

Not just optics, it's about health

With five of the dirtiest cities, UP is facing a huge sanitation crisis

According to the urban development ministry's Swachh Survekshan survey of the cleanest cities in India, in a list of 434 cities covered, five of the bottom ten are in the state of Uttar Pradesh — Gonda (rank 434), Hardoi (rank 431), Bahraich (rank 429), Shahjahanpur (rank 426), and Khurja (rank 425). This ignominy should be a wake-up call for the most populous state in India. With a newly-elected Chief Minister who has claimed that his focus is going to be on development, this may be a good time to begin a state-wide movement on cleanliness. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan will also get a fillip from the efforts of the state.

The question of cleanliness is not just one of optics alone. It is not just the fact that a city stinks or looks awful because of piles of rubbish; nor is it the fact that the low rankings compared to other states make Uttar Pradesh look bad. This is a much more serious question of public health and sanitation. According to observers, the sanitation situation in Gonda is worsening by the day. Commuting is difficult as garbage heaps are common and there is a permanent stench in the air. This is exactly the sort of situation that invites water and vector borne diseases such as Japanese encephalitis that ravage the state routinely. As the summer peaks and the monsoon arrives, the spread of diseases is only expected to get worse. It would be a tragedy if in spite of the knowledge of the problem, we fail to take steps to solve it in a timely and effective fashion.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has taken a positive step with the banning of paan masala and gutka in government offices. While it is a welcome move in terms of health; its cleanliness consequences will only reflect in cleaner corridors and staircase landings. The state at large is facing a massive health and sanitation crisis; and the number of cities from Uttar Pradesh in the bottom half of the list should be cause for immediate alarm.

E-India Inc needs to reinvent itself, quickly

The changes in the IT services industry are making H-1B visas redundant

Infosys has joined TCS and other Indian information technology services firms in announcing plans to hire more local workers for their cross-border work. Much of this hiring will take place in the United States to try and influence the Trump administration's review of the H-1B visa programme. The expectation is that the review will, at the very least, pave the way for higher visa fees if not slash the number of such visas altogether. Even while it is fighting a rearguard action to save the H-1B, New Delhi should be realistic. The primary lobbying force for such visas is the US software industry. If they are unwilling to put their shoulders behind it, the visa boulder will be beyond India's ability to move.

What should be understood is that the IT services industry is undergoing a fundamental change, one that is making H-1B visas increasingly redundant. Job growth in India's IT services sector had been falling even before Trump was voted to office. Two technological developments are responsible. One is robotic process automation which is slowly erasing job creation in business process outsourcing, a pillar of the Indian IT industry. A few lines of software can now replace thousands of programmers while voice tech is wreaking similar havoc on call centres. The other is what the industry calls SMAC innovation — social, mobile, analytics and cloud — in which software services are increasingly provided ready-made and transported through the internet. Unfortunately, Bangalore has been addicted to an earlier low-wage, body-shopping business model that is running out of steam.

The result is already evident in the industry's job figures. Nasscom predicts IT jobs will shrink by 20-25% over the coming three years. Donald Trump's impact may further pinch profits. India's software industry must look at moving into the cloud-based space that Silicon Valley firms are already well placed. E-India Inc needs to reinvent itself quickly. Bangalore has been the nation's pride for two decades. Now it needs to upgrade.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



Getting the short end of the stick

ATM frauds and the UP petrol scam prove that consumer rights are not protected anywhere

The government probe into malpractices by petrol pumps in Uttar Pradesh has brought to light certain facts that may shock you. The way technology was being used to pilfer petrol and diesel makes it clear that the rights of the average consumer are not safe anywhere.

An old incident comes to mind. Back in the 1980s, one of my friends got involved in a road mishap. A few days after the incident he began receiving postcards where the senders claimed they were lawyers. 'Contact us if you want to avoid paying compensation,' they wrote. Instead of getting duped by this group of people, my friend decided to establish contact with the other party that had suffered in the accident. Both the persons were astonished to discover that the same people had been writing to them in a different language. One person was promised they'll help him avoid paying compensation and the same so-called lawyers were claiming they would help the other group extract the maximum compensation.

My friend had got his car insured. When he contacted the insurance officials, he was advised to keep mum. These matters reach the court and after some negotiation, the insurance company pays compensation to

the accident victim. It is an arrangement that proves to be a win-win situation where nobody loses and everybody emerges a winner. He didn't lose time understanding how the hefty premiums that people pay to insurance companies were going.

Which is why, when former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao first spoke about economic liberalisation, we felt we would break free from the tentacles of bureaucracy. A work culture will be developed where everything will be transparent. If you recall, computers were slowly becoming a part of our lives. We were made to believe that transactions done through computers will be free of any kind of dishonesty.

None of us knew that this was merely a pipe dream.

We frequently keep hearing that an ATM has been hacked or someone's credit card misused. Often the lack of computer literacy is blamed for this. But that is just half the truth. Large institutions and big industrialists are among the victims of digital fraud. A few years ago, a famous Indian industrialist and his wife went out to dine at a Mumbai restaurant. He used his credit card to pay for the meal. The next day a message flashed on his mobile phone saying he had spent an amount of ₹2.5 lakh. Investigations revealed that an



■ A pump inspection in Varanasi. Fraudsters inserted a chip in the cable of the dispensing machine to pilfer petrol and diesel

ordinary restaurant employee had managed to clone the credit card of one of India's top industrialists. Since he was an influential man, the criminals were apprehended.

Thousands of such cases involving similar fraud are pending with numerous law enforcement authorities. But there is no sign of redressal. People thought such fraud was limited to just ATMs and credit cards. But the revelations in the Uttar Pradesh petrol pump scam have proved that the rights of the consumer are not safe anywhere. For this a chip was inserted in the cable of the petrol dispensing machine to steal as much as 50 to 100 ml per litre of petrol or diesel using a remote

control. Where is the guarantee that this is not happening in other parts of the nation? Can anybody assure us that the digital scales used to weigh products of daily use that we buy are not being tampered with?

Digital transactions are a fact of life today, but the consumer was being cheated yesterday and he is being cheated today.

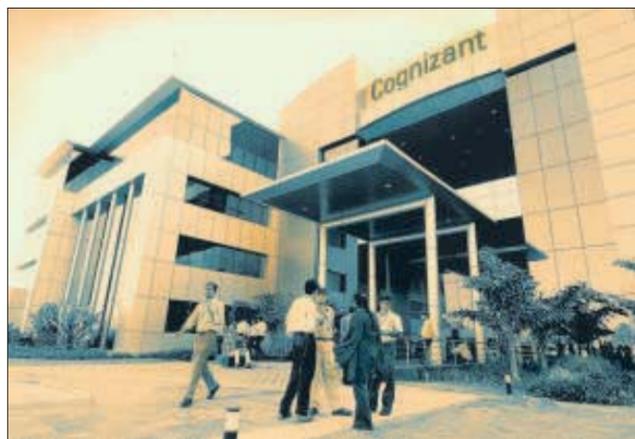
What can be done to prevent such incidents? A simple solution to this is strengthening our regulatory bodies. How can this be achieved, though? Important posts in our law enforcement agencies stay vacant for long periods of time. This happens because political patrons don't find people 'suitable' to man these positions. Last year the then Chief Justice of India TS Thakur had said that more than 70,000 judges at different levels of the judiciary were required to clear pending cases in the country. This had increased the judiciary's workload and created numerous challenges for judicial processes.

When our courts are lying vacant, who will bother about government panels and regulatory bodies?

Still, please keep something in mind. The basic premise of a democracy is the safeguarding of the rights of its citizens. Those brave warriors busy conducting virtual wars with Pakistan and China on social media should address this question: are the consumers who are being short-changed on every platform not a part of the world's largest democracy?

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HARD TIMES



■ The past few months have seen some of the biggest technology companies in India downsizing. Cognizant is the latest on the list, cutting almost 10,000 jobs in March

Protectionism could take us to a 'jobless' India

According to the World Bank, 69% of our existing jobs will be threatened by automation in the near future

ANIL ANTONY



The stuttering state of the world economy coupled with growing unemployment numbers are forcing countries across the globe to build walls and burn bridges — to restrict the free flow of goods, services and workforce across their borders. This is adversely affecting all the Indian exports including that of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), technology support services and human capital.

The various global protectionist forces seem to have worst hit our \$ 150 Billion Information Technology (IT) sector — contributor to almost 9.5% of our GDP, provider of direct or indirect employment to a population of over a crore, and the primary contributor towards the social mobility of millions into our burgeoning middle class.

The month of April itself has seen US President Donald Trump's new "Buy American, Hire American" executive order, followed suit by several countries including Australia, New Zealand and Singapore introducing their own legislation, aimed at curbing the inflow of foreign labour, in turn boosting their own citizens' employment rates and wages. As you would have thought, Indian engineers make up a sizable chunk of immigrants to all these countries.

The resultant effects are not that hard to miss. The past few months have seen some of the biggest names in technology, ranging from Microsoft, Cisco, Infosys and Flipkart take decisions to downsize their workforce. Cognizant and Wipro are the latest to join the list, with Cognizant said to have taken a decision in March, to downsize by almost 10,000 personnel.

Automation technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, 3D printing and driverless automobiles are in the process of completely overhauling the mass employment generating jobs in our farms, factories and offices. According to a World Bank research, 69% of the existing jobs in India would be threatened by automation in the near future, suggesting that times are about to get even more turbulent. Concerted efforts would have to be made, on a war footing, to address these challenges.

A few of our lackadaisical policymakers, seemingly well content with our 7% GDP growth, need an urgent reminder of a statement BJP stalwart and former finance minister Yashwant Sinha not made not so long ago: "Fresh job creation continues to suffer and will lose its connect with economic growth. What is important for us politicians to remember, however is that the aam aadmi is not concerned with theories. He wants results, and if we fail to provide the people with job opportunities in adequate numbers, they will be disappointed."

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pulp-it

R SUKUMAR



Using older models is really smart messaging

Vodafone's new campaign featuring a real-life couple is classic slice-of-life advertising with a dash of aspiration

As someone who began his career in advertising, I know one shouldn't read too much into ad campaigns. Still, I can't resist commenting on the latest campaign for Vodafone India, the one the company is airing during the Indian Premier League (IPL) — yes, the popular Twenty20 cricket league has become significant enough for companies to launch special ad campaigns around it. Readers who've been watching IPL know what I am referring to: the series of ads featuring a couple enjoying their second honeymoon in Goa.

The campaign is well made, starting with the choice of the couple. For those who don't know (and most don't), the couple is a real-life one — the Dhananjayans from Chennai. Both are legendary dancers. I know this because I grew up in Chennai and have seen them perform. A minor digression here: I know Amy Chua made Chinese mothers look pushy in her Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother, but they come a poor second to Tam-brahm (short for Tamilian Brahmin) mothers. Back in the 1970s and the 1980s, when I was growing up in Chennai, Tam-brahm mothers wanted their children to be either doctors or engineers (nothing else would do). I remember being yelled at once because I came third in class (not third class; third in class). If you were a boy, you had to learn the violin or the mridangam (I learnt the violin, for around 13 years). If you were a girl, you had to learn to sing or dance. My sister learnt Bharatanatyam. Part of the drill was attending concerts, which, in hindsight, wasn't all that bad (although it seemed a drag back then). And so, I've seen the Dhananjayans perform. Of course, they were a lot younger than they are in the ads. Shucks, even I was a lot younger then. But, as I said at the beginning, I digress.

Part of the appeal of the campaign is also that the old couple are very cool — the husband gets a tattoo; the wife goes parasailing — and who doesn't like the idea of cool parents, or grandparents? Most of our parents

THE VODAFONE CAMPAIGN WILL MOST LIKELY CATER TO UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS IN URBAN AREAS - THAT MAKES THE BUSINESS MODEL EVEN MORE APPEALING, ALTHOUGH IT DOES NARROW THE MARKET

(or grandparents) aren't cool. One of my grandfathers (alas, now departed), was uber-cool, but that's not a story for a family newspaper. But we understand the appeal of cool parents or grandparents.

There's also something endearing about old people, especially ones as cool as those in the ad, who are happy to do adventurous things such as getting a tattoo (without worrying about the needle or the hygiene of the tattoo artist) or para-sailing (without complaining about aches and pains in three different and widespread joints).

This is classic slice-of-life advertising (as it's called) with a dash of aspiration and perfection thrown into the mix for good effect. I can actually visualise the family — the old (and cool) couple in Besant Nagar (Chennai); the son in Koramangala (Bengaluru), and the grand-daughter and grandson in San Jose and London respectively.

The campaign is a departure of sorts for Vodafone, which has previously used the infamous Zoozoos (they were cute to begin with, but the company and the agency forgot to look at the best-by date) around the IPL, and the endearing pug. The second one, showing a pug faithfully and obediently following in the steps of a small boy was especially appealing to me — I've had dogs all my life, and, with the exception of one, have had to run after most. Come to think of it, that pretty much sums up my relationship with my cellular service provider.

The most interesting thing about the campaign is that it seems to signal a desire by Vodafone to move towards older customers who will probably pay more. It is unlikely that the old couple will appeal to anyone under the age of 30. That's not a bad idea. Most telcos are either giving things away for free, or obsessed about appealing to the young. Neither is a particularly lucrative option. In contrast, appealing to an older age-group willing to pay more is definitely a more attractive one. The Vodafone campaign will likely appeal most to upper-middle class households in urban areas — even more slicing and dicing (marketers call this segmentation) that makes the business model even more appealing, although it does narrow the market significantly.

That's probably too much of an analysis of an ad campaign. It's probably best to just enjoy the antics of the Dhananjayans (or the Balakrishnans, as they are called in the campaign), at face value.

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innervoice 

LEARN THE ART OF CONTROLLING YOUR MIND

Tommy Baruah

What do we expect from ourselves? Performance and growth wherever we might be placed? We want our desires to be fulfilled without any delay. But all this cannot be achieved with a wavering mind. We need a stable, calm mind to achieve this.

Although the art of controlling our mind is a difficult task, it isn't impossible. The only thing we need is to develop a habit of engaging our mind, because as they say: An empty mind is devil's workshop. Hence,

positive engagement becomes necessary for the mind.

A variety of ideas continuously pass through our mind. Ultimately, what we select is what's essential for our growth. In order to do this, we need to evolve a structured pattern of thinking. This mostly doesn't happen because we tend to follow an erratic pattern of thinking. As a result, we don't lead our life, but the unwanted patterns do. Obviously, we have to come out of this slavery. But how can we do this? What we need to follow is a simple proce-

sure. Just evaluate everything bad accumulated inside you.

Thoughts will flow one after the other like waves but our selection will depend on our controlled mind which, after analysing, will allow only those thoughts which are supposed to get in. This is how we can acquire a controlled mind.

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

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