

perspective

the buzz

The New York Times



1 In Bangalore, where hundreds of such minor road accidents occur daily, only a tiny fraction of cases gets reported to the police. The others are reconciled by what some refer to as the Court of Instant Traffic Justice, where a customary crowd gathers out of nowhere and arguments could turn ugly, even devolve into fisticuffs. If an accident involves two vehicles of unequal size or value, the onlookers invariably side with the driver of the smaller or less sumptuous vehicle, the seeming underdog.

2 theguardian

In the early 2000s, pharmaceutical companies were high on activists' hit lists, prompted by Big Pharma's ill-advised attempt to sue the South African government for patent infringement on HIV drugs; an attempt to deal with the country's epidemic by allowing cheaper, generic copies to be sold.

3 DAWN

Pakistan had braced itself for a 'bloody' election. But the carnage that is unfolding ahead of polls in Karachi, Quetta and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is far worse than anyone could have prepared for. ANP, MQM and PPP candidates are being mercilessly targeted by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

big picture

A CLOSE LOOK AT ISSUES THAT MATTER

IT BELONGS TO EVERYONE



■ The moustache can hopefully serve as a reminder of the values what MARD initiative stands for

HT PHOTO

comment

No checks

A routine airport check on a UP minister in the US has sent his state government into a tizzy

Utter Pradesh's urban development minister Azam Khan has either a very heightened sense of self-importance or is suffering from some sort of delusional incapacity. What else explains his deduction that a very short detention at Boston's Logan International Airport late last week was a conspiracy hatched by external affairs minister Salman Khurshid to defame him outside India? The detention — which according to some media reports was for about 10 minutes — seems to really have set a cat among the pigeons in the UP government. Reacting to it UP chief minister Akhilesh Yadav cancelled his talk at Harvard University and also chose to skip a reception hosted by the Indian consul general at New York. A routine check is now being sought to be made into an international incident. Anyone who has travelled to the US, Europe or Israel will testify to often intrusive security checks. But, on the other hand, every country has the right to put in place its own security systems and most passengers may grumble but do accept that this is for the safety of everyone.

Khan's charge that he was singled out because he is a Muslim is really over the top. It is highly unlikely that the US security was lying in wait for Khan in order to humiliate him. The UP minister is not the first person to be 'humiliated' by the US authorities. Actor Shah Rukh Khan and former Union minister George Fernandes were also subjected to such security checks. Most notably, former president APJ Abdul Kalam was frisked twice, once in 2008 and then in 2011.

Given that the Azam Khan 'incident' comes a few days after the Boston bombings, it is entirely possible that the airport security officials were doubly cautious. Many of our netas seem to be allergic to being treated on a par with ordinary people, given that they are used to such security checks. Most notably, former president APJ Abdul Kalam was frisked twice, once in 2008 and then in 2011.

If such checks are such a nuisance to Mr Khan, all we can say is stay at home. This is infinitely preferable to going abroad and creating such a shindig which really does no credit to him and gives the impression that Indian egos are so fragile as to be hurt by a common and garden security check.

CHANGE Boys and men of our nation should learn that while respect is a thing to be earned, dignity is something we should give everyone

Farhan Akhtar

The boys and men of our nation should learn that while respect is a thing to be earned, dignity is something we should give everyone, says Farhan Akhtar. It might be strange to find me, whose primary job is that of entertaining people, now involved in a story that has



■ Farhan Akhtar is a film personality and a part of the initiative MARD

WHAT DOES THE CAMPAIGN STANDS FOR



- Translation of the word man, mard implies a man who stands for what is right
- Claims that change in society can start only when by each individual making it at home
- It says stalking should be considered a serious problem
- By asking men to support the initiative, it isn't just asking them to respect women, but to change the way they think about them
- It also says that to treat all with equal dignity reflects more who you are and how much respect you deserve

so violent a premise. A story that anyone, and indeed everyone, should consider unacceptable. As I read and watched the continuing news of brutal rape and abuse in our newspapers and on our televisions, I thought it necessary to do something. The fact that a hero can have many faces is a lesson that writing characters has taught me. He could be your father, a member of your neighbourhood club or she could be the woman in your office. I am of the belief that one has the power to influence society through even the smallest of actions and the largest change in society can possibly start by each individual making a small change at home.

So when you see the cricketer great Sunil Gavaskar on your TV screen, sporting the curled moustache, speaking about a need for change in the idea of manhood, he is setting an example. Through history there have been such examples, men who have believed that they and women ought to stand shoulder to shoulder, equal to one another. I found that apart from the IPL, cricketers were more than willing to join that league of extraordinary gentlemen. Adam Gilchrist wasn't just heartfelt in what he said to us and on television; he followed up his involvement with our campaign, Men Against Rape and Discrimination (MARD), with admirable and concerted effort. He seemed to share the concern and horror that

had led photographer Atul Kasbekar and me to want to re-introduce the parameters of what it means to call yourself a man.

When trying to arrive at a word that would best define the parameters of a new definition, we felt that the word mard fit best. A literal translation of the word 'man' into Hindi would be purush. Mard implies a man who stands for what is right. We realised our complete logo block can only be viewed in select locations and social media but the long, thick, twirled moustache, which is so common across India, can be viewed by people everywhere. That moustache, we hope, can now also serve as a reminder of the values our MARD initiative stands for.

The question of what is acceptable sexuality often comes up in debates about films and their ethics. While certain representations of gender and sexuality in today's films is undoubtedly questionable, neither the media nor its artists would like to arrive in a culture which actively promotes censorship or bans. Only through our own efforts can we set a higher standard, can we expect society to follow. As personalities with influence, it should be our responsibility to wisely choose what to and what not to make. But while vulgarity in cinema should be condemned, we must also realise that cinema, which is also an industry, can end up making

bad products. It is time the audience also remembered that it has the power to reject. If any piece of filmmaking is considered to be crude, we need to ask — how then did it end up doing so well?

In films such as Dil Chahta Hai and Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara that I have either directed or acted in, the effort was to promote gender interaction that would be healthy for our youth. While desire for a member of the opposite sex and flirtation is natural behaviour; there is no reason that such actions cannot be imbued with dignity. Item songs, by very virtue of the fact they are an 'item' in a film, are instances that would make you expect exaggerated representations of sexuality. What I find even more disconcerting is the manner in which some heroes go about romancing their love interests. During many a wooing process, you find the woman insisting that she be left alone, but somehow the man remains physically present and the imposition on her space can, at times, cross levels of decency.

Stalking should be considered a serious problem. The treatment of romance in film has always had the ability to seep into a culture's subconscious, and we should ensure that we consider the implications of its representations. Since we always derive our points of reference more from the popular media of our times than from speaking with our parents, it would be good if instances of cinematic love promoted a culture of dignity in the wooing process. These little changes could definitely make the youth think progressively.

Our campaign MARD hopes to have taken a step towards that goal. By asking men to support the initiative, we aren't just asking them to respect women, we are asking them to change the way they think about them. You can argue that respect should only be given when the other person deserves it, but to treat all with equal dignity reflects more who you are and how much respect you deserve. In conclusion, it is our collective responsibility to make society healthier and safer. So please do not wait for someone else to come along and do it. Take the initiative. You will be an inspiration for someone else to follow.



■ School kids during an Autism Awareness Walk 2013 at India Gate

HT PHOTO

How much do you care to be autism-aware?

■ Kimberley Fernandes

At three years, Sparsh Gupta* would cry a great deal and was often frustrated. Being fully non-verbal by 38 months, made his parents contact his paediatrician with a heavy heart. Though he presented symptoms as early as 19 months, it was during a trip to Dr Rastogi's* clinic that Sparsh was diagnosed with autism.

His parents, Kabir* and Seema* felt helpless — questions like "What could have been done to 'prevent' this 'problem'?", "Why Sparsh?", "Will he be able to live a 'normal' life?", "What about our unborn child — will s/he be autistic too?", and more kept mushrooming.

Often, we are faced with questions like "What could have been done? What should be done?" But there aren't enough solutions, or "right" answers. Like social stigma, the root cause of there not being enough solutions, is the lack of awareness. A few weeks ago, people celebrated Autism Awareness Day on April 2. But as always, families like the Gupta's and others debated whether "awareness" was the right terminology, and if "acceptance" or "equality" was apt. To them, problems that parents of "normal" children face, (my child is 4 and still has to wear a diaper to sleep; my daughter stutters while talking, etc.), are minuscule.

As for consciousness, to people like you and I (people who know an autistic person), the world may appear to be swamped by autism recognition - this may be due to us specifically looking for that news. For a typical person who tunes in to the evening news daily and clings to Google News every now and then, however, s/he is probably not as aware. The types of autism stories that make the mainstream media usually comprise the following:

- "Feel good" and inspiring stories about "regular" people displaying an act of kindness towards autistic people
- Autistic children doing extraordinary things
- Theories concerning autism

Reading 4-5 such stories every month doesn't make one autism-aware, if I may say so. Dedicating a day to autism may force mainstream media to cover more such stories; slowly, but surely, more people will become aware of the problems that families of autistic kids (and autistic kids themselves) face, and the latter won't be asked questions like "How do you live like that? Isn't it hard to deal with your child's fits of rages?"; because people would be aware of how things are done, what can be done, how they can help.

*All names used are fictitious