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Plastic bags never die

Delhi cannot afford to falter on implementing the NGT ban

Last week, the National Green Tribunal banned the most common shopping accessory available in Delhi: Plastic bags. In an interim order, a bench headed by the Tribunal's chairperson, Justice Swatanter Kumar, also slapped a fine of ₹5,000 on anyone found in possession of non-biodegradable plastic bags less than 50 microns, which is the thickness of a human hair. Micron is the global measurement unit for thickness of such bags. The thinner the bag, the more harmful it is to the environment. There are many reasons why this seminal order should be followed to a T by the Delhi Pollution Control Board, the implementing agency of the National Green Tribunal directive: Plastic bags not only pollute our water but also land; they are made from non-renewable sources and contribute to climate change; a lot of energy is used in producing these bags; they do not degrade and are harmful to wildlife and marine life. Then, as we find out every monsoons, these bags choke drains, leading to flooding in urban areas. In other words, plastic bags never die, they simply break into smaller and smaller pieces and ultimately leaches chemicals into water.

This is not the first time the National Green Tribunal has ruled against use of plastic bags. Last month too the Tribunal criticised the Delhi government over rampant use of plastic in the national capital despite the 2016 ban. The Union government last year also imposed a similar ban. But nothing worked due to various reasons. The plastic lobby says manufacturing of plastic below 50 microns is already prohibited as per factory licencing norms. But these are made by unregistered units, which find many takers because they are cheaper, in states such as Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

If the plastic ban has to be successful this time round, the Delhi government needs to do much more: It has to work on proper collection, segregation, recycling and processing of plastic waste and, more importantly, ensure that people have alternatives to plastic bags.

Is the Army doing enough for mentally ill soldiers?

Mere lip service to its glory won't do. It needs more counsellors and psychiatrists

When it comes to proclaiming their admiration for the Indian Army, our political parties tend to outdo each other. Yet, the very real problems the forces face are often left unaddressed, a significant one being stress-related deaths in the form of suicides or fratricides.

Since 2014, according to a defence ministry submission in Parliament, 310 officers have committed suicide and 11 cases of fratricide were reported in this period. The Army works in extremely difficult conditions even in peacetime. The hierarchies in the forces are rigid and do not encourage those from the lower ranks to express themselves freely. Those in hardship postings or facing civil strife work for months on end without leave or proper sleep and food, exacerbating mental disorientation and illness. On and off, jawans have complained about their working conditions, but the response has often been to discipline the 'errant' soldier. The welfare of the Army should be a matter of much more concern to the political class given that it has to guard hostile borders with at least two countries. Spending months away from their homes also contributes to a sense of loneliness and disconnectedness.

The Army should have far more counsellors on hand as well as psychiatric help. It should not be seen as a disadvantage for a soldier to seek such help, in fact it should be encouraged. They should be assured that this will not lead to them facing any discrimination. The issue of post-traumatic stress disorder is talked about a lot with relation to the US military, but in India soldiers facing hostile circumstances, as for example in Kashmir, are rarely treated for this once they leave the theatre of operations. For the Army to be an effective fighting machine, the mental health of its soldiers must be a priority. Mere lip service to the glory of the Army will do little to make things easier for soldiers whose task is unenviable even in the best of times.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



India@70: Pessimists, take a walk

There can be a debate over the speed of our progress but not over the progress itself

Let us return to the latter half of August 1947. What an eventful time it was! Jawaharlal Nehru was hoping for a tryst with destiny. Refugees on both sides of the border were crying over the bloodshed. It was a period of great economic distress. Those who were part of the erstwhile royalty were wondering how they would get along with those who were commoners till yesterday. Those who were poor could not comprehend they had become masters of their own destiny.

Delhi's political class was fighting with a vortex of problems. Nehru was worried over the communal divide and Vallabhbhai Patel was grappling with the responsibility of unifying the country. Baldev Singh, our first defence minister, had to use his army less to defend the borders and more to keep the erstwhile royalty under control. Finance minister RK Shanmukham Chetty had to work with empty coffers. India's share in the manufacturing output was hovering around 2%, whereas in 1757 this figure was 24%.

Clearly, the wings of the golden birds had been clipped.

This is why British prime minister Winston Churchill used to poke fun at us. Once he even said, "If India is granted freedom, power will go to the hands of rascals, rogues, freebooters..." Unfortunately a large section of our

royalty and intelligentsia also believed him. People who were used to bowing before kings for thousands of years were reluctant to accept the meaning of democracy in its entirety. Is it not a matter of pride that today, despite mutual conflicts, 125 crore confident Indians cannot even dream of being colonised once again?

Now let us talk about a contradiction. Despite the slogan of unity in diversity, the bitter truth is that the hot winds of mutual hatred have also kept blowing in the country. Even today a separatist movement is raging in Kashmir, the Maoists sing a different tune and the seeds of a protest against the national language are being sown in Karnataka. But all this doesn't become more than a regional matter. There is an overall consensus in the country when it comes to the nation's sovereignty. Contrastingly Pakistan that attained independence along with us has witnessed intermittent spells of military rule. Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have seen democracy come and go. But it has never been the case with India. In the last seven decades, we've seen the transfer of national government 16 times through democratic means.

Mr Churchill, if you were alive today, I would have looked you in the eye and said that we 'beastly' people are also capable of running a democracy.



Is it not a matter of pride that Indians can't even dream of being colonised once again?

Think about it, where did the United States stand 70 years after its independence? The slave system was prevalent. No woman has become an American president till date, but India can proudly say that everybody from a Dalit President to a woman PM is a possibility in our democracy. This has been possible because once Indians have taken a step they've not retreated. For instance, at the time of Independence, we didn't have a Constitution. The Constitution that was written with Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar's initiative is revered

even today. By amending the Constitution time and again, we have indicated to the world that Indians know how to keep in step with changing times. Statistics show this clearly. In 1951, at the time of the first population Census, just 18% of Indians were literate. By the time of the 2011 Census, our literacy had crossed the 74% mark. Similarly life expectancy has risen from 32 years to 69 years in the same period. The country was declared polio-free in March, 2014.

While it is true that even today we see communal riots take place. Dalits and backwards face difficulties in joining the mainstream. We have great economic inequality and lots of people sustain themselves on the benevolence of nature and lack even the bare essentials. But this doesn't mean that our Independence has become meaningless. At many points of time after Independence, we've encountered dark periods and thought that our steps were shaky. But getting up after falling down and resuming to walk is second nature to Indians. There can be a debate over the speed of our progress but not over the progress itself.

I would like to remind my pessimistic friends that the blows of time can smudge even the strongest of walls. We can notice some stains on the impenetrable wall of our democracy. But we've successfully been washing them off over the years and will continue to do so. These stains are essential. They give the nation opportunities for improvement and contemplation.

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CAUSE CÉLÈBRE



Varnika Kundu (sitting), backed by a supportive family, stood up for herself and spoke out against the powerful men who were stalking her

HINDUSTAN TIMES

Varnika has given cynics a reason to hope, to believe

Her fearless response to stalking shows that an individual can, on occasion, successfully fight the powerful system



SOUMYA BHATTACHARYA

The times we live in have made us cynical. The powerful always get away, we believe. The influential and wealthy will never be brought to account. The system will work to the advantage of those with clout rather than those without. The system is powerless, servile, ineffectual.

In such times, the case of Chandigarh disc jockey Varnika Kundu offers a glimmer of hope. On her way home from work late at night, Kundu was allegedly stalked by a couple of drunk young men who, she says, followed her in their vehicle and then banged on the door of her car so that they could get in or drag her out. One of the men happened to be Vikas Barala, the son of Haryana BJP chief, Subhash Barala. What followed Kundu's complaint was of a piece with what the times we live in have led us to expect. Vikas and his friend refused to give blood and urine samples to the police. They were booked under bailable charges, and allowed to walk away.

What occurred next was what the cynic in us did not expect. Kundu stood up for herself. Her Facebook post went viral. Her father, a senior bureaucrat, put out a strongly worded statement. The media picked up the story; it acquired legs; and it ran and ran.

The BJP was forced to swiftly dissociate itself from Vikas. CCTV footage, initially said to be missing, turned up. The police summoned Vikas and his friend, interrogated them, and arrested them under the far more serious section of attempt to abduction.

Kundu's fearless response to her ordeal shows that, however heavily weighted the system may be in favour of the powerful, an individual can, on occasion, successfully fight it. But for that to happen, certain circumstances need to come together in her favour. In this case, they did: The nature of Kundu's tribulation is particularly flattering. And India is capable of birthing proper innovations, not Jugaads. Indeed, over the past 70 years—yes, this is my contribution to the veritable rash of listicles that everyone is churning out to mark the 70th anniversary of India's Independence—the country has engendered several fundamental innovations, some of which have found global acceptance.

On top of my list is the sachet revolution in packaged consumer products. The now ubiquitous sachet was most probably the invention of a school-teacher turned entrepreneur named Chinmi Krishnan. Krishnan himself didn't achieve any great success with his innovations but his sons did. One of them, CK Rajkumar, launched the first shampoo in a sachet (Velvette) in the 1980s. Another, CK Ranganathan, went on to start a company (now CavinKare) that once gave managers at Hindustan Unilever Ltd sleepless nights. It wasn't till the late 1980s/early 1990s that multinational packaged goods companies realised the true potential of the sachet (it made expensive products accessible by offering them in single-use packs, although most Indian consumers ended up

not much of a difference between aiming and dreaming. Until we aim, we cannot hope to be there. It all starts in the mind and only strong passion can lead us from dreams to reality. Once we set our aim and start exploring ways and means to achieve it, providence will also help us in making our dreams a reality. This will only happen if we pursue our passion with sincerity and zeal. A half-hearted approach will not help. Once we set our sights on our goal and

SOME PEOPLE MAY FIND THIS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE BUT INDIA HAS ALWAYS HAD SIGNIFICANT STRENGTHS IN MANUFACTURING, ALBEIT IN POCKETS

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innervoice

REMEMBER THAT FAILURES ARE STEPPING STONES ON THE WAY TO SUCCESS

Ashok Goswami

It's not failures but a low aim that is a crime in life. Not having any ambition is much worse than never getting to the pinnacle of success.

Many of us tend to believe that aiming too high is not practical based on their present conditions and hence avoid looking into the eye of the future.

Like Emerson wrote, 'Aim at the sun; your arrow may not reach it, but it will fly higher than your expectations.' There is

start working towards it, it's very important that we stay focused to such an extent that it is refuted to as devotion.

The only real failure in life is when one does not have an aim in life and the worse situation is when one doesn't even try.

Failures are stepping stones to success. We should be proud of our success stories but remember F is the 6th alphabet while S is the 19th.

Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal. innervoice@hindustantimes.com