

Topic 1: Heavy-handed order: on contempt law

The contempt law must not be used or seen to be used, to stifle dissenting views

The Meghalaya High Court's order finding the Editor and Publisher of Shillong Times guilty of contempt, and asking them to "sit in a corner" till the rising of the court and imposing a fine of ₹2 lakh each, is a heavy-handed response to comments in the newspaper on the court's earlier orders. What makes the order even more unfortunate is the explicit threat to ban the newspaper and jail them if they fail to pay the fine. While courts are indeed empowered to decide whether a publication scandalised or tended to scandalise the judiciary or interfered with the administration of justice, there is no legal provision for an outright ban on it. The origin of these contempt proceedings appears to be the State government's unilateral decision to withdraw certain facilities to retired judges without consulting the court administration. After the matter was not resolved on the administrative side for two months, the court initiated suo motu proceedings and issued some directions. It was because of a news item, accompanied by a commentary on the court's directions, that the contemnors had incurred the court's displeasure.

The offending comments appeared to imply that the directions regarding extending facilities, including protocol services and domestic help, and reimbursing communication bills up to ₹10,000 a month and a mobile phone worth ₹80,000, to retired judges amounted to "judges judging for themselves". It is a moot question whether the court ought to have taken umbrage at this remark or ignored it. It would serve the cause of preserving the dignity of the higher judiciary if overzealous comments made by activists or journalists were ignored. In 1999, the Supreme Court had brushed aside some adverse remarks by activists by saying, "the court's shoulders are broad enough to shrug off their comments." However, in the case of Patricia Mukhim, the Editor of Shillong Times, the court has made sweeping remarks that the newspaper had always attacked individuals and institutions, had published propaganda calling for bandhs and "was always working against judges and the judicial system". The defence argued the court should frame specific charges before convicting them for contempt. However, the matter was tried summarily. While it is open to the court to try a case of contempt in a summary manner, the use of personalised views of the publication's past record to hand down the verdict puts a question mark over the decision-making process. While there may be a need to curb tendentious criticism of the judiciary and self-serving comments on ongoing proceedings in mainstream and social media, there is a compelling case to use the contempt law sparingly, and avoid the impression that it is being used to stifle free speech or dissent. Lenience, not anger, ought to be the primary response of a detached judiciary.

WORD		MEANING	SYNONYMS
Contempt	Noun	He feeling that a person or a thing is worthless or beneath consideration	Scorn, Disdain, Disrespect, Deprecation,
Stifle	Verb	Prevent or constrain	Constrain, Hinder, Hamper, Impede, Hold Back

Dissenting	Adjective	Holding or expressing opinions that are at variance with those commonly or officially held.	
Guilty	Adjective	Culpable of or responsible for a specified wrongdoing	Culpable, To Blame, Blameworthy, Blameable
Imposing	Adjective	Grand and impressive in appearance.	Impressive, Striking, Arresting, Eye-Catching, Dramatic
Unfortunate	Adjective	Having or marked by bad fortune; unlucky.	Unlucky, Hapless, Out Of Luck, Down On One's Luck
Explicit	Adjective	Stated clearly and in detail, leaving no room for confusion or doubt	Clear, Direct, Plain, Obvious, Straightforward, Clear-Cut
Threat	Noun	A statement of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done.	Threatening Remark, Warning, Ultimatum, Intimidating Remark
Indeed	Adverb	Used to emphasize a statement or response confirming something already suggested	As Expected, To Be Sure, In Fact, In Point Of Fact, Really,
Empower	Verb	Give (someone) the authority or power to do something	Authorize, License, Entitle, Permit, Allow, Sanction,
Scandalise	Verb	Shock or horrify (someone) by a real or imagined violation of propriety or morality.	Shock, Appal, Outrage, Horrify, Disgust, Revolt
Tend	Verb	Regularly or frequently behave in a particular way or have a certain characteristic.	Be Inclined, Be Apt, Be Disposed, Be Prone, Be Liable,
Interfere	Verb	Intervene in a situation without invitation or necessity	Meddlesome, Meddling, Intrusive, Intruding, Prying,
Outright	Adverb	Wholly and completely	Completely, Entirely, Wholly, Fully, Totally, Categorically,
Unilateral	Adjective	An action or decision performed by or affecting only one person, group, or country involved in a situation, without the agreement of another or the others.	
Suo motu		On its own motion	
Displeasure	Noun	A feeling of annoyance or disapproval.	Annoyance, Irritation, Crossness, Infuriation, Anger
Offending	Adjective	Causing problems or displeasure	
Imply	Verb	Indicate the truth or existence of (something) by suggestion rather than explicit reference.	Insinuate, Suggest, Hint, Intimate, Implicate,
Moot	Adjective	Subject to debate, dispute, or uncertainty	Debatable, Open To Debate, Open To Discussion, Arguable, Questionable
Umbrage	Noun	Offence or annoyance.	Take Offence, Be Offended, Take Exception, Bridle,

Preserve	Verb	Maintain (something) in its original or existing state.	Conserve, Protect, Maintain, Care For, Take Care Of,
Dignity	Noun	A sense of pride in oneself; self-respect	Self-Esteem, Self-Worth, Self-Respect, Pride, Morale
Overzealous	Adjective	Too zealous in one's attitude or behaviour	Extreme, Fanatical, Over-Enthusiastic, Extremist, Violent,
Brushed	Adjective	Having a soft raised nap	
Adverse	Adjective	Preventing success or development; harmful; unfavourable	Unfavourable, Disadvantageous, Inauspicious,
Shrug	Verb	Raise (one's shoulders) slightly and momentarily to express doubt, ignorance, or indifference.	
Sweeping	Adjective	Extending or performed in a long, continuous curve	Broad, Extensive, Expansive, Vast, Spacious, Roomy
Propaganda	Noun	Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view.	Information, Promotion, Advertising,
Convict	Verb	Declare (someone) to be guilty of a criminal offence by the verdict of a jury or the decision of a judge in a court of law.	Declare Guilty, Find Guilty, Pronounce Guilty
Summarily	Adverb	In a summary manner; without the customary formalities.	Immediately, Instantly, Right Away, Right Off, Forthwith, Promptly
Curb	Noun	A check or restraint on something.	Restraint, Restriction, Check, Brake, Rein, Control
Tendentious	Adjective	Expressing or intending to promote a particular cause or point of view, especially a controversial one	Contentious, Disputed, Contended, At Issue, Moot,
Criticism	Noun	The expression of disapproval of someone or something on the basis of perceived faults or mistakes.	Censure, Reproval, Condemnation, Denunciation,
Compelling	Adjective	Evoking interest, attention, or admiration in a powerfully irresistible way.	Enthralling, Captivating, Gripping, Engrossing,
Sparingly	Adverb	In a restricted or infrequent manner; in small quantities	
Impression	Noun	An idea, feeling, or opinion about something or someone, especially one formed without conscious thought or on the basis of little evidence	Feeling, Sense, Fancy, Suspicion, Sneaking Suspicion
Dissent	Noun	The holding or expression of opinions at variance with those	Disagreement, Lack Of Agreement, Difference Of Opinion

		commonly or officially held.	
Lenience	NOUN	The fact or quality of being more merciful or tolerant than expected; clemency	
Detached	Adjective	Separate or disconnected	Unfastened, Disconnected, Disengaged, Parted,

Topic 2: In slow mode: on manufacturing and inflation data

Manufacturing, inflation data give monetary policy makers room for an interest rate cut

Manufacturing activity in the country continues to remain becalmed. The latest Index of Industrial Production data show that output across the broad sector expanded 1.3% in January, a clear loss of momentum from the 3% pace in December and a drastic slowdown from the 8.7% growth seen in January 2018. Overall, industrial output growth slumped to 1.7%, from 2.6% in December, and 7.5% a year earlier, as production in 12 of the 23 industry groups that comprise the manufacturing sector shrank from a year earlier. These are quick estimates that are likely to be revised. But the fact that key job-creating industries, including textiles, leather and related products, pharmaceuticals, rubber and plastic products, and motor vehicles, reported contractions hardly bodes well for the real economy. A look at the use-based classification of industries also gives little cause for cheer. Capital goods, a closely watched proxy for business spending plans, contracted 3.2%, a telling contrast with the 12.4% expansion posted 12 months earlier. A sustained revival on this vital front may still be some time away. A recent survey by IHS Markit of business activity expectations, conducted over two weeks in the latter half of February, shows that Indian businesses plan to curb outlays on hiring and capital spending, with sentiment on capex at a one-year low. And growth in consumer durables output was an anaemic 1.8% (7.6% in January 2018), another clear sign that spending on consumption of non-essentials remains in search of favourable winds.

If the IIP poses cause for concern, retail inflation data hardly provide much reassurance. While price gains measured by the Consumer Price Index accelerated to a four-month high of 2.57% in February, it is the persistent deflationary trend in the prices of some farm items that is deeply disquieting, reflecting as it does a collapse in pricing power in the agrarian heartland. Vegetables, fruits and pulses and products all posted negative rates of inflation from a year earlier, of -7.69%, -4.62% and -3.82% respectively. While urban consumers may cheer the increased affordability of vegetables and fruits, rural demand for manufactured goods will remain depressed unless there is a meaningful turnaround in the farm sector's economic fortunes. Looking ahead, with Saudi Arabia committed to deepening its production cuts in order to keep crude oil prices well-supported, it appears unlikely that India's fuel and energy costs will stay soft for much longer. And with political parties sure to open the spending spigot in a bid to woo voters, inflationary impulses will quicken. For now, though, with growth slowing and inflation still comfortably within the Reserve Bank's 2%-6% target range, monetary policy

makers would feel justified in pressing ahead with one more interest rate cut at their meeting next month.

WORD		MEANING	SYNONYMS
Inflation	Noun	The action of inflating something or the condition of being inflated	Exaggeration, Overemphasis, Magnification, Amplification,
Monetary	Adjective	Relating to money or currency.	Financial, Fiscal, Pecuniary, Money, Cash
Becalmed	Adjective	unable to move	
Momentum	Noun	The impetus gained by a moving object	Speed, Pace, Rate, Tempo, Impetus
Drastic	Adjective	Likely to have a strong or far-reaching effect; radical and extreme.	Extreme, Serious, Forceful, Desperate, Dire, Radical,
Slumped	Verb	Sit, lean, or fall heavily and limply.	Sit Heavily, Flop, Flump, Collapse,
Comprise	Verb	Consist of; be made up of.	Consist Of, Be Made Up Of, Be Composed Of, Contain,
Shrink	Verb	Become or make smaller in size or amount	Get Smaller, Become Smaller, Grow Smaller, Contract
Contractions	Noun	The process of becoming smaller	Shrinking, Reduction In Size, Shrinkage
Bode	Verb	Be a portent of a particular outcome.	
Proxy	Noun	The authority to represent someone else, especially in voting.	Deputy, Representative, Substitute, Delegate, Agent,
Sustained	Adjective	Continuing for an extended period or without interruption	
Revival	Noun	An improvement in the condition, strength, or fortunes of someone or something	Improvement, Rallying, Picking Up, Betterment, Amelioration,
Vital	Adjective	Absolutely necessary; essential.	Essential, Indispensable, Crucial, Requisite,
Curb	Noun	A check or restraint on something.	Restraint, Restriction, Check, Brake, Rein, Control,
Outlay	Noun	An amount of money spent on something.	Expenditure, Expenses, Spending, Outgoings,
Anaemic	Adjective	Lacking in colour, spirit, or vitality	Feeble, Weak, Insipid, Pallid, Pale
Reassurance	Noun	The action of removing someone's doubts or fears.	Comfort, Solace
Persistent	Adjective	Continuing to exist or occur over a prolonged period	Continuing, Constant, Continual, Continuous
Deflationary	Adjective	Characterized by or tending to cause economic deflation	

Disquieting	Adjective	Inducing feelings of anxiety or worry	Appalling, Horrifying, Horrific, Dreadful, ,
Collapse	Verb	(of a structure) suddenly fall down or give way	Cave In, Fall In, Subside
Agrarian	Adjective	Relating to cultivated land or the cultivation of land	Agricultural, Rural, Countryside, Farming, Rustic,
Heartland	Noun	The central or most important part of a country, area, or field of activity.	
Affordability	Noun	Bility to be afforded; inexpensiveness.	
Spigot	Noun	A small peg or plug, especially for insertion into the vent of a cask.	Stopper, Stop, Plug, Bung
Woo	Verb	Seek the favour, support, or custom of.	Try To Attract, Try To Cultivate, Chase, Pursue
Impulses	Noun	A sudden strong and unreflective urge or desire to act.	Urge, Instinct, Drive, Compulsion

