

No State shelter for homeless

Nearly 1.77 mn are on the streets but funds for them go unutilised

They can be found everywhere but somehow the Indian State fails to notice them. They are the homeless people of India. According to the government's definition, homeless or houseless are those who live in "the open or roadside, pavements, in hume-pipes,

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under flyovers and staircases, or in the open in places of worship, mandaps, railway platforms etc." Yet when it comes to providing them the basic needs, governments have been failing to spend even their allocated funds. There are 1.77 million homeless people in India. Last week, the Supreme Court took the Centre and states to task, saying that there should be an audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of the money disbursed by the Centre to the states for a scheme under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM), and observed that these funds, which are meant for a specific purpose, should not be diverted.

The good news is that there has been an overall decline in the houseless population from the last Census. While there has been a 28% decline reported from rural India, there has been a 20% increase in houseless people living in the cities. But still there is a long way to go. But only spending money will not solve the problem. Here's what needs to be done.

First, the State needs to identify and address the structural causes of homelessness; second, a national moratorium on forced evictions and demolitions should be introduced; third, enhanced policy coherence and convergence between housing schemes in urban and rural areas and schemes for the provision of water and sanitation; fourth, the central and state governments should put in place effective and timely mechanisms to collect data on evictions, including with disaggregation of the persons who are evicted by age, gender, disability, caste and religion. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set a target for the nation — every Indian must have a house by 2022. This is a tall order. However it is possible if the State undertakes the right sort of planning and spends funds judiciously.

Listen to the President's advice on language

Instead of forcing people to learn Hindi, celebrate India's multilingual heritage

Coercion is not always the best path if you want to convince people to do something that they are averse to. President Ram Nath Kovind seems to understand that well. Addressing a function on the occasion of 'Hindi Divas' in Delhi last week, he asked Hindi-speaking people to give more respect and space to regional languages and their speakers in a bid to make the language more popular across the country. He added that Hindi continued to face opposition in some parts of the country even though it became an official language many decades ago. Mr Kovind suggested that those who speak Hindi should greet a Tamilian with a 'vanakkam', a Sikh with 'Sat Sri Akal' and a Muslim with an 'Adaab'—words of greeting in Tamil, among Sikhs and in Urdu respectively.

Language tensions are not new in India, it started from Independence. Even today, in many parts of India, Hindi is still a foreign language. In fact, many communities feel cornered when languages spoken by the majority of the state try to push them through. Take for example, what happened recently in West Bengal. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had to revoke her decision of making Bengali a compulsory subject in schools in the hill district Darjeeling after protests by Gorkhas.

Coming back to Hindi-regional language rivalry, last month, activists in Karnataka blackened sign boards displayed in Hindi on the walls of a metro station. In March, Tamil Nadu saw a spate of protests when it replaced English with Hindi on its road signs. The pro-Hindi lobby must understand that a language is not just about words; it carries with it culture, traditional knowledge, and works as comfort zone for its speakers. Instead of ramming down a language down the throats of the unwilling, it will be a much better to give regional languages their due and let a thousand languages bloom.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



Who was Rajdev? He too was killed

Most people in cities are oblivious to challenges that many journalists in the regional media face

W e are living in a unique era when the hunter has become the hunted and the audience itself becomes a spectacle. In these days of ideological haze, Indian society needs to do some deep introspection because the mistakes of a few moments can lead to punishment for centuries.

Let me begin with discussing Gauri Lankesh.

If I so desired, I could have written on this subject last week but I kept silent. I wanted to see the conspiracy theories that were being spun over the murder of an intellectual reach a logical conclusion, but that did not happen. Even now, bizarre discussions are being carried out on the idiot box (as someone coined it so beautifully). The collective agony over the murder of a journalist was transformed into a battle for ideological supremacy. Not just journalists, even thinkers, writers and actors were dragged into this cesspool. Who said Indians need the battlefield of Kurukshetra to unleash a Mahabharat?

At one time Charlie Chaplin had said: "Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in a long shot." Today, when people have themselves shed their masks, the reality of their internal dilemmas has been revealed.

Those who keep announcing the death of truth in the world must be guffawing loudly.

No matter what she wrote, ate or spoke, Gauri Lankesh shouldn't have been killed. If our journalists, writers and intellectuals are murdered, how will Indians stand out from other barbaric nationalities? That's why lakhs of people like me, who hadn't heard of Gauri before the tragedy, are in anguish. But this doesn't mean that we begin acting like judges and delivering our own verdicts. In a healthy democracy, probe agencies should be given the time to investigate. Creating unnecessary noise puts them under enormous psychological pressure. Why don't those holding forth on TV and social media not realise this irony: The rationale behind their outrage is as antithetical to the spirit of the Constitution as the acts of violence themselves?

It is also important to know that Gauri Lankesh was associated with a certain ideology. That's one of the reasons why so many people congregated to mourn her murder. How about other journalists who are silently doing their job with objectivity? They don't live in the safe environment of big cities. They can be killed but not intimidated. Our colleague Rajdev Ranjan was one of these. A little more than a year ago, he was murdered in a busy market while returning home from Hindustan's Siwan office.



A candle light vigil for Hindustan journalist Rajdev Ranjan, who was shot dead in Siwan, Bihar, in May 2016

It was a tragic moment for us. The body of our young colleague was lying in the hospital. We had to pull his two minor children and his wife out of the whirlpool of misfortune they were caught in. The killers had to be brought to justice. Apart from all this, we had to bring out a newspaper the next day. We knew that the mafia that had killed Rajdev would attempt to deflect attention from the murder by trying to character assassinate him. So his colleagues at Hindustan decided that they

won't let his death become a public spectacle.

That is the reason why his killers are in prison today. Rajdev's wife Ashadevi Ranjan teaches in a village and the responsibility of ensuring that his children are educated at a safe place is being carried out by Hindustan Media Ventures Limited. It is true that the Bihar Police didn't leave any stone unturned and the CBI filed a chargesheet. But if the government wanted, it could have made Ashadevi's employment permanent. She could have been given monetary assistance. But that is the misfortune of regional journalism. Those shouting themselves hoarse on TV in Delhi and Mumbai fail to recognise their challenges. They keep silent on this even as more than 99% of journalists who become victims of such violence come from small towns.

Why are those of us who believe in raising our voices selective in our outrage?

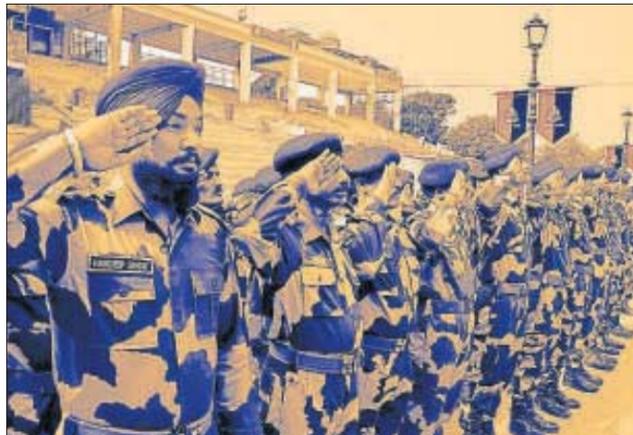
The issue isn't just about journalists. When a child was killed in Gurgaon's Ryan School, the issue shook both Delhi and Mumbai. The very next day a five-year-old girl in east Delhi was raped by a security guard in a not-so-high-profile school and there was no similar outrage. Those creating noise are ensconced in their cocoons. The noise makers have forgotten that the victim was one of their own.

Most of these social media warriors belong to the same walk of life as the unfortunate victims. Why don't they understand that by beating these virtual drums, they are driving the prey towards danger in the human jungle?

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JUSTICE DELAYED



Border Security soldiers during a flag-hoisting ceremony at the India-Pakistan joint checkpoint near Amritsar, August 15

SAMEER SEHGAL/HINDUSTAN TIMES

Our paramilitary forces need a dedicated tribunal

Frustrated and demoralised personnel can do more harm than good. Speedy redressal of grievances is important



MP NATHANAEL

Constable Vithal Patel, a water carrier with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was dismissed from service in 1997. His offence? He wrote a letter to the prime minister about the service conditions of CRPF personnel. He got relief only after battling in the Gujarat High Court for more than 18 years. The government was directed to reinstate him and pay him salary for the period he wasn't in service. The government incurred a heavy loss. In another long-drawn legal battle, the Delhi High Court rejected CRPF constable Kumar Pal Singh's plea for reinstatement. He was dismissed for being a member of a mob that raised abusive anti-government slogans in 1979. The High Court's judgment was pronounced last year.

Personnel of India's paramilitary forces — CRPF, BSF, Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and Assam Rifles — end up knocking on the doors of justice for years on end. Finally, when the verdict is pronounced in favour of the litigant, without any services rendered, the government ends up sustaining a huge loss.

With an overall strength of nearly 10 lakh personnel in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) as the paramilitary forces are known,

legal cases are mounting in the forces. The average number of years to settle cases is around six years, says a senior CRPF officer. Not infrequently, paramilitary officers approach the courts with matters concerning their promotions which take a number of years and tend to demoralise them.

In 1990, then home minister P Chidambaram changed the criteria for promotion of officers in the CAPFs resulting in mass supersession of officers. Many officers were ultimately forced to go in appeal to the Supreme Court where the matter was dismissed on grounds of delay. In a case of biased promotion policy, the Armed Forces Tribunal in Chandigarh recently directed the defence ministry, to review its "two stream" promotion orders before October 2017. Had there been such tribunals for our paramilitary forces, many superseded officers would have been saved the ignominy of supersession and having to serve under junior officers.

Immediate redressal of grievances is an important factor for man-management in the armed forces to keep up their morale. Frustrated and demoralised personnel can do more harm than good.

It would be in the fitness of things to establish tribunals exclusively for the paramilitary forces for quick redressal of grievances. Since cadre officers of these forces are better placed to address their grievances, they should be appointed to these tribunals and not the IPS officers who serve for short durations.

MP Nathanael is former inspector general of police, CRPF

The views expressed are personal

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R SUKUMAR



The X factor gives iPhone an edge over competitors

The cult of Apple and Steve Jobs puts the brand in the same class as top-end luxury products

Once considered a niche brand popular with those in so-called creative professions, Apple products have now become mainstream and mass — or at least as mainstream or mass as their premium pricing allows.

As anecdotal evidence, I offer that wonderful observatory of consumer behaviour, the airport (which is how I discovered many years ago that Amish was the new Chetan). Even five, six years ago, the MacBook was a relative rarity. Today, every second or third computer spotted in airports (and aircraft) is a MacBook.

Across Apple's products, nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the iPhone.

Which means that while people may look askance at the ₹89,000 pricing (for the entry-level model) of the latest iPhone X — and over ₹1 lakh, the price at which Ratan Tata once launched a car, for the fully-loaded one — I do expect many people to go out and buy the phone.

Even in price-conscious India — although it is unlikely that those who buy Apple products can be labelled that — the iPhone5 is the most popular smart phone priced over ₹20,000, CyberMedia Research said in May. As Mint's Sapna Agarwal pointed out in a column earlier this year, one of Samsung's biggest problems in India is that most CEOs of large companies use iPhones. Indeed, I know of only one CEO of a large company who carries a Samsung (I am excluding CEOs of companies that make phones who have to, perforce, carry those phones).

It isn't CEOs, even young people (who can afford it), seem to prefer the iPhone to any other.

That's strange. The iPhone may have been exclusive when it was launched a decade back; it no longer is (so exclusivity as something that appeals to people is out).

Apple isn't a young brand (it is dad and

mom's brand). Nor is it, I am reliably told by the Samsung loyalists in the Mint newsroom, at the bleeding edge of technology.

So, what explains its ability to stay relevant, popular and aspirational; and, more importantly, consistently increase the asking price of a phone?

For at least some older users such as this writer, one thing that works is familiarity.

For long, I was a Nokia loyalist (my favourite was a Nokia Communicator).

Then, reluctantly at first, I moved to BlackBerry — and remained a loyalist even as others around me moved to the iPhone.

But for the past few years, I've been an iPhone loyalist.

It is easier to move from an iPhone 7 to an iPhone X or an iPhone 8 than it is to a Pixel or a Samsung.

Things like iTunes and the App Store (and continuing subscriptions) make it even tougher to make the change. Sure, there's the Play Store (and I do have a second phone, an Android one, so I speak from experience), but it's not like the App Store. Apple has managed to build a very sticky ecosystem around the iPhone that is also vibrant and secure.

It's also very profitable — the typical Apple customer spends more on the App Store than the Android phone user spends on the Play Store.

The iPhone is also, fundamentally, a damn good phone despite not being at the cutting edge of technology. It is built well, reasonably hardy, and lasts and lasts (like, indeed, many Apple products do), which explains why there is a thriving second-hand market for iPhones in India.

It is also an extremely good-looking product with arguably the most glitch-free user interface among smart phones.

But none of these, independently or together, can explain why, for 10 years now, the iPhone has been the benchmark for smartphones.

That's perhaps where the X factor comes in. It's difficult to put a finger on it, but this is perhaps a bit of the cult of Apple and the cult of Steve Jobs. None of the iPhone's competitors have anything similar. Nor, come to think of it, do most brands across other product categories. It is only the really top-end, storied luxury brands that do.

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innervoice

AVOIDING EVIL PEOPLE ISN'T AN ACT OF COWARDICE

Shiv Sethi

If life is symbolically equated with a journey, you will certainly have a slew of co-passengers. As we draw a comparison of life with a walk; we are bound to bump into a number of other walkers. But life is neither a hassle-free, smooth journey nor is it a cakewalk. People who accompany us are not always our well-wishers with hearts filled with benevolent affection.

It is in no way cynicism to see the sordid side of humanity. If there is inherent good-

ness in human beings the same is aptly pertinent about the inherent depravity that permeates through them. When this innate diabolical element in a man grows stronger in its power and gets him in its grip, he begins to behave in manner which is even worse than that of a barbaric beast. Thus while taking the precarious walk of life, when confronted with such nefarious people, we have to walk with a caution as such people are capable of playing havoc with our moods.

I have no hesitation in comparing this cunning class of people with ferocious preda-

tors whose only intent is to pounce on the innocent and the naive. With fake smiles and hidden daggers, they sprawl their arms not to lovingly embrace but to furtively stab. But a man with a virtuous bent of mind has to act wise to ward off this devious design. One should understand the futility of unwarranted conflicts. This act of judicious avoidance isn't cowardice.

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers.

The views expressed are personal)

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