aja Harishchandra who ruled around 6300 BC, set a benchmark as a man who lived an ideal life. Renowned for his piety and justice, he had two unique qualities that stand out. The first is that he kept his word and the second, that he did not utter a single lie in his life. Mythology tells us that the world at that time was a different place; where people lived in houses with open doors and without any fear. Now, 8000 plus years on, the world is a very different place with crime and falsehoods stalking us at each step. Fear is a key component of our lives. R L Stevenson’s character Dr Jekyll, who is also Mr Hyde and has the mental condition known as a ‘split personality’, is a real person. In Dr Jekyll’s body, there exist two distinct personalities. One, that is apparently good and the other evil with completely opposite levels of morality.

With crime rampantly increasing all around us, ‘trust’ is no longer a sensible proposition, unless it is backed with due diligence. Those who are entrusted with ‘securing’ or ‘serving’ the people are themselves persons from whom we need to seek protection. Two recent examples of a breakdown of trust in society are the attempted rape followed by murder of Pallavi Purkayastha by the security guard at Wadala, in Mumbai; the second is the gang rape in Delhi, where the victim succumbed to her injuries and died, after the brutal assault on her. This incident has resulted in sustained protests by the people forcing the government to act. The first incident is a crime allegedly committed by a security guard and the latter by the bus driver and five others. These are neither the first nor the last of such instances; nor were they the only variants of breach of trust or faith.

A peep into the commercial arena shows a different set of breaches in the form of cyber crime, data and information theft, different sorts of corruption, or just plain fraud. A recent update from the International Chamber of Commerce has indicated that globally, the fraud and counterfeit goods industry, currently at about USD 650 billion, is projected to be a staggering USD 1.7 trillion by 2015. An analysis done by First Advantage, global provider of integrated talent acquisition products and services shows that the trend for background verification has an overall discrepancy ranging between 9-11 per cent (See Chart 1). Intriguingly, employment-related discrepancies are the highest in the country, ranging between 65-70 per cent (See Chart 2). It has been found that most corporate breaches are caused by insiders within organisations and, in extreme circumstances of criminal activity or potential terrorist links, CEOs and directors of companies can face an enormous personal risk.

Given the current economic conditions coupled with a tight job market, but an increasing supply of graduates, the extent of fraudulent documents and discrepancies continues to increase. Consequently, organisations face a higher risk of employing people
The ROI on background screening cannot be measured; however, the impact can be 20 to 200 times the cost of screening.

Vigilance and risk mitigation a need of the hour

Speaking of crime and its visibility in various forms reminds me of the tagline of a Hindi programme on television called, Crime Patrol Dastak. The line in Hindi says, “Har jurm dastak deta hai, dhyan se suniyega, jaane bach sakti hain - satark rahen aur savdhaan rahen.” The message contained here is that there are always enough signals, or indications of an impending crime, and we can avert a crime and save lives of people, if we are vigilant and alert, and do our due diligence.

With an alarming national average crime rate of 187.6 cases registered per lakh population (NCRB-2010), citizens are increasingly seeking preventive measures both at the workplace and at home. ‘Trust’ is being replaced by ‘vigilance’ and ‘risk mitigation’. People can either make or break organisations. CXO titles come with an obligation to safeguard organisations (that they represent) from the impact of a crime and take preventive care. With fraudulent practices and white collar crimes on the rise, it has become critical to hire the ‘right’ people, train them, and, yes, retain them as well. Despite the fact that science and technology has made rapid progress, one still cannot peep into the minds of individuals whom we hire or work with, and hence we need experts who can assist us. Background checks conducted by specialist screening companies can more likely provide information of any history of misrepresentation, or crime by individuals seeking jobs. Even a small incident of misrepresentation may be sufficient in predicting the larger threat ahead. It is necessary to take note of these ominous signs.

Over two-lakh background checks are done in the country every month, though awareness among MNCs is higher than in Indian companies. Companies are fast realising the benefit of doing background checks of prospective employees or risk hurting their brand image in a fraud case. Screening of job candidates at all levels, and even vendors and contract staff is preferred. Previous employment details, academic and professional certificates, identity, criminal records, and credit risk, among other information.
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In sum

Security is not just about physical security that you experience at airports, malls, and theatres, among other public places. Or even the ‘information security’ systems deployed in IT systems of organisations. Background screening conducted by specialists adds a big ‘preventive’ dimension which could significantly minimise the risk of engaging with the ‘wrong’ people, whether at the workplace or outside.

We owe it to ourselves and to our future generations to leave behind as legacy a ‘clean society’. We cannot continue to ride only on our luck and hope that we will be insulated from the darker side that author R L Stevenson speaks about. Security consciousness has to be a ‘movement’, resulting from a collective sense of responsibility, so that we can filter out individuals with unclean credentials or dishonourable intentions, and demonstrate that crime does not pay. Else, we will continue to have incidents of fraud or dastardly acts in our society, like the Wadala or the latest Delhi incident.

Jago Bharat, Jago!