

Convicts too have rights

The Byculla prison riot reminds us that our jails are hellholes

The savage assault on a prisoner in Mumbai by her jailors because she dared to complain about missing food rations is symptomatic of what ails India's justice system. That the jailors assumed they were above the law and that convicts had no rights was evident in the brutality displayed – not satisfied with beating up the woman, they inserted a lathi into her private parts. By the time the doctor sent her to hospital, it was too late to save Manjula Shetye. A witness has identified the jailors who committed the atrocity and the police have booked them, but they continue to roam free. On mere suspicion, ordinary citizens would have been behind bars by now.

India's prisons have long gained notoriety as overcrowded hells that militate against the modern ideal of reformatory justice. The horrors perpetrated are well-documented. Numerous committees of experts have submitted voluminous reports suggesting steps to improve matters, but successive governments have ignored these recommendations. The underlying assumption appears to be that convicts, and even undertrials, have no rights. Across India, jails are filled with people awaiting trial. The sheer numbers add to the strain on infrastructure.

The money allotted to feed the prisoners is barely adequate to begin with and things get worse when corruption kicks in. But no one seems to care. Wasn't Shetye a murderer? Why should we care about feeding and housing criminals properly? Why should we care about their human rights when they have broken the law? But civilised societies do; dignity of the individual is the cornerstone on which they are built. Every criminal deserves the chance to reform. A society that treats people, whatever their crime, as less than human can hardly claim to be law-abiding either. But the larger share of the blame must lie with the administration, with those entrusted with ensuring justice for all. Those responsible for brutality in Mumbai must be made an example of. The rule of law must prevail and be seen to have prevailed.

Why the disabled are dropping out of schools

The State must invest in special teaching equipment and educators

The motto for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the national educational initiative to help realise universal elementary education policy, goes: "Every child with special needs should be placed in regular schools with the needed support services." But a look at the ground realities of the country's disabled population illustrates that it is just another utopian ideal. Those with special needs form the largest out-of-school group in the country. Two towns in Uttar Pradesh exemplify this. A recent Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan study said 3,417 disabled children had no access to education in Agra and 3,400 in Bareilly. Bareilly and Agra are not aberrations. More than 25 lakh school students in India are identified as Children with Special Needs. But the 2011 census says 45% of India's disabled are still illiterate, compared to 26% of all Indians.

The dropout rates for physically challenged students are high. Of persons with disability who are educated, 59% complete Class X, compared to 67% of the general population. In a country that has almost universal primary school enrolment, a 2014 'National Survey of Out of School Children' report put the number of special-needs children between six and 13 years of age who are out of school at 600,000.

Once in school, these children need user-friendly instruction and teaching equipment, apart from special educators who are hard to come by. On top of it, there is a policy dichotomy. Even as the ministry of human resource development propagates an inclusive-education model where special kids study in regular classrooms, the ministry of social justice and empowerment vouches for separate schools for children with special needs. Till the nation begins to be serious about educating the country's divyang population (disenfranchised but divine) as Prime Minister Narendra Modi likes to call them, the accomplishments of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will have a hollow ring to them.

India is on its own against China

Beijing uses trade as a weapon. Why doesn't New Delhi take a page out of their playbook?

BRAHMA CHELLANEY



Just as Prime Minister Narendra Modi was meeting United States President Donald Trump at the White House, Beijing ratcheted up pressure on New Delhi by officially publicising a military standoff at the Sikkim-Bhutan-Tibet tri-junction. The shadow of China's muscle flexing over the Modi-Trump discussions paralleled what happened when Chinese President Xi Jinping paid an official visit to India in 2014. Xi arrived on Modi's birthday bearing an unusual gift for his host — a major Chinese military encroachment into Ladakh's Chumar region. And Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's 2013 visit was preceded by a 19-kilometre incursion into Ladakh's Dapsang Plateau.

In China's Sun Tsu-style strategy, diplomacy and military pressure, as well as soft and hard tactics, go hand-in-hand. In the same way, China's xenophobic nationalism goes hand-in-hand with its economic globalisation project. China has held border talks with India while its forces perched on the upper heights of the Tibetan massif have staged fresh incursions.

In Beijing's view, India is a critical 'swing

State' that increasingly is moving to the US camp, undercutting Xi's ambition to establish a Sino-centric Asia through an expanded tianxia system of the 15th century. Given India's vantage geographical location, China needs its participation to plug key gaps in Xi's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project. But India not only boycotted Xi's OBOR summit but has also portrayed OBOR as an opaque, neo-colonial enterprise seeking to ensnare smaller, cash-strapped states in a debt trap.

China may have orchestrated the Sikkim standoff not so much to cast a shadow over the Modi-Trump discussions as to warn Modi that his increasing tilt toward the US will carry long-term costs. China is already stepping up its direct and surrogate threats against India. One example is the proliferation of incursions and other border incidents since the 2005 India-US nuclear deal, which laid out a strategic framework for the US to co-opt India. China is also waging a psy-war through media.

With Chinese forces aggressively seeking to nibble away at Indian territory, India's Himalayan challenge has been compounded by a lack of an integrated approach that blends military, economic and diplomatic elements into a coherent strategy. Modi, for example, has allowed China's trade surplus with India to double on his watch to almost \$60 billion. By comparison, India's trade surplus with the US is about half of that, yet Trump wants urgent Indian action to balance the two-way trade. By importing \$5 worth of goods from China for



Chinese army officers on the Chinese side of the international border, Sikkim AP

every \$1 worth of exports to it, India not only rewards Chinese belligerence but also foots the bill for Beijing's encirclement strategy. Beijing's annual trade surplus with India is large enough for it to finance one China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) every calendar year and still have a few billion dollars to spare. India's most powerful weapon against China is trade. Given China's proclivity to deploy trade as a political weapon, as against South Korea in the latest case, why doesn't India take a page out of the Chinese playbook?

India also needs to eschew accommodating rhetoric that plays into China's hands. Modi's recent statement that — despite the boundary

dispute — "not a single bullet has been fired" was music to Chinese ears, with Beijing going out of its way to welcome it. In truth, China's bullet-less Himalayan aggression, as the Sikkim episode demonstrates, is similar to the way it has expanded its control in the South China Sea. Indian statements should not give comfort to an adversary that employs furtive, creeping actions to alter the frontier bit by bit.

Meanwhile, China, by arbitrarily suspending Indians' pilgrimage to the sacred duo of Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarover, is reminding New Delhi to review its Tibet policy. To blunt China's Tibet-linked claims to Indian territories and to defend against the growing Chinese pressure, India must subtly reopen Tibet as an outstanding issue. Theoretically, India has a better historical claim to Kailash-Manasarover than China has to Arunachal Pradesh, where no Han Chinese set foot until the 1962 invasion.

Make no mistake: Despite the cosy ties with Washington, India, essentially, is on its own against China. It needs to bolster its border defences and boost its nuclear and missile deterrent capabilities. The US, with a price tag of up to \$3 billion, is offering 22 unarmed MQ-9B unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for surveillance, not the "hunter-killer" UAVs India needs to counter the emerging Indian Ocean threat from China. By investing that kind of money, India could develop potent new deterrent instruments against China — intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and long-range cruise missiles, the symbols of power in today's world.

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FARM TRUTHS



Amid strong signs of food deflation, indications are that farmers are expanding acreage under non-food crops like cotton and sugarcane, and devoting less for pulses

Good rains could still leave a long debt trail for farmers

Loan waivers do not address the crisis of agriculture. They benefit large farmers, not small and marginal ones

N CHANDRA MOHAN



With the likelihood of a normal south-west monsoon, higher grain production during the kharif or summer season is in prospect. Normal rainfall will ensure that the overall sown area for crops will be similar if not higher than last year. The big question is whether another bumper kharif due to good rainfall benefits the farming community at large? If so, this will perhaps be the best news for the BJP-led NDA government that is confronted with the challenge of dealing with an agrarian crisis.

On the face of it, higher grain production during the kharif season boosts farmer incomes. Higher income stimulates demand for FMCGs, tractors etc and raise overall industrial and GDP growth. Good rains will, therefore, reinforce the current robust growth momentum of the economy.

But higher crop production need not be associated with rural prosperity. Last year, a bumper crop production saw an across-the-board crash in food prices, a deflationary process that devastated farmer livelihoods.

Farm prices remain lower today as well. This has a crucial influence on the sort of crops farmers will sow. Amid strong signs of food deflation, indications are that they are

expanding acreage under non-food crops like cotton and sugarcane and devoting less for pulses, jute and mesta.

Why are farm prices depressed? When farmers reap record harvests, prices are bound to collapse with excess production. The opposite holds if there are severe shortages and prices spiral upwards. But the State heavily intervenes in agriculture by providing minimum support prices for major crops. In recent years these MSPs have failed to keep pace with rising input costs of crop cultivation — making farming an increasingly unviable proposition.

However, the proximate cause for the 2016-17 price crash was demonetisation. With many small and marginal farmers not having access to institutional sources of finance, they have no option but to borrow from usurious moneylenders. Thus while overall sowing during the kharif season goes up, there will be a long debt trail to it.

To be sure, the government has sought to address farmer grievances through higher MSPs for 15 crops, but many of these crops are selling below the MSP. Many state governments are responding by announcing loan waivers which they cannot afford. Loan waivers do not address the crisis of farming. They benefit large farmers and not small and marginal cultivators. Distress will continue to haunt the countryside if this season of plenty due to good rains adversely impacts price realisations. Whether the cash economy is indeed back to normal is also a big imponderable that has a bearing on the fortunes of kharif 2017.

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'Beef' has now become a licence to kill without fear

Today Junaid Khan's family is not only his parents and siblings, but all those who despair at the lynchings

SYEDA HAMEED



I will go to Jama Masjid with my brothers. Ammi, give me my Eidi as I'm 15-years-old and I can choose my own clothes. Ammi please', said Junaid Khan.

A few hours later this bright, happy, child from a village near Ballabgarh in Haryana's Faridabad district was stabbed to death while he was on his way back home after buying a new pair of shoes and kurta. His fault? — He was young, wore a namazi cap, had a hint of a beard, and was looking happy in the company of his brothers. Junaid's fault was that he was a Muslim.

In 1951 Zakir Husain, later the President of India, wrote a foreword to my book You Have to Learn to Make Friends: "A child goes out to play in the garden and is stung by a wasp. That is an experience but it leads nowhere... A child goes out to play with other children and they do not want her. That is an experience which, if misunderstood, are not soon cleared, would have agitated the mind and disturbed the values of life."

He then goes on to write about my story and then comes his shattering conclusion; those words written 65 years ago are a clarion call for India: 'May the simple childlike beauty of this story help people understand each other better and to realise the reality of a comradeship that extends beyond space and time.'

My story was based on my own experience. In 1951, the wounds of Partition were still fresh. Children in the playground, when they learnt that I was a Muslim, refused to play with me. "Go away, we won't play with you," a nine-year-old said. They became emboldened in my heart and it took years to wear off. Today I know for certain that if this incident happened 65 years later when India is at the cusp of celebrating its 75 year of independence, I would have been stabbed to death for being a Mus-

THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE OF THE NATION HAS BEEN STIRRED FOLLOWING THE KILLING OF 15-YEAR-OLD JUNAID KHAN AND SILENT PROTESTS WERE HELD ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

lim. For the last few days, my Hindu friends have been requesting that I pray for Junaid. The collective conscience of the nation has been stirred and silent protests were held all over the country. If we decide and act this could develop into something similar to the outpouring of emotion and anger that was seen across India after the 2012 December gang rape of a 23-year-old student in Delhi.

No longer recognise this country as the one my parents taught me to love. In my school we celebrated all religions, national heroes and heroines, languages, and cultures. Looking back, we were tiny rainbows running around throwing our hues all around in our family, our neighbourhood and wherever we went in the world.

All of that today is awash with one colour.

The fact that a news headline 'Accused of carrying beef, teen killed in train' is followed by a photograph of Prime Minister Narendra Modi holding hands with the presidential candidate, flanked by two seniors, Lal Krishna Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, both accused in the Babri masjid demolition case, speaks volumes for what this country has become. What does it matter to Jalauddin and Saira, Junaid's parents, if the prime minister meets United States President Donald Trump to discuss strategic issues and bilateral ties? Their child was knifed by vigilantes who will kill Muslims with impunity, whether they are on a train or on the road or in their house or in the fields because the word 'Beef' has now become a license to kill without fear of the consequences.

The consequences of these developments will be dreadful in the long run. The killers may be protected by the State or be let off with a light sentence. But where will the despair of Junaid's family be vented? Today Junaid's family is not only his parents and siblings but all of us. We all are Junaid. I am Junaid and where will my despair take me? As we all will be seen coming out on the streets, how many Junaids will they knife?

It time to remember Sahir Ludhianvi's lines:

Zulm phir zulm hai badhta hai to ttham jaata hai / Khoon phir khoon hai tapke ga to jum jayega.

(Oppression is after all oppression; if it goes up, it will stop; / Blood is after all blood; once it spills, it will be frozen.)

Junaid's blood has now congealed forever.

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innervoice **DON'T IGNORE THE AGED; THIS PHASE WILL COME IN EVERYONE'S LIFE**

Vijai Pant

American writer and novelist Pearl S Buck had once remarked, "Our society must make it right and possible for old people not to fear the young or be deserted by them, for the test of a civilisation is the way that it cares for its helpless members."

Certainly, the elder people are a treasure to the society. They are torchbearers of the past and help us carry forward the faith in society. Their wisdom is something we must welcome as an inheritance. There is a lot we

can learn from them.

However, with the crumbling of the joint family system, the young are deprived of the sagacity of the elders. As the young 21st century, modern India moves forward at an impatient pace, it has no time for the older generation. The current fall in values can be attributed to youngsters distancing themselves from the elders in family and society. This is a neglect a young India cannot afford to do.

Worse still, some are guilty of not just indifference but also abusing them. Ageing

is a natural phenomenon and the old always encounter many challenges and disabilities which the young should empathise with.

It would be wrong to view the elderly as an obligation. They deserve our love and care. Small everyday gestures, kind words, and acts are enough to bring a cheer into their lives. Remember that the needs of an aged are very little, but that need is all that they require in life.

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal.)

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