



A thought for today

Any which way you look at it,
it is the mini World Cup

VVS LAXMAN

Coaching Blues

Indian cricket team faces a tough off-field challenge at the Champions Trophy

Team India took to the field against Pakistan to defend its ICC Champions Trophy title amidst a raging controversy – over reported differences between captain Virat Kohli and coach Anil Kumble. Though Kohli has denied these reports, it must be distracting for the team how BCCI invited applications for the post of head coach just as it landed in England to play a prestigious tournament. Until then Kumble's one-year contract was widely expected to be renewed given the team's impressive performance under him, with five Test series wins in a row.

This controversy raises fundamental questions about continuing lack of professionalism in cricket governance. Why did the Committee of Administrators (CoA) leave such an important decision to be made at the very end of Kumble's tenure (which concludes with the Champions Trophy)? Perhaps the captain has expressed concerns only at this juncture but if his view is so important, he should anyway have been consulted earlier instead of creating a situation that adversely affects team morale during a very competitive overseas tournament.



This is disappointing especially as expectations ran high from the Supreme Court appointed CoA which took over running BCCI affairs from January 30. CoA member Ramachandra Guha has resigned during this cricketing firestorm but not without raising more troublesome

questions – about how CoA has been unable to resolve the sensitive issue of conflict of interest, which was critical to its replacing the established BCCI leadership. Too much of cricket administration continues to be person-specific rather than principle-based.

Take the case of Rahul Dravid who is India A and India under-19 cricket coach who has been given a 10-month contract by BCCI. This allows him to double up as mentor of Delhi Daredevils during the remaining two months in IPL season. To secure his exclusive services BCCI would have to give him a longer-term contract and enhanced compensation, because today such services have a market that's high-paying and global. Basically CoA needs to replace non-transparent loopholes with a holistic and impersonal approach to conflict of interest among coaching and support staff. Meanwhile, the likes of Virender Sehwag and Tom Moody have thrown their hat in the ring to replace Kumble. Competition as such is well and good. But as Justice Lodha points out, what's unfortunate is how the atmosphere surrounding this coach selection has been vitiated.

EVMs Win

Politicians making wild allegations against EVMs totally fail to back these up

This weekend, a challenge issued by the Election Commission to doubters to prove that electronic voting machines could be tampered with ended predictably: no one took up the challenge. Thus parties like BSP and AAP whose leaders have loudly cried EVM tampering stand exposed as sore losers, who would do well to introspect rather than blame the machine post-elections.

EVMs have been an important instrument in strengthening Indian democracy. The credit for their introduction should go to EC which successfully manages the monumental task of conducting elections in a country with about 850 million registered voters. Elections in the era prior to EVMs were often marred by booth capturing. On occasions, the number of invalid votes exceeded the margin between the first and second spots thereby vitiating the electoral process. These problems have been overcome by the introduction of EVMs. Electoral reforms are an ongoing process and we are on the threshold of the next big improvement. VVPAT, or voter verifiable paper audit trail, was used in some constituencies in the recent assembly elections. With NDA government ready to financially back this change, the next general election is expected to be conducted using VVPATs.

India's political parties have a responsibility to support EC efforts to enhance the integrity of the electoral process. Three general elections and numerous assembly elections have been conducted using EVMs. A reduction in the incidence of polling related violence has been one of the many benefits of this reform. Instead of trying to undermine this reform and campaigning for the resurrection of a paper based manual system, political parties should work with EC to bring about further reforms. A meaningful debate on electoral funding, for example, needs ideas from political parties.

Happy birthday to me

Governments are celebrating their birthdays but are taxpayers getting a share of the cake?

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There was a time when films were declared hits when they celebrated their silver and golden jubilees at the box office. Remember the days of Sholay and all those jubilees? Now silver and golden jubilees don't matter because only weekends are enough to decide whether a movie is a muqaddar ka sikandar. These days governments too are not waiting every five years for the voters' verdict on whether they have been hits or flops. Instead, governments are singing 'happy birthday to me' every year. The question must be asked: are voters invited to the party?

The three year celebrations of Modi sarkar have already kicked off with sabka saath sabka vikaas sammelans. The TMC government in Bengal released a special book on its sixth anniversary. Why even the Left has been bitten by the happy birthday bug, as revealed in the blitzkrieg of full page ads on the one year anniversary of the Pinarayi Vijayan government in Kerala. 3 year old and 1 year old governments, still toddlers in power, are telling us how wonderful they are and how much they have achieved. That's why voters are mumbling, 'hum bhi agar bachche hote... duniya kehti happy birthday to you.'

Birthdays for governments can mean taxing times for the public. Since PSUs have been asked to pay for the NDA's 3rd anniversary celebrations, many taxpayers may see red in their account books. Since most are cowed down these days, few are asking, show me the money. If governments put up too many birthday decorations is there a danger of the public being swamped in hot air balloons and sarkari magic shows?

But then we Indians love anniversaries. A bridal store recently celebrated its six month anniversary. Film star couples even celebrate their one month anniversaries. Celebrating anniversaries shows we are not just marking time, instead we are timing our pleasures. When governments decide to have parties, the public may not like the bash it has to endure: many might also not be happy about return gifts which will come in the form of tax returns. Also, given the Opposition disarray, citizens no longer have a choice in putting on too many different parties' hats. When chief ministers and prime ministers keep cutting their own birthday cakes they may only be blowing out voters' candles. The Modi government's three year birthday celebrations proclaim we are having achhe din but is the public getting a share of the birthday cake?

India: A Nation Of Bans

Prohibition never achieves intended objectives but inflicts massive collateral damage

Jaiveer Shergill



"Prohibition did not work even in the Garden of Eden. Adam ate the apple." Those were the words of Vicente Fox, former President of Mexico who represented change people were hungry for in his country. If we look back in history it's apparent that prohibition, wherever practised, has created parallel problems while failing to achieve its intended objectives.

Not only are the facts of prohibition misunderstood, it is also misapplied by the government and the judiciary in India. Our nation is now in the forefront of bans, with the government banning anything and everything that goes against its understanding of nationalism and cultural ethos, and the judiciary imposing bans based on its judicial prudence.

From alcohol to TV programmes and social media, bans have been imposed based on the premise that conscience of the general public is disturbed by such things. The reality is we are curbing democracy and the constitutional rights of citizens with these bans. They are based on the flawed premise that by closing our minds we can resolve a problem. The more the political anxiety surrounding an issue, the more is the propensity to ban.

The government's addiction to bans without realising the consequences and inherent contradictions in their own policies is reflected yet again in the recent notification banning sale of cattle (which includes buffaloes and other bovines) for slaughter at animal markets.

On the one hand the government permits operation of legal slaughterhouses, which in turn have a thriving export business, and on the other hand, bans the sale of cattle meant for these very 'legal' slaughterhouses. Has the government thought about the consequences of this ban on income of farmers who sell their buffaloes in animal markets? Will this ban not provide another opportunity to murderers in guise of gau rakshaks to kill innocents?

We live, at present, in troubled and trou-



bling times where not a day passes without some outrage in the name of nationalism. But what do we achieve with bans? Bans on beef and cow vigilantism have disturbed the economy and social order. The same Constitution which provides for cow protection as a directive principle also provides, by way of fundamental rights, the right to life and liberty which also includes the right to livelihood.

In matters relating to law and order facts have to take priority over emotions. And the fact is uninterrupted murders and attacks by cow vigilantes have adversely affected the dairy, leather and allied businesses which employ millions of people – besides disrupting social harmony.

Similarly, increasing cases of substance abuse ranging from cannabis, inhalants and sedatives to opioids have been reported from states where liquor prohibition has been imposed. Behavioural science has proved that a state will achieve more by creating a

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movement and building awareness on issues such as alcohol abuse than by banning the substance.

Competing with the government, the Supreme Court banned sale of liquor near highways. The order did not serve any purpose other than imposing another ban. States and civic authorities found their way to circumvent it. For instance, the government of Odisha renamed

state highways passing through cities and towns as 'urban roads'. Since these roads are no more highways, liquor sale goes on as usual.

Another block off the ban wagon series was the ban on social media in Jammu and Kashmir: Is there any concrete evidence that riots can be contained by blocking channels of communication? On the contrary, such measures increase distrust between people and the establishment.

J&K should learn from the Chhattisgarh example. The tribal-dominated state is infamous for censoring information and targeting journalists and civil rights activists working in Naxalite areas. Did it help the state government curb Naxalism? Incidents in Dantewada, Bastar and Sukma offer ample answers.

A nation cannot be built on bans. Democratic order implies that there are moral limits on what states can do to individuals and their choices. The culture of bans and censorship are components of a theocratic order and not of a democratic order.

Citizens of the largest democracy in the world are mature enough to take rational and logical choices. They do not want the state to determine what they should eat, how they should dress or what movie they should watch. In fact, the idea of ban is antithetical to the idea of India. India has a great tradition of openness with a faculty for assimilation and spirit of dialogue is the essence that strengthens our democracy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for building a new India, in stark contrast to the attitude of his government and party. We need to constantly remind ourselves that the only way for India to thrive and survive is to remain open and inclusive and be a functional democracy. We should not present ourselves as a ban happy state. Instead of banning, debate and discuss. Be it Parliament or the government or the judiciary, the focus should be on welfare and empowerment of people rather than curbing their constitutional rights.

The writer is on Congress's national media panel. Views are personal

'Would not overplay the slowdown concerns merely on a one quarter figure. If this persists, it would be a different matter'

After releasing new economic data showing that India's GDP growth slowed down sharply in January-March this year to 6.1% and to a three-year-low of 7.1% overall in 2016-17, TCA Anant, Chief Statistician of India and Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, spoke to Sanjiv Shankaran and Nalin Mehta on slowdown concerns, the impact of demonetisation and employment numbers:

■ **Looking at last year's GDP, what would the points of concern be?**

It is a good idea for purposes of policy to not react to short-term trends. The idea is to build policy from underlying long-term trends. The present release highlights a long-term trend which policy is addressing: the fact that capital formation rates are low. There is a need to address this trend as it is not a one quarter thing. For two and a half years capital formation rates have gone below 30% (in proportion to GDP). This is certainly amenable to long-term policy. Government from its side has addressed this issue by addressing issues related to infrastructure investment. It is these types of systemic issues which are more important to analyse.

■ **Inflation adjusted, or real GDP, declined while nominal GDP increased. How does one reconcile these divergences?**

The difference between the two is the

movement of the price indicator. What you would notice is the wholesale price index (WPI) over the last three years had registered a sharp fall due to a fall in international commodity prices. Subsequent to that, these prices started rising. These show up in GDP as well. The difference between nominal and real, or constant prices, is essentially price behaviour. If commodity prices show up in a certain way that will also show up in value added figures.

It is a good idea to look at both nominal and constant price GDP. Last year we had high real GDP growth but slower nominal GDP growth. Current prices or nominal GDP is extremely important because you earn and spend in current prices. The correct way is to look at both pictures together. Merely to tell a story from one side is misleading. To say the economy is doing well or poorly from the constant price story is misleading.

There is a slowdown but it is a systemic thing and more apparent in constant prices. In part, this slowdown in constant prices is an artifact driven by the price movement. A sharp rise in GDP the previous year and the current slowdown is driven by price dynamics. My reading of both taken together is that the economy is growing quite rapidly. It is not as fast as we would have liked it to be but I would not overplay the slowdown concerns merely on a one quarter figure. If this persists, it



would be a different matter. ■ **What was the impact of demonetisation on GDP estimates for the last quarter of 2016-17?**

That is a question very difficult to answer at the best of times. As a statistician, one looks at trends in data to disentangle the underlying process prior to a policy's introduction and after its introduction. In order to be able to tell you in a statistically robust manner that this has been the consequence of the change, he needs a large amount of data after the change and data prior to the

change to do proper comparisons. This is not a straightforward exercise and nor is it, in purely discussion terms, an exercise easy to do.

My judgment is that most people who are trying to make sense out of the statistical exercise based on two numbers are simply doing post-hoc statements and are ignoring the difference between to what extent they are caused by long-term trends and to what extent they are caused by immediate policy.

■ **Wasn't demonetisation one of the factors influencing GDP?**

Of course, it is. But to estimate how much you can attribute to that particular policy you should be willing to take the effort to separate the consequences of all other factors which have not changed.

■ **Which are other factors which influenced GDP?**

The commodity price story is one.

■ **Do you see employment numbers changing?**

We have limited time series data on employment. Most of these are from administrative sources. My personal reading is that we can't make a case of a significant slowdown in employment growth. There are certain long-run patterns taking place in employment growth. I have not seen anything which posits differently from that story. It appears that there is a certain degree of structural stability in employment.

dilbert



Work Towards Abundance And Rejuvenation

Aruna Jethwani

Driving from Dharwad to Pune some years ago, a small hill fascinated me. It looked like a beautiful rock sculpture and worth a visit. On my next trip I was sad to see it mutilated. On my last trip, to my utmost grief, the hill had disappeared. Where did that beautiful rock formation go?

I was lost in these grey thoughts when my house-help came weeping. Someone had cut down a tree in the neighbourhood and that had hurt her: "I will miss all those birds that I watched in the early morning sun rays. That white owl will come no longer."

I had no answer but she had. Wiping tears she said, "The earth gives us so much, water, food, fuel, and gold and oceans." She went on, "What do we give her in return?" Then as if hit by an idea she said, "With its strength she holds itself spreading her two arms, so

that we should get everything without being hurt. I think we should pray to her." Perhaps she was referring to the earth spirit – that which sustains us according to the laws of the universe. And which is also invoked by many indigenous communities. In many sacred places, when a tree is felled, its permission and forgiveness are asked.

Many tribes including indigenous Indians, the original inhabitants of America, worship the earth spirit; that is their religion. All indigenous tribes of America have the common tradition of revering the earth spirit. Indic ancient scriptures describe verses as prayers to be offered to Mother Earth. The Atharva Veda says: "Creator of the cosmos proclaims: I create and set/ the celestial region and the earth/ It is I who create all the seven seasons/ connected with one

another/ serially and systematically." Mother is embodiment of unconditional and unlimited love. And so she follows the laws of abundance and rejuvenation, in order to help her children evolve to witness the sphere of light.

Give a seed to Mother Earth and she dissolves it in her womb to give us a plant or a tree. That single tree gives the world multiple seeds, sometimes so many seeds that you cannot count them. Mathematicians and economists will call it Multiplier Effect. But the tree is teaching us the Law of Abundance. Give, give, and give, unconditionally. The Multiplier Effect will be seen depending on your karmic circumstances and on yourself as an evolving entity.

Seasons rejuvenate the earth with elements of nature like sunshine and

rain. But today the earth needs healing. The self-rejuvenating earth, visible in the built-in cycle of all life, provides rejuvenation to all, but today it refuses to do so. For the earth, ever forgiving – giving corn to those who dig and burn it – is tired and weary.

Tibetan monks recommend antidote as a remedy for all malaise. The antidote to violence is ahimsa. The earth spirit needs love and compassion, which is the antidote to excessive aggression and cruelty. "And so awaken the spirit of Symbiotic Reality, and love will flow by itself. But before that conserve the soil, respect the rivers, and worship water. Go to villages where hungry children are waiting with empty plates; serve the young steeped in ignorance with knowledge. The earth needs the great Law of Sharing, as an antidote to excessive consumerism, luxury, and greed. The Law of Balance and Rejuvenation will follow."

Post your comments at speakintree.in

Sacredspace

Future Shock

So bleak is the picture (of the future of humanity and the environment)... that the bulldozer and not the atomic bomb may turn out to be the most destructive invention of the 20th century.

Philip Shabecoff



the speaking tree