

Cease and Desist, Mamata Banerjee

Pandering to communal politics will backfire

A derogatory Facebook post about the Prophet Muhammad, allegedly posted on Friday, June 30, has sparked communal violence in Bengal. The affected areas are Baduria, Basirhat and surrounding towns and hamlets in the North 24 Parganas district, less than 100 km from the capital, Kolkata. Part of the story, such as the rumour that a schoolgoing 17-year-old wrote the offensive post and chief minister Mamata Banerjee's claim that governor Keshari Nath Tripathi insulted her, are hard to believe. What is indisputable, however, is that the ugly politics of faith has reared its head in Bengal after nearly 60 years. The blame for this lies at the doorstep of Banerjee, who knows that her landslide majorities in 2011 and 2016 were due to Muslims shifting their allegiance from the Left to Trinamool Congress.

Bengal's Muslim population, according to the 2011 census, is around 28%, second only to Assam's 34%. Mamata's 'appeasement' of Muslims — including job reservations and state funds for imams — has given the state BJP an opportunity to accuse her of being 'anti-Hindu'. So, the chief minister is caught up in a whirlwind, attending Islamic festivals as well as Hindu ones, trying to project that she does not favour any particular faith.

This strategy of playing on religious affinities, we fear, will push Bengal down the slippery slope of communalism. The last time this happened was between the late 1920s and 1940s. The Hindu elite of Bengal were not keen to let democracy produce Muslim-dominated governments in an undivided Bengal.

After Independence, successive governments in Bengal, including those ruled by the Congress and the Left's 34-year-old regime, avoided letting communal passions boil over. Perhaps the memory of the Great Calcutta Killings and the Noakhali riots of 1946 shaped their strategies. Banerjee should focus on good administration, building social and physical infrastructure, instead of stoking fires that might destroy the social and political fabric of Bengal. Such a strategy would be politically counterproductive from a partisan point of view as well.

Welcome Focus on Political Funding

Finance minister Arun Jaitley has said that reform in political funding is on the government's radar now, after the goods and services tax and demonetisation. This is welcome. The focus should be on getting a handle on political parties' expenditure to start with, rather than income. Corrupt politicians loot the exchequer, sell patronage and extort money in the name of mobilising funds for political activity, pocket a large slice of the collection and pass on the rest to the party and the workers they employ. Monitoring political funding from the ground up and making parties show the source of income to finance expenditure is the way to go.

We reiterate that every political party should be mandated to declare the amount of money it spends at every level: from the polling booth to the panchayat, the municipal ward, the district, the state and the nation. Money spent by activists or well-wishers too must be included in the total expenditure. The spending claim should be allowed to be freely challenged by rival parties, the media and non-government organisations taking into account rallies, posters printed by the party and transport used to ferry leaders and party workers. The Election Commission should arbitrate this challenge and firm up spending at every level. The party then should identify the source of funding to finance this expenditure.

The electoral bonds the government has come up with violate the crucial norm of transparency, denying voters the right to know who funds the parties seeking their votes. The government should replace this with transparently disclosed contributions with no absolute upper or lower limits but with an upper bound as to the share of a company's profits, to prevent shell companies being used for routing funds to parties.

Edmonton's city 'wordmark' does just that, and its impact will be enlightening

Leaving Everything to the Imagination

These days, branding is the name of the game and so much rides on perception. But it is surprising that the Canadian city of Edmonton has not generated much enthusiasm for its new rebranding tagline: Edmonton, with the red Canadian maple leaf at the end adding a dash of colour. While some may deride this city "wordmark" as deathly dull, it is actually quite brilliant. After all it leaves a lot — everything, in fact — to the imagination of the beholder. As it, therefore, ends up being only what the observer deems it to be, Edmonton can never really disappoint. It will always remain true to the main message, which is formulated by the beholder of the logo. Of course, some may ask whether this simple reiteration of the city's name as a catchline-cum-logo justified the millions paid to branding mavens, but only time will tell if the gamble has been worth it.

The City of Vancouver is another attempted wordmark in Canada, but the less-than-enthusiastic public reaction has stalled its release. Vancouver residents should reconsider their intransigence, looking at Edmonton's example. If Edmonton can be brave enough to depend only on its name, surely Vancouver can do the same? No Indian city has really embarked on a serious branding exercise as yet. But if any of them does so, relying on just their names may not be enough.

Government holds the key to tackling climate change. But solutions will come from business

Ease of Doing Climate Change



Naina Lal Kidwai

Climate change has no borders or bias. It does not care whether you are rich or poor, big or small. Last month, the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the US, withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement. It now becomes even more relevant for the rest of the world to accelerate their efforts towards climate change mitigation and adaptation.

India has taken the lead by firming up its stance to follow a low-carbon growth trajectory to fulfil the aspirations of its growing economy. The ambitious climate targets of lowering the emissions intensity of its economy by 33-35% by 2030 under the Nationally Determined Contributions of the Paris Agreement — and carrying out one of the most mammoth renewable energy expansion programmes in the world that seeks to install 175 GW of renewable energy by 2022 — is reflective of God's stance: that no matter what the world does, India won't free-ride on the efforts by other nations.

Changing Business Climate

Under the rubric of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement, all stakeholders, governments, businesses, citizens and civil society have embarked on the journey to chart out a strengthened global partnership to reach the targeted net zero emissions over the course of the next half-century.

This is reflected by the emphasis given to non-State actors in the agreement for the first time, which calls on businesses and corporate conglomerates to partner with governments.

But governments can only contribute to a small chunk of the pie by formulating policies, giving stimulus to climate-sensitive sectors and clean energy, building and assimilating the knowledge repository of climate-friendly solutions and technologies. These solutions will ultimately need to be put into action by large and small businesses, the financial world and the manufacturing industry.

Influential global conglomerates and business houses have recognised the threat climate change poses to their survival over the longer term. They have realised the only way to sustain themselves will be to integrate climate-friendly and climate-resilient approaches of doing business.

This is the silver lining and has set the tone of these large organisations playing the role of climate evangelists to demonstrate to smaller players that an energy-efficient, clean energy, low-emissions way of doing business will not only reduce their ecological footprint on the planet but also enhance their competitiveness and lead to energy savings.

The private sector, innovating business models that deliver affordable climate-friendly solutions to remote areas and to people deprived of electricity, water and sanitation and last-mile connectivity, are the real champions. They are challenging the traditional approach and have taken on the risks that come with uncharted territory. The business models have the potential to be replicated and scaled with the right policy measures by governments.

Climate concerns have now become an integral boardroom consideration for those businesses ahead of the



With better weather, it could rain profits: Golconda, René Magritte, 1953

curve. Climate-related risks will impact all sectors and require tangible actions to address these issues. A recent report demonstrated that it was vital for financial institutions to understand that addressing stranded assets and other financial risks and opportunities associated with climate change is not a one-off action, but it needs to become a permanent feature of everyday decision-making.

Reaching a New Summit

At least \$1 trillion is required every five years, half of which needs to come from the private sector. Some of the key challenges that have precluded this from happening are the mismatch between long-term assets and short-term credit provision, as well as attracting additional flows of foreign public and private capital. A clear roadmap based on strategic sector-specific needs for channelling sustainable, adequate and predictable finance across key sectors — such as waste, low-carbon infrastructure, agriculture, sustainable transportation — and to build on innovating and developing scalable and replicable climate-proofed business models are needed.

Businesses have already embarked on this journey. However, a push will be required from governments in devising policies, giving stimuli to clean energy, fiscal and regulatory assistance towards developing affordable env-

ironmentally sound technologies and finance from developed to developing nations to enable the transitions. Action must be taken now before it's too late.

This calls for a synergised effort by all stakeholders. One such collaborative effort is the Business and Climate Summit (BCS). Launched in Paris in 2015, and held in London next in 2016, the summit brought together businesses, investors and policymakers to mobilise the business community in support of climate action ahead of the UN climate negotiations and emphasise swifter government action on policies.

The third BCS to be held on August 31-September 1 in New Delhi will bring this discourse to Asia for the first time in the run up to UNFCCC COP 23. The discourse will focus on key areas relevant not only to businesses around the globe, but also will be contextual for the developing world, dealing with topics ranging from urban mobility, buildings and spatial planning, clean energy circular economy, climate finance, markets for waste, to innovative business models for mitigation, and role of carbon markets.

The summit will essentially bind the discourse around a public-private partnership framework where government holds the key, while business brings the solution.

The writer is Chair, Sustainability, Energy & Water Council, Dci

Governments, businesses, citizens and civil society are charting out a global partnership to reach the targeted net zero emissions in the next half-century

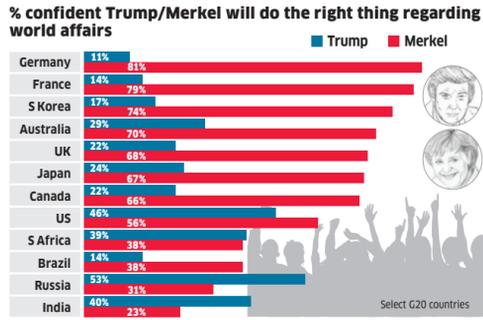
WIT & WISDOM

"We all pay for life with death, so everything in between should be free."

Bill Hicks
Comedian

Trust in Merkel

As leaders from 20 of the world's largest economies prepare to meet in Germany this week, residents in most member-countries have more confidence in the summit's host — German Chancellor Angela Merkel — than in US President Donald Trump to do the right thing in world affairs, according to a new Pew survey...



MEME'S THE WORD



STUDIES ON AGEING

Old Age & Age-Old Bigotry



Rupa Sengupta

Who wants to live it up forever? Almost everybody, it seems. From fitness fads to designer diets, from bariatric bulge removal to cryopreservation research, age-busting seems as much part of contemporary life and imagination as the Kardashians and the Beliebers.

How long we can live is paradoxically a fitting poser for our teeny-bop times. The answer, said a controversial study that created ripples last year ('Evidence for limit to human lifespan', Nature, October 2016, Xiao Dong, Brandon Milholland and Jan Vijg), is about 115 years, the natural human age limit. And chances of anyone crossing 125 in any given year are below 1 in 10,000.

But hope floats for those who want to live forever. Five research groups recently pooh-poohed the 115-year ceiling. They suggest that while things could change, so far there's no strong evidence for a limit to lifespan.

These critics of the 2016 paper question what they consider its shaky methodology, inadequate sample size and inflated analysis. They say it used patchy data while analysing maximum age at death in a year instead of maximum lifespan. Nor did it factor in medical and technological leaps expected to boost longevity.

Some researchers looked at longest lifespans yearly since 1968 in countries with the most 110-plus 'super-centenarians': France, Britain, the US, Japan. Extend 'trend lines', they say, and it seems average and maximum lifespans will keep lengthening. Other demographers expect a maximum lifespan of 125 by 2070.

Unfazed, the 2016 paper's authors re-emphasise natural age-related constraints. On this score, sufficient data sug-

gested that peak age plateaued since the mid-1990s. Jan Vijg, a molecular geneticist who led the study, grants that scientific breakthroughs could undo age barriers. But that wasn't the point. Most laypersons can follow the debate, even if unsure about taking sides. What's interesting is that mention of a human age limit should raise dust. Few live to be 100-plus, let alone 110-plus. Yet, the idea that more of us could luck out that way seems widely appealing. But what does that mean, really?

Yes, compared to the past, life isn't nasty, brutish and short. Lifespans everywhere are longer thanks to better nutrition, healthcare, amenities, education and economic opportunities. This means the 60-plus ranks will grow. It's estimated they'll form nearly 22% of the world's population by 2050. In India, they'll be about 324 million-strong by then.

This has profound implications. It is one thing to romanticise grand old age such as Jeanne Calment's, a Frenchwoman who died aged 122 in 1997. It's quite another to create enabling conditions for old folks to live with dignity, remain productive and be cared for when they hang up their boots. Inarguably, many societies seek to address age-related issues, whether by reconsidering retirement age, bolste-

ring social security or reorienting taxation and healthcare.

None of this excuses our cringe-worthy public discourse on ageing. Old age is everywhere seen as a drain on resources and a strain on families, instead of a natural stage of life no different from, say, childhood with its special needs. Assisting elders through public and private efforts is projected as growth-dampening. Policymakers patronise the elderly as wards. Or they resent them, wanting funds for age-friendly support systems to go to more 'productive' areas.

Young and old seem like entries in a ledger, one marked as future gains, the other as dead losses. Childcare being 'good investment', we demand better anganwadis, schools, children's parks. But there's a heartburn over providing pensions, wheelchairs or old age homes. Falling fertility rates in some countries are yoked to the demographic 'disaster' of greying populations. The terminology is telling. It's as if old folks should drop dead because people aren't making enough babies.

Our culture reeks of ageism. People are cheer-led to live long in a society that views death as an affront. Then they're badgered to stay forever young in a society that views ageing as scandalous. Ergo, we're told to get as close to 100 as possible in a youth-obsessed, Bot-ox-jabbed world that thinks old is mould.

Old age ain't for sissies, Bette Davis said. One may rage against the dying of the light as an aesthetic gesture. But light dimming is as inevitable as baldpates and cataracts. A sissy culture that quakes in neurotic fear of wrinkles lacks the spiritual heft to accept change and mortality. Nor can it achieve a happy death.

Can this culture have the political and moral wherewithal to treat the elderly as equal citizens, which is what they are? Don't their lifelong contributions to family, society and economic productivity offset the 'economic cost' of their being nurtured in their twilight years? If the answer is no, let's hope we don't live till 115.

Citings

Managing Decisions

AARON DE SMET ET AL

As we've worked with organisations seeking to become more agile, we've found that it's possible to accelerate the improvement of decision-making through the simple steps of categorising the type of decision that's being made and tailoring your approach accordingly. There are four types of decisions: Big-bet decisions. These infrequent and high-risk decisions have the potential to shape the future of the company.

Cross-cutting decisions. In these frequent and high-risk decisions, a series of small, interconnected decisions are made by different groups as part of a collaborative, end-to-end decision process. Delegated decisions. These frequent and low-risk decisions are effectively handled by an individual or working team, with limited input from others.

Ad hoc decisions. The organisation's infrequent, low-stakes decisions are deliberately ignored in this article, in order to sharpen our focus on the other three areas, where organisational ambiguity is most likely to undermine decision-making effectiveness. These decision categories often get overlooked, in our experience, because organisational complexity, murky accountabilities and information overload have conspired to create messy decision-making processes.

In this article, we'll describe how to vary your decision-making methods according to the circumstances. We'll also offer some tools that individuals can use to pinpoint problems and to take corrective action.

From "Untangling Your Organisation's Decision-Making"



Gita: Book of Ethics

ARUP K MAJUMDER

Several western thinkers, including Albert Schweitzer, have expressed the opinion that despite having a rich and ancient spiritual and cultural heritage, India does not have a single book of ethics that can serve as a practical life-guide. Which is why, according to them, we live in a state of constant mystical longing, seeking the truth even while denying ourselves material pursuits.

Those who concur with this view need to understand the true message of our multi-dimensional religious scriptures. True, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Cicero's Good Life, Kant's treatise on Pure and Practical Reason and the Benedictine work ethics are all valid in their respective contexts. But it is incorrect to say that the concept of "active love" representing life affirmation — pronounced in western thought — is absent in Indian scriptures.

The concept of work ethics is elaborated upon in the Bhagavad Gita when Krishna tells Arjuna about the importance of Karma Yoga. "Maximum good of the maximum number" is the basic tenet of contemporary practical philosophy. But will the "good" be determined by numbers or by the results of the work done? Should ends justify the means? Failing to comprehend what's meant by "good", it's impossible to extrapolate from there to bring about an ideal quality of life.

From practical experience, the philosophy and ethical guidelines as spelt out by Krishna in the Gita make it one of the most profound works on ethics worldwide.

Chat Room

Loopholes Can Bury the Law

Apropos 'Giving NPs a Decent Burial' by Reshmi Khurana (Jul 6). Unless loopholes in the new recovery law are plugged, we will not see the end of mounting NPs in our banks. Many defaulters are already contemplating moving the courts to circumvent the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) proceedings. If this becomes the new norm, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code will remain only on paper.

ANIL KUMAR YADAV
Gangtok

No Exemptions in the New Tax

This refers to the Edit, 'Don't Let States and Lobbies Abuse GST' (Jul 6). One nation, one tax is a radical step to end the cascading effect of multiple taxes. The government is being proactive by amending and tweaking rules if inherent flaws are brought to its notice.

GST is not perfect but may prove to be a game changer in the long run after more reforms follow to refine the law. The convergence of slabs into two may be sought once compliance rises. The GST Council must not entertain exemption requests.

BHOLEY BHARDWAJ
Mumbai

Curb Usage of Smartphones

Apropos the Edit, 'Careful With Ghosts in Our Machines' (Jul 5), not just the metros, the contagious disease of smartphones has spread to teenagers even in far-flung villages. And as the parents are mostly illiterate and unskilled daily wagers, they cannot figure out what their wards are doing with the smartphones. The smartphone has not only become a health hazard. The addiction has reached a level where the teens carry the phones with them wherever they go. So, to ensure that the sorid story of the Gurugram boy is not repeated, some restraint is called for in the interest of the new generation.

PM GOPALAN
Chennai

Letters to the editor may be addressed to editet@timesgroup.com