

The General has it wrong

Justifying Gogoi's action could undermine the Army's prestige

It is highly regrettable that Gen. Bipin Rawat, the Chief of Army Staff, has chosen to justify and extol the actions of Maj. Leetul Gogoi, who used a Kashmiri civilian as a human shield against stone-pelters in Budgam on April 9. It is understandable that Gen. Rawat feels a loyalty to his men, and a concern for the morale of his troops. But his defence of Maj. Gogoi achieves neither of those objectives. If anything, it undermines the prestige of the Army, and makes even worse a bad situation in the Valley.

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The General has suggested that the Major was right to violate one man's human rights in order to get his soldiers out of a difficult situation. He has also argued that it is necessary for the Army to engender a sense of fear, not only among India's enemies, but also among its own citizens. Gen. Rawat's assertions are the more disappointing because they come, not from some desk-bound general, but from a decorated veteran of Kashmir, an officer with vast experience in counter-insurgency operations. As a soldier's soldier, Gen. Rawat knows that his men daily demonstrate that there are ways to tackle stone-pelters without violating human rights. To defend the one soldier who does is to tell the thousands of others that their noble restraint is unnecessary. It is one thing for hyper-nationalistic paper patriots to celebrate Maj. Gogoi with unthinking enthusiasm, but coming from the Army chief, this is a message with potentially dangerous consequences.

It is hardly reassuring that the nation's top soldier thinks it is necessary that Indians should be afraid of those in uniform, but in any event the use of human shields doesn't engender fear: it invites contempt. Nor are these the words of a mature leader of men: "In fact, I wish these people, instead of throwing stones at us, were firing weapons at us. Then I would have been happy. Then I could do what I (want to do)." The most charitable interpretation of Gen. Rawat's statements is that they are the outcome of his being put in a profoundly unnatural situation. Perhaps it is inevitable, then, that the country's top soldier has started to talk like a politician.

When it comes to civic spaces, we flout all rules

Vandalising the Tejas Express shows a serious disregard for public property

Before the prime minister embarked on his mission to inculcate cleanliness across the country (Swachh Bharat), he obviously did not reckon with the inherent lack of civic sense among the majority of us. Sabhya Bharat (civilised India) should have preceded the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. How else does one react when one hears that India's first high-speed luxury train has been vandalised on its first journey. Launched with much fanfare from Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus last week, the Tejas Express boasts of impressive frills and features as automatic doors, nine-inch infotainment screens for every seat, beverage vending machines, vacuum bio-toilets and touch-free taps. But the manner in which some of the travellers behaved was in extremely bad taste. The toilet facilities were stinking within an hour of the journey beginning as people left a mess with no thought for fellow travellers.

When the train returned to Mumbai from Pune, the staff realised some passengers had tried to yank the customised LCD screens off, by pulling on the hinges. At least 12 of the high-quality headphones provided for infotainment screens were missing. When the government provides efficient and comfortable means of connectivity, the public has no right to trash it. In fact, the railways should enforce much stricter penalties for vandalising trains and littering.

This behaviour is not confined to trains. We have learnt few lessons in community living even as urbanisation grows at a rapid clip. So, we find that garbage is disposed in public places with no thought to the fact that communicable diseases for which garbage provides a breeding ground will affect all of us. If the anti-social behaviour seen on the Tejas is anything to go by, we cannot really blame the railways or any other public or private sector organisation for not wanting to invest in amenities which are difficult to guard and maintain.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



A frightening level of indifference

Most vernacular journalists work in conditions their English-speaking brethren call 'jungle raj'

On May 30, Hindi journalism will celebrate its 188th birth anniversary. On birthdays the convention is to look back and take stock of achievements. On this occasion, let us look at the entire language press in the country?

News men are grappling with a credibility crisis. Since last week the disciples of a jailed godman have laid siege to the Twitter accounts of journalists, lawyers and some others. They began by asking why their guru was behind bars. They alleged it was happening because of the media and they claimed the media had been bribed for carrying out such misdeeds. One of the guru's imbecile followers was asked: Does the judiciary pronounce its decisions based on the media's reports?

As expected, the gang of locusts began taking swipes at the judiciary itself. I felt those who are attacking the pillars of democracy should be left to their devices. But why don't they themselves reveal the names of the people who've bribed these journalists and the journalists who've taken the bribe. What evidence do they have against the media and the judiciary? I know that in response they can just spew profanities because these anonymous conspiracy theorists make allegations, without the backing of facts.

They should also be asked about the girl, allegedly raped by this man, who has now grown up. Her family and she have been punished for a number of years for raising their voices against him. Her family has been subject to victim-shaming. Not just this, who is behind the murder of two key witnesses?

Godmen tell us that the truth cannot be destroyed. If not today the facts will come out tomorrow. Why can't they wait till then? Why display such impetuosity?

The issue that arises is whether the media would have treated the matter in a similar fashion had the accused been a journalist from their own fraternity? Here are some examples. An editor who was a flag-bearer of investigative journalism was accused of harassment by a lady colleague. As a result, he had to spend many months behind bars. The editor of a TV channel went to jail for allegedly extorting money from an MP of the last Lok Sabha, belonging to the then ruling party. Some media houses as well as businessmen who made meteoric rises in their profession went the same way. In each of these cases, the media was unrelenting in exposing them. Point: the kind of debate that journalists indulged, in all these cases, was not done even by lawyers in courts. Clearly, if one of us indulges in any immoral behav-



On its 188th birth anniversary, Hindi journalism is in robust health SONU MEHTA/HT

our, the entire community will unite to challenge the person. Why don't the self-styled guardians of morality take lessons from this?

The social media explosion has begun to dismantle all established norms. Where does the media stand a chance against it — religion, power structures, styles of governance, nations and clans — have all fallen victim to this epidemic. Unfortunately, these social media soldiers are bent upon destroying the edifices of propriety built by their forefathers. The responsibilities of every individ-

ual increase in such a scenario. The media and its supporters are no exception to this.

After the departure of the British Raj, in independent India, there have been several proclamations of emergencies whether official or unofficial. For journalists — neither bestowed with any special rights by the constitution nor with any special resources by the society — the times are particularly challenging. Governments, politicians and devotees of power have always been inimical to them. Who wants to look at one's own reflection in the mirror? That's why there are attempts to shatter the mirror from time to time.

With respect I would like to state that the English media is relatively luckier than its vernacular counterparts because English is still the language of the cities. The responsibility of telling the truth to make a living is carried out by vernacular journalists on their own. They have to work in terrain and circumstances that are often labelled as 'jungle raj' by their urban brethren. The venomous backlash for this is also borne by the language press.

The question is: What does society give in return to journalists who make numerous sacrifices trying to uphold societal values? Our fellow travellers in society tolerate the excesses of tyrants but pretend to be oblivious to the excesses on journalists and unblinkingly move on. I take strong objection to their indifference.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief Hindustan Times. letters@hindustantimes.com

MAILGAZE



Unlike their brothers, many girls in rural India are not allowed mobile phones as their parents are worried they may use it to chat with boys (Representative Photo) MINT FILE PHOTO

On the Web, too, women are the invisible gender

It's time we identified the social and cultural barriers that discourage women from using the Internet

SUJATHA SUBRAMANIAN



While conducting research on young women's engagement with online spaces, I had a conversation with 16-year-old Jyoti about how she uses the Internet. Jyoti, who lives in a single room apartment with her two parents and older brother, told me that every time she logs in to the internet, her brother looks over her shoulder to keep an eye on which website she is accessing. While it is acceptable for her to use online dictionaries for help with homework and access news websites, she is not allowed to use Facebook or other social media sites. Unlike her brother, she is also not allowed to have a mobile phone since her parents are worried that she might use it to chat with boys.

The 'Digital in 2017' report compiled by Hootsuite and We Are Social demonstrates that compared to the global internet penetration rate of 50%, only 35% of the Indian population uses the Internet. This divide is largely understood in terms of lack of access to digital resources and the absence of digital literacy skills. However, the report also makes visible gender as a crucial factor that determines internet usage; the report demonstrates that when it comes to Facebook users, the percent-

age of male users outnumber female users in every age group. In India, of the total 191 million Facebook users in India, only 24% are female. In order to close the digital divide, we must therefore recognise not only the economic factors but also address the social and cultural barriers that discourage women from meaningfully using the Internet.

Recently, a panchayat in Uttar Pradesh decided to impose a fine on women seen using mobile phones. Such a fear must be understood in the broader context of patriarchal restrictions on women's autonomy, mobility and self-expression. Efforts by women to participate in online spaces and make their voices heard is often met with violence, leading women to withdraw from such spaces.

Earlier this year, Gurmehar Kaur spoke about deleting her Facebook account after receiving rape threats in response to one of her posts. The incident exemplifies how the presence of women in online spaces and their participation in political debates is seen as a challenge to the status quo that limits women's participation to the private sphere. Efforts towards addressing the gender gap in internet access and use must not only take into account issues of access but also work towards creating spaces where women can participate without fear of violence. Only then can the potential of the internet as a space for education, self-expression and mobilisation be realised.

Sujatha Subramanian is with the department of women's, gender and sexuality studies, Ohio State University. The views expressed are personal.

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R SUKUMAR



Why IT jobs in India will need different skill sets

For years, IT companies have been speaking of focusing on non-linear growth, but this hasn't been easy

India's large information technology (IT) services companies could fire around 56,000 employees this year, Mint reported in early May. That's double the number they usually fire, the report added.

People I know in the IT business admit that this is a conservative estimate and that the real number could be much higher. Across the sector — this would mean looking beyond the top seven companies Mint considered — the casualty list could add up to between 100,000 and 200,000, they claim.

That's worrying. Since the late 1990s, when legions of COBOL-crunching Indian IT coders helped exterminate the millennium bug, India's IT services companies have become employers of choice (and, more importantly, employers of scale) for young engineers. At their peak, they were hiring any engineer who came their way (and made the cut). In the mid-2000s, the CEO of a large (diversified) engineering company told me that his firm, one of the most respected in the country, couldn't find any engineers because of "these IT guys".

The boom in IT services was fed by, and in turn, reinforced, a boom in engineering education. Many of the colleges were churning out unemployable engineers but this wasn't a problem either for the colleges (the students would get snapped up, usually in their third year, by one of the IT companies) or the companies (most had parallel engineering schools running on their sprawling campuses to which these graduates would then head — a sort of finishing school for engineers).

Both booms are now at risk. Why did it come to this?

Blame it on the innovator's dilemma. The theory — there's a book of the same name — by Clayton M. Christensen, a professor at Harvard Business School, says the very factors that contributed to a company's success — focus on a segment and innovative workflow processes — could

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eventually result in its failure, especially in the face of disruptive change. Christensen is on the board of our largest IT services company, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd.

Indian IT companies pretty much invented the famed Global Delivery Model of outsourcing IT services. And much of the work outsourced to them was in the area of Application Development and Maintenance. This is, literally, back-breaking work. The amount of such work that companies can take on used to be a direct function of the number of people they employed. This business still accounts for the largest chunk of work done by such companies.

For years, Indian IT companies have been speaking of the need to focus on non-linear growth, but this hasn't been easy. This would have meant focusing on new service offerings, hiring an entirely different set of people (different skills), and, maybe, moving away from the Global Delivery Model. All large Indian IT companies tried to do this. Indeed, some tried so hard they lost their way in the other, older, larger part of the business, and suffered.

Now, with automation becoming a way of life in most companies, and Artificial Intelligence becoming a reality, the Application Business and Development part of the business is under threat. And so, Indian IT companies find themselves caught in the middle of two changes.

What does this mean for jobs in the sector? The simple answer: there will be fewer. And the new jobs that will be created will largely be in areas such as analytics, Artificial Intelligence, and the like — which means companies will be looking for an entirely different set of skills.

For people looking for jobs in Big IT, there's worse news to come: not all these new jobs have to reside within companies. The companies themselves know it. In early May, Mint reported that Wipro Ventures' investment in nine start-ups had helped the company in "60 engagements" with clients. The chairman of one of the large Indian IT firms recently told me that his company is aware that many people with the kind of skills it needs right now, would probably prefer to work at a start-up. There will be more instances of acqui-hiring, this person said, referring to the practice of a company acquiring another for its team (and skills).

R Sukumar is editor, Mint. letters@hindustantimes.com

innervoice

FIRE IS THE TEST OF GOLD, ADVERSITY, OF STRONG PERSONALITIES

R Krishnan

The other day, I read the life stories of some of the world's most successful people. They fascinated me a great deal, because they showed how one's talent and hard work, coupled with persistence, dedication, and sometimes a bit of luck, can work miracles. But what stood out for me were the stories of ordinary people who rose above their humble backgrounds to achieve extraordinary success.

They were the rag-to-riches stories, the stories of the ones who grew up in bitter circumstances, some with education, some not, but who still managed to dream big, and overcome enormous odds to make their chosen career successful. Such stories inspire us to be resilient in the face of adversity. They serve as a reminder that no matter what the life might throw at us, we should not fear it, and keep moving forward. In fact, some stories that suggest that sometimes adversity is what you need to face in order to

be successful. Two examples that come to my mind are: Simone Biles, who overcame an appalling childhood to become the most successful American gymnast, and Dipa Karmakar, who broke free from the shackles of poverty and shined at the 2016 Rio Olympics. As a saying goes: "Fire is the test of gold, adversity, of strong men."

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers.)

The views expressed are personal. innervoice@hindustantimes.com