

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

## Maximum City, minimum care

The authorities had warning of this disaster. They did nothing

What happened in Mumbai on Tuesday was criminal. Thirty cm of rainfall in a day drowned a city celebrated as India's financial capital and with a civic body with a budget larger than many states. Lakhs of people were stranded at railway stations or their workplaces or spent the night wading home through flooded roads.

**ourtake**

It's not as if those who are paid to keep the city running and its citizens safe did not know that there could be a deluge on Tuesday. The weatherman had sounded a warning three days ago and repeated it on Monday. More than enough time to prepare. But that is the crux of the problem. We never learn from our mistakes. After the great deluge of July 26, 2005, when 944 mm of rain fell in 24 hours, there was a lot of talk that the authorities would be better prepared the next time around. Twelve years later, the downpour was only a third of that in 2005, but the impact was nearly as bad. Mumbai was saved from worse because the rain stopped, not because the authorities did anything. What was heartwarming was that Mumbaiites as usual stepped up to lend each other a helping hand.

That is as it should be in any civilised society, but shouldn't the civic body and the state government be held to account? And don't forget the railways, which summarily shut services on the three lines by 12.30 pm on Tuesday. This left at least 30 lakh commuters stranded. The railways say they can't do anything if the tracks are flooded. Really? In this day and age can't they build a better drainage system? The railways blame the civic body and the civic body blames the weather. Where does that leave the Mumbaiite? This tactic of passing the buck is endemic across the country. Remember the floods of 2015 that devastated Chennai? Or the recent floods in Bihar. People die, property is destroyed, and the authorities make excuses that would be comical if they weren't so abhorrent or go after those who complain. It really is time we put our foot down. We must hold those we elect and pay to run our cities and towns and villages accountable. Life cannot go on as usual.

## Still a long wait for manufacturers in India

Niti Aayog's report on ease of doing business reveals many lacunae

The business of India remains to make it hard to do business. A Niti Aayog and IDFC institute survey of formal Indian manufacturing firms has found that as of 2016, despite the reforms by the NDA government, factory-owners do not feel things had changed too much. Only a minority of the businessmen believed things had gotten worse, but the survey's findings are a sign of how deeply entrenched is the anti-business environment. This should not be a complete surprise. The Modi government was able to lift India only one point, from 131 to 130, in the broader World Bank's 2017 Doing Business survey of countries. The Niti Aayog survey looked at the sector of the economy most entangled in India's socialist legacy: White economy manufacturing. It showed a third of businessmen believed things had remained the same, a smaller number said things had improved and about a fifth felt things had gotten worse. The government scored best when it came to the basics: Power, water and setting up a business. Land, labour, regulations and taxes was where it was felt the government's actions had done little.

Labour restrictions were cited as the worst problem for labour-intensive industries. Getting electricity was still the primary source of migraine for power-intensive industries. The most positive finding was that new companies gave the overall business environment a bigger thumbs up than older firms. Surprisingly, only 20% of manufacturing start-ups were using the new single window clearance system.

While there is much that is positive about the changes being attempted, knowledge about them is being disseminated in the ways of a previous generations. The State has spent much of the past 70 years making manufacturing in India as difficult as possible. Turning this around was always going to be difficult. The Centre should do well to embrace the findings, draw suitable lessons and begin to redress the lacunae that have been pointed out.

## Political patronage fuels these cults

Blind faith in fraudulent dispensers of divine blessings will ensure that they flourish



CHANDAN MITRA

An abiding news picture of the 1980s was that of the then Lok Sabha speaker Balram Jakhur getting literally kicked on his head by a sparsely-clothed emaciated man sitting on a machan. The look of pure bliss on the face of the recipient of the kick was difficult to miss for this apparently symbolised the blessings of the machan-man.

The giver of this unusual method of blessing was an obscure godman, Deoraha baba, whose kick on a devotee's head supposedly led to fame and fortune. The baba who suddenly shot into fame around that time was said to never descend to the ground, having vowed to live forever on a tree! While the godman's eccentricity could be overlooked, what was astonishing was the list of his visitors — a veritable Who's Who — men not only educated but powerful, holding important positions in government and even academia.

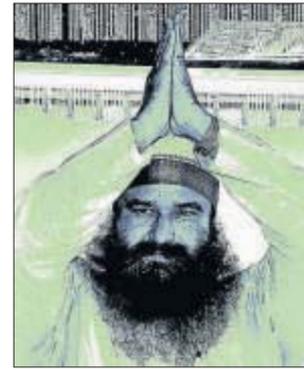
Perhaps the vulnerability of politicians and their greed for power and position make them easy targets of godmen, but such babas in turn thrive on the endorsement from the high and mighty. There was never a dearth of sadhus in India that attracted cult following

with which came donations and an army of followers ready to obey their every command.

It is however remarkable that in recent years the cult of such godmen has not only grown, but their followers have become increasingly violent, ready to confront the State and shed blood. The irony is that such cults have expanded even as India has risen to become an IT giant, sent sophisticated rockets into space and established an enviable record in science and technical education. The further irony is that persons with top qualifications from Indian and foreign universities often join such cults and use their talents to serve the nefarious designs of megalomaniacal gurus.

The tragic happenings in Panchkula and elsewhere last Friday after one such megalomaniac with a criminal mindset was convicted of rape are the latest example of the nexus between politics and fraudulent babadom. Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh ran a well-oiled empire from his citadel or Dera in Sirsa where thousands of devotees believed him to be an incarnation of god. With a huge following among lower caste Hindus and Sikhs, he had politicians at his beck and call for they knew one signal from him could ensure tens of thousands of votes for their party. He had no particular ideological predilection, having played footsie with most parties in Punjab and Haryana where his support base was significant.

Not Singh alone, but various babas have been convinced of their own invincibility.



A file photo of Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Singh outside the CBI court

This in turn often caused them to overreach and invite their own doom. Singh, a barely literate villager, started dispensing spirituality although he led a life of ostentatious indolence and aspired to rock star status. Two films produced by him may have bombed at the box office but this failure had no impact on his cult following.

In this he was somewhat different from other cult leaders such as the one who led hundreds of his devotees to death near Mathura last year after setting up a commune of sorts from where he thought he could wage war against the State in the name of Subhas Chandra Bose.

Such cults are not to be found in India alone. Many would recall the mass suicide by devotees of a Christian cult in the United

States about two decades ago. But unlike other countries from which similar instances can be cited, political patronage for cult leaders is probably unique to India.

As Indian elections become fiercely competitive and identity the major determinant of electoral choice, these cults have the capacity to barter support in exchange for official favours. Leaders of organised religious groups too are not averse to strike such deals. Political chieftains routinely make a beeline for sadhus, maulanas and padres to seek their blessings for electoral gain. In exchange, such groups are promised land allotments and protection from possible police harassment.

Smaller religious sects being more organised and disciplined are more adept at cutting such bargains. For example, a sect called the Matua, comprising mainly lower caste adherents in West Bengal and led by two rival godmothers, shoots into the news before every election. Several Muslim pirs too find political leaders knocking at their doors in the hope that they would influence followers' voting preference.

Usually, this is how it starts. And before long ambitious babas, pirs and evangelist preachers acquire larger than life status. Some of them establish a state within a state, as in the case of Dera Sacha Sauda. By the time politicians realise and start to repent, matters go out of hand.

But will the Dera tragedy put a stop to this? Most unlikely, for as long as large sections of Indians remain superstitious and have blind faith in fraudulent dispensers of divine blessings, they will continue to grow, especially if political patronage remains forthcoming.

Chandan Mitra is editor of The Pioneer and has been two-time Rajya Sabha MP from the BJP. The views expressed are personal.

### SHOCKING APATHY



A child being looked after by medical staff at the Encephalitis ward of the BRD medical centre, Gorakhpur, August 13

## Why patient-centric care is non-existent in India

The refusal to consider the outcomes for people as a parameter to judge the quality of healthcare is baffling



M RAJIVLOCHAN  
MEETA RAJIVLOCHAN

Every time there is a serious crisis in a State run health facility, there is always a lot of discussion on how India is not spending enough on the sector. But this conversation does not focus on one critical aspect that needs to be fixed: The importance of patient-centric healthcare.

At present, the country's healthcare system is geared towards the needs of hospital managements and pharmaceutical companies. There is hardly any concern about doctors and other healthcare providers, and more importantly on curing a patient. Surprisingly, even patients do not take the cure as an important matter till they have a bad experience.

What do we mean by patient-centric systems? These are indicators that tell us whether patients are getting better. These standardised parameters are based on the premise that no matter how much money is spent per patient, the chances of the person getting better will still remain low if certain basic things are not taken care of. For example, do hospital Operation Theatres have elbow-operated taps?

Are there separate places for keeping

medicines with similar-sounding names? Are the equipment serviced and calibrated regularly? Do caregivers maintain the basics of hygiene and wash their hands? It is only when these things are followed scrupulously, the per patient expenditure made by the State becomes important.

How does one ensure the creation and existence of a patient-centric system? The only way to do so is by following protocols, by maintaining data within the patient care facility along all parameters of the protocol and reviewing them constantly. In India, these protocols are not followed because there is no law that compels the healthcare facilities to keep track of such data or to learn from it. Those few that do, report improvements in their abilities to cure patients. In the absence of laws, only expenditure-income data is maintained and the effort to create positive results revolves only around this data.

It will be too naive to focus only on the amount of money spent and the numbers of patients treated. So, why is there such persistent refusal to consider patient outcomes as an important parameter to judge the quality of health care? Is it possible that there is a fear that this would expose system-wide deficiencies? Is there a fear of discovering that even the five-star facilities that charge millions are no different in quality of care than the free-for-all public facility?

Meeta Rajivlochan is an IAS officer. M Rajivlochan is director, internal quality assurance cell, Panjab University, Chandigarh. The views expressed are personal.

## SC's privacy ruling brings hope to the marginalised

The revolutionary consequences of such a verdict are most evident for India's LGBTQ community



ANJA KOVACS

As women, sexual minorities and other disadvantaged groups in our society know all too well, surveillance, only growing in the digital age, is essential to controlling people. Last Wednesday, the Supreme Court gave us one of the most important tools to fight back against such control: a nine-judge bench unanimously held that the right to privacy is a fundamental right, protected and upheld by the Indian constitution. Moreover, the court argued that this right needs to be protected also when a privacy concern is relevant only to a small minority. Plus, it noted explicitly that privacy is essential to guaranteeing people's social and economic rights, rather than being a hurdle in the way of achieving social welfare.

For privacy advocates, the Supreme Court's ruling will be a great boost to their arguments.

How much difference the court's pronouncements will make on the ground will, however, depend on their implementation. Not surprisingly, and quite rightly so, the court has argued that the right to privacy is not absolute. Undoubtedly, the government, as the driving force behind this challenge to privacy as a fundamental right at the Supreme Court, will now try to make the most of possible grounds for restrictions of this right that have already been flagged in the verdict — including 'legitimate state interest', 'social, moral and compelling public interest', 'safety of persons and the state' and 'national security'. We can only hope that the ruling's strong and pervasive emphasis on the importance of privacy to the constitutional values of dignity and liberty for all will be taken into account when competing interests are being balanced in practice.

In aspects of its ruling, the Supreme Court could also have gone further. While

**WHILE THE COURT STOPS SHORT OF OVERRULING AN EARLIER VERDICT UPHOLDING SECTION 377, IT DOES MAKE A STRONG CASE THAT A PERSON'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION FALLS INTEGRALLY WITHIN THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

it acknowledges repeatedly that technological changes continuously throw up new challenges for jurisprudence around privacy, it addresses current challenges only in a limited way. For example, in its discussions of what it calls 'informational' privacy, it seems to reason that big data is merely a challenge of data protection. But as feminist academic Irma van der Ploeg has asked, where bodily searches are increasingly replaced by searches of data about our bodies (biometrics, DNA), often repeated over and over again, how valid is the line that we draw traditionally between our body and information about our body? If bodily searches are subject to higher privacy standards, shouldn't similar standards apply to body data as well? We hope that the court will take into account such paradigm shifts when the time for implementation comes.

For now, however, especially for those most vulnerable to control by others, the Supreme Court has certainly offered tremendous hope, most importantly by looking at privacy in a rounded way: the right does not only include the right to be left alone, the court noted repeatedly, but also to decision-making about personal life and to control information about oneself.

The potentially revolutionary consequences of such a reading are most evident where India's LGBTQ community is concerned. While the court stops short of overruling an earlier Supreme Court verdict upholding section 377, it does make a strong case that a person's sexual orientation falls integrally within the right to privacy.

But for many issues concerning women's rights, too, the verdict has potentially far-reaching consequences.

To its credit, the Court explicitly covered feminist critiques of privacy that warn against the use of privacy as a shield to hide from view, and court trials, issues such as domestic violence. What it didn't address are critiques that highlight how the privacy accorded to women is often restrictive, in that it frequently privileges a conception of privacy as bodily integrity — a bodily integrity centred around notions of morality and concerns about family reputation which ultimately constrain, rather than enhance, women's autonomy. The examples from ancient Indian religious texts cited by Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde in his judgement, too, are in fact examples of this.

If this ruling will be implemented in a consistent manner, it may well pave the way for tremendous, positive social change.

Anja Kovacs is director of the Internet Democracy Project. The views expressed are personal.

**innervoice**

**IS CYNICISM ROBBING YOU OF THE JOY OF GIVING TO THE NEEDY?**

Himika Chaudhuri

The recent flood in Bengal has caused widespread damage to property in several rural areas. My cook, a Bengali, has lost her home in her village in the deluge. As she narrated the incident to me, I felt compelled to commit a certain sum of money to her so that she could use it to repair her home when she goes there once the water subsides. I was sharing this story with a friend who just had one question after hearing me out. "How can you be so sure that she's telling you the

truth?"

Clearly, her question isn't her question alone. Most of us tend to doubt the veracity of a story, when we are approached by someone for financial help. While logic dictates that we ought not to be fooled by sob stories, should that be the only criterion when we are helping someone? It is said in the judicial system that not one innocent person should be punished, even if it means letting go of 10 criminals. The same probably holds true for giving, too. As we go along life and pledge our support — financial or otherwise

to those around us — chances are some of them will be undeserving of that help. But to deprive one person truly in need, just because there have been others who may have fooled us, perhaps defeats the entire purpose of giving.

And it also takes away in large parts the joy that one feels in helping with a free mind and a happy heart.

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