

Rajan seeks better debate; says intent important, not words

Under attack from certain quarters over his 'one-eyed king' remark for the Indian economy, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan on Wednesday called for raising the level of 'public dialogue', saying people should not look for "insults" everywhere. "I think we all have to work to improve public dialogue. Speakers have to be more careful with words and not be gratuitously offensive. At the same time, listeners should not look for insults everywhere and should place words in context so as to understand the intent," he said.

Rajan was referring to the criticism of his recent remarks in the US where in he had said that India being referred to as the 'bright spot in an otherwise gloomy world economy' was like "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is the king". Rajan's comments were flayed by finance minister Arun Jaitley and commerce minister Nirmala Sitharaman, among others. While Jaitley said any other country would be celebrating a 7.5 per cent

growth rate that was fastest in the world, Sitharaman stated Rajan should have used better words.

Addressing the graduating students of the RBI-run National Institute of Bank Management here, Rajan, however, invoked Mahatma Gandhi, saying his famous quote — 'an eye for an eye will only make the whole world go blind' — was also not meant to demean a handicap. "One might take umbrage since it suggests blindness is an inferior state to that of being able to see and the saying could be seen as discriminatory. Yet Gandhiji's focus was on the absurdity of a policy of revenge, not on blindness, and his intent was not to disparage the blind," Rajan said.

"If we spend all our time watching our words and using inoffensive language or hedging everything with caveats, we will be dull and will not be able to communicate because no one will listen. If we are to have a reasonable public dialogue, everyone should read words in their context, not stripped of it," he added.