



A thought for today

We are considered like demi-gods here, and the reason is not because we are better or good, but because there is no other mode of entertainment

SHAH RUKH KHAN

Unsteady State

As Ram Rahim case shows, the Indian state does assert itself but only at a terminal stage

The Indian state eventually gets there, but after the longest possible delay and triggering every possible crisis. For example, this Monday witnessed the powerful symbolism of pathetic supplication replacing hubris for Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh – treated as divine by his followers – as the state imposed its writ through the judiciary, 15 years after the case against him was lodged. State failure was starkly exposed by the violence that paralysed Haryana previously, costing 38 lives and property worth crores, as Ram Rahim flexed his organisational muscle and lakhs of Dera Sacha Sauda followers were allowed to pour into Panchkula despite prohibitory orders.

There is an important lesson here. If the state wishes the rule of law to prevail mafia dons, cult leaders, 'bahubalis' and communal rioters can be cut to size. But the state keeps surrendering to strongmen



who soon set up parallel administrations and thereafter challenge public authority. Twenty-four years after the Babri Masjid demolition the Supreme Court had to step in and revive criminal conspiracy charges against LK Advani and others. What explains such delay other than official pusillanimity? Sant Bhindranwale's rebellion should have served as a cautionary tale. The Union government propped him up to counter the Akalis and ceded its political and moral authority to a demagogue. The state's withdrawal or absence creates space for charismatic individuals to usurp power, and become spiritual or political messiahs to subaltern groups.

This is not to deny that people may need such mediums for spiritual or temporal uplift, treating illnesses, accessing public services or gaining a measure of social belonging. But when such mediums become a law unto themselves, governments must draw a line. Names like Ram Rahim, Asaram, Rampal, and Shahabuddin represent both the state's failure and its delayed fightback. Only if such leaders are nailed for one offence, does a long list of more charges ranging from murder to criminal intimidation to land grabbing invite action.

This does not inspire much confidence in the rule of law. It does not behave a robust state to hold its powers in abeyance and watch in complicity as strongmen who cultivate a dedicated mass of followers take the law into their own hands, even if those strongmen hold keys to vote banks. Thus begins the weakening of the state until, in some cases, the judiciary and a few public spirited citizens call the bluff.

Privacy Law Please

To actualise privacy as a fundamental right, India needs comprehensive legislation

A collateral benefit of the Supreme Court verdict which declared privacy as a fundamental right is that a comprehensive legislation on data protection becomes imperative. Digitisation has led to enormous quantity of personal data being transferred to public and private bodies. But this transfer has not been governed by a coherent legal framework to govern the use of data and its safety. To remedy the situation government last month asked retired judge B Srikrishna to head a committee to identify important data protection issues and suggest solutions.

India's current legal framework to protect data is a patchwork quilt. If the 17-year-old information technology legislation tried to address some challenges, financial regulators such as RBI have dealt with sector specific problems.



The result is unsatisfactory. The way out now is a comprehensive data protection legislation which will be the touchstone for issues emerging out of transfer of personal information across the entire spectrum of activity.

In this context, India can learn from the experience of other areas such as European Union and the US. The core principles of data protection need to form the foundation of a comprehensive legislation. Moreover, harmonisation with other important jurisdictions will boost India's IT industry.

Among the principles, legislation needs to clearly define the scope of personal data. This needs to be followed by clear boundaries on the extent of data that can be collected and limiting it to the stated purpose. Indian data protection law must be applicable to both private and public sector. Given relatively low awareness levels and weak enforcement mechanisms in India, grey areas when it comes to consent or grievance redressal must be ironed out. To actualise privacy as a fundamental right, India needs a comprehensive law on protecting personal data.

Take that, Ganeshotsav

Notting Hill Carnival out-crowds, out-louds, out-dances it all

Bachi Karkaria



If you think nothing can beat the gridlock, meltdown sound and certifiable celebration which will paralyse Mumbai during Ganapati visarjan next Tuesday, you should have been in West London last Monday. Should I be hanged, drawn and mercifully trolled for comparing a supposedly sacred festival with a riotous, rum-powered carnival that's frontally secular every which way? Well, if what we see on the streets of Mumbai is about religion, then feel free to immerse blasphemous me. Actually, the processionists back home should come here and learn some of the real 'rumba-samba'. Uhhm, but they'd need more height, more curves, and advisably more clothes than are missing in all that action on every August bank holiday.

London's xxxtravaganza is second only to Rio's, each year reduces the gap. It's an explosion of the large Caribbean community, but it reveals every shade of this multicultural city. Last Monday, all roads led to Notting Hill, everyone driving, bus-ing, tube-ing and then walking towards it with excitement, painted faces and serial selfies. The police was out in full force, including Constable Patel who offered to take our photograph before the real frenzy began. Then, like the lumbering trucks of visarjan – complete with mountainous boom boxes and live steel bands – the floats began rolling in. They bore aloft celebrants as tall and bedecked as idols, but there the resemblance ended. How to compare the expense and innovation on decorating 'Ganapati Bappa' with the 30 million sequins, 15,000 exotic feather plumes and 30 litres of body paint on the official dandies alone. That's all some of them were.

The 70-foot spectacle inched its voluptuous way along the 3.5 mile route. Revelers jumped into its path to Shakira their hips to the reggae music, toot plastic horns, and grab Instagram-ops. Most visible were flashy BBWs – big, black women. Footballs bursting out of thong-grade shorts and necklines as lowered as inhibition. Then, on a side street packed with a roaring, drinking, jerk-chicken-chomping, crowd, I tripped. Heart thumping, eardrums bursting, I thought I'd be stomped over. A giant black pair of arms saved me – but, Bro, whatta way that would've bin to go!

Alec Smart said: "Rains/ reigns of terror, Mumbai knows them both." <http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/erratica>

Truth About Urban Flooding

Cities like Mumbai get inundated regularly due to administrative apathy, not climate change

Asit K Biswas, Udisha Saklani and Cecilia Tortajada

While tropical storm Harvey in Texas has grabbed more international attention, flooding in South Asia has been quite severe: already a thousand people have died. This year, among the main sufferers of this regular annual event have been the residents of Mumbai, India's financial capital. On Tuesday, roads were jammed with residents wading through knee-deep water. Over 30 lakh commuters were affected by delayed local train services as train lines lay inundated. Overcrowded and flooded government hospitals are now facing the risk of spreading infections, exposing citizens to a public health crisis.

Residents were reminded of the 2005 flood that left the city in a similar state of paralysis. Over a thousand people lost their lives and essential infrastructure including airports, local trains, power and telecommunication systems were all shut down. Sadly, no real lessons have been learnt.

For most part of the monsoon season this year, a significant part of India has been submerged in flood waters. Incessant rains in Gujarat, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bengal, Odisha and Bihar have triggered floods leading often to emergency situations. Most politicians, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have conveniently blamed climate change for floods that have impacted millions of people, paralysed local economies and caused deaths and serious economic upheavals.

India is one of the world's most flood-prone countries with 113 million people exposed to floods. According to a UN report India's average annual economic loss due to disasters is estimated to be \$9.8 billion, out of which more than \$7 billion loss is due to floods. Flooding in urban areas is a particularly challenging problem. Similar to the havoc in Mumbai, several such events have occurred in some of the major cities such as Kolkata, Chennai, Delhi, Gurugram and Bengaluru during the past decade.

Climatic impacts on urban environments demand greater scrutiny and better planning. India has failed to offer any long-term solutions. Unplanned



Chaitanya

urban growth increases risk to natural hazards like floods. In addition real estate-driven developments, poor city planning, lack of accountability of all levels of government and political neglect have left cities to the vagaries of extreme climate.

Urban ecosystems comprising marshlands, wetlands, lakes and rivers which could attenuate floods have steadily deteriorated. Encroachment and illegal construction in flood-prone areas and indiscriminate destruction of green areas have steadily reduced the resilience of cities to withstand serious flooding.

Consider Bengaluru. Once a city of 2,500 lakes, it boasted an efficient storm water drainage system of interconnected lakes. If one lake overflowed water would automatically flow to another lake. With increasing encroachment and solid wastes blocking the channels, floodwater cannot flow to the next water body, resulting in frequent inundations.

Non-functional land use planning has impacted water bodies and drainage system in other major cities like Hyderabad, which has reported extinction of 375 lakes, and Delhi, where 274 of 611 water bodies have dried up due to neglect and exploita-

Cities like Delhi, which witness floods every monsoon, are also some of the most water-stressed in the world. This is a serious indictment of the poor state of India's water management

Gurugram, a lowland area, has emerged as one of India's most important industrial hubs. Many of its residential areas are still not connected to any drainage system. Thus, it is not surprising that roads in Gurugram are severely waterlogged each monsoon season resulting in traffic snarls lasting up to 20 hours.

Proactive actions from municipal governments are essential to address the negative impacts of urban floods. Without strict adherence to land-use planning and construction laws, it is impossible for any city to manage its growing pressures and adequately plan its infrastructure. Not a single Indian city has a drainage system that can promptly evacuate intense

Is Modi momentum slowing down? Crony spiritualism and a depressed economy could impede Mission 350

Bindu Dalmia



Prime Minister Narendra Modi looked invincible till last week in BJP's march towards Mission 350, despite jobless growth after demonetisation, increasing criticism of vigilantes on the prowl, and mounting agrarian distress. Following mayhem in Haryana the quicksands of political calculations can turn brutal for BJP if the opposition succeeds in upping the ante.

With opposition unable to capitalise on the cracks in incumbency thus far, the judiciary filled in that vacuum in the Ram Rahim aftermath by chiding the Haryana CM for being lax only "to allure the vote bank". Modi's 'New India' cannot be built on a political model of overlapping religion and state, as under the Constitution the two are separate entities, vide the Hindutva judgment of 1996 (1) SCC 130.

Faustian pacts have their own perils as political parties outsource enlarging voter base to cult leaders who play kingmaker to netas on one side, and offer salvation to humanity in search of redemption on the other. Guru power over politics is now institutionalised, the stock-in-trade of this business being the number of followers who constitute political capital, which is then sold by the guru in return for state patronage.

This is a developing form of cronyism after business cronyism that Modi has successfully curtailed, only to supplant it with what I deem to be 'spiritual cronyism'. BJP's dependence on such cult leaders to influence voters has grown deeper than in the Congress era, as each cult caters to diverse demographics. Voter-outsourcing to religious heads now comes as a comprehensive package with the lumpen elements and footsollers ready to rabble rouse, or riot-on-command in return for state patronage.

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Either politicians live for their country, or they live off their country. Clearly Modi's brand of politics adhered to the former in freeing India of those that fed off the system. However multiple issues derailed that noble intent, as the efficient functioning of the Modi-Shah diarchy has extended BJP's appeal to newer vote banks. Moreover, manufactured perceptions are in utter disconnect from ground realities where 73% of corporates are averse to hiring, job creation is sub-



optimal and private investment tepid, and farmer suicides at 31 a day.

How then is Modi's popularity surging? Thus far it's been a choreographed projection by the Modi-Shah-RSS trinity that has marketed its 108 socio-economic programmes well, when little has changed on the ground. As a once devout Modi bhakt I am not sure if I will vote again for BJP, yet affirm Modi is the best leader we could have got thus far.

Congress today is like an ailing corporate ripe for a takeover, but no heavyweight is available to carry out a coup on the Gandhis. In contrast, Modi course-corrected BJP's loss of Delhi and Bihar within two years and regained momentum. I would not go down the path of Rahul-bashing for his lack of leadership skills, because attaining the elusive post

of president of the party is not a job he aspired for, but was thrust upon him by an ambitious mother as well as opportunistic Congress courtiers.

Strategically, BJP is way ahead with a back-up plan for preempting anti-incumbency in states where the party has reached saturation point such as UP, Rajasthan and Gujarat. By courting regional parties like AIADMK or keeping a door open for NCP to jump ship BJP widens its net for local partners, as more satraps go the Nitish way. Besides, BJP of the Modi era is a formidable force dominating 18 states, nearing a majority in both Houses of Parliament, and with a firm grip on every constitutional office.

Should the economic rebound not happen by next year, merely weeding out corruption will be seen as inadequate and an intangible goal, as opposed to quantifiable achievements like jobs and enhanced income in hand. Farm loan waivers, NPAs of banks and provisioning for big-bang welfare schemes close to election time will be a cumulative drain on the exchequer, deferring economic recovery. If prevailing sentiments remain negative on that score, or the Haryana factor dampens the BJP juggernaut, the irrational momentum of 2017 will likely simmer down, yet still keep Modi in the lead, with expectations of a slimmer margin of victory.

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dilbert



Five Crucial Habits For Restful Sleep

Deepak Chopra

All of us spend the day being conscious and aware and spend the night being seemingly unconscious and unaware. This rhythm of rest and activity pervades nature and affects every creature. But human beings are unique, because, only we use sleep to restore body, mind, and spirit.

However, modern life works against sleep and its restorative powers. Around 30% of Americans get less than seven hours of sleep per night, and among single mothers, this rises to 47%. The negative side of sleep disorders has gotten the most study, but let's focus on the positive side: the benefits derived from seven to nine hours of good sleep. Good sleep is uninterrupted; you sleep through the entire night. It isn't restless, and there are extended periods of REM or dream sleep. The benefits begin with sharp mental functioning throughout the day,

abundant energy, freshness, positive moods and consistent alertness without stretches of fatigue and dullness. Good sleep is connected via hormonal rhythms to regulated appetite, while poor sleep is associated with lack of impulse control and weight gain.

To enable restful sleep and bring you these benefits, here are five positive lifestyle changes you can adopt as new habits. Each conforms to Ayurvedic principles and modern sleep research:

1. Set your bedroom aside as a room for sleeping, not texting, reading, or watching TV.
2. Go to sleep at the same time every night.
3. Make your bedroom as dark and silent as possible.
4. Stop major mental activity, such as work you brought home with you, two hours before bedtime.

5. Curtail eating two hours before bedtime.

These seemingly simple practices – which many people would overlook or focus on intermittently – really work together in a powerful way. You are changing the feedback loop that connects mind and body.

Instead of sending mixed signals, you are conveying one unified message: Relax. If this message is backed up by regular intention every night, pathways in the brain associated with biorhythms will begin to fall into their natural pattern of rest and activity.

'Relax' means lowering external stimulation like light and sound in the bedroom. It means easing the thinking process so that the hypothalamus – which is a brain region critical for regulating many bodily rhythms – is allowed to be heard,

chemically speaking. Relax also refers to the gut-brain feedback loop. By not eating two hours before bedtime, your digestive tract tells the brain that extra energy and activity don't have to be fired up. But at the same time, the brain realises that it doesn't need the extra energy produced by digestion.

This whole interrelated feedback sets the stage for the body-mind system to let sleep happen as naturally as possible. Such changes are much more preferable than over-the-counter or prescription sleep aids, which force an unnatural state of sleep and actually take the brain in the opposite direction you want to go.

Try these changes for yourself, adding a simple Ayurvedic daily regime that balances your doshas as comfortably as possible. The results will benefit you for the rest of your life. (Courtesy: deepakchopra.com)

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Sacredspace

*Ordinary People,
Extraordinary Courage*

Bad things do happen in the world, like war, natural disasters, disease. But out of those situations always arise stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Daryn Kagan