

O HERALDO

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Stark truth:
Our unequal
scales of justice

The aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack and the subsequent India-Pakistan military engagement may have united Indians across political picket lines, but it has also exposed the deep faultlines in society — especially when it comes to how we shield those in positions of political power. It also shows that deep-rooted prejudice can't be wished away by blowing the bugle of nationalism and patriotism.

On one side of this debate is Ali Khan Mahmudabad, a respected academic and political science professor at Ashoka University. The other is Vijay Shah, a senior BJP leader and Madhya Pradesh minister. Their stories are not just about two individuals; they are symptomatic of a growing disparity in the application of justice in India today.

Prof. Mahmudabad was arrested for a social media post in which he criticised the performative nature of patriotism, noting the "optics" of women officers, like Colonel Sofiya Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh, presenting military briefings during Operation Sindoor. He wrote that while the symbolism was powerful, real patriotism would also involve protecting the rights of mob lynching victims and those targeted by communal policies. The professor's remarks were measured, civil, and firmly within the bounds of democratic critique.

Yet, for expressing a thought that challenged the ruling dispensation's narrative, Mahmudabad was arrested by a police team reportedly 12 to 15 strong. He was charged with grave offences like endangering the sovereignty and integrity of India, promoting enmity between groups, and insulting the modesty of women — charges that legal experts and citizens have described as wildly disproportionate and politically motivated.

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Contrast this with Vijay Shah, the Madhya Pradesh minister whose remarks about Colonel Qureshi — the very officer Mahmudabad was accused of insulting — were so vitriolic and communal in tone that they triggered not just outrage, but judicial intervention. Speaking at a

public rally, Shah crudely referred to the Army colonel as a "sister of terrorists", drawing a link between her faith and the perpetrators of the Pahalgam terror attack. His language was deemed "filthy and abusive" by the Supreme Court, which refused to accept his apology and ordered the creation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the incident.

Despite this, Shah continues to enjoy freedom, government protection, and ministerial authority. His statement prompted a delayed FIR only after a high court directive, and no meaningful police action followed. The Supreme Court questioned this inertia, calling the FIR "weakly drafted" and pulling up the state government for its inaction.

It is difficult to overlook the pattern. One man calls for truth, accountability, and peace — and is jailed. The other incites religious animosity and degrades a serving officer of the Indian Army — and remains a minister in good standing. This glaring asymmetry cannot be dismissed as coincidence. It has become a feature, not a bug, in the current political climate, where dissenters are labelled as anti-national and those spewing hate speech are shielded.

Political leaders across the spectrum have spoken out. Congress's Pawan Khera called Mahmudabad's arrest a reflection of a government that fears its own people and views critique as a threat. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav highlighted the hypocrisy with a sharp observation: "Those in power are free even after speaking ill of others, and those who speak the truth are arrested." Even the Supreme Court — often cautious in matters involving high-ranking politicians — stated plainly that Shah's words had brought shame upon the nation.

Yet despite this clarity from the judiciary and condemnation from civil society, the central government has maintained a telling silence. If Shah's comments had been made by a Muslim leader about a Hindu officer, would the response have been as sluggish? If Mahmudabad's name were different, would he have been arrested so swiftly and aggressively? These are uncomfortable questions, but they must be asked if India is to remain a functioning democracy, rather than slide further into selective authoritarianism.

The BJP government has been eager to send parliamentary delegations abroad to present India as a unified, resolute democracy standing firm against terrorism. Yet domestically, it allows communal rhetoric from its own ministers to go unchecked while jailing professors for posts that advocate for justice and national introspection.

This duality — championing diversity and tolerance to the world while silencing internal dissent — weakens the moral authority of India's democratic institutions. It sends a dangerous message: that criticism of the state, even when well-meaning and fact-based, will not be tolerated, especially if it comes from minority voices. At stake is not just the future of one professor or one minister, but the integrity of Indian democracy itself.

comment



CHERYL VENAN DIAS

Integrating AI for a stress-free educational experience

The rise of AI has transformed nearly every aspect of our lives. Its ability to process vast amounts of data and extract relevant information has become a valuable asset for students. With just a few prompts, learners can generate complete essays with minimal effort. However, this convenience presents a challenge for educators, who now struggle to detect instances of AI-assisted academic dishonesty, turning the situation into a game of cat and mouse. As teachers focus on verifying the authenticity of students' submissions, critical thinking and innovation are being sidelined in the education system.

This article aims to challenge the current education model, which is overly reliant on grades and shaped by industry demands for high achievers rather than individuals with true potential. Such expectations from both academia and employers push students toward shortcuts, compromising genuine learning. Furthermore, students must navigate another hurdle—interim and final exams, which often devolve into a relentless competition. These high-stakes assessments promote rote memorisation and short-term retention, adding unnecessary stress to the learning experience. Can education truly leave a last-

Instead of rigid grading systems, education could shift toward continuous evaluation, focusing on the attainment of individual goals and competencies



ing imprint on a learner's mind? If so, how can we reshape the way students engage with learning? One approach is to rethink essay submissions. Educators could curate a set of books that students must borrow, encouraging them to cite the authors—not merely for academic accuracy but as a gesture of gratitude for their literary contributions. Each borrowed sentence should prompt a reflection from the learner, allowing them to articulate what resonated with them and how it inspired their own ideas. Through this reflective process, students can build a narrative that is uniquely their own.

Technology can still play a role—AI tools may assist in formatting citations efficiently, reducing time spent on technicalities while preserving intellectual effort. However, handwritten assignments should be prioritised over simple copy-paste submissions to foster

deeper engagement. A teacher's recommended approach for writing might look like this: select a book or set of books, highlight sentences that inspire thought, reflect on their significance, craft a personal response, and acknowledge the author through citations. Even a single-page write-up with this level of effort cultivates genuine appreciation for an author's work.

This method of assessment allows educators to evaluate students based on essential academic skills research, citation, reflection, and articulation, while also encouraging the application of real-world observations. Shifting the focus from mere grading to meaningful learning could transform education into an experience that nurtures true intellectual growth.

To foster public speaking skills among students, encourage them to share what inspired them most and their personal insights on the given topic. Speaking in front of their peers allows them to build confidence while engaging in meaningful discussions. Their classmates can then contribute by expressing their own perspectives, collaboratively shaping new ideas on the subject.

Classroom debates may naturally lead to agreements or disagreements, but with careful moderation from the teacher, students can overcome their fear of speaking while cultivating mutual respect. Establishing clear expectations for what is allowed during discussions ensures an open yet structured exchange of thoughts, promoting a smooth and productive dialogue.

Independent India has abolished many outdated practices—so why not rethink the traditional concepts of passing and failing? Instead of rigid grading systems, education could shift toward continuous evaluation, focusing on the attainment of individual goals and competencies. Schools should guide students toward achieving fundamental skills such as writing, creating, problem-solving, interpreting, and applying knowledge effectively.

Bloom's Taxonomy serves as a relevant framework, reminding educators that every objective in a lesson plan should translate into real-world applications for students. By the end of each semester, assessments could go beyond mere grades and focus on practical abilities. For instance, can a student confidently draft an official letter; a leave request, an apology, or an internship application? Can they bring new ideas to life, whether physically or theoretically? When faced with real-world problems, do they have the ability to propose solutions? Are they capable of interpreting situations or initiating meaningful discus-

sions to understand them better? During internships, how well do they apply classroom learning—whether through discussions, brainstorming, or collaboration in team dynamics?

Shifting from an exam-centric approach to one that evaluates real skills would cultivate independent thinking and genuine competence, ensuring education serves as a foundation for lifelong learning rather than a mere race for grades.

The pressure of exams can be alleviated by assessing students holistically, including their interactions with the world beyond the classroom. Instead of labelling outcomes as Pass or Fail, a more constructive approach would be to categorise them as "Attained" and "Yet to be Attained." This shift reinforces the idea that learning is an ongoing process—nothing is truly lost, and there is always an opportunity for growth in the next task.

By removing the stigma of failure, students can experience education with reduced anxiety. Administrative processes can be automated, allowing classroom interactions to become more engaging and centered on individual development rather than solely on exam performance, which should be just a small part of the overall learning experience.

However, this doesn't mean eliminating all forms of challenge—stress, when managed well, plays an essential role in helping students learn task management rather than relying on short-term memorisation. A natural fear of the unknown should exist, but it must be accompanied by the support of educators and peers, encouraging students to navigate challenges with confidence. Ultimately, the education system should foster an environment of positive reinforcement, mutual respect, and encouragement, ensuring that students grow both academically and personally.

AI-driven counselling can support stressed students by analysing their online behaviour to detect signs of distress. With the guidance of a certified counsellor, AI can offer timely interventions, providing personalised coping strategies and emotional support. This hybrid approach combines AI's efficiency with human empathy, ensuring that students receive a balanced and well-monitored response. By reducing stigma and increasing accessibility, technology-backed counselling can empower learners to manage stress proactively, fostering resilience and emotional well-being in today's demanding academic environment.

(Dr. Cheryl Venan Dias is a renowned academician, dedicated researcher, and committed environmentalist)

people's edit

THE ART OF
INSPIRED ACTION

IBONIO D' SOUZA

Man works to live and not lives to work, and thus actions incessantly flow from him as long he is alive. But, how our actions can be organised, altered or disciplined in order that they necessarily and inevitably bring about happiness all around in the community and a sense of fulfillment to our own selves? Obviously, the answer has to be that we follow the art of inspired action.

The glory of our actions is dependent upon not the environment, not where you work and how you work, but it is the intention or motive behind our actions that lends enchantment to the very work. The work is glorified, it gathers momentum, because of the ardour and sincerity, the intention, the great motive or ideal that has inspired our heart when we are at work.

Think of the beautiful sculptures, paintings or other art works in churches, temples or mosques. The sculptor or the artist here not only did the form, but his heart had a great love and reverence for the theme that he was working on. Such sculptured pieces become immortal in the world. It is no more a stone or marble chiselled by iron bits. The pieces start talking. The individual seems to have poured out his personality and beauty of heart into pieces of stone. They are not mere rock pieces, but they seem to give the immortal message of the heart of the sculptor.

What primarily matters are the kind of ideas we have in our mind. The way in which we behave in the world is altered, controlled, regulated and commanded by the type of ideas that inspire us in our actions in the world. The quality of action is improved by the ideals, which illumine and inspire the individual worker in the world outside. Thus, the nobler the ideal, the greater the shine and beauty of action, and such ideals that inspire us at all times to bring out of ourselves a better efficiency and beauty of action are called noble ideals or moral ideals.

Inspiring ideals are; the spirit of freedom, the spirit of reverence for your country, the spirit of sacrifice for the sake of society and such other virtues. Inspired by such ideals, mighty men have done great, ennobling work in the world and fruits of their actions are enjoyed by the future generations for many years. The higher the ideal that inspires an individual, the nobler is the work he does in the world.

Mahatma Gandhi was only a Barrister-at-Law. He probably would have been a successful one if he had only looked after his wife and children. But, what would have been the total turnover of his work? On the other hand, the same person, when he was inspired by the ideal of his country's freedom, was a different person, a mahatma. It was only because of the change in the moral vision of the country and of all the thinkers of the world that he brought about, and the quality-work that he turned out.

The quality of it has been higher and nobler because of the high ideals that inspired him. Even so, when we discover a goal and surrender ourselves to that goal in life we simultaneously find ourselves propelled by an unknown super energy from within.

Need to prevent type-2 diabetes in children

It must be said that Type 2 diabetes in children is a growing concern, often associated with factors like childhood obesity, genetics, and a sedentary lifestyle. In children, it may develop so gradually that there are no noticeable symptoms. Sometimes, the disorder is diagnosed during a routine check-up. The exact cause of type 2 diabetes is unknown. But family history and genetics appear to play an important role. Excessive sugar intake can contribute to increased risk of type 2 diabetes in children, particularly through weight gain and insulin resistance. High sugar consumption can also have other negative impacts on a child's health, like weight gain, tooth decay, and weakened immune systems.

The CBSE has reportedly directed affiliated schools to establish "sugar boards" in order to monitor and reduce sugar intake of children. These boards will provide essential information, including the recommended daily sugar intake, sugar content in commonly consumed junk food, cold drinks, etc. and healthier dietary alternatives.

Additionally, schools are expected to organise awareness workshops and seminars to educate students on the issue. This is a step in the right direction in order to prevent diabetes related health issues later in life. A child should be encouraged to eat healthy foods, get plenty of physical activity and maintain a healthy weight.

letterstotheeditor

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All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

In Goa, it is observed that several roadside vendors sell candies, ice-creams, beverages and various types of sweets outside schools, especially government schools. Children consume these sweets and beverages during the recess. There needs to be a total ban on the sale of candies, ice-creams and sweet beverages outside schools in the state.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Safety measures need to be put in place

It evokes a lot of sympathy and commiseration that 17 members of a family, including 8 children were killed in a massive fire accident in a building near the Charminar, Hyderabad. In fact, only last month, a major fire broke out at a hotel in central Kolkata, claiming 14 lives, with an official suspecting a short circuit to be the cause of the blaze.

One of the biggest challenges that India has been facing for a long time when it comes to safety and well-being of its people, is the scanty fire safety standards prevalent in workplaces, public buildings and at homes. Buildings must be planned, designed and constructed to ensure that fire safety measures are in place in strict accordance with National Building Code of India's guidelines which regulate the building construction activities across the country. Even though

NBC makes these measures mandatory, the majority of multi-story buildings continue to ignore and violate the safety norms. In fact, many buildings lack even basic fire safety systems, like fire extinguishers. Also, there is no statutory provision for regular verification of adherence to fire safety norms in multi-story buildings. To reduce fire accidents, First Safety Audit should be made mandatory across the country, and it must be entrusted to third-party agencies, who have the expertise in it.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Big salute to our brave hearts

I first salute the Indian Army soldiers who were very successful in demolishing the terrorist camps in Pakistan during the Sindoor operation. Soldiers laid their lives while many Indian civilians have lost their precious lives during the retaliation by the Pakistan army. For a moment, there were signs of patriotism by the political parties halting festival functions and even the extravaganza IPL, the biggest money minting tournament, was almost facing uncertainty. But the halt in Operation Sindoor immediately all seems to be normal. My only point of suggestion is why did the Goa government not cancel the Cashew festival and all

the money gone for the soldiers and civilians who lost their precious lives to show unity?

We chose to celebrate and try to show some gestures of patriotism by waving the National tri color with an event that also showcased the spirit of Cashew feni. Even the rain Gods acted by turning the second day into a water day show.

Gregory E D'Souza, Siolim

Trump wooing Arab investors

US President Donald Trump recently concluded a high-profile tour of the Gulf region, securing substantial investment commitments from Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar. These agreements, totalling over \$2 trillion will be utilised for various sectors, marking a significant shift in US foreign policy towards more transactional relationships with Middle Eastern allies.

How Trump will utilise the \$2 trillion Arab investment is anybody's guess? Perhaps, he may use them to upgrade old American infrastructure — from highways to airports — or he might use it to set up new industries or revive old ones? At current level, his slogan of 'Make America Great Again' is not gaining ground. Importantly, Trump feels that America needs investment and that Americans themselves are not in a position to invest and reinvest in their own country, though America has the

largest number of billionaires living in the country.

While these deals promise economic benefits, concerns have been raised by US lawmakers about potential national security risks, particularly regarding the transfer of advanced technologies and the possibility of indirect benefits to rival nations like China.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

Meaningless junket at the cost of taxpayer

After Modi failed to impress the world, 51 MPs forming seven teams are being sent on a junket to 33 countries to educate them about how the mighty India has vanquished Pakistan.

We thought, we were already Vishwaguru and the world was looking at Modi to solve all its problems, including but not limited to climate change, the resurgent Covid virus and even world peace, ie. getting Putin and Zelensky to agree to a ceasefire, and by the way also impressing upon Netanyahu to stop the massacre of Palestinians.

And just who is going to pay for this international jamboree? Do remember, everyone pays taxes, some pay income tax as they have income that falls under taxable bracket, 800 million others would like to pay income tax too but they economically backward and subsisting on 5 kg of free ration per month.

But everyone pays GST, enjoy people as Modi burns your hard-earned money on such brainless endeavours.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim