizes. These are all going to come in the next two years.

TM: China is a very interesting place. Just in sheer volume terms, India is far behind. However, India has a far stronger two-wheeler industry, and a very capable assembly and component manufacturing ecosystem. Indian component manufacturing for two-wheelers is even more price competitive than China, which is a very rare thing to achieve. In China, there are no credible players. There is a very large market but no credible players and very little real R&D for electric two-wheelers. There are a lot of commodity components being manufactured there. In India, local market and large players can create a strong R&D base, leverage our local demand to create economies of scale, a strong supplier base, and take a leadership role in two-wheeler electrics globally.

Is there a time frame by which we can do that?

TM: Most larger two-wheeler original equipment manufacturer (OEM) players today have ₹10,000 crore to ₹20,000 crore of deployable capital, and the electrification process will take only a fraction of it. Indian industry can invest, and our suppliers can make the transition. We will create more jobs, high quality jobs. From assembling mechanical components we can move to manu-

Governments have to think of phasing out internal combustion engine vehicles. This is what China is doing. And we have to move in that direction.

facturing PCBs [printed circuit boards], assembling electronic boards, and bring battery manufacturing to India.

Do we have sufficient battery capacity to meet rising demand?

AJ: Four or five years back, we were nowhere in battery manufacturing. I had gone to labs in China, the U.S. and Germany. The Germans were by far the best. But in the last four to five years, we have started making battery packs as good as those made in Germany, probably better. This has happened through start-ups. We have a start-up at IIT-Madras, Grinntech, and we have a number of manufacturers who have jumped into it. As electric vehicles grow, batteries will be made in India.

There are three parts to battery production. One is battery pack development, which we will do immediately. Number two is cell manufacturing. On this a number of companies are setting up cell manufacturing units in India as a joint venture. It will take two or three years to start cell manufacturing. The third is raw material. Lithium, cobalt, manganese, nickel – for that we need to recycle old batteries. Even cell phone batteries, which is lithium ion. We throw away 300 million cell phone batteries. If we recycle and extract, we can expect [to recover] 90% of lithium, cobalt,

manganese, nickel and graphite. And there are small companies that have the technology.

Battery technology will continue to evolve. There is no question of limits. The cost falls as better technology starts coming in, giving us higher energy density. More energy per kilogramme of material. There will be continuous work on that, at least over the next 10 years.

TM: Capacities will have to be installed now. All of us building battery packs are now in the process of installing more capacity quickly. We don't have cell supply in India today, but cells are abundantly available in the global supply chain. Which is what we will have to tap into to build battery packs. As our volume rises, as we start topping a few gigawatts in capacity, cell manufacturing will come to India.

What will drive adoption and use of electric vehicles from a policy perspective?

AJ: Basically governments have to think of phasing out [ICE vehicles]. For example, the amount of pollution that we have, we cannot continue to live in that kind of pollution. We are importing all the oil; we cannot continue to import all that oil. City after city may say, no more ICE two-wheelers or three-wheelers and four-wheelers from this date onwards. This is what China is doing. And we have to move in that direction. Enough time has to be given for change.

TM: The Budget incentivises the demand side. We need a few policies around the supply side and on infrastructure. We need to incentivise battery pack and cell manufacturing. Rebates around setting up battery plant capacity, manufacturing of battery packs in India in the next 18-24 months will help. On the infrastructure side, the government can come up with requirements to have charging points in every parking location. We don't need charging hardware that OEMs and other companies can bring, we only need access to an electrical socket.

There are in-between segments like electrically powered bicycles. Will they become more popular?

TM: Micro-mobility is a new, emerg-

ing segment. I am not sure what form factor will be suitable there – electric cycles or electric stick scooters or something which is a smaller version of the bicycle. But I am pretty confident that real micro-mobility within one km sort of travel will find interesting solutions beyond scooters and bikes in the next five years.

AJ: Let the manufacturer find customers and if they like it, let them go for it. We should do minimum regulation.

What about the EU model of a law for automobile companies to cap total emissions across products to spur electric vehicle growth?

AJ: All that should be done. Step by step. Don't give too many shocks. Already the auto industry is nervous. Convey to them that this is going to happen, give them time and make it happen. For three-wheelers and two-wheelers, they have suggested [a shift by] 2023 and 2025 [respectively] for new vehicles to be 100% electric. That is a very good window. In due course we can define this for cars.

TM: It makes a lot of sense for a place like India. However, places like Europe and the U.S. have been implementing policies like that for almost a decade, but we would not have the luxury of 20 years to implement them.

Should taxation of conventional fuels have a role to play?

AJ: Finally, at some point of time, conventional fuel vehicles have to move out. I am open to time frames, we should have a discussion with the auto industry and figure out what is doable. In the meantime, support electric vehicles as much as possible, so that they can become a common thing.

TM: You can use capital created by the United Nations and still tax polluting vehicles to generate a balance to fund cleaner transport. We don't have the time to wait to do only a handful of things. We should do everything we can. Funding factories, funding lithium cells, electric infrastructure, vehicles and subsidising user behaviour.



Ashok Jhunjunhwalla is professor at the Department of Electrical Engineering, IIT Madras



Tarun Mehta is co-founder and CEO, Ather Energy



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

Majoritarian here, secular there

Modi has been able to bring about a paradigmatic shift to India's foreign policy in one regard

SHAIKH MUJIBUR REHMAN

Some argue that Narendra Modi as Prime Minister has brought dynamism to India's foreign policy, evident by his frequent visits abroad. However, no theory in foreign policy research suggests that the higher the frequency of head-of-government visits to foreign nations, the greater the success in foreign policy outcomes. The most enduring foreign policy outcomes are accomplished by quiet diplomacy engineered by professional bodies. That is why heads of government of China, France or even Israel, to name a few, are selective in their visits. But Mr. Modi's foreign visits and diaspora meetings have a spectacle of dynamism and generated an image of him as a world leader among his followers. Compared to splendid foreign policy accomplishments of leaders such as former U.S. President Harry Truman, who laid down the institutional arrangement for the U.S. to operate as a global power, or Chancellor Helmut Kohl's political wisdom that led to German unification, the foreign policy accomplishments of Mr. Modi remained modest during his first term.

A paradox

However, Mr. Modi has been able to bring about a paradigmatic shift to India's foreign policy at least in one regard. His regime has demonstrated a majoritarian character in the domestic arena, as seen in the formulation of the Citizenship Bill for instance, but secular tendencies on foreign policymaking. He has strengthened ties with West Asian countries, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Acceptance of Saudi Arabia's prominent role in the de-escalation process during the post-Pulwama tensions and the UAE's decision to present the highest civilian honour, Zayed Medal, to Mr. Modi are signs of a special relationship that his regime has built up in recent years.

The Modi regime's attempt to enable the Indian state to grapple with paradoxical ideologies – domestically majoritarian and secular in the foreign policy arena – is a departure from India's traditional foreign policy paradigm. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia

and Israel have governed their countries with majoritarian ideologies and have pursued their national interests through secular alliances with foreign nations. By implication, there is a fair chance that future violations of human rights and minority rights in India could be firewalled as an internal matter. This would weaken the global voice for India's minority rights and human rights. Ironically, the Modi regime's response to the Rohingya issue or the Christchurch attack in New Zealand indicates that even the so-called secular approach in foreign policy has a majoritarian spin.

Arms deal

The Modi government's ability to take prompt decisions over an arms deal, such as Rafale, is argued as a sign of robust security policy. But mere accumulation of cutting-edge weapons is no guarantee for a coun-



try's security. Countries such as Iraq, Libya and Syria were some of the top arms-importing nations during the early 1980s, according to a report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London. The powerful nations that sold pricey weapons to these countries also played a decisive role in bringing these countries to the position they are in today. The mighty Soviet Union disintegrated despite possessing stockpiles of cutting-edge weapons, mainly owing to its failure to deal with its domestic economic crisis. Dynamism in foreign policy may have few substantial domestic consequences unless it is accompanied by a reduction in India's mass unemployment.

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NOTEBOOK

Why access to officials is so important for reporters

Every bit of information, whether crucial or trivial, is a piece of a large puzzle

SOBHANA K. NAIR

The Finance Ministry has decided not to let journalists, even those with Press Information Bureau (PIB) accredited cards, enter its premises without prior appointment. The Ministry has benevolently arranged an "air-conditioned waiting room" for reporters with regular supply of "water, tea and coffee" outside Gate 2 in the beautiful North Block. This is where reporters are apparently to stay put till a bureaucrat agrees for a meeting.

If only the life of a reporter were so easy that merely waiting outside rooms could get us sources and stories. We stalk corridors and wait outside rooms for a living. We knock at doors, reach out to disgruntled babus, and ambush senior officers and Ministers to ask them uncomfortable questions – all to gather little bits of information. A former Editor of mine

used to say that there are two kinds of stories. The first is the kind that everyone chases but nobody gets. The second is what the government wants us to publish. For the first, we need sources; the second is simply public relations. Sources are built over many inconsequential conversations. Reporters and sources talk about the weather, discuss movies and parenting woes, listen to one another's small victories and frustrations. There was a Police Commissioner in Delhi who was an avid cricket fan. Before entering his room, crime reporters used to go armed with cricket anecdotes.

And tea is an important tool in news-gathering. If a bureaucrat offers tea, it means you sit. It buys you time. It also means that the bureaucrat wants to talk. And when tea is not offered, we sometimes ask for it to get bureaucrats talking. It's not as if most of

us enjoy that milky sweet concoction – it's more a professional hazard!

Simply put, a bond needs to be built that is strong enough for officers to part with that one note or report that the government is trying to suppress. And it's a two-way street. Officials equally use reporters as a sounding board to fine-tune an idea that is still on the drawing board.

The accreditation card issued by the PIB is seen as an entitlement by many. It's as much an 'entitlement' as is a ticket to a cricket match for an average spectator. After all, scribes are really the first spectators of any government. We record what we see and hear. Without that small, rectangular card, getting access to government officials every day is like running a hurdle race.

Routine visits to officials give reporters a peek into their eccentricities and habits. One Minister I know

rearranged her office for *vastu* purposes using tax payers' money. One had a penchant for taking selfies in front of elaborate flower arrangements in his office during lunch breaks. One loved cats so much that his office would stink of cat poo. These might be trivial bits of information for the readers, but for us, each bit of information helps us piece together the entire puzzle. You never know which one of these could come in handy and when.

On one visit to Shastri Bhawan, I stumbled upon a story during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first term. A Cabinet Minister got her door sealed and constructed a wall in its place. The entrance to her room was rearranged, according to the directions of her *vastu* consultant. It's another matter that despite all the *vastu*, she could not stay on in her post for too long due to the controversies she generated.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 12, 1969

Forecasts with aid of computer

A fresh weather map of India will be prepared every six hours with the help of a modern electronic computer to be installed in the Meteorological Office in Delhi. An agreement for the acquisition of the computer was signed to-day [July 11] between Dr. P. K. Koteswaram, Director-General of Observatories, on behalf of the Government and Mr. A. L. T. Taylor, Regional General Manager of I.B.M. Dr. Koteswaram told a Press conference that computerised weather forecasts would be a significant development in the field of meteorology in India. It would be a big leap forward from the traditional and subjective forecasts. The computer to be installed in the Meteorological Office is model 44 of I.B.M.'s latest computer '360' which makes about one million calculations in a second. It would be manufactured in India, Mr. Taylor said. According to a spokesman of the Meteorological Department, the acquisition of the computer was the natural consequence of a global project named World Weather Watch (W.W.W.). The decision to participate in this project was recently approved by the Government of India.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 12, 1919.

Civil Disobedience.

In reference to Mr. Gandhi's fresh resolve to renew the Satyagraha campaign, Sir Narayan Chandravarkar, ex-Judge, Bombay High Court, and a Moderate Leader, through the medium of the press, makes a strong and earnest appeal to Mr. Gandhi [from Bombay, on July 11] to desist from starting the campaign. He says that Mr. Gandhi's advice to the people to make no disturbance in case he is punished for offering civil disobedience as a protest against the Rowlatt Act and such pious advice condemning lawlessness and violence fail as the country knows to its cost and pain, because ignorant people are unable to distinguish between civil disobedience to laws, of a harmless character, and violent defiance of law and authority. In Sir Narayan's opinion the real reason is afforded by the actual fact of revolutionary crime in India with which he became officially familiar in the course of his examination of the 806 cases of Bengal interments. He found to his amazement that the revolutionary organisations educated their members in certain literature of political daocities, murders and other acts of violence.

उत्पीड़न के विरुद्ध

बाल यौन उत्पीड़न रोकने संबंधी पाक्सो कानून को और कठोर बनाने की केंद्रीय मंत्रिमंडल की मंजूरी से सुरक्षित बचपन की एक नई उम्मीद जगी है। पिछले कुछ सालों से नाबालिगों के साथ यौन उत्पीड़न और हिंसा की घटनाएं लगातार बढ़ी हैं। इसी के मद्देनजर सरकार ने यह फैसला किया है। प्रस्तावित संशोधनों में बच्चों का गंभीर यौन शोषण करने वालों को मृत्युदंड और नाबालिगों के खिलाफ अन्य अपराधों के लिए कठोर सजा का प्रावधान किया गया है। हालांकि दिल्ली में हुए निर्भया कांड के बाद यौन उत्पीड़न संबंधी कानूनों को काफी कठोर किया गया था। तब माना गया था कि इससे आपराधिक वृत्ति के लोगों में भय पैदा होगा और यौन हिंसा की घटनाओं में काफी कमी आएगी। मगर ऐसा नहीं हुआ। बल्कि उसके बाद से कम उम्र की बच्चियों के यौन उत्पीड़न और उनकी हत्या की घटनाएं बढ़ी हैं। इसलिए मांग की जा रही थी कि पाक्सो कानून को और कठोर बनाया जाए। जघन्य यौन अपराधों में मौत की सजा का भी प्रावधान किया जाए। इसलिए प्रस्तावित संशोधनों के बाद माना जा रहा है कि ऐसी घटनाओं पर काफी हद तक लगाम लगेगी। मगर देखने की बात है कि इन कानूनों पर अमल कराने वाला तंत्र कितनी मुस्तैदी दिखा पाता है।

बाल यौन उत्पीड़न की कुछ वजहें साफ हैं। एक तो यह कि बच्चों को बहला-फुसला या डरा-धमका कर कहीं ले जाना और फिर उनका यौन उत्पीड़न करना अपेक्षाकृत आसान होता है। छोटे बच्चे या बच्चियां कई बार ऐसा करने वालों को ठीक से पहचान नहीं पातीं, जिससे पुलिस को सबूत जुटाने में दिक्कत आती है। फिर कड़े कानूनों के बावजूद ऐसी हरकतें करने वालों के मन में भय इसलिए नहीं पैदा हो पा रहा कि बलात्कार जैसे मामलों में सजा की दर काफी कम है। इसके अलावा आजकल इंटरनेट पर खुलेआम यौनाचार की तस्वीरें उपलब्ध हैं। हर किसी के हाथ में मोबाइल फोन आ जाने से बहुत सारे लोग ऐसी तस्वीरें देखते रहते हैं। कई लोग ऐसी तस्वीरें साझा भी करते हैं, जिन्हें देख कर अनेक लोग बलात्कार आदि के लिए प्रवृत्त होते हैं। जब उन्हें किसी तरह की मुसीबत में फंसने का अंदेशा नजर आता है, तो पीड़ित या पीड़िता की हत्या तक कर देने में संकोच नहीं करते। इसलिए पाक्सो कानून में प्रस्तावित संशोधनों में अश्लील तस्वीरों यानी पोर्न फिल्मों पर भी नियंत्रण करने का प्रावधान किया है। अश्लील तस्वीरों के प्रसारण पर रोक की मांग भी लंबे समय से उठती रही है, मगर कुछ लोग इसे यौन शिक्षा के लिए जरूरी बता कर ऐसा करने का विरोध करते रहे हैं।

कानूनों को कड़ा बनाने के साथ-साथ पुलिस की जवाबदेही भी अनिवार्य है, क्योंकि इसके बिना कानूनों पर अमल सुनिश्चित नहीं कराया जा सकता। बलात्कार जैसी घटनाओं में पुलिस की जांच में देरी होने से कई सबूत नष्ट हो जाते हैं। फिर कई बार रसूखदार लोगों के प्रभाव में आकर भी कई मामले दबा दिए जाते या समझौते से उन्हें रफा-दफा करने का प्रयास किया जाता है। यों कई लोग अपनी बच्चियों के साथ हुई यौन उत्पीड़न की घटनाओं को इज्जत का मामला मान कर खुद चुपपी साध लेते हैं, पर जो मामले सामने आते हैं वे पुलिस की दिलाई की वजह से इंसाफ में न बदल पाएं, तो कानूनों का कोई अर्थ नहीं रह जाता। इसलिए उन पक्षों पर भी गंभीरता से ध्यान देने की जरूरत है कि आखिर किस वजह से यौन अपराधियों को दंड नहीं मिल पाता।

कुंठा के कारोबारी

गायक यो यो हनी सिंह जितनी चर्चा अपनी गायकी से हासिल करते हैं, उससे ज्यादा सुखियां उन्हें अक्सर ऐसे गानों के लिए मिल जाती हैं, जिन्हें आमतौर पर स्त्रियों के खिलाफ माना जाता है। हाल ही में अपने नाम से जारी एक गाने में उन्होंने महिलाओं के खिलाफ ऐसे आपत्तिजनक शब्दों का प्रयोग किया, जिन्हें अश्लीलता के दायरे में और महिलाओं की गरिमा कम करने वाला माना गया। इस पर घोर आपत्ति जताई गई थी और अब पंजाब राज्य महिला आयोग की शिकायत पर उनके खिलाफ पुलिस ने मुकदमा दर्ज कर लिया है। आयोग की अध्यक्ष ने कहा है कि जिस गीत में भी महिलाओं के खिलाफ अश्लीलता का प्रयोग हुआ हो, वह पूरे पंजाब में प्रतिबंधित होना चाहिए। यों हनी सिंह पहली बार ऐसे गीतों के लिए कठघरे में खड़े नहीं हुए हैं। करीब पांच साल पहले भी वे अपने एक ऐसे गीत के लिए विवाद में थे, जिसके शब्द बलात्कार जैसे अपराध की महिमामंडित करते थे। सवाल है कि दिल्ली में जिस ‘निर्भया’ मामले के बाद समूचा देश बलात्कार के खिलाफ आक्रोश में था, उसमें ‘मैं बलात्कारी हूं’ जैसा गीत गाने का साहस हनी सिंह में कहां से आया था?

दरअसल, हनी सिंह अकेले ऐसे गीतों के कारोबारी नहीं हैं। भोजपुरी, हरियाणवी और दूसरी प्रांतीय भाषाओं में भी ऐसे गीतों की सीढ़ी बिकती है या फिर इंटरनेट पर खुलेआम मौजूद हैं, जिनके बोल घोर अश्लील और एक स्तर पर आपराधिक होते हैं, पर उन्हें सरेआम बजाया जाता है। सच यह है कि महिलाओं के खिलाफ सभी तरह के अपराधों में ऐसे गीतों की बड़ी भूमिका होती है। इसमें कोई शक नहीं कि ऐसे गीतों का मकसद खालिस कारोबार और पैसे कमाना होता है। आखिर ऐसे गीतों को सुनने और देखने वाले लोग कहां से आते हैं? वे किस समाज में और कैसे तैयार होते हैं? आधुनिकता की चकाचौंध में कमजोर होते सामाजिक सरोकारों के बीच हनी सिंह जैसे कलाकार इसलिए मशहूर हो जाते हैं कि उनके गीतों में बहुत सारे लोग अपनी हिंसक यौन कुंठाओं की नुमाइंदगी महसूस करते हैं। शायद यही वजह है कि कई बार लोग ऐसे गीत गाने वाले मशहूर कथित कलाकारों को अपने समारोहों में आमंत्रित करके उनके कार्यक्रम आयोजित करते हैं। ऐसे लोगों को कई राजनीतिक दल भी अपनी सदस्यता देकर इतराते हैं। यह एक तरह से ऐसे गीतों और इसके गायकों को वैधता देना होता है। जबकि ऐसे गीतों के संदर्भ समाज में पसरी यौन कुंठित मानसिकता को और ज्यादा पुष्ट करते हैं।

कहा जा सकता है कि पहले से ही महिलाओं के खिलाफ कई ग्रंथियों में जकड़े समाज में ऐसे गीत एक तरह से प्रशिक्षण की भूमिका निभाते हैं। सवाल है कि जो गीत जनता के व्यापक हिस्से में सुने या देखे जाते हैं, उन्हें पर्याप्त जांच-परख के बिना कैसे जारी होने दिया जाता है! किसी फिल्म के सार्वजनिक प्रदर्शन से पहले उसे सेंसर बोर्ड के कड़े परीक्षण से गुजरना पड़ता है। ऐसी तमाम फिल्में होती हैं, जिनके जरूरी माने जाने वाले दृश्यों को भी सेंसर बोर्ड अश्लीलता की दलील पर काट देता है। फिर इस तरह के स्वतंत्र वीडियो और गीतों पर कोई रोकटोक क्यों नहीं है? यह ध्यान रखने की जरूरत है कि महिलाओं के खिलाफ अपराधों के पीछे कई तरह की कुंठाओं का एक मनोविज्ञान काम करता है। उसे पुष्ट करने वाले कारकों पर लगाम लगाए बिना उन अपराधों पर काबू पाने की कोशिश अधूरी रहेगी।

कल्पमेधा

तुम कुछ लोगों को हमेशा के लिए मूर्ख बना सकते हो और अधिक व्यक्तियों को कुछ समय के लिए मूर्ख बना सकते हो। लेकिन सभी को हमेशा के लिए मूर्ख नहीं बना सकते।

–अब्राहम लिंकन

जनसत्ता

मोनिका शर्मा

मोनिका शर्मा

मोनिका शर्मा

विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन के अनुसार प्रति दस हजार की आबादी पर पचास बिस्तर और पच्चीस डॉक्टर होने चाहिए। जबकि भारत में प्रति दस हजार की आबादी पर मात्र नौ बिस्तर और सात चिकित्सक उपलब्ध हैं। स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं की स्तरीय रिथिति के मामले में भारत विकसित देशों से तो पीछे है ही, कई विकासशील देशों से भी बराबरी नहीं कर पा रहा है। स्वास्थ्य सेवा से जुड़े हर मानक पर हम दुनिया के देशों में निचले पायदान पर खड़े हैं।

मोनिका शर्मा

हाल में आई नीति आयोग की रिपोर्ट ‘स्वस्थ राज्य, प्रगतिशील भारत’ ने देश की स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं की दयनीय रिथिति को सामने रखा है। रिपोर्ट में बिगड़ती स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं की जो हालत सामने आई है, वह वाकई चिंतनीय है। नीति आयोग ने तेईस संकेतकों को आधार बना कर राज्यों की एक सूची तैयार की है। ये सभी संकेतक जीवन सहेजने से जुड़ी बुनियादी स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं के सूचक हैं। इनमें नवजात मृत्यु दर, प्रजनन दर, लिंगानुपात, स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं की संचालन व्यवस्था, अधिकारियों की नियुक्ति और अवधि के साथ ही नर्सों और डॉक्ट्रयें के खाली पद जैसे मुद्दे शामिल हैं। भारत में स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं की हकीकत बयान करने वाली इस रिपोर्ट को केंद्रीय स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण मंत्रालय, विश्व बैंक और नीति आयोग ने मिल कर तैयार किया है। रिपोर्ट को तीन हिस्सों– बड़े राज्य, छोटे राज्य और केंद्र शासित प्रदेश में बांट कर बनाया गया है।

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