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A long wait

The Supreme Court's decision to constitute a three-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) to reopen 186 cases related to the anti-Sikh violence of 1984 is yet another reminder that due process was not followed in probing these crimes and the state has failed to deliver justice to the victims. The apex court's move comes after a supervisory panel it appointed in August last year recommended that these cases, among the 250 cases probed by a government-appointed SIT and recommended for closure, need to be reopened and re-investigated. The SC's decision is welcome, but the promise of closure comes much too late. Political parties have already started claiming credit for the SIT and apportioning blame on others for the miscarriage of justice so far, but the failure is a collective one.

Nearly 34 years have passed since armed mobs targeted the Sikh community in the national capital in the aftermath of the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Homes and gurdwaras were attacked and businesses run by Sikhs targeted. Nearly 3,000 persons were killed as mobs had unchecked run of Delhi's streets for four days. Leaders of the then ruling Congress were accused of instigating and even leading the mobs. Inquiry commissions under Justices Ranganath Mishra and G.T. Nanavati indicted the state police for complicity in the violence. P.V. Narasimha Rao, the then home minister, to whom the Delhi Police reported, became prime minister seven years later. Congress leaders accused of involvement in the violence were allowed to continue careers in politics and even given ministerial responsibilities till severe public criticism later forced the party to deny them office. It took 20 years before the Congress would issue a public apology for its role in the '84 violence — Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gave a statement in Parliament on August 12, 2005. Singh said: "I apologise not only to the Sikh community, but to the whole Indian nation because what took place in 1984 is the negation of the concept of nationhood enshrined in our Constitution."

A closure in the cases will be possible only if the perpetrators are identified and punished through due process. Many of them have died or are too old for any punishment and evidence gathering may be difficult, but the process must not be abandoned. There needs to be serious reflection on why the state failed to book the guilty or pin responsibility on those who abdicated their responsibility to uphold the rule of law.

Security questions

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has taken a firm step in support of data security and privacy by introducing disposable IDs, authentication tokens and tiered KYC requirements to reduce the exposure of Aadhaar numbers. These are logical measures, since providers only need to have the number authenticated against a person. There is no need for them to store it even for a second thereafter. This principle has been followed in other services for decades. For instance, email providers do not know their users' passwords, since they are not stored on servers in plain text. They are stored as hexadecimal hashes, which are cryptographically compared against passwords during a login. It is surprising that this pervasive principle, which is followed by almost all services requiring a login, was not applied to UIDAI earlier.

While the objectives of Aadhaar are entirely reasonable, its implementation has not earned universal trust. Apart from disastrous denials of the very services it was designed to assure — withdrawal of food and shelter entitlements to the poorest have been noted — the security of the world's biggest repository of biometric data has been questioned following leaks. The first problem is being examined by the courts. And the virtual ID is the UIDAI's first attempt to address the second. From the time the project was launched by Nandan Nilekani, its promoters chose to stonewall criticism, instead of engaging with it, by arguing that Aadhaar is an impregnable data silo. The UIDAI's reaction to a newspaper story which showed how easy it is to acquire Aadhaar numbers was to target the messenger. Just two months ago, the government claimed in an affidavit that Aadhaar is breach-proof.

There is an element of hubris here, and the technologists behind Aadhaar must know it. Systems are secured by multiple strategies, but there is no such thing as bulletproof security. All systems are vulnerable to a capable, imaginative and determined attacker, no matter how diligently they are secured. The only certain deterrent is legal, and fortunately privacy law has plugged the gap. However, it remains to be seen how many impugned parties have the stomach for private litigation. And the fact remains that large repositories of data, whether Equifax or Aadhaar, are targets in a world where data is the new gold. Their holdings must be shared on a need-to-know basis, and the recent blanket requirements for Aadhaar data to be shared with service providers, from mutual fund managers to telecom companies, flies in the face of that principle. Tiered exposure and virtual IDs would now reduce exposure of real Aadhaar numbers, though they must have already been shared in large quantities. Now, UIDAI has taken a step towards seeking universal trust, which is the bedrock of a legitimate authentication system.

To live happily is an inward power of the soul.

--Marcus Aurelius

Saudi Arabia: Transforming the face of a Kingdom

By Nilova Roy Chaudhury

There is a huge buzz throughout Saudi Arabia as the hitherto conservative Kingdom -- seen as the religious font of Islam and home to its holiest shrines -- gets ready to welcome women into its sports stadiums Friday.

The women of Saudi Arabia have entered 2018 with hope unlike ever before, for now they will be allowed greater freedom and perhaps play select sports -- and drive. These efforts to bring gender parity are among a series of sweeping social and economic changes being orchestrated by the young Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, to bring Saudi Arabia into a global leadership role in the 21st century.

The year 2017 was transformational for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with a series of initiatives designed to improve gender equality, promote economic diversification, root out corruption and make it more open and attractive to visitors.

Behind a vast majority of these path-breaking initiatives was Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the world's youngest defence minister, who, at 32, was elevated to the position of Crown Prince last June. Initiatives he has taken form part of the "National Transformation Programme 2020" and the Kingdom's "Vision 2030", guidelines of which he outlined last year.

The most momentous of these have been in gender equality. For the first time, girls in public schools will be allowed to play sports and get physical education. The women of Saudi Arabia will be allowed to enter some of the country's sports stadiums, earlier an all-male preserve, while a royal decree issued last September will allow women the right to drive in the country, begin-



ning June.

In further social transformations, the municipality of the holy city of Madinah will be run by women. The women-only branch of the municipality will provide all the regular services offered by municipalities, including issuance of licences for commercial activities and construction permits, inspection campaigns and investment opportunities, among others.

These measures gained international recognition and Saudi Arabia was elected in 2017 to the UN Women's Rights Commission for a four-year term.

Other than the major social impact, shrewd economic thoughts are behind these measures, as increasing women's participation in the workplace will boost the economy and combat corruption. The "National Transformation Programme 2020" aims to capitalise on the Kingdom's youth dividend by opening up the country to more employment opportunities through sports and entertainment and to

empower women.

Opening the country to more entertainment, allowing musical concerts and even a Comic-Con event (a three-day festival of anime, pop art, video gaming and film-related events last year) was part of a wide-ranging push to reform the economy and society and restore what Prince Mohammed bin Salman called the "moderate" face of Islam.

The plan involves changing the education curriculum, increasing women's participation in the workforce and investing in the entertainment and tourism sectors to create jobs for young people.

Equally far-reaching are efforts to open up the Kingdom to outsiders, by offering tourist visas for foreigners, from this year, and creating facilities to promote the country as a tourist destination. The Red Sea project, which aims to offer an unparalleled tourist destination, will be developed along with leading global hospitality firms and will not be sub-

ject to the Kingdom's conservative rules.

Over 18 million foreigners visited Saudi Arabia last year, almost all on pilgrimage to Mecca. As tourism is the country's second-most important sector, the Red Sea project will spearhead the diversification of the Saudi leisure industry.

Meanwhile, an ongoing nationwide anti-corruption drive culminated last November with the detention of four ministers, high-profile entrepreneurs and 11 princes, including a son of former King Abdullah and multi-billionaire Alwaleed bin Talal.

This not only consolidated the Crown Prince's authority, but clearly sent out a message that the royal family was not immune from facing the law, hitherto unthinkable in the Kingdom where the descendants of Ibn Saud were seen as a law unto themselves. That members of the royal family could no longer take their privileges for granted became more apparent when princes,

protesting a cut in their water and electricity consumption payments, were taken into custody in the first week of 2018.

"Vision 2030" outlines the Crown Prince's intent to make the country the centre of the Islamic and Arab world, a hub connecting three continents and an economic and investment powerhouse.

That Prince Mohammed bin Salman is King Salman's chosen successor and heads the Council for Economic Affairs and Development, which oversees the Kingdom's economic affairs and also shapes its political and security policies, indicates that manifold measures he has initiated will be carried through.

After taking over as Crown Prince in June 2017, Mohammed signalled his intent to fight radicalisation and combat terrorism, spearheading a boycott of Qatar over its alleged support to terrorism. In October, the prince said the return of "moderate Islam" was central to his plans to modernise

the Kingdom.

After a horrific terrorist attack killed over 300 people in Egypt, Mohammed declared a "war against terrorism" at the inaugural meeting of the 41-member Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) in Riyadh in November saying, "We will not allow such elements to tarnish the image of Islam."

With global climate change measures intensifying moves towards less dependence on fossil fuels, the Crown Prince's Vision 2030 aims to drastically reduce the Kingdom's reliance on oil while reforming, diversifying and privatising the economy.

The Crown Prince plans this year to sell about five per cent government stake in Aramco, the national oil company. He intends to create the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, worth up to \$3 trillion, with money generated by partially privatising Saudi Aramco.

He also plans to create a \$500 billion business and industrial zone extending to Jordan and Egypt. The 26,500 sq km city, known as NEOM, will focus on industries including advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, energy, entertainment, food and water. It will be powered entirely with wind power and solar energy.

The country has also announced plans to build a massive entertainment city in Riyadh. The 334 sq km city, almost the size of Las Vegas when ready, will offer cultural, entertainment and sporting activities. The Al-Qiddiya project will be part of Saudi Arabia's diversification drive and boost economic development by creating major job opportunities for local men and women.

The project perhaps best captures Prince Mohammed bin Salman's intent to radically transform the face of the Kingdom.

(Courtesy: IANS)

Let The Market Decide

By Michael Pinto

From bemoaning the lack of technical institutes and colleges of engineering to training young people, we have moved to a situation — as The Indian Express series in December, 2017 shows — where we have too many of them. So workshops that once trained budding engineers are now being used for many other purposes, including wrestling akhadhas. The question is if this is a serious problem.

It is important to separate the question of excess capacity from the need for high quality education. Today, many of the engineers turned out by our colleges are unemployable and unless this changes, "Make in India" can never succeed. Every engineering college cannot be an IIT but the institute can certainly ensure that its graduates are not unemployable. So while there can be no compromise on quality we can still debate how much private investment we need in engineering colleges.

It's inevitable that some private colleges will maintain standards and turn out worthy candidates while others will fall short. In our haste to snuff out the latter,



are we saying that government should conduct all technical training or, if private entities are to be allowed in, barriers to entry should be so high as to discourage all but the most intrepid? This could bring back inspector raj in education.

Some years ago, we faced this problem in the field of maritime education. The government had the monopoly of running maritime training institutes; so trained manpower was scarce because training slots were limited and a huge potential source

of employment for skilled youth was being ignored. One way was to allow private investment in maritime education but, as always, this threw up many imponderables. How was quality to be maintained? How would we ban fly-by-night operators? And what if a number of poorly-run training institutes fell by the wayside?

There were no easy answers to any of these questions but ultimately it was decided to take the risk and open the sector to private invest-

ment. Quick checks could ensure that, by and large, standards could be maintained, model syllabi could be put in place and minimum infrastructure made compulsory. No one had any doubt that there would be a vast difference in standards between different institutions. Some would be very good, some middling and some way below expectations. But ultimately it would be for the students to decide which institution they would join. You can open an institute in a smart building in a tony part of a town

but if standards are not maintained no company would hire your graduates. So candidates would vote with their feet by joining only those institutions that ensured subsequent employment by giving the best training. The rest would fall by the wayside.

Private engineering colleges today face the same situation. In the immediate aftermath of the IT explosion when it seemed that we would never have enough engineers we have reached the stage where several poorly trained engi-

neers are unemployed and seats go a-begging. Out of the nearly 17 lakh B.Tech and M.Tech seats now on offer, a good number will remain vacant and colleges set up when it seemed that the good times would never end will have to shut shop.

Is this a bad thing and should we ask the AICTE to let loose their inspectors? Institutions providing quality education will still find good demand for their seats. Only those colleges with inferior academic standards and inadequate infrastructure will see students deserting them. If, as a result, they have to close down isn't this part of the discipline the market imposes?

In education it is always better to let a hundred flowers bloom. Some of them will wither and die, some of them will struggle before they can achieve anything at all and some will become bright attractive flowers that will win laurels. As long as we have enough of the last two categories there is no need to worry about the first. Our only concern should be to turn out high quality, employable engineers and healthy competition will ensure this. It is a much better option than licence raj.

(Courtesy: Indian Express)