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K O V I E W

Apni Party

Finally, after more than a monthlong wait, Apni Party was launched on Sunday. And as expected, its leader Altaf Bukhari made politically correct noises, staying well short of demanding a reversal of the revocation of the Article 370 which granted J&K autonomy under India's constitution. Instead, he chose to focus on what he termed as "achievable demands", which includes statehood for J&K and domicile rights for land and government jobs. While these demands do resonate with people of J&K, a large section of population seems in no mood to let go of the semi-autonomous status enjoyed by the region under Article 370. So, it is likely that Bukhari's party may initially find it difficult to relate to people.

With top leadership of the main regional parties like National Conference and the PDP under detention, Apni Party is likely to have a free run which it can use to its advantage. Should it want, it can hold rallies and initiate public outreach programs. Ditto for separatist groups. Almost all their leadership and the activists have been jailed. They have thus struggled to even issue a call for a hartal, let alone hold protests, otherwise their regular activity.

The consequent political vacuum certainly needed filling. And it is here that Apni Party has come handy to New Delhi. Its leaders are drawn from the PDP, the NC and the Congress. Some of the leaders like Dilawar Mir, Ghulam Hassan Mir and for that matter even Usmaan Majeed even command a committed section of support in their respective constituencies. But in their new avatar, it may be a challenge for them to find a spontaneous support for their politics. Unless they earn it, the relevance of Apni Party, under the circumstances hinges on an absence of a political opposition and which centre has so far ensured by denying space to the established parties across mainstream-separatist divide.

But there is a limit to centre's role. For example, it cannot prevent the other parties from participating in the polls, which will be the real test for Apni Party. And should the other parties contest the future elections, as doesn't look unlikely, Apni Party may not find itself up to the challenge. Although, some of its leaders do enjoy a strong support base in their respective constituencies, a perceived pro-New Delhi tilt of Bukhari's party may not translate into votes. Ultimately, it depends on what kind of leadership does Bukhari demonstrate and how far the party can bring itself closer to the public sentiment. It will be a pretty uphill climb, going forward.

OTHER OPINION

A new experiment in Kashmir

Ever since the nullification of Article 370 and the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) last August, political activity in the new Union Territory (UT) has stalled, with detention of leaders and restrictions (now substantially eased) in communication and connectivity. In this backdrop, the formation of a new political party in J&K merits attention. Former PDP leader, Syed Altaf Bukhari, has set up the J&K Apni Party, with the stated goal of bringing relief to the residents of the UT, and building confidence with Delhi. In a democracy, setting up a political party is a right, and the exercise of this right in the existing vacuum in J&K, is welcome.

But the future of Apni Party will depend substantially on whether it can actually represent the views, voices, grievances and aspirations of the people of J&K. There is speculation that Mr Bukhari has Delhi's political support. This will pose, for him, a credibility crisis, for the politics of Kashmir have often revolved around taking a strong position against Delhi. This is not necessarily good — and Kashmir itself has lost a lot because of this binary. But if Apni Party is perceived as a voice of the Indian State, rather than being seen as a voice of Kashmiris, it will not succeed in winning popular support. The fact that Mr Bukhari has been allowed to set up a party — even as three former chief ministers remain in detention — adds to the perception that Delhi is playing favourites and is seeking to engineer a particular political outcome. The Centre must allow political ideas and formations to evolve organically, even as it creates an environment where all democratic leaders are free and can espouse their ideas in J&K — even those unpalatable to New Delhi.

Hindustan Times

Our 'Pursuit Of Happiness' Is Killing The Planet

We need to strike a new balance between our private pleasures and our collective survival

JAMES TRAUB

As the coronavirus continues to spread, the chances that any one of us will be placed in quarantine goes up considerably. I know that being locked away like that would drive me nuts. Two weeks subtracted from my life! Still, I'd accept the justice of my confinement because I would recognise that my liberty had come to pose a real danger to my fellow humans.

Now, let's ratchet up the sacrifice: Suppose you were required by law to turn the thermostat up to 75 in the summer, and down to 66 in the winter, in order to reduce your carbon footprint. The principle is the same: Your freedom to live as you wish turns out to jeopardise public well-being.

I, for one, would bristle; I can't stand being hot in summer. Maybe you wouldn't mind. But what if you were also told that you had to eliminate most or all of the red meat from your diet?

At some point, presumably, things will get so bad that (a future) President Ocasio-Cortez manages to ram a green-enough new deal through Congress. Then we'll adjust our thermostats and go two-thirds vegan.

What if Greta Thunberg persuades President Sanders that we need to ration jet travel? At some point you'll begin to think that the increasing globalisation of bad things like climate change and infectious diseases is threatening liberal society.

You'd have a point. At the foundation of classical liberalism is John Stuart Mill's principle that every individual must be free to speak and act as he wishes "so long as he refrains from molesting others in what concerns them, and merely acts according to his own inclination and judgement in things which concern himself."

Artificial distinction

For instance, drinking to excess, Mill said, deserves reprobation, but not prohibition; it's a self-regarding act. But there's a problem with this formulation: Even in his own time Mill was criticised for drawing a largely artificial distinction between behaviour which does and does not impinge on others. The filaments that bind people to one another are incomparably stronger today than they were in Victorian England.

What would Mill have said if England had had then, as it does now, a public health system in which everyone shared the cost of treatment for alcoholism? What would he have said about smoking if he knew about the effects of second-hand smoke? Indeed, second-hand smoke is rapidly becoming a metaphor for our time.

I first started fretting over this question a few weeks ago, when I went to a Manhattan high school where I serve as a volunteer writing tutor. I was working with a young woman who had written an essay weighing the evidence that we could reduce global warming by switching to a vegetarian or vegan diet.

She had learned that, thanks to the methane and nitrous oxide released by cows and manure, livestock is responsible for as large a fraction of CO2 emissions as the entire transportation sector (including air travel) — about a seventh. (In fact, the figure for livestock includes, among other things, the emissions caused by transporting meat and dairy products, which properly belongs under transportation.)

In order to take account of human frailty, including her own, the student advocated something called "the two-thirds vegan diet," in which you get to eat meat and dairy one meal per day. I asked which meal she'd indulge her veins in.

"Breakfast."
"Really? What about lunch and dinner?"
"I guess I'd have salads."
"I would never have the strength to do that."
I wasn't kidding. I haven't sworn off meat, even after reading the horror stories about the raising

of poultry and livestock, and learning that an animal-protein diet is bad for the planet. But maybe I should, maybe, in fact, I will be compelled to.

Am I being too alarmist? Possibly. Sweeping legislative proposals like the Green New Deal (in the US) places virtually all of the burden on utilities and industry, rather than end users like us, by imposing a price on carbon so high that these businesses will be forced to switch to renewable energy by 2050.

A swift transition

The recently passed Dutch climate change law proposes to reduce emissions by half within a decade through a large increase in offshore wind production, a swift transition to electric cars and technical upgrades to electricity grids. But it's unlikely the world will be able to get to net-zero without serious changes in personal behaviour.

The Green New Deal also mandates "sustainable farming," which usually includes reductions in methane emissions from livestock, while the Dutch law takes aim at ham through limits to pork production.

The other obvious objection to my scenario would be, in effect, so what? The First Amendment

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doesn't protect your right to eat steak; nothing in the Bill of Rights prohibits a quarantine. Whatever discomfort or vexation arises from these restrictions should hardly be classed as a violation of liberty.

Yet that's not quite right. Very few of us care so much about our rights of speech or conscience to test their constitutional boundaries. There's a reason people got so angry when Mayor Michel Bloomberg tried to ban the sale of large-size soft drinks; they were defending a right they actually cared about.

Indeed, Donald Trump is illiberal in every respect save for his single-minded commitment to private pleasures.

Another great 19th-century liberal, Benjamin Constant, put the matter squarely. As a young man, Constant had watched the French Revolution, and then the Terror, unfold from the safety of Switzerland, and concluded that the most dangerous people are fanatics who tell the rest of us how to live; totalitarians, as we would learn to call them in the 20th century.

In a brilliant, now largely forgotten, lecture delivered in 1819, Constant wrote that the democrats of Greece and Rome, like the revolutionaries of his own day, "admitted as compatible with this collective freedom the complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the community." By contrast, Constant wrote, "the aim of the moderns is the enjoyment of security in private pleasures, and they call liberty the guarantees accorded by institutions to those pleasures."

Liberal individualism

Constant wasn't thinking of Marie Antoinette's right to play at shepherdess while her subjects starved, but the right to open a shop and build yourself a home rather than be drafted into Napoleon's army spreading republicanism across the face of Europe. We moderns build institutions, and establish tacit norms, to guarantee the security of such private pleasures. That's liberal individualism.

But what do we do once we see that some of those choices threaten the health and lives of others? We will have to strike a new equilibrium between what society has the right to demand of us

and what we have a right to retain for ourselves.

But we've done that before. To take the most obvious example, President Franklin D. Roosevelt curbed the excesses of the marketplace in order to nurse a devastated economy back to health, thereby incurring the wrath of much of the business community.

F.D.R. was a liberal — that was the word he used to describe himself — but he was willing to restrict some liberties in order to advance larger ones. A liberal, as he once put it, was prepared to use government to ensure the ordinary citizen "the right to his own economic and political life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Liberal societies, in short, have always faced the problem of second-hand smoke, but what once was exceptional has now become endemic. One man's meat is another man's poison, as F.D.R. put it, more prescient than he knew. In the cataclysm of the Depression, the president was able to summon up the sense of collective purpose needed to embark on large-scale change.

Our own crisis, of course, still appears to many far too remote for any such call to sacrifice. To make matters worse, we've elected as president

a libertine devoted not to fostering a spirit of collective purpose, but to his right to do anything he pleases. Indeed, Donald Trump is illiberal in every respect save for his single-minded commitment to private pleasures.

Green New Deal

Can we forge a new equilibrium before Miami is under water? I would like to think we'll do so as part of a larger process of democratic deliberation. The Green New Deal envisions a 10-year phase of "transparent and inclusive consultation," which sounds just about right.

I note, however, that the authors seem more committed to consulting with "vulnerable communities" and "worker cooperatives" (I didn't know we had that many) than with recalcitrant carnivores, or for that matter with energy companies. That does not put one in mind of F.D.R.

The Dutch can reach consensus on painful social questions because they've spent the last thousand years working cooperatively to build dykes; the climate accord adopted last year came after a full year of discussion among representatives of all interest groups.

That's not how American democracy works, and especially so in recent years. We allow those interest groups to wage a pitched battle using all the money and influence they can muster against one another.

Legislation emerges only after a war of attrition. That's a very self-defeating way of doing business when all parties must be called on to sacrifice. At some point, presumably, things will get so bad that President Ocasio-Cortez manages to ram a green-enough new deal through Congress. Then we'll adjust our thermostats and go two-thirds vegan the same way we got used to the chaos and tedium of airport security check-ins: We'll have no choice.

Or just maybe we'll rise to the occasion: With the flood upon us, we, too, will learn how to build dykes together.

— James Traub is the author of "What Was Liberalism: The Past, Present and Promise of A Noble Idea."

We Need to do Something About the Rising Road Accidents

SYED MOHSIN ATTIQ

The messy state of affairs on part of the traffic police is a serious cause for concern. They have miserably failed to implement the fundamental traffic rules & regulations. Corruption has shaken the foundations of this vital department. Violators are let off easy for some money.

The rise in road accidents is claiming precious human lives everyday. With each passing day, new accident reports emerge. It is a multi-faceted problem. From officials to ordinary citizens, we're all responsible. The cosmetic interventions by the state traffic department are far from satisfactory and impatience on our part leads to many traffic violations.

There are more vehicles on our roads everyday. Successive state governments have miserably failed to evolve a comprehensive strategy. Authorities have not been able to lay out a proper plan for robust road connectivity within the city to meet this growth. The over-dependence on age old road networks has resulted in unavoidable traffic jams. The over-crowded roads are the fundamental reason of rising road accidents.

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Driving licenses are sold in every RTO office. The department has become a hub for corruption. The driving test is designed to only test an individual's ability to move around corners. They do not test a drivers comprehension for the rules of traffic. The unchecked rash

driving of individuals is a dominant factor in these rising road accidents. These individuals have zero regards for their lives as well as others.

We need to change and it is also the responsibility of the state apparatus to fix this problem. The traffic department should not wait for a divine intervention in this regard. It is better late than never.