

# Much to Gain From Being Snapped Up

Flipkart's acquisition of Snapdeal is welcome

Snapdeal's sale to Flipkart is not exactly a fairy-tale ending, but is not a horror story either. The company's promoters have not done as well as they could have hoped for, and have to be content to be dollar millionaires rather than billionaires, but they can probably live with that. The early backers of the promoters have got a decent, if not fabulous, return on their investment and probably end up with some stake in the acquirer. Late-stage investors who came in with big money and the clout to force the sale, namely SoftBank, have been able to carry out the strategic restructuring they deemed necessary, after the valuation of the company dropped after they had invested. India presents itself as a country where startup investments face primarily business risks that is the job of the investor to evaluate and not much of regulatory risk. All this is to the good.

Reports suggest that SoftBank was opposed to handsome valuation of the stake to be acquired from the promoters. The investor blamed the promoters for their poor execution. Considering that the e-commerce game in India has primarily been one of capital dumping, investors have to take the blame if their venture had less cash to burn than their competitors have. But, in all fairness, did Snapdeal founders invest in creating an e-commerce platform that India's masses, who do not read English all that well, if not at all, could access? They did not. Could that have brought on board a customer base many times as large as their English-speaking one? It could have. Would the investment required to tap this customer base be justified by the additional revenue and potential profits inherent in it? Probably. This is something that the e-commerce companies that remain standing will probably try out.

We wish the promoters who have exited all the very best in their next venture or ventures. With some cash of their own to invest in them, the promoters can afford to be more selective in taking on-board outside investors who could potentially oust them at a later stage. Good luck to Flipkart as well, as it takes on Amazon and Paytm, with the help of Snapdeal's added heft.

# Welcome Revision of the Industrial Index

It is welcome that the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) has been revised, albeit after much delay, and that an institutional mechanism is now in place to include new products in the items basket and delete those that have lost their relevance, on an annual basis. Dynamic revision of the index would lead to better output estimates.

The new index shows that industrial production is more buoyant than as per the previous estimate, and further that there's been a sharp deceleration in output following the withdrawal of large currency notes last November. In changing the base year of the index from 2004-05 to 2011-12 (output in the new base year has the index number of 100), 149 new items such as cement clinkers and refined palm oil have been added, while 124 items such as calculators and TV picture tubes have been discontinued. Also, manufactures have a slightly larger weight in the index, electricity a bit less, although the latter now includes renewable energy, while the weight for mining is about the same. There are other improvements in the index designed to better estimate output.

Under capital goods, the plan is to factor in work in progress as well, to more accurately gauge output of lumpy capital equipment. Also, for double the items, 109, output data would now be captured in value terms, taking into account the inflation rate.

There remains the issue of timely capture of production data in the organised sector, and its estimation in the non-formal sector. Automation and internet-enabled data-gathering could overcome the many vagaries involved, and carefully designed surveys should better reveal output in the unorganised sector. Goods and services tax will also be a big help in this regard. We also need to construct and operationalise a dynamic index of services production.

There must be a kernel of concern about safe fruit-cutting

# Avocado Hands Point to an Aam Problem

Indian authorities seem to be as nonchalant as the rest of the world when it comes to a new issue of public health: cutting fruit. Right now, millions of mangoes are being eagerly sliced and consumed without the state stepping in to warn its citizens to be careful when doing so, given the tricky task of separating the flesh from the kernel. The west is currently exercised about increasing incidences of a grave new affliction, a result of a fascination with another fruit with a creamy flesh but hard core that dangerously defies extraction: the avocado. While there are no comprehensive records of the extent of this ailment — characterised by hands lacerated and bruised due to inept handling of knives when slicing through the hard rind and then loosening and removing the round pit — the 'avocado hand' condition clearly cannot be ignored. Now that even Hollywood stars have come clean about their own experience with this little-known but distressing malaise, surely health authorities will not brush it aside.

Doctors in some countries are asking their governments to put warning labels on avocados. As handling mangoes is similar to avocados — and, therefore, susceptible to the same hazards — will India be proactive on this matter by putting warning stickers on mangoes to protect the hands of the aam-(loving) aadmis?

STATE OF PLAY The Indian Army also has its own Kashmir story to tell

# An Ummer Fayaz to a Wani



Pranab Dhal Samanta

Is the Indian Army an occupation force in Kashmir? Over the last three-and-a-half decades that the army has been deployed in the Valley, this question has taken many meanings and forms, ranging from marauding, ruthless troops to being a force of stability in a difficult, violent situation.

Today, when the situation in the Valley is being compared with the late 1980s and 1990s when the army moved in large numbers, what's easily forgotten is the interregnum.

The army is, today, a part of daily life in Kashmir. New generations of Kashmiris have grown up living next door to military camps while the army, too, has learnt more about dealing with the Valley.

## Here to Help

It has sought to wean off the occupation force tag through institutional responses, making the point that it has robust and fair mechanisms to deal with errant actions, regardless of rank and order. To this end, it has shown willingness to open itself up to public scrutiny and debate where needed, trying to protect its operational privileges in the Valley guaranteed by the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA).

But behind this iron wall, the one narrative that the Indian Army has worked hard to cultivate is that of its own ethos rubbing off on local life.

The army has always lived in this strong self-belief that regardless of what anyone says or does, as an institution, it has always won the hearts and minds of people in insurgency-hit areas.

So, when the Naga regiment does well in Kargil operations, it becomes a moment of glory for this narrative — a story of how the Nagas, identified with insurgent groups, were recruited, trained and equipped to fight for India.

Ummer Fayaz represented that part of the narrative in Kashmir for the Indian Army. Which is why his killing has hurt the army more than all the sloganeering and assertions of it being an occupation force. In other words, Fayaz symbolised all that the army believes it has got right in Kashmir.

The constant internal refrain within the army is that the last three decades have seen many of the likes of Burhan Wani in the Valley capturing the imagination of a particular generation at that time but never an alternate hero. Wani also had his impact on this generation of Kashmiris. He became a poster boy of the Kashmiri struggle all over again with the Pakistan establishment highlighting his case in capitals across the world.

This time, however, India, too, has a Kashmiri face in Fayaz, one that the army believes is a result of its efforts. When close to 20,000 young men turn up at its recruitment fairs, the army views it as a statement of confidence. The belief among the forces appears quite strong that left to their own, Kashmiri youth will take up employment opportunities in large numbers.

So, the parallel with the past may be appealing but the situation on the ground is clearly not in the same league. The Indian Army is not only well-trenched but it also believes it



In the same boat

has an effective story to stand for and fight for, one that it has nurtured and protected despite political upheavals in the last three decades.

## Service Before Self

What does this add up to? Fayaz's killing is bound to strengthen the military's resolve even further. It will dig its heels in and want authority to deal with any violent situation. The test for the government will be on whether to provide that legal comfort within the AFSPA by way of fresh legislation or amendment after the recent Supreme Court order on allowing first information reports (FIRs) to be registered on encounters.

Yes, the Valley is probably set up for difficult times given the acrimony between India and Pakistan. But Fayaz's killing has changed the complexion of the pitch completely. The Indian Army believes that its own story is on test now and it simply cannot let things slide back.

Essentially, the Indian Army locates itself within the country's democratic narrative and is increasingly using those tools to register protest or to counter allegations of excess, or, for that matter, even to address veteran welfare issues. This is a gradual but impressive evolution of a colonial army into a democratic civilian-controlled one, quite different from some of the other armies in the sub-continent that shares the same roots.

So, when described as an occupation force in the Valley, the Indian Army has tried to respond with its own reach-out. After all, just like those who pulled out an unsuspecting Fayaz from a wedding, there was also an insider who helped the Army and gave up Wani. And, to that extent, for the army, the battle lines in the Valley are drawn between the idea of Fayaz and the narrative of Wani — a cause they believe is worth fighting for.

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**WIT & WISDOM**

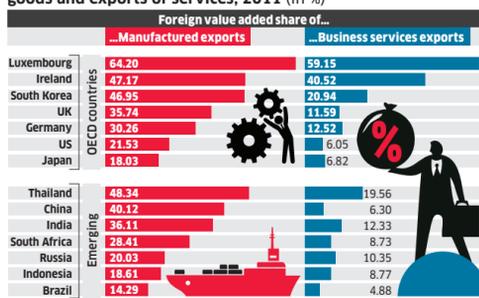
"My mother buried three husbands — and two of them were only napping."

Rita Rudner  
Comedian

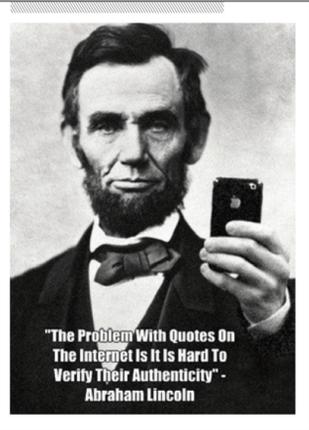
## Foreign Share in Exports

In this era of global value chains, when many products (such as the iPhone) are designed in one country and assembled in another, it makes sense to distinguish between the value of exports added domestically and value that is added abroad. Here's a look at some major countries...

### Foreign value added embodied in exports of manufactured goods and exports of services, 2011 (in %)



## MEME'S THE WORD



## RED HERRING

# A Law Unto Themselves



Indrajit Hazra

There's once upon a time. The Flipkart delivery guy always rings twice. But India remains the only country in the world where the triple talaq remains law. Which means that an Indian Muslim man, by the power invested in Section 2 of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, can, like the Beatles chorus line of 'Back in the US/ Back in the US/ Back in the USSR', divorce his wife by simply uttering 'talaq, talaq, talaq'.

For a country that defines its secularism not along the thick line of separation between religion and state but by the all-embracing Article 14 of the Constitution — 'The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law and equal protection of laws within the territory of India' — circa 2017 India sure knows how to treat all laws as equal, but some laws more equal than others. The Supreme Court, currently hearing arguments for petitions challenging the validity of the triple talaq, could soon well be discussing arguments pertaining to how many angels can be allowed to dance on a pinhead.

Personal laws based on various religious groupings have been allowed to exist in secular India. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, for instance, provides guidelines for property inheritance among Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs. Similarly, the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936, and the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, can be jollily used by Parsis and Hindus respectively if they choose to override the rather ironically named Special Marriage Act, which applies irrespective of the religion of those getting married.

Congressman-lawyer Kapil Sibal has been arguing the case on behalf of the

All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB). On Friday, he argued before the Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice J S Khehar that triple talaq was a "non-issue" because the practice was "optional". That's like saying prenatal sex determination would've been a non-issue if it had been made optional. The case being made that instances of triple talaq are rare and, therefore, inconsequential — "No prudent Muslim would wake up one fine morning and say 'Talaq, talaq and talaq,'" says the prudent Sibal — is made to fit the larger argument of 'personal matters' being protected from the orangutan arms of the law. This has been the 'liberal' argument of 'respecting customs', even when they come in direct conflict with Indian law.

Sibal may remember what followed in the wake of the Shah Bano verdict in 1985 in which Bano had challenged the Muslim Personal Law that denied her alimony. In 1986, the Government of India overturned the Supreme Court judgement that granted her alimony. If, therefore, overturned the law, by facilitating the passage of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act that allowed 'maintenance' to a divorced Muslim woman "till 90 days after the divorce", again "according to the provisions of Islamic law".

Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which was to provide Shah Bano justice like any other Indian woman,

was kicked out of one of Parliament's chhajja-shaded windows. And the modern usage of the word 'appeasement' was born.

The AIMPLB, like Asterix's Gaulish village holding out against the Roman Empire, has successfully portrayed itself as the protector of the 'Muslim way of life', which is being threatened by an overriding, hostile force that sees religion as irrelevant.

But when one confronts those 'occasional' triple talaq cases, or even the 'rarer' ones of nikah halala — such as the one reported in October last year when a Muslim man from Jaipur drugged his wife and forced her to have sex with a friend, since by conducting nikah halala, "a woman must consummate her marriage with another man if she wants to go back to her former husband, with whom she has been divorced" — one comes to the borderline of moral relativism.

If the Uttar Pradesh elections showed one thing, it was that entities such as the AIMPLB hold very few in their sway these days. The Supreme Court is investigating whether "something which is considered abhorrent by religion (Islam) be validated by law".

The real question is whether the law of the land can be flicked aside in the name of protecting any grouping, whether based on religion or shoe size. It's time to roll out the Uniform Civil Code.

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Ek jagah jab jama hon...

## Citings

# Internet Innovation

## MARK PATEL ET AL

Niccolò Machiavelli, one of history's great futurists, might have predicted the Internet of Things (IoT) when he wrote, "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."

The IoT's early innovators, who have grappled with mixed overall demand, a lack of consistent standards and other challenges, would agree that their road has been difficult. But, like other visionaries before them, they have persisted in establishing a new order because they see the promise ahead. Both consumers and the media are fascinated by IoT innovations already in the market.

These "smart" devices have sensors that communicate seamlessly over the internet with other devices or the cloud, generating data that make the world safer, more productive, and healthier. In just a few years, some IoT devices have become standard, including thermostats that automatically adjust temperature and production-line sensors that inform workshop supervisors of machine condition. Innovators want to enable more sophisticated IoT technologies for self-driving cars, drone-delivery and other advanced applications...

We believe the IoT could have a significant, and possibly revolutionary, impact across society. But we also think that the lead time to achieve these benefits, and the widespread adoption of IoT applications, may take longer than anticipated.

From "What's New With the Internet of Things"



# Conquer Anger

## NILANSHU RANJAN

What do we generally do when we want to get something done, or want to expel something unnecessary, unnatural or repugnant? We take a vow and feel immensely satisfied in the bargain. But we forget that taking a vow is quite an unintelligent act.

When we vow not to do something, it simply means we have not understood certain underlying truths, or are unaware of the workings of our unconscious. It is an act of suppression, that can turn into a strange and poisonous repression as well. When we repress something, it seeps into our unconsciousness and disturbs our equilibrium, leaving us in misery. That's why Buddha lays stress on consciousness. 'Be conscious' — this is the sole truth given by Buddha. Pythagoras speaks the same language. His every statement must be clearly understood. He urges us not to be angry. And, when he forbids anger, he does not mean repression. He says, "Don't be angry. It mars your happiness, ecstasy. It leads to nothing but to utter miseries." He asks us to transcend anger, not to suppress it, whereas we do quite the opposite. Transcendence can be achieved by watching anger.

The liberation from all emotions, including anger, is akin to a state of moksha, or enlightenment. Achieving freedom from anger cannot be seen in isolation of liberation from all forms of emotional bondage. Jain and Buddhist philosophies have linked these notions to austerity in day-to-day existence, a concept that Mahatma Gandhi developed as a full-fledged philosophical principle. Let us carry this torch forward.

## Chat Room

# Don't Drive Down Obor

India has done well to boycott the One Belt, One Road (Obor) conference in Beijing. India is right in saying that its 'core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity' regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that passes through POK had been 'ignored'. Besides, China's rigid stance on India's entry into the NSG club, the UN ban on JeM leader Masood Azhar and the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh have not struck the right chord. China must engage in a meaningful dialogue to create an amiable atmosphere.

N J RAVI CHANDER  
Bengaluru

# Also Punish Staff With Airs

Apropos 'Airtight, for Air Travellers' by R K Vidyanathan and Mansi Singh (May 13), it's good that people who misbehave and endanger other people's lives in the air or on ground need to be punished, but what



about the airline staff who misbehave with flyers? By empowering them further, they may not just care about them at all. I am a frequent flyer and I have seen almost all airline staff at one point or another treating flyers with scant respect. Safeguards are needed to check airline staff as well.

ASHOK GOSWAMI  
Chennai

# No Basis for Triple Talaq

When marriage is a contract between two persons, how can the contract be unilaterally ended by the husband alone? Besides, 'triple talaq', as confirmed once again by Salman Khurshid before a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, is not practised in any of the Muslim countries. Triple talaq, practised by Indian Sunni Muslims, is not only invalid but unconstitutional and violative of Article 14 (equality before law) as the right of divorce is available only to the husband. So, there is no room for triple talaq not to be struck down by the apex court.

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