Status revoked



TICKER

MIHIR S SHARMA

ventually, illiberal gov-ernments come even for those who welcomed their ascent. That is one of the great lessons of history, and if India is unlucky a similar story will play out here over the next few You cannot demonstrate enough loyalty to an illiberal government unless vou already part

whichever in-group it prefers. In India, if you have a "Muslim-sounding" name, have served a past government, are linked to the West through education or commerce or funding, have spoken on social media of "human rights" — all these are, in one way or another, indicators of potential disloyalty.

The latest incarnation of this effect is what has happened to the writer Aatish Taseer. It appears that his status as an Overseas Citizen of India has been revoked — "revocation of status" is something the government is pretty good at, apparently. The Ministry of Home Affairs said on Twitter that "Mr Aatish Ali Taseer" - a nice touch that, like Barack Hussein Obama — "while submitting his PIO application concealed the fact that his late father was of Pakistani origin". Now, on the face of it, this appears truly representative of the Indian state's famed brilliance. Taseer has written columns, essays, and entire books about his complicated relationship with Salman Taseer, the murdered British-Pakistani politician who was his biological father. Only the Indian state could say he was "concealing" it. It also reveals the Indian state's general inability to deal with modern life, and its realities such as single-parent families. Salman Taseer did not bring up Aatish Taseer, who was in effect the child of a single mother. Surely the PIO application should reflect the fact that single mothers exist? That in such case, the applicant's biological grandparents and great-grandparents on the "other side" are irrelevant? Or is any link, however distant, to Muslim countries so insidious, like a worm coiled deep in your soul, that even if you spend your life in India re-awakening your Hindu, "Indic" heritage it is still too dangerous to allow

Taseer says, and many believe, though the Union home ministry has officially denied it, that the revocation of Taseer's status is linked to an article he wrote on the subject of the Prime Minister for Time magazine. I myself have not read it, so cannot let you know whether the article was of earth-shattering novelty, though the chances are it was not. Nevertheless it apparently came to the attention of the Prime Minister, who was quoted by NDTV as saying that the magazine was foreign and the writer from "a Pakistani political family". The home ministry perhaps felt itself constrained to follow up.

I do not, as it happens, believe that the Prime Minister himself sought that Taseer's status be revoked. That would be ridiculous and uncharacteristic of the PM. It is also not how things happen in illiberal states. In such places, lower-level functionaries of every rank and hue seek to ingratiate themselves with the highest authority by going pellmell after dissenters and outsiders. All you have to do is indicate who the outsiders are — and, fortunately, there are usually relatively easy indicators. Somebody with the middle name "Ali" is never going to be an insider in today's India, after all.

The advantage for these aspiring apparatchiks in India is that our rules, laws and procedures are so spiky with arbitrariness and contradictory principles that they can be weaponised almost at will. If citizenship rules don't get vou, tax will: if tax doesn't, FEMA can; if all those fail, then surely you've said something on Twitter that violates colonial-era provisions of the penal code. You might want to give in to schadenfreude at the sight of those who minimised such concerns in the past now being caught up in them. How else should one feel when a former home minister, under whose watch the government went after foreign-funded NGOs, independent-minded researchers and much else is himself incarcerated because of the oppressiv rules that he failed to change and in fact used against dissenters? How should one react when the ruling party comes after a man who was a prominent supporter in the years leading up to 2014, and who said in 2012, when debating whether India should welcome foreign writers, that "a little xenophobia is not such a bad thing" in a country overrun with invisible foreign power? (Taseer meant Sonia Gandhi, of course, who was apparently still a foreigner in 2012.)

But such schadenfreude would be both unkind and unwise. The fact is that similar things could happen to anyone and probably will. It is impossible to ever be loyal enough. There will always be ever more stringent loyalty tests, and at some point everyone with a soul will fail to clear at least one. And then, well, those very people whose approval you once sought, whose rise you once praised, whose triumph you welcomed — those people will see you as an outsider, and "revoke your status".

Smog is crippling the next generation

India's future is imperilled. Any government that tolerates that commits a crime against humanity



WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K. DATTA-RAY

It was a relief to escape from suffocating Delhi where law and order seemed also to have collapsed and return to Kolkata last week. But toxic though the capital's air was, I won't pretend it was altogether new. Three other cities I have lived in -- Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne and even Singapore -- have been shrouded in a haze on occasion but with a vital difference. Their leaders were not gallivanting abroad or merely watching the disgraceful fisticuffs between lawyers and policemen while people choked and coughed. Nor did they insult public agony with claptrap about digitalisation

and "faceless tax assessment".

As a newspaper reporter in Newcastle, I was in the town hall council chamber when the Lord Mayor, a working class housewife in everyday life, summoned the directors of some of Britain's biggest industrial companies after a smogshrouded day and gave them a sharp dressingdown. My Lord Mayor brusquely silenced a director who tried to talk smoothly of how their gratifying profits reflected credit on the city. Profits might be gratifying for businessmen, she retorted bluntly, but public health was her concern. She would shut down their factories if pollution continued.

I first heard the word smog as a teenager in Manchester in the 1950s when visibility could dwindle to a foot, and your handkerchief was black with grit when you blew your nose. John Ruskin, the social thinker, called smog "Manchester Devil's darkness" and said the city was the spiritual home of pollution. Old-timers recalled a thick cloud smothering Manchester in 1931, killing 450 people. Not even the smokeless zone that the National Smoke Abatement Society's campaign created could avoid deaths from lung diseases such as bronchitis. Manchester had the "foulest air in Britain" in 1995. No wonder Victorians branded it the "Chimney of the World".

What Singapore called the haze was not very

different from Delhi's pollution: satellite imagery confirmed it was mainly smoke from fires all over Indonesia, especially in Sumatra and Borneo. Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia and southern Thailand were worst affected, the soaring air pollution index sometimes forcing shops, offices and places of entertainment to close down, especially during June and July.

Pressured by its ASEAN neighbours, Indonesia's government eventually began to use weather-changing technology to create artificial rain and extinguish raging fires. Thousands of soldiers, marines and airmen were deployed to fight the flames while military aircraft and helicopters carried out water bombing and cloud-seeding. These expensive and elaborate methods were necessary only because Indonesia's rulers were as callous and corrupt as India's. The fires were not natural phenomena in California or Australia but the result of slash-and-burn operations to clear forest land for commercial plantations.

Some of Indonesia's most influential tycoons were suspected of involvement. Everyone knew who they were, but – as in India – the rich and the powerful were above the law. Among them in my time were prominent golfing partners of Suharto who was president for 31 years, from Sukarno's ouster in 1967 until the 1998 uprising forced his resig-

nation. Later, various agriculture and forestry ministers daringly promised to publish the names of the guilty firms and expedite their prosecution but I don't know if the threats were ever carried out.

Delhi's infinitely worse plight is similar in the sense that despite the furore over odd and even numbers, the problem is really agricultural. Anyone who ventures into the surrounding countryside, whether Haryana, Punjab or Uttar Pradesh, at once sees smoke billowing from fields whose paddy stubble must be burned hastily to sow the wheat crop. Special incentives for encouraging water exploitation for extra production are now counter-productive. Instead of squandering money on boosting crops, the government should eliminate excess production (which is criminally wasted anyway) and invest in modern equipment that is beyond the financial resources of cultivators to clear fields and convert stubble to manure or fodder or some other useful product, thus sparing the neighbourhood poisonous pollution. Gimmicks like Swachh Bharat are unworthy of a responsible

Toxic air is India's fifth largest killer, taking toll of about 1.5 million lives annually. The World Health Organisation reckons India has the world's highest death rate from chronic respiratory diseases and asthma. Delhi's intense pollution irreversibly damages the lungs and stunts the brain development of 2.2 million (50 per cent) children. Smog is crippling the next generation. India's future is imperilled. Any government that tolerates that commits a crime against humanity. The Supreme Court has reminded us that such a government is unfit to govern.

LUNCH WITH BS ▶ RONNIE SCREWVALA | ENTREPRENEUR & PHILANTHROPIST

A finger in many pies

Over a fish and salad lunch, **Screwvala** talks to **Pavan Lall** about why he's betting big on online education, how a crocodile disrupted his charitable work and what India needs to do to fix the economy

even years after he sold motion picture company UTV to Disney for \$454 million, 63-year-old Ronnie Screwvala shows no sign of slowing down as he says he's only half-way to achieving what he set out to do. I'm invited over for a Saturday lunch to Screwvala's home in Breach Candy in Mumbai, the city where he was born and raised.

I press the doorbell and it's opened a few seconds later by Screwvala himself who is dressed, as almost always, is in a premiumtwill T-shirt and everyday slacks and leather slip-ons minus socks. Inside his apartment that would seem massive even in Los Angeles, Screwvala, who's produced over 50 films including hits such as Jodha Akbar, A Wednesday, Chennai Express, Rang De Basanti and Barfi!, leads me into an alcove that doubles up as a dining area where a table for two has been laid out.

I'm guided to sit opposite the window and am arrested by the scenic horizon that features tranquil greenery and water as far as the eye can see. By any standards, it's a knockout view. Screwvala is easily the most successful entrepreneur the tightly-knit and insular film business in India has seen in the last decade or so and his success is all the more crucial given that he is a rank outsider. "Happy in life, almost there?" I ask? "Those are two separate questions and well, yes happier with the mix in life in many ways," he concedes.

Has time mellowed Screwvala and his risk-taking ability? On the contrary, it's actually increased, I am told. "After I sold UTV I did the whole PE investor thing for a while and ended up spending the weekends with wealth managers and realised very fast that this is not what I am going to do," he shares. "One becomes an entrepreneur to break the glass ceiling and that's when you grow the market. Of course in that process you have to be prepared to get hurt. You will get hurt. But I'm a doer and I like taking risks."

It I'm a doer and I like taking risks."

It's Parsi lunch for the day, I'm told. I soon

realise what that means — multiple courses — and plan for an extended jog the next day.

Our first course, a beetroot, orange and candied-walnut salad with mixed greens is served and we both dig in. Born in a middle-class family, Screwvala's ascent is remarkable and leads him to explain how his father who recently passed away would chide him for not owning enough shares in listed companies. "I chose to invest everything in my own private companies," he says. He doesn't get into specifics but shares how he held the loan record for a home and "borrowed all the way for his daughter's education". His daughter Trishya attended Sevenoaks School (England), followed by the University of California, Los Angeles, and then the University of Southern California. Screwvala now divides his time between

four different ventures: UpGrad, which is an online educational start-up and the one he's most involved in; Unilazer Ventures, which serves as a holding and investment company for his other start-ups that include Lenskart, a bot company and more; U Mumba which funds and supports teams playing football, kahaddi table tennis and other sports, and Swades a non-profit he runs along with wife Zarina Mehta. Screwvala narrates an incident that happened when he was helping some lower income group people in metros move back to rural areas so that they could enjoy a better quality of life. That was largely successful but sprung unexpected challenges. One individual who had moved to Mumbai and put in charge of a fishing pond in the countryside. Weeks later, Screwvala got a call saying that a crocodile had entered the pond and that person was scared for his life. "We had to drain the pond to get the crocodile out but the man made his way back to Mumbai never wanting to go back,'

Course two is a Parsi breakfast classic — tamata per eedu (fried eggs smothered in

₹400 crore in his avatar as a private equity partner in ventures that range from pomegranate farms to online optometry. He's invested another ₹400 crore in his own ground-up businesses. Once his non-compete clause with Disney expired, Screwvala wasted no time in resurrecting his film business through a firm called RSVP. "It's just a coincidence that the initials expand into Ronnie Screwvala Productions — we actually called it that because no one in the business does RSVP."

Much has changed while Screwvala waited it out. For one, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar are chasing market share even as big telcos watch from the sidelines. Equally, growth in the entertainment and media sector has been challenged. "The subscription model for OTT has yet to take off in India and media grows at just about 7 per cent a year," he says. That's at least partly why he will limit RSVP to around three or four films a year that he personally believes in and wants to do, and include the likes of the recently made *Uri* and the *Sky is Pink*.

course saas ni machhi, which is pomfret cooked Parsi style and doused in a mild sour sauce. It comes accompanied with a dry khichdi-styled pilaf. I grab what appears to be half of a perfectly cooked flaky fresh fish. Screwvala helps himself and then insists I try it with the sauce. He also insists I try the Parsi lagaan nu achaar (pickle served at Parsi weddings) with the khichdi. I don't

regret it.

We come face to face with our main

its — the reason he's putting his heft behind UpGrad. Screwvala owns 75 per cent of the venture. Since inception, it has signed on 15,000 students who spend an average of ₹2.8 lakh on various courses, and is clocking ₹240 crore in annual revenue. It is what Screwvala says will be his biggest play yet. "If telecom changed the game for how business was done in India then we need 20 more of those systemic

Education is growing at double dig-

his biggest play yet. "If telecom changed the game for how business was done in India then we need 20 more of those systemic game-changers to take us to the next level." He counts education and tourism as examples.

Dessert comes in the form of a chocolate

as examples.

Dessert comes in the form of a chocolate pie. I cant resist asking what is the next big blockbuster to stay tuned for? It's a futuristic version of *Ashwatthama*, one of the most complex characters in Mahabharata.



stewed spices and tomatoes) — which can pass off easily as a Spanish starter.

pass off easily as a Spanish starter.

Screwvala says he has invested around

The dark side of the veil



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

his week, while in Dewas, Indore, and the Dhar district of rural Madhya Pradesh, all the young women I met were chafing under the tyranny of the ghunghat (veil). Tradition dictates that within and outside their homes, all married women in this region must cover not only their heads, but in some cases, faces too. There is an elaborate, often bewildering set of rules dictating the length of the ghunghat. For example, new brides and women under 30 are expected to cover their faces up to the neck; women in their thirties cover up to the forehead and older women get away with the *ghunghat* simply covering their heads. Another set of complicated kinship rules define the people in front of whom a woman must remain veiled. As part of a team conducting a documentation exercise for an international NGO, we had to quickly figure out optimal conditions in which women would shed their veils for us — and that was quite a task.

"I can show my face only to men younger than me," said 24-year-old Pooja Itodiya, the ASHA worker in Aalri village, Dewas district. So we shooed off all the guys who looked like they were over 24 before she would settle down for a chat. She's chosen to work with children and women as she doesn't need to cover her face and head in front of them. Hours later, we were introduced to the heavily veiled Sapna Diwana, age 26.

Thinking we now understood how this worked, we asked all the young men hovering around to scram, but she still didn't remove her *ghunghat*. It turned out that there was an older woman present in the room who was, in kinship terms, the same category as her mother-in-law. Later on, as we sipped tea, she told us that in their family, young daughters-in-law couldn't even face the family's matriarchs while eating. "I end up eating facing the wall," she said ruefully. The amazing thing is that young women are expected to not only do housework but also work outside their homes while veiled. In Ghatgara village,

Dhar district, my heart went out to 27-year-old Sarika Mandloi, who has to ferry 15-litre buckets of water in full *ghunghat* even when the wind played truant with her sari.

It was restrictive, they all agreed. "In my twenties, when I had to cover my entire face, it was as if my world was restricted to inside the ghunghat," said Kanchan Jadav, who's 35 and now has more leeway with it. Savita Parihar, a bright young community mobiliser working with a local NGO, simply decided to break with tradition and hasn't looked back. "If only other families would support their daughters-in-law the way mine has," she told me. Maya Mausariya, the sarpanch of Ghatgara village, didn't sport a ghunghat either, "My family supported my choice, but the neighbours had a field day gossiping about me," she said.

about me," she said.

I wondered why more young women didn't rebel against this regressive practice. Both these spunky ladies said that ditching the *ghunghat* was possible only with family support. As long as the community insisted young women follow hackneyed traditions, Mausariya said, it won't be easy. "But I can tell you this," she said. "Things will definitely be different when my 12-year-old daughter and 15-year-old son come

Where did my space go?



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

lill some years ago, among the most awaited times of the year used to be the seasonal sales for which the household would wait with bated breath, carting home armloads of year-old fashions to stuff into already overflowing wardrobes. The children did it because brands were still new and aspirational in India, and my wife did it so she didn't feel left out among her kitty party peers. Having acquired several such outfits, or shoes, she would refuse to actually use them "because my taste is better than theirs", she would mock her friends, rendering the pile of clothes useless.

When they were young, my wife

would think nothing of purloining cupboard space in the children's rooms, but as they grew older, I found my jackets and shirts being squeezed out by strange looking clothes on hangers that I never saw my wife wear – unless she led a secret life to which I was not privy. Since that seemed unlikely, I could only imagine that she was hoarding these clothes in preparation for some future garment apocalypse. At any rate, the number of outfits grew by mass and volume till it seemed they would overwhelm us.

My own contribution to the increasing number of objects came by way of books that lined cupboards, occupied tables, took up floor space, served as tabletops – and generally threatened to drown us in fonts and folios. Being somewhat better organised than members of my family, I took things into my hands. Additional space was leased, bookshelves designed and a library set up in the basement. I finally had a room for myself, a place to think, write, work. But the idyll lasted barely a week.

First, my wife dispatched extra linen to the basement, then unused crockery and other kitchen paraphernalia. Empty cartons, packing cases and bags-that-might-be-of-use-some-day followed. Winter clothes, pairs of shoes, electronic gadgets, useless gifts piled up over the years, worn-out towels and duvets,

excess grocery, photographs and paintings, stuff my wife had got in her trousseau, stuff she planned to give our daughter in her trousseau, a television that still worked and a toaster that didn't, fabric for upholstery, old magazines and older journals, reusable glasses and recyclable cutlery, bubblewrap for wrapping stuff and stuff wrapped in bubblewrap, lamps, shades and bulbs that could never be found when needed, a wheelchair, collectibles, odd bits of furniture soon converted the study into a dump.

Having reconciled to the inevitable my wife and I waited for what should have been logical - our grown children to move out and make their own lives. 'You work so far from home," my wife advised our daughter, "you should live closer to where you work." No go. "You'll love your independence," I said to my son — only he didn't and, in fact, got married and brought his bride home. "I worked hard all these years so we could have separate bedrooms," I cribbed to my wife, "but GenNxt just won't move out." "All my life I wanted separate bathrooms," my wife said philosophically, "but you don't always get what you want." Not only is that luxury denied to us, it appears the kids are now laying claim to more storage space than they currently command. I worry for our future — my wife's and mine.

Volume VII Number 15 MUMBAI | 9 NOVEMBER 2019

WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

Darkening clouds

here is simply no way to get away from the fact that the clouds over the economy continue to darken - not just because of events already unfolding but equally because of the quality of the government response. Moody's decision to put out a warning on its India rating may be nothing more than recognising the changes in economic prospects that have already occurred, since rating agencies typically react slowly and tend to be behind the curve. What should worry forecasters (and everyone else) is the risk that the minor upswing in economic growth that most of them expect in the quarters following July-September, even if only helped by progressive changes in the base period comparator, may in fact not come about because of a downswing that feeds on itself for a variety of reasons.

There is a fiscal crisis building up, which might become apparent when the Finance Commission presents its report — especially if it seeks to claw back the tax share of the states by putting out the data on the central government's vast unpaid bills, hidden expenditures, revenue shortfalls, and much else. The government is spending on citizen-friendly programmes to win votes, and who is to complain, but where are the steps to bring in the money to pay for the goodies?

At the same time, capital is being used badly or destroyed. The financial sector is one sink. The public sector swallows up ever more cash — the latest pile going to two bankrupt phone companies which are unable to pay salaries. The railways has taken in huge cash, but has little to show so far by way of growth in traffic and revenue. The bankruptcy process is taking its own toll. Irresponsible chief ministers cancelling energy contracts destroy capital, too. Regulators who mismanage sectors, as in telecom, have destroyed capital wholesale — and the Supreme Court has not helped. What underpins the economy's growth potential are the still high savings and investment rates, but these have little meaning if the money that is invested disappears without trace down various sinkholes - among which one is real estate.

The big worry is continuing denial by those in charge, perhaps even a lack of comprehension. The decision to opt out of the big regional trade agreement may eventually have been out of lack of choice, but it is silly to pretend that it is a sign of bold leadership. When every country east of Dhaka is willing to sign up and India is not, it says something is wrong with India. This reflects a failure of leadership over the past five years, and a failure to reform and get ready for opening up to and integrating with the largest, fastest-growing region in the world.

The argument that past free-trade agreements have not worked in India's favour is false; they made little difference. The fear of Chinese products swamping the market may or may not be real, but the trade deficit with China is only half the regional story: India has a big trade deficit with virtually every country in the region. The bilateral deals talked about as an alternative are non-starters. Opening up to Australia means opening up to agriculture; with New Zealand, dairying; and with Asean countries, on other agricultural items. As for switching from "Acting East" to looking West, trade deals with the US will be no easier, even as the country loses trade disputes at the World Trade Organization.

It is claimed that we can join later, but when the domestic lobbies that have won are the protectionists, why should they give up their hold on government policymakers? Where are the action plans and timelines to get ready for slashing tariffs, doubling agricultural productivity, and ending cross-subsidies in power pricing so that industry is not penalised? Or to get into regional supply chains when organised retailers are discouraged? The government has raised tariffs and become an anti-dumping champion, so the country is becoming more inward-looking. How then can the system open up, or become more competitive? Those that are competitive are being locked out of markets by those that are not. The losers are winning. This is no way to get to \$5 trillion.



Think Nanak, not Imran

India isn't made of porcelain. Kartarpur Sahib is open. It's our moment of joy. Switch off that TV neurosis on the 'return of Khalistan'. It isn't happening

NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

· mran Khan isn't the brightest being you've met, division is inevitable. That two efforts in the past – except when playing cricket. Yet, even by his standards, his offer to make the visit to Kartarpur Sahib visa-free for only the Sikhs from India was curious. How would he, to begin with, define a Sikh?

Sikhism is neither doctrinaire, nor exclusive. Anyone from any faith is welcome in a gurudwara. You just need to follow a couple of simple rules: A covered head, bare feet. Then, you can pray, the priest will treat you and get you the blessings from the holy book like any other devotee, and the "sangat" (community)

will feed you at the "langar". There is no place in Sikhism, including the Golden Temple or Akal Takht Sahib, where anyone's faith bars them.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

The essence of Sikhism is bar none. That is where the philosophy of the langar, a community meal where everyone eats together, comes from. You share a meal, you are equals. Then anyone, irrespective of faith, can do "kar sewa" (voluntary work). And so many do. This is the reason Sikh holy places are among the cleanest anywhere.

There is much anxiety in India about the moves and intentions of Imran/the Pakistan Army/the Inter-Services Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi handled the Intelligence (ISI) over Kartarpur Sahib. They all might be — and probably are — as diabolical as we suspect. But they aren't particularly bright. Even if they had such a genius idea of subverting India's Sikhs and reviving separatism through Kartarpur Sahib, Imran has ruined their "operation" by offering freebies to only the Sikhs. Besides the fact that the Sikh faith, intrinsically equal and inclusive, will dismiss this preferential treatment with contempt, Imran will also not know how to define a Sikh, or tell one from any other devotee of Guru Nanak and the great faith he and his nine successors founded. There is nothing in Sikh practice and tradition that discriminates Sikh from non-Sikh.

Imran has bought into the old military establishment folklore in Pakistan that a final Sikh-Hindu Singh Bhindranwale.

one in the mid-1960s and the second in the 1981-94 period — failed, but the time for a third push has now come. That's why some overseas Sikh organisations, especially in Canada, are being brought together with Pakistani immigrant groups, especially Kashmiri (Mirpuri), and this so-called "Referendum 2020" is being sponsored. Another chapter is being opened in an old playbook.

It is bound to fail like the earlier ones, again causing Pakistan enormously more damage than to India. We, in India, need have no anxieties.

> Preaking the Sikhs away from India is a fantasy of the Pakistani elites going back to the early 1950s, when that generation's wounds of the Partition were still raw.

The Pakistanis took this operation to its first peak in the mid-1960s, hoping to prise the Sikhs away. One faction of the Punjabi Suba (separate Punjabi state) movement had a radical/separatist impulse. But Partap Singh Kairon as chief minister in Puniab, and after his assassination

challenge adroitly. Punjab was divided again, with Hindi-predominant Haryana and Himachal Pradesh becoming new states and a Punjabi-speaking (and Sikh) majority now with a Punjab of its own. A curious little sidelight: The Pakistanis also separated and tried to indoctrinate Sikh Indian prisoners of war, especially officers, in 1965.

That chapter ended, and the second one was launched in 1981 by a Pakistani establishment emboldened by the new clout it had acquired with the Afghan jihad. It coincided, however, with many other factors internal to India: A revivalist mood among the Sikhs, weak governments, and the marginalisation of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Then, the arrival of a leader as charismatic and puritanical as Sant Jarnail

What followed is well-recorded history. It is just that in the following 13 years, tens of thousands died. And then, just when it had begun to look like Punjab was a lost cause, it all ended. So rapidly that even those of us following this closely didn't have the time to catch our breath.

OPINION 11

And why did this happen? For sure, the security forces and intelligence agencies did their job well. But that phase of terror ended the day the Sikhs themselves decided that they had had enough. The real hero of that fight was the predominantly Sikh Punjab Police. It was quite dramatic how Sikh popular opinion turned.

From a point where some of my fellow journalists were even talking of visiting "liberated zones" in Punjab, it ended almost overnight. In fact, no one even wanted to talk about this anymore. KPS Gill, who led the campaign as Punjab Police chief then, spoke to me in detail for an India Today story, and when I asked him why and how this ended so dramatically, he said, you see, the Pakistanis do not read Iqbal: kuchch baat hai ke hasti, mit-ti nahin hamaari...

For the Pakistanis to think that they can bring back those days, therefore, is fantastic nonsense. Similarly, for us in India to now worry that the Pakistanis will take "our" Sikhs away from "us" is embarrassing neurosis.

e have to be nuts to get unnerved over the pictures of Bhindranwale on the odd hoarding in Kartarpur Sahib. You can even find them in and around the Golden Temple, on key-chains sold in shops outside it, on the backs of cars in Delhi, and sometimes even as computer and tablet screen-savers. If we choose to get alarmed by any of this, we must have very little confidence in ourselves as a nation, and trust in the Sikh community.

To think that they are so gullible as to fall for the same trope in 2019 is an insult to their intelligence. And to think any of us as "we" who have to protect "them' — the Sikhs from evil Pakistanis — is worse than being irrational. It's stupid.

We had said in National Interest last week that Indian social and national coherence had strengthened over the years as it had become more relaxed. We are stronger not because we are merely united in our diversity, but because we are at ease with it now. It is possible to argue today that the founders of our Republic were a bit anxious and erred in giving us the slogan of "Unity in Diversity". They should have simply said, celebrate diversity. Once you accept that, you need not worry about the national commitment to any fellow Indian.

That's why it is time to forget subversive fears. India isn't made of porcelain. One of the holiest shrines for the Indian Sikhs and so many non-Sikh Indians is open now. It's a moment of collective joy for us to cherish. Switch off those TV discussions on the "return of Khalistan". It isn't happening. Don't paint the devil on the wall.

And if it still bothers you, just remember that concluding line of the Sikh prayer, invoking Guru Nanak: Nanak naam chardi kala/tere bhane sarbat da bhala. Translated loosely: Nanak, your name would keep us all upbeat/on the ascendant/gung-ho (you can choose either or all, or find another name for that brilliant Sikh attitude)/may the entire mankind be joyful and prosperous with your benevolence.

By special arrangement with ThePrint

Making Wikipedia more useful



DEVANGSHU DATTA

inger and composer, Dido Florian Cloud Bounevialle O'Malley Armstrong decided, understandably enough, that she needed to shorten her name when she went professional. By the late 1990s, she had attained However, when it comes a fair degree of success as

A few years later, she ended up cursing herself for picking politicians, media persons and that particular diminutive. By the time the online crowd-Wikipedia launched in 2001, she was certainly "notable" the Armenian Genocide, or the enough to merit an entry there. Aryan Invasion Theory.

Some vandals with a warped sense of humour kept inserting the letter "L" into the middle of her professional name, and this happened persistently, over a

That particular problem has been finally fixed but the "Wiki" continues to provide fake, or Academics use it themselves, many of its 40 million-plus and pharmacologists have been ing information. Wiki's model. The encyclonedia's USP is crowd-sourcing; it allows anybody to make an entry about pretty much anything and it's designed for easy cross-referencing and linking.

ally, through a process of editing, argument and debate, most encyclopedia news. There are unending

period of several years.

entries. This is inherent to the known to look it up as well The assumption is, eventu-

of the entries will get fixed. to any hot-button subject, this assumption is probably dubious. The biographical entries of celebrities are regularly vandalised or "injected" with fake flame wars on topics like

about Wikipedia. Students are wholesale from the crowdsourced online encyclopedia. The more honest among them even cite it as a reference!

It is a good bump up the Wiki place to look up accuracy quotient by a physics equa- several notches. One of tion, or a mathe- the problems with Wiki matical theo- citations is that the rem, so long as reference is often not you can ignore available online for the background primary viewing noise. There are often fierce

debates about the actual origin clopedias where the entries are theorem, a scientific theory — ethnic experts and fact-checked by nationalists like to "prove" it other experts. But 80 per cent is was Newton. Leibnitz or a reasonable baseline for Madhava who discovered cal- somebody who's starting to culus, for example.

if fallible, source of knowledge. even though it is a long way It has many multiples more in from perfection.

Academics and school- the way of entries across its 290teachers frequently complain odd languages than any other encyclopedic source. Even known to copy-paste entries encyclopedic aggregators, such as Xrefplus and GaleNet have less than 4 million entries between them. Moreover, the Wiki is free and that's not an viewing. A book may not be inconsiderable factor when available online at all, or it may incomplete information, in though secretively, and doctors impecunious students are seek-

> guesstimates suggest around 80-85 per cent of Wiki information is accurate. That is less than 95 per cent that is con-

standard

"normal" encyor written by commissioned research a topic and it does sug-So, the Wiki is an invaluable, gest that crowd-sourcing works,

A new initiative could bump up the Wiki accuracy quotient by several notches. One of the problems with Wiki citations is that the reference is often not available online for primary viewing. This is especially true in the case of books and scientific papers. Scientific papers are often behind paywalls, with only the abstract available for be a paid resource that has to be bought, and in many Wiki cita-As of now, tions, there may not even be an ISBN to facilitate search. Not that every researcher can afford to pay significant sums to simply check if a reference is accurately cited.

The Internet Archive, (sometimes called the Wayback Machine, though that is only sidered the gold one of the Archive's functions) is trying to sort this issue out. It will try to scan the relevant pages of every book that is cited in a Wiki reference. This would enable researchers to click on the citation and go to the relevant page and check for accuracy. As of now, the archive has done this for 130,000 entries in the English, Arabic and Greek editions. This itself involved

for

scanning 50,000 books.

indoor toilets; persuade the gov- only via a cess or a municipal

means about ₹10,000 per person per year. But questions can be asked: cost of each option. On the face If you are going to pay farmers not to grow paddy, why not pay all polluters. Thus, car owners could be paid not to drive, coalbased power plants paid to shut

who live in the NCR. That

So we come back to the temporary cure rather than permanent prevention, namely, target courts will hand the stubble. This involves technological solutions, the equivalent of better fuel and better car engines, etc.

Some also suggest that we create a market for the stubble. But how do you get it out in the first place? Indeed, that's why it is burnt as the cheapest form of disposal.

As you can see, there are no cheap solutions. Someone will have to bear the cost, which has to be shared by everyone except the polluters. But the stubbleburning problem is so temporary — just about a month that no one will agree to pay.

Made in India AI

EYE CULTURE

GANESH MANI

t a recent workshop I co-organised in Bangalore, with the

IDC, global AI spending is about \$36 bilyear. Just in the US, which pioneered some of the early AI research and applications, there are now over 2,000 AI companies and about 3,800 AI-related patent applications were filed in 2018. DARPA, which has a multi-decade history of making investments in technology aimed at national security, has announced a \$2 billion AI initiative there. In China, there are many significant AI start-ups, including SenseTime, which touts a valuation of \$7.5 billion. Domestically, NITI Aayog has proposed a ₹7.500 crore-plan to boost AI. Secondly, AI is not a fad; it has the

potential to deliver real value, especially to people at the bottom and middle of the pyramid. For instance, in health care, there is a great urban-rural divide both in terms of accessibility and affordability. The Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai found that a significant number of new patients were travelling from states as far away as UP and Bihar to avail of treatment, often after their cancer had progressed to an advanced stage. AI-enabled telemedicine has the potential to ameliorate this. In general, the new AI is about augmented intelligence - scaling expert services and also making remote delivery possible, in tandem with other technologies. To make this a reality, India is starting to develop significant expertise in machine learning as well as language technologies.

Thirdly, increasing globalisation has spread the origins of a product and sourcing its components far and wide: An Apple iPhone is designed in the US, its parts are sourced from over a dozen countries and, until recently, was assembled primarily in China. Contrast that with the Sony Walkman of the 1980s. which was entirely designed and produced in Japan. The recent trade wars have made the origin of goods a focal point. My guess is the question and ensuing discussion at the recent workshop stemmed from trepidation about the origin label being relevant to AI systems as well and, thus, with the potential to get caught up in future cross-border trade restrictions and shenanigans.

An AI system today is not generalpurpose enough to work facilely across multiple contexts and geographies. It is best thought of as a triumvirate: Data, domain knowledge and techniques (or

speech reflecting the regional language; as well as dialect and scenes with every day, endemic objects are what will be readily available as inputs to a retrieval or reasoning system. If any training is theme of Artificial Intelligence involved to teach the system, it is best to (AI) and innovation, the discussion use data similar to what the system will turned to the origin of an AI system or encounter when deployed. Likewise, specifically: What is "Made in India AI"? domain or subject matter expertise has Answering that question seems to many rich nuances — for example, be important for three reasons. First, AI which side of the street vehicles will be adoption is rapidly increasing. typically driven, denomination and According to technology research firm appearance of a banknote or the uniform of a state's policeman. Algorithms lion this year, up 45 per cent from last can then aid in partially or completely automating driving, paying and checking out at a retail store or in an emergency, directing people — via their smart phones — to a law enforcement officer for any clarifications and guidance. While advances in search and machine learning techniques have come from many countries via global teams of researchers and are widely published, often the systems have to be re-created domestically in the country of use with local data and domain knowledge. Such local data and domain knowledge embedding aid system performance and robustness.

Thus, "Made in India AI" needs to be interpreted as a system trained using traffic scenes in Kanpur or a conversation in Malayalam guided by local linguistic nuances. Given the rich diversity in languages and local customs, an AI system in many instances may have to be hyper-regionalised.

More importantly, the AI system will need to be trusted by the end-user farmer in Guwahati and its recommendations explainable in pithy Marathi by a physician in Mumbai — over WhatsApp perhaps — to a patient in Wardha.

In the start-up world, over the last decade or so, investors have encouraged copycat entrepreneurship: Take a successful business model that worked in the developed market(s) and execute the copy-paste routine in an emerging market. While this has been successful in some cases, it has stifled sustainable innovation. Copycat AI systems need to be wary of this expediency trap. Hastily assembled AI systems built with scant attention to local data and know-how can exhibit unanticipated behaviour and have unintended consequences. It may even end up creating a new class system.

Perhaps a better question to ask would be: Is this "Made for India"? We need to ensure that the system is fair, transparent and explainable to the common man in India.

Note to innovators and entrepreneurs: To guarantee an incredible India AI experience, make sure you stick with local data and expertise, even if you download the algorithms from an alien cloud!

Ganesh Mani is an AI expert, adjunct faculty member at Carnegie Mellon University, and past-President of the algorithms). Faces of local people, Pittsburgh chapter of TiE.org

Pay up or put up



LINE AND LENGTH

T C A SRINIVASA-RAGHAVAN

very year for the past 10 years, the National years, the Capital Region, comprising about 55,000 square km, chokes at this time of the year because of severe pollution. One of the many contributory factors is the burning of paddy stubble. Paddy is harvested in early October each year.

The governments of Delhi, Punjab, and Haryana are trying to persuade farmers not to burn the stubble. The farmers are not listening because they don't have an alternative. As a result, an impasse has developed.

The impasse can be broken if the problem is diagnosed. The diagnosis is that it's not the burning of stubble but the cultivation the Nobel Prize for it in 1991. of paddy that is the problem.

Punjab and Haryana are not Pay the polluter traditional paddy states because

the crop needs a lot of water and they have less of it naturally than, say, south or east India. But the two state governments, by making water and electricity free two decades ago, have inadvertently caused the farmers to grow paddy - around 15 million tonnes.

This is a case of what economics calls negative externalities. Mr A maximises his welfare at the cost of Mr B. Mr A's actions constitute a negative externality for Mr B. This is what the paddy stubble problem is.

One way to prevent the cultivation of paddy is to charge for the water and electricity the farmers use. But that would reduce their incomes even further. In a highly competitive democracy, this is not a practical solution.

So what's to be done? The Coase Theorem in economics offers a partial solution to the problem of negative externalities. It is named after the late Ronald Coase, who was awarded

The theorem rests on many ifs and buts but its core message is that if you think it's worth your while, pay your tormentor to stop tormenting. This, by the often happens. Nor can he down, construction companies way, was what India and China depend on the government to stop construction, etc. demanded on a global scale for because it will want their two climate issues.

worth its while. to charge for the water So everyone is and electricity the worse off now. Anyway, to would reduce their

consider, for a highly competitive example, three democracy, this is not a adjacent houses. practical solution middle

house is richer than the two on whole house stinking and his either side. Being much poorer, water supply contaminated? they have built their toilets along their respective compound walls, instead of indoors. This causes a stink for the house in the middle.

The rich owner of the middle house has five options buy the two adjacent houses: pay the other two to build

ernment to ban toilets that are tax on about 50 million people outside the house; or seek help from the courts ... What should The answer depends on the

of it, the "build them the damn toilets" option appears cheaper but it need not be so if the two owners turn extortionate. This

votes against his The world decid- One way to prevent the one. And the ed it wasn't cultivation of paddy is down rulings that cannot be farmers use. But that enforced. That's

get a sense of it, incomes even further. In the core question: How much is it worth to the

> No easy solutions This is the question that the Delhi, UP, Punjab, and Haryana governments have to answer. One way is to pay farmers not

It's a lot of money for 15 milsell his own house and move; lion tonnes of paddy at ₹36,000 per tonne. This cost can be met 30-day problem.

rich house-owner not to have his

to grow paddy.

Net net: You can't consume clean air if you won't pay for it just because it's a