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Many cities are in siesta mode

This summer is going to be severe, but Nagpur, Ahmedabad and Bhubaneswar have a plan

India's signature long, dry and listless summer months have just begun and people are already dying. Last week, the heat wave claimed 66 people in Telangana and 45 in Andhra Pradesh. The vicious summer of 2015 had killed 2,300-plus people, mostly the poor and homeless. The weather forecast for this year is good and bad: While the first official projection of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) will be on April 20, other weather observers have said the rains will be normal. The bad news: The IMD has announced that temperatures will soar higher than normal between April and June and that the frequency of heat waves will be more than normal in central and north-west India.

If last year's summer was an indicator, this year, too, will see deaths. This may sound alarmist but unless city administrations come out with city-specific Heat Action Plans (HAP), deaths are a certainty. Despite the IMD's advance warnings, only three Indian cities — Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar and Nagpur — have come up with robust action plans. The benefits of such an action plan were visible last year in Ahmedabad: There were very few deaths in the city though the temperatures were consistently high.

The highlights of the three heat action plans include simple-but-effective measures: Initiating early warning systems and building public awareness through SMSes, building capacity of health professionals, reducing heat exposure and promoting adaptive measures such as cool shelter zones, avoiding power cuts during heat waves and also long-term mitigating plans such as expanding tree planting and gardens, cool roofs, rainwater harvesting, ensuring availability of drinking water and shelter during the hottest times of the day for outdoor labourers and encouraging the use of public transport. None of these are cumbersome and expensive measures but they need advance planning and coordination among different government agencies. Other Indian cities should take the cue from the three front-runners and devise their own city-specific plans because high temperatures are not going to be a one-off phenomenon, thanks to climate change, which increases the frequency and severity of heat waves.

It's a two-way street

Honesty is the best policy and there's nothing wrong with work visas having the rosy edges of a Green Card

Trust NR Narayana Murthy to speak out, unmindful of political correctness, or, should we say, economic correctness. The co-founder of Infosys has criticised Indian software companies for acting like "immigration agents" by guaranteeing US visas and promising Green Cards to please employees — and suggesting that they should instead hire permanent residents and local citizens. Industry murmurs against his words are understandable. Businessmen are normally known to speak for their own interests and maintain a discreet silence where there is room for doubt or controversy. But Mr Murthy is not in that league. Some years ago, he had suggested that India's tax-exempt software exporters should in fact be paying taxes. Now, as somebody out of active office in the industry, his tongue has only grown sharper.

We can only say two cheers to the veteran's words. In an industry where talent is at a premium, foreign postings are considered plum for both money and prestige. Whether Mr Murthy likes it or not, getting cost-effective Indian workers to slog for global clients involves the dangling of incentives that matter to them. Mr Murthy's comments should also be seen in the context of the rise of a protectionist Donald Trump in American politics. It is a good idea that India's software barons should make the right noises to be seen as truly global — even as India remains a competitive base for both quality and cost-effective software. Murthy's comments should be taken as a case for good, clean approaches to sending IT professionals abroad — coming as it does in a week when the US authorities have unearthed a visa fraud through a sting operation in which they created a fake university to trap wrongdoers. Honesty remains the best policy, but Mr Murthy should know there's nothing wrong with regular work visas that may have the rosy edges of a Green Card.

On a serious note, the government should take note of the fact that decades of economic reform have not ended the brain drain from India — and also the fact that the US often uses visa quotas as some kind of a trade barrier, which in principle can be challenged. "Movement of Natural Persons" is a legitimate avenue for service exports under the World Trade Organisation rules and it is India's right to get access for work done by its IT professionals. It pays to be aware that globalisation is a two-way street.

moderntimes

MANU JOSEPH

India's tale of many miseries

If an active cricket ground exists, it would be watered on most days of a year, or it would die. So why this fuss before the tournament?

All of good life is vulgar when there is misery around. Feasting in the sight of urchins, for instance, or kissing on the street in a nation starved of feasts, love, sex and foreplay. In the same category of vulgarity is the watering of cricket grounds in a state where there is a drought. It deserves lament, perhaps in a sweet mediocre collegiate poem. But to take the matter to court is out of proportion.

The public interest litigations against the hosting of a cricket tournament in Maharashtra have fanned a moral outrage that is, like many urban moral outrages, a confluence of serious concerns, contempt for a wealthy organisation, pious exaggerations, irrational arguments and personal agendas.

The issue before the Bombay High Court was that Maharashtra should not be allowed to host the Indian Premier League matches as cricket grounds consume thousands of litres of water every day in maintenance. The court saved Saturday's inaugural match but asked, probably with anger: "Are cricket matches more important than people?" Now, the Board of Control for Cricket in India is a despicable private club of industrialists and politicians, but the question was hyperbolic. Also, people matter to the board because that is how it makes money.

And what exactly is the reasoning of the court? Is not an international-grade cricket ground maintained when there is no tournament underway? If an active cricket ground exists, it would be watered on most days of a year, or it would die. So why this fuss before the tournament? Also, the calls for the cancellation of matches are comical for a simple reason — it is on the days of the matches that the grounds are not heavily watered.

The water that is used on an Indian cricket field, according to an official, is about 15,000 to 20,000 litres of non-potable water a day, or less than five tankers. That is as much fresh water required to make one kilo of chocolate. In any case, most of the water that is used to nourish the



cricket field is retained in the ground or evaporates to remain in the hydrological system.

Sunil Gavaskar, whose relationship with the BCCI, it is reported, has collapsed and whose lucrative contract with the board may end, made a rare comment against the board. He wrote, "The issue of drought is one such where many lives are at stake." (True). "I am no expert on ground and pitch preparation..." (True) "...Nor do I know whether the water that will be saved if the matches are not played can be used to irrigate the lands that have become dry and parched." (It can't be used). He went on to suggest that the matches should be moved out of Maharashtra. "It is a small price to pay, for the alternative could well be unnecessary loss of lives of those whose hard work gives us our daily roti and dal."

This is a mystifying exaggeration — the suggestion that if matches are held in three cricket grounds in Maharashtra the lives of farmers would be at risk. But it is a popular view.

There is much veneration of farmers in India by those who are not farmers. These are the very people whose greatest fortune was that their grandfathers or fathers ejected their children from the agrarian economy. Most farmers in India have small land-holdings and they are doomed to depend on the alms of the government. The reason why most Indian farms are land waiting to become real estate.

If people really cared about water, all they have to do is adopt a healthy diet — quit eating red meat (just one kilo of mutton requires over 10,000 litres of water to produce, or half the quantity of water required by a cricket ground in a day), quit rice (one kilo of rice needs about 2,500 litres of water, but half of this does re-enter the hydrological system), wheat and sugar (about 1,000 to 1,500 litres for every kilo).

The human body does not require rice and wheat. In fact it does very well without grain. Rice and wheat are the staples of the world because they have been subsidised to be so. The world has promoted an unhealthy diet that takes considerable fresh water to produce. Add to it the evil



■ A woman carries pitchers filled with water outside Denganmal village, Maharashtra. This is a mystifying exaggeration — the suggestion that if matches are held in cricket grounds in Maharashtra the lives of farmers would be at risk. But it is a popular view
REUTERS

called sugar, we have a species that sucks out water to eat poorly. The comic hypocrisy of those who are outraged by the watering of cricket grounds lies in their very paunches.

And, if people really care about poor farmers they would fight for a greater role of science. India is unable to experiment with biotech, which includes processes to create drought-resistant crops, because the very science has been maligned.

It was inevitable that the talk of farmers and drought would bring up the outlandish hypothesis of "farmer suicides", first popularised by Vandana Shiva and later sustained by other noted activists, like P Sainath, because it aligned with their economic grouses. Let me repeat an assertion this column made earlier while arguing that farmer suicides are primarily a depression story where poverty only plays a role:

"In a country where most people can be termed 'farmers', it is not anomalous that most people who kill themselves would be 'farmers'. In fact, what is anomalous is that a huge majority of farmers who commit suicide are male. If both official and activist statistics are considered, it would appear that women in impoverished farming communities are among the least likely Indians to commit suicide. Activists who ascribe social, economic and political reasons for suicides would never be able to explain why? In most nations of the world, including India, the number of men who commit suicide is several times more than the number of women. There is correlation between this pattern and what is branded as 'farmer suicide'.

But the idea that farmers commit suicide because of crop failure or loans or India is not socialistic enough, is a beloved of activists. There is a book here if you are interested and may I suggest a title: 'P Sainath Loves A Good Farmer Suicide'.

Manu Joseph is a journalist and the author of the novel, *The Illicit Happiness of Other People*.
Twitter: @manujosephan
The views expressed are personal

newsmaker

MAMATA BANERJEE West Bengal chief minister

I FIGHT WITH MY HEAD HELD HIGH. THE PRIME MINISTER CAN ARREST ME IF HE SO WISHES... MAKING BIG SPEECHES IS EASY BUT WORKING FOR PEOPLE IS DIFFICULT... WHENEVER MODIJI COMES TO BENGAL, HE MAKES PERSONAL ATTACKS WHICH ARE IN BAD TASTE. BUT JUST BECAUSE THE PM MADE PERSONAL ATTACKS AGAINST ME, I WILL NOT DO THE SAME. I DO NOT MAKE PERSONAL ATTACKS EVEN IF I AM POLITICALLY OPPOSED TO SOMEONE.



Illustration: SIDDHANT JUMDE

THINK IT OVER >>

WE DRINK ONE ANOTHER'S HEALTH AND SPOIL OUR OWN:
JEROME K. JEROME

New Delhi must play its cards in good faith

India must persevere in its engagement with Myanmar's military, while enhancing lines of credit to the new government

Ashis Ray

Broadly defined, democracy can apply to the admirable examples in Europe as well as to a fledgling case like Pakistan. Notwithstanding such a generous characterisation, Myanmar cannot as yet be included in this category. Last month, India's eastern neighbour swore in its first genuine civilian president for 54 years — Htin Kyaw. He will, though, defer to decision-making by the Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of his party, the National League for Democracy (NLD).

Suu Kyi was effectively appointed prime minister by the passage of a bill in Myanmar's parliament which made her 'state counsellor', thereby circumventing the country's military dictated constitution, which prevents her — for her late husband was and sons are foreign nationals — from formally being president.

In the lower house of the legislature, lawmakers representing the armed forces — who constitute 25% of the chamber — boycotted the vote, calling the motion unconstitutional.

Suu Kyi will also hold charge of the cabinet portfolios of foreign affairs and the president's office. The president — a trusted associate of Suu Kyi — has therefore reduced himself to a rubber stamp. However, the National Defence and Security Council in the country has hitherto been the final arbiter. How this body, where the military will maintain a majority, regardless of Htin Kyaw and Suu Kyi becoming members, adapts to the new scenario is uncharted territory.

At the same time, the armed forces would be acutely aware the people of Myanmar want a termination of international isolation and parity with the rest of the ASEAN by way of economic development.

Suu Kyi, who campaigned for 28 years against military rule, decided to strike while public esteem for her is at a peak; when obstruction from unelected institutions is likely to be frowned upon both within and outside Myanmar.

In his address, immediately after being sworn in as head of state, Htin Kyaw made the NLD's intentions clear by declaring: "We have a duty to work for the emergence of a constitution that is appropriate for our country and also in accordance with democratic standards."

But the respected Cambridge and Harvard historian and author of a fascinating book on Myanmar entitled *Where China Meets*



■ Irrespective of living and studying in India for several years, Suu Kyi's approach as minister of foreign affairs can be expected to be cautious
REUTERS

India, Thant Myint-U underlined: "They (the armed forces) are in no hurry to amend it (the constitution). The NLD on the other hand have placed constitutional reform towards a more democratic government front and centre of their agenda." He notably added: "Both sides for now would like amicable relations. But how relations will look in say a year or two only time will tell."

The military will continue to control the ministries of home, defence and border affairs. The civil service in Myanmar deep down to the districts reports to the home department. Consequently, it could hold the key to implementing NLD policies.

To come to the point, what does all this mean for New Delhi? Buddhism, which is all-pervading in Myanmar, spread from India. Civilisationally the two countries have much in common. Yet, barring the brief bonhomie between Jawaharlal Nehru and Suu Kyi's father, the independence hero General Aung San — cut short by the latter's assassination — relations between the two nations have oscillated between being unexciting to being uneasy, until former prime minister Manmohan Singh accelerated Narasimha Rao's decision (supported by Atal Bihari Vajpayee) to forsake Rajiv Gandhi's principled but counter-productive policy of opposing the generals.

If truth be told, Indians settled for generations in Myanmar were rendered uncomfort-

able in the 1950s and after the 1962 military coup made to feel distinctly unwanted.

Diplomacy, though, has paid dividends, including containing secessionist tendencies in states bordering Myanmar. Moreover, the country is a sizeable, mutually beneficial economic opportunity for India.

A consolidation of commercial ties can bring prosperity to India's north-east and revitalise Kolkata and other eastern ports. But from Naypyitaw's perspective a well-entrenched China cannot be side-lined in the foreseeable future; and if Suu Kyi delivers on economic reforms, Japan, the US and the European Union would expand its options.

The policy under Thein Sein, the general who switched from khakis to civvies (and now temporarily to a monk's robe) to pave the way for today's partial democracy, was to reduce dependence on China. The succeeding strategy will, in all likelihood, attempt to prevent dominance by anyone. But if India plays its cards in good faith, there is potential of a bountiful strategic relationship emerging in the future.

India would, though, be wise to persevere with its political engagement with Myanmar's military and widen the recent naval co-operation to other spheres, while enhancing its financial assistance and lines of credit to the new government.

Furthermore, to clinch Myanmar's confidence India must complete its current infrastructure projects before the agreed deadlines.

Sadly, the Indian private sector has done precious little to take advantage of the opportunities created by a series of bilateral initiatives under Manmohan Singh.

Irrespective of living and studying in India for several years, the inspiration she draws from Mahatma Gandhi and being impressed by Nehru, Suu Kyi's approach as minister of foreign affairs can be expected to be cautious.

She will not upset China and may want Japan to play a pivotal role in Myanmar's development. She cannot be oblivious of overtures from the US and the EU, especially Britain, either. After all she spent over 20 years of her life in England, including being married to an Oxford academic and has two sons who are Britons.

Suu Kyi is not easily accessible. She tends to meet people on her own terms. India will have to work on her sensitively to secure results.

Ashis Ray is a London-based journalist and creator of *www.boselies.info*.
The views expressed are personal

innervoice

For a happy life, laugh out loud as often as you can

Sini Shaji

Laughing is an excellent way to reduce stress. Laughter therapy aims to get people together and laugh in groups or on their own. These sessions can make people and employees happy and more committed. It can also improve their interpersonal skills.

Many years ago, Norman Cousins, a celebrated political writer, terminally ill and was given six months to live. His chance for recovery was very low and he could see that the worry, depression and anger in his life contributed to, and perhaps caused his disease. He wondered, "If illness can be caused by negativity, can wellness be created by positivity?" He rented all the funny movies he could find, read funny stories and asked his friends to call him whenever they said, heard or did something funny. His pain was so great, he could not sleep. Laughing, he found, also allowed him to sleep well. He fully recovered from his illness and lived for another 20 happy, healthy and productive years. He gives credit to the love of his family and friends, and laughter for his recovery and has shared the journey in his book, *Anatomy of an Illness*.

Some people think laughter is a waste of time while others feel it is a luxury, a frivolity, something to indulge in only every so often. Scientific studies have also shown that laughter has a curative effect on the body, the mind and emotions. So, if you like laughter, consider it a sound medical advice to indulge in it as often as you can. Let yourself laugh — long and loud — whenever you see or hear something funny. The people around you may think you're strange, but sooner or later they too will join in.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers
The views expressed are personal)
■ innervoice@hindustantimes.com