

Computer Emergency Response and Beyond

Local, global effort needed for cyber security

If WannaCry, the ransomware that struck countries around the world and got defeated by a serendipitous discovery of a kill-switch in the malware, sends a chill down your spine, the response to that attack makes you want to cry. India has a Computer Emergency Response Team — in theory. In practice, it is yet to make a public response to the attack. But this is only a quibble. The attack serves to highlight a grossly neglected dimension of Digital India: security. If the present attack forces the government and India Inc to get serious about cyber defence, it would turn out to be a curse that is actually a boon.

To begin with, the government must defend itself. If America's National Security Agency could be hacked, presumably, India's Registrar of Companies and the demat account database are vulnerable, too. Imagine the havoc an enemy state can wreak by destroying or scrambling data on ownership of assets. The government must coordinate with other governments, to establish a protocol to share key vulnerabilities any government discovers with other governments, before such information reaches savvy criminals. The government must create a legal framework that mandates any and every company that suffers a breach of cyber security to report the incident to a designated agency that would investigate and keep identities confidential, but alert other potential targets and cyber security agencies. India does have some cyber security capability. This must be scaled up, with adequate funding for training and research, from government grants and private sector projects, in universities and specialised institutions. Ethical hacking must be encouraged among bright youngsters, who should be rewarded for their discoveries of vulnerabilities.

India Inc must get its act together. Security is not just about the latest update or patch but also about employee discipline on following the recommended safety protocol. Smaller firms must upgrade to licensed software and keep security up to date. Online security is not a luxury in a country with a billion phones. It is do or die. Literally.

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Needed, Biotechnology Regulator With Teeth

India's regulator for genetically modified organisms, Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, has declared the GM Mustard strain developed by Delhi University's Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants to be safe for commercial introduction. Environment minister Anil Madhav Dave will take the final call, making the decision inherently political.

It is not possible to completely separate politics and science on matters such as food. The point is to decide on the basis of evidence, and through processes that are transparent and have integrity. India must promote, not suppress, genetic research and its commercial deployment. At the same time, the government needs to put in place robust science-based institutions that will determine and certify the efficacy and safety of taking these innovations beyond the laboratory. There are concerns about the regulatory process and oversight. As part of ongoing public interest litigation, the Supreme Court appointed a Technical Expert Group comprising leading scientists from relevant disciplines to assess the regulatory regime. The group identified deficiencies in the current regulatory system, suggesting remedial measures reflecting a deeper understanding of the process of risk assessment within the regulatory system to ensure proper biosafety regulations. The expert group recommended putting on hold all field trials and commercialisation till the regulatory mechanism was put in place.

The court is expected to give its final ruling soon. In parallel, the government should revive the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India Bill that died with the last government. The question regarding genetically modified food should not be about ideology or politics but about science and evidence. Sound regulation alone can ensure this.

The US President's monosyllabic tweet has trumped sesquipedalians

Those Times When 'We' Can Say a Lot

While US President Donald Trump is usually excoriated on Twitter for peddling an exasperating farrago of distortions, misrepresentations and outright lies — though not with such an engagingly recondite turn of phrase, of course — his latest tweet, a single word, deserves unqualified praise. Though he speedily deleted it, 'We' clearly proved to be the ultimate catalyst for catharsis as thousands promptly completed what is suspected to have been an inadvertent holophrase. It was a masterly if unintentional gambit to assess what his 29-million Twitter followers in the US and the world are exercised about at this time. More specific pronouncements, couched in inevitably longer words, would probably not have evoked the prodigious effusion of celebrations that a single one did. That it was retweeted thousands of times also speaks volumes about the medium and the message.

Sesquipedalians, especially in the political arena, have hopefully realised that a thousand well-chosen syllables need not necessarily be as pithy as one accidental one. Indeed, political analysts looking back on the Trump administration could well cite this abortive but evocative tweet as a powerful if short-lived message of unity and inclusiveness by a beleaguered president to a riven country. Imagine if he had tweeted 'Be', 'He' or even 'Me' instead.

CURSOR Raiding individual netas will not end corruption, without reform of political funding

It's the System, Not Just Lalu



T K Arun

Lalu Yadav has already been convicted in a corruption case and barred from contesting elections till 2019. The income-tax department is now carrying out raids to investigate land deals reportedly worth an illicit ₹1,000 crore. Many other figures of the Opposition are also being investigated by the CBI or the income-tax department.

Indians would welcome a crackdown on corruption. They are also savvy enough to draw the distinction between a crackdown on corruption and a crackdown on the Opposition. Any crackdown will carry conviction as a genuine attack on corruption only when the basic enabler of corruption in the country, the absence of an institutional mechanism to finance politics, is dealt with. We are yet to see any sign of that.

No Nripen Chakraborty Now

In a situation in which politics is financed principally off the books, personal honesty of politicians is just a question of letting someone else do the dirty work of resource mobilisation. Of course, there can be rare exceptions. Nripen Chakraborty, who was chief minister of Tripura from 1978 till the Left Front's defeat in 1988, famously vacated the chief minister's official house packing his belongings, all of them, into a steel trunk, which he carried out in a cycle rick-

shaw. And the politics of his party in those times depended on voluntary work and small, willing donations.

There are no Nripen Chakrabortys around in the world's fastest-growing economy, although his Communist successor Manik Sarkar is also a man with a Spartan lifestyle.

Even if a leader himself did not insist on having all the creature comforts of high office every waking moment, air conditioners and sofas are likely to be thrust upon him, even when he makes a condolence visit to a home bereft of such things.

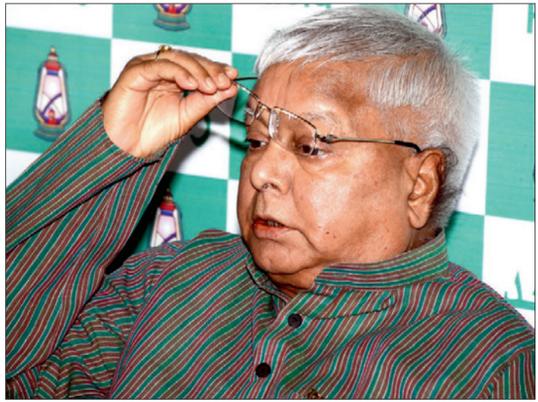
No one would seriously question the personal honesty of a leader like Mammoan Singh or A K Antony. But do they contribute to their party's war chest, from which their own political expenses are met?

Political expenses are real and immense. Take a rally of one lakh people. Organisers spend anything from ₹500 to ₹1,500 per head, apart from the expense on the travel of the leader who addresses the rally. Such a rally can cost ₹10 crore, on average. National and regional parties together hold hundreds of such rallies in one state in an election. Do the math.

Then there is publicity. Posters, hoardings, banners, television spots, newspaper advertisements, publications, other propaganda material, including masks, caps, flags and T-shirts. Chartered planes and helicopters that fly for extended periods. Sensible parties do not pack senior leaders into the same aircraft — one crash would eliminate the entire leadership. Many peripatetic leaders mean many planes/choppers.

It is not just the star campaigners who travel. On the ground, cars, jeeps and two-wheelers cover thousands of dusty kilometres. These days, every party conducts election surveys, several times over.

Democracy does not come cheap, and unless we raise legal expenditure levels for politicians and make poll funding transparent, corruption will continue to thrive



Through his glasses, darkly

Parties need offices and staff. They need to be paid for. This is all valid expenditure, even if the ridiculously low spending limits prescribed by the Representation of the People Act make much of it illegitimate. Then, there is the kind of spending that is not valid, the money spent on buying off politicians, bribing voters with cash, liquor and drugs, hiring goons and musclemen.

Democracy is Expensive

All told, Indian democracy calls for tens of thousands of crores to be spent. But the declared expenditure of all political parties typically adds up to less than ₹1,000 crore. Which means, the bulk of their actual income and expenditure is off the books.

Does this mean that political parties keep two sets of books, one for their own internal use and the other to show the Election Commission? It's a little more complex. It is not the party HQ that finances all expenditure. Individual leaders raise money and spend, on their own campaigns and on those of some others, these numbers rising with their seniority. This means that political leaders

raise money off the books, maintain a war chest and spend from it when required. Since most of the funds so raised and kept ready for spending is off the books, most leaders sit on quantities of black money. If a serious enough effort is made by an investigating agency, almost any leader can be caught with assets disproportionate to his or her known means of income, except those senior enough or smart enough to leave no trail.

Traders and businessmen fund not parties but individual leaders. They give money as token of respect, out of gratitude for work done or because they are forced to (the last kind of tribute leads to a backlash). Politicians wax rich. Without this columnist naming names and risking a charge of libel, anyone can identify, eyes shut, politicians in their state who have become abnormally rich for no apparent reason other than being in politics.

Change, this system must. But the starting point has to be institutionalising transparent funding of politics, not raids on individual leaders chosen by expedience.

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Greed, After All, is Bad

A K MERCHANT

On his release from prison, the great Nelson Mandela said, "Together, we live in a global neighbourhood and it is not to the long-term benefit of any if there are islands of wealth in a sea of poverty. We need a globalisation of responsibility as well. Above all, that is the challenge of the new century." He was right. The evolution of technology down the linear, reductionist path, which defines only that which is physically quantifiable, has jeopardised our ecosystem, if not human civilisation.

Our advances cannot be disputed. But have we lost the woods for the trees in this directionless drift towards modernity? Living a truly happy life depends on how wisely we spend our rich endowment of knowledge, emotions, skills, time, energy and material resources. It is also true that living one day at a time is a challenge better met on some days than on others.

In the competitive and unjust world, the approach should be to celebrate every little wise investment, no matter how small, while keeping at bay the demands of lower nature and the inertia of drifting through life.

We all share with one another the fact that we arrive in this world as spiritual beings, for a purpose, and at some point, we will leave it. So, while we are here on earth, we must make continual choices. We have neither unconditional freedom nor limitless power, but we do have the capacity to make of ourselves developed and seasoned spiritual beings bringing happiness and sharing goodness with as many as possible, who cross our path.

Chat Room

Trust Wins the Day for Modi

Appropos '3 Years On, Modi Sweeps Polls' (May 16), favourable rating of Narendra Modi and his government by businessmen, markets and people is due to the trust he has built among the constituencies. This has led to positive perception about the performance in spite of hardships from demonetisation and tardy progress in key areas such as job creation, J&K imbroglio and corruption in lower hierarchies. Modi has also succeeded in breaking the silos of caste, community and religion. The PM now has to deliver on job growth, communal harmony and efficient and honest administration.

Y G CHOUKSEY
Pune

Enact Uniform Civil Code

This refers to 'A Law Unto Themselves' by Indrajit Hazra (May 15). 'Triple talaq' does violate Section 14 of the Constitution providing equality before law to all citizens irrespective of religion. If SC's constitution bench hearing the case strikes down the practice, will it not be interfering in the personal law of a religion or community? Therefore, the Uniform Civil Code to be enacted by Parliament provides the right answer to the discriminatory practices prevalent in all religions and will protect an individual's rights.

CL SURI
New Delhi

Bitcoin as Terror Currency Now?

Appropos the news report, 'Cyber Attack Spreads in Asia, But No 'Second Wave' Seen' (May 16), the story of the 2007 movie Diehard 4.0 is playing out real-time in 2017. What is more unnerving is the ransom demand in Bitcoins. The virtual currency, which allows the perpetrators to stay anonymous, has enabled the audacity and scale of the cyber attack, and could become a refuge of scoundrels, unleashing more lethal cyber attacks, money laundering and criminal activities. This needs to be tackled through international cooperation.

SUNDER G
Navi Mumbai

Letters to the editor may be addressed to editet@timesgroup.com

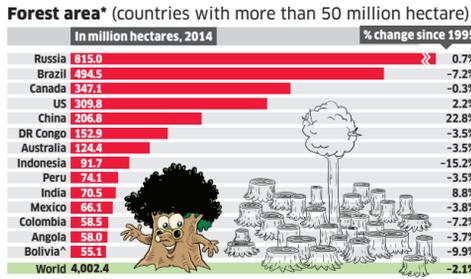
WIT & WISDOM

"The opinion which other people have of you is their problem, not yours."

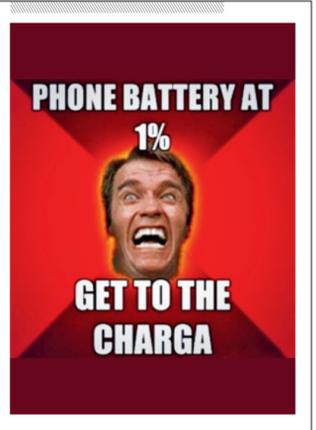
Elisabeth Kübler-Ross
Psychologist

Forest Cover

Home to more than 80% of land animals and plants, forests safeguard the planet's biodiversity and act as a natural defence against climate change, but they continue to be degraded and lost at a rate of 3.3 million hectares per year, according to the FAO. Of the countries with substantial forest cover, many have lost upwards of 3% of their forests since 1995.



MEME'S THE WORD



OBOR

Client State, Escort Service



Ashok Malik

Diplomacy is usually a careful, calibrated exercise. Risks and sudden moves are few and far between. Given this, the Narendra Modi government's decision to boycott the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Forum in China constitutes one of the three biggest Indian foreign policy risks in recent memory.

The previous two were the decision to back the liberation of Bangladesh, even if it meant conflict with Pakistan, and the nuclear tests of 1998. In the end, both those risks worked out well. The moral principle of India's stand in 1971 won it international validation and military success, and signalled Indira Gandhi's finest hour.

On the other hand, Pokhran 2 and the formal declaration of India's nuclear weapon forced the world to confront the reality of India as a responsible nuclear power. After a period of ostracism, it forced an engagement with India and led to a phase of modern diplomacy.

The boycott of the BRI Forum, the formal statement punching holes into the viability and logic of the farrago of projects known as 'One Belt, One Road' (Obor), and the refusal to line up for Emperor Xi Jinping's Beijing Durbar constitutes the strongest Indian challenge to China in a long, long time. Frankly, India had no alternative to refusing to travel for the forum, and to treating BRI/Obor as a strategic threat to its own legitimate aspirations.

How did the Modi-Xi relationship come to this pass? Modi came to office in 2014 with a China that saw itself at the zenith of its economic and composite power. In 2000, about when the previous BJP government was inaugurated, China's GDP was double India's GDP. By 2014, it was close to five times

ka, Bangladesh and even Nepal and Myanmar than it was three years ago. In the context of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor — an Obor component that China sees as a route to take its goods to markets in India — New Delhi's wariness has been matched by Naypyidaw's. Myanmar is worried Chinese truckers and cargo movers will just exploit its geography but without fostering local jobs or value addition.

That concern — the absence of value addition and local job creation — is not limited to the BCIM. It is written into Obor's DNA. In Sri Lanka, the country has been saddled with white elephants and debt. Pakistan's Dawn newspaper ('CPEC Master Plan Revealed', goo.gl/dQdHcu), the 'CPEC master plan' suggested the creation of Chinese-only enclaves and economic and leisure zones within Pakistani territory as an end-goal of Obor.

China would want to secure access from its western frontier (Xinjiang) to Gwadar port and the Arabian Sea. Once that corridor is sequestered — if such sequestration is possible — its social and political dynamic with the rest of Pakistan remains an imponderable.

With similar plans across South Asia and in Indian Ocean countries, Obor runs the risk of destabilising sensitive and still-developing polities by buying up political and (in Pakistan) military elites. As an important regional stakeholder, India cannot but flag the issues. India also has to step up implementation of the 100-odd connectivity and infrastructure projects it has announced, or begun work on, in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Chinese projects are gold-plated, in that they have two to three times the budget of a similar project in an open bid. In the case of certain road projects Sri Lanka, Indian bids were about a third the value of Chinese bids, and used local labour. As such, Indian projects are appreciated. But the perception remains that Chinese implementation is faster. Modi has to change that perception if India is to take on Obor.



Well, we'll just have to walk in

Citings

Managing by Numeracy

ROBERT FELDMANN ET AL

Many companies do their best to optimise production processes using established rules of thumb or incomplete data. But at the end of the month or reporting period, they often discover sizeable gaps between actual profits and what they had expected. In our experience, that is because they typically lack precise-enough measures to understand the small, real-time variations in process flows and manufacturing steps that cumulatively erode returns at facilities such as mines, steel mills or other manufacturing plants.

This information, moreover, is rarely shared quickly enough for managers to respond in the tight time frames required. Our work across a number of industries suggests that companies can eliminate these profit-draining variations, and speed up reaction times by using advanced data analytics combined with upward cascades of data to manage performance.

A metric we have termed profit per hour provides a much more exact view of fluctuations in the operating environment and a much better means of communicating the implications to top managers. By combining measures of value, cost and volume over time, profit per hour is more potent than the sort of metrics commonly used in many industries.

Using data captured from sensors, along with advanced analytics tools, industrial companies can deploy self-learning models that simulate the expected value and cost of individual processes and entire factories on a continuous basis.

From "Pushing Manufacturing Productivity to the Max"