

SUGAR PRICES

India is the only country where government can be toppled because of the prices of sugar and opinion. Sugar is neither an essential commodity nor is it something that we should become anxious about if the prices rise. This time it's because of speculations and resultant hoarding that the prices have gone up to the level that people may be forced to cut down on consumption. Here the sugar industry has clarified that there is no shortage of sugar in the country and that the prices would decline in the coming days. The commodity market feeds on speculations, rumours and fears. However the government intervention of importing the sugar is expected to stabilise the prices and counter the artificial scarcity.

However, the fundamental question here to all Indians is can't we be patient about situations and let things cool down? Be it rushing into a train, metro or a bus, an average India shows immense impatience. Now with the mobile in hand and the eyes and mind glued to it, people, especially in the north, don't even look up while pushing and shoving others while boarding a mode of transport. The impatience also shows up while speaking to each other. The traffic-related arguments, or parking brawls are so common. In some parts of the country people want round the clock electric supply but would not like the smart meters to be installed. Others don't want a hike in any prices while the global markets remain volatile. In short people want to have the cake and eat it too. While it's a fact that food price hike pinches people, especially the poor and the middle class, sugar is not food. Health experts suggest that it's good to avoid or minimize its use to prevent non-communicable diseases. If the prices of sugar have gone up, common Indians can easily reduce its consumption to beat the market trends.

When loyalty becomes the only qualification

Nilantha Ilangamuwa

Here is where it is coming to an end, step by step. The façade is crumbling; the putrid structure is becoming visible. First, they leave. There is no grand theoretical explanation, no elaborate political doctrine, no convincing institutional account. They simply depart, citing personal reasons, political disagreements, reassignment or silence. This is how such systems often end, not with a single dramatic collapse, but with departures that gradually reveal what had been concealed by the appearance of control. President Trump's administration offers a laboratory in which loyalty can become more valuable than competence, repetition more useful than evidence, aggression more effective than explanation, and personal allegiance more important than institutional responsibility. The deeper danger is that intelligent people learn to justify the behaviour, reproduce it and eventually mistake their participation in it for political virtue. The political order begins to fracture, and their loyalty does not necessarily protect them.

Pam Bondi, former Attorney General, Tulsi Gabbard, the former spy chief, and Karoline Leavitt, the former White House press secretary, are revealing precisely because they are not identical figures. Leavitt transformed the office of White House press secretary from an institution supposed to mediate between government and journalists into something closer to a combat platform. The press secretary became an amplifier. The exchange was no longer about what the administration had done, but about how effectively the administration could defeat the person asking. A press briefing ceases to be an information mechanism when the performance of dominance becomes more important than the transmission of information. The exchange is clipped, posted, shared, praised, attacked and recycled. A hostile question becomes a thirty-second video. The answer need not survive scrutiny if the clip survives the news cycle. The reporter could be recategorised as an enemy, a partisan, a "left-wing hack". Once that transformation occurs, the factual content of the question



becomes secondary. The audience is invited to judge allegiance rather than accuracy. This is precisely the political psychology of propaganda. The public no longer asks, "Is the claim true?" It asks, "Whose side is this person on?" Plato's warning about persuasion without knowledge becomes particularly relevant here because propaganda does not require the elimination of facts. It requires only the destruction of a common procedure for deciding which facts deserve belief. New subscription service

Pam Bondi exposes a different mechanism: the transformation of institutional authority into personal loyalty. Her exceptional loyalty to Trump did not guarantee permanence. Her removal demonstrates the brutal rule of personalised government: loyalty is necessary but never sufficient. A subordinate can be indispensable on Monday and expendable on Thursday. Such systems consume loyalists because those who gain institutional authority, knowledge and independent judgement can eventually become liabilities.

The Epstein affair further reveals the collision between secrecy, expectation and political loyalty. A promise to release information creates an obligation; delay creates suspicion; incomplete disclosure creates a vacuum filled by speculation. The dismissed official becomes part of the story. Removing an official does not remove the underlying institutional crisis.

Gabbard presents the third variation. She is the subordinate whose independent judgement can become politically dangerous even when she remains formally loyal. Her reported hesitation over the justification for the Iran war and her defence of a former subordinate illustrate the narrow space available to officials who possess their own institutional credibility. Such a system needs experienced people because inexperienced loyalists are incompetent. Yet experienced people possess knowledge, networks and judgement of their own. The more seriously they exercise those qualities, the greater the possibility that they will disagree with the leader. The system consequently begins selecting not merely for loyalty but for anticipatory obedience.

Nietzsche wrote in Beyond Good and Evil, "Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies." A conviction can become immune to evidence precisely because it is experienced as moral identity. The political loyalist does not necessarily believe every statement because it is factually persuasive. Joseph Goebbels did not invent propaganda; he industrialised its relationship with the modern mass public. Stalin's system did not survive because every Soviet official was personally convinced of every proposition issued by the Kremlin. It survived because institutions were progressively organised around obedience, fear, career incentives and the destruction of

independent sources of authority. The Roman imperial system offers another variation. Under emperors such as Tiberius and Domitian, proximity to power could be extraordinarily advantageous and extraordinarily dangerous. Court politics rewarded those who understood the ruler's psychology, but the same intimacy could make a courtier vulnerable when the ruler's suspicion changed direction. Tacitus understood that imperial power corrupts not only those who command but those who adapt themselves to command.

The personalised leader does not create loyal institutions; he creates loyal relationships within institutions. An institution survives a bad minister because its procedures remain stronger than the personality occupying the office. A personalised administration survives by weakening precisely those procedures.

He claims that "the more powerful than the weaker" naturally deserves more, and that laws can become instruments devised by the weak to restrain the strong. That argument has survived because it contains a temptation that democratic societies never permanently eliminate. Power can persuade people that its own success is evidence of its righteousness. If the leader wins, defeats opponents, humiliates journalists and forces institutions to retreat, supporters can interpret every victory as proof that he is right. Failure becomes sabotage by enemies. Criticism becomes persecution. Evidence becomes propaganda. Accountability becomes betrayal. The political system then develops an extraordinary capacity to convert contradiction into confirmation.

He insists that "to do injustice is the greatest of evils, and to suffer injustice is the next greatest evil." Political systems obsessed with humiliation, victory and retaliation teach their servants to fear losing power more than becoming corrupted by it. Once retaining the leader's favour becomes the supreme political good, every compromise with truth can be rationalised as necessary. The official who knows a claim is false can repeat it. The official who knows a policy is failing can defend it. The official who sees an institution being degraded can convince herself that she is protecting democracy by remaining inside the room.

SCHOOLS ARE NOT CONTENT FACTORIES

Sakshi Sethi

A child steps onto a stage, gives a flawlessly rehearsed line, smiles at precisely the correct moment and waits while a teacher adjusts the camera. The performance is replayed because someone blinked. Then again because the background was untidy. Finally, the perfect shot is captured. Within hours, it emerges online with joyful music, polished captions and a message celebrating experiential learning. But halfway between the first take and the last reel, an uncomfortable question arises: Was the activity created for the child to learn or for the school to be seen?

Social media has surely changed how schools communicate. Parents today want glimpses of classroom life. Photographs and films may attractively document success, highlight ingenuity and give families a glimpse into situations they would otherwise miss. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with a school showing its work. The trouble occurs when presenting the work increasingly becomes the work itself. True education is rarely flashy or photogenic. It often looks quiet and plain. It shows up as a sudden, messy question that stops a class to start a new talk. It is the simple loop of reading, thinking, trying, failing and getting better. This slow work does not make



a flashy 30-second video, but a synchronised dance does. And that is where the trap begins. Most schools today face an increasingly competitive environment. Their social-media feeds now serve as quiet digital brochures. A colourful activity, an impressive celebration or a confident child speaking before a camera can communicate vibrancy far more quickly than examination results, teacher training or carefully planned classroom instruction. But what happens when visibility begins influencing educational priorities?

Teachers already hold responsibilities

that extend well beyond teaching. Between lesson preparation, grading, meetings and the pressure to capture social-media-worthy classroom pictures and videos, teachers are stretched past their breaking point. A hidden concern is what children learn from this culture. When every activity and achievement requires a photo or public display, children may start viewing participation purely as a performance and success solely as a bid for applause.

Activities which were meant to spark curiosity instead turn into staged photo opportunities. Extroverted children be-

come the visible face of the school, while introverted ones making massive academic progress remain invisible because real growth doesn't photograph well. This creates a dangerous definition of success. Schools must ask whether the constant recording strips away the authenticity of childhood. A science experiment does not become more educational because it was uploaded. A plantation drive is not more meaningful because children posed beside saplings. Kindness does not need a hashtag to become valuable. Some of the profound educational moments simply cannot and should not be captured. The goal is not to quit social media entirely, which is impractical. Instead, schools must re-establish their core priorities, ensuring that genuine education always comes before documentation.

Schools must evaluate activities by a simple standard: is it worth doing if it isn't posted online? Parents too can support this shift by looking past social-media metrics to demand deeper quality such as critical thinking, teacher support and true student growth. Because schools are not production houses, teachers are not content creators, and children are not marketing assets. Educational success outlives fleeting digital attention; its true value is measured by what remains when the cameras are turned off.

The writer is an educator and a counsellor; Views presented are personal.

When welfare schemes punish women for their family size

Swapna Majumdar

On paper, the Delhi Lakshmi Yojana, launched with great fanfare recently, is expected to benefit 1.7 million marginalised women from low-income families in the national capital region. Women between 21 to 60 will receive Rs 2,500 a month provided they meet certain edibility criteria, including the number of children. If the woman has more than two children, she automatically becomes ineligible. The reason for imposing this exclusionary clause according to Rekha Gupta, the chief minister of the BJP-led Delhi government, was because 'women are not baby-producing machines'.

But is it the woman's fault that she has more than two children? Why is it that women are always held responsible for controlling their family size when most women lack the agency, choice and bodily autonomy to decide how many children they want to have.

Yet, several government programmes to empower women include the number of children as one of main

eligibility criteria. Whether the aim is economic empowerment through cash transfer schemes or political empowerment by way of reservations of seats, these policies benefitting only women with not more than two children end up violating their reproductive, human and political rights. One of the biggest examples of this disempowerment is the two-child norm set as eligibility condition to contest local panchayat elections and followed by many states even today as a way to 'control' population. Women face negative consequences of implementation of the norm directly (as candidates) as well as indirectly (as spouse of those disqualified) in the form of desertion, forced abortions, neglect and death of female infant or female child being given up for adoption.

One of the reasons for focussing on women for population stabilisation, whether directly or indirectly, is because they are soft targets. Despite India being a signatory to the programme of action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), and committed to providing a basket of contraceptive



choices, national data shows that female sterilisation continues to overwhelmingly dominate family planning procedures in the country.

So, it is unsurprising that the national capital has shown a similar trend. In Delhi, over 97 per cent of the 14,543 sterilisation procedures carried out during 2024-25 were performed on women. Only 301 vasectomies took place in the same period, underlining

the massive gender gap in sterilisation and unwillingness of men to take responsibility to limit their family size.

But when women want to plan their families, they have no access to contraception or are not able to use it for spacing or limiting birth, thus increasing their risk of becoming pregnant. This unmet need for family planning increased to 7.3 per cent in 2023-24 from 6.1 per cent in 2019-21 (NFHS-

6). While unmet need for spacing increased to 2.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 2.0 per cent in 2019-21, unmet need for limiting or for not wanting any more children increased to 4.6 per cent from 4.1 per cent for the same period (NFHS-6).

Then, why should women, who find themselves burdened with an unwanted pregnancy, be punished?

A more serious and worrying fallout of this conditional benefit will be the increased desire for the male child. If families stand to benefit from having only two children, the prevailing gender inequalities coupled with deeply entrenched patriarchy and preference for sons is likely to sound the death knell for girls. More so if the first child is a daughter. How cash transfer schemes help to change perception and attitudes of parents towards girls is still not clear, according to a study on 15 such schemes by UNFPA.

Alarm bells have been ringing for some time now with the continuing trend of declining sex ratio at birth in Delhi. Statistics for 2024 showed a fourth straight year decline in 2024, with 920 females born per 1,000

males, down from 922 in 2023 and 929 in 2022, according to the annual report on births and deaths released by Delhi's Directorate of Economics and Statistics and the office of the Chief Registrar (Births & Deaths). Concerns have been raised by health experts linking the trend to illegal prenatal sex determination in Delhi-NCR. This fear has been compounded by the unavailability of updated data for sex ratio at birth for Delhi in NFHS-6. This is among the several key indicators removed from NFHS-6 by the Union Health Ministry along with mortality rates and anaemia prevalence.

Incidentally, Delhi has reported the country's lowest total fertility rate (TFR) at 1.2 children per woman, lower than even the national TFR of 1.9 (Sample Registration System Statistical Report 2024). Delhi has also recorded the steepest decline in general fertility rate (GFR), which measures births per 1,000 women aged 15-49.

So, the vital question remains- why link women empowerment programmes with the size of their family?