

Physical verification of projects

General complaint about various infrastructure projects taken in hand, either on state or district level, is that these are not completed on time. Various reasons are given for the delay. It could be a technical complicity, non-release of funds at proper time, defaulting contractors etc. When a project is delayed inordinately, its execution cost goes up and then the entire project runs into major complicity. There have been efforts on the part of the administration to find a way out of this impasse. By and large, a project completed within stipulated time encourages the authorities and the executors to take up another project in hand and utilize the experience gained in it.

Planning and Development Department has come out with a proposal of finding a solution to this problem by setting up random monitoring and verifying system within the administration. The monitoring will cover projects/schemes involving more than Rs 1 crore of the State Sector and Rs 20 lakh of the District Sector. Planning and Development Department will be the Nodal Department through Director PA&PM and all the instructions, clarifications and modifications will flow from the Department. This is in modification of the practice observed so far. Planning and Development Department will assign 2 to 4 projects on monthly basis to the concerned for physical verification on random basis from the list of works under Projectized/CCS/Negotiated Loan Scheme etc. The Nodal Officer will convene monthly/quarterly meetings for input about field verification reports and make a presentation in respect of projects monitored in the quarterly meeting.

We think this is an experiment and the Government might be intending to monitor the extent to which this experiment succeeds. Random verification is bound to energize execution of the project and also help in bringing to the notice of the authorities the financial position of the project. What really happens is that funds are not released in time and the work on project is stopped and labour gets dispersed and engaged somewhere else. Periodic and random verification should be helpful in deciding the release of funds on spot and without delay. Equally important is the quality of work done. We have many examples of defective planning and execution that come to light after the project is completed or when it is half way. In some cases projects are abandoned halfway as unfeasible. It is waste of funds and labour to put a halt on a project half way for technical and other reasons.

One important reason for delay in completion of projects is the matter related to acquisition of land and payment of compensation. It has been found that inordinate delay is made in the payment of compensation amounts to the owners of land and this gives rise to long time litigations. The monitoring agency will take care of this issue also and the master computer in the Planning and Development Department will maintain a full record of the feasibility of projects, work completed and under completion, and all other related matters. The concerned officers at the Planning and Development Department will submit reports on at least 2 to 4 projects in a month.

The saying is that the taste of pudding is in eating. Whatever mechanism is employed, the purpose is that a project should be completed within the stipulated time; it should be of the standard as is set forth in the blue print and it should be profitable to the society. We welcome the new monitoring and verification scheme announced by the Planning Department. But we will focus attention on delivery. People will be happy to know that the project has been brought to completion in time. Obviously, the periodic reports from the competent authority will also bring out the obstacles in the path of completing the project in time. The Planning Department will need a mechanism to remove those obstacles within shortest possible time. Mere verification does not solve the question, though, of course, positive verification will help in deciding what should be the next step. Let the Planning and Development Department makes this experiment and even let there be full support for the new mechanism. We learn by error. If any fault seeps in, the Government will be able to set it right.

Controversy over mining site

On January 2, 1989 J&K Government sanctioned mining rights for 20 years in favour of National Mineral Development Corporation for mining of Magnesite and Dolomite in Trikuta Hills near the Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi. In 2011 it was renewed for another ten years. Though the total mining lease area in Magnesite zone is 1.4 sq kilometer, the area required for breaking the earth for mining purpose is 26.42 hectares. The site is close to the shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi to which pilgrims from all over the country come in hundreds of thousands round the year. Mining in the hills close to the shrine will cause pollution in the air and depletion of the ecology of the area. As it will be opencast mechanized involving drilling and blasting, it will result in generating huge fugitive dust as well as the apprehension of disturbing the strata of the hill slopes in the entire area. We are not sure the Mineral Development Corporation has obtained expert opinion of Union Ministry of Environment and Forests on the impact of mining on the ecology of the shrine and the pilgrims visiting the shrine. There are other issues as well that surface in this case. The land at Chiprain near Katra on which mining is proposed belongs to Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine. Although the Government has claimed that it is barren and not forestland yet many trees have been felled which contradicts the claim of the Government. If it is really barren land then why did the Corporation approach the State Forest Department for clearance?

The fact is that there are technical as well as social issues involved in allowing mining of an area which stands close to the Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi. This is an area where people from all parts of the country come in hundreds of thousands round the year. We need to ensure their health lest the dust arising from excavations close to the shrine adversely affects their health. Secondly, the formation of the rocks needs to be examined by experts to ensure that mining in the close areas will not damage the shrine. In view of these objections, the Government should refer the matter to an expert body for its opinion. A broad-based meeting of all stakeholders should be held to discuss the issue and take a decision. No arbitrary decision should be imposed and the people who feel that mining will cause damage to the shrine have to be convinced. The Government should handle this issue with patience and care.

Money shouts, conscience merely murmurs

M.J. Akbar

Would you walk? Think about it. You have time, which Stuart Broad did not, when he was batting for England on the third day of the first Ashes Test in a fierce game which was certain to produce a result, and where, therefore, every single run counted in double digits. Stuart Broad had to choose between honesty and expediency in those instinctive seconds between a vociferous appeal and the umpire's decision after he nicked a ball to first slip. He realised what everyone saw, except for the umpire who, being eyeless, shall be left nameless. Broad knew he was out. Honour demanded voluntary departure from the crease; he chose to wait for the jury to make a mistake even when he knew he was guilty.

For you, lolling on a sofa, or, if a cricket junkie, watching the match on television, any debate with conscience may seem merely theoretical. But is it any the less important? For the debate is about values. Is honesty dispensable? Are survival and success the only priorities in life?

Cricket, like existence, is not always black and white. There are situations in which a batsman has every right to hold his ground against a chorus of theatrical appeals, because he is genuinely uncertain, most often in a leg-before-wicket decision, or when a catch has not gone cleanly to hand. Innovations like the technology-driven third umpire have been created to find light through grey space. But Stuart Broad's case is worth mention precisely

because there was huge daylight between black and white. He was out. Everyone on the field, and millions outside, knew the truth. Honour was once essential to the spirit of cricket. Bad behaviour, caused by temperament or the pressures of sport, was a discrepancy. No one has ever wanted to fail through the long history of human endeavour, and yet cricket looked down upon success without honour. In

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the larger field of life, honour bred the honours system, which was society's way of recognising merit. You could, of course, occasionally buy your way to a gong, for money always talks. But money used to speak in a whisper. Today it shouts. The little murmur of conscience is lost in such noise.

Cricket was always proud to place itself on a pedestal, even when inconsistencies existed lower down. Till the 1950s, there was obnoxious class distinction, in which the amateur entered the field through the club gate, and professionals used a turnstile. A gentleman considered payment beneath his dignity,

largely because he had enough money. The professional, from the working class, could not afford to take a week off from his job. But during the game honesty was not divisible by class.

We claim to live in a more egalitarian age, but we have turned 'professional' into a synonym for amorality. Broad was exonerated because of his 'professional' approach, as if honour is now a derisive hobby of the parson or a preacher.

Former England captain Tony Grieg was an exemplar of this tough-guy saloon-bar approach to cricket. His counterpart, during a series in India, was the very opposite: a courteous, gentlemanly G.R. Viswanath. In one Test, Grieg was given out when the English innings was tottering. There was obviously no review system. But Viswanath, to everyone's surprise, overturned the bemused umpire and asked Grieg to play on. Was that the holy moment in which Grieg saw the light and converted to purity of thought and behaviour? No. He remained loyal to his tough

school, where success is all that matters. Perhaps he privately laughed at Viswanath for being a sucker. Some cricketers still at the crease have resisted dining at this trough. Australian Adam Gilchrist famously walked against Sri Lanka in 2003, and South African Hashim Amla does not linger if he knows he is out. But both have an old-fashioned look about them.

So would you walk? The question is larger than cricket. Ministers, ordinary, extraordinary, chief or prime, do not walk when exposed as corrupt, or when atrocious administration kills children after a mid-day meal. Do those on lower rungs of power, whether secretary presiding over a department, or clerk guarding a file, walk away from a bribe? Do business executives walk away from offering one? What prevails in the constant battle between commerce and conscience? If we all walked away from temptation, wouldn't the world be a nice little Utopia?

The first commandment of contemporary religion is unambiguous: Thou shalt win. Everyone, as the saying goes, loves a winner. There is a second commandment: Thou shalt not be so stupid as to get caught. There is no third commandment. If Stuart Broad were only a cog in a game it might not matter, but he is also a role model for millions of young people. If survival by any means can guarantee heroism, then surely plain old morality sucks. Enjoy the delicious fruits of survival. Don't walk.

Vajpayee quotes 'misquoted' by Kashmir protagonists

It is a unique paradox in the State of Jammu & Kashmir. More than the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), it is often the leaders of Kashmir-centric political parties like National Conference (NC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who take pleasure in quoting Atal Behari Vajpayee, even though often wrongly or out of context to add a semblance of conviction to an unconvincing point made by them. And these leaders illude themselves to believe that they have carried the day simply because Atal ji is too indisposed to correct them while his followers or successors find it too absurd to contradict them.

Now here is a sampling of some of the Vajpayee's famous, or shall we say infamous, "misquotes" made by these over-zealous BJP baiters. "Insaaniyat Ke Daare Mein" is one of the most commonly cited Vajpayee expressions quoted by these zealots. Interestingly, those who cite this phrase, which Vajpayee had articulated in his inimitable style during one of his

Kashmir visits as Prime Minister, want everybody to believe that this is Vajpayee's endorsement to resolve the so-called Kashmir issue even if it has to be resolved through "Azaadi", "semi-Independence", "Autonomy" etc. What these worthies conveniently forget is that "Insaaniyat Ke Daare Mein" is a humane expression which in no way indicates the possibility of an

unconditionally bow to the diktats of its neighbour Pakistan even if the latter continues sponsoring terror and violence in Jammu & Kashmir. Again, please don't forget, it was Vajpayee as Prime Minister who gave a free hand to India's defense forces to rebuff the Pakistan's mischief in Kargil. And, most hilariously, some lesser knowing Kashmir enthu-

siasts even have the cheek to say that Vajpayee had, as External Affairs Minister, opposed abrogation of Article 370. Will somebody educate these wise worthies that Vajpayee was External Affairs Minister in the Janata Party government headed by Morarji Desai when Jan Sangh had been disbanded at the behest of Jai Parkash Narain and Bharatiya Janata Party was yet to be born! The only agenda of this dispensation inspired by JP was to liberate Indian democracy from the dynastic rule perpetuated by Indira Gandhi and Article 370 was not even once remotely discussed.

And finally, to the lesser knowing protagonists who use Vajpayee quotes to convince in vain the common man that these were an endorsement of National Conference's "Autonomy" slogan, Umaphathy quotes a long poem written by Vajpayee referring to Sheikh Abdullah at the height of Praja Prashid movement in early 1950s "...Kab Tak Jammu Ko You Jalne Denge....Holika Bani Dekho "Abdullah-Shahi".

TALES OF TRAVESTY DR. JITENDRA SINGH

option outside the framework of Indian constitution. Please don't forget, it was Vajpayee as Prime Minister who had rejected the National Conference's "Autonomy" resolution taken up by the J&K Legislative Assembly even though Omar Abdullah was at that time a Minister in his government. Vajpayee's famous expression "friends can be changed

not neighbours" qualifies to be included in the World Book of greatest quotations. Very few know that the second line of this Vajpayee quote is "history can be changed, not geography". But look how this quote is sought to be cited out of context by Kashmir's separatist leaders as well as "separatist friendly" scalled mainstream leaders as if it is a suggestion that India should

Drug addiction

Gaurav Sharma

Born in the late 20th century, many of us have been lucky to see two centuries in a single lifespan. But we have also been unlucky to see a few things which should not be present on our mother earth. Few of them are Global Warming and Terrorism, both of which were unknown terms in the earlier centuries but are growing at a lightning speed and I am afraid that no one can stop them unless some immediate and drastic remedies are devised and SUCCESSFULLY EXECUTED - the toughest part of the game.

The business of narcotics is directly or indirectly funded by many terrorist organizations across the border and managed by regional gangs present in almost every city of our country. These gangs now have become a wholesale market with small time retailers found in many slum areas and even some educated youth have taken up Drug Peddling to support their luxuries and lavish lifestyles undeterred of the fact that one day the game will be over and their life will become worse than hell.

Last eight years of my life have been spent in watching life quite closely in most of its aspects. One of them which caught my eye is Drug Addiction which is growing at a rate faster than petrol prices. People call it Drug Addiction but I prefer to call it Terrorism in Hibernation who when wakes up, will give such a jolt to the country that no power will be able to deal with it and it has already started to stretch its arms, waiting to get up and bug the "Almost ripe crops of our youth".

GEN Y! The moment I listen to this word, a movie starts running behind my eyes visualizing the direction the young India is moving in. No doubt India is producing a capable force of professionals with enormous intellect and passion but many of these NATIONAL PILLARS are becoming hollow day by day because these pillars are not growing strong with the cement of education and iron bars of knowledge but they are growing weaker with the ash of narcotics which is slowly but directly taking a toll on the national assets - Human Resources and Economy. Huge numbers of teenagers and adolescents are getting addicted to drugs every minute. Commonly known as Dope, Joint, Coke, Grass, Marijuana, LSD, Ketamine, Prescription Drugs, and countless other BRANDS & VARIANTS are openly available in almost every city and least is being done to put a full stop on the menace, though few pauses are observed for very short intervals - thanks to corruption and an inef-

ficient administration.

With access to every kind of media, we do witness a few headlines discovering the use of narcotics by film stars and even sportspersons. These celebrities are the ideals of our so called Gen Y and the generation will follow them in the times to come.

We cannot blame these celebrities of spoiling the generation because they were also in the same state at some point of time and rest everybody knows that it is easier to take up bad habits but very difficult to keep good habits.

The age is so tender that parents as well as teachers have to be extra cautious if they find their ward/student taking up a wrong path. But that is not enough. All parents in this world definitely want their children to be well educated, well mannered and well settled in life for which they leave no stone unturned which sometimes results in a little shortage of time to spend together. Moreover, kids these days have learnt to outsmart their parents in seconds but kids will be kids - we can't help it. Recently a professional acquaintance of mine told me that in a top notch school in Noida where her daughter studies, an 11th standard student fainted in the class. When checked, he was found to be drunk at 10:30 am in the school. Later on it was discovered that a considerable amount of Vodka was mixed with water in his water-bottle. The student is a batch topper with 98% marks in 10th standard. What will this child do after a couple of years?

We have seen many causes like rapes, murders, corruption and even religious issues being taken up by public at national level which were converted into mass movements sometimes even resulting into positive results but this issue has hardly been brought up barring a few movies, media reports and some hardly recognized street plays by local theatre artists from time to time. I appreciate these efforts but this is not enough. We have to go that extra mile to keep the road clean and clear for the generations to come.

Also, it is high time The NCB, Vigilance, Anti-corruption; National & International Level Intelligence ought to join hands with a willingness and passion to eradicate this nonsense from our society. Believe you me - it is just a matter of taking a step which once taken will give a new life to our wandering youth and let them steer the country into a direction which India actually needs.

Traffic misrule in Jammu

J S Kamra

My six year old daughter Royali said, when our car had to stop suddenly behind a matador, when the guy applied brakes all of a sudden, "papa why the drivers of these matadors stop them all of a sudden in the middle of the road?" I had no easy answer. So I thought this question should be put to the Traffic Police Department.

Unlike most cities in our country, the summer capital of this state, sadly enough, has no prescribed matador stops. And if there are any, matadors are hardly made to stop there. Result is that they stop anywhere and everywhere. I think even if it is Chief Minister's residence, matador drivers have the courage to stop in front of it.

So, in Jammu, no matter if you are driving a merc or a BMW, your luxury limos can be stopped in the middle of the road all of a sudden. I am sure that if the C M sahab's cavalcade is cruising through the city, and the traffic is not stopped for its hasslefree cruising, it will be interesting to see the pilot car of the CM's cavalcade struck behind a macho matador!!

Another stark reality of our city is that the traffic police does not like to stop the drivers who are busy talking over their mobile phones. So you can reserve the driving time for chatting over the phone as well.

Yet another quite a unique experience regarding moving on the roads can be had only in our city. And that is offenders who jump the traffic lights reach their destinations earlier than those who sheepishly and seeming rather foolishly keep waiting for the green light. It is so as traffic policemen are seldom seen on traffic signals and if they are there, they simply stare at the rule breaker like the rule breaker has molested them. But the truth is that these rule breakers keep



on raping our traffic rules day and night. So sad.

Last month I was in Chandigarh on some work. Among other things like beautiful shopping places, their traffic management is really awesome. I wondered why our Jammu city lacks this. Is it because of lack of funds, lack of proper staff, lack of skill, or is it just a lack of will. Whatever the reason, it is best known to the Government. As for as we common people are concerned, we can only grumble about it and keep doing our little jobs.

It is always said that the system in India cannot change. I too believe this. But then I wonder why on earth I am writing this article. May be it is because of some defense mechanism our mind uses to deal with the inability to do something to change the system ourselves.

But one more striking feature of our traffic police is that no matter how lazy they may seem, not doing anything if a matador stops in the middle of the road, simply remaining standing and not stopping someone who is chatting over the phone while driving, and again remaining mute spectators while one moves ahead while the traffic light is red!! But these very lazy policemen become hyper active on one occasion. guess?

Yes, you guessed it right. It is when some VIP has to come and move on the road. If one is to see the law of the land working perfectly somewhere, it is at this time.

So it is quite apt as to whom the traffic police is meant to serve. It is not we, the common people but the VIPs. It is in quite a contrast to the Western countries where every person whether a beggar or a minister is treated equally.

This is why we are still called the third world.

May be one day, no matter how far it may be, we Jammuites see the traffic RULE and not mis rule !!

Much ado about Modi

Kalyani Shankar

Gone are the days when elections were fought on issues or on anti-Congressism or anti-BJPism or communalism or any other 'isms'. Today, increasingly, the political parties are moving towards personality-based politics. The 2014 Lok Sabha polls might well turn out to be a Modi versus the rest contest.

The Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi has built up a personality cult to such an extent that the political parties are revolving around whatever controversial statement he makes on a daily basis. Within weeks of his appointment as the BJP's campaign committee chief (the committee is yet to be constituted) Modi has turned a political battle into a Modi-centric contest. He expects that the sharp attacks against him could improve his position, both within the BJP and outside. Partially, he has achieved what he wanted as the BJP spokespersons are busy defending Modi's statements, while the Congress spokespersons are examining them with microscopic precision. The war of words between the Congress and Modi is becoming louder and boisterous. But the debate is going nowhere as the real issues are forgotten by the two national parties. This might put off the voters when the time comes to choose.

What is Modi's game plan? As a senior BJP leader points out he has to sustain the campaign for the next eight months and create an atmosphere favourable to him. In his anxiety to come to the centrestage, he has started his campaign too early. His recent controversial public statements are designed to polarise the pro-Hindutva vote to counter his rivals attempting to consolidate the minority vote against him making it a communal versus secular debate. Modi has already provided a direction to the poll campaign amidst reports that Ram Mandir will

become a poll issue with the blessings of the RSS. At the same time he is also talking of development confusing his core voters about what he stands for. So far, he has indulged in Congress bashing talking about terrorism, Pakistan beheading Indian soldiers, policy paralysis in the UPA, price rise, increasing dollar rate, the dynastic rule and also about secularism as practiced by the Congress. Modi could have used a polished language in his controversial comments like the "puppy" analogy or Congress hiding behind a "burqa of secularism" but that is his strident campaign style. Did he not talk of "Mia Musharraf" in his 2002 elections or "Maut ka Saudagar" comment made by the Congress chief in 2009 Assembly polls? His calculated response in a recent interview that he is a Hindu nationalist is also meant to polarise the voter. His voice might become more shrill nearer the polls.

But not the entire party is behind Modi as some top leaders think Modi is not consulting others and that the issues are getting blunted. It was the BJP patriarch L K Advani who apprehended that if Modi were made the campaign chief, the real issues would be lost, as it would become a 'secularism versus communalism' debate. He has proved to be correct. Another BJP leader Yashwant Sinha has echoed the same pointing out that the more Modi speaks, the more controversy he will create, with the result the serious issues like the price rise and economy will not get debated. Also they feel that the campaign is getting too personalised. Modi has been hogging all the attention, leaving little space for other seniors including the BJP chief Rajnath Singh. They fear that the anti-Modi polarisation will help the Congress in the months leading up to elections as both the major parties scout for new allies.

The Congress, on the other hand thinks that Modi's projection is good- send as it has been groping in darkness about issues. The arrival of Modi, a divisive figure, seems to have given a new focus to the Congress, which is facing too many scams. Some senior leaders in the party privately admit that while the party was groping for issues, now it can convert the electoral battle as one of communalism versus secularism with Modi at the centrestage. The Congress is delighted that it is no longer on the back foot as Modi-bashing could get them Muslim votes. Moreover, the Gandhi scion Rahul has been spared as he has been kept out of the debates. The backroom boys of the Congress are working overtime to come up with a strategy to take on Modi. This brings us to the question whether the two responsible national parties - the Congress and the BJP should be trading barbs rather than thrashing out the real issues. Should they go for a negative campaign rather than focusing on a positive campaign? How are the voters concerned about the "puppy" or "burqa" remarks when they are unable to get jobs or eat two meals a day? Can they not score points on those issues while debating them publicly? Modi is taking a risk by walking on this razor's edge. He got a standing ovation when he came to Delhi to talk to the Shri Ram College of Commerce students about getting jobs and to the FICCI ladies about entrepreneurship. But now, he is moving towards a divisive politics and it might boomerang as he might win some verbal battles but lose the ultimate war. The Congress, too, should be careful in making Modi the main election issue. It is a debatable point whether Modi has fallen into the Congress trap or the Congress has fallen into that of Modi's. It's only the spokesperson of the two parties who are currently fighting the battle in the TV channels. There would soon come a day when the TV watchers and newspaper readers hungry for real issues might ignore these senseless debates. (IPA)