

India is key to EU's global role

Merkel wants to look beyond the US. Modi can help

Europe has often declared its intention to be an independent player on the world stage. But in every case, Europe has fallen far short of its promise and, in times of crisis, gone back to the Atlantic alliance and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. What makes German Chancellor Angela Merkel's comments after the latest Group of Seven summit that Europe should no longer be "completely" dependent on the US is that it was given by a German leader and someone as cautious as Ms Merkel. Brussels and Paris have a long record of similar statements. However, they were always treated as sound and fury, signifying nothing, because the beating heart of the EU was in Berlin. However, after a disastrous G-7 summit in which US president Donald Trump, declined to join the others on climate change and denounced Germany for its trade policies, Ms Merkel felt that it was necessary to at least throw a few straws in the wind.

It is almost fortuitous that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has come for the consultations held every two years between New Delhi and Berlin at this point. The flip side to Ms Merkel's concerns at the Atlantic alliance is that Germany needs to reach out to new and rising powers. Almost by default, India should be first among equals in such an outreach. Russia is seen as a source of trouble by Europe. China has a political system that is almost the antithesis of the post-sovereign, liberal democratic order of which the EU believes it is the bellwether. India is not without its flaws, but its trajectory both economic and political is much closer to what Europe and Germany would feel comfortable with.

New Delhi has long treated the EU only as an economic partner because European countries seemed incapable of understanding that in places like Asia concepts the balance of power and realpolitik were alive and kicking. Germany has a chance to show it understands this and begin using its considerable financial and technological capacities to enhance Indian economic and even military power.

Time to flush out complacency

The killing of a man over public urination is bad news for Swachh Bharat

It was a senseless act of violence and a blow to the Swachh Bharat Mission. On May 27, Ravinder Kumar, a 31-year-old e-rickshaw driver, was beaten to death in Delhi after he objected to two people relieving themselves in public and instead directed them to a public toilet barely five metres away. Was Kumar a victim of the scant disregard for public decency and hygiene that is widespread in our cities? That indeed appears to be the case.

While the government has put all its might behind the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), an ambitious scheme for making the country open-defecation-free by 2019 and eradication of manual scavenging, people seem to be still reluctant to use toilets even when they are available. Over the last three years, close to 2.09 crore toilets have been built. Understandably, since 60% of open defecation in the country takes place in rural areas, the thrust of the government as well as its outreach programmes has been on rural audiences. According to official data on the Swachh Bharat Mission analysed by The Accountability Initiative of the Centre for Policy Research for the period October 2014 to 2017-18, the government allocated just ₹7,290 crore to the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban, which is just 18% of the total allocation. The allocation to Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin is much higher at ₹33,823 crore. If we look at actual spending, the government spent ₹18,513 crore on Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin and just ₹3,410 crore on Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban that is only 16% of total expenditure.

Building household toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission (urban) runs into a number of challenges such as property tenure rights, sludge disposal issues and above all, a change in mindsets, which is not easy to achieve. A dual strategy of raising awareness and as well as deterring those who shed civic sense and propriety in the public is the need of the hour.

comment

Big tobacco is hiding behind farmers

Contrary to what the powerful industry claims, agriculturists want to shift to alternative crops

Srinath Reddy

In Andhra, a separate department for tobacco development is set up to encourage tobacco growing... We must cry a half to this trend and reclaim these lands for growing food grains.'

This excerpt from MS Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966; page 252) is good advice that tobacco farmers and policymakers who guide agricultural policies, must heed.

Since November 2016, Delhi has witnessed a hoardings and poster war targeting the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC), the Union health ministry and civil society organisations advocating tobacco control. The force behind this campaign is ostensibly a tobacco farmers' association from Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

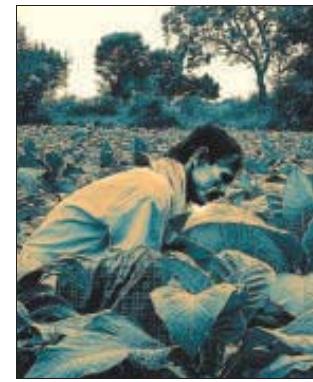
A former prime minister from that region, PV Narasimha Rao (also former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh) made a fervent plea in the Lok Sabha that tobacco farmers should switch to alternate crops, as the world was becoming increasingly aware of the harm from tobacco. Venkiah Naidu, as minister for rural development in the AB Vajpayee government, also gave similar advice to

farmers. They were speaking as responsible leaders interested in protecting both the health of the people and future of the farmers.

It is false propaganda of the tobacco industry that widespread unemployment would strike tobacco farmers and workers if effective tobacco control measures are implemented. Even with strong policies and programmes, decline in tobacco consumption would be a gradual process, with falling prevalence partially compensated by a growing population which shores up the absolute number of tobacco consumers. Becoming a tobacco-free society will take a few decades, not few months or a few years. This gives ample time for planned and assisted transition to alternative crops and occupations.

Surveys have shown that many farmers would like to shift to alternate crops, if government and banks can support them during the transition. A study by economists from Dharwad, published in the *Current Agriculture Research Journal* in 2015, reports possibilities of promoting ginger, chilly, sugarcane and plantation crops as economically viable alternatives. However, this needs market support mechanisms similar to those provided to tobacco ("a pampered crop" as that report describes).

The desire for beedi workers to shift to other livelihoods is even more intense, as employment is seasonal, wages are poor, health is imperilled and working conditions are often exploitative. The women who are



A farmer works in his tobacco field at Hunsur, near Bangalore

REUTERS

engaged in this unrewarding work desire change and are determined that their daughters will not take up this employment. Government should support the aspirations of these women and the young girls in their families by training them as community health workers, allied health professionals and nurses - both to meet the dire shortages in India and to meet the growing gaps in the global health workforce.

Tobacco claims lives of 1.2 million Indians every year, many of them young or middle aged. Around 35% of Indian adults and 14.5% of adolescents consume tobacco in some form. Health care costs of tobacco related diseases like heart attacks, cancer and chronic lung disease have been shown to outweigh the

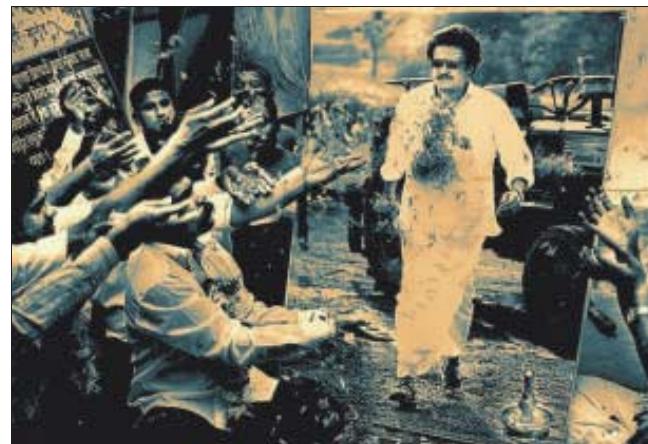
revenue contributed by tobacco. It also poses many threats to the environment. If India needs to compete with the world in health, sustained economic growth, sports or environmental protection, tobacco cannot feature in our developmental design.

It is painful to see the farmers and their industry sponsors accusing 'foreign-funded NGOs' of being anti-national. If ardently seeking and actively striving for the health and well-being of the people, protecting their productivity and reducing tobacco related health care costs, are measures of patriotism, tobacco control advocates are among those who love and serve the nation best. Certainly better than tobacco corporates with substantial foreign investments, where investors trade Indian lives for profits. Worldwide, the tobacco industry hides its hostility to tobacco control behind the tears and fears of farmers and workers. Tobacco farmers should recognise this and play their role in nation building by moving to livelihoods that do not endanger the lives of fellow Indians. Central and state governments should assist them in doing so.

Under the leadership of Sushma Swaraj, India's health ministry fought hard in 2003 to include Article 17 in FCTC, for promotion of economically viable alternate livelihoods. In 2016, the health ministry under the leadership of Jyoti Nadda steered a resolution, listing specific pathways for speedy implementation of this article, at the Conference of Parties to FCTC. A pan-India multi-sectoral effort is now needed to assist the farmers to move to a better future so that other Indians too can have a better future.

K. Srinath Reddy is president, Public Health Foundation of India. The views expressed are personal

TAKETWO



Actor Rajinikanth has been consistent that he does not see himself as a 'political leader or statesman'

HINDUSTAN TIMES

Can Rajinikanth fill the vacuum in Tamil Nadu?

The actor's reticence in taking the political plunge could be interpreted as a sign of his prudence



SUBHASH RAI

This could be the moment. The prospect that Rajinikanth has been toying with for a long time now. His reticence in taking the long-sought-for political plunge is consistent with his low-profile real-life persona, but could also be interpreted as a sign of his prudence.

Rajinikanth has been consistent that he does not see himself as a "political leader or statesman". Nevertheless, speculation about his imminent entry into the political arena has cropped up with uncanny regularity.

Rajinikanth, given that he is from Bengaluru, has been compelled to weigh in when tensions between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have come to a head over the Cauvery river water sharing dispute. He has even tried to build a political consensus over the inter-linking of the rivers across the country, another of his projects that has not found much traction — a reflection of his lack of political sagacity.

The other piece of the Rajinikanth's political puzzle is his supposed antipathy towards the late Tamil Nadu chief minister, J Jayalalithaa. Rajinikanth chose not to confront her in a one-on-one confrontation, and with her death, never can. Rajinikanth's political prospects seems the brightest now, thanks to

the political vacuum created by the demise of Jayalalithaa and the near-retirement of the DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi. Or do they?

So when a Marathi-speaking Kannadiga from Tamil Nadu considers a political career in his adopted state, what are the factors he would have to weigh? Of course he is hugely popular. Would that translate into votes? MG Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa as actors-turned-politicians and who ever had strong roots outside the state have etched their names in the Tamil political firmament. If anybody can form a triumvirate with MGR and Jaya, it could be Rajinikanth. For that, his fan clubs should be deployed as a part of larger strategy to build his political career, like how MGR's fan clubs acted as the bulwark of his political plan, which helped Jayalalithaa too.

MGR had his political career firmly ensconced in the Dravidian movement. Jayalalithaa stayed true to it merely in name. Though the Dravidian movement is rooted in atheism, Jayalalithaa was clearly religious and publicly gave money to temples. Rajinikanth has not got the political pedigree or the ideology, instead he has been bobnobbed with the Congress initially and more recently with the BJP.

Caste politics is a reality despite the Dravidian movement's sway over the politics of Tamil Nadu in the past few decades. Will Rajinikanth overcome the political faultlines?

For that the people of Tamil Nadu should feel the State has reached a political cul de sac and only Rajinikanth can save it. If not, the mega star will make space for a non-existent BJP to make some inroads and nothing else.

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Brutality has become a public spectacle in India

Recent incidents of lynching demonstrate the extent of symbolic and celebratory violence in our lives



NONICA DATTA

in all these instances is synonymous with humiliation, violation and destruction of human bodies.

In many ways, colonial forms of violence have continued to flourish in modern India. After Independence, however, a new script of violence has been written. Since the 1980s, violence escalated amid processes of secularisation and economic development. Closer to our public memory are, in the words of Ashis Nandy, the 'secular riots' of 1984 openly organised and promoted by Congress cadres. The angry mobs carrying voters' lists celebrated public lynching and burning on the streets. Indeed, the modern languages of Hindutva nationalism and statist secularism, as Nandy argues, have converged at different points to find political expression in violence. It is in this sense, mob violence has acquired a new legitimacy, sanction and political meaning.

Incidents of lynching in Dadri, Alwar and Khanda demonstrate the extent of symbolic and celebratory forms of violence in everyday lives. These are aggressively linked to modern technologies, modes of communication and institutions of the State — police, judiciary and bureaucracy. Smartphones are used to spread rumours about cow-slaughter and to circulate incendiary motifs, images and symbols. A new form of primal propaganda is manufactured to forge a collective, homogenous, standardised majoritarian identity devoid of plurality and fluidity. The grisly scenes of violence are captured through cameras and demonstrated as extra-judicial punitive measures against the so-called transgressors, who are helpless and innocent victims. Such scientific techniques provoke, mobilise and inflame the passions of the mass audience.

The widening web of violence has become localised, but it openly coheres with larger national interests and political outfits. Local vigilante groups, which also include non-State actors, have become active participants in perpetrating vigilante justice and asserting their muscle power through extortions and intimidations. There is a numbness to the response of the public audience. Often, perpetrators of violence are not seen as aggressors, and victims are viewed as non-victims. In the cacophony of hate, anger, savagery, political and intellectual debates, justice eludes. The recent lynchings show the complexity and pattern of the violence-laden situation. The category of the 'other' is now uncertain and shifting. The modern State remains mute. A complicit spectator of the spectacle.

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The views expressed are personal

THE WIDENING WEB OF VIOLENCE IN THIS COUNTRY HAS BECOME LOCALISED, BUT IT COHERES WITH NATIONAL INTERESTS AND POLITICAL OUTFITS

innervoice
MAKING A DIFFERENCE CAN BE A MATTER OF CHOICE AND PLANNING

PP Wangchuk

To make a difference, you have to do something different. A friend of mine keeps this kind of 'reminders' in his 'have-a-look-daily' diary.

He is hardworking, honest and a stickler to principles. He doesn't have a million bucks but leads a beautiful life, happy and contented.

It is a fact that nothing big comes without thinking big and 'out of the box'. A routine day will give you only routine results

that don't help you make any headway. You go on doing the same every day, and life gets stuck.

What is important to remember is, in the words of American author Byron Garrett: "Being a man or a woman is a matter of birth. Being a man or a woman who makes a difference is a matter of choice."

It is not that whatever you do does not make a difference. It does, but it depends on your attitude.

If you work with the idea and consciousness that what you are doing ha ill. You

have to plan, work hard and be consistent.

Tom Broka, American TV journalist and author, says it is "easy to make a million bucks but quite tough to make a difference."

And yet, mind you, it is not impossible. In a way, even making a million bucks can make a lot of difference provided this money is used for the overall good of all.

Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal.
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