



A thought for today

A good candle provides barely a hundredth of the illumination of a single 100 watt light bulb

BILL BRYSON

Engineered Death

Rampant power theft a symptom of governance failure, which holds back development

The tragic death of a BSES engineer in the national capital, when out inspecting complaints of power theft, shows up India's collective governance failures which hold back development. The engineer, Abhimanyu Singh, and his colleagues were chased by a mob despite police presence. This resulted in a car crash that took his life and left others critically injured. Other than rampant lawlessness and the general surrender of police to mobs, it also shows why India's power sector needs repeated bailouts. To put electricity theft in perspective, 33% of Indian households in 2011 did not have access to electricity in 2011. If power theft remains unchecked, there won't be enough resources to electrify every home.

Electricity foregone on account of aggregate technical and commercial losses was about 24.6% in 2014-15. In other words, only three of every four units of electricity generated get paid for by consumers. There is no free lunch for an economy, so tax payers have to make good the electricity pilfered. This has many forms, including bailouts for financial institutions which have lent money to discoms. For sure, there have been improvements in this area and losses are lower than what they were a decade ago. But India's performance on this front still remains poor.

Unless power consumed is paid for, it will be difficult for discoms to generate resources to upgrade infrastructure. This translates into poor electricity supply and a slow pace of industrialisation. Getting India's power reforms right is key to making Indian manufacturing competitive. If politicians feel poor consumers cannot pay for electricity, they should be provided for through a transparent government subsidy. Politically sanctioned power theft can cripple Indian industry.

Central governments have met with little success in power reforms as states generally control discoms. However, it is possible for NDA to change this situation. One, some of the states with the largest technical and commercial losses – such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, UP and Haryana – have BJP governments. If these states get their act together, it will make a meaningful impact at the national level. Two, the last bailout package, Uday, was built around incentivising states to reform their power sector to access central resources. This is a sound approach. Moreover police should not tamely surrender to mobs, as they routinely do these days.

Not So Sharif

Pakistan SC's decision on Nawaz Sharif will make little difference to India

Pakistan's unhappy tryst with democracy hit another speed breaker when a joint investigation team (JIT) appointed by its Supreme Court to probe the "Panama Papers" indicted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his children for financial irregularities and tax evasion. Elected governments in Pakistan serve at the army's pleasure and a weakened Sharif will suit its interests. Pakistan's judiciary takes its cue from the army and enthusiastically cracks down on political corruption while leaving other sectors of society untouched. Recall that former PM Yousaf Raza Gilani lost his job in 2012 after a court judgment against him.

But Pak politicians have only themselves to blame for not uniting against military and judicial overreach. Politicians like former cricketer Imran Khan have cosied up to the army to breach Pakistan's bipolar politics that revolved around PML(N) and PPP. Two army officers affiliated with ISI and Military Intelligence served on the six-member JIT, giving enough reason for Sharif supporters to question the probe's credibility. Even after democracy was restored and Pervez Musharraf stepped down in 2008, the army has continued to dictate foreign policy. But Pakistan's political class, including Sharif, accepts this humiliating arrangement.

Even when Sharif used his prerogative to appoint Qamar Javed Bajwa as army chief, the 'Dawn Leaks' episode revealed his weak hand in dictating policy on India and terror. Not surprisingly, the army thwarted Sharif's attempts to build bridges with counterpart Narendra Modi, evident in the string of terror attacks on Indian military bases. Elections are due in 2018 and Sharif seemed poised to benefit from a weak opposition and positive economic outlook. Democracy teeters along in Pakistan but offers little comfort to India. Engaging the army, with its influence on foreign policy and terror groups, may yield what toothless governments can't.

Point of sale

Products made to serve one purpose, are often marketed for something quite different

Jug Suraiya



The other day I was struck by an ad for a mobile phone. Ads featuring mobile phones are even more common than ads featuring Amitabh Bachchan. So what was it about this ad that I found so unusual?

It was that the ad was promoting the mobile phone not as a mobile phone but as a camera with which to take pictures, preferably of oneself.

Mobile phones are increasingly being marketed not as phones but as cameras with which to take selfies, or as fashion accessories, or as mini computers, or anything else that makes you appy.

Such surrogate marketing – selling a product for something other than the purpose it was made for – is nothing new. Makers of washing machines sell their products in the rural heartland of Punjab not for the purposes of cleaning laundry but as giant lasshi makers.

In what was then called Calcutta, the mid-1960s saw an acute shortage of baby food. No, there wasn't an unprecedented baby boom in the metropolis. The reason for the shortage of baby food was that the stuff wasn't going into babies but into the gulab jamuns and rassagallas that the local confectioners were making, having discovered that formula milk a la Nestle and Co made for more delectable sweets than did regular cow milk.

Surrogate salesmanship is perhaps nowhere so common as in the world of politics.

Pakistan is one of the most notable examples of the art of surrogate marketing. The single biggest made-for-export product of that country is terrorism. But Islamabad cleverly markets its home-grown terrorists not as terrorists but as freedom fighters seeking to liberate Kashmir from the oppressive stranglehold of India.

In our own country, ever since Independence a closed-shop family business has sold itself to the public as the Grand Old Party of Indian politics, the Congress.

And more recently, what once was a democracy of the people, by the people and for the people is today finding ready buyers as a sarkar of the bhakts, by the bhakts and for the bhakts.

secondopinion@timesgroup.com
http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/juglebandi/

Is The Hindu A Victim?

No. Hindus feel safe and the victim narrative is a manufactured war cry

Sagarika.Ghose@timesgroup.com



The targeting of Amarnath Yattris in Anantnag has sparked off a familiar narrative: Hindus are victims in their own land. According to this shopworn line, Hindus suffer in silence while attacks on Muslims are highlighted. From Paris to Manchester, every time Islamist terror strikes a western city, it is used to put the entire Muslim community in India on notice, even though as George Bush famously said, "India is a country which does not have a single al-Qaida member in a population of 150 million Muslims." The Hindu victimhood narrative which is nothing but an Islamophobic war cry against minorities, needs to be busted.

Yes, those who died in Anantnag were innocent Hindu pilgrims. Yes, their killers may have been motivated by a radicalised Islam that spurs violence. But is that enough reason to spin a comprehensive story of Hindus at the mercy of a pincer attack from Islamic zealots and liberal "Hindu haters"? Such an imagined attack is not only dangerous fantasy but also deliberate strategy to create a fear psychosis when in fact the Hindu experiences no fear from minorities and is perfectly safe and free to practice his religion in whichever manner he wants. Deliberately manufactured "insults" like Dhoni as Krishna on a magazine cover or whipped up rage over a few seconds of azaan or imagined slights to Hinduism in books and movies are only means to keep the pot boiling and politicise both religion and society.

Islamophobia reigns supreme, making Hindutva a mimic of extremist Islam. The fixation on the Islamic threat has meant that there are politicised Hindus now agitating for blasphemy laws, public punishment of crimes, some even issuing fatwas. Islamophobia is also growing because of perceptions of "appeasement" of Muslims and a selective application of laws. But the special privileges sometimes granted to orthodox Maulanas by short-sighted "secular" politicians cannot now be



Arundhati Das/Batu

used to demand appeasement of radical Hindutva forces who are claiming total immunity from the law.

The fact is Muslims are the worst victims of terrorism. In 2011 BBC reported 82.97% of terrorism-related fatalities over the last five years were Muslims, the Shia-Sunni conflict has resulted in the Muslim brotherhood turning on itself and in Kashmir the overwhelming majority of the thousands killed in militancy have been Muslims. So who's the victim here? Images of Muslim groups targeting Hindu shops in Bengal's Basirhat are troubling, but equally nasty and sinister are the fake photographs being circulated on social media designed to push a strategic campaign that Bengal has become a hub of hatred for Hindus.

Are Hindus victims in Bengal? No, they certainly are not, which is why the fake photos on social media found no resonance among the citizenry which palpably experiences no fear of Muslims. In fact, across India the Hindu experiences no fear at all from the Muslim, however relentlessly "love jihad" campaigns are pushed by Hindutva

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foot soldiers. The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits was a terrible blot on Kashmir, and exposes the failures of successive governments in Srinagar. But is that reason enough to claim Hindus are under threat across the country?

The Sachar Committee report showed horrifyingly low levels of education and healthcare among Muslims, falling rate of Muslim representation in bureaucracy and police, female literacy lower than SCs and STs; it showed only one out of 25 students in undergraduate colleges and one in 50 in post graduate colleges are Muslims. If the community was "pampered" and "appeased" why doesn't

'Bihar alliance very unstable ... don't know why Nitish is doing what he is doing, but it's not natural'

Corruption charges against Bihar's deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav and other members of RJD chief Lalu Prasad's family have raised question marks over the state's ruling alliance. With chief minister Nitish Kumar giving mixed signals, Union minister of state for skill development and entrepreneurship (independent charge) Rajiv Pratap Rudy, who defeated Rabri Devi to win the Saran Lok Sabha seat, spoke to Sanjeev Singh and Nalin Mehta about the shifting winds in Bihar politics, allegations of political vendetta and NDA's focus on skills development:

■ How do you respond to Tejashwi's refusal to resign despite accusations of corruption and his comments that he didn't even have a moustache at the time the allegations date from?

He is misquoting facts. The company in question was registered as a shell company by (former central government minister and RJD leader) Prem Chand Gupta. IRCTC was given the bid after norms were changed and the person who got the contract got a land deal done in lieu of the railway contract. This was done earlier but the actual divesting of the entire deal happened only in 2012. So the ownership that came to Lalu and his family for an act of illegality was finally confirmed in 2012. Tejashwi is trying to distract attention from the issue.

■ But how will you answer the opposition's charge that this is a

political vendetta?

Is it not a fact that Lalu was the railway minister? Is it not a fact that the Puri and Tatanagar railway hotel in Ranchi were contracted out? Was it not that it was manipulated by a person from Patna who runs a hotel business? There is proof of transactions. Was it not true that Gupta as corporate affairs minister manipulated the deal?

Was it not true that the CA who has been arrested was actually handling all of Lalu's cases? All this circumstantial evidence is enough proof that he was hand-in-glove.

How is that Lalu was convicted in the fodder scam? He called that case politically motivated as well.

■ If Nitish and Lalu fall out, what will BJP's role be in such a scenario?

We don't know what's happening there. We are just watching the situation. It's too early to be discussed at this point of time.

■ But you are not ruling out a renewed BJP-JD(U) alliance?

What you are saying is just an assumption. You are free to make your assumptions.

■ Do you think the ruling alliance will last in Bihar?

The Bihar alliance is very unstable. It's about who buckles under pressure first. It is an unnatural alliance. I don't know why Nitish is doing what he is doing, but it's not natural.

■ Your ministry has suspended further allocation under the skilling scheme PMKVY 2.0 in three states (UP, Haryana and Rajasthan) after finding various irregularities like fraudulent enrolment of ghost candidates by franchisee skill centres. What next?

Our ministry is just 30 months old but everyone compares my ministry with others thinking it has been around for 30 years. When you roll out such a big scheme, there are leakages in the existing system. My job is not just to skill, but quality skilling with accountability. In the existing system there was a flaw. Why should a training partner who chooses someone else as his assistant take Rs 40 for

not doing anything while giving Rs 60 to the trainer? Why not encourage the trainer and get rid of the franchisees – who act as middlemen?

We are trying to tell genuine trainers that they should build and run their own centres. There were 80 centres in just one district of Rajasthan. Once you come to know, you do course correction. For that, one has to stop and fix things before moving on. The ban is only temporary. We are weeding out people who were middlemen.

■ How will your ministry address the challenge of providing 10 million jobs every year?

Government and corporate employment is very limited. It has to be triggered through non-formal sector employability. For example, our ministry trains about one lakh gardeners. Where in the system are these gardeners being captured? But there is a huge demand for them. There are many more such trades that do not get captured.

■ Did demonetisation and GST hurt the economy and employment?

I do not find jobs in the system coming down. I can tell you frankly that our ministry does not have the eco-system to skill as many people as required in the system.

There is a huge demand for entry-level specialised people. We are matching the demand through sector skill councils. For example retail requires 1.6 crore youth so we train people to get into that sector.

dilbert



Concept Of Yajna, Sacrifice, In The Gita

Bansi Mahajan

Yajna, sacrifice, is often considered as havan performance only, where offerings are made to fire. The Bhagwad Gita provides a deeper and wider meaning, that yajna is the route for all development and growth of the universe.

The idea of Karma Yoga in the Gita is essentially based on sacrifice. Krishna says, "Yajnarthat karmano nyatra lokoyam karm abandhanah sama cara" (3:9), that is, when actions are not performed for the cause of yajna, one is bound by his own actions. As per karmic account, one has to take rebirth to complete the debit-credit circle of actions. Hence one should perform duties for the sake of sacrifice, without any attachment.

If actions are performed with the spirit of yajna only one is absolved from the cycle of birth and death and attains

salvation. Here yajna means, when you carry out your duty selflessly, without pride and attachment, for the benefit and welfare of all beings. If you don't perform your duty and contribute your share for the sake of Humanity, then you are not part of the growth and evolution of the universe, the scripture advises.

When we perform yajna, gods bestow us even with gifts we did not wish for. If one enjoys these gifts without sharing them, we would be behaving like a thief, and being ungrateful (3:12). Scriptures impart to us the culture of gratitude and thankfulness. There are various debts we incur, they're called rinahs. We need to clear them. Some of these are classified as matri rinha, mother's debt; pitri rinha, father's debt; dev rinha, debts of gods; social debt, teacher's debt and debt of the land.

From whichever person, place or source you get something or are bestowed something by them, you must repay it. You should be grateful and thankful to them. This is a noble and typical characteristic of our culture and civilisation. The pious and benevolent person who partakes and accepts leftovers, after the sacrifice, is cleared of the guilt of all sins (3:13). The practice of accepting the fruit after distributing to all after the yajna (yajna sistasinh) gives us the thought of "judicious sharing of wealth". It is the finest form of socialism, the summum bonum of any economy. The economy of yajna in karma yoga is being taught in management studies of many universities of the world.

Krishna says, "He who doesn't act according to the wheel of existence or

carry out his duties or contribute to the evolution of the universe, he lives in vain" (3:16). His birth is futile and goes waste.

No society can evolve until there is a balance of responsibilities and rights. It is applicable to all, from family units to institutions, societies, nations and entire civilisation. The lack of balance between duties and rights, responsibility and freedom, trigger many chaotic conditions. Most people, including leaders, tend to harp on only one aspect – the rights. They hardly talk of responsibilities or duties for fear of becoming unpopular. It is imperative – in fact it is leaders' moral duty to make their followers aware of their duties also to make a future that is peaceful and hassle-free.

So let's become true karma yogis, by following Krishna's sage suggestions on the spirit and form of yajna in the third chapter of Karma Yoga in the Bhagwad Gita.

Sacredspace

Your Belief

A belief is purely an individual matter, and you cannot and must not organise it. If you do, it becomes dead, crystallised; it becomes a creed, a sect, a religion, to be imposed on others.

J Krishnamurti