

The  
**Hindustan Times**

ESTABLISHED IN 1924

# Let's break the science barrier

## STEM education cannot remain a boys' only club

**T**he Joint Entrance Examination – Advanced (JEE – Advanced) results are out and coaching institutes have been proudly advertising their 'successful' candidates. All most all advertisements have rows of photographs of bright young boys smiling at the camera. But where are the girls? This gender imbalance is not surprising because when it comes to STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering, and mathematics — it's very much a boys' club. The situation is so dire that earlier this month, a meeting of the joint admission board of IITs recommended an increase of 600 seats — a hike of 14% — in the number of seats allotted to women, taking the quota to 1,440 seats. Currently, women make up just 8% of the student strength at the 23 IITs. The IITs are among India's best institutes and rank high in global surveys but are plagued by a paltry number of women students, seen as society's belief that men are more suited for technical jobs.

While even developed countries have fewer female scientists, the crisis is different in India, says a report. In India, women do take up science for degrees, but few of them go on to pursue careers in this discipline. The reason hasn't been performance, though. Because of the default role of a woman as a homemaker and society's perception that only women are responsible for rearing children, marriage and not career is perceived to be the primary goal of a woman — no matter which profession she is in.

In a recent interview with HT, Melinda Gates spoke about how women are losing out by not taking up STEM subjects. "The technology sector is connected to all industry, it offers great pay and the best opportunities, and girls are losing points by not studying STEM subjects," she said. Getting girls hooked to science is a must. If India wants more women doing science, the barriers — travel and safety limitations, centrality of career progression around male working patterns, inflexible work hours and negative stereotyping — have to be removed. There are no short cuts in this road map.

In a recent interview with HT, Melinda Gates spoke about how women are losing out by not taking up STEM subjects. "The technology sector is connected to all industry, it offers great pay and the best opportunities, and girls are losing points by not studying STEM subjects," she said. Getting girls hooked to science is a must. If India wants more women doing science, the barriers — travel and safety limitations, centrality of career progression around male working patterns, inflexible work hours and negative stereotyping — have to be removed. There are no short cuts in this road map.

# Don't encroach into the RBI's domain

## The bank has made a sound argument for keeping interest rates where they are

**I**t is true that a finance ministry in possession of a slowing economy must be in want of an interest rate cut. With the economy showing slowing growth and investment, the ministry was unsurprisingly disappointed when the Reserve Bank of India decided last week to keep interest rates where they are. Chief economic adviser Arvind Subramanian argued that with consumer price having risen less than 3% in March there was a "plausible alternative macroeconomic assessment" in which a repo rate cut made sense.

There are two points to be made here. One is that there are as many macroeconomic assessments when it comes to forecasting India's inflation and growth trajectories as there are economists. The RBI has made a perfectly sound argument for keeping interest rates where they are. The bank has just begun to achieve its ambitious 4% target. The primary reason for the recent price fall has been a sudden collapse in pulse prices and surprisingly soft global oil prices. Neither is a certainty even in the next quarter. If anything, the RBI's monetary policy announcement was generous in arguing the new Goods and Service Tax would not boost prices in the coming months — but global experience would point to the contrary.

Two is the larger issue of central bank autonomy. Governments and businesses inevitably think both short-term and in terms of lower interest rates. Central banks were created to invest in the long-term stability of economies and save it from short-term political interests. The inflation that ravaged the second Manmohan Singh government and the bad loan legacy it left in its wake can partly be blamed on the failure of the then RBI governor to stand up to the finance ministry. With a new monetary policy committee in place, it is more than ever important that the RBI establish its credibility as an independent policy-maker.

@ghoshworld

BOBBY GHOSH



# Time to rescind Suu Kyi's Nobel

## Her silence on the plight of the Rohingya Muslims makes her unworthy of the coveted peace prize

**T**he Oslo Freedom Forum, with which I have been associated for the past few years, is a remarkable event, for several reasons. It has been variously described as 'Davos for dissidents,' and 'Aspen for activists,' because it brings together people from all over the world who are fighting the good fight for democracy and human rights — invariably at great personal risk. These amazing people gather in the Norwegian capital to tell stories about their struggle, which are always inspiring, and which sometimes reduces the audience to tears.

The official high point of the OFF is the annual awarding of the Vaclav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent, but for me the real satisfaction comes from being part of private conversations, in which the activists share advice and best practices with each other. It's fascinating to observe how the techniques and tactics that you develop in the fight against the tyrants in Cuba, for instance, can come in handy for people struggling against tyrants in North Korea, Syria, and Saudi Arabia.

This year's speakers included exiled Bangladeshi secular publisher Ahmedur Rashid "Tutul" Choudhury, the deposed Maldivian president Mohamed Nasheed, Pakistani

squash player Maria Toorpakai Wazir, and Burmese Rohingya activist Wai Wai Nu and that's just to name those from India's neighbourhood. The Havel Prize went to the Venezuelan satirical website El Chiguire Bipolar, Zimbabwean playwright Silvano Mudzova, and Bahraini poet Ayat Alqormozi.

But perhaps the most remarkable thing at this year's OFF actually got almost no attention at all. During his speech, Thor Halvorssen, the Forum's founder, noted how "profoundly heartbreaking" it was that Burmese leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been silent on the plight of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority that is being systematically oppressed by Buddhist extremists and the Burmese government. Why is a line in a speech important? Because Suu Kyi was among the first recipients of the Havel Prize, one of many she got when she was a human-rights icon, and yet this was the first time I had heard direct criticism from someone who had previously honoured her.

Halvorssen's words were on my mind when, later that evening, I walked to the Nobel Peace Centre on the Oslo harbour. This lovely, light-yellow building is a museum to the Peace Laureates and their work. (The Nobel Peace prize is awarded at the imposing town hall across the square; all the other Nobels are



Aung San Suu Kyi was also among the first recipients of the Vaclav Havel Prize AP

given in Stockholm, Sweden.) Suu Kyi has been honoured at the museum since she won the prize, in 1991.

What, I wondered, would be the reaction if the Nobel committee followed Halvorssen's example and criticised Suu Kyi? What if they went further, and rescinded the prize? Better yet, it should conduct, every five years, an audit of the work and words of all living laureates, denouncing and defrocking those found to have fallen conspicuously short of the Nobel ideals. Perhaps a room could be set

aside in the museum for images of cashiered laureates, and before they received their prize at the town hall, every future awardee could be required to spend time in the Hall of Shame, just so they know the consequences of betraying their principles.

Okay, so maybe that last idea was a bit much. But a prize that can be rescinded would carry greater value, and it would also give the committee the chance to correct some of the more risible mistakes it has made in recent years. Glancing down the list of living laureates (it's hard to shame someone already dead), I can think of five others who should be required to turn in their medals: the European Union (2012), Barack Obama (2009), Mohammed El Baradei (2005), Kofi Annan (2001), Henry Kissinger (1973). The EU has disgraced itself with its treatment of refugees; Obama's sins of omission have cost hundreds of thousands of lives in Syria; El Baradei betrayed Egypt's democracy by backing the military coup; Kofi Annan must answer for his failure to act in Rwanda, and for the oil-for-food scandal in the UN; and Kissinger should arguably be in jail for his role in war crimes in Indochina, Bangladesh and Chile.

Would this keep laureates true to their values? Maybe not. Perhaps Suu Kyi, for example, is so far gone that even the withdrawal of the Nobel would leave her unmoved. It would nonetheless send a powerful message to the world, and restore some much-needed credibility to the most important prize in the world.

letters@hindustantimes.com

## OFFTANGENT



The Quran says, "If anyone slays a person, it is as though he has slain all of humankind; and if anyone saves a life it is as though he has saved the life of all humankind." AP

# Attacks during Ramadan aren't sanctioned by Islam

## Terrorists who believe their actions during the fasting month will earn them more blessings are misguided



M MUNEER

**W**hile doing research to "construct" the mind of the jihadist, I was flummoxed by the upsurge in "jihadi" activities during the holy month of Ramadan. The past few days alone witnessed a slew of attacks in Egypt, Afghanistan, Iraq and the UK.

Muslims worldwide fast during daylight hours (no eating, drinking, smoking or sex), offer charity, abstain from solemis, observe tolerance and peace during Ramadan. This was the month when the Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). It is astounding that jihadis have twisted the true meaning of this month and misquoted the Quran to suit their needs of recruiting new activists and to breed hatred in order to carry out more attacks on innocents. This year, just before the beginning of Ramadan, ISIS beseeched its followers to cause collateral damage and "maximise the benefits" they can get in the hereafter. The results? On the eve of Ramadan, the massacre of innocents in Egypt, followed by the London attack last week.

Jihadis are driven by the honour and solidarity, and they consider jihad to be noble. They cite the Battle of Badr, which was the turning point for Islam, to drive their mission.

In that battle on the 17th day of Ramadan (March 13, 624 AD), Muslims, in spite of being outnumbered by their oppressors, registered a historic victory with divine intervention. Jihadis attribute this victory to Ramadan, and propagate ferocity and fanaticism by falsely evoking God's name for better rewards in the hereafter. The recruits think that martyrdom during the fasting month is the easiest entry ticket to Jannah (Paradise). Little do they know that they are misguided.

The belief that spiritual rewards await good deeds is being twisted by the jihadis to brainwash believers to their ways. That the attacks are happening in Ramadan only proves that they respect neither life nor faith. Devout Muslims know that there is no justification for killing, holy month or not. The Quran warns of this in 5:32: "If anyone slays a person — unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land — it is as though he has slain all of humankind; and if anyone saves a life it is as though he has saved the life of all humankind." Clearly this explains the ostracism of jihadis by Islamic scholars.

The predicament is that the Quran gets misquoted and misinterpreted by miscreants. The language of scripture is poetic and allegorical, leading to "lost-in-translation" issues. It requires considerable education for a Muslim to internalise its verses. When the vast majority has not read — even less understood — it fully, the jihadis have a field day manipulating the innocent.

M Muneer is the co-founder of Medici Institute, a non-profit organisation and a commentator on religious issues. The views expressed are personal.

## Shubham Chandra

In this extremely competitive world, where we are constantly trying to scale the heights of success, the rigorous exercises (sometimes not even matching our competency) that the competition demands fall heavily on the neutral state of our mind.

Society's demands that put pressure on us to succeed also make us feel dejected when we are unable to win the race.

Why do we fall prey to these pressures? Perhaps due to the compulsion of parents or

the need to be identified in our society. This entire rat race ends either with a victory knock or with a great shock.

To insulate ourselves to these pressures we must have a proper, solid and sound blueprint for life where no societal pressures are allowed.

Our determination to achieve excellence should be based on our eternal principles as only our inner force has constructive properties.

Our vision and imagination that bears fruit with our efforts should be to stay

focused on our inner strength. In such a situation, we can never know which step will bring a good turn in our life but one thing we should be aware of is that it is our vision that will ensure our future trail.

So, in this light where we rely upon others at the cost of our life, let's value self dignity, respect and quality of life and achieve the platform of success.

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

innervoice@hindustantimes.com

**innvoice**

VALUE YOUR DREAMS AND VISIONS OVER THE PRESSURES OF SOCIETY



# Sexual assault survivors need long-term support

## Prevent secondary victimisation by dealing with their emotional traumas and social ostracisation



SANJEEV SAHNI

**T**hough states have come up with victim-friendly laws to encourage participation in the criminal justice process, many survivors of sexual assault feel further traumatised by the way justice is dispensed. This reduces their willingness to come forward and report these crimes. A case in point is the recent one of a woman raped by three men, who also killed her 8-month-old child by throwing her out of a moving vehicle. The woman could only tell her family about her assault much later, and reported it to the police after that.

In fact, even those cases that get as far as criminal proceedings often see the process itself becoming the source of another kind of victimisation. In legal parlance, this is called secondary victimisation. An important thing to consider in this regard is whether the survivor is satisfied with the severity of punishment meted out to the perpetrator. There is nothing worse for a victim than to feel that the perpetrator has got away lightly. In fact, survivors often feel that they are being treated worse than the perpetrator when it comes to dispensing justice. This is especially true in cases of sexual assault.

Agencies set up to assist the survivors, ironically, also have policies and procedures that lead to further or secondary victimisation. The first logical step in case of a sexual assault is to approach the medical agencies. But the questioning procedure and tests the victim is put through can be more traumatic than the offence itself.

The next step is approaching the police; there have been several instances of debasement, and insensitive remarks against the survivor (for example asking what kind of clothes they were wearing at the time of offence) that lead to secondary victimisation (the police's refusal to file the case saying it is not serious enough, or worse, casting moral aspersions on the survivor).

**SURVIVORS OF VIOLENT CRIMES LIKE SEXUAL ASSAULT OFTEN BECOME PARANOID AND SEE THEMSELVES AS COMPLETELY VULNERABLE; THEY MAY ALSO LOSE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL STABILITY**

Clearly, more often than not, the remedy is worse than the disease. It is therefore important that we pay due attention to secondary victimisation that takes place very often. Compensation should not only encompass monetary relief, but should also focus on soothing the mental and psychological trauma resulting from the crime. This is lacking in the discourse on sexual assault today. It overlooks the fact that the crime affects the survivor's social relationships — with friends, family, colleagues — and brings about a change in the survivor's psyche. Survivors of violent crimes like sexual assault often become paranoid and see themselves as completely vulnerable. This adversely affects the quality of their life. Survivors also tend to lose personal and professional stability, leading to reduction in financial capacity as well. But this aspect is generally ignored. Quantifying emotional effects is complex and problematic.

We need to devise policies and methods to reduce this victimisation. This could be done by sensitising policy makers and making them realise that trauma associated with an offence extends far beyond the actual commission. The government has some provisions for addressing the concerns of victims, but these are hardly adequate and often leave out those from poor socio-economic backgrounds. What we need is to address the difficulties faced by survivors and prevent secondary victimisation. These policies should keep in mind the main causes of secondary victimisation — (1) the acceptance of stereotypes about offences that lead to treating survivors in an insensitive manner; (2) officials refusing to provide assistance and contributing to delay, and (3) assistance offered is insensitive and invasive.

Secondary victimisation can be prevented by supporting and empowering survivors in all possible ways. This can be achieved by prioritising and targeting efforts. It is essential to involve the survivors in post-victimisation intervention as it gives them a framework for their recovery process. In fact, their non-involvement results in further victimisation. Lack of sensitivity by officials may influence the survivor's willingness to report crimes. Therefore, the need for sensitisation training for officials. But none of these attempts at preventing secondary victimisation is possible without the active support of people in power. They have to be the agents of change. They must work closely with the community and society. The focus of the victimisation prevention must be on the well-being and social integration of the survivor.

Sanjeev P Sahni is principal director, Jindal Institute of Behavioral Sciences. The views expressed are personal.