

## DEMOCRACY SHOULD NOT PERMIT A TRADE-OFF

### Measures Taken During Emergencies Cannot Come At The Cost Of Institutional Checks And Balances.

Independent India inherited a legal system which was designed to control the colonised. Caught in the relentless grip of COVID-19, several State governments have invoked the Epidemic Diseases Act, first drafted to deal with bubonic plague that swept Maharashtra in 1897. The Act prohibited public gatherings, and regulated travel, routine screening, segregation, and quarantine. The government was given enormous powers to control public opinion. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, described as the 'father of Indian unrest' by Valentine Chirol of *The Times* (London) was imprisoned for 18 months. His newspaper, *Kesari*, had criticised measures adopted by the government to tackle the epidemic. The law was stark. It did not establish the right of affected populations to medical treatment, or to care and consideration in times of great stress, anxiety and panic.

Silence on these crucial issues bore expected results. In June 1897, the brothers, Damodar Hari Chapekar and Balkrishna Hari Chapekar, assassinated W.C. Rand, the plague commissioner of Poona, and Lieutenant Charles Egerton Ayerst, an officer of the administration. Both were considered guilty of invading private spaces, and disregarding taboos on entry into the inner domain of households. The two brothers were hanged in the summer of 1899. The assassination heralded a storm of revolutionary violence that shook the country at the turn of the twentieth century.

Today our world should have been different. The government could have paid attention to migrant labour when it declared a lockdown on economic activities, roads, public spaces, transport, neighbourhoods and zones in which the unorganised working class ekes out bare subsistence. The result of this slip-up was tragic. Thousands of workers and their families were forced to exit the city, and begin an onerous trek to their villages. The unnerving spectacle of a mass of people trudging across State borders carrying pitiful bundles on their heads and little babies in their arms, without food or money, shocked the conscience of humankind. The neglect of workers upon whose shoulders the Indian economy rests, exposed the class bias of regulations. Confronted with the unexpected sight of people defying the lockdown, State governments and the Central government rushed to announce remedial measures. The afterthought came too late and gave too little.

- **Dispensing with rights**

On March 31, at a hearing of the Supreme Court of India on two petitions relating to the welfare of migrants, the Central government demanded that the Court should allow the imposition of censorship over media reports on measures adopted by the state. The government claimed that panic over the migration of thousands of bare-footed people was based on fake news, and that the scale of migration was over-estimated. Therefore, the Court should support rules that no news will be published or telecast without checking with the Central government. The plea was rejected, and the Court suggested that responsible journalism should rely on daily official bulletins. Witness the irony. The government is concerned about reports of involuntary migrations. It is not concerned with the reason why people were forced to walk out of the city in the first place.

The prospect seems remote. If democratic India continues to invoke draconian colonial laws that were drafted in another time and for another purpose, why should we expect anything different in the future?

On March 16, United Nations human rights experts issued a statement expressing deep concern with the way leaders were amassing power ostensibly for dealing with the pandemic. The statement urged governments to avoid an 'overreach' of security measures when they respond to the coronavirus outbreak. Emergency powers, the experts insisted, should not be used to quash dissent. More significantly, these measures have to be proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory. Some states and security institutions, continued the statement, will find the use of emergency powers attractive because it offers shortcuts. There is need to ensure that excessive powers are not hardwired into legal and political systems. Care should be taken to see that restrictions are narrowly tailored. Governments should deploy the least intrusive method to protect

public health. “We encourage States,” concluded the statement, “to remain steadfast in maintaining a human rights-based approach to regulating this pandemic, in order to facilitate the emergence of healthy societies with rule of law and human rights protections.”

The prospect seems remote. If democratic India continues to invoke draconian colonial laws that were drafted in another time and for another purpose, why should we expect anything different in the future?

On March 16, United Nations human rights experts issued a statement expressing deep concern with the way leaders were amassing power ostensibly for dealing with the pandemic. The statement urged governments to avoid an ‘overreach’ of security measures when they respond to the coronavirus outbreak. Emergency powers, the experts insisted, should not be used to quash dissent. More significantly, these measures have to be proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory. Some states and security institutions, continued the statement, will find the use of emergency powers attractive because it offers shortcuts. There is need to ensure that excessive powers are not hardwired into legal and political systems. Care should be taken to see that restrictions are narrowly tailored. Governments should deploy the least intrusive method to protect public health. “We encourage States,” concluded the statement, “to remain steadfast in maintaining a human rights-based approach to regulating this pandemic, in order to facilitate the emergence of healthy societies with rule of law and human rights protections.”

In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, notorious for his anti-migrant tirades, has personalised immense power. He now rules by decree. Existing laws and parliamentary oversight have been suspended. In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte has appropriated broad emergency powers in order to take effective decisions to tackle the virus. Again, he is not known for his commitment to civil liberties or to the Constitution. In Chile, the declaration of a ‘state of catastrophe’ has repressed anti-government dissent that has been raging on the streets since last year.

- **No counter-balancing steps**

States are the product of history, composed of layers of meaning some of which have been fashioned for another time. The nature of the state is historically specific. Yet modern states share a common determination; a ruthless ambition to control the minds and bodies of citizens. Epidemics provide an opportunity to accomplish precisely this, to do away with inconvenient checks and balances institutionalised in the media, the judiciary, and civil society. The dismantling of constitutions and institutions will have a major impact on societies. Do decisions to control the pandemic have to be at the expense of human rights and democracy? On March 6, Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, advised governments to ensure that the measures they adopt to control the virus do not adversely impact people’s lives. “The most vulnerable and neglected people in society,” she recommended, “must be protected both medically and economically.” She gave sage advice, democracy does not permit trade-offs.

**Meanings of Difficult Words:**

1. **trade-off** (noun) – a situation in which you must choose between (balance) two things that are opposite or cannot be had at the same time; a compromise; swap, exchange.
2. **at the cost of** (phrase) – by sacrificing/losing/giving up something; at the expense of.
3. **checks and balances** (plural noun) - a system in which all departments of a government organization have right to amend/limit the powers of the other departments in order to avoid dominance of one department.
4. **inherit** (verb) - assume, take over, receive ( from a former user of something).
5. **relentless** (adjective) – persistent, continuing, constant; harsh, severe, unforgiving.
6. **COVID-19** (noun) – coronavirus disease 2019.
7. **invoke** (verb) – cite, refer to, adduce.
8. **epidemic** (noun) – widespread disease/illness; outbreak, plague, scourge.

9. **bubonic plague** (noun) – an infectious disease transmitted to humans from infected rodents (rats); patients develop sudden onset of fever, headache, chills, and weakness and one or more swollen, tender and painful lymph nodes (called buboes).
10. **swept** past participle of **sweep** (verb) – move swiftly/quickly.
11. **screening** (noun) – examination, testing (of a group of people for the symptoms of a disease). The process of identifying healthy people who may be at increased risk of disease or condition.
12. **segregation** (noun) – separation, isolation, exclusion, setting apart.
13. **quarantine** (noun) – a process of separating out people, animals and things (such as plants) from others for a period of time in order to control/restrict the spread of a contagious disease; Quarantine is imposed to separate and restrict the movement of persons, who may have been exposed to infectious disease, but not yet known to be ill.
14. **unrest** (noun) - protest, agitation, dissent.
15. **imprison** (verb) - jail, put in prison, incarcerate, lock up.
16. **stark** (adjective) – clear, distinct, evident.
17. **bore past of bear** (verb) - exhibit, show, set forth, have.
18. **assassinate** (verb) – murder, kill, execute.
19. **guilty** (adjective) - culpable, blameable, at fault, responsible.
20. **invade** (verb) – occupy, capture, seize, attack, assail, assault.
21. **disregard** (verb) – ignore, take no account of, pay no attention to; dismiss.
22. **taboo** (noun) - a prohibition of social actions based on religious, social, cultural (false) beliefs that performing such actions is either too scared, or too dangerous for the human race; prohibition, ban, non-acceptance.
23. **domain** (noun) - area, sector/section, region.
24. **household** (noun) – family, house.
25. **hang** (verb) - execute by hanging, put to death.
26. **herald** (verb) - indicate, announce; usher in, pave the way for.
27. **storm** (noun) - outburst, outbreak, flare up, eruption.
28. **at the turn of** (phrase) - during the period between the end of one century and the beginning of the next.
29. **pay attention** (phrase) – listen/heed, attend, concentrate on.
30. **lockdown** (noun) – an emergency protocol implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving from a place; An extended state of confinement/encirclement/isolation of a person by the authority.
31. **unorganised workforce** (noun) – workers, labour force in an unorganized sector (an (unregistered) economic activity that is neither taxed nor monitored by a government. As per the International Labor Organization, over 80 per cent of the Indian economy is in the unorganized/informal sector).
32. **eke out** (phrasal verb) – to make/manage a living painstakingly.
33. **bare** (adjective) - only, mere, just, simple, basic.
34. **subsistence** (modifier) – living, livelihood, existence, survival.
35. **slip-up** (noun) – mistake, error, blunder.
36. **onerous** (adjective) – burdensome, tough, heavy, formidable.
37. **trek** (noun) - a long journey/trip on foot, walk.
38. **unnerving** (adjective) – disconcerting, unsettling, discomfiting, disturbing.
39. **spectacle** (noun) – display, show, event.
40. **trudge** (verb) – walk heavily, walk slowly (due to harsh conditions).
41. **pitiful** (adjective) - distressing, sad; awful/terrible.
42. **conscience** (noun) – moral sense; morals, values/ethics, principles.
43. **humankind** (noun) – humanity, the human race, people.
44. **neglect** (noun) – negligence, dereliction of duty, lack of concern, irresponsibility, laxity, failure to take proper care/action.

45. **shoulders** (noun) - a person's shoulders considering bearing responsibility/hardship.
46. **bias** (noun) - prejudice, partiality; bigotry, intolerance.
47. **confront with** (verb) – tackle, deal with, grapple with, try to cope with.
48. **sight** (noun) - notice, view, observation.
49. **remedial** (adjective) - beneficial, corrective, healing.
50. **afterthought** (noun) - additional remark, second thought, reconsideration.
51. **dispense with** (phrasal verb) – discard, get rid of, do away with, throw away.
52. **imposition** (noun) – implementation, execution, enforcement.
53. **bare-footed** (adjective) - not wearing any footwear.
54. **plea** (noun) – appeal, petition, request.
55. **rely on** (phrasal verb) – depend on; resort to, have recourse to.
56. **bulletin** (noun) – news, news report, press release, communiqué.
57. **irony** (noun) – paradox, incongruity, peculiarity.
58. **involuntary** (adjective) - forced, compelled, imposed; unplanned, uncontrolled, knee-jerk.
59. **at hand** (phrase) – nearby, close by, around the corner; imminent, approaching, about to happen.
60. **unease** (noun) - fright, distress, anxiety.
61. **bear** (verb) – have, display, present, set forth.
62. **hose down** (phrasal verb) - dampen, moisten, spray something (disinfectant) with a hose pipe.
63. **simultaneously** (adverb) - at the same time, concurrently, at once.
64. **specificity** (noun) - the state of being specific; particularity; attentiveness/carefulness.
65. **brutality** (noun) – cruelty, barbarity, inhumanity.
66. **indiscriminately** (adverb) – aimlessly, unsystematically; carelessly.
67. **overreach** (noun) – an act of trying to do too much.
68. **admittedly** (adverb) – actually, truly/verily, indeed.
69. **authoritarian** (adjective) – oppressive, dictatorial, totalitarian.
70. **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
71. **set off** (phrasal verb) – give rise to, cause, trigger, bring about.
72. **ripple** (noun) – a small wave/wavelet, a series of waves.
73. **run its course** (phrase) - come to an end, fade away, finish, draw to a close.
74. **abdicate** (verb) – reject, renounce, give up, avoid.
75. **amass** (verb) - gather, accumulate, pile up, collect.
76. **coronavirus** (CoV)(noun) – a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.
77. **unbridled** (adjective) – unrestrained, unconstrained, uncontrolled.
78. **prospect** (noun) – hope, promise, possibility of future.
79. **draconian** (adjective) - (of laws or punishments) extremely harsh, severe, strict, stringent, tough.
80. **ostensibly** (adverb) – apparently, seemingly, on the face of it.
81. **outbreak** (noun) – sudden appearance/occurrence(of a disease); outburst, epidemic.
82. **inflict (on)** (verb) – impose, force, thrust, burden.
83. **quash** (verb) – cancel, reverse, repeal.
84. **dissent** (noun) – disagreement, disapproval, opposition.
85. **proportionate** (adjective) – proportional, comparable, equivalent to.
86. **non-discriminatory** (adjective) – fair, judicial, unbiased.
87. **hardwire** (verb) – make something as standard, basic/fundamental, essential, constitutional.
88. **narrowly** (adverb) – in a restricted/limited way.
89. **tailor** (verb) – customize, adapt, adjust, modify, change.
90. **deploy** (verb) – employ.

91. **intrusive** (adjective) – personal, offensive, unwanted.
92. **steadfast** (adjective) – firm, determined, resolute.
93. **facilitate** (verb) – make easier, make possible; assist, help, aid.
94. **unravel** (verb) – fall apart, come apart; separate out, disengage.
95. **unmitigated** (adjective) – absolute, complete, total.
96. **the executive** (noun) – the executive is a branch of government which enforces the law as written by the legislature and interpreted by the judiciary.
97. **breach** (noun) – contravention, violation, breaking, non-compliance.
98. **surveillance** (noun) – observation, scrutiny, inspection/examination.
99. **notorious** (adjective) – infamous, ill-famed, with a bad reputation.
100. **tirade** (noun) – attack, verbal onslaught, rant; a long talk of criticism/accusation.
101. **personalize** (verb) - customize, individualize, make distinctive (to one's own requirements).
102. **decree** (noun) - order, command, dictum, fiat.
103. **oversight** (noun) – management, administration, supervision.
104. **appropriate** (verb) – secure, acquire, assume, wrest/claim, (something forcefully).
105. **catastrophe** (noun) – destruction, damage, disaster.
106. **repress** (verb) - suppress, quell, quash, oppress.
107. **rage** (verb) – be at its height, be uncontrollable; (of anger) reach a high degree of intensity.
108. **counter-balance** (verb) - counteract, offset, balance out, equalize, neutralize.
109. **fashion** (verb) - create, make, build/construct.
110. **ruthless** (adjective) – unforgiving, heartless, uncaring.
111. **accomplish** (verb) – achieve, complete, fulfil.
112. **do away with** (phrasal verb) – abolish, eliminate, remove.
113. **institutionalise** (verb) – set up a standard practice (in an organisation/culture).
114. **dismantle** (verb) – defeat heavily; demolish, knock down, destroy.
115. **adversely** (adverb) – unfavourably, disadvantageously, badly.
116. **vulnerable** (adjective) – relating to a weak/neglected person who is in need of special care/support.
117. **neglected** (adjective) - overlooked, ignored, unrecognized, abandoned.
118. **sage** (adjective) - wise, sensible, insightful/prudent.

\*\*\*\*\*