

Modern Pains

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

WHILE cracking my spine as casually as a game of 'bursting the bubble wrap', my physiotherapist tells me that the future looks really bright for members of his profession.

Intrigued, I ask why. "Oh, because nobody looks up anymore, everyone is busy looking down into their cell phones," he says wryly, "so the more people use their mobile phones the more neck problems they will have and who do you think they will go to? Us, of course!" He grins and tells me to do my neck exercises – a series of rather unflattering moves involving bringing my chin towards my chest, exaggerating my (ahem, 'slight') double chin till I resemble an oversized turkey. He even has the audacity to say 'very good' at the end of it, completely oblivious of my mortification. This bizarre exercise he expects me to do at least five to six times daily – even while at work where our glass cubicles make sure that one's every move is visible from multiple angles. Yippee yay, I think to myself but also cannot help but think of the ominous message in his remarks.

Yes, technology is making everything faster, more accessible, more efficient, more connected. But it is also killing our backs and necks. If you think of the hours people, especially youngsters, spend bent over their cell phones or glued to their laptops, desktops, i-Pads and other seductive gadgets, and match this with what my rather blunt physiotherapist says, you know that there is trouble ahead. In 2008, Dr Dean Fisherman, an American chiropractic physician coined the term

'text neck', after he discovered why a 17-year-old patient was having severe neck and shoulder pain. It was because he was constantly looking down into his phone which immediately caused his neck muscles to strain. According to the docs, the more you bend your head the heavier your head becomes – it can be as heavy as a four-year-old being balanced on your delicate neck. But it's not just our kids who are ruining their spinal cords – we are doing pretty well in the business of back breaking too. Think of the number of times you look down when your bestie sends a highly inappropriate joke on Viber during a meeting, or when you are stuck in traffic and go about checking emails, FB updates, playing Candy Crush or catching up on the news. It may mean at least one hour of non-stop bending of the neck.

The recent Pokemon Go craze that seems to be sweeping the world may result in millions of necks bent for hours on end, resulting in millions of neck problems and millions for all the physios who will be busy fixing them.

But why blame only the smart phones? Most professionals spend hours on end at their desktops, forgetting the mandatory 'getting up every thirty minutes' rule and ending up with lower back pain, Carpel Tunnel syndrome, shoulder and neck stiffness, not to mention the complimentary headache to go with all that. And then what do we do when we go home? Open the laptop to watch the latest jaw dropping remark of the Great Donald or rush to check out some bizarre cat video someone posted on Facebook which you kind of saw a little bit on your way home while tilting your head 45 degrees to look at your smartphone.

The misery of continuous pain is of course inevitable. Not only will you feel



CARTOON: MARK PARISI

like you are playing some morbid, masochistic game of 'figure out the spot which has no pain' (very, very difficult) but you will also become a pain to others. Constant pain makes you crotchety, a bit of a killjoy, any kind of social engagement seems like an ordeal and work involving sitting at the

computer, tilting your head to read, an everyday drudgery, all of which will be reflected on the grouchy face your co-workers will have to put up with. It will also be risky for anyone to ask 'So how are you?', as it may open up the floodgates of self pity as you give a list of all the types of aches you have in

each part of your body. If any of this sounds familiar to you, do not despair. There may not be any permanent solution to your problems until you throw away your mobile phone or quit your job but there are ways you can at least keep the whining to a manageable level. Physiotherapists, who are nothing short of modern day angels, bless their souls, will give you tips that are boring but could actually significantly make you a more tolerable human being, even to yourself.

Here are some of the ones my knight in shining armour has given me: create resistance by pushing your head towards your hand on all four sides of the head for several times (try to do this without that frightening grimace that makes you look like a psychopath); do the 'Turkey move' explained before; cross your fingers and stretch in front like a cat and do the same at the back to stretch the shoulders; sit upright and make sure your body is at a ninety degree angle, elbows straight and supported, head directly looking at the screen; get up every twenty minutes and walk around – make excuses to pester co-workers if you must; look down at your device without bending your neck.

Of course, many of you will go to YouTube to see how this looks unless you already have. And I can add my two cents on how not to let technology ruin your health – try to disassociate with it every now and then. Look at the sky or at the street scenes when you're marooned inside a gridlock. And you young people out there, don't text your buddy sitting right next to you. Try some real face to face talking. It's pretty cool.

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Swing states and the US presidential election

SAHID HOSSAIN

EVEN after highly controversial and sometimes unconstitutional and, speaking generally, unpalatable statements by the Republican nominee Donald Trump, and continuous internal and world-wide condemnation for quite some time, there is still almost a consensus amongst the poll analysts that the US Presidential Election 2016 will be a contest to the end, with both sides spending considerable time and money in almost all the 11 swing states.

It is more or less true that the endless election campaigns – including televised presidential debates, one vice-presidential debate and many TV advertisements – have registered immensely on the race. But all available signs and indications suggest that it will take almost hand to hand political combat to make even small gains by November 8, the Election Day. That means that the two sides – Democrats and Republicans – are poised for fierce fights, especially in all the swing states.

Today, roughly two-thirds of the states are written off as the province of one party or the other before the first primary votes are even cast. The reason is simple: 33 states have voted for the same party in the past five presidential elections and 40 of the 50 states have voted for the same party since 2000. As such, it is quite difficult at this stage to say which states will really decide who amongst Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump will become the next US president.

One can reasonably argue that US presidents are determined by the Electoral College. Candidates need 270 of the 538 electoral votes to win. Most states show a strong preference for one party or the other from election to election. Those that don't are known as swing states, battleground states or purple states.

That is because the president is selected via a quirky mechanism called the Electoral College, created by the nation's founders as a compromise between those who favoured a direct popular vote and those who wanted lawmakers to pick the president. Every state in the US is assigned as many electoral college votes as it has members of Congress, a formula that amplifies the importance of small states.

The electoral votes of many states – including Democratic California and Republican Texas – can be taken for granted. As such, Florida, Ohio and North Carolina favour both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

The winner-take-all system caused the Electoral College to choose presidents who did not win the overall vote in 1876, 1888 and 2000, when Republican George W. Bush beat Democrat Al Gore after a week-long recount.

POLITICO has identified 11 states where the 2016 election could be won or lost – Colorado,

recent and past electoral history.

Together, the 11 battleground states will deliver 146 electoral votes – more than half of the electoral votes necessary to win the presidency. The list includes the bellwether behemoths of Ohio and Florida; the fast-growing Mountain West states of Nevada and Colorado; increasingly diverse North Carolina and Virginia, both altered by Hispanic population growth; and slower growing Iowa, New Hampshire and Wisconsin. According to another report, Michigan and Pennsylvania, neither of which has voted for a



PHOTO: AFP

Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Another feature that is important today is the battleground states polling average, based on the most recent public polls from each of the 11 states and weighed by each state's representation in the Electoral College. The states were selected after weighing a variety of factors including polling, demography, voter registration, early advertisement spending, campaign staffing, and

Republican for President since 1988, have also been included largely because of Donald Trump. If there is a path to victory for the GOP nominee, it will likely go through these Rust Belt manufacturing giants, where his message on trade and economy could take hold.

As a result, both the candidates and their campaign strategists have already taken up several attractive programmes designed to draw the attention and sympathy of the voters of swing states, who could practically determine the fate of

the presidential race. Following the outcome of the televised debates, the campaign strategists of both contenders have started reassessing their respective position, particularly in the swing states, for framing their promotional content and other campaign materials for those areas.

There are a good number of affluent undecided voters in other states and big cities as well. Eyeing them, particularly keeping in mind the November 8 presidential race, the Hillary campaign has recently started emphasising on business friendly stances, such as opposition to runaway deficits, although as a politician she previously consistently backed expansion deals as part of an effort to court the union voters. The Republicans face similar challenges, especially when appeals to its socially conservative base become too strident.

On the other hand, the campaign advisers of Republican candidate Donald Trump have, of late, started counting on economic growth to hold more socially liberal and affluent voters in line. His campaign strategists have been, however, trying from the very beginning to exploit the Democrat nominee's balancing act to press its charge that Hillary Clinton flip flops on her views, depending on the political circumstances.

Several Democrats and their supporters, whom I have had the opportunity to have many a discussions with at a Manhattan based Senior Citizens Centre in New York during my recent eight-month stay in the US, think that to win the election, Hillary needs to expand her beachhead with fence sitting voters to turn her bounce into a lasting shift with a stunning 84 percent of voters already certain of whom they will back. This slice of the electorate, ranging from 4 percent to 10 percent of likely voters, yearns for change but is not necessarily sold on Hillary.

Now the question arises: who are these people? They are independents. They are up-scale suburbanites who are turned off by the Republican Party's ties to the "religious Right". They are also alienated blue-collar workers who feel left-out of the GOP's "ownership society". Finally, they are the turned-off young voters who worry about their job prospects.

The writer is an analyst and a former executive chairman of BOI.

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QUOTABLE Quote

CHARLES DE GAULLE

Patriotism is when love of your own people comes first; nationalism, when hate for people other than your own comes first.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Go over again

7 Earth circler

11 Without delay

12 Edit menu choice

13 Airport structure

14 Croquet contents

15 Grab greedily

17 Heaps

20 Smart guy

23 Kayo count

24 Sage

26 Back muscle

27 Leaf carrier

28 Punk rock offshoot

29 Butt holder

31 Tennis need

32 Paper unit

33 Altar exchange

34 Learn completely

37 Impresses

39 Beautiful boy

43 Traffic marker

44 Disregard

45 See the sights

46 Anne Rice vampire

DOWN

1 Stadium cry

2 H look-alike

3 Sweetie

4 Uneasy feeling

5 Scrutinize

6 Mother of Areas

7 Strength

8 Getting better

9 Shelley work

10 Immediately

16 Scrumptious

17 Heavens supporter

18 Rein for rover

19 Available for ordering

21 Small role

22 Shoelace problems

24 Toad features

25 One million link

30 Movie ad

3 Some golf clubs

35 Plane part

36 Keeness

37 Drama division

38 Court

40 Negating word

41 S&L offering

42 Determined

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

WILDE

IDIOM

DONT

ELK

SEXES

ALBUM

BEAD

STRAP

AMI

DONT

ANNIE

MOSES

CASED

HITME

BLAME

LAP

LEASH

PLEA

TAPED

NAVAL

SIR

SOB

TEMPT

ARIES

CORNS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott