



## Today's Thought

Our only real hope for democracy is that we get the money out of politics entirely and establish a system of publicly funded elections.

Noam Chomsky.

## Choosing the right candidate is key Eyes on BJP, Congress

It is early days yet, but it stands that choosing the right candidate is the first big step towards fighting the coming Lok Sabha elections. And this is particularly true for the two principal political parties, BJP and the Congress. The Left, or rather the CPI is another political party that is more than sure to field a candidate and in Dr M Nara Singh, they may already have the man of their choice for the coming Lok Sabha polls. As things stand at the moment, already 16 personalities are vying for the Congress ticket in the Outer Parliamentary Constituency and Inner Parliamentary Constituency. Nine in the Inner and seven in the Outer. Curtain has already been drawn on filing the nomination papers and a look at the personalities vying for the Congress ticket is interesting. Save for one or two, all seem to be veterans, having faced Assembly elections at different points of time and even serving in the Council of Ministers at one time or the other. This was obviously at that point of time when the Congress was a giant and lorded over almost everything but today things are different. With the BJP in power at New Delhi and at Imphal too, it is the Congress which is today seen as the challenger and not the defender of the position of power. And the question of how successfully they play the role of the challenger will be determined to a large extent by the choice of the candidates. Interesting to note too that amongst the hopefuls are a handful of personalities who are political novice, but who nevertheless have managed to make a name for themselves. Along with the fresh faces, there are the tried and tested and it remains to be seen how the Congress reads the pulse of the public and decide accordingly.

On the other hand, the BJP is yet to come out with an official list of those who are seeking the party's ticket in the two Parliamentary Constituencies but already a number of them have launched their own poster campaign, without naming any political party. This is what is seen in the Inner Parliamentary Constituency and it would not be surprising if the same script is followed in the Outer Parliamentary Constituency. Poster campaign, attending events of importance, reaching out programmes etc are some of the approaches adopted and other than those who have come out in the open, there must be others too, quietly doing what ought to be done. This is about some of the activities seen from those seeking the saffron party's ticket and at the other end of the line, the saffron party too must be quietly but effectively studying the antecedents and prospects of all the intending candidates. This is where the first important step lies. Will the think tank of the BJP go in for the tried and tested, all those who have had a brush with politics in one way or the other and in the process have already created some sort of an impression on the people or will it go in for someone who is not remotely connected with day to day party politics but have been quietly and effectively doing what ought to be done? All questions at the moment, but to be sure the think tank of the two principal political parties must have started exploring all the possible avenues and choosing the right candidate will mean going off on a great start, a start which cannot be guaranteed by pedigree but by the personal integrity of the candidate.

# Healing is different from cure, conveys pirates of chemotherapy

When we first heard of a dramatic comedy theatre play on breast cancer, it was difficult to comprehend how will the three go together? Comedy, theatre and poignant theme of breast cancer! Glad we went for the preview show of this play because it did justice to comedy, theatre and breast cancer issue in a very compelling way. One of the most throbbing messages that resonates within me, is: healing is different from cure. It is important to mention that this play was staged by outstanding artists, few of them are breast cancer survivors (including one male actor) themselves. Toni Cacioppo, director of this powerful dramatic comedy, Pirates of Chemotherapy (written by Paul Schutte), explained in an exclusive interview with Steve Mellow: "Not only 'Pirates Of Chemotherapy' is funny and well written with rich and well-developed characters, but it also has a message that needs to go out. And that message is importance of early detection of breast cancer - sooner your breast cancer is caught higher your rates of survival."

**'I hated when people preach to me'**: "One of the characters in the play says, 'I hated when people preach to me'. So, this play gets the message out in an entertaining way and you do not feel that you are being preached" points out Toni Cacioppo, underpinning why it is vital to ensure entertainment and education go hand-in-hand. This play, Pirates Of Chemotherapy, was staged in Chiang Mai, Thailand (14-17 February 2019) and live streamed online on 15th February 2019. This 'dramedy' is about six women (and one man) who share a diagnosis of #breastcancer, all of whom are in various stages of treatment, recovery, and remission. They bond and band together in touching and often hilarious support of one another, pledging to live life to the fullest!

**When life takes a permanent detour**: The play begins how a positive diagnosis of breast cancer and disclosure, impacts people and life takes a permanent detour thereon. The counselling systems (if) in place, are rightly providing information, but are affected people able to grasp and absorb all the information bombarded to them? Are our health systems giving space enough for people to better cope with the therapy? Life-changing impact of cancer diagnosis is coupled with deep rooted concerns of losing body parts, such as breast, and intertwined with a matrix of human interpersonal issues. Dr Rita Banik, who has not only courageously fought breast cancer but also bravely survived other cancer recurrences, joined the live streaming of Pirates Of Chemotherapy. "Even cancer diagnosis creates a big havoc in our mind. Cancer related fatigue starts from our mind, then the fatigue grows through the long treatment, surgery, chemotherapy etc, and drains all our energy. Besides the looming danger of cancer spreading in the body which happened to me. I was a normal person having a good life, and with one stroke of cancer diagnosis, everything changed - it changes the life dramatically," said Dr Banik who now leads 'Race To Rein In Cancer'.

**Break the silence!**: For me, it is important to share how this comedy play successfully breaks the silence that surrounds intimacy and sexuality related concerns of breast cancer patients.

Thankfully this play has one male breast cancer survivor along with six female survivors. Women face the majority of the burden of breast cancer as well as are at higher risk, but men and

## Bobby Ramakant

transgender people have breasts too and do get affected by cancer of the breast, although the rates are much lower compared with women. Jokes apart, mammogram procedures are painful. This truth is so rightly brought out in the play too. We need better diagnostics that is convenient, patient-friendly, affordable and accessible to all those in need. If we truly want people to get mammography done regularly when indicated, then we have to ensure it is patient-friendly and not painful. People's needs should set the research agenda. "It is hard to laugh with well ones. They do not know how it feels" is a line from the play that still echoes in my heart. Perhaps that is why affected communities connect so intensely with each other and help one another as they move ahead in their journey to heal and cure. May be people who undergo similar experiences find it easier to be vulnerable enough to share with each other with empathy and dignity.

Human relationships are so central especially when the going gets tough. Data shows women have been abandoned by their husbands and thrown out of homes when infected with tuberculosis (TB) disease (over 100,000 women with TB in a year were abandoned by their husbands in India, as said by India's then health minister Dr Ambumani Ramadoss).

Travails of women with breast cancer multiply if their relationship with their partner goes through a rocky phase. "My husband left me", "I was withering away, he won't even touch me", "I wonder what he truly feels about me", "I have a chest of a boy", "I cannot stand to look at you", "He married a whole woman", "this is about intimacy, about being a woman", "Do you still find me attractive? My breasts were first thing that attracted him to me - he wants to hold me tight, but he is afraid he may hurt me" were some of the dialogues spoken by characters in the play that still are etched in my mind. "We are more than couple of breasts" rightly said the survivors in unison! A character in the play goes through divorce where her husband has cleaned all bank accounts leaving her on the edge of bankruptcy. This character rightly remarks "He said I looked like a pirate but he was a pirate all the while". "Why anyone else will love you when you don't love yourself" is another life influencing dialogue during a conversation between survivors in support group.

**Resurrection**: Towards the end of this play, a character dies as her breast cancer could not be detected early enough and had spread too. Before she passed away in the play, how "healing" happened in the support group despite she had incurable cancer, is so powerfully yet subtly brought out. Resurrection was the name of the store she ran, and is also the name of the sequel of this play which is currently being developed, shared Toni Cacioppo. "Educate in a way they don't get to know they are being educated" is another value this play embodies!

**Pirates of chemotherapy was live streamed!**: Breast cancer was among the two most common cancers globally in 2018. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), two most common cancers last year, were lung cancer (2.09 million cases and 1.76 million deaths in 2018) and breast cancer (2.09 million cases and 627,000 deaths in 2018), said Dr Pooja Ramakant,

noted breast cancer surgeon and researcher with the King George's Medical University (KGMU).

Dr Pooja Ramakant, Associate Editor of prestigious Indian Journal of Surgery, who joined the live streaming of Pirates Of Chemotherapy play said: "I agree with Toni Cacioppo, as preaching does not help much but we have to effectively communicate in local contexts to encourage health seeking behaviour. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, and in developing countries it is also among the deadliest cancers. Women present late to us unfortunately as 50-70% of patients who present to us are already in advanced stage or metastatic when they are first diagnosed. If breast cancer is picked up early, then survival is much better. All women and men must self-examine their breasts every month - neither it costs anything, nor any equipment is needed. If in any doubt people must seek medical checkup without any delay." Dr Pooja Ramakant, who is former member of Editorial Board of Indian Association of Endocrine Surgeons (IAES) added that patient support groups play a key role in helping people with breast cancer. Those who have gone through the journey of seeking treatment for breast cancer are best placed to help support each other. Quality cancer care includes dignity, respect, support and love and considers not just the physical impact of cancer but respects the emotional, and social wellbeing of each individual and their carer.

Dr Chanchal Rana, breast pathologist from King George's Medical University (KGMU), also joined the live streaming of Pirates Of Chemotherapy. She said "Breast cancer can be diagnosed at an early stage and is a treatable malignancy. In developing countries like ours many times patients are coming at a very late stage where they have to go through more extensive surgery, chemotherapy and other treatment modalities. Good sign is that more women are self-examining their breasts. We must remember that cancer of the breast is treatable if diagnosed at an early stage."

**Indestructible!**: One of the after thoughts of seeing this play three times, was, how people who come across often as "indestructible", may be tanking up issues that may make them vulnerable as human beings. Being invulnerable and indestructible also perhaps prevent them from accepting love and empathy.

When the live streaming of Pirates Of Chemotherapy play ended, Shobha Shukla, noted gender justice advocate and Executive Director of CNS (Citizen News Service) commented: "What I learnt today is that while cancer is nothing to laugh about, but one can choose to laugh at it. Just like pirates of the sea, you really did spit in the wind against all odds and made it change its direction. And like pirates, despite the missing parts, you fought a formidable battle, and reminded us of how the relentless human spirit responds to love and also that healing is different than cure. The play was like an infomercial for early cancer detection and convinced me that along with chemotherapy, the curative powers of laughter and fortitude should not be discounted."

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## Total ban on polythene bags need of the hour in Manipur

### Dr Govind Singh



Image source : Google image

The polythene bag is perhaps the most polluting discovery of the previous century. First created by accident in 1933 in England, and further developed (and patented) by the Swedish company Celloplast in 1965, polythene bags started replacing most other types of shopping bags by the 1980s. But in 1997, after making another chance discovery of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the world became aware of the deadly waste plastic mess that we have now created for ourselves. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is located in Northern Pacific Ocean and is a large collection of marine debris. Most of this marine debris comprises polythene, both intact as well as broken down into tiny pieces. This has become one of the greatest threat to marine animals, most notably to the sea turtles which mistakenly eat polythene bags thinking they are jellyfish.

Polythene is a non-biodegradable substance and it does not disintegrate or degrade itself in nature. Once created, it remains around us at all times. Once discarded, it often comes back to us in ugly and unhealthy ways. In 2002, Bangladesh became the first visible victim of the plastic mess. Plastic bags were found to play a key role in the clogging of drains which resulted in disastrous flooding in Bang-

ladesh in that year. Bangladesh did not think twice before banning the use of use of polythene bags in that same year to prevent further such disasters. Many countries and states in India have banned polythene bags since then.

Manipur banned the use of certain polythene bags (less than 50 microns in thickness) in 2017. However, the ban is yet to be fully implemented. Large-scale use of polythene bags is a common sight across markets in Imphal, the State capital. What is surprising is that even though polythene bags are now known to cause severe health hazards, they are not being automatically discarded by the people at large. And despite a ban declared by the concerned authorities, we are not able to stop the use of these polythene bags. This clearly indicates a lack of awareness in the people on the health implications of using polythene bags.

Let us try to fully understand the public health and environmental impacts of using polythene bags, especially in Manipur. Choking of drains and water channels resulting in floods is a direct consequence of plastic waste. Rivers and drains filled with polythene bags can be easily witnessed in many parts of Manipur, especially in urban areas, all

year round. If not properly managed, this can result in flooding and inundation of low-lying areas during the monsoon months. Manipur has indeed been facing more frequent floods in recent years which only stand to worsen due to the accumulation of plastic waste.

What is perhaps more concerning than polythene bags choking our rivers and drains is the affect they may have on the fish and other aquatic organisms. Polythene bags break down into smaller particles through a process known as fragmentation, and end up becoming microplastic. These tiny bits of plastic are often

ingested by fish and are known to have damaging effects on all aquatic animals. One estimate suggests that at least two-thirds of the world's fish stocks are already suffering from plastic ingestion. Microplastics are known to absorb harmful toxic chemicals. These chemicals often get released from the microplastics when they are inside an animal's body. What is even more concerning is that through fish, these microplastics are able to enter the human body. This is especially true in Manipur where fish is an integral part of the food intake. While research is ongoing to find out detailed impacts of microplastics on

fish and on humans, there is enough data available to know that they cause much harm to both fish and to humans. Thus, the more polythene bags we use in Manipur, the more polythene we are consuming in our daily diet.

Polythene bags are often dumped on land or buried underground in order to get rid of them. Here too, it is well known that chlorinated plastic tends to release harmful chemicals into the surrounding soil and in the ground water. A large number of waste polythene bags in Manipur mostly end up being burnt. This is because the Waste Management System in Manipur is yet to cover the entire State. An evening view from most rooftops in Imphal will reveal smoke emanating from all sides. The burning of waste, which includes large amounts of plastic, is actually the most unhealthy way of getting rid of plastic waste. This is because when plastic burns, it releases toxic gases some of which are also carcinogenic.

Repeated exposure to such toxic gases can cause many harmful diseases including cancer. In addition, toxic gases that are released from burning plastic are also known to have adverse neurological, reproductive and immunological impacts on the human body.

This is even more concerning for Imphal Valley since once these toxic gases are released, they will not be dispersed immediately due to the hills on all sides. Thus, toxic gases from plastic burning will remain in the air for longer time thus exposing more and more people to their harmful impacts.

How polythene bags are impacting us is becoming more apparent as more and more data is being generated. However what is absolutely clear is that their use is causing harm to us and that people of Manipur are at a greater risk. However, due to their convenience and less cost, polythene bags are being readily used everywhere.

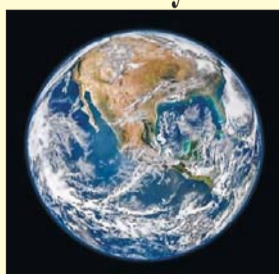
It is time we understand the actual human health cost of using polythene bags and take a pledge to stop using polythene bags altogether. The State can help by banning not just some plastic bags but implement a total ban on the use of all kinds of polythene bags. Remember, polythene bags may be very cheap, but your life is not!

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## Science News

### Earth may be 140 years away from reaching carbon levels not seen in 56 million years

**Feb 21:** Total human carbon dioxide emissions could match those of Earth's last major greenhouse warming event in fewer than five generations, new research finds. A new study finds humans are pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at a rate nine to 10 times higher than the greenhouse gas was emitted during the Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum (PETM), a global warming event that occurred roughly 56 million years ago. The results suggest if carbon emissions continue to rise, the total amount of carbon dioxide injected into the atmosphere since humans started burning fossil fuels could equal the amount released during the PETM as soon as 2159.



"You and I won't be here in 2159, but that's only about four generations away," said Philip Gingerich, a paleoclimatologist researcher at the University of Michigan and author of the new study in the AGU journal Paleoclimatology and Paleoclimatology. "When you start to think about your children and your grandchildren, and your great-grandchildren, you're about there." Scientists often use the PETM as a benchmark against which to compare modern climate change. But the new study shows we're on track to meet this benchmark much sooner than previously thought, as the pace of today's warming far outstrips any climate event that has happened since the extinction of the dinosaurs.

"Given a business-as-usual assumption for the future, the rates of carbon release that are happening today are really unprecedented, even in the context of an event like the PETM," said Gabriel Bowen, a geophysicist at the University of Utah who was not connected to the new study. "We don't have much in the way of geologic examples to draw from in understanding how the world responds to that kind of perturbation."

Attuned as we have become to political grandstanding on the purpose of democracy, we may not have imagined that something so prosaic as statistics can alter our perception of how it is actually working for us. The emergence over the past few months of data on employment, speaking precisely the lack of it, cannot but have an influence on our assessment. They paint a picture of an economy that is widely out of line with the government's pronouncements on its performance. These have generally avoided any reference to employment, except to say that there is a lack of reliable data on it, for the rectification of which the government itself has done very little.

Arun Jaitley, Finance Minister for the greater part of this government's tenure, has claimed that it has coincided with a degree of macroeconomic stability that has not been surpassed. Perhaps he had in mind the combination of falling inflation and declining Budget deficits since 2014. However, while this has indeed transpired, it is important to note that these trends had commenced even before. Moreover, after repeatedly expressing a commitment to fiscal consolidation, the government did not hesitate to swerve from the path of rectitude to finance an income support programme for farmers in an election year.

Silence on jobs: But of greater significance is the fact that neither he nor the Prime Minister has had anything to say about employment. In this the BJP is not unique. Employment does not usually figure in the public discourse orchestrated by political parties, either at the Centre or in the States. This must change, for steady employment is the citizen's aspiration, to realise which she elects representatives. Governments in India must therefore be routinely subjected to an employment test which gauges their success in generating and sustaining high employment. In his election campaign in 2014 Narendra Modi had announced that he would generate jobs.

Employment data from government sources (Labour Bureau) for about half a decade up to 2015 and from the independent agency Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) for the period since give us a reasonably good idea of the progress made with respect to employment. When supplemented with other information, these sources also suggest to us the proximate factors responsible for that history. The evidence they provide tell two stories. First, the Modi government has had next to no success in generating employment, notwithstanding its promises at election time. A development that may require some effort to understand fully, but which nevertheless it is important for the citizen to do, is that the labour force may actually have shrunk while it has been in office. The labour force is the sum of the

## The employment test

### Pulapre Balakrishnan

employed and those unemployed who are seeking employment. A shrinking of the labour force is most unusual in an economy with a growing population, and thus a growing working age cohort. The demonetisation effect: While this decline had already emerged in 2015, it became pronounced after demonetisation in 2016. We owe to CMIE, a private Indian body, both this finding and the articulation of the precise mechanism at work. A section of those hitherto willing to work may have simply dropped out of an already challenged labour market. This possibility is recognised in macroeconomics as the 'discouraged-worker effect' and has been observed in Western economies. The loss of skill that can accompany being unemployed even temporarily, and the consequent loss of long-run output for the economy, is the basis of the argument that public policy must respond with alacrity to growing unemployment. No such sensibility has infused the government, which appears not to have noticed the decline in the labour force itself, a development that occurred very early in its tenure. It has instead congratulated itself on having delivered macroeconomic stability. We are now able to see that whatever may have been the acclaimed beneficial impact of demonetisation in terms of raising direct tax compliance, it has caused demoralisation among a section of the already unemployed who may have given up all hope of finding employment.

The second of the two histories referred to, seen in the reports of one of the government's agencies, is that of a rising unemployment rate from 2011 onwards. This point has political significance as we stay poised for the general election. This is that while the Modi government may have run amok with the demonetisation, India's unemployment challenge predates this episode and evidently runs deeper. Labour Bureau data show that the unemployment rate almost doubled between 2011 and 2015. It is surprising that the government's own reports did not flag this. The economic, as opposed to the political, message is that the recent history of unemployment has been impervious to the political formation governing India.

If we are to more than just wring our hands at the existent unemployment, an understanding of what underlies it is necessary. Actually, no more than standard macroeconomic analysis is needed in this regard. Both output growth and employment are

under normal circumstances associated with capital formation. Capital formation as a share of output has been declining since 2011-12. Unlike consumption expenditure, capital expenditure is unique in expanding both the supply and demand sides of the economy. Despite the declining capital formation, neither United Progressive Alliance (UPA) II nor National Democratic Alliance II considered it necessary to respond to it by stepping up public investment, the obvious thing to do in the prevailing circumstances.

The clue to this inertia may be found in the political economy. For UPA II the success of its first term in office must have looked like the perfect opportunity to expand its political base by legislating rights and reciting the mantra "inclusive growth". Then came Narendra Modi, who somewhat incongruously for an avowedly nationalist politician, embraced the dogma of the Washington Consensus. Popular in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it extolled small government and asserted the capacity of the market mechanism to deliver an optimal outcome. There was in this scheme of things no place for any involuntary unemployment.

So, whatever may have been the calculation of the two political formations, employment generation just took a back seat in their respective programmes.

Cost of failure?: We have adopted representative democracy as our form of government because we cannot in isolation achieve the outcomes we desire even when they are exclusive to us. Employment is one example of this. Though it manifests itself as jobs for individuals, it is determined by macroeconomic factors which individuals cannot influence on their own. The Great Depression in the 20th century and the Great Recession in the 21st, both which have originated in the U.S. but quickly spread across the world, testify to this helplessness of individuals in the face of market forces. In a democracy, it is left to elected representatives whether to pursue macroeconomic policies conducive to the generation of employment. India's political parties have for close to a decade now failed to do so, either wilfully or out of neglect. However, when elected to govern, they are given a chance to create the conditions that enable Indians to lead flourishing lives, which includes being meaningfully employed during their working age. India's political parties must pass "the employment test". When they fail they must vacate the stage.

Courtesy: The Hindu

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