

Afternoon

DESPATCH & COURIER

Ponder awhile...

"Justice is the cornerstone of a system based on liberty."

—R.E. Spapiro

Pak PM has his own separate agenda?

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh was all praise for Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif whom he met in New York on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meeting. They are said to have had "peace talks" for an hour during which Sharif said that the two countries must bring about close ties with each other. The camera showed that the handshake between the two was firm and long.

But even as that handshake was going on, a big effort was being made by the Pakistan's army to conduct a major infiltration operation on the Line of Control (LoC). It was described as the biggest infiltration bid by Pakistan ever. A long gun battle ensued between the Indian and Pakistan soldiers as the terrorists were being pushed into Indian territory.

Can we trust Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif? How can his doublespeak explained? Is he serious at all about peace between India and Pakistan?

There is another explanation – a little more convincing – that the Prime Minister is not in control in Pakistan and that it is the army which is ruling the country. The army has its own separate perceptions and agenda for action. It evidently does not believe in peace talks and it is all set for grabbing Kashmir by force. If this is the situation on the ground in Pakistan, was it pointless for our PM to have had that hour-long talk with Nawaz Sharif in New York? There is, however, a glimmer of hope if we go on holding talks, the some good result may emerge. Perhaps we should sympathetically try to understand the situation in which Sharif finds himself and help him in his bid to be the boss in Pakistan.

Mr. Moily, you're no Lal Bahadur Shastri

OCTOBER 5th 1988 was incidentally a Wednesday. Dan Quayle, a 41 year old Republican Senator, was the Vice-Presidential Candidate on the George H.W. Bush ticket. Quayle, on that day, was debating Lloyd Bensten the Vice Presidential Candidate on the Democrat Party ticket at the Civic Auditorium in Omaha, Nebraska. When Quayle's lack of experience was brought into question, he sought to allay fears by comparing his length of congressional service to that of John F. Kennedy, when the latter was seeking the Presidency. Bensten's pre-meditated response to Quayle – "Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy. I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy." – has now entered the political lexicon for deflating opponents punching way above their weight.

Intellectual dishonesty

Petroleum Minister Veerappa Moily's recent announcement that he would travel by public transport, every Wednesday starting October 9th, along with his officials in the ministry and Oil PSUs can at best be construed as cynical tokenism aimed at the galleries. This gesture or any of the other measures pale in comparison to the daily under-recovery of Rs. 432 crore that oil companies incur on the sale of Diesel, PDS Kerosene and Domestic LPG. Some within the Minister's party were comparing Moily's announcement to that of Lal Bahadur Shastri when he exhorted the people to skip one meal a week. This clearly shows the intellectual dishonesty of a party that has disowned the legacy of one of its leaders largely due to the pervasive competitive sycophancy that exists towards a select few. Shastri's plea to the people of India was a response to the US threat to stop providing wheat under the Public Law-480 (PL-480), commonly known as the *Food for Peace Program*, after the war with Pakistan in 1965. The response to the request from Shastri, who shared his birth anniversary with Mahatma Gandhi on October 2nd, was overwhelming as even restaurants and eateries shut down on Monday evenings to observe *Shastri Vrat*. Apart from the absolute honesty and probity through which he led his life, Shastri's credibility came from the fact that he led by example and he himself skipped a meal every week before he asked the same off the citizens of India. He died with very little personal property and with no hereditary flag-bearer to carry on his legacy,

a stark contrast to public office aspirants in today's political arena, making Moily's assertions sound hollow and gimmicky at best.

In fact, if there is any inspiration that the Government could take from Shastri, it would be to exhort the people to pay more for all petroleum products. According to a comparative study done by the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in July 2013, the prices of Kerosene and LPG in India are lowest among our neighbouring countries. While the prices of Petrol and Diesel have risen since July the comparative chart shows how

not address the under-recoveries of oil companies. Moreover, after the Supreme Court judgment that has ruled Aadhaar as non-mandatory for citizens to avail of Government benefits and services, the savings envisaged due to de-duplication, cutting of wastages and reduction of fraud will not be realised in entirety. In such a scenario, the government seems to neither possess the political will nor the political capital to take the logical step of increasing the prices of petroleum products.

Higher prices spur conservation

The Minister also went on to suggest car-pooling and using bicycles as a mechanism to save fuel though he provided no roadmap to ensure these measures would be adopted. One option is for the Minister to provide incentives that allow companies to encourage car-pooling or provide for shared transport either as tax breaks or as a part of the "within the fence" Corporate Social Responsibility clause in the new Companies Bill. The Petroleum Minister is free to observe a Bus Day and spend Rs. 52 crore in a nationwide campaign involving Saina Nehwal and Virat Kohli to propagate conservation of oil and gas. However, all these will remain insignificant measures if the main problem of under-recoveries and subsidies are not addressed on a war-footing. There is no better campaign in the world to propagate conservation of oil



« PERSPECTIVE »

Venkat Goli

skewed our pricing in domestic fuel is compared to our neighbours as a result of under-recoveries and subsidies.

Country	Petrol	Diesel	Kerosene	LPG (14.2 Kg)/Cylinder)
India (Delhi)	70.44	50.84	14.96	410.50
Pakistan	60.58	65.32	58.61	996.95
Bangladesh	75.36	53.11	53.11	624.18
Sri Lanka	75.73	56.78	51.28	1,274.36
Nepal	76.29	61.66	61.66	910.26

Retail Selling Price (INR) in Neighbouring Countries

Various Committees, including the *Committee on Pricing and Taxation of Petroleum Products* under the Chairmanship of Dr. C. Rangarajan and *The Report of The Expert Group on A Viable and Sustainable System of Pricing of Petroleum Products* under Prof Kirit S. Parikh have laid out various recommendations. In fact, the Parikh Committee report went on to suggest that even the poorest decile of rural households can afford to spend a bit more on kerosene. The Direct Benefit Transfers for subsidies under LPG and Kerosene address the subsidy aspect but do

and petroleum products than higher prices that forces more judicious usage, especially on those who can afford it. While the Petroleum Minister is definitely no Lal Bahadur Shastri, it is the government's best opportunity to pay tribute to India's most forgotten Prime Minister who propagated personal sacrifice as a policy tool.

● Venkat Goli is the Founder of Yudofud — a conservative public strategy think-tank and can be contacted at @kanesh_goli on Twitter

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CAROL ANDRADE
Editor

A.R. KANANGI
Associate Editor

KAMAL MORARKA
Chairman of the
Board of Directors

Afternoon Despatch & Courier office is located at: Janmabhoomi Bhavan, 3rd Floor, Janmabhoomi Marg, Fort, Mumbai-400 001. Phone: 40768999. Fax: 40768916. E-mail: afternoonnews@gmail.com
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WINNERS are tall, muscular and robust, right? They have a swagger to their walk, cocksure in their talk and carry their attitude heavily on broad shoulders. But the two winners I saw, winning spectacular victories, were anything but that: The first, Ravi Dwivedi, was a mild, affable chap. Went round on a small scooter, left home for a walk everyday, and came back looking a little rounder! Nobody, expected him to win the cricket tournament. But there was a difference in him this time, a difference the other captains didn't see and paid heavily for:

Ravi batted like a man on fire. This was no mild man at the crease, this was fury, zeal and passion in a tight bundle: The best bowlers looked astonished as their carefully crafted balls were sent effortlessly to the boundary, they watched their fielders looking bewildered at his cheeky singles and his team, suddenly realizing their captain meant business, started whacking the ball, like their little captain was doing.

It was a display of courage, tenacity and determination as Ravi and teammates won

Unlikely Winners...!

three games in a row, and held the trophy at the end of the day.

What a glorious victory: What a lesson for everybody!

Just a few buildings away from where the first winner lives, lives the second, Alwyn D'Souza: His sightless eyes through tapping stick, treads it's way through badly parked

« BOB'S BANTER »

Robert Clements

cars, potholes and open gutters and leads him home. His eyes had failed him over a decade ago, and then he'd been abandoned at his mother's doorstep by cruel, callous wife. Anybody else at this stage would have given up.

He didn't. He taught himself to forgive just as much as he taught himself to use the stick. He, who

had always relied on wife or child to move around, learned to travel alone in crowded local and uncaring bus. He was bitten by stray dogs near Jogeshwari, fell near Churchgate, but continued relentlessly.

He called me yesterday, "Bob, I'm the guest speaker at the Community Centre!" he said.

I attended, startled, shocked, surprised. His sightless eyes came alive as he delivered his speech with professionalism and confidence. A blind man speaking with such assurance: Unheard of!

Alwyn's journey has been long and harsh, he fought, he won, just like his neighbour Ravi.

But again, winners are tall, muscular and robust, right? They have a swagger to their walk, cocksure in their talk and carry their attitude heavily on broad shoulders? Wrong! These two were different; they just decided they'd win.

A lesson for us all: You can, if you think you can..!

bobsbanter@gmail.com