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When you go into court you are putting your fate into the hands of twelve people who weren't smart enough to get out of jury duty
Norm Crosby

Arsons and blasts

First there was the fire that burnt down the Bagree market, Kolkata's biggest wholesale trade centre for drugs and medicines. Then there was fire in the Central Medical Stores of the Calcutta Medical College in which medicines worth Rs 6 crores were either burnt or were rendered unusable due to extreme heat they were exposed to. In between, came the blast at Nagerbazar in which a child was killed and several injured. Three incidents in close succession in the heart of Kolkata have given rise to suspicions whether these are accidents or caused by deliberate sabotage. No arrest has been made so far but the police claim they have some clues that point to some suspects. There were several cases of arsons in markets the city in a not-too-distant past. In March, 2012, there was a devastating fire that burnt down the Hatibagan market in North Kolkta. Next year, 2013, there was another fire in a market on Surya Sen Street in which nineteen persons were killed. In all these cases it was suspected that markets were set on fire by interested persons who wanted to grab the land.

In the case of Medical College fire there are reports suggesting financial corruption. Medicines and instruments were allegedly purchased at much higher prices than fixed by the State Government. The intent was to destroy the relevant papers and documents of these purchases. The Nagerbazar fire, however, is a different story. The ruling Trinamool Congress has blamed it on the party's Right-wing political opponents. But the police suspect there is a 'Bangladesh angle to it. The involvement of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB) of Bangladesh is being suspected. But nothing definitive has come out of the probes so far.

What is undeniable, however, is that statutory steps for fire prevention were not taken in any of these cases. Neither the civic body nor the State Government nor the fire service department had carried out any checks to ensure that fire-fighting measures were in place. Every time, the negligence of the authorities concerned becomes evident but nothing is done. What the ordinary citizen fails to understand is why fire prevention measures should not be taken and why these should not be periodically checked. A fire in a hospital puts the lives of hundreds of patients in danger. In the case of the Amri Hospital fire in South Kolkata a few years ago, several people were killed, not by fire but due to suffocation caused by billowing smoke. Will it be too much to expect that the authorities will now do the needful to prevent breaking out of such fires in future?

Modern day 'Thugs of Hindostan'

REFLEX ACTION

Aditya Aamir

You think 'Thugs of Hindostan' and you think 'Aamir Khan', criminal politicians, Mumbai dons, shady lawyers, sleazy diamond merchants, kingfisher beer and Philip Meadows Taylor, God rest his soul. Oops! He will not be happy at all. For several reasons, including because the Supreme Court of India failed to rein in political thugs Tuesday. Meadows wrote 'Confessions of a Thug' in 1839 based on which Aamir Khan made his cocktail 'Thugs of Hindostan', playing possum with Meadows' book.

And that when Meadows warned not to take thugee lightly; that it's not something to glorify because thugs at the time (mid-19th century and before) were mass murderers and audacious thieves, with garrote killer scarves to snuff lives on the trail, Khan climbed a donkey! "How many thousands must annually have perished by the hands of these remorseless assassins? Awful indeed is the contemplation," Meadows wrote. Aamir Khan's 'Thugs of Hindostan' makes a mockery of Meadows' serious endeavour. The creative liberties taken border on the criminal. He seems to have no qualms of making heroes of murdering thugs, remorseless assassins, sex and child traffickers. "The confessions I have recorded are not published to gratify a morbid taste in anyone for tales of horror and of crime," Meadows explained.

What/who according to Aamir Khan are the thugs of Hindostan? One of them is "Firangi Mallah" who is kinder than anyone on the planet. "Truth is my second name and loyalty drips from my work. I swear on my grandmother," is his favourite punch line. To paint him a jovial wicked man, Aamir puts him on a donkey wearing a green jacket and a top hat. A big bottle of liquor hangs by his side and he has red glasses on his eyes.

Another thug is Khudabaksh, the "biggest thug of them all, wading through storms and battles, the commander of thugs." Two other thugs who Aamir introduces are 'Zafira' and the sultry Surraiyya. Talking of the film, Aamir says, "Thugs of Hindostan is a big action-adventure film. There's no message in that. I am playing a character who cannot be trusted at all... a very slippery character. He has no scruples at all – for money he can sell his mother out."

Meadows will squirm in his grave. But wait, Firangi is "a very entertaining guy." Then, of course, it's just a movie, to be shown here and in China and the world over. Why the big hoo-ha, there are bigger 'Thugs of Hindostan' living in the here and now, and some of them had reason to cheer Tuesday, September 25 when the apex court refused to ban politicians with criminal records. Instead, it left it to Parliament to enact a law to bar criminals from entering politics. "Such a law should be enacted as soon as possible. The sooner the better, before it becomes fatal to democracy," the 5-judge bench headed by CJI Dipak Misra pointed out, obviously concerned but not as much as it was while taking up Triple Talaq or #377. "Society has the right to be governed by better people."

Seems like the Supreme Court like God acts in mysterious ways! Word is that there are as many as 1,700 serving MPs and MLAs with criminal records in the country, nearly 35% of all elected representatives. Under the current law, convicted 'Thugs of Hindostan' are banned from contesting elections for six years. But they can join political parties and head them, too. Like friend Lalu Prasad Yadav, who now lives with a number on his chest but continues to be RJD chief.

For reasons unknown, Supreme Court justices, while not shying away from occasional judicial activism, are wary of judging politicians charged with criminal shenanigans, including rape, reprehensible behaviour not expected from lawmakers. Separation of powers could be one of the reasons. The government of the day opposed any court ruling to affect the composition of Parliament or assemblies and the top court agreed with little opposition except with the mild rebuke: "The question is what can be done to contain the rot?" Nothing in the near future, definitely. The 'Thugs of Hindostan' will live on in Hindustan. (IPA)

Members of the Akash Ganga paradivers after their drive during the dress rehearsal of Air Force Day celebration at Hindan airbase 20 km North East of New Delhi on Saturday

Rafale Deal: Judges giving a close look

FOCUS

Nitya Chakraborty

As more and more reports are coming out pointing at the personal involvement of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the selection of the Anil Ambani led Reliance Defence as against the public sector HAL as the offset partner for the Rafale project, all focus has now shifted to the Supreme Court bench led by Justice Ranjan Gogoi who will be hearing the PIL challenging the Rafale deal on October 10. By that time, Gogoi will be acting as the Chief Justice of India since he will be taking over as the CJI on October 3.

Earlier on September 18, the three judge bench headed by Ranjan Gogoi adjourned the hearing till October 10 as the petitioner M K Dharma sought additional time for submitting more documents challenging the Rafale deal. Sharma in his petition, has alleged discrepancies in the fighter jet deal with France and sought a stay on it. Though the apex court did not grant interim stay on the deal, the fact that the petition has been admitted for hearing and the petitioner has been allowed to submit documents, gives enough indication that the learned judges will go seriously into the ways involving the conclusion of the deal and that will question the role played by the PMO and personally by the Prime Minister. The petition has also sought lodging of an FIR and prosecution of the Prime Minster Narendra Modi, former Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, business tycoon Anil Ambani and the concerned French firm Dassault along with the recovery of the amount. The legal experts say that the circumstances under which the offset partner decision was taken at the last minute before the announcement was made by the Prime Minister on April 10, 2015 give enough indication that the decision was taken in an unilateral manner violating the long standing procedures of making such inter government agreement. The reports which are being received in the recent days mention of deliberate pressure tactics by the Prime Minister to push Reliance Defence as a partner.

A media report quoting experts at Dassault Aviation said technical staff were unhappy with the move to drop HAL and that CEO Eric Trappier chose Reliance Defence for Rafale deal at the last minute.

More skeletons are tumbling out from the technical rooms of Rafale jet-mkaer Dassault Aviation, creating more headaches for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Completely contradicting the official statement from Dassault Aviation which was given to save the deal, two top technical heads have stated in an interview to India Scoops, that the entire technical staff team at Dassault Aviation were unhappy with the move to drop the Indian public sector undertaking Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) from the deal and instead partner with Anil Ambani's Reliance Defence Ltd. According to the report, the experts, who did not want to be identified, said there were heated discussions between Dassault officials and several mails were sent over a week. The entire technical team wanted to work with HAL, but the decision was overruled by the top Dassault management headed by CEO Eric Trappier at the last minute. The experts said that Trappier and two others were adamant that they could only go with Reliance Defence and refused to listen to the advice of the departmental HODs.

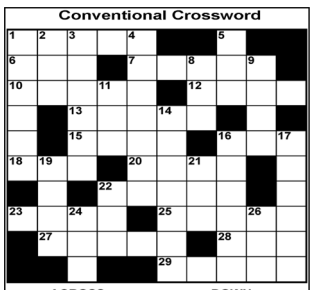
"We were sure we would be working with HAL and not any other Indian company... At the last minute, we were informed that HAL was dropped and a new Indian company with whom we had never worked before and which had no expertise in manufacturing fighter aircraft was selected for the job," the article quoted the officials as saying.

"The entire technical team and our team heads and HODs were shocked. It was a bolt from the blue. But we had to follow instructions. At the end of the day... if the top management decided to work with Reliance Defence, we had to toe the line... But it was CEO Eric Trappier and a couple of other officials' at DA who took the decision to go with Reliance Defence," the officials were further quoted as saying. The article quoted Dassault officials as saying that CEO Eric Trappier and two others were adamant that they could only go with Reliance Defence and refused to listen to the advice of the departmental HODs, adding that they were told the Indian government would have scrapped the deal if Reliance was not taken on board. The Dassault Aviation officials made the following points to India Scoops: The Indian government would have scrapped the deal if Reliance was not taken on board. Scrapping the deal would mean losses for the company and hence the top management headed by CEO Eric Trappier took the decision to work with Reliance. This was despite the fact that the in-house technical HODs had vetoed working with a new company having no experience and expertise.

The technical HODs told the Dassault Aviation top management that handing over the contract to a new company would compromise and jeopardise the technology and equipment. The HODs also said taking on an inexperienced offset partner would be hazardous for the over-all image of Dassault as a world-class manufacturer of fighter aircraft.

All these media reports along with the statement of the former HAL chairman who was a privy to all discussions with Dassault and who retired only on September 1 this year and the statement of former French President Francois Hollande that PM Modi proposed Reliance to him and Dassault had no choice, will be before the Supreme Court. Apart the officials of the HAL are seething with anger at the statements of the Defence Minister defaming HAL. They will also see that their reputation is retained. So in all, the proceedings of the Supreme Court will be scary to the PMO and the Prime Minister apart from the BJP leadership. (IPA)

Conventional Crossword



ACROSS
1 Examines
6 Respectful fear
7 Region
10 Stanza
12 Exploit
13 Cut grass
15 Gem
16 Rounded vase
18 Sister
20 Stagger
22 Borders
23 Water hole
25 Church item
27 Evil spirit
28 Optic
29 Weary

DOWN
1 Inn
2 Female sheep
3 Pulpit discourse
4 Race track official
5 Top card
8 Annex
9 Lacerate
11 Soaked food
14 Tastefully fine
16 Northern Ireland
17 Approached
19 Second-hand
21 Snakelike fish
22 Tree
24 Zodiac sign
26 Vote in favour

SUDOKU: 2334

			6			4	9	
	5		7		4	6		
	8							7
7	1						3	
		3				2		
	2						7	4
8							4	
		5	9		1		8	
	9	4			2			

Yesterday's Solution 2333

1	4	3	9	6	8	2	7	5
6	7	2	3	1	5	4	8	9
5	8	9	4	7	2	1	3	6
4	5	8	1	2	6	3	9	7
9	1	6	7	5	3	8	4	2
2	3	7	8	4	9	6	5	1
8	9	1	2	3	7	5	6	4
3	2	5	6	9	4	7	1	8
7	6	4	5	8	1	9	2	3

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 342

	S	T	E	M		D	O	L	L
B		I	R	I	S		B	E	E
A	L	T	A	R			O	N	E
N		H		A	S	S	E	T	
G	R	E	E	C	E			E	
	E			L	A	T	E	N	T
	B	O	X	E	S		L		E
T	A	P			O	L	I	V	E
A	T	E		U	N	I	T		M
R	E	N	D		S	T	E	P	

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