https://telegram.me/TheHindu_Zone https://telegram.me/PDF4EXAMS

GST Has A Good Start But Needs Help

Broadband must have minimum speed of 2 Mbps

The ongoing transition of the country's indirect taxes, other than Customs, to a goods and services tax has so far been relatively smooth, not dismissing minor glitches. But there are a few more things the government can do to make things even simpler and prevent the kind of political backlash that has accompanied switchover to a similar value-added tax in other countries. The biggest source of worry are small suppliers, who are exempt from GST below a threshold. But that will not help them if people who traditionally have been sourcing from them shift to large suppliers who are GST-compliant and upload the returns and invoices the customers need to claim input tax credit.

It is in the interest of the smallest supplier to be able to generate a GST-compliant invoice in order not to lose the custom of small producers and service providers, who need those invoices to reduce their own tax burden. These small suppliers need different kinds of help. The series of advertisements the government has been putting

out are a great help. But more can be done on the lines of how the passport office functions under TCS' outsourced regime. A checklist of the needed documents is available to anyone who wants to apply for a passport. The applicant happily assembles all the relevant documents before s/he commences the process. Such a checklist, with details that specify the size of JPEG and PDF documents that the GSTN site would accept, and instructions on getting a digital signature would help. But the biggest help would-be GST registrants need is in the realm of communications.

India's is the first value-added tax regime that rides on an information technology and communications backbone from the word go. This is great. But that communication infrastructure must work all the time and everywhere. One necessary step would be to redefine broadband as a data connection that has a minimum speed of 2 Mb per second, instead of the outdated norm of 512 Kbps. Another would be to let Ka band transponders of satellites be available for data connectivity where cable will take time to reach.

Too Sensitive To Fish For Partisan Gains

Nagaland is in turmoil, as two factions of the ruling Nagaland People's Front (NPF) have laid claim to chief ministership: one is loyal to Shurhozelie Liezietsu, an NPF veteran who has held office for a little more than five months. The other faction supports TR Zeliang, who became chief minister in 2014, after incumbent Neiphio Rio won Lok Sabha polls and moved to Delhi. During this struggle for power, as many as 10 MLAs in a House of 60 have been suspended. Liezietsu's followers claim to have a majority on their side; Zeliang says he has 37 legislators — 30 from NPF and seven independents.

Governor PB Acharya had asked Liezietsu to convene an emergency session of the Nagaland assembly and give each

faction the chance to demonstrate its strength on the floor of the House. When the ruling faction refused, Acharya said he was 'prima facie' convinced that the Zeliang group had the upper hand. He muddied the waters further by claiming that Zeliang could muster the support of 44 MLAs in a House of 59 (one seat is vacant). Governors are the eyes and ears of the Centre; they are bound to follow constitutional rules in their actions. Acharya's initial position favouring a trust vote was correct. Since then he has begun dabbling in the politics of the state.

This shows Acharya, and his masters in New Delhi, in poor light. The northeast comprises states that share international borders with China, Bangladesh and Myanmar. For various historical reasons the region has had decades of militancy: some groups want more autonomy from the Centre; others, outright independence. Decades of exposure to the draconian AFSPA has left it scarred. The Centre must stop playing partisan games, get experts who understand the region well to mediate for reconciliation — and not fish in troubled waters.

Modi's hugs may have countered it, but other leaders will need a credible shake-off

When Trump Makes it a Hand-to-Hand Combat

Glad-handing has been always been a crucial part of a politician's credo but the advent of the Trumpshake on the international stage has made the usual heads-of-state greeting a *mano-a-mano* duel. Even the most trenchant critics would have to concede that Prime Minister Narendra Modi trumped the US president's signature shake-and-yank manoeuvre — that had famously troubled many a world leader from Japanese PM Shinzo Abe to Canadian PM Justin Trudeau — by enveloping him in several successive sweeping Modi-hugs. But he may not be so lucky the next time, judging by the experience of French President Emmanuel Macron, who exchanged a white-knuckled grapple — deemed a technical draw rather than a knockout — with Donald Trump at a NATO summit in Brussels in May. He was eventually subjected to a marathon revenge 32-second *poignee de main* by Donald Trump right on the Champs-Élysées last week, with the French First Lady reluctantly making it an awkward *menage a trois*.

Previous US presidents have been known for their clasps, including the famous, brief "McKinley grip" which can be posited as the opposite of the Trump's prolonged manual cincture. It would not be farfetched to prophesy that there will be plenty more gripping coverage of the clinching moments of certain international leaders, at least in the foreseeable future.

Let privacy rules not stifle Digitial India and the accompanying growth of India's economy

Don't WhatsUpset the Cart

Kuldip Singh & TV Ramachandran

The Internet has revolutionised the way modern society lives, interacts with each other, shares information and conducts its business. At first, it was only for the use of government and scientific organisations. But as the Internet welcomed people and businesses, it created a marketplace of ideas that generated enormous economic growth all over, especially in India. Digital India, which is moving at breakneck speed, promises to accelerate this revolution.

Online e-contracts are increasingly the only way to carry out transactions on the Internet. The Information Technology Act, 2000, provides the legal framework for electronic records, digital signatures and online contracts. Online contracts include click-wrap contracts used for online transactions of both tangible and non-tangible goods and services. The users are typically required to click on a button that says, 'I agree', 'I do not agree', 'I accept', etc.

On affirming acceptance by clicking on the relevant button, the user is allowed to use the site and services, and is bound by the terms and conditions of the usage. Many end-user licence agreements (EULA) for use of software and popular applications are based on such click-wrap or web-wrap contracts.

While the benefits of information and communication technology (ICT) are immense, collection, use and sharing of personal data are an essential requirement to avail these benefits. No one can deny the role that the Aadhar card can play in the smooth delivery of various government services to residents, and in ensuring that the benefits of government schemes reach the right persons. However, one is required to part with personal data, including sensitive biometrics data.

Guidelines

While the correct use and protection of this data is most important, this cannot be allowed to disrupt the huge benefits provided by ICT. Recognising the need to protect personal data may result in different legislations, regulations and policy guidelines in different countries, resulting in a disruption in the flow of data across international borders, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) framed guidelines to strike a right balance between the objective of free flow of such data, at the same time protecting sensitive personal data.

European laws on the protection of personal data, based on the OECD guidelines, are one of the most stringent. Yet, these laws facilitate the lawful collection, use and sharing of data for various specific purposes. They are based on informed consent. However, privacy of personal data may not be used as an excuse to restrict trans-border flow of data.

Last year, two students of law filed a public interest litigation (PIL) challenging WhatsApp's updated terms and conditions, including its privacy policy. They argued that people in India are unable to make an informed choice when presented with WhatsApp's updated terms of service that include limited information-sharing with its new parent company, Facebook. This interesting case has made its way to the Supreme Court.

FILE PHOTO

Let it grow

Ironically, the students brought their case against an app that's used by millions but who know virtually nothing about it. WhatsApp uses encryption to secure messages. It doesn't require much user data to run its service. The company was acquired by Facebook in 2014, and WhatsApp wanted to begin using its parent's technology infrastructure, spam protection services, and the like – services that every online company needs, and many other companies offer, but which Facebook could provide virtually free of charge.

Terms & Conditions

To do this, WhatsApp did what hundreds of apps do in India every day. They explained how they wanted to work. Then they asked people to tap 'Accept' to continue using the service. If people did not agree, they could stop using the service and switch to other apps.

This is a fundamental part of how the Internet works. Look no further than GoI's own online services, as well as public service utility providers like the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC). Or private ecommerce apps like OLX and Paytm. There are apps that even trace the location of people at all times. Yet these apps also provide very useful services. People have a choice which apps to use. But all of them first provide prospective users with terms and conditions that must be reviewed.

The outcome of the WhatsApp case will have far-reaching effect on the future of Digital India. If the ruling were to have the effect of making such contracts more difficult to establish, it could change the fundamental legal system that has enabled the Internet to flourish. It could delay the fast pace of business and hurt the profitability of the Internet business model.

It could also introduce uncertainty for small startups that can't afford the massive legal fees of battling a new approach in court, and give pause to investors who fund those services. Above all, it could affect the millions who use these services every day.

India is at the cusp of a powerful digital revolution, with rapidly growing smartphone usage and strategic government policies that promote a vibrant economy. We should recognise that it is not just our size, but also our society that has enabled us to become the world's second-largest mobile market. The Internet should, therefore, work for all Indians.

Singh is former member, Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT). Ramachandran is President, Broadband India Forum

WhatsApp did what hundreds of apps do in India every day. They explained how they wanted to work. Then they asked people to tap 'Accept' to continue using the service

WIT & WISDOM

"If you can't beat 'em, cooperate 'em to death!"

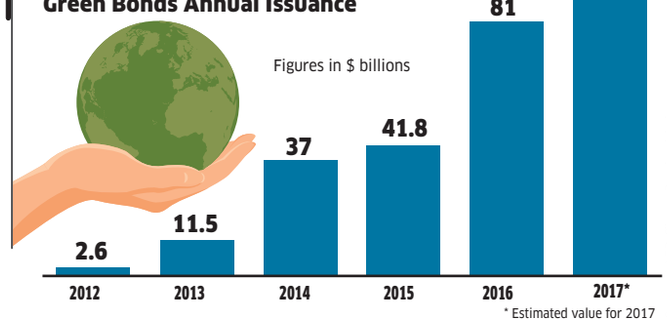
Charles M Schulz
Cartoonist

Green Bonds

The IEA says some $40 trillion of investments are required to green the world's energy systems by 2050. This is where a green bond market comes in—it can drive down capital costs. According to UN's Green Finance progress report, there has been record green bond issuance in the first quarter of this year. And this encouraging trend mirrors last year's progress when green bonds mopup reached $81 billion, up 100% from 2015. ...

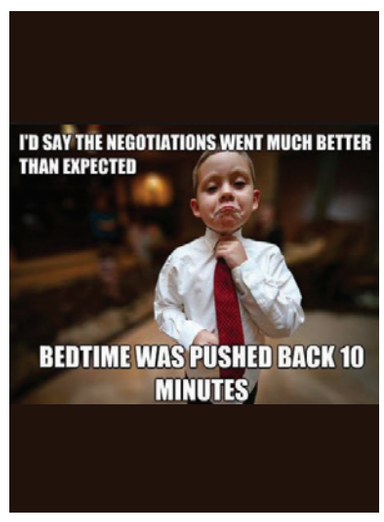
Green Bonds Annual Issuance

Figures in $ billions



Source: UNEP, Climate Bonds Initiative
* Estimated value for 2017

MEME'S THE WORD



NEUTRON TO NYLON

Death to All Rumours!

Debkumar Mitra

Has 'Mr Bean' actor Rowan Atkinson died in a car crash? 'Fox News reports' floating on social media seemed to 'confirm' this. Till some 'alt-news'-slaying website decided to play the spoilsport. Atkinson was fine, declared the website, and another rumour was put to bed.

Rumour-mongering is as old as human civilisation. Like Atkinson, Julius Caesar died a few times before he actually did on that Ides of March. Now, however, rumours have become a menace. Every day they surface at an alarming frequency. It is almost like an information contagion infecting unsuspecting minds at the speed of light. Many of these are really sinister.

Take the one about the little girl in the US who got 'infected with HIV' while swimming in a public pool. Or, closer home, the 'fact' about a bus-load of miscreants having left communally charged Bashirhat in West Bengal and heading towards the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, near Kolkata.

According to researchers, rumours are born and are carried riding four basic deep-seated human anxieties: death, disaster, conspiracy and racial tensions. In the 1986 paper, Belief in Rumour and Likelihood of Rumour Transmission, Ralph L Rosnow, John H Yost and James L Esposito speculate that rumours are a way of "making sense of a stressful and nebulous situation by theorising on one's own and through others when no acceptable information is available".

Often, the researchers noted, this 'theorisation' in the form of a rumour can escalate existing tensions and aggravate doubts, giving birth to additional rumours as a consequence. With the rise of social media, it is not only the speed of its spread, but also the complexity of rumour dynamics that has increased. With, say, Photoshop, a person can make the most outlandish claims believable.

Research has revealed that people are more likely to transmit a rumour they believe is most likely true than a rumour that has 'false' written all over it. The job of the rumour mill is to increase the believability quotient. So, a transformed or 'photoshopped' image can help even a preposterous claim survive for a long time.

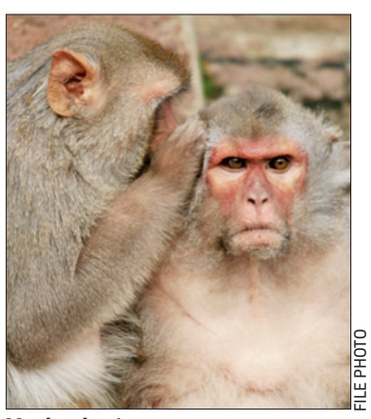
Why do people transmit a rumour even when they find it disturbing to them? One hypothesis is that they believe that sharing their own anxieties with others lessens the uneasiness. There appears to be an 'I-believe-in-it-so-I'll-pass-it-on' kind of vested interest working as a transmission cue. Even in cases where a preposterous claim, such as where someone saw a green sun last Sunday, or the 'fact' that all ravens are white in New Zealand, is allowed to pass, a choice is made based on our own experiences and sensibilities. Often the original rumour gets mutated in the process. But it still gets transmitted.

Given its capacity to cause irreversible damage to individuals or society at large, there is an acute shortage to data on rumours to come up with an effective strategy to combat them. Fredrick Koenig in his book, Rumour in the Marketplace: The Social Psychology of Commercial Hearsay, writes about four steps to fight a rumour: 1) Be alert on hearing the rumour, 2) Assess its damage potential 3) Collect material and evidence to launch a 'counterattack', 4) Refute the rumour and all its mutated forms by 'attacking' it from every possible angle. Once the decision has been taken to take down a rumour, the timing of the counterattack is important.

Given that many of us believe tweets to be gospel truth, a lightning counteroffensive alone can contain damage. A research on the rumours floating around in the form of tweets during the announcement of the discovery of the Higgs Boson particle found that "tweets were more likely to be sent within a few seconds by users living within 20km. During the main event [announcement by the research group at CERN] the activity became frenetic and its time scale reduced to 2 seconds without a specific spatial pattern".

A similar phenomenon was noticed in the case of the recent communal tension at Bashirhat in Bengal. Before the government took the decision to stop the 'information' (read: rumour) exchange on social media, a war of tweets had already started. It took the rumour-mongers sitting in far-flung areas only 12 hours to shatter the uneasy calm of this border town.

The world now lives on screens — smartphones, tablets, laptops. Any happening anywhere in the world gets flashed on screens in almost real time in the form of news and rumours. Add to that, the deliberate spread of misinformation by some agencies and you have a recipe for disaster. The only way to contain the damage caused by the rumour genie is to educate the masses. We cannot let Mr Bean die so many deaths.



FILE PHOTO

Monkey baat

Citings

Logical Notions

JAN VON PLATO

Philosophical realism dictates an absolute notion of truth. Somewhere in a big imaginary book is a list of all truths. To be a truth just means to be in the list. As the list is infinite, we human beings don't have direct access to it but have to proceed on the basis of evidence for truth. In the best of cases, such evidence amounts to a proof, or inference in the sense of logic and mathematics. The list is not affected by what we happen to have proved; it's at most worth a marginal remark: This truth was even proved by human beings. By the 1920s, especially under the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the view of logical truths as tautologies emerged. A tautology is a logical sentence that is true under all possible circumstances, or true by virtue of its form. Wittgenstein listed in his little book Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, originally just the German "Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung," a number of logical maxims, from 1 (the world is all that is the case) to 7 (what one cannot speak about, on that one must be silent). One maxim is that tautologies stand on their own feet, so to say; there is no need for a concept of inference from other tautologies or assumptions: One can always conceive logic in such a way that every theorem is its own proof. The notion of a tautology can be used in place of the axioms and inferences from them; inference is indeed completely absent from the Tractatus.

From: The Great Formal Machinery Works: Theories of Deduction and Computation at the Origins of the Digital Age

the speaking tree

The Kural's Relevance

MRINALINI V SARABHAI

The Tirukkural is among the finest works of Indian spiritual literature, comparable to the Vedas. Written in Tamil by Tiruvalluvar, a humble weaver, it is a treatise on the three-fold purposeful direction of life: Aram or virtue Porul or wealth and Inbam or love. It begins with invocation of the Supreme, followed by an elaboration of the three directives, and ends in mukti.

Tiruval luvar does not extol asceticism but says that the life of the house holder is far greater than that of one in the path of renunciation.

It also offers useful suggestions on the art of governance. "Good government makes one rule enduring. Where it is absent the lustre will not last long", he says.

While Valluvar deals with a variety of subjects, many stanzas are suffused with humour. "One must regard it as a windfall if one is able to shake off unwise friends," he says. And on diet he says, "No disease attacks the person who eats with moderation the food which agrees with him, for countless are the ills that befall a glutton." Tiruvalluvar is also a romantic. He appreciates love as much as he understands righteous conduct and ethical behaviour.

Tamil offers the earliest inspiration of Indian culture and from this language came many of the original thoughts of modern Hinduism. The ancient language has survived as a spoken tongue with its basic structure unchanged. And the Kural is an enduring example of the changeless nature of right human values.

Chat Room

China And Human Rights

China's Noble laureate Liu Xiaobo died last week while still in custody following a battle with cancer. China may have been a rising economic giant rivalling the US, but its track record on the human rights front is despicable. Chinese rulers have demonstrated their disregard in respecting human rights of their citizens. Without democracy and freedom of expression, China cannot sustain its economic prosperity.

M JEYARAM
Sholavandan (Tamil Nadu)

Make Economy Robust

Apropos Abheek Burman's '2017, Our Roaring Twenties?' (July 14). The stock market is soaring. The Sensex and Nifty closed at record levels last week and the market capitalisation of Indian stocks hit $2 trillion. Caution is in order. We tend to

give too much value to foreign institutional investors and to their stock-picking abilities. The maxim of wise investment, of course, requires one to know when to cash out. But strengthening the macroeconomic foundation is crucial to reinforcing a positive outlook. The government should not intervene in equity markets, but must ensure that the foundation becomes stronger. For that to happen, bad loans need to be resolved swiftly.

DR RAMAN AGRAWALLA
Bhubaneswar

Over To The President

Apropos Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay's 'Friend, Rashtrapati & Guide' (July 15). There has been considerable debate over the election to the post of the President of India. Under our statute, the president appoints the council of ministers 'on the aid and advice' of the PM. And the roots of our parliamentary system lie in fostering democratic ideals. Ram Nath Kovind, NDA's presidential candidate and known to be a non-controversial politician, if elected, should ensure that India upholds these ideals.

SUBRAHMANIAN SH
Thane

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