



A thought for today

All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others

GEORGE ORWELL

Retrograde Law

Restricting cattle trade will hurt farmers and threaten jobs

Last week the environment ministry introduced rules to regulate cattle trade which will effectively kill the buffalo meat industry. This will be the immediate impact. Subsequently, it will increase already high levels of stress on agriculture as livestock trade – on which draconian restrictions will be placed – is an essential component of the agrarian economy. This law will have a harmful impact on farmers and industries which use livestock products as input. In addition, it undermines federalism as it encroaches on the domain of states.

The rule, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets), prohibits sale of cattle for slaughter. The scope of the rules covers buffaloes and camels. Overall trade in livestock has thereby been squeezed, as when sale of animals takes place it is difficult to determine what purpose it is for. Trade that has been legitimate for centuries will now be burdened by layers of bureaucracy and red tape, which will catalyse corruption. India's thriving buffalo meat exports, which recorded Rs 26,684 crore in 2015-16, will be crippled by the move. It doesn't end there. Milch cattle have a limited productive period. The livestock economy therefore depends on the farmer's ability to sell cattle subsequently. Other industries such as meat, leather, soap, automobile grease among others, use livestock or its by-products as inputs. Therefore, restricting livestock trade impairs other industries and threatens millions of jobs.

Moreover, Article 246 (3) of the Constitution gives states exclusive powers to legislate on preservation of cattle. By encroaching on this domain, we are headed towards greater friction and contestation between Centre and states. To make matters worse, vigilante groups which have functioned unchecked may choke even the limited livestock trade permitted by the new rule. Irrationality in laws promotes overall levels of irrationality in society.

The new rule will not be effective right away. Therefore, the government should annul it before adverse economic and political consequences (including for BJP) show up. The argument that the rules aim to prevent cruelty to animals is unconvincing – they will in fact promote cruelty to animals when farmers are forced to resort to underhand means to dispose of unproductive cattle. The Indian economy today produces few jobs relative to the number of young people coming into labour markets. It is, therefore, imperative that the government not introduce rules that destroy even jobs that exist currently.



Year In Office

Kerala's left front government must accelerate development and quell political violence

Kerala's Left Democratic Front (LDF) government has taken a leaf out of the playbook of the NDA government at the Centre, by announcing large celebrations on completion of its first year in office. However, there is very little that the Left government can claim after its first year. It is highlighting its efforts to reduce corruption and improve governance. Surely there have been some gains on both counts, but very little is visible at the grassroots (many would argue that for the central government as well).

Corruption in government offices and speed and efficiency of delivery of services remain major hindrances. Worst has been the government's record on law and order, as evident from continuing political killings even after active intervention of chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan in an effort to promote peace. Two of his ministers had to quit office following allegations of nepotism and other misdemeanours. Moreover allies in the coalition – especially the two communist parties – continue to clash on various policies raising doubts about cohesion in government.

Recent developments show the state has faltered badly even in areas where its achievements have been historically significant. For instance its universities are ranked way down the list in national rankings on educational excellence; likewise its major urban centres have neglected cleanliness and waste disposal services. The state has been unable to attract substantial private sector investments and it ranks close to the bottom on ease of doing business. All this points to lack of a long term vision for building on the state's significant achievements in the social sector. The LDF government has to step up efforts to mobilise private sector investments, if it is to develop Kerala and provide decent employment to its educated workforce who are forced to migrate in large numbers in search of a livelihood.



Appne APP

From Bai to Babu, India has wide nomenclature for virtual personal assistants

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Virtual assistants, apps and bots are all the rage lately. They perform automated tasks over the internet on command, including voice command, often sparing us time and the tedium of typed instructions. Such computer programmes or "intelligent personal assistants" (IPAs) from US corporations also come with charming names: Apple has Siri, Amazon has Alexa, Microsoft has Cortana and no doubt there will be many more in due course. Some, like Google Home's IPA, lack a name: It's simply called Assistant. "Okay, Google. What is the capital of Karnataka?" I asked Assistant recently. "Hartford is the capital of Connecticut," Assistant intoned, doubtless piqued that he didn't have a proper name.

Nomenclature should pose no problems in India once Indian companies begin putting out apps and IPAs. At least one Indian bank already has an appropriately named app called Laxmi. Doubtless other banks will come out with Kubera, Vasudhara, etc in due course, not to speak of upgraded versions called Mahalaxmi and Varamahalaxmi, instead of Laxmi 2.0, Laxmi 3.0, etc. Education portals can come with virtual assistants named after Ganesh and Saraswati, and hospitals and health portals can have appsnamed Dhanvantari and Vaidyanath. I'd like to see an app dispensing short fairy-tales for children ... called Appnara. But it is in the area of personal assistance that we will have the greatest variety. Instead of giving names of real people to IPAs and risk offending the Champa-Chamelis of India, we have a broad array of familiar euphemisms to fall back on. From Chhotu, Bhaiyya, and Bhaisaab in the north to Thambi, Thamma, and Thammudu in the south, from Paaji in Punjab to Babu in Bengal, we have a surfeit of winning names for virtual personal assistants, should Ramu and Kamla take exception to lending their names. Service apps in Mumbai can go for Bai (if Ganpat declines), and security apps in the north can go with Bahadur. America can dine out on food apps such as Opentable and Instacart, but they can't beat our Maharaj and Bawarchi.

Those who feel such metonyms are classist and discriminatory can also go with Saar (in south India), Boss (in north India) and Saheb (everywhere). Want a more casually named app? Try Yaar or Dost. Something more respectful? Ji-Huzoor and Manyavar. My own favourite name (and suggestion) for anyone who is working on a desi virtual assistant/app would be Uncle – or Auntie. Everyone who can provide answers in India is Uncle or Auntie. 'Aunty, kya time hua?' "Oye, Aunty kisko bulaya, hain?"

Head Off Digital Colonialism

How Indian IT can compete with Google and Facebook and show the world a better way

Mishi Choudhary and Eben Moglen



The world's major societies are now wrestling with the enormous social power wielded by the internet's "platform companies". In Europe they speak of "GAFA": Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon. Twitter, Uber and other aspirant companies hover just out of the main ring.

Billions of people provide data about their personal lives and business activities to these companies, which are using that data as leverage to change human behaviour to their economic advantage. Governments everywhere see them as rivals to their power and also invaluable allies. India and its government too face immense challenges, but also an extraordinary opportunity, if GoI can lead India in the right direction.

Essentially, three basic approaches to deal with the power of these American data miners have emerged.

First, the US government sees them as pillars of post-industrial American power, and as an immense national security intelligence resource. It is therefore their strategically. Second, proponents of "digital sovereignty", mostly autocracies, have chosen to build national search engines and social media structures, favouring domestic private market entrants (as has happened in Russia and China), and by exercising control over national telecommunications networks to block the US companies. Third, the European Union has attempted to control the companies' behaviour by regulation and litigation.

Europe's open and democratic societies have been fully colonised by the platforms as the US: the plurality of their citizens' email is read by Google, most of their citizens' social and family lives are surveilled by Facebook, and so on. The European Commission and national governments mostly attempt to regulate the companies through competition and "data protection" law, both of which assume that profiting by collecting information about customers and their behaviour is essentially legitimate, and



that the states' functions should be to require a "level playing field" for local companies, and the acquisition of uninformed "opt-in" clocks from the citizens whose intimate lives are being commoditised.

Even the pursuit of these very narrow neo-liberal goals, however, means undertaking vastly expensive and complex litigation against the platform companies, expending time and taxpayers' money on the largest scale, with uncertain results at best.

India has a golden opportunity to find a fourth way. The market in internet services – that is, information technology for use by people in their daily lives – is now dominated by companies that provide "free" services in return for massive privacy invasion. This model, in which the consumer is the product, is doing enormous harm to the human race and destroying our privacy environment completely, in order to provide people supposedly "free" email and other forms of social communication, calendaring and similar services "in the cloud".

Autocratic "digital sovereignty" like China or Russia cannot be India's way: more than any other society, India stands to benefit economically from the open worldwide Net. No Indian government can afford to use its law officers, its

Indian industries could very profitably provide state-of-the-art cloud services to everyone in the world who has seen the error of "free" services based on privacy invasion

Competition Commission and its taxpayers' money to spend years litigating with Google, Microsoft, or Facebook over individual business practices, in the European style. But to take an American free-market position with respect to the US platform companies is to endorse an immense act of digital colonialism, in which the private lives of more than a billion Indian citizens are delivered "free" to the data miners.

India's greatest advantages in 21st century global economic competition are the intelligence and education of its people. Software- and network-based service industries are core components of any Digital India economic strategy. European countries intuit that spending hundreds of millions of euros and years

in litigation with Google over whether search results prioritise Google services contributes less to European welfare than building a European business that would compete with Google globally. But this isn't aerospace and they don't know how.

India can. India can invent competition that challenges not just the platform companies but their basic, anti-environmental business model. Indian internet companies can provide global digital service platforms that protect, rather than destroy, privacy. Indian internet industries can provide reasonably priced, universally available, privacy respecting services that compete directly with services provided by the US data miners, priced reasonably in local terms in all the developed and developing societies.

Indian industries, providing state-of-the-art cloud services – social networking, email, travel, calendaring, on-line retailing everywhere, etc – could very profitably, given Indian cost structures, compete to provide those services to everyone in the world who has seen the error of "free" services based on privacy invasion, and wants an alternative she can pay for, with confidence in the privacy technology that is all open source, and works in their interest rather than someone else's.

This is "for-profit, pro-privacy IT for humanity." And because of the economies of scale in this business, industry will be able to provide Indians with deeply subsidised or no-cost services, based not on invading or selling their privacy to multinationals, but as a consequence of the redistributive effect of selling first world consumers their data privacy as an export industry.

As a method of restoring competitive health to an industry, nothing succeeds like competition. India can not only secure its strategic economic role in the 21st century global order, not only provide its own people with a chance to raise themselves by serving their own needs and the world's, but also help restore the privacy environment for all humanity by controlling the platform companies directly, positively, profitably, by making a better mousetrap. The world will beat a path to India's door.

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'Need to re-evaluate how we counter radicalisation in UK ... it is not working, home-grown terrorism an increasing problem'

Keith Vaz is Britain's longest serving Indian-origin Member of Parliament. Now a Labour candidate from Leicester East for UK's upcoming general elections, he has previously served as minister for Europe and been a member of Britain's joint committee on national security strategy. He spoke to Rohit E David on the recent Manchester bomb attack, on the possibility of UK overhauling its laws on internal security and India-UK cooperation on counterterrorism.

■ British PM Theresa May warned that more strikes may be 'imminent' after the Ariana Grande concert bombing in Manchester. Your comments?

The attack in Manchester was a tragedy. Targeting children and families is completely deplorable and has shocked our nation to the core.

■ Do you feel there was an intelligence failure in this case?

The details of the investigation into the attack in Manchester are still being revealed. A number of arrests have already been made, however it is too soon to know if there was an intelligence failure. However, I must commend the reactions of the police and emergency services, who have worked round the clock to secure the scene and keep our streets safe.

■ Should UK take a relook at its law and have a harder policy against hard-line Islamists in the country?

The UK is a country of tolerance. Hatred and terrorism has no place within our borders. I am sure that in the days and weeks to come, the law will be looked at. In particular our preventive strategy will need careful re-evaluation. Engaging Muslim communities in the fight against extremism is vital.

■ By attacking Manchester, what message do you think the terrorists have sent to the world?

They have sent a message of cowardice. Shamelessly attacking innocent children is nothing to be proud of and has caused outrage around the world. What was meant to be an evening of fun and enjoyment for many young people and their families quickly turned into a nightmare. The world will forget the attacker, his name and his actions will not haunt us. However, we will remember the victims and those that reacted with such bravery in what must have been a terrifying situation.

■ The Manchester bomber has alleged ties with Islamic State. How can the world prevent youngsters from selecting the path of terrorism?

We need to re-evaluate how we counter radicalisation in the UK. Clearly something is not working, as

home-grown terrorism is becoming an increasing problem. Our preventive strategy has been widely criticised and it is clearly not working. We must involve Muslim communities in the development, implementation and evaluation of these programmes. Without their input we will never succeed.

■ The Indian cricket team has reportedly raised concerns for their safety in England with the Champions Trophy coming up. Your comments?

The UK remains safe. The Indian cricket team should not have concerns for its safety. Armed forces have been deployed to the streets and key areas to allow the police to continue their vital work keeping the public safe.

■ Do you feel greater controls or government regulations for social networking are needed to control terrorism?

Social networking sites have a responsibility when it comes to monitoring, re-

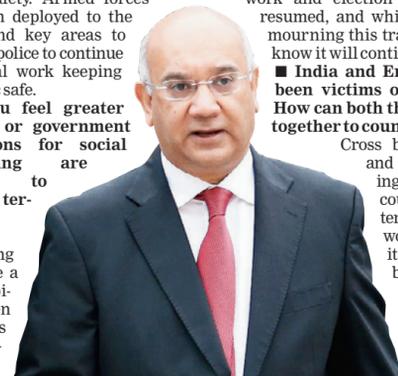
porting and removing extremist material. At present they are not reacting quickly enough and extremist material is still being distributed freely. More must be done by these sites to tackle this issue.

■ What impact has the attack had on the City of London and the campaign for UK's general elections?

London will continue as normal. There is an increased police presence on the streets, as well as armed forces, but life as the city knows it must continue as normal. The country has gone back to work and election campaigning has resumed, and whilst we are all still mourning this tragic loss, life as we know it will continue.

■ India and England have both been victims of terror attacks. How can both the countries work together to counter terrorists?

Cross border cooperation and intelligence sharing is the best way to counter international terrorists. The UK is world-renowned for its intelligence capabilities and cooperation with our European and international partners has never been more important.



dilbert



When Tenzing And Hillary Defied Astrology

Sumit Paul

There's a very inspiring anecdote in "The Tiger Of The Snows", the autobiography of Tenzing with James Ramsey Ullman, 1955. Before the Everest expedition, Tenzing Norgay and New Zealand's Edmund Hillary went to meet the head priest of the Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu for an astrological consultation. They went there just for a lark.

The head priest read their palms and categorically told them that neither of them would surmount Sagarmatha (Nepali word for the Everest) and he further "predicted" that one of them would die during the gruelling expedition. The duo didn't pay heed to the seer's "prediction" and went on to become the first men to stand atop the world's highest mountain on May 29, 1953.

When young Zahiruddin Babar was getting ready for the first Battle of Panipat in 1526, his nujoomi – Arabic for

a soothsayer – warned him that he would lose the battle and might even die. Babar won that decisive battle to establish the Mughal empire on the sub-continent that continued with all its glory till 1857, when Bahadur Shah Zafar was defeated by the English and banished to Rangoon in Burma.

A six-fingered child with a couple of teeth was born in a poor family near Barbados. The village clergyman, who happened to be a face-reader and clairvoyant, immediately declared that the child was the Devil's son and would die before the age of 10. That child is still alive as an 81-year-old graceful man who's universally regarded as the greatest cricketer ever to have graced the greens. He's the legendary West Indian cricketer, Garfield Sobers.

The above mentioned instances are not with a view to casting aspersions on

astrology, but to underline the fact that man can falsify any astrological prediction if he's determined to prove that wrong with his indomitable spirit to succeed in life.

Astrology is great but not greater than a man who makes his own destiny. We're all architects of our own destiny. It's basic human nature to be curious about the future because it's unseen and unknown and anything that's unknown has an irresistible appeal.

But astrology is not an oracular or Gospel truth. It may provide certain directions but the destination lies with the person. Had Tenzing, Hillary, Babar and Sobers accepted those predictions as ultimate truths, they'd not have become what they eventually became, leaving their names on the sands of time. They weren't unnerved by those predictions. They had faith in themselves and an

Sacredspace

*I'm The Ocean
I am like the ocean and this phenomenal world is like its waves. With such an understanding (for the knower of the Self) there is neither renunciation nor acceptance for dissolution.*

Ashtavakra Gita

