



A thought for today

You have to stay in school. You have to

MICHELLE OBAMA

Wrong Move

Scrapping no-detention policy won't improve learning outcomes in schools

The Union Cabinet's decision to scrap the no-detention policy in schools till Class VIII – a key provision of the Right to Education (RTE) Act – is a backward step. The no-detention policy was instituted to arrest school dropouts, especially among economically marginalised communities. However, last year the Central Advisory Board of Education – the highest body advising the Centre and states on education – passed a resolution to scrap the no-detention policy on the ground that it was leading to lower learning outcomes. But it's the poor quality of teaching that must be blamed rather than students.

Bringing back year-end examinations for Classes V and VIII and detaining students who fail them won't improve learning outcomes. It will simply palm off the responsibility of learning to students, letting teachers off the hook. Students from economically well off backgrounds can overcome the pass-fail system through out-of-school tuitions. But this option simply isn't available to economically disadvantaged students who are clinging to the school system precariously. Hence, a reversal of the no-detention policy in the foundational years of schooling is bound to increase dropouts, casting a shadow on the future of millions of disadvantaged students.

It needs to be recalled that an important aspect of RTE was continuous comprehensive evaluation where teachers were to periodically assess students' progress without a pass-fail exam. However, this was never implemented properly. In fact, an analysis of RTE over the last two years shows that more emphasis was laid on implementing 25% free seats for economically weaker children in private schools than on upgrading infrastructure or teacher training. This clearly shows that improvement of quality of education continues to get short shrift. Politicians still see education as a tool to disburse patronage rather than a means to uplift the next generation.

It's precisely this approach that's behind the caste-based reservation policy, both in higher education and government jobs. But as experience shows, quotas simply initiate a race to the bottom with each community fighting to get a share of the reservation pie. This in turn creates a creamy layer within the disadvantaged communities, perpetuating the cycle of inequality. The real solution to socio-economic deprivation lies in improving quality of and access to education. And that requires making teachers do their job better as well as fixing shortcomings in educational infrastructure and administration. Governments must deliver inclusive education policies that nurture students and keep them in school.



Unfriendly Fight

Tax raids on Congress minister ignite charges of partisanship by investigative agencies

A political storm is raging over income tax raids on over 60 premises linked to Karnataka power minister DK Shivakumar, who was busy keeping together Congress's group of 44 Gujarat MLAs before the August 8 Rajya Sabha election. Shivakumar has a reputation for being Congress's money and muscle man in Karnataka, and income tax sleuths recovered Rs 10 crore from the raids. They have denied acting under political pressure and claim the raids were decided well in advance. Nevertheless questions are bound to be raised about the timing of the raids, which coincided with when Shivakumar was shepherding the Congress flock and trying to avoid a break in its ranks.



The resignation of veteran Congress leader Shankersinh Vaghela followed by six MLAs in Gujarat last month precipitated a crisis for the party. The crisis came even as Congress party's chief strategist Ahmed Patel faces a tough challenge in his bid to get re-elected to the Rajya Sabha. Congress has cried foul, claiming that BJP is offering Rs 15 crore for each MLA to break ranks which had forced them to seek refuge in Congress-ruled Karnataka. Income tax investigations and raids only of opposition parties can raise questions of partisanship of state investigative agencies, especially when it will be scarcely credible to most that only opposition parties offer illicit money to legislators, and not parties that are friendly to BJP.

All this is bound to spark further polarisation in an already polarised political atmosphere. To avoid this government should ensure that agencies like IT department are insulated from political control, else it could soon draw comparisons with CBI which was famously called a caged parrot by the Supreme Court in 2013.

I, robot

Machines that can think will enslave us? What rubbish!

Jug Suraiya



What gives with Elon Musk, the guy behind the Tesla, the driverless car? He's going around saying that, if we don't watch out, Artificial Intelligence (AI) as represented by thinking machines – like his autonomous automobile – will end up ruling our lives.

What nonsense. As if we'd ever let machines – no matter how smart they get – dominate us. How dumb can you get to suggest such a thing?

And I'd have texted him and told Musk that, except my pre-paid smartphone is out of action, having run out of cash.

It's so darned irritating when these things happen. I know what. Why don't I use my desktop Mac to do an online recharge of my phone?

Damn and blast! The Mac's on the blink because there's no broadband service. Every time it rains, like it does in the monsoons, the wretched broadband goes for a six, and that's that.

No internet, no emails, no Google, no WhatsApp chats. No nothing. Isolation.

Total. I know how Robinson Crusoe must have felt. Except he at least had his Man Friday whom he must have found on Facebook. Or maybe LinkedIn. Or whatever social media sites they had on that desert island of theirs.

OK, don't panic. You can always watch TV. That's something, what with all these hundreds of channels, all in different languages, and many of them 24x7.

Bloody hell. Where's the damn TV remote gone? Except they don't call it a remote anymore, not if it's a smart TV. Then it's called a Magic Wand. And the most Magical thing about the Magic Wand is its seeming ability to wave and make itself disappear where you can never find it when you need it the most. So no TV. Now what?

But Musk is wrong about machines running our lives and us being unable to do anything without them. I am doing something without them. Twiddling my thumbs.

Humankind: 1, machinekind: 0.

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Tathagata Satpathy



The Aadhaar juggernaut continues unabated. The government claims 99% of people over age 18 now have Aadhaar. I, however, belong to the 1% who don't.

There are many others who are actively resisting getting the 12-digit unique ID number for a plethora of reasons. One of them is a crippling fear that Aadhaar violates our right to privacy and takes our personal information for various purposes. It is also being used by private corporate entities to create their own database. The UIDAI chairman admitted in an interview that Aadhaar can be used to create a 360-degree profile of an individual.

The biggest industrialist in India stated very clearly: "Data is the new oil" that would lead the world into a fourth industrial revolution. His words got me thinking. If data is indeed like oil, shouldn't there be a price to it?

The Supreme Court is presently hearing arguments on whether Indians have a right to privacy and whether Aadhaar violates that right. Judging by the way things are unfolding since 2014, it's simply too late to expect Aadhaar can be trashed.

For the sake of argument let us accept that, as the government propounds, we don't have a right to privacy. We accept that citizens' personal biometrics and metadata are being used by multiple companies and the government to achieve different objectives. It's being used to make better policies after looking at spending patterns and demographic information or it is being used by companies to sell their products to me directly. Accepted that certain commercial bodies are doing deep packet inspection and using personal data of customers to earn massive profits.

The larger question now is: If my data has monetary value for the government and private players, shouldn't it also benefit from it? If data is the 'new oil' and you are extracting that

If Data Is the New Oil ...

Compensate citizens for their personal data used for Aadhaar and other purposes



oil from me, it implies I am the resource. I should be compensated for providing that resource.

The way things are going, I wouldn't be surprised if Aadhaar becomes mandatory for practically everything between birth and death. Let us accept that unquestioningly as well. Now, let us talk about the future.

If a citizen's personal data is a commodity, which can be bought and sold by different entities like detergent or a pair of jeans, the citizen should get paid for it. Period.

Contractors engaged in enrolling people for Aadhaar should buy that resource at a price. These contractors should pay a flat upfront amount to the person who is enrolling and is converting into a rich resource. Since morals, beliefs and personal liberty matter little in this brave new world, I don't think anyone would have a problem selling their soul for a high amount, say Rs 5 lakh. They will line up to link their bank accounts with

Critics, me included, need to evolve and ask the government to simply be open about the uses of Aadhaar data. Make it transparent and incentivise people to give up their rights

Aadhaar the day this is announced.

A cheaper option would be to simply introduce Universal Basic Income (UBI) through Aadhaar. The Economic Survey 2016-17 points out that a UBI of Rs 12,000 per person per year is an optimal amount. If the government starts a UBI programme, it can gradually get rid of all other targeted welfare schemes. The way Aadhaar is becoming an impediment for people to get welfare currently is causing unimaginable pain and hardship. So just get rid of that welfare completely

instead of destroying it piecemeal. UBI in partial lieu of Aadhaar should compensate for acquiring data for the remainder of the life of a citizen. Rich or poor doesn't matter.

UIDAI itself can become a for-profit entity which buys and sells citizens' data to whoever asks for it for a price that is transferred directly to the bank account of the 'resource' persons. Suppose a school asks for the data of a child for admission, the parent would get an alert on her phone which will quote a price for the data exchange and purpose of usage. If the person accepts the terms, the data will be shared by UIDAI with the school and their account will be immediately credited with the agreed price. UIDAI gets a cut.

Every exchange of such data from one entity to the other would be for a price depending on the value that the UIDAI assigns. This can be done when UIDAI facilitates these data transactions. All contracts signed between UIDAI and private entities would be public and available for review. This way, data would indeed become the new oil.

Since there is an overwhelming opinion amongst many experts that our data is being used for profit and profiling anyway, I believe it's time we start discussing the next step: Of becoming a willing commodity and demanding a price from those interested in using us. Critics, me included, need to evolve and ask the government to simply be open about the uses of Aadhaar data.

Make it transparent and incentivise people to give up their rights. Tell us citizens where you intend to sell us and give us a share of the profits. If we are all being treated as a commodity now, tell us that to our face and we will be willing to get used to the idea.

The Aadhaar data river is flowing into an ocean consisting of large private entities and government who are benefitting from our data. We citizens need to build a small canal to irrigate our own farms. Why should they have all the fun?

The writer is a BJD Lok Sabha MP. Views are personal

'Decision to shift Congress MLAs to Karnataka was taken by them without interference of high command'

Gujarat Congress president **Bharat Solanki** has accused BJP of misusing the income-tax department and other central agencies to harass the opposition party's Gujarat MLAs ahead of crucial Rajya Sabha elections on August 8. Three seats are up for grabs between BJP president **Amit Shah**, information and broadcasting minister **Smriti Irani**, senior Congress leader **Ahmed Patel** and Congress rebel-turned BJP candidate, **Baluwantsinh Rajput**. He spoke to **Rohit E David** on why 44 Congress MLAs fled to Bengaluru where they are being kept in a private resort, IT raids on a Karnataka Congress minister and the upcoming elections in the state:

■ Is it right that Gujarat Congress MLAs fled to Bengaluru in fear? Or are they being kept against their will?

Our MLAs did not go to Bengaluru in fear, they went for security. BJP-ruled states, especially Gujarat, are not secure places. Our MLAs decided they wanted to be together in a safe place. After thinking about this for long, all of them decided to go to a Congress-ruled state. This decision to shift the MLAs to Karnataka was taken by themselves without any interference of the high command.

■ What is your reaction to the IT raids on one of your ministers in Karnataka?

It clearly shows BJP's mindset. If BJP was so sure of winning the three Rajya Sabha seats in Gujarat, why did

they force Congress MLAs to resign? Congress had got enough votes with 57 MLAs. After resignations and defections were induced by threat and pressure, six of our MLAs resigned. BJP fielded one of our former MLAs **Baluwantsinh Rajput** as a fourth candidate in the Rajya Sabha election. These IT raids definitely show vendetta, corruption and criminalisation of politics by BJP.

■ You have claimed that BJP is offering Rs 15 crore to each MLA. Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani has emphatically denied these charges. Can you substantiate these charges?

The figures can vary from Rs 5 to 15 crore. This is absolutely true. Else why would any

Congress MLA resign? In Gujarat there is a two-party system. These MLAs had put their career at stake. If they cross-vote they would not be able to contest for the next six years.

■ Political observers say you had a rivalry with Shankersinh Vaghela who recently left Congress? Is this the reason he left?

I don't have rivalry with anyone. I was made state Congress president by **Sonia Gandhi** ji. Initially, I was reluctant to become the state president but she wanted me to be at the helm of affairs in Gujarat. I don't know why all of a sudden Vaghela ji thought of leaving the party. He raised a few issues including the demand to make him the chief ministerial candidate and to remove me as the state president.

■ What has been the political impact of Vaghela leaving Congress? Do you have hope of him coming back?

Well, you will see in the 2017 elections. We will win the elections and come to power. **Shankersinh Vaghela** coming back to the Congress is out of question. When he was the state president, Congress got minimum seats in the assembly.

■ Is Congress going to tie up with Hardik Patel in the coming elections?

It is not a question of having an alliance. It is a question of supporting

electoral politics of **Hardik Patel** and **Alpesh Thakore**. They are all anti-BJP. It is a natural course of action to be getting together and removing one of the worst governments ever in Gujarat.

■ It has been said that when Gujarat is facing floods, Congress MLAs are enjoying themselves in a resort outside the state. Your response?

We did not enjoy anything. The MLAs were forced to get together and leave for Bengaluru. Before leaving, all MLAs were working in the field, where floods had struck the state. There was a lady MLA who had gone to Bengaluru though her son was admitted in the hospital.

■ With Prime Minister Narendra Modi not heading the state during the coming assembly elections, is Congress more confident of winning now?

The leadership of BJP is very poor. **Vijay Rupani** and the state BJP president are weak leaders. This is the reason why the PM had to rush to Gujarat and send **Amit Shah** to save the sinking boat.

■ What do you have to say about cross voting during presidential elections?

There was no cross voting from the Congress side.

■ Is Ahmed Patel going to win the Rajya Sabha election?

He is definitely going to win. There is no question of him losing. Whoever is with us, will stand strong. I feel that **Smriti Irani** may lose in the Rajya Sabha election.

dilbert



Fate, Free Will And Law Of Karma

Jaya Row

Karma or action is the pivot around which life revolves. Action comes from desire emerging from thought. And thought comes from vasana, the inborn urge, deep-rooted inclination. When you have a vasana for music, thought for music arises in your intellect. This consolidates as desire, and manifests as action. Action further creates an imprint, vasana, for music. Thus you are a victim of your vasanas in the present. This is referred to as fate or destiny.

Only human beings are gifted with choice of action. With purushartha or choice, you determine your future. Prarabdh, destiny, is the sum total of all your past purusharthas. It is irrevocable. So if you look at your past you are a victim. With reference to the future, you are a victor. Think a negative, hateful thought.

That moment, you become a little more evil. The effect is failure, misery and sorrow. You carelessly entertain negative thoughts. When the collective effect of all this negativity hits, you wonder why tragedy has struck!

Think a positive, loving, elevating thought. That instant, you become a little more divine. The effect is good fortune, happiness and spiritual growth. You meet with serendipitous experiences.

Free will is the key to your emancipation. Irrespective of your past, you can choose to be better and nobler. God is only the facilitator and enabler of your actions. God has set the Law of Karma in place. It is up to you to use it for your evolution.

At death, all our desires and aspirations seem to vanish into thin air. While at birth, distinct traits and ambitions

appear from nowhere. So there are causes with no known effects at death and effects with unknown causes at birth. Ancient seers in India deduced that the inner personality of a person just moves from one physical body to another. The movement of mind, intellect and vasanas from one body to another is called death of the former body and birth of the latter.

Just as a person discards old clothes to don new ones, a person discards a body and environment that is no longer conducive for fulfilment of his desires and moves to another body and atmosphere that fits the bill. Death allows you to start afresh.

The sum total of all your vasanas is called sanchita vasanas. Of these a few powerful desires that exert pressure for fulfilment are called prarabdh vasanas. They determine your

birth in an environment that is tailor-made for their exhaustion. Once they are fulfilled, the next batch of desires starts playing up. So you move to another body and surrounding, customised for those prarabdh vasanas. This cycle goes on, as long as one has desires.

During your lifetime your prarabdh vasanas will be fulfilled, irrespective of what you do. You also have the option of changing your sanchita vasanas. You can add to them, subtract from them, upgrade or downgrade them or even eliminate them.

You are born in the world only to reach enlightenment. You are designed to take off into sublime spiritual realms that confer power, independence and infinite bliss. Wake up to your potential. Strive for it. Stop not, till the goal is reached.

Jaya Row will speak on this subject at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi, on August 4, from 6.15-8pm. All are welcome.

