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comment

## This should set off alarm bells

A declining sex ratio will affect us economically and politically

All things being equal, women would outnumber men, the girl child is more likely to survive in infancy than the boy. But in India, according to a Youth in India report brought out by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation, the sex ratio is declining steadily. From 939 women to 1,000 men in 2011 it is projected to fall to 898 by 2031. This should set

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off alarm bells in the government, civil society groups and the law. This ratio is man-made through selective sex determination with the aim of getting rid of the girl child and early death due to neglect. But there is no reason why things cannot be set right.

The consequences of a falling sex ratio are evident and none of it is good news. The shortage of women has led to a sharp rise in violence against them. This has led to a situation where, apart from the ingrained son preference, people don't want girls all the more as they feel that it is difficult to keep them safe. In a study done by the Centre for Social Research in Haryana, fear of violence is a cause for female foeticide. Also the women who produce daughters face much more domestic violence which makes them complicit in getting rid of the girl child. The ugly social practice of polygamy has made a comeback in certain areas as well as forcible marriages of widows and purchasing of brides. With the advances in technology, sex determination has become easier with fatal consequences for the girl child.

The economic consequences are grave for this means that a huge proportion of the productive population is missing. The declining sex ratio calls for much greater political will and the willingness to take the help of powerful organised entities like the clergy and of course civil society groups. The Sikh clergy took the lead earlier when it said that anyone found guilty of female foeticide would be ex-communicated. This worked in favour of the girl child. The government has a master communicator in the form of the prime minister who has taken up the cause of girls in his Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao programme. But, a stronger message would be in order — let the girl child be born and let her live up to her full potential.

## Unruly flyers must pay for their bad behaviour

Air India's proposed fine for indiscipline passengers will ensure a smoother flight

It's become a story that doesn't even merit a cursory raising of the eyebrow. A politician is running late, an aircraft full of people are kept waiting for a few hours; or the politician wants some special treatment, and when it is denied, behaves in a petulant and violent manner. This is followed by some outrage on social media, and then the news fades away. Until the next time a person in a position of authority and power misuses it again. But Shiv Sena MP Ravindra Gaikwad and Trinamool Congress MP Dola Sen may have helped change all that with their bad behaviour. After Gaikwad's vicious and violent behaviour on board an Air India flight followed by Sen's refusal to comply with safety regulations that do not allow elderly people (such as her mother) to be seated next to the emergency exit (in spite of having been offered a business class seat in exchange); the national carrier has proposed a set of standard operating procedures to tackle unruly flyers.

It is high time that we had some guidelines on dealing with the indiscipline of people in power. To have a set of procedures, followed up with swift legal action is a step in the right direction. The rules which include an immediate report to the police and a monetary fine that could go up to Rs. 15 lakh, will hopefully act as a deterrent to bad behaviour in future. This applies not just to politicians and celebrities, but to the several other arrogant, petulant, drunk and disorderly passengers that airline crews have to deal with everyday as well.

Of course, it is important to ensure that there is adequate proof of this bad behaviour and to make certain that airlines do not use it as a tool of discrimination against specific passengers. But to allow unruly and badly behaved passengers to get away with it would be to endanger the safety of other passengers; and delays caused to ordinary people held to ransom by the indiscipline of a few, cost more than just money.

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BOBBY GHOSH



## Erdogan is a winner and yet a loser

The outcome of the referendum is embarrassing because he tilted the playing field in his favour

When I first met Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in the autumn of 2011, he had just arrived in New York after a triumphant tour of West Asia. The Arab Spring was then in full bloom, and in countries like Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, the Turkish Prime Minister (as he was then) was greeted like a rock star. Young Arabs, heady from having toppled their dictators, saw in Erdogan an ideal of a truly democratic leader. And he sought out potential leaders in all these countries, to lecture them on the Ankara way. "At my meetings, I said... Turkey is a model of democracy, a secular state, a social state with the rule of law upheld," he told me. "We are not intentionally trying to export a regime — we couldn't care less. But if they want our help, we'll provide any assistance they need."

At home, his star was at its apogee: Turkey's economy was surging, his AK Party seemed impregnable, and his decision to sever ties with Israel — in response to the 2010 Maavi Marmara incident, in which Israeli commandos killed several Turkish activists on a peace flotilla bound for Gaza — was hugely popular. Erdogan, in the eyes of many of his countrymen, was a leader of the stature

of Kemal Ataturk.

When President Erdogan (as he is now) arrives in New Delhi this month, he will be a shadow of the man I met in New York. Although it will be his first trip after a personal triumph — over the weekend, he "won" a referendum giving the President vastly increased powers — it has come at a tremendous political cost, to his country as well as to Erdogan himself. Far from being the popular mandate he had hoped for, the vote was desperately close: 51.5%–48.5%, and even that was weakened by charges of vote tampering.

Let's pause here for a moment to thank the framers of India's Constitution for making such a charade near as makes no difference impossible here. For one thing, India doesn't do referendums. For another, any Indian Prime Minister seeking to pull an Erdogan would find his way blocked, first by Parliament, and then by the judiciary.

The outcome of the Turkish referendum is especially embarrassing since Erdogan has spent the past two years systematically tilting the playing field in his favour, by purging the opposition, and suppressing press freedom. Turkey has 81 presspersons in its prisons, the largest number of any country in the world. This would be shameful under any circumstance, but the more so because Tur-



Erdogan is no longer the colossus he once was on the West Asian stage

REUTERS

key is a democracy.

Which brings us to the next blot on Erdogan's record: his deliberate undermining of democratic institutions. This had begun before an abortive coup attempt against him last July, and accelerated soon after under emergency powers that he now aims to normalise. Not only did Erdogan purge the military, he also identified and removed (or arrested) tens of thousands of people from educational institutions, the police, judiciary and civil service.

All of this would be worrying enough without the fact that Turkey is being buffeted by two wars: one across the border, in Syria; and the other within, in its Kurdish territory.

And there's growing evidence that the terrorist group that calls itself the Islamic State is putting down roots on Turkish soil.

Abroad, Erdogan's star is now at its perigee. Relations with Europe, already strained by the European Union frustrating Turkey's efforts to join the grouping, have plummeted precipitously in recent weeks, with Erdogan lambasting the governments of Holland and Germany for "Nazi tendencies," all because they, in according to their own laws, forbade Erdogan's ministers from canvassing for votes among Turkish expats there.

Erdogan is no longer the colossus he once was on the West Asian stage. Turkey's pretensions of having a major role in the affairs of Arab states have been embarrassingly exposed by its inability to exert much influence on the Arab state on its border. Where Erdogan once regarded Bashar al-Assad as something of a protégé, he is now seeking the downfall of the Syrian dictator — but having very little impact.

Gone, too, is the hero-worship Erdogan once enjoyed among young Arabs. Once, they listened attentively as he lectured them on democracy, now they see that he has become an autocrat, not unlike their own dictators.

So the Erdogan who arrives in New Delhi may be a winner of a referendum — assuming opposition parties are unable to challenge the outcome in the courts. But in every way that matters to his country, Turkey's President is a loser.

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LOUDSPEAKER



Call for morning prayers at a mosque in Delhi

MAYANK AUSTEN SOOFI

## Twitter-happy celebrities are too quick off the mark

Role models such as Sonu Nigam and Gautam Gambhir should be more circumspect on social media



The voices have assumed a shrill, chauvinistic tone. A few months after playback singer Abhijeet Bhattacharya, (remember him?), warned us of the hazards of allowing Pakistani artistes to work in India, Sonu Nigam has woken up to the perils of forced religiosity and loudspeakers blaring the azaan.

One fine April morning, Nigam, best known for such chartbusters as Sandese aate hain, decided to express his displeasure over the azaan. "God bless everyone, I'm not a Muslim and I have to be woken up by the azaan in the morning. When will this forced religiousness end in India," he tweeted to his 5.92 million followers. "Gundagardi hai bus... (it is hooliganism)," he said in another tweet. It helps that the political climate in the country is decidedly Right-of-Centre and the BJP in power in the Centre and in Maharashtra.

The tweet came soon after Olympic medalist wrestler Yogeshwar Dutt threw his weight behind the army personnel stationed in Kashmir. Reacting to the outrage over the video of a Kashmiri youth tied to a jeep and being used as a human shield, he retorted on Twitter that there was no similar upheaval when army personnel were pelted with stones despite rescuing the people of the state from floods.

Dutt isn't the only sports icon wearing his

coloured views on his sleeve. Last week, World Cup 2011 star Gautam Gambhir took umbrage over the heckling of troops in the Valley, tweeting: "For every slap on my army's Jawan lay down at least a 100 jihadi lives. Whoever wants Azadi LEAVE NOW! Kashmir is ours. #kashmirbelongs2us".

This new-found candour among artistes and athletes is a departure from the pre-social media days where a Mohammad Rafi, an AR Rahman or a Sachin Tendulkar kept their counsel and were circumspect about airing their opinions.

To some, Nigam's controversial statement that came out of the blue or Gambhir's pop-patriot tweets may appear to be attempts to draw attention towards themselves and revive their flagging careers. Others say that artistes or athletes have as much a right to air their views on social media as you and I.

Although celebrities in the age of social media displaying a degree of openness in expressing their opinion on matters of popular interest is a good development, since they have millions clinging on to every character type, they have to be careful of what they put out in the Twitterverse. Displaying a degree of maturity on social media will help them gain the respect of millions of fans who might respect their craft but are enraged by their biases or views. The trigger-happy Twitter celeb can inadvertently turn into a troll. Whether it is the compulsions of staying relevant or the nature of the social media beast that is fuelling this, they need to be mindful of the medium and the message.

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by invitation

PRAKASH SINGH



## Fifty years later, the 'revolution' is still on

Maoism still exists in parts of the nation because the core socio-economic challenges remain unaddressed

It was March 1967. Poor farmers armed with lathis, bows and arrows raided the paddy granaries of Jotedars at Naxalbari, situated at the tri-junction of India, Nepal and Bangladesh (then, East Pakistan). These were small incidents but with far-reaching implications. The People's Daily of China hailed these attacks as "a peal of spring thunder" and that "the Chinese people joyfully applaud this revolutionary storm of the Indian peasants". The movement was crushed by the police, but its sparks flew to distant parts of India. The State could never imagine that the movement would spread across states and, at its peak, affect 200 districts in 20 states.

According to latest estimates, 104 districts in 13 states are affected by the Maoist movement. With 2017 marking the 50th anniversary of the movement, security forces in the affected areas have sounded the alarm that recent attacks on the forces could signal the start of a resurgence of anti-State activity by the armed insurgents. The NDA claims to be winning the war against the Maoists. It is true that there has been significant shrinkage in the total area affected by Maoist violence and that several members of the party's central committee and politburo have been neutralised.

Last year, however, witnessed a considerable escalation in Maoist depredations. There were 433 fatalities in 2016 as against 251 in 2015. What is worrying is that the proportion of security forces personnel killed to that of Maoists has dropped from 1.3:7 in 2016 to 1:1.55 in 2017 (to date). Home minister Rajnath Singh recently claimed that the Maoist threat would be eliminated in the next five years. It is true that the military capability of the Maoists has been dented, but let's not be too optimistic. If we take a historical overview of the Naxalite/Maoist movement, we find that twice in the past, governments believed that they had knocked out LWE but they managed a comeback.

**GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS DO NOT ESTABLISH THEMSELVES IN AREAS WHEN THE MAOISTS HAVE BEEN DRIVEN AWAY. IN THE COURSE OF TIME, MAOISTS FILL THE ADMINISTRATIVE VACUUM AND REGAIN LOST GROUND**

After the arrest of Charu Mazumdar, one of the key leaders of the Naxalbari movement, in 1972 and the subsequent differences within the party, it was thought that the movement had run out of steam. However, it revived in 1980 with the formation of the People's War Group (PWG) by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah. Effective counter-insurgency operations however decimated the PWG. Seetharamaiah was arrested. Again, the government thought the movement had been vanquished. However, in 2004, the movement resurrected in its third avatar the People's War and the Maoist Communist Centre merged to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

The objective of the party: To "carry on and complete the already ongoing and advancing New Democratic Revolution in India as part of world proletarian revolution by overthrowing the semi-colonial, semi-feudal system." The guerrilla outfits were reorganised as People's Liberation Guerrilla Army, which is about 6,000 strong.

The movement keeps on reappearing like a phoenix because the basic socio-economic factors, which are responsible for it, remain unaddressed. Wealth is increasing, but its distribution is unequal. About 1% of the rich are said to own 58% of the country's wealth. Unemployment is another area of concern. Land reforms have been forgotten. Tribals are an alienated lot, largely due to their displacement as a result of developmental activities in the forest areas. The state police forces unfortunately lean heavily on the shoulders of the Central Armed Police Forces. The great lesson of Punjab is that until the state police take the terrorists/extremists head-on, the battle against terrorism/extremism will never be won. The state police are today in a shambles.

It is also disconcerting that the successes of the security forces are not followed up by the administration. Government departments do not establish themselves in areas when the Maoists have been driven away. In the course of time, Maoists fill the administrative vacuum and regain lost ground.

And so, the battle which started 50 years ago in Naxalbari goes on. It will continue to bleed the State until we improve governance and address the core issues, which sustain the movement.

Prakash Singh is a retired police chief and was member of an expert group appointed by the Planning Commission to study Maoism. The views expressed are personal

innervoice

WE MUST ERASE THE DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN JUDGMENT AND LOVE

Vijai Pant

I was in the habit of passing harsh judgments on others at the very first opportunity. My mother told me, before passing judgments on others, to keep in mind that not all scars show and not all wounds heal.

American philosopher and motivational speaker Wayne Dyer remarked, "Judgments prevent us from seeing the good that lies beyond appearances." Also, if it is imperative then too we must refrain from judging a man's actions until we know his motives.

Despite knowing these pitfalls, many of us judge others, whether deliberately or inadvertently. Some adopt a critical attitude even before we come across people or situations, thus revealing our prejudiced side.

Most of the criticism is done behind people's backs. In such circumstances, we enjoy finding fault in others. Our judgmental behaviour rests on the fact that we want the other person to remain that way. This reflects very poorly on us.

Instead of merely sitting on judgment we must move from 'judgment' towards 'love'.

This can be done by making the other person aware of his shortcomings, albeit never in public. We should suggest corrective measures too. This reformist approach acquires more relevance when we are close to the other person and wish him well. This would also help the latter to iron out his flaws and change for the good. In this way we can erase the dividing line between judgment and love.

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal)

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