

Changing Gears on the Modi-Merkel Autobahn

India must push for free trade pact with EU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the three biggest economies of the European Union could not have been better timed. Uncertainty over the nature of US-EU relations, and an underlying discomfort with an aggressive China adds to the attraction of India as a long-term partner. The visit, close on the heels of a significant tax reform, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on its way, provides demonstrable action of India's intention to augment this partnership.

India's bilateral trade with Germany is at €17.4 billion (\$19.74 billion) in 2016, a fraction of the value of Germany's trade with its No. 1 trade partner, China. But the room to grow is immense, and Chancellor Angela Merkel gets this. This is a good opportunity to get the ball rolling on the EU-India free trade agreement, which has been stalled since 2013. Indications that talks will resume in July is welcome. With a slew of reforms and streamlined systems in place, India can now pitch for a bigger share of investments — German foreign direct investment in 2016 stood at \$1.1 billion. In the context of China's One Belt One Road initiative, Modi and Merkel are converging on working together in Africa, focusing on renewable energy, connectivity, vocational training, and have called on businesses to collaborate on promoting trade and development. Climate change is an important focus area. India has made it clear it is committed to the Paris Agreement. The two countries remain committed to working with Afghanistan to tackle terrorism, thus containing Pakistan.



Ashok Malik

The Modi-Merkel meeting was about continuing with the partnership, and putting it on firmer ground. Both countries will work together on issues such as UN reforms, expansion of the UN Security Council, India's inclusion in export control regimes such as the Nuclear Suppliers Group, tackling terrorism, and the adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Modi and Merkel will have the opportunity to deepen this partnership when they meet for the G-20 summit in July in Hamburg. It will be another chance to demonstrate why India and Germany are good for each other.

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Learn From Ashoka, It's About Animal Welfare

With the Madras High Court staying the Centre's order prohibiting the sale of cattle and other milch animals at marketplaces, the government is reportedly chewing the cud over making its case from a prevention of animal cruelty angle. This would be the right way forward. Ironically, the petition was introduced by animal rights activist Gauri Maulekhi in 2014 for that very objective — and not to disrupt livelihoods or change diets. But somehow, in all the dust kicked up by far too many hooves, the issue of ameliorating the suffering of animals has been pushed into the background. GoI must use this opportunity to make prevention of animal cruelty policy.



For this purpose, the Centre would be wise to look towards a figure from Indian history, Emperor Ashoka, the first ruler in the world who included animals in his citizenry by providing them rights. A great communicator, Ashoka's edicts, a kind of 3rd century BCE Mann Ki Baat scattered across the subcontinent, included messages prohibiting animal slaughter for religious sacrifice. But even as a vegetarian himself and an evangelist of vegetarianism, Ashoka understood that forcing dietary restrictions on his largely non-vegetarian subjects was not an option. Thus, his emphasis on animal welfare, the banning of animal sacrifice, regulation of practices such as castration, establishing veterinary facilities, and the espousal of a strong message of kindness towards all animals. This combination of ecological awareness and sensitivity toward animals — 'stray' dogs, for instance, face the brunt of cruelty — is a 'modernist' policy the government can borrow from the Mauryan king. This will bring the original intent of putting a stop to cruelty and apathy towards cattle on the table. And without hijacking an issue that deals with animal welfare and making it into offal to feed human brawls.

Learn from Trump on how to keep carping compatriots pointlessly occupied

Creating a Covfefe Is a Great Idea

His predecessor, Barack Obama certainly had a way with words, as rapt audiences would vouch rather readily. However, US President Donald J Trump has a way with new words, although they tend to elicit mirth more than admiration. Yuge and bigly were his earlier notable contributions to American political discourse. But that was before he became Leader of the Free World. Now any words that emanate from him are bound to assume a more serious cast. No wonder his latest offering — covfefe — has caused a furore on social media. While it could well be the result of him not using his reading glasses when he took another shot at the media on Twitter, people cannot be blamed for wondering whether it was the nuclear launch code, his microblogging password, or actually meant 'I resign' in Trumpese.

Covfefe being just what happens to the word 'coverage' when typed out by a small presidential hand is too boringly obvious. And Trump must be complimented for turning a slip into a convenient conundrum by exhorting his fellow Americans in a follow-up tweet to decipher what covfefe really means. Not many world leaders would be able to deftly keep a large number of carping compatriots happily occupied with an utterly pointless task. His peers in other countries with similar 'fan' following on social media could try this gambit too.

The foundations of a post-2019 team are going to be laid now by Prime Minister Modi

Will the Mover Turn Shaker?



Ashok Malik

In Year Four, what are Prime Minister Narendra Modi's priorities? This is an unusual question because by this stage in a government's life, most prime ministers would become cautious. One doubts this is Modi's path. He is a risk-taker by instinct and will strive to up his game. That apart, after the victory in Uttar Pradesh, he has the political capital to retain his government's energy.

So what will he do? To answer with one or two gimmicky responses would be unfair and limiting. The PM had begun with a long-term agenda of national transformation. Several of the programmes he introduced — Swachh Bharat, promoting and building systems for a less-cash economy, Make in India, particularly in defence and electronics and telecom hardware — had timeframes that ran well beyond a five-year term.

In his initial years, Modi had to cope with a bureaucracy and a Delhi establishment that was sizing him up, with a hostile Rajya Sabha, and with several states run by non-BJP parties. Gradually, he has addressed some of these vulnerabilities. Of course, electoral victories have helped.

It is important to look at the remaining two years through the prism described above. Even the July 1 rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) — vital for tax uniformity, reducing the cash economy and incen-

tivising manufacture — becomes part of this grand narrative, rather than just a standalone reform.

Make in India

The next challenge will be to get substantial 'Make in India' projects going, especially in the defence sector. The finalisation of the Strategic Partnership (SP) model, whereby the defence ministry will identify private sector partners for a multi-year programme to invest in domestic military manufacture capacities, is a case in point.

The fruits of this policy will be apparent in a decade, if not longer. Yet, Modi would want to show some progress by 2019. Perhaps the Indian Air Force's quest for a single-engine fighter — for which American and Swedish companies are promising technology transfer — will advance by then.

In his first three years, Modi did not rush into privatisation and strategic disinvestment. This has disappointed some supporters. But in his mind he has been clear that by creating space for private enterprise and vacating public sector monopolies — such as in the defence sector or merchant mining in coal — he is alive to the limits of the State.

It is telling that the government's interest in strategic disinvestment, beginning with Air India, has been rekindled. Here, too, the finalisation of reports from NITI Aayog, the decision on which companies to divest and how, and how the benefits and value accrual must be shared with state governments and ordinary people are all key issues.

In that search for balance between intervention and competition, the prime minister needs to devote some thought to price controls. He has worked hard on rationalising and



It's crunch time

targeting subsidies and welfare delivery, and on laying the ground for a low-cost housing expansion. This has given him credibility and political space. Even so, there is a risk that the current mood has led to a normalisation of price controls as a preferred method of ensuring equity and delivering welfare.

This is not just about the Modi government. A variety of state governments (including non-BJP ones) and even the judiciary have fallen into the trap of equating a legitimate battle against profiteering and exploitative market practices with the simplistic tool of price caps, whether for medical devices or school fees. The PM cannot be unaware of this and he needs to gently restore nuance.

One moves to human resources. It is logical to expect a reshuffle in the Union council of ministers, maybe after the presidential election in July. There are gaps to fill. More so, the political sweet spot Modi is in gives him the opportunity to do what he could not in 2014: plan a team well in advance.

This summer's reordering of the Cabinet will probably be the last such exercise till 2019. The foundations of a post-2019 team — presuming the election that year goes as predicted — are going to be laid

now. Will it be a younger team, aimed at the India of the mid-2020s? Will there be a restructuring of ministries and departments? Will Modi identify non-regular ministerial choices and back them as candidates in 2019? Some clues may be available later this summer.

Bureaucracy Overhaul

Relatedly, an overhaul of the bureaucracy remains a work in progress. This is central to a modernisation of Indian administration and to incorporating certain specialist capacities that the Indian state lacks. The high-octane foreign and investment-seeking forays the PM has made have not always been complemented and followed up on by the domestic system. If India is to move towards middle-income economy status, and if Modi is to have a memorable legacy, this delivery mechanism needs a drastic change.

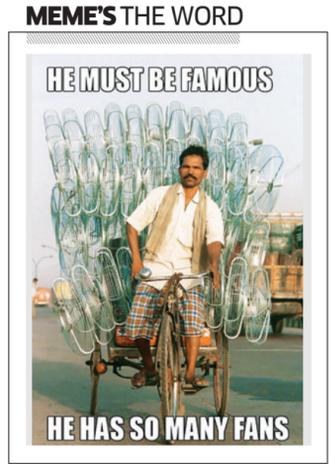
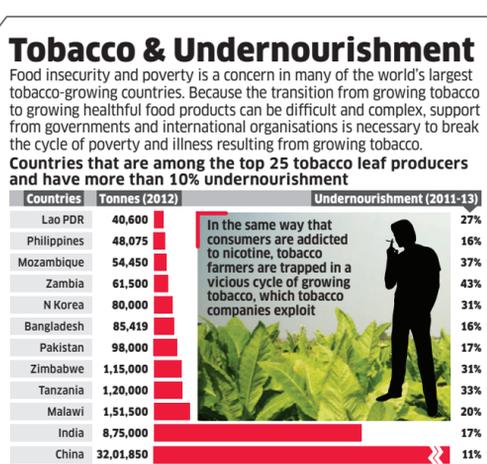
Gentle steps have been taken. Middle to senior jobs that were the preserve of IAS officers have seen appointments from allied services. Recently, two batches of IAS officers (1984 and 1985) were taken together for empanelment for secretary-level posts to give the government more choice. One expects the shake-up is only starting.

In that search for balance between intervention and competition, the prime minister needs to devote some thought to price controls

WIT & WISDOM

"I'm afraid. Allow me to be afraid."

Francesco Totti
Footballer



SEN & SENSIBILITY

Do Shut Up, Gentlemen



Rajyasree Sen

First, Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Azam Khan's buffaloes had run away from him — a portent of what was to come India's way a few years later. And now his tongue seems to have followed suit. Last fortnight, a video of two women being molested by 14 men in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh started doing the rounds on social media. Khan, still smarting from the SP debacle at the hustings, decided that this was the opportune moment to show that even if UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath didn't much care for women, Khan definitely does.

"Standing up" for us women, Khan said, "After the Bulandshahr gangrape case [last Thursday], everyone should ensure that the women of their house stay indoors as much as possible." Well, of course, it's our fault. If we just lock ourselves up, nothing bad can happen. Why change the behaviour of perpetrators when you can simply imprison the victims?

Now, to be fair, Khan is at least consistent. He is consistently offensive in his views on women and sexual violence. When another gangrape of a 14-year-old girl and her mother took place in Bulandshahr in July 2016, Khan claimed that this was a conspiracy to defame the Akhilesh Yadav government. The girl appealed to the Supreme Court, which made Khan apologise for his statement.

In October 2015, Khan had claimed that women were being raped because they used cellphones. Essentially, it's our fault for stepping out in public and for using mobile telephony. While Khan has been rightfully

pilloried for his utterly regressive comments, in Khan's defence, he is not alone. It seems that if you are a politician, even a female one, your brain will instantly regress into a Neanderthal version.

It also seems the SP's verbose leaders share the same views. Abu Azmi, who seems to have worked hard at permanently fixing his sexist foot in his mouth, in January commented on a molestation case in Bengaluru, saying that the incident took place because of "skin show". And that's not all. "If a girl celebrates after dark she should go with her husband, father, and not with strangers. There should be strict action against those going against our culture."

But even this was more palatable than what Azmi had said following a 2014 rape: "Rape is punishable by hanging in Islam. But here, nothing happens to women, only to men. Even the woman is guilty."

It's not, however, just male politicians. The rot cuts across genders. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee had claimed that the rape of a woman in a taxi in Kolkata in 2013 was a conspiracy. Maneka Gand-

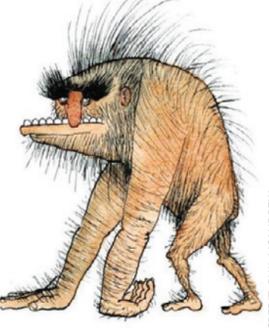
hi, minister of child and women development, justified marital rape by saying that the international "concept" of marital rape cannot be applied in the Indian context. Because, according to her impeccable logic, when you say 'no' to sex abroad, it means 'yes' in India.

And then there's the protector of women and cows and Muslims and UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath. He has gone on record in his pre-CM avatar saying that the protection given to a woman by her father, husband and son is only to channelise her energy and to make her more powerful. And only a powerful woman can give birth to a mahapurush. And that women who acquire male traits turn into rakshasas.

But none of us should be surprised by this love for women. After all, Adityanath was not the only BJP MP who opposed the Women's Reservation Bill in 2010. It is one thing to oppose the Bill for it being patronising, and going against gender equality. It is quite another to say, as he did, that women were surging ahead in every aspect of life, so "what is the need to hurry (sic) things unnecessarily [with reservations]?"

At the time, Mulayam Singh Yadav had said that if the Bill was passed, Parliament would be filled with women who "will attract catcalls". This is true. With men like Adityanath and Azmi and Khan being voted into power, it may well be wiser for us not to rush things along. And to simply stay in the kitchen and have sex with our husbands, whether we want to or not, and give birth to 'mahapurush'.

Before pulling Khan up — as he must be — let's recognise that the apple really doesn't fall far from the regressive political tree. It's time we stop asking our elected representatives for their views on women. And maybe they will also realise that being offensive really isn't the best form of defending the indefensible.



No reservations with women

Citings

Managing Oneself

EMILY ESFAHANI SMITH

Research shows that if you set happiness as your goal and pursue it, value it the way our culture encourages us to do, you can actually end up feeling unhappy and lonely. But if you set meaning as your goal and devote yourself to living a meaningful life, you experience this deeper and more enduring form of well-being down the road... I remember seeing a study that showed that of all the things that millennials want in a job — financial reward, prestige, status — the No. 1 priority for them is a sense of meaning at work, which I think is wonderful. I would also say that sometimes all of us can suffer from some myths about meaning. We think that if we want our work to be meaningful, it has to give us the one meaning and purpose of our lives — and that we can't find or craft meaning... to value meaning, I think that we also need to bring it down to earth a bit. I interviewed all kinds of people about what makes their lives meaningful, and I looked at what the social science research said. No two people told me the same things. But I did find that there were certain themes that came up again and again. When people talk about what makes their lives meaningful, they talk about having relationships that are defined by a sense of belonging, having a purpose or something worthwhile to do with their time, crafting narratives that help them understand themselves in the world, and having experiences of transcendence or self-loss.

From: *Why Finding Meaning — Not Happiness — Is What Really Matters*



the speaking tree

The Mobile Temples

KSRAM

In Vedic times there were no temples as we know them today. Temples were constructed when kingdoms began to flourish. Anand Coomaraswamy observes that the rise of the temple represents the softening of the practice of yajna or sacrifice into puja.

The temple — the practice of 'fixing' God in a permanent building — was never entirely endorsed by thinkers. Questions have been raised in this regard down the years. Basavanna, the 11th century Kannada poet who began the Veerasaiva movement, wrote an interesting poem on this subject: "The rich/ shall make temples for Siva./ What shall I, a poor man./ do?/ My legs are pillars, the body the shrine, the head a cupola/ of gold./ Listen, O kudala-sangama-deva/ things standing shall fall, but the moving ever shall stay."

AK Ramanujan observed that Hindu temples are modelled after the human body: Temples have padas or legs; hasta or side walls; shikhara or head; and garbha griha or wombhouse. The 'fixed' temple is in opposition to the 'mobile' body; the transient building contrasts with the abiding Self; and, most importantly, the making of a temple is opposed to the being of a temple. A constructed temple is only a symbol of the original, the body. Is it wise then to chase the symbol, when you have the original? Is it wise then to make something, if you can be it?

Chat Room

Elementary, My Dear Watson

This refers to 'Busy Politicking, Not Politics' (May 31) by TK Arun. Mass mobilisation by the BJP is inevitable with a weak Opposition. But it is unfair to blame the government for all the problems faced by the common man. Political parties voted to power have the foremost obligation to ensure the society's economic and social well-being. But a vibrant democracy also needs a strong and constructive Opposition, and its absence, any government in power would go all out to establish greater connect with people.

PARTHASARATHY SEN
New Delhi

Make Bharat Swachh

The WHO is reported to have confirmed three cases of Zika virus in India. The government and the medical fraternity should do their bit to tackling such virus threats. Laboratories equipped to



confirm Zika diagnoses should assist in testing. Mosquitoes spread the virus, and an unclean environment only adds to the problem. In India, the lack of basic facilities such as working toilets and sewerage systems lead to the transmission of many deadly viruses that can lead to infection and even death. Not just the government, citizens also have the responsibility to safeguard the environment.

P SENTHIL SARAVANA DURAI
Mumbai

Trust the Prime Minister

Apropos 'PM Modi's Invitation to a Conversation' (May 30), This is a rare gesture, and there is no reason not to trust the PM as he has sought constructive criticism. Politicians are generally known to be egoistic and it is commendable that the PM has proactively asked for criticism on matters of national interest. He's open to course correction in policies, if need be. The onus lies with the Opposition to take the dialogue forward. Let's have some out-of-the-box ideas.

BAL GOVIND
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