



A thought for today

Civilisation is the progress toward a society of privacy. The savage's whole existence is public

AYN RAND

False Choice

It's wrong to pose a dichotomy between food security and the right to privacy

In the Supreme Court nine-judge bench hearing on the constitutional status of right to privacy, senior advocate CA Sundaram appearing for the Maharashtra government asserted that privacy would always take a back seat to securing basic needs of people. He even posed the question: "What is better, two square meals or right to privacy?" In response, the learned judges of the court rightly argued that people's economic rights could never be a ground to undermine fundamental rights.

In real life the choice between food security and supposedly 'higher order' rights pertaining to freedom and privacy is a false one, often used by Marxist regimes to justify authoritarian administration. As the work of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has demonstrated, famines are less widespread in a democratic regime, as a guaranteed right to free expression also means that reports of famine cannot be suppressed. In the present case under consideration, Sundaram's argument represents an unnecessarily cavalier attitude to privacy on the part of the government.

As far as privacy is concerned, it's true that government initiatives like JAM – the trinity of Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and mobile governance – require authorities to collect citizens' data for facilitating welfare benefits and direct transfers. However, such data needs strong protection safeguards to prevent misuse. It's wrong to posit one against the other; if the government wishes to promote Digital India it must also institute robust data protection for citizens. To this end the Supreme Court should uphold a basic right to privacy. Moreover, it's also in the government's interest to come up with a strong law protecting data privacy.

Such a law would mandate the consent of an individual for collecting and processing her personal data, with "exceptions" against this right being closely and narrowly defined. Further, there needs to be strict accountability in case of data breaches, with procedures and punishments laid down. India has signed on to international treaties guaranteeing the right to privacy. Many countries have already enacted privacy legislation. Moreover, BJD MP Baijayant 'Jay' Panda recently tabled a private member's bill – Data (Privacy and Protection) Bill, 2017 – in Parliament outlining useful provisions for protecting citizens' data in India. These are templates that can be utilised to enact privacy legislation, and it's not a prospect that government should resist.



Free Children From Chains

India and the world need a multi-dimensional strategy to stop human trafficking

Kailash Satyarthi



Ideas have legs. So do human beings. When ideas are chained, we desecrate the very fundamentals of freedom. When human beings are chained, we desecrate the fundamentals of humanity.

One of the monumental milestones for mankind is the abolition of slavery. But while we have won many decisive wars against slavery and bondage, we haven't succeeded in completely vanquishing this degrading and dehumanising practice. What is ironic is that the world today has the largest number of slaves at any point of time in history, even medieval or colonial.

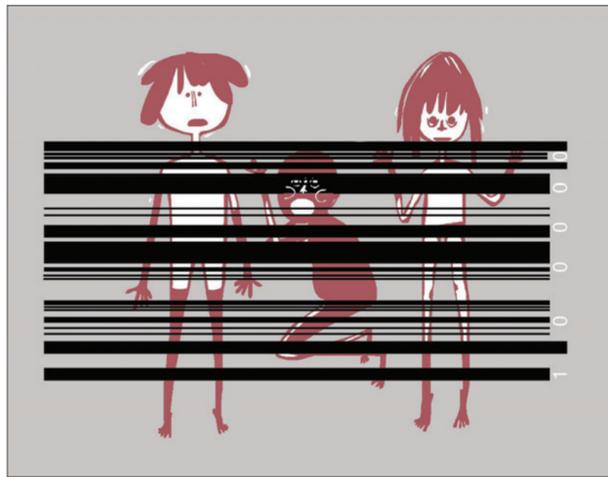
Let us remind ourselves of some sobering and deeply disturbing facts. More than 21 million people across the world are victims of trafficking. They are de facto 21st century slaves.

While sexual slavery and forced labour remain the major drivers behind trafficking, shocking new trends have emerged. At least 10 nations have reported that trafficking has been related directly with organ harvesting. This is now a \$32 billion a year business according to the UN.

But humanitarian agencies reckon that it has surpassed drugs and arms as the largest criminal business in the world with an annual revenue of \$150 billion. Women and children constitute 71% of the victims. How can any civilisation allow this atrocity to continue and flourish?

Another alarming trend is that the line between migration, refugee crisis and trafficking is becoming very thin. It has been consistently noticed that the geographical paths and routes of trafficking bear striking resemblance with those of migration. The increasing scale of both natural and man-made disasters, particularly armed conflicts and civil wars, is creating a whole new generation of refugees who are becoming victims of trafficking gangs. Syria is a stark reminder of this trend.

Clearly, law enforcement agencies in



Uday Dub

was raped repeatedly by drivers.

Malvika is lucky that she was rescued and is back with her family. Hundreds of thousands of victims like her have not been as lucky. What can we do in India to stop the barbarity against young girls like Malvika?

For starters, we need a strong law against trafficking. Despite endless debates and repeated pleas by civil society groups, stringent anti-trafficking laws have not been passed by Parliament. Nor have state governments taken meaningful measures to stop this atrocity. It took almost 19 years for India to ratify the ILO conventions that prohibit the worst forms of child labour. Let us not drive hundreds of thousands of innocent children into cruel and miserable lives of slavery by indulging in such unforgivable delays.

We as citizens too need to play a more proactive role by refusing to keep our eyes and ears closed. We must protest and report cases of suspected trafficking victims in our neighbourhoods. That is a moral imperative. Equally important is the need to target the economic roots behind trafficking. It is states like Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam and Odisha that still witness extreme poverty that report the most cases of trafficking.

Apart from vastly improved awareness and law enforcement, what India needs to deal with trafficking and slavery is economic opportunities. When poor families earn enough to feed themselves, they become less vulnerable to criminal gangs. When incomes of poor families improve, their children go to school instead of seeking work. When children go to school, their chances of being trafficked and sold into slavery diminish dramatically.

For 70 years or so, India has not ensured economic security to a large number of its citizens. Of what help is India becoming an economic superpower if hundreds of millions remain in poverty with their children vulnerable to predatory traffickers?

The writer is 2014 Nobel peace laureate and founder of Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation

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dies. But a historic Supreme Court judgment of 2013 based on a petition by our movement Bachpan Bachao Andolan has directed the state to act promptly and effectively. Yet, trafficking and slavery continue to flourish in India.

And the stories are tragic. We had rescued 13-year-old Malvika (name changed) from Gurgaon. She was trafficked from a village in West Bengal with promises of good wages. Her life was hell after that. In two consecutive homes where she worked as a domestic help, Malvika was treated like a slave with the employers routinely beating her. In both houses, she

developed countries as well as global bodies tasked to check trafficking need much more coordination and cooperation. Moreover, the international community – by incorporating abolition of trafficking and all other forms of modern slavery in a time bound manner in UN Sustainable Development Goals – has agreed this crime has wider negative implications on economic growth and development. Realisation of these goals requires will, resources and action at national and international levels.

India has not been immune to this global scourge. Official data indicates that close to 20,000 women and children were trafficked in India in 2016 but the real numbers could be far higher. More than 1,00,000 children go missing every year. Almost half of them are never traced. Most of the untraced children become victims of human trafficking, slavery, begging and prostitution rackets.

Since most victims of trafficking belong to poor and marginalised families, hardly anyone, including police personnel, paid much attention to these family tra-

By refusing to buckle under China's threats on Doklam, India has called the bully's bluff

Brahma Chellaney



Standing on the Himalayan crest with well-developed infrastructure, China is in a militarily advantageous position along much of the border with India. The tri-border overlooking the Chinese-held Chumbi valley is one of the few areas where India still holds a distinct advantage, with Chinese forces within Indian observation cum artillery range. If China were to capture Bhutan's high-altitude Doklam plateau, it would not only mitigate that vulnerability but also hold a knife to India's jugular vein – the Siliguri Corridor, through which Bhutan's communications and transportation arteries also pass.

While existential stakes drove India to halt China's construction of a strategic highway through Doklam, Beijing made a serious strategic miscalculation by intruding there: It anticipated Bhutan's diplomatic protest but not India's swift, stealthy military intervention. The Indian army had long geared up to respond to such a contingency.

No Indian government can countenance the construction of a

road through Doklam that allows China to bring main battle tanks to the tri-border and implement, in the event of a war, its military plan to decapitate India. In such a corridor-bisecting scenario, while China gobbles up Arunachal Pradesh, the other northeast Indian states, as a Chinese state mouthpiece warned recently, could become "independent".

Today, thanks to its miscalculation, China finds itself in an unenviable position: It must extricate itself from a militarily wretched situation in Doklam, where its intruding soldiers are caught in a pincer movement. If

India should allow the Doklam stalemate to drag on until the arrival of the harsh winter forces the rival troops to retreat, thus restoring the status quo ante

China were to initiate hostilities at the tri-border, it will likely be left, as in 1967, with a bloodied nose, given the Indian army's terrain and tactical advantages.

Politically Beijing has boxed itself in a corner, with its intense



psychological warfare ("psywar") and disinformation operations failing to yield continuing gains, after the success in initially dominating the narrative. If anything, its psychological operations ("psy-ops") and manipulation of legal arguments ("lawfare"), as by selectively quoting an 1890 colonial-era accord, offer India important lessons. It is standard Chinese strategy to play the victim in any conflict or dispute, as China brazenly did even in 1962.

Mounting frustration has sharpened Beijing's war rhetoric. To compound matters, the standoff is imposing reputational costs on a power that supposedly brooks no challenge and is ever willing to wreak punishment. India, in the face of vitriolic

warmongering, has defiantly stood up to China and refused to budge. By calling the bully's bluff, India has set an example for other Asian states to emulate. Beijing's story that Indian troops "trespassed" into Chinese territory was designed to disguise its intrusion into tiny Bhutan. But this tale, along with President Xi Jinping's vow not to permit the loss of "any piece" of Chinese land, deepens China's discomfiture by undermining the image it has sought to project at home and abroad – Asia's pre-eminent power that no neighbour will mess with.

In sum China, if it is to save face, needs India's help to extricate itself from a mess of its own making. Beijing's coarse statements and threats, while in-

tegral to its psywar, are also part of a negotiating ploy to secure a compromise on largely its terms.

There is no reason, however, why India should let China off the hook easily. With Xi looking ahead to this autumn's Communist Party congress to cement his status as China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, India should play psychological hardball because Chinese incursions have become increasingly recurrent.

India should allow the Doklam military stalemate to drag on until the arrival of the harsh winter forces the rival troops to retreat, thus restoring the status quo ante, including frustrating China's road-building plan. If an earlier negotiated mutual retreat from Doklam becomes possible, it should be based on an unequivocal assurance that China henceforth will refrain from unilaterally disturbing the territorial status quo anywhere in the Himalayan borderlands.

Implicitly, if not explicitly, China must come out a significant loser in order to help rein in its creeping, covert encroachments. There should be no more Depsang, Chumars and Doklams or the quiet chipping away at Indian and Bhutanese lands.

The writer is a geostrategist and author

Trending Down

A cut in RBI policy rate is welcome but more must be done to boost the economy

Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy committee (MPC) yesterday lowered its policy interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point, the first change in 10 months. The current rate, 6%, has now been brought down to the level that existed over six years ago. The change signals two things. One, MPC is now more sanguine about the trajectory of inflation. Two, the reduction in interest rate has come amidst signs that industrial performance remains lacklustre. Given this context, MPC's decision is welcome but it is unlikely to make a meaningful difference to the economy.

Interest rates have been trending down for a while. In the backdrop of slowing growth of bank credit, deposit rates have been constantly lowered. Recently, State Bank of India lowered even savings rates for most of its deposit holders. On the other side, interest rates for borrowers have not declined proportionately on account of the bad loans plaguing banks. But there has been more activity from non-banking financial intermediaries and India's top companies have been able to benefit from the current environment. It is the smaller companies, the ones most dependent on banks, which have missed out.

The benign environment for borrowers has not translated into a revival of investment demand. MPC's statement pointed out that the number of new investment announcements fell to a 12-year low in April-June quarter. Part of the problem can be traced to the collapse in global trade following the financial crisis, but there are levers the government can use to improve the situation. The immediate need is to carry through with the resolution process of bad loans following the promulgation of an ordinance in May. This must be supplemented with measures to ease doing business, which would substantially improve the investment climate.



Mourning cuppa

If its tea goes downhill, can bracing Darjeeling be far behind?

Bachi Karkaria



My cup fell to the ground in dismay and shattered like our current relationship with China. Or to pluck a leaf from Keats, 'My heart ached and a dreary numbness pained/ My sense as though of Assam I had drunk.' What occasioned this sinking heart and rising dread? The news that the auctions and private sale of Darjeeling tea may cease from the second week of August; by September, retail shelves will be empty. An indefinite strike led by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha has shut down since early June the terraced gardens around the hill station of my childhood. Soon, the last fragrant, long-leaved lots will be put on the block. My heady joy will be there too. It's all due to the provocations of that kulhar-chai-quaffing La Belle Dame Sans Mamata.

Yes, I'm aware of the impact on, and of, suddenly jobless tea-garden workers. Unlike Mumbai's millhands thrown to the wolves by Datta Samant's fatal strike of 1982, the Gorkhas will not go sheepishly to their fate. A rebellious kettle is already on the boil; it will speed to a gallop with the infusion of hundreds with time – and kukris – on their hands. But my concern is more selfish since my morning doesn't become electric without my two, single-estate cups brewed to perfection. Tea-bags? Eeuw!

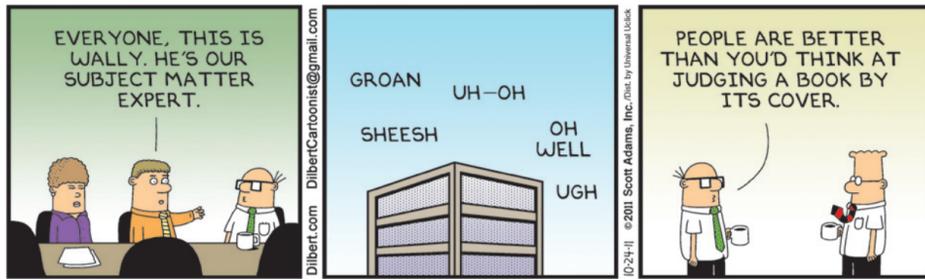
This woman's home is her Castleton, a brand which I can't find in Mumbai, and so must depend on the kindness of friends to ferry supplies from Kolkata. The obliging Sanjay Kapur from Delhi offers me his finest first flush, but I blush to say I prefer my tin, black like its contents. At a pinch I will drink his jasmine. No other Chinese green. No black oolong-shoolong or lapsang souchong either. Forget their health benefits; call me an 'anti-Occident' like their emperors of yore. Closer home, a 'free radical' has become an oxymoron.

Of all legal stimulants, tea takes the cake, and I will go to any lengths for my Darjeeling, though I might draw the line at flying all the way to Boston for a tea party. They probably serve some atrocious concoction, pretentiously called 'chai'. Which reminds me of a name that Bengalis once gave their daughters: 'China', which was actually 'Chai na', 'don't want'.

Alec Smart said: "With all this cow-chauvinism, will foreign breeds get 'desimated'?"

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Dream On, But Sleep Is Very Important, Too

Anil K Rajvanshi

Everybody dreams. Some remember their dreams; others don't. The brain never sleeps; neural pathways are always active, whether mediated by ego during waking state or without it, as happens during sleep. Activation of neural pathways produces dreams.

During sleep, we go through four to five cycles of deep sleep and dreaming episodes, each of roughly 90 minutes duration. Electro-encephalography (EEG) studies done on the human brain during sleep, show that deep sleep is characterised by production of low frequency (1-4 Hz) Delta waves, known to help produce life and mood-enhancing chemicals. At this stage, we are totally unaware of our surroundings. But, dreaming episodes characterised by rapid eye movement (REM), are of light sleep kind, from which one can be woken up quite easily. Dreams are both internal and external. Since ego, the director, is absent during

sleep, neural pathways have free run. Thus, day-long experiences or existing memories are the driving force for internal dreams. When there is sanyam or tremendous thinking activity on a particular thought during waking time, it leads sometimes to solution-dreams. Several great inventions and discoveries have come through such dreaming process.

Externality of dreams comes because brain is both receiver and transmitter of human thought. Hence during sleep, memories or signals from knowledge-space impinge on the brain and may modify neural pathways. This can give rise to strange dreams of events and places never visited or interacted with. This is also the mechanism of getting prophetic dreams of which there are many instances. Why don't we remember dreams? Brain scientists say part of it is to do with

creating long-term memory. But it is dreams we remember that make life interesting. We still don't know why we dream. A possible answer may lie in how synapses behave during sleep.

Synapses are connections between two neurons; they allow the transfer of information through passage of neurochemicals across the synaptic cleft, the distance (about 0.02 micron) between neuron and synapse that exchanges neurochemicals. Scientists have found that during deep sleep, the synaptic cleft widens by about 20%. Perhaps it helps in allowing the cerebrospinal fluid to flow through it and to remove toxins from the brain. The more we dream during the night, the less restful is the sleep. A really restful sleep is deep sleep without dreams. This helps in flushing out toxic material from major part of the brain. Besides this, the increase of synaptic cleft may also help in explaining

the dreaming process.

During sleep, neural pathways are active without ego, so circuit production is quite random. But only those pathways produce circuits in which neural connections are still strong. Thus "loosened" synapses or those with increased synaptic cleft might not take part in the information transfer and hence, in the dreaming process. So dreams could be random in nature. Besides, this loosening of neural pathways may also explain the removal of some memories of day-long experiences. Sleep is therefore necessary to remove clutter or irrelevant information from the brain.

Too often, we have dreams connected with our suppressed desires; most are based on unfulfilled emotional needs and psychological knots based on strong memories that do not get loosened during sleep and cause recurring dreams. Resolution of these knots through wisdom allows the loosening of strong memories and helps in brain detoxification, producing dreamless sleep.



Sacred space

Tree Of Life

We are all but recent leaves on the same old tree of life and if this life has adapted itself to new functions and conditions, it uses the same old basic principles over and over again.

Albert Szent-Györgyi