



DECCAN HERALD

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Cloudy, with a chance of Modi-isms

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim that he gave the go-ahead for the Indian Air Force (IAF) strike on Balakot in Pakistan in February despite bad weather because he believed "clouds could actually help our planes to escape the radars" has implications that go beyond a certificate of ignorance that he has awarded himself on television. A cloudburst of trolls, ridicule, humour and criticism greeted the remark. It is not wrong for a prime minister to make errors, or even be ignorant about something, but it is wrong to parade ignorance as 'raw wisdom' and make it the basis for decisions on military operations. It's all the more despicable when the attempt is to hog credit for something. Modi did a surgical strike on science and common sense when he said that radars would not detect fighters shielded by clouds. It is not very unexpected of someone who once proclaimed to the Indian Science Congress that Ganesha's elephant head was the result of plastic surgery and that artificial insemination existed in ancient India.



Attempts at self-promotion do not behave a PM

Modi was suggesting to the nation that he was better in operational decision-making than the military professionals with whom he was presumably discussing the air force action. He has claimed credit for the airstrike in the past, and now he is taking credit for micro-managing it and deciding to go ahead against doubts expressed by the professionals. What should be of concern to the nation is that the air force officers did not correct the prime minister and let him overrule them on operational matters. According to reports, undertaking the airstrike in cloudy conditions limited the type of weapon they could use. This is not the best way to plan and conduct a military operation. Should the prime minister discuss details of his discussions with military commanders about a recent operation, and suggest to the nation that he is better than them in their job? That is what he did when he struck a posture of humility, perhaps for better effect, and claimed that he had no expertise in the matter but had relied on his "raw wisdom" to make the decision.

The BJP first proudly put up Modi's statement and then quietly removed it from the party's official twitter page. Given the barrage of ridicule, the party found it difficult to defend it, though leaders and spokesmen, as is their wont, tried to give lame justifications and explanations. In the same interview where he talked about radars, Modi also gloated about having used a digital camera and email in 1987-88 to show off his tech-savvy. Neither of them had come into the market at the time and were most certainly unavailable in India until the mid-1990s. Desperate attempts at self-promotion, combined with ignorance, do not behave a prime minister.

Probe IS threat thoroughly

The Islamic State (IS) group's recent announcement regarding its new 'India branch,' the 'Wilayah al-Hind' should worry India. Coming less than a month after the IS joined hands with the National Tawaheed Jamaat (NTJ), a Sri Lanka-based Islamist radical group, to carry out a series of deadly suicide bombings in the island, it reaffirms apprehensions that the IS is according more importance to India in its new global strategy. Following its loss of the last sliver of land it controlled in Syria in late March, the IS is seeking to re-assess and reinvent itself, taking aim at India and South Asia. Investigations into its Sri Lankan support network revealed strong links with Indian jihadists in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The IS announced the appointment of a new emir (chief) for 'Bengal' and threatened a wave of attacks in India and Bangladesh. It followed that up with a blast in Dhaka. The string of IS-related announcements and terror incidents in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh over a short span of three weeks indicates that the jihadist terror group has these three countries in its crosshairs. This is perhaps aimed at boosting the morale of its fighters. South Asia, with its large Muslim population and multiple communal and sectarian conflicts, could have emerged on the IS' radar as a convenient new base for its terror activities. It is in this context that the announcement regarding the 'Wilayah al-Hind' must be seen.

Indian security agencies could be tempted to dismiss the IS' 'Wilayah al-Hind' as mere bluster. Indeed, the IS controls no territory in India. So, the question of it declaring India a 'province' of its Caliphate doesn't arise. Importantly, when Indian Muslims did not heed the call of the Al-Qaeda, there is little reason for them to flock to join the IS now. On the other hand, over-reaction to the IS 'threat' could result in India playing into the hands of the terror group. Going into a security overdrive with random crackdowns will prove counterproductive.

Still, a possible threat cannot be ignored. Indian security agencies should probe the authenticity of the IS announcement and act accordingly. After all, anger and alienation has grown among India's religious minorities since the BJP came to power in 2014, a scenario in which Muslim youth could get drawn to the IS' call to arms. The announcement of a 'Wilayah al-Hind' is not a clear and present danger to India, but it should not be dismissed without a thorough investigation, either.

Comment

TECHNOLOGY AND THEATRICALS

Being a modern teacher

Modern teacher seems to be slowly transforming into a classroom-based Hunger Artist in a Raymond Carver storyline

Chitresh Kumar

In the 2014 movie *Interstellar*, the grandfather in the mid-21st century, reminiscing about the early 21st century, tells his granddaughter, "Everyday, there was some new technology or the other, it was a struggle to stay relevant." The same could be said about today's higher education teacher, who is trying to remain coherent in this struggle for relevance in the classroom. Amidst the banal ascent of technologies within the classroom, the teaching itself has seen a philosophical transition towards becoming a practice of detailing out the paths and processes to explore, rather than the traditional approach even 20 years back of inspiring the want to explore.

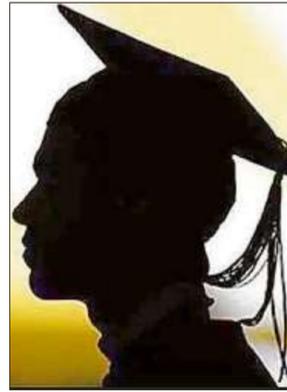
Teaching at institutes of higher education is a profession traditionally cherished for its inner calling and internal validity. However, recently, it seems to be plagued by the quagmire of student feedback and fears of backlash and antagonisation. Today, for an average instructor, the lecture seems to be more of theatre than a process of elucidating the subject matter at hand. Further, there remains the perpetual streamlining of research work along contemporary research paradigms amidst rejections, blind peer reviews and subsequent publications.

The fact that the academician's career path is decisively guided by these dimensions, not to forget the competition within the profession, the novelty of the modern teacher in the neo-liberal world at times seems to be lost in the hands of post-modern ideals of accountability, transparency and the external validity of pay and promotion. And hence, without published and well-cited research work or successful dramatisation of the classroom, the modern teacher's academic authority remains questionable.

This is also evident in the fact that in the last decade though there has been new impetus to liberal arts education, devoid of any major short-term incentive, the creation as well as consumption of non-citable literary or fictional work by academicians has gone down significantly.

While literature itself remains a static representation of society, it allows readers across generations to reflect upon the

relative shifting paradigms of their times. However, it goes against the philosophy of the current economic environment that defines relevance in terms of incremental improvement, while providing consumers the option of sorting, selecting or to move on, without getting invested in the subject, thereby not allowing the consumer to critically think. While calling students consumers might be harsh, the fact that education in the last two decades has also been seen through the lens of 'return on investment' makes it a market-defined idea through the economics of utility.



The modern classroom with the traditional teacher requires assimilated knowledge transfer in an entertaining format. A more precise way of defining it would be a near real 3D representation of an instructor with Byju's, Sololearn and Khan Academy's animation design prowess.

And hence, a modern teacher is looking towards a future where there are academicians purely dedicated to research and bringing citations leading to improved institutional ranking, or the academician as the entertaining teacher or literary or fiction writers outside the umbrella of being called an academician. Whether they co-exist within the same institutional framework called colleges and universities remains to be seen.

Amidst these, the modern teacher has been completely missing from the debate as well as policy formulation, be it on the nearly decade-old implementation of OBC quota, which suddenly added to the already overburdened educational infrastructure, or the UGC's credit-based choice system for design of curriculum. The recently passed laws to grant university status to prominent government institutions or the acts establishing pri-

vate universities do not help.

Besides these, recent times have been all about the ever-increasing thrust towards the highest levels of awareness regarding gender sensitisation, codes of conduct, sexual harassment sensitisation, etc., making the conversation within the classroom intense tightrope theatre. The interactions in the class amidst these morally ambiguous lines of bringing order and falling prey to the fuzziness around the human conversation is becoming more and more complex in nature.

The corporatisation of compensation and promotion policy has added more layers of complexity to the profession. Currently, there is a policy and regulations void in addressing these issues at the national level. The UGC Rules, Regulations & Guidelines 2018 for selection, salary, promotion, leave and workload for Assistant Professors seem to be a right step in this direction.

However, much is required to be addressed in terms of integration of the changing social, economic and technological environment. A policy encompassing all these seems to be the need of the hour. The UGC or the Ministry of Human Resource Development should look towards advocating the same.

From the student's perspective, the present-day consumer of education needs to realise that unlike other modern economic goods, education is a merit good, distinct from other entitlements of consumerism, requiring hard labour outside its transactional financial aspects. The consumer needs to be sensitised that not every session can be therapeutic and not every teacher is going to be entertaining.

Not all of us are proficient at self-learning and would require the discipline and structure of classroom education in physical spaces, irrespective of the available technology. And hence, amidst all the technological advancement and knowledge within the reach of our fingertips, the modern teacher's significance cannot be undermined or eliminated. The current institutional framework needs to comprehensively address these issues so as to create a balance between the external and internal validity of the profession.

Policymakers today need to remember that academics as a profession is a real-world laboratory for ideating. Devoid of a conducive environment, the right amount of freedom and patronage, the modern teacher seems to be slowly transforming into a classroom-based Hunger Artist in a Raymond Carver storyline. (The writer is Assistant Professor, O P Jindal Global University, Sonipat)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Unforgettable Notre Dame

Nothing had prepared me for that sight. It rose, majestic and graceful...

Sahana Prasad

Paris. The name held a magical feel. Associated with fashion, romance, glitz, glamour and, of late, some unfortunate terror incidents, it was a city I had seen in countless movies and magazines. When I got selected to visit it last year, I was extremely excited. I couldn't believe my luck and kept my fingers crossed till I boarded the flight.

The airport gave me the first jolt of shock. It was enormous with no English signboards or English-speaking people. The huge metro stations, some with a dungeon-like appearance, did not use English, too. As I stood in the city of dreams, where one can feel easily lost, I was experiencing the pain of asking directions, using sign language, not knowing where to get off or on.

I may probably have enjoyed the trip

had I visited when I was young but now, it was hard to navigate. In addition, the futile attempt of two young girls who tried to pick my husband's pocket while getting into a metro sobered me a lot.

But all these thoughts evaporated once I went sight seeing after completing the conference I had come to attend. The Eiffel tower, the Seine river cruise, the Shakespeare and Company book shop, Louvre, Palace of Versailles... the list was endless. The beauty of the city came alive in all its hues. But what left me the most stunned was the Notre Dame Cathedral.

As it came into view during the cruise, I gasped. Nothing had prepared me for that sight. It rose, majestic and graceful, into the sky. As the boat slowly moved away, everyone stood mesmerised, all eyes fixed on the surreal-looking spiral. There was a hush among travellers as each struggled with the emotions evoked.

Somehow, I was reluctant to visit it the next day. It was like a dream, seen only from far. Did I want to go closer and see the imperfections and sully my imagination? Others were aghast. "Visit Paris and not visit Notre Dame? How can you?

People come from all over the world to enjoy its beauty!"

Reluctantly, still confused, I agreed to go. As the famous spiral came into view, a sweet pain arose in my heart. Its frontage was filled with people trying to click pictures from all directions and poses. I soaked in, wondering if any camera could capture the wonder's essence.

Once inside the place, it was again time for silence. Looking at the prayer halls, altars, tinted windows, sculptures of saints and solemn priests, a calmness descended on me as I realised that it was this we were all seeking in life—a quiet and deep sense of happiness, which comes only from humanitarian thinking.

This wasn't a religious place, it was just a symbol. A place to reflect on the beauty of life and love and on the futility of hate. It doesn't really matter what the other person follows in his beliefs, as long as he/she is humane.

I would have missed a lovely experience had I not visited Notre Dame. I know, too, that after the devastating fire, it will be renovated to stand more beautiful and mesmerising than ever.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

K'taka coalition can't survive despite poll outcome

Sir, Apropos "Cong readying for post-poll scenario?" (DH, May 14), the coalition government, formed with the sole objective to keep the BJP out of power, has been at loggerheads since the beginning. The partners in state Assembly are traditional rivals and have never been on the same page on several issues. The deep distrust between political antagonists, Siddaramaiah and H D Deve Gowda's family, has potential to trigger the downfall of the government irrespective of the nature of poll outcome on May 23.

Kamal's googly

Sir, Kamal Hassan has called Nathuram Godse the "first Hindu terrorist" to score brownie points in the run up to the final phase of Lok Sabha polls. Would he also call those patriots who took up arms against the British as terrorists? His Makkal Needhi Maiyam is a non-starter and he is making controversial statements to remain politically relevant. If Godse indeed was a terrorist why did he make a bionic *Hey Ram* on Godse? Was he trying to eulogise terrorism? A V AKHILESH, Bengaluru

Rightly said

Sir, There is nothing wrong in Nathuram Godse being called the first

Hindu terrorist by actor-turned-politician, Kamal Haasan. After all, he did assassinate Mahatma Gandhi. KMS GOWDA, Bengaluru

Fudged claims

Sir, Apropos "PM's digicam, email use claim break the Net" (DH, May 14), in 1988, even in the developed West, email was available only to a few academics and scientists. The first digital camera came into existence in 1990 while email service in India was made publicly available in 1995 by VSNL. So how could PM Modi have sent emails in 1987? Modi should justify this, failing which it will be considered as delusional assertions, fudged claims and brazen lies uttered by him. KV CHANDRA MOULI, via email

Siddaramaiah, with an iron grip over Congress legislators, had been reluctant to the idea of coalition imposed by the party high command, but accepted it with Parliament elections in mind. CM H D Kumaraswamy has also failed to take Congress legislators into confidence, forcing them to make a beeline to Siddaramaiah's house. The message is clear that the state parties' greed for power is the sole reason behind their aversion to make the coalition work. N SADHASIVA REDDY, Bengaluru

Fickle format

Sir, Frankly, though the annual summer tamasha got a thrilling end with MI beating CSK by one run in the finals, T20 cricket defies analysis. But one thing is clear—it's the bowlers who seem to play a decisive role in a team's success. Again due to the fickleness of T20, losses don't wound the players. More serious cricket will be upon us soon—the 50-over World Cup begins on May 30. National teams will be in action, and passion, hurt and anger will be much more authentic. JAKSHAY, Bengaluru

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SPEAK OUT



"Parl polls of 2019 will decide future of next generation. Will you prefer a govt being run by honest person...or someone at helm who is out on bail?"

NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister

The great thieves lead away the little thief.

Diogenes

IN PERSPECTIVE

RBI's 'Sandbox' could spur fintech

It will help fintech companies test out financial products for regulatory issues before launch

Vasant G Hegde

The Reserve Bank of India has recently released draft guidelines on setting up a 'regulatory sandbox' for testing financial products and has invited comments and feedback on it from stakeholders. The guidelines, when introduced, could have a significant impact on fintech innovations and the financial ecosystem.

The genesis of this can be traced to July 2016 when RBI set up a Working Group (WG) to look into granular aspects of financial technology (fintech) and its implications to review the regulatory framework and respond to dynamics of the rapidly evolving fintech scenario.

One of the key recommendations of the WG was to introduce an appropriate framework for a regulatory sandbox (RS) within a well-defined space and duration where the financial sector regulator would provide the necessary regulatory guidance to increase efficiency, manage risks and create new opportunities for consumers.

A sandbox, as we remember from our childhood memories, is a box filled with sand to play. This could have been the backyard either of our house or our school. However, in the world of computing, a sandbox is a virtual space in which untested software or a new programme is tested securely without harming the entire system.

Started in the UK in 2015, regulatory sandboxes normally involve temporary relaxations or adjustments of regulatory requirements to provide a "safe space" for start-ups or fintech companies to test new technology-based financial services in a live environment for a limited time, without having to undergo a full authorisation and licensing process.

Regulatory sandboxes are in different stages of development and implementation in many countries. Businesses that want to try out their unique products or services have to demonstrate that their innovations offer solutions for an "existing gap" and serve the public interest, improve access to financial products and services, and do not pose risks to consumers or burden the financial system.

As per the draft guidelines, "a regulatory sandbox refers to live testing of new products or services in a controlled regulatory environment for which regulators may (or may not) permit certain regulatory relaxations for the limited purpose of testing." The regulatory sandbox allows the regulator, innovators, financial service providers (as potential deployers of the technology) and customers (as final users) to conduct field tests to

collect evidence on the benefits and risks of new financial innovations, while carefully monitoring and containing their risks.

The sandbox can provide a structured avenue for the regulator to engage with the ecosystem and to develop innovation-enabling or innovation-responsive regulations that facilitate delivery of relevant, low-cost financial products. It is stipulated that the proposed financial service to be launched should include new or emerging technology, or use of existing technology in an innovative way and should address a problem, or bring benefits to consumers. The objective of allowing such innovations to be tested is to promote financial inclusion and benefit customers.

For the innovator, the biggest benefits is that unlike simulation, they can test the product's viability in the real world, without the need for a larger and more expensive rollout. If the product is not successful, the innovator can either make modifications or discard it at the sandbox stage itself, thus minimising the loss. If it has the potential to be successful, the product can be authorised and brought to the broader market more quickly.

The sandbox approach also encourages "learning by doing" by all stakeholders like regulators, financial service providers, banks, innovators and fintech companies. Feedback from customers can also help innovators tweak the product to suit their needs. While regulatory sandbox can go a long way in improving the pace of innovation and technology absorption, it can also help in financial inclusion and improving financial reach.

Some areas that can get a fillip include remittances, digital payments, microfinance, micro-insurance products, mobile banking and digital payments. That said, a product or service may not be suitable for RS if the proposed financial service is similar to those that are already being offered. Also, start-ups trying to test products or technology related to credit registry, services related to crypto currency trading or settlement, initial coin offering, chain-marketing services, etc., will not be considered.

The guidelines also have stipulated "fit and proper criteria" for participants, which says that the entity should be a company incorporated and registered in India and should meet the criteria of a start-up as per government notification, have a minimum net worth of Rs 50 lakh, a satisfactory CIBIL score and a robust IT infrastructure with adequate safeguards.

The flipside is that regulators may potentially face some legal issues—those relating to consumer losses in case of failures or from competitors who are outside the RS, especially those whose applications have been rejected. This may not have any legal ground if the RS framework and processes are transparent and have clear entry and exit criteria.

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 years ago: May 15, 1969

Legislative curb as foreign money taints poll

New Delhi, May 14. Home Minister Chavan told Lok Sabha that the government would soon bring forward comprehensive legislation to impose suitable restrictions on receipt of funds from

foreign organisations other than in the ordinary course of business transactions.

Chavan who was making a statement in respect of the probe conducted by the CIB into the use of foreign money in internal politics, did not indicate the precise level of foreign contributions.

25 years ago: May 15, 1994

Clinton keen on making Rao visit a success

DH News Service The United States is pulling out all stops to ensure Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's long-awaited visit is successful. Both the administration and the Congress has made

gestures to emphasise the importance of the visit.

In the wake of assertions from the State Department of friendship and emphasis on commonalities between the two nations comes the efforts of the Congress to confirm the appointment of Frank Wisner as Ambassador to India.