

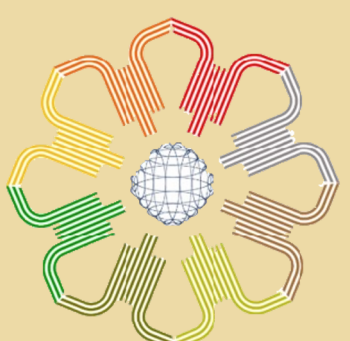


XLRI
Xavier School of Management
For the greater good

ABHIJNAH



September 2019



CPPR

Note from the editorial team

Public policy is an instrument which shapes the social, political, economic and business environment of a nation. Hence, it is imperative that aspiring managers of tomorrow develop a sound awareness and understanding of the nuances of policy decisions taken by the government.

It gives us immense pleasure to announce that Committee For Public Policy Research (CPPR) has released the 2019 edition of its annual magazine “Abhijnah”. The magazine by all measures keeps getting better every year, due to the diverse articles contributed by the talented minds present in our beloved campus. 2019 has been an eventful year for the country. India finally flexed its muscles by conducting an airstrike in Balakot in response to the dastardly attack on the CRPF soldiers in Pulwama. “Don’t mess with us” was the message that was clearly sent across to the enemy. 2019 also marked the first time a non-congress government was elected with a full majority for a second consecutive term.

Initial euphoria of the first 6 months of 2019 soon gave way to a more somber national mood. NSSO job survey revealed a spike in unemployment rate to over 6%. Growth of economy slowed down to 5.8% of GDP and industrial output rose a paltry 0.2%. Slowdown in the auto-sector became a symbol of everything that is wrong with the economy leading to heated debates across the nation.

Amidst all the gloom surrounding the economy, the country woke up to a historical decision of abrogation of Article 370 and 35 A which granted the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir a special status within the ambit of our federal structure. The news was met with jubilation in some quarters and tribulation in others. While one may or may not agree with the methods or the decision taken by the government, there was however, a grudging acceptance of the boldness of the decision itself.

Committee for Public Policy Research was formed to promote awareness on public policy in the campus. Over the years CPPR has endeavored to increase awareness by organising various policy parleys on diverse areas to facilitate discussions and disseminate information among the students of the campus with active support from our faculty coordinator professor Gourav Vallabh.

Continuing with our efforts in that direction, we bring to you Abhijnah 2019 that contains a diverse set of articles encompassing defence, economic, foreign affairs, political and social issues presented in a simple and lucid manner. I thank the editorial and design team for working tirelessly to give shape and structure to the magazine and ensure that our readers have a good time reading the magazine.

With regards
Editorial Team,
ABHIJNAH 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** **Shielded by Pseudonym**
By Saransh Kejriwal
-
- 07** **Securing the Unsecured**
By Rajarshi Sengupta
-
- 13** **India's Defence Policy**
By Souvik Atha
-
- 19** **A Critical Evaluation of the PDS in India**
By Rhea Sharma
-
- 23** **Agricultural Success**
By Devagya Jha
-
- 28** **AYUSH: Government Funded pseudoscience**
By Praphull Kabtiyal
- 04** **Fixing our education system- One step at a time**
By Aakash Jaiswal
-
- 09** **The Modi Doctrine and South Asia**
By Sujith Nair
-
- 16** **Indian Foreign Policy**
By Ujjwal Sinha
-
- 21** **Nudging India**
By Anusha Sinha
-
- 26** **Legitimacy: An Unfinished Project**
By Aditya Prakash
-
- 30** **Dissent, Journalism and other unnecessary obstacles**
By Angshuman Pal

Shielded by Pseudonym

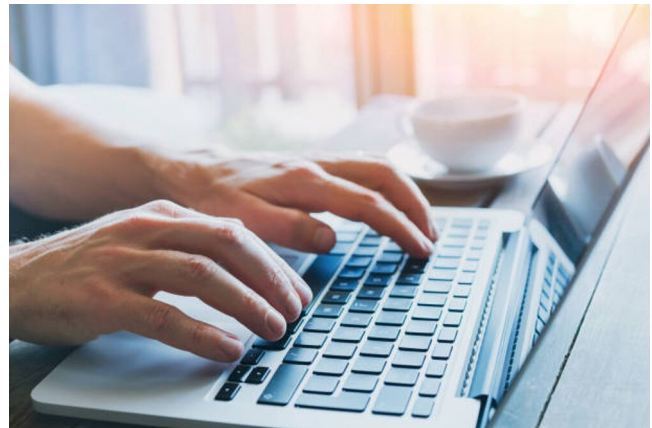
By Saransh Kejriwal

When Sir Tim-Berners Lee envisioned the “hypertext” concept at CERN, which later transformed into the World Wide Web in 1989, he envisioned a system where multiple computers could seamlessly share data and information among each other. His vision for the web was one with open access - anyone could access it without a fee or a need for permission. “Had the technology been proprietary, and in my total control, it would probably not have taken off. You can’t propose that something be a universal space and at the same time keep control of it.”, said Sir Tim-Berners Lee.

When the internet first took roots in the early 21st century, it was seen as a means for organizations to share relevant data and information with the world at large, since individuals did not have the necessary technological capability to design or maintain their own websites at the time. A “Google search” was considered to be as good a source of information as any, since a substantial majority of content available online was owned and backed by reputed entities. However, with an explosion of social media over the past decade, the barrier of the technological expertise needed to create online content was breached, and individuals were given access to do so as well. When people were introduced to the idea of social media, they started with the content they owned - information that they wished to share about themselves online. However, as more and more users started joining the online social networks, these media became an excellent platform for marketing and advertisement of brands, and soon, ideas.

Individuals started diversifying their usage social media platforms to share their opinions about practically anything. Social media was no longer just the platform where

people chose to share light-hearted pictures of their best moments, it became a stage for every individual to advertise their brand of truth. While the internet had completely changed at this point, the perception that “Seeing is believing” did not. Confirmation bias plays a key role here - believing in anything that one found easier to believe. When everyone is given a voice, everyone will have something to say, but it is necessary that an individual can be held accountable for what they say.



Henceforth comes the idea of a pseudonym shield and how it can abet the spread of false information. Once people were given free rein to broadcast anything they deem fit to the masses, and when a large group of people tend to agree with what they say, their opinions could be easily mistook as prevalent facts. This easy-to-gain influence was used by many individuals and entities to create what we now know as “Fake News”, to cultivate and spread false propaganda and misinformation to sway the masses . It also became an excuse to disagree with any piece of information with which one does not tend to agree. In January 2017, US President Donald Trump said, “You’re fake news” to CNN White House Correspondent John Acosta, thus conveniently stonewalling him from any confrontation that lay ahead of him. With information flooding in from a myriad of sources, people were given an unreal choice - to choose the facts that they want.

It is easy to exploit the freedom of speech when one cannot be held accountable for it. Fake profiles across any social media platf-

orm can allow an individual to speak freely, falsely, even scathingly, about anyone or anything they deem fit, and to spread propaganda with which they would like to agree. Rather than use their real identities online, people are free to market such content under falsified profiles, to escape the consequences of doing so. Separation of their real identity and the one(s) they've come up with on cyberspace makes it difficult to track them down. This strategy was used extensively in Myanmar to incite communal hatred against the residing Muslim committee. The perpetrators exploited the outreach of Facebook across the country, to depict how Islam was a "global threat to Buddhism". The campaign spread like wildfire because of the use of sham accounts on Facebook, which made the spread of fake news challenging to contain and trace

This was also highlighted in the wake of the 2019 Indian elections when WhatsApp was linked with the spread of anti-Muslim sentiments. Several social media platforms, most notably WhatsApp, were required to come up with several product level changes to their applications to discourage and curb the spread of fake news..

Evidently, the use of fake profiles and pseudonyms to sway public opinion has been a matter warranting substantial concerns. Therefore, it is essential to look at how this idea is implemented today. Most social media platforms expect their users to provide an email ID, which is used to verify the account of the user. However, this email ID itself is unverified, to begin with. Popular email service providers do not expect users to provide legally binding proofs of their identity while creating their accounts. At best, the email ID would be linked to a mobile number, which does not give the email ID any legitimacy either, given that the mobile number need not be visible on the account. This makes it is easy to create a fake email ID, thereby a fake social media account. In case this account is blocked or removed for wrongful conduct, there is always an open opportunity to switch to another such account.

This method can not only be used to create anonymous profiles but also fake profiles of noteworthy personalities and use their brand to attract an audience towards wrongful propaganda.

Having seen how this ecosystem functions, we must now devise the changes that it needs to curb the fake news menace. A solution to this accountability problem would be to link an email account not only with a contact number but also with a legitimate identity proof of the end-user. This identity proof can vary from region to region, such as the Aadhar in India, and the social security number(SSN) in the US. The name on the identity proof can be used to authenticate the name of the user as mentioned on the account. If an account linked to an identity proof is misused, it can be traced back to the owner of the account, and the individual can be blocked from the service permanently via blacklisting of the identity proof, or be held liable to legal consequences. Furthermore, if possible, it can be used to ascertain the age of the user and to determine if the user is old enough to use the platform. Though platforms like Facebook do warn users of an age restriction, it is difficult to impose because the age can be altered on the email account. Facebook currently has an age restriction at 13 years of age, but this can easily be breached. Similarly, this solution can be used to restrict children from accessing online content that is not suitable for their age group.

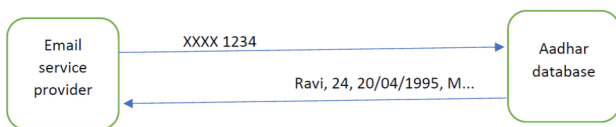
Naturally, this solution is not easy to implement. It requires earnest collaboration among social media platform owners, email service providers, and governments, to be able to design a stable and secure framework to verify an individual's identity. Such a step might also raise concerns about user privacy, and the repercussions of sharing sensitive information on such platforms, especially considering incidents like the Cambridge Analytica data scandal.

To address privacy concerns, one occam's razor tactic would be to design "minimal interfaces"

To explore this idea, let us take individual's example - Ravi, age 24, born on 20th April 1995 would like to create an email account for himself. As the proposed model, the email service is asking Ravi to provide his Aadhar card number (say XXXX 1234) for verification. When Ravi enters his Aadhar card number, the email service would be designed to access the Aadhar interface and provide the Aadhar number to verify two things:

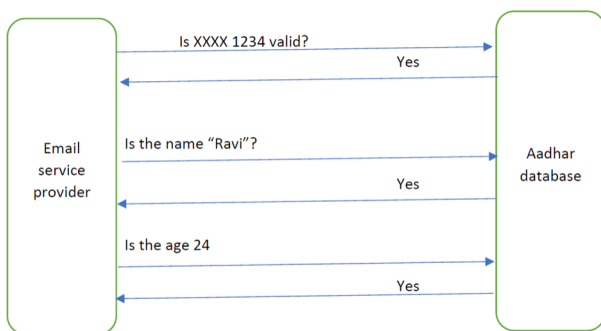
1. The Aadhar number is valid
2. The information provided along with the Aadhar number (Name, age, DOB, sex, etc.) are valid.

Here is an interface that can infringe on Ravi's privacy:

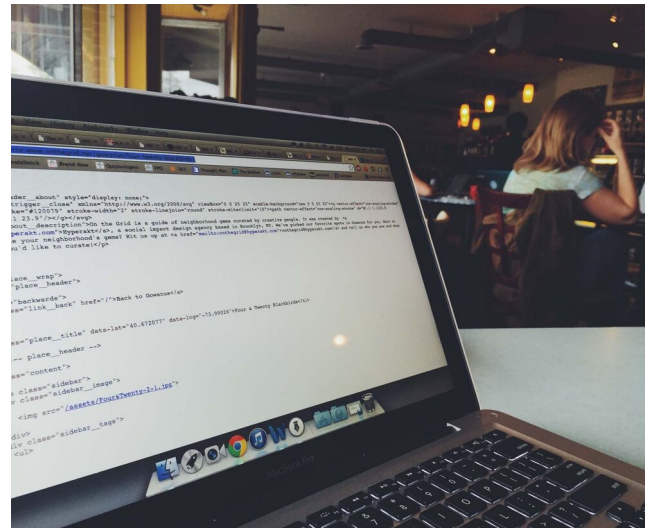


This provides the Email service provider with all the information about Ravi, even the information which he did not intend to share with the service provider.

In contrast, a "minimal interface" would have a model like the one shown below:



This way, the email service provider would have to work with just the information that Ravi has willingly provided to it, without gaining access to any other information about Ravi that is associated with his Aadhar number. For instance, the email service provider would not know Ravi's date of birth if Ravi does not intend to share it on their website. One might also argue that such a step may discourage the growth of small businesses, which require the use of multiple email accounts. However, such a



solution is already implemented by platforms offering Massive Open Online Courses, like Coursera and Udemy - The identity of any instructor on their portal is validated using their national identity proof, failing which they're not allowed to publish any content on the platform. Moreover, the need for multiple accounts to set up a business should be taken as even more reason for accountability and transparency.

In summary, while the internet was envisioned as a means to spread information, the rise of social media had given individuals the ability to create accounts without substantial verification of identity, allowing individuals to be "shielded by a pseudonym". Thus, they can create content online without fear of accountability, which in turn can lead to spread of phenomena like "Fake news", escalating to events of political and economic turmoil.

The proposed solution is to implement an identity verification system for individuals while they're creating email accounts, using identifications recognized by the regional government. The arguments against the idea, while valid and relevant, are such that there can be a technological solution for them, so as to limit the amount of information that is accessible on these platforms. Sir Tim-Berners Lee's initial draft for hypertext was also rejected in 1989, however, had that been enough of an incentive for him to give up on the cause of the internet, we would not have come this far.

Fixing our education system- One step at a time

By Aakash Jaiswal

Recently, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) announced that it would not allow any new Engineering colleges to be set-up from 2020 onward and close down 75 engineering colleges owing to lack of students enrolling in these colleges.

India is home to more than 10,000 Engineering College from where more than 1.5 million Engineering students graduate every year - a statistic, which paints a very rosy picture of the number of Engineering Professionals India. But here's the catch: we are not producing quality engineers.

NASSCOM, the apex body of the Indian IT Industry, has reported that only about 25% of Engineering Graduates are employable. Only 5% of the Engineering graduates have the desired skills to be employed in software and product market, and only 7% can handle core roles. The message is clear - we have failed and continue to fail - millions of engineering students when it comes to equipping them with the necessity, industry demanded skills.

So how did we get here? To answer

this question; we will have to analyze the historical evolution of Engineering as an undergraduate subject. There was a boom in the number of Engineering Colleges across the country owing to meteoric rise of the IT industry - with private colleges starting to mushroom throughout the nation, a massive chunk of colleges failed to update their curriculum over the years, thus becoming hubs of rote learning, instead of logical thinking, hindering development of critical thought process among students. Inadequately skilled engineers now have to settle for jobs that never required an Engineering Degree in the first place.



The recently released draft National Education Policy (NEP) could be a step in the right direction to rectify past missteps. The NEP aims to impart students with essential 21st Century skills like - critical thinking, creativity, scientific temper, communication, collaboration, multilingualism, problem-solving, ethics, social responsibility, and digital literacy. It is heartening to see that, albeit very late - we have today managed to strike a conversation where we have accorded due importance to these essential skills. But here are some fundamental problems that the NEP must have answers to, before getting worked upon:

First - to issue a finely worded, but somewhat unambiguous and subjective policy

and measures is the easiest of the task. The problem lies in adequately defining the same. For example, there must be a clear definition of critical thinking, and methodology to enable schools and colleges measure the critical-thinking abilities in a student. Same would apply to something as broad as scientific temper. Unless you have concrete metrics to measure these skill developments - the directive would be reduced to the same nadir, as the nominal 'Moral Science' subject in our schools today.

Second, who would enable students to develop such skills? The fairly obvious answer is teachers. But let us not forget that the existing teachers have been an integral part of the current education system. Hence one needs to re-train our teachers at all levels. Teachers will have to proactively learn, unlearn, and relearn novel methods of imparting education. This is not an easy task. A considerable number of teachers today would have been set in their ways and might find adopting to the change challenging.

Third, at what level should students be exposed to a changed curriculum and pedagogy? An obvious answer would be - right at the kindergarten level, so that they develop critical thinking abilities right from childhood. But then, what about the existing students in say 8th standard of a school or Engineering 2nd Year? Completely overhauling their curriculum all of a sudden would make it difficult for them to cope up with such overwhelming changes as students too, have been a part of the existing system and are set in their ways. Introducing new teaching curriculum only for students joining a school, or college would mean that there would be individuals with vastly different learning outcomes and thought processes in the same education institute, thus causing great incoherence and disparity.

Fourth - is it right to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach while implementing NEP throughout the nation? In doing so, are we not discounting the varying diversity when it comes to our States in terms of education?

Hence, it is essential to carry out state-wise study and tailor-make provisions, without compromising on the core values of the NEP. Andhra Pradesh has taken the lead in this direction by instituting a committee to usher in reforms in the education sector. This committee aims to undertake extensive study and suggest measures to the state government to improve the education System of the State. This model could be taken up by more states on a pilot basis, the state-committees so formed would identify opportunities to implement NEP on the basis of their findings and suggestions.

An important question to ask now is - the NEP aims to solve problems in the education system which have protracted time frames. It could take anywhere between 10-20 years to see the fruits of NEP provisions. So how do we deal with problems facing the education system today, take short term steps to provide reprieve to students? Here are some steps that should be taken:

First, at the undergraduate level, there exists a vast 'skill gap.' Students are being trained in technologies and skills that are not relevant anymore. This leads to low employability quotients. To tackle this, the government should take the help of the booming and largely successful ed-tech industry for providing students with training-interventions. Companies such as Simplilearn, Great Learning, UpGrad, Faceprep, etc. have been involved in upskilling students in industry demanded skills like full-stack development, RPA, AI-ML, Data Analytics, etc. The government should have a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model, where the companies could be incentivized to help students get up-skilled and certified to improve the latter's employability. These companies could also become training grounds for teachers who can get upskilled and help in imparting the same in schools and colleges. Something similar exists today in the form of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDUGKY). This project could be scaled, and a similar scheme for urban students should be formulated.

Second - there should be an emphasis towards more faculty-industry relationship building. This would give the faculty a first-hand



view of the industry requirements and better equip them drive change in pedagogy and teaching methodology. Faculty should also be encouraged to take up industry consulting assignments (something that is being followed currently in some of the premier Business Schools in the country) to stay abreast with the latest industry trends.

Third, there should be a standardized system of career counseling right at the school level. Students today are expected to take decisions (or expected to take) regarding career choices while they are still in school, without adequate awareness about various careers. Hence, engineering or medicine becomes a natural, safe choice which subsequently creates students who are dissatisfied professionals later. Effective aptitude-career matching could help counselors suggest the right career paths to students.

The NEP has also been criticized for its ambiguity. In spite of all its faults, it is the need of the hour. Extensive consultations across cross-

section of society, from all possible stakeholders, should be undertaken to make the policy more robust and infallible.

During World War 2, Great Britain was reducing its budget outlay from other sectors and allocating more money towards its defense budget. When it came to Education, the members of the House of Commons raised an uproar when it was announced that there had been no decrease in the budget allocated towards education. At this point, the Education Minister rose and defended government's decision by stating that "bridges could be rebuilt, wars could be won, but if they don't properly educate our children today, an entire generation of Britishers would be left helpless in the face of the future".

Not only Right-to-Education but also "Right Education" though unstated anywhere, is implicitly one of Fundamental Rights of every Indian. It is high time to sit up and take corrective measures – so that students can reap the benefits of right-education in the future.

Securing the Unsecured

By Rajarshi Sengupta

The 42nd Constitution Amendment Act added the word "Socialist" to the preamble of the Indian Constitution besides many other sweeping changes. The idea that wealth should be distributed equally amongst the population was included in the preamble to our constitution. The reality of our country, today, couldn't be far from it. A study by Oxfam states that India's top 1% account for 73% of the nation's total wealth. It is in this context; attention needs to be drawn upon one of the most vulnerable section of the society which accounts for about 90% of the workforce and contributes to 50% of the GDP of our country—the unorganized workers (UW).

Who are the Unorganised Workers?

To understand why the unorganized workers are among the most vulnerable and marginalized, we need to first understand who they are, their profiles, and the challenges they face. There is no fixed definition for the unorganized sector, but there are some broad characterizations. They would include, a lack of fixed employee-employer relationship, low levels of unionization, the prevalence of home-based work. The majority of the unorganized workers belong to the agricultural and allied industry. A remarkable feature of the unorganized workforce is that a large proportion of them are employed in the formal sector. This is due to employers favoring contract or casual workers. From the employer's point of view, the benefits are many. The wage costs remain low, fewer benefits have to be provided, and there is much greater flexibility in hiring and firing, which is not possible for permanent workers. Due to these benefits, more and more employers are utilizing contract workers, giving rise to a trend called "informatization of the workforce."

While the workers employed in the formal sector have some degree of security and benefits, at the other end are those people who come every morning to the labor markets hoping to gain employment for the day. The challenges they face are many. Employment is unpredictable and seasonal. Education and specialized skill levels are very low. Since the workers are scattered, it is difficult to form unions. It is because of these vulnerabilities they can be easily exploited. Their skill levels and consequently, income levels remain stagnant because they can't afford to miss work to upskill themselves. Perhaps the biggest challenge in securing the futures of the workers is the low levels of social security coverage among them.



Unorganized and Unsecured

The number of laws provisioning any social security for 90% of our workforce is one, while organized workers have numerous protections for them in the form of Payment of Gratuity Act 1971, Workmen Compensation Act 1923, Maternity Benefit Act 1971, Employees Provident Fund and the Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1952, etc. None of the acts mentioned has any special provisions for unorganized workers. In 2008, the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act was passed. As per the act, Social Security Boards were to be established at the Centre and State level to recommend welfare schemes. The center is responsible for schemes related to life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits, and old age protection. The states can provide

any other welfare benefits apart from the ones covered by center. Also, all unorganized workers have to be registered with the District Administration.

However, criticisms of the act are many due to its limited scope and poor implementation. Looking into the actual text of the legislation, we can find severe flaws in the act. Firstly, Social Security Boards are purely an advisory body. They do not have any power in administrating and monitoring the welfare schemes recommended by them. Secondly, there is no clarity on the funding source for the schemes. The act also restricts the "unorganized sector" to enterprises where the number of workers is less than 10. This ceiling makes no sense as large enterprises are increasing the proportion of unorganized workers in their payroll.

To be fair, there have been numerous schemes introduced by the Central Government targeting various aspects like medical insurance, pension, etc. However, the percentage of unorganized workers covered under these schemes is in the range of 5-6%, as per the Development Commissioner (MSME) report. These figures point to how ineffective the implementation of the schemes has been. Many schemes are suffering from splintering and overlap in scope. Latest in the line of schemes to be offered by Central Government is the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan (PMSYM). It is a contributory pension scheme offering a monthly pension of Rs 3000 to unorganized workers, who are over the age of 60. If the scheme sounds familiar, it is because this is essentially a rebranding of Atal Pension Yojana (APY), launched in 2015, which is also a contributory pension scheme which offers fixed pension between Rs 1000 to Rs 5000 per month.

The reach of APY till now has been dismal. The number of beneficiaries was around 80 lakh, which is negligible compared to the country's unorganized workforce [Ministry of Finance Press release - Jan 2018]. A significant reason for the unpopularity of APY has been that



future pension amount is too low, after adjusting for inflation. PMSYM does not address this concern, and by fixing the pension amount to Rs.3000 further restricts the flexibility currently offered by APY.

Back to Grass-Roots

The sorry state of affairs begets the question of what exactly is going wrong. Why even after numerous schemes, there is barely any change in the situation? Are the schemes providing any meaningful benefits to its target population? Do we even understand what ails India's unorganized sector?

Governments, with their need to retain or increase electoral mandate, are under even more pressure to go for quick-fix solutions rather than conducting a detailed study to understand the needs of the workers. Recent press reports indicate that even the government is not aware of the exact size of India's unorganized workforce. The proportion varies from 85% (Niti Ayog) to 93% (Economic Survey 2018-19). It is about time to admit that we have failed in understanding the multi-faceted challenges the unorganized workers are facing. Any solution that is supposed to impact the grass-root level positively should first understand the grass-root problems.

The word "Socialist", so enshrined in our Constitution Preamble, will continue to remain only a word if we do not take adequate measures to protect and secure the nation's most vulnerable.

The Modi Doctrine and South Asia: A Critical Analysis

By Sujith Sukumaran Nair

On the 26th of May 2014, when Mr. Narendra Modi took oath as the 14th Prime Minister of India, the nation watched with bated breath at history unfolding in front of them. What people witnessed then was a tectonic shift in Indian politics, a portent of the numerous similar events that would soon follow in the global stage. Here was a divisive strongman, who had just ended a six-decade-long inefficient hegemony; a polarising figure hailed as a murderer by some and a messiah by many. One of the most significant contributing factors to this massive sweep was the vision of a powerful India on the global stage that he sold to the masses. The idea of an India that could not just stand up to her foes on the global stage, but also one that could claim her rightful spot as a leading power on the planet.

The past five years since then has witnessed a paradigm shift in India's geopolitical strategies, one that foreign policy experts have termed as the Modi Doctrine. Right-wing commentators have called this new shift as a pursuit of 'enlightened self-interest' in order to realign our interests in today's world. This has thrown up a mixed bag of results.

As they say, all good diplomacy begins close to home. Being the dominant power of South Asia, India has always strived to maintain a stranglehold on our much smaller neighbours. The paternalistic attitude our successive governments have displayed towards Nepal and Bhutan and the big brotherly attitude towards Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bangladesh, all point towards the perceived asymmetry that we maintain in our relationship towards them.

This attitude also happens to be the leading reason for mutual distrust in these relationships. Nevertheless, the current government has taken numerous steps to further our interests in the region, which need to be analysed case by case: -

Nepal

Indo-Nepal relations are inarguably one of the most curious cases in modern geopolitics. Almost entirely dependent on India for all its trade and travel needs, Nepal, along with Bhutan, had the most disproportionate relationship with India, among any sovereign states. With the advent of democracy and the subsequent rise of the mainstream Left, Nepal has sought to exploit its long but treacherous border with China. While the economic benefits it reaped from opening up to China is questionable, this shift has given Nepal a much-needed bargaining chip in its relations with India.



Photo Credit: The Financial Express

It was in this background that the 2015 Blockade emerged as the most significant challenge that Indo-Nepal relations had faced. The tipping point for the crisis came with the adoption of Nepal's 2015 constitution, which though widely accepted within the polity and hill people, was bitterly opposed by the Madhesi community.

As protests erupted throughout the Indo Nepal border areas, India was accused

of siding with the Indian origin Madhesis and imposing an unofficial blockade on Nepal. As the tiny nation battled fuel and food shortages, anti-India sentiments rose exponentially. In what could be termed as a monumental PR disaster for our government, India was soon cast as an oppressive, hegemonic foreign power that sought to subjugate Nepal. Perhaps, the government preoccupied with upcoming Bihar State elections, its response to the fiasco can be best summarised as too little too late. By the time India eased up its border restrictions and normalised ties, an entire generation of Nepalese youth had, perhaps indelibly cast India as a threat to their peace. This has conversely led to a strong pro-China sentiment among the populace, much to India's chagrin.

Verdict: 2/10

Maldives

The Maldives, on the other hand, can be characterised as one of the Modi government's success stories, at least for the time being. Abdulla Yameen government that took power in 2013 took a decisive pro-China turn resulting in Maldives almost slipping away from India's sphere of influence. China poured in billions of dollars' worth of infrastructure projects to woo it (4). This resulted in numerous measures by the government against Indian interests, including unofficial denial of work visas for Indian nationals. Precisely at the point when Indo-Maldivian ties were at its lowest ebb came the Presidential election of 2018 resulting in a decisive victory for Ibrahim Solih, the pro-India opposition leader (5). One of the first decisions taken by him was the suspension of trade deals with China, thus signalling his government's realignment towards us firmly. Thus, the Indian government's unyielding demand of a return to democracy ultimately paid off rich dividends in the form of a friendly government in a strategic neighbour.

Verdict: 8/10

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka can be best described as a mixed bag as far as Indian interests are concerned. Like the Maldives, India was faced with a pro-China Sri Lankan president in Mahinda Rajapaksa. The relations between the two neighbours had hit a low point in 2008 when the Sri Lankan government signed a deal with China to develop the Hambantota port, despite protests from India.

It was against this backdrop that the 2015 Presidential elections which dethroned Rajapaksa and paved the way for Maithripala Sirisena acquired significance. Seen as more pro-India and pro-Tamil, Sirisena was India's blue-eyed boy who in his first year scrapped many Chinese infrastructure projects. The various rumours that spoke of hidden collusion between Indian intelligence agencies and Sirisena lent credence to the theories of aggressive foreign policy adopted by the Modi government.

However, after an initial upswing, the relationship between the two countries have mostly cooled, thanks to the newly developed distrust between Sirisena and his Prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. This distrust has also resulted in a governance gap, which has seen popularity ratings of Rajapaksa soar, much to India's chagrin. With fresh presidential elections scheduled to take place this year, it will be a matter of great interest to see India's moves to ensure a favourable government in Colombo.

Verdict: 7/10

Bangladesh

Since its formation in 1971, Bangladesh has always enjoyed warm ties with India, even in periods of Centre-right governments. However, the rise of Sheikh Hasina and her ANL party has given a massive upswing to Indo-Bangladesh relations. The strength of this relationship becomes evident when we consider the fact

that the open hostility that Indian right-wing outfits show towards Bangladeshi immigrants has not strained the ties between the two nations.

It is thus with great concern that we must look upon the slow march to authoritarianism that Bangladesh is taking. With allegations of widespread rigging and opposition silencing in the recently concluded general elections of 2018, Sheikh Hasina seems to be turning into the very foe that she fought to replace (7). While this may be beneficial for Indian interests in the short run, dictators are never considered a safe bet in geopolitics, and any overt political support for a despot can backfire in the future.

Verdict: 6/10

Pakistan

Indo-Pak relations of the 21st century have mostly followed a wave-like pattern where a conflagration of tensions in the form of terror attacks or border skirmishes leads to a period of heightened tensions. These troughs in relations are generally followed by gradual thaws and later warmth from both sides, leading to brief periods of hope among peace lovers. This pattern has mostly continued under the current government. Coming amid a great thaw, the first foreign policy coup of Modi was the impromptu invitations that he extended to all South Asian heads of state, including Pakistan. This followed up with a quick visit to Lahore by Modi himself in 2015, which took commentators on both sides by surprise. To the world, these unusual events indicated the ushering of an era of peace.

The Pathankot and Uri terror attacks of 2016 put an expected end to this upswing and reset the relationship paradigm back into hostility (9). In retaliation to these attacks, the Modi government launched a series of cross border strikes, popularly termed as surgical strikes. Despite competing claims of its effectiveness, these strikes had all indications of the strain of muscular nationalism that the



Photo Credit: Bigstock

government wished to project. Once again, Pakistan was back in the public eye as the spectre haunting India on her quest for glory.

The period from 2017 to 2019 saw a low level of cooling of tensions, which include notable overtures such as the opening of the Kartarpur corridor. This uneasy calm was quickly shattered by the 2019 Pulwama terror attack, which can be termed as a watershed moment of our modern history. The Balakot airstrikes launched in retaliation brought the nuclear-armed neighbours the closest they have been to war since 1999.

Of particular note is the PR policy adopted by the government after these strikes. While the domestic media largely toed the official line reporting overtly optimistic casualty numbers, the PR mishandling on an international scale saw a squandered opportunity for India. The downing of an Indian fighter jet and the lack of proof for the number of casualties and the Pakistani jet downed by Indian forces, all contributed to erode the country's international standing. However, this was to the least of concerns for the government, which used its domestic PR muscle to effectively milk the issue to gain a clean sweep in the elections that followed. It's a great irony that despite accusing the opposition of accepting covert Pakistani support, it was the BJP who reaped the biggest benefits of our neighbour's misdeeds.

Verdict:4/10

New frontiers- BIMSTEC

With the effective failure of the SAARC to bring about consensus in the region, India has increasingly begun realigning its neighbourhood policy eastwards. BIMSTEC is the best example of this pivotal shift. The credit for elevation and utilisation of BIMSTEC as a significant supranational body goes entirely to the Modi government. Consisting of India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka, BIMSTEC allows us to maintain a significant degree of influence over both South and South East Asia. With large scale infrastructure projects being planned to link the region, this new grouping can play a huge part in India's future prosperity.

Final verdict

Comparing the Modi government's first term with the previous UPA-2 regime would be unfair

since the latter was indelibly marred with rampant corruption and crippling policy paralysis. This slowdown had spilt over into geopolitics too with the second UPA government becoming notorious for numerous foreign policy blunders. In contrast, the Modi regime saw numerous big bang policies and gimmicks, which has undoubtedly brought the nation visibility on an international front. While Modi began his first term by inviting SAARC leaders for his swearing-in, the second swearing ceremony was marked with the presence of BIMSTEC leaders, thus signalling the change of priorities. As India tries to pull off a balancing act walking on a tightrope between the East and the West, it must always remember that it is only the neighbours that stick with you during your worst times.

India's Defence Policy

Prioritising Military Modernisation amidst fund crunch

By Souvik Atha

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her maiden budget on 5th July 2019, kept the total budget allocation of 4,31,001 crore rupees (\$61.96 billion) to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), unchanged as compared to the interim budget presented on 1st February 2019, thereby provoking extensive debates on whether such a step will harm the modernization aspirations of the Indian armed forces. The allocated budget to the MoD in the fiscal year (FY) 2019-20 saw a modest 6% increase over the actual expenditure of FY 2018-19. Compared to 2.28% of GDP or 17% of government spending in FY 2014-15, defence spending for FY 2019-20 is only 2.04% of GDP or about 15.5% of government spending. The most important decision which the finance minister announced was the exemption of defence procurement from basic customs duty in line with the nation's military modernisation goals. However, the expenditure on military pensioners of INR 1,21,080 crore rupees is still taking away a considerable chunk of the defence spending, thereby inhibiting investment in defence research and the government's Make in India aspirations towards self-sufficiency. The government has also extended the term of the 15th Finance Commission till 30th November 2019, to suggest allocation of non-lapseable funds as well as explore separate mechanisms for funding of defence and internal security and whether materialisation of such an infrastructure is feasible.

Bureaucratic prevarication, risk aversion, frequent changes in qualitative requirements by the Army, and occasional corruption charges exacerbates the problem of inadequate funds. While the pride of the Indian forces had always ridden in the back of the valiant soldiers who

keep vigil at the borders, in 2017, when BSF soldier Tej Bahadur Yadav took to social media to expose the appalling quality of food supplied to them, it opened up a whole can of worms. The difference between the treatment of the Army and the BSF came to the forefront, instilling debates on possible corruption, the ill-treatment of India's first line of defence and the neglect which these hardworking soldiers routinely face.



Picture credit: India Today

While the differential treatment and sub-standard quality of food became a subject of vigorous discussion, the apparent fund crunch in our defence budget also gained ground. The current budgetary situation of the armed forces is desperately calls for cost-cutting measures, with the Indian Army initiating a restructuring exercise to cut down personnel count by 100,000 soldiers and controlling its revenue budget. This decision goes by the current trend of forming lean and mean military units, equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and armor to reduce chances of battle casualties as well as boost military morale.

Under Xi Jinping, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has already reduced their soldier count by 300,000 and has reinvested the surplus funds into developing their air force and navy, build ground support establishments as well as restructuring the military commands for efficient communication between the divisions of the military. To keep the regional balance and protect her diplomatic interests, India also needs to implement methodologies

of modern warfare at the earliest. With separate headquarters, there has been a history of bickering between the three pillars of Indian defence, leading to inefficient communication and a need for self-sufficiency in every department to avoid inter-force reliance.

However, the Indian defence policy follows the mandate of protection and not aggression. This requires modern warfare methods of flash attack techniques requiring a synchronized attack by all three forces to destroy enemy assets leaving it with no second-strike capability. This necessity has led to the formation of the "joint doctrine" in 2018 which envisions improved synergies between the army, air force and navy and increased inter-forces co-ordination. India urgently needs a chief of defence staff in order to streamline inter forces logistics, procurement, planning, training as well as act as a single point of contact to the government for advise on military matters.

India's defence policy has to accommodate threats from external powers as well as internal threats from insurgencies. This leads to challenging situations where protecting the borders of the country has clashed with protecting the interests of the citizens. With widespread protests against the abuse of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1948, in Northeast India and Kashmir, the government is in a predicament. The act is critical in maintaining peace and curb tension in disturbed areas. The government has repealed AFSPA from three of the nine districts in Arunachal Pradesh last April and started investigations on the rest to test the validity of the "disturbed area" designation till 30th September 2019. In March, last year, AFSPA was entirely removed from the state of Meghalaya following an improvement in the security situation. However, the act would remain in effect in areas bordering Myanmar. External threats from Pakistan and China and several insurgencies inside the country calls for Indian defence policy to be ready for fighting wars on two and a half fronts.

The steady decline in the number of fighter jets in the air-force which now operates effectively only 31 squadrons against a sanctioned strength of 42 and troops armed with last generation weaponry, upgradation is of the utmost urgency. The Navy is the only arm which has achieved significant autonomy in designing and building warships, submarines as well as artillery guns. Even then the government has released a 2000-million-dollar tender for critical torpedoes for the Naval submarines. The Navy is also set to procure a military satellite from ISRO, named GSAT 7R, worth 1598 crore rupees to improve communications between its warships, aircraft and shore-based units.

Investing heavily in Make in India initiative, the government should push for indigenous weaponry towards achieving military self-sufficiency, a security guarantee in case of a conflict of interest, and a capability to export armaments. The indigenously developed Brahmos missiles in collaboration with Russia, Sukhoi Su-30MKI produced under license by HAL, successful induction of the indigenously developed Tejas aircraft has re-established faith in the Indian defence manufacturing. Numerous African countries have already shown interest in the Light Combat Helicopters (LCH) produced by HAL due to its sleek fuselage, low flying capabilities and abilities to take off and land in the Siachen Glacier. However, the Airforce has still expressed concerns about meeting its squadron strength with the retirement of the Mirage 2000s. Lockheed Martin has offered to transfer technology if the Indian government procures 114 F-21s, but given that they are last generation fighters, its feasibility has come under questioning.

India is looking towards acquiring cutting-edge military technology as well as improving her military ties with the USA, Australia and Japan to curb the rising presence of China in the Indian and the Pacific Ocean with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. With the signing of the LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement), COMCASA

(Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) and the pending signing of BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation), India- US ties have deepened. LEMOA ensures that both India and US forces can opt for logistical support, like refuelling and replenishment facilities by ironing out the tedious payment processes, but restricts setting up bases in each other's territory.

However, LEMOA has attracted criticism from experts owing to the fickle nature of US politics. COMCASA is a crucial agreement for India as this allows the US to transfer heavily-coded communication systems and supporting infrastructure which can integrate US- made equipment and features. This agreement will enable India to achieve increased interoperability between militaries and also buy high-end technology from the US. Although COMCASA promises to deliver a whole platter of technologies, military communication during conflict, and a secure communication platform, military strategists are worried that implementation of US-made communication systems may create hiccups for the Indian military, since a majority of Indian defence systems are of Russian-origin. Being elevated to the highest tier of the Strategic Trade Authorisation (STA-1) by the US has also proven to be helpful for India's modernisation and procurement aspirations.

The rising number of technologically enhanced weapons and incidents of conflict spreading into the cyberspace, the whole communications network of a country can be instantly compromised, leading to widespread anarchy, either through cyber-attacks or through satellite induced jamming. With the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) aiming to recognise space as a new domain of warfare, the requirements of setting up the Defence Space Agency, Defence Cyber Agency and the Special Operations Directorate have been brought back into the government's agenda, with China heavily investing in all the three domains already. This March, the successful testing of an ASAT missile in lower earth orbit cemented India's position as a venerable space power. The rising cyber-attacks on intelligence agencies and ransomware attacks in recent years also calls for improved defence in the cyberspace sector to protect state secrets and civilian interests.

To Conclude, even in the light of a tighter budget, the vagaries of geopolitical scenarios, and the continuing trade war between the USA and China, India's military modernisation deserves highest priority. Even with bilateral treaties and memorandums of understanding, it is necessary that the Indian defence policy strives towards self- sufficiency and higher operational efficiency to remain militarily relevant in global politics.



INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

By Ujjwal Sinha

Since the economic reforms of 1991, India has emerged as one of the largest economies in the world. With the centre of gravity of world economy shifting towards Asia, the 21st century is increasingly being called the Asian century. India has increasingly flexed its muscles on the global stage and was instrumental in creation of forums and bodies like G-20, BRICS, BRICS Bank, BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), Asian Development Bank (ADB). Memberships of Elite groups like Australia Group, MTCR (Missile technology control regime), and Wassenaar arrangement has further added to India's stature as a responsible and growing nuclear power in the world stage. However, 21st century apart from bringing a slew of opportunities also brings with itself some important challenges which include the following.

Terrorism emanating from our neighbours

For decades India has been a victim of cross border terrorism emanating out of Pakistan. According to a data released by the Government of India, since 2005, terror attacks have claimed more than 1000 civilian lives in India in addition to leaving thousands injured. India faces the multi-dimensional problems that includes those emanating from across the border and internal issues like Maoists which further compounds our internal security problem. Intelligence reports of these home-grown insurgents having relations with cross border terrorist groups is another great cause of worry.

Our internal security and defence policy have seen a paradigm shift since the new government took power in 2014. India today no longer shies away from using its military muscle as was evident from the surgical strikes on terrorist groups operating in Myanmar or the strikes into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir after Uri attacks or even the most recent Balakot airstrikes undertaken in response to the deadly attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama by terrorists on 14 February 2019. Furthermore, the skilful use of diplomacy employed by the government ensured that the world opinion was largely in favour of India post these military actions.



Relations with neighbouring countries

In order to reset India's sagging relations with its neighbours, Indian government implemented an ACT EAST policy and the first foreign visit undertaken by the Prime minister was to the neighbouring Bhutan which has been the nation friendliest towards India.

India's massive mobilisation of aid to Nepal in the aftermath of a massive earthquake in April 2015 won India a tremendous amount

of goodwill but this was proved short-lived. The political parties resolved to implement a constitution that was perceived against the plain dwelling Madhesi community. India's support for Madhesi community combined with its action of imposing an unofficial blockade choking the supply of essential goods into Nepal like petroleum, food, medical supplies had a debilitating impact on its economy and turned the public mood against India.

Relations with Maldives too took a turn for the worse when the erstwhile Abdullah Yameen government took a decisive Pro China turn and jeopardised Indian investments in the region. Indian Prime Minister cancelled a scheduled trip to Male in march 2015 over treatment of pro Indian former president Mohammad Nasheed, Indian infrastructure behemoth GMR had been unceremoniously shunted out of an airport development project and Maldives also stopped issuing work visas and visa renewals to Indians legally working in Maldives. The matters came to its head when Maldives asked India to withdraw its helicopters and personnel from the archipelago and things only improved after election of president Ibrahim Mohammad Solih.

On a brighter note, relations with Bangladesh saw a decisive turn for the better with the implementation of the landmark Land Boundary Agreement between two countries, a particularly thorny issue came to an amicable end. Bangladesh on its part has cracked down hard on all anti India terror groups operating out of its soil. The continued Bangladeshi cooperation is crucial for the security and stability of the Indian Subcontinent. A lot however needs to be done to ensure to change India's perception of a bullying big brother in its neighbourhood in general, particularly in Nepal with whom we have enjoyed years of excellent relations.

Unsolved border issues with China

Even though China happens to be one of our largest trading partners sharing a largely peace-



Photo Credit: Getty Images

ful border with us, the boundary dispute with them have eluded a solution despite several rounds of meetings.

The bone of contention between India and China has been the McMahon line which China rejects. Further, China lays claims on the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Ladakh, which has not helped matters. The massive Chinese thrust on building infrastructure on its border areas is something which is viewed with much suspicion in India. China also happens to be India's biggest rival on the world stage. In addition to these, China's role in providing Pakistan with sophisticated weaponry and manufacture of nuclear weapons is well documented. China's recent intrusion into Doklam, its role in preventing Indian entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group as well as its role in putting a technical hold on designating Maulana Masood Azhar as a global terrorist by UN has made Chinese intentions of bogging down and frustrating India clear. China also displayed its insensitivity towards India's territorial integrity by planning CPEC as part of Belt and Road initiative which passes through Indian territory currently occupied by Pakistan. Thus, foreign policy on China requires a well-crafted approach, one in which we can expand avenues of cooperation with the Chinese, which includes cooperation on issues of common interest in international forums, but also stand our ground firmly on issues that affect our national interest and resist any intrusions on our territory.

Instability & emerging power equations in West Asia

West Asia is one of the most the most important regions in the world with respect to our energy security and economic well-being. West Asian countries not only supply India with Oil and gas but are also home to millions of Indians who send billions of dollars as foreign remittances back home. This is not only a huge source of foreign currency but also crucial for the economies of many southern states like Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka. According to world bank report, India was the largest recipient of Foreign remittances in the year 2018 with the Indian diaspora sending a whopping \$80 billion back home. However, this region has also been one of the most dangerous regions of the world marred by numerous conflicts, most prominent among them being conflict in Syria and Yemen. Operation *Raahat* where scores of citizens of Indian and other nationalities were safely evacuated by the Indian navy is still fresh in our minds. Recently emerging rivalry and enmity between Iran and Saudi Arabia further complicates situation in an already tensed part of the world and it is imperative for India to avoid taking sides in the ongoing rivalry and maintain cordial relations with each of these powers.

On a brighter note, relations with UAE has seen an improvement. Prime minister has succeeded in building good relations with the crown prince of UAE and the fact that India has succeeded in getting the accused of Augusta Westland scam Christian Michel deported to India is a very strong signal that UAE can no longer be counted as a safe haven for fugitives wanted by India.

Unilateralism of the USA

Relations with the USA especially in the field of military and strategic cooperation has touched new heights especially since Donald Trump took over the presidency with India becoming the 37th member to be granted STA-1 authorisation which marks a significant step towards designating India as a major Non-NATO

US ally. Trade relations has however taken a hit. It started with unilateral imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminium (25% on steel and 10% on aluminium) products by the American side on many countries including India. India took a mature stance of keeping negotiation channels open and deferring retaliatory tariffs for over one year while lobbying to secure an exemption. However, ending benefits to Indian exporters under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) which withdrew benefits to the tune of \$1.5 billion to the Indian exporters came as a proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. This resulted in India imposing modest retaliatory tariffs on 28 US products. The tariffs amount to more than \$200 million on exports worth \$1.4 billion.

Apart from this American pressure on India to toe its line and stop oil imports from Iran and legislations like CAATSA (Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) which targeted Indian purchase of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia also presents a significant challenge to the policy makers. This acquires even more significance in the light of facts that India has always chosen to pursue an independent foreign policy aimed towards securing India's interests and economic development since independence.

It can be argued that the steps taken by the current government has without a doubt added a new sense of direction and dynamism to the Indian foreign policy. Foreign Direct Investments in India amounted to \$193 Billion during the NDA government's first term which was 50% more than the preceding five years. For the first time India started sourcing crude and liquefied natural gas from the USA. At the same time, challenges have also multiplied manifold and on many frontiers, causing India to walk on a diplomatic knife edge which requires a fine calibration of its policies and strategies to ensure that Indian foreign policy remains geared up to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

A Critical Evaluation of the Public Distribution System in India

By Rhea Sharma

The Public Distribution System (PDS), introduced in the immediate years after Independence, was envisioned as a universal program aimed at addressing the problems of frequent famines, food scarcity, shortages and nutritional deficiency by supplying essential commodities such as wheat, rice, kerosene, sugar at subsidized rates to the poor. However, the system had its drawbacks. In June 1997, the Government of India launched a more focused Targeted PDS (TPDS). This delivery mechanism aimed to cater to poor households of India, based on the recommendations from the Planning Commission. It envisaged providing approximately six crore poor families with 72 lakh tonnes of ration subsidies annually. However, the TPDS failed to tackle the problem of inclusion of ineligible beneficiaries, and of the estimated 45.41 million Below Poverty Line (BPL) households, (March 2000), it could only cover 57% BPL families. Moreover, leakages¹ and diversions reflected the failure of the implementation of the governmental scheme. For example, in 2003-04, out of the 14.07 million tonnes of food grains intended for the BPL households, 8.14 million tonnes of food never reached the rightful beneficiaries. The TPDS also demonstrates an "error of inclusion" wherein grains were distributed to unintended beneficiaries (APL households) leading to high implicit delivery costs as the Government had to issue 2.4 kg of subsidized grains for every kilogram of food grain.

Current Scenario

The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) was introduced to tackle the inefficiencies of the TPDS scheme, and it aimed to bring about a paradigm shift in the approach to PDS. It also identified Right to Food as an essential

component of the fundamental Right to Life. Currently, NFSA covers 50% of the urban population and 75% of the rural population by recategorizing the beneficiaries as Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and priority households. Under this scheme, the priority and AAY households are entitled to 5kg of grains per person/month and 35kg per household/month respectively as opposed to the 35 kgs per beneficiary/month under the TPDS.



The NFSA also brought about significant focus in the TPDS by targeting pregnant women and lactating mothers, and children between 6 months to 14 years through ICDS2 and MDM3 schemes. In addition to this, NFSA also introduced the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme for transfer of cash, instead of food entitlements into the account of beneficiaries.

Problem Statement

While the NFSA is acknowledged as a substantial improvement over the previous Public Distribution Systems, its implementation is subject to widespread criticism. Though, the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme under NFSA seemed like a viable alternative to prevent leakages from the TPDS, Khera(2016) reported that around 67% of the surveyed people preferred food over cash due to allowance being used for non-food purposes, limited bank access in rural areas, lack of adjustment for inflation and delay in cash transfers.

The NFSA has also been criticized on the grounds that it fails to incorporate micro-nutrients and vitamins in the food quota, leading to nutritional deficiencies. Moreover, the significant differences between the subsidized cost of grains (Rs 3/kg for rice, and Rs 2/kg for wheat) and the market prices (Rs 30/kg for rice and Rs 25/kg for wheat), also known as the dual pricing system has tempted the FPS4 owners to sell food grains in the open market instead. Additionally, widespread leakages from the distribution channel, individual inclusion criteria of states, and mandatory possession of Aadhar Card to avail the ration have contributed to NFSA's failure to solve the error of wrongful inclusion. Lastly, the fact that 20.7% of non-poor possess BPL/AAY cards meant for the poor and 19.1% of the poor don't even possess a ration card point towards the inefficiencies in implementation of an otherwise visionary policy.

This was also highlighted in the wake of the 2019 Indian elections when WhatsApp was linked with the spread of anti-Muslim sentiments. Several social media platforms, most notably WhatsApp, were required to come up with several product level changes to their applications to discourage and curb the spread of fake news..

Recommendations for Improvements and Alternatives

The need of the hour is to improve the implementation of the PDS under the NFSA as it is a safety net for the poor, by bringing about a paradigm shift in its execution. Firstly, an online grievance redressal portal should be incorporated to keep a track of complaints filed by the beneficiaries which can be addressed in real-time. This can later be extended to keep track of instances of misappropriation of ration and leakages. Secondly, to avoid leakages by the FPS owners who end up selling the food grains meant for the ration shops in the open market, a comprehensive approach needs to be undertaken wherein the state government will only transfer the subsidy to the FPS owner after verifying that the ration has been transferred to the rightful beneficiary.

Thirdly, there should be selective allocation of subsidies by analyzing the demand and supply requirements in the concerned area, and the government should only provide for the deficit in the food grains. Lastly, the Government should engage professional supply chain logistics managers to coordinate the logistics of all the aspects of the Public Distribution System to maximize value for the end user and adopt Materials Flow Cost Accounting (MFCA) techniques to reduce costs due to wastages and leakages.



Nudging India: Using Behavioural Insights to Enhance Public Policy

By Anusha Sinha

In 2017, Richard Thaler, an economist, won the Nobel Prize for his work on something incredibly complex and yet highly intuitive - the idea that human beings do not always behave rationally. He theorized that individuals are instead subject to numerous biases and use the information at hand to pick choices. Further, even the way that choices are presented can affect decision-making.

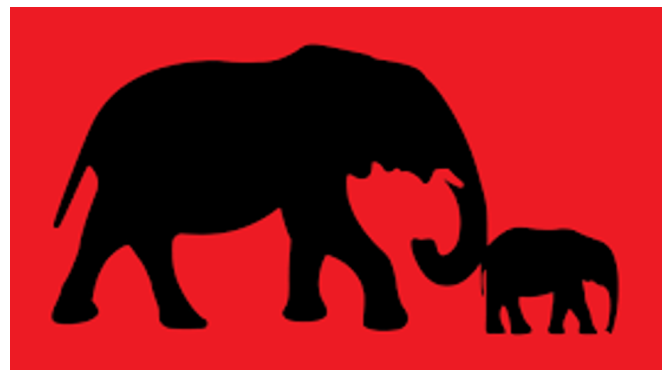
Initially, his work met with resistance from more traditional economists who had built their theories around the idea of the Homo Economicus, or the rational man. Gradually, Thaler's ideas gained more acceptance and along with Daniel Kahneman and Dan Ariely's work, have popularized the related field of study known as behavioural economics. Although Thaler's work brought about a radical change in how economists, marketers, and policymakers viewed their work, the fundamental ideas presented in his research had some precedents. In 1759 Adam Smith argued in his work 'The Theory of Moral Sentiments' that our decisions and actions are guided by our values and psychology more so than reason in real-life situations.

While some of the behaviours that irrational thinking might lead to are relatively harmless, these same irrationalities can also lead to more severe consequences. For example, individuals often put-off important decisions like opting for pension plans or filing tax due to the cognitive load involved. However, simple changes like opt-in being the default for pension or pre-filled tax forms were seen to increase compliance. As Thaler's ideas gained traction, governments set up 'nudge units' which use behavioural insights to improve public policies. Many challenges faced by public policymakers like climate change or rising costs of health infrastructure can be addressed by nudges which change the behaviour of individual actors, thus benefiting society as a whole.

Applying Nudge Theory in Public Policy

One such team is The World Bank's behavioural sciences team, The Mind, Behaviour, and Development Unit (eMBeD). Its objective is to guide governments in creating and executing 'behaviourally informed policy.' Their success stories include an increase in Peruvian students' growth mindset through positive messaging and increased financial literacy in Tanzania through text messages.

eMBeD's counterpart in the UK is the Cabinet Office's Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) which conducts experiments to collect evidence on the impact of behavioural interventions. The team's past projects have included an attempt to understand the effectiveness of the Get Out the Vote campaign in 2005 and the result of recognition for charitable donations. David Halpern, the CEO of the BIT, found that in India, workers save more when they were paid in two installments, preferably in envelopes with pictures of their children on it. This tactic would probably make the worker think twice before withdrawing money for frivolous expenses and keep the needs of their children at top-of-mind.



Why does India need nudging?

The appeal of nudge units lies in the fact that these interventions are cost-effective and do not require additional resources, but instead draw their power from a fundamental paradigm shift in the way policymakers view human behaviour. In India, where state intervention is vital, and the resource-starved state machinery faces numerous challenges in addressing the needs of the population, nudge units could help optimize the impact of public policies if used effectively.

The government of India (henceforth GOI) has recognized the relevance of nudge theory in the latest Economic Survey released on 4 July 2019. Its chapter on 'Policy for Homo Sapiens..' describes how the government has used behavioural insights in the implementation of schemes like Swacch Bharat Abhiyan and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao. Also, it makes a strong case for setting up a nudge unit in the NITIAayog. However, promises of a nudge unit in India were first made way back in 2016, perhaps in response to similar teams in the UK, the US, Singapore, and Australia. Three years hence, it is high time that the government executes the idea in a sustainable and scalable manner.

How should India implement nudge theory?

HAs nudge units are highly experimental, starting small would be advisable. Zeina Afif, a social scientist, writing for the World Bank Group, advises nudge units staffed with two to four members to demonstrate the impact of interventions on select policies in a short trial period. A pilot would help understand how to scale up operations and bring diverse stakeholders on board. In the economic survey, the CEA stressed the importance of understanding the social and cultural norms governing India. In a diverse country like India, an agile and adaptable network of nudge units across ministries and levels of government would be better placed to suggest nudges than a centralized body. GOI could take a cue from the Netherlands in this regard, where each ministry has its behavioural team, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs merely provides oversight.

What can go wrong?

An underlying assumption in nudge theory is that the citizen does not understand what is best for her and hence the government must exercise its power in prodding her towards goals that are beneficial for her and the larger society. However, this means that the government has the power to restrict individual freedoms to serve the greater common good. Nudge units place great importance in the power of outthinking the irrationality presented by everyday human behaviours.



However, it would be dangerous to assume that all negative actions can be accounted for and reduced by the power of a nudge; nudge theory can never be a panacea for everything that is wrong with society. Moreover, it cannot be a replacement for shoddily-designed public policies and can only be used to augment the impact of well thought out policies.

Besides, policymakers themselves might be subject to similar biases, being no different from citizens in that respect. One way to curtail the effects of no oversight over the key decision-makers would be to decentralise authority, giving nudge units the power to develop policies at a local level.

Conclusion

In summary, the question is not whether India needs a nudge unit, but rather how and where to implement one. It is not too late to implement nudge theory, and the Indian nudge unit can learn from the successes and failures of similar teams. In the great tradition of naming public policies after localized concepts in India, the nudge unit could be named Prabhaav, a Hindi word which translates to influence. Through a combination of an understanding of the Indian people and human behaviour, Prabhaav units could be a potent enabler of change!

Agricultural Success- Why the Chinese Whispers are yet to reach Indian ears

By Devagya Jha

Both India and China have had economies relying excessively on agrarian culture with the agricultural sector providing the backbone for industrial growth, food supplies, raw materials, labour, and foreign exchange through imports and exports. The similarities do not end there. The countries have similar population levels, as studies of demographics of the two nations suggest, similarly colonial history, similar struggles against famines in the past, similar food consumption habits, and similar cultivable land. The report brought to light by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister presents a grave concern. The traditional excuses for the lack of production in India do not hold up when compared to China- in terms of quantity of agricultural land (161 million hectares vs. 130 million hectares), irrigated land (55.8 million hectares vs. 54.5 million hectares), average farm size (1.4 hectares vs. 0.4 hectares) and farm mechanization (15.7 tractors per 1000 hectares vs. 7 tractors per 1000 hectares). Other arguments notwithstanding, there is ample reason to believe that comparative land holdings would be taking a turn for the worse given India has continued with the even-handed inheritance laws while the Chinese shifted focus towards joint management of agricultural land.

This naturally leads to the growth charts which present a contrasting picture- the agriculture sector of India has shown an average growth of 2.5% per annum as compared to 3.5-5 percent exhibited by China over the past 15 years. Just to put things in perspective, while Chinese official statistics suggested that the grain production in the country had crossed the 600 million tons mark in 2013, India took pride

in record production of 277.5 million tonnes in a year for 2017 and as of 2018-19 has only reached 283.4 million tonnes. Analysis of horticultural production further deepens the divide. Going back to 1980, both nations had been neck and neck in the production of fruits and vegetables with India at 55 million tonnes and China at 60 million tonnes. Jumping forth a couple of decades, the numbers swing massively in favour of China with a production of 450 million tonnes while India straggled behind at 135.



The *prima facie* reasons for India falling behind in the race of agricultural prosperity are two-fold, namely, research seeing fruition through technological development, and allowing agriculture to be brought within the folds of private sector investments, and secondly, recognising its natural advantages and capitalising on the same

Scientific Research: Where India failed & China Sailed

The effect of research being put to effect in China is palpable given that about two third of the cotton produced is BT cotton and its entire paddy is of modern variety, something that has facilitated more than 2 million hectares of land to now be used for agricultural diversification.

China received 1044 GM Plants applications in 1997-2002 and the same number in 2016 shot up to more than 2000 in 2016 alone. The only number supporting India's claim in research is the number of scientists on the payroll that it had at the turn of the millennium- the highest in the world- at 30,000 and counting. Any outstanding results arising therefrom are yet to be witnessed especially when it comes riding on the back of the claim India spending almost the same amount on Agricultural research as China does. This number, unfortunately, only seeks to aggravate the apprehension since the quantity is unable to justify the dismal quality of research. The other side of the coin only a mockery of the gravity of this situation- the amount spent on research is just 0.6-0/7% of the GDP of the nation. While the corresponding percentage for China stands at an inconspicuous 2.1%, looks are deceiving- the GDP of China happens to be 4 times that of India.

The issue can be viewed through the lens of government assistance too. Government assistance in agriculture in India has been mainly through subsidies and not investments which are against market reforms, against resource efficiency, and for market distortions. Hence, when going equity vs efficiency, it is clear which side Indian Government favours. Chinese figures depict only 5% of its agricultural investment being in the form of subsidies.

Further, China seems to have adopted different approach compared to India in hiring research staff with a majority of them being hired on contractual basis and the research centers are encouraged to engage in joint ventures with private entities for formulating commercial plans for the developed products. The contracts find mention of clauses suggesting performance-based raises in funding implying accountability through delivery. India, on the other hand, sees the government trying to defend the production of endosulfan, a pesticide, in 2015 since it allows for increased crop production, knowing that the substance had been banned by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in 2011 based on health issues and pollution caused therefrom.



Liberalised Farm Policy

China, with focus on efficiency without undermining equity, has been able to reach self-sufficiency with leveraging competitive advantages. Following on the footsteps of David Ricardo's principle of comparative advantage, China has realised which crops it can more efficiently produce in comparison to other nations and works towards enhancing production of the same. Professor Huang Jikun takes soybean as an example. In the 1990s, China imported no soybean at all despite the lack of domestic suitability for its cultivation. In contrast, by 2005 the country imported 26 million tonnes of the legume, 11 million tonnes more than it produced locally. "The demand for soybean is growing but rather than meet it domestically we have realised it is better to import it. We should focus on what we are most suited to producing instead," Professor Huang concludes. Indian farmers, to the contrary, have cast their lots with the same crops over the years and it's time the government steps in to provide alternate crops with high-yielding varieties added to the mix to enhance production.

These, in addition to China willing to cast its lot with joint management of land, as herein-above mentioned, have been adopted to adapt themselves to changing times.

The Future: Impact of WTO Decisions

The Panel Report by the WTO in February of this year could turn out to be a blessing in disguise for Indian agriculture. Grain subsidies being viewed unfavourably by the body in pursuit of its goal of free trade and open markets, although the argument made by China may have sound logical backing- that measurement of subsidies (Aggregate measurement of support) be done through the amount actually procured by the State instead of total production, it lacks support from precedents given the Appellate Body has clarified the issue in the past. Given that the calculation for grain subsidies provided by both China as well as India is similar, it is highly likely that India would be facing a similar restrictive order on the subsidies that it offers to the farmers. Grave as the situation is, the opportunity on offer to take away the crutches which exist in form of subsidies, farm-loan waivers, etc. for the farmers is too good to let by. This provides an added impetus to the government to make farmers financially independent and the current trends of public-private partnership, if it sees the light of day in agriculture, would seek to greatly benefit the farmers specifically, and the economy as a whole. The investments though, as recommended by IFPRI, need to be moulded to facilitate quality research instead of getting more scientists on the payroll. While the immediate implementation of such a decision by the WTO would have drastic implications, the future paints a rosier picture.

The need of the hour for India seems to be following on the same path as was taken by China- research centers need to shift gears from the typical public sector complacency to private sector efficiency, and the crops and crop varieties grown by the farmers need a revolution of their own by laying a strong foundation in farmers' education. Identification of the crops which suit the climates and soil types and working towards improving their production and would only seek to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, small, and marginal farmers, and according to a study commissioned by the Tata Trusts and the Copenhagen Consensus,

would imply improved incomes, increased yields, and trimming down loss of crop. All of these might appear a lot, but a problem of plenty is something that the Indian farmer has never had to suffer from. It's time the day came.



Legitimacy: An Unfinished Project

By Aditya Prakash

The issue concerning this article is the legitimacy of any sitting government as is perceived by the people when a nation like India stands against opportunities of demographic dividend. Are we equipped enough with policies to respond to these challenges amidst the loud claims of becoming a \$5Tn economy? Do national policy uncertainties erode government's legitimacy and thus their combating power or will that invisible hand do it alright for us?

Legitimacy: An unfinished project

In early 1970s, German sociologist Jurgen Habermas postulated from his experiences of 1930 crash, World Wars and related politico-economic changes that while late-capitalist nations had learnt from their mistakes, so had the citizens. Each entity learnt the value of a welfare-state democracy and kept government on its toes. So, while the government, in order to maintain its legitimacy, had to demonstrate a sympathy for corporates, nation-building or not, it also had to appease the citizenry through typical welfare-state measures. If, through any misstep, government flirts with economic crisis, it inadvertently invites itself for a social crisis as a spill over.

In context of economic problems that India faces, Habermas' assertion rings starkly true. Take the case of our demographic dividend (DD). India's DD is sitting on an upper cusp of 1.7, which is the population-ratio of Working Age to Non-Working Age and which is about to remain at its peak for a few coming decades. This statistic prepares us for a high value of sustained growth despite us starting late as compared to countries like: China, Korea, Japan etc.

The only bottleneck is: are our policies sharp enough to utilize this to the maximum?

News reports:

- 45-year peaking of unemployment.
- An ex-CM expressed that Southern states finance the former's aspirations, upon seeing the devolution formula used by the 15th Finance Commission. The Southern ones had been rather penalized for posting more growth and being able to control fertility rates through policy measures.
- Skewed realization of tax with respect to national potential. Only 17% contribute against probable 53%.



Do these reports increase legitimacy of the government or do they erode it? A prudent analysis would suggest the latter. Economist Albert Hirschman would have said about this, "...if the Government tries to redistribute income without guaranteeing effective deliveries of the public services, the middle class starts 'exiting the state'". This state-exiting delegitimises the government and can even render the most effective policy a dead-wood. And so, if this prize of a demographic dividend is not harnessed, we, as a nation, are likely to witness India's descent into a social chaos, as Habermas postulated. What had to be a boon will be an eternal bane to last us a few generations if not more.

A Bearable Lightness of Being

The state of policy-making, as the Economic Survey 2019 suggests, has actually improved and the uncertainty that comes along with it is palpably in decline. An increase in economic policy uncertainty dampens investment growth in India for about five quarters. Add to it that India has actually decreased its policy uncertainty when compared to its Western counterparts in the last five years.

What is interesting to note is that this toeing the middle line of legitimacy is easier said than done. However, these facts shall aid us in making use of our edgy demographic dividend:

- India is set to witness a sharp slowdown in population growth in the next two decades.
- Peninsular states have a higher edge of usable resources for working age population of the hinterland states in India. Working-age population will grow by roughly 9.7mn per year during 2021-31 and 4.2mn per year in 2031-41.
- The continued resolution of the twin balance sheet problem following implementation of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 and recapitalization of banks helped to promote investment. Capital investment fosters job creation as production of capital goods, research & development and supply chains generate jobs
- Forward guidance, consistency of actual policy with forward guidance, and quality assurance certification of processes in Government departments can help to reduce economic policy uncertainty.



AYUSH

Government Funded Pseudoscience

By Praphull Kabtiyal

In 2014, the government of India created a new ministry called A.Y.U.S.H., which stands for Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturo-therapy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy, with the objective of overseeing and expanding alternate medicine systems in India and promoting the use of the same. However, all of the six systems under the ministry either lack empirical proof of efficacy or have been thoroughly debunked.

Homeopathy started in eighteenth-century Germany, but it has been a subject of controversy for several decades. Its foundational principle is the serial dilution of medicine, which increases efficacy according to homeopathic theory. It was developed before the modern concept of a molecule. With the development of molecular theory, it was realized that the extent of dilution in homeopathy was so high that it would leave practically none of the active ingredient left in the medicine administered.

The 2015 study by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), one of the world's premier medical institutes, published a landmark study, titled "Evidence on the effectiveness of homeopathy for treating health conditions", Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council; 2015. This study reviewed 225 research papers, evidence of 176 trials of 68 different health conditions. It concluded that there was no difference between homeopathic medicine and a placebo. The study, while widely acclaimed in the scientific community as a decisive proof of homeopathy's inefficacy, provoked a rebuke and denial from AYUSH ministry. The minister for AYUSH called the study "unscientific" and claimed that the study's findings are "contrary to findings and conclusions of homeopathy in India."

In addition to the NHMRC study, there are numerous studies debunking homeopathy. Some of the most notable amongst these are a study by Lancet in 2005, a paper in British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology in 2002 (Br J Clin Pharmacol. 2002 Dec; 54(6): 577-582), and a review by UK House of Lords Committee on Science and Technology in 2002.



In contrast, Ayurveda is not based on fundamentally unsound principles. Ayurveda is centered on the concept of maintaining a balance between different components of the human body. While Ayurveda is often classified as a pseudoscience, some prefer to consider it a form of protoscience. There is plenty of theory developed regarding Ayurveda, but there is a shortage of evidence. Double-blind tests (Randomized Control Trials or RCT) are a necessary requirement to establish the efficacy of medicine, but these trials are rarely conducted because there is little incentive to conduct trials as most medicines with the Ayurveda tag will easily find willing buyers in the Indian market. Till date, there has been no evidence of the efficacy of any Ayurvedic treatment.

Similarly, a lack of RCTs marks Unani and Siddha. There has been no evidence of the efficacy of either despite that their popularity continues to grow.

Healthcare is one of the essential provisions that a government provides to its citizens. It is even more significant for people from the economically weaker sections of the society as they cannot afford private hospitals and expensive medicines. The government is acting irresponsibly in advocating alternate medicine. Those most affected would be from the economically and educationally backward community, possibly trying to treat a chronic condition.



Dissent, Journalism and Other Unnecessary Obstacles

-Angshuman Pal

"Journalism can never be silent: that is its greatest virtue and its greatest fault. It must speak, and speak immediately, while the echoes of wonder, the claims of triumph and the signs of horror are still in the air."

-Albert Camus

Democracy is said to be standing on three pillars - the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. These three independent identities are the fundamentals on which the model of a democracy stands and its existence depends. It is not unknown to most that a fourth pillar exists, which is the pillar of media. If one makes a comparison, the pillar of media is probably the most accessible, identifiable and conceivable part of the structure. In a country like India, the average polity is highly aware of the presence of media all around and it is also decently conscious of the media's role in creating a public opinion; unfortunately it is gloriously indifferent to the utmost criticality of the function of media and how the country would simply fail to exist were the fourth pillar to fail. When the public displays apathy or disinterest towards an aspect of public life, the government most certainly will capitalize on that through its policies and actions.

Media, press, journalism are terms not unknown to anyone, but their analysis and frequent usage warrants a formal definition. Mass media refers to a method of communication used for reaching out to people in large numbers; it does not speak about the content of the information to be transmitted. Press, coming from the institution of the printing press, comes closer to specifying the function and means of information transmittal - newspapers, periodicals, and often radio and television news broadcasting.

Finally, Merriam Webster very judiciously puts down "journalism" as "writing characterized by a direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation".



The role of the media is that of the eyes and ears of a polity. In order to function as a country, it is imminent for a citizen to make himself aware of the developments in all regions of the nation because the fate of the country is all interlinked together. Considering the vastness of the country in terms of dimension and diversity, it is not possible for a citizen to do this alone and individually, and that is where media comes in. The most essential part of the field of journalism is its unbiasedness. They are supposed to portray the facts of an incident precisely in the form an eyewitness would see them. The responsibility of interpreting the events and coming to a conclusion about what would augur well for the country is the responsibility of the common man - the "consumer" of the news.

In the World Press Freedom Index India ranks a glorious 140th, below the likes of Palestine, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Liberia. In all honesty, this is not a surprising result. The primary impediment to achieving free media lies in the funding which the media houses receive. Journalists have their own families to run, and media houses have their expenses to pay.

The moment they turn to external sources for advertisement and funds, it is the objectivity of journalism which is destroyed and the occurrence of the financial transaction alters the nature of functioning of the media house. It would be an understatement to call mainstream Indian media today as biased. What is most scary is not the incident of their biasedness towards business organizations or political affiliations of their choice, but the blatant disregard for journalistic principles they display when they make no effort to disguise their lack of objectivity.

Democracy stands on the fundamental right of allowing every adult citizen the right to choose his/her future. It is a great weapon, a precious gift which our generation has had the privilege of being born with. Considering this, how unfortunate is it that our interpretation of democracy and of our fundamental duties towards our constitution and the holy institution of parliamentary government have been distorted and contorted beyond recognition, and that too by the facilitator of democracy named media? The structure of democracy rests on the concept of suffrage and election, but voting is by no definition the only responsibility that a citizen has towards the country. As per our political structure, an average Indian citizen would get the opportunity to vote thrice in five years. Are our democratic rights restricted to merely thrice in every 1800-odd days? Democracy thrives only when it is a continuous process. Discussion, dissent and argument are as vital in a democracy as the fundamental duty of voting, and without the reporting of honest, unbiased and undistorted facts and figures by journalists, these acts are as good as none. In the words of American historian Howard Zinn, "Protest beyond the law is not a departure from democracy; it is absolutely essential to it". The Indian parliament sits three times a year, but the newspaper is a parliament always in session.

The murder of democracy is not a new phenomenon, and neither is it limited to particular political dispositions or ideologies. A case in point is the occurrence of silencing the media by threats

and enticement at an unimaginable scale during the Emergency of 1975.

The Congress government of the day under the iron-clad control of Indira Gandhi declared the suspension of civil liberties which included, among other things, free media. The newspapers of the day broadly took two positions - institutions like The Statesman and Indian Express took firm stances and left their editorial pages empty and unblemished as a symbol of their tremendous opposition, while other media houses who judged their own security and comfort above national interest prompted senior leader LK Advani to comment, "You were asked only to bend, but you crawled". One can only sigh in irony when his party, forty years later, would be accused of committing the gravest crimes on free speech this country has seen.

The need for highlighting the sorry state of the Indian media is not merely because of lack of professional ethics by a section of the journalists, but because of the systematic degradation and a well-planned technique followed by consecutive governments and influential business houses for killing the sanctity of the media for their personal benefit. Professional immorality alone cannot threaten the institution of journalism unless there are external organized forces behind the downfall. Dissent as a concept is being targeted. In a lot of cases, the striking down of dissent is a direct hangover of the British colonial era where policies and laws were used to target the leaders of the masses of the Indian freedom struggle. Section 124A of the IPC penalizes "sedition" as an offence, and does so in a manner which is extremely vague and improperly defined. In the 21st century, most of the moderately advanced and open-minded nations of the world have decided against having legal ramifications against sedition simply because of the gross misuses that are possible in the name of punishing "affections against the state", and for greater respect towards the freedom of speech and expression. Even in the countries of the occident where the law is indeed still present, its use is a

Almost unheard of; the Indian government of the present day has promised to make the draconian law stronger. The British government, who opened the Pandora's Box by setting up and using the sedition law for their own purposes to derail the Indian freedom have now themselves scrapped the law; India meanwhile joins the ranks of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Turkey and Senegal in holding sedition as a criminal act. During his prosecution and trial by the colonial government in 1922, Mahatma Gandhi had remarked about sedition, "If one has no affection for a person or system, one should be free to give the fullest expression to his disaffection, so long as he does not contemplate, promote, or incite to violence". The country still has a long way to travel before it reaches the actual ramrajya Gandhi had dreamt of, and if that is not ironical, then one doesn't know what is.

Acts of gagging fair journalism and silencing dissent are not just legal technicalities which get discussed in the intellectual circles, but it is a harsh reality that affects ordinary individuals like us. Even after the Supreme Court struck down the notorious Section 66A of the Information Technology Act 2008, dissenters and those speaking against the powerful, the rich and the government are routinely arrested and illegally framed under a section that does not even hold now. During the Congress regime under Rajiv Gandhi, playwright Safdar Hashmi, a vocal social activist and staunch critic of the government of the day was stabbed and killed in Delhi while performing a street play - the perpetrators had the backing of the government.

he Golden Quadrilateral project which was supposed to bring the country together is remembered less for its contribution to road-



ways transport and more for the murder of an engineer who was too outspoken for his own good and had disturbed the comfortable bastions of the powers that were. Since the NDA government has come to power in 2014, deaths of journalists and social worker who took anti-government stands have not only been increasing, but these incidents are also not being given even a fraction of the importance they deserve by significant sections of the media. The names of Vinayak Dabholkar, MM Kalburgi, Govind Pansare, Gauri Lankesh have been forgotten soon after their lives were extinguished.

Silencing of dissent and muzzling of the media is not an accident, nor is it a classified conspiracy of an evil few. It is a well-framed and well-thought-out policy of the forces in power. The fourth pillar of our democracy's structure is under considerable attack, and if the remaining three do not seem intent on restoring it to its position, the people of the country need to sit up.